

Complete Works of
D. H. LAWRENCE



DELPHI CLASSICS

**THE COMPLETE WORKS OF
D.H. LAWRENCE**

(1885-1930)



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A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "D.H. Lawrence". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large, prominent 'L'.

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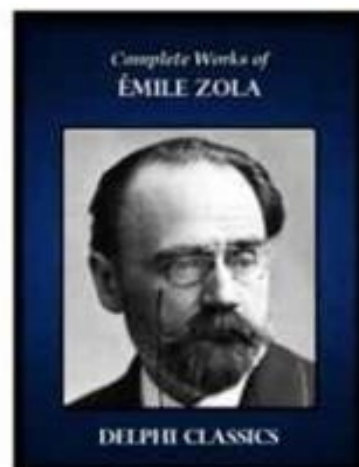
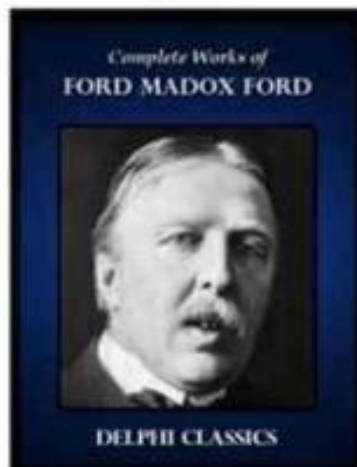
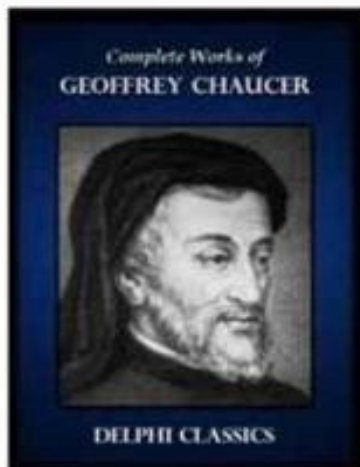
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THE COMPLETE WORKS OF
D.H. LAWRENCE



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The Novels



Lawrence's birthplace - Eastwood, Nottingham

THE WHITE PEACOCK



Lawrence started his first novel in 1906, rewriting it three times, before it was published in 1911. The early versions had the working title of *Laetitia*. Set in the Eastwood area of his youth, Lawrence's first novel is narrated in the first person by the somewhat weak character named Cyril Beardsall. It involves such typical Lawrence themes as the damage associated with mismatched marriages and the border country between town and country. A misanthropic gamekeeper makes an appearance, in some ways the prototype of Mellors in Lawrence's last novel, *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. The book includes some notable description of nature and the impact of industrialisation on the countryside and the town.



The Lawrence family, with a young David standing between his parents, 1895

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Felley Mill, known as Strelly Mill in Lawrence's first novel

PART ONE

CHAPTER I

THE PEOPLE OF NETHERMERE

I stood watching the shadowy fish slide through the gloom of the millpond. They were grey, descendants of the silvery things that had darted away from the monks, in the young days when the valley was lusty. The whole place was gathered in the musing of old age. The thick-piled trees on the far shore were too dark and sober to dally with the sun; the weeds stood crowded and motionless. Not even a little wind flickered the willows of the islets. The water lay softly, intensely still. Only the thin stream falling through the millrace murmured to itself of the tumult of life which had once quickened the valley.

I was almost startled into the water from my perch on the alder roots by a voice saying:

“Well, what is there to look at?” My friend was a young farmer, stoutly built, brown-eyed, with a naturally fair skin burned dark and freckled in patches. He laughed, seeing me start, and looked down at me with lazy curiosity.

“I was thinking the place seemed old, brooding over its past.” He looked at me with a lazy indulgent smile, and lay down on his back on the bank, saying:

“It’s all right for a doss — here.”

“Your life is nothing else but a doss. I shall laugh when somebody jerks you awake,” I replied.

He smiled comfortably and put his hands over his eyes because of the light.

“Why shall you laugh?” he drawled.

“Because you’ll be amusing,” said I.

We were silent for a long time, when he rolled over and began to poke with his finger in the bank.

“I thought,” he said in his leisurely fashion, “there was some cause for all this buzzing.”

I looked, and saw that he had poked out an old, papery nest of those pretty field bees which seem to have dipped their tails into bright amber dust. Some agitated insects ran round the cluster of eggs, most of which were empty now,

the crowns gone; a few young bees staggered about in uncertain flight before they could gather power to wing away in a strong course. He watched the little ones that ran in and out among the shadows of the grass, hither and thither in consternation.

“Come here — come here!” he said, imprisoning one poor little bee under a grass stalk, while with another stalk he loosened the folded blue wings.

“Don’t tease the little beggar,” I said.

“It doesn’t hurt him — I wanted to see if it was because he couldn’t spread his wings that he couldn’t fly. There he goes — no, he doesn’t. Let’s try another.”

“Leave them alone,” said I. “Let them run in the sun. They’re only just out of the shells. Don’t torment them into flight.”

He persisted, however, and broke the wing of the next.

“Oh, dear — pity!” said he, and he crushed the little thing between his fingers. Then he examined the eggs, and pulled out some silk from round the dead larva, and investigated it all in a desultory manner, asking of me all I knew about the insects. When he had finished he flung the clustered eggs into the water and rose, pulling out his watch from the depth of his breeches’ pocket.

“It thought it was about dinner-time,” said he, smiling at me.

“I always know when it’s about twelve. Are you coming in?”

“I’m coming down at any rate,” said I as we passed along the pond bank, and over the plank bridge that crossed the brow of the falling sluice. The bankside where the grey orchard twisted its trees, was a steep declivity, long and sharp, dropping down to the garden.

The stones of the large house were burdened with ivy and honeysuckle, and the great lilac bush that had once guarded the porch now almost blocked the doorway. We passed out of the front garden into the farmyard, and walked along the brick path to the back door.

“Shut the gate, will you?” he said to me over his shoulder, as he passed on first.

We went through the large scullery into the kitchen. The servant-girl was just hurriedly snatching the table-cloth out of the table drawer, and his mother, a quaint little woman with big, brown eyes, was hovering round the wide fireplace with a fork.

“Dinner not ready?” said he with a shade of resentment.

“No, George,” replied his mother apologetically, “it isn’t. The fire wouldn’t burn a bit. You shall have it in a few minutes, though.”

He dropped on the sofa and began to read a novel. I wanted to go, but his mother insisted on my staying.

“Don’t go,” she pleaded. “Emily will be so glad if you stay — and father will,

I'm sure. Sit down, now."

I sat down on a rush chair by the long window that looked out into the yard. As he was reading, and as it took all his mother's powers to watch the potatoes boil and the meat roast, I was left to my thoughts. George, indifferent to all claims, continued to read. It was very annoying to watch him pulling his brown moustache, and reading indolently while the dog rubbed against his leggings and against the knee of his old riding-breeches. He would not even be at the trouble to play with Trip's ears, he was so content with his novel and his moustache. Round and round twirled his thick fingers, and the muscles of his bare arm moved slightly under the red-brown skin. The little square window above him filtered a green light from the foliage of the great horse-chestnut outside and the glimmer fell on his dark hair, and trembled across the plates which Annie was reaching down from the rack, and across the face of the tall clock. The kitchen was very big; the table looked lonely, and the chairs mourned darkly for the lost companionship of the sofa; the chimney was a black cavern away at the back, and the inglenook seats shut in another little compartment ruddy with firelight, where the mother hovered. It was rather a desolate kitchen, such a bare expanse of uneven grey flagstones, such far-away dark corners and sober furniture. The only gay things were the chintz coverings of the sofa and the arm-chair cushions, bright red in the bare sombre room; some might smile at the old clock, adorned as it was with remarkable and vivid poultry; in me it only provoked wonder and contemplation.

In a little while we heard the scraping of heavy boots outside, and the father entered. He was a big burly farmer, with his half-bald head sprinkled with crisp little curls.

"Hullo, Cyril," he said cheerfully. "You've not forsaken us then," and turning to his son:

"Have you many more rows in the coppice close?"

"Finished!" replied George, continuing to read.

"That's all right — you've got on with 'em. The rabbits has bitten them turnips down, Mother."

"I expect so," replied his wife, whose soul was in the saucepans. At last she deemed the potatoes cooked and went out with the steaming pan.

The dinner was set on the table and the father began to carve. George looked over his book to survey the fare, then read until his plate was handed him. The maid sat at her little table near the window, and we began the meal. There came the treading of four feet along the brick path, and a little girl entered, followed by her grown-up sister. The child's long brown hair was tossed wildly back beneath her sailor hat. She flung aside this article of her attire and sat down to

dinner, talking endlessly to her mother. The elder sister, a girl of about twenty-one, gave me a smile and a bright look from her brown eyes, and went to wash her hands. Then she came and sat down, and looked disconsolately at the underdone beef on her plate.

“I do hate this raw meat,” she said.

“Good for you,” replied her brother, who was eating industriously. “Give you some muscle to wallop the nippers.” She pushed it aside, and began to eat the vegetables. Her brother re-charged his plate and continued to eat.

“Well, our George, I do think you might pass a body that gravy,” said Mollie, the younger sister, in injured tones.

“Certainly,” he replied. “Won’t you have the joint as well?”

“No!” retorted the young lady of twelve, “I don’t expect you’ve done with it yet.”

“Clever!” he exclaimed across a mouthful.

“Do you think so?” said the elder sister, Emily, sarcastically.

“Yes,” he replied complacently, “you’ve made her as sharp as yourself, I see, since you’ve had her in Standard Six. I’ll try a potato, Mother, if you can find one that’s done.”

“Well, George, they seem mixed, I’m sure that was done that I tried. There — they are mixed — look at this one, it’s soft enough. I’m sure they were boiling long enough.”

“Don’t explain and apologise to him,” said Emily irritably. “Perhaps the kids were too much for her this morning,” he said calmly, to nobody in particular.

“No,” chimed in Mollie, “she knocked a lad across his nose and made it bleed.”

“Little wretch,” said Emily, swallowing with difficulty. “I’m glad I did! Some of my lads belong to — to — ”

“To the devil,” suggested George, but she would not accept it from him.

Her father sat laughing; her mother, with distress in her eyes, looked at her daughter, who hung her head and made patterns on the table-cloth with her finger.

“Are they worse than the last lot?” asked the mother, softly, fearfully.

“No — nothing extra,” was the curt answer.

“She merely felt like bashing ‘em,” said George, calling, as he looked at the sugar-bowl and at his pudding:

“Fetch some more sugar, Annie.”

The maid rose from her little table in the corner, and the mother also hurried to the cupboard. Emily trifled with her dinner and said bitterly to him:

“I only wish you had a taste of teaching, it would cure your self-satisfaction.”

“Pf!” he replied contemptuously, “I could easily bleed the noses of a handful of kids.”

“You wouldn’t sit there bleating like a fatted calf,” she continued.

This speech so tickled Mollie that she went off into a burst of laughter, much to the terror of her mother, who stood up in trembling apprehension lest she should choke.

“You made a joke, Emily,” he said, looking at his younger sister’s contortions.

Emily was too impatient to speak to him further, and left the table. Soon the two men went back to the fallow to the turnips, and I walked along the path with the girls as they were going to school.

“He irritates me in everything he does and says,” burst out Emily with much heat.

“He’s a pig sometimes,” said I.

“He is!” she insisted. “He irritates me past bearing, with his grand know-all way, and his heavy smartness — I can’t bear it. And the way Mother humbles herself to him — !”

“It makes you wild,” said I.

“Wild!” she echoed, her voice vibrating with nervous passion. We walked on in silence, till she asked:

“Have you brought me those verses of yours?”

“No — I’m so sorry — I’ve forgotten them again. As a matter of fact, I’ve sent them away.”

“But you promised me.”

“You know what my promises are. I’m as irresponsible as a puff of wind.”

She frowned with impatience and her disappointment was greater than necessary. When I left her at the corner of the lane I felt a string of her deep reproach in my mind. I always felt the reproach when she had gone.

I ran over the little bright brook that came from the weedy, bottom pond. The stepping-stones were white in the sun, and the water slid sleepily among them. One or two butterflies, indistinguishable against the blue sky, trifled from flower to flower and led me up the hill, across the field where the hot sunshine stood as in a bowl, and I was entering the caverns of the wood, where the oaks bowed over and saved us a grateful shade. Within, everything was so still and cool that my steps hung heavily along the path. The bracken held out arms to me, and the bosom of the wood was full of sweetness, but I journeyed on, spurred by the attacks of an army of flies which kept up a guerrilla warfare round my head till I had passed the black rhododendron bushes in the garden, where they left me, scenting no doubt Rebecca’s pots of vinegar and sugar.

The low red house, with its roof discoloured and sunken, dozed in sunlight, and

slept profoundly in the shade thrown by the massive maples encroaching from the wood.

There was no one in the dining-room, but I could hear the whirr of a sewing-machine coming from the little study, a sound as of some great, vindictive insect buzzing about, now louder, now softer, now settling. Then came a jingling of four or five keys at the bottom of the keyboard of the drawing-room piano, continuing till the whole range had been covered in little leaps, as if some very fat frog had jumped from end to end.

“That must be mother dusting the drawing-room,” I thought. The unaccustomed sound of the old piano startled me. The vocal chords behind the green-silk bosom — you only discovered it was not a bronze-silk bosom by poking a fold aside — had become as thin and tuneless as a dried old woman’s. Age had yellowed the teeth of my mother’s little piano, and shrunken its spindle legs. Poor old thing, it could but screech in answer to Lettie’s fingers flying across it in scorn, so the prim, brown lips were always closed save to admit the duster.

Now, however, the little old-maidish piano began to sing a tinkling Victorian melody, and I fancied it must be some demure little woman, with curls like bunches of hops on either side of her face, who was touching it. The coy little tune teased me with old sensations, but my memory would give me no assistance. As I stood trying to fix my vague feelings, Rebecca came in to remove the cloth from the table.

“Who is playing, Beck?” I asked.

“Your mother, Cyril.”

“But she never plays. I thought she couldn’t.”

“Ah,” replied Rebecca, “you forget when you was a little thing sitting playing against her frock with the prayer-book, and she singing to you. You can’t remember her when her curls was long like a piece of brown silk. You can’t remember her when she used to play and sing, before Lettie came and your father was — ”

Rebecca turned and left the room. I went and peeped in the drawing-room. Mother sat before the little brown piano, with her plump, rather stiff fingers moving across the keys, a faint smile on her lips. At that moment Lettie came flying past me, and flung her arms round mother’s neck, kissing her and saying:

“Oh, my Dear, fancy my Dear playing the piano! Oh, Little Woman, we never knew you could!”

“Nor can I,” replied Mother laughing, disengaging herself. “I only wondered if I could just strum out this old tune; I learned it when I was quite a girl, on this piano. It was a cracked one then; the only one I had.”

“But play again, dearie, do play again. It was like the clinking of lustre glasses, and you look so quaint at the piano. Do play, my dear!” pleaded Lettie.

“Nay,” said my mother, “the touch of the old keys on my fingers is making me sentimental — you wouldn’t like to see me reduced to the tears of old age?”

“Old age!” scolded Lettie, kissing her again. “You are young enough to play little romances. Tell us about it, Mother.”

“About what, child?”

“When you used to play.”

“Before my fingers were stiff with fifty-odd years? Where have you been, Cyril, that you weren’t in to dinner?”

“Only down to Strelley Mill,” said I.

“Of course,” said Mother coldly.

“Why ‘of course’?” I asked.

“And you came away as soon as Em went to school?” said Lettie.

“I did,” said I.

They were cross with me, these two women. After I had swallowed my little resentment I said:

“They would have me stay to dinner.”

My mother vouchsafed no reply.

“And has the great George found a girl yet?” asked Lettie. “No,” I replied, “he never will at this rate. Nobody will ever be good enough for him.”

“I’m sure I don’t know what you can find in any of them to take you there so much,” said my mother.

“Don’t be so mean, Mater,” I answered, nettled. “You know I like them.”

“I know you like her,” said my mother sarcastically. “As for him — he’s an unlicked cub. What can you expect when his mother has spoiled him as she has. But I wonder you are so interested in licking him.” My mother sniffed contemptuously.

“He is rather good-looking,” said Lettie with a smile.

“You could make a man of him, I am sure,” I said, bowing satirically to her.

“I am not interested,” she replied, also satirical.

Then she tossed her head, and all the fine hairs that were free from bonds made a mist of yellow light in the sun. “What frock shall I wear, Mater?” she asked.

“Nay, don’t ask me,” replied her mother.

“I think I’ll wear the heliotrope — though this sun will fade it,” she said pensively. She was tall, nearly six feet in height, but slenderly formed. Her hair was yellow, tending towards a dun brown. She had beautiful eyes and brows, but not a nice nose. Her hands were very beautiful.

“Where are you going?” I asked.

She did not answer me.

“To Tempest’s!” I said. She did not reply.

“Well, I don’t know what you can see in him,” I continued. “Indeed!” said she. “He’s as good as most folk — ” then we both began to laugh.

“Not,” she continued blushing, “that I think anything about him. I’m merely going for a game of tennis. Are you coming?”

“What shall you say if I agree?” I asked.

“Oh!” she tossed her head. “We shall all be very pleased I’m sure.”

“Ooray!” said I with fine irony.

She laughed at me, blushed, and ran upstairs.

Half an hour afterwards she popped her head in the study to bid me good-bye, wishing to see if I appreciated her. She was so charming in her fresh linen frock and flowered hat, that I could not but be proud of her. She expected me to follow her to the window, for from between the great purple rhododendrons she waved me a lace mitten, then glinted on like a flower moving brightly through the green hazels. Her path lay through the wood in the opposite direction from Strelley Mill, down the red drive across the tree-scattered space to the highroad. This road ran along the end of our lakelet, Nethermere, for about a quarter of a mile. Nethermere is the lowest in a chain of three ponds. The other two are the upper and lower millponds at Strelley; this is the largest and most charming piece of water, a mile long and about a quarter of a mile in width. Our wood runs down to the water’s edge. On the opposite side, on a hill beyond the farthest corner of the lake, stands Highclose. It looks across the water at us in Woodside with one eye as it were, while our cottage casts a sidelong glance back again at the proud house, and peeps coyly through the trees.

I could see Lettie like a distant sail stealing along the water’s edge, her parasol flowing above. She turned through the wicket under the pine clump, climbed the steep field, and was enfolded again in the trees beside Highclose.

Leslie was sprawled on a camp-chair, under a copper beech on the lawn, his cigar glowing. He watched the ash grow strange and grey in the warm daylight, and he felt sorry for poor Nell Wycherley, whom he had driven that morning to the station, for would she not be frightfully cut up as the train whirled her farther and farther away? These girls are so daft with a fellow! But she was a nice little thing — he’d get Marie to write to her.

At this point he caught sight of a parasol fluttering along the drive, and immediately he fell in a deep sleep, with just a tiny slit in his slumber to allow him to see Lettie approach. She, finding her watchman ungallantly asleep, and his cigar, instead of his lamp, untrimmed, broke off a twig of syringa whose

ivory buds had not yet burst with luscious scent. I know not how the end of his nose tickled in anticipation before she tickled him in reality, but he kept bravely still until the petals swept him. Then, starting from his sleep, he exclaimed:

“Lettie! I was dreaming of kisses!”

“On the bridge of your nose?” laughed she — ”But whose were the kisses?”

“Who produced the sensation?” he smiled.

“Since I only tapped your nose you should dream of — ”

“Go on!” said he, expectantly.

“Of Doctor Slop,” she replied, smiling to herself as she closed her parasol.

“I do not know the gentleman,” he said, afraid that she was laughing at him.

“No — your nose is quite classic,” she answered, giving him one of those brief intimate glances with which women flatter men so cleverly. He radiated with pleasure.

CHAPTER II

DANGLING THE APPLE

The long-drawn booming of the wind in the wood, and the sobbing and moaning in the maples and oaks near the house, had made Lettie restless. She did not want to go anywhere, she did not want to do anything, so she insisted on my just going out with her as far as the edge of the water. We crossed the tangle of fern and bracken, bramble and wild-raspberry canes that spread in the open space before the house, and we went down the grassy slope to the edge of Nethermere. The wind whipped up noisy little wavelets, and the cluck and clatter of these among the pebbles, the swish of the rushes and the freshening of the breeze against our faces, roused us.

The tall meadow-sweet was in bud along the tiny beach and we walked knee-deep among it, watching the foamy race of the ripples and the whitening of the willows on the far shore. At the place where Nethermere narrows to the upper end, and receives the brook from Strelley, the wood sweeps down and stands with its feet washed round with waters. We broke our way along the shore, crushing the sharp-scented wild mint, whose odour checks the breath, and examining here and there among the marshy places ragged nests of water-fowl, now deserted. Some slim young lapwings started at our approach, and sped lightly from us, their necks outstretched in straining fear of that which could not hurt them. One, two, fled cheeping into cover of the wood; almost instantly they coursed back again to where we stood, to dart off from us at an angle, in an ecstasy of bewilderment and terror.

“What had frightened the crazy little things?” asked Lettie.

“I don’t know. They’ve cheek enough sometimes; then they go whining, skelping off from a fancy as if they had a snake under their wings.”

Lettie, however, paid small attention to my eloquence. She pushed aside an elder bush, which graciously showered down upon her myriad crumbs from its flowers like slices of bread, and bathed her in a medicinal scent. I followed her, taking my dose, and was startled to hear her sudden, “Oh, Cyril!”

On the bank before us lay a black cat, both hind paws torn and bloody in a trap. It had no doubt been bounding forward after its prey when it was caught. It

was gaunt and wild; no wonder it frightened the poor lapwings into cheeping hysteria. It glared at us fiercely, growling low.

“How cruel — oh, how cruel!” cried Lettie, shuddering.

I wrapped my cap and Lettie’s scarf over my hands and bent to open the trap. The cat struck with her teeth, tearing the cloth convulsively. When it was free, it sprang away with one bound, and fell panting, watching us.

I wrapped the creature in my jacket, and picked her up, murmuring:

“Poor Mrs Nickie Ben — we always prophesied it of you.”

“What will you do with it?” asked Lettie.

“It is one of the Strelley Mill cats,” said I, “and so I’ll take her home.”

The poor animal moved and murmured and I carried her, but we brought her home. They stared, on seeing me enter the kitchen coatless, carrying a strange bundle, while Lettie followed me.

“I have brought poor Mrs Nickie Ben,” said I, unfolding my burden.

“Oh, what a shame!” cried Emily, putting out her hand to touch the cat, but drawing quickly back, like the peewits. “This is how they all go,” said the mother.

“I wish keepers had to sit two or three days with their bare ankles in a trap,” said Mollie in vindictive tones.

We laid the poor brute on the rug, and gave it warm milk. It drank very little, being too feeble. Mollie, full of anger, fetched Mr Nickie Ben, another fine black cat, to survey his crippled mate. Mr Nickie Ben looked, shrugged his sleek shoulders, and walked away with high steps. There was a general feminine outcry on masculine callousness.

George came in for hot water. He exclaimed in surprise on seeing us, and his eyes became animated.

“Look at Mrs Nickie Ben,” cried Mollie. He dropped on his knees on the rug and lifted the wounded paws.

“Broken,” said he.

“How awful!” said Emily, shuddering violently, and leaving the room.

“Both?” I asked.

“Only one — look!”

“You are hurting her!” cried Lettie.

“It’s no good,” said he.

Mollie and the mother hurried out of the kitchen into the parlour.

“What are you going to do?” asked Lettie.

“Put her out of her misery,” he replied, taking up the poor cat. We followed him into the barn.

“The quickest way,” said he, “is to swing her round and knock her head

against the wall.”

“You make me sick,” exclaimed Lettie.

“I’ll drown her then,” he said with a smile. We watched him morbidly, as he took a length of twine and fastened a noose round the animal’s neck, and near it an iron goose; he kept a long piece of cord attached to the goose.

“You’re not coming, are you?” said he. Lettie looked at him; she had grown rather white.

“It’ll make you sick,” he said. She did not answer, but followed him across the yard to the garden. On the bank of the lower millpond he turned again to us and said:

“Now for it! — you are chief mourners.” As neither of us replied, he smiled, and dropped the poor writhing cat into the water, saying, “Good-bye, Mrs Nickie Ben.”

We waited on the bank some time. He eyed us curiously. “Cyril,” said Lettie quietly, “isn’t it cruel? — isn’t it awful?” I had nothing to say.

“Do you mean me?” asked George.

“Not you in particular — everything! If we move the blood rises in our heel-prints.”

He looked at her seriously, with dark eyes.

“I had to drown her out of mercy,” said he, fastening the cord he held to an ash-pole. Then he went to get a spade, and with it, he dug a grave in the old black earth.

“If,” said he, “the poor old cat had made a prettier corpse, you’d have thrown violets on her.”

He had struck the spade into the ground, and hauled up the iron goose.

“Well,” he said, surveying the hideous object, “haven’t her good looks gone! She was a fine cat.”

“Bury it and have done,” Lettie replied.

He did so asking: “Shall you have bad dreams after it?”

“Dreams do not trouble me,” she answered, turning away.

We went indoors, into the parlour, where Emily sat by a window, biting her finger. The room was long and not very high; there was a great rough beam across the ceiling. On the mantelpiece, and in the fireplace, and over the piano were wild flowers and fresh leaves plentifully scattered; the room was cool with the scent of the woods.

“Has he done it?” asked Emily — “and did you watch him? If I had seen it I should have hated the sight of him, and I’d rather have touched a maggot than him.”

“I shouldn’t be particularly pleased if he touched me,” said Lettie.

“There is something so loathsome about callousness and brutality,” said Emily. “He fills me with disgust.”

“Does he?” said Lettie, smiling coldly. She went across to the old piano. “He’s only healthy. He’s never been sick, not anyway, yet.” She sat down and played at random, letting the numbed notes fall like dead leaves from the haughty, ancient piano.

Emily and I talked oh by the widow, about books and people. She was intensely serious, and generally succeeded in reducing me to the same state.

After a while, when the milking and feeding were finished, George came in. Lettie was still playing the piano. He asked her why she didn’t play something with a tune in it, and this caused her to turn round in her chair to give him a withering answer. His appearance, however, scattered her words like startled birds. He had come straight from washing in the scullery, to the parlour, and he stood behind Lettie’s chair, unconcernedly wiping the moisture from his arms. His sleeves were rolled up to the shoulder, and his shirt was opened wide at the breast. Lettie was somewhat taken aback by the sight of him standing with legs apart, dressed in dirty leggings and boots, and breeches torn at the knee, naked at the breast and arms.

“Why don’t you play something with a tune in it?” he repeated, rubbing the towel over his shoulders beneath the shirt.

“A tune!” she echoed, watching the swelling of his arms as he moved them, and the rise and fall of his breasts, wonderfully solid and white. Then having curiously examined the sudden meeting of the sun-hot skin with the white flesh in his throat, her eyes met his, and she turned again to the piano, while the colour grew in her ears, mercifully sheltered by a profusion of bright curls.

“What shall I play?” she asked, fingering the keys somewhat confusedly.

He dragged out a book of songs from a little heap of music, and set it before her.

“Which do you want to sing?” she asked, thrilling a little as she felt his arms so near her.

“Anything you like.”

“A love song?” she said.

“If you like — yes, a love song — ” he laughed with clumsy insinuation that made the girl writhe.

She did not answer, but began to play Sullivan’s “Tit Willow”. He had a passable bass voice, not of any great depth, and he sang with gusto. Then she gave him “Drink to me only with thine eyes”. At the end she turned and asked him if he liked the words. He replied that he thought them rather daft. But he looked at her with glowing brown eyes, as if in hesitating challenge.

“That’s because you have no wine in your eyes to pledge with,” she replied, answering his challenge with a blue blaze of her eyes. Then her eyelashes drooped on to her cheek. He laughed with a faint ring of consciousness, and asked her how could she know.

“Because,” she said slowly, looking up at him with pretended scorn, “because there’s no change in your eyes when I look at you. I always think people who are worth much talk with their eyes. That’s why you are forced to respect many quite uneducated people. Their eyes are so eloquent, and full of knowledge.” She had continued to look at him as she spoke — watching his faint appreciation of her upturned face, and her hair, where the light was always tangled, watching his brief self-examination to see if he could feel any truth in her words, watching till he broke into a little laugh which was rather more awkward and less satisfied than usual. Then she turned away, smiling also.

“There’s nothing in this book nice to sing,” she said, turning over the leaves discontentedly. I found her a volume, and she sang “Should he upbraid”. She had a fine soprano voice, and the song delighted him. He moved nearer to her, and when at the finish she looked round with a flashing, mischievous air, she found him pledging her with wonderful eyes.

“You like that,” said she with the air of superior knowledge, as if, dear me, all one had to do was to turn over to the right page of the vast volume of one’s soul to suit these people.

“I do,” he answered emphatically, thus acknowledging her triumph.

“I’d rather ‘dance and sing’ round ‘wrinkled care’ than carefully shut the door on him, while I slept in the chimney-seat wouldn’t you?” she asked.

He laughed, and began to consider what she meant before he replied.

“As you do,” she added.

“What?” he asked.

“Keep half your senses asleep — half alive.”

“Do I?” he asked.

“Of course you do; — ’bos bovis; an ox.’ You are like a stalled ox, food and comfort, no more. Don’t you love comfort?” she smiled.

“Don’t you?” he replied, smiling shamefaced.

“Of course. Come and turn over for me while I play this piece. Well, I’ll nod when you must turn — bring a chair.” She began to play a romance of Schubert’s. He leaned nearer to her to take hold of the leaf of music; she felt her loose hair touch his face, and turned to him a quick, laughing glance, while she played. At the end of the page she nodded, but he was oblivious; “Yes!” she said, suddenly impatient, and he tried to get the leaf over; she quickly pushed his hand aside, turned the page herself and continued playing.

“Sorry!” said he, blushing actually.

“Don’t bother,” she said, continuing to play without observing him. When she had finished:

“There!” she said, “now tell me how you felt while I was playing.”

“Oh — a fool!” — he replied, covered with confusion.

“I’m glad to hear it,” she said — “but I didn’t mean that. I meant how did the music make you feel?”

“I don’t know — whether — it made me feel anything,” he replied deliberately, pondering over his answer, as usual.

“I tell you,” she declared, “you’re either asleep or stupid. Did you really see nothing in the music? But what did you think about?”

He laughed — and thought awhile — and laughed again.

“Why!” he admitted, laughing, and trying to tell the exact truth, “I thought how pretty your hands are — and what they are like to touch — and I thought it was a new experience to feel somebody’s hair tickling my cheek.” When he had finished his deliberate account she gave his hand a little knock, and left him saying:

“You are worse and worse.”

She came across the room to the couch where I was sitting talking to Emily, and put her arm around my neck.

“Isn’t it time to go home, Pat?” she asked.

“Half-past eight — quite early,” said I.

“But I believe — I think I ought to be home now,” she said. “Don’t go,” said he.

“Why?” I asked.

“Stay to supper,” urged Emily.

“But I believe — ” she hesitated.

“She has another fish to fry,” I said.

“I am not sure — ” she hesitated again. Then she flashed into sudden wrath, exclaiming, “Don’t be so mean and nasty, Cyril!”

“Were you going somewhere?” asked George humbly. “Why — no!” she said, blushing.

“Then stay to supper — will you?” he begged. She laughed, and yielded. We went into the kitchen. Mr. Saxton was sitting reading. Trip, the big bull terrier, lay at his feet pretending to sleep; Mr Nickie Ben reposed calmly on the sofa; Mrs Saxton and Mollie were just going to bed. We bade them good night, and sat down. Annie, the servant, had gone home, so Emily prepared the supper.

“Nobody can touch that piano like you,” said Mr Saxton to Lettie, beaming upon her with admiration and deference. He was proud of the stately, mumbling

old thing, and used to say that it was full of music for those that liked to ask for it. Lettie laughed, and said that so few folks ever tried it, that her honour was not great.

“What do you think of our George’s singing?” asked the father proudly, but with a deprecating laugh at the end.

“I tell him, when he’s in love he’ll sing quite well,” she said.

“When he’s in love!” echoed the father, laughing aloud, very pleased.

“Yes,” she said, “when he finds out something he wants and can’t have.”

George thought about it, and he laughed also.

Emily, who was laying the table, said, “There is hardly any water in the pippin, George.”

“Oh, dash!” he exclaimed, “I’ve taken my boots off.”

“It’s not a very big job to put them on again,” said his sister. “Why couldn’t Annie fetch it — what’s she here for?” he said angrily.

Emily looked at us, tossed her head, and turned her back on him.

“I’ll go, I’ll go, after supper,” said the father in a comforting tone.

“After supper!” laughed Emily.

George got up and shuffled out. He had to go into the spinney near the house to a well, and being warm disliked turning out.

We had just sat down to supper when Trip rushed barking to the door. “Be quiet,” ordered the father, thinking of those in bed, and he followed the dog.

It was Leslie. He wanted Lettie to go home with him at once. This she refused to do, so he came indoors, and was persuaded to sit down at table. He swallowed a morsel of bread and cheese, and a cup of coffee, talking to Lettie of a garden party which was going to be arranged at Highclose for the following week.

“What is it for then?” interrupted Mr Saxton.

“For?” echoed Leslie.

“Is it for the missionaries, or the unemployed, or something?” explained Mr Saxton.

“It’s a garden-party, not a bazaar,” said Leslie.

“Oh — a private affair. I thought it would be some church matter of your mother’s. She’s very big at the church, isn’t she?”

“She is interested in the church — yes!” said Leslie, then proceeding to explain to Lettie that he was arranging a tennis tournament in which she was to take part. At this point he became aware that he was monopolising the conversation, and turned to George, just as the latter was taking a piece of cheese from his knife with his teeth, asking:

“Do you play tennis, Mr Saxton? — I know Miss Saxton does not.”

“No,” said George, working the piece of cheese into his cheek. “I never

learned any ladies' accomplishments."

Leslie turned to Emily, who had nervously been pushing two plates over a stain in the cloth, and who was very startled when she found herself addressed.

"My mother would be so glad if you would come to the party, Miss Saxton."

"I cannot. I shall be at school. Thanks very much."

"Ah — it's very good of you," said the father, beaming. But George smiled contemptuously.

When supper was over Leslie looked at Lettie to inform her that he was ready to go. She, however, refused to see his look, but talked brightly to Mr Saxton, who was delighted. George, flattered, joined in the talk with gusto. Then Leslie's angry silence began to tell on us all. After a dull lapse, George lifted his head and said to his father:

"Oh, I shouldn't be surprised if that little red heifer calved tonight."

Lettie's eyes flashed with a sparkle of amusement at this thrust.

"No," assented the father, "I thought so myself."

After a moment's silence, George continued deliberately, "I felt her gristles —

"George!" said Emily sharply.

"We will go," said Leslie.

George looked up sideways at Lettie and his black eyes were full of sardonic mischief.

"Lend me a shawl, will you, Emily?" said Lettie. "I brought nothing, and I think the wind is cold."

Emily, however, regretted that she had no shawl, and so Lettie must needs wear a black coat over her summer dress. It fitted so absurdly that we all laughed, but Leslie was very angry that she should appear ludicrous before them. He showed her all the polite attentions possible, fastened the neck of her coat with his pearl scarf-pin, refusing the pin Emily discovered, after some search. Then we sallied forth.

When we were outside, he offered Lettie his arm with an air of injured dignity. She refused it and he began to remonstrate. "I consider you ought to have been home as you promised."

"Pardon me," she replied, "but I did not promise."

"But you knew I was coming," said he.

"Well — you found me," she retorted.

"Yes," he assented. "I did find you; flirting with a common fellow," he sneered.

"Well," she returned. "He did — it is true — call a heifer, a heifer."

"And I should think you liked it," he said.

“I didn’t mind,” she said, with galling negligence.

“I thought your taste was more refined,” he replied sarcastically. “But I suppose you thought it romantic.”

“Very! Ruddy, dark, and really thrilling eyes,” said she.

“I hate to hear a girl talk rot,” said Leslie. He himself had crisp hair of the “ginger” class.

“But I mean it,” she insisted, aggravating his anger. Leslie was angry. “I’m glad he amuses you!”

“Of course, I’m not hard to please,” she said pointedly. He was stung to the quick.

“Then there’s some comfort in knowing I don’t please you,” he said coldly.

“Oh! but you do! You amuse me also,” she said.

After that he would not speak, preferring, I suppose, not to amuse her.

Lettie took my arm, and with her disengaged hand held her skirts above the wet grass. When he had left us at the end of the riding in the wood, Lettie said:

“What an infant he is!”

“A bit of an ass,” I admitted.

“But really!” she said, “he’s more agreeable on the whole than — than my Taurus.”

“Your bull!” I repeated, laughing.

CHAPTER III

A VENDOR OF VISIONS

The Sunday following Lettie's visit to the mill, Leslie came up in the morning, admirably dressed, and perfected by a grand air. I showed him into the dark drawing-room, and left him. Ordinarily he would have wandered to the stairs, and sat there calling to Lettie; today he was silent. I carried the news of his arrival to my sister, who was pinning on her brooch.

"And how is the dear boy?" she asked.

"I have not inquired," said I.

She laughed, and loitered about till it was time to set off for church before she came downstairs. Then she also assumed the grand air and bowed to him with a beautiful bow. He was somewhat taken aback and had nothing to say. She rustled across the room to the window, where the white geraniums grew magnificently. "I must adorn myself," she said.

It was Leslie's custom to bring her flowers. As he had not done so this day, she was piqued. He hated the scent and chalky whiteness of the geraniums. So she smiled at him as she pinned them into the bosom of her dress, saying:

"They are very fine, are they not?"

He muttered that they were. Mother came downstairs, greeted him warmly, and asked him if he would take her to church.

"If you will allow me," said he.

"You are modest today," laughed Mother.

"Today!" he repeated.

"I hate modesty in a young man," said Mother — "Come, we shall be late." Lettie wore the geraniums all day — till evening. She brought Alice Gall home to tea, and bade me bring up "Mon Taureau", when his farm work was over.

The day had been hot and close. The sun was reddening in the west as we leaped across the lesser brook. The evening scents began to awake, and wander unseen through the still air. An occasional yellow sunbeam would slant through the thick roof of leaves and cling passionately to the orange clusters of mountain-ash berries. The trees were silent, drawing together to sleep. Only a few pink orchids stood palely by the path, looking wistfully out at the ranks of

red-purple bugle, whose last flowers, glowing from the top of the bronze column, yearned darkly for the sun.

We sauntered on in silence, not breaking the first hush of the woodlands. As we drew near home we heard a murmur from among the trees, from the lover's seat, where a great tree had fallen and remained mossed and covered with fragile growth. There a crooked bough made a beautiful seat for two.

"Fancy being in love and making a row in such a twilight," said I as we continued our way. But when we came opposite the fallen tree, we saw no lovers there, but a man sleeping, and muttering through his sleep. The cap had fallen from his grizzled hair, and his head leaned back against a profusion of the little wild geraniums that decorated the dead bough so delicately. The man's clothing was good, but slovenly and neglected. His face was pale and worn with sickness and dissipation. As he slept, his grey beard wagged, and his loose unlovely mouth moved in indistinct speech. He was acting over again some part of his life, and his features twitched during the unnatural sleep. He would give a little groan, gruesome to hear, and then talk to some woman. His features twitched as if with pain, and he moaned slightly.

The lips opened in a grimace, showing the yellow teeth behind the beard. Then he began again talking in his throat, thickly, so that we could only tell part of what he said. It was very unpleasant. I wondered how we should end it. Suddenly through the gloom of the twilight-haunted woods came the scream of a rabbit caught by a weasel. The man awoke with a sharp "Ah!" — he looked round in consternation, then sinking down again wearily, said, "I was dreaming again."

"You don't seem to have nice dreams," said George.

The man winced then, looking at us, said, almost sneering: "And who are you?"

We did not answer, but waited for him to move. He sat still, looking at us.

"So!" he said at last, wearily, "I do dream. I do, I do." He sighed heavily. Then he added, sarcastically, "Were you interested?"

"No," said I. "But you are out of your way surely. Which road did you want?"

"You want me to clear out," he said.

"Well," I said, laughing in deprecation, "I don't mind your dreaming. But this is not the way to anywhere."

"Where may you be going then?" he asked.

"I? Home," I replied with dignity.

"You are a Beardsall?" he queried, eyeing me with bloodshot eyes.

"I am!" I replied with more dignity, wondering who the fellow could be.

He sat a few moments looking at me. It was getting dark in the wood. Then he

took up an ebony stick with a gold head, and rose. The stick seemed to catch at my imagination. I watched it curiously as we walked with the old man along the path to the gate. We went with him into the open road. When we reached the clear sky where the light from the west fell full on our faces, he turned again and looked at us closely. His mouth opened sharply, as if he would speak, but he stopped himself, and only said, "Good-bye — Good-bye."

"Shall you be all right?" I asked, seeing him totter. "Yes — all right — good-bye, lad."

He walked away feebly into the darkness. We saw the lights of a vehicle on the high-road: after a while we heard the bang of a door, and a cab rattled away.

"Well — whoever's he?" said George, laughing.

"Do you know," said I, "it's made me feel a bit rotten."

"Ay?" he laughed, turning up the end of the exclamation with indulgent surprise.

We went back home, deciding to say nothing to the women. They were sitting in the window seat watching for us, Mother and Alice and Lettie.

"You have been a long time!" said Lettie. "We've watched the sun go down — it set splendidly — look — the rim of the hill is smouldering yet. What have you been doing?"

"Waiting till your Taurus finished work."

"Now be quiet," she said hastily, and — turning to him — "You have come to sing hymns?"

"Anything you like," he replied.

"How nice of you, George!" exclaimed Alice, ironically. She was a short, plump girl, pale, with daring, rebellious eyes. Her mother was a Wyld, a family famous either for shocking lawlessness, or for extreme uprightness. Alice, with an admirable father, and a mother who loved her husband passionately, was wild and lawless on the surface, but at heart very upright and amenable. My mother and she were fast friends, and Lettie had a good deal of sympathy with her. But Lettie generally deplored Alice's outrageous behaviour, though she relished it — if "superior" friends were not present. Most men enjoyed Alice in company, but they fought shy of being alone with her.

"Would you say the same to me?" she asked.

"It depends what you'd answer," he said, laughingly.

"Oh, you're so bloomin' cautious. I'd rather have a tack in my shoe than a cautious man, wouldn't you, Lettie?"

"Well — it depends how far I had to walk," was Lettie's reply — "but if I hadn't to limp too far — —"

Alice turned away from Lettie, whom she often found rather irritating.

“You do look glum, Sybil,” she said to me, “did somebody want to kiss you?”

I laughed — on the wrong side, understanding her malicious feminine reference — and answered:

“If they had, I should have looked happy.”

“Dear boy, smile now then” — and she tipped me under the chin. I drew away.

“Oh, Gum — we are solemn! What’s the matter with you? Georgie — say something — else I’s’ll begin to feel nervous.”

“What shall I say?” he asked, shifting his feet and resting his elbows on his knees. “Oh, Lor!” she cried in great impatience. He did not help her, but sat clasping his hands, smiling on one side of his face. He was nervous. He looked at the pictures, the ornaments, and everything in the room; Lettie got up to settle some flowers on the mantelpiece, and he scrutinised her closely. She was dressed in some blue foulard stuff, with lace at the throat, and lace cuffs to the elbow. She was tall and supple; her hair had a curling fluffiness very charming. He was no taller than she, and looked shorter, being strongly built. He too had a grace of his own, but not as he sat stiffly on a horse-hair chair. She was elegant in her movements.

After a little while Mother called us in to supper.

“Come,” said Lettie to him, “take me in to supper.” He rose, feeling very awkward.

“Give me your arm,” said she to tease him. He did so, and flushed under his tan, afraid of her round arm half hidden by lace, which lay among his sleeve.

When we were seated she flourished her spoon and asked him what he would have. He hesitated, looked at the strange dishes, and said he would have some cheese. They insisted on his eating new, complicated meats.

“I’m sure you like tantafflins, don’t you, Georgie?” said Alice, in her mocking fashion. He was not sure. He could not analyse the flavours, he felt confused and bewildered even through his sense of taste! Alice begged him to have salad.

“No, thanks,” said he. “I don’t like it.”

“Oh, George!” she said. “How can you say so when I’m offering it you.”

“Well — I’ve only had it once,” said he, “and that was when I was working with Flint, and he gave us fat bacon and bits of lettuce soaked in vinegar — ’Ave a bit more salt,’ he kept saying, but I’d had enough.”

“But all our lettuce,” said Alice with a wink, “is as sweet as a nut, no vinegar about our lettuce.” George laughed in much confusion at her pun on my sister’s name.

“I believe you,” he said, with pompous gallantry.

“Think of that!” cried Alice. “Our Georgie believes me. Oh, I am so, so

pleased!”

He smiled painfully. His hand was resting on the table, the thumb tucked tight under the fingers, his knuckles white as he nervously gripped his thumb. At last supper was finished, and he picked up his serviette from the floor and began to fold it. Lettie also seemed ill at ease. She had teased him till the sense of his awkwardness had become uncomfortable. Now she felt sorry, and a trifle repentant, so she went to the piano, as she always did to dispel her moods. When she was angry she played tender fragments of Tchaikovsky, when she was miserable, Mozart. Now she played Handel in a manner that suggested the plains of heaven in the long notes, and in the little trills as if she were waltzing up the ladder of Jacob’s dream like the damsels in Blake’s pictures. I often told her she flattered herself scandalously through the piano; but generally she pretended not to understand me, and occasionally she surprised me by a sudden rush of tears to her eyes. For George’s sake, she played Gounod’s “Ave Maria”, knowing that the sentiment of the chant would appeal to him, and make him sad, forgetful of the petty evils of this life. I smiled as I watched the cheap spell working. When she had finished, her fingers lay motionless for a minute on the keys, then she spun round, and looked him straight in the eyes, giving promise of a smile. But she glanced down at her knee.

“You are tired of music,” she said.

“No,” he replied, shaking his head.

“Like it better than salad?” she asked with a flash of raillery.

He looked up at her with a sudden smile, but did not reply. He was not handsome; his features were too often in a heavy repose; but when he looked up and smiled unexpectedly, he flooded her with an access of tenderness.

“Then you’ll have a little more,” said she, and she turned again to the piano. She played soft, wistful morsels, then suddenly broke off in the midst of one sentimental plaint, and left the piano, dropping into a low chair by the fire. There she sat and looked at him. He was conscious that her eyes were fixed on him, but he dared not look back at her, so he pulled his moustache.

“You are only a boy, after all,” she said to him quietly. Then he turned and asked her why.

“It is a boy that you are,” she repeated, leaning back in her chair, and smiling lazily at him.

“I never thought so,” he replied seriously.

“Really?” she said, chuckling.

“No,” said he, trying to recall his previous impressions. She laughed heartily, saying:

“You’re growing up.”

“How?” he asked.

“Growing up,” she repeated, still laughing.

“But I’m sure I was never boyish,” said he.

“I’m teaching you,” said she, “and when you’re boyish you’ll be a very decent man. A mere man daren’t be a boy for fear of tumbling off his manly dignity, and then he’d be a fool, poor thing.”

He laughed, and sat still to think about it, as was his way. “Do you like pictures?” she asked suddenly, being tired of looking at him.

“Better than anything,” he replied.

“Except dinner, and a warm hearth and a lazy evening,” she said.

He looked at her suddenly, hardening at her insult, and biting his lips at the taste of this humiliation. She repented, and smiled her plaintive regret to him.

“I’ll show you some,” she said, rising and going out of the room. He felt he was nearer her. She returned, carrying a pile of great books.

“Jove — you’re pretty strong!” said he.

“You are charming in your compliment,” she said. He glanced at her to see if she were mocking.

“That’s the highest you could say of me, isn’t it?” she insisted.

“Is it?” he asked, unwilling to compromise himself.

“For sure,” she answered — and then, laying the books on the table, “I know how a man will compliment me by the way he looks at me” — she kneeled before the fire. “Some look at my hair, some watch the rise and fall of my breathing, some look at my neck, and a few — not you among them — look me in the eyes for my thoughts. To you, I’m a fine specimen, strong! Pretty strong! You primitive man!”

He sat twisting his fingers; she was very contrary.

“Bring your chair up,” she said, sitting down at the table and opening a book. She talked to him of each picture, insisting on hearing his opinion. Sometimes he disagreed with her and would not be persuaded. At such times she was piqued.

“If,” said she, “an ancient Briton in his skins came and contradicted me as you do, wouldn’t you tell him not to make an ass of himself?”

“I don’t know,” said he.

“Then you ought to,” she replied. “You know nothing.”

“How is it you ask me then?” he said.

She began to laugh.

“Why — that’s a pertinent question. I think you might be rather nice, you know.”

“Thank you,” he said, smiling ironically.

“Oh!” she said. “I know, you think you’re perfect, but you’re not, you’re very

annoying.”

“Yes,” exclaimed Alice, who had entered the room again, dressed ready to depart. “He’s so blooming slow! Great whizz! Who wants fellows to carry cold dinners? Shouldn’t you like to shake him, Lettie?”

“I don’t feel concerned enough,” replied the other calmly. “Did you ever carry a boiled pudding, Georgie?” asked Alice with innocent interest, punching me slyly.

“Me! — why? — what makes you ask?” he replied, quite at a loss.

“Oh, I only wondered if your people needed any indigestion mixture — Pa mixes it — 1/1½ a bottle.”

“I don’t see — ” he began.

“Ta — ta, old boy, I’ll give you time to think about it. Good night, Lettie. Absence makes the heart grow fonder — Georgie — of someone else. Farewell. Come along, Sybil love, the moon is shining — Good night all, good night!”

I escorted her home, while they continued to look at the pictures. He was a romanticist. He liked Copley, Fielding, Cattermole and Birket Foster; he could see nothing whatsoever in Girtin or David Cox. They fell out decidedly over George Clausen.

“But,” said Lettie, “he is a real realist, he makes common things beautiful, he sees the mystery and magnificence that envelops us even when we work menially. I do know and I can speak. If I hoed in the fields beside you — ” This was a very new idea for him, almost a shock to his imagination, and she talked unheeded. The picture under discussion was a water-colour — “Hoeing” by Clausen.

“You’d be just that colour in the sunset,” she said, thus bringing him back to the subject, “and if you looked at the ground you’d find there was a sense of warm gold fire in it, and once you’d perceived the colour, it would strengthen till you’d see nothing else. You are blind; you are only half-born; you are gross with good living and heavy sleeping. You are a piano which will only play a dozen common notes. Sunset is nothing to you — it merely happens anywhere. Oh, but you make me feel as if I’d like to make you suffer. If you’d ever been sick; if you’d ever been born into a home where there was something oppressed you, and you couldn’t understand; if ever you’d believed, or even doubted, you might have been a man by now. You never grow up, like bulbs which spend all summer getting fat and fleshy, but never wakening the germ of a flower. As for me, the flower is born in me, but it wants bringing forth. Things don’t flower if they’re overfed. You have to suffer before you blossom in this life. When death is just touching a plant, it forces it into a passion of flowering. You wonder how I have touched death. You don’t know. There’s always a sense of death in this

home. I believe my mother hated my father before I was born. That was death in her veins for me before I was born. It makes a difference — ”

As he sat listening, his eyes grew wide and his lips were parted, like a child who feels the tale but does not understand the words. She, looking away from herself at last, saw him, began to laugh gently, and patted his hand, saying:

“Oh! my dear heart, are you bewildered? How amiable of you to listen to me — there isn’t any meaning in it all — there isn’t really!”

“But,” said he, “why do you say it?”

“Oh, the question!” she laughed. “Let us go back to our muttons, we’re gazing at each other like two dazed images.” They turned on, chatting casually, till George suddenly exclaimed, “There!”

It was Maurice Griffenhagen’s “Idyll”.

“What of it?” she asked, gradually flushing. She remembered her own enthusiasm over the picture.

“Wouldn’t it be fine?” he exclaimed, looking at her with glowing eyes, his teeth showing white in a smile that was not amusement.

“What?” she asked, dropping her head in confusion. “That — a girl like that — half afraid — and passion!” He lit up curiously.

“She may well be half afraid, when the barbarian comes out in his glory, skins and all.”

“But don’t you like it?” he asked.

She shrugged her shoulders, saying, “Make love to the next girl you meet, and by the time the poppies redden the field, she’ll hang in your arms. She’ll have need to be more than half afraid, won’t she?”

She played with the leaves of the book, and did not look at him.

“But,” he faltered, his eyes glowing, “it would be — rather — ”

“Don’t, sweet lad, don’t!” she cried, laughing.

“But I shouldn’t — ” he insisted. “I don’t know whether I should like any girl I know to — ”

“Precious Sir Galahad,” she said in a mock caressing voice, and stroking his cheek with her finger, “you ought to have been a monk — a martyr, a Carthusian.”

He laughed, taking no notice. He was breathlessly quivering under the new sensation of heavy, unappeased fire in his breast, and in the muscles of his arms. He glanced at her bosom and shivered.

“Are you studying just how to play the part?” she asked.

“No — but — ” he tried to look at her, but failed. He shrank, laughing, and dropped his head.

“What?” she asked with vibrant curiosity.

Having become a few degrees calmer, he looked up at her now, his eyes wide and vivid with a declaration that made her shrink back as if flame had leaped towards her face. She bent down her head and picked at her dress.

“Didn’t you know the picture before?” she said, in a low, toneless voice.

He shut his eyes and shrank with shame.

“No, I’ve never seen it before,” he said.

“I’m surprised,” she said. “It is a very common one.”

“Is it?” he answered, and this make-belief conversation fell. She looked up, and found his eyes. They gazed at each other for a moment before they hid their faces again. It was a torture to each of them to look thus nakedly at the other, a dazzled, shrinking pain that they forced themselves to undergo for a moment, that they might the moment after tremble with a fierce sensation that filled their veins with fluid, fiery electricity. She sought, almost in panic, for something to say.

“I believe it’s in Liverpool, the picture,” she contrived to say.

He dared not kill this conversation, he was too self-conscious. He forced himself to reply, “I didn’t know there was a gallery in Liverpool.”

“Oh yes, a very good one,” she said.

Their eyes met in the briefest flash of a glance, then both turned their faces aside. Thus averted, one from the other, they made talk. At last she rose, gathered the books together, and carried them off. At the door she turned. She must steal another keen moment: “Are you admiring my strength?” she asked. Her pose was fine. With her head thrown back, the roundness of her throat ran finely down to the bosom, which swelled above the pile of books held by her straight arms. He looked at her. Their lips smiled curiously. She put back her throat as if she were drinking. They felt the blood beating madly in their necks. Then, suddenly breaking into a slight trembling, she turned round and left the room.

While she was out, he sat twisting his moustache. She came back along the hall talking madly to herself in French. Having been much impressed by Sarah Bernhardt’s “*Dame aux Camélias*” and “*Adrienne Lecouvreur*”, Lettie had caught something of the weird tone of this great actress, and her raillery and mockery came out in little wild waves. She laughed at him, and at herself, and at men in general, and at love in particular. Whatever he said to her, she answered in the same mad clatter of French, speaking high and harshly. The sound was strange and uncomfortable. There was a painful perplexity in his brow, such as I often perceived afterwards, a sense of something hurting, something he could not understand.

“Well, well, well, well!” she exclaimed at last. “We must be mad sometimes,

or we should be getting aged, hein?"

"I wish I could understand," he said plaintively.

"Poor dear!" she laughed. "How sober he is! And will you really go? They will think we've given you no supper, you look so sad."

"I have supped — full — " he began, his eyes dancing with a smile as he ventured upon a quotation. He was very much excited.

"Of horrors!" she cried, completing it. "Now that is worse than anything I have given you."

"Is it?" he replied, and they smiled at each other.

"Far worse," she answered. They waited in suspense for some moments. He looked at her.

"Good-bye," she said, holding out her hand. Her voice was full of insurgent tenderness. He looked at her again, his eyes flickering. Then he took her hand. She pressed his fingers, holding them a little while. Then ashamed of her display of feeling, she looked down. He had a deep cut across his thumb.

"What a gash!" she exclaimed, shivering, and clinging a little tighter to his fingers before she released them. He gave a little laugh.

"Does it hurt you?" she asked very gently.

He laughed again — "No!" he said softly, as if his thumb were not worthy of consideration.

They smiled again at each other, and, with a blind movement, he broke the spell and was gone.

CHAPTER IV

THE FATHER

Autumn set in, and the red dahlias which kept the warm light alive in their bosoms so late into the evening died in the night, and the morning had nothing but brown balls of rottenness to show.

They called me as I passed the post office door in Eberwich one evening, and they gave me a letter for my mother. The distorted, sprawling handwriting perplexed me with a dim uneasiness; I put the letter away, and forgot it. I remembered it later in the evening, when I wished to recall something to interest my mother. She looked at the handwriting, and began hastily and nervously to tear open the envelope; she held it away from her in the light of the lamp, and with eyes drawn half closed, tried to scan it. So I found her spectacles, but she did not speak her thanks, and her hand trembled. She read the short letter quickly; then she sat down, and read it again, and continued to look at it.

“What is it, Mother?” I asked.

She did not answer, but continued staring at the letter. I went up to her, and put my hand on her shoulder, feeling very uncomfortable. She took no notice of me, beginning to murmur, “Poor Frank — Poor Frank.” That was my father’s name.

“But what is it, Mother? — tell me what’s the matter!”

She turned and looked at me as if I were a stranger; she got up, and began to walk about the room; then she left the room, and I heard her go out of the house.

The letter had fallen on to the floor. I picked it up. The handwriting was very broken. The address gave a village some few miles away; the date was three days before.

“My Dear Lettice:

“You will want to know I am gone. I can hardly last a day or two — my kidneys are nearly gone.

“I came over one day. I didn’t see you, but I saw the girl by the window, and I had a few words with the lad. He never knew, and he felt nothing. I think the girl might have done. If you knew how awfully lonely I am, Lettice — how awfully I have been, you might feel sorry.

“I have saved what I could, to pay you back. I have had the worst of it, Lettice, and I’m glad the end has come. I have had the worst of it.

“Good-bye — for ever — your husband,

“FRANK BEARDSALL.”

I was numbed by this letter of my father’s. With almost agonised effort I strove to recall him, But I knew that my image of a tall, handsome, dark man with pale grey eyes was made up from my mother’s few words, and from a portrait I had once seen.

The marriage had been unhappy. My father was of frivolous, rather vulgar character, but plausible, having a good deal of charm. He was a liar, without notion of honesty, and he had deceived my mother thoroughly. One after another she discovered his mean dishonesties and deceits, and her soul revolted from him, and because the illusion of him had broken into a thousand vulgar fragments, she turned away with the scorn of a woman who finds her romance has been a trumpery tale. When he left her for other pleasures — Lettie being a baby of three years, while I was five — she rejoiced bitterly. She had heard of him indirectly — and of him nothing good, although he prospered — but he had never come to see her or written to her in all the eighteen years.

In a while my mother came in. She sat down, pleating up the hem of her black apron, and smoothing it out again. “You know,” she said, “he had a right to the children, and I’ve kept them all the time.”

“He could have come,” said I.

“I set them against him, I have kept them from him, and he wanted them. I ought to be by him now — I ought to have taken you to him long ago.”

“But how could you, when you knew nothing of him?”

“He would have come — he wanted to come — I have felt it for years. But I kept him away. I know I have kept him away. I have felt it, and he has. Poor Frank — he’ll see his mistakes now. He would not have been as cruel as I have been — ”

“Nay, Mother, it is only the shock that makes you say so.”

“This makes me know. I have felt in myself a long time that he was suffering; I have had the feeling of him in me. I knew, yes, I did know he wanted me, and you, I felt it. I have had the feeling of him upon me this last three months especially...I have been cruel to him.”

“Well — we’ll go to him now, shall we?” I said. “Tomorrow — tomorrow,” she replied, noticing me really for the first time. “I go in the morning.”

“And I’ll go with you.”

“Yes — in the morning. Lettie has her party to Chatsworth — don’t tell her — we won’t tell her.”

“No,” said I.

Shortly after, my mother went upstairs. Lettie came in rather late from Highclose; Leslie did not come in. In the morning they were going with a motor party into Matloch and Chatsworth, and she was excited, and did not observe anything.

After all, Mother and I could not set out until the warm tempered afternoon. The air was full of a soft yellowness when we stepped down from the train at Cossethay. My mother insisted on walking the long two miles to the village. We went slowly along the road, lingering over the little red flowers in the high hedge-bottom up the hillside. We were reluctant to come to our destination. As we came in sight of the little grey tower of the church, we heard the sound of braying, brassy music. Before us, filling a little croft, the Wakes was in full swing.

Some wooden horses careered gaily round, and the swingboats leaped into the mild blue sky. We sat upon the stile, my mother and I, and watched. There were booths, and coconut shies and roundabouts scattered in the small field. Groups of children moved quietly from attraction to attraction. A deeply tanned man came across the field swinging two dripping buckets of water. Women looked from the doors of their brilliant caravans, and lean dogs rose lazily and settled down again under the steps. The fair moved slowly, for all its noise. A stout lady, with a husky masculine voice, invited the excited children into her peep-show. A swarthy man stood with his thin legs astride on the platform of the roundabouts, and sloping backwards, his mouth distended with a row of fingers, he whistled astonishingly to the coarse row of the organ, and his whistling sounded clear, like the flight of a wild goose high over the chimney tops, as he was carried round and round. A little fat man with an ugly swelling on his chest stood screaming from a filthy booth to a crowd of urchins, bidding them challenge a big, stolid young man who stood with folded arms, his fists pushing out his biceps. On being asked if he would undertake any of these prospective challenges, this young man nodded, not having yet attained a talking stage: — yes he would take two at a time, screamed the little fat man with the big excrescence on his chest, pointing at the cowering lads and girls. Farther off, Punch’s quaint voice could be heard when the coconut man ceased grinding out screeches from his rattle. The coconut man was wroth, for these youngsters would not risk a penny shy, and the rattle yelled like a fiend. A little girl came along to look at us, daintily licking an ice-cream sandwich. We were uninteresting, however, so she passed on to stare at the caravans.

We had almost gathered courage to cross the wakes, when the cracked bell of the church sent its note falling over the babble.

“One — two — three” — had it really sounded three! Then it rang on a lower bell — “One — two — three.” A passing bell for a man! I looked at my mother — she turned away from me.

The organ flared on — the husky woman came forward to make another appeal. Then there was a lull. The man with the lump on his chest had gone inside the rag to spar with the solid fellow. The coconut man had gone to the “Three Tunns” in fury, and a brazen girl of seventeen or so was in charge of the nuts. The horses careered round, carrying two frightened boys.

Suddenly the quick, throbbing note of the low bell struck again through the din. I listened — but could not keep count. One, two, three, four — for the third time that great lad had determined to go on the horses, and they had started while his foot was on the step, and he had been foiled — eight, nine, ten — no wonder that whistling man had such a big Adam’s apple — I wondered if it hurt his neck when he talked, being so pointed — nineteen, twenty — the girl was licking more ice-cream, with precious, tiny licks — twenty-five, twenty-six — I wondered if I did count to twenty-six mechanically. At this point I gave it up, and watched for Lord Tennyson’s bald head to come spinning round on the painted rim of the roundabouts, followed by a red-faced Lord Roberts, and a villainous-looking Disraeli.

“Fifty-one — ” said my mother. “Come — come along.” We hurried through the fair, towards the church; towards a garden where the last red sentinels looked out from the top of the hollyhock spires. The garden was a tousled mass of faded pink chrysanthemums, and weak-eyed Michaelmas daisies, and spectre stalks of hollyhocks. It belonged to a low, dark house, which crouched behind a screen of yews. We walked along to the front. The blinds were down, and in one room we could see the stale light of candles burning.

“Is this Yew Cottage?” asked my mother of a curious lad.

“It’s Mrs May’s,” replied the boy.

“Does she live alone?” I asked.

“She ‘ad French Carlin — but he’s dead — an’ she’s letten th’ candles ter keep th’ owd lad off’n ‘im.”

We went to the house and knocked.

“An’ ye come about him?” hoarsely whispered a bent old woman, looking up with very blue eyes, nodding her old head with its velvet net significantly towards the inner room.

“Yes — ” said my mother, “we had a letter.”

“Ay, poor fellow — he’s gone, missis,” and the old lady shook her head. Then she looked at us curiously, leaned forward, and, putting her withered old hand on my mother’s arm, her hand with its dark blue veins, she whispered in

confidence, "And the candles 'as gone out twice. 'E wor a funny feller, very funny!"

"I must come in and settle things — I am his nearest relative," said my mother, trembling.

"Yes — I must 'a dozed, for when I looked up, it wor black darkness. Missis, I dursn't sit up wi' 'im no more, an' many a one I've laid out. Eh, but his sufferin's, Missis — poor feller — eh, Missis!" — she lifted her ancient hands, and looked up at my mother, with her eyes so intensely blue.

"Do you know where he kept his papers?" asked my mother.

"Yis, I axed Father Burns about it; he said we mun pray for 'im. I bought him candles out o' my own pocket. He wor a rum feller, he wor!" and again she shook her grey head mournfully. My mother took a step forward.

"Did ye want to see 'im?" asked the old woman with half-timid questioning.

"Yes," replied my mother, with a vigorous nod. She perceived now that the old lady was deaf.

We followed the woman into the kitchen, a long, low room, dark, with drawn blinds.

"Sit ye down," said the old lady in the same low tone, as if she were speaking to herself:

"Ye are his sister, 'appen?"

My mother shook her head.

"Oh — his brother's wife!" persisted the old lady.

We shook our heads.

"Only a cousin?" she guessed, and looked at us appealingly. I nodded assent.

"Sit ye there a minute," she said, and trotted off. She banged the door, and jarred a chair as she went. When she returned, she set down a bottle and two glasses with a thump on the table in front of us. Her thin, skinny wrist seemed hardly capable of carrying the bottle.

"It's one as he'd only just begun of — 'ave a drop to keep ye up — do now, poor thing," she said, pushing the bottle to my mother and hurrying off, returning with the sugar and the kettle. We refused.

"'E won't want it no more, poor feller — an' it's good, Missis, he allers drank it good. Ay — an' 'e 'adn't a drop the last three days, poor man, poor feller, not a drop. Come now, it'll stay ye, come now." We refused.

"'T's in there," she whispered, pointing to a closed door in a dark corner of the gloomy kitchen. I stumbled up a little step, and went plunging against a rickety table on which was a candle in a tall brass candlestick. Over went the candle, and it rolled on the floor, and the brass holder fell with much clanging.

"Eh! — Eh! Dear — Lord, Dear — Heart. Dear — Heart!" wailed the old

woman. She hastened trembling round to the other side of the bed, and relit the extinguished candle at the taper which was still burning. As she returned, the light glowed on her old, wrinkled face, and on the burnished knobs of the dark mahogany bedstead, while a stream of wax dripped down on to the floor. By the glimmering light of the two tapers we could see the outlined form under the counterpane. She turned back the hem and began to make painful wailing sounds. My heart was beating heavily, and I felt choked. I did not want to look — but I must. It was the man I had seen in the woods — with the puffiness gone from his face. I felt the great wild pity, and a sense of terror, and a sense of horror, and a sense of awful littleness and loneliness among a great empty space. I felt beyond myself as if I were a mere fleck drifting unconsciously through the dark. Then I felt my mother's arm round my shoulders, and she cried pitifully, "Oh, my son, my son!"

I shivered, and came back to myself. There were no tears in my mother's face, only a great pleading. "Never mind, Mother — never mind," I said incoherently.

She rose and covered the face again, and went round to the old lady, and held her still, and stayed her little wailings. The woman wiped from her cheeks the few tears of old age, and pushed her grey hair smooth under the velvet network.

"Where are all his things?" asked mother.

"Eh?" said the old lady, lifting up her ear.

"Are all his things here?" repeated mother in a louder tone.

"Here?" — the woman waved her hand round the room. It contained the great mahogany bedstead naked of hangings, a desk, and an oak chest, and two or three mahogany chairs. "I couldn't get him upstairs; he's only been here about a three week."

"Where's the key to the desk?" said my mother loudly in the woman's ear.

"Yes," she replied — "it's his desk." She looked at us, perplexed and doubtful, fearing she had misunderstood us. This was dreadful.

"Key!" I shouted. "Where is the key?"

Her old face was full of trouble as she shook her head. I took it that she did not know.

"Where are his clothes? Clothes," I repeated, pointing to my coat. She understood, and muttered, "I'll fetch 'em ye." We should have followed her as she hurried upstairs through a door near the head of the bed, had we not heard a heavy footstep in the kitchen, and a voice saying, "Is the old lady going to drink with the Devil? Hullo, Mrs May, come and drink with me!" We heard the tinkle of the liquor poured into a glass, and almost immediately the light tap of the empty tumbler on the table.

"I'll see what the old girl's up to," he said, and the heavy tread came towards

us. Like me, he stumbled at the little step, but escaped collision with the table.

“Damn that fool’s step,” he said heartily. It was the doctor — for he kept his hat on his head, and did not hesitate to stroll about the house. He was a big, burly, red-faced man.

“I beg your pardon,” he said, observing my mother. My mother bowed.

“Mrs Beardsall?” he asked, taking off his hat.

My mother bowed.

“I posted a letter to you. You are a relative of his — of poor old Carlin’s?” — he nodded sideways towards the bed. “The nearest,” said my mother.

“Poor fellow — he was a bit stranded. Comes of being a bachelor, Ma’am.”

“I was very much surprised to hear from him,” said my mother.

“Yes, I guess he’s not been much of a one for writing to his friends. He’s had a bad time lately. You have to pay some time or other. We bring them on ourselves — silly devils as we are. — I beg your pardon.”

There was a moment of silence, during which the doctor sighed, and then began to whistle softly.

“Well — we might be more comfortable if we had the blind up,” he said, letting daylight in among the glimmer of the tapers as he spoke.

“At any rate,” he said, “you won’t have any trouble settling up — no debts or anything of that. I believe there’s a bit to leave — so it’s not so bad. Poor devil — he was very down at the last; but we have to pay at one end or the other. What on earth is the old girl after?” he asked, looking up at the raftered ceiling, which was rumbling and thundering with the old lady’s violent rummaging.

“We wanted the key of his desk,” said my mother.

“Oh — I can find you that — and the will. He told me where they were, and to give them you when you came. He seemed to think a lot of you. Perhaps he might ha’ done better for himself — ”

Here we heard the heavy tread of the old lady coming downstairs. The doctor went to the foot of the stairs.

“Hello, now — be careful!” he bawled. The poor old woman did as he expected, and trod on the braces of the trousers she was trailing, and came crashing into his arms. He set her tenderly down, saying, “Not hurt, are you? — no!” and he smiled at her and shook his head.

“Eh, Doctor — Eh, Doctor — bless ye, I’m thankful ye’ve come. Ye’ll see to ‘em now, will ye?”

“Yes — ” he nodded in his bluff, winning way, and hurrying into the kitchen, he mixed her a glass of whisky, and brought one for himself, saying to her, “There you are — ’twas a nasty shaking for you.”

The poor old woman sat in a chair by the open door of the staircase, the pile of

clothing tumbled about her feet. She looked round pitifully at us, and at the daylight struggling among the candle-light, making a ghostly gleam on the bed where the rigid figure lay unmoved; her hand trembled so that she could scarcely hold her glass.

The doctor gave us the keys, and we rifled the desk and the drawers, sorting out all the papers. The doctor sat sipping and talking to us all the time.

“Yes,” he said, “he’s only been here about two years. Felt himself beginning to break up then, I think. He’d been a long time abroad; they always called him Frenchy.” The doctor sipped and reflected, and sipped again, “Ay — he’d run the rig in his day — used to dream dreadfully. Good thing the old woman was so deaf. Awful, when a man gives himself away in his sleep; played the deuce with him, knowing it.” Sip, sip, sip — and more reflections — and another glass to be mixed.

“But he was a jolly decent fellow — generous, open-handed. The folks didn’t like him, because they couldn’t get to the bottom of him; they always hate a thing they can’t fathom. He was close, there’s no mistake — save when he was asleep sometimes.” The doctor looked at his glass and sighed.

“However — we shall miss him — shan’t we, Mrs May?” he bawled suddenly, startling us, making us glance at the bed.

He lit his pipe and puffed voluminously in order to obscure the attraction of his glass. Meanwhile we examined the papers. There were very few letters — one or two addressed to Paris. There were many bills, and receipts, and notes — business, all business.

There was hardly a trace of sentiment among all the litter. My mother sorted out such papers as she considered valuable; the others, letters and missives which she glanced at cursorily and put aside, she took into the kitchen and burned. She seemed afraid to find out too much.

The doctor continued to colour his tobacco smoke with a few pensive words.

“Ay,” he said, “there are two ways. You can burn your lamp with a big draught, and it’ll flare away, till the oil’s gone, then it’ll stink and smoke itself out. Or you can keep it trim on the kitchen table, dirty your fingers occasionally trimming it up, and it’ll last a long time, and sink out mildly.” Here he turned to his glass, and finding it empty, was awakened to reality.

“Anything I can do, Madam?” he asked.

“No, thank you.”

“Ay, I don’t suppose there’s much to settle. Nor many tears to shed — when a fellow spends his years an’ his prime on the Lord knows who, you can’t expect those that remember him young to feel his loss too keenly. He’d had his fling in his day, though, ma’am. Ay — must ha’ had some rich times. No lasting

satisfaction in it though — always wanting, craving. There's nothing like marrying — you've got your dish before you then, and you've got to eat it." He lapsed again into reflection, from which he did not rouse till we had locked up the desk, burned the useless papers, put the others into my pocket and the black bag, and were standing ready to depart. Then the doctor looked up suddenly and said:

"But what about the funeral?"

Then he noticed the weariness of my mother's look, and he jumped up, and quickly seized his hat, saying:

"Come across to my wife and have a cup of tea. Buried in these dam holes a fellow gets such a boor. Do come — my little wife is lonely — come just to see her."

My mother smiled and thanked him. We turned to go. My mother hesitated in her walk; on the threshold of the room she glanced round at the bed, but she went on.

Outside, in the fresh air of the fading afternoon, I could not believe it was true. It was not true, that sad, colourless face with grey beard, wavering in the yellow candle-light. It was a lie — that wooden bedstead, that deaf woman, they were fading phrases of the untruth. That yellow blaze of little sunflowers was true, and the shadow from the sun-dial on the warm old almshouses — that was real. The heavy afternoon sunlight came round us warm and reviving; we shivered, and the untruth went out of our veins, and we were no longer chilled.

The doctor's house stood sweetly among the beech trees, and at the iron fence in front of the little lawn a woman was talking to a beautiful Jersey cow that pushed its dark nose through the fence from the field beyond. She was a little, dark woman with vivid colouring; she rubbed the nose of the delicate animal, peeped right into the dark eyes, and talked in a lovable Scottish speech; talked as a mother talks softly to her child. When she turned round in surprise to greet us there was still the softness of a rich affection in her eyes. She gave us tea, and scones, and apple jelly, and all the time we listened with delight to her voice, which was musical as bees humming in the lime trees. Though she said nothing significant, we listened to her attentively.

Her husband was merry and kind. She glanced at him with quick glances of apprehension, and her eyes avoided him. He, in his merry, frank way, chaffed her, and praised her extravagantly, and teased her again. Then he became a trifle uneasy. I think she was afraid he had been drinking; I think she was shaken with horror when she found him tipsy, and bewildered and terrified when she saw him drunk. They had no children. I noticed he ceased to joke when she became a little constrained. He glanced at her often, and looked somewhat pitiful when she

avoided his looks, and he grew uneasy, and I could see he wanted to go away.

“I had better go with you to see the vicar, then,” he said to me, and we left the room, whose windows looked south, over the meadows, the room where dainty little water-colours, and beautiful bits of embroidery, and empty flower-vases, and two dirty novels from the town library, and the closed piano, and the odd cups, and the chipped spout of the teapot causing stains on the cloth — all told one story.

We went to the joiner’s and ordered the coffin, and the doctor had a glass of whisky on it; the graveyard fees were paid, and the doctor sealed the engagement with a drop of brandy; the vicar’s port completed the doctor’s joviality, and we went home.

This time the disquiet in the little woman’s dark eyes could not dispel the doctor’s merriment. He rattled away, and she nervously twisted her wedding-ring. He insisted on driving us to the station, in spite of our alarm.

“But you will be quite safe with him,” said his wife, in her caressing Highland speech. When she shook hands at parting I noticed the hardness of the little palm; — and I have always hated an old, black alpaca dress.

It is such a long way home from the station at Eberwich. We rode part way in the bus; then we walked. It is a very Hong way for my mother, when her steps are heavy with trouble.

Rebecca was out by the rhododendrons looking for us. She hurried to us all solicitous, and asked Mother if she had had tea.

“But you’ll do with another cup,” she said, and ran back into the house.

She came into the dining-room to take my mother’s bonnet and coat. She wanted us to talk; she was distressed on my mother’s behalf; she noticed the blackness that lay under her eyes, and she fidgeted about, unwilling to ask anything, yet uneasy and anxious to know.

“Lettie has been home,” she said.

“And gone back again?” asked Mother.

“She only came to change her dress. She put the green poplin on. She wondered where you’d gone.”

“What did you tell her?”

“I said you’d just gone out a bit. She said she was glad. She was as lively as a squirrel.”

Rebecca looked wistfully at my mother. At length the latter said:

“He’s dead, Rebecca. I have seen him.”

“Now thank God for that — no more need to worry over him.”

“Well! — He died all alone, Rebecca — all alone.”

“He died as you’ve lived,” said Becky with some asperity. “But I’ve had the

children, I've had the children — we won't tell Lettie, Rebecca.”

“No ‘m.” Rebecca left the room.

“You and Lettie will have the money,” said mother to me. There was a sum of four thousand pounds or so. It was left to my mother; or, in default to Lettie and me.”

“Well, Mother — if it's ours, it's yours.”

There was silence for some minutes, then she said, “You might have had a father — ”

“We're thankful we hadn't, Mother. You spared us that.”

“But how can you tell?” said my mother.

“I can,” I replied. “And I am thankful to you.”

“If ever you feel scorn for one who is near you rising in your throat, try and be generous, my lad.”

“Well — ” said I.

“Yes,” she replied, “we'll say no more. Sometime you must tell Lettie — you tell her.”

I did tell her, a week or so afterwards.

“Who knows?” she asked, her face hardening.

“Mother, Becky, and ourselves.”

“Nobody else?”

“No.”

“Then it's a good thing he is out of the way if he was such a nuisance to Mother. Where is she?”

“Upstairs.”

Lettie ran to her.

CHAPTER V

THE SCENT OF BLOOD

The death of the man who was our father changed our lives. It was not that we suffered a great grief; the chief trouble was the unanswered crying of failure. But we were changed in our feelings and in our relations; there was a new consciousness, a new carefulness.

We had lived between the woods and the water all our lives, Lettie and I, and she had sought the bright notes in everything. She seemed to hear the water laughing, and the leaves tittering and giggling like young girls; the aspen fluttered like the draperies of a flirt, and the sound of the wood-pigeons was almost foolish in its sentimentality.

Lately, however, she had noticed again the cruel, pitiful crying of a hedgehog caught in a gin, and she had noticed the traps for the fierce little murderers, traps walled in with a small fence of fir, and baited with the guts of a killed rabbit.

On an afternoon a short time after our visit to Cossethay, Lettie sat in the window seat. The sun clung to her hair, and kissed her with passionate splashes of colour brought from the vermilion, dying creeper outside. The sun loved Lettie, and was loath to leave her. She looked out over Nethermere to Highclose, vague in the September mist. Had it not been for the scarlet light on her face, I should have thought her look was sad and serious. She nestled up to the window, and leaned her head against the wooden shaft. Gradually she drooped into sleep. Then she became wonderfully childish again — it was the girl of seventeen sleeping there, with her full pouting lips slightly apart, and the breath coming lightly. I felt the old feeling of responsibility; I must protect her, and take care of her.

There was a crunch of the gravel. It was Leslie coming. He lifted his hat to her, thinking she was looking. He had that fine, lithe physique, suggestive of much animal vigour; his person was exceedingly attractive; one watched him move about, and felt pleasure. His face was less pleasing than his person. He was not handsome; his eyebrows were too light, his nose was large and ugly, and his forehead, though high and fair, was without dignity. But he had a frank, good-natured expression, and a fine, wholesome laugh.

He wondered why she did not move. As he came nearer he saw. Then he winked at me and came in. He tiptoed across the room to look at her. The sweet carelessness of her attitude, the appealing, half-pitiful girlishness of her face touched his responsive heart, and he leaned forward and kissed her cheek where already was a crimson stain of sunshine.

She roused half out of her sleep with a little, petulant “Oh!” as an awkward child. He sat down behind her, and gently drew her head against him, looking down at her with a tender, soothing smile. I thought she was going to fall asleep thus. But her eyelids quivered, and her eyes beneath them flickered into consciousness.

“Leslie! — oh! — Let me go!” she exclaimed, pushing him away. He loosed her, and rose, looking at her reproachfully. She shook her dress, and went quickly to the mirror to arrange her hair.

“You are mean!” she exclaimed, looking very flushed, vexed, and dishevelled.

He laughed indulgently, saying, “You shouldn’t go to sleep then and look so pretty. Who could help?”

“It is not nice!” she said, frowning with irritation.

“We are not ‘nice’ — are we? I thought we were proud of our unconventionality. Why shouldn’t I kiss you?”

“Because it is a question of me, not of you alone.”

“Dear me, you are in a way!”

“Mother is coming.”

“Is she? You had better tell her.”

Mother was very fond of Leslie.

“Well, sir,” she said, “why are you frowning?”

He broke into a laugh.

“Lettie is scolding me for kissing her when she was playing ‘Sleeping Beauty’.”

“The conceit of the boy, to play Prince!” said my mother. “Oh, but it appears I was sadly out of character,” he said ruefully.

Lettie laughed and forgave him.

“Well,” he said, looking at her and smiling, “I came to ask you to go out.”

“It is a lovely afternoon,” said Mother.

She glanced at him, and said:

“I feel dreadfully lazy.”

“Never mind!” he replied, “you’ll wake up. Go and put your hat on.”

He sounded impatient. She looked at him.

He seemed to be smiling peculiarly.

She lowered her eyes and went out of the room.

“She’ll come all right,” he said to himself, and to me. “She likes to play you on a string.”

She must have heard him. When she came in again, drawing on her gloves, she said quietly:

“You come as well, Pat.”

He swung round and stared at her in angry amazement.

“I had rather stay and finish this sketch,” I said, feeling uncomfortable.

“No, but do come, there’s a dear.” She took the brush from my hand, and drew me from my chair. The blood flushed into his cheeks. He went quietly into the hall and brought my cap.

“All right!” he said angrily. “Women like to fancy themselves Napoleons.”

“They do, dear Iron Duke, they do,” she mocked.

“Yet, there’s a Waterloo in all their histories,” he said, since she had supplied him with the idea.

“Say Peterloo, my general, say Peterloo.”

“Ay, Peterloo,” he replied, with a splendid curl of the lip — “Easy conquests!”

“He came, he saw, he conquered,” Lettie recited.

“Are you coming?” he said, getting more angry.

“When you bid me,” she replied, taking my arm.

We went through the wood, and through the dishevelled border-land to the high road, through the border-land that should have been park-like, but which was shaggy with loose grass and yellow mole-hills, ragged with gorse and bramble and briar, with wandering old thorn trees, and a queer clump of Scotch firs.

On the highway the leaves were falling, and they chattered under our steps. The water was mild and blue, and the corn stood drowsily in “stook”.

We climbed the hill behind Highclose, and walked on along the upland, looking across towards the hills of arid Derbyshire, and seeing them not, because it was autumn. We came in sight of the head-stocks of the pit at Selsby, and of the ugly village standing blank and naked on the brow of the hill.

Lettie was in very high spirits. She laughed and joked continually. She picked bunches of hips and stuck them in her dress. Having got a thorn in her finger from a spray of blackberries, she went to Leslie to have it squeezed out. We were all quite gay as we turned off the high road and went along the bridle path, with the woods on our right, the high Strelley hills shutting in our small valley in front, and the fields and the common to the left. About half-way down the lane we heard the slurr of the scythe-stone on the scythe. Lettie went to the hedge to see. It was George mowing the oats on the steep hillside where the machine could not go. His father was tying up the corn into sheaves.

Straightening his back, Mr Saxton saw us, and called to us to come and help. We pushed through a gap in the hedge and went up to him.

“Now then,” said the father to me, “take that coat off,” and to Lettie, “Have you brought us a drink? No; — come, that sounds bad! Going a walk I guess. You see what it is to get fat,” and he pulled a wry face as he bent over to tie the corn. He was a man beautifully ruddy and burly, in the prime of life.

“Show me, I’ll do some,” said Lettie.

“Nay,” he answered gently, “it would scratch your wrists and break your stays. Hark at my hands” — he rubbed them together — ”like sandpaper!”

George had his back to us, and had not noticed us. He continued to mow. Leslie watched him.

“That’s a fine movement!” he exclaimed.

“Yes,” replied the father, rising very red in the face from the tying, “and our George enjoys a bit o’ mowing. It puts you in fine condition when you get over the first stiffness.”

We moved across to the standing corn. The sun being mild, George had thrown off his hat, and his black hair was moist and twisted into confused half-curls. Firmly planted, he swung with a beautiful rhythm from the waist. On the hip of his belted breeches hung the scythe-stone; his shirt, faded almost white, was torn just above the belt, and showed the muscles of his back playing like lights upon the white sand of a brook. There was something exceedingly attractive in the rhythmic body.

I spoke to him, and he turned round. He looked straight at Lettie with a flashing, betraying smile. He was remarkably handsome. He tried to say some words of greeting, then he bent down and gathered an armful of corn, and deliberately bound it up.

Like him, Lettie had found nothing to say. Leslie, however, remarked:

“I should think mowing is a nice exercise.”

“It is,” he replied, and continued, as Leslie picked up the scythe, “but it will make you sweat, and your hands will be sore.”

Leslie tossed his head a little, threw off his coat, and said briefly:

“How do you do it?” Without waiting for a reply he proceeded. George said nothing, but turned to Lettie.

“You are picturesque,” she said, a trifle awkwardly, “quite fit for an Idyll.”

“And you?” he said.

She shrugged her shoulders, laughed, and turned to pick up a scarlet pimpernel.

“How do you bind the corn?” she asked.

He took some long straws, cleaned them, and showed her the way to hold

them. Instead of attending, she looked at his hands, big, hard, inflamed by the snath of the scythe.

“I don’t think I could do it,” she said.

“No,” he replied quietly, and watched Leslie mowing. The latter who was wonderfully ready at everything, was doing fairly well, but he had not the invincible sweep of the other, nor did he make his same crisp crunching music.

“I bet he’ll sweat,” said George.

“Don’t you?” she replied.

“A bit — but I’m not dressed up.”

“Do you know,” she said suddenly, “your arms tempt me to touch them. They are such a fine brown colour, and they look so hard.”

He held out one arm to her. She hesitated, then she swiftly put her finger-tips on the smooth brown muscle, and drew them along. Quickly she hid her hand into the folds of her skirt, blushing.

He laughed a low, quiet laugh, at once pleasant and startling to hear.

“I wish I could work here,” she said, looking away at the standing corn, and the dim blue woods. He followed her look, and laughed quietly, with indulgent resignation.

“I do!” she said emphatically.

“You feel so fine,” he said, pushing his hand through his open shirt-front, and gently rubbing the muscles of his side. “It’s a pleasure to work or to stand still. It’s a pleasure to yourself — your own physique.”

She looked at him, full at his physical beauty, as if he were some great firm bud of life.

Leslie came up, wiping his brow.

“Jove,” said he, “I do perspire.”

George picked up his coat and helped him into it, saying: “You may take a chill.”

“It’s a jolly nice form of exercise,” said he.

George, who had been feeling one finger-tip, now took out his pen-knife and proceeded to dig a thorn from his hand. “What a hide you must have,” said Leslie.

Lettie said nothing, but she recoiled slightly.

The father, glad of an excuse to straighten his back and to chat, came to us.

“You’d soon had enough,” he said, laughing to Leslie.

George startled us with a sudden, “Holloa.” We turned, and saw a rabbit, which had burst from the corn, go coursing through the hedge, dodging and bounding the sheaves. The standing corn was a patch along the hillside some fifty paces in length, and ten or so in width.

“I didn’t think there’d have been any in,” said the father, picking up a short rake, and going to the low wall of the corn. We all followed.

“Watch!” said the father, “if you see the heads of the corn shake!”

We prowled round the patch of corn.

“Hold! Look out!” shouted the father excitedly, and immediately after a rabbit broke from the cover.

“Ay — Ay — Ay,” was the shout, “turn him — turn him!” We set off full pelt. The bewildered little brute, scared by Leslie’s wild running and crying, turned from its course, and dodged across the hill, threading its terrified course through the maze of lying sheaves, spurting on in a painful zigzag, now bounding over an untied bundle of corn, now swerving from the sound of a shout. The little wretch was hard pressed; George rushed upon it. It darted into some fallen corn, but he had seen it, and had fallen on it. In an instant he was up again, and the little creature was dangling from his hand.

We returned, panting, sweating, our eyes flashing, to the edge of the standing corn. I heard Lettie calling, and turning round saw Emily and the two children entering the field as they passed from school.

“There’s another!” shouted Leslie.

I saw the oat-tops quiver. “Here! Here!” I yelled. The animal leaped out, and made for the hedge. George and Leslie, who were on that side, dashed off, turned him, and he coursed back our way. I headed him off to the father who swept in pursuit for a short distance, but who was too heavy for the work. The little beast made towards the gate, but this time Mollie, with her hat in her hand and her hair flying, whirled upon him, and she and the little fragile lad sent him back again. The rabbit was getting tired. It dodged the sheaves badly, running towards the top hedge. I went after it. If I could have let myself fall on it I could have caught it, but this was impossible to me, and I merely prevented its dashing through the hole into safety. It raced along the hedge bottom. George tore after it. As he was upon it, it darted into the hedge. He fell flat, and shot his hand into the gap. But it had escaped. He lay there, panting in great sobs, and looking at me with eyes in which excitement and exhaustion struggled like flickering light and darkness. When he could speak, he said, “Why didn’t you fall on top of it?”

“I couldn’t,” said I.

We returned again. The two children were peering into the thick corn also. We thought there was nothing more. George began to mow. As I walked round I caught sight of a rabbit skulking near the bottom corner of the patch. Its ears lay pressed against its back; I could see the palpitation of the heart under the brown fur, and I could see the shining dark eyes looking at me. I felt no pity for it, but still I could not actually hurt it. I beckoned to the father. He ran up, and aimed a

blow with the rake. There was a sharp little cry which sent a hot pain through me as if I had been cut. But the rabbit ran out, and instantly I forgot the cry, and gave pursuit, fairly feeling my fingers stiffen to choke it. It was all lame. Leslie was upon it in a moment, and he almost pulled its head off in his excitement to kill it.

I looked up. The girls were at the gate, just turning away. "There are no more," said the father.

At that instant Mollie shouted.

"There's one down this hole."

The hole was too small for George to get his hand in, so we dug it out with the rake-handle. The stick went savagely down the hole, and there came a squeak.

"Mice!" said George, and as he said it the mother slid out. Somebody knocked her on the back, and the hole was opened out. Little mice seemed to swarm everywhere. It was like killing insects. We counted nine little ones lying dead.

"Poor brute," said George, looking at the mother. "What a job she must have had rearing that lot!" He picked her up, handled her curiously and with pity. Then he said, "Well, I may as well finish this tonight!"

His father took another scythe from off the hedge, and together they soon laid the proud, quivering heads low. Leslie and I tied up as they mowed, and soon all was finished.

The beautiful day was flushing to die. Over in the west the mist was gathering bluer. The intense stillness was broken by the rhythmic hum of the engines at the distant coal-mine, as they drew up the last bantles of men. As we walked across the fields the tubes of stubble tinkled like dulcimers. The scent of the corn began to rise gently. The last cry of the pheasants came from the wood, and the little clouds of birds were gone.

I carried a scythe, and we walked, pleasantly weary, down the hill towards the farm. The children had gone home with the rabbits.

When we reached the mill, we found the girls just rising from the table. Emily began to carry away the used pots, and to set clean ones for us. She merely glanced at us and said her formal greeting. Lettie picked up a book that lay in the ingle seat, and went to the window. George dropped into a chair. He had flung off his coat, and had pushed back his hair. He rested his great brown arms on the table and was silent for a moment.

"Running like that," he said to me, passing his hand over his eyes, "makes you more tired than a whole day's work. I don't think I shall do it again."

"The sport's exciting while it lasts," said Leslie.

"It does you more harm than the rabbits do us good," said Mrs Saxton.

"Oh, I don't know, Mother," drawled her son, "it's a couple of shillings."

“And a couple of days off your life.”

“What be that!” he replied, taking a piece of bread and butter, and biting a large piece from it.

“Pour us a drop of tea,” he said to Emily.

“I don’t know that I shall wait on such brutes,” she replied, relenting, and flourishing the teapot.

“Oh,” said he, taking another piece of bread and butter, “I’m not all alone in my savageness this time.”

“Men are all brutes,” said Lettie hotly, without looking up from her book.

“You can tame us,” said Leslie, in mighty good humour. She did not reply. George, began, in that deliberate voice that so annoyed Emily:

“It does make you mad, though, to touch the fur, and not be able to grab him” — he laughed quietly.

Emily moved off in disgust. Lettie opened her mouth sharply to speak, but remained silent.

“I don’t know,” said Leslie. “When it comes to killing it goes against the stomach.”

“If you can run,” said George, “you should be able to run to death. When your blood’s up, you don’t hang half-way.”

“I think a man is horrible,” said Lettie, “who can tear the head off a little mite of a thing like a rabbit, after running it in torture over a field.”

“When he is nothing but a barbarian to begin with — ” said Emily.

“If you began to run yourself — you’d be the same,” said George.

“Why, women are cruel enough,” said Leslie, with a glance at Lettie. “Yes,” he continued, “they’re cruel enough in their way” — another look, and a comical little smile.

“Well,” said George, “what’s the good finicking! If you feel like doing a thing — you’d better do it.”

“Unless you haven’t courage,” said Emily, bitingly.

He Hooked up at her with dark eyes, suddenly full of anger.

“But,” said Lettie — she could not hold herself from asking, “Don’t you think it’s brutal, now — now that you do think — isn’t it degrading and mean to run the poor little things down?”

“Perhaps it is,” he replied, “but it wasn’t an hour ago.”

“You have no feeling,” she said bitterly.

He laughed deprecatingly, but said nothing.

We finished tea in silence, Lettie reading, Emily moving about the house. George got up and went out at the end. A moment or two after we heard him across the yard with the milk-buckets, singing “The Ash Grove”.

“He doesn’t care a scrap for anything,” said Emily with accumulated bitterness. Lettie looked out of the window across the yard, thinking. She looked very glum.

After a while we went out also, before the light faded altogether from the pond. Emily took us into the lower garden to get some ripe plums. The old garden was very low. The soil was black. The cornbind and goosegrass were clutching at the ancient gooseberry bushes, which sprawled by the paths. The garden was not very productive, save of weeds, and, perhaps, tremendous lank artichokes or swollen marrows. But at the bottom, where the end of the farm buildings rose high and grey, there was a plum tree which had been crucified to the wall, and which had broken away and leaned forward from bondage. Now under the boughs were hidden great mist-bloomed, crimson treasures, splendid globes. I shook the old, ragged trunk, green, with even the fresh gum dulled over, and the treasures fell heavily, thudding down among the immense rhubarb leaves below. The girls laughed, and we divided the spoil, and turned back to the yard. We went down to the edge of the garden, which skirted the bottom pond, a pool chained in a heavy growth of weeds. It was moving with rats, the father had said. The rushes were thick below us; opposite, the great bank fronted us, with orchard trees climbing it like a hillside. The lower pond received the overflow from the upper by a tunnel from the deep black sluice.

Two rats ran into the black culvert at our approach. We sat on some piled, mossy stones to watch. The rats came out again, ran a little way, stopped, ran again, listened, were reassured, and slid about freely, dragging their long naked tails. Soon six or seven grey beasts were playing round the mouth of the culvert, in the gloom. They sat and wiped their sharp faces, stroking their whiskers. Then one would give a little rush and a little squirm of excitement and would jump vertically into the air, alighting on four feet, running, sliding into the black shadow. One dropped with an ugly plop into the water, and swam towards us, the hoary imp, his sharp snout and his wicked little eyes moving at us. Lettie shuddered. I threw a stone into the dead pool, and frightened them all. But we had frightened ourselves more, so we hurried away, and stamped our feet in relief on the free pavement of the yard.

Leslie was looking for us. He had been inspecting the yard and the stock under Mr Saxton’s supervision.

“Were you running away from me?” he asked.

“No,” she replied. “I have been to fetch you a plum. Look!” And she showed him two in a leaf.

“They are too pretty to eat!” said he.

“You have not tasted yet,” she laughed.

“Come,” he said, offering her his arm. “Let us go up to the water.” She took his arm.

It was a splendid evening, with the light all thick and yellow lying on the smooth pond. Lettie made him lift her on to a leaning bough of willow. He sat with his head resting against her skirts. Emily and I moved on. We heard him murmur something, and her voice reply, gently, caressingly:

“No — let us be still — it is all so still — I love it best of all now.”

Emily and I talked, sitting at the base of the alders, a little way on. After an excitement, and in the evening, especially in autumn, one is inclined to be sad and sentimental. We had forgotten that the darkness was weaving. I heard in the little distance Leslie’s voice begin to murmur like a flying beetle that comes not too near. Then, away down in the yard, George began singing the old song, “I sowed the seeds of love”.

This interrupted the flight of Leslie’s voice, and as the singing came nearer, the hum of low words ceased. We went forward to meet George. Leslie sat up, clasping his knees, and did not speak. George came nearer, saying:

“The moon is going to rise.”

“Let me get down,” said Lettie, lifting her hands to him to help her. He, mistaking her wish, put his hands under her arms, and set her gently down, as one would a child. Leslie got up quickly, and seemed to hold himself separate, resenting the intrusion.

“I thought you were all four together,” said George quietly. Lettie turned quickly at the apology:

“So we were. So we are — five now. Is it there the moon will rise?”

“Yes — I like to see it come over the wood. It lifts slowly up to stare at you. I always think it wants to know something, and I always think I have something to answer, only I don’t know what it is,” said Emily.

Where the sky was pale in the east over the rim of wood came the forehead of the yellow moon. We stood and watched in silence. Then, as the great disc, nearly full, lifted and looked straight upon us, we were washed off our feet in a vague sea of moonlight. We stood with the light like water on our faces. Lettie was glad, a little bit exalted; Emily was passionately troubled; her lips were parted, almost beseeching; Leslie was frowning, oblivious, and George was thinking, and the terrible, immense moonbeams braided through his feeling. At length Leslie said softly, mistakenly:

“Come along, dear” — and he took her arm.

She let him lead her along the bank of the pond, and across the plank over the sluice.

“Do you know,” she said, as we were carefully descending the steep bank of

the orchard, "I feel as if I wanted to laugh, or dance — something rather outrageous."

"Surely not like that now," Leslie replied in a low voice, feeling really hurt.

"I do though! I will race you to the bottom."

"No, no, dear!" He held her back. When he came to the wicket leading on to the front lawns, he said something to her softly, as he held the gate.

I think he wanted to utter his half-finished proposal, and so bind her.

She broke free, and, observing the long lawn which lay in grey shadow between the eastern and western glows, she cried:

"Polka! — a polka — one can dance a polka when the grass is smooth and short — even if there are some fallen leaves. Yes, yes — how jolly!"

She held out her hands to Leslie, but it was too great a shock to his mood. So she called to me, and there was a shade of anxiety in her voice, lest after all she should be caught in the toils of the night's sentiment.

"Pat — you'll dance with me — Leslie hates a polka." I danced with her. I do not know the time when I could not polka — it seems innate in one's feet, to dance that dance. We went flying round, hissing through the dead leaves. The night, the low-hung yellow moon, the pallor of the west, the blue cloud of evening overhead went round and through the fantastic branches of the old laburnum, spinning a little madness. You cannot tire Lettie; her feet are wings that beat the air. When at last I stayed her she laughed as fresh as ever, as she bound her hair.

"There!" she said to Leslie, in tones of extreme satisfaction. "That was lovely. Do you come and dance now."

"Not a polka," said he, sadly, feeling the poetry in his heart insulted by the jiggling measure.

"But one cannot dance anything else on wet grass, and through shuffling dead leaves. You, George?"

"Emily says I jump," he replied.

"Come on — come on" — and in a moment they were bounding across the grass. After a few steps she fell in with him, and they spun round the grass. It was true, he leaped, sprang with large strides, carrying her with him. It was a tremendous, irresistible dancing. Emily and I must join, making an inner ring. Now and again there was a sense of something white flying near, and wild rustle of draperies, and a swish of disturbed leaves as they whirled past us. Long after we were tired they danced on.

At the end, he looked big, erect, nerved with triumph, and she was exhilarated like a Bacchante.

"Have you finished?" Leslie asked.

She knew she was safe from his question that day.

“Yes,” she panted. “You should have danced. Give me my hat, please. Do I look very disgraceful?”

He took her hat and gave it to her.

“Disgraceful?” he repeated.

“Oh, you are solemn tonight! What is it?”

“Yes, what is it?” he repeated ironically.

“It must be the moon. Now, is my hat straight? Tell me now — you’re not looking. Then put it level. Now then! Why, your hands are quite cold, and mine so hot! I feel so impish,” and she laughed.

“There — now I’m ready. Do you notice those little chrysanthemums trying to smell sadly; when the old moon is laughing and winking through those boughs. What business have they with their sadness!” She took a handful of petals and flung them into the air: “There — if they sigh they ask for sorrow — I like things to wink and look wild.”

CHAPTER VI

THE EDUCATION OF GEORGE

As I have said, Strelley Mill lies at the north end of the long Nethermere valley. On the northern slopes lay its pasture and arable lands. The shaggy common, now closed, and the cultivated land was bounded on the east by the sharp dip of the brook course, a thread of woodland broadening into a spinney and ending at the upper pond; beyond this, on the east, rose the sharp, wild, grassy hillside, scattered with old trees, ruinous with the gaunt, ragged bones of old hedge-rows, grown into thorn trees. Along the rim of the hills, beginning in the north-west, were dark woodlands, which swept round east and south till they raced down in riot to the very edge of southern Nethermere, surrounding our house. From the eastern hill-crest, looking straight across, you could see the spire of Selsby church, and a few roofs, and the head-stocks of the pit.

So on three sides the farm was skirted by woods, the dens of rabbits, and the common held another warren.

Now the squire of the estate, head of an ancient, once even famous, but now decayed house, loved his rabbits. Unlike the family fortunes, the family tree flourished amazingly; Sherwood could show nothing comparable. Its ramifications were stupendous; it was more like a banyan than a British oak. How was the good squire to nourish himself and his lady, his name, his tradition, and his thirteen lusty branches on his meagre estates? An evil fortune discovered to him that he could sell each of his rabbits, those bits of furry vermin, for a shilling or thereabout in Nottingham; since which time the noble family subsisted by rabbits.

Farms were gnawed away; corn and sweet grass departed from the face of the hills; cattle grew lean, unable to eat the defiled herbage. Then the farm became the home of a keeper, and the country was silent, with no sound of cattle, no clink of horses, no barking of lusty dogs.

But the squire loved his rabbits. He defended them against the snares of the despairing farmer, protected them with gun and notices to quit. How he glowed with thankfulness as he saw the dishevelled hillside heave when the gnawing hosts moved on!

“Are they not quails and manna?” said he to his sporting guest, early one Monday morning, as the high meadow broke into life at the sound of his gun. “Quails and manna — in this wilderness?”

“They are, by Jove!” assented the sporting guest as he took another gun, while the saturnine keeper smiled grimly. Meanwhile, Strelley Mill began to suffer under this gangrene. It was the outpost in the wilderness. It was an understood thing that none of the squire’s tenants had a gun.

“Well,” said the squire to Mr Saxton, “you have the land for next to nothing — next to nothing — at a rent really absurd. Surely the little that the rabbits eat — ”

“It’s not a little — come and look for yourself,” replied the farmer. The squire made a gesture of impatience.

“What do you want?” he inquired.

“Will you wire me off?” was the repeated request.

“Wire is — what does Halkett say — so much per yard — and it would come to — what did Halkett tell me now? — but a Harge sum. No, I can’t do it.”

“Well, I can’t live like this.”

“Have another glass of whisky? Yes, yes, I want another glass myself, and I can’t drink alone — so if I am to enjoy my glass — That’s it! Now surely you exaggerate a little. It’s not so bad.”

“I can’t go on like it, I’m sure.”

“Well, we’ll see about compensation — we’ll see. I’ll have a talk with Halkett, and I’ll come down and have a look at you. We all find a pinch somewhere — it’s nothing but humanity’s heritage.”

I was born in September, and love it best of all the months. There is no heat, no hurry, no thirst and weariness in corn harvest as there is in the hay. If the season is late, as is usual with us, then mid-September sees the corn still standing in stook. The mornings come slowly. The earth is like a woman married and fading; she does not leap up with a laugh for the first fresh kiss of dawn, but slowly, quietly, unexpectantly lies watching the waking of each new day. The blue mist, like memory in the eyes of a neglected wife, never goes from the wooded hill, and only at noon creeps from the near hedges. There is no bird to put a song in the throat of morning; only the crow’s voice speaks during the day. Perhaps there is the regular breathing hush of the scythe — even the fretful jar of the mowing-machine. But next day, in the morning, all is still again. The lying corn is wet, and when you have bound it, and lift the heavy sheaf to make the stook, the tresses of oats wreath round each other and drop mournfully.

As I worked with my friend through the still mornings we talked endlessly. I would give him the gist of what I knew of chemistry, and botany, and

psychology. Day after day I told him what the professors had told me; of life, of sex and its origins; of Schopenhauer and William James. We had been friends for years, and he was accustomed to my talk. But this autumn fruited the first crop of intimacy between us. I talked a great deal of poetry to him, and of rudimentary metaphysics. He was very good stuff. He had hardly a single dogma, save that of pleasing himself. Religion was nothing to him. So he heard all I had to say with an open mind, and understood the drift of things very rapidly, and quickly made these ideas part of himself.

We tramped down to dinner with only the clinging warmth of the sunshine for a coat. In this still, enfolding weather a quiet companionship is very grateful. Autumn creeps through everything. The little damsons in the pudding taste of September, and are fragrant with memory. The voices of those at table are softer and more reminiscent than at haytime.

Afternoon is all warm and golden. Oat sheaves are lighter; they whisper to each other as they freely embrace. The long, stout stubble tinkles as the foot brushes over it; the scent of the straw is sweet. When the poor, bleached sheaves are lifted out of the hedge, a spray of nodding wild raspberries is disclosed, with belated berries ready to drop; among the damp grass lush blackberries may be discovered. Then one notices that the last bell hangs from the ragged spire of foxglove. The talk is of people, an odd book; of one's hopes — and the future; of Canada, where work is strenuous, but not life; where the plains are wide, and one is not lapped in a soft valley, like an apple that falls in a secluded orchard. The mist steals over the face of the warm afternoon. The tying-up is all finished, and it only remains to rear up the fallen bundles into shocks. The sun sinks into a golden glow in the west. The gold turns to red, the red darkens, like a fire burning low, the sun disappears behind the bank of milky mist, purple like the pale bloom on blue plums, and we put on our coats and go home.

In the evening, when the milking was finished, and all the things fed, then we went out to look at the snares. We wandered on across the stream and up the wild hillside. Our feet rattled through black patches of devil's-bit scabius; we skirted a swim of thistle-down, which glistened when the moon touched it. We stumbled on through wet, coarse grass, over soft mole-hills and black rabbit-holes. The hills and woods cast shadows; the pools of mist in the valleys gathered the moonbeams in cold, shivery light.

We came to an old farm that stood on the level brow of the hill. The woods swept away from it, leaving a great clearing of what was once cultivated land. The handsome chimneys of the house, silhouetted against a light sky, drew my admiration. I noticed that there was no light or glow in any window, though the house had only the width of one room, and though the night was only at eight

o'clock. We looked at the long, impressive front. Several of the windows had been bricked in, giving a pitiful impression of blindness; the places where the plaster had fallen off the walls showed blacker in the shadow. We pushed open the gate, and as we walked down the path, weeds and dead plants brushed our ankles. We looked in at a window. The room was lighted also by a window from the other side, through which the moonlight streamed on to the flagged floor, dirty, littered with paper, and wisps of straw. The hearth lay in the light, with all its distress of grey ashes, and piled cinders of burnt paper, and a child's headless doll, charred and pitiful. On the border-line of shadow lay a round fur cap — a game-keeper's cap. I blamed the moonlight for entering the desolate room; the darkness alone was decent and reticent. I hated the little roses on the illuminated piece of wallpaper, I hated that fireside.

With farmer's instinct George turned to the outhouse. The cow-yard startled me. It was a forest of the tallest nettles I have ever seen — nettles far taller than my six feet. The air was soddened with the dank scent of nettles. As I followed George along the obscure brick path, I felt my flesh creep. But the buildings, when we entered them, were in splendid condition; they had been restored within a small number of years; they were well-timbered, neat, and cosy. Here and there we saw feathers, bits of animal wreckage, even the remnants of a cat, which we hastily examined by the light of a match. As we entered the stable there was an ugly noise, and three great rats half rushed at us and threatened us with their vicious teeth. I shuddered, and hurried back, stumbling over a bucket, rotten with rust, and so filled with weeds that I thought it part of the jungle. There was a silence made horrible by the faint noises that rats and flying bats give out. The place was bare of any vestige of corn or straw or hay, only choked with a growth of abnormal weeds. When I found myself free in the orchard I could not stop shivering. There were no apples to be seen overhead between us and the clear sky. Either the birds had caused them to fall, when the rabbits had devoured them, or someone had gathered the crop.

"This," said George bitterly, "is what the mill will come to."

"After your time," I said.

"My time — my time. I shall never have a time. And I shouldn't be surprised if Father's time isn't short — with rabbits and one thing and another. As it is, we depend on the milk-round, and on the carting which I do for the council. You can't call it farming. We're a miserable mixture of farmer, milkman, greengrocer, and carting contractor. It's a shabby business."

"You have to live," I retorted.

"Yes — but it's rotten. And Father won't move — and he won't change his methods."

“Well — what about you?”

“Me! What should I change for? — I’m comfortable at home. As for my future, it can look after itself, so long as nobody depends on me.”

“Laissez-faire,” said I, smiling.

“This is no laissez-faire,” he replied, glancing round. “This is pulling the nipple out of your lips, and letting the milk run away sour. Look there!”

Through the thin wall of moonlit mist that slid over the hillside we could see an army of rabbits bunched up, or hopping a few paces forward, feeding.

We set off at a swinging pace down the hill, scattering the hosts. As we approached the fence that bounded the Mill fields, he exclaimed, “Hullo!” and hurried forward. I followed him, and observed the dark figure of a man rise from the hedge. It was a game-keeper. He pretended to be examining his gun. As we came up he greeted us with a calm “Good evenin’!”

George replied by investigating the little gap in the hedge. “I’ll trouble you for that snare,” he said.

“Will yer?” answered Annable, a broad, burly, black-faced fellow. “And I should like ter know what you’re doin’ on th’ wrong side th’ ‘edge?”

“You can see what we’re doing — hand over my snare — and the rabbit,” said George angrily.

“What rabbit?” said Annable, turning sarcastically to me. “You know well enough — an’ you can hand it over — or — ” George replied.

“Or what? Spit it out! The sound won’t kill me — ” the man grinned with contempt.

“Hand over here!” said George, stepping up to the man in a rage.

“Now don’t!” said the keeper, standing stock-still, and looking unmovedly at the proximity of George:

“You’d better get off home — both you an’ ‘im. You’ll get neither snare nor rabbit — see!”

“We will see!” said George, and he made a sudden move to get hold of the man’s coat. Instantly he went staggering back with a heavy blow under the left ear.

“Damn brute!” I ejaculated, bruising my knuckles against the fellow’s jaw. Then I too found myself sitting dazedly on the grass, watching the great skirts of his velveteens flinging round him as if he had been a demon, as he strode away. I got up, pressing my chest where I had been struck. George was lying in the hedge-bottom. I turned him over, and rubbed his temples, and shook the drenched grass on his face. He opened his eyes and looked at me, dazed. Then he drew his breath quickly, and put his hand to his head.

“He — he nearly stunned me,” he said.

“The devil!” I answered.

“I wasn’t ready.”

“No.”

“Did he knock me down?”

“Ay — me too.”

He was silent for some time, sitting limply. Then he pressed his hand against the back of his head, saying, “My head does sing!!” He tried to get up, but failed. “Good God — being knocked into this state by a damned keeper!”

“Come on,” I said, “let’s see if we can’t get indoors.”

“No!” he said quickly, “we needn’t tell them — don’t let them know.”

I sat thinking of the pain in my own chest, and wishing I could remember hearing Annable’s jaw smash, and wishing that my knuckles were more bruised than they were — though that was bad enough. I got up, and helped George to rise. He swayed, almost pulling me over. But in a while he could walk unevenly.

“Am I,” he said, “covered with clay and stuff?”

“Not much,” I replied, troubled by the shame and confusion with which he spoke.

“Get it off,” he said, standing still to be cleaned.

I did my best. Then we walked about the fields for a time, gloomy, silent, and sore.

Suddenly, as we went by the pond-side, we were startled by great, swishing black shadows that swept just above our heads. The swans were flying up for shelter, now that a cold wind had begun to fret Nethermere. They swung down on to the glassy millpond, shaking the moonlight in flecks across the deep shadows; the night rang with the clacking of their wings on the water; the stillness and calm were broken; the moonlight was furrowed and scattered, and broken. The swans, as they sailed into shadow, were dim, haunting spectres; the wind found us shivering.

“Don’t — you won’t say anything?” he asked as I was leaving him.

“No.”

“Nothing at all — not to anybody?”

“No.”

“Good night.”

About the end of September, our countryside was alarmed by the harrying of sheep by strange dogs. One morning, the squire, going the round of his fields as was his custom, to his grief and horror found two of his sheep torn and dead in the hedge-bottom, and the rest huddled in a corner swaying about in terror, smeared with blood. The squire did not recover his spirits for days.

There was a report of two grey wolfish dogs. The squire’s keeper had heard

yelping in the fields of Dr Collins of the Abbey, about dawn. Three sheep lay soaked in blood when the labourer went to tend the flocks.

Then the farmers took alarm. Lord, of the White House farm, intended to put his sheep in pen, with his dogs in charge. It was Saturday, however, and the lads ran off to the little travelling theatre that had halted at Westwold. While they sat open-mouthed in the theatre, gloriously nicknamed the "Blood-Tub", watching heroes die with much writhing and heaving, and struggling up to say a word, and collapsing without having said it, six of their silly sheep were slaughtered in the field. At every house it was inquired' of the dog; nowhere had one been loose.

Mr Saxton had some thirty sheep on the Common. George determined that the easiest thing was for him to sleep out with them. He built a shelter of hurdles interlaced with brushwood, and in the sunny afternoon we collected piles of bracken, browning to the ruddy winter-brown now. He slept there for a week, but that week aged his mother like a year. She was out in the cold morning twilight watching, with her apron over her head, for his approach. She did not rest with the thought of him out on the Common.

Therefore, on Saturday night he brought down his rugs, and took up Gyp to watch in his stead. For some time we sat looking at the stars over the dark hills. Now and then a sheep coughed, or a rabbit rustled beneath the brambles, and Gyp whined. The mist crept over the grose-bushes, and the webs on the brambles were white — the devil throws his net over the blackberries as soon as September's back is turned, they say.

"I saw two fellows go by with bags and nets," said George, as we sat looking out of his little shelter.

"Poachers," said I. "Did you speak to them?"

"No — they didn't see me. I was dropping asleep when a rabbit rushed under the blanket, all of a shiver, and a whippet dog after it. I gave the whippet a punch in the neck, and he yelped off. The rabbit stopped with me quite a long time — then it went."

"How did you feel?"

"I didn't care. I don't care much what happens just now. Father could get along without me, and Mother has the children. I think I shall emigrate."

"Why didn't you before?"

"Oh, I don't know. There are a lot of little comforts and interests at home that one would miss. Besides, you feel somebody in your own countryside, and you're nothing in a foreign part, I expect."

"But you're going?"

"What is there to stop here for? The valley is all running wild and unprofitable. You've no freedom for thinking of what the other folks think of

you, and everything round you keeps the same, and so you can't change yourself — because everything you look at brings up the same old feeling, and stops you from feeling fresh things. And what is there that's worth anything? — What's worth having in my life?"

"I thought," said I, "your comfort was worth having."

He sat still and did not answer.

"What's shaken you out of your nest?" I asked.

"I don't know. I've not felt the same since that row with Annable. And Lettie said to me, 'Here, you can't live as you like — in any way or circumstance. You're like a bit out of those coloured marble mosaics in the hall, you have to fit in your own set, fit into your own pattern, because you're put there from the first. But you don't want to be like a fixed bit of a mosaic — you want to fuse into life, and melt and mix with the rest of folk, to have some things burned out of you — ' She was downright serious."

"Well, you need not believe her. When did you see her?"

"She came down on Wednesday, when I was getting the apples in the morning. She climbed a tree with me, and there was a wind, that was why I was getting all the apples, and it rocked us, me right up at the top, she sitting half-way down holding the basket. I asked her didn't she think that free kind of life was the best, and that was how she answered me."

"You should have contradicted her."

"It seemed true. I never thought of it being wrong, in fact."

"Come — that sounds bad."

"No — I thought she looked down on us — on our way of life. I thought she meant I was like a toad in a hole."

"You should have shown her different."

"How could I when I could see no different?"

"It strikes me you're in love."

He laughed at the idea, saying, "No, but it is rotten to find that there isn't a sine thing you have to be proud of."

"This is a new tune for you."

He pulled the grass moodily.

"And when do you think of going?"

"Oh — I don't know — I've said nothing to Mother. Not yet — at any rate, not till spring."

"Not till something has happened," said I.

"What?" he asked.

"Something decisive."

"I don't know what can happen — unless the squire turns us out."

“No?” I said.

He did not speak.

“You should make things happen,” said I.

“Don’t make me feel a worse fool, Cyril,” he replied despairingly.

Gyp whined and jumped, tugging her chain to follow us. The grey blurs among the blackness of the bushes were resting sheep. A chill, dim mist crept along the ground.

“But, for all that, Cyril,” he said, “to have her laugh at you across the table; to hear her sing as she moved about, before you are washed at night, when the fire’s warm, and you’re tired; to have her sit by you on the hearth-seat, close and soft...”

“In Spain,” I said. “In Spain.”

He took no notice, but turned suddenly, laughing.

“Do you know, when I was stooking up, lifting the sheaves, it felt like having your arm round a girl. It was quite a sudden sensation.”

“You’d better take care,” said I, “you’ll mesh yourself in the silk of dreams, and then — ”

He laughed, not having heard my words.

“The time seems to go like lightning — thinking,” he confessed — “I seem to sweep the mornings up in a handful.”

“Oh Lord!” said I. “Why don’t you scheme for getting what you want, instead of dreaming fulfilments?”

“Well,” he replied. “If it was a fine dream, wouldn’t you want to go on dreaming?” And with that he finished, and I went home.

I sat at my window looking out, trying to get things straight. Mist rose, and wreathed round Nethermere, like ghosts meeting and embracing sadly. I thought of the time when my friend should not follow the harrow on our own snug valley side, and when Lettie’s room next mine should be closed to hide its emptiness, not its joy. My heart clung passionately to the hollow which held us all; how could I bear that it should be desolate! I wondered what Lettie would do.

In the morning I was up early, when daybreak came with a shiver through the woods. I went out, while the moon still shone sickly in the west. The world shrank from the morning. It was then that the last of the summer things died. The wood was dark — and smelt damp and heavy with autumn. On the paths the leaves lay clogged.

As I came near the farm I heard the yelling of dogs. Running, I reached the Common, and saw the sheep huddled and scattered in groups; something leaped round them. George burst into sight pursuing. Directly, there was the bang, bang of a gun. I picked up a heavy piece of sandstone and ran forward. Three sheep

scattered wildly before me. In the dim light I saw their grey shadows move among the gorse bushes. Then a dog leaped, and I flung my stone with all my might. I hit. There came a high-pitched howling yelp of pain; I saw the brute make off, and went after him, dodging the prickly bushes, leaping the trailing brambles. The gunshots rang out again, and I heard the men shouting with excitement. My dog was out of sight, but I followed still, slanting down the hill. In a field ahead I saw someone running. Leaping the low hedge, I pursued, and overtook Emily, who was hurrying as fast as she could through the wet grass. There was another gunshot and great shouting. Emily glanced round, saw me, and started.

“It’s gone to the quarries,” she panted. We walked on, without saying a word. Skirting the spinney, we followed the brook course, and came at last to the quarry fence. The old excavations were filled now with trees. The steep walls, twenty feet deep in places, were packed with loose stones, and trailed with hanging brambles. We climbed down the steep bank of the brook, and entered the quarries by the bed of the stream. Under the groves of ash and oak a pale primrose still lingered, glimmering wanly beside the hidden water. Emily found a smear of blood on a beautiful trail of yellow convolvulus. We followed the tracks on to the open, where the brook flowed on the hard rock bed, and the stony floor of the quarry was only a tangle of gorse and bramble and honeysuckle.

“Take a good stone,” said I, and we pressed on, where the grove in the great excavation darkened again, and the brook slid secretly under the arms of the bushes and the hair of the long grass. We beat the cover almost to the road. I thought the brute had escaped, and I pulled a bunch of mountain-ash berries, and stood tapping them against my knee. I was startled by a snarl and a little scream. Running forward, I came upon one of the old, horse-shoe lime-kilns that stood at the head of the quarry. There, in the mouth of one of the kilns, Emily was kneeling on the dog, her hands buried in the hair of its throat, pushing back its head. The little jerks of the brute’s body were the spasms of death; already the eyes were turning inward, and the upper lip was drawn from the teeth by pain.

“Good Lord, Emily! But he is dead!” I exclaimed.

“Has he hurt you?” I drew her away. She shuddered violently, and seemed to feel a horror of herself.

“No — no,” she said, looking at herself, with blood all on her skirt, where she had knelt on the wound which I had given the dog, and pressed the broken rib into the chest. There was a trickle of blood on her arm.

“Did he bite you?” I asked, anxious.

“No — oh no — I just peeped in, And he jumped. But he had no strength, and

I hit him back with my stone, and I lost my balance, and fell on him.”

“Let me wash your arm.”

“Oh!” she exclaimed, “isn’t it horrible! Oh, I think it is so awful.”

“What?” said I, busy bathing her arm in the cold water of the brook.

“This — this whole brutal affair.”

“It ought to be cauterised,” said I, looking at a score on her arm from the dog’s tooth.

“That scratch — that’s nothing! Can you get that off my skirt — I feel hateful to myself.”

I washed her skirt with my handkerchief as well as I could, saying:

“Let me just sear it for you; we can go to the Kennels. Do — you ought — I don’t feel safe otherwise.”

“Really,” she said, glancing up at me, a smile coming into her fine dark eyes.

“Yes — come along.”

“Ha, ha!” she laughed. “You look so serious.”

I took her arm and drew her away. She linked her arm in mine and leaned on me.

“It is just like Lorna Doone,” she said as if she enjoyed it. “But you will let me do it,” said I, referring to the cauterising.

“You make me; but I shall feel — ugh, I daren’t think of it. Get me some of those berries.”

I plucked a few bunches of guelder-rose fruits, transparent, ruby berries. She stroked them softly against her lips and cheek, caressing them. Then she murmured to herself:

“I have always wanted to put red berries in my hair.”

The shawl she had been wearing was thrown across her shoulders, and her head was bare, and her black hair, soft and short and ecstatic, tumbled wildly into loose light curls. She thrust the stalks of the berries under her combs. Her hair was not heavy or long enough to have held them. Then, with the ruby bunches glowing through the black mist of curls, she looked up at me, brightly, with wide eyes. I looked at her, and felt the smile winning into her eyes. Then I turned and dragged a trail of golden-leaved convolvulus from the hedge, and I twisted it into a coronet for her.

“There!” said I, “you’re crowned.”

She put back her head, and the low laughter shook in her throat.

“What!” she asked, putting all the courage and recklessness she had into the question, and in her soul trembling.

“Not Chloe, not Bacchante. You have always got your soul in your eyes, such an earnest, troublesome soul.”

The laughter faded at once, and her great seriousness looked out again at me, pleading.

“You are like Burne-Jones’s damsels. Troublesome shadows are always crowding across your eyes, and you cherish them. You think the flesh of the apple is nothing, nothing. You only care for the eternal pips. Why don’t you snatch your apple and eat it, and throw the core away?”

She looked at me sadly, not understanding, but believing that I in my wisdom spoke truth, as she always believed when I lost her in a maze of words. She stooped down, and the chaplet fell from her hair, and only one bunch of berries remained. The ground around us was strewn with the four-lipped burrs of beechnuts, and the quaint little nut-pyramids were scattered among the ruddy fallen leaves. Emily gathered a few nuts.

“I love beechnuts,” she said, “but they make me long for my childhood again till I could almost cry out. To go out for beechnuts before breakfast; to thread them for necklaces before supper — to be the envy of the others at school next day! There was as much pleasure in a beech necklace then as there is in the whole autumn now — and no sadness. There are no more unmixed joys after you have grown up.” She kept her face to the ground as she spoke, and she continued to gather the fruits.

“Do you find any with nuts in?” I asked.

“Not many — here — here are two, three. You have them. No — I don’t care about them.”

I stripped one of its horny brown coat and gave it to her. She opened her mouth slightly to take it, looking up into my eyes. Some people, instead of bringing with them clouds of glory, trail clouds of sorrow; they are born with “the gift of Sorrow”; “Sorrows,” they proclaim, “alone are real. The veiled grey angels of sorrow work out slowly the beautiful shapes. Sorrow is beauty, and the supreme blessedness.” You read it in their eyes, and in the tones of their voices. Emily had the gift of sorrow. It fascinated me, but it drove me to rebellion.

We followed the soft, smooth-bitten turf road under the old beeches. The hillside fell away, dishevelled with thistles and coarse grass. Soon we were in sight of the Kennels, the red old Kennels which had been the scene of so much animation in the time of Lord Byron. They were empty now, overgrown with weeds. The barred windows of the cottages were grey with dust; there was no need now to protect the windows from cattle, dog or man. One of the three houses was inhabited. Clear water trickled through a wooden runnel into a great stone trough outside near the door.

“Come here,” said I to Emily. “Let me fasten the back of your dress.”

“Is it undone?” she asked, looking quickly over her shoulder, and blushing.

As I was engaged in my task, a girl came out of the cottage with a black kettle and a tea-cup. She was so surprised to see me thus occupied that she forgot her own duty, and stood open-mouthed.

“S’r Ann! S’r Ann,” called a voice from inside. “Are ter goin’ ter come in an’ shut that door?”

Sarah Ann hastily poured a few cupfuls of water into the kettle, then she put down both utensils and stood holding her bare arms to warm them. Her chief garment consisted of a skirt with grey bodice and red flannel skirt, very much torn. Her black hair hung in wild tails on to her shoulders.

“We must go in here,” said I, approaching the girl. She, however, hastily seized the kettle and ran indoors with an “Oh, Mother — !”

A woman came to the door. One breast was bare, and hung over her blouse, which, like a dressing-jacket, fell loose over her skirt. Her fading, red-brown hair was all frowsy from the bed. In the folds of her skirt clung a swarthy urchin with a shockingly short shirt. He stared at us with big black eyes, the only portion of his face undecorated with egg and jam. The woman’s blue eyes questioned us languidly. I told her our errand.

“Come in — come in,” she said, “but dunna look at th’ ‘ouse. Th’ childers not been long up. Go in, Billy, wi’ nowt on!”

We entered, taking the forgotten kettle lid. The kitchen was large, but scantily furnished save, indeed, for children. The eldest, a girl of twelve or so, was standing toasting a piece of bacon with one hand, and holding back her night-dress in the other. As the toast hand got scorched, she transferred the bacon to the other, gave the hot fingers a lick to cool them, and then held back her night-dress again. Her auburn hair hung in heavy coils down her gown. A boy sat on the steel fender, catching the dropping fat on a piece of bread. “One, two, three, four, five, six drops,” and he quickly bit off the tasty corner, and resumed the task with the other hand. When we entered he tried to draw his shirt over his knees, which caused the fat to fall wasted. A fat baby, evidently laid down from the breast, lay kicking on the squab, purple in the face, while another lad was pushing bread and butter into its mouth. The mother swept to the sofa, poked out the bread and butter, pushed her finger into the baby’s throat, lifted the child up, punched its back, and was highly relieved when it began to yell. Then she administered a few sound spanks to the naked buttocks of the crammer. He began to howl, but stopped suddenly on seeing us laughing. On the sack-cloth which served as hearth-rug sat a beautiful child washing the face of a wooden doll with tea, and wiping it on her night-gown. At the table, an infant in a high chair sat sucking a piece of bacon, till the grease ran down his swarthy arms, oozing through his fingers. An old lad stood in the big armchair, whose back was

hung with a calf-skin, and was industriously pouring the dregs of the tea-cups into a basin of milk. The mother whisked away the milk, and made a rush for the urchin, the baby hanging over her arm the while.

“I could half kill thee,” she said, but he had slid under the table — and sat serenely unconcerned.

“Could you” — I asked when the mother had put her bonny baby again to her breast — “could you lend me a knitting-needle?”

“Our S’r Ann, wheer’s thy knittin’-needles?” asked the woman, wincing at the same time, and putting her hand to the mouth of the sucking child. Catching my eye, she said:

“You wouldn’t credit how he bites. ‘E’s nobbut two teeth, but they like six needles.” She drew her brows together and pursed her lips, saying to the child, “Naughty lad, naughty lad! Tha’ shanna hae it, no, not if ter bites thy mother like that.”

The family interest was now divided between us and the private concerns in process when we entered — save, however, that the bacon-sucker had sucked on stolidly, immovable, all the time.

“Our Sam, wheer’s my knittin’, tha’s ‘ad it?” cried S’r Ann after a little search.

“A ‘e na,” replied Sam from under the table.

“Yes, tha’ ‘as,” said the mother, giving a blind prod under the table with her foot.

“A ‘e na then!” persisted Sam.

The mother suggested various possible places of discovery, and at last the knitting was found at the back of the table drawer, among forks and old wooden skewers.

“I ‘an ter tell yer wheer ivrythink is,” said the mother in mild reproach. S’r Ann, however, gave no heed to her parent. Her heart was torn for her knitting, the fruit of her labours; it was a red woollen cuff for the winter; a corkscrew was bored through the web, and the ball of red wool was bristling with skewers.

“It’s a’ thee, our Sam,” she wailed. “I know it’s a’ thee an’ thy A. B. C.”

Samuel, under the table, croaked out in a voice of fierce monotony:

“P. is for Porkypine, whose bristles so strong

Kill the bold lion by pricking ‘is tongue.”

The mother began to shake with quiet laughter.

“His father learnt him that — made it all up,” she whispered proudly to us — and to him.

“Tell us what ‘B’ is, Sam.”

“Shonna,” grunted Sam.

“Go on, there’s a duckie; an’ I’ll ma’ ‘e a treacle-puddin’.”

“Today?” asked S’r Ann eagerly.

“Go on, Sam, my duck,” persisted the mother.

“Tha’ ‘as na got no treacle,” said Sam conclusively.

The needle was in the fire; the children stood about watching. “Will you do it yourself?” I asked Emily.

“I!” she exclaimed, with wide eyes of astonishment, and she shook her head emphatically.

“Then I must.” I took out the needle, holding it in my handkerchief. I took her hand and examined the wound. But when she saw the hot glow of the needle, she snatched away her hand, and looked into my eyes, laughing in a half-hysterical fear and shame. I was very serious, very insistent. She yielded me her hand again, biting her lips in imagination of the pain, and looking at me. While my eyes were looking into hers she had courage; when I was forced to pay attention to my cauterising, she glanced down, and with a sharp “Ah!” ending in a little laugh, she put her hands behind her, and looked again up at me with wide brown eyes, all quivering with apprehension, and a little shame, and a laughter that held much pleading.

One of the children began to cry.

“It is no good,” said I, throwing the fast cooling needle on to the hearth.

I gave the girls all the pennies I had — then I offered Sam, who had crept out of the shelter of the table, a sixpence.

“Shonna a’e that,” he said, turning from the small coin.

“Well — I have no more pennies, so nothing will be your share.”

I gave the other boy a rickety knife I had in my pocket. Sam looked fiercely at me. Eager for revenge, he picked up the “porkypine quill” by the hot end. He dropped it with a shout of rage, and, seizing a cup off the table, flung it at the fortunate Jack. It smashed against the fireplace. The mother grabbed at Sam, but he was gone. A girl, a little girl, wailed, “Oh, that’s my rosey mug — my rosey mug.” We fled from the scene of confusion. Emily had already noticed it. Her thoughts were of herself, and of me.

“I am an awful coward,” said she humbly.

“But I can’t help it — ” She looked beseechingly. “Never mind,” said I.

“All my flesh seems to jump from it. You don’t know how I feel.”

“Well — never mind.”

“I couldn’t help it, not for my life.”

“I wonder,” said I, “if anything could possibly disturb that young bacon-sucker? He didn’t even look round at the smash.”

“No,” said she, biting the tip of her finger moodily.

Further conversation was interrupted by howls from the rear. Looking round we saw Sam careering after us over the close-bitten turf, howling scorn and derision at us. "Rabbit-tail, rabbit-tail," he cried, his bare little legs twinkling, and his Hittle shirt fluttering in the cold morning air. Fortunately, at Hast he trod on a thistle or a thorn, for when we looked round again to see why he was silent, he was capering on one leg, holding his wounded foot in his hands.

CHAPTER VII

LETTIE PULLS DOWN THE SMALL GOLD GRAPES

During the falling of the leaves Lettie was very wilful. She uttered many banalities concerning men, and love, and marriage; she taunted Leslie and thwarted his wishes. At last he stayed away from her. She had been several times down to the mill, but because she fancied they were very familiar, receiving her on to their rough plane like one of themselves, she stayed away. Since the death of our father she had been restless; since inheriting her little fortune she had become proud, scornful, difficult to please. Difficult to please in every circumstance; she, who had always been so rippling in thoughtless life, sat down in the window-sill to think, and her strong teeth bit at her handkerchief till it was torn in holes. She would say nothing to me; she read all things that dealt with modern women.

One afternoon Lettie walked over to Eberwich. Leslie had not been to see us for a fortnight. It was a grey, dreary afternoon. The wind drifted a clammy fog across the hills, and the roads were black and deep with mud. The trees in the wood slouched sulkily. It was a day to be shut out and ignored if possible. I heaped up the fire, and went to draw the curtains and make perfect the room. Then I saw Lettie coming along the path quickly, very erect. When she came in her colour was high.

“Tea not laid?” she said briefly.

“Rebecca has just brought in the lamp,” said I.

Lettie took off her coat and furs, and flung them on the couch. She went to the mirror, lifted her hair, all curled by the fog, and stared haughtily at herself. Then she swung round, looked at the bare table, and rang the bell.

It was so rare a thing for us to ring the bell from the dining-room, that Rebecca went first to the outer door. Then she came in the room saying:

“Did you ring?”

“I thought tea would have been ready,” said Lettie coldly. Rebecca looked at me, and at her, and replied:

“It is but half-past four. I can bring it in.”

Mother came down hearing the clink of the teacups. “Well,” she said to Lettie,

who was unlacing her boots, “and did you find it a pleasant walk?”

“Except for the mud,” was the reply.

“Ah, I guess you wished you had stayed at home. What a state for your boots! — and your skirts too, I know. Here, let me take them into the kitchen.”

“Let Rebecca take them,” said Lettie — but Mother was out of the room.

When Mother had poured out the tea, we sat silently at table. It was on the tip of our tongues to ask Lettie what ailed her, but we were experienced and we refrained. After a while she said:

“Do you know, I met Leslie Tempest.”

“Oh,” said Mother tentatively. “Did he come along with you?”

“He did not look at me.”

“Oh!” exclaimed Mother, and it was speaking volumes; then, after a moment, she resumed:

“Perhaps he did not see you.”

“Or was it a stony Britisher?” I asked.

“He saw me,” declared Lettie, “or he wouldn’t have made such a babyish show of being delighted with Margaret Raymond.”

“It may have been no show — he still may not have seen you.”

“I felt at once that he had; I could see his animation was extravagant. He need not have troubled himself. I was not going to run after him.”

“You seem very cross,” said I.

“Indeed I am not. But he knew I had to walk all this way home, and he could take up Margaret, who has only half the distance.”

“Was he driving?”

“In the dog-cart.” She cut her toast into strips viciously. We waited patiently.

“It was mean of him, wasn’t it, Mother?”

“Well, my girl, you have treated him badly.”

“What a baby! What a mean, manly baby! Men are great infants.”

“And girls,” said Mother, “do not know what they want.”

“A grown-up quality,” I added.

“Nevertheless,” said Lettie, “he is a mean fop, and I detest him.”

She rose and sorted out some stitchery. Lettie never stitched unless she was in a bad humour. Mother smiled at me, sighed, and proceeded to Mr Gladstone for comfort; her breviary and missal were Morley’s *Life of Gladstone*.

I had to take a letter to Highclose to Mrs Tempest — from my mother, concerning a bazaar in process at the church. “I will bring Leslie back with me,” said I to myself.

The night was black and hateful. The lamps by the road from Eberwich ended at Nethermere; their yellow blur on the water made the cold, wet inferno of the

night more ugly.

Leslie and Marie were both in the library — half a library, half a business office; used also as a lounge room, being cosy. Leslie lay in a great arm-chair by the fire, immune among clouds of blue smoke. Marie was perched on the steps, a great volume on her knee. Leslie got up in his cloud, shook hands, greeted me curtly, and vanished again. Marie smiled me a quaint, vexed smile, saying:

“Oh, Cyril, I’m so glad you’ve come. I’m so worried, and Leslie says he’s not a pastry-cook, though I’m sure I don’t want him to be one, only he need not be a bear.”

“What’s the matter?”

She frowned, gave the big volume a little smack and said:

“Why, I do so much want to make some of those Spanish tartlets of your mother’s that are so delicious, and of course Mabel knows nothing of them, and they’re not in my cookery book, and I’ve looked through page upon page of the encyclopaedia, right through ‘Spain’, and there’s nothing yet, and there are fifty pages more, and Leslie won’t help me, though I’ve got a headache, because he’s frabous about something.” She looked at me in comical despair.

“Do you want them for the bazaar?”

“Yes — for tomorrow. Cook has done the rest, but I had fairly set my heart on these. Don’t you think they are lovely?”

“Exquisitely lovely. Suppose I go and ask Mother.”

“If you would. But no, oh no, you can’t make all that journey this terrible night. We are simply besieged by mud. The men are both out — William has gone to meet Father — and Mother has sent George to carry some things to the vicarage. I can’t ask one of the girls on a night like this. I shall have to let it go — and the cranberry tarts too — it cannot be helped. I am so miserable.”

“Ask Leslie,” said I.

“He is too cross,” she replied, looking at him.

He did not deign a remark.

“Will you, Leslie?”

“What?”

“Go across to Woodside for me?”

“What for?”

“A recipe. Do, there’s a dear boy.”

“Where are the men?”

“They are both engaged — they are out.”

“Send a girl, then.”

“At night like this? Who would go?”

“Cissy.”

“I shall not ask her. Isn’t he mean, Cyril? Men are mean.”

“I will come back,” said I. “There is nothing at home to do. Mother is reading, and Lettie is stitching. The weather disagrees with her, as it does with Leslie.”

“But it is not fair — ” she said, looking at me softly. Then she put away the great book and climbed down.

“Won’t you go, Leslie?” she said, laying her hand on his shoulder.

“Women!” he said, rising as if reluctantly. “There’s no end to their wants and their caprices.”

“I thought he would go,” said she warmly. She ran to fetch his overcoat. He put one arm slowly in the sleeve, and then the other, but he would not lift the coat on to his shoulders.

“Well!” she said, struggling on tiptoe, “you are a great creature. Can’t you get it on, naughty child?”

“Give her a chair to stand on,” he said.

She shook the collar of the coat sharply, but he stood like a sheep, impassive.

“Leslie, you are too bad. I can’t get it on, you stupid boy.” I took the coat and jerked it on.

“There,” she said, giving him his cap. “Now don’t be long.”

“What a damned dirty night!” said he, when we were out.

“It is,” said I.

“The town, anywhere’s better than this hell of a country.”

“Ha! How did you enjoy yourself?”

He began a long history of three days in the metropolis. I listened, and heard little. I heard more plainly the cry of some night birds over Nethermere, and the peevish, wailing, yarling cry of some beast in the wood. I was thankful to slam the door behind me, to stand in the light of the hall.

“Leslie!” exclaimed Mother, “I am glad to see you.”

“Thank you,” he said, turning to Lettie, who sat with her lap full of work, her head busily bent.

“You see I can’t get up,” she said, giving him her hand, adorned as it was by the thimble. “How nice of you to come! We did not know you were back.”

“But...!” he exclaimed, then he stopped.

“I suppose you enjoyed yourself,” she went on calmly. “Immensely, thanks.”

Snap, snap, snap went her needle through the new stuff. Then, without looking up, she said:

“Yes, no doubt. You have the air of a man who has been enjoying himself.”

“How do you mean?”

“A kind of guilty — or shall I say embarrassed — look. Don’t you notice it, Mother?”

“I do!” said my mother.

“I suppose it means we may not ask him questions,” Lettie concluded, always very busily sewing.

He laughed. She had broken her cotton, and was trying to thread the needle again.

“What have you been doing this miserable weather?” he enquired awkwardly.

“Oh, we have sat at home desolate. ‘Ever of thee I’m fo-o-onldy dreaming’ — and so on. Haven’t we, Mother?”

“Well,” said Mother, “I don’t know. We imagined him all sorts of lions up there.”

“What a shame we may not ask him to roar his old roars over for us,” said Lettie.

“What are they like?” he asked.

“How should I know? Like a sucking dove, to judge from your present voice. ‘A monstrous little voice.’“

He laughed uncomfortably.

She went on sewing, suddenly beginning to sing to herself:

“Pussy cat, Pussy cat, where have you been?

I’ve been up to London to see the fine queen:

Pussy cat, Pussy cat, what did you there —

I frightened a little mouse under a stair.”

“I suppose,” she added, “that may be so. Poor mouse! — but I guess she’s none the worse. You did not see the queen, though?”

“She was not in London,” he replied sarcastically.

“You don’t — ” she said, taking two pins from between her teeth. “I suppose you don’t mean by that, she was in Eberwich — your queen?”

“I don’t know where she was,” he answered angrily.

“Oh!” she said, very sweetly, “I thought perhaps you had met her in Eberwich. When did you come back?”

“Last night,” he replied.

“Oh — why didn’t you come and see us before?”

“I’ve been at the offices all day.”

“I’ve been up to Eberwich,” she said innocently.

“Have you?”

“Yes. And I feel so cross because of it. I thought I might see you. I felt as if you were at home.”

She stitched a little, and glanced up secretly to watch his face redden, then she continued innocently, “Yes — I felt you had come back. It is funny how one has a feeling occasionally that someone is near; when it is someone one has a

sympathy with." She continued to stitch, then she took a pin from her bosom, and fixed her work, all without the least suspicion of guile.

"I thought I might meet you when I was out — " another pause, another fixing, a pin to be taken from her lips — "but I didn't."

"I was at the office till rather late," he said quickly. She stitched away calmly, provokingly.

She took the pin from her mouth again, fixed down a fold of stuff, and said softly:

"You little liar."

Mother had gone out of the room for her recipe book.

He sat on his chair dumb with mortification. She stitched swiftly and unerringly. There was silence for some moments. Then he spoke:

"I did not know you wanted me for the pleasure of plucking this crow," he said.

"I wanted you!" she exclaimed, looking up for the first time. "Who said I wanted you?"

"No one. If you didn't want me I may as well go."

The sound of stitching alone broke the silence for some moments, then she said deliberately:

"What made you think I wanted you?"

"I don't care a damn whether you wanted me or whether you didn't."

"It seems to upset you! And don't use bad language. It is the privilege of those near and dear to one."

"That's why you begin it, I suppose."

"I cannot remember — " she said loftily.

He laughed sarcastically.

"Well — if you're so beastly cut up about it — " He put this tentatively, expecting the soft answer. But she refused to speak, and went on stitching. He fidgeted about, twisted his cap uncomfortably, and sighed. At last he said:

"Well — you — have we done then?"

She had the vast superiority, in that she was engaged in ostentatious work. She could fix the cloth, regard it quizzically, rearrange it, settle down and begin to sew before she replied. This humbled him. At last she said:

"I thought so this afternoon."

"But, good God, Lettie, can't you drop it?"

"And then?" — the question startled him.

"Why! — forget it," he replied.

"Well?" — she spoke softly, gently. He answered to the call like an eager hound. He crossed quickly to her side as she sat sewing, and said, in a low voice:

“You do care something for me, don’t you, Lettie?”

“Well” — it was modulated kindly, a sort of promise of assent.

“You have treated me rottenly, you know, haven’t you? You know I — well, I care a good bit.”

“It is a queer way of showing it.” Her voice was now a gentle reproof, the sweetest of surrenders and forgiveness. He leaned forward, took her face in his hands, and kissed her, murmuring:

“You are a little tease.”

She laid her sewing in her lap, and looked up.

The next day, Sunday, broke wet and dreary. Breakfast was late, and about ten o’clock we stood at the window looking upon the impossibility of our going to church.

There was a driving drizzle of rain, like a dirty curtain before the landscape. The nasturtium leaves by the garden walk had gone rotten in a frost, and the gay green discs had given place to the first black flags of winter, hung on flaccid stalks, pinched at the neck. The grass plot was strewn with fallen leaves, wet and brilliant: scarlet splashes of Virginia creeper, golden drift from the limes, ruddy brown shawls under the beeches, and away back in the corner, the black mat of maple leaves, heavy soddened; they ought to have been a vivid lemon colour. Occasionally one of these great black leaves would loose its hold, and zigzag down, staggering in the dance of death.

“There now!” said Lettie suddenly.

I looked up in time to see a crow close his wings and clutch the topmost bough of an old grey holly tree on the edge of the clearing. He flapped again, recovered his balance, and folded himself up in black resignation to the detestable weather.

“Why has the old wretch settled just over our noses,” said Lettie petulantly. “Just to blot the promise of a sorrow.”

“Yours or mine?” I asked.

“He is looking at me, I declare.”

“You can see the wicked pupil of his eye at this distance,” I insinuated.

“Well,” she replied, determined to take this omen unto herself, “I saw him first.”

“‘One for sorrow, two for joy,
Three for a letter, four for a boy,
Five for silver, six for gold,
And seven for a secret never told.’

“ — You may bet he’s only a messenger in advance. There’ll be three more shortly, and you’ll have your four,” said I, comforting.

“Do you know,” she said, “it is very funny, but whenever I’ve particularly

noticed one crow, I've had some sorrow or other."

"And when you notice four?" I asked.

"You should have heard old Mrs Wagstaffe," was her reply. "She declares an old crow croaked in their apple tree every day for a week before Jerry got drowned."

"Great sorrow for her," I remarked.

"Oh, but she wept abundantly. I felt like weeping too, but somehow I laughed. She hoped he had gone to heaven — but I'm sick of that word 'but' — it is always tangling one's thoughts."

"But, Jerry!" I insisted.

"Oh, she lifted up her forehead, and the tears dripped off her nose. He must have been an old nuisance, Syb. I can't understand why women marry such men. I felt downright glad to think of the drunken old wretch toppling into the canal out of the way."

She pulled the thick curtain across the window, and nestled down in it, resting her cheek against the edge, protecting herself from the cold window-pane. The wet, grey wind shook the half-naked trees, whose leaves dripped and shone sullenly. Even the trunks were blackened, trickling with the rain which drove persistently.

Whirled down the sky like black maple leaves caught up aloft, came two more crows. They swept down and clung hold of the trees in front of the house, staying near the old forerunner. Lettie watched them, half amused, half melancholy. One bird was carried past. He swerved round and began to battle up the wind, rising higher, and rowing laboriously against the driving wet current.

"Here comes your fourth," said I.

She did not answer, but continued to watch. The bird wrestled heroically, but the wind pushed him aside, tilted him, caught under his broad wings and bore him down. He swept in level flight down the stream, outspread and still, as if fixed in despair. I grieved for him. Sadly two of his fellows rose and were carried away after him, like souls hunting for a body to inhabit, and despairing. Only the first ghoul was left on the withered, silver-grey skeleton of the holly.

"He won't even say 'Nevermore'," I remarked.

"He has more sense," replied Lettie. She looked a trifle lugubrious. Then she continued: "Better say 'Nevermore' than 'Evermore'."

"Why?" I asked.

"Oh, I don't know. Fancy this 'Evermore'."

She had been sure in her own soul that Leslie would come — now she began to doubt: — things were very perplexing.

The bell in the kitchen jangled, she jumped up. I went and opened the door.

He came in. She gave him one bright look of satisfaction. He saw it, and understood.

“Helen has got some people over — I have been awfully rude to leave them now,” he said quietly.

“What a dreadful day!” said Mother.

“Oh, fearful! Your face is red, Lettie! What have you been doing?”

“Looking into the fire.”

“What did you see?”

“The pictures wouldn’t come plain — nothing.”

He laughed. We were silent for some time.

“You were expecting me?” he murmured.

“Yes — I knew you’d come.”

They were left alone. He came up to her and put his arms round her, as she stood with her elbow on the mantelpiece.

“You do want me,” he pleaded softly.

“Yes,” she murmured.

He held her in his arms and kissed her repeatedly, again and again, till she was out of breath, and put up her hand, and gently pushed her face away.

“You are a cold little lover — you are a shy bird,” he said, laughing into her eyes. He saw her tears rise, swimming on her lids, but not falling.

“Why, my love, my darling — why!” — he put his face to her’s and took the tear on his cheek:

“I know you love me,” he said, gently, all tenderness.

“Do you know,” he murmured. “I can positively feel the tears rising up from my heart and throat. They are quite painful gathering, my love. There — you can do anything with me.”

They were silent for some time. After a while, a rather long while, she came upstairs and found Mother — and at the end of some minutes I heard my mother go to him.

I sat by my window and watched the low clouds reel and stagger past. It seemed as if everything were being swept along — I myself seemed to have lost my substance, to have become detached from concrete things and the firm trodden pavement of everyday life. Onward, always onward, not knowing where, nor why, the wind, the clouds, the rain and the birds and the leaves, everything whirling along — why?

All this time the old crow sat motionless, though the clouds tumbled, and were rent and piled, though the trees bent, and the window-pane shivered with running water. Then I found it had ceased to rain; that there was a sickly yellow sunlight, brightening on some great elm leaves near at hand till they looked like ripe

lemons hanging. The crow looked at me — I was certain he looked at me.

“What do you think of it all?” I asked him.

He eyed me with contempt: great featherless, half-winged bird as I was, incomprehensible, contemptible, but awful. I believe he hated me.

“But,” said I, “if a raven could answer, why won’t you?” He looked wearily away. Nevertheless my gaze disquieted him. He turned uneasily; he rose, waved his wings as if for flight, poised, then settled defiantly down again.

“You are no good,” said I, “you won’t help even with a word.”

He sat stolidly unconcerned. Then I heard the lapwings in the meadow crying, crying. They seemed to seek the storm, yet to rail at it. They wheeled in the wind, yet never ceased to complain of it. They enjoyed the struggle, and lamented it in wild lament, through which came a sound of exultation. All the lapwings cried, cried the same tale, “Bitter, bitter, the struggle — for nothing, nothing, nothing” — and all the time they swung about on their broad wings, revelling.

“There,” said I to the crow, “they try it, and find it bitter, but they wouldn’t like to miss it, to sit still like you, you old corpse.”

He could not endure this. He rose in defiance, flapped his wings, and launched off, uttering one “Caw” of sinister foreboding. He was soon whirled away.

I discovered that I was very cold, so I went downstairs.

Twisting a curl round his finger, one of those loose curls that always dance free from the captured hair, Leslie said:

“Look how fond your hair is of me; look how it twines round my finger. Do you know, your hair — the light in it is like — oh — buttercups in the sun.”

“It is like me — it won’t be kept in bounds,” she replied. “Shame if it were — like this, it brushes my face — so — and sets me tingling like music.”

“Behave! Now be still, and I’ll tell you what sort of music you make.”

“Oh — well — tell me.”

“Like the calling of throstles and blackies, in the evening, frightening the pale little wood-anemones, till they run panting and swaying right up to our wall. Like the ringing of bluebells when the bees are at them; like Hippomenes, out-of-breath, laughing because he’d won.”

He kissed her with rapturous admiration.

“Marriage music, sir,” she added.

“What golden apples did I throw?” he asked lightly. “What!” she exclaimed, half mocking.

“This Atalanta,” he replied, looking lovingly upon her, “this Atalanta — I believe she just lagged at last on purpose.”

“You have it,” she cried, laughing, submitting to his caresses. “It was you —

the apples of your firm heels — the apples of your eyes — the apples Eve bit — that won me — hein!”

“That was it — you are clever, you are rare. And I’ve won, won the ripe apples of your cheeks, and your breasts, and your very fists — they can’t stop me — and — and — all your roundness and warmth and softness — I’ve won you, Lettie.”

She nodded wickedly, saying:

“All those — those — yes.”

“All — she admits it — everything!”

“Oh! — but let me breathe. Did you claim everything?”

“Yes, and you gave it me.”

“Not yet. Everything though?”

“Every atom.”

“But — now you look — ”

“Did I look aside?”

“With the inward eye. Suppose now we were two angels — ”

“Oh, dear — a sloppy angel!”

“Well — don’t interrupt now — suppose I were one — like the ‘Blessed Damosel’.”

“With a warm bosom — !”

“Don’t be foolish, now — I a ‘Blessed Damosel’ and you kicking the brown beech leaves below thinking — ”

“What are you driving at?”

“Would you be thinking — thoughts like prayers?”

“What on earth do you ask that for? Oh — I think I’d be cursing — eh?”

“No — saying fragrant prayers — that your thin soul might mount up — ”

“Hang thin souls, Lettie! I’m not one of your souly sort. I can’t stand Pre-Raphaelities. You — You’re not a Burne-Jonesess — you’re an Albert Moore. I think there’s more in the warm touch of a soft body than in a prayer. I’ll pray with kisses.”

“And when you can’t?”

“I’ll wait till prayer-time again. By. Jove, I’d rather feel my arms full of you; I’d rather touch that red mouth — you grudger! — than sing hymns with you in any heaven.”

“I’m afraid you’ll never sing hymns with me in heaven.”

“Well — I have you here — yes, I have you now.”

“Our life is but a fading dawn?”

“Liar! — Well, you called me! Besides, I don’t care; ‘Carpe diem’, my rosebud, my fawn. There’s a nice Carmen about a fawn. ‘Time to leave its

mother, and venture into a warm embrace.' Poor old Horace — I've forgotten him."

"Then poor old Horace."

"Ha! Ha! — Well, I shan't forget you. What's that queer look in your eyes?"

"What is it?"

"Nay — you tell me. You are such a tease, there's no getting to the bottom of you."

"You can fathom the depth of a kiss — "

"I will — I will — "

After a while he asked:

"When shall we be properly engaged, Lettie?"

"Oh, wait till Christmas — till I am twenty-one."

"Nearly three months! Why on earth — "

"It will make no difference. I shall be able to choose thee of my own free choice then."

"But three months!"

"I shall consider thee engaged — it doesn't matter about other people."

"I thought we should be married in three months."

"Ah — married in haste — But what will your mother say?"

"Say! Oh, she'll say it's the first wise thing I've done. You'll make a fine wife, Lettie, able to entertain, and all that."

"You will flutter brilliantly."

"We will."

"No — you'll be the moth — I'll paint your wings — gaudy feather-dust. Then when you lose your coloured dust, when you fly too near the light, or when you play dodge with a butterfly-net — away goes my part — you can't fly — I — alas, poor me! What becomes of the feather-dust when the moth brushes his wings against a butterfly-net?"

"What are you making so many words about? You don't know now, do you?"

"No — that I don't."

"Then just be comfortable. Let me look at myself in your eyes."

"Narcissus, Narcissus! — Do you see yourself well? Does the image flatter you? — Or is it a troubled stream, distorting your fair lineaments?"

"I can't see anything — only feel you looking — you are laughing at me. — What have you behind there — what joke?"

"I — I'm thinking you're just like Narcissus — a sweet, beautiful youth."

"Be serious — do."

"It would be dangerous. You'd die of it, and I — I should — "

"What!"

“Be just like I am now — serious.”

He looked proudly, thinking she referred to the earnestness of her love.

In the wood the wind rumbled and roared hoarsely overhead, but not a breath stirred among the saddened bracken. An occasional raindrop was shaken out of the trees; I slipped on the wet paths. Black bars striped the grey tree-trunks, where water had trickled down; the bracken was overthrown, its yellow ranks broken. I slid down the steep path to the gate, out of the wood.

Armies of cloud marched in rank across the sky, heavily laden, almost brushing the gorse on the common. The wind was cold and disheartening. The ground sobbed at every step. The brook was full, swirling along, hurrying, talking to itself, in absorbed intent tones. The clouds darkened; I felt the rain. Careless of the mud, I ran, and burst into the farm kitchen.

The children were painting, and they immediately claimed my help.

“Emily — and George — are in the front room,” said the mother quietly, for it was Sunday afternoon. I satisfied the little ones; I said a few words to the mother, and sat down to take off my clogs.

In the parlour, the father, big and comfortable, was sleeping in an arm-chair. Emily was writing at the table — she hurriedly hid her papers when I entered. George was sitting by the fire, reading. He looked up as I entered, and I loved him when he looked up at me, and as he lingered on his quiet “Hullo!” His eyes were beautifully eloquent — as eloquent as a kiss.

We talked in subdued murmurs, because the father was asleep, opulently asleep, his tanned face as still as a brown pear against the wall. The clock itself went slowly, with languid throbs. We gathered round the fire, and talked quietly, about nothing — blissful merely in the sound of our voices, a murmured, soothing sound — a grateful, dispassionate love trio.

At last George rose, put down his book — looked at his father — and went out.

In the barn there was a sound of the pulper crunching the turnips. The crisp strips of turnip sprinkled quietly down on to a heap of gold which grew beneath the pulper. The smell of pulped turnips, keen and sweet, brings back to me the feeling of many winter nights, when frozen hoof-prints crunch in the yard, and Orion is in the south; when a friendship was at its mystical best.

“Pulping on Sunday!” I exclaimed.

“Father didn’t do it yesterday; it’s his work; and I didn’t notice it. You know — Father often forgets — he doesn’t like to have to work in the afternoon — now.”

The cattle stirred in their stalls; the chains rattled round the posts; a cow coughed noisily. When George had finished pulping, and it was quiet enough for

talk, just as he was spreading the first layers of chop and turnip and meal — in ran Emily — with her hair in silken, twining confusion, her eyes glowing — to bid us go in to tea before the milking was begun. It was the custom to milk before tea on Sunday — but George abandoned it without demur — his father willed it so, and his father was master, not to be questioned on farm matters, however one disagreed.

The last day in October had been dreary enough; the night could not come too early. We had tea by lamplight, merrily, with the father radiating comfort as, the lamp shone yellow light. Sunday tea was imperfect without a visitor; with me, they always declared, it was perfect. I loved to hear them say so. I smiled, rejoicing quietly into my teacup when the father said:

“It seems proper to have Cyril here at Sunday tea, it seems natural.”

He was most loath to break the delightful bond of the lamp-lit tea-table; he looked up with a half-appealing glance when George at last pushed back his chair and said he supposed he’d better make a start.

“Ay,” said the father in a mild, conciliatory tone, “I’ll be out in a minute.”

The lamp hung against the barn wall, softly illuminating the lower part of the building, where bits of hay and white dust lay in the hollows between the bricks, where the curled chips of turnip scattered orange gleams over the earthen floor; the lofty roof, with its swallows’ nests under the tiles, was deep in shadow, and the corners were full of darkness, hiding, half hiding, the hay, the chopper, the bins. The light shone along the passages before the stalls, glistening on the moist noses of the cattle, and on the whitewash of the walls.

George was very cheerful; but I wanted to tell him my message. When he had finished the feeding, and had at last sat down to milk, I said:

“I told you Leslie Tempest was at our house when I came away.”

He sat with the bucket between his knees, his hands at the cow’s udder, about to begin to milk. He looked up a question at me.

“They are practically engaged now,” I said.

He did not turn his eyes away, but he ceased to look at me. As one who is listening for a far-off noise, he sat with his eyes fixed. Then he bent his head, and leaned it against the side of the cow, as if he would begin to milk. But he did not. The cow looked round and stirred uneasily. He began to draw the milk, and then to milk mechanically. I watched the movement of his hands, listening to the rhythmic clang of the jets of milk on the bucket, as a relief. After a while the movement of his hands became slower, thoughtful — then stopped.

“She has really said yes?”

I nodded.

“And what does your mother say?”

“She is pleased.”

He began to milk again. The cow stirred uneasily, shifting her legs. He looked at her angrily, and went on milking. Then, quite upset, she shifted again, and swung her tail in his face.

“Stand still!” he shouted, striking her on the haunch. She seemed to cower like a beaten woman. He swore at her, and continued to milk. She did not yield much that night; she was very restive; he took the stool from beneath him and gave her a good blow; I heard the stool knock on her prominent hipbone. After that she stood still, but her milk soon ceased to flow.

When he stood up, he paused before he went to the next beast, and I thought he was going to talk. But just then the father came along with his bucket. He looked in the shed, and, laughing in his mature, pleasant way, said:

“So you’re an onlooker today, Cyril — I thought you’d have milked a cow or two for me by now.”

“Nay,” said I, “Sunday is a day of rest — and milking makes your hands ache.”

“You only want a bit more practice,” he said, joking in his ripe fashion. “Why, George, is that all you’ve got from Julia?”

“It is.”

“H’m — she’s soon going dry. Julia, old lady, don’t go and turn skinny.”

When he had gone, and the shed was still, the air seemed colder. I heard his good-humoured “Stand over, old lass,” from the other shed, and the drum-beats of the first jets of milk on the pail.

“He has a comfortable time,” said George, looking savage. I laughed. He still waited.

“You really expected Lettie to have him,” I said.

“I suppose so,” he replied, “then she’d made up her mind to it. It didn’t matter — what she wanted — at the bottom.”

“You?” said I.

“If it hadn’t been that he was a prize — with a ticket — she’d have had — ”

“You!” said I.

“She was afraid — look how she turned and kept away — ”

“From you?” said I.

“I should like to squeeze her till she screamed.”

“You should have gripped her before, and kept her,” said I. “She — she’s like a woman, like a cat — running to comforts — she strikes a bargain. Women are all tradesmen.”

“Don’t generalise, it’s no good.”

“She’s like a prostitute — ”

“It’s banal! I believe she loves him.”

He started, and looked at me queerly. He looked quite childish in his doubt and perplexity.

“She what —

“Loves him — honestly.”

“She’d ‘a loved me better,” he muttered, and turned to his milking. I left him and went to talk to his father. When the latter’s four beasts were finished, George’s light still shone in the other shed.

I went and found him at the fifth, the last cow. When at length he had finished he put down his pail, and going over to poor Julia, stood scratching her back, and her poll, and her nose, looking into her big, startled eye and murmuring. She was afraid; she jerked her head, giving him a good blow on the cheek with her horn.

“You can’t understand them,” he said sadly, rubbing his face, and looking at me with his dark, serious eyes.

“I never knew I couldn’t understand them. I never thought about it — till — ”

“But you know, Cyril, she led me on.” I laughed at his rueful appearance.

CHAPTER VIII

THE RIOT OF CHRISTMAS

For some weeks, during the latter part of November and the beginning of December, I was kept indoors by a cold. At last came a frost which cleared the air and dried the mud. On the second Saturday before Christmas the world was transformed; tall, silver and pearl-grey trees rose pale against a dim blue sky, like trees in some rare, pale Paradise; the whole woodland was as if petrified in marble and silver and snow; the holly-leaves and long leaves of the rhododendron were rimmed and spangled with delicate tracery.

When the night came clear and bright, with a moon among the hoar-frost, I rebelled against confinement, and the house. No longer the mists and dank weather made the home dear; tonight even the glare of the distant little iron works was not visible, for the low clouds were gone, and pale stars blinked from beyond the moon.

Lettie was staying with me; Leslie was in London again. She tried to remonstrate in a sisterly fashion when I said I would go out.

“Only down to the Mill,” said I. Then she hesitated a while — said she would come too. I suppose I looked at her curiously, for she said:

“Oh — if you would rather go alone — !”

“Come — come — yes, come!” said I, smiling to myself.

Lettie was in her old animated mood. She ran, leaping over rough places, laughing, talking to herself in French. We came to the Mill. Gyp did not bark. I opened the outer door and we crept softly into the great dark scullery, peeping into the kitchen through the crack of the door.

The mother sat by the hearth, where was a big bath half full of soapy water, and at her feet, warming his bare legs at the fire, was David, who had just been bathed. The mother was gently rubbing his fine fair hair into a cloud. Mollie was combing out her brown curls, sitting by her father, who, in the fire-seat, was reading aloud in a hearty voice, with quaint precision. At the table sat Emily and George: she was quickly picking over a pile of little yellow raisins, and he, slowly, with his head sunk, was stoning the large raisins. David kept reaching forward to play with the sleepy cat — interrupting his mother’s rubbing. There

was no sound but the voice of the father, full of zest; I am afraid they were not all listening carefully. I clicked the latch and entered.

“Lettie!” exclaimed George.

“Cyril!” cried Emily.

“Cyril, ‘ooray!” shouted David.

“Hullo, Cyril!” said Mollie.

Six large brown eyes, round with surprise, welcomed me. They overwhelmed me with questions, and made much of us. At length they were settled and quiet again.

“Yes, I am a stranger,” said Lettie, who had taken off her hat and furs and coat. “But you do not expect me often, do you? I may come at times, eh?”

“We are only too glad,” replied the mother. “Nothing all day long but the sound of the sluice — and mists, and rotten leaves. I am thankful to hear a fresh voice.”

“Is Cyril really better, Lettie?” asked Emily softly.

“He’s a spoiled boy — I believe he keeps a little bit ill so that we can cade him. Let me help you — let me peel the apples — yes, yes — I will.”

She went to the table, and occupied one side with her apple-peeling. George had not spoken to her. So she said:

“I won’t help you, George, because I don’t like to feel my fingers so sticky, and because I love to see you so domesticated.”

“You’ll enjoy the sight a long time, then, for these things are numberless.”

“You should eat one now and then — I always do.”

“If I ate one I should eat the lot.”

“Then you may give me your one.”

He passed her a handful without speaking.

“That is too many, your mother is looking. Let me just finish this apple. There, I’ve not broken the peel!”

She stood up, holding up a long curling strip of peel. “How many times must I swing it, Mrs Saxton?”

“Three times — but it’s not All Hallows’ Eve.”

“Never mind! Look! — ” She carefully swung the long band of green peel over her head three times, letting it fall the third. The cat pounced on it, but Mollie swept him off again.

“What is it?” cried Lettie, blushing.

“G,” said the father, winking and laughing — the mother looked daggers at him.

“It isn’t nothink,” said David naïvely, forgetting his confusion at being in the presence of a lady in his shirt. Mollie remarked in her cool way:

“It might be a ‘hess’ — if you couldn’t write.”

“Or an ‘L’,” I added. Lettie looked over at me imperiously, and I was angry.

“What do you say, Emily?” she asked.

“Nay,” said Emily. “It’s only you can see the right letter.”

“Tell us what’s the right letter,” said George to her.

“I!” exclaimed Lettie. “Who can look into the seeds of Time?”

“Those who have set ‘em and watched ‘em sprout,” said I. She flung the peel into the fire, laughing a short laugh, and went on with her work.

Mrs Saxton leaned over to her daughter and said softly, so that he should not hear, that George was pulling the flesh out of the raisins.

“George!” said Emily sharply, “you’re leaving nothing but the husks.”

He too was angry.

““And he would fain fill his belly with the husks that the swine did eat,”“ he said quietly, taking a handful of the fruit he had picked and putting some in his mouth. Emily snatched away the basin.

“It is too bad!” she said.

“Here,” said Lettie, handing him an apple she had peeled. “You may have an apple, greedy boy.”

He took it and looked at it. Then a malicious smile twinkled round his eyes — as he said:

“If you give me the apple, to whom will you give the peel?”

“The swine,” she said, as if she only understood his first reference to the Prodigal Son. He put the apple on the table. “Don’t you want it?” she said.

“Mother,” he said comically, as if jesting. “She is offering me the apple like Eve.”

Like a flash, she snatched the apple from him, hid it in her skirts a moment, looking at him with dilated eyes, and then she flung it at the fire. She missed, and the father leaned forward and picked it off the hob, saying:

“The pigs may as well have it. You were slow, George — when a lady offers you a thing you don’t have to make mouths.”

“A ce qu’il paraît,” she cried, laughing now at her ease, boisterously.

“Is she making love, Emily?” asked the father, laughing suggestively.

“She says it too fast for me,” said Emily.

George was leaning back in his chair, his hands in his breeches pockets.

“We shall have to finish his raisins after all, Emily,” said Lettie brightly. “Look what a lazy animal he is.”

“He likes his comfort,” said Emily, with irony.

“The picture of content — solid, healthy, easy-moving content — ” continued Lettie. As he sat thus, with his head thrown back against the end of the ingle-

seat, coatless, his red neck seen in repose, he did indeed look remarkably comfortable.

“I shall never fret my fat away,” he said stolidly. “No — you and I — we are not like Cyril. We do not burn our bodies in our heads — or our hearts, do we?”

“We have it in common,” said he, looking at her indifferently beneath his lashes, as his head was tilted back.

Lettie went on with the paring and coring of her apples — then she took the raisins. Meanwhile, Emily was making the house ring as she chopped the suet in a wooden bowl. The children were ready for bed. They kissed us all “Good night” — save George. At last they were gone, accompanied by their mother. Emily put down her chopper, and sighed that her arm was aching, so I relieved her. The chopping went on for a long time, while the father read, Lettie worked, and George sat tilted back looking on. When at length the mincemeat was finished we were all out of work. Lettie helped to clear away — sat down — talked a little with effort — jumped up and said:

“Oh, I’m too excited to sit still — it’s so near Christmas — let us play at something.”

“A dance?” said Emily.

“A dance — a dance!”

He suddenly sat straight and got up.

“Come on!” he said.

He kicked off his slippers, regardless of the holes in his stocking feet, and put away the chairs. He held out his arm to her — she came with a laugh, and away they went, dancing over the great flagged kitchen at an incredible speed. Her light flying steps followed his leaps; you could hear the quick light tap of her toes more plainly than the thud of his stockinged feet. Emily and I joined in. Emily’s movements are naturally slow, but we danced at great speed. I was hot and perspiring, and she was panting, when I put her in a chair. But they whirled on in the dance, on and on till I was giddy, till the father, laughing, cried that they should stop. But George continued the dance; her hair was shaken loose, and fell in a great coil down her back; her feet began to drag; you could hear a light slur on the floor; she was panting — I could see her lips murmur to him, begging him to stop; he was laughing with open mouth, holding her tight; at last her feet trailed; he lifted her, clasping her tightly, and danced twice round the room with her thus. Then he fell with a crash on the sofa, pulling her beside him. His eyes glowed like coals; he was panting in sobs, and his hair was wet and glistening. She lay back on the sofa, with his arm still around her, not moving; she was quite overcome. Her hair was wild about her face. Emily was anxious; the father said, with a shade of inquietude:

“You’ve overdone it — it is very foolish.”

When at last she recovered her breath and her life, she got up, and laughing in a queer way, began to put up her hair. She went into the scullery where were the brush and combs, and Emily followed with a candle. When she returned, ordered once more, with a little pallor succeeding the flush, and with a great black stain of sweat on her leathern belt where his hand had held her, he looked up at her from his position on the sofa, with a peculiar glance of triumph, smiling.

“You great brute,” she said, but her yoke was not as harsh as her words. He gave a deep sigh, sat up, and laughed quietly. “Another?” he said.

“Will you dance with me?”

“At your pleasure.”

“Come then — a minuet.”

“Don’t know it.”

“Nevertheless, you must dance it. Come along.”

He reared up, and walked to her side. She put him through the steps, even dragging him round the waltz. It was very ridiculous. When it was finished she bowed him to his seat, and, wiping her hands on her handkerchief, because his shirt where her hand had rested on his shoulders was moist, she thanked him.

“I hope you enjoyed it,” he said.

“Ever so much,” she replied.

“You made me look a fool — so no doubt you did.”

“Do you think you could look a fool? Why, you are ironical! *Ca marche!* In other words, you have come on. But it is a sweet dance.”

He looked at her, lowered his eyelids, and said nothing. “Ah, well,” she laughed, “some are bred for the minuet, and some for — ”

“ — Less tomfoolery,” he answered.

“Ah — you call it tomfoolery because you cannot do it. Myself, I like it — so — ”

“And I can’t do it?”

“Could you? Did you? You are not built that way.”

“Sort of Clarence MacFadden,” he said, lighting a pipe as if the conversation did not interest him.

“Yes — what ages since we sang that!”

‘Clarence MacFadden he wanted to dance

But his feet were not gaited that way...’

“I remember we sang it after one corn harvest — we had a fine time. I never thought of you before as Clarence. It is very funny. By the way — will you come to our party at Christmas?”

“When? Who’s coming?”

“The twenty-sixth — Oh! — only the old people — Alice — Tom Smith — Fanny — those from Highclose.”

“And what will you do?”

“Sing — charades — -dance a little — anything you like.”

“Polka?”

“And minuets — and valetas. Come and dance a valeta, Cyril.”

She made me take her through a valeta, a minuet, a mazurka, and she danced elegantly, but with a little of Carmen’s ostentation — her dash and devilry. When we had finished, the father said:

“Very pretty — very pretty, indeed! They do look nice, don’t they, George? I wish I was young.”

“As I am — ” said George, laughing bitterly.

“Show me how to do them — some time, Cyril,” said Emily, in her pleading way, which displeased Lettie so much. “Why don’t you ask me?” said the latter quickly. “Well — but you are not often here.”

“I am here now. Come — ” and she waved Emily imperiously to the attempt.

Lettie, as I have said, is tall, approaching six feet; she is lissome. but firmly moulded, by nature graceful; in her poise and harmonious movement are revealed the subtle sympathies of her artist’s soul. The other is shorter, much heavier. In her every motion you can see the extravagance of her emotional nature. She quivers with feeling; emotion conquers and carries havoc through her, for she had not a strong intellect, nor a heart of light humour; her nature is brooding and defenceless; she knows herself powerless in the tumult of her feelings, and adds to her misfortunes a profound mistrust of herself.

As they danced together, Lettie and Emily, they showed in striking contrast. My sister’s ease and beautiful poetic movement were exquisite; the other could not control her movements, but repeated the same error again and again. She gripped Lettie’s hand fiercely, and glanced up with eyes full of humiliation and terror of her continued failure, and passionate, trembling, hopeless desire to succeed. To show her, to explain, made matters worse. As soon as she trembled on the brink of an action, the terror of not being able to perform it properly blinded her, and she was conscious of nothing but that she must do something — in a turmoil. At last Lettie ceased to talk, and merely swung her through the dances haphazard. This way succeeded better. So long as Emily need not think about her actions, she had a large, free grace; and the swing and rhythm and time were imparted through her senses rather than through her intelligence.

It was time for supper. The mother came down for a while, and we talked quietly, at random. Lettie did not utter a word about her engagement, not a suggestion. She made it seem as if things were just as before, although I am sure

she had discovered that I had told George. She intended that we should play as if ignorant of her bond.

After supper, when we were ready to go home, Lettie said to him:

“By the way — you must send us some mistletoe for the party — with plenty of berries, you know. Are there many berries on your mistletoe this year?”

“I do not know — I have never looked. We will go and see — if you like,” George answered.

“But will you come out into the cold?”

He pulled on his boots, and his coat, and twisted a scarf round his neck. The young moon had gone. It was very dark — the liquid stars wavered. The great night filled us with awe. Lettie caught hold of my arm, and held it tightly. He passed on in front to open the gates. We went down into the front garden, over the turf bridge where the sluice rushed coldly under, on to the broad slope of the bank. We could just distinguish the gnarled old apple trees leaning about us. We bent our heads to avoid the boughs, and followed George. He hesitated a moment, saying:

“Let me see — I think they are there — the two trees with mistletoe on.”

We again followed silently.

“Yes,” he said. “Here they are!”

We went close and peered into the old trees. We could just see the dark bush of the mistletoe between the boughs of the tree. Lettie began to laugh.

“Have we come to count the berries?” she said. “I can’t even see the mistletoe.”

She leaned forward and upwards to pierce the darkness; he, also straining to look, felt her breath on his cheek, and turning, saw the pallor of her face close to his, and felt the dark glow of her eyes. He caught her in his arms, and held her mouth in a kiss. Then, when he released her, he turned away, saying something incoherent about going to fetch the lantern to look. She remained with her back towards me, and pretended to be feeling among the mistletoe for the berries. Soon I saw the swing of the hurricane lamp below.

“He is bringing the lantern,” said I.

When he came up, he said, and his voice was strange and subdued:

“Now we can see what it’s like.”

He went near, and held up the lamp, so that it illuminated both their faces, and the fantastic boughs of the trees, and the weird bush of mistletoe sparsely pearly with berries. Instead of looking at the berries they looked into each other’s eyes; his lids flickered, and he flushed, in the yellow light of the lamp looking warm and handsome; he looked upwards in confusion and said, “There are plenty of berries.”

As a matter of fact, there were very few.

She too looked up, and murmured her assent. The light seemed to hold them as in a globe, in another world, apart from the night in which I stood. He put up his hand and broke off a sprig of mistletoe, with berries, and offered it to her. They looked into each other's eyes again. She put the mistletoe among her furs, looking down at her bosom. They remained still, in the centre of light, with the lamp uplifted; the red and black scarf wrapped loosely round his neck gave him a luxurious, generous look. He lowered the lamp and said, affecting to speak naturally:

“Yes — there is plenty this year.”

“You will give me some,” she replied, turning away and finally breaking the spell.

“When shall I cut it?” — He strode beside her, swinging the lamp, as we went down the bank to go home. He came as far as the brooks without saying another word. Then he bade us good night. When he had lighted her over the stepping-stones, she did not take my arm as we walked home.

During the next two weeks we were busy preparing for Christmas, ranging the woods for the reddest holly, and pulling the gleaming ivy-bunches from the trees. From the farms around came the cruel yelling of pigs, and in the evening later, was a scent of pork-pies. Far off on the high-way could be heard the sharp trot of ponies hastening with Christmas goods.

There the carts of the hucksters dashed by to the expectant villagers, triumphant with great bunches of light foreign mistletoe, gay with oranges peeping through the boxes, and scarlet intrusion of apples, and wild confusion of cold, dead poultry. The hucksters waved their whips triumphantly, the little ponies rattled bravely under the sycamores, towards Christmas.

In the late afternoon of the 24th, when dust was rising under the hazel brake, I was walking with Lettie. All among the mesh of twigs overhead was tangled a dark red sky. The boles of the trees grew denser — almost blue.

Tramping down the riding we met two boys, fifteen or sixteen years old. Their clothes were largely patched with tough cotton moleskin; scarves were knotted round their throats, and in their pockets rolled tin bottles full of tea, and the white knobs of their knotted snap-bags.

“Why!” said Lettie. “Are you going to work on Christmas eve?”

“It looks like it, don't it?” said the elder.

“And what time will you be coming back?”

“About 'alf-past tow.”

“Christmas morning!”

“You'll be able to look out for the herald Angels and the Star,” said I.

“They’d think we was two dirty little ‘uns,” said the younger lad, laughing.

“They’ll ‘appen ‘a done before we get up ter th’ top,” added the elder boy, “an’ they’ll none venture down th’ shaft.”

“If they did,” put in the other, “you’d ha’e ter bath ‘em after. I’d gi’e ‘em a bit o’ my pasty.”

“Come on,” said the elder sulkily.

They tramped off, slurring their heavy boots.

“Merry Christmas!” I called after them.

“In th’ mornin’,” replied the elder.

“Same to you,” said the younger, and he began to sing with a tinge of bravado.

“In the fields with their flocks abiding.

They lay on the dewy ground — ”

“Fancy,” said Lettie, “those boys are working for me!” We were all going to the party at Highclose. I happened to go into the kitchen about half-past seven. The lamp was turned low, and Rebecca sat in the shadows. On the table, in the light of the lamp, I saw a glass vase with five or six very beautiful Christmas roses.

“Hullo, Becka, who’s sent you these?” said I.

“They’re not sent,”. replied Rebecca from the depth of the shadow, with suspicion of tears in her voice.

“Why! I never saw them in the garden.”

“Perhaps not. But I’ve watched them these three weeks, and kept them under glass.”

“For Christmas? They are beauties. I thought someone must have sent them to you.”

“It’s little as ‘as ever been sent me,” replied Rebecca, “an’ less as will be.”

“Why — what’s the matter?”

“Nothing. Who’m I, to have anything the matter! Nobody — nor ever was, nor ever will be. And I’m getting old as well.”

“Something’s upset you, Becky.”

“What does it matter if it has? What are my feelings? A bunch o’ fal-de-rol flowers as a gardener clips off wi’ never a thought is preferred before mine as I’ve fettle after this three-week. I can sit at home to keep my flowers company — nobody wants ‘em.”

I remembered that Lettie was wearing hot-house flowers; she was excited and full of the idea of the party at Highclose; I could imagine her quick “Oh no, thank you, Rebecca. I have had a spray sent to me — ”

“Never mind, Becky,” said I, “she is excited tonight.”

“An’ I’m easy forgotten.”

“So are we all, Becky — tant mieux.”

At Highclose Lettie made a stir. Among the little belles of the countryside, she was decidedly the most distinguished. She was brilliant, moving as if in a drama. Leslie was enraptured, ostentatious in his admiration, proud of being so well infatuated. They looked into each other’s eyes when they met, both triumphant, excited, blazing arch looks at one another. Lettie was enjoying her public demonstration immensely; it exhilarated her into quite a vivid love for him. He was magnificent in response. Meanwhile, the honoured lady of the house, pompous and ample, sat aside with my mother conferring her patronage on the latter amiable little woman, who smiled sardonically and watched Lettie. It was a splendid party; it was brilliant, it was dazzling.

I danced with several ladies, and honourably kissed each under the mistletoe — except that two of them kissed me first, it was all done in a most correct manner.

“You wolf,” said Miss Wookey archly. “I believe you are a wolf — a veritable rôdeur des femmes — and you look such a lamb too — such a dear.”

“Even my bleat reminds you of Mary’s pet.”

“But you are not my pet — at least — it is well that my Golaud doesn’t hear you — ”

“If he is so very big — ” said I.

“He is really; he’s beefy. I’ve engaged myself to him, somehow or other. One never knows how one does those things, do they?”

“I couldn’t speak from experience,” said I.

“Cruel man! I suppose I felt Christmasy, and I’d just been reading Maeterlinck — and he really is big.”

“Who?” I asked.

“Oh — He, of course. My Golaud. I can’t help admiring men who are a bit avoirdupoisy. It is unfortunate they can’t dance.”

“Perhaps fortunate,” said I.

“I can see you hate him. Pity I didn’t think to ask him if he danced — before — ”

“Would it have influenced you very much?”

“Well — of course — one can be free to dance all the more with the really nice men whom one never marries.”

“Why not?”

“Oh — you can only marry one — ”

“Of course.”

“There he is — he’s coming for me! Oh, Frank, you leave me to the tender mercies of the world at large. I thought you’d forgotten me, dear.”

“I thought the same,” replied her Golaud, a great fat fellow with a childish bare face. He smiled awesomely, and one never knew what he meant to say.

We drove home in the early Christmas morning. Lettie, warmly wrapped in her cloak, had had a little stroll with her lover in the shrubbery. She was still brilliant, flashing in her movements. He, as he bade her good-bye, was almost beautiful in his grace and his low musical tone. I nearly loved him myself. She was very fond towards him. As we came to the gate where the private road branched from the highroad, we heard John say “Thank you” — and looking out, saw our two boys returning from the pit. They were very grotesque in the dark nights as the lamplight fell on them, showing them grimy, flecked with bits of snow. They shouted merrily, their good wishes. Lettie leaned out and waved to them, and they cried ““ooray!” Christmas came in with their acclamations.

CHAPTER IX

LETTIE COMES OF AGE

Lettie was twenty-one on the day after Christmas. She woke me in the morning with cries of dismay. There was a great fall of snow, multiplying the cold morning light, startling the slow-footed twilight. The lake was black like the open eyes of a corpse; the woods were black like the beard on the face of a corpse. A rabbit bobbed out, and floundered in much consternation; little birds settled into the depth, and rose in a dusty whirr, much terrified at the universal treachery of the earth. The snow was eighteen inches deep, and drifted in places.

“They will never come!” lamented Lettie, for it was the day of her party.

“At any rate — Leslie will,” said I.

“One!” she exclaimed.

“That one is all, isn’t it?” said I. “And for sure George will come, though I’ve not seen him this fortnight. He’s not been in one night, they say, for a fortnight.”

“Why not?”

“I cannot say.”

Lettie went away to ask Rebecca for the fiftieth time if she thought they would come. At any rate, the extra woman-help came.

It was not more than ten o’clock when Leslie arrived, ruddy, with shining eyes, laughing like a boy. There was much stamping in the porch, and knocking of leggings with his stick, and crying of Lettie from the kitchen to know who had come, and loud, cheery answers from the porch bidding her come and see. She came, and greeted him with effusion.

“Ha, my little woman!” he said, kissing her. “I declare you are a woman. Look at yourself in the glass now — ”

She did so —

“What do you see?” he asked, laughing.

“You — mighty gay, looking at me.”

“Ah, but look at yourself. There! I declare you’re more afraid of your own eyes than of mine, aren’t you?”

“I am,” she said, and he kissed her with rapture.

“It’s your birthday,” he said.

“I know,” she replied.

“So do I. You promised me something.”

“What?” she asked.

“Here — see if you like it” — he gave her a little case. She opened it, and instinctively slipped the ring on her finger. He made a movement of pleasure. She looked up, laughing breathlessly at him.

“Now!” said he, in times of finality.

“Ah!” she exclaimed in a strange, thrilled voice.

He caught her in his arms.

After a while, when they could talk rationally again, she said: “Do you think they will come to my party?”

“I hope not — By Heaven!”

“But — oh yes! We have made all preparations.”

“What does that matter! Ten thousand folks here today — !”

“Not ten thousand — only five or six. I shall be wild if they can’t come.”

“You want them?”

“We have asked them — and everything is ready — and I do want us to have a party one day.”

“But today — damn it all, Lettie!”

“But I did want my party today. Don’t you think they’ll come?”

“They won’t if they’ve any sense!”

“You might help me — ” she pouted.

“Well, I’ll be — ! and you’ve set your mind on having a houseful of people today?”

“You know how we look forward to it — my party. At any rate — I know Tom Smith will come — and I’m almost sure Emily Saxton will.”

He bit his moustache angrily, and said at last:

“Then I suppose I’d better send John round for the lot.”

“It wouldn’t be much trouble, would it?”

“No trouble at all.”

“Do you know,” she said, twisting the ring on her finger, “it makes me feel as if I tied something round my finger to remember by. It somehow remains in my consciousness all the time.”

“At any rate,” said he, “I have got you.”

After dinner, when we were alone, Lettie sat at the table, nervously fingering her ring.

“It is pretty, Mother, isn’t it?” she said a trifle pathetically.

“Yes, very pretty. I have always liked Leslie,” replied my mother.

“But it feels so heavy — it fidgets me. I should like to take it off.”

“You are like me, I never could wear rings. I hated my wedding ring for months.”

“Did you, Mother?”

“I longed to take it off and put it away. But after a while I got used to it.”

“I’m glad this isn’t a wedding ring.”

“Leslie says it is as good,” said I.

“Ah well, yes! But still it is different — ” She put the jewels round under her finger, and looked at the plain gold band — then she twisted it back quickly, saying:

“I’m glad it’s not — not yet. I begin to feel a woman, little Mother — I feel grown up today.”

My mother got up suddenly and went and kissed Lettie fervently.

“Let me kiss my girl good-bye,” she said, and her voice was muffled with tears. Lettie clung to my mother, and sobbed a few quiet sobs, hidden in her bosom. Then she lifted her face, which was wet with tears, and kissed my mother, murmuring:

“No, Mother — no — o — !”

About three o’clock the carriage came with Leslie and Marie. Both Lettie and I were upstairs, and I heard Marie come tripping up to my sister.

“Oh, Lettie, he is in such a state of excitement, you never knew. He took me with him to buy it — let me see it on. I think it’s awfully lovely. Here, let me help you to do your hair — all in those little rolls — it will look charming. You’ve really got beautiful hair — there’s so much life in it — it’s a pity to twist it into a coil as you do. I wish my hair were a bit longer — though really, it’s all the better for this fashion — don’t you like it? — it’s ‘so chic’ — I think these little puffs are just fascinating — it is rather long for them — but it will look ravishing. Really, my eyes, and eyebrows, and eyelashes are my best features, don’t you think?”

Marie, the delightful, charming little creature, twittered on. I went downstairs.

Leslie started when I entered the room, but seeing only me, he leaned forward again, resting his arms on his knees, looking in the fire.

“What the Dickens is she doing?” he asked.

“Dressing.”

“Then we may keep on waiting. Isn’t it a deuced nuisance, these people coming?”

“Well, we generally have a good time.”

“Oh — it’s all very well — we’re not in the same boat, you and me.”

“Fact,” said I, laughing.

“By Jove, Cyril, you don’t know what it is to be in love. I never thought — I

couldn't ha' believed I should be like it. And the time when it isn't at the top of your blood, it's at the bottom: — 'the Girl, the Girl'."

He stared into the fire.

"It seems pressing you, pressing you on. Never leaves you alone a moment."

Again he lapsed into reflection.

"Then, all at once, you remember how she kissed you, and all your blood jumps afire."

He mused again for a while — or rather, he seemed fiercely to con over his sensations.

"You know," he said, "I don't think she feels for me as I do for her."

"Would you want her to?" said I.

"I don't know. Perhaps not — but — still I don't think she feels —"

At this he lighted a cigarette to soothe his excited feelings, and there was silence for some time. Then the girls came down. We could hear their light chatter. Lettie entered the room. He jumped up and surveyed her. She was dressed in soft, creamy, silken stuff; her neck was quite bare; her hair was, as Marie promised, fascinating; she was laughing nervously. She grew warm, like a blossom in the sunshine, in the glow of his admiration. He went forward and kissed her.

"You are splendid!" he said.

She only laughed for answer. He drew her away to the great arm-chair, and made her sit in it beside him. She was indulgent and he radiant. He took her hand and looked at it, and at his ring which she wore.

"It looks all right!" he murmured.

"Anything would," she replied.

"What do you mean — sapphires and diamonds — for I don't know?"

"Nor do I. Blue for hope, because Speranza in 'Fairy Queen' had a blue gown — and diamonds for — the crystalline clearness of my nature."

"Its glitter and hardness, you mean. — You are a hard little mistress. But why hope?"

"Why? — No reason whatever, like most things. No, that's not right. Hope! Oh — blindfolded — hugging a silly harp with no strings. I wonder why she didn't drop her harp framework over the edge of the globe, and take the handkerchief off her eyes, and have a look round! But of course she was a woman — and a man's woman. Do you know I believe most women can sneak a look down their noses from underneath the handkerchief of hope they've tied over their eyes. They could take the whole muffler off — but they don't do it, the dears."

"I don't believe you know what you're talking about, and I'm sure I don't.

Sapphires reminded me of your eyes — and isn't it 'Blue that kept the faith'? I remember something about it."

"Here," said she, pulling off the ring, "you ought to wear it yourself, Faithful One, to keep me in constant mind."

"Keep it on, keep it on. It holds you faster than that fair damsel tied to a tree in Millais's picture — I believe it's Millais."

She sat shaking with laughter.

"What a comparison! Who'll be the brave knight to rescue me — discreetly — from behind?"

"Ah," he answered, "it doesn't matter. You don't want rescuing, do you?"

"Not yet," she replied, teasing him.

They continued to talk half nonsense, making themselves eloquent by quick looks and gestures, and communion of warm closeness. The ironical tones went out of Lettie's voice, and they made love.

Marie drew me away into the dining-room, to leave them alone.

Marie is a charming little maid, whose appearance is neatness, whose face is confident little goodness. Her hair is dark, and lies low upon her neck in wavy coils. She does not affect the fashion in coiffure, and generally is a little behind the fashion in dress. Indeed she is a half-opened bud of a matron, conservative, full of proprieties, and of gentle indulgence. She now smiled at me with a warm delight in the romance upon which she had just shed her grace, but her demureness allowed nothing to be said. She glanced round the room, and out of the window, and observed:

"I always love Woodside, it is restful — there is something about it — oh — assuring — really — it comforts me — I've been reading Maxim Gorky."

"You shouldn't," said I.

"Dadda reads them — but I don't like them — I shall read no more. I like Woodside — it makes you feel — really at home — it soothes one like the old wood does. It seems right — life is proper here — not ulcery — "

"Just healthy living flesh," said I.

"No, I don't mean that, because one feels — oh, as if the world were old and good, not old and bad."

"Young, and undisciplined, and mad," said I.

"No — but here, you, and Lettie, and Leslie, and me — it is so nice for us, and it seems so natural and good. Woodside is so old, and so sweet and serene — it does reassure one."

"Yes," said I, "we just live, nothing abnormal, nothing cruel and extravagant — just natural — like doves in a dovecote."

"Oh! — doves! — they are so — so mushy."

“They are dear little birds, doves. You look like one yourself, with the black band round your neck. You a turtle-dove, and Lettie a wood-pigeon.”

“Lettie is splendid, isn’t she? What a swing she has — what a mastery! I wish I had her strength — she just marches straight through in the right way — I think she’s fine.”

I laughed to see her so enthusiastic in her admiration of my sister. Marie is such a gentle, serious little soul. She went to the window. I kissed her, and pulled two berries off the mistletoe. I made her a nest in the heavy curtains, and she sat there looking out on the snow.

“It is lovely,” she said reflectively. “People must be ill when they write like Maxim Gorky.”

“They live in town,” said I.

“Yes — but then look at Hardy — life seems so terrible — it isn’t, is it?”

“If you don’t feel it, it isn’t — if you don’t see it. I don’t see it for myself.”

“It’s lovely enough for heaven.”

“Eskimo’s heaven perhaps. And we’re the angels, eh? And I’m an archangel.”

“No, you’re a vain, frivolous man. Is that — ? What is that moving through the trees?”

“Somebody coming,” said I.

It was a big, burly fellow moving curiously through the bushes.

“Doesn’t he walk funnily?” exclaimed Marie. He did. When he came near enough we saw he was straddled upon Indian snow-shoes. Marie peeped, and laughed, and peeped, and hid again in the curtains laughing. He was very red, and looked very hot, as he hauled the great meshes, shuffling over the snow; his body rolled most comically. I went to the door and admitted him, while Marie stood stroking her face with her hands to smooth away the traces of her laughter.

He grasped my hand in a very large and heavy glove, with which he then wiped his perspiring brow.

“Well, Beardsall, old man,” he said, “and how’s things? God, I’m not ‘alf hot! Fine idea though — ” He showed me his snow-shoes.

“Ripping! ain’t they? I’ve come like an Indian brave — ”

He rolled his “r’s”, and lengthened out his “ah’s” tremendously — ”brra-ave”.

“Couldn’t resist it though,” he continued.

“Remember your party last year — Girls turned up? On the war-path, eh?” He pursed up his childish lips and rubbed his fat chin.

Having removed his coat, and the white wrap which protected his collar, not to mention the snowflakes, which Rebecca took almost as an insult to herself — he seated his fat, hot body on a chair, and proceeded to take off his gaiters and his boots. Then he donned his dancing-pumps, and I led him upstairs.

“Lord, I skimmed here like a swallow!” he continued — and I looked at his corpulence.

“Never met a soul, though they’ve had a snow-plough down the road. I saw the marks of a cart up the drive, so I guessed the Tempests were here. So Lettie’s put her nose in Tempest’s nosebag — leaves nobody a chance, that — some women have rum taste — only they’re like ravens, they go for the gilding — don’t blame ‘em — only it leaves nobody a chance. Madie Howitt’s coming, I suppose?”

I ventured something about the snow.

“She’ll come,” he said, “if it’s up to the neck. Her mother saw me go past.”

He proceeded with his toilet. I told him that Leslie had sent the carriage for Alice and Madie. He slapped his fat legs, and exclaimed:

“Miss Gall — I smell sulphur! Beardsall, old boy, there’s fun in the wind. Madie, and the coy little Tempest, and — ” he hissed a line of a music-hall song through his teeth.

During all this he had straightened his cream and lavender waistcoat.

“Little pink of a girl worked it for me — a real juicy little peach — chipped somehow or other” — he had arranged his white bow — he had drawn forth two rings, one a great signet, the other gorgeous with diamonds, and had adjusted them on his fat white fingers; he had run his fingers delicately through his hair, which rippled backwards a trifle tawdrily — being fine and somewhat sapless; he had produced a box, containing a cream carnation with suitable greenery; he had flicked himself with a silk handkerchief, and had dusted his patent-leather shoes; lastly, he had pursed up his lips and surveyed himself with great satisfaction in the mirror. Then he was ready to be presented.

“Couldn’t forget today, Lettie. Wouldn’t have let old Pluto and all the bunch of ‘em keep me away. I skimmed here like a ‘Brra-ave’ on my snow-shoes, like Hiawatha coming to Minnehaha.”

“Ah — that was famine,” said Marie softly.

“And this is a feast, a gorgeous feast, Miss Tempest,” he said, bowing to Marie, who laughed.

“You have brought some music?” asked mother.

“Wish I was Orpheus,” he said, uttering his words with exaggerated enunciation, a trick he had caught from his singing, I suppose.

“I see you’re in full feather, Tempest. Is she kind as she is fair?”

“Who?”

Will pursed up his smooth sensuous face that looked as if it had never needed shaving. Lettie went out with Marie, hearing the bell ring.

“She’s an houri!” exclaimed William. “Gad, I’m almost done for! She’s a

lotus-blossom! — But is that your ring she's wearing, Tempest?"

"Keep off," said Leslie.

"And don't be a fool," said I.

"Oh, 0-0-Oh!" drawled Will, "so we must look the other way! 'Le bel homme sans merci'!"

He sighed profoundly, and ran his fingers through his hair, keeping one eye on himself in the mirror as he did so. Then he adjusted his rings and went to the piano. At first he only splashed about brilliantly. Then he sorted the music, and took a volume of Tchaikovsky's songs. He began the long opening of one song, was unsatisfied, and found another, a serenade of Don Juan. Then at last he began to sing.

His voice is a beautiful tenor, softer, more mellow, less strong and brassy than Leslie's. Now it was raised that it might be heard upstairs. As the melting gush poured forth, the door opened. William softened his tones, and sang 'dolce', but he did not glance round.

"Rapture! — Choir of Angels," exclaimed Alice, clasping her hands and gazing up at the lintel of the door like a sainted virgin.

"Persephone — Europa — " murmured Madie, at her side, getting tangled in her mythology.

Alice pressed her clasped hands against her bosom in ecstasy as the notes rose higher.

"Hold me, Madie, or I shall rush to extinction in the arms of this siren." She clung to Madie. The song finished, and Will turned round.

"Take it calmly, Miss Gall," he said. "I hope you're not hit too badly."

"Oh — how can you say 'take it calmly' — how can the savage beast be calm!"

"I'm sorry for you," said Will.

"You are the cause of my trouble, dear boy," replied Alice. "I never thought you'd come," said Madie.

"Skimmed here like an Indian 'brra-ave'," said Will. "Like Hiawatha towards Minnehaha. I knew you were coming."

"You know," simpered Madie, "it gave me quite a flutter when I heard the piano. It is a year since I saw you. How did you get here?"

"I came on snow-shoes," said he. "Real Indian — came from Canada — they're just ripping."

"Oh — Aw-w do go and put them on and show us — do! — do perform for us, Billy dear!" cried Alice.

"Out in the cold and driving sleet — no fear," said he, and he turned to talk to Madie. Alice sat chatting with Mother. Soon Tom Smith came, and took a seat

next to Marie; and sat quietly looking over his spectacles with his sharp brown eyes, full of scorn for William, full of misgiving for Leslie and Lettie.

Shortly after, George and Emily came in. They were rather nervous. When they had changed their clogs, and Emily had taken off her brown-paper leggings, and he his leather ones, they were not anxious to go into the drawing-room. I was surprised — and so was Emily — to see that he had put on dancing shoes.

Emily, ruddy from the cold air, was wearing a wine-coloured dress, which suited her luxurious beauty. George's clothes were well made — it was a point on which he was particular, being somewhat self-conscious. He wore a jacket and a dark bow. The other men were in evening dress.

We took them into the drawing-room, where the lamp was not lighted, and the glow of the fire was becoming evident in the dusk. We had taken up the carpet — the floor was all polished — and some of the furniture was taken away — so that the room looked large and ample.

There was general hand-shaking, and the newcomers were seated near the fire. First Mother talked to them — then the candles were lighted at the piano, and Will played to us. He is an exquisite pianist, full of refinement and poetry. It is astonishing, and it is a fact. Mother went out to attend to the tea, and after a while, Lettie crossed over to Emily and George, and, drawing up a low chair, sat down to talk to them. Leslie stood in the window bay, looking out on the lawn where the snow grew bluer and bluer and the sky almost purple.

Lettie put her hands on Emily's lap, and said softly, "Look — do you like it?"

"What! Engaged?" exclaimed Emily.

"I am of age, you see," said Lettie.

"It is a beauty, isn't it? Let me try it on, will you? Yes, I've never had a ring. There, it won't go over my knuckle-end — I thought not. Aren't my hands red? — it's the cold — yes, it's too small for me. I do like it."

George sat watching the play of the four hands in his sister's lap, two hands moving so white and fascinating in the twilight, the other two rather red, with rather large bones, looking so nervous, almost hysterical. The ring played between the four hands, giving an occasional flash from the twilight or candlelight.

"You must congratulate me," she said, in a very low voice, and two of us knew she spoke to him.

"Ah, yes," said Emily, "I do."

"And you?" she said, turning to him, who was silent. "What do you want me to say?" he asked.

"Say what you like."

"Some time, when I've thought about it."

“Cold dinners!” laughed Lettie, awaking Alice’s old sarcasm at his slowness.

“What?” he exclaimed, looking up suddenly at her taunt. She knew she was playing false; she put the ring on her finger and went across the room to Leslie, laying her arm over his shoulder, and leaning her head against him, murmuring softly to him. He, poor fellow, was delighted with her, for she did not display her fondness often.

We went in to tea. The yellow shaded lamp shone softly over the table, where Christmas roses spread wide open among some dark-coloured leaves; where the china and silver and the coloured dishes shone delightfully. We were all very gay and bright; who could be otherwise, seated round a well-laid table, with young company, and the snow outside? George felt awkward when he noticed his hands over the table, but for the rest, we enjoyed ourselves exceedingly.

The conversation veered inevitably to marriage.

“But what have you to say about it, Mr Smith?” asked little Marie.

“Nothing yet,” replied he in his peculiar grating voice. “My marriage is in the unanalysed solution of the future — when I’ve done the analysis I’ll tell you.”

“But what do you think about it — ?”

“Do you remember, Lettie,” said Will Bancroft, “that little red-haired girl who was in our year at college? She has just married old Craven out of Physic’s department.”

“I wish her joy of it!” said Lettie; “Wasn’t she an old flame of yours?”

“Among the rest,” he replied, smiling. “Don’t you remember you were one of them; you had your day.”

“What a joke that was!” exclaimed Lettie. “We used to go in the arboretum at dinner-time. You lasted half one autumn. Do you remember when we gave a concert, you and I, and Frank Wishaw, in the small lecture theatre?”

“When the Prinny was such an old buck, flattering you,” continued Will. “And that night Wishaw took you to the station — sent old Gettim for a cab and saw you in, large as life — never was such a thing before. Old Wishaw won you with that cab, didn’t he?”

“Oh, how I swelled!” cried Lettie. “There were you all at the top of the steps gazing with admiration! But Frank Wishaw was not a nice fellow, though he played the violin beautifully. I never liked his eyes — ”

“No,” added Will. “He didn’t last long, did he? — though long enough to oust me. We had a giddy ripping time in Coll., didn’t we?”

“It was not bad,” said Lettie. “Rather foolish. I’m afraid I wasted my three years.”

“I think,” said Leslie, smiling, “you improved the shining hours to great purpose.”

It pleased him to think what a flirt she had been, since the flirting had been harmless, and only added to the glory of his final conquest. George felt very much left out during these reminiscences.

When we had finished tea, we adjourned to the drawing-room. It was in darkness, save for the fire-light. The mistletoe had been discovered, and was being appreciated.

“Georgie, Sybil, Sybil, Georgie, come and kiss me,” cried Alice.

Will went forward to do her the honour. She ran to me, saying, “Get away, you fat fool — keep on your own preserves. Now, Georgie dear, come and kiss me, ‘cause you haven’t got nobody else but me, no y’ ‘aven’t. Do you want to run away, like Georgy-Porgy apple-pie? Shan’t cry, sure I shan’t, if you are ugly.”

She took him and kissed him on either cheek, saying softly, “You shan’t be so serious, old boy — buck up, there’s a good fellow.”

We lighted the lamp, and charades were proposed, Leslie and Lettie, Will and Madie and Alice went out to play. The first scene was an elopement to Gretna Green — with Alice a maidservant, a part that she played wonderfully well as a caricature. It was very noisy, and extremely funny. Leslie was in high spirits. It was remarkable to observe that, as he became more animated, more abundantly energetic, Lettie became quieter. The second scene, which they were playing as excited melodrama, she turned into small tragedy with her bitterness. They went out, and Lettie blew us kisses from the doorway.

“Doesn’t she act well?” exclaimed Marie, speaking to Tom.

“Quite realistic,” said he.

“She could always play a part well,” said Mother.

“I should think,” said Emily, “she could take a role in life and play up to it.”

“I believe she could,” Mother answered. “There would only be intervals when she would see herself in a mirror acting.”

“And what then?” said Marie.

“She would feel desperate, and wait till the fit passed off,” replied my mother, smiling significantly.

The players came in again. Lettie kept her part subordinate. Leslie played with brilliance; it was rather startling how he excelled. The applause was loud — but we could not guess the word. Then they laughed, and told us. We clamoured for more.

“Do go, dear,” said Lettie to Leslie, “and I will be helping to arrange the room for the dances. I want to watch you — I am rather tired — it is so exciting — Emily will take my place.”

They went. Marie and Tom, and Mother and I played bridge in one corner.

Lettie said she wanted to show George some new pictures, and they bent over a portfolio for some time. Then she bade him help her to clear the room for the dances.

“Well, you have had time to think,” she said to him.

“A short time,” he replied. “What shall I say?”

“Tell me what you’ve been thinking.”

“Well — about you — ” he answered, smiling foolishly. “What about me?” she asked, venturesome.

“About you, how you were at college,” he replied.

“Oh! I had a good time. I had plenty of boys. I liked them all, till I found there was nothing in them; then they tired me.”

“Poor boys!” he said, laughing. “Were they all alike?”

“All alike,” she replied, “and they are still.”

“Pity,” he said, smiling. “It’s hard lines on you.”

“Why?” she said.

“It leaves you nobody to care for — ” he replied. “How very sarcastic you are. You make one reservation.”

“Do I?” he answered, smiling. “But you fire sharp into the air, and then say we’re all blank cartridges — except one, of course.”

“You?” she queried ironically — “Oh, you would for ever hang fire.”

“Cold dinners!” he quoted in bitterness. “But you knew I loved you. You knew well enough.”

“Past tense,” she replied, “thanks — make it perfect next time.”

“It’s you who hang fire — it’s you who make me,” he said.

“And so from the retort circumstantial to the retort direct.” she replied, smiling.

“You see — you put me off,” he insisted, growing excited. For reply, she held out her hand and showed him the ring. She smiled very quietly. He stared at her with darkening anger.

“Will you gather the rugs and stools together, and put them in that corner?” she said.

He turned away to do so, but he looked back again, and said, in low, passionate tones:

“You never counted me. I was a figure naught in the counting all along.”

“See — there is a chair that will be in the way,” she replied calmly; but she flushed, and bowed her head. She turned away, and he dragged an armful of rugs into a corner.

When the actors came in, Lettie was moving a vase of flowers. While they played, she sat looking on, smiling, clapping her hands. When it was finished

Leslie came and whispered to her, whereon she kissed him unobserved, delighting and exhilarating him more than ever. Then they went out to prepare the next act.

George did not return to her till she called him to help her. Her colour was high in her cheeks.

“How do you know you did not count?” she said nervously, unable to resist the temptation to play this forbidden game. He laughed, and for a moment could not find any reply.

“I do!” he said. “You knew you could have me any day, so you didn’t care.”

“Then we’re behaving in quite the traditional fashion,” she answered with irony.

“But you know,” he said, “you began it. You played with me, and showed me heaps of things — and those mornings — when I was binding corn, and when I was gathering the apples, and when I was finishing the straw-stack — you came then — I can never forget those mornings — things will never be the same — You have awakened my life — I imagine things that I couldn’t have done.”

“Ah! — I am very sorry, I am so sorry.”

“Don’t be! — don’t say so. But what of me?”

“What?” she asked rather startled. He smiled again; he felt the situation, and was a trifle dramatic, though deadly in earnest.

“Well,” said he, “you start me off — then leave me at a loose end. What am I going to do?”

“You are a man,” she replied.

He laughed. “What does that mean?” he said contemptuously.

“You can go on — which way you like,” she answered. “Oh well,” he said, “we’ll see.”

“Don’t you think so?” she asked, rather anxious.

“I don’t know — we’ll see,” he replied.

They went out with some things. In the hall, she turned to him, with a break in her voice, saying, “Oh, I am so sorry — I am so sorry.”

He said, very low and soft, “Never mind — never mind.”

She heard the laughter of those preparing the charade. She drew away and went in the drawing-room, saying aloud:

“Now I think everything is ready — we can sit down now.”

After the actors had played the last charade, Leslie came and claimed her.

“Now, Madam — are you glad to have me back?”

“That I am,” she said. “Don’t leave me again, will you?”

“I won’t,” he replied, drawing her beside him. “I have left my handkerchief in the dining-room,” he continued; and they went out together.

Mother gave me permission for the men to smoke.

“You know,” said Marie to Tom, “I am surprised that a scientist should smoke. Isn’t it a waste of time?”

“Come and light me,” he said.

“Nay,” she replied, “let science light you.”

“Science does — Ah, but science is nothing without a girl to set it going — Yes — Come on — now, don’t burn my precious nose.”

“Poor George!” cried Alice. “Does he want a ministering angel?”

He was half lying in a big arm-chair.

“I do,” he replied. “Come on, be my box of soothing ointment. My matches are all loose.”

“I’ll strike it on my heel, eh? Now, rouse up, or I shall have to sit on your knee to reach you.”

“Poor dear — he shall be luxurious,” and the dauntless girl perched on his knee.

“What if I singe your whiskers — would you send an Armada? Aw — aw — pretty! — You do look sweet — doesn’t he suck prettily?”

“Do you envy me?” he asked, smiling whimsically. “Ra — ther!”

“Shame to debar you,” he said, almost with tenderness. “Smoke with me.”

He offered her the cigarette from his lips. She was surprised, and exceedingly excited by his tender tone. She took the cigarette.

“I’ll make a heifer — like Mrs Daws,” she said.

“Don’t call yourself a cow,” he said.

“Nasty thing — let me go,” she exclaimed.

“No — you fit me — don’t go,” he replied, holding her.

“Then you must have growed. Oh — what great hands — let go. Lettie, come and pinch him.”

“What’s the matter?” asked my sister.

“He won’t let me go.”

“He’ll be tired first,” Lettie answered.

Alice was released, but she did not move. She sat with wrinkled forehead trying his cigarette. She blew out little tiny whiffs of smoke, and thought about it; she sent a small puff down her nostrils, and rubbed her nose.

“It’s not as nice as it looks,” she said.

He laughed at her with masculine indulgence.

“Pretty boy,” she said, stroking his chin.

“Am I?” he murmured languidly.

“Cheek!” she cried, and she boxed his ears. Then “Oh, pore fing!” she said, and kissed him.

She turned round to wink at my mother and at Lettie. She found the latter sitting in the old position with Leslie, two in a chair. He was toying with her arm; holding it and stroking it.

“Isn’t it lovely?” he said, kissing the forearm, “so warm and yet so white. Io — it reminds one of Io.”

“Somebody else talking about heifers,” murmured Alice to George.

“Can you remember,” said Leslie, speaking low, “that man in Merimée who wanted to bite his wife and taste her blood?”

“I do,” said Lettie. “Have you a strain of wild beast too?”

“Perhaps,” he laughed. “I wish these folks had gone. Your hair is all loose in your neck — it looks lovely like that, though — ”

Alice, the mocker, had unbuttoned the cuff of the thick wrist that lay idly on her knee, and had pushed his sleeve a little way.

“Ah!” she said. “What a pretty arm, brown as an over-baked loaf!”

He watched her smiling.

“Hard as a brick,” she added.

“Do you like it?” he drawled.

“No,” she said emphatically, in a tone that meant “yes”. “It makes me feel shivery.” He smiled again.

She superposed her tiny, pale, flower-like hands on his. He lay back looking at them curiously.

“Do you feel as if your hands were full of silver?” she asked almost wistfully, mocking.

“Better than that,” he replied gently.

“And your heart full of gold?” she mocked.

“Of hell!” he replied briefly.

Alice looked at him searchingly.

“And am I like a blue-bottle buzzing in your window to keep you company?” she asked.

He laughed.

“Good-bye,” she said, slipping down and leaving him. “Don’t go,” he said — but too late.

The irruption of Alice into the quiet, sentimental party was like taking a bright light into a sleeping hen-roost. Everybody jumped up and wanted to do something. They cried out for a dance.

“Emily — play a waltz — you won’t mind, will you, George? What! You don’t dance, Tom? Oh, Marie!”

“I don’t mind, Lettie,” protested Marie.

“Dance with me, Alice,” said George, smiling, “and Cyril will take Miss

Tempest.”

“Glory! — come on — do or die!” said Alice.

We began to dance. I saw Lettie watching, and I looked round. George was waltzing with Alice, dancing passably, laughing at her remarks. Lettie was not listening to what her lover was saying to her; she was watching the laughing pair. At the end she went to George.

“Why!” she said, “you can —

“Did you think I couldn’t?” he said. “You are pledged for a minuet and a valeta with me — you remember?”

“Yes.”

“You promise?”

“Yes. But —

“I went to Nottingham and learned.”

“Why — because? — Very well, Leslie, a mazurka. Will you play it, Emily — Yes, it is quite easy. Tom, you look quite happy talking to the Mater.”

We danced the mazurka with the same partners. He did it better than I expected — without much awkwardness — but stiffly. However, he moved quietly through the dance, laughing and talking abstractedly all the time with Alice.

Then Lettie cried a change of partners, and they took their valeta. There was a little triumph in his smile.

“Do you congratulate me?” he said.

“I am surprised,” she answered.

“So am I. But I congratulate myself.”

“Do you? Well, so do I.”

“Thanks! You’re beginning at last.”

“What?” she asked.

“To believe in me.”

“Don’t begin to talk again,” she pleaded sadly, “nothing vital.”

“Do you like dancing with me?” he asked

“Now, be quiet — that’s real,” she replied.

“By Heaven, Lettie, you make me laugh!”

“Do I?” she said — “What if you married Alice — soon.”

“I — Alice! — Lettie!! Besides, I’ve only a hundred pounds in the world, and no prospects whatever. That’s why — well — I shan’t marry anybody — unless it’s somebody with money.”

“I’ve a couple of thousand or so of my own — ”

“Have you? It would have done nicely,” he said, smiling. “You are different tonight,” she said, leaning on him.

“Am I?” he replied — “It’s because things are altered too. They’re settled one way now — for the present at least.”

“Don’t forget the two steps this time,” said she, smiling, and adding seriously, “You see, I couldn’t help it.”

“No, why not?”

“Things! I have been brought up to expect it — everybody expected it — and you’re bound to do what people expect you to do — you can’t help it. We can’t help ourselves, we’re all chess-men,” she said.

“Ay,” he agreed, but doubtfully.

“I wonder where it will end,” she said.

“Lettie!” he cried, and his hand closed in a grip on hers.

“Don’t — don’t say anything — it’s no good now, it’s too late. It’s done; and what is done, is done. If you talk any more, I shall say I’m tired and stop the dance. Don’t say another word.”

He did not — at least to her. Their dance came to an end. Then he took Marie, who talked winsomely to him. As he waltzed with Marie he regained his animated spirits. He was very lively the rest of the evening, quite astonishing and reckless. At supper he ate everything, and drank much wine.

“Have some more turkey, Mr Saxton.”

“Thanks — but give me some of that stuff in brown jelly, will you? It’s new to me.”

“Have some of this trifle, Georgie?”

“I will — you are a jewel.”

“So will you be — a yellow topaz tomorrow!”

“Ah! tomorrow’s tomorrow!”

After supper was over, Alice cried:

“Georgie, dear — have you finished? — don’t die the death of a king — King John — I can’t spare you, pet.”

“Are you so fond of me?”

“I am — Aw! I’d throw my best Sunday hat under a milk-cart for you, I would!”

“No; throw yourself into the milk-cart — some Sunday, when I’m driving.”

“Yes — come and see us,” said Emily.

“How nice! Tomorrow you won’t want me, Georgie dear, so I’ll come. Don’t you wish Pa would make Tono-Bungay? Wouldn’t you marry me then?”

“I would,” said he.

When the cart came, and Alice, Madie, Tom and Will departed, Alice bade Lettie a long farewell — blew Georgie many kisses — promised to love him faithful and true — and was gone.

George and Emily lingered a short time.

Now the room seemed empty and quiet, and all the laughter seemed to have gone. The conversation dribbled away; there was an awkwardness.

“Well,” said George heavily, at last. “Today is nearly gone — it will soon be tomorrow. I feel a bit drunk! We had a good time tonight.”

“I am glad,” said Lettie.

They put on their clogs and leggings, and wrapped themselves up, and stood in the hall.

“We must go,” said George, “before the clock strikes — like Cinderella — look at my glass slippers — ” he pointed to his clogs. “Midnight, and rags, and fleeing. Very appropriate. I shall call myself Cinderella who wouldn’t fit. I believe I’m a bit drunk — the world looks funny.”

We looked out at the haunting wanness of the hills beyond Nethermere. “Good-bye, Lettie; good-bye.”

They were out in the snow, which peered pale and eerily from the depths of the black wood.

“Good-bye,” he called out of the darkness. Leslie slammed the door, and drew Lettie away into the drawing-room. The sound of his low, vibrating satisfaction reached us, as he murmured to her, and laughed now. Then he kicked the door of the room shut. Lettie began to laugh and mock and talk in a high strained voice. The sound of their laughter mingled was strange and incongruous. Then her voice died down.

Marie sat at the little piano — which was put in the dining-room — strumming and tinkling the false, quavering old notes. It was a depressing jingling in the deserted remains of the feast, but she felt sentimental, and enjoyed it.

This was a gap between today and tomorrow, a dreary gap, where one sat and looked at the dreary comedy of yesterdays, and the grey tragedies of dawning tomorrows, vacantly, missing the poignancy of an actual today.

The cart returned.

“Leslie, Leslie, John is here, come along!” called Marie. There was no answer.

“Leslie — John is waiting in the snow.”

“All right.”

“But you must come at once.” She went to the door and spoke to him. Then he came out looking rather sheepish, and rather angry at the interruption. Lettie followed, tidying her hair. She did not laugh and look confused, as most girls do on similar occasions; she seemed very tired.

At last Leslie tore himself away, and after more returns for a farewell kiss, mounted the carriage, which stood in a pool of yellow light, blurred and

splotched with shadows, and drove away, calling something about tomorrow.

PART TWO

CHAPTER I

STRANGE BLOSSOMS AND STRANGE NEW BUDDING

Winter lay a long time prostrate on the earth. The men in the mines of Tempest, Warrall and Co. came out on strike on a question of the rearranging of the working system down below. The distress was not awful, for the men were on the whole wise and well-conditioned, but there was a dejection over the face of the country-side, and some suffered keenly. Everywhere, along the lanes and in the streets, loitered gangs of men, unoccupied and spiritless. Week after week went on, and the agents of the Miners' Union held great meetings, and the ministers held prayer-meetings, but the strike continued. There was no rest. Always the crier's bell was ringing in the street; always the servants of the company were delivering handbills, stating the case clearly, and always the people talked and filled the months with bitter, and then hopeless, resenting. Schools gave breakfasts, chapels gave soup, well-to-do people gave teas — the children enjoyed it. But we, who knew the faces of the old men and the privations of the women, breathed a cold, disheartening atmosphere of sorrow and trouble.

Determined poaching was carried on in the squire's woods and warrens. Annable defended his game heroically. One man was at home with a leg supposed to be wounded by a fall on the slippery roads — but really, by a man-trap in the woods. Then Annable caught two men, and they were sentenced to two months' imprisonment.

On both the lodge gates of Highclose — on our side and on the far Eberwich side — were posted notices that trespassers on the drive or in the grounds would be liable to punishment. These posters were soon mudded over, and fresh ones fixed.

The men loitering on the road by Nethermere looked angrily at Lettie as she passed, in her black furs which Leslie had given her, and their remarks were pungent. She heard them, and they burned in her heart. From my mother she

inherited democratic views, which she now proceeded to debate warmly with her lover.

Then she tried to talk to Leslie about the strike. He heard her with mild superiority, smiled, and said she did not know. Women jumped to conclusions at the first touch of feeling; men must look at a thing all round, then make a decision — nothing hasty and impetuous — careful, long-thought-out, correct decisions. Women could not be expected to understand these things, business was not for them; in fact, their mission was above business — *etc. etc.* Unfortunately Lettie was the wrong woman to treat thus.

“So!” said she, with a quiet, hopeless tone of finality.

“There now, you understand, don’t you, Minnehaha, my Laughing Water. — So laugh again, darling, and don’t worry about these things. We will not talk about them any more, eh?”

“No more.”

“No more — that’s right — you are as wise as an angel. Come here — pooh, the wood is thick and lonely! Look, there is nobody in the world but us, and you are my heaven and earth!”

“And hell?”

“Ah — if you are so cold — how cold you are! — it gives me little shivers when you look so — and I am always hot — Lettie!”

“Well?”

“You are cruel! Kiss me — now — No, I don’t want your cheek — kiss me yourself. Why don’t you say something?”

“What for? What’s the use of saying anything when there’s nothing immediate to say?”

“You are offended!”

“It feels like snow today,” she answered.

At last, however, winter began to gather her limbs, to rise, and drift with saddened garments northward.

The strike was over. The men had compromised. It was a gentle way of telling them they were beaten. But the strike was over.

The birds fluttered and dashed; the catkins on the hazel loosened their winter rigidity, and swung soft tassels. All through the day sounded long, sweet whistlings from the bushes; then later, loud, laughing shouts of bird triumph on every hand.

I remember a day when the breast of the hills was heaving in a last quick waking sigh, and the blue eyes of the waters opened bright. Across the infinite skies of March great rounded masses of cloud had sailed stately all day, domed with white radiance, softened with faint, fleeting shadows as if companies of

angels were gently sweeping past; adorned with resting, silken shadows like those of a full white breast. All day the clouds had moved on to their vast destination, and I had clung to the earth yearning and impatient. I took a brush and tried to paint them, then I raged at myself. I wished that in all the wild valley where cloud shadows were travelling like pilgrims, something would call me forth from my rooted loneliness. Through all the grandeur of the white and blue day, the poised cloud masses swung their slow flight, and left me unnoticed.

At evening they were all gone, and the empty sky, like a blue bubble over us, swam on its pale bright rims.

Leslie came, and asked his betrothed to go out with him, under the darkening wonderful bubble. She bade me accompany her, and, to escape from myself, I went.

It was warm in the shelter of the wood and in the crouching hollows of the hills. But over the slanting shoulders of the hills the wind swept, whipping the redness into our faces.

“Get me some of those alder catkins, Leslie,” said Lettie, as we came down to the stream.

“Yes, those, where they hang over the brook. They are ruddy like new blood freshening under the skin. Look, tassels of crimson and gold!” She pointed to the dusty hazel catkins mingled with the alder on her bosom. Then she began to quote Christina Rossetti’s “A Birthday”.

“I’m glad you came to take me a walk,” she continued — “Doesn’t Strelley Mill look pretty? Like a group of orange and scarlet fungi in a fairy picture. Do you know, I haven’t been, no, not for quite a long time. Shall we call now?”

“The daylight will be gone if we do. It is half-past five — more! I saw him — the son — the other morning.”

“Where?”

“He was carting manure — I made haste by.”

“Did he speak to you — did you look at him?”

“No, he said nothing. I glanced at him — he’s just the same, brick colour — stolid. Mind that stone — it rocks. I’m glad you’ve got strong boots on.”

“Seeing that I usually wear them.”

She stood poised a moment on a large stone, the fresh spring brook hastening towards her, deepening sidling round her.

“You won’t call and see them, then?” she asked.

“No. I like to hear the brook tinkling, don’t you?” he replied.

“Ah, yes — it’s full of music.”

“Shall we go on?” he said, impatient but submissive. “I’ll catch up in a minute,” said I.

I went in and found Emily putting some bread into the oven. "Come out for a walk," said I.

"Now? Let me tell Mother — I was longing — "

She ran and put on her long grey coat and her red tam-o'-shanter. As we went down the yard, George called to me. "I'll come back," I shouted.

He came to the crew-yard gate to see us off. When we came out onto the path, we saw Lettie standing on the top bar of the stile, balancing with her hand on Leslie's head. She saw us, she saw George, and she waved to us. Leslie was looking up at her anxiously. She waved again, then we could hear her laughing, and telling him excitedly to stand still, and steady her while she turned. She turned round, and leaped with a great flutter, like a big bird launching, down from the top of the stile to the ground and into his arms. Then we climbed the steep hill-side — Sunny Bank, that had once shone yellow with wheat, and now waved black tattered ranks of thistles where the rabbits ran. We passed the little cottages in the hollow scooped out of the hill, and gained the highlands that look out over Leicestershire to Charnwood on the left, and away into the mountain knob of Derbyshire straight in front and towards the right.

The upper road is all grassy, fallen into long disuse. It used to lead from the Abbey to the Hall; but now it ends blindly on the hill-brow. Half-way along is the old White House farm, with its green mounting-steps mouldering outside. Ladies have mounted here and ridden towards the Vale of Belvoir — but now a labourer holds the farm.

We came to the quarries, and looked in at the lime-kilns. "Let us go right into the woods out of the quarry," said Leslie. "I have not been since I was a little lad."

"It is trespassing," said Emily.

"We don't trespass," he replied grandiloquently.

So we went along by the hurrying brook, which fell over little cascades in its haste, never looking once at the primroses that were glimmering all along its banks. We turned aside, and climbed the hill through the woods. Velvety green sprigs of dog-mercury were scattered on the red soil. We came to the top of a slope, where the wood thinned. As I talked to Emily I became dimly aware of a whiteness over the ground. She exclaimed with surprise, and I found that I was walking, in the first shades of twilight, over clumps of snowdrops. The hazels were thin, and only here and there an oak tree uprose. All the ground was white with snowdrops, like drops of manna scattered over the red earth, on the grey-green clusters of leaves. There was a deep little dell, sharp sloping like a cup, and white sprinkling of flowers all the way down, with white flowers showing pale among the first inpouring of shadow at the bottom. The earth was red and

warm, pricked with the dark, succulent green of bluebell sheaths, and embroidered with grey-green clusters of spears, and many white flowerets. High above, above the light tracery of hazel, the weird oaks tangled in the sunset. Below, in the first shadows, drooped hosts of little white flowers, so silent and sad; it seemed like a holy communion of pure wild things, numberless, frail, and folded meekly in the evening light. Other flower companies are glad; stately barbaric hordes of bluebells, merry-headed cowslip groups, even light, tossing wood-anemones; but snowdrops are sad and mysterious. We have lost their meaning. They do not belong to us, who ravish them. The girls bent among them, touching them with their fingers, and symbolising the yearning which I felt. Folded in the twilight, these conquered flowerets are sad like forlorn little friends of dryads.

“What do they mean, do you think?” said Lettie in a low voice, as her white fingers touched the flowers, and her black furs fell on them.

“There are not so many this year,” said Leslie.

“They remind me of mistletoe, which is never ours, though we wear it.” said Emily to me.

“What do you think they say — what do they make you think, Cyril?” Lettie repeated.

“I don’t know. Emily says they belong to some old wild lost religion. They were the symbol of tears, perhaps, to some strange-hearted Druid folk before us.”

“More than tears,” said Lettie. “More than tears, they are so still. Something out of an old religion, that we have lost. They make me feel afraid.”

“What should you have to fear?” asked Leslie.

“If I knew I shouldn’t fear,” she answered. “Look at all the snowdrops” — they hung in dim, strange flecks among the dusky leaves — “look at them — closed up, retreating, powerless. They belong to some knowledge we have lost, that I have lost and that I need. I feel afraid. They seem like something in fate. Do you think, Cyril, we can lose things off the earth — like mastodons, and those old monstrosities — but things that matter — wisdom?”

“It is against my creed,” said I.

“I believe I have lost something,” said she.

“Come,” said Leslie, “don’t trouble with fancies. Come with me to the bottom of this cup, and see how strange it will be, with the sky marked with branches like a filigree lid.”

She rose and followed him down the steep side of the pit, crying, “Ah, you are treading on the flowers.”

“No,” said he, “I am being very careful.”

They sat down together on a fallen tree at the bottom. She leaned forward, her fingers wandering white among the shadowed grey spaces of leaves, plucking, as if it were a rite, flowers here and there. He could not see her face.

“Don’t you care for me?” he asked softly.

“You?” — she sat up and looked at him, and laughed strangely. “You do not seem real to me,” she replied, in a strange voice.

For some time they sat thus, both bowed and silent. Birds “skirred” off from the bushes, and Emily looked up with a great start as a quiet, sardonic voice said above us:

“A dove-cot, my eyes if it ain’t! It struck me I ‘eered a cooin’, an’ ‘ere’s th’ birds. Come on, sweethearts, it’s th’ wrong place for billin’ an’ cooin’, in th’ middle o’ these ‘ere snowdrops. Let’s ‘ave yer names, come on.”

“Clear off, you fool!” answered Leslie from below, jumping up in anger.

We all four turned and looked at the keeper. He stood in the rim of light, darkly; fine, powerful form, menacing us. He did not move, but like some malicious Pan looked down on us and said:

“Very pretty — pretty! Two — and two makes four. ‘Tis true, two and two makes four. Come on, come on out o’ this ‘ere bridal bed, an’ let’s ‘ave a look at yer.”

“Can’t you use your eyes, you fool,” replied Leslie, standing up and helping Lettie with her furs. “At any rate you can see there are ladies here.”

“Very sorry, Sir! You can’t tell a lady from a woman at this distance at dusk. Who may you be, Sir?”

“Clear out! Come along, Lettie, you can’t stay here now.” They climbed into the light.

“Oh, very sorry, Mr Tempest — when yer look down on a man he never looks the same. I thought it was some young fools come here dallyin’ — ”

“Damn you — shut up!” exclaimed Leslie — “I beg your pardon, Lettie. Will you have my arm?”

They looked very elegant, the pair of them. Lettie was wearing a long coat which fitted close; she had a small hat whose feathers flushed straight back with her hair.

The keeper looked at them. Then, smiling, he went down the dell with great strides, and returned, saying, “Well, the lady might as well take her gloves.”

She took them from him, shrinking to Leslie. Then she started, and said:

“Let me fetch my flowers.”

She ran for the handful of snowdrops that lay among the roots of the trees. We all watched her.

“Sorry I made such a mistake — a lady!” said Annable. “But I’ve nearly

forgot the sight o' one — save the squire's daughters, who are never out o' nights."

"I should think you never have seen many — unless — Have you ever been a groom?"

"No groom but a bridegroom, Sir, and then I think I'd rather groom a horse than a lady, for I got well bit — if you will excuse me, Sir."

"And you deserved it — no doubt."

"I got it — an' I wish you better luck, Sir. One's more a man here in th' wood, though, than in my lady's parlour, it strikes me."

"A lady's parlour!" laughed Leslie, indulgent in his amusement at the facetious keeper.

"Oh, yes! 'Will you walk into my parlour — '"

"You're very smart for a keeper."

"Oh yes, Sir — I was once a lady's man. But I'd rather watch th' rabbits an' th' birds; an' it's easier breeding brats in th' Kennels than in th' town."

"They are yours, are they?" said I.

"You know' em, do you, Sir? Aren't they a lovely little litter? — aren't they a pretty bag o' ferrets? — natural as weasels — that's what I said they should be — bred up like a bunch o' young foxes, to run as they would."

Emily had joined Lettie, and they kept aloof from the man they instinctively hated.

"They'll get nicely trapped, one of these days," said I. "They're natural — they can fend for themselves like wild beasts do," he replied, grinning.

"You are not doing your duty, it strikes me," put in Leslie sententiously.

"Duties of parents! — tell me, I've need of it. I've nine — that is eight, and one not far off. She breeds well, the ow'd lass — one every two years — nine in fourteen years — done well, hasn't she?"

"You've done pretty badly, I think."

"I — why? it's natural! When a man's more than nature he's a devil. Be a good animal, says I, whether it's man or woman. You, Sir, a good natural male animal; the lady there — a female un — that's proper as long as yer enjoy it."

"And what then?"

"Do as th' animals do. I watch my brats — I let 'em grow. They're beauties, they are — sound as a young ash pole, every one. They shan't learn to dirty themselves wi' smirking deviltry — not if I can help it. They can be like birds, or weasels, or vipers, or squirrels, so long as they ain't human rot, that's what I say."

"It's one way of looking at things," said Leslie.

"Ay. Look at the women looking at us. I'm something between a bull and a

couple of worms stuck together, I am. See that spink!" he raised his voice for the girls to hear, "Pretty, isn't he? What for? — And what for do you wear a fancy vest and twist your moustache, Sir! What for, at the bottom! Ha — tell a woman not to come in a wood till she can look at natural things — she might see something. — Good night, Sir."

He marched off into the darkness.

"Coarse fellow, that," said Leslie when he had rejoined Lettie, "but he's a character."

"He makes you shudder," she replied. "But yet you are interested in him. I believe he has a history."

"He seems to lack something," said Emily.

"I thought him rather a fine fellow," said I.

"Splendidly built fellow, but callous — no soul," remarked Leslie, dismissing the question.

"No," assented Emily. "No soul — and among the snowdrops."

Lettie was thoughtful, and I smiled.

It was a beautiful evening, still, with red, shaken clouds in the west. The moon in heaven was turning wistfully back to the east. Dark purple woods lay around us, painting out the distance. The near, wild, ruined land looked sad and strange under the pale afterglow. The turf path was fine and springy.

"Let us run!" said Lettie, and joining hands we raced wildly along, with a flutter and a breathless laughter, till we were happy and forgetful. When we stopped we exclaimed at once, "Hark!"

"A child!" said Lettie.

"At the Kennels," said I.

We hurried forward. From the house came the mad yelling and yelping of children, and the wild hysterical shouting of a woman.

"Tha' little devil — tha' little devil — tha' shanna — that tha' shanna!" and this was accompanied by the hollow sound of blows, and a pandemonium of howling. We rushed in, and found the woman in a tousled frenzy belabouring a youngster with an enamelled pan. The lad was rolled up like a young hedgehog — the woman held him by the foot, and like a flail came the hollow utensil thudding on his shoulders and back. He lay in the firelight and howled, while scattered in various groups, with the leaping firelight twinkling over their tears and their open mouths, were the other children, crying too. The mother was in a state of hysteria; her hair streamed over her face, and her eyes were fixed in a stare of overwrought irritation. Up and down went her long arm like a windmill sail. I ran and held it. When she could hit no more, the woman dropped the pan from her nerveless hand, and staggered, trembling, to the squab. She looked

desperately weary and foredone — she clasped and unclasped her hands continually. Emily hushed the children, while Lettie hushed the mother, holding her hard, cracked hands as she swayed to and fro. Gradually the mother became still, and sat staring in front of her; then aimlessly she began to finger the jewels on Lettie's finger.

Emily was bathing the cheek of a little girl, who lifted up her voice and wept loudly when she saw the speck of blood on the cloth. But presently she became quiet too, and Emily could empty the water from the late instrument of castigation, and at last light the lamp.

I found Sam under the table in a little heap. I put out my hand for him, and he wriggled away, like a lizard, into the passage. After a while I saw him in a corner, lying whimpering with little savage cries of pain. I cut off his retreat and captured him, bearing him struggling into the kitchen. Then, weary with pain, he became passive.

We undressed him, and found his beautiful white body all discoloured with bruises. The mother began to sob again, with a chorus of babies. The girls tried to soothe the weeping, while I rubbed butter into the silent, wincing boy. Then his mother caught him in her arms, and kissed him passionately, and cried with abandon. The boy let himself be kissed — then he too began to sob, till his little body was all shaken. They folded themselves together, the poor dishevelled mother and the half-naked boy, and wept themselves still. Then she took him to bed, and the girls helped the other little ones into their nightgowns, and soon the house was still.

"I canna manage 'em, I canna," said the mother mournfully. "They growin' beyont me — I dunna know what to do wi' 'em. An' niver a 'and does 'e lift ter 'elp me — no — 'e cares not a thing for me — not a thing — nowt but makes a mock an' a sludge o' me."

"Ah, baby!" said Lettie, setting the bonny boy on his feet, and holding up his trailing nightgown behind him, "do you want to walk to your mother — go then — Ah!"

The child, a handsome little fellow of some sixteen months, toddled across to his mother, waving his hands as he went, and laughing, while his large hazel eyes glowed with pleasure. His mother caught him, pushed the silken brown hair back from his forehead, and laid his cheek against hers.

"Ah!" she said, "tha's got a funny Dad, tha' has, not like another man, no, my duckie. 'E's got no 'art ter care for nobody, 'e 'asna, ma pigeon — no — lives like a stranger to his own flesh an' blood."

The girl with the wounded cheek had found comfort in Leslie. She was seated on his knee, looking at him with solemn blue eyes, her solemnity increased by

the quaint round head, whose black hair was cut short.

“‘S my chalk, yes it is, ‘n our Sam says as it’s ‘issen, an’ ‘e ta’es it and marks it all gone, so I wouldna gie ‘t’ ‘im,” — she clutched in her fat little hand a piece of red chalk. “My Dad gen it me, ter mark my dolly’s face red, what’s on’y wood — I’ll show yer.”

She wriggled down, and holding up her trailing gown with one hand, trotted to a corner piled with a child’s rubbish, and hauled out a hideous carven caricature of a woman, and brought it to Leslie. The face of the object was streaked with red.

‘Ere sh’ is, my dolly, what my Dad make me — ‘er name’s Lady Mima.”

“Is it?” said Lettie, “and are these her cheeks? She’s not pretty, is she?”

“Um — sh’ is. My Dad says sh’ is — like a lady.”

“And he gave you her rouge, did he?”

“Rouge!” she nodded.

“And you wouldn’t let Sam have it?”

“No — an’ mi movver says, Dun gie ‘t’ ‘im’ — ‘n ‘e bite me.”

“What will your father say?”

“Me Dad?”

“‘E’d nobbut laugh,” put in the mother, “an’ say as a bite’s bett’r’n a kiss.”

“Brute!” said Leslie feelingly.

“No, but ‘e never laid a finger on’ em — nor me neither. But ‘e ‘s not like another man — niver tells yer nowt. He’s more a stranger to me this day than ‘e wor th’ day I first set eyes on ‘im.”

“Where was that?” asked Lettie.

“When I wor a lass at th’ ‘All — an’ ‘im a new man come — fair a gentleman, an’ a, an’ a! Ond even now can read an’ talk like a gentleman — but ‘e tells me nothing — Oh no — what am I in ‘is eyes but a sludge bump? — ‘e ‘s above me, ‘e is, an’ above ‘is own childer. God a-mercy, ‘e ‘11 be in in a minute. Come on ‘ere!”

She hustled the children to bed, swept the litter into a corner, and began to lay the table. The cloth was spotless, and she put him a silver spoon in the saucer.

We had only just got out of the house when he drew near. I saw his massive figure in the doorway, and the big, prolific woman moved subserviently about the room.

“Hullo, Proserpine — had visitors?”

“I never axed ‘em — they come in ‘earin’ th’ childer cryin’. I never encouraged ‘em — ”

We hurried away into the night.

“Ah, it’s always the woman bears the burden,” said Lettie bitterly.

“If he’d helped her — wouldn’t she have been a fine woman now — splendid? But she’s dragged to bits. Men are brutes — and marriage just gives scope to them,” said Emily.

“Oh, you wouldn’t take that as a fair sample of marriage,” replied Leslie. “Think of you and me, Minnehaha.”

“Ay.”

“Oh — I meant to tell you — what do you think of Greymede old vicarage for us?”

“It’s a lovely old place!” exclaimed Lettie, and we passed out of hearing.

We stumbled over the rough path. The moon was bright, and we stepped apprehensively on the shadows thrown from the trees, for they lay so black and substantial. Occasionally a moonbeam would trace out a suave white branch that the rabbits had gnawed quite bare in the hard winter. We came out of the woods into the full heavens. The northern sky was full of a gush of green light; in front, eclipsed Orion leaned over his bed, and the moon followed.

“When the northern lights are up,” said Emily, “I feel so strange — half eerie — they do fill you with awe, don’t they?”

“Yes,” said I, “they make you wonder, and look, and expect something.”

“What do you expect?” she said softly, and looked up, and saw me smiling, and she looked down again, biting her lips.

When we came to the parting of the roads, Emily begged them just to step into the mill — just for a moment — and Lettie consented.

The kitchen window was uncurtained, and the blind, as usual, was not drawn. We peeped in through the cords of budding honeysuckle. George and Alice were sitting at the table playing chess; the mother was mending a coat, and the father, as usual, was reading. Alice was talking quietly, and George was bent on the game. His arms lay on the table.

We made a noise at the door, and entered. George rose heavily, shook hands, and sat down again.

“Hullo, Lettie Beardsall, you are a stranger,” said Alice. “Are you so much engaged?”

“Ay — we don’t see much of her nowadays,” added the father in his jovial way.

“And isn’t she a toff, in her fine hat and furs and snowdrops. Look at her, George, you’ve never looked to see what a toff she is.”

He raised his eyes, and looked at her apparel and at her flowers, but not at her face:

“Ay, she is fine,” he said, and returned to the chess.

“We have been gathering snowdrops,” said Lettie, fingering the flowers in her

bosom.

“They are pretty — give me some, will you?” said Alice, holding out her hand. Lettie gave her the flowers.

“Check!” said George deliberately.

“Get out!” replied his opponent, “I’ve got some snowdrops — don’t they suit me, an innocent little soul like me? Lettie won’t wear them — she’s not meek and mild and innocent like me. Do you want some?”

“If you like — what for?”

“To make you pretty, of course, and to show you an innocent little meekling.”

“You’re in check,” he said.

“Where can you wear them? — there’s only your shirt. Aw! — there! — she stuck a few flowers in his ruffled black hair — ”

“Look, Lettie, isn’t he sweet?”

Lettie laughed with a strained little laugh:

“He’s like Bottom and the ass’s head,” she said.

“Then I’m Titania — don’t I make a lovely fairy queen, Bully Bottom? — and who’s jealous Oberon?”

“He reminds me of that man in Hedda Gabler — crowned with vine leaves — oh yes, vine leaves,” said Emily.

“How’s your mare’s sprain, Mr Tempest?” George asked, taking no notice of the flowers in his hair.

“Oh — she’ll soon be all right, thanks.”

“Ah — George told me about it,” put in the father, and he held Leslie in conversation.

“Am I in check, George?” said Alice, returning to the game. She knitted her brows and cogitated:

“Pooh!” she said, “that’s soon remedied!” — she moved her piece, and said triumphantly, “Now, Sir!”

He surveyed the game, and, with deliberation moved. Alice pounced on him; with a leap of her knight she called, “Check!”

“I didn’t see it — you may have the game now,” he said.

“Beaten, my boy! — don’t crow over a woman any more. Stalemate — with flowers in your hair!”

He put his hand to his head, and felt among his hair, and threw the flowers on the table.

“Would you believe it — !” said the mother, coming into the room from the dairy.

“What?” we all asked.

“Nickie Ben’s been and eaten the sile-cloth. Yes! When I went to wash it,

there sat Nickie Ben gulping, and wiping the froth off his whiskers.”

George laughed loudly and heartily. He laughed till he was tired. Lettie looked and wondered when he would be done.

“I imagined,” he gasped, “how he’d feel with half a yard of muslin creeping down his throttle.”

This laughter was most incongruous. He went off into another burst. Alice laughed too — it was easy to infect her with laughter. Then the father began — and in walked Nickie Ben, stepping disconsolately — we all roared again, till the rafters shook. Only Lettie looked impatiently for the end. George swept his bare arms across the table, and the scattered little flowers fell broken to the ground.

“Oh — what a shame!” exclaimed Lettie.

“What?” said he, looking round. “Your flowers? Do you feel sorry for them? — You’re too tender-hearted; isn’t she, Cyril?”

“Always was — for dumb animals, and things,” said I.

“Don’t you wish you was a little dumb animal, Georgie?” said Alice.

He smiled, putting away the chess-men.

“Shall we go, dear?” said Lettie to Leslie.

“If you are ready,” he replied, rising with alacrity.

“I am tired,” she said plaintively.

He attended to her with little tender solicitations.

“Have we walked too far?” he asked.

“No, it’s not that. No — it’s the snowdrops, and the man, and the children — and everything. I feel just a bit exhausted.” She kissed Alice, and Emily, and the mother.

“Good night, Alice,” she said. “It’s not altogether my fault we’re strangers. You know — really — I’m just the same — really. Only you imagine, and then what can I do?”

She said farewell to George, and looked at him through a quiver of suppressed tears.

George was somewhat flushed with triumph over Lettie: She had gone home with tears shaken from her eyes unknown to her lover; at the farm George laughed with Alice.

We escorted Alice home to Eberwich — “Like a blooming little monkey dangling from two boughs,” as she put it, when we swung her along on our arms. We laughed and said many preposterous things. George wanted to kiss her at parting, but she tipped him under the chin and said, “Sweet!” as one does to a canary. Then she laughed with her tongue between her teeth, and ran indoors.

“She is a little devil,” said he.

We took the long way home by Greymede, and passed the dark schools.

“Come on,” said he, “let’s go in the ‘Ram Inn’, and have a look at my cousin Meg.”

It was half-past ten when he marched me across the road and into the sanded passage of the little inn. The place had been an important farm in the days of George’s grand-uncle, but since his decease it had declined, under the governance of the widow and a man-of-all-work. The old grand-aunt was propped and supported by a splendid granddaughter. The near kin of Meg were all in California, so she, a bonny delightful girl of twenty-four, stayed near her grandma.

As we tramped grittily down the passage, the red head of Bill poked out of the bar, and he said as he recognised George: “Good ev’nin’ — go forward — ’er’s non abed yit.”

We went forward, and unlatched the kitchen door. The great-aunt was seated in her little, round-backed arm-chair sipping her “night-cap”.

“Well, George, my lad!” she cried, in her querulous voice. “Tha’ niver says it’s thai, does ter? That’s com’n for summat, for sure, else what brings thee ter see me?”

“No,” he said. “Ah’n corn ter see thee, nowt else. Wheer’s Meg?”

“Ah! — Ha — Ha — Ah! — Me, did ter say? — come ter see me? — Ha — wheer’s Meg! — an’ who’s this young gentleman?”

I was formally introduced, and shook the clammy corded hand of the old lady.

“Tha’ looks delikit,” she observed, shaking her cap and its scarlet geraniums sadly: “Cum now, sit thee down, an’ dunna look so long o’ th’ leg.”

I sat down on the sofa, on the cushions covered with blue and red checks. The room was very hot, and I stared about uncomfortably. The old lady sat peering at nothing, in reverie. She was a hard-visaged, bosomless dame, clad in thick black cloth-like armour, and wearing an immense twisted gold brooch in the lace at her neck.

We heard heavy, quick footsteps above.

“‘Er’s commin’,” remarked the old lady, rousing from her apathy. The footsteps came downstairs — quickly, then cautiously round the bend. Meg appeared in the doorway. She started with surprise, saying:

“Well, I ‘eered sumbody, but I never thought it was you.” More colour still flamed into her glossy cheeks, and she smiled in her fresh, frank way. I think I have never seen a woman who had more physical charm; there was a voluptuous fascination in her every outline and movement; one never listened to the words that came from her lips, one watched the ripe motion of those red fruits.

“Get ‘em a drop o’ whisky, Meg — you’ll ‘a’e a drop?” I declined firmly, but did not escape.

“Nay,” declared the old dame.. “I s’ll ha’e none o’ thy no’s. Should ter like it ‘ot? — Say th’ word, an’ tha’ ‘as it.”

I did not say the word.

“Then gi’e ‘im claret,” pronounced my hostess, “though it’s thin-bellied stuff ter go ter bed on” — and claret it was.

Meg went out again to see about closing. The grand-aunt sighed, and sighed again, for no perceptible reason but the whisky.

“It’s well you’ve come ter see me now,” she moaned, “for you’ll none ‘a’e a chance next time you come’ n; — No — I’m all gone but my cap — ”

She shook that geraniumed erection, and I wondered what sardonic fate left it behind.

“An’ I’m forced ter say it, I s’ll be thankful to be gone,” she added, after a few sighs.

This weariness of the flesh was touching. The cruel truth is, however, that the old lady clung to life like a louse to a pig’s back. Dying, she faintly, but emphatically declared herself, “a bit better — a bit better. I s’ll be up tomorrow.”

“I should a gone before now,” she continued, “but for that blessed wench — I canna abear to think o’ leavin’ ‘er — come drink up, my lad, drink up — nay, tha’ ‘rt nobbut young yet, tha’ ‘rt none topped up wi’ a thimbleful.”

I took whisky in preference to the acrid stuff.

“Ay,” resumed the grand-aunt. “I canna go in peace till ‘er’s settled — an’ ‘er’s that tickle o’ choosin’. Th’ right sort ‘asn’t th’ gumption ter ax’ ‘er.”

She sniffed, and turned scornfully to her glass. George grinned and looked conscious; as he swallowed a gulp of whisky it crackled in his throat. The sound annoyed the old lady.

“Tha’ might be scar’d at summat,” she said. “Tha’ niver ‘ad six drops o’ spunk in thee.”

She turned again with a sniff to her glass. He frowned with irritation, half filled his glass with liquor, and drank again.

“I dare bet as tha’ niver kissed a wench in thy life — not proper” — and she tossed the last drops of her toddy down her skinny throat.

Here Meg came along the passage.

“Come, Gran’ma,” she said. “I’m sure it’s time as you was in bed — come on.”

“Sit thee down an’ drink a drop wi’s — it’s not ivry night as we ‘a’e cumpny.”

“No, let me take you to bed — I’m sure you must be ready.”

“Sit thee down ‘ere, I say, an’ get thee a drop o’ port. Come — no argy-bargyin’.”

Meg fetched more glasses and a decanter. I made a place for her between me

and George. We all had port wine. Meg, naïve and unconscious, waited on us deliciously. Her cheeks gleamed like satin when she laughed, save when the dimples held the shadow. Her suave, tawny neck was bare and bewitching. She turned suddenly to George as he asked her a question, and they found their faces close together. He kissed her, and when she started back, jumped and kissed her neck with warmth.

“La — là — dy — dà — là — dy — dà — dy — dà,” cried the old woman in delight, and she clutched her wineglass.

“Come on — chink!” she cried, “all together — chink to him!”

We four chinked and drank. George poured wine in a tumbler, and drank it off. He was getting excited, and all the energy and passion that normally were bound down by his caution and self-instinct began to flame out.

“Here, Aunt!” said he, lifting his tumbler, “here’s to what you want — you know!”

“I knowed tha’ wor as spunky as ony on’em,” she cried.

“Tha’ nobbut wanted warmin’ up. I’ll see as you’re all right. It’s a bargain. Chink again, iverybody.”

“A bargain,” said he before he put his lips to the glass. “What bargain’s that?” said Meg.

The old lady laughed loudly and winked at George, who, with his lips wet with wine, got up and kissed Meg soundly, saying:

“There it is — that seals it.”

Meg wiped her face with her big pinafore, and seemed uncomfortable.

“Aren’t you comin’, Gran’ma?” she pleaded.

“Eh, tha’ wants ter ‘orry me off — what’s thai say, George — a deep un, isna ‘er?”

“Dunna go, Aunt, dunna be hustled off.”

“Tush — Pish,” snorted the old lady. “Yah, tha’ ‘rt a slow un, an’ no mistakes! Get a candle, Meg, I’m ready.”

Meg brought a brass bedroom candlestick. Bill brought in the money in a tin box, and delivered it into the hands of the old lady.

“Go thy ways to bed now, lad,” said she to the ugly, wizened serving-man. He sat in a corner and pulled off his boots.

“Come an’ kiss me good night, George,” said the old woman — and as he did so she whispered in his ear, whereat he laughed loudly. She poured whisky into her glass and called to the serving-man to drink it. Then, pulling herself up heavily, she leaned on Meg and went upstairs. She had been a big woman, one could see, but now her shapeless, broken figure looked pitiful beside Meg’s luxuriant form. We heard them slowly, laboriously climb the stairs. George sat

pulling his moustache and half smiling; his eyes were alight with that peculiar childish look they had when he was experiencing new and doubtful sensations. Then he poured himself more whisky.

“I say, steady!” I admonished.

“What for!” he replied, indulging himself like a spoiled child and laughing.

Bill, who had sat for some time looking at the hole in his stocking, drained his glass, and with a sad “Good night,” creaked off upstairs.

Presently Meg came down, and I rose and said we must be going.

“I’ll just come an’ lock the door after you,” said she, standing uneasily waiting.

George got up. He gripped the edge of the table to steady himself; then he got his balance, and, with his eyes on Meg, said:

“‘Ere!” he nodded his head to her. “Come here, I want ter ax thee sumwhat.”

She looked at him, half smiling, half doubtful. He put his arm round her and looking down into her eyes, with his face very close to hers, said:

“Let’s ha’e a kiss.”

Quite unresisting she yielded him her mouth, looking at him intently with her bright brown eyes. He kissed her, and pressed her closely to him.

“I’m going to marry thee,” he said.

“Go on!” she replied, softly, half glad, half doubtful.

“I am an’ all,” he repeated, pressing her more tightly to him.

I went down the passage, and stood in the open doorway looking out into the night. It seemed a long time. Then I heard the thin voice of the old woman at the top of the stairs:

“Meg! Meg! Send ‘im off now. Come on!”

In the silence that followed there was a murmur of voices, and then they came into the passage.

“Good night, my lad, good luck to thee!” cried the voice like a ghoul from upper regions.

He kissed his betrothed a rather hurried good night at the door.

“Good night,” she replied softly, watching him retreat. Then we heard her shoot the heavy bolts.

“You know,” he began, and he tried to clear his throat. His voice was husky and strangulated with excitement. He tried again:

“You know — she — she’s a clinker.”

I did not reply, but he took no notice.

“Damn!” he ejaculated. “What did I let her go for!”

We walked along in silence — his excitement abated somewhat.

“It’s the way she swings her body — an’ the curves as she stands. It’s when

you look at her — you feel — you know.”

I suppose I knew, but it was unnecessary to say so.

“You know — if ever I dream in the night — of women — you know — it’s always Meg; she seems to look so soft, and to curve her body — ”

Gradually his feet began to drag. When we came to the place where the colliery railway crossed the road, he stumbled, and pitched forward, only just recovering himself. I took hold of his arm.

“Good Lord, Cyril, am I drunk?” he said.

“Not quite,” said I.

“No,” he muttered, “couldn’t be.”

But his feet dragged again, and he began to stagger from side to side. I took hold of his arm. He murmured angrily — then, subsiding again, muttered, with slovenly articulation:

“I feel fit to drop with sleep.”

Along the dead, silent roadway, and through the uneven blackness of the wood, we lurched and stumbled. He was very heavy and difficult to direct. When at last we came to the brook we splashed straight through the water. I urged him to walk steadily and quietly across the yard. He did his best, and we made a fairly still entry into the farm. He dropped with all his weight on the sofa, and leaning down, began to unfasten his leggings. In the midst of his fumbings he fell asleep, and I was afraid he would pitch forward on to his head. I took off his leggings and his wet boots and his collar. Then, as I was pushing and shaking him awake to get off his coat, I heard a creaking on the stairs, and my heart sank, for I thought it was his mother. But it was Emily, in her long white nightgown. She looked at us with great dark eyes of terror, and whispered: “What’s the matter?”

I shook my head and looked at him. His head had dropped down on his chest again.

“Is he hurt?” she asked, her voice becoming audible, and dangerous. He lifted his head, and looked at her with heavy, angry eyes.

“George!” she said sharply, in bewilderment and fear. His eyes seemed to contract evilly.

“Is he drunk?” she whispered, shrinking away, and looking at me. “Have you made him drunk — you?”

I nodded. I too was angry.

“Oh, if Mother gets up! I must get him to bed! Oh, how could you!”

This sibilant whispering irritated him, and me. I tugged at his coat. He snarled incoherently, and swore. She caught her breath. He looked at her sharply, and I was afraid he would wake himself into a rage.

“Go upstairs!” I whispered to her. She shook her head. I could see him taking heavy breaths, and the veins of his neck were swelling. I was furious at her disobedience.

“Go at once,” I said fiercely, and she went, still hesitating and looking back.

I had hauled off his coat and waistcoat, so I let him sink again into stupidity while I took off my boots. Then I got him to his feet, and, walking behind him, impelled him slowly upstairs. I lit a candle in his bedroom. There was no sound from the other rooms. So I undressed him, and got him in bed at last, somehow. I covered him up and put over him the calfskin rug, because the night was cold. Almost immediately he began to breathe heavily. I dragged him over to his side, and pillowed his head comfortably. He looked like a tired boy, asleep.

I stood still, now I felt myself alone, and looked round. Up to the low roof rose the carven pillars of dark mahogany; there was a chair by the bed, and a little yellow chest of drawers by the windows; that was all the furniture, save the calfskin rug on the floor. In the drawers I noticed a book. It was a copy of Omar Khayyam, that Lettie had given him in her Khayyam days, a little shilling book with coloured illustrations.

I blew out the candle, when I had looked at him again. As I crept on to the landing, Emily peeped from her room, whispering, “Is he in bed?”

I nodded, and whispered good night. Then I went home, heavily.

After the evening at the farm, Lettie and Leslie drew closer together. They eddied unevenly down the little stream of courtship, jostling and drifting together and apart. He was unsatisfied and strove with every effort to bring her closer to him, submissive. Gradually she yielded, and submitted to him. She folded round her and him the snug curtain of the present, and they sat like children playing a game behind the hangings of an old bed. She shut out all distant outlooks, as an Arab unfolds his tent and conquers the mystery and space of the desert. So she lived gleefully in a little tent of present pleasures and fancies.

Occasionally, only occasionally, she would peep from her tent into the out space. Then she sat poring over books, and nothing would be able to draw her away; or she sat in her room looking out of the window for hours together. She pleaded headaches; Mother said liver; he, angry like a spoilt child denied his wish, declared it moodiness and perversity.

CHAPTER II

A SHADOW IN SPRING

With spring came trouble. The Saxtons declared they were being bitten off the estate by rabbits. Suddenly, in a fit of despair, the father bought a gun. Although he knew that the squire would not for one moment tolerate the shooting of that manna, the rabbits, yet he was out in the first cold morning twilight banging away. At first he but scared the brutes, and brought Annable on the scene; then, blooded by the use of the weapon, he played havoc among the furry beasts, bringing home some eight or nine couples.

George entirely approved of this measure; it rejoiced him even; yet he had never had the initiative to begin the like himself, or even to urge his father to it. He prophesied trouble, and possible loss of the farm. It disturbed him somewhat, to think they must look out for another place, but he postponed the thought of the evil day till the time should be upon him.

A vendetta was established between the Mill and the keeper, Annable. The latter cherished his rabbits:

“Call ‘em vermin!” he said. “I only know one sort of vermin — and that’s the talkin’ sort.” So he set himself to thwart and harass the rabbit-slayers.

It was about this time I cultivated the acquaintance of the keeper. All the world hated him — to the people in the villages he was like a devil of the woods. Some miners had sworn vengeance on him for having caused their committal to gaol. But he had a great attraction for me; his magnificent physique, his great vigour and vitality, and his swarthy, gloomy face drew me.

He was a man of one idea: that all civilisation was the painted fungus of rottenness. He hated any sign of culture. I won his respect one afternoon when he found me trespassing in the woods because I was watching some maggots at work in a dead rabbit. That led us to a discussion of life. He was a thorough materialist — he scorned religion and all mysticism. He spent his days sleeping, making intricate traps for weasels and men, putting together a gun, or doing some amateur forestry, cutting down timber, splitting it in logs for use in the hall, and planting young trees. When he thought, he reflected on the decay of mankind — the decline of the human race into folly and weakness and

rotteness. “Be a good animal, true to your animal instinct,” was his motto. With all this, he was fundamentally very unhappy — and he made me also wretched. It was this power to communicate his unhappiness that made me somewhat dear to him, I think. He treated me as an affectionate father treats a delicate son; I noticed he liked to put his hand on my shoulder or my knee as we talked; yet withal, he asked me questions, and saved his thoughts to tell me, and believed in my knowledge like any acolyte.

I went up to the quarry woods one evening in early April, taking a look for Annable. I could not find him, however, in the wood. So I left the wildlands, and went along by the old red wall of the kitchen garden, along the main road as far as the mouldering church which stands high on a bank by the roadside, just where the trees tunnel the darkness, and the gloom of the highway startles the travellers at noon. Great trees growing on the banks suddenly fold over everything at this point in the swinging road, and in the obscurity rots the Hall church, black and melancholy above the shrinking head of the traveller.

The grassy path to the churchyard was still clogged with decayed leaves. The church is abandoned. As I drew near an owl floated softly out of the black tower. Grass overgrew the threshold. I pushed open the door, grinding back a heap of fallen plaster and rubbish and entered the place. In the twilight the pews were leaning in ghostly disorder, the prayer-books dragged from their ledges, scattered on the floor in the dust and rubble, torn by mice and birds. Birds scuffled in the darkness of the roof. I looked up. In the upward well of the tower I could see a bell hanging. I stooped and picked up a piece of plaster from the ragged confusion of feathers, and broken nests, and remnants of dead birds. Up into the vault overhead I tossed pieces of plaster until one hit the bell, and it “tonged” out its faint remonstrance. There was a rustle of many birds like spirits. I sounded the bell again, and dark forms moved with cries of alarm overhead, and something fell heavily. I shivered in the dark, evil-smelling place, and hurried to get out of doors. I clutched my hands with relief and pleasure when I saw the sky above me quivering with the last crystal lights, and the lowest red of sunset behind the yew-boles. I drank the fresh air, that sparkled with the sound of the blackbirds and thrushes whistling their strong bright notes.

I strayed round to where the headstones, from their eminence, leaned to look on the Hall below, where great windows shone yellow light on the flagged courtyard, and the little fish-pool. A stone staircase descended from the graveyard to the court, between stone balustrades whose pock-marked grey columns still swelled gracefully and with dignity, encrusted with lichens. The staircase was filled with ivy and rambling roses — impassable. Ferns were unrolling round the big square halting-place, half-way down where the stairs

turned.

A peacock, startled from the back premises of the Hall, came flapping up the terraces to the churchyard. Then a heavy footstep crossed the flags. It was the keeper. I whistled the whistle he knew, and he broke his way through the vicious rose-boughs up the stairs. The peacock flapped beyond me, on to the neck of an old bowed angel, rough and dark, an angel which had long ceased sorrowing for the lost Lucy, and had died also. The bird bent its voluptuous neck and peered about. Then it lifted up its head and yelled. The sound tore the dark sanctuary of twilight. The old grey grass seemed to stir, and I could fancy the smothered primroses and violets beneath it waking and gasping for fear.

The keeper looked at me and smiled. He nodded his head towards the peacock, saying:

“Hark at that damned thing!”

Again the bird lifted its crested head and gave a cry, at the same time turning awkwardly on its ugly legs, so that it showed us the full wealth of its tail glimmering like a stream of coloured stars over the sunken face of the angel.

“The proud fool! — look at it! Perched on an angel, too, as if it were a pedestal for vanity. That’s the soul of a woman — or it’s the devil.”

He was silent for a time, and we watched the great bird moving uneasily before us in the twilight.

“That’s the very soul of a lady,” he said, “the very, very soul. Damn the thing, to perch on that old angel. I should like to wring its neck.”

Again the bird screamed, and shifted awkwardly on its legs; it seemed to stretch its beak at us in derision. Annable picked up a piece of sod and flung it at the bird, saying:

“Get out, you screeching devil! God!” he laughed. “There must be plenty of hearts twisting under here” — and he stamped on a grave — “when they hear that row.”

He kicked another sod from a grave and threw at the big bird. The peacock flapped away, over the tombs, down the terraces.

“Just look!” he said, “the miserable brute has dirtied that angel. A woman to the end, I tell you, all vanity and screech and defilement.”

He sat down on a vault and lit his pipe. But before he had smoked two minutes, it was out again. I had not seen him in a state of perturbation before.

“The church,” said I, “is rotten. I suppose they’ll stand all over the country like this soon — with peacocks trailing the graveyards.”

“Ay,” he muttered, taking no notice of me.

“This stone is cold,” I said, rising.

He got up too, and stretched his arms as if he were tired. It was quite dark,

save for the waxing moon which leaned over the east.

“It is a very fine night,” I said. “Don’t you notice a smell of violets?”

“Ay! The moon looks like a woman with child. I wonder what Time’s got in her belly.”

“You?” I said. “You don’t expect anything exciting, do you?”

“Exciting! — No — about as exciting as this rotten old place — just rot off — Oh, my God! — I’m like a good house, built and finished, and left to tumble down again with nobody to live in it.”

“Why — what’s up — really?”

He laughed bitterly, saying, “Come and sit down.”

He led me off to a seat by the north door, between two pews, very black and silent. There we sat, he putting his gun carefully beside him. He remained perfectly still, thinking.

“Whot’s up?” he said at last. “Why — I’ll tell you. I went to Cambridge — my father was a big cattle dealer — he died bankrupt while I was in college, and I never took my degree. They persuaded me to be a parson, and a parson I was.

“I went a curate to a little place in Leicestershire — a bonnie place with not many people, and a fine old church, and a great rich parsonage. I hadn’t overmuch to do, and the rector — he was the son of an earl — was generous. He lent me a horse and would have me hunt like the rest. I always think of that place with a smell of honeysuckle while the grass is wet in the morning. It was fine, and I enjoyed myself, and did the parish work all right. I believe I was pretty good.

“A cousin of the rector’s used to come in the hunting season — a Lady Crystabel, lady in her own right. The second year I was there she came in June. There wasn’t much company, so she used to talk to me — I used to read then — and she used to pretend to be so childish and unknowing, and would get me telling her things, and talking to her, and I was hot on things. We must play tennis together, and ride together, and I must row her down the river. She said we were in the wilderness and could do as we liked. She made me wear flannels and soft clothes. She was very fine and frank and unconventional — ripping, I thought her. All the summer she stopped on. I should meet her in the garden early in the morning when I came from a swim in the river — it was cleared and deepened on purpose — and she’d blush and make me talk with her. I can remember I used to stand and dry myself on the bank full where she might see me — I was mad on her — and she was madder on me.

“We went to some caves in Derbyshire once, and she would wander from the rest, and loiter, and, for a game, we played a sort of hide and seek with the party. They thought we’d gone, and they went and locked the door. Then she pretended

to be frightened and clung to me, and said what would they think, and hid her face in my coat. I took her and kissed her, and we made it up properly. I found out afterwards — she actually told me — she'd got the idea from a sloppy French novel — the Romance of a Poor Young Man. I was the Poor Young Man.

“We got married. She gave me a living she had in her parsonage, and we went to live at her Hall. She wouldn't let me out of her sight. Lord! — we were an infatuated couple — and she would choose to view me in an aesthetic light. I was Greek statues for her, bless you: Croton, Hercules, I don't know what! She had her own way too much — I let her do as she liked with me.

“Then gradually she got tired — it took her three years to be really glugged with me. I had a physique then — for that matter, I have now.”

He held out his arm to me, and bade me try his muscle. I was startled. The hard flesh almost filled his sleeve.

“Ah,” he continued, “you don't know what it is to have the pride of a body like mine. But she wouldn't have children — no, she wouldn't — said she daren't. That was the root of the difference at first. But she cooled down, and if you don't know the pride of my body you'd never know my humiliation. I tried to remonstrate — and she looked simply astounded at my cheek. I never got over that amazement.

“She began to get souly. A poet got hold of her, and she began to affect Burne-Jones — or Waterhouse — it was Waterhouse — she was a lot like one of his women — Lady of Shalott, I believe. At any rate, she got souly, and I was her animal — son animal — son bceuf. I put up with that for above a year. Then I got some servants' clothes and went.

“I was seen in France — then in Australia — though I never left England. I was supposed to have died in the bush. She married a young fellow. Then I was proved to have died, and I read a little obituary notice on myself in a woman's paper she subscribed to. She wrote it herself — as a warning to other young ladies of position not to be seduced by plausible ‘Poor Young Men’.

“Now she's dead. They've got the paper — her paper — in the kitchen down there, and it's full of photographs, even an old photo of me — ‘an unfortunate misalliance’. I feel, somehow, as if I were at an end too. I thought I'd grown a solid, middle-aged man, and here I feel sore as I did at twenty-six, and I talk as I used to.

“One thing — I have got some children, and they're of a breed as you'd not meet anywhere. I was a good animal before everything, and I've got some children.”

He sat looking up where the big moon swam through the black branches of the

yew.

“So she’s dead — your poor peacock!” I murmured.

He got up, looking always at the sky, and stretched himself again. He was an impressive figure massed in blackness against the moonlight, with his arms outspread.

“I suppose,” he said, “it wasn’t all her fault.”

“A white peacock, we will say,” I suggested.

He laughed.

“Go home by the top road, will you!” he said. “I believe there’s something on in the bottom wood.”

“All right,” I answered, with a quiver of apprehension. “Yes, she was fair enough,” he muttered.

“Ay,” said I, rising. I held out my hand from the shadow. I was startled myself by the white sympathy it seemed to express, extended towards him in the moonlight. He gripped it, and cleaved to me for a moment, then he was gone.

I went out of the churchyard feeling a sullen resentment against the tousled graves that lay inanimate across my way. The air was heavy to breathe, and fearful in the shadow of the great trees. I was glad when I came out on the bare white road, and could see the copper lights from the reflectors of a pony-cart’s lamps, and could hear the amiable chat-chat of the hoofs trotting towards me. I was lonely when they had passed.

Over the hill, the big flushed face of the moon poised just above the tree-tops, very majestic, and far off — yet imminent. I turned with swift sudden friendliness to the net of elm-boughs spread over my head, dotted with soft clusters winsomely. I jumped up and pulled the cool soft tufts against my face for company; and as I passed, still I reached upward for the touch of this budded gentleness of the trees. The wood breathed fragrantly, with a subtle sympathy. The firs softened their touch to me, and the larches woke from the barren winter sleep, and put out velvet fingers to caress me as I passed. Only the clean, bare branches of the ash stood emblem of the discipline of life. I looked down on the blackness where trees filled the quarry and the valley bottoms, and it seemed that the world, my own home world, was strange again.

Some four or five days after Annable had talked to me in the churchyard, I went out to find him again. It was Sunday morning. The larch-wood was afloat with clear, lyric green, and some primroses scattered whitely on the edge under the fringing boughs. It was a clear morning, as when the latent life of the world begins to vibrate afresh in the air. The smoke from the cottage rose blue against the trees, and thick yellow against the sky. The fire, it seemed, was only just lighted, and the wood-smoke poured out.

Sam appeared outside the house, and looked round. Then he climbed the water-trough for a better survey. Evidently unsatisfied, paying slight attention to me, he jumped down and went running across the hillside to the wood. "He is going for his father," I said to myself, and I left the path to follow him down hill across the waste meadow, crackling the blanched stems of last year's thistles as I went, and stumbling in rabbit-holes. He reached the wall that ran along the quarry's edge, and was over it in a twinkling.

When I came to the place, I was somewhat nonplussed, for sheer from the stone fence, the quarry-side dropped for some twenty or thirty feet, piled up with unmortared stones. I looked round — there was a plain dark thread down the hillside, which marked a path to this spot, and the wall was scored with the marks of heavy boots. Then I looked again down the quarry-side, and I saw — how could I have failed to see? — stones projecting to make an uneven staircase, such as is often seen in the Derbyshire fences. I saw this ladder was well used, so I trusted myself to it, and scrambled down, clinging to the face of the quarry wall. Once down, I felt pleased with myself for having discovered and used the unknown access, and I admired the care and ingenuity of the keeper, who had fitted and wedged the long stones into the uncertain pile.

It was warm in the quarry: there the sunshine seemed to thicken and sweeten; there the little mounds of overgrown waste were aglow with very early dog-violets; there the sparks were coming out on the bits of gorse, and among the stones the coltfoot plumes were already silvery. Here was spring sitting just awake, unloosening her glittering hair, and opening her purple eyes.

I went across the quarry, down to where the brook ran murmuring a tale to the primroses and the budding trees. I was startled from my wandering among the fresh things by a faint clatter of stones.

"What's that young rascal doing?" I said to myself, setting forth to see. I came towards the other side of the quarry: on this, the moister side, the bushes grew up against the wall, which was higher than on the other side, though piled the same with old dry stones. As I drew near I could hear the scrape and rattle of stones, and the vigorous grunting of Sam as he laboured among them. He was hidden by a great bush of sallow catkins, all yellow, and murmuring with bees, warm with spice. When he came in view I laughed to see him lugging and grunting among the great pile of stones that had fallen in a mass from the quarry-side; a pile of stones and earth and crushed vegetation. There was a great bare gap in the quarry wall. Somehow, the lad's labouring earnestness made me anxious, and I hurried up.

He heard me, and glancing round, his face red with exertion, eyes big with terror, he called, commanding me:

“Pull ‘em off ‘im — pull ‘em off!”

Suddenly my heart beating in my throat nearly suffocated me. I saw the hand of the keeper lying among the stones. I set to tearing away the stones, and we worked for some time without a word. Then I seized the arm of the keeper and tried to drag him out. But I could not.

“Pull it off ‘im!” whined the lad, working in a frenzy.

When we got him out I saw at once he was dead, and I sat down trembling with exertion. There was a great smashed wound on the side of the head. Sam put his face against his father’s and snuffed round him like a dog, to feel the life in him. The child looked at me:

“He won’t get up,” he said, and his little voice was hoarse with fear and anxiety.

I shook my head. Then the boy began to whimper. He tried to close the lips which were drawn with pain and death, leaving the teeth bare; then his fingers hovered round the eyes, which were wide open, glazed, and I could see he was trembling to touch them into life.

“He’s not asleep,” he said, “because his eyes is open — look!” I could not bear the child’s questioning terror. I took him up to carry him away, but he struggled and fought to be free. “Ma’e ‘im get up — ma’e ‘im get up,” he cried in a frenzy, and I had to let the boy go.

He ran to the dead man, calling, “Feyther! Feyther!” and pulling his shoulder; then he sat down, fascinated by the sight of the wound; he put out his finger to touch it, and shivered.

“Come away,” said I.

“Is it that?” he asked, pointing to the wound. I covered the face with a big silk handkerchief.

“Now,” said I, “he’ll go to sleep if you don’t touch him — so sit still while I go and fetch somebody. Will you run to the Hall?”

He shook his head. I knew he would not. So I told him again not to touch his father, but to let him lie still till I came back. He watched me go, but did not move from his seat on the stones beside the dead man, though I know he was full of terror at being left alone.

I ran to the Hall — I dared not go to the Kennels. In a short time I was back with the squire and three men. As I led the way, I saw the child lifting a corner of the handkerchief to peep and see if the eyes were closed in sleep. Then he heard us, and started violently. When we removed the covering, and he saw the face unchanged in its horror, he looked at me with a look I have never forgotten.

“A bad business — an awful business!” repeated the squire. “A bad business. I said to him from the first that the stones might come down when he was going

up, and he said he had taken care to fix them. But you can't be sure, you can't be certain. And he'd be about half-way up — ay — and the whole wall would come down on him. An awful business, it is really; a terrible piece of work!"

They decided at the inquest that the death came by misadventure. But there were vague rumours in the village that this was revenge which had overtaken the keeper.

They decided to bury him in our churchyard at Greymede under the beeches; the widow would have it so, and nothing might be denied her in her state.

It was a magnificent morning in early spring when I watched among the trees to see the procession come down the hillside. The upper air was woven with the music of the larks, and my whole world thrilled with the conception of summer. The young pale wind-flowers had arisen by the wood-gale, and under the hazels, when perchance the hot sun pushed his way, new little suns dawned, and blazed with real light. There was a certain thrill and quickening everywhere, as a woman must feel when she has conceived. A sallow tree in a favoured spot looked like a pale gold cloud of summer dawn; nearer it had poised a golden, fairy busby on every twig, and was voiced with a hum of bees, like any sacred golden bush, uttering its gladness in the thrilling murmur of bees, and in warm scent. Birds called and flashed on every hand; they made off exultant with streaming strands of grass, or wisps of fleece, plunging into the dark spaces of the wood, and out again into the blue.

A lad moved across the field from the farm below with a dog trotting behind him — a dog, no, a fussy, black-legged lamb trotting along on its toes, with its tail swinging behind. They were going to the mothers on the common, who moved like little grey clouds among the dark gorse.

I cannot help forgetting, and sharing the spink's triumph, when he flashes past with a fleece from a bramble bush. It will cover the bedded moss, it will weave among the soft red cow-hair beautifully. It is a prize, it is an ecstasy to have captured it at the right moment, and the nest is nearly ready.

Ah, but the thrush is scornful, ringing out his voice from the hedge! He sets his breast against the mud, and models it warm for the turquoise eggs — blue, blue, bluest of eggs, which cluster so close and round against the breast, which round up beneath the breast, nestling content. You should see the bright ecstasy in the eyes of a nesting thrush, because of the rounded caress of the eggs against her breast!

What a hurry the jenny wren makes — hoping I shall not see her dart into the low bush. I have a delight in watching them against their shy little wills. But they have all risen with a rush of wings, and are gone, the birds. The air is brushed with agitation. There is no lark in the sky, not one; the heaven is clear of

wings or twinkling dot — .

Till the heralds come — till the heralds wave like shadows in the bright air, crying, lamenting, fretting for ever. Rising and falling and circling round and round, the slow-waving peewits cry and complain, and lift their broad wings in sorrow. They stoop suddenly to the ground, the lapwings, then in another throb of anguish and protest, they swing up again, offering a glistening white breast to the sunlight, to deny it in black shadow, then a glisten of green, and all the time crying and crying in despair.

The pheasants are frightened into cover, they run and dart through the hedge. The cold cock must fly in his haste, spread himself on his streaming plumes, and sail into the wood's security.

There is a cry in answer to the peewits, echoing louder and stronger the lamentation of the lapwings, a wail which hushes the birds. The men come over the brow of the hill, slowly, with the old squire walking tall and straight in front; six bowed men bearing the coffin on their shoulders, treading heavily and cautiously, under the great weight of the glistening white coffin; six men following behind, ill at ease, waiting their turn for the burden. You can see the red handkerchiefs knotted round their throats, and their shirt-fronts blue and white between the open waistcoats. The coffin is of new unpolished wood, gleaming and glistening in the sunlight; the men who carry it remember all their lives after the smell of new, warm elm-wood.

Again a loud cry from the hill-top. The woman has followed thus far, the big, shapeless woman, and she cries with loud cries after the white coffin as it descends the hill, and the children that cling to her skirts weep aloud, and are not to be hushed by the other woman, who bends over them, but does not form one of the group. How the crying frightens the birds, and the rabbits; and the lambs away there run to their mothers. But the peewits are not frightened, they add their notes to the sorrow; they circle after the white, retreating coffin, they circle round the woman; it is they who for ever "keen" the sorrows of this world. They are like priests in their robes, more black than white, more grief than hope, driving endlessly round and round, turning, lifting, falling and crying always in mournful desolation, repeating their last syllables like the broken accents of despair.

The bearers have at last sunk between the high banks, and turned out of sight. The big woman cannot see them, and yet she stands to look. She must go home, there is nothing left.

They have rested the coffin on the gate-posts, and the bearers are wiping the sweat from their faces. They put their hands to their shoulders on the place where the weight has pressed.

The other six are placing the pads on their shoulders, when a girl comes up with a jug and a blue pot. The squire drinks first, and fills for the rest. Meanwhile the girl stands back under the hedge, away from the coffin which smells of new elm-wood. In imagination she pictures the man shut up there in close darkness, while the sunlight flows all outside, and she catches her breast with terror. She must turn and rustle among the leaves of the violets for the flowers she does not see. Then, trembling, she comes to herself, and plucks a few flowers and breathes them hungrily into her soul, for comfort. The men put down the pots beside her, with thanks, and the squire gives the word. The bearers lift up the burden again, and the elm-boughs rattle along the hollow white wood, and the pitiful red clusters of elm-flowers sweep along it as if they whispered in sympathy — "We are so sorry, so sorry — "; always the compassionate buds in their fulness of life bend down to comfort the dark man shut up there. "Perhaps," the girl thinks, "he hears them, and goes softly to sleep." She shakes the tears out of her eyes on to the ground, and, taking up her pots, goes slowly down, over the brooks.

In a while, I too got up and went down to the mill, which lay red and peaceful, with the blue smoke rising as winsomely and carelessly as ever. On the other side of the valley I could see a pair of horses nod slowly across the fallow. A man's voice called to him now and again with a resonance that filled me with longing to follow my horses over the fallow, in the still, lonely valley, full of sunshine and eternal forgetfulness. The day had already forgotten. The water was blue and white and dark-burnished with shadows; two swans sailed across the reflected trees with perfect blithe grace. The gloom that had passed across was gone. I watched the swan with his ruffled wings swell onwards; I watched his slim consort go peeping into corners and under bushes; I saw him steer clear of the bushes, to keep full in view, turning his head to me imperiously, till I longed to pelt him with the empty husks of last year's flowers, knap-weed and scabious. I was too indolent, and I turned instead to the orchard.

There the daffodils were lifting their heads and throwing back their yellow curls. At the foot of each sloping, grey old tree stood a family of flowers, some bursten with golden fulness, some lifting their heads slightly, to show a modest, sweet countenance, others still hiding their faces, leaning forward pensively from the jaunty grey-green spears; I wished I had their language, to talk to them distinctly.

Overhead, the trees, with lifted fingers shook out their hair to the sun, decking themselves with buds as white and cool as a water-nymph's breasts.

I began to be very glad. The colts-foot discs glowed and laughed in a merry company down the path; I stroked the velvet faces, and laughed also, and I

smelled the scent of black-currant leaves, which is full of childish memories.

The house was quiet and complacent; it was peopled with ghosts again; but the ghosts had only come to enjoy the warm place once more, carrying sunshine in their arms and scattering it through the dusk of gloomy rooms.

CHAPTER III

THE IRONY OF INSPIRED MOMENTS

It happened, the next day after the funeral, I came upon reproductions of Aubrey Beardsley's *Atalanta*, and of the tailpiece to *Salome*, and others. I sat and looked and my soul leaped out upon the new thing. I was bewildered, wondering, grudging, fascinated. I looked a long time, but my mind, or my soul, would come to no state of coherence. I was fascinated and overcome, but yet full of stubbornness and resistance.

Lettie was out, so, although it was dinner-time, even because it was dinner-time, I took the book and went down to the mill.

The dinner was over; there was the fragrance of cooked rhubarb in the room. I went straight to Emily, who was leaning back in her chair, and put the *Salome* before her.

"Look," said I, "look here!"

She looked; she was short-sighted, and peered close. I was impatient for her to speak. She turned slowly at last and looked at me, shrinking, with questioning.

"Well?" I said.

"Isn't it — fearful!" she replied softly.

"No! — why is it?"

"It makes you feel — Why have you brought it?"

"I wanted you to see it."

Already I felt relieved, seeing that she too was caught in the spell.

George came and bent over my shoulder. I could feel the heavy warmth of him.

"Good Lord!" he drawled, half amused. The children came crowding to see, and Emily closed the book.

"I shall be late — Hurry up, Dave!" and she went to wash her hands before going to school.

"Give it me, will you?" George asked, putting out his hand for the book. I gave it him, and he sat down to look at the drawings. When Mollie crept near to look, he angrily shouted to her to get away. She pulled a mouth, and got her hat over her wild brown curls. Emily came in ready for school.

“I’m going — good-bye,” she said, and she waited hesitatingly. I moved to get my cap. He looked up with a new expression in his eyes, and said:

“Are you going? — wait a bit — I’m coming.”

I waited.

“Oh, very well — good-bye,” said Emily bitterly, and she departed.

When he had looked long enough he got up and we went out. He kept his finger between the pages of the book as he carried it. We went towards the fallow land without speaking. There he sat down on a bank, leaning his back against a holly tree, and saying, very calmly:

“There’s no need to be in any hurry now — ” whereupon he proceeded to study the illustrations.

“You know,” he said at last, “I do want her.”

I started at the irrelevance of this remark, and said, “Who?”

“Lettie. We’ve got notice, did you know?”

I started to my feet this time with amazement.

“Notice to leave? — What for?”

“Rabbits I expect. I wish she’d have me, Cyril.”

“To leave Strelley Mill!” I repeated.

“That’s it — and I’m rather glad. But do you think she might have me, Cyril?”

“What a shame! Where will you go? And you lie there joking — !”

“I don’t. Never mind about the damned notice. I want her more than anything. — And the more I look at these naked lines, the more I want her. It’s a sort of fine sharp feeling, like these curved lines. I don’t know what I’m saying — but do you think she’d have me? Has she seen these pictures?”

“No.”

“If she did perhaps she’d want me — I mean she’d feel it clear and sharp coming through her.”

“I’ll show her and see.”

“I’d been sort of thinking about it — since Father had that notice. It seemed as if the ground was pulled from under our feet. I never felt so lost. Then I began to think of her, if she’d have me — but not clear, till you showed me those pictures. I must have her if I can — and I must have something. It’s rather ghostish to have the road suddenly smudged out, and all the world anywhere, nowhere for you to go. I must get something sure soon, or else I feel as if I should fall from somewhere and hurt myself. I’ll ask her.”

I looked at him as he lay there under the holly tree, his face all dreamy and boyish, very unusual.

“You’ll ask Lettie?” said I. “When — how?”

“I must ask her quick, while I feel as if everything had gone, and I was

ghostish. I think I must sound rather a lunatic.”

He looked at me, and his eyelids hung heavy over his eyes as if he had been drinking, or as if he were tired.

“Is she at home?” he said.

“No, she’s gone to Nottingham. She’ll be home before dark.”

“I’ll see her then. Can you smell violets?”

I replied that I could not. He was sure that he could, and he seemed uneasy till he had justified the sensation. So he arose, very leisurely, and went along the bank, looking closely for the flowers.

“I knew I could. White ones!”

He sat down and picked three flowers, and held them to his nostrils, and inhaled their fragrance. Then he put them to his mouth, and I saw his strong white teeth crush them. He chewed them for a while without speaking; then he spat them out and gathered more.

“They remind me of her too,” he said, and he twisted a piece of honeysuckle stem round the bunch and handed it to me.

“A white violet, is she?” I smiled.

“Give them to her, and tell her to come and meet me just when it’s getting dark in the wood.”

“But if she won’t?”

“She will.”

“If she’s not at home?”

“Come and tell me.”

He lay down again with his head among the green violet leaves, saying:

“I ought to work, because it all counts in the valuation. But I don’t care.”

He lay looking at me for some time. Then he said:

“I don’t suppose I shall have above twenty pounds left when we’ve sold up — but she’s got plenty of money to start with — if she has me — in Canada. I could get well off — and she could have — what she wanted — I’m sure she’d have what she wanted.”

He took it all calmly as if it were realised. I was somewhat amused.

“What frock will she have on when she comes to meet me?” he asked.

“I don’t know. The same as she’s gone to Nottingham in, I suppose — a sort of gold-brown costume with a rather tight-fitting coat. Why?”

“I was thinking how she’d look.”

“What chickens are you counting now?” I asked.

“But what do you think I look best in?” he replied.

“You? Just as you are — no, put that old smooth cloth coat on — that’s all.” I smiled as I told him, but he was very serious. “Shan’t I put my new clothes on?”

“No — you want to leave your neck showing.”

He put his hand to his throat, and said naïvely:

“Do I?” — and it amused him.

Then he lay looking dreamily up into the tree. I left him, and went wandering round the fields finding flowers and bird’s nests.

When I came back, it was nearly four o’clock. He stood up and stretched himself. He pulled out his watch.

“Good Lord,” he drawled, “I’ve lain there thinking all afternoon. I didn’t know I could do such a thing. Where have you been? It’s with being all upset, you see. You left the violets — here, take them, will you; and tell her; I’ll come when it’s getting dark. I feel like somebody else — or else really like myself. I hope I shan’t wake up to the other things — you know, like I am always — before them.”

“Why not?”

“Oh, I don’t know — only I feel as if I could talk straight off without arranging — like birds, without knowing what note is coming next.”

When I was going he said:

“Here, leave me that book — it’ll keep me like this — I mean I’m not the same as I was yesterday, and that book’ll keep me like it. Perhaps it’s a bilious bout — I do sometimes have one, if something very extraordinary happens. When it’s getting dark then!”

Lettie had not arrived when I went home. I put the violets in a little vase on the table. I remembered he had wanted her to see the drawings — it was perhaps as well he had kept them.

She came about six o’clock — in the motor-car with Marie. But the latter did not descend. I went out to assist with the parcels. Lettie had already begun to buy things; the wedding was fixed for July.

The room was soon over-covered with stuffs: table linen, underclothing, pieces of silken stuff and lace stuff, patterns for carpets and curtains, a whole gleaming, glowing array. Lettie was very delighted. She could hardly wait to take off her hat, but went round cutting the string of her parcels, opening them, talking all the time to my mother.

“Look, Little Woman. I’ve got a ready-made underskirt — isn’t it lovely. Listen!” and she ruffled it through her hands. “Shan’t I sound splendid! Frou-Frou! But it is a charming shade, isn’t it, and not a bit bulky or clumsy anywhere?” She put the band of the skirt against her waist, and put forward her foot, and looked down, saying, “It’s just the right length, isn’t it, Little Woman? — and they said I was tall — it was a wonder. Don’t you wish it were yours, Little? — oh, you won’t confess it. Yes, you like to be as fine as anybody —

that's why I bought you this piece of silk — isn't it sweet, though? — you needn't say there's too much lavender in it, there is not. Now!" She pleated it up and held it against my mother's chin. "It suits you beautifully — doesn't it? Don't you like it, Sweet? You don't seem to like it a bit, and I'm sure it suits you — makes you look ever so young. I wish you wouldn't be so old-fashioned in your notions. You do like it, don't you?"

"Of course I do — I was only thinking what an extravagant mortal you are when you begin to buy. You know you mustn't keep on always — "

"Now — now, Sweet, don't be naughty and preachy. It's such a treat to go buying. You will come with me next time, won't you? Oh, I have enjoyed it — but I wished you were there — Marie takes anything, she's so easy to suit — I like to have a good buy — Oh, it was splendid! — and there's lots more yet. Oh, did you see this cushion-cover — these are the colours I want for that room — gold and amber — "

This was a bad opening. I watched the shadows darken farther and farther along the brightness, hushing the glitter of the water. I watched the golden ripeness come upon the west, and thought the rencontre was never to take place. At last, however, Lettie flung herself down with a sigh, saying she was tired.

"Come into the dining-room and have a cup of tea," said Mother. "I told Rebecca to mash when you came in."

"All right. Leslie's coming up later on, I believe — about half-past eight, he said. Should I show him what I've bought?"

"There's nothing there for a man to see."

"I shall have to change my dress, and I'm sure I don't want the fag. Rebecca, just go and look at the things I've bought — in the other room — and, Becky, fold them up for me, will you, and put them on my bed?"

As soon as she'd gone out, Lettie said:

"She'll enjoy doing it, won't she, Mother, they're so nice! Do you think I need dress, Mother?"

"Please yourself — do as you wish."

"I suppose I shall have to; he doesn't like blouses and skirts of an evening, he says; he hates the belt. I'll wear that old cream cashmere; it looks nice now I've put that new lace on it. Don't those violets smell nice? — who got them?"

"Cyril brought them in."

"George sent them you," said I.

"Well, I'll just run up and take my dress off. Why are we troubled with men!"

"It's a trouble you like well enough," said Mother. "Oh, do I? such a bother!" and she ran upstairs.

The sun was red behind Highclose. I kneeled in the window seat and smiled at

Fate and at people who imagine that strange states are near to the inner realities. The sun went straight down behind the cedar trees, deliberately, and, it seemed as I watched, swiftly lowered itself behind the trees, behind the rim of the hill.

“I must go,” I said to myself, “and tell him she will not come.”

Yet I fidgeted about the room, loth to depart. Lettie came down, dressed in white — or cream — cut low round the neck. She looked very delightful and fresh again, with a sparkle of the afternoon’s excitement still.

“I’ll put some of these violets on me,” she said, glancing at herself in the mirror, and then taking the flowers from their water, she dried them, and fastened them among her lace.

“Don’t Lettie and I look nice tonight?” she said, smiling, glancing from me to her reflection which was like a light in the dusky room.

“That reminds me,” I said, “George Saxton wanted to see you this evening.”

“Whatever for?”

“I don’t know. They’ve got notice to leave their farm, and I think he feels a bit sentimental.”

“Oh, well — is he coming here?”

“He said would you go just a little way in the wood to meet him.”

“Did he! Oh, indeed! Well, of course I can’t.”

“Of course not — if you won’t. They’re his violets you’re wearing, by the way.”

“Are they — let them stay, it makes no difference. But whatever did he want to see me for?”

“I couldn’t say, I assure you.”

She glanced at herself in the mirror, and then at the clock.

“Let’s see,” she remarked, “it’s only a quarter to eight. Three-quarters of an hour — ! But what can he want me for? — I never knew anything like it.”

“Startling, isn’t it!” I observed satirically.

“Yes.” She glanced at herself in the mirror.

“I can’t go out like this.”

“All right, you can’t then.”

“Besides — it’s nearly dark, it will be too dark to see in the wood, won’t it?”

“It will directly.”

“Well, I’ll just go to the end of the garden, for one moment — run and fetch that silk shawl out of my wardrobe — be quick, while it’s light.”

I ran and brought the wrap. She arranged it carefully over her head.

We went out, down the garden path. Lettie held her skirts carefully gathered from the ground. A nightingale began to sing in the twilight; we stepped along in silence as far as the rhododendron bushes, now in rosy bud.

“I cannot go into the wood,” she said.

“Come to the top of the riding” — and we went round the dark bushes.

George was waiting. I saw at once he was half distrustful of himself now. Lettie dropped her skirts and trailed towards him. He stood awkwardly awaiting her, conscious of the clownishness of his appearance. She held out her hand with something of a grand air.

“See.” she said, “I have come.”

“Yes — I thought you wouldn’t — perhaps” — he looked at her, and suddenly gained courage.

“You have been putting white on — you, you do look nice — though not like —”

“What? — Who else?”

“Nobody else — only I — well, I’d — I’d thought about it different — like some pictures.”

She smiled with a gentle radiance, and asked indulgently, “And how was I different?”

“Not all that soft stuff — plainer.”

“But don’t I look very nice with all this soft stuff, as you call it?” — and she shook the silk away from her smiles.

“Oh, yes — better than those naked lines.”

“You are quaint tonight — what did you want me for — to say good-bye?”

“Good-bye?”

“Yes — you’re going away, Cyril tells me. I’m very sorry — fancy horrid strangers at the Mill! But then I shall be gone away soon, too. We are all going, you see, now we’ve grown up” — she kept hold of my arm.

“Yes.”

“And where will you go — Canada? You’ll settle there and be quite a patriarch, won’t you?”

“I don’t know.”

“You are not really sorry to go, are you?”

“No, I’m glad.”

“Glad to go away from us all.”

“I suppose so — since I must.”

“Ah, Fate — Fate! It separates you whether you want it or not.”

“What?”

“Why, you see, you have to leave. I mustn’t stay out here — it is growing chilly. How soon are you going?”

“I don’t know.”

“Not soon then?”

“I don’t know.”

“Then I may see you again?”

“I don’t know.”

“Oh yes, I shall. Well, I must go. Shall I say good-bye now? — that was what you wanted, was it not?”

“To say good-bye?”

“Yes.”

“No — it wasn’t — I wanted, I wanted to ask you — ”

“What?” she cried.

“You don’t know, Lettie, now the old life’s gone, everything — how I want you — to set out with — it’s like beginning life, and I want you.”

“But what could I do — I could only hinder — what help should I be?”

“I should feel as if my mind was made up — as if I could do something clearly. Now it’s all hazy — not knowing what to do next.”

“And if — if you had — what then?”

“If I had you I could go straight on.”

“Where?”

“Oh — I should take a farm in Canada — ”

“Well, wouldn’t it be better to get it first and make sure — ?”

“I have no money.”

“Oh! — so you wanted me — ?”

“I only wanted you, I only wanted you. I would have given you — ”

“What?”

“You’d have me — you’d have all me, and everything you wanted.”

“That I paid for — a good bargain! No, oh no, George, I beg your pardon. This is one of my flippant nights. I don’t mean it like that. But you know it’s impossible — look how I’m fixed — it is impossible, isn’t it now?”

“I suppose it is.”

“You know it is. — Look at me now, and say if it’s not impossible — a farmer’s wife — with you in Canada.”

“Yes — I didn’t expect you like that. Yes, I see it is impossible. But I’d thought about it, and felt as if I must have you. Should have you...Yes, it doesn’t do to go on dreaming. I think it’s the first time, and it’ll be the last. Yes, it is impossible. Now I have made up my mind.”

“And what will you do?”

“I shall not go to Canada.”

“Oh, you must not — you must not do anything rash.”

“No — I shall get married.”

“You will? Oh, I am glad. I thought — you — you were too fond — . But

you're not — of yourself, I meant. I am so glad. Yes — do marry!”

“Well, I shall — since you are — ”

“Yes,” said Lettie. “It is best. But I thought that you she smiled at him in sad reproach.

“Did you think so?” he replied, smiling gravely.

“Yes,” she whispered. They stood looking at one another. He made an impulsive movement towards her. She, however, drew back slightly, checking him.

“Well — I shall see you again some time — so good-bye,” he said, putting out his hand.

We heard a foot crunching on the gravel. Leslie halted at the top of the riding. Lettie, hearing him, relaxed into a kind of feline graciousness, and said to George:

“I am so sorry you are going to leave — it breaks the old life up. You said I would see you again — ” She left her hand in his a moment or two.

“Yes,” George replied. “Good night” — and he turned away. She stood for a moment in the same drooping, graceful attitude watching him, then she turned round slowly. She seemed hardly to notice Leslie.

“Who was that you were talking to?” he asked.

“He has gone now,” she replied irrelevantly, as if even then she seemed hardly to realise it.

“It appears to upset you — his going — who is it?”

“He! — Oh — why, it's George Saxton.”

“Oh, him!”

“Yes.”

“What did he want?”

“Eh? What did he want? Oh, nothing.”

“A mere trysting — in the interim, eh!” he said this laughing, generously passing off his annoyance in a jest.

“I feel so sorry,” she said.

“What for?”

“Oh — don't let us talk about him — talk about something else. I can't bear to talk about — him.”

“All right,” he replied — and after an awkward little pause, “What sort of a time had you in Nottingham?”

“Oh, a fine time.”

“You'll enjoy yourself in the shops between now and — July. Some time I'll go with you and see them.”

“Very well.”

“That sounds as if you don’t want me to go. Am I already in the way on a shopping expedition, like an old husband?”

“I should think you would be.”

“That’s nice of you! Why?”

“Oh, I don’t know.”

“Yes you do.”

“Oh, I suppose you’d hang about.”

“I’m much too well brought up.”

“Rebecca has lighted the hall lamp.”

“Yes, it’s grown quite dark. I was here early. You never gave me a good word for it.”

“I didn’t notice. There’s a light in the dining-room, we’ll go there.”

They went into the dining-room. She stood by the piano and carefully took off the wrap. Then she wandered listlessly about the room for a minute.

“Aren’t you coming to sit down?” he said, pointing to the seat on the couch beside him.

“Not just now,” she said, trailing aimlessly to the piano. She sat down and began to play at random, from memory. Then she did that most irritating thing — played accompaniments to songs, with snatches of the air where the voice should have predominated.

“I say Lettie...” he interrupted after a time.

“Yes,” she replied, continuing to play.

“It’s not very interesting...”

“No?” — she continued to play.

“Nor very amusing...”

She did not answer. He bore it for a little time longer, then he said:

“How much longer is it going to last, Lettie?”

“What?”

“That sort of business...”

“The piano? — I’ll stop playing if you don’t like it.” She did not, however, cease.

“Yes — and all this dry business.”

“I don’t understand.”

“Don’t you? — you make me.”

There she went on, tinkling away at “If I built a world for you, dear”.

“I say, stop it, do!” he cried.

She tinkled to the end of the verse, and very slowly closed the piano.

“Come on — come and sit down,” he said.

“No, I don’t want to — I’d rather have gone on playing.”

“Go on with your damned playing then, and I’ll go where there’s more interest.”

“You ought to like it.”

He did not answer, so she turned slowly round on the stool, opened the piano, and laid her fingers on the keys. At the sound of the chord he started up, saying: “Then I’m going.”

“‘t’s very early — why?” she said, through the calm jingle of “Meine Ruh is hin — ”

He stood biting his lips. Then he made one more appeal. “Lettie!”

“Yes?”

“Aren’t you going to leave off — and be — amiable?”

“Amiable?”

“You are a jolly torment. What’s upset you now?”

“Nay, it’s not I who am upset.”

“I’m glad to hear it — what do you call yourself?”

“I? — nothing.”

“Oh, well, I’m going then.”

“Must you? — so early tonight?”

He did not go, and she played more and more softly, languidly, aimlessly. Once she lifted her head to speak, but did not say anything.

“Look here!” he ejaculated all at once, so that she started, and jarred the piano, “What do you mean by it?”

She jingled leisurely a few seconds before answering, then she replied:

“What a worry you are!”

“I suppose you want me out of the way while you sentimentalise over that milkman. You needn’t bother. You can do it while I’m here. Or I’ll go and leave you in peace. I’ll go and call him back for you, if you like — if that’s what you want — ”

She turned on the piano stool slowly and looked at him, smiling faintly.

“It is very good of you!” she said.

He clenched his fists and grinned with rage.

“You tantalising little — ” he began, lifting his fists expressively. She smiled. Then he swung round, knocked several hats flying off the stand in the hall, slammed the door, and was gone.

Lettie continued to play for some time, after which she went up to her own room.

Leslie did not return to us the next day, nor the day after. The first day Marie came and told us he had gone away to Yorkshire to see about the new mines that were being sunk there, and was likely to be absent for a week or so. These

business visits to the north were rather frequent. The firm, of which Mr Tempest was director and chief shareholder, were opening important new mines in the other county, as the seams at home were becoming exhausted or unprofitable. It was proposed that Leslie should live in Yorkshire when he was married, to superintend the new workings. He at first rejected the idea, but he seemed later to approve of it more.

During the time he was away Lettie was moody and cross-tempered. She did not mention George nor the mill; indeed, she preserved her best, most haughty and ladylike manner.

On the evening of the fourth day of Leslie's absence we were out in the garden. The trees were "uttering joyous leaves". My mother was in the midst of her garden, lifting the dusky faces of the auriculas to look at the velvet lips, or tenderly taking a young weed from the black soil. The thrushes were calling and clamouring all round. The japonica flamed on the wall as the light grew thicker; the tassels of white cherry-blossom swung gently in the breeze.

"What shall I do, Mother?" said Lettie, as she wandered across the grass to pick at the japonica flowers. "What shall I do? There's nothing to do."

"Well, my girl — what do you want to do? You have been moping about all day — go and see somebody."

"It's such a long way to Eberwich."

"Is it? Then go somewhere nearer."

Lettie fretted about with restless, petulant indecision.

"I don't know what to do," she said, "And I feel as if I might just as well never have lived at all as waste days like this. I wish we weren't buried in this dead little hole — I wish we were near the town — it's hateful having to depend on about two or three folk for your — your — your pleasure in life."

"I can't help it, my dear — you must do something for yourself."

"And what can I do? — I can do nothing."

"Then I'd go to bed."

"That I won't — with the dead weight of a wasted day on me. I feel as if I'd do something desperate."

"Very well, then," said Mother, "do it, and have done."

"Oh, it's no good talking to you — I don't want — " She turned away, went to the laurestinus, and began pulling off it the long red berries. I expected she would fret the evening wastefully away. I noticed all at once that she stood still. It was the noise of a motor-car running rapidly down the hill towards Nethermere — a light, quick-clicking sound. I listened also. I could feel the swinging drop of the car as it came down the leaps of the hill. We could see the dust trail up among the trees. Lettie raised her head and listened expectantly. The

car rushed along the edge of Nethermere — then there was the jar of brakes, as the machine slowed down and stopped. In a moment with a quick flutter of sound, it was passing the lodge gates and whirling up the drive, through the wood, to us. Lettie stood with flushed cheeks and brightened eyes. She went towards the bushes that shut off the lawn from the gravelled space in front of the house, watching. A car came racing through the trees. It was the small car Leslie used on the firm's business — now it was white with dust. Leslie suddenly put on the brakes, and tore to a standstill in front of the house. He stepped to the ground. There he staggered a little, being giddy and cramped with the long drive. His motor-jacket and cap were thick with dust.

Lettie called to him, "Leslie!" — and flew down to him. He took her into his arms, and clouds of dust rose round her. He kissed her, and they stood perfectly still for a moment. She looked up into his face — then she disengaged her arms to take off his disfiguring motor-spectacles. After she had looked at him a moment, tenderly, she kissed him again. He loosened his hold of her, and she said, in a voice full of tenderness:

"You are trembling, dear."

"It's the ride. I've never stopped."

Without further words she took him into the house.

"How pale you are — see, lie on the couch — never mind the dust. All right, I'll find you a coat of Cyril's. Oh, Mother, he's come all those miles in the car without stopping — make him lie down."

She ran and brought him a jacket, and put the cushions round, and made him lie on the couch. Then she took off his boots and put slippers on his feet. He lay watching her all the time; he was white with fatigue and excitement.

"I wonder if I shall be had up for scorching — I can feel the road coming at me yet," he said.

"Why were you so headlong?"

"I felt as if I should go wild if I didn't come — if I didn't rush. I didn't know how you might have taken me, Lettie when I said — what I did."

She smiled gently at him, and he lay resting, recovering, looking at her.

"It's a wonder I haven't done something desperate — I've been half mad since I said — Oh, Lettie, I was a damned fool and a wretch — I could have torn myself in two. I've done nothing but curse and rage at myself ever since. I feel as if I'd just come up out of hell. You don't know how thankful I am, Lettie, that you've not — oh — turned against me for what I said."

She went to him and sat down by him, smoothing his hair from his forehead, kissing him, her attitude tender, suggesting tears, her movements impulsive, as if with a self-reproach she would not acknowledge, but which she must silence

with lavish tenderness. He drew her to him, and they remained quiet for some time, till it grew dark.

The noise of my mother stirring in the next room disturbed them. Lettie rose, and he also got up from the couch.

“I suppose,” he said, “I shall have to go home and get bathed and dressed — though,” he added in tones which made it clear he did not want to go, “I shall have to get back in the morning — I don’t know what they’ll say.”

“At any rate,” she said, “You could wash here — ”

“But I must get out of these clothes — and I want a bath.”

“You could — you might have some of Cyril’s clothes — and the water’s hot. I know. At all events, you can stay to supper — ”

“If I’m going I shall have to go soon — or they’d not like it, if I go in late; — they have no idea I’ve come; — they don’t expect me till next Monday or Tuesday — ”

“Perhaps you could stay here — and they needn’t know.” They looked at each other with wide, smiling eyes — like children on the brink of a stolen pleasure.

“Oh, but what would your mother think! — no, I’ll go.”

“She won’t mind a bit.”

“Oh, but — ”

“I’ll ask her.”

He wanted to stay far more than she wished it, so it was she who put down his opposition and triumphed.

My mother lifted her eyebrows, and said very quietly: “He’d better go home — and be straight.”

“But look how he’d feel — he’d have to tell them...and how would he feel! It’s really my fault, in the end. Don’t be pigging and mean and Grundyish, Matouchka.”

“It is neither meanness nor Grundyishness — ”

“Oh, Ydgrun, Ydgrun — !” exclaimed Lettie, ironically. “He may certainly stay if he likes,” said Mother, slightly nettled at Lettie’s gibe.

“All right, Mutterchen — and be a sweetling, do!”

Lettie went out a little impatient at my mother’s unwillingness, but Leslie stayed, nevertheless.

In a few moments Lettie was up in the spare bedroom, arranging and adorning, and Rebecca was running with hot-water bottles, and hurrying down with clean bedclothes. Lettie hastily appropriated my best brushes — which she had given me — and took the suit of pyjamas of the thinnest, finest flannel and discovered a new tooth-brush — and made selections from my shirts and handkerchiefs and underclothing — and directed me which suit to lend him.

Altogether I was astonished, and perhaps a trifle annoyed, at her extraordinary thoughtfulness and solicitude.

He came down to supper, bathed, brushed, and radiant. He ate heartily and seemed to emanate a warmth of physical comfort and pleasure. The colour was flushed again into his face, and he carried his body with the old independent, assertive air. I have never known the time when he looked handsomer, when he was more attractive. There was a certain warmth about him, a certain glow that enhanced his words, his laughter, his movements; he was the predominant person, and we felt a pleasure in his mere proximity. My mother, however, could not quite get rid of her stiffness, and soon after supper she rose, saying she would finish her letter in the next room, bidding him good-night, as she would probably not see him again. The cloud of this little coolness was the thinnest and most transitory. He talked and laughed more gaily than ever, and was ostentatious in his movements, throwing back his head, taking little attitudes which displayed the broad firmness of his breast, the grace of his well-trained physique. I left them at the piano; he was sitting pretending to play, and looking up all the while at her, who stood with her hand on his shoulder.

In the morning he was up early, by six o'clock downstairs and attending to the car. When I got down I found him very busy, and very quiet.

"I know I'm a beastly nuisance," he said, "but I must get off early."

Rebecca came and prepared breakfast, which we two ate alone. He was remarkably dull and wordless.

"It's a wonder Lettie hasn't got up to have breakfast with you — she's such a one for raving about the perfection of the early morning — its purity and promises and so forth," I said.

He broke his bread nervously, and drank some coffee as if he were agitated, making noises in his throat as he swallowed.

"It's too early for her, I should think," he replied, wiping his moustache hurriedly. Yet he seemed to listen for her. Lettie's bedroom was over the study, where Rebecca had laid breakfast, and he listened now and again, holding his knife and fork suspended in their action. Then he went on with his meal again.

When he was laying down his serviette, the door opened. He pulled himself together, and turned round sharply. It was Mother. When she spoke to him, his face twitched with a little frown, half of relief, half of disappointment.

"I must be going now," he said — "thank you very much — Mother."

"You are a harum-scarum boy. I wonder why Lettie doesn't come down. I know she is up."

"Yes," he replied. "Yes, I've heard her. Perhaps she is dressing. I must get off."

“I’ll call her.”

“No — don’t bother her — she’d come if she wanted — ”

But Mother had called from the foot of the stairs. “Lettie, Lettie — he’s going.”

“All right,” said Lettie, and in another minute she came downstairs. She was dressed in dark, severe stuff, and she was somewhat pale. She did not look at any of us, but turned her eyes aside.

“Good-bye,” she said to him, offering him her cheek. He kissed her, murmuring, “Good-bye — my love.”

He stood in the doorway a moment, looking at her with beseeching eyes. She kept her face half averted, and would not look at him, but stood pale and cold, biting her under-lip. He turned sharply away with a motion of keen disappointment, set the engines of the car into action, mounted, and drove quickly away.

Lettie stood pale and inscrutable for some moments. Then she went in to breakfast and sat toying with her food, keeping her head bent down, her face hidden.

In less than an hour he was back again, saying he had left something behind. He ran upstairs, and then, hesitating, went into the room where Lettie was still sitting at table. “I had to come back,” he said.

She lifted her face towards him, but kept her eyes averted, looking out of the window. She was flushed.

“What had you forgotten?” she asked.

“I’d left my cigarette-case,” he replied.

There was an awkward silence.

“But I shall have to be getting off,” he added.

“Yes, I suppose you will,” she replied.

After another pause, he asked:

“Won’t you just walk down the path with me?”

She rose without answering. He took a shawl and put it round her carefully. She merely allowed him. They walked in silence down the garden.

“You — are you — are you angry with me?” he faltered. Tears suddenly came to her eyes.

“What did you come back for?” she said, averting her face from him. He looked at her.

“I knew you were angry and — ” he hesitated.

“Why didn’t you go away?” she said impulsively. He hung his head and was silent.

“I don’t see why — why it should make trouble between us, Lettie,” he

faltered. She made a swift gesture of repulsion, whereupon, catching sight of her hand, she hid it swiftly against her skirt again.

“You make my hands — my very hands disclaim me,” she struggled to say.

He looked at her clenched fist pressed against the folds of her dress.

“But — ” he began, much troubled.

“I tell you, I can’t bear the sight of my own hands,” she said in low, passionate tones.

“But surely, Lettie, there’s no need — if you love me — ”

She seemed to wince. He waited, puzzled and miserable. “And we’re going to be married, aren’t we?” he resumed, looking pleadingly at her.

She stirred, and exclaimed:

“Oh, why don’t you go away? What did you come back for?”

“You’ll kiss me before I go?” he asked.

She stood with averted face, and did not reply. His forehead was twitching in a puzzled frown.

“Lettie!” he said.

She did not move or answer, but remained with her face turned full away, so that he could see only the contour of her cheek. After waiting awhile, he flushed, turned swiftly and set his machine rattling. In a moment he was racing between the trees.

CHAPTER IV

KISS WHEN SHE'S RIPE FOR TEARS

It was the Sunday after Lettie's visit. We had had a wretched week, with everybody mute and unhappy.

Though spring had come, none of us saw it. Afterwards it occurred to me that I had seen all the ranks of poplars suddenly bursten into a dark crimson glow, with a flutter of blood-red where the sun came through the leaves; that I had found high cradles where the swan's eggs lay by the water-side; that I had seen the daffodils leaning from the moss-grown wooden walls of the boat-house, and all, moss, daffodils, water, scattered with the pink scarves from the elm buds; that I had broken the half-spread fans of the sycamore, and had watched the white cloud of sloe-blossom go silver grey against the evening sky: but I had not perceived it, and I had not any vivid spring pictures left from the neglected week.

It was Sunday evening, just after tea, when Lettie suddenly said to me:

"Come with me down to Strelley Mill."

I was astonished, but I obeyed unquestioningly.

On the threshold we heard a chattering of girls, and immediately Alice's voice greeted us:

"Hello, Sybil, love! Hello, Lettie! Come on, here's a gathering of the goddesses. Come on, you just make us right. You're Juno, and here's Meg, she's Venus, and I'm — here, somebody, who am I, tell us quick — did you say Minerva, Sybil dear? Well, you ought, then! Now, Paris, hurry up. He's putting his Sunday clothes on to take us a walk — Laws, what a time it takes him! Get your blushes ready, Meg — now, Lettie, look haughty, and I'll look wise. I wonder if he wants me to go and tie his tie. Oh, Glory — where on earth did you get that antimacassar?"

"In Nottingham — don't you like it?" said George, referring to his tie. "Hello, Lettie — have you come?"

"Yes, it's a gathering of the goddesses. Have you that apple? If so, hand it over," said Alice.

"What apple?"

“Oh, Lum, his education! Paris’s apple — Can’t you see we’ve come to be chosen?”

“Oh, well — I haven’t got any apple — I’ve eaten mine.”

“Isn’t he flat — he’s like boiling magnesia that’s done boiling for a week. Are you going to take us all to church then?”

“If you like.”

“Come on, then. Where’s the Abode of Love? Look at Lettie looking shocked. Awfully sorry, old girl — thought love agreed with you.”

“Did you say love?” inquired George.

“Yes, I did; didn’t I, Meg? And you say ‘Love’ as well, don’t you?”

“I don’t know what it is,” laughed Meg, who was very red and rather bewildered.

“‘Amor est titillatio’ — ‘Love is a tickling’ — there — that’s it, isn’t it, Sybil?”

“How should I know.”

“Of course not, old fellow. Leave it to the girls. See how knowing Lettie looks — and, laws, Lettie, you are solemn.”

“It’s love,” suggested George, over his new neck-tie.

“I’ll bet it is ‘degustasse sat est’ — ain’t it, Lettie? ‘One lick’s enough’ — ‘and damned be he that first cries: Hold, enough!’ — Which one do you like? But are you going to take us to church, Georgie, darling — one by one, or all at once?”

“What do you want me to do, Meg?” he asked.

“Oh, I don’t mind.”

“And do you mind, Lettie?”

“I’m not going to church.”

“Let’s go a walk somewhere — and let us start now,” said Emily somewhat testily. She did not like this nonsense. “There you are, Syb — you’ve got your orders — don’t leave me behind,” wailed Alice.

Emily frowned and bit her finger.

“Come on, Georgie. You look like the finger of a pair of scales — between two weights. Which’ll draw?”

“The heavier,” he replied, smiling, and looking neither at Meg or Lettie.

“Then it’s Meg,” cried Alice. “Oh, I wish I was fleshy — I’ve no chance with Syb against Pem.”

Emily flashed looks of rage; Meg blushed and felt ashamed; Lettie began to recover from her first outraged indignation, and smiled.

Thus we went a walk, in two trios.

Unfortunately, as the evening was so fine, the roads were full of strollers:

groups of three or four men dressed in pale trousers and shiny black cloth coats, following their suspicious little dogs: gangs of youths slouching along, occupied with nothing, often silent, talking now and then in raucous tones on some subjects of brief interest: then the gallant husbands, in their tail coats very husbandly, pushing a jingling perambulator, admonished by a much-dressed spouse round whom the small members of the family gyrated: occasionally, two lovers walking with a space between them, disowning each other; occasionally, a smartly dressed mother with two little girls in white silk frocks and much expanse of yellow hair, stepping mincingly, and, near by, a father awkwardly controlling his Sunday suit.

To endure all this it was necessary to chatter unconcernedly. George had to keep up the conversation behind, and he seemed to do it with ease, discoursing on the lambs, discussing the breed — when Meg exclaimed:

“Oh, aren’t they black! They might ha’ crept down th’ chimney. I never saw any like them before.” He described how he had reared two on the bottle, exciting Meg’s keen admiration by his mothering of the lambs. Then he went on to the peewits, harping on the same string: how they would cry and pretend to be wounded — “Just fancy, though!” — and how he had moved the eggs of one pair while he was ploughing, and the mother had followed them, and had even sat watching as he drew near again with the plough, watching him come and go — “Well, she knew you — but they do know those who are kind to them — ”

“Yes,” he agreed, “her little bright eyes seem to speak as you go by.”

“Oh, I do think they’re nice little things — don’t you, Lettie?” cried Meg in access of tenderness.

Lettie did — with brevity.

We walked over the hills and down into Greymede. Meg thought she ought to go home to her grandmother, and George bade her go, saying he would call and see her in an hour or so.

The dear girl was disappointed, but she went unmurmuring. We left Alice with a friend, and hurried home through Selsby to escape the after-church parade.

As you walk home past Selsby, the pit stands up against the west, with beautiful tapering chimneys marked in black against the swim of sunset, and the head-stocks etched with tall significance on the brightness. Then the houses are squat in rows of shadow at the foot of these high monuments.

“Do you know, Cyril,” said Emily, “I have meant to go and see Mrs Annable — the keeper’s wife — she’s moved into Bonsart’s Row, and the children come to school — Oh, it’s awful! — they’ve never been to school, and they are unspeakable.”

“What’s she gone there for?” I asked.

“I suppose the squire wanted the Kennels — and she chose it herself. But the way they live — it’s fearful to think of!”

“And why haven’t you been?”

“I don’t know — I’ve meant to — but — ” Emily stumbled. “You didn’t want, and you daren’t?”

“Perhaps not — would you?”

“Pah — let’s go now! — There, you hang back.”

“No, I don’t,” she replied sharply.

“Come on then, we’ll go through the twitchel. Let me tell Lettie.”

Lettie at once declared, “No!” — with some asperity. “All right,” said George. “I’ll take you home.”

But this suited Lettie still less.

“I don’t know what you want to go for, Cyril,” she said, “and Sunday night, and, everybody everywhere. I want to go home.”

“Well — you go then — Emily will come with you.”

“Ha,” cried the latter, “you think I won’t go to see her.” I shrugged my shoulders, and George pulled his moustache. “Well, I don’t care,” declared Lettie, and we marched down the twitchel, Indian file.

We came near to the ugly rows of houses that back up against the pit-hill. Everywhere is black and sooty; the houses are back to back, having only one entrance, which is from a square garden where black-speckled weeds grow sulkily, and which looks on to a row of evil little ash-pit huts. The road everywhere is trodden over with a crust of soot and coal-dust and cinders.

Between the rows, however, was a crowd of women and children, bare hands, bare arms, white aprons, and black Sunday frocks bristling with gimp. One or two men squatted on their heels with their backs against a wall, laughing. The women were waving their arms and screaming up at the roof of the end house.

Emily and Lettie drew back.

“Look there — it’s that little beggar, Sam!” said George.

There, sure enough, perched on the ridge of the roof against the end chimney, was the young imp, coatless, his shirt-sleeves torn away from the cuffs. I knew his bright, reddish young head in a moment. He got up, his bare toes clinging to the tiles, and spread out his fingers fanwise from his nose, shouting something, which immediately caused the crowd to toss with indignation, and the women to shriek again. Sam sat down suddenly, having almost lost his balance.

The village constable hurried up, his thin neck stretching out of his tunic, and demanded the cause of the hubbub.

Immediately a woman, with bright brown squinting eyes and a birthmark on her cheek, rushed forward and seized the policeman by the sleeve.

“Ta’e ‘im up, ta’e ‘im up, an’ birch ‘im till ‘is bloody back’s raw,” she screamed.

The thin policeman shook her off, and wanted to know what as the matter.

“I’ll smosh ‘im like a rotten tater,” cried the woman, “if I can lay ‘ands on ‘im. ‘E’s not fit ter live nowhere where there’s decent folks — the thievin’, brazen little devil — ” thus she went on.

“But what’s up!” interrupted the thin constable, “What’s up wi’ ‘im?”

“Up — it’s ‘im as ‘is up, an’ let ‘im wait till I get ‘im down. A crafty little — ”

Sam, seeing her look at him, distorted his honest features, and overheated her wrath, till Lettie and Emily trembled with dismay.

The mother’s head appeared at the bedroom window. She slid the sash back, and craned out, vainly trying to look over the gutter below the slates. She was even more dishevelled than usual, and the tears had dried on her pale face. She stretched farther out, clinging to the window-frame and to the gutter overhead, till I was afraid she would come down with a crash.

The men, squatting on their heels against the wall of the ash-pit laughed, saying:

“Nab ‘im, Poll — can ter see ‘im — clawk ‘im!” and then the pitiful voice of the woman was heard crying, “Come thy ways down, my duckie, come on — on’y come ter thy mother — they shanna touch thee. Du thy mother’s biddin’ now — Sam — Sam — Sam!” her voice rose higher and higher.

“Sammy, Sammy, go to thy mammy,” jeered the wits below. “Shonna ter come, shonna ter come to thy mother, my duckie — come on, come thy ways down.”

Sam looked at the crowd, and at the eaves from under which rose his mother’s voice. He was going to cry. A big gaunt woman, with the family steel comb stuck in her back hair, shouted, “Tha’ mun well bend thy face, tha’ needs ter scraight,” and, aided by the woman with the birthmark and the squint, she reviled him. The little scoundrel, in a burst of defiance, picked a piece of mortar from between the slates, and in a second it flew into fragments against the family steel comb. The wearer thereof declared her head was laid open and there was general confusion. The policeman — I don’t know how thin he must have been when he was taken out of his uniform — lost his head, and he too began brandishing his fists, spitting from under his sweep’s-brush moustache as he commanded in tones of authority:

“Now then, no more on it — let’s ‘a’e thee down here, an’ no more messin’ about!”

The boy tried to creep over the ridge of the roof and escape down the other

side. Immediately the brats rushed round yelling to the other side of the row, and pieces of red-burnt gravel began to fly over the roof. Sam crouched against the chimney.

“Got ‘im!” yelled one little devil “Got ‘im! Hi — go again!” A shower of stones came down, scattering the women and the policeman. The mother rushed from the house and made a wild onslaught on the throwers. She caught one and flung him down. Immediately the rest turned and aimed their missiles at her. Then George and the policeman and I dashed after the young wretches, and the women ran to see what happened to their offspring. We caught two lads of fourteen or so, and made the policeman haul them after us. The rest fled.

When we returned to the field of battle, Sam had gone too.

“If ‘e ‘asna slived off!” cried the woman with a squint. “But I’ll see him locked up for this.”

At this moment a band of missioners from one of the chapels or churches arrived at the end of the row, and the little harmonium began to bray, and the place vibrated with the sound of a woman’s powerful voice, propped round by several others, singing:

“At even ‘ere the sun was set — ”

Everybody hurried towards the new noise, save the policeman with his captives, the woman with the squint, and the woman with the family comb. I told the limb of the law he’d better get rid of the two boys and find out what mischief the others were after.

Then I enquired of the woman with the squint what was the matter.

“Thirty-seven young ‘uns ‘an we ‘ad from that doe, an’ there’s no knowin’ ‘ow many more, if they ‘adn’t a-gone an’ ate-n ‘er,” she replied, lapsing, now her fury was spent, into sullen resentment.

“An’ niver a word should we a’ known,” added the familycomb-bearer, “but for that blessed cat of ourn, as scrat it up.”

“Indeed,” said I, “the rabbit?”

“No, there were nöwt left but th’ skin — they’d seen ter that, a thieving, dirt-eatin’ lot.”

“When was that?” said I.

“This mortal night — an’ there was th’ head an’ th’ back in th’ dirty stewpot — I can show you this instant — I’ve got ‘em in our pantry for a proof, ‘aven’t I, Martha?”

“A fat lot o’ good it is — but I’ll rip th’ neck out of ‘im, if ever I lay ‘ands on ‘im.”

At last I made out that Samuel had stolen a large, lop-eared doe out of a bunch in the coal-house of the squint-eyed lady, had skinned it, buried the skin, and

offered his booty to his mother as a wild rabbit, trapped. The doe had been the chief item of the Annables' Sunday dinner — albeit a portion was unluckily saved till Monday, providing undeniable proof of the theft. The owner of the rabbit had supposed the creature to have escaped. This peaceful supposition had been destroyed by the comb-bearer's seeing her cat, scratching in the Annable garden, unearthing the white and brown doe-skin, after which the trouble had begun.

The squint-eyed woman was not so hard to manage. I talked to her as if she were some male friend of mine, only appealing to her womanliness with all the soft sadness I could press into the tones of my voice. In the end she was mollified, and even tender and motherly in her feelings towards the unfortunate family. I left on her dresser the half-crown I shrank from offering her, and, having reduced the comb-wearer also, I marched off, carrying the stewpot and the fragments of the ill-fated doe to the cottage of the widow, where George and the girls awaited me.

The house was in a woeful state. In the rocking-chair, beside the high guard that surrounded the hearth, sat the mother, rocking, looking sadly shaken now her excitement was over. Lettie was nursing the little baby, and Emily the next child. George was smoking his pipe and trying to look natural. The little kitchen was crowded — there was no room — there was not even a place on the table for the stew-jar, so I gathered together cups and mugs containing tea sops, and set down the vessel of ignominy on the much-slopped tea-cloth. The four little children were striped and patched with tears — at my entrance one under the table recommenced to weep, so I gave him my pencil which pushed in and out, but which pushes in and out no more.

The sight of the stewpot affected the mother afresh. She wept again, crying:

“An' I niver thought as 'ow it were aught but a snared 'un; as if I should set 'im on ter thieve their old doe; an' tough it was an' all; an' 'im a thief, an' me called all the names they could lay their tongues to; an' then in my bit of a pantry, takin' the very pots out; that stewpot as I brought all the way from Nottingham, an' I've 'ad it afore our Minnie wor born — ”

The baby, the little baby, then began to cry. The mother got up suddenly, and took it.

“Oh, come then, come then, my pet. Why, why cos they shanna, no they shanna. Yes, he's his mother's least little lad, he is, a little 'un. Hush then, there, there — what's a matter, my little?”

She hushed the baby, and herself. At length she asked: ““As th' p'liceman gone as well?”

“Yes — it's all right,” I said.

She sighed deeply, and her look of weariness was painful to see.

“How old is your eldest?” I asked.

“Fanny — she’s fourteen. She’s out service at Websters. Then Jim, as is thirteen next month — let’s see, yes, it is next month — he’s gone to Flints — farming. They can’t do much — an’ I shan’t let ‘em go into th’ pit, if I can help it. My husband always used to say they should never go in th’ pit.”

“They can’t do much for you.”

“They dun what they can. But it’s a hard job, it is, ter keep ‘em all goin’. Wi’ weshin’, an’ th’ parish pay, an’ five shillin’ from th’ squire — it’s ‘ard. It was diff’rent when my husband was alive. It ought ter ‘a been me as should ‘a died — I don’t seem as if I can manage ‘em — they get beyond me. I wish I was dead this minnit, an’ ‘im ‘ere. I can’t understand it: ‘im as wor so capable, to be took, an’ me left. ‘E wor a man in a thousand, ‘e wor — full o’ management like a gentleman. I wisht it was me as ‘ad a been took. ‘An ‘e’s restless, ‘cos ‘e knows I find it ‘ard. I stood at th’ door last night, when they was all asleep, looking out over th’ pit pond — an’ I saw a light, an’ I knowed it was ‘im — cos it wor our weddin’ day yesterday — by the day an’ th’ date. An’ I said to ‘im, ‘Frank, is it thee, Frank? I’m all right, I’m gettin’ on all right’ — an’ then ‘e went; seemed to go ower the whimsey an’ back towards th’ wood. I know it wor ‘im, an’ ‘e couldna rest, thinkin’ I couldna manage — ”

After a while we left, promising to go again, and to see after the safety of Sam.

It was quite dark, and the lamps were lighted in the houses. We could hear the throb of the fan-house engines, and the soft whirr of the fan.

“Isn’t it cruel?” said Emily plaintively.

“Wasn’t the man a wretch to marry the woman like that,” added Lettie with decision.

“Speak of Lady Chrystabel,” said I, and then there was silence. “I suppose he did not know what he was doing, any more than the rest of us.”

“I thought you were going to your aunt’s — to the Ram Inn,” said Lettie to George when they came to the cross-roads.

“Not now — it’s too late,” he answered quietly. “You will come round our way, won’t you?”

“Yes,” she said.

We were eating bread and milk at the farm, and the father was talking with vague sadness and reminiscence, lingering over the thought of their departure from the old house. He was a pure romanticist, forever seeking the colour of the past in the present’s monotony. He seemed settling down to an easy contented middle age, when the unrest on the farm and development of his children

quicken him with fresh activity. He read books on the land question and modern novels. In the end he became an advanced radical, almost a socialist. Occasionally his letters appeared in the newspapers. He had taken a new hold on life.

Over supper he became enthusiastic about Canada, and to watch him, his ruddy face lighted up, his burly form straight and nerved with excitement, was to admire him; to hear him, his words of thoughtful common sense all warm with a young man's hopes, was to love him. At forty-five he was more spontaneous and enthusiastic than George, and far more happy and hopeful.

Emily would not agree to go away with them — what should she do in Canada, she said — and she did not want the little ones “to be drudges on a farm — in the end to be nothing but cattle”.

“Nay,” said her father gently, “Mollie shall learn the dairying, and David will just be right to take to the place when I give up. It'll perhaps be a bit rough and hard at first, but when we've got over it we shall think it was one of the best times — like you do.”

“And you, George?” asked Lettie.

“I'm not going. What should I go for? There's nothing at the end of it only a long life. It's like a day here in June — a long work day, pleasant enough, and when it's done you sleep well — but it's work and sleep and comfort — half a life. It's not enough. What's the odds? — I might as well be Flower, the mare.”

His father looked at him gravely and thoughtfully.

“Now it seems to me so different,” he said sadly, “it seems to me you can live your own life, and be independent, and think as you like without being choked with harassments. I feel as if I could keep on — like that — ”

“I'm going to get more out of my life, I hope,” laughed George. “No. Do you know?” and here he turned straight to Lettie. “Do you know, I'm going to get pretty rich, so that I can do what I want for a bit. I want to see what it's like, to taste all sides — to taste the towns. I want to know what I've got in me. I'll get rich — or at least I'll have a good try.”

“And pray how will you manage it?” asked Emily.

“I'll begin by marrying — and then you'll see.”

Emily laughed with scorn — “Let us see you begin.”

“Ah, you're not wise!” said the father sadly — then, laughing, he said to Lettie in coaxing, confidential tones, “But he'll come out there to me in a year or two — you see if he doesn't.”

“I wish I could come now,” said I.

“If you would,” said George, “I'd go with you. But not by myself, to become a fat stupid fool, like my own cattle.”

While he was speaking Gyp burst into a rage of barking. The father got up to see what it was, and George followed. Trip, the great bull-terrier, rushed out of the house shaking the buildings with his roars. We saw the white dog flash down the yard, we heard a rattle from the hen-house ladder, and in a moment a scream from the orchard side.

We rushed forward, and there on the sharp bank-side lay a little figure, face down, and Trip standing over it, looking rather puzzled.

I picked up the child — it was Sam. He struggled as soon as he felt my hands, but I bore him off to the house. He wriggled like a wild hare, and kicked, but at last he was still. I set him on the hearth-rug to examine him. He was a quaint little figure, dressed in a man's trousers that had been botched small for him, and a coat hanging in rags.

“Did he get hold of you?” asked the father. “Where was it he got hold of you?”

But the child stood unanswering, his little pale lips pinched together, his eyes staring out at nothing. Emily went on her knees before him, and put her face close to his, saying, with a voice that made one shrink from its unbridled emotion of caress:

“Did he hurt you, eh? — tell us where he hurt you.” She would have put her arms around him, but he shrank away.

“Look here,” said Lettie, “it's here — and it's bleeding. Go and get some water, Emily, and some rags. Come on, Sam, let me look and I'll put some rags round it. Come along.”

She took the child and stripped him of his grotesque garments. Trip had given him a sharp grab on the thigh before he had realised that he was dealing with a little boy. It was not much, however, and Lettie soon had it bathed, and anointed with elder-flower ointment. On the boy's body were several scars and bruises — evidently he had rough times. Lettie tended to him and dressed him again. He endured these attentions like a trapped wild rabbit — never looking at us, never opening his lips — only shrinking slightly. When Lettie had put on him his torn little shirt, and had gathered the great breeches about him, Emily went to him to coax him and make him at home. She kissed him, and talked to him with her full vibration of emotional caress. It seemed almost to suffocate him. Then she tried to feed him with bread and milk from a spoon, but he would not open his mouth, and he turned his head away.

“Leave him alone — take no notice of him,” said Lettie, lifting him into the chimney seat, with the basin of bread and milk beside him. Emily fetched the two kittens out of their basket and put them too beside him.

“I wonder how many eggs he'd got,” said the father, laughing softly.

“Hush!” said Lettie. “When do you think you will go to Canada, Mr Saxton?”

“Next spring — it’s no good going before.”

“And then you’ll marry?” asked Lettie of George.

“Before then — oh, before then,” he said.

“Why — how is it you are suddenly in such a hurry? — When will it be?”

“When are you marrying?” he asked in reply.

“I don’t know,” she said, coming to a full stop.

“Then I don’t know,” he said, taking a large wedge of cheese and biting a piece from it.

“It was fixed for June,” she said, recovering herself at his suggestion of hope.

“July!” said Emily.

“Father!” said he, holding the piece of cheese up before him as he spoke — he was evidently nervous: “Would you advise me to marry Meg?”

His father started, and said:

“Why, was you thinking of doing?”

“Yes — all things considered.”

“Well — if she suits you — ”

“We’re cousins — ”

“If you want her, I suppose you won’t let that hinder you. She’ll have a nice bit of money, and if you like her — ”

“I like her all right — I shan’t go out to Canada with her though. I shall stay at the Ram — for the sake of the life.”

“It’s a poor life, that!” said the father, ruminating.

George laughed. “A bit mucky!” he said — “But it’ll do. It would need Cyril or Lettie to keep me alive in Canada.”

It was a bold stroke — everybody was embarrassed.

“Well,” said the father, “I suppose we can’t have everything we want — we generally have to put up with the next best thing — don’t we, Lettie?” — he laughed. Lettie flushed furiously.

“I don’t know,” she said. “You can generally get what you want if you want it badly enough. Of course — if you don’t mind — ”

She rose and went across to Sam.

He was playing with the kittens. One was patting and cuffing his bare toe, which had poked through his stocking. He pushed and teased the little scamp with his toe till it rushed at him, clinging, tickling, biting till he gave little bubbles of laughter, quite forgetful of us. Then the kitten was tired, and ran off. Lettie shook her skirts, and directly the two playful mites rushed upon it, darting round her, rolling head over heels, and swinging from the soft cloth. Suddenly becoming aware that they felt tired, the young things trotted away and cuddled

together by the fender, where in an instant they were asleep. Almost as suddenly, Sam sank into drowsiness.

“He’d better go to bed,” said the father.

“Put him in my bed,” said George. “David would wonder what had happened.”

“Will you go to bed, Sam?” asked Emily, holding out her arms to him, and immediately startling him by the terrible gentleness of her persuasion. He retreated behind Lettie.

“Come along,” said the latter, and she quickly took him and undressed him. Then she picked him up, and his bare legs hung down in front of her. His head drooped drowsily on to her shoulder, against her neck.

She put down her face to touch the loose riot of his ruddy hair. She stood so, quiet, still and wistful, for a few moments; perhaps she was vaguely aware that the attitude was beautiful for her, and irresistibly appealing to George, who loved, above all in her, her delicate dignity of tenderness. Emily waited with the lighted candle for her some moments.

When she came down there was a softness about her. “Now,” said I to myself, “if George asks her again he is wise.”

“He is asleep,” she said quietly.

“I’m thinking we might as well let him stop while we’re here, should we, George?” said the father.

“Eh?”

“We’ll keep him here while we are here — ”

“Oh — the lad! I should. Yes — he’d be better here than up yonder.”

“Ah, yes — ever so much. It is good of you,” said Lettie. “Oh, he’ll make no difference,” said the father.

“Not a bit,” added George.

“What about his mother?” asked Lettie.

“I’ll call and tell her in the morning,” said George. “Yes,” she said, “call and tell her.”

Then she put on her things to go. He also put on his cap. “Are you coming a little way, Emily?” I asked.

She ran, laughing, with bright eyes as we went out into the darkness.

We waited for them at the wood gate. We all lingered, not knowing what to say. Lettie said finally:

“Well — it’s no good — the grass is wet — Good night — Good night, Emily.”

“Good night,” he said, with regret and hesitation, and a trifle of impatience in his voice and his manner. He lingered still a moments; she hesitated — then she

struck off sharply.

“He has not asked her, the idiot!” I said to myself.

“Really,” she said bitterly, when we were going up the garden path, “you think rather quiet folks have a lot in them, but it’s only stupidity — they are mostly fools.”

CHAPTER V

AN ARROW FROM THE IMPATIENT GOD

On an afternoon three or four days after the recovery of Sam. matters became complicated. George, as usual, discovered that he had been dawdling in the portals of his desires, when the doors came to with a bang. Then he hastened to knock.

“Tell her,” he said, “I will come up tomorrow after milking — tell her I’m coming to see her.”

On the evening of that morrow, the first person to put in an appearance was a garrulous spinster who had called ostensibly to enquire into the absence of the family from church: “I said to Elizabeth, ‘Now what a thing if anything happens to them just now, and the wedding is put off.’ I felt I must come and make myself sure — that nothing had happened. We all feel so interested in Lettie just now. I’m sure everybody is talking of her, she seems in the air. — I really think we shall have thunder: I hope we shan’t. — Yes, we are all so glad that Mr Tempest is content with a wife from at home — the others, his father and Mr Robert and the rest — they were none of them to be suited at home, though to be sure the wives they brought were nothing — indeed they were not — as many a one said — Mrs Robert was a paltry choice — neither in looks or manner had she anything to boast of — if her family was older than mine. Family wasn’t much to make up for what she lacked in other things, that I could easily have supplied her with; and, oh, dear, what an object she is now, with her wisp of hair and her spectacles! She for one hasn’t kept much of her youth. But when is the exact date, dear? — Some say this and some that, but as I always say, I never trust a ‘they say’. It is so nice that you have that cousin a canon to come down for the service, Mrs Beardsall, and Sir Walter Houghton for the groom’s man! What? — You don’t think so — oh, but I know, dear, I know; you do like to treasure up these secrets, don’t you; you are greedy for all the good things just now.”

She shook her head at Lettie, and the jet ornaments on her bonnet twittered like a thousand wagging little tongues. Then she sighed, and was about to recommence her song, when she happened to turn her head and to espy a

telegraph-boy coming up the path.

“Oh, I hope nothing is wrong, dear — I hope nothing is wrong! I always feel so terrified of a telegram. You’d better not open it yourself, dear — don’t now — let your brother go.”

Lettie, who had turned pale, hurried to the door. The sky was very dark — there was a mutter of thunder.

“It’s all right,” said Lettie, trembling, “it’s only to say he’s coming tonight.”

“I’m very thankful, very thankful,” cried the spinster. “It might have been so much worse. I’m sure I never open a telegram without feeling as if I was opening a death-blow. I’m so glad, dear; it must have upset you. What news to take back to the village, supposing something had happened!” she sighed again, and the jet drops twinkled ominously in the thunder light, as if declaring they would make something of it yet.

It was six o’clock. The air relaxed a little, and the thunder was silent. George would be coming about seven; and the spinster showed no signs of departure; and Leslie might arrive at any moment. Lettie fretted and fidgeted, and the old woman gabbled on. I looked out of the window at the water and the sky.

The day had been uncertain. In the morning it was warm, and the sunshine had played and raced among the cloud-shadows on the hills. Later, great cloud masses had stalked up from the north-west and crowded thick across the sky; in this little night, sleet and wind, and rain whirled furiously. Then the sky had laughed at us again. In the sunshine came the spinster. But as she talked, over the hill-top rose the wide forehead of the cloud, rearing slowly, ominously higher. A first messenger of storm passed darkly over the sky, leaving the way clear again.

“I will go round to Highclose,” said Lettie. “I am sure it will be stormy again. Are you coming down the road, Miss Slaught, or do you mind if I leave you?”

“I will go, dear, if you think there is going to be another storm — I dread it so. Perhaps I had better wait — ”

“Oh, it will not come over for an hour, I am sure. We read the weather well out here, don’t we, Cyril? You’ll come with me, won’t you?”

We three set off, the gossip leaning on her toes, tripping between us. She was much gratified by Lettie’s information concerning the proposals for the new home. We left her in a glow of congratulatory smiles on the highway. But the clouds had upreared, and stretched in two great arms, reaching overhead. The little spinster hurried along, but the black hands of the clouds kept pace and clutched her. A sudden gust of wind shuddered in the trees, and rushed upon her cloak, blowing its bugles.

An icy raindrop smote into her cheek. She hurried on, praying fervently for her bonnet’s sake that she might reach Widow Harriman’s cottage before the

burst came. But the thunder crashed in her ear, and a host of hailstones flew at her. In despair and anguish she fled from under the ash trees; she reached the widow's garden gate, when out leapt the lightning full at her. "Put me in the stair-hole!" she cried. "Where is the stair-hole?"

Glancing wildly round, she saw a ghost. It was the reflection of the sainted spinster, Hilda Slaughter, in the widow's mirror; a reflection with a bonnet fallen backwards, and to it attached a thick rope of grey-brown hair. The author of the ghost instinctively twisted to look at the back of her head. She saw some ends of grey hair, and fled into the open stair-hole as into a grave.

We had gone back home till the storm was over, and then, restless, afraid of the arrival of George, we set out again into the wet evening. It was fine and chilly, and already a mist was rising from Nethermere, veiling the farther shore, where the trees rose loftily, suggesting groves beyond the Nile. The birds were singing riotously. The fresh green hedge glistened vividly and glowed again with intense green. Looking at the water, I perceived a delicate flush from the west hiding along it. The mist licked and wreathed up the shores; from the hidden white distance came the mournful cry of water-fowl. We went slowly along behind a heavy cart, which clanked and rattled under the dripping trees, with the hoofs of the horse moving with broad thuds in front. We passed over black patches where the ash flowers were beaten down, and under great massed clouds of green sycamore. At the sudden curve of the road, near the foot of the hill, I stopped to break off a spray of larch, where the soft cones were heavy as raspberries, and gay like flowers with petals. The shaken bough spattered a heavy shower on my face, of drops so cold that they seemed to sink into my blood and chill it.

"Hark!" said Lettie, as I was drying my face. There was the quick patter of a motor-car coming downhill. The heavy cart was drawn across the road to rest, and the driver hurried to turn the horse back. It moved with painful slowness, and we stood in the road in suspense. Suddenly, before we knew it, the car was dropping down on us, coming at us in a curve, having rounded the horse and cart. Lettie stood faced with terror. Leslie saw her, and swung round the wheels on the sharp, curving hill-side; looking only to see that he should miss her. The car slid sideways; the mud crackled under the wheels, and the machine went crashing into Nethermere. It caught the edge of the old stone wall with a smash. Then for a few moments I think I was blind. When I saw again, Leslie was lying across the broken hedge, his head hanging down the bank, his face covered with blood; the car rested strangely on the brink of the water, crumpled as if it had sunk down to rest.

Lettie, with hands shuddering, was wiping the blood from his eyes with a

piece of her underskirt. In a moment she said:

“He is not dead — let us take him home — let us take him quickly.”

I ran and took the wicket-gate off its hinges and laid him on that. His legs trailed down, but we carried him thus, she at the feet, I at the head. She made me stop and put him down. I thought the weight was too much for her, but it was not that.

“I can’t bear to see his hand hanging, knocking against the bushes and things.”

It was not many yards to the house. A maidservant saw us, came running out, and went running back, like the frightened lapwing from the wounded cat.

We waited until the doctor came. There was a deep graze down the side of the head — serious, but not dangerous; there was a cut across the cheek-bone that would leave a scar; and the collar-bone was broken. I stayed until he had recovered consciousness. “Lettie.” He wanted Lettie, so she had to remain at Highclose all night. I went home to tell my mother.

When I went to bed I looked across at the lighted windows of Highclose, and the lights trailed mistily towards me across the water. The cedar stood dark guard against the house; bright the windows were, like the stars, covering their torment in brightness. The sky was glittering with sharp lights — they are too far off to take trouble for us, so little, little almost to nothingness. All the great hollow vastness roars overhead, and the stars are only sparks that whirl and spin in the restless space. The earth must listen to us; she covers her face with a thin veil of mist, and is sad; she soaks up our blood tenderly, in the darkness, grieving, and in the light she soothes and reassures us. Here on our earth is sympathy and hope, the heavens have nothing but distances.

A corn-crake talked to me across the valley, talked and talked endlessly, asking and answering in hoarse tones from the sleeping, mist-hidden meadows. The monotonous voice, that on past summer evenings had had pleasant notes of romance, now was intolerable to me. Its inflexible harshness and cacophony seemed like the voice of fate speaking out its tuneless perseverance in the night.

In the morning Lettie came home wan, sad-eyed, and self-reproachful. After a short time they came for her, as he wanted her again.

When in the evening I went to see George, he too was very despondent.

“It’s no good now,” said I. “You should have insisted and made your own destiny.”

“Yes — perhaps so,” he drawled in his best reflective manner.

“I would have had her — she’d have been glad if you’d done as you wanted with her. She won’t leave him till he’s strong, and he’ll marry her before then. You should have had the courage to risk yourself — you’re always too careful of yourself and your own poor feelings — you never could brace yourself up to a

shower-bath of contempt and hard usage, so you've saved your feelings and lost — not much, I suppose — you couldn't."

"But — " he began, not looking up; and I laughed at him.

"Go on," I said.

"Well — she was engaged to him —

"Pah — you thought you were too good to be rejected."

He was very pale, and when he was pale, the tan on his skin looked sickly. He regarded me with his dark eyes, which were now full of misery and a child's big despair.

"And nothing else," I completed, with which the little, exhausted gunboat of my anger wrecked and sank utterly. Yet no thoughts would spread sail on the sea of my pity: I was like water that heaves with yearning, and is still.

Leslie was very ill for some time. He had a slight brain fever, and was delirious, insisting that Lettie was leaving him. She stayed most of her days at Highclose.

One day in June he lay resting on a deck-chair in the shade of the cedar, and she was sitting by him. It was a yellow, sultry day, when all the atmosphere seemed inert, and all things were languid.

"Don't you think, dear," she said, "it would be better for us not to marry?"

He lifted his head nervously from the cushions; his face was emblazoned with a livid red bar on a field of white, and he looked worn, wistful.

"Do you mean not yet?" he asked.

"Yes — and, perhaps — perhaps never."

"Ha," he laughed, sinking down again. "I must be getting like myself again, if you begin to tease me."

"But," she said, struggling valiantly, "I'm not sure I ought to marry you."

He laughed again, though a little apprehensively.

"Are you afraid I shall always be weak in my noddle?" he asked. "But you wait a month."

"No, that doesn't bother me — "

"Oh, doesn't it!"

"Silly boy — no, it's myself."

"I'm sure I've made no complaint about you."

"Not likely — but I wish you'd let me go."

"I'm a strong man to hold you, aren't I? Look at my muscular paw!" — he held out his hands, frail and white with sickness.

"You know you hold me — and I want you to let me go. I don't want to

"To what?"

"To get married at all — let me be, let me go."

“What for?”

“Oh — for my sake.”

“You mean you don’t love me?”

“Love — love — I don’t know anything about it. But I can’t — we can’t be — don’t you see — oh, what do they say — flesh of one flesh.”

“Why?” he whispered, like a child that is told some tale of mystery.

She looked at him, as he lay propped upon his elbow, turning towards hers his white face of fear and perplexity, like a child that cannot understand, and is afraid, and wants to cry. Then slowly tears gathered full in her eyes, and she wept from pity and despair.

This excited him terribly. He got up from his chair, and the cushions fell on to the grass.

“What’s the matter, what’s the matter! — Oh, Lettie, — is it me? — don’t you want me now? — is that it? — tell me, tell me now, tell me,” — he grasped her wrists, and tried to pull her hands from her face. The tears were running down his cheeks. She felt him trembling, and the sound of his voice alarmed her from herself. She hastily smeared the tears from her eyes, got up, and put her arms round him. He hid his head on her shoulder and sobbed, while she bent over him, and so they cried out their cries, till they were ashamed, looking round to see if anyone were near. Then she hurried about, picking up the cushions, making him lie down, and arranging him comfortably, so that she might be busy. He was querulous, like a sick, indulged child. He would have her arm under his shoulders, and her face near his.

“Well,” he said, smiling faintly again after a time. “You are naughty to give us such rough times — is it for the pleasure of making up, bad little Schnucke — aren’t you?”

She kept close to him, and he did not see the wince and quiver of her lips.

“I wish I was strong again — couldn’t we go boating — or ride on horseback — and you’d have to behave then. Do you think I shall be strong in a month? Stronger than you?”

“I hope so,” she said.

“Why, I don’t believe you do, I believe you like me like this — so that you can lay me down and smooth me — don’t you, quiet girl?”

“When you’re good.”

“Ah, well, in a month I shall be strong, and we’ll be married and go to Switzerland — do you hear, Schnucke — you won’t be able to be naughty any more then. Oh — do you want to go away from me again?”

“No — only my arm is dead,” she drew it from beneath him, standing up, swinging it, smiling because it hurt her.

“Oh, my darling — what a shame! Oh, I am a brute, a kiddish brute. I wish I was strong again, Lettie, and didn’t do these things.”

“You boy — it’s nothing.” She smiled at him again.

CHAPTER VI

THE COURTING

During Leslie's illness I strolled down to the mill one Saturday evening. I met George tramping across the yard with a couple of buckets of swill, and eleven young pigs rushing squealing about his legs, shrieking in an agony of suspense. He poured the stuff into a trough with luscious gurgle, and instantly ten noses were dipped in, and ten little mouths began to slobber. Though there was plenty of room for ten, yet they shouldered and shoved and struggled to capture a larger space, and many little trotters dabbled and spilled the stuff, and the ten sucking, clapping snouts twitched fiercely, and twenty little eyes glared askance, like so many points of wrath. They gave uneasy, gasping grunts in their haste. The unhappy eleventh rushed from point to point trying to push in his snout, but for his pains he got rough squeezing, and sharp grabs on the ears. Then he lifted up his face and screamed screams of grief and wrath unto the evening sky.

But the ten little gluttons only twitched their ears to make sure there was no danger in the noise, and they sucked harder, with much spilling and slobbering. George laughed like a sardonic Jove, but at last he gave ear, and kicked the ten gluttons from the trough, and allowed the residue to the eleventh. This one, poor wretch, almost wept with relief as he sucked and swallowed in sobs, casting his little eyes apprehensively upwards, though he did not lift his nose from the trough, as he heard the vindictive shrieks of ten little fiends kept at bay by George. The solitary feeder, shivering with apprehension, rubbed the wood bare with his snout, then, turning up to heaven his eyes of gratitude, he reluctantly left the trough. I expected to see the ten fall upon him and devour him, but they did not; they rushed upon the empty trough, and rubbed the wood still drier, shrieking with misery.

"How like life," I laughed.

"Fine litter," said George; "there were fourteen, only that damned she-devil, Circe, went and ate three of 'em before we got at her."

The great ugly sow came leering up as he spoke.

"Why don't you fatten her up, and devour her, the old gargoyle? She's an offence to the universe."

“Nay — she’s a fine sow.”

I snorted, and he laughed, and the old sow grunted with contempt, and her little eyes twisted towards us with a demoniac leer as she rolled past.

“What are you going to do tonight!” I asked. “Going out?”

“I’m going courting,” he replied, grinning.

“Oh! — wish I were!”

“You can come if you like — and tell me where I make mistakes, since you’re an expert on such matters.”

“Don’t you get on very well then?” I asked.

“Oh, all right — it’s easy enough when you don’t care a damn. Besides, you can always have a Johnny Walker. That’s the best of courting at the Ram Inn. I’ll go and get ready.”

In the kitchen Emily sat grinding out some stitching from a big old hand machine that stood on the table before her: she was making shirts for Sam, I presumed. That little fellow, who was installed at the farm, was seated by her side firing off words from a reading book. The machine rumbled and rattled on, like a whole factory at work, for an inch or two, during which time Sam shouted in shrill explosions like irregular pistol shots: “Do — not — pot — ”

“Put!” cried Emily from the machine; “put — ” shrilled the child, “the soot — on — my — boot — ,” there the machine broke down, and, frightened by the sound of his own voice, the boy stopped in bewilderment and looked round.

“Go on!” said Emily, as she poked in the teeth of the old machine with the scissors, then pulled and prodded again. He began, “ — boot — but — you — — ” here he died off again, made nervous by the sound of his voice in the stillness. Emily sucked a piece of cotton and pushed it through the needle.

“Now go on,” she said, “ — ’but you may’.”

“But — you — may — shoot”: — he shouted away, reassured by the rumble of the machine: “Shoot — the — fox. I — I — It — is — at — the — rot — ”

“Root,” shrieked Emily, as she guided the stuff through the doddering jaws of the machine.

“Root,” echoed the boy, and he went off with these crackers: “Root — of — the — tree.”

“Next one!” cried Emily.

“Put — the — ol — ” began the boy.

“What?” cried Emily.

“Ole — on — ”

“Wait a bit!” cried Emily, and then the machine broke down.

“Hang!” she ejaculated.

“Hang!” shouted the child.

She laughed, and leaned over to him:

“Put the oil in the pan to boil, while I toil in the soil’ — Oh, Cyril, I never knew you were there! Go along now, Sam: David ‘11 be at the back somewhere.”

“He’s in the bottom garden,” said I, and the child ran out.

Directly George came in from the scullery, drying himself. He stood on the hearth-rug as he rubbed himself, and surveyed his reflection in the mirror above the high mantelpiece; he looked at himself and smiled. I wondered that he found such satisfaction in his image, seeing that there was a gap in his chin, and an uncertain moth-eaten appearance in one cheek. Mrs Saxton still held this mirror an object of dignity; it was fairly large, and had a well-carven frame; but it left gaps and spots and scratches in one’s countenance, and even where it was brightest, it gave one’s reflection a far-away dim aspect. Notwithstanding, George smiled at himself as he combed his hair, and twisted his moustache.

“You seem to make a good impression on yourself,” said I.

“I was thinking I looked all right — sort of face to go courting with,” he replied, laughing: “You just arrange a patch of black to come and hide your faults — and you’re all right.”

“I always used to think,” said Emily, “that the black spots had swallowed so many faces they were full up, and couldn’t take any more — and the rest was misty because there were so many faces lapped one over the other — reflected.”

“You do see yourself a bit ghostish — ” said he, “on a background of your ancestors. I always think when you stop in an old place like this you sort of keep company with your ancestors too much; I sometimes feel like a bit of the old building walking about; the old feelings of the old folks stick to you like the lichens on the walls; you sort of get hoary.”

“That’s it — it’s true,” asserted the father, “people whose families have shifted about much don’t know how it feels. That’s why I’m going to Canada.”

“And I’m going in a pub,” said George, “where it’s quite different — plenty of life.”

“Life!” echoed Emily with contempt.

“That’s the word, my wench,” replied her brother, lapsing into the dialect. “That’s what I’m after. We know such a lot, an’ we know nowt.”

“You do — ” said the father, turning to me, “you stay in one place, generation after generation, and you seem to get proud, an’ look on things outside as foolishness. There’s many a thing as any common man knows, as we haven’t a glimpse of. We keep on thinking and feeling the same, year after year, till we’ve only got one side; an’ I suppose they’ve done it before us.”

“It’s ‘Good night an’ God bless you,’ to th’ owd place, granfeythers an’

grammothers,” laughed George as he ran upstairs — ”an’ off we go on the gallivant,” he shouted from the landing.

His father shook his head, saying:

“I can’t make out how it is, he’s so different. I suppose it’s being in love — ”

We went into the barn to get the bicycles to cycle over to Greymede. George struck a match to look for his pump, and he noticed a great spider scuttle off into the corner of the wall, and sit peeping out at him like a hoary little ghoul.

“How are you, old chap?” said George, nodding to him — ”Thought he looked like an old grandfather of mine,” he said to me, laughing, as he pumped up the tyres of the old bicycle for me.

It was Saturday night, so the bar parlour of the Ram Inn was fairly full.

“Hello, George — come co’tin’?” was the cry, followed by a nod and a “Good evenin’,” to me, who was a stranger in the parlour.

“It’s raight for thaigh,” said a fat young fellow with an unwilling white moustache, “ — tha can co’te as much as ter likes ter ‘a’e, as well as th’ lass, an’ it cost thee nöwt — ” at which the room laughed, taking pipes from mouths to do so. George sat down, looking round.

“Owd on a bit,” said a black-whiskered man, “tha mun ‘a ‘e patience when to ‘t co’tin’ a lass. Ow’s puttin’ th’ öwd lady ter bed — ’ark thee — can t’ ‘ear — that wor th’ bed latts goin’ bang. Ow’ll be dern in a minnit now, gie ‘er time ter tuck th’ öwd lady up. Can’ ter ‘ear ‘er say ‘er prayers.”

“Strike!” cried the fat young man, exploding:

“Fancy th’ öwd lady sayin’ ‘er prayers! — it ‘ud be enough ter ma’e ‘er false teeth drop out.”

The room laughed.

They began to tell tales about the old landlady. She had practised bone-setting, in which she was very skilful. People come to her from long distances that she might divine their trouble and make right their limbs. She would accept no fee.

Once she had gone up to Dr Fullwood to give him a piece of her mind, inasmuch as he had let a child go for three weeks with a broken collar-bone, whilst treating him for dislocation. The doctor had tried the high hand with her, since when, wherever he went, the miners placed their hands on their shoulders, and groaned: “Oh my collar-bone!”

Here Meg came in. She gave a bright, quick, bird-like look at George, and flushed a brighter red.

“I thought you wasn’t cummin’,” she said.

“Dunna thee bother — ’e’d none stop away,” said the black-whiskered man.

She brought us glasses of whisky, and moved about supplying the men, who chaffed with her honestly and good-naturedly. Then she went out, but we

remained in our corner. The men talked on the most peculiar subjects: there was a bitter discussion as to whether London is or is not a seaport — the matter was thrashed out with heat; then an embryo artist set the room ablaze by declaring there were only three colours, red, yellow, and blue, and the rest were not colours, they were mixtures: this amounted almost to atheism and one man asked the artist to dare to declare that his brown breeches were not a colour, which the artist did, and almost had to fight for it; next they came to strength, and George won a bet of five shillings, by lifting a piano; then they settled down, and talked sex, sotto voce, one man giving startling accounts of Japanese and Chinese prostitutes in Liverpool. After this the talk split up: a farmer began to counsel George how to manage the farm attached to the inn, another bargained with him about horses, and argued about cattle, a tailor advised him thickly to speculate, and unfolded a fine secret by which a man might make money, if he had the go to do it — so on, till eleven o'clock. Then Bill came and called "time!" and the place was empty, and the room shivered as a little fresh air came in between the foul tobacco smoke, and the smell of drink, and foul breath.

We were both affected by the whisky we had drunk. I was ashamed to find that when I put out my hand to take my glass, or to strike a match, I missed my mark, and fumbled; my hands seemed hardly to belong to me, and my feet were not much more sure. Yet I was acutely conscious of every change in myself and in him; it seemed as if I could make my body drunk, but could never intoxicate my mind, which roused itself and kept the sharpest guard. George was frankly half drunk: his eyelids sloped over his eyes and his speech was thick; when he put out his hand he knocked over his glass, and the stuff was spilled all over the table; he only laughed. I, too, felt a great prompting to giggle on every occasion, and I marvelled at myself.

Meg came into the room when all the men had gone.

"Come on, my duck," he said, waving his arm with the generous flourish of a tipsy man. "Come an' sit 'ere."

"Shan't you come in th' kitchen?" she asked, looking round on the tables where pots and glasses stood in little pools of liquor, and where spent match and tobacco-ash littered the white wood.

"No — what for? — come an' sit 'ere!" — he was reluctant to get on his feet; I knew it and laughed inwardly; I also laughed to hear his thick speech, and his words which seemed to slur against his cheeks.

She went and sat by him, having moved the little table with its spilled liquor.

"They've been tellin' me how to get rich," he said, nodding his head and laughing, showing his teeth, "An' I'm goin' ter show 'em. You see, Meg, you see — I'm goin' ter show 'em I can be as good as them, you see."

“Why,” said she, indulgent, “what are you going to do?”

“You wait a bit an’ see — they don’t know yet what I can do — they don’t know — you don’t know — none of you know.”

“An’ what shall you do when we’re rich, George?”

“Do? — I shall do what I like. I can make as good a show as anybody else, can’t I?” — he put his face very near to hers, and nodded at her, but she did not turn away. “Yes — I’ll see what it’s like to have my fling. We’ve been too cautious, our family has — an’ I have; we’re frightened of ourselves, to do anything. I’m goin’ to do what I like, my duck, now — I don’t care — I don’t care — that!” — he brought his hand down heavily on the table nearest him, and broke a glass. Bill looked in to see what was happening.

“But you won’t do anything that’s not right, George!”

“No — I don’t want to hurt nobody — but I don’t care — that!”

“You’re too good-hearted to do anybody any harm.”

“I believe I am. You know me a bit, you do, Meg — you don’t think I’m a fool now, do you?”

“I’m sure I don’t — who does?”

“No — you don’t — I know you don’t. Gi’e me a kiss — thou’rt a little beauty, thou art — like a ripe plum! I could set my teeth in thee, thou’rt that nice — full o’ red juice” — he playfully pretended to bite her. She laughed, and gently pushed him away.

“Tha likest me, doesna to?” he asked softly.

“What do you want to know for?” she replied, with a tender archness.

“But tha does — say now, tha does.”

“I should a’ thought you’d a’ known, without telling.”

“Nay, but I want to hear thee.”

“Go on,” she said, and she kissed him.

“But what should you do if I went to Canada and left you?”

“Ah — you wouldn’t do that.”

“But I might — and what then?”

“Oh, I don’t know what I should do. But you wouldn’t do it, I know you wouldn’t — you couldn’t.” He quickly put his arms round her and kissed her, moved by the trembling surety of her tone:

“No, I wouldna — I’d niver leave thee — tha’d be as miserable as sin, shouldna ta, my duck?”

“Yes,” she murmured.

“Ah,” he said, “tha’rt a warm little thing — tha loves me, eh?”

“Yes,” she murmured, and he pressed her to him, and kissed her, and held her close.

“We’ll be married soon, my bird — are ter glad? — in a bittha’rt glad, aren’t ta?”

She looked up at him as if he were noble. Her love for him was so generous that it beautified him.

He had to walk his bicycle home, being unable to ride; his shins, I know, were a good deal barked by the pedals.

CHAPTER VII

THE FASCINATION OF THE FORBIDDEN APPLE

On the first Sunday in June, when Lettie knew she would keep her engagement with Leslie, and when she was having a day at home from Highclose, she got ready to go down to the mill. We were in mourning for an aunt, so she wore a dress of fine black voile, and a black hat with long feathers. Then, when I looked at her fair hands, and her arms closely covered in the long black cuffs of her sleeves, I felt keenly my old brother-love shielding, indulgent.

It was a windy, sunny day. In shelter the heat was passionate, but in the open the wind scattered its fire. Every now and then a white cloud broad based, blue shadowed, travelled slowly along the sky-road after the forerunner small in the distance, and trailing over us a chill shade, a gloom which we watched creep on over the water, over the wood and the hill. These royal, rounded clouds had sailed all day along the same route, from the harbour of the south to the wastes in the northern sky, following the swift wild geese. The brook hurried along singing, only here and there lingering to whisper to the secret bushes, then setting off afresh with a new snatch of song.

The fowls pecked staidly in the farmyard, with Sabbath decorum. Occasionally a lost, sportive wind-puff would wander across the yard and ruffle them, and they resented it. The pigs were asleep in the sun, giving faint grunts now and then from sheer luxury. I saw a squirrel go darting down the mossy garden wall, up into the laburnum tree, where he lay flat along the bough, and listened. Suddenly away he went, chuckling to himself. Gyp all at once set off barking, but I soothed her down; it was the unusual sight of Lettie's dark dress that startled her, I suppose.

We went quietly into the kitchen. Mrs Saxton was just putting a chicken, wrapped in a piece of flannel, on the warm hob to coax it into life; it looked very feeble. George was asleep, with his head in his arms on the table; the father was asleep on the sofa, very comfortable and admirable; I heard Emily fleeing upstairs, presumably to dress.

“He stays out so late — up at the Ram Inn,” whispered the mother in a high whisper, looking at George, “and then he's up at five — he doesn't get his

proper rest.” she turned to the chicks, and continued in her whisper — ”the mother left them just before they hatched out, so we’ve been bringing them on here. This one’s a bit weak — I thought I’d hot him up a bit,” she laughed with a quaint little frown of deprecation. Eight or nine yellow, fluffy little mites were cheeping and scuffling in the fender. Lettie bent over them to touch them; they were tame, and ran among her fingers.

Suddenly George’s mother gave a loud cry, and rushed to the fire. There was a smell of singed down. The chicken had toddled into the fire, and gasped its faint gasp among the red-hot cokes. The father jumped from the sofa; George sat up with wide eyes; Lettie gave a little cry and a shudder; Trip rushed round and began to bark. There was a smell of cooked meat.

“There goes number one!” said the mother, with her queer little laugh. It made me laugh too.

“What’s a matter — what’s a matter?” asked the father excitedly.

“It’s a chicken been and walked into the fire — I put it on the hob to warm,” explained his wife.

“Goodness — I couldn’t think what was up!” he said, and dropped his head to trace gradually the border between sleeping and waking.

George sat and smiled at us faintly, he was too dazed to speak. His chest still leaned against the table, and his arms were spread out thereon, but he lifted his face, and looked at Lettie with his dazed, dark eyes, and smiled faintly at her. His hair was all ruffled, and his shirt collar unbuttoned. Then he got up slowly, pushing his chair back with a loud noise, and stretched himself, pressing his arms upwards with a long, heavy stretch.

“Oh — h — h!” he said, bending his arms and then letting them drop to his sides. “I never thought you’d come today.”

“I wanted to come and see you — I shan’t have many more chances,” said Lettie, turning from him and yet looking at him again.

“No, I suppose not,” he said, subsiding into quiet. Then there was silence for some time. The mother began to enquire after Leslie, and kept the conversation up till Emily came down, blushing and smiling and glad.

“Are you coming out?” said she, “there are two or three robins’ nests, and a spinkie’s — ”

“I think I’ll leave my hat,” said Lettie, unpinning it as she spoke, and shaking her hair when she was free. Mrs Saxton insisted on her taking a long white silk scarf; Emily also wrapped her hair in a gauze scarf, and looked beautiful.

George came out with us, coatless, hatless, his waistcoat all unbuttoned, as he was. We crossed the orchard, over the old bridge, and went to where the slopes ran down to the lower pond, a bank all covered with nettles, and scattered with a

hazel bush or two. Among the nettles old pans were rusting, and old coarse pottery cropped up.

We came upon a kettle heavily coated with lime. Emily bent down and looked, and then we peeped in. There were the robin birds with their yellow beaks stretched so wide apart I feared they would never close them again. Among the naked little mites, that begged from us so blindly and confidently, were huddled three eggs.

“They are like Irish children peeping out of a cottage,” said Emily, with the family fondness for romantic similes.

We went on to where a tin lay with the lid pressed back, and inside it, snug and neat, was another nest, with six eggs, cheek to cheek.

“How warm they are,” said Lettie, touching them, “you can fairly feel the mother’s breast.”

He tried to put his hand into the tin, but the space was too small, and they looked into each other’s eyes and smiled. “You’d think the father’s breast had marked them with red,” said Emily.

As we went up the orchard side we saw three wide displays of coloured pieces of pots arranged at the foot of three trees.

“Look,” said Emily, “those are the children’s houses. You don’t know how our Mollie gets all Sam’s pretty bits — she is a cajoling hussy!”

The two looked at each other again, smiling. Up on the pond-side, in the full glitter of light, we looked round where the blades of clustering corn were softly healing the red bosom of the hill. The larks were overhead among the sunbeams. We straggled away across the grass. The field was all afroth with cowslips, a yellow, glittering, shaking froth on the still green of the grass. We trailed our shadows across the fields, extinguishing the sunshine on the flowers as we went. The air was tingling with the scent of blossoms.

“Look at the cowslips, all shaking with laughter,” said Emily, and she tossed back her head, and her dark eyes sparkled among the flow of gauze. Lettie was on in front, flitting darkly across the field, bending over the flowers, stooping to the earth like a sable Persephone come into freedom. George had left her at a little distance, hunting for something in the grass. He stopped, and remained standing in one place.

Gradually, as if unconsciously, she drew near to him, and when she lifted her head, after stooping to pick some chimney-sweeps, little grass flowers, she laughed with a slight surprise to see him so near.

“Ah!” she said. “I thought I was all alone in the world — such a splendid world — it was so nice.”

“Like Eve in a meadow in Eden — and Adam’s shadow somewhere on the

grass,” said I.

“No — no Adam,” she asserted, frowning slightly, and laughing.

“Who ever would wants streets of gold,” Emily was saying to me, “when you can have a field of cowslips! Look at that hedgebottom that gets the south sun — one stream and glitter of buttercups.”

“Those Jews always had an eye to the filthy lucre — they even made heaven out of it,” laughed Lettie, and, turning to him, she said, “Don’t you wish we were wild — hark, like woodpigeons — or larks — or, look, like peewits? Shouldn’t you love flying and wheeling and sparkling and — courting in the wind?” She lifted her eyelids, and vibrated the question. He flushed, bending over the ground.

“Look,” he said, “here’s a larkie’s.”

Once a horse had left a hoof-print in the soft meadow; now the larks had rounded, softened the cup, and had laid there three dark-brown eggs. Lettie sat down and leaned over the nest; he leaned above her. The wind running over the flower-heads, peeped in at the little brown buds, and bounded off again gladly. The big clouds sent messages to them down the shadows, and ran in raindrops to touch them.

“I wish,” she said, “I wish we were free like that. If we could put everything safely in a little place in the earth — . couldn’t we have a good time as well as the larks?”

“I don’t see,” said he, “why we can’t.”

“Oh — but I can’t — you know we can’t” — and she looked at him fiercely.

“Why can’t you?” he asked.

“You know we can’t — you know as well as I do,” she replied, and her whole soul challenged him. “We have to consider things,” she added. He dropped his head. He was afraid to make the struggle, to rouse himself to decide the question for her. She turned away, and went kicking through the flowers. He picked up the blossoms she had left by the nest — they were still warm from her hands — and followed her. She walked on towards the end of the field, the long strands of her white scarf running before her. Then she leaned back to the wind, while he caught her up.

“Don’t you want your flowers?” he asked humbly.

“No, thanks — they’d be dead before I got home — throw them away, you look absurd with a posy.”

He did as he was bidden. They came near the hedge. A crabapple tree blossomed up among the blue.

“You may get me a bit of that blossom,” said she, and suddenly added, “No, I can reach it myself,” whereupon she stretched upward and pulled several sprigs

of the pink and white, and put it in her dress.

“Isn’t it pretty?” she said, and she began to laugh ironically, pointing to the flowers — “pretty, pink-cheeked petals, and stamens like yellow hair, and buds like lips promising something nice” — she stopped and looked at him, flickering with a smile. Then she pointed to the ovary beneath the flower, and said, “Result: Crabapples!”

She continued to look at him, and to smile. He said nothing. So they went on to where they could climb the fence into the spinney. She climbed to the top rail, holding by an oak bough. Then she let him lift her down bodily.

“Ah!” she said, “you like to show me how strong you area veritable Samson!” — she mocked, although she had invited him with her eyes to take her in his arms.

We were entering the spinney of black poplar. In the hedge was an elm tree, with myriads of dark dots pointed against the bright sky, myriads of clusters of flaky green fruit.

“Look at that elm,” she said, “you’d think it was in full leaf, wouldn’t you? Do you know why it’s so prolific?”

“No,” he said, with a curious questioning drawl of the monosyllable.

“It’s casting its bread upon the winds — no, it is dying, so it puts out all its strength and loads its boughs with the last fruit It’ll be dead next year. If you’re here then, come and see. Look at the ivy, the suave smooth ivy, with its fingers in the trees’ throat. Trees know how to die, you see — we don’t.”

With her whimsical moods she tormented him. She was at the bottom a seething confusion of emotion, and she wanted to make him likewise.

“If we were trees with ivy — instead of being fine humans with free active life — we should hug our thinning lives, shouldn’t we?”

“I suppose we should.”

“You, for instance — fancy your sacrificing yourself — for the next generation — that reminds you of Schopenhauer, doesn’t it? — for the next generation, or love, or anything!”

He did not answer her; she was too swift for him. They passed on under the poplars, which were hanging strings of green beads above them. There was a little open space, with tufts of bluebells. Lettie stooped over a woodpigeon that lay on the ground on its breast, its wings half spread. She took it up — its eyes were bursten and bloody; she felt its breast, ruffling the dimming iris on its throat.

“It’s been fighting,” he said.

“What for — a mate?” she asked, looking at him.

“I don’t know,” he answered.

“Cold — he’s quite cold, under the feathers! I think a woodpigeon must enjoy being fought for — and being won; especially if the right one won. It would be a fine pleasure to see them fighting — don’t you think?” she said, torturing him.

“The claws are spread — it fell dead off the perch,” he replied.

“Ah, poor thing — it was wounded — and sat and waited for death — when the other had won. Don’t you think life is very cruel, George — and love the cruellest of all?”

He laughed bitterly under the pain of her soft, sad tones. “Let me bury him — and have done with the beaten lover. But we’ll make him a pretty grave.”

She scooped a hole in the dark soil, and snatching a handful of bluebells, threw them in on top of the dead bird. Then she smoothed the soil over all, and pressed her white hands on the black loam.

“There,” she said, knocking her hands one against the other to shake off the soil, “He’s done with. Come on.”

He followed her, speechless with his emotion.

The spinney opened out; the ferns were serenely uncoiling, the bluebells stood grouped with blue curls mingled. In the freer spaces forget-me-nots flowered in nebulae, and dog-violets gave an undertone of dark purple, with primroses for planets in the night. There was a slight drift of woodruff, sweet new-mown hay, scenting the air under the boughs. On a wet bank was the design of golden saxifrage, glistening unholily as if varnished by its minister, the snail. George and Lettie crushed the veined belles of wood-sorrel and broke the silken mosses. What did it matter to them what they broke or crushed?

Over the fence of the spinney was the hill-side, scattered with old thorn trees. There the little grey lichens held up ruby balls to us unnoticed. What did it matter, when all the great red apples were being shaken from the Tree to be left to rot.

“If I were a man,” said Lettie, “I would go out west and be free. I should love it.”

She took the scarf from her head and let it wave out on the wind; the colour was warm in her face with climbing, and her curls were freed by the wind, sparkling and rippling.

“Well — you’re not a man,” he said, looking at her, and speaking with timid bitterness.

“No,” she laughed, “if I were, I would shape things — oh, wouldn’t I have my own way!”

“And don’t you now?”

“Oh — I don’t want it particularly — when I’ve got it. When I’ve had my way, I do want somebody to take it back from me.”

She put her head back and looked at him sideways, laughing through the glitter of her hair.

They came to the kennels. She sat down on the edge of the great stone water-trough, and put her hands in the water, moving them gently like submerged flowers through the clear pool.

“I love to see myself in the water,” she said, “I don’t mean on the water, Narcissus — but that’s how I should like to be out west, to have a little lake of my own, and swim with my limbs quite free in the water.”

“Do you swim well?” he asked.

“Fairly.”

“I would race you — in your little lake.”

She laughed, took her hands out of the water, and watched the clear drops trickle off. Then she lifted her head suddenly, at some thought or other. She looked across the valley, and saw the red roofs of the Mill.

“Ilion, Ilion

Fatalis incestusque iudex

Et mulier peregrina vertit.

In pulverem — — ”

“What’s that?” he said.

“Nothing.”

“That’s a private trough,” exclaimed a thin voice, high like a peewit’s cry. We started in surprise to see a tall, black-bearded man looking at us and away from us nervously, fidgeting uneasily some ten yards off.

“Is it?” said Lettie, looking at her wet hands, which she proceeded to dry on a fragment of a handkerchief.

“You mustn’t meddle with it,” said the man in the same reedy, oboe voice. Then he turned his head away, and his pale grey eyes roved the country-side — when he had courage, he turned his back to us, shading his eyes to continue his scrutiny. He walked hurriedly, a few steps, then craned his neck, peering into the valley, and hastened a dozen yards in another direction, again stretching and peering about. Then he went indoors.

“He is pretending to look for somebody,” said Lettie, “but it’s only because he’s afraid we shall think he came out just to look at us” — and they laughed.

Suddenly a woman appeared at the gate; she had pale eyes like the mouse-voiced man.

“You’ll get Bright’s disease sitting on that there damp stone,” she said to Lettie, who at once rose apologetically.

“I ought to know,” continued the mouse-voiced woman, “my own mother died of it.”

“Indeed,” murmured Lettie, “I’m sorry.”

“Yes,” continued the woman, “it behooves you to be careful. Do you come from Strelley Mill Farm?” she asked suddenly of George, surveying his shameful deshabelle with bitter reproof.

He admitted the imputation.

“And you’re going to leave, aren’t you?”

Which also he admitted.

“Humph! — we s’ll ‘appen get some neighbours. It’s a dog’s life for loneliness. I suppose you knew the last lot that was here.”

Another brief admission.

“A dirty lot — a dirty beagle she must have been. You should just ha’ seen these grates.”

“Yes,” said Lettie. “I have seen them.”

“Faugh — the state! But come in — come in, you’ll see a difference.”

They entered, out of curiosity.

The kitchen was indeed different. It was clean and sparkling, warm with bright red chintzes on the sofa and on every chair cushion. Unfortunately the effect was spoiled by green and yellow antimaccassars, and by a profusion of paper and woollen flowers. There were three cases of woollen flowers, and on the wall, four fans stitched over with ruffled green and yellow paper, adorned with yellow paper roses, carnations, arum lilies, and poppies; there were also wall pockets full of paper flowers; while the wood outside was loaded with blossom.

“Yes,” said Lettie, “there is a difference.”

The woman swelled, and looked round. The black-bearded man peeped from behind the Christian Herald — those long blaring trumpets! — and shrank again. The woman darted at his pipe, which he had put on a piece of newspaper on the hob, and blew some imaginary ash from it. Then she caught sight of something — perhaps some dust — on the fireplace.

“There!” she cried, “I knew it; I couldn’t leave him one second! I haven’t work enough burning wood, but he must be poke — poke — ”

“I only pushed a piece in between the bars,” complained the mouse voice from behind the paper.

“Pushed a piece in!” she re-echoed, with awful scorn, seizing the poker and thrusting it over his paper. “What do you call that, sitting there telling your stories before folks — ”

They crept out and hurried away. Glancing round, Lettie saw the woman mopping the doorstep after them, and she laughed. He pulled his watch out of his breeches’ pocket; it was half-past three.

“What are you looking at the time for?” she asked. “Meg’s coming to tea,” he

replied.

She said no more, and they walked slowly on.

When they came on to the shoulder of the hill, and looked down on to the mill, and the millpond, she said:

“I will not come down with you — I will go home.”

“Not come down to tea!” he exclaimed, full of reproach and amazement. “Why, what will they say?”

“No, I won’t come down — let me say farewell — jamque Vale! Do you remember how Eurydice sank back into Hell?”

“But” — he stammered, “you must come down to tea — how can I tell them? Why won’t you come?”

She answered him in Latin, with two lines from Virgil. As she watched him, she pitied his helplessness, and gave him a last cut as she said, very softly and tenderly:

“It wouldn’t be fair to Meg.”

He stood looking at her; his face was coloured only by the grey-brown tan; his eyes, the dark, self-mistrustful eyes of the family, were darker than ever, dilated with misery of helplessness; and she was infinitely pitiful. She wanted to cry in her yearning.

“Shall we go into the wood for a few minutes?” she said in a low, tremulous voice, as they turned aside.

The wood was high and warm. Along the ridings the forget-me-nots were knee deep, stretching, glimmering into the distance like the Milky Way through the night. They left the tall, flower-tangled paths to go in among the bluebells, breaking through the close-pressed flowers and ferns till they came to an oak which had fallen across the hazels, where they sat half screened. The hyacinths drooped magnificently with an overweight of purple, or they stood pale and erect, like unripe ears of purple corn. Heavy bees swung down in a blunder of extravagance among the purple flowers. They were intoxicated even with the sight of so much blue. The sound of their hearty, wanton humming came clear upon the solemn boom of the wind overhead. The sight of their clinging, clambering riot gave satisfaction to the soul. A rosy campion flower caught the sun and shone out. An elm sent down a shower of flesh-tinted sheaths upon them.

“If there were fauns and hamadryads!” she said softly, turning to him to soothe his misery. She took his cap from his head, ruffled his hair, saying:

“If you were a faun, I would put guelder roses round your hair, and make you look Bacchanalian.” She left her hand lying on his knee, and looked up at the sky. Its blue looked pale and green in comparison with the purple tide ebbing

about the wood. The clouds rose up like towers, and something had touched them into beauty, and poised them up among the winds. The clouds passed on, and the pool of sky was clear.

“Look,” she said, “how we are netted down — boughs with knots of green buds. If we were free on the winds! — But I’m glad we’re not.” She turned suddenly to him, and with the same movement, she gave him her hand, and he clasped it in both his. “I’m glad we’re netted down here; if we were free in the winds — Ah!”

She laughed a peculiar little laugh, catching her breath.

“Look!” she said, “it’s a palace, with the ash-trunks smooth like a girl’s arm, and the elm-columns, ribbed and bossed and fretted, with the great steel shafts of beech, all rising up to hold an embroidered care-cloth over us; and every thread of the care-cloth vibrates with music for us, and the little brodered birds sing; and the hazel-bushes fling green spray round us, and the honeysuckle leans down to pour out scent over us. Look at the harvest of bluebells — ripened for us! Listen to the bee, sounding among all the organ-play — if he sounded exultant for us!” She looked at him, with tears coming up into her eyes, and a little, winsome, wistful smile hovering round her mouth. He was very pale, and dared not look at her. She put her hand in his, leaning softly against him. He watched, as if fascinated, a young thrush with full pale breast who hopped near to look at them — glancing with quick, shining eyes.

“The clouds are going on again,” said Lettie.

“Look at that cloud face — see — gazing right up into the sky. The lips are opening — he is telling us something — now the form is slipping away — it’s gone — come, we must go too.”

“No,” he cried, “don’t go — don’t go away.”

Her tenderness made her calm. She replied in a voice perfect in restrained sadness and resignation.

“No, my dear, no. The threads of my life were untwined; they drifted about like floating threads of gossamer; and you didn’t put out your hand to take them and twist them up into the chord with yours. Now another has caught them up, and the chord of my life is being twisted, and I cannot wrench it free and untwine it again — I can’t. I am not strong enough. Besides, you have twisted another thread far and tight into your chord; could you get free?”

“Tell me what to do — yes, if you tell me.”

“I can’t tell you — so let me go.”

“No, Lettie,” he pleaded, with terror and humility. “No, Lettie; don’t go. What should I do with my life? Nobody would love you like I do — and what should I do with my love for you? — hate it and fear it, because it’s too much for me?”

She turned and kissed him gratefully. He then took her in a long, passionate embrace, mouth to mouth. In the end it had so wearied her that she could only wait in his arms till he was too tired to hold her. He was trembling already.

“Poor Meg!” she murmured to herself dully, her sensations having become vague.

He winced, and the pressure of his arms slackened. She loosened his hands and rose half dazed from her seat by him. She left him, while he sat dejected, raising no protest.

When I went out to look for them, when tea had already been waiting on the table half an hour or more, I found him leaning against the gatepost at the bottom of the hill. There was no blood in his face, and his tan showed livid; he was haggard as if he had been ill for some weeks.

“Whatever’s the matter?” I said. “Where’s Lettie?”

“She’s gone home,” he answered, and the sound of his own voice, and the meaning of his own words made him heave. “Why?” I asked in alarm.

He looked at me as if to say, “What are you talking about? I cannot listen!”

“Why?” I insisted.

“I don’t know,” he replied.

“They are waiting tea for you,” I said.

He heard me, but took no notice.

“Come on,” I repeated, “there’s Meg and everybody waiting tea for you.”

“I don’t want any,” he said.

I waited a minute or two. He was violently sick.

“Vae meum Fervens difficile bile tumet jecur,”

I thought to myself.

When the sickness passed over, he stood up away from the post, trembling and lugubrious. His eyelids dropped heavily over his eyes, and he looked at me, and smiled a faint, sick smile.

“Come and lie down in the loft,” I said, “and I’ll tell them you’ve got a bilious bout.”

He obeyed me, not having energy to question; his strength had gone, and his splendid physique seemed shrunken; he walked weakly. I looked away from him, for in his feebleness he was already beginning to feel ludicrous.

We got into the barn unperceived, and I watched him climb the ladder to the loft. Then I went indoors to tell them.

I told them Lettie had promised to be at Highclose for tea, that George had a bilious attack, and was mooning about the barn till it was over; he had been badly sick. We ate tea without zest or enjoyment. Meg was wistful and ill at ease; the father talked to her and made much of her; the mother did not care for

her much.

“I can’t understand it,” said the mother, “he so rarely has anything the matter with him — why, I’ve hardly known the day! Are you sure it’s nothing serious, Cyril? It seems such a thing — and just when Meg happened to be down — just when Meg was coming — ”

About half-past six I had again to go and look for him, to satisfy the anxiety of his mother and his sweetheart. I went whistling to let him know I was coming. He lay on a pile of hay in a corner, asleep. He had put his cap under his head to stop the tickling of the hay, and he lay half curled up, sleeping soundly. He was still very pale, and there was on his face the repose and pathos that a sorrow always leaves. As he wore no coat, I was afraid he might be chilly, so I covered him up with a couple of sacks, and I left him. I would not have him disturbed — I helped the father about the cowsheds and with the pigs.

Meg had to go at half-past seven. She was so disappointed that I said:

“Come and have a look at him — I’ll tell him you did.”

He had thrown off the sacks and spread out his limbs. As he lay on his back, flung out on the hay, he looked big again, and manly. His mouth had relaxed, and taken its old, easy lines. One felt for him now the warmth one feels for anyone who sleeps in an attitude of abandon. She leaned over him, and looked at him with a little rapture of love and tenderness; she longed to caress him. Then he stretched himself, and his eyes opened. Their sudden unclosing gave her a thrill. He smiled sleepily, and murmured, “Alto, Meg!” Then I saw him awake. As he remembered, he turned with a great sighing yawn, hid his face again, and lay still.

“Come along, Meg,” I whispered, “he’ll be best asleep.”

“I’d better cover him up,” she said, taking the sack and laying it very gently over his shoulders. He kept perfectly still while I drew her away.

CHAPTER VIII

A POEM OF FRIENDSHIP

The magnificent promise of spring was broken before the May blossom was fully out. All through the beloved month the wind rushed in upon us from the north and north-east, bringing the rain fierce and heavy. The tender-budded trees shuddered and moaned; when the wind was dry, the young leaves flapped limp. The grass and corn grew lush, but the light of the dandelions was quite extinguished, and it seemed that only a long time back had we made merry before the broad glare of these flowers. The bluebells lingered and lingered; they fringed the fields for weeks like purple fringe of mourning. The pink champions came out only to hang heavy with rain; hawthorn buds remained tight and hard as pearls, shrinking into the brilliant green foliage; the forget-me-nots, the poor pleiades of the wood, were ragged weeds. Often at the end of the day the sky opened, and stately clouds hung over the horizon infinitely far away, glowing, through the yellow distance, with an amber lustre. They never came any nearer, always they remained far off, looking calmly and majestically over the shivering earth, then saddened, fearing their radiance might be dimmed, they drew away, and sank out of sight. Sometimes, towards sunset, a great shield stretched dark from the west to the zenith, tangling the light along its edges. As the canopy rose higher, it broke, dispersed, and the sky was primrose coloured, high and pale above the crystal moon. Then the cattle crouched among the gorse, distressed by the cold, while the long-billed snipe flickered round high overhead, round and round in great circles, seeming to carry a serpent from its throat, and crying a tragedy, more painful than the poignant lamentations and protests of the peewits. Following these evenings came mornings cold and grey.

Such a morning I went up to George, on the top fallow. His father was out with the milk — he was alone; as I came up the hill I could see him standing in the cart, scattering manure over the bare red fields; I could hear his voice calling now and then to the mare, and the creak and clank of the cart as it moved on. Starlings and smart wagtails were running briskly over the clods, and many little birds flashed, fluttered, hopped here and there. The lapwings wheeled and cried as ever between the low clouds and the earth, and some ran beautifully among

the furrows, too graceful and glistening for the rough field.

I took a fork and scattered the manure along the hollows, and thus we worked, with a wide field between us, yet very near in the sense of intimacy. I watched him through the wheeling peewits, as the low clouds went stealthily overhead. Beneath us, the spires of the poplars in the spinney were warm gold, as if the blood shone through. Farther gleamed the grey water, and below it the red roofs. Nethermere was half hidden and far away. There was nothing in this grey, lonely world but the peewits swinging and crying, and George swinging silently at his work. The movement of active life held all my attention, and when I looked up, it was to see the motion of his limbs and his head, the rise and fall of his rhythmic body, and the rise and fall of the slow waving peewits. After a while, when the cart was empty, he took a fork and came towards me, working at my task.

It began to rain, so he brought a sack from the cart, and we crushed ourselves under the thick hedge. We sat close together and watched the rain fall like a grey striped curtain before us, hiding the valley; we watched it trickle in dark streams off the mare's back, as she stood dejectedly; we listened to the swish of the drops falling all about; we felt the chill of the rain, and drew ourselves together in silence. He smoked his pipe, and I lit a cigarette. The rain continued; all the little pebbles and the red earth glistened in the grey gloom. We sat together, speaking occasionally. It was at these times we formed the almost passionate attachment which later years slowly wore away.

When the rain was over, we filled our buckets with potatoes, and went along the wet furrows, sticking the spritted tubers in the cold ground. Being sandy, the field dried quickly. About twelve o'clock, when nearly all the potatoes were set, he left me, and fetching up Bob from the far hedge-side, harnessed the mare and him to the ridger, to cover the potatoes. The sharp light plough turned the soil in a fine furrow over the potatoes; hosts of little birds fluttered, settled, bounded off again after the plough. He called to the horses, and they came downhill, the white stars on the two brown noses nodding up and down, George striding firm and heavy behind. They came down upon me; at a call the horses turned, shifting awkwardly sideways; he flung himself against the plough, and leaning well in, brought it round with a sweep: a click, and they are off uphill again. There is a great rustle as the birds sweep round after him and follow up the new-turned furrow. Untackling the horses when the rows were all covered, we tramped behind them down the wet hill-side to dinner.

I kicked through the drenched grass, crushing the withered cowslips under my clogs, avoiding the purple orchids that were stunted with harsh upbringing, but magnificent in their powerful colouring, crushing the pallid lady smocks, the

washed-out wild gillivers. I became conscious of something near my feet, something little and dark, moving indefinitely. I had found again the larkie's nest. I perceived the yellow beaks, the bulging eyelids of two tiny larks, and the blue lines of their wing quills. The indefinite movement was the swift rise and fall of the brown fledged backs, over which waved long strands of fine down. The two little specks of birds lay side by side, beak to beak, their tiny bodies rising and falling in quick unison. I gently put down my fingers to touch them; they were warm; gratifying to find them warm, in the midst of so much cold and wet. I became curiously absorbed in them, as an eddy of wind stirred the strands of down. When one fledgling moved uneasily, shifting his soft ball, I was quite excited; but he nestled down again, with his head close to his brother's. In my heart of hearts, I longed for someone to nestle against, someone who would come between me and the coldness and wetness of the surroundings. I envied the two little miracles exposed to any tread, yet so serene. It seemed as if I were always wandering, looking for something which they had found even before the light broke into their shell. I was cold; the lilacs in the Mill garden looked blue and perished. I ran with my heavy clogs, and my heart heavy with vague longing, down to the Mill, while the wind blanched the sycamores, and pushed the sullen pines rudely, for the pines were sulking because their million creamy sprites could not fly wet-winged. The horse-chestnuts bravely kept their white candles erect in the socket of every bough, though no sun came to light them. Drearily a cold swan swept up the water, trailing its black feet, clacking its great hollow wings, rocking the frightened water-hens, and insulting the staid black-necked geese. What did I want that I turned thus from one thing to another?

At the end of June the weather became fine again. Hay harvest was to begin as soon as it settled. There were only two fields to be mown this year, to provide just enough stuff to last until the spring. As my vacation had begun I decided I would help, and that we three, the father, George and I, would get in the hay without hired assistance.

I rose the first morning very early, before the sun was well up. The clear sound of challenging cocks could be heard along the valley. In the bottoms, over the water and over the lush wet grass, the night mist still stood white and substantial. As I passed along the edge of the meadow the cow-parsnip was as tall as I, frothing up to the top of the hedge, putting the faded hawthorn to a wan blush. Little, early birds — I had not heard the lark — fluttered in and out of the foamy meadow-sea, plunging under the surf of flowers washed high in one corner, swinging out again, dashing past the crimson sorrel cresset. Under the froth of flowers were the purple vetch-clumps, yellow milk vetches, and the scattered pink of the wood-betony, and the floating stars of marguerites. There

was a weight of honeysuckle on the hedges, where pink roses were waking up for their broad-spread flight through the day.

Morning silvered the swaths of the far meadow, and swept in smooth, brilliant curves round the stones of the brook; morning ran in my veins; morning chased the silver, darting fish out of the depth, and I, who saw them, snapped my fingers at them, driving them back.

I heard Trip barking, so I ran towards the pond. The punt was at the island, where from behind the bushes I could hear George whistling. I called to him, and he came to the water's edge half dressed.

"Fetch a towel," he called, "and come on."

I was back in a few moments, and there stood my Charon fluttering in the cool air. One good push sent us to the islet. I made haste to undress, for he was ready for the water, Trip dancing round, barking with excitement at his new appearance.

"He wonders what's happened to me," he said, laughing, pushing the dog playfully away with his bare foot. Trip bounded back, and came leaping up, licking him with little caressing licks. He began to play with the dog, and directly they were rolling on the fine turf, the laughing, expostulating, naked man, and the excited dog, who thrust his great head on to the man's face, licking, and, when flung away, rushed forward again, snapping playfully at the naked arms and breasts. At last George lay back, laughing and panting, holding Trip by the two forefeet which were planted on his breast, while the dog, also panting, reached forward his head for a flickering lick at the throat pressed back on the grass, and the mouth thrown back out of reach. When the man had thus lain still for a few moments, and the dog was just laying his head against his master's neck to rest too, I called, and George jumped up, and plunged into the pond with me, Trip after us.

The water was icily cold, and for a moment deprived me of my senses. When I began to swim, soon the water was buoyant, and I was sensible of nothing but the vigorous poetry of action. I saw George swimming on his back laughing at me, and in an instant I had flung myself like an impulse after him. The laughing face vanished as he swung over and fled, and I pursued the dark head and the ruddy neck. Trip, the wretch, came paddling towards me, interrupting me; then all bewildered with excitement, he scudded to the bank. I chuckled to myself as I saw him run along, then plunge in and go plodding to George. I was gaining. He tried to drive off the dog, and I gained rapidly. As I came up to him and caught him, with my hand on his shoulder, there came a laughter from the bank. It was Emily.

I trod the water, and threw handfuls of spray at her. She laughed and blushed.

Then Trip waded out to her and she fled swiftly from his shower-bath. George was floating just beside me, looking up and laughing.

We stood and looked at each other as we rubbed ourselves dry. He was well proportioned, and naturally of handsome physique, heavily limbed. He laughed at me, telling me I was like one of Aubrey Beardsley's long, lean, ugly fellows. I referred him to many classic examples of slenderness, declaring myself more exquisite than his grossness, which amused him.

But I had to give in, and bow to him, and he took on an indulgent, gentle manner. I laughed and submitted. For he knew how I admired the noble, white fruitfulness of his form. As I watched him, he stood in white relief against the mass of green. He polished his arm, holding it out straight and solid; he rubbed his hair into curls, while I watched the deep muscles of his shoulders, and the bands stand out in his neck as he held it firm; I remembered the story of Annable.

He saw I had forgotten to continue my rubbing, and laughing he took hold of me and began to rub me briskly, as if I were a child, or rather, a woman he loved and did not fear. I left myself quite limply in his hands, and, to get a better grip of me, he put his arm round me and pressed me against him, and the sweetness of the touch of our naked bodies one against the other was superb. It satisfied in some measure the vague, indecipherable yearning of my soul; and it was the same with him. When he had rubbed me all warm, he let me go, and we looked at each other with eyes of still laughter, and our love was perfect for a moment, more perfect than any love I have known since, either for man or woman.

We went together down to the fields, he to mow the island of grass he had left standing the previous evening, I to sharpen the machine knife, to mow out the hedge-bottoms with the scythe, and to rake the swaths from the way of the machine when the unmown grass was reduced to a triangle. The cool, moist fragrance of the morning, the intentional stillness of everything, of the tall bluish trees, of the wet, frank flowers, of the trustful moths folded and unfolded in the fallen swaths, was a perfect medium of sympathy. The horses moved with a still dignity, obeying his commands. When they were harnessed, and the machine oiled, still he was loth to mar the perfect morning, but stood looking down the valley.

"I shan't mow these fields any more," he said, and the fallen, silvered swaths flickered back his regret, and the faint scent of the limes was wistful. So much of the field was cut, so much remained to cut; then it was ended. This year the elder flowers were widespread over the corner bushes, and the pink roses fluttered high above the hedge. There were the same flowers in the grass as we had known many years; we should not know them any more.

“But merely to have mown them is worth having lived for,” he said, looking at me.

We felt the warmth of the sun trickling through the morning’s mist of coolness.

“You see that sycamore,” he said, “that bushy one beyond the big willow? I remember when Father broke off the leading shoot because he wanted a fine straight stick, I can remember I felt sorry. It was running up so straight, with such a fine balance of leaves — you know how a young strong sycamore looks about nine feet high — it seemed a cruelty. When you are gone, and we are left from here, I shall feel like that, as if my leading shoot were broken off. You see, the tree is spoiled. Yet how it went on growing. I believe I shall grow faster. I can remember the bright red stalks of the leaves as he broke them off from the bough.”

He smiled at me, half proud of his speech. Then he swung into the seat of the machine, having attended to the horses’ heads. He lifted the knife.

“Good-bye,” he said, smiling whimsically back at me. The machine started. The bed of the knife fell, and the grass shivered and dropped over. I watched the heads of the daisies and the splendid lines of the cocksfoot grass quiver, shake against the crimson burnet, and drop over. The machine went singing down the field, leaving a track of smooth, velvet green in the way of the swath-board. The flowers in the wall of uncut grass waited unmoved, as the days wait for us. The sun caught in the up-licking scarlet sorrel flames, the butterflies woke, and I could hear the fine ring of his “Whoa!” from the far corner. Then he turned, and I could see only the tossing ears of the horses, and the white of his shoulder as they moved along the wall of high grass on the hill slope. I sat down under the elm to file the sections of the knife. Always as he rode he watched the falling swath, only occasionally calling the horses into line. It was his voice which rang the morning awake. When we were at work we hardly noticed one another. Yet his mother had said:

“George is so glad when you’re in the field — he doesn’t care how long the day is.”

Later, when the morning was hot, and the honeysuckle had ceased to breathe, and all the other scents were moving in the air about us, when all the field was down, when I had seen the last trembling ecstasy of the harebells, trembling to fall; when the thick clump of purple vetch had sunk; when the green swaths were settling, and the silver swaths were glistening and glittering as the sun came along them, in the hot ripe morning we worked together turning the hay, tipping over the yesterday’s swaths with our forks, and bringing yesterday’s fresh, hidden flowers into the death of sunlight.

It was then that we talked of the past, and speculated on the future. As the day grew older and less wistful, we forgot everything, and worked on, singing, and sometimes I would recite him verses as we went, and sometimes I would tell him about books. Life was full of glamour for us both.

CHAPTER IX

PASTORALS AND PEONIES

At dinner-time the father announced to us the exciting fact that Leslie had asked if a few of his guests might picnic that afternoon in the Strelley hayfields. The closes were so beautiful, with the brook under all its sheltering trees, running into the pond that was set with two green islets. Moreover, the squire's lady had written a book filling these meadows and the mill precincts with pot-pourri romance. The wedding guests at Highclose were anxious to picnic in so choice a spot.

The father, who delighted in a gay throng, beamed at us from over the table. George asked who were coming.

"Oh, not many — about half a dozen — mostly ladies down for the wedding."

George at first swore warmly; then he began to appreciate the affair as a joke.

Mrs Saxton hoped they wouldn't want her to provide them pots, for she hadn't two cups that matched, nor had any of her spoons the least pretence to silver. The children were hugely excited, and wanted a holiday from school, which Emily at once vetoed firmly, thereby causing family dissension.

As we went round the field in the afternoon turning the hay, we were thinking apart, and did not talk. Every now and then — and at every corner — we stopped to look down towards the wood, to see if they were coming.

"Here they are!" George exclaimed suddenly, having spied the movement of white in the dark wood. We stood still and watched. Two girls, heliotrope and white, a man with two girls, pale green and white, and a man with a girl last.

"Can you tell who they are?" I asked.

"That's Marie Tempest, that first girl in white, and that's him and Lettie at the back, I don't know any more."

He stood perfectly still until they had gone out of sight behind the banks down by the brooks, then he stuck his fork in the ground, saying:

"You can easily finish — if you like. I'll go and mow out that bottom corner."

He glanced at me to see what I was thinking of him. I was thinking that he was afraid to meet her, and I was smiling to myself. Perhaps he felt ashamed, for he went silently away to the machine, where he belted his riding breeches tightly

round his waist, and slung the scythe-strap on his hip. I heard the clanging slur of the scythe stone as he whetted the blade. Then he strode off to mow the far bottom corner, where the ground was marshy, and the machine might not go, to bring down the lush green grass and the tall meadow-sweet.

I went to the pond to meet the newcomers. I bowed to Louie Denys, a tall, graceful girl of the drooping type, elaborately gowned in heliotrope linen; I bowed to Agnes D'Arcy, an erect, intelligent girl with magnificent auburn hair — she wore no hat and carried a sunshade; I bowed to Hilda Seconde, a svelte, petite girl, exquisitely and delicately pretty; I bowed to Maria and to Lettie, and I shook hands with Leslie and with his friend, Freddy Cresswell. The latter was to be best man, a broad-shouldered, pale-faced fellow, with beautiful soft hair like red wheat, and laughing eyes, and a whimsical, drawling manner of speech, like a man who has suffered enough to bring him to manhood and maturity, but who in spite of all remains a boy, irresponsible, lovable — a trifle pathetic. As the day was very hot, both men were in flannels, and wore flannel collars, yet it was evident that they had dressed with scrupulous care. Instinctively I tried to pull my trousers into shape within my belt, and I felt the inferiority cast upon the father, big and fine as he was in his way, for his shoulders were rounded with work, and his trousers were much distorted.

“What can we do?” said Marie; “you know we don't want to hinder, we want to help you. It was so good of you to let us come.”

The father laughed his fine indulgence, saying to them — they loved him for the mellow, laughing modulation of his voice:

“Come on, then — I see there's a bit of turning-over to do, as Cyril's left. Come and pick your forks.”

From among a sheaf of hay-forks he chose the lightest for them, and they began anywhere, just tipping at the swaths. He showed them carefully — Marie and the charming little Hilda — just how to do it, but they found the right way the hardest way, so they worked in their own fashion, and laughed heartily with him when he made playful jokes at them. He was a great lover of girls, and they blossomed from timidity under his hearty influence.

“Ain' it flippin' 'ot?” drawled Cresswell, who had just taken his M.A. degree in classics: “This bloomin' stuff's dry enough — come an' flop on it.”

He gathered a cushion of hay, which Louie Denys carefully appropriated, arranging first her beautiful dress, that fitted close to her shape, without any belt or interruption, and then laying her arms, that were netted to the shoulder in open lace, gracefully at rest. Lettie, who was also in a close-fitting white dress which showed her shape down to the hips, sat where Leslie had prepared for her, and Miss D'Arcy reluctantly accepted my pile.

Cresswell twisted his clean-cut mouth in a little smile, saying:

“Lord, a giddy little pastoral — fit for old Theocritus, ain’t it, Miss Denys?”

“Why do you talk to me about those classic people — I daren’t even say their names. What would he say about us?” He laughed, winking his blue eyes:

“He’d make old Daphnis there” — pointing to Leslie — “sing a match with me, Damoetas — contesting the merits of our various shepherdesses — begin Daphnis, sing up for Amaryllis, I mean Nais, damn ‘em, they were for ever getting mixed up with their nymphs.”

“I say, Mr Cresswell, your language! Consider whom you’re damning,” said Miss Denys, leaning over and tapping his head with her silk glove.

“You say any giddy thing in a pastoral,” he replied, taking the edge of her skirt, and lying back on it, looking up at her as she leaned over him. “Strike up, Daphnis, something about honey or white cheese — or else the early apples that’ll be ripe in a week’s time.”

“I’m sure the apples you showed me are ever so little and green,” interrupted Miss Denys; “they will never be ripe in a week — ugh, sour!”

He smiled up at her in his whimsical way:

“Hear that, Tempest — Ugh, sour!’ — not much! Oh, love us, haven’t you got a start yet? — isn’t there aught to sing about, you blunt-faced kid?”

“I’ll hear you first — I’m no judge of honey and cheese.”

“An’ darn little apples — takes a woman to judge them; don’t it, Miss Denys?”

“I don’t know,” she said, stroking his soft hair from his forehead with her hand whereon rings were sparkling.

“‘My love is not white, my hair is not yellow, like honey dropping through the sunlight — my love is brown, and sweet, and ready for the lips of love.’ Go on, Tempest — strike up, old cowherd. Who’s that tuning his pipe? — oh, that fellow sharpening his scythe! It’s enough to make your back ache to look at him working — go an’ stop him, somebody.”

“Yes, let us go and fetch him,” said Miss D’Arcy. “I’m sure he doesn’t know what a happy pastoral state he’s in — let us go and fetch him.”

“They don’t like hindering at their work, Agnes — besides, where ignorance is bliss — ” said Lettie, afraid lest she might bring him. The other hesitated, then with her eyes she invited me to go with her.

“Oh, dear,” she laughed, with a little moue, “Freddy is such an ass, and Louie Denys is like a wasp at treacle. I wanted to laugh, yet I felt just a tiny bit cross. Don’t you feel great when you go mowing like that? Father Timey sort of feeling? Shall we go and look! We’ll say we want those foxgloves he’ll be cutting down directly — and those bell flowers. I suppose you needn’t go on

with your labours — ”

He did not know we were approaching till I called him, then he started slightly as he saw the tall, proud girl.

“Mr Saxton — Miss D’Arcy,” I said, and he shook hands with her. Immediately his manner became ironic, for he had seen his hand big and coarse and inflamed with the snail claspings the lady’s hand.

“We thought you looked so fine,” she said to him, “and men are so embarrassing when they make love to somebody else — aren’t they? Save us those foxgloves, will you — they are splendid — like savage soldiers drawn up against the hedge — don’t cut them down — and those campanulas — bell-flowers, ah, yes! They are spinning idylls up there. I don’t care for idylls, do you? Oh, you don’t know what a classical pastoral person you are — but there, I don’t suppose you suffer from idyllic love — ” she laughed, “ — one doesn’t see the silly little god fluttering about in our hayfields, does one? Do you find much time to sport with Amaryllis in the shade? — I’m sure it’s a shame they banish Phyllis from the fields — ”

He laughed and went on with his work. She smiled a little, too, thinking she had made a great impression. She put out her hand with a dramatic gesture, and looked at me, when the scythe crunched through the meadow-sweet.

“Crunch! isn’t it fine!” she exclaimed, “a kind of inevitable fate — I think it’s fine!”

We wandered about picking flowers and talking until teatime. A manservant came with the tea-basket, and the girls spread the cloth under a great willow tree. Lettie took the little silver kettle, and went to fill it at the small spring which trickled into a stone trough all pretty with cranesbill and stellaria hanging over, while long blades of grass waved in the water. George, who had finished his work, and wanted to go home to tea, walked across to the spring where Lettie sat playing with the water, getting little cupfuls to put into the kettle, watching the quick skating of the water-beetles, and the large faint spots of their shadows darting on the silted mud at the bottom of the trough.

She glanced round on hearing him coming, and smiled nervously: they were mutually afraid of meeting each other again.

“It is about teatime,” he said.

“Yes — it will be ready in a moment — this is not to make the tea with — it’s only to keep a little supply of hot water.”

“Oh,” he said, “I’ll go on home — I’d rather.”

“No,” she replied, “you can’t because we are all having tea together: I had some fruits put up, because I know you don’t trifle with tea — and your father’s coming.”

“But,” he replied pettishly, “I can’t have my tea with all those folks — I don’t want to — look at me!”

He held out his inflamed, barbaric hands.

She winced and said:

“It won’t matter — you’ll give the realistic touch.”

He laughed ironically.

“No — you must come,” she insisted.

“I’ll have a drink then, if you’ll let me,” he said, yielding. She got up quickly, blushing, offering him the tiny, pretty cup.

“I’m awfully sorry,” she said.

“Never mind,” he muttered, and turning from the proffered cup he lay down flat, put his mouth to the water, and drank deeply. She stood and watched the motion of his drinking, and of his heavy breathing afterwards. He got up, wiping his mouth, not looking at her. Then he washed his hands in the water, and stirred up the mud. He put his hand to the bottom of the trough, bringing out a handful of silt, with the grey shrimps twisting in it. He flung the mud on the floor where the poor grey creatures writhed.

“It wants cleaning out,” he said.

“Yes,” she replied, shuddering. “You won’t be long,” she added, taking up the silver kettle.

In a few moments he got up and followed her reluctantly down. He was nervous and irritable.

The girls were seated on tufts of hay, with the men leaning in attendance on them, and the manservant waiting on all. George was placed between Lettie and Hilda. The former handed him his little egg-shell of tea, which, as he was not very thirsty, he put down on the ground beside him. Then she passed him the bread and butter, cut for five-o’clock tea, and fruits, grapes and peaches, and strawberries, in a beautifully-carved oak tray. She watched for a moment his thick, half-washed fingers fumbling over the fruits, then she turned her head away. All the gay teatime, when the talk bubbled and frothed over all the cups, she avoided him with her eyes. Yet again and again, as someone said: “I’m sorry, Mr Saxton — will you have some cake?” — or “See, Mr Saxton — try this peach, I’m sure it will be mellow right to the stone,” — speaking very naturally, but making the distinction between him and the other men by their indulgence towards him, Lettie was forced to glance at him as he sat eating, answering in monosyllables, laughing with constraint and awkwardness, and her irritation flickered between her brows. Although she kept up the gay frivolity of the conversation, still the discord was felt by everybody, and we did not linger as we should have done over the cups. “George,” they said afterwards, “was a wet

blanket on the party.” Lettie was intensely annoyed with him. His presence was unbearable to her. She wished him a thousand miles away. He sat listening to Cresswell’s whimsical affectation of vulgarity which flickered with fantasy, and he laughed in a strained fashion.

He was the first to rise, saying he must get the cows up for milking.

“Oh, let us go — let us go. May we come and see the cows milked?” said Hilda, her delicate, exquisite features flushing, for she was very shy.

“No,” drawled Freddy, “the stink o’ live beef ain’t salubrious. You be warned, and stop here.”

“I never could bear cows, except those lovely little highland cattle, all woolly, in pictures,” said Louie Denys, smiling archly, with a little irony.

“No,” laughed Agnes D’Arcy, “they — they’re smelly,” — and she pursed up her mouth, and ended in a little trill of deprecatory laughter, as she often did. Hilda looked from one to the other, blushing.

“Come, Lettie,” said Leslie good-naturedly, “I know you have a farmyard fondness — come on,” and they followed George down.

As they passed along the pond bank a swan and her tawny, fluffy brood sailed with them the length of the water, “tipping on their little toes, the darlings — pitter-patter through the water, tiny little things,” as Marie said.

We heard George below calling “Bully — Bully — Bully — Bully!” and then, a moment or two after, in the bottom garden: “Come out, you little fool — are you coming out of it?” in manifestly angry tones.

“Has it run away?” laughed Hilda, delighted, and we hastened out of the lower garden to see.

There in the green shade, between the tall gooseberry bushes, the heavy crimson peonies stood gorgeously along the path. The full red globes, poised and leaning voluptuously, sank their crimson weight on to the seeding grass of the path, borne down by secret rain, and by their own splendour. The path was poured over with red rich silk of strewn petals. The great flowers swung their crimson grandly about the walk, like crowds of cardinals in pomp among the green bushes. We burst into the new world of delight. As Lettie stooped, taking between both hands the gorgeous silken fullness of one blossom that was sunk to the earth. George came down the path, with the brown bull-calf straddling behind him, its neck stuck out, sucking zealously at his middle finger.

The unconscious attitudes of the girls, all bent enraptured over the peonies, touched him with sudden pain. As he came up, with the calf stalking grudgingly behind, he said:

“There’s a fine show of pyeenocks this year, isn’t there?”

“What do you call them?” cried Hilda, turning to him her sweet, charming

face full of interest.

“Pyeenocks,” he replied.

Lettie remained crouching with a red flower between her hands, glancing sideways unseen to look at the calf, which with its shiny nose uplifted was mumbling in its sticky gums the seductive finger. It sucked eagerly, but unprofitably, and it appeared to cast a troubled eye inwards to see if it were really receiving any satisfaction, — doubting, but not despairing. Marie, and Hilda, and Leslie laughed, while he, after looking at Lettie as she crouched, wistfully, as he thought, over the flower, led the little brute out of the garden, and sent it running into the yard with a smack on the haunch.

Then he returned, rubbing his sticky finger dry against his breeches. He stood near to Lettie, and she felt rather than saw the extraordinary pale cleanness of the one finger among the others. She rubbed her finger against her dress in painful sympathy.

“But aren’t the flowers lovely!” exclaimed Marie again. “I want to hug them.”

“Oh, yes!” assented Hilda.

“They are like a romance — D’Annunzio — a romance in passionate sadness,” said Lettie, in an ironical voice, speaking half out of conventional necessity of saying something, half out of desire to shield herself, and yet in a measure express herself.

“There is a tale about them,” I said.

The girls clamoured for the legend.

“Pray, do tell us,” pleaded Hilda, the irresistible.

“It was Emily told me — she says it’s a legend, but I believe it’s only a tale. She says the peonies were brought from the Hall long since by a fellow of this place — when it was a mill. He was brown and strong, and the daughter of the Hall, who was pale and fragile and young, loved him. When he went up to the Hall gardens to cut the yew hedges, she would hover round him in her white frock, and tell him tales of old days, in little snatches like a wren singing, till he thought she was a fairy who had bewitched him. He would stand and watch her, and one day, when she came near to him telling him a tale that set the tears swimming in her eyes, he took hold of her and kissed her and kept her. They used to tryst in the poplar spinney. She would come with her arms full of flowers, for she always kept to her fairy part. One morning she came early through the mists. He was out shooting. She wanted to take him unawares, like a fairy. Her arms were full of peonies. When she was moving beyond the trees he shot her, not knowing. She stumbled on, and sank down in their tryst place. He found her lying there among the red pyeenocks, white and fallen. He thought she was just lying talking to the red flowers, so he stood waiting. Then he went up,

and bent over her, and found the flowers full of blood. It was he set the garden here with these pyeenocks.”

The eyes of the girls were round with pity of the tale and Hilda turned away to hide her tears.

“It is a beautiful ending,” said Lettie, in a low tone, looking at the floor.

“It’s all a tale,” said Leslie, soothing the girls.

George waited till Lettie looked at him. She lifted her eyes to him at last. Then each turned aside, trembling.

Marie asked for some of the peonies.

“Give me just a few — and I can tell the others the story — it is so sad — I feel so sorry for him, it was so cruel for him And Lettie says it ends beautifully — ”

George cut the flowers with his great clasp-knife, and Marie took them, carefully, treating their romance with great tenderness. Then all went out of the garden and he turned to the cowshed.

“Good-bye for the present,” said Lettie, afraid to stay near him.

“Good-bye,” he laughed.

“Thank you so much for the flowers — and the story — it was splendid,” said Marie, “ — but so sad!”

Then they went, and we did not see them again.

Later, when all had gone to bed at the mill, George and I sat together on opposite sides of the fire, smoking, saying little. He was casting up the total of discrepancies, and now and again he ejaculated one of his thoughts.

“And all day,” he said, “Blench has been ploughing his wheat in, because it was that bitten off by the rabbits it was no manner of use, so he’s ploughed it in: an’ they say with idylls, eating peaches in our close.”

Then there was silence, while the clock throbbed heavily, and outside a wild bird called, and was still; softly the ashes rustled lower in the grate.

“She said it ended well — but what’s the good of death — what’s the good of that?” He turned his face to the ashes in the grate, and sat brooding.

Outside, among the trees, some wild animal set up a thin, wailing cry.

“Damn that row!” said I, stirring, looking also into the grey fire.

“It’s some stoat or weasel, or something. It’s been going on like that for nearly a week. I’ve shot in the trees ever so many times. There were two — one’s gone.”

Continuously, through the heavy, chilling silence, came the miserable crying from the darkness among the trees.

“You know,” he said, “she hated me this afternoon, and I hated her — ”

It was midnight, full of sick thoughts.

“It is no good,” said I. “Go to bed — it will be morning in a few hours.”

PART THREE

CHAPTER I

A NEW START IN LIFE

Lettie was wedded, as I had said, before Leslie lost all the wistful traces of his illness. They had been gone away to France five days before we recovered anything like the normal tone in the house. Then, though the routine was the same, everywhere was a sense of loss, and of change. The long voyage in the quiet home was over; we had crossed the bright sea of our youth, and already Lettie had landed and was travelling to a strange destination in a foreign land. It was time for us all to go, to leave the valley of Nethermere whose waters and whose woods were distilled in the essence of our veins. We were the children of the valley of Nethermere, a small nation with language and blood of our own, and to cast ourselves each one into separate exile was painful to us.

“I shall have to go now,” said George. “It is my nature to linger an unconscionable time, yet I dread above all things this slow crumbling away from my foundations by which I free myself at last. I must wrench myself away now —”

It was the slack time between the hay and the corn harvest, and we sat together in the grey, still morning of August pulling the stack. My hands were sore with tugging the loose wisps from the lower part of the stack, so I waited for the touch of rain to send us indoors. It came at last, and we hurried into the barn. We climbed the ladder into the loft that was strewn with farming implements and with carpenters’ tools. We sat together on the shavings that littered the bench before the high gable window, and looked out over the brooks and the woods and the ponds. The tree-tops were very near to us, and we felt ourselves the centre of the waters and the woods that spread down the rainy valley.

“In a few years,” I said, “we shall be almost strangers.”

He looked at me with fond, dark eyes and smiled incredulously.

“It is as far,” said I, “to the ‘Ram’ as it is for me to London — farther.”

“Don’t you want me to go there?” he asked, smiling quietly.

“It’s all as one where you go, you will travel north, and I east, and Lettie south. Lettie has departed. In seven weeks I go. — And you?”

“I must be gone before you,” he said decisively.

“Do you know — ” and he smiled timidly in confession, “I feel alarmed at the idea of being left alone on a loose end. I must not be the last to leave — ” he added almost appealingly.

“And you will go to Meg?” I asked.

He sat tearing the silken shavings into shreds, and telling me in clumsy fragments all he could of his feelings:

“You see, it’s not so much what you call love. I don’t know. You see, I built on Lettie” — he looked up at me shamefacedly, then continued tearing the shavings — ”you must found your castles on something, and I founded mine on Lettie. You see, I’m like plenty of folks, I have nothing definite to shape my life to. I put brick upon brick, as they come, and if the whole topples down in the end, it does. But you see, you and Lettie have made me conscious, and now I’m at a dead loss. I have looked to marriage to set me busy on my house of life, something whole and complete, of which it will supply the design. I must marry or be in a lost lane. There are two people I could marry — and Lettie’s gone. I love Meg just as well, as far as love goes. I’m not sure I don’t feel better pleased at the idea of marrying her. You know I should always have been second to Lettie, and the best part of love is being made much of, being first and foremost in the whole world for somebody. And Meg’s easy and lovely. I can have her without trembling, she’s full of soothing and comfort. I can stroke her hair and pet her, and she looks up at me, full of trust and lovingness, and there is no flaw, all restfulness in one another — ”

Three weeks later, as I lay in the August sunshine in a deck-chair on the lawn, I heard the sound of wheels along the gravel path. It was George calling for me to accompany him to his marriage. He pulled up the dog-cart near the door and came up the steps to me on the lawn. He was dressed as if for the cattle market, in jacket and breeches and gaiters.

“Well, are you ready?” he said, standing smiling down on me. His eyes were dark with excitement, and had that vulnerable look which was so peculiar to the Saxtons in their emotional moments.

“You are in good time,” said I, “it is but half-past nine.”

“It wouldn’t do to be late on a day like this,” he said gaily, “see how the sun shines. Come, you don’t look as brisk as a best man should. I thought you would have been on tenterhooks of excitement. Get up, get up! Look here, a bird has given me luck” — he showed me a white smear on his shoulder.

I drew myself up lazily.

“All right,” I said, “but we must drink a whisky to establish it.”

He followed me out of the fragrant sunshine into the dark house. The rooms were very still and empty, but the cool silence responded at once to the gaiety of our sun-warm entrance. The sweetness of the summer morning hung invisible like glad ghosts of romance through the shadowy room. We seemed to feel the sunlight dancing golden in our veins as we filled again the pale liqueur.

“Joy to you — I envy you today.”

His teeth were white, and his eyes stirred like dark liquor as he smiled.

“Here is my wedding present!”

I stood the four large water-colours along the wall before him. They were drawings among the waters and the fields of the mill, grey rain and twilight, morning with the sun pouring gold into the mist, and the suspense of a midsummer noon upon the pond. All the glamour of our yesterdays came over him like an intoxicant, and he quivered with the wonderful beauty of life that was weaving him into the large magic of the years. He realised the splendour of the pageant of days which had him in train.

“It’s been wonderful, Cyril, all the time,” he said, with surprised joy.

We drove away through the freshness of the wood, and among the flowing of the sunshine along the road. The cottages of Greymede filled the shadows with colour of roses, and the sunlight with odour of pinks and the blue of corn-flowers and larkspur. We drove briskly up the long, sleeping hill, and bowled down the hollow past the farms where the hens were walking with the red gold cocks in the orchard, and the ducks like white cloudlets under the aspen trees revelled on the pond.

“I told her to be ready any time,” said George — “but she doesn’t know it’s today. I didn’t want the public-house full of the business.”

The mare walked up the sharp little rise on top of which stood the Ram Inn. In the quiet, as the horse slowed to a standstill, we heard the crooning of a song in the garden. We sat still in the cart, and looked across the flagged yard to where the tall madonna lilies rose in clusters out of the alyssum. Beyond the border of flowers was Meg, bending over the gooseberry bushes. She saw us and came swinging down the path, with a bowl of gooseberries poised on her hip. She was dressed in a plain, fresh holland frock, with a white apron. Her black, heavy hair reflected the sunlight, and her ripe face was luxuriant with laughter.

“Well, I never!” she exclaimed, trying not to show that she guessed his errand. “Fancy you here at this time o’ morning!”

Her eyes, delightful black eyes like polished jet, untroubled and frank, looked at us as a robin might, with bright questioning. Her eyes were so different from the Saxtons’: darker, but never still and full, never hesitating, dreading a wound,

never dilating with hurt or with timid ecstasy.

“Are you ready then?” he asked, smiling down on her. “What?” she asked in confusion.

“To come to the registrar with me — I’ve got the licence.”

“But I’m just going to make the pudding,” she cried, in full expostulation.

“Let them make it themselves — put your hat on.”

“But look at me! I’ve just been getting the gooseberries. Look!” She showed us the berries, and the scratches on her arms and hands.

“What a shame!” he said, bending down to stroke her hand and her arm. She drew back smiling, flushing with joy. I could smell the white lilies where I sat.

“But you don’t mean it, do you?” she said, lifting to him her face that was round and glossy like a blackheart cherry. For answer, he unfolded the marriage licence. She read it, and turned aside her face in confusion, saying:

“Well, I’ve got to get ready. Shall you come an’ tell Gran’ma?”

“Is there any need?” he answered reluctantly.

“Yes, you come an’ tell ‘er,” persuaded Meg.

He got down from the trap. I preferred to stay out of doors. Presently Meg ran out with a glass of beer for me.

“We shan’t be many minutes,” she apologised. “I’ve o’ny to slip another frock on.”

I heard George go heavily up the stairs and enter the room over the bar-parlour, where the grandmother lay bedridden.

“What, is it thaigh, ma lad? What are thaigh doin’ ‘ere this mornin’?” she asked.

“Well A’nt, how does ta feel by now?” he said.

“Eh, sadly, lad, sadly! It’ll not be long afore they carry me downstairs head first — ”

“Nay, dunna thee say so! — I’m just off to Nottingham — I want Meg ter come.”

“What for?” cried the old woman sharply.

“I wanted ‘er to get married,” he replied.

“What! What does’t say? An’ what about th’ licence, an’ th’ ring, an’ ivrything?”

“I’ve seen to that all right,” he answered.

“Well, tha ‘rt a nice’st ‘un, I must say! What’s want goin’ in this pig-in-a-poke fashion for? This is a nice shabby trick to serve a body! What does ta mean by it?”

“You knowed as I wor goin’ ter marry ‘er directly, so I can’t see as it matters o’ th’ day. I non wanted a’ th’ pub talkin’ — ”

“Tha ‘rt mighty particklar, an’ all, an’ all! An’ why shouldn’t the pub talk? Tha ‘rt non marryin’ a nigger, as ta should be so frightened — I niver thought it on thee! — An’ what’s thy ‘orry, all of a sudden?”

“No hurry as I know of.”

“No ‘orry — !” replied the old lady, with withering sarcasm. “Tha wor niver in a ‘orry a’ thy life! She’s non commin’ wi’ thee this day, though.”

He laughed, also sarcastic. The old lady was angry. She poured on him her abuse, declaring she would not have Meg in the house again, nor leave her a penny, if she married him that day.

“Tha can please thysen,” answered George, also angry. Meg came hurriedly into the room.

“Ta’e that ‘at off — ta’e it off! Tha non goos wi’ ‘im this day, not if I know it! Does ‘e think tha ‘rt a cow, or a pig, to be fetched whenever ‘e thinks fit. Ta’e that ‘at off, I say!”

The old woman was fierce and peremptory.

“But Gran’ma — !” began Meg.

The bed creaked as the old lady tried to rise.

“Ta’e that ‘at off, afore I pull it off!” she cried.

“Oh, be still, Gran’ma — you’ll be hurtin’ yourself, you know you will — ”

“Are you coming, Meg?” said George suddenly.

“She is not!” cried the old woman.

“Are you coming, Meg?” repeated George, in a passion. Meg began to cry. I suppose she looked at him through her tears. The next thing I heard was a cry from the old woman, and the sound of staggering feet.

“Would ta drag ‘er from me! — if tha goos, ma wench, tha enters this ‘ouse no more, tha ‘eers that! Tha does thysen, my lady! Dunna venture anigh me after this, my gel!” — the old woman called louder and louder. George appeared in the doorway, holding Meg by the arm. She was crying in a little distress. Her hat, with its large silk roses, was slanting over her eyes. She was dressed in white linen. They mounted the trap. I gave him the reins and scrambled up behind. The old woman heard us through the open window, and we listened to her calling as we drove away:

“Dunna let me clap eyes on thee again, tha ungrateful ‘ussy, tha ungrateful ‘ussy! Tha’ll rue it, my wench, tha’ll rue it, an’ then dunna come ter me — ”

We drove out of hearing. George sat with a shut mouth, scowling. Meg wept a while to herself woefully. We were swinging at a good pace under the beeches of the churchyard which stood above the level of the road. Meg, having settled her hat, bent her head to the wind, too much occupied with her attire to weep. We swung round the hollow by the bog end, and rattled a short distance up the

steep hill to Watnall. Then the mare walked slowly. Meg, at leisure to collect herself, exclaimed plaintively:

“Oh, I’ve only got one glove!”

She looked at the odd silk glove that lay in her lap, then peered about among her skirts.

“I must ‘a left it in th’ bedroom,” she said piteously. He laughed, and his anger suddenly vanished.

“What does it matter? You’ll do without all right.”

At the sound of his voice, she recollected, and her tears and her weeping returned.

“Nay,” he said, “don’t fret about the old woman. She’ll come round tomorrow — an’ if she doesn’t, it’s her lookout. She’s got Polly to attend to her.”

“But she’ll be that miserable — !” wept Meg.

“It’s her own fault. At any rate, don’t let it make you miserable” — he glanced to see if anyone were in sight, then he put his arm round her waist and kissed her, saying softly, coaxingly, “She’ll be all right tomorrow. We’ll go an’ see her then, an’ she’ll be glad enough to have us. We’ll give in to her then, poor old gran’ma. She can boss you about, an’ me as well, tomorrow as much as she likes. She feels it hard, being tied to her bed. But today is ours, surely — isn’t it? Today is ours, an’ you’re not sorry, are you?”

“But I’ve got no gloves, an’ I’m sure my hair’s a sight. I never thought she could ‘a reached up like that.”

George laughed, tickled.

“No,” he said, “she Was in a temper. But we can get you some gloves directly we get to Nottingham.”

“I haven’t a farthing of money,” she said.

“I’ve plenty!” he laughed. “Oh, an’ let’s try this on.”

They were merry together as he tried on her wedding ring, and they talked softly, he gentle and coaxing, she rather plaintive. The mare took her own way, and Meg’s hat was disarranged once more by the sweeping elm-boughs. The yellow corn was dipping and flowing in the fields, like a cloth of gold pegged down at the corners under which the wind was heaving. Sometimes we passed cottages where the scarlet lilies rose like bonfires, and the tall larkspur like bright blue leaping smoke. Sometimes we smelled the sunshine on the browning corn, sometimes the fragrance of the shadow of leaves. Occasionally it was the dizzy scent of new haystacks. Then we rocked and jolted over the rough cobblestones of Cinderhill, and bounded forward again at the foot of the enormous pit hill, smelling of sulphur, inflamed with slow red fires in the daylight, and crusted with ashes. We reached the top of the rise and saw the city

before us, heaped high and dim upon the broad range of the hill. I looked for the square tower of my old school, and the sharp proud spire of St Andrews. Over the city hung a dullness, a thin dirty canopy against the blue sky.

We turned and swung down the slope between the last sullied cornfields towards Basford, where the swollen gasometers stood like toadstools. As we neared the mouth of the street, Meg rose excitedly, pulling George's arm, crying:

"Oh, look, the poor little thing!"

On the causeway stood two small boys lifting their faces and weeping to the heedless heavens, while before them, upside down, lay a baby strapped to a shut-up baby-chair. The gim-crack carpet-seated thing had collapsed as the boys were dismounting the kerb-stone with it. It had fallen backwards, and they were unable to right it. There lay the infant strapped head downwards to its silly cart, in imminent danger of suffocation. Meg leaped out, and dragged the child from the wretched chair. The two boys, drenched with tears, howled on. Meg crouched on the road, the baby on her knee, its tiny feet dangling against her skirt. She soothed the pitiful tear-wet mite. She hugged it to her, and kissed it, and hugged it, and rocked it in an abandonment of pity. When at last the childish trio were silent, the boys shaken only by the last ebbing sobs, Meg calmed also from her frenzy of pity for the little thing. She murmured to it tenderly, and wiped its wet little cheeks with her handkerchief, soothing, kissing, fondling the bewildered mite, smoothing the wet strands of brown hair under the scrap of cotton bonnet, twitching the inevitable baby cape into order. It was a pretty baby, with wisps of brown-gold silken hair and large blue eyes.

"Is it a girl?" I asked one of the boys — "How old is she?"

"I don't know," he answered awkwardly. "We've 'ad 'er about a three week."

"Why, isn't she your sister?"

"No — my mother keeps 'er" — they were very reluctant to tell us anything.

"Poor little lamb!" cried Meg, in another access of pity, clasping the baby to her bosom with one hand, holding its winsome slippered feet in the other. She remained thus, stung through with acute pity, crouching, folding herself over the mite. At last she raised her head, and said, in a voice difficult with emotion:

"But you love her — don't you?"

"Yes — she's — she's all right. But we 'ave to mind 'er," replied the boy in great confusion.

"Surely," said Meg, "surely you don't begrudge that. Poor little thing — so little, she is — surely you don't grumble at minding her a bit — ?"

The boys would not answer.

"Oh, poor little lamb, poor little lamb!" murmured Meg over the child, condemning with bitterness the boys and the whole world of men.

I taught one of the lads how to fold and unfold the wretched chair. Meg very reluctantly seated the unfortunate baby therein, gently fastening her with the strap.

“Wheer’s ‘er dummy?” asked one of the boys in muffled, self-conscious tones. The infant began to cry thinly. Meg crouched over it. The “dummy” was found in the gutter and wiped on the boy’s coat, then plugged into the baby’s mouth. Meg released the tiny clasping hand from over her finger, and mounted the dog-cart, saying sternly to the boys:

“Mind you look after her well, poor little baby with no mother. God’s watching to see what you do to her — so you be careful, mind.”

They stood very shamefaced. George clicked to the mare, and as we started threw coppers to the boys. While we drove away I watched the little group diminish down the road.

“It’s such a shame,” she said, and the tears were in her voice, “ — A sweet little thing like that — ”

“Ay,” said George softly, “there’s all sorts of things in towns.”

Meg paid no attention to him, but sat woman-like, thinking of the forlorn baby, and condemning the hard world. He, full of tenderness and protectiveness towards her, having watched her with softening eyes, felt a little bit rebuffed that she ignored him, and sat alone in her fierce womanhood. So he busied himself with the reins, and the two sat each alone until Meg was roused by the bustle of the town. The mare sidled past the electric cars nervously, and jumped when a traction engine came upon us. Meg, rather frightened, clung to George again. She was very glad when we had passed the cemetery with its white population of tombstones, and drew up in a quiet street.

But when we had dismounted, and given the horse’s head to a loafer, she became confused and bashful and timid to the last degree. He took her on his arm; he took the whole charge of her, and laughing, bore her away towards the steps of the office. She left herself entirely in his hands; she was all confusion, so he took the charge of her.

When, after a short time, they came out, she began to chatter with blushful animation. He was very quiet, and seemed to be taking his breath.

“Wasn’t he a funny little man? Did I do it all proper? — I didn’t know what I was doing. I’m sure they were laughing at me — do you think they were? Oh, just look at my frock — what a sight! What would they think — !” The baby had slightly soiled the front of her dress.

George drove up the long hill into the town. As we came down between the shops on Mansfield Road he recovered his spirits.

“Where are we going — where are you taking us?” asked Meg.

“We may as well make a day of it while we are here,” he answered, smiling and flicking the mare. They both felt that they were launched forth on an adventure. He put up at the Spread Eagle, and we walked towards the market-place for Meg’s gloves. When he had bought her these and a large lace scarf to give her a more clothed appearance, he wanted dinner.

“We’ll go,” he said, “to an hotel.”

His eyes dilated as he said it, and she shrank away with delighted fear. Neither of them had ever been to an hotel. She was really afraid. She begged him to go to an eating-house, to a cafe. He was obdurate. His one idea was to do the thing that he was half afraid to do. His passion — and it was almost intoxication — was to dare to play with life. He was afraid of the town. He was afraid to venture into the foreign places of life, and all was foreign save the valley of Nethermere. So he crossed the borders flauntingly, and marched towards the heart of the unknown. We went to the Victoria Hotel — the most imposing he could think of — and we had luncheon according to the menu. They were like two children, very much afraid, yet delighting in the adventure. He dared not, however, give the orders. He dared not address anybody, waiters or otherwise. I did that for him, and he watched me, absorbing, learning, wondering that things were so easy and so delightful. I murmured them injunctions across the table and they blushed and laughed with each other nervously. It would be hard to say whether they enjoyed that luncheon. I think Meg did not — even though she was with him. But of George I am doubtful. He suffered exquisitely from self-consciousness and nervous embarrassment, but he felt also the intoxication of the adventure, he felt as a man who has lived in a small island when he first sets foot on a vast continent. This was the first step into a new life, and he mused delightedly upon it over his brandy. Yet he was nervous. He could not get over the feeling that he was trespassing.

“Where shall we go this afternoon?” he asked.

Several things were proposed, but Meg pleaded warmly for Colwick.

“Let’s go on a steamer to Colwick Park. There’ll be entertainments there this afternoon. It’ll be lovely.”

In a few moments we were on the top of the car swinging down to the Trent Bridges. It was dinner-time, and crowds of people from shops and warehouses were hurrying in the sunshine along the pavements. Sun-blinds cast their shadows on the shop-fronts, and in the shade streamed the people dressed brightly for summer. As our car stood in the great space of the market-place we could smell the mingled scent of fruit, oranges, and small apricots, and pears piled in their vividly coloured sections on the stalls. Then away we sailed through the shadows of the dark streets and the open pools of sunshine. The

castle on its high rock stood in the dazzling dry sunlight; the fountain stood shadowy in the green glimmer of the lime trees that surrounded the alms-houses.

There were many people at the Trent. We stood a while on the bridge to watch the bright river swirling in a silent dance to the sea, while the light pleasure-boats lay asleep along the banks. We went on board the little paddle-steamer and paid our "sixpence return". After much waiting we set off, with great excitement, for our mile-long voyage. Two banjos were tumming somewhere below, and the passengers hummed and sang to their tunes. A few boats dabbled on the water. Soon the river meadows with their high thorn hedges lay green on our right, while the scarp of red rock rose on our left, covered with the dark trees of summer.

We landed at Colwick Park. It was early, and few people were there. Dead glass fairy-lamps were slung about the trees. The grass in places was worn threadbare. We walked through the avenues and small glades of the park till we came to the boundary where the race-course stretched its level green, its winding white barriers running low into the distance. They sat in the shade for some time while I wandered about. Then many people began to arrive. It became noisy, even rowdy. We listened for some time to an open-air concert, given by the pierrots. It was rather vulgar, and very tiresome. It took me back to Cowes, to Yarmouth. There were the same foolish over-eyebrowed faces, the same perpetual jingle from an outof-tune piano, the restless jiggling to the songs, the same choruses, the same escapading. Meg was well pleased. The vulgarity passed by her. She laughed, and sang the choruses half audibly, daring, but not bold. She was immensely pleased. "Oh, it's Ben's turn now. I like him, he's got such a wicked twinkle in his eye. Look at Joey trying to be funny! — He can't to save his life. Doesn't he look soft — !" She began to giggle in George's shoulder. He saw the funny side of things for the time and laughed with her.

During tea, which we took on the green veranda of the degraded hall, she was constantly breaking forth into some chorus, and he would light up as she looked at him and sing with her, sotto voce. He was not embarrassed at Colwick. There he had on his best careless, superior air. He moved about with a certain scornfulness, and ordered lobster for tea off-handedly. This also was a new walk of life. Here he was not hesitating or tremulously strung; he was patronising. Both Meg and he thoroughly enjoyed themselves.

When we got back into Nottingham she entreated him not to go to the hotel as he had proposed, and he readily yielded. Instead they went to the Castle. We stood on the high rock in the cool of the day, and watched the sun sloping over the great river-flats where the menial town spread out, and ended, while the river and the meadows continued into the distance. In the picture-galleries there was a

fine collection of Arthur Melville's paintings. Meg thought them very ridiculous. I began to expound them, but she was manifestly bored, and he was half-hearted. Outside in the grounds was a military band playing. Meg longed to be there. The townspeople were dancing on the grass. She longed to join them, but she could not dance. So they sat a while looking on.

We were to go to the theatre in the evening. The Carl Rosa Company was giving "Carmen" at the Royal. We went into the dress circle "like giddy dukes", as I said to him, so that I could see his eyes dilate with adventure again as he laughed. In the theatre, among the people in evening dress, he became once more childish and timorous. He had always the air of one who does something forbidden, and is charmed, yet fearful, like a trespassing child. He had begun to trespass that day outside his own estates of Nethermere.

"Carmen" fascinated them both. The gaudy, careless Southern life amazed them. The bold free way in which Carmen played with life startled them with hints of freedom. They stared on the stage fascinated. Between the acts they held each other's hands, and looked full into each other's wide bright eyes, and, laughing with excitement, talked about the opera. The theatre surged and roared dimly like a hoarse shell. Then the music rose like a storm, and swept and rattled at their feet. On the stage the strange storm of life clashed in music towards tragedy and futile death. The two were shaken with a tumult of wild feeling. When it was all over they rose bewildered, stunned, she with tears in her eyes, he with a strange wild beating of his heart.

They were both in a tumult of confused emotion. Their ears were full of the roaring passion of life, and their eyes were blinded by a spray of tears and that strange quivering laughter which burns with real pain. They hurried along the pavement to the Spread Eagle, Meg clinging to him, running, clasping her lace scarf over her white frock, like a scared white butterfly shaken through the night. We hardly spoke as the horse was being harnessed and the lamps lighted. In the little smoke-room he drank several whiskies, she sipping out of his glass, standing all the time ready to go. He pushed into his pocket great pieces of bread and cheese, to eat on the way home. He seemed now to be thinking with much acuteness. His few orders were given sharp and terse. He hired an extra light rug in which to wrap Meg, and then we were ready.

"Who drives?" said I.

He looked at me and smiled faintly.

"You," he answered.

Meg, like an impatient white flame, stood waiting in the light of the lamps. He covered her, extinguished her in the dark rug.

CHAPTER II

PUFFS OF WIND IN THE SAIL

The year burst into glory to usher us forth out of the valley of Nethermere. The cherry trees had been gorgeous with heavy out-reaching boughs of red and gold. Immense vegetable marrows lay prostrate in the bottom garden, their great tentacles clutching the pond bank. Against the wall the globed crimson plums hung close together, and dropped occasionally with a satisfied plunge into the rhubarb leaves. The crop of oats was very heavy. The stalks of corn were like strong reeds of bamboo; the heads of grain swept heavily over like tresses weighted with drops of gold.

George spent his time between the Mill and the Ram. The grandmother had received them with much grumbling but with real gladness. Meg was re-installed, and George slept at the Ram. He was extraordinarily bright, almost gay. The fact was that his new life interested and pleased him keenly. He often talked to me about Meg, how quaint and naïve she was, how she amused him and delighted him. He rejoiced in having a place of his own, a home, and a beautiful wife who adored him. Then the public house was full of strangeness and interest. No hour was ever dull. If he wanted company he could go into the smoke-room, if he wanted quiet he could sit with Meg, and she was such a treat, so soft and warm, and so amusing. He was always laughing at her quaint crude notions, and at her queer little turns of speech. She talked to him with a little language, she sat on his knee and twisted his moustache, finding small, unreal fault with his features for the delight of dwelling upon them. He was, he said, incredibly happy. Really he could not believe it. Meg was, ah! she was a treat. Then he would laugh, thinking how indifferent he had been about taking her. A little shadow might cross his eyes, but he would laugh again, and tell me one of his wife's funny little notions. She was quite uneducated, and such fun, he said. I looked at him as he sounded this note. I remembered his crude superiority of early days, which had angered Emily so deeply. There was in him something of the prig. I did not like his amused indulgence of his wife.

At threshing day, when I worked for the last time at the Mill, I noticed the new tendency in him. The Saxtons had always kept up a certain proud reserve. In

former years, the family had moved into the parlour on threshing day, and an extra woman had been hired to wait on the men who came with the machine. This time George suggested: "Let us have dinner with the men in the kitchen, Cyril. They are a rum gang. It's rather good sport mixing with them. They've seen a bit of life, and I like to hear them, they're so blunt. They're good studies though."

The farmer sat at the head of the table. The seven men trooped in, very sheepish, and took their places. They had not much to say at first. They were a mixed set, some rather small, young, and furtive looking, some unshapely and coarse, with unpleasant eyes, the eyelids slack. There was one man whom we called the Parrot, because he had a hooked nose, and put forward his head as he talked. He had been a very large man, but he was grey, and bending at the shoulders. His face was pale and fleshy, and his eyes seemed dull-sighted.

George patronised the men, and they did not object. He chaffed them, making a good deal of demonstration in giving them more beer. He invited them to pass up their plates, called the woman to bring more bread, and altogether played mine host of a feast of beggars. The Parrot ate very slowly.

"Come, Dad," said George, "you're not getting on. Not got many grinders — ?"

"What I've got's in th' road. Is'll 'a'e ter get 'em out. I can manage wi' bare gums, like a baby again."

"Second childhood, eh? Ah well, we must all come to it," George laughed.

The old man lifted his head and looked at him, and said slowly:

"You'n got ter get ower th' first afore that."

George laughed, unperturbed. Evidently he was well used to the thrusts of the public house.

"I suppose you soon got over yours," he said.

The old man raised himself and his eyes flickered into life. He chewed slowly, then said:

"I'd married, an' paid for it; I'd broke a constable's jaw an' paid for it; I'd deserted from the army, an' paid for that: I'd had a bullet through my cheek in India atop of it all, by I was your age."

"Oh!" said George, with condescending interest, "you've seen a bit of life then?"

They drew the old man out, and he told them in his slow, laconic fashion, a few brutal stories. They laughed and chaffed him. George seemed to have a thirst for tales of brutal experience, the raw gin of life. He drank it all in with relish, enjoying the sensation. The dinner was over. It was time to go out again to work.

“And how old are you, Dad?” George asked. The Parrot looked at him again with his heavy, tired, ironic eyes, and answered:

“If you’ll be any better for knowing — sixty-four.”

“It’s a bit rough on you, isn’t it?” continued the young man, “going round with the threshing machine and sleeping outdoors at that time of life? I should ‘a thought you’d ‘a wanted a bit o’ comfort — ”

“How do you mean, ‘rough on me’?” the Parrot replied slowly.

“Oh, I think you know what I mean,” answered George easily.

“Don’t know as I do,” said the slow old Parrot.

“Well, you haven’t made exactly a good thing out of life, have you?”

“What d’you mean by a good thing? I’ve had my life, an’ I’m satisfied wi’ it. Is’ll die with a full belly.”

“Oh, so you have saved a bit?”

“No,” said the old man deliberately, “I’ve spent as I’ve gone on. An’ I’ve had all I wish for. But I pity the angels, when the Lord sets me before them like a book to read. Heaven won’t be heaven just then.”

“You’re a philosopher in your way,” laughed George.

“And you,” replied the old man, “toddling about your backyard, think yourself mighty wise. But your wisdom ‘11 go with your teeth. You’ll learn in time to say nothing.”

The old man went out and began his work, carrying the sacks of corn from the machine to the chamber.

“There’s a lot in the old Parrot,” said George, “as he’ll never tell.”

I laughed.

“He makes you feel, as well, as if you’d a lot to discover in life,” he continued, looking thoughtfully over the dusty straw-stack at the chuffing machine.

After the harvest was ended the father began to deplete his I farm. Most of the stock was transferred to the Ram. George was going to take over his father’s milk business, and was going to farm enough of the land attaching to the Inn to support nine or ten cows. Until the spring, however, Mr Saxton retained his own milk round, and worked at improving the condition of the land ready for the valuation. George, with three cows, started a little milk supply in the neighbourhood of the Inn, prepared his land for the summer, and helped in the public-house.

Emily was the first to depart finally from the Mill. She went to a school in Nottingham, and shortly afterwards Mollie, her younger sister, went to her. In October I moved to London. Lettie and Leslie were settled in their home in Brentwood, Yorkshire. We all felt very keenly our exile from Nethermere. But

as yet the bonds were not broken; only use could sever them. Christmas brought us all home again, hastening to greet each other. There was a slight change in everybody. Lettie was brighter, more imperious, and very gay; Emily was quiet, self-restrained, and looked happier; Leslie was jollier and at the same time more subdued and earnest; George looked very healthy and happy, and sounded well pleased with himself; my mother with her gaiety at our return brought tears to our eyes.

We dined one evening at Highclose with the Tempests. It was dull as usual, and we left before ten o'clock. Lettie had changed her shoes and put on a fine cloak of greenish blue. We walked over the frost-bound road. The ice on Nethmere gleamed mysteriously in the moonlight, and uttered strange, half-audible whoops and yelps. The moon was very high in the sky, small and brilliant like a vial full of the pure white liquid of light. There was no sound in the night save the haunting movement of the ice, and the clear twinkle of Lettie's laughter.

On the drive leading to the wood we saw someone approaching. The wild grass was grey on either side, the thorn trees stood with shaggy black beards sweeping down, the pine trees were erect like dark soldiers. The black shape of the man drew near, with a shadow running at its feet. I recognised George, obscured as he was in his cap and his upturned collar. Lettie was in front with her husband. As George was passing, she said, in bright clear tones:

"A Happy New Year to you."

He stopped, swung round, and laughed.

"I thought you wouldn't have known me," he said.

"What, is it you, George?" cried Lettie in great surprise — "Now, what a joke! How are you?" — she put out her white hand from her draperies. He took it, and answered, "I am very well — and you — ?" However meaningless the words were, the tone was curiously friendly, intimate, informal.

"As you see," she replied, laughing, interested in his attitude — "but where are you going?"

"I am going home," he answered, in a voice that meant "have you forgotten that I too am married"?

"Oh, of course!" cried Lettie. "You are now mine host of the Ram. You must tell me about it. May I ask him to come home with us for an hour, Mother? — It is New Year's Eve, you know."

"You have asked him already," laughed Mother.

"Will Mrs Saxton spare you for so long?" asked Lettie of George.

"Meg? Oh, she does not order my comings and goings."

"Does she not?" laughed Lettie. "She is very unwise. Train up a husband in

the way he should go, and in after life — I never could quote a text from end to end. I am full of beginnings, but as for a finish — — -! Leslie, my shoe-lace is untied — shall I wait till I can put my foot on the fence?”

Leslie knelt down at her feet. She shook the hood back from her head, and her ornaments sparkled in the moonlight. Her face with its whiteness and its shadows was full of fascination, and in their dark recesses her eyes thrilled George with hidden magic. She smiled at him along her cheeks while her husband crouched before her. Then, as the three walked along towards the wood she flung her draperies into loose eloquence and there was a glimpse of her bosom white with the moon. She laughed and chattered, and shook her silken stuffs, sending out a perfume exquisite on the frosted air. When we reached the house Lettie dropped her draperies and rustled into the drawing-room. There the lamp was low-lit, shedding a yellow twilight from the window space. Lettie stood between the firelight and the dusky lamp-glow, tall and warm between the lights. As she turned laughing to the two men, she let her cloak slide over her white shoulder and fall with silk splendour of a peacock’s gorgeous blue over the arm of the large settee. There she stood, with her white hand upon the peacock of her cloak, where it tumbled against her dull orange dress. She knew her own splendour, and she drew up her throat laughing and brilliant with triumph. Then she raised both her arms to her head and remained for a moment delicately touching her hair into order, still fronting the two men. Then with a final little laugh she moved slowly and turned up the lamp, dispelling some of the witchcraft from the room. She had developed strangely in six months. She seemed to have discovered the wonderful charm of her womanhood. As she leaned forward with her arm outstretched to the lamp, as she delicately adjusted the wicks with mysterious fingers, she seemed to be moving in some alluring figure of a dance, her hair like a nimbus clouding the light, her bosom lit with wonder. The soft outstretching of her hand was like the whispering of strange words into the blood, and as she fingered a book the heart watched silently for the meaning.

“Won’t you take off my shoes, darling?” she said, sinking among the cushions of the settee. Leslie knelt again before her, and she bent her head and watched him.

“My feet are a tiny bit cold,” she said plaintively, giving him her foot, that seemed like gold in the yellow silk stocking. He took it between his hands, stroking it.

“It is quite cold,” he said, and he held both her feet in his hands.

“Ah, you dear boy!” she cried with sudden gentleness, bending forward and touching his cheek.

“Is it great fun being mine host of ‘Ye Ramme Inne’!” she said playfully to George. There seemed a long distance between them now as she sat, with the man in evening dress crouching before her putting golden shoes on her feet.

“It is rather,” he replied, “the men in the smoke-room say such rum things. My word, you hear some tales there.”

“Tell us, do!” she pleaded.

“Oh! I couldn’t. I never could tell a tale, and even if I could — well — ”

“But I do long to hear,” she said, “what the men say in the smoke-room of ‘Ye Ramme Inne’. Is it quite untellable?”

“Quite!” he laughed.

“What a pity! See what a cruel thing it is to be a woman, Leslie: we never know what men say in smoke-rooms, while you read in your novels everything a woman ever uttered. It is a shame! George, you are a wretch, you should tell me. I do envy you — ”

“What do you envy me, exactly?” he asked, laughing always at her whimsical way.

“Your smoke-room. The way you see life — or the way you hear it, rather.”

“But I should have thought you saw life ten times more than me,” he replied.

“I! I only see manners — good manners and bad manners. You know ‘manners maketh a man’. That’s when a woman’s there. But you wait a while, you’ll see.”

“When shall I see?” asked George, flattered and interested.

“When you have made the fortune you talked about,” she replied.

He was uplifted by her remembering the things he had said.

“But when I have made it — when!” — he said sceptically — “even then — well, I shall only be, or have been, landlord of ‘Ye Ramme Inne’.” He looked at her, waiting for her to lift up his hopes with her gay balloons.

“Oh, that doesn’t matter! Leslie might be landlord of some ‘Ram Inn’ when he’s at home, for all anybody would know — mightn’t you, hubby, dear?”

“Thanks!” replied Leslie, with good-humoured sarcasm.

“You can’t tell a publican from a peer, if he’s a rich publican,” she continued. “Money maketh the man, you know.”

“Plus manners,” added George, laughing.

“Oh, they are always There — where I am. I give you ten years. At the end of that time you must invite us to your swell place — say the Hall at Eberwich — and we will come — ‘with all our numerous array’.”

She sat among her cushions smiling upon him. She was half ironical, half sincere. He smiled back at her, his dark eyes full of trembling hope, and pleasure, and pride.

“How is Meg?” she asked. “Is she as charming as ever — or have you spoiled her?”

“Oh, she is as charming as ever,” he replied. “And we are tremendously fond of one another.”

“That is right! — I do think men are delightful,” she added, smiling.

“I am glad you think so,” he laughed.

They talked on brightly about a thousand things. She touched on Paris, and pictures, and new music, with her quick chatter, sounding to George wonderful in her culture and facility. And at last he said he must go.

“Not until you have eaten a biscuit and drunk good luck with me,” she cried, catching her dress about her like a dim flame and running out of the room. We all drank to the New Year in the cold champagne.

“To the Vita Nuova!” said Lettie, and we drank, smiling. “Hark!” said George, “the hooters.”

We stood still and listened. There was a faint booing noise far away outside. It was midnight. Lettie caught up a wrap and we went to the door. The wood, the ice, the grey dim hills lay frozen in the light of the moon. But outside the valley, far away in Derbyshire, away towards Nottingham, on every hand the distant hooters and buzzers of mines and ironworks crowded small on the borders of the night, like so many strange, low voices of cockerels bursting forth at different pitch, with different tone, warning us of the dawn of the New Year.

CHAPTER III

THE FIRST PAGES OF SEVERAL ROMANCES

I found a good deal of difference in Leslie since his marriage. He had lost his assertive self-confidence. He no longer pronounced emphatically and ultimately on every subject, nor did he seek to dominate, as he had always done, the company in which he found himself. I was surprised to see him so courteous and attentive to George. He moved unobtrusively about the room while Lettie was chattering, and in his demeanour there was a new reserve, a gentleness and grace. It was charming to see him offering the cigarettes to George, or, with beautiful tact, asking with his eyes only whether he should refill the glass of his guest, and afterward replacing it softly close to the other's hand.

To Lettie he was unfailingly attentive, courteous, and undemonstrative.

Towards the end of my holiday he had to go to London on business, and we agreed to take the journey together. We must leave Woodside soon after eight o'clock in the morning. Lettie and he had separate rooms. I thought she would not have risen to take breakfast with us, but at a quarter-past seven, just as Rebecca was bringing in the coffee, she came downstairs. She wore a blue morning-gown, and her hair was as beautifully dressed as usual.

"Why, my darling, you shouldn't have troubled to come down so early," said Leslie, as he kissed her.

"Of course, I should come down," she replied, lifting back the heavy curtains and looking out on the snow where the darkness was wilting into daylight. "I should not let you go away into the cold without having seen you take a good breakfast. I think it is thawing. The snow on the rhododendrons looks sodden and drooping. Ah, well, we can keep out the dismal of the morning for another hour." She glanced at the clock — "just an hour!" she added. He turned to her with a swift tenderness. She smiled to him, and sat down at the coffee-maker. We took our places at table.

"I think I shall come back tonight," he said quietly, almost appealingly.

She watched the flow of the coffee before she answered. Then the brass urn swung back, and she lifted her face to hand him the cup.

"You will not do anything so foolish, Leslie," she said calmly. He took his

cup, thanking her, and bent his face over the fragrant steam.

“I can easily catch the 7.15 from St Pancras,” he replied, without looking up.

“Have I sweetened to your liking Cyril?” she asked, and then, as she stirred her coffee she added, “It is ridiculous, Leslie! You catch the 7.15 and very probably miss the connection at Nottingham. You can’t have the motor-car there, because of the roads. Besides, it is absurd to come toiling home in the cold slushy night when you can just as well stay in London and be comfortable.”

“At any rate I should get the 10.30 down to Lawton Hill,” he urged.

“But there is no need,” she replied, “there is not the faintest need for you to come home tonight. It is really absurd of you. Think of all the discomfort! Indeed I should not want to come trailing dismally home at midnight, I should not indeed. You would be simply wretched. Stay and have a jolly evening with Cyril.”

He kept his head bent over his plate and did not reply. His persistence irritated her slightly.

“That is what you can do!” she said. “Go to the pantomime. Or wait — go to Maeterlinck’s ‘Blue Bird’. I am sure that is on somewhere. I wonder if Rebecca has destroyed yesterday’s paper. Do you mind touching the bell, Cyril?” Rebecca came, and the paper was discovered. Lettie carefully read the notices, and planned for us with zest a delightful programme for the evening. Leslie listened to it all in silence.

When the time had come for our departure Lettie came with us into the hall to see that we were well wrapped up. Leslie had spoken very few words. She was conscious that he, was deeply offended, but her manner was quite calm, and she petted us both brightly.

“Goodbye dear!” she said to him, when he came mutely to kiss her. “You know it would have been miserable for you to sit all those hours in the train at night. You will have ever such a jolly time. I know you will. I shall look for you tomorrow. Goodbye, then, goodbye!”

He went down the steps and into the car without looking at her. She waited in the doorway as we moved round. In the black-grey morning she seemed to harbour the glittering blue sky and the sunshine of March in her dress and her luxuriant hair. He did not look at her till we were curving to the great, snow-cumbered rhododendrons, when, at the last moment he stood up in a sudden panic to wave to her. Almost as he saw her the bushes came between them and he dropped dejectedly into his seat.

“Goodbye!” we heard her call cheerfully and tenderly like a blackbird.

“Goodbye!” I answered, and: “Goodbye Darling, goodbye!” he cried, suddenly starting up in a passion of forgiveness and tenderness.

The car went cautiously down the soddened white path, under the trees.

I suffered acutely the sickness of exile in Norwood. For weeks I wandered the streets of the suburb, haunted by the spirit of some part of Nethermere. As I went along the quiet roads where the lamps in yellow loneliness stood among the leafless trees of the night I would feel the feeling of the dark, wet bit of path between the wood meadow and the brooks. The spirit of that wild little slope to the Mill would come upon me, and there in the suburb of London I would walk wrapt in the sense of a small wet place in the valley of Nethermere. A strange voice within me rose and called for the hill path; again I could feel the wood waiting for me, calling and calling, and I crying for the wood, yet the space of many miles was between us. Since I left the valley of home I have not much feared any other loss. The hills of Nethermere had been my walls, and the sky of Nethermere my roof overhead. It seemed almost as if, at home, I might lift my hand to the ceiling of the valley, and touch my own beloved sky, whose familiar clouds came again and again to visit me, whose stars were constant to me, born when I was born, whose sun had been all my father to me. But now the skies were strange over my head, and Orion walked past me unnoticed, he who night after night had stood over the woods to spend with me a wonderful hour. When does day now lift up the confines of my dwelling place, when does the night throw open her vastness for me, and send me the stars for company? There is no night in a city. How can I lose myself in the magnificent forest of darkness when night is only a thin scattering of the trees of shadow with barrenness of lights between!

I could never lift my eyes save to the Crystal Palace, crouching, cowering wretchedly among the yellow-grey clouds, pricking up its two round towers like pillars of anxious misery. No landmark could have been more foreign to me, more depressing, than the great dilapidated palace which lay for ever prostrate above us, fretting because of its own degradation and ruin.

I watched the buds coming on the brown almond trees; I heard the blackbirds, and saw the restless starlings; in the streets were many heaps of violets, and men held forward to me snowdrops whose white mute lips were pushed upwards in a bunch: but these things had no meaning for me, and little interest.

Most eagerly I waited for my letters. Emily wrote to me very constantly:

“Don’t you find it quite exhilarating, almost intoxicating, to be so free? I think it is quite wonderful. At home you cannot live your own life. You have to struggle to keep even a little apart for yourself. It is so hard to stand aloof from our mothers, and yet they are only hurt and insulted if you tell them what is in your heart. It is such a relief not to have to be anything to anybody, but just to please yourself. I am sure Mother and I have suffered a great deal from trying to

keep up our old relations. Yet she would not let me go. When I come home in the evening and think that I needn't say anything to anybody, nor do anything for anybody, but just have the evening for myself, I am overjoyed.

“I have begun to write a story — ”

Again, a little later, she wrote:

“As I go to school by Old Brayford village in the morning the birds are thrilling wonderfully and everything seems stirring. Very likely there will be a set-back, and after that spring will come in truth.

“When shall you come and see me? I cannot think of a spring without you. The railways are the only fine exciting things here — one is only a few yards away from school. All day long I am watching the great Midland trains go south. They are very lucky to be able to rush southward through the sunshine.

“The crows are very interesting. They flap past all the time we're out in the yard. The railways and the crows make the charm of my life in Brayford. The other day I saw no end of pairs of crows. Do you remember what they say at home? — 'One for sorrow.' Very often one solitary creature sits on the telegraph wires. I almost hate him when I look at him. I think my badge for life ought to be — one crow — ”

Again, a little later:

“I have been home for the week-end. Isn't it nice to be made much of, to be an important cherished person for a little time? It is quite a new experience for me.

“The snowdrops are full out among the grass in the front garden — and such a lot. I imagined you must come in the sunshine of the Sunday afternoon to see them. It did not seem possible you should not. The winter aconites are out along the hedge. I knelt and kissed them. I have been so glad to go away, to breathe the free air of life, but I felt as if I could not come away from the aconites. I have sent you some — are they much withered?

“Now I am in my lodgings, I have the quite unusual feeling of being contented to stay here a little while — not long — not above a year, I am sure. But even to be contented for a little while is enough for me — ”

In the beginning of March I had a letter from the father:

“You'll not see us again in the old place. We shall be gone in a fortnight. The things are most of them gone already. George has got Bob and Flower. I have sold three of the cows, Stafford, and Julia and Hannah. The place looks very empty. I don't like going past the cowsheds, and we miss hearing the horses stamp at night. But I shall not be sorry when we have really gone. I begin to feel as if we'd stagnated here. I begin to feel as if I was settling and getting narrow and dull. It will be a new lease of life to get away.

“But I'm wondering how we shall be over there. Mrs Saxton feels very

nervous about going. But at the worst we can but come back. I feel as if I must go somewhere, it's stagnation and starvation for us here. I wish George would come with me. I never thought he would have taken to public-house keeping, but he seems to like it all right. He was down with Meg on Sunday. Mrs Saxton says he's getting a public-house tone. He is certainly much livelier, more full of talk than he was. Meg and he seem very comfortable, I'm glad to say. He's got a good milk round, and I've no doubt but what he'll do well. He is very cautious at the bottom; he'll never lose much if he never makes much.

"Sam and David are very great friends. I'm glad I've got the boy. We often talk of you. It would be very lonely if it wasn't for the excitement of selling things and so on. Mrs Saxton hopes you will stick by George. She worries a bit about him, thinking he may go wrong. I don't think he will ever go far. But I should be glad to know you were keeping friends. Mrs Saxton says she will write to you about it —"

George was a very poor correspondent. I soon ceased to expect a letter from him. I received one directly after the father's.

"My Dear Cyril,

"Forgive me for not having written you before, but you see, I cannot sit down and write to you any time. If I cannot do it just when I am in the mood, I cannot do it at all. And it so often happens that the mood comes upon me when I am in the fields at work, when it is impossible to write. Last night I sat by myself in the kitchen on purpose to write to you, and then I could not. All day, at Greymede, when I was drilling in the fallow at the back of the church, I had been thinking of you, and I could have written there if I had had materials, but I had not, and at night I could not.

"I am sorry to say that in my last letter I did not thank you for the books. I have not read them both, but I have nearly finished Evelyn Innes. I get a bit tired of it towards the end. I do not do much reading now. There seems to be hardly any chance for me, either somebody is crying for me in the smoke-room, or there is some business, or else Meg won't let me. She doesn't like me to read at night, she says I ought to talk to her, so I have to.

"It is half-past seven, and I am sitting ready dressed to go and talk to Harry Jackson about a young horse he wants to sell to me. He is in pretty low water, and it will make a pretty good horse. But I don't care much whether I have it or not. The mood seized me to write to you. Somehow at the bottom I feel miserable and heavy, yet there is no need. I am making pretty good money, and I've got all I want. But when I've been ploughing and getting the oats in those fields on the hillside at the back of Greymede church, I've felt as if I didn't care whether I got on or not. It's very funny. Last week I made over five pounds

clear, one way and another, and yet now I'm as restless, and discontented as I can be, and I seem eager for something, but I don't know what it is. Sometimes I wonder where I am going. Yesterday I watched broken white masses of cloud sailing across the sky in a fresh strong wind. They all seemed to be going somewhere. I wondered where the wind was blowing them. I don't seem to have hold on anything, do I? Can you tell me what I want at the bottom of my heart? I wish you were here, then I think I should not feel like this. But generally I don't, generally I am quite jolly, and busy.

"By jove, here's Harry Jackson come for me. I will finish this letter when I get back.

" — I have got back, we have turned out, but I cannot finish. I cannot tell you all about it. I've had a little row with Meg. Oh, I've had a rotten time. But I cannot tell you about it tonight, it is late, and I am tired, and have a headache. Some other time perhaps — "

"GEORGE SAXTON."

The spring came bravely, even in south London, and the town was filled with magic. I never knew the sumptuous purple of evening till I saw the round arc-lamps fill with light, and roll like golden bubbles along the purple dusk of the high road. Everywhere at night the city is filled with the magic of lamps: over the river they pour in golden patches their floating luminous oil on the restless darkness; the bright lamps float in and out of the cavern of London Bridge Station like round shining bees in and out of a black hive; in the suburbs the street lamps glimmer with the brightness of lemons among the trees. I began to love the town.

In the mornings I loved to move in the aimless street's procession, watching the faces come near to me, with the sudden glance of dark eyes, watching the mouths of the women blossom with talk as they passed, watching the subtle movements of the shoulders of men beneath their coats, and the naked warmth of their necks that went glowing along the street. I loved the city intensely for its movement of men and women, the soft, fascinating flow of the limbs of men and women, and the sudden flash of eyes and lips as they pass. Among all the faces of the street my attention roved like a bee which clammers drunkenly among blue flowers. I became intoxicated with the strange nectar which I sipped out of the eyes of the passers-by.

I did not know how time was hastening by on still bright wings, till I saw the scarlet hawthorn flaunting over the road, and the lime buds lit up like wine drops in the sun, and the pink scarves of the lime buds pretty as louse-wort a-blossom in the gutters, and a silver-pink tangle of almond boughs against the blue sky. The lilacs came out, and in the pensive stillness of the suburb, at night, came the

delicious tarry scent of lilac flowers, wakening a silent laughter of romance.

Across all this, strangely, came the bleak sounds of home. Alice wrote to me at the end of May:

“Cyril dear, prepare yourself. Meg has got twins — yesterday. I went up to see how she was this afternoon, not knowing anything, and there I found a pair of bubs in the nest, and old Ma Stainwright bossing the show. I nearly fainted. Sybil dear, I hardly knew whether to laugh or to cry when I saw those two rummy little round heads, like two larch cones cheek by cheek on a twig. One is a darkie, with lots of black hair, and the other is red, would you believe it, just lit up with thin red hair like a flicker of firelight. I gasped. I believe I did shed a few tears, though what for, I don’t know.

“The old grandma is a perfect old wretch over it. She lies chuckling and passing audible remarks in the next room, as pleased as punch really, but so mad because Ma Stainwright wouldn’t have them taken in to her. You should have heard her when we took them in at last. They are both boys. She did make a fuss, poor old woman. I think she’s going a bit funny in the head. She seemed sometimes to think they were hers, and you should have heard her, the way she talked to them, it made me feel quite funny. She wanted them lying against her on the pillow, so that she could feel them with her face. I shed a few more tears, Sybil. I think I must be going dotty also. But she came round when we took them away, and began to chuckle to herself, and talk about the things she’d say to George when he came — awful shocking things, Sybil, made me blush dreadfully.

“Georgie didn’t know about it then. He was down at Bingham, buying some horses, I believe. He seems to have got a craze for buying horses. He got in with Harry Jackson and Mayhew’s sons — you know, they were horse dealers — at least their father was. You remember he died bankrupt about three years ago. There are Fred and Duncan left, and they pretend to keep on the old business. They are always up at the Ram, and Georgie is always driving about with them. I don’t like it — they are a loose lot, rather common, and poor enough now.

“Well, I thought I’d wait and see Georgie. He came about half-past five. Meg had been fidgeting about him, wondering where he was, and how he was, and so on. Bless me if I’d worry and whittle about a man. The old grandma heard the cart, and before he could get down she shouted — you know her room is in the front — ‘Hi, George, ma lad, sharpen thy shins an’ com’ an’ a’e a look at ‘em — thee’r’s two on ‘em, two on ‘em!’ and she laughed something awful.

“‘Ello Granma, what art ter shoutin’ about?’ he said, and at the sound of his voice Meg turned to me so pitiful, and said: “‘He’s been wi’ them Mayhews.’

“‘Tha’s gotten twins, a couple at a go, ma lad!’ shouted the old woman, and

you know how she gives squeal before she laughs! She made the horse shy, and he swore at it something awful. Then Bill took it, and Georgie came upstairs. I saw Meg seem to shrink when she heard him kick at the stairs as he came up, and she went white. When he got to the top he came in. He fairly reeked of whisky and horses. Bah, a man is hateful when he reeks of drink! He stood by the side of the bed grinning like a fool, and saying, quite thick:

“‘You’ve bin in a bit of a ‘urry, ‘aven’t you Meg. An’ how are ter feelin’ then?’

“‘Oh, I’m a’ right,’ said Meg.

“‘Is it twins, straight?’ he said; ‘Wheer is ‘em?’

“‘Meg looked over at the cradle, and he went round the bed to it, holding to the bed-rail. He had never kissed her, nor anything. When he saw the twins, asleep with their fists shut tight as wax, he gave a laugh as if he was amused, and said:

“‘Two right enough — an’ one on ‘em red! Which is the girl, Meg, the black ‘un?’

“‘They’re both boys,’ said Meg, quite timidly.

“‘He turned round, and his eyes went little.

“‘Blast ‘em then!’ he said. He stood there looking like a devil. Sybil dear, I did not know our George could look like that. I thought he could only look like a faithful dog or a wounded stag. But he looked fiendish. He stood watching the poor little twins, scowling at them, till at last the little red one began to whine a bit. Ma Stainwright came pushing her fat carcass in front of him and bent over the baby, saying:

“‘Why, my pretty, what are they doin’ to thee, what are they? — What are they doin’ to thee?’”

“‘Georgie scowled blacker than ever, and went out, lurching against the wash-stand and making the pots rattle till my heart jumped in my throat.

“‘Well, if you don’t call that scandylous — !’ said old Ma

“‘Stainwright, and Meg began to cry. You don’t know, Cyril! She sobbed fit to break her heart. I felt as if I could have killed him.

“‘That old gran’ma began talking to him, and he laughed at her. I do hate to hear a man laugh when he’s half drunk. It makes my blood boil all of a sudden. That old grandmother backs him up in everything, she’s a regular nuisance. Meg has cried to me before over the pair of them. The wicked, vulgar old thing that she is — ”

I went home to Woodside early in September. Emily was staying at the Ram. It was strange that everything was so different. Nethermere even had changed. Nethermere was no longer a complete, wonderful little world that held us charmed inhabitants. It was a small, insignificant valley lost in the spaces of the

earth. The tree that had drooped over the brook with such delightful, romantic grace was a ridiculous thing when I came home after a year of absence in the south. The old symbols were trite and foolish.

Emily and I went down one morning to Strelley Mill. The house was occupied by a labourer and his wife, strangers from the north. He was tall, very thin, and silent, strangely suggesting kinship with the rats of the place. She was small and very active, like some ragged domestic fowl run wild. Already Emily had visited her, so she invited us into the kitchen of the mill, and set forward the chairs for us. The large room had the barren air of a cell. There was a small table stranded towards the fireplace, and a few chairs by the walls; for the rest, desert spaces of flagged floor retreating into shadow. On the walls by the windows were five cages of canaries, and the small sharp movements of the birds made the room more strange in its desolation. When we began to talk the birds began to sing, till we were quite bewildered, for the little woman spoke Glasgow Scotch, and she had a hare lip. She rose and ran towards the cages, crying herself like some wild fowl, and flapping a duster at the warbling canaries.

“Stop it, stop it,” she cried, shaking her thin weird body at them. “Silly little devils, fools, fools, fools!!” and she flapped the duster till the birds were subdued. Then she brought us delicious scones and apple jelly, urging us, almost nudging us with her thin elbows to make us eat.

“Don’t you like ‘em, don’t you? Well, eat ‘em, eat ‘em then. Go on, Emily, go on, eat some more. Only don’t tell Tom — don’t tell Tom when ‘e comes in” — she shook her head and laughed her shrilling, weird laughter.

As we were going she came out with us, and went running on in front. We could not help noting how ragged and unkempt was her short black skirt. But she hastened around us, hither and thither like an excited fowl, talking in her high-pitched, unintelligible manner. I could not believe the brooding mill was in her charge. I could not think this was the Strelley Mill of a year ago. She fluttered up the steep orchard bank in front of us. Happening to turn round and see Emily and me smiling at each other she began to laugh her strident, weird laughter, saying, with a leer:

“Emily, he’s your sweetheart, your sweetheart, Emily! You never told me!” and she laughed aloud.

We blushed furiously. She came away from the edge of the sluice gully, nearer to us, crying:

“You’ve been here o’ nights, haven’t you, Emily — haven’t you?” and she laughed again. Then she sat down suddenly, and pointing above our heads, shrieked:

“Ah, look there “ — we looked and saw the mistletoe. “Look at her, look at

her! How many kisses a night, Emily? — Ha! Ha! Kisses all the year! Kisses o' nights in a lonely place.”

She went on wildly for a short time, then she dropped her voice and talked in low, pathetic tones. She pressed on us scones and jelly and oat-cakes, and we left her.

When we were out on the road by the brook Emily looked at me with shamefaced, laughing eyes. I noticed a small movement of her lips, and in an instant I found myself kissing her, laughing with some of the little woman's wildness.

CHAPTER IV

DOMESTIC LIFE AT THE RAM

George was very anxious to receive me at his home. The Ram had as yet only a six days' licence, so on Sunday afternoon I walked over to tea. It was very warm and still and sunny as I came through Greymede. A few sweethearts were sauntering under the horse-chestnut trees, or crossing the road to go into the fields that lay smoothly carpeted after the hay-harvest.

As I came round the flagged track to the kitchen door of the inn I heard the slur of a baking-tin and the bang of the oven door, and Meg saying crossly:

"No, don't you take him, Emily — naughty little thing! Let his father hold him."

One of the babies was crying.

I entered, and found Meg all flushed and untidy, wearing a large white apron, just rising from the oven. Emily, in a cream dress, was taking a red-haired, crying baby from out of the cradle. George sat in the small arm-chair, smoking and looking cross.

"I can't shake hands," said Meg, rather flurried. "I am all floury. Sit down, will you — " and she hurried out of the room. Emily looked up from the complaining baby to me and smiled a woman's rare, intimate smile, which says: "See, I am engaged thus for a moment, but I keep my heart for you all the time."

George rose and offered me the round arm-chair. It was the highest honour he could do me. He asked me what I would drink. When I refused everything, he sat down heavily on the sofa, frowning, and angrily cudgelling his wits for something to say — in vain.

The room was large and comfortably furnished with rush-chairs, a glass-knobbed dresser, a cupboard with glass doors, perched on a shelf in the corner, and the usual large sofa whose cosy loose-bed and pillows were covered with red cotton stuff. There was a peculiar reminiscence of victuals and drink in the room; beer, and a touch of spirits, and bacon. Teenie, the sullen, black-browed servant girl came in carrying the other baby, and Meg called from the scullery to ask her if the child were asleep. Meg was evidently in a bustle and a flurry, a most uncomfortable state.

“No,” replied Teenie, “he’s not for sleep this day.”

“Mend the fire and see to the oven, and then put him his frock on,” replied Meg testily. Teenie set the black-haired baby in the second cradle. Immediately he began to cry, or rather to shout his remonstrance. George went across to him and picked up a white furry rabbit, which he held before the child.

“Here, look at bun-bun! Have your nice rabbit! Hark at it squeaking”

The baby listened for a moment, then, deciding that this was only a put-off, began to cry again. George threw down the rabbit and took the baby, swearing inwardly. He dandled the child on his knee.

“What’s up then? — What’s up wi’ thee? Have a ride then — dee-de-dee-dee.”

But the baby knew quite well what was the father’s feeling towards him, and he continued to cry.

“Hurry up, Teenie” said George as the maid rattled the coal on the fire. Emily was walking about hushing her charge, and smiling at me, so that I had a peculiar pleasure in gathering for myself the honey of endearment which she shed on the lips of the baby. George handed over his child to the maid, and said to me with patient sarcasm:

“Will you come in the garden?”

I rose and followed him across the sunny flagged yard, along the path between the bushes. He lit his pipe and sauntered along as a man on his own estate does, feeling as if he were untrammelled by laws or conventions.

“You know,” he said, “she’s a dam rotten manager.”

I laughed, and remarked how full of plums the trees were.

“Yes” he replied heedlessly — “you know she ought to have sent the girl out with the kids this afternoon, and have got dressed directly. But no, she must sit gossiping with Emily all the time they were asleep, and then as soon as they wake up she begins to make cake — ”

“I suppose she felt she’d enjoy a pleasant chat, all quiet,” I answered.

“But she knew quite well you were coming, and what it would be. But a woman’s no dam foresight.”

“Nay, what does it matter” said I.

“Sunday’s the only day we can have a bit of peace, so she might keep ‘em quiet then.”

“I suppose it was the only time, too, that she could have a quiet gossip,” I replied.

“But you don’t know,” he said, “there seems to be never a minute of freedom. Teenie sleeps in now, and lives with us in the kitchen — Oswald as well — so I never know what it is to have a moment private. There doesn’t seem a single

spot anywhere where I can sit quiet. It's the kids all day, and the kids all night, and the servants, and then all the men in the house — I sometimes feel as if I should like to get away. I shall leave the pub as soon as I can — only Meg doesn't want to."

"But if you leave the public-house — what then?"

"I should like to get back on a farm. This is no sort of a place, really, for farming. I've always got some business on hand. There's a traveller to see, or I've got to go to the brewers, or I've somebody to look at a horse, or something. Your life's all messed up. If I had a place of my own, and farmed it in peace — "

"You'd be as miserable as you could be," I said.

"Perhaps so," he assented, in his old reflective manner. "Perhaps so! Anyhow, I needn't bother, for I feel as if I never shall go back — to the land."

"Which means at the bottom of your heart you don't intend to," I said, laughing.

"Perhaps so" he again yielded. "You see, I'm doing pretty well here — apart from the public-house: I always think that's Meg's. Come and look in the stable. I've got a shire mare and two nags: pretty good; I went down to Melton Mowbray with Tom Mayhew, to a chap they've had dealings with. Tom's all right, and he knows how to buy, but he is such a lazy, careless devil, too lazy to be bothered to sell — "

George was evidently interested. As we went round to the stables, Emily came out with the baby, which was dressed in a new silk frock. She advanced, smiling to me with dark eyes.

"See, now he is good! Doesn't he look pretty?"

She held the baby for me to look at. I glanced at it, but I was only conscious of the near warmth of her cheek, and of the scent of her hair.

"Who is he like?" I asked, looking up and finding myself full in her eyes. The question was quite irrelevant: her eyes spoke a whole clear message that made my heart throb; yet she answered.

"Who is he? Why, nobody, of course! But he will be like Father, don't you think?"

The question drew my eyes to hers again, and again we looked each other the strange intelligence that made her flush and me breathe in as I smiled.

"Ay! Blue eyes like your father's — not like yours — " Again the wild messages in her looks.

"No" she answered very softly. "And I think he'll be jolly, like Father — they have neither of them our eyes, have they?"

"No," I answered, overcome by a sudden hot flush of tenderness. "No — not vulnerable. To have such soft, vulnerable eyes as you used makes one feel

nervous and irascible. But you have clothed over the sensitiveness of yours, haven't you? — like naked life, naked defenceless protoplasm they were, is it not so?"

She laughed, and at the old painful memories she dilated in the old way, and I felt the old tremor at seeing her soul flung quivering on my pity.

"And were mine like that?" asked George, who had come up.

He must have perceived the bewilderment of my look as I tried to adjust myself to him. A slight shadow, a slight chagrin appeared on his face.

"Yes," I answered, "yes — but not so bad. You never gave yourself away so much — you were most cautious: but just as defenceless."

"And am I altered?" he asked, with quiet irony, as if he knew I was not interested in him.

"Yes, more cautious. You keep in the shadow. But Emily has clothed herself, and can now walk among the crowd at her own gait."

It was with an effort I refrained from putting my lips to kiss her at that moment as she looked at me with womanly dignity and tenderness. Then I remembered, and said:

"But you are taking me to the stable, George! Come and see the horses too, Emily."

"I will. I admire them so much," she replied, and thus we both indulged him.

He talked to his horses and of them, laying his hand upon them, running over their limbs. The glossy, restless animals interested him more than anything. He broke into a little flush of enthusiasm over them. They were his new interest. They were quiet and yet responsive; he was their master and owner. This gave him real pleasure.

But the baby became displeased again. Emily looked at me for sympathy with him.

"He is a little wanderer," she said, "he likes to be always moving. Perhaps he objects to the ammonia of stables too," she added, frowning and laughing slightly; "It is not very agreeable, is it?"

"Not particularly," I agreed, and as she moved off I went with her, leaving him in the stables. When Emily and I were alone we sauntered aimlessly back to the garden. She persisted in talking to the baby, and in talking to me about the baby, till I wished the child in Jericho. This made her laugh, and she continued to tantalise me. The hollyhock flowers of the second whorl were flushing to the top of the spires. The bees, covered with pale crumbs of pollen, were swaying a moment outside the wide gates of the florets, then they swung in with excited hum, and clung madly to the furry white capitols, and worked riotously round the waxy bases. Emily held out the baby to watch, talking all the time in low,

fond tones. The child stretched towards the bright flowers. The sun glistened on his smooth hair as on bronze dust, and the wondering blue eyes of the baby followed the bees. Then he made small sounds, and suddenly waved his hands, like crumpled pink hollyhock buds.

“Look,” said Emily, “look at the little bees! Ah, but you mustn’t touch them, they bite. They’re coming” she cried, with sudden laughing apprehension, drawing the child away. He made noises of remonstrance. She put him near to the flowers again till he knocked the spire with his hand and two indignant bees came sailing out. Emily drew back quickly crying in alarm, then laughing with excited eyes at me, as if she had just escaped a peril in my presence. Thus she teased me by flinging me all kinds of bright gages of love while she kept me aloof because of the child. She laughed with pure pleasure at this state of affairs, and delighted the more when I frowned, till at last I swallowed my resentment and laughed too, playing with the hands of the baby, and watching his blue eyes change slowly like a softly sailing sky.

Presently Meg called us in to tea. She wore a dress of fine blue stuff with cream silk embroidery, and she looked handsome, for her hair was very hastily dressed.

“What, have you had that child all this time?” she exclaimed, on seeing Emily. “Where is his father?”

“I don’t know — we left him in the stable, didn’t we, Cyril? But I like nursing him, Meg. I like it ever so much,” replied Emily.

“Oh yes, you may be sure George would get off it if he could. He’s always in the stable. As I tell him, he fair stinks of horses. He’s not that fond of the children, I can tell you. Come on, my pet — why, come to its mammy.”

She took the baby and kissed it passionately, and made extravagant love to it. A clean-shaven young man with thick bare arms went across the yard.

“Here, just look and tell George as tea is ready,” said Meg.

“Where is he?” asked Oswald, the sturdy youth who attended to the farm business.

“You know where to find him,” replied Meg, with that careless freedom which was so subtly derogatory to her husband. George came hurrying from the out-building. “What, is it tea already?” he said.

“It’s a wonder you haven’t been crying out for it this last hour,” said Meg.

“It’s a marvel you’ve got dressed so quick,” he replied.

“Oh, is it?” she answered — “well, it’s not with any of your help that I’ve done it, that is a fact. Where’s Teenie?” The maid, short, stiffly built, very dark and sullen-looking, came forward from the gate.

“Can you take Alfie as well, just while we have tea?” she asked. Teenie replied

that she should think she could, whereupon she was given the ruddy-haired baby, as well as the dark one. She sat with them on a seat at the end of the yard. We proceeded to tea.

It was a very great spread. There were hot cakes, three or four kinds of cold cakes, tinned apricots, jellies, tinned lobster, and trifles in the way of jam, cream, and rum.

“I don’t know what those cakes are like,” said Meg. “I made them in such a fluster. Really, you have to do things as best you can when you’ve got children — especially when there’s two. I never seem to have time to do my hair up even — look at it now.”

She put up her hands to her head, and I could not help noticing how grimy and rough were her nails.

The tea was going on pleasantly when one of the babies began to cry. Teenie bent over it crooning gruffly. I leaned back and looked out of the door to watch her. I thought of the girl in Tchekoff’s story, who smothered her charge, and I hoped the grim Teenie would not be driven to such desperation. The other child joined in this chorus. Teenie rose from her seat and walked about the yard, gruffly trying to soothe the twins.

“It’s a funny thing, but whenever anybody comes they’re sure to be cross,” said Meg, beginning to simmer.

“They’re no different from ordinary,” said George, “it’s only that you’re forced to notice it then.”

“No, it is not,” cried Meg in a sudden passion:

“Is it now, Emily? Of course, he has to say something! Weren’t they as good as gold this morning, Emily? — and yesterday! — Why, they never murmured, as good as gold they were. But he wants them to be as dumb as fishes: he’d like them shutting up in a box as soon as they make a bit of noise.”

“I was not saying anything about it,” he replied.

“Yes, you were,” she retorted. “I don’t know what you call it then — ”

The babies outside continued to cry.

“Bring Alfie to me,” called Meg, yielding to the mother feeling.

“Oh no, damn it” said George, “let Oswald take him.”

“Yes,” replied Meg bitterly, “let anybody take him so long as he’s out of your sight. You never ought to have children, you didn’t — ”

George murmured something about “today”.

“Come then,” said Meg, with a whole passion of tenderness, as she took the red-haired baby and held it to her bosom. “Why, what is it then, what is it, my precious? Hush then, pet, hush then.”

The baby did not hush. Meg rose from her chair and stood rocking the baby in

her arms, swaying from one foot to the other.

“He’s got a bit of wind,” she said.

We tried to continue the meal, but everything was awkward and difficult.

“I wonder if he’s hungry,” said Meg, “let’s try him.”

She turned away and gave him her breast. Then he was still, so she covered herself as much as she could, and sat down again to tea. We had finished, so we sat and waited while she ate. This disjuncting of the meal, by reflex action, made Emily and me more accurate. We were exquisitely attentive, and polite to a nicety. Our very speech was clipped with precision, as we drifted to a discussion of Strauss and Debussy. This of course put a breach between us two and our hosts, but we could not help it; it was our only way of covering over the awkwardness of the occasion. George sat looking glum and listening to us. Meg was quite indifferent. She listened occasionally, but her position as mother made her impregnable. She sat eating calmly, looking down now and again at her baby, holding us in slight scorn, babblers that we were. She was secure in her high maternity; she was mistress and sole authority. George, as father, was first servant; as an indifferent father, she humiliated him and was hostile to his wishes. Emily and I were mere intruders, feeling ourselves such. After tea we went upstairs to wash our hands. The grandmother had had a second stroke of paralysis, and lay inert, almost stupified. Her large bulk upon the bed was horrible to me, and her face, with the muscles all slack and awry, seemed like some cruel cartoon. She spoke a few thick words to me. George asked her if she felt all right, or should he rub her. She turned her old eyes slowly to him.

“My leg — my leg a bit,” she said in her strange guttural.

He took off his coat, and pushing his hand under the bedclothes, sat rubbing the poor old woman’s limb patiently, slowly, for some time. She watched him for a moment, then without her turning her eyes from him, he passed out of her vision and she lay staring at nothing, in his direction.

“There,” he said at last, “is that any better then, Mother?”

“Ay, that’s a bit better,” she said slowly.

“Should I gi’e thee a drink?” he asked, lingering, wishing to minister all he could to her before he went.

She looked at him, and he brought the cup. She swallowed a few drops with difficulty.

“Doesn’t it make you miserable to have her always there?” I asked him, when we were in the next room. He sat down on the large white bed and laughed shortly.

“We’re used to it — we never notice her, poor old gran’ma.”

“But she must have made a difference to you — she must make a big

difference at the bottom, even if you don't know it," I said.

"She'd got such a strong character," he said, musing, " — she seemed to understand me. She was a real friend to me before she was so bad. Sometimes I happen to look at her — generally I never see her, you know how I mean — but sometimes I do — and then — it seems a bit rotten — "

He smiled at me peculiarly, " — it seems to take the shine off things," he added, and then, smiling again with ugly irony — "She's our skeleton in the closet." He indicated her large bulk.

The church bells began to ring. The grey church stood on a rise among the fields not far away, like a handsome old stag looking over towards the inn. The five bells began to play, and the sound came beating upon the window.

"I hate Sunday night," he said restlessly.

"Because you've nothing to do?" I asked.

"I don't know," he said. "It seems like a gag, and you feel helpless. I don't want to go to church, and hark at the bells, they make you feel uncomfortable."

"What do you generally do?" I asked.

"Feel miserable — I've been down to Mayhew's these last two Sundays, and Meg's been pretty mad. She says it's the only night I could stop with her, or go out with her. But if I stop with her, what can I do? — and if we go out, it's only for half an hour. I hate Sunday night — it's a dead end."

When we went downstairs, the table was cleared, and Meg was bathing the dark baby. Thus she was perfect. She handled the bonny, naked child with beauty of gentleness. She kneeled over him nobly. Her arms and her bosom and her throat had a nobility of roundness and softness. She drooped her head with the grace of a Madonna, and her movements were lovely, accurate and exquisite, like an old song perfectly sung. Her voice, playing and soothing round the curved limbs of the baby, was like water, soft as wine in the sun, running with delight.

We watched humbly, sharing the wonder from afar.

Emily was very envious of Meg's felicity. She begged to be allowed to bathe the second baby. Meg granted her bounteous permission:

"Yes, you can wash him if you like, but what about your frock?"

Emily, delighted, began to undress the baby whose hair was like crocus petals. Her fingers trembled with pleasure as she loosed the little tapes. I always remember the inarticulate delight with which she took the child in her hands, when at last his little shirt was removed, and felt his soft white limbs and body. A distinct, glowing atmosphere seemed suddenly to burst out around her and the child, leaving me outside. The moment before she had been very near to me, her eyes searching mine, her spirit clinging timidly about me. Now I was put away,

quite alone, neglected, forgotten, outside the glow which surrounded the woman and the baby.

“Ha! — Ha-a-a!” she said with a deep-throated vowel, as she put her face against the child’s small breasts, so round, almost like a girl’s, silken and warm and wonderful. She kissed him, and touched him, and hovered over him, drinking in his baby sweetnesses, the sweetness of the laughing little mouth’s wide, wet kisses, of the round, waving limbs, of the little shoulders so winsomely curving to the arms and the breasts, of the tiny soft neck hidden very warm beneath the chin, tasting deliciously with her lips and her cheeks all the exquisite softness, silkiness, warmth, and tender life of the baby’s body.

A woman is so ready to disclaim the body of a man’s love; she yields him her own soft beauty with so much gentle patience and regret; she clings to his neck, to his head and his cheeks, fondling them for the soul’s meaning that is there, and shrinking from his passionate limbs and his body. It was with some perplexity, some anger and bitterness that I watched Emily moved almost to ecstasy by the baby’s small, innocuous person.

“Meg never found any pleasure in me as she does in the kids,” said George bitterly, for himself.

The child, laughing and crowing, caught his hands in Emily’s hair and pulled dark tresses down, while she cried out in remonstrance, and tried to loosen the small fists that were shut so fast. She took him from the water and rubbed him dry, with marvellous gentle little rubs, he kicking and expostulating. She brought his fine hair into one silken up-springing of ruddy gold like an aureole. She played with his tiny balls of toes, like wee pink mushrooms, till at last she dare detain him no longer, when she put on his flannel and his night-gown and gave him to Meg.

Before carrying him to bed Meg took him to feed him. His mouth was stretched round the nipple as he sucked, his face was pressed closer and closer to the breast, his fingers wandered over the fine white globe, blue-veined and heavy, trying to hold it. Meg looked down upon him with a consuming passion of tenderness, and Emily clasped her hands and leaned forward to him. Even thus they thought him exquisite.

When the twins were both asleep, I must tiptoe upstairs to see them. They lay cheek by cheek in the crib next the large white bed, breathing little, ruffling breaths, out of unison, so small and pathetic with their tiny shut fingers. I remembered the two larks.

From the next room came a heavy sound of the old woman’s breathing. Meg went in to her. As in passing I caught sight of the large, prone figure in the bed, I thought of Guy de Maupassant’s “Toine”, who acted as an incubator.

CHAPTER V

THE DOMINANT MOTIF OF SUFFERING

The old woman lay still another year, then she suddenly sank out of life. George ceased to write to me, but I learned his news elsewhere. He became more and more intimate with the Mayhews. After old Mayhew's bankruptcy, the two sons had remained on in the large dark house that stood off the Nottingham Road in Eberwich. This house had been bequeathed to the oldest daughter by the mother. Maud Mayhew, who was married and separated from her husband, kept house for her brothers. She was a tall, large woman with high cheek-bones and oily black hair looped over her ears. Tom Mayhew was also a handsome man, very dark, and ruddy, with insolent bright eyes.

The Mayhews' house was called the "Hollies". It was a solid building, of old red brick, standing fifty yards back from the Eberwich highroad. Between it and the road was an unkempt lawn, surrounded by very high black holly trees. The house seemed to be imprisoned among the bristling hollies. Passing through the large gate, one came immediately upon the bare side of the house and upon the great range of stables. Old Mayhew had in his day stabled thirty or more horses there. Now grass was between the red bricks, and all the bleaching doors were shut, save perhaps two or three which were open for George's horses.

The "Hollies" became a kind of club for the disconsolate, "better-off" men of the district. The large dining-room was gloomily and sparsely furnished, the drawing-room was a desert, but the smaller morning-room was comfortable enough, with wicker arm-chairs, heavy curtains, and a large sideboard. In this room George and the Mayhews met with several men two or three times a week. There they discussed horses and made mock of the authority of women. George provided the whisky, and they all gambled timidly at cards. These bachelor parties were the source of great annoyance to the wives of the married men who attended them.

"He's quite unbearable when he's been at those Mayhews'," said Meg. "I'm sure they do nothing but cry us down."

Maud Mayhew kept apart from these meetings, watching over her two children. She had been very unhappily married, and now was reserved, silent.

The women of Eberwiche watched her as she went swiftly along the street in the morning with her basket, and they gloried a little in her overthrow, because she was too proud to accept consolation, yet they were sorry in their hearts for her, and she was never touched with calumny. George saw her frequently, but she treated him coldly as she treated the other men, so he was afraid of her.

He had more facilities now for his horse-dealing. When the grandmother died, in the October two years after the marriage of George, she left him seven hundred pounds. To Meg she left the Inn, and the two houses she had built in Newerton, together with brewery shares to the value of nearly a thousand pounds. George and Meg felt themselves to be people of property. The result, however, was only a little further coldness between them. He was very careful that she had all that was hers. She said to him once when they were quarrelling, that he needn't go feeding the Mayhews on the money that came out of her business. Thenceforward he kept strict accounts of all his affairs, and she must audit them, receiving her exact dues. This was a mortification to her woman's capricious soul of generosity and cruelty.

The Christmas after the grandmother's death another son was born to them. For the time George and Meg became very good friends again.

When in the following March I heard he was coming down to London with Tom Mayhew on business, I wrote and asked him to stay with me. Meg replied, saying she was so glad I had asked him: she did not want him going off with that fellow again; he had been such a lot better lately, and she was sure it was only those men at Mayhews' made him what he was.

He consented to stay with me. I wrote and told him Lettie and Leslie were in London, and that we should dine with them one evening. I met him at King's Cross and we all three drove west. Mayhew was a remarkably handsome, well-built man; he and George made a notable couple. They were both in breeches and gaiters, but George still looked like a yeoman, while Mayhew had all the braggadocio of the stable. We made an impossible trio. Mayhew laughed and jested broadly for a short time, then he grew restless and fidgety. He felt restrained and awkward in my presence. Later, he told George I was a damned parson. On the other hand, I was content to look at his rather vulgar beauty — his teeth were blackened with smoking — and to listen to his ineffectual talk, but I could find absolutely no response. George was go-between. To me he was cautious and rather deferential, to Mayhew he was careless, and his attitude was tinged with contempt.

When the son of the horse-dealer at last left us to go to some of his father's old cronies, we were glad. Very uncertain, very sensitive and wavering, our old intimacy burned again like the fragile burning of alcohol. Closed together in the

same blue flames, we discovered and watched the pageant of life in the town revealed wonderfully to us. We laughed at the tyranny of old romance. We scorned the faded procession of old years, and made mock of the vast pilgrimage of by-gone romances travelling farther into the dim distance. Were we not in the midst of the bewildering pageant of modern life, with all its confusion of bannerets and colours, with its infinite inter-weaving of sounds, the screech of the modern toys of haste striking like keen spray, the heavy boom of busy mankind gathering its bread, earnestly, forming the bed of all other sounds; and between these two the swiftness of songs, the triumphant tilt of the joy of life, the hoarse oboes of privation, the shuddering drums of tragedy, and the eternal scraping of the two deep-toned strings of despair?

We watched the taxi-cabs coursing with their noses down to the street, we watched the rocking hansoms, and the lumbering stateliness of buses. In the silent green cavern of the park we stood and listened to the surging of the ocean of life. We watched a girl with streaming hair go galloping down the Row, a dark man, laughing and showing his white teeth, galloping more heavily at her elbow. We saw a squad of life-guards enter the gates of the park, erect and glittering with silver and white and red. They came near to us, and we thrilled a little as we watched the muscles of their white smooth thighs answering the movement of the horses, and their cheeks and their chins bending with proud manliness to the rhythm of the march. We watched the exquisite rhythm of the body of men moving in scarlet and silver farther down the leafless avenue, like a slightly wavering spark of red life blown along. At the Marble Arch Corner we listened to a little socialist who was flaring fiercely under a plane tree. The hot stream of his words flowed over the old wounds that the knowledge of the unending miseries of the poor had given me, and I winced. For him the world was all East End, and all the East End was as a pool from which the waters are drained off, leaving the water-things to wrestle in the wet mud under the sun, till the whole of the city seems a heaving, shuddering struggle of black-mudded objects deprived of the elements of life. I felt a great terror of the little man, lest he should make me see all mud, as I had seen before. Then I felt a breathless pity for him, that his eyes should be always filled with mud, and never brightened. George listened intently to the speaker, very much moved by him.

At night, after the theatre, we saw the outcasts sleep in a rank under the Waterloo bridge, their heads to the wall, their feet lying out on the pavement: a long, black, ruffled heap at the foot of the wall. All the faces were covered but two, that of a peaked, pale little man, and that of a brutal woman. Over these two faces, floating like uneasy pale dreams on their obscurity, swept now and again the trailing light of the tramcars. We picked our way past the line of abandoned

feet, shrinking from the sight of the thin bare ankles of a young man, from the draggled edge of the skirts of a bunched-up woman, from the pitiable sight of the men who had wrapped their legs in newspaper for a little warmth, and lay like worthless parcels. It was raining. Some men stood at the edge of the causeway fixed in dreary misery, finding no room to sleep. Outside, on a seat in the blackness and the rain, a woman sat sleeping, while the water trickled and hung heavily at the ends of her loosened strands of hair. Her hands were pushed in the bosom of her jacket. She lurched forward in her sleep, started, and one of her hands fell out of her bosom. She sank again to sleep. George gripped my arm.

“Give her something,” he whispered in panic. I was afraid. Then suddenly getting a florin from my pocket, I stiffened my nerves and slid it into her palm. Her hand was soft, and warm, and curled in sleep. She started violently, looking up at me, then down at her hand. I turned my face aside, terrified lest she should look in my eyes, and full of shame and grief I ran down the embankment to him. We hurried along under the plane trees in silence. The shining cars were drawing tall in the distance over Westminster Bridge, a fainter, yellow light running with them on the water below. The wet streets were spilled with golden liquor of light, and on the deep blackness of the river were the restless yellow slashes of the lamps.

Lettie and Leslie were staying up at Hampstead with a friend of the Tempests, one of the largest shareholders in the firm of Tempest, Wharton & Co. The Raphaels had a substantial house, and Lettie preferred to go to them rather than to an hotel, especially as she had brought with her her infant son, now ten months old, with his nurse. They invited George and me to dinner on the Friday evening. The party included Lettie’s host and hostess, and also a Scottish poetess, and an Irish musician, composer of songs and pianoforte rhapsodies.

Lettie wore a black lace dress in mourning for one of Leslie’s maternal aunts. This made her look older, otherwise there seemed to be no change in her. A subtle observer might have noticed a little hardness about her mouth, and disillusion hanging slightly on her eyes. She was, however, excited by the company in which she found herself, therefore she overflowed with clever speeches and rapid, brilliant observations. Certainly on such occasions she was admirable. The rest of the company formed, as it were, the orchestra which accompanied her.

George was exceedingly quiet. He spoke a few words now and then to Mrs Raphael, but on the whole he was altogether silent, listening.

“Really!” Lettie was saying, “I don’t see that one thing is worth doing any more than another. It’s like dessert: you are equally indifferent whether you have grapes, or pears, or pineapple.”

“Have you already dined so far?” sang the Scottish poetess in her musical, plaintive manner.

“The only thing worth doing is producing,” said Lettie. “Alas, that is what all the young folk are saying nowadays!” sighed the Irish musician.

“That is the only thing one finds any pleasure in — that is to say, any satisfaction,” continued Lettie, smiling, and turning to the two artists.

“Do you not think so?” she added.

“You do come to a point at last,” said the Scottish poetess, “when your work is a real source of satisfaction.”

“Do you write poetry then?” asked George of Lettie.

“I! Oh, dear no! I have tried strenuously to make up a Limerick for a competition, but in vain. So you see, I am a failure there. Did you know I have a son, though? — A marvellous little fellow, is he not, Leslie? — He is my work. I am a wonderful mother, am I not, Leslie?”

“Too devoted,” he replied.

“There!” she exclaimed in triumph — “When I have to sign my name and occupation in a visitor’s book, it will be, ‘ — Mother’. I hope my business will flourish,” she concluded, smiling.

There was a touch of ironical brutality in her now. She was, at the bottom, quite sincere. Having reached that point in a woman’s career when most, perhaps all, of the things in life seem worthless and insipid, she had determined to put up with it, to ignore her own self, to empty her own potentialities into the vessel of another or others, and to live her life at secondhand. This peculiar abnegation of self is the resource of a woman for the escaping of the responsibilities of her own development. Like a nun, she puts over her living face a veil, as a sign that the woman no longer exists for herself: she is the servant of God, of some man, of her children, or maybe of some cause. As a servant, she is no longer responsible for her self, which would make her terrified and lonely. Service is light and easy. To be responsible for the good progress of one’s life is terrifying. It is the most insufferable form of loneliness, and the heaviest of responsibilities. So Lettie indulged her husband, but did not yield her independence to him; rather it was she who took much of the responsibility of him into her hands, and therefore he was so devoted to her. She had, however, now determined to abandon the charge of herself to serve her children. When the children grew up, either they would unconsciously fling her away, back upon herself again in bitterness and loneliness, or they would tenderly cherish her, chafing at her love-bonds occasionally.

George looked and listened to all the flutter of conversation, and said nothing. It seemed to him like so much unreasonable rustling of pieces of paper, of leaves

of books, and so on. Later in the evening Lettie sang, no longer Italian folk songs, but the fragmentary utterances of Debussy and Strauss. These also to George were quite meaningless, and rather wearisome. It made him impatient to see her wasting herself upon them.

“Do you like those songs?” she asked in the frank, careless manner she affected.

“Not much,” he replied, ungraciously.

“Don’t you?” she exclaimed, adding with a smile, “Those are the most wonderful things in the world, those little things” — she began to hum a Debussy idiom. He could not answer her on the point, so he sat with the arrow sticking in him, and did not speak.

She enquired of him concerning Meg and his children and the affairs of Eberwich, but the interest was flimsy, as she preserved a wide distance between them, although apparently she was so unaffected and friendly. We left before eleven.

When we were seated in the cab and rushing down-hill, he said:

“You know, she makes me mad.”

He was frowning, looking out of the window away from me. “Who, Lettie? Why, what riles you?” I asked.

He was some time in replying.

“Why, she’s so affected.”

I sat in the small, close space and waited.

“Do you know — ?” he laughed, keeping his face averted from me. “She makes my blood boil. I could hate her.”

“Why?” I said gently.

“I don’t know. I feel as if she’d insulted me. She does lie, doesn’t she?”

“I didn’t notice it,” I said, but I knew he meant her shirking, her shuffling of her life.

“And you think of those poor devils under the bridge — and then of her and them frittering away themselves and money in that idiocy — ”

He spoke with passion.

“You are quoting Longfellow,” I said.

“What?” he asked, looking at me suddenly.

““Life is real, life is earnest — ”“

He flushed slightly at my good-natured gibe.

“I don’t know what it is,” he replied. “But it’s a pretty rotten business, when you think of her fooling about wasting herself, and all the waste that goes on up there, and the poor devils rotting on the Embankment — and — ”

“And you — and Mayhew — and me — ” I continued.

He looked at me very intently to see if I was mocking. He laughed. I could see he was very much moved.

“Is the time quite out of joint?” I asked.

“Why! “ — he laughed. “No. But she makes me feel so angry — as if I should burst. — I don’t know when I felt in such a rage. I wonder why. I’m sorry for him, poor devil. Lettie and Leslie’ — they seemed christened for one another, didn’t they?”

“What if you’d had her?” I asked.

“We should have been like a cat and dog; I’d rather be with Meg a thousand times — now!” he added significantly. He sat watching the lamps and the people and the dark buildings slipping past us.

“Shall we go and have a drink?” I asked him, thinking we would call in Frascati’s to see the come-and-go.

“I could do with a brandy,” he replied, looking at me slowly.

We sat in the restaurant listening to the jiggling of the music, watching the changing flow of the people. I like to sit a long time by the hollyhocks watching the throng of varied bees which poise and hesitate outside the wild flowers, then swing in with a hum which sets everything aquiver. But still more fascinating it is to watch the come and go of people weaving and intermingling in the complex mesh of their intentions, with all the subtle grace and mystery of their moving, shapely bodies.

I sat still, looking out across the amphitheatre. George looked also, but he drank glass after glass of brandy. “I like to watch the people,” said I.

“Ay — and doesn’t it seem an aimless, idiotic business — look at them!” he replied in tones of contempt. I looked instead at him, in some surprise and resentment. His face was gloomy, stupid and unrelieved. The amount of brandy he had drunk had increased his ill humour.

“Shall we be going?” I said. I did not want him to get drunk in his present state of mind.

“Ay — in half a minute,” he finished the brandy, and rose. Although he had drunk a good deal, he was quite steady, only there was a disagreeable look always on his face, and his eyes seemed smaller and more glittering than I had seen them. We took a bus to Victoria. He sat swaying on his seat in the dim, clumsy vehicle, saying not a word. In the vast cavern of the station the theatre-goers were hastening, crossing the pale grey strand, small creatures scurrying hither and thither in the space beneath the lonely lamps. As the train crawled over the river we watched the far-flung hoop of diamond lights curving slowly round and striping with bright threads the black water. He sat looking with heavy eyes, seeming to shrink from the enormous unintelligible lettering of the poem

of London.

The town was too large for him, he could not take in its immense, its stupendous poetry. What did come home to him was its flagrant discords. The unintelligibility of the vast city made him apprehensive, and the crudity of its big, coarse contrasts wounded him unutterably.

“What is the matter?” I asked him as we went along the silent pavement at Norwood.

“Nothing,” he replied. “Nothing!” and I did not trouble him further.

We occupied a large, two-bedded room — that looked down the hill and over to the far woods of Kent. He was morose and untalkative. I brought up a soda-siphon and whisky, and we proceeded to undress. When he stood in his pyjamas he waited as if uncertain.

“Do you want a drink?” he asked.

I did not. He crossed to the table, and as I got into my bed I heard the brief fizzing of the syphon. He drank his glass at one draught, then switched off the light. In the sudden darkness I saw his pale shadow go across to the sofa in the window-space. The blinds were undrawn, and the stars looked in. He gazed out on the great bay of darkness wherein, far away and below, floated a few sparks of lamps like herring-boats at sea.

“Aren’t you coming to bed?” I asked.

“I’m not sleepy — you go to sleep,” he answered, resenting having to speak at all.

“Then put on a dressing-gown — there’s one in that corner — turn the light on.”

He did not answer, but fumbled for the garment in the darkness. When he had found it, he said:

“Do you mind if I smoke?”

I did not. He fumbled again in his pockets for cigarettes, always refusing to switch on the light. I watched his face bowed to the match as he lighted his cigarette. He was still handsome in the ruddy light, but his features were coarser. I felt very sorry for him, but I saw that I could get no nearer to him, to relieve him. For some time I lay in the darkness watching the end of his cigarette like a ruddy, malignant insect hovering near his lips, putting the timid stars immensely far away. He sat quiet still, leaning on the sofa arm. Occasionally there was a little glow on his cheeks as the cigarette burned brighter, then again I could see nothing but the dull red bee.

I suppose I must have dropped asleep. Suddenly I started as something fell to the floor. I heard him cursing under his breath.

“What’s the matter?” I asked.

“I’ve only knocked something down — cigarette-case or something,” he replied, apologetically.

“Aren’t you coming to bed?” I asked.

“Yes, I’m coming,” he answered quite docile.

He seemed to wander about and knock against things as he came. He dropped heavily into bed.

“Are you sleepy now?” I asked.

“I dunno — I shall be directly,” he replied.

“What’s up with you?” I asked.

“I dunno,” he answered. “I’m like this sometimes, when there’s nothing I want to do, and nowhere I want to go, and nobody I want to be near. Then you feel so rottenly lonely, Cyril. You feel awful, like a vacuum, with a pressure on you, a sort of pressure of darkness, and you yourself — just nothing, a vacuum — that’s what it’s like — a little vacuum that’s not dark, all loose in the middle of a space of darkness, that’s pressing on you.”

“Good gracious!” I exclaimed, rousing myself in bed. “That sounds bad!”

He laughed slightly.

“It’s all right,” he said, “it’s only the excitement of London, and that little man in the park, and that woman on the seat — I wonder where she is tonight, poor devil — and then Lettie. I seem thrown off my balance. — I think really, I ought to have made something of myself — ”

“What?” I asked, as he hesitated.

“I don’t know,” he replied slowly, “ — a poet or something, like Burns — I don’t know. I shall laugh at myself for thinking so, tomorrow. But I am born a generation too soon — I wasn’t ripe enough when I came. I wanted something I hadn’t got. I’m something short. I’m like corn in a wet harvest — full, but pappy, no good. I s’ll rot. I came too soon; or I wanted something that would ha’ made me grow fierce. That’s why I wanted Lettie — I think. But am I talking damn rot? What am I saying? What are you making me talk for? What are you listening for?”

I rose and went across to him, saying:

“I don’t want you to talk! If you sleep till morning things will look different.”

I sat on his bed and took his hand. He lay quite still.

“I’m only a kid after all, Cyril,” he said, a few moments later.

“We all are,” I answered, still holding his hand. Presently he fell asleep.

When I awoke the sunlight was laughing with the young morning in the room. The large blue sky shone against the window, and the birds were calling in the garden below, shouting to one another and making fun of life. I felt glad to have opened my eyes. I lay for a moment looking out on the morning as on a blue

bright sea in which I was going to plunge.

Then my eyes wandered to the little table near the couch. I noticed the glitter of George's cigarette-case, and then, with a start, the whisky decanter. It was nearly empty. He must have drunk three-quarters of a pint of liquor while I was dozing. I could not believe it. I thought I must have been mistaken as to the quantity the bottle contained. I leaned out to see what it was that had startled me by its fall the night before. It was the large, heavy drinking glass which he had knocked down but not broken. I could see no stain on the carpet.

George was still asleep. He lay half uncovered, and was breathing quietly. His face looked inert like a mask. The pallid, uninspired clay of his features seemed to have sunk a little out of shape, so that he appeared rather haggard, rather ugly, with grooves of ineffectual misery along his cheeks. I wanted him to wake, so that his inert, flaccid features might be inspired with life again. I could not believe his charm and his beauty could have forsaken him so, and left his features dreary, sunken clay.

As I looked he woke. His eyes opened slowly. He looked at me and turned away, unable to meet my eyes. He pulled the bedclothes up over his shoulders, as though to cover himself from me, and he lay with his back to me, quite still, as if he were asleep, although I knew he was quite awake; he was suffering the humiliation of lying waiting for his life to crawl back and inhabit his body. As it was, his vitality was not yet sufficient to inform the muscles of his face and give him an expression, much less to answer by challenge.

CHAPTER VI

PISGAH

When her eldest boy was three years old Lettie returned to live at Eberwich. Old Mr Tempest died suddenly, so Leslie came down to inhabit Highclose. He was a very much occupied man. Very often he was in Germany or in the South of England engaged on business. At home he was unfailingly attentive to his wife and his two children. He had cultivated a taste for public life. In spite of his pressure of business he had become a County Councillor, and one of the prominent members of the Conservative Association. He was very fond of answering or proposing toasts at some public dinner, of entertaining political men at Highclose, of taking the chair at political meetings, and finally, of speaking on this or that platform. His name was fairly often seen in the newspapers. As a mine-owner, he spoke as an authority on the employment of labour, on royalties, land-owning and so on.

At home he was quite tame. He treated his wife with respect, romped in the nursery, and domineered the servants royally. They liked him for it — her they did not like. He was noisy, but unobservant, she was quiet and exacting. He would swear and bluster furiously, but when he was round the corner they smiled. She gave her orders and passed very moderate censure, but they went away cursing to themselves. As Lettie was always a very good wife, Leslie adored her when he had the time, and when he had not, forgot her comfortably.

She was very contradictory. At times she would write to me in terms of passionate dissatisfaction: she had nothing at all in her life, it was a barren futility.

“I hope I shall have another child next spring,” she would write, “there is only that to take away the misery of this torpor. I seem full of passion and energy, and it all fizzles out in day-to-day domestics — ”

When I replied to her, urging her to take some work that she could throw her soul into, she would reply indifferently. Then later:

“You charge me with contradiction. Well, naturally. You see I wrote that screeching letter in a mood which won’t come again for some time. Generally I am quite content to take the rain and the calm days just as they come, then

something flings me out of myself — and I am a trifle demented: — very, very blue, as I tell Leslie.”

Like so many women, she seemed to live, for the most part contentedly, a small indoor existence with artificial light and padded upholstery. Only occasionally, hearing the winds of life outside, she clamoured to be out in the black, keen storm. She was driven to the door, she looked out and called into the tumult wildly, but feminine caution kept her from stepping over the threshold.

George was flourishing in his horse-dealing.

In the morning, processions of splendid shire horses, tied tail and head, would tramp grandly along the quiet lanes of Eberwich, led by George’s man, or by Tom Mayhew, while in the fresh clean sunlight George would go riding by, two restless nags dancing beside him.

When I came home from France five years after our meeting in London I found him installed in the Hollies. He had rented the house from the Mayhews, and had moved there with his family, leaving Oswald in charge of the Ram. I called at the large house one afternoon, but George was out. His family surprised me. The twins were tall lads of six. There were two more boys, and Meg was nursing a beautiful baby girl about a year old. This child was evidently mistress of the household. Meg, who was growing stouter, indulged the little creature in every way.

“How is George?” I asked her.

“Oh, he’s very well,” she replied. “He’s always got something on hand. He hardly seems to have a spare moment; what with his socialism, and one thing and another.”

It was true, the outcome of his visit to London had been a wild devotion to the cause of the down-trodden. I saw a picture of Watt’s “Mammon” on the walls of the morning-room, and the works of Blatchford, Masterman, and Chiozza Money on the side-table. The socialists of the district used to meet every other Thursday evening at the Hollies to discuss reform. Meg did not care for these earnest souls.

“They’re not my sort,” she said, “too jerky and bumptious. They think everybody’s slow-witted but them. There’s one thing about them, though, they don’t drink, so that’s a blessing.”

“Why!” I said, “Have you had much trouble that way?” She lowered her voice to a pitch which was sufficiently mysterious to attract the attention of the boys.

“I shouldn’t say anything if it wasn’t that you were like brothers,” she said. “But he did begin to have dreadful drinking bouts. You know it was always spirits, and generally brandy — and that makes such work with them. You’ve no idea what he’s like when he’s evil-drunk. Sometimes he’s all for talk, sometimes

he's laughing at everything, and sometimes he's just snappy. And then — " here her tones grew ominous, " — he'll come home evil-drunk."

At the memory she grew serious.

"You couldn't imagine what it's like, Cyril," she said. "It's like having Satan in the house with you, or a black tiger glowering at you. I'm sure nobody knows what I've suffered with him — "

The children stood with large awful eyes and paling lips, listening.

"But he's better now?" I said.

"Oh, yes — since Gertie came," — she looked fondly at the baby in her arms — "He's a lot better now. You see he always wanted a girl, and he's very fond of her — isn't he, pet? — are you your Dadda's girlie? — and Mamma's too, aren't you?"

The baby turned with sudden coy shyness, and clung to her mother's neck. Meg kissed her fondly, then the child laid her cheek against her mother's. The mother's dark eyes, and the baby's large, hazel eyes looked at me serenely. The two were very calm, very complete and triumphant together. In their completeness was a security which made me feel alone and ineffectual. A woman who has her child in her arms is a tower of strength, a beautiful, unassailable tower of strength that may in its turn stand quietly dealing death.

I told Meg I would call again to see George. Two evenings later I asked Lettie to lend me a dog-cart to drive over to the Hollies. Leslie was away on one of his political jaunts, and she was restless. She proposed to go with me. She had called on Meg twice before in the new large home.

We started about six o'clock. The night was dark and muddy. Lettie wanted to call in Eberwich village, so she drove the long way round Selsby. The horse was walking through the gate of the Hollies at about seven o'clock. Meg was upstairs in the nursery, the maid told me, and George was in the dining-room getting baby to sleep.

"All right!" I said, "we will go in to him. Don't bother to tell him."

As we stood in the gloomy, square hall we heard the rumble of a rocking-chair, the stroke coming slow and heavy to the tune of "Henry Martin", one of our Strelley Mill folk songs. Then, through the man's heavily-accented singing floated the long light crooning of the baby as she sang, in her quaint little fashion, a mischievous second to her father's lullaby. He waxed a little louder; and without knowing why, we found ourselves smiling with piquant amusement. The baby grew louder too, till there was a shrill ring of laughter and mockery in her music. He sang louder and louder, the baby shrilled higher and higher, the chair swung in long, heavy beats. Then suddenly he began to laugh. The rocking stopped, and he said, still with laughter and enjoyment in his tones:

“Now that is very wicked! Ah, naughty Girlie — go to boh, go to bohey! — at once.”

The baby chuckled her small, insolent mockery.

“Come, Mamma!” he said, “come and take Girlie to bohey!”

The baby laughed again, but with an uncertain touch of appeal in her tone. We opened the door and entered. He looked up very much startled to see us. He was sitting in a tall rocking-chair by the fire, coatless, with white shirt-sleeves. The baby, in her high-waisted, tight little night-gown, stood on his knee, her wide eyes fixed on us, wild wisps of her brown hair brushed across her forehead and glinting like puffs of bronze dust over her ears. Quickly she put her arms round his neck and tucked her face under his chin, her small feet poised on his thigh, the night-gown dropping upon them. He shook his head as the puff of soft brown hair tickled him. He smiled at us, saying:

“You see I’m busy!”

Then he turned again to the little brown head tucked under his chin, blew away the luminous cloud of hair, and rubbed his lips and his moustache on the small white neck, so warm and secret. The baby put up her shoulders, and shrank a little, bubbling in his neck with hidden laughter. She did not lift her face or loosen her arms.

“She thinks she is shy,” he said. “Look up, young hussy, and see the lady and gentleman. She is a positive owl, she won’t go to bed — will you, young brown-owl?”

He tickled her neck again with his moustache, and the child bubbled over with naughty, merry laughter.

The room was very warm, with a red bank of fire up the chimney mouth. It was half lighted from a heavy bronze chandelier, black and gloomy, in the middle of the room. There was the same sombre, sparse furniture that the Mayhews had had. George looked large and handsome, the glossy black silk of his waistcoat fitting close to his sides, the roundness of the shoulder muscle filling the white linen of his sleeves.

Suddenly the baby lifted her head and stared at us, thrusting into her mouth the dummy that was pinned to the breast of her night-gown. The faded pink sleeves of the night-gown were tight on her fat little wrists. She stood thus sucking her dummy, one arm round her father’s neck, watching us with hazel solemn eyes. Then she pushed her fat little fist up among the bush of small curls, and began to twist her fingers about her ear that was white like a camellia flower.

“She is really sleepy,” said Lettie.

“Come then!” said he, folding her for sleep against his breast. “Come and go

to boh.”

But the young rascal immediately began to cry her remonstrance. She stiffened herself, freed herself, and stood again on his knee, watching us solemnly, vibrating the dummy in her mouth as she suddenly sucked at it, twisting her father’s ear in her small fingers till he winced.

“Her nails are sharp,” he said, smiling.

He began asking and giving the small information that pass between friends who have not met for a long time. The baby laid her head on his shoulder, keeping her tired, owl-like eyes fixed darkly on us. Then gradually the lids fluttered and sank, and she dropped on to his arm.

“She is asleep,” whispered Lettie.

Immediately the dark eyes opened again. We looked significantly at one another, continuing our subdued talk. After a while the baby slept soundly.

Presently Meg came downstairs. She greeted us in breathless whispers of surprise, and then turned to her husband. “Has she gone?” she whispered, bending over the sleeping child in astonishment. “My, this is wonderful, isn’t it!” She took the sleeping drooping baby from his arms, putting her mouth close to its forehead, murmuring with soothing, inarticulate sounds.

We stayed talking for some time when Meg had put the baby to bed. George had a new tone of assurance and authority. In the first place he was an established man, living in a large house, having altogether three men working for him. In the second place he had ceased to value the conventional treasures of social position and ostentatious refinement. Very, very many things he condemned as flummery and sickly waste of time. The life of an ordinary well-to-do person he set down as adorned futility, almost idiocy. He spoke passionately of the monstrous denial of life to the many of the fortunate few. He talked at Lettie most flagrantly.

“Of course,” she said, “I have read Mr Wells and Mr Shaw, and even Niel Lyon and a Dutchman — what is his name, Querido? But what can I do? I think the rich have as much misery as the poor, and of quite as deadly a sort. What can I do? It is a question of life and the development of the human race. Society and its regulations is not a sort of drill that endless Napoleons have forced on us: it is the only way we have yet found of living together.”

“Pah!” said he, “that is rank cowardice. It is feeble and futile to the last degree.”

“We can’t grow consumption-proof in a generation, nor can we grow poverty-proof.”

“We can begin to take active measures,” he replied contemptuously.

“We can all go into a sanatorium and live miserably and dejectedly warding

off death,” she said, “but life is full of goodliness for all that.”

“It is fuller of misery,” he said.

Nevertheless, she had shaken him. She still kept her astonishing power of influencing his opinions. All his passion, and heat, and rude speech, analysed out, was only his terror at her threatening of his life-interest.

She was rather piqued by his rough treatment of her, and by his contemptuous tone. Moreover, she could never quite let him be. She felt a driving force which impelled her against her will to interfere in his life. She invited him to dine with them at Highclose. He was now quite possible. He had, in the course of his business, been sufficiently in the company of gentlemen to be altogether “comme il faut” at a private dinner, and after dinner.

She wrote me concerning him occasionally:

“George Saxton was here to dinner yesterday. He and Leslie had frightful battles over the nationalisation of industries. George is rather more than a match for Leslie, which, in his secret heart, makes our friend gloriously proud. It is very amusing. I, of course, have to preserve the balance of power, and, of course, to bolster my husband’s dignity. At a crucial dangerous moment, when George is just going to wave his bloody sword and Leslie lies bleeding with rage, I step in and prick the victor under the heart with some little satire or some esoteric question, I raise Leslie and say his blood is luminous for the truth, and *vous voilà!* Then I abate for the thousandth time Leslie’s conservative crow, and I appeal once more to George — it is no use my arguing with him, he gets so angry — I make an abstruse appeal for all the wonderful, sad, and beautiful expressions on the countenance of life, expressions which he does not see or which he distorts by his oblique vision of socialism into grimaces — and there I am! I think I am something of a Machiavelli, but it is quite true, what I say — ”

Again she wrote:

“We happened to be motoring from Derby on Sunday morning, and as we came to the top of the hill, we had to thread our way through quite a large crowd. I looked up, and whom should I see but our friend George, holding forth about the state endowment of mothers. I made Leslie stop while we listened. The market-place was quite full of people. George saw us, and became fiery. Leslie then grew excited, and although I clung to the skirts of his coat with all my strength, he jumped up and began to question. I must say it with shame and humility — he made an ass of himself. The men all round were jeering and muttering under their breath. I think Leslie is not very popular among them, he is such an advocate of machinery which will do the work of men. So they cheered our friend George when he thundered forth his replies and his demonstrations. He pointed his fingers at us, and flung his hand at us, and shouted till I quailed in

my seat. I cannot understand why he should become so frenzied as soon as I am within range. George had a triumph that morning, but when I saw him a few days later he seemed very uneasy, rather self-mistrustful — ”

Almost a year later I heard from her again on the same subject.

“I have had such a lark. Two or three times I have been to the Hollies: to socialist meetings. Leslie does not know. They are great fun. Of course, I am in sympathy with the socialists, but I cannot narrow my eyes till I see one thing only. Life is like a large, rather beautiful man who is young and full of vigour, but hairy, barbaric, with hands hard and dirty, the dirt ingrained. I know his hands are very ugly, I know his mouth is not firmly shapen, I know his limbs are hairy and brutal: but his eyes are deep and very beautiful. That is what I tell George.

“The people are so earnest, they make me sad. But then, they are so didactic, they hold forth so much, they are so cocksure and so narrow-eyed, they make me laugh. George laughs too. I am sure we made such fun of a straight-haired goggle of a girl who had suffered in prison for the cause of women, that I am ashamed when I see my ‘Woman’s League’ badge. At the bottom, you know, Cyril, I don’t care for anything very much, except myself. Things seem so frivolous. I am the only real thing, I and the children — ”

Gradually George fell out of the socialist movement. It wearied him. It did not feed him altogether. He began by mocking his friends of the confraternity. Then he spoke in bitter dislike of Hudson, the wordy, humorous, shallow leader of the movement in Eberwich; it was Hudson with his wriggling and his clap-trap who disgusted George with the cause. Finally the meetings at the Hollies ceased, and my friend dropped all connection with his former associates.

He began to speculate in land. A hosiery factory moved to Eberwich, giving the place a new stimulus to growth. George happened to buy a piece of land at the end of the street of the village. When he got it, it was laid out in allotment gardens. These were becoming valueless owing to the encroachment of houses. He took it, divided it up, and offered it as sites for a new row of shops. He sold at a good profit.

Altogether he was becoming very well off. I heard from Meg that he was flourishing, that he did not drink “anything to speak of,” but that he was always out, she hardly saw anything of him. If getting-on was to keep him so much away from home, she would be content with a little less fortune. He complained that she was narrow, and that she would not entertain any sympathy with any of his ideas.

“Nobody comes here to see me twice,” he said. “Because Meg receives them in such an off-hand fashion. I asked Jim Curtiss and his wife from Everley Hall

one evening. We were uncomfortable all the time. Meg had hardly a word for anybody — 'Yes' and 'No' and 'Hm Hm!' — They'll never come again."

Meg herself said:

"Oh, I can't stand stuck-up folks. They make me feel uncomfortable. As soon as they begin mincing their words I'm done for — I can no more talk than a lobster —"

Thus their natures contradicted each other. He tried hard to gain a footing in Eberwich. As it was he belonged to no class of society whatsoever. Meg visited and entertained the wives of small shop-keepers and publicans: this was her set.

George voted the women loud-mouthed, vulgar, and narrow — not without some cause. Meg, however, persisted. She visited when she thought fit, and entertained when he was out. He made acquaintance after acquaintance: Dr Francis; Mr Cartridge, the veterinary surgeon; Toby Heswall, the brewer's son; the Curtisses, farmers of good standing from Everly Hall. But it was no good. George was by nature a family man. He wanted to be private and secure in his own rooms, then he was at ease. As Meg never went out with him, and as every attempt to entertain at the Hollies filled him with shame and mortification, he began to give up trying to place himself, and remained suspended in social isolation at the Hollies.

The friendship between Lettie and himself had been kept up, in spite of all things. Leslie was sometimes jealous, but he dared not show it openly, for fear of his wife's scathing contempt. George went to Highclose perhaps once in a fortnight, perhaps not so often. Lettie never went to the Hollies, as Meg's attitude was too antagonistic.

Meg complained very bitterly of her husband. He often made a beast of himself drinking, he thought more of himself than he ought, home was not good enough for him, he was selfish to the back-bone, he cared neither for her nor the children, only for himself.

I happened to be at home for Lettie's thirty-first birthday. George was then thirty-five. Lettie had allowed her husband to forget her birthday. He was now very much immersed in politics, foreseeing a general election in the following year, and intending to contest the seat in Parliament. The division was an impregnable Liberal stronghold, but Leslie had hopes that he might capture the situation. Therefore he spent a great deal of time at the Conservative club, and among the men of influence in the southern division. Lettie encouraged him in these affairs. It relieved her of him. It was thus that she let him forget her birthday, while, for some unknown reason, she let the intelligence slip to George. He was invited to dinner, as I was at home.

George came at seven o'clock. There was a strange feeling of festivity in the

house, although there were no evident signs. Lettie had dressed with some magnificence in a blackish purple gauze over soft satin of lighter tone, nearly the colour of double violets. She wore vivid green azurite ornaments on the fairness of her bosom, and her bright hair was bound by a band of the same colour. It was rather startling. She was conscious of her effect, and was very excited. Immediately George saw her his eyes wakened with a dark glow. She stood up as he entered, her hand stretched straight out to him, her body very erect, her eyes bright and rousing, like two blue pennants.

“Thank you so much,” she said softly, giving his hand a last pressure before she let it go. He could not answer, so he sat down, bowing his head, then looking up at her in suspense. He smiled at her.

Presently the children came in. They looked very quaint, like acolytes, in their long straight dressing-gowns of quilted blue silk. The boy, particularly, looked as if he were going to light the candles in some childish church in paradise. He was very tall and slender and fair, with a round fine head, and serene features. Both children looked remarkable, almost transparently clean: it is impossible to consider anything more fresh and fair. The girl was a merry, curly-headed puss of six. She played with her mother’s green jewels and prattled prettily, while the boy stood at his mother’s side, a slender and silent acolyte in his pale blue gown. I was impressed by his patience and his purity. When the girl had bounded away into George’s arms, the lad laid his hand timidly on Lettie’s knee and looked with a little wonder at her dress.

“How pretty those green stones are, Mother!” he said. “Yes,” replied Lettie brightly, lifting them and letting their strange pattern fall again on her bosom. “I like them.”

“Are you going to sing, Mother?” he asked.

“Perhaps. But why?” said Lettie, smiling.

“Because you generally sing when Mr Saxton comes.” He bent his head and stroked Lettie’s dress shyly.

“Do I?” she said, laughing. “Can you hear?”

“Just a little,” he replied. “Quite small, as if it were nearly lost in the dark.”

He was hesitating, shy as boys are. Lettie laid her hand on his head and stroked his smooth fair hair.

“Sing a song for us before we go, Mother — ” he asked, almost shamefully. She kissed him.

She played without a copy of the music. He stood at her side, while Lucy, the little mouse, sat on her mother’s skirts, pressing Lettie’s silk slippers in turn upon the pedals. The mother and the boy sang their song.

“Gaily the troubadour touched his guitar

As he was hastening from the war.”

The boy had a pure treble, clear as the flight of swallows in the morning. The light shone on his lips. Under the piano the girl child sat laughing, pressing her mother’s feet with all her strength, and laughing again. Lettie smiled as she sang.

At last they kissed us a gentle “good night”, and flitted out of the room. The girl popped her curly head round the door again. We saw the white cuff of the nurse’s wrist as she held the youngster’s arm.

“You’ll come and kiss us when we’re in bed, Mum?” asked the rogue. Her mother laughed and agreed.

Lucy was withdrawn for a moment; then we heard her, “Just a tick, nurse, just half a tick!”

The curly head appeared round the door again.

“And one teenie sweetie,” she suggested, “only one!”

“Go, you — !” Lettie clapped her hands in mock wrath. The child vanished, but immediately there appeared again round the door two blue laughing eyes and the snub tip of a nose.

“A nice one, Mum — not a jelly one!”

Lettie rose with a rustle to sweep upon her. The child vanished with a glitter of laughter. We heard her calling breathlessly on the stairs — “Wait a bit, Freddie — wait for me!”

George and Lettie smiled at each other when the children had gone. As the smile died from their faces they looked down sadly, and until dinner was announced they were very still and heavy with melancholy. After dinner Lettie debated pleasantly which bon-bon she should take for the children. When she came down again she smoked a cigarette with us over coffee. George did not like to see her smoking, yet he brightened a little when he sat down after giving her a light, pleased with the mark of recklessness in her.

“It is ten years today since my party at Woodside,” she said, reaching for the small Roman salt-cellar of green jade that she used as an ash-tray.

“My Lord — ten years!” he exclaimed bitterly. “It seems a hundred.”

“It does and it doesn’t,” she answered, smiling.

“If I look straight back, and think of my excitement, it seems only yesterday. If I look between then and now, at all the days that lie between, it is an age.”

“If I look at myself,” he said, “I think I am another person altogether.”

“You have changed,” she agreed, looking at him sadly. “There is a great change — but you are not another person. I often think — there is one of his old looks, he is just the same at the bottom!”

They embarked on a barge of gloomy recollections and drifted along the soiled canal of their past.

“The worst of it is,” he said, “I have got a miserable carelessness, a contempt for things. You know I had such a faculty for reverence. I always believed in things.”

“I know you did,” she smiled. “You were so humblyminded — too humblyminded, I always considered. You always thought things had a deep religious meaning, somewhere hidden, and you revered them. Is it different now?”

“You know me very well,” he laughed. “What is there left for me to believe in, if not in myself?”

“You have to live for your wife and children,” she said with firmness.

“Meg has plenty to secure her and the children as long as they live,” he said, smiling. “So I don’t know that I’m essential.”

“But you are,” she replied. “You are necessary as a father and a husband, if not as a provider.”

“I think,” said he, “marriage is more of a duel than a duet. One party wins and takes the other captive, slave, servant — what you like. It is so, more or less.”

“Well?” said Lettie.

“Well!” he answered. “Meg is not like you. She wants me, part of me, so she’d kill me rather than let me go loose.”

“Oh, no!” said Lettie, emphatically.

“You know nothing about it,” he said quietly.

“In the marital duel Meg is winning. The woman generally does; she has the children on her side. I can’t give her any of the real part of me, the vital part that she wants — I can’t, any more than you could give kisses to a stranger. And I feel that I’m losing — and don’t care.”

“No,” she said, “you are getting morbid.”

He put the cigarette between his lips, drew a deep breath, then slowly sent the smoke down his nostrils.

“No,” he said.

“Look here!” she said. “Let me sing to you, shall I, and make you cheerful again?”

She sang from Wagner. It was the music of resignation and despair. She had not thought of it. All the time he listened he was thinking. The music stimulated his thoughts and illuminated the trend of his brooding. All the time he sat looking at her his eyes were dark with his thoughts. She finished the “Star of Eve” from Tannhäuser and came over to him.

“Why are you so sad tonight, when it is my birthday?” she asked plaintively.

“Am I slow?” he replied. “I am sorry.”

“What is the matter?” she said, sinking onto the small sofa near to him.

“Nothing!” he replied — “You are looking very beautiful.”

“There, I wanted you to say that! You ought to be quite gay, you know, when I am so smart tonight.”

“Nay,” he said, “I know I ought. But the tomorrow seems to have fallen in love with me. I can’t get out of its lean arms.”

“Why!” she said. “Tomorrow’s arms are not lean. They are white, like mine.” She lifted her arms and looked at them, smiling.

“How do you know?” he asked, pertinently.

“Oh, of course they are,” was her light answer.

He laughed, brief and sceptical.

“No!” he said. “It came when the children kissed us.”

“What?” she asked.

“These lean arms of tomorrow’s round me, and the white arms round you,” he replied, smiling whimsically. She reached out and clasped his hand.

“You foolish boy,” she said.

He laughed painfully, not able to look at her.

“You know,” he said, and his voice was low and difficult “I have needed you for a light. You will soon be the only light again.”

“Who is the other?” she asked.

“My little girl!” he answered. Then he continued, “And you know, I couldn’t endure complete darkness, I couldn’t. It’s the solitariness.”

“You mustn’t talk like this,” she said. “You know you mustn’t.” She put her hand on his head and ran her fingers through the hair he had so ruffled.

“It is as thick as ever, your hair,” she said.

He did not answer, but kept his face bent out of sight. She rose from her seat and stood at the back of his low armchair. Taking an amber comb from her hair, she bent over him, and with the translucent comb and her white fingers she busied herself with his hair.

“I believe you would have a parting,” she said softly.

He laughed shortly at her playfulness. She continued combing, just touching, pressing the strands in place with the tips of her fingers.

“I was only a warmth to you,” he said, pursuing the same train of thought. “So you could do without me. But you were like the light to me, and otherwise it was dark and aimless. Aimlessness is horrible.”

She had finally smoothed his hair, so she lifted her hands and put back her head.

“There!” she said. “It looks fair fine, as Alice would say. Raven’s wings are raggy in comparison.”

He did not pay any attention to her.

“Aren’t you going to look at yourself?” she said, playfully reproachful. She put her finger-tips under his chin. He lifted his head and they looked at each other, she smiling, trying to make him play, he smiling with his lips, but not with eyes, dark with pain.

“We can’t go on like this, Lettie, can we?” he said softly. “Yes,” she answered him, “Yes; why not?”

“It can’t!” he said, “it can’t, I couldn’t keep it up, Lettie.”

“But don’t think about it,” she answered. “Don’t think of it.”

“Lettie,” he said. “I have to set my teeth with loneliness.”

“Hush!” she said. “No! There are the children. Don’t say anything — do not be serious, will you?”

“No, there are the children,” he replied, smiling dimly.

“Yes! Hush now! Stand up and look what a fine parting I have made in your hair. Stand up, and see if my style becomes you.”

“It is no good, Lettie,” he said, “we can’t go on.”

“Oh, but come, come, come!” she exclaimed. “We are not talking about going on; we are considering what a fine parting I have made down the middle, like two wings of a spread bird — ” she looked down, smiling playfully on him, just closing her eyes slightly in petition.

He rose and took a deep breath, and set his shoulders.

“No,” he said, and at the sound of his voice, Lettie went pale and also stiffened herself.

“No!” he repeated. “It is impossible. I felt as soon as Fred came into the room — it must be one way or another.”

“Very well then,” said Lettie, coldly. Her voice was “muted” like a violin.

“Yes,” he replied, submissive. “The children.” He looked at her, contracting his lips in a smile of misery.

“Are you sure it must be so final?” she asked, rebellious, even resentful. She was twisting the azurite jewels on her bosom, and pressing the blunt points into her flesh. He looked up from the fascination of her action when he heard the tone of her last question. He was angry.

“Quite sure!” he said at last, simply, ironically.

She bowed her head in assent. His face twitched sharply as he restrained himself from speaking again. Then he turned and quietly left the room. She did not watch him go, but stood as he had left her. When, after some time, she heard the grating of his dog-cart on the gravel, and then the sharp trot of hoofs down the frozen road, she dropped herself on the settee, and lay with her bosom against the cushions, looking fixedly at the wall.

CHAPTER VII

THE SCARP SLOPE

Leslie won the conservative victory in the general election which took place a year or so after my last visit to Highclose.

In the interim the Tempests had entertained a continuous stream of people. I heard occasionally from Lettie how she was busy, amused, or bored. She told me that George had thrown himself into the struggle on behalf of the candidate of the Labour Party; that she had not seen him, except in the streets, for a very long time.

When I went down to Eberwich in the March succeeding the election, I found several people staying with my sister. She had under her wing a young literary fellow who affected the "Doady" style — Dora Copperfield's "Doady". He had bunches of half-curly hair, and a romantic black cravat; he played the impulsive part, but was really as calculating as any man on the stock-exchange. It delighted Lettie to "mother" him. He was so shrewd as to be less than harmless. His fellow guests, a woman much experienced in music and an elderly man who was in the artistic world without being of it, were interesting for a time. Bubble after bubble of floating fancy and wit we blew with our breath in the evenings. I rose in the morning loathing the idea of more bubble-blowing.

I wandered around Nethermere, which had now forgotten me. The daffodils under the boat-house continued their golden laughter, and nodded to one another in gossip, as I watched them, never for a moment pausing to notice me. The yellow reflection of daffodils among the shadows of grey willow in the water trembled faintly as they told haunted tales in the gloom. I felt like a child left out of the group of my playmates. There was a wind running across Nethermere, and on the eager water blue and glistening grey shadows changed places swiftly. Along the shore the wild birds rose, flapping in expostulation as I passed, peewits mewing fiercely round my head, while two white swans lifted their glistening feathers till they looked like grand double water-lilies, laying back their orange beaks among the petals, and fronting me with haughty resentment, charging towards me insolently.

I wanted to be recognised by something. I said to myself that the dryads were

looking out for me from the wood's edge. But as I advanced they shrank, and glancing wistfully, turned back like pale flowers falling in the shadow of the forest. I was a stranger, an intruder. Among the bushes a twitter of lively birds exclaimed upon me. Finches went leaping past in bright flashes, and a robin sat and asked rudely, "Hello! Who are you?"

The bracken lay sere under the trees, broken and chavelled by the restless wild winds of the long winter.

The trees caught the wind in their tall netted twigs, and the young morning wind moaned at its captivity. As I trod the discarded oak-leaves and the bracken they uttered their last sharp gasps, pressed into oblivion. The wood was roofed with a wide young sobbing sound, and floored with a faint hiss like the intaking of the last breath. Between, was all the glad out-peeping of buds and anemone flowers and the rush of birds. I, wandering alone, felt them all, the anguish of the bracken fallen face down in defeat, the careless dash of the birds, the sobbing of the young wind arrested in its haste, the trembling, expanding delight of the buds. I alone among them could hear the whole succession of chords.

The brooks talked on just the same, just as gladly, just as boisterously as they had done when I had netted small, glittering fish in the rest-pools. At Strelley Mill a servant girl in a white cap, and white apron-bands, came running out of the house with purple prayer-books, which she gave to the elder of two finicking girls who sat disconsolately with their blacksilked mother in the governess cart at the gate, ready to go to church. Near Woodside there was barbed-wire along the path, and at the end of every riding it was tarred on the tree-trunks, "Private".

I had done with the valley of Nethermere. The valley of Nethermere had cast me out many years before, while I had fondly believed it cherished me in memory.

I went along the road to Eberwich. The church bells were ringing boisterously, with the careless boisterousness of the brooks and the birds and the rollicking coltsfoots and celandines.

A few people were hastening blithely to service. Miners and other labouring men were passing in aimless gangs, walking nowhere in particular, so long as they reached a sufficiently distant public-house.

I reached the Hollies. It was much more spruce than it had been. The yard, however, and the stables had again a somewhat abandoned air. I asked the maid for George.

"Oh, master's not up yet," she said, giving a little significant toss of her head, and smiling. I waited a moment.

"But he rung for a bottle of beer about ten minutes since, so I should think —" she emphasised the word with some ironical contempt, " — he won't be very

long,” she added, in tones which conveyed that she was not by any means sure. I asked for Meg.

“Oh, Missis is gone to church — and the children — but Miss Saxton is in, she might — ”

“Emily!” I exclaimed.

The maid smiled.

“She’s in the drawing-room. She’s engaged, but perhaps if I tell her — ”

“Yes, do,” said I, sure that Emily would receive me.

I found my old sweetheart sitting in a low chair by the fire, a man standing on the hearth-rug pulling his moustache. Emily and I both felt a thrill of old delight at meeting.

“I can hardly believe it is really you,” she said, laughing me one of the old intimate looks. She had changed a great deal. She was very handsome, but she had now a new self-confidence, a fine, free indifference.

“Let me introduce you. Mr Renshaw, Cyril. Tom, you know who it is; you have heard me speak often enough of Cyril. I am going to marry Tom in three weeks’ time,” she said, laughing.

“The devil you are!” I exclaimed involuntarily.

“If he will have me,” she added, quite as a playful afterthought.

Tom was a well-built fair man, smoothly, almost delicately tanned. There was something soldierly in his bearing, something self-conscious in the way he bent his head and pulled his moustache, something charming and fresh in the way he laughed at Emily’s last preposterous speech.

“Why didn’t you tell me?” I asked.

“Why didn’t you ask me?” she retorted, arching her brows. “Mr Renshaw,” I said. “You have out-manoeuvred me all unawares, quite indecently.”

“I am very sorry,” he said, giving one more twist to his moustache, then breaking into a loud, short laugh at his joke.

“Do you really feel cross?” said Emily to me, knitting her brows and smiling quaintly.

“I do!” I replied, with truthful emphasis.

She laughed, and laughed again, very much amused.

“It is such a joke,” she said. “To think you should feel cross now, when it is — how long is it ago — ?”

“I will not count up,” said I.

“Are you not sorry for me?” I asked of Tom Renshaw.

He looked at me with his young blue eyes, eyes so bright, so naïvely inquisitive, so winsomely meditative. He did not know quite what to say, or how to take it.

“Very!” he replied in another short burst of laughter, quickly twisting his moustache again and looking down at his feet.

He was twenty-nine years old; had been a soldier in China for five years, was now farming his fathers’ farm at Papplewick, where Emily was schoolmistress. He had been at home eighteen months. His father was an old man of seventy who had had his right hand chopped to bits in the chopping machine. So they told me. I liked Tom for his handsome bearing and his fresh, winsome way. He was exceedingly manly: that is to say, he did not dream of questioning or analysing anything. All that came his way was ready labelled nice or nasty, good or bad. He did not imagine that anything could be other than just what it appeared to be — and with this appearance, he was quite content. He looked up to Emily as one wiser, nobler, nearer to God than himself.

“I am a thousand years older than he,” she said to me, laughing. “Just as you are centuries older than I.”

“And you love him for his youth?” I asked.

“Yes,” she replied. “For that and — he is wonderfully sagacious — and so gentle.”

“And I was never gentle, was I?” I said.

“No! As restless and as urgent as the wind,” she said, and I saw a last flicker of the old terror.

“Where is George?” I asked.

“In bed,” she replies briefly. “He’s recovering from one of his orgies. If I were Meg I would not live with him.”

“Is he so bad?” I asked.

“Bad!” she replied. “He’s disgusting, and I’m sure he’s dangerous. I’d have him removed to an inebriates’ home.”

“You’d have to persuade him to go,” said Tom, who had come into the room again. “He does have dreadful bouts, though! He’s killing himself, sure enough. I feel awfully sorry for the fellow.”

“It seems so contemptible to me,” said Emily, “to become enslaved to one of your likings till it makes a beast of you. Look what a spectacle he is for his children, and what a disgusting disgrace for his wife.”

“Well, if he can’t help it, he can’t, poor chap,” said Tom. “Though I do think a man should have more backbone.” We heard heavy noises from the room above.

“He is getting up,” said Emily. “I suppose I’d better see if he’ll have any breakfast.” She waited, however. Presently the door opened, and there stood George with his hand on the knob, leaning, looking in.

“I thought I heard three voices,” he said, as if it freed him from a certain apprehension. He smiled. His waistcoat hung open over his woollen shirt, he

wore no coat and was slipper-less. His hair and his moustache were dishevelled, his face pale and stupid with sleep, his eyes small. He turned aside from our looks as from a bright light. His hand as I shook it was flaccid and chill.

“How do you come to be here, Cyril?” he said subduedly, faintly smiling.

“Will you have any breakfast?” Emily asked him coldly. “I’ll have a bit if there’s any for me,” he replied.

“It has been waiting for you long enough,” she answered. He turned and went with a dull thud of his stockinged feet across to the dining-room. Emily rang for the maid, I followed George, leaving the betrothed together. I found my host moving about the dining-room, looking behind the chairs and in the corners.

“I wonder where the devil my slippers are!” he muttered explanatorily. Meanwhile he continued his search. I noticed he did not ring the bell to have them found for him. Presently he came to the fire, spreading his hands over it. As he was smashing the slowly burning coal the maid came in with the tray. He desisted, and put the poker carefully down. While the maid spread his meal on one corner of the table, he looked in the fire, paying her no heed. When she had finished:

“It’s fried white-bait,” she said. “Shall you have that?”

He lifted his head and looked at the plate.

“Ay,” he said. “Have you brought the vinegar?”

Without answering, she took the cruet from the sideboard and set it on the table. As she was closing the door, she looked back to say:

“You’d better eat it now, while it’s hot.”

He took no notice, but sat looking in the fire.

“And how are you going on?” he asked me.

“I? Oh, very well! And you — ?”

“As you see,” he replied, turning his head on one side with a little gesture of irony.

“As I am very sorry to see,” I rejoined.

He sat forward with his elbows on his knees, tapping the back of his hand with one finger, in monotonous two-pulse like heart-beats.

“Aren’t you going to have breakfast?” I urged. The clock at that moment began to ring a sonorous twelve. He looked up at it with subdued irritation.

“Ay, I suppose so,” he answered me, when the clock had finished striking. He rose heavily and went to the table. As he poured out a cup of tea he spilled it on the cloth, and stood looking at the stain. It was still some time before he began to eat. He poured vinegar freely over the hot fish, and ate with an indifference that made eating ugly, pausing now and again to wipe the tea off his moustache, or to pick a bit of fish from off his knee.

“You are not married, I suppose?” he said in one of his pauses.

“No,” I replied. “I expect I shall have to be looking round.”

“You’re wiser not,” he replied, quiet and bitter.

A moment or two later the maid came in with a letter. “This came this morning,” she said, as she laid it on the table beside him. He looked at it, then he said:

“You didn’t give me a knife for the marmalade.”

“Didn’t I?” she replied. “I thought you wouldn’t want it. You don’t as a rule.”

“And do you know where my slippers are?” he asked.

“They ought to be in their usual place.” She went and looked in the corner. “I suppose Miss Gertie’s put them somewhere. I’ll get you another pair.”

As he waited for her he read the letter. He read it twice, then he put it back in the envelope, quietly, without any change of expression. But he ate no more breakfast, even after the maid had brought the knife and his slippers, and though he had had but a few mouthfuls.

At half-past twelve there was an imperious woman’s voice in the house. Meg came to the door. As she entered the room, and saw me, she stood still. She sniffed, glanced at the table, and exclaimed, coming forward effusively:

“Well I never, Cyril! Who’d a thought of seeing you here this morning! How are you?”

She waited for the last of my words, then immediately she turned to George, and said:

“I must say you’re in a nice state for Cyril to see you! Have you finished? — If you have, Kate can take that tray out. It smells quite sickly. Have you finished?”

He did not answer, but drained his cup of tea and pushed it away with the back of his hand. Meg rang the bell, and having taken off her gloves, began to put the things on the tray, tipping the fragments of fish and bones from the edge of his plate to the middle with short, disgusted jerks of the fork. Her attitude and expression were of resentment and disgust. The maid came in.

“Clear the table, Kate, and open the window. Have you opened the bedroom windows?”

“No’m — not yet” — she glanced at George as if to say he had only been down a few minutes.

“Then do it when you have taken the tray,” said Meg. “You don’t open this window,” said George churlishly. “It’s cold enough as it is.”

“You should put a coat on then if you’re starved,” replied Meg contemptuously. “It’s warm enough for those that have got any life in their blood. You do not find it cold, do you, Cyril?”

“It is fresh this morning,” I replied.

“Of course it is, not cold at all. And I’m sure this room needs airing.”

The maid, however, folded the cloth and went out without approaching the windows.

Meg had grown stouter, and there was a certain immovable confidence in her. She was authoritative, amiable, calm. She wore a handsome dress of dark green, and a toque with opulent ostrich feathers. As she moved about the room she seemed to dominate everything, particularly her husband, who sat ruffled and dejected, his waistcoat hanging loose over his shirt.

A girl entered. She was proud and mincing in her deportment. Her face was handsome, but too haughty for a child. She wore a white coat, with ermine tippet, muff, and hat. Her long brown hair hung twining down her back.

“Has Dad only just had his breakfast?” she exclaimed in high censorious tones as she came in.

“He has!” replied Meg.

The girl looked at her father in calm, childish censure.

“And we have been to church, and come home to dinner,” she said, as she drew off her little white gloves. George watched her with ironical amusement.

“Hello!” said Meg, glancing at the opened letter which lay near his elbow. “Who is that from?”

He glanced round, having forgotten it. He took the envelope, doubled it and pushed it in his waistcoat pocket.

“It’s from William Housley,” he replied.

“Oh! And what has he to say?” she asked.

George turned his dark eyes at her.

“Nothing!” he said.

“Hm-Hm!” sneered Meg. “Funny letter, about nothing!”

“I suppose,” said the child, with her insolent, high-pitched superiority, “it’s some money that he doesn’t want us to know about.”

“That’s about it!” said Meg, giving a small laugh at the child’s perspicuity.

“So’s he can keep it for himself, that’s what it is,” continued the child, nodding her head in rebuke at him.

“I’ve no right to any money, have I?” asked the father sarcastically.

“No, you haven’t,” the child nodded her head at him dictatorially, “you haven’t, because you only put it in the fire.”

“You’ve got it wrong,” he sneered. “You mean it’s like giving a child fire to play with.”

“Um! — and it is, isn’t it, Mam?” — the small woman turned to her mother for corroboration. Meg had flushed at his sneer, when he quoted for the child its

mother's dictum.

"And you're very naughty!" preached Gertie, turning her back disdainfully on her father.

"Is that what the parson's been telling you?" he asked, a grain of amusement still in his bitterness.

"No, it isn't!" retorted the youngster. "If you want to know you should go and listen for yourself. Everybody that goes to church looks nice — " she glanced at her mother and at herself, pruning herself proudly, " — and God loves them," she added. She assumed a sanctified expression, and continued after a little thought, "Because they look nice and are meek."

"What!" exclaimed Meg, laughing, glancing with secret pride at me.

"Because they're meek!" repeated Gertie, with a superior little smile of knowledge.

"You're off the mark this time," said George.

"No, I'm not, am I, Mam? Isn't it right, Mam? 'The meek shall inevit the erf'?"

Meg was too much amused to answer.

"The meek shall have herrings on earth," mocked the father, also amused. His daughter looked dubiously at him. She smelled impropriety.

"It's not, Mam, is it?" she asked, turning to her mother. Meg laughed.

"The meek shall have herrings on earth," repeated George with soft banter.

"No, it's not, Mam, is it?" cried the child in real distress.

"Tell your father he's always teaching you something wrong," answered Meg. Then I said I must go. They pressed me to stay.

"Oh yes — do stop to dinner," suddenly pleaded the child, smoothing her wild ravel of curls after having drawn off her hat. She asked me again and again, with much earnestness.

"But why?" I asked.

"So's you can talk to us this afternoon — an' so's Dad won't be so dis'greeable," she replied plaintively, poking the black spots on her muff.

Meg moved nearer to her daughter with a little gesture of compassion.

"But," said I, "I promised a lady I would be back for lunch, so I must. You have some more visitors, you know."

"Oh, well!" she complained. "They go in another room, and Dad doesn't care about them."

"But come!" said I.

"Well, he's just as dis'greeable when Auntie Emily's here — he is with her an' all."

"You are having your character given away," said Meg brutally, turning to

him.

I bade him good-bye. He did me the honour of coming with me to the door. We could neither of us find a word to say, though we were both moved. When at last I held his hand and was looking at him as I said "Good-bye", he looked back at me for the first time during our meeting. His eyes were heavy, and as he lifted them to me, seemed to recoil in an agony of shame.

CHAPTER VIII

A PROSPECT AMONG THE MARSHES OF LETHE

George steadily declined from this time. I went to see him two years later. He was not at home. Meg wept to me as she told me of him, how he let the business slip, how he drank, what a brute he was in drink, and how unbearable afterwards. He was ruining his constitution, he was ruining her life and the children's. I felt very sorry for her as she sat, large and ruddy, brimming over with bitter tears. She asked me if I did not think I might influence him. He was, she said, at the Ram. When he had an extra bad bout on he went up there, and stayed sometimes for a week at a time, with Oswald, coming back to the Hollies when he had recovered — "though," said Meg, "he's sick every morning and almost after every meal."

All the time Meg was telling me this, sat curled up in a large chair their youngest boy, a pale, sensitive, rather spoiled lad of seven or eight years, with a petulant mouth and nervous dark eyes. He sat watching his mother as she told her tale, heaving his shoulders and settling himself in a new position when his feelings were nearly too much for him. He was full of wild, childish pity for his mother, and furious, childish hate of his father, the author of all their trouble. I called at the Ram and saw George. He was half drunk.

I went up to Highclose with a heavy heart. Lettie's last child had been born, much to the surprise of everybody, some few months before I came down. There was a space of seven years between her youngest girl and this baby. Lettie was much absorbed in motherhood.

When I went up to talk to her about George, I found her in the bedroom nursing the baby, who was very good and quiet on her knee. She listened to me sadly, but her attention was caught away by each movement made by the child. As I was telling her of the attitude of George's children towards their father and mother, she glanced from the baby to me, and exclaimed:

"See how he watches the light flash across your spectacles when you turn suddenly — Look!"

But I was weary of babies. My friends had all grown up and married and inflicted them on me. There were storms of babies. I longed for a place where

they would be obsolete, and young, arrogant, impervious mothers might be a forgotten tradition. Lettie's heart would quicken in answer to only one pulse, the easy, light ticking of the baby's blood.

I remembered, one day as I sat in the train hastening to Charing Cross on my way from France, that that was George's birthday. I had the feeling of him upon me, heavily, and I could not rid myself of the depression. I put it down to travel fatigue, and tried to dismiss it. As I watched the evening sun glitter along the new corn-stubble in the fields we passed, trying to describe the effect to myself, I found myself asking, "But — what's the matter? I've not had bad news, have I, to make my chest feel so weighted?"

I was surprised when I reached my lodging in New Malden to find no letters for me, save one fat budget from Alice. I knew her squat, saturnine handwriting on the envelope, and I thought I knew what contents to expect from the letter.

She had married an old acquaintance who had been her particular aversion. This young man had got himself into trouble, so that the condemnations of the righteous pursued him like clouds of gnats on a summer evening. Alice immediately rose to sting back his vulgar enemies, and having rendered him a service, felt she could only wipe out the score by marrying him. They were fairly comfortable. Occasionally, as she said, there were displays of small fireworks in the back yard. He worked in the offices of some iron foundries just over the Erewash in Derbyshire. Alice lived in a dirty little place in the valley a mile and a half from Eberwich, not far from his work. She had no children, and practically no friends; a few young matrons for acquaintances. As wife of a superior clerk, she had to preserve her dignity among the work-people. So all her little crackling fires were sodded down with the sods of British respectability. Occasionally she smouldered a fierce smoke that made one's eyes water. Occasionally, perhaps once a year, she wrote me a whole venomous budget, much to my amusement.

I was not in any haste to open this fat letter until, after supper, I turned to it as a resource from my depression.

"Oh dear, Cyril, I'm in a bubbling state, I want to yell, not write. Oh, Cyril, why didn't you marry me, or why didn't our Georgie Saxton, or somebody. I'm deadly sick. Percival Charles is enough to stop a clock. Oh, Cyril, he lives in an eternal Sunday suit, holy broadcloth and righteous three inches of cuffs! He goes to bed in it. Nay, he wallows in Bibles when he goes to bed. I can feel the brass covers of all his family Bibles sticking in my ribs as I lie by his side. I could weep with wrath, yet I put on my black hat and trot to chapel with him like a lamb.

"Oh, Cyril, nothing's happened. Nothing has happened to me all these years. I shall die of it. When I see Percival Charles at dinner, after having asked a

blessing, I feel as if I should never touch a bit at his table again. In about an hour I shall hear him hurrying up the entry — prayers always make him hungry — and his first look will be on the table. But I'm not fair to him — he's really a good fellow — I only wish he wasn't.

"It's George Saxton who's put this Seidlitz powder in my marital cup of cocoa. Cyril, I must a tale unfold. It is fifteen years since our George married Meg. When I count up, and think of the future, it nearly makes me scream. But my tale, my tale!

"Can you remember his faithful-dog, wounded-stag, gentle-gazelle eyes? Cyril, you can see the whisky or the brandy combusting in them. He's got d.t.'s, blue-devils — and I've seen him, and I'm swarming myself with little red devils after it. I went up to Eberwich on Wednesday afternoon for a pound of fry for Percival Charles' Thursday dinner. I walked by that little path which you know goes round the back of the Hollies — it's as near as any way for me. I thought I heard a row in the paddock at the back of the stables, so I said I might as well see the fun. I went to the gate, basket in one hand, ninepence in coppers in the other, a demure deacon's wife. I didn't take in the scene at first.

"There was our Georgie, in leggings and breeches as of yore, and a whip. He was flourishing, and striding, and yelling. 'Go it, old boy,' I said, 'you'll want your stocking round your throat tonight.' But, Cyril, I had spoken too soon. Oh, lum! There came raking up the croft that long, wire-springy racehorse of his, ears flat, and, clinging to its neck, the pale-faced lad, Wilfred. The kid was white as death, and squealing 'Mam! Mam!' I thought it was a bit rotten of Georgie trying to teach the kid to jockey. The racehorse, Bonny-Boy — Boney Boy, I call him — came bouncing round like a spiral egg-whisk. Then I saw our Georgie rush up screaming, nearly spitting the moustache off his face, and fetch the horse a cut with the whip. It went off like a flame along hot paraffin. The kid shrieked and clung. Georgie went rushing after him, running staggery, and swearing, fairly screaming — awful — 'a lily-livered little swine!' The high lanky racehorse went larroping round as if it was going mad. I was dazed. Then Meg came rushing, and the other two lads, all screaming. She went for George, but he lifted his whip like the devil. She daren't go near him — she rushed at him, and stopped, rushed at him, and stopped, striking at him with her two fists. He waved his whip and kept her off, and the racehorse kept tearing along. Meg flew to stop it, he ran with his drunken totter-step, brandishing his whip. I flew as well. I hit him with my basket. The kid fell off, and Mag rushed to him. Some men came running. George stood fairly shuddering. You would never have known his face, Cyril. He was mad, demoniacal. I feel sometimes as if I should burst and shatter to bits like a sky-rocket when I think of it. I've got such a weal

on my arm.

“I lost Percival Charles’s ninepence and my nice white cloth out of the basket, and everything, besides having black looks on Thursday because it was mutton-chops, which he hates. Oh, Cyril, ‘I wish I was a cassowary, on the banks of the Timbuctoo.’ When I saw Meg sobbing over that lad — thank goodness he wasn’t hurt! — I wished our Georgie was dead; I do now, also; I wish we only had to remember him. I haven’t been to see them lately — can’t stand Meg’s ikeyness. I wonder how it all will end.

“There’s P. C. bidding ‘Good night and God bless You’ to Brother Jakes, and no supper ready — ”

As soon as I could, after reading Alice’s letter, I went down to Eberwich to see how things were. Memories of the old days came over me again till my heart hungered for its old people.

They told me at the Hollies that, after a bad attack of delirium tremens, George had been sent to Papplewick in the lonely country to stay with Emily. I borrowed a bicycle to ride the nine miles. The summer had been wet, and everything was late. At the end of September the foliage was heavy green, and the wheat stood dejectedly in stook. I rode through the still sweetness of an autumn morning. The mist was folded blue along the hedges; the elm trees loomed up along the dim walls of the morning, the horse-chestnut trees at hand flickered with a few yellow leaves like bright blossoms. As I rode through the tree tunnel by the church where, on his last night, the keeper had told me his story, I smelled the cold rotting of the leaves of the cloudy summer.

I passed silently through the lanes, where the chill grass was weighed down with grey-blue seed-pearls of dew in the shadow, where the wet woollen spider-cloths of autumn were spread as on a loom. Brown birds rustled in flocks like driven leaves before me. I heard the far-off hooting of the “loose-all” at the pits, telling me it was half-past eleven, that the men and boys would be sitting in the narrow darkness of the mines eating their “snap”, while shadowy mice darted for the crumbs, and the boys laughed with red mouths rimmed with grime, as the bold little creatures peeped at them in the dim light of the lamps. The dogwood berries stood jauntily scarlet on the hedge-tops, the bunched scarlet and green berries of the convolvulus and bryony hung amid golden trails, the blackberries dropped ungathered. I rode slowly on, the plants dying around me, the berries leaning their heavy ruddy mouths, and languishing for the birds, the men imprisoned underground below me, the brown birds dashing in haste along the hedges.

Swineshed Farm, where the Renshaws lived, stood quite alone among its fields, hidden from the highway and from everything. The lane leading up to it

was deep and unsunned. On my right, I caught glimpses through the hedge of the cornfields, where the shocks of wheat stood like small yellow-sailed ships in a widespread flotilla. The upper part of the field was cleared. I heard the clank of a wagon and the voices of men, and I saw the high load of sheaves go lurching, rocking up the incline to the stackyard.

The lane debouched into a close-bitten field, and out of this empty land the farm rose up with its buildings like a huddle of old, painted vessels floating in still water. White fowls went stepping discreetly through the mild sunshine and the shadow. I leaned my bicycle against the grey, silken doors of the old coach-house. The place was breathing with silence. I hesitated to knock at the open door. Emily came. She was rich as always with her large beauty, and stately now with the stateliness of a strong woman six months gone with child.

She exclaimed with surprise, and I followed her into the kitchen, catching a glimpse of the glistening pans and the white wood baths as I passed through the scullery. The kitchen was a good-sized, low room that through long course of years had become absolutely a home. The great beams of the ceiling bowed easily, the chimney-seat had a bit of dark-green curtain, and under the high mantel-piece was another low shelf that the men could reach with their hands as they sat in the inglenook. There the pipes lay. Many generations of peaceful men and fruitful women had passed through the room, and not one but had added a new small comfort; a chair in the right place, a hook, a stool, a cushion, a certain pleasing cloth for the sofa covers, a shelf of books. The room, that looked so quiet and crude, was a home evolved through generations to fit the large bodies of the men who dwelled in it, and the placid fancy of the women. At last, it had an individuality. It was the home of the Renshaws, warm, lovable, serene. Emily was in perfect accord with its brownness, its shadows, its ease. I, as I sat on the sofa under the window, felt rejected by the kind room. I was distressed with a sense of ephemerality, of pale, erratic fragility.

Emily, in her full-blooded beauty, was at home. It is rare now to feel a kinship between a room and the one who inhabits it, a close bond of blood relation. Emily had at last found her place, and had escaped from the torture of strange, complex modern life. She was making a pie, and the flour was white on her brown arms. She pushed the tickling hair from her face with her arm, and looked at me with tranquil pleasure, as she worked the paste in the yellow bowl. I was quiet, subdued before her.

“You are very happy?” I said.

“Ah, very!” she replied. “And you? — you are not, you look worn.”

“Yes,” I replied. “I am happy enough. I am living my life.”

“Don’t you find it wearisome?” she asked pityingly.

She made me tell her all my doings, and she marvelled, but all the time her eyes were dubious and pitiful.

“You have George here,” I said.

“Yes. He’s in a poor state, but he’s not as sick as he was.”

“What about the delirium tremens?”

“Oh, he was better of that — very nearly — before he came here. He sometimes fancies they’re coming on again, and he’s terrified. Isn’t it awful! And he’s brought it all on himself. Tom’s very good to him.”

“There’s nothing the matter with him — physically, is there?” I asked.

“I don’t know,” she replied, as she went to the oven to turn a pie that was baking. She put her arm to her forehead and brushed aside her hair, leaving a mark of flour on her nose. For a moment or two she remained kneeling on the fender, looking into the fire and thinking. “He was in a poor way when he came here, could eat nothing, sick every morning. I suppose it’s his liver. They all end like that.” She continued to wipe the large black plums and put them in the dish.

“Hardening of the liver?” I asked. She nodded.

“And is he in bed?” I asked again.

“Yes,” she replied. “It’s as I say, if he’d get up and potter about a bit, he’d get over it. But he lies there skulking.”

“And what time will he get up?” I insisted.

“I don’t know. He may crawl down somewhere towards teatime. Do you want to see him? That’s what you came for, isn’t it?”

She smiled at me with a little sarcasm, and added, “You always thought more of him than anybody, didn’t you? Ah, well, come up and see him.”

I followed her up the back stairs, which led out of the kitchen, and which emerged straight in a bedroom. We crossed the hollow-sounding plaster-floor of this naked room and opened a door at the opposite side. George lay in bed watching us with apprehensive eyes.

“Here is Cyril come to see you,” said Emily, “so I’ve brought him up, for I didn’t know when you’d be downstairs.”

A small smile of relief came on his face, and he put out his hand from the bed. He lay with the disorderly clothes pulled up to his chin. His face was discoloured and rather bloated, his nose swollen.

“Don’t you feel so well this morning?” asked Emily, softening with pity when she came into contact with his sickness.

“Oh, all right,” he replied, wishing only to get rid of us.

“You should try to get up a bit, it’s a beautiful morning, warm and soft — ” she said gently. He did not reply, and she went downstairs.

I looked round to the cold, whitewashed room, with its ceiling curving and

sloping down the walls. It was sparsely furnished, and bare of even the slightest ornament. The only things of warm colour were the cow and horse skins on the floor. All the rest was white or grey or drab. On one side, the room sloped down so that the window was below my knees, and nearly touching the floor, on the other side was a larger window, breast high. Through it one could see the jumbled, ruddy roofs of the sheds and the skies. The tiles were shining with patches of vivid orange lichen. Beyond was the cornfield, and the men, small in the distance, lifting the sheaves on the cart.

“You will come back to farming again, won’t you?” I asked him, turning to the bed. He smiled.

“I don’t know,” he answered dully.

“Would you rather I went downstairs?” I asked.

“No, I’m glad to see you,” he replied, in the same uneasy fashion.

“I’ve only just come back from France,” I said.

“Ah!” he replied, indifferent.

“I am sorry you’re ill,” I said.

He stared unmovedly at the opposite wall. I went to the window and looked out. After some time, I compelled myself to say, in a casual manner:

“Won’t you get up and come out a bit?”

“I suppose I s’ll have to,” he said, gathering himself slowly together for the effort. He pushed himself up in bed.

When he took off the jacket of his pyjamas to wash himself I turned away. His arms seemed thin, and he had bellied, and was bowed and unsightly. I remembered the morning we swam in the millpond. I remembered that he was now in the prime of his life. I looked at his bluish feeble hands as he laboriously washed himself. The soap once slipped from his fingers as he was picking it up, and fell, rattling the pot loudly. It startled us, and he seemed to grip the sides of the washstand to steady himself. Then he went on with his slow, painful toilet. As he combed his hair he looked at himself with dull eyes of shame.

The men were coming in from the scullery when we got downstairs. Dinner was smoking on the table. I shook hands with Tom Renshaw, and with the old man’s hard, fierce left hand. Then I was introduced to Arthur Renshaw, a clean-faced, large, bashful lad of twenty. I nodded to the man, Jim, and to Jim’s wife, Annie. We all sat down to table.

“Well, an’ ‘ow are ter feelin’ by now, like?” asked the old man heartily of George. Receiving no answer, he continued, “Tha should ‘a gor up an’ corn’ an’ gen us a ‘and wi’ th’ wheat, it ‘ud ‘a done thee good.”

“You will have a bit of this mutton, won’t you?” Tom asked him, tapping the joint with the carving-knife. George shook his head.

“It’s quite lean and tender,” he said gently.

“No, thanks,” said George.

“Gi’e ‘im a bit, gi’e ‘im a bit!” cried the old man. “It’ll do ‘im good — it’s what ‘e wants, a bit o’ strengthenin’ nourishment.”

“It’s no good if his stomach won’t have it.” said Tom, in mild reproof, as if he were sneaking of a child. Arthur filled George’s glass with beer without speaking. The two young men were full of kind, gentle attention.

“Let ‘im ‘a’e a spoonful o’ tonnup then,” persisted the old man. “I canna eat while ‘is plate stands there emp’y.”

So they put turnip and onion sauce on George’s plate, and he took up his fork and tasted a few mouthfuls. The men ate largely, and with zest. The sight of their grand satisfaction, amounting almost to gusto, sickened him.

When at last the old man laid down the dessert-spoon which he used in place of a knife and fork, he looked again at George’s plate, and said:

“Why tha ‘asna aten a smite, not a smite! Tha non goos th’ raight road to be better.”

George maintained a stupid silence.

“Don’t bother him, Father,” said Emily.

“Tha art an öwd whittle, Feythey,” added Tom, smiling good-naturedly. He spoke to his father in dialect, but to Emily in good English. Whatever she said had Tom’s immediate support. Before serving us with pie, Emily gave her brother junket and damsons, setting the plate and the spoon before him as if he were a child. For this act of grace Tom looked at her lovingly, and stroked her hand as she passed.

After dinner, George said, with a miserable struggle for an indifferent tone:

“Aren’t you going to give Cyril a glass of whisky?”

He looked up furtively, in a conflict of shame and hope. A silence fell on the room.

“Ay!” said the old man softly. “Let ‘im ‘ave a drop.”

“Yes!” added Tom, in submissive pleading.

All the men in the room shrank a little, awaiting the verdict of the woman.

“I don’t know,” she said clearly, “that Cyril wants a glass.”

“I don’t mind,” I answered, feeling myself blush. I had not the courage to counteract her will directly. Not even the old man had that courage. We waited in suspense. After keeping us so for a few minutes, while we smouldered with mortification, she went into another room, and we heard her unlocking a door. She returned with a decanter containing rather less than half a pint of liquor. She put out five tumblers.

“Tha neda gi’e me none,” said the old man. “Ah’m non a proud chap. Ah’m

not.”

“Nor me neither,” said Arthur.

“You will, Tom?” she asked.

“Do you want me to?” he replied, smiling.

“I don’t,” she answered sharply. “I want nobody to have it, when you look at the results of it. But if Cyril is having a glass, you may as well have one with him.”

Tom was pleased with her. She gave her husband and me fairly stiff glasses.

“Steady, steady!” he said. “Give that George, and give me not so much. Two fingers, two of your fingers, you know.”

But she passed him the glass. When George had had his share, there remained but a drop in the decanter.

Emily watched the drunkard coldly as he took this remainder.

George and I talked for a time while the men smoked. He, from his glum stupidity, broke into a harsh, almost imbecile loquacity.

“Have you seen my family lately?” he asked, continuing. “Yes! Not badly set up, are they, the children? But the little devils are soft, mard-soft, every one of ‘em. It’s their mother’s bringin’ up — she marded ‘em till they were soft, an’ would never let me have a say in it. I should ‘a brought ‘em up different, you know I should.”

Tom looked at Emily, and, remarking her angry contempt, suggested that she should go out with him to look at the stacks. I watched the tall, square-shouldered man leaning with deference and tenderness towards his wife as she walked calmly at his side. She was the mistress, quiet and self-assured, he her rejoiced husband and servant.

George was talking about himself. If I had not seen him, I should hardly have recognised the words as his. He was lamentably decayed. He talked stupidly, with vulgar contumely of others, and in weak praise of himself.

The old man rose, with a:

“Well, I suppose we mun ma’e another dag at it,” and the men left the house.

George continued his foolish, harsh monologue, making gestures of emphasis with his head and his hands. He continued when we were walking round the buildings into the fields, the same babble of bragging and abuse. I was wearied and disgusted. He looked, and he sounded, so worthless.

Across the empty cornfield the partridges were running. We walked through the September haze slowly, because he was feeble on his legs. As he became tired he ceased to talk. We leaned for some time on a gate, in the brief glow of the transient afternoon, and he was stupid again. He did not notice the brown haste of the partridges, he did not care to share with me the handful of ripe

blackberries, and when I pulled the bryony ropes off the hedges, and held the great knots of red and green berries in my hand, he glanced at them without interest or appreciation.

“Poison-berries, aren’t they?” he said dully.

Like a tree that is falling, going soft and pale and rotten, clammy with small fungi, he stood leaning against the gate, while the dim afternoon drifted with a flow of thick sweet sunshine past him, not touching him.

In the stackyard, the summer’s splendid monuments of wheat and grass were reared in gold and grey. The wheat was littered brightly round the rising stack. The loaded wagon clanked slowly up the incline, drew near, and rode like a ship at anchor against the scotches, brushing the stack with a crisp, sharp sound. Tom climbed the ladder and stood a moment there against the sky, amid the brightness and fragrance of the gold corn, and waved his arm to his wife who was passing in the shadow of the building. Then Arthur began to lift the sheaves to the stack, and the two men worked in an exquisite, subtle rhythm, their white sleeves and their dark heads gleaming, moving against the mild sky and the corn. The silence was broken only by the occasional lurch of the body of the wagon, as the teamer stepped to the front, or again to the rear of the load. Occasionally I could catch the blue glitter of the prongs of the forks. Tom, now lifted high above the small wagon load, called to his brother some question about the stack. The sound of his voice was strong and mellow.

I turned to George, who was also watching, and said: “You ought to be like that.”

We heard Tom calling, “All right!” and saw him standing high up on the tallest corner of the stack, as on the prow of a ship.

George watched, and his face slowly gathered expression. He turned to me, his dark eyes alive with horror and despair.

“I shall soon — be out of everybody’s way!” he said. His moment of fear and despair was cruel. I cursed myself for having roused him from his stupor.

“You will be better,” I said.

He watched again the handsome movement of the men at the stack.

“I couldn’t team ten sheaves,” he said.

“You will in a month or two,” I urged.

He continued to watch, while Tom got on the ladder and came down the front of the stack.

“Nay, the sooner I clear out, the better,” he repeated to himself.

When we went in to tea, he was, as Tom said, “downcast”. The men talked uneasily with abated voices. Emily attended to him with a little, palpitating solicitude. We were all uncomfortably impressed with the sense of our alienation

from him He sat apart and obscure among us, like a condemned man.

THE END

THE TRESPASSER



The Trespasser is the second novel written by Lawrence, which was published in 1912. Originally it was entitled the *Saga of Siegmund* and drew upon the experiences of a friend of Lawrence, Helen Corke, and her adulterous relationship with a married man that ended with his suicide. Lawrence worked from Corke's diary, with her permission, but also urged her to publish; which she did in 1933 as *Neutral Ground*. Corke later wrote several biographical works on Lawrence.



Lawrence, whilst employed as a school teacher

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CHAPTER 1

‘Take off that mute, do!’ cried Louisa, snatching her fingers from the piano keys, and turning abruptly to the violinist.

Helena looked slowly from her music.

‘My dear Louisa,’ she replied, ‘it would be simply unendurable.’ She stood tapping her white skirt with her bow in a kind of a pathetic forbearance.

‘But I can’t understand it,’ cried Louisa, bouncing on her chair with the exaggeration of one who is indignant with a beloved. ‘It is only lately you would even submit to muting your violin. At one time you would have refused flatly, and no doubt about it.’

‘I have only lately submitted to many things,’ replied Helena, who seemed weary and stupefied, but still sententious. Louisa drooped from her bristling defiance.

‘At any rate,’ she said, scolding in tones too naked with love, I don’t like it.’

‘*Go on from Allegro,*’ said Helena, pointing with her bow to the place on Louisa’s score of the Mozart sonata. Louisa obediently took the chords, and the music continued.

A young man, reclining in one of the wicker arm-chairs by the fire, turned luxuriously from the girls to watch the flames poise and dance with the music. He was evidently at his ease, yet he seemed a stranger in the room.

It was the sitting-room of a mean house standing in line with hundreds of others of the same kind, along a wide road in South London. Now and again the trams hummed by, but the room was foreign to the trams and to the sound of the London traffic. It was Helena’s room, for which she was responsible. The walls were of the dead-green colour of August foliage; the green carpet, with its border of polished floor, lay like a square of grass in a setting of black loam. Ceiling and frieze and fireplace were smooth white. There was no other colouring.

The furniture, excepting the piano, had a transitory look; two light wicker arm-chairs by the fire, the two frail stands of dark, polished wood, the couple of flimsy chairs, and the case of books in the recess — all seemed uneasy, as if they might be tossed out to leave the room clear, with its green floor and walls, and its white rim of skirting-board, serene.

On the mantlepice were white lustres, and a small soapstone Buddha from China, grey, impassive, locked in his renunciation. Besides these, two tablets of translucent stone beautifully clouded with rose and blood, and carved with

Chinese symbols; then a litter of mementoes, rock-crystals, and shells and scraps of seaweed.

A stranger, entering, felt at a loss. He looked at the bare wall-spaces of dark green, at the scanty furniture, and was assured of his unwelcome. The only objects of sympathy in the room were the white lamp that glowed on a stand near the wall, and the large, beautiful fern, with narrow fronds, which ruffled its cloud of green within the gloom of the window-bay. These only, with the fire, seemed friendly.

The three candles on the dark piano burned softly, the music fluttered on, but, like numbed butterflies, stupidly. Helena played mechanically. She broke the music beneath her bow, so that it came lifeless, very hurting to hear. The young man frowned, and pondered. Uneasily, he turned again to the players.

The violinist was a girl of twenty-eight. Her white dress, high-waisted, swung as she forced the rhythm, determinedly swaying to the time as if her body were the white stroke of a metronome. It made the young man frown as he watched. Yet he continued to watch. She had a very strong, vigorous body. Her neck, pure white, arched in strength from the fine hollow between her shoulders as she held the violin. The long white lace of her sleeve swung, floated, after the bow.

Byrne could not see her face, more than the full curve of her cheek. He watched her hair, which at the back was almost of the colour of the soapstone idol, take the candlelight into its vigorous freedom in front and glisten over her forehead.

Suddenly Helena broke off the music, and dropped her arm in irritable resignation. Louisa looked round from the piano, surprised.

‘Why,’ she cried, ‘wasn’t it all right?’

Helena laughed wearily.

‘It was all wrong,’ she answered, as she put her violin tenderly to rest.

‘Oh, I’m sorry I did so badly,’ said Louisa in a huff. She loved Helena passionately.

‘You didn’t do badly at all,’ replied her friend, in the same tired, apathetic tone. ‘It was I.’

When she had closed the black lid of her violin-case, Helena stood a moment as if at a loss. Louisa looked up with eyes full of affection, like a dog that did not dare to move to her beloved. Getting no response, she drooped over the piano. At length Helena looked at her friend, then slowly closed her eyes. The burden of this excessive affection was too much for her. Smiling faintly, she said, as if she were coaxing a child:

‘Play some Chopin, Louisa.’

‘I shall only do that all wrong, like everything else,’ said the elder plaintively.

Louisa was thirty-five. She had been Helena's friend for years.

'Play the mazurkas,' repeated Helena calmly.

Louisa rummaged among the music. Helena blew out her violin-candle, and came to sit down on the side of the fire opposite to Byrne. The music began. Helena pressed her arms with her hands, musing.

'They are inflamed still' said the young man.

She glanced up suddenly, her blue eyes, usually so heavy and tired, lighting up with a small smile.

'Yes,' she answered, and she pushed back her sleeve, revealing a fine, strong arm, which was scarlet on the outer side from shoulder to wrist, like some long, red-burned fruit. The girl laid her cheek on the smarting soft flesh caressively.

'It is quite hot,' she smiled, again caressing her sun-scalded arm with peculiar joy.

'Funny to see a sunburn like that in mid-winter,' he replied, frowning. 'I can't think why it should last all these months. Don't you ever put anything on to heal it?'

She smiled at him again, almost pitying, then put her mouth lovingly on the burn.

'It comes out every evening like this,' she said softly, with curious joy.

'And that was August, and now it's February!' he exclaimed. 'It must be psychological, you know. You make it come — the smart; you invoke it.'

She looked up at him, suddenly cold.

'I! I never think of it,' she answered briefly, with a kind of sneer.

The young man's blood ran back from her at her acid tone. But the mortification was physical only. Smiling quickly, gently —

'Never?' he re-echoed.

There was silence between them for some moments, whilst Louisa continued to play the piano for their benefit. At last:

'Drat it,' she exclaimed, flouncing round on the piano-stool.

The two looked up at her.

'Ye did run well — what hath hindered you?' laughed Byrne.

'You!' cried Louisa. 'Oh, I can't play any more,' she added, dropping her arms along her skirt pathetically. Helena laughed quickly.

'Oh I can't, Helen!' pleaded Louisa.

'My dear,' said Helena, laughing briefly, 'you are really under *no* obligation *whatever*.'

With the little groan of one who yields to a desire contrary to her self-respect, Louisa dropped at the feet of Helena, laid her arm and her head languishingly on the knee of her friend. The latter gave no sign, but continued to gaze in the fire.

Byrne, on the other side of the hearth, sprawled in his chair, smoking a reflective cigarette.

The room was very quiet, silent even of the tick of a clock. Outside, the traffic swept by, and feet pattered along the pavement. But this vulgar storm of life seemed shut out of Helena's room, that remained indifferent, like a church. Two candles burned dimly as on an altar, glistening yellow on the dark piano. The lamp was blown out, and the flameless fire, a red rubble, dwindled in the grate, so that the yellow glow of the candles seemed to shine even on the embers. Still no one spoke.

At last Helena shivered slightly in her chair, though did not change her position. She sat motionless.

'Will you make coffee, Louisa?' she asked. Louisa lifted herself, looked at her friend, and stretched slightly.

'Oh!' she groaned voluptuously. 'This is so comfortable!'

'Don't trouble then, I'll go. No, don't get up,' said Helena, trying to disengage herself. Louisa reached and put her hands on Helena's wrists.

'I will go,' she drawled, almost groaning with voluptuousness and appealing love.

Then, as Helena still made movements to rise, the elder woman got up slowly, leaning as she did so all her weight on her friend.

'Where is the coffee?' she asked, affecting the dullness of lethargy. She was full of small affectations, being consumed with uneasy love.

'I think, my dear,' replied Helena, 'it is in its usual place.'

'Oh — o-o-oh!' yawned Louisa, and she dragged herself out.

The two had been intimate friends for years, had slept together, and played together and lived together. Now the friendship was coming to an end.

'After all,' said Byrne, when the door was closed, 'if you're alive you've got to live.'

Helena burst into a titter of amusement at this sudden remark.

'Wherefore?' she asked indulgently.

'Because there's no such thing as passive existence,' he replied, grinning.

She curled her lip in amused indulgence of this very young man.

'I don't see it at all,' she said.

'You can't, he protested, 'any more than a tree can help budding in April — it can't help itself, if it's alive; same with you.'

'Well, then' — and again there was the touch of a sneer — 'if I can't help myself, why trouble, my friend?'

'Because — because I suppose *I* can't help myself — if it bothers me, it does. You see, I' — he smiled brilliantly — 'am April.'

She paid very little attention to him, but began in a peculiar reedy, metallic tone, that set his nerves quivering:

‘But I am not a bare tree. All my dead leaves, they hang to me — and — and go through a kind of *danse macabre* — ’

‘But you bud underneath — like beech,’ he said quickly.

‘Really, my friend,’ she said coldly, ‘I am too tired to bud.’

‘No,’ he pleaded, ‘no!’ With his thick brows knitted, he surveyed her anxiously. She had received a great blow in August, and she still was stunned. Her face, white and heavy, was like a mask, almost sullen. She looked in the fire, forgetting him.

‘You want March,’ he said — he worried endlessly over her — ‘to rip off your old leaves. I s’ll have to be March,’ he laughed.

She ignored him again because of his presumption. He waited awhile, then broke out once more.

‘You must start again — you must. Always you rustle your red leaves of a blasted summer. You are not dead. Even if you want to be, you’re not. Even if it’s a bitter thing to say, you have to say it: you are not dead...’

Smiling a peculiar, painful smile, as if he hurt her, she turned to gaze at a photograph that hung over the piano. It was the profile of a handsome man in the prime of life. He was leaning slightly forward, as if yielding beneath a burden of life, or to the pull of fate. He looked out musingly, and there was no hint of rebellion in the contours of the regular features. The hair was brushed back, soft and thick, straight from his fine brow. His nose was small and shapely, his chin rounded, cleft, rather beautifully moulded. Byrne gazed also at the photo. His look became distressed and helpless.

‘You cannot say you are dead with Siegmund,’ he cried brutally. She shuddered, clasped her burning arms on her breast, and looked into the fire. ‘You are not dead with Siegmund,’ he persisted, ‘so you can’t say you live with him. You may live with his memory. But Siegmund is dead, and his memory is not he — himself,’ He made a fierce gesture of impatience. ‘Siegmund now — he is not a memory — he is not your dead red leaves — he is Siegmund Dead! And you do not know him, because you are alive, like me, so Siegmund Dead is a stranger to you.’

With her head bowed down, cowering like a sulky animal, she looked at him under her brows. He stared fiercely back at her, but beneath her steady, glowering gaze he shrank, then turned aside.

‘You stretch your hands blindly to the dead; you look backwards. No, you never touch the thing,’ he cried.

‘I have the arms of Louisa always round my neck,’ came her voice, like the

cry of a cat. She put her hands on her throat as if she must relieve an ache. He saw her lip raised in a kind of disgust, a revulsion from life. She was very sick after the tragedy.

He frowned, and his eyes dilated.

‘Folk are good; they are good for one. You never have looked at them. You would linger hours over a blue weed, and let all the people down the road go by. Folks are better than a garden in full blossom — ’

She watched him again. A certain beauty in his speech, and his passionate way, roused her when she did not want to be roused, when moving from her torpor was painful. At last —

‘You are merciless, you know, Cecil,’ she said.

‘And I will be,’ protested Byrne, flinging his hand at her. She laughed softly, wearily.

For some time they were silent. She gazed once more at the photograph over the piano, and forgot all the present. Byrne, spent for the time being, was busy hunting for some life-interest to give her. He ignored the simplest — that of love — because he was even more faithful than she to the memory of Siegmund, and blinder than most to his own heart.

‘I do wish I had Siegmund’s violin,’ she said quietly, but with great intensity. Byrne glanced at her, then away. His heart beat sulkily. His sanguine, passionate spirit dropped and slouched under her contempt. He, also, felt the jar, heard the discord. She made him sometimes pant with her own horror. He waited, full of hate and tasting of ashes, for the arrival of Louisa with the coffee.

CHAPTER 2

Siegmund's violin, desired of Helena, lay in its case beside Siegmund's lean portmanteau in the white dust of the lumber-room in Highgate. It was worth twenty pounds, but Beatrice had not yet roused herself to sell it; she kept the black case out of sight.

Siegmund's violin lay in the dark, folded up, as he had placed it for the last time, with hasty, familiar hands, in its red silk shroud. After two dead months the first string had snapped, sharply striking the sensitive body of the instrument. The second string had broken near Christmas, but no one had heard the faint moan of its going. The violin lay mute in the dark, a faint odour of must creeping over the smooth, soft wood. Its twisted, withered strings lay crisped from the anguish of breaking, smothered under the silk folds. The fragrance of Siegmund himself, with which the violin was steeped, slowly changed into an odour of must.

Siegmund died out even from his violin. He had infused it with his life, till its fibres had been as the tissue of his own flesh. Grasping his violin, he seemed to have his fingers on the strings of his heart and of the heart of Helena. It was his little beloved that drank his being and turned it into music. And now Siegmund was dead; only an odour of must remained of him in his violin.

It lay folded in silk in the dark, waiting. Six months before it had longed for rest; during the last nights of the season, when Siegmund's fingers had pressed too hard, when Siegmund's passion, and joy, and fear had hurt, too, the soft body of his little beloved, the violin had sickened for rest. On that last night of opera, without pity Siegmund had struck the closing phrases from the fiddle, harsh in his impatience, wild in anticipation.

The curtain came down, the great singers bowed, and Siegmund felt the spattering roar of applause quicken his pulse. It was hoarse, and savage, and startling on his inflamed soul, making him shiver with anticipation, as if something had brushed his hot nakedness. Quickly, with hands of habitual tenderness, he put his violin away.

The theatre-goers were tired, and life drained rapidly out of the opera-house. The members of the orchestra rose, laughing, mingling their weariness with good wishes for the holiday, with sly warning and suggestive advice, pressing hands warmly ere they disbanded. Other years Siegmund had lingered, unwilling to take the long farewell of his associates of the orchestra. Other years he had

left the opera-house with a little pain of regret. Now he laughed, and took his comrades' hands, and bade farewells, all distractedly, and with impatience. The theatre, awesome now in its emptiness, he left gladly, hastening like a flame stretched level on the wind.

With his black violin-case he hurried down the street, then halted to pity the flowers massed pallid under the gaslight of the market-hall. For himself, the sea and the sunlight opened great spaces tomorrow. The moon was full above the river. He looked at it as a man in abstraction watches some clear thing; then he came to a standstill. It was useless to hurry to his train. The traffic swung past the lamplight shone warm on all the golden faces; but Siegmund had already left the city. His face was silver and shadows to the moon; the river, in its soft grey, shaking golden sequins among the folds of its shadows, fell open like a garment before him, to reveal the white moon-glitter brilliant as living flesh. Mechanically, overcast with the reality of the moonlight, he took his seat in the train, and watched the moving of things. He was in a kind of trance, his consciousness seeming suspended. The train slid out amongst lights and dark places. Siegmund watched the endless movement, fascinated.

This was one of the crises of his life. For years he had suppressed his soul, in a kind of mechanical despair doing his duty and enduring the rest. Then his soul had been softly enticed from its bondage. Now he was going to break free altogether, to have at least a few days purely for his own joy. This, to a man of his integrity, meant a breaking of bonds, a severing of blood-ties, a sort of new birth. In the excitement of this last night his life passed out of his control, and he sat at the carriage-window, motionless, watching things move.

He felt busy within him a strong activity which he could not help. Slowly the body of his past, the womb which had nourished him in one fashion for so many years, was casting him forth. He was trembling in all his being, though he knew not with what. All he could do now was to watch the lights go by, and to let the translation of himself continue.

When at last the train ran out into the full, luminous night, and Siegmund saw the meadows deep in moonlight, he quivered with a low anticipation. The elms, great grey shadows, seemed to loiter in their cloaks across the pale fields. He had not seen them so before. The world was changing.

The train stopped, and with a little effort he rose to go home. The night air was cool and sweet. He drank it thirstily. In the road again he lifted his face to the moon. It seemed to help him; in its brilliance amid the blonde heavens it seemed to transcend fretfulness. It would front the waves with silver as they slid to the shore, and Helena, looking along the coast, waiting, would lift her white hands with sudden joy. He laughed, and the moon hurried laughing alongside, through

the black masses of the trees.

He had forgotten he was going home for this night. The chill wetness of his little white garden-gate reminded him, and a frown came on his face. As he closed the door, and found himself in the darkness of the hall, the sense of his fatigue came fully upon him. It was an effort to go to bed. Nevertheless, he went very quietly into the drawing-room. There the moonlight entered, and he thought the whiteness was Helena. He held his breath and stiffened, then breathed again. 'Tomorrow,' he thought, as he laid his violin-case across the arms of a wicker chair. But he had a physical feeling of the presence of Helena: in his shoulders he seemed to be aware of her. Quickly, half lifting his arms, he turned to the moonshine. 'Tomorrow!' he exclaimed quietly; and he left the room stealthily, for fear of disturbing the children.

In the darkness of the kitchen burned a blue bud of light. He quickly turned up the gas to a broad yellow flame, and sat down at table. He was tired, excited, and vexed with misgiving. As he lay in his arm-chair, he looked round with disgust.

The table was spread with a dirty cloth that had great brown stains betokening children. In front of him was a cup and saucer, and a small plate with a knife laid across it. The cheese, on another plate, was wrapped in a red-bordered, fringed cloth, to keep off the flies, which even then were crawling round, on the sugar, on the loaf, on the cocoa-tin. Siegmund looked at his cup. It was chipped, and a stain had gone under the glaze, so that it looked like the mark of a dirty mouth. He fetched a glass of water.

The room was drab and dreary. The oil-cloth was worn into a hole near the door. Boots and shoes of various sizes were scattered over the floor, while the sofa was littered with children's clothing. In the black stove the ash lay dead; on the range were chips of wood, and newspapers, and rubbish of papers, and crusts of bread, and crusts of bread-and-jam. As Siegmund walked across the floor, he crushed two sweets underfoot. He had to grope under sofa and dresser to find his slippers; and he was in evening dress.

It would be the same, while ever Beatrice was Beatrice and Siegmund her husband. He ate his bread and cheese mechanically, wondering why he was miserable, why he was not looking forward with joy to the morrow. As he ate, he closed his eyes, half wishing he had not promised Helena, half wishing he had no tomorrow.

Leaning back in his chair, he felt something in the way. It was a small teddy-bear and half of a strong white comb. He grinned to himself. This was the summary of his domestic life — a broken, coarse comb, a child crying because her hair was lugged, a wife who had let the hair go till now, when she had got into a temper to see the job through; and then the teddy-bear, pathetically

cocking a black worsted nose, and lifting absurd arms to him.

He wondered why Gwen had gone to bed without her pet. She would want the silly thing. The strong feeling of affection for his children came over him, battling with something else. He sank in his chair, and gradually his baffled mind went dark. He sat, overcome with weariness and trouble, staring blankly into the space. His own stifling roused him. Straightening his shoulders, he took a deep breath, then relaxed again. After a while he rose, took the teddy-bear, and went slowly to bed.

Gwen and Marjory, aged nine and twelve, slept together in a small room. It was fairly light. He saw his favourite daughter lying quite uncovered, her wilful head thrown back, her mouth half open. Her black hair was tossed across the pillow: he could see the action. Marjory snuggled under the sheet. He placed the teddy-bear between the two girls.

As he watched them, he hated the children for being so dear to him. Either he himself must go under, and drag on an existence he hated, or they must suffer. But he had agreed to spend this holiday with Helena, and meant to do so. As he turned, he saw himself like a ghost cross the mirror. He looked back; he peered at himself. His hair still grew thick and dark from his brow: he could not see the grey at the temples. His eyes were dark and tender, and his mouth, under the black moustache, was full of youth.

He rose, looked at the children, frowned, and went to his own small room. He was glad to be shut alone in the little cubicle of darkness.

Outside the world lay in a glamorous pallor, casting shadows that made the farm, the trees, the bulks of villas, look like live creatures. The same pallor went through all the night, glistening on Helena as she lay curled up asleep at the core of the glamour, like the moon; on the sea rocking backwards and forwards till it rocked her island as she slept. She was so calm and full of her own assurance. It was a great rest to be with her. With her, nothing mattered but love and the beauty of things. He felt parched and starving. She had rest and love, like water and manna for him. She was so strong in her self-possession, in her love of beautiful things and of dreams.

The clock downstairs struck two.

'I must get to sleep,' he said.

He dragged his portmanteau from beneath the bed and began to pack it. When at last it was finished, he shut it with a snap. The click sounded final. He stood up, stretched himself, and sighed.

'I am fearfully tired,' he said.

But that was persuasive. When he was undressed he sat in his pyjamas for some time, rapidly beating his fingers on his knee.

‘Thirty-eight years old,’ he said to himself, ‘and disconsolate as a child!’ He began to muse of the morrow.

When he seemed to be going to sleep, he woke up to find thoughts labouring over his brain, like bees on a hive. Recollections, swift thoughts, flew in and alighted upon him, as wild geese swing down and take possession of a pond. Phrases from the opera tyrannized over him; he played the rhythm with all his blood. As he turned over in this torture, he sighed, and recognized a movement of the De Beriot concerto which Helena had played for her last lesson. He found himself watching her as he had watched then, felt again the wild impatience when she was wrong, started again as, amid the dipping and sliding of her bow, he realized where his thoughts were going. She was wrong, he was hasty; and he felt her blue eyes looking intently at him.

Both started as his daughter Vera entered suddenly. She was a handsome girl of nineteen. Crossing the room, brushing Helena as if she were a piece of furniture in the way, Vera had asked her father a question, in a hard, insulting tone, then had gone out again, just as if Helena had not been in the room.

Helena stood fingering the score of *Pelléas*. When Vera had gone, she asked, in the peculiar tone that made Siegmund shiver:

‘Why do you consider the music of *Pelléas* cold?’

Siegmund had struggled to answer. So they passed everything off, without mention, after Helena’s fashion, ignoring all that might be humiliating; and to her much was humiliating.

For years she had come as pupil to Siegmund, first as a friend of the household. Then she and Louisa went occasionally to whatever hall or theatre had Siegmund in the orchestra, so that shortly the three formed the habit of coming home together. Then Helena had invited Siegmund to her home; then the three friends went walks together; then the two went walks together, whilst Louisa sheltered them.

Helena had come to read his loneliness and the humiliation of his lot. He had felt her blue eyes, heavily, steadily gazing into his soul, and he had lost himself to her.

That day, three weeks before the end of the season, when Vera had so insulted Helena, the latter had said, as she put on her coat, looking at him all the while with heavy blue eyes: ‘I think, Siegmund, I cannot come here any more. Your home is not open to me any longer.’ He had writhed in confusion and humiliation. As she pressed his hand, closely and for a long time, she said: ‘I will write to you.’ Then she left him.

Siegmund had hated his life that day. Soon she wrote. A week later, when he lay resting his head on her lap in Richmond Park, she said:

‘You are so tired, Siegmund.’ She stroked his face, and kissed him softly. Siegmund lay in the molten daze of love. But Helena was, if it is not to debase the word, virtuous: an inconsistent virtue, cruel and ugly for Siegmund.

‘You are so tired, dear. You must come away with me and rest, the first week in August.’

His blood had leapt, and whatever objections he raised, such as having no money, he allowed to be overridden. He was going to Helena, to the Isle of Wight, tomorrow.

Helena, with her blue eyes so full of storm, like the sea, but, also like the sea, so eternally self-sufficient, solitary; with her thick white throat, the strongest and most wonderful thing on earth, and her small hands, silken and light as wind-flowers, would be his tomorrow, along with the sea and the downs. He clung to the exquisite flame which flooded him....

But it died out, and he thought of the return to London, to Beatrice, and the children. How would it be? Beatrice, with her furious dark eyes, and her black hair loosely knotted back, came to his mind as she had been the previous day, flaring with temper when he said to her:

‘I shall be going away tomorrow for a few days’ holiday.’

She asked for detail, some of which he gave. Then, dissatisfied and inflamed, she broke forth in her suspicion and her abuse, and her contempt, while two large-eyed children stood listening by. Siegmund hated his wife for drawing on him the grave, cold looks of condemnation from his children.

Something he had said touched Beatrice. She came of good family, had been brought up like a lady, educated in a convent school in France. He evoked her old pride. She drew herself up with dignity, and called the children away. He wondered if he could bear a repetition of that degradation. It bled him of his courage and self-respect.

In the morning Beatrice was disturbed by the sharp sneck of the hall door. Immediately awake, she heard his quick, firm step hastening down the gravel path. In her impotence, discarded like a worn out object, she lay for the moment stiff with bitterness.

‘I am nothing, I am nothing,’ she said to herself. She lay quite rigid for a time.

There was no sound anywhere. The morning sunlight pierced vividly through the slits of the blind. Beatrice lay rocking herself, breathing hard, her finger-nails pressing into her palm. Then came the sound of a train slowing down in the station, and directly the quick ‘chuff-chuff-chuff’ of its drawing out. Beatrice imagined the sunlight on the puffs of steam, and the two lovers, her husband and Helena, rushing through the miles of morning sunshine.

‘God strike her dead! Mother of God, strike her down!’ she said aloud, in a

low tone. She hated Helena.

Irene, who lay with her mother, woke up and began to question her.

CHAPTER 3

In the miles of morning sunshine, Siegmund's shadows, his children, Beatrice, his sorrow, dissipated like mist, and he was elated as a young man setting forth to travel. When he had passed Portsmouth Town everything had vanished but the old gay world of romance. He laughed as he looked out of the carriage window.

Below, in the street, a military band passed glittering. A brave sound floated up, and again he laughed, loving the tune, the clash and glitter of the band, the movement of scarlet, blithe soldiers beyond the park. People were drifting brightly from church. How could it be Sunday! It was no time; it was Romance, going back to Tristan.

Women, like crocus flowers, in white and blue and lavender, moved gaily. Everywhere fluttered the small flags of holiday. Every form danced lightly in the sunshine.

And beyond it all were the silent hillsides of the island, with Helena. It was so wonderful, he could bear to be patient. She would be all in white, with her cool, thick throat left bare to the breeze, her face shining, smiling as she dipped her head because of the sun, which glistened on her uncovered hair.

He breathed deeply, stirring at the thought. But he would not grow impatient. The train had halted over the town, where scarlet soldiers, and ludicrous blue sailors, and all the brilliant women from church shook like a kaleidoscope down the street. The train crawled on, drawing near to the sea, for which Siegmund waited breathless. It was so like Helena, blue, beautiful, strong in its reserve.

Another moment they were in the dirty station. Then the day flashed out, and Siegmund mated with joy. He felt the sea heaving below him. He looked round, and the sea was blue as a periwinkle flower, while gold and white and blood-red sails lit here and there upon the blueness. Standing on the deck, he gave himself to the breeze and to the sea, feeling like one of the ruddy sails — as if he were part of it all. All his body radiated amid the large, magnificent sea-moon like a piece of colour.

The little ship began to pulse, to tremble. White with the softness of a bosom, the water rose up frothing and swaying gently. Ships drew near the inquisitive birds; the old *Victory* shook her myriad pointed flags of yellow and scarlet; the straight old houses of the quay passed by.

Outside the harbour, like fierce creatures of the sea come wildly up to look, the battleships laid their black snouts on the water. Siegmund laughed at them.

He felt the foam on his face like a sparkling, felt the blue sea gathering round.

On the left stood the round fortress, quaintly chequered, and solidly alone in the walk of water, amid the silent flight of the golden-and crimson-winged boats.

Siegmund watched the bluish bulk of the island. Like the beautiful women in the myths, his love hid in its blue haze. It seemed impossible. Behind him, the white wake trailed myriads of daisies. On either hand the grim and wicked battleships watched along their sharp noses. Beneath him the clear green water swung and puckered as if it were laughing. In front, Sieglinde's island drew near and nearer, creeping towards him, bringing him Helena.

Meadows and woods appeared, houses crowded down to the shore to meet him; he was in the quay, and the ride was over. Siegmund regretted it. But Helena was on the island, which rode like an anchored ship under the fleets of cloud that had launched whilst Siegmund was on water. As he watched the end of the pier loom higher, large ponderous trains of cloud cast over him the shadows of their bulk, and he shivered in the chill wind.

His travelling was very slow. The sky's dark shipping pressed closer and closer, as if all the clouds had come to harbour. Over the flat lands near Newport the wind moaned like the calling of many violoncellos. All the sky was grey. Siegmund waited drearily on Newport station, where the wind swept coldly. It was Sunday, and the station and the island were desolate, having lost their purposes.

Siegmund put on his overcoat and sat down. All his morning's blaze of elation was gone, though there still glowed a great hope. He had slept only two hours of the night. An empty man, he had drunk joy, and now the intoxication was dying out.

At three o'clock of the afternoon he sat alone in the second-class carriage, looking out. A few raindrops struck the pane, then the blurred dazzle of a shower came in a burst of wind, and hid the downs and the reeds that shivered in the marshy places. Siegmund sat in a chilly torpor. He counted the stations. Beneath his stupor his heart was thudding heavily with excitement, surprising him, for his brain felt dead.

The train slowed down: Yarmouth! One more station, then. Siegmund watched the platform, shiny with rain, slide past. On the dry grey under the shelter, one white passenger was waiting. Suddenly Siegmund's heart leaped up, wrenching wildly. He burst open the door, and caught hold of Helena. She dilated, gave a palpitating cry as he dragged her into the carriage.

'You *here!*' he exclaimed, in a strange tone. She was shivering with cold. Her almost naked arms were blue. She could not answer Siegmund's question, but lay clasped against him, shivering away her last chill as his warmth invaded her.

He laughed in his heart as she nestled in to him.

‘Is it a dream now, dear?’ he whispered. Helena clasped him tightly, shuddering because of the delicious suffusing of his warmth through her.

Almost immediately they heard the grinding of the brakes.

‘Here we are, then!’ exclaimed Helena, dropping into her conventional, cheerful manner at once. She put straight her hat, while he gathered his luggage.

Until tea-time there was a pause in their progress. Siegmund was tingling with an exquisite vividness, as if he had taken some rare stimulant. He wondered at himself. It seemed that every fibre in his body was surprised with joy, as each tree in a forest at dawn utters astonished cries of delight.

When Helena came back, she sat opposite to him to see him. His naïve look of joy was very sweet to her. His eyes were dark blue, showing the fibrils, like a purple-veined flower at twilight, and somehow, mysteriously, joy seemed to quiver in the iris. Helena appreciated him, feature by feature. She liked his clear forehead, with its thick black hair, and his full mouth, and his chin. She loved his hands, that were small, but strong and nervous, and very white. She liked his breast, that breathed so strong and quietly, and his arms, and his thighs, and his knees.

For him, Helena was a presence. She was ambushed, fused in an aura of his love. He only saw she was white, and strong, and full fruited, he only knew her blue eyes were rather awful to him.

Outside, the sea-mist was travelling thicker and thicker inland. Their lodging was not far from the bay. As they sat together at tea, Siegmund’s eyes dilated, and he looked frowning at Helena.

‘What is it?’ he asked, listening uneasily.

Helena looked up at him, from pouring out the tea. His little anxious look of distress amused her.

‘The noise, you mean? Merely the fog-horn, dear — not Wotan’s wrath, nor Siegfried’s dragon....’

The fog was white at the window. They sat waiting. After a few seconds the sound came low, swelling, like the mooing of some great sea animal, alone, the last of the monsters. The whole fog gave off the sound for a second or two, then it died down into an intense silence. Siegmund and Helena looked at each other. His eyes were full of trouble. To see a big, strong man anxious-eyed as a child because of a strange sound amused her. But he was tired.

‘I assure you, it is only a fog-horn,’ she laughed.

‘Of course. But it is a depressing sort of sound.’

‘Is it?’ she said curiously. ‘Why? Well — yes — I think I can understand its being so to some people. It’s something like the call of the horn across the sea to

Tristan.'

She hummed softly, then three times she sang the horn-call. Siegmund, with his face expressionless as a mask, sat staring out at the mist. The boom of the siren broke in upon them. To him, the sound was full of fatality. Helena waited till the noise died down, then she repeated her horn-call.

'Yet it is very much like the fog-horn,' she said, curiously interested.

'This time next week, Helena!' he said.

She suddenly went heavy, and stretched across to clasp his hand as it lay upon the table.

'I shall be calling to you from Cornwall,' she said.

He did not reply. So often she did not take his meaning, but left him alone with his sense of tragedy. She had no idea how his life was wrenched from its roots, and when he tried to tell her, she balked him, leaving him inwardly quite lonely.

'There is *no* next week,' she declared, with great cheerfulness. 'There is only the present.'

At the same moment she rose and slipped across to him. Putting her arms round his neck, she stood holding his head to her bosom, pressing it close, with her hand among his hair. His nostrils and mouth were crushed against her breast. He smelled the silk of her dress and the faint, intoxicating odour of her person. With shut eyes he owned heavily to himself again that she was blind to him. But some other self urged with gladness, no matter how blind she was, so that she pressed his face upon her.

She stroked and caressed his hair, tremblingly clasped his head against her breast, as if she would never release him; then she bent to kiss his forehead. He took her in his arms, and they were still for awhile.

Now he wanted to blind himself with her, to blaze up all his past and future in a passion worth years of living.

After tea they rested by the fire, while she told him all the delightful things she had found. She had a woman's curious passion for details, a woman's peculiar attachment to certain dear trifles. He listened, smiling, revived by her delight, and forgetful of himself. She soothed him like sunshine, and filled him with pleasure; but he hardly attended to her words.

'Shall we go out, or are you too tired? No, you are tired — you are very tired,' said Helena.

She stood by his chair, looking down on him tenderly.

'No,' he replied, smiling brilliantly at her, and stretching his handsome limbs in relief — 'no, not at all tired now.'

Helena continued to look down on him in quiet, covering tenderness. But she

quailed before the brilliant, questioning gaze of his eyes.

‘You must go to bed early tonight,’ she said, turning aside her face, ruffling his soft black hair. He stretched slightly, stiffening his arms, and smiled without answering. It was a very keen pleasure to be thus alone with her and in her charge. He rose, bidding her wrap herself up against the fog.

‘You are sure you’re not too tired?’ she reiterated.

He laughed.

Outside, the sea-mist was white and woolly. They went hand in hand. It was cold, so she thrust her hand with his into the pocket of his overcoat, while they walked together.

‘I like the mist,’ he said, pressing her hand in his pocket.

‘I don’t dislike it,’ she replied, shrinking nearer to him.

‘It puts us together by ourselves,’ he said. She plodded alongside, bowing her head, not replying. He did not mind her silence.

‘It couldn’t have happened better for us than this mist,’ he said.

She laughed curiously, almost with a sound of tears.

‘Why?’ she asked, half tenderly, half bitterly.

‘There is nothing else but you, and for you there is nothing else but me — look!’

He stood still. They were on the downs, so that Helena found herself quite alone with the man in a world of mist. Suddenly she flung herself sobbing against his breast. He held her closely, tenderly, not knowing what it was all about, but happy and unafraid.

In one hollow place the siren from the Needles seemed to bellow full in their ears. Both Siegmund and Helena felt their emotion too intense. They turned from it.

‘What is the pitch?’ asked Helena.

‘Where it is horizontal? It slides up a chromatic scale,’ said Siegmund.

‘Yes, but the settled pitch — is it about E?’

‘E!’ exclaimed Siegmund. ‘More like F.’

‘Nay, listen!’ said Helena.

They stood still and waited till there came the long booming of the fog-horn.

‘There!’ exclaimed Siegmund, imitating the sound. ‘That is not E.’ He repeated the sound. ‘It is F.’

‘Surely it is E,’ persisted Helena.

‘Even F sharp,’ he rejoined, humming the note.

She laughed, and told him to climb the chromatic scale.

‘But you agree?’ he said.

‘I do not,’ she replied.

The fog was cold. It seemed to rob them of their courage to talk.

‘What is the note in *Tristan*?’ Helena made an effort to ask.

‘That is not the same,’ he replied.

‘No, dear, that is not the same,’ she said in low, comforting tones. He quivered at the caress. She put her arms round him reached up her face yearningly for a kiss. He forgot they were standing in the public footpath, in daylight, till she drew hastily away. She heard footsteps down the fog.

As they climbed the path the mist grew thinner, till it was only a grey haze at the top. There they were on the turfy lip of the land. The sky was fairly clear overhead. Below them the sea was singing hoarsely to itself.

Helena drew him to the edge of the cliff. He crushed her hand, drawing slightly back. But it pleased her to feel the grip on her hand becoming unbearable. They stood right on the edge, to see the smooth cliff slope into the mist, under which the sea stirred noisily.

‘Shall we walk over, then?’ said Siegmund, glancing downwards. Helena’s heart stood still a moment at the idea, then beat heavily. How could he play with the idea of death, and the five great days in front? She was afraid of him just then.

‘Come away, dear,’ she pleaded.

He would, then, forgo the few consummate days! It was bitterness to her to think so.

‘Come away, dear!’ she repeated, drawing him slowly to the path.

‘You are not afraid?’ he asked.

‘Not afraid, no....’ Her voice had that peculiar, reedy, harsh quality that made him shiver.

‘It is too easy a way,’ he said satirically.

She did not take in his meaning.

‘And five days of our own before us, Siegmund!’ she scolded. ‘The mist is Lethe. It is enough for us if its spell lasts five days.’

He laughed, and took her in his arms, kissing her very closely.

They walked on joyfully, locking behind them the doors of forgetfulness.

As the sun set, the fog dispersed a little. Breaking masses of mist went flying from cliff to cliff, and far away beyond the cliffs the western sky stood dimmed with gold. The lovers wandered aimlessly over the golf-links to where green mounds and turfed banks suggested to Helena that she was tired, and would sit down. They faced the lighted chamber of the west, whence, behind the torn, dull-gold curtains of fog, the sun was departing with pomp.

Siegmund sat very still, watching the sunset. It was a splendid, flaming bridal chamber where he had come to Helena. He wondered how to express it; how

other men had borne this same glory.

‘What is the music of it?’ he asked.

She glanced at him. His eyelids were half lowered, his mouth slightly open, as if in ironic rhapsody.

‘Of what, dear?’

‘What music do you think holds the best interpretation of sunset?’

His skin was gold, his real mood was intense. She revered him for a moment.

‘I do not know,’ she said quietly; and she rested her head against his shoulder, looking out west.

There was a space of silence, while Siegmund dreamed on.

‘A Beethoven symphony — the one — ’ and he explained to her.

She was not satisfied, but leaned against him, making her choice. The sunset hung steady, she could scarcely perceive a change.

‘The Grail music in *Lohengrin*,’ she decided.

‘Yes,’ said Siegmund. He found it quite otherwise, but did not trouble to dispute. He dreamed by himself. This displeased her. She wanted him for herself. How could he leave her alone while he watched the sky? She almost put her two hands over his eyes.

CHAPTER 4

The gold march of sunset passed quickly, the ragged curtains of mist closed to. Soon Siegmund and Helena were shut alone within the dense wide fog. She shivered with the cold and the damp. Startled, he took her in his arms, where she lay and clung to him. Holding her closely, he bent forward, straight to her lips. His moustache was drenched cold with fog, so that she shuddered slightly after his kiss, and shuddered again. He did not know why the strong tremor passed through her. Thinking it was with fear and with cold, he undid his overcoat, put her close on his breast, and covered her as best he could. That she feared him at that moment was half pleasure, half shame to him. Pleadingly he hid his face on her shoulder, held her very tightly, till his face grew hot, buried against her soft strong throat.

‘You are so big I can’t hold you,’ she whispered plaintively, catching her breath with fear. Her small hands grasped at the breadth of his shoulders ineffectually.

‘You will be cold. Put your hands under my coat,’ he whispered.

He put her inside his overcoat and his coat. She came to his warm breast with a sharp intaking of delight and fear; she tried to make her hands meet in the warmth of his shoulders, tried to clasp him.

‘See! I can’t,’ she whispered.

He laughed short, and pressed her closer.

Then, tucking her head in his breast, hiding her face, she timidly slid her hands along his sides, pressing softly, to find the contours of his figure. Softly her hands crept over the silky back of his waistcoat, under his coats, and as they stirred, his blood flushed up, and up again, with fire, till all Siegmund was hot blood, and his breast was one great ache.

He crushed her to him — crushed her in upon the ache of his chest. His muscles set hard and unyielding; at that moment he was a tense, vivid body of flesh, without a mind; his blood, alive and conscious, running towards her. He remained perfectly still, locked about Helena, conscious of nothing.

She was hurt and crushed, but it was pain delicious to her. It was marvellous to her how strong he was, to keep up that grip of her like steel. She swooned in a kind of intense bliss. At length she found herself released, taking a great breath, while Siegmund was moving his mouth over her throat, something like a dog snuffing her, but with his lips. Her heart leaped away in revulsion. His

moustache thrilled her strangely. His lips, brushing and pressing her throat beneath the ear, and his warm breath flying rhythmically upon her, made her vibrate through all her body. Like a violin under the bow, she thrilled beneath his mouth, and shuddered from his moustache. Her heart was like fire in her breast.

Suddenly she strained madly to him, and, drawing back her head, placed her lips on his, close, till at the mouth they seemed to melt and fuse together. It was the long, supreme kiss, in which man and woman have one being, Two-in-one, the only Hermaphrodite.

When Helena drew away her lips, she was exhausted. She belonged to that class of 'dreaming women' with whom passion exhausts itself at the mouth. Her desire was accomplished in a real kiss. The fire, in heavy flames, had poured through her to Siegmund, from Siegmund to her. It sank, and she felt herself flagging. She had not the man's brightness and vividness of blood. She lay upon his breast, dreaming how beautiful it would be to go to sleep, to swoon unconscious there, on that rare bed. She lay still on Siegmund's breast, listening to his heavily beating heart.

With her the dream was always more than the actuality. Her dream of Siegmund was more to her than Siegmund himself. He might be less than her dream, which is as it may be. However, to the real man she was very cruel.

He held her close. His dream was melted in his blood, and his blood ran bright for her. His dreams were the flowers of his blood. Hers were more detached and inhuman. For centuries a certain type of woman has been rejecting the 'animal' in humanity, till now her dreams are abstract, and full of fantasy, and her blood runs in bondage, and her kindness is full of cruelty.

Helena lay flagging upon the breast of Siegmund. He folded her closely, and his mouth and his breath were warm on her neck. She sank away from his caresses, passively, subtly drew back from him. He was far too sensitive not to be aware of this, and far too much of a man not to yield to the woman. His heart sank, his blood grew sullen at her withdrawal. Still he held her; the two were motionless and silent for some time.

She became distressedly conscious that her feet, which lay on the wet grass, were aching with cold. She said softly, gently, as if he was her child whom she must correct and lead:

'I think we ought to go home, Siegmund.' He made a small sound, that might mean anything, but did not stir or release her. His mouth, however, remained motionless on her throat, and the caress went out of it.

'It is cold and wet, dear; we ought to go,' she coaxed determinedly.

'Soon,' he said thickly.

She sighed, waited a moment, then said very gently, as if she were loath to

take him from his pleasure:

‘Siegmund, I am cold.’

There was a reproach in this which angered him.

‘Cold!’ he exclaimed. ‘But you are warm with me — ’

‘But my feet are out on the grass, dear, and they are like wet pebbles.’

‘Oh dear!’ he said. ‘Why didn’t you give them me to warm?’ He leaned forward, and put his hand on her shoes.

‘They are very cold,’ he said. ‘We must hurry and make them warm.’

When they rose, her feet were so numbed she could hardly stand. She clung to Siegmund, laughing.

‘I wish you had told me before,’ he said. ‘I ought to have known....’

Vexed with himself, he put his arm round her, and they set off home.

CHAPTER 5

They found the fire burning brightly in their room. The only other person in the pretty, stiffly-furnished cottage was their landlady, a charming old lady, who let this sitting-room more for the change, for the sake of having visitors, than for gain.

Helena introduced Siegmund as 'My friend'. The old lady smiled upon him. He was big, and good-looking, and embarrassed. She had had a son years back... And the two were lovers. She hoped they would come to her house for their honeymoon.

Siegmund sat in his great horse-hair chair by the fire, while Helena attended to the lamp. Glancing at him over the glowing globe, she found him watching her with a small, peculiar smile of irony, and anger, and bewilderment. He was not quite himself. Her hand trembled so, she could scarcely adjust the wicks.

Helena left the room to change her dress.

'I shall be back before Mrs Curtiss brings in the tray. There is the Nietzsche I brought —'

He did not answer as he watched her go. Left alone, he sat with his arms along his knees, perfectly still. His heart beat heavily, and all his being felt sullen, watchful, aloof, like a balked animal. Thoughts came up in his brain like bubbles — random, hissing out aimlessly. Once, in the startling inflammability of his blood, his veins ran hot, and he smiled.

When Helena entered the room his eyes sought hers swiftly, as sparks lighting on the tinder. But her eyes were only moist with tenderness. His look instantly changed. She wondered at his being so silent, so strange.

Coming to him in her unhesitating, womanly way — she was only twenty-six to his thirty-eight — she stood before him, holding both his hands and looking down on him with almost gloomy tenderness. She wore a white dress that showed her throat gathering like a fountain-jet of solid foam to balance her head. He could see the full white arms passing clear through the dripping spume of lace, towards the rise of her breasts. But her eyes bent down upon him with such gloom of tenderness that he dared not reveal the passion burning in him. He could not look at her. He strove almost pitifully to be with her sad, tender, but he could not put out his fire. She held both his hands firm, pressing them in appeal for her dream love. He glanced at her wistfully, then turned away. She waited for him. She wanted his caresses and tenderness. He would not look at her.

‘You would like supper now, dear?’ she asked, looking where the dark hair ended, and his neck ran smooth, under his collar, to the strong setting of his shoulders.

‘Just as you will,’ he replied.

Still she waited, and still he would not look at her. Something troubled him, she thought. He was foreign to her.

‘I will spread the cloth, then,’ she said, in deep tones of resignation. She pressed his hands closely, and let them drop. He took no notice, but, still with his arms on his knees, he stared into the fire.

In the golden glow of lamplight she set small bowls of white and lavender sweet-peas, and mignonette, upon the round table. He watched her moving, saw the stir of her white, sloping shoulders under the lace, and the hollow of her shoulders firm as marble, and the slight rise and fall of her loins as she walked. He felt as if his breast were scalded. It was a physical pain to him.

Supper was very quiet. Helena was sad and gentle; he had a peculiar, enigmatic look in his eyes, between suffering and mockery and love. He was quite intractable; he would not soften to her, but remained there aloof. He was tired, and the look of weariness and suffering was evident to her through his strangeness. In her heart she wept.

At last she tinkled the bell for supper to be cleared. Meanwhile, restlessly, she played fragments of Wagner on the piano.

‘Will you want anything else?’ asked the smiling old landlady.

‘Nothing at all, thanks,’ said Helena, with decision.

‘Oh! then I think I will go to bed when I’ve washed the dishes. You will put the lamp out, dear?’

‘I am well used to a lamp,’ smiled Helena. ‘We use them always at home.’

She had had a day before Siegmund’s coming, in which to win Mrs Curtiss’ heart, and she had been successful. The old lady took the tray.

‘Good-night, dear — good-night, sir. I will leave you. You will not be long, dear?’

‘No, we shall not be long. Mr MacNair is very evidently tired out.’

‘Yes — yes. It is very tiring, London.’

When the door was closed, Helena stood a moment undecided, looking at Siegmund. He was lying in his armchair in a dispirited way, and looking in the fire. As she gazed at him with troubled eyes, he happened to glance to her, with the same dark, curiously searching, disappointed eyes.

‘Shall I read to you?’ she asked bitterly.

‘If you will,’ he replied.

He sounded so indifferent, she could scarcely refrain from crying. She went

and stood in front of him, looking down on him heavily.

‘What is it, dear?’ she said.

‘You,’ he replied, smiling with a little grimace.

‘Why me?’

He smiled at her ironically, then closed his eyes. She slid into his arms with a little moan. He took her on his knee, where she curled up like a heavy white cat. She let him caress her with his mouth, and did not move, but lay there curled up and quiet and luxuriously warm.

He kissed her hair, which was beautifully fragrant of itself, and time after time drew between his lips one long, keen thread, as if he would ravel out with his mouth her vigorous confusion of hair. His tenderness of love was like a soft flame lapping her voluptuously.

After a while they heard the old lady go upstairs. Helena went very still, and seemed to contract. Siegmund himself hesitated in his love-making. All was very quiet. They could hear the faint breathing of the sea. Presently the cat, which had been sleeping in a chair, rose and went to the door.

‘Shall I let her out?’ said Siegmund.

‘Do!’ said Helena, slipping from his knee. ‘She goes out when the nights are fine.’

Siegmund rose to set free the tabby. Hearing the front door open, Mrs Curtiss called from upstairs: ‘Is that you, dear?’

‘I have just let Kitty out,’ said Siegmund.

‘Ah, thank you. Good night!’ They heard the old lady lock her bedroom door.

Helena was kneeling on the hearth. Siegmund softly closed the door, then waited a moment. His heart was beating fast.

‘Shall we sit by firelight?’ he asked tentatively.

‘Yes — If you wish,’ she replied, very slowly, as if against her will. He carefully turned down the lamp, then blew out the light. His whole body was burning and surging with desire.

The room was black and red with firelight. Helena shone ruddily as she knelt, a bright, bowed figure, full in the glow. Now and then red stripes of firelight leapt across the walls. Siegmund, his face ruddy, advanced out of the shadows.

He sat in the chair beside her, leaning forward, his hands hanging like two scarlet flowers listless in the fire glow, near to her, as she knelt on the hearth, with head bowed down. One of the flowers awoke and spread towards her. It asked for her mutely. She was fascinated, scarcely able to move.

‘Come,’ he pleaded softly.

She turned, lifted her hands to him. The lace fell back, and her arms, bare to the shoulder, shone rosily. He saw her breasts raised towards him. Her face was

bent between her arms as she looked up at him afraid. Lit by the firelight, in her white, clinging dress, cowering between her uplifted arms, she seemed to be offering him herself to sacrifice.

In an instant he was kneeling, and she was lying on his shoulder, abandoned to him. There was a good deal of sorrow in his joy.

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It was eleven o'clock when Helena at last loosened Siegmund's arms, and rose from the armchair where she lay beside him. She was very hot, feverish, and restless. For the last half-hour he had lain absolutely still, with his heavy arms about her, making her hot. If she had not seen his eyes blue and dark, she would have thought him asleep. She tossed in restlessness on his breast.

'Am I not uneasy?' she had said, to make him speak. He had smiled gently.

'It is wonderful to be as still as this,' he said. She had lain tranquil with him, then, for a few moments. To her there was something sacred in his stillness and peace. She wondered at him; he was so different from an hour ago. How could he be the same! Now he was like the sea, blue and hazy in the morning, musing by itself. Before, he was burning, volcanic, as if he would destroy her.

She had given him this new soft beauty. She was the earth in which his strange flowers grew. But she herself wondered at the flowers produced of her. He was so strange to her, so different from herself. What next would he ask of her, what new blossom would she rear in him then. He seemed to grow and flower involuntarily. She merely helped to produce him.

Helena could not keep still; her body was full of strange sensations, of involuntary recoil from shock. She was tired, but restless. All the time Siegmund lay with his hot arms over her, himself so incomprehensible in his base of blue, open-eyed slumber, she grew more breathless and unbearable to herself.

At last she lifted his arm, and drew herself out of the chair. Siegmund looked at her from his tranquillity. She put the damp hair from her forehead, breathed deep, almost panting. Then she glanced hauntingly at her flushed face in the mirror. With the same restlessness, she turned to look at the night. The cool, dark, watery sea called to her. She pushed back the curtain.

The moon was wading deliciously through shallows of white cloud. Beyond the trees and the few houses was the great concave of darkness, the sea, and the moonlight. The moon was there to put a cool hand of absolution on her brow.

'Shall we go out a moment, Siegmund?' she asked fretfully.

'Ay, if you wish to,' he answered, altogether willing. He was filled with an easiness that would comply with her every wish.

They went out softly, walked in silence to the bay. There they stood at the head of the white, living moonpath, where the water whispered at the casement

of the land seductively.

‘It’s the finest night I have seen,’ said Siegmund. Helena’s eyes suddenly filled with tears, at his simplicity of happiness.

‘I like the moon on the water,’ she said.

‘I can hardly tell the one from the other,’ he replied simply. ‘The sea seems to be poured out of the moon, and rocking in the hands of the coast. They are all one, just as your eyes and hands and what you say, are all you.’

‘Yes,’ she answered, thrilled. This was the Siegmund of her dream, and she had created him. Yet there was a quiver of pain. He was beyond her now, and did not need her.

‘I feel at home here,’ he said; ‘as if I had come home where I was bred.’

She pressed his hand hard, clinging to him.

‘We go an awful long way round, Helena,’ he said, ‘just to find we’re all right.’ He laughed pleasantly. ‘I have thought myself such an outcast! How can one be outcast in one’s own night, and the moon always naked to us, and the sky half her time in rags? What do we want?’

Helena did not know. Nor did she know what he meant. But she felt something of the harmony.

‘Whatever I have or haven’t from now,’ he continued, ‘the darkness is a sort of mother, and the moon a sister, and the stars children, and sometimes the sea is a brother: and there’s a family in one house, you see.’

‘And I, Siegmund?’ she said softly, taking him in all seriousness. She looked up at him piteously. He saw the silver of tears among the moonlit ivory of her face. His heart tightened with tenderness, and he laughed, then bent to kiss her.

‘The key of the castle,’ he said. He put his face against hers, and felt on his cheek the smart of her tears.

‘It’s all very grandiose,’ he said comfortably, ‘but it does for tonight, all this that I say.’

‘It is true for ever,’ she declared.

‘In so far as tonight is eternal,’ he said.

He remained, with the wetness of her cheek smarting on his, looking from under his brows at the white transport of the water beneath the moon. They stood folded together, gazing into the white heart of the night.

CHAPTER 6

Siegmund woke with wonder in the morning. 'It is like the magic tales,' he thought, as he realized where he was; 'and I am transported to a new life, to realize my dream! Fairy-tales are true, after all.'

He had slept very deeply, so that he felt strangely new. He issued with delight from the dark of sleep into the sunshine. Reaching out his hand, he felt for his watch. It was seven o'clock. The dew of a sleep-drenched night glittered before his eyes. Then he laughed and forgot the night.

The creeper was tapping at the window, as a little wind blew up the sunshine. Siegmund put out his hands for the unfolding happiness of the morning. Helena was in the next room, which she kept inviolate. Sparrows in the creeper were shaking shadows of leaves among the sunshine; milk-white shallop of cloud stemmed bravely across the bright sky; the sea would be blossoming with a dewy shimmer of sunshine.

Siegmund rose to look, and it was so. Also the houses, like white, and red, and black cattle, were wandering down the bay, with a mist of sunshine between him and them. He leaned with his hands on the window-ledge looking out of the casement. The breeze ruffled his hair, blew down the neck of his sleeping-jacket upon his chest. He laughed, hastily threw on his clothes, and went out.

There was no sign of Helena. He strode along, singing to himself, and spinning his towel rhythmically. A small path led him across a field and down a zigzag in front of the cliffs. Some nooks, sheltered from the wind, were warm with sunshine, scented of honeysuckle and of thyme. He took a sprig of woodbine that was coloured of cream and butter. The grass wetted his brown shoes and his flannel trousers. Again, a fresh breeze put the scent of the sea in his uncovered hair. The cliff was a tangle of flowers above and below, with poppies at the lip being blown out like red flame, and scabious leaning inquisitively to look down, and pink and white rest-harrow everywhere, very pretty.

Siegmund stood at a bend where heath blossomed in shaggy lilac, where the sunshine but no wind came. He saw the blue bay curl away to the far-off headland. A few birds, white and small, circled, dipped by the thin foam-edge of the water; a few ships dimmed the sea with silent travelling; a few small people, dark or naked-white, moved below the swinging birds.

He chose his bathing-place where the incoming tide had half covered a stretch

of fair, bright sand that was studded with rocks resembling square altars, hollowed on top. He threw his clothes on a high rock. It delighted him to feel the fresh, soft fingers of the wind touching him and wandering timidly over his nakedness. He ran laughing over the sand to the sea, where he waded in, thrusting his legs noisily through the heavy green water.

It was cold, and he shrank. For a moment he found himself thigh-deep, watching the horizontal stealing of a ship through the intolerable glitter, afraid to plunge. Laughing, he went under the clear green water.

He was a poor swimmer. Sometimes a choppy wave swamped him, and he rose gasping, wringing the water from his eyes and nostrils, while he heaved and sank with the rocking of the waves that clasped his breast. Then he stooped again to resume his game with the sea. It is splendid to play, even at middle age, and the sea is a fine partner.

With his eyes at the shining level of the water, he liked to peer across, taking a seal's view of the cliffs as they confronted the morning. He liked to see the ships standing up on a bright floor; he liked to see the birds come down.

But in his playing he drifted towards the spur of rock, where, as he swam, he caught his thigh on a sharp, submerged point. He frowned at the pain, at the sudden cruelty of the sea; then he thought no more of it, but ruffled his way back to the clear water, busily continuing his play.

When he ran out on to the fair sand his heart, and brain, and body were in a turmoil. He panted, filling his breast with the air that was sparkled and tasted of the sea. As he shuddered a little, the wilful palpitations of his flesh pleased him, as if birds had fluttered against him. He offered his body to the morning, glowing with the sea's passion. The wind nestled in to him, the sunshine came on his shoulders like warm breath. He delighted in himself.

The rock before him was white and wet, like himself; it had a pool of clear water, with shells and one rose anemone.

'She would make so much of this little pool,' he thought. And as he smiled, he saw, very faintly, his own shadow in the water. It made him conscious of himself, seeming to look at him. He glanced at himself, at his handsome, white maturity. As he looked he felt the insidious creeping of blood down his thigh, which was marked with a long red slash. Siegmund watched the blood travel over the bright skin. It wound itself redly round the rise of his knee.

'That is I, that creeping red, and this whiteness I pride myself on is I, and my black hair, and my blue eyes are I. It is a weird thing to be a person. What makes me myself, among all these?'

Feeling chill, he wiped himself quickly.

'I am at my best, at my strongest,' he said proudly to himself. 'She ought to be

rejoiced at me, but she is not; she rejects me as if I were a baboon under my clothing.'

He glanced at his whole handsome maturity, the firm plating of his breasts, the full thighs, creatures proud in themselves. Only he was marred by the long raw scratch, which he regretted deeply.

'If I was giving her myself, I wouldn't want that blemish on me,' he thought.

He wiped the blood from the wound. It was nothing.

'She thinks ten thousand times more of that little pool, with a bit of pink anemone and some yellow weed, than of me. But, by Jove! I'd rather see her shoulders and breast than all heaven and earth put together could show.... Why doesn't she like me?' he thought as he dressed. It was his physical self thinking.

After dabbling his feet in a warm pool, he returned home. Helena was in the dining-room arranging a bowl of purple pansies. She looked up at him rather heavily as he stood radiant on the threshold. He put her at her ease. It was a gay, handsome boy she had to meet, not a man, strange and insistent. She smiled on him with tender dignity.

'You have bathed?' she said, smiling, and looking at his damp, ruffled black hair. She shrank from his eyes, but he was quite unconscious.

'You have not bathed!' he said; then bent to kiss her. She smelt the brine in his hair.

'No; I bathe later,' she replied. 'But what —'

Hesitating, she touched the towel, then looked up at him anxiously.

'It is blood?' she said.

'I grazed my thigh — nothing at all,' he replied.

'Are you sure?'

He laughed.

'The towel looks bad enough,' she said.

'It's an alarmist,' he laughed.

She looked in concern at him, then turned aside.

'Breakfast is quite ready,' she said.

'And I for breakfast — but shall I do?'

She glanced at him. He was without a collar, so his throat was bare above the neck-band of his flannel shirt. Altogether she disapproved of his slovenly appearance. He was usually so smart in his dress.

'I would not trouble,' she said almost sarcastically.

Whistling, he threw the towel on a chair.

'How did you sleep?' she asked gravely, as she watched him beginning to eat.

'Like the dead — solid,' he replied'. 'And you?'

'Oh, pretty well, thanks,' she said, rather piqued that he had slept so deeply,

whilst she had tossed, and had called his name in a torture of sleeplessness.

‘I haven’t slept like that for years,’ he said enthusiastically. Helena smiled gently on him. The charm of his handsome, healthy zest came over her. She liked his naked throat and his shirt-breast, which suggested the breast of the man beneath it. She was extraordinarily happy, with him so bright. The dark-faced pansies, in a little crowd, seemed gaily winking a golden eye at her.

After breakfast, while Siegmund dressed, she went down to the sea. She dwelled, as she passed, on all tiny, pretty things — on the barbaric yellow ragwort, and pink convolvuli; on all the twinkling of flowers, and dew, and snail-tracks drying in the sun. Her walk was one long lingering. More than the spaces, she loved the nooks, and fancy more than imagination.

She wanted to see just as she pleased, without any of humanity’s previous vision for spectacles. So she knew hardly any flower’s name, nor perceived any of the relationships, nor cared a jot about an adaptation or a modification. It pleased her that the lowest brown florets of the clover hung down; she cared no more. She clothed everything in fancy.

‘That yellow flower hadn’t time to be brushed and combed by the fairies before dawn came. It is tousled ...’ so she thought to herself. The pink convolvuli were fairy horns or telephones from the day fairies to the night fairies. The rippling sunlight on the sea was the Rhine maidens spreading their bright hair to the sun. That was her favourite form of thinking. The value of all things was in the fancy they evoked. She did not care for people; they were vulgar, ugly, and stupid, as a rule.

Her sense of satisfaction was complete as she leaned on the low sea-wall, spreading her fingers to warm on the stones, concocting magic out of the simple morning. She watched the indolent chasing of wavelets round the small rocks, the curling of the deep blue water round the water-shadowed reefs.

‘This is very good,’ she said to herself. ‘This is eternally cool, and clean and fresh. It could never be spoiled by satiety.’

She tried to wash herself with the white and blue morning, to clear away the soiling of the last night’s passion.

The sea played by itself, intent on its own game. Its aloofness, its self-sufficiency, are its great charm. The sea does not give and take, like the land and the sky. It has no traffic with the world. It spends its passion upon itself. Helena was something like the sea, self-sufficient and careless of the rest.

Siegmund came bareheaded, his black hair ruffling to the wind, his eyes shining warmer than the sea-like cornflowers rather, his limbs swinging backward and forward like the water. Together they leaned on the wall, warming the four white hands upon the grey bleached stone as they watched the water

playing.

When Siegmund had Helena near, he lost the ache, the yearning towards something, which he always felt otherwise. She seemed to connect him with the beauty of things, as if she were the nerve through which he received intelligence of the sun, and wind, and sea, and of the moon and the darkness. Beauty she never felt herself came to him through her. It is that makes love. He could always sympathize with the wistful little flowers, and trees lonely in their crowds, and wild, sad seabirds. In these things he recognized the great yearning, the ache outwards towards something, with which he was ordinarily burdened. But with Helena, in this large sea-morning, he was whole and perfect as the day.

‘Will it be fine all day?’ he asked, when a cloud came over.

‘I don’t know,’ she replied in her gentle, inattentive manner, as if she did not care at all. ‘I think it will be a mixed day — cloud and sun — more sun than cloud.’

She looked up gravely to see if he agreed. He turned from frowning at the cloud to smile at her. He seemed so bright, teeming with life.

‘I like a bare blue sky,’ he said; ‘sunshine that you seem to stir about as you walk.’

‘It is warm enough here, even for you,’ she smiled.

‘Ah, here!’ he answered, putting his face down to receive the radiation from the stone, letting his fingers creep towards Helena’s. She laughed, and captured his fingers, pressing them into her hand. For nearly an hour they remained thus in the still sunshine by the sea-wall, till Helena began to sigh, and to lift her face to the little breeze that wandered down from the west. She fled as soon from warmth as from cold. Physically, she was always so; she shrank from anything extreme. But psychically she was an extremist, and a dangerous one.

They climbed the hill to the fresh-breathing west. On the highest point of land stood a tall cross, railed in by a red iron fence. They read the inscription.

‘That’s all right — but a vilely ugly railing!’ exclaimed Siegmund.

‘Oh, they’d have to fence in Lord Tennyson’s white marble,’ said Helena, rather indefinitely.

He interpreted her according to his own idea.

‘Yes, he did belittle great things, didn’t he?’ said Siegmund.

‘Tennyson!’ she exclaimed.

‘Not peacocks and princesses, but the bigger things.’

‘I shouldn’t say so,’ she declared.

He sounded indeterminate, but was not really so.

They wandered over the downs westward, among the wind. As they followed the headland to the Needles, they felt the breeze from the wings of the sea

brushing them, and heard restless, poignant voices screaming below the cliffs. Now and again a gull, like a piece of spume flung up, rose over the cliff's edge, and sank again. Now and again, as the path dipped in a hollow, they could see the low, suspended intertwining of the birds passing in and out of the cliff shelter.

These savage birds appealed to all the poetry and yearning in Helena. They fascinated her, they almost voiced her. She crept nearer and nearer the edge, feeling she must watch the gulls thread out in flakes of white above the weed-black rocks. Siegmund stood away back, anxiously. He would not dare to tempt Fate now, having too strong a sense of death to risk it.

'Come back, dear. Don't go so near,' he pleaded, following as close as he might. She heard the pain and appeal in his voice. It thrilled her, and she went a little nearer. What was death to her but one of her symbols, the death of which the sagas talk — something grand, and sweeping, and dark.

Leaning forward, she could see the line of grey sand and the line of foam broken by black rocks, and over all the gulls, stirring round like froth on a pot, screaming in chorus.

She watched the beautiful birds, heard the pleading of Siegmund, and she thrilled with pleasure, toying with his keen anguish.

Helena came smiling to Siegmund, saying:

'They look so fine down there.'

He fastened his hands upon her, as a relief from his pain. He was filled with a keen, strong anguish of dread, like a presentiment. She laughed as he gripped her.

They went searching for a way of descent. At last Siegmund inquired of the coastguard the nearest way down the cliff. He was pointed to the 'Path of the Hundred Steps'.

'When is a hundred not a hundred?' he said sceptically, as they descended the dazzling white chalk. There were sixty-eight steps. Helena laughed at his exactitude.

'It must be a love of round numbers,' he said.

'No doubt,' she laughed. He took the thing so seriously.

'Or of exaggeration,' he added.

There was a shelving beach of warm white sand, bleached soft as velvet. A sounding of gulls filled the dark recesses of the headland; a low chatter of shingle came from where the easy water was breaking; the confused, shell-like murmur of the sea between the folded cliffs. Siegmund and Helena lay side by side upon the dry sand, small as two resting birds, while thousands of gulls whirled in a white-flaked storm above them, and the great cliffs towered beyond,

and high up over the cliffs the multitudinous clouds were travelling, a vast caravan *en route*. Amidst the journeying of oceans and clouds and the circling flight of heavy spheres, lost to sight in the sky, Siegmund and Helena, two grains of life in the vast movement, were travelling a moment side by side.

They lay on the beach like a grey and a white seabird together. The lazy ships that were idling down the Solent observed the cliffs and the boulders, but Siegmund and Helena were too little. They lay ignored and insignificant, watching through half-closed fingers the diverse caravan of Day go past. They lay with their latticed fingers over their eyes, looking out at the sailing of ships across their vision of blue water.

‘Now, that one with the greyish sails — ’ Siegmund was saying.

‘Like a housewife of forty going placidly round with the duster — yes?’ interrupted Helena.

‘That is a schooner. You see her four sails, and — ’

He continued to classify the shipping, until he was interrupted by the wicked laughter of Helena.

‘That is right, I am sure,’ he protested.

‘I won’t contradict you,’ she laughed, in a tone which showed him he knew even less of the classifying of ships than she did.

‘So you have lain there amusing yourself at my expense all the time?’ he said, not knowing in the least why she laughed. They turned and looked at one another, blue eyes smiling and wavering as the beach wavers in the heat. Then they closed their eyes with sunshine.

Drowsed by the sun, and the white sand, and the foam, their thoughts slept like butterflies on the flowers of delight. But cold shadows startled them up.

‘The clouds are coming,’ he said regretfully.

‘Yes; but the wind is quite strong enough for them,’ she answered,

‘Look at the shadows — like blots floating away. Don’t they devour the sunshine?’

‘It is quite warm enough here,’ she said, nestling in to him.

‘Yes; but the sting is missing. I like to feel the warmth biting in.’

‘No, I do not. To be cosy is enough.’

‘I like the sunshine on me, real, and manifest, and tangible. I feel like a seed that has been frozen for ages. I want to be bitten by the sunshine.’

She leaned over and kissed him. The sun came bright-footed over the water, leaving a shining print on Siegmund’s face. He lay, with half-closed eyes, sprawled loosely on the sand. Looking at his limbs, she imagined he must be heavy, like the bounders. She sat over him, with her fingers stroking his eyebrows, that were broad and rather arched. He lay perfectly still, in a half-

dream.

Presently she laid her head on his breast, and remained so, watching the sea, and listening to his heart-beats. The throb was strong and deep. It seemed to go through the whole island and the whole afternoon, and it fascinated her: so deep, unheard, with its great expulsions of life. Had the world a heart? Was there also deep in the world a great God thudding out waves of life, like a great heart, unconscious? It frightened her. This was the God she knew not, as she knew not this Siegmund. It was so different from the half-shut eyes with black lashes, and the winsome, shapely nose. And the heart of the world, as she heard it, could not be the same as the curling splash of retreat of the little sleepy waves. She listened for Siegmund's soul, but his heart overbeat all other sound, thudding powerfully.

CHAPTER 7

Siegmund woke to the muffled firing of guns on the sea. He looked across at the shaggy grey water in wonder. Then he turned to Helena.

‘I suppose,’ he said, ‘they are saluting the Czar. Poor beggar!’

‘I was afraid they would wake you,’ she smiled.

They listened again to the hollow, dull sound of salutes from across the water and the downs.

The day had gone grey. They decided to walk, down below, to the next bay.

‘The tide is coming in,’ said Helena.

‘But this broad strip of sand hasn’t been wet for months. It’s as soft as pepper,’ he replied.

They laboured along the shore, beside the black, sinuous line of shrivelled fucus. The base of the cliff was piled with chalk debris. On the other side was the level plain of the sea. Hand in hand, alone and overshadowed by huge cliffs, they toiled on. The waves staggered in, and fell, overcome at the end of the race.

Siegmund and Helena neared a headland, sheer as the side of a house, its base weighted with a tremendous white mass of boulders, that the green sea broke amongst with a hollow sound, followed by a sharp hiss of withdrawal. The lovers had to cross this desert of white boulders, that glistened in smooth skins uncannily. But Siegmund saw the waves were almost at the wall of the headland. Glancing back, he saw the other headland white-dashed at the base with foam. He and Helena must hurry, or they would be prisoned on the thin crescent of strand still remaining between the great wall and the water.

The cliffs overhead oppressed him — made him feel trapped and helpless. He was caught by them in a net of great boulders, while the sea fumbled for him. But he and Helena. She laboured strenuously beside him, blinded by the skin-like glisten of the white rock.

‘I think I will rest awhile,’ she said.

‘No, come along,’ he begged.

‘My dear,’ she laughed, ‘there is tons of this shingle to buttress us from the sea.’

He looked at the waves curving and driving maliciously at the boulders. It would be ridiculous to be trapped.

‘Look at this black wood,’ she said. ‘Does the sea really char it?’

‘Let us get round the corner,’ he begged.

‘Really, Siegmund, the sea is not so anxious to take us,’ she said ironically.

When they rounded the first point, they found themselves in a small bay jutting out to sea; the front of the headland was, as usual, grooved. This bay was pure white at the base, from its great heaped mass of shingle. With the huge concave of the cliff behind, the foothold of massed white boulders, and the immense arc of the sea in front, Helena was delighted.

‘This is fine, Siegmund!’ she said, halting and facing west.

Smiling ironically, he sat down on a boulder. They were quite alone, in this great white niche thrust out to sea. Here, he could see, the tide would beat the base of the wall. It came plunging not far from their feet.

‘Would you really like to travel beyond the end?’ he asked.

She looked round quickly, thrilled, then answered as if in rebuke:

‘This is a fine place. I should like to stay here an hour.’

‘And then where?’

‘Then? Oh, then, I suppose, it would be tea-time.’

‘Tea on brine and pink anemones, with Daddy Neptune.’

She looked sharply at the outjutting capes. The sea did foam perilously near their bases.

‘I suppose it *is* rather risky,’ she said; and she turned, began silently to clamber forwards.

He followed; she should set the pace.

‘I have no doubt there’s plenty of room, really,’ he said. ‘The sea only looks near.’

But she toiled on intently. Now it was a question of danger, not of inconvenience, Siegmund felt elated. The waves foamed up, as it seemed, against the exposed headland, from which the massive shingle had been swept back. Supposing they could not get by? He began to smile curiously. He became aware of the tremendous noise of waters, of the slight shudder of the shingle when a wave struck it, and he always laughed to himself. Helena laboured on in silence; he kept just behind her. The point seemed near, but it took longer than they thought. They had against them the tremendous cliff, the enormous weight of shingle, and the swinging sea. The waves struck louder, booming fearfully; wind, sweeping round the corner, wet their faces. Siegmund hoped they were cut off, and hoped anxiously the way was clear. The smile became set on his face.

Then he saw there was a ledge or platform at the base of the cliff, and it was against this the waves broke. They climbed the side of this ridge, hurried round to the front. There the wind caught them, wet and furious; the water raged below. Between the two Helena shrank, wilted. She took hold of Siegmund. The great, brutal wave flung itself at the rock, then drew back for another heavy

spring. Fume and spray were spun on the wind like smoke. The roaring thud of the waves reminded Helena of a beating heart. She clung closer to him, as her hair was blown out damp, and her white dress flapped in the wet wind. Always, against the rock, came the slow thud of the waves, like a great heart beating under the breast. There was something brutal about it that she could not bear. She had no weapon against brute force.

She glanced up at Siegmund. Tiny drops of mist greyed his eyebrows. He was looking out to sea, screwing up his eyes, and smiling brutally. Her face became heavy and sullen. He was like the heart and the brute sea, just here; he was not her Siegmund. She hated the brute in him.

Turning suddenly, she plunged over the shingle towards the wide, populous bay. He remained alone, grinning at the smashing turmoil, careless of her departure. He would easily catch her.

When at last he turned from the wrestling water, he had spent his savagery, and was sad. He could never take part in the great battle of action. It was beyond him. Many things he had let slip by. His life was whittled down to only a few interests, only a few necessities. Even here, he had but Helena, and through her the rest. After this week — well, that was vague. He left it in the dark, dreading it.

And Helena was toiling over the rough beach alone. He saw her small figure bowed as she plunged forward. It smote his heart with the keenest tenderness. She was so winsome, a playmate with beauty and fancy. Why was he cruel to her because she had not his own bitter wisdom of experience? She was young and naïve, and should he be angry with her for that? His heart was tight at the thought of her. She would have to suffer also, because of him.

He hurried after her. Not till they had nearly come to a little green mound, where the downs sloped, and the cliffs were gone, did he catch her up. Then he took her hand as they walked.

They halted on the green hillock beyond the sand, and, without a word, he folded her in his arms. Both were put of breath. He clasped her close, seeming to rock her with his strong panting. She felt his body lifting into her, and sinking away. It seemed to force a rhythm, a new pulse, in her. Gradually, with a fine, keen thrilling, she melted down on him, like metal sinking on a mould. He was sea and sunlight mixed, heaving, warm, deliciously strong.

Siegmund exulted. At last she was moulded to him in pure passion.

They stood folded thus for some time. Then Helena raised her burning face, and relaxed. She was throbbing with strange elation and satisfaction.

‘It might as well have been the sea as any other way, dear,’ she said, startling both of them. The speech went across their thoughtfulness like a star flying into

the night, from nowhere. She had no idea why she said it. He pressed his mouth on hers. 'Not for you,' he thought, by reflex. 'You can't go that way yet.' But he said nothing, strained her very tightly, and kept her lips.

They were roused by the sound of voices. Unclasping, they went to walk at the fringe of the water. The tide was creeping back. Siegmund stooped, and from among the water's combings picked up an electric-light bulb. It lay in some weed at the base of a rock. He held it in his hand to Helena. Her face lighted with a curious pleasure. She took the thing delicately from his hand, fingered it with her exquisite softness.

'Isn't it remarkable!' she exclaimed joyously. 'The sea must be very, very gentle — and very kind.'

'Sometimes,' smiled Siegmund.

'But I did not think it could be so fine-fingered,' she said. She breathed on the glass bulb till it looked like a dim magnolia bud; she inhaled its fine savour.

'It would not have treated *you* so well,' he said. She looked at him with heavy eyes. Then she returned to her bulb. Her fingers were very small and very pink. She had the most delicate touch in the world, like a faint feel of silk. As he watched her lifting her fingers from off the glass, then gently stroking it, his blood ran hot. He watched her, waited upon her words and movements attentively.

'It is a graceful act on the sea's part,' she said. 'Wotan is so clumsy — he knocks over the bowl, and flap-flap-flap go the gasping fishes, *pizzicato!* — but the sea —'

Helena's speech was often difficult to render into plain terms. She was not lucid.

'But life's so full of anti-climax,' she concluded. Siegmund smiled softly at her. She had him too much in love to disagree or to examine her words.

'There's no reckoning with life, and no reckoning with the sea. The only way to get on with both is to be as near a vacuum as possible, and float,' he jested. It hurt her that he was flippant. She proceeded to forget he had spoken.

There were three children on the beach. Helena had handed him back the senseless bauble, not able to throw it away. Being a father:

'I will give it to the children,' he said.

She looked up at him, loved him for the thought.

Wandering hand in hand, for it pleased them both to own each other publicly, after years of conventional distance, they came to a little girl who was bending over a pool. Her black hair hung in long snakes to the water. She stood up, flung back her locks to see them as they approached. In one hand she clasped some pebbles.

‘Would you like this? I found it down there,’ said Siegmund, offering her the bulb.

She looked at him with grave blue eyes and accepted his gift. Evidently she was not going to say anything.

‘The sea brought it all the way from the mainland without breaking it,’ said Helena, with the interesting intonation some folk use to children.

The girl looked at her.

‘The waves put it out of their lap on to some seaweed with such careful fingers — ’

The child’s eyes brightened.

‘The tide-line is full of treasures,’ said Helena, smiling.

The child answered her smile a little.

Siegmund had walked away.

‘What beautiful eyes she had!’ said Helena.

‘Yes,’ he replied.

She looked up at him. He felt her searching him tenderly with her eyes. But he could not look back at her. She took his hand and kissed it, knowing he was thinking of his own youngest child.

CHAPTER 8

The way home lay across country, through deep little lanes where the late foxgloves sat seriously, like sad hounds; over open downlands, rough with gorse and ling, and through pocketed hollows of bracken and trees.

They came to a small Roman Catholic church in the fields. There the carved Christ looked down on the dead whose sleeping forms made mounds under the coverlet. Helena's heart was swelling with emotion. All the yearning and pathos of Christianity filled her again.

The path skirted the churchyard wall, so that she had on the one hand the sleeping dead, and on the other Siegmund, strong and vigorous, but walking in the old, dejected fashion. She felt a rare tenderness and admiration for him. It was unusual for her to be so humble-minded, but this evening she felt she must minister to him, and be submissive.

She made him stop to look at the graves. Suddenly, as they stood, she kissed him, clasped him fervently, roused him till his passion burned away his heaviness, and he seemed tipped with life, his face glowing as if soon he would burst alight. Then she was satisfied, and could laugh.

As they went through the fir copse, listening to the birds like a family assembled and chattering at home in the evening, listening to the light swish of the wind, she let Siegmund predominate; he set the swing of their motion; she rested on him like a bird on a swaying bough.

They argued concerning the way. Siegmund, as usual, submitted to her. They went quite wrong. As they retraced their steps, stealthily, through a poultry farm whose fowls were standing in forlorn groups, once more dismayed by evening, Helena's pride battled with her new subjugation to Siegmund. She walked head down, saying nothing. He also was silent, but his heart was strong in him. Somewhere in the distance a band was playing 'The Watch on the Rhine'.

As they passed the beeches and were near home, Helena said, to try him, and to strike a last blow for her pride:

'I wonder what next Monday will bring us.'

'Quick curtain,' he answered joyously. He was looking down and smiling at her with such careless happiness that she loved him. He was wonderful to her. She loved him, was jealous of every particle of him that evaded her. She wanted to sacrifice to him, make herself a burning altar to him, and she wanted to possess him.

The hours that would be purely their own came too slowly for her.

That night she met his passion with love. It was not his passion she wanted, actually. But she desired that he should want *her* madly, and that he should have all — everything. It was a wonderful night to him. It restored in him the full ‘will to live’. But she felt it destroyed her. Her soul seemed blasted.

At seven o’clock in the morning Helena lay in the deliciously cool water, while small waves ran up the beach full and clear and foamless, continuing perfectly in their flicker the rhythm of the night’s passion. Nothing, she felt, had ever been so delightful as this cool water running over her. She lay and looked out on the shining sea. All things, it seemed, were made of sunshine more or less soiled. The cliffs rose out of the shining waves like clouds of strong, fine texture, and rocks along the shore were the dapplings of a bright dawn. The coarseness was fused out of the world, so that sunlight showed in the veins of the morning cliffs and the rocks. Yea, everything ran with sunshine, as we are full of blood, and plants are tissue from green-gold, glistening sap. Substance and solidity were shadows that the morning cast round itself to make itself tangible: as she herself was a shadow, cast by that fragment of sunshine, her soul, over its inefficiency.

She remembered to have seen the bats flying low over a burnished pool at sunset, and the web of their wings had burned in scarlet flickers, as they stretched across the light. Winged momentarily on bits of tissue flame, threaded with blood, the bats had flickered a secret to her.

Now the cliffs were like wings uplifted, and the morning was coming dimly through them. She felt the wings of all the world upraised against the morning in a flashing, multitudinous flight. The world itself was flying. Sunlight poured on the large round world till she fancied it a heavy bee humming on its iridescent atmosphere across a vast air of sunshine.

She lay and rode the fine journey. Sunlight liquid in the water made the waves heavy, golden, and rich with a velvety coolness like cowslips. Her feet fluttered in the shadowy underwater. Her breast came out bright as the breast of a white bird.

Where was Siegmund? she wondered. He also was somewhere among the sea and the sunshine, white and playing like a bird, shining like a vivid, restless speck of sunlight. She struck the water, smiling, feeling along with him. They two were the owners of this morning, as a pair of wild, large birds inhabiting an empty sea.

Siegmund had found a white cave welling with green water, brilliant and full of life as mounting sap. The white rock glimmered through the water, and soon Siegmund shimmered also in the living green of the sea, like pale flowers

trembling upward.

‘The water,’ said Siegmund, ‘is as full of life as I am,’ and he pressed forward his breast against it. He swam very well that morning; he had more wilful life than the sea, so he mastered it laughingly with his arms, feeling a delight in his triumph over the waves. Venturing recklessly in his new pride, he swam round the corner of the rock, through an archway, lofty and spacious, into a passage where the water ran like a flood of green light over the skin-white bottom. Suddenly he emerged in the brilliant daylight of the next tiny scoop of a bay.

There he arrived like a pioneer, for the bay was inaccessible from the land. He waded out of the green, cold water on to sand that was pure as the shoulders of Helena, out of the shadow of the archway into the sunlight, on to the glistening petal of this blossom of a sea-bay.

He did not know till he felt the sunlight how the sea had drunk with its cold lips deeply of his warmth. Throwing himself down on the sand that was soft and warm as white fur, he lay glistening wet, panting, swelling with glad pride at having conquered also this small, inaccessible sea-cave, creeping into it like a white bee into a white virgin blossom that had waited, how long, for its bee.

The sand was warm to his breast, and his belly, and his arms. It was like a great body he cleaved to. Almost, he fancied, he felt it heaving under him in its breathing. Then he turned his face to the sun, and laughed. All the while, he hugged the warm body of the sea-bay beneath him. He spread his hands upon the sand; he took it in handfuls, and let it run smooth, warm, delightful, through his fingers.

‘Surely,’ he said to himself, ‘it is like Helena;’ and he laid his hands again on the warm body of the shore, let them wander, discovering, gathering all the warmth, the softness, the strange wonder of smooth warm pebbles, then shrinking from the deep weight of cold his hand encountered as he burrowed under the surface wrist-deep. In the end he found the cold mystery of the deep sand also thrilling. He pushed in his hands again and deeper, enjoying the almost hurt of the dark, heavy coldness. For the sun and the white flower of the bay were breathing and kissing him dry, were holding him in their warm concave, like a bee in a flower, like himself on the bosom of Helena, and flowing like the warmth of her breath in his hair came the sunshine, breathing near and lovingly; yet, under all, was this deep mass of cold, that the softness and warmth merely floated upon.

Siegmund lay and clasped the sand, and tossed it in handfuls till over him he was all hot and cloyed. Then he rose and looked at himself and laughed. The water was swaying reproachfully against the steep pebbles below, murmuring like a child that it was not fair — it was not fair he should abandon his playmate.

Siegmund laughed, and began to rub himself free of the clogging sand. He found himself strangely dry and smooth. He tossed more dry sand, and more, over himself, busy and intent like a child playing some absorbing game with itself. Soon his body was dry and warm and smooth as a camomile flower. He was, however, greyed and smeared with sand-dust. Siegmund looked at himself with disapproval, though his body was full of delight and his hands glad with the touch of himself. He wanted himself clean. He felt the sand thick in his hair, even in his moustache. He went painfully over the pebbles till he found himself on the smooth rock bottom. Then he soused himself, and shook his head in the water, and washed and splashed and rubbed himself with his hands assiduously. He must feel perfectly clean and free — fresh, as if he had washed away all the years of soilure in this morning's sea and sun and sand. It was the purification. Siegmund became again a happy priest of the sun. He felt as if all the dirt of misery were soaked out of him, as he might soak clean a soiled garment in the sea, and bleach it white on the sunny shore. So white and sweet and tissue-clean he felt — full of lightness and grace.

The garden in front of their house, where Helena was waiting for him, was long and crooked, with a sunken flagstone pavement running up to the door by the side of the lawn. On either hand the high fence of the garden was heavy with wild clematis and honeysuckle. Helena sat sideways, with a map spread out on her bench under the bushy little laburnum tree, tracing the course of their wanderings. It was very still. There was just a murmur of bees going in and out the brilliant little porches of nasturtium flowers. The nasturtium leaf-coins stood cool and grey; in their delicate shade, underneath in the green twilight, a few flowers shone their submerged gold and scarlet. There was a faint scent of mignonette. Helena, like a white butterfly in the shade, her two white arms for antennae stretching firmly to the bench, leaned over her map. She was busy, very busy, out of sheer happiness. She traced word after word, and evoked scene after scene. As she discovered a name, she conjured up the place. As she moved to the next mark she imagined the long path lifting and falling happily.

She was waiting for Siegmund, yet his hand upon the latch startled her. She rose suddenly, in agitation. Siegmund was standing in the sunshine at the gate. They greeted each other across the tall roses.

When Siegmund was holding her hand, he said, softly laughing:

‘You have come out of the water very beautiful this morning.’

She laughed. She was not beautiful, but she felt so at that moment. She glanced up at him, full of love and gratefulness.

‘And you,’ she murmured, in a still tone, as if it were almost sacrilegiously unnecessary to say it.

Siegmund was glad. He rejoiced to be told he was beautiful. After a few moments of listening to the bees and breathing the mignonette, he said:

‘I found a little white bay, just like you — a virgin bay. I had to swim there.’

‘Oh!’ she said, very interested in him, not in the fact.

‘It seemed just like you. Many things seem like you,’ he said.

She laughed again in her joyous fashion, and the reed-like vibration came into her voice.

‘I saw the sun through the cliffs, and the sea, and you,’ she said.

He did not understand. He looked at her searchingly. She was white and still and inscrutable. Then she looked up at him; her earnest eyes, that would not flinch, gazed straight into him. He trembled, and things all swept into a blur. After she had taken away her eyes he found himself saying:

‘You know, I felt as if I were the first man to discover things: like Adam when he opened the first eyes in the world.’

‘I saw the sunshine in you,’ repeated Helena quietly, looking at him with her eyes heavy with meaning.

He laughed again, not understanding, but feeling she meant love.

‘No, but you have altered everything,’ he said.

The note of wonder, of joy, in his voice touched her almost beyond self-control. She caught his hand and pressed it; then quickly kissed it. He became suddenly grave.

‘I feel as if it were right — you and me, Helena — so, even righteous. It is so, isn’t it? And the sea and everything, they all seem with us. Do you think so?’

Looking at her, he found her eyes full of tears. He bent and kissed her, and she pressed his head to her bosom. He was very glad.

CHAPTER 9

The day waxed hot. A few little silver tortoisés of cloud had crawled across the desert of sky, and hidden themselves. The chalk roads were white, quivering with heat. Helena and Siegmund walked eastward bareheaded under the sunshine. They felt like two insects in the niche of a hot hearth as they toiled along the deep road. A few poppies here and there among the wild rye floated scarlet in sunshine like blood-drops on green water. Helena recalled Francis Thompson's poems, which Siegmund had never read. She repeated what she knew, and laughed, thinking what an ineffectual pale shadow of a person Thompson must have been. She looked at Siegmund, walking in large easiness beside her.

'Artists are supremely unfortunate persons,' she announced.

'Think of Wagner,' said Siegmund, lifting his face to the hot bright heaven, and drinking the heat with his blinded face. All states seemed meagre, save his own. He recalled people who had loved, and he pitied them — dimly, drowsily, without pain.

They came to a place where they might gain access to the shore by a path down a landslip. As they descended through the rockery, yellow with ragwort, they felt themselves dip into the inert, hot air of the bay. The living atmosphere of the uplands was left overhead. Among the rocks of the sand, white as if smelted, the heat glowed and quivered. Helena sat down and took off her shoes. She walked on the hot, glistening sand till her feet were delightfully, almost intoxicatingly scorched. Then she ran into the water to cool them. Siegmund and she paddled in the light water, pensively watching the haste of the ripples, like crystal beetles, running over the white outline of their feet; looking out on the sea that rose so near to them, dwarfing them by its far reach.

For a short time they flitted silently in the water's edge. Then there settled down on them a twilight of sleep, the little hush that closes the doors and draws the blinds of the house after a festival. They wandered out across the beach above high-water mark, where they sat down together on the sand, leaning back against a flat brown stone, Siegmund with the sunshine on his forehead, Helena drooping close to him, in his shadow. Then the hours ride by unnoticed, making no sound as they go. The sea creeps nearer, nearer, like a snake which watches two birds asleep. It may not disturb them, but sinks back, ceasing to look at them with its bright eyes.

Meanwhile the flowers of their passion were softly shed, as poppies fall at noon, and the seed of beauty ripened rapidly within them. Dreams came like a wind through, their souls, drifting off with the seed-dust of beautiful experience which they had ripened, to fertilize the souls of others withal. In them the sea and the sky and ships had mingled and bred new blossoms of the torrid heat of their love. And the seed of such blossoms was shaken as they slept, into the hand of God, who held it in His palm precious; then scattered it again, to produce new splendid blooms of beauty.

A little breeze came down the cliffs. Sleep lightened the lovers of their experience; new buds were urged in their souls as they lay in a shadowed twilight, at the porch of death. The breeze fanned the face of Helena; a coolness wafted on her throat. As the afternoon wore on she revived. Quick to flag, she was easy to revive, like a white pansy flung into water. She shivered lightly and rose.

Strange, it seemed to her, to rise from the brown stone into life again. She felt beautifully refreshed. All around was quick as a garden wet in the early morning of June. She took her hair and loosened it, shook it free from sand, spread, and laughed like a fringed poppy that opens itself to the sun. She let the wind comb through its soft fingers the tangles of her hair. Helena loved the wind. She turned to it, and took its kisses on her face and throat.

Siegmund lay still, looking up at her. The changes in him were deeper, like alteration in his tissue. His new buds came slowly, and were of a fresh type. He lay smiling at her. At last he said:

‘You look now as if you belonged to the sea.’

‘I do; and some day I shall go back to it,’ she replied.

For to her at that moment the sea was a great lover, like Siegmund, but more impersonal, who would receive her when Siegmund could not. She rejoiced momentarily in the fact. Siegmund looked at her and continued smiling. His happiness was budded firm and secure.

‘Come!’ said Helena, holding out her hand.

He rose somewhat reluctantly from his large, fruitful inertia.

CHAPTER 10

Siegmund carried the boots and the shoes while they wandered over the sand to the rocks. There was a delightful sense of risk in scrambling with bare feet over the smooth irregular jumble of rocks. Helena laughed suddenly from fear as she felt herself slipping. Siegmund's heart was leaping like a child's with excitement as he stretched forward, himself very insecure, to succour her. Thus they travelled slowly. Often she called to him to come and look in the lovely little rock-pools, dusky with blossoms of red anemones and brown anemones that seemed nothing but shadows, and curtained with green of finest sea-silk. Siegmund loved to poke the white pebbles, and startle the little ghosts of crabs in a shadowy scuttle through the weed. He would tease the expectant anemones, causing them to close suddenly over his finger. But Helena liked to watch without touching things. Meanwhile the sun was slanting behind the cross far away to the west, and the light was swimming in silver and gold upon the lacquered water. At last Siegmund looked doubtfully at two miles more of glistening, gilded boulders. Helena was seated on a stone, dabbling her feet in a warm pool, delicately feeling the wet sea-velvet of the weeds.

'Don't you think we had better be mounting the cliffs?' he said.

She glanced up at him, smiling with irresponsible eyes. Then she lapped the water with her feet, and surveyed her pink toes. She was absurdly, childishly happy.

'Why should we?' she asked lightly.

He watched her. Her child-like indifference to consequences touched him with a sense of the distance between them. He himself might play with the delicious warm surface of life, but always he reeked of the relentless mass of cold beneath — the mass of life which has no sympathy with the individual, no cognizance of him.

She loved the trifles and the toys, the mystery and the magic of things. She would not own life to be relentless. It was either beautiful, fantastic, or weird, or inscrutable, or else mean and vulgar, below consideration. He had to get a sense of the anemone and a sympathetic knowledge of its experience, into his blood, before he was satisfied. To Helena an anemone was one more fantastic pretty figure in her kaleidoscope.

So she sat dabbling her pink feet in the water, quite unconscious of his gravity. He waited on her, since he never could capture her.

‘Come,’ he said very gently. ‘You are only six years old today.’

She laughed as she let him take her. Then she nestled up to him, smiling in a brilliant, child-like fashion. He kissed her with all the father in him sadly alive.

‘Now put your stockings on,’ he said.

‘But my feet are wet.’ She laughed.

He kneeled down and dried her feet on his handkerchief while she sat tossing his hair with her finger-tips. The sunlight grew more and more golden.

‘I envy the savages their free feet,’ she said.

‘There is no broken glass in the wilderness — or there used not to be,’ he replied.

As they were crossing the sands, a whole family entered by the cliff track. They descended in single file, unequally, like the theatre; two boys, then a little girl, the father, another girl, then the mother. Last of all trotted the dog, warily, suspicious of the descent. The boys emerged into the bay with a shout; the dog rushed, barking, after them. The little one waited for her father, calling shrilly:

‘Tiss can’t fall now, can she, dadda? Shall I put her down?’

‘Ay, let her have a run,’ said the father.

Very carefully she lowered the kitten which she had carried clasped to her bosom. The mite was bewildered and scared. It turned round pathetically.

‘Go on, Tissie; you’re all right,’ said the child. ‘Go on; have a run on the sand.’

The kitten stood dubious and unhappy. Then, perceiving the dog some distance ahead, it scampered after him, a fluffy, scurrying mite. But the dog had already raced into the water. The kitten walked a few steps, turning its small face this way and that, and mewling piteously. It looked extraordinarily tiny as it stood, a fluffy handful, staring away from the noisy water, its thin cry floating over the splash of waves.

Helena glanced at Siegmund, and her eyes were shining with pity. He was watching the kitten and smiling.

‘Crying because things are too big, and it can’t take them in,’ he said.

‘But look how frightened it is,’ she said.

‘So am I.’ He laughed. ‘And if there are any gods looking on and laughing at me, at least they won’t be kind enough to put me in their pinafores....’

She laughed very quickly.

‘But why?’ she exclaimed. ‘Why should you want putting in a pinafore?’

‘I don’t,’ he laughed.

On the top of the cliff they were between two bays, with darkening blue water on the left, and on the right gold water smoothing to the sun. Siegmund seemed to stand waist-deep in shadow, with his face bright and glowing. He was

watching earnestly.

‘I want to absorb it all,’ he said.

When at last they turned away:

‘Yes,’ said Helena slowly; ‘one can recall the details, but never the atmosphere.’

He pondered a moment.

‘How strange!’ he said. I can recall the atmosphere, but not the detail. It is a moment to me, not a piece of scenery. I should say the picture was in me, not out there.’

Without troubling to understand — she was inclined to think it verbiage — she made a small sound of assent.

‘That is why you want to go again to a place, and I don’t care so much, because I have it with me,’ he concluded.

CHAPTER 11

They decided to find their way through the lanes to Alum Bay, and then, keeping the cross in sight, to return over the downs, with the moon-path broad on the water before them. For the moon was rising late. Twilight, however, rose more rapidly than they had anticipated. The lane twisted among meadows and wild lands and copses — a wilful little lane, quite incomprehensible. So they lost their distant landmark, the white cross.

Darkness filtered through the daylight. When at last they came to a signpost, it was almost too dark to read it. The fingers seemed to withdraw into the dusk the more they looked.

‘We must go to the left,’ said Helena.

To the left rose the downs, smooth and grey near at hand, but higher black with gorse, like a giant lying asleep with a bearskin over his shoulders.

Several pale chalk-tracks ran side by side through the turf. Climbing, they came to a disused chalk-pit, which they circumvented. Having passed a lonely farmhouse, they mounted the side of the open down, where was a sense of space and freedom.

‘We can steer by the night,’ said Siegmund, as they trod upwards pathlessly. Helena did not mind whither they steered. All places in that large fair night were home and welcome to her. They drew nearer to the shaggy cloak of furze.

‘There will be a path through it,’ said Siegmund.

But when they arrived there was no path. They were confronted by a tall, impenetrable growth of gorse, taller than Siegmund.

‘Stay here,’ said he, ‘while I look for a way through. I am afraid you will be tired.’

She stood alone by the walls of gorse. The lights that had flickered into being during the dusk grew stronger, so that a little farmhouse down the hill glowed with great importance on the night, while the far-off in visible sea became like a roadway, large and mysterious, its specks of light moving slowly, and its bigger lamps stationed out amid the darkness. Helena wanted the day-wanness to be quite wiped off the west. She asked for the full black night, that would obliterate everything save Siegmund. Siegmund it was that the whole world meant. The darkness, the gorse, the downs, the specks of light, seemed only to bespeak him. She waited for him to come back. She could hardly endure the condition of intense waiting.

He came, in his grey clothes almost invisible. But she felt him coming.

‘No good,’ he said, ‘no vestige of a path. Not a rabbit-run.’

‘Then we will sit down awhile,’ said she calmly.

“‘Here on this mole-hill,’” he quoted mockingly.

They sat down in a small gap in the gorse, where the turf was very soft, and where the darkness seemed deeper. The night was all fragrance, cool odour of darkness, keen, savoury scent of the downs, touched with honeysuckle and gorse and bracken scent.

Helena turned to him, leaning her hand on his thigh.

‘What day is it, Siegmund?’ she asked, in a joyous, wondering tone. He laughed, understanding, and kissed her.

‘But really,’ she insisted, ‘I would not have believed the labels could have fallen off everything like this.’

He laughed again. She still leaned towards him, her weight on her hand, stopping the flow in the artery down his thigh.

‘The days used to walk in procession like seven marionettes, each in order and costume, going endlessly round.’ She laughed, amused at the idea.

‘It is very strange,’ she continued, ‘to have the days and nights smeared into one piece, as if the clock-hand only went round once in a lifetime.’

‘That is how it is,’ he admitted, touched by her eloquence. ‘You have torn the labels off things, and they all are so different. This morning! It does seem absurd to talk about this morning. Why should I be parcelled up into mornings and evenings and nights? *I* am not made up of sections of time. Now, nights and days go racing over us like cloud-shadows and sunshine over the sea, and all the time we take no notice.’

She put her arms round his neck. He was reminded by a sudden pain in his leg how much her hand had been pressing on him. He held his breath from pain. She was kissing him softly over the eyes. They lay cheek to cheek, looking at the stars. He felt a peculiar tingling sense of joy, a keenness of perception, a fine, delicate tingling as of music.

‘You know,’ he said, repeating himself, ‘it is true. You seem to have knit all things in a piece for me. Things are not separate; they are all in a symphony. They go moving on and on. You are the motive in everything.’

Helena lay beside him, half upon him, sad with bliss.

‘You must write a symphony of this — of us,’ she said, prompted by a disciple’s vanity.

‘Some time,’ he answered. ‘Later, when I have time.’

‘Later,’ she murmured — ‘later than what?’

‘I don’t know,’ he replied. ‘This is so bright we can’t see beyond.’ He turned

his face to hers and through the darkness smiled into her eyes that were so close to his. Then he kissed her long and lovingly. He lay, with her head on his shoulder looking through her hair at the stars.

‘I wonder how it is you have such a fine natural perfume,’ he said, always in the same abstract, inquiring tone of happiness.

‘Haven’t all women?’ she replied, and the peculiar penetrating twang of a brass reed was again in her voice.

‘I don’t know,’ he said, quite untouched. ‘But you are scented like nuts, new kernels of hazel-nuts, and a touch of opium....’ He remained abstractedly breathing her with his open mouth, quite absorbed in her.

‘You are so strange,’ she murmured tenderly, hardly able to control her voice to speak.

‘I believe,’ he said slowly, ‘I can see the stars moving through your hair. No, keep still, *you* can’t see them.’ Helena lay obediently very still. ‘I thought I could watch them travelling, crawling like gold flies on the ceiling,’ he continued in a slow singsong. ‘But now you make your hair tremble, and the stars rush about.’ Then, as a new thought struck him: ‘Have you noticed that you can’t recognize the constellations lying back like this. I can’t see one. Where is the north, even?’

She laughed at the idea of his questioning her concerning these things. She refused to learn the names of the stars or of the constellations, as of the wayside plants. ‘Why should I want to label them?’ she would say. ‘I prefer to look at them, not to hide them under a name.’ So she laughed when he asked her to find Vega or Arcturus.

‘How full the sky is!’ Siegmund dreamed on — ‘like a crowded street. Down here it is vastly lonely in comparison. We’ve found a place far quieter and more private than the stars, Helena. Isn’t it fine to be up here, with the sky for nearest neighbour?’

‘I did well to ask you to come?’ she inquired wistfully. He turned to her.

‘As wise as God for the minute,’ he replied softly. ‘I think a few furtive angels brought us here — smuggled us in.’

‘And you are glad?’ she asked. He laughed.

‘*Carpe diem,*’ he said. ‘We have plucked a beauty, my dear. With this rose in my coat I dare go to hell or anywhere.’

‘Why hell, Siegmund?’ she asked in displeasure.

‘I suppose it is the *postero*. In everything else I’m a failure, Helena. But,’ he laughed, ‘this day of ours is a rose not many men have plucked.’

She kissed him passionately, beginning to cry in a quick, noiseless fashion.

‘What does it matter, Helena?’ he murmured. ‘What does it matter? We are

here yet.'

The quiet tone of Siegmund moved her with a vivid passion of grief. She felt she should lose him. Claspng him very closely, she burst into uncontrollable sobbing. He did not understand, but he did not interrupt her. He merely held her very close, while he looked through her shaking hair at the motionless stars. He bent his head to hers, he sought her face with his lips, heavy with pity. She grew a little quieter. He felt his cheek all wet with her tears, and, between his cheek and hers, the ravelled roughness of her wet hair that chafed and made his face burn.

'What is it, Helena?' he asked at last. 'Why should you cry?'

She pressed her face in his breast, and said in a muffled, unrecognizable voice: 'You won't leave me, will you, Siegmund?'

'How could I? How should I?' he murmured soothingly. She lifted her face suddenly and pressed on him a fierce kiss.

'How could I leave you?' he repeated, and she heard his voice waking, the grip coming into his arms, and she was glad.

An intense silence came over everything. Helena almost expected to hear the stars moving, everything below was so still. She had no idea what Siegmund was thinking. He lay with his arms strong around her. Then she heard the beating of his heart, like the muffled sound of salutes, she thought. It gave her the same thrill of dread and excitement, mingled with a sense of triumph. Siegmund had changed again, his mood was gone, so that he was no longer wandering in a night of thoughts, but had become different, incomprehensible to her. She had no idea what she thought or felt. All she knew was that he was strong, and was knocking urgently with his heart on her breast, like a man who wanted something and who dreaded to be sent away. How he came to be so concentratedly urgent she could not understand. It seemed an unreasonable an incomprehensible obsession to her. Yet she was glad, and she smiled in her heart, feeling triumphant and restored. Yet again, dimly, she wondered where was the Siegmund of ten minutes ago, and her heart lifted slightly with yearning, to sink with a dismay. This Siegmund was so incomprehensible. Then again, when he raised his head and found her mouth, his lips filled her with a hot flush like wine, a sweet, flaming flush of her whole body, most exquisite, as if she were nothing but a soft rosy flame of fire against him for a moment or two. That, she decided, was supreme, transcendental.

The lights of the little farmhouse below had vanished, the yellow specks of ships were gone. Only the pier-light, far away, shone in the black sea like the broken piece of a star. Overhead was a silver-greyness of stars; below was the velvet blackness of the night and the sea. Helena found herself glimmering with

fragments of poetry, as she saw the sea, when she looked very closely, glimmered dustily with a reflection of stars.

*Tiefe Stille herrscht im Wasser
Ohne Regung ruht das Meer ...*

She was fond of what scraps of German verse she knew. With French verse she had no sympathy; but Goethe and Heine and Uhland seemed to speak her language.

*Die Luft ist kühl, und es dunkelt,
Und ruhig fließt der Rhein.*

She liked Heine best of all:

*Wie Träume der Kindheit seh' ich es flimmern
Auf deinem wogenden Wellengebiet,
Und alte Erinnerung erzählt mir auf's Neue
Von all dem lieben herrlichen Spielzeug,
Von all den blinkenden Weihnachtsgaben....*

As she lay in Siegmund's arms again, and he was very still, dreaming she knew not what, fragments such as these flickered and were gone, like the gleam of a falling star over water. The night moved on imperceptibly across the sky. Unlike the day, it made no sound and gave no sign, but passed unseen, unfelt, over them. Till the moon was ready to step forth. Then the eastern sky blenched, and there was a small gathering of clouds round the opening gates:

*Aus alten Märchen winket es
Hervor mit weisser Hand,
Da singt es und da klingt es
Von einem Zauberland.*

Helena sang this to herself as the moon lifted herself slowly among the clouds. She found herself repeating them aloud in a forgetful singsong, as children do.

'What is it?' said Siegmund. They were both of them sunk in their own stillness, therefore it was a moment or two before she repeated her singsong, in a little louder tone. He did not listen to her, having forgotten that he had asked her a question.

'Turn your head,' she told him, when she had finished the verse, 'and look at the moon.'

He pressed back his head, so that there was a gleaming pallor on his chin and his forehead and deep black shadow over his eyes and his nostrils. This thrilled Helena with a sense of mystery and magic.

"*Die grossen Blumen schmachten,*" she said to herself, curiously awake and joyous. 'The big flowers open with black petals and silvery ones, Siegmund. You are the big flowers, Siegmund; yours is the bridegroom face, Siegmund,

like a black and glistening flesh-petalled flower, Siegmund, and it blooms in the *Zauberland*, Siegmund — this is the magic land.’

Between the phrases of this whispered ecstasy she kissed him swiftly on the throat, in the shadow, and on his faintly gleaming cheeks. He lay still, his heart beating heavily; he was almost afraid of the strange ecstasy she concentrated on him. Meanwhile she whispered over him sharp, breathless phrases in German and English, touching him with her mouth and her cheeks and her forehead.

“*Und Liebesweisen tonen*”—not tonight, Siegmund. They are all still-gorse and the stars and the sea and the trees, are all kissing, Siegmund. The sea has its mouth on the earth, and the gorse and the trees press together, and they all look up at the moon, they put up their faces in a kiss, my darling. But they haven’t you—and it all centres in you, my dear, all the wonder-love is in you, more than in them all Siegmund — Siegmund!’

He felt the tears falling on him as he lay with heart beating in slow heavy drops under the ecstasy of her love. Then she sank down and lay prone on him, spent, clinging to him, lifted up and down by the beautiful strong motion of his breathing. Rocked thus on his strength, she swooned lightly into unconsciousness.

When she came to herself she sighed deeply. She woke to the exquisite heaving of his life beneath her.

‘I have been beyond life. I have been a little way into death!’ she said to her soul, with wide-eyed delight. She lay dazed, wondering upon it. That she should come back into a marvellous, peaceful happiness astonished her.

Suddenly she became aware that she must be slowly weighing down the life of Siegmund. There was a long space between the lift of one breath and the next. Her heart melted with sorrowful pity. Resting herself on her hands, she kissed him — a long, anguished kiss, as if she would fuse her soul into his for ever. Then she rose, sighing, sighing again deeply. She put up her hands to her head and looked at the moon. ‘No more,’ said her heart, almost as if it sighed too—no more!’

She looked down at Siegmund. He was drawing in great heavy breaths. He lay still on his back, gazing up at her, and she stood motionless at his side, looking down at him. He felt stunned, half-conscious. Yet as he lay helplessly looking up at her some other consciousness inside him murmured; ‘Hawwa — Eve — Mother!’ She stood compassionate over him. Without touching him she seemed to be yearning over him like a mother. Her compassion, her benignity, seemed so different from his little Helena. This woman, tall and pale, drooping with the strength of her compassion, seemed stable, immortal, not a fragile human being, but a personification of the great motherhood of women.

'I am her child, too,' he dreamed, as a child murmurs unconscious in sleep. He had never felt her eyes so much as now, in the darkness, when he looked only into deep shadow. She had never before so entered and gathered his plaintive masculine soul to the bosom of her nurture.

'Come,' she said gently, when she knew he was restored. 'Shall we go?'
He rose, with difficulty gathering his strength.

CHAPTER 12

Siegmund made a great effort to keep the control of his body. The hill-side, the gorse, when he stood up, seemed to have fallen back into shadowed vagueness about him. They were meaningless dark heaps at some distance, very great, it seemed.

‘I can’t get hold of them,’ he said distractedly to himself. He felt detached from the earth, from all the near, concrete, beloved things; as if these had melted away from him, and left him, sick and unsupported, somewhere alone on the edge of an enormous space. He wanted to lie down again, to relieve himself of the sickening effort of supporting and controlling his body. If he could lie down again perfectly still he need not struggle to animate the cumbersome matter of his body, and then he would not feel thus sick and outside himself.

But Helena was speaking to him, telling him they would see the moon-path. They must set off downhill. He felt her arm clasped firmly, joyously, round his waist. Therein was his stability and warm support. Siegmund felt a keen flush of pitiful tenderness for her as she walked with buoyant feet beside him, clasping him so happily, all unconscious. This pity for her drew him nearer to life.

He shuddered lightly now and again, as they stepped lurching down the hill. He set his jaws hard to suppress this shuddering. It was not in his limbs, or even on the surface of his body, for Helena did not notice it. Yet he shuddered almost in anguish internally.

‘What is it?’ he asked himself in wonder.

His thought consisted of these detached phrases, which he spoke verbally to himself. Between-whiles he was conscious only of an almost insupportable feeling of sickness, as a man feels who is being brought from under an anaesthetic; also he was vaguely aware of a teeming stir of activity, such as one may hear from a closed hive, within him.

They swung rapidly downhill. Siegmund still shuddered, but not so uncontrollably. They came to a stile which they must climb. As he stepped over it needed a concentrated effort of will to place his foot securely on the step. The effort was so great that he became conscious of it.

‘Good Lord!’ he said to himself. ‘I wonder what it is.’

He tried to examine himself. He thought of all the organs of his body — his brain, his heart, his liver. There was no pain, and nothing wrong with any of them, he was sure. His dim searching resolved itself into another detached

phrase. 'There is nothing the matter with me,' he said.

Then he continued vaguely wondering, recalling the sensation of wretched sickness which sometimes follows drunkenness, thinking of the times when he had fallen ill.

'But I am not like that,' he said, 'because I don't feel tremulous. I am sure my hand is steady.'

Helena stood still to consider the road. He held out his hand before him. It was motionless as a dead flower on this silent night.

'Yes, I think this is the right way,' said Helena, and they set off again, as if gaily.

'It certainly feels rather deathly,' said Siegmund to himself. He remembered distinctly, when he was a child and had diphtheria, he had stretched himself in the horrible sickness, which he felt was — and here he chose the French word — '*l'agonie*'. But his mother had seen and had cried aloud, which suddenly caused him to struggle with all his soul to spare her her suffering.

'Certainly it is like that,' he said. 'Certainly it is rather deathly. I wonder how it is.'

Then he reviewed the last hour.

'I believe we are lost!' Helena interrupted him.

'Lost! What matter!' he answered indifferently, and Helena pressed him tighter, nearer to her in a kind of triumph. 'But did we not come this way?' he added.

'No. See' — her voice was reeded with restrained emotion — 'we have certainly not been along this bare path which dips up and down.'

'Well, then, we must merely keep due eastward, towards the moon pretty well, as much as we can,' said Siegmund, looking forward over the down, where the moon was wrestling heroically to win free of the pack of clouds which hung on her like wolves on a white deer. As he looked at the moon he felt a sense of companionship. Helena, not understanding, left him so much alone; the moon was nearer.

Siegmund continued to review the last hours. He had been so wondrously happy. The world had been filled with a new magic, a wonderful, stately beauty which he had perceived for the first time. For long hours he had been wandering in another — a glamorous, primordial world.

'I suppose,' he said to himself, 'I have lived too intensely, I seem to have had the stars and moon and everything else for guests, and now they've gone my house is weak.'

So he struggled to diagnose his case of splendour and sickness. He reviewed his hour of passion with Helena.

‘Surely,’ he told himself, ‘I have drunk life too hot, and it has hurt my cup. My soul seems to leak out — I am half here, half gone away. That’s why I understand the trees and the night so painfully.’

Then he came to the hour of Helena’s strange ecstasy over him. That, somehow, had filled him with passionate grief. It was happiness concentrated one drop too keen, so that what should have been vivid wine was like a pure poison scathing him. But his consciousness, which had been unnaturally active, now was dulling. He felt the blood flowing vigorously along the limbs again, and stilling his brain, sweeping away his sickness, soothing him.

‘I suppose,’ he said to himself for the last time, ‘I suppose living too intensely kills you, more or less.’

Then Siegmund forgot. He opened his eyes and saw the night about him. The moon had escaped from the cloud-pack, and was radiant behind a fine veil which glistened to her rays, and which was brodered with a lustrous halo, very large indeed, the largest halo Siegmund had ever seen. When the little lane turned full towards the moon, it seemed as if Siegmund and Helena would walk through a large Moorish arch of horse-shoe shape, the enormous white halo opening in front of them. They walked on, keeping their faces to the moon, smiling with wonder and a little rapture, until once more the little lane curved wilfully, and they were walking north. Helena observed three cottages crouching under the hill and under trees to cover themselves from the magic of the moonlight.

‘We certainly did not come this way before,’ she said triumphantly. The idea of being lost delighted her.

Siegmund looked round at the grey hills smeared over with a low, dim glisten of moon-mist. He could not yet fully realize that he was walking along a lane in the Isle of Wight. His surroundings seemed to belong to some state beyond ordinary experience — some place in romance, perhaps, or among the hills where Brünhild lay sleeping in her large bright halo of fire. How could it be that he and Helena were two children of London wandering to find their lodging in Freshwater? He sighed, and looked again over the hills where the moonlight was condensing in mist ethereal, frail, and yet substantial, reminding him of the way the manna must have condensed out of the white moonlit mists of Arabian deserts.

‘We may be on the road to Newport,’ said Helena presently, ‘and the distance is ten miles.’

She laughed, not caring in the least whither they wandered, exulting in this wonderful excursion! She and Siegmund alone in a glistening wilderness of night at the back of habited days and nights! Siegmund looked at her. He by no means shared her exultation, though he sympathized with it. He walked on alone

in his deep seriousness, of which she was not aware. Yet when he noticed her abandon, he drew her nearer, and his heart softened with protecting tenderness towards her, and grew heavy with responsibility.

The fields breathed off a scent as if they were come to life with the night, and were talking with fragrant eagerness. The farms huddled together in sleep, and pulled the dark shadow over them to hide from the supernatural white night; the cottages were locked and darkened. Helena walked on in triumph through this wondrous hinterland of night, actively searching for the spirits, watching the cottages they approached, listening, looking for the dreams of those sleeping inside, in the darkened rooms. She imagined she could see the frail dream-faces at the windows; she fancied they stole out timidly into the gardens, and went running away among the rabbits on the gleamy hill-side. Helena laughed to herself, pleased with her fancy of wayward little dreams playing with weak hands and feet among the large, solemn-sleeping cattle. This was the first time, she told herself, that she had ever been out among the grey-frocked dreams and white-armed fairies. She imagined herself lying asleep in her room, while her own dreams slid out down the moonbeams. She imagined Siegmund sleeping in his room, while his dreams, dark-eyed, their blue eyes very dark and yearning at night-time, came wandering over the grey grass seeking her dreams.

So she wove her fancies as she walked, until for very weariness she was fain to remember that it was a long way — a long way. Siegmund's arm was about her to support her; she rested herself upon it. They crossed a stile and recognized, on the right of the path, the graveyard of the Catholic chapel. The moon, which the days were paring smaller with envious keen knife, shone upon the white stones in the burial-ground. The carved Christ upon His cross hung against a silver-grey sky. Helena looked up wearily, bowing to the tragedy. Siegmund also looked, and bowed his head.

'Thirty years of earnest love; three years' life like a passionate ecstasy-and it was finished. He was very great and very wonderful. I am very insignificant, and shall go out ignobly. But we are the same; love, the brief ecstasy, and the end. But mine is one rose, and His all the white beauty in the world.'

Siegmund felt his heart very heavy, sad, and at fault, in presence of the Christ. Yet he derived comfort from the knowledge that life was treating him in the same manner as it had treated the Master, though his compared small and despicable with the Christ-tragedy. Siegmund stepped softly into the shadow of the pine copse.

'Let me get under cover,' he thought. 'Let me hide in it; it is good, the sudden intense darkness. I am small and futile: my small, futile tragedy!'

Helena shrank in the darkness. It was almost terrible to her, and the silence

was like a deep pit. She shrank to Siegmund. He drew her closer, leaning over her as they walked, trying to assure her. His heart was heavy, and heavy with a tenderness approaching grief, for his small, brave Helena.

‘Are you sure this is the right way?’ he whispered to her.

‘Quite, quite sure,’ she whispered confidently in reply. And presently they came out into the hazy moonlight, and began stumbling down the steep hill. They were both very tired, both found it difficult to go with ease or surety this sudden way down. Soon they were creeping cautiously across the pasture and the poultry farm. Helena’s heart was beating, as she imagined what a merry noise there would be should they wake all the fowls. She dreaded any commotion, any questioning, this night, so she stole carefully along till they issued on the high-road not far from home.

CHAPTER 13

In the morning, after bathing, Siegmund leaned upon the seawall in a kind of reverie. It was late, towards nine o'clock, yet he lounged, dreamily looking out on the turquoise blue water, and the white haze of morning, and the small, fair shadows of ships slowly realizing before him. In the bay were two battleships, uncouth monsters, lying as naïve and curious as sea-lions strayed afar.

Siegmund was gazing oversea in a half-stupid way, when he heard a voice beside him say:

‘Where have they come from; do you know, sir?’

He turned, saw a fair, slender man of some thirty-five years standing beside him and smiling faintly at the battleships.

‘The men-of-war? There are a good many at Spithead,’ said Siegmund.

The other glanced negligently into his face.

‘They look rather incongruous, don’t you think? We left the sea empty and shining, and when we come again, behold, these objects keeping their eye on us!’

Siegmund laughed.

‘You are not an Anarchist, I hope?’ he said jestingly.

‘A Nihilist, perhaps,’ laughed the other. ‘But I am quite fond of the Czar, if pity is akin to love. No; but you can’t turn round without finding some policeman or other at your elbow — look at them, abominable ironmongery! — ready to put his hand on your shoulder.’

The speaker’s grey-blue eyes, always laughing with mockery, glanced from the battleships and lit on the dark blue eyes of Siegmund. The latter felt his heart lift in a convulsive movement. This stranger ran so quickly to a perturbing intimacy.

‘I suppose we are in the hands of — God,’ something moved Siegmund to say. The stranger contracted his eyes slightly as he gazed deep at the speaker.

‘Ah!’ he drawled curiously. Then his eyes wandered over the wet hair, the white brow, and the bare throat of Siegmund, after which they returned again to the eyes of his interlocutor. ‘Does the Czar sail this way?’ he asked at last.

‘I do not know,’ replied Siegmund, who, troubled by the other’s penetrating gaze, had not expected so trivial a question.

‘I suppose the newspaper will tell us?’ said the man.

Sure to,’ said Siegmund.

‘You haven’t seen it this morning?’

‘Not since Saturday.’

The swift blue eyes of the man dilated. He looked curiously at Siegmund.

‘You are not alone on your holiday?’

‘No.’ Siegmund did not like this — he gazed over the sea in displeasure.

‘I live here — at least for the present — name, Hampson — ’

‘Why, weren’t you one of the first violins at the Savoy fifteen years back?’ asked Siegmund.

They chatted awhile about music. They had known each other, had been fairly intimate, and had since become strangers. Hampson excused himself for having addressed Siegmund:

‘I saw you with your nose flattened against the window,’ he said, ‘and as I had mine in the same position too, I thought we were fit to be re-acquainted.’

Siegmund looked at the man in astonishment.

‘I only mean you were staring rather hard at nothing. It’s a pity to try and stare out of a beautiful blue day like this, don’t you think?’

‘Stare beyond it, you mean?’ asked Siegmund.

‘Exactly!’ replied the other, with a laugh of intelligence. ‘I call a day like this “the blue room”. It’s the least draughty apartment in all the confoundedly draughty House of Life.’

Siegmund looked at him very intently. This Hampson seemed to express something in his own soul.

‘I mean,’ the man explained, ‘that after all, the great mass of life that washes unidentified, and that we call death, creeps through the blue envelope of the day, and through our white tissue, and we can’t stop it, once we’ve begun to leak.’

‘What do you mean by “leak”?’ asked Siegmund.

‘Goodness knows — I talk through my hat. But once you’ve got a bit tired of the house, you glue your nose to the windowpane, and stare for the dark — as you were doing.’

‘But, to use your metaphor, I’m not tired of the House — if you mean Life,’ said Siegmund.

‘Praise God! I’ve met a poet who’s not afraid of having his pocket picked — or his soul, or his brain!’ said the stranger, throwing his head back in a brilliant smile, his eyes dilated.

‘I don’t know what you mean, sir,’ said Siegmund, very quietly, with a strong fear and a fascination opposing each other in his heart.

‘You’re not tired of the House, but of your own particular room-say, suite of rooms — ’

‘Tomorrow I am turned out of this “blue room”,’ said Siegmund with a wry

smile. The other looked at him seriously.

‘Dear Lord!’ exclaimed Hampson; then: ‘Do you remember Flaubert’s saint, who laid naked against a leper? I could *not* do it.’

‘Nor I,’ shuddered Siegmund.

‘But you’ve got to-or something near it!’

Siegmund looked at the other with frightened, horrified eyes.

‘What of yourself?’ he said, resentfully.

‘I’ve funk-ed-ran away from my leper, and now am eating my heart out, and staring from the window at the dark.’

‘But can’t you *do* something?’ said Siegmund.

The other man laughed with amusement, throwing his head back and showing his teeth.

‘I won’t ask you what *your* intentions are,’ he said, with delicate irony in his tone. ‘You know, I am a tremendously busy man. I earn five hundred a year by hard work; but it’s no good. If you have acquired a liking for intensity in life, you can’t do without it. I mean vivid soul experience. It takes the place, with us, of the old adventure, and physical excitement.’

Siegmund looked at the other man with baffled, anxious eyes.

‘Well, and what then?’ he said.

‘What then? A craving for intense life is nearly as deadly as any other craving. You become a *concentré*, you feed your normal flame with oxygen, and it devours your tissue. The soulful ladies of romance are always semi-transparent.’

Siegmund laughed.

‘At least, I am quite opaque,’ he said.

The other glanced over his easy, mature figure and strong throat.

‘Not altogether,’ said Hampson. ‘And you, I should think, are one whose flame goes nearly out, when the stimulant is lacking.’

Siegmund glanced again at him, startled.

‘You haven’t much reserve. You’re like a tree that’ll flower till it kills itself,’ the man continued. ‘You’ll run till you drop, and then you won’t get up again. You’ve no dispassionate intellect to control you and economize.’

‘You’re telling me very plainly what I am and am not,’ said Siegmund, laughing rather sarcastically. He did not like it.

‘Oh, it’s only what I think,’ replied Hampson. ‘We’re a good deal alike, you see, and have gone the same way. You married and I didn’t; but women have always done as they liked with me.’

‘That’s hardly so in my case,’ said Siegmund.

Hampson eyed him critically.

‘Say one woman; it’s enough,’ he replied.

Siegmund gazed, musing, over the sea.

‘The best sort of women — the most interesting — are the worst for us,’ Hampson resumed. ‘By instinct they aim at suppressing the gross and animal in us. Then they are supersensitive — refined a bit beyond humanity. We, who are as little gross as need be, become their instruments. Life is grounded in them, like electricity in the earth; and we take from them their unrealized life, turn it into light or warmth or power for them. The ordinary woman is, alone, a great potential force, an accumulator, if you like, charged from the source of life. In us her force becomes evident.

‘She can’t live without us, but she destroys us. These deep, interesting women don’t want *us*; they want the flowers of the spirit they can gather of us. We, as natural men, are more or less degrading to them and to their love of us; therefore they destroy the natural man in us — that is, us altogether.’

‘You’re a bit downright are you not?’ asked Siegmund, deprecatingly. He did not disagree with what his friend said, nor tell him such statements were arbitrary.

‘That’s according to my intensity,’ laughed Hampson. ‘I can open the blue heaven with looking, and push back the doors of day a little, and see — God knows what! One of these days I shall slip through. Oh, I am perfectly sane; I only strive beyond myself!’

‘Don’t you think it’s wrong to get like it?’ asked Siegmund.

‘Well, I do, and so does everybody; but the crowd profits by us in the end. When they understand my music, it will be an education to them; and the whole aim of mankind is to render life intelligible.’

Siegmund pondered a little....

‘You make me feel — as if I were loose, and a long way off from myself,’ he said slowly.

The young man smiled, then looked down at the wall, where his own hands lay white and fragile, showing the blue veins.

‘I can scarcely believe they are me,’ he said. ‘If they rose up and refused me, I should not be surprised. But aren’t they beautiful?’

He looked, with a faint smile, at Siegmund.

Siegmund glanced from the stranger’s to his own hands, which lay curved on the seawall as if asleep. They were small for a man of his stature, but, lying warm in the sun, they looked particularly secure in life. Instinctively, with a wave of self-love, he closed his fists over his thumbs.

‘I wonder,’ said Hampson softly, with strange bitterness, ‘that she can’t see it; I wonder she doesn’t cherish you. You are full and beautiful enough in the flesh — why will she help to destroy you, when she loved you to such extremity?’

Siegmund looked at him with awe-stricken eyes. The frail, swift man, with his intensely living eyes, laughed suddenly.

‘Fools — the fools, these women!’ he said. ‘Either they smash their own crystal, or it revolts, turns opaque, and leaps out of their hands. Look at me, I am whittled down to the quick; but your neck is thick with compressed life; it is a stem so tense with life that it will hold up by itself. I am very sorry.’

All at once he stopped. The bitter despair in his tone was the voice of a heavy feeling of which Siegmund had been vaguely aware for some weeks. Siegmund felt a sense of doom. He laughed, trying to shake it off.

‘I wish I didn’t go on like this,’ said Hampson piteously. ‘I wish I could be normal. How hot it is already! You should wear a hat. It is really hot.’ He pulled open his flannel shirt.

‘I like the heat,’ said Siegmund.

‘So do I.’

Directly, the young man dashed the long hair on his forehead into some sort of order, bowed, and smiling in his gay fashion, walked leisurely to the village.

Siegmund stood awhile as if stunned. It seemed to him only a painful dream. Sighing deeply to relieve himself of the pain, he set off to find Helena.

CHAPTER 14

In the garden of tall rose trees and nasturtiums Helena was again waiting. It was past nine o'clock, so she was growing impatient. To herself, however, she professed a great interest in a little book of verses she had bought in St Martin's Lane for twopence.

A late, harsh blackbird smote him with her wings, As through the glade, dim in the dark, she flew....

So she read. She made a curious, pleased sound, and remarked to herself that she thought these verses very fine. But she watched the road for Siegmund.

And now she takes the scissors on her thumb ... Oh then, no more unto my lattice come.

'H'm!' she said, 'I really don't know whether I like that or not.'

Therefore she read the piece again before she looked down the road.

'He really is very late. It is absurd to think he may have got drowned; but if he were washing about at the bottom of the sea, his hair loose on the water!'

Her heart stood still as she imagined this.

'But what nonsense! I like these verses *very* much. I will read them as I walk along the side path, where I shall hear the bees, and catch the flutter of a butterfly among the words. That will be a very fitting way to read this poet.'

So she strolled to the gate, glancing up now and again. There, sure enough, was Siegmund coming, the towel hanging over his shoulder, his throat bare, and his face bright. She stood in the mottled shade.

'I have kept you waiting,' said Siegmund.

'Well, I was reading, you see.'

She would not admit her impatience.

'I have been talking,' he said.

'Talking!' she exclaimed in slight displeasure. 'Have you found an acquaintance even here?'

'A fellow who was quite close friends in Savoy days; he made me feel queer-sort of *Doppelgänger*, he was.'

Helena glanced up swiftly and curiously.

'In what way?' she said.

'He talked all the skeletons in the cupboard-such piffle it seems, now! The sea is like a harebell, and there are two battleships lying in the bay. You can hear the voices of the men on deck distinctly. Well, have you made the plans for today?'

They went into the house to breakfast. She watched him helping himself to the scarlet and green salad.

‘Mrs Curtiss,’ she said, in rather reedy tone, ‘has been very motherly to me this morning; oh, very motherly!’

Siegmund, who was in a warm, gay mood, shrank up.

‘What, has she been saying something about last night?’ he asked.

‘She was very much concerned for me—was afraid something dreadful had happened,’ continued Helena, in the same keen, sarcastic tone, which showed she was trying to rid herself of her own mortification.

‘Because we weren’t in till about eleven?’ said Siegmund, also with sarcasm.

‘I mustn’t do it again. Oh no, I mustn’t do it again, really.’

‘For fear of alarming the old lady?’ he asked.

‘“You know, dear, it troubles *me* a good deal ... but if I were your *mother*, I don’t know *how* I should feel,”’ she quoted.

‘When one engages rooms one doesn’t usually stipulate for a stepmother to nourish one’s conscience,’ said Siegmund. They laughed, making jest of the affair; but they were both too thin-skinned. Siegmund writhed within himself with mortification, while Helena talked as if her teeth were on edge.

‘I don’t *mind* in the least,’ she said. ‘The poor old woman has her opinions, and I mine.’

Siegmund brooded a little.

‘I know I’m a moral coward,’ he said bitterly.

‘Nonsense’ she replied. Then, with a little heat: ‘But you *do* continue to try so hard to justify yourself, as if *you* felt you needed justification.’

He laughed bitterly.

‘I tell you — a little thing like this — it remains tied tight round something inside me, reminding me for hours — well, what everybody else’s opinion of me is.’

Helena laughed rather plaintively.

‘I thought you were so sure we were right,’ she said.

He winced again.

‘In myself I am. But in the eyes of the world — ’

‘If you feel so in yourself, is not that enough?’ she said brutally.

He hung his head, and slowly turned his serviette-ring.

‘What is myself?’ he asked.

‘Nothing very definite,’ she said, with a bitter laugh.

They were silent. After a while she rose, went lovingly over to him, and put her arms round his neck.

‘This is our last clear day, dear,’ she said.

A wave of love came over him, sweeping away all the rest. He took her in his arms....

‘It will be hot today,’ said Helena, as they prepared to go out.

‘I felt the sun steaming in my hair as I came up,’ he replied.

‘I shall wear a hat — you had better do so too.’

‘No,’ he said. ‘I told you I wanted a sun-soaking; now I think I shall get one.’

She did not urge or compel him. In these matters he was old enough to choose for himself.

This morning they were rather silent. Each felt the tarnish on their remaining day.

‘I think, dear,’ she said, ‘we ought to find the little path that escaped us last night.’

‘We were lucky to miss it,’ he answered. ‘You don’t get a walk like that twice in a lifetime, in spite of the old ladies.’

She glanced up at him with a winsome smile, glad to hear his words.

They set off, Siegmund bare-headed. He was dressed in flannels and a loose canvas shirt, but he looked what he was — a Londoner on holiday. He had the appearance, the diffident bearing, and the well-cut clothes of a gentleman. He had a slight stoop, a strong-shouldered stoop, and as he walked he looked unseeing in front of him.

Helena belonged to the unclassed. She was not ladylike, nor smart, nor assertive. One could not tell whether she were of independent means or a worker. One thing was obvious about her: she was evidently educated.

Rather short, of strong figure, she was much more noticeably a *concentrée* than was Siegmund. Unless definitely looking at something she always seemed coiled within herself.

She wore a white voile dress made with the waist just below her breasts, and the skirt dropping straight and clinging. On her head was a large, simple hat of burnt straw.

Through the open-worked sleeves of her dress she could feel the sun bite vigorously.

‘I wish you had put on a hat, Siegmund,’ she said.

‘Why?’ he laughed. ‘My hair is like a hood,’ He ruffled it back with his hand. The sunlight glistened on his forehead.

On the higher paths a fresh breeze was energetically chasing the butterflies and driving the few small clouds disconsolate out of the sky. The lovers stood for some time watching the people of the farm in the down below dip their sheep on this sunny morning. There was a ragged noise of bleating from the flock penned in a corner of the yard. Two red-armed men seized a sheep, hauled it to a

large bath that stood in the middle of the yard, and there held it, more or less in the bath, whilst a third man baled a dirty yellow liquid over its body. The white legs of the sheep twinkled as it butted this way and that to escape the yellow douche, the blue-shirted men ducked and struggled. There was a faint splashing and shouting to be heard even from a distance. The farmer's wife and children stood by ready to rush in with assistance if necessary.

Helena laughed with pleasure.

'That is really a very quaint and primitive proceeding,' she said. 'It is cruder than Theocritus.'

'In an instant it makes me wish I were a farmer,' he laughed. 'I think every man has a passion for farming at the bottom of his blood. It would be fine to be plain-minded, to see no farther than the end of one's nose, and to own cattle and land.'

'Would it?' asked Helena sceptically.

'If I had a red face, and went to sleep as soon as I sat comfortable, I should love it,' he said.

'It amuses me to hear you long to be stupid,' she replied.

'To have a simple, slow-moving mind and an active life is the desideratum.'

'Is it?' she asked ironically.

'I would give anything to be like that,' he said.

'That is, not to be yourself,' she said pointedly.

He laughed without much heartiness.

'Don't they seem a long way off?' he said, staring at the bucolic scene. 'They are farther than Theocritus — down there is farther than Sicily, and more than twenty centuries from us. I wish it weren't.'

'Why do you?' she cried, with curious impatience.

He laughed.

Crossing the down, scattered with dark bushes, they came directly opposite the path through the furze.

'There it is!' she cried, 'How could we miss it?'

'Ascribe it to the fairies,' he replied, whistling the bird music out of *Siegfried*, then pieces of *Tristan*. They talked very little.

She was tired. When they arrived at a green, naked hollow near the cliff's edge, she said:

'This shall be our house today.'

'Welcome home!' said Siegmund.

He flung himself down on the high, breezy slope of the dip, looking out to sea. Helena sat beside him. It was absolutely still, and the wind was slackening more and more. Though they listened attentively, they could hear only an indistinct

breathing sound, quite small, from the water below: no clapping nor hoarse conversation of waves. Siegmund lay with his hands beneath his head, looking over the sparkling sea. To put her page in the shadow, Helena propped her book against him and began to read.

Presently the breeze, and Siegmund, dropped asleep. The sun was pouring with dreadful persistence. It beat and beat on Helena, gradually drawing her from her book in a confusion of thought. She closed her eyes wearily, longing for shade. Vaguely she felt a sympathy with Adam in 'Adam Cast Forth'. Her mind traced again the tumultuous, obscure strugglings of the two, forth from Eden through the primitive wildernesses, and she felt sorrowful. Thinking of Adam blackened with struggle, she looked down at Siegmund. The sun was beating him upon the face and upon his glistening brow. His two hands, which lay out on the grass, were full of blood, the veins of his wrists purple and swollen with heat. Yet he slept on, breathing with a slight, panting motion. Helena felt deeply moved. She wanted to kiss him as he lay helpless, abandoned to the charge of the earth and the sky. She wanted to kiss him, and shed a few tears. She did neither, but instead, moved her position so that she shaded his head. Cautiously putting her hand on his hair, she found it warm, quite hot, as when you put your hand under a sitting hen, and feel the hot-feathered bosom.

'It will make him ill,' she whispered to herself, and she bent over to smell the hot hair. She noticed where the sun was scalding his forehead. She felt very pitiful and helpless when she saw his brow becoming inflamed with the sun-scalding.

Turning weariedly away, she sought relief in the landscape. But the sea was glittering unbearably, like a scaled dragon wreathing. The houses of Freshwater slept, as cattle sleep motionless in the hollow valley. Green Farringford on the slope, was drawn over with a shadow of heat and sleep. In the bay below the hill the sea was hot and restless. Helena was sick with sunshine and the restless glitter of water.

"'And there shall be no more sea,'" she quoted to herself, she knew not wherefrom.

'No more sea, no more anything,' she thought dazedly, as she sat in the midst of this fierce welter of sunshine. It seemed to her as if all the lightness of her fancy and her hope were being burned away in this tremendous furnace, leaving her, Helena, like a heavy piece of slag seamed with metal. She tried to imagine herself resuming the old activities, the old manner of living.

'It is impossible,' she said; 'it is impossible! What shall I be when I come out of this? I shall not come out, except as metal to be cast in another shape. No more the same Siegmund, no more the same life. What will become of us —

what will happen?’

She was roused from these semi-delirious speculations in the sun furnace by Siegmund’s waking. He opened his eyes, took a deep breath, and looked smiling at Helena.

‘It is worth while to sleep,’ said he, ‘for the sake of waking like this. I was dreaming of huge ice-crystals.’

She smiled at him. He seemed unconscious of fate, happy and strong. She smiled upon him almost in condescension.

‘I should like to realize your dream,’ she said. ‘This is terrible!’

They went to the cliff’s edge, to receive the cool up-flow of air from the water. She drank the travelling freshness eagerly with her face, and put forward her sunburnt arms to be refreshed.

‘It is really a very fine sun,’ said Siegmund lightly. ‘I feel as if I were almost satisfied with heat.’

Helena felt the chagrin of one whose wretchedness must go unperceived, while she affects a light interest in another’s pleasure. This time, when Siegmund ‘failed to follow her’, as she put it, she felt she must follow him.

‘You are having your satisfaction complete this journey,’ she said, smiling; ‘even a sufficiency of me.’

‘Ay!’ said Siegmund drowsily. ‘I think I am. I think this is about perfect, don’t you?’

She laughed.

‘I want nothing more and nothing different,’ he continued; ‘and that’s the extreme of a decent time, I should think.’

‘The extreme of a decent time!’ she repeated.

But he drawled on lazily:

‘I’ve only rubbed my bread on the cheese-board until now. Now I’ve got all the cheese — which is you, my dear.’

‘I certainly feel eaten up,’ she laughed, rather bitterly. She saw him lying in a royal ease, his eyes naïve as a boy’s, his whole being careless. Although very glad to see him thus happy, for herself she felt very lonely. Being listless with sun-weariness, and heavy with a sense of impending fate, she felt a great yearning for his sympathy, his fellow-suffering. Instead of receiving this, she had to play to his buoyant happiness, so as not to shrivel one petal of his flower, or spoil one minute of his consummate hour.

From the high point of the cliff where they stood, they could see the path winding down to the beach, and broadening upwards towards them. Slowly approaching up the slight incline came a black invalid’s chair, wheeling silently over the short dry grass. The invalid, a young man, was so much deformed that

already his soul seemed to be wilting in his pale sharp face, as if there were not enough life-flow in the distorted body to develop the fair bud of the spirit. He turned his pain-sunken eyes towards the sea, whose meaning, like that of all things, was half obscure to him. Siegmund glanced, and glanced quickly away, before he should see. Helena looked intently for two seconds. She thought of the torn, shrivelled seaweed flung above the reach of the tide — 'the life tide,' she said to herself. The pain of the invalid overshadowed her own distress. She was fretted to her soul.

'Come!' she said quietly to Siegmund, no longer resenting the completeness of his happiness, which left her unnecessary to him.

'We will leave the poor invalid in possession of our green hollow — so quiet,' she said to herself.

They sauntered downwards towards the bay. Helena was brooding on her own state, after her own fashion.

'The Mist Spirit,' she said to herself. 'The Mist Spirit draws a curtain round us — it is very kind. A heavy gold curtain sometimes; a thin, torn curtain sometimes. I want the Mist Spirit to close the curtain again, I do not want to think of the outside. I am afraid of the outside, and I am afraid when the curtain tears open in rags. I want to be in our own fine world inside the heavy gold mist-curtain.'

As if in answer or in protest to her thoughts, Siegmund said:

'Do you want anything better than this, dear? Shall we come here next year, and stay for a whole month?'

'If there be any next year,' said she.

Siegmund did not reply.

She wondered if he had really spoken in sincerity, or if he, too, were mocking fate. They walked slowly through the broiling sun towards their lodging.

'There will be an end to this,' said Helena, communing with herself. 'And when we come out of the mist-curtain, what will it be? No matter — let come what will. All along Fate has been resolving, from the very beginning, resolving obvious discords, gradually, by unfamiliar progression; and out of original combinations weaving wondrous harmonies with our lives. Really, the working out has been wondrous, is wondrous now. The Master-Fate is too great an artist to suffer an anti-climax. I am sure the Master-Musician is too great an artist to allow a bathetic anti-climax.'

CHAPTER 15

The afternoon of the blazing day passed drowsily. Lying close together on the beach, Siegmund and Helena let the day exhale its hours like perfume, unperceived. Siegmund slept, a light evanescent sleep irised with dreams and with suffering: nothing definite, the colour of dreams without shape. Helena, as usual, retained her consciousness much more clearly. She watched the far-off floating of ships, and the near wading of children through the surf. Endless trains of thoughts, like little waves, rippled forward and broke on the shore of her drowsiness. But each thought-ripple, though it ran lightly, was tinged with copper-coloured gleams as from a lurid sunset. Helena felt that the sun was setting on her and Siegmund. The hour was too composed, spell-bound, for grief or anxiety or even for close perception. She was merely aware that the sun was wheeling down, tangling Siegmund and her in the traces, like overthrown charioteers. So the hours passed.

After tea they went eastwards on the downs. Siegmund was animated, so that Helena caught his mood. It was very rare that they spoke of the time preceding their acquaintance, Helena knew little or nothing of Siegmund's life up to the age of thirty, whilst he had never learned anything concerning her childhood. Somehow she did not encourage him to self-discovery. Today, however, the painful need of lovers for self-revelation took hold on him.

'It is awfully funny,' he said. 'I was so gone on Beatrice when I married her. She had only just come back from Egypt. Her father was an army officer, a very handsome man, and, I believe, a bit of a rake. Beatrice is really well connected, you know. But old FitzHerbert ran through all his money, and through everything else. He was too hot for the rest of the family, so they dropped him altogether.

'He came to live at Peckham when I was sixteen. I had just left school, and was to go into father's business. Mrs FitzHerbert left cards, and very soon we were acquainted. Beatrice had been a good time in a French convent school. She had only knocked about with the army a little while, but it had brought her out. I remember I thought she was miles above me — which she was. She wasn't bad-looking, either, and you know men all like her. I bet she'd marry again, in spite of the children.

'At first I fluttered round her. I remember I'd got a little, silky moustache. They all said I looked older than sixteen. At that time I was mad on the violin,

and she played rather well. Then FitzHerbert went off abroad somewhere, so Beatrice and her mother half lived at our house. The mother was an invalid.

‘I remember I nearly stood on my head one day. The conservatory opened off the smoking-room, so when I came in the room, I heard my two sisters and Beatrice talking about good-looking men.

“‘I consider Bertram will make a handsome man,” said my younger sister.

“‘He’s got beautiful eyes,” said my other sister.

“‘And a real darling nose and chin!” cried Beatrice. “‘If only he was more *solide*! He is like a windmill, all limbs.”

“‘He will fill out. Remember, he’s not quite seventeen,” said my elder sister.

“‘Ah, he is *doux* — he is *câlin*,” said Beatrice.

“‘I think he is rather *too* spoony for his age,” said my elder sister.

“‘But he’s a fine boy for all that. See how thick his knees are,” my younger sister chimed in.

“‘Ah, *si, si!*” cried Beatrice.

‘I made a row against the door, then walked across.

“‘Hello, is somebody in here?” I said, as I pushed into the little conservatory.

‘I looked straight at Beatrice, and she at me. We seemed to have formed an alliance in that look: she was the other half of my consciousness, I of hers. Ha! Ha! there were a lot of white narcissus, and little white hyacinths, Roman hyacinths, in the conservatory. I can see them now, great white stars, and tangles of little ones, among a bank of green; and I can recall the keen, fresh scent on the warm air; and the look of Beatrice ... her great dark eyes.

‘It’s funny, but Beatrice is as dead — ay, far more dead — than Dante’s. And I am not that young fool, not a bit.

‘I was very romantic, fearfully emotional, and the soul of honour. Beatrice said nobody cared a thing about her. FitzHerbert was always jaunting off, the mother was a fretful invalid. So I was seventeen, earning half a guinea a week, and she was eighteen, with no money, when we ran away to Brighton and got married. Poor old Pater, he took it awfully well, I have been a frightful drag on him, you know.

‘There’s the romance. I wonder how it will all end.’

Helena laughed, and he did not detect her extreme bitterness of spirit.

They walked on in silence for some time. He was thinking back, before Helena’s day. This left her very much alone, and forced on her the idea that, after all, love, which she chose to consider as single and wonderful a thing in a man’s life as birth, or adolescence, or death, was temporary, and formed only an episode. It was her hour of disillusion.

‘Come to think of it,’ Siegmund continued, ‘I have always shirked. Whenever

I've been in a tight corner I've gone to Pater.'

'I think,' she said, 'marriage has been a tight corner you couldn't get out of to go to anybody.'

'Yet I'm here,' he answered simply.

The blood suffused her face and neck.

'And some men would have made a better job of it. When it's come to sticking out against Beatrice, and sailing the domestic ship in spite of her, I've always faked. I tell you I'm something of a moral coward.'

He had her so much on edge she was inclined to answer, 'So be it.' Instead, she ran back over her own history: it consisted of petty discords in contemptible surroundings, then of her dreams and fancies, finally — Siegmund.

'In my life,' she said, with the fine, grating discord in her tones, 'I might say *always*, the real life has seemed just outside — brownies running and fairies peeping — just beyond the common, ugly place where I am. I seem to have been hedged in by vulgar circumstances, able to glimpse outside now and then, and see the reality.'

'You are so hard to get at,' said Siegmund. 'And so scornful of familiar things.'

She smiled, knowing he did not understand. The heat had jaded her, so that physically she was full of discord, of dreariness that set her teeth on edge. Body and soul, she was out of tune.

A warm, noiseless twilight was gathering over the downs and rising darkly from the sea. Fate, with wide wings, was hovering just over her. Fate, ashen grey and black, like a carrion crow, had her in its shadow. Yet Siegmund took no notice. He did not understand. He walked beside her whistling to himself, which only distressed her the more.

They were alone on the smooth hills to the east. Helena looked at the day melting out of the sky, leaving the permanent structure of the night. It was her turn to suffer the sickening detachment which comes after moments of intense living.

The rosiness died out of the sunset as embers fade into thick ash. In herself, too, the ruddy glow sank and went out. The earth was a cold dead heap, coloured drearily, the sky was dark with flocculent grey ash, and she herself an upright mass of soft ash.

She shuddered slightly with horror. The whole face of things was to her livid and ghastly. Being a moralist rather than an artist, coming of fervent Wesleyan stock, she began to scourge herself. She had done wrong again. Looking back, no one had she touched without hurting. She had a destructive force; anyone she embraced she injured. Faint voices echoed back from her conscience. The

shadows were full of complaint against her. It was all true, she was a harmful force, dragging Fate to petty, mean conclusions.

Life and hope were ash in her mouth. She shuddered with discord. Despair grated between her teeth. This dreariness was worse than any her dreary, lonely life had known. She felt she could bear it no longer.

Siegmund was there. Surely he could help? He would rekindle her. But he was straying ahead, carelessly whistling the Spring Song from *Die Walküre*. She looked at him, and again shuddered with horror. Was that really Siegmund, that stooping, thick-shouldered, indifferent man? Was that the Siegmund who had seemed to radiate joy into his surroundings, the Siegmund whose coming had always changed the whole weather of her soul? Was that the Siegmund whose touch was keen with bliss for her, whose face was a panorama of passing God? She looked at him again. His radiance was gone, his aura had ceased. She saw him a stooping man, past the buoyancy of youth, walking and whistling rather stupidly — in short, something of the ‘clothed animal on end’, like the rest of men.

She suffered an agony of disillusion. Was this the real Siegmund, and her own only a projection of her soul? She took her breath sharply. Was he the real clay, and that other, her beloved, only the breathing of her soul upon this. There was an awful blank before her.

‘Siegmund!’ she said in despair.

He turned sharply at the sound of her voice. Seeing her face pale and distorted in the twilight, he was filled with dismay. She mutely lifted her arms to him, watching him in despair. Swiftly he took her in his arms, and asked in a troubled voice:

‘What is it, dear? Is something wrong?’

His voice was nothing to her — it was stupid. She felt his arms round her, felt her face pressed against the cloth of his coat, against the beating of his heart. What was all this? This was not comfort or love. He was not understanding or helping, only chaining her, hurting. She did not want his brute embrace — she was most utterly alone, gripped so in his arms. If he could not save her from herself, he must leave her free to pant her heart out in free air. The secret thud, thud of his heart, the very self of that animal in him she feared and hated, repulsed her. She struggled to escape.

‘What is it? Won’t you tell me what is the matter?’ he pleaded.

She began to sob, dry wild sobs, feeling as if she would go mad. He tried to look at her face, for which she hated him. And all the time he held her fast, all the time she was imprisoned in the embrace of this brute, blind creature, whose heart confessed itself in thud, thud, thud.

‘Have you heard anything against us? Have I done anything? Have I said anything? Tell me — at any rate tell me, Helena.’

Her sobbing was like the chattering of dry leaves. She grew frantic to be free. Stifled in that prison any longer, she would choke and go mad. His coat chafed her face; as she struggled she could see the strong working of his throat. She fought against him; she struggled in panic to be free.

‘Let me go!’ she cried. ‘Let me go! Let me go!’ He held her in bewilderment and terror. She thrust her hands in his chest and pushed him apart. Her face, blind to him, was very much distorted by her suffering. She thrust him furiously away with great strength.

His heart stood still with wonder. She broke from him and dropped down, sobbing wildly, in the shelter of the tumuli. She was bunched in a small, shaken heap. Siegmund could not bear it. He went on one knee beside her, trying to take her hand in his, and pleading:

‘Only tell me, Helena, what it is. Tell me what it is. At least tell me, Helena; tell me what it is. Oh, but this is dreadful!’

She had turned convulsively from him. She shook herself, as if beside herself, and at last covered her ears with her hands, to shut out this unreasoning pleading of his voice.

Seeing her like this, Siegmund at last gave in. Quite still, he knelt on one knee beside her, staring at the late twilight. The intense silence was crackling with the sound of Helena’s dry, hissing sobs. He remained silenced, stunned by the unnatural conflict. After waiting a while, he put his hand on her. She winced convulsively away.

Then he rose, saying in his heart, ‘It is enough,’ He went behind the small hill, and looked at the night. It was all exposed. He wanted to hide, to cover himself from the openness, and there was not even a bush under which he could find cover.

He lay down flat on the ground, pressing his face into the wiry turf, trying to hide. Quite stunned, with a death taking place in his soul, he lay still, pressed against the earth. He held his breath for a long time before letting it go, then again he held it. He could scarcely bear, even by breathing, to betray himself. His consciousness was dark.

Helena had sobbed and struggled the life animation back into herself. At length, weary but comfortable, she lay still to rest. Almost she could have gone to sleep. But she grew chilly, and a ground insect tickled her face. Was somebody coming?

It was dark when she rose. Siegmund was not in sight. She tidied herself, and rather frightened, went to look for him. She saw him like a thick shadow on the

earth. Now she was heavy with tears good to shed. She stood in silent sorrow, looking at him.

Suddenly she became aware of someone passing and looking curiously at them.

‘Dear!’ she said softly, stooping and touching his hair. He began to struggle with himself to respond. At that minute he would rather have died than face anyone. His soul was too much uncovered.

‘Dear, someone is looking,’ she pleaded.

He drew himself up from cover. But he kept his face averted. They walked on.

‘Forgive me, dear,’ she said softly.

‘Nay, it’s not you,’ he answered, and she was silenced. They walked on till the night seemed private. She turned to him, and ‘Siegmond!’ she said, in a voice of great sorrow and pleading.

He took her in his arms, but did not kiss her, though she lifted her face. He put his mouth against her throat, below the ear, as she offered it, and stood looking out through the ravel of her hair, dazed, dreamy.

The sea was smoking with darkness under half-luminous heavens. The stars, one after another, were catching alight. Siegmund perceived first one, and then another dimmer one, flicker out in the darkness over the sea. He stood perfectly still, watching them. Gradually he remembered how, in the cathedral, the tapers of the choir-stalls would tremble and set steadily to burn, opening the darkness point after point with yellow drops of flame, as the acolyte touched them, one by one, delicately with his rod. The night was religious, then, with its proper order of worship. Day and night had their ritual, and passed in uncouth worship.

Siegmond found himself in an abbey. He looked up the nave of the night, where the sky came down on the sea-like arches, and he watched the stars catch fire. At least it was all sacred, whatever the God might be. Helena herself, the bitter bread, was stuff of the ceremony, which he touched with his lips as part of the service.

He had Helena in his arms, which was sweet company, but in spirit he was quite alone. She would have drawn him back to her, and on her woman’s breast have hidden him from Fate, and saved him from searching the unknown. But this night he did not want comfort. If he were ‘an infant crying in the night’, it was crying that a woman could not still. He was abroad seeking courage and faith for his own soul. He, in loneliness, must search the night for faith.

‘My fate is finely wrought out,’ he thought to himself. ‘Even damnation may be finely imagined for me in the night. I have come so far. Now I must get clarity and courage to follow out the theme. I don’t want to botch and bungle even damnation.’

But he needed to know what was right, what was the proper sequence of his acts. Staring at the darkness, he seemed to feel his course, though he could not see it. He bowed in obedience. The stars seemed to swing softly in token of submission.

CHAPTER 16

Feeling him abstract, withdrawn from her, Helena experienced the dread of losing him. She was in his arms, but his spirit ignored her. That was insufferable to her pride. Yet she dared not disturb him — she was afraid. Bitterly she repented her of the giving way to her revulsion a little space before. Why had she not smothered it and pretended? Why had she, a woman, betrayed herself so flagrantly? Now perhaps she had lost him for good. She was consumed with uneasiness.

At last she drew back from him, held him her mouth to kiss. As he gently, sadly kissed her she pressed him to her bosom. She must get him back, whatever else she lost. She put her hand tenderly on his brow.

‘What are you thinking of?’ she asked.

‘I?’ he replied. ‘I really don’t know. I suppose I was hardly thinking anything.’

She waited a while, clinging to him, then, finding some difficulty in speech, she asked:

‘Was I very cruel, dear?’

It was so unusual to hear her grieved and filled with humility that he drew her close into him.

‘It was pretty bad, I suppose,’ he replied. ‘But I should think neither of us could help it.’

She gave a little sob, pressed her face into his chest, wishing she had helped it. Then, with Madonna love, she clasped his head upon her shoulder, covering her hands over his hair. Twice she kissed him softly in the nape of the neck, with fond, reassuring kisses. All the while, delicately, she fondled and soothed him, till he was child to her Madonna.

They remained standing with his head on her shoulder for some time, till at last he raised himself to lay his lips on hers in a long kiss of healing and renewal — long, pale kisses of after-suffering.

Someone was coming along the path. Helena let him go, shook herself free, turned sharply aside, and said:

‘Shall we go down to the water?’

‘If you like,’ he replied, putting out his hand to her. They went thus with clasped hands down the cliff path to the beach.

There they sat in the shadow of the uprising island, facing the restless water.

Around them the sand and shingle were grey; there stretched a long pale line of surf, beyond which the sea was black and smeared with star-reflections. The deep, velvety sky shone with lustrous stars.

As yet the moon was not risen. Helena proposed that they should lie on a tuft of sand in a black cleft of the cliff to await its coming. They lay close together without speaking. Each was looking at a low, large star which hung straight in front of them, dripping its brilliance in a thin streamlet of light along the sea almost to their feet. It was a star-path fine and clear, trembling in its brilliance, but certain upon the water. Helena watched it with delight. As Siegmund looked at the star, it seemed to him a lantern hung at the gate to light someone home. He imagined himself following the thread of the star-track. What was behind the gate?

They heard the wash of a steamer crossing the bay. The water seemed populous in the night-time, with dark, uncanny comings and goings.

Siegmund was considering.

‘What *was* the matter with you?’ he asked.

She leaned over him, took his head in her lap, holding his face between her two hands as she answered in a low, grave voice, very wise and old in experience:

‘Why, you see, dear, you won’t understand. But there was such a greyish darkness, and through it — the crying of lives I have touched...’

His heart suddenly shrank and sank down. She acknowledged then that she also had helped to injure Beatrice and his children. He coiled with shame.

‘...A crying of lives against me, and I couldn’t silence them, nor escape out of the darkness. I wanted you — I saw you in front, whistling the Spring Song, but I couldn’t find you — it was not you — I couldn’t find you.’

She kissed his eyes and his brows.

‘No, I don’t see it,’ he said. ‘You would always be you. I could think of hating you, but you’d still be yourself.’

She made a moaning, loving sound. Full of passionate pity, she moved her mouth on his face, as a woman does on her child that has hurt itself.

‘Sometimes,’ she murmured, in a low, grieved confession, ‘you lose me.’

He gave a brief laugh.

‘I lose you!’ he repeated. ‘You mean I lose my attraction for you, or my hold over you, and then you — ?’

He did not finish. She made the same grievous murmuring noise over him.

‘It shall not be any more,’ she said.

‘All right,’ he replied, ‘since you decide it.’

She clasped him round the chest and fondled him, distracted with pity.

‘You mustn’t be bitter,’ she murmured.

‘Four days is enough,’ he said. ‘In a fortnight I should be intolerable to you. I am not masterful.’

‘It is not so, Siegmund,’ she said sharply.

‘I give way always,’ he repeated. ‘And then — tonight!’

‘Tonight, tonight!’ she cried in wrath. ‘Tonight I have been a fool!’

‘And I?’ he asked.

‘You — what of you?’ she cried. Then she became sad. ‘I have little perverse feelings,’ she lamented.

‘And I can’t bear to compel anything, for fear of hurting it. So I’m always pushed this way and that, like a fool.’

‘You don’t know how you hurt me, talking so,’ she said.

He kissed her. After a moment he said:

‘You are not like other folk. “*Ihr Lascheks seid ein anderes Geschlecht.*” I thought of you when we read it.’

‘Would you rather have me more like the rest, or more unlike, Siegmund? Which is it?’

‘Neither,’ he said. ‘You are *you*.’

They were quiet for a space. The only movement in the night was the faint gambolling of starlight on the water. The last person had passed in black silhouette between them and the sea.

He was thinking bitterly. She seemed to goad him deeper and deeper into life. He had a sense of despair, a preference of death. The German she read with him — she loved its loose and violent romance — came back to his mind: ‘*Der Tod geht einem zur Seite, fast sichtbarlich, und jagt einem immer tiefer ins Leben.*’

Well, the next place he would be hunted to, like a hare run down, was home. It seemed impossible the morrow would take him back to Beatrice.

‘This time tomorrow night,’ he said.

‘Siegmund!’ she implored.

‘Why not?’ he laughed.

‘Don’t, dear,’ she pleaded.

‘All right, I won’t.’

Some large steamer crossing the mouth of the bay made the water dash a little as it broke in accentuated waves. A warm puff of air wandered in on them now and again.

‘You won’t be tired when you go back?’ Helena asked.

‘Tired!’ he echoed.

‘You know how you were when you came,’ she reminded him, in tones full of pity. He laughed.

‘Oh, that is gone,’ he said.

With a slow, mechanical rhythm she stroked his cheek.

‘And will you be sad?’ she said, hesitating.

‘Sad!’ he repeated.

‘But will you be able to fake the old life up, happier, when you go back?’

‘The old life will take me up, I suppose,’ he said.

There was a pause.

‘I think, dear,’ she said, ‘I have done wrong.’

‘Good Lord — you have not!’ he replied sharply, pressing back his head to look at her, for the first time.

‘I shall have to send you back to Beatrice and the babies — tomorrow — as you are now....’

“‘Take no thought for the morrow.’ Be quiet, Helena!’ he exclaimed as the reality bit him. He sat up suddenly.

‘Why?’ she asked, afraid.

‘Why!’ he repeated. He remained sitting, leaning forward on the sand, staring intently at Helena. She looked back in fear at him. The moment terrified her, and she lost courage.

With a fluttered motion she put her hand on his, which was pressed hard on the sand as he leaned forward. At once he relaxed his intensity, laughed, then became tender.

Helena yielded herself like a forlorn child to his arms, and there lay, half crying, while he smoothed her brow with his fingers, and grains of sand fell from his palm on her cheek. She shook with dry, withered sobs, as a child does when it snatches itself away from the lancet of the doctor and hides in the mother’s bosom, refusing to be touched.

But she knew the morrow was coming, whether or not, and she cowered down on his breast. She was wild with fear of the parting and the subsequent days. They must drink, after tomorrow, separate cups. She was filled with vague terror of what it would be. The sense of the oneness and unity of their fates was gone.

Siegmund also was cowed by the threat of separation. He had more definite knowledge of the next move than had Helena. His heart was certain of calamity, which would overtake him directly. He shrank away. Wildly he beat about to find a means of escape from the next day and its consequences. He did not want to go. Anything rather than go back.

In the midst of their passion of fear the moon rose. Siegmund started to see the rim appear ruddily beyond the sea. His struggling suddenly ceased, and he watched, spellbound, the oval horn of fiery gold come up, resolve itself. Some golden liquor dripped and spilled upon the far waves, where it shook in ruddy

splashes. The gold-red cup rose higher, looming before him very large, yet still not all discovered. By degrees the horn of gold detached itself from the darkness at back of the waves. It was immense and terrible. When would the tip be placed upon the table of the sea?

It stood at last, whole and calm, before him; then the night took up this drinking-cup of fiery gold, lifting it with majestic movement overhead, letting stream forth the wonderful unwasted liquor of gold over the sea — a libation.

Siegmund looked at the shaking flood of gold and paling gold spread wider as the night upraised the blanching crystal, poured out farther and farther the immense libation from the whitening cup, till at last the moon looked frail and empty.

And there, exhaustless in the night, the white light shook on the floor of the sea. He wondered how it would be gathered up. 'I gather it up into myself,' he said. And the stars and the cliffs and a few trees were watching, too. 'If I have spilled my life,' he thought, 'the unfamiliar eyes of the land and sky will gather it up again.'

Turning to Helena, he found her face white and shining as the empty moon.

CHAPTER 17

Towards morning, Siegmund went to sleep. For four hours, until seven o'clock, the womb of sleep received him and nourished him again.

'But it is finest of all to wake,' he said, as the bright sunshine of the window, and the luminous green sunshine coming through the lifted hands of the leaves, challenged him into the open.

The morning was exceedingly fair, and it looked at him so gently that his blue eyes trembled with self-pity. A fragment of scarlet geranium glanced up at him as he passed, so that amid the vermilion tyranny of the uniform it wore he could see the eyes of the flower, wistful, offering him love, as one sometimes see the eyes of a man beneath the brass helmet of a soldier, and is startled. Everything looked at him with the same eyes of tenderness, offering him, timidly, a little love.

'They are all extraordinarily sweet,' said Siegmund to the full-mouthed scabious and the awkward, downcast ragwort. Three or four butterflies fluttered up and down in agitated little leaps, around him. Instinctively Siegmund put his hand forward to touch them.

'The careless little beggars!' he said.

When he came to the cliff tops there was the morning, very bravely dressed, rustling forward with a silken sound and much silken shining to meet him. The battleships had gone; the sea was blue with a *panier* of diamonds; the sky was full with a misty tenderness like love. Siegmund had never recognized before the affection that existed between him and everything. We do not realize how tremendously dear and indispensable to us are the hosts of common things, till we must leave them, and we break our hearts.

'We have been very happy together,' everything seemed to say.

Siegmund looked up into the eyes of the morning with a laugh.

'It is very lovely,' he said, 'whatever happens.'

So he went down to the beach; his dark blue eyes, darker from last night's experience, smiled always with the pride of love. He undressed by his usual altar-stone.

'How closely familiar everything is,' he thought. 'It seems almost as if the curves of this stone were rounded to fit in my soul.'

He touched the smooth white slope of the stone gently with discovering fingers, in the same way as he touched the cheek of Helena, or of his own

babies. He found great pleasure in this feeling of intimacy with things. A very soft wind, shy as a girl, put his arms round him, and seemed to lay its cheek against his chest. He placed his hands beneath his arms, where the wind was caressing him, and his eyes opened with wondering pleasure.

‘They find no fault with me,’ he said. ‘I suppose they are as fallible as I, and so don’t judge,’ he added, as he waded thigh-deep into the water, thrusting it to hear the mock-angry remonstrance.

‘Once more,’ he said, and he took the sea in his arms. He swam very quietly. The water buoyed him up, holding him closely clasped. He swam towards the white rocks of the headlands; they rose before him like beautiful buttressed gates, so glistening that he half expected to see fantail pigeons puffing like white irises in the niches, and white peacocks with dark green feet stepping down the terraces, trailing a sheen of silver.

‘Helena is right,’ he said to himself as he swam, scarcely swimming, but moving upon the bosom of the tide; ‘she is right, it is all enchanted. I have got into her magic at last. Let us see what it is like.’

He determined to visit again his little bay. He swam carefully round the terraces, whose pale shadows through the swift-spinning emerald facets of the water seemed merest fancy. Siegmund touched them with his foot; they were hard, cold, dangerous. He swam carefully. As he made for the archway, the shadows of the headland chilled the water. There under water, clamouring in a throng at the base of the submerged walls, were sea-women with dark locks, and young sea-girls, with soft hair, vividly green, striving to climb up out of the darkness into the morning, their hair swirling in abandon. Siegmund was half afraid of their frantic efforts.

But the tide carried him swiftly through the high gate into the porch. There was exultance in this sweeping entry. The skin-white, full-fleshed walls of the archway were dappled with green lights that danced in and out among themselves. Siegmund was carried along in an invisible chariot, beneath the jewel-stained walls. The tide swerved, threw him as he swam against the inward-curving white rock; his elbow met the rock, and he was sick with pain. He held his breath, trying to get back the joy and magic. He could not believe that the lovely, smooth side of the rock, fair as his own side with its ripple of muscles, could have hurt him thus. He let the water carry him till he might climb out on to the shingle. There he sat upon a warm boulder, and twisted to look at his arm. The skin was grazed, not very badly, merely a ragged scarlet patch no bigger than a carnation petal. The bruise, however, was painful, especially when, a minute or two later, he bent his arm.

‘No,’ said he pitifully to himself, ‘it is impossible it should have hurt me. I

suppose I was careless.'

Nevertheless, the aspect of the morning changed. He sat on the boulder looking out on the sea. The azure sky and the sea laughed on, holding a bright conversation one with another. The two headlands of the tiny bay gossiped across the street of water. All the boulders and pebbles of the sea-shore played together.

'Surely,' said Siegmund, 'they take no notice of me; they do not care a jot or a tittle for me. I am a fool to think myself one with them.'

He contrasted this with the kindness of the morning as he had stood on the cliffs.

'I was mistaken,' he said. 'It was an illusion.'

He looked wistfully out again. Like neighbours leaning from opposite windows of an overhanging street, the headlands were occupied one with another. White rocks strayed out to sea, followed closely by other white rocks. Everything was busy, interested, occupied with its own pursuit and with its own comrades. Siegmund alone was without pursuit or comrade.

'They will all go on the same; they will be just as gay. Even Helena, after a while, will laugh and take interest in others. What do I matter?'

Siegmund thought of the futility of death:

We are not long for music and laughter, Love and desire and hate; I think we have no portion in them after We pass the gate.

'Why should I be turned out of the game?' he asked himself, rebelling. He frowned, and answered: 'Oh, Lord! — the old argument!'

But the thought of his own expunging from the picture was very bitter.

'Like the puff from the steamer's funnel, I should be gone.'

He looked at himself, at his limbs and his body in the pride of his maturity. He was very beautiful to himself.

'Nothing, in the place where I am,' he said. 'Gone, like a puff of steam that melts on the sunshine.'

Again Siegmund looked at the sea. It was glittering with laughter as at a joke.

'And I,' he said, lying down in the warm sand, 'I am nothing. I do not count; I am inconsiderable.'

He set his teeth with pain. There were no tears, there was no relief. A convulsive gasping shook him as he lay on the sands. All the while he was arguing with himself.

'Well,' he said, 'if I am nothing dead I am nothing alive.'

But the vulgar proverb arose — 'Better a live dog than a dead lion,' to answer him. It seemed an ignominy to be dead. It meant, to be overlooked, even by the smallest creature of God's earth. Surely that was a great ignominy.

Helena, meanwhile, was bathing, for the last time, by the same sea-shore with him. She was no swimmer. Her endless delight was to explore, to discover small treasures. For her the world was still a great wonder-box which hid innumerable sweet toys for surprises in all its crevices. She had bathed in many rock-pools' tepid baths, trying first one, then another. She had lain on the sand where the cold arms of the ocean lifted her and smothered her impetuously, like an awful lover.

'The sea is a great deal like Siegmund,' she said, as she rose panting, trying to dash her nostrils free from water. It was true; the sea as it flung over her filled her with the same uncontrollable terror as did Siegmund when he sometimes grew silent and strange in a tide of passion.

She wandered back to her rock-pools; they were bright and docile; they did not fling her about in a game of terror. She bent over watching the anemone's fleshy petals shrink from the touch of her shadow, and she laughed to think they should be so needlessly fearful. The flowing tide trickled noiselessly among the rocks, widening and deepening insidiously her little pools. Helena retreated towards a large cave round the bend. There the water gurgled under the bladder-wrack of the large stones; the air was cool and clammy. She pursued her way into the gloom, bending, though there was no need, shivering at the coarse feel of the seaweed beneath her naked feet. The water came rustling up beneath the fucus as she crept along on the big stones; it returned with a quiet gurgle which made her shudder, though even that was not disagreeable. It needed, for all that, more courage than was easy to summon before she could step off her stone into the black pool that confronted her. It was festooned thick with weeds that slid under her feet like snakes. She scrambled hastily upwards towards the outlet.

Turning, the ragged arch was before her, brighter than the brightest window. It was easy to believe the light-fairies stood outside in a throng, excited with fine fear, throwing handfuls of light into the dragon's hole.

'How surprised they will be to see me!' said Helena, scrambling forward, laughing.

She stood still in the archway, astounded. The sea was blazing with white fire, and glowing with azure as coals glow red with heat below the flames. The sea was transfused with white burning, while over it hung the blue sky in a glory, like the blue smoke of the fire of God. Helena stood still and worshipped. It was a moment of astonishment, when she stood breathless and blinded, involuntarily offering herself for a thank-offering. She felt herself confronting God at home in His white incandescence, His fire settling on her like the Holy Spirit. Her lips were parted in a woman's joy of adoration.

The moment passed, and her thoughts hurried forward in confusion.

‘It is good,’ said Helena; ‘it is very good.’ She looked again, and saw the waves like a line of children racing hand in hand, the sunlight pursuing, catching hold of them from behind, as they ran wildly till they fell, caught, with the sunshine dancing upon them like a white dog.

‘It is really wonderful here!’ said she; but the moment had gone, she could not see again the grand burning of God among the waves. After a while she turned away.

As she stood dabbling her bathing-dress in a pool, Siegmund came over the beach to her.

‘You are not gone, then?’ he said.

‘Siegmund!’ she exclaimed, looking up at him with radiant eyes, as if it could not be possible that he had joined her in this rare place. His face was glowing with the sun’s inflaming, but Helena did not notice that his eyes were full of misery.

‘I, actually,’ he said, smiling.

‘I did not expect you,’ she said, still looking at him in radiant wonder. ‘I could easier have expected’ — she hesitated, struggled, and continued — ‘Eros walking by the sea. But you are like him,’ she said, looking radiantly up into Siegmund’s face. ‘Isn’t it beautiful this morning?’ she added.

Siegmund endured her wide, glad look for a moment, then he stooped and kissed her. He remained moving his hand in the pool, ashamed, and full of contradiction. He was at the bitter point of farewell; could see, beyond the glamour around him, the ugly building of his real life.

‘Isn’t the sea wonderful this morning?’ asked Helena, as she wrung the water from her costume.

‘It is very fine,’ he answered. He refrained from saying what his heart said: ‘It is my last morning; it is not yours. It is my last morning, and the sea is enjoying the joke, and you are full of delight.’

‘Yes,’ said Siegmund, ‘the morning is perfect.’

‘It is,’ assented Helena warmly. ‘Have you noticed the waves? They are like a line of children chased by a white dog.’

‘Ay!’ said Siegmund.

‘Didn’t you have a good time?’ she asked, touching with her finger-tips the nape of his neck as he stooped beside her.

‘I swam to my little bay again,’ he replied.

‘Did you?’ she exclaimed, pleased.

She sat down by the pool, in which she washed her feet free from sand, holding them to Siegmund to dry.

‘I am very hungry,’ she said.

‘And I,’ he agreed.

‘I feel quite established here,’ she said gaily, something in his position having reminded her of their departure.

He laughed.

‘It seems another eternity before the three-forty-five train, doesn’t it?’ she insisted.

‘I wish we might never go back,’ he said.

Helena sighed.

‘It would be too much for life to give. We have had something, Siegmund,’ she said.

He bowed his head, and did not answer.

‘It has been something, dear,’ she repeated.

He rose and took her in his arms.

‘Everything,’ he said, his face muffled in the shoulder of her dress. He could smell her fresh and fine from the sea. ‘Everything!’ he said.

She pressed her two hands on his head.

‘I did well, didn’t I, Siegmund?’ she asked. Helena felt the responsibility of this holiday. She had proposed it; when he had withdrawn, she had insisted, refusing to allow him to take back his word, declaring that she should pay the cost. He permitted her at last.

‘Wonderfully well, Helena,’ he replied.

She kissed his forehead.

‘You are everything,’ he said.

She pressed his head on her bosom.

CHAPTER 18

Siegmund had shaved and dressed, and come down to breakfast. Mrs Curtiss brought in the coffee. She was a fragile little woman, of delicate, gentle manner.

‘The water would be warm this morning,’ she said, addressing no one in particular.

Siegmund stood on the hearth-rug with his hands behind him, swaying from one leg to the other. He was embarrassed always by the presence of the amiable little woman; he could not feel at ease before strangers, in his capacity of accepted swain of Helena.

‘It was,’ assented Helena. ‘It was as warm as new milk.’

‘Ay, it would be,’ said the old lady, looking in admiration upon the experience of Siegmund and his beloved. ‘And did ye see the ships of war?’ she asked.

‘No, they had gone,’ replied Helena.

Siegmund swayed from foot to foot, rhythmically.

‘You’ll be coming in to dinner today?’ asked the old lady.

Helena arranged the matter.

‘I think ye both look better,’ Mrs. Curtiss said. She glanced at Siegmund.

He smiled constrainedly.

‘I thought ye looked so worn when you came,’ she said sympathetically.

‘He had been working hard,’ said Helena, also glancing at him.

He bent his head, and was whistling without making any sound.

‘Ay,’ sympathized the little woman. ‘And it’s a very short time for you. What a pity ye can’t stop for the fireworks at Cowes on Monday. They are grand, so they say.’

Helena raised her eyebrows in polite interest. ‘Have you never seen them?’ she asked.

‘No,’ replied Mrs. Curtiss. ‘I’ve never been able to get; but I hope to go yet.’

‘I hope you may,’ said Siegmund.

The little woman beamed on him. Having won a word from him, she was quite satisfied.

‘Well,’ she said brightly, ‘the eggs must be done by now.’

She tripped out, to return directly.

‘I’ve brought you,’ she said, ‘some of the Island cream, and some white currants, if ye’ll have them. You must think well of the Island, and come back.’

‘How could we help?’ laughed Helena.

‘We will,’ smiled Siegmund.

When finally the door was closed on her, Siegmund sat down in relief. Helena looked in amusement at him. She was perfectly self-possessed in presence of the delightful little lady.

‘This is one of the few places that has ever felt like home to me,’ she said. She lifted a tangled bunch of fine white currants.

‘Ah!’ exclaimed Siegmund, smiling at her.

‘One of the few places where everything is friendly,’ she said. ‘And everybody.’

‘You have made so many enemies?’ he asked, with gentle irony.

‘Strangers,’ she replied. ‘I seem to make strangers of all the people I meet.’

She laughed in amusement at this *mot*. Siegmund looked at her intently. He was thinking of her left alone amongst strangers.

‘Need we go — need we leave this place of friends?’ he said, as if ironically. He was very much afraid of tempting her.

She looked at the clock on the mantelpiece and counted: ‘One, two, three, four, five hours, thirty-five minutes. It is an age yet,’ she laughed.

Siegmund laughed too, as he accepted the particularly fine bunch of currants she had extricated for him.

CHAPTER 19

The air was warm and sweet in the little lane, remote from the sea, which led them along their last walk. On either side the white path was a grassy margin thickly woven with pink convolvuli. Some of the reckless little flowers, so gay and evanescent, had climbed the trunks of an old yew tree, and were looking up pertly at their rough host.

Helena walked along, watching the flowers, and making fancies out of them.

‘Who called them “fairies’ telephones”?’ she said to herself. ‘They are tiny children in pinafores. How gay they are! They are children dawdling along the pavement of a morning. How fortunate they are! See how they take a wind-thrill! See how wide they are set to the sunshine! And when they are tired, they will curl daintily to sleep, and some fairies in the dark will gather them away. They won’t be here in the morning, shrivelled and dowdy ... If only we could curl up and be gone, after our day....’

She looked at Siegmund. He was walking moodily beside her.

‘It is good when life holds no anti-climax,’ she said.

‘Ay!’ he answered. Of course, he could not understand her meaning.

She strayed into the thick grass, a sturdy white figure that walked with bent head, abstract, but happy.

‘What is she thinking?’ he asked himself. ‘She is sufficient to herself — she doesn’t want me. She has her own private way of communing with things, and is friends with them.’

‘The dew has been very heavy,’ she said, turning, and looking up at him from under her brows, like a smiling witch.

‘I see it has,’ he answered. Then to himself he said: ‘She can’t translate herself into language. She is incommunicable; she can’t render herself to the intelligence. So she is alone and a law unto herself: she only wants me to explore me, like a rock-pool, and to bathe in me. After a while, when I am gone, she will see I was not indispensable....’

The lane led up to the eastern down. As they were emerging, they saw on the left hand an extraordinarily spick and span red bungalow. The low roof of dusky red sloped down towards the coolest green lawn, that was edged and ornamented with scarlet, and yellow, and white flowers brilliant with dew.

A stout man in an alpaca jacket and panama hat was seated on the bare lawn, his back to the sun, reading a newspaper. He tried in vain to avoid the glare of

the sun on his reading. At last he closed the paper and looked angrily at the house — not at anything in particular.

He irritably read a few more lines, then jerked up his head in sudden decision, glared at the open door of the house, and called:

‘Amy! Amy!’

No answer was forthcoming. He flung down the paper and strode off indoors, his mien one of wrathful resolution. His voice was heard calling curtly from the dining-room. There was a jingle of crockery as he bumped the table leg in sitting down.

‘He is in a bad temper,’ laughed Siegmund.

‘Breakfast is late,’ said Helena with contempt.

‘Look!’ said Siegmund.

An elderly lady in black and white striped linen, a young lady in holland, both carrying some wild flowers, hastened towards the garden gate. Their faces were turned anxiously to the house. They were hot with hurrying, and had no breath for words. The girl pressed forward, opened the gate for the lady in striped linen, who hastened over the lawn. Then the daughter followed, and vanished also under the shady veranda.

There was a quick sound of women’s low, apologetic voices, overridden by the resentful abuse of the man.

The lovers moved out of hearing.

‘Imagine that breakfast-table!’ said Siegmund.

‘I feel,’ said Helena, with a keen twang of contempt in her voice, ‘as if a fussy cock and hens had just scuffled across my path.’

‘There are many such roosts,’ said Siegmund pertinently.

Helena’s cold scorn was very disagreeable to him. She talked to him winsomely and very kindly as they crossed the open down to meet the next incurving of the coast, and Siegmund was happy. But the sense of humiliation, which he had got from her the day before, and which had fixed itself, bled him secretly, like a wound. This haemorrhage of self-esteem tortured him to the end.

Helena had rejected him. She gave herself to her fancies only. For some time she had confused Siegmund with her god. Yesterday she had cried to her ideal lover, and found only Siegmund. It was the spear in the side of his tortured self-respect.

‘At least,’ he said, in mortification of himself — ‘at least, someone must recognize a strain of God in me — and who does? I don’t believe in it myself.’

And, moreover, in the intense joy and suffering of his realized passion, the island, with its sea and sky, had fused till, like a brilliant bead, all their beauty ran together out of the common ore, and Siegmund saw it naked, saw the beauty

of everything naked in the shifting magic of this bead. The island would be gone tomorrow: he would look for the beauty and find the dirt. What was he to do?

‘You know, Domine,’ said Helena — it was his old nickname she used — ‘you look quite stern today.’

‘I feel anything but stern,’ he laughed. ‘Weaker than usual, in fact.’

‘Yes, perhaps so, when you talk. Then you are really surprisingly gentle. But when you are silent, I am even afraid of you — you seem so grave.’

He laughed.

‘And shall I not be brave?’ he said. ‘Can’t you smell *Fumum et opes strepitumque Romae*?’ He turned quickly to Helena. ‘I wonder if that’s right,’ he said. ‘It’s years since I did a line of Latin, and I thought it had all gone.’

‘In the first place, what does it mean?’ said Helena calmly, ‘for I can only half translate. I have thrown overboard all my scrap-books of such stuff.’

‘Why,’ said Siegmund, rather abashed, ‘only “the row and the smoke of Rome”. But it is remarkable, Helena’ — here the peculiar look of interest came on his face again — ‘it is really remarkable that I should have said that.’

‘Yes, you look surprised,’ smiled she.

‘But it must be twenty’ — he counted — ‘twenty-two or three years since I learned that, and I forgot it — goodness knows how long ago. Like a drowning man, I have these memories before...’ He broke off, smiling mockingly, to tease her.

‘Before you go back to London,’ said she, in a matter-of-fact, almost ironical tone. She was inscrutable. This morning she could not bear to let any deep emotion come uppermost. She wanted rest. ‘No,’ she said, with calm distinctness, a few moments after, when they were climbing the rise to the cliff’s edge. ‘I can’t say that I smell the smoke of London. The mist-curtain is thick yet. There it is’ — she pointed to the heavy, purple-grey haze that hung like arras on a wall, between the sloping sky and the sea. She thought of yesterday morning’s mist-curtain, thick and blazing gold, so heavy that no wind could sway its fringe.

They lay down in the dry grass, upon the gold bits of bird’s-foot trefoil of the cliff’s edge, and looked out to sea. A warm, drowsy calm drooped over everything.

‘Six hours,’ thought Helena, ‘and we shall have passed the mist-curtain. Already it is thinning. I could break it open with waving my hand. I will not wave my hand.’

She was exhausted by the suffering of the last night, so she refused to allow any emotion to move her this morning, till she was strong. Siegmund was also exhausted; but his thoughts laboured like ants, in spite of himself, striving towards a conclusion.

Helena had rejected him. In his heart he felt that in this love affair also he had been a failure. No matter how he contradicted himself, and said it was absurd to imagine he was a failure as Helena's lover, yet he felt a physical sensation of defeat, a kind of knot in his breast which neither reason, nor dialectics, nor circumstance, not even Helena, could untie. He had failed as lover to Helena.

It was not surprising his marriage with Beatrice should prove disastrous. Rushing into wedlock as he had done, at the ripe age of seventeen, he had known nothing of his woman, nor she of him. When his mind and soul set to develop, as Beatrice could not sympathize with his interests, he naturally inclined away from her, so that now, after twenty years, he was almost a stranger to her. That was not very surprising.

But why should he have failed with Helena?

The bees droned fitfully over the scented grass, aimlessly swinging in the heat. Siegmund watched one gold and amber fellow lazily let go a white clover-head, and boom in a careless curve out to sea, humming softer and softer as he reeled along in the giddy space.

'The little fool!' said Siegmund, watching the black dot swallowed into the light.

No ship sailed the curving sea. The light danced in a whirl upon the ripples. Everything else watched with heavy eyes of heat enhancement the wild spinning of the lights.

'Even if I were free,' he continued to think, 'we should only grow apart, Helena and I. She would leave me. This time I should be the laggard. She is young and vigorous; I am beginning to set.

'Is that why I have failed? I ought to have had her in love sufficiently to keep her these few days. I am not quick. I do not follow her or understand her swiftly enough. And I am always timid of compulsion. I cannot compel anybody to follow me.

'So we are here. I am out of my depth. Like the bee, I was mad with the sight of so much joy, such a blue space, and now I shall find no footing to alight on. I have flown out into life beyond my strength to get back. When can I set my feet on when this is gone?'

The sun grew stronger. Slower and more slowly went the hawks of Siegmund's mind, after the quarry of conclusion. He lay bare-headed, looking out to sea. The sun was burning deeper into his face and head.

'I feel as if it were burning into me,' thought Siegmund abstractedly. 'It is certainly consuming some part of me. Perhaps it is making me ill.' Meanwhile, perversely, he gave his face and his hot black hair to the sun.

Helena lay in what shadow he afforded. The heat put out all her thought-

activity. Presently she said:

‘This heat is terrible, Siegmund. Shall we go down to the water?’

They climbed giddily down the cliff path. Already they were somewhat sun-intoxicated. Siegmund chose the hot sand, where no shade was, on which to lie.

‘Shall we not go under the rocks?’ said Helena.

‘Look!’ he said, ‘the sun is beating on the cliffs. It is hotter, more suffocating, there.’

So they lay down in the glare, Helena watching the foam retreat slowly with a cool splash; Siegmund thinking. The naked body of heat was dreadful.

‘My arms, Siegmund,’ said she. ‘They feel as if they were dipped in fire.’

Siegmund took them, without a word, and hid them under his coat.

‘Are you sure it is not bad for you — your head, Siegmund? Are you sure?’

He laughed stupidly.

‘That is all right,’ he said. He knew that the sun was burning through him, and doing him harm, but he wanted the intoxication.

As he looked wistfully far away over the sea at Helena’s mist-curtain, he said:

‘*I think* we should be able to keep together if’ — he faltered — ‘if only I could have you a little longer. I have never had you ...’

Some sound of failure, some tone telling her it was too late, some ring of despair in his quietness, made Helena cling to him wildly, with a savage little cry as if she were wounded. She clung to him, almost beside herself. She could not lose him, she could not spare him. She would not let him go. Helena was, for the moment, frantic.

He held her safely, saying nothing until she was calmer, when, with his lips on her cheek, he murmured:

‘I should be able, shouldn’t I, Helena?’

‘You are always able!’ she cried. ‘It is I who play with you at hiding.’

‘I have really had you so little,’ he said.

‘Can’t you forget it, Siegmund?’ she cried. ‘Can’t you forget it? It was only a shadow, Siegmund. It was a lie, it was nothing real. Can’t you forget it, dear?’

‘You can’t do without me?’ he asked.

‘If I lose you I am lost,’ answered she with swift decision. She had no knowledge of weeping, yet her tears were wet on his face. He held her safely; her arms were hidden under his coat.

‘I will have no mercy on those shadows the next time they come between us,’ said Helena to herself. ‘They may go back to hell.’

She still clung to him, craving so to have him that he could not be reft away.

Siegmund felt very peaceful. He lay with his arms about her, listening to the backward-creeping tide. All his thoughts, like bees, were flown out to sea and

lost.

‘If I had her more, I should understand her through and through. If we were side by side we should grow together. If we could stay here, I should get stronger and more upright.’

This was the poor heron of quarry the hawks of his mind had struck.

Another hour fell like a foxglove bell from the stalk. There were only two red blossoms left. Then the stem would have set to seed. Helena leaned her head upon the breast of Siegmund, her arms clasping, under his coat, his body, which swelled and sank gently, with the quiet of great power.

‘If,’ thought she, ‘the whole clock of the world could stand still now, and leave us thus, me with the lift and fall of the strong body of Siegmund in my arms....’

But the clock ticked on in the heat, the seconds marked off by the falling of the waves, repeated so lightly, and in such fragile rhythm, that it made silence sweet.

‘If now,’ prayed Siegmund, ‘death would wipe the sweat from me, and it were dark....’

But the waves softly marked the minutes, retreating farther, leaving the bare rocks to bleach and the weed to shrivel.

Gradually, like the shadow on a dial, the knowledge that it was time to rise and go crept upon them. Although they remained silent, each knew that the other felt the same weight of responsibility, the shadow-finger of the sundial travelling over them. The alternative was, not to return, to let the finger travel and be gone. But then ... Helena knew she must not let the time cross her; she must rise before it was too late, and travel before the coming finger. Siegmund hoped she would not get up. He lay in suspense, waiting.

At last she sat up abruptly.

‘It is time, Siegmund,’ she said.

He did not answer, he did not look at her, but lay as she had left him. She wiped her face with her handkerchief, waiting. Then she bent over him. He did not look at her. She saw his forehead was swollen and inflamed with the sun. Very gently she wiped from it the glistening sweat. He closed his eyes, and she wiped his cheeks and his mouth. Still he did not look at her. She bent very close to him, feeling her heart crushed with grief for him.

‘We must go, Siegmund,’ she whispered.

‘All right,’ he said, but still he did not move.

She stood up beside him, shook herself, and tried to get a breath of air. She was dazzled blind by the sunshine.

Siegmund lay in the bright light, with his eyes closed, never moving. His face

was inflamed, but fixed like a mask.

Helena waited, until the terror of the passing of the hour was too strong for her. She lifted his hand, which lay swollen with heat on the sand, and she tried gently to draw him.

‘We shall be too late,’ she said in distress.

He sighed and sat up, looking out over the water.

Helena could not bear to see him look so vacant and expressionless. She put her arm round his neck, and pressed his head against her skirt.

Siegmund knew he was making it unbearable for her. Pulling himself together, he bent his head from the sea, and said:

‘Why, what time is it?’

He took out his watch, holding it in his hand. Helena still held his left hand, and had one arm round his neck.

‘I can’t see the figures,’ he said. ‘Everything is dimmed, as if it were coming dark.’

‘Yes,’ replied Helena, in that reedy, painful tone of hers. ‘My eyes were the same. It is the strong sunlight.’

‘I can’t,’ he repeated, and he was rather surprised — ‘I can’t see the time. Can you?’

She stooped down and looked.

‘It is half past one,’ she said.

Siegmund hated her voice as she spoke. There was still sufficient time to catch the train. He stood up, moved inside his clothing, saying: ‘I feel almost stunned by the heat. I can hardly see, and all my feeling in my body is dulled.’

‘Yes,’ answered Helena, ‘I am afraid it will do you harm.’

‘At any rate,’ he smiled as if sleepily, ‘I have had enough. If it’s too much — what *is* too much?’

They went unevenly over the sand, their eyes sun-dimmed.

‘We are going back — we are going back!’ the heart of Helena seemed to run hot, beating these words.

They climbed the cliff path toilsomely. Standing at the top, on the edge of the grass, they looked down the cliffs at the beach and over the sea. The strand was wide, forsaken by the sea, forlorn with rocks bleaching in the sun, and sand and seaweed breathing off their painful scent upon the heat. The sea crept smaller, farther away; the sky stood still. Siegmund and Helena looked hopelessly out on their beautiful, incandescent world. They looked hopelessly at each other, Siegmund’s mood was gentle and forbearing. He smiled faintly at Helena, then turned, and, lifting his hand to his mouth in a kiss for the beauty he had enjoyed, ‘*Addio!*’ he said.

He turned away, and, looking from Helena landwards, he said, smiling peculiarly:

‘It reminds me of Traviata — an “*Addio*” at every verse-end.’

She smiled with her mouth in acknowledgement of his facetious irony; it jarred on her. He was pricked again by her supercilious reserve. ‘*Addi-i-i-o, Addi-i-i-o!*’ he whistled between his teeth, hissing out the Italian’s passion-notes in a way that made Helena clench her fists.

‘I suppose,’ she said, swallowing, and recovering her voice to check this discord — ‘I suppose we shall have a fairly easy journey — Thursday.’

‘I don’t know,’ said Siegmund.

‘There will not be very many people,’ she insisted.

‘I think,’ he said, in a very quiet voice, ‘you’d better let me go by the South-Western from Portsmouth while you go on by the Brighton.’

‘But why?’ she exclaimed in astonishment.

‘I don’t want to sit looking at you all the way,’ he said.

‘But why should you?’ she exclaimed.

He laughed.

‘Indeed, no!’ she said. ‘We shall go together.’

‘Very well,’ he answered.

They walked on in silence towards the village. As they drew near the little post office, he said:

‘I suppose I may as well wire them that I shall be home tonight.’

‘You haven’t sent them any word?’ she asked.

He laughed. They came to the open door of the little shop. He stood still, not entering. Helena wondered what he was thinking.

‘Shall I?’ he asked, meaning, should he wire to Beatrice. His manner was rather peculiar.

‘Well, I should think so,’ faltered Helena, turning away to look at the postcards in the window. Siegmund entered the shop. It was dark and cumbered with views, cheap china ornaments, and toys. He asked for a telegraph form.

‘My God!’ he said to himself bitterly as he took the pencil. He could not sign the abbreviated name his wife used towards him. He scribbled his surname, as he would have done to a stranger. As he watched the amiable, stout woman counting up his words carefully, pointing with her finger, he felt sick with irony.

‘That’s right,’ she said, picking up the sixpence and taking the form to the instrument. ‘What beautiful weather!’ she continued. ‘It will be making you sorry to leave us.’

‘There goes my warrant,’ thought Siegmund, watching the flimsy bit of paper under the post-mistress’s heavy hand.

‘Yes — it is too bad, isn’t it,’ he replied, bowing and laughing to the woman.

‘It is, sir,’ she answered pleasantly. ‘Good morning.’

He came out of the shop still smiling, and when Helena turned from the postcards to look at him, the lines of laughter remained over his face like a mask. She glanced at his eyes for a sign; his facial expression told her nothing; his eyes were just as inscrutable, which made her falter with dismay.

‘What is he thinking of?’ she asked herself. Her thoughts flashed back. ‘And why did he ask me so peculiarly whether he should wire them at home?’

‘Well,’ said Siegmund, ‘are there any postcards?’

‘None that I care to take,’ she replied. ‘Perhaps you would like one of these?’

She pointed to some faded-looking cards which proved to be imaginary views of Alum Bay done in variegated sand. Siegmund smiled.

‘I wonder if they dribbled the sand on with a fine glass tube,’ he said.

‘Or a brush,’ said Helena.

‘She does not understand,’ said Siegmund to himself. ‘And whatever I do I must not tell her. I should have thought she would understand.’

As he walked home beside her there mingled with his other feelings resentment against her. Almost he hated her.

CHAPTER 20

At first they had a carriage to themselves. They sat opposite each other with averted faces, looking out of the windows and watching the houses, the downs dead asleep in the sun, the embankments of the railway with exhausted hot flowers go slowly past out of their reach. They felt as if they were being dragged away like criminals. Unable to speak or think, they stared out of the windows, Helena struggling in vain to keep back her tears, Siegmund labouring to breathe normally.

At Yarmouth the door was snatched open, and there was a confusion of shouting and running; a swarm of humanity, clamouring, attached itself at the carriage doorway, which was immediately blocked by a stout man who heaved a leather bag in front of him as he cried in German that here was room for all. Faces innumerable — hot, blue-eyed faces — strained to look over his shoulders at the shocked girl and the amazed Siegmund.

There entered eight Germans into the second-class compartment, five men and three ladies. When at last the luggage was stowed away they sank into the seats. The last man on either side to be seated lowered himself carefully, like a wedge, between his two neighbours. Siegmund watched the stout man, the one who had led the charge, settling himself between his large lady and the small Helena. The latter crushed herself against the side of the carriage. The German's hips came down tight against her. She strove to lessen herself against the window, to escape the pressure of his flesh, whose heat was transmitted to her. The man squeezed in the opposite direction.

'I am afraid I press you,' he said, smiling in his gentle, chivalric German fashion. Helena glanced swiftly at him. She liked his grey eyes, she liked the agreeable intonation, and the pleasant sound of his words.

'Oh no,' she answered. 'You do not crush me.'

Almost before she had finished the words she turned away to the window. The man seemed to hesitate a moment, as if recovering himself from a slight rebuff, before he could address his lady with the good-humoured remark in German: 'Well, and have we not managed it very nicely, eh?'

The whole party began to talk in German with great animation. They told each other of the quaint ways of this or the other; they joked loudly over 'Billy' — this being a nickname discovered for the German Emperor — and what he would be saying of the Czar's trip; they questioned each other, and answered

each other concerning the places they were going to see, with great interest, displaying admirable knowledge. They were pleased with everything; they extolled things English.

Helena's stout neighbour, who, it seemed, was from Dresden, began to tell anecdotes. He was a *raconteur* of the naïve type: he talked with face, hands, with his whole body. Now and again he would give little spurts in his seat. After one of these he must have become aware of Helena — who felt as if she were enveloped by a soft stove — struggling to escape his compression. He stopped short, lifted his hat, and smiling beseechingly, said in his persuasive way:

'I am sorry. I am sorry. I compress you!' He glanced round in perplexity, seeking some escape or remedy. Finding none, he turned to her again, after having squeezed hard against his lady to free Helena, and said:

'Forgive me, I am sorry.'

'You are forgiven,' replied Helena, suddenly smiling into his face with her rare winsomeness. The whole party, attentive, relaxed into a smile at this. The good humour was complete.

'Thank you,' said the German gratefully.

Helena turned away. The talk began again like the popping of corn; the *raconteur* resumed his anecdote. Everybody was waiting to laugh. Helena rapidly wearied of trying to follow the tale. Siegmund had made no attempt. He had watched, with the others, the German's apologies, and the sight of his lover's face had moved him more than he could tell.

She had a peculiar, childish wistfulness at times, and with this an intangible aloofness that pierced his heart. It seemed to him he should never know her. There was a remoteness about her, an estrangement between her and all natural daily things, as if she were of an unknown race that never can tell its own story. This feeling always moved Siegmund's pity to its deepest, leaving him poignantly helpless. This same foreignness, revealed in other ways, sometimes made him hate her. It was as if she would sacrifice him rather than renounce her foreign birth. There was something in her he could never understand, so that never, never could he say he was master of her as she was of him the mistress.

As she smiled and turned away from the German, mute, uncomplaining, like a child wise in sorrow beyond its years, Siegmund's resentment against her suddenly took fire, and blazed him with sheer pain of pity. She was very small. Her quiet ways, and sometimes her impetuous clinging made her seem small; for she was very strong. But Siegmund saw her now, small, quiet, uncomplaining, living for him who sat and looked at her. But what would become of her when he had left her, when she was alone, little foreigner as she was, in this world, which apologizes when it has done the hurt, too blind to see beforehand? Helena

would be left behind; death was no way for her. She could not escape thus with him from this house of strangers which she called 'life'. She had to go on alone, like a foreigner who cannot learn the strange language.

'What will she do?' Siegmund asked himself, 'when her loneliness comes upon her like a horror, and she has no one to go to. She will come to the memory of me for a while, and that will take her over till her strength is established. But what then?'

Siegmund could find no answer. He tried to imagine her life. It would go on, after his death, just in the same way, for a while, and then? He had not the faintest knowledge of how she would develop. What would she do when she was thirty-eight, and as old as himself? He could not conceive. Yet she would not die, of that he was certain.

Siegmund suddenly realized that he knew nothing of her life, her real inner life. She was a book written in characters unintelligible to him and to everybody. He was tortured with the problem of her till it became acute, and he felt as if his heart would burst inside him. As a boy he had experienced the same sort of feeling after wrestling for an hour with a problem in Euclid, for he was capable of great concentration.

He felt Helena looking at him. Turning, he found her steady, unswerving eyes fixed on him, so that he shrank confused from them. She smiled: by an instinctive movement she made him know that she wanted him to hold her hand. He leaned forward and put his hand over hers. She had peculiar hands, small, with a strange, delightful silkiness. Often they were cool or cold; generally they lay unmoved within his clasp, but then they were instinct with life, not inert. Sometimes he would feel a peculiar jerking in his pulse, very much like electricity, when he held her hand. Occasionally it was almost painful, and felt as if a little virtue were passing out of his blood. But that he dismissed as nonsense.

The Germans were still rattling away, perspiring freely, wiping their faces with their handkerchiefs as they laughed, moving inside their clothing, which was sticking to their sides. Siegmund had not noticed them for some time, he was so much absorbed. But Helena, though she sympathized with her fellow-passengers, was tormented almost beyond endurance by the noise, the heat of her neighbour's body, the atmosphere of the crowded carriage, and her own emotion. The only thing that could relieve her was the hand of Siegmund soothing her in its hold.

She looked at him with the same steadiness which made her eyes feel heavy upon him, and made him shrink. She wanted his strength of nerve to support her, and he submitted at once, his one aim being to give her out of himself whatever she wanted.

CHAPTER 21

The tall white yachts in a throng were lounging off the roads of Ryde. It was near the regatta time, so these proud creatures had flown loftily together, and now flitted hither and thither among themselves, like a concourse of tall women, footing the waves with superb touch. To Siegmund they were very beautiful, but removed from him, as dancers crossing the window-lights are removed from the man who looks up from the street. He saw the Solent and the world of glamour flying gay as snow outside, where inside was only Siegmund, tired, dispirited, without any joy.

He and Helena had climbed among coils of rope on to the prow of their steamer, so they could catch a little spray of speed on their faces to stimulate them. The sea was very bright and crowded. White sails leaned slightly and filed along the roads; two yachts with sails of amber floated, it seemed, without motion, amid the eclipsed blue of the day; small boats with red and yellow flags fluttered quickly, trailing the sea with colour; a pleasure steamer coming from Cowes swung her soft stout way among the fleeting ships; high in the background were men-of-war, a long line, each one threading tiny triangles of flags through a sky dim with distance.

‘It is all very glad,’ said Siegmund to himself, ‘but it seems to be fanciful.’

He was out of it. Already he felt detached from life. He belonged to his destination. It is always so: we have no share in the beauty that lies between us and our goal.

Helena watched with poignant sorrow all the agitation of colour on the blue afternoon.

‘We must leave it; we must pass out of it,’ she lamented, over and over again. Each new charm she caught eagerly.

‘I like the steady purpose of that brown-sailed tramp,’ she said to herself, watching a laden coaster making for Portsmouth.

They were still among the small shipping of Ryde. Siegmund and Helena, as they looked out, became aware of a small motor-launch heading across their course towards a yacht whose tall masts were drawn clean on the sky. The eager launch, its nose up as if to breathe, was racing over the swell like a coursing dog. A lady, in white, and a lad with dark head and white jersey were leaning in the bows; a gentleman was bending over some machinery in the middle of the boat, while the sailor in the low stern was also stooping forward attending to

something. The steamer was sweeping onwards, huge above the water; the dog of a boat was coursing straight across her track. The lady saw the danger first. Stretching forward, she seized the arm of the lad and held him firm, making no sound, but watching the forward menace of the looming steamer.

‘Look!’ cried Helena, catching hold of Siegmund. He was already watching. Suddenly the steamer bell clanged. The gentleman looked up, with startled, sunburned face; then he leaped to the stern. The launch veered. It and the steamer closed together like a pair of scissors. The lady, still holding the boy, looked up with an expressionless face at the high sweeping chisel of the steamer’s bows; the husband stood rigid, staring ahead. No sound was to be heard save the rustling of water under the bows. The scissors closed, the launch skelped forward like a dog from in front of the traffic. It escaped by a yard or two. Then, like a dog, it seemed to look round. The gentleman in the stern glanced back quickly. He was a handsome, dark-haired man with dark eyes. His face was as if carved out of oak, set and grey-brown. Then he looked to the steering of his boat. No one had uttered a sound. From the tiny boat coursing low on the water, not a sound, only tense waiting. The launch raced out of danger towards the yacht. The gentleman, with a brief gesture, put his man in charge again, whilst he himself went forward to the lady. He was a handsome man, very proud in his movements; and she, in her bearing, was prouder still. She received him almost with indifference.

Helena turned to Siegmund. He took both her hands and pressed them, whilst she looked at him with eyes blind with emotion. She was white to the lips, and heaving like the buoy in the wake of the steamer. The noise of life had suddenly been hushed, and each heart had heard for a moment the noiselessness of death. How everyone was white and gasping! They strove, on every hand, to fill the day with noise and the colour of life again.

‘By Jove, that was a near thing!’

‘Ah, that has made me feel bad!’ said a woman.

‘A French yacht,’ said somebody.

Helena was waiting for the voice of Siegmund. But he did not know what to say. Confused, he repeated:

‘That was a close shave.’

Helena clung to him, searching his face. She felt his difference from herself. There was something in his experience that made him different, quiet, with a peculiar expression as if he were pained.

‘Ah, dear Lord!’ he was saying to himself. ‘How bright and whole the day is for them! If God had suddenly put His hand over the sun, and swallowed us up in a shadow, they could not have been more startled. That man, with his fine,

white-flannelled limbs and his dark head, has no suspicion of the shadow that supports it all. Between the blueness of the sea and the sky he passes easy as a gull, close to the fine white seamew of his mate, amid red flowers of flags, and soft birds of ships, and slow-moving monsters of steamboats.

‘For me the day is transparent and shrivelling. I can see the darkness through its petals. But for him it is a fresh bell-flower, in which he fumbles with delights like a bee.

‘For me, quivering in the interspaces of the atmosphere, is the darkness the same that fills in my soul. I can see death urging itself into life, the shadow supporting the substance. For my life is burning an invisible flame. The glare of the light of myself, as I burn on the fuel of death, is not enough to hide from me the source and the issue. For what is a life but a flame that bursts off the surface of darkness, and tapers into the darkness again? But the death that issues differs from the death that was the source. At least, I shall enrich death with a potent shadow, if I do not enrich life.’

‘Wasn’t that woman fine!’ said Helena.

‘So perfectly still,’ he answered.

‘The child realized nothing,’ she said.

Siegmund laughed, then leaned forward impulsively to her.

‘I am always so sorry,’ he said, ‘that the human race is urged inevitably into a deeper and deeper realization of life.’

She looked at him, wondering what provoked such a remark.

‘I guess,’ she said slowly, after a while, ‘that the man, the sailor, will have a bad time. He was abominably careless.’

‘He was careful of something else just then,’ said Siegmund, who hated to hear her speak in cold condemnation. ‘He was attending to the machinery or something.’

‘That was scarcely his first business,’ said she, rather sarcastic.

Siegmund looked at her. She seemed very hard in judgement — very blind. Sometimes his soul surged against her in hatred.

‘Do you think the man *wanted* to drown the boat?’ he asked.

‘He nearly succeeded,’ she replied.

There was antagonism between them. Siegmund recognized in Helena the world sitting in judgement, and he hated it. ‘But, after all,’ he thought, I suppose it is the only way to get along, to judge the event and not the person. I have a disease of sympathy, a vice of exoneration.’

Nevertheless, he did not love Helena as a judge. He thought rather of the woman in the boat. She was evidently one who watched the sources of life, saw it great and impersonal.

‘Would the woman cry, or hug and kiss the boy when she got on board?’ he asked.

‘I rather think not. Why?’ she replied.

‘I hope she didn’t,’ he said.

Helena sat watching the water spurt back from the bows. She was very much in love with Siegmund. He was suggestive; he stimulated her. But to her mind he had not her own dark eyes of hesitation; he was swift and proud as the wind. She never realized his helplessness.

Siegmund was gathering strength from the thought of that other woman’s courage. If she had so much restraint as not to cry out, or alarm the boy, if she had so much grace not to complain to her husband, surely he himself might refrain from revealing his own fear of Helena, and from lamenting his hard fate.

They sailed on past the chequered round towers. The sea opened, and they looked out to eastward into the sea-space. Siegmund wanted to flee. He yearned to escape down the open ways before him. Yet he knew he would be carried on to London. He watched the sea-ways closing up. The shore came round. The high old houses stood flat on the right hand. The shore swept round in a sickle, reaping them into the harbour. There the old *Victory*, gay with myriad pointed pennons, was harvested, saved for a trophy.

‘It is a dreadful thing,’ thought Siegmund, ‘to remain as a trophy when there is nothing more to do.’ He watched the landing-stages swooping nearer. There were the trains drawn up in readiness. At the other end of the train was London.

He could scarcely bear to have Helena before him for another two hours. The suspense of that protracted farewell, while he sat opposite her in the beating train, would cost too much. He longed to be released from her.

They had got their luggage, and were standing at the foot of the ladder, in the heat of the engines and the smell of hot oil, waiting for the crowd to pass on, so that they might ascend and step off the ship on to the mainland.

‘Won’t you let me go by the South-Western, and you by the Brighton?’ asked Siegmund, hesitating, repeating the morning’s question.

Helena looked at him, knitting her brows with misgiving and perplexity.

‘No,’ she replied. ‘Let us go together.’

Siegmund followed her up the iron ladder to the quay.

There was no great crowd on the train. They easily found a second-class compartment without occupants. He swung the luggage on the rack and sat down, facing Helena.

‘Now,’ said he to himself, ‘I wish I were alone.’

He wanted to think and prepare himself.

Helena, who was thinking actively, leaned forward to him to say:

‘Shall I not go down to Cornwall?’

By her soothing willingness to do anything for him, Siegmund knew that she was dogging him closely. He could not bear to have his anxiety protracted.

‘But you have promised Louisa, have you not?’ he replied.

‘Oh, well!’ she said, in the peculiar slighting tone she had when she wished to convey the unimportance of affairs not touching him.

‘Then you must go,’ he said.

‘But,’ she began, with harsh petulance, ‘I do not want to go down to Cornwall with *Louisa and Olive*’ — she accentuated the two names — ‘after *this*,’ she added.

‘Then Louisa will have no holiday — and you have promised,’ he said gravely.

Helena looked at him. She saw he had decided that she should go.

‘Is my promise so *very* important?’ she asked. She glanced angrily at the three ladies who were hesitating in the doorway. Nevertheless, the ladies entered, and seated themselves at the opposite end of the carriage. Siegmund did not know whether he were displeased or relieved by their intrusion. If they had stayed out, he might have held Helena in his arms for still another hour. As it was, she could not harass him with words. He tried not to look at her, but to think.

The train at last moved out of the station. As it passed through Portsmouth, Siegmund remembered his coming down, on the Sunday. It seemed an indefinite age ago. He was thankful that he sat on the side of the carriage opposite from the one he had occupied five days before. The afternoon of the flawless sky was ripening into evening. The chimneys and the sides of the houses of Portsmouth took on that radiant appearance which transfigures the end of day in town. A rich bloom of light appears on the surfaces of brick and stone.

‘It will go on,’ thought Siegmund, ‘being gay of an evening, for ever. And I shall miss it all!’

But as soon as the train moved into the gloom of the Town station, he began again:

‘Beatrice will be proud, and silent as steel when I get home. She will say nothing, thank God — nor shall I. That will expedite matters: there will be no interruptions....

‘But we cannot continue together after this. Why should I discuss reasons for and against? We cannot. She goes to a cottage in the country. Already I have spoken of it to her. I allow her all I can of my money, and on the rest I manage for myself in lodgings in London. Very good.

‘But when I am comparatively free I cannot live alone. I shall want Helena; I shall remember the children. If I have the one, I shall be damned by the thought

of the other. This bruise on my mind will never get better. Helena says she would never come to me; but she would, out of pity for me. I know she would.

‘But then, what then? Beatrice and the children in the country, and me not looking after the children. Beatrice is thriftless. She would be in endless difficulty. It would be a degradation to me. She would keep a red sore inflamed against me; I should be a shameful thing in her mouth. Besides, there would go all her strength. She would not make any efforts. “He has brought it on us,” she would say; “let him see what the result is.” And things would go from bad to worse with them. It would be a gangrene of shame.

‘And Helena — I should have nothing but mortification. When she was asleep I could not look at her. She is such a strange, incongruous creature. But I should be responsible for her. She believes in me as if I had the power of God. What should I think of myself?’

Siegmund leaned with his head against the window, watching the country whirl past, but seeing nothing. He thought imaginatively, and his imagination destroyed him. He pictured Beatrice in the country. He sketched the morning — breakfast haphazard at a late hour; the elder children rushing off without food, miserable and untidy, the youngest bewildered under her swift, indifferent preparations for school. He thought of Beatrice in the evening, worried and irritable, her bills unpaid, the work undone, declaiming lamentably against the cruelty of her husband, who had abandoned her to such a burden of care while he took his pleasure elsewhere.

This line exhausted or intolerable, Siegmund switched off to the consideration of his own life in town. He would go to America; the agreement was signed with the theatre manager. But America would be only a brief shutting of the eyes and closing of the mouth. He would wait for the home-coming to Helena, and she would wait for him. It was inevitable; then would begin — what? He would never have enough money to keep Helena, even if he managed to keep himself. Their meetings would then be occasional and clandestine. Ah, it was intolerable!

‘If I were rich,’ said Siegmund, ‘all would be plain. I would give each of my children enough, and Beatrice, and we would go away; but I am nearly forty; I have no genius; I shall never be rich,’ Round and round went his thoughts like oxen over a threshing floor, treading out the grain. Gradually the chaff flew away; gradually the corn of conviction gathered small and hard upon the floor.

As he sat thinking, Helena leaned across to him and laid her hand on his knee.

‘If I have made things more difficult,’ she said, her voice harsh with pain, ‘you will forgive me.’

He started. This was one of the cruel cuts of pain that love gives, filling the eyes with blood. Siegmund stiffened himself; slowly he smiled, as he looked at

her childish, plaintive lips, and her large eyes haunted with pain.

‘Forgive you?’ he repeated. ‘Forgive you for five days of perfect happiness; the only real happiness I have ever known!’

Helena tightened her fingers on his knee. She felt herself stinging with painful joy; but one of the ladies was looking her curiously. She leaned back in her place, and turned to watch at the shocks of corn strike swiftly, in long rows, across her vision.

Siegmund, also quivering, turned his face to the window, where the rotation of the wide sea-flat helped the movement of his thought. Helena had interrupted him. She had bewildered his thoughts from their hawking, so that they struck here and there, wildly, among small, pitiful prey that was useless, conclusions which only hindered the bringing home of the final convictions.

‘What will she do?’ cried Siegmund, ‘What will she do when I am gone? What will become of her? Already she has no aim in life; then she will have no object. Is it any good my going if I leave her behind? What an inextricable knot this is! But what will she do?’

It was a question she had aroused before, a question which he could never answer; indeed, it was not for him to answer.

They wound through the pass of the South Downs. As Siegmund, looking backward, saw the northern slope of the downs swooping smoothly, in a great, broad bosom of sward, down to the body of the land, he warmed with sudden love for the earth; there the great downs were, naked like a breast, leaning kindly to him. The earth is always kind; it loves us, and would foster us like a nurse. The downs were big and tender and simple. Siegmund looked at the farm, folded in a hollow, and he wondered what fortunate folk were there, nourished and quiet, hearing the vague roar of the train that was carrying him home.

Up towards Arundel the cornfields of red wheat were heavy with gold. It was evening, when the green of the trees went out, leaving dark shapes proud upon the sky; but the red wheat was forged in the sunset, hot and magnificent. Siegmund almost gloated as he smelled the ripe corn, and opened his eyes to its powerful radiation. For a moment he forgot everything, amid the forging of red fields of gold in the smithy of the sunset. Like sparks, poppies blew along the railway-banks, a crimson train. Siegmund waited, through the meadows, for the next wheat-field. It came like the lifting of yellow-hot metal out of the gloom of darkened grass-lands.

Helena was reassured by the glamour of evening over ripe Sussex. She breathed the land now and then, while she watched the sky. The sunset was stately. The blue-eyed day, with great limbs, having fought its victory and won, now mounted triumphant on its pyre, and with white arms uplifted took the

flames, which leaped like blood about its feet. The day died nobly, so she thought.

One gold cloud, as an encouragement tossed to her, followed the train.

‘Surely that cloud is for us,’ said she, as she watched it anxiously. Dark trees brushed between it and her, while she waited in suspense. It came, unswerving, from behind the trees.

‘I am sure it is for us,’ she repeated. A gladness came into her eyes. Still the cloud followed the train. She leaned forward to Siegmund and pointed out the cloud to him. She was very eager to give him a little of her faith.

‘It has come with us quite a long way. Doesn’t it seem to you to be travelling with us? It is the golden hand; it is the good omen.’

She then proceeded to tell him the legend from ‘Aylwin’.

Siegmund listened, and smiled. The sunset was handsome on his face.

Helena was almost happy.

‘I am right,’ said he to himself. I am right in my conclusions, and Helena will manage by herself afterwards. I am right; there is the hand to confirm it.’

The heavy train settled down to an easy, unbroken stroke, swinging like a greyhound over the level northwards. All the time Siegmund was mechanically thinking the well-known movement from the Valkyrie Ride, his whole self beating to the rhythm. It seemed to him there was a certain grandeur in this flight, but it hurt him with its heavy insistence of catastrophe. He was afraid; he had to summon his courage to sit quiet. For a time he was reassured; he believed he was going on towards the right end. He hunted through the country and the sky, asking of everything, ‘Am I right? Am I right?’ He did not mind what happened to him, so long as he felt it was right. What he meant by ‘right’ he did not trouble to think, but the question remained. For a time he had been reassured; then a dullness came over him, when his thoughts were stupid, and he merely submitted to the rhythm of the train, which stamped him deeper and deeper with a brand of catastrophe.

The sun had gone down. Over the west was a gush of brightness as the fountain of light bubbled lower. The stars, like specks of froth from the foaming of the day, clung to the blue ceiling. Like spiders they hung overhead, while the hosts of the gold atmosphere poured out of the hive by the western low door. Soon the hive was empty, a hollow dome of purple, with here and there on the floor a bright brushing of wings — a village; then, overhead, the luminous star-spider began to run.

‘Ah, well!’ thought Siegmund — he was tired — ‘if one bee dies in a swarm, what is it, so long as the hive is all right? Apart from the gold light, and the hum and the colour of day, what was I? Nothing! Apart from these rushings out of the

hive, along with swarm, into the dark meadows of night, gathering God knows what, I was a pebble. Well, the day will swarm in golden again, with colour on the wings of every bee, and humming in each activity. The gold and the colour and sweet smell and the sound of life, they exist, even if there is no bee; it only happens we see the iridescence on the wings of a bee. It exists whether or not, bee or no bee. Since the iridescence and the humming of life *are* always, and since it was they who made me, then I am not lost. At least, I do not care. If the spark goes out, the essence of the fire is there in the darkness. What does it matter? Besides, I *have* burned bright; I have laid up a fine cell of honey somewhere — I wonder where? We can never point to it; but it *is* so — what does it matter, then!’

They had entered the north downs, and were running through Dorking towards Leatherhead. Box Hill stood dark in the dusky sweetness of the night. Helena remembered that here she and Siegmund had come for their first walk together. She would like to come again. Presently she saw the quick stilettoes of stars on the small, baffled river; they ran between high embankments. Siegmund recollected that these were covered with roses of Sharon — the large golden St John’s wort of finest silk. He looked, and could just distinguish the full-blown, delicate flowers, ignored by the stars. At last he had something to say to Helena:

‘Do you remember,’ he asked, ‘the roses of Sharon all along here?’

‘I do,’ replied Helena, glad he spoke so brightly. ‘Weren’t they pretty?’

After a few moments of watching the bank, she said:

‘Do you know, I have never gathered one? I think I should like to; I should like to feel them, and they should have an orangy smell.’

He smiled, without answering.

She glanced up at him, smiling brightly.

‘But shall we come down here in the morning, and find some?’ she asked. She put the question timidly. ‘Would you care to?’ she added.

Siegmund darkened and frowned. Here was the pain revived again.

‘No,’ he said gently; ‘I think we had better not.’ Almost for the first time he did not make apologetic explanation.

Helena turned to the window, and remained, looking out at the spinning of the lights of the towns without speaking, until they were near Sutton. Then she rose and pinned on her hat, gathering her gloves and her basket. She was, in spite of herself, slightly angry. Being quite ready to leave the train, she sat down to wait for the station. Siegmund was aware that she was displeased, and again, for the first time, he said to himself, ‘Ah, well, it must be so.’

She looked at him. He was sad, therefore she softened instantly.

‘At least,’ she said doubtfully, ‘I shall see you at the station.’

‘At Waterloo?’ he asked.

‘No, at Wimbledon,’ she replied, in her metallic tone.

‘But — ’ he began.

‘It will be the best way for us,’ she interrupted, in the calm tone of conviction.

‘Much better than crossing London from Victoria to Waterloo.’

‘Very well,’ he replied.

He looked up a train for her in his little time-table.

‘You will get in Wimbledon 10.5 — leave 10.40 — leave Waterloo 11.30,’ he said.

‘Very good,’ she answered.

The brakes were grinding. They waited in a burning suspense for the train to stop.

‘If only she will soon go!’ thought Siegmund. It was an intolerable minute. She rose; everything was a red blur. She stood before him, pressing his hand; then he rose to give her the bag. As he leaned upon the window-frame and she stood below on the platform, looking up at him, he could scarcely breathe. ‘How long will it be?’ he said to himself, looking at the open carriage doors. He hated intensely the lady who could not get a porter to remove her luggage; he could have killed her; he could have killed the dilatory guard. At last the doors slammed and the whistle went. The train started imperceptibly into motion.

‘Now I lose her,’ said Siegmund.

She looked up at him; her face was white and dismal.

‘Good-bye, then!’ she said, and she turned away.

Siegmund went back to his seat. He was relieved, but he trembled with sickness. We are all glad when intense moments are done with; but why did she fling round in that manner, stopping the keen note short; what would she do?

CHAPTER 22

Siegmund went up to Victoria. He was in no hurry to get down to Wimbledon. London was warm and exhausted after the hot day, but this peculiar lukewarmness was not unpleasant to him. He chose to walk from Victoria to Waterloo.

The streets were like polished gun-metal glistened over with gold. The taxicabs, the wild cats of the town, swept over the gleaming floor swiftly, soon lessening in the distance, as if scornful of the other clumsy-footed traffic. He heard the merry click-clock of the swinging hansoms, then the excited whirring of the motor-buses as they charged full-tilt heavily down the road, their hearts, as it seemed, beating with trepidation; they drew up with a sigh of relief by the kerb, and stood there panting — great, nervous, clumsy things. Siegmund was always amused by the headlong, floundering career of the buses. He was pleased with this scampering of the traffic; anything for distraction. He was glad Helena was not with him, for the streets would have irritated her with their coarse noise. She would stand for a long time to watch the rabbits pop and hobble along on the common at night; but the tearing along of the taxis and the charge of a great motor-bus was painful to her. ‘Discords,’ she said, ‘after the trees and sea.’ She liked the glistening of the streets; it seemed a fine alloy of gold laid down for pavement, such pavement as drew near to the pure gold streets of Heaven; but this noise could not be endured near any wonderland.

Siegmund did not mind it; it drummed out his own thoughts. He watched the gleaming magic of the road, raced over with shadows, project itself far before him into the night. He watched the people. Soldiers, belted with scarlet, went jauntily on in front. There was a peculiar charm in their movement. There was a soft vividness of life in their carriage; it reminded Siegmund of the soft swaying and lapping of a poised candle-flame. The women went blithely alongside. Occasionally, in passing, one glanced at him; then, in spite of himself, he smiled; he knew not why. The women glanced at him with approval, for he was ruddy; besides, he had that carelessness and abstraction of despair. The eyes of the women said, ‘You are comely, you are lovable,’ and Siegmund smiled.

When the street opened, at Westminster, he noticed the city sky, a lovely deep purple, and the lamps in the square steaming out a vapour of grey-gold light.

‘It is a wonderful night,’ he said to himself. ‘There are not two such in a year.’

He went forward to the Embankment, with a feeling of elation in his heart.

This purple and gold-grey world, with the fluttering flame-warmth of soldiers and the quick brightness of women, like lights that clip sharply in a draught, was a revelation to him.

As he leaned upon the Embankment parapet the wonder did not fade, but rather increased. The trams, one after another, floated loftily over the bridge. They went like great burning bees in an endless file into a hive, past those which were drifting dreamily out, while below, on the black, distorted water, golden serpents flashed and twisted to and fro.

‘Ah!’ said Siegmund to himself; ‘it is far too wonderful for me. Here, as well as by the sea, the night is gorgeous and uncouth. Whatever happens, the world is wonderful.’

So he went on amid all the vast miracle of movement in the city night, the swirling of water to the sea, the gradual sweep of the stars, the floating of many lofty, luminous cars through the bridged darkness, like an army of angels filing past on one of God’s campaigns, the purring haste of the taxis, the slightly dancing shadows of people. Siegmund went on slowly, like a slow bullet winging into the heart of life. He did not lose this sense of wonder, not in the train, nor as he walked home in the moonless dark.

When he closed the door behind him and hung up his hat he frowned. He did not think definitely of anything, but his frown meant to him: ‘Now for the beginning of Hell!’

He went towards the dining-room, where the light was, and the uneasy murmur. The clock, with its deprecating, suave chime, was striking ten, Siegmund opened the door of the room. Beatrice was sewing, and did not raise her head. Frank, a tall, thin lad of eighteen, was bent over a book. He did not look up. Vera had her fingers thrust in among her hair, and continued to read the magazine that lay on the table before her. Siegmund looked at them all. They gave no sign to show they were aware of his entry; there was only that unnatural tenseness of people who cover their agitation. He glanced round to see where he should go. His wicker arm-chair remained by the fireplace; his slippers were standing under the sideboard, as he had left them. Siegmund sat down in the creaking chair; he began to feel sick and tired.

‘I suppose the children are in bed,’ he said.

His wife sewed on as if she had not heard him; his daughter noisily turned over a leaf and continued to read, as if she were pleasantly interested and had known no interruption. Siegmund waited, with his slipper dangling from his hand, looking from one to another.

‘They’ve been gone two hours,’ said Frank at last, still without raising his eyes from his book. His tone was contemptuous, his voice was jarring, not yet

having developed a man's fullness.

Siegmund put on his slipper, and began to unlace the other boot. The slurring of the lace through the holes and the snacking of the tag seemed unnecessarily loud. It annoyed his wife. She took a breath to speak, then refrained, feeling suddenly her daughter's scornful restraint upon her. Siegmund rested his arms upon his knees, and sat leaning forward, looking into the barren fireplace, which was littered with paper, and orange-peel, and a banana-skin.

'Do you want any supper?' asked Beatrice, and the sudden harshness of her voice startled him into looking at her.

She had her face averted, refusing to see him. Siegmund's heart went down with weariness and despair at the sight of her.

'Aren't you having any?' he asked.

The table was not laid. Beatrice's work-basket, a little wicker fruit-skep, overflowed scissors, and pins, and scraps of holland, and reels of cotton on the green serge cloth. Vera leaned both her elbows on the table.

Instead of replying to him, Beatrice went to the sideboard. She took out a table-cloth, pushing her sewing litter aside, and spread the cloth over one end of the table. Vera gave her magazine a little knock with her hand.

'Have you read this tale of a French convent school in here, Mother?' she asked.

'In where?'

In this month's *Nash's*.'

'No,' replied Beatrice. 'What time have I for reading, much less for anything else?'

'You should think more of yourself, and a little less of other people, then,' said Vera, with a sneer at the 'other people'. She rose. 'Let me do this. You sit down; you are tired, Mother,' she said.

Her mother, without replying, went out to the kitchen. Vera followed her. Frank, left alone with his father, moved uneasily, and bent his thin shoulders lower over his book. Siegmund remained with his arms on his knees, looking into the grate. From the kitchen came the chinking of crockery, and soon the smell of coffee. All the time Vera was heard chatting with affected brightness to her mother, addressing her in fond tones, using all her wits to recall bright little incidents to retail to her. Beatrice answered rarely, and then with utmost brevity.

Presently Vera came in with the tray. She put down a cup of coffee, a plate with boiled ham, pink and thin, such as is bought from a grocer, and some bread-and-butter. Then she sat down, noisily turning over the leaves of her magazine. Frank glanced at the table; it was laid solely for his father. He looked at the bread and the meat, but restrained himself, and went on reading, or pretended to

do so. Beatrice came in with the small cruet; it was conspicuously bright.

Everything was correct: knife and fork, spoon, cruet, all perfectly clean, the crockery fine, the bread and butter thin — in fact, it was just as it would have been for a perfect stranger. This scrupulous neatness, in a household so slovenly and easy-going, where it was an established tradition that something should be forgotten or wrong, impressed Siegmund. Beatrice put the serving knife and fork by the little dish of ham, saw that all was proper, then went and sat down. Her face showed no emotion; it was calm and proud. She began to sew.

‘What do you say, Mother?’ said Vera, as if resuming a conversation. ‘Shall it be Hampton Court or Richmond on Sunday?’

‘I say, as I said before,’ replied Beatrice: ‘I cannot afford to go out.’

‘But you must begin, my dear, and Sunday shall see the beginning. *Dîtes donc!*’

‘There are other things to think of,’ said Beatrice.

‘Now, *maman, nous avons changé tout cela!* We are going out — a jolly little razzle!’ Vera, who was rather handsome, lifted up her face and smiled at her mother gaily.

‘I am afraid there will be no *razzle*’ — Beatrice accented the word, smiling slightly — ‘for me. You are slangy, Vera.’

‘*Un doux argot, ma mère.* You look tired.’

Beatrice glanced at the clock.

‘I will go to bed when I have cleared the table,’ she said.

Siegmund winced. He was still sitting with his head bent down, looking in the grate. Vera went on to say something more. Presently Frank looked up at the table, and remarked in his grating voice:

‘There’s your supper, Father.’

The women stopped and looked round at this. Siegmund bent his head lower. Vera resumed her talk. It died out, and there was silence.

Siegmund was hungry.

‘Oh, good Lord, good Lord! bread of humiliation tonight!’ he said to himself before he could muster courage to rise and go to the table. He seemed to be shrinking inwards. The women glanced swiftly at him and away from him as his chair creaked and he got up. Frank was watching from under his eyebrows.

Siegmund went through the ordeal of eating and drinking in presence of his family. If he had not been hungry, he could not have done it, despite the fact that he was content to receive humiliation this night. He swallowed the coffee with effort. When he had finished he sat irresolute for some time; then he arose and went to the door.

‘Good night!’ he said.

Nobody made any reply. Frank merely stirred in his chair. Siegmund shut the door and went.

There was absolute silence in the room till they heard him turn on the tap in the bathroom; then Beatrice began to breathe spasmodically, catching her breath as if she would sob. But she restrained herself. The faces of the two children set hard with hate.

‘He is not worth the flicking of your little finger, Mother,’ said Vera.

Beatrice moved about with pitiful, groping hands, collecting her sewing and her cottons.

‘At any rate, he’s come back red enough,’ said Frank, in his grating tone of contempt. ‘He’s like boiled salmon.’

Beatrice did not answer anything. Frank rose, and stood with his back to the grate, in his father’s characteristic attitude.

‘He *would* come slinking back in a funk!’ he said, with a young man’s sneer.

Stretching forward, he put a piece of ham between two pieces of bread, and began to eat the sandwich in large bites. Vera came to the table at this, and began to make herself a more dainty sandwich. Frank watched her with jealous eyes.

‘There is a little more ham, if you’d like it,’ said Beatrice to him. ‘I kept you some.’

‘All right, Ma,’ he replied. Fetch it in.’

Beatrice went out to the kitchen.

‘And bring the bread and butter, too, will you?’ called Vera after her.

‘The damned coward! Ain’t he a rotten funk?’ said Frank, *sotto voce*, while his mother was out of the room.

Vera did not reply, but she seemed tacitly to agree.

They petted their mother, while she waited on them. At length Frank yawned. He fidgeted a moment or two, then he went over to his mother, and, putting his hand on her arm — the feel of his mother’s round arm under the black silk sleeve made his tears rise — he said, more gratefully than ever:

‘Ne’er mind, Ma; we’ll be all right to you.’ Then he bent and kissed her. ‘Good night, Mother,’ he said awkwardly, and he went out of the room.

Beatrice was crying.

CHAPTER 23

‘I shall never re-establish myself,’ said Siegmund as he closed behind him the dining-room door and went upstairs in the dark. ‘I am a family criminal. Beatrice might come round, but the children’s insolent judgement is too much. And I am like a dog that creeps round the house from which it escaped with joy. I have nowhere else to go. Why did I come back? But I am sleepy. I will not bother tonight.’

He went into the bathroom and washed himself. Everything he did gave him a grateful sense of pleasure, notwithstanding the misery of his position. He dipped his arms deeper into the cold water, that he might feel the delight of it a little farther. His neck he swilled time after time, and it seemed to him he laughed with pleasure as the water caught him and fell away. The towel reminded him how sore were his forehead and his neck, blistered both to a state of rawness by the sun. He touched them very cautiously to dry them, wincing, and smiling at his own childish touch-and-shrink.

Though his bedroom was very dark, he did not light the gas. Instead, he stepped out into the small balcony. His shirt was open at the neck and wrists. He pulled it farther apart, baring his chest to the deliciously soft night. He stood looking out at the darkness for some time. The night was as yet moonless, but luminous with a certain atmosphere of light. The stars were small. Near at hand, large shapes of trees rose up. Farther, lamps like little mushroom groups shone amid an undergrowth of darkness. There was a vague hoarse noise filling the sky, like the whispering in a shell, and this breathing of the summer night occasionally swelled into a restless sigh as a train roared across the distance.

‘What a big night!’ thought Siegmund. ‘The night gathers everything into a oneness. I wonder what is in it.’

He leaned forward over the balcony, trying to catch something out of the night. He felt his soul like tendrils stretched out anxiously to grasp a hold. What could he hold to in this great, hoarse breathing night? A star fell. It seemed to burst into sight just across his eyes with a yellow flash. He looked up, unable to make up his mind whether he had seen it or not. There was no gap in the sky.

‘It is a good sign — a shooting star,’ he said to himself. ‘It is a good sign for me. I know I am right. That was my sign.’

Having assured himself, he stepped indoors, unpacked his bag, and was soon in bed.

‘This is a good bed,’ he said. ‘And the sheets are very fresh.’

He lay for a little while with his head bending forwards, looking from his pillow out at the stars, then he went to sleep.

At half past six in the morning he suddenly opened his eyes.

‘What is it?’ he asked, and almost without interruption answered: ‘Well, I’ve got to go through it.’

His sleep had shaped him perfect premonition, which, like a dream, he forgot when he awoke. Only this naïve question and answer betrayed what had taken place in his sleep. Immediately he awoke this subordinate knowledge vanished.

Another fine day was striding in triumphant. The first thing Siegmund did was to salute the morning, because of its brightness. The second thing was to call to mind the aspect of that bay in the Isle of Wight. ‘What would it just be like now?’ said he to himself. He had to give his heart some justification for the peculiar pain left in it from his sleep activity, so he began poignantly to long for the place which had been his during the last mornings. He pictured the garden with roses and nasturtiums; he remembered the sunny way down the shore, and all the expanse of sea hung softly between the tall white cliffs.

‘It is impossible it is gone!’ he cried to himself. ‘It can’t be gone. I looked forward to it as if it never would come. It can’t be gone now. Helena is not lost to me, surely.’ Then he began a long pining for the departed beauty of his life. He turned the jewel of memory, and facet by facet it wounded him with its brilliant loveliness. This pain, though it was keen, was half pleasure.

Presently he heard his wife stirring. She opened the door of the room next to his, and he heard her:

‘Frank, it’s a quarter to eight. You *will* be late.’

‘All right, Mother. Why didn’t you call me sooner?’ grumbled the lad.

‘I didn’t wake myself. I didn’t go to sleep till morning, and then I slept.’

She went downstairs. Siegmund listened for his son to get out of bed. The minutes passed.

‘The young donkey, why doesn’t he get out?’ said Siegmund angrily to himself. He turned over, pressing himself upon the bed in anger and humiliation, because now he had no authority to call to his son and keep him to his duty. Siegmund waited, writhing with anger, shame, and anxiety. When the suave, velvety ‘Pan-n-n! pan-n-n-n!’ of the clock was heard striking, Frank stepped with a thud on to the floor. He could be heard dressing in clumsy haste. Beatrice called from the bottom of the stairs:

‘Do you want any hot water?’

‘You know there isn’t time for me to shave now,’ answered her son, lifting his voice to a kind of broken falsetto.

The scent of the cooking of bacon filled the house. Siegmund heard his second daughter, Marjory, aged nine, talking to Vera, who occupied the same room with her. The child was evidently questioning, and the elder girl answered briefly. There was a lull in the household noises, broken suddenly by Marjory, shouting from the top of the stairs:

‘Mam!’ She wailed. ‘Mam!’ Still Beatrice did not hear her. ‘Mam! Mamma!’ Beatrice was in the scullery. ‘Mamma-a!’ The child was getting impatient. She lifted her voice and shouted: ‘Mam? Mamma!’ Still no answer. ‘Mam-mee-e!’ she squealed.

Siegmund could hardly contain himself.

‘Why don’t you go down and ask?’ Vera called crossly from the bedroom.

And at the same moment Beatrice answered, also crossly: ‘What do you want?’

‘Where’s my stockings?’ cried the child at the top of her voice.

‘Why do you ask me? Are they down here?’ replied her mother. ‘What are you shouting for?’

The child plodded downstairs. Directly she returned, and as she passed into Vera’s room, she grumbled: ‘And now they’re not mended.’

Siegmund heard a sound that made his heart beat. It was the crackling of the sides of the crib, as Gwen, his little girl of five, climbed out. She was silent for a space. He imagined her sitting on the white rug and pulling on her stockings. Then there came the quick little thud of her feet as she went downstairs.

‘Mam,’ Siegmund heard her say as she went down the hall, ‘has dad come?’

The answer and the child’s further talk were lost in the distance of the kitchen. The small, anxious question, and the quick thudding of Gwen’s feet, made Siegmund lie still with torture. He wanted to hear no more. He lay shrinking within himself. It seemed that his soul was sensitive to madness. He felt that he could not, come what might, get up and meet them all.

The front door banged, and he heard Frank’s hasty call: ‘Good-bye!’ Evidently the lad was in an ill-humour. Siegmund listened for the sound of the train; it seemed an age; the boy would catch it. Then the water from the wash-hand bowl in the bathroom ran loudly out. That, he suggested, was Vera, who was evidently not going up to town. At the thought of this, Siegmund almost hated her. He listened for her to go downstairs. It was nine o’clock.

The footsteps of Beatrice came upstairs. She put something down in the bathroom — his hot water. Siegmund listened intently for her to come to his door. Would she speak? She approached hurriedly, knocked, and waited. Siegmund, startled, for the moment, could not answer. She knocked loudly.

‘All right,’ said he.

Then she went downstairs.

He lay probing and torturing himself for another half-hour, till Vera's voice said coldly, beneath his window outside:

'You should clear away, then. We don't want the breakfast things on the table for a week.'

Siegmund's heart set hard. He rose, with a shut mouth, and went across to the bathroom. There he started. The quaint figure of Gwen stood at the bowl, her back was towards him; she was sponging her face gingerly. Her hair, all blowsed from the pillow, was tied in a stiff little pigtail, standing out from her slender, childish neck. Her arms were bare to the shoulder. She wore a bodiced petticoat of pink flannelette, which hardly reached her knees. Siegmund felt slightly amused to see her stout little calves planted so firmly close together. She carefully sponged her cheeks, her pursed-up mouth, and her neck, soaping her hair, but not her ears. Then, very deliberately, she squeezed out the sponge and proceeded to wipe away the soap.

For some reason or other she glanced round. Her startled eyes met his. She, too, had beautiful dark blue eyes. She stood, with the sponge at her neck, looking full at him. Siegmund felt himself shrinking. The child's look was steady, calm, inscrutable.

'Hello!' said her father. 'Are you here!'

The child, without altering her expression in the slightest, turned her back on him, and continued wiping her neck. She dropped the sponge in the water and took the towel from off the side of the bath. Then she turned to look again at Siegmund, who stood in his pyjamas before her, his mouth shut hard, but his eyes shrinking and tender. She seemed to be trying to discover something in him.

'Have you washed your ears?' he said gaily.

She paid no heed to this, except that he noticed her face now wore a slight constrained smile as she looked at him. She was shy. Still she continued to regard him curiously.

'There is some chocolate on my dressing-table,' he said.

'Where have you been to?' she asked suddenly.

'To the seaside,' he answered, smiling.

'To Brighton?' she asked. Her tone was still condemning.

'Much farther than that,' he replied.

'To Worthing?' she asked.

'Farther — in a steamer,' he replied.

'But who did you go with?' asked the child.

'Why, I went all by myself,' he answered.

'Twuly?' she asked.

'Weally and twuly,' he answered, laughing.

'Couldn't you take me?' she asked.

'I will next time,' he replied.

The child still looked at him, unsatisfied.

'But what did you go for?' she asked, goading him suspiciously.

'To see the sea and the ships and the fighting ships with cannons —'

'You *might* have taken me,' said the child reproachfully.

'Yes, I ought to have done, oughtn't I?' he said, as if regretful.

Gwen still looked full at him.

'You *are* red,' she said.

He glanced quickly in the glass, and replied:

'That is the sun. Hasn't it been hot?'

'Mm! It made my nose all peel. Vera said she would scrape me like a new potato.' The child laughed and turned shyly away.

'Come here,' said Siegmund. 'I believe you've got a tooth out, haven't you?'

He was very cautious and gentle. The child drew back. He hesitated, and she drew away from him, unwilling.

'Come and let me look,' he repeated.

She drew farther away, and the same constrained smile appeared on her face, shy, suspicious, condemning.

'Aren't you going to get your chocolate?' he asked, as the child hesitated in the doorway.

She glanced into his room, and answered:

'I've got to go to mam and have my hair done.'

Her awkwardness and her lack of compliance insulted him. She went downstairs without going into his room.

Siegmund, rebuffed by the only one in the house from whom he might have expected friendship, proceeded slowly to shave, feeling sick at heart. He was a long time over his toilet. When he stripped himself for the bath, it seemed to him he could smell the sea. He bent his head and licked his shoulder. It tasted decidedly salt.

'A pity to wash it off,' he said.

As he got up dripping from the cold bath, he felt for the moment exhilarated. He rubbed himself smooth. Glancing down at himself, he thought: 'I look young. I look as young as twenty-six.'

He turned to the mirror. There he saw himself a mature, complete man of forty, with grave years of experience on his countenance.

'I used to think that, when I was forty,' he said to himself, 'I should find

everything straight as the nose on my face, walking through my affairs as easily as you like. Now I am no more sure of myself, have no more confidence than a boy of twenty. What can I do? It seems to me a man needs a mother all his life. I don't feel much like a lord of creation.'

Having arrived at this cynicism, Siegmund prepared to go downstairs. His sensitiveness had passed off; his nerves had become callous. When he was dressed he went down to the kitchen without hesitation. He was indifferent to his wife and children. No one spoke to him as he sat to the table. That was as he liked it; he wished for nothing to touch him. He ate his breakfast alone, while his wife bustled about upstairs and Vera bustled about in the dining-room. Then he retired to the solitude of the drawing-room. As a reaction against his poetic activity, he felt as if he were gradually becoming more stupid and blind. He remarked nothing, not even the extravagant bowl of grasses placed where he would not have allowed it — on his piano; nor his fiddle, laid cruelly on the cold, polished floor near the window. He merely sat down in an arm-chair, and felt sick.

All his unnatural excitement, all the poetic stimulation of the past few days, had vanished. He felt flaccid, while his life struggled slowly through him. After an intoxication of passion and love, and beauty, and of sunshine, he was prostrate. Like a plant that blossoms gorgeously and madly, he had wasted the tissue of his strength, so that now his life struggled in a clogged and broken channel.

Siegmund sat with his head between his hands, leaning upon the table. He would have been stupidly quiescent in his feeling of loathing and sickness had not an intense irritability in all his nerves tormented him into consciousness.

'I suppose this is the result of the sun — a sort of sunstroke,' he said, realizing an intolerable stiffness of his brain, a stunned condition in his head.

'This is hideous!' he said. His arms were quivering with intense irritation. He exerted all his will to stop them, and then the hot irritability commenced in his belly. Siegmund fidgeted in his chair without changing his position. He had not the energy to get up and move about. He fidgeted like an insect pinned down.

The door opened. He felt violently startled; yet there was no movement perceptible. Vera entered, ostensibly for an autograph-album into which she was going to copy a drawing from the *London Opinion*, really to see what her father was doing. He did not move a muscle. He only longed intensely for his daughter to go out of the room, so that he could let go. Vera went out of the drawing-room humming to herself. Apparently she had not even glanced at her father. In reality, she had observed him closely.

'He is sitting with his head in his hands,' she said to her mother.

Beatrice replied: 'I'm glad he's nothing else to do.'

'I should think he's pitying himself,' said Vera.

'He's a good one at it,' answered Beatrice.

Gwen came forward and took hold of her mother's skirt, looking up anxiously.

'What is he doing, Mam?' she asked.

'Nothing,' replied her mother — 'nothing; only sitting in the drawing-room.'

'But what has he *been* doing?' persisted the anxious child.

'Nothing — nothing that I can tell *you*. He's only spoilt all our lives.'

The little girl stood regarding her mother in the greatest distress and perplexity.

'But what will he do, Mam?' she asked.

'Nothing. Don't bother. Run and play with Marjory now. Do you want a nice plum?'

She took a yellow plum from the table. Gwen accepted it without a word. She was too much perplexed.

'What do you say?' asked her mother.

'Thank you,' replied the child, turning away.

Siegmund sighed with relief when he was again left alone. He twisted in his chair, and sighed again, trying to drive out the intolerable clawing irritability from his belly.

'Ah, this is horrible!' he said.

He stiffened his muscles to quieten them.

'I've never been like this before. What is the matter?' he asked himself.

But the question died out immediately. It seemed useless and sickening to try and answer it. He began to cast about for an alleviation. If he could only do something, or have something he wanted, it would be better.

'What do I want?' he asked himself, and he anxiously strove to find this out.

Everything he suggested to himself made him sicken with weariness or distaste: the seaside, a foreign land, a fresh life that he had often dreamed of, farming in Canada.

'I should be just the same there,' he answered himself. 'Just the same sickening feeling there that I want nothing.'

'Helena!' he suggested to himself, trembling.

But he only felt a deeper horror. The thought of her made him shrink convulsively.

'I can't endure this,' he said. 'If this is the case, I had better be dead. To have no want, no desire — that is death, to begin with.'

He rested awhile after this. The idea of death alone seemed entertaining. Then, 'Is there really nothing I could turn to?' he asked himself.

To him, in that state of soul, it seemed there was not.

‘Helena!’ he suggested again, appealingly testing himself. ‘Ah, no!’ he cried, drawing sharply back, as from an approaching touch upon a raw place.

He groaned slightly as he breathed, with a horrid weight of nausea. There was a fumbling upon the door-knob. Siegmund did not start. He merely pulled himself together. Gwen pushed open the door, and stood holding on to the door-knob looking at him.

‘Dad, Mam says dinner’s ready,’ she announced.

Siegmund did not reply. The child waited, at a loss for some moments, before she repeated, in a hesitating tone:

‘Dinner’s ready.’

‘All right,’ said Siegmund. ‘Go away.’

The little girl returned to the kitchen with tears in her eyes, very crestfallen.

‘What did he say?’ asked Beatrice.

‘He shouted at me,’ replied the little one, breaking into tears.

Beatrice flushed. Tears came into her own eyes. She took the child in her arms and pressed her to her, kissing her forehead.

‘Did he?’ she said very tenderly. ‘Never mind, then, dearie — never mind.’

The tears in her mother’s voice made the child sob bitterly. Vera and Marjory sat silent at table. The steak and mashed potatoes steamed and grew cold.

CHAPTER 24

When Helena arrived home on the Thursday evening she found everything repulsive. All the odours of the sordid street through which she must pass hung about the pavement, having crept out in the heat. The house was bare and narrow. She remembered children sometimes to have brought her moths shut up in matchboxes. As she knocked at the door she felt like a numbed moth which a boy is pushing off its leaf-rest into his box.

The door was opened by her mother. She was a woman whose sunken mouth, ruddy cheeks, and quick brown eyes gave her the appearance of a bird which walks about pecking suddenly here and there. As Helena reluctantly entered the mother drew herself up, and immediately relaxed, seeming to peck forwards as she said:

‘Well?’

‘Well, here we are!’ replied the daughter in a matter-of-fact tone.

Her mother was inclined to be affectionate, therefore she became proportionately cold.

‘So I see,’ exclaimed Mrs Verden, tossing her head in a peculiar jocular manner. ‘And what sort of a time have you had?’

‘Oh, very good,’ replied Helena, still more coolly.

‘H’m!’

Mrs Verden looked keenly at her daughter. She recognized the peculiar sulky, childish look she knew so well, therefore, making an effort, she forbore to question.

‘You look well,’ she said.

Helena smiled ironically.

‘And are you ready for your supper?’ she asked, in the playful, affectionate manner she had assumed.

‘If the supper is ready I will have it,’ replied her daughter.

‘Well, it’s not ready.’ The mother shut tight her sunken mouth, and regarded her daughter with playful challenge. ‘Because,’ she continued, ‘I didn’t know when you were coming.’ She gave a jerk with her arm, like an orator who utters the incontrovertible. ‘But,’ she added, after a tedious dramatic pause, ‘I can soon have it ready. What will you have?’

‘The full list of your capacious larder,’ replied Helena.

Mrs Verden looked at her again, and hesitated.

‘Will you have cocoa or lemonade?’ she asked, coming to the point curtly.

‘Lemonade,’ said Helena.

Presently Mr Verden entered — a small, white-bearded man with a gentle voice.

‘Oh, so you are back, Nellie!’ he said, in his quiet, reserved manner.

‘As you see, Pater,’ she answered.

‘H’m!’ he murmured, and he moved about at his accounts.

Neither of her parents dared to question Helena. They moved about her on tiptoe, stealthily. Yet neither subserved her. Her father’s quiet ‘H’m!’ her mother’s curt question, made her draw inwards like a snail which can never retreat far enough from condemning eyes. She made a careless pretence of eating. She was like a child which has done wrong, and will not be punished, but will be left with the humiliating smear of offence upon it.

There was a quick, light palpitating of the knocker. Mrs Verden went to the door.

‘Has she come?’

And there were hasty steps along the passage. Louisa entered. She flung herself upon Helena and kissed her.

‘How long have you been in?’ she asked, in a voice trembling with affection.

‘Ten minutes,’ replied Helena.

‘Why didn’t you send me the time of the train, so that I could come and meet you?’ Louisa reproached her.

‘Why?’ drawled Helena.

Louisa looked at her friend without speaking. She was deeply hurt by this sarcasm.

As soon as possible Helena went upstairs. Louisa stayed with her that night. On the next day they were going to Cornwall together for their usual midsummer holiday. They were to be accompanied by a third girl — a minor friend of Louisa, a slight acquaintance of Helena.

During the night neither of the two friends slept much. Helena made confidences to Louisa, who brooded on these, on the romance and tragedy which enveloped the girl she loved so dearly. Meanwhile, Helena’s thoughts went round and round, tethered amid the five days by the sea, pulling forwards as far as the morrow’s meeting with Siegmund, but reaching no further.

Friday was an intolerable day of silence, broken by little tender advances and playful, affectionate sallies on the part of the mother, all of which were rapidly repulsed. The father said nothing, and avoided his daughter with his eyes. In his humble reserve there was a dignity which made his disapproval far more difficult to bear than the repeated flagrant questionings of the mother’s eyes. But

the day wore on. Helena pretended to read, and sat thinking. She played her violin a little, mechanically. She went out into the town, and wandered about.

At last the night fell.

‘Well,’ said Helena to her mother, ‘I suppose I’d better pack.’

‘Haven’t you done it?’ cried Mrs Verden, exaggerating her surprise. ‘You’ll never have it done. I’d better help you. What times does the train go?’

Helena smiled.

‘Ten minutes to ten.’

Her mother glanced at the clock. It was only half-past eight. There was ample time for everything.

‘Nevertheless, you’d better look sharp,’ Mrs Verden said.

Helena turned away, weary of this exaggeration.

‘I’ll come with you to the station,’ suggested Mrs Verden. ‘I’ll see the last of you. We shan’t see much of you just now.’

Helena turned round in surprise.

‘Oh, I wouldn’t bother,’ she said, fearing to make her disapproval too evident.

‘Yes — I will — I’ll see you off.’

Mrs Verden’s animation and indulgence were remarkable. Usually she was curt and undemonstrative. On occasions like these, however, when she was reminded of the ideal relations between mother and daughter, she played the part of the affectionate parent, much to the general distress.

Helena lit a candle and went to her bedroom. She quickly packed her dress-basket. As she stood before the mirror to put on her hat, her eyes, gazing heavily, met her heavy eyes in the mirror. She glanced away swiftly as if she had been burned.

‘How stupid I look!’ she said to herself. ‘And Siegmund, how is he, I wonder?’

She wondered how Siegmund had passed the day, what had happened to him, how he felt, how he looked. She thought of him protectively.

Having strapped her basket, she carried it downstairs. Her mother was ready, with a white lace scarf round her neck. After a short time Louisa came in. She dropped her basket in the passage, and then sank into a chair.

‘I don’t want to go, Nell,’ she said, after a few moments of silence.

‘Why, how is that?’ asked Helena, not surprised, but condescending, as to a child.

‘Oh, I don’t know; I’m tired,’ said the other petulantly.

‘Of course you are. What do you expect, after a day like this?’ said Helena.

‘And rushing about packing,’ exclaimed Mrs Verden, still in an exaggerated manner, this time scolding playfully.

‘Oh, I don’t know. I don’t think I want to go, dear,’ repeated Louisa dejectedly.

‘Well, it is time we set out,’ replied Helena, rising. ‘Will you carry the basket or the violin, Mater?’

Louisa rose, and with a forlorn expression took up her light luggage.

The west opposite the door was smouldering with sunset. Darkness is only smoke that hangs suffocatingly over the low red heat of the sunken day. Such was Helena’s longed-for night. The tramcar was crowded. In one corner Olive, the third friend, rose excitedly to greet them. Helena sat mute, while the car swung through the yellow, stale lights of a third-rate street of shops. She heard Olive remarking on her sunburned face and arms; she became aware of the renewed inflammation in her blistered arms; she heard her own curious voice answering. Everything was in a maze. To the beat of the car, while the yellow blur of the shops passed over her eyes, she repeated: ‘Two hundred and forty miles — two hundred and forty miles.’

CHAPTER 25

Siegmund passed the afternoon in a sort of stupor. At tea-time Beatrice, who had until then kept herself in restraint, gave way to an outburst of angry hysteria.

‘When does your engagement at the Comedy Theatre commence?’ she had asked him coldly.

He knew she was wondering about money.

‘Tomorrow — if ever,’ he had answered.

She was aware that he hated the work. For some reason or other her anger flashed out like sudden lightning at his ‘if ever’.

‘What do you think you *can* do?’ she cried. ‘For I think you have done enough. We can’t do as we like altogether — indeed, indeed we cannot. You have had your fling, haven’t you? You have had your fling, and you want to keep on. But there’s more than one person in the world. Remember that. But there are your children, let me remind you. Whose are they? You talk about shirking the engagement, but who is going to be responsible for your children, do you think?’

‘I said nothing about shirking the engagement,’ replied Siegmund, very coldly.

‘No, there was no need to say. I know what it means. You sit there sulking all day. What do you think *I* do? I have to see to the children, I have to work and slave, I go on from day to day. I tell you *I’ll* stop, I tell you *I’ll* do as I like. *I’ll* go as well. No, I wouldn’t be such a coward, you know that. You know *I* wouldn’t leave little children — to the workhouse or anything. They’re my children; they mightn’t be yours.’

‘There is no need for this,’ said Siegmund contemptuously.

The pressure in his temples was excruciating, and he felt loathsomely sick.

Beatrice’s dark eyes flashed with rage.

‘Isn’t there!’ she cried. ‘Oh, isn’t there? No, there is need for a great deal more. I don’t know what you think I am. How much farther do you’ think you can go? No, you don’t like reminding of us. You sit moping, sulking, because you have to come back to your own children. I wonder how much you think I shall stand? What do you think I am, to put up with it? What do you think I am? Am I a servant to eat out of your hand?’

‘Be quiet!’ shouted Siegmund. ‘Don’t I know what you are? Listen to yourself!’

Beatrice was suddenly silenced. It was the stillness of white-hot wrath. Even Siegmund was glad to hear her voice again. She spoke low and trembling.

‘You coward — you miserable coward! It is I, is it, who am wrong? It is I who am to blame, is it? You miserable thing! I have no doubt you know what I am.’

Siegmund looked up at her as her words died off. She looked back at him with dark eyes loathing his cowed, wretched animosity. His eyes were bloodshot and furtive, his mouth was drawn back in a half-grin of hate and misery. She was goading him, in his darkness whither he had withdrawn himself like a sick dog, to die or recover as his strength should prove. She tortured him till his sickness was swallowed by anger, which glared redly at her as he pushed back his chair to rise. He trembled too much, however. His chin dropped again on his chest. Beatrice sat down in her place, hearing footsteps. She was shuddering slightly, and her eyes were fixed.

Vera entered with the two children. All three immediately, as if they found themselves confronted by something threatening, stood arrested. Vera tackled the situation.

‘Is the table ready to be cleared yet?’ she asked in an unpleasant tone.

Her father’s cup was half emptied. He had come to tea late, after the others had left the table. Evidently he had not finished, but he made no reply, neither did Beatrice. Vera glanced disgustedly at her father. Gwen sidled up to her mother, and tried to break the tension.

‘Mam, there was a lady had a dog, and it ran into a shop, and it licked a sheep, Mam, what was hanging up.’

Beatrice sat fixed, and paid not the slightest attention. The child looked up at her, waited, then continued softly.

‘Mam, there was a lady had a dog — ’

‘Don’t bother!’ snapped Vera sharply.

The child looked, wondering and resentful, at her sister. Vera was taking the things from the table, snatching them, and thrusting them on the tray. Gwen’s eyes rested a moment or two on the bent head of her father; then deliberately she turned again to her mother, and repeated in her softest and most persuasive tones:

‘Mam, I saw a dog, and it ran in a butcher’s shop and licked a piece of meat. Mam, Mam!’

There was no answer. Gwen went forward and put her hand on her mother’s knee.

‘Mam!’ she pleaded timidly.

No response.

‘Mam!’ she whispered.

She was desperate. She stood on tiptoe, and pulled with little hands at her mother's breast.

'Mam!' she whispered shrilly.

Her mother, with an effort of self-denial, put off her investment of tragedy, and, laying her arm round the child's shoulders, drew her close. Gwen was somewhat reassured, but not satisfied. With an earnest face upturned to the impassive countenance of her mother, she began to whisper, sibilant, coaxing, pleading.

'Mam, there was a lady, she had a dog —'

Vera turned sharply to stop this whispering, which was too much for her nerves, but the mother forestalled her. Taking the child in her arms, she averted her face, put her cheek against the baby cheek, and let the tears run freely. Gwen was too much distressed to cry. The tears gathered very slowly in her eyes, and fell without her having moved a muscle in her face. Vera remained in the scullery, weeping tears of rage, and pity, and shame into the towel. The only sound in the room was the occasional sharp breathing of Beatrice. Siegmund sat without the trace of a movement, almost without breathing. His head was ducked low; he dared never lift it, he dared give no sign of his presence.

Presently Beatrice put down the child, and went to join Vera in the scullery. There came the low sound of women's talking — an angry, ominous sound. Gwen followed her mother. Her little voice could be heard cautiously asking:

'Mam, is dad cross — is he? What did he do?'

'Don't bother!' snapped Vera. 'You *are* a little nuisance! Here, take this into the dining-room, and don't drop it.'

The child did not obey. She stood looking from her mother to her sister. The latter pushed a dish into her hand.

'Go along,' she said, gently thrusting the child forth.

Gwen departed. She hesitated in the kitchen. Her father still remained unmoved. The child wished to go to him, to speak to him, but she was afraid. She crossed the kitchen slowly, hugging the dish; then she came slowly back, hesitating. She sidled into the kitchen; she crept round the table inch by inch, drawing nearer her father. At about a yard from the chair she stopped. He, from under his bent brows, could see her small feet in brown slippers, nearly kicked through at the toes, waiting and moving nervously near him. He pulled himself together, as a man does who watches the surgeon's lancet suspended over his wound. Would the child speak to him? Would she touch him with her small hands? He held his breath, and, it seemed, held his heart from beating. What he should do he did not know.

He waited in a daze of suspense. The child shifted from one foot to another.

He could just see the edge of her white-frilled drawers. He wanted, above all things, to take her in his arms, to have something against which to hide his face. Yet he was afraid. Often, when all the world was hostile, he had found her full of love, he had hidden his face against her, she had gone to sleep in his arms, she had been like a piece of apple-blossom in his arms. If she should come to him now — his heart halted again in suspense — he knew not what he would do. It would open, perhaps, the tumour of his sickness. He was quivering too fast with suspense to know what he feared, or wanted, or hoped.

‘Gwen!’ called Vera, wondering why she did not return. ‘Gwen!’

‘Yes,’ answered the child, and slowly Siegmund saw her feet lifted, hesitate, move, then turn away.

She had gone. His excitement sank rapidly, and the sickness returned stronger, more horrible and wearying than ever. For a moment it was so bad that he was afraid of losing consciousness. He recovered slightly, pulled himself up, and went upstairs. His fists were tightly clenched, his fingers closed over his thumbs, which were pressed bloodless. He lay down on the bed.

For two hours he lay in a dazed condition resembling sleep. At the end of that time the knowledge that he had to meet Helena was actively at work — an activity quite apart from his will or his consciousness, jogging and pulling him awake. At eight o’clock he sat up. A cramped pain in his thumbs made him wonder. He looked at them, and mechanically shut them again under his fingers into the position they sought after two hours of similar constraint. Siegmund opened his hands again, smiling.

‘It is said to be the sign of a weak, deceitful character,’ he said to himself.

His head was peculiarly numbed; at the back it felt heavy, as if weighted with lead. He could think only one detached sentence at intervals. Between-whiles there was a blank, grey sleep or swoon.

‘I have got to go and meet Helena at Wimbledon,’ he said to himself, and instantly he felt a peculiar joy, as if he had laughed somewhere. ‘But I must be getting ready. I can’t disappoint her,’ said Siegmund.

The idea of Helena woke a craving for rest in him. If he should say to her, ‘Do not go away from me; come with me somewhere,’ then he might lie down somewhere beside her, and she might put her hands on his head. If she could hold his head in her hands — for she had fine, silken hands that adjusted themselves with a rare pressure, wrapping his weakness up in life — then his head would gradually grow healed, and he could rest. This was the one thing that remained for his restoration — that she should with long, unwearying gentleness put him to rest. He longed for it utterly — for the hands and the restfulness of Helena.

‘But it is no good,’ he said, staring like a drunken man from sleep. ‘What time is it?’

It was ten minutes to nine. She would be in Wimbledon by 10.10. It was time he should be getting ready. Yet he remained sitting on the bed.

‘I am forgetting again,’ he said. ‘But I do not want to go. What is the good? I have only to tie a mask on for the meeting. It is too much.’

He waited and waited; his head dropped forward in a sort of sleep. Suddenly he started awake. The back of his head hurt severely.

‘Goodness,’ he said, ‘it’s getting quite dark!’

It was twenty minutes to ten. He went bewildered into the bathroom to wash in cold water and bring back his senses. His hands were sore, and his face blazed with sun inflammation. He made himself neat as usual. It was ten minutes to ten. He would be very late. It was practically dark, though these bright days were endless. He wondered whether the children were in bed. It was too late, however, to wonder.

Siegmund hurried downstairs and took his hat. He was walking down the path when the door was snatched open behind him, and Vera ran out crying:

‘Are you going out? Where are you going?’

Siegmund stood still and looked at her.

‘She is frightened,’ he said to himself, smiling ironically.

‘I am only going a walk. I have to go to Wimbledon. I shall not be very long.’

‘Wimbledon, at this time!’ said Vera sharply, full of suspicion.

‘Yes, I am late. I shall be back in an hour.’

He was sorry for her. She knew he gave her an honourable promise.

‘You need not keep us sitting up,’ she said.

He did not answer, but hurried to the station.

CHAPTER 26

Helena, Louisa, and Olive climbed the steps to go to the South-Western platform. They were laden with dress-baskets, umbrellas, and little packages. Olive and Louisa, at least, were in high spirits. Olive stopped before the indicator.

‘The next train for Waterloo,’ she announced, in her contralto voice, ‘is 10.30. It is now 10.12.’

‘We go by the 10.40; it is a better train,’ said Helena.

Olive turned to her with a heavy-arch manner.

‘Very well, dear. There is a parting to be got through, I am told. We sympathize, dear, but we regret it. Starting for a holiday is always a prolonged agony. But I am strong to endure it.’

‘You look it. You look as if you could tackle a bull,’ cried Louisa, skittish.

‘My dear Louisa,’ rang out Olive’s contralto, ‘don’t judge me by appearances. You’re sure to be taken in. With me it’s a case of

“‘Oh, the gladness of her gladness when she’s sad, And the sadness of her sadness when she’s glad!’”

She looked round to see the effect of this. Helena, expected to say something, chimed in sarcastically:

“‘They are nothing to her madness — ’”

‘When she’s going for a holiday, dear,’ cried Olive.

‘Oh, go on being mad,’ cried Louisa.

‘What, do you like it? I thought you’d be thanking Heaven that sanity was given me in large doses.’

‘And holidays in small,’ laughed Louisa. ‘Good! No, I like your madness, if you call it such. You are always so serious.’

“‘It’s ill talking of halts in the house of the hanged,’” dear,’ boomed Olive.

She looked from side to side. She felt triumphant. Helena smiled, acknowledging the sarcasm.

‘But,’ said Louisa, smiling anxiously, ‘I don’t quite see it. What’s the point?’

‘Well, to be explicit, dear,’ replied Olive, ‘it is hardly safe to accuse me of sadness and seriousness in *this* trio.’

Louisa laughed and shook herself.

‘Come to think of it, it isn’t,’ she said.

Helena sighed, and walked down the platform. Her heart was beating thickly;

she could hardly breathe. The station lamps hung low, so they made a ceiling of heat and dusty light. She suffocated under them. For a moment she beat with hysteria, feeling, as most of us feel when sick on a hot summer night, as if she must certainly go crazed, smothered under the grey, woolly blanket of heat. Siegmund was late. It was already twenty-five minutes past ten.

She went towards the booking-office. At that moment Siegmund came on to the platform.

‘Here I am!’ he said. ‘Where is Louisa?’

Helena pointed to the seat without answering. She was looking at Siegmund. He was distracted by the excitement of the moment, so she could not read him.

‘Olive is there, too,’ she explained.

Siegmund stood still, straining his eyes to see the two women seated amidst pale wicker dress-baskets and dark rugs. The stranger made things more complex.

‘Does she — your other friend — does she know?’ he asked.

‘She knows nothing,’ replied Helena in a low tone, as she led him forward to be introduced.

‘How do you do?’ replied Olive in most mellow contralto. ‘Behold the dauntless three, with their traps! You will see us forth on our perils?’

‘I will, since I may not do more,’ replied Siegmund, smiling, continuing: ‘And how is Sister Louisa?’

‘She is very well, thank you. It is *her* turn now,’ cried Louisa, vindictive, triumphant.

There was always a faint animosity in her bearing towards Siegmund. He understood, and smiled at her enmity, for the two were really good friends.

‘It is your turn now,’ he repeated, smiling, and he turned away.

He and Helena walked down the platform.

‘How did you find things at home?’ he asked her.

‘Oh, as usual,’ she replied indifferently. ‘And you?’

‘Just the same,’ he answered. He thought for a moment or two, then added: ‘The children are happier without me.’

‘Oh, you mustn’t say that kind of thing protested Helena miserably. ‘It’s not true.’

‘It’s all right, dear,’ he answered. ‘So long as they are happy, it’s all right.’ After a pause he added: ‘But I feel pretty bad tonight.’

Helena’s hand tightened on his arm. He had reached the end of the platform. There he stood, looking up the line which ran dark under a haze of lights. The high red signal-lamps hung aloft in a scarlet swarm; farther off, like spangles shaking downwards from a burst sky-rocket, was a tangle of brilliant red and

green signal-lamps settling. A train with the warm flare on its thick column of smoke came thundering upon the lovers. Dazed, they felt the yellow bar of carriage-windows brush in vibration across their faces. The ground and the air rocked. Then Siegmund turned his head to watch the red and the green lights in the rear of the train swiftly dwindle on the darkness. Still watching the distance where the train had vanished, he said:

‘Dear, I want you to promise that, whatever happens to me, you will go on. Remember, dear, two wrongs don’t make a right.’

Helena swiftly, with a movement of terror, faced him, looking into his eyes. But he was in the shadow, she could not see him. The flat sound of his voice, lacking resonance — the dead, expressionless tone — made her lose her presence of mind. She stared at him blankly.

‘What do you mean? What has happened? Something has happened to you. What has happened at home? What are you going to do?’ she said sharply. She palpitated with terror. For the first time she felt powerless. Siegmund was beyond her grasp. She was afraid of him. He had shaken away her hold over him.

‘There is nothing fresh the matter at home,’ he replied wearily. He was to be scourged with emotion again. ‘I swear it,’ he added. ‘And I have not made up my mind. But I can’t think of life without you — and life must go on.’

‘And I swear,’ she said wrathfully, turning at bay, ‘that I won’t live a day after you.’

Siegmund dropped his head. The dead spring of his emotion swelled up scalding hot again. Then he said, almost inaudibly: ‘Ah, don’t speak to me like that, dear. It is late to be angry. When I have seen your train out tonight there is nothing left.’

Helena looked at him, dumb with dismay, stupid, angry.

They became aware of the porters shouting loudly that the Waterloo train was to leave from another platform.

‘You’d better come,’ said Siegmund, and they hurried down towards Louisa and Olive.

‘We’ve got to change platforms,’ cried Louisa, running forward and excitedly announcing the news.

‘Yes,’ replied Helena, pale and impassive.

Siegmund picked up the luggage.

‘I say,’ cried Olive, rushing to catch Helena and Louisa by the arm, ‘look — look — both of you — look at that hat!’ A lady in front was wearing on her hat a wild and dishevelled array of peacock feathers. ‘It’s the sight of a lifetime. I wouldn’t have you miss it,’ added Olive in hoarse *sotto voce*.

‘Indeed not!’ cried Helena, turning in wild exasperation to look. ‘Get a good view of it, Olive. Let’s have a good mental impression of it — one that will last.’

‘That’s right, dear,’ said Olive, somewhat nonplussed by this outburst.

Siegmund had escaped with the heaviest two bags. They could see him ahead, climbing the steps. Olive readjusted herself from the wildly animated to the calmly ironical.

‘After all, dear,’ she said, as they hurried in the tail of the crowd, ‘it’s not half a bad idea to get a man on the job.’

Louisa laughed aloud at this vulgar conception of Siegmund.

‘Just now, at any rate,’ she rejoined.

As they reached the platform the train ran in before them. Helena watched anxiously for an empty carriage. There was not one.

‘Perhaps it is as well,’ she thought. ‘We needn’t talk. There will be three-quarters of an hour at Waterloo. If we were alone. Olive would make Siegmund talk.’

She found a carriage with four people, and hastily took possession. Siegmund followed her with the bags. He swung these on the rack, and then quickly received the rugs, umbrellas, and packages from the other two. These he put on the seats or anywhere, while Helena stowed them. She was very busy for a moment or two; the racks were full. Other people entered; their luggage was troublesome to bestow.

When she turned round again she found Louisa and Olive seated, but Siegmund was outside on the platform, and the door was closed. He saw her face move as if she would cry to him. She restrained herself, and immediately called:

‘You are coming? Oh, you are coming to Waterloo?’

He shook his head.

‘I cannot come,’ he said.

She stood looking blankly at him for some moments, unable to reach the door because of the portmanteau thrust through with umbrellas and sticks, which stood on the floor between the knees of the passengers. She was helpless. Siegmund was repeating deliriously in his mind:

‘Oh — go — go — go — when will she go?’

He could not bear her piteousness. Her presence made him feel insane.

‘Would you like to come to the window?’ a man asked of Helena kindly.

She smiled suddenly in his direction, without perceiving him. He pulled the portmanteau under his legs, and Helena edged past. She stood by the door, leaning forward with some of her old protective grace, her ‘Hawwa’ spirit evident. Benign and shielding, she bent forward, looking at Siegmund. But her face was blank with helplessness, with misery of helplessness. She stood looking

at Siegmund, saying nothing. His forehead was scorched and swollen, she noticed sorrowfully, and beneath one eye the skin was blistered. His eyes were bloodshot and glazed in a kind of apathy; they filled her with terror. He looked up at her because she wished it. For himself, he could not see her; he could only recoil from her. All he wished was to hide himself in the dark, alone. Yet she wanted him, and so far he yielded. But to go to Waterloo he could not yield.

The people in the carriage, made uneasy by this strange farewell, did not speak. There were a few taut moments of silence. No one seems to have strength to interrupt these spaces of irresolute anguish. Finally, the guard's whistle went. Siegmund and Helena clasped hands. A warm flush of love and healthy grief came over Siegmund for the last time. The train began to move, drawing Helena's hand from his.

'Monday,' she whispered — 'Monday,' meaning that on Monday she should receive a letter from him. He nodded, turned, hesitated, looked at her, turned and walked away. She remained at the window watching him depart.

'Now, dear, we are manless,' said Olive in a whisper. But her attempt at a joke fell dead. Everybody was silent and uneasy.

CHAPTER 27

He hurried down the platform, wincing at every stride, from the memory of Helena's last look of mute, heavy yearning. He gripped his fists till they trembled; his thumbs were again closed under his fingers. Like a picture on a cloth before him he still saw Helena's face, white, rounded, in feature quite mute and expressionless, just made terrible by the heavy eyes, pleading dumbly. He thought of her going on and on, still at the carriage window looking out; all through the night rushing west and west to the land of Isolde. Things began to haunt Siegmund like a delirium. He knew not where he was hurrying. Always in front of him, as on a cloth, was the face of Helena, while somewhere behind the cloth was Cornwall, a far-off lonely place where darkness came on intensely. Sometimes he saw a dim, small phantom in the darkness of Cornwall, very far off. Then the face of Helena, white, inanimate as a mask, with heavy eyes, came between again.

He was almost startled to find himself at home, in the porch of his house. The door opened. He remembered to have heard the quick thud of feet. It was Vera. She glanced at him, but said nothing. Instinctively she shrank from him. He passed without noticing her. She stood on the door-mat, fastening the door, striving to find something to say to him.

'You have been over an hour,' she said, still more troubled when she found her voice shaking. She had no idea what alarmed her.

'Ay,' returned Siegmund.

He went into the dining-room and dropped into his chair, with his head between his hands. Vera followed him nervously.

'Will you have anything to eat?' she asked.

He looked up at the table, as if the supper laid there were curious and incomprehensible. The delirious lifting of his eyelids showed the whole of the dark pupils and the bloodshot white of his eyes. Vera held her breath with fear. He sank his head again and said nothing. Vera sat down and waited. The minutes ticked slowly off. Siegmund neither moved nor spoke. At last the clock struck midnight. She was weary with sleep, querulous with trouble.

'Aren't you going to bed?' she asked.

Siegmund heard her without paying any attention. He seemed only to half hear. Vera waited awhile, then repeated plaintively:

'Aren't you going to bed, Father?'

Siegmund lifted his head and looked at her. He loathed the idea of having to move. He looked at her confusedly.

‘Yes, I’m going,’ he said, and his head dropped again. Vera knew he was not asleep. She dared not leave him till he was in his bedroom. Again she sat waiting.

‘Father!’ she cried at last.

He started up, gripping the arms of his chair, trembling.

‘Yes, I’m going,’ he said.

He rose, and went unevenly upstairs. Vera followed him close behind.

‘If he reels and falls backwards he will kill me,’ she thought, but he did not fall. From habit he went into the bathroom. While trying to brush his teeth he dropped the tooth-brush on to the floor.

‘I’ll pick it up in the morning,’ he said, continuing deliriously: ‘I must go to bed — I must go to bed — I am very tired.’ He stumbled over the door mat into his own room.

Vera was standing behind the unclosed door of her room. She heard the sneck of his lock. She heard the water still running in the bathroom, trickling with the mysterious sound of water at dead of night. Screwing up her courage, she went and turned off the tap. Then she stood again in her own room, to be near the companionable breathing of her sleeping sister, listening. Siegmund undressed quickly. His one thought was to get into bed.

‘One must sleep,’ he said as he dropped his clothes on the floor. He could not find the way to put on his sleeping-jacket, and that made him pant. Any little thing that roused or thwarted his mechanical action aggravated his sickness till his brain seemed to be bursting. He got things right at last, and was in bed.

Immediately he lapsed into a kind of unconsciousness. He would have called it sleep, but such it was not. All the time he could feel his brain working ceaselessly, like a machine running with unslackening rapidity. This went on, interrupted by little flickerings of consciousness, for three or four hours. Each time he had a glimmer of consciousness he wondered if he made any noise.

‘What am I doing? What is the matter? Am I unconscious? Do I make any noise? Do I disturb them?’ he wondered, and he tried to cast back to find the record of mechanical sense impression. He believed he could remember the sound of inarticulate murmuring in his throat. Immediately he remembered, he could feel his throat producing the sounds. This frightened him. Above all things, he was afraid of disturbing the family. He roused himself to listen. Everything was breathing in silence. As he listened to this silence he relapsed into his sort of sleep.

He was awakened finally by his own perspiration. He was terribly hot. The

pillow, the bedclothes, his hair, all seemed to be steaming with hot vapour, whilst his body was bathed in sweat. It was coming light. Immediately he shut his eyes again and lay still. He was now conscious, and his brain was irritably active, but his body was a separate thing, a terrible, heavy, hot thing over which he had slight control.

Siegmund lay still, with his eyes closed, enduring the exquisite torture of the trickling of drops of sweat. First it would be one gathering and running its irregular, hesitating way into the hollow of his neck. His every nerve thrilled to it, yet he felt he could not move more than to stiffen his throat slightly. While yet the nerves in the track of this drop were quivering, raw with sensitiveness, another drop would start from off the side of his chest, and trickle downwards among the little muscles of his side, to drip on to the bed. It was like the running of a spider over his sensitive, moveless body. Why he did not wipe himself he did not know. He lay still and endured this horrible tickling, which seemed to bite deep into him, rather than make the effort to move, which he loathed to do. The drops ran off his forehead down his temples. Those he did not mind: he was blunt there. But they started again, in tiny, vicious spurts, down the sides of his chest, from under his armpits, down the inner sides of his thighs, till he seemed to have a myriad quivering tracks of a myriad running insects over his hot, wet, highly-sensitized body. His nerves were trembling, one and all, with outrage and vivid suspense. It became unbearable. He felt that, if he endured it another moment, he would cry out, or suffocate and burst.

He sat up suddenly, threw away the bedclothes, from which came a puff of hot steam, and began to rub his pyjamas against his sides and his legs. He rubbed madly for a few moments. Then he sighed with relief. He sat on the side of the bed, moving from the hot dampness of the place where he had lain. For a moment he thought he would go to sleep. Then, in an instant his brain seemed to click awake. He was still as loath as ever to move, but his brain was no longer clouded in hot vapour: it was clear. He sat, bowing forward on the side of the bed, his sleeping-jacket open, the dawn stealing into the room, the morning air entering fresh through the wide-flung window-door. He felt a peculiar sense of guilt, of wrongness, in thus having jumped out of bed. It seemed to him as if he ought to have endured the heat of his body, and the infernal trickling of the drops of sweat. But at the thought of it he moved his hands gratefully over his sides, which now were dry, and soft, and smooth; slightly chilled on the surface perhaps, for he felt a sudden tremor of shivering from the warm contact of his hands.

Siegmund sat up straight: his body was re-animated. He felt the pillow and the groove where he had lain. It was quite wet and clammy. There was a scent of

sweat on the bed, not really unpleasant, but he wanted something fresh and cool.

Siegmund sat in the doorway that gave on to the small veranda. The air was beautifully cool. He felt his chest again to make sure it was not clammy. It was smooth as silk. This pleased him very much. He looked out on the night again, and was startled. Somewhere the moon was shining duskily, in a hidden quarter of sky; but straight in front of him, in the northwest, silent lightning was fluttering. He waited breathlessly to see if it were true. Then, again, the pale lightning jumped up into the dome of the fading night. It was like a white bird stirring restlessly on its nest. The night was drenching thinner, greyer. The lightning, like a bird that should have flown before the arm of day, moved on its nest in the boughs of darkness, raised itself, flickered its pale wings rapidly, then sank again, loath to fly. Siegmund watched it with wonder and delight.

The day was pushing aside the boughs of darkness, hunting. The poor moon would be caught when the net was flung. Siegmund went out on the balcony to look at it. There it was, like a poor white mouse, a half-moon, crouching on the mound of its course. It would run nimbly over to the western slope, then it would be caught in the net, and the sun would laugh, like a great yellow cat, as it stalked behind playing with its prey, flashing out its bright paws. The moon, before making its last run, lay crouched, palpitating. The sun crept forth, laughing to itself as it saw its prey could not escape. The lightning, however, leaped low off the nest like a bird decided to go, and flew away. Siegmund no longer saw it opening and shutting its wings in hesitation amid the disturbance of the dawn. Instead there came a flush, the white lightning gone. The brief pink butterflies of sunrise and sunset rose up from the mown fields of darkness, and fluttered low in a cloud. Even in the west they flew in a narrow, rosy swarm. They separated, thinned, rising higher. Some, flying up, became golden. Some flew rosy gold across the moon, the mouse-moon motionless with fear. Soon the pink butterflies had gone, leaving a scarlet stretch like a field of poppies in the fens. As a wind, the light of day blew in from the east, puff after puff filling with whiteness the space which had been the night. Siegmund sat watching the last morning blowing in across the mown darkness, till the whole field of the world was exposed, till the moon was like a dead mouse which floats on water.

When the few birds had called in the August morning, when the cocks had finished their crowing, when the minute sounds of the early day were astir, Siegmund shivered disconsolate. He felt tired again, yet he knew he could not sleep. The bed was repulsive to him. He sat in his chair at the open door, moving uneasily. What should have been sleep was an ache and a restlessness. He turned and twisted in his chair.

‘Where is Helena?’ he asked himself, and he looked out on the morning.

Everything out of doors was unreal, like a show, like a peepshow. Helena was an actress somewhere in the brightness of this view. He alone was out of the piece. He sighed petulantly, pressing back his shoulders as if they ached. His arms, too, ached with irritation, while his head seemed to be hissing with angry irritability. For a long time he sat with clenched teeth, merely holding himself in check. In his present state of irritability everything that occurred to his mind stirred him with dislike or disgust. Helena, music, the pleasant company of friends, the sunshine of the country, each, as it offered itself to his thoughts, was met by an angry contempt, was rejected scornfully. As nothing could please or distract him, the only thing that remained was to support the discord. He felt as if he were a limb out of joint from the body of life: there occurred to his imagination a disjoined finger, swollen and discoloured, racked with pains. The question was, How should he reset himself into joint? The body of life for him meant Beatrice, his children, Helena, the Comic Opera, his friends of the orchestra. How could he set himself again into joint with these? It was impossible. Towards his family he would henceforward have to bear himself with humility. That was a cynicism. He would have to leave Helena, which he could not do. He would have to play strenuously, night after night, the music of *The Saucy Little Switzer* which was absurd. In fine, it was all absurd and impossible. Very well, then, that being so, what remained possible? Why, to depart. 'If thine hand offend thee, cut it off.' He could cut himself off from life. It was plain and straightforward.

But Beatrice, his young children, without him! He was bound by an agreement which there was no discrediting to provide for them. Very well, he must provide for them. And then what? Humiliation at home, Helena forsaken, musical comedy night after night. That was insufferable — impossible! Like a man tangled up in a rope, he was not strong enough to free himself. He could not break with Helena and return to a degrading life at home; he could not leave his children and go to Helena.

Very well, it was impossible! Then there remained only one door which he could open in this prison corridor of life. Siegmund looked round the room. He could get his razor, or he could hang himself. He had thought of the two ways before. Yet now he was unprovided. His portmanteau stood at the foot of the bed, its straps flung loose. A portmanteau strap would do. Then it should be a portmanteau strap!

'Very well!' said Siegmund, 'it is finally settled. I had better write to Helena, and tell her, and say to her she must go on. I'd better tell her.'

He sat for a long time with his notebook and a pencil, but he wrote nothing. At last he gave up.

‘Perhaps it is just as well,’ he said to himself. ‘She said she would come with me — perhaps that is just as well. She will go to the sea. When she knows, the sea will take her. She must know.’

He took a card, bearing her name and her Cornwall address, from his pocket-book, and laid it on the dressing-table.

‘She will come with me,’ he said to himself, and his heart rose with elation.

‘That is a cowardice,’ he added, looking doubtfully at the card, as if wondering whether to destroy it.

‘It is in the hands of God. Beatrice may or may not send word to her at Tintagel. It is in the hands of God,’ he concluded.

Then he sat down again.

“‘But for that fear of something after-death,’” he quoted to himself.

‘It is not fear,’ he said. ‘The act itself will be horrible and fearsome, but the after-death — it’s no more than struggling awake when you’re sick with a fright of dreams. “We are such stuff as dreams are made on.”’

Siegmund sat thinking of the after-death, which to him seemed so wonderfully comforting, full of rest, and reassurance, and renewal. He experienced no mystical ecstasies. He was sure of a wonderful kindness in death, a kindness which really reached right through life, though here he could not avail himself of it. Siegmund had always inwardly held faith that the heart of life beat kindly towards him. When he was cynical and sulky he knew that in reality it was only a waywardness of his.

The heart of life is implacable in its kindness. It may not be moved to fluttering of pity; it swings on uninterrupted by cries of anguish or of hate.

Siegmund was thankful for this unfaltering sternness of life. There was no futile hesitation between doom and pity. Therefore, he could submit and have faith. If each man by his crying could swerve the slow, sheer universe, what a doom of guilt he might gain. If Life could swerve from its orbit for pity, what terror of vacillation; and who would wish to bear the responsibility of the deflection?

Siegmund thanked God that life was pitiless, strong enough to take his treasures out of his hands, and to thrust him out of the room; otherwise, how could he go with any faith to death; otherwise, he would have felt the helpless disillusion of a youth who finds his infallible parents weaker than himself.

‘I know the heart of life is kind,’ said Siegmund, ‘because I feel it. Otherwise I would live in defiance. But Life is greater than me or anybody. We suffer, and we don’t know why, often. Life doesn’t explain. But I can keep faith in it, as a dog has faith in his master. After all, Life is as kind to me as I am to my dog. I have, proportionally, as much zest. And my purpose towards my dog is good. I

need not despair of Life.'

It occurred to Siegmund that he was meriting the old gibe of the atheists. He was shirking the responsibility of himself, turning it over to an imaginary god.

'Well,' he said, 'I can't help it. I do not feel altogether self-responsible.'

The morning had waxed during these investigations. Siegmund had been vaguely aware of the rousing of the house. He was finally startled into a consciousness of the immediate present by the calling of Vera at his door.

'There are two letters for you. Father.'

He looked about him in bewilderment; the hours had passed in a trance, and he had no idea of his time or place.

'Oh, all right,' he said, too much dazed to know what it meant. He heard his daughter going downstairs. Then swiftly returned over him the throbbing ache of his head and his arms, the discordant jarring of his body.

'What made her bring me the letters?' he asked himself. It was a very unusual attention. His heart replied, very sullen and shameful: 'She wanted to know; she wanted to make sure I was all right.'

Siegmund forgot all his speculations on a divine benevolence. The discord of his immediate situation overcame every harmony. He did not fetch in the letters.

'Is it so late?' he said. 'Is there no more time for me?'

He went to look at his watch. It was a quarter to nine. As he walked across the room he trembled, and a sickness made his bones feel rotten. He sat down on the bed.

'What am I going to do?' he asked himself.

By this time he was shuddering rapidly. A peculiar feeling, as if his belly were turned into nothingness, made him want to press his fists into his abdomen. He remained shuddering drunkenly, like a drunken man who is sick, incapable of thought or action.

A second knock came at the door. He started with a jolt.

'Here is your shaving-water,' said Beatrice in cold tones. 'It's half past nine.'

'All right,' said Siegmund, rising from the bed, bewildered.

'And what time shall you expect dinner?' asked Beatrice. She was still contemptuous.

'Any time. I'm not going out,' he answered.

He was surprised to hear the ordinary cool tone of his own voice, for he was shuddering uncontrollably, and was almost sobbing. In a shaking, bewildered, disordered condition he set about fulfilling his purpose. He was hardly conscious of anything he did; try as he would, he could not keep his hands steady in the violent spasms of shuddering, nor could he call his mind to think. He was one shuddering turmoil. Yet he performed his purpose methodically and exactly. In

every particular he was thorough, as if he were the servant of some stern will. It was a mesmeric performance, in which the agent trembled with convulsive sickness.

CHAPTER 28

Siegmund's lying late in bed made Beatrice very angry. The later it became, the more wrathful she grew. At half past nine she had taken up his shaving-water. Then she proceeded to tidy the dining-room, leaving the breakfast spread in the kitchen.

Vera and Frank were gone up to town; they would both be home for dinner at two o'clock. Marjory was despatched on an errand, taking Gwen with her. The children had no need to return home immediately, therefore it was highly probable they would play in the field or in the lane for an hour or two. Beatrice was alone downstairs. It was a hot, still morning, when everything outdoors shone brightly, and all indoors was dusked with coolness and colour. But Beatrice was angry. She moved rapidly and determinedly about the dining-room, thrusting old newspapers and magazines between the cupboard and the wall, throwing the litter in the grate, which was clear, Friday having been charwoman's day, passing swiftly, lightly over the front of the furniture with the duster. It was Saturday, when she did not spend much time over the work. In the afternoon she was going out with Vera. That was not, however, what occupied her mind as she brushed aside her work. She had determined to have a settlement with Siegmund, as to how matters should continue. She was going to have no more of the past three years' life; things had come to a crisis, and there must be an alteration. Beatrice was going to do battle, therefore she flew at her work, thus stirring herself up to a proper heat of blood. All the time, as she thrust things out of sight, or straightened a cover, she listened for Siegmund to come downstairs.

He did not come, so her anger waxed.

'He can lie skulking in bed!' she said to herself. 'Here I've been up since seven, broiling at it. I should think he's pitying himself. He ought to have something else to do. He ought to have to go out to work every morning, like another man, as his son has to do. He has had too little work. He has had too much his own way. But it's come to a stop now. I'll servant-housekeeper him no longer.'

Beatrice went to clean the step of the front door. She clanged the bucket loudly, every minute becoming more and more angry. That piece of work finished, she went into the kitchen. It was twenty past ten. Her wrath was at ignition point. She cleared all the things from the table and washed them up. As

she was so doing, her anger, having reached full intensity without bursting into flame, began to dissipate in uneasiness. She tried to imagine what Siegmund would do and say to her. As she was wiping a cup, she dropped it, and the smash so unnerved her that her hands trembled almost too much to finish drying the things and putting them away. At last it was done. Her next piece of work was to make the beds. She took her pail and went upstairs. Her heart was beating so heavily in her throat that she had to stop on the landing to recover breath. She dreaded the combat with him. Suddenly controlling herself, she said loudly at Siegmund's door, her voice coldly hostile:

‘Aren't you going to get up?’

There was not the faintest sound in the house. Beatrice stood in the gloom of the landing, her heart thudding in her ears.

‘It's after half past ten — aren't you going to get up?’ she called.

She waited again. Two letters lay unopened on a small table. Suddenly she put down her pail and went into the bathroom. The pot of shaving-water stood untouched on the shelf, just as she had left it. She returned and knocked swiftly at her husband's door, not speaking. She waited, then she knocked again, loudly, a long time. Something in the sound of her knocking made her afraid to try again. The noise was dull and thudding: it did not resound through the house with a natural ring, so she thought. She ran downstairs in terror, fled out into the front garden, and there looked up at his room. The window-door was open — everything seemed quiet.

Beatrice stood vacillating. She picked up a few tiny pebbles and flung them in a handful at his door. Some splattered on the panes sharply; some dropped dully in the room. One clinked on the wash-hand bowl. There was no response. Beatrice was terribly excited. She ran, with her black eyes blazing, and wisps of her black hair flying about her thin temples, out on to the road. By a mercy she saw the window-cleaner just pushing his ladder out of the passage of a house a little farther down the road. She hurried to him.

‘Will you come and see if there's anything wrong with my husband?’ she asked wildly.

‘Why, mum?’ answered the window-cleaner, who knew her, and was humbly familiar. ‘Is he taken bad or something? Yes, I'll come.’

He was a tall thin man with a brown beard. His clothes were all so loose, his trousers so baggy, that he gave one the impression his limbs must be bone, and his body a skeleton. He pushed at his ladders with a will.

‘Where is he, Mum?’ he asked officiously, as they slowed down at the side passage.

‘He's in his bedroom, and I can't get an answer from him.’

‘Then I s’ll want a ladder,’ said the window-cleaner, proceeding to lift one off his trolley. He was in a very great bustle. He knew which was Siegmund’s room: he had often seen Siegmund rise from some music he was studying and leave the drawing-room when the window-cleaning began, and afterwards he had found him in the small front bedroom. He also knew there were matrimonial troubles: Beatrice was not reserved.

‘Is it the least of the front rooms he’s in?’ asked the window-cleaner.

‘Yes, over the porch,’ replied Beatrice.

The man bustled with his ladder.

‘It’s easy enough,’ he said. ‘The door’s open, and we’re soon on the balcony.’

He set the ladder securely. Beatrice cursed him for a slow, officious fool. He tested the ladder, to see it was safe, then he cautiously clambered up. At the top he stood leaning sideways, bending over the ladder to peer into the room. He could see all sorts of things, for he was frightened.

‘I say there!’ he called loudly.

Beatrice stood below in horrible suspense.

‘Go in!’ she cried. ‘Go in! Is he there?’

The man stepped very cautiously with one foot on to the balcony, and peered forward. But the glass door reflected into his eyes. He followed slowly with the other foot, and crept forward, ready at any moment to take flight.

‘Hie, hie!’ he suddenly cried in terror, and he drew back.

Beatrice was opening her mouth to scream, when the window-cleaner exclaimed weakly, as if dubious:

‘I believe ‘e’s ‘anged ‘imself from the door-’ooks!’

‘No!’ cried Beatrice. ‘No, no, no!’

‘I believe ‘e ‘as!’ repeated the man.

‘Go in and see if he’s dead!’ cried Beatrice.

The man remained in the doorway, peering fixedly.

‘I believe he is,’ he said doubtfully.

‘No — go and see!’ screamed Beatrice.

The man went into the room, trembling, hesitating. He approached the body as if fascinated. Shivering, he took it round the loins and tried to lift it down. It was too heavy.

‘I know!’ he said to himself, once more bustling now he had something to do. He took his clasp-knife from his pocket, jammed the body between himself and the door so that it should not drop, and began to saw his way through the leathern strap. It gave. He started, and clutched the body, dropping his knife. Beatrice, below in the garden, hearing the scuffle and the clatter, began to scream in hysteria. The man hauled the body of Siegmund, with much difficulty,

on to the bed, and with trembling fingers tried to unloose the buckle in which the strap ran. It was bedded in Siegmund's neck. The window-cleaner tugged at it frantically, till he got it loose. Then he looked at Siegmund. The dead man lay on the bed with swollen, discoloured face, with his sleeping-jacket pushed up in a bunch under his armpits, leaving his side naked. Beatrice was screaming below. The window-cleaner, quite unnerved, ran from the room and scrambled down the ladder. Siegmund lay heaped on the bed, his sleeping-suit twisted and bunched up about him, his face hardly recognizable.

CHAPTER 29

Helena was dozing down in the cove at Tintagel. She and Louisa and Olive lay on the cool sands in the shadow, and steeped themselves in rest, in a cool, sea-fragrant tranquillity.

The journey down had been very tedious. After waiting for half an hour in the midnight turmoil of an August Friday in Waterloo station, they had seized an empty carriage, only to be followed by five north-countrymen, all of whom were affected by whisky. Olive, Helena, Louisa, occupied three corners of the carriage. The men were distributed between them. The three women were not alarmed. Their tipsy travelling companions promised to be tiresome, but they had a frank honesty of manner that placed them beyond suspicion. The train drew out westward. Helena began to count the miles that separated her from Siegmund. The north-countrymen began to be jolly: they talked loudly in their uncouth English; they sang the music-hall songs of the day; they furtively drank whisky. Through all this they were polite to the girls. As much could hardly be said in return of Olive and Louisa. They leaned forward whispering one to another. They sat back in their seats laughing, hiding their laughter by turning their backs on the men, who were a trifle disconcerted by this amusement.

The train spun on and on. Little homely clusters of lamps, suggesting the quiet of country life, turned slowly round through the darkness. The men dropped into a doze. Olive put a handkerchief over her face and went to sleep. Louisa gradually nodded and jerked into slumber. Helena sat weariedly and watched the rolling of the sleeping travellers and the dull blank of the night sheering off outside. Neither the men nor the women looked well asleep. They lurched and nodded stupidly. She thought of Bazarof in *Fathers and Sons*, endorsing his opinion on the appearance of sleepers: all but Siegmund. Was Siegmund asleep? She imagined him breathing regularly on the pillows; she could see the under arch of his eyebrows, the fine shape of his nostrils, the curve of his lips, as she bent in fancy over his face.

The dawn came slowly. It was rather cold. Olive wrapped herself in rugs and went to sleep again. Helena shivered, and stared out of the window. There appeared a wanness in the night, and Helena felt inexpressibly dreary. A rosiness spread out far away. It was like a flock of flamingoes hovering over a dark lake. The world vibrated as the sun came up.

Helena waked the tipsy men at Exeter, having heard them say that there they

must change. Then she walked the platform, very jaded. The train rushed on again. It was a most, most wearisome journey. The fields were very flowery, the morning was very bright, but what were these to her? She wanted dimness, sleep, forgetfulness. At eight o'clock, breakfast-time, the 'dauntless three' were driving in a waggonette amid blazing, breathless sunshine, over country naked of shelter, ungracious and harsh.

'Why am I doing this?' Helena asked herself.

The three friends, washed, dressed, and breakfasted. It was too hot to rest in the house, so they trudged to the coast, silently, each feeling in an ill humour.

When Helena was really rested, she took great pleasure in Tintagel. In the first place, she found that the cove was exactly, almost identically the same as the Walhalla scene in *Walküre*; in the second place, *Tristan* was here, in the tragic country filled with the flowers of a late Cornish summer, an everlasting reality; in the third place, it was a sea of marvellous, portentous sunsets, of sweet morning baths, of pools blossomed with life, of terrible suave swishing of foam which suggested the Anadyomene. In sun it was the enchanted land of divided lovers. Helena for ever hummed fragments of *Tristan*. As she stood on the rocks she sang, in her little, half-articulate way, bits of Isolde's love, bits of Tristan's anguish, to Siegmund.

She had not received her letter on Sunday. That had not very much disquieted her, though she was disappointed. On Monday she was miserable because of Siegmund's silence, but there was so much of enchantment in Tintagel, and Olive and Louisa were in such high spirits, that she forgot most whiles.

On Monday night, towards two o'clock, there came a violent storm of thunder and lightning. Louisa started up in bed at the first clap, waking Helena. The room palpitated with white light for two seconds; the mirror on the dressing-table glared supernaturally. Louisa clutched her friend. All was dark again, the thunder clapping directly.

'There, wasn't that lovely!' cried Louisa, speaking of the lightning. 'Oo, wasn't it magnificent! — glorious!'

The door clicked and opened: Olive entered in her long white nightgown. She hurried to the bed.

'I say, dear!' she exclaimed, 'may I come into the fold? I prefer the shelter of your company, dear, during this little lot.'

'Don't you like it?' cried Louisa. 'I think it's *lovely* — lovely!'

There came another slash of lightning. The night seemed to open and shut. It was a pallid vision of a ghost-world between the clanging shutters of darkness. Louisa and Olive clung to each other spasmodically.

'There!' exclaimed the former, breathless. 'That was fine! Helena, did you see

that?’

She clasped ecstatically the hand of her friend, who was lying down. Helena’s answer was extinguished by the burst of thunder.

‘There’s no accounting for tastes,’ said Olive, taking a place in the bed. ‘I can’t say I’m struck on lightning. What about you, Helena?’

‘I’m not struck yet,’ replied Helena, with a sarcastic attempt at a jest.

‘Thank you, dear,’ said Olive; ‘you do me the honour of catching hold.’

Helena laughed ironically.

‘Catching what?’ asked Louisa, mystified.

‘Why, dear,’ answered Olive, heavily condescending to explain, ‘I offered Helena the handle of a pun, and she took it. What a flash! You know, it’s not that I’m afraid...’

The rest of her speech was overwhelmed in thunder.

Helena lay on the edge of the bed, listening to the ecstasies of one friend and to the impertinences of the other. In spite of her ironical feeling, the thunder impressed her with a sense of fatality. The night opened, revealing a ghostly landscape, instantly to shut again with blackness. Then the thunder crashed. Helena felt as if some secret were being disclosed too swiftly and violently for her to understand. The thunder exclaimed horribly on the matter. She was sure something had happened.

Gradually the storm, drew away. The rain came down with a rush, persisted with a bruising sound upon the earth and the leaves.

‘What a deluge!’ exclaimed Louisa.

No one answered her. Olive was falling asleep, and Helena was in no mood to reply. Louisa, disconsolate, lay looking at the black window, nursing a grievance, until she, too, drifted into sleep. Helena was awake; the storm had left her with a settled sense of calamity. She felt bruised. The sound of the heavy rain bruising the ground outside represented her feeling; she could not get rid of the bruised sense of disaster.

She lay wondering what it was, why Siegmund had not written, what could have happened to him. She imagined all of them terrible, and endued with grandeur, for she had kinship with Hedda Gabler.

‘But no,’ she said to herself, ‘it is impossible anything should have happened to him — I should have known. I should have known the moment his spirit left his body; he would have come to me. But I slept without dreams last night, and today I am sure there has been no crisis. It is impossible it should have happened to him: I should have known.’

She was very certain that in event of Siegmund’s death, she would have received intelligence. She began to consider all the causes which might arise to

prevent his writing immediately to her.

‘Nevertheless,’ she said at last, ‘if I don’t hear tomorrow I will go and see.’

She had written to him on Monday. If she should receive no answer by Wednesday morning she would return to London. As she was deciding this she went to sleep.

The next day passed without news. Helena was in a state of distress. Her wistfulness touched the other two women very keenly. Louisa waited upon her, was very tender and solicitous. Olive, who was becoming painful by reason of her unsatisfied curiosity, had to be told in part of the state of affairs.

Helena looked up a train. She was quite sure by this time that something fatal awaited her.

The next morning she bade her friends a temporary good-bye, saying she would return in the evening. Immediately the train had gone, Louisa rushed into the little waiting-room of the station and wept. Olive shed tears for sympathy and self-pity. She pitied herself that she should be let in for so dismal a holiday. Louisa suddenly stopped crying and sat up:

‘Oh, I know I’m a pig, dear, am I not?’ she exclaimed. ‘Spoiling your holiday. But I couldn’t help it, dear, indeed I could not.’

‘My dear Lou!’ cried Olive in tragic contralto. ‘Don’t refrain for my sake. The bargain’s made; we can’t help what’s in the bundle.’

The two unhappy women trudged the long miles back from the station to their lodging. Helena sat in the swinging express revolving the same thought like a prayer-wheel. It would be difficult to think of anything more trying than thus sitting motionless in the train, which itself is throbbing and bursting its heart with anxiety, while one waits hour after hour for the blow which falls nearer as the distance lessens. All the time Helena’s heart and her consciousness were with Siegmund in London, for she believed he was ill and needed her.

‘Promise me,’ she had said, ‘if ever I were sick and wanted you, you would come to me.’

‘I would come to you from hell!’ Siegmund had replied.

‘And if you were ill — you would let me come to you?’ she had added.

‘I promise,’ he answered.

Now Helena believed he was ill, perhaps very ill, perhaps she only could be of any avail. The miles of distance were like hot bars of iron across her breast, and against them it was impossible to strive. The train did what it could.

That day remains as a smear in the record of Helena’s life. In it there is no spacing of hours, no lettering of experience, merely a smear of suspense.

Towards six o’clock she alighted, at Surbiton station, deciding that this would be the quickest way of getting to Wimbledon. She paced the platform slowly, as

if resigned, but her heart was crying out at the great injustice of delay. Presently the local train came in. She had planned to buy a local paper at Wimbledon, and if from that source she could learn nothing, she would go on to his house and inquire. She had prearranged everything minutely.

After turning the newspaper several times she found what she sought.

‘The funeral took place, at two o’clock today at Kingston Cemetery, of — — . Deceased was a professor of music, and had just returned from a holiday on the South Coast...’

The paragraph, in a bald twelve lines, told her everything.

‘Jury returned a verdict of suicide during temporary insanity. Sympathy was expressed for the widow and children.’

Helena stood still on the station for some time, looking at the print. Then she dropped the paper and wandered into the town, not knowing where she was going.

‘That was what I got,’ she said, months afterwards; ‘and it was like a brick, it was like a brick.’

She wandered on and on, until suddenly she found herself in the grassy lane with only a wire fence bounding her from the open fields on either side, beyond which fields, on the left, she could see Siegmund’s house standing florid by the road, catching the western sunlight. Then she stopped, realizing where she had come. For some time she stood looking at the house. It was no use her going there; it was of no use her going anywhere; the whole wide world was opened, but in it she had no destination, and there was no direction for her to take. As if marooned in the world, she stood desolate, looking from the house of Siegmund over the fields and the hills. Siegmund was gone; why had he not taken her with him?

The evening was drawing on; it was nearly half past seven when Helena looked at her watch, remembering Louisa, who would be waiting for her to return to Cornwall.

‘I must either go to her, or wire to her. She will be in a fever of suspense,’ said Helena to herself, and straightway she hurried to catch a tramcar to return to the station. She arrived there at a quarter to eight; there was no train down to Tintagel that night. Therefore she wired the news:

‘Siegmund dead. No train tonight. Am going home.’

*

This done, she took her ticket and sat down to wait. By the strength of her will everything she did was reasonable and accurate. But her mind was chaotic.

‘It was like a brick,’ she reiterated, and that brutal simile was the only one she could find, months afterwards, to describe her condition. She felt as if something

had crashed into her brain, stunning and maiming her.

As she knocked at the door of home she was apparently quite calm. Her mother opened to her.

‘What, are you alone?’ cried Mrs. Verden.

‘Yes. Louisa did not come up,’ replied Helena, passing into the dining-room. As if by instinct she glanced on the mantelpiece to see if there was a letter. There was a newspaper cutting. She went forward and took it. It was from one of the London papers.

‘Inquest was held today upon the body of — — .’

Helena read it, read it again, folded it up and put it in her purse. Her mother stood watching her, consumed with distress and anxiety.

‘How did you get to know?’ she asked.

‘I went to Wimbledon and bought a local paper,’ replied the daughter, in her muted, toneless voice.

‘Did you go to the house?’ asked the mother sharply.

‘No,’ replied Helena.

‘I was wondering whether to send you that paper,’ said her mother hesitatingly.

Helena did not answer her. She wandered about the house mechanically, looking for something. Her mother followed her, trying very gently to help her.

For some time Helena sat at table in the dining-room staring before her. Her parents moved restlessly in silence, trying not to irritate her by watching her, praying for something to change the fixity of her look. They acknowledged themselves helpless; like children, they felt powerless and forlorn, and were very quiet.

‘Won’t you go to rest, Nellie?’ asked the father at last. He was an unobtrusive, obscure man, whose sympathy was very delicate, whose ordinary attitude was one of gentle irony.

‘Won’t you go to rest, Nellie?’ he repeated.

Helena shivered slightly.

‘Do, my dear,’ her mother pleaded. ‘Let me take you to bed.’

Helena rose. She had a great horror of being fussed or petted, but this night she went dully upstairs, and let her mother help her to undress. When she was in bed the mother stood for some moments looking at her, yearning to beseech her daughter to pray to God; but she dared not. Helena moved with a wild impatience under her mother’s gaze.

‘Shall I leave you the candle?’ said Mrs Verden.

‘No, blow it out,’ replied the daughter. The mother did so, and immediately left the room, going downstairs to her husband. As she entered the dining-room

he glanced up timidly at her. She was a tall, erect woman. Her brown eyes, usually so swift and searching, were haggard with tears that did not fall. He bowed down, obliterating himself. His hands were tightly clasped.

‘Will she be all right if you leave her?’ he asked.

‘We must listen,’ replied the mother abruptly.

The parents sat silent in their customary places. Presently Mrs. Verden cleared the supper table, sweeping together a few crumbs from the floor in the place where Helena had sat, carefully putting her pieces of broken bread under the loaf to keep moist. Then she sat down again. One could see she was keenly alert to every sound. The father had his hand to his head; he was thinking and praying.

Mrs. Verden suddenly rose, took a box of matches from the mantelpiece, and hurrying her stately, heavy tread, went upstairs. Her husband followed in much trepidation, hovering near the door of his daughter’s room. The mother tremblingly lit the candle. Helena’s aspect distressed and alarmed her. The girl’s face was masked as if in sleep, but occasionally it was crossed by a vivid expression of fear or horror. Her wide eyes showed the active insanity of her brain. From time to time she uttered strange, inarticulate sounds. Her mother held her hands and soothed her. Although she was hardly aware of the mother’s presence, Helena was more tranquil. The father went downstairs and turned out the light. He brought his wife a large shawl, which he put on the bed-rail, and silently left the room. Then he went and kneeled down by his own bedside, and prayed.

Mrs Verden watched her daughter’s delirium, and all the time, in a kind of mental chant, invoked the help of God. Once or twice the girl came to herself, drew away her hand on recognizing the situation, and turned from her mother, who patiently waited until, upon relapse, she could soothe her daughter again. Helena was glad of her mother’s presence, but she could not bear to be looked at.

Towards morning the girl fell naturally asleep. The mother regarded her closely, lightly touched her forehead with her lips, and went away, having blown out the candle. She found her husband kneeling in his nightshirt by the bed. He muttered a few swift syllables, and looked up as she entered.

‘She is asleep,’ whispered the wife hoarsely.

‘Is it a — a natural sleep?’ hesitated the husband.

‘Yes. I think it is. I think she will be all right.’

‘Thank God!’ whispered the father, almost inaudibly.

He held his wife’s hand as she lay by his side. He was the comforter. She felt as if now she might cry and take comfort and sleep. He, the quiet, obliterated man, held her hand, taking the responsibility upon himself.

CHAPTER 30

Beatrice was careful not to let the blow of Siegmund's death fall with full impact upon her. As it were, she dodged it. She was afraid to meet the accusation of the dead Siegmund, with the sacred jury of memories. When the event summoned her to stand before the bench of her own soul's understanding, she fled, leaving the verdict upon herself eternally suspended.

When the neighbours had come, alarmed by her screaming, she had allowed herself to be taken away from her own house into the home of a neighbour. There the children were brought to her. There she wept, and stared wildly about, as if by instinct seeking to cover her mind with confusion. The good neighbour controlled matters in Siegmund's house, sending for the police, helping to lay out the dead body. Before Vera and Frank came home, and before Beatrice returned to her own place, the bedroom of Siegmund was locked.

Beatrice avoided seeing the body of her husband; she gave him one swift glance, blinded by excitement; she never saw him after his death. She was equally careful to avoid thinking of him. Whenever her thoughts wandered towards a consideration of how he must have felt, what his inner life must have been, during the past six years, she felt herself dilate with terror, and she hastened to invoke protection.

'The children!' she said to herself — 'the children. I must live for the children; I must think for the children.'

This she did, and with much success. All her tears and her wildness rose from terror and dismay rather than from grief. She managed to fend back a grief that would probably have broken her. Vera was too practical-minded, she had too severe a notion of what ought to be and what ought not, ever to put herself in her father's place and try to understand him. She concerned herself with judging him sorrowfully, exonerating him in part because Helena, that other, was so much more to blame. Frank, as a sentimentalist, wept over the situation, not over the personae. The children were acutely distressed by the harassing behaviour of the elders, and longed for a restoration of equanimity. By common consent no word was spoken of Siegmund. As soon as possible after the funeral Beatrice moved from South London to Harrow. The memory of Siegmund began to fade rapidly.

Beatrice had had all her life a fancy for a more open, public form of living than that of a domestic circle. She liked strangers about the house; they stimulated her agreeably. Therefore, nine months after the death of her husband,

she determined to carry out the scheme of her heart, and take in boarders. She came of a well-to-do family, with whom she had been in disgrace owing to her early romantic but degrading marriage with a young lad who had neither income nor profession. In the tragic, but also sordid, event of his death, the Waltons returned again to the aid of Beatrice. They came hesitatingly, and kept their gloves on. They inquired what she intended to do. She spoke highly and hopefully of her future boarding-house. They found her a couple of hundred pounds, glad to salve their consciences so cheaply. Siegmund's father, a winsome old man with a heart of young gold, was always ready further to diminish his diminished income for the sake of his grandchildren. So Beatrice was set up in a fairly large house in Highgate, was equipped with two maids, and gentlemen were invited to come and board in her house. It was a huge adventure, wherein Beatrice was delighted. Vera was excited and interested; Frank was excited, but doubtful and grudging; the children were excited, elated, wondering. The world was big with promise.

Three gentlemen came, before a month was out, to Beatrice's establishment. She hoped shortly to get a fourth or a fifth. Her plan was to play hostess, and thus bestow on her boarders the inestimable blessing of family life. Breakfast was at eight-thirty, and everyone attended. Vera sat opposite Beatrice, Frank sat on the maternal right hand; Mr MacWhirter, who was *superior*, sat on the left hand; next him sat Mr Allport, whose opposite was Mr Holiday. All were young men of less than thirty years. Mr MacWhirter was tall, fair, and stoutish; he was very quietly spoken, was humorous and amiable, yet extraordinarily learned. He never, by any chance, gave himself away, maintaining always an absolute reserve amid all his amiability. Therefore Frank would have done anything to win his esteem, while Beatrice was deferential to him. Mr Allport was tall and broad, and thin as a door; he had also a remarkably small chin. He was naïve, inclined to suffer in the first pangs of disillusionment; nevertheless, he was waywardly humorous, sometimes wistful, sometimes petulant, always gallant. Therefore Vera liked him, whilst Beatrice mothered him. Mr Holiday was short, very stout, very ruddy, with black hair. He had a disagreeable voice, was vulgar in the grain, but officiously helpful if appeal were made to him. Therefore Frank hated him. Vera liked his handsome, lusty appearance, but resented bitterly his behaviour. Beatrice was proud of the superior and skilful way in which she handled him, clipping him into shape without hurting him.

One evening in July, eleven months after the burial of Siegmund, Beatrice went into the dining-room and found Mr Allport sitting with his elbow on the window-sill, looking out on the garden. It was half-past seven. The red rents between the foliage of the trees showed the sun was setting; a fragrance of

evening-scented stocks filtered into the room through the open window; towards the south the moon was budding out of the twilight.

‘What, you here all alone!’ exclaimed Beatrice, who had just come from putting the children to bed. ‘I thought you had gone out.’

‘No — o! What’s the use,’ replied Mr Allport, turning to look at his landlady, ‘of going out? There’s nowhere to go.’

‘Oh, come! There’s the Heath, and the City — and you must join a tennis club. Now I know just the thing — the club to which Vera belongs.’

‘Ah, yes! You go down to the City — but there’s nothing there — what I mean to say — you want a pal — and even then — well’ — he drawled the word — ‘we-ell, it’s merely escaping from yourself — killing time.’

‘Oh, don’t say that!’ exclaimed Beatrice. ‘You want to enjoy life.’

‘Just so! Ah, just so!’ exclaimed Mr Allport. ‘But all the same — it’s like this — you only get up to the same thing tomorrow. What I mean to say — what’s the good, after all? It’s merely living because you’ve got to.’

‘You are too pessimistic altogether for a young man. I look at it differently myself; yet I’ll be bound I have more cause for grumbling. What’s the trouble now?’

‘We-ell — you can’t lay your finger on a thing like that! What I mean to say — it’s nothing very definite. But, after all — what is there to do but to hop out of life as quickly as possible? That’s the best way.’

Beatrice became suddenly grave.

‘You talk in that way, Mr. Allport,’ she said. ‘You don’t think of the others.’

‘I don’t know,’ he drawled. ‘What does it matter? Look here — who’d care? What I mean to say — for long?’

‘That’s all very easy, but it’s cowardly,’ replied Beatrice gravely.

‘Nevertheless,’ said Mr. Allport, ‘it’s true — isn’t it?’

‘It is not — and I *should* know,’ replied Beatrice, drawing a cloak of reserve ostentatiously over her face. Mr. Allport looked at her and waited. Beatrice relaxed toward the pessimistic young man.

‘Yes,’ she said, ‘I call it very cowardly to want to get out of your difficulties in that way. Think what you inflict on other people. You men, you’re all selfish. The burden is always left for the women.’

‘Ah, but then,’ said Mr. Allport very softly and sympathetically, looking at Beatrice’s black dress, ‘I’ve no one depending on *me*.’

‘No — you haven’t — but you’ve a mother and sister. The women always have to bear the brunt.’

Mr. Allport looked at Beatrice, and found her very pathetic.

‘Yes, they do rather,’ he replied sadly, tentatively waiting.

‘My husband — ’ began Beatrice. The young man waited. ‘My husband was one of your sort: he ran after trouble, and when he’d found it — he couldn’t carry it off — and left it — to me.’

Mr. Allport looked at her very sympathetically.

‘You don’t mean it!’ he exclaimed softly. ‘Surely he didn’t — ?’

Beatrice nodded, and turned aside her face.

‘Yes,’ she said. ‘I know what it is to bear that kind of thing — and it’s no light thing, I can assure you.’

There was a suspicion of tears in her voice.

‘And when was this, then — that he — ?’ asked Mr. Allport, almost with reverence.

‘Only last year,’ replied Beatrice.

Mr. Allport made a sound expressing astonishment and dismay. Little by little Beatrice told him so much: ‘Her husband had got entangled with another woman. She herself had put up with it for a long time. At last she had brought matters to a crisis, declaring what she should do. He had killed himself — hanged himself — and left her penniless. Her people, who were very wealthy, had done for her as much as she would allow them. She and Frank and Vera had done the rest. She did not mind for herself; it was for Frank and Vera, who should be now enjoying their careless youth, that her heart was heavy.’

There was silence for a while. Mr. Allport murmured his sympathy, and sat overwhelmed with respect for this little woman who was unbroken by tragedy. The bell rang in the kitchen. Vera entered.

‘Oh, what a nice smell! Sitting in the dark, Mother?’

‘I was just trying to cheer up Mr. Allport; he is very despondent.’

‘Pray do not overlook me,’ said Mr. Allport, rising and bowing.

‘Well! I did not see you! Fancy your sitting in the twilight chatting with the mater. You must have been an unscrupulous bore, maman.’

‘On the contrary,’ replied Mr. Allport, ‘Mrs. MacNair has been so good as to bear with me making a fool of myself.’

‘In what way?’ asked Vera sharply.

‘Mr. Allport is so despondent. I think he must be in love,’ said Beatrice playfully.

‘Unfortunately, I am not — or at least I am not yet aware of it,’ said Mr. Allport, bowing slightly to Vera.

She advanced and stood in the bay of the window, her skirt touching the young man’s knees. She was tall and graceful. With her hands clasped behind her back she stood looking up at the moon, now white upon the richly darkening sky.

‘Don’t look at the moon, Miss MacNair, it’s all rind,’ said Mr Allport in melancholy mockery. ‘Somebody’s bitten all the meat out of our slice of moon, and left us nothing but peel.’

‘It certainly does look like a piece of melon-shell — one portion,’ replied Vera.

‘Never mind, Miss MacNair,’ he said, ‘Whoever got the slice found it raw, I think.’

‘Oh, I don’t know,’ she said. ‘But isn’t it a beautiful evening? I will just go and see if I can catch the primroses opening.’

‘What primroses?’ he exclaimed.

‘Evening primroses — there are some.’

‘Are there?’ he said in surprise. Vera smiled to herself.

‘Yes, come and look,’ she said.

The young man rose with alacrity.

Mr Holiday came into the dining-room whilst they were down the garden.

‘What, nobody in!’ they heard him exclaim.

‘There is Holiday,’ murmured Mr Allport resentfully.

Vera did not answer. Holiday came to the open window, attracted by the fragrance.

‘Ho! that’s where you are!’ he cried in his nasal tenor, which annoyed Vera’s trained ear. She wished she had not been wearing a white dress to betray herself.

‘What have you got?’ he asked.

‘Nothing in particular,’ replied Mr Allport.

Mr Holiday sniggered.

‘Oh, well, if it’s nothing particular and private — ’ said Mr Holiday, and with that he leaped over the window-sill and went to join them.

‘Curst fool!’ muttered Mr Allport. ‘I beg your pardon,’ he added swiftly to Vera.

‘Have you ever noticed, Mr Holiday,’ asked Vera, as if very friendly, ‘how awfully tantalizing these flowers are? They won’t open while you’re looking.’

‘No,’ sniggered he, ‘I don’t blame ‘em. Why should they give themselves away any more than you do? You won’t open while you’re watched.’ He nudged Allport facetiously with his elbow.

After supper, which was late and badly served, the young men were in poor spirits. Mr MacWhirter retired to read. Mr Holiday sat picking his teeth; Mr. Allport begged Vera to play the piano.

‘Oh, the piano is not my instrument; mine was the violin, but I do not play now,’ she replied.

‘But you will begin again,’ pleaded Mr. Allport.

‘No, never!’ she said decisively. Allport looked at her closely. The family tragedy had something to do with her decision, he was sure. He watched her interestedly.

‘Mother used to play — ’ she began.

‘Vera!’ said Beatrice reproachfully.

‘Let us have a song,’ suggested Mr. Holiday.

‘Mr. Holiday wishes to sing, Mother,’ said Vera, going to the music-rack.

‘Nay — I — it’s not me,’ Holiday began.

‘“The Village Blacksmith”,’ said Vera, pulling out the piece. Holiday advanced. Vera glanced at her mother.

‘But I have not touched the piano for — for years, I am sure,’ protested Beatrice.

‘You can play beautifully,’ said Vera.

Beatrice accompanied the song. Holiday sang atrociously. Allport glared at him. Vera remained very calm.

At the end Beatrice was overcome by the touch of the piano. She went out abruptly.

‘Mother has suddenly remembered that tomorrow’s jellies are not made,’ laughed Vera.

Allport looked at her, and was sad.

When Beatrice returned, Holiday insisted she should play again. She would have found it more difficult to refuse than to comply.

Vera retired early, soon to be followed by Allport and Holiday. At half past ten Mr. MacWhirter came in with his ancient volume. Beatrice was studying a cookery-book.

‘You, too, at the midnight lamp!’ exclaimed MacWhirter politely.

‘Ah, I am only looking for a pudding for tomorrow,’ Beatrice replied.

‘We shall feel hopelessly in debt if you look after us so well,’ smiled the young man ironically.

‘I must look after you,’ said Beatrice.

‘You do — wonderfully. I feel that we owe you large debts of gratitude.’ The meals were generally late, and something was always wrong.

‘Because I scan a list of puddings?’ smiled Beatrice uneasily.

‘For the puddings themselves, and all your good things. The piano, for instance. That was very nice indeed.’ He bowed to her.

‘Did it disturb you? But one does not hear very well in the study.’

‘I opened the door,’ said MacWhirter, bowing again.

‘It is not fair,’ said Beatrice. ‘I am clumsy now — clumsy. I once could play.’

‘You play excellently. Why that “once could”?’ said MacWhirter.

‘Ah, you are amiable. My old master would have said differently,’ she replied.

‘We,’ said MacWhirter, ‘are humble amateurs, and to us you are more than excellent.’

‘Good old Monsieur Fannière, how he would scold me! He said I would not take my talent out of the napkin. He would quote me the New Testament. I always think Scripture false in French, do not you?’

‘Er — my acquaintance with modern languages is not extensive, I regret to say.’

‘No? I was brought up at a convent school near Rouen.’

‘Ah — that would be very interesting.’

‘Yes, but I was there six years, and the interest wears off everything.’

‘Alas!’ assented MacWhirter, smiling.

‘Those times were very different from these,’ said Beatrice.

‘I should think so,’ said MacWhirter, waxing grave and sympathetic.

CHAPTER 31

In the same month of July, not yet a year after Siegmund's death, Helena sat on the top of the tramcar with Cecil Byrne. She was dressed in blue linen, for the day had been hot. Byrne was holding up to her a yellow-backed copy of *Einsame Menschen*, and she was humming the air of the Russian folk-song printed on the front page, frowning, nodding with her head, and beating time with her hand to get the rhythm of the song. She turned suddenly to him, and shook her head, laughing.

'I can't get it — it's no use. I think it's the swinging of the car prevents me getting the time,' she said.

'These little outside things always come a victory over you,' he laughed.

'Do they?' she replied, smiling, bending her head against the wind. It was six o'clock in the evening. The sky was quite overcast, after a dim, warm day. The tramcar was leaping along southwards. Out of the corners of his eyes Byrne watched the crisp morsels of hair shaken on her neck by the wind.

'Do you know,' she said, 'it feels rather like rain.'

'Then,' said he calmly, but turning away to watch the people below on the pavement, 'you certainly ought not to be out.'

'I ought not,' she said, 'for I'm totally unprovided.'

Neither, however, had the slightest intention of turning back.

Presently they descended from the car, and took a road leading uphill off the highway. Trees hung over one side, whilst on the other side stood a few villas with lawns upraised. Upon one of these lawns two great sheep-dogs rushed and stood at the brink of the, grassy declivity, at some height above the road, barking and urging boisterously. Helena and Byrne stood still to watch them. One dog was grey, as is usual, the other pale fawn. They raved extravagantly at the two pedestrians. Helena laughed at them.

'They are — ' she began, in her slow manner.

'Villa sheep-dogs baying us wolves,' he continued.

'No,' she said, 'they remind me of Fafner and Fasolt.'

'Fasolt? They *are* like that. I wonder if they really dislike us.'

'It appears so,' she laughed.

'Dogs generally chum up to me,' he said.

Helena began suddenly to laugh. He looked at her inquiringly.

'I remember,' she said, still laughing, 'at Knockholt — you — a half-grown

lamb — a dog — in procession.’ She marked the position of the three with her finger.

‘What an ass I must have looked!’ he said.

‘Sort of silent Pied Piper,’ she laughed.

‘Dogs do follow me like that, though,’ he said.

‘They did Siegmund,’ she said.

‘Ah!’ he exclaimed.

‘I remember they had for a long time a little brown dog that followed him home.’

‘Ah!’ he exclaimed.

‘I remember, too,’ she said, ‘a little black-and-white kitten that followed me. Mater *would not* have it in — she would not. And I remember finding it, a few days after, dead in the road. I don’t think I ever quite forgave my mater that.’

‘More sorrow over one kitten brought to destruction than over all the sufferings of men,’ he said.

She glanced at him and laughed. He was smiling ironically.

‘For the latter, you see,’ she replied, ‘I am not responsible.’

As they neared the top of the hill a few spots of rain fell.

‘You know,’ said Helena, ‘if it begins it will continue all night. Look at that!’

She pointed to the great dark reservoir of cloud ahead.

‘Had we better go back?’ he asked.

‘Well, we will go on and find a thick tree; then we can shelter till we see how it turns out. We are not far from the cars here.’

They walked on and on. The raindrops fell more thickly, then thinned away.

‘It is exactly a year today,’ she said, as they-walked on the round shoulder of the down with an oak-wood on the left hand. ‘Exactly!’

‘What anniversary is it, then?’ he inquired.

‘Exactly a year today, Siegmund and I walked here — by the day, Thursday. We went through the larch-wood. Have you ever been through the larch-wood?’

‘No.’

‘We will go, then,’ she said.

‘History repeats itself,’ he remarked.

‘How?’ she asked calmly.

He was pulling at the heads of the cocksfoot grass as he walked.

‘I see no repetition,’ she added.

‘No,’ he exclaimed biting; ‘you are right!’

They went on in silence. As they drew near a farm they saw the men unloading a last wagon of hay on to a very brown stack. He sniffed the air. Though he was angry, he spoke.

‘They got that hay rather damp,’ he said. ‘Can’t you smell it — like hot tobacco and sandal-wood?’

‘What, is that the stack?’ she asked.

‘Yes, it’s always like that when it’s picked damp.’

The conversation was restarted, but did not flourish. When they turned on to a narrow path by the side of the field he went ahead. Leaning over the hedge, he pulled three sprigs of honeysuckle, yellow as butter, full of scent; then he waited for her. She was hanging her head, looking in the hedge-bottom. He presented her with the flowers without speaking. She bent forward, inhaled the rich fragrance, and looked up at him over the blossoms with her beautiful, beseeching blue eyes. He smiled gently to her.

‘Isn’t it nice?’ he said. ‘Aren’t they fine bits?’

She took them without answering, and put one piece carefully in her dress. It was quite against her rule to wear a flower. He took his place by her side.

‘I always like the gold-green of cut fields,’ he said. ‘They seem to give off sunshine even when the sky’s greyer than a tabby cat.’

She laughed, instinctively putting out her hand towards the glowing field on her right.

They entered the larch-wood. There the chill wind was changed into sound. Like a restless insect he hovered about her, like a butterfly whose antennae flicker and twitch sensitively as they gather intelligence, touching the aura, as it were, of the female. He was exceedingly delicate in his handling of her.

The path was cut windingly through the lofty, dark, and closely serried trees, which vibrated like chords under the soft bow of the wind. Now and again he would look down passages between the trees — narrow pillared corridors, dusky as if webbed across with mist. All round was a twilight, thickly populous with slender, silent trunks. Helena stood still, gazing up at the tree-tops where the bow of the wind was drawn, causing slight, perceptible quivering. Byrne walked on without her. At a bend in the path he stood, with his hand on the roundness of a larch-trunk, looking back at her, a blue fleck in the brownness of congregated trees. She moved very slowly down the path.

‘I might as well not exist, for all she is aware of me,’ he said to himself bitterly. Nevertheless, when she drew near he said brightly:

‘Have you noticed how the thousands of dry twigs between the trunks make a brown mist, a brume?’

She looked at him suddenly as if interrupted.

‘H’m? Yes, I see what you mean.’

She smiled at him, because of his bright boyish tone and manner.

‘That’s the larch fog,’ he laughed.

‘Yes,’ she said, ‘you see it in pictures. I had not noticed it before.’

He shook the tree on which his hand was laid.

‘It laughs through its teeth,’ he said, smiling, playing with everything he touched.

As they went along she caught swiftly at her hat; then she stooped, picking up a hat-pin of twined silver. She laughed to herself as if pleased by a coincidence.

‘Last year,’ she said, ‘the larch-fingers stole both my pins — the same ones.’

He looked at her, wondering how much he was filling the place of a ghost with warmth. He thought of Siegmund, and seemed to see him swinging down the steep bank out of the wood exactly as he himself was doing at the moment, with Helena stepping carefully behind. He always felt a deep sympathy and kinship with Siegmund; sometimes he thought he hated Helena.

They had emerged at the head of a shallow valley — one of those wide hollows in the North Downs that are like a great length of tapestry held loosely by four people. It was raining. Byrne looked at the dark blue dots rapidly appearing on the sleeves of Helena’s dress. They walked on a little way. The rain increased. Helena looked about for shelter.

‘Here,’ said Byrne — ‘here is our tent — a black tartar’s — ready pitched.’

He stooped under the low boughs of a very large yew tree that stood just back from the path. She crept after him. It was really a very good shelter. Byrne sat on the ledge of a root, Helena beside him. He looked under the flap of the black branches down the valley. The grey rain was falling steadily; the dark hollow under the tree was immersed in the monotonous sound of it. In the open, where the bright young corn shone intense with wet green, was a fold of sheep. Exposed in a large pen on the hillside, they were moving restlessly; now and again came the ‘tong-ting-tong’ of a sheep-bell. First the grey creatures huddled in the high corner, then one of them descended and took shelter by the growing corn lowest down. The rest followed, bleating and pushing each other in their anxiety to reach the place of desire, which was no whit better than where they stood before.

‘That’s like us all,’ said Byrne whimsically. ‘We’re all penned out on a wet evening, but we think, if only we could get where someone else is, it would be deliciously cosy.’

Helena laughed swiftly, as she always did when he became whimsical and fretful. He sat with his head bent down, smiling with his lips, but his eyes melancholy. She put her hand out to him. He took it without apparently observing it, folding his own hand over it, and unconsciously increasing the pressure.

‘You are cold,’ he said.

‘Only my hands, and they usually are,’ she replied gently.

‘And mine are generally warm.’

‘I know that,’ she said. ‘It’s almost the only warmth I get now — your hands. They really are wonderfully warm and close-touching.’

‘As good as a baked potato,’ he said.

She pressed his hand, scolding him for his mockery.

‘So many calories per week — isn’t that how we manage it?’ he asked. ‘On credit?’

She put her other hand on his, as if beseeching him to forgo his irony, which hurt her. They sat silent for some time. The sheep broke their cluster, and began to straggle back to the upper side of the pen.

‘Tong-tong, tong,’ went the forlorn bell. The rain waxed louder.

Byrne was thinking of the previous week. He had gone to Helena’s home to read German with her as usual. She wanted to understand Wagner in his own language.

In each of the arm-chairs, reposing across the arms, was a violin-case. He had sat down on the edge of one seat in front of the sacred fiddle. Helena had come quickly and removed the violin.

‘I shan’t knock it — it is all right,’ he had said, protesting.

This was Siegmund’s violin, which Helena had managed to purchase, and Byrne was always ready to yield its precedence.

‘It was all right,’ he repeated.

‘But you were not,’ she had replied gently.

Since that time his heart had beat quick with excitement. Now he sat in a little storm of agitation, of which nothing was betrayed by his gloomy, pondering expression, but some of which was communicated to Helena by the increasing pressure of his hand, which adjusted itself delicately in a stronger and stronger stress over her fingers and palm. By some movement he became aware that her hand was uncomfortable. He relaxed. She sighed, as if restless and dissatisfied. She wondered what he was thinking of. He smiled quietly.

‘The Babes in the Wood,’ he teased.

Helena laughed, with a sound of tears. In the tree overhead some bird began to sing, in spite of the rain, a broken evening song.

‘That little beggar sees it’s a hopeless case, so he reminds us of heaven. But if he’s going to cover us with yew-leaves, he’s set himself a job.’

Helena laughed again, and shivered. He put his arm round her, drawing her nearer his warmth. After this new and daring move neither spoke for a while.

‘The rain continues,’ he said.

‘And will do,’ she added, laughing.

‘Quite content,’ he said.

The bird overhead chirruped loudly again.

“‘Strew on us roses, roses,’” quoted Byrne, adding after a while, in wistful mockery: “‘And never a sprig of yew” — eh?’

Helena made a small sound of tenderness and comfort for him, and weariness for herself. She let herself sink a little closer against him.

‘Shall it not be so — no yew?’ he murmured.

He put his left hand, with which he had been breaking larch-twigs, on her chilled wrist. Noticing that his fingers were dirty, he held them up.

‘I shall make marks on you,’ he said.

‘They will come off,’ she replied.

‘Yes, we come clean after everything. Time scrubs all sorts of scars off us.’

‘Some scars don’t seem to go,’ she smiled.

And she held out her other arm, which had been pressed warm against his side. There, just above the wrist, was the red sun-inflammation from last year. Byrne regarded it gravely.

‘But it’s wearing off — even that,’ he said wistfully.

Helena put her arms round him under his coat. She was cold. He felt a hot wave of joy suffuse him. Almost immediately she released him, and took off her hat.

‘That is better,’ he said.

‘I was afraid of the pins,’ said she.

‘I’ve been dodging them for the last hour,’ he said, laughing, as she put her arms under his coat again for warmth.

She laughed, and, making a small, moaning noise, as if of weariness and helplessness, she sank her head on his chest. He put down his cheek against hers.

‘I want rest and warmth,’ she said, in her dull tones.

‘All right!’ he murmured.

THE END

SONS AND LOVERS



Sons and Lovers is Lawrence's third published novel and regarded by many as a masterpiece, telling the story of Paul Morel, a young man and a budding artist. Richard Aldington explains the semi-autobiographical nature of his masterpiece: 'When you have experienced *Sons and Lovers* you have lived through the agonies of the young Lawrence striving to win free from his old life'. Generally, it is not only considered as an evocative portrayal of working-class life in a mining community, but also an intense study of family, class and early sexual relationships.

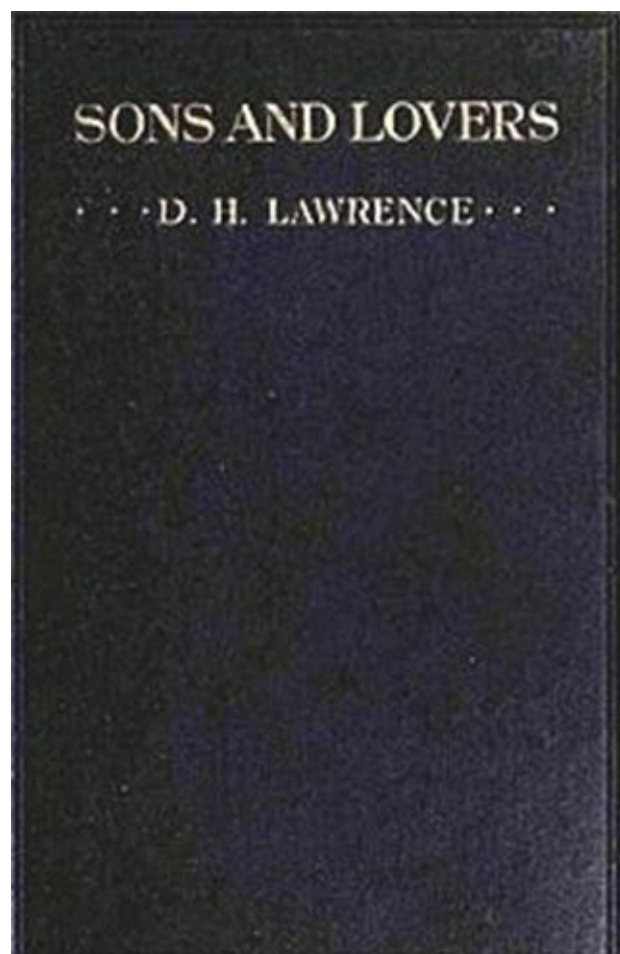
Lawrence began working on the novel in the period of his mother's illness, and often expresses this sense of his mother's wasted life through his female protagonist Gertrude Morel. Letters written around the time of its development clearly demonstrate the admiration he felt for his mother - viewing her as a 'clever, ironical, delicately moulded woman' - and her apparently unfortunate marriage to his coal mining father, a man of 'sanguine temperament' and instability. He believed that his mother had married below her class status. Rather interestingly, Lydia Lawrence wasn't born into the middle-class. This personal family conflict experienced by Lawrence provided him with the impetus for the first half of his novel - in which both William, the older brother, and Paul Morel become increasingly contemptuous of their father - and the subsequent exploration of Paul Morel's antagonizing relationships with both his lovers, which are both invariably affected by his allegiance to his mother.

The first draft of Lawrence's novel is now lost and was never completed, which seems to be directly due to his mother's illness. He did not return to the novel for three months, at which point it was titled 'Paul Morel'. The penultimate draft of the novel coincided with a remarkable change in Lawrence's life, as his health was thrown into tumult and he resigned his teaching job in order to spend time in Germany. This plan was never followed, however, as he met and married the German minor aristocrat, Frieda Weekley. According to Frieda's account of their first meeting, she and Lawrence talked about Oedipus and the effects of early childhood on later life within twenty minutes of meeting.

The third draft of '*Paul Morel*' was sent to the publishing house Heinemann, which was repulsively responded to by William Heinemann himself. His reaction captures the shock and newness of Lawrence's novel, 'the degradation

of the mother [as explored in this novel], supposed to be of gentler birth, is almost inconceivable', and encouraged Lawrence to redraft the novel one more time. In addition to altering the title to a more thematic *Sons and Lovers*, Heninemann's response had reinvigorated Lawrence into vehemently defending his novel and its themes as a coherent work of art. In order to justify its form Lawrence explains, in letters to Garnett, that it is a 'great tragedy' and a 'great book', one that mirrors the 'tragedy of thousands of young men in England'.

Lawrence rewrote the novel four times until he was happy with it. Although before publication the work was usually called Paul Morel, Lawrence finally settled on *Sons and Lovers*. Just as this changed title makes the work less focused on a central character, many of the later additions broadened the scope of the work thereby making the work less autobiographical. While some of the edits by Garnett were on the grounds of propriety or style, others would once more narrow the emphasis back upon Paul.



The first edition

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**THE FIRST EXPERIENCES OF A
YOUNG MAN IN THE MYSTERIES OF WOMAN!**



The
innocence
of a girl
like Marian
and the
experience
of a woman
like Clara
are part of
a young man's
growing up!



The tenderness and
sublimity of the
world-famous novel
are on the screen!

JERRY WALD'S production of D. H. LAWRENCE'S
Sons and Lovers



with **TREVOR HOWARD**
DEAN STOCKWELL - WENDY HILLER - MARY URE - HEATHER SEARS
Presented by **JACK PEROFF** & Adapted by **GAVIN LAMBERT** and **T. E. B. CLARKE**

The 1960 film adaptation

PART ONE

CHAPTER I

THE EARLY MARRIED LIFE OF THE MORELS

“THE BOTTOMS” succeeded to “Hell Row”. Hell Row was a block of thatched, bulging cottages that stood by the brookside on Greenhill Lane. There lived the colliers who worked in the little gin-pits two fields away. The brook ran under the alder trees, scarcely soiled by these small mines, whose coal was drawn to the surface by donkeys that plodded wearily in a circle round a gin. And all over the countryside were these same pits, some of which had been worked in the time of Charles II, the few colliers and the donkeys burrowing down like ants into the earth, making queer mounds and little black places among the corn-fields and the meadows. And the cottages of these coal-miners, in blocks and pairs here and there, together with odd farms and homes of the stockings, straying over the parish, formed the village of Bestwood.

Then, some sixty years ago, a sudden change took place, gin-pits were elbowed aside by the large mines of the financiers. The coal and iron field of Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire was discovered. Carston, Waite and Co. appeared. Amid tremendous excitement, Lord Palmerston formally opened the company’s first mine at Spinney Park, on the edge of Sherwood Forest.

About this time the notorious Hell Row, which through growing old had acquired an evil reputation, was burned down, and much dirt was cleansed away.

Carston, Waite & Co. found they had struck on a good thing, so, down the valleys of the brooks from Selby and Nuttall, new mines were sunk, until soon there were six pits working. From Nuttall, high up on the sandstone among the woods, the railway ran, past the ruined priory of the Carthusians and past Robin Hood’s Well, down to Spinney Park, then on to Minton, a large mine among corn-fields; from Minton across the farmlands of the valleyside to Bunker’s Hill, branching off there, and running north to Beggarlee and Selby, that looks over at Crich and the hills of Derbyshire: six mines like black studs on the countryside, linked by a loop of fine chain, the railway.

To accommodate the regiments of miners, Carston, Waite and Co. built the Squares, great quadrangles of dwellings on the hillside of Bestwood, and then, in the brook valley, on the site of Hell Row, they erected the Bottoms.

The Bottoms consisted of six blocks of miners' dwellings, two rows of three, like the dots on a blank-six domino, and twelve houses in a block. This double row of dwellings sat at the foot of the rather sharp slope from Bestwood, and looked out, from the attic windows at least, on the slow climb of the valley towards Selby.

The houses themselves were substantial and very decent. One could walk all round, seeing little front gardens with auriculas and saxifrage in the shadow of the bottom block, sweet-williams and pinks in the sunny top block; seeing neat front windows, little porches, little privet hedges, and dormer windows for the attics. But that was outside; that was the view on to the uninhabited parlours of all the colliers' wives. The dwelling-room, the kitchen, was at the back of the house, facing inward between the blocks, looking at a scrubby back garden, and then at the ash-pits. And between the rows, between the long lines of ash-pits, went the alley, where the children played and the women gossiped and the men smoked. So, the actual conditions of living in the Bottoms, that was so well built and that looked so nice, were quite unsavoury because people must live in the kitchen, and the kitchens opened on to that nasty alley of ash-pits.

Mrs. Morel was not anxious to move into the Bottoms, which was already twelve years old and on the downward path, when she descended to it from Bestwood. But it was the best she could do. Moreover, she had an end house in one of the top blocks, and thus had only one neighbour; on the other side an extra strip of garden. And, having an end house, she enjoyed a kind of aristocracy among the other women of the "between" houses, because her rent was five shillings and sixpence instead of five shillings a week. But this superiority in station was not much consolation to Mrs. Morel.

She was thirty-one years old, and had been married eight years. A rather small woman, of delicate mould but resolute bearing, she shrank a little from the first contact with the Bottoms women. She came down in the July, and in the September expected her third baby.

Her husband was a miner. They had only been in their new home three weeks when the wakes, or fair, began. Morel, she knew, was sure to make a holiday of it. He went off early on the Monday morning, the day of the fair. The two children were highly excited. William, a boy of seven, fled off immediately after breakfast, to prowl round the wakes ground, leaving Annie, who was only five, to whine all morning to go also. Mrs. Morel did her work. She scarcely knew her neighbours yet, and knew no one with whom to trust the little girl. So she

promised to take her to the wakes after dinner.

William appeared at half-past twelve. He was a very active lad, fair-haired, freckled, with a touch of the Dane or Norwegian about him.

“Can I have my dinner, mother?” he cried, rushing in with his cap on. “‘Cause it begins at half-past one, the man says so.”

“You can have your dinner as soon as it’s done,” replied the mother.

“Isn’t it done?” he cried, his blue eyes staring at her in indignation. “Then I’m goin’ be-out it.”

“You’ll do nothing of the sort. It will be done in five minutes. It is only half-past twelve.”

“They’ll be beginnin’,” the boy half cried, half shouted.

“You won’t die if they do,” said the mother. “Besides, it’s only half-past twelve, so you’ve a full hour.”

The lad began hastily to lay the table, and directly the three sat down. They were eating batter-pudding and jam, when the boy jumped off his chair and stood perfectly stiff. Some distance away could be heard the first small braying of a merry-go-round, and the tooting of a horn. His face quivered as he looked at his mother.

“I told you!” he said, running to the dresser for his cap.

“Take your pudding in your hand — and it’s only five past one, so you were wrong — you haven’t got your twopence,” cried the mother in a breath.

The boy came back, bitterly disappointed, for his twopence, then went off without a word.

“I want to go, I want to go,” said Annie, beginning to cry.

“Well, and you shall go, whining, wizzening little stick!” said the mother. And later in the afternoon she trudged up the hill under the tall hedge with her child. The hay was gathered from the fields, and cattle were turned on to the eddish. It was warm, peaceful.

Mrs. Morel did not like the wakes. There were two sets of horses, one going by steam, one pulled round by a pony; three organs were grinding, and there came odd cracks of pistol-shots, fearful screeching of the cocoanut man’s rattle, shouts of the Aunt Sally man, screeches from the peep-show lady. The mother perceived her son gazing enraptured outside the Lion Wallace booth, at the pictures of this famous lion that had killed a negro and maimed for life two white men. She left him alone, and went to get Annie a spin of toffee. Presently the lad stood in front of her, wildly excited.

“You never said you was coming — isn’t the’ a lot of things? — that lion’s killed three men — I’ve spent my tuppence — an’ look here.”

He pulled from his pocket two egg-cups, with pink moss-roses on them.

“I got these from that stall where y’ave ter get them marbles in them holes. An’ I got these two in two goes-’aepenny a go-they’ve got moss-roses on, look here. I wanted these.”

She knew he wanted them for her.

“H’m!” she said, pleased. “They ARE pretty!”

“Shall you carry ‘em, ‘cause I’m frightened o’ breakin’ ‘em?”

He was tipful of excitement now she had come, led her about the ground, showed her everything. Then, at the peep-show, she explained the pictures, in a sort of story, to which he listened as if spellbound. He would not leave her. All the time he stuck close to her, bristling with a small boy’s pride of her. For no other woman looked such a lady as she did, in her little black bonnet and her cloak. She smiled when she saw women she knew. When she was tired she said to her son:

“Well, are you coming now, or later?”

“Are you goin’ a’ready?” he cried, his face full of reproach.

“Already? It is past four, I know.”

“What are you goin’ a’ready for?” he lamented.

“You needn’t come if you don’t want,” she said.

And she went slowly away with her little girl, whilst her son stood watching her, cut to the heart to let her go, and yet unable to leave the wakes. As she crossed the open ground in front of the Moon and Stars she heard men shouting, and smelled the beer, and hurried a little, thinking her husband was probably in the bar.

At about half-past six her son came home, tired now, rather pale, and somewhat wretched. He was miserable, though he did not know it, because he had let her go alone. Since she had gone, he had not enjoyed his wakes.

“Has my dad been?” he asked.

“No,” said the mother.

“He’s helping to wait at the Moon and Stars. I seed him through that black tin stuff wi’ holes in, on the window, wi’ his sleeves rolled up.”

“Ha!” exclaimed the mother shortly. “He’s got no money. An’ he’ll be satisfied if he gets his ‘lowance, whether they give him more or not.”

When the light was fading, and Mrs. Morel could see no more to sew, she rose and went to the door. Everywhere was the sound of excitement, the restlessness of the holiday, that at last infected her. She went out into the side garden. Women were coming home from the wakes, the children hugging a white lamb with green legs, or a wooden horse. Occasionally a man lurched past, almost as full as he could carry. Sometimes a good husband came along with his family, peacefully. But usually the women and children were alone. The stay-at-home

mothers stood gossiping at the corners of the alley, as the twilight sank, folding their arms under their white aprons.

Mrs. Morel was alone, but she was used to it. Her son and her little girl slept upstairs; so, it seemed, her home was there behind her, fixed and stable. But she felt wretched with the coming child. The world seemed a dreary place, where nothing else would happen for her — at least until William grew up. But for herself, nothing but this dreary endurance — till the children grew up. And the children! She could not afford to have this third. She did not want it. The father was serving beer in a public house, swilling himself drunk. She despised him, and was tied to him. This coming child was too much for her. If it were not for William and Annie, she was sick of it, the struggle with poverty and ugliness and meanness.

She went into the front garden, feeling too heavy to take herself out, yet unable to stay indoors. The heat suffocated her. And looking ahead, the prospect of her life made her feel as if she were buried alive.

The front garden was a small square with a privet hedge. There she stood, trying to soothe herself with the scent of flowers and the fading, beautiful evening. Opposite her small gate was the stile that led uphill, under the tall hedge between the burning glow of the cut pastures. The sky overhead throbbed and pulsed with light. The glow sank quickly off the field; the earth and the hedges smoked dusk. As it grew dark, a ruddy glare came out on the hilltop, and out of the glare the diminished commotion of the fair.

Sometimes, down the trough of darkness formed by the path under the hedges, men came lurching home. One young man lapsed into a run down the steep bit that ended the hill, and went with a crash into the stile. Mrs. Morel shuddered. He picked himself up, swearing viciously, rather pathetically, as if he thought the stile had wanted to hurt him.

She went indoors, wondering if things were never going to alter. She was beginning by now to realise that they would not. She seemed so far away from her girlhood, she wondered if it were the same person walking heavily up the back garden at the Bottoms as had run so lightly up the breakwater at Sheerness ten years before.

“What have I to do with it?” she said to herself. “What have I to do with all this? Even the child I am going to have! It doesn’t seem as if I were taken into account.”

Sometimes life takes hold of one, carries the body along, accomplishes one’s history, and yet is not real, but leaves oneself as it were slurred over.

“I wait,” Mrs. Morel said to herself — “I wait, and what I wait for can never come.”

Then she straightened the kitchen, lit the lamp, mended the fire, looked out the washing for the next day, and put it to soak. After which she sat down to her sewing. Through the long hours her needle flashed regularly through the stuff. Occasionally she sighed, moving to relieve herself. And all the time she was thinking how to make the most of what she had, for the children's sakes.

At half-past eleven her husband came. His cheeks were very red and very shiny above his black moustache. His head nodded slightly. He was pleased with himself.

"Oh! Oh! waitin' for me, lass? I've bin 'elpin' Anthony, an' what's think he's gen me? Nowt b'r a lousy hae'f-crown, an' that's ivry penny —"

"He thinks you've made the rest up in beer," she said shortly.

"An' I 'aven't — that I 'aven't. You b'lieve me, I've 'ad very little this day, I have an' all." His voice went tender. "Here, an' I browt thee a bit o' brandysnap, an' a cocoanut for th' children." He laid the gingerbread and the cocoanut, a hairy object, on the table. "Nay, tha niver said thankyer for nowt i' thy life, did ter?"

As a compromise, she picked up the cocoanut and shook it, to see if it had any milk.

"It's a good 'un, you may back yer life o' that. I got it fra' Bill Hodgkisson. 'Bill,' I says, 'tha non wants them three nuts, does ter? Arena ter for gi'ein' me one for my bit of a lad an' wench?' 'I ham, Walter, my lad,' 'e says; 'ta'e which on 'em ter's a mind.' An' so I took one, an' thanked 'im. I didn't like ter shake it afore 'is eyes, but 'e says, 'Tha'd better ma'e sure it's a good un, Walt.' An' so, yer see, I knowed it was. He's a nice chap, is Bill Hodgkisson, e's a nice chap!"

"A man will part with anything so long as he's drunk, and you're drunk along with him," said Mrs. Morel.

"Eh, tha mucky little 'ussy, who's drunk, I sh'd like ter know?" said Morel. He was extraordinarily pleased with himself, because of his day's helping to wait in the Moon and Stars. He chattered on.

Mrs. Morel, very tired, and sick of his babble, went to bed as quickly as possible, while he raked the fire.

Mrs. Morel came of a good old burgher family, famous independents who had fought with Colonel Hutchinson, and who remained stout Congregationalists. Her grandfather had gone bankrupt in the lace-market at a time when so many lace-manufacturers were ruined in Nottingham. Her father, George Coppard, was an engineer — a large, handsome, haughty man, proud of his fair skin and blue eyes, but more proud still of his integrity. Gertrude resembled her mother in her small build. But her temper, proud and unyielding, she had from the Coppards.

George Coppard was bitterly galled by his own poverty. He became foreman

of the engineers in the dockyard at Sheerness. Mrs. Morel — Gertrude — was the second daughter. She favoured her mother, loved her mother best of all; but she had the Coppards' clear, defiant blue eyes and their broad brow. She remembered to have hated her father's overbearing manner towards her gentle, humorous, kindly-souled mother. She remembered running over the breakwater at Sheerness and finding the boat. She remembered to have been petted and flattered by all the men when she had gone to the dockyard, for she was a delicate, rather proud child. She remembered the funny old mistress, whose assistant she had become, whom she had loved to help in the private school. And she still had the Bible that John Field had given her. She used to walk home from chapel with John Field when she was nineteen. He was the son of a well-to-do tradesman, had been to college in London, and was to devote himself to business.

She could always recall in detail a September Sunday afternoon, when they had sat under the vine at the back of her father's house. The sun came through the chinks of the vine-leaves and made beautiful patterns, like a lace scarf, falling on her and on him. Some of the leaves were clean yellow, like yellow flat flowers.

"Now sit still," he had cried. "Now your hair, I don't know what it IS like! It's as bright as copper and gold, as red as burnt copper, and it has gold threads where the sun shines on it. Fancy their saying it's brown. Your mother calls it mouse-colour."

She had met his brilliant eyes, but her clear face scarcely showed the elation which rose within her.

"But you say you don't like business," she pursued.

"I don't. I hate it!" he cried hotly.

"And you would like to go into the ministry," she half implored.

"I should. I should love it, if I thought I could make a first-rate preacher."

"Then why don't you — why DON'T you?" Her voice rang with defiance. "If I were a man, nothing would stop me."

She held her head erect. He was rather timid before her.

"But my father's so stiff-necked. He means to put me into the business, and I know he'll do it."

"But if you're a MAN?" she had cried.

"Being a man isn't everything," he replied, frowning with puzzled helplessness.

Now, as she moved about her work at the Bottoms, with some experience of what being a man meant, she knew that it was NOT everything.

At twenty, owing to her health, she had left Sheerness. Her father had retired

home to Nottingham. John Field's father had been ruined; the son had gone as a teacher in Norwood. She did not hear of him until, two years later, she made determined inquiry. He had married his landlady, a woman of forty, a widow with property.

And still Mrs. Morel preserved John Field's Bible. She did not now believe him to be — Well, she understood pretty well what he might or might not have been. So she preserved his Bible, and kept his memory intact in her heart, for her own sake. To her dying day, for thirty-five years, she did not speak of him.

When she was twenty-three years old, she met, at a Christmas party, a young man from the Erewash Valley. Morel was then twenty-seven years old. He was well set-up, erect, and very smart. He had wavy black hair that shone again, and a vigorous black beard that had never been shaved. His cheeks were ruddy, and his red, moist mouth was noticeable because he laughed so often and so heartily. He had that rare thing, a rich, ringing laugh. Gertrude Coppard had watched him, fascinated. He was so full of colour and animation, his voice ran so easily into comic grotesque, he was so ready and so pleasant with everybody. Her own father had a rich fund of humour, but it was satiric. This man's was different: soft, non-intellectual, warm, a kind of gambolling.

She herself was opposite. She had a curious, receptive mind which found much pleasure and amusement in listening to other folk. She was clever in leading folk to talk. She loved ideas, and was considered very intellectual. What she liked most of all was an argument on religion or philosophy or politics with some educated man. This she did not often enjoy. So she always had people tell her about themselves, finding her pleasure so.

In her person she was rather small and delicate, with a large brow, and dropping bunches of brown silk curls. Her blue eyes were very straight, honest, and searching. She had the beautiful hands of the Coppards. Her dress was always subdued. She wore dark blue silk, with a peculiar silver chain of silver scallops. This, and a heavy brooch of twisted gold, was her only ornament. She was still perfectly intact, deeply religious, and full of beautiful candour.

Walter Morel seemed melted away before her. She was to the miner that thing of mystery and fascination, a lady. When she spoke to him, it was with a southern pronunciation and a purity of English which thrilled him to hear. She watched him. He danced well, as if it were natural and joyous in him to dance. His grandfather was a French refugee who had married an English barmaid — if it had been a marriage. Gertrude Coppard watched the young miner as he danced, a certain subtle exultation like glamour in his movement, and his face the flower of his body, ruddy, with tumbled black hair, and laughing alike whatever partner he bowed above. She thought him rather wonderful, never

having met anyone like him. Her father was to her the type of all men. And George Coppard, proud in his bearing, handsome, and rather bitter; who preferred theology in reading, and who drew near in sympathy only to one man, the Apostle Paul; who was harsh in government, and in familiarity ironic; who ignored all sensuous pleasure: — he was very different from the miner. Gertrude herself was rather contemptuous of dancing; she had not the slightest inclination towards that accomplishment, and had never learned even a Roger de Coverley. She was puritan, like her father, high-minded, and really stern. Therefore the dusky, golden softness of this man's sensuous flame of life, that flowed off his flesh like the flame from a candle, not baffled and gripped into incandescence by thought and spirit as her life was, seemed to her something wonderful, beyond her.

He came and bowed above her. A warmth radiated through her as if she had drunk wine.

"Now do come and have this one wi' me," he said caressively. "It's easy, you know. I'm pining to see you dance."

She had told him before she could not dance. She glanced at his humility and smiled. Her smile was very beautiful. It moved the man so that he forgot everything.

"No, I won't dance," she said softly. Her words came clean and ringing.

Not knowing what he was doing — he often did the right thing by instinct — he sat beside her, inclining reverentially.

"But you mustn't miss your dance," she reproved.

"Nay, I don't want to dance that — it's not one as I care about."

"Yet you invited me to it."

He laughed very heartily at this.

"I never thought o' that. Tha'rt not long in taking the curl out of me."

It was her turn to laugh quickly.

"You don't look as if you'd come much uncurled," she said.

"I'm like a pig's tail, I curl because I canna help it," he laughed, rather boisterously.

"And you are a miner!" she exclaimed in surprise.

"Yes. I went down when I was ten."

She looked at him in wondering dismay.

"When you were ten! And wasn't it very hard?" she asked.

"You soon get used to it. You live like th' mice, an' you pop out at night to see what's going on."

"It makes me feel blind," she frowned.

"Like a mouidiwarp!" he laughed. "Yi, an' there's some chaps as does go

round like mouidiwarps.” He thrust his face forward in the blind, snout-like way of a mole, seeming to sniff and peer for direction. “They dun though!” he protested naively. “Tha niver seed such a way they get in. But tha mun let me ta’e thee down some time, an’ tha can see for thysen.”

She looked at him, startled. This was a new tract of life suddenly opened before her. She realised the life of the miners, hundreds of them toiling below earth and coming up at evening. He seemed to her noble. He risked his life daily, and with gaiety. She looked at him, with a touch of appeal in her pure humility.

“Shouldn’t ter like it?” he asked tenderly. “‘Appen not, it ‘ud dirty thee.”

She had never been “thee’d” and “thou’d” before.

The next Christmas they were married, and for three months she was perfectly happy: for six months she was very happy.

He had signed the pledge, and wore the blue ribbon of a tee-totaller: he was nothing if not showy. They lived, she thought, in his own house. It was small, but convenient enough, and quite nicely furnished, with solid, worthy stuff that suited her honest soul. The women, her neighbours, were rather foreign to her, and Morel’s mother and sisters were apt to sneer at her ladylike ways. But she could perfectly well live by herself, so long as she had her husband close.

Sometimes, when she herself wearied of love-talk, she tried to open her heart seriously to him. She saw him listen deferentially, but without understanding. This killed her efforts at a finer intimacy, and she had flashes of fear. Sometimes he was restless of an evening: it was not enough for him just to be near her, she realised. She was glad when he set himself to little jobs.

He was a remarkably handy man — could make or mend anything. So she would say:

“I do like that coal-rake of your mother’s — it is small and natty.”

“Does ter, my wench? Well, I made that, so I can make thee one!”

“What! why, it’s a steel one!”

“An’ what if it is! Tha s’lt ha’e one very similar, if not exactly same.”

She did not mind the mess, nor the hammering and noise. He was busy and happy.

But in the seventh month, when she was brushing his Sunday coat, she felt papers in the breast pocket, and, seized with a sudden curiosity, took them out to read. He very rarely wore the frock-coat he was married in: and it had not occurred to her before to feel curious concerning the papers. They were the bills of the household furniture, still unpaid.

“Look here,” she said at night, after he was washed and had had his dinner. “I found these in the pocket of your wedding-coat. Haven’t you settled the bills yet?”

“No. I haven’t had a chance.”

“But you told me all was paid. I had better go into Nottingham on Saturday and settle them. I don’t like sitting on another man’s chairs and eating from an unpaid table.”

He did not answer.

“I can have your bank-book, can’t I?”

“Tha can ha’e it, for what good it’ll be to thee.”

“I thought — ” she began. He had told her he had a good bit of money left over. But she realised it was no use asking questions. She sat rigid with bitterness and indignation.

The next day she went down to see his mother.

“Didn’t you buy the furniture for Walter?” she asked.

“Yes, I did,” tartly retorted the elder woman.

“And how much did he give you to pay for it?”

The elder woman was stung with fine indignation.

“Eighty pound, if you’re so keen on knowin’,” she replied.

“Eighty pounds! But there are forty-two pounds still owing!”

“I can’t help that.”

“But where has it all gone?”

“You’ll find all the papers, I think, if you look — beside ten pound as he owed me, an’ six pound as the wedding cost down here.”

“Six pounds!” echoed Gertrude Morel. It seemed to her monstrous that, after her own father had paid so heavily for her wedding, six pounds more should have been squandered in eating and drinking at Walter’s parents’ house, at his expense.

“And how much has he sunk in his houses?” she asked.

“His houses — which houses?”

Gertrude Morel went white to the lips. He had told her the house he lived in, and the next one, was his own.

“I thought the house we live in — ” she began.

“They’re my houses, those two,” said the mother-in-law. “And not clear either. It’s as much as I can do to keep the mortgage interest paid.”

Gertrude sat white and silent. She was her father now.

“Then we ought to be paying you rent,” she said coldly.

“Walter is paying me rent,” replied the mother.

“And what rent?” asked Gertrude.

“Six and six a week,” retorted the mother.

It was more than the house was worth. Gertrude held her head erect, looked straight before her.

“It is lucky to be you,” said the elder woman, biting, “to have a husband as takes all the worry of the money, and leaves you a free hand.”

The young wife was silent.

She said very little to her husband, but her manner had changed towards him. Something in her proud, honourable soul had crystallised out hard as rock.

When October came in, she thought only of Christmas. Two years ago, at Christmas, she had met him. Last Christmas she had married him. This Christmas she would bear him a child.

“You don’t dance yourself, do you, missis?” asked her nearest neighbour, in October, when there was great talk of opening a dancing-class over the Brick and Tile Inn at Bestwood.

“No — I never had the least inclination to,” Mrs. Morel replied.

“Fancy! An’ how funny as you should ha’ married your Mester. You know he’s quite a famous one for dancing.”

“I didn’t know he was famous,” laughed Mrs. Morel.

“Yea, he is though! Why, he ran that dancing-class in the Miners’ Arms club-room for over five year.”

“Did he?”

“Yes, he did.” The other woman was defiant. “An’ it was thronged every Tuesday, and Thursday, an’ Sat’day — an’ there WAS carryin’s-on, accordin’ to all accounts.”

This kind of thing was gall and bitterness to Mrs. Morel, and she had a fair share of it. The women did not spare her, at first; for she was superior, though she could not help it.

He began to be rather late in coming home.

“They’re working very late now, aren’t they?” she said to her washer-woman.

“No later than they allers do, I don’t think. But they stop to have their pint at Ellen’s, an’ they get talkin’, an’ there you are! Dinner stone cold — an’ it serves ‘em right.”

“But Mr. Morel does not take any drink.”

The woman dropped the clothes, looked at Mrs. Morel, then went on with her work, saying nothing.

Gertrude Morel was very ill when the boy was born. Morel was good to her, as good as gold. But she felt very lonely, miles away from her own people. She felt lonely with him now, and his presence only made it more intense.

The boy was small and frail at first, but he came on quickly. He was a beautiful child, with dark gold ringlets, and dark-blue eyes which changed gradually to a clear grey. His mother loved him passionately. He came just when her own bitterness of disillusion was hardest to bear; when her faith in life was

shaken, and her soul felt dreary and lonely. She made much of the child, and the father was jealous.

At last Mrs. Morel despised her husband. She turned to the child; she turned from the father. He had begun to neglect her; the novelty of his own home was gone. He had no grit, she said bitterly to herself. What he felt just at the minute, that was all to him. He could not abide by anything. There was nothing at the back of all his show.

There began a battle between the husband and wife — a fearful, bloody battle that ended only with the death of one. She fought to make him undertake his own responsibilities, to make him fulfill his obligations. But he was too different from her. His nature was purely sensuous, and she strove to make him moral, religious. She tried to force him to face things. He could not endure it — it drove him out of his mind.

While the baby was still tiny, the father's temper had become so irritable that it was not to be trusted. The child had only to give a little trouble when the man began to bully. A little more, and the hard hands of the collier hit the baby. Then Mrs. Morel loathed her husband, loathed him for days; and he went out and drank; and she cared very little what he did. Only, on his return, she scathed him with her satire.

The estrangement between them caused him, knowingly or unknowingly, grossly to offend her where he would not have done.

William was only one year old, and his mother was proud of him, he was so pretty. She was not well off now, but her sisters kept the boy in clothes. Then, with his little white hat curled with an ostrich feather, and his white coat, he was a joy to her, the twining wisps of hair clustering round his head. Mrs. Morel lay listening, one Sunday morning, to the chatter of the father and child downstairs. Then she dozed off. When she came downstairs, a great fire glowed in the grate, the room was hot, the breakfast was roughly laid, and seated in his armchair, against the chimney-piece, sat Morel, rather timid; and standing between his legs, the child — cropped like a sheep, with such an odd round poll — looking wondering at her; and on a newspaper spread out upon the hearthrug, a myriad of crescent-shaped curls, like the petals of a marigold scattered in the reddening firelight.

Mrs. Morel stood still. It was her first baby. She went very white, and was unable to speak.

“What dost think o’ ‘im?” Morel laughed uneasily.

She gripped her two fists, lifted them, and came forward. Morel shrank back.

“I could kill you, I could!” she said. She choked with rage, her two fists uplifted.

“Yer non want ter make a wench on ‘im,” Morel said, in a frightened tone, bending his head to shield his eyes from hers. His attempt at laughter had vanished.

The mother looked down at the jagged, close-clipped head of her child. She put her hands on his hair, and stroked and fondled his head.

“Oh — my boy!” she faltered. Her lip trembled, her face broke, and, snatching up the child, she buried her face in his shoulder and cried painfully. She was one of those women who cannot cry; whom it hurts as it hurts a man. It was like ripping something out of her, her sobbing.

Morel sat with his elbows on his knees, his hands gripped together till the knuckles were white. He gazed in the fire, feeling almost stunned, as if he could not breathe.

Presently she came to an end, soothed the child and cleared away the breakfast-table. She left the newspaper, littered with curls, spread upon the hearthrug. At last her husband gathered it up and put it at the back of the fire. She went about her work with closed mouth and very quiet. Morel was subdued. He crept about wretchedly, and his meals were a misery that day. She spoke to him civilly, and never alluded to what he had done. But he felt something final had happened.

Afterwards she said she had been silly, that the boy’s hair would have had to be cut, sooner or later. In the end, she even brought herself to say to her husband it was just as well he had played barber when he did. But she knew, and Morel knew, that that act had caused something momentous to take place in her soul. She remembered the scene all her life, as one in which she had suffered the most intensely.

This act of masculine clumsiness was the spear through the side of her love for Morel. Before, while she had striven against him bitterly, she had fretted after him, as if he had gone astray from her. Now she ceased to fret for his love: he was an outsider to her. This made life much more bearable.

Nevertheless, she still continued to strive with him. She still had her high moral sense, inherited from generations of Puritans. It was now a religious instinct, and she was almost a fanatic with him, because she loved him, or had loved him. If he sinned, she tortured him. If he drank, and lied, was often a poltroon, sometimes a knave, she wielded the lash unmercifully.

The pity was, she was too much his opposite. She could not be content with the little he might be; she would have him the much that he ought to be. So, in seeking to make him nobler than he could be, she destroyed him. She injured and hurt and scarred herself, but she lost none of her worth. She also had the children.

He drank rather heavily, though not more than many miners, and always beer, so that whilst his health was affected, it was never injured. The week-end was his chief carouse. He sat in the Miners' Arms until turning-out time every Friday, every Saturday, and every Sunday evening. On Monday and Tuesday he had to get up and reluctantly leave towards ten o'clock. Sometimes he stayed at home on Wednesday and Thursday evenings, or was only out for an hour. He practically never had to miss work owing to his drinking.

But although he was very steady at work, his wages fell off. He was blab-mouthed, a tongue-wagger. Authority was hateful to him, therefore he could only abuse the pit-managers. He would say, in the Palmerston:

"Th' gaffer come down to our stall this morning, an' 'e says, 'You know, Walter, this 'ere'll not do. What about these props?' An' I says to him, 'Why, what art talkin' about? What d'st mean about th' props?' 'It'll never do, this 'ere,' 'e says. 'You'll be havin' th' roof in, one o' these days.' An' I says, 'Tha'd better stan' on a bit o' clunch, then, an' hold it up wi' thy 'ead.' So 'e wor that mad, 'e cossed an' 'e swore, an' t'other chaps they did laugh." Morel was a good mimic. He imitated the manager's fat, squeaky voice, with its attempt at good English.

"I shan't have it, Walter. Who knows more about it, me or you?' So I says, 'I've niver fun out how much tha' knows, Alfred. It'll 'appen carry thee ter bed an' back.'"'

So Morel would go on to the amusement of his boon companions. And some of this would be true. The pit-manager was not an educated man. He had been a boy along with Morel, so that, while the two disliked each other, they more or less took each other for granted. But Alfred Charlesworth did not forgive the butty these public-house sayings. Consequently, although Morel was a good miner, sometimes earning as much as five pounds a week when he married, he came gradually to have worse and worse stalls, where the coal was thin, and hard to get, and unprofitable.

Also, in summer, the pits are slack. Often, on bright sunny mornings, the men are seen trooping home again at ten, eleven, or twelve o'clock. No empty trucks stand at the pit-mouth. The women on the hillside look across as they shake the hearthrug against the fence, and count the wagons the engine is taking along the line up the valley. And the children, as they come from school at dinner-time, looking down the fields and seeing the wheels on the headstocks standing, say:

"Minton's knocked off. My dad'll be at home."

And there is a sort of shadow over all, women and children and men, because money will be short at the end of the week.

Morel was supposed to give his wife thirty shillings a week, to provide

everything — rent, food, clothes, clubs, insurance, doctors. Occasionally, if he were flush, he gave her thirty-five. But these occasions by no means balanced those when he gave her twenty-five. In winter, with a decent stall, the miner might earn fifty or fifty-five shillings a week. Then he was happy. On Friday night, Saturday, and Sunday, he spent royally, getting rid of his sovereign or thereabouts. And out of so much, he scarcely spared the children an extra penny or bought them a pound of apples. It all went in drink. In the bad times, matters were more worrying, but he was not so often drunk, so that Mrs. Morel used to say:

“I’m not sure I wouldn’t rather be short, for when he’s flush, there isn’t a minute of peace.”

If he earned forty shillings he kept ten; from thirty-five he kept five; from thirty-two he kept four; from twenty-eight he kept three; from twenty-four he kept two; from twenty he kept one-and-six; from eighteen he kept a shilling; from sixteen he kept sixpence. He never saved a penny, and he gave his wife no opportunity of saving; instead, she had occasionally to pay his debts; not public-house debts, for those never were passed on to the women, but debts when he had bought a canary, or a fancy walking-stick.

At the wakes time Morel was working badly, and Mrs. Morel was trying to save against her confinement. So it galled her bitterly to think he should be out taking his pleasure and spending money, whilst she remained at home, harassed. There were two days’ holiday. On the Tuesday morning Morel rose early. He was in good spirits. Quite early, before six o’clock, she heard him whistling away to himself downstairs. He had a pleasant way of whistling, lively and musical. He nearly always whistled hymns. He had been a choir-boy with a beautiful voice, and had taken solos in Southwell cathedral. His morning whistling alone betrayed it.

His wife lay listening to him tinkering away in the garden, his whistling ringing out as he sawed and hammered away. It always gave her a sense of warmth and peace to hear him thus as she lay in bed, the children not yet awake, in the bright early morning, happy in his man’s fashion.

At nine o’clock, while the children with bare legs and feet were sitting playing on the sofa, and the mother was washing up, he came in from his carpentry, his sleeves rolled up, his waistcoat hanging open. He was still a good-looking man, with black, wavy hair, and a large black moustache. His face was perhaps too much inflamed, and there was about him a look almost of peevishness. But now he was jolly. He went straight to the sink where his wife was washing up.

“What, are thee there!” he said boisterously. “Sluthe off an’ let me wesh mysen.”

“You may wait till I’ve finished,” said his wife.

“Oh, mun I? An’ what if I shonna?”

This good-humoured threat amused Mrs. Morel.

“Then you can go and wash yourself in the soft-water tub.”

“Ha! I can’ an’ a’, tha mucky little ‘ussy.”

With which he stood watching her a moment, then went away to wait for her.

When he chose he could still make himself again a real gallant. Usually he preferred to go out with a scarf round his neck. Now, however, he made a toilet. There seemed so much gusto in the way he puffed and swilled as he washed himself, so much alacrity with which he hurried to the mirror in the kitchen, and, bending because it was too low for him, scrupulously parted his wet black hair, that it irritated Mrs. Morel. He put on a turn-down collar, a black bow, and wore his Sunday tail-coat. As such, he looked spruce, and what his clothes would not do, his instinct for making the most of his good looks would.

At half-past nine Jerry Purdy came to call for his pal. Jerry was Morel’s bosom friend, and Mrs. Morel disliked him. He was a tall, thin man, with a rather foxy face, the kind of face that seems to lack eyelashes. He walked with a stiff, brittle dignity, as if his head were on a wooden spring. His nature was cold and shrewd. Generous where he intended to be generous, he seemed to be very fond of Morel, and more or less to take charge of him.

Mrs. Morel hated him. She had known his wife, who had died of consumption, and who had, at the end, conceived such a violent dislike of her husband, that if he came into her room it caused her haemorrhage. None of which Jerry had seemed to mind. And now his eldest daughter, a girl of fifteen, kept a poor house for him, and looked after the two younger children.

“A mean, wizen-hearted stick!” Mrs. Morel said of him.

“I’ve never known Jerry mean in MY life,” protested Morel. “A opener-handed and more freer chap you couldn’t find anywhere, accordin’ to my knowledge.”

“Open-handed to you,” retorted Mrs. Morel. “But his fist is shut tight enough to his children, poor things.”

“Poor things! And what for are they poor things, I should like to know.”

But Mrs. Morel would not be appeased on Jerry’s score.

The subject of argument was seen, craning his thin neck over the scullery curtain. He caught Mrs. Morel’s eye.

“Mornin’, missis! Mester in?”

“Yes — he is.”

Jerry entered unasked, and stood by the kitchen doorway. He was not invited to sit down, but stood there, coolly asserting the rights of men and husbands.

“A nice day,” he said to Mrs. Morel.

“Yes.

“Grand out this morning — grand for a walk.”

“Do you mean YOU’RE going for a walk?” she asked.

“Yes. We mean walkin’ to Nottingham,” he replied.

“H’m!”

The two men greeted each other, both glad: Jerry, however, full of assurance, Morel rather subdued, afraid to seem too jubilant in presence of his wife. But he laced his boots quickly, with spirit. They were going for a ten-mile walk across the fields to Nottingham. Climbing the hillside from the Bottoms, they mounted gaily into the morning. At the Moon and Stars they had their first drink, then on to the Old Spot. Then a long five miles of drought to carry them into Bulwell to a glorious pint of bitter. But they stayed in a field with some haymakers whose gallon bottle was full, so that, when they came in sight of the city, Morel was sleepy. The town spread upwards before them, smoking vaguely in the midday glare, fridging the crest away to the south with spires and factory bulks and chimneys. In the last field Morel lay down under an oak tree and slept soundly for over an hour. When he rose to go forward he felt queer.

The two had dinner in the Meadows, with Jerry’s sister, then repaired to the Punch Bowl, where they mixed in the excitement of pigeon-racing. Morel never in his life played cards, considering them as having some occult, malevolent power — “the devil’s pictures,” he called them! But he was a master of skittles and of dominoes. He took a challenge from a Newark man, on skittles. All the men in the old, long bar took sides, betting either one way or the other. Morel took off his coat. Jerry held the hat containing the money. The men at the tables watched. Some stood with their mugs in their hands. Morel felt his big wooden ball carefully, then launched it. He played havoc among the nine-pins, and won half a crown, which restored him to solvency.

By seven o’clock the two were in good condition. They caught the 7.30 train home.

In the afternoon the Bottoms was intolerable. Every inhabitant remaining was out of doors. The women, in twos and threes, bareheaded and in white aprons, gossiped in the alley between the blocks. Men, having a rest between drinks, sat on their heels and talked. The place smelled stale; the slate roofs glistened in the arid heat.

Mrs. Morel took the little girl down to the brook in the meadows, which were not more than two hundred yards away. The water ran quickly over stones and broken pots. Mother and child leaned on the rail of the old sheep-bridge, watching. Up at the dipping-hole, at the other end of the meadow, Mrs. Morel

could see the naked forms of boys flashing round the deep yellow water, or an occasional bright figure dart glittering over the blackish stagnant meadow. She knew William was at the dipping-hole, and it was the dread of her life lest he should get drowned. Annie played under the tall old hedge, picking up alder cones, that she called currants. The child required much attention, and the flies were teasing.

The children were put to bed at seven o'clock. Then she worked awhile.

When Walter Morel and Jerry arrived at Bestwood they felt a load off their minds; a railway journey no longer impended, so they could put the finishing touches to a glorious day. They entered the Nelson with the satisfaction of returned travellers.

The next day was a work-day, and the thought of it put a damper on the men's spirits. Most of them, moreover, had spent their money. Some were already rolling dismally home, to sleep in preparation for the morrow. Mrs. Morel, listening to their mournful singing, went indoors. Nine o'clock passed, and ten, and still "the pair" had not returned. On a doorstep somewhere a man was singing loudly, in a drawl: "Lead, kindly Light." Mrs. Morel was always indignant with the drunken men that they must sing that hymn when they got maudlin.

"As if 'Genevieve' weren't good enough," she said.

The kitchen was full of the scent of boiled herbs and hops. On the hob a large black saucepan steamed slowly. Mrs. Morel took a panchion, a great bowl of thick red earth, streamed a heap of white sugar into the bottom, and then, straining herself to the weight, was pouring in the liquor.

Just then Morel came in. He had been very jolly in the Nelson, but coming home had grown irritable. He had not quite got over the feeling of irritability and pain, after having slept on the ground when he was so hot; and a bad conscience afflicted him as he neared the house. He did not know he was angry. But when the garden gate resisted his attempts to open it, he kicked it and broke the latch. He entered just as Mrs. Morel was pouring the infusion of herbs out of the saucepan. Swaying slightly, he lurched against the table. The boiling liquor pitched. Mrs. Morel started back.

"Good gracious," she cried, "coming home in his drunkenness!"

"Comin' home in his what?" he snarled, his hat over his eye.

Suddenly her blood rose in a jet.

"Say you're NOT drunk!" she flashed.

She had put down her saucepan, and was stirring the sugar into the beer. He dropped his two hands heavily on the table, and thrust his face forwards at her.

"Say you're not drunk," he repeated. "Why, nobody but a nasty little bitch

like you 'ud 'ave such a thought."

He thrust his face forward at her.

"There's money to bezzle with, if there's money for nothing else."

"I've not spent a two-shillin' bit this day," he said.

"You don't get as drunk as a lord on nothing," she replied. "And," she cried, flashing into sudden fury, "if you've been sponging on your beloved Jerry, why, let him look after his children, for they need it."

"It's a lie, it's a lie. Shut your face, woman."

They were now at battle-pitch. Each forgot everything save the hatred of the other and the battle between them. She was fiery and furious as he. They went on till he called her a liar.

"No," she cried, starting up, scarce able to breathe. "Don't call me that — you, the most despicable liar that ever walked in shoe-leather." She forced the last words out of suffocated lungs.

"You're a liar!" he yelled, banging the table with his fist. "You're a liar, you're a liar."

She stiffened herself, with clenched fists.

"The house is filthy with you," she cried.

"Then get out on it — it's mine. Get out on it!" he shouted. "It's me as brings th' money whoam, not thee. It's my house, not thine. Then ger out on't — ger out on't!"

"And I would," she cried, suddenly shaken into tears of impotence. "Ah, wouldn't I, wouldn't I have gone long ago, but for those children. Ay, haven't I repented not going years ago, when I'd only the one" — suddenly drying into rage. "Do you think it's for YOU I stop — do you think I'd stop one minute for YOU?"

"Go, then," he shouted, beside himself. "Go!"

"No!" She faced round. "No," she cried loudly, "you shan't have it ALL your own way; you shan't do ALL you like. I've got those children to see to. My word," she laughed, "I should look well to leave them to you."

"Go," he cried thickly, lifting his fist. He was afraid of her. "Go!"

"I should be only too glad. I should laugh, laugh, my lord, if I could get away from you," she replied.

He came up to her, his red face, with its bloodshot eyes, thrust forward, and gripped her arms. She cried in fear of him, struggled to be free. Coming slightly to himself, panting, he pushed her roughly to the outer door, and thrust her forth, slotting the bolt behind her with a bang. Then he went back into the kitchen, dropped into his armchair, his head, bursting full of blood, sinking between his knees. Thus he dipped gradually into a stupor, from exhaustion and intoxication.

The moon was high and magnificent in the August night. Mrs. Morel, seared with passion, shivered to find herself out there in a great white light, that fell cold on her, and gave a shock to her inflamed soul. She stood for a few moments helplessly staring at the glistening great rhubarb leaves near the door. Then she got the air into her breast. She walked down the garden path, trembling in every limb, while the child boiled within her. For a while she could not control her consciousness; mechanically she went over the last scene, then over it again, certain phrases, certain moments coming each time like a brand red-hot down on her soul; and each time she enacted again the past hour, each time the brand came down at the same points, till the mark was burnt in, and the pain burnt out, and at last she came to herself. She must have been half an hour in this delirious condition. Then the presence of the night came again to her. She glanced round in fear. She had wandered to the side garden, where she was walking up and down the path beside the currant bushes under the long wall. The garden was a narrow strip, bounded from the road, that cut transversely between the blocks, by a thick thorn hedge.

She hurried out of the side garden to the front, where she could stand as if in an immense gulf of white light, the moon streaming high in face of her, the moonlight standing up from the hills in front, and filling the valley where the Bottoms crouched, almost blindingly. There, panting and half weeping in reaction from the stress, she murmured to herself over and over again: "The nuisance! the nuisance!"

She became aware of something about her. With an effort she roused herself to see what it was that penetrated her consciousness. The tall white lilies were reeling in the moonlight, and the air was charged with their perfume, as with a presence. Mrs. Morel gasped slightly in fear. She touched the big, pallid flowers on their petals, then shivered. They seemed to be stretching in the moonlight. She put her hand into one white bin: the gold scarcely showed on her fingers by moonlight. She bent down to look at the binful of yellow pollen; but it only appeared dusky. Then she drank a deep draught of the scent. It almost made her dizzy.

Mrs. Morel leaned on the garden gate, looking out, and she lost herself awhile. She did not know what she thought. Except for a slight feeling of sickness, and her consciousness in the child, herself melted out like scent into the shiny, pale air. After a time the child, too, melted with her in the mixing-pot of moonlight, and she rested with the hills and lilies and houses, all swum together in a kind of swoon.

When she came to herself she was tired for sleep. Languidly she looked about her; the clumps of white phlox seemed like bushes spread with linen; a moth

ricochetted over them, and right across the garden. Following it with her eye roused her. A few whiffs of the raw, strong scent of phlox invigorated her. She passed along the path, hesitating at the white rose-bush. It smelled sweet and simple. She touched the white ruffles of the roses. Their fresh scent and cool, soft leaves reminded her of the morning-time and sunshine. She was very fond of them. But she was tired, and wanted to sleep. In the mysterious out-of-doors she felt forlorn.

There was no noise anywhere. Evidently the children had not been wakened, or had gone to sleep again. A train, three miles away, roared across the valley. The night was very large, and very strange, stretching its hoary distances infinitely. And out of the silver-grey fog of darkness came sounds vague and hoarse: a corncrake not far off, sound of a train like a sigh, and distant shouts of men.

Her quietened heart beginning to beat quickly again, she hurried down the side garden to the back of the house. Softly she lifted the latch; the door was still bolted, and hard against her. She rapped gently, waited, then rapped again. She must not rouse the children, nor the neighbours. He must be asleep, and he would not wake easily. Her heart began to burn to be indoors. She clung to the door-handle. Now it was cold; she would take a chill, and in her present condition!

Putting her apron over her head and her arms, she hurried again to the side garden, to the window of the kitchen. Leaning on the sill, she could just see, under the blind, her husband's arms spread out on the table, and his black head on the board. He was sleeping with his face lying on the table. Something in his attitude made her feel tired of things. The lamp was burning smokily; she could tell by the copper colour of the light. She tapped at the window more and more noisily. Almost it seemed as if the glass would break. Still he did not wake up.

After vain efforts, she began to shiver, partly from contact with the stone, and from exhaustion. Fearful always for the unborn child, she wondered what she could do for warmth. She went down to the coal-house, where there was an old hearthrug she had carried out for the rag-man the day before. This she wrapped over her shoulders. It was warm, if grimy. Then she walked up and down the garden path, peeping every now and then under the blind, knocking, and telling herself that in the end the very strain of his position must wake him.

At last, after about an hour, she rapped long and low at the window. Gradually the sound penetrated to him. When, in despair, she had ceased to tap, she saw him stir, then lift his face blindly. The labouring of his heart hurt him into consciousness. She rapped imperatively at the window. He started awake. Instantly she saw his fists set and his eyes glare. He had not a grain of physical

fear. If it had been twenty burglars, he would have gone blindly for them. He glared round, bewildered, but prepared to fight.

“Open the door, Walter,” she said coldly.

His hands relaxed. It dawned on him what he had done. His head dropped, sullen and dogged. She saw him hurry to the door, heard the bolt chock. He tried the latch. It opened — and there stood the silver-grey night, fearful to him, after the tawny light of the lamp. He hurried back.

When Mrs. Morel entered, she saw him almost running through the door to the stairs. He had ripped his collar off his neck in his haste to be gone ere she came in, and there it lay with bursten button-holes. It made her angry.

She warmed and soothed herself. In her weariness forgetting everything, she moved about at the little tasks that remained to be done, set his breakfast, rinsed his pit-bottle, put his pit-clothes on the hearth to warm, set his pit-boots beside them, put him out a clean scarf and snap-bag and two apples, raked the fire, and went to bed. He was already dead asleep. His narrow black eyebrows were drawn up in a sort of peevish misery into his forehead while his cheeks' down-strokes, and his sulky mouth, seemed to be saying: “I don't care who you are nor what you are, I SHALL have my own way.”

Mrs. Morel knew him too well to look at him. As she unfastened her brooch at the mirror, she smiled faintly to see her face all smeared with the yellow dust of lilies. She brushed it off, and at last lay down. For some time her mind continued snapping and jetting sparks, but she was asleep before her husband awoke from the first sleep of his drunkenness.

CHAPTER II

THE BIRTH OF PAUL, AND ANOTHER BATTLE

AFTER such a scene as the last, Walter Morel was for some days abashed and ashamed, but he soon regained his old bullying indifference. Yet there was a slight shrinking, a diminishing in his assurance. Physically even, he shrank, and his fine full presence waned. He never grew in the least stout, so that, as he sank from his erect, assertive bearing, his physique seemed to contract along with his pride and moral strength.

But now he realised how hard it was for his wife to drag about at her work, and, his sympathy quickened by penitence, hastened forward with his help. He came straight home from the pit, and stayed in at evening till Friday, and then he could not remain at home. But he was back again by ten o'clock, almost quite sober.

He always made his own breakfast. Being a man who rose early and had plenty of time he did not, as some miners do, drag his wife out of bed at six o'clock. At five, sometimes earlier, he woke, got straight out of bed, and went downstairs. When she could not sleep, his wife lay waiting for this time, as for a period of peace. The only real rest seemed to be when he was out of the house.

He went downstairs in his shirt and then struggled into his pit-trousers, which were left on the hearth to warm all night. There was always a fire, because Mrs. Morel raked. And the first sound in the house was the bang, bang of the poker against the raker, as Morel smashed the remainder of the coal to make the kettle, which was filled and left on the hob, finally boil. His cup and knife and fork, all he wanted except just the food, was laid ready on the table on a newspaper. Then he got his breakfast, made the tea, packed the bottom of the doors with rugs to shut out the draught, piled a big fire, and sat down to an hour of joy. He toasted his bacon on a fork and caught the drops of fat on his bread; then he put the rasher on his thick slice of bread, and cut off chunks with a clasp-knife, poured his tea into his saucer, and was happy. With his family about, meals were never so pleasant. He loathed a fork: it is a modern introduction which has still scarcely reached common people. What Morel preferred was a clasp-knife. Then, in solitude, he ate and drank, often sitting, in cold weather, on a little stool

with his back to the warm chimney-piece, his food on the fender, his cup on the hearth. And then he read the last night's newspaper — what of it he could — spelling it over laboriously. He preferred to keep the blinds down and the candle lit even when it was daylight; it was the habit of the mine.

At a quarter to six he rose, cut two thick slices of bread and butter, and put them in the white calico snap-bag. He filled his tin bottle with tea. Cold tea without milk or sugar was the drink he preferred for the pit. Then he pulled off his shirt, and put on his pit-singlet, a vest of thick flannel cut low round the neck, and with short sleeves like a chemise.

Then he went upstairs to his wife with a cup of tea because she was ill, and because it occurred to him.

"I've brought thee a cup o' tea, lass," he said.

"Well, you needn't, for you know I don't like it," she replied.

"Drink it up; it'll pop thee off to sleep again."

She accepted the tea. It pleased him to see her take it and sip it.

"I'll back my life there's no sugar in," she said.

"Yi — there's one big 'un," he replied, injured.

"It's a wonder," she said, sipping again.

She had a winsome face when her hair was loose. He loved her to grumble at him in this manner. He looked at her again, and went, without any sort of leave-taking. He never took more than two slices of bread and butter to eat in the pit, so an apple or an orange was a treat to him. He always liked it when she put one out for him. He tied a scarf round his neck, put on his great, heavy boots, his coat, with the big pocket, that carried his snap-bag and his bottle of tea, and went forth into the fresh morning air, closing, without locking, the door behind him. He loved the early morning, and the walk across the fields. So he appeared at the pit-top, often with a stalk from the hedge between his teeth, which he chewed all day to keep his mouth moist, down the mine, feeling quite as happy as when he was in the field.

Later, when the time for the baby grew nearer, he would bustle round in his slovenly fashion, poking out the ashes, rubbing the fireplace, sweeping the house before he went to work. Then, feeling very self-righteous, he went upstairs.

"Now I'm cleaned up for thee: tha's no 'casions ter stir a peg all day, but sit and read thy books."

Which made her laugh, in spite of her indignation.

"And the dinner cooks itself?" she answered.

"Eh, I know nowt about th' dinner."

"You'd know if there weren't any."

"Ay, 'appen so," he answered, departing.

When she got downstairs, she would find the house tidy, but dirty. She could not rest until she had thoroughly cleaned; so she went down to the ash-pit with her dustpan. Mrs. Kirk, spying her, would contrive to have to go to her own coal-place at that minute. Then, across the wooden fence, she would call:

“So you keep wagging on, then?”

“Ay,” answered Mrs. Morel deprecatingly. “There’s nothing else for it.”

“Have you seen Hose?” called a very small woman from across the road. It was Mrs. Anthony, a black-haired, strange little body, who always wore a brown velvet dress, tight fitting.

“I haven’t,” said Mrs. Morel.

“Eh, I wish he’d come. I’ve got a copperful of clothes, an’ I’m sure I heered his bell.”

“Hark! He’s at the end.”

The two women looked down the alley. At the end of the Bottoms a man stood in a sort of old-fashioned trap, bending over bundles of cream-coloured stuff; while a cluster of women held up their arms to him, some with bundles. Mrs. Anthony herself had a heap of creamy, undyed stockings hanging over her arm.

“I’ve done ten dozen this week,” she said proudly to Mrs. Morel.

“T-t-t!” went the other. “I don’t know how you can find time.”

“Eh!” said Mrs. Anthony. “You can find time if you make time.”

“I don’t know how you do it,” said Mrs. Morel. “And how much shall you get for those many?”

“Tuppence-ha’penny a dozen,” replied the other.

“Well,” said Mrs. Morel. “I’d starve before I’d sit down and seam twenty-four stockings for twopence ha’penny.”

“Oh, I don’t know,” said Mrs. Anthony. “You can rip along with ‘em.”

Hose was coming along, ringing his bell. Women were waiting at the yard-ends with their seamed stockings hanging over their arms. The man, a common fellow, made jokes with them, tried to swindle them, and bullied them. Mrs. Morel went up her yard disdainfully.

It was an understood thing that if one woman wanted her neighbour, she should put the poker in the fire and bang at the back of the fireplace, which, as the fires were back to back, would make a great noise in the adjoining house. One morning Mrs. Kirk, mixing a pudding, nearly started out of her skin as she heard the thud, thud, in her grate. With her hands all floury, she rushed to the fence.

“Did you knock, Mrs. Morel?”

“If you wouldn’t mind, Mrs. Kirk.”

Mrs. Kirk climbed on to her copper, got over the wall on to Mrs. Morel’s

copper, and ran in to her neighbour.

“Eh, dear, how are you feeling?” she cried in concern.

“You might fetch Mrs. Bower,” said Mrs. Morel.

Mrs. Kirk went into the yard, lifted up her strong, shrill voice, and called:

“Ag-gie — Ag-gie!”

The sound was heard from one end of the Bottoms to the other. At last Aggie came running up, and was sent for Mrs. Bower, whilst Mrs. Kirk left her pudding and stayed with her neighbour.

Mrs. Morel went to bed. Mrs. Kirk had Annie and William for dinner. Mrs. Bower, fat and waddling, bossed the house.

“Hash some cold meat up for the master’s dinner, and make him an apple-charlotte pudding,” said Mrs. Morel.

“He may go without pudding this day,” said Mrs. Bower.

Morel was not as a rule one of the first to appear at the bottom of the pit, ready to come up. Some men were there before four o’clock, when the whistle blew loose-all; but Morel, whose stall, a poor one, was at this time about a mile and a half away from the bottom, worked usually till the first mate stopped, then he finished also. This day, however, the miner was sick of the work. At two o’clock he looked at his watch, by the light of the green candle — he was in a safe working — and again at half-past two. He was hewing at a piece of rock that was in the way for the next day’s work. As he sat on his heels, or kneeled, giving hard blows with his pick, “Uszza — uszza!” he went.

“Shall ter finish, Sorry?” cried Barker, his fellow butty.

“Finish? Niver while the world stands!” growled Morel.

And he went on striking. He was tired.

“It’s a heart-breaking job,” said Barker.

But Morel was too exasperated, at the end of his tether, to answer. Still he struck and hacked with all his might.

“Tha might as well leave it, Walter,” said Barker. “It’ll do to-morrow, without thee hackin’ thy guts out.”

“I’ll lay no b — — finger on this to-morrow, Isr’el!” cried Morel.

“Oh, well, if tha wanna, somebody else’ll ha’e to,” said Israel.

Then Morel continued to strike.

“Hey-up there — LOOSE-A’!” cried the men, leaving the next stall.

Morel continued to strike.

“Tha’ll happen catch me up,” said Barker, departing.

When he had gone, Morel, left alone, felt savage. He had not finished his job. He had overworked himself into a frenzy. Rising, wet with sweat, he threw his tool down, pulled on his coat, blew out his candle, took his lamp, and went.

Down the main road the lights of the other men went swinging. There was a hollow sound of many voices. It was a long, heavy tramp underground.

He sat at the bottom of the pit, where the great drops of water fell splash. Many colliers were waiting their turns to go up, talking noisily. Morel gave his answers short and disagreeable.

“It’s rainin’, Sorry,” said old Giles, who had had the news from the top.

Morel found one comfort. He had his old umbrella, which he loved, in the lamp cabin. At last he took his stand on the chair, and was at the top in a moment. Then he handed in his lamp and got his umbrella, which he had bought at an auction for one-and-six. He stood on the edge of the pit-bank for a moment, looking out over the fields; grey rain was falling. The trucks stood full of wet, bright coal. Water ran down the sides of the waggons, over the white “C.W. and Co.”. Colliers, walking indifferent to the rain, were streaming down the line and up the field, a grey, dismal host. Morel put up his umbrella, and took pleasure from the peppering of the drops thereon.

All along the road to Bestwood the miners tramped, wet and grey and dirty, but their red mouths talking with animation. Morel also walked with a gang, but he said nothing. He frowned peevishly as he went. Many men passed into the Prince of Wales or into Ellen’s. Morel, feeling sufficiently disagreeable to resist temptation, trudged along under the dripping trees that overhung the park wall, and down the mud of Greenhill Lane.

Mrs. Morel lay in bed, listening to the rain, and the feet of the colliers from Minton, their voices, and the bang, bang of the gates as they went through the stile up the field.

“There’s some herb beer behind the pantry door,” she said. “Th’ master’ll want a drink, if he doesn’t stop.”

But he was late, so she concluded he had called for a drink, since it was raining. What did he care about the child or her?

She was very ill when her children were born.

“What is it?” she asked, feeling sick to death.

“A boy.”

And she took consolation in that. The thought of being the mother of men was warming to her heart. She looked at the child. It had blue eyes, and a lot of fair hair, and was bonny. Her love came up hot, in spite of everything. She had it in bed with her.

Morel, thinking nothing, dragged his way up the garden path, wearily and angrily. He closed his umbrella, and stood it in the sink; then he slathered his heavy boots into the kitchen. Mrs. Bower appeared in the inner doorway.

“Well,” she said, “she’s about as bad as she can be. It’s a boy childt.”

The miner grunted, put his empty snap-bag and his tin bottle on the dresser, went back into the scullery and hung up his coat, then came and dropped into his chair.

“Han yer got a drink?” he asked.

The woman went into the pantry. There was heard the pop of a cork. She set the mug, with a little, disgusted rap, on the table before Morel. He drank, gasped, wiped his big moustache on the end of his scarf, drank, gasped, and lay back in his chair. The woman would not speak to him again. She set his dinner before him, and went upstairs.

“Was that the master?” asked Mrs. Morel.

“I’ve gave him his dinner,” replied Mrs. Bower.

After he had sat with his arms on the table — he resented the fact that Mrs. Bower put no cloth on for him, and gave him a little plate, instead of a full-sized dinner-plate — he began to eat. The fact that his wife was ill, that he had another boy, was nothing to him at that moment. He was too tired; he wanted his dinner; he wanted to sit with his arms lying on the board; he did not like having Mrs. Bower about. The fire was too small to please him.

After he had finished his meal, he sat for twenty minutes; then he stoked up a big fire. Then, in his stockinged feet, he went reluctantly upstairs. It was a struggle to face his wife at this moment, and he was tired. His face was black, and smeared with sweat. His singlet had dried again, soaking the dirt in. He had a dirty woollen scarf round his throat. So he stood at the foot of the bed.

“Well, how are ter, then?” he asked.

“I s’ll be all right,” she answered.

“H’m!”

He stood at a loss what to say next. He was tired, and this bother was rather a nuisance to him, and he didn’t quite know where he was.

“A lad, tha says,” he stammered.

She turned down the sheet and showed the child.

“Bless him!” he murmured. Which made her laugh, because he blessed by rote — pretending paternal emotion, which he did not feel just then.

“Go now,” she said.

“I will, my lass,” he answered, turning away.

Dismissed, he wanted to kiss her, but he dared not. She half wanted him to kiss her, but could not bring herself to give any sign. She only breathed freely when he was gone out of the room again, leaving behind him a faint smell of pit-dirt.

Mrs. Morel had a visit every day from the Congregational clergyman. Mr. Heaton was young, and very poor. His wife had died at the birth of his first baby,

so he remained alone in the manse. He was a Bachelor of Arts of Cambridge, very shy, and no preacher. Mrs. Morel was fond of him, and he depended on her. For hours he talked to her, when she was well. He became the god-parent of the child.

Occasionally the minister stayed to tea with Mrs. Morel. Then she laid the cloth early, got out her best cups, with a little green rim, and hoped Morel would not come too soon; indeed, if he stayed for a pint, she would not mind this day. She had always two dinners to cook, because she believed children should have their chief meal at midday, whereas Morel needed his at five o'clock. So Mr. Heaton would hold the baby, whilst Mrs. Morel beat up a batter-pudding or peeled the potatoes, and he, watching her all the time, would discuss his next sermon. His ideas were quaint and fantastic. She brought him judiciously to earth. It was a discussion of the wedding at Cana.

"When He changed the water into wine at Cana," he said, "that is a symbol that the ordinary life, even the blood, of the married husband and wife, which had before been uninspired, like water, became filled with the Spirit, and was as wine, because, when love enters, the whole spiritual constitution of a man changes, is filled with the Holy Ghost, and almost his form is altered."

Mrs. Morel thought to herself:

"Yes, poor fellow, his young wife is dead; that is why he makes his love into the Holy Ghost."

They were halfway down their first cup of tea when they heard the sluther of pit-boots.

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Mrs. Morel, in spite of herself.

The minister looked rather scared. Morel entered. He was feeling rather savage. He nodded a "How d'yer do" to the clergyman, who rose to shake hands with him.

"Nay," said Morel, showing his hand, "look thee at it! Tha niver wants ter shake hands wi' a hand like that, does ter? There's too much pick-haft and shovel-dirt on it."

The minister flushed with confusion, and sat down again. Mrs. Morel rose, carried out the steaming saucepan. Morel took off his coat, dragged his armchair to table, and sat down heavily.

"Are you tired?" asked the clergyman.

"Tired? I ham that," replied Morel. "YOU don't know what it is to be tired, as I'M tired."

"No," replied the clergyman.

"Why, look yer 'ere," said the miner, showing the shoulders of his singlet. "It's a bit dry now, but it's wet as a clout with sweat even yet. Feel it."

“Goodness!” cried Mrs. Morel. “Mr. Heaton doesn’t want to feel your nasty singlet.”

The clergyman put out his hand gingerly.

“No, perhaps he doesn’t,” said Morel; “but it’s all come out of me, whether or not. An’ iv’ry day alike my singlet’s wringin’ wet. ‘Aven’t you got a drink, Missis, for a man when he comes home barked up from the pit?”

“You know you drank all the beer,” said Mrs. Morel, pouring out his tea.

“An’ was there no more to be got?” Turning to the clergyman — “A man gets that caked up wi’ th’ dust, you know, — that clogged up down a coal-mine, he NEEDS a drink when he comes home.”

“I am sure he does,” said the clergyman.

“But it’s ten to one if there’s owt for him.”

“There’s water — and there’s tea,” said Mrs. Morel.

“Water! It’s not water as’ll clear his throat.”

He poured out a saucerful of tea, blew it, and sucked it up through his great black moustache, sighing afterwards. Then he poured out another saucerful, and stood his cup on the table.

“My cloth!” said Mrs. Morel, putting it on a plate.

“A man as comes home as I do ‘s too tired to care about cloths,” said Morel.

“Pity!” exclaimed his wife, sarcastically.

The room was full of the smell of meat and vegetables and pit-clothes.

He leaned over to the minister, his great moustache thrust forward, his mouth very red in his black face.

“Mr. Heaton,” he said, “a man as has been down the black hole all day, dingin’ away at a coal-face, yi, a sight harder than that wall — ”

“Needn’t make a moan of it,” put in Mrs. Morel.

She hated her husband because, whenever he had an audience, he whined and played for sympathy. William, sitting nursing the baby, hated him, with a boy’s hatred for false sentiment, and for the stupid treatment of his mother. Annie had never liked him; she merely avoided him.

When the minister had gone, Mrs. Morel looked at her cloth.

“A fine mess!” she said.

“Dos’t think I’m goin’ to sit wi’ my arms danglin’, cos tha’s got a parson for tea wi’ thee?” he bawled.

They were both angry, but she said nothing. The baby began to cry, and Mrs. Morel, picking up a saucepan from the hearth, accidentally knocked Annie on the head, whereupon the girl began to whine, and Morel to shout at her. In the midst of this pandemonium, William looked up at the big glazed text over the mantelpiece and read distinctly:

“God Bless Our Home!”

Whereupon Mrs. Morel, trying to soothe the baby, jumped up, rushed at him, boxed his ears, saying:

“What are YOU putting in for?”

And then she sat down and laughed, till tears ran over her cheeks, while William kicked the stool he had been sitting on, and Morel growled:

“I canna see what there is so much to laugh at.”

One evening, directly after the parson’s visit, feeling unable to bear herself after another display from her husband, she took Annie and the baby and went out. Morel had kicked William, and the mother would never forgive him.

She went over the sheep-bridge and across a corner of the meadow to the cricket-ground. The meadows seemed one space of ripe, evening light, whispering with the distant mill-race. She sat on a seat under the alders in the cricket-ground, and fronted the evening. Before her, level and solid, spread the big green cricket-field, like the bed of a sea of light. Children played in the bluish shadow of the pavilion. Many rooks, high up, came cawing home across the softly-woven sky. They stooped in a long curve down into the golden glow, concentrating, cawing, wheeling, like black flakes on a slow vortex, over a tree clump that made a dark boss among the pasture.

A few gentlemen were practising, and Mrs. Morel could hear the chock of the ball, and the voices of men suddenly roused; could see the white forms of men shifting silently over the green, upon which already the under shadows were smouldering. Away at the grange, one side of the haystacks was lit up, the other sides blue-grey. A waggon of sheaves rocked small across the melting yellow light.

The sun was going down. Every open evening, the hills of Derbyshire were blazed over with red sunset. Mrs. Morel watched the sun sink from the glistening sky, leaving a soft flower-blue overhead, while the western space went red, as if all the fire had swum down there, leaving the bell cast flawless blue. The mountain-ash berries across the field stood fiercely out from the dark leaves, for a moment. A few shocks of corn in a corner of the fallow stood up as if alive; she imagined them bowing; perhaps her son would be a Joseph. In the east, a mirrored sunset floated pink opposite the west’s scarlet. The big haystacks on the hillside, that butted into the glare, went cold.

With Mrs. Morel it was one of those still moments when the small frets vanish, and the beauty of things stands out, and she had the peace and the strength to see herself. Now and again, a swallow cut close to her. Now and again, Annie came up with a handful of alder-currants. The baby was restless on his mother’s knee, clambering with his hands at the light.

Mrs. Morel looked down at him. She had dreaded this baby like a catastrophe, because of her feeling for her husband. And now she felt strangely towards the infant. Her heart was heavy because of the child, almost as if it were unhealthy, or malformed. Yet it seemed quite well. But she noticed the peculiar knitting of the baby's brows, and the peculiar heaviness of its eyes, as if it were trying to understand something that was pain. She felt, when she looked at her child's dark, brooding pupils, as if a burden were on her heart.

"He looks as if he was thinking about something — quite sorrowful," said Mrs. Kirk.

Suddenly, looking at him, the heavy feeling at the mother's heart melted into passionate grief. She bowed over him, and a few tears shook swiftly out of her very heart. The baby lifted his fingers.

"My lamb!" she cried softly.

And at that moment she felt, in some far inner place of her soul, that she and her husband were guilty.

The baby was looking up at her. It had blue eyes like her own, but its look was heavy, steady, as if it had realised something that had stunned some point of its soul.

In her arms lay the delicate baby. Its deep blue eyes, always looking up at her unblinking, seemed to draw her innermost thoughts out of her. She no longer loved her husband; she had not wanted this child to come, and there it lay in her arms and pulled at her heart. She felt as if the navel string that had connected its frail little body with hers had not been broken. A wave of hot love went over her to the infant. She held it close to her face and breast. With all her force, with all her soul she would make up to it for having brought it into the world unloved. She would love it all the more now it was here; carry it in her love. Its clear, knowing eyes gave her pain and fear. Did it know all about her? When it lay under her heart, had it been listening then? Was there a reproach in the look? She felt the marrow melt in her bones, with fear and pain.

Once more she was aware of the sun lying red on the rim of the hill opposite. She suddenly held up the child in her hands.

"Look!" she said. "Look, my pretty!"

She thrust the infant forward to the crimson, throbbing sun, almost with relief. She saw him lift his little fist. Then she put him to her bosom again, ashamed almost of her impulse to give him back again whence he came.

"If he lives," she thought to herself, "what will become of him — what will he be?"

Her heart was anxious.

"I will call him Paul," she said suddenly; she knew not why.

After a while she went home. A fine shadow was flung over the deep green meadow, darkening all.

As she expected, she found the house empty. But Morel was home by ten o'clock, and that day, at least, ended peacefully.

Walter Morel was, at this time, exceedingly irritable. His work seemed to exhaust him. When he came home he did not speak civilly to anybody. If the fire were rather low he bullied about that; he grumbled about his dinner; if the children made a chatter he shouted at them in a way that made their mother's blood boil, and made them hate him.

On the Friday, he was not home by eleven o'clock. The baby was unwell, and was restless, crying if he were put down. Mrs. Morel, tired to death, and still weak, was scarcely under control.

"I wish the nuisance would come," she said wearily to herself.

The child at last sank down to sleep in her arms. She was too tired to carry him to the cradle.

"But I'll say nothing, whatever time he comes," she said. "It only works me up; I won't say anything. But I know if he does anything it'll make my blood boil," she added to herself.

She sighed, hearing him coming, as if it were something she could not bear. He, taking his revenge, was nearly drunk. She kept her head bent over the child as he entered, not wishing to see him. But it went through her like a flash of hot fire when, in passing, he lurched against the dresser, setting the tins rattling, and clutched at the white pot knobs for support. He hung up his hat and coat, then returned, stood glowering from a distance at her, as she sat bowed over the child.

"Is there nothing to eat in the house?" he asked, insolently, as if to a servant. In certain stages of his intoxication he affected the clipped, mincing speech of the towns. Mrs. Morel hated him most in this condition.

"You know what there is in the house," she said, so coldly, it sounded impersonal.

He stood and glared at her without moving a muscle.

"I asked a civil question, and I expect a civil answer," he said affectedly.

"And you got it," she said, still ignoring him.

He glowered again. Then he came unsteadily forward. He leaned on the table with one hand, and with the other jerked at the table drawer to get a knife to cut bread. The drawer stuck because he pulled sideways. In a temper he dragged it, so that it flew out bodily, and spoons, forks, knives, a hundred metallic things, splashed with a clatter and a clang upon the brick floor. The baby gave a little convulsed start.

"What are you doing, clumsy, drunken fool?" the mother cried.

“Then tha should get the flamin’ thing thysen. Tha should get up, like other women have to, an’ wait on a man.”

“Wait on you — wait on you?” she cried. “Yes, I see myself.”

“Yis, an’ I’ll learn thee tha’s got to. Wait on ME, yes tha sh’lt wait on me — ”

“Never, milord. I’d wait on a dog at the door first.”

“What — what?”

He was trying to fit in the drawer. At her last speech he turned round. His face was crimson, his eyes bloodshot. He stared at her one silent second in threat.

“P-h!” she went quickly, in contempt.

He jerked at the drawer in his excitement. It fell, cut sharply on his shin, and on the reflex he flung it at her.

One of the corners caught her brow as the shallow drawer crashed into the fireplace. She swayed, almost fell stunned from her chair. To her very soul she was sick; she clasped the child tightly to her bosom. A few moments elapsed; then, with an effort, she brought herself to. The baby was crying plaintively. Her left brow was bleeding rather profusely. As she glanced down at the child, her brain reeling, some drops of blood soaked into its white shawl; but the baby was at least not hurt. She balanced her head to keep equilibrium, so that the blood ran into her eye.

Walter Morel remained as he had stood, leaning on the table with one hand, looking blank. When he was sufficiently sure of his balance, he went across to her, swayed, caught hold of the back of her rocking-chair, almost tipping her out; then leaning forward over her, and swaying as he spoke, he said, in a tone of wondering concern:

“Did it catch thee?”

He swayed again, as if he would pitch on to the child. With the catastrophe he had lost all balance.

“Go away,” she said, struggling to keep her presence of mind.

He hiccupped. “Let’s — let’s look at it,” he said, hiccupping again.

“Go away!” she cried.

“Lemme — lemme look at it, lass.”

She smelled him of drink, felt the unequal pull of his swaying grasp on the back of her rocking-chair.

“Go away,” she said, and weakly she pushed him off.

He stood, uncertain in balance, gazing upon her. Summoning all her strength she rose, the baby on one arm. By a cruel effort of will, moving as if in sleep, she went across to the scullery, where she bathed her eye for a minute in cold water; but she was too dizzy. Afraid lest she should swoon, she returned to her rocking-chair, trembling in every fibre. By instinct, she kept the baby clasped.

Morel, bothered, had succeeded in pushing the drawer back into its cavity, and was on his knees, groping, with numb paws, for the scattered spoons.

Her brow was still bleeding. Presently Morel got up and came craning his neck towards her.

“What has it done to thee, lass?” he asked, in a very wretched, humble tone.

“You can see what it’s done,” she answered.

He stood, bending forward, supported on his hands, which grasped his legs just above the knee. He peered to look at the wound. She drew away from the thrust of his face with its great moustache, averting her own face as much as possible. As he looked at her, who was cold and impassive as stone, with mouth shut tight, he sickened with feebleness and hopelessness of spirit. He was turning drearily away, when he saw a drop of blood fall from the averted wound into the baby’s fragile, glistening hair. Fascinated, he watched the heavy dark drop hang in the glistening cloud, and pull down the gossamer. Another drop fell. It would soak through to the baby’s scalp. He watched, fascinated, feeling it soak in; then, finally, his manhood broke.

“What of this child?” was all his wife said to him. But her low, intense tones brought his head lower. She softened: “Get me some wadding out of the middle drawer,” she said.

He stumbled away very obediently, presently returning with a pad, which she singed before the fire, then put on her forehead, as she sat with the baby on her lap.

“Now that clean pit-scarf.”

Again he rummaged and fumbled in the drawer, returning presently with a red, narrow scarf. She took it, and with trembling fingers proceeded to bind it round her head.

“Let me tie it for thee,” he said humbly.

“I can do it myself,” she replied. When it was done she went upstairs, telling him to rake the fire and lock the door.

In the morning Mrs. Morel said:

“I knocked against the latch of the coal-place, when I was getting a raker in the dark, because the candle blew out.” Her two small children looked up at her with wide, dismayed eyes. They said nothing, but their parted lips seemed to express the unconscious tragedy they felt.

Walter Morel lay in bed next day until nearly dinner-time. He did not think of the previous evening’s work. He scarcely thought of anything, but he would not think of that. He lay and suffered like a sulking dog. He had hurt himself most; and he was the more damaged because he would never say a word to her, or express his sorrow. He tried to wriggle out of it. “It was her own fault,” he said

to himself. Nothing, however, could prevent his inner consciousness inflicting on him the punishment which ate into his spirit like rust, and which he could only alleviate by drinking.

He felt as if he had not the initiative to get up, or to say a word, or to move, but could only lie like a log. Moreover, he had himself violent pains in the head. It was Saturday. Towards noon he rose, cut himself food in the pantry, ate it with his head dropped, then pulled on his boots, and went out, to return at three o'clock slightly tipsy and relieved; then once more straight to bed. He rose again at six in the evening, had tea and went straight out.

Sunday was the same: bed till noon, the Palmerston Arms till 2.30, dinner, and bed; scarcely a word spoken. When Mrs. Morel went upstairs, towards four o'clock, to put on her Sunday dress, he was fast asleep. She would have felt sorry for him, if he had once said, "Wife, I'm sorry." But no; he insisted to himself it was her fault. And so he broke himself. So she merely left him alone. There was this deadlock of passion between them, and she was stronger.

The family began tea. Sunday was the only day when all sat down to meals together.

"Isn't my father going to get up?" asked William.

"Let him lie," the mother replied.

There was a feeling of misery over all the house. The children breathed the air that was poisoned, and they felt dreary. They were rather disconsolate, did not know what to do, what to play at.

Immediately Morel woke he got straight out of bed. That was characteristic of him all his life. He was all for activity. The prostrated inactivity of two mornings was stifling him.

It was near six o'clock when he got down. This time he entered without hesitation, his wincing sensitiveness having hardened again. He did not care any longer what the family thought or felt.

The tea-things were on the table. William was reading aloud from "The Child's Own", Annie listening and asking eternally "why?" Both children hushed into silence as they heard the approaching thud of their father's stockinged feet, and shrank as he entered. Yet he was usually indulgent to them.

Morel made the meal alone, brutally. He ate and drank more noisily than he had need. No one spoke to him. The family life withdrew, shrank away, and became hushed as he entered. But he cared no longer about his alienation.

Immediately he had finished tea he rose with alacrity to go out. It was this alacrity, this haste to be gone, which so sickened Mrs. Morel. As she heard him sousing heartily in cold water, heard the eager scratch of the steel comb on the side of the bowl, as he wetted his hair, she closed her eyes in disgust. As he bent

over, lacing his boots, there was a certain vulgar gusto in his movement that divided him from the reserved, watchful rest of the family. He always ran away from the battle with himself. Even in his own heart's privacy, he excused himself, saying, "If she hadn't said so-and-so, it would never have happened. She asked for what she's got." The children waited in restraint during his preparations. When he had gone, they sighed with relief.

He closed the door behind him, and was glad. It was a rainy evening. The Palmerston would be the cosier. He hastened forward in anticipation. All the slate roofs of the Bottoms shone black with wet. The roads, always dark with coal-dust, were full of blackish mud. He hastened along. The Palmerston windows were steamed over. The passage was paddled with wet feet. But the air was warm, if foul, and full of the sound of voices and the smell of beer and smoke.

"What shollt ha'e, Walter?" cried a voice, as soon as Morel appeared in the doorway.

"Oh, Jim, my lad, wheriver has thee sprung frae?"

The men made a seat for him, and took him in warmly. He was glad. In a minute or two they had thawed all responsibility out of him, all shame, all trouble, and he was clear as a bell for a jolly night.

On the Wednesday following, Morel was penniless. He dreaded his wife. Having hurt her, he hated her. He did not know what to do with himself that evening, having not even twopence with which to go to the Palmerston, and being already rather deeply in debt. So, while his wife was down the garden with the child, he hunted in the top drawer of the dresser where she kept her purse, found it, and looked inside. It contained a half-crown, two halfpennies, and a sixpence. So he took the sixpence, put the purse carefully back, and went out.

The next day, when she wanted to pay the greengrocer, she looked in the purse for her sixpence, and her heart sank to her shoes. Then she sat down and thought: "WAS there a sixpence? I hadn't spent it, had I? And I hadn't left it anywhere else?"

She was much put about. She hunted round everywhere for it. And, as she sought, the conviction came into her heart that her husband had taken it. What she had in her purse was all the money she possessed. But that he should sneak it from her thus was unbearable. He had done so twice before. The first time she had not accused him, and at the week-end he had put the shilling again into her purse. So that was how she had known he had taken it. The second time he had not paid back.

This time she felt it was too much. When he had had his dinner — he came home early that day — she said to him coldly:

“Did you take sixpence out of my purse last night?”

“Me!” he said, looking up in an offended way. “No, I didna! I niver clapped eyes on your purse.”

But she could detect the lie.

“Why, you know you did,” she said quietly.

“I tell you I didna,” he shouted. “Yer at me again, are yer? I’ve had about enough on’t.”

“So you filch sixpence out of my purse while I’m taking the clothes in.”

“I’ll may yer pay for this,” he said, pushing back his chair in desperation. He bustled and got washed, then went determinedly upstairs. Presently he came down dressed, and with a big bundle in a blue-checked, enormous handkerchief.

“And now,” he said, “you’ll see me again when you do.”

“It’ll be before I want to,” she replied; and at that he marched out of the house with his bundle. She sat trembling slightly, but her heart brimming with contempt. What would she do if he went to some other pit, obtained work, and got in with another woman? But she knew him too well — he couldn’t. She was dead sure of him. Nevertheless her heart was gnawed inside her.

“Where’s my dad?” said William, coming in from school.

“He says he’s run away,” replied the mother.

“Where to?”

“Eh, I don’t know. He’s taken a bundle in the blue handkerchief, and says he’s not coming back.”

“What shall we do?” cried the boy.

“Eh, never trouble, he won’t go far.”

“But if he doesn’t come back,” wailed Annie.

And she and William retired to the sofa and wept. Mrs. Morel sat and laughed.

“You pair of gabeys!” she exclaimed. “You’ll see him before the night’s out.”

But the children were not to be consoled. Twilight came on. Mrs. Morel grew anxious from very weariness. One part of her said it would be a relief to see the last of him; another part fretted because of keeping the children; and inside her, as yet, she could not quite let him go. At the bottom, she knew very well he could NOT go.

When she went down to the coal-place at the end of the garden, however, she felt something behind the door. So she looked. And there in the dark lay the big blue bundle. She sat on a piece of coal and laughed. Every time she saw it, so fat and yet so ignominious, slunk into its corner in the dark, with its ends flopping like dejected ears from the knots, she laughed again. She was relieved.

Mrs. Morel sat waiting. He had not any money, she knew, so if he stopped he was running up a bill. She was very tired of him — tired to death. He had not

even the courage to carry his bundle beyond the yard-end.

As she meditated, at about nine o'clock, he opened the door and came in, slinking, and yet sulky. She said not a word. He took off his coat, and slunk to his armchair, where he began to take off his boots.

"You'd better fetch your bundle before you take your boots off," she said quietly.

"You may thank your stars I've come back to-night," he said, looking up from under his dropped head, sulkily, trying to be impressive.

"Why, where should you have gone? You daren't even get your parcel through the yard-end," she said.

He looked such a fool she was not even angry with him. He continued to take his boots off and prepare for bed.

"I don't know what's in your blue handkerchief," she said. "But if you leave it the children shall fetch it in the morning."

Whereupon he got up and went out of the house, returning presently and crossing the kitchen with averted face, hurrying upstairs. As Mrs. Morel saw him slink quickly through the inner doorway, holding his bundle, she laughed to herself: but her heart was bitter, because she had loved him.

CHAPTER III

THE CASTING OFF OF MOREL — THE TAKING ON OF WILLIAM

DURING the next week Morel's temper was almost unbearable. Like all miners, he was a great lover of medicines, which, strangely enough, he would often pay for himself.

"You mun get me a drop o' laxy vitral," he said. "It's a winder as we canna ha'e a sup i' th' 'ouse."

So Mrs. Morel bought him elixir of vitriol, his favourite first medicine. And he made himself a jug of wormwood tea. He had hanging in the attic great bunches of dried herbs: wormwood, rue, horehound, elder flowers, parsley-purt, marshmallow, hyssop, dandelion, and centaury. Usually there was a jug of one or other decoction standing on the hob, from which he drank largely.

"Grand!" he said, smacking his lips after wormwood. "Grand!" And he exhorted the children to try.

"It's better than any of your tea or your cocoa stews," he vowed. But they were not to be tempted.

This time, however, neither pills nor vitriol nor all his herbs would shift the "nasty peens in his head". He was sickening for an attack of an inflammation of the brain. He had never been well since his sleeping on the ground when he went with Jerry to Nottingham. Since then he had drunk and stormed. Now he fell seriously ill, and Mrs. Morel had him to nurse. He was one of the worst patients imaginable. But, in spite of all, and putting aside the fact that he was breadwinner, she never quite wanted him to die. Still there was one part of her wanted him for herself.

The neighbours were very good to her: occasionally some had the children in to meals, occasionally some would do the downstairs work for her, one would mind the baby for a day. But it was a great drag, nevertheless. It was not every day the neighbours helped. Then she had nursing of baby and husband, cleaning and cooking, everything to do. She was quite worn out, but she did what was wanted of her.

And the money was just sufficient. She had seventeen shillings a week from

clubs, and every Friday Barker and the other butty put by a portion of the stall's profits for Morel's wife. And the neighbours made broths, and gave eggs, and such invalids' trifles. If they had not helped her so generously in those times, Mrs. Morel would never have pulled through, without incurring debts that would have dragged her down.

The weeks passed. Morel, almost against hope, grew better. He had a fine constitution, so that, once on the mend, he went straight forward to recovery. Soon he was pottering about downstairs. During his illness his wife had spoilt him a little. Now he wanted her to continue. He often put his band to his head, pulled down the corners of his mouth, and shammed pains he did not feel. But there was no deceiving her. At first she merely smiled to herself. Then she scolded him sharply.

"Goodness, man, don't be so lachrymose."

That wounded him slightly, but still he continued to feign sickness.

"I wouldn't be such a mardy baby," said the wife shortly.

Then he was indignant, and cursed under his breath, like a boy. He was forced to resume a normal tone, and to cease to whine.

Nevertheless, there was a state of peace in the house for some time. Mrs. Morel was more tolerant of him, and he, depending on her almost like a child, was rather happy. Neither knew that she was more tolerant because she loved him less. Up till this time, in spite of all, he had been her husband and her man. She had felt that, more or less, what he did to himself he did to her. Her living depended on him. There were many, many stages in the ebbing of her love for him, but it was always ebbing.

Now, with the birth of this third baby, her self no longer set towards him, helplessly, but was like a tide that scarcely rose, standing off from him. After this she scarcely desired him. And, standing more aloof from him, not feeling him so much part of herself, but merely part of her circumstances, she did not mind so much what he did, could leave him alone.

There was the halt, the wistfulness about the ensuing year, which is like autumn in a man's life. His wife was casting him off, half regretfully, but relentlessly; casting him off and turning now for love and life to the children. Henceforward he was more or less a husk. And he himself acquiesced, as so many men do, yielding their place to their children.

During his recuperation, when it was really over between them, both made an effort to come back somewhat to the old relationship of the first months of their marriage. He sat at home and, when the children were in bed, and she was sewing — she did all her sewing by hand, made all shirts and children's clothing — he would read to her from the newspaper, slowly pronouncing and delivering

the words like a man pitching quoits. Often she hurried him on, giving him a phrase in anticipation. And then he took her words humbly.

The silences between them were peculiar. There would be the swift, slight “cluck” of her needle, the sharp “pop” of his lips as he let out the smoke, the warmth, the sizzle on the bars as he spat in the fire. Then her thoughts turned to William. Already he was getting a big boy. Already he was top of the class, and the master said he was the smartest lad in the school. She saw him a man, young, full of vigour, making the world glow again for her.

And Morel sitting there, quite alone, and having nothing to think about, would be feeling vaguely uncomfortable. His soul would reach out in its blind way to her and find her gone. He felt a sort of emptiness, almost like a vacuum in his soul. He was unsettled and restless. Soon he could not live in that atmosphere, and he affected his wife. Both felt an oppression on their breathing when they were left together for some time. Then he went to bed and she settled down to enjoy herself alone, working, thinking, living.

Meanwhile another infant was coming, fruit of this little peace and tenderness between the separating parents. Paul was seventeen months old when the new baby was born. He was then a plump, pale child, quiet, with heavy blue eyes, and still the peculiar slight knitting of the brows. The last child was also a boy, fair and bonny. Mrs. Morel was sorry when she knew she was with child, both for economic reasons and because she did not love her husband; but not for the sake of the infant.

They called the baby Arthur. He was very pretty, with a mop of gold curls, and he loved his father from the first. Mrs. Morel was glad this child loved the father. Hearing the miner’s footsteps, the baby would put up his arms and crow. And if Morel were in a good temper, he called back immediately, in his hearty, mellow voice:

“What then, my beauty? I sh’ll come to thee in a minute.”

And as soon as he had taken off his pit-coat, Mrs. Morel would put an apron round the child, and give him to his father.

“What a sight the lad looks!” she would exclaim sometimes, taking back the baby, that was smutted on the face from his father’s kisses and play. Then Morel laughed joyfully.

“He’s a little collier, bless his bit o’ mutton!” he exclaimed.

And these were the happy moments of her life now, when the children included the father in her heart.

Meanwhile William grew bigger and stronger and more active, while Paul, always rather delicate and quiet, got slimmer, and trotted after his mother like her shadow. He was usually active and interested, but sometimes he would have

fits of depression. Then the mother would find the boy of three or four crying on the sofa.

“What’s the matter?” she asked, and got no answer.

“What’s the matter?” she insisted, getting cross.

“I don’t know,” sobbed the child.

So she tried to reason him out of it, or to amuse him, but without effect. It made her feel beside herself. Then the father, always impatient, would jump from his chair and shout:

“If he doesn’t stop, I’ll smack him till he does.”

“You’ll do nothing of the sort,” said the mother coldly. And then she carried the child into the yard, plumped him into his little chair, and said: “Now cry there, Misery!”

And then a butterfly on the rhubarb-leaves perhaps caught his eye, or at last he cried himself to sleep. These fits were not often, but they caused a shadow in Mrs. Morel’s heart, and her treatment of Paul was different from that of the other children.

Suddenly one morning as she was looking down the alley of the Bottoms for the barm-man, she heard a voice calling her. It was the thin little Mrs. Anthony in brown velvet.

“Here, Mrs. Morel, I want to tell you about your Willie.”

“Oh, do you?” replied Mrs. Morel. “Why, what’s the matter?”

“A lad as gets ‘old of another an’ rips his clothes off’n ‘is back,” Mrs. Anthony said, “wants showing something.”

“Your Alfred’s as old as my William,” said Mrs. Morel.

“‘Appen ‘e is, but that doesn’t give him a right to get hold of the boy’s collar, an’ fair rip it clean off his back.”

“Well,” said Mrs. Morel, “I don’t thrash my children, and even if I did, I should want to hear their side of the tale.”

“They’d happen be a bit better if they did get a good hiding,” retorted Mrs. Anthony. “When it comes ter rippin’ a lad’s clean collar off’n ‘is back a-purpose —”

“I’m sure he didn’t do it on purpose,” said Mrs. Morel.

“Make me a liar!” shouted Mrs. Anthony.

Mrs. Morel moved away and closed her gate. Her hand trembled as she held her mug of barm.

“But I s’ll let your mester know,” Mrs. Anthony cried after her.

At dinner-time, when William had finished his meal and wanted to be off again — he was then eleven years old — his mother said to him:

“What did you tear Alfred Anthony’s collar for?”

“When did I tear his collar?”

“I don’t know when, but his mother says you did.”

“Why — it was yesterday — an’ it was torn a’ready.”

“But you tore it more.”

“Well, I’d got a cobbler as ‘ad licked seventeen — an’ Alfy Ant’ny ‘e says:

‘Adam an’ Eve an’ pinch-me,

Went down to a river to bade.

Adam an’ Eve got drowned,

Who do yer think got saved?’

An’ so I says: ‘Oh, Pinch-YOU,’ an’ so I pinched ‘im, an’ ‘e was mad, an’ so he snatched my cobbler an’ run off with it. An’ so I run after ‘im, an’ when I was gettin’ hold of ‘im, ‘e dodged, an’ it ripped ‘is collar. But I got my cobbler — ”

He pulled from his pocket a black old horse-chestnut hanging on a string. This old cobbler had “cobbled” — hit and smashed — seventeen other cobblers on similar strings. So the boy was proud of his veteran.

“Well,” said Mrs. Morel, “you know you’ve got no right to rip his collar.”

“Well, our mother!” he answered. “I never meant tr’a done it — an’ it was on’y an old indirubber collar as was torn a’ready.”

“Next time,” said his mother, “YOU be more careful. I shouldn’t like it if you came home with your collar torn off.”

“I don’t care, our mother; I never did it a-purpose.”

The boy was rather miserable at being reprimanded.

“No — well, you be more careful.”

William fled away, glad to be exonerated. And Mrs. Morel, who hated any bother with the neighbours, thought she would explain to Mrs. Anthony, and the business would be over.

But that evening Morel came in from the pit looking very sour. He stood in the kitchen and glared round, but did not speak for some minutes. Then:

“Wheer’s that Willy?” he asked.

“What do you want HIM for?” asked Mrs. Morel, who had guessed.

“I’ll let ‘im know when I get him,” said Morel, banging his pit-bottle on to the dresser.

“I suppose Mrs. Anthony’s got hold of you and been yarning to you about Alfy’s collar,” said Mrs. Morel, rather sneering.

“Niver mind who’s got hold of me,” said Morel. “When I get hold of ‘IM I’ll make his bones rattle.”

“It’s a poor tale,” said Mrs. Morel, “that you’re so ready to side with any snipey vixen who likes to come telling tales against your own children.”

“I’ll learn ‘im!” said Morel. “It none matters to me whose lad ‘e is; ‘e’s none

goin' rippin' an' tearin' about just as he's a mind."

"Ripping and tearing about!" repeated Mrs. Morel. "He was running after that Alfy, who'd taken his cobbler, and he accidentally got hold of his collar, because the other dodged — as an Anthony would."

"I know!" shouted Morel threateningly.

"You would, before you're told," replied his wife bitingly.

"Niver you mind," stormed Morel. "I know my business."

"That's more than doubtful," said Mrs. Morel, "supposing some loud-mouthed creature had been getting you to thrash your own children."

"I know," repeated Morel.

And he said no more, but sat and nursed his bad temper. Suddenly William ran in, saying:

"Can I have my tea, mother?"

"Tha can ha'e more than that!" shouted Morel.

"Hold your noise, man," said Mrs. Morel; "and don't look so ridiculous."

"He'll look ridiculous before I've done wi' him!" shouted Morel, rising from his chair and glaring at his son.

William, who was a tall lad for his years, but very sensitive, had gone pale, and was looking in a sort of horror at his father.

"Go out!" Mrs. Morel commanded her son.

William had not the wit to move. Suddenly Morel clenched his fist, and crouched.

"I'll GI'E him 'go out'!" he shouted like an insane thing.

"What!" cried Mrs. Morel, panting with rage. "You shall not touch him for HER telling, you shall not!"

"Shonna I?" shouted Morel. "Shonna I?"

And, glaring at the boy, he ran forward. Mrs. Morel sprang in between them, with her fist lifted.

"Don't you DARE!" she cried.

"What!" he shouted, baffled for the moment. "What!"

She spun round to her son.

"GO out of the house!" she commanded him in fury.

The boy, as if hypnotised by her, turned suddenly and was gone. Morel rushed to the door, but was too late. He returned, pale under his pit-dirt with fury. But now his wife was fully roused.

"Only dare!" she said in a loud, ringing voice. "Only dare, milord, to lay a finger on that child! You'll regret it for ever."

He was afraid of her. In a towering rage, he sat down.

When the children were old enough to be left, Mrs. Morel joined the Women's

Guild. It was a little club of women attached to the Co-operative Wholesale Society, which met on Monday night in the long room over the grocery shop of the Bestwood "Co-op". The women were supposed to discuss the benefits to be derived from co-operation, and other social questions. Sometimes Mrs. Morel read a paper. It seemed queer to the children to see their mother, who was always busy about the house, sitting writing in her rapid fashion, thinking, referring to books, and writing again. They felt for her on such occasions the deepest respect.

But they loved the Guild. It was the only thing to which they did not grudge their mother — and that partly because she enjoyed it, partly because of the treats they derived from it. The Guild was called by some hostile husbands, who found their wives getting too independent, the "clat-fart" shop — that is, the gossip-shop. It is true, from off the basis of the Guild, the women could look at their homes, at the conditions of their own lives, and find fault. So the colliers found their women had a new standard of their own, rather disconcerting. And also, Mrs. Morel always had a lot of news on Monday nights, so that the children liked William to be in when their mother came home, because she told him things.

Then, when the lad was thirteen, she got him a job in the "Co-op." office. He was a very clever boy, frank, with rather rough features and real viking blue eyes.

"What dost want ter ma'e a stool-harsed Jack on 'im for?" said Morel. "All he'll do is to wear his britches behind out an' earn nowt. What's 'e startin' wi'?"

"It doesn't matter what he's starting with," said Mrs. Morel.

"It wouldna! Put 'im i' th' pit we me, an' 'ell earn a easy ten shillin' a wik from th' start. But six shillin' wearin' his truck-end out on a stool's better than ten shillin' i' th' pit wi'me, I know."

"He is NOT going in the pit," said Mrs. Morel, "and there's an end of it."

"It wor good enough for me, but it's non good enough for 'im."

"If your mother put you in the pit at twelve, it's no reason why I should do the same with my lad."

"Twelve! It wor a sight afore that!"

"Whenever it was," said Mrs. Morel.

She was very proud of her son. He went to the night school, and learned shorthand, so that by the time he was sixteen he was the best shorthand clerk and book-keeper on the place, except one. Then he taught in the night schools. But he was so fiery that only his good-nature and his size protected him.

All the things that men do — the decent things — William did. He could run like the wind. When he was twelve he won a first prize in a race; an inkstand of

glass, shaped like an anvil. It stood proudly on the dresser, and gave Mrs. Morel a keen pleasure. The boy only ran for her. He flew home with his anvil, breathless, with a "Look, mother!" That was the first real tribute to herself. She took it like a queen.

"How pretty!" she exclaimed.

Then he began to get ambitious. He gave all his money to his mother. When he earned fourteen shillings a week, she gave him back two for himself, and, as he never drank, he felt himself rich. He went about with the bourgeois of Bestwood. The townlet contained nothing higher than the clergyman. Then came the bank manager, then the doctors, then the tradespeople, and after that the hosts of colliers. Willam began to consort with the sons of the chemist, the schoolmaster, and the tradesmen. He played billiards in the Mechanics' Hall. Also he danced — this in spite of his mother. All the life that Bestwood offered he enjoyed, from the sixpenny-hops down Church Street, to sports and billiards.

Paul was treated to dazzling descriptions of all kinds of flower-like ladies, most of whom lived like cut blooms in William's heart for a brief fortnight.

Occasionally some flame would come in pursuit of her errant swain. Mrs. Morel would find a strange girl at the door, and immediately she sniffed the air.

"Is Mr. Morel in?" the damsel would ask appealingly.

"My husband is at home," Mrs. Morel replied.

"I — I mean YOUNG Mr. Morel," repeated the maiden painfully.

"Which one? There are several."

Whereupon much blushing and stammering from the fair one.

"I — I met Mr. Morel — at Ripley," she explained.

"Oh — at a dance!"

"Yes."

"I don't approve of the girls my son meets at dances. And he is NOT at home."

Then he came home angry with his mother for having turned the girl away so rudely. He was a careless, yet eager-looking fellow, who walked with long strides, sometimes frowning, often with his cap pushed jollily to the back of his head. Now he came in frowning. He threw his cap on to the sofa, and took his strong jaw in his hand, and glared down at his mother. She was small, with her hair taken straight back from her forehead. She had a quiet air of authority, and yet of rare warmth. Knowing her son was angry, she trembled inwardly.

"Did a lady call for me yesterday, mother?" he asked.

"I don't know about a lady. There was a girl came."

"And why didn't you tell me?"

"Because I forgot, simply."

He fumed a little.

“A good-looking girl — seemed a lady?”

“I didn’t look at her.”

“Big brown eyes?”

“I did NOT look. And tell your girls, my son, that when they’re running after you, they’re not to come and ask your mother for you. Tell them that — brazen baggages you meet at dancing-classes.”

“I’m sure she was a nice girl.”

“And I’m sure she wasn’t.”

There ended the altercation. Over the dancing there was a great strife between the mother and the son. The grievance reached its height when William said he was going to Hucknall Torkard — considered a low town — to a fancy-dress ball. He was to be a Highlander. There was a dress he could hire, which one of his friends had had, and which fitted him perfectly. The Highland suit came home. Mrs. Morel received it coldly and would not unpack it.

“My suit come?” cried William.

“There’s a parcel in the front room.”

He rushed in and cut the string.

“How do you fancy your son in this!” he said, enraptured, showing her the suit.

“You know I don’t want to fancy you in it.”

On the evening of the dance, when he had come home to dress, Mrs. Morel put on her coat and bonnet.

“Aren’t you going to stop and see me, mother?” he asked.

“No; I don’t want to see you,” she replied.

She was rather pale, and her face was closed and hard. She was afraid of her son’s going the same way as his father. He hesitated a moment, and his heart stood still with anxiety. Then he caught sight of the Highland bonnet with its ribbons. He picked it up gleefully, forgetting her. She went out.

When he was nineteen he suddenly left the Co-op. office and got a situation in Nottingham. In his new place he had thirty shillings a week instead of eighteen. This was indeed a rise. His mother and his father were brimmed up with pride. Everybody praised William. It seemed he was going to get on rapidly. Mrs. Morel hoped, with his aid, to help her younger sons. Annie was now studying to be a teacher. Paul, also very clever, was getting on well, having lessons in French and German from his godfather, the clergyman who was still a friend to Mrs. Morel. Arthur, a spoilt and very good-looking boy, was at the Board school, but there was talk of his trying to get a scholarship for the High School in Nottingham.

William remained a year at his new post in Nottingham. He was studying hard, and growing serious. Something seemed to be fretting him. Still he went out to the dances and the river parties. He did not drink. The children were all rabid teetotallers. He came home very late at night, and sat yet longer studying. His mother implored him to take more care, to do one thing or another.

“Dance, if you want to dance, my son; but don’t think you can work in the office, and then amuse yourself, and THEN study on top of all. You can’t; the human frame won’t stand it. Do one thing or the other — amuse yourself or learn Latin; but don’t try to do both.”

Then he got a place in London, at a hundred and twenty a year. This seemed a fabulous sum. His mother doubted almost whether to rejoice or to grieve.

“They want me in Lime Street on Monday week, mother,” he cried, his eyes blazing as he read the letter. Mrs. Morel felt everything go silent inside her. He read the letter: “‘And will you reply by Thursday whether you accept. Yours faithfully — ’ They want me, mother, at a hundred and twenty a year, and don’t even ask to see me. Didn’t I tell you I could do it! Think of me in London! And I can give you twenty pounds a year, mater. We s’ll all be rolling in money.”

“We shall, my son,” she answered sadly.

It never occurred to him that she might be more hurt at his going away than glad of his success. Indeed, as the days drew near for his departure, her heart began to close and grow dreary with despair. She loved him so much! More than that, she hoped in him so much. Almost she lived by him. She liked to do things for him: she liked to put a cup for his tea and to iron his collars, of which he was so proud. It was a joy to her to have him proud of his collars. There was no laundry. So she used to rub away at them with her little convex iron, to polish them, till they shone from the sheer pressure of her arm. Now she would not do it for him. Now he was going away. She felt almost as if he were going as well out of her heart. He did not seem to leave her inhabited with himself. That was the grief and the pain to her. He took nearly all himself away.

A few days before his departure — he was just twenty — he burned his love-letters. They had hung on a file at the top of the kitchen cupboard. From some of them he had read extracts to his mother. Some of them she had taken the trouble to read herself. But most were too trivial.

Now, on the Saturday morning he said:

“Come on, Postle, let’s go through my letters, and you can have the birds and flowers.”

Mrs. Morel had done her Saturday’s work on the Friday, because he was having a last day’s holiday. She was making him a rice cake, which he loved, to take with him. He was scarcely conscious that she was so miserable.

He took the first letter off the file. It was mauve-tinted, and had purple and green thistles. William sniffed the page.

“Nice scent! Smell.”

And he thrust the sheet under Paul’s nose.

“Um!” said Paul, breathing in. “What d’you call it? Smell, mother.”

His mother ducked her small, fine nose down to the paper.

“I don’t want to smell their rubbish,” she said, sniffing.

“This girl’s father,” said William, “is as rich as Croesus. He owns property without end. She calls me Lafayette, because I know French. ‘You will see, I’ve forgiven you’ — I like HER forgiving me. ‘I told mother about you this morning, and she will have much pleasure if you come to tea on Sunday, but she will have to get father’s consent also. I sincerely hope he will agree. I will let you know how it transpires. If, however, you — ’“

“‘Let you know how it’ what?” interrupted Mrs. Morel.

“‘Transpires’ — oh yes!”

“‘Transpires!’“ repeated Mrs. Morel mockingly. “I thought she was so well educated!”

William felt slightly uncomfortable, and abandoned this maiden, giving Paul the corner with the thistles. He continued to read extracts from his letters, some of which amused his mother, some of which saddened her and made her anxious for him.

“My lad,” she said, “they’re very wise. They know they’ve only got to flatter your vanity, and you press up to them like a dog that has its head scratched.”

“Well, they can’t go on scratching for ever,” he replied. “And when they’ve done, I trot away.”

“But one day you’ll find a string round your neck that you can’t pull off,” she answered.

“Not me! I’m equal to any of ‘em, mater, they needn’t flatter themselves.”

“You flatter YOURSELF,” she said quietly.

Soon there was a heap of twisted black pages, all that remained of the file of scented letters, except that Paul had thirty or forty pretty tickets from the corners of the notepaper — swallows and forget-me-nots and ivy sprays. And William went to London, to start a new life.

CHAPTER IV

THE YOUNG LIFE OF PAUL

PAUL would be built like his mother, slightly and rather small. His fair hair went reddish, and then dark brown; his eyes were grey. He was a pale, quiet child, with eyes that seemed to listen, and with a full, dropping underlip.

As a rule he seemed old for his years. He was so conscious of what other people felt, particularly his mother. When she fretted he understood, and could have no peace. His soul seemed always attentive to her.

As he grew older he became stronger. William was too far removed from him to accept him as a companion. So the smaller boy belonged at first almost entirely to Annie. She was a tomboy and a “flybie-skybie”, as her mother called her. But she was intensely fond of her second brother. So Paul was towed round at the heels of Annie, sharing her game. She raced wildly at lerky with the other young wild-cats of the Bottoms. And always Paul flew beside her, living her share of the game, having as yet no part of his own. He was quiet and not noticeable. But his sister adored him. He always seemed to care for things if she wanted him to.

She had a big doll of which she was fearfully proud, though not so fond. So she laid the doll on the sofa, and covered it with an antimacassar, to sleep. Then she forgot it. Meantime Paul must practise jumping off the sofa arm. So he jumped crash into the face of the hidden doll. Annie rushed up, uttered a loud wail, and sat down to weep a dirge. Paul remained quite still.

“You couldn’t tell it was there, mother; you couldn’t tell it was there,” he repeated over and over. So long as Annie wept for the doll he sat helpless with misery. Her grief wore itself out. She forgave her brother — he was so much upset. But a day or two afterwards she was shocked.

“Let’s make a sacrifice of Arabella,” he said. “Let’s burn her.”

She was horrified, yet rather fascinated. She wanted to see what the boy would do. He made an altar of bricks, pulled some of the shavings out of Arabella’s body, put the waxen fragments into the hollow face, poured on a little paraffin, and set the whole thing alight. He watched with wicked satisfaction the drops of wax melt off the broken forehead of Arabella, and drop like sweat into the flame.

So long as the stupid big doll burned he rejoiced in silence. At the end he poked among the embers with a stick, fished out the arms and legs, all blackened, and smashed them under stones.

“That’s the sacrifice of Missis Arabella,” he said. “An’ I’m glad there’s nothing left of her.”

Which disturbed Annie inwardly, although she could say nothing. He seemed to hate the doll so intensely, because he had broken it.

All the children, but particularly Paul, were peculiarly against their father, along with their mother. Morel continued to bully and to drink. He had periods, months at a time, when he made the whole life of the family a misery. Paul never forgot coming home from the Band of Hope one Monday evening and finding his mother with her eye swollen and discoloured, his father standing on the hearthrug, feet astride, his head down, and William, just home from work, glaring at his father. There was a silence as the young children entered, but none of the elders looked round.

William was white to the lips, and his fists were clenched. He waited until the children were silent, watching with children’s rage and hate; then he said:

“You coward, you daren’t do it when I was in.”

But Morel’s blood was up. He swung round on his son. William was bigger, but Morel was hard-muscled, and mad with fury.

“Dossn’t I?” he shouted. “Dossn’t I? Ha’e much more o’ thy chelp, my young jockey, an’ I’ll rattle my fist about thee. Ay, an’ I sholl that, dost see?”

Morel crouched at the knees and showed his fist in an ugly, almost beast-like fashion. William was white with rage.

“Will yer?” he said, quiet and intense. “It ‘ud be the last time, though.”

Morel danced a little nearer, crouching, drawing back his fist to strike. William put his fists ready. A light came into his blue eyes, almost like a laugh. He watched his father. Another word, and the men would have begun to fight. Paul hoped they would. The three children sat pale on the sofa.

“Stop it, both of you,” cried Mrs. Morel in a hard voice. “We’ve had enough for ONE night. And YOU,” she said, turning on to her husband, “look at your children!”

Morel glanced at the sofa.

“Look at the children, you nasty little bitch!” he sneered. “Why, what have I done to the children, I should like to know? But they’re like yourself; you’ve put ‘em up to your own tricks and nasty ways — you’ve learned ‘em in it, you ‘ave.”

She refused to answer him. No one spoke. After a while he threw his boots under the table and went to bed.

“Why didn’t you let me have a go at him?” said William, when his father was

upstairs. "I could easily have beaten him."

"A nice thing — your own father," she replied.

"FATHER!" repeated William. "Call HIM MY father!"

"Well, he is — and so —"

"But why don't you let me settle him? I could do, easily."

"The idea!" she cried. "It hasn't come to THAT yet."

"No," he said, "it's come to worse. Look at yourself. WHY didn't you let me give it him?"

"Because I couldn't bear it, so never think of it," she cried quickly.

And the children went to bed, miserably.

When William was growing up, the family moved from the Bottoms to a house on the brow of the hill, commanding a view of the valley, which spread out like a convex cockle-shell, or a clamp-shell, before it. In front of the house was a huge old ash-tree. The west wind, sweeping from Derbyshire, caught the houses with full force, and the tree shrieked again. Morel liked it.

"It's music," he said. "It sends me to sleep."

But Paul and Arthur and Annie hated it. To Paul it became almost a demoniacal noise. The winter of their first year in the new house their father was very bad. The children played in the street, on the brim of the wide, dark valley, until eight o'clock. Then they went to bed. Their mother sat sewing below. Having such a great space in front of the house gave the children a feeling of night, of vastness, and of terror. This terror came in from the shrieking of the tree and the anguish of the home discord. Often Paul would wake up, after he had been asleep a long time, aware of thuds downstairs. Instantly he was wide awake. Then he heard the booming shouts of his father, come home nearly drunk, then the sharp replies of his mother, then the bang, bang of his father's fist on the table, and the nasty snarling shout as the man's voice got higher. And then the whole was drowned in a piercing medley of shrieks and cries from the great, wind-swept ash-tree. The children lay silent in suspense, waiting for a lull in the wind to hear what their father was doing. He might hit their mother again. There was a feeling of horror, a kind of bristling in the darkness, and a sense of blood. They lay with their hearts in the grip of an intense anguish. The wind came through the tree fiercer and fiercer. All the chords of the great harp hummed, whistled, and shrieked. And then came the horror of the sudden silence, silence everywhere, outside and downstairs. What was it? Was it a silence of blood? What had he done?

The children lay and breathed the darkness. And then, at last, they heard their father throw down his boots and tramp upstairs in his stockinged feet. Still they listened. Then at last, if the wind allowed, they heard the water of the tap

drumming into the kettle, which their mother was filling for morning, and they could go to sleep in peace.

So they were happy in the morning — happy, very happy playing, dancing at night round the lonely lamp-post in the midst of the darkness. But they had one tight place of anxiety in their hearts, one darkness in their eyes, which showed all their lives.

Paul hated his father. As a boy he had a fervent private religion.

“Make him stop drinking,” he prayed every night. “Lord, let my father die,” he prayed very often. “Let him not be killed at pit,” he prayed when, after tea, the father did not come home from work.

That was another time when the family suffered intensely. The children came from school and had their teas. On the hob the big black saucepan was simmering, the stew-jar was in the oven, ready for Morel’s dinner. He was expected at five o’clock. But for months he would stop and drink every night on his way from work.

In the winter nights, when it was cold, and grew dark early, Mrs. Morel would put a brass candlestick on the table, light a tallow candle to save the gas. The children finished their bread-and-butter, or dripping, and were ready to go out to play. But if Morel had not come they faltered. The sense of his sitting in all his pit-dirt, drinking, after a long day’s work, not coming home and eating and washing, but sitting, getting drunk, on an empty stomach, made Mrs. Morel unable to bear herself. From her the feeling was transmitted to the other children. She never suffered alone any more: the children suffered with her.

Paul went out to play with the rest. Down in the great trough of twilight, tiny clusters of lights burned where the pits were. A few last colliers straggled up the dim field path. The lamplighter came along. No more colliers came. Darkness shut down over the valley; work was done. It was night.

Then Paul ran anxiously into the kitchen. The one candle still burned on the table, the big fire glowed red. Mrs. Morel sat alone. On the hob the saucepan steamed; the dinner-plate lay waiting on the table. All the room was full of the sense of waiting, waiting for the man who was sitting in his pit-dirt, dinnerless, some mile away from home, across the darkness, drinking himself drunk. Paul stood in the doorway.

“Has my dad come?” he asked.

“You can see he hasn’t,” said Mrs. Morel, cross with the futility of the question.

Then the boy dawdled about near his mother. They shared the same anxiety. Presently Mrs. Morel went out and strained the potatoes.

“They’re ruined and black,” she said; “but what do I care?”

Not many words were spoken. Paul almost hated his mother for suffering because his father did not come home from work.

“What do you bother yourself for?” he said. “If he wants to stop and get drunk, why don’t you let him?”

“Let him!” flashed Mrs. Morel. “You may well say ‘let him’.”

She knew that the man who stops on the way home from work is on a quick way to ruining himself and his home. The children were yet young, and depended on the breadwinner. William gave her the sense of relief, providing her at last with someone to turn to if Morel failed. But the tense atmosphere of the room on these waiting evenings was the same.

The minutes ticked away. At six o’clock still the cloth lay on the table, still the dinner stood waiting, still the same sense of anxiety and expectation in the room. The boy could not stand it any longer. He could not go out and play. So he ran in to Mrs. Inger, next door but one, for her to talk to him. She had no children. Her husband was good to her but was in a shop, and came home late. So, when she saw the lad at the door, she called:

“Come in, Paul.”

The two sat talking for some time, when suddenly the boy rose, saying:

“Well, I’ll be going and seeing if my mother wants an errand doing.”

He pretended to be perfectly cheerful, and did not tell his friend what ailed him. Then he ran indoors.

Morel at these times came in churlish and hateful.

“This is a nice time to come home,” said Mrs. Morel.

“Wha’s it matter to yo’ what time I come whoam?” he shouted.

And everybody in the house was still, because he was dangerous. He ate his food in the most brutal manner possible, and, when he had done, pushed all the pots in a heap away from him, to lay his arms on the table. Then he went to sleep.

Paul hated his father so. The collier’s small, mean head, with its black hair slightly soiled with grey, lay on the bare arms, and the face, dirty and inflamed, with a fleshy nose and thin, paltry brows, was turned sideways, asleep with beer and weariness and nasty temper. If anyone entered suddenly, or a noise were made, the man looked up and shouted:

“I’ll lay my fist about thy y’ead, I’m tellin’ thee, if tha doesna stop that clatter! Dost hear?”

And the two last words, shouted in a bullying fashion, usually at Annie, made the family writhe with hate of the man.

He was shut out from all family affairs. No one told him anything. The children, alone with their mother, told her all about the day’s happenings,

everything. Nothing had really taken place in them until it was told to their mother. But as soon as the father came in, everything stopped. He was like the scotch in the smooth, happy machinery of the home. And he was always aware of this fall of silence on his entry, the shutting off of life, the unwelcome. But now it was gone too far to alter.

He would dearly have liked the children to talk to him, but they could not. Sometimes Mrs. Morel would say:

“You ought to tell your father.”

Paul won a prize in a competition in a child’s paper. Everybody was highly jubilant.

“Now you’d better tell your father when he comes in,” said Mrs. Morel. “You know how he carries on and says he’s never told anything.”

“All right,” said Paul. But he would almost rather have forfeited the prize than have to tell his father.

“I’ve won a prize in a competition, dad,” he said. Morel turned round to him.

“Have you, my boy? What sort of a competition?”

“Oh, nothing — about famous women.”

“And how much is the prize, then, as you’ve got?”

“It’s a book.”

“Oh, indeed!”

“About birds.”

“Hm — hm!”

And that was all. Conversation was impossible between the father and any other member of the family. He was an outsider. He had denied the God in him.

The only times when he entered again into the life of his own people was when he worked, and was happy at work. Sometimes, in the evening, he cobbled the boots or mended the kettle or his pit-bottle. Then he always wanted several attendants, and the children enjoyed it. They united with him in the work, in the actual doing of something, when he was his real self again.

He was a good workman, dexterous, and one who, when he was in a good humour, always sang. He had whole periods, months, almost years, of friction and nasty temper. Then sometimes he was jolly again. It was nice to see him run with a piece of red-hot iron into the scullery, crying:

“Out of my road — out of my road!”

Then he hammered the soft, red-glowing stuff on his iron goose, and made the shape he wanted. Or he sat absorbed for a moment, soldering. Then the children watched with joy as the metal sank suddenly molten, and was shoved about against the nose of the soldering-iron, while the room was full of a scent of burnt resin and hot tin, and Morel was silent and intent for a minute. He always sang

when he mended boots because of the jolly sound of hammering. And he was rather happy when he sat putting great patches on his moleskin pit trousers, which he would often do, considering them too dirty, and the stuff too hard, for his wife to mend.

But the best time for the young children was when he made fuses. Morel fetched a sheaf of long sound wheat-straws from the attic. These he cleaned with his hand, till each one gleamed like a stalk of gold, after which he cut the straws into lengths of about six inches, leaving, if he could, a notch at the bottom of each piece. He always had a beautifully sharp knife that could cut a straw clean without hurting it. Then he set in the middle of the table a heap of gunpowder, a little pile of black grains upon the white-scrubbed board. He made and trimmed the straws while Paul and Annie rifled and plugged them. Paul loved to see the black grains trickle down a crack in his palm into the mouth of the straw, peppering jollily downwards till the straw was full. Then he bunged up the mouth with a bit of soap — which he got on his thumb-nail from a pat in a saucer — and the straw was finished.

“Look, dad!” he said.

“That’s right, my beauty,” replied Morel, who was peculiarly lavish of endearments to his second son. Paul popped the fuse into the powder-tin, ready for the morning, when Morel would take it to the pit, and use it to fire a shot that would blast the coal down.

Meantime Arthur, still fond of his father, would lean on the arm of Morel’s chair and say:

“Tell us about down pit, daddy.”

This Morel loved to do.

“Well, there’s one little ‘oss — we call ‘im Taffy,” he would begin. “An’ he’s a fawce ‘un!”

Morel had a warm way of telling a story. He made one feel Taffy’s cunning.

“He’s a brown ‘un,” he would answer, “an’ not very high. Well, he comes i’ th’ stall wi’ a rattle, an’ then yo’ ‘ear ‘im sneeze.

“‘Ello, Taff,’ you say, ‘what art sneezin’ for? Bin ta’ ein’ some snuff?’

“An’ ‘e sneezes again. Then he slives up an’ shoves ‘is ‘ead on yer, that cadin’.

“‘What’s want, Taff?’ yo’ say.”

“And what does he?” Arthur always asked.

“He wants a bit o’ bacca, my duckie.”

This story of Taffy would go on interminably, and everybody loved it.

Or sometimes it was a new tale.

“An’ what dost think, my darlin’? When I went to put my coat on at snap-

time, what should go runnin' up my arm but a mouse.

““Hey up, theer!’ I shouts.

“An’ I wor just in time ter get ‘im by th’ tail.”

“And did you kill it?”

“I did, for they’re a nuisance. The place is fair snied wi’ ‘em.”

“An’ what do they live on?”

“The corn as the ‘osses drops — an’ they’ll get in your pocket an’ eat your snap, if you’ll let ‘em — no matter where yo’ hing your coat — the slivin’, nibblin’ little nuisances, for they are.”

These happy evenings could not take place unless Morel had some job to do. And then he always went to bed very early, often before the children. There was nothing remaining for him to stay up for, when he had finished tinkering, and had skimmed the headlines of the newspaper.

And the children felt secure when their father was in bed. They lay and talked softly a while. Then they started as the lights went suddenly sprawling over the ceiling from the lamps that swung in the hands of the colliers tramping by outside, going to take the nine o’clock shift. They listened to the voices of the men, imagined them dipping down into the dark valley. Sometimes they went to the window and watched the three or four lamps growing tinier and tinier, swaying down the fields in the darkness. Then it was a joy to rush back to bed and cuddle closely in the warmth.

Paul was rather a delicate boy, subject to bronchitis. The others were all quite strong; so this was another reason for his mother’s difference in feeling for him. One day he came home at dinner-time feeling ill. But it was not a family to make any fuss.

“What’s the matter with YOU?” his mother asked sharply.

“Nothing,” he replied.

But he ate no dinner.

“If you eat no dinner, you’re not going to school,” she said.

“Why?” he asked.

“That’s why.”

So after dinner he lay down on the sofa, on the warm chintz cushions the children loved. Then he fell into a kind of doze. That afternoon Mrs. Morel was ironing. She listened to the small, restless noise the boy made in his throat as she worked. Again rose in her heart the old, almost weary feeling towards him. She had never expected him to live. And yet he had a great vitality in his young body. Perhaps it would have been a little relief to her if he had died. She always felt a mixture of anguish in her love for him.

He, in his semi-conscious sleep, was vaguely aware of the clatter of the iron

on the iron-stand, of the faint thud, thud on the ironing-board. Once roused, he opened his eyes to see his mother standing on the hearthrug with the hot iron near her cheek, listening, as it were, to the heat. Her still face, with the mouth closed tight from suffering and disillusion and self-denial, and her nose the smallest bit on one side, and her blue eyes so young, quick, and warm, made his heart contract with love. When she was quiet, so, she looked brave and rich with life, but as if she had been done out of her rights. It hurt the boy keenly, this feeling about her that she had never had her life's fulfilment: and his own incapability to make up to her hurt him with a sense of impotence, yet made him patiently dogged inside. It was his childish aim.

She spat on the iron, and a little ball of spit bounded, raced off the dark, glossy surface. Then, kneeling, she rubbed the iron on the sack lining of the hearthrug vigorously. She was warm in the ruddy firelight. Paul loved the way she crouched and put her head on one side. Her movements were light and quick. It was always a pleasure to watch her. Nothing she ever did, no movement she ever made, could have been found fault with by her children. The room was warm and full of the scent of hot linen. Later on the clergyman came and talked softly with her.

Paul was laid up with an attack of bronchitis. He did not mind much. What happened happened, and it was no good kicking against the pricks. He loved the evenings, after eight o'clock, when the light was put out, and he could watch the fire-flames spring over the darkness of the walls and ceiling; could watch huge shadows waving and tossing, till the room seemed full of men who battled silently.

On retiring to bed, the father would come into the sickroom. He was always very gentle if anyone were ill. But he disturbed the atmosphere for the boy.

"Are ter asleep, my darlin'?" Morel asked softly.

"No; is my mother comin'?"

"She's just finishin' foldin' the clothes. Do you want anything?" Morel rarely "thee'd" his son.

"I don't want nothing. But how long will she be?"

"Not long, my duckie."

The father waited undecidedly on the hearthrug for a moment or two. He felt his son did not want him. Then he went to the top of the stairs and said to his wife:

"This childt's axin' for thee; how long art goin' to be?"

"Until I've finished, good gracious! Tell him to go to sleep."

"She says you're to go to sleep," the father repeated gently to Paul.

"Well, I want HER to come," insisted the boy.

“He says he can’t go off till you come,” Morel called downstairs.

“Eh, dear! I shan’t be long. And do stop shouting downstairs. There’s the other children — ”

Then Morel came again and crouched before the bedroom fire. He loved a fire dearly.

“She says she won’t be long,” he said.

He loitered about indefinitely. The boy began to get feverish with irritation. His father’s presence seemed to aggravate all his sick impatience. At last Morel, after having stood looking at his son awhile, said softly:

“Good-night, my darling.”

“Good-night,” Paul replied, turning round in relief to be alone.

Paul loved to sleep with his mother. Sleep is still most perfect, in spite of hygienists, when it is shared with a beloved. The warmth, the security and peace of soul, the utter comfort from the touch of the other, knits the sleep, so that it takes the body and soul completely in its healing. Paul lay against her and slept, and got better; whilst she, always a bad sleeper, fell later on into a profound sleep that seemed to give her faith.

In convalescence he would sit up in bed, see the fluffy horses feeding at the troughs in the field, scattering their hay on the trodden yellow snow; watch the miners troop home — small, black figures trailing slowly in gangs across the white field. Then the night came up in dark blue vapour from the snow.

In convalescence everything was wonderful. The snowflakes, suddenly arriving on the window-pane, clung there a moment like swallows, then were gone, and a drop of water was crawling down the glass. The snowflakes whirled round the corner of the house, like pigeons dashing by. Away across the valley the little black train crawled doubtfully over the great whiteness.

While they were so poor, the children were delighted if they could do anything to help economically. Annie and Paul and Arthur went out early in the morning, in summer, looking for mushrooms, hunting through the wet grass, from which the larks were rising, for the white-skinned, wonderful naked bodies crouched secretly in the green. And if they got half a pound they felt exceedingly happy: there was the joy of finding something, the joy of accepting something straight from the hand of Nature, and the joy of contributing to the family exchequer.

But the most important harvest, after gleaning for frumenty, was the blackberries. Mrs. Morel must buy fruit for puddings on the Saturdays; also she liked blackberries. So Paul and Arthur scoured the coppices and woods and old quarries, so long as a blackberry was to be found, every week-end going on their search. In that region of mining villages blackberries became a comparative rarity. But Paul hunted far and wide. He loved being out in the country, among

the bushes. But he also could not bear to go home to his mother empty. That, he felt, would disappoint her, and he would have died rather.

“Good gracious!” she would exclaim as the lads came in, late, and tired to death, and hungry, “wherever have you been?”

“Well,” replied Paul, “there wasn’t any, so we went over Misk Hills. And look here, our mother!”

She peeped into the basket.

“Now, those are fine ones!” she exclaimed.

“And there’s over two pounds — isn’t there over two pounds?”

She tried the basket.

“Yes,” she answered doubtfully.

Then Paul fished out a little spray. He always brought her one spray, the best he could find.

“Pretty!” she said, in a curious tone, of a woman accepting a love-token.

The boy walked all day, went miles and miles, rather than own himself beaten and come home to her empty-handed. She never realised this, whilst he was young. She was a woman who waited for her children to grow up. And William occupied her chiefly.

But when William went to Nottingham, and was not so much at home, the mother made a companion of Paul. The latter was unconsciously jealous of his brother, and William was jealous of him. At the same time, they were good friends.

Mrs. Morel’s intimacy with her second son was more subtle and fine, perhaps not so passionate as with her eldest. It was the rule that Paul should fetch the money on Friday afternoons. The colliers of the five pits were paid on Fridays, but not individually. All the earnings of each stall were put down to the chief butty, as contractor, and he divided the wages again, either in the public-house or in his own home. So that the children could fetch the money, school closed early on Friday afternoons. Each of the Morel children — William, then Annie, then Paul — had fetched the money on Friday afternoons, until they went themselves to work. Paul used to set off at half-past three, with a little calico bag in his pocket. Down all the paths, women, girls, children, and men were seen trooping to the offices.

These offices were quite handsome: a new, red-brick building, almost like a mansion, standing in its own grounds at the end of Greenhill Lane. The waiting-room was the hall, a long, bare room paved with blue brick, and having a seat all round, against the wall. Here sat the colliers in their pit-dirt. They had come up early. The women and children usually loitered about on the red gravel paths. Paul always examined the grass border, and the big grass bank, because in it

grew tiny pansies and tiny forget-me-nots. There was a sound of many voices. The women had on their Sunday hats. The girls chattered loudly. Little dogs ran here and there. The green shrubs were silent all around.

Then from inside came the cry "Spinney Park — Spinney Park." All the folk for Spinney Park trooped inside. When it was time for Bretty to be paid, Paul went in among the crowd. The pay-room was quite small. A counter went across, dividing it into half. Behind the counter stood two men — Mr. Braithwaite and his clerk, Mr. Winterbottom. Mr. Braithwaite was large, somewhat of the stern patriarch in appearance, having a rather thin white beard. He was usually muffled in an enormous silk neckerchief, and right up to the hot summer a huge fire burned in the open grate. No window was open. Sometimes in winter the air scorched the throats of the people, coming in from the freshness. Mr. Winterbottom was rather small and fat, and very bald. He made remarks that were not witty, whilst his chief launched forth patriarchal admonitions against the colliers.

The room was crowded with miners in their pit-dirt, men who had been home and changed, and women, and one or two children, and usually a dog. Paul was quite small, so it was often his fate to be jammed behind the legs of the men, near the fire which scorched him. He knew the order of the names — they went according to stall number.

"Holliday," came the ringing voice of Mr. Braithwaite. Then Mrs. Holliday stepped silently forward, was paid, drew aside.

"Bower — John Bower."

A boy stepped to the counter. Mr. Braithwaite, large and irascible, glowered at him over his spectacles.

"John Bower!" he repeated.

"It's me," said the boy.

"Why, you used to 'ave a different nose than that," said glossy Mr. Winterbottom, peering over the counter. The people tittered, thinking of John Bower senior.

"How is it your father's not come!" said Mr. Braithwaite, in a large and magisterial voice.

"He's badly," piped the boy.

"You should tell him to keep off the drink," pronounced the great cashier.

"An' niver mind if he puts his foot through yer," said a mocking voice from behind.

All the men laughed. The large and important cashier looked down at his next sheet.

"Fred Pilkington!" he called, quite indifferent.

Mr. Braithwaite was an important shareholder in the firm.

Paul knew his turn was next but one, and his heart began to beat. He was pushed against the chimney-piece. His calves were burning. But he did not hope to get through the wall of men.

“Walter Morel!” came the ringing voice.

“Here!” piped Paul, small and inadequate.

“Morel — Walter Morel!” the cashier repeated, his finger and thumb on the invoice, ready to pass on.

Paul was suffering convulsions of self-consciousness, and could not or would not shout. The backs of the men obliterated him. Then Mr. Winterbottom came to the rescue.

“He’s here. Where is he? Morel’s lad?”

The fat, red, bald little man peered round with keen eyes. He pointed at the fireplace. The colliers looked round, moved aside, and disclosed the boy.

“Here he is!” said Mr. Winterbottom.

Paul went to the counter.

“Seventeen pounds eleven and fivepence. Why don’t you shout up when you’re called?” said Mr. Braithwaite. He banged on to the invoice a five-pound bag of silver, then in a delicate and pretty movement, picked up a little ten-pound column of gold, and plumped it beside the silver. The gold slid in a bright stream over the paper. The cashier finished counting off the money; the boy dragged the whole down the counter to Mr. Winterbottom, to whom the stoppages for rent and tools must be paid. Here he suffered again.

“Sixteen an’ six,” said Mr. Winterbottom.

The lad was too much upset to count. He pushed forward some loose silver and half a sovereign.

“How much do you think you’ve given me?” asked Mr. Winterbottom.

The boy looked at him, but said nothing. He had not the faintest notion.

“Haven’t you got a tongue in your head?”

Paul bit his lip, and pushed forward some more silver.

“Don’t they teach you to count at the Board-school?” he asked.

“Nowt but algibbra an’ French,” said a collier.

“An’ cheek an’ impidence,” said another.

Paul was keeping someone waiting. With trembling fingers he got his money into the bag and slid out. He suffered the tortures of the damned on these occasions.

His relief, when he got outside, and was walking along the Mansfield Road, was infinite. On the park wall the mosses were green. There were some gold and some white fowls pecking under the apple trees of an orchard. The colliers were

walking home in a stream. The boy went near the wall, self-consciously. He knew many of the men, but could not recognise them in their dirt. And this was a new torture to him.

When he got down to the New Inn, at Bretty, his father was not yet come. Mrs. Wharmby, the landlady, knew him. His grandmother, Morel's mother, had been Mrs. Wharmby's friend.

"Your father's not come yet," said the landlady, in the peculiar half-scornful, half-patronising voice of a woman who talks chiefly to grown men. "Sit you down."

Paul sat down on the edge of the bench in the bar. Some colliers were "reckoning" — sharing out their money — in a corner; others came in. They all glanced at the boy without speaking. At last Morel came; brisk, and with something of an air, even in his blackness.

"Hello!" he said rather tenderly to his son. "Have you bested me? Shall you have a drink of something?"

Paul and all the children were bred up fierce anti-alcoholists, and he would have suffered more in drinking a lemonade before all the men than in having a tooth drawn.

The landlady looked at him *de haut en bas*, rather pitying, and at the same time, resenting his clear, fierce morality. Paul went home, glowering. He entered the house silently. Friday was baking day, and there was usually a hot bun. His mother put it before him.

Suddenly he turned on her in a fury, his eyes flashing:

"I'm NOT going to the office any more," he said.

"Why, what's the matter?" his mother asked in surprise. His sudden rages rather amused her.

"I'm NOT going any more," he declared.

"Oh, very well, tell your father so."

He chewed his bun as if he hated it.

"I'm not — I'm not going to fetch the money."

"Then one of Carlin's children can go; they'd be glad enough of the sixpence," said Mrs. Morel.

This sixpence was Paul's only income. It mostly went in buying birthday presents; but it WAS an income, and he treasured it. But —

"They can have it, then!" he said. "I don't want it."

"Oh, very well," said his mother. "But you needn't bully ME about it."

"They're hateful, and common, and hateful, they are, and I'm not going any more. Mr. Braithwaite drops his 'h's', an' Mr. Winterbottom says 'You was'."

"And is that why you won't go any more?" smiled Mrs. Morel.

The boy was silent for some time. His face was pale, his eyes dark and furious. His mother moved about at her work, taking no notice of him.

“They always stan’ in front of me, so’s I can’t get out,” he said.

“Well, my lad, you’ve only to ASK them,” she replied.

“An’ then Alfred Winterbottom says, ‘What do they teach you at the Board-school?’”

“They never taught HIM much,” said Mrs. Morel, “that is a fact — neither manners nor wit — and his cunning he was born with.”

So, in her own way, she soothed him. His ridiculous hypersensitiveness made her heart ache. And sometimes the fury in his eyes roused her, made her sleeping soul lift up its head a moment, surprised.

“What was the cheque?” she asked.

“Seventeen pounds eleven and fivepence, and sixteen and six stoppages,” replied the boy. “It’s a good week; and only five shillings stoppages for my father.”

So she was able to calculate how much her husband had earned, and could call him to account if he gave her short money. Morel always kept to himself the secret of the week’s amount.

Friday was the baking night and market night. It was the rule that Paul should stay at home and bake. He loved to stop in and draw or read; he was very fond of drawing. Annie always “gallivanted” on Friday nights; Arthur was enjoying himself as usual. So the boy remained alone.

Mrs. Morel loved her marketing. In the tiny market-place on the top of the hill, where four roads, from Nottingham and Derby, Ilkeston and Mansfield, meet, many stalls were erected. Brakes ran in from surrounding villages. The market-place was full of women, the streets packed with men. It was amazing to see so many men everywhere in the streets. Mrs. Morel usually quarrelled with her lace woman, sympathised with her fruit man — who was a gabey, but his wife was a bad ‘un — laughed with the fish man — who was a scamp but so droll — put the linoleum man in his place, was cold with the odd-wares man, and only went to the crockery man when she was driven — or drawn by the cornflowers on a little dish; then she was coldly polite.

“I wondered how much that little dish was,” she said.

“Sevenpence to you.”

“Thank you.”

She put the dish down and walked away; but she could not leave the market-place without it. Again she went by where the pots lay coldly on the floor, and she glanced at the dish furtively, pretending not to.

She was a little woman, in a bonnet and a black costume. Her bonnet was in

its third year; it was a great grievance to Annie.

“Mother!” the girl implored, “don’t wear that nubbly little bonnet.”

“Then what else shall I wear,” replied the mother tartly. “And I’m sure it’s right enough.”

It had started with a tip; then had had flowers; now was reduced to black lace and a bit of jet.

“It looks rather come down,” said Paul. “Couldn’t you give it a pick-me-up?”

“I’ll jowl your head for impudence,” said Mrs. Morel, and she tied the strings of the black bonnet valiantly under her chin.

She glanced at the dish again. Both she and her enemy, the pot man, had an uncomfortable feeling, as if there were something between them. Suddenly he shouted:

“Do you want it for fivepence?”

She started. Her heart hardened; but then she stooped and took up her dish.

“I’ll have it,” she said.

“Yer’ll do me the favour, like?” he said. “Yer’d better spit in it, like yer do when y’ave something give yer.”

Mrs. Morel paid him the fivepence in a cold manner.

“I don’t see you give it me,” she said. “You wouldn’t let me have it for fivepence if you didn’t want to.”

“In this flamin’, scratlin’ place you may count yerself lucky if you can give your things away,” he growled.

“Yes; there are bad times, and good,” said Mrs. Morel.

But she had forgiven the pot man. They were friends. She dare now finger his pots. So she was happy.

Paul was waiting for her. He loved her home-coming. She was always her best so — triumphant, tired, laden with parcels, feeling rich in spirit. He heard her quick, light step in the entry and looked up from his drawing.

“Oh!” she sighed, smiling at him from the doorway.

“My word, you ARE loaded!” he exclaimed, putting down his brush.

“I am!” she gasped. “That brazen Annie said she’d meet me. SUCH a weight!”

She dropped her string bag and her packages on the table.

“Is the bread done?” she asked, going to the oven.

“The last one is soaking,” he replied. “You needn’t look, I’ve not forgotten it.”

“Oh, that pot man!” she said, closing the oven door. “You know what a wretch I’ve said he was? Well, I don’t think he’s quite so bad.”

“Don’t you?”

The boy was attentive to her. She took off her little black bonnet.

“No. I think he can’t make any money — well, it’s everybody’s cry alike nowadays — and it makes him disagreeable.”

“It would ME,” said Paul.

“Well, one can’t wonder at it. And he let me have — how much do you think he let me have THIS for?”

She took the dish out of its rag of newspaper, and stood looking on it with joy.

“Show me!” said Paul.

The two stood together gloating over the dish.

“I LOVE cornflowers on things,” said Paul.

“Yes, and I thought of the teapot you bought me — ”

“One and three,” said Paul.

“Fivepence!”

“It’s not enough, mother.”

“No. Do you know, I fairly sneaked off with it. But I’d been extravagant, I couldn’t afford any more. And he needn’t have let me have it if he hadn’t wanted to.”

“No, he needn’t, need he,” said Paul, and the two comforted each other from the fear of having robbed the pot man.

“We c’n have stewed fruit in it,” said Paul.

“Or custard, or a jelly,” said his mother.

“Or radishes and lettuce,” said he.

“Don’t forget that bread,” she said, her voice bright with glee.

Paul looked in the oven; tapped the loaf on the base.

“It’s done,” he said, giving it to her.

She tapped it also.

“Yes,” she replied, going to unpack her bag. “Oh, and I’m a wicked, extravagant woman. I know I s’ll come to want.”

He hopped to her side eagerly, to see her latest extravagance. She unfolded another lump of newspaper and disclosed some roots of pansies and of crimson daisies.

“Four penn’orth!” she moaned.

“How CHEAP!” he cried.

“Yes, but I couldn’t afford it THIS week of all weeks.”

“But lovely!” he cried.

“Aren’t they!” she exclaimed, giving way to pure joy. “Paul, look at this yellow one, isn’t it — and a face just like an old man!”

“Just!” cried Paul, stooping to sniff. “And smells that nice! But he’s a bit splashed.”

He ran in the scullery, came back with the flannel, and carefully washed the

pansy.

“NOW look at him now he’s wet!” he said.

“Yes!” she exclaimed, brimful of satisfaction.

The children of Scargill Street felt quite select. At the end where the Morels lived there were not many young things. So the few were more united. Boys and girls played together, the girls joining in the fights and the rough games, the boys taking part in the dancing games and rings and make-belief of the girls.

Annie and Paul and Arthur loved the winter evenings, when it was not wet. They stayed indoors till the colliers were all gone home, till it was thick dark, and the street would be deserted. Then they tied their scarves round their necks, for they scorned overcoats, as all the colliers’ children did, and went out. The entry was very dark, and at the end the whole great night opened out, in a hollow, with a little tangle of lights below where Minton pit lay, and another far away opposite for Selby. The farthest tiny lights seemed to stretch out the darkness for ever. The children looked anxiously down the road at the one lamp-post, which stood at the end of the field path. If the little, luminous space were deserted, the two boys felt genuine desolation. They stood with their hands in their pockets under the lamp, turning their backs on the night, quite miserable, watching the dark houses. Suddenly a pinafore under a short coat was seen, and a long-legged girl came flying up.

“Where’s Billy Pillins an’ your Annie an’ Eddie Dakin?”

“I don’t know.”

But it did not matter so much — there were three now. They set up a game round the lamp-post, till the others rushed up, yelling. Then the play went fast and furious.

There was only this one lamp-post. Behind was the great scoop of darkness, as if all the night were there. In front, another wide, dark way opened over the hill brow. Occasionally somebody came out of this way and went into the field down the path. In a dozen yards the night had swallowed them. The children played on.

They were brought exceedingly close together owing to their isolation. If a quarrel took place, the whole play was spoilt. Arthur was very touchy, and Billy Pillins — really Philips — was worse. Then Paul had to side with Arthur, and on Paul’s side went Alice, while Billy Pillins always had Emmie Limb and Eddie Dakin to back him up. Then the six would fight, hate with a fury of hatred, and flee home in terror. Paul never forgot, after one of these fierce internecine fights, seeing a big red moon lift itself up, slowly, between the waste road over the hilltop, steadily, like a great bird. And he thought of the Bible, that the moon should be turned to blood. And the next day he made haste to be friends with

Billy Pillins. And then the wild, intense games went on again under the lamp-post, surrounded by so much darkness. Mrs. Morel, going into her parlour, would hear the children singing away:

“My shoes are made of Spanish leather,
My socks are made of silk;
I wear a ring on every finger,
I wash myself in milk.”

They sounded so perfectly absorbed in the game as their voices came out of the night, that they had the feel of wild creatures singing. It stirred the mother; and she understood when they came in at eight o'clock, ruddy, with brilliant eyes, and quick, passionate speech.

They all loved the Scargill Street house for its openness, for the great scallop of the world it had in view. On summer evenings the women would stand against the field fence, gossiping, facing the west, watching the sunsets flare quickly out, till the Derbyshire hills ridged across the crimson far away, like the black crest of a newt.

In this summer season the pits never turned full time, particularly the soft coal. Mrs. Dakin, who lived next door to Mrs. Morel, going to the field fence to shake her hearthrug, would spy men coming slowly up the hill. She saw at once they were colliers. Then she waited, a tall, thin, shrew-faced woman, standing on the hill brow, almost like a menace to the poor colliers who were toiling up. It was only eleven o'clock. From the far-off wooded hills the haze that hangs like fine black crape at the back of a summer morning had not yet dissipated. The first man came to the stile. “Chock-chock!” went the gate under his thrust.

“What, han' yer knocked off?” cried Mrs. Dakin.

“We han, missis.”

“It's a pity as they letn yer goo,” she said sarcastically.

“It is that,” replied the man.

“Nay, you know you're flig to come up again,” she said.

And the man went on. Mrs. Dakin, going up her yard, spied Mrs. Morel taking the ashes to the ash-pit.

“I reckon Minton's knocked off, missis,” she cried.

“Isn't it sickenin!” exclaimed Mrs. Morel in wrath.

“Ha! But I'n just seed Jont Hutchby.”

“They might as well have saved their shoe-leather,” said Mrs. Morel. And both women went indoors disgusted.

The colliers, their faces scarcely blackened, were trooping home again. Morel hated to go back. He loved the sunny morning. But he had gone to pit to work, and to be sent home again spoilt his temper.

“Good gracious, at this time!” exclaimed his wife, as he entered.

“Can I help it, woman?” he shouted.

“And I’ve not done half enough dinner.”

“Then I’ll eat my bit o’ snap as I took with me,” he bawled pathetically. He felt ignominious and sore.

And the children, coming home from school, would wonder to see their father eating with his dinner the two thick slices of rather dry and dirty bread-and-butter that had been to pit and back.

“What’s my dad eating his snap for now?” asked Arthur.

“I should ha’e it holled at me if I didna,” snorted Morel.

“What a story!” exclaimed his wife.

“An’ is it goin’ to be wasted?” said Morel. “I’m not such a extravagant mortal as you lot, with your waste. If I drop a bit of bread at pit, in all the dust an’ dirt, I pick it up an’ eat it.”

“The mice would eat it,” said Paul. “It wouldn’t be wasted.”

“Good bread-an’-butter’s not for mice, either,” said Morel. “Dirty or not dirty, I’d eat it rather than it should be wasted.”

“You might leave it for the mice and pay for it out of your next pint,” said Mrs. Morel.

“Oh, might I?” he exclaimed.

They were very poor that autumn. William had just gone away to London, and his mother missed his money. He sent ten shillings once or twice, but he had many things to pay for at first. His letters came regularly once a week. He wrote a good deal to his mother, telling her all his life, how he made friends, and was exchanging lessons with a Frenchman, how he enjoyed London. His mother felt again he was remaining to her just as when he was at home. She wrote to him every week her direct, rather witty letters. All day long, as she cleaned the house, she thought of him. He was in London: he would do well. Almost, he was like her knight who wore HER favour in the battle.

He was coming at Christmas for five days. There had never been such preparations. Paul and Arthur scoured the land for holly and evergreens. Annie made the pretty paper hoops in the old-fashioned way. And there was unheard-of extravagance in the larder. Mrs. Morel made a big and magnificent cake. Then, feeling queenly, she showed Paul how to blanch almonds. He skinned the long nuts reverently, counting them all, to see not one was lost. It was said that eggs whisked better in a cold place. So the boy stood in the scullery, where the temperature was nearly at freezing-point, and whisked and whisked, and flew in excitement to his mother as the white of egg grew stiffer and more snowy.

“Just look, mother! Isn’t it lovely?”

And he balanced a bit on his nose, then blew it in the air.

“Now, don’t waste it,” said the mother.

Everybody was mad with excitement. William was coming on Christmas Eve. Mrs. Morel surveyed her pantry. There was a big plum cake, and a rice cake, jam tarts, lemon tarts, and mince-pies — two enormous dishes. She was finishing cooking — Spanish tarts and cheese-cakes. Everywhere was decorated. The kissing bunch of berried holly hung with bright and glittering things, spun slowly over Mrs. Morel’s head as she trimmed her little tarts in the kitchen. A great fire roared. There was a scent of cooked pastry. He was due at seven o’clock, but he would be late. The three children had gone to meet him. She was alone. But at a quarter to seven Morel came in again. Neither wife nor husband spoke. He sat in his armchair, quite awkward with excitement, and she quietly went on with her baking. Only by the careful way in which she did things could it be told how much moved she was. The clock ticked on.

“What time dost say he’s coming?” Morel asked for the fifth time.

“The train gets in at half-past six,” she replied emphatically.

“Then he’ll be here at ten past seven.”

“Eh, bless you, it’ll be hours late on the Midland,” she said indifferently. But she hoped, by expecting him late, to bring him early. Morel went down the entry to look for him. Then he came back.

“Goodness, man!” she said. “You’re like an ill-sitting hen.”

“Hadna you better be gettin’ him summat t’ eat ready?” asked the father.

“There’s plenty of time,” she answered.

“There’s not so much as I can see on,” he answered, turning crossly in his chair. She began to clear her table. The kettle was singing. They waited and waited.

Meantime the three children were on the platform at Sethley Bridge, on the Midland main line, two miles from home. They waited one hour. A train came — he was not there. Down the line the red and green lights shone. It was very dark and very cold.

“Ask him if the London train’s come,” said Paul to Annie, when they saw a man in a tip cap.

“I’m not,” said Annie. “You be quiet — he might send us off.”

But Paul was dying for the man to know they were expecting someone by the London train: it sounded so grand. Yet he was much too much scared of broaching any man, let alone one in a peaked cap, to dare to ask. The three children could scarcely go into the waiting-room for fear of being sent away, and for fear something should happen whilst they were off the platform. Still they waited in the dark and cold.

“It’s an hour an’ a half late,” said Arthur pathetically.

“Well,” said Annie, “it’s Christmas Eve.”

They all grew silent. He wasn’t coming. They looked down the darkness of the railway. There was London! It seemed the utter-most of distance. They thought anything might happen if one came from London. They were all too troubled to talk. Cold, and unhappy, and silent, they huddled together on the platform.

At last, after more than two hours, they saw the lights of an engine peering round, away down the darkness. A porter ran out. The children drew back with beating hearts. A great train, bound for Manchester, drew up. Two doors opened, and from one of them, William. They flew to him. He handed parcels to them cheerily, and immediately began to explain that this great train had stopped for HIS sake at such a small station as Sethley Bridge: it was not booked to stop.

Meanwhile the parents were getting anxious. The table was set, the chop was cooked, everything was ready. Mrs. Morel put on her black apron. She was wearing her best dress. Then she sat, pretending to read. The minutes were a torture to her.

“H’m!” said Morel. “It’s an hour an’ a ha’ef.”

“And those children waiting!” she said.

“Th’ train canna ha’ come in yet,” he said.

“I tell you, on Christmas Eve they’re HOURS wrong.”

They were both a bit cross with each other, so gnawed with anxiety. The ash tree moaned outside in a cold, raw wind. And all that space of night from London home! Mrs. Morel suffered. The slight click of the works inside the clock irritated her. It was getting so late; it was getting unbearable.

At last there was a sound of voices, and a footstep in the entry.

“Ha’s here!” cried Morel, jumping up.

Then he stood back. The mother ran a few steps towards the door and waited. There was a rush and a patter of feet, the door burst open. William was there. He dropped his Gladstone bag and took his mother in his arms.

“Mater!” he said.

“My boy!” she cried.

And for two seconds, no longer, she clasped him and kissed him. Then she withdrew and said, trying to be quite normal:

“But how late you are!”

“Aren’t I!” he cried, turning to his father. “Well, dad!”

The two men shook hands.

“Well, my lad!”

Morel’s eyes were wet.

“We thought tha’d niver be commin’,” he said.

“Oh, I’d come!” exclaimed William.

Then the son turned round to his mother.

“But you look well,” she said proudly, laughing.

“Well!” he exclaimed. “I should think so — coming home!”

He was a fine fellow, big, straight, and fearless-looking. He looked round at the evergreens and the kissing bunch, and the little tarts that lay in their tins on the hearth.

“By jove! mother, it’s not different!” he said, as if in relief.

Everybody was still for a second. Then he suddenly sprang forward, picked a tart from the hearth, and pushed it whole into his mouth.

“Well, did iver you see such a parish oven!” the father exclaimed.

He had brought them endless presents. Every penny he had he had spent on them. There was a sense of luxury overflowing in the house. For his mother there was an umbrella with gold on the pale handle. She kept it to her dying day, and would have lost anything rather than that. Everybody had something gorgeous, and besides, there were pounds of unknown sweets: Turkish delight, crystallised pineapple, and such-like things which, the children thought, only the splendour of London could provide. And Paul boasted of these sweets among his friends.

“Real pineapple, cut off in slices, and then turned into crystal — fair grand!”

Everybody was mad with happiness in the family. Home was home, and they loved it with a passion of love, whatever the suffering had been. There were parties, there were rejoicings. People came in to see William, to see what difference London had made to him. And they all found him “such a gentleman, and SUCH a fine fellow, my word”!

When he went away again the children retired to various places to weep alone. Morel went to bed in misery, and Mrs. Morel felt as if she were numbed by some drug, as if her feelings were paralysed. She loved him passionately.

He was in the office of a lawyer connected with a large shipping firm, and at the midsummer his chief offered him a trip in the Mediterranean on one of the boats, for quite a small cost. Mrs. Morel wrote: “Go, go, my boy. You may never have a chance again, and I should love to think of you cruising there in the Mediterranean almost better than to have you at home.” But William came home for his fortnight’s holiday. Not even the Mediterranean, which pulled at all his young man’s desire to travel, and at his poor man’s wonder at the glamorous south, could take him away when he might come home. That compensated his mother for much.

CHAPTER V

PAUL LAUNCHES INTO LIFE

MOREL was rather a heedless man, careless of danger. So he had endless accidents. Now, when Mrs. Morel heard the rattle of an empty coal-cart cease at her entry-end, she ran into the parlour to look, expecting almost to see her husband seated in the waggon, his face grey under his dirt, his body limp and sick with some hurt or other. If it were he, she would run out to help.

About a year after William went to London, and just after Paul had left school, before he got work, Mrs. Morel was upstairs and her son was painting in the kitchen — he was very clever with his brush — when there came a knock at the door. Crossly he put down his brush to go. At the same moment his mother opened a window upstairs and looked down.

A pit-lad in his dirt stood on the threshold.

“Is this Walter Morel’s?” he asked.

“Yes,” said Mrs. Morel. “What is it?”

But she had guessed already.

“Your mester’s got hurt,” he said.

“Eh, dear me!” she exclaimed. “It’s a wonder if he hadn’t, lad. And what’s he done this time?”

“I don’t know for sure, but it’s ‘is leg somewhere. They ta’ein’ ‘im ter th’ ‘ospital.”

“Good gracious me!” she exclaimed. “Eh, dear, what a one he is! There’s not five minutes of peace, I’ll be hanged if there is! His thumb’s nearly better, and now — Did you see him?”

“I seed him at th’ bottom. An’ I seed ‘em bring ‘im up in a tub, an’ ‘e wor in a dead faint. But he shouted like anythink when Doctor Fraser examined him i’ th’ lamp cabin — an’ cossed an’ swore, an’ said as ‘e wor goin’ to be ta’en whoam — ‘e worn’t goin’ ter th’ ‘ospital.”

The boy faltered to an end.

“He WOULD want to come home, so that I can have all the bother. Thank you, my lad. Eh, dear, if I’m not sick — sick and surfeited, I am!”

She came downstairs. Paul had mechanically resumed his painting.

“And it must be pretty bad if they’ve taken him to the hospital,” she went on. “But what a CARELESS creature he is! OTHER men don’t have all these accidents. Yes, he WOULD want to put all the burden on me. Eh, dear, just as we WERE getting easy a bit at last. Put those things away, there’s no time to be painting now. What time is there a train? I know I s’ll have to go trailing to Keston. I s’ll have to leave that bedroom.”

“I can finish it,” said Paul.

“You needn’t. I shall catch the seven o’clock back, I should think. Oh, my blessed heart, the fuss and commotion he’ll make! And those granite setts at Tinder Hill — he might well call them kidney pebbles — they’ll jolt him almost to bits. I wonder why they can’t mend them, the state they’re in, an’ all the men as go across in that ambulance. You’d think they’d have a hospital here. The men bought the ground, and, my sirs, there’d be accidents enough to keep it going. But no, they must trail them ten miles in a slow ambulance to Nottingham. It’s a crying shame! Oh, and the fuss he’ll make! I know he will! I wonder who’s with him. Barker, I s’d think. Poor beggar, he’ll wish himself anywhere rather. But he’ll look after him, I know. Now there’s no telling how long he’ll be stuck in that hospital — and WON’T he hate it! But if it’s only his leg it’s not so bad.”

All the time she was getting ready. Hurriedly taking off her bodice, she crouched at the boiler while the water ran slowly into her lading-can.

“I wish this boiler was at the bottom of the sea!” she exclaimed, wriggling the handle impatiently. She had very handsome, strong arms, rather surprising on a smallish woman.

Paul cleared away, put on the kettle, and set the table.

“There isn’t a train till four-twenty,” he said. “You’ve time enough.”

“Oh no, I haven’t!” she cried, blinking at him over the towel as she wiped her face.

“Yes, you have. You must drink a cup of tea at any rate. Should I come with you to Keston?”

“Come with me? What for, I should like to know? Now, what have I to take him? Eh, dear! His clean shirt — and it’s a blessing it IS clean. But it had better be aired. And stockings — he won’t want them — and a towel, I suppose; and handkerchiefs. Now what else?”

“A comb, a knife and fork and spoon,” said Paul. His father had been in the hospital before.

“Goodness knows what sort of state his feet were in,” continued Mrs. Morel, as she combed her long brown hair, that was fine as silk, and was touched now with grey. “He’s very particular to wash himself to the waist, but below he

thinks doesn't matter. But there, I suppose they see plenty like it."

Paul had laid the table. He cut his mother one or two pieces of very thin bread and butter.

"Here you are," he said, putting her cup of tea in her place.

"I can't be bothered!" she exclaimed crossly.

"Well, you've got to, so there, now it's put out ready," he insisted.

So she sat down and sipped her tea, and ate a little, in silence. She was thinking.

In a few minutes she was gone, to walk the two and a half miles to Keston Station. All the things she was taking him she had in her bulging string bag. Paul watched her go up the road between the hedges — a little, quick-stepping figure, and his heart ached for her, that she was thrust forward again into pain and trouble. And she, tripping so quickly in her anxiety, felt at the back of her her son's heart waiting on her, felt him bearing what part of the burden he could, even supporting her. And when she was at the hospital, she thought: "It WILL upset that lad when I tell him how bad it is. I'd better be careful." And when she was trudging home again, she felt he was coming to share her burden.

"Is it bad?" asked Paul, as soon as she entered the house.

"It's bad enough," she replied.

"What?"

She sighed and sat down, undoing her bonnet-strings. Her son watched her face as it was lifted, and her small, work-hardened hands fingering at the bow under her chin.

"Well," she answered, "it's not really dangerous, but the nurse says it's a dreadful smash. You see, a great piece of rock fell on his leg — here — and it's a compound fracture. There are pieces of bone sticking through — "

"Ugh — how horrid!" exclaimed the children.

"And," she continued, "of course he says he's going to die — it wouldn't be him if he didn't. 'I'm done for, my lass!' he said, looking at me. 'Don't be so silly,' I said to him. 'You're not going to die of a broken leg, however badly it's smashed.' 'I s'll niver come out of 'ere but in a wooden box,' he groaned. 'Well,' I said, 'if you want them to carry you into the garden in a wooden box, when you're better, I've no doubt they will.' 'If we think it's good for him,' said the Sister. She's an awfully nice Sister, but rather strict."

Mrs. Morel took off her bonnet. The children waited in silence.

"Of course, he IS bad," she continued, "and he will be. It's a great shock, and he's lost a lot of blood; and, of course, it IS a very dangerous smash. It's not at all sure that it will mend so easily. And then there's the fever and the mortification — if it took bad ways he'd quickly be gone. But there, he's a

clean-blooded man, with wonderful healing flesh, and so I see no reason why it SHOULD take bad ways. Of course there's a wound — ”

She was pale now with emotion and anxiety. The three children realised that it was very bad for their father, and the house was silent, anxious.

“But he always gets better,” said Paul after a while.

“That's what I tell him,” said the mother.

Everybody moved about in silence.

“And he really looked nearly done for,” she said. “But the Sister says that is the pain.”

Annie took away her mother's coat and bonnet.

“And he looked at me when I came away! I said: ‘I s'll have to go now, Walter, because of the train — and the children.’ And he looked at me. It seems hard.”

Paul took up his brush again and went on painting. Arthur went outside for some coal. Annie sat looking dismal. And Mrs. Morel, in her little rocking-chair that her husband had made for her when the first baby was coming, remained motionless, brooding. She was grieved, and bitterly sorry for the man who was hurt so much. But still, in her heart of hearts, where the love should have burned, there was a blank. Now, when all her woman's pity was roused to its full extent, when she would have slaved herself to death to nurse him and to save him, when she would have taken the pain herself, if she could, somewhere far away inside her, she felt indifferent to him and to his suffering. It hurt her most of all, this failure to love him, even when he roused her strong emotions. She brooded a while.

“And there,” she said suddenly, “when I'd got halfway to Keston, I found I'd come out in my working boots — and LOOK at them.” They were an old pair of Paul's, brown and rubbed through at the toes. “I didn't know what to do with myself, for shame,” she added.

In the morning, when Annie and Arthur were at school, Mrs. Morel talked again to her son, who was helping her with her housework.

“I found Barker at the hospital. He did look bad, poor little fellow! ‘Well,’ I said to him, ‘what sort of a journey did you have with him?’ ‘Dunna ax me, missis!’ he said. ‘Ay,’ I said, ‘I know what he'd be.’ ‘But it WOR bad for him, Mrs. Morel, it WOR that!’ he said. ‘I know,’ I said. ‘At ivry jolt I thought my ‘eart would ha' flown clean out o' my mouth,’ he said. ‘An' the scream ‘e gives sometimes! Missis, not for a fortune would I go through wi' it again.’ ‘I can quite understand it,’ I said. ‘It's a nasty job, though,’ he said, ‘an' one as'll be a long while afore it's right again.’ ‘I'm afraid it will,’ I said. I like Mr. Barker — I DO like him. There's something so manly about him.”

Paul resumed his task silently.

“And of course,” Mrs. Morel continued, “for a man like your father, the hospital IS hard. He CAN’T understand rules and regulations. And he won’t let anybody else touch him, not if he can help it. When he smashed the muscles of his thigh, and it had to be dressed four times a day, WOULD he let anybody but me or his mother do it? He wouldn’t. So, of course, he’ll suffer in there with the nurses. And I didn’t like leaving him. I’m sure, when I kissed him an’ came away, it seemed a shame.”

So she talked to her son, almost as if she were thinking aloud to him, and he took it in as best he could, by sharing her trouble to lighten it. And in the end she shared almost everything with him without knowing.

Morel had a very bad time. For a week he was in a critical condition. Then he began to mend. And then, knowing he was going to get better, the whole family sighed with relief, and proceeded to live happily.

They were not badly off whilst Morel was in the hospital. There were fourteen shillings a week from the pit, ten shillings from the sick club, and five shillings from the Disability Fund; and then every week the butties had something for Mrs. Morel — five or seven shillings — so that she was quite well to do. And whilst Morel was progressing favourably in the hospital, the family was extraordinarily happy and peaceful. On Saturdays and Wednesdays Mrs. Morel went to Nottingham to see her husband. Then she always brought back some little thing: a small tube of paints for Paul, or some thick paper; a couple of postcards for Annie, that the whole family rejoiced over for days before the girl was allowed to send them away; or a fret-saw for Arthur, or a bit of pretty wood. She described her adventures into the big shops with joy. Soon the folk in the picture-shop knew her, and knew about Paul. The girl in the book-shop took a keen interest in her. Mrs. Morel was full of information when she got home from Nottingham. The three sat round till bed-time, listening, putting in, arguing. Then Paul often raked the fire.

“I’m the man in the house now,” he used to say to his mother with joy. They learned how perfectly peaceful the home could be. And they almost regretted — though none of them would have owned to such callousness — that their father was soon coming back.

Paul was now fourteen, and was looking for work. He was a rather small and rather finely-made boy, with dark brown hair and light blue eyes. His face had already lost its youthful chubbiness, and was becoming somewhat like William’s — rough-featured, almost rugged — and it was extraordinarily mobile. Usually he looked as if he saw things, was full of life, and warm; then his smile, like his mother’s, came suddenly and was very lovable; and then, when there was any

clog in his soul's quick running, his face went stupid and ugly. He was the sort of boy that becomes a clown and a lout as soon as he is not understood, or feels himself held cheap; and, again, is adorable at the first touch of warmth.

He suffered very much from the first contact with anything. When he was seven, the starting school had been a nightmare and a torture to him. But afterwards he liked it. And now that he felt he had to go out into life, he went through agonies of shrinking self-consciousness. He was quite a clever painter for a boy of his years, and he knew some French and German and mathematics that Mr. Heaton had taught him. But nothing he had was of any commercial value. He was not strong enough for heavy manual work, his mother said. He did not care for making things with his hands, preferred racing about, or making excursions into the country, or reading, or painting.

"What do you want to be?" his mother asked.

"Anything."

"That is no answer," said Mrs. Morel.

But it was quite truthfully the only answer he could give. His ambition, as far as this world's gear went, was quietly to earn his thirty or thirty-five shillings a week somewhere near home, and then, when his father died, have a cottage with his mother, paint and go out as he liked, and live happy ever after. That was his programme as far as doing things went. But he was proud within himself, measuring people against himself, and placing them, inexorably. And he thought that PERHAPS he might also make a painter, the real thing. But that he left alone.

"Then," said his mother, "you must look in the paper for the advertisements."

He looked at her. It seemed to him a bitter humiliation and an anguish to go through. But he said nothing. When he got up in the morning, his whole being was knotted up over this one thought:

"I've got to go and look for advertisements for a job."

It stood in front of the morning, that thought, killing all joy and even life, for him. His heart felt like a tight knot.

And then, at ten o'clock, he set off. He was supposed to be a queer, quiet child. Going up the sunny street of the little town, he felt as if all the folk he met said to themselves: "He's going to the Co-op. reading-room to look in the papers for a place. He can't get a job. I suppose he's living on his mother." Then he crept up the stone stairs behind the drapery shop at the Co-op., and peeped in the reading-room. Usually one or two men were there, either old, useless fellows, or colliers "on the club". So he entered, full of shrinking and suffering when they looked up, seated himself at the table, and pretended to scan the news. He knew they would think: "What does a lad of thirteen want in a reading-room with a

newspaper?" and he suffered.

Then he looked wistfully out of the window. Already he was a prisoner of industrialism. Large sunflowers stared over the old red wall of the garden opposite, looking in their jolly way down on the women who were hurrying with something for dinner. The valley was full of corn, brightening in the sun. Two collieries, among the fields, waved their small white plumes of steam. Far off on the hills were the woods of Annesley, dark and fascinating. Already his heart went down. He was being taken into bondage. His freedom in the beloved home valley was going now.

The brewers' waggons came rolling up from Keston with enormous barrels, four a side, like beans in a burst bean-pod. The waggoner, throned aloft, rolling massively in his seat, was not so much below Paul's eye. The man's hair, on his small, bullet head, was bleached almost white by the sun, and on his thick red arms, rocking idly on his sack apron, the white hairs glistened. His red face shone and was almost asleep with sunshine. The horses, handsome and brown, went on by themselves, looking by far the masters of the show.

Paul wished he were stupid. "I wish," he thought to himself, "I was fat like him, and like a dog in the sun. I wish I was a pig and a brewer's waggoner."

Then, the room being at last empty, he would hastily copy an advertisement on a scrap of paper, then another, and slip out in immense relief. His mother would scan over his copies.

"Yes," she said, "you may try."

William had written out a letter of application, couched in admirable business language, which Paul copied, with variations. The boy's handwriting was execrable, so that William, who did all things well, got into a fever of impatience.

The elder brother was becoming quite swanky. In London he found that he could associate with men far above his Bestwood friends in station. Some of the clerks in the office had studied for the law, and were more or less going through a kind of apprenticeship. William always made friends among men wherever he went, he was so jolly. Therefore he was soon visiting and staying in houses of men who, in Bestwood, would have looked down on the unapproachable bank manager, and would merely have called indifferently on the Rector. So he began to fancy himself as a great gun. He was, indeed, rather surprised at the ease with which he became a gentleman.

His mother was glad, he seemed so pleased. And his lodging in Walthamstow was so dreary. But now there seemed to come a kind of fever into the young man's letters. He was unsettled by all the change, he did not stand firm on his own feet, but seemed to spin rather giddily on the quick current of the new life.

His mother was anxious for him. She could feel him losing himself. He had danced and gone to the theatre, boated on the river, been out with friends; and she knew he sat up afterwards in his cold bedroom grinding away at Latin, because he intended to get on in his office, and in the law as much as he could. He never sent his mother any money now. It was all taken, the little he had, for his own life. And she did not want any, except sometimes, when she was in a tight corner, and when ten shillings would have saved her much worry. She still dreamed of William, and of what he would do, with herself behind him. Never for a minute would she admit to herself how heavy and anxious her heart was because of him.

Also he talked a good deal now of a girl he had met at a dance, a handsome brunette, quite young, and a lady, after whom the men were running thick and fast.

“I wonder if you would run, my boy,” his mother wrote to him, “unless you saw all the other men chasing her too. You feel safe enough and vain enough in a crowd. But take care, and see how you feel when you find yourself alone, and in triumph.” William resented these things, and continued the chase. He had taken the girl on the river. “If you saw her, mother, you would know how I feel. Tall and elegant, with the clearest of clear, transparent olive complexions, hair as black as jet, and such grey eyes — bright, mocking, like lights on water at night. It is all very well to be a bit satirical till you see her. And she dresses as well as any woman in London. I tell you, your son doesn’t half put his head up when she goes walking down Piccadilly with him.”

Mrs. Morel wondered, in her heart, if her son did not go walking down Piccadilly with an elegant figure and fine clothes, rather than with a woman who was near to him. But she congratulated him in her doubtful fashion. And, as she stood over the washing-tub, the mother brooded over her son. She saw him saddled with an elegant and expensive wife, earning little money, dragging along and getting draggled in some small, ugly house in a suburb. “But there,” she told herself, “I am very likely a silly — meeting trouble halfway.” Nevertheless, the load of anxiety scarcely ever left her heart, lest William should do the wrong thing by himself.

Presently, Paul was bidden call upon Thomas Jordan, Manufacturer of Surgical Appliances, at 21, Spaniel Row, Nottingham. Mrs. Morel was all joy.

“There, you see!” she cried, her eyes shining. “You’ve only written four letters, and the third is answered. You’re lucky, my boy, as I always said you were.”

Paul looked at the picture of a wooden leg, adorned with elastic stockings and other appliances, that figured on Mr. Jordan’s notepaper, and he felt alarmed. He

had not known that elastic stockings existed. And he seemed to feel the business world, with its regulated system of values, and its impersonality, and he dreaded it. It seemed monstrous also that a business could be run on wooden legs.

Mother and son set off together one Tuesday morning. It was August and blazing hot. Paul walked with something screwed up tight inside him. He would have suffered much physical pain rather than this unreasonable suffering at being exposed to strangers, to be accepted or rejected. Yet he chattered away with his mother. He would never have confessed to her how he suffered over these things, and she only partly guessed. She was gay, like a sweetheart. She stood in front of the ticket-office at Bestwood, and Paul watched her take from her purse the money for the tickets. As he saw her hands in their old black kid gloves getting the silver out of the worn purse, his heart contracted with pain of love of her.

She was quite excited, and quite gay. He suffered because she WOULD talk aloud in presence of the other travellers.

“Now look at that silly cow!” she said, “careering round as if it thought it was a circus.”

“It’s most likely a bottfly,” he said very low.

“A what?” she asked brightly and unashamed.

They thought a while. He was sensible all the time of having her opposite him. Suddenly their eyes met, and she smiled to him — a rare, intimate smile, beautiful with brightness and love. Then each looked out of the window.

The sixteen slow miles of railway journey passed. The mother and son walked down Station Street, feeling the excitement of lovers having an adventure together. In Carrington Street they stopped to hang over the parapet and look at the barges on the canal below.

“It’s just like Venice,” he said, seeing the sunshine on the water that lay between high factory walls.

“Perhaps,” she answered, smiling.

They enjoyed the shops immensely.

“Now you see that blouse,” she would say, “wouldn’t that just suit our Annie? And for one-and-eleven-three. Isn’t that cheap?”

“And made of needlework as well,” he said.

“Yes.”

They had plenty of time, so they did not hurry. The town was strange and delightful to them. But the boy was tied up inside in a knot of apprehension. He dreaded the interview with Thomas Jordan.

It was nearly eleven o’clock by St. Peter’s Church. They turned up a narrow street that led to the Castle. It was gloomy and old-fashioned, having low dark

shops and dark green house doors with brass knockers, and yellow-ochred doorsteps projecting on to the pavement; then another old shop whose small window looked like a cunning, half-shut eye. Mother and son went cautiously, looking everywhere for "Thomas Jordan and Son". It was like hunting in some wild place. They were on tiptoe of excitement.

Suddenly they spied a big, dark archway, in which were names of various firms, Thomas Jordan among them.

"Here it is!" said Mrs. Morel. "But now WHERE is it?"

They looked round. On one side was a queer, dark, cardboard factory, on the other a Commercial Hotel.

"It's up the entry," said Paul.

And they ventured under the archway, as into the jaws of the dragon. They emerged into a wide yard, like a well, with buildings all round. It was littered with straw and boxes, and cardboard. The sunshine actually caught one crate whose straw was streaming on to the yard like gold. But elsewhere the place was like a pit. There were several doors, and two flights of steps. Straight in front, on a dirty glass door at the top of a staircase, loomed the ominous words "Thomas Jordan and Son — Surgical Appliances." Mrs. Morel went first, her son followed her. Charles I mounted his scaffold with a lighter heart than had Paul Morel as he followed his mother up the dirty steps to the dirty door.

She pushed open the door, and stood in pleased surprise. In front of her was a big warehouse, with creamy paper parcels everywhere, and clerks, with their shirt-sleeves rolled back, were going about in an at-home sort of way. The light was subdued, the glossy cream parcels seemed luminous, the counters were of dark brown wood. All was quiet and very homely. Mrs. Morel took two steps forward, then waited. Paul stood behind her. She had on her Sunday bonnet and a black veil; he wore a boy's broad white collar and a Norfolk suit.

One of the clerks looked up. He was thin and tall, with a small face. His way of looking was alert. Then he glanced round to the other end of the room, where was a glass office. And then he came forward. He did not say anything, but leaned in a gentle, inquiring fashion towards Mrs. Morel.

"Can I see Mr. Jordan?" she asked.

"I'll fetch him," answered the young man.

He went down to the glass office. A red-faced, white-whiskered old man looked up. He reminded Paul of a pomeranian dog. Then the same little man came up the room. He had short legs, was rather stout, and wore an alpaca jacket. So, with one ear up, as it were, he came stoutly and inquiringly down the room.

"Good-morning!" he said, hesitating before Mrs. Morel, in doubt as to

whether she were a customer or not.

“Good-morning. I came with my son, Paul Morel. You asked him to call this morning.”

“Come this way,” said Mr. Jordan, in a rather snappy little manner intended to be businesslike.

They followed the manufacturer into a grubby little room, upholstered in black American leather, glossy with the rubbing of many customers. On the table was a pile of trusses, yellow wash-leather hoops tangled together. They looked new and living. Paul sniffed the odour of new wash-leather. He wondered what the things were. By this time he was so much stunned that he only noticed the outside things.

“Sit down!” said Mr. Jordan, irritably pointing Mrs. Morel to a horse-hair chair. She sat on the edge in an uncertain fashion. Then the little old man fidgeted and found a paper.

“Did you write this letter?” he snapped, thrusting what Paul recognised as his own notepaper in front of him.

“Yes,” he answered.

At that moment he was occupied in two ways: first, in feeling guilty for telling a lie, since William had composed the letter; second, in wondering why his letter seemed so strange and different, in the fat, red hand of the man, from what it had been when it lay on the kitchen table. It was like part of himself, gone astray. He resented the way the man held it.

“Where did you learn to write?” said the old man crossly.

Paul merely looked at him shamedly, and did not answer.

“He IS a bad writer,” put in Mrs. Morel apologetically. Then she pushed up her veil. Paul hated her for not being prouder with this common little man, and he loved her face clear of the veil.

“And you say you know French?” inquired the little man, still sharply.

“Yes,” said Paul.

“What school did you go to?”

“The Board-school.”

“And did you learn it there?”

“No — I — ” The boy went crimson and got no farther.

“His godfather gave him lessons,” said Mrs. Morel, half pleading and rather distant.

Mr. Jordan hesitated. Then, in his irritable manner — he always seemed to keep his hands ready for action — he pulled another sheet of paper from his pocket, unfolded it. The paper made a crackling noise. He handed it to Paul.

“Read that,” he said.

It was a note in French, in thin, flimsy foreign handwriting that the boy could not decipher. He stared blankly at the paper.

“Monsieur,” he began; then he looked in great confusion at Mr. Jordan. “It’s the — it’s the — ”

He wanted to say “handwriting”, but his wits would no longer work even sufficiently to supply him with the word. Feeling an utter fool, and hating Mr. Jordan, he turned desperately to the paper again.

“Sir, — Please send me’ — er — er — I can’t tell the — er — ’two pairs — gris fil bas — grey thread stockings’ — er — er — ’sans — without’ — er — I can’t tell the words — er — ’doigts — fingers’ — er — I can’t tell the — ”

He wanted to say “handwriting”, but the word still refused to come. Seeing him stuck, Mr. Jordan snatched the paper from him.

“Please send by return two pairs grey thread stockings without TOES.”

“Well,” flashed Paul, “‘doigts’ means ‘fingers’ — as well — as a rule — ”

The little man looked at him. He did not know whether “doigts” meant “fingers”; he knew that for all HIS purposes it meant “toes”.

“Fingers to stockings!” he snapped.

“Well, it DOES mean fingers,” the boy persisted.

He hated the little man, who made such a clod of him. Mr. Jordan looked at the pale, stupid, defiant boy, then at the mother, who sat quiet and with that peculiar shut-off look of the poor who have to depend on the favour of others.

“And when could he come?” he asked.

“Well,” said Mrs. Morel, “as soon as you wish. He has finished school now.”

“He would live in Bestwood?”

“Yes; but he could be in — at the station — at quarter to eight.”

“H’m!”

It ended by Paul’s being engaged as junior spiral clerk at eight shillings a week. The boy did not open his mouth to say another word, after having insisted that “doigts” meant “fingers”. He followed his mother down the stairs. She looked at him with her bright blue eyes full of love and joy.

“I think you’ll like it,” she said.

“‘Doigts’ does mean ‘fingers’, mother, and it was the writing. I couldn’t read the writing.”

“Never mind, my boy. I’m sure he’ll be all right, and you won’t see much of him. Wasn’t that first young fellow nice? I’m sure you’ll like them.”

“But wasn’t Mr. Jordan common, mother? Does he own it all?”

“I suppose he was a workman who has got on,” she said. “You mustn’t mind people so much. They’re not being disagreeable to YOU — it’s their way. You always think people are meaning things for you. But they don’t.”

It was very sunny. Over the big desolate space of the market-place the blue sky shimmered, and the granite cobbles of the paving glistened. Shops down the Long Row were deep in obscurity, and the shadow was full of colour. Just where the horse trams trundled across the market was a row of fruit stalls, with fruit blazing in the sun — apples and piles of reddish oranges, small green-gage plums and bananas. There was a warm scent of fruit as mother and son passed. Gradually his feeling of ignominy and of rage sank.

“Where should we go for dinner?” asked the mother.

It was felt to be a reckless extravagance. Paul had only been in an eating-house once or twice in his life, and then only to have a cup of tea and a bun. Most of the people of Bestwood considered that tea and bread-and-butter, and perhaps potted beef, was all they could afford to eat in Nottingham. Real cooked dinner was considered great extravagance. Paul felt rather guilty.

They found a place that looked quite cheap. But when Mrs. Morel scanned the bill of fare, her heart was heavy, things were so dear. So she ordered kidney-pies and potatoes as the cheapest available dish.

“We oughtn’t to have come here, mother,” said Paul.

“Never mind,” she said. “We won’t come again.”

She insisted on his having a small currant tart, because he liked sweets.

“I don’t want it, mother,” he pleaded.

“Yes,” she insisted; “you’ll have it.”

And she looked round for the waitress. But the waitress was busy, and Mrs. Morel did not like to bother her then. So the mother and son waited for the girl’s pleasure, whilst she flirted among the men.

“Brazen hussy!” said Mrs. Morel to Paul. “Look now, she’s taking that man HIS pudding, and he came long after us.”

“It doesn’t matter, mother,” said Paul.

Mrs. Morel was angry. But she was too poor, and her orders were too meagre, so that she had not the courage to insist on her rights just then. They waited and waited.

“Should we go, mother?” he said.

Then Mrs. Morel stood up. The girl was passing near.

“Will you bring one currant tart?” said Mrs. Morel clearly.

The girl looked round insolently.

“Directly,” she said.

“We have waited quite long enough,” said Mrs. Morel.

In a moment the girl came back with the tart. Mrs. Morel asked coldly for the bill. Paul wanted to sink through the floor. He marvelled at his mother’s hardness. He knew that only years of battling had taught her to insist even so

little on her rights. She shrank as much as he.

“It’s the last time I go THERE for anything!” she declared, when they were outside the place, thankful to be clear.

“We’ll go,” she said, “and look at Keep’s and Boot’s, and one or two places, shall we?”

They had discussions over the pictures, and Mrs. Morel wanted to buy him a little sable brush that he hankered after. But this indulgence he refused. He stood in front of milliners’ shops and drapers’ shops almost bored, but content for her to be interested. They wandered on.

“Now, just look at those black grapes!” she said. “They make your mouth water. I’ve wanted some of those for years, but I s’ll have to wait a bit before I get them.”

Then she rejoiced in the florists, standing in the doorway sniffing.

“Oh! oh! Isn’t it simply lovely!”

Paul saw, in the darkness of the shop, an elegant young lady in black peering over the counter curiously.

“They’re looking at you,” he said, trying to draw his mother away.

“But what is it?” she exclaimed, refusing to be moved.

“Stocks!” he answered, sniffing hastily. “Look, there’s a tubful.”

“So there is — red and white. But really, I never knew stocks to smell like it!” And, to his great relief, she moved out of the doorway, but only to stand in front of the window.

“Paul!” she cried to him, who was trying to get out of sight of the elegant young lady in black — the shop-girl. “Paul! Just look here!”

He came reluctantly back.

“Now, just look at that fuchsia!” she exclaimed, pointing.

“H’m!” He made a curious, interested sound. “You’d think every second as the flowers was going to fall off, they hang so big an’ heavy.”

“And such an abundance!” she cried.

“And the way they drop downwards with their threads and knots!”

“Yes!” she exclaimed. “Lovely!”

“I wonder who’ll buy it!” he said.

“I wonder!” she answered. “Not us.”

“It would die in our parlour.”

“Yes, beastly cold, sunless hole; it kills every bit of a plant you put in, and the kitchen chokes them to death.”

They bought a few things, and set off towards the station. Looking up the canal, through the dark pass of the buildings, they saw the Castle on its bluff of brown, green-bushed rock, in a positive miracle of delicate sunshine.

“Won’t it be nice for me to come out at dinner-times?” said Paul. “I can go all round here and see everything. I s’ll love it.”

“You will,” assented his mother.

He had spent a perfect afternoon with his mother. They arrived home in the mellow evening, happy, and glowing, and tired.

In the morning he filled in the form for his season-ticket and took it to the station. When he got back, his mother was just beginning to wash the floor. He sat crouched up on the sofa.

“He says it’ll be here on Saturday,” he said.

“And how much will it be?”

“About one pound eleven,” he said.

She went on washing her floor in silence.

“Is it a lot?” he asked.

“It’s no more than I thought,” she answered.

“An’ I s’ll earn eight shillings a week,” he said.

She did not answer, but went on with her work. At last she said:

“That William promised me, when he went to London, as he’d give me a pound a month. He has given me ten shillings — twice; and now I know he hasn’t a farthing if I asked him. Not that I want it. Only just now you’d think he might be able to help with this ticket, which I’d never expected.”

“He earns a lot,” said Paul.

“He earns a hundred and thirty pounds. But they’re all alike. They’re large in promises, but it’s precious little fulfilment you get.”

“He spends over fifty shillings a week on himself,” said Paul.

“And I keep this house on less than thirty,” she replied; “and am supposed to find money for extras. But they don’t care about helping you, once they’ve gone. He’d rather spend it on that dressed-up creature.”

“She should have her own money if she’s so grand,” said Paul.

“She should, but she hasn’t. I asked him. And I know he doesn’t buy her a gold bangle for nothing. I wonder whoever bought ME a gold bangle.”

William was succeeding with his “Gipsy”, as he called her. He asked the girl — her name was Louisa Lily Denys Western — for a photograph to send to his mother. The photo came — a handsome brunette, taken in profile, smirking slightly — and, it might be, quite naked, for on the photograph not a scrap of clothing was to be seen, only a naked bust.

“Yes,” wrote Mrs. Morel to her son, “the photograph of Louie is very striking, and I can see she must be attractive. But do you think, my boy, it was very good taste of a girl to give her young man that photo to send to his mother — the first? Certainly the shoulders are beautiful, as you say. But I hardly expected to see so

much of them at the first view.”

Morel found the photograph standing on the chiffonier in the parlour. He came out with it between his thick thumb and finger.

“Who dost reckon this is?” he asked of his wife.

“It’s the girl our William is going with,” replied Mrs. Morel.

“H’m! ‘Er’s a bright spark, from th’ look on ‘er, an’ one as wanna do him owermuch good neither. Who is she?”

“Her name is Louisa Lily Denys Western.”

“An’ come again tomorrer!” exclaimed the miner. “An’ is ‘er an actress?”

“She is not. She’s supposed to be a lady.”

“I’ll bet!” he exclaimed, still staring at the photo. “A lady, is she? An’ how much does she reckon ter keep up this sort o’ game on?”

“On nothing. She lives with an old aunt, whom she hates, and takes what bit of money’s given her.”

“H’m!” said Morel, laying down the photograph. “Then he’s a fool to ha’ ta’en up wi’ such a one as that.”

“Dear Mater,” William replied. “I’m sorry you didn’t like the photograph. It never occurred to me when I sent it, that you mightn’t think it decent. However, I told Gyp that it didn’t quite suit your prim and proper notions, so she’s going to send you another, that I hope will please you better. She’s always being photographed; in fact, the photographers ask her if they may take her for nothing.”

Presently the new photograph came, with a little silly note from the girl. This time the young lady was seen in a black satin evening bodice, cut square, with little puff sleeves, and black lace hanging down her beautiful arms.

“I wonder if she ever wears anything except evening clothes,” said Mrs. Morel sarcastically. “I’m sure I ought to be impressed.”

“You are disagreeable, mother,” said Paul. “I think the first one with bare shoulders is lovely.”

“Do you?” answered his mother. “Well, I don’t.”

On the Monday morning the boy got up at six to start work. He had the season-ticket, which had cost such bitterness, in his waistcoat pocket. He loved it with its bars of yellow across. His mother packed his dinner in a small, shut-up basket, and he set off at a quarter to seven to catch the 7.15 train. Mrs. Morel came to the entry-end to see him off.

It was a perfect morning. From the ash tree the slender green fruits that the children call “pigeons” were twinkling gaily down on a little breeze, into the front gardens of the houses. The valley was full of a lustrous dark haze, through which the ripe corn shimmered, and in which the steam from Minton pit melted

swiftly. Puffs of wind came. Paul looked over the high woods of Aldersley, where the country gleamed, and home had never pulled at him so powerfully.

“Good-morning, mother,” he said, smiling, but feeling very unhappy.

“Good-morning,” she replied cheerfully and tenderly.

She stood in her white apron on the open road, watching him as he crossed the field. He had a small, compact body that looked full of life. She felt, as she saw him trudging over the field, that where he determined to go he would get. She thought of William. He would have leaped the fence instead of going round the stile. He was away in London, doing well. Paul would be working in Nottingham. Now she had two sons in the world. She could think of two places, great centres of industry, and feel that she had put a man into each of them, that these men would work out what SHE wanted; they were derived from her, they were of her, and their works also would be hers. All the morning long she thought of Paul.

At eight o'clock he climbed the dismal stairs of Jordan's Surgical Appliance Factory, and stood helplessly against the first great parcel-rack, waiting for somebody to pick him up. The place was still not awake. Over the counters were great dust sheets. Two men only had arrived, and were heard talking in a corner, as they took off their coats and rolled up their shirt-sleeves. It was ten past eight. Evidently there was no rush of punctuality. Paul listened to the voices of the two clerks. Then he heard someone cough, and saw in the office at the end of the room an old, decaying clerk, in a round smoking-cap of black velvet embroidered with red and green, opening letters. He waited and waited. One of the junior clerks went to the old man, greeted him cheerily and loudly. Evidently the old “chief” was deaf. Then the young fellow came striding importantly down to his counter. He spied Paul.

“Hello!” he said. “You the new lad?”

“Yes,” said Paul.

“H'm! What's your name?”

“Paul Morel.”

“Paul Morel? All right, you come on round here.”

Paul followed him round the rectangle of counters. The room was second storey. It had a great hole in the middle of the floor, fenced as with a wall of counters, and down this wide shaft the lifts went, and the light for the bottom storey. Also there was a corresponding big, oblong hole in the ceiling, and one could see above, over the fence of the top floor, some machinery; and right away overhead was the glass roof, and all light for the three storeys came downwards, getting dimmer, so that it was always night on the ground floor and rather gloomy on the second floor. The factory was the top floor, the warehouse the

second, the storehouse the ground floor. It was an insanitary, ancient place.

Paul was led round to a very dark corner.

“This is the ‘Spiral’ corner,” said the clerk. “You’re Spiral, with Pappleworth. He’s your boss, but he’s not come yet. He doesn’t get here till half-past eight. So you can fetch the letters, if you like, from Mr. Melling down there.”

The young man pointed to the old clerk in the office.

“All right,” said Paul.

“Here’s a peg to hang your cap on. Here are your entry ledgers. Mr. Pappleworth won’t be long.”

And the thin young man stalked away with long, busy strides over the hollow wooden floor.

After a minute or two Paul went down and stood in the door of the glass office. The old clerk in the smoking-cap looked down over the rim of his spectacles.

“Good-morning,” he said, kindly and impressively. “You want the letters for the Spiral department, Thomas?”

Paul resented being called “Thomas”. But he took the letters and returned to his dark place, where the counter made an angle, where the great parcel-rack came to an end, and where there were three doors in the corner. He sat on a high stool and read the letters — those whose handwriting was not too difficult. They ran as follows:

“Will you please send me at once a pair of lady’s silk spiral thigh-hose, without feet, such as I had from you last year; length, thigh to knee, etc.” Or, “Major Chamberlain wishes to repeat his previous order for a silk non-elastic suspensory bandage.”

Many of these letters, some of them in French or Norwegian, were a great puzzle to the boy. He sat on his stool nervously awaiting the arrival of his “boss”. He suffered tortures of shyness when, at half-past eight, the factory girls for upstairs trooped past him.

Mr. Pappleworth arrived, chewing a chlorodyne gum, at about twenty to nine, when all the other men were at work. He was a thin, sallow man with a red nose, quick, staccato, and smartly but stiffly dressed. He was about thirty-six years old. There was something rather “doggy”, rather smart, rather ‘cute and shrewd, and something warm, and something slightly contemptible about him.

“You my new lad?” he said.

Paul stood up and said he was.

“Fetched the letters?”

Mr. Pappleworth gave a chew to his gum.

“Yes.”

“Copied ‘em?”

“No.”

“Well, come on then, let’s look slippy. Changed your coat?”

“No.”

“You want to bring an old coat and leave it here.” He pronounced the last words with the chlorodyne gum between his side teeth. He vanished into the darkness behind the great parcel-rack, reappeared coatless, turning up a smart striped shirt-cuff over a thin and hairy arm. Then he slipped into his coat. Paul noticed how thin he was, and that his trousers were in folds behind. He seized a stool, dragged it beside the boy’s, and sat down.

“Sit down,” he said.

Paul took a seat.

Mr. Pappleworth was very close to him. The man seized the letters, snatched a long entry-book out of a rack in front of him, flung it open, seized a pen, and said:

“Now look here. You want to copy these letters in here.” He sniffed twice, gave a quick chew at his gum, stared fixedly at a letter, then went very still and absorbed, and wrote the entry rapidly, in a beautiful flourishing hand. He glanced quickly at Paul.

“See that?”

“Yes.”

“Think you can do it all right?”

“Yes.”

“All right then, let’s see you.”

He sprang off his stool. Paul took a pen. Mr. Pappleworth disappeared. Paul rather liked copying the letters, but he wrote slowly, laboriously, and exceedingly badly. He was doing the fourth letter, and feeling quite busy and happy, when Mr. Pappleworth reappeared.

“Now then, how’r’ yer getting on? Done ‘em?”

He leaned over the boy’s shoulder, chewing, and smelling of chlorodyne.

“Strike my bob, lad, but you’re a beautiful writer!” he exclaimed satirically. “Ne’er mind, how many h’yer done? Only three! I’d ‘a eaten ‘em. Get on, my lad, an’ put numbers on ‘em. Here, look! Get on!”

Paul ground away at the letters, whilst Mr. Pappleworth fussed over various jobs. Suddenly the boy started as a shrill whistle sounded near his ear. Mr. Pappleworth came, took a plug out of a pipe, and said, in an amazingly cross and bossy voice:

“Yes?”

Paul heard a faint voice, like a woman’s, out of the mouth of the tube. He

gazed in wonder, never having seen a speaking-tube before.

“Well,” said Mr. Pappleworth disagreeably into the tube, “you’d better get some of your back work done, then.”

Again the woman’s tiny voice was heard, sounding pretty and cross.

“I’ve not time to stand here while you talk,” said Mr. Pappleworth, and he pushed the plug into the tube.

“Come, my lad,” he said imploringly to Paul, “there’s Polly crying out for them orders. Can’t you buck up a bit? Here, come out!”

He took the book, to Paul’s immense chagrin, and began the copying himself. He worked quickly and well. This done, he seized some strips of long yellow paper, about three inches wide, and made out the day’s orders for the work-girls.

“You’d better watch me,” he said to Paul, working all the while rapidly. Paul watched the weird little drawings of legs, and thighs, and ankles, with the strokes across and the numbers, and the few brief directions which his chief made upon the yellow paper. Then Mr. Pappleworth finished and jumped up.

“Come on with me,” he said, and the yellow papers flying in his hands, he dashed through a door and down some stairs, into the basement where the gas was burning. They crossed the cold, damp storeroom, then a long, dreary room with a long table on trestles, into a smaller, cosy apartment, not very high, which had been built on to the main building. In this room a small woman with a red serge blouse, and her black hair done on top of her head, was waiting like a proud little bantam.

“Here y’are!” said Pappleworth.

“I think it is ‘here you are!’” exclaimed Polly. “The girls have been here nearly half an hour waiting. Just think of the time wasted!”

“YOU think of getting your work done and not talking so much,” said Mr. Pappleworth. “You could ha’ been finishing off.”

“You know quite well we finished everything off on Saturday!” cried Pony, flying at him, her dark eyes flashing.

“Tu-tu-tu-tu-terterter!” he mocked. “Here’s your new lad. Don’t ruin him as you did the last.”

“As we did the last!” repeated Polly. “Yes, WE do a lot of ruining, we do. My word, a lad would TAKE some ruining after he’d been with you.”

“It’s time for work now, not for talk,” said Mr. Pappleworth severely and coldly.

“It was time for work some time back,” said Polly, marching away with her head in the air. She was an erect little body of forty.

In that room were two round spiral machines on the bench under the window. Through the inner doorway was another longer room, with six more machines. A

little group of girls, nicely dressed in white aprons, stood talking together.

“Have you nothing else to do but talk?” said Mr. Pappleworth.

“Only wait for you,” said one handsome girl, laughing.

“Well, get on, get on,” he said. “Come on, my lad. You’ll know your road down here again.”

And Paul ran upstairs after his chief. He was given some checking and invoicing to do. He stood at the desk, labouring in his execrable handwriting. Presently Mr. Jordan came strutting down from the glass office and stood behind him, to the boy’s great discomfort. Suddenly a red and fat finger was thrust on the form he was filling in.

“MR. J. A. Bates, Esquire!” exclaimed the cross voice just behind his ear.

Paul looked at “Mr. J. A. Bates, Esquire” in his own vile writing, and wondered what was the matter now.

“Didn’t they teach you any better THAN that while they were at it? If you put ‘Mr.’ you don’t put Esquire’ -a man can’t be both at once.”

The boy regretted his too-much generosity in disposing of honours, hesitated, and with trembling fingers, scratched out the “Mr.” Then all at once Mr. Jordan snatched away the invoice.

“Make another! Are you going to send that to a gentleman?” And he tore up the blue form irritably.

Paul, his ears red with shame, began again. Still Mr. Jordan watched.

“I don’t know what they DO teach in schools. You’ll have to write better than that. Lads learn nothing nowadays, but how to recite poetry and play the fiddle. Have you seen his writing?” he asked of Mr. Pappleworth.

“Yes; prime, isn’t it?” replied Mr. Pappleworth indifferently.

Mr. Jordan gave a little grunt, not unamiable. Paul divined that his master’s bark was worse than his bite. Indeed, the little manufacturer, although he spoke bad English, was quite gentleman enough to leave his men alone and to take no notice of trifles. But he knew he did not look like the boss and owner of the show, so he had to play his role of proprietor at first, to put things on a right footing.

“Let’s see, WHAT’S your name?” asked Mr. Pappleworth of the boy.

“Paul Morel.”

It is curious that children suffer so much at having to pronounce their own names.

“Paul Morel, is it? All right, you Paul-Morel through them things there, and then — ”

Mr. Pappleworth subsided on to a stool, and began writing. A girl came up from out of a door just behind, put some newly-pressed elastic web appliances

on the counter, and returned. Mr. Pappleworth picked up the whitey-blue knee-band, examined it, and its yellow order-paper quickly, and put it on one side. Next was a flesh-pink "leg". He went through the few things, wrote out a couple of orders, and called to Paul to accompany him. This time they went through the door whence the girl had emerged. There Paul found himself at the top of a little wooden flight of steps, and below him saw a room with windows round two sides, and at the farther end half a dozen girls sitting bending over the benches in the light from the window, sewing. They were singing together "Two Little Girls in Blue". Hearing the door opened, they all turned round, to see Mr. Pappleworth and Paul looking down on them from the far end of the room. They stopped singing.

"Can't you make a bit less row?" said Mr. Pappleworth. "Folk'll think we keep cats."

A hunchback woman on a high stool turned her long, rather heavy face towards Mr. Pappleworth, and said, in a contralto voice:

"They're all tom-cats then."

In vain Mr. Pappleworth tried to be impressive for Paul's benefit. He descended the steps into the finishing-off room, and went to the hunchback Fanny. She had such a short body on her high stool that her head, with its great bands of bright brown hair, seemed over large, as did her pale, heavy face. She wore a dress of green-black cashmere, and her wrists, coming out of the narrow cuffs, were thin and flat, as she put down her work nervously. He showed her something that was wrong with a knee-cap.

"Well," she said, "you needn't come blaming it on to me. It's not my fault." Her colour mounted to her cheek.

"I never said it WAS your fault. Will you do as I tell you?" replied Mr. Pappleworth shortly.

"You don't say it's my fault, but you'd like to make out as it was," the hunchback woman cried, almost in tears. Then she snatched the knee-cap from her "boss", saying: "Yes, I'll do it for you, but you needn't be snappy."

"Here's your new lad," said Mr. Pappleworth.

Fanny turned, smiling very gently on Paul.

"Oh!" she said.

"Yes; don't make a softy of him between you."

"It's not us as 'ud make a softy of him," she said indignantly.

"Come on then, Paul," said Mr. Pappleworth.

"Au revoy, Paul," said one of the girls.

There was a titter of laughter. Paul went out, blushing deeply, not having spoken a word.

The day was very long. All morning the work-people were coming to speak to Mr. Pappleworth. Paul was writing or learning to make up parcels, ready for the midday post. At one o'clock, or, rather, at a quarter to one, Mr. Pappleworth disappeared to catch his train: he lived in the suburbs. At one o'clock, Paul, feeling very lost, took his dinner-basket down into the stockroom in the basement, that had the long table on trestles, and ate his meal hurriedly, alone in that cellar of gloom and desolation. Then he went out of doors. The brightness and the freedom of the streets made him feel adventurous and happy. But at two o'clock he was back in the corner of the big room. Soon the work-girls went trooping past, making remarks. It was the commoner girls who worked upstairs at the heavy tasks of truss-making and the finishing of artificial limbs. He waited for Mr. Pappleworth, not knowing what to do, sitting scribbling on the yellow order-paper. Mr. Pappleworth came at twenty minutes to three. Then he sat and gossiped with Paul, treating the boy entirely as an equal, even in age.

In the afternoon there was never very much to do, unless it were near the week-end, and the accounts had to be made up. At five o'clock all the men went down into the dungeon with the table on trestles, and there they had tea, eating bread-and-butter on the bare, dirty boards, talking with the same kind of ugly haste and slovenliness with which they ate their meal. And yet upstairs the atmosphere among them was always jolly and clear. The cellar and the trestles affected them.

After tea, when all the gases were lighted, WORK went more briskly. There was the big evening post to get off. The hose came up warm and newly pressed from the workrooms. Paul had made out the invoices. Now he had the packing up and addressing to do, then he had to weigh his stock of parcels on the scales. Everywhere voices were calling weights, there was the chink of metal, the rapid snapping of string, the hurrying to old Mr. Melling for stamps. And at last the postman came with his sack, laughing and jolly. Then everything slacked off, and Paul took his dinner-basket and ran to the station to catch the eight-twenty train. The day in the factory was just twelve hours long.

His mother sat waiting for him rather anxiously. He had to walk from Keston, so was not home until about twenty past nine. And he left the house before seven in the morning. Mrs. Morel was rather anxious about his health. But she herself had had to put up with so much that she expected her children to take the same odds. They must go through with what came. And Paul stayed at Jordan's, although all the time he was there his health suffered from the darkness and lack of air and the long hours.

He came in pale and tired. His mother looked at him. She saw he was rather pleased, and her anxiety all went.

“Well, and how was it?” she asked.

“Ever so funny, mother,” he replied. “You don’t have to work a bit hard, and they’re nice with you.”

“And did you get on all right?”

“Yes: they only say my writing’s bad. But Mr. Pappleworth — he’s my man — said to Mr. Jordan I should be all right. I’m Spiral, mother; you must come and see. It’s ever so nice.”

Soon he liked Jordan’s. Mr. Pappleworth, who had a certain “saloon bar” flavour about him, was always natural, and treated him as if he had been a comrade. Sometimes the “Spiral boss” was irritable, and chewed more lozenges than ever. Even then, however, he was not offensive, but one of those people who hurt themselves by their own irritability more than they hurt other people.

“Haven’t you done that YET?” he would cry. “Go on, be a month of Sundays.”

Again, and Paul could understand him least then, he was jocular and in high spirits.

“I’m going to bring my little Yorkshire terrier bitch tomorrow,” he said jubilantly to Paul.

“What’s a Yorkshire terrier?”

“DON’T know what a Yorkshire terrier is? DON’T KNOW A YORKSHIRE — ” Mr. Pappleworth was aghast.

“Is it a little silky one — colours of iron and rusty silver?”

“THAT’S it, my lad. She’s a gem. She’s had five pounds’ worth of pups already, and she’s worth over seven pounds herself; and she doesn’t weigh twenty ounces.”

The next day the bitch came. She was a shivering, miserable morsel. Paul did not care for her; she seemed so like a wet rag that would never dry. Then a man called for her, and began to make coarse jokes. But Mr. Pappleworth nodded his head in the direction of the boy, and the talk went on *sotto voce*.

Mr. Jordan only made one more excursion to watch Paul, and then the only fault he found was seeing the boy lay his pen on the counter.

“Put your pen in your ear, if you’re going to be a clerk. Pen in your ear!” And one day he said to the lad: “Why don’t you hold your shoulders straighter? Come down here,” when he took him into the glass office and fitted him with special braces for keeping the shoulders square.

But Paul liked the girls best. The men seemed common and rather dull. He liked them all, but they were uninteresting. Polly, the little brisk overseer downstairs, finding Paul eating in the cellar, asked him if she could cook him anything on her little stove. Next day his mother gave him a dish that could be

heated up. He took it into the pleasant, clean room to Polly. And very soon it grew to be an established custom that he should have dinner with her. When he came in at eight in the morning he took his basket to her, and when he came down at one o'clock she had his dinner ready.

He was not very tall, and pale, with thick chestnut hair, irregular features, and a wide, full mouth. She was like a small bird. He often called her a "robinet". Though naturally rather quiet, he would sit and chatter with her for hours telling her about his home. The girls all liked to hear him talk. They often gathered in a little circle while he sat on a bench, and held forth to them, laughing. Some of them regarded him as a curious little creature, so serious, yet so bright and jolly, and always so delicate in his way with them. They all liked him, and he adored them. Polly he felt he belonged to. Then Connie, with her mane of red hair, her face of apple-blossom, her murmuring voice, such a lady in her shabby black frock, appealed to his romantic side.

"When you sit winding," he said, "it looks as if you were spinning at a spinning-wheel — it looks ever so nice. You remind me of Elaine in the 'Idylls of the King'. I'd draw you if I could."

And she glanced at him blushing shyly. And later on he had a sketch he prized very much: Connie sitting on the stool before the wheel, her flowing mane of red hair on her rusty black frock, her red mouth shut and serious, running the scarlet thread off the hank on to the reel.

With Louie, handsome and brazen, who always seemed to thrust her hip at him, he usually joked.

Emma was rather plain, rather old, and condescending. But to condescend to him made her happy, and he did not mind.

"How do you put needles in?" he asked.

"Go away and don't bother."

"But I ought to know how to put needles in."

She ground at her machine all the while steadily.

"There are many things you ought to know," she replied.

"Tell me, then, how to stick needles in the machine."

"Oh, the boy, what a nuisance he is! Why, THIS is how you do it."

He watched her attentively. Suddenly a whistle piped. Then Polly appeared, and said in a clear voice:

"Mr. Pappleworth wants to know how much longer you're going to be down here playing with the girls, Paul."

Paul flew upstairs, calling "Good-bye!" and Emma drew herself up.

"It wasn't ME who wanted him to play with the machine," she said.

As a rule, when all the girls came back at two o'clock, he ran upstairs to

Fanny, the hunchback, in the finishing-off room. Mr. Pappleworth did not appear till twenty to three, and he often found his boy sitting beside Fanny, talking, or drawing, or singing with the girls.

Often, after a minute's hesitation, Fanny would begin to sing. She had a fine contralto voice. Everybody joined in the chorus, and it went well. Paul was not at all embarrassed, after a while, sitting in the room with the half a dozen work-girls.

At the end of the song Fanny would say:

"I know you've been laughing at me."

"Don't be so soft, Fanny!" cried one of the girls.

Once there was mention of Connie's red hair.

"Fanny's is better, to my fancy," said Emma.

"You needn't try to make a fool of me," said Fanny, flushing deeply.

"No, but she has, Paul; she's got beautiful hair."

"It's a treat of a colour," said he. "That coldish colour like earth, and yet shiny. It's like bog-water."

"Goodness me!" exclaimed one girl, laughing.

"How I do but get criticised," said Fanny.

"But you should see it down, Paul," cried Emma earnestly. "It's simply beautiful. Put it down for him, Fanny, if he wants something to paint."

Fanny would not, and yet she wanted to.

"Then I'll take it down myself," said the lad.

"Well, you can if you like," said Fanny.

And he carefully took the pins out of the knot, and the rush of hair, of uniform dark brown, slid over the humped back.

"What a lovely lot!" he exclaimed.

The girls watched. There was silence. The youth shook the hair loose from the coil.

"It's splendid!" he said, smelling its perfume. "I'll bet it's worth pounds."

"I'll leave it you when I die, Paul," said Fanny, half joking.

"You look just like anybody else, sitting drying their hair," said one of the girls to the long-legged hunchback.

Poor Fanny was morbidly sensitive, always imagining insults. Polly was curt and businesslike. The two departments were for ever at war, and Paul was always finding Fanny in tears. Then he was made the recipient of all her woes, and he had to plead her case with Polly.

So the time went along happily enough. The factory had a homely feel. No one was rushed or driven. Paul always enjoyed it when the work got faster, towards post-time, and all the men united in labour. He liked to watch his

fellow-clerks at work. The man was the work and the work was the man, one thing, for the time being. It was different with the girls. The real woman never seemed to be there at the task, but as if left out, waiting.

From the train going home at night he used to watch the lights of the town, sprinkled thick on the hills, fusing together in a blaze in the valleys. He felt rich in life and happy. Drawing farther off, there was a patch of lights at Bulwell like myriad petals shaken to the ground from the shed stars; and beyond was the red glare of the furnaces, playing like hot breath on the clouds.

He had to walk two and more miles from Keston home, up two long hills, down two short hills. He was often tired, and he counted the lamps climbing the hill above him, how many more to pass. And from the hilltop, on pitch-dark nights, he looked round on the villages five or six miles away, that shone like swarms of glittering living things, almost a heaven against his feet. Marlpool and Heanor scattered the far-off darkness with brilliance. And occasionally the black valley space between was traced, violated by a great train rushing south to London or north to Scotland. The trains roared by like projectiles level on the darkness, fuming and burning, making the valley clang with their passage. They were gone, and the lights of the towns and villages glittered in silence.

And then he came to the corner at home, which faced the other side of the night. The ash-tree seemed a friend now. His mother rose with gladness as he entered. He put his eight shillings proudly on the table.

“It’ll help, mother?” he asked wistfully.

“There’s precious little left,” she answered, “after your ticket and dinners and such are taken off.”

Then he told her the budget of the day. His life-story, like an Arabian Nights, was told night after night to his mother. It was almost as if it were her own life.

CHAPTER VI

DEATH IN THE FAMILY

ARTHUR MOREL was growing up. He was a quick, careless, impulsive boy, a good deal like his father. He hated study, made a great moan if he had to work, and escaped as soon as possible to his sport again.

In appearance he remained the flower of the family, being well made, graceful, and full of life. His dark brown hair and fresh colouring, and his exquisite dark blue eyes shaded with long lashes, together with his generous manner and fiery temper, made him a favourite. But as he grew older his temper became uncertain. He flew into rages over nothing, seemed unbearably raw and irritable.

His mother, whom he loved, wearied of him sometimes. He thought only of himself. When he wanted amusement, all that stood in his way he hated, even if it were she. When he was in trouble he moaned to her ceaselessly.

“Goodness, boy!” she said, when he groaned about a master who, he said, hated him, “if you don’t like it, alter it, and if you can’t alter it, put up with it.”

And his father, whom he had loved and who had worshipped him, he came to detest. As he grew older Morel fell into a slow ruin. His body, which had been beautiful in movement and in being, shrank, did not seem to ripen with the years, but to get mean and rather despicable. There came over him a look of meanness and of paltriness. And when the mean-looking elderly man bullied or ordered the boy about, Arthur was furious. Moreover, Morel’s manners got worse and worse, his habits somewhat disgusting. When the children were growing up and in the crucial stage of adolescence, the father was like some ugly irritant to their souls. His manners in the house were the same as he used among the colliers down pit.

“Dirty nuisance!” Arthur would cry, jumping up and going straight out of the house when his father disgusted him. And Morel persisted the more because his children hated it. He seemed to take a kind of satisfaction in disgusting them, and driving them nearly mad, while they were so irritably sensitive at the age of fourteen or fifteen. So that Arthur, who was growing up when his father was degenerate and elderly, hated him worst of all.

Then, sometimes, the father would seem to feel the contemptuous hatred of his children.

“There’s not a man tries harder for his family!” he would shout. “He does his best for them, and then gets treated like a dog. But I’m not going to stand it, I tell you!”

But for the threat and the fact that he did not try so hard as he imagined, they would have felt sorry. As it was, the battle now went on nearly all between father and children, he persisting in his dirty and disgusting ways, just to assert his independence. They loathed him.

Arthur was so inflamed and irritable at last, that when he won a scholarship for the Grammar School in Nottingham, his mother decided to let him live in town, with one of her sisters, and only come home at week-ends.

Annie was still a junior teacher in the Board-school, earning about four shillings a week. But soon she would have fifteen shillings, since she had passed her examination, and there would be financial peace in the house.

Mrs. Morel clung now to Paul. He was quiet and not brilliant. But still he stuck to his painting, and still he stuck to his mother. Everything he did was for her. She waited for his coming home in the evening, and then she unburdened herself of all she had pondered, or of all that had occurred to her during the day. He sat and listened with his earnestness. The two shared lives.

William was engaged now to his brunette, and had bought her an engagement ring that cost eight guineas. The children gasped at such a fabulous price.

“Eight guineas!” said Morel. “More fool him! If he’d gen me some on’t, it ‘ud ha’ looked better on ‘im.”

“Given YOU some of it!” cried Mrs. Morel. “Why give YOU some of it!”

She remembered HE had bought no engagement ring at all, and she preferred William, who was not mean, if he were foolish. But now the young man talked only of the dances to which he went with his betrothed, and the different resplendent clothes she wore; or he told his mother with glee how they went to the theatre like great swells.

He wanted to bring the girl home. Mrs. Morel said she should come at the Christmas. This time William arrived with a lady, but with no presents. Mrs. Morel had prepared supper. Hearing footsteps, she rose and went to the door. William entered.

“Hello, mother!” He kissed her hastily, then stood aside to present a tall, handsome girl, who was wearing a costume of fine black-and-white check, and furs.

“Here’s Gyp!”

Miss Western held out her hand and showed her teeth in a small smile.

“Oh, how do you do, Mrs. Morel!” she exclaimed.

“I am afraid you will be hungry,” said Mrs. Morel.

“Oh no, we had dinner in the train. Have you got my gloves, Chubby?”

William Morel, big and raw-boned, looked at her quickly.

“How should I?” he said.

“Then I’ve lost them. Don’t be cross with me.”

A frown went over his face, but he said nothing. She glanced round the kitchen. It was small and curious to her, with its glittering kissing-bunch, its evergreens behind the pictures, its wooden chairs and little deal table. At that moment Morel came in.

“Hello, dad!”

“Hello, my son! Tha’s let on me!”

The two shook hands, and William presented the lady. She gave the same smile that showed her teeth.

“How do you do, Mr. Morel?”

Morel bowed obsequiously.

“I’m very well, and I hope so are you. You must make yourself very welcome.”

“Oh, thank you,” she replied, rather amused.

“You will like to go upstairs,” said Mrs. Morel.

“If you don’t mind; but not if it is any trouble to you.”

“It is no trouble. Annie will take you. Walter, carry up this box.”

“And don’t be an hour dressing yourself up,” said William to his betrothed.

Annie took a brass candlestick, and, too shy almost to speak, preceded the young lady to the front bedroom, which Mr. and Mrs. Morel had vacated for her. It, too, was small and cold by candlelight. The colliers’ wives only lit fires in bedrooms in case of extreme illness.

“Shall I unstrap the box?” asked Annie.

“Oh, thank you very much!”

Annie played the part of maid, then went downstairs for hot water.

“I think she’s rather tired, mother,” said William. “It’s a beastly journey, and we had such a rush.”

“Is there anything I can give her?” asked Mrs. Morel.

“Oh no, she’ll be all right.”

But there was a chill in the atmosphere. After half an hour Miss Western came down, having put on a purplish-coloured dress, very fine for the collier’s kitchen.

“I told you you’d no need to change,” said William to her.

“Oh, Chubby!” Then she turned with that sweetish smile to Mrs. Morel.

“Don’t you think he’s always grumbling, Mrs. Morel?”

“Is he?” said Mrs. Morel. “That’s not very nice of him.”

“It isn’t, really!”

“You are cold,” said the mother. “Won’t you come near the fire?”

Morel jumped out of his armchair.

“Come and sit you here!” he cried. “Come and sit you here!”

“No, dad, keep your own chair. Sit on the sofa, Gyp,” said William.

“No, no!” cried Morel. “This cheer’s warmest. Come and sit here, Miss Wesson.”

“Thank you so much,” said the girl, seating herself in the collier’s armchair, the place of honour. She shivered, feeling the warmth of the kitchen penetrate her.

“Fetch me a hanky, Chubby dear!” she said, putting up her mouth to him, and using the same intimate tone as if they were alone; which made the rest of the family feel as if they ought not to be present. The young lady evidently did not realise them as people: they were creatures to her for the present. William winced.

In such a household, in Streatham, Miss Western would have been a lady condescending to her inferiors. These people were to her, certainly clownish — in short, the working classes. How was she to adjust herself?

“I’ll go,” said Annie.

Miss Western took no notice, as if a servant had spoken. But when the girl came downstairs again with the handkerchief, she said: “Oh, thank you!” in a gracious way.

She sat and talked about the dinner on the train, which had been so poor; about London, about dances. She was really very nervous, and chattered from fear. Morel sat all the time smoking his thick twist tobacco, watching her, and listening to her glib London speech, as he puffed. Mrs. Morel, dressed up in her best black silk blouse, answered quietly and rather briefly. The three children sat round in silence and admiration. Miss Western was the princess. Everything of the best was got out for her: the best cups, the best spoons, the best table cloth, the best coffee-jug. The children thought she must find it quite grand. She felt strange, not able to realise the people, not knowing how to treat them. William joked, and was slightly uncomfortable.

At about ten o’clock he said to her:

“Aren’t you tired, Gyp?”

“Rather, Chubby,” she answered, at once in the intimate tones and putting her head slightly on one side.

“I’ll light her the candle, mother,” he said.

“Very well,” replied the mother.

Miss Western stood up, held out her hand to Mrs. Morel.

“Good-night, Mrs. Morel,” she said.

Paul sat at the boiler, letting the water run from the tap into a stone beer-bottle. Annie swathed the bottle in an old flannel pit-singlet, and kissed her mother good-night. She was to share the room with the lady, because the house was full.

“You wait a minute,” said Mrs. Morel to Annie. And Annie sat nursing the hot-water bottle. Miss Western shook hands all round, to everybody’s discomfort, and took her departure, preceded by William. In five minutes he was downstairs again. His heart was rather sore; he did not know why. He talked very little till everybody had gone to bed, but himself and his mother. Then he stood with his legs apart, in his old attitude on the hearthrug, and said hesitatingly:

“Well, mother?”

“Well, my son?”

She sat in the rocking-chair, feeling somehow hurt and humiliated, for his sake.

“Do you like her?”

“Yes,” came the slow answer.

“She’s shy yet, mother. She’s not used to it. It’s different from her aunt’s house, you know.”

“Of course it is, my boy; and she must find it difficult.”

“She does.” Then he frowned swiftly. “If only she wouldn’t put on her BLESSED airs!”

“It’s only her first awkwardness, my boy. She’ll be all right.”

“That’s it, mother,” he replied gratefully. But his brow was gloomy. “You know, she’s not like you, mother. She’s not serious, and she can’t think.”

“She’s young, my boy.”

“Yes; and she’s had no sort of show. Her mother died when she was a child. Since then she’s lived with her aunt, whom she can’t bear. And her father was a rake. She’s had no love.”

“No! Well, you must make up to her.”

“And so — you have to forgive her a lot of things.”

“WHAT do you have to forgive her, my boy?”

“I dunno. When she seems shallow, you have to remember she’s never had anybody to bring her deeper side out. And she’s FEARFULLY fond of me.”

“Anybody can see that.”

“But you know, mother — she’s — she’s different from us. Those sort of

people, like those she lives amongst, they don't seem to have the same principles."

"You mustn't judge too hastily," said Mrs. Morel.

But he seemed uneasy within himself.

In the morning, however, he was up singing and larking round the house.

"Hello!" he called, sitting on the stairs. "Are you getting up?"

"Yes," her voice called faintly.

"Merry Christmas!" he shouted to her.

Her laugh, pretty and tinkling, was heard in the bedroom. She did not come down in half an hour.

"Was she REALLY getting up when she said she was?" he asked of Annie.

"Yes, she was," replied Annie.

He waited a while, then went to the stairs again.

"Happy New Year," he called.

"Thank you, Chubby dear!" came the laughing voice, far away.

"Buck up!" he implored.

It was nearly an hour, and still he was waiting for her. Morel, who always rose before six, looked at the clock.

"Well, it's a winder!" he exclaimed.

The family had breakfasted, all but William. He went to the foot of the stairs.

"Shall I have to send you an Easter egg up there?" he called, rather crossly. She only laughed. The family expected, after that time of preparation, something like magic. At last she came, looking very nice in a blouse and skirt.

"Have you REALLY been all this time getting ready?" he asked.

"Chubby dear! That question is not permitted, is it, Mrs. Morel?"

She played the grand lady at first. When she went with William to chapel, he in his frock-coat and silk hat, she in her furs and London-made costume, Paul and Arthur and Annie expected everybody to bow to the ground in admiration. And Morel, standing in his Sunday suit at the end of the road, watching the gallant pair go, felt he was the father of princes and princesses.

And yet she was not so grand. For a year now she had been a sort of secretary or clerk in a London office. But while she was with the Morels she queened it. She sat and let Annie or Paul wait on her as if they were her servants. She treated Mrs. Morel with a certain glibness and Morel with patronage. But after a day or so she began to change her tune.

William always wanted Paul or Annie to go along with them on their walks. It was so much more interesting. And Paul really DID admire "Gipsy" wholeheartedly; in fact, his mother scarcely forgave the boy for the adulation with which he treated the girl.

On the second day, when Lily said: "Oh, Annie, do you know where I left my muff?" William replied:

"You know it is in your bedroom. Why do you ask Annie?"

And Lily went upstairs with a cross, shut mouth. But it angered the young man that she made a servant of his sister.

On the third evening William and Lily were sitting together in the parlour by the fire in the dark. At a quarter to eleven Mrs. Morel was heard raking the fire. William came out to the kitchen, followed by his beloved.

"Is it as late as that, mother?" he said. She had been sitting alone.

"It is not LATE, my boy, but it is as late as I usually sit up."

"Won't you go to bed, then?" he asked.

"And leave you two? No, my boy, I don't believe in it."

"Can't you trust us, mother?"

"Whether I can or not, I won't do it. You can stay till eleven if you like, and I can read."

"Go to bed, Gyp," he said to his girl. "We won't keep mater waiting."

"Annie has left the candle burning, Lily," said Mrs. Morel; "I think you will see."

"Yes, thank you. Good-night, Mrs. Morel."

William kissed his sweetheart at the foot of the stairs, and she went. He returned to the kitchen.

"Can't you trust us, mother?" he repeated, rather offended.

"My boy, I tell you I don't BELIEVE in leaving two young things like you alone downstairs when everyone else is in bed."

And he was forced to take this answer. He kissed his mother good-night.

At Easter he came over alone. And then he discussed his sweetheart endlessly with his mother.

"You know, mother, when I'm away from her I don't care for her a bit. I shouldn't care if I never saw her again. But, then, when I'm with her in the evenings I am awfully fond of her."

"It's a queer sort of love to marry on," said Mrs. Morel, "if she holds you no more than that!"

"It IS funny!" he exclaimed. It worried and perplexed him. "But yet — there's so much between us now I couldn't give her up."

"You know best," said Mrs. Morel. "But if it is as you say, I wouldn't call it LOVE — at any rate, it doesn't look much like it."

"Oh, I don't know, mother. She's an orphan, and —"

They never came to any sort of conclusion. He seemed puzzled and rather fretted. She was rather reserved. All his strength and money went in keeping this

girl. He could scarcely afford to take his mother to Nottingham when he came over.

Paul's wages had been raised at Christmas to ten shillings, to his great joy. He was quite happy at Jordan's, but his health suffered from the long hours and the confinement. His mother, to whom he became more and more significant, thought how to help.

His half-day holiday was on Monday afternoon. On a Monday morning in May, as the two sat alone at breakfast, she said:

"I think it will be a fine day."

He looked up in surprise. This meant something.

"You know Mr. Leivers has gone to live on a new farm. Well, he asked me last week if I wouldn't go and see Mrs. Leivers, and I promised to bring you on Monday if it's fine. Shall we go?"

"I say, little woman, how lovely!" he cried. "And we'll go this afternoon?"

Paul hurried off to the station jubilant. Down Derby Road was a cherry-tree that glistened. The old brick wall by the Statutes ground burned scarlet, spring was a very flame of green. And the steep swoop of highroad lay, in its cool morning dust, splendid with patterns of sunshine and shadow, perfectly still. The trees sloped their great green shoulders proudly; and inside the warehouse all the morning, the boy had a vision of spring outside.

When he came home at dinner-time his mother was rather excited.

"Are we going?" he asked.

"When I'm ready," she replied.

Presently he got up.

"Go and get dressed while I wash up," he said.

She did so. He washed the pots, straightened, and then took her boots. They were quite clean. Mrs. Morel was one of those naturally exquisite people who can walk in mud without dirtying their shoes. But Paul had to clean them for her. They were kid boots at eight shillings a pair. He, however, thought them the most dainty boots in the world, and he cleaned them with as much reverence as if they had been flowers.

Suddenly she appeared in the inner doorway rather shyly. She had got a new cotton blouse on. Paul jumped up and went forward.

"Oh, my stars!" he exclaimed. "What a bobby-dazzler!"

She sniffed in a little haughty way, and put her head up.

"It's not a bobby-dazzler at all!" she replied. "It's very quiet."

She walked forward, whilst he hovered round her.

"Well," she asked, quite shy, but pretending to be high and mighty, "do you like it?"

“Awfully! You ARE a fine little woman to go jaunting out with!”

He went and surveyed her from the back.

“Well,” he said, “if I was walking down the street behind you, I should say: ‘Doesn’t THAT little person fancy herself!’”

“Well, she doesn’t,” replied Mrs. Morel. “She’s not sure it suits her.”

“Oh no! she wants to be in dirty black, looking as if she was wrapped in burnt paper. It DOES suit you, and I say you look nice.”

She sniffed in her little way, pleased, but pretending to know better.

“Well,” she said, “it’s cost me just three shillings. You couldn’t have got it ready-made for that price, could you?”

“I should think you couldn’t,” he replied.

“And, you know, it’s good stuff.”

“Awfully pretty,” he said.

The blouse was white, with a little sprig of heliotrope and black.

“Too young for me, though, I’m afraid,” she said.

“Too young for you!” he exclaimed in disgust. “Why don’t you buy some false white hair and stick it on your head.”

“I s’ll soon have no need,” she replied. “I’m going white fast enough.”

“Well, you’ve no business to,” he said. “What do I want with a white-haired mother?”

“I’m afraid you’ll have to put up with one, my lad,” she said rather strangely.

They set off in great style, she carrying the umbrella William had given her, because of the sun. Paul was considerably taller than she, though he was not big. He fancied himself.

On the fallow land the young wheat shone silkily. Minton pit waved its plumes of white steam, coughed, and rattled hoarsely.

“Now look at that!” said Mrs. Morel. Mother and son stood on the road to watch. Along the ridge of the great pit-hill crawled a little group in silhouette against the sky, a horse, a small truck, and a man. They climbed the incline against the heavens. At the end the man tipped the wagon. There was an undue rattle as the waste fell down the sheer slope of the enormous bank.

“You sit a minute, mother,” he said, and she took a seat on a bank, whilst he sketched rapidly. She was silent whilst he worked, looking round at the afternoon, the red cottages shining among their greenness.

“The world is a wonderful place,” she said, “and wonderfully beautiful.”

“And so’s the pit,” he said. “Look how it heaps together, like something alive almost — a big creature that you don’t know.”

“Yes,” she said. “Perhaps!”

“And all the trucks standing waiting, like a string of beasts to be fed,” he said.

“And very thankful I am they ARE standing,” she said, “for that means they’ll turn middling time this week.”

“But I like the feel of MEN on things, while they’re alive. There’s a feel of men about trucks, because they’ve been handled with men’s hands, all of them.”

“Yes,” said Mrs. Morel.

They went along under the trees of the highroad. He was constantly informing her, but she was interested. They passed the end of Nethermere, that was tossing its sunshine like petals lightly in its lap. Then they turned on a private road, and in some trepidation approached a big farm. A dog barked furiously. A woman came out to see.

“Is this the way to Willey Farm?” Mrs. Morel asked.

Paul hung behind in terror of being sent back. But the woman was amiable, and directed them. The mother and son went through the wheat and oats, over a little bridge into a wild meadow. Peewits, with their white breasts glistening, wheeled and screamed about them. The lake was still and blue. High overhead a heron floated. Opposite, the wood heaped on the hill, green and still.

“It’s a wild road, mother,” said Paul. “Just like Canada.”

“Isn’t it beautiful!” said Mrs. Morel, looking round.

“See that heron — see — see her legs?”

He directed his mother, what she must see and what not. And she was quite content.

“But now,” she said, “which way? He told me through the wood.”

The wood, fenced and dark, lay on their left.

“I can feel a bit of a path this road,” said Paul. “You’ve got town feet, somehow or other, you have.”

They found a little gate, and soon were in a broad green alley of the wood, with a new thicket of fir and pine on one hand, an old oak glade dipping down on the other. And among the oaks the bluebells stood in pools of azure, under the new green hazels, upon a pale fawn floor of oak-leaves. He found flowers for her.

“Here’s a bit of new-mown hay,” he said; then, again, he brought her forget-me-nots. And, again, his heart hurt with love, seeing her hand, used with work, holding the little bunch of flowers he gave her. She was perfectly happy.

But at the end of the riding was a fence to climb. Paul was over in a second.

“Come,” he said, “let me help you.”

“No, go away. I will do it in my own way.”

He stood below with his hands up ready to help her. She climbed cautiously.

“What a way to climb!” he exclaimed scornfully, when she was safely to earth again.

“Hateful stiles!” she cried.

“Duffer of a little woman,” he replied, “who can’t get over ‘em.”

In front, along the edge of the wood, was a cluster of low red farm buildings. The two hastened forward. Flush with the wood was the apple orchard, where blossom was falling on the grindstone. The pond was deep under a hedge and overhanging oak trees. Some cows stood in the shade. The farm and buildings, three sides of a quadrangle, embraced the sunshine towards the wood. It was very still.

Mother and son went into the small railed garden, where was a scent of red gillivers. By the open door were some floury loaves, put out to cool. A hen was just coming to peck them. Then, in the doorway suddenly appeared a girl in a dirty apron. She was about fourteen years old, had a rosy dark face, a bunch of short black curls, very fine and free, and dark eyes; shy, questioning, a little resentful of the strangers, she disappeared. In a minute another figure appeared, a small, frail woman, rosy, with great dark brown eyes.

“Oh!” she exclaimed, smiling with a little glow, “you’ve come, then. I AM glad to see you.” Her voice was intimate and rather sad.

The two women shook hands.

“Now are you sure we’re not a bother to you?” said Mrs. Morel. “I know what a farming life is.”

“Oh no! We’re only too thankful to see a new face, it’s so lost up here.”

“I suppose so,” said Mrs. Morel.

They were taken through into the parlour — a long, low room, with a great bunch of guelder-roses in the fireplace. There the women talked, whilst Paul went out to survey the land. He was in the garden smelling the gillivers and looking at the plants, when the girl came out quickly to the heap of coal which stood by the fence.

“I suppose these are cabbage-roses?” he said to her, pointing to the bushes along the fence.

She looked at him with startled, big brown eyes.

“I suppose they are cabbage-roses when they come out?” he said.

“I don’t know,” she faltered. “They’re white with pink middles.”

“Then they’re maiden-blush.”

Miriam flushed. She had a beautiful warm colouring.

“I don’t know,” she said.

“You don’t have MUCH in your garden,” he said.

“This is our first year here,” she answered, in a distant, rather superior way, drawing back and going indoors. He did not notice, but went his round of exploration. Presently his mother came out, and they went through the buildings.

Paul was hugely delighted.

“And I suppose you have the fowls and calves and pigs to look after?” said Mrs. Morel to Mrs. Leivers.

“No,” replied the little woman. “I can’t find time to look after cattle, and I’m not used to it. It’s as much as I can do to keep going in the house.”

“Well, I suppose it is,” said Mrs. Morel.

Presently the girl came out.

“Tea is ready, mother,” she said in a musical, quiet voice.

“Oh, thank you, Miriam, then we’ll come,” replied her mother, almost ingratiatingly. “Would you CARE to have tea now, Mrs. Morel?”

“Of course,” said Mrs. Morel. “Whenever it’s ready.”

Paul and his mother and Mrs. Leivers had tea together. Then they went out into the wood that was flooded with bluebells, while fummy forget-me-nots were in the paths. The mother and son were in ecstasy together.

When they got back to the house, Mr. Leivers and Edgar, the eldest son, were in the kitchen. Edgar was about eighteen. Then Geoffrey and Maurice, big lads of twelve and thirteen, were in from school. Mr. Leivers was a good-looking man in the prime of life, with a golden-brown moustache, and blue eyes screwed up against the weather.

The boys were condescending, but Paul scarcely observed it. They went round for eggs, scrambling into all sorts of places. As they were feeding the fowls Miriam came out. The boys took no notice of her. One hen, with her yellow chickens, was in a coop. Maurice took his hand full of corn and let the hen peck from it.

“Durst you do it?” he asked of Paul.

“Let’s see,” said Paul.

He had a small hand, warm, and rather capable-looking. Miriam watched. He held the corn to the hen. The bird eyed it with her hard, bright eye, and suddenly made a peck into his hand. He started, and laughed. “Rap, rap, rap!” went the bird’s beak in his palm. He laughed again, and the other boys joined.

“She knocks you, and nips you, but she never hurts,” said Paul, when the last corn had gone. “Now, Miriam,” said Maurice, “you come an ‘ave a go.”

“No,” she cried, shrinking back.

“Ha! baby. The mardy-kid!” said her brothers.

“It doesn’t hurt a bit,” said Paul. “It only just nips rather nicely.”

“No,” she still cried, shaking her black curls and shrinking.

“She dursn’t,” said Geoffrey. “She niver durst do anything except recite poitry.”

“Dursn’t jump off a gate, dursn’t tweedle, dursn’t go on a slide, dursn’t stop a

girl hittin' her. She can do nowt but go about thinkin' herself somebody. 'The Lady of the Lake.' Yah!" cried Maurice.

Miriam was crimson with shame and misery.

"I dare do more than you," she cried. "You're never anything but cowards and bullies."

"Oh, cowards and bullies!" they repeated mincingly, mocking her speech.

"Not such a clown shall anger me,

A boor is answered silently,"

he quoted against her, shouting with laughter.

She went indoors. Paul went with the boys into the orchard, where they had rigged up a parallel bar. They did feats of strength. He was more agile than strong, but it served. He fingered a piece of apple-blossom that hung low on a swinging bough.

"I wouldn't get the apple-blossom," said Edgar, the eldest brother. "There'll be no apples next year."

"I wasn't going to get it," replied Paul, going away.

The boys felt hostile to him; they were more interested in their own pursuits. He wandered back to the house to look for his mother. As he went round the back, he saw Miriam kneeling in front of the hen-coop, some maize in her hand, biting her lip, and crouching in an intense attitude. The hen was eyeing her wickedly. Very gingerly she put forward her hand. The hen bobbed for her. She drew back quickly with a cry, half of fear, half of chagrin.

"It won't hurt you," said Paul.

She flushed crimson and started up.

"I only wanted to try," she said in a low voice.

"See, it doesn't hurt," he said, and, putting only two corns in his palm, he let the hen peck, peck, peck at his bare hand. "It only makes you laugh," he said.

She put her hand forward and dragged it away, tried again, and started back with a cry. He frowned.

"Why, I'd let her take corn from my face," said Paul, "only she bumps a bit. She's ever so neat. If she wasn't, look how much ground she'd peck up every day."

He waited grimly, and watched. At last Miriam let the bird peck from her hand. She gave a little cry — fear, and pain because of fear — rather pathetic. But she had done it, and she did it again.

"There, you see," said the boy. "It doesn't hurt, does it?"

She looked at him with dilated dark eyes.

"No," she laughed, trembling.

Then she rose and went indoors. She seemed to be in some way resentful of

the boy.

“He thinks I’m only a common girl,” she thought, and she wanted to prove she was a grand person like the “Lady of the Lake”.

Paul found his mother ready to go home. She smiled on her son. He took the great bunch of flowers. Mr. and Mrs. Leivers walked down the fields with them. The hills were golden with evening; deep in the woods showed the darkening purple of bluebells. It was everywhere perfectly stiff, save for the rustling of leaves and birds.

“But it is a beautiful place,” said Mrs. Morel.

“Yes,” answered Mr. Leivers; “it’s a nice little place, if only it weren’t for the rabbits. The pasture’s bitten down to nothing. I dunno if ever I s’ll get the rent off it.”

He clapped his hands, and the field broke into motion near the woods, brown rabbits hopping everywhere.

“Would you believe it!” exclaimed Mrs. Morel.

She and Paul went on alone together.

“Wasn’t it lovely, mother?” he said quietly.

A thin moon was coming out. His heart was full of happiness till it hurt. His mother had to chatter, because she, too, wanted to cry with happiness.

“Now WOULDN’T I help that man!” she said. “WOULDN’T I see to the fowls and the young stock! And I’D learn to milk, and I’D talk with him, and I’D plan with him. My word, if I were his wife, the farm would be run, I know! But there, she hasn’t the strength — she simply hasn’t the strength. She ought never to have been burdened like it, you know. I’m sorry for her, and I’m sorry for him too. My word, if I’D had him, I shouldn’t have thought him a bad husband! Not that she does either; and she’s very lovable.”

William came home again with his sweetheart at the Whitsuntide. He had one week of his holidays then. It was beautiful weather. As a rule, William and Lily and Paul went out in the morning together for a walk. William did not talk to his beloved much, except to tell her things from his boyhood. Paul talked endlessly to both of them. They lay down, all three, in a meadow by Minton Church. On one side, by the Castle Farm, was a beautiful quivering screen of poplars. Hawthorn was dropping from the hedges; penny daisies and ragged robin were in the field, like laughter. William, a big fellow of twenty-three, thinner now and even a bit gaunt, lay back in the sunshine and dreamed, while she fingered with his hair. Paul went gathering the big daisies. She had taken off her hat; her hair was black as a horse’s mane. Paul came back and threaded daisies in her jet-black hair — big spangles of white and yellow, and just a pink touch of ragged robin.

“Now you look like a young witch-woman,” the boy said to her. “Doesn’t she, William?”

Lily laughed. William opened his eyes and looked at her. In his gaze was a certain baffled look of misery and fierce appreciation.

“Has he made a sight of me?” she asked, laughing down on her lover.

“That he has!” said William, smiling.

He looked at her. Her beauty seemed to hurt him. He glanced at her flower-decked head and frowned.

“You look nice enough, if that’s what you want to know,” he said.

And she walked without her hat. In a little while William recovered, and was rather tender to her. Coming to a bridge, he carved her initials and his in a heart.

L. L. W.

W. M.

She watched his strong, nervous hand, with its glistening hairs and freckles, as he carved, and she seemed fascinated by it.

All the time there was a feeling of sadness and warmth, and a certain tenderness in the house, whilst William and Lily were at home. But often he got irritable. She had brought, for an eight-days’ stay, five dresses and six blouses.

“Oh, would you mind,” she said to Annie, “washing me these two blouses, and these things?”

And Annie stood washing when William and Lily went out the next morning. Mrs. Morel was furious. And sometimes the young man, catching a glimpse of his sweetheart’s attitude towards his sister, hated her.

On Sunday morning she looked very beautiful in a dress of foulard, silky and sweeping, and blue as a jay-bird’s feather, and in a large cream hat covered with many roses, mostly crimson. Nobody could admire her enough. But in the evening, when she was going out, she asked again:

“Chubby, have you got my gloves?”

“Which?” asked William.

“My new black SUEDE.”

“No.”

There was a hunt. She had lost them.

“Look here, mother,” said William, “that’s the fourth pair she’s lost since Christmas — at five shillings a pair!”

“You only gave me TWO of them,” she remonstrated.

And in the evening, after supper, he stood on the hearthrug whilst she sat on the sofa, and he seemed to hate her. In the afternoon he had left her whilst he went to see some old friend. She had sat looking at a book. After supper William wanted to write a letter.

“Here is your book, Lily,” said Mrs. Morel. “Would you care to go on with it for a few minutes?”

“No, thank you,” said the girl. “I will sit still.”

“But it is so dull.”

William scribbled irritably at a great rate. As he sealed the envelope he said:

“Read a book! Why, she’s never read a book in her life.”

“Oh, go along!” said Mrs. Morel, cross with the exaggeration,

“It’s true, mother — she hasn’t,” he cried, jumping up and taking his old position on the hearthrug. “She’s never read a book in her life.”

“Er’s like me,” chimed in Morel. “‘Er canna see what there is i’ books, ter sit borin’ your nose in ‘em for, nor more can I.”

“But you shouldn’t say these things,” said Mrs. Morel to her son.

“But it’s true, mother — she CAN’T read. What did you give her?”

“Well, I gave her a little thing of Annie Swan’s. Nobody wants to read dry stuff on Sunday afternoon.”

“Well, I’ll bet she didn’t read ten lines of it.”

“You are mistaken,” said his mother.

All the time Lily sat miserably on the sofa. He turned to her swiftly.

“DID you ready any?” he asked.

“Yes, I did,” she replied.

“How much?”

“I don’t know how many pages.”

“Tell me ONE THING you read.”

She could not.

She never got beyond the second page. He read a great deal, and had a quick, active intelligence. She could understand nothing but love-making and chatter. He was accustomed to having all his thoughts sifted through his mother’s mind; so, when he wanted companionship, and was asked in reply to be the billing and twittering lover, he hated his betrothed.

“You know, mother,” he said, when he was alone with her at night, “she’s no idea of money, she’s so wessel-brained. When she’s paid, she’ll suddenly buy such rot as marrons glaces, and then I have to buy her season ticket, and her extras, even her underclothing. And she wants to get married, and I think myself we might as well get married next year. But at this rate — ”

“A fine mess of a marriage it would be,” replied his mother. “I should consider it again, my boy.”

“Oh, well, I’ve gone too far to break off now,” he said, “and so I shall get married as soon as I can.”

“Very well, my boy. If you will, you will, and there’s no stopping you; but I

tell you, I can't sleep when I think about it."

"Oh, she'll be all right, mother. We shall manage."

"And she lets you buy her underclothing?" asked the mother.

"Well," he began apologetically, "she didn't ask me; but one morning — and it WAS cold — I found her on the station shivering, not able to keep still; so I asked her if she was well wrapped up. She said: 'I think so.' So I said: 'Have you got warm underthings on?' And she said: 'No, they were cotton.' I asked her why on earth she hadn't got something thicker on in weather like that, and she said because she HAD nothing. And there she is — a bronchial subject! I HAD to take her and get some warm things. Well, mother, I shouldn't mind the money if we had any. And, you know, she OUGHT to keep enough to pay for her season-ticket; but no, she comes to me about that, and I have to find the money."

"It's a poor lookout," said Mrs. Morel bitterly.

He was pale, and his rugged face, that used to be so perfectly careless and laughing, was stamped with conflict and despair.

"But I can't give her up now; it's gone too far," he said. "And, besides, for SOME things I couldn't do without her."

"My boy, remember you're taking your life in your hands," said Mrs. Morel. "NOTHING is as bad as a marriage that's a hopeless failure. Mine was bad enough, God knows, and ought to teach you something; but it might have been worse by a long chalk."

He leaned with his back against the side of the chimney-piece, his hands in his pockets. He was a big, raw-boned man, who looked as if he would go to the world's end if he wanted to. But she saw the despair on his face.

"I couldn't give her up now," he said.

"Well," she said, "remember there are worse wrongs than breaking off an engagement."

"I can't give her up NOW," he said.

The clock ticked on; mother and son remained in silence, a conflict between them; but he would say no more. At last she said:

"Well, go to bed, my son. You'll feel better in the morning, and perhaps you'll know better."

He kissed her, and went. She raked the fire. Her heart was heavy now as it had never been. Before, with her husband, things had seemed to be breaking down in her, but they did not destroy her power to live. Now her soul felt lamed in itself. It was her hope that was struck.

And so often William manifested the same hatred towards his betrothed. On the last evening at home he was railing against her.

"Well," he said, "if you don't believe me, what she's like, would you believe

she has been confirmed three times?”

“Nonsense!” laughed Mrs. Morel.

“Nonsense or not, she HAS! That’s what confirmation means for her — a bit of a theatrical show where she can cut a figure.”

“I haven’t, Mrs. Morel!” cried the girl — “I haven’t! it is not true!”

“What!” he cried, flashing round on her. “Once in Bromley, once in Beckenham, and once somewhere else.”

“Nowhere else!” she said, in tears — “nowhere else!”

“It WAS! And if it wasn’t why were you confirmed TWICE?”

“Once I was only fourteen, Mrs. Morel,” she pleaded, tears in her eyes.

“Yes,” said Mrs. Morel; “I can quite understand it, child. Take no notice of him. You ought to be ashamed, William, saying such things.”

“But it’s true. She’s religious — she had blue velvet Prayer-Books — and she’s not as much religion, or anything else, in her than that table-leg. Gets confirmed three times for show, to show herself off, and that’s how she is in EVERYTHING — EVERYTHING!”

The girl sat on the sofa, crying. She was not strong.

“As for LOVE!” he cried, “you might as well ask a fly to love you! It’ll love settling on you — ”

“Now, say no more,” commanded Mrs. Morel. “If you want to say these things, you must find another place than this. I am ashamed of you, William! Why don’t you be more manly. To do nothing but find fault with a girl, and then pretend you’re engaged to her!”

Mrs. Morel subsided in wrath and indignation.

William was silent, and later he repented, kissed and comforted the girl. Yet it was true, what he had said. He hated her.

When they were going away, Mrs. Morel accompanied them as far as Nottingham. It was a long way to Keston station.

“You know, mother,” he said to her, “Gyp’s shallow. Nothing goes deep with her.”

“William, I WISH you wouldn’t say these things,” said Mrs. Morel, very uncomfortable for the girl who walked beside her.

“But it doesn’t, mother. She’s very much in love with me now, but if I died she’d have forgotten me in three months.”

Mrs. Morel was afraid. Her heart beat furiously, hearing the quiet bitterness of her son’s last speech.

“How do you know?” she replied. “You DON’T know, and therefore you’ve no right to say such a thing.”

“He’s always saying these things!” cried the girl.

“In three months after I was buried you’d have somebody else, and I should be forgotten,” he said. “And that’s your love!”

Mrs. Morel saw them into the train in Nottingham, then she returned home.

“There’s one comfort,” she said to Paul — ”he’ll never have any money to marry on, that I AM sure of. And so she’ll save him that way.”

So she took cheer. Matters were not yet very desperate. She firmly believed William would never marry his Gipsy. She waited, and she kept Paul near to her.

All summer long William’s letters had a feverish tone; he seemed unnatural and intense. Sometimes he was exaggeratedly jolly, usually he was flat and bitter in his letter.

“Ah,” his mother said, “I’m afraid he’s ruining himself against that creature, who isn’t worthy of his love — no, no more than a rag doll.”

He wanted to come home. The midsummer holiday was gone; it was a long while to Christmas. He wrote in wild excitement, saying he could come for Saturday and Sunday at Goose Fair, the first week in October.

“You are not well, my boy,” said his mother, when she saw him. She was almost in tears at having him to herself again.

“No, I’ve not been well,” he said. “I’ve seemed to have a dragging cold all the last month, but it’s going, I think.”

It was sunny October weather. He seemed wild with joy, like a schoolboy escaped; then again he was silent and reserved. He was more gaunt than ever, and there was a haggard look in his eyes.

“You are doing too much,” said his mother to him.

He was doing extra work, trying to make some money to marry on, he said. He only talked to his mother once on the Saturday night; then he was sad and tender about his beloved.

“And yet, you know, mother, for all that, if I died she’d be broken-hearted for two months, and then she’d start to forget me. You’d see, she’d never come home here to look at my grave, not even once.”

“Why, William,” said his mother, “you’re not going to die, so why talk about it?”

“But whether or not — ” he replied.

“And she can’t help it. She is like that, and if you choose her — well, you can’t grumble,” said his mother.

On the Sunday morning, as he was putting his collar on:

“Look,” he said to his mother, holding up his chin, “what a rash my collar’s made under my chin!”

Just at the junction of chin and throat was a big red inflammation.

“It ought not to do that,” said his mother. “Here, put a bit of this soothing

ointment on. You should wear different collars.”

He went away on Sunday midnight, seeming better and more solid for his two days at home.

On Tuesday morning came a telegram from London that he was ill. Mrs. Morel got off her knees from washing the floor, read the telegram, called a neighbour, went to her landlady and borrowed a sovereign, put on her things, and set off. She hurried to Keston, caught an express for London in Nottingham. She had to wait in Nottingham nearly an hour. A small figure in her black bonnet, she was anxiously asking the porters if they knew how to get to Elmers End. The journey was three hours. She sat in her corner in a kind of stupor, never moving. At King’s Cross still no one could tell her how to get to Elmers End. Carrying her string bag, that contained her nightdress, a comb and brush, she went from person to person. At last they sent her underground to Cannon Street.

It was six o’clock when she arrived at William’s lodging. The blinds were not down.

“How is he?” she asked.

“No better,” said the landlady.

She followed the woman upstairs. William lay on the bed, with bloodshot eyes, his face rather discoloured. The clothes were tossed about, there was no fire in the room, a glass of milk stood on the stand at his bedside. No one had been with him.

“Why, my son!” said the mother bravely.

He did not answer. He looked at her, but did not see her. Then he began to say, in a dull voice, as if repeating a letter from dictation: “Owing to a leakage in the hold of this vessel, the sugar had set, and become converted into rock. It needed hacking — ”

He was quite unconscious. It had been his business to examine some such cargo of sugar in the Port of London.

“How long has he been like this?” the mother asked the landlady.

“He got home at six o’clock on Monday morning, and he seemed to sleep all day; then in the night we heard him talking, and this morning he asked for you. So I wired, and we fetched the doctor.”

“Will you have a fire made?”

Mrs. Morel tried to soothe her son, to keep him still.

The doctor came. It was pneumonia, and, he said, a peculiar erysipelas, which had started under the chin where the collar chafed, and was spreading over the face. He hoped it would not get to the brain.

Mrs. Morel settled down to nurse. She prayed for William, prayed that he

would recognise her. But the young man's face grew more discoloured. In the night she struggled with him. He raved, and raved, and would not come to consciousness. At two o'clock, in a dreadful paroxysm, he died.

Mrs. Morel sat perfectly still for an hour in the lodging bedroom; then she roused the household.

At six o'clock, with the aid of the charwoman, she laid him out; then she went round the dreary London village to the registrar and the doctor.

At nine o'clock to the cottage on Scargill Street came another wire:

"William died last night. Let father come, bring money."

Annie, Paul, and Arthur were at home; Mr. Morel was gone to work. The three children said not a word. Annie began to whimper with fear; Paul set off for his father.

It was a beautiful day. At Brinsley pit the white steam melted slowly in the sunshine of a soft blue sky; the wheels of the headstocks twinkled high up; the screen, shuffling its coal into the trucks, made a busy noise.

"I want my father; he's got to go to London," said the boy to the first man he met on the bank.

"Tha wants Walter Morel? Go in theer an' tell Joe Ward."

Paul went into the little top office.

"I want my father; he's got to go to London."

"Thy feyther? Is he down? What's his name?"

"Mr. Morel."

"What, Walter? Is owt amiss?"

"He's got to go to London."

The man went to the telephone and rang up the bottom office.

"Walter Morel's wanted, number 42, Hard. Summat's amiss; there's his lad here."

Then he turned round to Paul.

"He'll be up in a few minutes," he said.

Paul wandered out to the pit-top. He watched the chair come up, with its wagon of coal. The great iron cage sank back on its rest, a full carflie was hauled off, an empty tram run on to the chair, a bell ting'ed somewhere, the chair heaved, then dropped like a stone.

Paul did not realise William was dead; it was impossible, with such a bustle going on. The puller-off swung the small truck on to the turn-table, another man ran with it along the bank down the curving lines.

"And William is dead, and my mother's in London, and what will she be doing?" the boy asked himself, as if it were a conundrum.

He watched chair after chair come up, and still no father. At last, standing

beside a wagon, a man's form! the chair sank on its rests, Morel stepped off. He was slightly lame from an accident.

"Is it thee, Paul? Is 'e worse?"

"You've got to go to London."

The two walked off the pit-bank, where men were watching curiously. As they came out and went along the railway, with the sunny autumn field on one side and a wall of trucks on the other, Morel said in a frightened voice:

"'E's niver gone, child?"

"Yes."

"When wor't?"

"Last night. We had a telegram from my mother."

Morel walked on a few strides, then leaned up against a truck-side, his hand over his eyes. He was not crying. Paul stood looking round, waiting. On the weighing machine a truck trundled slowly. Paul saw everything, except his father leaning against the truck as if he were tired.

Morel had only once before been to London. He set off, scared and peaked, to help his wife. That was on Tuesday. The children were left alone in the house. Paul went to work, Arthur went to school, and Annie had in a friend to be with her.

On Saturday night, as Paul was turning the corner, coming home from Keston, he saw his mother and father, who had come to Sethley Bridge Station. They were walking in silence in the dark, tired, straggling apart. The boy waited.

"Mother!" he said, in the darkness.

Mrs. Morel's small figure seemed not to observe. He spoke again.

"Paul!" she said, uninterestedly.

She let him kiss her, but she seemed unaware of him.

In the house she was the same — small, white, and mute. She noticed nothing, she said nothing, only:

"The coffin will be here to-night, Walter. You'd better see about some help." Then, turning to the children: "We're bringing him home."

Then she relapsed into the same mute looking into space, her hands folded on her lap. Paul, looking at her, felt he could not breathe. The house was dead silent.

"I went to work, mother," he said plaintively.

"Did you?" she answered, dully.

After half an hour Morel, troubled and bewildered, came in again.

"Wheer s'll we ha'e him when he DOEScome?" he asked his wife.

"In the front-room."

"Then I'd better shift th' table?"

“Yes.”

“An’ ha’e him across th’ chairs?”

“You know there — Yes, I suppose so.”

Morel and Paul went, with a candle, into the parlour. There was no gas there. The father unscrewed the top of the big mahogany oval table, and cleared the middle of the room; then he arranged six chairs opposite each other, so that the coffin could stand on their beds.

“You niver seed such a length as he is!” said the miner, and watching anxiously as he worked.

Paul went to the bay window and looked out. The ash-tree stood monstrous and black in front of the wide darkness. It was a faintly luminous night. Paul went back to his mother.

At ten o’clock Morel called:

“He’s here!”

Everyone started. There was a noise of unbarring and unlocking the front door, which opened straight from the night into the room.

“Bring another candle,” called Morel.

Annie and Arthur went. Paul followed with his mother. He stood with his arm round her waist in the inner doorway. Down the middle of the cleared room waited six chairs, face to face. In the window, against the lace curtains, Arthur held up one candle, and by the open door, against the night, Annie stood leaning forward, her brass candlestick glittering.

There was the noise of wheels. Outside in the darkness of the street below Paul could see horses and a black vehicle, one lamp, and a few pale faces; then some men, miners, all in their shirt-sleeves, seemed to struggle in the obscurity. Presently two men appeared, bowed beneath a great weight. It was Morel and his neighbour.

“Steady!” called Morel, out of breath.

He and his fellow mounted the steep garden step, heaved into the candlelight with their gleaming coffin-end. Limbs of other men were seen struggling behind. Morel and Burns, in front, staggered; the great dark weight swayed.

“Steady, steady!” cried Morel, as if in pain.

All the six bearers were up in the small garden, holding the great coffin aloft. There were three more steps to the door. The yellow lamp of the carriage shone alone down the black road.

“Now then!” said Morel.

The coffin swayed, the men began to mount the three steps with their load. Annie’s candle flickered, and she whimpered as the first men appeared, and the limbs and bowed heads of six men struggled to climb into the room, bearing the

coffin that rode like sorrow on their living flesh.

“Oh, my son — my son!” Mrs. Morel sang softly, and each time the coffin swung to the unequal climbing of the men: “Oh, my son — my son — my son!”

“Mother!” Paul whimpered, his hand round her waist.

She did not hear.

“Oh, my son — my son!” she repeated.

Paul saw drops of sweat fall from his father’s brow. Six men were in the room — six coatless men, with yielding, struggling limbs, filling the room and knocking against the furniture. The coffin veered, and was gently lowered on to the chairs. The sweat fell from Morel’s face on its boards.

“My word, he’s a weight!” said a man, and the five miners sighed, bowed, and, trembling with the struggle, descended the steps again, closing the door behind them.

The family was alone in the parlour with the great polished box. William, when laid out, was six feet four inches long. Like a monument lay the bright brown, ponderous coffin. Paul thought it would never be got out of the room again. His mother was stroking the polished wood.

They buried him on the Monday in the little cemetery on the hillside that looks over the fields at the big church and the houses. It was sunny, and the white chrysanthemums frilled themselves in the warmth.

Mrs. Morel could not be persuaded, after this, to talk and take her old bright interest in life. She remained shut off. All the way home in the train she had said to herself: “If only it could have been me!”

When Paul came home at night he found his mother sitting, her day’s work done, with hands folded in her lap upon her coarse apron. She always used to have changed her dress and put on a black apron, before. Now Annie set his supper, and his mother sat looking blankly in front of her, her mouth shut tight. Then he beat his brains for news to tell her.

“Mother, Miss Jordan was down to-day, and she said my sketch of a colliery at work was beautiful.”

But Mrs. Morel took no notice. Night after night he forced himself to tell her things, although she did not listen. It drove him almost insane to have her thus. At last:

“What’s a-matter, mother?” he asked.

She did not hear.

“What’s a-matter?” he persisted. “Mother, what’s a-matter?”

“You know what’s the matter,” she said irritably, turning away.

The lad — he was sixteen years old — went to bed drearily. He was cut off and wretched through October, November and December. His mother tried, but

she could not rouse herself. She could only brood on her dead son; he had been let to die so cruelly.

At last, on December 23, with his five shillings Christmas-box in his pocket, Paul wandered blindly home. His mother looked at him, and her heart stood still.

“What’s the matter?” she asked.

“I’m badly, mother!” he replied. “Mr. Jordan gave me five shillings for a Christmas-box!”

He handed it to her with trembling hands. She put it on the table.

“You aren’t glad!” he reproached her; but he trembled violently.

“Where hurts you?” she said, unbuttoning his overcoat.

It was the old question.

“I feel badly, mother.”

She undressed him and put him to bed. He had pneumonia dangerously, the doctor said.

“Might he never have had it if I’d kept him at home, not let him go to Nottingham?” was one of the first things she asked.

“He might not have been so bad,” said the doctor.

Mrs. Morel stood condemned on her own ground.

“I should have watched the living, not the dead,” she told herself.

Paul was very ill. His mother lay in bed at nights with him; they could not afford a nurse. He grew worse, and the crisis approached. One night he tossed into consciousness in the ghastly, sickly feeling of dissolution, when all the cells in the body seem in intense irritability to be breaking down, and consciousness makes a last flare of struggle, like madness.

“I s’ll die, mother!” he cried, heaving for breath on the pillow.

She lifted him up, crying in a small voice:

“Oh, my son — my son!”

That brought him to. He realised her. His whole will rose up and arrested him. He put his head on her breast, and took ease of her for love.

“For some things,” said his aunt, “it was a good thing Paul was ill that Christmas. I believe it saved his mother.”

Paul was in bed for seven weeks. He got up white and fragile. His father had bought him a pot of scarlet and gold tulips. They used to flame in the window in the March sunshine as he sat on the sofa chattering to his mother. The two knitted together in perfect intimacy. Mrs. Morel’s life now rooted itself in Paul.

William had been a prophet. Mrs. Morel had a little present and a letter from Lily at Christmas. Mrs. Morel’s sister had a letter at the New Year.

“I was at a ball last night. Some delightful people were there, and I enjoyed myself thoroughly,” said the letter. “I had every dance — did not sit out one.”

Mrs. Morel never heard any more of her.

Morel and his wife were gentle with each other for some time after the death of their son. He would go into a kind of daze, staring wide-eyed and blank across the room. Then he got up suddenly and hurried out to the Three Spots, returning in his normal state. But never in his life would he go for a walk up Shepstone, past the office where his son had worked, and he always avoided the cemetery.

PART TWO

CHAPTER VII

LAD-AND-GIRL LOVE

PAUL had been many times up to Willey Farm during the autumn. He was friends with the two youngest boys. Edgar the eldest, would not condescend at first. And Miriam also refused to be approached. She was afraid of being set at nought, as by her own brothers. The girl was romantic in her soul. Everywhere was a Walter Scott heroine being loved by men with helmets or with plumes in their caps. She herself was something of a princess turned into a swine-girl in her own imagination. And she was afraid lest this boy, who, nevertheless, looked something like a Walter Scott hero, who could paint and speak French, and knew what algebra meant, and who went by train to Nottingham every day, might consider her simply as the swine-girl, unable to perceive the princess beneath; so she held aloof.

Her great companion was her mother. They were both brown-eyed, and inclined to be mystical, such women as treasure religion inside them, breathe it in their nostrils, and see the whole of life in a mist thereof. So to Miriam, Christ and God made one great figure, which she loved tremblingly and passionately when a tremendous sunset burned out the western sky, and Ediths, and Lucys, and Rowenas, Brian de Bois Guilberts, Rob Roys, and Guy Mannerings, rustled the sunny leaves in the morning, or sat in her bedroom aloft, alone, when it snowed. That was life to her. For the rest, she drudged in the house, which work she would not have minded had not her clean red floor been mucked up immediately by the trampling farm-boots of her brothers. She madly wanted her little brother of four to let her swathe him and stifle him in her love; she went to church reverently, with bowed head, and quivered in anguish from the vulgarity of the other choir-girls and from the common-sounding voice of the curate; she fought with her brothers, whom she considered brutal louts; and she held not her

father in too high esteem because he did not carry any mystical ideals cherished in his heart, but only wanted to have as easy a time as he could, and his meals when he was ready for them.

She hated her position as swine-girl. She wanted to be considered. She wanted to learn, thinking that if she could read, as Paul said he could read, “Colomba”, or the “Voyage autour de ma Chambre”, the world would have a different face for her and a deepened respect. She could not be princess by wealth or standing. So she was mad to have learning whereon to pride herself. For she was different from other folk, and must not be scooped up among the common fry. Learning was the only distinction to which she thought to aspire.

Her beauty — that of a shy, wild, quiveringly sensitive thing — seemed nothing to her. Even her soul, so strong for rhapsody, was not enough. She must have something to reinforce her pride, because she felt different from other people. Paul she eyed rather wistfully. On the whole, she scorned the male sex. But here was a new specimen, quick, light, graceful, who could be gentle and who could be sad, and who was clever, and who knew a lot, and who had a death in the family. The boy’s poor morsel of learning exalted him almost sky-high in her esteem. Yet she tried hard to scorn him, because he would not see in her the princess but only the swine-girl. And he scarcely observed her.

Then he was so ill, and she felt he would be weak. Then she would be stronger than he. Then she could love him. If she could be mistress of him in his weakness, take care of him, if he could depend on her, if she could, as it were, have him in her arms, how she would love him!

As soon as the skies brightened and plum-blossom was out, Paul drove off in the milkman’s heavy float up to Willey Farm. Mr. Leivers shouted in a kindly fashion at the boy, then clicked to the horse as they climbed the hill slowly, in the freshness of the morning. White clouds went on their way, crowding to the back of the hills that were rousing in the springtime. The water of Nethermere lay below, very blue against the seared meadows and the thorn-trees.

It was four and a half miles’ drive. Tiny buds on the hedges, vivid as copper-green, were opening into rosettes; and thrushes called, and blackbirds shrieked and scolded. It was a new, glamorous world.

Miriam, peeping through the kitchen window, saw the horse walk through the big white gate into the farmyard that was backed by the oak-wood, still bare. Then a youth in a heavy overcoat climbed down. He put up his hands for the whip and the rug that the good-looking, ruddy farmer handed down to him.

Miriam appeared in the doorway. She was nearly sixteen, very beautiful, with her warm colouring, her gravity, her eyes dilating suddenly like an ecstasy.

“I say,” said Paul, turning shyly aside, “your daffodils are nearly out. Isn’t it

early? But don't they look cold?"

"Cold!" said Miriam, in her musical, caressing voice.

"The green on their buds — " and he faltered into silence timidly.

"Let me take the rug," said Miriam over-gently.

"I can carry it," he answered, rather injured. But he yielded it to her.

Then Mrs. Leivers appeared.

"I'm sure you're tired and cold," she said. "Let me take your coat. It IS heavy. You mustn't walk far in it."

She helped him off with his coat. He was quite unused to such attention. She was almost smothered under its weight.

"Why, mother," laughed the farmer as he passed through the kitchen, swinging the great milk-churns, "you've got almost more than you can manage there."

She beat up the sofa cushions for the youth.

The kitchen was very small and irregular. The farm had been originally a labourer's cottage. And the furniture was old and battered. But Paul loved it — loved the sack-bag that formed the hearthrug, and the funny little corner under the stairs, and the small window deep in the corner, through which, bending a little, he could see the plum trees in the back garden and the lovely round hills beyond.

"Won't you lie down?" said Mrs. Leivers.

"Oh no; I'm not tired," he said. "Isn't it lovely coming out, don't you think? I saw a sloe-bush in blossom and a lot of celandines. I'm glad it's sunny."

"Can I give you anything to eat or to drink?"

"No, thank you."

"How's your mother?"

"I think she's tired now. I think she's had too much to do. Perhaps in a little while she'll go to Skegness with me. Then she'll be able to rest. I s'll be glad if she can."

"Yes," replied Mrs. Leivers. "It's a wonder she isn't ill herself."

Miriam was moving about preparing dinner. Paul watched everything that happened. His face was pale and thin, but his eyes were quick and bright with life as ever. He watched the strange, almost rhapsodic way in which the girl moved about, carrying a great stew-jar to the oven, or looking in the saucepan. The atmosphere was different from that of his own home, where everything seemed so ordinary. When Mr. Leivers called loudly outside to the horse, that was reaching over to feed on the rose-bushes in the garden, the girl started, looked round with dark eyes, as if something had come breaking in on her world. There was a sense of silence inside the house and out. Miriam seemed as in some

dreamy tale, a maiden in bondage, her spirit dreaming in a land far away and magical. And her discoloured, old blue frock and her broken boots seemed only like the romantic rags of King Cophetua's beggar-maid.

She suddenly became aware of his keen blue eyes upon her, taking her all in. Instantly her broken boots and her frayed old frock hurt her. She resented his seeing everything. Even he knew that her stocking was not pulled up. She went into the scullery, blushing deeply. And afterwards her hands trembled slightly at her work. She nearly dropped all she handled. When her inside dream was shaken, her body quivered with trepidation. She resented that he saw so much.

Mrs. Leivers sat for some time talking to the boy, although she was needed at her work. She was too polite to leave him. Presently she excused herself and rose. After a while she looked into the tin saucepan.

"Oh DEAR, Miriam," she cried, "these potatoes have boiled dry!"

Miriam started as if she had been stung.

"HAVE they, mother?" she cried.

"I shouldn't care, Miriam," said the mother, "if I hadn't trusted them to you." She peered into the pan.

The girl stiffened as if from a blow. Her dark eyes dilated; she remained standing in the same spot.

"Well," she answered, gripped tight in self-conscious shame, "I'm sure I looked at them five minutes since."

"Yes," said the mother, "I know it's easily done."

"They're not much burned," said Paul. "It doesn't matter, does it?"

Mrs. Leivers looked at the youth with her brown, hurt eyes.

"It wouldn't matter but for the boys," she said to him. "Only Miriam knows what a trouble they make if the potatoes are 'caught'."

"Then," thought Paul to himself, "you shouldn't let them make a trouble."

After a while Edgar came in. He wore leggings, and his boots were covered with earth. He was rather small, rather formal, for a farmer. He glanced at Paul, nodded to him distantly, and said:

"Dinner ready?"

"Nearly, Edgar," replied the mother apologetically.

"I'm ready for mine," said the young man, taking up the newspaper and reading. Presently the rest of the family trooped in. Dinner was served. The meal went rather brutally. The over-gentleness and apologetic tone of the mother brought out all the brutality of manners in the sons. Edgar tasted the potatoes, moved his mouth quickly like a rabbit, looked indignantly at his mother, and said:

"These potatoes are burnt, mother."

“Yes, Edgar. I forgot them for a minute. Perhaps you’ll have bread if you can’t eat them.”

Edgar looked in anger across at Miriam.

“What was Miriam doing that she couldn’t attend to them?” he said.

Miriam looked up. Her mouth opened, her dark eyes blazed and winced, but she said nothing. She swallowed her anger and her shame, bowing her dark head.

“I’m sure she was trying hard,” said the mother.

“She hasn’t got sense even to boil the potatoes,” said Edgar. “What is she kept at home for?”

“On’y for eating everything that’s left in th’ pantry,” said Maurice.

“They don’t forget that potato-pie against our Miriam,” laughed the father.

She was utterly humiliated. The mother sat in silence, suffering, like some saint out of place at the brutal board.

It puzzled Paul. He wondered vaguely why all this intense feeling went running because of a few burnt potatoes. The mother exalted everything — even a bit of housework — to the plane of a religious trust. The sons resented this; they felt themselves cut away underneath, and they answered with brutality and also with a sneering superciliousness.

Paul was just opening out from childhood into manhood. This atmosphere, where everything took a religious value, came with a subtle fascination to him. There was something in the air. His own mother was logical. Here there was something different, something he loved, something that at times he hated.

Miriam quarrelled with her brothers fiercely. Later in the afternoon, when they had gone away again, her mother said:

“You disappointed me at dinner-time, Miriam.”

The girl dropped her head.

“They are such BRUTES!” she suddenly cried, looking up with flashing eyes.

“But hadn’t you promised not to answer them?” said the mother. “And I believed in you. I CAN’T stand it when you wrangle.”

“But they’re so hateful!” cried Miriam, “and — and LOW.”

“Yes, dear. But how often have I asked you not to answer Edgar back? Can’t you let him say what he likes?”

“But why should he say what he likes?”

“Aren’t you strong enough to bear it, Miriam, if even for my sake? Are you so weak that you must wrangle with them?”

Mrs. Leivers stuck unflinchingly to this doctrine of “the other cheek”. She could not instil it at all into the boys. With the girls she succeeded better, and Miriam was the child of her heart. The boys loathed the other cheek when it was presented to them. Miriam was often sufficiently lofty to turn it. Then they spat

on her and hated her. But she walked in her proud humility, living within herself.

There was always this feeling of jangle and discord in the Leivers family. Although the boys resented so bitterly this eternal appeal to their deeper feelings of resignation and proud humility, yet it had its effect on them. They could not establish between themselves and an outsider just the ordinary human feeling and unexaggerated friendship; they were always restless for the something deeper. Ordinary folk seemed shallow to them, trivial and inconsiderable. And so they were unaccustomed, painfully uncouth in the simplest social intercourse, suffering, and yet insolent in their superiority. Then beneath was the yearning for the soul-intimacy to which they could not attain because they were too dumb, and every approach to close connection was blocked by their clumsy contempt of other people. They wanted genuine intimacy, but they could not get even normally near to anyone, because they scorned to take the first steps, they scorned the triviality which forms common human intercourse.

Paul fell under Mrs. Leivers's spell. Everything had a religious and intensified meaning when he was with her. His soul, hurt, highly developed, sought her as if for nourishment. Together they seemed to sift the vital fact from an experience.

Miriam was her mother's daughter. In the sunshine of the afternoon mother and daughter went down the fields with him. They looked for nests. There was a jenny wren's in the hedge by the orchard.

"I DO want you to see this," said Mrs. Leivers.

He crouched down and carefully put his finger through the thorns into the round door of the nest.

"It's almost as if you were feeling inside the live body of the bird," he said, "it's so warm. They say a bird makes its nest round like a cup with pressing its breast on it. Then how did it make the ceiling round, I wonder?"

The nest seemed to start into life for the two women. After that, Miriam came to see it every day. It seemed so close to her. Again, going down the hedgeside with the girl, he noticed the celandines, scalloped splashes of gold, on the side of the ditch.

"I like them," he said, "when their petals go flat back with the sunshine. They seemed to be pressing themselves at the sun."

And then the celandines ever after drew her with a little spell. Anthropomorphic as she was, she stimulated him into appreciating things thus, and then they lived for her. She seemed to need things kindling in her imagination or in her soul before she felt she had them. And she was cut off from ordinary life by her religious intensity which made the world for her either a nunnery garden or a paradise, where sin and knowledge were not, or else an ugly, cruel thing.

So it was in this atmosphere of subtle intimacy, this meeting in their common feeling for something in Nature, that their love started.

Personally, he was a long time before he realized her. For ten months he had to stay at home after his illness. For a while he went to Skegness with his mother, and was perfectly happy. But even from the seaside he wrote long letters to Mrs. Leivers about the shore and the sea. And he brought back his beloved sketches of the flat Lincoln coast, anxious for them to see. Almost they would interest the Leivers more than they interested his mother. It was not his art Mrs. Morel cared about; it was himself and his achievement. But Mrs. Leivers and her children were almost his disciples. They kindled him and made him glow to his work, whereas his mother's influence was to make him quietly determined, patient, dogged, unwearied.

He soon was friends with the boys, whose rudeness was only superficial. They had all, when they could trust themselves, a strange gentleness and loveliness.

"Will you come with me on to the fallow?" asked Edgar, rather hesitatingly.

Paul went joyfully, and spent the afternoon helping to hoe or to single turnips with his friend. He used to lie with the three brothers in the hay piled up in the barn and tell them about Nottingham and about Jordan's. In return, they taught him to milk, and let him do little jobs — chopping hay or pulping turnips — just as much as he liked. At midsummer he worked all through hay-harvest with them, and then he loved them. The family was so cut off from the world actually. They seemed, somehow, like "*les derniers fils d'une race epuisee*". Though the lads were strong and healthy, yet they had all that over-sensitiveness and hanging-back which made them so lonely, yet also such close, delicate friends once their intimacy was won. Paul loved them dearly, and they him.

Miriam came later. But he had come into her life before she made any mark on his. One dull afternoon, when the men were on the land and the rest at school, only Miriam and her mother at home, the girl said to him, after having hesitated for some time:

"Have you seen the swing?"

"No," he answered. "Where?"

"In the cowshed," she replied.

She always hesitated to offer or to show him anything. Men have such different standards of worth from women, and her dear things — the valuable things to her — her brothers had so often mocked or flouted.

"Come on, then," he replied, jumping up.

There were two cowsheds, one on either side of the barn. In the lower, darker shed there was standing for four cows. Hens flew scolding over the manger-wall as the youth and girl went forward for the great thick rope which hung from the

beam in the darkness overhead, and was pushed back over a peg in the wall.

“It’s something like a rope!” he exclaimed appreciatively; and he sat down on it, anxious to try it. Then immediately he rose.

“Come on, then, and have first go,” he said to the girl.

“See,” she answered, going into the barn, “we put some bags on the seat”; and she made the swing comfortable for him. That gave her pleasure. He held the rope.

“Come on, then,” he said to her.

“No, I won’t go first,” she answered.

She stood aside in her still, aloof fashion.

“Why?”

“You go,” she pleaded.

Almost for the first time in her life she had the pleasure of giving up to a man, of spoiling him. Paul looked at her.

“All right,” he said, sitting down. “Mind out!”

He set off with a spring, and in a moment was flying through the air, almost out of the door of the shed, the upper half of which was open, showing outside the drizzling rain, the filthy yard, the cattle standing disconsolate against the black cartshed, and at the back of all the grey-green wall of the wood. She stood below in her crimson tam-o’-shanter and watched. He looked down at her, and she saw his blue eyes sparkling.

“It’s a treat of a swing,” he said.

“Yes.”

He was swinging through the air, every bit of him swinging, like a bird that swoops for joy of movement. And he looked down at her. Her crimson cap hung over her dark curls, her beautiful warm face, so still in a kind of brooding, was lifted towards him. It was dark and rather cold in the shed. Suddenly a swallow came down from the high roof and darted out of the door.

“I didn’t know a bird was watching,” he called.

He swung negligently. She could feel him falling and lifting through the air, as if he were lying on some force.

“Now I’ll die,” he said, in a detached, dreamy voice, as though he were the dying motion of the swing. She watched him, fascinated. Suddenly he put on the brake and jumped out.

“I’ve had a long turn,” he said. “But it’s a treat of a swing — it’s a real treat of a swing!”

Miriam was amused that he took a swing so seriously and felt so warmly over it.

“No; you go on,” she said.

“Why, don’t you want one?” he asked, astonished.

“Well, not much. I’ll have just a little.”

She sat down, whilst he kept the bags in place for her.

“It’s so ripping!” he said, setting her in motion. “Keep your heels up, or they’ll bang the manger wall.”

She felt the accuracy with which he caught her, exactly at the right moment, and the exactly proportionate strength of his thrust, and she was afraid. Down to her bowels went the hot wave of fear. She was in his hands. Again, firm and inevitable came the thrust at the right moment. She gripped the rope, almost swooning.

“Ha!” she laughed in fear. “No higher!”

“But you’re not a BIT high,” he remonstrated.

“But no higher.”

He heard the fear in her voice, and desisted. Her heart melted in hot pain when the moment came for him to thrust her forward again. But he left her alone. She began to breathe.

“Won’t you really go any farther?” he asked. “Should I keep you there?”

“No; let me go by myself,” she answered.

He moved aside and watched her.

“Why, you’re scarcely moving,” he said.

She laughed slightly with shame, and in a moment got down.

“They say if you can swing you won’t be sea-sick,” he said, as he mounted again. “I don’t believe I should ever be sea-sick.”

Away he went. There was something fascinating to her in him. For the moment he was nothing but a piece of swinging stuff; not a particle of him that did not swing. She could never lose herself so, nor could her brothers. It roused a warmth in her. It was almost as if he were a flame that had lit a warmth in her whilst he swung in the middle air.

And gradually the intimacy with the family concentrated for Paul on three persons — the mother, Edgar, and Miriam. To the mother he went for that sympathy and that appeal which seemed to draw him out. Edgar was his very close friend. And to Miriam he more or less condescended, because she seemed so humble.

But the girl gradually sought him out. If he brought up his sketch-book, it was she who pondered longest over the last picture. Then she would look up at him. Suddenly, her dark eyes alight like water that shakes with a stream of gold in the dark, she would ask:

“Why do I like this so?”

Always something in his breast shrank from these close, intimate, dazzled

looks of hers.

“Why DO you?” he asked.

“I don’t know. It seems so true.”

“It’s because — it’s because there is scarcely any shadow in it; it’s more shimmery, as if I’d painted the shimmering protoplasm in the leaves and everywhere, and not the stiffness of the shape. That seems dead to me. Only this shimmeriness is the real living. The shape is a dead crust. The shimmer is inside really.”

And she, with her little finger in her mouth, would ponder these sayings. They gave her a feeling of life again, and vivified things which had meant nothing to her. She managed to find some meaning in his struggling, abstract speeches. And they were the medium through which she came distinctly at her beloved objects.

Another day she sat at sunset whilst he was painting some pine-trees which caught the red glare from the west. He had been quiet.

“There you are!” he said suddenly. “I wanted that. Now, look at them and tell me, are they pine trunks or are they red coals, standing-up pieces of fire in that darkness? There’s God’s burning bush for you, that burned not away.”

Miriam looked, and was frightened. But the pine trunks were wonderful to her, and distinct. He packed his box and rose. Suddenly he looked at her.

“Why are you always sad?” he asked her.

“Sad!” she exclaimed, looking up at him with startled, wonderful brown eyes.

“Yes,” he replied. “You are always sad.”

“I am not — oh, not a bit!” she cried.

“But even your joy is like a flame coming off of sadness,” he persisted. “You’re never jolly, or even just all right.”

“No,” she pondered. “I wonder — why?”

“Because you’re not; because you’re different inside, like a pine-tree, and then you flare up; but you’re not just like an ordinary tree, with fidgety leaves and jolly — ”

He got tangled up in his own speech; but she brooded on it, and he had a strange, roused sensation, as if his feelings were new. She got so near him. It was a strange stimulant.

Then sometimes he hated her. Her youngest brother was only five. He was a frail lad, with immense brown eyes in his quaint fragile face — one of Reynolds’s “Choir of Angels”, with a touch of elf. Often Miriam kneeled to the child and drew him to her.

“Eh, my Hubert!” she sang, in a voice heavy and surcharged with love. “Eh, my Hubert!”

And, folding him in her arms, she swayed slightly from side to side with love,

her face half lifted, her eyes half closed, her voice drenched with love.

“Don’t!” said the child, uneasy — ”don’t, Miriam!”

“Yes; you love me, don’t you?” she murmured deep in her throat, almost as if she were in a trance, and swaying also as if she were swooned in an ecstasy of love.

“Don’t!” repeated the child, a frown on his clear brow.

“You love me, don’t you?” she murmured.

“What do you make such a FUSS for?” cried Paul, all in suffering because of her extreme emotion. “Why can’t you be ordinary with him?”

She let the child go, and rose, and said nothing. Her intensity, which would leave no emotion on a normal plane, irritated the youth into a frenzy. And this fearful, naked contact of her on small occasions shocked him. He was used to his mother’s reserve. And on such occasions he was thankful in his heart and soul that he had his mother, so sane and wholesome.

All the life of Miriam’s body was in her eyes, which were usually dark as a dark church, but could flame with light like a conflagration. Her face scarcely ever altered from its look of brooding. She might have been one of the women who went with Mary when Jesus was dead. Her body was not flexible and living. She walked with a swing, rather heavily, her head bowed forward, pondering. She was not clumsy, and yet none of her movements seemed quite THE movement. Often, when wiping the dishes, she would stand in bewilderment and chagrin because she had pulled in two halves a cup or a tumbler. It was as if, in her fear and self-mistrust, she put too much strength into the effort. There was no looseness or abandon about her. Everything was gripped stiff with intensity, and her effort, overcharged, closed in on itself.

She rarely varied from her swinging, forward, intense walk. Occasionally she ran with Paul down the fields. Then her eyes blazed naked in a kind of ecstasy that frightened him. But she was physically afraid. If she were getting over a stile, she gripped his hands in a little hard anguish, and began to lose her presence of mind. And he could not persuade her to jump from even a small height. Her eyes dilated, became exposed and palpitating.

“No!” she cried, half laughing in terror — ”no!”

“You shall!” he cried once, and, jerking her forward, he brought her falling from the fence. But her wild “Ah!” of pain, as if she were losing consciousness, cut him. She landed on her feet safely, and afterwards had courage in this respect.

She was very much dissatisfied with her lot.

“Don’t you like being at home?” Paul asked her, surprised.

“Who would?” she answered, low and intense. “What is it? I’m all day

cleaning what the boys make just as bad in five minutes. I don't WANT to be at home."

"What do you want, then?"

"I want to do something. I want a chance like anybody else. Why should I, because I'm a girl, be kept at home and not allowed to be anything? What chance HAVE I?"

"Chance of what?"

"Of knowing anything — of learning, of doing anything. It's not fair, because I'm a woman."

She seemed very bitter. Paul wondered. In his own home Annie was almost glad to be a girl. She had not so much responsibility; things were lighter for her. She never wanted to be other than a girl. But Miriam almost fiercely wished she were a man. And yet she hated men at the same time.

"But it's as well to be a woman as a man," he said, frowning.

"Ha! Is it? Men have everything."

"I should think women ought to be as glad to be women as men are to be men," he answered.

"No!" — she shook her head — "no! Everything the men have."

"But what do you want?" he asked.

"I want to learn. Why SHOULD it be that I know nothing?"

"What! such as mathematics and French?"

"Why SHOULDN'T I know mathematics? Yes!" she cried, her eye expanding in a kind of defiance.

"Well, you can learn as much as I know," he said. "I'll teach you, if you like."

Her eyes dilated. She mistrusted him as teacher.

"Would you?" he asked.

Her head had dropped, and she was sucking her finger broodingly.

"Yes," she said hesitatingly.

He used to tell his mother all these things.

"I'm going to teach Miriam algebra," he said.

"Well," replied Mrs. Morel, "I hope she'll get fat on it."

When he went up to the farm on the Monday evening, it was drawing twilight. Miriam was just sweeping up the kitchen, and was kneeling at the hearth when he entered. Everyone was out but her. She looked round at him, flushed, her dark eyes shining, her fine hair falling about her face.

"Hello!" she said, soft and musical. "I knew it was you."

"How?"

"I knew your step. Nobody treads so quick and firm."

He sat down, sighing.

“Ready to do some algebra?” he asked, drawing a little book from his pocket.

“But — ”

He could feel her backing away.

“You said you wanted,” he insisted.

“To-night, though?” she faltered.

“But I came on purpose. And if you want to learn it, you must begin.”

She took up her ashes in the dustpan and looked at him, half tremulously, laughing.

“Yes, but to-night! You see, I haven’t thought of it.”

“Well, my goodness! Take the ashes and come.”

He went and sat on the stone bench in the back-yard, where the big milk-cans were standing, tipped up, to air. The men were in the cowsheds. He could hear the little sing-song of the milk spurting into the pails. Presently she came, bringing some big greenish apples.

“You know you like them,” she said.

He took a bite.

“Sit down,” he said, with his mouth full.

She was short-sighted, and peered over his shoulder. It irritated him. He gave her the book quickly.

“Here,” he said. “It’s only letters for figures. You put down ‘a’ instead of ‘2’ or ‘6’.”

They worked, he talking, she with her head down on the book. He was quick and hasty. She never answered. Occasionally, when he demanded of her, “Do you see?” she looked up at him, her eyes wide with the half-laugh that comes of fear. “Don’t you?” he cried.

He had been too fast. But she said nothing. He questioned her more, then got hot. It made his blood rouse to see her there, as it were, at his mercy, her mouth open, her eyes dilated with laughter that was afraid, apologetic, ashamed. Then Edgar came along with two buckets of milk.

“Hello!” he said. “What are you doing?”

“Algebra,” replied Paul.

“Algebra!” repeated Edgar curiously. Then he passed on with a laugh. Paul took a bite at his forgotten apple, looked at the miserable cabbages in the garden, pecked into lace by the fowls, and he wanted to pull them up. Then he glanced at Miriam. She was poring over the book, seemed absorbed in it, yet trembling lest she could not get at it. It made him cross. She was ruddy and beautiful. Yet her soul seemed to be intensely supplicating. The algebra-book she closed, shrinking, knowing he was angered; and at the same instant he grew gentle, seeing her hurt because she did not understand.

But things came slowly to her. And when she held herself in a grip, seemed so utterly humble before the lesson, it made his blood rouse. He stormed at her, got ashamed, continued the lesson, and grew furious again, abusing her. She listened in silence. Occasionally, very rarely, she defended herself. Her liquid dark eyes blazed at him.

“You don’t give me time to learn it,” she said.

“All right,” he answered, throwing the book on the table and lighting a cigarette. Then, after a while, he went back to her repentant. So the lessons went. He was always either in a rage or very gentle.

“What do you tremble your SOUL before it for?” he cried. “You don’t learn algebra with your blessed soul. Can’t you look at it with your clear simple wits?”

Often, when he went again into the kitchen, Mrs. Leivers would look at him reproachfully, saying:

“Paul, don’t be so hard on Miriam. She may not be quick, but I’m sure she tries.”

“I can’t help it,” he said rather pitiably. “I go off like it.”

“You don’t mind me, Miriam, do you?” he asked of the girl later.

“No,” she reassured him in her beautiful deep tones — “no, I don’t mind.”

“Don’t mind me; it’s my fault.”

But, in spite of himself, his blood began to boil with her. It was strange that no one else made him in such fury. He flared against her. Once he threw the pencil in her face. There was a silence. She turned her face slightly aside.

“I didn’t — ” he began, but got no farther, feeling weak in all his bones. She never reproached him or was angry with him. He was often cruelly ashamed. But still again his anger burst like a bubble surcharged; and still, when he saw her eager, silent, as it were, blind face, he felt he wanted to throw the pencil in it; and still, when he saw her hand trembling and her mouth parted with suffering, his heart was scalded with pain for her. And because of the intensity to which she roused him, he sought her.

Then he often avoided her and went with Edgar. Miriam and her brother were naturally antagonistic. Edgar was a rationalist, who was curious, and had a sort of scientific interest in life. It was a great bitterness to Miriam to see herself deserted by Paul for Edgar, who seemed so much lower. But the youth was very happy with her elder brother. The two men spent afternoons together on the land or in the loft doing carpentry, when it rained. And they talked together, or Paul taught Edgar the songs he himself had learned from Annie at the piano. And often all the men, Mr. Leivers as well, had bitter debates on the nationalizing of the land and similar problems. Paul had already heard his mother’s views, and as these were as yet his own, he argued for her. Miriam attended and took part, but

was all the time waiting until it should be over and a personal communication might begin.

“After all,” she said within herself, “if the land were nationalized, Edgar and Paul and I would be just the same.” So she waited for the youth to come back to her.

He was studying for his painting. He loved to sit at home, alone with his mother, at night, working and working. She sewed or read. Then, looking up from his task, he would rest his eyes for a moment on her face, that was bright with living warmth, and he returned gladly to his work.

“I can do my best things when you sit there in your rocking-chair, mother,” he said.

“I’m sure!” she exclaimed, sniffing with mock scepticism. But she felt it was so, and her heart quivered with brightness. For many hours she sat still, slightly conscious of him labouring away, whilst she worked or read her book. And he, with all his soul’s intensity directing his pencil, could feel her warmth inside him like strength. They were both very happy so, and both unconscious of it. These times, that meant so much, and which were real living, they almost ignored.

He was conscious only when stimulated. A sketch finished, he always wanted to take it to Miriam. Then he was stimulated into knowledge of the work he had produced unconsciously. In contact with Miriam he gained insight; his vision went deeper. From his mother he drew the life-warmth, the strength to produce; Miriam urged this warmth into intensity like a white light.

When he returned to the factory the conditions of work were better. He had Wednesday afternoon off to go to the Art School — Miss Jordan’s provision — returning in the evening. Then the factory closed at six instead of eight on Thursday and Friday evenings.

One evening in the summer Miriam and he went over the fields by Herod’s Farm on their way from the library home. So it was only three miles to Willey Farm. There was a yellow glow over the mowing-grass, and the sorrel-heads burned crimson. Gradually, as they walked along the high land, the gold in the west sank down to red, the red to crimson, and then the chill blue crept up against the glow.

They came out upon the high road to Alfreton, which ran white between the darkening fields. There Paul hesitated. It was two miles home for him, one mile forward for Miriam. They both looked up the road that ran in shadow right under the glow of the north-west sky. On the crest of the hill, Selby, with its stark houses and the up-pricked headstocks of the pit, stood in black silhouette small against the sky.

He looked at his watch.

“Nine o’clock!” he said.

The pair stood, loth to part, hugging their books.

“The wood is so lovely now,” she said. “I wanted you to see it.”

He followed her slowly across the road to the white gate.

“They grumble so if I’m late,” he said.

“But you’re not doing anything wrong,” she answered impatiently.

He followed her across the nibbled pasture in the dusk. There was a coolness in the wood, a scent of leaves, of honeysuckle, and a twilight. The two walked in silence. Night came wonderfully there, among the throng of dark tree-trunks. He looked round, expectant.

She wanted to show him a certain wild-rose bush she had discovered. She knew it was wonderful. And yet, till he had seen it, she felt it had not come into her soul. Only he could make it her own, immortal. She was dissatisfied.

Dew was already on the paths. In the old oak-wood a mist was rising, and he hesitated, wondering whether one whiteness were a strand of fog or only campion-flowers pallid in a cloud.

By the time they came to the pine-trees Miriam was getting very eager and very tense. Her bush might be gone. She might not be able to find it; and she wanted it so much. Almost passionately she wanted to be with him when he stood before the flowers. They were going to have a communion together — something that thrilled her, something holy. He was walking beside her in silence. They were very near to each other. She trembled, and he listened, vaguely anxious.

Coming to the edge of the wood, they saw the sky in front, like mother-of-pearl, and the earth growing dark. Somewhere on the outermost branches of the pine-wood the honeysuckle was streaming scent.

“Where?” he asked.

“Down the middle path,” she murmured, quivering.

When they turned the corner of the path she stood still. In the wide walk between the pines, gazing rather frightened, she could distinguish nothing for some moments; the greying light robbed things of their colour. Then she saw her bush.

“Ah!” she cried, hastening forward.

It was very still. The tree was tall and straggling. It had thrown its briers over a hawthorn-bush, and its long streamers trailed thick, right down to the grass, splashing the darkness everywhere with great spilt stars, pure white. In bosses of ivory and in large splashed stars the roses gleamed on the darkness of foliage and stems and grass. Paul and Miriam stood close together, silent, and watched. Point after point the steady roses shone out to them, seeming to kindle something

in their souls. The dusk came like smoke around, and still did not put out the roses.

Paul looked into Miriam's eyes. She was pale and expectant with wonder, her lips were parted, and her dark eyes lay open to him. His look seemed to travel down into her. Her soul quivered. It was the communion she wanted. He turned aside, as if pained. He turned to the bush.

"They seem as if they walk like butterflies, and shake themselves," he said.

She looked at her roses. They were white, some incurved and holy, others expanded in an ecstasy. The tree was dark as a shadow. She lifted her hand impulsively to the flowers; she went forward and touched them in worship.

"Let us go," he said.

There was a cool scent of ivory roses — a white, virgin scent. Something made him feel anxious and imprisoned. The two walked in silence.

"Till Sunday," he said quietly, and left her; and she walked home slowly, feeling her soul satisfied with the holiness of the night. He stumbled down the path. And as soon as he was out of the wood, in the free open meadow, where he could breathe, he started to run as fast as he could. It was like a delicious delirium in his veins.

Always when he went with Miriam, and it grew rather late, he knew his mother was fretting and getting angry about him — why, he could not understand. As he went into the house, flinging down his cap, his mother looked up at the clock. She had been sitting thinking, because a chill to her eyes prevented her reading. She could feel Paul being drawn away by this girl. And she did not care for Miriam. "She is one of those who will want to suck a man's soul out till he has none of his own left," she said to herself; "and he is just such a gaby as to let himself be absorbed. She will never let him become a man; she never will." So, while he was away with Miriam, Mrs. Morel grew more and more worked up.

She glanced at the clock and said, coldly and rather tired:

"You have been far enough to-night."

His soul, warm and exposed from contact with the girl, shrank.

"You must have been right home with her," his mother continued.

He would not answer. Mrs. Morel, looking at him quickly, saw his hair was damp on his forehead with haste, saw him frowning in his heavy fashion, resentfully.

"She must be wonderfully fascinating, that you can't get away from her, but must go trailing eight miles at this time of night."

He was hurt between the past glamour with Miriam and the knowledge that his mother fretted. He had meant not to say anything, to refuse to answer. But he

could not harden his heart to ignore his mother.

“I DO like to talk to her,” he answered irritably.

“Is there nobody else to talk to?”

“You wouldn’t say anything if I went with Edgar.”

“You know I should. You know, whoever you went with, I should say it was too far for you to go trailing, late at night, when you’ve been to Nottingham. Besides” — her voice suddenly flashed into anger and contempt — “it is disgusting — bits of lads and girls courting.”

“It is NOT courting,” he cried.

“I don’t know what else you call it.”

“It’s not! Do you think we SPOON and do? We only talk.”

“Till goodness knows what time and distance,” was the sarcastic rejoinder.

Paul snapped at the laces of his boots angrily.

“What are you so mad about?” he asked. “Because you don’t like her.”

“I don’t say I don’t like her. But I don’t hold with children keeping company, and never did.”

“But you don’t mind our Annie going out with Jim Inger.”

“They’ve more sense than you two.”

“Why?”

“Our Annie’s not one of the deep sort.”

He failed to see the meaning of this remark. But his mother looked tired. She was never so strong after William’s death; and her eyes hurt her.

“Well,” he said, “it’s so pretty in the country. Mr. Sleath asked about you. He said he’d missed you. Are you a bit better?”

“I ought to have been in bed a long time ago,” she replied.

“Why, mother, you know you wouldn’t have gone before quarter-past ten.”

“Oh, yes, I should!”

“Oh, little woman, you’d say anything now you’re disagreeable with me, wouldn’t you?”

He kissed her forehead that he knew so well: the deep marks between the brows, the rising of the fine hair, greying now, and the proud setting of the temples. His hand lingered on her shoulder after his kiss. Then he went slowly to bed. He had forgotten Miriam; he only saw how his mother’s hair was lifted back from her warm, broad brow. And somehow, she was hurt.

Then the next time he saw Miriam he said to her:

“Don’t let me be late to-night — not later than ten o’clock. My mother gets so upset.”

Miriam dropped her bead, brooding.

“Why does she get upset?” she asked.

“Because she says I oughtn’t to be out late when I have to get up early.”

“Very well!” said Miriam, rather quietly, with just a touch of a sneer.

He resented that. And he was usually late again.

That there was any love growing between him and Miriam neither of them would have acknowledged. He thought he was too sane for such sentimentality, and she thought herself too lofty. They both were late in coming to maturity, and psychological ripeness was much behind even the physical. Miriam was exceedingly sensitive, as her mother had always been. The slightest grossness made her recoil almost in anguish. Her brothers were brutal, but never coarse in speech. The men did all the discussing of farm matters outside. But, perhaps, because of the continual business of birth and of begetting which goes on upon every farm, Miriam was the more hypersensitive to the matter, and her blood was chastened almost to disgust of the faintest suggestion of such intercourse. Paul took his pitch from her, and their intimacy went on in an utterly blanched and chaste fashion. It could never be mentioned that the mare was in foal.

When he was nineteen, he was earning only twenty shillings a week, but he was happy. His painting went well, and life went well enough. On the Good Friday he organised a walk to the Hemlock Stone. There were three lads of his own age, then Annie and Arthur, Miriam and Geoffrey. Arthur, apprenticed as an electrician in Nottingham, was home for the holiday. Morel, as usual, was up early, whistling and sawing in the yard. At seven o’clock the family heard him buy threepennyworth of hot-cross buns; he talked with gusto to the little girl who brought them, calling her “my darling”. He turned away several boys who came with more buns, telling them they had been “kested” by a little lass. Then Mrs. Morel got up, and the family straggled down. It was an immense luxury to everybody, this lying in bed just beyond the ordinary time on a weekday. And Paul and Arthur read before breakfast, and had the meal unwashed, sitting in their shirt-sleeves. This was another holiday luxury. The room was warm. Everything felt free of care and anxiety. There was a sense of plenty in the house.

While the boys were reading, Mrs. Morel went into the garden. They were now in another house, an old one, near the Scargill Street home, which had been left soon after William had died. Directly came an excited cry from the garden:

“Paul! Paul! come and look!”

It was his mother’s voice. He threw down his book and went out. There was a long garden that ran to a field. It was a grey, cold day, with a sharp wind blowing out of Derbyshire. Two fields away Bestwood began, with a jumble of roofs and red house-ends, out of which rose the church tower and the spire of the Congregational Chapel. And beyond went woods and hills, right away to the

pale grey heights of the Pennine Chain.

Paul looked down the garden for his mother. Her head appeared among the young currant-bushes.

“Come here!” she cried.

“What for?” he answered.

“Come and see.”

She had been looking at the buds on the currant trees. Paul went up.

“To think,” she said, “that here I might never have seen them!”

Her son went to her side. Under the fence, in a little bed, was a ravel of poor grassy leaves, such as come from very immature bulbs, and three scyllas in bloom. Mrs. Morel pointed to the deep blue flowers.

“Now, just see those!” she exclaimed. “I was looking at the currant bushes, when, thinks I to myself, ‘There’s something very blue; is it a bit of sugar-bag?’ and there, behold you! Sugar-bag! Three glories of the snow, and such beauties! But where on earth did they come from?”

“I don’t know,” said Paul.

“Well, that’s a marvel, now! I THOUGHT I knew every weed and blade in this garden. But HAVEN’T they done well? You see, that gooseberry-bush just shelters them. Not nipped, not touched!”

He crouched down and turned up the bells of the little blue flowers.

“They’re a glorious colour!” he said.

“Aren’t they!” she cried. “I guess they come from Switzerland, where they say they have such lovely things. Fancy them against the snow! But where have they come from? They can’t have BLOWN here, can they?”

Then he remembered having set here a lot of little trash of bulbs to mature.

“And you never told me,” she said.

“No! I thought I’d leave it till they might flower.”

“And now, you see! I might have missed them. And I’ve never had a glory of the snow in my garden in my life.”

She was full of excitement and elation. The garden was an endless joy to her. Paul was thankful for her sake at last to be in a house with a long garden that went down to a field. Every morning after breakfast she went out and was happy pottering about in it. And it was true, she knew every weed and blade.

Everybody turned up for the walk. Food was packed, and they set off, a merry, delighted party. They hung over the wall of the mill-race, dropped paper in the water on one side of the tunnel and watched it shoot out on the other. They stood on the foot-bridge over Boathouse Station and looked at the metals gleaming coldly.

“You should see the Flying Scotsman come through at half-past six!” said

Leonard, whose father was a signalman. "Lad, but she doesn't half buzz!" and the little party looked up the lines one way, to London, and the other way, to Scotland, and they felt the touch of these two magical places.

In Ilkeston the colliers were waiting in gangs for the public-houses to open. It was a town of idleness and lounging. At Stanton Gate the iron foundry blazed. Over everything there were great discussions. At Trowell they crossed again from Derbyshire into Nottinghamshire. They came to the Hemlock Stone at dinner-time. Its field was crowded with folk from Nottingham and Ilkeston.

They had expected a venerable and dignified monument. They found a little, gnarled, twisted stump of rock, something like a decayed mushroom, standing out pathetically on the side of a field. Leonard and Dick immediately proceeded to carve their initials, "L. W." and "R. P.", in the old red sandstone; but Paul desisted, because he had read in the newspaper satirical remarks about initial-carvers, who could find no other road to immortality. Then all the lads climbed to the top of the rock to look round.

Everywhere in the field below, factory girls and lads were eating lunch or sporting about. Beyond was the garden of an old manor. It had yew-hedges and thick clumps and borders of yellow crocuses round the lawn.

"See," said Paul to Miriam, "what a quiet garden!"

She saw the dark yews and the golden crocuses, then she looked gratefully. He had not seemed to belong to her among all these others; he was different then — not her Paul, who understood the slightest quiver of her innermost soul, but something else, speaking another language than hers. How it hurt her, and deadened her very perceptions. Only when he came right back to her, leaving his other, his lesser self, as she thought, would she feel alive again. And now he asked her to look at this garden, wanting the contact with her again. Impatient of the set in the field, she turned to the quiet lawn, surrounded by sheaves of shut-up crocuses. A feeling of stillness, almost of ecstasy, came over her. It felt almost as if she were alone with him in this garden.

Then he left her again and joined the others. Soon they started home. Miriam loitered behind, alone. She did not fit in with the others; she could very rarely get into human relations with anyone: so her friend, her companion, her lover, was Nature. She saw the sun declining wanly. In the dusky, cold hedgerows were some red leaves. She lingered to gather them, tenderly, passionately. The love in her finger-tips caressed the leaves; the passion in her heart came to a glow upon the leaves.

Suddenly she realised she was alone in a strange road, and she hurried forward. Turning a corner in the lane, she came upon Paul, who stood bent over something, his mind fixed on it, working away steadily, patiently, a little

hopelessly. She hesitated in her approach, to watch.

He remained concentrated in the middle of the road. Beyond, one rift of rich gold in that colourless grey evening seemed to make him stand out in dark relief. She saw him, slender and firm, as if the setting sun had given him to her. A deep pain took hold of her, and she knew she must love him. And she had discovered him, discovered in him a rare potentiality, discovered his loneliness. Quivering as at some “annunciation”, she went slowly forward.

At last he looked up.

“Why,” he exclaimed gratefully, “have you waited for me!”

She saw a deep shadow in his eyes.

“What is it?” she asked.

“The spring broken here;” and he showed her where his umbrella was injured.

Instantly, with some shame, she knew he had not done the damage himself, but that Geoffrey was responsible.

“It is only an old umbrella, isn’t it?” she asked.

She wondered why he, who did not usually trouble over trifles, made such a mountain of this molehill.

“But it was William’s an’ my mother can’t help but know,” he said quietly, still patiently working at the umbrella.

The words went through Miriam like a blade. This, then, was the confirmation of her vision of him! She looked at him. But there was about him a certain reserve, and she dared not comfort him, not even speak softly to him.

“Come on,” he said. “I can’t do it;” and they went in silence along the road.

That same evening they were walking along under the trees by Nether Green. He was talking to her fretfully, seemed to be struggling to convince himself.

“You know,” he said, with an effort, “if one person loves, the other does.”

“Ah!” she answered. “Like mother said to me when I was little, ‘Love begets love.’”

“Yes, something like that, I think it **MUST** be.”

“I hope so, because, if it were not, love might be a very terrible thing,” she said.

“Yes, but it **IS** — at least with most people,” he answered.

And Miriam, thinking he had assured himself, felt strong in herself. She always regarded that sudden coming upon him in the lane as a revelation. And this conversation remained graven in her mind as one of the letters of the law.

Now she stood with him and for him. When, about this time, he outraged the family feeling at Willey Farm by some overbearing insult, she stuck to him, and believed he was right. And at this time she dreamed dreams of him, vivid, unforgettable. These dreams came again later on, developed to a more subtle

psychological stage.

On the Easter Monday the same party took an excursion to Wingfield Manor. It was great excitement to Miriam to catch a train at Sethley Bridge, amid all the bustle of the Bank Holiday crowd. They left the train at Alfreton. Paul was interested in the street and in the colliers with their dogs. Here was a new race of miners. Miriam did not live till they came to the church. They were all rather timid of entering, with their bags of food, for fear of being turned out. Leonard, a comic, thin fellow, went first; Paul, who would have died rather than be sent back, went last. The place was decorated for Easter. In the front hundreds of white narcissi seemed to be growing. The air was dim and coloured from the windows and thrilled with a subtle scent of lilies and narcissi. In that atmosphere Miriam's soul came into a glow. Paul was afraid of the things he mustn't do; and he was sensitive to the feel of the place. Miriam turned to him. He answered. They were together. He would not go beyond the Communion-rail. She loved him for that. Her soul expanded into prayer beside him. He felt the strange fascination of shadowy religious places. All his latent mysticism quivered into life. She was drawn to him. He was a prayer along with her.

Miriam very rarely talked to the other lads. They at once became awkward in conversation with her. So usually she was silent.

It was past midday when they climbed the steep path to the manor. All things shone softly in the sun, which was wonderfully warm and enlivening. Celandines and violets were out. Everybody was tip-top full with happiness. The glitter of the ivy, the soft, atmospheric grey of the castle walls, the gentleness of everything near the ruin, was perfect.

The manor is of hard, pale grey stone, and the other walls are blank and calm. The young folk were in raptures. They went in trepidation, almost afraid that the delight of exploring this ruin might be denied them. In the first courtyard, within the high broken walls, were farm-carts, with their shafts lying idle on the ground, the tyres of the wheels brilliant with gold-red rust. It was very still.

All eagerly paid their sixpences, and went timidly through the fine clean arch of the inner courtyard. They were shy. Here on the pavement, where the hall had been, an old thorn tree was budding. All kinds of strange openings and broken rooms were in the shadow around them.

After lunch they set off once more to explore the ruin. This time the girls went with the boys, who could act as guides and expositors. There was one tall tower in a corner, rather tottering, where they say Mary Queen of Scots was imprisoned.

"Think of the Queen going up here!" said Miriam in a low voice, as she climbed the hollow stairs.

“If she could get up,” said Paul, “for she had rheumatism like anything. I reckon they treated her rottenly.”

“You don’t think she deserved it?” asked Miriam.

“No, I don’t. She was only lively.”

They continued to mount the winding staircase. A high wind, blowing through the loopholes, went rushing up the shaft, and filled the girl’s skirts like a balloon, so that she was ashamed, until he took the hem of her dress and held it down for her. He did it perfectly simply, as he would have picked up her glove. She remembered this always.

Round the broken top of the tower the ivy bushed out, old and handsome. Also, there were a few chill gillivvers, in pale cold bud. Miriam wanted to lean over for some ivy, but he would not let her. Instead, she had to wait behind him, and take from him each spray as he gathered it and held it to her, each one separately, in the purest manner of chivalry. The tower seemed to rock in the wind. They looked over miles and miles of wooded country, and country with gleams of pasture.

The crypt underneath the manor was beautiful, and in perfect preservation. Paul made a drawing: Miriam stayed with him. She was thinking of Mary Queen of Scots looking with her strained, hopeless eyes, that could not understand misery, over the hills whence no help came, or sitting in this crypt, being told of a God as cold as the place she sat in.

They set off again gaily, looking round on their beloved manor that stood so clean and big on its hill.

“Supposing you could have THAT farm,” said Paul to Miriam.

“Yes!”

“Wouldn’t it be lovely to come and see you!”

They were now in the bare country of stone walls, which he loved, and which, though only ten miles from home, seemed so foreign to Miriam. The party was straggling. As they were crossing a large meadow that sloped away from the sun, along a path embedded with innumerable tiny glittering points, Paul, walking alongside, laced his fingers in the strings of the bag Miriam was carrying, and instantly she felt Annie behind, watchful and jealous. But the meadow was bathed in a glory of sunshine, and the path was jewelled, and it was seldom that he gave her any sign. She held her fingers very still among the strings of the bag, his fingers touching; and the place was golden as a vision.

At last they came into the straggling grey village of Crich, that lies high. Beyond the village was the famous Crich Stand that Paul could see from the garden at home. The party pushed on. Great expanse of country spread around and below. The lads were eager to get to the top of the hill. It was capped by a

round knoll, half of which was by now cut away, and on the top of which stood an ancient monument, sturdy and squat, for signalling in old days far down into the level lands of Nottinghamshire and Leicestershire.

It was blowing so hard, high up there in the exposed place, that the only way to be safe was to stand nailed by the wind to the wan of the tower. At their feet fell the precipice where the limestone was quarried away. Below was a jumble of hills and tiny villages — Mattock, Ambergate, Stoney Middleton. The lads were eager to spy out the church of Bestwood, far away among the rather crowded country on the left. They were disgusted that it seemed to stand on a plain. They saw the hills of Derbyshire fall into the monotony of the Midlands that swept away South.

Miriam was somewhat scared by the wind, but the lads enjoyed it. They went on, miles and miles, to Whatstandwell. All the food was eaten, everybody was hungry, and there was very little money to get home with. But they managed to procure a loaf and a currant-loaf, which they hacked to pieces with shut-knives, and ate sitting on the wall near the bridge, watching the bright Derwent rushing by, and the brakes from Matlock pulling up at the inn.

Paul was now pale with weariness. He had been responsible for the party all day, and now he was done. Miriam understood, and kept close to him, and he left himself in her hands.

They had an hour to wait at Ambergate Station. Trains came, crowded with excursionists returning to Manchester, Birmingham, and London.

“We might be going there — folk easily might think we’re going that far,” said Paul.

They got back rather late. Miriam, walking home with Geoffrey, watched the moon rise big and red and misty. She felt something was fulfilled in her.

She had an elder sister, Agatha, who was a school-teacher. Between the two girls was a feud. Miriam considered Agatha worldly. And she wanted herself to be a school-teacher.

One Saturday afternoon Agatha and Miriam were upstairs dressing. Their bedroom was over the stable. It was a low room, not very large, and bare. Miriam had nailed on the wall a reproduction of Veronese’s “St. Catherine”. She loved the woman who sat in the window, dreaming. Her own windows were too small to sit in. But the front one was dripped over with honeysuckle and virginia creeper, and looked upon the tree-tops of the oak-wood across the yard, while the little back window, no bigger than a handkerchief, was a loophole to the east, to the dawn beating up against the beloved round hills.

The two sisters did not talk much to each other. Agatha, who was fair and small and determined, had rebelled against the home atmosphere, against the

doctrine of “the other cheek”. She was out in the world now, in a fair way to be independent. And she insisted on worldly values, on appearance, on manners, on position, which Miriam would fain have ignored.

Both girls liked to be upstairs, out of the way, when Paul came. They preferred to come running down, open the stair-foot door, and see him watching, expectant of them. Miriam stood painfully pulling over her head a rosary he had given her. It caught in the fine mesh of her hair. But at last she had it on, and the red-brown wooden beads looked well against her cool brown neck. She was a well-developed girl, and very handsome. But in the little looking-glass nailed against the whitewashed wall she could only see a fragment of herself at a time. Agatha had bought a little mirror of her own, which she propped up to suit herself. Miriam was near the window. Suddenly she heard the well-known click of the chain, and she saw Paul fling open the gate, push his bicycle into the yard. She saw him look at the house, and she shrank away. He walked in a nonchalant fashion, and his bicycle went with him as if it were a live thing.

“Paul’s come!” she exclaimed.

“Aren’t you glad?” said Agatha cuttingly.

Miriam stood still in amazement and bewilderment.

“Well, aren’t you?” she asked.

“Yes, but I’m not going to let him see it, and think I wanted him.”

Miriam was startled. She heard him putting his bicycle in the stable underneath, and talking to Jimmy, who had been a pit-horse, and who was seedy.

“Well, Jimmy my lad, how are ter? Nobbut sick an’ sadly, like? Why, then, it’s a shame, my owd lad.”

She heard the rope run through the hole as the horse lifted its head from the lad’s caress. How she loved to listen when he thought only the horse could hear. But there was a serpent in her Eden. She searched earnestly in herself to see if she wanted Paul Morel. She felt there would be some disgrace in it. Full of twisted feeling, she was afraid she did want him. She stood self-convicted. Then came an agony of new shame. She shrank within herself in a coil of torture. Did she want Paul Morel, and did he know she wanted him? What a subtle infamy upon her. She felt as if her whole soul coiled into knots of shame.

Agatha was dressed first, and ran downstairs. Miriam heard her greet the lad gaily, knew exactly how brilliant her grey eyes became with that tone. She herself would have felt it bold to have greeted him in such wise. Yet there she stood under the self-accusation of wanting him, tied to that stake of torture. In bitter perplexity she kneeled down and prayed:

“O Lord, let me not love Paul Morel. Keep me from loving him, if I ought not to love him.”

Something anomalous in the prayer arrested her. She lifted her head and pondered. How could it be wrong to love him? Love was God's gift. And yet it caused her shame. That was because of him, Paul Morel. But, then, it was not his affair, it was her own, between herself and God. She was to be a sacrifice. But it was God's sacrifice, not Paul Morel's or her own. After a few minutes she hid her face in the pillow again, and said:

"But, Lord, if it is Thy will that I should love him, make me love him — as Christ would, who died for the souls of men. Make me love him splendidly, because he is Thy son."

She remained kneeling for some time, quite still, and deeply moved, her black hair against the red squares and the lavender-sprigged squares of the patchwork quilt. Prayer was almost essential to her. Then she fell into that rapture of self-sacrifice, identifying herself with a God who was sacrificed, which gives to so many human souls their deepest bliss.

When she went downstairs Paul was lying back in an armchair, holding forth with much vehemence to Agatha, who was scorning a little painting he had brought to show her. Miriam glanced at the two, and avoided their levity. She went into the parlour to be alone.

It was tea-time before she was able to speak to Paul, and then her manner was so distant he thought he had offended her.

Miriam discontinued her practice of going each Thursday evening to the library in Bestwood. After calling for Paul regularly during the whole spring, a number of trifling incidents and tiny insults from his family awakened her to their attitude towards her, and she decided to go no more. So she announced to Paul one evening she would not call at his house again for him on Thursday nights.

"Why?" he asked, very short.

"Nothing. Only I'd rather not."

"Very well."

"But," she faltered, "if you'd care to meet me, we could still go together."

"Meet you where?"

"Somewhere — where you like."

"I shan't meet you anywhere. I don't see why you shouldn't keep calling for me. But if you won't, I don't want to meet you."

So the Thursday evenings which had been so precious to her, and to him, were dropped. He worked instead. Mrs. Morel sniffed with satisfaction at this arrangement.

He would not have it that they were lovers. The intimacy between them had been kept so abstract, such a matter of the soul, all thought and weary struggle

into consciousness, that he saw it only as a platonic friendship. He stoutly denied there was anything else between them. Miriam was silent, or else she very quietly agreed. He was a fool who did not know what was happening to himself. By tacit agreement they ignored the remarks and insinuations of their acquaintances.

“We aren’t lovers, we are friends,” he said to her. “WE know it. Let them talk. What does it matter what they say.”

Sometimes, as they were walking together, she slipped her arm timidly into his. But he always resented it, and she knew it. It caused a violent conflict in him. With Miriam he was always on the high plane of abstraction, when his natural fire of love was transmitted into the fine stream of thought. She would have it so. If he were jolly and, as she put it, flippant, she waited till he came back to her, till the change had taken place in him again, and he was wrestling with his own soul, frowning, passionate in his desire for understanding. And in this passion for understanding her soul lay close to his; she had him all to herself. But he must be made abstract first.

Then, if she put her arm in his, it caused him almost torture. His consciousness seemed to split. The place where she was touching him ran hot with friction. He was one internecine battle, and he became cruel to her because of it.

One evening in midsummer Miriam called at the house, warm from climbing. Paul was alone in the kitchen; his mother could be heard moving about upstairs.

“Come and look at the sweet-peas,” he said to the girl.

They went into the garden. The sky behind the townlet and the church was orange-red; the flower-garden was flooded with a strange warm light that lifted every leaf into significance. Paul passed along a fine row of sweet-peas, gathering a blossom here and there, all cream and pale blue. Miriam followed, breathing the fragrance. To her, flowers appealed with such strength she felt she must make them part of herself. When she bent and breathed a flower, it was as if she and the flower were loving each other. Paul hated her for it. There seemed a sort of exposure about the action, something too intimate.

When he had got a fair bunch, they returned to the house. He listened for a moment to his mother’s quiet movement upstairs, then he said:

“Come here, and let me pin them in for you.” He arranged them two or three at a time in the bosom of her dress, stepping back now and then to see the effect. “You know,” he said, taking the pin out of his mouth, “a woman ought always to arrange her flowers before her glass.”

Miriam laughed. She thought flowers ought to be pinned in one’s dress without any care. That Paul should take pains to fix her flowers for her was his whim.

He was rather offended at her laughter.

“Some women do — those who look decent,” he said.

Miriam laughed again, but mirthlessly, to hear him thus mix her up with women in a general way. From most men she would have ignored it. But from him it hurt her.

He had nearly finished arranging the flowers when he heard his mother’s footstep on the stairs. Hurriedly he pushed in the last pin and turned away.

“Don’t let mater know,” he said.

Miriam picked up her books and stood in the doorway looking with chagrin at the beautiful sunset. She would call for Paul no more, she said.

“Good-evening, Mrs. Morel,” she said, in a deferential way. She sounded as if she felt she had no right to be there.

“Oh, is it you, Miriam?” replied Mrs. Morel coolly.

But Paul insisted on everybody’s accepting his friendship with the girl, and Mrs. Morel was too wise to have any open rupture.

It was not till he was twenty years old that the family could ever afford to go away for a holiday. Mrs. Morel had never been away for a holiday, except to see her sister, since she had been married. Now at last Paul had saved enough money, and they were all going. There was to be a party: some of Annie’s friends, one friend of Paul’s, a young man in the same office where William had previously been, and Miriam.

It was great excitement writing for rooms. Paul and his mother debated it endlessly between them. They wanted a furnished cottage for two weeks. She thought one week would be enough, but he insisted on two.

At last they got an answer from Mablethorpe, a cottage such as they wished for thirty shillings a week. There was immense jubilation. Paul was wild with joy for his mother’s sake. She would have a real holiday now. He and she sat at evening picturing what it would be like. Annie came in, and Leonard, and Alice, and Kitty. There was wild rejoicing and anticipation. Paul told Miriam. She seemed to brood with joy over it. But the Morel’s house rang with excitement.

They were to go on Saturday morning by the seven train. Paul suggested that Miriam should sleep at his house, because it was so far for her to walk. She came down for supper. Everybody was so excited that even Miriam was accepted with warmth. But almost as soon as she entered the feeling in the family became close and tight. He had discovered a poem by Jean Ingelow which mentioned Mablethorpe, and so he must read it to Miriam. He would never have got so far in the direction of sentimentality as to read poetry to his own family. But now they condescended to listen. Miriam sat on the sofa absorbed in him. She always seemed absorbed in him, and by him, when he was present. Mrs. Morel sat

jealously in her own chair. She was going to hear also. And even Annie and the father attended, Morel with his head cocked on one side, like somebody listening to a sermon and feeling conscious of the fact. Paul ducked his head over the book. He had got now all the audience he cared for. And Mrs. Morel and Annie almost contested with Miriam who should listen best and win his favour. He was in very high feather.

“But,” interrupted Mrs. Morel, “what IS the ‘Bride of Enderby’ that the bells are supposed to ring?”

“It’s an old tune they used to play on the bells for a warning against water. I suppose the Bride of Enderby was drowned in a flood,” he replied. He had not the faintest knowledge what it really was, but he would never have sunk so low as to confess that to his womenfolk. They listened and believed him. He believed himself.

“And the people knew what that tune meant?” said his mother.

“Yes — just like the Scotch when they heard ‘The Flowers o’ the Forest’ — and when they used to ring the bells backward for alarm.”

“How?” said Annie. “A bell sounds the same whether it’s rung backwards or forwards.”

“But,” he said, “if you start with the deep bell and ring up to the high one — der — der — der — der — der — der — der — der — der!”

He ran up the scale. Everybody thought it clever. He thought so too. Then, waiting a minute, he continued the poem.

“Hm!” said Mrs. Morel curiously, when he finished. “But I wish everything that’s written weren’t so sad.”

“I canna see what they want drownin’ theirselves for,” said Morel.

There was a pause. Annie got up to clear the table.

Miriam rose to help with the pots.

“Let ME help to wash up,” she said.

“Certainly not,” cried Annie. “You sit down again. There aren’t many.”

And Miriam, who could not be familiar and insist, sat down again to look at the book with Paul.

He was master of the party; his father was no good. And great tortures he suffered lest the tin box should be put out at Firsby instead of at Mablethorpe. And he wasn’t equal to getting a carriage. His bold little mother did that.

“Here!” she cried to a man. “Here!”

Paul and Annie got behind the rest, convulsed with shamed laughter.

“How much will it be to drive to Brook Cottage?” said Mrs. Morel.

“Two shillings.”

“Why, how far is it?”

“A good way.”

“I don’t believe it,” she said.

But she scrambled in. There were eight crowded in one old seaside carriage.

“You see,” said Mrs. Morel, “it’s only threepence each, and if it were a tramcar — ”

They drove along. Each cottage they came to, Mrs. Morel cried:

“Is it this? Now, this is it!”

Everybody sat breathless. They drove past. There was a universal sigh.

“I’m thankful it wasn’t that brute,” said Mrs. Morel. “I WAS frightened.” They drove on and on.

At last they descended at a house that stood alone over the dyke by the highroad. There was wild excitement because they had to cross a little bridge to get into the front garden. But they loved the house that lay so solitary, with a sea-meadow on one side, and immense expanse of land patched in white barley, yellow oats, red wheat, and green root-crops, flat and stretching level to the sky.

Paul kept accounts. He and his mother ran the show. The total expenses — lodging, food, everything — was sixteen shillings a week per person. He and Leonard went bathing in the mornings. Morel was wandering abroad quite early.

“You, Paul,” his mother called from the bedroom, “eat a piece of bread-and-butter.”

“All right,” he answered.

And when he got back he saw his mother presiding in state at the breakfast-table. The woman of the house was young. Her husband was blind, and she did laundry work. So Mrs. Morel always washed the pots in the kitchen and made the beds.

“But you said you’d have a real holiday,” said Paul, “and now you work.”

“Work!” she exclaimed. “What are you talking about!”

He loved to go with her across the fields to the village and the sea. She was afraid of the plank bridge, and he abused her for being a baby. On the whole he stuck to her as if he were HER man.

Miriam did not get much of him, except, perhaps, when all the others went to the “Coons”. Coons were insufferably stupid to Miriam, so he thought they were to himself also, and he preached priggishly to Annie about the fatuity of listening to them. Yet he, too, knew all their songs, and sang them along the roads roisterously. And if he found himself listening, the stupidity pleased him very much. Yet to Annie he said:

“Such rot! there isn’t a grain of intelligence in it. Nobody with more gumption than a grasshopper could go and sit and listen.” And to Miriam he said, with much scorn of Annie and the others: “I suppose they’re at the ‘Coons’.”

It was queer to see Miriam singing coon songs. She had a straight chin that went in a perpendicular line from the lower lip to the turn. She always reminded Paul of some sad Botticelli angel when she sang, even when it was:

“Come down lover’s lane

For a walk with me, talk with me.”

Only when he sketched, or at evening when the others were at the “Coons”, she had him to herself. He talked to her endlessly about his love of horizontals: how they, the great levels of sky and land in Lincolnshire, meant to him the eternity of the will, just as the bowed Norman arches of the church, repeating themselves, meant the dogged leaping forward of the persistent human soul, on and on, nobody knows where; in contradiction to the perpendicular lines and to the Gothic arch, which, he said, leapt up at heaven and touched the ecstasy and lost itself in the divine. Himself, he said, was Norman, Miriam was Gothic. She bowed in consent even to that.

One evening he and she went up the great sweeping shore of sand towards Theddlethorpe. The long breakers plunged and ran in a hiss of foam along the coast. It was a warm evening. There was not a figure but themselves on the far reaches of sand, no noise but the sound of the sea. Paul loved to see it clanging at the land. He loved to feel himself between the noise of it and the silence of the sandy shore. Miriam was with him. Everything grew very intense. It was quite dark when they turned again. The way home was through a gap in the sandhills, and then along a raised grass road between two dykes. The country was black and still. From behind the sandhills came the whisper of the sea. Paul and Miriam walked in silence. Suddenly he started. The whole of his blood seemed to burst into flame, and he could scarcely breathe. An enormous orange moon was staring at them from the rim of the sandhills. He stood still, looking at it.

“Ah!” cried Miriam, when she saw it.

He remained perfectly still, staring at the immense and ruddy moon, the only thing in the far-reaching darkness of the level. His heart beat heavily, the muscles of his arms contracted.

“What is it?” murmured Miriam, waiting for him.

He turned and looked at her. She stood beside him, for ever in shadow. Her face, covered with the darkness of her hat, was watching him unseen. But she was brooding. She was slightly afraid — deeply moved and religious. That was her best state. He was impotent against it. His blood was concentrated like a flame in his chest. But he could not get across to her. There were flashes in his blood. But somehow she ignored them. She was expecting some religious state in him. Still yearning, she was half aware of his passion, and gazed at him, troubled.

“What is it?” she murmured again.

“It’s the moon,” he answered, frowning.

“Yes,” she assented. “Isn’t it wonderful?” She was curious about him. The crisis was past.

He did not know himself what was the matter. He was naturally so young, and their intimacy was so abstract, he did not know he wanted to crush her on to his breast to ease the ache there. He was afraid of her. The fact that he might want her as a man wants a woman had in him been suppressed into a shame. When she shrank in her convulsed, coiled torture from the thought of such a thing, he had winced to the depths of his soul. And now this “purity” prevented even their first love-kiss. It was as if she could scarcely stand the shock of physical love, even a passionate kiss, and then he was too shrinking and sensitive to give it.

As they walked along the dark fen-meadow he watched the moon and did not speak. She plodded beside him. He hated her, for she seemed in some way to make him despise himself. Looking ahead — he saw the one light in the darkness, the window of their lamp-lit cottage.

He loved to think of his mother, and the other jolly people.

“Well, everybody else has been in long ago!” said his mother as they entered.

“What does that matter!” he cried irritably. “I can go a walk if I like, can’t I?”

“And I should have thought you could get in to supper with the rest,” said Mrs. Morel.

“I shall please myself,” he retorted. “It’s not LATE. I shall do as I like.”

“Very well,” said his mother cuttingly, “then DO as you like.” And she took no further notice of him that evening. Which he pretended neither to notice nor to care about, but sat reading. Miriam read also, obliterating herself. Mrs. Morel hated her for making her son like this. She watched Paul growing irritable, priggish, and melancholic. For this she put the blame on Miriam. Annie and all her friends joined against the girl. Miriam had no friend of her own, only Paul. But she did not suffer so much, because she despised the triviality of these other people.

And Paul hated her because, somehow, she spoilt his ease and naturalness. And he writhed himself with a feeling of humiliation.

CHAPTER VIII

STRIFE IN LOVE

ARTHUR finished his apprenticeship, and got a job on the electrical plant at Minton Pit. He earned very little, but had a good chance of getting on. But he was wild and restless. He did not drink nor gamble. Yet he somehow contrived to get into endless scrapes, always through some hot-headed thoughtlessness. Either he went rabbiting in the woods, like a poacher, or he stayed in Nottingham all night instead of coming home, or he miscalculated his dive into the canal at Bestwood, and scored his chest into one mass of wounds on the raw stones and tins at the bottom.

He had not been at his work many months when again he did not come home one night.

“Do you know where Arthur is?” asked Paul at breakfast.

“I do not,” replied his mother.

“He is a fool,” said Paul. “And if he DID anything I shouldn’t mind. But no, he simply can’t come away from a game of whist, or else he must see a girl home from the skating-rink — quite proprietously — and so can’t get home. He’s a fool.”

“I don’t know that it would make it any better if he did something to make us all ashamed,” said Mrs. Morel.

“Well, I should respect him more,” said Paul.

“I very much doubt it,” said his mother coldly.

They went on with breakfast.

“Are you fearfully fond of him?” Paul asked his mother.

“What do you ask that for?”

“Because they say a woman always like the youngest best.”

“She may do — but I don’t. No, he wearies me.”

“And you’d actually rather he was good?”

“I’d rather he showed some of a man’s common sense.”

Paul was raw and irritable. He also wearied his mother very often. She saw the sunshine going out of him, and she resented it.

As they were finishing breakfast came the postman with a letter from Derby.

Mrs. Morel screwed up her eyes to look at the address.

“Give it here, blind eye!” exclaimed her son, snatching it away from her.

She started, and almost boxed his ears.

“It’s from your son, Arthur,” he said.

“What now — !” cried Mrs. Morel.

““My dearest Mother,”“ Paul read, ““I don’t know what made me such a fool. I want you to come and fetch me back from here. I came with Jack Bredon yesterday, instead of going to work, and enlisted. He said he was sick of wearing the seat of a stool out, and, like the idiot you know I am, I came away with him.

““I have taken the King’s shilling, but perhaps if you came for me they would let me go back with you. I was a fool when I did it. I don’t want to be in the army. My dear mother, I am nothing but a trouble to you. But if you get me out of this, I promise I will have more sense and consideration. . . .”“

Mrs. Morel sat down in her rocking-chair.

“Well, NOW,” she cried, “let him stop!”

“Yes,” said Paul, “let him stop.”

There was silence. The mother sat with her hands folded in her apron, her face set, thinking.

“If I’m not SICK!” she cried suddenly. “Sick!”

“Now,” said Paul, beginning to frown, “you’re not going to worry your soul out about this, do you hear.”

“I suppose I’m to take it as a blessing,” she flashed, turning on her son.

“You’re not going to mount it up to a tragedy, so there,” he retorted.

“The FOOL! — the young fool!” she cried.

“He’ll look well in uniform,” said Paul irritatingly.

His mother turned on him like a fury.

“Oh, will he!” she cried. “Not in my eyes!”

“He should get in a cavalry regiment; he’ll have the time of his life, and will look an awful swell.”

“Swell! — SWELL! — a mighty swell idea indeed! — a common soldier!”

“Well,” said Paul, “what am I but a common clerk?”

“A good deal, my boy!” cried his mother, stung.

“What?”

“At any rate, a MAN, and not a thing in a red coat.”

“I shouldn’t mind being in a red coat — or dark blue, that would suit me better — if they didn’t boss me about too much.”

But his mother had ceased to listen.

“Just as he was getting on, or might have been getting on, at his job — a young nuisance — here he goes and ruins himself for life. What good will he be,

do you think, after THIS?"

"It may lick him into shape beautifully," said Paul.

"Lick him into shape! — lick what marrow there WAS out of his bones. A SOLDIER! — a common SOLDIER! — nothing but a body that makes movements when it hears a shout! It's a fine thing!"

"I can't understand why it upsets you," said Paul.

"No, perhaps you can't. But I understand"; and she sat back in her chair, her chin in one hand, holding her elbow with the other, brimmed up with wrath and chagrin.

"And shall you go to Derby?" asked Paul.

"Yes."

"It's no good."

"I'll see for myself."

"And why on earth don't you let him stop. It's just what he wants."

"Of course," cried the mother, "YOU know what he wants!"

She got ready and went by the first train to Derby, where she saw her son and the sergeant. It was, however, no good.

When Morel was having his dinner in the evening, she said suddenly:

"I've had to go to Derby to-day."

The miner turned up his eyes, showing the whites in his black face.

"Has ter, lass. What took thee there?"

"That Arthur!"

"Oh — an' what's agate now?"

"He's only enlisted."

Morel put down his knife and leaned back in his chair.

"Nay," he said, "that he niver 'as!"

"And is going down to Aldershot tomorrow."

"Well!" exclaimed the miner. "That's a winder." He considered it a moment, said "H'm!" and proceeded with his dinner. Suddenly his face contracted with wrath. "I hope he may never set foot i' my house again," he said.

"The idea!" cried Mrs. Morel. "Saying such a thing!"

"I do," repeated Morel. "A fool as runs away for a soldier, let 'im look after 'issen; I s'll do no more for 'im."

"A fat sight you have done as it is," she said.

And Morel was almost ashamed to go to his public-house that evening.

"Well, did you go?" said Paul to his mother when he came home.

"I did."

"And could you see him?"

"Yes."

“And what did he say?”

“He blubbered when I came away.”

“H’m!”

“And so did I, so you needn’t ‘h’m!’”

Mrs. Morel fretted after her son. She knew he would not like the army. He did not. The discipline was intolerable to him.

“But the doctor,” she said with some pride to Paul, “said he was perfectly proportioned — almost exactly; all his measurements were correct. He IS good-looking, you know.”

“He’s awfully nice-looking. But he doesn’t fetch the girls like William, does he?”

“No; it’s a different character. He’s a good deal like his father, irresponsible.”

To console his mother, Paul did not go much to Willey Farm at this time. And in the autumn exhibition of students’ work in the Castle he had two studies, a landscape in water-colour and a still life in oil, both of which had first-prize awards. He was highly excited.

“What do you think I’ve got for my pictures, mother?” he asked, coming home one evening. She saw by his eyes he was glad. Her face flushed.

“Now, how should I know, my boy!”

“A first prize for those glass jars — ”

“H’m!”

“And a first prize for that sketch up at Willey Farm.”

“Both first?”

“Yes.”

“H’m!”

There was a rosy, bright look about her, though she said nothing.

“It’s nice,” he said, “isn’t it?”

“It is.”

“Why don’t you praise me up to the skies?”

She laughed.

“I should have the trouble of dragging you down again,” she said.

But she was full of joy, nevertheless. William had brought her his sporting trophies. She kept them still, and she did not forgive his death. Arthur was handsome — at least, a good specimen — and warm and generous, and probably would do well in the end. But Paul was going to distinguish himself. She had a great belief in him, the more because he was unaware of his own powers. There was so much to come out of him. Life for her was rich with promise. She was to see herself fulfilled. Not for nothing had been her struggle.

Several times during the exhibition Mrs. Morel went to the Castle unknown to

Paul. She wandered down the long room looking at the other exhibits. Yes, they were good. But they had not in them a certain something which she demanded for her satisfaction. Some made her jealous, they were so good. She looked at them a long time trying to find fault with them. Then suddenly she had a shock that made her heart beat. There hung Paul's picture! She knew it as if it were printed on her heart.

"Name — Paul Morel — First Prize."

It looked so strange, there in public, on the walls of the Castle gallery, where in her lifetime she had seen so many pictures. And she glanced round to see if anyone had noticed her again in front of the same sketch.

But she felt a proud woman. When she met well-dressed ladies going home to the Park, she thought to herself:

"Yes, you look very well — but I wonder if YOUR son has two first prizes in the Castle."

And she walked on, as proud a little woman as any in Nottingham. And Paul felt he had done something for her, if only a trifle. All his work was hers.

One day, as he was going up Castle Gate, he met Miriam. He had seen her on the Sunday, and had not expected to meet her in town. She was walking with a rather striking woman, blonde, with a sullen expression, and a defiant carriage. It was strange how Miriam, in her bowed, meditative bearing, looked dwarfed beside this woman with the handsome shoulders. Miriam watched Paul searchingly. His gaze was on the stranger, who ignored him. The girl saw his masculine spirit rear its head.

"Hello!" he said, "you didn't tell me you were coming to town."

"No," replied Miriam, half apologetically. "I drove in to Cattle Market with father."

He looked at her companion.

"I've told you about Mrs. Dawes," said Miriam huskily; she was nervous. "Clara, do you know Paul?"

"I think I've seen him before," replied Mrs. Dawes indifferently, as she shook hands with him. She had scornful grey eyes, a skin like white honey, and a full mouth, with a slightly lifted upper lip that did not know whether it was raised in scorn of all men or out of eagerness to be kissed, but which believed the former. She carried her head back, as if she had drawn away in contempt, perhaps from men also. She wore a large, dowdy hat of black beaver, and a sort of slightly affected simple dress that made her look rather sack-like. She was evidently poor, and had not much taste. Miriam usually looked nice.

"Where have you seen me?" Paul asked of the woman.

She looked at him as if she would not trouble to answer. Then:

“Walking with Louie Travers,” she said.

Louie was one of the “Spiral” girls.

“Why, do you know her?” he asked.

She did not answer. He turned to Miriam.

“Where are you going?” he asked.

“To the Castle.”

“What train are you going home by?”

“I am driving with father. I wish you could come too. What time are you free?”

“You know not till eight to-night, damn it!”

And directly the two women moved on.

Paul remembered that Clara Dawes was the daughter of an old friend of Mrs. Leivers. Miriam had sought her out because she had once been Spiral overseer at Jordan’s, and because her husband, Baxter Dawes, was smith for the factory, making the irons for cripple instruments, and so on. Through her Miriam felt she got into direct contact with Jordan’s, and could estimate better Paul’s position. But Mrs. Dawes was separated from her husband, and had taken up Women’s Rights. She was supposed to be clever. It interested Paul.

Baxter Dawes he knew and disliked. The smith was a man of thirty-one or thirty-two. He came occasionally through Paul’s corner — a big, well-set man, also striking to look at, and handsome. There was a peculiar similarity between himself and his wife. He had the same white skin, with a clear, golden tinge. His hair was of soft brown, his moustache was golden. And he had a similar defiance in his bearing and manner. But then came the difference. His eyes, dark brown and quick-shifting, were dissolute. They protruded very slightly, and his eyelids hung over them in a way that was half hate. His mouth, too, was sensual. His whole manner was of cowed defiance, as if he were ready to knock anybody down who disapproved of him — perhaps because he really disapproved of himself.

From the first day he had hated Paul. Finding the lad’s impersonal, deliberate gaze of an artist on his face, he got into a fury.

“What are yer lookin’ at?” he sneered, bullying.

The boy glanced away. But the smith used to stand behind the counter and talk to Mr. Pappleworth. His speech was dirty, with a kind of rottenness. Again he found the youth with his cool, critical gaze fixed on his face. The smith started round as if he had been stung.

“What’r yer lookin’ at, three hap’orth o’ pap?” he snarled.

The boy shrugged his shoulders slightly.

“Why yer — !” shouted Dawes.

“Leave him alone,” said Mr. Pappleworth, in that insinuating voice which means, “He’s only one of your good little sops who can’t help it.”

Since that time the boy used to look at the man every time he came through with the same curious criticism, glancing away before he met the smith’s eye. It made Dawes furious. They hated each other in silence.

Clara Dawes had no children. When she had left her husband the home had been broken up, and she had gone to live with her mother. Dawes lodged with his sister. In the same house was a sister-in-law, and somehow Paul knew that this girl, Louie Travers, was now Dawes’s woman. She was a handsome, insolent hussy, who mocked at the youth, and yet flushed if he walked along to the station with her as she went home.

The next time he went to see Miriam it was Saturday evening. She had a fire in the parlour, and was waiting for him. The others, except her father and mother and the young children, had gone out, so the two had the parlour together. It was a long, low, warm room. There were three of Paul’s small sketches on the wall, and his photo was on the mantelpiece. On the table and on the high old rosewood piano were bowls of coloured leaves. He sat in the armchair, she crouched on the hearthrug near his feet. The glow was warm on her handsome, pensive face as she kneeled there like a devotee.

“What did you think of Mrs. Dawes?” she asked quietly.

“She doesn’t look very amiable,” he replied.

“No, but don’t you think she’s a fine woman?” she said, in a deep tone,

“Yes — in stature. But without a grain of taste. I like her for some things. IS she disagreeable?”

“I don’t think so. I think she’s dissatisfied.”

“What with?”

“Well — how would you like to be tied for life to a man like that?”

“Why did she marry him, then, if she was to have revulsions so soon?”

“Ay, why did she!” repeated Miriam bitterly.

“And I should have thought she had enough fight in her to match him,” he said.

Miriam bowed her head.

“Ay?” she queried satirically. “What makes you think so?”

“Look at her mouth — made for passion — and the very setback of her throat — ” He threw his head back in Clara’s defiant manner.

Miriam bowed a little lower.

“Yes,” she said.

There was a silence for some moments, while he thought of Clara.

“And what were the things you liked about her?” she asked.

“I don’t know — her skin and the texture of her — and her — I don’t know — there’s a sort of fierceness somewhere in her. I appreciate her as an artist, that’s all.”

“Yes.”

He wondered why Miriam crouched there brooding in that strange way. It irritated him.

“You don’t really like her, do you?” he asked the girl.

She looked at him with her great, dazzled dark eyes.

“I do,” she said.

“You don’t — you can’t — not really.”

“Then what?” she asked slowly.

“Eh, I don’t know — perhaps you like her because she’s got a grudge against men.”

That was more probably one of his own reasons for liking Mrs. Dawes, but this did not occur to him. They were silent. There had come into his forehead a knitting of the brows which was becoming habitual with him, particularly when he was with Miriam. She longed to smooth it away, and she was afraid of it. It seemed the stamp of a man who was not her man in Paul Morel.

There were some crimson berries among the leaves in the bowl. He reached over and pulled out a bunch.

“If you put red berries in your hair,” he said, “why would you look like some witch or priestess, and never like a reveller?”

She laughed with a naked, painful sound.

“I don’t know,” she said.

His vigorous warm hands were playing excitedly with the berries.

“Why can’t you laugh?” he said. “You never laugh laughter. You only laugh when something is odd or incongruous, and then it almost seems to hurt you.”

She bowed her head as if he were scolding her.

“I wish you could laugh at me just for one minute — just for one minute. I feel as if it would set something free.”

“But” — and she looked up at him with eyes frightened and struggling — “I do laugh at you — I DO.”

“Never! There’s always a kind of intensity. When you laugh I could always cry; it seems as if it shows up your suffering. Oh, you make me knit the brows of my very soul and cogitate.”

Slowly she shook her head despairingly.

“I’m sure I don’t want to,” she said.

“I’m so damned spiritual with YOU always!” he cried.

She remained silent, thinking, “Then why don’t you be otherwise.” But he saw

her crouching, brooding figure, and it seemed to tear him in two.

“But, there, it’s autumn,” he said, “and everybody feels like a disembodied spirit then.”

There was still another silence. This peculiar sadness between them thrilled her soul. He seemed so beautiful with his eyes gone dark, and looking as if they were deep as the deepest well.

“You make me so spiritual!” he lamented. “And I don’t want to be spiritual.”

She took her finger from her mouth with a little pop, and looked up at him almost challenging. But still her soul was naked in her great dark eyes, and there was the same yearning appeal upon her. If he could have kissed her in abstract purity he would have done so. But he could not kiss her thus — and she seemed to leave no other way. And she yearned to him.

He gave a brief laugh.

“Well,” he said, “get that French and we’ll do some — some Verlaine.”

“Yes,” she said in a deep tone, almost of resignation. And she rose and got the books. And her rather red, nervous hands looked so pitiful, he was mad to comfort her and kiss her. But then he dared not — or could not. There was something prevented him. His kisses were wrong for her. They continued the reading till ten o’clock, when they went into the kitchen, and Paul was natural and jolly again with the father and mother. His eyes were dark and shining; there was a kind of fascination about him.

When he went into the barn for his bicycle he found the front wheel punctured.

“Fetch me a drop of water in a bowl,” he said to her. “I shall be late, and then I s’ll catch it.”

He lighted the hurricane lamp, took off his coat, turned up the bicycle, and set speedily to work. Miriam came with the bowl of water and stood close to him, watching. She loved to see his hands doing things. He was slim and vigorous, with a kind of easiness even in his most hasty movements. And busy at his work he seemed to forget her. She loved him absorbedly. She wanted to run her hands down his sides. She always wanted to embrace him, so long as he did not want her.

“There!” he said, rising suddenly. “Now, could you have done it quicker?”

“No!” she laughed.

He straightened himself. His back was towards her. She put her two hands on his sides, and ran them quickly down.

“You are so FINE!” she said.

He laughed, hating her voice, but his blood roused to a wave of flame by her hands. She did not seem to realise HIM in all this. He might have been an object.

She never realised the male he was.

He lighted his bicycle-lamp, bounced the machine on the barn floor to see that the tyres were sound, and buttoned his coat.

“That’s all right!” he said.

She was trying the brakes, that she knew were broken.

“Did you have them mended?” she asked.

“No!”

“But why didn’t you?”

“The back one goes on a bit.”

“But it’s not safe.”

“I can use my toe.”

“I wish you’d had them mended,” she murmured.

“Don’t worry — come to tea tomorrow, with Edgar.”

“Shall we?”

“Do — about four. I’ll come to meet you.”

“Very well.”

She was pleased. They went across the dark yard to the gate. Looking across, he saw through the uncurtained window of the kitchen the heads of Mr. and Mrs. Leivers in the warm glow. It looked very cosy. The road, with pine trees, was quite black in front.

“Till tomorrow,” he said, jumping on his bicycle.

“You’ll take care, won’t you?” she pleaded.

“Yes.”

His voice already came out of the darkness. She stood a moment watching the light from his lamp race into obscurity along the ground. She turned very slowly indoors. Orion was wheeling up over the wood, his dog twinkling after him, half smothered. For the rest the world was full of darkness, and silent, save for the breathing of cattle in their stalls. She prayed earnestly for his safety that night. When he left her, she often lay in anxiety, wondering if he had got home safely.

He dropped down the hills on his bicycle. The roads were greasy, so he had to let it go. He felt a pleasure as the machine plunged over the second, steeper drop in the hill. “Here goes!” he said. It was risky, because of the curve in the darkness at the bottom, and because of the brewers’ waggons with drunken waggoners asleep. His bicycle seemed to fall beneath him, and he loved it. Recklessness is almost a man’s revenge on his woman. He feels he is not valued, so he will risk destroying himself to deprive her altogether.

The stars on the lake seemed to leap like grasshoppers, silver upon the blackness, as he spun past. Then there was the long climb home.

“See, mother!” he said, as he threw her the berries and leaves on to the table.

“H’m!” she said, glancing at them, then away again. She sat reading, alone, as she always did.

“Aren’t they pretty?”

“Yes.”

He knew she was cross with him. After a few minutes he said:

“Edgar and Miriam are coming to tea tomorrow.”

She did not answer.

“You don’t mind?”

Still she did not answer.

“Do you?” he asked.

“You know whether I mind or not.”

“I don’t see why you should. I have plenty of meals there.”

“You do.”

“Then why do you begrudge them tea?”

“I begrudge whom tea?”

“What are you so horrid for?”

“Oh, say no more! You’ve asked her to tea, it’s quite sufficient. She’ll come.”

He was very angry with his mother. He knew it was merely Miriam she objected to. He flung off his boots and went to bed.

Paul went to meet his friends the next afternoon. He was glad to see them coming. They arrived home at about four o’clock. Everywhere was clean and still for Sunday afternoon. Mrs. Morel sat in her black dress and black apron. She rose to meet the visitors. With Edgar she was cordial, but with Miriam cold and rather grudging. Yet Paul thought the girl looked so nice in her brown cashmere frock.

He helped his mother to get the tea ready. Miriam would have gladly proffered, but was afraid. He was rather proud of his home. There was about it now, he thought, a certain distinction. The chairs were only wooden, and the sofa was old. But the hearthrug and cushions were cosy; the pictures were prints in good taste; there was a simplicity in everything, and plenty of books. He was never ashamed in the least of his home, nor was Miriam of hers, because both were what they should be, and warm. And then he was proud of the table; the china was pretty, the cloth was fine. It did not matter that the spoons were not silver nor the knives ivory-handled; everything looked nice. Mrs. Morel had managed wonderfully while her children were growing up, so that nothing was out of place.

Miriam talked books a little. That was her unfailing topic. But Mrs. Morel was not cordial, and turned soon to Edgar.

At first Edgar and Miriam used to go into Mrs. Morel’s pew. Morel never

went to chapel, preferring the public-house. Mrs. Morel, like a little champion, sat at the head of her pew, Paul at the other end; and at first Miriam sat next to him. Then the chapel was like home. It was a pretty place, with dark pews and slim, elegant pillars, and flowers. And the same people had sat in the same places ever since he was a boy. It was wonderfully sweet and soothing to sit there for an hour and a half, next to Miriam, and near to his mother, uniting his two loves under the spell of the place of worship. Then he felt warm and happy and religious at once. And after chapel he walked home with Miriam, whilst Mrs. Morel spent the rest of the evening with her old friend, Mrs. Burns. He was keenly alive on his walks on Sunday nights with Edgar and Miriam. He never went past the pits at night, by the lighted lamp-house, the tall black headstocks and lines of trucks, past the fans spinning slowly like shadows, without the feeling of Miriam returning to him, keen and almost unbearable.

She did not very long occupy the Morels' pew. Her father took one for themselves once more. It was under the little gallery, opposite the Morels'. When Paul and his mother came in the chapel the Leivers's pew was always empty. He was anxious for fear she would not come: it was so far, and there were so many rainy Sundays. Then, often very late indeed, she came in, with her long stride, her head bowed, her face hidden under her bat of dark green velvet. Her face, as she sat opposite, was always in shadow. But it gave him a very keen feeling, as if all his soul stirred within him, to see her there. It was not the same glow, happiness, and pride, that he felt in having his mother in charge: something more wonderful, less human, and tinged to intensity by a pain, as if there were something he could not get to.

At this time he was beginning to question the orthodox creed. He was twenty-one, and she was twenty. She was beginning to dread the spring: he became so wild, and hurt her so much. All the way he went cruelly smashing her beliefs. Edgar enjoyed it. He was by nature critical and rather dispassionate. But Miriam suffered exquisite pain, as, with an intellect like a knife, the man she loved examined her religion in which she lived and moved and had her being. But he did not spare her. He was cruel. And when they went alone he was even more fierce, as if he would kill her soul. He bled her beliefs till she almost lost consciousness.

"She exults — she exults as she carries him off from me," Mrs. Morel cried in her heart when Paul had gone. "She's not like an ordinary woman, who can leave me my share in him. She wants to absorb him. She wants to draw him out and absorb him till there is nothing left of him, even for himself. He will never be a man on his own feet — she will suck him up." So the mother sat, and battled and brooded bitterly.

And he, coming home from his walks with Miriam, was wild with torture. He walked biting his lips and with clenched fists, going at a great rate. Then, brought up against a stile, he stood for some minutes, and did not move. There was a great hollow of darkness fronting him, and on the black upslopes patches of tiny lights, and in the lowest trough of the night, a flare of the pit. It was all weird and dreadful. Why was he torn so, almost bewildered, and unable to move? Why did his mother sit at home and suffer? He knew she suffered badly. But why should she? And why did he hate Miriam, and feel so cruel towards her, at the thought of his mother. If Miriam caused his mother suffering, then he hated her — and he easily hated her. Why did she make him feel as if he were uncertain of himself, insecure, an indefinite thing, as if he had not sufficient sheathing to prevent the night and the space breaking into him? How he hated her! And then, what a rush of tenderness and humility!

Suddenly he plunged on again, running home. His mother saw on him the marks of some agony, and she said nothing. But he had to make her talk to him. Then she was angry with him for going so far with Miriam.

“Why don’t you like her, mother?” he cried in despair.

“I don’t know, my boy,” she replied piteously. “I’m sure I’ve tried to like her. I’ve tried and tried, but I can’t — I can’t!”

And he felt dreary and hopeless between the two.

Spring was the worst time. He was changeable, and intense and cruel. So he decided to stay away from her. Then came the hours when he knew Miriam was expecting him. His mother watched him growing restless. He could not go on with his work. He could do nothing. It was as if something were drawing his soul out towards Willey Farm. Then he put on his hat and went, saying nothing. And his mother knew he was gone. And as soon as he was on the way he sighed with relief. And when he was with her he was cruel again.

One day in March he lay on the bank of Nethermere, with Miriam sitting beside him. It was a glistening, white-and-blue day. Big clouds, so brilliant, went by overhead, while shadows stole along on the water. The clear spaces in the sky were of clean, cold blue. Paul lay on his back in the old grass, looking up. He could not bear to look at Miriam. She seemed to want him, and he resisted. He resisted all the time. He wanted now to give her passion and tenderness, and he could not. He felt that she wanted the soul out of his body, and not him. All his strength and energy she drew into herself through some channel which united them. She did not want to meet him, so that there were two of them, man and woman together. She wanted to draw all of him into her. It urged him to an intensity like madness, which fascinated him, as drug-taking might.

He was discussing Michael Angelo. It felt to her as if she were fingering the

very quivering tissue, the very protoplasm of life, as she heard him. It gave her deepest satisfaction. And in the end it frightened her. There he lay in the white intensity of his search, and his voice gradually filled her with fear, so level it was, almost inhuman, as if in a trance.

“Don’t talk any more,” she pleaded softly, laying her hand on his forehead.

He lay quite still, almost unable to move. His body was somewhere discarded.

“Why not? Are you tired?”

“Yes, and it wears you out.”

He laughed shortly, realising.

“Yet you always make me like it,” he said.

“I don’t wish to,” she said, very low.

“Not when you’ve gone too far, and you feel you can’t bear it. But your unconscious self always asks it of me. And I suppose I want it.”

He went on, in his dead fashion:

“If only you could want ME, and not want what I can reel off for you!”

“I!” she cried bitterly — “I! Why, when would you let me take you?”

“Then it’s my fault,” he said, and, gathering himself together, he got up and began to talk trivialities. He felt insubstantial. In a vague way he hated her for it. And he knew he was as much to blame himself. This, however, did not prevent his hating her.

One evening about this time he had walked along the home road with her. They stood by the pasture leading down to the wood, unable to part. As the stars came out the clouds closed. They had glimpses of their own constellation, Orion, towards the west. His jewels glimmered for a moment, his dog ran low, struggling with difficulty through the spume of cloud.

Orion was for them chief in significance among the constellations. They had gazed at him in their strange, surcharged hours of feeling, until they seemed themselves to live in every one of his stars. This evening Paul had been moody and perverse. Orion had seemed just an ordinary constellation to him. He had fought against his glamour and fascination. Miriam was watching her lover’s mood carefully. But he said nothing that gave him away, till the moment came to part, when he stood frowning gloomily at the gathered clouds, behind which the great constellation must be striding still.

There was to be a little party at his house the next day, at which she was to attend.

“I shan’t come and meet you,” he said.

“Oh, very well; it’s not very nice out,” she replied slowly.

“It’s not that — only they don’t like me to. They say I care more for you than for them. And you understand, don’t you? You know it’s only friendship.”

Miriam was astonished and hurt for him. It had cost him an effort. She left him, wanting to spare him any further humiliation. A fine rain blew in her face as she walked along the road. She was hurt deep down; and she despised him for being blown about by any wind of authority. And in her heart of hearts, unconsciously, she felt that he was trying to get away from her. This she would never have acknowledged. She pitied him.

At this time Paul became an important factor in Jordan's warehouse. Mr. Pappleworth left to set up a business of his own, and Paul remained with Mr. Jordan as Spiral overseer. His wages were to be raised to thirty shillings at the year-end, if things went well.

Still on Friday night Miriam often came down for her French lesson. Paul did not go so frequently to Willey Farm, and she grieved at the thought of her education's coming to end; moreover, they both loved to be together, in spite of discords. So they read Balzac, and did compositions, and felt highly cultured.

Friday night was reckoning night for the miners. Morel "reckoned" — shared up the money of the stall — either in the New Inn at Bretty or in his own house, according as his fellow-butties wished. Barker had turned a non-drinker, so now the men reckoned at Morel's house.

Annie, who had been teaching away, was at home again. She was still a tomboy; and she was engaged to be married. Paul was studying design.

Morel was always in good spirits on Friday evening, unless the week's earnings were small. He bustled immediately after his dinner, prepared to get washed. It was decorum for the women to absent themselves while the men reckoned. Women were not supposed to spy into such a masculine privacy as the butties' reckoning, nor were they to know the exact amount of the week's earnings. So, whilst her father was spluttering in the scullery, Annie went out to spend an hour with a neighbour. Mrs. Morel attended to her baking.

"Shut that doo-er!" bawled Morel furiously.

Annie banged it behind her, and was gone.

"If tha oppens it again while I'm weshin' me, I'll ma'e thy jaw rattle," he threatened from the midst of his soap-suds. Paul and the mother frowned to hear him.

Presently he came running out of the scullery, with the soapy water dripping from him, dithering with cold.

"Oh, my sirs!" he said. "Wheer's my towel?"

It was hung on a chair to warm before the fire, otherwise he would have bullied and blustered. He squatted on his heels before the hot baking-fire to dry himself.

"F-ff-f!" he went, pretending to shudder with cold.

“Goodness, man, don’t be such a kid!” said Mrs. Morel. “It’s NOT cold.”

“Thee strip thysen stark nak’d to wesh thy flesh i’ that scullery,” said the miner, as he rubbed his hair; “nowt b’r a ice-’ouse!”

“And I shouldn’t make that fuss,” replied his wife.

“No, tha’d drop down stiff, as dead as a door-knob, wi’ thy nesh sides.”

“Why is a door-knob deader than anything else?” asked Paul, curious.

“Eh, I dunno; that’s what they say,” replied his father. “But there’s that much draught i’ yon scullery, as it blows through your ribs like through a five-barred gate.”

“It would have some difficulty in blowing through yours,” said Mrs. Morel.

Morel looked down ruefully at his sides.

“Me!” he exclaimed. “I’m nowt b’r a skinned rabbit. My bones fair juts out on me.”

“I should like to know where,” retorted his wife.

“Iv’rywheer! I’m nobbut a sack o’ faggots.”

Mrs. Morel laughed. He had still a wonderfully young body, muscular, without any fat. His skin was smooth and clear. It might have been the body of a man of twenty-eight, except that there were, perhaps, too many blue scars, like tattoo-marks, where the coal-dust remained under the skin, and that his chest was too hairy. But he put his hand on his side ruefully. It was his fixed belief that, because he did not get fat, he was as thin as a starved rat. Paul looked at his father’s thick, brownish hands all scarred, with broken nails, rubbing the fine smoothness of his sides, and the incongruity struck him. It seemed strange they were the same flesh.

“I suppose,” he said to his father, “you had a good figure once.”

“Eh!” exclaimed the miner, glancing round, startled and timid, like a child.

“He had,” exclaimed Mrs. Morel, “if he didn’t hurtle himself up as if he was trying to get in the smallest space he could.”

“Me!” exclaimed Morel — “me a good figure! I wor niver much more n’r a skeleton.”

“Man!” cried his wife, “don’t be such a pulamiter!”

“Strewth!” he said. “Tha’s niver knowed me but what I looked as if I wor goin’ off in a rapid decline.”

She sat and laughed.

“You’ve had a constitution like iron,” she said; “and never a man had a better start, if it was body that counted. You should have seen him as a young man,” she cried suddenly to Paul, drawing herself up to imitate her husband’s once handsome bearing.

Morel watched her shyly. He saw again the passion she had had for him. It

blazed upon her for a moment. He was shy, rather scared, and humble. Yet again he felt his old glow. And then immediately he felt the ruin he had made during these years. He wanted to bustle about, to run away from it.

“Gi’e my back a bit of a wesh,” he asked her.

His wife brought a well-soaped flannel and clapped it on his shoulders. He gave a jump.

“Eh, tha mucky little ‘ussy!” he cried. “Cowl as death!”

“You ought to have been a salamander,” she laughed, washing his back. It was very rarely she would do anything so personal for him. The children did those things.

“The next world won’t be half hot enough for you,” she added.

“No,” he said; “tha’lt see as it’s draughty for me.”

But she had finished. She wiped him in a desultory fashion, and went upstairs, returning immediately with his shifting-trousers. When he was dried he struggled into his shirt. Then, ruddy and shiny, with hair on end, and his flannelette shirt hanging over his pit-trousers, he stood warming the garments he was going to put on. He turned them, he pulled them inside out, he scorched them.

“Goodness, man!” cried Mrs. Morel, “get dressed!”

“Should thee like to clap thysen into britches as cowl as a tub o’ water?” he said.

At last he took off his pit-trousers and donned decent black. He did all this on the hearthrug, as he would have done if Annie and her familiar friends had been present.

Mrs. Morel turned the bread in the oven. Then from the red earthenware panchion of dough that stood in a corner she took another handful of paste, worked it to the proper shape, and dropped it into a tin. As she was doing so Barker knocked and entered. He was a quiet, compact little man, who looked as if he would go through a stone wall. His black hair was cropped short, his head was bony. Like most miners, he was pale, but healthy and taut.

“Evenin’, missis,” he nodded to Mrs. Morel, and he seated himself with a sigh.

“Good-evening,” she replied cordially.

“Tha’s made thy heels crack,” said Morel.

“I dunno as I have,” said Barker.

He sat, as the men always did in Morel’s kitchen, effacing himself rather.

“How’s missis?” she asked of him.

He had told her some time back:

“We’re expectin’ us third just now, you see.”

“Well,” he answered, rubbing his head, “she keeps pretty middlin’, I think.”

“Let’s see — when?” asked Mrs. Morel.

“Well, I shouldn’t be surprised any time now.”

“Ah! And she’s kept fairly?”

“Yes, tidy.”

“That’s a blessing, for she’s none too strong.”

“No. An’ I’ve done another silly trick.”

“What’s that?”

Mrs. Morel knew Barker wouldn’t do anything very silly.

“I’m come be-out th’ market-bag.”

“You can have mine.”

“Nay, you’ll be wantin’ that yourself.”

“I shan’t. I take a string bag always.”

She saw the determined little collier buying in the week’s groceries and meat on the Friday nights, and she admired him. “Barker’s little, but he’s ten times the man you are,” she said to her husband.

Just then Wesson entered. He was thin, rather frail-looking, with a boyish ingenuousness and a slightly foolish smile, despite his seven children. But his wife was a passionate woman.

“I see you’ve kested me,” he said, smiling rather vapidly.

“Yes,” replied Barker.

The newcomer took off his cap and his big woollen muffler. His nose was pointed and red.

“I’m afraid you’re cold, Mr. Wesson,” said Mrs. Morel.

“It’s a bit nippy,” he replied.

“Then come to the fire.”

“Nay, I s’ll do where I am.”

Both colliers sat away back. They could not be induced to come on to the hearth. The hearth is sacred to the family.

“Go thy ways i’ th’ armchair,” cried Morel cheerily.

“Nay, thank yer; I’m very nicely here.”

“Yes, come, of course,” insisted Mrs. Morel.

He rose and went awkwardly. He sat in Morel’s armchair awkwardly. It was too great a familiarity. But the fire made him blissfully happy.

“And how’s that chest of yours?” demanded Mrs. Morel.

He smiled again, with his blue eyes rather sunny.

“Oh, it’s very middlin’,” he said.

“Wi’ a rattle in it like a kettle-drum,” said Barker shortly.

“T-t-t-t!” went Mrs. Morel rapidly with her tongue. “Did you have that flannel singlet made?”

“Not yet,” he smiled.

“Then, why didn’t you?” she cried.

“It’ll come,” he smiled.

“Ah, an’ Doomsday!” exclaimed Barker.

Barker and Morel were both impatient of Wesson. But, then, they were both as hard as nails, physically.

When Morel was nearly ready he pushed the bag of money to Paul.

“Count it, boy,” he asked humbly.

Paul impatiently turned from his books and pencil, tipped the bag upside down on the table. There was a five-pound bag of silver, sovereigns and loose money. He counted quickly, referred to the checks — the written papers giving amount of coal — put the money in order. Then Barker glanced at the checks.

Mrs. Morel went upstairs, and the three men came to table. Morel, as master of the house, sat in his armchair, with his back to the hot fire. The two butties had cooler seats. None of them counted the money.

“What did we say Simpson’s was?” asked Morel; and the butties cavilled for a minute over the dayman’s earnings. Then the amount was put aside.

“An’ Bill Naylor’s?”

This money also was taken from the pack.

Then, because Wesson lived in one of the company’s houses, and his rent had been deducted, Morel and Barker took four-and-six each. And because Morel’s coals had come, and the leading was stopped, Barker and Wesson took four shillings each. Then it was plain sailing. Morel gave each of them a sovereign till there were no more sovereigns; each half a crown till there were no more half-crowns; each a shilling till there were no more shillings. If there was anything at the end that wouldn’t split, Morel took it and stood drinks.

Then the three men rose and went. Morel scuttled out of the house before his wife came down. She heard the door close, and descended. She looked hastily at the bread in the oven. Then, glancing on the table, she saw her money lying. Paul had been working all the time. But now he felt his mother counting the week’s money, and her wrath rising,

“T-t-t-t-t!” went her tongue.

He frowned. He could not work when she was cross. She counted again.

“A measly twenty-five shillings!” she exclaimed. “How much was the cheque?”

“Ten pounds eleven,” said Paul irritably. He dreaded what was coming.

“And he gives me a scratlin’ twenty-five, an’ his club this week! But I know him. He thinks because YOU’RE earning he needn’t keep the house any longer. No, all he has to do with his money is to guttle it. But I’ll show him!”

“Oh, mother, don’t!” cried Paul.

“Don’t what, I should like to know?” she exclaimed.

“Don’t carry on again. I can’t work.”

She went very quiet.

“Yes, it’s all very well,” she said; “but how do you think I’m going to manage?”

“Well, it won’t make it any better to whittle about it.”

“I should like to know what you’d do if you had it to put up with.”

“It won’t be long. You can have my money. Let him go to hell.”

He went back to his work, and she tied her bonnet-strings grimly. When she was fretted he could not bear it. But now he began to insist on her recognizing him.

“The two loaves at the top,” she said, “will be done in twenty minutes. Don’t forget them.”

“All right,” he answered; and she went to market.

He remained alone working. But his usual intense concentration became unsettled. He listened for the yard-gate. At a quarter-past seven came a low knock, and Miriam entered.

“All alone?” she said.

“Yes.”

As if at home, she took off her tam-o’-shanter and her long coat, hanging them up. It gave him a thrill. This might be their own house, his and hers. Then she came back and peered over his work.

“What is it?” she asked.

“Still design, for decorating stuffs, and for embroidery.”

She bent short-sightedly over the drawings.

It irritated him that she peered so into everything that was his, searching him out. He went into the parlour and returned with a bundle of brownish linen. Carefully unfolding it, he spread it on the floor. It proved to be a curtain or portiere, beautifully stencilled with a design on roses.

“Ah, how beautiful!” she cried.

The spread cloth, with its wonderful reddish roses and dark green stems, all so simple, and somehow so wicked-looking, lay at her feet. She went on her knees before it, her dark curls dropping. He saw her crouched voluptuously before his work, and his heart beat quickly. Suddenly she looked up at him.

“Why does it seem cruel?” she asked.

“What?”

“There seems a feeling of cruelty about it,” she said.

“It’s jolly good, whether or not,” he replied, folding up his work with a lover’s

hands.

She rose slowly, pondering.

“And what will you do with it?” she asked.

“Send it to Liberty’s. I did it for my mother, but I think she’d rather have the money.”

“Yes,” said Miriam. He had spoken with a touch of bitterness, and Miriam sympathised. Money would have been nothing to HER.

He took the cloth back into the parlour. When he returned he threw to Miriam a smaller piece. It was a cushion-cover with the same design.

“I did that for you,” he said.

She fingered the work with trembling hands, and did not speak. He became embarrassed.

“By Jove, the bread!” he cried.

He took the top loaves out, tapped them vigorously. They were done. He put them on the hearth to cool. Then he went to the scullery, wetted his hands, scooped the last white dough out of the punchion, and dropped it in a baking-tin. Miriam was still bent over her painted cloth. He stood rubbing the bits of dough from his hands.

“You do like it?” he asked.

She looked up at him, with her dark eyes one flame of love. He laughed uncomfortably. Then he began to talk about the design. There was for him the most intense pleasure in talking about his work to Miriam. All his passion, all his wild blood, went into this intercourse with her, when he talked and conceived his work. She brought forth to him his imaginations. She did not understand, any more than a woman understands when she conceives a child in her womb. But this was life for her and for him.

While they were talking, a young woman of about twenty-two, small and pale, hollow-eyed, yet with a relentless look about her, entered the room. She was a friend at the Morel’s.

“Take your things off,” said Paul.

“No, I’m not stopping.”

She sat down in the armchair opposite Paul and Miriam, who were on the sofa. Miriam moved a little farther from him. The room was hot, with a scent of new bread. Brown, crisp loaves stood on the hearth.

“I shouldn’t have expected to see you here to-night, Miriam Leivers,” said Beatrice wickedly.

“Why not?” murmured Miriam huskily.

“Why, let’s look at your shoes.”

Miriam remained uncomfortably still.

“If tha doesna tha durs’na,” laughed Beatrice.

Miriam put her feet from under her dress. Her boots had that queer, irresolute, rather pathetic look about them, which showed how self-conscious and self-mistrustful she was. And they were covered with mud.

“Glory! You’re a positive muck-heap,” exclaimed Beatrice. “Who cleans your boots?”

“I clean them myself.”

“Then you wanted a job,” said Beatrice. “It would ha’ taken a lot of men to ha’ brought me down here to-night. But love laughs at sludge, doesn’t it, ‘Postle my duck?’”

“Inter alia,” he said.

“Oh, Lord! are you going to spout foreign languages? What does it mean, Miriam?”

There was a fine sarcasm in the last question, but Miriam did not see it.

“‘Among other things,’ I believe,” she said humbly.

Beatrice put her tongue between her teeth and laughed wickedly.

“‘Among other things,’ ‘Postle?’” she repeated. “Do you mean love laughs at mothers, and fathers, and sisters, and brothers, and men friends, and lady friends, and even at the b’loved himself?”

She affected a great innocence.

“In fact, it’s one big smile,” he replied.

“Up its sleeve, ‘Postle Morel — you believe me,” she said; and she went off into another burst of wicked, silent laughter.

Miriam sat silent, withdrawn into herself. Every one of Paul’s friends delighted in taking sides against her, and he left her in the lurch — seemed almost to have a sort of revenge upon her then.

“Are you still at school?” asked Miriam of Beatrice.

“Yes.”

“You’ve not had your notice, then?”

“I expect it at Easter.”

“Isn’t it an awful shame, to turn you off merely because you didn’t pass the exam?”

“I don’t know,” said Beatrice coldly.

“Agatha says you’re as good as any teacher anywhere. It seems to me ridiculous. I wonder why you didn’t pass.”

“Short of brains, eh, ‘Postle?’” said Beatrice briefly.

“Only brains to bite with,” replied Paul, laughing.

“Nuisance!” she cried; and, springing from her seat, she rushed and boxed his ears. She had beautiful small hands. He held her wrists while she wrestled with

him. At last she broke free, and seized two handfuls of his thick, dark brown hair, which she shook.

“Beat!” he said, as he pulled his hair straight with his fingers. “I hate you!”

She laughed with glee.

“Mind!” she said. “I want to sit next to you.”

“I’d as lief be neighbours with a vixen,” he said, nevertheless making place for her between him and Miriam.

“Did it ruffle his pretty hair, then!” she cried; and, with her hair-comb, she combed him straight. “And his nice little moustache!” she exclaimed. She tilted his head back and combed his young moustache. “It’s a wicked moustache, ‘Postle,” she said. “It’s a red for danger. Have you got any of those cigarettes?”

He pulled his cigarette-case from his pocket. Beatrice looked inside it.

“And fancy me having Connie’s last cig.,” said Beatrice, putting the thing between her teeth. He held a lit match to her, and she puffed daintily.

“Thanks so much, darling,” she said mockingly.

It gave her a wicked delight.

“Don’t you think he does it nicely, Miriam?” she asked.

“Oh, very!” said Miriam.

He took a cigarette for himself.

“Light, old boy?” said Beatrice, tilting her cigarette at him.

He bent forward to her to light his cigarette at hers. She was winking at him as he did so. Miriam saw his eyes trembling with mischief, and his full, almost sensual, mouth quivering. He was not himself, and she could not bear it. As he was now, she had no connection with him; she might as well not have existed. She saw the cigarette dancing on his full red lips. She hated his thick hair for being tumbled loose on his forehead.

“Sweet boy!” said Beatrice, tipping up his chin and giving him a little kiss on the cheek.

“I s’ll kiss thee back, Beat,” he said.

“Tha wanna!” she giggled, jumping up and going away. “Isn’t he shameless, Miriam?”

“Quite,” said Miriam. “By the way, aren’t you forgetting the bread?”

“By Jove!” he cried, flinging open the oven door.

Out puffed the bluish smoke and a smell of burned bread.

“Oh, golly!” cried Beatrice, coming to his side. He crouched before the oven, she peered over his shoulder. “This is what comes of the oblivion of love, my boy.”

Paul was ruefully removing the loaves. One was burnt black on the hot side; another was hard as a brick.

“Poor mater!” said Paul.

“You want to grate it,” said Beatrice. “Fetch me the nutmeg-grater.”

She arranged the bread in the oven. He brought the grater, and she grated the bread on to a newspaper on the table. He set the doors open to blow away the smell of burned bread. Beatrice grated away, puffing her cigarette, knocking the charcoal off the poor loaf.

“My word, Miriam! you’re in for it this time,” said Beatrice.

“I!” exclaimed Miriam in amazement.

“You’d better be gone when his mother comes in. I know why King Alfred burned the cakes. Now I see it! ‘Postle would fix up a tale about his work making him forget, if he thought it would wash. If that old woman had come in a bit sooner, she’d have boxed the brazen thing’s ears who made the oblivion, instead of poor Alfred’s.”

She giggled as she scraped the loaf. Even Miriam laughed in spite of herself. Paul mended the fire ruefully.

The garden gate was heard to bang.

“Quick!” cried Beatrice, giving Paul the scraped loaf. “Wrap it up in a damp towel.”

Paul disappeared into the scullery. Beatrice hastily blew her scrapings into the fire, and sat down innocently. Annie came bursting in. She was an abrupt, quite smart young woman. She blinked in the strong light.

“Smell of burning!” she exclaimed.

“It’s the cigarettes,” replied Beatrice demurely.

“Where’s Paul?”

Leonard had followed Annie. He had a long comic face and blue eyes, very sad.

“I suppose he’s left you to settle it between you,” he said. He nodded sympathetically to Miriam, and became gently sarcastic to Beatrice.

“No,” said Beatrice, “he’s gone off with number nine.”

“I just met number five inquiring for him,” said Leonard.

“Yes — we’re going to share him up like Solomon’s baby,” said Beatrice.

Annie laughed.

“Oh, ay,” said Leonard. “And which bit should you have?”

“I don’t know,” said Beatrice. “I’ll let all the others pick first.”

“An’ you’d have the leavings, like?” said Leonard, twisting up a comic face.

Annie was looking in the oven. Miriam sat ignored. Paul entered.

“This bread’s a fine sight, our Paul,” said Annie.

“Then you should stop an’ look after it,” said Paul.

“You mean YOU should do what you’re reckoning to do,” replied Annie.

“He should, shouldn’t he!” cried Beatrice.

“I s’d think he’d got plenty on hand,” said Leonard.

“You had a nasty walk, didn’t you, Miriam?” said Annie.

“Yes — but I’d been in all week — ”

“And you wanted a bit of a change, like,” insinuated Leonard kindly.

“Well, you can’t be stuck in the house for ever,” Annie agreed. She was quite amiable. Beatrice pulled on her coat, and went out with Leonard and Annie. She would meet her own boy.

“Don’t forget that bread, our Paul,” cried Annie. “Good-night, Miriam. I don’t think it will rain.”

When they had all gone, Paul fetched the swathed loaf, unwrapped it, and surveyed it sadly.

“It’s a mess!” he said.

“But,” answered Miriam impatiently, “what is it, after all — twopence, ha’penny.”

“Yes, but — it’s the mater’s precious baking, and she’ll take it to heart. However, it’s no good bothering.”

He took the loaf back into the scullery. There was a little distance between him and Miriam. He stood balanced opposite her for some moments considering, thinking of his behaviour with Beatrice. He felt guilty inside himself, and yet glad. For some inscrutable reason it served Miriam right. He was not going to repent. She wondered what he was thinking of as he stood suspended. His thick hair was tumbled over his forehead. Why might she not push it back for him, and remove the marks of Beatrice’s comb? Why might she not press his body with her two hands. It looked so firm, and every whit living. And he would let other girls, why not her?

Suddenly he started into life. It made her quiver almost with terror as he quickly pushed the hair off his forehead and came towards her.

“Half-past eight!” he said. “We’d better buck up. Where’s your French?”

Miriam shyly and rather bitterly produced her exercise-book. Every week she wrote for him a sort of diary of her inner life, in her own French. He had found this was the only way to get her to do compositions. And her diary was mostly a love-letter. He would read it now; she felt as if her soul’s history were going to be desecrated by him in his present mood. He sat beside her. She watched his hand, firm and warm, rigorously scoring her work. He was reading only the French, ignoring her soul that was there. But gradually his hand forgot its work. He read in silence, motionless. She quivered.

“*“Ce matin les oiseaux m’ont eveille,”*“ he read. “*“Il faisait encore un crepuscule. Mais la petite fenetre de ma chambre etait bleme, et puis, jaune, et*

tous les oiseaux du bois eclaterent dans un chanson vif et resonnant. Toute l'aube tressaillit. J'avais reve de vous. Est-ce que vous voyez aussi l'aube? Les oiseaux m'eveillent presque tous les matins, et toujours il y a quelque chose de terreur dans le cri des grives. Il est si clair — ’“

Miriam sat tremulous, half ashamed. He remained quite still, trying to understand. He only knew she loved him. He was afraid of her love for him. It was too good for him, and he was inadequate. His own love was at fault, not hers. Ashamed, he corrected her work, humbly writing above her words.

“Look,” he said quietly, “the past participle conjugated with *avoir* agrees with the direct object when it precedes.”

She bent forward, trying to see and to understand. Her free, fine curls tickled his face. He started as if they had been red hot, shuddering. He saw her peering forward at the page, her red lips parted piteously, the black hair springing in fine strands across her tawny, ruddy cheek. She was coloured like a pomegranate for richness. His breath came short as he watched her. Suddenly she looked up at him. Her dark eyes were naked with their love, afraid, and yearning. His eyes, too, were dark, and they hurt her. They seemed to master her. She lost all her self-control, was exposed in fear. And he knew, before he could kiss her, he must drive something out of himself. And a touch of hate for her crept back again into his heart. He returned to her exercise.

Suddenly he flung down the pencil, and was at the oven in a leap, turning the bread. For Miriam he was too quick. She started violently, and it hurt her with real pain. Even the way he crouched before the oven hurt her. There seemed to be something cruel in it, something cruel in the swift way he pitched the bread out of the tins, caught it up again. If only he had been gentle in his movements she would have felt so rich and warm. As it was, she was hurt.

He returned and finished the exercise.

“You’ve done well this week,” he said.

She saw he was flattered by her diary. It did not repay her entirely.

“You really do blossom out sometimes,” he said. “You ought to write poetry.”

She lifted her head with joy, then she shook it mistrustfully.

“I don’t trust myself,” she said.

“You should try!”

Again she shook her head.

“Shall we read, or is it too late?” he asked.

“It is late — but we can read just a little,” she pleaded.

She was really getting now the food for her life during the next week. He made her copy Baudelaire’s “Le Balcon”. Then he read it for her. His voice was soft and caressing, but growing almost brutal. He had a way of lifting his lips

and showing his teeth, passionately and bitterly, when he was much moved. This he did now. It made Miriam feel as if he were trampling on her. She dared not look at him, but sat with her head bowed. She could not understand why he got into such a tumult and fury. It made her wretched. She did not like Baudelaire, on the whole — nor Verlaine.

“Behold her singing in the field
Yon solitary highland lass.”

That nourished her heart. So did “Fair Ines”. And —

“It was a beauteous evening, calm and pure,
And breathing holy quiet like a nun.”

These were like herself. And there was he, saying in his throat bitterly:

“*Tu te rappelleras la beaute des caresses.*”

The poem was finished; he took the bread out of the oven, arranging the burnt loaves at the bottom of the panchion, the good ones at the top. The desiccated loaf remained swathed up in the scullery.

“Mater needn’t know till morning,” he said. “It won’t upset her so much then as at night.”

Miriam looked in the bookcase, saw what postcards and letters he had received, saw what books were there. She took one that had interested him. Then he turned down the gas and they set off. He did not trouble to lock the door.

He was not home again until a quarter to eleven. His mother was seated in the rocking-chair. Annie, with a rope of hair hanging down her back, remained sitting on a low stool before the fire, her elbows on her knees, gloomily. On the table stood the offending loaf unswathed. Paul entered rather breathless. No one spoke. His mother was reading the little local newspaper. He took off his coat, and went to sit down on the sofa. His mother moved curtly aside to let him pass. No one spoke. He was very uncomfortable. For some minutes he sat pretending to read a piece of paper he found on the table. Then —

“I forgot that bread, mother,” he said.

There was no answer from either woman.

“Well,” he said, “it’s only twopence ha’penny. I can pay you for that.”

Being angry, he put three pennies on the table and slid them towards his mother. She turned away her head. Her mouth was shut tightly.

“Yes,” said Annie, “you don’t know how badly my mother is!”

The girl sat staring glumly into the fire.

“Why is she badly?” asked Paul, in his overbearing way.

“Well!” said Annie. “She could scarcely get home.”

He looked closely at his mother. She looked ill.

“WHY could you scarcely get home?” he asked her, still sharply. She would

not answer.

“I found her as white as a sheet sitting here,” said Annie, with a suggestion of tears in her voice.

“Well, WHY?” insisted Paul. His brows were knitting, his eyes dilating passionately.

“It was enough to upset anybody,” said Mrs. Morel, “hugging those parcels — meat, and green-groceries, and a pair of curtains — ”

“Well, why DID you hug them; you needn’t have done.”

“Then who would?”

“Let Annie fetch the meat.”

“Yes, and I WOULD fetch the meat, but how was I to know. You were off with Miriam, instead of being in when my mother came.”

“And what was the matter with you?” asked Paul of his mother.

“I suppose it’s my heart,” she replied. Certainly she looked bluish round the mouth.

“And have you felt it before?”

“Yes — often enough.”

“Then why haven’t you told me? — and why haven’t you seen a doctor?”

Mrs. Morel shifted in her chair, angry with him for his hectoring.

“You’d never notice anything,” said Annie. “You’re too eager to be off with Miriam.”

“Oh, am I — and any worse than you with Leonard?”

“I was in at a quarter to ten.”

There was silence in the room for a time.

“I should have thought,” said Mrs. Morel bitterly, “that she wouldn’t have occupied you so entirely as to burn a whole ovenful of bread.”

“Beatrice was here as well as she.”

“Very likely. But we know why the bread is spoilt.”

“Why?” he flashed.

“Because you were engrossed with Miriam,” replied Mrs. Morel hotly.

“Oh, very well — then it was NOT!” he replied angrily.

He was distressed and wretched. Seizing a paper, he began to read. Annie, her blouse unfastened, her long ropes of hair twisted into a plait, went up to bed, bidding him a very curt good-night.

Paul sat pretending to read. He knew his mother wanted to upbraid him. He also wanted to know what had made her ill, for he was troubled. So, instead of running away to bed, as he would have liked to do, he sat and waited. There was a tense silence. The clock ticked loudly.

“You’d better go to bed before your father comes in,” said the mother harshly.

“And if you’re going to have anything to eat, you’d better get it.”

“I don’t want anything.”

It was his mother’s custom to bring him some trifle for supper on Friday night, the night of luxury for the colliers. He was too angry to go and find it in the pantry this night. This insulted her.

“If I WANTED you to go to Selby on Friday night, I can imagine the scene,” said Mrs. Morel. “But you’re never too tired to go if SHE will come for you. Nay, you neither want to eat nor drink then.”

“I can’t let her go alone.”

“Can’t you? And why does she come?”

“Not because I ask her.”

“She doesn’t come without you want her — ”

“Well, what if I DO want her — ” he replied.

“Why, nothing, if it was sensible or reasonable. But to go trapseing up there miles and miles in the mud, coming home at midnight, and got to go to Nottingham in the morning — ”

“If I hadn’t, you’d be just the same.”

“Yes, I should, because there’s no sense in it. Is she so fascinating that you must follow her all that way?” Mrs. Morel was bitterly sarcastic. She sat still, with averted face, stroking with a rhythmic, jerked movement, the black sateen of her apron. It was a movement that hurt Paul to see.

“I do like her,” he said, “but — ”

“LIKE her!” said Mrs. Morel, in the same biting tones. “It seems to me you like nothing and nobody else. There’s neither Annie, nor me, nor anyone now for you.”

“What nonsense, mother — you know I don’t love her — I — I tell you I DON’T love her — she doesn’t even walk with my arm, because I don’t want her to.”

“Then why do you fly to her so often?”

“I DO like to talk to her — I never said I didn’t. But I DON’T love her.”

“Is there nobody else to talk to?”

“Not about the things we talk of. There’s a lot of things that you’re not interested in, that — ”

“What things?”

Mrs. Morel was so intense that Paul began to pant.

“Why — painting — and books. YOU don’t care about Herbert Spencer.”

“No,” was the sad reply. “And YOU won’t at my age.”

“Well, but I do now — and Miriam does — ”

“And how do you know,” Mrs. Morel flashed defiantly, “that I shouldn’t. Do

you ever try me!”

“But you don’t, mother, you know you don’t care whether a picture’s decorative or not; you don’t care what MANNER it is in.”

“How do you know I don’t care? Do you ever try me? Do you ever talk to me about these things, to try?”

“But it’s not that that matters to you, mother, you know t’s not.”

“What is it, then — what is it, then, that matters to me?” she flashed. He knitted his brows with pain.

“You’re old, mother, and we’re young.”

He only meant that the interests of HER age were not the interests of his. But he realised the moment he had spoken that he had said the wrong thing.

“Yes, I know it well — I am old. And therefore I may stand aside; I have nothing more to do with you. You only want me to wait on you — the rest is for Miriam.”

He could not bear it. Instinctively he realised that he was life to her. And, after all, she was the chief thing to him, the only supreme thing.

“You know it isn’t, mother, you know it isn’t!”

She was moved to pity by his cry.

“It looks a great deal like it,” she said, half putting aside her despair.

“No, mother — I really DON’T love her. I talk to her, but I want to come home to you.”

He had taken off his collar and tie, and rose, bare-throated, to go to bed. As he stooped to kiss his mother, she threw her arms round his neck, hid her face on his shoulder, and cried, in a whimpering voice, so unlike her own that he writhed in agony:

“I can’t bear it. I could let another woman — but not her. She’d leave me no room, not a bit of room — ”

And immediately he hated Miriam bitterly.

“And I’ve never — you know, Paul — I’ve never had a husband — not really — ”

He stroked his mother’s hair, and his mouth was on her throat.

“And she exults so in taking you from me — she’s not like ordinary girls.”

“Well, I don’t love her, mother,” he murmured, bowing his head and hiding his eyes on her shoulder in misery. His mother kissed him a long, fervent kiss.

“My boy!” she said, in a voice trembling with passionate love.

Without knowing, he gently stroked her face.

“There,” said his mother, “now go to bed. You’ll be so tired in the morning.” As she was speaking she heard her husband coming. “There’s your father — now go.” Suddenly she looked at him almost as if in fear. “Perhaps I’m selfish.

If you want her, take her, my boy.”

His mother looked so strange, Paul kissed her, trembling.

“Ha — mother!” he said softly.

Morel came in, walking unevenly. His hat was over one corner of his eye. He balanced in the doorway.

“At your mischief again?” he said venomously.

Mrs. Morel’s emotion turned into sudden hate of the drunkard who had come in thus upon her.

“At any rate, it is sober,” she said.

“H’m — h’m! h’m — h’m!” he sneered. He went into the passage, hung up his hat and coat. Then they heard him go down three steps to the pantry. He returned with a piece of pork-pie in his fist. It was what Mrs. Morel had bought for her son.

“Nor was that bought for you. If you can give me no more than twenty-five shillings, I’m sure I’m not going to buy you pork-pie to stuff, after you’ve swilled a bellyful of beer.”

“Wha-at — wha-at!” snarled Morel, toppling in his balance. “Wha-at — not for me?” He looked at the piece of meat and crust, and suddenly, in a vicious spurt of temper, flung it into the fire.

Paul started to his feet.

“Waste your own stuff!” he cried.

“What — what!” suddenly shouted Morel, jumping up and clenching his fist. “I’ll show yer, yer young jockey!”

“All right!” said Paul viciously, putting his head on one side. “Show me!”

He would at that moment dearly have loved to have a smack at something. Morel was half crouching, fists up, ready to spring. The young man stood, smiling with his lips.

“Ussha!” hissed the father, swiping round with a great stroke just past his son’s face. He dared not, even though so close, really touch the young man, but swerved an inch away.

“Right!” said Paul, his eyes upon the side of his father’s mouth, where in another instant his fist would have hit. He ached for that stroke. But he heard a faint moan from behind. His mother was deadly pale and dark at the mouth. Morel was dancing up to deliver another blow.

“Father!” said Paul, so that the word rang.

Morel started, and stood at attention.

“Mother!” moaned the boy. “Mother!”

She began to struggle with herself. Her open eyes watched him, although she could not move. Gradually she was coming to herself. He laid her down on the

sofa, and ran upstairs for a little whisky, which at last she could sip. The tears were hopping down his face. As he kneeled in front of her he did not cry, but the tears ran down his face quickly. Morel, on the opposite side of the room, sat with his elbows on his knees glaring across.

“What’s a-matter with ‘er?” he asked.

“Faint!” replied Paul.

“H’m!”

The elderly man began to unlace his boots. He stumbled off to bed. His last fight was fought in that home.

Paul kneeled there, stroking his mother’s hand.

“Don’t be poorly, mother — don’t be poorly!” he said time after time.

“It’s nothing, my boy,” she murmured.

At last he rose, fetched in a large piece of coal, and raked the fire. Then he cleared the room, put everything straight, laid the things for breakfast, and brought his mother’s candle.

“Can you go to bed, mother?”

“Yes, I’ll come.”

“Sleep with Annie, mother, not with him.”

“No. I’ll sleep in my own bed.”

“Don’t sleep with him, mother.”

“I’ll sleep in my own bed.”

She rose, and he turned out the gas, then followed her closely upstairs, carrying her candle. On the landing he kissed her close.

“Good-night, mother.”

“Good-night!” she said.

He pressed his face upon the pillow in a fury of misery. And yet, somewhere in his soul, he was at peace because he still loved his mother best. It was the bitter peace of resignation.

The efforts of his father to conciliate him next day were a great humiliation to him.

Everybody tried to forget the scene.

CHAPTER IX

DEFEAT OF MIRIAM

PAUL was dissatisfied with himself and with everything. The deepest of his love belonged to his mother. When he felt he had hurt her, or wounded his love for her, he could not bear it. Now it was spring, and there was battle between him and Miriam. This year he had a good deal against her. She was vaguely aware of it. The old feeling that she was to be a sacrifice to this love, which she had had when she prayed, was mingled in all her emotions. She did not at the bottom believe she ever would have him. She did not believe in herself primarily: doubted whether she could ever be what he would demand of her. Certainly she never saw herself living happily through a lifetime with him. She saw tragedy, sorrow, and sacrifice ahead. And in sacrifice she was proud, in renunciation she was strong, for she did not trust herself to support everyday life. She was prepared for the big things and the deep things, like tragedy. It was the sufficiency of the small day-life she could not trust.

The Easter holidays began happily. Paul was his own frank self. Yet she felt it would go wrong. On the Sunday afternoon she stood at her bedroom window, looking across at the oak-trees of the wood, in whose branches a twilight was tangled, below the bright sky of the afternoon. Grey-green rosettes of honeysuckle leaves hung before the window, some already, she fancied, showing bud. It was spring, which she loved and dreaded.

Hearing the clack of the gate she stood in suspense. It was a bright grey day. Paul came into the yard with his bicycle, which glittered as he walked. Usually he rang his bell and laughed towards the house. To-day he walked with shut lips and cold, cruel bearing, that had something of a slouch and a sneer in it. She knew him well by now, and could tell from that keen-looking, aloof young body of his what was happening inside him. There was a cold correctness in the way he put his bicycle in its place, that made her heart sink.

She came downstairs nervously. She was wearing a new net blouse that she thought became her. It had a high collar with a tiny ruff, reminding her of Mary, Queen of Scots, and making her, she thought, look wonderfully a woman, and dignified. At twenty she was full-breasted and luxuriously formed. Her face was

still like a soft rich mask, unchangeable. But her eyes, once lifted, were wonderful. She was afraid of him. He would notice her new blouse.

He, being in a hard, ironical mood, was entertaining the family to a description of a service given in the Primitive Methodist Chapel, conducted by one of the well-known preachers of the sect. He sat at the head of the table, his mobile face, with the eyes that could be so beautiful, shining with tenderness or dancing with laughter, now taking on one expression and then another, in imitation of various people he was mocking. His mockery always hurt her; it was too near the reality. He was too clever and cruel. She felt that when his eyes were like this, hard with mocking hate, he would spare neither himself nor anybody else. But Mrs. Leivers was wiping her eyes with laughter, and Mr. Leivers, just awake from his Sunday nap, was rubbing his head in amusement. The three brothers sat with ruffled, sleepy appearance in their shirt-sleeves, giving a guffaw from time to time. The whole family loved a "take-off" more than anything.

He took no notice of Miriam. Later, she saw him remark her new blouse, saw that the artist approved, but it won from him not a spark of warmth. She was nervous, could hardly reach the teacups from the shelves.

When the men went out to milk, she ventured to address him personally.

"You were late," she said.

"Was I?" he answered.

There was silence for a while.

"Was it rough riding?" she asked.

"I didn't notice it." She continued quickly to lay the table. When she had finished —

"Tea won't be for a few minutes. Will you come and look at the daffodils?" she said.

He rose without answering. They went out into the back garden under the budding damson-trees. The hills and the sky were clean and cold. Everything looked washed, rather hard. Miriam glanced at Paul. He was pale and impassive. It seemed cruel to her that his eyes and brows, which she loved, could look so hurting.

"Has the wind made you tired?" she asked. She detected an underneath feeling of weariness about him.

"No, I think not," he answered.

"It must be rough on the road — the wood moans so."

"You can see by the clouds it's a south-west wind; that helps me here."

"You see, I don't cycle, so I don't understand," she murmured.

"Is there need to cycle to know that!" he said.

She thought his sarcasms were unnecessary. They went forward in silence.

Round the wild, tussocky lawn at the back of the house was a thorn hedge, under which daffodils were craning forward from among their sheaves of grey-green blades. The cheeks of the flowers were greenish with cold. But still some had burst, and their gold ruffled and glowed. Miriam went on her knees before one cluster, took a wild-looking daffodil between her hands, turned up its face of gold to her, and bowed down, caressing it with her mouth and cheeks and brow. He stood aside, with his hands in his pockets, watching her. One after another she turned up to him the faces of the yellow, bursten flowers appealingly, fondling them lavishly all the while.

“Aren’t they magnificent?” she murmured.

“Magnificent! It’s a bit thick — they’re pretty!”

She bowed again to her flowers at his censure of her praise. He watched her crouching, sipping the flowers with fervid kisses.

“Why must you always be fondling things?” he said irritably.

“But I love to touch them,” she replied, hurt.

“Can you never like things without clutching them as if you wanted to pull the heart out of them? Why don’t you have a bit more restraint, or reserve, or something?”

She looked up at him full of pain, then continued slowly to stroke her lips against a ruffled flower. Their scent, as she smelled it, was so much kinder than he; it almost made her cry.

“You wheedle the soul out of things,” he said. “I would never wheedle — at any rate, I’d go straight.”

He scarcely knew what he was saying. These things came from him mechanically. She looked at him. His body seemed one weapon, firm and hard against her.

“You’re always begging things to love you,” he said, “as if you were a beggar for love. Even the flowers, you have to fawn on them — ”

Rhythmically, Miriam was swaying and stroking the flower with her mouth, inhaling the scent which ever after made her shudder as it came to her nostrils.

“You don’t want to love — your eternal and abnormal craving is to be loved. You aren’t positive, you’re negative. You absorb, absorb, as if you must fill yourself up with love, because you’ve got a shortage somewhere.”

She was stunned by his cruelty, and did not hear. He had not the faintest notion of what he was saying. It was as if his fretted, tortured soul, run hot by thwarted passion, jetted off these sayings like sparks from electricity. She did not grasp anything he said. She only sat crouched beneath his cruelty and his hatred of her. She never realised in a flash. Over everything she brooded and brooded.

After tea he stayed with Edgar and the brothers, taking no notice of Miriam.

She, extremely unhappy on this looked-for holiday, waited for him. And at last he yielded and came to her. She was determined to track this mood of his to its origin. She counted it not much more than a mood.

“Shall we go through the wood a little way?” she asked him, knowing he never refused a direct request.

They went down to the warren. On the middle path they passed a trap, a narrow horseshoe hedge of small fir-boughs, baited with the guts of a rabbit. Paul glanced at it frowning. She caught his eye.

“Isn’t it dreadful?” she asked.

“I don’t know! Is it worse than a weasel with its teeth in a rabbit’s throat? One weasel or many rabbits? One or the other must go!”

He was taking the bitterness of life badly. She was rather sorry for him.

“We will go back to the house,” he said. “I don’t want to walk out.”

They went past the lilac-tree, whose bronze leaf-buds were coming unfastened. Just a fragment remained of the haystack, a monument squared and brown, like a pillar of stone. There was a little bed of hay from the last cutting.

“Let us sit here a minute,” said Miriam.

He sat down against his will, resting his back against the hard wall of hay. They faced the amphitheatre of round hills that glowed with sunset, tiny white farms standing out, the meadows golden, the woods dark and yet luminous, tree-tops folded over tree-tops, distinct in the distance. The evening had cleared, and the east was tender with a magenta flush under which the land lay still and rich.

“Isn’t it beautiful?” she pleaded.

But he only scowled. He would rather have had it ugly just then.

At that moment a big bull-terrier came rushing up, open-mouthed, pranced his two paws on the youth’s shoulders, licking his face. Paul drew back, laughing. Bill was a great relief to him. He pushed the dog aside, but it came leaping back.

“Get out,” said the lad, “or I’ll dot thee one.”

But the dog was not to be pushed away. So Paul had a little battle with the creature, pitching poor Bill away from him, who, however, only floundered tumultuously back again, wild with joy. The two fought together, the man laughing grudgingly, the dog grinning all over. Miriam watched them. There was something pathetic about the man. He wanted so badly to love, to be tender. The rough way he bowled the dog over was really loving. Bill got up, panting with happiness, his brown eyes rolling in his white face, and lumbered back again. He adored Paul. The lad frowned.

“Bill, I’ve had enough o’ thee,” he said.

But the dog only stood with two heavy paws, that quivered with love, upon his thigh, and flickered a red tongue at him. He drew back.

“No,” he said — ”no — I’ve had enough.”

And in a minute the dog trotted off happily, to vary the fun.

He remained staring miserably across at the hills, whose still beauty he begrudged. He wanted to go and cycle with Edgar. Yet he had not the courage to leave Miriam.

“Why are you sad?” she asked humbly.

“I’m not sad; why should I be,” he answered. “I’m only normal.”

She wondered why he always claimed to be normal when he was disagreeable.

“But what is the matter?” she pleaded, coaxing him soothingly.

“Nothing!”

“Nay!” she murmured.

He picked up a stick and began to stab the earth with it.

“You’d far better not talk,” he said.

“But I wish to know — ” she replied.

He laughed resentfully.

“You always do,” he said.

“It’s not fair to me,” she murmured.

He thrust, thrust, thrust at the ground with the pointed stick, digging up little clods of earth as if he were in a fever of irritation. She gently and firmly laid her hand on his wrist.

“Don’t!” she said. “Put it away.”

He flung the stick into the currant-bushes, and leaned back. Now he was bottled up.

“What is it?” she pleaded softly.

He lay perfectly still, only his eyes alive, and they full of torment.

“You know,” he said at length, rather wearily — ”you know — we’d better break off.”

It was what she dreaded. Swiftly everything seemed to darken before her eyes.

“Why!” she murmured. “What has happened?”

“Nothing has happened. We only realise where we are. It’s no good — ”

She waited in silence, sadly, patiently. It was no good being impatient with him. At any rate, he would tell her now what ailed him.

“We agreed on friendship,” he went on in a dull, monotonous voice. “How often HAVE we agreed for friendship! And yet — it neither stops there, nor gets anywhere else.”

He was silent again. She brooded. What did he mean? He was so wearying. There was something he would not yield. Yet she must be patient with him.

“I can only give friendship — it’s all I’m capable of — it’s a flaw in my make-up. The thing overbalances to one side — I hate a toppling balance. Let us

have done.”

There was warmth of fury in his last phrases. He meant she loved him more than he her. Perhaps he could not love her. Perhaps she had not in herself that which he wanted. It was the deepest motive of her soul, this self-mistrust. It was so deep she dared neither realise nor acknowledge. Perhaps she was deficient. Like an infinitely subtle shame, it kept her always back. If it were so, she would do without him. She would never let herself want him. She would merely see.

“But what has happened?” she said.

“Nothing — it’s all in myself — it only comes out just now. We’re always like this towards Easter-time.”

He grovelled so helplessly, she pitied him. At least she never floundered in such a pitiable way. After all, it was he who was chiefly humiliated.

“What do you want?” she asked him.

“Why — I mustn’t come often — that’s all. Why should I monopolise you when I’m not — You see, I’m deficient in something with regard to you — ”

He was telling her he did not love her, and so ought to leave her a chance with another man. How foolish and blind and shamefully clumsy he was! What were other men to her! What were men to her at all! But he, ah! she loved his soul. Was HE deficient in something? Perhaps he was.

“But I don’t understand,” she said huskily. “Yesterday — ”

The night was turning jangled and hateful to him as the twilight faded. And she bowed under her suffering.

“I know,” he cried, “you never will! You’ll never believe that I can’t — can’t physically, any more than I can fly up like a skylark — ”

“What?” she murmured. Now she dreaded.

“Love you.”

He hated her bitterly at that moment because he made her suffer. Love her! She knew he loved her. He really belonged to her. This about not loving her, physically, bodily, was a mere perversity on his part, because he knew she loved him. He was stupid like a child. He belonged to her. His soul wanted her. She guessed somebody had been influencing him. She felt upon him the hardness, the foreignness of another influence.

“What have they been saying at home?” she asked.

“It’s not that,” he answered.

And then she knew it was. She despised them for their commonness, his people. They did not know what things were really worth.

He and she talked very little more that night. After all he left her to cycle with Edgar.

He had come back to his mother. Hers was the strongest tie in his life. When

he thought round, Miriam shrank away. There was a vague, unreal feel about her. And nobody else mattered. There was one place in the world that stood solid and did not melt into unreality: the place where his mother was. Everybody else could grow shadowy, almost non-existent to him, but she could not. It was as if the pivot and pole of his life, from which he could not escape, was his mother.

And in the same way she waited for him. In him was established her life now. After all, the life beyond offered very little to Mrs. Morel. She saw that our chance for DOING is here, and doing counted with her. Paul was going to prove that she had been right; he was going to make a man whom nothing should shift off his feet; he was going to alter the face of the earth in some way which mattered. Wherever he went she felt her soul went with him. Whatever he did she felt her soul stood by him, ready, as it were, to hand him his tools. She could not bear it when he was with Miriam. William was dead. She would fight to keep Paul.

And he came back to her. And in his soul was a feeling of the satisfaction of self-sacrifice because he was faithful to her. She loved him first; he loved her first. And yet it was not enough. His new young life, so strong and imperious, was urged towards something else. It made him mad with restlessness. She saw this, and wished bitterly that Miriam had been a woman who could take this new life of his, and leave her the roots. He fought against his mother almost as he fought against Miriam.

It was a week before he went again to Willey Farm. Miriam had suffered a great deal, and was afraid to see him again. Was she now to endure the ignominy of his abandoning her? That would only be superficial and temporary. He would come back. She held the keys to his soul. But meanwhile, how he would torture her with his battle against her. She shrank from it.

However, the Sunday after Easter he came to tea. Mrs. Leivers was glad to see him. She gathered something was fretting him, that he found things hard. He seemed to drift to her for comfort. And she was good to him. She did him that great kindness of treating him almost with reverence.

He met her with the young children in the front garden.

"I'm glad you've come," said the mother, looking at him with her great appealing brown eyes. "It is such a sunny day. I was just going down the fields for the first time this year."

He felt she would like him to come. That soothed him. They went, talking simply, he gentle and humble. He could have wept with gratitude that she was deferential to him. He was feeling humiliated.

At the bottom of the Mow Close they found a thrush's nest.

"Shall I show you the eggs?" he said.

“Do!” replied Mrs. Leivers. “They seem SUCH a sign of spring, and so hopeful.”

He put aside the thorns, and took out the eggs, holding them in the palm of his hand.

“They are quite hot — I think we frightened her off them,” he said.

“Ay, poor thing!” said Mrs. Leivers.

Miriam could not help touching the eggs, and his hand which, it seemed to her, cradled them so well.

“Isn’t it a strange warmth!” she murmured, to get near him.

“Blood heat,” he answered.

She watched him putting them back, his body pressed against the hedge, his arm reaching slowly through the thorns, his hand folded carefully over the eggs. He was concentrated on the act. Seeing him so, she loved him; he seemed so simple and sufficient to himself. And she could not get to him.

After tea she stood hesitating at the bookshelf. He took “Tartarin de Tarascon”. Again they sat on the bank of hay at the foot of the stack. He read a couple of pages, but without any heart for it. Again the dog came racing up to repeat the fun of the other day. He shoved his muzzle in the man’s chest. Paul fingered his ear for a moment. Then he pushed him away.

“Go away, Bill,” he said. “I don’t want you.”

Bill slunk off, and Miriam wondered and dreaded what was coming. There was a silence about the youth that made her still with apprehension. It was not his furies, but his quiet resolutions that she feared.

Turning his face a little to one side, so that she could not see him, he began, speaking slowly and painfully:

“Do you think — if I didn’t come up so much — you might get to like somebody else — another man?”

So this was what he was still harping on.

“But I don’t know any other men. Why do you ask?” she replied, in a low tone that should have been a reproach to him.

“Why,” he blurted, “because they say I’ve no right to come up like this — without we mean to marry — ”

Miriam was indignant at anybody’s forcing the issues between them. She had been furious with her own father for suggesting to Paul, laughingly, that he knew why he came so much.

“Who says?” she asked, wondering if her people had anything to do with it. They had not.

“Mother — and the others. They say at this rate everybody will consider me engaged, and I ought to consider myself so, because it’s not fair to you. And I’ve

tried to find out — and I don't think I love you as a man ought to love his wife. What do you think about it?"

Miriam bowed her head moodily. She was angry at having this struggle. People should leave him and her alone.

"I don't know," she murmured.

"Do you think we love each other enough to marry?" he asked definitely. It made her tremble.

"No," she answered truthfully. "I don't think so — we're too young."

"I thought perhaps," he went on miserably, "that you, with your intensity in things, might have given me more — than I could ever make up to you. And even now — if you think it better — we'll be engaged."

Now Miriam wanted to cry. And she was angry, too. He was always such a child for people to do as they liked with.

"No, I don't think so," she said firmly.

He pondered a minute.

"You see," he said, "with me — I don't think one person would ever monopolize me — be everything to me — I think never."

This she did not consider.

"No," she murmured. Then, after a pause, she looked at him, and her dark eyes flashed.

"This is your mother," she said. "I know she never liked me."

"No, no, it isn't," he said hastily. "It was for your sake she spoke this time. She only said, if I was going on, I ought to consider myself engaged." There was a silence. "And if I ask you to come down any time, you won't stop away, will you?"

She did not answer. By this time she was very angry.

"Well, what shall we do?" she said shortly. "I suppose I'd better drop French. I was just beginning to get on with it. But I suppose I can go on alone."

"I don't see that we need," he said. "I can give you a French lesson, surely."

"Well — and there are Sunday nights. I shan't stop coming to chapel, because I enjoy it, and it's all the social life I get. But you've no need to come home with me. I can go alone."

"All right," he answered, rather taken aback. "But if I ask Edgar, he'll always come with us, and then they can say nothing."

There was silence. After all, then, she would not lose much. For all their talk down at his home there would not be much difference. She wished they would mind their own business.

"And you won't think about it, and let it trouble you, will you?" he asked.

"Oh no," replied Miriam, without looking at him.

He was silent. She thought him unstable. He had no fixity of purpose, no anchor of righteousness that held him.

“Because,” he continued, “a man gets across his bicycle — and goes to work — and does all sorts of things. But a woman broods.”

“No, I shan’t bother,” said Miriam. And she meant it.

It had gone rather chilly. They went indoors.

“How white Paul looks!” Mrs. Leivers exclaimed. “Miriam, you shouldn’t have let him sit out of doors. Do you think you’ve taken cold, Paul?”

“Oh, no!” he laughed.

But he felt done up. It wore him out, the conflict in himself. Miriam pitied him now. But quite early, before nine o’clock, he rose to go.

“You’re not going home, are you?” asked Mrs. Leivers anxiously.

“Yes,” he replied. “I said I’d be early.” He was very awkward.

“But this IS early,” said Mrs. Leivers.

Miriam sat in the rocking-chair, and did not speak. He hesitated, expecting her to rise and go with him to the barn as usual for his bicycle. She remained as she was. He was at a loss.

“Well — good-night, all!” he faltered.

She spoke her good-night along with all the others. But as he went past the window he looked in. She saw him pale, his brows knit slightly in a way that had become constant with him, his eyes dark with pain.

She rose and went to the doorway to wave good-bye to him as he passed through the gate. He rode slowly under the pine-trees, feeling a cur and a miserable wretch. His bicycle went tilting down the hills at random. He thought it would be a relief to break one’s neck.

Two days later he sent her up a book and a little note, urging her to read and be busy.

At this time he gave all his friendship to Edgar. He loved the family so much, he loved the farm so much; it was the dearest place on earth to him. His home was not so lovable. It was his mother. But then he would have been just as happy with his mother anywhere. Whereas Willey Farm he loved passionately. He loved the little pokey kitchen, where men’s boots tramped, and the dog slept with one eye open for fear of being trodden on; where the lamp hung over the table at night, and everything was so silent. He loved Miriam’s long, low parlour, with its atmosphere of romance, its flowers, its books, its high rosewood piano. He loved the gardens and the buildings that stood with their scarlet roofs on the naked edges of the fields, crept towards the wood as if for cosiness, the wild country scooping down a valley and up the uncultured hills of the other side. Only to be there was an exhilaration and a joy to him. He loved Mrs.

Leivers, with her unworldliness and her quaint cynicism; he loved Mr. Leivers, so warm and young and lovable; he loved Edgar, who lit up when he came, and the boys and the children and Bill — even the sow Circe and the Indian game-cock called Tippoo. All this besides Miriam. He could not give it up.

So he went as often, but he was usually with Edgar. Only all the family, including the father, joined in charades and games at evening. And later, Miriam drew them together, and they read Macbeth out of penny books, taking parts. It was great excitement. Miriam was glad, and Mrs. Leivers was glad, and Mr. Leivers enjoyed it. Then they all learned songs together from tonic sol-fa, singing in a circle round the fire. But now Paul was very rarely alone with Miriam. She waited. When she and Edgar and he walked home together from chapel or from the literary society in Bestwood, she knew his talk, so passionate and so unorthodox nowadays, was for her. She did envy Edgar, however, his cycling with Paul, his Friday nights, his days working in the fields. For her Friday nights and her French lessons were gone. She was nearly always alone, walking, pondering in the wood, reading, studying, dreaming, waiting. And he wrote to her frequently.

One Sunday evening they attained to their old rare harmony. Edgar had stayed to Communion — he wondered what it was like — with Mrs. Morel. So Paul came on alone with Miriam to his home. He was more or less under her spell again. As usual, they were discussing the sermon. He was setting now full sail towards Agnosticism, but such a religious Agnosticism that Miriam did not suffer so badly. They were at the Renan Vie de Jesus stage. Miriam was the threshing-floor on which he threshed out all his beliefs. While he trampled his ideas upon her soul, the truth came out for him. She alone was his threshing-floor. She alone helped him towards realization. Almost impassive, she submitted to his argument and expounding. And somehow, because of her, he gradually realized where he was wrong. And what he realized, she realized. She felt he could not do without her.

They came to the silent house. He took the key out of the scullery window, and they entered. All the time he went on with his discussion. He lit the gas, mended the fire, and brought her some cakes from the pantry. She sat on the sofa, quietly, with a plate on her knee. She wore a large white hat with some pinkish flowers. It was a cheap hat, but he liked it. Her face beneath was still and pensive, golden-brown and ruddy. Always her ears were hid in her short curls. She watched him.

She liked him on Sundays. Then he wore a dark suit that showed the lithe movement of his body. There was a clean, clear-cut look about him. He went on with his thinking to her. Suddenly he reached for a Bible. Miriam liked the way

he reached up — so sharp, straight to the mark. He turned the pages quickly, and read her a chapter of St. John. As he sat in the armchair reading, intent, his voice only thinking, she felt as if he were using her unconsciously as a man uses his tools at some work he is bent on. She loved it. And the wistfulness of his voice was like a reaching to something, and it was as if she were what he reached with. She sat back on the sofa away from him, and yet feeling herself the very instrument his hand grasped. It gave her great pleasure.

Then he began to falter and to get self-conscious. And when he came to the verse, “A woman, when she is in travail, hath sorrow because her hour is come”, he missed it out. Miriam had felt him growing uncomfortable. She shrank when the well-known words did not follow. He went on reading, but she did not hear. A grief and shame made her bend her head. Six months ago he would have read it simply. Now there was a scotch in his running with her. Now she felt there was really something hostile between them, something of which they were ashamed.

She ate her cake mechanically. He tried to go on with his argument, but could not get back the right note. Soon Edgar came in. Mrs. Morel had gone to her friends'. The three set off to Willey Farm.

Miriam brooded over his split with her. There was something else he wanted. He could not be satisfied; he could give her no peace. There was between them now always a ground for strife. She wanted to prove him. She believed that his chief need in life was herself. If she could prove it, both to herself and to him, the rest might go; she could simply trust to the future.

So in May she asked him to come to Willey Farm and meet Mrs. Dawes. There was something he hankered after. She saw him, whenever they spoke of Clara Dawes, rouse and get slightly angry. He said he did not like her. Yet he was keen to know about her. Well, he should put himself to the test. She believed that there were in him desires for higher things, and desires for lower, and that the desire for the higher would conquer. At any rate, he should try. She forgot that her “higher” and “lower” were arbitrary.

He was rather excited at the idea of meeting Clara at Willey Farm. Mrs. Dawes came for the day. Her heavy, dun-coloured hair was coiled on top of her head. She wore a white blouse and navy skirt, and somehow, wherever she was, seemed to make things look paltry and insignificant. When she was in the room, the kitchen seemed too small and mean altogether. Miriam's beautiful twilighty parlour looked stiff and stupid. All the Leivers were eclipsed like candles. They found her rather hard to put up with. Yet she was perfectly amiable, but indifferent, and rather hard.

Paul did not come till afternoon. He was early. As he swung off his bicycle,

Miriam saw him look round at the house eagerly. He would be disappointed if the visitor had not come. Miriam went out to meet him, bowing her head because of the sunshine. Nasturtiums were coming out crimson under the cool green shadow of their leaves. The girl stood, dark-haired, glad to see him.

“Hasn’t Clara come?” he asked.

“Yes,” replied Miriam in her musical tone. “She’s reading.”

He wheeled his bicycle into the barn. He had put on a handsome tie, of which he was rather proud, and socks to match.

“She came this morning?” he asked.

“Yes,” replied Miriam, as she walked at his side. “You said you’d bring me that letter from the man at Liberty’s. Have you remembered?”

“Oh, dash, no!” he said. “But nag at me till you get it.”

“I don’t like to nag at you.”

“Do it whether or not. And is she any more agreeable?” he continued.

“You know I always think she is quite agreeable.”

He was silent. Evidently his eagerness to be early to-day had been the newcomer. Miriam already began to suffer. They went together towards the house. He took the clips off his trousers, but was too lazy to brush the dust from his shoes, in spite of the socks and tie.

Clara sat in the cool parlour reading. He saw the nape of her white neck, and the fine hair lifted from it. She rose, looking at him indifferently. To shake hands she lifted her arm straight, in a manner that seemed at once to keep him at a distance, and yet to fling something to him. He noticed how her breasts swelled inside her blouse, and how her shoulder curved handsomely under the thin muslin at the top of her arm.

“You have chosen a fine day,” he said.

“It happens so,” she said.

“Yes,” he said; “I am glad.”

She sat down, not thanking him for his politeness.

“What have you been doing all morning?” asked Paul of Miriam.

“Well, you see,” said Miriam, coughing huskily, “Clara only came with father — and so — she’s not been here very long.”

Clara sat leaning on the table, holding aloof. He noticed her hands were large, but well kept. And the skin on them seemed almost coarse, opaque, and white, with fine golden hairs. She did not mind if he observed her hands. She intended to scorn him. Her heavy arm lay negligently on the table. Her mouth was closed as if she were offended, and she kept her face slightly averted.

“You were at Margaret Bonford’s meeting the other evening,” he said to her.

Miriam did not know this courteous Paul. Clara glanced at him.

“Yes,” she said.

“Why,” asked Miriam, “how do you know?”

“I went in for a few minutes before the train came,” he answered.

Clara turned away again rather disdainfully.

“I think she’s a lovable little woman,” said Paul.

“Margaret Bonford!” exclaimed Clara. “She’s a great deal cleverer than most men.”

“Well, I didn’t say she wasn’t,” he said, deprecating. “She’s lovable for all that.”

“And, of course, that is all that matters,” said Clara witheringly.

He rubbed his head, rather perplexed, rather annoyed.

“I suppose it matters more than her cleverness,” he said; “which, after all, would never get her to heaven.”

“It’s not heaven she wants to get — it’s her fair share on earth,” retorted Clara. She spoke as if he were responsible for some deprivation which Miss Bonford suffered.

“Well,” he said, “I thought she was warm, and awfully nice — only too frail. I wished she was sitting comfortably in peace — ”

“Darning her husband’s stockings,” said Clara scathingly.

“I’m sure she wouldn’t mind darning even my stockings,” he said. “And I’m sure she’d do them well. Just as I wouldn’t mind blacking her boots if she wanted me to.”

But Clara refused to answer this sally of his. He talked to Miriam for a little while. The other woman held aloof.

“Well,” he said, “I think I’ll go and see Edgar. Is he on the land?”

“I believe,” said Miriam, “he’s gone for a load of coal. He should be back directly.”

“Then,” he said, “I’ll go and meet him.”

Miriam dared not propose anything for the three of them. He rose and left them.

On the top road, where the gorse was out, he saw Edgar walking lazily beside the mare, who nodded her white-starred forehead as she dragged the clanking load of coal. The young farmer’s face lighted up as he saw his friend. Edgar was good-looking, with dark, warm eyes. His clothes were old and rather disreputable, and he walked with considerable pride.

“Hello!” he said, seeing Paul bareheaded. “Where are you going?”

“Came to meet you. Can’t stand ‘Nevermore.’”

Edgar’s teeth flashed in a laugh of amusement.

“Who is ‘Nevermore?’” he asked.

“The lady — Mrs. Dawes — it ought to be Mrs. The Raven that quothed ‘Nevermore.’”

Edgar laughed with glee.

“Don’t you like her?” he asked.

“Not a fat lot,” said Paul. “Why, do you?”

“No!” The answer came with a deep ring of conviction. “No!” Edgar pursed up his lips. “I can’t say she’s much in my line.” He mused a little. Then: “But why do you call her ‘Nevermore’?” he asked.

“Well,” said Paul, “if she looks at a man she says haughtily ‘Nevermore,’ and if she looks at herself in the looking-glass she says disdainfully ‘Nevermore,’ and if she thinks back she says it in disgust, and if she looks forward she says it cynically.”

Edgar considered this speech, failed to make much out of it, and said, laughing:

“You think she’s a man-hater?”

“SHE thinks she is,” replied Paul.

“But you don’t think so?”

“No,” replied Paul.

“Wasn’t she nice with you, then?”

“Could you imagine her NICE with anybody?” asked the young man.

Edgar laughed. Together they unloaded the coal in the yard. Paul was rather self-conscious, because he knew Clara could see if she looked out of the window. She didn’t look.

On Saturday afternoons the horses were brushed down and groomed. Paul and Edgar worked together, sneezing with the dust that came from the pelts of Jimmy and Flower.

“Do you know a new song to teach me?” said Edgar.

He continued to work all the time. The back of his neck was sun-red when he bent down, and his fingers that held the brush were thick. Paul watched him sometimes.

“‘Mary Morrison’?” suggested the younger.

Edgar agreed. He had a good tenor voice, and he loved to learn all the songs his friend could teach him, so that he could sing whilst he was carting. Paul had a very indifferent baritone voice, but a good ear. However, he sang softly, for fear of Clara. Edgar repeated the line in a clear tenor. At times they both broke off to sneeze, and first one, then the other, abused his horse.

Miriam was impatient of men. It took so little to amuse them — even Paul. She thought it anomalous in him that he could be so thoroughly absorbed in a triviality.

It was tea-time when they had finished.

“What song was that?” asked Miriam.

Edgar told her. The conversation turned to singing.

“We have such jolly times,” Miriam said to Clara.

Mrs. Dawes ate her meal in a slow, dignified way. Whenever the men were present she grew distant.

“Do you like singing?” Miriam asked her.

“If it is good,” she said.

Paul, of course, coloured.

“You mean if it is high-class and trained?” he said.

“I think a voice needs training before the singing is anything,” she said.

“You might as well insist on having people’s voices trained before you allowed them to talk,” he replied. “Really, people sing for their own pleasure, as a rule.”

“And it may be for other people’s discomfort.”

“Then the other people should have flaps to their ears,” he replied.

The boys laughed. There was a silence. He flushed deeply, and ate in silence.

After tea, when all the men had gone but Paul, Mrs. Leivers said to Clara:

“And you find life happier now?”

“Infinitely.”

“And you are satisfied?”

“So long as I can be free and independent.”

“And you don’t MISS anything in your life?” asked Mrs. Leivers gently.

“I’ve put all that behind me.”

Paul had been feeling uncomfortable during this discourse. He got up.

“You’ll find you’re always tumbling over the things you’ve put behind you,” he said. Then he took his departure to the cowsheds. He felt he had been witty, and his manly pride was high. He whistled as he went down the brick track.

Miriam came for him a little later to know if he would go with Clara and her for a walk. They set off down to Strelley Mill Farm. As they were going beside the brook, on the Willey Water side, looking through the brake at the edge of the wood, where pink campions glowed under a few sunbeams, they saw, beyond the tree-trunks and the thin hazel bushes, a man leading a great bay horse through the gullies. The big red beast seemed to dance romantically through that dimness of green hazel drift, away there where the air was shadowy, as if it were in the past, among the fading bluebells that might have bloomed for Deidre or Iseult.

The three stood charmed.

“What a treat to be a knight,” he said, “and to have a pavilion here.”

“And to have us shut up safely?” replied Clara.

“Yes,” he answered, “singing with your maids at your broidery. I would carry your banner of white and green and heliotrope. I would have ‘W.S.P.U.’ emblazoned on my shield, beneath a woman rampant.”

“I have no doubt,” said Clara, “that you would much rather fight for a woman than let her fight for herself.”

“I would. When she fights for herself she seems like a dog before a looking-glass, gone into a mad fury with its own shadow.”

“And YOU are the looking-glass?” she asked, with a curl of the lip.

“Or the shadow,” he replied.

“I am afraid,” she said, “that you are too clever.”

“Well, I leave it to you to be GOOD,” he retorted, laughing. “Be good, sweet maid, and just let ME be clever.”

But Clara wearied of his flippancy. Suddenly, looking at her, he saw that the upward lifting of her face was misery and not scorn. His heart grew tender for everybody. He turned and was gentle with Miriam, whom he had neglected till then.

At the wood’s edge they met Limb, a thin, swarthy man of forty, tenant of Strelley Mill, which he ran as a cattle-raising farm. He held the halter of the powerful stallion indifferently, as if he were tired. The three stood to let him pass over the stepping-stones of the first brook. Paul admired that so large an animal should walk on such springy toes, with an endless excess of vigour. Limb pulled up before them.

“Tell your father, Miss Leivers,” he said, in a peculiar piping voice, “that his young beas’es ‘as broke that bottom fence three days an’ runnin’.”

“Which?” asked Miriam, tremulous.

The great horse breathed heavily, shifting round its red flanks, and looking suspiciously with its wonderful big eyes upwards from under its lowered head and falling mane.

“Come along a bit,” replied Limb, “an’ I’ll show you.”

The man and the stallion went forward. It danced sideways, shaking its white fetlocks and looking frightened, as it felt itself in the brook.

“No hanky-pankyin’,” said the man affectionately to the beast.

It went up the bank in little leaps, then splashed finely through the second brook. Clara, walking with a kind of sulky abandon, watched it half-fascinated, half-contemptuous. Limb stopped and pointed to the fence under some willows.

“There, you see where they got through,” he said. “My man’s druv ‘em back three times.”

“Yes,” answered Miriam, colouring as if she were at fault.

“Are you comin’ in?” asked the man.

“No, thanks; but we should like to go by the pond.”

“Well, just as you’ve a mind,” he said.

The horse gave little whinnies of pleasure at being so near home.

“He is glad to be back,” said Clara, who was interested in the creature.

“Yes — ’e’s been a tidy step to-day.”

They went through the gate, and saw approaching them from the big farmhouse a smallish, dark, excitable-looking woman of about thirty-five. Her hair was touched with grey, her dark eyes looked wild. She walked with her hands behind her back. Her brother went forward. As it saw her, the big bay stallion whinnied again. She came up excitedly.

“Are you home again, my boy!” she said tenderly to the horse, not to the man. The great beast shifted round to her, ducking his head. She smuggled into his mouth the wrinkled yellow apple she had been hiding behind her back, then she kissed him near the eyes. He gave a big sigh of pleasure. She held his head in her arms against her breast.

“Isn’t he splendid!” said Miriam to her.

Miss Limb looked up. Her dark eyes glanced straight at Paul.

“Oh, good-evening, Miss Leivers,” she said. “It’s ages since you’ve been down.”

Miriam introduced her friends.

“Your horse IS a fine fellow!” said Clara.

“Isn’t he!” Again she kissed him. “As loving as any man!”

“More loving than most men, I should think,” replied Clara.

“He’s a nice boy!” cried the woman, again embracing the horse.

Clara, fascinated by the big beast, went up to stroke his neck.

“He’s quite gentle,” said Miss Limb. “Don’t you think big fellows are?”

“He’s a beauty!” replied Clara.

She wanted to look in his eyes. She wanted him to look at her.

“It’s a pity he can’t talk,” she said.

“Oh, but he can — all but,” replied the other woman.

Then her brother moved on with the horse.

“Are you coming in? DO come in, Mr. — I didn’t catch it.”

“Morel,” said Miriam. “No, we won’t come in, but we should like to go by the mill-pond.”

“Yes — yes, do. Do you fish, Mr. Morel?”

“No,” said Paul.

“Because if you do you might come and fish any time,” said Miss Limb. “We scarcely see a soul from week’s end to week’s end. I should be thankful.”

“What fish are there in the pond?” he asked.

They went through the front garden, over the sluice, and up the steep bank to the pond, which lay in shadow, with its two wooded islets. Paul walked with Miss Limb.

“I shouldn’t mind swimming here,” he said.

“Do,” she replied. “Come when you like. My brother will be awfully pleased to talk with you. He is so quiet, because there is no one to talk to. Do come and swim.”

Clara came up.

“It’s a fine depth,” she said, “and so clear.”

“Yes,” said Miss Limb.

“Do you swim?” said Paul. “Miss Limb was just saying we could come when we liked.”

“Of course there’s the farm-hands,” said Miss Limb.

They talked a few moments, then went on up the wild hill, leaving the lonely, haggard-eyed woman on the bank.

The hillside was all ripe with sunshine. It was wild and tussocky, given over to rabbits. The three walked in silence. Then:

“She makes me feel uncomfortable,” said Paul.

“You mean Miss Limb?” asked Miriam. “Yes.”

“What’s a matter with her? Is she going dotty with being too lonely?”

“Yes,” said Miriam. “It’s not the right sort of life for her. I think it’s cruel to bury her there. I really ought to go and see her more. But — she upsets me.”

“She makes me feel sorry for her — yes, and she bothers me,” he said.

“I suppose,” blurted Clara suddenly, “she wants a man.”

The other two were silent for a few moments.

“But it’s the loneliness sends her cracked,” said Paul.

Clara did not answer, but strode on uphill. She was walking with her hand hanging, her legs swinging as she kicked through the dead thistles and the tussocky grass, her arms hanging loose. Rather than walking, her handsome body seemed to be blundering up the hill. A hot wave went over Paul. He was curious about her. Perhaps life had been cruel to her. He forgot Miriam, who was walking beside him talking to him. She glanced at him, finding he did not answer her. His eyes were fixed ahead on Clara.

“Do you still think she is disagreeable?” she asked.

He did not notice that the question was sudden. It ran with his thoughts.

“Something’s the matter with her,” he said.

“Yes,” answered Miriam.

They found at the top of the hill a hidden wild field, two sides of which were

backed by the wood, the other sides by high loose hedges of hawthorn and elder bushes. Between these overgrown bushes were gaps that the cattle might have walked through had there been any cattle now. There the turf was smooth as velveteen, padded and holed by the rabbits. The field itself was coarse, and crowded with tall, big cowslips that had never been cut. Clusters of strong flowers rose everywhere above the coarse tussocks of bent. It was like a roadstead crowded with tan, fairy shipping.

“Ah!” cried Miriam, and she looked at Paul, her dark eyes dilating. He smiled. Together they enjoyed the field of flowers. Clara, a little way off, was looking at the cowslips disconsolately. Paul and Miriam stayed close together, talking in subdued tones. He kneeled on one knee, quickly gathering the best blossoms, moving from tuft to tuft restlessly, talking softly all the time. Miriam plucked the flowers lovingly, lingering over them. He always seemed to her too quick and almost scientific. Yet his bunches had a natural beauty more than hers. He loved them, but as if they were his and he had a right to them. She had more reverence for them: they held something she had not.

The flowers were very fresh and sweet. He wanted to drink them. As he gathered them, he ate the little yellow trumpets. Clara was still wandering about disconsolately. Going towards her, he said:

“Why don’t you get some?”

“I don’t believe in it. They look better growing.”

“But you’d like some?”

“They want to be left.”

“I don’t believe they do.”

“I don’t want the corpses of flowers about me,” she said.

“That’s a stiff, artificial notion,” he said. “They don’t die any quicker in water than on their roots. And besides, they LOOK nice in a bowl — they look jolly. And you only call a thing a corpse because it looks corpse-like.”

“Whether it is one or not?” she argued.

“It isn’t one to me. A dead flower isn’t a corpse of a flower.”

Clara now ignored him.

“And even so — what right have you to pull them?” she asked.

“Because I like them, and want them — and there’s plenty of them.”

“And that is sufficient?”

“Yes. Why not? I’m sure they’d smell nice in your room in Nottingham.”

“And I should have the pleasure of watching them die.”

“But then — it does not matter if they do die.”

Whereupon he left her, and went stooping over the clumps of tangled flowers which thickly sprinkled the field like pale, luminous foam-clots. Miriam had

come close. Clara was kneeling, breathing some scent from the cowslips.

“I think,” said Miriam, “if you treat them with reverence you don’t do them any harm. It is the spirit you pluck them in that matters.”

“Yes,” he said. “But no, you get ‘em because you want ‘em, and that’s all.” He held out his bunch.

Miriam was silent. He picked some more.

“Look at these!” he continued; “sturdy and lusty like little trees and like boys with fat legs.”

Clara’s hat lay on the grass not far off. She was kneeling, bending forward still to smell the flowers. Her neck gave him a sharp pang, such a beautiful thing, yet not proud of itself just now. Her breasts swung slightly in her blouse. The arching curve of her back was beautiful and strong; she wore no stays. Suddenly, without knowing, he was scattering a handful of cowslips over her hair and neck, saying:

“Ashes to ashes, and dust to dust,
If the Lord won’t have you the devil must.”

The chill flowers fell on her neck. She looked up at him, with almost pitiful, scared grey eyes, wondering what he was doing. Flowers fell on her face, and she shut her eyes.

Suddenly, standing there above her, he felt awkward.

“I thought you wanted a funeral,” he said, ill at ease.

Clara laughed strangely, and rose, picking the cowslips from her hair. She took up her hat and pinned it on. One flower had remained tangled in her hair. He saw, but would not tell her. He gathered up the flowers he had sprinkled over her.

At the edge of the wood the bluebells had flowed over into the field and stood there like flood-water. But they were fading now. Clara strayed up to them. He wandered after her. The bluebells pleased him.

“Look how they’ve come out of the wood!” he said.

Then she turned with a flash of warmth and of gratitude.

“Yes,” she smiled.

His blood beat up.

“It makes me think of the wild men of the woods, how terrified they would be when they got breast to breast with the open space.”

“Do you think they were?” she asked.

“I wonder which was more frightened among old tribes — those bursting out of their darkness of woods upon all the space of light, or those from the open tiptoeing into the forests.”

“I should think the second,” she answered.

“Yes, you DO feel like one of the open space sort, trying to force yourself into the dark, don’t you?”

“How should I know?” she answered queerly.

The conversation ended there.

The evening was deepening over the earth. Already the valley was full of shadow. One tiny square of light stood opposite at Crossleigh Bank Farm. Brightness was swimming on the tops of the hills. Miriam came up slowly, her face in her big, loose bunch of flowers, walking ankle-deep through the scattered froth of the cowslips. Beyond her the trees were coming into shape, all shadow.

“Shall we go?” she asked.

And the three turned away. They were all silent. Going down the path they could see the light of home right across, and on the ridge of the hill a thin dark outline with little lights, where the colliery village touched the sky.

“It has been nice, hasn’t it?” he asked.

Miriam murmured assent. Clara was silent.

“Don’t you think so?” he persisted.

But she walked with her head up, and still did not answer. He could tell by the way she moved, as if she didn’t care, that she suffered.

At this time Paul took his mother to Lincoln. She was bright and enthusiastic as ever, but as he sat opposite her in the railway carriage, she seemed to look frail. He had a momentary sensation as if she were slipping away from him. Then he wanted to get hold of her, to fasten her, almost to chain her. He felt he must keep hold of her with his hand.

They drew near to the city. Both were at the window looking for the cathedral.

“There she is, mother!” he cried.

They saw the great cathedral lying couchant above the plain.

“Ah!” she exclaimed. “So she is!”

He looked at his mother. Her blue eyes were watching the cathedral quietly. She seemed again to be beyond him. Something in the eternal repose of the uplifted cathedral, blue and noble against the sky, was reflected in her, something of the fatality. What was, WAS. With all his young will he could not alter it. He saw her face, the skin still fresh and pink and downy, but crow’s-feet near her eyes, her eyelids steady, sinking a little, her mouth always closed with disillusion; and there was on her the same eternal look, as if she knew fate at last. He beat against it with all the strength of his soul.

“Look, mother, how big she is above the town! Think, there are streets and streets below her! She looks bigger than the city altogether.”

“So she does!” exclaimed his mother, breaking bright into life again. But he had seen her sitting, looking steady out of the window at the cathedral, her face

and eyes fixed, reflecting the relentlessness of life. And the crow's-feet near her eyes, and her mouth shut so hard, made him feel he would go mad.

They ate a meal that she considered wildly extravagant.

"Don't imagine I like it," she said, as she ate her cutlet. "I DON'T like it, I really don't! Just THINK of your money wasted!"

"You never mind my money," he said. "You forget I'm a fellow taking his girl for an outing."

And he bought her some blue violets.

"Stop it at once, sir!" she commanded. "How can I do it?"

"You've got nothing to do. Stand still!"

And in the middle of High Street he stuck the flowers in her coat.

"An old thing like me!" she said, sniffing.

"You see," he said, "I want people to think we're awful swells. So look ikey."

"I'll jowl your head," she laughed.

"Strut!" he commanded. "Be a fantail pigeon."

It took him an hour to get her through the street. She stood above Glory Hole, she stood before Stone Bow, she stood everywhere, and exclaimed.

A man came up, took off his hat, and bowed to her.

"Can I show you the town, madam?"

"No, thank you," she answered. "I've got my son."

Then Paul was cross with her for not answering with more dignity.

"You go away with you!" she exclaimed. "Ha! that's the Jew's House. Now, do you remember that lecture, Paul — ?"

But she could scarcely climb the cathedral hill. He did not notice. Then suddenly he found her unable to speak. He took her into a little public-house, where she rested.

"It's nothing," she said. "My heart is only a bit old; one must expect it."

He did not answer, but looked at her. Again his heart was crushed in a hot grip. He wanted to cry, he wanted to smash things in fury.

They set off again, pace by pace, so slowly. And every step seemed like a weight on his chest. He felt as if his heart would burst. At last they came to the top. She stood enchanted, looking at the castle gate, looking at the cathedral front. She had quite forgotten herself.

"Now THIS is better than I thought it could be!" she cried.

But he hated it. Everywhere he followed her, brooding. They sat together in the cathedral. They attended a little service in the choir. She was timid.

"I suppose it is open to anybody?" she asked him.

"Yes," he replied. "Do you think they'd have the damned cheek to send us away."

“Well, I’m sure,” she exclaimed, “they would if they heard your language.”

Her face seemed to shine again with joy and peace during the service. And all the time he was wanting to rage and smash things and cry.

Afterwards, when they were leaning over the wall, looking at the town below, he blurted suddenly:

“Why can’t a man have a YOUNG mother? What is she old for?”

“Well,” his mother laughed, “she can scarcely help it.”

“And why wasn’t I the oldest son? Look — they say the young ones have the advantage — but look, THEY had the young mother. You should have had me for your eldest son.”

“I didn’t arrange it,” she remonstrated. “Come to consider, you’re as much to blame as me.”

He turned on her, white, his eyes furious.

“What are you old for!” he said, mad with his impotence. “WHY can’t you walk? WHY can’t you come with me to places?”

“At one time,” she replied, “I could have run up that hill a good deal better than you.”

“What’s the good of that to ME?” he cried, hitting his fist on the wall. Then he became plaintive. “It’s too bad of you to be ill. Little, it is — ”

“Ill!” she cried. “I’m a bit old, and you’ll have to put up with it, that’s all.”

They were quiet. But it was as much as they could bear. They got jolly again over tea. As they sat by Brayford, watching the boats, he told her about Clara. His mother asked him innumerable questions.

“Then who does she live with?”

“With her mother, on Bluebell Hill.”

“And have they enough to keep them?”

“I don’t think so. I think they do lace work.”

“And wherein lies her charm, my boy?”

“I don’t know that she’s charming, mother. But she’s nice. And she seems straight, you know — not a bit deep, not a bit.”

“But she’s a good deal older than you.”

“She’s thirty, I’m going on twenty-three.”

“You haven’t told me what you like her for.”

“Because I don’t know — a sort of defiant way she’s got — a sort of angry way.”

Mrs. Morel considered. She would have been glad now for her son to fall in love with some woman who would — she did not know what. But he fretted so, got so furious suddenly, and again was melancholic. She wished he knew some nice woman — She did not know what she wished, but left it vague. At any rate,

she was not hostile to the idea of Clara.

Annie, too, was getting married. Leonard had gone away to work in Birmingham. One week-end when he was home she had said to him:

“You don’t look very well, my lad.”

“I dunno,” he said. “I feel anyhow or nohow, ma.”

He called her “ma” already in his boyish fashion.

“Are you sure they’re good lodgings?” she asked.

“Yes — yes. Only — it’s a winder when you have to pour your own tea out — an’ nobody to grouse if you team it in your saucer and sup it up. It somehow takes a’ the taste out of it.”

Mrs. Morel laughed.

“And so it knocks you up?” she said.

“I dunno. I want to get married,” he blurted, twisting his fingers and looking down at his boots. There was a silence.

“But,” she exclaimed, “I thought you said you’d wait another year.”

“Yes, I did say so,” he replied stubbornly.

Again she considered.

“And you know,” she said, “Annie’s a bit of a spendthrift. She’s saved no more than eleven pounds. And I know, lad, you haven’t had much chance.”

He coloured up to the ears.

“I’ve got thirty-three quid,” he said.

“It doesn’t go far,” she answered.

He said nothing, but twisted his fingers.

“And you know,” she said, “I’ve nothing — ”

“I didn’t want, ma!” he cried, very red, suffering and remonstrating.

“No, my lad, I know. I was only wishing I had. And take away five pounds for the wedding and things — it leaves twenty-nine pounds. You won’t do much on that.”

He twisted still, impotent, stubborn, not looking up.

“But do you really want to get married?” she asked. “Do you feel as if you ought?”

He gave her one straight look from his blue eyes.

“Yes,” he said.

“Then,” she replied, “we must all do the best we can for it, lad.”

The next time he looked up there were tears in his eyes.

“I don’t want Annie to feel handicapped,” he said, struggling.

“My lad,” she said, “you’re steady — you’ve got a decent place. If a man had NEEDED me I’d have married him on his last week’s wages. She may find it a bit hard to start humbly. Young girls ARE like that. They look forward to the

fine home they think they'll have. But I had expensive furniture. It's not everything."

So the wedding took place almost immediately. Arthur came home, and was splendid in uniform. Annie looked nice in a dove-grey dress that she could take for Sundays. Morel called her a fool for getting married, and was cool with his son-in-law. Mrs. Morel had white tips in her bonnet, and some white on her blouse, and was teased by both her sons for fancying herself so grand. Leonard was jolly and cordial, and felt a fearful fool. Paul could not quite see what Annie wanted to get married for. He was fond of her, and she of him. Still, he hoped rather lugubriously that it would turn out all right. Arthur was astonishingly handsome in his scarlet and yellow, and he knew it well, but was secretly ashamed of the uniform. Annie cried her eyes up in the kitchen, on leaving her mother. Mrs. Morel cried a little, then patted her on the back and said:

"But don't cry, child, he'll be good to you."

Morel stamped and said she was a fool to go and tie herself up. Leonard looked white and overwrought. Mrs. Morel said to him:

"I s'll trust her to you, my lad, and hold you responsible for her."

"You can," he said, nearly dead with the ordeal. And it was all over.

When Morel and Arthur were in bed, Paul sat talking, as he often did, with his mother.

"You're not sorry she's married, mother, are you?" he asked.

"I'm not sorry she's married — but — it seems strange that she should go from me. It even seems to me hard that she can prefer to go with her Leonard. That's how mothers are — I know it's silly."

"And shall you be miserable about her?"

"When I think of my own wedding day," his mother answered, "I can only hope her life will be different."

"But you can trust him to be good to her?"

"Yes, yes. They say he's not good enough for her. But I say if a man is GENUINE, as he is, and a girl is fond of him — then — it should be all right. He's as good as she."

"So you don't mind?"

"I would NEVER have let a daughter of mine marry a man I didn't FEEL to be genuine through and through. And yet, there's a gap now she's gone."

They were both miserable, and wanted her back again. It seemed to Paul his mother looked lonely, in her new black silk blouse with its bit of white trimming.

"At any rate, mother, I s'll never marry," he said.

"Ay, they all say that, my lad. You've not met the one yet. Only wait a year or

two.”

“But I shan’t marry, mother. I shall live with you, and we’ll have a servant.”

“Ay, my lad, it’s easy to talk. We’ll see when the time comes.”

“What time? I’m nearly twenty-three.”

“Yes, you’re not one that would marry young. But in three years’ time — ”

“I shall be with you just the same.”

“We’ll see, my boy, we’ll see.”

“But you don’t want me to marry?”

“I shouldn’t like to think of you going through your life without anybody to care for you and do — no.”

“And you think I ought to marry?”

“Sooner or later every man ought.”

“But you’d rather it were later.”

“It would be hard — and very hard. It’s as they say:

““A son’s my son till he takes him a wife,

But my daughter’s my daughter the whole of her life.”“

“And you think I’d let a wife take me from you?”

“Well, you wouldn’t ask her to marry your mother as well as you,” Mrs. Morel smiled.

“She could do what she liked; she wouldn’t have to interfere.”

“She wouldn’t — till she’d got you — and then you’d see.”

“I never will see. I’ll never marry while I’ve got you — I won’t.”

“But I shouldn’t like to leave you with nobody, my boy,” she cried.

“You’re not going to leave me. What are you? Fifty-three! I’ll give you till seventy-five. There you are, I’m fat and forty-four. Then I’ll marry a staid body. See!”

His mother sat and laughed.

“Go to bed,” she said — ”go to bed.”

“And we’ll have a pretty house, you and me, and a servant, and it’ll be just all right. I s’ll perhaps be rich with my painting.”

“Will you go to bed!”

“And then you s’ll have a pony-carriage. See yourself — a little Queen Victoria trotting round.”

“I tell you to go to bed,” she laughed.

He kissed her and went. His plans for the future were always the same.

Mrs. Morel sat brooding — about her daughter, about Paul, about Arthur. She fretted at losing Annie. The family was very closely bound. And she felt she MUST live now, to be with her children. Life was so rich for her. Paul wanted her, and so did Arthur. Arthur never knew how deeply he loved her. He was a

creature of the moment. Never yet had he been forced to realise himself. The army had disciplined his body, but not his soul. He was in perfect health and very handsome. His dark, vigorous hair sat close to his smallish head. There was something childish about his nose, something almost girlish about his dark blue eyes. But he had the fun red mouth of a man under his brown moustache, and his jaw was strong. It was his father's mouth; it was the nose and eyes of her own mother's people — good-looking, weak-principled folk. Mrs. Morel was anxious about him. Once he had really run the rig he was safe. But how far would he go?

The army had not really done him any good. He resented bitterly the authority of the officers. He hated having to obey as if he were an animal. But he had too much sense to kick. So he turned his attention to getting the best out of it. He could sing, he was a boon-companion. Often he got into scrapes, but they were the manly scrapes that are easily condoned. So he made a good time out of it, whilst his self-respect was in suppression. He trusted to his good looks and handsome figure, his refinement, his decent education to get him most of what he wanted, and he was not disappointed. Yet he was restless. Something seemed to gnaw him inside. He was never still, he was never alone. With his mother he was rather humble. Paul he admired and loved and despised slightly. And Paul admired and loved and despised him slightly.

Mrs. Morel had had a few pounds left to her by her father, and she decided to buy her son out of the army. He was wild with joy. Now he was like a lad taking a holiday.

He had always been fond of Beatrice Wyld, and during his furlough he picked up with her again. She was stronger and better in health. The two often went long walks together, Arthur taking her arm in soldier's fashion, rather stiffly. And she came to play the piano whilst he sang. Then Arthur would unhook his tunic collar. He grew flushed, his eyes were bright, he sang in a manly tenor. Afterwards they sat together on the sofa. He seemed to flaunt his body: she was aware of him so — the strong chest, the sides, the thighs in their close-fitting trousers.

He liked to lapse into the dialect when he talked to her. She would sometimes smoke with him. Occasionally she would only take a few whiffs at his cigarette.

"Nay," he said to her one evening, when she reached for his cigarette. "Nay, tha doesna. I'll gi'e thee a smoke kiss if ter's a mind."

"I wanted a whiff, no kiss at all," she answered.

"Well, an' tha s'lt ha'e a whiff," he said, "along wi' t' kiss."

"I want a draw at thy fag," she cried, snatching for the cigarette between his lips.

He was sitting with his shoulder touching her. She was small and quick as

lightning. He just escaped.

“I’ll gi’e thee a smoke kiss,” he said.

“Tha’rt a knivey nuisance, Arty Morel,” she said, sitting back.

“Ha’e a smoke kiss?”

The soldier leaned forward to her, smiling. His face was near hers.

“Shonna!” she replied, turning away her head.

He took a draw at his cigarette, and pursed up his mouth, and put his lips close to her. His dark-brown cropped moustache stood out like a brush. She looked at the puckered crimson lips, then suddenly snatched the cigarette from his fingers and darted away. He, leaping after her, seized the comb from her back hair. She turned, threw the cigarette at him. He picked it up, put it in his mouth, and sat down.

“Nuisance!” she cried. “Give me my comb!”

She was afraid that her hair, specially done for him, would come down. She stood with her hands to her head. He hid the comb between his knees.

“I’ve non got it,” he said.

The cigarette trembled between his lips with laughter as he spoke.

“Liar!” she said.

“S true as I’m here!” he laughed, showing his hands.

“You brazen imp!” she exclaimed, rushing and scuffling for the comb, which he had under his knees. As she wrestled with him, pulling at his smooth, tight-covered knees, he laughed till he lay back on the sofa shaking with laughter. The cigarette fell from his mouth almost singeing his throat. Under his delicate tan the blood flushed up, and he laughed till his blue eyes were blinded, his throat swollen almost to choking. Then he sat up. Beatrice was putting in her comb.

“Tha tickled me, Beat,” he said thickly.

Like a flash her small white hand went out and smacked his face. He started up, glaring at her. They stared at each other. Slowly the flush mounted her cheek, she dropped her eyes, then her head. He sat down sulkily. She went into the scullery to adjust her hair. In private there she shed a few tears, she did not know what for.

When she returned she was pursed up close. But it was only a film over her fire. He, with ruffled hair, was sulking upon the sofa. She sat down opposite, in the armchair, and neither spoke. The clock ticked in the silence like blows.

“You are a little cat, Beat,” he said at length, half apologetically.

“Well, you shouldn’t be brazen,” she replied.

There was again a long silence. He whistled to himself like a man much agitated but defiant. Suddenly she went across to him and kissed him.

“Did it, pore fing!” she mocked.

He lifted his face, smiling curiously.

“Kiss?” he invited her.

“Daren’t I?” she asked.

“Go on!” he challenged, his mouth lifted to her.

Deliberately, and with a peculiar quivering smile that seemed to overspread her whole body, she put her mouth on his. Immediately his arms folded round her. As soon as the long kiss was finished she drew back her head from him, put her delicate fingers on his neck, through the open collar. Then she closed her eyes, giving herself up again in a kiss.

She acted of her own free will. What she would do she did, and made nobody responsible.

Paul felt life changing around him. The conditions of youth were gone. Now it was a home of grown-up people. Annie was a married woman, Arthur was following his own pleasure in a way unknown to his folk. For so long they had all lived at home, and gone out to pass their time. But now, for Annie and Arthur, life lay outside their mother’s house. They came home for holiday and for rest. So there was that strange, half-empty feeling about the house, as if the birds had flown. Paul became more and more unsettled. Annie and Arthur had gone. He was restless to follow. Yet home was for him beside his mother. And still there was something else, something outside, something he wanted.

He grew more and more restless. Miriam did not satisfy him. His old mad desire to be with her grew weaker. Sometimes he met Clara in Nottingham, sometimes he went to meetings with her, sometimes he saw her at Willey Farm. But on these last occasions the situation became strained. There was a triangle of antagonism between Paul and Clara and Miriam. With Clara he took on a smart, worldly, mocking tone very antagonistic to Miriam. It did not matter what went before. She might be intimate and sad with him. Then as soon as Clara appeared, it all vanished, and he played to the newcomer.

Miriam had one beautiful evening with him in the hay. He had been on the horse-rake, and having finished, came to help her to put the hay in cocks. Then he talked to her of his hopes and despairs, and his whole soul seemed to lie bare before her. She felt as if she watched the very quivering stuff of life in him. The moon came out: they walked home together: he seemed to have come to her because he needed her so badly, and she listened to him, gave him all her love and her faith. It seemed to her he brought her the best of himself to keep, and that she would guard it all her life. Nay, the sky did not cherish the stars more surely and eternally than she would guard the good in the soul of Paul Morel. She went on home alone, feeling exalted, glad in her faith.

And then, the next day, Clara came. They were to have tea in the hayfield.

Miriam watched the evening drawing to gold and shadow. And all the time Paul was sporting with Clara. He made higher and higher heaps of hay that they were jumping over. Miriam did not care for the game, and stood aside. Edgar and Geoffrey and Maurice and Clara and Paul jumped. Paul won, because he was light. Clara's blood was roused. She could run like an Amazon. Paul loved the determined way she rushed at the hay-cock and leaped, landed on the other side, her breasts shaken, her thick hair come undone.

"You touched!" he cried. "You touched!"

"No!" she flashed, turning to Edgar. "I didn't touch, did I? Wasn't I clear?"

"I couldn't say," laughed Edgar.

None of them could say.

"But you touched," said Paul. "You're beaten."

"I did NOT touch!" she cried.

"As plain as anything," said Paul.

"Box his ears for me!" she cried to Edgar.

"Nay," Edgar laughed. "I daren't. You must do it yourself."

"And nothing can alter the fact that you touched," laughed Paul.

She was furious with him. Her little triumph before these lads and men was gone. She had forgotten herself in the game. Now he was to humble her.

"I think you are despicable!" she said.

And again he laughed, in a way that tortured Miriam.

"And I KNEW you couldn't jump that heap," he teased.

She turned her back on him. Yet everybody could see that the only person she listened to, or was conscious of, was he, and he of her. It pleased the men to see this battle between them. But Miriam was tortured.

Paul could choose the lesser in place of the higher, she saw. He could be unfaithful to himself, unfaithful to the real, deep Paul Morel. There was a danger of his becoming frivolous, of his running after his satisfaction like any Arthur, or like his father. It made Miriam bitter to think that he should throw away his soul for this flippant traffic of triviality with Clara. She walked in bitterness and silence, while the other two rallied each other, and Paul sported.

And afterwards, he would not own it, but he was rather ashamed of himself, and prostrated himself before Miriam. Then again he rebelled.

"It's not religious to be religious," he said. "I reckon a crow is religious when it sails across the sky. But it only does it because it feels itself carried to where it's going, not because it thinks it is being eternal."

But Miriam knew that one should be religious in everything, have God, whatever God might be, present in everything.

"I don't believe God knows such a lot about Himself," he cried. "God doesn't

KNOW things, He IS things. And I'm sure He's not soulful."

And then it seemed to her that Paul was arguing God on to his own side, because he wanted his own way and his own pleasure. There was a long battle between him and her. He was utterly unfaithful to her even in her own presence; then he was ashamed, then repentant; then he hated her, and went off again. Those were the ever-recurring conditions.

She fretted him to the bottom of his soul. There she remained — sad, pensive, a worshipper. And he caused her sorrow. Half the time he grieved for her, half the time he hated her. She was his conscience; and he felt, somehow, he had got a conscience that was too much for him. He could not leave her, because in one way she did hold the best of him. He could not stay with her because she did not take the rest of him, which was three-quarters. So he chafed himself into rawness over her.

When she was twenty-one he wrote her a letter which could only have been written to her.

"May I speak of our old, worn love, this last time. It, too, is changing, is it not? Say, has not the body of that love died, and left you its invulnerable soul? You see, I can give you a spirit love, I have given it you this long, long time; but not embodied passion. See, you are a nun. I have given you what I would give a holy nun — as a mystic monk to a mystic nun. Surely you esteem it best. Yet you regret — no, have regretted — the other. In all our relations no body enters. I do not talk to you through the senses — rather through the spirit. That is why we cannot love in the common sense. Ours is not an everyday affection. As yet we are mortal, and to live side by side with one another would be dreadful, for somehow with you I cannot long be trivial, and, you know, to be always beyond this mortal state would be to lose it. If people marry, they must live together as affectionate humans, who may be commonplace with each other without feeling awkward — not as two souls. So I feel it.

"Ought I to send this letter? — I doubt it. But there — it is best to understand. Au revoir."

Miriam read this letter twice, after which she sealed it up. A year later she broke the seal to show her mother the letter.

"You are a nun — you are a nun." The words went into her heart again and again. Nothing he ever had said had gone into her so deeply, fixedly, like a mortal wound.

She answered him two days after the party.

"Our intimacy would have been all-beautiful but for one little mistake," she quoted. "Was the mistake mine?"

Almost immediately he replied to her from Nottingham, sending her at the

same time a little “Omar Khayyam.”

“I am glad you answered; you are so calm and natural you put me to shame. What a ranter I am! We are often out of sympathy. But in fundamentals we may always be together I think.

“I must thank you for your sympathy with my painting and drawing. Many a sketch is dedicated to you. I do look forward to your criticisms, which, to my shame and glory, are always grand appreciations. It is a lovely joke, that. Au revoir.”

This was the end of the first phase of Paul’s love affair. He was now about twenty-three years old, and, though still virgin, the sex instinct that Miriam had over-refined for so long now grew particularly strong. Often, as he talked to Clara Dawes, came that thickening and quickening of his blood, that peculiar concentration in the breast, as if something were alive there, a new self or a new centre of consciousness, warning him that sooner or later he would have to ask one woman or another. But he belonged to Miriam. Of that she was so fixedly sure that he allowed her right.

CHAPTER X

CLARA

WHEN he was twenty-three years old, Paul sent in a landscape to the winter exhibition at Nottingham Castle. Miss Jordan had taken a good deal of interest in him, and invited him to her house, where he met other artists. He was beginning to grow ambitious.

One morning the postman came just as he was washing in the scullery. Suddenly he heard a wild noise from his mother. Rushing into the kitchen, he found her standing on the hearthrug wildly waving a letter and crying "Hurrah!" as if she had gone mad. He was shocked and frightened.

"Why, mother!" he exclaimed.

She flew to him, flung her arms round him for a moment, then waved the letter, crying:

"Hurrah, my boy! I knew we should do it!"

He was afraid of her — the small, severe woman with graying hair suddenly bursting out in such frenzy. The postman came running back, afraid something had happened. They saw his tipped cap over the short curtains. Mrs. Morel rushed to the door.

"His picture's got first prize, Fred," she cried, "and is sold for twenty guineas."

"My word, that's something like!" said the young postman, whom they had known all his life.

"And Major Moreton has bought it!" she cried.

"It looks like meanin' something, that does, Mrs. Morel," said the postman, his blue eyes bright. He was glad to have brought such a lucky letter. Mrs. Morel went indoors and sat down, trembling. Paul was afraid lest she might have misread the letter, and might be disappointed after all. He scrutinised it once, twice. Yes, he became convinced it was true. Then he sat down, his heart beating with joy.

"Mother!" he exclaimed.

"Didn't I SAY we should do it!" she said, pretending she was not crying.

He took the kettle off the fire and mashed the tea.

“You didn’t think, mother — ” he began tentatively.

“No, my son — not so much — but I expected a good deal.”

“But not so much,” he said.

“No — no — but I knew we should do it.”

And then she recovered her composure, apparently at least. He sat with his shirt turned back, showing his young throat almost like a girl’s, and the towel in his hand, his hair sticking up wet.

“Twenty guineas, mother! That’s just what you wanted to buy Arthur out. Now you needn’t borrow any. It’ll just do.”

“Indeed, I shan’t take it all,” she said.

“But why?”

“Because I shan’t.”

“Well — you have twelve pounds, I’ll have nine.”

They cavilled about sharing the twenty guineas. She wanted to take only the five pounds she needed. He would not hear of it. So they got over the stress of emotion by quarrelling.

Morel came home at night from the pit, saying:

“They tell me Paul’s got first prize for his picture, and sold it to Lord Henry Bentley for fifty pound.”

“Oh, what stories people do tell!” she cried.

“Ha!” he answered. “I said I wor sure it wor a lie. But they said tha’d told Fred Hodgkisson.”

“As if I would tell him such stuff!”

“Ha!” assented the miner.

But he was disappointed nevertheless.

“It’s true he has got the first prize,” said Mrs. Morel.

The miner sat heavily in his chair.

“Has he, beguy!” he exclaimed.

He stared across the room fixedly.

“But as for fifty pounds — such nonsense!” She was silent awhile. “Major Moreton bought it for twenty guineas, that’s true.”

“Twenty guineas! Tha niver says!” exclaimed Morel.

“Yes, and it was worth it.”

“Ay!” he said. “I don’t misdoubt it. But twenty guineas for a bit of a paintin’ as he knocked off in an hour or two!”

He was silent with conceit of his son. Mrs. Morel sniffed, as if it were nothing.

“And when does he handle th’ money?” asked the collier.

“That I couldn’t tell you. When the picture is sent home, I suppose.”

There was silence. Morel stared at the sugar-basin instead of eating his dinner.

His black arm, with the hand all gnarled with work lay on the table. His wife pretended not to see him rub the back of his hand across his eyes, nor the smear in the coal-dust on his black face.

“Yes, an’ that other lad ‘ud ‘a done as much if they hadna ha’ killed ‘im,” he said quietly.

The thought of William went through Mrs. Morel like a cold blade. It left her feeling she was tired, and wanted rest.

Paul was invited to dinner at Mr. Jordan’s. Afterwards he said:

“Mother, I want an evening suit.”

“Yes, I was afraid you would,” she said. She was glad. There was a moment or two of silence. “There’s that one of William’s,” she continued, “that I know cost four pounds ten and which he’d only worn three times.”

“Should you like me to wear it, mother?” he asked.

“Yes. I think it would fit you — at least the coat. The trousers would want shortening.”

He went upstairs and put on the coat and vest. Coming down, he looked strange in a flannel collar and a flannel shirt-front, with an evening coat and vest. It was rather large.

“The tailor can make it right,” she said, smoothing her hand over his shoulder. “It’s beautiful stuff. I never could find in my heart to let your father wear the trousers, and very glad I am now.”

And as she smoothed her hand over the silk collar she thought of her eldest son. But this son was living enough inside the clothes. She passed her hand down his back to feel him. He was alive and hers. The other was dead.

He went out to dinner several times in his evening suit that had been William’s. Each time his mother’s heart was firm with pride and joy. He was started now. The studs she and the children had bought for William were in his shirt-front; he wore one of William’s dress shirts. But he had an elegant figure. His face was rough, but warm-looking and rather pleasing. He did not look particularly a gentleman, but she thought he looked quite a man.

He told her everything that took place, everything that was said. It was as if she had been there. And he was dying to introduce her to these new friends who had dinner at seven-thirty in the evening.

“Go along with you!” she said. “What do they want to know me for?”

“They do!” he cried indignantly. “If they want to know me — and they say they do — then they want to know you, because you are quite as clever as I am.”

“Go along with you, child!” she laughed.

But she began to spare her hands. They, too, were work-gnarled now. The skin was shiny with so much hot water, the knuckles rather swollen. But she began to

be careful to keep them out of soda. She regretted what they had been — so small and exquisite. And when Annie insisted on her having more stylish blouses to suit her age, she submitted. She even went so far as to allow a black velvet bow to be placed on her hair. Then she sniffed in her sarcastic manner, and was sure she looked a sight. But she looked a lady, Paul declared, as much as Mrs. Major Moreton, and far, far nicer. The family was coming on. Only Morel remained unchanged, or rather, lapsed slowly.

Paul and his mother now had long discussions about life. Religion was fading into the background. He had shovelled away an the beliefs that would hamper him, had cleared the ground, and come more or less to the bedrock of belief that one should feel inside oneself for right and wrong, and should have the patience to gradually realise one's God. Now life interested him more.

"You know," he said to his mother, "I don't want to belong to the well-to-do middle class. I like my common people best. I belong to the common people."

"But if anyone else said so, my son, wouldn't you be in a tear. YOU know you consider yourself equal to any gentleman."

"In myself," he answered, "not in my class or my education or my manners. But in myself I am."

"Very well, then. Then why talk about the common people?"

"Because — the difference between people isn't in their class, but in themselves. Only from the middle classes one gets ideas, and from the common people — life itself, warmth. You feel their hates and loves."

"It's all very well, my boy. But, then, why don't you go and talk to your father's pals?"

"But they're rather different."

"Not at all. They're the common people. After all, whom do you mix with now — among the common people? Those that exchange ideas, like the middle classes. The rest don't interest you."

"But — there's the life —"

"I don't believe there's a jot more life from Miriam than you could get from any educated girl — say Miss Moreton. It is YOU who are snobbish about class."

She frankly WANTED him to climb into the middle classes, a thing not very difficult, she knew. And she wanted him in the end to marry a lady.

Now she began to combat him in his restless fretting. He still kept up his connection with Miriam, could neither break free nor go the whole length of engagement. And this indecision seemed to bleed him of his energy. Moreover, his mother suspected him of an unrecognised leaning towards Clara, and, since the latter was a married woman, she wished he would fall in love with one of the

girls in a better station of life. But he was stupid, and would refuse to love or even to admire a girl much, just because she was his social superior.

“My boy,” said his mother to him, “all your cleverness, your breaking away from old things, and taking life in your own hands, doesn’t seem to bring you much happiness.”

“What is happiness!” he cried. “It’s nothing to me! How AM I to be happy?”

The plump question disturbed her.

“That’s for you to judge, my lad. But if you could meet some GOOD woman who would MAKE you happy — and you began to think of settling your life — when you have the means — so that you could work without all this fretting — it would be much better for you.”

He frowned. His mother caught him on the raw of his wound of Miriam. He pushed the tumbled hair off his forehead, his eyes full of pain and fire.

“You mean easy, mother,” he cried. “That’s a woman’s whole doctrine for life — ease of soul and physical comfort. And I do despise it.”

“Oh, do you!” replied his mother. “And do you call yours a divine discontent?”

“Yes. I don’t care about its divinity. But damn your happiness! So long as life’s full, it doesn’t matter whether it’s happy or not. I’m afraid your happiness would bore me.”

“You never give it a chance,” she said. Then suddenly all her passion of grief over him broke out. “But it does matter!” she cried. “And you OUGHT to be happy, you ought to try to be happy, to live to be happy. How could I bear to think your life wouldn’t be a happy one!”

“Your own’s been bad enough, mater, but it hasn’t left you so much worse off than the folk who’ve been happier. I reckon you’ve done well. And I am the same. Aren’t I well enough off?”

“You’re not, my son. Battle — battle — and suffer. It’s about all you do, as far as I can see.”

“But why not, my dear? I tell you it’s the best — ”

“It isn’t. And one OUGHT to be happy, one OUGHT.”

By this time Mrs. Morel was trembling violently. Struggles of this kind often took place between her and her son, when she seemed to fight for his very life against his own will to die. He took her in his arms. She was ill and pitiful.

“Never mind, Little,” he murmured. “So long as you don’t feel life’s paltry and a miserable business, the rest doesn’t matter, happiness or unhappiness.”

She pressed him to her.

“But I want you to be happy,” she said pathetically.

“Eh, my dear — say rather you want me to live.”

Mrs. Morel felt as if her heart would break for him. At this rate she knew he would not live. He had that poignant carelessness about himself, his own suffering, his own life, which is a form of slow suicide. It almost broke her heart. With all the passion of her strong nature she hated Miriam for having in this subtle way undermined his joy. It did not matter to her that Miriam could not help it. Miriam did it, and she hated her.

She wished so much he would fall in love with a girl equal to be his mate — educated and strong. But he would not look at anybody above him in station. He seemed to like Mrs. Dawes. At any rate that feeling was wholesome. His mother prayed and prayed for him, that he might not be wasted. That was all her prayer — not for his soul or his righteousness, but that he might not be wasted. And while he slept, for hours and hours she thought and prayed for him.

He drifted away from Miriam imperceptibly, without knowing he was going. Arthur only left the army to be married. The baby was born six months after his wedding. Mrs. Morel got him a job under the firm again, at twenty-one shillings a week. She furnished for him, with the help of Beatrice's mother, a little cottage of two rooms. He was caught now. It did not matter how he kicked and struggled, he was fast. For a time he chafed, was irritable with his young wife, who loved him; he went almost distracted when the baby, which was delicate, cried or gave trouble. He grumbled for hours to his mother. She only said: "Well, my lad, you did it yourself, now you must make the best of it." And then the grit came out in him. He buckled to work, undertook his responsibilities, acknowledged that he belonged to his wife and child, and did make a good best of it. He had never been very closely inbound into the family. Now he was gone altogether.

The months went slowly along. Paul had more or less got into connection with the Socialist, Suffragette, Unitarian people in Nottingham, owing to his acquaintance with Clara. One day a friend of his and of Clara's, in Bestwood, asked him to take a message to Mrs. Dawes. He went in the evening across Sneinton Market to Bluebell Hill. He found the house in a mean little street paved with granite cobbles and having causeways of dark blue, grooved bricks. The front door went up a step from off this rough pavement, where the feet of the passersby rasped and clattered. The brown paint on the door was so old that the naked wood showed between the rents. He stood on the street below and knocked. There came a heavy footstep; a large, stout woman of about sixty towered above him. He looked up at her from the pavement. She had a rather severe face.

She admitted him into the parlour, which opened on to the street. It was a small, stuffy, defunct room, of mahogany, and deathly enlargements of

photographs of departed people done in carbon. Mrs. Radford left him. She was stately, almost martial. In a moment Clara appeared. She flushed deeply, and he was covered with confusion. It seemed as if she did not like being discovered in her home circumstances.

“I thought it couldn’t be your voice,” she said.

But she might as well be hung for a sheep as for a lamb. She invited him out of the mausoleum of a parlour into the kitchen.

That was a little, darkish room too, but it was smothered in white lace. The mother had seated herself again by the cupboard, and was drawing thread from a vast web of lace. A clump of fluff and ravelled cotton was at her right hand, a heap of three-quarter-inch lace lay on her left, whilst in front of her was the mountain of lace web, piling the hearthrug. Threads of curly cotton, pulled out from between the lengths of lace, strewed over the fender and the fireplace. Paul dared not go forward, for fear of treading on piles of white stuff.

On the table was a jenny for carding the lace. There was a pack of brown cardboard squares, a pack of cards of lace, a little box of pins, and on the sofa lay a heap of drawn lace.

The room was all lace, and it was so dark and warm that the white, snowy stuff seemed the more distinct.

“If you’re coming in you won’t have to mind the work,” said Mrs. Radford. “I know we’re about blocked up. But sit you down.”

Clara, much embarrassed, gave him a chair against the wall opposite the white heaps. Then she herself took her place on the sofa, shamedly.

“Will you drink a bottle of stout?” Mrs. Radford asked. “Clara, get him a bottle of stout.”

He protested, but Mrs. Radford insisted.

“You look as if you could do with it,” she said. “Haven’t you never any more colour than that?”

“It’s only a thick skin I’ve got that doesn’t show the blood through,” he answered.

Clara, ashamed and chagrined, brought him a bottle of stout and a glass. He poured out some of the black stuff.

“Well,” he said, lifting the glass, “here’s health!”

“And thank you,” said Mrs. Radford.

He took a drink of stout.

“And light yourself a cigarette, so long as you don’t set the house on fire,” said Mrs. Radford.

“Thank you,” he replied.

“Nay, you needn’t thank me,” she answered. “I s’ll be glad to smell a bit of

smoke in th' 'ouse again. A house o' women is as dead as a house wi' no fire, to my thinkin'. I'm not a spider as likes a corner to myself. I like a man about, if he's only something to snap at."

Clara began to work. Her jenny spun with a subdued buzz; the white lace hopped from between her fingers on to the card. It was filled; she snipped off the length, and pinned the end down to the banded lace. Then she put a new card in her jenny. Paul watched her. She sat square and magnificent. Her throat and arms were bare. The blood still mantled below her ears; she bent her head in shame of her humility. Her face was set on her work. Her arms were creamy and full of life beside the white lace; her large, well-kept hands worked with a balanced movement, as if nothing would hurry them. He, not knowing, watched her all the time. He saw the arch of her neck from the shoulder, as she bent her head; he saw the coil of dun hair; he watched her moving, gleaming arms.

"I've heard a bit about you from Clara," continued the mother. "You're in Jordan's, aren't you?" She drew her lace unceasing.

"Yes."

"Ay, well, and I can remember when Thomas Jordan used to ask ME for one of my toffies."

"Did he?" laughed Paul. "And did he get it?"

"Sometimes he did, sometimes he didn't — which was latterly. For he's the sort that takes all and gives naught, he is — or used to be."

"I think he's very decent," said Paul.

"Yes; well, I'm glad to hear it."

Mrs. Radford looked across at him steadily. There was something determined about her that he liked. Her face was falling loose, but her eyes were calm, and there was something strong in her that made it seem she was not old; merely her wrinkles and loose cheeks were an anachronism. She had the strength and sangfroid of a woman in the prime of life. She continued drawing the lace with slow, dignified movements. The big web came up inevitably over her apron; the length of lace fell away at her side. Her arms were finely shapen, but glossy and yellow as old ivory. They had not the peculiar dull gleam that made Clara's so fascinating to him.

"And you've been going with Miriam Leivers?" the mother asked him.

"Well — " he answered.

"Yes, she's a nice girl," she continued. "She's very nice, but she's a bit too much above this world to suit my fancy."

"She is a bit like that," he agreed.

"She'll never be satisfied till she's got wings and can fly over everybody's head, she won't," she said.

Clara broke in, and he told her his message. She spoke humbly to him. He had surprised her in her drudgery. To have her humble made him feel as if he were lifting his head in expectation.

“Do you like jennying?” he asked.

“What can a woman do!” she replied bitterly.

“Is it sweated?”

“More or less. Isn’t ALL woman’s work? That’s another trick the men have played, since we force ourselves into the labour market.”

“Now then, you shut up about the men,” said her mother. “If the women wasn’t fools, the men wouldn’t be bad uns, that’s what I say. No man was ever that bad wi’ me but what he got it back again. Not but what they’re a lousy lot, there’s no denying it.”

“But they’re all right really, aren’t they?” he asked.

“Well, they’re a bit different from women,” she answered.

“Would you care to be back at Jordan’s?” he asked Clara.

“I don’t think so,” she replied.

“Yes, she would!” cried her mother; “thank her stars if she could get back. Don’t you listen to her. She’s for ever on that ‘igh horse of hers, an’ it’s back’s that thin an’ starved it’ll cut her in two one of these days.”

Clara suffered badly from her mother. Paul felt as if his eyes were coming very wide open. Wasn’t he to take Clara’s fulminations so seriously, after all? She spun steadily at her work. He experienced a thrill of joy, thinking she might need his help. She seemed denied and deprived of so much. And her arm moved mechanically, that should never have been subdued to a mechanism, and her head was bowed to the lace, that never should have been bowed. She seemed to be stranded there among the refuse that life has thrown away, doing her jennying. It was a bitter thing to her to be put aside by life, as if it had no use for her. No wonder she protested.

She came with him to the door. He stood below in the mean street, looking up at her. So fine she was in her stature and her bearing, she reminded him of Juno dethroned. As she stood in the doorway, she winced from the street, from her surroundings.

“And you will go with Mrs. Hodgkisson to Hucknall?”

He was talking quite meaninglessly, only watching her. Her grey eyes at last met his. They looked dumb with humiliation, pleading with a kind of captive misery. He was shaken and at a loss. He had thought her high and mighty.

When he left her, he wanted to run. He went to the station in a sort of dream, and was at home without realising he had moved out of her street.

He had an idea that Susan, the overseer of the Spiral girls, was about to be

married. He asked her the next day.

“I say, Susan, I heard a whisper of your getting married. What about it?”

Susan flushed red.

“Who’s been talking to you?” she replied.

“Nobody. I merely heard a whisper that you WERE thinking — ”

“Well, I am, though you needn’t tell anybody. What’s more, I wish I wasn’t!”

“Nay, Susan, you won’t make me believe that.”

“Shan’t I? You CAN believe it, though. I’d rather stop here a thousand times.”

Paul was perturbed.

“Why, Susan?”

The girl’s colour was high, and her eyes flashed.

“That’s why!”

“And must you?”

For answer, she looked at him. There was about him a candour and gentleness which made the women trust him. He understood.

“Ah, I’m sorry,” he said.

Tears came to her eyes.

“But you’ll see it’ll turn out all right. You’ll make the best of it,” he continued rather wistfully.

“There’s nothing else for it.”

“Yea, there’s making the worst of it. Try and make it all right.”

He soon made occasion to call again on Clara.

“Would you,” he said, “care to come back to Jordan’s?”

She put down her work, laid her beautiful arms on the table, and looked at him for some moments without answering. Gradually the flush mounted her cheek.

“Why?” she asked.

Paul felt rather awkward.

“Well, because Susan is thinking of leaving,” he said.

Clara went on with her jennying. The white lace leaped in little jumps and bounds on to the card. He waited for her. Without raising her head, she said at last, in a peculiar low voice:

“Have you said anything about it?”

“Except to you, not a word.”

There was again a long silence.

“I will apply when the advertisement is out,” she said.

“You will apply before that. I will let you know exactly when.”

She went on spinning her little machine, and did not contradict him.

Clara came to Jordan’s. Some of the older hands, Fanny among them, remembered her earlier rule, and cordially disliked the memory. Clara had

always been “ikey”, reserved, and superior. She had never mixed with the girls as one of themselves. If she had occasion to find fault, she did it coolly and with perfect politeness, which the defaulter felt to be a bigger insult than crassness. Towards Fanny, the poor, overstrung hunchback, Clara was unfailingly compassionate and gentle, as a result of which Fanny shed more bitter tears than ever the rough tongues of the other overseers had caused her.

There was something in Clara that Paul disliked, and much that piqued him. If she were about, he always watched her strong throat or her neck, upon which the blonde hair grew low and fluffy. There was a fine down, almost invisible, upon the skin of her face and arms, and when once he had perceived it, he saw it always.

When he was at his work, painting in the afternoon, she would come and stand near to him, perfectly motionless. Then he felt her, though she neither spoke nor touched him. Although she stood a yard away he felt as if he were in contact with her. Then he could paint no more. He flung down the brushes, and turned to talk to her.

Sometimes she praised his work; sometimes she was critical and cold.

“You are affected in that piece,” she would say; and, as there was an element of truth in her condemnation, his blood boiled with anger.

Again: “What of this?” he would ask enthusiastically.

“H’m!” She made a small doubtful sound. “It doesn’t interest me much.”

“Because you don’t understand it,” he retorted.

“Then why ask me about it?”

“Because I thought you would understand.”

She would shrug her shoulders in scorn of his work. She maddened him. He was furious. Then he abused her, and went into passionate exposition of his stuff. This amused and stimulated her. But she never owned that she had been wrong.

During the ten years that she had belonged to the women’s movement she had acquired a fair amount of education, and, having had some of Miriam’s passion to be instructed, had taught herself French, and could read in that language with a struggle. She considered herself as a woman apart, and particularly apart, from her class. The girls in the Spiral department were all of good homes. It was a small, special industry, and had a certain distinction. There was an air of refinement in both rooms. But Clara was aloof also from her fellow-workers.

None of these things, however, did she reveal to Paul. She was not the one to give herself away. There was a sense of mystery about her. She was so reserved, he felt she had much to reserve. Her history was open on the surface, but its inner meaning was hidden from everybody. It was exciting. And then sometimes

he caught her looking at him from under her brows with an almost furtive, sullen scrutiny, which made him move quickly. Often she met his eyes. But then her own were, as it were, covered over, revealing nothing. She gave him a little, lenient smile. She was to him extraordinarily provocative, because of the knowledge she seemed to possess, and gathered fruit of experience he could not attain.

One day he picked up a copy of *Lettres de mon Moulin* from her work-bench.

“You read French, do you?” he cried.

Clara glanced round negligently. She was making an elastic stocking of heliotrope silk, turning the Spiral machine with slow, balanced regularity, occasionally bending down to see her work or to adjust the needles; then her magnificent neck, with its down and fine pencils of hair, shone white against the lavender, lustrous silk. She turned a few more rounds, and stopped.

“What did you say?” she asked, smiling sweetly.

Paul’s eyes glittered at her insolent indifference to him.

“I did not know you read French,” he said, very polite.

“Did you not?” she replied, with a faint, sarcastic smile.

“Rotten swank!” he said, but scarcely loud enough to be heard.

He shut his mouth angrily as he watched her. She seemed to scorn the work she mechanically produced; yet the hose she made were as nearly perfect as possible.

“You don’t like Spiral work,” he said.

“Oh, well, all work is work,” she answered, as if she knew all about it.

He marvelled at her coldness. He had to do everything hotly. She must be something special.

“What would you prefer to do?” he asked.

She laughed at him indulgently, as she said:

“There is so little likelihood of my ever being given a choice, that I haven’t wasted time considering.”

“Pah!” he said, contemptuous on his side now. “You only say that because you’re too proud to own up what you want and can’t get.”

“You know me very well,” she replied coldly.

“I know you think you’re terrific great shakes, and that you live under the eternal insult of working in a factory.”

He was very angry and very rude. She merely turned away from him in disdain. He walked whistling down the room, flirted and laughed with Hilda.

Later on he said to himself:

“What was I so impudent to Clara for?” He was rather annoyed with himself, at the same time glad. “Serve her right; she stinks with silent pride,” he said to

himself angrily.

In the afternoon he came down. There was a certain weight on his heart which he wanted to remove. He thought to do it by offering her chocolates.

“Have one?” he said. “I bought a handful to sweeten me up.”

To his great relief, she accepted. He sat on the work-bench beside her machine, twisting a piece of silk round his finger. She loved him for his quick, unexpected movements, like a young animal. His feet swung as he pondered. The sweets lay strewn on the bench. She bent over her machine, grinding rhythmically, then stooping to see the stocking that hung beneath, pulled down by the weight. He watched the handsome crouching of her back, and the apron-strings curling on the floor.

“There is always about you,” he said, “a sort of waiting. Whatever I see you doing, you’re not really there: you are waiting — like Penelope when she did her weaving.” He could not help a spurt of wickedness. “I’ll call you Penelope,” he said.

“Would it make any difference?” she said, carefully removing one of her needles.

“That doesn’t matter, so long as it pleases me. Here, I say, you seem to forget I’m your boss. It just occurs to me.”

“And what does that mean?” she asked coolly.

“It means I’ve got a right to boss you.”

“Is there anything you want to complain about?”

“Oh, I say, you needn’t be nasty,” he said angrily.

“I don’t know what you want,” she said, continuing her task.

“I want you to treat me nicely and respectfully.”

“Call you ‘sir’, perhaps?” she asked quietly.

“Yes, call me ‘sir’. I should love it.”

“Then I wish you would go upstairs, sir.”

His mouth closed, and a frown came on his face. He jumped suddenly down.

“You’re too blessed superior for anything,” he said.

And he went away to the other girls. He felt he was being angrier than he had any need to be. In fact, he doubted slightly that he was showing off. But if he were, then he would. Clara heard him laughing, in a way she hated, with the girls down the next room.

When at evening he went through the department after the girls had gone, he saw his chocolates lying untouched in front of Clara’s machine. He left them. In the morning they were still there, and Clara was at work. Later on Minnie, a little brunette they called Pussy, called to him:

“Hey, haven’t you got a chocolate for anybody?”

“Sorry, Pussy,” he replied. “I meant to have offered them; then I went and forgot ‘em.”

“I think you did,” she answered.

“I’ll bring you some this afternoon. You don’t want them after they’ve been lying about, do you?”

“Oh, I’m not particular,” smiled Pussy.

“Oh no,” he said. “They’ll be dusty.”

He went up to Clara’s bench.

“Sorry I left these things littering about,” he said.

She flushed scarlet. He gathered them together in his fist.

“They’ll be dirty now,” he said. “You should have taken them. I wonder why you didn’t. I meant to have told you I wanted you to.”

He flung them out of the window into the yard below. He just glanced at her. She winced from his eyes.

In the afternoon he brought another packet.

“Will you take some?” he said, offering them first to Clara. “These are fresh.”

She accepted one, and put it on to the bench.

“Oh, take several — for luck,” he said.

She took a couple more, and put them on the bench also. Then she turned in confusion to her work. He went on up the room.

“Here you are, Pussy,” he said. “Don’t be greedy!”

“Are they all for her?” cried the others, rushing up.

“Of course they’re not,” he said.

The girls clamoured round. Pussy drew back from her mates.

“Come out!” she cried. “I can have first pick, can’t I, Paul?”

“Be nice with ‘em,” he said, and went away.

“You ARE a dear,” the girls cried.

“Tenpence,” he answered.

He went past Clara without speaking. She felt the three chocolate creams would burn her if she touched them. It needed all her courage to slip them into the pocket of her apron.

The girls loved him and were afraid of him. He was so nice while he was nice, but if he were offended, so distant, treating them as if they scarcely existed, or not more than the bobbins of thread. And then, if they were impudent, he said quietly: “Do you mind going on with your work,” and stood and watched.

When he celebrated his twenty-third birthday, the house was in trouble. Arthur was just going to be married. His mother was not well. His father, getting an old man, and lame from his accidents, was given a paltry, poor job. Miriam was an eternal reproach. He felt he owed himself to her, yet could not give himself. The

house, moreover, needed his support. He was pulled in all directions. He was not glad it was his birthday. It made him bitter.

He got to work at eight o'clock. Most of the clerks had not turned up. The girls were not due till 8.30. As he was changing his coat, he heard a voice behind him say:

“Paul, Paul, I want you.”

It was Fanny, the hunchback, standing at the top of her stairs, her face radiant with a secret. Paul looked at her in astonishment.

“I want you,” she said.

He stood, at a loss.

“Come on,” she coaxed. “Come before you begin on the letters.”

He went down the half-dozen steps into her dry, narrow, “finishing-off” room. Fanny walked before him: her black bodice was short — the waist was under her armpits — and her green-black cashmere skirt seemed very long, as she strode with big strides before the young man, himself so graceful. She went to her seat at the narrow end of the room, where the window opened on to chimney-pots. Paul watched her thin hands and her flat red wrists as she excitedly twitched her white apron, which was spread on the bench in front of her. She hesitated.

“You didn’t think we’d forgot you?” she asked, reproachful.

“Why?” he asked. He had forgotten his birthday himself.

“‘Why,’ he says! ‘Why!’ Why, look here!” She pointed to the calendar, and he saw, surrounding the big black number “21”, hundreds of little crosses in black-lead.

“Oh, kisses for my birthday,” he laughed. “How did you know?”

“Yes, you want to know, don’t you?” Fanny mocked, hugely delighted. “There’s one from everybody — except Lady Clara — and two from some. But I shan’t tell you how many I put.”

“Oh, I know, you’re spooney,” he said.

“There you ARE mistaken!” she cried, indignant. “I could never be so soft.” Her voice was strong and contralto.

“You always pretend to be such a hard-hearted hussy,” he laughed. “And you know you’re as sentimental — ”

“I’d rather be called sentimental than frozen meat,” Fanny blurted. Paul knew she referred to Clara, and he smiled.

“Do you say such nasty things about me?” he laughed.

“No, my duck,” the hunchback woman answered, lavishly tender. She was thirty-nine. “No, my duck, because you don’t think yourself a fine figure in marble and us nothing but dirt. I’m as good as you, aren’t I, Paul?” and the question delighted her.

“Why, we’re not better than one another, are we?” he replied.

“But I’m as good as you, aren’t I, Paul?” she persisted daringly.

“Of course you are. If it comes to goodness, you’re better.”

She was rather afraid of the situation. She might get hysterical.

“I thought I’d get here before the others — won’t they say I’m deep! Now shut your eyes — ” she said.

“And open your mouth, and see what God sends you,” he continued, suiting action to words, and expecting a piece of chocolate. He heard the rustle of the apron, and a faint clink of metal. “I’m going to look,” he said.

He opened his eyes. Fanny, her long cheeks flushed, her blue eyes shining, was gazing at him. There was a little bundle of paint-tubes on the bench before him. He turned pale.

“No, Fanny,” he said quickly.

“From us all,” she answered hastily.

“No, but — ”

“Are they the right sort?” she asked, rocking herself with delight.

“Jove! they’re the best in the catalogue.”

“But they’re the right sorts?” she cried.

“They’re off the little list I’d made to get when my ship came in.” He bit his lip.

Fanny was overcome with emotion. She must turn the conversation.

“They was all on thorns to do it; they all paid their shares, all except the Queen of Sheba.”

The Queen of Sheba was Clara.

“And wouldn’t she join?” Paul asked.

“She didn’t get the chance; we never told her; we wasn’t going to have HER bossing THIS show. We didn’t WANT her to join.”

Paul laughed at the woman. He was much moved. At last he must go. She was very close to him. Suddenly she flung her arms round his neck and kissed him vehemently.

“I can give you a kiss to-day,” she said apologetically. “You’ve looked so white, it’s made my heart ache.”

Paul kissed her, and left her. Her arms were so pitifully thin that his heart ached also.

That day he met Clara as he ran downstairs to wash his hands at dinner-time.

“You have stayed to dinner!” he exclaimed. It was unusual for her.

“Yes; and I seem to have dined on old surgical-appliance stock. I MUST go out now, or I shall feel stale india-rubber right through.”

She lingered. He instantly caught at her wish.

“You are going anywhere?” he asked.

They went together up to the Castle. Outdoors she dressed very plainly, down to ugliness; indoors she always looked nice. She walked with hesitating steps alongside Paul, bowing and turning away from him. Dowdy in dress, and drooping, she showed to great disadvantage. He could scarcely recognise her strong form, that seemed to slumber with power. She appeared almost insignificant, drowning her stature in her stoop, as she shrank from the public gaze.

The Castle grounds were very green and fresh. Climbing the precipitous ascent, he laughed and chattered, but she was silent, seeming to brood over something. There was scarcely time to go inside the squat, square building that crowns the bluff of rock. They leaned upon the wall where the cliff runs sheer down to the Park. Below them, in their holes in the sandstone, pigeons preened themselves and cooed softly. Away down upon the boulevard at the foot of the rock, tiny trees stood in their own pools of shadow, and tiny people went scurrying about in almost ludicrous importance.

“You feel as if you could scoop up the folk like tadpoles, and have a handful of them,” he said.

She laughed, answering:

“Yes; it is not necessary to get far off in order to see us proportionately. The trees are much more significant.”

“Bulk only,” he said.

She laughed cynically.

Away beyond the boulevard the thin stripes of the metals showed upon the railway-track, whose margin was crowded with little stacks of timber, beside which smoking toy engines fussed. Then the silver string of the canal lay at random among the black heaps. Beyond, the dwellings, very dense on the river flat, looked like black, poisonous herbage, in thick rows and crowded beds, stretching right away, broken now and then by taller plants, right to where the river glistened in a hieroglyph across the country. The steep scarp cliffs across the river looked puny. Great stretches of country darkened with trees and faintly brightened with corn-land, spread towards the haze, where the hills rose blue beyond grey.

“It is comforting,” said Mrs. Dawes, “to think the town goes no farther. It is only a LITTLE sore upon the country yet.”

“A little scab,” Paul said.

She shivered. She loathed the town. Looking drearily across at the country which was forbidden her, her impassive face, pale and hostile, she reminded Paul of one of the bitter, remorseful angels.

“But the town’s all right,” he said; “it’s only temporary. This is the crude, clumsy make-shift we’ve practised on, till we find out what the idea is. The town will come all right.”

The pigeons in the pockets of rock, among the perched bushes, cooed comfortably. To the left the large church of St. Mary rose into space, to keep close company with the Castle, above the heaped rubble of the town. Mrs. Dawes smiled brightly as she looked across the country.

“I feel better,” she said.

“Thank you,” he replied. “Great compliment!”

“Oh, my brother!” she laughed.

“H’m! that’s snatching back with the left hand what you gave with the right, and no mistake,” he said.

She laughed in amusement at him.

“But what was the matter with you?” he asked. “I know you were brooding something special. I can see the stamp of it on your face yet.”

“I think I will not tell you,” she said.

“All right, hug it,” he answered.

She flushed and bit her lip.

“No,” she said, “it was the girls.”

“What about ‘em?” Paul asked.

“They have been plotting something for a week now, and to-day they seem particularly full of it. All alike; they insult me with their secrecy.”

“Do they?” he asked in concern.

“I should not mind,” she went on, in the metallic, angry tone, “if they did not thrust it into my face — the fact that they have a secret.”

“Just like women,” said he.

“It is hateful, their mean gloating,” she said intensely.

Paul was silent. He knew what the girls gloated over. He was sorry to be the cause of this new dissension.

“They can have all the secrets in the world,” she went on, brooding bitterly; “but they might refrain from glorying in them, and making me feel more out of it than ever. It is — it is almost unbearable.”

Paul thought for a few minutes. He was much perturbed.

“I will tell you what it’s all about,” he said, pale and nervous. “It’s my birthday, and they’ve bought me a fine lot of paints, all the girls. They’re jealous of you” — he felt her stiffen coldly at the word ‘jealous’ — “merely because I sometimes bring you a book,” he added slowly. “But, you see, it’s only a trifle. Don’t bother about it, will you — because” — he laughed quickly — “well, what would they say if they saw us here now, in spite of their victory?”

She was angry with him for his clumsy reference to their present intimacy. It was almost insolent of him. Yet he was so quiet, she forgave him, although it cost her an effort.

Their two hands lay on the rough stone parapet of the Castle wall. He had inherited from his mother a fineness of mould, so that his hands were small and vigorous. Hers were large, to match her large limbs, but white and powerful looking. As Paul looked at them he knew her. "She is wanting somebody to take her hands — for all she is so contemptuous of us," he said to himself. And she saw nothing but his two hands, so warm and alive, which seemed to live for her. He was brooding now, staring out over the country from under sullen brows. The little, interesting diversity of shapes had vanished from the scene; all that remained was a vast, dark matrix of sorrow and tragedy, the same in all the houses and the river-flats and the people and the birds; they were only shapen differently. And now that the forms seemed to have melted away, there remained the mass from which all the landscape was composed, a dark mass of struggle and pain. The factory, the girls, his mother, the large, uplifted church, the thicket of the town, merged into one atmosphere — dark, brooding, and sorrowful, every bit.

"Is that two o'clock striking?" Mrs. Dawes said in surprise.

Paul started, and everything sprang into form, regained its individuality, its forgetfulness, and its cheerfulness.

They hurried back to work.

When he was in the rush of preparing for the night's post, examining the work up from Fanny's room, which smelt of ironing, the evening postman came in.

"Mr. Paul Morel," he said, smiling, handing Paul a package. "A lady's handwriting! Don't let the girls see it."

The postman, himself a favourite, was pleased to make fun of the girls' affection for Paul.

It was a volume of verse with a brief note: "You will allow me to send you this, and so spare me my isolation. I also sympathise and wish you well. — C.D." Paul flushed hot.

"Good Lord! Mrs. Dawes. She can't afford it. Good Lord, who ever'd have thought it!"

He was suddenly intensely moved. He was filled with the warmth of her. In the glow he could almost feel her as if she were present — her arms, her shoulders, her bosom, see them, feel them, almost contain them.

This move on the part of Clara brought them into closer intimacy. The other girls noticed that when Paul met Mrs. Dawes his eyes lifted and gave that peculiar bright greeting which they could interpret. Knowing he was unaware,

Clara made no sign, save that occasionally she turned aside her face from him when he came upon her.

They walked out together very often at dinner-time; it was quite open, quite frank. Everybody seemed to feel that he was quite unaware of the state of his own feeling, and that nothing was wrong. He talked to her now with some of the old fervour with which he had talked to Miriam, but he cared less about the talk; he did not bother about his conclusions.

One day in October they went out to Lambley for tea. Suddenly they came to a halt on top of the hill. He climbed and sat on a gate, she sat on the stile. The afternoon was perfectly still, with a dim haze, and yellow sheaves glowing through. They were quiet.

“How old were you when you married?” he asked quietly.

“Twenty-two.”

Her voice was subdued, almost submissive. She would tell him now.

“It is eight years ago?”

“Yes.”

“And when did you leave him?”

“Three years ago.”

“Five years! Did you love him when you married him?”

She was silent for some time; then she said slowly:

“I thought I did — more or less. I didn’t think much about it. And he wanted me. I was very prudish then.”

“And you sort of walked into it without thinking?”

“Yes. I seemed to have been asleep nearly all my life.”

“*Somnambule*? But — when did you wake up?”

“I don’t know that I ever did, or ever have — since I was a child.”

“You went to sleep as you grew to be a woman? How queer! And he didn’t wake you?”

“No; he never got there,” she replied, in a monotone.

The brown birds dashed over the hedges where the rose-hips stood naked and scarlet.

“Got where?” he asked.

“At me. He never really mattered to me.”

The afternoon was so gently warm and dim. Red roofs of the cottages burned among the blue haze. He loved the day. He could feel, but he could not understand, what Clara was saying.

“But why did you leave him? Was he horrid to you?”

She shuddered lightly.

“He — he sort of degraded me. He wanted to bully me because he hadn’t got

me. And then I felt as if I wanted to run, as if I was fastened and bound up. And he seemed dirty.”

“I see.”

He did not at all see.

“And was he always dirty?” he asked.

“A bit,” she replied slowly. “And then he seemed as if he couldn’t get AT me, really. And then he got brutal — he WAS brutal!”

“And why did you leave him finally?”

“Because — because he was unfaithful to me — ”

They were both silent for some time. Her hand lay on the gate-post as she balanced. He put his own over it. His heart beat quickly.

“But did you — were you ever — did you ever give him a chance?”

“Chance? How?”

“To come near to you.”

“I married him — and I was willing — ”

They both strove to keep their voices steady.

“I believe he loves you,” he said.

“It looks like it,” she replied.

He wanted to take his hand away, and could not. She saved him by removing her own. After a silence, he began again:

“Did you leave him out of count all along?”

“He left me,” she said.

“And I suppose he couldn’t MAKE himself mean everything to you?”

“He tried to bully me into it.”

But the conversation had got them both out of their depth. Suddenly Paul jumped down.

“Come on,” he said. “Let’s go and get some tea.”

They found a cottage, where they sat in the cold parlour. She poured out his tea. She was very quiet. He felt she had withdrawn again from him. After tea, she stared broodingly into her tea-cup, twisting her wedding ring all the time. In her abstraction she took the ring off her finger, stood it up, and spun it upon the table. The gold became a diaphanous, glittering globe. It fell, and the ring was quivering upon the table. She spun it again and again. Paul watched, fascinated.

But she was a married woman, and he believed in simple friendship. And he considered that he was perfectly honourable with regard to her. It was only a friendship between man and woman, such as any civilised persons might have.

He was like so many young men of his own age. Sex had become so complicated in him that he would have denied that he ever could want Clara or Miriam or any woman whom he knew. Sex desire was a sort of detached thing,

that did not belong to a woman. He loved Miriam with his soul. He grew warm at the thought of Clara, he battled with her, he knew the curves of her breast and shoulders as if they had been moulded inside him; and yet he did not positively desire her. He would have denied it for ever. He believed himself really bound to Miriam. If ever he should marry, some time in the far future, it would be his duty to marry Miriam. That he gave Clara to understand, and she said nothing, but left him to his courses. He came to her, Mrs. Dawes, whenever he could. Then he wrote frequently to Miriam, and visited the girl occasionally. So he went on through the winter; but he seemed not so fretted. His mother was easier about him. She thought he was getting away from Miriam.

Miriam knew now how strong was the attraction of Clara for him; but still she was certain that the best in him would triumph. His feeling for Mrs. Dawes — who, moreover, was a married woman — was shallow and temporal, compared with his love for herself. He would come back to her, she was sure; with some of his young freshness gone, perhaps, but cured of his desire for the lesser things which other women than herself could give him. She could bear all if he were inwardly true to her and must come back.

He saw none of the anomaly of his position. Miriam was his old friend, lover, and she belonged to Bestwood and home and his youth. Clara was a newer friend, and she belonged to Nottingham, to life, to the world. It seemed to him quite plain.

Mrs. Dawes and he had many periods of coolness, when they saw little of each other; but they always came together again.

“Were you horrid with Baxter Dawes?” he asked her. It was a thing that seemed to trouble him.

“In what way?”

“Oh, I don’t know. But weren’t you horrid with him? Didn’t you do something that knocked him to pieces?”

“What, pray?”

“Making him feel as if he were nothing — I know,” Paul declared.

“You are so clever, my friend,” she said coolly.

The conversation broke off there. But it made her cool with him for some time.

She very rarely saw Miriam now. The friendship between the two women was not broken off, but considerably weakened.

“Will you come in to the concert on Sunday afternoon?” Clara asked him just after Christmas.

“I promised to go up to Willey Farm,” he replied.

“Oh, very well.”

“You don’t mind, do you?” he asked.

“Why should I?” she answered.

Which almost annoyed him.

“You know,” he said, “Miriam and I have been a lot to each other ever since I was sixteen — that’s seven years now.”

“It’s a long time,” Clara replied.

“Yes; but somehow she — it doesn’t go right — ”

“How?” asked Clara.

“She seems to draw me and draw me, and she wouldn’t leave a single hair of me free to fall out and blow away — she’d keep it.”

“But you like to be kept.”

“No,” he said, “I don’t. I wish it could be normal, give and take — like me and you. I want a woman to keep me, but not in her pocket.”

“But if you love her, it couldn’t be normal, like me and you.”

“Yes; I should love her better than. She sort of wants me so much that I can’t give myself.”

“Wants you how?”

“Wants the soul out of my body. I can’t help shrinking back from her.”

“And yet you love her!”

“No, I don’t love her. I never even kiss her.”

“Why not?” Clara asked.

“I don’t know.”

“I suppose you’re afraid,” she said.

“I’m not. Something in me shrinks from her like hell — she’s so good, when I’m not good.”

“How do you know what she is?”

“I do! I know she wants a sort of soul union.”

“But how do you know what she wants?”

“I’ve been with her for seven years.”

“And you haven’t found out the very first thing about her.”

“What’s that?”

“That she doesn’t want any of your soul communion. That’s your own imagination. She wants you.”

He pondered over this. Perhaps he was wrong.

“But she seems — ” he began.

“You’ve never tried,” she answered.

CHAPTER XI

THE TEST ON MIRIAM

WITH the spring came again the old madness and battle. Now he knew he would have to go to Miriam. But what was his reluctance? He told himself it was only a sort of overstrong virginity in her and him which neither could break through. He might have married her; but his circumstances at home made it difficult, and, moreover, he did not want to marry. Marriage was for life, and because they had become close companions, he and she, he did not see that it should inevitably follow they should be man and wife. He did not feel that he wanted marriage with Miriam. He wished he did. He would have given his head to have felt a joyous desire to marry her and to have her. Then why couldn't he bring it off? There was some obstacle; and what was the obstacle? It lay in the physical bondage. He shrank from the physical contact. But why? With her he felt bound up inside himself. He could not go out to her. Something struggled in him, but he could not get to her. Why? She loved him. Clara said she even wanted him; then why couldn't he go to her, make love to her, kiss her? Why, when she put her arm in his, timidly, as they walked, did he feel he would burst forth in brutality and recoil? He owed himself to her; he wanted to belong to her. Perhaps the recoil and the shrinking from her was love in its first fierce modesty. He had no aversion for her. No, it was the opposite; it was a strong desire battling with a still stronger shyness and virginity. It seemed as if virginity were a positive force, which fought and won in both of them. And with her he felt it so hard to overcome; yet he was nearest to her, and with her alone could he deliberately break through. And he owed himself to her. Then, if they could get things right, they could marry; but he would not marry unless he could feel strong in the joy of it — never. He could not have faced his mother. It seemed to him that to sacrifice himself in a marriage he did not want would be degrading, and would undo all his life, make it a nullity. He would try what he COULD do.

And he had a great tenderness for Miriam. Always, she was sad, dreaming her religion; and he was nearly a religion to her. He could not bear to fail her. It would all come right if they tried.

He looked round. A good many of the nicest men he knew were like himself,

bound in by their own virginity, which they could not break out of. They were so sensitive to their women that they would go without them for ever rather than do them a hurt, an injustice. Being the sons of mothers whose husbands had blundered rather brutally through their feminine sanctities, they were themselves too diffident and shy. They could easier deny themselves than incur any reproach from a woman; for a woman was like their mother, and they were full of the sense of their mother. They preferred themselves to suffer the misery of celibacy, rather than risk the other person.

He went back to her. Something in her, when he looked at her, brought the tears almost to his eyes. One day he stood behind her as she sang. Annie was playing a song on the piano. As Miriam sang her mouth seemed hopeless. She sang like a nun singing to heaven. It reminded him so much of the mouth and eyes of one who sings beside a Botticelli Madonna, so spiritual. Again, hot as steel, came up the pain in him. Why must he ask her for the other thing? Why was there his blood battling with her? If only he could have been always gentle, tender with her, breathing with her the atmosphere of reverie and religious dreams, he would give his right hand. It was not fair to hurt her. There seemed an eternal maidenhood about her; and when he thought of her mother, he saw the great brown eyes of a maiden who was nearly scared and shocked out of her virgin maidenhood, but not quite, in spite of her seven children. They had been born almost leaving her out of count, not of her, but upon her. So she could never let them go, because she never had possessed them.

Mrs. Morel saw him going again frequently to Miriam, and was astonished. He said nothing to his mother. He did not explain nor excuse himself. If he came home late, and she reproached him, he frowned and turned on her in an overbearing way:

“I shall come home when I like,” he said; “I am old enough.”

“Must she keep you till this time?”

“It is I who stay,” he answered.

“And she lets you? But very well,” she said.

And she went to bed, leaving the door unlocked for him; but she lay listening until he came, often long after. It was a great bitterness to her that he had gone back to Miriam. She recognised, however, the uselessness of any further interference. He went to Willey Farm as a man now, not as a youth. She had no right over him. There was a coldness between him and her. He hardly told her anything. Discarded, she waited on him, cooked for him still, and loved to slave for him; but her face closed again like a mask. There was nothing for her to do now but the housework; for all the rest he had gone to Miriam. She could not forgive him. Miriam killed the joy and the warmth in him. He had been such a

jolly lad, and full of the warmest affection; now he grew colder, more and more irritable and gloomy. It reminded her of William; but Paul was worse. He did things with more intensity, and more realisation of what he was about. His mother knew how he was suffering for want of a woman, and she saw him going to Miriam. If he had made up his mind, nothing on earth would alter him. Mrs. Morel was tired. She began to give up at last; she had finished. She was in the way.

He went on determinedly. He realised more or less what his mother felt. It only hardened his soul. He made himself callous towards her; but it was like being callous to his own health. It undermined him quickly; yet he persisted.

He lay back in the rocking-chair at Willey Farm one evening. He had been talking to Miriam for some weeks, but had not come to the point. Now he said suddenly:

“I am twenty-four, almost.”

She had been brooding. She looked up at him suddenly in surprise.

“Yes. What makes you say it?”

There was something in the charged atmosphere that she dreaded.

“Sir Thomas More says one can marry at twenty-four.”

She laughed quaintly, saying:

“Does it need Sir Thomas More’s sanction?”

“No; but one ought to marry about then.”

“Ay,” she answered broodingly; and she waited.

“I can’t marry you,” he continued slowly, “not now, because we’ve no money, and they depend on me at home.”

She sat half-guessing what was coming.

“But I want to marry now — ”

“You want to marry?” she repeated.

“A woman — you know what I mean.”

She was silent.

“Now, at last, I must,” he said.

“Ay,” she answered.

“And you love me?”

She laughed bitterly.

“Why are you ashamed of it,” he answered. “You wouldn’t be ashamed before your God, why are you before people?”

“Nay,” she answered deeply, “I am not ashamed.”

“You are,” he replied bitterly; “and it’s my fault. But you know I can’t help being — as I am — don’t you?”

“I know you can’t help it,” she replied.

“I love you an awful lot — then there is something short.”

“Where?” she answered, looking at him.

“Oh, in me! It is I who ought to be ashamed — like a spiritual cripple. And I am ashamed. It is misery. Why is it?”

“I don’t know,” replied Miriam.

“And I don’t know,” he repeated. “Don’t you think we have been too fierce in our what they call purity? Don’t you think that to be so much afraid and averse is a sort of dirtiness?”

She looked at him with startled dark eyes.

“You recoiled away from anything of the sort, and I took the motion from you, and recoiled also, perhaps worse.”

There was silence in the room for some time.

“Yes,” she said, “it is so.”

“There is between us,” he said, “all these years of intimacy. I feel naked enough before you. Do you understand?”

“I think so,” she answered.

“And you love me?”

She laughed.

“Don’t be bitter,” he pleaded.

She looked at him and was sorry for him; his eyes were dark with torture. She was sorry for him; it was worse for him to have this deflated love than for herself, who could never be properly mated. He was restless, for ever urging forward and trying to find a way out. He might do as he liked, and have what he liked of her.

“Nay,” she said softly, “I am not bitter.”

She felt she could bear anything for him; she would suffer for him. She put her hand on his knee as he leaned forward in his chair. He took it and kissed it; but it hurt to do so. He felt he was putting himself aside. He sat there sacrificed to her purity, which felt more like nullity. How could he kiss her hand passionately, when it would drive her away, and leave nothing but pain? Yet slowly he drew her to him and kissed her.

They knew each other too well to pretend anything. As she kissed him, she watched his eyes; they were staring across the room, with a peculiar dark blaze in them that fascinated her. He was perfectly still. She could feel his heart throbbing heavily in his breast.

“What are you thinking about?” she asked.

The blaze in his eyes shuddered, became uncertain.

“I was thinking, all the while, I love you. I have been obstinate.”

She sank her head on his breast.

“Yes,” she answered.

“That’s all,” he said, and his voice seemed sure, and his mouth was kissing her throat.

Then she raised her head and looked into his eyes with her full gaze of love. The blaze struggled, seemed to try to get away from her, and then was quenched. He turned his head quickly aside. It was a moment of anguish.

“Kiss me,” she whispered.

He shut his eyes, and kissed her, and his arms folded her closer and closer.

When she walked home with him over the fields, he said:

“I am glad I came back to you. I feel so simple with you — as if there was nothing to hide. We will be happy?”

“Yes,” she murmured, and the tears came to her eyes.

“Some sort of perversity in our souls,” he said, “makes us not want, get away from, the very thing we want. We have to fight against that.”

“Yes,” she said, and she felt stunned.

As she stood under the drooping-thorn tree, in the darkness by the roadside, he kissed her, and his fingers wandered over her face. In the darkness, where he could not see her but only feel her, his passion flooded him. He clasped her very close.

“Sometime you will have me?” he murmured, hiding his face on her shoulder. It was so difficult.

“Not now,” she said.

His hopes and his heart sunk. A dreariness came over him.

“No,” he said.

His clasp of her slackened.

“I love to feel your arm THERE!” she said, pressing his arm against her back, where it went round her waist. “It rests me so.”

He tightened the pressure of his arm upon the small of her back to rest her.

“We belong to each other,” he said.

“Yes.”

“Then why shouldn’t we belong to each other altogether?”

“But — ” she faltered.

“I know it’s a lot to ask,” he said; “but there’s not much risk for you really — not in the Gretchen way. You can trust me there?”

“Oh, I can trust you.” The answer came quick and strong. “It’s not that — it’s not that at all — but — ”

“What?”

She hid her face in his neck with a little cry of misery.

“I don’t know!” she cried.

She seemed slightly hysterical, but with a sort of horror. His heart died in him.

“You don’t think it ugly?” he asked.

“No, not now. You have TAUGHT me it isn’t.”

“You are afraid?”

She calmed herself hastily.

“Yes, I am only afraid,” she said.

He kissed her tenderly.

“Never mind,” he said. “You should please yourself.”

Suddenly she gripped his arms round her, and clenched her body stiff.

“You SHALL have me,” she said, through her shut teeth.

His heart beat up again like fire. He folded her close, and his mouth was on her throat. She could not bear it. She drew away. He disengaged her.

“Won’t you be late?” she asked gently.

He sighed, scarcely hearing what she said. She waited, wishing he would go. At last he kissed her quickly and climbed the fence. Looking round he saw the pale blotch of her face down in the darkness under the hanging tree. There was no more of her but this pale blotch.

“Good-bye!” she called softly. She had no body, only a voice and a dim face. He turned away and ran down the road, his fists clenched; and when he came to the wall over the lake he leaned there, almost stunned, looking up the black water.

Miriam plunged home over the meadows. She was not afraid of people, what they might say; but she dreaded the issue with him. Yes, she would let him have her if he insisted; and then, when she thought of it afterwards, her heart went down. He would be disappointed, he would find no satisfaction, and then he would go away. Yet he was so insistent; and over this, which did not seem so all-important to her, was their love to break down. After all, he was only like other men, seeking his satisfaction. Oh, but there was something more in him, something deeper! She could trust to it, in spite of all desires. He said that possession was a great moment in life. All strong emotions concentrated there. Perhaps it was so. There was something divine in it; then she would submit, religiously, to the sacrifice. He should have her. And at the thought her whole body clenched itself involuntarily, hard, as if against something; but Life forced her through this gate of suffering, too, and she would submit. At any rate, it would give him what he wanted, which was her deepest wish. She brooded and brooded and brooded herself towards accepting him.

He courted her now like a lover. Often, when he grew hot, she put his face from her, held it between her hands, and looked in his eyes. He could not meet her gaze. Her dark eyes, full of love, earnest and searching, made him turn away.

Not for an instant would she let him forget. Back again he had to torture himself into a sense of his responsibility and hers. Never any relaxing, never any leaving himself to the great hunger and impersonality of passion; he must be brought back to a deliberate, reflective creature. As if from a swoon of passion she caged him back to the littleness, the personal relationship. He could not bear it. "Leave me alone — leave me alone!" he wanted to cry; but she wanted him to look at her with eyes full of love. His eyes, full of the dark, impersonal fire of desire, did not belong to her.

There was a great crop of cherries at the farm. The trees at the back of the house, very large and tall, hung thick with scarlet and crimson drops, under the dark leaves. Paul and Edgar were gathering the fruit one evening. It had been a hot day, and now the clouds were rolling in the sky, dark and warm. Paul combed high in the tree, above the scarlet roofs of the buildings. The wind, moaning steadily, made the whole tree rock with a subtle, thrilling motion that stirred the blood. The young man, perched insecurely in the slender branches, rocked till he felt slightly drunk, reached down the boughs, where the scarlet beady cherries hung thick underneath, and tore off handful after handful of the sleek, cool-fleshed fruit. Cherries touched his ears and his neck as he stretched forward, their chill finger-tips sending a flash down his blood. All shades of red, from a golden vermilion to a rich crimson, glowed and met his eyes under a darkness of leaves.

The sun, going down, suddenly caught the broken clouds. Immense piles of gold flared out in the south-east, heaped in soft, glowing yellow right up the sky. The world, till now dusk and grey, reflected the gold glow, astonished. Everywhere the trees, and the grass, and the far-off water, seemed roused from the twilight and shining.

Miriam came out wondering.

"Oh!" Paul heard her mellow voice call, "isn't it wonderful?"

He looked down. There was a faint gold glimmer on her face, that looked very soft, turned up to him.

"How high you are!" she said.

Beside her, on the rhubarb leaves, were four dead birds, thieves that had been shot. Paul saw some cherry stones hanging quite bleached, like skeletons, picked clear of flesh. He looked down again to Miriam.

"Clouds are on fire," he said.

"Beautiful!" she cried.

She seemed so small, so soft, so tender, down there. He threw a handful of cherries at her. She was startled and frightened. He laughed with a low, chuckling sound, and pelted her. She ran for shelter, picking up some cherries.

Two fine red pairs she hung over her ears; then she looked up again.

“Haven’t you got enough?” she asked.

“Nearly. It is like being on a ship up here.”

“And how long will you stay?”

“While the sunset lasts.”

She went to the fence and sat there, watching the gold clouds fall to pieces, and go in immense, rose-coloured ruin towards the darkness. Gold flamed to scarlet, like pain in its intense brightness. Then the scarlet sank to rose, and rose to crimson, and quickly the passion went out of the sky. All the world was dark grey. Paul scrambled quickly down with his basket, tearing his shirt-sleeve as he did so.

“They are lovely,” said Miriam, fingering the cherries.

“I’ve torn my sleeve,” he answered.

She took the three-cornered rip, saying:

“I shall have to mend it.” It was near the shoulder. She put her fingers through the tear. “How warm!” she said.

He laughed. There was a new, strange note in his voice, one that made her pant.

“Shall we stay out?” he said.

“Won’t it rain?” she asked.

“No, let us walk a little way.”

They went down the fields and into the thick plantation of trees and pines.

“Shall we go in among the trees?” he asked.

“Do you want to?”

“Yes.”

It was very dark among the firs, and the sharp spines pricked her face. She was afraid. Paul was silent and strange.

“I like the darkness,” he said. “I wish it were thicker — good, thick darkness.”

He seemed to be almost unaware of her as a person: she was only to him then a woman. She was afraid.

He stood against a pine-tree trunk and took her in his arms. She relinquished herself to him, but it was a sacrifice in which she felt something of horror. This thick-voiced, oblivious man was a stranger to her.

Later it began to rain. The pine-trees smelled very strong. Paul lay with his head on the ground, on the dead pine needles, listening to the sharp hiss of the rain — a steady, keen noise. His heart was down, very heavy. Now he realised that she had not been with him all the time, that her soul had stood apart, in a sort of horror. He was physically at rest, but no more. Very dreary at heart, very sad, and very tender, his fingers wandered over her face pitifully. Now again she

loved him deeply. He was tender and beautiful.

“The rain!” he said.

“Yes — is it coming on you?”

She put her hands over him, on his hair, on his shoulders, to feel if the raindrops fell on him. She loved him dearly. He, as he lay with his face on the dead pine-leaves, felt extraordinarily quiet. He did not mind if the raindrops came on him: he would have lain and got wet through: he felt as if nothing mattered, as if his living were smeared away into the beyond, near and quite lovable. This strange, gentle reaching-out to death was new to him.

“We must go,” said Miriam.

“Yes,” he answered, but did not move.

To him now, life seemed a shadow, day a white shadow; night, and death, and stillness, and inaction, this seemed like BEING. To be alive, to be urgent and insistent — that was NOT-TO-BE. The highest of all was to melt out into the darkness and sway there, identified with the great Being.

“The rain is coming in on us,” said Miriam.

He rose, and assisted her.

“It is a pity,” he said.

“What?”

“To have to go. I feel so still.”

“Still!” she repeated.

“Stiller than I have ever been in my life.”

He was walking with his hand in hers. She pressed his fingers, feeling a slight fear. Now he seemed beyond her; she had a fear lest she should lose him.

“The fir-trees are like presences on the darkness: each one only a presence.”

She was afraid, and said nothing.

“A sort of hush: the whole night wondering and asleep: I suppose that’s what we do in death — sleep in wonder.”

She had been afraid before of the brute in him: now of the mystic. She trod beside him in silence. The rain fell with a heavy “Hush!” on the trees. At last they gained the cartshed.

“Let us stay here awhile,” he said.

There was a sound of rain everywhere, smothering everything.

“I feel so strange and still,” he said; “along with everything.”

“Ay,” she answered patiently.

He seemed again unaware of her, though he held her hand close.

“To be rid of our individuality, which is our will, which is our effort — to live effortless, a kind of curious sleep — that is very beautiful, I think; that is our after-life — our immortality.”

“Yes?”

“Yes — and very beautiful to have.”

“You don’t usually say that.”

“No.”

In a while they went indoors. Everybody looked at them curiously. He still kept the quiet, heavy look in his eyes, the stillness in his voice. Instinctively, they all left him alone.

About this time Miriam’s grandmother, who lived in a tiny cottage in Woodlinton, fell ill, and the girl was sent to keep house. It was a beautiful little place. The cottage had a big garden in front, with red brick walls, against which the plum trees were nailed. At the back another garden was separated from the fields by a tall old hedge. It was very pretty. Miriam had not much to do, so she found time for her beloved reading, and for writing little introspective pieces which interested her.

At the holiday-time her grandmother, being better, was driven to Derby to stay with her daughter for a day or two. She was a crotchety old lady, and might return the second day or the third; so Miriam stayed alone in the cottage, which also pleased her.

Paul used often to cycle over, and they had as a rule peaceful and happy times. He did not embarrass her much; but then on the Monday of the holiday he was to spend a whole day with her.

It was perfect weather. He left his mother, telling her where he was going. She would be alone all the day. It cast a shadow over him; but he had three days that were all his own, when he was going to do as he liked. It was sweet to rush through the morning lanes on his bicycle.

He got to the cottage at about eleven o’clock. Miriam was busy preparing dinner. She looked so perfectly in keeping with the little kitchen, ruddy and busy. He kissed her and sat down to watch. The room was small and cosy. The sofa was covered all over with a sort of linen in squares of red and pale blue, old, much washed, but pretty. There was a stuffed owl in a case over a corner cupboard. The sunlight came through the leaves of the scented geraniums in the window. She was cooking a chicken in his honour. It was their cottage for the day, and they were man and wife. He beat the eggs for her and peeled the potatoes. He thought she gave a feeling of home almost like his mother; and no one could look more beautiful, with her tumbled curls, when she was flushed from the fire.

The dinner was a great success. Like a young husband, he carved. They talked all the time with unflagging zest. Then he wiped the dishes she had washed, and they went out down the fields. There was a bright little brook that ran into a bog

at the foot of a very steep bank. Here they wandered, picking still a few marsh-marigolds and many big blue forget-me-nots. Then she sat on the bank with her hands full of flowers, mostly golden water-blobs. As she put her face down into the marigolds, it was all overcast with a yellow shine.

“Your face is bright,” he said, “like a transfiguration.”

She looked at him, questioning. He laughed pleadingly to her, laying his hands on hers. Then he kissed her fingers, then her face.

The world was all steeped in sunshine, and quite still, yet not asleep, but quivering with a kind of expectancy.

“I have never seen anything more beautiful than this,” he said. He held her hand fast all the time.

“And the water singing to itself as it runs — do you love it?” She looked at him full of love. His eyes were very dark, very bright.

“Don’t you think it’s a great day?” he asked.

She murmured her assent. She WAS happy, and he saw it.

“And our day — just between us,” he said.

They lingered a little while. Then they stood up upon the sweet thyme, and he looked down at her simply.

“Will you come?” he asked.

They went back to the house, hand in hand, in silence. The chickens came scampering down the path to her. He locked the door, and they had the little house to themselves.

He never forgot seeing her as she lay on the bed, when he was unfastening his collar. First he saw only her beauty, and was blind with it. She had the most beautiful body he had ever imagined. He stood unable to move or speak, looking at her, his face half-smiling with wonder. And then he wanted her, but as he went forward to her, her hands lifted in a little pleading movement, and he looked at her face, and stopped. Her big brown eyes were watching him, still and resigned and loving; she lay as if she had given herself up to sacrifice: there was her body for him; but the look at the back of her eyes, like a creature awaiting immolation, arrested him, and all his blood fell back.

“You are sure you want me?” he asked, as if a cold shadow had come over him.

“Yes, quite sure.”

She was very quiet, very calm. She only realised that she was doing something for him. He could hardly bear it. She lay to be sacrificed for him because she loved him so much. And he had to sacrifice her. For a second, he wished he were sexless or dead. Then he shut his eyes again to her, and his blood beat back again.

And afterwards he loved her — loved her to the last fibre of his being. He loved her. But he wanted, somehow, to cry. There was something he could not bear for her sake. He stayed with her till quite late at night. As he rode home he felt that he was finally initiated. He was a youth no longer. But why had he the dull pain in his soul? Why did the thought of death, the after-life, seem so sweet and consoling?

He spent the week with Miriam, and wore her out with his passion before it was gone. He had always, almost wilfully, to put her out of count, and act from the brute strength of his own feelings. And he could not do it often, and there remained afterwards always the sense of failure and of death. If he were really with her, he had to put aside himself and his desire. If he would have her, he had to put her aside.

“When I come to you,” he asked her, his eyes dark with pain and shame, “you don’t really want me, do you?”

“Ah, yes!” she replied quickly.

He looked at her.

“Nay,” he said.

She began to tremble.

“You see,” she said, taking his face and shutting it out against her shoulder — “you see — as we are — how can I get used to you? It would come all right if we were married.”

He lifted her head, and looked at her.

“You mean, now, it is always too much shock?”

“Yes — and — ”

“You are always clenched against me.”

She was trembling with agitation.

“You see,” she said, “I’m not used to the thought — ”

“You are lately,” he said.

“But all my life. Mother said to me: ‘There is one thing in marriage that is always dreadful, but you have to bear it.’ And I believed it.”

“And still believe it,” he said.

“No!” she cried hastily. “I believe, as you do, that loving, even in THAT way, is the high-water mark of living.”

“That doesn’t alter the fact that you never want it.”

“No,” she said, taking his head in her arms and rocking in despair. “Don’t say so! You don’t understand.” She rocked with pain. “Don’t I want your children?”

“But not me.”

“How can you say so? But we must be married to have children — ”

“Shall we be married, then? I want you to have my children.”

He kissed her hand reverently. She pondered sadly, watching him.

“We are too young,” she said at length.

“Twenty-four and twenty-three — ”

“Not yet,” she pleaded, as she rocked herself in distress.

“When you will,” he said.

She bowed her head gravely. The tone of hopelessness in which he said these things grieved her deeply. It had always been a failure between them. Tacitly, she acquiesced in what he felt.

And after a week of love he said to his mother suddenly one Sunday night, just as they were going to bed:

“I shan’t go so much to Miriam’s, mother.”

She was surprised, but she would not ask him anything.

“You please yourself,” she said.

So he went to bed. But there was a new quietness about him which she had wondered at. She almost guessed. She would leave him alone, however. Precipitation might spoil things. She watched him in his loneliness, wondering where he would end. He was sick, and much too quiet for him. There was a perpetual little knitting of his brows, such as she had seen when he was a small baby, and which had been gone for many years. Now it was the same again. And she could do nothing for him. He had to go on alone, make his own way.

He continued faithful to Miriam. For one day he had loved her utterly. But it never came again. The sense of failure grew stronger. At first it was only a sadness. Then he began to feel he could not go on. He wanted to run, to go abroad, anything. Gradually he ceased to ask her to have him. Instead of drawing them together, it put them apart. And then he realised, consciously, that it was no good. It was useless trying: it would never be a success between them.

For some months he had seen very little of Clara. They had occasionally walked out for half an hour at dinner-time. But he always reserved himself for Miriam. With Clara, however, his brow cleared, and he was gay again. She treated him indulgently, as if he were a child. He thought he did not mind. But deep below the surface it piqued him.

Sometimes Miriam said:

“What about Clara? I hear nothing of her lately.”

“I walked with her about twenty minutes yesterday,” he replied.

“And what did she talk about?”

“I don’t know. I suppose I did all the jawing — I usually do. I think I was telling her about the strike, and how the women took it.”

“Yes.”

So he gave the account of himself.

But insidiously, without his knowing it, the warmth he felt for Clara drew him away from Miriam, for whom he felt responsible, and to whom he felt he belonged. He thought he was being quite faithful to her. It was not easy to estimate exactly the strength and warmth of one's feelings for a woman till they have run away with one.

He began to give more time to his men friends. There was Jessop, at the art school; Swain, who was chemistry demonstrator at the university; Newton, who was a teacher; besides Edgar and Miriam's younger brothers. Pleading work, he sketched and studied with Jessop. He called in the university for Swain, and the two went "down town" together. Having come home in the train with Newton, he called and had a game of billiards with him in the Moon and Stars. If he gave to Miriam the excuse of his men friends, he felt quite justified. His mother began to be relieved. He always told her where he had been.

During the summer Clara wore sometimes a dress of soft cotton stuff with loose sleeves. When she lifted her hands, her sleeves fell back, and her beautiful strong arms shone out.

"Half a minute," he cried. "Hold your arm still."

He made sketches of her hand and arm, and the drawings contained some of the fascination the real thing had for him. Miriam, who always went scrupulously through his books and papers, saw the drawings.

"I think Clara has such beautiful arms," he said.

"Yes! When did you draw them?"

"On Tuesday, in the work-room. You know, I've got a corner where I can work. Often I can do every single thing they need in the department, before dinner. Then I work for myself in the afternoon, and just see to things at night."

"Yes," she said, turning the leaves of his sketch-book.

Frequently he hated Miriam. He hated her as she bent forward and pored over his things. He hated her way of patiently casting him up, as if he were an endless psychological account. When he was with her, he hated her for having got him, and yet not got him, and he tortured her. She took all and gave nothing, he said. At least, she gave no living warmth. She was never alive, and giving off life. Looking for her was like looking for something which did not exist. She was only his conscience, not his mate. He hated her violently, and was more cruel to her. They dragged on till the next summer. He saw more and more of Clara.

At last he spoke. He had been sitting working at home one evening. There was between him and his mother a peculiar condition of people frankly finding fault with each other. Mrs. Morel was strong on her feet again. He was not going to stick to Miriam. Very well; then she would stand aloof till he said something. It had been coming a long time, this bursting of the storm in him, when he would

come back to her. This evening there was between them a peculiar condition of suspense. He worked feverishly and mechanically, so that he could escape from himself. It grew late. Through the open door, stealthily, came the scent of madonna lilies, almost as if it were prowling abroad. Suddenly he got up and went out of doors.

The beauty of the night made him want to shout. A half-moon, dusky gold, was sinking behind the black sycamore at the end of the garden, making the sky dull purple with its glow. Nearer, a dim white fence of lilies went across the garden, and the air all round seemed to stir with scent, as if it were alive. He went across the bed of pinks, whose keen perfume came sharply across the rocking, heavy scent of the lilies, and stood alongside the white barrier of flowers. They flagged all loose, as if they were panting. The scent made him drunk. He went down to the field to watch the moon sink under.

A corncrake in the hay-close called insistently. The moon slid quite quickly downwards, growing more flushed. Behind him the great flowers leaned as if they were calling. And then, like a shock, he caught another perfume, something raw and coarse. Hunting round, he found the purple iris, touched their fleshy throats and their dark, grasping hands. At any rate, he had found something. They stood stiff in the darkness. Their scent was brutal. The moon was melting down upon the crest of the hill. It was gone; all was dark. The corncrake called still.

Breaking off a pink, he suddenly went indoors.

“Come, my boy,” said his mother. “I’m sure it’s time you went to bed.”

He stood with the pink against his lips.

“I shall break off with Miriam, mother,” he answered calmly.

She looked up at him over her spectacles. He was staring back at her, unswerving. She met his eyes for a moment, then took off her glasses. He was white. The male was up in him, dominant. She did not want to see him too clearly.

“But I thought — ” she began.

“Well,” he answered, “I don’t love her. I don’t want to marry her — so I shall have done.”

“But,” exclaimed his mother, amazed, “I thought lately you had made up your mind to have her, and so I said nothing.”

“I had — I wanted to — but now I don’t want. It’s no good. I shall break off on Sunday. I ought to, oughtn’t I?”

“You know best. You know I said so long ago.”

“I can’t help that now. I shall break off on Sunday.”

“Well,” said his mother, “I think it will be best. But lately I decided you had

made up your mind to have her, so I said nothing, and should have said nothing. But I say as I have always said, I DON'T think she is suited to you."

"On Sunday I break off," he said, smelling the pink. He put the flower in his mouth. Unthinking, he bared his teeth, closed them on the blossom slowly, and had a mouthful of petals. These he spat into the fire, kissed his mother, and went to bed.

On Sunday he went up to the farm in the early afternoon. He had written Miriam that they would walk over the fields to Hucknall. His mother was very tender with him. He said nothing. But she saw the effort it was costing. The peculiar set look on his face stilled her.

"Never mind, my son," she said. "You will be so much better when it is all over."

Paul glanced swiftly at his mother in surprise and resentment. He did not want sympathy.

Miriam met him at the lane-end. She was wearing a new dress of figured muslin that had short sleeves. Those short sleeves, and Miriam's brown-skinned arms beneath them — such pitiful, resigned arms — gave him so much pain that they helped to make him cruel. She had made herself look so beautiful and fresh for him. She seemed to blossom for him alone. Every time he looked at her — a mature young woman now, and beautiful in her new dress — it hurt so much that his heart seemed almost to be bursting with the restraint he put on it. But he had decided, and it was irrevocable.

On the hills they sat down, and he lay with his head in her lap, whilst she fingered his hair. She knew that "he was not there," as she put it. Often, when she had him with her, she looked for him, and could not find him. But this afternoon she was not prepared.

It was nearly five o'clock when he told her. They were sitting on the bank of a stream, where the lip of turf hung over a hollow bank of yellow earth, and he was hacking away with a stick, as he did when he was perturbed and cruel.

"I have been thinking," he said, "we ought to break off."

"Why?" she cried in surprise.

"Because it's no good going on."

"Why is it no good?"

"It isn't. I don't want to marry. I don't want ever to marry. And if we're not going to marry, it's no good going on."

"But why do you say this now?"

"Because I've made up my mind."

"And what about these last months, and the things you told me then?"

"I can't help it! I don't want to go on."

“You don’t want any more of me?”

“I want us to break off — you be free of me, I free of you.”

“And what about these last months?”

“I don’t know. I’ve not told you anything but what I thought was true.”

“Then why are you different now?”

“I’m not — I’m the same — only I know it’s no good going on.”

“You haven’t told me why it’s no good.”

“Because I don’t want to go on — and I don’t want to marry.”

“How many times have you offered to marry me, and I wouldn’t?”

“I know; but I want us to break off.”

There was silence for a moment or two, while he dug viciously at the earth. She bent her head, pondering. He was an unreasonable child. He was like an infant which, when it has drunk its fill, throws away and smashes the cup. She looked at him, feeling she could get hold of him and WRING some consistency out of him. But she was helpless. Then she cried:

“I have said you were only fourteen — you are only FOUR!”

He still dug at the earth viciously. He heard.

“You are a child of four,” she repeated in her anger.

He did not answer, but said in his heart: “All right; if I’m a child of four, what do you want me for? I don’t want another mother.” But he said nothing to her, and there was silence.

“And have you told your people?” she asked.

“I have told my mother.”

There was another long interval of silence.

“Then what do you WANT?” she asked.

“Why, I want us to separate. We have lived on each other all these years; now let us stop. I will go my own way without you, and you will go your way without me. You will have an independent life of your own then.”

There was in it some truth that, in spite of her bitterness, she could not help registering. She knew she felt in a sort of bondage to him, which she hated because she could not control it. She hated her love for him from the moment it grew too strong for her. And, deep down, she had hated him because she loved him and he dominated her. She had resisted his domination. She had fought to keep herself free of him in the last issue. And she was free of him, even more than he of her.

“And,” he continued, “we shall always be more or less each other’s work. You have done a lot for me, I for you. Now let us start and live by ourselves.”

“What do you want to do?” she asked.

“Nothing — only to be free,” he answered.

She, however, knew in her heart that Clara's influence was over him to liberate him. But she said nothing.

"And what have I to tell my mother?" she asked.

"I told my mother," he answered, "that I was breaking off — clean and altogether."

"I shall not tell them at home," she said.

Frowning, "You please yourself," he said.

He knew he had landed her in a nasty hole, and was leaving her in the lurch. It angered him.

"Tell them you wouldn't and won't marry me, and have broken off," he said. "It's true enough."

She bit her finger moodily. She thought over their whole affair. She had known it would come to this; she had seen it all along. It chimed with her bitter expectation.

"Always — it has always been so!" she cried. "It has been one long battle between us — you fighting away from me."

It came from her unawares, like a flash of lightning. The man's heart stood still. Was this how she saw it?

"But we've had SOME perfect hours, SOME perfect times, when we were together!" he pleaded.

"Never!" she cried; "never! It has always been you fighting me off."

"Not always — not at first!" he pleaded.

"Always, from the very beginning — always the same!"

She had finished, but she had done enough. He sat aghast. He had wanted to say: "It has been good, but it is at an end." And she — she whose love he had believed in when he had despised himself — denied that their love had ever been love. "He had always fought away from her?" Then it had been monstrous. There had never been anything really between them; all the time he had been imagining something where there was nothing. And she had known. She had known so much, and had told him so little. She had known all the time. All the time this was at the bottom of her!

He sat silent in bitterness. At last the whole affair appeared in a cynical aspect to him. She had really played with him, not he with her. She had hidden all her condemnation from him, had flattered him, and despised him. She despised him now. He grew intellectual and cruel.

"You ought to marry a man who worships you," he said; "then you could do as you liked with him. Plenty of men will worship you, if you get on the private side of their natures. You ought to marry one such. They would never fight you off."

“Thank you!” she said. “But don’t advise me to marry someone else any more. You’ve done it before.”

“Very well,” he said; “I will say no more.”

He sat still, feeling as if he had had a blow, instead of giving one. Their eight years of friendship and love, THE eight years of his life, were nullified.

“When did you think of this?” she asked.

“I thought definitely on Thursday night.”

“I knew it was coming,” she said.

That pleased him bitterly. “Oh, very well! If she knew then it doesn’t come as a surprise to her,” he thought.

“And have you said anything to Clara?” she asked.

“No; but I shall tell her now.”

There was a silence.

“Do you remember the things you said this time last year, in my grandmother’s house — nay last month even?”

“Yes,” he said; “I do! And I meant them! I can’t help that it’s failed.”

“It has failed because you want something else.”

“It would have failed whether or not. YOU never believed in me.”

She laughed strangely.

He sat in silence. He was full of a feeling that she had deceived him. She had despised him when he thought she worshipped him. She had let him say wrong things, and had not contradicted him. She had let him fight alone. But it stuck in his throat that she had despised him whilst he thought she worshipped him. She should have told him when she found fault with him. She had not played fair. He hated her. All these years she had treated him as if he were a hero, and thought of him secretly as an infant, a foolish child. Then why had she left the foolish child to his folly? His heart was hard against her.

She sat full of bitterness. She had known — oh, well she had known! All the time he was away from her she had summed him up, seen his littleness, his meanness, and his folly. Even she had guarded her soul against him. She was not overthrown, not prostrated, not even much hurt. She had known. Only why, as he sat there, had he still this strange dominance over her? His very movements fascinated her as if she were hypnotised by him. Yet he was despicable, false, inconsistent, and mean. Why this bondage for her? Why was it the movement of his arm stirred her as nothing else in the world could? Why was she fastened to him? Why, even now, if he looked at her and commanded her, would she have to obey? She would obey him in his trifling commands. But once he was obeyed, then she had him in her power, she knew, to lead him where she would. She was sure of herself. Only, this new influence! Ah, he was not a man! He was a baby

that cries for the newest toy. And all the attachment of his soul would not keep him. Very well, he would have to go. But he would come back when he had tired of his new sensation.

He hacked at the earth till she was fretted to death. She rose. He sat flinging lumps of earth in the stream.

“We will go and have tea here?” he asked.

“Yes,” she answered.

They chattered over irrelevant subjects during tea. He held forth on the love of ornament — the cottage parlour moved him thereto — and its connection with aesthetics. She was cold and quiet. As they walked home, she asked:

“And we shall not see each other?”

“No — or rarely,” he answered.

“Nor write?” she asked, almost sarcastically.

“As you will,” he answered. “We’re not strangers — never should be, whatever happened. I will write to you now and again. You please yourself.”

“I see!” she answered cuttingly.

But he was at that stage at which nothing else hurts. He had made a great cleavage in his life. He had had a great shock when she had told him their love had been always a conflict. Nothing more mattered. If it never had been much, there was no need to make a fuss that it was ended.

He left her at the lane-end. As she went home, solitary, in her new frock, having her people to face at the other end, he stood still with shame and pain in the highroad, thinking of the suffering he caused her.

In the reaction towards restoring his self-esteem, he went into the Willow Tree for a drink. There were four girls who had been out for the day, drinking a modest glass of port. They had some chocolates on the table. Paul sat near with his whisky. He noticed the girls whispering and nudging. Presently one, a bonny dark hussy, leaned to him and said:

“Have a chocolate?”

The others laughed loudly at her impudence.

“All right,” said Paul. “Give me a hard one — nut. I don’t like creams.”

“Here you are, then,” said the girl; “here’s an almond for you.”

She held the sweet between her fingers. He opened his mouth. She popped it in, and blushed.

“You ARE nice!” he said.

“Well,” she answered, “we thought you looked overcast, and they dared me offer you a chocolate.”

“I don’t mind if I have another — another sort,” he said.

And presently they were all laughing together.

It was nine o'clock when he got home, falling dark. He entered the house in silence. His mother, who had been waiting, rose anxiously.

"I told her," he said.

"I'm glad," replied the mother, with great relief.

He hung up his cap wearily.

"I said we'd have done altogether," he said.

"That's right, my son," said the mother. "It's hard for her now, but best in the long run. I know. You weren't suited for her."

He laughed shakily as he sat down.

"I've had such a lark with some girls in a pub," he said.

His mother looked at him. He had forgotten Miriam now. He told her about the girls in the Willow Tree. Mrs. Morel looked at him. It seemed unreal, his gaiety. At the back of it was too much horror and misery.

"Now have some supper," she said very gently.

Afterwards he said wistfully:

"She never thought she'd have me, mother, not from the first, and so she's not disappointed."

"I'm afraid," said his mother, "she doesn't give up hopes of you yet."

"No," he said, "perhaps not."

"You'll find it's better to have done," she said.

"I don't know," he said desperately.

"Well, leave her alone," replied his mother. So he left her, and she was alone. Very few people cared for her, and she for very few people. She remained alone with herself, waiting.

CHAPTER XII

PASSION

HE was gradually making it possible to earn a livelihood by his art. Liberty's had taken several of his painted designs on various stuffs, and he could sell designs for embroideries, for altar-cloths, and similar things, in one or two places. It was not very much he made at present, but he might extend it. He had also made friends with the designer for a pottery firm, and was gaining some knowledge of his new acquaintance's art. The applied arts interested him very much. At the same time he laboured slowly at his pictures. He loved to paint large figures, full of light, but not merely made up of lights and cast shadows, like the impressionists; rather definite figures that had a certain luminous quality, like some of Michael Angelo's people. And these he fitted into a landscape, in what he thought true proportion. He worked a great deal from memory, using everybody he knew. He believed firmly in his work, that it was good and valuable. In spite of fits of depression, shrinking, everything, he believed in his work.

He was twenty-four when he said his first confident thing to his mother.

"Mother," he said, "I s'll make a painter that they'll attend to."

She sniffed in her quaint fashion. It was like a half-pleased shrug of the shoulders.

"Very well, my boy, we'll see," she said.

"You shall see, my pigeon! You see if you're not swanky one of these days!"

"I'm quite content, my boy," she smiled.

"But you'll have to alter. Look at you with Minnie!"

Minnie was the small servant, a girl of fourteen.

"And what about Minnie?" asked Mrs. Morel, with dignity.

"I heard her this morning: 'Eh, Mrs. Morel! I was going to do that,' when you went out in the rain for some coal," he said. "That looks a lot like your being able to manage servants!"

"Well, it was only the child's niceness," said Mrs. Morel.

"And you apologising to her: 'You can't do two things at once, can you?'"

"She WAS busy washing up," replied Mrs. Morel.

“And what did she say? ‘It could easy have waited a bit. Now look how your feet paddle!’”

“Yes — brazen young baggage!” said Mrs. Morel, smiling.

He looked at his mother, laughing. She was quite warm and rosy again with love of him. It seemed as if all the sunshine were on her for a moment. He continued his work gladly. She seemed so well when she was happy that he forgot her grey hair.

And that year she went with him to the Isle of Wight for a holiday. It was too exciting for them both, and too beautiful. Mrs. Morel was full of joy and wonder. But he would have her walk with him more than she was able. She had a bad fainting bout. So grey her face was, so blue her mouth! It was agony to him. He felt as if someone were pushing a knife in his chest. Then she was better again, and he forgot. But the anxiety remained inside him, like a wound that did not close.

After leaving Miriam he went almost straight to Clara. On the Monday following the day of the rupture he went down to the work-room. She looked up at him and smiled. They had grown very intimate unawares. She saw a new brightness about him.

“Well, Queen of Sheba!” he said, laughing.

“But why?” she asked.

“I think it suits you. You’ve got a new frock on.”

She flushed, asking:

“And what of it?”

“Suits you — awfully! I could design you a dress.”

“How would it be?”

He stood in front of her, his eyes glittering as he expounded. He kept her eyes fixed with his. Then suddenly he took hold of her. She half-started back. He drew the stuff of her blouse tighter, smoothed it over her breast.

“More SO!” he explained.

But they were both of them flaming with blushes, and immediately he ran away. He had touched her. His whole body was quivering with the sensation.

There was already a sort of secret understanding between them. The next evening he went to the cinematograph with her for a few minutes before train-time. As they sat, he saw her hand lying near him. For some moments he dared not touch it. The pictures danced and dithered. Then he took her hand in his. It was large and firm; it filled his grasp. He held it fast. She neither moved nor made any sign. When they came out his train was due. He hesitated.

“Good-night,” she said. He darted away across the road.

The next day he came again, talking to her. She was rather superior with him.

“Shall we go a walk on Monday?” he asked.

She turned her face aside.

“Shall you tell Miriam?” she replied sarcastically.

“I have broken off with her,” he said.

“When?”

“Last Sunday.”

“You quarrelled?”

“No! I had made up my mind. I told her quite definitely I should consider myself free.”

Clara did not answer, and he returned to his work. She was so quiet and so superb!

On the Saturday evening he asked her to come and drink coffee with him in a restaurant, meeting him after work was over. She came, looking very reserved and very distant. He had three-quarters of an hour to train-time.

“We will walk a little while,” he said.

She agreed, and they went past the Castle into the Park. He was afraid of her. She walked moodily at his side, with a kind of resentful, reluctant, angry walk. He was afraid to take her hand.

“Which way shall we go?” he asked as they walked in darkness.

“I don’t mind.”

“Then we’ll go up the steps.”

He suddenly turned round. They had passed the Park steps. She stood still in resentment at his suddenly abandoning her. He looked for her. She stood aloof. He caught her suddenly in his arms, held her strained for a moment, kissed her. Then he let her go.

“Come along,” he said, penitent.

She followed him. He took her hand and kissed her finger-tips. They went in silence. When they came to the light, he let go her hand. Neither spoke till they reached the station. Then they looked each other in the eyes.

“Good-night,” she said.

And he went for his train. His body acted mechanically. People talked to him. He heard faint echoes answering them. He was in a delirium. He felt that he would go mad if Monday did not come at once. On Monday he would see her again. All himself was pitched there, ahead. Sunday intervened. He could not bear it. He could not see her till Monday. And Sunday intervened — hour after hour of tension. He wanted to beat his head against the door of the carriage. But he sat still. He drank some whisky on the way home, but it only made it worse. His mother must not be upset, that was all. He dissembled, and got quickly to bed. There he sat, dressed, with his chin on his knees, staring out of the window

at the far hill, with its few lights. He neither thought nor slept, but sat perfectly still, staring. And when at last he was so cold that he came to himself, he found his watch had stopped at half-past two. It was after three o'clock. He was exhausted, but still there was the torment of knowing it was only Sunday morning. He went to bed and slept. Then he cycled all day long, till he was fagged out. And he scarcely knew where he had been. But the day after was Monday. He slept till four o'clock. Then he lay and thought. He was coming nearer to himself — he could see himself, real, somewhere in front. She would go a walk with him in the afternoon. Afternoon! It seemed years ahead.

Slowly the hours crawled. His father got up; he heard him pottering about. Then the miner set off to the pit, his heavy boots scraping the yard. Cocks were still crowing. A cart went down the road. His mother got up. She knocked the fire. Presently she called him softly. He answered as if he were asleep. This shell of himself did well.

He was walking to the station — another mile! The train was near Nottingham. Would it stop before the tunnels? But it did not matter; it would get there before dinner-time. He was at Jordan's. She would come in half an hour. At any rate, she would be near. He had done the letters. She would be there. Perhaps she had not come. He ran downstairs. Ah! he saw her through the glass door. Her shoulders stooping a little to her work made him feel he could not go forward; he could not stand. He went in. He was pale, nervous, awkward, and quite cold. Would she misunderstand him? He could not write his real self with this shell.

“And this afternoon,” he struggled to say. “You will come?”

“I think so,” she replied, murmuring.

He stood before her, unable to say a word. She hid her face from him. Again came over him the feeling that he would lose consciousness. He set his teeth and went upstairs. He had done everything correctly yet, and he would do so. All the morning things seemed a long way off, as they do to a man under chloroform. He himself seemed under a tight band of constraint. Then there was his other self, in the distance, doing things, entering stuff in a ledger, and he watched that far-off him carefully to see he made no mistake.

But the ache and strain of it could not go on much longer. He worked incessantly. Still it was only twelve o'clock. As if he had nailed his clothing against the desk, he stood there and worked, forcing every stroke out of himself. It was a quarter to one; he could clear away. Then he ran downstairs.

“You will meet me at the Fountain at two o'clock,” he said.

“I can't be there till half-past.”

“Yes!” he said.

She saw his dark, mad eyes.

“I will try at a quarter past.”

And he had to be content. He went and got some dinner. All the time he was still under chloroform, and every minute was stretched out indefinitely. He walked miles of streets. Then he thought he would be late at the meeting-place. He was at the Fountain at five past two. The torture of the next quarter of an hour was refined beyond expression. It was the anguish of combining the living self with the shell. Then he saw her. She came! And he was there.

“You are late,” he said.

“Only five minutes,” she answered.

“I’d never have done it to you,” he laughed.

She was in a dark blue costume. He looked at her beautiful figure.

“You want some flowers,” he said, going to the nearest florist’s.

She followed him in silence. He bought her a bunch of scarlet, brick-red carnations. She put them in her coat, flushing.

“That’s a fine colour!” he said.

“I’d rather have had something softer,” she said.

He laughed.

“Do you feel like a blot of vermilion walking down the street?” he said.

She hung her head, afraid of the people they met. He looked sideways at her as they walked. There was a wonderful close down on her face near the ear that he wanted to touch. And a certain heaviness, the heaviness of a very full ear of corn that dips slightly in the wind, that there was about her, made his brain spin. He seemed to be spinning down the street, everything going round.

As they sat in the tramcar, she leaned her heavy shoulder against him, and he took her hand. He felt himself coming round from the anaesthetic, beginning to breathe. Her ear, half-hidden among her blonde hair, was near to him. The temptation to kiss it was almost too great. But there were other people on top of the car. It still remained to him to kiss it. After all, he was not himself, he was some attribute of hers, like the sunshine that fell on her.

He looked quickly away. It had been raining. The big bluff of the Castle rock was streaked with rain, as it reared above the flat of the town. They crossed the wide, black space of the Midland Railway, and passed the cattle enclosure that stood out white. Then they ran down sordid Wilford Road.

She rocked slightly to the tram’s motion, and as she leaned against him, rocked upon him. He was a vigorous, slender man, with exhaustless energy. His face was rough, with rough-hewn features, like the common people’s; but his eyes under the deep brows were so full of life that they fascinated her. They seemed to dance, and yet they were still trembling on the finest balance of

laughter. His mouth the same was just going to spring into a laugh of triumph, yet did not. There was a sharp suspense about him. She bit her lip moodily. His hand was hard clenched over hers.

They paid their two halfpennies at the turnstile and crossed the bridge. The Trent was very full. It swept silent and insidious under the bridge, travelling in a soft body. There had been a great deal of rain. On the river levels were flat gleams of flood water. The sky was grey, with glisten of silver here and there. In Wilford churchyard the dahlias were sodden with rain — wet black-crimson balls. No one was on the path that went along the green river meadow, along the elm-tree colonnade.

There was the faintest haze over the silvery-dark water and the green meadow-bank, and the elm-trees that were spangled with gold. The river slid by in a body, utterly silent and swift, intertwining among itself like some subtle, complex creature. Clara walked moodily beside him.

“Why,” she asked at length, in rather a jarring tone, “did you leave Miriam?”

He frowned.

“Because I WANTED to leave her,” he said.

“Why?”

“Because I didn’t want to go on with her. And I didn’t want to marry.”

She was silent for a moment. They picked their way down the muddy path. Drops of water fell from the elm-trees.

“You didn’t want to marry Miriam, or you didn’t want to marry at all?” she asked.

“Both,” he answered — ”both!”

They had to manoeuvre to get to the stile, because of the pools of water.

“And what did she say?” Clara asked.

“Miriam? She said I was a baby of four, and that I always HAD battled her off.”

Clara pondered over this for a time.

“But you have really been going with her for some time?” she asked.

“Yes.”

“And now you don’t want any more of her?”

“No. I know it’s no good.”

She pondered again.

“Don’t you think you’ve treated her rather badly?” she asked.

“Yes; I ought to have dropped it years back. But it would have been no good going on. Two wrongs don’t make a right.”

“How old ARE you?” Clara asked.

“Twenty-five.”

“And I am thirty,” she said.

“I know you are.”

“I shall be thirty-one — or AM I thirty-one?”

“I neither know nor care. What does it matter!”

They were at the entrance to the Grove. The wet, red track, already sticky with fallen leaves, went up the steep bank between the grass. On either side stood the elm-trees like pillars along a great aisle, arching over and making high up a roof from which the dead leaves fell. All was empty and silent and wet. She stood on top of the stile, and he held both her hands. Laughing, she looked down into his eyes. Then she leaped. Her breast came against his; he held her, and covered her face with kisses.

They went on up the slippery, steep red path. Presently she released his hand and put it round her waist.

“You press the vein in my arm, holding it so tightly,” she said.

They walked along. His finger-tips felt the rocking of her breast. All was silent and deserted. On the left the red wet plough-land showed through the doorways between the elm-boles and their branches. On the right, looking down, they could see the tree-tops of elms growing far beneath them, hear occasionally the gurgle of the river. Sometimes there below they caught glimpses of the full, soft-sliding Trent, and of water-meadows dotted with small cattle.

“It has scarcely altered since little Kirke White used to come,” he said.

But he was watching her throat below the ear, where the flush was fusing into the honey-white, and her mouth that pouted disconsolate. She stirred against him as she walked, and his body was like a taut string.

Halfway up the big colonnade of elms, where the Grove rose highest above the river, their forward movement faltered to an end. He led her across to the grass, under the trees at the edge of the path. The cliff of red earth sloped swiftly down, through trees and bushes, to the river that glimmered and was dark between the foliage. The far-below water-meadows were very green. He and she stood leaning against one another, silent, afraid, their bodies touching all along. There came a quick gurgle from the river below.

“Why,” he asked at length, “did you hate Baxter Dawes?”

She turned to him with a splendid movement. Her mouth was offered him, and her throat; her eyes were half-shut; her breast was tilted as if it asked for him. He flashed with a small laugh, shut his eyes, and met her in a long, whole kiss. Her mouth fused with his; their bodies were sealed and annealed. It was some minutes before they withdrew. They were standing beside the public path.

“Will you go down to the river?” he asked.

She looked at him, leaving herself in his hands. He went over the brim of the

declivity and began to climb down.

“It is slippery,” he said.

“Never mind,” she replied.

The red clay went down almost sheer. He slid, went from one tuft of grass to the next, hanging on to the bushes, making for a little platform at the foot of a tree. There he waited for her, laughing with excitement. Her shoes were clogged with red earth. It was hard for her. He frowned. At last he caught her hand, and she stood beside him. The cliff rose above them and fell away below. Her colour was up, her eyes flashed. He looked at the big drop below them.

“It’s risky,” he said; “or messy, at any rate. Shall we go back?”

“Not for my sake,” she said quickly.

“All right. You see, I can’t help you; I should only hinder. Give me that little parcel and your gloves. Your poor shoes!”

They stood perched on the face of the declivity, under the trees.

“Well, I’ll go again,” he said.

Away he went, slipping, staggering, sliding to the next tree, into which he fell with a slam that nearly shook the breath out of him. She came after cautiously, hanging on to the twigs and grasses. So they descended, stage by stage, to the river’s brink. There, to his disgust, the flood had eaten away the path, and the red decline ran straight into the water. He dug in his heels and brought himself up violently. The string of the parcel broke with a snap; the brown parcel bounded down, leaped into the water, and sailed smoothly away. He hung on to his tree.

“Well, I’ll be damned!” he cried crossly. Then he laughed. She was coming perilously down.

“Mind!” he warned her. He stood with his back to the tree, waiting. “Come now,” he called, opening his arms.

She let herself run. He caught her, and together they stood watching the dark water scoop at the raw edge of the bank. The parcel had sailed out of sight.

“It doesn’t matter,” she said.

He held her close and kissed her. There was only room for their four feet.

“It’s a swindle!” he said. “But there’s a rut where a man has been, so if we go on I guess we shall find the path again.”

The river slid and twined its great volume. On the other bank cattle were feeding on the desolate flats. The cliff rose high above Paul and Clara on their right hand. They stood against the tree in the watery silence.

“Let us try going forward,” he said; and they struggled in the red clay along the groove a man’s nailed boots had made. They were hot and flushed. Their barkled shoes hung heavy on their steps. At last they found the broken path. It was littered with rubble from the water, but at any rate it was easier. They

cleaned their boots with twigs. His heart was beating thick and fast.

Suddenly, coming on to the little level, he saw two figures of men standing silent at the water's edge. His heart leaped. They were fishing. He turned and put his hand up warningly to Clara. She hesitated, buttoned her coat. The two went on together.

The fishermen turned curiously to watch the two intruders on their privacy and solitude. They had had a fire, but it was nearly out. All kept perfectly still. The men turned again to their fishing, stood over the grey glinting river like statues. Clara went with bowed head, flushing; he was laughing to himself. Directly they passed out of sight behind the willows.

"Now they ought to be drowned," said Paul softly.

Clara did not answer. They toiled forward along a tiny path on the river's lip. Suddenly it vanished. The bank was sheer red solid clay in front of them, sloping straight into the river. He stood and cursed beneath his breath, setting his teeth.

"It's impossible!" said Clara.

He stood erect, looking round. Just ahead were two islets in the stream, covered with osiers. But they were unattainable. The cliff came down like a sloping wall from far above their heads. Behind, not far back, were the fishermen. Across the river the distant cattle fed silently in the desolate afternoon. He cursed again deeply under his breath. He gazed up the great steep bank. Was there no hope but to scale back to the public path?

"Stop a minute," he said, and, digging his heels sideways into the steep bank of red clay, he began nimbly to mount. He looked across at every tree-foot. At last he found what he wanted. Two beech-trees side by side on the hill held a little level on the upper face between their roots. It was littered with damp leaves, but it would do. The fishermen were perhaps sufficiently out of sight. He threw down his rainproof and waved to her to come.

She toiled to his side. Arriving there, she looked at him heavily, dumbly, and laid her head on his shoulder. He held her fast as he looked round. They were safe enough from all but the small, lonely cows over the river. He sunk his mouth on her throat, where he felt her heavy pulse beat under his lips. Everything was perfectly still. There was nothing in the afternoon but themselves.

When she arose, he, looking on the ground all the time, saw suddenly sprinkled on the black wet beech-roots many scarlet carnation petals, like splashed drops of blood; and red, small splashes fell from her bosom, streaming down her dress to her feet.

"Your flowers are smashed," he said.

She looked at him heavily as she put back her hair. Suddenly he put his finger-

tips on her cheek.

“Why dost look so heavy?” he reproached her.

She smiled sadly, as if she felt alone in herself. He caressed her cheek with his fingers, and kissed her.

“Nay!” he said. “Never thee bother!”

She gripped his fingers tight, and laughed shakily. Then she dropped her hand. He put the hair back from her brows, stroking her temples, kissing them lightly.

“But tha shouldna worrit!” he said softly, pleading.

“No, I don’t worry!” she laughed tenderly and resigned.

“Yea, tha does! Dunna thee worrit,” he implored, caressing.

“No!” she consoled him, kissing him.

They had a stiff climb to get to the top again. It took them a quarter of an hour. When he got on to the level grass, he threw off his cap, wiped the sweat from his forehead, and sighed.

“Now we’re back at the ordinary level,” he said.

She sat down, panting, on the tussocky grass. Her cheeks were flushed pink. He kissed her, and she gave way to joy.

“And now I’ll clean thy boots and make thee fit for respectable folk,” he said.

He kneeled at her feet, worked away with a stick and tufts of grass. She put her fingers in his hair, drew his head to her, and kissed it.

“What am I supposed to be doing,” he said, looking at her laughing; “cleaning shoes or dibbling with love? Answer me that!”

“Just whichever I please,” she replied.

“I’m your boot-boy for the time being, and nothing else!” But they remained looking into each other’s eyes and laughing. Then they kissed with little nibbling kisses.

“T-t-t-t!” he went with his tongue, like his mother. “I tell you, nothing gets done when there’s a woman about.”

And he returned to his boot-cleaning, singing softly. She touched his thick hair, and he kissed her fingers. He worked away at her shoes. At last they were quite presentable.

“There you are, you see!” he said. “Aren’t I a great hand at restoring you to respectability? Stand up! There, you look as irreproachable as Britannia herself!”

He cleaned his own boots a little, washed his hands in a puddle, and sang. They went on into Clifton village. He was madly in love with her; every movement she made, every crease in her garments, sent a hot flash through him and seemed adorable.

The old lady at whose house they had tea was roused into gaiety by them.

“I could wish you’d had something of a better day,” she said, hovering round.

“Nay!” he laughed. “We’ve been saying how nice it is.”

The old lady looked at him curiously. There was a peculiar glow and charm about him. His eyes were dark and laughing. He rubbed his moustache with a glad movement.

“Have you been saying SO!” she exclaimed, a light rousing in her old eyes.

“Truly!” he laughed.

“Then I’m sure the day’s good enough,” said the old lady.

She fussed about, and did not want to leave them.

“I don’t know whether you’d like some radishes as well,” she said to Clara; “but I’ve got some in the garden — AND a cucumber.”

Clara flushed. She looked very handsome.

“I should like some radishes,” she answered.

And the old lady pattered off gleefully.

“If she knew!” said Clara quietly to him.

“Well, she doesn’t know; and it shows we’re nice in ourselves, at any rate. You look quite enough to satisfy an archangel, and I’m sure I feel harmless — so — if it makes you look nice, and makes folk happy when they have us, and makes us happy — why, we’re not cheating them out of much!”

They went on with the meal. When they were going away, the old lady came timidly with three tiny dahlias in full blow, neat as bees, and speckled scarlet and white. She stood before Clara, pleased with herself, saying:

“I don’t know whether — ” and holding the flowers forward in her old hand.

“Oh, how pretty!” cried Clara, accepting the flowers.

“Shall she have them all?” asked Paul reproachfully of the old woman.

“Yes, she shall have them all,” she replied, beaming with joy. “You have got enough for your share.”

“Ah, but I shall ask her to give me one!” he teased.

“Then she does as she pleases,” said the old lady, smiling. And she bobbed a little curtsy of delight.

Clara was rather quiet and uncomfortable. As they walked along, he said:

“You don’t feel criminal, do you?”

She looked at him with startled grey eyes.

“Criminal!” she said. “No.”

“But you seem to feel you have done a wrong?”

“No,” she said. “I only think, ‘If they knew!’”

“If they knew, they’d cease to understand. As it is, they do understand, and they like it. What do they matter? Here, with only the trees and me, you don’t feel not the least bit wrong, do you?”

He took her by the arm, held her facing him, holding her eyes with his.

Something fretted him.

“Not sinners, are we?” he said, with an uneasy little frown.

“No,” she replied.

He kissed her, laughing.

“You like your little bit of guiltiness, I believe,” he said. “I believe Eve enjoyed it, when she went cowering out of Paradise.”

But there was a certain glow and quietness about her that made him glad. When he was alone in the railway-carriage, he found himself tumultuously happy, and the people exceedingly nice, and the night lovely, and everything good.

Mrs. Morel was sitting reading when he got home. Her health was not good now, and there had come that ivory pallor into her face which he never noticed, and which afterwards he never forgot. She did not mention her own ill-health to him. After all, she thought, it was not much.

“You are late!” she said, looking at him.

His eyes were shining; his face seemed to glow. He smiled to her.

“Yes; I’ve been down Clifton Grove with Clara.”

His mother looked at him again.

“But won’t people talk?” she said.

“Why? They know she’s a suffragette, and so on. And what if they do talk!”

“Of course, there may be nothing wrong in it,” said his mother. “But you know what folks are, and if once she gets talked about — ”

“Well, I can’t help it. Their jaw isn’t so almighty important, after all.”

“I think you ought to consider HER.”

“So I DO! What can people say? — that we take a walk together. I believe you’re jealous.”

“You know I should be GLAD if she weren’t a married woman.”

“Well, my dear, she lives separate from her husband, and talks on platforms; so she’s already singled out from the sheep, and, as far as I can see, hasn’t much to lose. No; her life’s nothing to her, so what’s the worth of nothing? She goes with me — it becomes something. Then she must pay — we both must pay! Folk are so frightened of paying; they’d rather starve and die.”

“Very well, my son. We’ll see how it will end.”

“Very well, my mother. I’ll abide by the end.”

“We’ll see!”

“And she’s — she’s AWFULLY nice, mother; she is really! You don’t know!”

“That’s not the same as marrying her.”

“It’s perhaps better.”

There was silence for a while. He wanted to ask his mother something, but was afraid.

“Should you like to know her?” He hesitated.

“Yes,” said Mrs. Morel coolly. “I should like to know what she’s like.”

“But she’s nice, mother, she is! And not a bit common!”

“I never suggested she was.”

“But you seem to think she’s — not as good as — She’s better than ninety-nine folk out of a hundred, I tell you! She’s BETTER, she is! She’s fair, she’s honest, she’s straight! There isn’t anything underhand or superior about her. Don’t be mean about her!”

Mrs. Morel flushed.

“I am sure I am not mean about her. She may be quite as you say, but — ”

“You don’t approve,” he finished.

“And do you expect me to?” she answered coldly.

“Yes! — yes! — if you’d anything about you, you’d be glad! Do you WANT to see her?”

“I said I did.”

“Then I’ll bring her — shall I bring her here?”

“You please yourself.”

“Then I WILL bring her here — one Sunday — to tea. If you think a horrid thing about her, I shan’t forgive you.”

His mother laughed.

“As if it would make any difference!” she said. He knew he had won.

“Oh, but it feels so fine, when she’s there! She’s such a queen in her way.”

Occasionally he still walked a little way from chapel with Miriam and Edgar. He did not go up to the farm. She, however, was very much the same with him, and he did not feel embarrassed in her presence. One evening she was alone when he accompanied her. They began by talking books: it was their unfailing topic. Mrs. Morel had said that his and Miriam’s affair was like a fire fed on books — if there were no more volumes it would die out. Miriam, for her part, boasted that she could read him like a book, could place her finger any minute on the chapter and the line. He, easily taken in, believed that Miriam knew more about him than anyone else. So it pleased him to talk to her about himself, like the simplest egoist. Very soon the conversation drifted to his own doings. It flattered him immensely that he was of such supreme interest.

“And what have you been doing lately?”

“I — oh, not much! I made a sketch of Bestwood from the garden, that is nearly right at last. It’s the hundredth try.”

So they went on. Then she said:

“You’ve not been out, then, lately?”

“Yes; I went up Clifton Grove on Monday afternoon with Clara.”

“It was not very nice weather,” said Miriam, “was it?”

“But I wanted to go out, and it was all right. The Trent IS full.”

“And did you go to Barton?” she asked.

“No; we had tea in Clifton.”

“DID you! That would be nice.”

“It was! The jolliest old woman! She gave us several pompom dahlias, as pretty as you like.”

Miriam bowed her head and brooded. He was quite unconscious of concealing anything from her.

“What made her give them you?” she asked.

He laughed.

“Because she liked us — because we were jolly, I should think.”

Miriam put her finger in her mouth.

“Were you late home?” she asked.

At last he resented her tone.

“I caught the seven-thirty.”

“Ha!”

They walked on in silence, and he was angry.

“And how IS Clara?” asked Miriam.

“Quite all right, I think.”

“That’s good!” she said, with a tinge of irony. “By the way, what of her husband? One never hears anything of him.”

“He’s got some other woman, and is also quite all right,” he replied. “At least, so I think.”

“I see — you don’t know for certain. Don’t you think a position like that is hard on a woman?”

“Rottenly hard!”

“It’s so unjust!” said Miriam. “The man does as he likes — ”

“Then let the woman also,” he said.

“How can she? And if she does, look at her position!”

“What of it?”

“Why, it’s impossible! You don’t understand what a woman forfeits — ”

“No, I don’t. But if a woman’s got nothing but her fair fame to feed on, why, it’s thin tack, and a donkey would die of it!”

So she understood his moral attitude, at least, and she knew he would act accordingly.

She never asked him anything direct, but she got to know enough.

Another day, when he saw Miriam, the conversation turned to marriage, then to Clara's marriage with Dawes.

"You see," he said, "she never knew the fearful importance of marriage. She thought it was all in the day's march — it would have to come — and Dawes — well, a good many women would have given their souls to get him; so why not him? Then she developed into the femme incomprise, and treated him badly, I'll bet my boots."

"And she left him because he didn't understand her?"

"I suppose so. I suppose she had to. It isn't altogether a question of understanding; it's a question of living. With him, she was only half-alive; the rest was dormant, deadened. And the dormant woman was the femme incomprise, and she HAD to be awakened."

"And what about him."

"I don't know. I rather think he loves her as much as he can, but he's a fool."

"It was something like your mother and father," said Miriam.

"Yes; but my mother, I believe, got real joy and satisfaction out of my father at first. I believe she had a passion for him; that's why she stayed with him. After all, they were bound to each other."

"Yes," said Miriam.

"That's what one MUST HAVE, I think," he continued — "the real, real flame of feeling through another person — once, only once, if it only lasts three months. See, my mother looks as if she'd HAD everything that was necessary for her living and developing. There's not a tiny bit of feeling of sterility about her."

"No," said Miriam.

"And with my father, at first, I'm sure she had the real thing. She knows; she has been there. You can feel it about her, and about him, and about hundreds of people you meet every day; and, once it has happened to you, you can go on with anything and ripen."

"What happened, exactly?" asked Miriam.

"It's so hard to say, but the something big and intense that changes you when you really come together with somebody else. It almost seems to fertilise your soul and make it that you can go on and mature."

"And you think your mother had it with your father?"

"Yes; and at the bottom she feels grateful to him for giving it her, even now, though they are miles apart."

"And you think Clara never had it?"

"I'm sure."

Miriam pondered this. She saw what he was seeking — a sort of baptism of

fire in passion, it seemed to her. She realised that he would never be satisfied till he had it. Perhaps it was essential to him, as to some men, to sow wild oats; and afterwards, when he was satisfied, he would not rage with restlessness any more, but could settle down and give her his life into her hands. Well, then, if he must go, let him go and have his fill — something big and intense, he called it. At any rate, when he had got it, he would not want it — that he said himself; he would want the other thing that she could give him. He would want to be owned, so that he could work. It seemed to her a bitter thing that he must go, but she could let him go into an inn for a glass of whisky, so she could let him go to Clara, so long as it was something that would satisfy a need in him, and leave him free for herself to possess.

“Have you told your mother about Clara?” she asked.

She knew this would be a test of the seriousness of his feeling for the other woman: she knew he was going to Clara for something vital, not as a man goes for pleasure to a prostitute, if he told his mother.

“Yes,” he said, “and she is coming to tea on Sunday.”

“To your house?”

“Yes; I want mater to see her.”

“Ah!”

There was a silence. Things had gone quicker than she thought. She felt a sudden bitterness that he could leave her so soon and so entirely. And was Clara to be accepted by his people, who had been so hostile to herself?

“I may call in as I go to chapel,” she said. “It is a long time since I saw Clara.”

“Very well,” he said, astonished, and unconsciously angry.

On the Sunday afternoon he went to Keston to meet Clara at the station. As he stood on the platform he was trying to examine in himself if he had a premonition.

“Do I FEEL as if she’d come?” he said to himself, and he tried to find out. His heart felt queer and contracted. That seemed like foreboding. Then he HAD a foreboding she would not come! Then she would not come, and instead of taking her over the fields home, as he had imagined, he would have to go alone. The train was late; the afternoon would be wasted, and the evening. He hated her for not coming. Why had she promised, then, if she could not keep her promise? Perhaps she had missed her train — he himself was always missing trains — but that was no reason why she should miss this particular one. He was angry with her; he was furious.

Suddenly he saw the train crawling, sneaking round the corner. Here, then, was the train, but of course she had not come. The green engine hissed along the platform, the row of brown carriages drew up, several doors opened. No; she had

not come! No! Yes; ah, there she was! She had a big black hat on! He was at her side in a moment.

“I thought you weren’t coming,” he said.

She was laughing rather breathlessly as she put out her hand to him; their eyes met. He took her quickly along the platform, talking at a great rate to hide his feeling. She looked beautiful. In her hat were large silk roses, coloured like tarnished gold. Her costume of dark cloth fitted so beautifully over her breast and shoulders. His pride went up as he walked with her. He felt the station people, who knew him, eyed her with awe and admiration.

“I was sure you weren’t coming,” he laughed shakily.

She laughed in answer, almost with a little cry.

“And I wondered, when I was in the train, WHATEVER I should do if you weren’t there!” she said.

He caught her hand impulsively, and they went along the narrow twitchel. They took the road into Nuttall and over the Reckoning House Farm. It was a blue, mild day. Everywhere the brown leaves lay scattered; many scarlet hips stood upon the hedge beside the wood. He gathered a few for her to wear.

“Though, really,” he said, as he fitted them into the breast of her coat, “you ought to object to my getting them, because of the birds. But they don’t care much for rose-hips in this part, where they can get plenty of stuff. You often find the berries going rotten in the springtime.”

So he chattered, scarcely aware of what he said, only knowing he was putting berries in the bosom of her coat, while she stood patiently for him. And she watched his quick hands, so full of life, and it seemed to her she had never SEEN anything before. Till now, everything had been indistinct.

They came near to the colliery. It stood quite still and black among the corn-fields, its immense heap of slag seen rising almost from the oats.

“What a pity there is a coal-pit here where it is so pretty!” said Clara.

“Do you think so?” he answered. “You see, I am so used to it I should miss it. No; and I like the pits here and there. I like the rows of trucks, and the headstocks, and the steam in the daytime, and the lights at night. When I was a boy, I always thought a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night was a pit, with its steam, and its lights, and the burning bank, — and I thought the Lord was always at the pit-top.”

As they drew near home she walked in silence, and seemed to hang back. He pressed her fingers in his own. She flushed, but gave no response.

“Don’t you want to come home?” he asked.

“Yes, I want to come,” she replied.

It did not occur to him that her position in his home would be rather a peculiar

and difficult one. To him it seemed just as if one of his men friends were going to be introduced to his mother, only nicer.

The Morels lived in a house in an ugly street that ran down a steep hill. The street itself was hideous. The house was rather superior to most. It was old, grimy, with a big bay window, and it was semi-detached; but it looked gloomy. Then Paul opened the door to the garden, and all was different. The sunny afternoon was there, like another land. By the path grew tansy and little trees. In front of the window was a plot of sunny grass, with old lilacs round it. And away went the garden, with heaps of dishevelled chrysanthemums in the sunshine, down to the sycamore-tree, and the field, and beyond one looked over a few red-roofed cottages to the hills with all the glow of the autumn afternoon.

Mrs. Morel sat in her rocking-chair, wearing her black silk blouse. Her grey-brown hair was taken smooth back from her brow and her high temples; her face was rather pale. Clara, suffering, followed Paul into the kitchen. Mrs. Morel rose. Clara thought her a lady, even rather stiff. The young woman was very nervous. She had almost a wistful look, almost resigned.

“Mother — Clara,” said Paul.

Mrs. Morel held out her hand and smiled.

“He has told me a good deal about you,” she said.

The blood flamed in Clara’s cheek.

“I hope you don’t mind my coming,” she faltered.

“I was pleased when he said he would bring you,” replied Mrs. Morel.

Paul, watching, felt his heart contract with pain. His mother looked so small, and sallow, and done-for beside the luxuriant Clara.

“It’s such a pretty day, mother!” he said. “And we saw a jay.”

His mother looked at him; he had turned to her. She thought what a man he seemed, in his dark, well-made clothes. He was pale and detached-looking; it would be hard for any woman to keep him. Her heart glowed; then she was sorry for Clara.

“Perhaps you’ll leave your things in the parlour,” said Mrs. Morel nicely to the young woman.

“Oh, thank you,” she replied.

“Come on,” said Paul, and he led the way into the little front room, with its old piano, its mahogany furniture, its yellowing marble mantelpiece. A fire was burning; the place was littered with books and drawing-boards. “I leave my things lying about,” he said. “It’s so much easier.”

She loved his artist’s paraphernalia, and the books, and the photos of people. Soon he was telling her: this was William, this was William’s young lady in the evening dress, this was Annie and her husband, this was Arthur and his wife and

the baby. She felt as if she were being taken into the family. He showed her photos, books, sketches, and they talked a little while. Then they returned to the kitchen. Mrs. Morel put aside her book. Clara wore a blouse of fine silk chiffon, with narrow black-and-white stripes; her hair was done simply, coiled on top of her head. She looked rather stately and reserved.

“You have gone to live down Sneinton Boulevard?” said Mrs. Morel. “When I was a girl — girl, I say! — when I was a young woman WE lived in Minerva Terrace.”

“Oh, did you!” said Clara. “I have a friend in number 6.”

And the conversation had started. They talked Nottingham and Nottingham people; it interested them both. Clara was still rather nervous; Mrs. Morel was still somewhat on her dignity. She clipped her language very clear and precise. But they were going to get on well together, Paul saw.

Mrs. Morel measured herself against the younger woman, and found herself easily stronger. Clara was deferential. She knew Paul’s surprising regard for his mother, and she had dreaded the meeting, expecting someone rather hard and cold. She was surprised to find this little interested woman chatting with such readiness; and then she felt, as she felt with Paul, that she would not care to stand in Mrs. Morel’s way. There was something so hard and certain in his mother, as if she never had a misgiving in her life.

Presently Morel came down, ruffled and yawning, from his afternoon sleep. He scratched his grizzled head, he plodded in his stocking feet, his waistcoat hung open over his shirt. He seemed incongruous.

“This is Mrs. Dawes, father,” said Paul.

Then Morel pulled himself together. Clara saw Paul’s manner of bowing and shaking hands.

“Oh, indeed!” exclaimed Morel. “I am very glad to see you — I am, I assure you. But don’t disturb yourself. No, no make yourself quite comfortable, and be very welcome.”

Clara was astonished at this flood of hospitality from the old collier. He was so courteous, so gallant! She thought him most delightful.

“And may you have come far?” he asked.

“Only from Nottingham,” she said.

“From Nottingham! Then you have had a beautiful day for your journey.”

Then he strayed into the scullery to wash his hands and face, and from force of habit came on to the hearth with the towel to dry himself.

At tea Clara felt the refinement and sang-froid of the household. Mrs. Morel was perfectly at her ease. The pouring out the tea and attending to the people went on unconsciously, without interrupting her in her talk. There was a lot of

room at the oval table; the china of dark blue willow-pattern looked pretty on the glossy cloth. There was a little bowl of small, yellow chrysanthemums. Clara felt she completed the circle, and it was a pleasure to her. But she was rather afraid of the self-possession of the Morels, father and all. She took their tone; there was a feeling of balance. It was a cool, clear atmosphere, where everyone was himself, and in harmony. Clara enjoyed it, but there was a fear deep at the bottom of her.

Paul cleared the table whilst his mother and Clara talked. Clara was conscious of his quick, vigorous body as it came and went, seeming blown quickly by a wind at its work. It was almost like the hither and thither of a leaf that comes unexpected. Most of herself went with him. By the way she leaned forward, as if listening, Mrs. Morel could see she was possessed elsewhere as she talked, and again the elder woman was sorry for her.

Having finished, he strolled down the garden, leaving the two women to talk. It was a hazy, sunny afternoon, mild and soft. Clara glanced through the window after him as he loitered among the chrysanthemums. She felt as if something almost tangible fastened her to him; yet he seemed so easy in his graceful, indolent movement, so detached as he tied up the too-heavy flower branches to their stakes, that she wanted to shriek in her helplessness.

Mrs. Morel rose.

“You will let me help you wash up,” said Clara.

“Eh, there are so few, it will only take a minute,” said the other.

Clara, however, dried the tea-things, and was glad to be on such good terms with his mother; but it was torture not to be able to follow him down the garden. At last she allowed herself to go; she felt as if a rope were taken off her ankle.

The afternoon was golden over the hills of Derbyshire. He stood across in the other garden, beside a bush of pale Michaelmas daisies, watching the last bees crawl into the hive. Hearing her coming, he turned to her with an easy motion, saying:

“It’s the end of the run with these chaps.”

Clara stood near him. Over the low red wall in front was the country and the far-off hills, all golden dim.

At that moment Miriam was entering through the garden-door. She saw Clara go up to him, saw him turn, and saw them come to rest together. Something in their perfect isolation together made her know that it was accomplished between them, that they were, as she put it, married. She walked very slowly down the cinder-track of the long garden.

Clara had pulled a button from a hollyhock spire, and was breaking it to get the seeds. Above her bowed head the pink flowers stared, as if defending her.

The last bees were falling down to the hive.

“Count your money,” laughed Paul, as she broke the flat seeds one by one from the roll of coin. She looked at him.

“I’m well off,” she said, smiling.

“How much? Pf!” He snapped his fingers. “Can I turn them into gold?”

“I’m afraid not,” she laughed.

They looked into each other’s eyes, laughing. At that moment they became aware of Miriam. There was a click, and everything had altered.

“Hello, Miriam!” he exclaimed. “You said you’d come!”

“Yes. Had you forgotten?”

She shook hands with Clara, saying:

“It seems strange to see you here.”

“Yes,” replied the other; “it seems strange to be here.”

There was a hesitation.

“This is pretty, isn’t it?” said Miriam.

“I like it very much,” replied Clara.

Then Miriam realised that Clara was accepted as she had never been.

“Have you come down alone?” asked Paul.

“Yes; I went to Agatha’s to tea. We are going to chapel. I only called in for a moment to see Clara.”

“You should have come in here to tea,” he said.

Miriam laughed shortly, and Clara turned impatiently aside.

“Do you like the chrysanthemums?” he asked.

“Yes; they are very fine,” replied Miriam.

“Which sort do you like best?” he asked.

“I don’t know. The bronze, I think.”

“I don’t think you’ve seen all the sorts. Come and look. Come and see which are YOUR favourites, Clara.”

He led the two women back to his own garden, where the trowsed bushes of flowers of all colours stood raggedly along the path down to the field. The situation did not embarrass him, to his knowledge.

“Look, Miriam; these are the white ones that came from your garden. They aren’t so fine here, are they?”

“No,” said Miriam.

“But they’re hardier. You’re so sheltered; things grow big and tender, and then die. These little yellow ones I like. Will you have some?”

While they were out there the bells began to ring in the church, sounding loud across the town and the field. Miriam looked at the tower, proud among the clustering roofs, and remembered the sketches he had brought her. It had been

different then, but he had not left her even yet. She asked him for a book to read. He ran indoors.

“What! is that Miriam?” asked his mother coldly.

“Yes; she said she’d call and see Clara.”

“You told her, then?” came the sarcastic answer.

“Yes; why shouldn’t I?”

“There’s certainly no reason why you shouldn’t,” said Mrs. Morel, and she returned to her book. He winced from his mother’s irony, frowned irritably, thinking: “Why can’t I do as I like?”

“You’ve not seen Mrs. Morel before?” Miriam was saying to Clara.

“No; but she’s so nice!”

“Yes,” said Miriam, dropping her head; “in some ways she’s very fine.”

“I should think so.”

“Had Paul told you much about her?”

“He had talked a good deal.”

“Ha!”

There was silence until he returned with the book.

“When will you want it back?” Miriam asked.

“When you like,” he answered.

Clara turned to go indoors, whilst he accompanied Miriam to the gate.

“When will you come up to Willey Farm?” the latter asked.

“I couldn’t say,” replied Clara.

“Mother asked me to say she’d be pleased to see you any time, if you cared to come.”

“Thank you; I should like to, but I can’t say when.”

“Oh, very well!” exclaimed Miriam rather bitterly, turning away.

She went down the path with her mouth to the flowers he had given her.

“You’re sure you won’t come in?” he said.

“No, thanks.”

“We are going to chapel.”

“Ah, I shall see you, then!” Miriam was very bitter.

“Yes.”

They parted. He felt guilty towards her. She was bitter, and she scorned him. He still belonged to herself, she believed; yet he could have Clara, take her home, sit with her next his mother in chapel, give her the same hymn-book he had given herself years before. She heard him running quickly indoors.

But he did not go straight in. Halting on the plot of grass, he heard his mother’s voice, then Clara’s answer:

“What I hate is the bloodhound quality in Miriam.”

“Yes,” said his mother quickly, “yes; DOESN’T it make you hate her, now!”

His heart went hot, and he was angry with them for talking about the girl. What right had they to say that? Something in the speech itself stung him into a flame of hate against Miriam. Then his own heart rebelled furiously at Clara’s taking the liberty of speaking so about Miriam. After all, the girl was the better woman of the two, he thought, if it came to goodness. He went indoors. His mother looked excited. She was beating with her hand rhythmically on the sofa-arm, as women do who are wearing out. He could never bear to see the movement. There was a silence; then he began to talk.

In chapel Miriam saw him find the place in the hymn-book for Clara, in exactly the same way as he used for herself. And during the sermon he could see the girl across the chapel, her hat throwing a dark shadow over her face. What did she think, seeing Clara with him? He did not stop to consider. He felt himself cruel towards Miriam.

After chapel he went over Pentrich with Clara. It was a dark autumn night. They had said good-bye to Miriam, and his heart had smitten him as he left the girl alone. “But it serves her right,” he said inside himself, and it almost gave him pleasure to go off under her eyes with this other handsome woman.

There was a scent of damp leaves in the darkness. Clara’s hand lay warm and inert in his own as they walked. He was full of conflict. The battle that raged inside him made him feel desperate.

Up Pentrich Hill Clara leaned against him as he went. He slid his arm round her waist. Feeling the strong motion of her body under his arm as she walked, the tightness in his chest because of Miriam relaxed, and the hot blood bathed him. He held her closer and closer.

Then: “You still keep on with Miriam,” she said quietly.

“Only talk. There never WAS a great deal more than talk between us,” he said bitterly.

“Your mother doesn’t care for her,” said Clara.

“No, or I might have married her. But it’s all up really!”

Suddenly his voice went passionate with hate.

“If I was with her now, we should be jawing about the ‘Christian Mystery’, or some such tack. Thank God, I’m not!”

They walked on in silence for some time.

“But you can’t really give her up,” said Clara.

“I don’t give her up, because there’s nothing to give,” he said.

“There is for her.”

“I don’t know why she and I shouldn’t be friends as long as we live,” he said. “But it’ll only be friends.”

Clara drew away from him, leaning away from contact with him.

“What are you drawing away for?” he asked.

She did not answer, but drew farther from him.

“Why do you want to walk alone?” he asked.

Still there was no answer. She walked resentfully, hanging her head.

“Because I said I would be friends with Miriam!” he exclaimed.

She would not answer him anything.

“I tell you it’s only words that go between us,” he persisted, trying to take her again.

She resisted. Suddenly he strode across in front of her, barring her way.

“Damn it!” he said. “What do you want now?”

“You’d better run after Miriam,” mocked Clara.

The blood flamed up in him. He stood showing his teeth. She drooped sulkily. The lane was dark, quite lonely. He suddenly caught her in his arms, stretched forward, and put his mouth on her face in a kiss of rage. She turned frantically to avoid him. He held her fast. Hard and relentless his mouth came for her. Her breasts hurt against the wall of his chest. Helpless, she went loose in his arms, and he kissed her, and kissed her.

He heard people coming down the hill.

“Stand up! stand up!” he said thickly, gripping her arm till it hurt. If he had let go, she would have sunk to the ground.

She sighed and walked dizzily beside him. They went on in silence.

“We will go over the fields,” he said; and then she woke up.

But she let herself be helped over the stile, and she walked in silence with him over the first dark field. It was the way to Nottingham and to the station, she knew. He seemed to be looking about. They came out on a bare hilltop where stood the dark figure of the ruined windmill. There he halted. They stood together high up in the darkness, looking at the lights scattered on the night before them, handfuls of glittering points, villages lying high and low on the dark, here and there.

“Like treading among the stars,” he said, with a quaky laugh.

Then he took her in his arms, and held her fast. She moved aside her mouth to ask, dogged and low:

“What time is it?”

“It doesn’t matter,” he pleaded thickly.

“Yes it does — yes! I must go!”

“It’s early yet,” he said.

“What time is it?” she insisted.

All round lay the black night, speckled and spangled with lights.

“I don’t know.”

She put her hand on his chest, feeling for his watch. He felt the joints fuse into fire. She groped in his waistcoat pocket, while he stood panting. In the darkness she could see the round, pale face of the watch, but not the figures. She stooped over it. He was panting till he could take her in his arms again.

“I can’t see,” she said.

“Then don’t bother.”

“Yes; I’m going!” she said, turning away.

“Wait! I’ll look!” But he could not see. “I’ll strike a match.”

He secretly hoped it was too late to catch the train. She saw the glowing lantern of his hands as he cradled the light: then his face lit up, his eyes fixed on the watch. Instantly all was dark again. All was black before her eyes; only a glowing match was red near her feet. Where was he?

“What is it?” she asked, afraid.

“You can’t do it,” his voice answered out of the darkness.

There was a pause. She felt in his power. She had heard the ring in his voice. It frightened her.

“What time is it?” she asked, quiet, definite, hopeless.

“Two minutes to nine,” he replied, telling the truth with a struggle.

“And can I get from here to the station in fourteen minutes?”

“No. At any rate — ”

She could distinguish his dark form again a yard or so away. She wanted to escape.

“But can’t I do it?” she pleaded.

“If you hurry,” he said brusquely. “But you could easily walk it, Clara; it’s only seven miles to the tram. I’ll come with you.”

“No; I want to catch the train.”

“But why?”

“I do — I want to catch the train.”

Suddenly his voice altered.

“Very well,” he said, dry and hard. “Come along, then.”

And he plunged ahead into the darkness. She ran after him, wanting to cry. Now he was hard and cruel to her. She ran over the rough, dark fields behind him, out of breath, ready to drop. But the double row of lights at the station drew nearer. Suddenly:

“There she is!” he cried, breaking into a run.

There was a faint rattling noise. Away to the right the train, like a luminous caterpillar, was threading across the night. The rattling ceased.

“She’s over the viaduct. You’ll just do it.”

Clara ran, quite out of breath, and fell at last into the train. The whistle blew. He was gone. Gone! — and she was in a carriage full of people. She felt the cruelty of it.

He turned round and plunged home. Before he knew where he was he was in the kitchen at home. He was very pale. His eyes were dark and dangerous-looking, as if he were drunk. His mother looked at him.

“Well, I must say your boots are in a nice state!” she said.

He looked at his feet. Then he took off his overcoat. His mother wondered if he were drunk.

“She caught the train then?” she said.

“Yes.”

“I hope HER feet weren’t so filthy. Where on earth you dragged her I don’t know!”

He was silent and motionless for some time.

“Did you like her?” he asked grudgingly at last.

“Yes, I liked her. But you’ll tire of her, my son; you know you will.”

He did not answer. She noticed how he laboured in his breathing.

“Have you been running?” she asked.

“We had to run for the train.”

“You’ll go and knock yourself up. You’d better drink hot milk.”

It was as good a stimulant as he could have, but he refused and went to bed. There he lay face down on the counterpane, and shed tears of rage and pain. There was a physical pain that made him bite his lips till they bled, and the chaos inside him left him unable to think, almost to feel.

“This is how she serves me, is it?” he said in his heart, over and over, pressing his face in the quilt. And he hated her. Again he went over the scene, and again he hated her.

The next day there was a new aloofness about him. Clara was very gentle, almost loving. But he treated her distantly, with a touch of contempt. She sighed, continuing to be gentle. He came round.

One evening of that week Sarah Bernhardt was at the Theatre Royal in Nottingham, giving “La Dame aux Camelias”. Paul wanted to see this old and famous actress, and he asked Clara to accompany him. He told his mother to leave the key in the window for him.

“Shall I book seats?” he asked of Clara.

“Yes. And put on an evening suit, will you? I’ve never seen you in it.”

“But, good Lord, Clara! Think of ME in evening suit at the theatre!” he remonstrated.

“Would you rather not?” she asked.

“I will if you WANT me to; but I s’ll feel a fool.”

She laughed at him.

“Then feel a fool for my sake, once, won’t you?”

The request made his blood flush up.

“I suppose I s’ll have to.”

“What are you taking a suitcase for?” his mother asked.

He blushed furiously.

“Clara asked me,” he said.

“And what seats are you going in?”

“Circle — three-and-six each!”

“Well, I’m sure!” exclaimed his mother sarcastically.

“It’s only once in the bluest of blue moons,” he said.

He dressed at Jordan’s, put on an overcoat and a cap, and met Clara in a cafe. She was with one of her suffragette friends. She wore an old long coat, which did not suit her, and had a little wrap over her head, which he hated. The three went to the theatre together.

Clara took off her coat on the stairs, and he discovered she was in a sort of semi-evening dress, that left her arms and neck and part of her breast bare. Her hair was done fashionably. The dress, a simple thing of green crape, suited her. She looked quite grand, he thought. He could see her figure inside the frock, as if that were wrapped closely round her. The firmness and the softness of her upright body could almost be felt as he looked at her. He clenched his fists.

And he was to sit all the evening beside her beautiful naked arm, watching the strong throat rise from the strong chest, watching the breasts under the green stuff, the curve of her limbs in the tight dress. Something in him hated her again for submitting him to this torture of nearness. And he loved her as she balanced her head and stared straight in front of her, pouting, wistful, immobile, as if she yielded herself to her fate because it was too strong for her. She could not help herself; she was in the grip of something bigger than herself. A kind of eternal look about her, as if she were a wistful sphinx, made it necessary for him to kiss her. He dropped his programme, and crouched down on the floor to get it, so that he could kiss her hand and wrist. Her beauty was a torture to him. She sat immobile. Only, when the lights went down, she sank a little against him, and he caressed her hand and arm with his fingers. He could smell her faint perfume. All the time his blood kept sweeping up in great white-hot waves that killed his consciousness momentarily.

The drama continued. He saw it all in the distance, going on somewhere; he did not know where, but it seemed far away inside him. He was Clara’s white heavy arms, her throat, her moving bosom. That seemed to be himself. Then

away somewhere the play went on, and he was identified with that also. There was no himself. The grey and black eyes of Clara, her bosom coming down on him, her arm that he held gripped between his hands, were all that existed. Then he felt himself small and helpless, her towering in her force above him.

Only the intervals, when the lights came up, hurt him expressibly. He wanted to run anywhere, so long as it would be dark again. In a maze, he wandered out for a drink. Then the lights were out, and the strange, insane reality of Clara and the drama took hold of him again.

The play went on. But he was obsessed by the desire to kiss the tiny blue vein that nestled in the bend of her arm. He could feel it. His whole face seemed suspended till he had put his lips there. It must be done. And the other people! At last he bent quickly forward and touched it with his lips. His moustache brushed the sensitive flesh. Clara shivered, drew away her arm.

When all was over, the lights up, the people clapping, he came to himself and looked at his watch. His train was gone.

“I s’ll have to walk home!” he said.

Clara looked at him.

“It is too late?” she asked.

He nodded. Then he helped her on with her coat.

“I love you! You look beautiful in that dress,” he murmured over her shoulder, among the throng of bustling people.

She remained quiet. Together they went out of the theatre. He saw the cabs waiting, the people passing. It seemed he met a pair of brown eyes which hated him. But he did not know. He and Clara turned away, mechanically taking the direction to the station.

The train had gone. He would have to walk the ten miles home.

“It doesn’t matter,” he said. “I shall enjoy it.”

“Won’t you,” she said, flushing, “come home for the night? I can sleep with mother.”

He looked at her. Their eyes met.

“What will your mother say?” he asked.

“She won’t mind.”

“You’re sure?”

“Quite!”

“SHALL I come?”

“If you will.”

“Very well.”

And they turned away. At the first stopping-place they took the car. The wind blew fresh in their faces. The town was dark; the tram tipped in its haste. He sat

with her hand fast in his.

“Will your mother be gone to bed?” he asked.

“She may be. I hope not.”

They hurried along the silent, dark little street, the only people out of doors. Clara quickly entered the house. He hesitated.

He leaped up the step and was in the room. Her mother appeared in the inner doorway, large and hostile.

“Who have you got there?” she asked.

“It’s Mr. Morel; he has missed his train. I thought we might put him up for the night, and save him a ten-mile walk.”

“H’m,” exclaimed Mrs. Radford. “That’s your lookout! If you’ve invited him, he’s very welcome as far as I’m concerned. YOU keep the house!”

“If you don’t like me, I’ll go away again,” he said.

“Nay, nay, you needn’t! Come along in! I dunno what you’ll think of the supper I’d got her.”

It was a little dish of chip potatoes and a piece of bacon. The table was roughly laid for one.

“You can have some more bacon,” continued Mrs. Radford. “More chips you can’t have.”

“It’s a shame to bother you,” he said.

“Oh, don’t you be apologetic! It doesn’t DO wi’ me! You treated her to the theatre, didn’t you?” There was a sarcasm in the last question.

“Well?” laughed Paul uncomfortably.

“Well, and what’s an inch of bacon! Take your coat off.”

The big, straight-standing woman was trying to estimate the situation. She moved about the cupboard. Clara took his coat. The room was very warm and cosy in the lamplight.

“My sirs!” exclaimed Mrs. Radford; “but you two’s a pair of bright beauties, I must say! What’s all that get-up for?”

“I believe we don’t know,” he said, feeling a victim.

“There isn’t room in THIS house for two such bobby-dazzlers, if you fly your kites THAT high!” she rallied them. It was a nasty thrust.

He in his dinner jacket, and Clara in her green dress and bare arms, were confused. They felt they must shelter each other in that little kitchen.

“And look at THAT blossom!” continued Mrs. Radford, pointing to Clara. “What does she reckon she did it for?”

Paul looked at Clara. She was rosy; her neck was warm with blushes. There was a moment of silence.

“You like to see it, don’t you?” he asked.

The mother had them in her power. All the time his heart was beating hard, and he was tight with anxiety. But he would fight her.

“Me like to see it!” exclaimed the old woman. “What should I like to see her make a fool of herself for?”

“I’ve seen people look bigger fools,” he said. Clara was under his protection now.

“Oh, ay! and when was that?” came the sarcastic rejoinder.

“When they made frights of themselves,” he answered.

Mrs. Radford, large and threatening, stood suspended on the hearthrug, holding her fork.

“They’re fools either road,” she answered at length, turning to the Dutch oven.

“No,” he said, fighting stoutly. “Folk ought to look as well as they can.”

“And do you call THAT looking nice!” cried the mother, pointing a scornful fork at Clara. “That — that looks as if it wasn’t properly dressed!”

“I believe you’re jealous that you can’t swank as well,” he said laughing.

“Me! I could have worn evening dress with anybody, if I’d wanted to!” came the scornful answer.

“And why didn’t you want to?” he asked pertinently. “Or DID you wear it?”

There was a long pause. Mrs. Radford readjusted the bacon in the Dutch oven. His heart beat fast, for fear he had offended her.

“Me!” she exclaimed at last. “No, I didn’t! And when I was in service, I knew as soon as one of the maids came out in bare shoulders what sort SHE was, going to her sixpenny hop!”

“Were you too good to go to a sixpenny hop?” he said.

Clara sat with bowed head. His eyes were dark and glittering. Mrs. Radford took the Dutch oven from the fire, and stood near him, putting bits of bacon on his plate.

“THERE’S a nice crozzly bit!” she said.

“Don’t give me the best!” he said.

“SHE’S got what SHE wants,” was the answer.

There was a sort of scornful forbearance in the woman’s tone that made Paul know she was mollified.

“But DO have some!” he said to Clara.

She looked up at him with her grey eyes, humiliated and lonely.

“No thanks!” she said.

“Why won’t you?” he answered carelessly.

The blood was beating up like fire in his veins. Mrs. Radford sat down again, large and impressive and aloof. He left Clara altogether to attend to the mother.

“They say Sarah Bernhardt’s fifty,” he said.

“Fifty! She’s turned sixty!” came the scornful answer.

“Well,” he said, “you’d never think it! She made me want to howl even now.”

“I should like to see myself howling at THAT bad old baggage!” said Mrs. Radford. “It’s time she began to think herself a grandmother, not a shrieking catamaran — ”

He laughed.

“A catamaran is a boat the Malays use,” he said.

“And it’s a word as I use,” she retorted.

“My mother does sometimes, and it’s no good my telling her,” he said.

“I s’d think she boxes your ears,” said Mrs. Radford, good-humouredly.

“She’d like to, and she says she will, so I give her a little stool to stand on.”

“That’s the worst of my mother,” said Clara. “She never wants a stool for anything.”

“But she often can’t touch THAT lady with a long prop,” retorted Mrs. Radford to Paul.

“I s’d think she doesn’t want touching with a prop,” he laughed. “I shouldn’t.”

“It might do the pair of you good to give you a crack on the head with one,” said the mother, laughing suddenly.

“Why are you so vindictive towards me?” he said. “I’ve not stolen anything from you.”

“No; I’ll watch that,” laughed the older woman.

Soon the supper was finished. Mrs. Radford sat guard in her chair. Paul lit a cigarette. Clara went upstairs, returning with a sleeping-suit, which she spread on the fender to air.

“Why, I’d forgot all about THEM!” said Mrs. Radford. “Where have they sprung from?”

“Out of my drawer.”

“H’m! You bought ‘em for Baxter, an’ he wouldn’t wear ‘em, would he?” — laughing. “Said he reckoned to do wi’out trousers i’ bed.” She turned confidentially to Paul, saying: “He couldn’t BEAR ‘em, them pyjama things.”

The young man sat making rings of smoke.

“Well, it’s everyone to his taste,” he laughed.

Then followed a little discussion of the merits of pyjamas.

“My mother loves me in them,” he said. “She says I’m a pierrot.”

“I can imagine they’d suit you,” said Mrs. Radford.

After a while he glanced at the little clock that was ticking on the mantelpiece. It was half-past twelve.

“It is funny,” he said, “but it takes hours to settle down to sleep after the theatre.”

“It’s about time you did,” said Mrs. Radford, clearing the table.

“Are YOU tired?” he asked of Clara.

“Not the least bit,” she answered, avoiding his eyes.

“Shall we have a game at cribbage?” he said.

“I’ve forgotten it.”

“Well, I’ll teach you again. May we play crib, Mrs. Radford?” he asked.

“You’ll please yourselves,” she said; “but it’s pretty late.”

“A game or so will make us sleepy,” he answered.

Clara brought the cards, and sat spinning her wedding-ring whilst he shuffled them. Mrs. Radford was washing up in the scullery. As it grew later Paul felt the situation getting more and more tense.

“Fifteen two, fifteen four, fifteen six, and two’s eight — !”

The clock struck one. Still the game continued. Mrs. Radford had done all the little jobs preparatory to going to bed, had locked the door and filled the kettle. Still Paul went on dealing and counting. He was obsessed by Clara’s arms and throat. He believed he could see where the division was just beginning for her breasts. He could not leave her. She watched his hands, and felt her joints melt as they moved quickly. She was so near; it was almost as if he touched her, and yet not quite. His mettle was roused. He hated Mrs. Radford. She sat on, nearly dropping asleep, but determined and obstinate in her chair. Paul glanced at her, then at Clara. She met his eyes, that were angry, mocking, and hard as steel. Her own answered him in shame. He knew SHE, at any rate, was of his mind. He played on.

At last Mrs. Radford roused herself stiffly, and said:

“Isn’t it nigh on time you two was thinking o’ bed?”

Paul played on without answering. He hated her sufficiently to murder her.

“Half a minute,” he said.

The elder woman rose and sailed stubbornly into the scullery, returning with his candle, which she put on the mantelpiece. Then she sat down again. The hatred of her went so hot down his veins, he dropped his cards.

“We’ll stop, then,” he said, but his voice was still a challenge.

Clara saw his mouth shut hard. Again he glanced at her. It seemed like an agreement. She bent over the cards, coughing, to clear her throat.

“Well, I’m glad you’ve finished,” said Mrs. Radford. “Here, take your things” — she thrust the warm suit in his hand — “and this is your candle. Your room’s over this; there’s only two, so you can’t go far wrong. Well, good-night. I hope you’ll rest well.”

“I’m sure I shall; I always do,” he said.

“Yes; and so you ought at your age,” she replied.

He bade good-night to Clara, and went. The twisting stairs of white, scrubbed wood creaked and clanged at every step. He went doggedly. The two doors faced each other. He went in his room, pushed the door to, without fastening the latch.

It was a small room with a large bed. Some of Clara's hair-pins were on the dressing-table — her hair-brush. Her clothes and some skirts hung under a cloth in a corner. There was actually a pair of stockings over a chair. He explored the room. Two books of his own were there on the shelf. He undressed, folded his suit, and sat on the bed, listening. Then he blew out the candle, lay down, and in two minutes was almost asleep. Then click! — he was wide awake and writhing in torment. It was as if, when he had nearly got to sleep, something had bitten him suddenly and sent him mad. He sat up and looked at the room in the darkness, his feet doubled under him, perfectly motionless, listening. He heard a cat somewhere away outside; then the heavy, poised tread of the mother; then Clara's distinct voice:

“Will you unfasten my dress?”

There was silence for some time. At last the mother said:

“Now then! aren't you coming up?”

“No, not yet,” replied the daughter calmly.

“Oh, very well then! If it's not late enough, stop a bit longer. Only you needn't come waking me up when I've got to sleep.”

“I shan't be long,” said Clara.

Immediately afterwards Paul heard the mother slowly mounting the stairs. The candlelight flashed through the cracks in his door. Her dress brushed the door, and his heart jumped. Then it was dark, and he heard the clatter of her latch. She was very leisurely indeed in her preparations for sleep. After a long time it was quite still. He sat strung up on the bed, shivering slightly. His door was an inch open. As Clara came upstairs, he would intercept her. He waited. All was dead silence. The clock struck two. Then he heard a slight scrape of the fender downstairs. Now he could not help himself. His shivering was uncontrollable. He felt he must go or die.

He stepped off the bed, and stood a moment, shuddering. Then he went straight to the door. He tried to step lightly. The first stair cracked like a shot. He listened. The old woman stirred in her bed. The staircase was dark. There was a slit of light under the stair-foot door, which opened into the kitchen. He stood a moment. Then he went on, mechanically. Every step creaked, and his back was creeping, lest the old woman's door should open behind him up above. He fumbled with the door at the bottom. The latch opened with a loud clack. He went through into the kitchen, and shut the door noisily behind him. The old woman daren't come now.

Then he stood, arrested. Clara was kneeling on a pile of white underclothing on the hearthrug, her back towards him, warming herself. She did not look round, but sat crouching on her heels, and her rounded beautiful back was towards him, and her face was hidden. She was warming her body at the fire for consolation. The glow was rosy on one side, the shadow was dark and warm on the other. Her arms hung slack.

He shuddered violently, clenching his teeth and fists hard to keep control. Then he went forward to her. He put one hand on her shoulder, the fingers of the other hand under her chin to raise her face. A convulsed shiver ran through her, once, twice, at his touch. She kept her head bent.

“Sorry!” he murmured, realising that his hands were very cold.

Then she looked up at him, frightened, like a thing that is afraid of death.

“My hands are so cold,” he murmured.

“I like it,” she whispered, closing her eyes.

The breath of her words were on his mouth. Her arms clasped his knees. The cord of his sleeping-suit dangled against her and made her shiver. As the warmth went into him, his shuddering became less.

At length, unable to stand so any more, he raised her, and she buried her head on his shoulder. His hands went over her slowly with an infinite tenderness of caress. She clung close to him, trying to hide herself against him. He clasped her very fast. Then at last she looked at him, mute, imploring, looking to see if she must be ashamed.

His eyes were dark, very deep, and very quiet. It was as if her beauty and his taking it hurt him, made him sorrowful. He looked at her with a little pain, and was afraid. He was so humble before her. She kissed him fervently on the eyes, first one, then the other, and she folded herself to him. She gave herself. He held her fast. It was a moment intense almost to agony.

She stood letting him adore her and tremble with joy of her. It healed her hurt pride. It healed her; it made her glad. It made her feel erect and proud again. Her pride had been wounded inside her. She had been cheapened. Now she radiated with joy and pride again. It was her restoration and her recognition.

Then he looked at her, his face radiant. They laughed to each other, and he strained her to his chest. The seconds ticked off, the minutes passed, and still the two stood clasped rigid together, mouth to mouth, like a statue in one block.

But again his fingers went seeking over her, restless, wandering, dissatisfied. The hot blood came up wave upon wave. She laid her head on his shoulder.

“Come you to my room,” he murmured.

She looked at him and shook her head, her mouth pouting disconsolately, her eyes heavy with passion. He watched her fixedly.

“Yes!” he said.

Again she shook her head.

“Why not?” he asked.

She looked at him still heavily, sorrowfully, and again she shook her head. His eyes hardened, and he gave way.

When, later on, he was back in bed, he wondered why she had refused to come to him openly, so that her mother would know. At any rate, then things would have been definite. And she could have stayed with him the night, without having to go, as she was, to her mother’s bed. It was strange, and he could not understand it. And then almost immediately he fell asleep.

He awoke in the morning with someone speaking to him. Opening his eyes, he saw Mrs. Radford, big and stately, looking down on him. She held a cup of tea in her hand.

“Do you think you’re going to sleep till Doomsday?” she said.

He laughed at once.

“It ought only to be about five o’clock,” he said.

“Well,” she answered, “it’s half-past seven, whether or not. Here, I’ve brought you a cup of tea.”

He rubbed his face, pushed the tumbled hair off his forehead, and roused himself.

“What’s it so late for!” he grumbled.

He resented being wakened. It amused her. She saw his neck in the flannel sleeping-jacket, as white and round as a girl’s. He rubbed his hair crossly.

“It’s no good your scratching your head,” she said. “It won’t make it no earlier. Here, an’ how long d’you think I’m going to stand waiting wi’ this here cup?”

“Oh, dash the cup!” he said.

“You should go to bed earlier,” said the woman.

He looked up at her, laughing with impudence.

“I went to bed before YOU did,” he said.

“Yes, my Guyney, you did!” she exclaimed.

“Fancy,” he said, stirring his tea, “having tea brought to bed to me! My mother’ll think I’m ruined for life.”

“Don’t she never do it?” asked Mrs. Radford.

“She’d as leave think of flying.”

“Ah, I always spoilt my lot! That’s why they’ve turned out such bad uns,” said the elderly woman.

“You’d only Clara,” he said. “And Mr. Radford’s in heaven. So I suppose there’s only you left to be the bad un.”

“I’m not bad; I’m only soft,” she said, as she went out of the bedroom. “I’m only a fool, I am!”

Clara was very quiet at breakfast, but she had a sort of air of proprietorship over him that pleased him infinitely. Mrs. Radford was evidently fond of him. He began to talk of his painting.

“What’s the good,” exclaimed the mother, “of your whittling and worrying and twistin’ and too-in’ at that painting of yours? What GOOD does it do you, I should like to know? You’d better be enjoyin’ yourself.”

“Oh, but,” exclaimed Paul, “I made over thirty guineas last year.”

“Did you! Well, that’s a consideration, but it’s nothing to the time you put in.”

“And I’ve got four pounds owing. A man said he’d give me five pounds if I’d paint him and his missis and the dog and the cottage. And I went and put the fowls in instead of the dog, and he was waxy, so I had to knock a quid off. I was sick of it, and I didn’t like the dog. I made a picture of it. What shall I do when he pays me the four pounds?”

“Nay! you know your own uses for your money,” said Mrs. Radford.

“But I’m going to bust this four pounds. Should we go to the seaside for a day or two?”

“Who?”

“You and Clara and me.”

“What, on your money!” she exclaimed, half-wrathful.

“Why not?”

“YOU wouldn’t be long in breaking your neck at a hurdle race!” she said.

“So long as I get a good run for my money! Will you?”

“Nay; you may settle that atween you.”

“And you’re willing?” he asked, amazed and rejoicing.

“You’ll do as you like,” said Mrs. Radford, “whether I’m willing or not.”

CHAPTER XIII

BAXTER DAWES

SOON after Paul had been to the theatre with Clara, he was drinking in the Punch Bowl with some friends of his when Dawes came in. Clara's husband was growing stout; his eyelids were getting slack over his brown eyes; he was losing his healthy firmness of flesh. He was very evidently on the downward track. Having quarrelled with his sister, he had gone into cheap lodgings. His mistress had left him for a man who would marry her. He had been in prison one night for fighting when he was drunk, and there was a shady betting episode in which he was concerned.

Paul and he were confirmed enemies, and yet there was between them that peculiar feeling of intimacy, as if they were secretly near to each other, which sometimes exists between two people, although they never speak to one another. Paul often thought of Baxter Dawes, often wanted to get at him and be friends with him. He knew that Dawes often thought about him, and that the man was drawn to him by some bond or other. And yet the two never looked at each other save in hostility.

Since he was a superior employee at Jordan's, it was the thing for Paul to offer Dawes a drink.

"What'll you have?" he asked of him.

"Nowt wi' a bleeder like you!" replied the man.

Paul turned away with a slight disdainful movement of the shoulders, very irritating.

"The aristocracy," he continued, "is really a military institution. Take Germany, now. She's got thousands of aristocrats whose only means of existence is the army. They're deadly poor, and life's deadly slow. So they hope for a war. They look for war as a chance of getting on. Till there's a war they are idle good-for-nothings. When there's a war, they are leaders and commanders. There you are, then — they WANT war!"

He was not a favourite debater in the public-house, being too quick and overbearing. He irritated the older men by his assertive manner, and his cocksureness. They listened in silence, and were not sorry when he finished.

Dawes interrupted the young man's flow of eloquence by asking, in a loud sneer:

"Did you learn all that at th' theatre th' other night?"

Paul looked at him; their eyes met. Then he knew Dawes had seen him coming out of the theatre with Clara.

"Why, what about th' theatre?" asked one of Paul's associates, glad to get a dig at the young fellow, and sniffing something tasty.

"Oh, him in a bob-tailed evening suit, on the lardy-da!" sneered Dawes, jerking his head contemptuously at Paul.

"That's comin' it strong," said the mutual friend. "Tart an' all?"

"Tart, begod!" said Dawes.

"Go on; let's have it!" cried the mutual friend.

"You've got it," said Dawes, "an' I reckon Morelly had it an' all."

"Well, I'll be jiggered!" said the mutual friend. "An' was it a proper tart?"

"Tart, God blimey — yes!"

"How do you know?"

"Oh," said Dawes, "I reckon he spent th' night — "

There was a good deal of laughter at Paul's expense.

"But who WAS she? D'you know her?" asked the mutual friend.

"I should SHAY SHO," said Dawes.

This brought another burst of laughter.

"Then spit it out," said the mutual friend.

Dawes shook his head, and took a gulp of beer.

"It's a wonder he hasn't let on himself," he said. "He'll be braggin' of it in a bit."

"Come on, Paul," said the friend; "it's no good. You might just as well own up."

"Own up what? That I happened to take a friend to the theatre?"

"Oh well, if it was all right, tell us who she was, lad," said the friend.

"She WAS all right," said Dawes.

Paul was furious. Dawes wiped his golden moustache with his fingers, sneering.

"Strike me — ! One o' that sort?" said the mutual friend. "Paul, boy, I'm surprised at you. And do you know her, Baxter?"

"Just a bit, like!"

He winked at the other men.

"Oh well," said Paul, "I'll be going!"

The mutual friend laid a detaining hand on his shoulder.

"Nay," he said, "you don't get off as easy as that, my lad. We've got to have a

full account of this business.”

“Then get it from Dawes!” he said.

“You shouldn’t funk your own deeds, man,” remonstrated the friend.

Then Dawes made a remark which caused Paul to throw half a glass of beer in his face.

“Oh, Mr. Morel!” cried the barmaid, and she rang the bell for the “chucker-out”.

Dawes spat and rushed for the young man. At that minute a brawny fellow with his shirt-sleeves rolled up and his trousers tight over his haunches intervened.

“Now, then!” he said, pushing his chest in front of Dawes.

“Come out!” cried Dawes.

Paul was leaning, white and quivering, against the brass rail of the bar. He hated Dawes, wished something could exterminate him at that minute; and at the same time, seeing the wet hair on the man’s forehead, he thought he looked pathetic. He did not move.

“Come out, you — ,” said Dawes.

“That’s enough, Dawes,” cried the barmaid.

“Come on,” said the “chucker-out”, with kindly insistence, “you’d better be getting on.”

And, by making Dawes edge away from his own close proximity, he worked him to the door.

“THAT’S the little sod as started it!” cried Dawes, half-cowed, pointing to Paul Morel.

“Why, what a story, Mr. Dawes!” said the barmaid. “You know it was you all the time.”

Still the “chucker-out” kept thrusting his chest forward at him, still he kept edging back, until he was in the doorway and on the steps outside; then he turned round.

“All right,” he said, nodding straight at his rival.

Paul had a curious sensation of pity, almost of affection, mingled with violent hate, for the man. The coloured door swung to; there was silence in the bar.

“Serve, him, jolly well right!” said the barmaid.

“But it’s a nasty thing to get a glass of beer in your eyes,” said the mutual friend.

“I tell you I was glad he did,” said the barmaid. “Will you have another, Mr. Morel?”

She held up Paul’s glass questioningly. He nodded.

“He’s a man as doesn’t care for anything, is Baxter Dawes,” said one.

“Pooh! is he?” said the barmaid. “He’s a loud-mouthed one, he is, and they’re never much good. Give me a pleasant-spoken chap, if you want a devil!”

“Well, Paul, my lad,” said the friend, “you’ll have to take care of yourself now for a while.”

“You won’t have to give him a chance over you, that’s all,” said the barmaid.

“Can you box?” asked a friend.

“Not a bit,” he answered, still very white.

“I might give you a turn or two,” said the friend.

“Thanks, I haven’t time.”

And presently he took his departure.

“Go along with him, Mr. Jenkinson,” whispered the barmaid, tipping Mr. Jenkinson the wink.

The man nodded, took his hat, said: “Good-night all!” very heartily, and followed Paul, calling:

“Half a minute, old man. You an’ me’s going the same road, I believe.”

“Mr. Morel doesn’t like it,” said the barmaid. “You’ll see, we shan’t have him in much more. I’m sorry; he’s good company. And Baxter Dawes wants locking up, that’s what he wants.”

Paul would have died rather than his mother should get to know of this affair. He suffered tortures of humiliation and self-consciousness. There was now a good deal of his life of which necessarily he could not speak to his mother. He had a life apart from her — his sexual life. The rest she still kept. But he felt he had to conceal something from her, and it irked him. There was a certain silence between them, and he felt he had, in that silence, to defend himself against her; he felt condemned by her. Then sometimes he hated her, and pulled at her bondage. His life wanted to free itself of her. It was like a circle where life turned back on itself, and got no farther. She bore him, loved him, kept him, and his love turned back into her, so that he could not be free to go forward with his own life, really love another woman. At this period, unknowingly, he resisted his mother’s influence. He did not tell her things; there was a distance between them.

Clara was happy, almost sure of him. She felt she had at last got him for herself; and then again came the uncertainty. He told her jestingly of the affair with her husband. Her colour came up, her grey eyes flashed.

“That’s him to a ‘T’,” she cried — “like a navvy! He’s not fit for mixing with decent folk.”

“Yet you married him,” he said.

It made her furious that he reminded her.

“I did!” she cried. “But how was I to know?”

“I think he might have been rather nice,” he said.

“You think I made him what he is!” she exclaimed.

“Oh no! he made himself. But there’s something about him — ”

Clara looked at her lover closely. There was something in him she hated, a sort of detached criticism of herself, a coldness which made her woman’s soul harden against him.

“And what are you going to do?” she asked.

“How?”

“About Baxter.”

“There’s nothing to do, is there?” he replied.

“You can fight him if you have to, I suppose?” she said.

“No; I haven’t the least sense of the ‘fist’. It’s funny. With most men there’s the instinct to clench the fist and hit. It’s not so with me. I should want a knife or a pistol or something to fight with.”

“Then you’d better carry something,” she said.

“Nay,” he laughed; “I’m not daggeroso.”

“But he’ll do something to you. You don’t know him.”

“All right,” he said, “we’ll see.”

“And you’ll let him?”

“Perhaps, if I can’t help it.”

“And if he kills you?” she said.

“I should be sorry, for his sake and mine.”

Clara was silent for a moment.

“You DO make me angry!” she exclaimed.

“That’s nothing afresh,” he laughed.

“But why are you so silly? You don’t know him.”

“And don’t want.”

“Yes, but you’re not going to let a man do as he likes with you?”

“What must I do?” he replied, laughing.

“I should carry a revolver,” she said. “I’m sure he’s dangerous.”

“I might blow my fingers off,” he said.

“No; but won’t you?” she pleaded.

“No.”

“Not anything?”

“No.”

“And you’ll leave him to — ?”

“Yes.”

“You are a fool!”

“Fact!”

She set her teeth with anger.

“I could SHAKE you!” she cried, trembling with passion.

“Why?”

“Let a man like HIM do as he likes with you.”

“You can go back to him if he triumphs,” he said.

“Do you want me to hate you?” she asked.

“Well, I only tell you,” he said.

“And YOU say you LOVE me!” she exclaimed, low and indignant.

“Ought I to slay him to please you?” he said. “But if I did, see what a hold he’d have over me.”

“Do you think I’m a fool!” she exclaimed.

“Not at all. But you don’t understand me, my dear.”

There was a pause between them.

“But you ought NOT to expose yourself,” she pleaded.

He shrugged his shoulders.

““The man in righteousness arrayed,
The pure and blameless liver,
Needs not the keen Toledo blade,
Nor venom-freighted quiver,”“

he quoted.

She looked at him searchingly.

“I wish I could understand you,” she said.

“There’s simply nothing to understand,” he laughed.

She bowed her head, brooding.

He did not see Dawes for several days; then one morning as he ran upstairs from the Spiral room he almost collided with the burly metal-worker.

“What the — !” cried the smith.

“Sorry!” said Paul, and passed on.

“SORRY!” sneered Dawes.

Paul whistled lightly, “Put Me among the Girls”.

“I’ll stop your whistle, my jockey!” he said.

The other took no notice.

“You’re goin’ to answer for that job of the other night.”

Paul went to his desk in his corner, and turned over the leaves of the ledger.

“Go and tell Fanny I want order 097, quick!” he said to his boy.

Dawes stood in the doorway, tall and threatening, looking at the top of the young man’s head.

“Six and five’s eleven and seven’s one-and-six,” Paul added aloud.

“An’ you hear, do you!” said Dawes.

“FIVE AND NINEPENCE!” He wrote a figure. “What’s that?” he said.

“I’m going to show you what it is,” said the smith.

The other went on adding the figures aloud.

“Yer crawlin’ little — , yer daresn’t face me proper!”

Paul quickly snatched the heavy ruler. Dawes started. The young man ruled some lines in his ledger. The elder man was infuriated.

“But wait till I light on you, no matter where it is, I’ll settle your hash for a bit, yer little swine!”

“All right,” said Paul.

At that the smith started heavily from the doorway. Just then a whistle piped shrilly. Paul went to the speaking-tube.

“Yes!” he said, and he listened. “Er — yes!” He listened, then he laughed. “I’ll come down directly. I’ve got a visitor just now.”

Dawes knew from his tone that he had been speaking to Clara. He stepped forward.

“Yer little devil!” he said. “I’ll visitor you, inside of two minutes! Think I’m goin’ to have YOU whipperty-snappin’ round?”

The other clerks in the warehouse looked up. Paul’s office-boy appeared, holding some white article.

“Fanny says you could have had it last night if you’d let her know,” he said.

“All right,” answered Paul, looking at the stocking. “Get it off.” Dawes stood frustrated, helpless with rage. Morel turned round.

“Excuse me a minute,” he said to Dawes, and he would have run downstairs.

“By God, I’ll stop your gallop!” shouted the smith, seizing him by the arm. He turned quickly.

“Hey! Hey!” cried the office-boy, alarmed.

Thomas Jordan started out of his little glass office, and came running down the room.

“What’s a-matter, what’s a-matter?” he said, in his old man’s sharp voice.

“I’m just goin’ ter settle this little — , that’s all,” said Dawes desperately.

“What do you mean?” snapped Thomas Jordan.

“What I say,” said Dawes, but he hung fire.

Morel was leaning against the counter, ashamed, half-grinning.

“What’s it all about?” snapped Thomas Jordan.

“Couldn’t say,” said Paul, shaking his head and shrugging his shoulders.

“Couldn’t yer, couldn’t yer!” cried Dawes, thrusting forward his handsome, furious face, and squaring his fist.

“Have you finished?” cried the old man, strutting. “Get off about your business, and don’t come here tipsy in the morning.”

Dawes turned his big frame slowly upon him.

“Topsy!” he said. “Who’s tipsy? I’m no more tipsy than YOU are!”

“We’ve heard that song before,” snapped the old man. “Now you get off, and don’t be long about it. Comin’ HERE with your rowdying.”

The smith looked down contemptuously on his employer. His hands, large, and grimy, and yet well shaped for his labour, worked restlessly. Paul remembered they were the hands of Clara’s husband, and a flash of hate went through him.

“Get out before you’re turned out!” snapped Thomas Jordan.

“Why, who’ll turn me out?” said Dawes, beginning to sneer.

Mr. Jordan started, marched up to the smith, waving him off, thrusting his stout little figure at the man, saying:

“Get off my premises — get off!”

He seized and twitched Dawes’s arm.

“Come off!” said the smith, and with a jerk of the elbow he sent the little manufacturer staggering backwards.

Before anyone could help him, Thomas Jordan had collided with the flimsy spring-door. It had given way, and let him crash down the half-dozen steps into Fanny’s room. There was a second of amazement; then men and girls were running. Dawes stood a moment looking bitterly on the scene, then he took his departure.

Thomas Jordan was shaken and braised, not otherwise hurt. He was, however, beside himself with rage. He dismissed Dawes from his employment, and summoned him for assault.

At the trial Paul Morel had to give evidence. Asked how the trouble began, he said:

“Dawes took occasion to insult Mrs. Dawes and me because I accompanied her to the theatre one evening; then I threw some beer at him, and he wanted his revenge.”

“*Cherchez la femme!*” smiled the magistrate.

The case was dismissed after the magistrate had told Dawes he thought him a skunk.

“You gave the case away,” snapped Mr. Jordan to Paul.

“I don’t think I did,” replied the latter. “Besides, you didn’t really want a conviction, did you?”

“What do you think I took the case up for?”

“Well,” said Paul, “I’m sorry if I said the wrong thing.” Clara was also very angry.

“Why need MY name have been dragged in?” she said.

“Better speak it openly than leave it to be whispered.”

“There was no need for anything at all,” she declared.

“We are none the poorer,” he said indifferently.

“YOU may not be,” she said.

“And you?” he asked.

“I need never have been mentioned.”

“I’m sorry,” he said; but he did not sound sorry.

He told himself easily: “She will come round.” And she did.

He told his mother about the fall of Mr. Jordan and the trial of Dawes. Mrs. Morel watched him closely.

“And what do you think of it all?” she asked him.

“I think he’s a fool,” he said.

But he was very uncomfortable, nevertheless.

“Have you ever considered where it will end?” his mother said.

“No,” he answered; “things work out of themselves.”

“They do, in a way one doesn’t like, as a rule,” said his mother.

“And then one has to put up with them,” he said.

“You’ll find you’re not as good at ‘putting up’ as you imagine,” she said.

He went on working rapidly at his design.

“Do you ever ask HER opinion?” she said at length.

“What of?”

“Of you, and the whole thing.”

“I don’t care what her opinion of me is. She’s fearfully in love with me, but it’s not very deep.”

“But quite as deep as your feeling for her.”

He looked up at his mother curiously.

“Yes,” he said. “You know, mother, I think there must be something the matter with me, that I CAN’T love. When she’s there, as a rule, I DO love her. Sometimes, when I see her just as THE WOMAN, I love her, mother; but then, when she talks and criticises, I often don’t listen to her.”

“Yet she’s as much sense as Miriam.”

“Perhaps; and I love her better than Miriam. But WHY don’t they hold me?”

The last question was almost a lamentation. His mother turned away her face, sat looking across the room, very quiet, grave, with something of renunciation.

“But you wouldn’t want to marry Clara?” she said.

“No; at first perhaps I would. But why — why don’t I want to marry her or anybody? I feel sometimes as if I wronged my women, mother.”

“How wronged them, my son?”

“I don’t know.”

He went on painting rather despairingly; he had touched the quick of the trouble.

“And as for wanting to marry,” said his mother, “there’s plenty of time yet.”

“But no, mother. I even love Clara, and I did Miriam; but to GIVE myself to them in marriage I couldn’t. I couldn’t belong to them. They seem to want ME, and I can’t ever give it them.”

“You haven’t met the right woman.”

“And I never shall meet the right woman while you live,” he said.

She was very quiet. Now she began to feel again tired, as if she were done.

“We’ll see, my son,” she answered.

The feeling that things were going in a circle made him mad.

Clara was, indeed, passionately in love with him, and he with her, as far as passion went. In the daytime he forgot her a good deal. She was working in the same building, but he was not aware of it. He was busy, and her existence was of no matter to him. But all the time she was in her Spiral room she had a sense that he was upstairs, a physical sense of his person in the same building. Every second she expected him to come through the door, and when he came it was a shock to her. But he was often short and offhand with her. He gave her his directions in an official manner, keeping her at bay. With what wits she had left she listened to him. She dared not misunderstand or fail to remember, but it was a cruelty to her. She wanted to touch his chest. She knew exactly how his breast was shapen under the waistcoat, and she wanted to touch it. It maddened her to hear his mechanical voice giving orders about the work. She wanted to break through the sham of it, smash the trivial coating of business which covered him with hardness, get at the man again; but she was afraid, and before she could feel one touch of his warmth he was gone, and she ached again.

He knew that she was dreary every evening she did not see him, so he gave her a good deal of his time. The days were often a misery to her, but the evenings and the nights were usually a bliss to them both. Then they were silent. For hours they sat together, or walked together in the dark, and talked only a few, almost meaningless words. But he had her hand in his, and her bosom left its warmth in his chest, making him feel whole.

One evening they were walking down by the canal, and something was troubling him. She knew she had not got him. All the time he whistled softly and persistently to himself. She listened, feeling she could learn more from his whistling than from his speech. It was a sad dissatisfied tune — a tune that made her feel he would not stay with her. She walked on in silence. When they came to the swing bridge he sat down on the great pole, looking at the stars in the water. He was a long way from her. She had been thinking.

“Will you always stay at Jordan’s?” she asked.

“No,” he answered without reflecting. “No; I s’ll leave Nottingham and go abroad — soon.”

“Go abroad! What for?”

“I dunno! I feel restless.”

“But what shall you do?”

“I shall have to get some steady designing work, and some sort of sale for my pictures first,” he said. “I am gradually making my way. I know I am.”

“And when do you think you’ll go?”

“I don’t know. I shall hardly go for long, while there’s my mother.”

“You couldn’t leave her?”

“Not for long.”

She looked at the stars in the black water. They lay very white and staring. It was an agony to know he would leave her, but it was almost an agony to have him near her.

“And if you made a nice lot of money, what would you do?” she asked.

“Go somewhere in a pretty house near London with my mother.”

“I see.”

There was a long pause.

“I could still come and see you,” he said. “I don’t know. Don’t ask me what I should do; I don’t know.”

There was a silence. The stars shuddered and broke upon the water. There came a breath of wind. He went suddenly to her, and put his hand on her shoulder.

“Don’t ask me anything about the future,” he said miserably. “I don’t know anything. Be with me now, will you, no matter what it is?”

And she took him in her arms. After all, she was a married woman, and she had no right even to what he gave her. He needed her badly. She had him in her arms, and he was miserable. With her warmth she folded him over, consoled him, loved him. She would let the moment stand for itself.

After a moment he lifted his head as if he wanted to speak.

“Clara,” he said, struggling.

She caught him passionately to her, pressed his head down on her breast with her hand. She could not bear the suffering in his voice. She was afraid in her soul. He might have anything of her — anything; but she did not want to KNOW. She felt she could not bear it. She wanted him to be soothed upon her — soothed. She stood clasping him and caressing him, and he was something unknown to her — something almost uncanny. She wanted to soothe him into forgetfulness.

And soon the struggle went down in his soul, and he forgot. But then Clara was not there for him, only a woman, warm, something he loved and almost worshipped, there in the dark. But it was not Clara, and she submitted to him. The naked hunger and inevitability of his loving her, something strong and blind and ruthless in its primitiveness, made the hour almost terrible to her. She knew how stark and alone he was, and she felt it was great that he came to her; and she took him simply because his need was bigger either than her or him, and her soul was still within her. She did this for him in his need, even if he left her, for she loved him.

All the while the peewits were screaming in the field. When he came to, he wondered what was near his eyes, curving and strong with life in the dark, and what voice it was speaking. Then he realised it was the grass, and the peewit was calling. The warmth was Clara's breathing heaving. He lifted his head, and looked into her eyes. They were dark and shining and strange, life wild at the source staring into his life, stranger to him, yet meeting him; and he put his face down on her throat, afraid. What was she? A strong, strange, wild life, that breathed with his in the darkness through this hour. It was all so much bigger than themselves that he was hushed. They had met, and included in their meeting the thrust of the manifold grass stems, the cry of the peewit, the wheel of the stars.

When they stood up they saw other lovers stealing down the opposite hedge. It seemed natural they were there; the night contained them.

And after such an evening they both were very still, having known the immensity of passion. They felt small, half-afraid, childish and wondering, like Adam and Eve when they lost their innocence and realised the magnificence of the power which drove them out of Paradise and across the great night and the great day of humanity. It was for each of them an initiation and a satisfaction. To know their own nothingness, to know the tremendous living flood which carried them always, gave them rest within themselves. If so great a magnificent power could overwhelm them, identify them altogether with itself, so that they knew they were only grains in the tremendous heave that lifted every grass blade its little height, and every tree, and living thing, then why fret about themselves? They could let themselves be carried by life, and they felt a sort of peace each in the other. There was a verification which they had had together. Nothing could nullify it, nothing could take it away; it was almost their belief in life.

But Clara was not satisfied. Something great was there, she knew; something great enveloped her. But it did not keep her. In the morning it was not the same. They had KNOWN, but she could not keep the moment. She wanted it again; she wanted something permanent. She had not realised fully. She thought it was

he whom she wanted. He was not safe to her. This that had been between them might never be again; he might leave her. She had not got him; she was not satisfied. She had been there, but she had not gripped the — the something — she knew not what — which she was mad to have.

In the morning he had considerable peace, and was happy in himself. It seemed almost as if he had known the baptism of fire in passion, and it left him at rest. But it was not Clara. It was something that happened because of her, but it was not her. They were scarcely any nearer each other. It was as if they had been blind agents of a great force.

When she saw him that day at the factory her heart melted like a drop of fire. It was his body, his brows. The drop of fire grew more intense in her breast; she must hold him. But he, very quiet, very subdued this morning, went on giving his instruction. She followed him into the dark, ugly basement, and lifted her arms to him. He kissed her, and the intensity of passion began to burn him again. Somebody was at the door. He ran upstairs; she returned to her room, moving as if in a trance.

After that the fire slowly went down. He felt more and more that his experience had been impersonal, and not Clara. He loved her. There was a big tenderness, as after a strong emotion they had known together; but it was not she who could keep his soul steady. He had wanted her to be something she could not be.

And she was mad with desire of him. She could not see him without touching him. In the factory, as he talked to her about Spiral hose, she ran her hand secretly along his side. She followed him out into the basement for a quick kiss; her eyes, always mute and yearning, full of unrestrained passion, she kept fixed on his. He was afraid of her, lest she should too flagrantly give herself away before the other girls. She invariably waited for him at dinnertime for him to embrace her before she went. He felt as if she were helpless, almost a burden to him, and it irritated him.

“But what do you always want to be kissing and embracing for?” he said. “Surely there’s a time for everything.”

She looked up at him, and the hate came into her eyes.

“DO I always want to be kissing you?” she said.

“Always, even if I come to ask you about the work. I don’t want anything to do with love when I’m at work. Work’s work — ”

“And what is love?” she asked. “Has it to have special hours?”

“Yes; out of work hours.”

“And you’ll regulate it according to Mr. Jordan’s closing time?”

“Yes; and according to the freedom from business of any sort.”

“It is only to exist in spare time?”

“That’s all, and not always then — not the kissing sort of love.”

“And that’s all you think of it?”

“It’s quite enough.”

“I’m glad you think so.”

And she was cold to him for some time — she hated him; and while she was cold and contemptuous, he was uneasy till she had forgiven him again. But when they started afresh they were not any nearer. He kept her because he never satisfied her.

In the spring they went together to the seaside. They had rooms at a little cottage near Theddlethorpe, and lived as man and wife. Mrs. Radford sometimes went with them.

It was known in Nottingham that Paul Morel and Mrs. Dawes were going together, but as nothing was very obvious, and Clara always a solitary person, and he seemed so simple and innocent, it did not make much difference.

He loved the Lincolnshire coast, and she loved the sea. In the early morning they often went out together to bathe. The grey of the dawn, the far, desolate reaches of the fenland smitten with winter, the sea-meadows rank with herbage, were stark enough to rejoice his soul. As they stepped on to the highroad from their plank bridge, and looked round at the endless monotony of levels, the land a little darker than the sky, the sea sounding small beyond the sandhills, his heart filled strong with the sweeping relentlessness of life. She loved him then. He was solitary and strong, and his eyes had a beautiful light.

They shuddered with cold; then he raced her down the road to the green turf bridge. She could run well. Her colour soon came, her throat was bare, her eyes shone. He loved her for being so luxuriously heavy, and yet so quick. Himself was light; she went with a beautiful rush. They grew warm, and walked hand in hand.

A flush came into the sky, the wan moon, half-way down the west, sank into insignificance. On the shadowy land things began to take life, plants with great leaves became distinct. They came through a pass in the big, cold sandhills on to the beach. The long waste of foreshore lay moaning under the dawn and the sea; the ocean was a flat dark strip with a white edge. Over the gloomy sea the sky grew red. Quickly the fire spread among the clouds and scattered them. Crimson burned to orange, orange to dull gold, and in a golden glitter the sun came up, dribbling fierily over the waves in little splashes, as if someone had gone along and the light had spilled from her pail as she walked.

The breakers ran down the shore in long, hoarse strokes. Tiny seagulls, like specks of spray, wheeled above the line of surf. Their crying seemed larger than

they. Far away the coast reached out, and melted into the morning, the tussocky sandhills seemed to sink to a level with the beach. Mablethorpe was tiny on their right. They had alone the space of all this level shore, the sea, and the upcoming sun, the faint noise of the waters, the sharp crying of the gulls.

They had a warm hollow in the sandhills where the wind did not come. He stood looking out to sea.

“It’s very fine,” he said.

“Now don’t get sentimental,” she said.

It irritated her to see him standing gazing at the sea, like a solitary and poetic person. He laughed. She quickly undressed.

“There are some fine waves this morning,” she said triumphantly.

She was a better swimmer than he; he stood idly watching her.

“Aren’t you coming?” she said.

“In a minute,” he answered.

She was white and velvet skinned, with heavy shoulders. A little wind, coming from the sea, blew across her body and ruffled her hair.

The morning was of a lovely limpid gold colour. Veils of shadow seemed to be drifting away on the north and the south. Clara stood shrinking slightly from the touch of the wind, twisting her hair. The sea-grass rose behind the white stripped woman. She glanced at the sea, then looked at him. He was watching her with dark eyes which she loved and could not understand. She hugged her breasts between her arms, cringing, laughing:

“Oo, it will be so cold!” she said.

He bent forward and kissed her, held her suddenly close, and kissed her again. She stood waiting. He looked into her eyes, then away at the pale sands.

“Go, then!” he said quietly.

She flung her arms round his neck, drew him against her, kissed him passionately, and went, saying:

“But you’ll come in?”

“In a minute.”

She went plodding heavily over the sand that was soft as velvet. He, on the sandhills, watched the great pale coast envelop her. She grew smaller, lost proportion, seemed only like a large white bird toiling forward.

“Not much more than a big white pebble on the beach, not much more than a clot of foam being blown and rolled over the sand,” he said to himself.

She seemed to move very slowly across the vast sounding shore. As he watched, he lost her. She was dazzled out of sight by the sunshine. Again he saw her, the merest white speck moving against the white, muttering sea-edge.

“Look how little she is!” he said to himself. “She’s lost like a grain of sand in

the beach — just a concentrated speck blown along, a tiny white foam-bubble, almost nothing among the morning. Why does she absorb me?”

The morning was altogether uninterrupted: she was gone in the water. Far and wide the beach, the sandhills with their blue marrain, the shining water, glowed together in immense, unbroken solitude.

“What is she, after all?” he said to himself. “Here’s the seacoast morning, big and permanent and beautiful; there is she, fretting, always unsatisfied, and temporary as a bubble of foam. What does she mean to me, after all? She represents something, like a bubble of foam represents the sea. But what is she? It’s not her I care for.”

Then, startled by his own unconscious thoughts, that seemed to speak so distinctly that all the morning could hear, he undressed and ran quickly down the sands. She was watching for him. Her arm flashed up to him, she heaved on a wave, subsided, her shoulders in a pool of liquid silver. He jumped through the breakers, and in a moment her hand was on his shoulder.

He was a poor swimmer, and could not stay long in the water. She played round him in triumph, sporting with her superiority, which he begrudged her. The sunshine stood deep and fine on the water. They laughed in the sea for a minute or two, then raced each other back to the sandhills.

When they were drying themselves, panting heavily, he watched her laughing, breathless face, her bright shoulders, her breasts that swayed and made him frightened as she rubbed them, and he thought again:

“But she is magnificent, and even bigger than the morning and the sea. Is she — ? Is she — ”

She, seeing his dark eyes fixed on her, broke off from her drying with a laugh.

“What are you looking at?” she said.

“You,” he answered, laughing.

Her eyes met his, and in a moment he was kissing her white “goose-fleshed” shoulder, and thinking:

“What is she? What is she?”

She loved him in the morning. There was something detached, hard, and elemental about his kisses then, as if he were only conscious of his own will, not in the least of her and her wanting him.

Later in the day he went out sketching.

“You,” he said to her, “go with your mother to Sutton. I am so dull.”

She stood and looked at him. He knew she wanted to come with him, but he preferred to be alone. She made him feel imprisoned when she was there, as if he could not get a free deep breath, as if there were something on top of him. She felt his desire to be free of her.

In the evening he came back to her. They walked down the shore in the darkness, then sat for a while in the shelter of the sandhills.

“It seems,” she said, as they stared over the darkness of the sea, where no light was to be seen — “it seemed as if you only loved me at night — as if you didn’t love me in the daytime.”

He ran the cold sand through his fingers, feeling guilty under the accusation.

“The night is free to you,” he replied. “In the daytime I want to be by myself.”

“But why?” she said. “Why, even now, when we are on this short holiday?”

“I don’t know. Love-making stifles me in the daytime.”

“But it needn’t be always love-making,” she said.

“It always is,” he answered, “when you and I are together.”

She sat feeling very bitter.

“Do you ever want to marry me?” he asked curiously.

“Do you me?” she replied.

“Yes, yes; I should like us to have children,” he answered slowly.

She sat with her head bent, fingering the sand.

“But you don’t really want a divorce from Baxter, do you?” he said.

It was some minutes before she replied.

“No,” she said, very deliberately; “I don’t think I do.”

“Why?”

“I don’t know.”

“Do you feel as if you belonged to him?”

“No; I don’t think so.”

“What, then?”

“I think he belongs to me,” she replied.

He was silent for some minutes, listening to the wind blowing over the hoarse, dark sea.

“And you never really intended to belong to ME?” he said.

“Yes, I do belong to you,” she answered.

“No,” he said; “because you don’t want to be divorced.”

It was a knot they could not untie, so they left it, took what they could get, and what they could not attain they ignored.

“I consider you treated Baxter rottenly,” he said another time.

He half-expected Clara to answer him, as his mother would: “You consider your own affairs, and don’t know so much about other people’s.” But she took him seriously, almost to his own surprise.

“Why?” she said.

“I suppose you thought he was a lily of the valley, and so you put him in an appropriate pot, and tended him according. You made up your mind he was a lily

of the valley and it was no good his being a cow-parsnip. You wouldn't have it."

"I certainly never imagined him a lily of the valley."

"You imagined him something he wasn't. That's just what a woman is. She thinks she knows what's good for a man, and she's going to see he gets it; and no matter if he's starving, he may sit and whistle for what he needs, while she's got him, and is giving him what's good for him."

"And what are you doing?" she asked.

"I'm thinking what tune I shall whistle," he laughed.

And instead of boxing his ears, she considered him in earnest.

"You think I want to give you what's good for you?" she asked.

"I hope so; but love should give a sense of freedom, not of prison. Miriam made me feel tied up like a donkey to a stake. I must feed on her patch, and nowhere else. It's sickening!"

"And would YOU let a WOMAN do as she likes?"

"Yes; I'll see that she likes to love me. If she doesn't — well, I don't hold her."

"If you were as wonderful as you say —," replied Clara.

"I should be the marvel I am," he laughed.

There was a silence in which they hated each other, though they laughed.

"Love's a dog in a manger," he said.

"And which of us is the dog?" she asked.

"Oh well, you, of course."

So there went on a battle between them. She knew she never fully had him. Some part, big and vital in him, she had no hold over; nor did she ever try to get it, or even to realise what it was. And he knew in some way that she held herself still as Mrs. Dawes. She did not love Dawes, never had loved him; but she believed he loved her, at least depended on her. She felt a certain surety about him that she never felt with Paul Morel. Her passion for the young man had filled her soul, given her a certain satisfaction, eased her of her self-mistrust, her doubt. Whatever else she was, she was inwardly assured. It was almost as if she had gained HERSELF, and stood now distinct and complete. She had received her confirmation; but she never believed that her life belonged to Paul Morel, nor his to her. They would separate in the end, and the rest of her life would be an ache after him. But at any rate, she knew now, she was sure of herself. And the same could almost be said of him. Together they had received the baptism of life, each through the other; but now their missions were separate. Where he wanted to go she could not come with him. They would have to part sooner or later. Even if they married, and were faithful to each other, still he would have to leave her, go on alone, and she would only have to attend to him when he came

home. But it was not possible. Each wanted a mate to go side by side with.

Clara had gone to live with her mother upon Mapperley Plains. One evening, as Paul and she were walking along Woodborough Road, they met Dawes. Morel knew something about the bearing of the man approaching, but he was absorbed in his thinking at the moment, so that only his artist's eye watched the form of the stranger. Then he suddenly turned to Clara with a laugh, and put his hand on her shoulder, saying, laughing:

"But we walk side by side, and yet I'm in London arguing with an imaginary Orpen; and where are you?"

At that instant Dawes passed, almost touching Morel. The young man glanced, saw the dark brown eyes burning, full of hate and yet tired.

"Who was that?" he asked of Clara.

"It was Baxter," she replied.

Paul took his hand from her shoulder and glanced round; then he saw again distinctly the man's form as it approached him. Dawes still walked erect, with his fine shoulders flung back, and his face lifted; but there was a furtive look in his eyes that gave one the impression he was trying to get unnoticed past every person he met, glancing suspiciously to see what they thought of him. And his hands seemed to be wanting to hide. He wore old clothes, the trousers were torn at the knee, and the handkerchief tied round his throat was dirty; but his cap was still defiantly over one eye. As she saw him, Clara felt guilty. There was a tiredness and despair on his face that made her hate him, because it hurt her.

"He looks shady," said Paul.

But the note of pity in his voice reproached her, and made her feel hard.

"His true commonness comes out," she answered.

"Do you hate him?" he asked.

"You talk," she said, "about the cruelty of women; I wish you knew the cruelty of men in their brute force. They simply don't know that the woman exists."

"Don't I?" he said.

"No," she answered.

"Don't I know you exist?"

"About ME you know nothing," she said bitterly — "about ME!"

"No more than Baxter knew?" he asked.

"Perhaps not as much."

He felt puzzled, and helpless, and angry. There she walked unknown to him, though they had been through such experience together.

"But you know ME pretty well," he said.

She did not answer.

“Did you know Baxter as well as you know me?” he asked.

“He wouldn’t let me,” she said.

“And I have let you know me?”

“It’s what men WON’T let you do. They won’t let you get really near to them,” she said.

“And haven’t I let you?”

“Yes,” she answered slowly; “but you’ve never come near to me. You can’t come out of yourself, you can’t. Baxter could do that better than you.”

He walked on pondering. He was angry with her for preferring Baxter to him.

“You begin to value Baxter now you’ve not got him,” he said.

“No; I can only see where he was different from you.”

But he felt she had a grudge against him.

One evening, as they were coming home over the fields, she startled him by asking:

“Do you think it’s worth it — the — the sex part?”

“The act of loving, itself?”

“Yes; is it worth anything to you?”

“But how can you separate it?” he said. “It’s the culmination of everything. All our intimacy culminates then.”

“Not for me,” she said.

He was silent. A flash of hate for her came up. After all, she was dissatisfied with him, even there, where he thought they fulfilled each other. But he believed her too implicitly.

“I feel,” she continued slowly, “as if I hadn’t got you, as if all of you weren’t there, and as if it weren’t ME you were taking — ”

“Who, then?”

“Something just for yourself. It has been fine, so that I daren’t think of it. But is it ME you want, or is it IT?”

He again felt guilty. Did he leave Clara out of count, and take simply women? But he thought that was splitting a hair.

“When I had Baxter, actually had him, then I DID feel as if I had all of him,” she said.

“And it was better?” he asked.

“Yes, yes; it was more whole. I don’t say you haven’t given me more than he ever gave me.”

“Or could give you.”

“Yes, perhaps; but you’ve never given me yourself.”

He knitted his brows angrily.

“If I start to make love to you,” he said, “I just go like a leaf down the wind.”

“And leave me out of count,” she said.

“And then is it nothing to you?” he asked, almost rigid with chagrin.

“It’s something; and sometimes you have carried me away — right away — I know — and — I reverence you for it — but — ”

“Don’t ‘but’ me,” he said, kissing her quickly, as a fire ran through him.

She submitted, and was silent.

It was true as he said. As a rule, when he started love-making, the emotion was strong enough to carry with it everything — reason, soul, blood — in a great sweep, like the Trent carries bodily its back-swirls and intertwinings, noiselessly. Gradually the little criticisms, the little sensations, were lost, thought also went, everything borne along in one flood. He became, not a man with a mind, but a great instinct. His hands were like creatures, living; his limbs, his body, were all life and consciousness, subject to no will of his, but living in themselves. Just as he was, so it seemed the vigorous, wintry stars were strong also with life. He and they struck with the same pulse of fire, and the same joy of strength which held the bracken-frond stiff near his eyes held his own body firm. It was as if he, and the stars, and the dark herbage, and Clara were licked up in an immense tongue of flame, which tore onwards and upwards. Everything rushed along in living beside him; everything was still, perfect in itself, along with him. This wonderful stillness in each thing in itself, while it was being borne along in a very ecstasy of living, seemed the highest point of bliss.

And Clara knew this held him to her, so she trusted altogether to the passion. It, however, failed her very often. They did not often reach again the height of that once when the peewits had called. Gradually, some mechanical effort spoilt their loving, or, when they had splendid moments, they had them separately, and not so satisfactorily. So often he seemed merely to be running on alone; often they realised it had been a failure, not what they had wanted. He left her, knowing THAT evening had only made a little split between them. Their loving grew more mechanical, without the marvellous glamour. Gradually they began to introduce novelties, to get back some of the feeling of satisfaction. They would be very near, almost dangerously near to the river, so that the black water ran not far from his face, and it gave a little thrill; or they loved sometimes in a little hollow below the fence of the path where people were passing occasionally, on the edge of the town, and they heard footsteps coming, almost felt the vibration of the tread, and they heard what the passersby said — strange little things that were never intended to be heard. And afterwards each of them was rather ashamed, and these things caused a distance between the two of them. He began to despise her a little, as if she had merited it!

One night he left her to go to Daybrook Station over the fields. It was very

dark, with an attempt at snow, although the spring was so far advanced. Morel had not much time; he plunged forward. The town ceases almost abruptly on the edge of a steep hollow; there the houses with their yellow lights stand up against the darkness. He went over the stile, and dropped quickly into the hollow of the fields. Under the orchard one warm window shone in Swineshead Farm. Paul glanced round. Behind, the houses stood on the brim of the dip, black against the sky, like wild beasts glaring curiously with yellow eyes down into the darkness. It was the town that seemed savage and uncouth, glaring on the clouds at the back of him. Some creature stirred under the willows of the farm pond. It was too dark to distinguish anything.

He was close up to the next stile before he saw a dark shape leaning against it. The man moved aside.

“Good-evening!” he said.

“Good-evening!” Morel answered, not noticing.

“Paul Morel?” said the man.

Then he knew it was Dawes. The man stopped his way.

“I’ve got yer, have I?” he said awkwardly.

“I shall miss my train,” said Paul.

He could see nothing of Dawes’s face. The man’s teeth seemed to chatter as he talked.

“You’re going to get it from me now,” said Dawes.

Morel attempted to move forward; the other man stepped in front of him.

“Are yer goin’ to take that top-coat off,” he said, “or are you goin’ to lie down to it?”

Paul was afraid the man was mad.

“But,” he said, “I don’t know how to fight.”

“All right, then,” answered Dawes, and before the younger man knew where he was, he was staggering backwards from a blow across the face.

The whole night went black. He tore off his overcoat and coat, dodging a blow, and flung the garments over Dawes. The latter swore savagely. Morel, in his shirt-sleeves, was now alert and furious. He felt his whole body unsheath itself like a claw. He could not fight, so he would use his wits. The other man became more distinct to him; he could see particularly the shirt-breast. Dawes stumbled over Paul’s coats, then came rushing forward. The young man’s mouth was bleeding. It was the other man’s mouth he was dying to get at, and the desire was anguish in its strength. He stepped quickly through the stile, and as Dawes was coming through after him, like a flash he got a blow in over the other’s mouth. He shivered with pleasure. Dawes advanced slowly, spitting. Paul was afraid; he moved round to get to the stile again. Suddenly, from out of nowhere,

came a great blow against his ear, that sent him falling helpless backwards. He heard Dawes's heavy panting, like a wild beast's, then came a kick on the knee, giving him such agony that he got up and, quite blind, leapt clean under his enemy's guard. He felt blows and kicks, but they did not hurt. He hung on to the bigger man like a wild cat, till at last Dawes fell with a crash, losing his presence of mind. Paul went down with him. Pure instinct brought his hands to the man's neck, and before Dawes, in frenzy and agony, could wrench him free, he had got his fists twisted in the scarf and his knuckles dug in the throat of the other man. He was a pure instinct, without reason or feeling. His body, hard and wonderful in itself, cleaved against the struggling body of the other man; not a muscle in him relaxed. He was quite unconscious, only his body had taken upon itself to kill this other man. For himself, he had neither feeling nor reason. He lay pressed hard against his adversary, his body adjusting itself to its one pure purpose of choking the other man, resisting exactly at the right moment, with exactly the right amount of strength, the struggles of the other, silent, intent, unchanging, gradually pressing its knuckles deeper, feeling the struggles of the other body become wilder and more frenzied. Tighter and tighter grew his body, like a screw that is gradually increasing in pressure, till something breaks.

Then suddenly he relaxed, full of wonder and misgiving. Dawes had been yielding. Morel felt his body flame with pain, as he realised what he was doing; he was all bewildered. Dawes's struggles suddenly renewed themselves in a furious spasm. Paul's hands were wrenched, torn out of the scarf in which they were knotted, and he was flung away, helpless. He heard the horrid sound of the other's gasping, but he lay stunned; then, still dazed, he felt the blows of the other's feet, and lost consciousness.

Dawes, grunting with pain like a beast, was kicking the prostrate body of his rival. Suddenly the whistle of the train shrieked two fields away. He turned round and glared suspiciously. What was coming? He saw the lights of the train draw across his vision. It seemed to him people were approaching. He made off across the field into Nottingham, and dimly in his consciousness as he went, he felt on his foot the place where his boot had knocked against one of the lad's bones. The knock seemed to re-echo inside him; he hurried to get away from it.

Morel gradually came to himself. He knew where he was and what had happened, but he did not want to move. He lay still, with tiny bits of snow tickling his face. It was pleasant to lie quite, quite still. The time passed. It was the bits of snow that kept rousing him when he did not want to be roused. At last his will clicked into action.

"I mustn't lie here," he said; "it's silly."

But still he did not move.

“I said I was going to get up,” he repeated. “Why don’t I?”

And still it was some time before he had sufficiently pulled himself together to stir; then gradually he got up. Pain made him sick and dazed, but his brain was clear. Reeling, he groped for his coats and got them on, buttoning his overcoat up to his ears. It was some time before he found his cap. He did not know whether his face was still bleeding. Walking blindly, every step making him sick with pain, he went back to the pond and washed his face and hands. The icy water hurt, but helped to bring him back to himself. He crawled back up the hill to the tram. He wanted to get to his mother — he must get to his mother — that was his blind intention. He covered his face as much as he could, and struggled sickly along. Continually the ground seemed to fall away from him as he walked, and he felt himself dropping with a sickening feeling into space; so, like a nightmare, he got through with the journey home.

Everybody was in bed. He looked at himself. His face was discoloured and smeared with blood, almost like a dead man’s face. He washed it, and went to bed. The night went by in delirium. In the morning he found his mother looking at him. Her blue eyes — they were all he wanted to see. She was there; he was in her hands.

“It’s not much, mother,” he said. “It was Baxter Dawes.”

“Tell me where it hurts you,” she said quietly.

“I don’t know — my shoulder. Say it was a bicycle accident, mother.”

He could not move his arm. Presently Minnie, the little servant, came upstairs with some tea.

“Your mother’s nearly frightened me out of my wits — fainted away,” she said.

He felt he could not bear it. His mother nursed him; he told her about it.

“And now I should have done with them all,” she said quietly.

“I will, mother.”

She covered him up.

“And don’t think about it,” she said — “only try to go to sleep. The doctor won’t be here till eleven.”

He had a dislocated shoulder, and the second day acute bronchitis set in. His mother was pale as death now, and very thin. She would sit and look at him, then away into space. There was something between them that neither dared mention. Clara came to see him. Afterwards he said to his mother:

“She makes me tired, mother.”

“Yes; I wish she wouldn’t come,” Mrs. Morel replied.

Another day Miriam came, but she seemed almost like a stranger to him.

“You know, I don’t care about them, mother,” he said.

“I’m afraid you don’t, my son,” she replied sadly.

It was given out everywhere that it was a bicycle accident. Soon he was able to go to work again, but now there was a constant sickness and gnawing at his heart. He went to Clara, but there seemed, as it were, nobody there. He could not work. He and his mother seemed almost to avoid each other. There was some secret between them which they could not bear. He was not aware of it. He only knew that his life seemed unbalanced, as if it were going to smash into pieces.

Clara did not know what was the matter with him. She realised that he seemed unaware of her. Even when he came to her he seemed unaware of her; always he was somewhere else. She felt she was clutching for him, and he was somewhere else. It tortured her, and so she tortured him. For a month at a time she kept him at arm’s length. He almost hated her, and was driven to her in spite of himself. He went mostly into the company of men, was always at the George or the White Horse. His mother was ill, distant, quiet, shadowy. He was terrified of something; he dared not look at her. Her eyes seemed to grow darker, her face more waxen; still she dragged about at her work.

At Whitsuntide he said he would go to Blackpool for four days with his friend Newton. The latter was a big, jolly fellow, with a touch of the bouncer about him. Paul said his mother must go to Sheffield to stay a week with Annie, who lived there. Perhaps the change would do her good. Mrs. Morel was attending a woman’s doctor in Nottingham. He said her heart and her digestion were wrong. She consented to go to Sheffield, though she did not want to; but now she would do everything her son wished of her. Paul said he would come for her on the fifth day, and stay also in Sheffield till the holiday was up. It was agreed.

The two young men set off gaily for Blackpool. Mrs. Morel was quite lively as Paul kissed her and left her. Once at the station, he forgot everything. Four days were clear — not an anxiety, not a thought. The two young men simply enjoyed themselves. Paul was like another man. None of himself remained — no Clara, no Miriam, no mother that fretted him. He wrote to them all, and long letters to his mother; but they were jolly letters that made her laugh. He was having a good time, as young fellows will in a place like Blackpool. And underneath it all was a shadow for her.

Paul was very gay, excited at the thought of staying with his mother in Sheffield. Newton was to spend the day with them. Their train was late. Joking, laughing, with their pipes between their teeth, the young men swung their bags on to the tram-car. Paul had bought his mother a little collar of real lace that he wanted to see her wear, so that he could tease her about it.

Annie lived in a nice house, and had a little maid. Paul ran gaily up the steps. He expected his mother laughing in the hall, but it was Annie who opened to

him. She seemed distant to him. He stood a second in dismay. Annie let him kiss her cheek.

“Is my mother ill?” he said.

“Yes; she’s not very well. Don’t upset her.”

“Is she in bed?”

“Yes.”

And then the queer feeling went over him, as if all the sunshine had gone out of him, and it was all shadow. He dropped the bag and ran upstairs. Hesitating, he opened the door. His mother sat up in bed, wearing a dressing-gown of old-rose colour. She looked at him almost as if she were ashamed of herself, pleading to him, humble. He saw the ashy look about her.

“Mother!” he said.

“I thought you were never coming,” she answered gaily.

But he only fell on his knees at the bedside, and buried his face in the bedclothes, crying in agony, and saying:

“Mother — mother — mother!”

She stroked his hair slowly with her thin hand.

“Don’t cry,” she said. “Don’t cry — it’s nothing.”

But he felt as if his blood was melting into tears, and he cried in terror and pain.

“Don’t — don’t cry,” his mother faltered.

Slowly she stroked his hair. Shocked out of himself, he cried, and the tears hurt in every fibre of his body. Suddenly he stopped, but he dared not lift his face out of the bedclothes.

“You ARE late. Where have you been?” his mother asked.

“The train was late,” he replied, muffled in the sheet.

“Yes; that miserable Central! Is Newton come?”

“Yes.”

“I’m sure you must be hungry, and they’ve kept dinner waiting.”

With a wrench he looked up at her.

“What is it, mother?” he asked brutally.

She averted her eyes as she answered:

“Only a bit of a tumour, my boy. You needn’t trouble. It’s been there — the lump has — a long time.”

Up came the tears again. His mind was clear and hard, but his body was crying.

“Where?” he said.

She put her hand on her side.

“Here. But you know they can sweal a tumour away.”

He stood feeling dazed and helpless, like a child. He thought perhaps it was as she said. Yes; he reassured himself it was so. But all the while his blood and his body knew definitely what it was. He sat down on the bed, and took her hand. She had never had but the one ring — her wedding-ring.

“When were you poorly?” he asked.

“It was yesterday it began,” she answered submissively.

“Pains?”

“Yes; but not more than I’ve often had at home. I believe Dr. Ansell is an alarmist.”

“You ought not to have travelled alone,” he said, to himself more than to her.

“As if that had anything to do with it!” she answered quickly.

They were silent for a while.

“Now go and have your dinner,” she said. “You MUST be hungry.”

“Have you had yours?”

“Yes; a beautiful sole I had. Annie IS good to me.”

They talked a little while, then he went downstairs. He was very white and strained. Newton sat in miserable sympathy.

After dinner he went into the scullery to help Annie to wash up. The little maid had gone on an errand.

“Is it really a tumour?” he asked.

Annie began to cry again.

“The pain she had yesterday — I never saw anybody suffer like it!” she cried. “Leonard ran like a madman for Dr. Ansell, and when she’d got to bed she said to me: ‘Annie, look at this lump on my side. I wonder what it is?’ And there I looked, and I thought I should have dropped. Paul, as true as I’m here, it’s a lump as big as my double fist. I said: ‘Good gracious, mother, whenever did that come?’ ‘Why, child,’ she said, ‘it’s been there a long time.’ I thought I should have died, our Paul, I did. She’s been having these pains for months at home, and nobody looking after her.”

The tears came to his eyes, then dried suddenly.

“But she’s been attending the doctor in Nottingham — and she never told me,” he said.

“If I’d have been at home,” said Annie, “I should have seen for myself.”

He felt like a man walking in unrealities. In the afternoon he went to see the doctor. The latter was a shrewd, lovable man.

“But what is it?” he said.

The doctor looked at the young man, then knitted his fingers.

“It may be a large tumour which has formed in the membrane,” he said slowly, “and which we MAY be able to make go away.”

“Can’t you operate?” asked Paul.

“Not there,” replied the doctor.

“Are you sure?”

“QUITE!”

Paul meditated a while.

“Are you sure it’s a tumour?” he asked. “Why did Dr. Jameson in Nottingham never find out anything about it? She’s been going to him for weeks, and he’s treated her for heart and indigestion.”

“Mrs. Morel never told Dr. Jameson about the lump,” said the doctor.

“And do you KNOW it’s a tumour?”

“No, I am not sure.”

“What else MIGHT it be? You asked my sister if there was cancer in the family. Might it be cancer?”

“I don’t know.”

“And what shall you do?”

“I should like an examination, with Dr. Jameson.”

“Then have one.”

“You must arrange about that. His fee wouldn’t be less than ten guineas to come here from Nottingham.”

“When would you like him to come?”

“I will call in this evening, and we will talk it over.”

Paul went away, biting his lip.

His mother could come downstairs for tea, the doctor said. Her son went upstairs to help her. She wore the old-rose dressing-gown that Leonard had given Annie, and, with a little colour in her face, was quite young again.

“But you look quite pretty in that,” he said.

“Yes; they make me so fine, I hardly know myself,” she answered.

But when she stood up to walk, the colour went. Paul helped her, half-carrying her. At the top of the stairs she was gone. He lifted her up and carried her quickly downstairs; laid her on the couch. She was light and frail. Her face looked as if she were dead, with blue lips shut tight. Her eyes opened — her blue, unfailing eyes — and she looked at him pleadingly, almost wanting him to forgive her. He held brandy to her lips, but her mouth would not open. All the time she watched him lovingly. She was only sorry for him. The tears ran down his face without ceasing, but not a muscle moved. He was intent on getting a little brandy between her lips. Soon she was able to swallow a teaspoonful. She lay back, so tired. The tears continued to run down his face.

“But,” she panted, “it’ll go off. Don’t cry!”

“I’m not doing,” he said.

After a while she was better again. He was kneeling beside the couch. They looked into each other's eyes.

"I don't want you to make a trouble of it," she said.

"No, mother. You'll have to be quite still, and then you'll get better soon."

But he was white to the lips, and their eyes as they looked at each other understood. Her eyes were so blue — such a wonderful forget-me-not blue! He felt if only they had been of a different colour he could have borne it better. His heart seemed to be ripping slowly in his breast. He kneeled there, holding her hand, and neither said anything. Then Annie came in.

"Are you all right?" she murmured timidly to her mother.

"Of course," said Mrs. Morel.

Paul sat down and told her about Blackpool. She was curious.

A day or two after, he went to see Dr. Jameson in Nottingham, to arrange for a consultation. Paul had practically no money in the world. But he could borrow.

His mother had been used to go to the public consultation on Saturday morning, when she could see the doctor for only a nominal sum. Her son went on the same day. The waiting-room was full of poor women, who sat patiently on a bench around the wall. Paul thought of his mother, in her little black costume, sitting waiting likewise. The doctor was late. The women all looked rather frightened. Paul asked the nurse in attendance if he could see the doctor immediately he came. It was arranged so. The women sitting patiently round the walls of the room eyed the young man curiously.

At last the doctor came. He was about forty, good-looking, brown-skinned. His wife had died, and he, who had loved her, had specialised on women's ailments. Paul told his name and his mother's. The doctor did not remember.

"Number forty-six M.," said the nurse; and the doctor looked up the case in his book.

"There is a big lump that may be a tumour," said Paul. "But Dr. Ansell was going to write you a letter."

"Ah, yes!" replied the doctor, drawing the letter from his pocket. He was very friendly, affable, busy, kind. He would come to Sheffield the next day.

"What is your father?" he asked.

"He is a coal-miner," replied Paul.

"Not very well off, I suppose?"

"This — I see after this," said Paul.

"And you?" smiled the doctor.

"I am a clerk in Jordan's Appliance Factory."

The doctor smiled at him.

"Er — to go to Sheffield!" he said, putting the tips of his fingers together, and

smiling with his eyes. "Eight guineas?"

"Thank you!" said Paul, flushing and rising. "And you'll come to-morrow?"

"To-morrow — Sunday? Yes! Can you tell me about what time there is a train in the afternoon?"

"There is a Central gets in at four-fifteen."

"And will there be any way of getting up to the house? Shall I have to walk?"
The doctor smiled.

"There is the tram," said Paul; "the Western Park tram."

The doctor made a note of it.

"Thank you!" he said, and shook hands.

Then Paul went on home to see his father, who was left in the charge of Minnie. Walter Morel was getting very grey now. Paul found him digging in the garden. He had written him a letter. He shook hands with his father.

"Hello, son! Tha has landed, then?" said the father.

"Yes," replied the son. "But I'm going back to-night."

"Are ter, beguy!" exclaimed the collier. "An' has ter eaten owt?"

"No."

"That's just like thee," said Morel. "Come thy ways in."

The father was afraid of the mention of his wife. The two went indoors. Paul ate in silence; his father, with earthy hands, and sleeves rolled up, sat in the arm-chair opposite and looked at him.

"Well, an' how is she?" asked the miner at length, in a little voice.

"She can sit up; she can be carried down for tea," said Paul.

"That's a blessin'!" exclaimed Morel. "I hope we s'll soon be havin' her whoam, then. An' what's that Nottingham doctor say?"

"He's going to-morrow to have an examination of her."

"Is he beguy! That's a tidy penny, I'm thinkin'!"

"Eight guineas."

"Eight guineas!" the miner spoke breathlessly. "Well, we mun find it from somewhere."

"I can pay that," said Paul.

There was silence between them for some time.

"She says she hopes you're getting on all right with Minnie," Paul said.

"Yes, I'm all right, an' I wish as she was," answered Morel. "But Minnie's a good little wench, bless 'er heart!" He sat looking dismal.

"I s'll have to be going at half-past three," said Paul.

"It's a trapse for thee, lad! Eight guineas! An' when dost think she'll be able to get as far as this?"

"We must see what the doctors say to-morrow," Paul said.

Morel sighed deeply. The house seemed strangely empty, and Paul thought his father looked lost, forlorn, and old.

“You’ll have to go and see her next week, father,” he said.

“I hope she’ll be a-whoam by that time,” said Morel.

“If she’s not,” said Paul, “then you must come.”

“I dunno wheer I s’ll find th’ money,” said Morel.

“And I’ll write to you what the doctor says,” said Paul.

“But tha writes i’ such a fashion, I canna ma’e it out,” said Morel.

“Well, I’ll write plain.”

It was no good asking Morel to answer, for he could scarcely do more than write his own name.

The doctor came. Leonard felt it his duty to meet him with a cab. The examination did not take long. Annie, Arthur, Paul, and Leonard were waiting in the parlour anxiously. The doctors came down. Paul glanced at them. He had never had any hope, except when he had deceived himself.

“It MAY be a tumour; we must wait and see,” said Dr. Jameson.

“And if it is,” said Annie, “can you sweal it away?”

“Probably,” said the doctor.

Paul put eight sovereigns and half a sovereign on the table. The doctor counted them, took a florin out of his purse, and put that down.

“Thank you!” he said. “I’m sorry Mrs. Morel is so ill. But we must see what we can do.”

“There can’t be an operation?” said Paul.

The doctor shook his head.

“No,” he said; “and even if there could, her heart wouldn’t stand it.”

“Is her heart risky?” asked Paul.

“Yes; you must be careful with her.”

“Very risky?”

“No — er — no, no! Just take care.”

And the doctor was gone.

Then Paul carried his mother downstairs. She lay simply, like a child. But when he was on the stairs, she put her arms round his neck, clinging.

“I’m so frightened of these beastly stairs,” she said.

And he was frightened, too. He would let Leonard do it another time. He felt he could not carry her.

“He thinks it’s only a tumour!” cried Annie to her mother. “And he can sweal it away.”

“I KNEW he could,” protested Mrs. Morel scornfully.

She pretended not to notice that Paul had gone out of the room. He sat in the

kitchen, smoking. Then he tried to brush some grey ash off his coat. He looked again. It was one of his mother's grey hairs. It was so long! He held it up, and it drifted into the chimney. He let go. The long grey hair floated and was gone in the blackness of the chimney.

The next day he kissed her before going back to work. It was very early in the morning, and they were alone.

"You won't fret, my boy!" she said.

"No, mother."

"No; it would be silly. And take care of yourself."

"Yes," he answered. Then, after a while: "And I shall come next Saturday, and shall bring my father?"

"I suppose he wants to come," she replied. "At any rate, if he does you'll have to let him."

He kissed her again, and stroked the hair from her temples, gently, tenderly, as if she were a lover.

"Shan't you be late?" she murmured.

"I'm going," he said, very low.

Still he sat a few minutes, stroking the brown and grey hair from her temples.

"And you won't be any worse, mother?"

"No, my son."

"You promise me?"

"Yes; I won't be any worse."

He kissed her, held her in his arms for a moment, and was gone. In the early sunny morning he ran to the station, crying all the way; he did not know what for. And her blue eyes were wide and staring as she thought of him.

In the afternoon he went a walk with Clara. They sat in the little wood where bluebells were standing. He took her hand.

"You'll see," he said to Clara, "she'll never be better."

"Oh, you don't know!" replied the other.

"I do," he said.

She caught him impulsively to her breast.

"Try and forget it, dear," she said; "try and forget it."

"I will," he answered.

Her breast was there, warm for him; her hands were in his hair. It was comforting, and he held his arms round her. But he did not forget. He only talked to Clara of something else. And it was always so. When she felt it coming, the agony, she cried to him:

"Don't think of it, Paul! Don't think of it, my darling!"

And she pressed him to her breast, rocked him, soothed him like a child. So he

put the trouble aside for her sake, to take it up again immediately he was alone. All the time, as he went about, he cried mechanically. His mind and hands were busy. He cried, he did not know why. It was his blood weeping. He was just as much alone whether he was with Clara or with the men in the White Horse. Just himself and this pressure inside him, that was all that existed. He read sometimes. He had to keep his mind occupied. And Clara was a way of occupying his mind.

On the Saturday Walter Morel went to Sheffield. He was a forlorn figure, looking rather as if nobody owned him. Paul ran upstairs.

“My father’s come,” he said, kissing his mother.

“Has he?” she answered wearily.

The old collier came rather frightened into the bedroom.

“How dun I find thee, lass?” he said, going forward and kissing her in a hasty, timid fashion.

“Well, I’m middlin’,” she replied.

“I see tha art,” he said. He stood looking down on her. Then he wiped his eyes with his handkerchief. Helpless, and as if nobody owned him, he looked.

“Have you gone on all right?” asked the wife, rather wearily, as if it were an effort to talk to him.

“Yis,” he answered. “‘Er’s a bit behint-hand now and again, as yer might expect.”

“Does she have your dinner ready?” asked Mrs. Morel.

“Well, I’ve ‘ad to shout at ‘er once or twice,” he said.

“And you MUST shout at her if she’s not ready. She WILL leave things to the last minute.”

She gave him a few instructions. He sat looking at her as if she were almost a stranger to him, before whom he was awkward and humble, and also as if he had lost his presence of mind, and wanted to run. This feeling that he wanted to run away, that he was on thorns to be gone from so trying a situation, and yet must linger because it looked better, made his presence so trying. He put up his eyebrows for misery, and clenched his fists on his knees, feeling so awkward in presence of big trouble.

Mrs. Morel did not change much. She stayed in Sheffield for two months. If anything, at the end she was rather worse. But she wanted to go home. Annie had her children. Mrs. Morel wanted to go home. So they got a motor-car from Nottingham — for she was too ill to go by train — and she was driven through the sunshine. It was just August; everything was bright and warm. Under the blue sky they could all see she was dying. Yet she was jollier than she had been for weeks. They all laughed and talked.

“Annie,” she exclaimed, “I saw a lizard dart on that rock!”

Her eyes were so quick; she was still so full of life.

Morel knew she was coming. He had the front door open. Everybody was on tiptoe. Half the street turned out. They heard the sound of the great motor-car. Mrs. Morel, smiling, drove home down the street.

“And just look at them all come out to see me!” she said. “But there, I suppose I should have done the same. How do you do, Mrs. Mathews? How are you, Mrs. Harrison?”

They none of them could hear, but they saw her smile and nod. And they all saw death on her face, they said. It was a great event in the street.

Morel wanted to carry her indoors, but he was too old. Arthur took her as if she were a child. They had set her a big, deep chair by the hearth where her rocking-chair used to stand. When she was unwrapped and seated, and had drunk a little brandy, she looked round the room.

“Don’t think I don’t like your house, Annie,” she said; “but it’s nice to be in my own home again.”

And Morel answered huskily:

“It is, lass, it is.”

And Minnie, the little quaint maid, said:

“An’ we glad t’ ‘ave yer.”

There was a lovely yellow ravel of sunflowers in the garden. She looked out of the window.

“There are my sunflowers!” she said.

CHAPTER XIV

THE RELEASE

“By the way,” said Dr. Ansell one evening when Morel was in Sheffield, “we’ve got a man in the fever hospital here who comes from Nottingham — Dawes. He doesn’t seem to have many belongings in this world.”

“Baxter Dawes!” Paul exclaimed.

“That’s the man — has been a fine fellow, physically, I should think. Been in a bit of a mess lately. You know him?”

“He used to work at the place where I am.”

“Did he? Do you know anything about him? He’s just sulking, or he’d be a lot better than he is by now.”

“I don’t know anything of his home circumstances, except that he’s separated from his wife and has been a bit down, I believe. But tell him about me, will you? Tell him I’ll come and see him.”

The next time Morel saw the doctor he said:

“And what about Dawes?”

“I said to him,” answered the other, “‘Do you know a man from Nottingham named Morel?’ and he looked at me as if he’d jump at my throat. So I said: ‘I see you know the name; it’s Paul Morel.’ Then I told him about your saying you would go and see him. ‘What does he want?’ he said, as if you were a policeman.”

“And did he say he would see me?” asked Paul.

“He wouldn’t say anything — good, bad or indifferent,” replied the doctor.

“Why not?”

“That’s what I want to know. There he lies and sulks, day in, day out. Can’t get a word of information out of him.”

“Do you think I might go?” asked Paul.

“You might.”

There was a feeling of connection between the rival men, more than ever since they had fought. In a way Morel felt guilty towards the other, and more or less responsible. And being in such a state of soul himself, he felt an almost painful nearness to Dawes, who was suffering and despairing, too. Besides, they had met

in a naked extremity of hate, and it was a bond. At any rate, the elemental man in each had met.

He went down to the isolation hospital, with Dr. Ansell's card. This sister, a healthy young Irishwoman, led him down the ward.

"A visitor to see you, Jim Crow," she said.

Dawes turned over suddenly with a startled grunt.

"Eh?"

"Caw!" she mocked. "He can only say 'Caw!' I have brought you a gentleman to see you. Now say 'Thank you,' and show some manners."

Dawes looked swiftly with his dark, startled eyes beyond the sister at Paul. His look was full of fear, mistrust, hate, and misery. Morel met the swift, dark eyes, and hesitated. The two men were afraid of the naked selves they had been.

"Dr. Ansell told me you were here," said Morel, holding out his hand.

Dawes mechanically shook hands.

"So I thought I'd come in," continued Paul.

There was no answer. Dawes lay staring at the opposite wall.

"Say 'Caw!'" mocked the nurse. "Say 'Caw!' Jim Crow."

"He is getting on all right?" said Paul to her.

"Oh yes! He lies and imagines he's going to die," said the nurse, "and it frightens every word out of his mouth."

"And you MUST have somebody to talk to," laughed Morel.

"That's it!" laughed the nurse. "Only two old men and a boy who always cries. It is hard lines! Here am I dying to hear Jim Crow's voice, and nothing but an odd 'Caw!' will he give!"

"So rough on you!" said Morel.

"Isn't it?" said the nurse.

"I suppose I am a godsend," he laughed.

"Oh, dropped straight from heaven!" laughed the nurse.

Presently she left the two men alone. Dawes was thinner, and handsome again, but life seemed low in him. As the doctor said, he was lying sulking, and would not move forward towards convalescence. He seemed to grudge every beat of his heart.

"Have you had a bad time?" asked Paul.

Suddenly again Dawes looked at him.

"What are you doing in Sheffield?" he asked.

"My mother was taken ill at my sister's in Thurston Street. What are you doing here?"

There was no answer.

"How long have you been in?" Morel asked.

“I couldn’t say for sure,” Dawes answered grudgingly.

He lay staring across at the wall opposite, as if trying to believe Morel was not there. Paul felt his heart go hard and angry.

“Dr. Ansell told me you were here,” he said coldly.

The other man did not answer.

“Typhoid’s pretty bad, I know,” Morel persisted.

Suddenly Dawes said:

“What did you come for?”

“Because Dr. Ansell said you didn’t know anybody here. Do you?”

“I know nobody nowhere,” said Dawes.

“Well,” said Paul, “it’s because you don’t choose to, then.”

There was another silence.

“We s’ll be taking my mother home as soon as we can,” said Paul.

“What’s a-matter with her?” asked Dawes, with a sick man’s interest in illness.

“She’s got a cancer.”

There was another silence.

“But we want to get her home,” said Paul. “We s’ll have to get a motor-car.”

Dawes lay thinking.

“Why don’t you ask Thomas Jordan to lend you his?” said Dawes.

“It’s not big enough,” Morel answered.

Dawes blinked his dark eyes as he lay thinking.

“Then ask Jack Pilkington; he’d lend it you. You know him.”

“I think I s’ll hire one,” said Paul.

“You’re a fool if you do,” said Dawes.

The sick man was gaunt and handsome again. Paul was sorry for him because his eyes looked so tired.

“Did you get a job here?” he asked.

“I was only here a day or two before I was taken bad,” Dawes replied.

“You want to get in a convalescent home,” said Paul.

The other’s face clouded again.

“I’m goin’ in no convalescent home,” he said.

“My father’s been in the one at Seathorpe, an’ he liked it. Dr. Ansell would get you a recommend.”

Dawes lay thinking. It was evident he dared not face the world again.

“The seaside would be all right just now,” Morel said. “Sun on those sandhills, and the waves not far out.”

The other did not answer.

“By Gad!” Paul concluded, too miserable to bother much; “it’s all right when

you know you're going to walk again, and swim!"

Dawes glanced at him quickly. The man's dark eyes were afraid to meet any other eyes in the world. But the real misery and helplessness in Paul's tone gave him a feeling of relief.

"Is she far gone?" he asked.

"She's going like wax," Paul answered; "but cheerful — lively!"

He bit his lip. After a minute he rose.

"Well, I'll be going," he said. "I'll leave you this half-crown."

"I don't want it," Dawes muttered.

Morel did not answer, but left the coin on the table.

"Well," he said, "I'll try and run in when I'm back in Sheffield. Happen you might like to see my brother-in-law? He works in Pyecrofts."

"I don't know him," said Dawes.

"He's all right. Should I tell him to come? He might bring you some papers to look at."

The other man did not answer. Paul went. The strong emotion that Dawes aroused in him, repressed, made him shiver.

He did not tell his mother, but next day he spoke to Clara about this interview. It was in the dinner-hour. The two did not often go out together now, but this day he asked her to go with him to the Castle grounds. There they sat while the scarlet geraniums and the yellow calceolarias blazed in the sunlight. She was now always rather protective, and rather resentful towards him.

"Did you know Baxter was in Sheffield Hospital with typhoid?" he asked.

She looked at him with startled grey eyes, and her face went pale.

"No," she said, frightened.

"He's getting better. I went to see him yesterday — the doctor told me."

Clara seemed stricken by the news.

"Is he very bad?" she asked guiltily.

"He has been. He's mending now."

"What did he say to you?"

"Oh, nothing! He seems to be sulking."

There was a distance between the two of them. He gave her more information.

She went about shut up and silent. The next time they took a walk together, she disengaged herself from his arm, and walked at a distance from him. He was wanting her comfort badly.

"Won't you be nice with me?" he asked.

She did not answer.

"What's the matter?" he said, putting his arm across her shoulder.

"Don't!" she said, disengaging herself.

He left her alone, and returned to his own brooding.

“Is it Baxter that upsets you?” he asked at length.

“I HAVE been VILE to him!” she said.

“I’ve said many a time you haven’t treated him well,” he replied.

And there was a hostility between them. Each pursued his own train of thought.

“I’ve treated him — no, I’ve treated him badly,” she said. “And now you treat ME badly. It serves me right.”

“How do I treat you badly?” he said.

“It serves me right,” she repeated. “I never considered him worth having, and now you don’t consider ME. But it serves me right. He loved me a thousand times better than you ever did.”

“He didn’t!” protested Paul.

“He did! At any rate, he did respect me, and that’s what you don’t do.”

“It looked as if he respected you!” he said.

“He did! And I MADE him horrid — I know I did! You’ve taught me that. And he loved me a thousand times better than ever you do.”

“All right,” said Paul.

He only wanted to be left alone now. He had his own trouble, which was almost too much to bear. Clara only tormented him and made him tired. He was not sorry when he left her.

She went on the first opportunity to Sheffield to see her husband. The meeting was not a success. But she left him roses and fruit and money. She wanted to make restitution. It was not that she loved him. As she looked at him lying there her heart did not warm with love. Only she wanted to humble herself to him, to kneel before him. She wanted now to be self-sacrificial. After all, she had failed to make Morel really love her. She was morally frightened. She wanted to do penance. So she kneeled to Dawes, and it gave him a subtle pleasure. But the distance between them was still very great — too great. It frightened the man. It almost pleased the woman. She liked to feel she was serving him across an insuperable distance. She was proud now.

Morel went to see Dawes once or twice. There was a sort of friendship between the two men, who were all the while deadly rivals. But they never mentioned the woman who was between them.

Mrs. Morel got gradually worse. At first they used to carry her downstairs, sometimes even into the garden. She sat propped in her chair, smiling, and so pretty. The gold wedding-ring shone on her white hand; her hair was carefully brushed. And she watched the tangled sunflowers dying, the chrysanthemums coming out, and the dahlias.

Paul and she were afraid of each other. He knew, and she knew, that she was dying. But they kept up a pretence of cheerfulness. Every morning, when he got up, he went into her room in his pyjamas.

“Did you sleep, my dear?” he asked.

“Yes,” she answered.

“Not very well?”

“Well, yes!”

Then he knew she had lain awake. He saw her hand under the bedclothes, pressing the place on her side where the pain was.

“Has it been bad?” he asked.

“No. It hurt a bit, but nothing to mention.”

And she sniffed in her old scornful way. As she lay she looked like a girl. And all the while her blue eyes watched him. But there were the dark pain-circles beneath that made him ache again.

“It’s a sunny day,” he said.

“It’s a beautiful day.”

“Do you think you’ll be carried down?”

“I shall see.”

Then he went away to get her breakfast. All day long he was conscious of nothing but her. It was a long ache that made him feverish. Then, when he got home in the early evening, he glanced through the kitchen window. She was not there; she had not got up.

He ran straight upstairs and kissed her. He was almost afraid to ask:

“Didn’t you get up, pigeon?”

“No,” she said, “it was that morphia; it made me tired.”

“I think he gives you too much,” he said.

“I think he does,” she answered.

He sat down by the bed, miserably. She had a way of curling and lying on her side, like a child. The grey and brown hair was loose over her ear.

“Doesn’t it tickle you?” he said, gently putting it back.

“It does,” she replied.

His face was near hers. Her blue eyes smiled straight into his, like a girl’s — warm, laughing with tender love. It made him pant with terror, agony, and love.

“You want your hair doing in a plait,” he said. “Lie still.”

And going behind her, he carefully loosened her hair, brushed it out. It was like fine long silk of brown and grey. Her head was snuggled between her shoulders. As he lightly brushed and plaited her hair, he bit his lip and felt dazed. It all seemed unreal, he could not understand it.

At night he often worked in her room, looking up from time to time. And so

often he found her blue eyes fixed on him. And when their eyes met, she smiled. He worked away again mechanically, producing good stuff without knowing what he was doing.

Sometimes he came in, very pale and still, with watchful, sudden eyes, like a man who is drunk almost to death. They were both afraid of the veils that were ripping between them.

Then she pretended to be better, chattered to him gaily, made a great fuss over some scraps of news. For they had both come to the condition when they had to make much of the trifles, lest they should give in to the big thing, and their human independence would go smash. They were afraid, so they made light of things and were gay.

Sometimes as she lay he knew she was thinking of the past. Her mouth gradually shut hard in a line. She was holding herself rigid, so that she might die without ever uttering the great cry that was tearing from her. He never forgot that hard, utterly lonely and stubborn clenching of her mouth, which persisted for weeks. Sometimes, when it was lighter, she talked about her husband. Now she hated him. She did not forgive him. She could not bear him to be in the room. And a few things, the things that had been most bitter to her, came up again so strongly that they broke from her, and she told her son.

He felt as if his life were being destroyed, piece by piece, within him. Often the tears came suddenly. He ran to the station, the tear-drops falling on the pavement. Often he could not go on with his work. The pen stopped writing. He sat staring, quite unconscious. And when he came round again he felt sick, and trembled in his limbs. He never questioned what it was. His mind did not try to analyse or understand. He merely submitted, and kept his eyes shut; let the thing go over him.

His mother did the same. She thought of the pain, of the morphia, of the next day; hardly ever of the death. That was coming, she knew. She had to submit to it. But she would never entreat it or make friends with it. Blind, with her face shut hard and blind, she was pushed towards the door. The days passed, the weeks, the months.

Sometimes, in the sunny afternoons, she seemed almost happy.

“I try to think of the nice times — when we went to Mablethorpe, and Robin Hood’s Bay, and Shanklin,” she said. “After all, not everybody has seen those beautiful places. And wasn’t it beautiful! I try to think of that, not of the other things.”

Then, again, for a whole evening she spoke not a word; neither did he. They were together, rigid, stubborn, silent. He went into his room at last to go to bed, and leaned against the doorway as if paralysed, unable to go any farther. His

consciousness went. A furious storm, he knew not what, seemed to ravage inside him. He stood leaning there, submitting, never questioning.

In the morning they were both normal again, though her face was grey with the morphia, and her body felt like ash. But they were bright again, nevertheless. Often, especially if Annie or Arthur were at home, he neglected her. He did not see much of Clara. Usually he was with men. He was quick and active and lively; but when his friends saw him go white to the gills, his eyes dark and glittering, they had a certain mistrust of him. Sometimes he went to Clara, but she was almost cold to him.

“Take me!” he said simply.

Occasionally she would. But she was afraid. When he had her then, there was something in it that made her shrink away from him — something unnatural. She grew to dread him. He was so quiet, yet so strange. She was afraid of the man who was not there with her, whom she could feel behind this make-belief lover; somebody sinister, that filled her with horror. She began to have a kind of horror of him. It was almost as if he were a criminal. He wanted her — he had her — and it made her feel as if death itself had her in its grip. She lay in horror. There was no man there loving her. She almost hated him. Then came little bouts of tenderness. But she dared not pity him.

Dawes had come to Colonel Seely’s Home near Nottingham. There Paul visited him sometimes, Clara very occasionally. Between the two men the friendship developed peculiarly. Dawes, who mended very slowly and seemed very feeble, seemed to leave himself in the hands of Morel.

In the beginning of November Clara reminded Paul that it was her birthday.

“I’d nearly forgotten,” he said.

“I’d thought quite,” she replied.

“No. Shall we go to the seaside for the week-end?”

They went. It was cold and rather dismal. She waited for him to be warm and tender with her, instead of which he seemed hardly aware of her. He sat in the railway-carriage, looking out, and was startled when she spoke to him. He was not definitely thinking. Things seemed as if they did not exist. She went across to him.

“What is it dear?” she asked.

“Nothing!” he said. “Don’t those windmill sails look monotonous?”

He sat holding her hand. He could not talk nor think. It was a comfort, however, to sit holding her hand. She was dissatisfied and miserable. He was not with her; she was nothing.

And in the evening they sat among the sandhills, looking at the black, heavy sea.

“She will never give in,” he said quietly.

Clara’s heart sank.

“No,” she replied.

“There are different ways of dying. My father’s people are frightened, and have to be hauled out of life into death like cattle into a slaughter-house, pulled by the neck; but my mother’s people are pushed from behind, inch by inch. They are stubborn people, and won’t die.”

“Yes,” said Clara.

“And she won’t die. She can’t. Mr. Renshaw, the parson, was in the other day. ‘Think!’ he said to her; ‘you will have your mother and father, and your sisters, and your son, in the Other Land.’ And she said: ‘I have done without them for a long time, and CAN do without them now. It is the living I want, not the dead.’ She wants to live even now.”

“Oh, how horrible!” said Clara, too frightened to speak.

“And she looks at me, and she wants to stay with me,” he went on monotonously. “She’s got such a will, it seems as if she would never go — never!”

“Don’t think of it!” cried Clara.

“And she was religious — she is religious now — but it is no good. She simply won’t give in. And do you know, I said to her on Thursday: ‘Mother, if I had to die, I’d die. I’d WILL to die.’ And she said to me, sharp: ‘Do you think I haven’t? Do you think you can die when you like?’“

His voice ceased. He did not cry, only went on speaking monotonously. Clara wanted to run. She looked round. There was the black, re-echoing shore, the dark sky down on her. She got up terrified. She wanted to be where there was light, where there were other people. She wanted to be away from him. He sat with his head dropped, not moving a muscle.

“And I don’t want her to eat,” he said, “and she knows it. When I ask her: ‘Shall you have anything’ she’s almost afraid to say ‘Yes.’ ‘I’ll have a cup of Benger’s,’ she says. ‘It’ll only keep your strength up,’ I said to her. ‘Yes’ — and she almost cried — ‘but there’s such a gnawing when I eat nothing, I can’t bear it.’ So I went and made her the food. It’s the cancer that gnaws like that at her. I wish she’d die!”

“Come!” said Clara roughly. “I’m going.”

He followed her down the darkness of the sands. He did not come to her. He seemed scarcely aware of her existence. And she was afraid of him, and disliked him.

In the same acute daze they went back to Nottingham. He was always busy, always doing something, always going from one to the other of his friends.

On the Monday he went to see Baxter Dawes. Listless and pale, the man rose to greet the other, clinging to his chair as he held out his hand.

“You shouldn’t get up,” said Paul.

Dawes sat down heavily, eyeing Morel with a sort of suspicion.

“Don’t you waste your time on me,” he said, “if you’ve owt better to do.”

“I wanted to come,” said Paul. “Here! I brought you some sweets.”

The invalid put them aside.

“It’s not been much of a week-end,” said Morel.

“How’s your mother?” asked the other.

“Hardly any different.”

“I thought she was perhaps worse, being as you didn’t come on Sunday.”

“I was at Skegness,” said Paul. “I wanted a change.”

The other looked at him with dark eyes. He seemed to be waiting, not quite daring to ask, trusting to be told.

“I went with Clara,” said Paul.

“I knew as much,” said Dawes quietly.

“It was an old promise,” said Paul.

“You have it your own way,” said Dawes.

This was the first time Clara had been definitely mentioned between them.

“Nay,” said Morel slowly; “she’s tired of me.”

Again Dawes looked at him.

“Since August she’s been getting tired of me,” Morel repeated.

The two men were very quiet together. Paul suggested a game of draughts. They played in silence.

“I s’ll go abroad when my mother’s dead,” said Paul.

“Abroad!” repeated Dawes.

“Yes; I don’t care what I do.”

They continued the game. Dawes was winning.

“I s’ll have to begin a new start of some sort,” said Paul; “and you as well, I suppose.”

He took one of Dawes’s pieces.

“I dunno where,” said the other.

“Things have to happen,” Morel said. “It’s no good doing anything — at least — no, I don’t know. Give me some toffee.”

The two men ate sweets, and began another game of draughts.

“What made that scar on your mouth?” asked Dawes.

Paul put his hand hastily to his lips, and looked over the garden.

“I had a bicycle accident,” he said.

Dawes’s hand trembled as he moved the piece.

“You shouldn’t ha’ laughed at me,” he said, very low.

“When?”

“That night on Woodborough Road, when you and her passed me — you with your hand on her shoulder.”

“I never laughed at you,” said Paul.

Dawes kept his fingers on the draught-piece.

“I never knew you were there till the very second when you passed,” said Morel.

“It was that as did me,” Dawes said, very low.

Paul took another sweet.

“I never laughed,” he said, “except as I’m always laughing.”

They finished the game.

That night Morel walked home from Nottingham, in order to have something to do. The furnaces flared in a red blotch over Bulwell; the black clouds were like a low ceiling. As he went along the ten miles of highroad, he felt as if he were walking out of life, between the black levels of the sky and the earth. But at the end was only the sick-room. If he walked and walked for ever, there was only that place to come to.

He was not tired when he got near home, or He did not know it. Across the field he could see the red firelight leaping in her bedroom window.

“When she’s dead,” he said to himself, “that fire will go out.”

He took off his boots quietly and crept upstairs. His mothers door was wide open, because she slept alone still. The red firelight dashed its glow on the landing. Soft as a shadow, he peeped in her doorway.

“Paul!” she murmured.

His heart seemed to break again. He went in and sat by the bed.

“How late you are!” she murmured.

“Not very,” he said.

“Why, what time is it?” The murmur came plaintive and helpless.

“It’s only just gone eleven.”

That was not true; it was nearly one o’clock.

“Oh!” she said; “I thought it was later.”

And he knew the unutterable misery of her nights that would not go.

“Can’t you sleep, my pigeon?” he said.

“No, I can’t,” she wailed.

“Never mind, Little!” He said crooning. “Never mind, my love. I’ll stop with you half an hour, my pigeon; then perhaps it will be better.”

And he sat by the bedside, slowly, rhythmically stroking her brows with his finger-tips, stroking her eyes shut, soothing her, holding her fingers in his free

hand. They could hear the sleepers' breathing in the other rooms.

"Now go to bed," she murmured, lying quite still under his fingers and his love.

"Will you sleep?" he asked.

"Yes, I think so."

"You feel better, my Little, don't you?"

"Yes," she said, like a fretful, half-soothed child.

Still the days and the weeks went by. He hardly ever went to see Clara now. But he wandered restlessly from one person to another for some help, and there was none anywhere. Miriam had written to him tenderly. He went to see her. Her heart was very sore when she saw him, white, gaunt, with his eyes dark and bewildered. Her pity came up, hurting her till she could not bear it.

"How is she?" she asked.

"The same — the same!" he said. "The doctor says she can't last, but I know she will. She'll be here at Christmas."

Miriam shuddered. She drew him to her; she pressed him to her bosom; she kissed him and kissed him. He submitted, but it was torture. She could not kiss his agony. That remained alone and apart. She kissed his face, and roused his blood, while his soul was apart writhing with the agony of death. And she kissed him and fingered his body, till at last, feeling he would go mad, he got away from her. It was not what he wanted just then — not that. And she thought she had soothed him and done him good.

December came, and some snow. He stayed at home all the while now. They could not afford a nurse. Annie came to look after her mother; the parish nurse, whom they loved, came in morning and evening. Paul shared the nursing with Annie. Often, in the evenings, when friends were in the kitchen with them, they all laughed together and shook with laughter. It was reaction. Paul was so comical, Annie was so quaint. The whole party laughed till they cried, trying to subdue the sound. And Mrs. Morel, lying alone in the darkness heard them, and among her bitterness was a feeling of relief.

Then Paul would go upstairs gingerly, guiltily, to see if she had heard.

"Shall I give you some milk?" he asked.

"A little," she replied plaintively.

And he would put some water with it, so that it should not nourish her. Yet he loved her more than his own life.

She had morphia every night, and her heart got fitful. Annie slept beside her. Paul would go in in the early morning, when his sister got up. His mother was wasted and almost ashen in the morning with the morphia. Darker and darker grew her eyes, all pupil, with the torture. In the mornings the weariness and ache

were too much to bear. Yet she could not — would not — weep, or even complain much.

“You slept a bit later this morning, little one,” he would say to her.

“Did I?” she answered, with fretful weariness.

“Yes; it’s nearly eight o’clock.”

He stood looking out of the window. The whole country was bleak and pallid under the snow. Then he felt her pulse. There was a strong stroke and a weak one, like a sound and its echo. That was supposed to betoken the end. She let him feel her wrist, knowing what he wanted.

Sometimes they looked in each other’s eyes. Then they almost seemed to make an agreement. It was almost as if he were agreeing to die also. But she did not consent to die; she would not. Her body was wasted to a fragment of ash. Her eyes were dark and full of torture.

“Can’t you give her something to put an end to it?” he asked the doctor at last. But the doctor shook his head.

“She can’t last many days now, Mr. Morel,” he said.

Paul went indoors.

“I can’t bear it much longer; we shall all go mad,” said Annie.

The two sat down to breakfast.

“Go and sit with her while we have breakfast, Minnie,” said Annie. But the girl was frightened.

Paul went through the country, through the woods, over the snow. He saw the marks of rabbits and birds in the white snow. He wandered miles and miles. A smoky red sunset came on slowly, painfully, lingering. He thought she would die that day. There was a donkey that came up to him over the snow by the wood’s edge, and put its head against him, and walked with him alongside. He put his arms round the donkey’s neck, and stroked his cheeks against his ears.

His mother, silent, was still alive, with her hard mouth gripped grimly, her eyes of dark torture only living.

It was nearing Christmas; there was more snow. Annie and he felt as if they could go on no more. Still her dark eyes were alive. Morel, silent and frightened, obliterated himself. Sometimes he would go into the sick-room and look at her. Then he backed out, bewildered.

She kept her hold on life still. The miners had been out on strike, and returned a fortnight or so before Christmas. Minnie went upstairs with the feeding-cup. It was two days after the men had been in.

“Have the men been saying their hands are sore, Minnie?” she asked, in the faint, querulous voice that would not give in. Minnie stood surprised.

“Not as I know of, Mrs. Morel,” she answered.

“But I’ll bet they are sore,” said the dying woman, as she moved her head with a sigh of weariness. “But, at any rate, there’ll be something to buy in with this week.”

Not a thing did she let slip.

“Your father’s pit things will want well airing, Annie,” she said, when the men were going back to work.

“Don’t you bother about that, my dear,” said Annie.

One night Annie and Paul were alone. Nurse was upstairs.

“She’ll live over Christmas,” said Annie. They were both full of horror. “She won’t,” he replied grimly. “I s’ll give her morphia.”

“Which?” said Annie.

“All that came from Sheffield,” said Paul.

“Ay — do!” said Annie.

The next day he was painting in the bedroom. She seemed to be asleep. He stepped softly backwards and forwards at his painting. Suddenly her small voice wailed:

“Don’t walk about, Paul.”

He looked round. Her eyes, like dark bubbles in her face, were looking at him.

“No, my dear,” he said gently. Another fibre seemed to snap in his heart.

That evening he got all the morphia pills there were, and took them downstairs. Carefully he crushed them to powder.

“What are you doing?” said Annie.

“I s’ll put ‘em in her night milk.”

Then they both laughed together like two conspiring children. On top of all their horror flicked this little sanity.

Nurse did not come that night to settle Mrs. Morel down. Paul went up with the hot milk in a feeding-cup. It was nine o’clock.

She was reared up in bed, and he put the feeding-cup between her lips that he would have died to save from any hurt. She took a sip, then put the spout of the cup away and looked at him with her dark, wondering eyes. He looked at her.

“Oh, it IS bitter, Paul!” she said, making a little grimace.

“It’s a new sleeping draught the doctor gave me for you,” he said. “He thought it would leave you in such a state in the morning.”

“And I hope it won’t,” she said, like a child.

She drank some more of the milk.

“But it IS horrid!” she said.

He saw her frail fingers over the cup, her lips making a little move.

“I know — I tasted it,” he said. “But I’ll give you some clean milk afterwards.”

“I think so,” she said, and she went on with the draught. She was obedient to him like a child. He wondered if she knew. He saw her poor wasted throat moving as she drank with difficulty. Then he ran downstairs for more milk. There were no grains in the bottom of the cup.

“Has she had it?” whispered Annie.

“Yes — and she said it was bitter.”

“Oh!” laughed Annie, putting her under lip between her teeth.

“And I told her it was a new draught. Where’s that milk?”

They both went upstairs.

“I wonder why nurse didn’t come to settle me down?” complained the mother, like a child, wistfully.

“She said she was going to a concert, my love,” replied Annie.

“Did she?”

They were silent a minute. Mrs. Morel gulped the little clean milk.

“Annie, that draught WAS horrid!” she said plaintively.

“Was it, my love? Well, never mind.”

The mother sighed again with weariness. Her pulse was very irregular.

“Let US settle you down,” said Annie. “Perhaps nurse will be so late.”

“Ay,” said the mother — “try.”

They turned the clothes back. Paul saw his mother LIKE a girl curled up in her flannel nightdress. Quickly they made one half of the bed, moved her, made the other, straightened her nightgown over her small feet, and covered her up.

“There,” said Paul, stroking her softly. “There! — now you’ll sleep.”

“Yes,” she said. “I didn’t think you could do the bed so nicely,” she added, almost gaily. Then she curled up, with her cheek on her hand, her head snugged between her shoulders. Paul put the long thin plait of grey hair over her shoulder and kissed her.

“You’ll sleep, my love,” he said.

“Yes,” she answered trustfully. “Good-night.”

They put out the light, and it was still.

Morel was in bed. Nurse did not come. Annie and Paul came to look at her at about eleven. She seemed to be sleeping as usual after her draught. Her mouth had come a bit open.

“Shall we sit up?” said Paul.

“I s’ll lie with her as I always do,” said Annie. “She might wake up.”

“All right. And call me if you see any difference.”

“Yes.”

They lingered before the bedroom fire, feeling the night big and black and snowy outside, their two selves alone in the world. At last he went into the next

room and went to bed.

He slept almost immediately, but kept waking every now and again. Then he went sound asleep. He started awake at Annie's whispered, "Paul, Paul!" He saw his sister in her white nightdress, with her long plait of hair down her back, standing in the darkness.

"Yes?" he whispered, sitting up.

"Come and look at her."

He slipped out of bed. A bud of gas was burning in the sick chamber. His mother lay with her cheek on her hand, curled up as she had gone to sleep. But her mouth had fallen open, and she breathed with great, hoarse breaths, like snoring, and there were long intervals between.

"She's going!" he whispered.

"Yes," said Annie.

"How long has she been like it?"

"I only just woke up."

Annie huddled into the dressing-gown, Paul wrapped himself in a brown blanket. It was three o'clock. He mended the fire. Then the two sat waiting. The great, snoring breath was taken — held awhile — then given back. There was a space — a long space. Then they started. The great, snoring breath was taken again. He bent close down and looked at her.

"Isn't it awful!" whispered Annie.

He nodded. They sat down again helplessly. Again came the great, snoring breath. Again they hung suspended. Again it was given back, long and harsh. The sound, so irregular, at such wide intervals, sounded through the house. Morel, in his room, slept on. Paul and Annie sat crouched, huddled, motionless. The great snoring sound began again — there was a painful pause while the breath was held — back came the rasping breath. Minute after minute passed. Paul looked at her again, bending low over her.

"She may last like this," he said.

They were both silent. He looked out of the window, and could faintly discern the snow on the garden.

"You go to my bed," he said to Annie. "I'll sit up."

"No," she said, "I'll stop with you."

"I'd rather you didn't," he said.

At last Annie crept out of the room, and he was alone. He hugged himself in his brown blanket, crouched in front of his mother, watching. She looked dreadful, with the bottom jaw fallen back. He watched. Sometimes he thought the great breath would never begin again. He could not bear it — the waiting. Then suddenly, startling him, came the great harsh sound. He mended the fire

again, noiselessly. She must not be disturbed. The minutes went by. The night was going, breath by breath. Each time the sound came he felt it wring him, till at last he could not feel so much.

His father got up. Paul heard the miner drawing his stockings on, yawning. Then Morel, in shirt and stockings, entered.

“Hush!” said Paul.

Morel stood watching. Then he looked at his son, helplessly, and in horror.

“Had I better stop a-whoam?” he whispered.

“No. Go to work. She’ll last through to-morrow.”

“I don’t think so.”

“Yes. Go to work.”

The miner looked at her again, in fear, and went obediently out of the room. Paul saw the tape of his garters swinging against his legs.

After another half-hour Paul went downstairs and drank a cup of tea, then returned. Morel, dressed for the pit, came upstairs again.

“Am I to go?” he said.

“Yes.”

And in a few minutes Paul heard his father’s heavy steps go thudding over the deadening snow. Miners called in the streets as they tramped in gangs to work. The terrible, long-drawn breaths continued — heave — heave — heave; then a long pause — then — ah-h-h-h-h! as it came back. Far away over the snow sounded the hooters of the ironworks. One after another they crowed and boomed, some small and far away, some near, the blowers of the collieries and the other works. Then there was silence. He mended the fire. The great breaths broke the silence — she looked just the same. He put back the blind and peered out. Still it was dark. Perhaps there was a lighter tinge. Perhaps the snow was bluer. He drew up the blind and got dressed. Then, shuddering, he drank brandy from the bottle on the wash-stand. The snow WAS growing blue. He heard a cart clanking down the street. Yes, it was seven o’clock, and it was coming a little bit light. He heard some people calling. The world was waking. A grey, deathly dawn crept over the snow. Yes, he could see the houses. He put out the gas. It seemed very dark. The breathing came still, but he was almost used to it. He could see her. She was just the same. He wondered if he piled heavy clothes on top of her it would stop. He looked at her. That was not her — not her a bit. If he piled the blanket and heavy coats on her —

Suddenly the door opened, and Annie entered. She looked at him questioningly.

“Just the same,” he said calmly.

They whispered together a minute, then he went downstairs to get breakfast. It

was twenty to eight. Soon Annie came down.

“Isn’t it awful! Doesn’t she look awful!” she whispered, dazed with horror.

He nodded.

“If she looks like that!” said Annie.

“Drink some tea,” he said.

They went upstairs again. Soon the neighbours came with their frightened question:

“How is she?”

It went on just the same. She lay with her cheek in her hand, her mouth fallen open, and the great, ghastly snores came and went.

At ten o’clock nurse came. She looked strange and woebegone.

“Nurse,” cried Paul, “she’ll last like this for days?”

“She can’t, Mr. Morel,” said nurse. “She can’t.”

There was a silence.

“Isn’t it dreadful!” wailed the nurse. “Who would have thought she could stand it? Go down now, Mr. Morel, go down.”

At last, at about eleven o’clock, he went downstairs and sat in the neighbour’s house. Annie was downstairs also. Nurse and Arthur were upstairs. Paul sat with his head in his hand. Suddenly Annie came flying across the yard crying, half mad:

“Paul — Paul — she’s gone!”

In a second he was back in his own house and upstairs. She lay curled up and still, with her face on her hand, and nurse was wiping her mouth. They all stood back. He kneeled down, and put his face to hers and his arms round her:

“My love — my love — oh, my love!” he whispered again and again. “My love — oh, my love!”

Then he heard the nurse behind him, crying, saying:

“She’s better, Mr. Morel, she’s better.”

When he took his face up from his warm, dead mother he went straight downstairs and began blacking his boots.

There was a good deal to do, letters to write, and so on. The doctor came and glanced at her, and sighed.

“Ay — poor thing!” he said, then turned away. “Well, call at the surgery about six for the certificate.”

The father came home from work at about four o’clock. He dragged silently into the house and sat down. Minnie bustled to give him his dinner. Tired, he laid his black arms on the table. There were swede turnips for his dinner, which he liked. Paul wondered if he knew. It was some time, and nobody had spoken. At last the son said:

“You noticed the blinds were down?”

Morel looked up.

“No,” he said. “Why — has she gone?”

“Yes.”

“When was that?”

“About twelve this morning.”

“H’m!”

The miner sat still for a moment, then began his dinner. It was as if nothing had happened. He ate his turnips in silence. Afterwards he washed and went upstairs to dress. The door of her room was shut.

“Have you seen her?” Annie asked of him when he came down.

“No,” he said.

In a little while he went out. Annie went away, and Paul called on the undertaker, the clergyman, the doctor, the registrar. It was a long business. He got back at nearly eight o’clock. The undertaker was coming soon to measure for the coffin. The house was empty except for her. He took a candle and went upstairs.

The room was cold, that had been warm for so long. Flowers, bottles, plates, all sick-room litter was taken away; everything was harsh and austere. She lay raised on the bed, the sweep of the sheet from the raised feet was like a clean curve of snow, so silent. She lay like a maiden asleep. With his candle in his hand, he bent over her. She lay like a girl asleep and dreaming of her love. The mouth was a little open as if wondering from the suffering, but her face was young, her brow clear and white as if life had never touched it. He looked again at the eyebrows, at the small, winsome nose a bit on one side. She was young again. Only the hair as it arched so beautifully from her temples was mixed with silver, and the two simple plaits that lay on her shoulders were filigree of silver and brown. She would wake up. She would lift her eyelids. She was with him still. He bent and kissed her passionately. But there was coldness against his mouth. He bit his lips with horror. Looking at her, he felt he could never, never let her go. No! He stroked the hair from her temples. That, too, was cold. He saw the mouth so dumb and wondering at the hurt. Then he crouched on the floor, whispering to her:

“Mother, mother!”

He was still with her when the undertakers came, young men who had been to school with him. They touched her reverently, and in a quiet, businesslike fashion. They did not look at her. He watched jealously. He and Annie guarded her fiercely. They would not let anybody come to see her, and the neighbours were offended.

After a while Paul went out of the house, and played cards at a friend's. It was midnight when he got back. His father rose from the couch as he entered, saying in a plaintive way:

"I thought tha wor niver comin', lad."

"I didn't think you'd sit up," said Paul.

His father looked so forlorn. Morel had been a man without fear — simply nothing frightened him. Paul realised with a start that he had been afraid to go to bed, alone in the house with his dead. He was sorry.

"I forgot you'd be alone, father," he said.

"Dost want owt to eat?" asked Morel.

"No."

"Sithee — I made thee a drop o' hot milk. Get it down thee; it's cold enough for owt."

Paul drank it.

After a while Morel went to bed. He hurried past the closed door, and left his own door open. Soon the son came upstairs also. He went in to kiss her good-night, as usual. It was cold and dark. He wished they had kept her fire burning. Still she dreamed her young dream. But she would be cold.

"My dear!" he whispered. "My dear!"

And he did not kiss her, for fear she should be cold and strange to him. It eased him she slept so beautifully. He shut her door softly, not to wake her, and went to bed.

In the morning Morel summoned his courage, hearing Annie downstairs and Paul coughing in the room across the landing. He opened her door, and went into the darkened room. He saw the white uplifted form in the twilight, but he dared not see. Bewildered, too frightened to possess any of his faculties, he got out of the room again and left her. He never looked at her again. He had not seen her for months, because he had not dared to look. And she looked like his young wife again.

"Have you seen her?" Annie asked of him sharply after breakfast.

"Yes," he said.

"And don't you think she looks nice?"

"Yes."

He went out of the house soon after. And all the time He seemed to be creeping aside to avoid it.

Paul went about from place to place, doing the business of the death. He met Clara in Nottingham, and they had tea together in a cafe, when they were quite jolly again. She was infinitely relieved to find he did not take it tragically.

Later, when the relatives began to come for the funeral, the affair became

public, and the children became social beings. They put themselves aside. They buried her in a furious storm of rain and wind. The wet clay glistened, all the white flowers were soaked. Annie gripped his arm and leaned forward. Down below she saw a dark corner of William's coffin. The oak box sank steadily. She was gone. The rain poured in the grave. The procession of black, with its umbrellas glistening, turned away. The cemetery was deserted under the drenching cold rain.

Paul went home and busied himself supplying the guests with drinks. His father sat in the kitchen with Mrs. Morel's relatives, "superior" people, and wept, and said what a good lass she'd been, and how he'd tried to do everything he could for her — everything. He had striven all his life to do what he could for her, and he'd nothing to reproach himself with. She was gone, but he'd done his best for her. He wiped his eyes with his white handkerchief. He'd nothing to reproach himself for, he repeated. All his life he'd done his best for her.

And that was how he tried to dismiss her. He never thought of her personally. Everything deep in him he denied. Paul hated his father for sitting sentimentalising over her. He knew he would do it in the public-houses. For the real tragedy went on in Morel in spite of himself. Sometimes, later, he came down from his afternoon sleep, white and cowering.

"I HAVE been dreaming of thy mother," he said in a small voice.

"Have you, father? When I dream of her it's always just as she was when she was well. I dream of her often, but it seems quite nice and natural, as if nothing had altered."

But Morel crouched in front of the fire in terror.

The weeks passed half-real, not much pain, not much of anything, perhaps a little relief, mostly a *nuit blanche*. Paul went restless from place to place. For some months, since his mother had been worse, he had not made love to Clara. She was, as it were, dumb to him, rather distant. Dawes saw her very occasionally, but the two could not get an inch across the great distance between them. The three of them were drifting forward.

Dawes mended very slowly. He was in the convalescent home at Skegness at Christmas, nearly well again. Paul went to the seaside for a few days. His father was with Annie in Sheffield. Dawes came to Paul's lodgings. His time in the home was up. The two men, between whom was such a big reserve, seemed faithful to each other. Dawes depended on Morel now. He knew Paul and Clara had practically separated.

Two days after Christmas Paul was to go back to Nottingham. The evening before he sat with Dawes smoking before the fire.

"You know Clara's coming down for the day to-morrow?" he said.

The other man glanced at him.

“Yes, you told me,” he replied.

Paul drank the remainder of his glass of whisky.

“I told the landlady your wife was coming,” he said.

“Did you?” said Dawes, shrinking, but almost leaving himself in the other’s hands. He got up rather stiffly, and reached for Morel’s glass.

“Let me fill you up,” he said.

Paul jumped up.

“You sit still,” he said.

But Dawes, with rather shaky hand, continued to mix the drink.

“Say when,” he said.

“Thanks!” replied the other. “But you’ve no business to get up.”

“It does me good, lad,” replied Dawes. “I begin to think I’m right again, then.”

“You are about right, you know.”

“I am, certainly I am,” said Dawes, nodding to him.

“And Len says he can get you on in Sheffield.”

Dawes glanced at him again, with dark eyes that agreed with everything the other would say, perhaps a trifle dominated by him.

“It’s funny,” said Paul, “starting again. I feel in a lot bigger mess than you.”

“In what way, lad?”

“I don’t know. I don’t know. It’s as if I was in a tangled sort of hole, rather dark and dreary, and no road anywhere.”

“I know — I understand it,” Dawes said, nodding. “But you’ll find it’ll come all right.”

He spoke caressingly.

“I suppose so,” said Paul.

Dawes knocked his pipe in a hopeless fashion.

“You’ve not done for yourself like I have,” he said.

Morel saw the wrist and the white hand of the other man gripping the stem of the pipe and knocking out the ash, as if he had given up.

“How old are you?” Paul asked.

“Thirty-nine,” replied Dawes, glancing at him.

Those brown eyes, full of the consciousness of failure, almost pleading for reassurance, for someone to re-establish the man in himself, to warm him, to set him up firm again, troubled Paul.

“You’ll just be in your prime,” said Morel. “You don’t look as if much life had gone out of you.”

The brown eyes of the other flashed suddenly.

“It hasn’t,” he said. “The go is there.”

Paul looked up and laughed.

“We’ve both got plenty of life in us yet to make things fly,” he said.

The eyes of the two men met. They exchanged one look. Having recognised the stress of passion each in the other, they both drank their whisky.

“Yes, begod!” said Dawes, breathless.

There was a pause.

“And I don’t see,” said Paul, “why you shouldn’t go on where you left off.”

“What — ” said Dawes, suggestively.

“Yes — fit your old home together again.”

Dawes hid his face and shook his head.

“Couldn’t be done,” he said, and looked up with an ironic smile.

“Why? Because you don’t want?”

“Perhaps.”

They smoked in silence. Dawes showed his teeth as he bit his pipe stem.

“You mean you don’t want her?” asked Paul.

Dawes stared up at the picture with a caustic expression on his face.

“I hardly know,” he said.

The smoke floated softly up.

“I believe she wants you,” said Paul.

“Do you?” replied the other, soft, satirical, abstract.

“Yes. She never really hitched on to me — you were always there in the background. That’s why she wouldn’t get a divorce.”

Dawes continued to stare in a satirical fashion at the picture over the mantelpiece.

“That’s how women are with me,” said Paul. “They want me like mad, but they don’t want to belong to me. And she BELONGED to you all the time. I knew.”

The triumphant male came up in Dawes. He showed his teeth more distinctly.

“Perhaps I was a fool,” he said.

“You were a big fool,” said Morel.

“But perhaps even THEN you were a bigger fool,” said Dawes.

There was a touch of triumph and malice in it.

“Do you think so?” said Paul.

They were silent for some time.

“At any rate, I’m clearing out to-morrow,” said Morel.

“I see,” answered Dawes.

Then they did not talk any more. The instinct to murder each other had returned. They almost avoided each other.

They shared the same bedroom. When they retired Dawes seemed abstract,

thinking of something. He sat on the side of the bed in his shirt, looking at his legs.

“Aren’t you getting cold?” asked Morel.

“I was lookin’ at these legs,” replied the other.

“What’s up with ‘em? They look all right,” replied Paul, from his bed.

“They look all right. But there’s some water in ‘em yet.”

“And what about it?”

“Come and look.”

Paul reluctantly got out of bed and went to look at the rather handsome legs of the other man that were covered with glistening, dark gold hair.

“Look here,” said Dawes, pointing to his shin. “Look at the water under here.”

“Where?” said Paul.

The man pressed in his finger-tips. They left little dents that filled up slowly.

“It’s nothing,” said Paul.

“You feel,” said Dawes.

Paul tried with his fingers. It made little dents.

“H’m!” he said.

“Rotten, isn’t it?” said Dawes.

“Why? It’s nothing much.”

“You’re not much of a man with water in your legs.”

“I can’t see as it makes any difference,” said Morel. “I’ve got a weak chest.”

He returned to his own bed.

“I suppose the rest of me’s all right,” said Dawes, and he put out the light.

In the morning it was raining. Morel packed his bag. The sea was grey and shaggy and dismal. He seemed to be cutting himself off from life more and more. It gave him a wicked pleasure to do it.

The two men were at the station. Clara stepped out of the train, and came along the platform, very erect and coldly composed. She wore a long coat and a tweed hat. Both men hated her for her composure. Paul shook hands with her at the barrier. Dawes was leaning against the bookstall, watching. His black overcoat was buttoned up to the chin because of the rain. He was pale, with almost a touch of nobility in his quietness. He came forward, limping slightly.

“You ought to look better than this,” she said.

“Oh, I’m all right now.”

The three stood at a loss. She kept the two men hesitating near her.

“Shall we go to the lodging straight off,” said Paul, “or somewhere else?”

“We may as well go home,” said Dawes.

Paul walked on the outside of the pavement, then Dawes, then Clara. They made polite conversation. The sitting-room faced the sea, whose tide, grey and

shaggy, hissed not far off.

Morel swung up the big arm-chair.

“Sit down, Jack,” he said.

“I don’t want that chair,” said Dawes.

“Sit down!” Morel repeated.

Clara took off her things and laid them on the couch. She had a slight air of resentment. Lifting her hair with her fingers, she sat down, rather aloof and composed. Paul ran downstairs to speak to the landlady.

“I should think you’re cold,” said Dawes to his wife. “Come nearer to the fire.”

“Thank you, I’m quite warm,” she answered.

She looked out of the window at the rain and at the sea.

“When are you going back?” she asked.

“Well, the rooms are taken until to-morrow, so he wants me to stop. He’s going back to-night.”

“And then you’re thinking of going to Sheffield?”

“Yes.”

“Are you fit to start work?”

“I’m going to start.”

“You’ve really got a place?”

“Yes — begin on Monday.”

“You don’t look fit.”

“Why don’t I?”

She looked again out of the window instead of answering.

“And have you got lodgings in Sheffield?”

“Yes.”

Again she looked away out of the window. The panes were blurred with streaming rain.

“And can you manage all right?” she asked.

“I s’d think so. I s’ll have to!”

They were silent when Morel returned.

“I shall go by the four-twenty,” he said as he entered.

Nobody answered.

“I wish you’d take your boots off,” he said to Clara.

“There’s a pair of slippers of mine.”

“Thank you,” she said. “They aren’t wet.”

He put the slippers near her feet. She left them there.

Morel sat down. Both the men seemed helpless, and each of them had a rather hunted look. But Dawes now carried himself quietly, seemed to yield himself,

while Paul seemed to screw himself up. Clara thought she had never seen him look so small and mean. He was as if trying to get himself into the smallest possible compass. And as he went about arranging, and as he sat talking, there seemed something false about him and out of tune. Watching him unknown, she said to herself there was no stability about him. He was fine in his way, passionate, and able to give her drinks of pure life when he was in one mood. And now he looked paltry and insignificant. There was nothing stable about him. Her husband had more manly dignity. At any rate HE did not waft about with any wind. There was something evanescent about Morel, she thought, something shifting and false. He would never make sure ground for any woman to stand on. She despised him rather for his shrinking together, getting smaller. Her husband at least was manly, and when he was beaten gave in. But this other would never own to being beaten. He would shift round and round, prowl, get smaller. She despised him. And yet she watched him rather than Dawes, and it seemed as if their three fates lay in his hands. She hated him for it.

She seemed to understand better now about men, and what they could or would do. She was less afraid of them, more sure of herself. That they were not the small egoists she had imagined them made her more comfortable. She had learned a good deal — almost as much as she wanted to learn. Her cup had been full. It was still as full as she could carry. On the whole, she would not be sorry when he was gone.

They had dinner, and sat eating nuts and drinking by the fire. Not a serious word had been spoken. Yet Clara realised that Morel was withdrawing from the circle, leaving her the option to stay with her husband. It angered her. He was a mean fellow, after all, to take what he wanted and then give her back. She did not remember that she herself had had what she wanted, and really, at the bottom of her heart, wished to be given back.

Paul felt crumpled up and lonely. His mother had really supported his life. He had loved her; they two had, in fact, faced the world together. Now she was gone, and for ever behind him was the gap in life, the tear in the veil, through which his life seemed to drift slowly, as if he were drawn towards death. He wanted someone of their own free initiative to help him. The lesser things he began to let go from him, for fear of this big thing, the lapse towards death, following in the wake of his beloved. Clara could not stand for him to hold on to. She wanted him, but not to understand him. He felt she wanted the man on top, not the real him that was in trouble. That would be too much trouble to her; he dared not give it her. She could not cope with him. It made him ashamed. So, secretly ashamed because he was in such a mess, because his own hold on life was so unsure, because nobody held him, feeling unsubstantial, shadowy, as if

he did not count for much in this concrete world, he drew himself together smaller and smaller. He did not want to die; he would not give in. But he was not afraid of death. If nobody would help, he would go on alone.

Dawes had been driven to the extremity of life, until he was afraid. He could go to the brink of death, he could lie on the edge and look in. Then, cowed, afraid, he had to crawl back, and like a beggar take what offered. There was a certain nobility in it. As Clara saw, he owned himself beaten, and he wanted to be taken back whether or not. That she could do for him. It was three o'clock.

"I am going by the four-twenty," said Paul again to Clara. "Are you coming then or later?"

"I don't know," she said.

"I'm meeting my father in Nottingham at seven-fifteen," he said.

"Then," she answered, "I'll come later."

Dawes jerked suddenly, as if he had been held on a strain. He looked out over the sea, but he saw nothing.

"There are one or two books in the corner," said Morel. "I've done with 'em."

At about four o'clock he went.

"I shall see you both later," he said, as he shook hands.

"I suppose so," said Dawes. "An' perhaps — one day — I s'll be able to pay you back the money as —"

"I shall come for it, you'll see," laughed Paul. "I s'll be on the rocks before I'm very much older."

"Ay — well —" said Dawes.

"Good-bye," he said to Clara.

"Good-bye," she said, giving him her hand. Then she glanced at him for the last time, dumb and humble.

He was gone. Dawes and his wife sat down again.

"It's a nasty day for travelling," said the man.

"Yes," she answered.

They talked in a desultory fashion until it grew dark. The landlady brought in the tea. Dawes drew up his chair to the table without being invited, like a husband. Then he sat humbly waiting for his cup. She served him as she would, like a wife, not consulting his wish.

After tea, as it drew near to six o'clock, he went to the window. All was dark outside. The sea was roaring.

"It's raining yet," he said.

"Is it?" she answered.

"You won't go to-night, shall you?" he said, hesitating.

She did not answer. He waited.

“I shouldn’t go in this rain,” he said.

“Do you WANT me to stay?” she asked.

His hand as he held the dark curtain trembled.

“Yes,” he said.

He remained with his back to her. She rose and went slowly to him. He let go the curtain, turned, hesitating, towards her. She stood with her hands behind her back, looking up at him in a heavy, inscrutable fashion.

“Do you want me, Baxter?” she asked.

His voice was hoarse as he answered:

“Do you want to come back to me?”

She made a moaning noise, lifted her arms, and put them round his neck, drawing him to her. He hid his face on her shoulder, holding her clasped.

“Take me back!” she whispered, ecstatic. “Take me back, take me back!” And she put her fingers through his fine, thin dark hair, as if she were only semi-conscious. He tightened his grasp on her.

“Do you want me again?” he murmured, broken.

CHAPTER XV

DERELICT

CLARA went with her husband to Sheffield, and Paul scarcely saw her again. Walter Morel seemed to have let all the trouble go over him, and there he was, crawling about on the mud of it, just the same. There was scarcely any bond between father and son, save that each felt he must not let the other go in any actual want. As there was no one to keep on the home, and as they could neither of them bear the emptiness of the house, Paul took lodgings in Nottingham, and Morel went to live with a friendly family in Bestwood.

Everything seemed to have gone smash for the young man. He could not paint. The picture he finished on the day of his mother's death — one that satisfied him — was the last thing he did. At work there was no Clara. When he came home he could not take up his brushes again. There was nothing left.

So he was always in the town at one place or another, drinking, knocking about with the men he knew. It really wearied him. He talked to barmaids, to almost any woman, but there was that dark, strained look in his eyes, as if he were hunting something.

Everything seemed so different, so unreal. There seemed no reason why people should go along the street, and houses pile up in the daylight. There seemed no reason why these things should occupy the space, instead of leaving it empty. His friends talked to him: he heard the sounds, and he answered. But why there should be the noise of speech he could not understand.

He was most himself when he was alone, or working hard and mechanically at the factory. In the latter case there was pure forgetfulness, when he lapsed from consciousness. But it had to come to an end. It hurt him so, that things had lost their reality. The first snowdrops came. He saw the tiny drop-pearls among the grey. They would have given him the liveliest emotion at one time. Now they were there, but they did not seem to mean anything. In a few moments they would cease to occupy that place, and just the space would be, where they had been. Tall, brilliant tram-cars ran along the street at night. It seemed almost a wonder they should trouble to rustle backwards and forwards. "Why trouble to go tilting down to Trent Bridges?" he asked of the big trams. It seemed they just

as well might NOT be as be.

The realest thing was the thick darkness at night. That seemed to him whole and comprehensible and restful. He could leave himself to it. Suddenly a piece of paper started near his feet and blew along down the pavement. He stood still, rigid, with clenched fists, a flame of agony going over him. And he saw again the sick-room, his mother, her eyes. Unconsciously he had been with her, in her company. The swift hop of the paper reminded him she was gone. But he had been with her. He wanted everything to stand still, so that he could be with her again.

The days passed, the weeks. But everything seemed to have fused, gone into a conglomerated mass. He could not tell one day from another, one week from another, hardly one place from another. Nothing was distinct or distinguishable. Often he lost himself for an hour at a time, could not remember what he had done.

One evening he came home late to his lodging. The fire was burning low; everybody was in bed. He threw on some more coal, glanced at the table, and decided he wanted no supper. Then he sat down in the arm-chair. It was perfectly still. He did not know anything, yet he saw the dim smoke wavering up the chimney. Presently two mice came out, cautiously, nibbling the fallen crumbs. He watched them as it were from a long way off. The church clock struck two. Far away he could hear the sharp clinking of the trucks on the railway. No, it was not they that were far away. They were there in their places. But where was he himself?

The time passed. The two mice, careering wildly, scampered cheekily over his slippers. He had not moved a muscle. He did not want to move. He was not thinking of anything. It was easier so. There was no wrench of knowing anything. Then, from time to time, some other consciousness, working mechanically, flashed into sharp phrases.

“What am I doing?”

And out of the semi-intoxicated trance came the answer:

“Destroying myself.”

Then a dull, live feeling, gone in an instant, told him that it was wrong. After a while, suddenly came the question:

“Why wrong?”

Again there was no answer, but a stroke of hot stubbornness inside his chest resisted his own annihilation.

There was a sound of a heavy cart clanking down the road. Suddenly the electric light went out; there was a bruising thud in the penny-in-the-slot meter. He did not stir, but sat gazing in front of him. Only the mice had scuttled, and

the fire glowed red in the dark room.

Then, quite mechanically and more distinctly, the conversation began again inside him.

“She’s dead. What was it all for — her struggle?”

That was his despair wanting to go after her.

“You’re alive.”

“She’s not.”

“She is — in you.”

Suddenly he felt tired with the burden of it.

“You’ve got to keep alive for her sake,” said his will in him.

Something felt sulky, as if it would not rouse.

“You’ve got to carry forward her living, and what she had done, go on with it.”

But he did not want to. He wanted to give up.

“But you can go on with your painting,” said the will in him. “Or else you can beget children. They both carry on her effort.”

“Painting is not living.”

“Then live.”

“Marry whom?” came the sulky question.

“As best you can.”

“Miriam?”

But he did not trust that.

He rose suddenly, went straight to bed. When he got inside his bedroom and closed the door, he stood with clenched fist.

“Mater, my dear — ” he began, with the whole force of his soul. Then he stopped. He would not say it. He would not admit that he wanted to die, to have done. He would not own that life had beaten him, or that death had beaten him. Going straight to bed, he slept at once, abandoning himself to the sleep.

So the weeks went on. Always alone, his soul oscillated, first on the side of death, then on the side of life, doggedly. The real agony was that he had nowhere to go, nothing to do, nothing to say, and WAS nothing himself. Sometimes he ran down the streets as if he were mad: sometimes he was mad; things weren’t there, things were there. It made him pant. Sometimes he stood before the bar of the public-house where he called for a drink. Everything suddenly stood back away from him. He saw the face of the barmaid, the gobbling drinkers, his own glass on the slopped, mahogany board, in the distance. There was something between him and them. He could not get into touch. He did not want them; he did not want his drink. Turning abruptly, he went out. On the threshold he stood and looked at the lighted street. But he was not of it or in it. Something separated

him. Everything went on there below those lamps, shut away from him. He could not get at them. He felt he couldn't touch the lamp-posts, not if he reached. Where could he go? There was nowhere to go, neither back into the inn, or forward anywhere. He felt stifled. There was nowhere for him. The stress grew inside him; he felt he should smash.

"I mustn't," he said; and, turning blindly, he went in and drank. Sometimes the drink did him good; sometimes it made him worse. He ran down the road. For ever restless, he went here, there, everywhere. He determined to work. But when he had made six strokes, he loathed the pencil violently, got up, and went away, hurried off to a club where he could play cards or billiards, to a place where he could flirt with a barmaid who was no more to him than the brass pump-handle she drew.

He was very thin and lantern-jawed. He dared not meet his own eyes in the mirror; he never looked at himself. He wanted to get away from himself, but there was nothing to get hold of. In despair he thought of Miriam. Perhaps — perhaps — ?

Then, happening to go into the Unitarian Church one Sunday evening, when they stood up to sing the second hymn he saw her before him. The light glistened on her lower lip as she sang. She looked as if she had got something, at any rate: some hope in heaven, if not in earth. Her comfort and her life seemed in the after-world. A warm, strong feeling for her came up. She seemed to yearn, as she sang, for the mystery and comfort. He put his hope in her. He longed for the sermon to be over, to speak to her.

The throng carried her out just before him. He could nearly touch her. She did not know he was there. He saw the brown, humble nape of her neck under its black curls. He would leave himself to her. She was better and bigger than he. He would depend on her.

She went wandering, in her blind way, through the little throngs of people outside the church. She always looked so lost and out of place among people. He went forward and put his hand on her arm. She started violently. Her great brown eyes dilated in fear, then went questioning at the sight of him. He shrank slightly from her.

"I didn't know — " she faltered.

"Nor I," he said.

He looked away. His sudden, flaring hope sank again.

"What are you doing in town?" he asked.

"I'm staying at Cousin Anne's."

"Ha! For long?"

"No; only till to-morrow."

“Must you go straight home?”

She looked at him, then hid her face under her hat-brim.

“No,” she said — “no; it’s not necessary.”

He turned away, and she went with him. They threaded through the throng of church people. The organ was still sounding in St. Mary’s. Dark figures came through the lighted doors; people were coming down the steps. The large coloured windows glowed up in the night. The church was like a great lantern suspended. They went down Hollow Stone, and he took the car for the Bridges.

“You will just have supper with me,” he said: “then I’ll bring you back.”

“Very well,” she replied, low and husky.

They scarcely spoke while they were on the car. The Trent ran dark and full under the bridge. Away towards Colwick all was black night. He lived down Holme Road, on the naked edge of the town, facing across the river meadows towards Sneinton Hermitage and the steep scrap of Colwick Wood. The floods were out. The silent water and the darkness spread away on their left. Almost afraid, they hurried along by the houses.

Supper was laid. He swung the curtain over the window. There was a bowl of freesias and scarlet anemones on the table. She bent to them. Still touching them with her finger-tips, she looked up at him, saying:

“Aren’t they beautiful?”

“Yes,” he said. “What will you drink — coffee?”

“I should like it,” she said.

“Then excuse me a moment.”

He went out to the kitchen.

Miriam took off her things and looked round. It was a bare, severe room. Her photo, Clara’s, Annie’s, were on the wall. She looked on the drawing-board to see what he was doing. There were only a few meaningless lines. She looked to see what books he was reading. Evidently just an ordinary novel. The letters in the rack she saw were from Annie, Arthur, and from some man or other she did not know. Everything he had touched, everything that was in the least personal to him, she examined with lingering absorption. He had been gone from her for so long, she wanted to rediscover him, his position, what he was now. But there was not much in the room to help her. It only made her feel rather sad, it was so hard and comfortless.

She was curiously examining a sketch-book when he returned with the coffee.

“There’s nothing new in it,” he said, “and nothing very interesting.”

He put down the tray, and went to look over her shoulder. She turned the pages slowly, intent on examining everything.

“H’m!” he said, as she paused at a sketch. “I’d forgotten that. It’s not bad, is

it?”

“No,” she said. “I don’t quite understand it.”

He took the book from her and went through it. Again he made a curious sound of surprise and pleasure.

“There’s some not bad stuff in there,” he said.

“Not at all bad,” she answered gravely.

He felt again her interest in his work. Or was it for himself? Why was she always most interested in him as he appeared in his work?

They sat down to supper.

“By the way,” he said, “didn’t I hear something about your earning your own living?”

“Yes,” she replied, bowing her dark head over her cup. “And what of it?”

“I’m merely going to the farming college at Broughton for three months, and I shall probably be kept on as a teacher there.”

“I say — that sounds all right for you! You always wanted to be independent.”

“Yes.

“Why didn’t you tell me?”

“I only knew last week.”

“But I heard a month ago,” he said.

“Yes; but nothing was settled then.”

“I should have thought,” he said, “you’d have told me you were trying.”

She ate her food in the deliberate, constrained way, almost as if she recoiled a little from doing anything so publicly, that he knew so well.

“I suppose you’re glad,” he said.

“Very glad.”

“Yes — it will be something.”

He was rather disappointed.

“I think it will be a great deal,” she said, almost haughtily, resentfully.

He laughed shortly.

“Why do you think it won’t?” she asked.

“Oh, I don’t think it won’t be a great deal. Only you’ll find earning your own living isn’t everything.”

“No,” she said, swallowing with difficulty; “I don’t suppose it is.”

“I suppose work CAN be nearly everything to a man,” he said, “though it isn’t to me. But a woman only works with a part of herself. The real and vital part is covered up.”

“But a man can give ALL himself to work?” she asked.

“Yes, practically.”

“And a woman only the unimportant part of herself?”

“That’s it.”

She looked up at him, and her eyes dilated with anger.

“Then,” she said, “if it’s true, it’s a great shame.”

“It is. But I don’t know everything,” he answered.

After supper they drew up to the fire. He swung her a chair facing him, and they sat down. She was wearing a dress of dark claret colour, that suited her dark complexion and her large features. Still, the curls were fine and free, but her face was much older, the brown throat much thinner. She seemed old to him, older than Clara. Her bloom of youth had quickly gone. A sort of stiffness, almost of woodenness, had come upon her. She meditated a little while, then looked at him.

“And how are things with you?” she asked.

“About all right,” he answered.

She looked at him, waiting.

“Nay,” she said, very low.

Her brown, nervous hands were clasped over her knee. They had still the lack of confidence or repose, the almost hysterical look. He winced as he saw them. Then he laughed mirthlessly. She put her fingers between her lips. His slim, black, tortured body lay quite still in the chair. She suddenly took her finger from her mouth and looked at him.

“And you have broken off with Clara?”

“Yes.”

His body lay like an abandoned thing, strewn in the chair.

“You know,” she said, “I think we ought to be married.”

He opened his eyes for the first time since many months, and attended to her with respect.

“Why?” he said.

“See,” she said, “how you waste yourself! You might be ill, you might die, and I never know — be no more than if I had never known you.”

“And if we married?” he asked.

“At any rate, I could prevent you wasting yourself and being a prey to other women — like — like Clara.”

“A prey?” he repeated, smiling.

She bowed her head in silence. He lay feeling his despair come up again.

“I’m not sure,” he said slowly, “that marriage would be much good.”

“I only think of you,” she replied.

“I know you do. But — you love me so much, you want to put me in your pocket. And I should die there smothered.”

She bent her head, put her fingers between her lips, while the bitterness surged

up in her heart.

“And what will you do otherwise?” she asked.

“I don’t know — go on, I suppose. Perhaps I shall soon go abroad.”

The despairing doggedness in his tone made her go on her knees on the rug before the fire, very near to him. There she crouched as if she were crushed by something, and could not raise her head. His hands lay quite inert on the arms of his chair. She was aware of them. She felt that now he lay at her mercy. If she could rise, take him, put her arms round him, and say, “You are mine,” then he would leave himself to her. But dare she? She could easily sacrifice herself. But dare she assert herself? She was aware of his dark-clothed, slender body, that seemed one stroke of life, sprawled in the chair close to her. But no; she dared not put her arms round it, take it up, and say, “It is mine, this body. Leave it to me.” And she wanted to. It called to all her woman’s instinct. But she crouched, and dared not. She was afraid he would not let her. She was afraid it was too much. It lay there, his body, abandoned. She knew she ought to take it up and claim it, and claim every right to it. But — could she do it? Her impotence before him, before the strong demand of some unknown thing in him, was her extremity. Her hands fluttered; she half-lifted her head. Her eyes, shuddering, appealing, gone, almost distracted, pleaded to him suddenly. His heart caught with pity. He took her hands, drew her to him, and comforted her.

“Will you have me, to marry me?” he said very low.

Oh, why did not he take her? Her very soul belonged to him. Why would he not take what was his? She had borne so long the cruelty of belonging to him and not being claimed by him. Now he was straining her again. It was too much for her. She drew back her head, held his face between her hands, and looked him in the eyes. No, he was hard. He wanted something else. She pleaded to him with all her love not to make it her choice. She could not cope with it, with him, she knew not with what. But it strained her till she felt she would break.

“Do you want it?” she asked, very gravely.

“Not much,” he replied, with pain.

She turned her face aside; then, raising herself with dignity, she took his head to her bosom, and rocked him softly. She was not to have him, then! So she could comfort him. She put her fingers through his hair. For her, the anguished sweetness of self-sacrifice. For him, the hate and misery of another failure. He could not bear it — that breast which was warm and which cradled him without taking the burden of him. So much he wanted to rest on her that the feint of rest only tortured him. He drew away.

“And without marriage we can do nothing?” he asked.

His mouth was lifted from his teeth with pain. She put her little finger between

her lips.

“No,” she said, low and like the toll of a bell. “No, I think not.”

It was the end then between them. She could not take him and relieve him of the responsibility of himself. She could only sacrifice herself to him — sacrifice herself every day, gladly. And that he did not want. He wanted her to hold him and say, with joy and authority: “Stop all this restlessness and beating against death. You are mine for a mate.” She had not the strength. Or was it a mate she wanted? or did she want a Christ in him?

He felt, in leaving her, he was defrauding her of life. But he knew that, in staying, stilling the inner, desperate man, he was denying his own life. And he did not hope to give life to her by denying his own.

She sat very quiet. He lit a cigarette. The smoke went up from it, wavering. He was thinking of his mother, and had forgotten Miriam. She suddenly looked at him. Her bitterness came surging up. Her sacrifice, then, was useless. He lay there aloof, careless about her. Suddenly she saw again his lack of religion, his restless instability. He would destroy himself like a perverse child. Well, then, he would!

“I think I must go,” she said softly.

By her tone he knew she was despising him. He rose quietly.

“I’ll come along with you,” he answered.

She stood before the mirror pinning on her hat. How bitter, how unutterably bitter, it made her that he rejected her sacrifice! Life ahead looked dead, as if the glow were gone out. She bowed her face over the flowers — the freesias so sweet and spring-like, the scarlet anemones flaunting over the table. It was like him to have those flowers.

He moved about the room with a certain sureness of touch, swift and relentless and quiet. She knew she could not cope with him. He would escape like a weasel out of her hands. Yet without him her life would trail on lifeless. Brooding, she touched the flowers.

“Have them!” he said; and he took them out of the jar, dripping as they were, and went quickly into the kitchen. She waited for him, took the flowers, and they went out together, he talking, she feeling dead.

She was going from him now. In her misery she leaned against him as they sat on the car. He was unresponsive. Where would he go? What would be the end of him? She could not bear it, the vacant feeling where he should be. He was so foolish, so wasteful, never at peace with himself. And now where would he go? And what did he care that he wasted her? He had no religion; it was all for the moment’s attraction that he cared, nothing else, nothing deeper. Well, she would wait and see how it turned out with him. When he had had enough he would give

in and come to her.

He shook hands and left her at the door of her cousin's house. When he turned away he felt the last hold for him had gone. The town, as he sat upon the car, stretched away over the bay of railway, a level fume of lights. Beyond the town the country, little smouldering spots for more towns — the sea — the night — on and on! And he had no place in it! Whatever spot he stood on, there he stood alone. From his breast, from his mouth, sprang the endless space, and it was there behind him, everywhere. The people hurrying along the streets offered no obstruction to the void in which he found himself. They were small shadows whose footsteps and voices could be heard, but in each of them the same night, the same silence. He got off the car. In the country all was dead still. Little stars shone high up; little stars spread far away in the flood-waters, a firmament below. Everywhere the vastness and terror of the immense night which is roused and stirred for a brief while by the day, but which returns, and will remain at last eternal, holding everything in its silence and its living gloom. There was no Time, only Space. Who could say his mother had lived and did not live? She had been in one place, and was in another; that was all. And his soul could not leave her, wherever she was. Now she was gone abroad into the night, and he was with her still. They were together. But yet there was his body, his chest, that leaned against the stile, his hands on the wooden bar. They seemed something. Where was he? — one tiny upright speck of flesh, less than an ear of wheat lost in the field. He could not bear it. On every side the immense dark silence seemed pressing him, so tiny a spark, into extinction, and yet, almost nothing, he could not be extinct. Night, in which everything was lost, went reaching out, beyond stars and sun. Stars and sun, a few bright grains, went spinning round for terror, and holding each other in embrace, there in a darkness that outpassed them all, and left them tiny and daunted. So much, and himself, infinitesimal, at the core a nothingness, and yet not nothing.

“Mother!” he whispered — “mother!”

She was the only thing that held him up, himself, amid all this. And she was gone, intermingled herself. He wanted her to touch him, have him alongside with her.

But no, he would not give in. Turning sharply, he walked towards the city's gold phosphorescence. His fists were shut, his mouth set fast. He would not take that direction, to the darkness, to follow her. He walked towards the faintly humming, glowing town, quickly.

THE END

THE RAINBOW



The Rainbow was first published in 1915. The novel follows three generations of the Brangwen family, particularly focusing on the sexual dynamics between the characters. Lawrence's frank treatment of sexual desire and the power plays within relationships, as a natural and even spiritual force of life caused *The Rainbow* to be prosecuted in an obscenity trial in late 1915, as a result of which all copies were seized and burnt. Following the ban it was unavailable in Britain for 11 years.

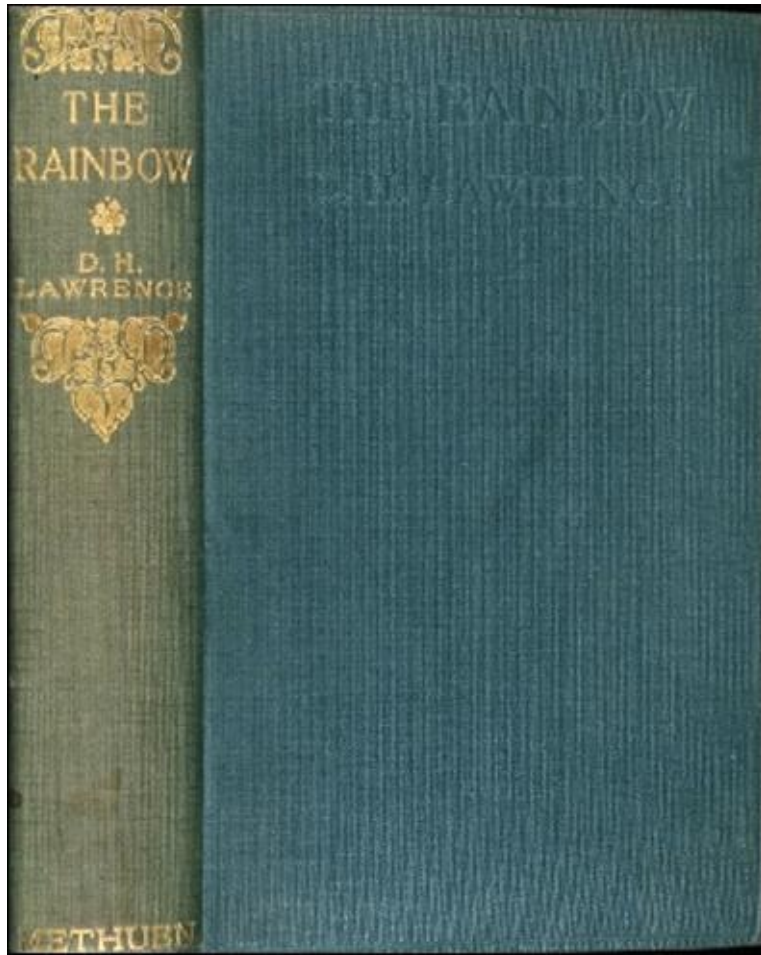
The novel was followed by a sequel in 1920, *Women in Love*. Although Lawrence conceived of the two novels as one, considering the titles *The Sisters* and *The Wedding Ring* for the work, they were published as two separate novels at the urging of his publisher. However, after the negative public reception of *The Rainbow*, Lawrence's publisher opted out of publishing the sequel. The two novels are now considered as being among the greatest literary achievements of the twentieth century.



Lawrence at the time of publication

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The rare first edition

CHAPTER 1

How Tom Brangwen Married a Polish Lady

I

The Brangwens had lived for generations on the Marsh Farm, in the meadows where the Erewash twisted sluggishly through alder trees, separating Derbyshire from Nottinghamshire. Two miles away, a church-tower stood on a hill, the houses of the little country town climbing assiduously up to it. Whenever one of the Brangwens in the fields lifted his head from his work, he saw the church-tower at Ilkeston in the empty sky. So that as he turned again to the horizontal land, he was aware of something standing above him and beyond him in the distance.

There was a look in the eyes of the Brangwens as if they were expecting something unknown, about which they were eager. They had that air of readiness for what would come to them, a kind of surety, an expectancy, the look of an inheritor.

They were fresh, blond, slow-speaking people, revealing themselves plainly, but slowly, so that one could watch the change in their eyes from laughter to anger, blue, lit-up laughter, to a hard blue-staring anger; through all the irresolute stages of the sky when the weather is changing.

Living on rich land, on their own land, near to a growing town, they had forgotten what it was to be in straitened circumstances. They had never become rich, because there were always children, and the patrimony was divided every time. But always, at the Marsh, there was ample.

So the Brangwens came and went without fear of necessity, working hard because of the life that was in them, not for want of the money. Neither were they thriftless. They were aware of the last halfpenny, and instinct made them not waste the peeling of their apple, for it would help to feed the cattle. But heaven and earth was teeming around them, and how should this cease? They felt the rush of the sap in spring, they knew the wave which cannot halt, but every year throws forward the seed to begetting, and, falling back, leaves the young-born on the earth. They knew the intercourse between heaven and earth, sunshine drawn into the breast and bowels, the rain sucked up in the daytime, nakedness that comes under the wind in autumn, showing the birds' nests no longer worth hiding. Their life and interrelations were such; feeling the pulse

and body of the soil, that opened to their furrow for the grain, and became smooth and supple after their ploughing, and clung to their feet with a weight that pulled like desire, lying hard and unresponsive when the crops were to be shorn away. The young corn waved and was silken, and the lustre slid along the limbs of the men who saw it. They took the udder of the cows, the cows yielded milk and pulse against the hands of the men, the pulse of the blood of the teats of the cows beat into the pulse of the hands of the men. They mounted their horses, and held life between the grip of their knees, they harnessed their horses at the wagon, and, with hand on the bridle-rings, drew the heaving of the horses after their will.

In autumn the partridges whirred up, birds in flocks blew like spray across the fallow, rooks appeared on the grey, watery heavens, and flew cawing into the winter. Then the men sat by the fire in the house where the women moved about with surety, and the limbs and the body of the men were impregnated with the day, cattle and earth and vegetation and the sky, the men sat by the fire and their brains were inert, as their blood flowed heavy with the accumulation from the living day.

The women were different. On them too was the drowse of blood-intimacy, calves sucking and hens running together in droves, and young geese palpitating in the hand while the food was pushed down their throttle. But the women looked out from the heated, blind intercourse of farm-life, to the spoken world beyond. They were aware of the lips and the mind of the world speaking and giving utterance, they heard the sound in the distance, and they strained to listen.

It was enough for the men, that the earth heaved and opened its furrow to them, that the wind blew to dry the wet wheat, and set the young ears of corn wheeling freshly round about; it was enough that they helped the cow in labour, or ferreted the rats from under the barn, or broke the back of a rabbit with a sharp knock of the hand. So much warmth and generating and pain and death did they know in their blood, earth and sky and beast and green plants, so much exchange and interchange they had with these, that they lived full and surcharged, their senses full fed, their faces always turned to the heat of the blood, staring into the sun, dazed with looking towards the source of generation, unable to turn round.

But the woman wanted another form of life than this, something that was not blood-intimacy. Her house faced out from the farm-buildings and fields, looked out to the road and the village with church and Hall and the world beyond. She stood to see the far-off world of cities and governments and the active scope of man, the magic land to her, where secrets were made known and desires fulfilled. She faced outwards to where men moved dominant and creative,

having turned their back on the pulsing heat of creation, and with this behind them, were set out to discover what was beyond, to enlarge their own scope and range and freedom; whereas the Brangwen men faced inwards to the teeming life of creation, which poured unresolved into their veins.

Looking out, as she must, from the front of her house towards the activity of man in the world at large, whilst her husband looked out to the back at sky and harvest and beast and land, she strained her eyes to see what man had done in fighting outwards to knowledge, she strained to hear how he uttered himself in his conquest, her deepest desire hung on the battle that she heard, far off, being waged on the edge of the unknown. She also wanted to know, and to be of the fighting host.

At home, even so near as Cossethay, was the vicar, who spoke the other, magic language, and had the other, finer bearing, both of which she could perceive, but could never attain to. The vicar moved in worlds beyond where her own menfolk existed. Did she not know her own menfolk: fresh, slow, full-built men, masterful enough, but easy, native to the earth, lacking outwardness and range of motion. Whereas the vicar, dark and dry and small beside her husband, had yet a quickness and a range of being that made Brangwen, in his large geniality, seem dull and local. She knew her husband. But in the vicar's nature was that which passed beyond her knowledge. As Brangwen had power over the cattle so the vicar had power over her husband. What was it in the vicar, that raised him above the common men as man is raised above the beast? She craved to know. She craved to achieve this higher being, if not in herself, then in her children. That which makes a man strong even if he be little and frail in body, just as any man is little and frail beside a bull, and yet stronger than the bull, what was it? It was not money nor power nor position. What power had the vicar over Tom Brangwen-none. Yet strip them and set them on a desert island, and the vicar was the master. His soul was master of the other man's. And why-why? She decided it was a question of knowledge.

The curate was poor enough, and not very efficacious as a man, either, yet he took rank with those others, the superior. She watched his children being born, she saw them running as tiny things beside their mother. And already they were separate from her own children, distinct. Why were her own children marked below the others? Why should the curate's children inevitably take precedence over her children, why should dominance be given them from the start? It was not money, nor even class. It was education and experience, she decided.

It was this, this education, this higher form of being, that the mother wished to give to her children, so that they too could live the supreme life on earth. For her children, at least the children of her heart, had the complete nature that should

take place in equality with the living, vital people in the land, not be left behind obscure among the labourers. Why must they remain obscured and stifled all their lives, why should they suffer from lack of freedom to move? How should they learn the entry into the finer, more vivid circle of life?

Her imagination was fired by the squire's lady at Shelly Hall, who came to church at Cossethay with her little children, girls in tidy capes of beaver fur, and smart little hats, herself like a winter rose, so fair and delicate. So fair, so fine in mould, so luminous, what was it that Mrs. Hardy felt which she, Mrs. Brangwen, did not feel? How was Mrs. Hardy's nature different from that of the common women of Cossethay, in what was it beyond them? All the women of Cossethay talked eagerly about Mrs. Hardy, of her husband, her children, her guests, her dress, of her servants and her housekeeping. The lady of the Hall was the living dream of their lives, her life was the epic that inspired their lives. In her they lived imaginatively, and in gossiping of her husband who drank, of her scandalous brother, of Lord William Bentley her friend, member of Parliament for the division, they had their own Odyssey enacting itself, Penelope and Ulysses before them, and Circe and the swine and the endless web.

So the women of the village were fortunate. They saw themselves in the lady of the manor, each of them lived her own fulfilment of the life of Mrs. Hardy. And the Brangwen wife of the Marsh aspired beyond herself, towards the further life of the finer woman, towards the extended being she revealed, as a traveller in his self-contained manner reveals far-off countries present in himself. But why should a knowledge of far-off countries make a man's life a different thing, finer, bigger? And why is a man more than the beast and the cattle that serve him? It is the same thing.

The male part of the poem was filled in by such men as the vicar and Lord William, lean, eager men with strange movements, men who had command of the further fields, whose lives ranged over a great extent. Ah, it was something very desirable to know, this touch of the wonderful men who had the power of thought and comprehension. The women of the village might be much fonder of Tom Brangwen, and more at their ease with him, yet if their lives had been robbed of the vicar, and of Lord William, the leading shoot would have been cut away from them, they would have been heavy and uninspired and inclined to hate. So long as the wonder of the beyond was before them, they could get along, whatever their lot. And Mrs. Hardy, and the vicar, and Lord William, these moved in the wonder of the beyond, and were visible to the eyes of Cossethay in their motion.

About 1840, a canal was constructed across the meadows of the Marsh Farm, connecting the newly-opened collieries of the Erewash Valley. A high embankment travelled along the fields to carry the canal, which passed close to the homestead, and, reaching the road, went over in a heavy bridge.

So the Marsh was shut off from Ilkeston, and enclosed in the small valley bed, which ended in a bushy hill and the village spire of Cossethay.

The Brangwens received a fair sum of money from this trespass across their land. Then, a short time afterwards, a colliery was sunk on the other side of the canal, and in a while the Midland Railway came down the valley at the foot of the Ilkeston hill, and the invasion was complete. The town grew rapidly, the Brangwens were kept busy producing supplies, they became richer, they were almost tradesmen.

Still the Marsh remained remote and original, on the old, quiet side of the canal embankment, in the sunny valley where slow water wound along in company of stiff alders, and the road went under ash-trees past the Brangwens' garden gate.

But, looking from the garden gate down the road to the right, there, through the dark archway of the canal's square aqueduct, was a colliery spinning away in the near distance, and further, red, crude houses plastered on the valley in masses, and beyond all, the dim smoking hill of the town.

The homestead was just on the safe side of civilisation, outside the gate. The house stood bare from the road, approached by a straight garden path, along which at spring the daffodils were thick in green and yellow. At the sides of the house were bushes of lilac and guelder-rose and privet, entirely hiding the farm buildings behind.

At the back a confusion of sheds spread into the home-close from out of two or three indistinct yards. The duck-pond lay beyond the furthest wall, littering its white feathers on the padded earthen banks, blowing its stray soiled feathers into the grass and the gorse bushes below the canal embankment, which rose like a high rampart near at hand, so that occasionally a man's figure passed in silhouette, or a man and a towing horse traversed the sky.

At first the Brangwens were astonished by all this commotion around them. The building of a canal across their land made them strangers in their own place, this raw bank of earth shutting them off disconcerted them. As they worked in the fields, from beyond the now familiar embankment came the rhythmic run of the winding engines, startling at first, but afterwards a narcotic to the brain. Then the shrill whistle of the trains re-echoed through the heart, with fearsome pleasure, announcing the far-off come near and imminent.

As they drove home from town, the farmers of the land met the blackened

colliers trooping from the pit-mouth. As they gathered the harvest, the west wind brought a faint, sulphurous smell of pit-refuse burning. As they pulled the turnips in November, the sharp clink-clink-clink-clink-clink of empty trucks shunting on the line, vibrated in their hearts with the fact of other activity going on beyond them.

The Alfred Brangwen of this period had married a woman from Heanor, a daughter of the "Black Horse". She was a slim, pretty, dark woman, quaint in her speech, whimsical, so that the sharp things she said did not hurt. She was oddly a thing to herself, rather querulous in her manner, but intrinsically separate and indifferent, so that her long lamentable complaints, when she raised her voice against her husband in particular and against everybody else after him, only made those who heard her wonder and feel affectionately towards her, even while they were irritated and impatient with her. She railed long and loud about her husband, but always with a balanced, easy-flying voice and a quaint manner of speech that warmed his belly with pride and male triumph while he scowled with mortification at the things she said.

Consequently Brangwen himself had a humorous puckering at the eyes, a sort of fat laugh, very quiet and full, and he was spoilt like a lord of creation. He calmly did as he liked, laughed at their railing, excused himself in a teasing tone that she loved, followed his natural inclinations, and sometimes, pricked too near the quick, frightened and broke her by a deep, tense fury which seemed to fix on him and hold him for days, and which she would give anything to placate in him. They were two very separate beings, vitally connected, knowing nothing of each other, yet living in their separate ways from one root.

There were four sons and two daughters. The eldest boy ran away early to sea, and did not come back. After this the mother was more the node and centre of attraction in the home. The second boy, Alfred, whom the mother admired most, was the most reserved. He was sent to school in Ilkeston and made some progress. But in spite of his dogged, yearning effort, he could not get beyond the rudiments of anything, save of drawing. At this, in which he had some power, he worked, as if it were his hope. After much grumbling and savage rebellion against everything, after much trying and shifting about, when his father was incensed against him and his mother almost despairing, he became a draughtsman in a lace-factory in Nottingham.

He remained heavy and somewhat uncouth, speaking with broad Derbyshire accent, adhering with all his tenacity to his work and to his town position, making good designs, and becoming fairly well-off. But at drawing, his hand swung naturally in big, bold lines, rather lax, so that it was cruel for him to pedgill away at the lace designing, working from the tiny squares of his paper,

counting and plotting and niggling. He did it stubbornly, with anguish, crushing the bowels within him, adhering to his chosen lot whatever it should cost. And he came back into life set and rigid, a rare-spoken, almost surly man.

He married the daughter of a chemist, who affected some social superiority, and he became something of a snob, in his dogged fashion, with a passion for outward refinement in the household, mad when anything clumsy or gross occurred. Later, when his three children were growing up, and he seemed a staid, almost middle-aged man, he turned after strange women, and became a silent, inscrutable follower of forbidden pleasure, neglecting his indignant bourgeois wife without a qualm.

Frank, the third son, refused from the first to have anything to do with learning. From the first he hung round the slaughter-house which stood away in the third yard at the back of the farm. The Brangwens had always killed their own meat, and supplied the neighbourhood. Out of this grew a regular butcher's business in connection with the farm.

As a child Frank had been drawn by the trickle of dark blood that ran across the pavement from the slaughter-house to the crew-yard, by the sight of the man carrying across to the meat-shed a huge side of beef, with the kidneys showing, embedded in their heavy laps of fat.

He was a handsome lad with soft brown hair and regular features something like a later Roman youth. He was more easily excitable, more readily carried away than the rest, weaker in character. At eighteen he married a little factory girl, a pale, plump, quiet thing with sly eyes and a wheedling voice, who insinuated herself into him and bore him a child every year and made a fool of him. When he had taken over the butchery business, already a growing callousness to it, and a sort of contempt made him neglectful of it. He drank, and was often to be found in his public house blathering away as if he knew everything, when in reality he was a noisy fool.

Of the daughters, Alice, the elder, married a collier and lived for a time stormily in Ilkeston, before moving away to Yorkshire with her numerous young family. Effie, the younger, remained at home.

The last child, Tom, was considerably younger than his brothers, so had belonged rather to the company of his sisters. He was his mother's favourite. She roused herself to determination, and sent him forcibly away to a grammar-school in Derby when he was twelve years old. He did not want to go, and his father would have given way, but Mrs. Brangwen had set her heart on it. Her slender, pretty, tightly-covered body, with full skirts, was now the centre of resolution in the house, and when she had once set upon anything, which was not often, the family failed before her.

So Tom went to school, an unwilling failure from the first. He believed his mother was right in decreeing school for him, but he knew she was only right because she would not acknowledge his constitution. He knew, with a child's deep, instinctive foreknowledge of what is going to happen to him, that he would cut a sorry figure at school. But he took the infliction as inevitable, as if he were guilty of his own nature, as if his being were wrong, and his mother's conception right. If he could have been what he liked, he would have been that which his mother fondly but deludedly hoped he was. He would have been clever, and capable of becoming a gentleman. It was her aspiration for him, therefore he knew it as the true aspiration for any boy. But you can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear, as he told his mother very early, with regard to himself; much to her mortification and chagrin.

When he got to school, he made a violent struggle against his physical inability to study. He sat gripped, making himself pale and ghastly in his effort to concentrate on the book, to take in what he had to learn. But it was no good. If he beat down his first repulsion, and got like a suicide to the stuff, he went very little further. He could not learn deliberately. His mind simply did not work.

In feeling he was developed, sensitive to the atmosphere around him, brutal perhaps, but at the same time delicate, very delicate. So he had a low opinion of himself. He knew his own limitation. He knew that his brain was a slow hopeless good-for-nothing. So he was humble.

But at the same time his feelings were more discriminating than those of most of the boys, and he was confused. He was more sensuously developed, more refined in instinct than they. For their mechanical stupidity he hated them, and suffered cruel contempt for them. But when it came to mental things, then he was at a disadvantage. He was at their mercy. He was a fool. He had not the power to controvert even the most stupid argument, so that he was forced to admit things he did not in the least believe. And having admitted them, he did not know whether he believed them or not; he rather thought he did.

But he loved anyone who could convey enlightenment to him through feeling. He sat betrayed with emotion when the teacher of literature read, in a moving fashion, Tennyson's "Ulysses", or Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind". His lips parted, his eyes filled with a strained, almost suffering light. And the teacher read on, fired by his power over the boy. Tom Brangwen was moved by this experience beyond all calculation, he almost dreaded it, it was so deep. But when, almost secretly and shamefully, he came to take the book himself, and began the words "Oh wild west wind, thou breath of autumn's being," the very fact of the print caused a prickly sensation of repulsion to go over his skin, the blood came to his face, his heart filled with a bursting passion of rage and

incompetence. He threw the book down and walked over it and went out to the cricket field. And he hated books as if they were his enemies. He hated them worse than ever he hated any person.

He could not voluntarily control his attention. His mind had no fixed habits to go by, he had nothing to get hold of, nowhere to start from. For him there was nothing palpable, nothing known in himself, that he could apply to learning. He did not know how to begin. Therefore he was helpless when it came to deliberate understanding or deliberate learning.

He had an instinct for mathematics, but if this failed him, he was helpless as an idiot. So that he felt that the ground was never sure under his feet, he was nowhere. His final downfall was his complete inability to attend to a question put without suggestion. If he had to write a formal composition on the Army, he did at last learn to repeat the few facts he knew: "You can join the army at eighteen. You have to be over five foot eight." But he had all the time a living conviction that this was a dodge and that his commonplaces were beneath contempt. Then he reddened furiously, felt his bowels sink with shame, scratched out what he had written, made an agonised effort to think of something in the real composition style, failed, became sullen with rage and humiliation, put the pen down and would have been torn to pieces rather than attempt to write another word.

He soon got used to the Grammar School, and the Grammar School got used to him, setting him down as a hopeless duffer at learning, but respecting him for a generous, honest nature. Only one narrow, domineering fellow, the Latin master, bullied him and made the blue eyes mad with shame and rage. There was a horrid scene, when the boy laid open the master's head with a slate, and then things went on as before. The teacher got little sympathy. But Brangwen winced and could not bear to think of the deed, not even long after, when he was a grown man.

He was glad to leave school. It had not been unpleasant, he had enjoyed the companionship of the other youths, or had thought he enjoyed it, the time had passed very quickly, in endless activity. But he knew all the time that he was in an ignominious position, in this place of learning. He was aware of failure all the while, of incapacity. But he was too healthy and sanguine to be wretched, he was too much alive. Yet his soul was wretched almost to hopelessness.

He had loved one warm, clever boy who was frail in body, a consumptive type. The two had had an almost classic friendship, David and Jonathan, wherein Brangwen was the Jonathan, the server. But he had never felt equal with his friend, because the other's mind outpaced his, and left him ashamed, far in the rear. So the two boys went at once apart on leaving school. But Brangwen

always remembered his friend that had been, kept him as a sort of light, a fine experience to remember.

Tom Brangwen was glad to get back to the farm, where he was in his own again. "I have got a turnip on my shoulders, let me stick to th' fallow," he said to his exasperated mother. He had too low an opinion of himself. But he went about at his work on the farm gladly enough, glad of the active labour and the smell of the land again, having youth and vigour and humour, and a comic wit, having the will and the power to forget his own shortcomings, finding himself violent with occasional rages, but usually on good terms with everybody and everything.

When he was seventeen, his father fell from a stack and broke his neck. Then the mother and son and daughter lived on at the farm, interrupted by occasional loud-mouthed lamenting, jealous-spirited visitations from the butcher Frank, who had a grievance against the world, which he felt was always giving him less than his dues. Frank was particularly against the young Tom, whom he called a mardy baby, and Tom returned the hatred violently, his face growing red and his blue eyes staring. Effie sided with Tom against Frank. But when Alfred came, from Nottingham, heavy jowled and lowering, speaking very little, but treating those at home with some contempt, Effie and the mother sided with him and put Tom into the shade. It irritated the youth that his elder brother should be made something of a hero by the women, just because he didn't live at home and was a lace-designer and almost a gentleman. But Alfred was something of a Prometheus Bound, so the women loved him. Tom came later to understand his brother better.

As youngest son, Tom felt some importance when the care of the farm devolved on to him. He was only eighteen, but he was quite capable of doing everything his father had done. And of course, his mother remained as centre to the house.

The young man grew up very fresh and alert, with zest for every moment of life. He worked and rode and drove to market, he went out with companions and got tipsy occasionally and played skittles and went to the little travelling theatres. Once, when he was drunk at a public house, he went upstairs with a prostitute who seduced him. He was then nineteen.

The thing was something of a shock to him. In the close intimacy of the farm kitchen, the woman occupied the supreme position. The men deferred to her in the house, on all household points, on all points of morality and behaviour. The woman was the symbol for that further life which comprised religion and love and morality. The men placed in her hands their own conscience, they said to her "Be my conscience-keeper, be the angel at the doorway guarding my outgoing and my incoming." And the woman fulfilled her trust, the men rested implicitly

in her, receiving her praise or her blame with pleasure or with anger, rebelling and storming, but never for a moment really escaping in their own souls from her prerogative. They depended on her for their stability. Without her, they would have felt like straws in the wind, to be blown hither and thither at random. She was the anchor and the security, she was the restraining hand of God, at times highly to be execrated.

Now when Tom Brangwen, at nineteen, a youth fresh like a plant, rooted in his mother and his sister, found that he had lain with a prostitute woman in a common public house, he was very much startled. For him there was until that time only one kind of woman-his mother and sister.

But now? He did not know what to feel. There was a slight wonder, a pang of anger, of disappointment, a first taste of ash and of cold fear lest this was all that would happen, lest his relations with woman were going to be no more than this nothingness; there was a slight sense of shame before the prostitute, fear that she would despise him for his inefficiency; there was a cold distaste for her, and a fear of her; there was a moment of paralysed horror when he felt he might have taken a disease from her; and upon all this startled tumult of emotion, was laid the steadying hand of common sense, which said it did not matter very much, so long as he had no disease. He soon recovered balance, and really it did not matter so very much.

But it had shocked him, and put a mistrust into his heart, and emphasised his fear of what was within himself. He was, however, in a few days going about again in his own careless, happy-go-lucky fashion, his blue eyes just as clear and honest as ever, his face just as fresh, his appetite just as keen.

Or apparently so. He had, in fact, lost some of his buoyant confidence, and doubt hindered his outgoing.

For some time after this, he was quieter, more conscious when he drank, more backward from companionship. The disillusion of his first carnal contact with woman, strengthened by his innate desire to find in a woman the embodiment of all his inarticulate, powerful religious impulses, put a bit in his mouth. He had something to lose which he was afraid of losing, which he was not sure even of possessing. This first affair did not matter much: but the business of love was, at the bottom of his soul, the most serious and terrifying of all to him.

He was tormented now with sex desire, his imagination reverted always to lustful scenes. But what really prevented his returning to a loose woman, over and above the natural squeamishness, was the recollection of the paucity of the last experience. It had been so nothing, so dribbling and functional, that he was ashamed to expose himself to the risk of a repetition of it.

He made a strong, instinctive fight to retain his native cheerfulness

unimpaired. He had naturally a plentiful stream of life and humour, a sense of sufficiency and exuberance, giving ease. But now it tended to cause tension. A strained light came into his eyes, he had a slight knitting of the brows. His boisterous humour gave place to lowering silences, and days passed by in a sort of suspense.

He did not know there was any difference in him, exactly; for the most part he was filled with slow anger and resentment. But he knew he was always thinking of women, or a woman, day in, day out, and that infuriated him. He could not get free: and he was ashamed. He had one or two sweethearts, starting with them in the hope of speedy development. But when he had a nice girl, he found that he was incapable of pushing the desired development. The very presence of the girl beside him made it impossible. He could not think of her like that, he could not think of her actual nakedness. She was a girl and he liked her, and dreaded violently even the thought of uncovering her. He knew that, in these last issues of nakedness, he did not exist to her nor she to him. Again, if he had a loose girl, and things began to develop, she offended him so deeply all the time, that he never knew whether he was going to get away from her as quickly as possible, or whether he were going to take her out of inflamed necessity. Again he learnt his lesson: if he took her it was a paucity which he was forced to despise. He did not despise himself nor the girl. But he despised the net result in him of the experience—he despised it deeply and bitterly.

Then, when he was twenty-three, his mother died, and he was left at home with Effie. His mother's death was another blow out of the dark. He could not understand it, he knew it was no good his trying. One had to submit to these unforeseen blows that come unawares and leave a bruise that remains and hurts whenever it is touched. He began to be afraid of all that which was up against him. He had loved his mother.

After this, Effie and he quarrelled fiercely. They meant a very great deal to each other, but they were both under a strange, unnatural tension. He stayed out of the house as much as possible. He got a special corner for himself at the "Red Lion" at Cossethay, and became a usual figure by the fire, a fresh, fair young fellow with heavy limbs and head held back, mostly silent, though alert and attentive, very hearty in his greeting of everybody he knew, shy of strangers. He teased all the women, who liked him extremely, and he was very attentive to the talk of the men, very respectful.

To drink made him quickly flush very red in the face, and brought out the look of self-consciousness and unsureness, almost bewilderment, in his blue eyes. When he came home in this state of tipsy confusion his sister hated him and abused him, and he went off his head, like a mad bull with rage.

He had still another turn with a light-o'-love. One Whitsuntide he went a jaunt with two other young fellows, on horseback, to Matlock and thence to Bakewell. Matlock was at that time just becoming a famous beauty-spot, visited from Manchester and from the Staffordshire towns. In the hotel where the young men took lunch, were two girls, and the parties struck up a friendship.

The Miss who made up to Tom Brangwen, then twenty-four years old, was a handsome, reckless girl neglected for an afternoon by the man who had brought her out. She saw Brangwen and liked him, as all women did, for his warmth and his generous nature, and for the innate delicacy in him. But she saw he was one who would have to be brought to the scratch. However, she was roused and unsatisfied and made mischievous, so she dared anything. It would be an easy interlude, restoring her pride.

She was a handsome girl with a bosom, and dark hair and blue eyes, a girl full of easy laughter, flushed from the sun, inclined to wipe her laughing face in a very natural and taking manner.

Brangwen was in a state of wonder. He treated her with his chaffing deference, roused, but very unsure of himself, afraid to death of being too forward, ashamed lest he might be thought backward, mad with desire yet restrained by instinctive regard for women from making any definite approach, feeling all the while that his attitude was ridiculous, and flushing deep with confusion. She, however, became hard and daring as he became confused, it amused her to see him come on.

"When must you get back?" she asked.

"I'm not particular," he said.

There the conversation again broke down.

Brangwen's companions were ready to go on.

"Art commin', Tom," they called, "or art for stoppin'?"

"Ay, I'm commin'," he replied, rising reluctantly, an angry sense of futility and disappointment spreading over him.

He met the full, almost taunting look of the girl, and he trembled with unusedness.

"Shall you come an' have a look at my mare," he said to her, with his hearty kindness that was now shaken with trepidation.

"Oh, I should like to," she said, rising.

And she followed him, his rather sloping shoulders and his cloth riding-gaiters, out of the room. The young men got their own horses out of the stable.

"Can you ride?" Brangwen asked her.

"I should like to if I could-I have never tried," she said.

"Come then, an' have a try," he said.

And he lifted her, he blushing, she laughing, into the saddle.

"I s'll slip off-it's not a lady's saddle," she cried.

"Hold yer tight," he said, and he led her out of the hotel gate.

The girl sat very insecurely, clinging fast. He put a hand on her waist, to support her. And he held her closely, he clasped her as in an embrace, he was weak with desire as he strode beside her.

The horse walked by the river.

"You want to sit straddle-leg," he said to her.

"I know I do," she said.

It was the time of very full skirts. She managed to get astride the horse, quite decently, showing an intent concern for covering her pretty leg.

"It's a lot's better this road," she said, looking down at him.

"Ay, it is," he said, feeling the marrow melt in his bones from the look in her eyes. "I dunno why they have that side-saddle business, twistin' a woman in two."

"Should us leave you then-you seem to be fixed up there?" called Brangwen's companions from the road.

He went red with anger.

"Ay-don't worry," he called back.

"How long are yer stoppin'?" they asked.

"Not after Christmas," he said.

And the girl gave a tinkling peal of laughter.

"All right-by-bye!" called his friends.

And they cantered off, leaving him very flushed, trying to be quite normal with the girl. But presently he had gone back to the hotel and given his horse into the charge of an ostler and had gone off with the girl into the woods, not quite knowing where he was or what he was doing. His heart thumped and he thought it the most glorious adventure, and was mad with desire for the girl.

Afterwards he glowed with pleasure. By Jove, but that was something like! He stayed the afternoon with the girl, and wanted to stay the night. She, however, told him this was impossible: her own man would be back by dark, and she must be with him. He, Brangwen, must not let on that there had been anything between them.

She gave him an intimate smile, which made him feel confused and gratified.

He could not tear himself away, though he had promised not to interfere with the girl. He stayed on at the hotel over night. He saw the other fellow at the evening meal: a small, middle-aged man with iron-grey hair and a curious face, like a monkey's, but interesting, in its way almost beautiful. Brangwen guessed that he was a foreigner. He was in company with another, an Englishman, dry

and hard. The four sat at table, two men and two women. Brangwen watched with all his eyes.

He saw how the foreigner treated the women with courteous contempt, as if they were pleasing animals. Brangwen's girl had put on a ladylike manner, but her voice betrayed her. She wanted to win back her man. When dessert came on, however, the little foreigner turned round from his table and calmly surveyed the room, like one unoccupied. Brangwen marvelled over the cold, animal intelligence of the face. The brown eyes were round, showing all the brown pupil, like a monkey's, and just calmly looking, perceiving the other person without referring to him at all. They rested on Brangwen. The latter marvelled at the old face turned round on him, looking at him without considering it necessary to know him at all. The eyebrows of the round, perceiving, but unconcerned eyes were rather high up, with slight wrinkles above them, just as a monkey's had. It was an old, ageless face.

The man was most amazingly a gentleman all the time, an aristocrat. Brangwen stared fascinated. The girl was pushing her crumbs about on the cloth, uneasily, flushed and angry.

As Brangwen sat motionless in the hall afterwards, too much moved and lost to know what to do, the little stranger came up to him with a beautiful smile and manner, offering a cigarette and saying:

“Will you smoke?”

Brangwen never smoked cigarettes, yet he took the one offered, fumbling painfully with thick fingers, blushing to the roots of his hair. Then he looked with his warm blue eyes at the almost sardonic, lidded eyes of the foreigner. The latter sat down beside him, and they began to talk, chiefly of horses.

Brangwen loved the other man for his exquisite graciousness, for his tact and reserve, and for his ageless, monkey-like self-surety. They talked of horses, and of Derbyshire, and of farming. The stranger warmed to the young fellow with real warmth, and Brangwen was excited. He was transported at meeting this odd, middle-aged, dry-skinned man, personally. The talk was pleasant, but that did not matter so much. It was the gracious manner, the fine contact that was all.

They talked a long while together, Brangwen flushing like a girl when the other did not understand his idiom. Then they said good night, and shook hands. Again the foreigner bowed and repeated his good night.

“Good night, and bon voyage.”

Then he turned to the stairs.

Brangwen went up to his room and lay staring out at the stars of the summer night, his whole being in a whirl. What was it all? There was a life so different from what he knew it. What was there outside his knowledge, how much? What

was this that he had touched? What was he in this new influence? What did everything mean? Where was life, in that which he knew or all outside him?

He fell asleep, and in the morning had ridden away before any other visitors were awake. He shrank from seeing any of them again, in the morning.

His mind was one big excitement. The girl and the foreigner: he knew neither of their names. Yet they had set fire to the homestead of his nature, and he would be burned out of cover. Of the two experiences, perhaps the meeting with the foreigner was the more significant. But the girl—he had not settled about the girl.

He did not know. He had to leave it there, as it was. He could not sum up his experiences.

The result of these encounters was, that he dreamed day and night, absorbedly, of a voluptuous woman and of the meeting with a small, withered foreigner of ancient breeding. No sooner was his mind free, no sooner had he left his own companions, than he began to imagine an intimacy with fine-textured, subtle-mannered people such as the foreigner at Matlock, and amidst this subtle intimacy was always the satisfaction of a voluptuous woman.

He went about absorbed in the interest and the actuality of this dream. His eyes glowed, he walked with his head up, full of the exquisite pleasure of aristocratic subtlety and grace, tormented with the desire for the girl.

Then gradually the glow began to fade, and the cold material of his customary life to show through. He resented it. Was he cheated in his illusion? He balked the mean enclosure of reality, stood stubbornly like a bull at a gate, refusing to re-enter the well-known round of his own life.

He drank more than usual to keep up the glow. But it faded more and more for all that. He set his teeth at the commonplace, to which he would not submit. It resolved itself starkly before him, for all that.

He wanted to marry, to get settled somehow, to get out of the quandary he found himself in. But how? He felt unable to move his limbs. He had seen a little creature caught in bird-lime, and the sight was a nightmare to him. He began to feel mad with the rage of impotency.

He wanted something to get hold of, to pull himself out. But there was nothing. Steadfastly he looked at the young women, to find a one he could marry. But not one of them did he want. And he knew that the idea of a life among such people as the foreigner was ridiculous.

Yet he dreamed of it, and stuck to his dreams, and would not have the reality of Cossethay and Ilkeston. There he sat stubbornly in his corner at the “Red Lion”, smoking and musing and occasionally lifting his beer-pot, and saying nothing, for all the world like a gorging farm-labourer, as he said himself.

Then a fever of restless anger came upon him. He wanted to go away-right

away. He dreamed of foreign parts. But somehow he had no contact with them. And it was a very strong root which held him to the Marsh, to his own house and land.

Then Effie got married, and he was left in the house with only Tilly, the cross-eyed woman-servant who had been with them for fifteen years. He felt things coming to a close. All the time, he had held himself stubbornly resistant to the action of the commonplace unreality which wanted to absorb him. But now he had to do something.

He was by nature temperate. Being sensitive and emotional, his nausea prevented him from drinking too much.

But, in futile anger, with the greatest of determination and apparent good humour, he began to drink in order to get drunk. "Damn it," he said to himself, "you must have it one road or another-you can't hitch your horse to the shadow of a gate-post-if you've got legs you've got to rise off your backside some time or other."

So he rose and went down to Ilkeston, rather awkwardly took his place among a gang of young bloods, stood drinks to the company, and discovered he could carry it off quite well. He had an idea that everybody in the room was a man after his own heart, that everything was glorious, everything was perfect. When somebody in alarm told him his coat pocket was on fire, he could only beam from a red, blissful face and say "Iss-all-ri-ight-iss-al'-ri-ight-it's a' right-let it be, let it be-" and he laughed with pleasure, and was rather indignant that the others should think it unnatural for his coat pocket to burn:-it was the happiest and most natural thing in the world-what?

He went home talking to himself and to the moon, that was very high and small, stumbling at the flashes of moonlight from the puddles at his feet, wondering What the Hanover! then laughing confidently to the moon, assuring her this was first class, this was.

In the morning he woke up and thought about it, and for the first time in his life, knew what it was to feel really acutely irritable, in a misery of real bad temper. After bawling and snarling at Tilly, he took himself off for very shame, to be alone. And looking at the ashen fields and the putty roads, he wondered what in the name of Hell he could do to get out of this prickly sense of disgust and physical repulsion. And he knew that this was the result of his glorious evening.

And his stomach did not want any more brandy. He went doggedly across the fields with his terrier, and looked at everything with a jaundiced eye.

The next evening found him back again in his place at the "Red Lion", moderate and decent. There he sat and stubbornly waited for what would happen

next.

Did he, or did he not believe that he belonged to this world of Cossethay and Ilkeston? There was nothing in it he wanted. Yet could he ever get out of it? Was there anything in himself that would carry him out of it? Or was he a dunderheaded baby, not man enough to be like the other young fellows who drank a good deal and wenched a little without any question, and were satisfied.

He went on stubbornly for a time. Then the strain became too great for him. A hot, accumulated consciousness was always awake in his chest, his wrists felt swelled and quivering, his mind became full of lustful images, his eyes seemed blood-flushed. He fought with himself furiously, to remain normal. He did not seek any woman. He just went on as if he were normal. Till he must either take some action or beat his head against the wall.

Then he went deliberately to Ilkeston, in silence, intent and beaten. He drank to get drunk. He gulped down the brandy, and more brandy, till his face became pale, his eyes burning. And still he could not get free. He went to sleep in drunken unconsciousness, woke up at four o'clock in the morning and continued drinking. He would get free. Gradually the tension in him began to relax. He began to feel happy. His riveted silence was unfastened, he began to talk and babble. He was happy and at one with all the world, he was united with all flesh in a hot blood-relationship. So, after three days of incessant brandy-drinking, he had burned out the youth from his blood, he had achieved this kindled state of oneness with all the world, which is the end of youth's most passionate desire. But he had achieved his satisfaction by obliterating his own individuality, that which it depended on his manhood to preserve and develop.

So he became a bout-drinker, having at intervals these bouts of three or four days of brandy-drinking, when he was drunk for the whole time. He did not think about it. A deep resentment burned in him. He kept aloof from any women, antagonistic.

When he was twenty-eight, a thick-limbed, stiff, fair man with fresh complexion, and blue eyes staring very straight ahead, he was coming one day down from Cossethay with a load of seed out of Nottingham. It was a time when he was getting ready for another bout of drinking, so he stared fixedly before him, watchful yet absorbed, seeing everything and aware of nothing, coiled in himself. It was early in the year.

He walked steadily beside the horse, the load clanked behind as the hill descended steeper. The road curved down-hill before him, under banks and hedges, seen only for a few yards ahead.

Slowly turning the curve at the steepest part of the slope, his horse britching between the shafts, he saw a woman approaching. But he was thinking for the

moment of the horse.

Then he turned to look at her. She was dressed in black, was apparently rather small and slight, beneath her long black cloak, and she wore a black bonnet. She walked hastily, as if unseeing, her head rather forward. It was her curious, absorbed, flitting motion, as if she were passing unseen by everybody, that first arrested him.

She had heard the cart, and looked up. Her face was pale and clear, she had thick dark eyebrows and a wide mouth, curiously held. He saw her face clearly, as if by a light in the air. He saw her face so distinctly, that he ceased to coil on himself, and was suspended.

“That’s her,” he said involuntarily. As the cart passed by, splashing through the thin mud, she stood back against the bank. Then, as he walked still beside his britching horse, his eyes met hers. He looked quickly away, pressing back his head, a pain of joy running through him. He could not bear to think of anything.

He turned round at the last moment. He saw her bonnet, her shape in the black cloak, the movement as she walked. Then she was gone round the bend.

She had passed by. He felt as if he were walking again in a far world, not Cossethay, a far world, the fragile reality. He went on, quiet, suspended, rarefied. He could not bear to think or to speak, nor make any sound or sign, nor change his fixed motion. He could scarcely bear to think of her face. He moved within the knowledge of her, in the world that was beyond reality.

The feeling that they had exchanged recognition possessed him like a madness, like a torment. How could he be sure, what confirmation had he? The doubt was like a sense of infinite space, a nothingness, annihilating. He kept within his breast the will to surety. They had exchanged recognition.

He walked about in this state for the next few days. And then again like a mist it began to break to let through the common, barren world. He was very gentle with man and beast, but he dreaded the starkness of disillusion cropping through again.

As he was standing with his back to the fire after dinner a few days later, he saw the woman passing. He wanted to know that she knew him, that she was aware. He wanted it said that there was something between them. So he stood anxiously watching, looking at her as she went down the road. He called to Tilly.

“Who might that be?” he asked.

Tilly, the cross-eyed woman of forty, who adored him, ran gladly to the window to look. She was glad when he asked her for anything. She craned her head over the short curtain, the little tight knob of her black hair sticking out pathetically as she bobbed about.

“Oh why”-she lifted her head and peered with her twisted, keen brown

eyes—"why, you know who it is-it's her from th' vicarage-you know-"

"How do I know, you hen-bird," he shouted.

Tilly blushed and drew her neck in and looked at him with her squinting, sharp, almost reproachful look.

"Why you do-it's the new housekeeper."

"Ay-an' what by that?"

"Well, an' what by that?" rejoined the indignant Tilly.

"She's a woman, isn't she, housekeeper or no housekeeper? She's got more to her than that! Who is she-she's got a name?"

"Well, if she has, I don't know," retorted Tilly, not to be badgered by this lad who had grown up into a man.

"What's her name?" he asked, more gently.

"I'm sure I couldn't tell you," replied Tilly, on her dignity.

"An' is that all as you've gathered, as she's housekeeping at the vicarage?"

"I've 'eered mention of 'er name, but I couldn't remember it for my life."

"Why, yer riddle-skulled woman o' nonsense, what have you got a head for?"

"For what other folks 'as got theirs for," retorted Tilly, who loved nothing more than these tilts when he would call her names.

There was a lull.

"I don't believe as anybody could keep it in their head," the woman-servant continued, tentatively.

"What?" he asked.

"Why, 'er name."

"How's that?"

"She's fra some foreign parts or other."

"Who told you that?"

"That's all I do know, as she is."

"An' wheer do you reckon she's from, then?"

"I don't know. They do say as she hails fra th' Pole. I don't know," Tilly hastened to add, knowing he would attack her.

"Fra th' Pole, why do you hail fra th' Pole? Who set up that menagerie confabulation?"

"That's what they say-I don't know-"

"Who says?"

"Mrs. Bentley says as she's fra th' Pole-else she is a Pole, or summat."

Tilly was only afraid she was landing herself deeper now.

"Who says she's a Pole?"

"They all say so."

"Then what's brought her to these parts?"

“I couldn’t tell you. She’s got a little girl with her.”

“Got a little girl with her?”

“Of three or four, with a head like a fuzz-ball.”

“Black?”

“White-fair as can be, an’ all of a fuzz.”

“Is there a father, then?”

“Not to my knowledge. I don’t know.”

“What brought her here?”

“I couldn’t say, without th’ vicar axed her.”

“Is the child her child?”

“I s’d think so-they say so.”

“Who told you about her?”

“Why, Lizzie-a-Monday-we seed her goin’ past.”

“You’d have to be rattling your tongues if anything went past.”

Brangwen stood musing. That evening he went up to Cossethay to the “Red Lion”, half with the intention of hearing more.

She was the widow of a Polish doctor, he gathered. Her husband had died, a refugee, in London. She spoke a bit foreign-like, but you could easily make out what she said. She had one little girl named Anna. Lensky was the woman’s name, Mrs. Lensky.

Brangwen felt that here was the unreality established at last. He felt also a curious certainty about her, as if she were destined to him. It was to him a profound satisfaction that she was a foreigner.

A swift change had taken place on the earth for him, as if a new creation were fulfilled, in which he had real existence. Things had all been stark, unreal, barren, mere nullities before. Now they were actualities that he could handle.

He dared scarcely think of the woman. He was afraid. Only all the time he was aware of her presence not far off, he lived in her. But he dared not know her, even acquaint himself with her by thinking of her.

One day he met her walking along the road with her little girl. It was a child with a face like a bud of apple-blossom, and glistening fair hair like thistle-down sticking out in straight, wild, flamy pieces, and very dark eyes. The child clung jealously to her mother’s side when he looked at her, staring with resentful black eyes. But the mother glanced at him again, almost vacantly. And the very vacancy of her look inflamed him. She had wide grey-brown eyes with very dark, fathomless pupils. He felt the fine flame running under his skin, as if all his veins had caught fire on the surface. And he went on walking without knowledge.

It was coming, he knew, his fate. The world was submitting to its

transformation. He made no move: it would come, what would come.

When his sister Effie came to the Marsh for a week, he went with her for once to church. In the tiny place, with its mere dozen pews, he sat not far from the stranger. There was a fineness about her, a poignancy about the way she sat and held her head lifted. She was strange, from far off, yet so intimate. She was from far away, a presence, so close to his soul. She was not really there, sitting in Cossethay church beside her little girl. She was not living the apparent life of her days. She belonged to somewhere else. He felt it poignantly, as something real and natural. But a pang of fear for his own concrete life, that was only Cossethay, hurt him, and gave him misgiving.

Her thick dark brows almost met above her irregular nose, she had a wide, rather thick mouth. But her face was lifted to another world of life: not to heaven or death: but to some place where she still lived, in spite of her body's absence.

The child beside her watched everything with wide, black eyes. She had an odd little defiant look, her little red mouth was pinched shut. She seemed to be jealously guarding something, to be always on the alert for defence. She met Brangwen's near, vacant, intimate gaze, and a palpitating hostility, almost like a flame of pain, came into the wide, over-conscious dark eyes.

The old clergyman droned on, Cossethay sat unmoved as usual. And there was the foreign woman with a foreign air about her, inviolate, and the strange child, also foreign, jealously guarding something.

When the service was over, he walked in the way of another existence out of the church. As he went down the churchpath with his sister, behind the woman and child, the little girl suddenly broke from her mother's hand, and slipped back with quick, almost invisible movement, and was picking at something almost under Brangwen's feet. Her tiny fingers were fine and quick, but they missed the red button.

"Have you found something?" said Brangwen to her.

And he also stooped for the button. But she had got it, and she stood back with it pressed against her little coat, her black eyes flaring at him, as if to forbid him to notice her. Then, having silenced him, she turned with a swift "Mother-," and was gone down the path.

The mother had stood watching impassive, looking not at the child, but at Brangwen. He became aware of the woman looking at him, standing there isolated yet for him dominant in her foreign existence.

He did not know what to do, and turned to his sister. But the wide grey eyes, almost vacant yet so moving, held him beyond himself.

"Mother, I may have it, mayn't I?" came the child's proud, silvery tones. "Mother"-she seemed always to be calling her mother to remember

her-"mother"-and she had nothing to continue now her mother had replied "Yes, my child." But, with ready invention, the child stumbled and ran on, "What are those people's names?"

Brangwen heard the abstract:

"I don't know, dear."

He went on down the road as if he were not living inside himself, but somewhere outside.

"Who was that person?" his sister Effie asked.

"I couldn't tell you," he answered unknowing.

"She's somebody very funny," said Effie, almost in condemnation. "That child's like one bewitched."

"Bewitched-how bewitched?" he repeated.

"You can see for yourself. The mother's plain, I must say-but the child is like a changeling. She'd be about thirty-five."

But he took no notice. His sister talked on.

"There's your woman for you," she continued. "You'd better marry her." But still he took no notice. Things were as they were.

Another day, at tea-time, as he sat alone at table, there came a knock at the front door. It startled him like a portent. No one ever knocked at the front door. He rose and began slotting back the bolts, turning the big key. When he had opened the door, the strange woman stood on the threshold.

"Can you give me a pound of butter?" she asked, in a curious detached way of one speaking a foreign language.

He tried to attend to her question. She was looking at him questioningly. But underneath the question, what was there, in her very standing motionless, which affected him?

He stepped aside and she at once entered the house, as if the door had been opened to admit her. That startled him. It was the custom for everybody to wait on the doorstep till asked inside. He went into the kitchen and she followed.

His tea-things were spread on the scrubbed deal table, a big fire was burning, a dog rose from the hearth and went to her. She stood motionless just inside the kitchen.

"Tilly," he called loudly, "have we got any butter?"

The stranger stood there like a silence in her black cloak.

"Eh?" came the shrill cry from the distance.

He shouted his question again.

"We've got what's on t' table," answered Tilly's shrill voice out of the dairy.

Brangwen looked at the table. There was a large pat of butter on a plate, almost a pound. It was round, and stamped with acorns and oak-leaves.

“Can’t you come when you’re wanted?” he shouted.

“Why, what d’you want?” Tilly protested, as she came peeking inquisitively through the other door.

She saw the strange woman, stared at her with cross-eyes, but said nothing.

“Haven’t we any butter?” asked Brangwen again, impatiently, as if he could command some by his question.

“I tell you there’s what’s on t’ table,” said Tilly, impatient that she was unable to create any to his demand. “We haven’t a morsel besides.”

There was a moment’s silence.

The stranger spoke, in her curiously distinct, detached manner of one who must think her speech first.

“Oh, then thank you very much. I am sorry that I have come to trouble you.”

She could not understand the entire lack of manners, was slightly puzzled. Any politeness would have made the situation quite impersonal. But here it was a case of wills in confusion. Brangwen flushed at her polite speech. Still he did not let her go.

“Get summat an’ wrap that up for her,” he said to Tilly, looking at the butter on the table.

And taking a clean knife, he cut off that side of the butter where it was touched.

His speech, the “for her”, penetrated slowly into the foreign woman and angered Tilly.

“Vicar has his butter fra Brown’s by rights,” said the insuppressible servant-woman. “We s’ll be churnin’ to-morrow mornin’ first thing.”

“Yes”-the long-drawn foreign yes-“yes,” said the Polish woman, “I went to Mrs. Brown’s. She hasn’t any more.”

Tilly bridled her head, bursting to say that, according to the etiquette of people who bought butter, it was no sort of manners whatever coming to a place cool as you like and knocking at the front door asking for a pound as a stop-gap while your other people were short. If you go to Brown’s you go to Brown’s, an’ my butter isn’t just to make shift when Brown’s has got none.

Brangwen understood perfectly this unspoken speech of Tilly’s. The Polish lady did not. And as she wanted butter for the vicar, and as Tilly was churning in the morning, she waited.

“Sluther up now,” said Brangwen loudly after this silence had resolved itself out; and Tilly disappeared through the inner door.

“I am afraid that I should not come, so,” said the stranger, looking at him enquiringly, as if referring to him for what it was usual to do.

He felt confused.

“How’s that?” he said, trying to be genial and being only protective.

“Do you — ?” she began deliberately. But she was not sure of her ground, and the conversation came to an end. Her eyes looked at him all the while, because she could not speak the language.

They stood facing each other. The dog walked away from her to him. He bent down to it.

“And how’s your little girl?” he asked.

“Yes, thank you, she is very well,” was the reply, a phrase of polite speech in a foreign language merely.

“Sit you down,” he said.

And she sat in a chair, her slim arms, coming through the slits of her cloak, resting on her lap.

“You’re not used to these parts,” he said, still standing on the hearthrug with his back to the fire, coatless, looking with curious directness at the woman. Her self-possession pleased him and inspired him, set him curiously free. It seemed to him almost brutal to feel so master of himself and of the situation.

Her eyes rested on him for a moment, questioning, as she thought of the meaning of his speech.

“No,” she said, understanding. “No-it is strange.”

“You find it middlin’ rough?” he said.

Her eyes waited on him, so that he should say it again.

“Our ways are rough to you,” he repeated.

“Yes-yes, I understand. Yes, it is different, it is strange. But I was in Yorkshire — ”

“Oh, well then,” he said, “it’s no worse here than what they are up there.”

She did not quite understand. His protective manner, and his sureness, and his intimacy, puzzled her. What did he mean? If he was her equal, why did he behave so without formality?

“No — ” she said, vaguely, her eyes resting on him.

She saw him fresh and naive, uncouth, almost entirely beyond relationship with her. Yet he was good-looking, with his fair hair and blue eyes full of energy, and with his healthy body that seemed to take equality with her. She watched him steadily. He was difficult for her to understand, warm, uncouth, and confident as he was, sure on his feet as if he did not know what it was to be unsure. What then was it that gave him this curious stability?

She did not know. She wondered. She looked round the room he lived in. It had a close intimacy that fascinated and almost frightened her. The furniture was old and familiar as old people, the whole place seemed so kin to him, as if it partook of his being, that she was uneasy.

“It is already a long time that you have lived in this house-yes?” she asked.

“I’ve always lived here,” he said.

“Yes-but your people-your family?”

“We’ve been here above two hundred years,” he said. Her eyes were on him all the time, wide-open and trying to grasp him. He felt that he was there for her.

“It is your own place, the house, the farm — ?”

“Yes,” he said. He looked down at her and met her look. It disturbed her. She did not know him. He was a foreigner, they had nothing to do with each other. Yet his look disturbed her to knowledge of him. He was so strangely confident and direct.

“You live quite alone?”

“Yes-if you call it alone?”

She did not understand. It seemed unusual to her. What was the meaning of it?

And whenever her eyes, after watching him for some time, inevitably met his, she was aware of a heat beating up over her consciousness. She sat motionless and in conflict. Who was this strange man who was at once so near to her? What was happening to her? Something in his young, warm-twinkling eyes seemed to assume a right to her, to speak to her, to extend her his protection. But how? Why did he speak to her? Why were his eyes so certain, so full of light and confident, waiting for no permission nor signal?

Tilly returned with a large loaf and found the two silent. At once he felt it incumbent on him to speak, now the serving-woman had come back.

“How old is your little girl?” he asked.

“Four years,” she replied.

“Her father hasn’t been dead long, then?” he asked.

“She was one year when he died.”

“Three years?”

“Yes, three years that he is dead-yes.”

Curiously quiet she was, almost abstracted, answering these questions. She looked at him again, with some maidenhood opening in her eyes. He felt he could not move, neither towards her nor away from her. Something about her presence hurt him, till he was almost rigid before her. He saw the girl’s wondering look rise in her eyes.

Tilly handed her the butter and she rose.

“Thank you very much,” she said. “How much is it?”

“We’ll make th’ vicar a present of it,” he said. “It’ll do for me goin’ to church.”

“It ‘ud look better of you if you went to church and took th’ money for your butter,” said Tilly, persistent in her claim to him.

“You’d have to put in, shouldn’t you?” he said.

“How much, please?” said the Polish woman to Tilly. Brangwen stood by and let be.

“Then, thank you very much,” she said.

“Bring your little girl down sometime to look at th’ fowls and horses,” he said, -“if she’d like it.”

“Yes, she would like it,” said the stranger.

And she went. Brangwen stood dimmed by her departure. He could not notice Tilly, who was looking at him uneasily, wanting to be reassured. He could not think of anything. He felt that he had made some invisible connection with the strange woman.

A daze had come over his mind, he had another centre of consciousness. In his breast, or in his bowels, somewhere in his body, there had started another activity. It was as if a strong light were burning there, and he was blind within it, unable to know anything, except that this transfiguration burned between him and her, connecting them, like a secret power.

Since she had come to the house he went about in a daze, scarcely seeing even the things he handled, drifting, quiescent, in a state of metamorphosis. He submitted to that which was happening to him, letting go his will, suffering the loss of himself, dormant always on the brink of ecstasy, like a creature evolving to a new birth.

She came twice with her child to the farm, but there was this lull between them, an intense calm and passivity like a torpor upon them, so that there was no active change took place. He was almost unaware of the child, yet by his native good humour he gained her confidence, even her affection, setting her on a horse to ride, giving her corn for the fowls.

Once he drove the mother and child from Ilkeston, picking them up on the road. The child huddled close to him as if for love, the mother sat very still. There was a vagueness, like a soft mist over all of them, and a silence as if their wills were suspended. Only he saw her hands, ungloved, folded in her lap, and he noticed the wedding-ring on her finger. It excluded him: it was a closed circle. It bound her life, the wedding-ring, it stood for her life in which he could have no part. Nevertheless, beyond all this, there was herself and himself which should meet.

As he helped her down from the trap, almost lifting her, he felt he had some right to take her thus between his hands. She belonged as yet to that other, to that which was behind. But he must care for her also. She was too living to be neglected.

Sometimes her vagueness, in which he was lost, made him angry, made him

rage. But he held himself still as yet. She had no response, no being towards him. It puzzled and enraged him, but he submitted for a long time. Then, from the accumulated troubling of her ignoring him, gradually a fury broke out, destructive, and he wanted to go away, to escape her.

It happened she came down to the Marsh with the child whilst he was in this state. Then he stood over against her, strong and heavy in his revolt, and though he said nothing, still she felt his anger and heavy impatience grip hold of her, she was shaken again as out of a torpor. Again her heart stirred with a quick, out-running impulse, she looked at him, at the stranger who was not a gentleman yet who insisted on coming into her life, and the pain of a new birth in herself strung all her veins to a new form. She would have to begin again, to find a new being, a new form, to respond to that blind, insistent figure standing over against her.

A shiver, a sickness of new birth passed over her, the flame leaped up him, under his skin. She wanted it, this new life from him, with him, yet she must defend herself against it, for it was a destruction.

As he worked alone on the land, or sat up with his ewes at lambing time, the facts and material of his daily life fell away, leaving the kernel of his purpose clean. And then it came upon him that he would marry her and she would be his life.

Gradually, even without seeing her, he came to know her. He would have liked to think of her as of something given into his protection, like a child without parents. But it was forbidden him. He had to come down from this pleasant view of the case. She might refuse him. And besides, he was afraid of her.

But during the long February nights with the ewes in labour, looking out from the shelter into the flashing stars, he knew he did not belong to himself. He must admit that he was only fragmentary, something incomplete and subject. There were the stars in the dark heaven travelling, the whole host passing by on some eternal voyage. So he sat small and submissive to the greater ordering.

Unless she would come to him, he must remain as a nothingness. It was a hard experience. But, after her repeated obliviousness to him, after he had seen so often that he did not exist for her, after he had raged and tried to escape, and said he was good enough by himself, he was a man, and could stand alone, he must, in the starry multiplicity of the night humble himself, and admit and know that without her he was nothing.

He was nothing. But with her, he would be real. If she were now walking across the frosty grass near the sheep-shelter, through the fretful bleating of the ewes and lambs, she would bring him completeness and perfection. And if it should be so, that she should come to him! It should be so-it was ordained so.

He was a long time resolving definitely to ask her to marry him. And he knew, if he asked her, she must really acquiesce. She must, it could not be otherwise.

He had learned a little of her. She was poor, quite alone, and had had a hard time in London, both before and after her husband died. But in Poland she was a lady well born, a landowner's daughter.

All these things were only words to him, the fact of her superior birth, the fact that her husband had been a brilliant doctor, the fact that he himself was her inferior in almost every way of distinction. There was an inner reality, a logic of the soul, which connected her with him.

One evening in March, when the wind was roaring outside, came the moment to ask her. He had sat with his hands before him, leaning to the fire. And as he watched the fire, he knew almost without thinking that he was going this evening.

"Have you got a clean shirt?" he asked Tilly.

"You know you've got clean shirts," she said.

"Ay,-bring me a white one."

Tilly brought down one of the linen shirts he had inherited from his father, putting it before him to air at the fire. She loved him with a dumb, aching love as he sat leaning with his arms on his knees, still and absorbed, unaware of her. Lately, a quivering inclination to cry had come over her, when she did anything for him in his presence. Now her hands trembled as she spread the shirt. He was never shouting and teasing now. The deep stillness there was in the house made her tremble.

He went to wash himself. Queer little breaks of consciousness seemed to rise and burst like bubbles out of the depths of his stillness.

"It's got to be done," he said as he stooped to take the shirt out of the fender, "it's got to be done, so why balk it?" And as he combed his hair before the mirror on the wall, he retorted to himself, superficially: "The woman's not speechless dumb. She's not clutterin' at the nipple. She's got the right to please herself, and displease whosoever she likes."

This streak of common sense carried him a little further.

"Did you want anythink?" asked Tilly, suddenly appearing, having heard him speak. She stood watching him comb his fair beard. His eyes were calm and uninterrupted.

"Ay," he said, "where have you put the scissors?"

She brought them to him, and stood watching as, chin forward, he trimmed his beard.

"Don't go an' crop yourself as if you was at a shearin' contest," she said, anxiously. He blew the fine-curved hair quickly off his lips.

He put on all clean clothes, folded his stock carefully, and donned his best coat. Then, being ready, as grey twilight was falling, he went across to the orchard to gather the daffodils. The wind was roaring in the apple trees, the yellow flowers swayed violently up and down, he heard even the fine whisper of their spears as he stooped to break the flattened, brittle stems of the flowers.

“What’s to-do?” shouted a friend who met him as he left the garden gate.

“Bit of courtin’, like,” said Brangwen.

And Tilly, in a great state of trepidation and excitement, let the wind whisk her over the field to the big gate, whence she could watch him go.

He went up the hill and on towards the vicarage, the wind roaring through the hedges, whilst he tried to shelter his bunch of daffodils by his side. He did not think of anything, only knew that the wind was blowing.

Night was falling, the bare trees drummed and whistled. The vicar, he knew, would be in his study, the Polish woman in the kitchen, a comfortable room, with her child. In the darkest of twilight, he went through the gate and down the path where a few daffodils stooped in the wind, and shattered crocuses made a pale, colourless ravel.

There was a light streaming on to the bushes at the back from the kitchen window. He began to hesitate. How could he do this? Looking through the window, he saw her seated in the rocking-chair with the child, already in its nightdress, sitting on her knee. The fair head with its wild, fierce hair was drooping towards the fire-warmth, which reflected on the bright cheeks and clear skin of the child, who seemed to be musing, almost like a grown-up person. The mother’s face was dark and still, and he saw, with a pang, that she was away back in the life that had been. The child’s hair gleamed like spun glass, her face was illuminated till it seemed like wax lit up from the inside. The wind boomed strongly. Mother and child sat motionless, silent, the child staring with vacant dark eyes into the fire, the mother looking into space. The little girl was almost asleep. It was her will which kept her eyes so wide.

Suddenly she looked round, troubled, as the wind shook the house, and Brangwen saw the small lips move. The mother began to rock, he heard the slight crunch of the rockers of the chair. Then he heard the low, monotonous murmur of a song in a foreign language. Then a great burst of wind, the mother seemed to have drifted away, the child’s eyes were black and dilated. Brangwen looked up at the clouds which packed in great, alarming haste across the dark sky.

Then there came the child’s high, complaining, yet imperative voice:

“Don’t sing that stuff, mother; I don’t want to hear it.”

The singing died away.

“You will go to bed,” said the mother.

He saw the clinging protest of the child, the unmoved farawayness of the mother, the clinging, grasping effort of the child. Then suddenly the clear childish challenge:

“I want you to tell me a story.”

The wind blew, the story began, the child nestled against the mother, Brangwen waited outside, suspended, looking at the wild waving of the trees in the wind and the gathering darkness. He had his fate to follow, he lingered there at the threshold.

The child crouched distinct and motionless, curled in against her mother, the eyes dark and unblinking among the keen wisps of hair, like a curled-up animal asleep but for the eyes. The mother sat as if in shadow, the story went on as if by itself. Brangwen stood outside seeing the night fall. He did not notice the passage of time. The hand that held the daffodils was fixed and cold.

The story came to an end, the mother rose at last, with the child clinging round her neck. She must be strong, to carry so large a child so easily. The little Anna clung round her mother’s neck. The fair, strange face of the child looked over the shoulder of the mother, all asleep but the eyes, and these, wide and dark, kept up the resistance and the fight with something unseen.

When they were gone, Brangwen stirred for the first time from the place where he stood, and looked round at the night. He wished it were really as beautiful and familiar as it seemed in these few moments of release. Along with the child, he felt a curious strain on him, a suffering, like a fate.

The mother came down again, and began folding the child’s clothes. He knocked. She opened wondering, a little bit at bay, like a foreigner, uneasy.

“Good evening,” he said. “I’ll just come in a minute.”

A change went quickly over her face; she was unprepared. She looked down at him as he stood in the light from the window, holding the daffodils, the darkness behind. In his black clothes she again did not know him. She was almost afraid.

But he was already stepping on to the threshold, and closing the door behind him. She turned into the kitchen, startled out of herself by this invasion from the night. He took off his hat, and came towards her. Then he stood in the light, in his black clothes and his black stock, hat in one hand and yellow flowers in the other. She stood away, at his mercy, snatched out of herself. She did not know him, only she knew he was a man come for her. She could only see the dark-clad man’s figure standing there upon her, and the gripped fist of flowers. She could not see the face and the living eyes.

He was watching her, without knowing her, only aware underneath of her presence.

“I come to have a word with you,” he said, striding forward to the table, laying down his hat and the flowers, which tumbled apart and lay in a loose heap. She had flinched from his advance. She had no will, no being. The wind boomed in the chimney, and he waited. He had disembarrassed his hands. Now he shut his fists.

He was aware of her standing there unknown, dread, yet related to him.

“I came up,” he said, speaking curiously matter-of-fact and level, “to ask if you’d marry me. You are free, aren’t you?”

There was a long silence, whilst his blue eyes, strangely impersonal, looked into her eyes to seek an answer to the truth. He was looking for the truth out of her. And she, as if hypnotised, must answer at length.

“Yes, I am free to marry.”

The expression of his eyes changed, became less impersonal, as if he were looking almost at her, for the truth of her. Steady and intent and eternal they were, as if they would never change. They seemed to fix and to resolve her. She quivered, feeling herself created, will-less, lapsing into him, into a common will with him.

“You want me?” she said.

A pallor came over his face.

“Yes,” he said.

Still there was no response and silence.

“No,” she said, not of herself. “No, I don’t know.”

He felt the tension breaking up in him, his fists slackened, he was unable to move. He stood there looking at her, helpless in his vague collapse. For the moment she had become unreal to him. Then he saw her come to him, curiously direct and as if without movement, in a sudden flow. She put her hand to his coat.

“Yes I want to,” she said, impersonally, looking at him with wide, candid, newly-opened eyes, opened now with supreme truth. He went very white as he stood, and did not move, only his eyes were held by hers, and he suffered. She seemed to see him with her newly-opened, wide eyes, almost of a child, and with a strange movement, that was agony to him, she reached slowly forward her dark face and her breast to him, with a slow insinuation of a kiss that made something break in his brain, and it was darkness over him for a few moments.

He had her in his arms, and, obliterated, was kissing her. And it was sheer, bleached agony to him, to break away from himself. She was there so small and light and accepting in his arms, like a child, and yet with such an insinuation of embrace, of infinite embrace, that he could not bear it, he could not stand.

He turned and looked for a chair, and keeping her still in his arms, sat down

with her close to him, to his breast. Then, for a few seconds, he went utterly to sleep, asleep and sealed in the darkest sleep, utter, extreme oblivion.

From which he came to gradually, always holding her warm and close upon him, and she as utterly silent as he, involved in the same oblivion, the fecund darkness.

He returned gradually, but newly created, as after a gestation, a new birth, in the womb of darkness. Aerial and light everything was, new as a morning, fresh and newly-begun. Like a dawn the newness and the bliss filled in. And she sat utterly still with him, as if in the same.

Then she looked up at him, the wide, young eyes blazing with light. And he bent down and kissed her on the lips. And the dawn blazed in them, their new life came to pass, it was beyond all conceiving good, it was so good, that it was almost like a passing-away, a trespass. He drew her suddenly closer to him.

For soon the light began to fade in her, gradually, and as she was in his arms, her head sank, she leaned it against him, and lay still, with sunk head, a little tired, effaced because she was tired. And in her tiredness was a certain negation of him.

“There is the child,” she said, out of the long silence.

He did not understand. It was a long time since he had heard a voice. Now also he heard the wind roaring, as if it had just begun again.

“Yes,” he said, not understanding. There was a slight contraction of pain at his heart, a slight tension on his brows. Something he wanted to grasp and could not.

“You will love her?” she said.

The quick contraction, like pain, went over him again.

“I love her now,” he said.

She lay still against him, taking his physical warmth without heed. It was great confirmation for him to feel her there, absorbing the warmth from him, giving him back her weight and her strange confidence. But where was she, that she seemed so absent? His mind was open with wonder. He did not know her.

“But I am much older than you,” she said.

“How old?” he asked.

“I am thirty-four,” she said.

“I am twenty-eight,” he said.

“Six years.”

She was oddly concerned, even as if it pleased her a little. He sat and listened and wondered. It was rather splendid, to be so ignored by her, whilst she lay against him, and he lifted her with his breathing, and felt her weight upon his living, so he had a completeness and an inviolable power. He did not interfere with her. He did not even know her. It was so strange that she lay there with her

weight abandoned upon him. He was silent with delight. He felt strong, physically, carrying her on his breathing. The strange, inviolable completeness of the two of them made him feel as sure and as stable as God. Amused, he wondered what the vicar would say if he knew.

“You needn’t stop here much longer, housekeeping,” he said.

“I like it also, here,” she said. “When one has been in many places, it is very nice here.”

He was silent again at this. So close on him she lay, and yet she answered him from so far away. But he did not mind.

“What was your own home like, when you were little?” he asked.

“My father was a landowner,” she replied. “It was near a river.”

This did not convey much to him. All was as vague as before. But he did not care, whilst she was so close.

“I am a landowner-a little one,” he said.

“Yes,” she said.

He had not dared to move. He sat there with his arms round her, her lying motionless on his breathing, and for a long time he did not stir. Then softly, timidly, his hand settled on the roundness of her arm, on the unknown. She seemed to lie a little closer. A hot flame licked up from his belly to his chest.

But it was too soon. She rose, and went across the room to a drawer, taking out a little tray-cloth. There was something quiet and professional about her. She had been a nurse beside her husband, both in Warsaw and in the rebellion afterwards. She proceeded to set a tray. It was as if she ignored Brangwen. He sat up, unable to bear a contradiction in her. She moved about inscrutably.

Then, as he sat there, all mused and wondering, she came near to him, looking at him with wide, grey eyes that almost smiled with a low light. But her ugly-beautiful mouth was still unmoved and sad. He was afraid.

His eyes, strained and roused with unusedness, quailed a little before her, he felt himself quailing and yet he rose, as if obedient to her, he bent and kissed her heavy, sad, wide mouth, that was kissed, and did not alter. Fear was too strong in him. Again he had not got her.

She turned away. The vicarage kitchen was untidy, and yet to him beautiful with the untidiness of her and her child. Such a wonderful remoteness there was about her, and then something in touch with him, that made his heart knock in his chest. He stood there and waited, suspended.

Again she came to him, as he stood in his black clothes, with blue eyes very bright and puzzled for her, his face tensely alive, his hair dishevelled. She came close up to him, to his intent, black-clothed body, and laid her hand on his arm. He remained unmoved. Her eyes, with a blackness of memory struggling with

passion, primitive and electric away at the back of them, rejected him and absorbed him at once. But he remained himself. He breathed with difficulty, and sweat came out at the roots of his hair, on his forehead.

“Do you want to marry me?” she asked slowly, always uncertain.

He was afraid lest he could not speak. He drew breath hard, saying:

“I do.”

Then again, what was agony to him, with one hand lightly resting on his arm, she leaned forward a little, and with a strange, primeval suggestion of embrace, held him her mouth. It was ugly-beautiful, and he could not bear it. He put his mouth on hers, and slowly, slowly the response came, gathering force and passion, till it seemed to him she was thundering at him till he could bear no more. He drew away, white, unbreathing. Only, in his blue eyes, was something of himself concentrated. And in her eyes was a little smile upon a black void.

She was drifting away from him again. And he wanted to go away. It was intolerable. He could bear no more. He must go. Yet he was irresolute. But she turned away from him.

With a little pang of anguish, of denial, it was decided.

“I’ll come an’ speak to the vicar to-morrow,” he said, taking his hat.

She looked at him, her eyes expressionless and full of darkness. He could see no answer.

“That’ll do, won’t it?” he said.

“Yes,” she answered, mere echo without body or meaning.

“Good night,” he said.

“Good night.”

He left her standing there, expressionless and void as she was. Then she went on laying the tray for the vicar. Needing the table, she put the daffodils aside on the dresser without noticing them. Only their coolness, touching her hand, remained echoing there a long while.

They were such strangers, they must for ever be such strangers, that his passion was a clanging torment to him. Such intimacy of embrace, and such utter foreignness of contact! It was unbearable. He could not bear to be near her, and know the utter foreignness between them, know how entirely they were strangers to each other. He went out into the wind. Big holes were blown into the sky, the moonlight blew about. Sometimes a high moon, liquid-brilliant, scudded across a hollow space and took cover under electric, brown-iridescent cloud-edges. Then there was a blot of cloud, and shadow. Then somewhere in the night a radiance again, like a vapour. And all the sky was teeming and tearing along, a vast disorder of flying shapes and darkness and ragged fumes of light and a great brown circling halo, then the terror of a moon running liquid-brilliant into the

open for a moment, hurting the eyes before she plunged under cover of cloud again.

CHAPTER 2

They Live at the Marsh

She was the daughter of a Polish landowner who, deeply in debt to the Jews, had married a German wife with money, and who had died just before the rebellion. Quite young, she had married Paul Lensky, an intellectual who had studied at Berlin, and had returned to Warsaw a patriot. Her mother had married a German merchant and gone away.

Lydia Lensky, married to the young doctor, became with him a patriot and an emancipee. They were poor, but they were very conceited. She learned nursing as a mark of her emancipation. They represented in Poland the new movement just begun in Russia. But they were very patriotic: and, at the same time, very "European".

They had two children. Then came the great rebellion. Lensky, very ardent and full of words, went about inciting his countrymen. Little Poles flamed down the streets of Warsaw, on the way to shoot every Muscovite. So they crossed into the south of Russia, and it was common for six little insurgents to ride into a Jewish village, brandishing swords and words, emphasising the fact that they were going to shoot every living Muscovite.

Lensky was something of a fire-eater also. Lydia, tempered by her German blood, coming of a different family, was obliterated, carried along in her husband's emphasis of declaration, and his whirl of patriotism. He was indeed a brave man, but no bravery could quite have equalled the vividness of his talk. He worked very hard, till nothing lived in him but his eyes. And Lydia, as if drugged, followed him like a shadow, serving, echoing. Sometimes she had her two children, sometimes they were left behind.

She returned once to find them both dead of diphtheria. Her husband wept aloud, unaware of everybody. But the war went on, and soon he was back at his work. A darkness had come over Lydia's mind. She walked always in a shadow, silenced, with a strange, deep terror having hold of her, her desire was to seek satisfaction in dread, to enter a nunnery, to satisfy the instincts of dread in her, through service of a dark religion. But she could not.

Then came the flight to London. Lensky, the little, thin man, had got all his life locked into a resistance and could not relax again. He lived in a sort of insane irritability, touchy, haughty to the last degree, fractious, so that as

assistant doctor in one of the hospitals he soon became impossible. They were almost beggars. But he kept still his great ideas of himself, he seemed to live in a complete hallucination, where he himself figured vivid and lordly. He guarded his wife jealously against the ignominy of her position, rushed round her like a brandished weapon, an amazing sight to the English eye, had her in his power, as if he hypnotised her. She was passive, dark, always in shadow.

He was wasting away. Already when the child was born he seemed nothing but skin and bone and fixed idea. She watched him dying, nursed him, nursed the baby, but really took no notice of anything. A darkness was on her, like remorse, or like a remembering of the dark, savage, mystic ride of dread, of death, of the shadow of revenge. When her husband died, she was relieved. He would no longer dart about her.

England fitted her mood, its aloofness and foreignness. She had known a little of the language before coming, and a sort of parrot-mind made her pick it up fairly easily. But she knew nothing of the English, nor of English life. Indeed, these did not exist for her. She was like one walking in the Underworld, where the shades throng intelligibly but have no connection with one. She felt the English people as a potent, cold, slightly hostile host amongst whom she walked isolated.

The English people themselves were almost deferential to her, the Church saw that she did not want. She walked without passion, like a shade, tormented into moments of love by the child. Her dying husband with his tortured eyes and the skin drawn tight over his face, he was as a vision to her, not a reality. In a vision he was buried and put away. Then the vision ceased, she was untroubled, time went on grey, uncoloured, like a long journey where she sat unconscious as the landscape unrolled beside her. When she rocked her baby at evening, maybe she fell into a Polish slumber song, or she talked sometimes to herself in Polish. Otherwise she did not think of Poland, nor of that life to which she had belonged. It was a great blot looming blank in its darkness. In the superficial activity of her life, she was all English. She even thought in English. But her long blanks and darkneses of abstraction were Polish.

So she lived for some time. Then, with slight uneasiness, she used half to awake to the streets of London. She realised that there was something around her, very foreign, she realised she was in a strange place. And then, she was sent away into the country. There came into her mind now the memory of her home where she had been a child, the big house among the land, the peasants of the village.

She was sent to Yorkshire, to nurse an old rector in his rectory by the sea. This was the first shake of the kaleidoscope that brought in front of her eyes

something she must see. It hurt her brain, the open country and the moors. It hurt her and hurt her. Yet it forced itself upon her as something living, it roused some potency of her childhood in her, it had some relation to her.

There was green and silver and blue in the air about her now. And there was a strange insistence of light from the sea, to which she must attend. Primroses glimmered around, many of them, and she stooped to the disturbing influence near her feet, she even picked one or two flowers, faintly remembering in the new colour of life, what had been. All the day long, as she sat at the upper window, the light came off the sea, constantly, constantly, without refusal, till it seemed to bear her away, and the noise of the sea created a drowsiness in her, a relaxation like sleep. Her automatic consciousness gave way a little, she stumbled sometimes, she had a poignant, momentary vision of her living child, that hurt her unspeakably. Her soul roused to attention.

Very strange was the constant glitter of the sea unsheathed in heaven, very warm and sweet the graveyard, in a nook of the hill catching the sunshine and holding it as one holds a bee between the palms of the hands, when it is benumbed. Grey grass and lichens and a little church, and snowdrops among coarse grass, and a cupful of incredibly warm sunshine.

She was troubled in spirit. Hearing the rushing of the beck away down under the trees, she was startled, and wondered what it was. Walking down, she found the bluebells around her glowing like a presence, among the trees.

Summer came, the moors were tangled with harebells like water in the ruts of the roads, the heather came rosy under the skies, setting the whole world awake. And she was uneasy. She went past the gorse bushes shrinking from their presence, she stepped into the heather as into a quickening bath that almost hurt. Her fingers moved over the clasped fingers of the child, she heard the anxious voice of the baby, as it tried to make her talk, distraught.

And she shrank away again, back into her darkness, and for a long while remained blotted safely away from living. But autumn came with the faint red glimmer of robins singing, winter darkened the moors, and almost savagely she turned again to life, demanding her life back again, demanding that it should be as it had been when she was a girl, on the land at home, under the sky. Snow lay in great expanses, the telegraph posts strode over the white earth, away under the gloom of the sky. And savagely her desire rose in her again, demanding that this was Poland, her youth, that all was her own again.

But there were no sledges nor bells, she did not see the peasants coming out like new people, in their sheepskins and their fresh, ruddy, bright faces, that seemed to become new and vivid when the snow lit up the ground. It did not come to her, the life of her youth, it did not come back. There was a little agony

of struggle, then a relapse into the darkness of the convent, where Satan and the devils raged round the walls, and Christ was white on the cross of victory.

She watched from the sick-room the snow whirl past, like flocks of shadows in haste, flying on some final mission out to a leaden inalterable sea, beyond the final whiteness of the curving shore, and the snow-speckled blackness of the rocks half submerged. But near at hand on the trees the snow was soft in bloom. Only the voice of the dying vicar spoke grey and querulous from behind.

By the time the snowdrops were out, however, he was dead. He was dead. But with curious equanimity the returning woman watched the snowdrops on the edge of the grass below, blown white in the wind, but not to be blown away. She watched them fluttering and bobbing, the white, shut flowers, anchored by a thread to the grey-green grass, yet never blown away, not drifting with the wind.

As she rose in the morning, the dawn was beating up white, gusts of light blown like a thin snowstorm from the east, blown stronger and fiercer, till the rose appeared, and the gold, and the sea lit up below. She was impassive and indifferent. Yet she was outside the enclosure of darkness.

There passed a space of shadow again, the familiarity of dread-worship, during which she was moved, oblivious, to Cossethay. There, at first, there was nothing-just grey nothing. But then one morning there was a light from the yellow jasmine caught her, and after that, morning and evening, the persistent ringing of thrushes from the shrubbery, till her heart, beaten upon, was forced to lift up its voice in rivalry and answer. Little tunes came into her mind. She was full of trouble almost like anguish. Resistant, she knew she was beaten, and from fear of darkness turned to fear of light. She would have hidden herself indoors, if she could. Above all, she craved for the peace and heavy oblivion of her old state. She could not bear to come to, to realise. The first pangs of this new parturition were so acute, she knew she could not bear it. She would rather remain out of life, than be torn, mutilated into this birth, which she could not survive. She had not the strength to come to life now, in England, so foreign, skies so hostile. She knew she would die like an early, colourless, scentless flower that the end of the winter puts forth mercilessly. And she wanted to harbour her modicum of twinkling life.

But a sunshiny day came full of the scent of a mezereon tree, when bees were tumbling into the yellow crocuses, and she forgot, she felt like somebody else, not herself, a new person, quite glad. But she knew it was fragile, and she dreaded it. The vicar put pea-flower into the crocuses, for his bees to roll in, and she laughed. Then night came, with brilliant stars that she knew of old, from her girlhood. And they flashed so bright, she knew they were victors.

She could neither wake nor sleep. As if crushed between the past and the

future, like a flower that comes above-ground to find a great stone lying above it, she was helpless.

The bewilderment and helplessness continued, she was surrounded by great moving masses that must crush her. And there was no escape. Save in the old obliviousness, the cold darkness she strove to retain. But the vicar showed her eggs in the thrush's nest near the back door. She saw herself the mother-thrush upon the nest, and the way her wings were spread, so eager down upon her secret. The tense, eager, nesting wings moved her beyond endurance. She thought of them in the morning, when she heard the thrush whistling as he got up, and she thought, "Why didn't I die out there, why am I brought here?"

She was aware of people who passed around her, not as persons, but as looming presences. It was very difficult for her to adjust herself. In Poland, the peasantry, the people, had been cattle to her, they had been her cattle that she owned and used. What were these people? Now she was coming awake, she was lost.

But she had felt Brangwen go by almost as if he had brushed her. She had tingled in body as she had gone on up the road. After she had been with him in the Marsh kitchen, the voice of her body had risen strong and insistent. Soon, she wanted him. He was the man who had come nearest to her for her awakening.

Always, however, between-whiles she lapsed into the old unconsciousness, indifference and there was a will in her to save herself from living any more. But she would wake in the morning one day and feel her blood running, feel herself lying open like a flower unsheathed in the sun, insistent and potent with demand.

She got to know him better, and her instinct fixed on him — just on him. Her impulse was strong against him, because he was not of her own sort. But one blind instinct led her, to take him, to leave him, and then to relinquish herself to him. It would be safety. She felt the rooted safety of him, and the life in him. Also he was young and very fresh. The blue, steady livingness of his eyes she enjoyed like morning. He was very young.

Then she lapsed again to stupor and indifference. This, however, was bound to pass. The warmth flowed through her, she felt herself opening, unfolding, asking, as a flower opens in full request under the sun, as the beaks of tiny birds open flat, to receive, to receive. And unfolded she turned to him, straight to him. And he came, slowly, afraid, held back by uncouth fear, and driven by a desire bigger than himself.

When she opened and turned to him, then all that had been and all that was, was gone from her, she was as new as a flower that unsheathes itself and stands always ready, waiting, receptive. He could not understand this. He forced

himself, through lack of understanding, to the adherence to the line of honourable courtship and sanctioned, licensed marriage. Therefore, after he had gone to the vicarage and asked for her, she remained for some days held in this one spell, open, receptive to him, before him. He was roused to chaos. He spoke to the vicar and gave in the banns. Then he stood to wait.

She remained attentive and instinctively expectant before him, unfolded, ready to receive him. He could not act, because of self-fear and because of his conception of honour towards her. So he remained in a state of chaos.

And after a few days, gradually she closed again, away from him, was sheathed over, impervious to him, oblivious. Then a black, bottomless despair became real to him, he knew what he had lost. He felt he had lost it for good, he knew what it was to have been in communication with her, and to be cast off again. In misery, his heart like a heavy stone, he went about unliving.

Till gradually he became desperate, lost his understanding, was plunged in a revolt that knew no bounds. Inarticulate, he moved with her at the Marsh in violent, gloomy, wordless passion, almost in hatred of her. Till gradually she became aware of him, aware of herself with regard to him, her blood stirred to life, she began to open towards him, to flow towards him again. He waited till the spell was between them again, till they were together within one rushing, hastening flame. And then again he was bewildered, he was tied up as with cords, and could not move to her. So she came to him, and unfastened the breast of his waistcoat and his shirt, and put her hand on him, needing to know him. For it was cruel to her, to be opened and offered to him, yet not to know what he was, not even that he was there. She gave herself to the hour, but he could not, and he bungled in taking her.

So that he lived in suspense, as if only half his faculties worked, until the wedding. She did not understand. But the vagueness came over her again, and the days lapsed by. He could not get definitely into touch with her. For the time being, she let him go again.

He suffered very much from the thought of actual marriage, the intimacy and nakedness of marriage. He knew her so little. They were so foreign to each other, they were such strangers. And they could not talk to each other. When she talked, of Poland or of what had been, it was all so foreign, she scarcely communicated anything to him. And when he looked at her, an over-much reverence and fear of the unknown changed the nature of his desire into a sort of worship, holding her aloof from his physical desire, self-thwarting.

She did not know this, she did not understand. They had looked at each other, and had accepted each other. It was so, then there was nothing to balk at, it was complete between them.

At the wedding, his face was stiff and expressionless. He wanted to drink, to get rid of his forethought and afterthought, to set the moment free. But he could not. The suspense only tightened at his heart. The jesting and joviality and jolly, broad insinuation of the guests only coiled him more. He could not hear. That which was impending obsessed him, he could not get free.

She sat quiet, with a strange, still smile. She was not afraid. Having accepted him, she wanted to take him, she belonged altogether to the hour, now. No future, no past, only this, her hour. She did not even notice him, as she sat beside him at the head of the table. He was very near, their coming together was close at hand. What more!

As the time came for all the guests to go, her dark face was softly lighted, the bend of her head was proud, her grey eyes clear and dilated, so that the men could not look at her, and the women were elated by her, they served her. Very wonderful she was, as she bade farewell, her ugly wide mouth smiling with pride and recognition, her voice speaking softly and richly in the foreign accent, her dilated eyes ignoring one and all the departing guests. Her manner was gracious and fascinating, but she ignored the being of him or her to whom she gave her hand.

And Brangwen stood beside her, giving his hearty handshake to his friends, receiving their regard gratefully, glad of their attention. His heart was tormented within him, he did not try to smile. The time of his trial and his admittance, his Gethsemane and his Triumphal Entry in one, had come now.

Behind her, there was so much unknown to him. When he approached her, he came to such a terrible painful unknown. How could he embrace it and fathom it? How could he close his arms round all this darkness and hold it to his breast and give himself to it? What might not happen to him? If he stretched and strained for ever he would never be able to grasp it all, and to yield himself naked out of his own hands into the unknown power! How could a man be strong enough to take her, put his arms round her and have her, and be sure he could conquer this awful unknown next his heart? What was it then that she was, to which he must also deliver himself up, and which at the same time he must embrace, contain?

He was to be her husband. It was established so. And he wanted it more than he wanted life, or anything. She stood beside him in her silk dress, looking at him strangely, so that a certain terror, horror took possession of him, because she was strange and impending and he had no choice. He could not bear to meet her look from under her strange, thick brows.

“Is it late?” she said.

He looked at his watch.

“No-half-past eleven,” he said. And he made an excuse to go into the kitchen, leaving her standing in the room among the disorder and the drinking-glasses.

Tilly was seated beside the fire in the kitchen, her head in her hands. She started up when he entered.

“Why haven’t you gone to bed?” he said.

“I thought I’d better stop an’ lock up an’ do,” she said. Her agitation quietened him. He gave her some little order, then returned, steadied now, almost ashamed, to his wife. She stood a moment watching him, as he moved with averted face. Then she said:

“You will be good to me, won’t you?”

She was small and girlish and terrible, with a queer, wide look in her eyes. His heart leaped in him, in anguish of love and desire, he went blindly to her and took her in his arms.

“I want to,” he said as he drew her closer and closer in. She was soothed by the stress of his embrace, and remained quite still, relaxed against him, mingling in to him. And he let himself go from past and future, was reduced to the moment with her. In which he took her and was with her and there was nothing beyond, they were together in an elemental embrace beyond their superficial foreignness. But in the morning he was uneasy again. She was still foreign and unknown to him. Only, within the fear was pride, belief in himself as mate for her. And she, everything forgotten in her new hour of coming to life, radiated vigour and joy, so that he quivered to touch her.

It made a great difference to him, marriage. Things became so remote and of so little significance, as he knew the powerful source of his life, his eyes opened on a new universe, and he wondered in thinking of his triviality before. A new, calm relationship showed to him in the things he saw, in the cattle he used, the young wheat as it eddied in a wind.

And each time he returned home, he went steadily, expectantly, like a man who goes to a profound, unknown satisfaction. At dinner-time, he appeared in the doorway, hanging back a moment from entering, to see if she was there. He saw her setting the plates on the white-scrubbed table. Her arms were slim, she had a slim body and full skirts, she had a dark, shapely head with close-banded hair. Somehow it was her head, so shapely and poignant, that revealed her his woman to him. As she moved about clothed closely, fullskirted and wearing her little silk apron, her dark hair smoothly parted, her head revealed itself to him in all its subtle, intrinsic beauty, and he knew she was his woman, he knew her essence, that it was his to possess. And he seemed to live thus in contact with her, in contact with the unknown, the unaccountable and incalculable.

They did not take much notice of each other, consciously.

“I’m betimes,” he said.

“Yes,” she answered.

He turned to the dogs, or to the child if she was there. The little Anna played about the farm, flitting constantly in to call something to her mother, to fling her arms round her mother’s skirts, to be noticed, perhaps caressed, then, forgetting, to slip out again.

Then Brangwen, talking to the child, or to the dog between his knees, would be aware of his wife, as, in her tight, dark bodice and her lace fichu, she was reaching up to the corner cupboard. He realised with a sharp pang that she belonged to him, and he to her. He realised that he lived by her. Did he own her? Was she here for ever? Or might she go away? She was not really his, it was not a real marriage, this marriage between them. She might go away. He did not feel like a master, husband, father of her children. She belonged elsewhere. Any moment, she might be gone. And he was ever drawn to her, drawn after her, with ever-raging, ever-unsatisfied desire. He must always turn home, wherever his steps were taking him, always to her, and he could never quite reach her, he could never quite be satisfied, never be at peace, because she might go away.

At evening, he was glad. Then, when he had finished in the yard, and come in and washed himself, when the child was put to bed, he could sit on the other side of the fire with his beer on the hob and his long white pipe in his fingers, conscious of her there opposite him, as she worked at her embroidery, or as she talked to him, and he was safe with her now, till morning. She was curiously self-sufficient and did not say very much. Occasionally she lifted her head, her grey eyes shining with a strange light, that had nothing to do with him or with this place, and would tell him about herself. She seemed to be back again in the past, chiefly in her childhood or her girlhood, with her father. She very rarely talked of her first husband. But sometimes, all shining-eyed, she was back at her own home, telling him about the riotous times, the trip to Paris with her father, tales of the mad acts of the peasants when a burst of religious, self-hurting fervour had passed over the country.

She would lift her head and say:

“When they brought the railway across the country, they made afterwards smaller railways, of shorter width, to come down to our town—a hundred miles. When I was a girl, Gisla, my German gouvernante, was very shocked and she would not tell me. But I heard the servants talking. I remember, it was Pierre, the coachman. And my father, and some of his friends, landowners, they had taken a wagon, a whole railway wagon—that you travel in — ”

“A railway-carriage,” said Brangwen.

She laughed to herself.

“I know it was a great scandal: yes-a whole wagon, and they had girls, you know, filles, naked, all the wagon-full, and so they came down to our village. They came through villages of the Jews, and it was a great scandal. Can you imagine? All the countryside! And my mother, she did not like it. Gisla said to me, ‘Madame, she must not know that you have heard such things.’

“My mother, she used to cry, and she wished to beat my father, plainly beat him. He would say, when she cried because he sold the forest, the wood, to jingle money in his pocket, and go to Warsaw or Paris or Kiev, when she said he must take back his word, he must not sell the forest, he would stand and say, ‘I know, I know, I have heard it all, I have heard it all before. Tell me some new thing. I know, I know, I know.’ Oh, but can you understand, I loved him when he stood there under the door, saying only, ‘I know, I know, I know it all already.’ She could not change him, no, not if she killed herself for it. And she could change everybody else, but him, she could not change him — ”

Brangwen could not understand. He had pictures of a cattle-truck full of naked girls riding from nowhere to nowhere, of Lydia laughing because her father made great debts and said, “I know, I know”; of Jews running down the street shouting in Yiddish, “Don’t do it, don’t do it,” and being cut down by demented peasants-she called them “cattle”-whilst she looked on interested and even amused; of tutors and governesses and Paris and a convent. It was too much for him. And there she sat, telling the tales to the open space, not to him, arrogating a curious superiority to him, a distance between them, something strange and foreign and outside his life, talking, rattling, without rhyme or reason, laughing when he was shocked or astounded, condemning nothing, confounding his mind and making the whole world a chaos, without order or stability of any kind. Then, when they went to bed, he knew that he had nothing to do with her. She was back in her childhood, he was a peasant, a serf, a servant, a lover, a paramour, a shadow, a nothing. He lay still in amazement, staring at the room he knew so well, and wondering whether it was really there, the window, the chest of drawers, or whether it was merely a figment in the atmosphere. And gradually he grew into a raging fury against her. But because he was so much amazed, and there was as yet such a distance between them, and she was such an amazing thing to him, with all wonder opening out behind her, he made no retaliation on her. Only he lay still and wide-eyed with rage, inarticulate, not understanding, but solid with hostility.

And he remained wrathful and distinct from her, unchanged outwardly to her, but underneath a solid power of antagonism to her. Of which she became gradually aware. And it irritated her to be made aware of him as a separate power. She lapsed into a sort of sombre exclusion, a curious communion with

mysterious powers, a sort of mystic, dark state which drove him and the child nearly mad. He walked about for days stiffened with resistance to her, stiff with a will to destroy her as she was. Then suddenly, out of nowhere, there was connection between them again. It came on him as he was working in the fields. The tension, the bond, burst, and the passionate flood broke forward into a tremendous, magnificent rush, so that he felt he could snap off the trees as he passed, and create the world afresh.

And when he arrived home, there was no sign between them. He waited and waited till she came. And as he waited, his limbs seemed strong and splendid to him, his hands seemed like passionate servants to him, goodly, he felt a stupendous power in himself, of life, and of urgent, strong blood.

She was sure to come at last, and touch him. Then he burst into flame for her, and lost himself. They looked at each other, a deep laugh at the bottom of their eyes, and he went to take of her again, wholesale, mad to revel in the inexhaustible wealth of her, to bury himself in the depths of her in an inexhaustible exploration, she all the while revelling in that he revelled in her, tossed all her secrets aside and plunged to that which was secret to her as well, whilst she quivered with fear and the last anguish of delight.

What did it matter who they were, whether they knew each other or not?

The hour passed away again, there was severance between them, and rage and misery and bereavement for her, and deposition and toiling at the mill with slaves for him. But no matter. They had had their hour, and should it chime again, they were ready for it, ready to renew the game at the point where it was left off, on the edge of the outer darkness, when the secrets within the woman are game for the man, hunted doggedly, when the secrets of the woman are the man's adventure, and they both give themselves to the adventure.

She was with child, and there was again the silence and distance between them. She did not want him nor his secrets nor his game, he was deposed, he was cast out. He seethed with fury at the small, ugly-mouthed woman who had nothing to do with him. Sometimes his anger broke on her, but she did not cry. She turned on him like a tiger, and there was battle.

He had to learn to contain himself again, and he hated it. He hated her that she was not there for him. And he took himself off, anywhere.

But an instinct of gratitude and a knowledge that she would receive him back again, that later on she would be there for him again, prevented his straying very far. He cautiously did not go too far. He knew she might lapse into ignorance of him, lapse away from him, farther, farther, farther, till she was lost to him. He had sense enough, premonition enough in himself, to be aware of this and to measure himself accordingly. For he did not want to lose her: he did not want

her to lapse away.

Cold, he called her, selfish, only caring about herself, a foreigner with a bad nature, caring really about nothing, having no proper feelings at the bottom of her, and no proper niceness. He raged, and piled up accusations that had some measure of truth in them all. But a certain grace in him forbade him from going too far. He knew, and he quivered with rage and hatred, that she was all these vile things, that she was everything vile and detestable. But he had grace at the bottom of him, which told him that, above all things, he did not want to lose her, he was not going to lose her.

So he kept some consideration for her, he preserved some relationship. He went out more often, to the "Red Lion" again, to escape the madness of sitting next to her when she did not belong to him, when she was as absent as any woman in indifference could be. He could not stay at home. So he went to the "Red Lion". And sometimes he got drunk. But he preserved his measure, some things between them he never forfeited.

A tormented look came into his eyes, as if something were always dogging him. He glanced sharp and quick, he could not bear to sit still doing nothing. He had to go out, to find company, to give himself away there. For he had no other outlet, he could not work to give himself out, he had not the knowledge.

As the months of her pregnancy went on, she left him more and more alone, she was more and more unaware of him, his existence was annulled. And he felt bound down, bound, unable to stir, beginning to go mad, ready to rave. For she was quiet and polite, as if he did not exist, as one is quiet and polite to a servant.

Nevertheless she was great with his child, it was his turn to submit. She sat opposite him, sewing, her foreign face inscrutable and indifferent. He felt he wanted to break her into acknowledgment of him, into awareness of him. It was insufferable that she had so obliterated him. He would smash her into regarding him. He had a raging agony of desire to do so.

But something bigger in him withheld him, kept him motionless. So he went out of the house for relief. Or he turned to the little girl for her sympathy and her love, he appealed with all his power to the small Anna. So soon they were like lovers, father and child.

For he was afraid of his wife. As she sat there with bent head, silent, working or reading, but so unutterably silent that his heart seemed under the millstone of it, she became herself like the upper millstone lying on him, crushing him, as sometimes a heavy sky lies on the earth.

Yet he knew he could not tear her away from the heavy obscurity into which she was merged. He must not try to tear her into recognition of himself, and agreement with himself. It were disastrous, impious. So, let him rage as he

might, he must withhold himself. But his wrists trembled and seemed mad, seemed as if they would burst.

When, in November, the leaves came beating against the window shutters, with a lashing sound, he started, and his eyes flickered with flame. The dog looked up at him, he sunk his head to the fire. But his wife was startled. He was aware of her listening.

“They blow up with a rattle,” he said.

“What?” she asked.

“The leaves.”

She sank away again. The strange leaves beating in the wind on the wood had come nearer than she. The tension in the room was overpowering, it was difficult for him to move his head. He sat with every nerve, every vein, every fibre of muscle in his body stretched on a tension. He felt like a broken arch thrust sickeningly out from support. For her response was gone, he thrust at nothing. And he remained himself, he saved himself from crashing down into nothingness, from being squandered into fragments, by sheer tension, sheer backward resistance.

During the last months of her pregnancy, he went about in a surcharged, imminent state that did not exhaust itself. She was also depressed, and sometimes she cried. It needed so much life to begin afresh, after she had lost so lavishly. Sometimes she cried. Then he stood stiff, feeling his heart would burst. For she did not want him, she did not want even to be made aware of him. By the very puckering of her face he knew that he must stand back, leave her intact, alone. For it was the old grief come back in her, the old loss, the pain of the old life, the dead husband, the dead children. This was sacred to her, and he must not violate her with his comfort. For what she wanted she would come to him. He stood aloof with turgid heart.

He had to see her tears come, fall over her scarcely moving face, that only puckered sometimes, down on to her breast, that was so still, scarcely moving. And there was no noise, save now and again, when, with a strange, somnambulant movement, she took her handkerchief and wiped her face and blew her nose, and went on with the noiseless weeping. He knew that any offer of comfort from himself would be worse than useless, hateful to her, jangling her. She must cry. But it drove him insane. His heart was scalded, his brain hurt in his head, he went away, out of the house.

His great and chiefest source of solace was the child. She had been at first aloof from him, reserved. However friendly she might seem one day, the next she would have lapsed to her original disregard of him, cold, detached, at her distance.

The first morning after his marriage he had discovered it would not be so easy with the child. At the break of dawn he had started awake hearing a small voice outside the door saying plaintively:

“Mother!”

He rose and opened the door. She stood on the threshold in her night-dress, as she had climbed out of bed, black eyes staring round and hostile, her fair hair sticking out in a wild fleece. The man and child confronted each other.

“I want my mother,” she said, jealously accenting the “my”.

“Come on then,” he said gently.

“Where’s my mother?”

“She’s here-come on.”

The child’s eyes, staring at the man with ruffled hair and beard, did not change. The mother’s voice called softly. The little bare feet entered the room with trepidation.

“Mother!”

“Come, my dear.”

The small bare feet approached swiftly.

“I wondered where you were,” came the plaintive voice. The mother stretched out her arms. The child stood beside the high bed. Brangwen lightly lifted the tiny girl, with an “up-a-daisy”, then took his own place in the bed again.

“Mother!” cried the child, as in anguish.

“What, my pet?”

Anna wriggled close into her mother’s arms, clinging tight, hiding from the fact of the man. Brangwen lay still, and waited. There was a long silence.

Then suddenly, Anna looked round, as if she thought he would be gone. She saw the face of the man lying upturned to the ceiling. Her black eyes stared antagonistic from her exquisite face, her arms clung tightly to her mother, afraid. He did not move for some time, not knowing what to say. His face was smooth and soft-skinned with love, his eyes full of soft light. He looked at her, scarcely moving his head, his eyes smiling.

“Have you just wakened up?” he said.

“Go away,” she retorted, with a little darting forward of the head, something like a viper.

“Nay,” he answered, “I’m not going. You can go.”

“Go away,” came the sharp little command.

“There’s room for you,” he said.

“You can’t send your father from his own bed, my little bird,” said her mother, pleasantly.

The child glowered at him, miserable in her impotence.

“There’s room for you as well,” he said. “It’s a big bed enough.”

She glowered without answering, then turned and clung to her mother. She would not allow it.

During the day she asked her mother several times:

“When are we going home, mother?”

“We are at home, darling, we live here now. This is our house, we live here with your father.”

The child was forced to accept it. But she remained against the man. As night came on, she asked:

“Where are you going to sleep, mother?”

“I sleep with the father now.”

And when Brangwen came in, the child asked fiercely:

“Why do you sleep with my mother? My mother sleeps with me,” her voice quivering.

“You come as well, an’ sleep with both of us,” he coaxed.

“Mother!” she cried, turning, appealing against him.

“But I must have a husband, darling. All women must have a husband.”

“And you like to have a father with your mother, don’t you?” said Brangwen.

Anna glowered at him. She seemed to cogitate.

“No,” she cried fiercely at length, “no, I don’t want.” And slowly her face puckered, she sobbed bitterly. He stood and watched her, sorry. But there could be no altering it.

Which, when she knew, she became quiet. He was easy with her, talking to her, taking her to see the live creatures, bringing her the first chickens in his cap, taking her to gather the eggs, letting her throw crusts to the horse. She would easily accompany him, and take all he had to give, but she remained neutral still.

She was curiously, incomprehensibly jealous of her mother, always anxiously concerned about her. If Brangwen drove with his wife to Nottingham, Anna ran about happily enough, or unconcerned, for a long time. Then, as afternoon came on, there was only one cry—“I want my mother, I want my mother — ” and a bitter, pathetic sobbing that soon had the soft-hearted Tilly sobbing too. The child’s anguish was that her mother was gone, gone.

Yet as a rule, Anna seemed cold, resenting her mother, critical of her. It was:

“I don’t like you to do that, mother,” or, “I don’t like you to say that.” She was a sore problem to Brangwen and to all the people at the Marsh. As a rule, however, she was active, lightly flitting about the farmyard, only appearing now and again to assure herself of her mother. Happy she never seemed, but quick, sharp, absorbed, full of imagination and changeability. Tilly said she was bewitched. But it did not matter so long as she did not cry. There was something

heart-rending about Anna's crying, her childish anguish seemed so utter and so timeless, as if it were a thing of all the ages.

She made playmates of the creatures of the farmyard, talking to them, telling them the stories she had from her mother, counselling them and correcting them. Brangwen found her at the gate leading to the paddock and to the duckpond. She was peering through the bars and shouting to the stately white geese, that stood in a curving line:

"You're not to call at people when they want to come. You must not do it."

The heavy, balanced birds looked at the fierce little face and the fleece of keen hair thrust between the bars, and they raised their heads and swayed off, producing the long, can-canking, protesting noise of geese, rocking their ship-like, beautiful white bodies in a line beyond the gate.

"You're naughty, you're naughty," cried Anna, tears of dismay and vexation in her eyes. And she stamped her slipper.

"Why, what are they doing?" said Brangwen.

"They won't let me come in," she said, turning her flushed little face to him.

"Yi, they will. You can go in if you want to," and he pushed open the gate for her.

She stood irresolute, looking at the group of bluey-white geese standing monumental under the grey, cold day.

"Go on," he said.

She marched valiantly a few steps in. Her little body started convulsively at the sudden, derisive can-cank-ank of the geese. A blankness spread over her. The geese trailed away with uplifted heads under the low grey sky.

"They don't know you," said Brangwen. "You should tell 'em what your name is."

"They're naughty to shout at me," she flashed.

"They think you don't live here," he said.

Later he found her at the gate calling shrilly and imperiously:

"My name is Anna, Anna Lensky, and I live here, because Mr. Brangwen's my father now. He is, yes he is. And I live here."

This pleased Brangwen very much. And gradually, without knowing it herself, she clung to him, in her lost, childish, desolate moments, when it was good to creep up to something big and warm, and bury her little self in his big, unlimited being. Instinctively he was careful of her, careful to recognise her and to give himself to her disposal.

She was difficult of her affections. For Tilly, she had a childish, essential contempt, almost dislike, because the poor woman was such a servant. The child would not let the serving-woman attend to her, do intimate things for her, not for

a long time. She treated her as one of an inferior race. Brangwen did not like it.

“Why aren’t you fond of Tilly?” he asked.

“Because-because-because she looks at me with her eyes bent.”

Then gradually she accepted Tilly as belonging to the household, never as a person.

For the first weeks, the black eyes of the child were for ever on the watch. Brangwen, good-humoured but impatient, spoiled by Tilly, was an easy blusterer. If for a few minutes he upset the household with his noisy impatience, he found at the end the child glowering at him with intense black eyes, and she was sure to dart forward her little head, like a serpent, with her biting:

“Go away.”

“I’m not going away,” he shouted, irritated at last. “Go yourself-hustle-stir thysen-hop.” And he pointed to the door. The child backed away from him, pale with fear. Then she gathered up courage, seeing him become patient.

“We don’t live with you,” she said, thrusting forward her little head at him. “You-you’re-you’re a bomakle.”

“A what?” he shouted.

Her voice wavered-but it came.

“A bomakle.”

“Ay, an’ you’re a comakle.”

She meditated. Then she hissed forwards her head.

“I’m not.”

“Not what?”

“A comakle.”

“No more am I a bomakle.”

He was really cross.

Other times she would say:

“My mother doesn’t live here.”

“Oh, ay?”

“I want her to go away.”

“Then want’s your portion,” he replied laconically.

So they drew nearer together. He would take her with him when he went out in the trap. The horse ready at the gate, he came noisily into the house, which seemed quiet and peaceful till he appeared to set everything awake.

“Now then, Topsy, pop into thy bonnet.”

The child drew herself up, resenting the indignity of the address.

“I can’t fasten my bonnet myself,” she said haughtily.

“Not man enough yet,” he said, tying the ribbons under her chin with clumsy fingers.

She held up her face to him. Her little bright-red lips moved as he fumbled under her chin.

“You talk-nonsents,” she said, re-echoing one of his phrases.

“That face shouts for th’ pump,” he said, and taking out a big red handkerchief, that smelled of strong tobacco, began wiping round her mouth.

“Is Kitty waiting for me?” she asked.

“Ay,” he said. “Let’s finish wiping your face-it’ll pass wi’ a cat-lick.”

She submitted prettily. Then, when he let her go, she began to skip, with a curious flicking up of one leg behind her.

“Now my young buck-rabbit,” he said. “Slippy!”

She came and was shaken into her coat, and the two set off. She sat very close beside him in the gig, tucked tightly, feeling his big body sway, against her, very splendid. She loved the rocking of the gig, when his big, live body swayed upon her, against her. She laughed, a poignant little shrill laugh, and her black eyes glowed.

She was curiously hard, and then passionately tenderhearted. Her mother was ill, the child stole about on tip-toe in the bedroom for hours, being nurse, and doing the thing thoughtfully and diligently. Another day, her mother was unhappy. Anna would stand with her legs apart, glowering, balancing on the sides of her slippers. She laughed when the goslings wriggled in Tilly’s hand, as the pellets of food were rammed down their throats with a skewer, she laughed nervously. She was hard and imperious with the animals, squandering no love, running about amongst them like a cruel mistress.

Summer came, and hay-harvest, Anna was a brown elfish mite dancing about. Tilly always marvelled over her, more than she loved her.

But always in the child was some anxious connection with the mother. So long as Mrs. Brangwen was all right, the little girl played about and took very little notice of her. But corn-harvest went by, the autumn drew on, and the mother, the later months of her pregnancy beginning, was strange and detached, Brangwen began to knit his brows, the old, unhealthy uneasiness, the unskinned susceptibility came on the child again. If she went to the fields with her father, then, instead of playing about carelessly, it was:

“I want to go home.”

“Home, why tha’s nobbut this minute come.”

“I want to go home.”

“What for? What ails thee?”

“I want my mother.”

“Thy mother! Thy mother none wants thee.”

“I want to go home.”

There would be tears in a moment.

“Can ter find t’road, then?”

And he watched her scudding, silent and intent, along the hedge-bottom, at a steady, anxious pace, till she turned and was gone through the gateway. Then he saw her two fields off, still pressing forward, small and urgent. His face was clouded as he turned to plough up the stubble.

The year drew on, in the hedges the berries shone red and twinkling above bare twigs, robins were seen, great droves of birds dashed like spray from the fallow, rooks appeared, black and flapping down to earth, the ground was cold as he pulled the turnips, the roads were churned deep in mud. Then the turnips were pitted and work was slack.

Inside the house it was dark, and quiet. The child flitted uneasily round, and now and again came her plaintive, startled cry:

“Mother!”

Mrs. Brangwen was heavy and unresponsive, tired, lapsed back. Brangwen went on working out of doors.

At evening, when he came in to milk, the child would run behind him. Then, in the cosy cow-sheds, with the doors shut and the air looking warm by the light of the hanging lantern, above the branching horns of the cows, she would stand watching his hands squeezing rhythmically the teats of the placid beast, watch the froth and the leaping squirt of milk, watch his hand sometimes rubbing slowly, understandingly, upon a hanging udder. So they kept each other company, but at a distance, rarely speaking.

The darkest days of the year came on, the child was fretful, sighing as if some oppression were on her, running hither and thither without relief. And Brangwen went about at his work, heavy, his heart heavy as the sodden earth.

The winter nights fell early, the lamp was lighted before tea-time, the shutters were closed, they were all shut into the room with the tension and stress. Mrs. Brangwen went early to bed, Anna playing on the floor beside her. Brangwen sat in the emptiness of the downstairs room, smoking, scarcely conscious even of his own misery. And very often he went out to escape it.

Christmas passed, the wet, drenched, cold days of January recurred monotonously, with now and then a brilliance of blue flashing in, when Brangwen went out into a morning like crystal, when every sound rang again, and the birds were many and sudden and brusque in the hedges. Then an elation came over him in spite of everything, whether his wife were strange or sad, or whether he craved for her to be with him, it did not matter, the air rang with clear noises, the sky was like crystal, like a bell, and the earth was hard. Then he worked and was happy, his eyes shining, his cheeks flushed. And the zest of life

was strong in him.

The birds pecked busily round him, the horses were fresh and ready, the bare branches of the trees flung themselves up like a man yawning, taut with energy, the twigs radiated off into the clear light. He was alive and full of zest for it all. And if his wife were heavy, separated from him, extinguished, then, let her be, let him remain himself. Things would be as they would be. Meanwhile he heard the ringing crow of a cockerel in the distance, he saw the pale shell of the moon effaced on a blue sky.

So he shouted to the horses, and was happy. If, driving into Ilkeston, a fresh young woman were going in to do her shopping, he hailed her, and reined in his horse, and picked her up. Then he was glad to have her near him, his eyes shone, his voice, laughing, teasing in a warm fashion, made the poise of her head more beautiful, her blood ran quicker. They were both stimulated, the morning was fine.

What did it matter that, at the bottom of his heart, was care and pain? It was at the bottom, let it stop at the bottom. His wife, her suffering, her coming pain-well, it must be so. She suffered, but he was out of doors, full in life, and it would be ridiculous, indecent, to pull a long face and to insist on being miserable. He was happy, this morning, driving to town, with the hoofs of the horse spanking the hard earth. Well he was happy, if half the world were weeping at the funeral of the other half. And it was a jolly girl sitting beside him. And Woman was immortal, whatever happened, whoever turned towards death. Let the misery come when it could not be resisted.

The evening arrived later very beautiful, with a rosy flush hovering above the sunset, and passing away into violet and lavender, with turquoise green north and south in the sky, and in the east, a great, yellow moon hanging heavy and radiant. It was magnificent to walk between the sunset and the moon, on a road where little holly trees thrust black into the rose and lavender, and starlings flickered in droves across the light. But what was the end of the journey? The pain came right enough, later on, when his heart and his feet were heavy, his brain dead, his life stopped.

One afternoon, the pains began, Mrs. Brangwen was put to bed, the midwife came. Night fell, the shutters were closed, Brangwen came in to tea, to the loaf and the pewter teapot, the child, silent and quivering, playing with glass beads, the house, empty, it seemed, or exposed to the winter night, as if it had no walls.

Sometimes there sounded, long and remote in the house, vibrating through everything, the moaning cry of a woman in labour. Brangwen, sitting downstairs, was divided. His lower, deeper self was with her, bound to her, suffering. But the big shell of his body remembered the sound of owls that used

to fly round the farmstead when he was a boy. He was back in his youth, a boy, haunted by the sound of the owls, waking up his brother to speak to him. And his mind drifted away to the birds, their solemn, dignified faces, their flight so soft and broad-winged. And then to the birds his brother had shot, fluffy, dust-coloured, dead heaps of softness with faces absurdly asleep. It was a queer thing, a dead owl.

He lifted his cup to his lips, he watched the child with the beads. But his mind was occupied with owls, and the atmosphere of his boyhood, with his brothers and sisters. Elsewhere, fundamental, he was with his wife in labour, the child was being brought forth out of their one flesh. He and she, one flesh, out of which life must be put forth. The rent was not in his body, but it was of his body. On her the blows fell, but the quiver ran through to him, to his last fibre. She must be torn asunder for life to come forth, yet still they were one flesh, and still, from further back, the life came out of him to her, and still he was the unbroken that has the broken rock in its arms, their flesh was one rock from which the life gushed, out of her who was smitten and rent, from him who quivered and yielded.

He went upstairs to her. As he came to the bedside she spoke to him in Polish.

“Is it very bad?” he asked.

She looked at him, and oh, the weariness to her, of the effort to understand another language, the weariness of hearing him, attending to him, making out who he was, as he stood there fair-bearded and alien, looking at her. She knew something of him, of his eyes. But she could not grasp him. She closed her eyes.

He turned away, white to the gills.

“It’s not so very bad,” said the midwife.

He knew he was a strain on his wife. He went downstairs.

The child glanced up at him, frightened.

“I want my mother,” she quavered.

“Ay, but she’s badly,” he said mildly, unheeding.

She looked at him with lost, frightened eyes.

“Has she got a headache?”

“No-she’s going to have a baby.”

The child looked round. He was unaware of her. She was alone again in terror.

“I want my mother,” came the cry of panic.

“Let Tilly undress you,” he said. “You’re tired.”

There was another silence. Again came the cry of labour.

“I want my mother,” rang automatically from the wincing, panic-stricken child, that felt cut off and lost in a horror of desolation.

Tilly came forward, her heart wrung.

“Come an’ let me undress her then, pet-lamb,” she crooned. “You s’ll have your mother in th’ mornin’, don’t you fret, my duckie; never mind, angel.”

But Anna stood upon the sofa, her back to the wall.

“I want my mother,” she cried, her little face quivering, and the great tears of childish, utter anguish falling.

“She’s poorly, my lamb, she’s poorly to-night, but she’ll be better by mornin’. Oh, don’t cry, don’t cry, love, she doesn’t want you to cry, precious little heart, no, she doesn’t.”

Tilly took gently hold of the child’s skirts. Anna snatched back her dress, and cried, in a little hysteria:

“No, you’re not to undress me-I want my mother,”-and her child’s face was running with grief and tears, her body shaken.

“Oh, but let Tilly undress you. Let Tilly undress you, who loves you, don’t be wilful to-night. Mother’s poorly, she doesn’t want you to cry.”

The child sobbed distractedly, she could not hear.

“I want my mother,” she wept.

“When you’re undressed, you s’ll go up to see your mother — when you’re undressed, pet, when you’ve let Tilly undress you, when you’re a little jewel in your nightie, love. Oh, don’t you cry, don’t you — ”

Brangwen sat stiff in his chair. He felt his brain going tighter. He crossed over the room, aware only of the maddening sobbing.

“Don’t make a noise,” he said.

And a new fear shook the child from the sound of his voice. She cried mechanically, her eyes looking watchful through her tears, in terror, alert to what might happen.

“I want-my-mother,” quavered the sobbing, blind voice.

A shiver of irritation went over the man’s limbs. It was the utter, persistent unreason, the maddening blindness of the voice and the crying.

“You must come and be undressed,” he said, in a quiet voice that was thin with anger.

And he reached his hand and grasped her. He felt her body catch in a convulsive sob. But he too was blind, and intent, irritated into mechanical action. He began to unfasten her little apron. She would have shrunk from him, but could not. So her small body remained in his grasp, while he fumbled at the little buttons and tapes, unthinking, intent, unaware of anything but the irritation of her. Her body was held taut and resistant, he pushed off the little dress and the petticoats, revealing the white arms. She kept stiff, overpowered, violated, he went on with his task. And all the while she sobbed, choking:

“I want my mother.”

He was unheedingly silent, his face stiff. The child was now incapable of understanding, she had become a little, mechanical thing of fixed will. She wept, her body convulsed, her voice repeating the same cry.

“Eh, dear o’ me!” cried Tilly, becoming distracted herself. Brangwen, slow, clumsy, blind, intent, got off all the little garments, and stood the child naked in its shift upon the sofa.

“Where’s her nightie?” he asked.

Tilly brought it, and he put it on her. Anna did not move her limbs to his desire. He had to push them into place. She stood, with fixed, blind will, resistant, a small, convulsed, unchangeable thing weeping ever and repeating the same phrase. He lifted one foot after the other, pulled off slippers and socks. She was ready.

“Do you want a drink?” he asked.

She did not change. Unheeding, uncaring, she stood on the sofa, standing back, alone, her hands shut and half lifted, her face, all tears, raised and blind. And through the sobbing and choking came the broken:

“I-want-my-mother.”

“Do you want a drink?” he said again.

There was no answer. He lifted the stiff, denying body between his hands. Its stiff blindness made a flash of rage go through him. He would like to break it.

He set the child on his knee, and sat again in his chair beside the fire, the wet, sobbing, inarticulate noise going on near his ear, the child sitting stiff, not yielding to him or anything, not aware.

A new degree of anger came over him. What did it all matter? What did it matter if the mother talked Polish and cried in labour, if this child were stiff with resistance, and crying? Why take it to heart? Let the mother cry in labour, let the child cry in resistance, since they would do so. Why should he fight against it, why resist? Let it be, if it were so. Let them be as they were, if they insisted.

And in a daze he sat, offering no fight. The child cried on, the minutes ticked away, a sort of torpor was on him.

It was some little time before he came to, and turned to attend to the child. He was shocked by her little wet, blinded face. A bit dazed, he pushed back the wet hair. Like a living statue of grief, her blind face cried on.

“Nay,” he said, “not as bad as that. It’s not as bad as that, Anna, my child. Come, what are you crying for so much? Come, stop now, it’ll make you sick. I wipe you dry, don’t wet your face any more. Don’t cry any more wet tears, don’t, it’s better not to. Don’t cry-it’s not so bad as all that. Hush now, hush-let it be enough.”

His voice was queer and distant and calm. He looked at the child. She was

beside herself now. He wanted her to stop, he wanted it all to stop, to become natural.

“Come,” he said, rising to turn away, “we’ll go an’ supper-up the beast.”

He took a big shawl, folded her round, and went out into the kitchen for a lantern.

“You’re never taking the child out, of a night like this,” said Tilly.

“Ay, it’ll quieten her,” he answered.

It was raining. The child was suddenly still, shocked, finding the rain on its face, the darkness.

“We’ll just give the cows their something-to-eat, afore they go to bed,” Brangwen was saying to her, holding her close and sure.

There was a trickling of water into the butt, a burst of rain-drops sputtering on to her shawl, and the light of the lantern swinging, flashing on a wet pavement and the base of a wet wall. Otherwise it was black darkness: one breathed darkness.

He opened the doors, upper and lower, and they entered into the high, dry barn, that smelled warm even if it were not warm. He hung the lantern on the nail and shut the door. They were in another world now. The light shed softly on the timbered barn, on the whitewashed walls, and the great heap of hay; instruments cast their shadows largely, a ladder rose to the dark arch of a loft. Outside there was the driving rain, inside, the softly-illuminated stillness and calmness of the barn.

Holding the child on one arm, he set about preparing the food for the cows, filling a pan with chopped hay and brewer’s grains and a little meal. The child, all wonder, watched what he did. A new being was created in her for the new conditions. Sometimes, a little spasm, eddying from the bygone storm of sobbing, shook her small body. Her eyes were wide and wondering, pathetic. She was silent, quite still.

In a sort of dream, his heart sunk to the bottom, leaving the surface of him still, quite still, he rose with the panful of food, carefully balancing the child on one arm, the pan in the other hand. The silky fringe of the shawl swayed softly, grains and hay trickled to the floor; he went along a dimly-lit passage behind the mangers, where the horns of the cows pricked out of the obscurity. The child shrank, he balanced stiffly, rested the pan on the manger wall, and tipped out the food, half to this cow, half to the next. There was a noise of chains running, as the cows lifted or dropped their heads sharply; then a contented, soothing sound, a long snuffing as the beasts ate in silence.

The journey had to be performed several times. There was the rhythmic sound of the shovel in the barn, then the man returned walking stiffly between the two

weights, the face of the child peering out from the shawl. Then the next time, as he stooped, she freed her arm and put it round his neck, clinging soft and warm, making all easier.

The beasts fed, he dropped the pan and sat down on a box, to arrange the child.

“Will the cows go to sleep now?” she said, catching her breath as she spoke.

“Yes.”

“Will they eat all their stuff up first?”

“Yes. Hark at them.”

And the two sat still listening to the snuffing and breathing of cows feeding in the sheds communicating with this small barn. The lantern shed a soft, steady light from one wall. All outside was still in the rain. He looked down at the silky folds of the paisley shawl. It reminded him of his mother. She used to go to church in it. He was back again in the old irresponsibility and security, a boy at home.

The two sat very quiet. His mind, in a sort of trance, seemed to become more and more vague. He held the child close to him. A quivering little shudder, re-echoing from her sobbing, went down her limbs. He held her closer. Gradually she relaxed, the eyelids began to sink over her dark, watchful eyes. As she sank to sleep, his mind became blank.

When he came to, as if from sleep, he seemed to be sitting in a timeless stillness. What was he listening for? He seemed to be listening for some sound a long way off, from beyond life. He remembered his wife. He must go back to her. The child was asleep, the eyelids not quite shut, showing a slight film of black pupil between. Why did she not shut her eyes? Her mouth was also a little open.

He rose quickly and went back to the house.

“Is she asleep?” whispered Tilly.

He nodded. The servant-woman came to look at the child who slept in the shawl, with cheeks flushed hot and red, and a whiteness, a wanness round the eyes.

“God-a-mercy!” whispered Tilly, shaking her head.

He pushed off his boots and went upstairs with the child. He became aware of the anxiety grasped tight at his heart, because of his wife. But he remained still. The house was silent save for the wind outside, and the noisy trickling and splattering of water in the water-butts. There was a slit of light under his wife’s door.

He put the child into bed wrapped as she was in the shawl, for the sheets would be cold. Then he was afraid that she might not be able to move her arms,

so he loosened her. The black eyes opened, rested on him vacantly, sank shut again. He covered her up. The last little quiver from the sobbing shook her breathing.

This was his room, the room he had had before he married. It was familiar. He remembered what it was to be a young man, untouched.

He remained suspended. The child slept, pushing her small fists from the shawl. He could tell the woman her child was asleep. But he must go to the other landing. He started. There was the sound of the owls-the moaning of the woman. What an uncanny sound! It was not human-at least to a man.

He went down to her room, entering softly. She was lying still, with eyes shut, pale, tired. His heart leapt, fearing she was dead. Yet he knew perfectly well she was not. He saw the way her hair went loose over her temples, her mouth was shut with suffering in a sort of grin. She was beautiful to him-but it was not human. He had a dread of her as she lay there. What had she to do with him? She was other than himself.

Something made him go and touch her fingers that were still grasped on the sheet. Her brown-grey eyes opened and looked at him. She did not know him as himself. But she knew him as the man. She looked at him as a woman in childbirth looks at the man who begot the child in her: an impersonal look, in the extreme hour, female to male. Her eyes closed again. A great, scalding peace went over him, burning his heart and his entrails, passing off into the infinite.

When her pains began afresh, tearing her, he turned aside, and could not look. But his heart in torture was at peace, his bowels were glad. He went downstairs, and to the door, outside, lifted his face to the rain, and felt the darkness striking unseen and steadily upon him.

The swift, unseen threshing of the night upon him silenced him and he was overcome. He turned away indoors, humbly. There was the infinite world, eternal, unchanging, as well as the world of life.

CHAPTER 3

Childhood of Anna Lensky

Tom Brangwen never loved his own son as he loved his stepchild Anna. When they told him it was a boy, he had a thrill of pleasure. He liked the confirmation of fatherhood. It gave him satisfaction to know he had a son. But he felt not very much outgoing to the baby itself. He was its father, that was enough.

He was glad that his wife was mother of his child. She was serene, a little bit shadowy, as if she were transplanted. In the birth of the child she seemed to lose connection with her former self. She became now really English, really Mrs. Brangwen. Her vitality, however, seemed lowered.

She was still, to Brangwen, immeasurably beautiful. She was still passionate, with a flame of being. But the flame was not robust and present. Her eyes shone, her face glowed for him, but like some flower opened in the shade, that could not bear the full light. She loved the baby. But even this, with a sort of dimness, a faint absence about her, a shadowiness even in her mother-love. When Brangwen saw her nursing his child, happy, absorbed in it, a pain went over him like a thin flame. For he perceived how he must subdue himself in his approach to her. And he wanted again the robust, moral exchange of love and passion such as he had had at first with her, at one time and another, when they were matched at their highest intensity. This was the one experience for him now. And he wanted it, always, with remorseless craving.

She came to him again, with the same lifting of her mouth as had driven him almost mad with trammelled passion at first. She came to him again, and, his heart delirious in delight and readiness, he took her. And it was almost as before.

Perhaps it was quite as before. At any rate, it made him know perfection, it established in him a constant eternal knowledge.

But it died down before he wanted it to die down. She was finished, she could take no more. And he was not exhausted, he wanted to go on. But it could not be.

So he had to begin the bitter lesson, to abate himself, to take less than he wanted. For she was Woman to him, all other women were her shadows. For she had satisfied him. And he wanted it to go on. And it could not. However he raged, and, filled with suppression that became hot and bitter, hated her in his soul that she did not want him, however he had mad outbursts, and drank and

made ugly scenes, still he knew, he was only kicking against the pricks. It was not, he had to learn, that she would not want him enough, as much as he demanded that she should want him. It was that she could not. She could only want him in her own way, and to her own measure. And she had spent much life before he found her as she was, the woman who could take him and give him fulfilment. She had taken him and given him fulfilment. She still could do so, in her own times and ways. But he must control himself, measure himself to her.

He wanted to give her all his love, all his passion, all his essential energy. But it could not be. He must find other things than her, other centres of living. She sat close and impregnable with the child. And he was jealous of the child.

But he loved her, and time came to give some sort of course to his troublesome current of life, so that it did not foam and flood and make misery. He formed another centre of love in her child, Anna. Gradually a part of his stream of life was diverted to the child, relieving the main flood to his wife. Also he sought the company of men, he drank heavily now and again.

The child ceased to have so much anxiety for her mother after the baby came. Seeing the mother with the baby boy, delighted and serene and secure, Anna was at first puzzled, then gradually she became indignant, and at last her little life settled on its own swivel, she was no more strained and distorted to support her mother. She became more childish, not so abnormal, not charged with cares she could not understand. The charge of the mother, the satisfying of the mother, had devolved elsewhere than on her. Gradually the child was freed. She became an independent, forgetful little soul, loving from her own centre.

Of her own choice, she then loved Brangwen most, or most obviously. For these two made a little life together, they had a joint activity. It amused him, at evening, to teach her to count, or to say her letters. He remembered for her all the little nursery rhymes and childish songs that lay forgotten at the bottom of his brain.

At first she thought them rubbish. But he laughed, and she laughed. They became to her a huge joke. Old King Cole she thought was Brangwen. Mother Hubbard was Tilly, her mother was the old woman who lived in a shoe. It was a huge, it was a frantic delight to the child, this nonsense, after her years with her mother, after the poignant folk-tales she had had from her mother, which always troubled and mystified her soul.

She shared a sort of recklessness with her father, a complete, chosen carelessness that had the laugh of ridicule in it. He loved to make her voice go high and shouting and defiant with laughter. The baby was dark-skinned and dark-haired, like the mother, and had hazel eyes. Brangwen called him the blackbird.

“Hallo,” Brangwen would cry, starting as he heard the wail of the child announcing it wanted to be taken out of the cradle, “there’s the blackbird tuning up.”

“The blackbird’s singing,” Anna would shout with delight, “the blackbird’s singing.”

“When the pie was opened,” Brangwen shouted in his bawling bass voice, going over to the cradle, “the bird began to sing.”

“Wasn’t it a dainty dish to set before a king?” cried Anna, her eyes flashing with joy as she uttered the cryptic words, looking at Brangwen for confirmation. He sat down with the baby, saying loudly:

“Sing up, my lad, sing up.”

And the baby cried loudly, and Anna shouted lustily, dancing in wild bliss:

“Sing a song of sixpence
Pocketful of posies,
Ascha! Ascha! — — ”

Then she stopped suddenly in silence and looked at Brangwen again, her eyes flashing, as she shouted loudly and delightedly:

“I’ve got it wrong, I’ve got it wrong.”

“Oh, my sirs,” said Tilly entering, “what a racket!”

Brangwen hushed the child and Anna flipped and danced on. She loved her wild bursts of rowdiness with her father. Tilly hated it, Mrs. Brangwen did not mind.

Anna did not care much for other children. She domineered them, she treated them as if they were extremely young and incapable, to her they were little people, they were not her equals. So she was mostly alone, flying round the farm, entertaining the farm-hands and Tilly and the servant-girl, whirring on and never ceasing.

She loved driving with Brangwen in the trap. Then, sitting high up and bowling along, her passion for eminence and dominance was satisfied. She was like a little savage in her arrogance. She thought her father important, she was installed beside him on high. And they spanked along, beside the high, flourishing hedge-tops, surveying the activity of the countryside. When people shouted a greeting to him from the road below, and Brangwen shouted jovially back, her little voice was soon heard shrilling along with his, followed by her chuckling laugh, when she looked up at her father with bright eyes, and they laughed at each other. And soon it was the custom for the passerby to sing out: “How are ter, Tom? Well, my lady!” or else, “Mornin’, Tom, mornin’, my Lass!” or else, “You’re off together then?” or else, “You’re lookin’ rarely, you two.”

Anna would respond, with her father: “How are you, John! Good mornin’, William! Ay, makin’ for Derby,” shrilling as loudly as she could. Though often,

in response to “You’re off out a bit then,” she would reply, “Yes, we are,” to the great joy of all. She did not like the people who saluted him and did not salute her.

She went into the public-house with him, if he had to call, and often sat beside him in the bar-parlour as he drank his beer or brandy. The landladies paid court to her, in the obsequious way landladies have.

“Well, little lady, an’ what’s your name?”

“Anna Brangwen,” came the immediate, haughty answer.

“Indeed it is! An’ do you like driving in a trap with your father?”

“Yes,” said Anna, shy, but bored by these inanities. She had a touch-me-not way of blighting the inane inquiries of grown-up people.

“My word, she’s a fawce little thing,” the landlady would say to Brangwen.

“Ay,” he answered, not encouraging comments on the child. Then there followed the present of a biscuit, or of cake, which Anna accepted as her dues.

“What does she say, that I’m a fawce little thing?” the small girl asked afterwards.

“She means your’re a sharp-shins.”

Anna hesitated. She did not understand. Then she laughed at some absurdity she found.

Soon he took her every week to market with him. “I can come, can’t I?” she asked every Saturday, or Thursday morning, when he made himself look fine in his dress of a gentleman farmer. And his face clouded at having to refuse her.

So at last, he overcame his own shyness, and tucked her beside him. They drove into Nottingham and put up at the “Black Swan”. So far all right. Then he wanted to leave her at the inn. But he saw her face, and knew it was impossible. So he mustered his courage, and set off with her, holding her hand, to the cattle-market.

She stared in bewilderment, flitting silent at his side. But in the cattle-market she shrank from the press of men, all men, all in heavy, filthy boots, and leathern leggins. And the road underfoot was all nasty with cow-muck. And it frightened her to see the cattle in the square pens, so many horns, and so little enclosure, and such a madness of men and a yelling of drovers. Also she felt her father was embarrassed by her, and ill-at-ease.

He brought her a cake at the refreshment-booth, and set her on a seat. A man hailed him.

“Good morning, Tom. That thine, then?”-and the bearded farmer jerked his head at Anna.

“Ay,” said Brangwen, deprecating.

“I did-na know tha’d one that old.”

“No, it’s my missis’s.”

“Oh, that’s it!” And the man looked at Anna as if she were some odd little cattle. She glowered with black eyes.

Brangwen left her there, in charge of the barman, whilst he went to see about the selling of some young stirks. Farmers, butchers, drovers, dirty, uncouth men from whom she shrank instinctively stared down at her as she sat on her seat, then went to get their drink, talking in unabated tones. All was big and violent about her.

“Whose child met that be?” they asked of the barman.

“It belongs to Tom Brangwen.”

The child sat on in neglect, watching the door for her father. He never came; many, many men came, but not he, and she sat like a shadow. She knew one did not cry in such a place. And every man looked at her inquisitively, she shut herself away from them.

A deep, gathering coldness of isolation took hold on her. He was never coming back. She sat on, frozen, unmoving.

When she had become blank and timeless he came, and she slipped off her seat to him, like one come back from the dead. He had sold his beast as quickly as he could. But all the business was not finished. He took her again through the hurtling welter of the cattle-market.

Then at last they turned and went out through the gate. He was always hailing one man or another, always stopping to gossip about land and cattle and horses and other things she did not understand, standing in the filth and the smell, among the legs and great boots of men. And always she heard the questions:

“What lass is that, then? I didn’t know tha’d one o’ that age.”

“It belongs to my missis.”

Anna was very conscious of her derivation from her mother, in the end, and of her alienation.

But at last they were away, and Brangwen went with her into a little dark, ancient eating-house in the Bridlesmith-Gate. They had cow’s-tail soup, and meat and cabbage and potatoes. Other men, other people, came into the dark, vaulted place, to eat. Anna was wide-eyed and silent with wonder.

Then they went into the big market, into the corn exchange, then to shops. He bought her a little book off a stall. He loved buying things, odd things that he thought would be useful. Then they went to the “Black Swan”, and she drank milk and he brandy, and they harnessed the horse and drove off, up the Derby Road.

She was tired out with wonder and marvelling. But the next day, when she thought of it, she skipped, flipping her leg in the odd dance she did, and talked

the whole time of what had happened to her, of what she had seen. It lasted her all the week. And the next Saturday she was eager to go again.

She became a familiar figure in the cattle-market, sitting waiting in the little booth. But she liked best to go to Derby. There her father had more friends. And she liked the familiarity of the smaller town, the nearness of the river, the strangeness that did not frighten her, it was so much smaller. She liked the covered-in market, and the old women. She liked the "George Inn", where her father put up. The landlord was Brangwen's old friend, and Anna was made much of. She sat many a day in the cosy parlour talking to Mr. Wigginton, a fat man with red hair, the landlord. And when the farmers all gathered at twelve o'clock for dinner, she was a little heroine.

At first she would only glower or hiss at these strange men with their uncouth accent. But they were good-humoured. She was a little oddity, with her fierce, fair hair like spun glass sticking out in a flamy halo round the apple-blossom face and the black eyes, and the men liked an oddity. She kindled their attention.

She was very angry because Marriott, a gentleman-farmer from Ambergate, called her the little pole-cat.

"Why, you're a pole-cat," he said to her.

"I'm not," she flashed.

"You are. That's just how a pole-cat goes."

She thought about it.

"Well, you're-you're — " she began.

"I'm what?"

She looked him up and down.

"You're a bow-leg man."

Which he was. There was a roar of laughter. They loved her that she was indomitable.

"Ah," said Marriott. "Only a pole-cat says that."

"Well, I am a pole-cat," she flamed.

There was another roar of laughter from the men.

They loved to tease her.

"Well, me little maid," Braithwaite would say to her, "an' how's th' lamb's wool?"

He gave a tug at a glistening, pale piece of her hair.

"It's not lamb's wool," said Anna, indignantly putting back her offended lock.

"Why, what'st ca' it then?"

"It's hair."

"Hair! Wheriver dun they rear that sort?"

"Wheriver dun they?" she asked, in dialect, her curiosity overcoming her.

Instead of answering he shouted with joy. It was the triumph, to make her speak dialect.

She had one enemy, the man they called Nut-Nat, or Nat-Nut, a cretin, with inturned feet, who came flap-lapping along, shoulder jerking up at every step. This poor creature sold nuts in the public-houses where he was known. He had no roof to his mouth, and the men used to mock his speech.

The first time he came into the "George" when Anna was there, she asked, after he had gone, her eyes very round:

"Why does he do that when he walks?"

"'E canna 'elp 'isself, Duckie, it's th' make o' th' fellow."

She thought about it, then she laughed nervously. And then she bethought herself, her cheeks flushed, and she cried:

"He's a horrid man."

"Nay, he's non horrid; he canna help it if he wor struck that road."

But when poor Nat came wambling in again, she slid away. And she would not eat his nuts, if the men bought them for her. And when the farmers gambled at dominoes for them, she was angry.

"They are dirty-man's nuts," she cried.

So a revulsion started against Nat, who had not long after to go to the workhouse.

There grew in Brangwen's heart now a secret desire to make her a lady. His brother Alfred, in Nottingham, had caused a great scandal by becoming the lover of an educated woman, a lady, widow of a doctor. Very often, Alfred Brangwen went down as a friend to her cottage, which was in Derbyshire, leaving his wife and family for a day or two, then returning to them. And no-one dared gainsay him, for he was a strong-willed, direct man, and he said he was a friend of this widow.

One day Brangwen met his brother on the station.

"Where are you going to, then?" asked the younger brother.

"I'm going down to Wirksworth."

"You've got friends down there, I'm told."

"Yes."

"I s'll have to be lookin' in when I'm down that road."

"You please yourself."

Tom Brangwen was so curious about the woman that the next time he was in Wirksworth he asked for her house.

He found a beautiful cottage on the steep side of a hill, looking clean over the town, that lay in the bottom of the basin, and away at the old quarries on the opposite side of the space. Mrs. Forbes was in the garden. She was a tall woman

with white hair. She came up the path taking off her thick gloves, laying down her shears. It was autumn. She wore a wide-brimmed hat.

Brangwen blushed to the roots of his hair, and did not know what to say.

“I thought I might look in,” he said, “knowing you were friends of my brother’s. I had to come to Wirksworth.”

She saw at once that he was a Brangwen.

“Will you come in?” she said. “My father is lying down.”

She took him into a drawing-room, full of books, with a piano and a violin-stand. And they talked, she simply and easily. She was full of dignity. The room was of a kind Brangwen had never known; the atmosphere seemed open and spacious, like a mountain-top to him.

“Does my brother like reading?” he asked.

“Some things. He has been reading Herbert Spencer. And we read Browning sometimes.”

Brangwen was full of admiration, deep thrilling, almost reverential admiration. He looked at her with lit-up eyes when she said, “we read”. At last he burst out, looking round the room:

“I didn’t know our Alfred was this way inclined.”

“He is quite an unusual man.”

He looked at her in amazement. She evidently had a new idea of his brother: she evidently appreciated him. He looked again at the woman. She was about forty, straight, rather hard, a curious, separate creature. Himself, he was not in love with her, there was something chilling about her. But he was filled with boundless admiration.

At tea-time he was introduced to her father, an invalid who had to be helped about, but who was ruddy and well-favoured, with snowy hair and watery blue eyes, and a courtly naive manner that again was new and strange to Brangwen, so suave, so merry, so innocent.

His brother was this woman’s lover! It was too amazing. Brangwen went home despising himself for his own poor way of life. He was a clod-hopper and a boor, dull, stuck in the mud. More than ever he wanted to clamber out, to this visionary polite world.

He was well off. He was as well off as Alfred, who could not have above six hundred a year, all told. He himself made about four hundred, and could make more. His investments got better every day. Why did he not do something? His wife was a lady also.

But when he got to the Marsh, he realised how fixed everything was, how the other form of life was beyond him, and he regretted for the first time that he had succeeded to the farm. He felt a prisoner, sitting safe and easy and

unadventurous. He might, with risk, have done more with himself. He could neither read Browning nor Herbert Spencer, nor have access to such a room as Mrs. Forbes's. All that form of life was outside him.

But then, he said he did not want it. The excitement of the visit began to pass off. The next day he was himself, and if he thought of the other woman, there was something about her and her place that he did not like, something cold something alien, as if she were not a woman, but an inhuman being who used up human life for cold, unliving purposes.

The evening came on, he played with Anna, and then sat alone with his own wife. She was sewing. He sat very still, smoking, perturbed. He was aware of his wife's quiet figure, and quiet dark head bent over her needle. It was too quiet for him. It was too peaceful. He wanted to smash the walls down, and let the night in, so that his wife should not be so secure and quiet, sitting there. He wished the air were not so close and narrow. His wife was obliterated from him, she was in her own world, quiet, secure, unnoticed, unnoticing. He was shut down by her.

He rose to go out. He could not sit still any longer. He must get out of this oppressive, shut-down, woman-haunt.

His wife lifted her head and looked at him.

"Are you going out?" she asked.

He looked down and met her eyes. They were darker than darkness, and gave deeper space. He felt himself retreating before her, defensive, whilst her eyes followed and tracked him own.

"I was just going up to Cossethay," he said.

She remained watching him.

"Why do you go?" she said.

His heart beat fast, and he sat down, slowly.

"No reason particular," he said, beginning to fill his pipe again, mechanically.

"Why do you go away so often?" she said.

"But you don't want me," he replied.

She was silent for a while.

"You do not want to be with me any more," she said.

It startled him. How did she know this truth? He thought it was his secret.

"Yi," he said.

"You want to find something else," she said.

He did not answer. "Did he?" he asked himself.

"You should not want so much attention," she said. "You are not a baby."

"I'm not grumbling," he said. Yet he knew he was.

"You think you have not enough," she said.

"How enough?"

“You think you have not enough in me. But how do you know me? What do you do to make me love you?”

He was flabbergasted.

“I never said I hadn’t enough in you,” he replied. “I didn’t know you wanted making to love me. What do you want?”

“You don’t make it good between us any more, you are not interested. You do not make me want you.”

“And you don’t make me want you, do you now?” There was a silence. They were such strangers.

“Would you like to have another woman?” she asked.

His eyes grew round, he did not know where he was. How could she, his own wife, say such a thing? But she sat there, small and foreign and separate. It dawned upon him she did not consider herself his wife, except in so far as they agreed. She did not feel she had married him. At any rate, she was willing to allow he might want another woman. A gap, a space opened before him.

“No,” he said slowly. “What other woman should I want?”

“Like your brother,” she said.

He was silent for some time, ashamed also.

“What of her?” he said. “I didn’t like the woman.”

“Yes, you liked her,” she answered persistently.

He stared in wonder at his own wife as she told him his own heart so callously. And he was indignant. What right had she to sit there telling him these things? She was his wife, what right had she to speak to him like this, as if she were a stranger.

“I didn’t,” he said. “I want no woman.”

“Yes, you would like to be like Alfred.”

His silence was one of angry frustration. He was astonished. He had told her of his visit to Wirksworth, but briefly, without interest, he thought.

As she sat with her strange dark face turned towards him, her eyes watched him, inscrutable, casting him up. He began to oppose her. She was again the active unknown facing him. Must he admit her? He resisted involuntarily.

“Why should you want to find a woman who is more to you than me?” she said.

The turbulence raged in his breast.

“I don’t,” he said.

“Why do you?” she repeated. “Why do you want to deny me?”

Suddenly, in a flash, he saw she might be lonely, isolated, unsure. She had seemed to him the utterly certain, satisfied, absolute, excluding him. Could she need anything?

“Why aren’t you satisfied with me?-I’m not satisfied with you. Paul used to come to me and take me like a man does. You only leave me alone or take me like your cattle, quickly, to forget me again-so that you can forget me again.”

“What am I to remember about you?” said Brangwen.

“I want you to know there is somebody there besides yourself.”

“Well, don’t I know it?”

“You come to me as if it was for nothing, as if I was nothing there. When Paul came to me, I was something to him-a woman, I was. To you I am nothing-it is like cattle-or nothing — ”

“You make me feel as if I was nothing,” he said.

They were silent. She sat watching him. He could not move, his soul was seething and chaotic. She turned to her sewing again. But the sight of her bent before him held him and would not let him be. She was a strange, hostile, dominant thing. Yet not quite hostile. As he sat he felt his limbs were strong and hard, he sat in strength.

She was silent for a long time, stitching. He was aware, poignantly, of the round shape of her head, very intimate, compelling. She lifted her head and sighed. The blood burned in him, her voice ran to him like fire.

“Come here,” she said, unsure.

For some moments he did not move. Then he rose slowly and went across the hearth. It required an almost deathly effort of volition, or of acquiescence. He stood before her and looked down at her. Her face was shining again, her eyes were shining again like terrible laughter. It was to him terrible, how she could be transfigured. He could not look at her, it burnt his heart.

“My love!” she said.

And she put her arms round him as he stood before her round his thighs, pressing him against her breast. And her hands on him seemed to reveal to him the mould of his own nakedness, he was passionately lovely to himself. He could not bear to look at her.

“My dear!” she said. He knew she spoke a foreign language. The fear was like bliss in his heart. He looked down. Her face was shining, her eyes were full of light, she was awful. He suffered from the compulsion to her. She was the awful unknown. He bent down to her, suffering, unable to let go, unable to let himself go, yet drawn, driven. She was now the transfigured, she was wonderful, beyond him. He wanted to go. But he could not as yet kiss her. He was himself apart. Easiest he could kiss her feet. But he was too ashamed for the actual deed, which were like an affront. She waited for him to meet her, not to bow before her and serve her. She wanted his active participation, not his submission. She put her fingers on him. And it was torture to him, that he must give himself to her

actively, participate in her, that he must meet and embrace and know her, who was other than himself. There was that in him which shrank from yielding to her, resisted the relaxing towards her, opposed the mingling with her, even while he most desired it. He was afraid, he wanted to save himself.

There were a few moments of stillness. Then gradually, the tension, the withholding relaxed in him, and he began to flow towards her. She was beyond him, the unattainable. But he let go his hold on himself, he relinquished himself, and knew the subterranean force of his desire to come to her, to be with her, to mingle with her, losing himself to find her, to find himself in her. He began to approach her, to draw near.

His blood beat up in waves of desire. He wanted to come to her, to meet her. She was there, if he could reach her. The reality of her who was just beyond him absorbed him. Blind and destroyed, he pressed forward, nearer, nearer, to receive the consummation of himself, he received within the darkness which should swallow him and yield him up to himself. If he could come really within the blazing kernel of darkness, if really he could be destroyed, burnt away till he lit with her in one consummation, that were supreme, supreme.

Their coming together now, after two years of married life, was much more wonderful to them than it had been before. It was the entry into another circle of existence, it was the baptism to another life, it was the complete confirmation. Their feet trod strange ground of knowledge, their footsteps were lit-up with discovery. Wherever they walked, it was well, the world re-echoed round them in discovery. They went gladly and forgetful. Everything was lost, and everything was found. The new world was discovered, it remained only to be explored.

They had passed through the doorway into the further space, where movement was so big, that it contained bonds and constraints and labours, and still was complete liberty. She was the doorway to him, he to her. At last they had thrown open the doors, each to the other, and had stood in the doorways facing each other, whilst the light flooded out from behind on to each of their faces, it was the transfiguration, glorification, the admission.

And always the light of the transfiguration burned on in their hearts. He went his way, as before, she went her way, to the rest of the world there seemed no change. But to the two of them, there was the perpetual wonder of the transfiguration.

He did not know her any better, any more precisely, now that he knew her altogether. Poland, her husband, the war — he understood no more of this in her. He did not understand her foreign nature, half German, half Polish, nor her foreign speech. But he knew her, he knew her meaning, without understanding.

What she said, what she spoke, this was a blind gesture on her part. In herself she walked strong and clear, he knew her, he saluted her, was with her. What was memory after all, but the recording of a number of possibilities which had never been fulfilled? What was Paul Lensky to her, but an unfulfilled possibility to which he, Brangwen, was the reality and the fulfilment? What did it matter, that Anna Lensky was born of Lydia and Paul? God was her father and her mother. He had passed through the married pair without fully making Himself known to them.

Now He was declared to Brangwen and to Lydia Brangwen, as they stood together. When at last they had joined hands, the house was finished, and the Lord took up his abode. And they were glad.

The days went on as before, Brangwen went out to his work, his wife nursed her child and attended in some measure to the farm. They did not think of each other-why should they? Only when she touched him, he knew her instantly, that she was with him, near him, that she was the gateway and the way out, that she was beyond, and that he was travelling in her through the beyond. Whither?-What does it matter? He responded always. When she called, he answered, when he asked, her response came at once, or at length.

Anna's soul was put at peace between them. She looked from one to the other, and she saw them established to her safety, and she was free. She played between the pillar of fire and the pillar of cloud in confidence, having the assurance on her right hand and the assurance on her left. She was no longer called upon to uphold with her childish might the broken end of the arch. Her father and her mother now met to the span of the heavens, and she, the child, was free to play in the space beneath, between.

CHAPTER 4

Girlhood of Anna Brangwen

When Anna was nine years old, Brangwen sent her to the dames' school in Cossethay. There she went, flipping and dancing in her inconsequential fashion, doing very much as she liked, disconcerting old Miss Coates by her indifference to respectability and by her lack of reverence. Anna only laughed at Miss Coates, liked her, and patronised her in superb, childish fashion.

The girl was at once shy and wild. She had a curious contempt for ordinary people, a benevolent superiority. She was very shy, and tortured with misery when people did not like her. On the other hand, she cared very little for anybody save her mother, whom she still rather resentfully worshipped, and her father, whom she loved and patronised, but upon whom she depended. These two, her mother and father, held her still in fee. But she was free of other people, towards whom, on the whole, she took the benevolent attitude. She deeply hated ugliness or intrusion or arrogance, however. As a child, she was as proud and shadowy as a tiger, and as aloof. She could confer favours, but, save from her mother and father, she could receive none. She hated people who came too near to her. Like a wild thing, she wanted her distance. She mistrusted intimacy.

In Cossethay and Ilkeston she was always an alien. She had plenty of acquaintances, but no friends. Very few people whom she met were significant to her. They seemed part of a herd, undistinguished. She did not take people very seriously.

She had two brothers, Tom, dark-haired, small, volatile, whom she was intimately related to but whom she never mingled with, and Fred, fair and responsive, whom she adored but did not consider as a real, separate thing. She was too much the centre of her own universe, too little aware of anything outside.

The first person she met, who affected her as a real, living person, whom she regarded as having definite existence, was Baron Skrebensky, her mother's friend. He also was a Polish exile, who had taken orders, and had received from Mr. Gladstone a small country living in Yorkshire.

When Anna was about ten years old, she went with her mother to spend a few days with the Baron Skrebensky. He was very unhappy in his red-brick vicarage. He was vicar of a country church, a living worth a little over two hundred

pounds a year, but he had a large parish containing several collieries, with a new, raw, heathen population. He went to the north of England expecting homage from the common people, for he was an aristocrat. He was roughly, even cruelly received. But he never understood it. He remained a fiery aristocrat. Only he had to learn to avoid his parishioners.

Anna was very much impressed by him. He was a smallish man with a rugged, rather crumpled face and blue eyes set very deep and glowing. His wife was a tall thin woman, of noble Polish family, mad with pride. He still spoke broken English, for he had kept very close to his wife, both of them forlorn in this strange, inhospitable country, and they always spoke in Polish together. He was disappointed with Mrs. Brangwen's soft, natural English, very disappointed that her child spoke no Polish.

Anna loved to watch him. She liked the big, new, rambling vicarage, desolate and stark on its hill. It was so exposed, so bleak and bold after the Marsh. The Baron talked endlessly in Polish to Mrs. Brangwen; he made furious gestures with his hands, his blue eyes were full of fire. And to Anna, there was a significance about his sharp, flinging movements. Something in her responded to his extravagance and his exuberant manner. She thought him a very wonderful person. She was shy of him, she liked him to talk to her. She felt a sense of freedom near him.

She never could tell how she knew it, but she did know that he was a knight of Malta. She could never remember whether she had seen his star, or cross, of his order or not, but it flashed in her mind, like a symbol. He at any rate represented to the child the real world, where kings and lords and princes moved and fulfilled their shining lives, whilst queens and ladies and princesses upheld the noble order.

She had recognised the Baron Skrebensky as a real person, he had had some regard for her. But when she did not see him any more, he faded and became a memory. But as a memory he was always alive to her.

Anna became a tall, awkward girl. Her eyes were still very dark and quick, but they had grown careless, they had lost their watchful, hostile look. Her fierce, spun hair turned brown, it grew heavier and was tied back. She was sent to a young ladies' school in Nottingham.

And at this period she was absorbed in becoming a young lady. She was intelligent enough, but not interested in learning. At first, she thought all the girls at school very ladylike and wonderful, and she wanted to be like them. She came to a speedy disillusion: they galled and maddened her, they were petty and mean. After the loose, generous atmosphere of her home, where little things did not count, she was always uneasy in the world, that would snap and bite at every

trifle.

A quick change came over her. She mistrusted herself, she mistrusted the outer world. She did not want to go on, she did not want to go out into it, she wanted to go no further.

“What do I care about that lot of girls?” she would say to her father, contemptuously; “they are nobody.”

The trouble was that the girls would not accept Anna at her measure. They would have her according to themselves or not at all. So she was confused, seduced, she became as they were for a time, and then, in revulsion, she hated them furiously.

“Why don’t you ask some of your girls here?” her father would say.

“They’re not coming here,” she cried.

“And why not?”

“They’re bagatelle,” she said, using one of her mother’s rare phrases.

“Bagatelles or billiards, it makes no matter, they’re nice young lasses enough.”

But Anna was not to be won over. She had a curious shrinking from commonplace people, and particularly from the young lady of her day. She would not go into company because of the ill-at-ease feeling other people brought upon her. And she never could decide whether it were her fault or theirs. She half respected these other people, and continuous disillusion maddened her. She wanted to respect them. Still she thought the people she did not know were wonderful. Those she knew seemed always to be limiting her, tying her up in little falsities that irritated her beyond bearing. She would rather stay at home and avoid the rest of the world, leaving it illusory.

For at the Marsh life had indeed a certain freedom and largeness. There was no fret about money, no mean little precedence, nor care for what other people thought, because neither Mrs. Brangwen nor Brangwen could be sensible of any judgment passed on them from outside. Their lives were too separate.

So Anna was only easy at home, where the common sense and the supreme relation between her parents produced a freer standard of being than she could find outside. Where, outside the Marsh, could she find the tolerant dignity she had been brought up in? Her parents stood undiminished and unaware of criticism. The people she met outside seemed to begrudge her her very existence. They seemed to want to belittle her also. She was exceedingly reluctant to go amongst them. She depended upon her mother and her father. And yet she wanted to go out.

At school, or in the world, she was usually at fault, she felt usually that she ought to be slinking in disgrace. She never felt quite sure, in herself, whether she

were wrong, or whether the others were wrong. She had not done her lessons: well, she did not see any reason why she should do her lessons, if she did not want to. Was there some occult reason why she should? Were these people, schoolmistresses, representatives of some mystic Right, some Higher Good? They seemed to think so themselves. But she could not for her life see why a woman should bully and insult her because she did not know thirty lines of *As You Like It*. After all, what did it matter if she knew them or not? Nothing could persuade her that it was of the slightest importance. Because she despised inwardly the coarsely working nature of the mistress. Therefore she was always at outs with authority. From constant telling, she came almost to believe in her own badness, her own intrinsic inferiority. She felt that she ought always to be in a state of slinking disgrace, if she fulfilled what was expected of her. But she rebelled. She never really believed in her own badness. At the bottom of her heart she despised the other people, who carped and were loud over trifles. She despised them, and wanted revenge on them. She hated them whilst they had power over her.

Still she kept an ideal: a free, proud lady absolved from the petty ties, existing beyond petty considerations. She would see such ladies in pictures: Alexandra, Princess of Wales, was one of her models. This lady was proud and royal, and stepped indifferently over all small, mean desires: so thought Anna, in her heart. And the girl did up her hair high under a little slanting hat, her skirts were fashionably bunched up, she wore an elegant, skin-fitting coat.

Her father was delighted. Anna was very proud in her bearing, too naturally indifferent to smaller bonds to satisfy Ilkeston, which would have liked to put her down. But Brangwen was having no such thing. If she chose to be royal, royal she should be. He stood like a rock between her and the world.

After the fashion of his family, he grew stout and handsome. His blue eyes were full of light, twinkling and sensitive, his manner was deliberate, but hearty, warm. His capacity for living his own life without attention from his neighbours made them respect him. They would run to do anything for him. He did not consider them, but was open-handed towards them, so they made profit of their willingness. He liked people, so long as they remained in the background.

Mrs. Brangwen went on in her own way, following her own devices. She had her husband, her two sons and Anna. These staked out and marked her horizon. The other people were outsiders. Inside her own world, her life passed along like a dream for her, it lapsed, and she lived within its lapse, active and always pleased, intent. She scarcely noticed the outer things at all. What was outside was outside, non-existent. She did not mind if the boys fought, so long as it was out of her presence. But if they fought when she was by, she was angry, and they

were afraid of her. She did not care if they broke a window of a railway carriage or sold their watches to have a revel at the Goose Fair. Brangwen was perhaps angry over these things. To the mother they were insignificant. It was odd little things that offended her. She was furious if the boys hung around the slaughterhouse, she was displeased when the school reports were bad. It did not matter how many sins her boys were accused of, so long as they were not stupid, or inferior. If they seemed to brook insult, she hated them. And it was only a certain gaucherie, a gawkiness on Anna's part that irritated her against the girl. Certain forms of clumsiness, grossness, made the mother's eyes glow with curious rage. Otherwise she was pleased, indifferent.

Pursuing her splendid-lady ideal, Anna became a lofty demoiselle of sixteen, plagued by family shortcomings. She was very sensitive to her father. She knew if he had been drinking, were he ever so little affected, and she could not bear it. He flushed when he drank, the veins stood out on his temples, there was a twinkling, cavalier boisterousness in his eye, his manner was jovially overbearing and mocking. And it angered her. When she heard his loud, roaring, boisterous mockery, an anger of resentment filled her. She was quick to forestall him, the moment he came in.

"You look a sight, you do, red in the face," she cried.

"I might look worse if I was green," he answered.

"Boozing in Ilkeston."

"And what's wrong wi' Il'son?"

She flounced away. He watched her with amused, twinkling eyes, yet in spite of himself said that she flouted him.

They were a curious family, a law to themselves, separate from the world, isolated, a small republic set in invisible bounds. The mother was quite indifferent to Ilkeston and Cossethay, to any claims made on her from outside, she was very shy of any outsider, exceedingly courteous, winning even. But the moment the visitor had gone, she laughed and dismissed him, he did not exist. It had been all a game to her. She was still a foreigner, unsure of her ground. But alone with her own children and husband at the Marsh, she was mistress of a little native land that lacked nothing.

She had some beliefs somewhere, never defined. She had been brought up a Roman Catholic. She had gone to the Church of England for protection. The outward form was a matter of indifference to her. Yet she had some fundamental religion. It was as if she worshipped God as a mystery, never seeking in the least to define what He was.

And inside her, the subtle sense of the Great Absolute wherein she had her being was very strong. The English dogma never reached her: the language was

too foreign. Through it all she felt the great Separator who held life in His hands, gleaming, imminent, terrible, the Great Mystery, immediate beyond all telling.

She shone and gleamed to the Mystery, Whom she knew through all her senses, she glanced with strange, mystic superstitions that never found expression in the English language, never mounted to thought in English. But so she lived, within a potent, sensuous belief that included her family and contained her destiny.

To this she had reduced her husband. He existed with her entirely indifferent to the general values of the world. Her very ways, the very mark of her eyebrows were symbols and indication to him. There, on the farm with her, he lived through a mystery of life and death and creation, strange, profound ecstasies and incommunicable satisfactions, of which the rest of the world knew nothing; which made the pair of them apart and respected in the English village, for they were also well-to-do.

But Anna was only half safe within her mother's unthinking knowledge. She had a mother-of-pearl rosary that had been her own father's. What it meant to her she could never say. But the string of moonlight and silver, when she had it between her fingers, filled her with strange passion. She learned at school a little Latin, she learned an Ave Maria and a Pater Noster, she learned how to say her rosary. But that was no good. "Ave Maria, gratia plena, Dominus tecum, Benedicta tu in mulieribus et benedictus fructus ventris tui Jesus. Ave Maria, Sancta Maria, ora pro nobis peccatoribus, nunc et in hora mortis nostrae, Amen."

It was not right, somehow. What these words meant when translated was not the same as the pale rosary meant. There was a discrepancy, a falsehood. It irritated her to say, "Dominus tecum," or, "benedicta tu in mulieribus." She loved the mystic words, "Ave Maria, Sancta Maria;" she was moved by "benedictus fructus ventris tui Jesus," and by "nunc et in hora mortis nostrae." But none of it was quite real. It was not satisfactory, somehow.

She avoided her rosary, because, moving her with curious passion as it did, it meant only these not very significant things. She put it away. It was her instinct to put all these things away. It was her instinct to avoid thinking, to avoid it, to save herself.

She was seventeen, touchy, full of spirits, and very moody: quick to flush, and always uneasy, uncertain. For some reason or other, she turned more to her father, she felt almost flashes of hatred for her mother. Her mother's dark muzzle and curiously insidious ways, her mother's utter surety and confidence, her strange satisfaction, even triumph, her mother's way of laughing at things and her mother's silent overriding of vexatious propositions, most of all her mother's triumphant power maddened the girl.

She became sudden and incalculable. Often she stood at the window, looking out, as if she wanted to go. Sometimes she went, she mixed with people. But always she came home in anger, as if she were diminished, belittled, almost degraded.

There was over the house a kind of dark silence and intensity, in which passion worked its inevitable conclusions. There was in the house a sort of richness, a deep, inarticulate interchange which made other places seem thin and unsatisfying. Brangwen could sit silent, smoking in his chair, the mother could move about in her quiet, insidious way, and the sense of the two presences was powerful, sustaining. The whole intercourse was wordless, intense and close.

But Anna was uneasy. She wanted to get away. Yet wherever she went, there came upon her that feeling of thinness, as if she were made smaller, belittled. She hastened home.

There she raged and interrupted the strong, settled interchange. Sometimes her mother turned on her with a fierce, destructive anger, in which was no pity or consideration. And Anna shrank, afraid. She went to her father.

He would still listen to the spoken word, which fell sterile on the unheeding mother. Sometimes Anna talked to her father. She tried to discuss people, she wanted to know what was meant. But her father became uneasy. He did not want to have things dragged into consciousness. Only out of consideration for her he listened. And there was a kind of bristling rousedness in the room. The cat got up and stretching itself, went uneasily to the door. Mrs. Brangwen was silent, she seemed ominous. Anna could not go on with her fault-finding, her criticism, her expression of dissatisfactions. She felt even her father against her. He had a strong, dark bond with her mother, a potent intimacy that existed inarticulate and wild, following its own course, and savage if interrupted, uncovered.

Nevertheless Brangwen was uneasy about the girl, the whole house continued to be disturbed. She had a pathetic, baffled appeal. She was hostile to her parents, even whilst she lived entirely with them, within their spell.

Many ways she tried, of escape. She became an assiduous church-goer. But the language meant nothing to her: it seemed false. She hated to hear things expressed, put into words. Whilst the religious feelings were inside her they were passionately moving. In the mouth of the clergyman, they were false, indecent. She tried to read. But again the tedium and the sense of the falsity of the spoken word put her off. She went to stay with girl friends. At first she thought it splendid. But then the inner boredom came on, it seemed to her all nothingness. And she felt always belittled, as if never, never could she stretch her length and stride her stride.

Her mind reverted often to the torture cell of a certain Bishop of France, in

which the victim could neither stand nor lie stretched out, never. Not that she thought of herself in any connection with this. But often there came into her mind the wonder, how the cell was built, and she could feel the horror of the crampedness, as something very real.

She was, however, only eighteen when a letter came from Mrs. Alfred Brangwen, in Nottingham, saying that her son William was coming to Ilkeston to take a place as junior draughtsman, scarcely more than apprentice, in a lace factory. He was twenty years old, and would the Marsh Brangwens be friendly with him.

Tom Brangwen at once wrote offering the young man a home at the Marsh. This was not accepted, but the Nottingham Brangwens expressed gratitude.

There had never been much love lost between the Nottingham Brangwens and the Marsh. Indeed, Mrs. Alfred, having inherited three thousand pounds, and having occasion to be dissatisfied with her husband, held aloof from all the Brangwens whatsoever. She affected, however, some esteem of Mrs. Tom, as she called the Polish woman, saying that at any rate she was a lady.

Anna Brangwen was faintly excited at the news of her Cousin Will's coming to Ilkeston. She knew plenty of young men, but they had never become real to her. She had seen in this young gallant a nose she liked, in that a pleasant moustache, in the other a nice way of wearing clothes, in one a ridiculous fringe of hair, in another a comical way of talking. They were objects of amusement and faint wonder to her, rather than real beings, the young men.

The only man she knew was her father; and, as he was something large, looming, a kind of Godhead, he embraced all manhood for her, and other men were just incidental.

She remembered her cousin Will. He had town clothes and was thin, with a very curious head, black as jet, with hair like sleek, thin fur. It was a curious head: it reminded her she knew not of what: of some animal, some mysterious animal that lived in the darkness under the leaves and never came out, but which lived vividly, swift and intense. She always thought of him with that black, keen, blind head. And she considered him odd.

He appeared at the Marsh one Sunday morning: a rather long, thin youth with a bright face and a curious self-possession among his shyness, a native unawareness of what other people might be, since he was himself.

When Anna came downstairs in her Sunday clothes, ready for church, he rose and greeted her conventionally, shaking hands. His manners were better than hers. She flushed. She noticed that he now had a thick fledge on his upper lip, a black, finely-shapen line marking his wide mouth. It rather repelled her. It reminded her of the thin, fine fur of his hair. She was aware of something

strange in him.

His voice had rather high upper notes, and very resonant middle notes. It was queer. She wondered why he did it. But he sat very naturally in the Marsh living-room. He had some uncouthness, some natural self-possession of the Brangwens, that made him at home there.

Anna was rather troubled by the strangely intimate, affectionate way her father had towards this young man. He seemed gentle towards him, he put himself aside in order to fill out the young man. This irritated Anna.

“Father,” she said abruptly, “give me some collection.”

“What collection?” asked Brangwen.

“Don’t be ridiculous,” she cried, flushing.

“Nay,” he said, “what collection’s this?”

“You know it’s the first Sunday of the month.”

Anna stood confused. Why was he doing this, why was he making her conspicuous before this stranger?

“I want some collection,” she reasserted.

“So tha says,” he replied indifferently, looking at her, then turning again to this nephew.

She went forward, and thrust her hand into his breeches pocket. He smoked steadily, making no resistance, talking to his nephew. Her hand groped about in his pocket, and then drew out his leathern purse. Her colour was bright in her clear cheeks, her eyes shone. Brangwen’s eyes were twinkling. The nephew sat sheepishly. Anna, in her finery, sat down and slid all the money into her lap. There was silver and gold. The youth could not help watching her. She was bent over the heap of money, fingering the different coins.

“I’ve a good mind to take half a sovereign,” she said, and she looked up with glowing dark eyes. She met the light-brown eyes of her cousin, close and intent upon her. She was startled. She laughed quickly, and turned to her father.

“I’ve a good mind to take half a sovereign, our Dad,” she said.

“Yes, nimble fingers,” said her father. “You take what’s your own.”

“Are you coming, our Anna?” asked her brother from the door.

She suddenly chilled to normal, forgetting both her father and her cousin.

“Yes, I’m ready,” she said, taking sixpence from the heap of money and sliding the rest back into the purse, which she laid on the table.

“Give it here,” said her father.

Hastily she thrust the purse into his pocket and was going out.

“You’d better go wi’ ‘em, lad, hadn’t you?” said the father to the nephew.

Will Brangwen rose uncertainly. He had golden-brown, quick, steady eyes, like a bird’s, like a hawk’s, which cannot look afraid.

“Your Cousin Will ‘ll come with you,” said the father.

Anna glanced at the strange youth again. She felt him waiting there for her to notice him. He was hovering on the edge of her consciousness, ready to come in. She did not want to look at him. She was antagonistic to him.

She waited without speaking. Her cousin took his hat and joined her. It was summer outside. Her brother Fred was plucking a sprig of flowery currant to put in his coat, from the bush at the angle of the house. She took no notice. Her cousin followed just behind her.

They were on the high road. She was aware of a strangeness in her being. It made her uncertain. She caught sight of the flowering currant in her brother’s buttonhole.

“Oh, our Fred,” she cried. “Don’t wear that stuff to go to church.”

Fred looked down protectively at the pink adornment on his breast.

“Why, I like it,” he said.

“Then you’re the only one who does, I’m sure,” she said.

And she turned to her cousin.

“Do you like the smell of it?” she asked.

He was there beside her, tall and uncouth and yet self-possessed. It excited her.

“I can’t say whether I do or not,” he replied.

“Give it here, Fred, don’t have it smelling in church,” she said to the little boy, her page.

Her fair, small brother handed her the flower dutifully. She sniffed it and gave it without a word to her cousin, for his judgment. He smelled the dangling flower curiously.

“It’s a funny smell,” he said.

And suddenly she laughed, and a quick light came on all their faces, there was a blithe trip in the small boy’s walk.

The bells were ringing, they were going up the summery hill in their Sunday clothes. Anna was very fine in a silk frock of brown and white stripes, tight along the arms and the body, bunched up very elegantly behind the skirt. There was something of the cavalier about Will Brangwen, and he was well dressed.

He walked along with the sprig of currant-blossom dangling between his fingers, and none of them spoke. The sun shone brightly on little showers of buttercup down the bank, in the fields the fool’s-parsley was foamy, held very high and proud above a number of flowers that flitted in the greenish twilight of the mowing-grass below.

They reached the church. Fred led the way to the pew, followed by the cousin, then Anna. She felt very conspicuous and important. Somehow, this young man

gave her away to other people. He stood aside and let her pass to her place, then sat next to her. It was a curious sensation, to sit next to him.

The colour came streaming from the painted window above her. It lit on the dark wood of the pew, on the stone, worn aisle, on the pillar behind her cousin, and on her cousin's hands, as they lay on his knees. She sat amid illumination, illumination and luminous shadow all around her, her soul very bright. She sat, without knowing it, conscious of the hands and motionless knees of her cousin. Something strange had entered into her world, something entirely strange and unlike what she knew.

She was curiously elated. She sat in a glowing world of unreality, very delightful. A brooding light, like laughter, was in her eyes. She was aware of a strange influence entering in to her, which she enjoyed. It was a dark enriching influence she had not known before. She did not think of her cousin. But she was startled when his hands moved.

She wished he would not say the responses so plainly. It diverted her from her vague enjoyment. Why would he obtrude, and draw notice to himself? It was bad taste. But she went on all right till the hymn came. He stood up beside her to sing, and that pleased her. Then suddenly, at the very first word, his voice came strong and overriding, filling the church. He was singing the tenor. Her soul opened in amazement. His voice filled the church! It rang out like a trumpet, and rang out again. She started to giggle over her hymn-book. But he went on, perfectly steady. Up and down rang his voice, going its own way. She was helplessly shocked into laughter. Between moments of dead silence in herself she shook with laughter. On came the laughter, seized her and shook her till the tears were in her eyes. She was amazed, and rather enjoyed it. And still the hymn rolled on, and still she laughed. She bent over her hymn-book crimson with confusion, but still her sides shook with laughter. She pretended to cough, she pretended to have a crumb in her throat. Fred was gazing up at her with clear blue eyes. She was recovering herself. And then a slur in the strong, blind voice at her side brought it all on again, in a gust of mad laughter.

She bent down to prayer in cold reproof of herself. And yet, as she knelt, little eddies of giggling went over her. The very sight of his knees on the praying cushion sent the little shock of laughter over her.

She gathered herself together and sat with prim, pure face, white and pink and cold as a christmas rose, her hands in her silk gloves folded on her lap, her dark eyes all vague, abstracted in a sort of dream, oblivious of everything.

The sermon rolled on vaguely, in a tide of pregnant peace.

Her cousin took out his pocket-handkerchief. He seemed to be drifted absorbed into the sermon. He put his handkerchief to his face. Then something

dropped on to his knee. There lay the bit of flowering currant! He was looking down at it in real astonishment. A wild snort of laughter came from Anna. Everybody heard: it was torture. He had shut the crumpled flower in his hand and was looking up again with the same absorbed attention to the sermon. Another snort of laughter from Anna. Fred nudged her remindingly.

Her cousin sat motionless. Somehow he was aware that his face was red. She could feel him. His hand, closed over the flower, remained quite still, pretending to be normal. Another wild struggle in Anna's breast, and the snort of laughter. She bent forward shaking with laughter. It was now no joke. Fred was nudging at her. She nudged him back fiercely. Then another vicious spasm of laughter seized her. She tried to ward it off in a little cough. The cough ended in a suppressed whoop. She wanted to die. And the closed hand crept away to the pocket. Whilst she sat in taut suspense, the laughter rushed back at her, knowing he was fumbling in his pocket to shove the flower away.

In the end, she felt weak, exhausted and thoroughly depressed. A blankness of wincing depression came over her. She hated the presence of the other people. Her face became quite haughty. She was unaware of her cousin any more.

When the collection arrived with the last hymn, her cousin was again singing resoundingly. And still it amused her. In spite of the shameful exhibition she had made of herself, it amused her still. She listened to it in a spell of amusement. And the bag was thrust in front of her, and her sixpence was mingled in the folds of her glove. In her haste to get it out, it flipped away and went twinkling in the next pew. She stood and giggled. She could not help it: she laughed outright, a figure of shame.

"What were you laughing about, our Anna?" asked Fred, the moment they were out of the church.

"Oh, I couldn't help it," she said, in her careless, half-mocking fashion. "I don't know why Cousin Will's singing set me off."

"What was there in my singing to make you laugh?" he asked.

"It was so loud," she said.

They did not look at each other, but they both laughed again, both reddening.

"What were you snorting and laughing for, our Anna?" asked Tom, the elder brother, at the dinner table, his hazel eyes bright with joy. "Everybody stopped to look at you." Tom was in the choir.

She was aware of Will's eyes shining steadily upon her, waiting for her to speak.

"It was Cousin Will's singing," she said.

At which her cousin burst into a suppressed, chuckling laugh, suddenly showing all his small, regular, rather sharp teeth, and just as quickly closing his

mouth again.

“Has he got such a remarkable voice on him then?” asked Brangwen.

“No, it’s not that,” said Anna. “Only it tickled me-I couldn’t tell you why.”

And again a ripple of laughter went down the table.

Will Brangwen thrust forward his dark face, his eyes dancing, and said:

“I’m in the choir of St. Nicholas.”

“Oh, you go to church then!” said Brangwen.

“Mother does-father doesn’t,” replied the youth.

It was the little things, his movement, the funny tones of his voice, that showed up big to Anna. The matter-of-fact things he said were absurd in contrast. The things her father said seemed meaningless and neutral.

During the afternoon they sat in the parlour, that smelled of geranium, and they ate cherries, and talked. Will Brangwen was called on to give himself forth. And soon he was drawn out.

He was interested in churches, in church architecture. The influence of Ruskin had stimulated him to a pleasure in the medieval forms. His talk was fragmentary, he was only half articulate. But listening to him, as he spoke of church after church, of nave and chancel and transept, of rood-screen and font, of hatchet-carving and moulding and tracery, speaking always with close passion of particular things, particular places, there gathered in her heart a pregnant hush of churches, a mystery, a ponderous significance of bowed stone, a dim-coloured light through which something took place obscurely, passing into darkness: a high, delighted framework of the mystic screen, and beyond, in the furthest beyond, the altar. It was a very real experience. She was carried away. And the land seemed to be covered with a vast, mystic church, reserved in gloom, thrilled with an unknown Presence.

Almost it hurt her, to look out of the window and see the lilacs towering in the vivid sunshine. Or was this the jewelled glass?

He talked of Gothic and Renaissance and Perpendicular, and Early English and Norman. The words thrilled her.

“Have you been to Southwell?” he said. “I was there at twelve o’clock at midday, eating my lunch in the churchyard. And the bells played a hymn.

“Ay, it’s a fine Minster, Southwell, heavy. It’s got heavy, round arches, rather low, on thick pillars. It’s grand, the way those arches travel forward.

“There’s a sedilia as well-pretty. But I like the main body of the church-and that north porch — ”

He was very much excited and filled with himself that afternoon. A flame kindled round him, making his experience passionate and glowing, burningly real.

His uncle listened with twinkling eyes, half-moved. His aunt bent forward her dark face, half-moved, but held by other knowledge. Anna went with him.

He returned to his lodging at night treading quick, his eyes glittering, and his face shining darkly as if he came from some passionate, vital tryst.

The glow remained in him, the fire burned, his heart was fierce like a sun. He enjoyed his unknown life and his own self. And he was ready to go back to the Marsh.

Without knowing it, Anna was wanting him to come. In him she had escaped. In him the bounds of her experience were transgressed: he was the hole in the wall, beyond which the sunshine blazed on an outside world.

He came. Sometimes, not often, but sometimes, talking again, there recurred the strange, remote reality which carried everything before it. Sometimes, he talked of his father, whom he hated with a hatred that was burningly close to love, of his mother, whom he loved, with a love that was keenly close to hatred, or to revolt. His sentences were clumsy, he was only half articulate. But he had the wonderful voice, that could ring its vibration through the girl's soul, transport her into his feeling. Sometimes his voice was hot and declamatory, sometimes it had a strange, twanging, almost cat-like sound, sometimes it hesitated, puzzled, sometimes there was the break of a little laugh. Anna was taken by him. She loved the running flame that coursed through her as she listened to him. And his mother and his father became to her two separate people in her life.

For some weeks the youth came frequently, and was received gladly by them all. He sat amongst them, his dark face glowing, an eagerness and a touch of derisiveness on his wide mouth, something grinning and twisted, his eyes always shining like a bird's, utterly without depth. There was no getting hold of the fellow, Brangwen irritably thought. He was like a grinning young tom-cat, that came when he thought he would, and without cognisance of the other person.

At first the youth had looked towards Tom Brangwen when he talked; and then he looked towards his aunt, for her appreciation, valuing it more than his uncle's; and then he turned to Anna, because from her he got what he wanted, which was not in the elder people.

So that the two young people, from being always attendant on the elder, began to draw apart and establish a separate kingdom. Sometimes Tom Brangwen was irritated. His nephew irritated him. The lad seemed to him too special, self-contained. His nature was fierce enough, but too much abstracted, like a separate thing, like a cat's nature. A cat could lie perfectly peacefully on the hearthrug whilst its master or mistress writhed in agony a yard away. It had nothing to do with other people's affairs. What did the lad really care about anything, save his

own instinctive affairs?

Brangwen was irritated. Nevertheless he liked and respected his nephew. Mrs. Brangwen was irritated by Anna, who was suddenly changed, under the influence of the youth. The mother liked the boy: he was not quite an outsider. But she did not like her daughter to be so much under the spell.

So that gradually the two young people drew apart, escaped from the elders, to create a new thing by themselves. He worked in the garden to propitiate his uncle. He talked churches to propitiate his aunt. He followed Anna like a shadow: like a long, persistent, unswerving black shadow he went after the girl. It irritated Brangwen exceedingly. It exasperated him beyond bearing, to see the lit-up grin, the cat-grin as he called it, on his nephew's face.

And Anna had a new reserve, a new independence. Suddenly she began to act independently of her parents, to live beyond them. Her mother had flashes of anger.

But the courtship went on. Anna would find occasion to go shopping in Ilkeston at evening. She always returned with her cousin; he walking with his head over her shoulder, a little bit behind her, like the Devil looking over Lincoln, as Brangwen noted angrily and yet with satisfaction.

To his own wonder, Will Brangwen found himself in an electric state of passion. To his wonder, he had stopped her at the gate as they came home from Ilkeston one night, and had kissed her, blocking her way and kissing her whilst he felt as if some blow were struck at him in the dark. And when they went indoors, he was acutely angry that her parents looked up scrutinisingly at him and her. What right had they there: why should they look up! Let them remove themselves, or look elsewhere.

And the youth went home with the stars in heaven whirling fiercely about the blackness of his head, and his heart fierce, insistent, but fierce as if he felt something baulking him. He wanted to smash through something.

A spell was cast over her. And how uneasy her parents were, as she went about the house unnoticed, not noticing them, moving in a spell as if she were invisible to them. She was invisible to them. It made them angry. Yet they had to submit. She went about absorbed, obscured for a while.

Over him too the darkness of obscurity settled. He seemed to be hidden in a tense, electric darkness, in which his soul, his life was intensely active, but without his aid or attention. His mind was obscured. He worked swiftly and mechanically, and he produced some beautiful things.

His favourite work was wood-carving. The first thing he made for her was a butter-stamper. In it he carved a mythological bird, a phoenix, something like an eagle, rising on symmetrical wings, from a circle of very beautiful flickering

flames that rose upwards from the rim of the cup.

Anna thought nothing of the gift on the evening when he gave it to her. In the morning, however, when the butter was made, she fetched his seal in place of the old wooden stamper of oak-leaves and acorns. She was curiously excited to see how it would turn out. Strange, the uncouth bird moulded there, in the cup-like hollow, with curious, thick waverings running inwards from a smooth rim. She pressed another mould. Strange, to lift the stamp and see that eagle-beaked bird raising its breast to her. She loved creating it over and over again. And every time she looked, it seemed a new thing come to life. Every piece of butter became this strange, vital emblem.

She showed it to her mother and father.

“That is beautiful,” said her mother, a little light coming on to her face.

“Beautiful!” exclaimed the father, puzzled, fretted. “Why, what sort of a bird does he call it?”

And this was the question put by the customers during the next weeks.

“What sort of a bird do you call that, as you’ve got on th’ butter?”

When he came in the evening, she took him into the dairy to show him.

“Do you like it?” he asked, in his loud, vibrating voice that always sounded strange, re-echoing in the dark places of her being.

They very rarely touched each other. They liked to be alone together, near to each other, but there was still a distance between them.

In the cool dairy the candle-light lit on the large, white surfaces of the cream pans. He turned his head sharply. It was so cool and remote in there, so remote. His mouth was open in a little, strained laugh. She stood with her head bent, turned aside. He wanted to go near to her. He had kissed her once. Again his eye rested on the round blocks of butter, where the emblematic bird lifted its breast from the shadow cast by the candle flame. What was restraining him? Her breast was near him; his head lifted like an eagle’s. She did not move. Suddenly, with an incredibly quick, delicate movement, he put his arms round her and drew her to him. It was quick, cleanly done, like a bird that swoops and sinks close, closer.

He was kissing her throat. She turned and looked at him. Her eyes were dark and flowing with fire. His eyes were hard and bright with a fierce purpose and gladness, like a hawk’s. She felt him flying into the dark space of her flames, like a brand, like a gleaming hawk.

They had looked at each other, and seen each other strange, yet near, very near, like a hawk stooping, swooping, dropping into a flame of darkness. So she took the candle and they went back to the kitchen.

They went on in this way for some time, always coming together, but rarely

touching, very seldom did they kiss. And then, often, it was merely a touch of the lips, a sign. But her eyes began to waken with a constant fire, she paused often in the midst of her transit, as if to recollect something, or to discover something.

And his face became sombre, intent, he did not really hear what was said to him.

One evening in August he came when it was raining. He came in with his jacket collar turned up, his jacket buttoned close, his face wet. And he looked so slim and definite, coming out of the chill rain, she was suddenly blinded with love for him. Yet he sat and talked with her father and mother, meaninglessly, whilst her blood seethed to anguish in her. She wanted to touch him now, only to touch him.

There was the queer, abstract look on her silvery radiant face that maddened her father, her dark eyes were hidden. But she raised them to the youth. And they were dark with a flare that made him quail for a moment.

She went into the second kitchen and took a lantern. Her father watched her as she returned.

“Come with me, Will,” she said to her cousin. “I want to see if I put the brick over where that rat comes in.”

“You’ve no need to do that,” retorted her father. She took no notice. The youth was between the two wills. The colour mounted into the father’s face, his blue eyes stared. The girl stood near the door, her head held slightly back, like an indication that the youth must come. He rose, in his silent, intent way, and was gone with her. The blood swelled in Brangwen’s forehead veins.

It was raining. The light of the lantern flashed on the cobbled path and the bottom of the wall. She came to a small ladder, and climbed up. He reached her the lantern, and followed. Up there in the fowl-loft, the birds sat in fat bunches on the perches, the red combs shining like fire. Bright, sharp eyes opened. There was a sharp caw of expostulation as one of the hens shifted over. The cock sat watching, his yellow neck-feathers bright as glass. Anna went across the dirty floor. Brangwen crouched in the loft watching. The light was soft under the red, naked tiles. The girl crouched in a corner. There was another explosive bustle of a hen springing from her perch.

Anna came back, stooping under the perches. He was waiting for her near the door. Suddenly she had her arms round him, was clinging close to him, cleaving her body against his, and crying, in a whispering, whimpering sound.

“Will, I love you, I love you, Will, I love you.” It sounded as if it were tearing her.

He was not even very much surprised. He held her in his arms, and his bones

melted. He leaned back against the wall. The door of the loft was open. Outside, the rain slanted by in fine, steely, mysterious haste, emerging out of the gulf of darkness. He held her in his arms, and he and she together seemed to be swinging in big, swooping oscillations, the two of them clasped together up in the darkness. Outside the open door of the loft in which they stood, beyond them and below them, was darkness, with a travelling veil of rain.

“I love you, Will, I love you,” she moaned, “I love you, Will.”

He held her as though they were one, and was silent.

In the house, Tom Brangwen waited a while. Then he got up and went out. He went down the yard. He saw the curious misty shaft coming from the loft door. He scarcely knew it was the light in the rain. He went on till the illumination fell on him dimly. Then looking up, through the blurr, he saw the youth and the girl together, the youth with his back against the wall, his head sunk over the head of the girl. The elder man saw them, blurred through the rain, but lit up. They thought themselves so buried in the night. He even saw the lighted dryness of the loft behind, and shadows and bunches of roosting fowls, up in the night, strange shadows cast from the lantern on the floor.

And a black gloom of anger, and a tenderness of self-effacement, fought in his heart. She did not understand what she was doing. She betrayed herself. She was a child, a mere child. She did not know how much of herself she was squandering. And he was blackly and furiously miserable. Was he then an old man, that he should be giving her away in marriage? Was he old? He was not old. He was younger than that young thoughtless fellow in whose arms she lay. Who knew her—he or that blind-headed youth? To whom did she belong, if not to himself?

He thought again of the child he had carried out at night into the barn, whilst his wife was in labour with the young Tom. He remembered the soft, warm weight of the little girl on his arm, round his neck. Now she would say he was finished. She was going away, to deny him, to leave an unendurable emptiness in him, a void that he could not bear. Almost he hated her. How dared she say he was old. He walked on in the rain, sweating with pain, with the horror of being old, with the agony of having to relinquish what was life to him.

Will Brangwen went home without having seen his uncle. He held his hot face to the rain, and walked on in a trance. “I love you, Will, I love you.” The words repeated themselves endlessly. The veils had ripped and issued him naked into the endless space, and he shuddered. The walls had thrust him out and given him a vast space to walk in. Whither, through this darkness of infinite space, was he walking blindly? Where, at the end of all the darkness, was God the Almighty still darkly, seated, thrusting him on? “I love you, Will, I love you.” He trembled

with fear as the words beat in his heart again. And he dared not think of her face, of her eyes which shone, and of her strange, transfigured face. The hand of the Hidden Almighty, burning bright, had thrust out of the darkness and gripped him. He went on subject and in fear, his heart gripped and burning from the touch.

The days went by, they ran on dark-padded feet in silence. He went to see Anna, but again there had come a reserve between them. Tom Brangwen was gloomy, his blue eyes sombre. Anna was strange and delivered up. Her face in its delicate colouring was mute, touched dumb and poignant. The mother bowed her head and moved in her own dark world, that was pregnant again with fulfilment.

Will Brangwen worked at his wood-carving. It was a passion, a passion for him to have the chisel under his grip. Varily the passion of his heart lifted the fine bite of steel. He was carving, as he had always wanted, the Creation of Eve. It was a panel in low relief, for a church. Adam lay asleep as if suffering, and God, a dim, large figure, stooped towards him, stretching forward His unveiled hand; and Eve, a small vivid, naked female shape, was issuing like a flame towards the hand of God, from the torn side of Adam.

Now, Will Brangwen was working at the Eve. She was thin, a keen, unripe thing. With trembling passion, fine as a breath of air, he sent the chisel over her belly, her hard, unripe, small belly. She was a stiff little figure, with sharp lines, in the throes and torture and ecstasy of her creation. But he trembled as he touched her. He had not finished any of his figures. There was a bird on a bough overhead, lifting its wings for flight, and a serpent wreathing up to it. It was not finished yet. He trembled with passion, at last able to create the new, sharp body of his Eve.

At the sides, at the far sides, at either end, were two Angels covering their faces with their wings. They were like trees. As he went to the Marsh, in the twilight, he felt that the Angels, with covered faces, were standing back as he went by. The darkness was of their shadows and the covering of their faces. When he went through the Canal bridge, the evening glowed in its last deep colours, the sky was dark blue, the stars glittered from afar, very remote and approaching above the darkening cluster of the farm, above the paths of crystal along the edge of the heavens.

She waited for him like the glow of light, and as if his face were covered. And he dared not lift his face to look at her.

Corn harvest came on. One evening they walked out through the farm buildings at nightfall. A large gold moon hung heavily to the grey horizon, trees hovered tall, standing back in the dusk, waiting. Anna and the young man went

on noiselessly by the hedge, along where the farm-carts had made dark ruts in the grass. They came through a gate into a wide open field where still much light seemed to spread against their faces. In the under-shadow the sheaves lay on the ground where the reapers had left them, many sheaves like bodies prostrate in shadowy bulk; others were riding hazily in shocks, like ships in the haze of moonlight and of dusk, farther off.

They did not want to turn back, yet whither were they to go, towards the moon? For they were separate, single.

“We will put up some sheaves,” said Anna. So they could remain there in the broad, open place.

They went across the stubble to where the long rows of upreared shocks ended. Curiously populous that part of the field looked, where the shocks rode erect; the rest was open and prostrate.

The air was all hoary silver. She looked around her. Trees stood vaguely at their distance, as if waiting like heralds, for the signal to approach. In this space of vague crystal her heart seemed like a bell ringing. She was afraid lest the sound should be heard.

“You take this row,” she said to the youth, and passing on, she stooped in the next row of lying sheaves, grasping her hands in the tresses of the oats, lifting the heavy corn in either hand, carrying it, as it hung heavily against her, to the cleared space, where she set the two sheaves sharply down, bringing them together with a faint, keen clash. Her two bulks stood leaning together. He was coming, walking shadowily with the gossamer dusk, carrying his two sheaves. She waited near-by. He set his sheaves with a keen, faint clash, next to her sheaves. They rode unsteadily. He tangled the tresses of corn. It hissed like a fountain. He looked up and laughed.

Then she turned away towards the moon, which seemed glowingly to uncover her bosom every time she faced it. He went to the vague emptiness of the field opposite, dutifully.

They stooped, grasped the wet, soft hair of the corn, lifted the heavy bundles, and returned. She was always first. She set down her sheaves, making a pent-house with those others. He was coming shadowy across the stubble, carrying his bundles. She turned away, hearing only the sharp hiss of his mingling corn. She walked between the moon and his shadowy figure.

She took her two new sheaves and walked towards him, as he rose from stooping over the earth. He was coming out of the near distance. She set down her sheaves to make a new stook. They were unsure. Her hands fluttered. Yet she broke away, and turned to the moon, which laid bare her bosom, so she felt as if her bosom were heaving and panting with moonlight. And he had to put up

her two sheaves, which had fallen down. He worked in silence. The rhythm of the work carried him away again, as she was coming near.

They worked together, coming and going, in a rhythm, which carried their feet and their bodies in tune. She stooped, she lifted the burden of sheaves, she turned her face to the dimness where he was, and went with her burden over the stubble. She hesitated, set down her sheaves, there was a swish and hiss of mingling oats, he was drawing near, and she must turn again. And there was the flaring moon laying bare her bosom again, making her drift and ebb like a wave.

He worked steadily, engrossed, threading backwards and forwards like a shuttle across the strip of cleared stubble, weaving the long line of riding shocks, nearer and nearer to the shadowy trees, threading his sheaves with hers.

And always, she was gone before he came. As he came, she drew away, as he drew away, she came. Were they never to meet? Gradually a low, deep-sounding will in him vibrated to her, tried to set her in accord, tried to bring her gradually to him, to a meeting, till they should be together, till they should meet as the sheaves that swished together.

And the work went on. The moon grew brighter, clearer, the corn glistened. He bent over the prostrate bundles, there was a hiss as the sheaves left the ground, a trailing of heavy bodies against him, a dazzle of moonlight on his eyes. And then he was setting the corn together at the stook. And she was coming near.

He waited for her, he fumbled at the stook. She came. But she stood back till he drew away. He saw her in shadow, a dark column, and spoke to her, and she answered. She saw the moonlight flash question on his face. But there was a space between them, and he went away, the work carried them, rhythmic.

Why was there always a space between them, why were they apart? Why, as she came up from under the moon, would she halt and stand off from him? Why was he held away from her? His will drummed persistently, darkly, it drowned everything else.

Into the rhythm of his work there came a pulse and a steadied purpose. He stooped, he lifted the weight, he heaved it towards her, setting it as in her, under the moonlit space. And he went back for more. Ever with increasing closeness he lifted the sheaves and swung striding to the centre with them, ever he drove her more nearly to the meeting, ever he did his share, and drew towards her, overtaking her. There was only the moving to and fro in the moonlight, engrossed, the swinging in the silence, that was marked only by the splash of sheaves, and silence, and a splash of sheaves. And ever the splash of his sheaves broke swifter, beating up to hers, and ever the splash of her sheaves recurred monotonously, unchanging, and ever the splash of his sheaves beat nearer.

Till at last, they met at the shock, facing each other, sheaves in hand. And he was silvery with moonlight, with a moonlit, shadowy face that frightened her. She waited for him.

“Put yours down,” she said.

“No, it’s your turn.” His voice was twanging and insistent.

She set her sheaves against the shock. He saw her hands glisten among the spray of grain. And he dropped his sheaves and he trembled as he took her in his arms. He had over-taken her, and it was his privilege to kiss her. She was sweet and fresh with the night air, and sweet with the scent of grain. And the whole rhythm of him beat into his kisses, and still he pursued her, in his kisses, and still she was not quite overcome. He wondered over the moonlight on her nose! All the moonlight upon her, all the darkness within her! All the night in his arms, darkness and shine, he possessed of it all! All the night for him now, to unfold, to venture within, all the mystery to be entered, all the discovery to be made.

Trembling with keen triumph, his heart was white as a star as he drove his kisses nearer.

“My love!” she called, in a low voice, from afar. The low sound seemed to call to him from far off, under the moon, to him who was unaware. He stopped, quivered, and listened.

“My love,” came again the low, plaintive call, like a bird unseen in the night.

He was afraid. His heart quivered and broke. He was stopped.

“Anna,” he said, as if he answered her from a distance, unsure.

“My love.”

And he drew near, and she drew near.

“Anna,” he said, in wonder and the birthpain of love.

“My love,” she said, her voice growing rapturous. And they kissed on the mouth, in rapture and surprise, long, real kisses. The kiss lasted, there among the moonlight. He kissed her again, and she kissed him. And again they were kissing together. Till something happened in him, he was strange. He wanted her. He wanted her exceedingly. She was something new. They stood there folded, suspended in the night. And his whole being quivered with surprise, as from a blow. He wanted her, and he wanted to tell her so. But the shock was too great to him. He had never realised before. He trembled with irritation and unusedness, he did not know what to do. He held her more gently, gently, much more gently. The conflict was gone by. And he was glad, and breathless, and almost in tears. But he knew he wanted her. Something fixed in him for ever. He was hers. And he was very glad and afraid. He did not know what to do, as they stood there in the open, moonlit field. He looked through her hair at the moon, which seemed to swim liquid-bright.

She sighed, and seemed to wake up, then she kissed him again. Then she loosened herself away from him and took his hand. It hurt him when she drew away from his breast. It hurt him with a chagrin. Why did she draw away from him? But she held his hand.

“I want to go home,” she said, looking at him in a way he could not understand.

He held close to her hand. He was dazed and he could not move, he did not know how to move. She drew him away.

He walked helplessly beside her, holding her hand. She went with bent head. Suddenly he said, as the simple solution stated itself to him:

“We’ll get married, Anna.”

She was silent.

“We’ll get married, Anna, shall we?”

She stopped in the field again and kissed him, clinging to him passionately, in a way he could not understand. He could not understand. But he left it all now, to marriage. That was the solution now, fixed ahead. He wanted her, he wanted to be married to her, he wanted to have her altogether, as his own for ever. And he waited, intent, for the accomplishment. But there was all the while a slight tension of irritation.

He spoke to his uncle and aunt that night.

“Uncle,” he said, “Anna and me think of getting married.”

“Oh ay!” said Brangwen.

“But how, you have no money?” said the mother.

The youth went pale. He hated these words. But he was like a gleaming, bright pebble, something bright and inalterable. He did not think. He sat there in his hard brightness, and did not speak.

“Have you mentioned it to your own mother?” asked Brangwen.

“No-I’ll tell her on Saturday.”

“You’ll go and see her?”

“Yes.”

There was a long pause.

“And what are you going to marry on-your pound a week?”

Again the youth went pale, as if the spirit were being injured in him.

“I don’t know,” he said, looking at his uncle with his bright inhuman eyes, like a hawk’s.

Brangwen stirred in hatred.

“It needs knowing,” he said.

“I shall have the money later on,” said the nephew. “I will raise some now, and pay it back then.”

“Oh ay!-And why this desperate hurry? She’s a child of eighteen, and you’re a boy of twenty. You’re neither of you of age to do as you like yet.”

Will Brangwen ducked his head and looked at his uncle with swift, mistrustful eyes, like a caged hawk.

“What does it matter how old she is, and how old I am?” he said. “What’s the difference between me now and when I’m thirty?”

“A big difference, let us hope.”

“But you have no experience-you have no experience, and no money. Why do you want to marry, without experience or money?” asked the aunt.

“What experience do I want, Aunt?” asked the boy.

And if Brangwen’s heart had not been hard and intact with anger, like a precious stone, he would have agreed.

Will Brangwen went home strange and untouched. He felt he could not alter from what he was fixed upon, his will was set. To alter it he must be destroyed. And he would not be destroyed. He had no money. But he would get some from somewhere, it did not matter. He lay awake for many hours, hard and clear and unthinking, his soul crystallising more inalterably. Then he went fast asleep.

It was as if his soul had turned into a hard crystal. He might tremble and quiver and suffer, it did not alter.

The next morning Tom Brangwen, inhuman with anger spoke to Anna.

“What’s this about wanting to get married?” he said.

She stood, paling a little, her dark eyes springing to the hostile, startled look of a savage thing that will defend itself, but trembles with sensitiveness.

“I do,” she said, out of her unconsciousness.

His anger rose, and he would have liked to break her.

“You do-you do-and what for?” he sneered with contempt. The old, childish agony, the blindness that could recognise nobody, the palpitating antagonism as of a raw, helpless, undefended thing came back on her.

“I do because I do,” she cried, in the shrill, hysterical way of her childhood. “You are not my father-my father is dead-you are not my father.”

She was still a stranger. She did not recognise him. The cold blade cut down, deep into Brangwen’s soul. It cut him off from her.

“And what if I’m not?” he said.

But he could not bear it. It had been so passionately dear to him, her “Father-Daddie.”

He went about for some days as if stunned. His wife was bemused. She did not understand. She only thought the marriage was impeded for want of money and position.

There was a horrible silence in the house. Anna kept out of sight as much as

possible. She could be for hours alone.

Will Brangwen came back, after stupid scenes at Nottingham. He too was pale and blank, but unchanging. His uncle hated him. He hated this youth, who was so inhuman and obstinate. Nevertheless, it was to Will Brangwen that the uncle, one evening, handed over the shares which he had transferred to Anna Lensky. They were for two thousand five hundred pounds. Will Brangwen looked at his uncle. It was a great deal of the Marsh capital here given away. The youth, however, was only colder and more fixed. He was abstract, purely a fixed will. He gave the shares to Anna.

After which she cried for a whole day, sobbing her eyes out. And at night, when she had heard her mother go to bed, she slipped down and hung in the doorway. Her father sat in his heavy silence, like a monument. He turned his head slowly.

“Daddy,” she cried from the doorway, and she ran to him sobbing as if her heart would break. “Daddy-daddy-daddy.”

She crouched on the hearthrug with her arms round him and her face against him. His body was so big and comfortable. But something hurt her head intolerably. She sobbed almost with hysteria.

He was silent, with his hand on her shoulder. His heart was bleak. He was not her father. That beloved image she had broken. Who was he then? A man put apart with those whose life has no more developments. He was isolated from her. There was a generation between them, he was old, he had died out from hot life. A great deal of ash was in his fire, cold ash. He felt the inevitable coldness, and in bitterness forgot the fire. He sat in his coldness of age and isolation. He had his own wife. And he blamed himself, he sneered at himself, for this clinging to the young, wanting the young to belong to him.

The child who clung to him wanted her child-husband. As was natural. And from him, Brangwen, she wanted help, so that her life might be properly fitted out. But love she did not want. Why should there be love between them, between the stout, middle-aged man and this child? How could there be anything between them, but mere human willingness to help each other? He was her guardian, no more. His heart was like ice, his face cold and expressionless. She could not move him any more than a statue.

She crept to bed, and cried. But she was going to be married to Will Brangwen, and then she need not bother any more. Brangwen went to bed with a hard, cold heart, and cursed himself. He looked at his wife. She was still his wife. Her dark hair was threaded with grey, her face was beautiful in its gathering age. She was just fifty. How poignantly he saw her! And he wanted to cut out some of his own heart, which was incontinent, and demanded still to

share the rapid life of youth. How he hated himself.

His wife was so poignant and timely. She was still young and naive, with some girl's freshness. But she did not want any more the fight, the battle, the control, as he, in his incontinence, still did. She was so natural, and he was ugly, unnatural, in his inability to yield place. How hideous, this greedy middle-age, which must stand in the way of life, like a large demon.

What was missing in his life, that, in his ravaging soul, he was not satisfied? He had had that friend at school, his mother, his wife, and Anna? What had he done? He had failed with his friend, he had been a poor son; but he had known satisfaction with his wife, let it be enough; he loathed himself for the state he was in over Anna. Yet he was not satisfied. It was agony to know it.

Was his life nothing? Had he nothing to show, no work? He did not count his work, anybody could have done it. What had he known, but the long, marital embrace with his wife! Curious, that this was what his life amounted to! At any rate, it was something, it was eternal. He would say so to anybody, and be proud of it. He lay with his wife in his arms, and she was still his fulfilment, just the same as ever. And that was the be-all and the end-all. Yes, and he was proud of it.

But the bitterness, underneath, that there still remained an unsatisfied Tom Brangwen, who suffered agony because a girl cared nothing for him. He loved his sons—he had them also. But it was the further, the creative life with the girl, he wanted as well. Oh, and he was ashamed. He trampled himself to extinguish himself.

What weariness! There was no peace, however old one grew! One was never right, never decent, never master of oneself. It was as if his hope had been in the girl.

Anna quickly lapsed again into her love for the youth. Will Brangwen had fixed his marriage for the Saturday before Christmas. And he waited for her, in his bright, unquestioning fashion, until then. He wanted her, she was his, he suspended his being till the day should come. The wedding day, December the twenty-third, had come into being for him as an absolute thing. He lived in it.

He did not count the days. But like a man who journeys in a ship, he was suspended till the coming to port.

He worked at his carving, he worked in his office, he came to see her; all was but a form of waiting, without thought or question.

She was much more alive. She wanted to enjoy courtship. He seemed to come and go like the wind, without asking why or whither. But she wanted to enjoy his presence. For her, he was the kernel of life, to touch him alone was bliss. But for him, she was the essence of life. She existed as much when he was at his

carving in his lodging in Ilkeston, as when she sat looking at him in the Marsh kitchen. In himself, he knew her. But his outward faculties seemed suspended. He did not see her with his eyes, nor hear her with his voice.

And yet he trembled, sometimes into a kind of swoon, holding her in his arms. They would stand sometimes folded together in the barn, in silence. Then to her, as she felt his young, tense figure with her hands, the bliss was intolerable, intolerable the sense that she possessed him. For his body was so keen and wonderful, it was the only reality in her world. In her world, there was this one tense, vivid body of a man, and then many other shadowy men, all unreal. In him, she touched the centre of reality. And they were together, he and she, at the heart of the secret. How she clutched him to her, his body the central body of all life. Out of the rock of his form the very fountain of life flowed.

But to him, she was a flame that consumed him. The flame flowed up his limbs, flowed through him, till he was consumed, till he existed only as an unconscious, dark transit of flame, deriving from her.

Sometimes, in the darkness, a cow coughed. There was, in the darkness, a slow sound of cud chewing. And it all seemed to flow round them and upon them as the hot blood flows through the womb, laving the unborn young.

Sometimes, when it was cold, they stood to be lovers in the stables, where the air was warm and sharp with ammonia. And during these dark vigils, he learned to know her, her body against his, they drew nearer and nearer together, the kisses came more subtly close and fitting. So when in the thick darkness a horse suddenly scrambled to its feet, with a dull, thunderous sound, they listened as one person listening, they knew as one person, they were conscious of the horse.

Tom Brangwen had taken them a cottage at Cossethay, on a twenty-one years' lease. Will Brangwen's eyes lit up as he saw it. It was the cottage next the church, with dark yewtrees, very black old trees, along the side of the house and the grassy front garden; a red, squarish cottage with a low slate roof, and low windows. It had a long dairy-scellery, a big flagged kitchen, and a low parlour, that went up one step from the kitchen. There were whitewashed beams across the ceilings, and odd corners with cupboards. Looking out through the windows, there was the grassy garden, the procession of black yew trees down one side, and along the other sides, a red wall with ivy separating the place from the high-road and the churchyard. The old, little church, with its small spire on a square tower, seemed to be looking back at the cottage windows.

"There'll be no need to have a clock," said Will Brangwen, peeping out at the white clock-face on the tower, his neighbour.

At the back of the house was a garden adjoining the paddock, a cowshed with standing for two cows, pig-cotes and fowl-houses. Will Brangwen was very

happy. Anna was glad to think of being mistress of her own place.

Tom Brangwen was now the fairy godfather. He was never happy unless he was buying something. Will Brangwen, with his interest in all wood-work, was getting the furniture. He was left to buy tables and round-staved chairs and the dressers, quite ordinary stuff, but such as was identified with his cottage.

Tom Brangwen, with more particular thought, spied out what he called handy little things for her. He appeared with a set of new-fangled cooking-pans, with a special sort of hanging lamp, though the rooms were so low, with canny little machines for grinding meat or mashing potatoes or whisking eggs.

Anna took a sharp interest in what he bought, though she was not always pleased. Some of the little contrivances, which he thought so canny, left her doubtful. Nevertheless she was always expectant, on market days there was always a long thrill of anticipation. He arrived with the first darkness, the copper lamps of his cart glowing. And she ran to the gate, as he, a dark, burly figure up in the cart, was bending over his parcels.

“It’s cupboard love as brings you out so sharp,” he said, his voice resounding in the cold darkness. Nevertheless he was excited. And she, taking one of the cart lamps, poked and peered among the jumble of things he had brought, pushing aside the oil or implements he had got for himself.

She dragged out a pair of small, strong bellows, registered them in her mind, and then pulled uncertainly at something else. It had a long handle, and a piece of brown paper round the middle of it, like a waistcoat.

“What’s this?” she said, poking.

He stopped to look at her. She went to the lamp-light by the horse, and stood there bent over the new thing, while her hair was like bronze, her apron white and cheerful. Her fingers plucked busily at the paper. She dragged forth a little wringer, with clean indiarubber rollers. She examined it critically, not knowing quite how it worked.

She looked up at him. He stood a shadowy presence beyond the light.

“How does it go?” she asked.

“Why, it’s for pulpin’ turnips,” he replied.

She looked at him. His voice disturbed her.

“Don’t be silly. It’s a little mangle,” she said. “How do you stand it, though?”

“You screw it on th’ side o’ your wash-tub.” He came and held it out to her.

“Oh, yes!” she cried, with one of her little skipping movements, which still came when she was suddenly glad.

And without another thought she ran off into the house, leaving him to untackle the horse. And when he came into the scullery, he found her there, with the little wringer fixed on the dolly-tub, turning blissfully at the handle, and Tilly

beside her, exclaiming:

“My word, that’s a natty little thing! That’ll save you luggin’ your inside out. That’s the latest contraption, that is.”

And Anna turned away at the handle, with great gusto of possession. Then she let Tilly have a turn.

“It fair runs by itself,” said Tilly, turning on and on. “Your clothes’ll nip out on to th’ line.”

CHAPTER 5

Wedding at the Marsh

It was a beautiful sunny day for the wedding, a muddy earth but a bright sky. They had three cabs and two big closed-in vehicles. Everybody crowded in the parlour in excitement. Anna was still upstairs. Her father kept taking a nip of brandy. He was handsome in his black coat and grey trousers. His voice was hearty but troubled. His wife came down in dark grey silk with lace, and a touch of peacock-blue in her bonnet. Her little body was very sure and definite. Brangwen was thankful she was there, to sustain him among all these people.

The carriages! The Nottingham Mrs. Brangwen, in silk brocade, stands in the doorway saying who must go with whom. There is a great bustle. The front door is opened, and the wedding guests are walking down the garden path, whilst those still waiting peer through the window, and the little crowd at the gate gorges and stretches. How funny such dressed-up people look in the winter sunshine!

They are gone-another lot! There begins to be more room. Anna comes down blushing and very shy, to be viewed in her white silk and her veil. Her mother-in-law surveys her objectively, twitches the white train, arranges the folds of the veil and asserts herself.

Loud exclamations from the window that the bridegroom's carriage has just passed.

"Where's your hat, father, and your gloves?" cries the bride, stamping her white slipper, her eyes flashing through her veil. He hunts round-his hair is ruffled. Everybody has gone but the bride and her father. He is ready-his face very red and daunted. Tilly dithers in the little porch, waiting to open the door. A waiting woman walks round Anna, who asks:

"Am I all right?"

She is ready. She bridles herself and looks queenly. She waves her hand sharply to her father:

"Come here!"

He goes. She puts her hand very lightly on his arm, and holding her bouquet like a shower, stepping, oh, very graciously, just a little impatient with her father for being so red in the face, she sweeps slowly past the fluttering Tilly, and down the path. There are hoarse shouts at the gate, and all her floating foamy whiteness passes slowly into the cab.

Her father notices her slim ankle and foot as she steps up: a child's foot. His heart is hard with tenderness. But she is in ecstasies with herself for making such a lovely spectacle. All the way she sat flamboyant with bliss because it was all so lovely. She looked down solicitously at her bouquet: white roses and lilies-of-the-valley and tube-roses and maidenhair fern-very rich and cascade-like.

Her father sat bewildered with all this strangeness, his heart was so full it felt hard, and he couldn't think of anything.

The church was decorated for Christmas, dark with evergreens, cold and snowy with white flowers. He went vaguely down to the altar. How long was it since he had gone to be married himself? He was not sure whether he was going to be married now, or what he had come for. He had a troubled notion that he had to do something or other. He saw his wife's bonnet, and wondered why she wasn't there with him.

They stood before the altar. He was staring up at the east window, that glowed intensely, a sort of blue purple: it was deep blue glowing, and some crimson, and little yellow flowers held fast in veins of shadow, in a heavy web of darkness. How it burned alive in radiance among its black web.

"Who giveth this woman to be married to this man?" He felt somebody touch him. He started. The words still re-echoed in his memory, but were drawing off.

"Me," he said hastily.

Ann bent her head and smiled in her veil. How absurd he was.

Brangwen was staring away at the burning blue window at the back of the altar, and wondering vaguely, with pain, if he ever should get old, if he ever should feel arrived and established. He was here at Anna's wedding. Well, what right had he to feel responsible, like a father? He was still as unsure and unfixed as when he had married himself. His wife and he! With a pang of anguish he realised what uncertainties they both were. He was a man of forty-five. Forty-five! In five more years fifty. Then sixty-then seventy-then it was finished. My God-and one still was so unestablished!

How did one grow old-how could one become confident? He wished he felt older. Why, what difference was there, as far as he felt matured or completed, between him now and him at his own wedding? He might be getting married over again-he and his wife. He felt himself tiny, a little, upright figure on a plain circled round with the immense, roaring sky: he and his wife, two little, upright figures walking across this plain, whilst the heavens shimmered and roared about them. When did one come to an end? In which direction was it finished? There was no end, no finish, only this roaring vast space. Did one never get old, never die? That was the clue. He exulted strangely, with torture. He would go on with his wife, he and she like two children camping in the plains. What was sure but

the endless sky? But that was so sure, so boundless.

Still the royal blue colour burned and blazed and sported itself in the web of darkness before him, unwearingly rich and splendid. How rich and splendid his own life was, red and burning and blazing and sporting itself in the dark meshes of his body: and his wife, how she glowed and burned dark within her meshes! Always it was so unfinished and unformed!

There was a loud noise of the organ. The whole party was trooping to the vestry. There was a blotted, scrawled book-and that young girl putting back her veil in her vanity, and laying her hand with the wedding-ring self-consciously conspicuous, and signing her name proudly because of the vain spectacle she made:

“Anna Theresa Lensky.”

“Anna Theresa Lensky”-what a vain, independent minx she was! The bridegroom, slender in his black swallow-tail and grey trousers, solemn as a young solemn cat, was writing seriously:

“William Brangwen.”

That looked more like it.

“Come and sign, father,” cried the imperious young hussy.

“Thomas Brangwen-clumsy-fist,” he said to himself as he signed.

Then his brother, a big, sallow fellow with black side-whiskers wrote:

“Alfred Brangwen.”

“How many more Brangwens?” said Tom Brangwen, ashamed of the too-frequent recurrence of his family name.

When they were out again in the sunshine, and he saw the frost hoary and blue among the long grass under the tomb-stones, the holly-berries overhead twinkling scarlet as the bells rang, the yew trees hanging their black, motionless, ragged boughs, everything seemed like a vision.

The marriage party went across the graveyard to the wall, mounted it by the little steps, and descended. Oh, a vain white peacock of a bride perching herself on the top of the wall and giving her hand to the bridegroom on the other side, to be helped down! The vanity of her white, slim, daintily-stepping feet, and her arched neck. And the regal impudence with which she seemed to dismiss them all, the others, parents and wedding guests, as she went with her young husband.

In the cottage big fires were burning, there were dozens of glasses on the table, and holly and mistletoe hanging up. The wedding party crowded in, and Tom Brangwen, becoming roisterous, poured out drinks. Everybody must drink. The bells were ringing away against the windows.

“Lift your glasses up,” shouted Tom Brangwen from the parlour, “lift your glasses up, an’ drink to the hearth an’ home-hearth an’ home, an’ may they enjoy

it.”

“Night an’ day, an’ may they enjoy it,” shouted Frank Brangwen, in addition.

“Hammer an’ tongs, and may they enjoy it,” shouted Alfred Brangwen, the saturnine.

“Fill your glasses up, an’ let’s have it all over again,” shouted Tom Brangwen.

“Hearth an’ home, an’ may ye enjoy it.”

There was a ragged shout of the company in response.

“Bed an’ blessin’, an’ may ye enjoy it,” shouted Frank Brangwen.

There was a swelling chorus in answer.

“Comin’ and goin’, an’ may ye enjoy it,” shouted the saturnine Alfred Brangwen, and the men roared by now boldly, and the women said, “Just hark, now!”

There was a touch of scandal in the air.

Then the party rolled off in the carriages, full speed back to the Marsh, to a large meal of the high-tea order, which lasted for an hour and a half. The bride and bridegroom sat at the head of the table, very prim and shining both of them, wordless, whilst the company raged down the table.

The Brangwen men had brandy in their tea, and were becoming unmanageable. The saturnine Alfred had glittering, unseeing eyes, and a strange, fierce way of laughing that showed his teeth. His wife glowered at him and jerked her head at him like a snake. He was oblivious. Frank Brangwen, the butcher, flushed and florid and handsome, roared echoes to his two brothers. Tom Brangwen, in his solid fashion, was letting himself go at last.

These three brothers dominated the whole company. Tom Brangwen wanted to make a speech. For the first time in his life, he must spread himself wordily.

“Marriage,” he began, his eyes twinkling and yet quite profound, for he was deeply serious and hugely amused at the same time, “Marriage,” he said, speaking in the slow, full-mouthed way of the Brangwens, “is what we’re made for — —”

“Let him talk,” said Alfred Brangwen, slowly and inscrutably, “let him talk.” Mrs. Alfred darted indignant eyes at her husband.

“A man,” continued Tom Brangwen, “enjoys being a man: for what purpose was he made a man, if not to enjoy it?”

“That a true word,” said Frank, floridly.

“And likewise,” continued Tom Brangwen, “a woman enjoys being a woman: at least we surmise she does — —”

“Oh, don’t you bother — —” called a farmer’s wife.

“You may back your life they’d be summisin’.” said Frank’s wife.

“Now,” continued Tom Brangwen, “for a man to be a man, it takes a woman

— — ”

“It does that,” said a woman grimly.

“And for a woman to be a woman, it takes a man — — ” continued Tom Brangwen.

“All speak up, men,” chimed in a feminine voice.

“Therefore we have marriage,” continued Tom Brangwen.

“Hold, hold,” said Alfred Brangwen. “Don’t run us off our legs.”

And in dead silence the glasses were filled. The bride and bridegroom, two children, sat with intent, shining faces at the head of the table, abstracted.

“There’s no marriage in heaven,” went on Tom Brangwen; “but on earth there is marriage.”

“That’s the difference between ‘em,” said Alfred Brangwen, mocking.

“Alfred,” said Tom Brangwen, “keep your remarks till afterwards, and then we’ll thank you for them.—There’s very little else, on earth, but marriage. You can talk about making money, or saving souls. You can save your own soul seven times over, and you may have a mint of money, but your soul goes gnawin’, gnawin’, gnawin’, and it says there’s something it must have. In heaven there is no marriage. But on earth there is marriage, else heaven drops out, and there’s no bottom to it.”

“Just hark you now,” said Frank’s wife.

“Go on, Thomas,” said Alfred sardonically.

“If we’ve got to be Angels,” went on Tom Brangwen, haranguing the company at large, “and if there is no such thing as a man nor a woman amongst them, then it seems to me as a married couple makes one Angel.”

“It’s the brandy,” said Alfred Brangwen wearily.

“For,” said Tom Brangwen, and the company was listening to the conundrum, “an Angel can’t be less than a human being. And if it was only the soul of a man minus the man, then it would be less than a human being.”

“Decidedly,” said Alfred.

And a laugh went round the table. But Tom Brangwen was inspired.

“An Angel’s got to be more than a human being,” he continued. “So I say, an Angel is the soul of man and woman in one: they rise united at the Judgment Day, as one Angel — — ”

“Praising the Lord,” said Frank.

“Praising the Lord,” repeated Tom.

“And what about the women left over?” asked Alfred, jeering. The company was getting uneasy.

“That I can’t tell. How do I know as there is anybody left over at the Judgment Day? Let that be. What I say is, that when a man’s soul and a woman’s soul

unites together — that makes an Angel — — ”

“I dunno about souls. I know as one plus one makes three, sometimes,” said Frank. But he had the laugh to himself.

“Bodies and souls, it’s the same,” said Tom.

“And what about your missis, who was married afore you knew her?” asked Alfred, set on edge by this discourse.

“That I can’t tell you. If I am to become an Angel, it’ll be my married soul, and not my single soul. It’ll not be the soul of me when I was a lad: for I hadn’t a soul as would make an Angel then.”

“I can always remember,” said Frank’s wife, “when our Harold was bad, he did nothink but see an angel at th’ back o’ th’ lookin’-glass. ‘Look, mother,’ ‘e said, ‘at that angel!’ ‘Theer isn’t no angel, my duck,’ I said, but he wouldn’t have it. I took th’ lookin’-glass off’n th’ dressin’-table, but it made no difference. He kep’ on sayin’ it was there. My word, it did give me a turn. I thought for sure as I’d lost him.”

“I can remember,” said another man, Tom’s sister’s husband, “my mother gave me a good hidin’ once, for sayin’ I’d got an angel up my nose. She seed me pokin’, an’ she said: ‘What are you pokin’ at your nose forgive over.’ ‘There’s an angel up it,’ I said, an’ she fetched me such a wipe. But there was. We used to call them thistle things ‘angels’ as wafts about. An’ I’d pushed one o’ these up my nose, for some reason or other.”

“It’s wonderful what children will get up their noses,” said Frank’s wife. “I c’n remember our Hemmie, she shoved one o’ them bluebell things out o’ th’ middle of a bluebell, what they call ‘candles’, up her nose, and oh, we had some work! I’d seen her stickin’ ‘em on the end of her nose, like, but I never thought she’d be so soft as to shove it right up. She was a gel of eight or more. Oh, my word, we got a crochet-hook an’ I don’t know what ...”

Tom Brangwen’s mood of inspiration began to pass away. He forgot all about it, and was soon roaring and shouting with the rest. Outside the wake came, singing the carols. They were invited into the bursting house. They had two fiddles and a piccolo. There in the parlour they played carols, and the whole company sang them at the top of its voice. Only the bride and bridegroom sat with shining eyes and strange, bright faces, and scarcely sang, or only with just moving lips.

The wake departed, and the guysers came. There was loud applause, and shouting and excitement as the old mystery play of St. George, in which every man present had acted as a boy, proceeded, with banging and thumping of club and dripping pan.

“By Jove, I got a crack once, when I was playin’ Beelzebub,” said Tom

Brangwen, his eyes full of water with laughing. "It knocked all th' sense out of me as you'd crack an egg. But I tell you, when I come to, I played Old Johnny Roger with St. George, I did that."

He was shaking with laughter. Another knock came at the door. There was a hush.

"It's th' cab," said somebody from the door.

"Walk in," shouted Tom Brangwen, and a red-faced grinning man entered.

"Now, you two, get yourselves ready an' off to blanket fair," shouted Tom Brangwen. "Strike a daisy, but if you're not off like a blink o' lightnin', you shanna go, you s'll sleep separate."

Anna rose silently and went to change her dress. Will Brangwen would have gone out, but Tilly came with his hat and coat. The youth was helped on.

"Well, here's luck, my boy," shouted his father.

"When th' fat's in th' fire, let it frizzle," admonished his uncle Frank.

"Fair and softly does it, fair an' softly does it," cried his aunt, Frank's wife, contrary.

"You don't want to fall over yourself," said his uncle by marriage. "You're not a bull at a gate."

"Let a man have his own road," said Tom Brangwen testily. "Don't be so free of your advice-it's his wedding this time, not yours."

"E don't want many sign-posts," said his father. "There's some roads a man has to be led, an' there's some roads a boss-eyed man can only follow wi' one eye shut. But this road can't be lost by a blind man nor a boss-eyed man nor a cripple-and he's neither, thank God."

"Don't you be so sure o' your walkin' powers," cried Frank's wife. "There's many a man gets no further than half-way, nor can't to save his life, let him live for ever."

"Why, how do you know?" said Alfred.

"It's plain enough in th' looks o' some," retorted Lizzie, his sister-in-law.

The youth stood with a faint, half-hearing smile on his face. He was tense and abstracted. These things, or anything, scarcely touched him.

Anna came down, in her day dress, very elusive. She kissed everybody, men and women, Will Brangwen shook hands with everybody, kissed his mother, who began to cry, and the whole party went surging out to the cab.

The young couple were shut up, last injunctions shouted at them.

"Drive on," shouted Tom Brangwen.

The cab rolled off. They saw the light diminish under the ash trees. Then the whole party, quietened, went indoors.

"They'll have three good fires burning," said Tom Brangwen, looking at his

watch. "I told Emma to make 'em up at nine, an' then leave the door on th' latch. It's only half-past. They'll have three fires burning, an' lamps lighted, an' Emma will ha' warmed th' bed wi' th' warmin' pan. So I s'd think they'll be all right."

The party was much quieter. They talked of the young couple.

"She said she didn't want a servant in," said Tom Brangwen. "The house isn't big enough, she'd always have the creature under her nose. Emma'll do what is wanted of her, an' they'll be to themselves."

"It's best," said Lizzie, "you're more free."

The party talked on slowly. Brangwen looked at his watch.

"Let's go an' give 'em a carol," he said. "We s'll find th' fiddles at the 'Cock an' Robin'."

"Ay, come on," said Frank.

Alfred rose in silence. The brother-in-law and one of Will's brothers rose also.

The five men went out. The night was flashing with stars. Sirius blazed like a signal at the side of the hill, Orion, stately and magnificent, was sloping along.

Tom walked with his brother, Alfred. The men's heels rang on the ground.

"It's a fine night," said Tom.

"Ay," said Alfred.

"Nice to get out."

"Ay."

The brothers walked close together, the bond of blood strong between them. Tom always felt very much the junior to Alfred.

"It's a long while since you left home," he said.

"Ay," said Alfred. "I thought I was getting a bit oldish-but I'm not. It's the things you've got as gets worn out, it's not you yourself."

"Why, what's worn out?"

"Most folks as I've anything to do with-as has anything to do with me. They all break down. You've got to go on by yourself, if it's only to perdition. There's nobody going alongside even there."

Tom Brangwen meditated this.

"Maybe you was never broken in," he said.

"No, I never was," said Alfred proudly.

And Tom felt his elder brother despised him a little. He winced under it.

"Everybody's got a way of their own," he said, stubbornly. "It's only a dog as hasn't. An' them as can't take what they give an' give what they take, they must go by themselves, or get a dog as'll follow 'em."

"They can do without the dog," said his brother. And again Tom Brangwen was humble, thinking his brother was bigger than himself. But if he was, he was. And if it were finer to go alone, it was: he did not want to go for all that.

They went over the field, where a thin, keen wind blew round the ball of the hill, in the starlight. They came to the stile, and to the side of Anna's house. The lights were out, only on the blinds of the rooms downstairs, and of a bedroom upstairs, firelight flickered.

"We'd better leave 'em alone," said Alfred Brangwen.

"Nay, nay," said Tom. "We'll carol 'em, for th' last time."

And in a quarter of an hour's time, eleven silent, rather tipsy men scrambled over the wall, and into the garden by the yew trees, outside the windows where faint firelight glowered on the blinds. There came a shrill sound, two violins and a piccolo shrilling on the frosty air.

"In the fields with their flocks abiding." A commotion of men's voices broke out singing in ragged unison.

Anna Brangwen had started up, listening, when the music began. She was afraid.

"It's the wake," he whispered.

She remained tense, her heart beating heavily, possessed with strange, strong fear. Then there came the burst of men's singing, rather uneven. She strained still, listening.

"It's Dad," she said, in a low voice. They were silent, listening.

"And my father," he said.

She listened still. But she was sure. She sank down again into bed, into his arms. He held her very close, kissing her. The hymn rambled on outside, all the men singing their best, having forgotten everything else under the spell of the fiddles and the tune. The firelight glowed against the darkness in the room. Anna could hear her father singing with gusto.

"Aren't they silly," she whispered.

And they crept closer, closer together, hearts beating to one another. And even as the hymn rolled on, they ceased to hear it.

CHAPTER 6

Anna Victrix

Will Brangwen had some weeks of holiday after his marriage, so the two took their honeymoon in full hands, alone in their cottage together.

And to him, as the days went by, it was as if the heavens had fallen, and he were sitting with her among the ruins, in a new world, everybody else buried, themselves two blissful survivors, with everything to squander as they would. At first, he could not get rid of a culpable sense of licence on his part. Wasn't there some duty outside, calling him and he did not come?

It was all very well at night, when the doors were locked and the darkness drawn round the two of them. Then they were the only inhabitants of the visible earth, the rest were under the flood. And being alone in the world, they were a law unto themselves, they could enjoy and squander and waste like conscienceless gods.

But in the morning, as the carts clanked by, and children shouted down the lane; as the hucksters came calling their wares, and the church clock struck eleven, and he and she had not got up yet, even to breakfast, he could not help feeling guilty, as if he were committing a breach of the law-ashamed that he was not up and doing.

"Doing what?" she asked. "What is there to do? You will only lounge about."

Still, even lounging about was respectable. One was at least in connection with the world, then. Whereas now, lying so still and peacefully, while the daylight came obscurely through the drawn blind, one was severed from the world, one shut oneself off in tacit denial of the world. And he was troubled.

But it was so sweet and satisfying lying there talking desultorily with her. It was sweeter than sunshine, and not so evanescent. It was even irritating the way the church-clock kept on chiming: there seemed no space between the hours, just a moment, golden and still, whilst she traced his features with her finger-tips, utterly careless and happy, and he loved her to do it.

But he was strange and unused. So suddenly, everything that had been before was shed away and gone. One day, he was a bachelor, living with the world. The next day, he was with her, as remote from the world as if the two of them were buried like a seed in darkness. Suddenly, like a chestnut falling out of a burr, he was shed naked and glistening on to a soft, fecund earth, leaving behind him the

hard rind of worldly knowledge and experience. He heard it in the huckster's cries, the noise of carts, the calling of children. And it was all like the hard, shed rind, discarded. Inside, in the softness and stillness of the room, was the naked kernel, that palpitated in silent activity, absorbed in reality.

Inside the room was a great steadiness, a core of living eternity. Only far outside, at the rim, went on the noise and the destruction. Here at the centre the great wheel was motionless, centred upon itself. Here was a poised, unflawed stillness that was beyond time, because it remained the same, inexhaustible, unchanging, unexhausted.

As they lay close together, complete and beyond the touch of time or change, it was as if they were at the very centre of all the slow wheeling of space and the rapid agitation of life, deep, deep inside them all, at the centre where there is utter radiance, and eternal being, and the silence absorbed in praise: the steady core of all movements, the unawakened sleep of all wakefulness. They found themselves there, and they lay still, in each other's arms; for their moment they were at the heart of eternity, whilst time roared far off, for ever far off, towards the rim.

Then gradually they were passed away from the supreme centre, down the circles of praise and joy and gladness, further and further out, towards the noise and the friction. But their hearts had burned and were tempered by the inner reality, they were unalterably glad.

Gradually they began to wake up, the noises outside became more real. They understood and answered the call outside. They counted the strokes of the bell. And when they counted midday, they understood that it was midday, in the world, and for themselves also.

It dawned upon her that she was hungry. She had been getting hungrier for a lifetime. But even yet it was not sufficiently real to rouse her. A long way off she could hear the words, "I am dying of hunger." Yet she lay still, separate, at peace, and the words were unuttered. There was still another lapse.

And then, quite calmly, even a little surprised, she was in the present, and was saying:

"I am dying with hunger."

"So am I," he said calmly, as if it were of not the slightest significance. And they relapsed into the warm, golden stillness. And the minutes flowed unheeded past the window outside.

Then suddenly she stirred against him.

"My dear, I am dying of hunger," she said.

It was a slight pain to him to be brought to.

"We'll get up," he said, unmoving.

And she sank her head on to him again, and they lay still, lapsing. Half consciously, he heard the clock chime the hour. She did not hear.

“Do get up,” she murmured at length, “and give me something to eat.”

“Yes,” he said, and he put his arms round her, and she lay with her face on him. They were faintly astonished that they did not move. The minutes rustled louder at the window.

“Let me go then,” he said.

She lifted her head from him, relinquishingly. With a little breaking away, he moved out of bed, and was taking his clothes. She stretched out her hand to him.

“You are so nice,” she said, and he went back for a moment or two.

Then actually he did slip into some clothes, and, looking round quickly at her, was gone out of the room. She lay translated again into a pale, clearer peace. As if she were a spirit, she listened to the noise of him downstairs, as if she were no longer of the material world.

It was half-past one. He looked at the silent kitchen, untouched from last night, dim with the drawn blind. And he hastened to draw up the blind, so people should know they were not in bed any later. Well, it was his own house, it did not matter. Hastily he put wood in the grate and made a fire. He exulted in himself, like an adventurer on an undiscovered island. The fire blazed up, he put on the kettle. How happy he felt! How still and secluded the house was! There were only he and she in the world.

But when he unbolted the door, and, half-dressed, looked out, he felt furtive and guilty. The world was there, after all. And he had felt so secure, as though this house were the Ark in the flood, and all the rest was drowned. The world was there: and it was afternoon. The morning had vanished and gone by, the day was growing old. Where was the bright, fresh morning? He was accused. Was the morning gone, and he had lain with blinds drawn, let it pass by unnoticed?

He looked again round the chill, grey afternoon. And he himself so soft and warm and glowing! There were two sprigs of yellow jasmine in the saucer that covered the milk-jug. He wondered who had been and left the sign. Taking the jug, he hastily shut the door. Let the day and the daylight drop out, let it go by unseen. He did not care. What did one day more or less matter to him. It could fall into oblivion unspent if it liked, this one course of daylight.

“Somebody has been and found the door locked,” he said when he went upstairs with the tray. He gave her the two sprigs of jasmine. She laughed as she sat up in bed, childishly threading the flowers in the breast of her nightdress. Her brown hair stuck out like a nimbus, all fierce, round her softly glowing face. Her dark eyes watched the tray eagerly.

“How good!” she cried, sniffing the cold air. “I’m glad you did a lot.” And she

stretched out her hands eagerly for her plate—"Come back to bed, quick-it's cold." She rubbed her hands together sharply.

He put off what little clothing he had on, and sat beside her in the bed.

"You look like a lion, with your mane sticking out, and your nose pushed over your food," he said.

She tinkled with laughter, and gladly ate her breakfast.

The morning was sunk away unseen, the afternoon was steadily going too, and he was letting it go. One bright transit of daylight gone by unacknowledged! There was something unmanly, recusant in it. He could not quite reconcile himself to the fact. He felt he ought to get up, go out quickly into the daylight, and work or spend himself energetically in the open air of the afternoon, retrieving what was left to him of the day.

But he did not go. Well, one might as well be hung for a sheep as for a lamb. If he had lost this day of his life, he had lost it. He gave it up. He was not going to count his losses. She didn't care. She didn't care in the least. Then why should he? Should he be behind her in recklessness and independence? She was superb in her indifference. He wanted to be like her.

She took her responsibilities lightly. When she spilled her tea on the pillow, she rubbed it carelessly with a handkerchief, and turned over the pillow. He would have felt guilty. She did not. And it pleased him. It pleased him very much to see how these things did not matter to her.

When the meal was over, she wiped her mouth on her handkerchief quickly, satisfied and happy, and settled down on the pillow again, with her fingers in his close, strange, fur-like hair.

The evening began to fall, the light was half alive, livid. He hid his face against her.

"I don't like the twilight," he said.

"I love it," she answered.

He hid his face against her, who was warm and like sunlight. She seemed to have sunlight inside her. Her heart beating seemed like sunlight upon him. In her was a more real day than the day could give: so warm and steady and restoring. He hid his face against her whilst the twilight fell, whilst she lay staring out with her unseeing dark eyes, as if she wandered forth untrammelled in the vagueness. The vagueness gave her scope and set her free.

To him, turned towards her heart-pulse, all was very still and very warm and very close, like noon-tide. He was glad to know this warm, full noon. It ripened him and took away his responsibility, some of his conscience.

They got up when it was quite dark. She hastily twisted her hair into a knot, and was dressed in a twinkling. Then they went downstairs, drew to the fire, and

sat in silence, saying a few words now and then.

Her father was coming. She bundled the dishes away, flew round and tidied the room, assumed another character, and again seated herself. He sat thinking of his carving of Eve. He loved to go over his carving in his mind, dwelling on every stroke, every line. How he loved it now! When he went back to his Creation-panel again, he would finish his Eve, tender and sparkling. It did not satisfy him yet. The Lord should labour over her in a silent passion of Creation, and Adam should be tense as if in a dream of immortality, and Eve should take form glimmeringly, shadowily, as if the Lord must wrestle with His own soul for her, yet she was a radiance.

“What are you thinking about?” she asked.

He found it difficult to say. His soul became shy when he tried to communicate it.

“I was thinking my Eve was too hard and lively.”

“Why?”

“I don’t know. She should be more — — ,” he made a gesture of infinite tenderness.

There was a stillness with a little joy. He could not tell her any more. Why could he not tell her any more? She felt a pang of disconsolate sadness. But it was nothing. She went to him.

Her father came, and found them both very glowing, like an open flower. He loved to sit with them. Where there was a perfume of love, anyone who came must breathe it. They were both very quick and alive, lit up from the other-world, so that it was quite an experience for them, that anyone else could exist.

But still it troubled Will Brangwen a little, in his orderly, conventional mind, that the established rule of things had gone so utterly. One ought to get up in the morning and wash oneself and be a decent social being. Instead, the two of them stayed in bed till nightfall, and then got up, she never washed her face, but sat there talking to her father as bright and shameless as a daisy opened out of the dew. Or she got up at ten o’clock, and quite blithely went to bed again at three, or at half-past four, stripping him naked in the daylight, and all so gladly and perfectly, oblivious quite of his qualms. He let her do as she liked with him, and shone with strange pleasure. She was to dispose of him as she would. He was translated with gladness to be in her hands. And down went his qualms, his maxims, his rules, his smaller beliefs, she scattered them like an expert skittle-player. He was very much astonished and delighted to see them scatter.

He stood and gazed and grinned with wonder whilst his Tablets of Stone went bounding and bumping and splintering down the hill, dislodged for ever. Indeed, it was true as they said, that a man wasn’t born before he was married. What a

change indeed!

He surveyed the rind of the world: houses, factories, trams, the discarded rind; people scurrying about, work going on, all on the discarded surface. An earthquake had burst it all from inside. It was as if the surface of the world had been broken away entire: Ilkeston, streets, church, people, work, rule-of-the-day, all intact; and yet peeled away into unreality, leaving here exposed the inside, the reality: one's own being, strange feelings and passions and yearnings and beliefs and aspirations, suddenly become present, revealed, the permanent bedrock, knitted one rock with the woman one loved. It was confounding. Things are not what they seem! When he was a child, he had thought a woman was a woman merely by virtue of her skirts and petticoats. And now, lo, the whole world could be divested of its garment, the garment could lie there shed away intact, and one could stand in a new world, a new earth, naked in a new, naked universe. It was too astounding and miraculous.

This then was marriage! The old things didn't matter any more. One got up at four o'clock, and had broth at tea-time and made toffee in the middle of the night. One didn't put on one's clothes or one did put on one's clothes. He still was not quite sure it was not criminal. But it was a discovery to find one might be so supremely absolved. All that mattered was that he should love her and she should love him and they should live kindled to one another, like the Lord in two burning bushes that were not consumed. And so they lived for the time.

She was less hampered than he, so she came more quickly to her fulness, and was sooner ready to enjoy again a return to the outside world. She was going to give a tea-party. His heart sank. He wanted to go on, to go on as they were. He wanted to have done with the outside world, to declare it finished for ever. He was anxious with a deep desire and anxiety that she should stay with him where they were in the timeless universe of free, perfect limbs and immortal breast, affirming that the old outward order was finished. The new order was begun to last for ever, the living life, palpitating from the gleaming core, to action, without crust or cover or outward lie. But no, he could not keep her. She wanted the dead world again-she wanted to walk on the outside once more. She was going to give a tea-party. It made him frightened and furious and miserable. He was afraid all would be lost that he had so newly come into: like the youth in the fairy tale, who was king for one day in the year, and for the rest a beaten herd: like Cinderella also, at the feast. He was sullen. But she blithely began to make preparations for her tea-party. His fear was too strong, he was troubled, he hated her shallow anticipation and joy. Was she not forfeiting the reality, the one reality, for all that was shallow and worthless? Wasn't she carelessly taking off her crown to be an artificial figure having other artificial women to tea: when

she might have been perfect with him, and kept him perfect, in the land of intimate connection? Now he must be deposed, his joy must be destroyed, he must put on the vulgar, shallow death of an outward existence.

He ground his soul in uneasiness and fear. But she rose to a real outburst of house-work, turning him away as she shoved the furniture aside to her broom. He stood hanging miserable near. He wanted her back. Dread, and desire for her to stay with him, and shame at his own dependence on her drove him to anger. He began to lose his head. The wonder was going to pass away again. All the love, the magnificent new order was going to be lost, she would forfeit it all for the outside things. She would admit the outside world again, she would throw away the living fruit for the ostensible rind. He began to hate this in her. Driven by fear of her departure into a state of helplessness, almost of imbecility, he wandered about the house.

And she, with her skirts kilted up, flew round at her work, absorbed.

“Shake the rug then, if you must hang round,” she said.

And fretting with resentment, he went to shake the rug. She was blithely unconscious of him. He came back, hanging near to her.

“Can’t you do anything?” she said, as if to a child, impatiently. “Can’t you do your wood-work?”

“Where shall I do it?” he asked, harsh with pain.

“Anywhere.”

How furious that made him.

“Or go for a walk,” she continued. “Go down to the Marsh. Don’t hang about as if you were only half there.”

He winced and hated it. He went away to read. Never had his soul felt so flayed and uncreated.

And soon he must come down again to her. His hovering near her, wanting her to be with him, the futility of him, the way his hands hung, irritated her beyond bearing. She turned on him blindly and destructively, he became a mad creature, black and electric with fury. The dark storms rose in him, his eyes glowed black and evil, he was fiendish in his thwarted soul.

There followed two black and ghastly days, when she was set in anguish against him, and he felt as if he were in a black, violent underworld, and his wrists quivered murderously. And she resisted him. He seemed a dark, almost evil thing, pursuing her, hanging on to her, burdening her. She would give anything to have him removed.

“You need some work to do,” she said. “You ought to be at work. Can’t you do something?”

His soul only grew the blacker. His condition now became complete, the

darkness of his soul was thorough. Everything had gone: he remained complete in his own tense, black will. He was now unaware of her. She did not exist. His dark, passionate soul had recoiled upon itself, and now, clinched and coiled round a centre of hatred, existed in its own power. There was a curiously ugly pallor, an expressionlessness in his face. She shuddered from him. She was afraid of him. His will seemed grappled upon her.

She retreated before him. She went down to the Marsh, she entered again the immunity of her parents' love for her. He remained at Yew Cottage, black and clinched, his mind dead. He was unable to work at his wood-carving. He went on working monotonously at the garden, blindly, like a mole.

As she came home, up the hill, looking away at the town dim and blue on the hill, her heart relaxed and became yearning. She did not want to fight him any more. She wanted love-oh, love. Her feet began to hurry. She wanted to get back to him. Her heart became tight with yearning for him.

He had been making the garden in order, cutting the edges of the turf, laying the path with stones. He was a good, capable workman.

"How nice you've made it," she said, approaching tentatively down the path.

But he did not heed, he did not hear. His brain was solid and dead.

"Haven't you made it nice?" she repeated, rather plaintively.

He looked up at her, with that fixed, expressionless face and unseeing eyes which shocked her, made her go dazed and blind. Then he turned away. She saw his slender, stooping figure groping. A revulsion came over her. She went indoors.

As she took off her hat in the bedroom, she found herself weeping bitterly, with some of the old, anguished, childish desolation. She sat still and cried on. She did not want him to know. She was afraid of his hard, evil moments, the head dropped a little, rigidly, in a crouching, cruel way. She was afraid of him. He seemed to lacerate her sensitive femaleness. He seemed to hurt her womb, to take pleasure in torturing her.

He came into the house. The sound of his footsteps in his heavy boots filled her with horror: a hard, cruel, malignant sound. She was afraid he would come upstairs. But he did not. She waited apprehensively. He went out.

Where she was most vulnerable, he hurt her. Oh, where she was delivered over to him, in her very soft femaleness, he seemed to lacerate her and desecrate her. She pressed her hands over her womb in anguish, whilst the tears ran down her face. And why, and why? Why was he like this?

Suddenly she dried her tears. She must get the tea ready. She went downstairs and set the table. When the meal was ready, she called to him.

"I've mashed the tea, Will, are you coming?"

She herself could hear the sound of tears in her own voice, and she began to cry again. He did not answer, but went on with his work. She waited a few minutes, in anguish. Fear came over her, she was panic-stricken with terror, like a child; and she could not go home again to her father; she was held by the power in this man who had taken her.

She turned indoors so that he should not see her tears. She sat down to table. Presently he came into the scullery. His movements jarred on her, as she heard them. How horrible was the way he pumped, exacerbating, so cruel! How she hated to hear him! How he hated her! How his hatred was like blows upon her! The tears were coming again.

He came in, his face wooden and lifeless, fixed, persistent. He sat down to tea, his head dropped over his cup, uglily. His hands were red from the cold water, and there were rims of earth in his nails. He went on with his tea.

It was his negative insensitiveness to her that she could not bear, something clayey and ugly. His intelligence was self-absorbed. How unnatural it was to sit with a self-absorbed creature, like something negative ensconced opposite one. Nothing could touch him—he could only absorb things into his own self.

The tears were running down her face. Something startled him, and he was looking up at her with his hateful, hard, bright eyes, hard and unchanging as a bird of prey.

“What are you crying for?” came the grating voice.

She winced through her womb. She could not stop crying.

“What are you crying for?” came the question again, in just the same tone. And still there was silence, with only the sniff of her tears.

His eyes glittered, and as if with malignant desire. She shrank and became blind. She was like a bird being beaten down. A sort of swoon of helplessness came over her. She was of another order than he, she had no defence against him. Against such an influence, she was only vulnerable, she was given up.

He rose and went out of the house, possessed by the evil spirit. It tortured him and wracked him, and fought in him. And whilst he worked, in the deepening twilight, it left him. Suddenly he saw that she was hurt. He had only seen her triumphant before. Suddenly his heart was torn with compassion for her. He became alive again, in an anguish of compassion. He could not bear to think of her tears—he could not bear it. He wanted to go to her and pour out his heart’s blood to her. He wanted to give everything to her, all his blood, his life, to the last dregs, pour everything away to her. He yearned with passionate desire to offer himself to her, utterly.

The evening star came, and the night. She had not lighted the lamp. His heart burned with pain and with grief. He trembled to go to her.

And at last he went, hesitating, burdened with a great offering. The hardness had gone out of him, his body was sensitive, slightly trembling. His hand was curiously sensitive, shrinking, as he shut the door. He fixed the latch almost tenderly.

In the kitchen was only the fireglow, he could not see her. He quivered with dread lest she had gone-he knew not where. In shrinking dread, he went through to the parlour, to the foot of the stairs.

“Anna,” he called.

There was no answer. He went up the stairs, in dread of the empty house-the horrible emptiness that made his heart ring with insanity. He opened the bedroom door, and his heart flashed with certainty that she had gone, that he was alone.

But he saw her on the bed, lying very still and scarcely noticeable, with her back to him. He went and put his hand on her shoulder, very gently, hesitating, in a great fear and self-offering. She did not move.

He waited. The hand that touched her shoulder hurt him, as if she were sending it away. He stood dim with pain.

“Anna,” he said.

But still she was motionless, like a curled up, oblivious creature. His heart beat with strange throes of pain. Then, by a motion under his hand, he knew she was crying, holding herself hard so that her tears should not be known. He waited. The tension continued-perhaps she was not crying-then suddenly relapsed with a sharp catch of a sob. His heart flamed with love and suffering for her. Kneeling carefully on the bed, so that his earthy boots should not touch it, he took her in his arms to comfort her. The sobs gathered in her, she was sobbing bitterly. But not to him. She was still away from him.

He held her against his breast, whilst she sobbed, withheld from him, and all his body vibrated against her.

“Don’t cry-don’t cry,” he said, with an odd simplicity. His heart was calm and numb with a sort of innocence of love, now.

She still sobbed, ignoring him, ignoring that he held her. His lips were dry.

“Don’t cry, my love,” he said, in the same abstract way. In his breast his heart burned like a torch, with suffering. He could not bear the desolateness of her crying. He would have soothed her with his blood. He heard the church clock chime, as if it touched him, and he waited in suspense for it to have gone by. It was quiet again.

“My love,” he said to her, bending to touch her wet face with his mouth. He was afraid to touch her. How wet her face was! His body trembled as he held her. He loved her till he felt his heart and all his veins would burst and flood her

with his hot, healing blood. He knew his blood would heal and restore her.

She was becoming quieter. He thanked the God of mercy that at last she was becoming quieter. His head felt so strange and blazed. Still he held her close, with trembling arms. His blood seemed very strong, enveloping her.

And at last she began to draw near to him, she nestled to him. His limbs, his body, took fire and beat up in flames. She clung to him, she cleaved to his body. The flames swept him, he held her in sinews of fire. If she would kiss him! He bent his mouth down. And her mouth, soft and moist, received him. He felt his veins would burst with anguish of thankfulness, his heart was mad with gratefulness, he could pour himself out upon her for ever.

When they came to themselves, the night was very dark. Two hours had gone by. They lay still and warm and weak, like the new-born, together. And there was a silence almost of the unborn. Only his heart was weeping happily, after the pain. He did not understand, he had yielded, given way. There was no understanding. There could be only acquiescence and submission, and tremulous wonder of consummation.

The next morning, when they woke up, it had snowed. He wondered what was the strange pallor in the air, and the unusual tang. Snow was on the grass and the window-sill, it weighed down the black, ragged branches of the yews, and smoothed the graves in the churchyard.

Soon, it began to snow again, and they were shut in. He was glad, for then they were immune in a shadowy silence, there was no world, no time.

The snow lasted for some days. On the Sunday they went to church. They made a line of footprints across the garden, he left a flat snowprint of his hand on the wall as he vaulted over, they traced the snow across the churchyard. For three days they had been immune in a perfect love.

There were very few people in church, and she was glad. She did not care much for church. She had never questioned any beliefs, and she was, from habit and custom, a regular attendant at morning service. But she had ceased to come with any anticipation. To-day, however, in the strangeness of snow, after such consummation of love, she felt expectant again, and delighted. She was still in the eternal world.

She used, after she went to the High School, and wanted to be a lady, wanted to fulfil some mysterious ideal, always to listen to the sermon and to try to gather suggestions. That was all very well for a while. The vicar told her to be good in this way and in that. She went away feeling it was her highest aim to fulfil these injunctions.

But quickly this palled. After a short time, she was not very much interested in being good. Her soul was in quest of something, which was not just being good,

and doing one's best. No, she wanted something else: something that was not her ready-made duty. Everything seemed to be merely a matter of social duty, and never of her self. They talked about her soul, but somehow never managed to rouse or to implicate her soul. As yet her soul was not brought in at all.

So that whilst she had an affection for Mr. Loverseed, the vicar, and a protective sort of feeling for Cossethay church, wanting always to help it and defend it, it counted very small in her life.

Not but that she was conscious of some dissatisfaction. When her husband was roused by the thought of the churches, then she became hostile to the ostensible church, she hated it for not fulfilling anything in her. The Church told her to be good: very well, she had no idea of contradicting what it said. The Church talked about her soul, about the welfare of mankind, as if the saving of her soul lay in her performing certain acts conducive to the welfare of mankind. Well and good-it was so, then.

Nevertheless, as she sat in church her face had a pathos and poignancy. Was this what she had come to hear: how by doing this thing and by not doing that, she could save her soul? She did not contradict it. But the pathos of her face gave the lie. There was something else she wanted to hear, it was something else she asked for from the Church.

But who was she to affirm it? And what was she doing with unsatisfied desires? She was ashamed. She ignored them and left them out of count as much as possible, her underneath yearnings. They angered her. She wanted to be like other people, decently satisfied.

He angered her more than ever. Church had an irresistible attraction for him. And he paid no more attention to that part of the service which was Church to her, than if he had been an angel or a fabulous beast sitting there. He simply paid no heed to the sermon or to the meaning of the service. There was something thick, dark, dense, powerful about him that irritated her too deeply for her to speak of it. The Church teaching in itself meant nothing to him. "And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them that trespass against us"-it simply did not touch him. It might have been more sounds, and it would have acted upon him in the same way. He did not want things to be intelligible. And he did not care about his trespasses, neither about the trespasses of his neighbour, when he was in church. Leave that care for weekdays. When he was in church, he took no more notice of his daily life. It was weekday stuff. As for the welfare of mankind-he merely did not realise that there was any such thing: except on weekdays, when he was good-natured enough. In church, he wanted a dark, nameless emotion, the emotion of all the great mysteries of passion.

He was not interested in the thought of himself or of her: oh, and how that

irritated her! He ignored the sermon, he ignored the greatness of mankind, he did not admit the immediate importance of mankind. He did not care about himself as a human being. He did not attach any vital importance to his life in the drafting office, or his life among men. That was just merely the margin to the text. The verity was his connection with Anna and his connection with the Church, his real being lay in his dark emotional experience of the Infinite, of the Absolute. And the great mysterious, illuminated capitals to the text, were his feelings with the Church.

It exasperated her beyond measure. She could not get out of the Church the satisfaction he got. The thought of her soul was intimately mixed up with the thought of her own self. Indeed, her soul and her own self were one and the same in her. Whereas he seemed simply to ignore the fact of his own self, almost to refute it. He had a soul—a dark, inhuman thing caring nothing for humanity. So she conceived it. And in the gloom and the mystery of the Church his soul lived and ran free, like some strange, underground thing, abstract.

He was very strange to her, and, in this church spirit, in conceiving himself as a soul, he seemed to escape and run free of her. In a way, she envied it him, this dark freedom and jubilation of the soul, some strange entity in him. It fascinated her. Again she hated it. And again, she despised him, wanted to destroy it in him.

This snowy morning, he sat with a dark-bright face beside her, not aware of her, and somehow, she felt he was conveying to strange, secret places the love that sprang in him for her. He sat with a dark-rapt, half-delighted face, looking at a little stained window. She saw the ruby-coloured glass, with the shadow heaped along the bottom from the snow outside, and the familiar yellow figure of the lamb holding the banner, a little darkened now, but in the murky interior strangely luminous, pregnant.

She had always liked the little red and yellow window. The lamb, looking very silly and self-conscious, was holding up a forepaw, in the cleft of which was dangerously perched a little flag with a red cross. Very pale yellow, the lamb, with greenish shadows. Since she was a child she had liked this creature, with the same feeling she felt for the little woolly lambs on green legs that children carried home from the fair every year. She had always liked these toys, and she had the same amused, childish liking for this church lamb. Yet she had always been uneasy about it. She was never sure that this lamb with a flag did not want to be more than it appeared. So she half mistrusted it, there was a mixture of dislike in her attitude to it.

Now, by a curious gathering, knitting of his eyes, the faintest tension of ecstasy on his face, he gave her the uncomfortable feeling that he was in correspondence with the creature, the lamb in the window. A cold wonder came

over her-her soul was perplexed. There he sat, motionless, timeless, with the faint, bright tension on his face. What was he doing? What connection was there between him and the lamb in the glass?

Suddenly it gleamed to her dominant, this lamb with the flag. Suddenly she had a powerful mystic experience, the power of the tradition seized on her, she was transported to another world. And she hated it, resisted it.

Instantly, it was only a silly lamb in the glass again. And dark, violent hatred of her husband swept up in her. What was he doing, sitting there gleaming, carried away, soulful?

She shifted sharply, she knocked him as she pretended to pick up her glove, she groped among his feet.

He came to, rather bewildered, exposed. Anybody but her would have pitied him. She wanted to rend him. He did not know what was amiss, what he had been doing.

As they sat at dinner, in their cottage, he was dazed by the chill of antagonism from her. She did not know why she was so angry. But she was incensed.

“Why do you never listen to the sermon?” she asked, seething with hostility and violation.

“I do,” he said.

“You don’t-you don’t hear a single word.”

He retired into himself, to enjoy his own sensation. There was something subterranean about him, as if he had an underworld refuge. The young girl hated to be in the house with him when he was like this.

After dinner, he retired into the parlour, continuing in the same state of abstraction, which was a burden intolerable to her. Then he went to the bookshelf and took down books to look at, that she had scarcely glanced over.

He sat absorbed over a book on the illuminations in old missals, and then over a book on paintings in churches: Italian, English, French and German. He had, when he was sixteen, discovered a Roman Catholic bookshop where he could find such things.

He turned the leaves in absorption, absorbed in looking, not thinking. He was like a man whose eyes were in his chest, she said of him later.

She came to look at the things with him. Half they fascinated her. She was puzzled, interested, and antagonistic.

It was when she came to pictures of the Pieta that she burst out.

“I do think they’re loathsome,” she cried.

“What?” he said, surprised, abstracted.

“Those bodies with slits in them, posing to be worshipped.”

“You see, it means the Sacraments, the Bread,” he said slowly.

“Does it,” she cried. “Then it’s worse. I don’t want to see your chest slit, nor to eat your dead body, even if you offer it to me. Can’t you see it’s horrible?”

“It isn’t me, it’s Christ.”

“What if it is, it’s you! And it’s horrible, you wallowing in your own dead body, and thinking of eating it in the Sacrament.”

“You’ve to take it for what it means.”

“It means your human body put up to be slit and killed and then worshipped—what else?”

They lapsed into silence. His soul grew angry and aloof.

“And I think that lamb in Church,” she said, “is the biggest joke in the parish — —”

She burst into a “Pouf” of ridiculing laughter.

“It might be, to those that see nothing in it,” he said. “You know it’s the symbol of Christ, of His innocence and sacrifice.”

“Whatever it means, it’s a lamb,” she said. “And I like lambs too much to treat them as if they had to mean something. As for the Christmas-tree flag-no — —”

And again she poufed with mockery.

“It’s because you don’t know anything,” he said violently, harshly. “Laugh at what you know, not at what you don’t know.”

“What don’t I know?”

“What things mean.”

“And what does it mean?”

He was reluctant to answer her. He found it difficult.

“What does it mean?” she insisted.

“It means the triumph of the Resurrection.”

She hesitated, baffled, a fear came upon her. What were these things? Something dark and powerful seemed to extend before her. Was it wonderful after all?

But no—she refused it.

“Whatever it may pretend to mean, what it is is a silly absurd toy-lamb with a Christmas-tree flag ledged on its paw — and if it wants to mean anything else, it must look different from that.”

He was in a state of violent irritation against her. Partly he was ashamed of his love for these things; he hid his passion for them. He was ashamed of the ecstasy into which he could throw himself with these symbols. And for a few moments he hated the lamb and the mystic pictures of the Eucharist, with a violent, ashy hatred. His fire was put out, she had thrown cold water on it. The whole thing was distasteful to him, his mouth was full of ashes. He went out cold with

corpse-like anger, leaving her alone. He hated her. He walked through the white snow, under a sky of lead.

And she wept again, in bitter recurrence of the previous gloom. But her heart was easy-oh, much more easy.

She was quite willing to make it up with him when he came home again. He was black and surly, but abated. She had broken a little of something in him. And at length he was glad to forfeit from his soul all his symbols, to have her making love to him. He loved it when she put her head on his knee, and he had not asked her to or wanted her to, he loved her when she put her arms round him and made bold love to him, and he did not make love to her. He felt a strong blood in his limbs again.

And she loved the intent, far look of his eyes when they rested on her: intent, yet far, not near, not with her. And she wanted to bring them near. She wanted his eyes to come to hers, to know her. And they would not. They remained intent, and far, and proud, like a hawk's naive and inhuman as a hawk's. So she loved him and caressed him and roused him like a hawk, till he was keen and instant, but without tenderness. He came to her fierce and hard, like a hawk striking and taking her. He was no mystic any more, she was his aim and object, his prey. And she was carried off, and he was satisfied, or satiated at last.

Then immediately she began to retaliate on him. She too was a hawk. If she imitated the pathetic plover running plaintive to him, that was part of the game. When he, satisfied, moved with a proud, insolent slouch of the body and a half-contemptuous drop of the head, unaware of her, ignoring her very existence, after taking his fill of her and getting his satisfaction of her, her soul roused, its pinions became like steel, and she struck at him. When he sat on his perch glancing sharply round with solitary pride, pride eminent and fierce, she dashed at him and threw him from his station savagely, she goaded him from his keen dignity of a male, she harassed him from his unperturbed pride, till he was mad with rage, his light brown eyes burned with fury, they saw her now, like flames of anger they flared at her and recognised her as the enemy.

Very good, she was the enemy, very good. As he prowled round her, she watched him. As he struck at her, she struck back.

He was angry because she had carelessly pushed away his tools so that they got rusty.

"Don't leave them littering in my way, then," she said.

"I shall leave them where I like," he cried.

"Then I shall throw them where I like."

They glowered at each other, he with rage in his hands, she with her soul fierce with victory. They were very well matched. They would fight it out.

She turned to her sewing. Immediately the tea-things were cleared away, she fetched out the stuff, and his soul rose in rage. He hated beyond measure to hear the shriek of calico as she tore the web sharply, as if with pleasure. And the run of the sewing-machine gathered a frenzy in him at last.

“Aren’t you going to stop that row?” he shouted. “Can’t you do it in the daytime?”

She looked up sharply, hostile from her work.

“No, I can’t do it in the daytime. I have other things to do. Besides, I like sewing, and you’re not going to stop me doing it.”

Whereupon she turned back to her arranging, fixing, stitching, his nerves jumped with anger as the sewing-machine started and stuttered and buzzed.

But she was enjoying herself, she was triumphant and happy as the darting needle danced ecstatically down a hem, drawing the stuff along under its vivid stabbing, irresistibly. She made the machine hum. She stopped it imperiously, her fingers were deft and swift and mistress.

If he sat behind her stiff with impotent rage it only made a trembling vividness come into her energy. On she worked. At last he went to bed in a rage, and lay stiff, away from her. And she turned her back on him. And in the morning they did not speak, except in mere cold civilities.

And when he came home at night, his heart relenting and growing hot for love of her, when he was just ready to feel he had been wrong, and when he was expecting her to feel the same, there she sat at the sewing-machine, the whole house was covered with clipped calico, the kettle was not even on the fire.

She started up, affecting concern.

“Is it so late?” she cried.

But his face had gone stiff with rage. He walked through to the parlour, then he walked back and out of the house again. Her heart sank. Very swiftly she began to make his tea.

He went black-hearted down the road to Ilkeston. When he was in this state he never thought. A bolt shot across the doors of his mind and shut him in, a prisoner. He went back to Ilkeston, and drank a glass of beer. What was he going to do? He did not want to see anybody.

He would go to Nottingham, to his own town. He went to the station and took a train. When he got to Nottingham, still he had nowhere to go. However, it was more agreeable to walk familiar streets. He paced them with a mad restlessness, as if he were running amok. Then he turned to a bookshop and found a book on Bamberg Cathedral. Here was a discovery! here was something for him! He went into a quiet restaurant to look at his treasure. He lit up with thrills of bliss as he turned from picture to picture. He had found something at last, in these

carvings. His soul had great satisfaction. Had he not come out to seek, and had he not found! He was in a passion of fulfilment. These were the finest carvings, statues, he had ever seen. The book lay in his hands like a doorway. The world around was only an enclosure, a room. But he was going away. He lingered over the lovely statues of women. A marvellous, finely-wrought universe crystallised out around him as he looked again, at the crowns, the twining hair, the woman-faces. He liked all the better the unintelligible text of the German. He preferred things he could not understand with the mind. He loved the undiscovered and the undiscoverable. He pored over the pictures intensely. And these were wooden statues, "Holz"-he believed that meant wood. Wooden statues so shapen to his soul! He was a million times gladdened. How undiscovered the world was, how it revealed itself to his soul! What a fine, exciting thing his life was, at his hand! Did not Bamberg Cathedral make the world his own? He celebrated his triumphant strength and life and verity, and embraced the vast riches he was inheriting.

But it was about time to go home. He had better catch a train. All the time there was a steady bruise at the bottom of his soul, but so steady as to be forgettable. He caught a train for Ilkeston.

It was ten o'clock as he was mounting the hill to Cossethay, carrying his limp book on Bamberg Cathedral. He had not yet thought of Anna, not definitely. The dark finger pressing a bruise controlled him thoughtlessly.

Anna had started guiltily when he left the house. She had hastened preparing the tea, hoping he would come back. She had made some toast, and got all ready. Then he didn't come. She cried with vexation and disappointment. Why had he gone? Why couldn't he come back now? Why was it such a battle between them? She loved him-she did love him-why couldn't he be kinder to her, nicer to her?

She waited in distress-then her mood grew harder. He passed out of her thoughts. She had considered indignantly, what right he had to interfere with her sewing? She had indignantly refuted his right to interfere with her at all. She was not to be interfered with. Was she not herself, and he the outsider.

Yet a quiver of fear went through her. If he should leave her? She sat conjuring fears and sufferings, till she wept with very self-pity. She did not know what she would do if he left her, or if he turned against her. The thought of it chilled her, made her desolate and hard. And against him, the stranger, the outsider, the being who wanted to arrogate authority, she remained steadily fortified. Was she not herself? How could one who was not of her own kind presume with authority? She knew she was immutable, unchangeable, she was not afraid for her own being. She was only afraid of all that was not herself. It

pressed round her, it came to her and took part in her, in form of her man, this vast, resounding, alien world which was not herself. And he had so many weapons, he might strike from so many sides.

When he came in at the door, his heart was blazed with pity and tenderness, she looked so lost and forlorn and young. She glanced up, afraid. And she was surprised to see him, shining-faced, clear and beautiful in his movements, as if he were clarified. And a startled pang of fear, and shame of herself went through her.

They waited for each other to speak.

“Do you want to eat anything?” she said.

“I’ll get it myself,” he answered, not wanting her to serve him. But she brought out food. And it pleased him she did it for him. He was again a bright lord.

“I went to Nottingham,” he said mildly.

“To your mother?” she asked, in a flash of contempt.

“No-I didn’t go home.”

“Who did you go to see?”

“I went to see nobody.”

“Then why did you go to Nottingham?”

“I went because I wanted to go.”

He was getting angry that she again rebuffed him when he was so clear and shining.

“And who did you see?”

“I saw nobody.”

“Nobody?”

“No-who should I see?”

“You saw nobody you knew?”

“No, I didn’t,” he replied irritably.

She believed him, and her mood became cold.

“I bought a book,” he said, handing her the propitiatory volume.

She idly looked at the pictures. Beautiful, the pure women, with their clear-dropping gowns. Her heart became colder. What did they mean to him?

He sat and waited for her. She bent over the book.

“Aren’t they nice?” he said, his voice roused and glad. Her blood flushed, but she did not lift her head.

“Yes,” she said. In spite of herself, she was compelled by him. He was strange, attractive, exerting some power over her.

He came over to her, and touched her delicately. Her heart beat with wild passion, wild raging passion. But she resisted as yet. It was always the unknown,

always the unknown, and she clung fiercely to her known self. But the rising flood carried her away.

They loved each other to transport again, passionately and fully.

“Isn’t it more wonderful than ever?” she asked him, radiant like a newly opened flower, with tears like dew.

He held her closer. He was strange and abstracted.

“It is always more wonderful,” she asseverated, in a glad, child’s voice, remembering her fear, and not quite cleared of it yet.

So it went on continually, the recurrence of love and conflict between them. One day it seemed as if everything was shattered, all life spoiled, ruined, desolate and laid waste. The next day it was all marvellous again, just marvellous. One day she thought she would go mad from his very presence, the sound of his drinking was detestable to her. The next day she loved and rejoiced in the way he crossed the floor, he was sun, moon and stars in one.

She fretted, however, at last, over the lack of stability. When the perfect hours came back, her heart did not forget that they would pass away again. She was uneasy. The surety, the surety, the inner surety, the confidence in the abidingness of love: that was what she wanted. And that she did not get. She knew also that he had not got it.

Nevertheless it was a marvellous world, she was for the most part lost in the marvellousness of it. Even her great woes were marvellous to her.

She could be very happy. And she wanted to be happy. She resented it when he made her unhappy. Then she could kill him, cast him out. Many days, she waited for the hour when he would be gone to work. Then the flow of her life, which he seemed to damn up, was let loose, and she was free. She was free, she was full of delight. Everything delighted her. She took up the rug and went to shake it in the garden. Patches of snow were on the fields, the air was light. She heard the ducks shouting on the pond, she saw them charge and sail across the water as if they were setting off on an invasion of the world. She watched the rough horses, one of which was clipped smooth on the belly, so that he wore a jacket and long stockings of brown fur, stand kissing each other in the wintry morning by the churchyard wall. Everything delighted her, now he was gone, the insulator, the obstruction removed, the world was all hers, in connection with her.

She was joyfully active. Nothing pleased her more than to hang out the washing in a high wind that came full-butt over the round of the hill, tearing the wet garments out of her hands, making flap-flap-flap of the waving stuff. She laughed and struggled and grew angry. But she loved her solitary days.

Then he came home at night, and she knitted her brows because of some

endless contest between them. As he stood in the doorway her heart changed. It steeled itself. The laughter and zest of the day disappeared from her. She was stiffened.

They fought an unknown battle, unconsciously. Still they were in love with each other, the passion was there. But the passion was consumed in a battle. And the deep, fierce unnamed battle went on. Everything glowed intensely about them, the world had put off its clothes and was awful, with new, primal nakedness.

Sunday came when the strange spell was cast over her by him. Half she loved it. She was becoming more like him. All the weekdays, there was a glint of sky and fields, the little church seemed to babble away to the cottages the morning through. But on Sundays, when he stayed at home, a deeply-coloured, intense gloom seemed to gather on the face of the earth, the church seemed to fill itself with shadow, to become big, a universe to her, there was a burning of blue and ruby, a sound of worship about her. And when the doors were opened, and she came out into the world, it was a world new-created, she stepped into the resurrection of the world, her heart beating to the memory of the darkness and the Passion.

If, as very often, they went to the Marsh for tea on Sundays, then she regained another, lighter world, that had never known the gloom and the stained glass and the ecstasy of chanting. Her husband was obliterated, she was with her father again, who was so fresh and free and all daylight. Her husband, with his intensity and his darkness, was obliterated. She left him, she forgot him, she accepted her father.

Yet, as she went home again with the young man, she put her hand on his arm tentatively, a little bit ashamed, her hand pleaded that he would not hold it against her, her recusancy. But he was obscured. He seemed to become blind, as if he were not there with her.

Then she was afraid. She wanted him. When he was oblivious of her, she almost went mad with fear. For she had become so vulnerable, so exposed. She was in touch so intimately. All things about her had become intimate, she had known them near and lovely, like presences hovering upon her. What if they should all go hard and separate again, standing back from her terrible and distinct, and she, having known them, should be at their mercy?

This frightened her. Always, her husband was to her the unknown to which she was delivered up. She was a flower that has been tempted forth into blossom, and has no retreat. He had her nakedness in his power. And who was he, what was he? A blind thing, a dark force, without knowledge. She wanted to preserve herself.

Then she gathered him to herself again and was satisfied for a moment. But as time went on, she began to realise more and more that he did not alter, that he was something dark, alien to herself. She had thought him just the bright reflex of herself. As the weeks and months went by she realised that he was a dark opposite to her, that they were opposites, not complements.

He did not alter, he remained separately himself, and he seemed to expect her to be part of himself, the extension of his will. She felt him trying to gain power over her, without knowing her. What did he want? Was he going to bully her?

What did she want herself? She answered herself, that she wanted to be happy, to be natural, like the sunlight and the busy daytime. And, at the bottom of her soul, she felt he wanted her to be dark, unnatural. Sometimes, when he seemed like the darkness covering and smothering her, she revolted almost in horror, and struck at him. She struck at him, and made him bleed, and he became wicked. Because she dreaded him and held him in horror, he became wicked, he wanted to destroy. And then the fight between them was cruel.

She began to tremble. He wanted to impose himself on her. And he began to shudder. She wanted to desert him, to leave him a prey to the open, with the unclean dogs of the darkness setting on to devour him. He must beat her, and make her stay with him. Whereas she fought to keep herself free of him.

They went their ways now shadowed and stained with blood, feeling the world far off, unable to give help. Till she began to get tired. After a certain point, she became impassive, detached utterly from him. He was always ready to burst out murderously against her. Her soul got up and left him, she went her way. Nevertheless in her apparent blitheness, that made his soul black with opposition, she trembled as if she bled.

And ever and again, the pure love came in sunbeams between them, when she was like a flower in the sun to him, so beautiful, so shining, so intensely dear that he could scarcely bear it. Then as if his soul had six wings of bliss he stood absorbed in praise, feeling the radiance from the Almighty beat through him like a pulse, as he stood in the upright flame of praise, transmitting the pulse of Creation.

And ever and again he appeared to her as the dread flame of power. Sometimes, when he stood in the doorway, his face lit up, he seemed like an Annunciation to her, her heart beat fast. And she watched him, suspended. He had a dark, burning being that she dreaded and resisted. She was subject to him as to the Angel of the Presence. She waited upon him and heard his will, and she trembled in his service.

Then all this passed away. Then he loved her for her childishness and for her strangeness to him, for the wonder of her soul which was different from his soul,

and which made him genuine when he would be false. And she loved him for the way he sat loosely in a chair, or for the way he came through a door with his face open and eager. She loved his ringing, eager voice, and the touch of the unknown about him, his absolute simplicity.

Yet neither of them was quite satisfied. He felt, somewhere, that she did not respect him. She only respected him as far as he was related to herself. For what he was, beyond her, she had no care. She did not care for what he represented in himself. It is true, he did not know himself what he represented. But whatever it was she did not really honour it. She did no service to his work as a lace-designer, nor to himself as bread-winner. Because he went down to the office and worked every day-that entitled him to no respect or regard from her, he knew. Rather she despised him for it. And he almost loved her for this, though at first it maddened him like an insult.

What was much deeper, she soon came to combat his deepest feelings. What he thought about life and about society and mankind did not matter very much to her: he was right enough to be insignificant. This was again galling to him. She would judge beyond him on these things. But at length he came to accept her judgments, discovering them as if they were his own. It was not here the deep trouble lay. The deep root of his enmity lay in the fact that she jeered at his soul. He was inarticulate and stupid in thought. But to some things he clung passionately. He loved the Church. If she tried to get out of him, what he believed, then they were both soon in a white rage.

Did he believe the water turned to wine at Cana? She would drive him to the thing as a historical fact: so much rain-water-look at it-can it become grape-juice, wine? For an instant, he saw with the clear eyes of the mind and said no, his clear mind, answering her for a moment, rejected the idea. And immediately his whole soul was crying in a mad, inchoate hatred against this violation of himself. It was true for him. His mind was extinguished again at once, his blood was up. In his blood and bones, he wanted the scene, the wedding, the water brought forward from the firkins as red wine: and Christ saying to His mother: "Woman, what have I to do with thee?-mine hour is not yet come."

And then:

"His mother saith unto the servants, 'Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it.'"

Brangwen loved it, with his bones and blood he loved it, he could not let it go. Yet she forced him to let it go. She hated his blind attachments.

Water, natural water, could it suddenly and unnaturally turn into wine, depart from its being and at haphazard take on another being? Ah no, he knew it was wrong.

She became again the palpitating, hostile child, hateful, putting things to

destruction. He became mute and dead. His own being gave him the lie. He knew it was so: wine was wine, water was water, for ever: the water had not become wine. The miracle was not a real fact. She seemed to be destroying him. He went out, dark and destroyed, his soul running its blood. And he tasted of death. Because his life was formed in these unquestioned concepts.

She, desolate again as she had been when she was a child, went away and sobbed. She did not care, she did not care whether the water had turned to wine or not. Let him believe it if he wanted to. But she knew she had won. And an ashy desolation came over her.

They were ashenly miserable for some time. Then the life began to come back. He was nothing if not dogged. He thought again of the chapter of St. John. There was a great biting pang. "But thou hast kept the good wine until now." "The best wine!" The young man's heart responded in a craving, in a triumph, although the knowledge that it was not true in fact bit at him like a weasel in his heart. Which was stronger, the pain of the denial, or the desire for affirmation? He was stubborn in spirit, and abode by his desire. But he would not any more affirm the miracles as true.

Very well, it was not true, the water had not turned into wine. The water had not turned into wine. But for all that he would live in his soul as if the water had turned into wine. For truth of fact, it had not. But for his soul, it had.

"Whether it turned into wine or whether it didn't," he said, "it doesn't bother me. I take it for what it is."

"And what is it?" she asked, quickly, hopefully.

"It's the Bible," he said.

That answer enraged her, and she despised him. She did not actively question the Bible herself. But he drove her to contempt.

And yet he did not care about the Bible, the written letter. Although he could not satisfy her, yet she knew of herself that he had something real. He was not a dogmatist. He did not believe in fact that the water turned into wine. He did not want to make a fact out of it. Indeed, his attitude was without criticism. It was purely individual. He took that which was of value to him from the Written Word, he added to his spirit. His mind he let sleep.

And she was bitter against him, that he let his mind sleep. That which was human, belonged to mankind, he would not exert. He cared only for himself. He was no Christian. Above all, Christ had asserted the brotherhood of man.

She, almost against herself, clung to the worship of the human knowledge. Man must die in the body, but in his knowledge he was immortal. Such, somewhere, was her belief, quite obscure and unformulated. She believed in the omnipotence of the human mind.

He, on the other hand, blind as a subterranean thing, just ignored the human mind and ran after his own dark-souled desires, following his own tunnelling nose. She felt often she must suffocate. And she fought him off.

Then he, knowing he was blind, fought madly back again, frantic in sensual fear. He did foolish things. He asserted himself on his rights, he arrogated the old position of master of the house.

“You’ve a right to do as I want,” he cried.

“Fool!” she answered. “Fool!”

“I’ll let you know who’s master,” he cried.

“Fool!” she answered. “Fool! I’ve known my own father, who could put a dozen of you in his pipe and push them down with his finger-end. Don’t I know what a fool you are!”

He knew himself what a fool he was, and was flayed by the knowledge. Yet he went on trying to steer the ship of their dual life. He asserted his position as the captain of the ship. And captain and ship bored her. He wanted to loom important as master of one of the innumerable domestic craft that make up the great fleet of society. It seemed to her a ridiculous armada of tubs jostling in futility. She felt no belief in it. She jeered at him as master of the house, master of their dual life. And he was black with shame and rage. He knew, with shame, how her father had been a man without arrogating any authority.

He had gone on the wrong tack, and he felt it hard to give up the expedition. There was great surging and shame. Then he yielded. He had given up the master-of-the-house idea.

There was something he wanted, nevertheless, some from of mastery. Ever and anon, after his collapses into the petty and the shameful, he rose up again, and, stubborn in spirit, strong in his power to start afresh, set out once more in his male pride of being to fulfil the hidden passion of his spirit.

It began well, but it ended always in war between them, till they were both driven almost to madness. He said, she did not respect him. She laughed in hollow scorn of this. For her it was enough that she loved him.

“Respect what?” she asked.

But he always answered the wrong thing. And though she cudgelled her brains, she could not come at it.

“Why don’t you go on with your wood-carving?” she said. “Why don’t you finish your Adam and Eve?”

But she did not care for the Adam and Eve, and he never put another stroke to it. She jeered at the Eve, saying, “She is like a little marionette. Why is she so small? You’ve made Adam as big as God, and Eve like a doll.”

“It is impudence to say that Woman was made out of Man’s body,” she

continued, “when every man is born of woman. What impudence men have, what arrogance!”

In a rage one day, after trying to work on the board, and failing, so that his belly was a flame of nausea, he chopped up the whole panel and put it on the fire. She did not know. He went about for some days very quiet and subdued after it.

“Where is the Adam and Eve board?” she asked him.

“Burnt.”

She looked at him.

“But your carving?”

“I burned it.”

“When?”

She did not believe him.

“On Friday night.”

“When I was at the Marsh?”

“Yes.”

She said no more.

Then, when he had gone to work, she wept for a whole day, and was much chastened in spirit. So that a new, fragile flame of love came out of the ashes of this last pain.

Directly, it occurred to her that she was with child. There was a great trembling of wonder and anticipation through her soul. She wanted a child. Not that she loved babies so much, though she was touched by all young things. But she wanted to bear children. And a certain hunger in her heart wanted to unite her husband with herself, in a child.

She wanted a son. She felt, a son would be everything. She wanted to tell her husband. But it was such a trembling, intimate thing to tell him, and he was at this time hard and unresponsive. So that she went away and wept. It was such a waste of a beautiful opportunity, such a frost that nipped in the bud one of the beautiful moments of her life. She went about heavy and tremulous with her secret, wanting to touch him, oh, most delicately, and see his face, dark and sensitive, attend to her news. She waited and waited for him to become gentle and still towards her. But he was always harsh and he bullied her.

So that the buds shrivelled from her confidence, she was chilled. She went down to the Marsh.

“Well,” said her father, looking at her and seeing her at the first glance, “what’s amiss wi’ you now?”

The tears came at the touch of his careful love.

“Nothing,” she said.

“Can’t you hit it off, you two?” he said.

“He’s so obstinate,” she quivered; but her soul was obdurate itself.

“Ay, an’ I know another who’s all that,” said her father.

She was silent.

“You don’t want to make yourselves miserable,” said her father; “all about nowt.”

“He isn’t miserable,” she said.

“I’ll back my life, if you can do nowt else, you can make him as miserable as a dog. You’d be a dab hand at that, my lass.”

“I do nothing to make him miserable,” she retorted.

“Oh no-oh no! A packet o’ butterscotch, you are.”

She laughed a little.

“You mustn’t think I want him to be miserable,” she cried. “I don’t.”

“We quite readily believe it,” retorted Brangwen. “Neither do you intend him to be hopping for joy like a fish in a pond.”

This made her think. She was rather surprised to find that she did not intend her husband to be hopping for joy like a fish in a pond.

Her mother came, and they all sat down to tea, talking casually.

“Remember, child,” said her mother, “that everything is not waiting for your hand just to take or leave. You mustn’t expect it. Between two people, the love itself is the important thing, and that is neither you nor him. It is a third thing you must create. You mustn’t expect it to be just your way.”

“Ha-nor do I. If I did I should soon find my mistake out. If I put my hand out to take anything, my hand is very soon bitten, I can tell you.”

“Then you must mind where you put your hand,” said her father.

Anna was rather indignant that they took the tragedy of her young married life with such equanimity.

“You love the man right enough,” said her father, wrinkling his forehead in distress. “That’s all as counts.”

“I do love him, more shame to him,” she cried. “I want to tell him-I’ve been waiting for four days now to tell him — — ” her face began to quiver, the tears came. Her parents watched her in silence. She did not go on.

“Tell him what?” said her father.

“That we’re going to have an infant,” she sobbed, “and he’s never, never let me, not once, every time I’ve come to him, he’s been horrid to me, and I wanted to tell him, I did. And he won’t let me-he’s cruel to me.”

She sobbed as if her heart would break. Her mother went and comforted her, put her arms round her, and held her close. Her father sat with a queer, wrinkled brow, and was rather paler than usual. His heart went tense with hatred of his

son-in-law.

So that, when the tale was sobbed out, and comfort administered and tea sipped, and something like calm restored to the little circle, the thought of Will Brangwen's entry was not pleasantly entertained.

Tilly was set to watch out for him as he passed by on his way home. The little party at table heard the woman's servant's shrill call:

"You've got to come in, Will. Anna's here."

After a few moments, the youth entered.

"Are you stopping?" he asked in his hard, harsh voice.

He seemed like a blade of destruction standing there. She quivered to tears.

"Sit you down," said Tom Brangwen, "an' take a bit off your length."

Will Brangwen sat down. He felt something strange in the atmosphere. He was dark browed, but his eyes had the keen, intent, sharp look, as if he could only see in the distance; which was a beauty in him, and which made Anna so angry.

"Why does he always deny me?" she said to herself. "Why is it nothing to him, what I am?"

And Tom Brangwen, blue-eyed and warm, sat in opposition to the youth.

"How long are you stopping?" the young husband asked his wife.

"Not very long," she said.

"Get your tea, lad," said Tom Brangwen. "Are you itchin' to be off the moment you enter?"

They talked of trivial things. Through the open door the level rays of sunset poured in, shining on the floor. A grey hen appeared stepping swiftly in the doorway, pecking, and the light through her comb and her wattles made an oriflamme tossed here and there, as she went, her grey body was like a ghost.

Anna, watching, threw scraps of bread, and she felt the child flame within her. She seemed to remember again forgotten, burning, far-off things.

"Where was I born, mother?" she asked.

"In London."

"And was my father"-she spoke of him as if he were merely a strange name: she could never connect herself with him-"was he dark?"

"He had dark-brown hair and dark eyes and a fresh colouring. He went bald, rather bald, when he was quite young," replied her mother, also as if telling a tale which was just old imagination.

"Was he good-looking?"

"Yes-he was very good-looking-rather small. I have never seen an Englishman who looked like him."

"Why?"

“He was”-the mother made a quick, running movement with her hands-”his figure was alive and changing-it was never fixed. He was not in the least steady-like a running stream.”

It flashed over the youth-Anna too was like a running stream. Instantly he was in love with her again.

Tom Brangwen was frightened. His heart always filled with fear, fear of the unknown, when he heard his women speak of their bygone men as of strangers they had known in passing and had taken leave of again.

In the room, there came a silence and a singleness over all their hearts. They were separate people with separate destinies. Why should they seek each to lay violent hands of claim on the other?

The young people went home as a sharp little moon was setting in the dusk of spring. Tufts of trees hovered in the upper air, the little church pricked up shadowily at the top of the hill, the earth was a dark blue shadow.

She put her hand lightly on his arm, out of her far distance. And out of the distance, he felt her touch him. They walked on, hand in hand, along opposite horizons, touching across the dusk. There was a sound of thrushes calling in the dark blue twilight.

“I think we are going to have an infant, Bill,” she said, from far off.

He trembled, and his fingers tightened on hers.

“Why?” he asked, his heart beating. “You don’t know?”

“I do,” she said.

They continued without saying any more, walking along opposite horizons, hand in hand across the intervening space, two separate people. And he trembled as if a wind blew on to him in strong gusts, out of the unseen. He was afraid. He was afraid to know he was alone. For she seemed fulfilled and separate and sufficient in her half of the world. He could not bear to know that he was cut off. Why could he not be always one with her? It was he who had given her the child. Why could she not be with him, one with him? Why must he be set in this separateness, why could she not be with him, close, close, as one with him? She must be one with him.

He held her fingers tightly in his own. She did not know what he was thinking. The blaze of light on her heart was too beautiful and dazzling, from the conception in her womb. She walked glorified, and the sound of the thrushes, of the trains in the valley, of the far-off, faint noises of the town, were her “Magnificat”.

But he was struggling in silence. It seemed as though there were before him a solid wall of darkness that impeded him and suffocated him and made him mad. He wanted her to come to him, to complete him, to stand before him so that his

eyes did not, should not meet the naked darkness. Nothing mattered to him but that she should come and complete him. For he was ridden by the awful sense of his own limitation. It was as if he ended uncompleted, as yet uncreated on the darkness, and he wanted her to come and liberate him into the whole.

But she was complete in herself, and he was ashamed of his need, his helpless need of her. His need, and his shame of need, weighed on him like a madness. Yet still he was quiet and gentle, in reverence of her conception, and because she was with child by him.

And she was happy in showers of sunshine. She loved her husband, as a presence, as a grateful condition. But for the moment her need was fulfilled, and now she wanted only to hold her husband by the hand in sheer happiness, without taking thought, only being glad.

He had various folios of reproductions, and among them a cheap print from Fra Angelico's "Entry of the Blessed into Paradise". This filled Anna with bliss. The beautiful, innocent way in which the Blessed held each other by the hand as they moved towards the radiance, the real, real, angelic melody, made her weep with happiness. The floweriness, the beams of light, the linking of hands, was almost too much for her, too innocent.

Day after day came shining through the door of Paradise, day after day she entered into the brightness. The child in her shone till she herself was a beam of sunshine; and how lovely was the sunshine that loitered and wandered out of doors, where the catkins on the big hazel bushes at the end of the garden hung in their shaken, floating aureole, where little fumes like fire burst out from the black yew trees as a bird settled clinging to the branches. One day bluebells were along the hedge-bottoms, then cowslips twinkled like manna, golden and evanescent on the meadows. She was full of a rich drowsiness and loneliness. How happy she was, how gorgeous it was to live: to have known herself, her husband, the passion of love and begetting; and to know that all this lived and waited and burned on around her, a terrible purifying fire, through which she had passed for once to come to this peace of golden radiance, when she was with child, and innocent, and in love with her husband and with all the many angels hand in hand. She lifted her throat to the breeze that came across the fields, and she felt it handling her like sisters fondling her, she drank it in perfume of cowslips and of apple-blossoms.

And in all the happiness a black shadow, shy, wild, a beast of prey, roamed and vanished from sight, and like strands of gossamer blown across her eyes, there was a dread for her.

She was afraid when he came home at night. As yet, her fear never spoke, the shadow never rushed upon her. He was gentle, humble, he kept himself

withheld. His hands were delicate upon her, and she loved them. But there ran through her the thrill, crisp as pain, for she felt the darkness and other-world still in his soft, sheathed hands.

But the summer drifted in with the silence of a miracle, she was almost always alone. All the while, went on the long, lovely drowsiness, the maidenblush roses in the garden were all shed, washed away in a pouring rain, summer drifted into autumn, and the long, vague, golden days began to close. Crimson clouds fumed about the west, and as night came on, all the sky was fuming and steaming, and the moon, far above the swiftness of vapours, was white, bleared, the night was uneasy. Suddenly the moon would appear at a clear window in the sky, looking down from far above, like a captive. And Anna did not sleep. There was a strange, dark tension about her husband.

She became aware that he was trying to force his will upon her, something, there was something he wanted, as he lay there dark and tense. And her soul sighed in weariness.

Everything was so vague and lovely, and he wanted to wake her up to the hard, hostile reality. She drew back in resistance. Still he said nothing. But she felt his power persisting on her, till she became aware of the strain, she cried out against the exhaustion. He was forcing her, he was forcing her. And she wanted so much the joy and the vagueness and the innocence of her pregnancy. She did not want his bitter-corrosive love, she did not want it poured into her, to burn her. Why must she have it? Why, oh, why was he not content, contained?

She sat many hours by the window, in those days when he drove her most with the black constraint of his will, and she watched the rain falling on the yew trees. She was not sad, only wistful, blanched. The child under her heart was a perpetual warmth. And she was sure. The pressure was only upon her from the outside, her soul had no stripes.

Yet in her heart itself was always this same strain, tense, anxious. She was not safe, she was always exposed, she was always attacked. There was a yearning in her for a fulness of peace and blessedness. What a heavy yearning it was-so heavy.

She knew, vaguely, that all the time he was not satisfied, all the time he was trying to force something from her. Ah, how she wished she could succeed with him, in her own way! He was there, so inevitable. She lived in him also. And how she wanted to be at peace with him, at peace. She loved him. She would give him love, pure love. With a strange, rapt look in her face, she awaited his homecoming that night.

Then, when he came, she rose with her hands full of love, as of flowers, radiant, innocent. A dark spasm crossed his face. As she watched, her face

shining and flower-like with innocent love, his face grew dark and tense, the cruelty gathered in his brows, his eyes turned aside, she saw the whites of his eyes as he looked aside from her. She waited, touching him with her hands. But from his body through her hands came the bitter-corrosive shock of his passion upon her, destroying her in blossom. She shrank. She rose from her knees and went away from him, to preserve herself. And it was great pain to her.

To him also it was agony. He saw the glistening, flower-like love in her face, and his heart was black because he did not want it. Not this-not this. He did not want flowery innocence. He was unsatisfied. The rage and storm of unsatisfaction tormented him ceaselessly. Why had she not satisfied him? He had satisfied her. She was satisfied, at peace, innocent round the doors of her own paradise.

And he was unsatisfied, unfulfilled, he raged in torment, wanting, wanting. It was for her to satisfy him: then let her do it. Let her not come with flowery handfuls of innocent love. He would throw these aside and trample the flowers to nothing. He would destroy her flowery, innocent bliss. Was he not entitled to satisfaction from her, and was not his heart all raging desire, his soul a black torment of unfulfilment. Let it be fulfilled in him, then, as it was fulfilled in her. He had given her her fulfilment. Let her rise up and do her part.

He was cruel to her. But all the time he was ashamed. And being ashamed, he was more cruel. For he was ashamed that he could not come to fulfilment without her. And he could not. And she would not heed him. He was shackled and in darkness of torment.

She beseeched him to work again, to do his wood-carving. But his soul was too black. He had destroyed his panel of Adam and Eve. He could not begin again, least of all now, whilst he was in this condition.

For her there was no final release, since he could not be liberated from himself. Strange and amorphous, she must go yearning on through the trouble, like a warm, glowing cloud blown in the middle of a storm. She felt so rich, in her warm vagueness, that her soul cried out on him, because he harried her and wanted to destroy her.

She had her moments of exaltation still, re-births of old exaltations. As she sat by her bedroom window, watching the steady rain, her spirit was somewhere far off.

She sat in pride and curious pleasure. When there was no one to exult with, and the unsatisfied soul must dance and play, then one danced before the Unknown.

Suddenly she realised that this was what she wanted to do. Big with child as she was, she danced there in the bedroom by herself, lifting her hands and her

body to the Unseen, to the unseen Creator who had chosen her, to Whom she belonged.

She would not have had anyone know. She danced in secret, and her soul rose in bliss. She danced in secret before the Creator, she took off her clothes and danced in the pride of her bigness.

It surprised her, when it was over. She was shrinking and afraid. To what was she now exposed? She half wanted to tell her husband. Yet she shrank from him.

All the time she ran on by herself. She liked the story of David, who danced before the Lord, and uncovered himself exultingly. Why should he uncover himself to Michal, a common woman? He uncovered himself to the Lord.

“Thou comest to me with a sword and a spear and a shield, but I come to thee in the name of the Lord:-for the battle is the Lord’s, and he will give you into our hands.”

Her heart rang to the words. She walked in her pride. And her battle was her own Lord’s, her husband was delivered over.

In these days she was oblivious of him. Who was he, to come against her? No, he was not even the Philistine, the Giant. He was like Saul proclaiming his own kingship. She laughed in her heart. Who was he, proclaiming his kingship? She laughed in her heart with pride.

And she had to dance in exultation beyond him. Because he was in the house, she had to dance before her Creator in exemption from the man. On a Saturday afternoon, when she had a fire in the bedroom, again she took off her things and danced, lifting her knees and her hands in a slow, rhythmic exulting. He was in the house, so her pride was fiercer. She would dance his nullification, she would dance to her unseen Lord. She was exalted over him, before the Lord.

She heard him coming up the stairs, and she flinched. She stood with the firelight on her ankles and feet, naked in the shadowy, late afternoon, fastening up her hair. He was startled. He stood in the doorway, his brows black and lowering.

“What are you doing?” he said, gratingly. “You’ll catch a cold.”

And she lifted her hands and danced again, to annul him, the light glanced on her knees as she made her slow, fine movements down the far side of the room, across the firelight. He stood away near the door in blackness of shadow, watching, transfixed. And with slow, heavy movements she swayed backwards and forwards, like a full ear of corn, pale in the dusky afternoon, threading before the firelight, dancing his non-existence, dancing herself to the Lord, to exultation.

He watched, and his soul burned in him. He turned aside, he could not look, it hurt his eyes. Her fine limbs lifted and lifted, her hair was sticking out all fierce,

and her belly, big, strange, terrifying, uplifted to the Lord. Her face was rapt and beautiful, she danced exulting before her Lord, and knew no man.

It hurt him as he watched as if he were at the stake. He felt he was being burned alive. The strangeness, the power of her in her dancing consumed him, he was burned, he could not grasp, he could not understand. He waited obliterated. Then his eyes became blind to her, he saw her no more. And through the unseeing veil between them he called to her, in his jarring voice:

“What are you doing that for?”

“Go away,” she said. “Let me dance by myself.”

“That isn’t dancing,” he said harshly. “What do you want to do that for?”

“I don’t do it for you,” she said. “You go away.”

Her strange, lifted belly, big with his child! Had he no right to be there? He felt his presence a violation. Yet he had his right to be there. He went and sat on the bed.

She stopped dancing, and confronted him, again lifting her slim arms and twisting at her hair. Her nakedness hurt her, opposed to him.

“I can do as I like in my bedroom,” she cried. “Why do you interfere with me?”

And she slipped on a dressing-gown and crouched before the fire. He was more at ease now she was covered up. The vision of her tormented him all the days of his life, as she had been then, a strange, exalted thing having no relation to himself.

After this day, the door seemed to shut on his mind. His brow shut and became impervious. His eyes ceased to see, his hands were suspended. Within himself his will was coiled like a beast, hidden under the darkness, but always potent, working.

At first she went on blithely enough with him shut down beside her. But then his spell began to take hold of her. The dark, seething potency of him, the power of a creature that lies hidden and exerts its will to the destruction of the free-running creature, as the tiger lying in the darkness of the leaves steadily enforces the fall and death of the light creatures that drink by the waterside in the morning, gradually began to take effect on her. Though he lay there in his darkness and did not move, yet she knew he lay waiting for her. She felt his will fastening on her and pulling her down, even whilst he was silent and obscure.

She found that, in all her outgoings and her incomings, he prevented her. Gradually she realised that she was being borne down by him, borne down by the clinging, heavy weight of him, that he was pulling her down as a leopard clings to a wild cow and exhausts her and pulls her down.

Gradually she realised that her life, her freedom, was sinking under the silent

grip of his physical will. He wanted her in his power. He wanted to devour her at leisure, to have her. At length she realised that her sleep was a long ache and a weariness and exhaustion, because of his will fastened upon her, as he lay there beside her, during the night.

She realised it all, and there came a momentous pause, a pause in her swift running, a moment's suspension in her life, when she was lost.

Then she turned fiercely on him, and fought him. He was not to do this to her, it was monstrous. What horrible hold did he want to have over her body? Why did he want to drag her down, and kill her spirit? Why did he want to deny her spirit? Why did he deny her spirituality, hold her for a body only? And was he to claim her carcase?

Some vast, hideous darkness he seemed to represent to her.

“What do you do to me?” she cried. “What beastly thing do you do to me? You put a horrible pressure on my head, you don't let me sleep, you don't let me live. Every moment of your life you are doing something to me, something horrible, that destroys me. There is something horrible in you, something dark and beastly in your will. What do you want of me? What do you want to do to me?”

All the blood in his body went black and powerful and corrosive as he heard her. Black and blind with hatred of her he was. He was in a very black hell, and could not escape.

He hated her for what she said. Did he not give her everything, was she not everything to him? And the shame was a bitter fire in him, that she was everything to him, that he had nothing but her. And then that she should taunt him with it, that he could not escape! The fire went black in his veins. For try as he might, he could not escape. She was everything to him, she was his life and his derivation. He depended on her. If she were taken away, he would collapse as a house from which the central pillar is removed.

And she hated him, because he depended on her so utterly. He was horrible to her. She wanted to thrust him off, to set him apart. It was horrible that he should cleave to her, so close, so close, like leopard that had leapt on her, and fastened.

He went on from day to day in a blackness of rage and shame and frustration. How he tortured himself, to be able to get away from her. But he could not. She was as the rock on which he stood, with deep, heaving water all round, and he was unable to swim. He must take his stand on her, he must depend on her.

What had he in life, save her? Nothing. The rest was a great heaving flood. The terror of the night of heaving, overwhelming flood, which was his vision of life without her, was too much for him. He clung to her fiercely and abjectly.

And she beat him off, she beat him off. Where could he turn, like a swimmer

in a dark sea, beaten off from his hold, whither could he turn? He wanted to leave her, he wanted to be able to leave her. For his soul's sake, for his manhood's sake, he must be able to leave her.

But for what? She was the ark, and the rest of the world was flood. The only tangible, secure thing was the woman. He could leave her only for another woman. And where was the other woman, and who was the other woman? Besides, he would be just in the same state. Another woman would be woman, the case would be the same.

Why was she the all, the everything, why must he live only through her, why must he sink if he were detached from her? Why must he cleave to her in a frenzy as for his very life?

The only other way to leave her was to die. The only straight way to leave her was to die. His dark, raging soul knew that. But he had no desire for death.

Why could he not leave her? Why could he not throw himself into the hidden water to live or die, as might be? He could not, he could not. But supposing he went away, right away, and found work, and had a lodging again. He could be again as he had been before.

But he knew he could not. A woman, he must have a woman. And having a woman, he must be free of her. It would be the same position. For he could not be free of her.

For how can a man stand, unless he have something sure under his feet. Can a man tread the unstable water all his life, and call that standing? Better give in and drown at once.

And upon what could he stand, save upon a woman? Was he then like the old man of the seas, impotent to move save upon the back of another life? Was he impotent, or a cripple, or a defective, or a fragment?

It was black, mad, shameful torture, the frenzy of fear, the frenzy of desire, and the horrible, grasping back-wash of shame.

What was he afraid of? Why did life, without Anna, seem to him just a horrible welter, everything jostling in a meaningless, dark, fathomless flood? Why, if Anna left him even for a week, did he seem to be clinging like a madman to the edge of reality, and slipping surely, surely into the flood of unreality that would drown him. This horrible slipping into unreality drove him mad, his soul screamed with fear and agony.

Yet she was pushing him off from her, pushing him away, breaking his fingers from their hold on her, persistently, ruthlessly. He wanted her to have pity. And sometimes for a moment she had pity. But she always began again, thrusting him off, into the deep water, into the frenzy and agony of uncertainty.

She became like a fury to him, without any sense of him. Her eyes were bright

with a cold, unmoving hatred. Then his heart seemed to die in its last fear. She might push him off into the deeps.

She would not sleep with him any more. She said he destroyed her sleep. Up started all his frenzy and madness of fear and suffering. She drove him away. Like a cowed, lurking devil he was driven off, his mind working cunningly against her, devising evil for her. But she drove him off. In his moments of intense suffering, she seemed to him inconceivable, a monster, the principle of cruelty.

However her pity might give way for moments, she was hard and cold as a jewel. He must be put off from her, she must sleep alone. She made him a bed in the small room.

And he lay there whipped, his soul whipped almost to death, yet unchanged. He lay in agony of suffering, thrown back into unreality, like a man thrown overboard into a sea, to swim till he sinks, because there is no hold, only a wide, weltering sea.

He did not sleep, save for the white sleep when a thin veil is drawn over the mind. It was not sleep. He was awake, and he was not awake. He could not be alone. He needed to be able to put his arms round her. He could not bear the empty space against his breast, where she used to be. He could not bear it. He felt as if he were suspended in space, held there by the grip of his will. If he relaxed his will would fall, fall through endless space, into the bottomless pit, always falling, will-less, helpless, non-existent, just dropping to extinction, falling till the fire of friction had burned out, like a falling star, then nothing, nothing, complete nothing.

He rose in the morning grey and unreal. And she seemed fond of him again, she seemed to make up to him a little.

“I slept well,” she said, with her slightly false brightness. “Did you?”

“All right,” he answered.

He would never tell her.

For three or four nights he lay alone through the white sleep, his will unchanged, unchanged, still tense, fixed in its grip. Then, as if she were revived and free to be fond of him again, deluded by his silence and seeming acquiescence, moved also by pity, she took him back again.

Each night, in spite of all the shame, he had waited with agony for bedtime, to see if she would shut him out. And each night, as, in her false brightness, she said Good night, he felt he must kill her or himself. But she asked for her kiss, so pathetically, so prettily. So he kissed her, whilst his heart was ice.

And sometimes he went out. Once he sat for a long time in the church porch, before going in to bed. It was dark with a wind blowing. He sat in the church

porch and felt some shelter, some security. But it grew cold, and he must go in to bed.

Then came the night when she said, putting her arms round him and kissing him fondly:

“Stay with me to-night, will you?”

And he had stayed without demur. But his will had not altered. He would have her fixed to him.

So that soon she told him again she must be alone.

“I don’t want to send you away. I want to sleep with you. But I can’t sleep, you don’t let me sleep.”

His blood turned black in his veins.

“What do you mean by such a thing? It’s an arrant lie. I don’t let you sleep — —”

“But you don’t. I sleep so well when I’m alone. And I can’t sleep when you’re there. You do something to me, you put a pressure on my head. And I must sleep, now the child is coming.”

“It’s something in yourself,” he replied, “something wrong in you.”

Horrible in the extreme were these nocturnal combats, when all the world was asleep, and they two were alone, alone in the world, and repelling each other. It was hardly to be borne.

He went and lay down alone. And at length, after a grey and livid and ghastly period, he relaxed, something gave way in him. He let go, he did not care what became of him. Strange and dim he became to himself, to her, to everybody. A vagueness had come over everything, like a drowning. And it was an infinite relief to drown, a relief, a great, great relief.

He would insist no more, he would force her no more. He would force himself upon her no more. He would let go, relax, lapse, and what would be, should be.

Yet he wanted her still, he always, always wanted her. In his soul, he was desolate as a child, he was so helpless. Like a child on its mother, he depended on her for his living. He knew it, and he knew he could hardly help it.

Yet he must be able to be alone. He must be able to lie down alongside the empty space, and let be. He must be able to leave himself to the flood, to sink or live as might be. For he recognised at length his own limitation, and the limitation of his power. He had to give in.

There was a stillness, a wanness between them. Half at least of the battle was over. Sometimes she wept as she went about, her heart was very heavy. But the child was always warm in her womb.

They were friends again, new, subdued friends. But there was a wanness between them. They slept together once more, very quietly, and distinct, not one

together as before. And she was intimate with him as at first. But he was very quiet, and not intimate. He was glad in his soul, but for the time being he was not alive.

He could sleep with her, and let her be. He could be alone now. He had just learned what it was to be able to be alone. It was right and peaceful. She had given him a new, deeper freedom. The world might be a welter of uncertainty, but he was himself now. He had come into his own existence. He was born for a second time, born at last unto himself, out of the vast body of humanity. Now at last he had a separate identity, he existed alone, even if he were not quite alone. Before he had only existed in so far as he had relations with another being. Now he had an absolute self-as well as a relative self.

But it was a very dumb, weak, helpless self, a crawling nursling. He went about very quiet, and in a way, submissive. He had an unalterable self at last, free, separate, independent.

She was relieved, she was free of him. She had given him to himself. She wept sometimes with tiredness and helplessness. But he was a husband. And she seemed, in the child that was coming, to forget. It seemed to make her warm and drowsy. She lapsed into a long muse, indistinct, warm, vague, unwilling to be taken out of her vagueness. And she rested on him also.

Sometimes she came to him with a strange light in her eyes, poignant, pathetic, as if she were asking for something. He looked and he could not understand. She was so beautiful, so visionary, the rays seemed to go out of his breast to her, like a shining. He was there for her, all for her. And she would hold his breast, and kiss it, and kiss it, kneeling beside him, she who was waiting for the hour of her delivery. And he would lie looking down at his breast, till it seemed that his breast was not himself, that he had left it lying there. Yet it was himself also, and beautiful and bright with her kisses. He was glad with a strange, radiant pain. Whilst she kneeled beside him, and kissed his breast with a slow, rapt, half-devotional movement.

He knew she wanted something, his heart yearned to give it her. His heart yearned over her. And as she lifted her face, that was radiant and rosy as a little cloud, his heart still yearned over her, and, now from the distance, adored her. She had a flower-like presence which he adored as he stood far off, a stranger.

The weeks passed on, the time drew near, they were very gentle, and delicately happy. The insistent, passionate, dark soul, the powerful unsatisfaction in him seemed stilled and tamed, the lion lay down with the lamb in him.

She loved him very much indeed, and he waited near her. She was a precious, remote thing to him at this time, as she waited for her child. Her soul was glad with an ecstasy because of the coming infant. She wanted a boy: oh, very much

she wanted a boy.

But she seemed so young and so frail. She was indeed only a girl. As she stood by the fire washing herself-she was proud to wash herself at this time-and he looked at her, his heart was full of extreme tenderness for her. Such fine, fine limbs, her slim, round arms like chasing lights, and her legs so simple and childish, yet so very proud. Oh, she stood on proud legs, with a lovely reckless balance of her full belly, and the adorable little roundnesses, and the breasts becoming important. Above it all, her face was like a rosy cloud shining.

How proud she was, what a lovely proud thing her young body! And she loved him to put his hand on her ripe fullness, so that he should thrill also with the stir and the quickening there. He was afraid and silent, but she flung her arms round his neck with proud, impudent joy.

The pains came on, and Oh-how she cried! She would have him stay with her. And after her long cries she would look at him, with tears in her eyes and a sobbing laugh on her face, saying:

“I don’t mind it really.”

It was bad enough. But to her it was never deathly. Even the fierce, tearing pain was exhilarating. She screamed and suffered, but was all the time curiously alive and vital. She felt so powerfully alive and in the hands of such a masterly force of life, that her bottom-most feeling was one of exhilaration. She knew she was winning, winning, she was always winning, with each onset of pain she was nearer to victory.

Probably he suffered more than she did. He was not shocked or horrified. But he was screwed very tight in the vise of suffering.

It was a girl. The second of silence on her face when they said so showed him she was disappointed. And a great blazing passion of resentment and protest sprang up in his heart. In that moment he claimed the child.

But when the milk came, and the infant sucked her breast, she seemed to be leaping with extravagant bliss.

“It sucks me, it sucks me, it likes me-oh, it loves it!” she cried, holding the child to her breast with her two hands covering it, passionately.

And in a few moments, as she became used to her bliss, she looked at the youth with glowing, unseeing eyes, and said:

“Anna Victrix.”

He went away, trembling, and slept. To her, her pains were the wound-smart of a victor, she was the prouder.

When she was well again she was very happy. She called the baby Ursula. Both Anna and her husband felt they must have a name that gave them private satisfaction. The baby was tawny skinned, it had a curious downy skin, and

wisps of bronze hair, and the yellow grey eyes that wavered, and then became golden-brown like the father's. So they called her Ursula because of the picture of the saint.

It was a rather delicate baby at first, but soon it became stronger, and was restless as a young eel. Anna was worn out with the day-long wrestling with its young vigour.

As a little animal, she loved and adored it and was happy. She loved her husband, she kissed his eyes and nose and mouth, and made much of him, she said his limbs were beautiful, she was fascinated by the physical form of him.

And she was indeed Anna Victrix. He could not combat her any more. He was out in the wilderness, alone with her. Having occasion to go to London, he marvelled, as he returned, thinking of naked, lurking savages on an island, how these had built up and created the great mass of Oxford Street or Piccadilly. How had helpless savages, running with their spears on the riverside, after fish, how had they come to rear up this great London, the ponderous, massive, ugly superstructure of a world of man upon a world of nature! It frightened and awed him. Man was terrible, awful in his works. The works of man were more terrible than man himself, almost monstrous.

And yet, for his own part, for his private being, Brangwen felt that the whole of the man's world was exterior and extraneous to his own real life with Anna. Sweep away the whole monstrous superstructure of the world of to-day, cities and industries and civilisation, leave only the bare earth with plants growing and waters running, and he would not mind, so long as he were whole, had Anna and the child and the new, strange certainty in his soul. Then, if he were naked, he would find clothing somewhere, he would make a shelter and bring food to his wife.

And what more? What more would be necessary? The great mass of activity in which mankind was engaged meant nothing to him. By nature, he had no part in it. What did he live for, then? For Anna only, and for the sake of living? What did he want on this earth? Anna only, and his children, and his life with his children and her? Was there no more?

He was attended by a sense of something more, something further, which gave him absolute being. It was as if now he existed in Eternity, let Time be what it might. What was there outside? The fabricated world, that he did not believe in? What should he bring to her, from outside? Nothing? Was it enough, as it was? He was troubled in his acquiescence. She was not with him. Yet he scarcely believed in himself, apart from her, though the whole Infinite was with him. Let the whole world slide down and over the edge of oblivion, he would stand alone. But he was unsure of her. And he existed also in her. So he was unsure.

He hovered near to her, never quite able to forget the vague, haunting uncertainty, that seemed to challenge him, and which he would not hear. A pang of dread, almost guilt, as of insufficiency, would go over him as he heard her talking to the baby. She stood before the window, with the month-old child in her arms, talking in a musical, young sing-song that he had not heard before, and which rang on his heart like a claim from the distance, or the voice of another world sounding its claim on him. He stood near, listening, and his heart surged, surged to rise and submit. Then it shrank back and stayed aloof. He could not move, a denial was upon him, as if he could not deny himself. He must, he must be himself.

“Look at the silly blue-caps, my beauty,” she crooned, holding up the infant to the window, where shone the white garden, and the blue-tits scuffling in the snow: “Look at the silly blue-caps, my darling, having a fight in the snow! Look at them, my bird-beating the snow about with their wings, and shaking their heads. Oh, aren’t they wicked things, wicked things! Look at their yellow feathers on the snow there! They’ll miss them, won’t they, when they’re cold later on.

“Must we tell them to stop, must we say ‘stop it’ to them, my bird? But they are naughty, naughty! Look at them!” Suddenly her voice broke loud and fierce, she rapped the pane sharply.

“Stop it,” she cried, “stop it, you little nuisances. Stop it!” She called louder, and rapped the pane more sharply. Her voice was fierce and imperative.

“Have more sense,” she cried.

“There, now they’re gone. Where have they gone, the silly things? What will they say to each other? What will they say, my lambkin? They’ll forget, won’t they, they’ll forget all about it, out of their silly little heads, and their blue caps.”

After a moment, she turned her bright face to her husband.

“They were really fighting, they were really fierce with each other!” she said, her voice keen with excitement and wonder, as if she belonged to the birds’ world, were identified with the race of birds.

“Ay, they’ll fight, will blue-caps,” he said, glad when she turned to him with her glow from elsewhere. He came and stood beside her and looked out at the marks on the snow where the birds had scuffled, and at the yew trees’ burdened, white and black branches. What was the appeal it made to him, what was the question of her bright face, what was the challenge he was called to answer? He did not know. But as he stood there he felt some responsibility which made him glad, but uneasy, as if he must put out his own light. And he could not move as yet.

Anna loved the child very much, oh, very much. Yet still she was not quite

fulfilled. She had a slight expectant feeling, as of a door half opened. Here she was, safe and still in Cossethay. But she felt as if she were not in Cossethay at all. She was straining her eyes to something beyond. And from her Pisgah mount, which she had attained, what could she see? A faint, gleaming horizon, a long way off, and a rainbow like an archway, a shadow-door with faintly coloured coping above it. Must she be moving thither?

Something she had not, something she did not grasp, could not arrive at. There was something beyond her. But why must she start on the journey? She stood so safely on the Pisgah mountain.

In the winter, when she rose with the sunrise, and out of the back windows saw the east flaming yellow and orange above the green, glowing grass, while the great pear tree in between stood dark and magnificent as an idol, and under the dark pear tree, the little sheet of water spread smooth in burnished, yellow light, she said, "It is here". And when, at evening, the sunset came in a red glare through the big opening in the clouds, she said again, "It is beyond".

Dawn and sunset were the feet of the rainbow that spanned the day, and she saw the hope, the promise. Why should she travel any further?

Yet she always asked the question. As the sun went down in his fiery winter haste, she faced the blazing close of the affair, in which she had not played her fullest part, and she made her demand still: "What are you doing, making this big shining commotion? What is it that you keep so busy about, that you will not let us alone?"

She did not turn to her husband, for him to lead her. He was apart from her, with her, according to her different conceptions of him. The child she might hold up, she might toss the child forward into the furnace, the child might walk there, amid the burning coals and the incandescent roar of heat, as the three witnesses walked with the angel in the fire.

Soon, she felt sure of her husband. She knew his dark face and the extent of its passion. She knew his slim, vigorous body, she said it was hers. Then there was no denying her. She was a rich woman enjoying her riches.

And soon again she was with child. Which made her satisfied and took away her discontent. She forgot that she had watched the sun climb up and pass his way, a magnificent traveller surging forward. She forgot that the moon had looked through a window of the high, dark night, and nodded like a magic recognition, signalled to her to follow. Sun and moon travelled on, and left her, passed her by, a rich woman enjoying her riches. She should go also. But she could not go, when they called, because she must stay at home now. With satisfaction she relinquished the adventure to the unknown. She was bearing her children.

There was another child coming, and Anna lapsed into vague content. If she were not the wayfarer to the unknown, if she were arrived now, settled in her builded house, a rich woman, still her doors opened under the arch of the rainbow, her threshold reflected the passing of the sun and moon, the great travellers, her house was full of the echo of journeying.

She was a door and a threshold, she herself. Through her another soul was coming, to stand upon her as upon the threshold, looking out, shading its eyes for the direction to take.

CHAPTER 7

The Cathedral

During the first year of her marriage, before Ursula was born, Anna Brangwen and her husband went to visit her mother's friend, the Baron Skrebensky. The latter had kept a slight connection with Anna's mother, and had always preserved some officious interest in the young girl, because she was a pure Pole.

When Baron Skrebensky was about forty years old, his wife died, and left him raving, disconsolate. Lydia had visited him then, taking Anna with her. It was when the girl was fourteen years old. Since then she had not seen him. She remembered him as a small sharp clergyman who cried and talked and terrified her, whilst her mother was most strangely consoling, in a foreign language.

The little Baron never quite approved of Anna, because she spoke no Polish. Still, he considered himself in some way her guardian, on Lensky's behalf, and he presented her with some old, heavy Russian jewellery, the least valuable of his wife's relics. Then he lapsed out of the Brangwen's life again, though he lived only about thirty miles away.

Three years later came the startling news that he had married a young English girl of good family. Everybody marvelled. Then came a copy of "The History of the Parish of Briswell, by Rudolph, Baron Skrebensky, Vicar of Briswell." It was a curious book, incoherent, full of interesting exhumations. It was dedicated: "To my wife, Millicent Maud Pearse, in whom I embrace the generous spirit of England."

"If he embraces no more than the spirit of England," said Tom Brangwen, "it's a bad look-out for him."

But paying a formal visit with his wife, he found the new Baroness a little, creamy-skinned, insidious thing with red-brown hair and a mouth that one must always watch, because it curved back continually in an incomprehensible, strange laugh that exposed her rather prominent teeth. She was not beautiful, yet Tom Brangwen was immediately under her spell. She seemed to snuggle like a kitten within his warmth, whilst she was at the same time elusive and ironical, suggesting the fine steel of her claws.

The Baron was almost dotingly courteous and attentive to her. She, almost mockingly, yet quite happy, let him dote. Curious little thing she was, she had the soft, creamy, elusive beauty of a ferret. Tom Brangwen was quite at a loss, at

her mercy, and she laughed, a little breathlessly, as if tempted to cruelty. She did put fine torments on the elderly Baron.

When some months later she bore a son, the Baron Skrebensky was loud with delight.

Gradually she gathered a circle of acquaintances in the county. For she was of good family, half Venetian, educated in Dresden. The little foreign vicar attained to a social status which almost satisfied his maddened pride.

Therefore the Brangwens were surprised when the invitation came for Anna and her young husband to pay a visit to Briswell vicarage. For the Skrebenskys were now moderately well off, Millicent Skrebensky having some fortune of her own.

Anna took her best clothes, recovered her best high-school manner, and arrived with her husband. Will Brangwen, ruddy, bright, with long limbs and a small head, like some uncouth bird, was not changed in the least. The little Baroness was smiling, showing her teeth. She had a real charm, a kind of joyous coldness, laughing, delighted, like some weasel. Anna at once respected her, and was on her guard before her, instinctively attracted by the strange, childlike surety of the Baroness, yet mistrusting it, fascinated. The little baron was now quite white-haired, very brittle. He was wizened and wrinkled, yet fiery, unsubdued. Anna looked at his lean body, at his small, fine lean legs and lean hands as he sat talking, and she flushed. She recognised the quality of the male in him, his lean, concentrated age, his informed fire, his faculty for sharp, deliberate response. He was so detached, so purely objective. A woman was thoroughly outside him. There was no confusion. So he could give that fine, deliberate response.

He was something separate and interesting; his hard, intrinsic being, whittled down by age to an essentiality and a directness almost death-like, cruel, was yet so unswervingly sure in its action, so distinct in its surety, that she was attracted to him. She watched his cool, hard, separate fire, fascinated by it. Would she rather have it than her husband's diffuse heat, than his blind, hot youth?

She seemed to be breathing high, sharp air, as if she had just come out of a hot room. These strange Skrebenskys made her aware of another, freer element, in which each person was detached and isolated. Was not this her natural element? Was not the close Brangwen life stifling her?

Meanwhile the little baroness, with always a subtle light stirring of her full, lustrous, hazel eyes, was playing with Will Brangwen. He was not quick enough to see all her movements. Yet he watched her steadily, with unchanging, lit-up eyes. She was a strange creature to him. But she had no power over him. She flushed, and was irritated. Yet she glanced again and again at his dark, living

face, curiously, as if she despised him. She despised his uncritical, unironical nature, it had nothing for her. Yet it angered her as if she were jealous. He watched her with deferential interest as he would watch a stoat playing. But he himself was not implicated. He was different in kind. She was all lambent, biting flames, he was a red fire glowing steadily. She could get nothing out of him. So she made him flush darkly by assuming a biting, subtle class-superiority. He flushed, but still he did not object. He was too different.

Her little boy came in with the nurse. He was a quick, slight child, with fine preceptiveness, and a cool transitoriness in his interest. At once he treated Will Brangwen as an outsider. He stayed by Anna for a moment, acknowledged her, then was gone again, quick, observant, restless, with a glance of interest at everything.

The father adored him, and spoke to him in Polish. It was queer, the stiff, aristocratic manner of the father with the child, the distance in the relationship, the classic fatherhood on the one hand, the filial subordination on the other. They played together, in their different degrees very separate, two different beings, differing as it were in rank rather than in relationship. And the baroness smiled, smiled, smiled, always smiled, showing her rather protruding teeth, having always a mysterious attraction and charm.

Anna realised how different her own life might have been, how different her own living. Her soul stirred, she became as another person. Her intimacy with her husband passed away, the curious enveloping Brangwen intimacy, so warm, so close, so stifling, when one seemed always to be in contact with the other person, like a blood-relation, was annulled. She denied it, this close relationship with her young husband. He and she were not one. His heat was not always to suffuse her, suffuse her, through her mind and her individuality, till she was of one heat with him, till she had not her own self apart. She wanted her own life. He seemed to lap her and suffuse her with his being, his hot life, till she did not know whether she were herself, or whether she were another creature, united with him in a world of close blood-intimacy that closed over her and excluded her from all the cool outside.

She wanted her own, old, sharp self, detached, detached, active but not absorbed, active for her own part, taking and giving, but never absorbed. Whereas he wanted this strange absorption with her, which still she resisted. But she was partly helpless against it. She had lived so long in Tom Brangwen's love, beforehand.

From the Skrebensky's, they went to Will Brangwen's beloved Lincoln Cathedral, because it was not far off. He had promised her, that one by one, they should visit all the cathedrals of England. They began with Lincoln, which he

knew well.

He began to get excited as the time drew near to set off. What was it that changed him so much? She was almost angry, coming as she did from the Skrebensky's. But now he ran on alone. His very breast seemed to open its doors to watch for the great church brooding over the town. His soul ran ahead.

When he saw the cathedral in the distance, dark blue lifted watchful in the sky, his heart leapt. It was the sign in heaven, it was the Spirit hovering like a dove, like an eagle over the earth. He turned his glowing, ecstatic face to her, his mouth opened with a strange, ecstatic grin.

"There she is," he said.

The "she" irritated her. Why "she"? It was "it". What was the cathedral, a big building, a thing of the past, obsolete, to excite him to such a pitch? She began to stir herself to readiness.

They passed up the steep hill, he eager as a pilgrim arriving at the shrine. As they came near the precincts, with castle on one side and cathedral on the other, his veins seemed to break into fiery blossom, he was transported.

They had passed through the gate, and the great west front was before them, with all its breadth and ornament.

"It is a false front," he said, looking at the golden stone and the twin towers, and loving them just the same. In a little ecstasy he found himself in the porch, on the brink of the unrevealed. He looked up to the lovely unfolding of the stone. He was to pass within to the perfect womb.

Then he pushed open the door, and the great, pillared gloom was before him, in which his soul shuddered and rose from her nest. His soul leapt, soared up into the great church. His body stood still, absorbed by the height. His soul leapt up into the gloom, into possession, it reeled, it swooned with a great escape, it quivered in the womb, in the hush and the gloom of fecundity, like seed of procreation in ecstasy.

She too was overcome with wonder and awe. She followed him in his progress. Here, the twilight was the very essence of life, the coloured darkness was the embryo of all light, and the day. Here, the very first dawn was breaking, the very last sunset sinking, and the immemorial darkness, whereof life's day would blossom and fall away again, re-echoed peace and profound immemorial silence.

Away from time, always outside of time! Between east and west, between dawn and sunset, the church lay like a seed in silence, dark before germination, silenced after death. Containing birth and death, potential with all the noise and transition of life, the cathedral remained hushed, a great, involved seed, whereof the flower would be radiant life inconceivable, but whose beginning and whose

end were the circle of silence. Spanned round with the rainbow, the jewelled gloom folded music upon silence, light upon darkness, fecundity upon death, as a seed folds leaf upon leaf and silence upon the root and the flower, hushing up the secret of all between its parts, the death out of which it fell, the life into which it has dropped, the immortality it involves, and the death it will embrace again.

Here in the church, “before” and “after” were folded together, all was contained in oneness. Brangwen came to his consummation. Out of the doors of the womb he had come, putting aside the wings of the womb, and proceeding into the light. Through daylight and day-after-day he had come, knowledge after knowledge, and experience after experience, remembering the darkness of the womb, having prescience of the darkness after death. Then between-while he had pushed open the doors of the cathedral, and entered the twilight of both darkness, the hush of the two-fold silence where dawn was sunset, and the beginning and the end were one.

Here the stone leapt up from the plain of earth, leapt up in a manifold, clustered desire each time, up, away from the horizontal earth, through twilight and dusk and the whole range of desire, through the swerving, the declination, ah, to the ecstasy, the touch, to the meeting and the consummation, the meeting, the clasp, the close embrace, the neutrality, the perfect, swooning consummation, the timeless ecstasy. There his soul remained, at the apex of the arch, clinched in the timeless ecstasy, consummated.

And there was no time nor life nor death, but only this, this timeless consummation, where the thrust from earth met the thrust from earth and the arch was locked on the keystone of ecstasy. This was all, this was everything. Till he came to himself in the world below. Then again he gathered himself together, in transit, every jet of him strained and leaped, leaped clear into the darkness above, to the fecundity and the unique mystery, to the touch, the clasp, the consummation, the climax of eternity, the apex of the arch.

She too was overcome, but silenced rather than tuned to the place. She loved it as a world not quite her own, she resented his transports and ecstasies. His passion in the cathedral at first awed her, then made her angry. After all, there was the sky outside, and in here, in this mysterious half-night, when his soul leapt with the pillars upwards, it was not to the stars and the crystalline dark space, but to meet and clasp with the answering impulse of leaping stone, there in the dusk and secrecy of the roof. The far-off clinching and mating of the arches, the leap and thrust of the stone, carrying a great roof overhead, awed and silenced her.

But yet-yet she remembered that the open sky was no blue vault, no dark

dome hung with many twinkling lamps, but a space where stars were wheeling in freedom, with freedom above them always higher.

The cathedral roused her too. But she would never consent to the knitting of all the leaping stone in a great roof that closed her in, and beyond which was nothing, nothing, it was the ultimate confine. His soul would have liked it to be so: here, here is all, complete, eternal: motion, meeting, ecstasy, and no illusion of time, of night and day passing by, but only perfectly proportioned space and movement clinching and renewing, and passion surging its way into great waves to the altar, recurrence of ecstasy.

Her soul too was carried forward to the altar, to the threshold of Eternity, in reverence and fear and joy. But ever she hung back in the transit, mistrusting the culmination of the altar. She was not to be flung forward on the lift and lift of passionate flights, to be cast at last upon the altar steps as upon the shore of the unknown. There was a great joy and a verity in it. But even in the dazed swoon of the cathedral, she claimed another right. The altar was barren, its lights gone out. God burned no more in that bush. It was dead matter lying there. She claimed the right to freedom above her, higher than the roof. She had always a sense of being roofed in.

So that she caught at little things, which saved her from being swept forward headlong in the tide of passion that leaps on into the Infinite in a great mass, triumphant and flinging its own course. She wanted to get out of this fixed, leaping, forward-travelling movement, to rise from it as a bird rises with wet, limp feet from the sea, to lift herself as a bird lifts its breast and thrusts its body from the pulse and heave of a sea that bears it forward to an unwilling conclusion, tear herself away like a bird on wings, and in open space where there is clarity, rise up above the fixed, surcharged motion, a separate speck that hangs suspended, moves this way and that, seeing and answering before it sinks again, having chosen or found the direction in which it shall be carried forward.

And it was as if she must grasp at something, as if her wings were too weak to lift her straight off the heaving motion. So she caught sight of the wicked, odd little faces carved in stone, and she stood before them arrested.

These sly little faces peeped out of the grand tide of the cathedral like something that knew better. They knew quite well, these little imps that retorted on man's own illusion, that the cathedral was not absolute. They winked and leered, giving suggestion of the many things that had been left out of the great concept of the church. "However much there is inside here, there's a good deal they haven't got in," the little faces mocked.

Apart from the lift and spring of the great impulse towards the altar, these little faces had separate wills, separate motions, separate knowledge, which

rippled back in defiance of the tide, and laughed in triumph of their own very littleness.

“Oh, look!” cried Anna. “Oh, look how adorable, the faces! Look at her.”

Brangwen looked unwillingly. This was the voice of the serpent in his Eden. She pointed him to a plump, sly, malicious little face carved in stone.

“He knew her, the man who carved her,” said Anna. “I’m sure she was his wife.”

“It isn’t a woman at all, it’s a man,” said Brangwen curtly.

“Do you think so?-No! That isn’t a man. That is no man’s face.”

Her voice sounded rather jeering. He laughed shortly, and went on. But she would not go forward with him. She loitered about the carvings. And he could not go forward without her. He waited impatient of this counteraction. She was spoiling his passionate intercourse with the cathedral. His brows began to gather.

“Oh, this is good!” she cried again. “Here is the same woman-look!-only he’s made her cross! Isn’t it lovely! Hasn’t he made her hideous to a degree?” She laughed with pleasure. “Didn’t he hate her? He must have been a nice man! Look at her-isn’t it awfully good-just like a shrewish woman. He must have enjoyed putting her in like that. He got his own back on her, didn’t he?”

“It’s a man’s face, no woman’s at all-a monk’s-clean shaven,” he said.

She laughed with a pouf! of laughter.

“You hate to think he put his wife in your cathedral, don’t you?” she mocked, with a tinkle of profane laughter. And she laughed with malicious triumph.

She had got free from the cathedral, she had even destroyed the passion he had. She was glad. He was bitterly angry. Strive as he would, he could not keep the cathedral wonderful to him. He was disillusioned. That which had been his absolute, containing all heaven and earth, was become to him as to her, a shapely heap of dead matter-but dead, dead.

His mouth was full of ash, his soul was furious. He hated her for having destroyed another of his vital illusions. Soon he would be stark, stark, without one place wherein to stand, without one belief in which to rest.

Yet somewhere in him he responded more deeply to the sly little face that knew better, than he had done before to the perfect surge of his cathedral.

Nevertheless for the time being his soul was wretched and homeless, and he could not bear to think of Anna’s ousting him from his beloved realities. He wanted his cathedral; he wanted to satisfy his blind passion. And he could not any more. Something intervened.

They went home again, both of them altered. She had some new reverence for that which he wanted, he felt that his cathedrals would never again be to him as they had been. Before, he had thought them absolute. But now he saw them

crouching under the sky, with still the dark, mysterious world of reality inside, but as a world within a world, a sort of side show, whereas before they had been as a world to him within a chaos: a reality, an order, an absolute, within a meaningless confusion.

He had felt, before, that could he but go through the great door and look down the gloom towards the far-off, concluding wonder of the altar, that then, with the windows suspended around like tablets of jewels, emanating their own glory, then he had arrived. Here the satisfaction he had yearned after came near, towards this, the porch of the great Unknown, all reality gathered, and there, the altar was the mystic door, through which all and everything must move on to eternity.

But now, somehow, sadly and disillusioned, he realised that the doorway was no doorway. It was too narrow, it was false. Outside the cathedral were many flying spirits that could never be sifted through the jewelled gloom. He had lost his absolute.

He listened to the thrushes in the gardens and heard a note which the cathedrals did not include: something free and careless and joyous. He crossed a field that was all yellow with dandelions, on his way to work, and the bath of yellow glowing was something at once so sumptuous and so fresh, that he was glad he was away from his shadowy cathedral.

There was life outside the Church. There was much that the Church did not include. He thought of God, and of the whole blue rotunda of the day. That was something great and free. He thought of the ruins of the Grecian worship, and it seemed, a temple was never perfectly a temple, till it was ruined and mixed up with the winds and the sky and the herbs.

Still he loved the Church. As a symbol, he loved it. He tended it for what it tried to represent, rather than for that which it did represent. Still he loved it. The little church across his garden-wall drew him, he gave it loving attention. But he went to take charge of it, to preserve it. It was as an old, sacred thing to him. He looked after the stone and woodwork, mending the organ and restoring a piece of broken carving, repairing the church furniture. Later, he became choir-master also.

His life was shifting its centre, becoming more superficial. He had failed to become really articulate, failed to find real expression. He had to continue in the old form. But in spirit, he was uncreated.

Anna was absorbed in the child now, she left her husband to take his own way. She was willing now to postpone all adventure into unknown realities. She had the child, her palpable and immediate future was the child. If her soul had found no utterance, her womb had.

The church that neighboured with his house became very intimate and dear to him. He cherished it, he had it entirely in his charge. If he could find no new activity, he would be happy cherishing the old, dear form of worship. He knew this little, whitewashed church. In its shadowy atmosphere he sank back into being. He liked to sink himself in its hush as a stone sinks into water.

He went across his garden, mounted the wall by the little steps, and entered the hush and peace of the church. As the heavy door clanged to behind him, his feet re-echoed in the aisle, his heart re-echoed with a little passion of tenderness and mystic peace. He was also slightly ashamed, like a man who has failed, who lapses back for his fulfilment.

He loved to light the candles at the organ, and sitting there alone in the little glow, practise the hymns and chants for the service. The whitewashed arches retreated into darkness, the sound of the organ and the organ-pedals died away upon the unalterable stillness of the church, there were faint, ghostly noises in the tower, and then the music swelled out again, loudly, triumphantly.

He ceased to fret about his life. He relaxed his will, and let everything go. What was between him and his wife was a great thing, if it was not everything. She had conquered, really. Let him wait, and abide, wait and abide. She and the baby and himself, they were one. The organ rang out his protestation. His soul lay in the darkness as he pressed the keys of the organ.

To Anna, the baby was a complete bliss and fulfilment. Her desires sank into abeyance, her soul was in bliss over the baby. It was rather a delicate child, she had trouble to rear it. She never for a moment thought it would die. It was a delicate infant, therefore it behoved her to make it strong. She threw herself into the labour, the child was everything. Her imagination was all occupied here. She was a mother. It was enough to handle the new little limbs, the new little body, hear the new little voice crying in the stillness. All the future rang to her out of the sound of the baby's crying and cooing, she balanced the coming years of life in her hands, as she nursed the child. The passionate sense of fulfilment, of the future germinated in her, made her vivid and powerful. All the future was in her hands, in the hands of the woman. And before this baby was ten months old, she was again with child. She seemed to be in the fecund of storm life, every moment was full and busy with productiveness to her. She felt like the earth, the mother of everything.

Brangwen occupied himself with the church, he played the organ, he trained the choir-boys, he taught a Sunday-school class of youths. He was happy enough. There was an eager, yearning kind of happiness in him as he taught the boys on Sundays. He was all the time exciting himself with the proximity of some secret that he had not yet fathomed.

In the house, he served his wife and the little matriarchy. She loved him because he was the father of her children. And she always had a physical passion for him. So he gave up trying to have the spiritual superiority and control, or even her respect for his conscious or public life. He lived simply by her physical love for him. And he served the little matriarchy, nursing the child and helping with the housework, indifferent any more of his own dignity and importance. But his abandoning of claims, his living isolated upon his own interest, made him seem unreal, unimportant.

Anna was not publicly proud of him. But very soon she learned to be indifferent to public life. He was not what is called a manly man: he did not drink or smoke or arrogate importance. But he was her man, and his very indifference to all claims of manliness set her supreme in her own world with him. Physically, she loved him and he satisfied her. He went alone and subsidiary always. At first it had irritated her, the outer world existed so little to him. Looking at him with outside eyes, she was inclined to sneer at him. But her sneer changed to a sort of respect. She respected him, that he could serve her so simply and completely. Above all, she loved to bear his children. She loved to be the source of children.

She could not understand him, his strange, dark rages and his devotion to the church. It was the church building he cared for; and yet his soul was passionate for something. He laboured cleaning the stonework, repairing the woodwork, restoring the organ, and making the singing as perfect as possible. To keep the church fabric and the church-ritual intact was his business; to have the intimate sacred building utterly in his own hands, and to make the form of service complete. There was a little bright anguish and tension on his face, and in his intent movements. He was like a lover who knows he is betrayed, but who still loves, whose love is only the more intense. The church was false, but he served it the more attentively.

During the day, at his work in the office, he kept himself suspended. He did not exist. He worked automatically till it was time to go home.

He loved with a hot heart the dark-haired little Ursula, and he waited for the child to come to consciousness. Now the mother monopolised the baby. But his heart waited in its darkness. His hour would come.

In the long run, he learned to submit to Anna. She forced him to the spirit of her laws, whilst leaving him the letter of his own. She combated in him his devils. She suffered very much from his inexplicable and incalculable dark rages, when a blackness filled him, and a black wind seemed to sweep out of existence everything that had to do with him. She could feel herself, everything, being annihilated by him.

At first she fought him. At night, in this state, he would kneel down to say his prayers. She looked at his crouching figure.

“Why are you kneeling there, pretending to pray?” she said, harshly. “Do you think anybody can pray, when they are in the vile temper you are in?”

He remained crouching by the beside, motionless.

“It’s horrible,” she continued, “and such a pretence! What do you pretend you are saying? Who do you pretend you are praying to?”

He still remained motionless, seething with inchoate rage, when his whole nature seemed to disintegrate. He seemed to live with a strain upon himself, and occasionally came these dark, chaotic rages, the lust for destruction. She then fought with him, and their fights were horrible, murderous. And then the passion between them came just as black and awful.

But little by little, as she learned to love him better, she would put herself aside, and when she felt one of his fits upon him, would ignore him, successfully leave him in his world, whilst she remained in her own. He had a black struggle with himself, to come back to her. For at last he learned that he would be in hell until he came back to her. So he struggled to submit to her, and she was afraid of the ugly strain in his eyes. She made love to him, and took him. Then he was grateful to her love, humble.

He made himself a woodwork shed, in which to restore things which were destroyed in the church. So he had plenty to do: his wife, his child, the church, the woodwork, and his wage-earning, all occupying him. If only there were not some limit to him, some darkness across his eyes! He had to give in to it at last himself. He must submit to his own inadequacy, aware of some limit to himself, of something unformed in his own black, violent temper, and to reckon with it. But as she was more gentle with him, it became quieter.

As he sat sometimes very still, with a bright, vacant face, Anna could see the suffering among the brightness. He was aware of some limit to himself, of something unformed in his very being, of some buds which were not ripe in him, some folded centres of darkness which would never develop and unfold whilst he was alive in the body. He was unready for fulfilment. Something undeveloped in him limited him, there was a darkness in him which he could not unfold, which would never unfold in him.

CHAPTER 8

The Child

From the first, the baby stirred in the young father a deep, strong emotion he dared scarcely acknowledge, it was so strong and came out of the dark of him. When he heard the child cry, a terror possessed him, because of the answering echo from the unfathomed distances in himself. Must he know in himself such distances, perilous and imminent?

He had the infant in his arms, he walked backwards and forwards troubled by the crying of his own flesh and blood. This was his own flesh and blood crying! His soul rose against the voice suddenly breaking out from him, from the distances in him.

Sometimes in the night, the child cried and cried, when the night was heavy and sleep oppressed him. And half asleep, he stretched out his hand to put it over the baby's face to stop the crying. But something arrested his hand: the very inhumanness of the intolerable, continuous crying arrested him. It was so impersonal, without cause or object. Yet he echoed to it directly, his soul answered its madness. It filled him with terror, almost with frenzy.

He learned to acquiesce to this, to submit to the awful, obliterated sources which were the origin of his living tissue. He was not what he conceived himself to be! Then he was what he was, unknown, potent, dark.

He became accustomed to the child, he knew how to lift and balance the little body. The baby had a beautiful, rounded head that moved him passionately. He would have fought to the last drop to defend that exquisite, perfect round head.

He learned to know the little hands and feet, the strange, unseeing, golden-brown eyes, the mouth that opened only to cry, or to suck, or to show a queer, toothless laugh. He could almost understand even the dangling legs, which at first had created in him a feeling of aversion. They could kick in their queer little way, they had their own softness.

One evening, suddenly, he saw the tiny, living thing rolling naked in the mother's lap, and he was sick, it was so utterly helpless and vulnerable and extraneous; in a world of hard surfaces and varying altitudes, it lay vulnerable and naked at every point. Yet it was quite blithe. And yet, in its blind, awful crying, was there not the blind, far-off terror of its own vulnerable nakedness, the terror of being so utterly delivered over, helpless at every point. He could not

bear to hear it crying. His heart strained and stood on guard against the whole universe.

But he waited for the dread of these days to pass; he saw the joy coming. He saw the lovely, creamy, cool little ear of the baby, a bit of dark hair rubbed to a bronze floss, like bronze-dust. And he waited, for the child to become his, to look at him and answer him.

It had a separate being, but it was his own child. His flesh and blood vibrated to it. He caught the baby to his breast with his passionate, clapping laugh. And the infant knew him.

As the newly-opened, newly-dawned eyes looked at him, he wanted them to perceive him, to recognise him. Then he was verified. The child knew him, a queer contortion of laughter came on its face for him. He caught it to his breast, clapping with a triumphant laugh.

The golden-brown eyes of the child gradually lit up and dilated at the sight of the dark-glowing face of the youth. It knew its mother better, it wanted its mother more. But the brightest, sharpest little ecstasy was for the father.

It began to be strong, to move vigorously and freely, to make sounds like words. It was a baby girl now. Already it knew his strong hands, it exulted in his strong clasp, it laughed and crowed when he played with it.

And his heart grew red-hot with passionate feeling for the child. She was not much more than a year old when the second baby was born. Then he took Ursula for his own. She his first little girl. He had set his heart on her.

The second had dark blue eyes and a fair skin: it was more a Brangwen, people said. The hair was fair. But they forgot Anna's stiff blonde fleece of childhood. They called the newcomer Gudrun.

This time, Anna was stronger, and not so eager. She did not mind that the baby was not a boy. It was enough that she had milk and could suckle her child: Oh, oh, the bliss of the little life sucking the milk of her body! Oh, oh, oh the bliss, as the infant grew stronger, of the two tiny hands clutching, catching blindly yet passionately at her breast, of the tiny mouth seeking her in blind, sure, vital knowledge, of the sudden consummate peace as the little body sank, the mouth and throat sucking, sucking, sucking, drinking life from her to make a new life, almost sobbing with passionate joy of receiving its own existence, the tiny hands clutching frantically as the nipple was drawn back, not to be gainsaid. This was enough for Anna. She seemed to pass off into a kind of rapture of motherhood, her rapture of motherhood was everything.

So that the father had the elder baby, the weaned child, the golden-brown, wondering vivid eyes of the little Ursula were for him, who had waited behind the mother till the need was for him. The mother felt a sharp stab of jealousy.

But she was still more absorbed in the tiny baby. It was entirely hers, its need was direct upon her.

So Ursula became the child of her father's heart. She was the little blossom, he was the sun. He was patient, energetic, inventive for her. He taught her all the funny little things, he filled her and roused her to her fullest tiny measure. She answered him with her extravagant infant's laughter and her call of delight.

Now there were two babies, a woman came in to do the housework. Anna was wholly nurse. Two babies were not too much for her. But she hated any form of work, now her children had come, except the charge of them.

When Ursula toddled about, she was an absorbed, busy child, always amusing herself, needing not much attention from other people. At evening, towards six o'clock, Anna very often went across the lane to the stile, lifted Ursula over into the field, with a: "Go and meet Daddy." Then Brangwen, coming up the steep round of the hill, would see before him on the brow of the path a tiny, tottering, windblown little mite with a dark head, who, as soon as she saw him, would come running in tiny, wild, windmill fashion, lifting her arms up and down to him, down the steep hill. His heart leapt up, he ran his fastest to her, to catch her, because he knew she would fall. She came fluttering on, wildly, with her little limbs flying. And he was glad when he caught her up in his arms. Once she fell as she came flying to him, he saw her pitch forward suddenly as she was running with her hands lifted to him; and when he picked her up, her mouth was bleeding. He could never bear to think of it, he always wanted to cry, even when he was an old man and she had become a stranger to him. How he loved that little Ursula!-his heart had been sharply seared for her, when he was a youth, first married.

When she was a little older, he would see her recklessly climbing over the bars of the stile, in her red pinafore, swinging in peril and tumbling over, picking herself up and flitting towards him. Sometimes she liked to ride on his shoulder, sometimes she preferred to walk with his hand, sometimes she would fling her arms round his legs for a moment, then race free again, whilst he went shouting and calling to her, a child along with her. He was still only a tall, thin, unsettled lad of twenty-two.

It was he who had made her her cradle, her little chair, her little stool, her high chair. It was he who would swing her up to table or who would make for her a doll out of an old table-leg, whilst she watched him, saying:

"Make her eyes, Daddy, make her eyes!"

And he made her eyes with his knife.

She was very fond of adorning herself, so he would tie a piece of cotton round her ear, and hang a blue bead on it underneath for an earring. The earrings varied

with a red bead, and a golden bead, and a little pearl bead. And as he came home at night, seeing her bridling and looking very self-conscious, he took notice and said:

“So you’re wearing your best golden and pearl earrings, to-day?”

“Yes.”

“I suppose you’ve been to see the queen?”

“Yes, I have.”

“Oh, and what had she to say?”

“She said-she said-’You won’t dirty your nice white frock.’”

He gave her the nicest bits from his plate, putting them into her red, moist mouth. And he would make on a piece of bread-and-butter a bird, out of jam: which she ate with extraordinary relish.

After the tea-things were washed up, the woman went away, leaving the family free. Usually Brangwen helped in the bathing of the children. He held long discussions with his child as she sat on his knee and he unfastened her clothes. And he seemed to be talking really of momentous things, deep moralities. Then suddenly she ceased to hear, having caught sight of a glassie rolled into a corner. She slipped away, and was in no hurry to return.

“Come back here,” he said, waiting. She became absorbed, taking no notice.

“Come on,” he repeated, with a touch of command.

An excited little chuckle came from her, but she pretended to be absorbed.

“Do you hear, Milady?”

She turned with a fleeting, exulting laugh. He rushed on her, and swept her up.

“Who was it that didn’t come!” he said, rolling her between his strong hands, tickling her. And she laughed heartily, heartily. She loved him that he compelled her with his strength and decision. He was all-powerful, the tower of strength which rose out of her sight.

When the children were in bed, sometimes Anna and he sat and talked, desultorily, both of them idle. He read very little. Anything he was drawn to read became a burning reality to him, another scene outside his window. Whereas Anna skimmed through a book to see what happened, then she had enough.

Therefore they would often sit together, talking desultorily. What was really between them they could not utter. Their words were only accidents in the mutual silence. When they talked, they gossiped. She did not care for sewing.

She had a beautiful way of sitting musing, gratefully, as if her heart were lit up. Sometimes she would turn to him, laughing, to tell him some little thing that had happened during the day. Then he would laugh, they would talk awhile, before the vital, physical silence was between them again.

She was thin but full of colour and life. She was perfectly happy to do just

nothing, only to sit with a curious, languid dignity, so careless as to be almost regal, so utterly indifferent, so confident. The bond between them was undefinable, but very strong. It kept everyone else at a distance.

His face never changed whilst she knew him, it only became more intense. It was ruddy and dark in its abstraction, not very human, it had a strong, intent brightness. Sometimes, when his eyes met hers, a yellow flash from them caused a darkness to swoon over her consciousness, electric, and a slight strange laugh came on his face. Her eyes would turn languidly, then close, as if hypnotised. And they lapsed into the same potent darkness. He had the quality of a young black cat, intent, unnoticeable, and yet his presence gradually made itself felt, stealthily and powerfully took hold of her. He called, not to her, but to something in her, which responded subtly, out of her unconscious darkness.

So they were together in a darkness, passionate, electric, for ever haunting the back of the common day, never in the light. In the light, he seemed to sleep, unknowing. Only she knew him when the darkness set him free, and he could see with his gold-glowing eyes his intention and his desires in the dark. Then she was in a spell, then she answered his harsh, penetrating call with a soft leap of her soul, the darkness woke up, electric, bristling with an unknown, overwhelming insinuation.

By now they knew each other; she was the daytime, the daylight, he was the shadow, put aside, but in the darkness potent with an overwhelming voluptuousness.

She learned not to dread and to hate him, but to fill herself with him, to give herself to his black, sensual power, that was hidden all the daytime. And the curious rolling of the eyes, as if she were lapsing in a trance away from her ordinary consciousness became habitual with her, when something threatened and opposed her in life, the conscious life.

So they remained as separate in the light, and in the thick darkness, married. He supported her daytime authority, kept it inviolable at last. And she, in all the darkness, belonged to him, to his close, insinuating, hypnotic familiarity.

All his daytime activity, all his public life, was a kind of sleep. She wanted to be free, to belong to the day. And he ran avoiding the day in work. After tea, he went to the shed to his carpentry or his wood-carving. He was restoring the patched, degraded pulpit to its original form.

But he loved to have the child near him, playing by his feet. She was a piece of light that really belonged to him, that played within his darkness. He left the shed door on the latch. And when, with his second sense of another presence, he knew she was coming, he was satisfied, he was at rest. When he was alone with her, he did not want to take notice, to talk. He wanted to live unthinking, with

her presence flickering upon him.

He always went in silence. The child would push open the shed door, and see him working by lamplight, his sleeves rolled back. His clothes hung about him, carelessly, like mere wrapping. Inside, his body was concentrated with a flexible, charged power all of its own, isolated. From when she was a tiny child Ursula could remember his forearm, with its fine black hairs and its electric flexibility, working at the bench through swift, unnoticeable movements, always ambushed in a sort of silence.

She hung a moment in the door of the shed, waiting for him to notice her. He turned, his black, curved eyebrows arching slightly.

“Hullo, Twittermiss!”

And he closed the door behind her. Then the child was happy in the shed that smelled of sweet wood and resounded to the noise of the plane or the hammer or the saw, yet was charged with the silence of the worker. She played on, intent and absorbed, among the shavings and the little nogs of wood. She never touched him: his feet and legs were near, she did not approach them.

She liked to flit out after him when he was going to church at night. If he were going to be alone, he swung her over the wall, and let her come.

Again she was transported when the door was shut behind them, and they two inherited the big, pale, void place. She would watch him as he lit the organ candles, wait whilst he began his practising his tunes, then she ran foraging here and there, like a kitten playing by herself in the darkness with eyes dilated. The ropes hung vaguely, twining on the floor, from the bells in the tower, and Ursula always wanted the fluffy, red-and-white, or blue-and-white rope-grips. But they were above her.

Sometimes her mother came to claim her. Then the child was seized with resentment. She passionately resented her mother’s superficial authority. She wanted to assert her own detachment.

He, however, also gave her occasional cruel shocks. He let her play about in the church, she rifled foot-stools and hymn-books and cushions, like a bee among flowers, whilst the organ echoed away. This continued for some weeks. Then the charwoman worked herself up into a frenzy of rage, to dare to attack Brangwen, and one day descended on him like a harpy. He wilted away, and wanted to break the old beast’s neck.

Instead he came glowering in fury to the house, and turned on Ursula.

“Why, you tiresome little monkey, can’t you even come to church without pulling the place to bits?”

His voice was harsh and cat-like, he was blind to the child. She shrank away in childish anguish and dread. What was it, what awful thing was it?

The mother turned with her calm, almost superb manner.

“What has she done, then?”

“Done? She shall go in the church no more, pulling and littering and destroying.”

The wife slowly rolled her eyes and lowered her eyelids.

“What has she destroyed, then?”

He did not know.

“I’ve just had Mrs. Wilkinson at me,” he cried, “with a list of things she’s done.”

Ursula withered under the contempt and anger of the “she”, as he spoke of her.

“Send Mrs. Wilkinson here to me with a list of the things she’s done,” said Anna. “I am the one to hear that.”

“It’s not the things the child has done,” continued the mother, “that have put you out so much, it’s because you can’t bear being spoken to by that old woman. But you haven’t the courage to turn on her when she attacks you, you bring your rage here.”

He relapsed into silence. Ursula knew that he was wrong. In the outside, upper world, he was wrong. Already came over the child the cold sense of the impersonal world. There she knew her mother was right. But still her heart clamoured after her father, for him to be right, in his dark, sensuous underworld. But he was angry, and went his way in blackness and brutal silence again.

The child ran about absorbed in life, quiet, full of amusement. She did not notice things, nor changes nor alterations. One day she would find daisies in the grass, another day, apple-blossoms would be sprinkled white on the ground, and she would run among it, for pleasure because it was there. Yet again birds would be pecking at the cherries, her father would throw cherries down from the tree all round her on the garden. Then the fields were full of hay.

She did not remember what had been nor what would be, the outside things were there each day. She was always herself, the world outside was accidental. Even her mother was accidental to her: a condition that happened to endure.

Only her father occupied any permanent position in the childish consciousness. When he came back she remembered vaguely how he had gone away, when he went away she knew vaguely that she must wait for his coming back. Whereas her mother, returning from an outing, merely became present, there was no reason for connecting her with some previous departure.

The return or the departure of the father was the one event which the child remembered. When he came, something woke up in her, some yearning. She knew when he was out of joint or irritable or tired: then she was uneasy, she could not rest.

When he was in the house, the child felt full and warm, rich like a creature in the sunshine. When he was gone, she was vague, forgetful. When he scolded her even, she was often more aware of him than of herself. He was her strength and her greater self.

Ursula was three years old when another baby girl was born. Then the two small sisters were much together, Gudrun and Ursula. Gudrun was a quiet child who played for hours alone, absorbed in her fancies. She was brown-haired, fair-skinned, strangely placid, almost passive. Yet her will was indomitable, once set. From the first she followed Ursula's lead. Yet she was a thing to herself, so that to watch the two together was strange. They were like two young animals playing together but not taking real notice of each other. Gudrun was the mother's favourite-except that Anna always lived in her latest baby.

The burden of so many lives depending on him wore the youth down. He had his work in the office, which was done purely by effort of will: he had his barren passion for the church; he had three young children. Also at this time his health was not good. So he was haggard and irritable, often a pest in the house. Then he was told to go to his woodwork, or to the church.

Between him and the little Ursula there came into being a strange alliance. They were aware of each other. He knew the child was always on his side. But in his consciousness he counted it for nothing. She was always for him. He took it for granted. Yet his life was based on her, even whilst she was a tiny child, on her support and her accord.

Anna continued in her violent trance of motherhood, always busy, often harassed, but always contained in her trance of motherhood. She seemed to exist in her own violent fruitfulness, and it was as if the sun shone tropically on her. Her colour was bright, her eyes full of a fecund gloom, her brown hair tumbled loosely over her ears. She had a look of richness. No responsibility, no sense of duty troubled her. The outside, public life was less than nothing to her, really.

Whereas when, at twenty-six, he found himself father of four children, with a wife who lived intrinsically like the ruddiest lilies of the field, he let the weight of responsibility press on him and drag him. It was then that his child Ursula strove to be with him. She was with him, even as a baby of four, when he was irritable and shouted and made the household unhappy. She suffered from his shouting, but somehow it was not really him. She wanted it to be over, she wanted to resume her normal connection with him. When he was disagreeable, the child echoed to the crying of some need in him, and she responded blindly. Her heart followed him as if he had some tie with her, and some love which he could not deliver. Her heart followed him persistently, in its love.

But there was the dim, childish sense of her own smallness and inadequacy, a

fatal sense of worthlessness. She could not do anything, she was not enough. She could not be important to him. This knowledge deadened her from the first.

Still she set towards him like a quivering needle. All her life was directed by her awareness of him, her wakefulness to his being. And she was against her mother.

Her father was the dawn wherein her consciousness woke up. But for him, she might have gone on like the other children, Gudrun and Theresa and Catherine, one with the flowers and insects and playthings, having no existence apart from the concrete object of her attention. But her father came too near to her. The clasp of his hands and the power of his breast woke her up almost in pain from the transient unconsciousness of childhood. Wide-eyed, unseeing, she was awake before she knew how to see. She was wakened too soon. Too soon the call had come to her, when she was a small baby, and her father held her close to his breast, her sleep-living heart was beaten into wakefulness by the striving of his bigger heart, by his clasping her to his body for love and for fulfilment, asking as a magnet must always ask. From her the response had struggled dimly, vaguely into being.

The children were dressed roughly for the country. When she was little, Ursula pattered about in little wooden clogs, a blue overall over her thick red dress, a red shawl crossed on her breast and tied behind again. So she ran with her father to the garden.

The household rose early. He was out digging by six o'clock in the morning, he went to his work at half-past eight. And Ursula was usually in the garden with him, though not near at hand.

At Eastertime one year, she helped him to set potatoes. It was the first time she had ever helped him. The occasion remained as a picture, one of her earliest memories. They had gone out soon after dawn. A cold wind was blowing. He had his old trousers tucked into his boots, he wore no coat nor waistcoat, his shirt-sleeves fluttered in the wind, his face was ruddy and intent, in a kind of sleep. When he was at work he neither heard nor saw. A long, thin man, looking still a youth, with a line of black moustache above his thick mouth, and his fine hair blown on his forehead, he worked away at the earth in the grey first light, alone. His solitariness drew the child like a spell.

The wind came chill over the dark-green fields. Ursula ran up and watched him push the setting-peg in at one side of his ready earth, stride across, and push it in the other side, pulling the line taut and clear upon the clods intervening. Then with a sharp cutting noise the bright spade came towards her, cutting a grip into the new, soft earth.

He struck his spade upright and straightened himself.

“Do you want to help me?” he said.

She looked up at him from out of her little woollen bonnet.

“Ay,” he said, “you can put some taters in for me. Look-like that-these little sprits standing up-so much apart, you see.”

And stooping down he quickly, surely placed the spritted potatoes in the soft grip, where they rested separate and pathetic on the heavy cold earth.

He gave her a little basket of potatoes, and strode himself to the other end of the line. She saw him stooping, working towards her. She was excited, and unused. She put in one potato, then rearranged it, to make it sit nicely. Some of the sprits were broken, and she was afraid. The responsibility excited her like a string tying her up. She could not help looking with dread at the string buried under the heaped-back soil. Her father was working nearer, stooping, working nearer. She was overcome by her responsibility. She put potatoes quickly into the cold earth.

He came near.

“Not so close,” he said, stooping over her potatoes, taking some out and rearranging the others. She stood by with the painful terrified helplessness of childhood. He was so unseeing and confident, she wanted to do the thing and yet she could not. She stood by looking on, her little blue overall fluttering in the wind, the red woollen ends of her shawl blowing gustily. Then he went down the row, relentlessly, turning the potatoes in with his sharp spade-cuts. He took no notice of her, only worked on. He had another world from hers.

She stood helplessly stranded on his world. He continued his work. She knew she could not help him. A little bit forlorn, at last she turned away, and ran down the garden, away from him, as fast as she could go away from him, to forget him and his work.

He missed her presence, her face in her red woollen bonnet, her blue overall fluttering. She ran to where a little water ran trickling between grass and stones. That she loved.

When he came by he said to her:

“You didn’t help me much.”

The child looked at him dumbly. Already her heart was heavy because of her own disappointment. Her mouth was dumb and pathetic. But he did not notice, he went his way.

And she played on, because of her disappointment persisting even the more in her play. She dreaded work, because she could not do it as he did it. She was conscious of the great breach between them. She knew she had no power. The grown-up power to work deliberately was a mystery to her.

He would smash into her sensitive child’s world destructively. Her mother

was lenient, careless The children played about as they would all day. Ursula was thoughtless-why should she remember things? If across the garden she saw the hedge had budded, and if she wanted these greeny-pink, tiny buds for bread-and-cheese, to play at teaparty with, over she went for them.

Then suddenly, perhaps the next day, her soul would almost start out of her body as her father turned on her, shouting:

“Who’s been tramplin’ an’ dancin’ across where I’ve just sowed seed? I know it’s you, nuisance! Can you find nowhere else to walk, but just over my seed beds? But it’s like you, that is-no heed but to follow your own greedy nose.”

It had shocked him in his intent world to see the zigzagging lines of deep little footprints across his work. The child was infinitely more shocked. Her vulnerable little soul was flayed and trampled. Why were the footprints there? She had not wanted to make them. She stood dazzled with pain and shame and unreality.

Her soul, her consciousness seemed to die away. She became shut off and senseless, a little fixed creature whose soul had gone hard and unresponsive. The sense of her own unreality hardened her like a frost. She cared no longer.

And the sight of her face, shut and superior with self-asserting indifference, made a flame of rage go over him. He wanted to break her.

“I’ll break your obstinate little face,” he said, through shut teeth, lifting his hand.

The child did not alter in the least. The look of indifference, complete glancing indifference, as if nothing but herself existed to her, remained fixed.

Yet far away in her, the sobs were tearing her soul. And when he had gone, she would go and creep under the parlour sofa, and lie clinched in the silent, hidden misery of childhood.

When she crawled out, after an hour or so, she went rather stiffly to play. She willed to forget. She cut off her childish soul from memory, so that the pain, and the insult should not be real. She asserted herself only. There was not nothing in the world but her own self. So very soon, she came to believe in the outward malevolence that was against her. And very early, she learned that even her adored father was part of this malevolence. And very early she learned to harden her soul in resistance and denial of all that was outside her, harden herself upon her own being.

She never felt sorry for what she had done, she never forgave those who had made her guilty. If he had said to her, “Why, Ursula, did you trample my carefully-made bed?” that would have hurt her to the quick, and she would have done anything for him. But she was always tormented by the unreality of outside things. The earth was to walk on. Why must she avoid a certain patch, just

because it was called a seed-bed? It was the earth to walk on. This was her instinctive assumption. And when he bullied her, she became hard, cut herself off from all connection, lived in the little separate world of her own violent will.

As she grew older, five, six, seven, the connection between her and her father was even stronger. Yet it was always straining to break. She was always relapsing on her own violent will into her own separate world of herself. This made him grind his teeth with bitterness, for he still wanted her. But she could harden herself into her own self's universe, impregnable.

He was very fond of swimming, and in warm weather would take her down to the canal, to a silent place, or to a big pond or reservoir, to bathe. He would take her on his back as he went swimming, and she clung close, feeling his strong movement under her, so strong, as if it would uphold all the world. Then he taught her to swim.

She was a fearless little thing, when he dared her. And he had a curious craving to frighten her, to see what she would do with him. He said, would she ride on his back whilst he jumped off the canal bridge down into the water beneath.

She would. He loved to feel the naked child clinging on to his shoulders. There was a curious fight between their two wills. He mounted the parapet of the canal bridge. The water was a long way down. But the child had a deliberate will set upon his. She held herself fixed to him.

He leapt, and down they went. The crash of the water as they went under struck through the child's small body, with a sort of unconsciousness. But she remained fixed. And when they came up again, and when they went to the bank, and when they sat on the grass side by side, he laughed, and said it was fine. And the dark-dilated eyes of the child looked at him wonderingly, darkly, wondering from the shock, yet reserved and unfathomable, so he laughed almost with a sob.

In a moment she was clinging safely on his back again, and he was swimming in deep water. She was used to his nakedness, and to her mother's nakedness, ever since she was born. They were clinging to each other, and making up to each other for the strange blow that had been struck at them. Yet still, on other days, he would leap again with her from the bridge, daringly, almost wickedly. Till at length, as he leapt, once, she dropped forward on to his head, and nearly broke his neck, so that they fell into the water in a heap, and fought for a few moments with death. He saved her, and sat on the bank, quivering. But his eyes were full of the blackness of death. It was as if death had cut between their two lives, and separated them.

Still they were not separate. There was this curious taunting intimacy between them. When the fair came, she wanted to go in the swingboats. He took her, and,

standing up in the boat, holding on to the irons, began to drive higher, perilously higher. The child clung fast on her seat.

“Do you want to go any higher?” he said to her, and she laughed with her mouth, her eyes wide and dilated. They were rushing through the air.

“Yes,” she said, feeling as if she would turn into vapour, lose hold of everything, and melt away. The boat swung far up, then down like a stone, only to be caught sickeningly up again.

“Any higher?” he called, looking at her over his shoulder, his face evil and beautiful to her.

She laughed with white lips.

He sent the swingboat sweeping through the air in a great semi-circle, till it jerked and swayed at the high horizontal. The child clung on, pale, her eyes fixed on him. People below were calling. The jerk at the top had almost shaken them both out. He had done what he could—and he was attracting censure. He sat down, and let the swingboat swing itself out.

People in the crowd cried shame on him as he came out of the swingboat. He laughed. The child clung to his hand, pale and mute. In a while she was violently sick. He gave her lemonade, and she gulped a little.

“Don’t tell your mother you’ve been sick,” he said. There was no need to ask that. When she got home, the child crept away under the parlour sofa, like a sick little animal, and was a long time before she crawled out.

But Anna got to know of this escapade, and was passionately angry and contemptuous of him. His golden-brown eyes glittered, he had a strange, cruel little smile. And as the child watched him, for the first time in her life a disillusion came over her, something cold and isolating. She went over to her mother. Her soul was dead towards him. It made her sick.

Still she forgot and continued to love him, but ever more coldly. He was at this time, when he was about twenty-eight years old, strange and violent in his being, sensual. He acquired some power over Anna, over everybody he came into contact with.

After a long bout of hostility, Anna at last closed with him. She had now four children, all girls. For seven years she had been absorbed in wifedom and motherhood. For years he had gone on beside her, never really encroaching upon her. Then gradually another self seemed to assert its being within him. He was still silent and separate. But she could feel him all the while coming near upon her, as if his breast and his body were threatening her, and he was always coming closer. Gradually he became indifferent of responsibility. He would do what pleased him, and no more.

He began to go away from home. He went to Nottingham on Saturdays,

always alone, to the football match and to the music-hall, and all the time he was watching, in readiness. He never cared to drink. But with his hard, golden-brown eyes, so keen seeing with their tiny black pupils, he watched all the people, everything that happened, and he waited.

In the Empire one evening he sat next to two girls. He was aware of the one beside him. She was rather small, common, with a fresh complexion and an upper lip that lifted from her teeth, so that, when she was not conscious, her mouth was slightly open and her lips pressed outwards in a kind of blind appeal. She was strongly aware of the man next to her, so that all her body was still, very still. Her face watched the stage. Her arms went down into her lap, very self-conscious and still.

A gleam lit up in him: should he begin with her? Should he begin with her to live the other, the unadmitted life of his desire? Why not? He had always been so good. Save for his wife, he was a virgin. And why, when all women were different? Why, when he would only live once? He wanted the other life. His own life was barren, not enough. He wanted the other.

Her open mouth, showing the small, irregular, white teeth, appealed to him. It was open and ready. It was so vulnerable. Why should he not go in and enjoy what was there? The slim arm that went down so still and motionless to the lap, it was pretty. She would be small, he would be able almost to hold her in his two hands. She would be small, almost like a child, and pretty. Her childishness whetted him keenly. She would be helpless between his hands.

“That was the best turn we’ve had,” he said to her, leaning over as he clapped his hands. He felt strong and unshakeable in himself, set over against all the world. His soul was keen and watchful, glittering with a kind of amusement. He was perfectly self-contained. He was himself, the absolute, the rest of the world was the object that should contribute to his being.

The girl started, turned round, her eyes lit up with an almost painful flash of a smile, the colour came deeply in her cheeks.

“Yes, it was,” she said, quite meaninglessly, and she covered her rather prominent teeth with her lips. Then she sat looking straight before her, seeing nothing, only conscious of the colour burning in her cheeks.

It pricked him with a pleasant sensation. His veins and his nerves attended to her, she was so young and palpitating.

“It’s not such a good programme as last week’s,” he said.

Again she half turned her face to him, and her clear, bright eyes, bright like shallow water, filled with light, frightened, yet involuntarily lighting and shaking with response.

“Oh, isn’t it! I wasn’t able to come last week.”

He noted the common accent. It pleased him. He knew what class she came of. Probably she was a warehouse-lass. He was glad she was a common girl.

He proceeded to tell her about the last week's programme. She answered at random, very confusedly. The colour burned in her cheek. Yet she always answered him. The girl on the other side sat remotely, obviously silent. He ignored her. All his address was for his own girl, with her bright, shallow eyes and her vulnerably opened mouth.

The talk went on, meaningless and random on her part, quite deliberate and purposive on his. It was a pleasure to him to make this conversation, an activity pleasant as a fine game of chance and skill. He was very quiet and pleasant-humoured, but so full of strength. She fluttered beside his steady pressure of warmth and his surety.

He saw the performance drawing to a close. His senses were alert and wilful. He would press his advantages. He followed her and her plain friend down the stairs to the street. It was raining.

"It's a nasty night," he said. "Shall you come and have a drink of something-a cup of coffee-it's early yet."

"Oh, I don't think so," she said, looking away into the night.

"I wish you would," he said, putting himself as it were at her mercy. There was a moment's pause.

"Come to Rollins?" he said.

"No-not there."

"To Carson's, then?"

There was a silence. The other girl hung on. The man was the centre of positive force.

"Will your friend come as well?"

There was another moment of silence, while the other girl felt her ground.

"No, thanks," she said. "I've promised to meet a friend."

"Another time, then?" he said.

"Oh, thanks," she replied, very awkward.

"Good night," he said.

"See you later," said his girl to her friend.

"Where?" said the friend.

"You know, Gertie," replied his girl.

"All right, Jennie."

The friend was gone into the darkness. He turned with his girl to the tea-shop. They talked all the time. He made his sentences in sheer, almost muscular pleasure of exercising himself with her. He was looking at her all the time, perceiving her, appreciating her, finding her out, gratifying himself with her. He

could see distinct attractions in her; her eyebrows, with their particular curve, gave him keen aesthetic pleasure. Later on he would see her bright, pellucid eyes, like shallow water, and know those. And there remained the open, exposed mouth, red and vulnerable. That he reserved as yet. And all the while his eyes were on the girl, estimating and handling with pleasure her young softness. About the girl herself, who or what she was, he cared nothing, he was quite unaware that she was anybody. She was just the sensual object of his attention.

“Shall we go, then?” he said.

She rose in silence, as if acting without a mind, merely physically. He seemed to hold her in his will. Outside it was still raining.

“Let’s have a walk,” he said. “I don’t mind the rain, do you?”

“No, I don’t mind it,” she said.

He was alert in every sense and fibre, and yet quite sure and steady, and lit up, as if transfused. He had a free sensation of walking in his own darkness, not in anybody else’s world at all. He was purely a world to himself, he had nothing to do with any general consciousness. Just his own senses were supreme. All the rest was external, insignificant, leaving him alone with this girl whom he wanted to absorb, whose properties he wanted to absorb into his own senses. He did not care about her, except that he wanted to overcome her resistance, to have her in his power, fully and exhaustively to enjoy her.

They turned into the dark streets. He held her umbrella over her, and put his arm round her. She walked as if she were unaware. But gradually, as he walked, he drew her a little closer, into the movement of his side and hip. She fitted in there very well. It was a real good fit, to walk with her like this. It made him exquisitely aware of his own muscular self. And his hand that grasped her side felt one curve of her, and it seemed like a new creation to him, a reality, an absolute, an existing tangible beauty of the absolute. It was like a star. Everything in him was absorbed in the sensual delight of this one small, firm curve in her body, that his hand, and his whole being, had lighted upon.

He led her into the Park, where it was almost dark. He noticed a corner between two walls, under a great overhanging bush of ivy.

“Let us stand here a minute,” he said.

He put down the umbrella, and followed her into the corner, retreating out of the rain. He needed no eyes to see. All he wanted was to know through touch. She was like a piece of palpable darkness. He found her in the darkness, put his arms round her and his hands upon her. She was silent and inscrutable. But he did not want to know anything about her, he only wanted to discover her. And through her clothing, what absolute beauty he touched.

“Take your hat off,” he said.

Silently, obediently, she shook off her hat and gave herself to his arms again. He liked her-he liked the feel of her-he wanted to know her more closely. He let his fingers subtly seek out her cheek and neck. What amazing beauty and pleasure, in the dark! His fingers had often touched Anna on the face and neck like that. What matter! It was one man who touched Anna, another who now touched this girl. He liked best his new self. He was given over altogether to the sensuous knowledge of this woman, and every moment he seemed to be touching absolute beauty, something beyond knowledge.

Very close, marvelling and exceedingly joyful in their discoveries, his hands pressed upon her, so subtly, so seekingly, so finely and desirously searching her out, that she too was almost swooning in the absolute of sensual knowledge. In utter sensual delight she clenched her knees, her thighs, her loins together! It was an added beauty to him.

But he was patiently working for her relaxation, patiently, his whole being fixed in the smile of latent gratification, his whole body electric with a subtle, powerful, reducing force upon her. So he came at length to kiss her, and she was almost betrayed by his insidious kiss. Her open mouth was too helpless and unguarded. He knew this, and his first kiss was very gentle, and soft, and assuring, so assuring. So that her soft, defenceless mouth became assured, even bold, seeking upon his mouth. And he answered her gradually, gradually, his soft kiss sinking in softly, softly, but ever more heavily, more heavily yet, till it was too heavy for her to meet, and she began to sink under it. She was sinking, sinking, his smile of latent gratification was becoming more tense, he was sure of her. He let the whole force of his will sink upon her to sweep her away. But it was too great a shock for her. With a sudden horrible movement she ruptured the state that contained them both.

“Don’t-don’t!”

It was a rather horrible cry that seemed to come out of her, not to belong to her. It was some strange agony of terror crying out the words. There was something vibrating and beside herself in the noise. His nerves ripped like silk.

“What’s the matter?” he said, as if calmly. “What’s the matter?”

She came back to him, but trembling, reservedly this time.

Her cry had given him gratification. But he knew he had been too sudden for her. He was now careful. For a while he merely sheltered her. Also there had broken a flaw into his perfect will. He wanted to persist, to begin again, to lead up to the point where he had let himself go on her, and then manage more carefully, successfully. So far she had won. And the battle was not over yet. But another voice woke in him and prompted him to let her go-let her go in contempt.

He sheltered her, and soothed her, and caressed her, and kissed her, and again began to come nearer, nearer. He gathered himself together. Even if he did not take her, he would make her relax, he would fuse away her resistance. So softly, softly, with infinite caressiveness he kissed her, and the whole of his being seemed to fondle her. Till, at the verge, swooning at the breaking point, there came from her a beaten, inarticulate, moaning cry:

“Don’t-oh, don’t!”

His veins fused with extreme voluptuousness. For a moment he almost lost control of himself, and continued automatically. But there was a moment of inaction, of cold suspension. He was not going to take her. He drew her to him and soothed her, and caressed her. But the pure zest had gone. She struggled to herself and realised he was not going to take her. And then, at the very last moment, when his fondling had come near again, his hot living desire despising her, against his cold sensual desire, she broke violently away from him.

“Don’t,” she cried, harsh now with hatred, and she flung her hand across and hit him violently. “Keep off of me.”

His blood stood still for a moment. Then the smile came again within him, steady, cruel.

“Why, what’s the matter?” he said, with suave irony. “Nobody’s going to hurt you.”

“I know what you want,” she said.

“I know what I want,” he said. “What’s the odds?”

“Well, you’re not going to have it off me.”

“Aren’t I? Well, then I’m not. It’s no use crying about it, is it?”

“No, it isn’t,” said the girl, rather disconcerted by his irony.

“But there’s no need to have a row about it. We can kiss good night just the same, can’t we?”

She was silent in the darkness.

“Or do you want your hat and umbrella to go home this minute?”

Still she was silent. He watched her dark figure as she stood there on the edge of the faint darkness, and he waited.

“Come and say good night nicely, if we’re going to say it,” he said.

Still she did not stir. He put his hand out and drew her into the darkness again.

“It’s warmer in here,” he said; “a lot cosier.”

His will had not yet relaxed from her. The moment of hatred exhilarated him.

“I’m going now,” she muttered, as he closed his hand over her.

“See how well you fit your place,” he said, as he drew her to her previous position, close upon him. “What do you want to leave it for?”

And gradually the intoxication invaded him again, the zest came back. After

all, why should he not take her?

But she did not yield to him entirely.

“Are you a married man?” she asked at length.

“What if I am?” he said.

She did not answer.

“I don’t ask you whether you’re married or not,” he said.

“You know jolly well I’m not,” she answered hotly. Oh, if she could only break away from him, if only she need not yield to him.

At length her will became cold against him. She had escaped. But she hated him for her escape more than for her danger. Did he despise her so coldly? And she was in torture of adherence to him still.

“Shall I see you next week-next Saturday?” he said, as they returned to the town. She did not answer.

“Come to the Empire with me-you and Gertie,” he said.

“I should look well, going with a married man,” she said.

“I’m no less of a man for being married, am I?” he said.

“Oh, it’s a different matter altogether with a married man,” she said, in a ready-made speech that showed her chagrin.

“How’s that?” he asked.

But she would not enlighten him. Yet she promised, without promising, to be at the meeting-place next Saturday evening.

So he left her. He did not know her name. He caught a train and went home.

It was the last train, he was very late. He was not home till midnight. But he was quite indifferent. He had no real relation with his home, not this man which he now was. Anna was sitting up for him. She saw the queer, absolved look on his face, a sort of latent, almost sinister smile, as if he were absolved from his “good” ties.

“Where have you been?” she asked, puzzled, interested.

“To the Empire.”

“Who with?”

“By myself. I came home with Tom Cooper.”

She looked at him, and wondered what he had been doing. She was indifferent as to whether he lied or not.

“You have come home very strange,” she said. And there was an appreciative inflexion in the speech.

He was not affected. As for his humble, good self, he was absolved from it. He sat down and ate heartily. He was not tired. He seemed to take no notice of her.

For Anna the moment was critical. She kept herself aloof, and watched him.

He talked to her, but with a little indifference, since he was scarcely aware of her. So, then she did not affect him. Here was a new turn of affairs! He was rather attractive, nevertheless. She liked him better than the ordinary mute, half-effaced, half-subdued man she usually knew him to be. So, he was blossoming out into his real self! It piqued her. Very good, let him blossom! She liked a new turn of affairs. He was a strange man come home to her. Glancing at him, she saw she could not reduce him to what he had been before. In an instant she gave it up. Yet not without a pang of rage, which would insist on their old, beloved love, their old, accustomed intimacy and her old, established supremacy. She almost rose up to fight for them. And looking at him, and remembering his father, she was wary. This was the new turn of affairs!

Very good, if she could not influence him in the old way, she would be level with him in the new. Her old defiant hostility came up. Very good, she too was out on her own adventure. Her voice, her manner changed, she was ready for the game. Something was liberated in her. She liked him. She liked this strange man come home to her. He was very welcome, indeed! She was very glad to welcome a stranger. She had been bored by the old husband. To his latent, cruel smile she replied with brilliant challenge. He expected her to keep the moral fortress. Not she! It was much too dull a part. She challenged him back with a sort of radiance, very bright and free, opposite to him. He looked at her, and his eyes glinted. She too was out in the field.

His senses pricked up and keenly attended to her. She laughed, perfectly indifferent and loose as he was. He came towards her. She neither rejected him nor responded to him. In a kind of radiance, superb in her inscrutability, she laughed before him. She too could throw everything overboard, love, intimacy, responsibility. What were her four children to her now? What did it matter that this man was the father of her four children?

He was the sensual male seeking his pleasure, she was the female ready to take hers: but in her own way. A man could turn into a free lance: so then could a woman. She adhered as little as he to the moral world. All that had gone before was nothing to her. She was another woman, under the instance of a strange man. He was a stranger to her, seeking his own ends. Very good. She wanted to see what this stranger would do now, what he was.

She laughed, and kept him at arm's length, whilst apparently ignoring him. She watched him undress as if he were a stranger. Indeed he was a stranger to her.

And she roused him profoundly, violently, even before he touched her. The little creature in Nottingham had but been leading up to this. They abandoned in one motion the moral position, each was seeking gratification pure and simple.

Strange his wife was to him. It was as if he were a perfect stranger, as if she were infinitely and essentially strange to him, the other half of the world, the dark half of the moon. She waited for his touch as if he were a marauder who had come in, infinitely unknown and desirable to her. And he began to discover her. He had an inkling of the vastness of the unknown sensual store of delights she was. With a passion of voluptuousness that made him dwell on each tiny beauty, in a kind of frenzy of enjoyment, he lit upon her: her beauty, the beauties, the separate, several beauties of her body.

He was quite ousted from himself, and sensually transported by that which he discovered in her. He was another man revelling over her. There was no tenderness, no love between them any more, only the maddening, sensuous lust for discovery and the insatiable, exorbitant gratification in the sensual beauties of her body. And she was a store, a store of absolute beauties that it drove him to contemplate. There was such a feast to enjoy, and he with only one man's capacity.

He lived in a passion of sensual discovery with her for some time-it was a duel: no love, no words, no kisses even, only the maddening perception of beauty consummate, absolute through touch. He wanted to touch her, to discover her, maddeningly he wanted to know her. Yet he must not hurry, or he missed everything. He must enjoy one beauty at a time. And the multitudinous beauties of her body, the many little rapturous places, sent him mad with delight, and with desire to be able to know more, to have strength to know more. For all was there.

He would say during the daytime:

"To-night I shall know the little hollow under her ankle, where the blue vein crosses." And the thought of it, and the desire for it, made a thick darkness of anticipation.

He would go all the day waiting for the night to come, when he could give himself to the enjoyment of some luxurious absolute of beauty in her. The thought of the hidden resources of her, the undiscovered beauties and ecstatic places of delight in her body, waiting, only waiting for him to discover them, sent him slightly insane. He was obsessed. If he did not discover and make known to himself these delights, they might be lost for ever. He wished he had a hundred men's energies, with which to enjoy her. He wished he were a cat, to lick her with a rough, grating, lascivious tongue. He wanted to wallow in her, bury himself in her flesh, cover himself over with her flesh.

And she, separate, with a strange, dangerous, glistening look in her eyes received all his activities upon her as if they were expected by her, and provoked him when he was quiet to more, till sometimes he was ready to perish for sheer

inability to be satisfied of her, inability to have had enough of her.

Their children became mere offspring to them, they lived in the darkness and death of their own sensual activities. Sometimes he felt he was going mad with a sense of Absolute Beauty, perceived by him in her through his senses. It was something too much for him. And in everything, was this same, almost sinister, terrifying beauty. But in the revelations of her body through contact with his body, was the ultimate beauty, to know which was almost death in itself, and yet for the knowledge of which he would have undergone endless torture. He would have forfeited anything, anything, rather than forego his right even to the instep of her foot, and the place from which the toes radiated out, the little, miraculous white plain from which ran the little hillocks of the toes, and the folded, dimpling hollows between the toes. He felt he would have died rather than forfeit this.

This was what their love had become, a sensuality violent and extreme as death. They had no conscious intimacy, no tenderness of love. It was all the lust and the infinite, maddening intoxication of the sense, a passion of death.

He had always, all his life, had a secret dread of Absolute Beauty. It had always been like a fetish to him, something to fear, really. For it was immoral and against mankind. So he had turned to the Gothic form, which always asserted the broken desire of mankind in its pointed arches, escaping the rolling, absolute beauty of the round arch.

But now he had given way, and with infinite sensual violence gave himself to the realisation of this supreme, immoral, Absolute Beauty, in the body of woman. It seemed to him, that it came to being in the body of woman, under his touch. Under his touch, even under his sight, it was there. But when he neither saw nor touched the perfect place, it was not perfect, it was not there. And he must make it exist.

But still the thing terrified him. Awful and threatening it was, dangerous to a degree, even whilst he gave himself to it. It was pure darkness, also. All the shameful things of the body revealed themselves to him now with a sort of sinister, tropical beauty. All the shameful, natural and unnatural acts of sensual voluptuousness which he and the woman partook of together, created together, they had their heavy beauty and their delight. Shame, what was it? It was part of extreme delight. It was that part of delight of which man is usually afraid. Why afraid? The secret, shameful things are most terribly beautiful.

They accepted shame, and were one with it in their most unlicensed pleasures. It was incorporated. It was a bud that blossomed into beauty and heavy, fundamental gratification.

Their outward life went on much the same, but the inward life was

revolutionised. The children became less important, the parents were absorbed in their own living.

And gradually, Brangwen began to find himself free to attend to the outside life as well. His intimate life was so violently active, that it set another man in him free. And this new man turned with interest to public life, to see what part he could take in it. This would give him scope for new activity, activity of a kind for which he was now created and released. He wanted to be unanimous with the whole of purposive mankind.

At this time Education was in the forefront as a subject of interest. There was the talk of new Swedish methods, of handwork instruction, and so on. Brangwen embraced sincerely the idea of handwork in schools. For the first time, he began to take real interest in a public affair. He had at length, from his profound sensual activity, developed a real purposive self.

There was talk of night-schools, and of handicraft classes. He wanted to start a woodwork class in Cossethay, to teach carpentry and joinery and wood-carving to the village boys, two nights a week. This seemed to him a supremely desirable thing to be doing. His pay would be very little-and when he had it, he spent it all on extra wood and tools. But he was very happy and keen in his new public spirit.

He started his night-classes in woodwork when he was thirty years old. By this time he had five children, the last a boy. But boy or girl mattered very little to him. He had a natural blood-affection for his children, and he liked them as they turned up: boys or girls. Only he was fondest of Ursula. Somehow, she seemed to be at the back of his new night-school venture.

The house by the yew trees was in connection with the great human endeavour at last. It gained a new vigour thereby.

To Ursula, a child of eight, the increase in magic was considerable. She heard all the talk, she saw the parish room fitted up as a workshop. The parish room was a high, stone, barn-like, ecclesiastical building standing away by itself in the Brangwens' second garden, across the lane. She was always attracted by its age and its stranded obsolescence. Now she watched preparations made, she sat on the flight of stone steps that came down from the porch to the garden, and heard her father and the vicar talking and planning and working. Then an inspector came, a very strange man, and stayed talking with her father all one evening. Everything was settled, and twelve boys enrolled their names. It was very exciting.

But to Ursula, everything her father did was magic. Whether he came from Ilkeston with news of the town, whether he went across to the church with his music or his tools on a sunny evening, whether he sat in his white surplice at the

organ on Sundays, leading the singing with his strong tenor voice, or whether he were in the workshop with the boys, he was always a centre of magic and fascination to her, his voice, sounding out in command, cheerful, laconic, had always a twang in it that sent a thrill over her blood, and hypnotised her. She seemed to run in the shadow of some dark, potent secret of which she would not, of whose existence even she dared not become conscious, it cast such a spell over her, and so darkened her mind.

CHAPTER 9

The Marsh and the Flood

There was always regular connection between the Yew Cottage and the Marsh, yet the two households remained separate, distinct.

After Anna's marriage, the Marsh became the home of the two boys, Tom and Fred. Tom was a rather short, good-looking youth, with crisp black hair and long black eyelashes and soft, dark, possessed eyes. He had a quick intelligence. From the High School he went to London to study. He had an instinct for attracting people of character and energy. He gave place entirely to the other person, and at the same time kept himself independent. He scarcely existed except through other people. When he was alone he was unresolved. When he was with another man, he seemed to add himself to the other, make the other bigger than life size. So that a few people loved him and attained a sort of fulfilment in him. He carefully chose these few.

He had a subtle, quick, critical intelligence, a mind that was like a scale or balance. There was something of a woman in all this.

In London he had been the favourite pupil of an engineer, a clever man, who became well-known at the time when Tom Brangwen had just finished his studies. Through this master the youth kept acquaintance with various individual, outstanding characters. He never asserted himself. He seemed to be there to estimate and establish the rest. He was like a presence that makes us aware of our own being. So that he was while still young connected with some of the most energetic scientific and mathematical people in London. They took him as an equal. Quiet and perceptive and impersonal as he was, he kept his place and learned how to value others in just degree. He was there like a judgment. Besides, he was very good-looking, of medium stature, but beautifully proportioned, dark, with fine colouring, always perfectly healthy.

His father allowed him a liberal pocket-money, besides which he had a sort of post as assistant to his chief. Then from time to time the young man appeared at the Marsh, curiously attractive, well-dressed, reserved, having by nature a subtle, refined manner. And he set the change in the farm.

Fred, the younger brother, was a Brangwen, large-boned, blue-eyed, English. He was his father's very son, the two men, father and son, were supremely at ease with one another. Fred was succeeding to the farm.

Between the elder brother and the younger existed an almost passionate love. Tom watched over Fred with a woman's poignant attention and self-less care. Fred looked up to Tom as to something miraculous, that which he himself would aspire to be, were he great also.

So that after Anna's departure, the Marsh began to take on a new tone. The boys were gentlemen; Tom had a rare nature and had risen high. Fred was sensitive and fond of reading, he pondered Ruskin and then the Agnostic writings. Like all the Brangwens, he was very much a thing to himself, though fond of people, and indulgent to them, having an exaggerated respect for them.

There was a rather uneasy friendship between him and one of the young Hardys at the Hall. The two households were different, yet the young men met on shy terms of equality.

It was young Tom Brangwen, with his dark lashes and beautiful colouring, his soft, inscrutable nature, his strange repose and his informed air, added to his position in London, who seemed to emphasise the superior foreign element in the Marsh. When he appeared, perfectly dressed, as if soft and affable, and yet quite removed from everybody, he created an uneasiness in people, he was reserved in the minds of the Cossethay and Ilkeston acquaintances to a different, remote world.

He and his mother had a kind of affinity. The affection between them was of a mute, distant character, but radical. His father was always uneasy and slightly deferential to his eldest son. Tom also formed the link that kept the Marsh in real connection with the Skrebenskys, now quite important people in their own district.

So a change in tone came over the Marsh. Tom Brangwen the father, as he grew older, seemed to mature into a gentleman-farmer. His figure lent itself: burly and handsome. His face remained fresh and his blue eyes as full of light, his thick hair and beard had turned gradually to a silky whiteness. It was his custom to laugh a great deal, in his acquiescent, wilful manner. Things had puzzled him very much, so he had taken the line of easy, good-humoured acceptance. He was not responsible for the frame of things. Yet he was afraid of the unknown in life.

He was fairly well-off. His wife was there with him, a different being from himself, yet somewhere vitally connected with him:-who was he to understand where and how? His two sons were gentlemen. They were men distinct from himself, they had separate beings of their own, yet they were connected with himself. It was all adventurous and puzzling. Yet one remained vital within one's own existence, whatever the off-shoots.

So, handsome and puzzled, he laughed and stuck to himself as the only thing

he could stick to. His youngness and the wonder remained almost the same in him. He became indolent, he developed a luxuriant ease. Fred did most of the farm-work, the father saw to the more important transactions. He drove a good mare, and sometimes he rode his cob. He drank in the hotels and the inns with better-class farmers and proprietors, he had well-to-do acquaintances among men. But one class suited him no better than another.

His wife, as ever, had no acquaintances. Her hair was threaded now with grey, her face grew older in form without changing in expression. She seemed the same as when she had come to the Marsh twenty-five years ago, save that her health was more fragile. She seemed always to haunt the Marsh rather than to live there. She was never part of the life. Something she represented was alien there, she remained a stranger within the gates, in some ways fixed and impervious, in some ways curiously refining. She caused the separateness and individuality of all the Marsh inmates, the friability of the household.

When young Tom Brangwen was twenty-three years old there was some breach between him and his chief which was never explained, and he went away to Italy, then to America. He came home for a while, then went to Germany; always the same good-looking, carefully-dressed, attractive young man, in perfect health, yet somehow outside of everything. In his dark eyes was a deep misery which he wore with the same ease and pleasantness as he wore his close-sitting clothes.

To Ursula he was a romantic, alluring figure. He had a grace of bringing beautiful presents: a box of expensive sweets, such as Cossethay had never seen; or he gave her a hair-brush and a long slim mirror of mother-of-pearl, all pale and glimmering and exquisite; or he sent her a little necklace of rough stones, amethyst and opal and brilliants and garnet. He spoke other languages easily and fluently, his nature was curiously gracious and insinuating. With all that, he was undefinably an outsider. He belonged to nowhere, to no society.

Anna Brangwen had left her intimacy with her father undeveloped since the time of her marriage. At her marriage it had been abandoned. He and she had drawn a reserve between them. Anna went more to her mother.

Then suddenly the father died.

It happened one springtime when Ursula was about eight years old, he, Tom Brangwen, drove off on a Saturday morning to the market in Nottingham, saying he might not be back till late, as there was a special show and then a meeting he had to attend. His family understood that he would enjoy himself.

The season had been rainy and dreary. In the evening it was pouring with rain. Fred Brangwen, unsettled, uneasy, did not go out, as was his wont. He smoked and read and fidgeted, hearing always the trickling of water outside. This wet,

black night seemed to cut him off and make him unsettled, aware of himself, aware that he wanted something else, aware that he was scarcely living. There seemed to him to be no root to his life, no place for him to get satisfied in. He dreamed of going abroad. But his instinct knew that change of place would not solve his problem. He wanted change, deep, vital change of living. And he did not know how to get it.

Tilly, an old woman now, came in saying that the labourers who had been suppering up said the yard and everywhere was just a slew of water. He heard in indifference. But he hated a desolate, raw wetness in the world. He would leave the Marsh.

His mother was in bed. At last he shut his book, his mind was blank, he walked upstairs intoxicated with depression and anger, and, intoxicated with depression and anger, locked himself into sleep.

Tilly set slippers before the kitchen fire, and she also went to bed, leaving the door unlocked. Then the farm was in darkness, in the rain.

At eleven o'clock it was still raining. Tom Brangwen stood in the yard of the "Angel", Nottingham, and buttoned his coat.

"Oh, well," he said cheerfully, "it's rained on me before. Put 'er in, Jack, my lad, put her in-Tha'rt a rare old cock, Jacky-boy, wi' a belly on thee as does credit to thy drink, if not to thy corn. Co' up lass, let's get off ter th' old homestead. Oh, my heart, what a wetness in the night! There'll be no volcanoes after this. Hey, Jack, my beautiful young slender feller, which of us is Noah? It seems as though the water-works is bursted. Ducks and ayquatic fowl 'll be king o' the castle at this rate-dove an' olive branch an' all. Stand up then, gel, stand up, we're not stoppin' here all night, even if you thought we was. I'm dashed if the jumping rain wouldn't make anybody think they was drunk. Hey, Jack-does rain-water wash the sense in, or does it wash it out?" And he laughed to himself at the joke.

He was always ashamed when he had to drive after he had been drinking, always apologetic to the horse. His apologetic frame made him facetious. He was aware of his inability to walk quite straight. Nevertheless his will kept stiff and attentive, in all his fuddleness.

He mounted and bowled off through the gates of the innyard. The mare went well, he sat fixed, the rain beating on his face. His heavy body rode motionless in a kind of sleep, one centre of attention was kept fitfully burning, the rest was dark. He concentrated his last attention on the fact of driving along the road he knew so well. He knew it so well, he watched for it attentively, with an effort of will.

He talked aloud to himself, sententious in his anxiety, as if he were perfectly

sober, whilst the mare bowled along and the rain beat on him. He watched the rain before the gig-lamps, the faint gleaming of the shadowy horse's body, the passing of the dark hedges.

"It's not a fit night to turn a dog out," he said to himself, aloud. "It's high time as it did a bit of clearing up, I'll be damned if it isn't. It was a lot of use putting those ten loads of cinders on th' road. They'll be washed to kingdom-come if it doesn't alter. Well, it's our Fred's look-out, if they are. He's top-sawyer as far as those things go. I don't see why I should concern myself. They can wash to kingdom-come and back again for what I care. I suppose they would be washed back again some day. That's how things are. Th' rain tumbles down just to mount up in clouds again. So they say. There's no more water on the earth than there was in the year naught. That's the story, my boy, if you understand it. There's no more to-day than there was a thousand years ago-nor no less either. You can't wear water out. No, my boy: it'll give you the go-by. Try to wear it out, and it takes its hook into vapour, it has its fingers at its nose to you. It turns into cloud and falleth as rain on the just and unjust. I wonder if I'm the just or the unjust."

He started awake as the trap lurched deep into a rut. And he wakened to the point in his journey. He had travelled some distance since he was last conscious.

But at length he reached the gate, and stumbled heavily down, reeling, gripping fast to the trap. He descended into several inches of water.

"Be damned!" he said angrily. "Be damned to the miserable slop."

And he led the horse washing through the gate. He was quite drunk now, moving blindly, in habit. Everywhere there was water underfoot.

The raised causeway of the house and the farm-stead was dry, however. But there was a curious roar in the night which seemed to be made in the darkness of his own intoxication. Reeling, blinded, almost without consciousness he carried his parcels and the rug and cushions into the house, dropped them, and went out to put up the horse.

Now he was at home, he was a sleep-walker, waiting only for the moment of activity to stop. Very deliberately and carefully, he led the horse down the slope to the cart-shed. She shied and backed.

"Why, wha's amiss?" he hiccupped, plodding steadily on. And he was again in a wash of water, the horse splashed up water as he went. It was thickly dark, save for the gig-lamps, and they lit on a rippling surface of water.

"Well, that's a knock-out," he said, as he came to the cart-shed, and was wading in six inches of water. But everything seemed to him amusing. He laughed to think of six inches of water being in the cart-shed.

He backed in the mare. She was restive. He laughed at the fun of untackling

the mare with a lot of water washing round his feet. He laughed because it upset her. "What's amiss, what's amiss, a drop o' water won't hurt you!" As soon as he had undone the traces, she walked quickly away.

He hung up the shafts and took the gig-lamp. As he came out of the familiar jumble of shafts and wheels in the shed, the water, in little waves, came washing strongly against his legs. He staggered and almost fell.

"Well, what the deuce!" he said, staring round at the running water in the black, watery night.

He went to meet the running flood, sinking deeper and deeper. His soul was full of great astonishment. He had to go and look where it came from, though the ground was going from under his feet. He went on, down towards the pond, shakily. He rather enjoyed it. He was knee-deep, and the water was pulling heavily. He stumbled, reeled sickeningly.

Fear took hold of him. Gripping tightly to the lamp, he reeled, and looked round. The water was carrying his feet away, he was dizzy. He did not know which way to turn. The water was whirling, whirling, the whole black night was swooping in rings. He swayed uncertainly at the centre of all the attack, reeling in dismay. In his soul, he knew he would fall.

As he staggered something in the water struck his legs, and he fell. Instantly he was in the turmoil of suffocation. He fought in a black horror of suffocation, fighting, wrestling, but always borne down, borne inevitably down. Still he wrestled and fought to get himself free, in the unutterable struggle of suffocation, but he always fell again deeper. Something struck his head, a great wonder of anguish went over him, then the blackness covered him entirely.

In the utter darkness, the unconscious, drowning body was rolled along, the waters pouring, washing, filling in the place. The cattle woke up and rose to their feet, the dog began to yelp. And the unconscious, drowning body was washed along in the black, swirling darkness, passively.

Mrs. Brangwen woke up and listened. With preternaturally sharp senses she heard the movement of all the darkness that swirled outside. For a moment she lay still. Then she went to the window. She heard the sharp rain, and the deep running of water. She knew her husband was outside.

"Fred," she called, "Fred!"

Away in the night was a hoarse, brutal roar of a mass of water rushing downwards.

She went downstairs. She could not understand the multiplied running of water. Stepping down the step into the kitchen, she put her foot into water. The kitchen was flooded. Where did it come from? She could not understand.

Water was running in out of the scullery. She paddled through barefoot, to see.

Water was bubbling fiercely under the outer door. She was afraid. Then something washed against her, something twined under her foot. It was the riding whip. On the table were the rug and the cushion and the parcel from the gig.

He had come home.

“Tom!” she called, afraid of her own voice.

She opened the door. Water ran in with a horrid sound. Everywhere was moving water, a sound of waters.

“Tom!” she cried, standing in her nightdress with the candle, calling into the darkness and the flood out of the doorway.

“Tom! Tom!”

And she listened. Fred appeared behind her, in trousers and shirt.

“Where is he?” he asked.

He looked at the flood, then at his mother. She seemed small and uncanny, elvish, in her nightdress.

“Go upstairs,” he said. “He’ll be in th’ stable.”

“To-om! To-om!” cried the elderly woman, with a long, unnatural, penetrating call that chilled her son to the marrow. He quickly pulled on his boots and his coat.

“Go upstairs, mother,” he said; “I’ll go an’ see where he is.”

“To-om! To-o-om!” rang out the shrill, unearthly cry of the small woman. There was only the noise of water and the mooing of uneasy cattle, and the long yelping of the dog, clamouring in the darkness.

Fred Brangwen splashed out into the flood with a lantern. His mother stood on a chair in the doorway, watching him go. It was all water, water, running, flashing under the lantern.

“Tom! Tom! To-o-om!” came her long, unnatural cry, ringing over the night. It made her son feel cold in his soul.

And the unconscious, drowning body of the father rolled on below the house, driven by the black water towards the high-road.

Tilly appeared, a skirt over her nightdress. She saw her mistress clinging on the top of a chair in the open doorway, a candle burning on the table.

“God’s sake!” cried the old serving-woman. “The cut’s burst. That embankment’s broke down. Whativer are we goin’ to do!”

Mrs. Brangwen watched her son, and the lantern, go along the upper causeway to the stable. Then she saw the dark figure of a horse: then her son hung the lamp in the stable, and the light shone out faintly on him as he untackled the mare. The mother saw the soft blazed face of the horse thrust forward into the stable-door. The stables were still above the flood. But the water flowed strongly into

the house.

“It’s getting higher,” said Tilly. “Hasn’t master come in?”

Mrs. Brangwen did not hear.

“Isn’t he the-ere?” she called, in her far-reaching, terrifying voice.

“No,” came the short answer out of the night.

“Go and loo-ok for him.”

His mother’s voice nearly drove the youth mad.

He put the halter on the horse and shut the stable door. He came splashing back through the water, the lantern swinging.

The unconscious, drowning body was pushed past the house in the deepest current. Fred Brangwen came to his mother.

“I’ll go to th’ cart-shed,” he said.

“To-om, To-o-om!” rang out the strong, inhuman cry. Fred Brangwen’s blood froze, his heart was very angry. He gripped his veins in a frenzy. Why was she yelling like this? He could not bear the sight of her, perched on a chair in her white nightdress in the doorway, elvish and horrible.

“He’s taken the mare out of the trap, so he’s all right,” he said, growling, pretending to be normal.

But as he descended to the cart-shed, he sank into a foot of water. He heard the rushing in the distance, he knew the canal had broken down. The water was running deeper.

The trap was there all right, but no signs of his father. The young man waded down to the pond. The water rose above his knees, it swirled and forced him. He drew back.

“Is he the-e-ere?” came the maddening cry of the mother.

“No,” was the sharp answer.

“To-om-To-o-om!” came the piercing, free, unearthly call. It seemed high and supernatural, almost pure. Fred Brangwen hated it. It nearly drove him mad. So awfully it sang out, almost like a song.

The water was flowing fuller into the house.

“You’d better go up to Beeby’s and bring him and Arthur down, and tell Mrs. Beeby to fetch Wilkinson,” said Fred to Tilly. He forced his mother to go upstairs.

“I know your father is drowned,” she said, in a curious dismay.

The flood rose through the night, till it washed the kettle off the hob in the kitchen. Mrs. Brangwen sat alone at a window upstairs. She called no more. The men were busy with the pigs and the cattle. They were coming with a boat for her.

Towards morning the rain ceased, the stars came out over the noise and the

terrifying clucking and trickling of the water. Then there was a pallor in the east, the light began to come. In the ruddy light of the dawn she saw the waters spreading out, moving sluggishly, the buildings rising out of a waste of water. Birds began to sing, drowsily, and as if slightly hoarse with the dawn. It grew brighter. Up the second field was the great, raw gap in the canal embankment.

Mrs. Brangwen went from window to window, watching the flood. Somebody had brought a little boat. The light grew stronger, the red gleam was gone off the flood-waters, day took place. Mrs. Brangwen went from the front of the house to the back, looking out, intent and unrelaxing, on the pallid morning of spring.

She saw a glimpse of her husband's buff coat in the floods, as the water rolled the body against the garden hedge. She called to the men in the boat. She was glad he was found. They dragged him out of the hedge. They could not lift him into the boat. Fred Brangwen jumped into the water, up to his waist, and half carried the body of his father through the flood to the road. Hay and twigs and dirt were in the beard and hair. The youth pushed through the water crying loudly without tears, like a stricken animal. The mother at the window cried, making no trouble.

The doctor came. But the body was dead. They carried it up to Cossethay, to Anna's house.

When Anna Brangwen heard the news, she pressed back her head and rolled her eyes, as if something were reaching forward to bite at her throat. She pressed back her head, her mind was driven back to sleep. Since she had married and become a mother, the girl she had been was forgotten. Now, the shock threatened to break in upon her and sweep away all her intervening life, make her as a girl of eighteen again, loving her father. So she pressed back, away from the shock, she clung to her present life.

It was when they brought him to her house dead and in his wet clothes, his wet, sodden clothes, fully dressed as he came from market, yet all sodden and inert, that the shock really broke into her, and she was terrified. A big, soaked, inert heap, he was, who had been to her the image of power and strong life.

Almost in horror, she began to take the wet things from him, to pull off him the incongruous market-clothes of a well-to-do farmer. The children were sent away to the Vicarage, the dead body lay on the parlour floor, Anna quickly began to undress him, laid his fob and seals in a wet heap on the table. Her husband and the woman helped her. They cleared and washed the body, and laid it on the bed.

There, it looked still and grand. He was perfectly calm in death, and, now he was laid in line, inviolable, unapproachable. To Anna, he was the majesty of the inaccessible male, the majesty of death. It made her still and awe-stricken,

almost glad.

Lydia Brangwen, the mother, also came and saw the impressive, inviolable body of the dead man. She went pale, seeing death. He was beyond change or knowledge, absolute, laid in line with the infinite. What had she to do with him? He was a majestic Abstraction, made visible now for a moment, inviolate, absolute. And who could lay claim to him, who could speak of him, of the him who was revealed in the stripped moment of transit from life into death? Neither the living nor the dead could claim him, he was both the one and the other, inviolable, inaccessibly himself.

“I shared life with you, I belong in my own way to eternity,” said Lydia Brangwen, her heart cold, knowing her own singleness.

“I did not know you in life. You are beyond me, supreme now in death,” said Anna Brangwen, awe-stricken, almost glad.

It was the sons who could not bear it. Fred Brangwen went about with a set, blanched face and shut hands, his heart full of hatred and rage for what had been done to his father, bleeding also with desire to have his father again, to see him, to hear him again. He could not bear it.

Tom Brangwen only arrived on the day of the funeral. He was quiet and controlled as ever. He kissed his mother, who was still dark-faced, inscrutable, he shook hands with his brother without looking at him, he saw the great coffin with its black handles. He even read the name-plate, “Tom Brangwen, of the Marsh Farm. Born — — . Died — — .”

The good-looking, still face of the young man crinkled up for a moment in a terrible grimace, then resumed its stillness. The coffin was carried round to the church, the funeral bell tanged at intervals, the mourners carried their wreaths of white flowers. The mother, the Polish woman, went with dark, abstract face, on her son’s arm. He was good-looking as ever, his face perfectly motionless and somehow pleasant. Fred walked with Anna, she strange and winsome, he with a face like wood, stiff, unyielding.

Only afterwards Ursula, flitting between the currant bushes down the garden, saw her Uncle Tom standing in his black clothes, erect and fashionable, but his fists lifted, and his face distorted, his lips curled back from his teeth in a horrible grin, like an animal which grimaces with torment, whilst his body panted quick, like a panting dog’s. He was facing the open distance, panting, and holding still, then panting rapidly again, but his face never changing from its almost bestial look of torture, the teeth all showing, the nose wrinkled up, the eyes, unseeing, fixed.

Terrified, Ursula slipped away. And when her Uncle Tom was in the house again, grave and very quiet, so that he seemed almost to affect gravity, to

pretend grief, she watched his still, handsome face, imagining it again in its distortion. But she saw the nose was rather thick, rather Russian, under its transparent skin, she remembered the teeth under the carefully cut moustache were small and sharp and spaced. She could see him, in all his elegant demeanour, bestial, almost corrupt. And she was frightened. She never forgot to look for the bestial, frightening side of him, after this.

He said "Good-bye" to his mother and went away at once. Ursula almost shrank from his kiss, now. She wanted it, nevertheless, and the little revulsion as well.

At the funeral, and after the funeral, Will Brangwen was madly in love with his wife. The death had shaken him. But death and all seemed to gather in him into a mad, over-whelming passion for his wife. She seemed so strange and winsome. He was almost beside himself with desire for her.

And she took him, she seemed ready for him, she wanted him.

The grandmother stayed a while at the Yew Cottage, till the Marsh was restored. Then she returned to her own rooms, quiet, and it seemed, wanting nothing. Fred threw himself into the work of restoring the farm. That his father was killed there, seemed to make it only the more intimate and the more inevitably his own place.

There was a saying that the Brangwens always died a violent death. To them all, except perhaps Tom, it seemed almost natural. Yet Fred went about obstinate, his heart fixed. He could never forgive the Unknown this murder of his father.

After the death of the father, the Marsh was very quiet. Mrs. Brangwen was unsettled. She could not sit all the evening peacefully, as she could before, and during the day she was always rising to her feet and hesitating, as if she must go somewhere, and were not quite sure whither.

She was seen loitering about the garden, in her little woollen jacket. She was often driven out in the gig, sitting beside her son and watching the countryside or the streets of the town, with a childish, candid, uncanny face, as if it all were strange to her.

The children, Ursula and Gudrun and Theresa went by the garden gate on their way to school. The grandmother would have them call in each time they passed, she would have them come to the Marsh for dinner. She wanted children about her.

Of her sons, she was almost afraid. She could see the sombre passion and desire and dissatisfaction in them, and she wanted not to see it any more. Even Fred, with his blue eyes and his heavy jaw, troubled her. There was no peace. He wanted something, he wanted love, passion, and he could not find them. But

why must he trouble her? Why must he come to her with his seething and suffering and dissatisfactions? She was too old.

Tom was more restrained, reserved. He kept his body very still. But he troubled her even more. She could not but see the black depths of disintegration in his eyes, the sudden glance upon her, as if she could save him, as if he would reveal himself.

And how could age save youth? Youth must go to youth. Always the storm! Could she not lie in peace, these years, in the quiet, apart from life? No, always the swell must heave upon her and break against the barriers. Always she must be embroiled in the seethe and rage and passion, endless, endless, going on for ever. And she wanted to draw away. She wanted at last her own innocence and peace. She did not want her sons to force upon her any more the old brutal story of desire and offerings and deep, deep-hidden rage of unsatisfied men against women. She wanted to be beyond it all, to know the peace and innocence of age.

She had never been a woman to work much. So that now she would stand often at the garden-gate, watching the scant world go by. And the sight of children pleased her, made her happy. She had usually an apple or a few sweets in her pocket. She liked children to smile at her.

She never went to her husband's grave. She spoke of him simply, as if he were alive. Sometimes the tears would run down her face, in helpless sadness. Then she recovered, and was herself again, happy.

On wet days, she stayed in bed. Her bedroom was her city of refuge, where she could lie down and muse and muse. Sometimes Fred would read to her. But that did not mean much. She had so many dreams to dream over, such an unsifted store. She wanted time.

Her chief friend at this period was Ursula. The little girl and the musing, fragile woman of sixty seemed to understand the same language. At Cossethay all was activity and passion, everything moved upon poles of passion. Then there were four children younger than Ursula, a throng of babies, all the time many lives beating against each other.

So that for the eldest child, the peace of the grandmother's bedroom was exquisite. Here Ursula came as to a hushed, paradisaal land, here her own existence became simple and exquisite to her as if she were a flower.

Always on Saturdays she came down to the Marsh, and always clutching a little offering, either a little mat made of strips of coloured, woven paper, or a tiny basket made in the kindergarten lesson, or a little crayon drawing of a bird.

When she appeared in the doorway, Tilly, ancient but still in authority, would crane her skinny neck to see who it was.

"Oh, it's you, is it?" she said. "I thought we should be seein' you. My word,

that's a bobby-dazzlin' posy you've brought!"

It was curious how Tilly preserved the spirit of Tom Brangwen, who was dead, in the Marsh. Ursula always connected her with her grandfather.

This day the child had brought a tight little nosegay of pinks, white ones, with a rim of pink ones. She was very proud of it, and very shy because of her pride.

"Your gran'mother's in her bed. Wipe your shoes well if you're goin' up, and don't go burstin' in on her like a skyrocket. My word, but that's a fine posy! Did you do it all by yourself, an' all?"

Tilly stealthily ushered her into the bedroom. The child entered with a strange, dragging hesitation characteristic of her when she was moved. Her grandmother was sitting up in bed, wearing a little grey woollen jacket.

The child hesitated in silence near the bed, clutching the nosegay in front of her. Her childish eyes were shining. The grandmother's grey eyes shone with a similar light.

"How pretty!" she said. "How pretty you have made them! What a darling little bunch."

Ursula, glowing, thrust them into her grandmother's hand, saying, "I made them you."

"That is how the peasants tied them at home," said the grandmother, pushing the pinks with her fingers, and smelling them. "Just such tight little bunches! And they make wreaths for their hair-they weave the stalks. Then they go round with wreaths in their hair, and wearing their best aprons."

Ursula immediately imagined herself in this story-land.

"Did you used to have a wreath in your hair, grandmother?"

"When I was a little girl, I had golden hair, something like Katie's. Then I used to have a wreath of little blue flowers, oh, so blue, that come when the snow is gone. Andrey, the coachman, used to bring me the very first."

They talked, and then Tilly brought the tea-tray, set for two. Ursula had a special green and gold cup kept for herself at the Marsh. There was thin bread and butter, and cress for tea. It was all special and wonderful. She ate very daintily, with little fastidious bites.

"Why do you have two wedding-rings, grandmother?-Must you?" asked the child, noticing her grandmother's ivory coloured hand with blue veins, above the tray.

"If I had two husbands, child."

Ursula pondered a moment.

"Then you must wear both rings together?"

"Yes."

"Which was my grandfather's ring?"

The woman hesitated.

“This grandfather whom you knew? This was his ring, the red one. The yellow one was your other grandfather’s whom you never knew.”

Ursula looked interestedly at the two rings on the proffered finger.

“Where did he buy it you?” she asked.

“This one? In Warsaw, I think.”

“You didn’t know my own grandfather then?”

“Not this grandfather.”

Ursula pondered this fascinating intelligence.

“Did he have white whiskers as well?”

“No, his beard was dark. You have his brows, I think.”

Ursula ceased and became self-conscious. She at once identified herself with her Polish grandfather.

“And did he have brown eyes?”

“Yes, dark eyes. He was a clever man, as quick as a lion. He was never still.”

Lydia still resented Lensky. When she thought of him, she was always younger than he, she was always twenty, or twenty-five, and under his domination. He incorporated her in his ideas as if she were not a person herself, as if she were just his aide-de-camp, or part of his baggage, or one among his surgical appliances. She still resented it. And he was always only thirty: he had died when he was thirty-four. She did not feel sorry for him. He was older than she. Yet she still ached in the thought of those days.

“Did you like my first grandfather best?” asked Ursula.

“I liked them both,” said the grandmother.

And, thinking, she became again Lensky’s girl-bride. He was of good family, of better family even than her own, for she was half German. She was a young girl in a house of insecure fortune. And he, an intellectual, a clever surgeon and physician, had loved her. How she had looked up to him! She remembered her first transports when he talked to her, the important young man with the severe black beard. He had seemed so wonderful, such an authority. After her own lax household, his gravity and confident, hard authority seemed almost God-like to her. For she had never known it in her life, all her surroundings had been loose, lax, disordered, a welter.

“Miss Lydia, will you marry me?” he had said to her in German, in his grave, yet tremulous voice. She had been afraid of his dark eyes upon her. They did not see her, they were fixed upon her. And he was hard, confident. She thrilled with the excitement of it, and accepted. During the courtship, his kisses were a wonder to her. She always thought about them, and wondered over them. She never wanted to kiss him back. In her idea, the man kissed, and the woman

examined in her soul the kisses she had received.

She had never quite recovered from her prostration of the first days, or nights, of marriage. He had taken her to Vienna, and she was utterly alone with him, utterly alone in another world, everything, everything foreign, even he foreign to her. Then came the real marriage, passion came to her, and she became his slave, he was her lord, her lord. She was the girl-bride, the slave, she kissed his feet, she had thought it an honour to touch his body, to unfasten his boots. For two years, she had gone on as his slave, crouching at his feet, embracing his knees.

Children had come, he had followed his ideas. She was there for him, just to keep him in condition. She was to him one of the baser or material conditions necessary for his welfare in prosecuting his ideas, of nationalism, of liberty, of science.

But gradually, at twenty-three, twenty-four, she began to realise that she too might consider these ideas. By his acceptance of her self-subordination, he exhausted the feeling in her. There were those of his associates who would discuss the ideas with her, though he did not wish to do so himself. She adventured into the minds of other men. His, then, was not the only male mind! She did not exist, then, just as his attribute! She began to perceive the attention of other men. An excitement came over her. She remembered now the men who had paid her court, when she was married, in Warsaw.

Then the rebellion broke out, and she was inspired too. She would go as a nurse at her husband's side. He worked like a lion, he wore his life out. And she followed him helplessly. But she disbelieved in him. He was so separate, he ignored so much. He counted too much on himself. His work, his ideas, -did nothing else matter?

Then the children were dead, and for her, everything became remote. He became remote. She saw him, she saw him go white when he heard the news, then frown, as if he thought, "Why have they died now, when I have no time to grieve?"

"He has no time to grieve," she had said, in her remote, awful soul. "He has no time. It is so important, what he does! He is then so self-important, this half-frenzied man! Nothing matters, but this work of rebellion! He has not time to grieve, nor to think of his children! He had not time even to beget them, really."

She had let him go on alone. But, in the chaos, she had worked by his side again. And out of the chaos, she had fled with him to London.

He was a broken, cold man. He had no affection for her, nor for anyone. He had failed in his work, so everything had failed. He stiffened, and died.

She could not subscribe. He had failed, everything had failed, yet behind the failure was the unyielding passion of life. The individual effort might fail, but

not the human joy. She belonged to the human joy.

He died and went his way, but not before there was another child. And this little Ursula was his grandchild. She was glad of it. For she still honoured him, though he had been mistaken.

She, Lydia Brangwen, was sorry for him now. He was dead—he had scarcely lived. He had never known her. He had lain with her, but he had never known her. He had never received what she could give him. He had gone away from her empty. So, he had never lived. So, he had died and passed away. Yet there had been strength and power in him.

She could scarcely forgive him that he had never lived. If it were not for Anna, and for this little Ursula, who had his brows, there would be no more left of him than of a broken vessel thrown away, and just remembered.

Tom Brangwen had served her. He had come to her, and taken from her. He had died and gone his way into death. But he had made himself immortal in his knowledge with her. So she had her place here, in life, and in immortality. For he had taken his knowledge of her into death, so that she had her place in death. “In my father’s house are many mansions.”

She loved both her husbands. To one she had been a naked little girl-bride, running to serve him. The other she loved out of fulfilment, because he was good and had given her being, because he had served her honourably, and become her man, one with her.

She was established in this stretch of life, she had come to herself. During her first marriage, she had not existed, except through him, he was the substance and she the shadow running at his feet. She was very glad she had come to her own self. She was grateful to Brangwen. She reached out to him in gratitude, into death.

In her heart she felt a vague tenderness and pity for her first husband, who had been her lord. He was so wrong when he died. She could not bear it, that he had never lived, never really become himself. And he had been her lord! Strange, it all had been! Why had he been her lord? He seemed now so far off, so without bearing on her.

“Which did you, grandmother?”

“What?”

“Like best.”

“I liked them both. I married the first when I was quite a girl. Then I loved your grandfather when I was a woman. There is a difference.”

They were silent for a time.

“Did you cry when my first grandfather died?” the child asked.

Lydia Brangwen rocked herself on the bed, thinking aloud.

“When we came to England, he hardly ever spoke, he was too much concerned to take any notice of anybody. He grew thinner and thinner, till his cheeks were hollow and his mouth stuck out. He wasn’t handsome any more. I knew he couldn’t bear being beaten, I thought everything was lost in the world. Only I had your mother a baby, it was no use my dying.

“He looked at me with his black eyes, almost as if he hated me, when he was ill, and said, ‘It only wanted this. It only wanted that I should leave you and a young child to starve in this London.’ I told him we should not starve. But I was young, and foolish, and frightened, which he knew.

“He was bitter, and he never gave way. He lay beating his brains, to see what he could do. ‘I don’t know what you will do,’ he said. ‘I am no good, I am a failure from beginning to end. I cannot even provide for my wife and child!’

“But you see, it was not for him to provide for us. My life went on, though his stopped, and I married your grandfather.

“I ought to have known, I ought to have been able to say to him: ‘Don’t be so bitter, don’t die because this has failed. You are not the beginning and the end.’ But I was too young, he had never let me become myself, I thought he was truly the beginning and the end. So I let him take all upon himself. Yet all did not depend on him. Life must go on, and I must marry your grandfather, and have your Uncle Tom, and your Uncle Fred. We cannot take so much upon ourselves.”

The child’s heart beat fast as she listened to these things. She could not understand, but she seemed to feel far-off things. It gave her a deep, joyous thrill, to know she hailed from far off, from Poland, and that dark-bearded impressive man. Strange, her antecedents were, and she felt fate on either side of her terrible.

Almost every day, Ursula saw her grandmother, and every time, they talked together. Till the grandmother’s sayings and stories, told in the complete hush of the Marsh bedroom, accumulated with mystic significance, and became a sort of Bible to the child.

And Ursula asked her deepest childish questions of her grandmother.

“Will somebody love me, grandmother?”

“Many people love you, child. We all love you.”

“But when I am grown up, will somebody love me?”

“Yes, some man will love you, child, because it’s your nature. And I hope it will be somebody who will love you for what you are, and not for what he wants of you. But we have a right to what we want.”

Ursula was frightened, hearing these things. Her heart sank, she felt she had no ground under her feet. She clung to her grandmother. Here was peace and

security. Here, from her grandmother's peaceful room, the door opened on to the greater space, the past, which was so big, that all it contained seemed tiny, loves and births and deaths, tiny units and features within a vast horizon. That was a great relief, to know the tiny importance of the individual, within the great past.

CHAPTER 10

The Widening Circle

It was very burdensome to Ursula, that she was the eldest of the family. By the time she was eleven, she had to take to school Gudrun and Theresa and Catherine. The boy, William, always called Billy, so that he should not be confused with his father, was a lovable, rather delicate child of three, so he stayed at home as yet. There was another baby girl, called Cassandra.

The children went for a time to the little church school just near the Marsh. It was the only place within reach, and being so small, Mrs. Brangwen felt safe in sending her children there, though the village boys did nickname Ursula "Urtler", and Gudrun "Good-runner", and Theresa "Tea-pot".

Gudrun and Ursula were co-mates. The second child, with her long, sleepy body and her endless chain of fancies, would have nothing to do with realities. She was not for them, she was for her own fancies. Ursula was the one for realities. So Gudrun left all such to her elder sister, and trusted in her implicitly, indifferently. Ursula had a great tenderness for her co-mate sister.

It was no good trying to make Gudrun responsible. She floated along like a fish in the sea, perfect within the medium of her own difference and being. Other existence did not trouble her. Only she believed in Ursula, and trusted to Ursula.

The eldest child was very much fretted by her responsibility for the other young ones. Especially Theresa, a sturdy, bold-eyed thing, had a faculty for warfare.

"Our Ursula, Billy Pillins has lugged my hair."

"What did you say to him?"

"I said nothing."

Then the Brangwen girls were in for a feud with the Pillinses, or Phillipses.

"You won't pull my hair again, Billy Pillins," said Theresa, walking with her sisters, and looking superbly at the freckled, red-haired boy.

"Why shan't I?" retorted Billy Pillins.

"You won't because you dursn't," said the tiresome Theresa.

"You come here, then, Tea-pot, an' see if I dursna."

Up marched Tea-pot, and immediately Billy Pillins lugged her black, snaky locks. In a rage she flew at him. Immediately in rushed Ursula and Gudrun, and little Katie, in clashed the other Phillipses, Clem and Walter, and Eddie

Anthony. Then there was a fray. The Brangwen girls were well-grown and stronger than many boys. But for pinafores and long hair, they would have carried easy victories. They went home, however, with hair lugged and pinafores torn. It was a joy to the Phillips boys to rip the pinafores of the Brangwen girls.

Then there was an outcry. Mrs. Brangwen would not have it; no, she would not. All her innate dignity and standoffishness rose up. Then there was the vicar lecturing the school. "It was a sad thing that the boys of Cossethay could not behave more like gentlemen to the girls of Cossethay. Indeed, what kind of boy was it that should set upon a girl, and kick her, and beat her, and tear her pinafore? That boy deserved severe castigation, and the name of coward, for no boy who was not a coward-etc., etc."

Meanwhile much hang-dog fury in the Pillinses' hearts, much virtue in the Brangwen girls', particularly in Theresa's. And the feud continued, with periods of extraordinary amity, when Ursula was Clem Phillips's sweetheart, and Gudrun was Walter's, and Theresa was Billy's, and even the tiny Katie had to be Eddie Ant'ny's sweetheart. There was the closest union. At every possible moment the little gang of Brangwens and Phillipses flew together. Yet neither Ursula nor Gudrun would have any real intimacy with the Phillips boys. It was a sort of fiction to them, this alliance and this dubbing of sweethearts.

Again Mrs. Brangwen rose up.

"Ursula, I will not have you raking the roads with lads, so I tell you. Now stop it, and the rest will stop it."

How Ursula hated always to represent the little Brangwen club. She could never be herself, no, she was always Ursula-Gudrun-Theresa-Catherine-and later even Billy was added on to her. Moreover, she did not want the Phillipses either. She was out of taste with them.

However, the Brangwen-Pillins coalition readily broke down, owing to the unfair superiority of the Brangwens. The Brangwens were rich. They had free access to the Marsh Farm. The school teachers were almost respectful to the girls, the vicar spoke to them on equal terms. The Brangwen girls presumed, they tossed their heads.

"You're not ivrybody, Urtler Brangwin, ugly-mug," said Clem Phillips, his face going very red.

"I'm better than you, for all that," retorted Urtler.

"You think you are-wi' a face like that-Ugly Mug,-Urtler Brangwin," he began to jeer, trying to set all the others in cry against her. Then there was hostility again. How she hated their jeering. She became cold against the Phillipses. Ursula was very proud in her family. The Brangwen girls had all a curious blind dignity, even a kind of nobility in their bearing. By some result of

breed and upbringing, they seemed to rush along their own lives without caring that they existed to other people. Never from the start did it occur to Ursula that other people might hold a low opinion of her. She thought that whosoever knew her, knew she was enough and accepted her as such. She thought it was a world of people like herself. She suffered bitterly if she were forced to have a low opinion of any person, and she never forgave that person.

This was maddening to many little people. All their lives, the Brangwens were meeting folk who tried to pull them down to make them seem little. Curiously, the mother was aware of what would happen, and was always ready to give her children the advantage of the move.

When Ursula was twelve, and the common school and the companionship of the village children, niggardly and begrudging, was beginning to affect her, Anna sent her with Gudrun to the Grammar School in Nottingham. This was a great release for Ursula. She had a passionate craving to escape from the belittling circumstances of life, the little jealousies, the little differences, the little meannesses. It was a torture to her that the Phillipses were poorer and meaner than herself, that they used mean little reservations, took petty little advantages. She wanted to be with her equals: but not by diminishing herself. She did want Clem Phillips to be her equal. But by some puzzling, painful fate or other, when he was really there with her, he produced in her a tight feeling in the head. She wanted to beat her forehead, to escape.

Then she found that the way to escape was easy. One departed from the whole circumstance. One went away to the Grammar School, and left the little school, the meagre teachers, the Phillipses whom she had tried to love but who had made her fail, and whom she could not forgive. She had an instinctive fear of petty people, as a deer is afraid of dogs. Because she was blind, she could not calculate nor estimate people. She must think that everybody was just like herself.

She measured by the standard of her own people: her father and mother, her grandmother, her uncles. Her beloved father, so utterly simple in his demeanour, yet with his strong, dark soul fixed like a root in unexpressed depths that fascinated and terrified her: her mother, so strangely free of all money and convention and fear, entirely indifferent to the world, standing by herself, without connection: her grandmother, who had come from so far and was centred in so wide an horizon: people must come up to these standards before they could be Ursula's people.

So even as a girl of twelve she was glad to burst the narrow boundary of Cossethay, where only limited people lived. Outside, was all vastness, and a throng of real, proud people whom she would love.

Going to school by train, she must leave home at a quarter to eight in the morning, and she did not arrive again till half-past five at evening. Of this she was glad, for the house was small and overful. It was a storm of movement, whence there had been no escape. She hated so much being in charge.

The house was a storm of movement. The children were healthy and turbulent, the mother only wanted their animal well-being. To Ursula, as she grew a little older, it became a nightmare. When she saw, later, a Rubens picture with storms of naked babies, and found this was called "Fecundity", she shuddered, and the world became abhorrent to her. She knew as a child what it was to live amidst storms of babies, in the heat and swelter of fecundity. And as a child, she was against her mother, passionately against her mother, she craved for some spirituality and stateliness.

In bad weather, home was a bedlam. Children dashed in and out of the rain, to the puddles under the dismal yew trees, across the wet flagstones of the kitchen, whilst the cleaning-woman grumbled and scolded; children were swarming on the sofa, children were kicking the piano in the parlour, to make it sound like a beehive, children were rolling on the hearthrug, legs in air, pulling a book in two between them, children, fiendish, ubiquitous, were stealing upstairs to find out where our Ursula was, whispering at bedroom doors, hanging on the latch, calling mysteriously, "Ursula! Ursula!" to the girl who had locked herself in to read. And it was hopeless. The locked door excited their sense of mystery, she had to open to dispel the lure. These children hung on to her with round-eyed excited questions.

The mother flourished amid all this.

"Better have them noisy than ill," she said.

But the growing girls, in turn, suffered bitterly. Ursula was just coming to the stage when Andersen and Grimm were being left behind for the "Idylls of the King" and romantic love-stories.

"Elaine the fair Elaine the lovable, Elaine the lily maid of Astolat, High in her chamber in a tower to the east Guarded the sacred shield of Launcelot."

How she loved it! How she leaned in her bedroom window with her black, rough hair on her shoulders, and her warm face all rapt, and gazed across at the churchyard and the little church, which was a turreted castle, whence Launcelot would ride just now, would wave to her as he rode by, his scarlet cloak passing behind the dark yew trees and between the open space: whilst she, ah, she, would remain the lonely maid high up and isolated in the tower, polishing the terrible shield, weaving it a covering with a true device, and waiting, waiting, always remote and high.

At which point there would be a faint scuffle on the stairs, a light-pitched

whispering outside the door, and a creaking of the latch: then Billy, excited, whispering:

“It’s locked-it’s locked.”

Then the knocking, kicking at the door with childish knees, and the urgent, childish:

“Ursula-our Ursula? Ursula? Eh, our Ursula?”

No reply.

“Ursula! Eh-our Ursula?” the name was shouted now Still no answer.

“Mother, she won’t answer,” came the yell. “She’s dead.”

“Go away-I’m not dead. What do you want?” came the angry voice of the girl.

“Open the door, our Ursula,” came the complaining cry. It was all over. She must open the door. She heard the screech of the bucket downstairs dragged across the flagstones as the woman washed the kitchen floor. And the children were prowling in the bedroom, asking:

“What were you doing? What had you locked the door for?” Then she discovered the key of the parish room, and betook herself there, and sat on some sacks with her books. There began another dream.

She was the only daughter of the old lord, she was gifted with magic. Day followed day of rapt silence, whilst she wandered ghost-like in the hushed, ancient mansion, or flitted along the sleeping terraces.

Here a grave grief attacked her: that her hair was dark. She must have fair hair and a white skin. She was rather bitter about her black mane.

Never mind, she would dye it when she grew up, or bleach it in the sun, till it was bleached fair. Meanwhile she wore a fair white coif of pure Venetian lace.

She flitted silently along the terraces, where jewelled lizards basked upon the stone, and did not move when her shadow fell upon them. In the utter stillness she heard the tinkle of the fountain, and smelled the roses whose blossoms hung rich and motionless. So she drifted, drifted on the wistful feet of beauty, past the water and the swans, to the noble park, where, underneath a great oak, a doe all dappled lay with her four fine feet together, her fawn nestling sun-coloured beside her.

Oh, and this doe was her familiar. It would talk to her, because she was a magician, it would tell her stories as if the sunshine spoke.

Then one day, she left the door of the parish room unlocked, careless and unheeding as she always was; the children found their way in, Katie cut her finger and howled, Billy hacked notches in the fine chisels, and did much damage. There was a great commotion.

The crossness of the mother was soon finished. Ursula locked up the room again, and considered all was over. Then her father came in with the notched

tools, his forehead knotted.

“Who the deuce opened the door?” he cried in anger.

“It was Ursula who opened the door,” said her mother. He had a duster in his hand. He turned and flapped the cloth hard across the girl’s face. The cloth stung, for a moment the girl was as if stunned. Then she remained motionless, her face closed and stubborn. But her heart was blazing. In spite of herself the tears surged higher, in spite of her they surged higher.

In spite of her, her face broke, she made a curious gulping grimace, and the tears were falling. So she went away, desolate. But her blazing heart was fierce and unyielding. He watched her go, and a pleasurable pain filled him, a sense of triumph and easy power, followed immediately by acute pity.

“I’m sure that was unnecessary-to hit the girl across the face,” said the mother coldly.

“A flip with the duster won’t hurt her,” he said.

“Nor will it do her any good.”

For days, for weeks, Ursula’s heart burned from this rebuff. She felt so cruelly vulnerable. Did he not know how vulnerable she was, how exposed and wincing? He, of all people, knew. And he wanted to do this to her. He wanted to hurt her right through her closest sensitiveness, he wanted to treat her with shame, to maim her with insult.

Her heart burnt in isolation, like a watchfire lighted. She did not forget, she did not forget, she never forgot. When she returned to her love for her father, the seed of mistrust and defiance burned unquenched, though covered up far from sight. She no longer belonged to him unquestioned. Slowly, slowly, the fire of mistrust and defiance burned in her, burned away her connection with him.

She ran a good deal alone, having a passion for all moving, active things. She loved the little brooks. Wherever she found a little running water, she was happy. It seemed to make her run and sing in spirit along with it. She could sit for hours by a brook or stream, on the roots of the alders, and watch the water hasten dancing over the stones, or among the twigs of a fallen branch. Sometimes, little fish vanished before they had become real, like hallucinations, sometimes wagtails ran by the water’s brink, sometimes other little birds came to drink. She saw a kingfisher darting blue-and then she was very happy. The kingfisher was the key to the magic world: he was witness of the border of enchantment.

But she must move out of the intricately woven illusion of her life: the illusion of a father whose life was an Odyssey in an outer world; the illusion of her grandmother, of realities so shadowy and far-off that they became as mystic symbols:-peasant-girls with wreaths of blue flowers in their hair, the sledges and

the depths of winter; the dark-bearded young grandfather, marriage and war and death; then the multitude of illusions concerning herself, how she was truly a princess of Poland, how in England she was under a spell, she was not really this Ursula Brangwen; then the mirage of her reading: out of the multicoloured illusion of this her life, she must move on, to the Grammar School in Nottingham.

She was shy, and she suffered. For one thing, she bit her nails, and had a cruel consciousness in her finger-tips, a shame, an exposure. Out of all proportion, this shame haunted her. She spent hours of torture, conjuring how she might keep her gloves on: if she might say her hands were scalded, if she might seem to forget to take off her gloves.

For she was going to inherit her own estate, when she went to the High School. There, each girl was a lady. There, she was going to walk among free souls, her co-mates and her equals, and all petty things would be put away. Ah, if only she did not bite her nails! If only she had not this blemish! She wanted so much to be perfect-without spot or blemish, living the high, noble life.

It was a grief to her that her father made such a poor introduction. He was brief as ever, like a boy saying his errand, and his clothes looked ill-fitting and casual. Whereas Ursula would have liked robes and a ceremonial of introduction to this, her new estate.

She made a new illusion of school. Miss Grey, the headmistress, had a certain silvery, school-mistressy beauty of character. The school itself had been a gentleman's house. Dark, sombre lawns separated it from the dark, select avenue. But its rooms were large and of good appearance, and from the back, one looked over lawns and shrubbery, over the trees and the grassy slope of the Arboretum, to the town which heaped the hollow with its roofs and cupolas and its shadows.

So Ursula seated herself upon the hill of learning, looking down on the smoke and confusion and the manufacturing, engrossed activity of the town. She was happy. Up here, in the Grammar School, she fancied the air was finer, beyond the factory smoke. She wanted to learn Latin and Greek and French and mathematics. She trembled like a postulant when she wrote the Greek alphabet for the first time.

She was upon another hill-slope, whose summit she had not scaled. There was always the marvellous eagerness in her heart, to climb and to see beyond. A Latin verb was virgin soil to her: she sniffed a new odour in it; it meant something, though she did not know what it meant. But she gathered it up: it was significant. When she knew that:

$$x^2 - y^2 = (x + y)(x - y)$$

then she felt that she had grasped something, that she was liberated into an intoxicating air, rare and unconditioned. And she was very glad as she wrote her French exercise:

“J’AI DONNE LE PAIN A MON PETIT FRERE.”

In all these things there was the sound of a bugle to her heart, exhilarating, summoning her to perfect places. She never forgot her brown “Longman’s First French Grammar”, nor her “Via Latina” with its red edges, nor her little grey Algebra book. There was always a magic in them.

At learning she was quick, intelligent, instinctive, but she was not “thorough”. If a thing did not come to her instinctively, she could not learn it. And then, her mad rage of loathing for all lessons, her bitter contempt of all teachers and schoolmistresses, her recoil to a fierce, animal arrogance made her detestable.

She was a free, unabateable animal, she declared in her revolts: there was no law for her, nor any rule. She existed for herself alone. Then ensued a long struggle with everybody, in which she broke down at last, when she had run the full length of her resistance, and sobbed her heart out, desolate; and afterwards, in a chastened, washed-out, bodiless state, she received the understanding that would not come before, and went her way sadder and wiser.

Ursula and Gudrun went to school together. Gudrun was a shy, quiet, wild creature, a thin slip of a thing hanging back from notice or twisting past to disappear into her own world again. She seemed to avoid all contact, instinctively, and pursued her own intent way, pursuing half-formed fancies that had no relation to anyone else.

She was not clever at all. She thought Ursula clever enough for two. Ursula understood, so why should she, Gudrun, bother herself? The younger girl lived her religious, responsible life in her sister, by proxy. For herself, she was indifferent and intent as a wild animal, and as irresponsible.

When she found herself at the bottom of the class, she laughed, lazily, and was content, saying she was safe now. She did not mind her father’s chagrin nor her mother’s tinge of mortification.

“What do I pay for you to go to Nottingham for?” her father asked, exasperated.

“Well, Dad, you know you needn’t pay for me,” she replied, nonchalant. “I’m ready to stop at home.”

She was happy at home, Ursula was not. Slim and unwilling abroad, Gudrun was easy in her own house as a wild thing in its lair. Whereas Ursula, attentive and keen abroad, at home was reluctant, uneasy, unwilling to be herself, or unable.

Nevertheless Sunday remained the maximum day of the week for both. Ursula

turned passionately to it, to the sense of eternal security it gave. She suffered anguish of fears during the week-days, for she felt strong powers that would not recognise her. There was upon her always a fear and a dislike of authority. She felt she could always do as she wanted if she managed to avoid a battle with Authority and the authorised Powers. But if she gave herself away, she would be lost, destroyed. There was always the menace against her.

This strange sense of cruelty and ugliness always imminent, ready to seize hold upon her this feeling of the grudging power of the mob lying in wait for her, who was the exception, formed one of the deepest influences of her life. Wherever she was, at school, among friends, in the street, in the train, she instinctively abated herself, made herself smaller, feigned to be less than she was, for fear that her undiscovered self should be seen, pounced upon, attacked by brutish resentment of the commonplace, the average Self.

She was fairly safe at school, now. She knew how to take her place there, and how much of herself to reserve. But she was free only on Sundays. When she was but a girl of fourteen, she began to feel a resentment growing against her in her own home. She knew she was the disturbing influence there. But as yet, on Sundays, she was free, really free, free to be herself, without fear or misgiving.

Even at its stormiest, Sunday was a blessed day. Ursula woke to it with a feeling of immense relief. She wondered why her heart was so light. Then she remembered it was Sunday. A gladness seemed to burst out around her, a feeling of great freedom. The whole world was for twenty-four hours revoked, put back. Only the Sunday world existed.

She loved the very confusion of the household. It was lucky if the children slept till seven o'clock. Usually, soon after six, a chirp was heard, a voice, an excited chirrup began, announcing the creation of a new day, there was a thudding of quick little feet, and the children were up and about, scampering in their shirts, with pink legs and glistening, flossy hair all clean from the Saturday's night bathing, their souls excited by their bodies' cleanliness.

As the house began to teem with rushing, half-naked clean children, one of the parents rose, either the mother, easy and slatternly, with her thick, dark hair loosely coiled and slipping over one ear, or the father, warm and comfortable, with ruffled black hair and shirt unbuttoned at the neck.

Then the girls upstairs heard the continual:

"Now then, Billy, what are you up to?" in the father's strong, vibrating voice: or the mother's dignified:

"I have said, Cassie, I will not have it."

It was amazing how the father's voice could ring out like a gong, without his being in the least moved, and how the mother could speak like a queen holding

an audience, though her blouse was sticking out all round and her hair was not fastened up and the children were yelling a pandemonium.

Gradually breakfast was produced, and the elder girls came down into the babel, whilst half-naked children flitted round like the wrong ends of cherubs, as Gudrun said, watching the bare little legs and the chubby tails appearing and disappearing.

Gradually the young ones were captured, and nightdresses finally removed, ready for the clean Sunday shirt. But before the Sunday shirt was slipped over the fleecy head, away darted the naked body, to wallow in the sheepskin which formed the parlour rug, whilst the mother walked after, protesting sharply, holding the shirt like a noose, and the father's bronze voice rang out, and the naked child wallowing on its back in the deep sheepskin announced gleefully:

"I'm bading in the sea, mother."

"Why should I walk after you with your shirt?" said the mother. "Get up now."

"I'm bading in the sea, mother," repeated the wallowing, naked figure.

"We say bathing, not bading," said the mother, with her strange, indifferent dignity. "I am waiting here with your shirt."

At length shirts were on, and stockings were paired, and little trousers buttoned and little petticoats tied behind. The besetting cowardice of the family was its shirking of the garter question.

"Where are your garters, Cassie?"

"I don't know."

"Well, look for them."

But not one of the elder Brangwens would really face the situation. After Cassie had grovelled under all the furniture and blacked up all her Sunday cleanliness, to the infinite grief of everybody, the garter was forgotten in the new washing of the young face and hands.

Later, Ursula would be indignant to see Miss Cassie marching into church from Sunday school with her stocking sluthered down to her ankle, and a grubby knee showing.

"It's disgraceful!" cried Ursula at dinner. "People will think we're pigs, and the children are never washed."

"Never mind what people think," said the mother superbly. "I see that the child is bathed properly, and if I satisfy myself I satisfy everybody. She can't keep her stocking up and no garter, and it isn't the child's fault she was let to go without one."

The garter trouble continued in varying degrees, but till each child wore long skirts or long trousers, it was not removed.

On this day of decorum, the Brangwen family went to church by the high-road, making a detour outside all the garden-hedge, rather than climb the wall into the churchyard. There was no law of this, from the parents. The children themselves were the wardens of the Sabbath decency, very jealous and instant with each other.

It came to be, gradually, that after church on Sundays the house was really something of a sanctuary, with peace breathing like a strange bird alighted in the rooms. Indoors, only reading and tale-telling and quiet pursuits, such as drawing, were allowed. Out of doors, all playing was to be carried on unobtrusively. If there were noise, yelling or shouting, then some fierce spirit woke up in the father and the elder children, so that the younger were subdued, afraid of being excommunicated.

The children themselves preserved the Sabbath. If Ursula in her vanity sang:

“Il était un’ bergère Et ron-ron-ron petit patapon,”

Theresa was sure to cry:

“That’s not a Sunday song, our Ursula.”

“You don’t know,” replied Ursula, superior. Nevertheless, she wavered. And her song faded down before she came to the end.

Because, though she did not know it, her Sunday was very precious to her. She found herself in a strange, undefined place, where her spirit could wander in dreams, unassailed.

The white-robed spirit of Christ passed between olive trees. It was a vision, not a reality. And she herself partook of the visionary being. There was the voice in the night calling, “Samuel, Samuel!” And still the voice called in the night. But not this night, nor last night, but in the unfathomed night of Sunday, of the Sabbath silence.

There was Sin, the serpent, in whom was also wisdom. There was Judas with the money and the kiss.

But there was no actual Sin. If Ursula slapped Theresa across the face, even on a Sunday, that was not Sin, the everlasting. It was misbehaviour. If Billy played truant from Sunday school, he was bad, he was wicked, but he was not a Sinner.

Sin was absolute and everlasting: wickedness and badness were temporary and relative. When Billy, catching up the local jargon, called Cassie a “sinner”, everybody detested him. Yet when there came to the Marsh a flippetty-floppetty foxhound puppy, he was mischievously christened “Sinner”.

The Brangwens shrank from applying their religion to their own immediate actions. They wanted the sense of the eternal and immortal, not a list of rules for everyday conduct. Therefore they were badly-behaved children, headstrong and arrogant, though their feelings were generous. They had, moreover-intolerable to

their ordinary neighbours—a proud gesture, that did not fit with the jealous idea of the democratic Christian. So that they were always extraordinary, outside of the ordinary.

How bitterly Ursula resented her first acquaintance with evangelical teachings. She got a peculiar thrill from the application of salvation to her own personal case. “Jesus died for me, He suffered for me.” There was a pride and a thrill in it, followed almost immediately by a sense of dreariness. Jesus with holes in His hands and feet: it was distasteful to her. The shadowy Jesus with the Stigmata: that was her own vision. But Jesus the actual man, talking with teeth and lips, telling one to put one’s finger into His wounds, like a villager gloating in his sores, repelled her. She was enemy of those who insisted on the humanity of Christ. If He were just a man, living in ordinary human life, then she was indifferent.

But it was the jealousy of vulgar people which must insist on the humanity of Christ. It was the vulgar mind which would allow nothing extra-human, nothing beyond itself to exist. It was the dirty, desecrating hands of the revivalists which wanted to drag Jesus into this everyday life, to dress Jesus up in trousers and frock-coat, to compel Him to a vulgar equality of footing. It was the impudent suburban soul which would ask, “What would Jesus do, if he were in my shoes?”

Against all this, the Brangwens stood at bay. If any one, it was the mother who was caught by, or who was most careless of the vulgar clamour. She would have nothing extra-human. She never really subscribed, all her life, to Brangwen’s mystical passion.

But Ursula was with her father. As she became adolescent, thirteen, fourteen, she set more and more against her mother’s practical indifference. To Ursula, there was something callous, almost wicked in her mother’s attitude. What did Anna Brangwen, in these years, care for God or Jesus or Angels? She was the immediate life of to-day. Children were still being born to her, she was throng with all the little activities of her family. And almost instinctively she resented her husband’s slavish service to the Church, his dark, subject hankering to worship an unseen God. What did the unrevealed God matter, when a man had a young family that needed fettling for? Let him attend to the immediate concerns of his life, not go projecting himself towards the ultimate.

But Ursula was all for the ultimate. She was always in revolt against babies and muddled domesticity. To her Jesus was another world, He was not of this world. He did not thrust His hands under her face and, pointing to His wounds, say:

“Look, Ursula Brangwen, I got these for your sake. Now do as you’re told.”

To her, Jesus was beautifully remote, shining in the distance, like a white

moon at sunset, a crescent moon beckoning as it follows the sun, out of our ken. Sometimes dark clouds standing very far off, pricking up into a clear yellow band of sunset, of a winter evening, reminded her of Calvary, sometimes the full moon rising blood-red upon the hill terrified her with the knowledge that Christ was now dead, hanging heavy and dead upon the Cross.

On Sundays, this visionary world came to pass. She heard the long hush, she knew the marriage of dark and light was taking place. In church, the Voice sounded, re-echoing not from this world, as if the Church itself were a shell that still spoke the language of creation.

“The Sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair: and they took them wives of all which they chose.

“And the Lord said, My spirit shall not always strive with Man, for that he also is flesh; yet his days shall be an hundred and twenty years.

“There were giants in the earth in those days; and also after that, when the Sons of God came in unto the daughters of men, and they bare children unto them, the same became mighty men which were of old, men of renown.”

Over this Ursula was stirred as by a call from far off. In those days, would not the Sons of God have found her fair, would she not have been taken to wife by one of the Sons of God? It was a dream that frightened her, for she could not understand it.

Who were the sons of God? Was not Jesus the only begotten Son? Was not Adam the only man created from God? Yet there were men not begotten by Adam. Who were these, and whence did they come? They too must derive from God. Had God many offspring, besides Adam and besides Jesus, children whose origin the children of Adam cannot recognise? And perhaps these children, these sons of God, had known no expulsion, no ignominy of the fall.

These came on free feet to the daughters of men, and saw they were fair, and took them to wife, so that the women conceived and brought forth men of renown. This was a genuine fate. She moved about in the essential days, when the sons of God came in unto the daughters of men.

Nor would any comparison of myths destroy her passion in the knowledge. Jove had become a bull, or a man, in order to love a mortal woman. He had begotten in her a giant, a hero.

Very good, so he had, in Greece. For herself, she was no Grecian woman. Not Jove nor Pan nor any of those gods, not even Bacchus nor Apollo, could come to her. But the Sons of God who took to wife the daughters of men, these were such as should take her to wife.

She clung to the secret hope, the aspiration. She lived a dual life, one where the facts of daily life encompassed everything, being legion, and the other

wherein the facts of daily life were superseded by the eternal truth. So utterly did she desire the Sons of God should come to the daughters of men; and she believed more in her desire and its fulfilment than in the obvious facts of life. The fact that a man was a man, did not state his descent from Adam, did not exclude that he was also one of the unhistoried, unaccountable Sons of God. As yet, she was confused, but not denied.

Again she heard the Voice:

“It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into heaven.”

But it was explained, the needle’s eye was a little gateway for foot passengers, through which the great, humped camel with his load could not possibly squeeze himself: or perhaps, at a great risk, if he were a little camel, he might get through. For one could not absolutely exclude the rich man from heaven, said the Sunday school teachers.

It pleased her also to know, that in the East one must use hyperbole, or else remain unheard; because the Eastern man must see a thing swelling to fill all heaven, or dwindled to a mere nothing, before he is suitably impressed. She immediately sympathised with this Eastern mind.

Yet the words continued to have a meaning that was untouched either by the knowledge of gateways or hyperboles. The historical, or local, or psychological interest in the words was another thing. There remained unaltered the inexplicable value of the saying. What was this relation between a needle’s eye, a rich man, and heaven? What sort of a needle’s eye, what sort of a rich man, what sort of heaven? Who knows? It means the Absolute World, and can never be more than half interpreted in terms of the relative world.

But must one apply the speech literally? Was her father a rich man? Couldn’t he get to heaven? Or was he only a half-rich man? Or was he merely a poor man? At any rate, unless he gave everything away to the poor, he would find it much harder to get to heaven. The needle’s eye would be too tight for him. She almost wished he were penniless poor. If one were coming to the base of it, any man was rich who was not as poor as the poorest.

She had her qualms, when in imagination she saw her father giving away their piano and the two cows, and the capital at the bank, to the labourers of the district, so that they, the Brangwens, should be as poor as the Wherrys. And she did not want it. She was impatient.

“Very well,” she thought, “we’ll forego that heaven, that’s all-at any rate the needle’s eye sort.” And she dismissed the problem. She was not going to be as poor as the Wherrys, not for all the sayings on earth-the miserable squalid Wherrys.

So she reverted to the non-literal application of the scriptures. Her father very rarely read, but he had collected many books of reproductions, and he would sit and look at these, curiously intent, like a child, yet with a passion that was not childish. He loved the early Italian painters, but particularly Giotto and Fra Angelico and Filippo Lippi. The great compositions cast a spell over him. How many times had he turned to Raphael's "Dispute of the Sacrament" or Fra Angelico's "Last Judgment" or the beautiful, complicated renderings of the Adoration of the Magi, and always, each time, he received the same gradual fulfilment of delight. It had to do with the establishment of a whole mystical, architectural conception which used the human figure as a unit. Sometimes he had to hurry home, and go to the Fra Angelico "Last Judgment". The pathway of open graves, the huddled earth on either side, the seemly heaven arranged above, the singing process to paradise on the one hand, the stuttering descent to hell on the other, completed and satisfied him. He did not care whether or not he believed in devils or angels. The whole conception gave him the deepest satisfaction, and he wanted nothing more.

Ursula, accustomed to these pictures from her childhood, hunted out their detail. She adored Fra Angelico's flowers and light and angels, she liked the demons and enjoyed the hell. But the representation of the encircled God, surrounded by all the angels on high, suddenly bored her. The figure of the Most High bored her, and roused her resentment. Was this the culmination and the meaning of it all, this draped, null figure? The angels were so lovely, and the light so beautiful. And only for this, to surround such a banality for God!

She was dissatisfied, but not fit as yet to criticise. There was yet so much to wonder over. Winter came, pine branches were torn down in the snow, the green pine needles looked rich upon the ground. There was the wonderful, starry, straight track of a pheasant's footsteps across the snow imprinted so clear; there was the lobbing mark of the rabbit, two holes abreast, two holes following behind; the hare shoved deeper shafts, slanting, and his two hind feet came down together and made one large pit; the cat podded little holes, and birds made a lacy pattern.

Gradually there gathered the feeling of expectation. Christmas was coming. In the shed, at nights, a secret candle was burning, a sound of veiled voices was heard. The boys were learning the old mystery play of St. George and Beelzebub. Twice a week, by lamplight, there was choir practice in the church, for the learning of old carols Brangwen wanted to hear. The girls went to these practices. Everywhere was a sense of mystery and rousedness. Everybody was preparing for something.

The time came near, the girls were decorating the church, with cold fingers

binding holly and fir and yew about the pillars, till a new spirit was in the church, the stone broke out into dark, rich leaf, the arches put forth their buds, and cold flowers rose to blossom in the dim, mystic atmosphere. Ursula must weave mistletoe over the door, and over the screen, and hang a silver dove from a sprig of yew, till dusk came down, and the church was like a grove.

In the cow-shed the boys were blacking their faces for a dress-rehearsal; the turkey hung dead, with opened, speckled wings, in the dairy. The time was come to make pies, in readiness.

The expectation grew more tense. The star was risen into the sky, the songs, the carols were ready to hail it. The star was the sign in the sky. Earth too should give a sign. As evening drew on, hearts beat fast with anticipation, hands were full of ready gifts. There were the tremulously expectant words of the church service, the night was past and the morning was come, the gifts were given and received, joy and peace made a flapping of wings in each heart, there was a great burst of carols, the Peace of the World had dawned, strife had passed away, every hand was linked in hand, every heart was singing.

It was bitter, though, that Christmas Day, as it drew on to evening, and night, became a sort of bank holiday, flat and stale. The morning was so wonderful, but in the afternoon and evening the ecstasy perished like a nipped thing, like a bud in a false spring. Alas, that Christmas was only a domestic feast, a feast of sweetmeats and toys! Why did not the grown-ups also change their everyday hearts, and give way to ecstasy? Where was the ecstasy?

How passionately the Brangwens craved for it, the ecstasy. The father was troubled, dark-faced and disconsolate, on Christmas night, because the passion was not there, because the day was become as every day, and hearts were not aflame. Upon the mother was a kind of absentness, as ever, as if she were exiled for all her life. Where was the fiery heart of joy, now the coming was fulfilled; where was the star, the Magi's transport, the thrill of new being that shook the earth?

Still it was there, even if it were faint and inadequate. The cycle of creation still wheeled in the Church year. After Christmas, the ecstasy slowly sank and changed. Sunday followed Sunday, trailing a fine movement, a finely developed transformation over the heart of the family. The heart that was big with joy, that had seen the star and had followed to the inner walls of the Nativity, that there had swooned in the great light, must now feel the light slowly withdrawing, a shadow falling, darkening. The chill crept in, silence came over the earth, and then all was darkness. The veil of the temple was rent, each heart gave up the ghost, and sank dead.

They moved quietly, a little wanness on the lips of the children, at Good

Friday, feeling the shadow upon their hearts. Then, pale with a deathly scent, came the lilies of resurrection, that shone coldly till the Comforter was given.

But why the memory of the wounds and the death? Surely Christ rose with healed hands and feet, sound and strong and glad? Surely the passage of the cross and the tomb was forgotten? But no-always the memory of the wounds, always the smell of grave-clothes? A small thing was Resurrection, compared with the Cross and the death, in this cycle.

So the children lived the year of christianity, the epic of the soul of mankind. Year by year the inner, unknown drama went on in them, their hearts were born and came to fulness, suffered on the cross, gave up the ghost, and rose again to unnumbered days, untired, having at least this rhythm of eternity in a ragged, inconsequential life.

But it was becoming a mechanical action now, this drama: birth at Christmas for death at Good Friday. On Easter Sunday the life-drama was as good as finished. For the Resurrection was shadowy and overcome by the shadow of death, the Ascension was scarce noticed, a mere confirmation of death.

What was the hope and the fulfilment? Nay, was it all only a useless after-death, a wan, bodiless after-death? Alas, and alas for the passion of the human heart, that must die so long before the body was dead.

For from the grave, after the passion and the trial of anguish, the body rose torn and chill and colourless. Did not Christ say, "Mary!" and when she turned with outstretched hands to him, did he not hasten to add, "Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my father."

Then how could the hands rejoice, or the heart be glad, seeing themselves repulsed. Alas, for the resurrection of the dead body! Alas, for the wavering, glimmering appearance of the risen Christ. Alas, for the Ascension into heaven, which is a shadow within death, a complete passing away.

Alas, that so soon the drama is over; that life is ended at thirty-three; that the half of the year of the soul is cold and historiless! Alas, that a risen Christ has no place with us! Alas, that the memory of the passion of Sorrow and Death and the Grave holds triumph over the pale fact of Resurrection!

But why? Why shall I not rise with my body whole and perfect, shining with strong life? Why, when Mary says: Rabboni, shall I not take her in my arms and kiss her and hold her to my breast? Why is the risen body deadly, and abhorrent with wounds?

The Resurrection is to life, not to death. Shall I not see those who have risen again walk here among men perfect in body and spirit, whole and glad in the flesh, living in the flesh, loving in the flesh, begetting children in the flesh, arrived at last to wholeness, perfect without scar or blemish, healthy without fear

of ill health? Is this not the period of manhood and of joy and fulfilment, after the Resurrection? Who shall be shadowed by Death and the Cross, being risen, and who shall fear the mystic, perfect flesh that belongs to heaven?

Can I not, then, walk this earth in gladness, being risen from sorrow? Can I not eat with my brother happily, and with joy kiss my beloved, after my resurrection, celebrate my marriage in the flesh with feasting, go about my business eagerly, in the joy of my fellows? Is heaven impatient for me, and bitter against this earth, that I should hurry off, or that I should linger pale and untouched? Is the flesh which was crucified become as poison to the crowds in the street, or is it as a strong gladness and hope to them, as the first flower blossoming out of the earth's humus?

CHAPTER 11

First Love

As Ursula passed from girlhood towards womanhood, gradually the cloud of self-responsibility gathered upon her. She became aware of herself, that she was a separate entity in the midst of an unseparated obscurity, that she must go somewhere, she must become something. And she was afraid, troubled. Why, oh why must one grow up, why must one inherit this heavy, numbing responsibility of living an undiscovered life? Out of the nothingness and the undifferentiated mass, to make something of herself! But what? In the obscurity and pathlessness to take a direction! But whither? How take even one step? And yet, how stand still? This was torment indeed, to inherit the responsibility of one's own life.

The religion which had been another world for her, a glorious sort of play-world, where she lived, climbing the tree with the short-statured man, walking shakily on the sea like the disciple, breaking the bread into five thousand portions, like the Lord, giving a great picnic to five thousand people, now fell away from reality, and became a tale, a myth, an illusion, which, however much one might assert it to be true an historical fact, one knew was not true—at least, for this present-day life of ours. There could, within the limits of this life we know, be no Feeding of the Five Thousand. And the girl had come to the point where she held that that which one cannot experience in daily life is not true for oneself.

So, the old duality of life, wherein there had been a weekday world of people and trains and duties and reports, and besides that a Sunday world of absolute truth and living mystery, of walking upon the waters and being blinded by the face of the Lord, of following the pillar of cloud across the desert and watching the bush that crackled yet did not burn away, this old, unquestioned duality suddenly was found to be broken apart. The weekday world had triumphed over the Sunday world. The Sunday world was not real, or at least, not actual. And one lived by action.

Only the weekday world mattered. She herself, Ursula Brangwen, must know how to take the weekday life. Her body must be a weekday body, held in the world's estimate. Her soul must have a weekday value, known according to the world's knowledge.

Well, then, there was a weekday life to live, of action and deeds. And so there

was a necessity to choose one's action and one's deeds. One was responsible to the world for what one did.

Nay, one was more than responsible to the world. One was responsible to oneself. There was some puzzling, tormenting residue of the Sunday world within her, some persistent Sunday self, which insisted upon a relationship with the now shed-away vision world. How could one keep up a relationship with that which one denied? Her task was now to learn the weekday life.

How to act, that was the question? Whither to go, how to become oneself? One was not oneself, one was merely a half-stated question. How to become oneself, how to know the question and the answer of oneself, when one was merely an unfixed something-nothing, blowing about like the winds of heaven, undefined, unstated.

She turned to the visions, which had spoken far-off words that ran along the blood like ripples of an unseen wind, she heard the words again, she denied the vision, for she must be a weekday person, to whom visions were not true, and she demanded only the weekday meaning of the words.

There were words spoken by the vision: and words must have a weekday meaning, since words were weekday stuff. Let them speak now: let them bespeak themselves in weekday terms. The vision should translate itself into weekday terms.

"Sell all thou hast, and give to the poor," she heard on Sunday morning. That was plain enough, plain enough for Monday morning too. As she went down the hill to the station, going to school, she took the saying with her.

"Sell all thou hast, and give to the poor."

Did she want to do that? Did she want to sell her pearl-backed brush and mirror, her silver candlestick, her pendant, her lovely little necklace, and go dressed in drab like the Wherrys: the unlovely uncombed Wherrys, who were the "poor" to her? She did not.

She walked this Monday morning on the verge of misery. For she did want to do what was right. And she didn't want to do what the gospels said. She didn't want to be poor-really poor. The thought was a horror to her: to live like the Wherrys, so ugly, to be at the mercy of everybody.

"Sell that thou hast, and give to the poor."

One could not do it in real life. How dreary and hopeless it made her!

Nor could one turn the other cheek. Theresa slapped Ursula on the face. Ursula, in a mood of Christian humility, silently presented the other side of her face. Which Theresa, in exasperation at the challenge, also hit. Whereupon Ursula, with boiling heart, went meekly away.

But anger, and deep, writhing shame tortured her, so she was not easy till she

had again quarrelled with Theresa and had almost shaken her sister's head off.

"That'll teach you," she said, grimly.

And she went away, unchristian but clean.

There was something unclean and degrading about this humble side of Christianity. Ursula suddenly revolted to the other extreme.

"I hate the Wherrys, and I wish they were dead. Why does my father leave us in the lurch like this, making us be poor and insignificant? Why is he not more? If we had a father as he ought to be, he would be Earl William Brangwen, and I should be the Lady Ursula? What right have I to be poor? crawling along the lane like vermin? If I had my rights I should be seated on horseback in a green riding-habit, and my groom would be behind me. And I should stop at the gates of the cottages, and enquire of the cottage woman who came out with a child in her arms, how did her husband, who had hurt his foot. And I would pat the flaxen head of the child, stooping from my horse, and I would give her a shilling from my purse, and order nourishing food to be sent from the hall to the cottage."

So she rode in her pride. And sometimes, she dashed into flames to rescue a forgotten child; or she dived into the canal locks and supported a boy who was seized with cramp; or she swept up a toddling infant from the feet of a runaway horse: always imaginatively, of course.

But in the end there returned the poignant yearning from the Sunday world. As she went down in the morning from Cossethay and saw Ilkeston smoking blue and tender upon its hill, then her heart surged with far-off words:

"Oh, Jerusalem, Jerusalem-how often would I have gathered thy children together as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not —"

The passion rose in her for Christ, for the gathering under the wings of security and warmth. But how did it apply to the weekday world? What could it mean, but that Christ should clasp her to his breast, as a mother clasps her child? And oh, for Christ, for him who could hold her to his breast and lose her there. Oh, for the breast of man, where she should have refuge and bliss for ever! All her senses quivered with passionate yearning.

Vaguely she knew that Christ meant something else: that in the vision-world He spoke of Jerusalem, something that did not exist in the everyday world. It was not houses and factories He would hold in His bosom: nor householders nor factory-workers nor poor people: but something that had no part in the weekday world, nor seen nor touched with weekday hands and eyes.

Yet she must have it in weekday terms-she must. For all her life was a weekday life, now, this was the whole. So he must gather her body to his breast, that was strong with a broad bone, and which sounded with the beating of the

heart, and which was warm with the life of which she partook, the life of the running blood.

So she craved for the breast of the Son of Man, to lie there. And she was ashamed in her soul, ashamed. For whereas Christ spoke for the Vision to answer, she answered from the weekday fact. It was a betrayal, a transference of meaning, from the vision world, to the matter-of-fact world. So she was ashamed of her religious ecstasy, and dreaded lest any one should see it.

Early in the year, when the lambs came, and shelters were built of straw, and on her uncle's farm the men sat at night with a lantern and a dog, then again there swept over her this passionate confusion between the vision world and the weekday world. Again she felt Jesus in the countryside. Ah, he would lift up the lambs in his arms! Ah, and she was the lamb. Again, in the morning, going down the lane, she heard the ewe call, and the lambs came running, shaking and twinkling with new-born bliss. And she saw them stooping, nuzzling, groping to the udder, to find the teats, whilst the mother turned her head gravely and sniffed her own. And they were sucking, vibrating with bliss on their little, long legs, their throats stretched up, their new bodies quivering to the stream of blood-warm, loving milk.

Oh, and the bliss, the bliss! She could scarcely tear herself away to go to school. The little noses nuzzling at the udder, the little bodies so glad and sure, the little black legs, crooked, the mother standing still, yielding herself to their quivering attraction-then the mother walked calmly away.

Jesus-the vision world-the everyday world-all mixed inextricably in a confusion of pain and bliss. It was almost agony, the confusion, the inextricability. Jesus, the vision, speaking to her, who was non-visionary! And she would take his words of the spirit and make them to pander to her own carnality.

This was a shame to her. The confusing of the spirit world with the material world, in her own soul, degraded her. She answered the call of the spirit in terms of immediate, everyday desire.

“Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.”

It was the temporal answer she gave. She leapt with sensuous yearning to respond to Christ. If she could go to him really, and lay her head on his breast, to have comfort, to be made much of, caressed like a child!

All the time she walked in a confused heat of religious yearning. She wanted Jesus to love her deliciously, to take her sensuous offering, to give her sensuous response. For weeks she went in a muse of enjoyment.

And all the time she knew underneath that she was playing false, accepting the

passion of Jesus for her own physical satisfaction. But she was in such a daze, such a tangle. How could she get free?

She hated herself, she wanted to trample on herself, destroy herself. How could one become free? She hated religion, because it lent itself to her confusion. She abused everything. She wanted to become hard, indifferent, brutally callous to everything but just the immediate need, the immediate satisfaction. To have a yearning towards Jesus, only that she might use him to pander to her own soft sensation, use him as a means of reacting upon herself, maddened her in the end. There was then no Jesus, no sentimentality. With all the bitter hatred of helplessness she hated sentimentality.

At this period came the young Skrebensky. She was nearly sixteen years old, a slim, smouldering girl, deeply reticent, yet lapsing into unreserved expansiveness now and then, when she seemed to give away her whole soul, but when in fact she only made another counterfeit of her soul for outward presentation. She was sensitive in the extreme, always tortured, always affecting a callous indifference to screen herself.

She was at this time a nuisance on the face of the earth, with her spasmodic passion and her slumberous torment. She seemed to go with all her soul in her hands, yearning, to the other person. Yet all the while, deep at the bottom of her was a childish antagonism of distrust. She thought she loved everybody and believed in everybody. But because she could not love herself nor believe in herself, she mistrusted everybody with the mistrust of a serpent or a captured bird. Her starts of revulsion and hatred were more inevitable than her impulses of love.

So she wrestled through her dark days of confusion, soulless, uncreated, unformed.

One evening, as she was studying in the parlour, her head buried in her hands, she heard new voices in the kitchen speaking. At once, from its apathy, her excitable spirit started and strained to listen. It seemed to crouch, to lurk under cover, tense, glaring forth unwilling to be seen.

There were two strange men's voices, one soft and candid, veiled with soft candour, the other veiled with easy mobility, running quickly. Ursula sat quite tense, shocked out of her studies, lost. She listened all the time to the sound of the voices, scarcely heeding the words.

The first speaker was her Uncle Tom. She knew the naive candour covering the girding and savage misery of his soul. Who was the other speaker? Whose voice ran on so easy, yet with an inflamed pulse? It seemed to hasten and urge her forward, that other voice.

"I remember you," the young man's voice was saying. "I remember you from

the first time I saw you, because of your dark eyes and fair face.”

Mrs. Brangwen laughed, shy and pleased.

“You were a curly-headed little lad,” she said.

“Was I? Yes, I know. They were very proud of my curls.”

And a laugh ran to silence.

“You were a very well-mannered lad, I remember,” said her father.

“Oh! did I ask you to stay the night? I always used to ask people to stay the night. I believe it was rather trying for my mother.”

There was a general laugh. Ursula rose. She had to go.

At the click of the latch everybody looked round. The girl hung in the doorway, seized with a moment’s fierce confusion. She was going to be good-looking. Now she had an attractive gawkiness, as she hung a moment, not knowing how to carry her shoulders. Her dark hair was tied behind, her yellow-brown eyes shone without direction. Behind her, in the parlour, was the soft light of a lamp upon open books.

A superficial readiness took her to her Uncle Tom, who kissed her, greeting her with warmth, making a show of intimate possession of her, and at the same time leaving evident his own complete detachment.

But she wanted to turn to the stranger. He was standing back a little, waiting. He was a young man with very clear greyish eyes that waited until they were called upon, before they took expression.

Something in his self-possessed waiting moved her, and she broke into a confused, rather beautiful laugh as she gave him her hand, catching her breath like an excited child. His hand closed over hers very close, very near, he bowed, and his eyes were watching her with some attention. She felt proud-her spirit leapt to life.

“You don’t know Mr. Skrebensky, Ursula,” came her Uncle Tom’s intimate voice. She lifted her face with an impulsive flash to the stranger, as if to declare a knowledge, laughing her palpitating, excited laugh.

His eyes became confused with roused lights, his detached attention changed to a readiness for her. He was a young man of twenty-one, with a slender figure and soft brown hair brushed up on the German fashion straight from his brow.

“Are you staying long?” she asked.

“I’ve got a month’s leave,” he said, glancing at Tom Brangwen. “But I’ve various places I must go to-put in some time here and there.”

He brought her a strong sense of the outer world. It was as if she were set on a hill and could feel vaguely the whole world lying spread before her.

“What have you a month’s leave from?” she asked.

“I’m in the Engineers-in the Army.”

“Oh!” she exclaimed, glad.

“We’re taking you away from your studies,” said her Uncle Tom.

“Oh, no,” she replied quickly.

Skrebensky laughed, young and inflammable.

“She won’t wait to be taken away,” said her father. But that seemed clumsy. She wished he would leave her to say her own things.

“Don’t you like study?” asked Skrebensky, turning to her, putting the question from his own case.

“I like some things,” said Ursula. “I like Latin and French-and grammar.”

He watched her, and all his being seemed attentive to her, then he shook his head.

“I don’t,” he said. “They say all the brains of the army are in the Engineers. I think that’s why I joined them-to get the credit of other people’s brains.”

He said this quizzically and with chagrin. And she became alert to him. It interested her. Whether he had brains or not, he was interesting. His directness attracted her, his independent motion. She was aware of the movement of his life over against hers.

“I don’t think brains matter,” she said.

“What does matter then?” came her Uncle Tom’s intimate, caressing, half-jeering voice.

She turned to him.

“It matters whether people have courage or not,” she said.

“Courage for what?” asked her uncle.

“For everything.”

Tom Brangwen gave a sharp little laugh. The mother and father sat silent, with listening faces. Skrebensky waited. She was speaking for him.

“Everything’s nothing,” laughed her uncle.

She disliked him at that moment.

“She doesn’t practise what she preaches,” said her father, stirring in his chair and crossing one leg over the other. “She has courage for mighty little.”

But she would not answer. Skrebensky sat still, waiting. His face was irregular, almost ugly, flattish, with a rather thick nose. But his eyes were pellucid, strangely clear, his brown hair was soft and thick as silk, he had a slight moustache. His skin was fine, his figure slight, beautiful. Beside him, her Uncle Tom looked full-blown, her father seemed uncouth. Yet he reminded her of her father, only he was finer, and he seemed to be shining. And his face was almost ugly.

He seemed simply acquiescent in the fact of his own being, as if he were beyond any change or question. He was himself. There was a sense of fatality

about him that fascinated her. He made no effort to prove himself to other people. Let it be accepted for what it was, his own being. In its isolation it made no excuse or explanation for itself.

So he seemed perfectly, even fatally established, he did not asked to be rendered before he could exist, before he could have relationship with another person.

This attracted Ursula very much. She was so used to unsure people who took on a new being with every new influence. Her Uncle Tom was always more or less what the other person would have him. In consequence, one never knew the real Uncle Tom, only a fluid, unsatisfactory flux with a more or less consistent appearance.

But, let Skrebensky do what he would, betray himself entirely, he betrayed himself always upon his own responsibility. He permitted no question about himself. He was irrevocable in his isolation.

So Ursula thought him wonderful, he was so finely constituted, and so distinct, self-contained, self-supporting. This, she said to herself, was a gentleman, he had a nature like fate, the nature of an aristocrat.

She laid hold of him at once for her dreams. Here was one such as those Sons of God who saw the daughters of men, that they were fair. He was no son of Adam. Adam was servile. Had not Adam been driven cringing out of his native place, had not the human race been a beggar ever since, seeking its own being? But Anton Skrebensky could not beg. He was in possession of himself, of that, and no more. Other people could not really give him anything nor take anything from him. His soul stood alone.

She knew that her mother and father acknowledged him. The house was changed. There had been a visit paid to the house. Once three angels stood in Abraham's doorway, and greeted him, and stayed and ate with him, leaving his household enriched for ever when they went.

The next day she went down to the Marsh according to invitation. The two men were not come home. Then, looking through the window, she saw the dogcart drive up, and Skrebensky leapt down. She saw him draw himself together, jump, laugh to her uncle, who was driving, then come towards her to the house. He was so spontaneous and revealed in his movements. He was isolated within his own clear, fine atmosphere, and as still as if fated.

His resting in his own fate gave him an appearance of indolence, almost of languor: he made no exuberant movement. When he sat down, he seemed to go loose, languid.

“We are a little late,” he said.

“Where have you been?”

“We went to Derby to see a friend of my father’s.”

“Who?”

It was an adventure to her to put direct questions and get plain answers. She knew she might do it with this man.

“Why, he is a clergyman too-he is my guardian-one of them.”

Ursula knew that Skrebensky was an orphan.

“Where is really your home now?” she asked.

“My home?-I wonder. I am very fond of my colonel-Colonel Hepburn: then there are my aunts: but my real home, I suppose, is the army.”

“Do you like being on your own?”

His clear, greenish-grey eyes rested on her a moment, and, as he considered, he did not see her.

“I suppose so,” he said. “You see my father-well, he was never acclimatised here. He wanted-I don’t know what he wanted-but it was a strain. And my mother-I always knew she was too good to me. I could feel her being too good to me-my mother! Then I went away to school so early. And I must say, the outside world was always more naturally a home to me than the vicarage-I don’t know why.”

“Do you feel like a bird blown out of its own latitude?” she asked, using a phrase she had met.

“No, no. I find everything very much as I like it.”

He seemed more and more to give her a sense of the vast world, a sense of distances and large masses of humanity. It drew her as a scent draws a bee from afar. But also it hurt her.

It was summer, and she wore cotton frocks. The third time he saw her she had on a dress with fine blue-and-white stripes, with a white collar, and a large white hat. It suited her golden, warm complexion.

“I like you best in that dress,” he said, standing with his head slightly on one side, and appreciating her in a perceiving, critical fashion.

She was thrilled with a new life. For the first time she was in love with a vision of herself: she saw as it were a fine little reflection of herself in his eyes. And she must act up to this: she must be beautiful. Her thoughts turned swiftly to clothes, her passion was to make a beautiful appearance. Her family looked on in amazement at the sudden transformation of Ursula. She became elegant, really elegant, in figured cotton frocks she made for herself, and hats she bent to her fancy. An inspiration was upon her.

He sat with a sort of languor in her grandmother’s rockingchair, rocking slowly, languidly, backward and forward, as Ursula talked to him.

“You are not poor, are you?” she said.

“Poor in money? I have about a hundred and fifty a year of my own-so I am poor or rich, as you like. I am poor enough, in fact.”

“But you will earn money?”

“I shall have my pay-I have my pay now. I’ve got my commission. That is another hundred and fifty.”

“You will have more, though?”

“I shan’t have more than 200 pounds a year for ten years to come. I shall always be poor, if I have to live on my pay.”

“Do you mind it?”

“Being poor? Not now-not very much. I may later. People-the officers, are good to me. Colonel Hepburn has a sort of fancy for me-he is a rich man, I suppose.”

A chill went over Ursula. Was he going to sell himself in some way?

“Is Colonel Hepburn married?”

“Yes-with two daughters.”

But she was too proud at once to care whether Colonel Hepburn’s daughter wanted to marry him or not.

There came a silence. Gudrun entered, and Skrebensky still rocked languidly on the chair.

“You look very lazy,” said Gudrun.

“I am lazy,” he answered.

“You look really floppy,” she said.

“I am floppy,” he answered.

“Can’t you stop?” asked Gudrun.

“No-it’s the perpetuum mobile.”

“You look as if you hadn’t a bone in your body.”

“That’s how I like to feel.”

“I don’t admire your taste.”

“That’s my misfortune.”

And he rocked on.

Gudrun seated herself behind him, and as he rocked back, she caught his hair between her finger and thumb, so that it tugged him as he swung forward again. He took no notice. There was only the sound of the rockers on the floor. In silence, like a crab, Gudrun caught a strand of his hair each time he rocked back. Ursula flushed, and sat in some pain. She saw the irritation gathering on his brow.

At last he leapt up, suddenly, like a steel spring going off, and stood on the hearthrug.

“Damn it, why can’t I rock?” he asked petulantly, fiercely.

Ursula loved him for his sudden, steel-like start out of the languor. He stood on the hearthrug fuming, his eyes gleaming with anger.

Gudrun laughed in her deep, mellow fashion.

“Men don’t rock themselves,” she said.

“Girls don’t pull men’s hair,” he said.

Gudrun laughed again.

Ursula sat amused, but waiting. And he knew Ursula was waiting for him. It roused his blood. He had to go to her, to follow her call.

Once he drove her to Derby in the dogcart. He belonged to the horsey set of the sappers. They had lunch in an inn, and went through the market, pleased with everything. He bought her a copy of *Wuthering Heights* from a bookstall. Then they found a little fair in progress and she said:

“My father used to take me in the swingboats.”

“Did you like it?” he asked.

“Oh, it was fine,” she said.

“Would you like to go now?”

“Love it,” she said, though she was afraid. But the prospect of doing an unusual, exciting thing was attractive to her.

He went straight to the stand, paid the money, and helped her to mount. He seemed to ignore everything but just what he was doing. Other people were mere objects of indifference to him. She would have liked to hang back, but she was more ashamed to retreat from him than to expose herself to the crowd or to dare the swingboat. His eyes laughed, and standing before her with his sharp, sudden figure, he set the boat swinging. She was not afraid, she was thrilled. His colour flushed, his eyes shone with a roused light, and she looked up at him, her face like a flower in the sun, so bright and attractive. So they rushed through the bright air, up at the sky as if flung from a catapult, then falling terribly back. She loved it. The motion seemed to fan their blood to fire, they laughed, feeling the flames.

After the swingboats, they went on the roundabouts to calm down, he twisting astride on his jerky wooden steed towards her, and always seeming at his ease, enjoying himself. A zest of antagonism to the convention made him fully himself. As they sat on the whirling carousal, with the music grinding out, she was aware of the people on the earth outside, and it seemed that he and she were riding carelessly over the faces of the crowd, riding for ever buoyantly, proudly, gallantly over the upturned faces of the crowd, moving on a high level, spurning the common mass.

When they must descend and walk away, she was unhappy, feeling like a giant suddenly cut down to ordinary level, at the mercy of the mob.

They left the fair, to return for the dogcart. Passing the large church, Ursula must look in. But the whole interior was filled with scaffolding, fallen stone and rubbish were heaped on the floor, bits of plaster crunched underfoot, and the place re-echoed to the calling of secular voices and to blows of the hammer.

She had come to plunge in the utter gloom and peace for a moment, bringing all her yearning, that had returned on her uncontrolled after the reckless riding over the face of the crowd, in the fair. After pride, she wanted comfort, solace, for pride and scorn seemed to hurt her most of all.

And she found the immemorial gloom full of bits of falling plaster, and dust of floating plaster, smelling of old lime, having scaffolding and rubbish heaped about, dust cloths over the altar.

“Let us sit down a minute,” she said.

They sat unnoticed in the back pew, in the gloom, and she watched the dirty, disorderly work of bricklayers and plasterers. Workmen in heavy boots walking grinding down the aisles, calling out in a vulgar accent:

“Hi, mate, has them corner mouldin’s come?”

There were shouts of coarse answer from the roof of the church. The place echoed desolate.

Skrebensky sat close to her. Everything seemed wonderful, if dreadful to her, the world tumbling into ruins, and she and he clambering unhurt, lawless over the face of it all. He sat close to her, touching her, and she was aware of his influence upon her. But she was glad. It excited her to feel the press of him upon her, as if his being were urging her to something.

As they drove home, he sat near to her. And when he swayed to the cart, he swayed in a voluptuous, lingering way, against her, lingering as he swung away to recover balance. Without speaking, he took her hand across, under the wrap, and with his unseeing face lifted to the road, his soul intent, he began with his one hand to unfasten the buttons of her glove, to push back her glove from her hand, carefully laying bare her hand. And the close-working, instinctive subtlety of his fingers upon her hand sent the young girl mad with voluptuous delight. His hand was so wonderful, intent as a living creature skilfully pushing and manipulating in the dark underworld, removing her glove and laying bare her palm, her fingers. Then his hand closed over hers, so firm, so close, as if the flesh knitted to one thing his hand and hers. Meanwhile his face watched the road and the ears of the horse, he drove with steady attention through the villages, and she sat beside him, rapt, glowing, blinded with a new light. Neither of them spoke. In outward attention they were entirely separate. But between them was the compact of his flesh with hers, in the hand-clasp.

Then, in a strange voice, affecting nonchalance and superficiality he said to

her:

“Sitting in the church there reminded me of Ingram.”

“Who is Ingram?” she asked.

She also affected calm superficiality. But she knew that something forbidden was coming.

“He is one of the other men with me down at Chatham—a subaltern—but a year older than I am.”

“And why did the church remind you of him?”

“Well, he had a girl in Rochester, and they always sat in a particular corner in the cathedral for their love-making.”

“How nice!” she cried, impulsively.

They misunderstood each other.

“It had its disadvantages though. The verger made a row about it.”

“What a shame! Why shouldn’t they sit in a cathedral?”

“I suppose they all think it a profanity—except you and Ingram and the girl.”

“I don’t think it a profanity—I think it’s right, to make love in a cathedral.”

She said this almost defiantly, in despite of her own soul.

He was silent.

“And was she nice?”

“Who? Emily? Yes, she was rather nice. She was a milliner, and she wouldn’t be seen in the streets with Ingram. It was rather sad, really, because the verger spied on them, and got to know their names and then made a regular row. It was a common tale afterwards.”

“What did she do?”

“She went to London, into a big shop. Ingram still goes up to see her.”

“Does he love her?”

“It’s a year and a half he’s been with her now.”

“What was she like?”

“Emily? Little, shy-violet sort of girl with nice eyebrows.”

Ursula meditated this. It seemed like real romance of the outer world.

“Do all men have lovers?” she asked, amazed at her own temerity. But her hand was still fastened with his, and his face still had the same unchanging fixity of outward calm.

“They’re always mentioning some amazing fine woman or other, and getting drunk to talk about her. Most of them dash up to London the moment they are free.”

“What for?”

“To some amazing fine woman or other.”

“What sort of woman?”

“Various. Her name changes pretty frequently, as a rule. One of the fellows is a perfect maniac. He keeps a suit-case always ready, and the instant he is at liberty, he bolts with it to the station, and changes in the train. No matter who is in the carriage, off he whips his tunic, and performs at least the top half of his toilet.”

Ursula quivered and wondered.

“Why is he in such a hurry?” she asked.

Her throat was becoming hard and difficult.

“He’s got a woman in his mind, I suppose.”

She was chilled, hardened. And yet this world of passions and lawlessness was fascinating to her. It seemed to her a splendid recklessness. Her adventure in life was beginning. It seemed very splendid.

That evening she stayed at the Marsh till after dark, and Skrebensky escorted her home. For she could not go away from him. And she was waiting, waiting for something more.

In the warm of the early night, with the shadows new about them, she felt in another, harder, more beautiful, less personal world. Now a new state should come to pass.

He walked near to her, and with the same, silent, intent approach put his arm round her waist, and softly, very softly, drew her to him, till his arm was hard and pressed in upon her; she seemed to be carried along, floating, her feet scarce touching the ground, borne upon the firm, moving surface of his body, upon whose side she seemed to lie, in a delicious swoon of motion. And whilst she swooned, his face bent nearer to her, her head was leaned on his shoulder, she felt his warm breath on her face. Then softly, oh softly, so softly that she seemed to faint away, his lips touched her cheek, and she drifted through strands of heat and darkness.

Still she waited, in her swoon and her drifting, waited, like the Sleeping Beauty in the story. She waited, and again his face was bent to hers, his lips came warm to her face, their footsteps lingered and ceased, they stood still under the trees, whilst his lips waited on her face, waited like a butterfly that does not move on a flower. She pressed her breast a little nearer to him, he moved, put both his arms round her, and drew her close.

And then, in the darkness, he bent to her mouth, softly, and touched her mouth with his mouth. She was afraid, she lay still on his arm, feeling his lips on her lips. She kept still, helpless. Then his mouth drew near, pressing open her mouth, a hot, drenching surge rose within her, she opened her lips to him, in pained, poignant eddies she drew him nearer, she let him come farther, his lips came and surging, surging, soft, oh soft, yet oh, like the powerful surge of water,

irresistible, till with a little blind cry, she broke away.

She heard him breathing heavily, strangely, beside her. A terrible and magnificent sense of his strangeness possessed her. But she shrank a little now, within herself. Hesitating, they continued to walk on, quivering like shadows under the ash trees of the hill, where her grandfather had walked with his daffodils to make his proposal, and where her mother had gone with her young husband, walking close upon him as Ursula was now walking upon Skrebensky.

Ursula was aware of the dark limbs of the trees stretching overhead, clothed with leaves, and of fine ash leaves tressing the summer night.

They walked with their bodies moving in complex unity, close together. He held her hand, and they went the long way round by the road, to be farther. Always she felt as if she were supported off her feet, as if her feet were light as little breezes in motion.

He would kiss her again-but not again that night with the same deep-reaching kiss. She was aware now, aware of what a kiss might be. And so, it was more difficult to come to him.

She went to bed feeling all warm with electric warmth, as if the gush of dawn were within her, upholding her. And she slept deeply, sweetly, oh, so sweetly. In the morning she felt sound as an ear of wheat, fragrant and firm and full.

They continued to be lovers, in the first wondering state of unrealisation. Ursula told nobody; she was entirely lost in her own world.

Yet some strange affectation made her seek for a spurious confidence. She had at school a quiet, meditative, serious-souled friend called Ethel, and to Ethel must Ursula confide the story. Ethel listened absorbedly, with bowed, unbetraying head, whilst Ursula told her secret. Oh, it was so lovely, his gentle, delicate way of making love! Ursula talked like a practised lover.

“Do you think,” asked Ursula, “it is wicked to let a man kiss you-real kisses, not flirting?”

“I should think,” said Ethel, “it depends.”

“He kissed me under the ash trees on Cossethay hill-do you think it was wrong?”

“When?”

“On Thursday night when he was seeing me home-but real kisses-real — . He is an officer in the army.”

“What time was it?” asked the deliberate Ethel.

“I don’t know-about half-past nine.”

There was a pause.

“I think it’s wrong,” said Ethel, lifting her head with impatience. “You don’t know him.”

She spoke with some contempt.

“Yes, I do. He is half a Pole, and a Baron too. In England he is equivalent to a Lord. My grandmother was his father’s friend.”

But the two friends were hostile. It was as if Ursula wanted to divide herself from her acquaintances, in asserting her connection with Anton, as she now called him.

He came a good deal to Cossethay, because her mother was fond of him. Anna Brangwen became something of a grande dame with Skrebensky, very calm, taking things for granted.

“Aren’t the children in bed?” cried Ursula petulantly, as she came in with the young man.

“They will be in bed in half an hour,” said the mother.

“There is no peace,” cried Ursula.

“The children must live, Ursula,” said her mother.

And Skrebensky was against Ursula in this. Why should she be so insistent?

But then, as Ursula knew, he did not have the perpetual tyranny of young children about him. He treated her mother with great courtliness, to which Mrs. Brangwen returned an easy, friendly hospitality. Something pleased the girl in her mother’s calm assumption of state. It seemed impossible to abate Mrs. Brangwen’s position. She could never be beneath anyone in public relation. Between Brangwen and Skrebensky there was an unbridgeable silence. Sometimes the two men made a slight conversation, but there was no interchange. Ursula rejoiced to see her father retreating into himself against the young man.

She was proud of Skrebensky in the house. His lounging, languorous indifference irritated her and yet cast a spell over her. She knew it was the outcome of a spirit of laissez-aller combined with profound young vitality. Yet it irritated her deeply.

Notwithstanding, she was proud of him as he lounged in his lambent fashion in her home, he was so attentive and courteous to her mother and to herself all the time. It was wonderful to have his awareness in the room. She felt rich and augmented by it, as if she were the positive attraction and he the flow towards her. And his courtesy and his agreement might be all her mother’s, but the lambent flicker of his body was for herself. She held it.

She must ever prove her power.

“I meant to show you my little wood-carving,” she said.

“I’m sure it’s not worth showing, that,” said her father.

“Would you like to see it?” she asked, leaning towards the door.

And his body had risen from the chair, though his face seemed to want to

agree with her parents.

“It is in the shed,” she said.

And he followed her out of the door, whatever his feelings might be.

In the shed they played at kisses, really played at kisses. It was a delicious, exciting game. She turned to him, her face all laughing, like a challenge. And he accepted the challenge at once. He twined his hand full of her hair, and gently, with his hand wrapped round with hair behind her head, gradually brought her face nearer to his, whilst she laughed breathless with challenge, and his eyes gleamed with answer, with enjoyment of the game. And he kissed her, asserting his will over her, and she kissed him back, asserting her deliberate enjoyment of him. Daring and reckless and dangerous they knew it was, their game, each playing with fire, not with love. A sort of defiance of all the world possessed her in it—she would kiss him just because she wanted to. And a dare-devilry in him, like a cynicism, a cut at everything he pretended to serve, retaliated in him.

She was very beautiful then, so wide opened, so radiant, so palpitating, exquisitely vulnerable and poignantly, wrongly, throwing herself to risk. It roused a sort of madness in him. Like a flower shaking and wide-opened in the sun, she tempted him and challenged him, and he accepted the challenge, something went fixed in him. And under all her laughing, poignant recklessness was the quiver of tears. That almost sent him mad, mad with desire, with pain, whose only issue was through possession of her body.

So, shaken, afraid, they went back to her parents in the kitchen, and dissimulated. But something was roused in both of them that they could not now allay. It intensified and heightened their senses, they were more vivid, and powerful in their being. But under it all was a poignant sense of transience. It was a magnificent self-assertion on the part of both of them, he asserted himself before her, he felt himself infinitely male and infinitely irresistible, she asserted herself before him, she knew herself infinitely desirable, and hence infinitely strong. And after all, what could either of them get from such a passion but a sense of his or of her own maximum self, in contradistinction to all the rest of life? Wherein was something finite and sad, for the human soul at its maximum wants a sense of the infinite.

Nevertheless, it was begun now, this passion, and must go on, the passion of Ursula to know her own maximum self, limited and so defined against him. She could limit and define herself against him, the male, she could be her maximum self, female, oh female, triumphant for one moment in exquisite assertion against the male, in supreme contradistinction to the male.

The next afternoon, when he came, prowling, she went with him across to the church. Her father was gradually gathering in anger against him, her mother was

hardening in anger against her. But the parents were naturally tolerant in action.

They went together across the churchyard, Ursula and Skrebensky, and ran to hiding in the church. It was dimmer in there than the sunny afternoon outside, but the mellow glow among the bowed stone was very sweet. The windows burned in ruby and in blue, they made magnificent arras to their bower of secret stone.

“What a perfect place for a rendezvous,” he said, in a hushed voice, glancing round.

She too glanced round the familiar interior. The dimness and stillness chilled her. But her eyes lit up with daring. Here, here she would assert her indomitable gorgeous female self, here. Here she would open her female flower like a flame, in this dimness that was more passionate than light.

They hung apart a moment, then wilfully turned to each other for the desired contact. She put her arms round him, she cleaved her body to his, and with her hands pressed upon his shoulders, on his back, she seemed to feel right through him, to know his young, tense body right through. And it was so fine, so hard, yet so exquisitely subject and under her control. She reached him her mouth and drank his full kiss, drank it fuller and fuller.

And it was so good, it was very, very good. She seemed to be filled with his kiss, filled as if she had drunk strong, glowing sunshine. She glowed all inside, the sunshine seemed to beat upon her heart underneath, she had drunk so beautifully.

She drew away, and looked at him radiant, exquisitely, glowingly beautiful, and satisfied, but radiant as an illumined cloud.

To him this was bitter, that she was so radiant and satisfied. She laughed upon him, blind to him, so full of her own bliss, never doubting but that he was the same as she was. And radiant as an angel she went with him out of the church, as if her feet were beams of light that walked on flowers for footsteps.

He went beside her, his soul clenched, his body unsatisfied. Was she going to make this easy triumph over him? For him, there was now no self-bliss, only pain and confused anger.

It was high summer, and the hay-harvest was almost over. It would be finished on Saturday. On Saturday, however, Skrebensky was going away. He could not stay any longer.

Having decided to go he became very tender and loving to her, kissing her gently, with such soft, sweet, insidious closeness that they were both of them intoxicated.

The very last Friday of his stay he met her coming out of school, and took her to tea in the town. Then he had a motor-car to drive her home.

Her excitement at riding in a motor-car was greatest of all. He too was very proud of this last coup. He saw Ursula kindle and flare up to the romance of the situation. She raised her head like a young horse snuffing with wild delight.

The car swerved round a corner, and Ursula was swung against Skrebensky. The contact made her aware of him. With a swift, foraging impulse she sought for his hand and clasped it in her own, so close, so combined, as if they were two children.

The wind blew in on Ursula's face, the mud flew in a soft, wild rush from the wheels, the country was blackish green, with the silver of new hay here and there, and masses of trees under a silver-gleaming sky.

Her hand tightened on his with a new consciousness, troubled. They did not speak for some time, but sat, hand-fast, with averted, shining faces.

And every now and then the car swung her against him. And they waited for the motion to bring them together. Yet they stared out of the windows, mute.

She saw the familiar country racing by. But now, it was no familiar country, it was wonderland. There was the Hemlock Stone standing on its grassy hill. Strange it looked on this wet, early summer evening, remote, in a magic land. Some rooks were flying out of the trees.

Ah, if only she and Skrebensky could get out, dismount into this enchanted land where nobody had ever been before! Then they would be enchanted people, they would put off the dull, customary self. If she were wandering there, on that hill-slope under a silvery, changing sky, in which many rooks melted like hurrying showers of blots! If they could walk past the wetted hay-swaths, smelling the early evening, and pass in to the wood where the honeysuckle scent was sweet on the cold tang in the air, and showers of drops fell when one brushed a bough, cold and lovely on the face!

But she was here with him in the car, close to him, and the wind was rushing on her lifted, eager face, blowing back the hair. He turned and looked at her, at her face clean as a chiselled thing, her hair chiselled back by the wind, her fine nose keen and lifted.

It was agony to him, seeing her swift and clean-cut and virgin. He wanted to kill himself, and throw his detested carcass at her feet. His desire to turn round on himself and rend himself was an agony to him.

Suddenly she glanced at him. He seemed to be crouching towards her, reaching, he seemed to wince between the brows. But instantly, seeing her lighted eyes and radiant face, his expression changed, his old reckless laugh shone to her. She pressed his hand in utter delight, and he abided. And suddenly she stooped and kissed his hand, bent her head and caught it to her mouth, in generous homage. And the blood burned in him. Yet he remained still, he made

no move.

She started. They were swinging into Cossethay. Skrebensky was going to leave her. But it was all so magic, her cup was so full of bright wine, her eyes could only shine.

He tapped and spoke to the man. The car swung up by the yew trees. She gave him her hand and said good-bye, naive and brief as a schoolgirl. And she stood watching him go, her face shining. The fact of his driving on meant nothing to her, she was so filled by her own bright ecstasy. She did not see him go, for she was filled with light, which was of him. Bright with an amazing light as she was, how could she miss him.

In her bedroom she threw her arms in the air in clear pain of magnificence. Oh, it was her transfiguration, she was beyond herself. She wanted to fling herself into all the hidden brightness of the air. It was there, it was there, if she could but meet it.

But the next day she knew he had gone. Her glory had partly died down-but never from her memory. It was too real. Yet it was gone by, leaving a wistfulness. A deeper yearning came into her soul, a new reserve.

She shrank from touch and question. She was very proud, but very new, and very sensitive. Oh, that no one should lay hands on her!

She was happier running on by herself. Oh, it was a joy to run along the lanes without seeing things, yet being with them. It was such a joy to be alone with all one's riches.

The holidays came, when she was free. She spent most of her time running on by herself, curled up in a squirrel-place in the garden, lying in a hammock in the coppice, while the birds came near-near-so near. Oh, in rainy weather, she flitted to the Marsh, and lay hidden with her book in a hay-loft.

All the time, she dreamed of him, sometimes definitely, but when she was happiest, only vaguely. He was the warm colouring of her dreams, he was the hot blood beating within them.

When she was less happy, out of sorts, she pondered over his appearance, his clothes, the buttons with his regimental badge, which he had given her. Or she tried to imagine his life in barracks. Or she conjured up a vision of herself as she appeared in his eyes.

His birthday was in August, and she spent some pains on making him a cake. She felt that it would not be in good taste for her to give him a present.

Their correspondence was brief, mostly an exchange of post-cards, not at all frequent. But with her cake she must send him a letter.

“DEAR ANTON. THE SUNSHINE HAS COME BACK SPECIALLY FOR YOUR BIRTHDAY, I THINK.

“I MADE THE CAKE MYSELF, AND WISH YOU MANY HAPPY RETURNS OF THE DAY. DON’T EAT IT IF IT IS NOT GOOD. MOTHER HOPES YOU WILL COME AND SEE US WHEN YOU ARE NEAR ENOUGH.

“I AM

“YOUR SINCERE FRIEND,

“URSULA BRANGWEN.”

It bored her to write a letter even to him. After all, writing words on paper had nothing to do with him and her.

The fine weather had set in, the cutting machine went on from dawn till sunset, chattering round the fields. She heard from Skrebensky; he too was on duty in the country, on Salisbury Plain. He was now a second lieutenant in a Field Troop. He would have a few days off shortly, and would come to the Marsh for the wedding.

Fred Brangwen was going to marry a schoolmistress out of Ilkeston as soon as corn-harvest was at an end.

The dim blue-and-gold of a hot, sweet autumn saw the close of the corn-harvest. To Ursula, it was as if the world had opened its softest purest flower, its chicory flower, its meadow saffron. The sky was blue and sweet, the yellow leaves down the lane seemed like free, wandering flowers as they chattered round the feet, making a keen, poignant, almost unbearable music to her heart. And the scents of autumn were like a summer madness to her. She fled away from the little, purple-red button-chrysanthemums like a frightened dryad, the bright yellow little chrysanthemums smelled so strong, her feet seemed to dither in a drunken dance.

Then her Uncle Tom appeared, always like the cynical Bacchus in the picture. He would have a jolly wedding, a harvest supper and a wedding feast in one: a tent in the home close, and a band for dancing, and a great feast out of doors.

Fred demurred, but Tom must be satisfied. Also Laura, a handsome, clever girl, the bride, she also must have a great and jolly feast. It appealed to her educated sense. She had been to Salisbury Training College, knew folk-songs and morris-dancing.

So the preparations were begun, directed by Tom Brangwen. A marquee was set up on the home close, two large bonfires were prepared. Musicians were hired, feast made ready.

Skrebensky was to come, arriving in the morning. Ursula had a new white dress of soft crepe, and a white hat. She liked to wear white. With her black hair and clear golden skin, she looked southern, or rather tropical, like a Creole. She wore no colour whatsoever.

She trembled that day as she appeared to go down to the wedding. She was to be a bridesmaid. Skrebensky would not arrive till afternoon. The wedding was at two o'clock.

As the wedding-party returned home, Skrebensky stood in the parlour at the Marsh. Through the window he saw Tom Brangwen, who was best man, coming up the garden path most elegant in cut-away coat and white slip and spats, with Ursula laughing on his arm. Tom Brangwen was handsome, with his womanish colouring and dark eyes and black close-cut moustache. But there was something subtly coarse and suggestive about him for all his beauty; his strange, bestial nostrils opened so hard and wide, and his well-shaped head almost disquieting in its nakedness, rather bald from the front, and all its soft fulness betrayed.

Skrebensky saw the man rather than the woman. She saw only the slender, unchangeable youth waiting there inscrutable, like her fate. He was beyond her, with his loose, slightly horsey appearance, that made him seem very manly and foreign. Yet his face was smooth and soft and impressionable. She shook hands with him, and her voice was like the rousing of a bird startled by the dawn.

“Isn't it nice,” she cried, “to have a wedding?”

There were bits of coloured confetti lodged on her dark hair.

Again the confusion came over him, as if he were losing himself and becoming all vague, undefined, inchoate. Yet he wanted to be hard, manly, horsey. And he followed her.

There was a light tea, and the guests scattered. The real feast was for the evening. Ursula walked out with Skrebensky through the stackyard to the fields, and up the embankment to the canal-side.

The new cornstacks were big and golden as they went by, an army of white geese marched aside in braggart protest. Ursula was light as a white ball of down. Skrebensky drifted beside her, indefinite, his old form loosened, and another self, grey, vague, drifting out as from a bud. They talked lightly, of nothing.

The blue way of the canal wound softly between the autumn hedges, on towards the greenness of a small hill. On the left was the whole black agitation of colliery and railway and the town which rose on its hill, the church tower topping all. The round white dot of the clock on the tower was distinct in the evening light.

That way, Ursula felt, was the way to London, through the grim, alluring seethe of the town. On the other hand was the evening, mellow over the green water-meadows and the winding alder trees beside the river, and the pale stretches of stubble beyond. There the evening glowed softly, and even a pee-wit was flapping in solitude and peace.

Ursula and Anton Skrebensky walked along the ridge of the canal between. The berries on the hedges were crimson and bright red, above the leaves. The glow of evening and the wheeling of the solitary pee-wit and the faint cry of the birds came to meet the shuffling noise of the pits, the dark, fuming stress of the town opposite, and they two walked the blue strip of water-way, the ribbon of sky between.

He was looking, Ursula thought, very beautiful, because of a flush of sunburn on his hands and face. He was telling her how he had learned to shoe horses and select cattle fit for killing.

“Do you like to be a soldier?” she asked.

“I am not exactly a soldier,” he replied.

“But you only do things for wars,” she said.

“Yes.”

“Would you like to go to war?”

“I? Well, it would be exciting. If there were a war I would want to go.”

A strange, distracted feeling came over her, a sense of potent unrealities.

“Why would you want to go?”

“I should be doing something, it would be genuine. It’s a sort of toy-life as it is.”

“But what would you be doing if you went to war?”

“I would be making railways or bridges, working like a nigger.”

“But you’d only make them to be pulled down again when the armies had done with them. It seems just as much a game.”

“If you call war a game.”

“What is it?”

“It’s about the most serious business there is, fighting.”

A sense of hard separateness came over her.

“Why is fighting more serious than anything else?” she asked.

“You either kill or get killed-and I suppose it is serious enough, killing.”

“But when you’re dead you don’t matter any more,” she said.

He was silenced for a moment.

“But the result matters,” he said. “It matters whether we settle the Mahdi or not.”

“Not to you-nor me-we don’t care about Khartoum.”

“You want to have room to live in: and somebody has to make room.”

“But I don’t want to live in the desert of Sahara-do you?” she replied, laughing with antagonism.

“I don’t-but we’ve got to back up those who do.

“Why have we?”

“Where is the nation if we don’t?”

“But we aren’t the nation. There are heaps of other people who are the nation.”

“They might say they weren’t either.”

“Well, if everybody said it, there wouldn’t be a nation. But I should still be myself,” she asserted brilliantly.

“You wouldn’t be yourself if there were no nation.”

“Why not?”

“Because you’d just be a prey to everybody and anybody.”

“How a prey?”

“They’d come and take everything you’d got.”

“Well, they couldn’t take much even then. I don’t care what they take. I’d rather have a robber who carried me off than a millionaire who gave me everything you can buy.”

“That’s because you are a romanticist.”

“Yes, I am. I want to be romantic. I hate houses that never go away, and people just living in the houses. It’s all so stiff and stupid. I hate soldiers, they are stiff and wooden. What do you fight for, really?”

“I would fight for the nation.”

“For all that, you aren’t the nation. What would you do for yourself?”

“I belong to the nation and must do my duty by the nation.”

“But when it didn’t need your services in particular-when there is no fighting? What would you do then?”

He was irritated.

“I would do what everybody else does.”

“What?”

“Nothing. I would be in readiness for when I was needed.”

The answer came in exasperation.

“It seems to me,” she answered, “as if you weren’t anybody-as if there weren’t anybody there, where you are. Are you anybody, really? You seem like nothing to me.”

They had walked till they had reached a wharf, just above a lock. There an empty barge, painted with a red and yellow cabin hood, but with a long, coal-black hold, was lying moored. A man, lean and grimy, was sitting on a box against the cabin-side by the door, smoking, and nursing a baby that was wrapped in a drab shawl, and looking into the glow of evening. A woman bustled out, sent a pail dashing into the canal, drew her water, and bustled in again. Children’s voices were heard. A thin blue smoke ascended from the cabin chimney, there was a smell of cooking.

Ursula, white as a moth, lingered to look. Skrebensky lingered by her. The man glanced up.

“Good evening,” he called, half impudent, half attracted. He had blue eyes which glanced impudently from his grimy face.

“Good evening,” said Ursula, delighted. “Isn’t it nice. now?”

“Ay,” said the man, “very nice.”

His mouth was red under his ragged, sandy moustache. His teeth were white as he laughed.

“Oh, but — ” stammered Ursula, laughing, “it is. Why do you say it as if it weren’t?”

“Appen for them as is childt-nursin’ it’s none so rosy.”

“May I look inside your barge?” asked Ursula.

“There’s nobody’ll stop you; you come if you like.”

The barge lay at the opposite bank, at the wharf. It was the Annabel, belonging to J. Ruth of Loughborough. The man watched Ursula closely from his keen, twinkling eyes. His fair hair was wispy on his grimed forehead. Two dirty children appeared to see who was talking.

Ursula glanced at the great lock gates. They were shut, and the water was sounding, spurting and trickling down in the gloom beyond. On this side the bright water was almost to the top of the gate. She went boldly across, and round to the wharf.

Stooping from the bank, she peeped into the cabin, where was a red glow of fire and the shadowy figure of a woman. She did want to go down.

“You’ll mess your frock,” said the man, warningly.

“I’ll be careful,” she answered. “May I come?”

“Ay, come if you like.”

She gathered her skirts, lowered her foot to the side of the boat, and leapt down, laughing. Coal-dust flew up.

The woman came to the door. She was plump and sandy-haired, young, with an odd, stubby nose.

“Oh, you will make a mess of yourself,” she cried, surprised and laughing with a little wonder.

“I did want to see. Isn’t it lovely living on a barge?” asked Ursula.

“I don’t live on one altogether,” said the woman cheerfully.

“She’s got her parlour an’ her plush suite in Loughborough,” said her husband with just pride.

Ursula peeped into the cabin, where saucepans were boiling and some dishes were on the table. It was very hot. Then she came out again. The man was talking to the baby. It was a blue-eyed, fresh-faced thing with floss of red-gold

hair.

“Is it a boy or a girl?” she asked.

“It’s a girl-aren’t you a girl, eh?” he shouted at the infant, shaking his head. Its little face wrinkled up into the oddest, funniest smile.

“Oh!” cried Ursula. “Oh, the dear! Oh, how nice when she laughs!”

“She’ll laugh hard enough,” said the father.

“What is her name?” asked Ursula.

“She hasn’t got a name, she’s not worth one,” said the man. “Are you, you fag-end o’ nothing?” he shouted to the baby. The baby laughed.

“No we’ve been that busy, we’ve never took her to th’ registry office,” came the woman’s voice. “She was born on th’ boat here.”

“But you know what you’re going to call her?” asked Ursula.

“We did think of Gladys Em’ly,” said the mother.

“We thought of nowt o’ th’ sort,” said the father.

“Hark at him! What do you want?” cried the mother in exasperation.

“She’ll be called Annabel after th’ boat she was born on.”

“She’s not, so there,” said the mother, viciously defiant

The father sat in humorous malice, grinning.

“Well, you’ll see,” he said.

And Ursula could tell, by the woman’s vibrating exasperation, that he would never give way.

“They’re all nice names,” she said. “Call her Gladys Annabel Emily.”

“Nay, that’s heavy-laden, if you like,” he answered.

“You see!” cried the woman. “He’s that pig-headed!”

“And she’s so nice, and she laughs, and she hasn’t even got a name,” crooned Ursula to the child.

“Let me hold her,” she added.

He yielded her the child, that smelt of babies. But it had such blue, wide, china blue eyes, and it laughed so oddly, with such a taking grimace, Ursula loved it. She cooed and talked to it. It was such an odd, exciting child.

“What’s your name?” the man suddenly asked of her.

“My name is Ursula-Ursula Brangwen,” she replied.

“Ursula!” he exclaimed, dumbfounded.

“There was a Saint Ursula. It’s a very old name,” she added hastily, in justification.

“Hey, mother!” he called.

There was no answer.

“Pem!” he called, “can’t y’hear?”

“What?” came the short answer.

“What about ‘Ursula’?” he grinned.

“What about what?” came the answer, and the woman appeared in the doorway, ready for combat.

“Ursula-it’s the lass’s name there,” he said, gently.

The woman looked the young girl up and down. Evidently she was attracted by her slim, graceful, new beauty, her effect of white elegance, and her tender way of holding the child.

“Why, how do you write it?” the mother asked, awkward now she was touched. Ursula spelled out her name. The man looked at the woman. A bright, confused flush came over the mother’s face, a sort of luminous shyness.

“It’s not a common name, is it!” she exclaimed, excited as by an adventure.

“Are you goin’ to have it then?” he asked.

“I’d rather have it than Annabel,” she said, decisively.

“An’ I’d rather have it than Gladys Em’ler,” he replied.

There was a silence, Ursula looked up.

“Will you really call her Ursula?” she asked.

“Ursula Ruth,” replied the man, laughing vainly, as pleased as if he had found something.

It was now Ursula’s turn to be confused.

“It does sound awfully nice,” she said. “I must give her something. And I haven’t got anything at all.”

She stood in her white dress, wondering, down there in the barge. The lean man sitting near to her watched her as if she were a strange being, as if she lit up his face. His eyes smiled on her, boldly, and yet with exceeding admiration underneath.

“Could I give her my necklace?” she said.

It was the little necklace made of pieces of amethyst and topaz and pearl and crystal, strung at intervals on a little golden chain, which her Uncle Tom had given her. She was very fond of it. She looked at it lovingly, when she had taken it from her neck.

“Is it valuable?” the man asked her, curiously.

“I think so,” she replied.

“The stones and pearl are real; it is worth three or four pounds,” said Skrebensky from the wharf above. Ursula could tell he disapproved of her.

“I must give it to your baby-may I?” she said to the bargee.

He flushed, and looked away into the evening.

“Nay,” he said, “it’s not for me to say.”

“What would your father and mother say?” cried the woman curiously, from the door.

“It is my own,” said Ursula, and she dangled the little glittering string before the baby. The infant spread its little fingers. But it could not grasp. Ursula closed the tiny hand over the jewel. The baby waved the bright ends of the string. Ursula had given her necklace away. She felt sad. But she did not want it back.

The jewel swung from the baby’s hand and fell in a little heap on the coal-dusty bottom of the barge. The man groped for it, with a kind of careful reverence. Ursula noticed the coarsened, blunted fingers groping at the little jewelled heap. The skin was red on the back of the hand, the fair hairs glistened stiffly. It was a thin, sinewy, capable hand nevertheless, and Ursula liked it. He took up the necklace carefully, and blew the coal-dust from it, as it lay in the hollow of his hand. He seemed still and attentive. He held out his hand with the necklace shining small in its hard, black hollow.

“Take it back,” he said.

Ursula hardened with a kind of radiance.

“No,” she said. “It belongs to little Ursula.”

And she went to the infant and fastened the necklace round its warm, soft, weak little neck.

There was a moment of confusion, then the father bent over his child:

“What do you say?” he said. “Do you say thank you? Do you say thank you, Ursula?”

“Her name’s Ursula now,” said the mother, smiling a little bit ingratiatingly from the door. And she came out to examine the jewel on the child’s neck.

“It is Ursula, isn’t it?” said Ursula Brangwen.

The father looked up at her, with an intimate, half-gallant, half-impudent, but wistful look. His captive soul loved her: but his soul was captive, he knew, always.

She wanted to go. He set a little ladder for her to climb up to the wharf. She kissed the child, which was in its mother’s arms, then she turned away. The mother was effusive. The man stood silent by the ladder.

Ursula joined Skrebensky. The two young figures crossed the lock, above the shining yellow water. The barge-man watched them go.

“I loved them,” she was saying. “He was so gentle-oh, so gentle! And the baby was such a dear!”

“Was he gentle?” said Skrebensky. “The woman had been a servant, I’m sure of that.”

Ursula winced.

“But I loved his impudence-it was so gentle underneath.”

She went hastening on, gladdened by having met the grimy, lean man with the ragged moustache. He gave her a pleasant warm feeling. He made her feel the

richness of her own life. Skrebensky, somehow, had created a deadness round her, a sterility, as if the world were ashes.

They said very little as they hastened home to the big supper. He was envying the lean father of three children, for his impudent directness and his worship of the woman in Ursula, a worship of body and soul together, the man's body and soul wistful and worshipping the body and spirit of the girl, with a desire that knew the inaccessibility of its object, but was only glad to know that the perfect thing existed, glad to have had a moment of communion.

Why could not he himself desire a woman so? Why did he never really want a woman, not with the whole of him: never loved, never worshipped, only just physically wanted her.

But he would want her with his body, let his soul do as it would. A kind of flame of physical desire was gradually beating up in the Marsh, kindled by Tom Brangwen, and by the fact of the wedding of Fred, the shy, fair, stiff-set farmer with the handsome, half-educated girl. Tom Brangwen, with all his secret power, seemed to fan the flame that was rising. The bride was strongly attracted by him, and he was exerting his influence on another beautiful, fair girl, chill and burning as the sea, who said witty things which he appreciated, making her glint with more, like phosphorescence. And her greenish eyes seemed to rock a secret, and her hands like mother-of-pearl seemed luminous, transparent, as if the secret were burning visible in them.

At the end of supper, during dessert, the music began to play, violins, and flutes. Everybody's face was lit up. A glow of excitement prevailed. When the little speeches were over, and the port remained unreached for any more, those who wished were invited out to the open for coffee. The night was warm.

Bright stars were shining, the moon was not yet up. And under the stars burned two great, red, flameless fires, and round these lights and lanterns hung, the marquee stood open before a fire, with its lights inside.

The young people flocked out into the mysterious night. There was sound of laughter and voices, and a scent of coffee. The farm-buildings loomed dark in the background. Figures, pale and dark, flitted about, intermingling. The red fire glinted on a white or a silken skirt, the lanterns gleamed on the transient heads of the wedding guests.

To Ursula it was wonderful. She felt she was a new being. The darkness seemed to breathe like the sides of some great beast, the haystacks loomed half-revealed, a crowd of them, a dark, fecund lair just behind. Waves of delirious darkness ran through her soul. She wanted to let go. She wanted to reach and be amongst the flashing stars, she wanted to race with her feet and be beyond the confines of this earth. She was mad to be gone. It was as if a hound were

straining on the leash, ready to hurl itself after a nameless quarry into the dark. And she was the quarry, and she was also the hound. The darkness was passionate and breathing with immense, unperceived heaving. It was waiting to receive her in her flight. And how could she start-and how could she let go? She must leap from the known into the unknown. Her feet and hands beat like a madness, her breast strained as if in bonds.

The music began, and the bonds began to slip. Tom Brangwen was dancing with the bride, quick and fluid and as if in another element, inaccessible as the creatures that move in the water. Fred Brangwen went in with another partner. The music came in waves. One couple after another was washed and absorbed into the deep underwater of the dance.

“Come,” said Ursula to Skrebensky, laying her hand on his arm.

At the touch of her hand on his arm, his consciousness melted away from him. He took her into his arms, as if into the sure, subtle power of his will, and they became one movement, one dual movement, dancing on the slippery grass. It would be endless, this movement, it would continue for ever. It was his will and her will locked in a trance of motion, two wills locked in one motion, yet never fusing, never yielding one to the other. It was a glaucous, intertwining, delicious flux and contest in flux.

They were both absorbed into a profound silence, into a deep, fluid underwater energy that gave them unlimited strength. All the dancers were waving intertwined in the flux of music. Shadowy couples passed and repassed before the fire, the dancing feet danced silently by into the darkness. It was a vision of the depths of the underworld, under the great flood.

There was a wonderful rocking of the darkness, slowly, a great, slow swinging of the whole night, with the music playing lightly on the surface, making the strange, ecstatic, rippling on the surface of the dance, but underneath only one great flood heaving slowly backwards to the verge of oblivion, slowly forward to the other verge, the heart sweeping along each time, and tightening with anguish as the limit was reached, and the movement, at crises, turned and swept back.

As the dance surged heavily on, Ursula was aware of some influence looking in upon her. Something was looking at her. Some powerful, glowing sight was looking right into her, not upon her, but right at her. Out of the great distance, and yet imminent, the powerful, overwhelming watch was kept upon her. And she danced on and on with Skrebensky, while the great, white watching continued, balancing all in its revelation.

“The moon has risen,” said Anton, as the music ceased, and they found themselves suddenly stranded, like bits of jetsam on a shore. She turned, and saw a great white moon looking at her over the hill. And her breast opened to it, she

was cleaved like a transparent jewel to its light. She stood filled with the full moon, offering herself. Her two breasts opened to make way for it, her body opened wide like a quivering anemone, a soft, dilated invitation touched by the moon. She wanted the moon to fill in to her, she wanted more, more communion with the moon, consummation. But Skrebensky put his arm round her, and led her away. He put a big, dark cloak round her, and sat holding her hand, whilst the moonlight streamed above the glowing fires.

She was not there. Patiently she sat, under the cloak, with Skrebensky holding her hand. But her naked self was away there beating upon the moonlight, dashing the moonlight with her breasts and her knees, in meeting, in communion. She half started, to go in actuality, to fling away her clothing and flee away, away from this dark confusion and chaos of people to the hill and the moon. But the people stood round her like stones, like magnetic stones, and she could not go, in actuality. Skrebensky, like a load-stone weighed on her, the weight of his presence detained her. She felt the burden of him, the blind, persistent, inert burden. He was inert, and he weighed upon her. She sighed in pain. Oh, for the coolness and entire liberty and brightness of the moon. Oh, for the cold liberty to be herself, to do entirely as she liked. She wanted to get right away. She felt like bright metal weighted down by dark, impure magnetism. He was the dross, people were the dross. If she could but get away to the clean free moonlight.

“Don’t you like me to-night?” said his low voice, the voice of the shadow over her shoulder. She clenched her hands in the dewy brilliance of the moon, as if she were mad.

“Don’t you like me to-night?” repeated the soft voice.

And she knew that if she turned, she would die. A strange rage filled her, a rage to tear things asunder. Her hands felt destructive, like metal blades of destruction.

“Let me alone,” she said.

A darkness, an obstinacy settled on him too, in a kind of inertia. He sat inert beside her. She threw off her cloak and walked towards the moon, silver-white herself. He followed her closely.

The music began again and the dance. He appropriated her. There was a fierce, white, cold passion in her heart. But he held her close, and danced with her. Always present, like a soft weight upon her, bearing her down, was his body against her as they danced. He held her very close, so that she could feel his body, the weight of him sinking, settling upon her, overcoming her life and energy, making her inert along with him, she felt his hands pressing behind her, upon her. But still in her body was the subdued, cold, indomitable passion. She

liked the dance: it eased her, put her into a sort of trance. But it was only a kind of waiting, of using up the time that intervened between her and her pure being. She left herself against him, she let him exert all his power over her, to bear her down. She received all the force of his power. She even wished he might overcome her. She was cold and unmoved as a pillar of salt.

His will was set and straining with all its tension to encompass him and compel her. If he could only compel her. He seemed to be annihilated. She was cold and hard and compact of brilliance as the moon itself, and beyond him as the moonlight was beyond him, never to be grasped or known. If he could only set a bond round her and compel her!

So they danced four or five dances, always together, always his will becoming more tense, his body more subtle, playing upon her. And still he had not got her, she was hard and bright as ever, intact. But he must weave himself round her, enclose her, enclose her in a net of shadow, of darkness, so she would be like a bright creature gleaming in a net of shadows, caught. Then he would have her, he would enjoy her. How he would enjoy her, when she was caught.

At last, when the dance was over, she would not sit down, she walked away. He came with his arm round her, keeping her upon the movement of his walking. And she seemed to agree. She was bright as a piece of moonlight, as bright as a steel blade, he seemed to be clasping a blade that hurt him. Yet he would clasp her, if it killed him.

They went towards the stackyard. There he saw, with something like terror, the great new stacks of corn glistening and gleaming transfigured, silvery and present under the night-blue sky, throwing dark, substantial shadows, but themselves majestic and dimly present. She, like glimmering gossamer, seemed to burn among them, as they rose like cold fires to the silvery-bluish air. All was intangible, a burning of cold, glimmering, whitish-steely fires. He was afraid of the great moon-conflagration of the cornstacks rising above him. His heart grew smaller, it began to fuse like a bead. He knew he would die.

She stood for some moments out in the overwhelming luminosity of the moon. She seemed a beam of gleaming power. She was afraid of what she was. Looking at him, at his shadowy, unreal, wavering presence a sudden lust seized her, to lay hold of him and tear him and make him into nothing. Her hands and wrists felt immeasurably hard and strong, like blades. He waited there beside her like a shadow which she wanted to dissipate, destroy as the moonlight destroys a darkness, annihilate, have done with. She looked at him and her face gleamed bright and inspired. She tempted him.

And an obstinacy in him made him put his arm round her and draw her to the shadow. She submitted: let him try what he could do. Let him try what he could

do. He leaned against the side of the stack, holding her. The stack stung him keenly with a thousand cold, sharp flames. Still obstinately he held her.

And timorously, his hands went over her, over the salt, compact brilliance of her body. If he could but have her, how he would enjoy her! If he could but net her brilliant, cold, salt-burning body in the soft iron of his own hands, net her, capture her, hold her down, how madly he would enjoy her. He strove subtly, but with all his energy, to enclose her, to have her. And always she was burning and brilliant and hard as salt, and deadly. Yet obstinately, all his flesh burning and corroding, as if he were invaded by some consuming, scathing poison, still he persisted, thinking at last he might overcome her. Even, in his frenzy, he sought for her mouth with his mouth, though it was like putting his face into some awful death. She yielded to him, and he pressed himself upon her in extremity, his soul groaning over and over:

“Let me come-let me come.”

She took him in the kiss, hard her kiss seized upon him, hard and fierce and burning corrosive as the moonlight. She seemed to be destroying him. He was reeling, summoning all his strength to keep his kiss upon her, to keep himself in the kiss.

But hard and fierce she had fastened upon him, cold as the moon and burning as a fierce salt. Till gradually his warm, soft iron yielded, yielded, and she was there fierce, corrosive, seething with his destruction, seething like some cruel, corrosive salt around the last substance of his being, destroying him, destroying him in the kiss. And her soul crystallised with triumph, and his soul was dissolved with agony and annihilation. So she held him there, the victim, consumed, annihilated. She had triumphed: he was not any more.

Gradually she began to come to herself. Gradually a sort of daytime consciousness came back to her. Suddenly the night was struck back into its old, accustomed, mild reality. Gradually she realised that the night was common and ordinary, that the great, blistering, transcendent night did not really exist. She was overcome with slow horror. Where was she? What was this nothingness she felt? The nothingness was Skrebensky. Was he really there?-who was he? He was silent, he was not there. What had happened? Had she been mad: what horrible thing had possessed her? She was filled with overpowering fear of herself, overpowering desire that it should not be, that other burning, corrosive self. She was seized with a frenzied desire that what had been should never be remembered, never be thought of, never be for one moment allowed possible. She denied it with all her might. With all her might she turned away from it. She was good, she was loving. Her heart was warm, her blood was dark and warm and soft. She laid her hand caressively on Anton's shoulder.

“Isn’t it lovely?” she said, softly, coaxingly, caressingly. And she began to caress him to life again. For he was dead. And she intended that he should never know, never become aware of what had been. She would bring him back from the dead without leaving him one trace of fact to remember his annihilation by.

She exerted all her ordinary, warm self, she touched him, she did him homage of loving awareness. And gradually he came back to her, another man. She was soft and winning and caressing. She was his servant, his adoring slave. And she restored the whole shell of him. She restored the whole form and figure of him. But the core was gone. His pride was bolstered up, his blood ran once more in pride. But there was no core to him: as a distinct male he had no core. His triumphant, flaming, overweening heart of the intrinsic male would never beat again. He would be subject now, reciprocal, never the indomitable thing with a core of overweening, unabateable fire. She had abated that fire, she had broken him.

But she caressed him. She would not have him remember what had been. She would not remember herself.

“Kiss me, Anton, kiss me,” she pleaded.

He kissed her, but she knew he could not touch her. His arms were round her, but they had not got her. She could feel his mouth upon her, but she was not at all compelled by it.

“Kiss me,” she whispered, in acute distress, “kiss me.”

And he kissed her as she bade him, but his heart was hollow. She took his kisses, outwardly. But her soul was empty and finished.

Looking away, she saw the delicate glint of oats dangling from the side of the stack, in the moonlight, something proud and royal, and quite impersonal. She had been proud with them, where they were, she had been also. But in this temporary warm world of the commonplace, she was a kind, good girl. She reached out yearningly for goodness and affection. She wanted to be kind and good.

They went home through the night that was all pale and glowing around, with shadows and glimmerings and presences. Distinctly, she saw the flowers in the hedge-bottoms, she saw the thin, raked sheaves flung white upon the thorny hedge.

How beautiful, how beautiful it was! She thought with anguish how wildly happy she was to-night, since he had kissed her. But as he walked with his arm round her waist, she turned with a great offering of herself to the night that glistened tremendous, a magnificent godly moon white and candid as a bridegroom, flowers silvery and transformed filling up the shadows.

He kissed her again, under the yew trees at home, and she left him. She ran

from the intrusion of her parents at home, to her bedroom, where, looking out on the moonlit country, she stretched up her arms, hard, hard, in bliss, agony offering herself to the blond, debonair presence of the night.

But there was a wound of sorrow, she had hurt herself, as if she had bruised herself, in annihilating him. She covered up her two young breasts with her hands, covering them to herself; and covering herself with herself, she crouched in bed, to sleep.

In the morning the sun shone, she got up strong and dancing. Skrebensky was still at the Marsh. He was coming to church. How lovely, how amazing life was! On the fresh Sunday morning she went out to the garden, among the yellows and the deep-vibrating reds of autumn, she smelled the earth and felt the gossamer, the cornfields across the country were pale and unreal, everywhere was the intense silence of the Sunday morning, filled with unacquainted noises. She smelled the body of the earth, it seemed to stir its powerful flank beneath her as she stood. In the bluish air came the powerful exudation, the peace was the peace of strong, exhausted breathing, the reds and yellows and the white gleam of stubble were the quivers and motion of the last subsiding transports and clear bliss of fulfilment.

The church-bells were ringing when he came. She looked up in keen anticipation at his entry. But he was troubled and his pride was hurt. He seemed very much clothed, she was conscious of his tailored suit.

“Wasn’t it lovely last night?” she whispered to him.

“Yes,” he said. But his face did not open nor become free.

The service and the singing in church that morning passed unnoticed by her. She saw the coloured glow of the windows, the forms of the worshippers. Only she glanced at the book of Genesis, which was her favourite book in the Bible.

“And God blessed Noah and his sons, and said unto them, Be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth.

“And the fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth, and upon every fowl of the air, upon all that moveth upon the earth, and upon all the fishes in the sea; into your hand are they delivered.

“Every moving thing that liveth shall be meat for you; even as the green herb have I given you all things.”

But Ursula was not moved by the history this morning. Multiplying and replenishing the earth bored her. Altogether it seemed merely a vulgar and stock-raising sort of business. She was left quite cold by man’s stock-breeding lordship over beast and fishes.

“And you, be ye fruitful and multiply; bring forth abundantly in the earth, and multiply therein.”

In her soul she mocked at this multiplication, every cow becoming two cows, every turnip ten turnips.

“And God said; This is the token of the covenant which I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for perpetual generations;

“I do set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be a token of a covenant between me and the earth.

“And it shall come to pass, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that a bow shall be seen in the cloud;

“And I will remember my covenant, which is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh, and the waters shall no more become a flood to destroy all flesh.”

“Destroy all flesh,” why “flesh” in particular? Who was this lord of flesh? After all, how big was the Flood? Perhaps a few dryads and fauns had just run into the hills and the farther valleys and woods, frightened, but most had gone on blithely unaware of any flood at all, unless the nymphs should tell them. It pleased Ursula to think of the naiads in Asia Minor meeting the nereids at the mouth of the streams, where the sea washed against the fresh, sweet tide, and calling to their sisters the news of Noah’s Flood. They would tell amusing accounts of Noah in his ark. Some nymphs would relate how they had hung on the side of the ark, peeped in, and heard Noah and Shem and Ham and Japeth, sitting in their place under the rain, saying, how they four were the only men on earth now, because the Lord had drowned all the rest, so that they four would have everything to themselves, and be masters of every thing, sub-tenants under the great Proprietor.

Ursula wished she had been a nymph. She would have laughed through the window of the ark, and flicked drops of the flood at Noah, before she drifted away to people who were less important in their Proprietor and their Flood.

What was God, after all? If maggots in a dead dog be but God kissing carrion, what then is not God? She was surfeited of this God. She was weary of the Ursula Brangwen who felt troubled about God. What ever God was, He was, and there was no need for her to trouble about Him. She felt she had now all licence.

Skrebensky sat beside her, listening to the sermon, to the voice of law and order. “The very hairs of your head are all numbered.” He did not believe it. He believed his own things were quite at his own disposal. You could do as you liked with your own things, so long as you left other people’s alone.

Ursula caressed him and made love to him. Nevertheless he knew she wanted to react upon him and to destroy his being. She was not with him, she was against him. But her making love to him, her complete admiration of him, in open life, gratified him.

She caught him out of himself, and they were lovers, in a young, romantic, almost fantastic way. He gave her a little ring. They put it in Rhine wine, in their glass, and she drank, then he drank. They drank till the ring lay exposed at the bottom of the glass. Then she took the simple jewel, and tied it on a thread round her neck, where she wore it.

He asked her for a photograph when he was going away. She went in great excitement to the photographer, with five shillings. The result was an ugly little picture of herself with her mouth on one side. She wondered over it and admired it.

He saw only the live face of the girl. The picture hurt him. He kept it, he always remembered it, but he could scarcely bear to see it. There was a hurt to his soul in the clear, fearless face that was touched with abstraction. Its abstraction was certainly away from him.

Then war was declared with the Boers in South Africa, and everywhere was a fizz of excitement. He wrote that he might have to go. And he sent her a box of sweets.

She was slightly dazed at the thought of his going to the war, not knowing how to feel. It was a sort of romantic situation that she knew so well in fiction she hardly understood it in fact. Underneath a top elation was a sort of dreariness, deep, ashy disappointment.

However, she secreted the sweets under her bed, and ate them all herself, when she went to bed, and when she woke in the morning. All the time she felt very guilty and ashamed, but she simply did not want to share them.

That box of sweets remained stuck in her mind afterwards. Why had she secreted them and eaten them every one? Why? She did not feel guilty-she only knew she ought to feel guilty. And she could not make up her mind. Curiously monumental that box of sweets stood up, now it was empty. It was a crux for her. What was she to think of it?

The idea of war altogether made her feel uneasy, uneasy. When men began organised fighting with each other it seemed to her as if the poles of the universe were cracking, and the whole might go tumbling into the bottomless pit. A horrible bottomless feeling she had. Yet of course there was the minted superscription of romance and honour and even religion about war. She was very confused.

Skrebensky was busy, he could not come to see her. She asked for no assurance, no security. What was between them, was, and could not be altered by avowals. She knew that by instinct, she trusted to the intrinsic reality.

But she felt an agony of helplessness. She could do nothing. Vaguely she knew the huge powers of the world rolling and crashing together, darkly,

clumsily, stupidly, yet colossal, so that one was brushed along almost as dust. Helpless, helpless, swirling like dust! Yet she wanted so hard to rebel, to rage, to fight. But with what?

Could she with her hands fight the face of the earth, beat the hills in their places? Yet her breast wanted to fight, to fight the whole world. And these two small hands were all she had to do it with.

The months went by, and it was Christmas-the snowdrops came. There was a little hollow in the wood near Cossethay, where snowdrops grew wild. She sent him some in a box, and he wrote her a quick little note of thanks-very grateful and wistful he seemed. Her eyes grew childlike and puzzled. Puzzled from day to day she went on, helpless, carried along by all that must happen.

He went about at his duties, giving himself up to them. At the bottom of his heart his self, the soul that aspired and had true hope of self-effectuation lay as dead, still-born, a dead weight in his womb. Who was he, to hold important his personal connection? What did a man matter personally? He was just a brick in the whole great social fabric, the nation, the modern humanity. His personal movements were small, and entirely subsidiary. The whole form must be ensured, not ruptured, for any personal reason whatsoever, since no personal reason could justify such a breaking. What did personal intimacy matter? One had to fill one's place in the whole, the great scheme of man's elaborate civilisation, that was all. The Whole mattered-but the unit, the person, had no importance, except as he represented the Whole.

So Skrebensky left the girl out and went his way, serving what he had to serve, and enduring what he had to endure, without remark. To his own intrinsic life, he was dead. And he could not rise again from the dead. His soul lay in the tomb. His life lay in the established order of things. He had his five senses too. They were to be gratified. Apart from this, he represented the great, established, extant Idea of life, and as this he was important and beyond question.

The good of the greatest number was all that mattered. That which was the greatest good for them all, collectively, was the greatest good for the individual. And so, every man must give himself to support the state, and so labour for the greatest good of all. One might make improvements in the state, perhaps, but always with a view to preserving it intact.

No highest good of the community, however, would give him the vital fulfilment of his soul. He knew this. But he did not consider the soul of the individual sufficiently important. He believed a man was important in so far as he represented all humanity.

He could not see, it was not born in him to see, that the highest good of the community as it stands is no longer the highest good of even the average

individual. He thought that, because the community represents millions of people, therefore it must be millions of times more important than any individual, forgetting that the community is an abstraction from the many, and is not the many themselves. Now when the statement of the abstract good for the community has become a formula lacking in all inspiration or value to the average intelligence, then the “common good” becomes a general nuisance, representing the vulgar, conservative materialism at a low level.

And by the highest good of the greatest number is chiefly meant the material prosperity of all classes. Skrebensky did not really care about his own material prosperity. If he had been penniless-well, he would have taken his chances. Therefore how could he find his highest good in giving up his life for the material prosperity of everybody else! What he considered an unimportant thing for himself he could not think worthy of every sacrifice on behalf of other people. And that which he would consider of the deepest importance to himself as an individual-oh, he said, you mustn't consider the community from that standpoint. No-no-we know what the community wants; it wants something solid, it wants good wages, equal opportunities, good conditions of living, that's what the community wants. It doesn't want anything subtle or difficult. Duty is very plain-keep in mind the material, the immediate welfare of every man, that's all.

So there came over Skrebensky a sort of nullity, which more and more terrified Ursula. She felt there was something hopeless which she had to submit to. She felt a great sense of disaster impending. Day after day was made inert with a sense of disaster. She became morbidly sensitive, depressed, apprehensive. It was anguish to her when she saw one rook slowly flapping in the sky. That was a sign of ill-omen. And the foreboding became so black and so powerful in her, that she was almost extinguished.

Yet what was the matter? At the worst he was only going away. Why did she mind, what was it she feared? She did not know. Only she had a black dread possessing her. When she went at night and saw the big, flashing stars they seemed terrible, by day she was always expecting some charge to be made against her.

He wrote in March to say that he was going to South Africa in a short time, but before he went, he would snatch a day at the Marsh.

As if in a painful dream, she waited suspended, unresolved. She did not know, she could not understand. Only she felt that all the threads of her fate were being held taut, in suspense. She only wept sometimes as she went about, saying blindly:

“I am so fond of him, I am so fond of him.”

He came. But why did he come? She looked at him for a sign. He gave no sign. He did not even kiss her. He behaved as if he were an affable, usual acquaintance. This was superficial, but what did it hide? She waited for him, she wanted him to make some sign.

So the whole of the day they wavered and avoided contact, until evening. Then, laughing, saying he would be back in six months' time and would tell them all about it, he shook hands with her mother and took his leave.

Ursula accompanied him into the lane. The night was windy, the yew trees seethed and hissed and vibrated. The wind seemed to rush about among the chimneys and the church-tower. It was dark.

The wind blew Ursula's face, and her clothes cleaved to her limbs. But it was a surging, turgid wind, instinct with compressed vigour of life. And she seemed to have lost Skrebensky. Out there in the strong, urgent night she could not find him.

"Where are you?" she asked.

"Here," came his bodiless voice.

And groping, she touched him. A fire like lightning drenched them.

"Anton?" she said.

"What?" he answered.

She held him with her hands in the darkness, she felt his body again with hers.

"Don't leave me-come back to me," she said.

"Yes," he said, holding her in his arms.

But the male in him was scotched by the knowledge that she was not under his spell nor his influence. He wanted to go away from her. He rested in the knowledge that to-morrow he was going away, his life was really elsewhere. His life was elsewhere-his life was elsewhere-the centre of his life was not what she would have. She was different-there was a breach between them. They were hostile worlds.

"You will come back to me?" she reiterated.

"Yes," he said. And he meant it. But as one keeps an appointment, not as a man returning to his fulfilment.

So she kissed him, and went indoors, lost. He walked down to the Marsh abstracted. The contact with her hurt him, and threatened him. He shrank, he had to be free of her spirit. For she would stand before him, like the angel before Balaam, and drive him back with a sword from the way he was going, into a wilderness.

The next day she went to the station to see him go. She looked at him, she turned to him, but he was always so strange and null-so null. He was so collected. She thought it was that which made him null. Strangely nothing he

was.

Ursula stood near him with a mute, pale face which he would rather not see. There seemed some shame at the very root of life, cold, dead shame for her.

The three made a noticeable group on the station; the girl in her fur cap and tippet and her olive green costume, pale, tense with youth, isolated, unyielding; the soldierly young man in a crush hat and a heavy overcoat, his face rather pale and reserved above his purple scarf, his whole figure neutral; then the elder man, a fashionable bowler hat pressed low over his dark brows, his face warm-coloured and calm, his whole figure curiously suggestive of full-blooded indifference; he was the eternal audience, the chorus, the spectator at the drama; in his own life he would have no drama.

The train was rushing up. Ursula's heart heaved, but the ice was frozen too strong upon it.

"Good-bye," she said, lifting her hand, her face laughing with her peculiar, blind, almost dazzling laugh. She wondered what he was doing, when he stooped and kissed her. He should be shaking hands and going.

"Good-bye," she said again.

He picked up his little bag and turned his back on her. There was a hurry along the train. Ah, here was his carriage. He took his seat. Tom Brangwen shut the door, and the two men shook hands as the whistle went.

"Good-bye-and good luck," said Brangwen.

"Thank you-good-bye."

The train moved off. Skrebensky stood at the carriage window, waving, but not really looking to the two figures, the girl and the warm-coloured, almost effeminately-dressed man Ursula waved her handkerchief. The train gathered speed, it grew smaller and smaller. Still it ran in a straight line. The speck of white vanished. The rear of the train was small in the distance. Still she stood on the platform, feeling a great emptiness about her. In spite of herself her mouth was quivering: she did not want to cry: her heart was dead cold.

Her Uncle Tom had gone to an automatic machine, and was getting matches.

"Would you like some sweets?" he said, turning round.

Her face was covered with tears, she made curious, downward grimaces with her mouth, to get control. Yet her heart was not crying-it was cold and earthy.

"What kind would you like-any?" persisted her uncle.

"I should love some peppermint drops," she said, in a strange, normal voice, from her distorted face. But in a few moments she had gained control of herself, and was still, detached.

"Let us go into the town," he said, and he rushed her into a train, moving to the town station. They went to a cafe to drink coffee, she sat looking at people in

the street, and a great wound was in her breast, a cold imperturbability in her soul.

This cold imperturbability of spirit continued in her now. It was as if some disillusion had frozen upon her, a hard disbelief. Part of her had gone cold, apathetic. She was too young, too baffled to understand, or even to know that she suffered much. And she was too deeply hurt to submit.

She had her blind agonies, when she wanted him, she wanted him. But from the moment of his departure, he had become a visionary thing of her own. All her roused torment and passion and yearning she turned to him.

She kept a diary, in which she wrote impulsive thoughts. Seeing the moon in the sky, her own heart surcharged, she went and wrote:

“If I were the moon, I know where I would fall down.”

It meant so much to her, that sentence-she put into it all the anguish of her youth and her young passion and yearning. She called to him from her heart wherever she went, her limbs vibrated with anguish towards him wherever she was, the radiating force of her soul seemed to travel to him, endlessly, endlessly, and in her soul's own creation, find him.

But who was he, and where did he exist? In her own desire only.

She received a post-card from him, and she put it in her bosom. It did not mean much to her, really. The second day, she lost it, and never even remembered she had had it, till some days afterwards.

The long weeks went by. There came the constant bad news of the war. And she felt as if all, outside there in the world, were a hurt, a hurt against her. And something in her soul remained cold, apathetic, unchanging.

Her life was always only partial at this time, never did she live completely. There was the cold, unliving part of her. Yet she was madly sensitive. She could not bear herself. When a dirty, red-eyed old woman came begging of her in the street, she started away as from an unclean thing. And then, when the old woman shouted acrid insults after her, she winced, her limbs palpitated with insane torment, she could not bear herself. Whenever she thought of the red-eyed old woman, a sort of madness ran in inflammation over her flesh and her brain, she almost wanted to kill herself.

And in this state, her sexual life flamed into a kind of disease within her. She was so overwrought and sensitive, that the mere touch of coarse wool seemed to tear her nerves.

CHAPTER 12

Shame

Ursula had only two more terms at school. She was studying for her matriculation examination. It was dreary work, for she had very little intelligence when she was disjointed from happiness. Stubbornness and a consciousness of impending fate kept her half-heartedly pinned to it. She knew that soon she would want to become a self-responsible person, and her dread was that she would be prevented. An all-containing will in her for complete independence, complete social independence, complete independence from any personal authority, kept her dullishly at her studies. For she knew that she had always her price of ransom — her femaleness. She was always a woman, and what she could not get because she was a human being, fellow to the rest of mankind, she would get because she was a female, other than the man. In her femaleness she felt a secret riches, a reserve, she had always the price of freedom.

However, she was sufficiently reserved about this last resource. The other things should be tried first. There was the mysterious man's world to be adventured upon, the world of daily work and duty, and existence as a working member of the community. Against this she had a subtle grudge. She wanted to make her conquest also of this man's world.

So she ground away at her work, never giving it up. Some things she liked. Her subjects were English, Latin, French, mathematics and history. Once she knew how to read French and Latin, the syntax bored her. Most tedious was the close study of English literature. Why should one remember the things one read? Something in mathematics, their cold absoluteness, fascinated her, but the actual practice was tedious. Some people in history puzzled her and made her ponder, but the political parts angered her, and she hated ministers. Only in odd streaks did she get a poignant sense of acquisition and enrichment and enlarging from her studies; one afternoon, reading *As You Like It*; once when, with her blood, she heard a passage of Latin, and she knew how the blood beat in a Roman's body; so that ever after she felt she knew the Romans by contact. She enjoyed the vagaries of English Grammar, because it gave her pleasure to detect the live movements of words and sentences; and mathematics, the very sight of the letters in Algebra, had a real lure for her.

She felt so much and so confusedly at this time, that her face got a queer, wondering, half-scared look, as if she were not sure what might seize upon her at any moment out of the unknown.

Odd little bits of information stirred unfathomable passion in her. When she knew that in the tiny brown buds of autumn were folded, minute and complete, the finished flowers of the summer nine months hence, tiny, folded up, and left there waiting, a flash of triumph and love went over her.

“I could never die while there was a tree,” she said passionately, sententiously, standing before a great ash in worship.

It was the people who, somehow, walked as an upright menace to her. Her life at this time was unformed, palpitating, essentially shrinking from all touch. She gave something to other people, but she was never herself, since she had no self. She was not afraid nor ashamed before trees, and birds, and the sky. But she shrank violently from people, ashamed she was not as they were, fixed, emphatic, but a wavering, undefined sensibility only, without form or being.

Gudrun was at this time a great comfort and shield to her. The younger girl was a lithe, farouche animal, who mistrusted all approach, and would have none of the petty secrecies and jealousies of schoolgirl intimacy. She would have no truck with the tame cats, nice or not, because she believed that they were all only untamed cats with a nasty, untrustworthy habit of tameness.

This was a great stand-back for Ursula, who suffered agonies when she thought a person disliked her, no matter how much she despised that other person. How could anyone dislike her, Ursula Brangwen? The question terrified her and was unanswerable. She sought refuge in Gudrun’s natural, proud indifference.

It had been discovered that Gudrun had a talent for drawing. This solved the problem of the girl’s indifference to all study. It was said of her, “She can draw marvellously.”

Suddenly Ursula found a queer awareness existed between herself and her class-mistress, Miss Inger. The latter was a rather beautiful woman of twenty-eight, a fearless-seeming, clean type of modern girl whose very independence betrays her sorrow. She was clever, and expert in what she did, accurate, quick, commanding.

To Ursula she had always given pleasure, because of her clear, decided, yet graceful appearance. She carried her head high, a little thrown back, and Ursula thought there was a look of nobility in the way she twisted her smooth brown hair upon her head. She always wore clean, attractive, well-fitting blouses, and a well-made skirt. Everything about her was so well-ordered, betraying a fine, clear spirit, that it was a pleasure to sit in her class.

Her voice was just as ringing and clear, and with unwavering, finely-touched modulation. Her eyes were blue, clear, proud, she gave one altogether the sense of a fine-mettled, scrupulously groomed person, and of an unyielding mind. Yet there was an infinite poignancy about her, a great pathos in her lonely, proudly closed mouth.

It was after Skrebensky had gone that there sprang up between the mistress and the girl that strange awareness, then the unspoken intimacy that sometimes connects two people who may never even make each other's acquaintance. Before, they had always been good friends, in the undistinguished way of the class-room, with the professional relationship of mistress and scholar always present. Now, however, another thing came to pass. When they were in the room together, they were aware of each other, almost to the exclusion of everything else. Winifred Inger felt a hot delight in the lessons when Ursula was present, Ursula felt her whole life begin when Miss Inger came into the room. Then, with the beloved, subtly-intimate teacher present, the girl sat as within the rays of some enriching sun, whose intoxicating heat poured straight into her veins.

The state of bliss, when Miss Inger was present, was supreme in the girl, but always eager, eager. As she went home, Ursula dreamed of the schoolmistress, made infinite dreams of things she could give her, of how she might make the elder woman adore her.

Miss Inger was a Bachelor of Arts, who had studied at Newnham. She was a clergyman's daughter, of good family. But what Ursula adored so much was her fine, upright, athletic bearing, and her indomitably proud nature. She was proud and free as a man, yet exquisite as a woman.

The girl's heart burned in her breast as she set off for school in the morning. So eager was her breast, so glad her feet, to travel towards the beloved. Ah, Miss Inger, how straight and fine was her back, how strong her loins, how calm and free her limbs!

Ursula craved ceaselessly to know if Miss Inger cared for her. As yet no definite sign had been passed between the two. Yet surely, surely Miss Inger loved her too, was fond of her, liked her at least more than the rest of the scholars in the class. Yet she was never certain. It might be that Miss Inger cared nothing for her. And yet, and yet, with blazing heart, Ursula felt that if only she could speak to her, touch her, she would know.

The summer term came, and with it the swimming class. Miss Inger was to take the swimming class. Then Ursula trembled and was dazed with passion. Her hopes were soon to be realised. She would see Miss Inger in her bathing dress.

The day came. In the great bath the water was glimmering pale emerald green, a lovely, glimmering mass of colour within the whitish marble-like confines.

Overhead the light fell softly and the great green body of pure water moved under it as someone dived from the side.

Ursula, trembling, hardly able to contain herself, pulled off her clothes, put on her tight bathing-suit, and opened the door of her cabin. Two girls were in the water. The mistress had not appeared. She waited. A door opened. Miss Inger came out, dressed in a rust-red tunic like a Greek girl's, tied round the waist, and a red silk handkerchief round her head. How lovely she looked! Her knees were so white and strong and proud, and she was firm-bodied as Diana. She walked simply to the side of the bath, and with a negligent movement, flung herself in. For a moment Ursula watched the white, smooth, strong shoulders, and the easy arms swimming. Then she too dived into the water.

Now, ah now, she was swimming in the same water with her dear mistress. The girl moved her limbs voluptuously, and swam by herself, deliciously, yet with a craving of unsatisfaction. She wanted to touch the other, to touch her, to feel her.

"I will race you, Ursula," came the well-modulated voice.

Ursula started violently. She turned to see the warm, unfolded face of her mistress looking at her, to her. She was acknowledged. Laughing her own beautiful, startled laugh, she began to swim. The mistress was just ahead, swimming with easy strokes. Ursula could see the head put back, the water flickering upon the white shoulders, the strong legs kicking shadowily. And she swam blinded with passion. Ah, the beauty of the firm, white, cool flesh! Ah, the wonderful firm limbs. Ah, if she did not so despise her own thin, dusky fragment of a body, if only she too were fearless and capable.

She swam on eagerly, not wanting to win, only wanting to be near her mistress, to swim in a race with her. They neared the end of the bath, the deep end. Miss Inger touched the pipe, swung herself round, and caught Ursula round the waist in the water, and held her for a moment.

"I won," said Miss Inger, laughing.

There was a moment of suspense. Ursula's heart was beating so fast, she clung to the rail, and could not move. Her dilated, warm, unfolded, glowing face turned to the mistress, as if to her very sun.

"Good-bye," said Miss Inger, and she swam away to the other pupils, taking professional interest in them.

Ursula was dazed. She could still feel the touch of the mistress's body against her own — only this, only this. The rest of the swimming time passed like a trance. When the call was given to leave the water, Miss Inger walked down the bath towards Ursula. Her rust-red, thin tunic was clinging to her, the whole body was defined, firm and magnificent, as it seemed to the girl.

“I enjoyed our race, Ursula, did you?” said Miss Inger.

The girl could only laugh with revealed, open, glowing face.

The love was now tacitly confessed. But it was some time before any further progress was made. Ursula continued in suspense, in inflamed bliss.

Then one day, when she was alone, the mistress came near to her, and touching her cheek with her fingers, said with some difficulty.

“Would you like to come to tea with me on Saturday, Ursula?”

The girl flushed all gratitude.

“We’ll go to a lovely little bungalow on the Soar, shall we? I stay the weekends there sometimes.”

Ursula was beside herself. She could not endure till the Saturday came, her thoughts burned up like a fire. If only it were Saturday, if only it were Saturday.

Then Saturday came, and she set out. Miss Inger met her in Sawley, and they walked about three miles to the bungalow. It was a moist, warm cloudy day.

The bungalow was a tiny, two-roomed shanty set on a steep bank. Everything in it was exquisite. In delicious privacy, the two girls made tea, and then they talked. Ursula need not be home till about ten o’clock.

The talk was led, by a kind of spell, to love. Miss Inger was telling Ursula of a friend, how she had died in childbirth, and what she had suffered; then she told of a prostitute, and of some of her experiences with men.

As they talked thus, on the little verandah of the bungalow, the night fell, there was a little warm rain.

“It is really stifling,” said Miss Inger.

They watched a train, whose lights were pale in the lingering twilight, rushing across the distance.

“It will thunder,” said Ursula.

The electric suspense continued, the darkness sank, they were eclipsed.

“I think I shall go and bathe,” said Miss Inger, out of the cloud-black darkness.

“At night?” said Ursula.

“It is best at night. Will you come?”

“I should like to.”

“It is quite safe — the grounds are private. We had better undress in the bungalow, for fear of the rain, then run down.”

Shyly, stiffly, Ursula went into the bungalow, and began to remove her clothes. The lamp was turned low, she stood in the shadow. By another chair Winifred Inger was undressing.

Soon the naked, shadowy figure of the elder girl came to the younger.

“Are you ready?” she said.

“One moment.”

Ursula could hardly speak. The other naked woman stood by, stood near, silent. Ursula was ready.

They ventured out into the darkness, feeling the soft air of night upon their skins.

“I can’t see the path,” said Ursula.

“It is here,” said the voice, and the wavering, pallid figure was beside her, a hand grasping her arm. And the elder held the younger close against her, close, as they went down, and by the side of the water, she put her arms round her, and kissed her. And she lifted her in her arms, close, saying, softly:

“I shall carry you into the water.”

Ursula lay still in her mistress’s arms, her forehead against the beloved, maddening breast.

“I shall put you in,” said Winifred.

But Ursula twined her body about her mistress.

After awhile the rain came down on their flushed, hot limbs, startling, delicious. A sudden, ice-cold shower burst in a great weight upon them. They stood up to it with pleasure. Ursula received the stream of it upon her breasts and her limbs. It made her cold, and a deep, bottomless silence welled up in her, as if bottomless darkness were returning upon her.

So the heat vanished away, she was chilled, as if from a waking up. She ran indoors, a chill, non-existent thing, wanting to get away. She wanted the light, the presence of other people, the external connection with the many. Above all she wanted to lose herself among natural surroundings.

She took her leave of her mistress and returned home. She was glad to be on the station with a crowd of Saturday-night people, glad to sit in the lighted, crowded railway carriage. Only she did not want to meet anybody she knew. She did not want to talk. She was alone, immune.

All this stir and seethe of lights and people was but the rim, the shores of a great inner darkness and void. She wanted very much to be on the seething, partially illuminated shore, for within her was the void reality of dark space.

For a time Miss Inger, her mistress, was gone; she was only a dark void, and Ursula was free as a shade walking in an underworld of extinction, of oblivion. Ursula was glad, with a kind of motionless, lifeless gladness, that her mistress was extinct, gone out of her.

In the morning, however, the love was there again, burning, burning. She remembered yesterday, and she wanted more, always more. She wanted to be with her mistress. All separation from her mistress was a restriction from living. Why could she not go to her to-day, to-day? Why must she pace about revoked

at Cossethay whilst her mistress was elsewhere? She sat down and wrote a burning, passionate love-letter: she could not help it.

The two women became intimate. Their lives seemed suddenly to fuse into one, inseparable. Ursula went to Winifred's lodging, she spent there her only living hours. Winifred was very fond of water, — of swimming, of rowing. She belonged to various athletic clubs. Many delicious afternoons the two girls spent in a light boat on the river, Winifred always rowing. Indeed, Winifred seemed to delight in having Ursula in her charge, in giving things to the girl, in filling and enriching her life.

So that Ursula developed rapidly during the few months of her intimacy with her mistress. Winifred had had a scientific education. She had known many clever people. She wanted to bring Ursula to her own position of thought.

They took religion and rid it of its dogmas, its falsehoods. Winifred humanised it all. Gradually it dawned upon Ursula that all the religion she knew was but a particular clothing to a human aspiration. The aspiration was the real thing, — the clothing was a matter almost of national taste or need. The Greeks had a naked Apollo, the Christians a white-robed Christ, the Buddhists a royal prince, the Egyptians their Osiris. Religions were local and religion was universal. Christianity was a local branch. There was as yet no assimilation of local religions into universal religion.

In religion there were the two great motives of fear and love. The motive of fear was as great as the motive of love. Christianity accepted crucifixion to escape from fear; "Do your worst to me, that I may have no more fear of the worst." But that which was feared was not necessarily all evil, and that which was loved not necessarily all good. Fear shall become reverence, and reverence is submission in identification; love shall become triumph, and triumph is delight in identification.

So much she talked of religion, getting the gist of many writings. In philosophy she was brought to the conclusion that the human desire is the criterion of all truth and all good. Truth does not lie beyond humanity, but is one of the products of the human mind and feeling. There is really nothing to fear. The motive of fear in religion is base, and must be left to the ancient worshippers of power, worship of Moloch.

We do not worship power, in our enlightened souls. Power is degenerated to money and Napoleonic stupidity.

Ursula could not help dreaming of Moloch. Her God was not mild and gentle, neither Lamb nor Dove. He was the lion and the eagle. Not because the lion and the eagle had power, but because they were proud and strong; they were themselves, they were not passive subjects of some shepherd, or pets of some

loving woman, or sacrifices of some priest. She was weary to death of mild, passive lambs and monotonous doves. If the lamb might lie down with the lion, it would be a great honour to the lamb, but the lion's powerful heart would suffer no diminishing. She loved the dignity and self-possession of lions.

She did not see how lambs could love. Lambs could only be loved. They could only be afraid, and tremblingly submit to fear, and become sacrificial; or they could submit to love, and become beloveds. In both they were passive. Raging, destructive lovers, seeking the moment when fear is greatest, and triumph is greatest, the fear not greater than the triumph, the triumph not greater than the fear, these were no lambs nor doves. She stretched her own limbs like a lion or a wild horse, her heart was relentless in its desires. It would suffer a thousand deaths, but it would still be a lion's heart when it rose from death, a fiercer lion she would be, a surer, knowing herself different from and separate from the great, conflicting universe that was not herself.

Winifred Inger was also interested in the Women's Movement.

"The men will do no more, — they have lost the capacity for doing," said the elder girl. "They fuss and talk, but they are really inane. They make everything fit into an old, inert idea. Love is a dead idea to them. They don't come to one and love one, they come to an idea, and they say 'You are my idea,' so they embrace themselves. As if I were any man's idea! As if I exist because a man has an idea of me! As if I will be betrayed by him, lend him my body as an instrument for his idea, to be a mere apparatus of his dead theory. But they are too fussy to be able to act; they are all impotent, they can't take a woman. They come to their own idea every time, and take that. They are like serpents trying to swallow themselves because they are hungry."

Ursula was introduced by her friend to various women and men, educated, unsatisfied people, who still moved within the smug provincial society as if they were nearly as tame as their outward behaviour showed, but who were inwardly raging and mad.

It was a strange world the girl was swept into, like a chaos, like the end of the world. She was too young to understand it all. Yet the inoculation passed into her, through her love for her mistress.

The examination came, and then school was over. It was the long vacation. Winifred Inger went away to London. Ursula was left alone in Cossethay. A terrible, outcast, almost poisonous despair possessed her. It was no use doing anything, or being anything. She had no connection with other people. Her lot was isolated and deadly. There was nothing for her anywhere, but this black disintegration. Yet, within all the great attack of disintegration upon her, she remained herself. It was the terrible core of all her suffering, that she was always

herself. Never could she escape that: she could not put off being herself.

She still adhered to Winifred Inger. But a sort of nausea was coming over her. She loved her mistress. But a heavy, clogged sense of deadness began to gather upon her, from the other woman's contact. And sometimes she thought Winifred was ugly, clayey. Her female hips seemed big and earthy, her ankles and her arms were too thick. She wanted some fine intensity, instead of this heavy cleaving of moist clay, that cleaves because it has no life of its own.

Winifred still loved Ursula. She had a passion for the fine flame of the girl, she served her endlessly, would have done anything for her.

"Come with me to London," she pleaded to the girl. "I will make it nice for you, — you shall do lots of things you will enjoy."

"No," said Ursula, stubbornly and dully. "No, I don't want to go to London, I want to be by myself."

Winifred knew what this meant. She knew that Ursula was beginning to reject her. The fine, unquenchable flame of the younger girl would consent no more to mingle with the perverted life of the elder woman. Winifred knew it would come. But she too was proud. At the bottom of her was a black pit of despair. She knew perfectly well that Ursula would cast her off.

And that seemed like the end of her life. But she was too hopeless to rage. Wisely, economising what was left of Ursula's love, she went away to London, leaving the beloved girl alone.

And after a fortnight, Ursula's letters became tender again, loving. Her Uncle Tom had invited her to go and stay with him. He was managing a big, new colliery in Yorkshire. Would Winifred come too?

For now Ursula was imagining marriage for Winifred. She wanted her to marry her Uncle Tom. Winifred knew this. She said she would come to Wiggiston. She would now let fate do as it liked with her, since there was nothing remaining to be done. Tom Brangwen also saw Ursula's intention. He too was at the end of his desires. He had done the things he had wanted to. They had all ended in a disintegrated lifelessness of soul, which he hid under an utterly tolerant good-humour. He no longer cared about anything on earth, neither man nor woman, nor God nor humanity. He had come to a stability of nullification. He did not care any more, neither about his body nor about his soul. Only he would preserve intact his own life. Only the simple, superficial fact of living persisted. He was still healthy. He lived. Therefore he would fill each moment. That had always been his creed. It was not instinctive easiness: it was the inevitable outcome of his nature. When he was in the absolute privacy of his own life, he did as he pleased, unscrupulous, without any ulterior thought. He believed neither in good nor evil. Each moment was like a separate little island,

isolated from time, and blank, unconditioned by time.

He lived in a large new house of red brick, standing outside a mass of homogeneous red-brick dwellings, called Wiggiston. Wiggiston was only seven years old. It had been a hamlet of eleven houses on the edge of healthy, half-agricultural country. Then the great seam of coal had been opened. In a year Wiggiston appeared, a great mass of pinkish rows of thin, unreal dwellings of five rooms each. The streets were like visions of pure ugliness; a grey-black macadamised road, asphalt causeways, held in between a flat succession of wall, window, and door, a new-brick channel that began nowhere, and ended nowhere. Everything was amorphous, yet everything repeated itself endlessly. Only now and then, in one of the house-windows vegetables or small groceries were displayed for sale.

In the middle of the town was a large, open, shapeless space, or market-place, of black trodden earth, surrounded by the same flat material of dwellings, new red-brick becoming grimy, small oblong windows, and oblong doors, repeated endlessly, with just, at one corner, a great and gaudy publichouse, and somewhere lost on one of the sides of the square, a large window opaque and darkish green, which was the postoffice.

The place had the strange desolation of a ruin. Colliers hanging about in gangs and groups, or passing along the asphalt pavements heavily to work, seemed not like living people, but like spectres. The rigidity of the blank streets, the homogeneous amorphous sterility of the whole suggested death rather than life. There was no meeting place, no centre, no artery, no organic formation. There it lay, like the new foundations of a red-brick confusion rapidly spreading, like a skin-disease.

Just outside of this, on a little hill, was Tom Brangwen's big, red-brick house. It looked from the front upon the edge of the place, a meaningless squalor of ash-pits and closets and irregular rows of the backs of houses, each with its small activity made sordid by barren cohesion with the rest of the small activities. Farther off was the great colliery that went night and day. And all around was the country, green with two winding streams, ragged with gorse, and heath, the darker woods in the distance.

The whole place was just unreal, just unreal. Even now, when he had been there for two years, Tom Brangwen did not believe in the actuality of the place. It was like some gruesome dream, some ugly, dead, amorphous mood become concrete.

Ursula and Winifred were met by the motor-car at the raw little station, and drove through what seemed to them like the horrible raw beginnings of something. The place was a moment of chaos perpetuated, persisting, chaos

fixed and rigid. Ursula was fascinated by the many men who were there — groups of men standing in the streets, four or five men walking in a gang together, their dogs running behind or before. They were all decently dressed, and most of them rather gaunt. The terrible gaunt repose of their bearing fascinated her. Like creatures with no more hope, but which still live and have passionate being, within some utterly unliving shell, they passed meaninglessly along, with strange, isolated dignity. It was as if a hard, horny shell enclosed them all.

Shocked and startled, Ursula was carried to her Uncle Tom's house. He was not yet at home. His house was simply, but well furnished. He had taken out a dividing wall, and made the whole front of the house into a large library, with one end devoted to his science. It was a handsome room, appointed as a laboratory and reading room, but giving the same sense of hard, mechanical activity, activity mechanical yet inchoate, and looking out on the hideous abstraction of the town, and at the green meadows and rough country beyond, and at the great, mathematical colliery on the other side.

They saw Tom Brangwen walking up the curved drive. He was getting stouter, but with his bowler hat worn well set down on his brows, he looked manly, handsome, curiously like any other man of action. His colour was as fresh, his health as perfect as ever, he walked like a man rather absorbed.

Winifred Inger was startled when he entered the library, his coat fastened and correct, his head bald to the crown, but not shiny, rather like something naked that one is accustomed to see covered, and his dark eyes liquid and formless. He seemed to stand in the shadow, like a thing ashamed. And the clasp of his hand was so soft and yet so forceful, that it chilled the heart. She was afraid of him, repelled by him, and yet attracted.

He looked at the athletic, seemingly fearless girl, and he detected in her a kinship with his own dark corruption. Immediately, he knew they were akin.

His manner was polite, almost foreign, and rather cold. He still laughed in his curious, animal fashion, suddenly wrinkling up his wide nose, and showing his sharp teeth. The fine beauty of his skin and his complexion, some almost waxen quality, hid the strange, repellent grossness of him, the slight sense of putrescence, the commonness which revealed itself in his rather fat thighs and loins.

Winifred saw at once the deferential, slightly servile, slightly cunning regard he had for Ursula, which made the girl at once so proud and so perplexed.

"But is this place as awful as it looks?" the young girl asked, a strain in her eyes.

"It is just what it looks," he said. "It hides nothing."

“Why are the men so sad?”

“Are they sad?” he replied.

“They seem unutterably, unutterably sad,” said Ursula, out of a passionate throat.

“I don’t think they are that. They just take it for granted.”

“What do they take for granted?”

“This — the pits and the place altogether.”

“Why don’t they alter it?” she passionately protested.

“They believe they must alter themselves to fit the pits and the place, rather than alter the pits and the place to fit themselves. It is easier,” he said.

“And you agree with them,” burst out his niece, unable to bear it. “You think like they do — that living human beings must be taken and adapted to all kinds of horrors. We could easily do without the pits.”

He smiled, uncomfortably, cynically. Ursula felt again the revolt of hatred from him.

“I suppose their lives are not really so bad,” said Winifred Inger, superior to the Zolaesque tragedy.

He turned with his polite, distant attention.

“Yes, they are pretty bad. The pits are very deep, and hot, and in some places wet. The men die of consumption fairly often. But they earn good wages.”

“How gruesome!” said Winifred Inger.

“Yes,” he replied gravely. It was his grave, solid, self-contained manner which made him so much respected as a colliery manager.

The servant came in to ask where they would have tea.

“Put it in the summer-house, Mrs. Smith,” he said.

The fair-haired, good-looking young woman went out.

“Is she married and in service?” asked Ursula.

“She is a widow. Her husband died of consumption a little while ago.” Brangwen gave a sinister little laugh. “He lay there in the house-place at her mother’s, and five or six other people in the house, and died very gradually. I asked her if his death wasn’t a great trouble to her. ‘Well,’ she said, ‘he was very fretful towards the last, never satisfied, never easy, always fret-fretting, an’ never knowing what would satisfy him. So in one way it was a relief when it was over — for him and for everybody.’ They had only been married two years, and she has one boy. I asked her if she hadn’t been very happy. ‘Oh, yes, sir, we was very comfortable at first, till he took bad — oh, we was very comfortable — oh, yes — but, you see, you get used to it. I’ve had my father and two brothers go off just the same. You get used to it’.”

“It’s a horrible thing to get used to,” said Winifred Inger, with a shudder.

“Yes,” he said, still smiling. “But that’s how they are. She’ll be getting married again directly. One man or another — it does not matter very much. They’re all colliers.”

“What do you mean?” asked Ursula. “They’re all colliers?”

“It is with the women as with us,” he replied. “Her husband was John Smith, loader. We reckoned him as a loader, he reckoned himself as a loader, and so she knew he represented his job. Marriage and home is a little sideshow.

“The women know it right enough, and take it for what it’s worth. One man or another, it doesn’t matter all the world. The pit matters. Round the pit there will always be the sideshows, plenty of ‘em.”

He looked round at the red chaos, the rigid, amorphous confusion of Wiggiston.

“Every man his own little sideshow, his home, but the pit owns every man. The women have what is left. What’s left of this man, or what is left of that — it doesn’t matter altogether. The pit takes all that really matters.”

“It is the same everywhere,” burst out Winifred. “It is the office, or the shop, or the business that gets the man, the woman gets the bit the shop can’t digest. What is he at home, a man? He is a meaningless lump — a standing machine, a machine out of work.”

“They know they are sold,” said Tom Brangwen. “That’s where it is. They know they are sold to their job. If a woman talks her throat out, what difference can it make? The man’s sold to his job. So the women don’t bother. They take what they can catch — and vogue la galere.”

“Aren’t they very strict here?” asked Miss Inger.

“Oh, no. Mrs. Smith has two sisters who have just changed husbands. They’re not very particular — neither are they very interested. They go dragging along what is left from the pits. They’re not interested enough to be very immoral — it all amounts to the same thing, moral or immoral — just a question of pit-wages. The most moral duke in England makes two hundred thousand a year out of these pits. He keeps the morality end up.”

Ursula sat black-souled and very bitter, hearing the two of them talk. There seemed something ghoulish even in their very deploring of the state of things. They seemed to take a ghoulish satisfaction in it. The pit was the great mistress. Ursula looked out of the window and saw the proud, demonlike colliery with her wheels twinkling in the heavens, the formless, squalid mass of the town lying aside. It was the squalid heap of sideshows. The pit was the main show, the *raison d’etre* of all.

How terrible it was! There was a horrible fascination in it — human bodies and lives subjected in slavery to that symmetric monster of the colliery. There

was a swooning, perverse satisfaction in it. For a moment she was dizzy.

Then she recovered, felt herself in a great loneliness, where-in she was sad but free. She had departed. No more would she subscribe to the great colliery, to the great machine which has taken us all captives. In her soul, she was against it, she disowned even its power. It had only to be forsaken to be inane, meaningless. And she knew it was meaningless. But it needed a great, passionate effort of will on her part, seeing the colliery, still to maintain her knowledge that it was meaningless.

But her Uncle Tom and her mistress remained there among the horde, cynically reviling the monstrous state and yet adhering to it, like a man who reviles his mistress, yet who is in love with her. She knew her Uncle Tom perceived what was going on. But she knew moreover that in spite of his criticism and condemnation, he still wanted the great machine. His only happy moments, his only moments of pure freedom were when he was serving the machine. Then, and then only, when the machine caught him up, was he free from the hatred of himself, could he act wholly, without cynicism and unreality.

His real mistress was the machine, and the real mistress of Winifred was the machine. She too, Winifred, worshipped the impure abstraction, the mechanisms of matter. There, there, in the machine, in service of the machine, was she free from the clog and degradation of human feeling. There, in the monstrous mechanism that held all matter, living or dead, in its service, did she achieve her consummation and her perfect unison, her immortality.

Hatred sprang up in Ursula's heart. If she could she would smash the machine. Her soul's action should be the smashing of the great machine. If she could destroy the colliery, and make all the men of Wiggiston out of work, she would do it. Let them starve and grub in the earth for roots, rather than serve such a Moloch as this.

She hated her Uncle Tom, she hated Winifred Inger. They went down to the summer-house for tea. It was a pleasant place among a few trees, at the end of a tiny garden, on the edge of a field. Her Uncle Tom and Winifred seemed to jeer at her, to cheapen her. She was miserable and desolate. But she would never give way.

Her coldness for Winifred should never cease. She knew it was over between them. She saw gross, ugly movements in her mistress, she saw a clayey, inert, unquickenened flesh, that reminded her of the great prehistoric lizards. One day her Uncle Tom came in out of the broiling sunshine heated from walking. Then the perspiration stood out upon his head and brow, his hand was wet and hot and suffocating in its clasp. He too had something marshy about him — the succulent moistness and turgidity, and the same brackish, nauseating effect of a

marsh, where life and decaying are one.

He was repellent to her, who was so dry and fine in her fire. Her very bones seemed to bid him keep his distance from her.

It was in these weeks that Ursula grew up. She stayed two weeks at Wiggiston, and she hated it. All was grey, dry ash, cold and dead and ugly. But she stayed. She stayed also to get rid of Winifred. The girl's hatred and her sense of repulsiveness in her mistress and in her uncle seemed to throw the other two together. They drew together as if against her.

In hardness and bitterness of soul, Ursula knew that Winifred was become her uncle's lover. She was glad. She had loved them both. Now she wanted to be rid of them both. Their marshy, bitter-sweet corruption came sick and unwholesome in her nostrils. Anything, to get out of the foetid air. She would leave them both for ever, leave for ever their strange, soft, half-corrupt element. Anything to get away.

One night Winifred came all burning into Ursula's bed, and put her arms round the girl, holding her to herself in spite of unwillingness, and said,

"Dear, my dear — shall I marry Mr. Brangwen — shall I?"

The clinging, heavy, muddy question weighed on Ursula intolerably.

"Has he asked you?" she said, using all her might of hard resistance.

"He's asked me," said Winifred. "Do you want me to marry him, Ursula?"

"Yes," said Ursula.

The arms tightened more on her.

"I knew you did, my sweet — and I will marry him. You're fond of him, aren't you?"

"I've been awfully fond of him — ever since I was a child."

"I know — I know. I can see what you like in him. He is a man by himself, he has something apart from the rest."

"Yes," said Ursula.

"But he's not like you, my dear — ha, he's not as good as you. There's something even objectionable in him — his thick thighs —"

Ursula was silent.

"But I'll marry him, my dear — it will be best. Now say you love me."

A sort of profession was extorted out of the girl. Nevertheless her mistress went away sighing, to weep in her own chamber.

In two days' time Ursula left Wiggiston. Miss Inger went to Nottingham. There was an engagement between her and Tom Brangwen, which the uncle seemed to vaunt as if it were an assurance of his validity.

Brangwen and Winifred Inger continued engaged for another term. Then they married. Brangwen had reached the age when he wanted children. He wanted

children. Neither marriage nor the domestic establishment meant anything to him. He wanted to propagate himself. He knew what he was doing. He had the instinct of a growing inertia, of a thing that chooses its place of rest in which to lapse into apathy, complete, profound indifference. He would let the machinery carry him; husband, father, pit-manager, warm clay lifted through the recurrent action of day after day by the great machine from which it derived its motion. As for Winifred, she was an educated woman, and of the same sort as himself. She would make a good companion. She was his mate.

CHAPTER 13

The Man's World

Ursula came back to Cossethay to fight with her mother. Her schooldays were over. She had passed the matriculation examination. Now she came home to face that empty period between school and possible marriage.

At first she thought it would be just like holidays all the time, she would feel just free. Her soul was in chaos, blinded suffering, maimed. She had no will left to think about herself. For a time she must just lapse.

But very shortly she found herself up against her mother. Her mother had, at this time, the power to irritate and madden the girl continuously. There were already seven children, yet Mrs. Brangwen was again with child, the ninth she had borne. One had died of diphtheria in infancy.

Even this fact of her mother's pregnancy enraged the eldest girl. Mrs. Brangwen was so complacent, so utterly fulfilled in her breeding. She would not have the existence at all of anything but the immediate, physical, common things. Ursula inflamed in soul, was suffering all the anguish of youth's reaching for some unknown ordeal, that it can't grasp, can't even distinguish or conceive. Maddened, she was fighting all the darkness she was up against. And part of this darkness was her mother. To limit, as her mother did, everything to the ring of physical considerations, and complacently to reject the reality of anything else, was horrible. Not a thing did Mrs. Brangwen care about, but the children, the house, and a little local gossip. And she would not be touched, she would let nothing else live near her. She went about, big with child, slovenly, easy, having a certain lax dignity, taking her own time, pleasing herself, always, always doing things for the children, and feeling that she thereby fulfilled the whole of womanhood.

This long trance of complacent child-bearing had kept her young and undeveloped. She was scarcely a day older than when Gudrun was born. All these years nothing had happened save the coming of the children, nothing had mattered but the bodies of her babies. As her children came into consciousness, as they began to suffer their own fulfilment, she cast them off. But she remained dominant in the house. Brangwen continued in a kind of rich drowse of physical heat, in connection with his wife. They were neither of them quite personal, quite defined as individuals, so much were they pervaded by the physical heat of

breeding and rearing their young.

How Ursula resented it, how she fought against the close, physical, limited life of herded domesticity! Calm, placid, unshakeable as ever, Mrs. Brangwen went about in her dominance of physical maternity.

There were battles. Ursula would fight for things that mattered to her. She would have the children less rude and tyrannical, she would have a place in the house. But her mother pulled her down, pulled her down. With all the cunning instinct of a breeding animal, Mrs. Brangwen ridiculed and held cheap Ursula's passions, her ideas, her pronunciations. Ursula would try to insist, in her own home, on the right of women to take equal place with men in the field of action and work.

"Ay," said the mother, "there's a good crop of stockings lying ripe for mending. Let that be your field of action."

Ursula disliked mending stockings, and this retort maddened her. She hated her mother bitterly. After a few weeks of enforced domestic life, she had had enough of her home. The commonness, the triviality, the immediate meaninglessness of it all drove her to frenzy. She talked and stormed ideas, she corrected and nagged at the children, she turned her back in silent contempt on her breeding mother, who treated her with supercilious indifference, as if she were a pretentious child not to be taken seriously.

Brangwen was sometimes dragged into the trouble. He loved Ursula, therefore he always had a sense of shame, almost of betrayal, when he turned on her. So he turned fiercely and scathingly, and with a wholesale brutality that made Ursula go white, mute, and numb. Her feelings seemed to be becoming deadened in her, her temper hard and cold.

Brangwen himself was in one of his states or flux. After all these years, he began to see a loophole of freedom. For twenty years he had gone on at this office as a draughtsman, doing work in which he had no interest, because it seemed his allotted work. The growing up of his daughters, their developing rejection of old forms set him also free.

He was a man of ceaseless activity. Blindly, like a mole, he pushed his way out of the earth that covered him, working always away from the physical element in which his life was captured. Slowly, blindly, gropingly, with what initiative was left to him, he made his way towards individual expression and individual form.

At last, after twenty years, he came back to his woodcarving, almost to the point where he had left off his Adam and Eve panel, when he was courting. But now he had knowledge and skill without vision. He saw the puerility of his young conceptions, he saw the unreal world in which they had been conceived.

He now had a new strength in his sense of reality. He felt as if he were real, as if he handled real things. He had worked for many years at Cossethay, building the organ for the church, restoring the woodwork, gradually coming to a knowledge of beauty in the plain labours. Now he wanted again to carve things that were utterances of himself.

But he could not quite hitch on — always he was too busy, too uncertain, confused. Wavering, he began to study modelling. To his surprise he found he could do it. Modelling in clay, in plaster, he produced beautiful reproductions, really beautiful. Then he set-to to make a head of Ursula, in high relief, in the Donatello manner. In his first passion, he got a beautiful suggestion of his desire. But the pitch of concentration would not come. With a little ash in his mouth he gave up. He continued to copy, or to make designs by selecting motives from classic stuff. He loved the Della Robbia and Donatello as he had loved Fra Angelico when he was a young man. His work had some of the freshness, the naive alertness of the early Italians. But it was only reproduction.

Having reached his limit in modelling, he turned to painting. But he tried water-colour painting after the manner of any other amateur. He got his results but was not much interested. After one or two drawings of his beloved church, which had the same alertness as his modelling, he seemed to be incongruous with the modern atmospheric way of painting, so that his church tower stood up, really stood and asserted its standing, but was ashamed of its own lack of meaning, he turned away again.

He took up jewellery, read Benvenuto Cellini, pored over reproductions of ornament, and began to make pendants in silver and pearl and matrix. The first things he did, in his start of discovery, were really beautiful. Those later were more imitative. But, starting with his wife, he made a pendant each for all his womenfolk. Then he made rings and bracelets.

Then he took up beaten and chiselled metal work. When Ursula left school, he was making a silver bowl of lovely shape. How he delighted in it, almost lusted after it.

All this time his only connection with the real outer world was through his winter evening classes, which brought him into contact with state education. About all the rest, he was oblivious, and entirely indifferent — even about the war. The nation did not exist to him. He was in a private retreat of his own, that had neither nationality, nor any great adherent.

Ursula watched the newspapers, vaguely, concerning the war in South Africa. They made her miserable, and she tried to have as little to do with them as possible. But Skrebensky was out there. He sent her an occasional post-card. But it was as if she were a blank wall in his direction, without windows or outgoing.

She adhered to the Skrebensky of her memory.

Her love for Winifred Inger wrenched her life as it seemed from the roots and native soil where Skrebensky had belonged to it, and she was aridly transplanted. He was really only a memory. She revived his memory with strange passion, after the departure of Winifred. He was to her almost the symbol of her real life. It was as if, through him, in him, she might return to her own self, which she was before she had loved Winifred, before this deadness had come upon her, this pitiless transplanting. But even her memories were the work of her imagination.

She dreamed of him and her as they had been together. She could not dream of him progressively, of what he was doing now, of what relation he would have to her now. Only sometimes she wept to think how cruelly she had suffered when he left her — ah, how she had suffered! She remembered what she had written in her diary:

“If I were the moon, I know where I would fall down.”

Ah, it was a dull agony to her to remember what she had been then. For it was remembering a dead self. All that was dead after Winifred. She knew the corpse of her young, loving self, she knew its grave. And the young living self she mourned for had scarcely existed, it was the creature of her imagination.

Deep within her a cold despair remained unchanging and unchanged. No one would ever love her now — she would love no one. The body of love was killed in her after Winifred, there was something of the corpse in her. She would live, she would go on, but she would have no lovers, no lover would want her any more. She herself would want no lover. The vividest little flame of desire was extinct in her for ever. The tiny, vivid germ that contained the bud of her real self, her real love, was killed, she would go on growing as a plant, she would do her best to produce her minor flowers, but her leading flower was dead before it was born, all her growth was the conveying of a corpse of hope.

The miserable weeks went on, in the poky house crammed with children. What was her life — a sordid, formless, disintegrated nothing; Ursula Brangwen a person without worth or importance, living in the mean village of Cossethay, within the sordid scope of Ilkeston. Ursula Brangwen, at seventeen, worthless and unvalued, neither wanted nor needed by anybody, and conscious herself of her own dead value. It would not bear thinking of.

But still her dogged pride held its own. She might be defiled, she might be a corpse that should never be loved, she might be a core-rotten stalk living upon the food that others provided; yet she would give in to nobody.

Gradually she became conscious that she could not go on living at home as she was doing, without place or meaning or worth. The very children that went to school held her uselessness in contempt. She must do something.

Her father said she had plenty to do to help her mother. From her parents she would never get more than a hit in the face. She was not a practical person. She thought of wild things, of running away and becoming a domestic servant, of asking some man to take her.

She wrote to the mistress of the High School for advice.

“I cannot see very clearly what you should do, Ursula,” came the reply, “unless you are willing to become an elementary school teacher. You have matriculated, and that qualifies you to take a post as uncertificated teacher in any school, at a salary of about fifty pounds a year.

“I cannot tell you how deeply I sympathise with you in your desire to do something. You will learn that mankind is a great body of which you are one useful member, you will take your own place at the great task which humanity is trying to fulfil. That will give you a satisfaction and a self-respect which nothing else could give.”

Ursula’s heart sank. It was a cold, dreary satisfaction to think of. Yet her cold will acquiesced. This was what she wanted.

“You have an emotional nature,” the letter went on, “a quick natural response. If only you could learn patience and self-discipline, I do not see why you should not make a good teacher. The least you could do is to try. You need only serve a year, or perhaps two years, as uncertificated teacher. Then you would go to one of the training colleges, where I hope you would take your degree. I most strongly urge and advise you to keep up your studies always with the intention of taking a degree. That will give you a qualification and a position in the world, and will give you more scope to choose your own way.

“I shall be proud to see one of my girls win her own economical independence, which means so much more than it seems. I shall be glad indeed to know that one more of my girls has provided for herself the means of freedom to choose for herself.”

It all sounded grim and desperate. Ursula rather hated it. But her mother’s contempt and her father’s harshness had made her raw at the quick, she knew the ignominy of being a hanger-on, she felt the festering thorn of her mother’s animal estimation.

At length she had to speak. Hard and shut down and silent within herself, she slipped out one evening to the workshed. She heard the tap-tap-tap of the hammer upon the metal. Her father lifted his head as the door opened. His face was ruddy and bright with instinct, as when he was a youth, his black moustache was cut close over his wide mouth, his black hair was fine and close as ever. But there was about him an abstraction, a sort of instrumental detachment from human things. He was a worker. He watched his daughter’s hard, expressionless

face. A hot anger came over his breast and belly.

“What now?” he said.

“Can’t I,” she answered, looking aside, not looking at him, “can’t I go out to work?”

“Go out to work, what for?”

His voice was so strong, and ready, and vibrant. It irritated her.

“I want some other life than this.”

A flash of strong rage arrested all his blood for a moment.

“Some other life?” he repeated. “Why, what other life do you want?”

She hesitated.

“Something else besides housework and hanging about. And I want to earn something.”

Her curious, brutal hardness of speech, and the fierce invincibility of her youth, which ignored him, made him also harden with anger.

“And how do you think you’re going to earn anything?” he asked.

“I can become a teacher — I’m qualified by my matric.”

He wished her matric. in hell.

“And how much are you qualified to earn by your matric?” he asked, jeering.

“Fifty pounds a year,” she said.

He was silent, his power taken out of his hand.

He had always hugged a secret pride in the fact that his daughters need not go out to work. With his wife’s money and his own they had four hundred a year. They could draw on the capital if need be later on. He was not afraid for his old age. His daughters might be ladies.

Fifty pounds a year was a pound a week — which was enough for her to live on independently.

“And what sort of a teacher do you think you’d make? You haven’t the patience of a Jack-gnat with your own brothers and sisters, let alone with a class of children. And I thought you didn’t like dirty, board-school brats.”

“They’re not all dirty.”

“You’d find they’re not all clean.”

There was silence in the workshop. The lamplight fell on the burned silver bowl that lay between him, on mallet and furnace and chisel. Brangwen stood with a queer, catlike light on his face, almost like a smile. But it was no smile.

“Can I try?” she said.

“You can do what the deuce you like, and go where you like.”

Her face was fixed and expressionless and indifferent. It always sent him to a pitch of frenzy to see it like that. He kept perfectly still.

Cold, without any betrayal of feeling, she turned and left the shed. He worked

on, with all his nerves jangled. Then he had to put down his tools and go into the house.

In a bitter tone of anger and contempt he told his wife. Ursula was present. There was a brief altercation, closed by Mrs. Brangwen's saying, in a tone of biting superiority and indifference:

“Let her find out what it's like. She'll soon have had enough.”

The matter was left there. But Ursula considered herself free to act. For some days she made no move. She was reluctant to take the cruel step of finding work, for she shrank with extreme sensitiveness and shyness from new contact, new situations. Then at length a sort of doggedness drove her. Her soul was full of bitterness.

She went to the Free Library in Ilkeston, copied out addresses from the Schoolmistress, and wrote for application forms. After two days she rose early to meet the postman. As she expected, there were three long envelopes.

Her heart beat painfully as she went up with them to her bedroom. Her fingers trembled, she could hardly force herself to look at the long, official forms she had to fill in. The whole thing was so cruel, so impersonal. Yet it must be done.

“Name (surname first):...”

In a trembling hand she wrote, “Brangwen, — Ursula.”

“Age and date of birth:...”

After a long time considering, she filled in that line.

“Qualifications, with date of Examination:...”

With a little pride she wrote:

“London Matriculation Examination.”

“Previous experience and where obtained:...”

Her heart sank as she wrote:

“None.”

Still there was much to answer. It took her two hours to fill in the three forms. Then she had to copy her testimonials from her head-mistress and from the clergyman.

At last, however, it was finished. She had sealed the three long envelopes. In the afternoon she went down to Ilkeston to post them. She said nothing of it all to her parents. As she stamped her long letters and put them into the box at the main post-office she felt as if already she was out of the reach of her father and mother, as if she had connected herself with the outer, greater world of activity, the man-made world.

As she returned home, she dreamed again in her own fashion her old, gorgeous dreams. One of her applications was to Gillingham, in Kent, one to Kingston-on-Thames, and one to Swanwick in Derbyshire.

Gillingham was such a lovely name, and Kent was the Garden of England. So that, in Gillingham, an old, old village by the hopfields, where the sun shone softly, she came out of school in the afternoon into the shadow of the plane trees by the gate, and turned down the sleepy road towards the cottage where cornflowers poked their blue heads through the old wooden fence, and phlox stood built up of blossom beside the path.

A delicate, silver-haired lady rose with delicate, ivory hands uplifted as Ursula entered the room, and:

“Oh, my dear, what do you think!”

“What is it, Mrs. Wetherall?”

Frederick had come home. Nay, his manly step was heard on the stair, she saw his strong boots, his blue trousers, his uniformed figure, and then his face, clean and keen as an eagle’s, and his eyes lit up with the glamour of strange seas, ah, strange seas that had woven through his soul, as he descended into the kitchen.

This dream, with its amplifications, lasted her a mile of walking. Then she went to Kingston-on-Thames.

Kingston-on-Thames was an old historic place just south of London. There lived the well-born dignified souls who belonged to the metropolis, but who loved peace. There she met a wonderful family of girls living in a large old Queen Anne house, whose lawns sloped to the river, and in an atmosphere of stately peace she found herself among her soul’s intimates. They loved her as sisters, they shared with her all noble thoughts.

She was happy again. In her musings she spread her poor, clipped wings, and flew into the pure empyrean.

Day followed day. She did not speak to her parents. Then came the return of her testimonials from Gillingham. She was not wanted, neither at Swanwick. The bitterness of rejection followed the sweets of hope. Her bright feathers were in the dust again.

Then, suddenly, after a fortnight, came an intimation from Kingston-on-Thames. She was to appear at the Education Office of that town on the following Thursday, for an interview with the Committee. Her heart stood still. She knew she would make the Committee accept her. Now she was afraid, now that her removal was imminent. Her heart quivered with fear and reluctance. But underneath her purpose was fixed.

She passed shadowily through the day, unwilling to tell her news to her mother, waiting for her father. Suspense and fear were strong upon her. She dreaded going to Kingston. Her easy dreams disappeared from the grasp of reality.

And yet, as the afternoon wore away, the sweetness of the dream returned

again. Kingston-on-Thames — there was such sound of dignity to her. The shadow of history and the glamour of stately progress enveloped her. The palaces would be old and darkened, the place of kings obscured. Yet it was a place of kings for her — Richard and Henry and Wolsey and Queen Elizabeth. She divined great lawns with noble trees, and terraces whose steps the water washed softly, where the swans sometimes came to earth. Still she must see the stately, gorgeous barge of the Queen float down, the crimson carpet put upon the landing stairs, the gentlemen in their purple-velvet cloaks, bare-headed, standing in the sunshine grouped on either side waiting.

“Sweet Thames, run softly till I end my song.”

Evening came, her father returned home, sanguine and alert and detached as ever. He was less real than her fancies. She waited whilst he ate his tea. He took big mouthfuls, big bites, and ate unconsciously with the same abandon an animal gives to its food.

Immediately after tea he went over to the church. It was choir-practice, and he wanted to try the tunes on his organ.

The latch of the big door clicked loudly as she came after him, but the organ rolled more loudly still. He was unaware. He was practising the anthem. She saw his small, jet-black head and alert face between the candle-flames, his slim body sagged on the music-stool. His face was so luminous and fixed, the movements of his limbs seemed strange, apart from him. The sound of the organ seemed to belong to the very stone of the pillars, like sap running in them.

Then there was a close of music and silence.

“Father!” she said.

He looked round as if at an apparition. Ursula stood shadowily within the candle-light.

“What now?” he said, not coming to earth.

It was difficult to speak to him.

“I’ve got a situation,” she said, forcing herself to speak.

“You’ve got what?” he answered, unwilling to come out of his mood of organ-playing. He closed the music before him.

“I’ve got a situation to go to.”

Then he turned to her, still abstracted, unwilling.

“Oh, where’s that?” he said.

“At Kingston-on-Thames. I must go on Thursday for an interview with the Committee.”

“You must go on Thursday?”

“Yes.”

And she handed him the letter. He read it by the light of the candles.

“Ursula Brangwen, Yew Tree Cottage, Cossethay, Derbyshire.

“Dear Madam, You are requested to call at the above offices on Thursday next, the 10th, at 11.30 a.m., for an interview with the committee, referring to your application for the post of assistant mistress at the Wellingborough Green Schools.”

It was very difficult for Brangwen to take in this remote and official information, glowing as he was within the quiet of his church and his anthem music.

“Well, you needn’t bother me with it now, need you?” he said impatiently, giving her back the letter.

“I’ve got to go on Thursday,” she said.

He sat motionless. Then he reached more music, and there was a rushing sound of air, then a long, emphatic trumpet-note of the organ, as he laid his hands on the keys. Ursula turned and went away.

He tried to give himself again to the organ. But he could not. He could not get back. All the time a sort of string was tugging, tugging him elsewhere, miserably.

So that when he came into the house after choir-practice his face was dark and his heart black. He said nothing however, until all the younger children were in bed. Ursula, however, knew what was brewing.

At length he asked:

“Where’s that letter?”

She gave it to him. He sat looking at it. “You are requested to call at the above offices on Thursday next — — ” It was a cold, official notice to Ursula herself and had nothing to do with him. So! She existed now as a separate social individual. It was for her to answer this note, without regard to him. He had even no right to interfere. His heart was hard and angry.

“You had to do it behind our backs, had you?” he said, with a sneer. And her heart leapt with hot pain. She knew she was free — she had broken away from him. He was beaten.

“You said, ‘let her try,’“ she retorted, almost apologising to him.

He did not hear. He sat looking at the letter.

“Education Office, Kingston-on-Thames” — and then the typewritten “Miss Ursula Brangwen, Yew Tree Cottage, Cossethay.” It was all so complete and so final. He could not but feel the new position Ursula held, as recipient of that letter. It was an iron in his soul.

“Well,” he said at length, “you’re not going.”

Ursula started and could find no words to clamour her revolt.

“If you think you’re going dancin’ off to th’ other side of London, you’re

mistaken.”

“Why not?” she cried, at once hard fixed in her will to go.

“That’s why not,” he said.

And there was silence till Mrs. Brangwen came downstairs.

“Look here, Anna,” he said, handing her the letter.

She put back her head, seeing a typewritten letter, anticipating trouble from the outside world. There was the curious, sliding motion of her eyes, as if she shut off her sentient, maternal self, and a kind of hard trance, meaningless, took its place. Thus, meaningless, she glanced over the letter, careful not to take it in. She apprehended the contents with her callous, superficial mind. Her feeling self was shut down.

“What post is it?” she asked.

“She wants to go and be a teacher in Kingston-on-Thames, at fifty pounds a year.”

“Oh, indeed.”

The mother spoke as if it were a hostile fact concerning some stranger. She would have let her go, out of callousness. Mrs. Brangwen would begin to grow up again only with her youngest child. Her eldest girl was in the way now.

“She’s not going all that distance,” said the father.

“I have to go where they want me,” cried Ursula. “And it’s a good place to go to.”

“What do you know about the place?” said her father harshly.

“And it doesn’t matter whether they want you or not, if your father says you are not to go,” said the mother calmly.

How Ursula hated her!

“You said I was to try,” the girl cried. “Now I’ve got a place and I’m going to go.”

“You’re not going all that distance,” said her father.

“Why don’t you get a place at Ilkeston, where you can live at home?” asked Gudrun, who hated conflicts, who could not understand Ursula’s uneasy way, yet who must stand by her sister.

“There aren’t any places in Ilkeston,” cried Ursula. “And I’d rather go right away.”

“If you’d asked about it, a place could have been got for you in Ilkeston. But you had to play Miss High-an’-mighty, and go your own way,” said her father.

“I’ve no doubt you’d rather go right away,” said her mother, very caustic. “And I’ve no doubt you’d find other people didn’t put up with you for very long either. You’ve too much opinion of yourself for your good.”

Between the girl and her mother was a feeling of pure hatred. There came a

stubborn silence. Ursula knew she must break it.

“Well, they’ve written to me, and I s’ll have to go,” she said.

“Where will you get the money from?” asked her father.

“Uncle Tom will give it me,” she said.

Again there was silence. This time she was triumphant.

Then at length her father lifted his head. His face was abstracted, he seemed to be abstracting himself, to make a pure statement.

“Well, you’re not going all that distance away,” he said. “I’ll ask Mr. Burt about a place here. I’m not going to have you by yourself at the other side of London.”

“But I’ve got to go to Kingston,” said Ursula. “They’ve sent for me.”

“They’ll do without you,” he said.

There was a trembling silence when she was on the point of tears.

“Well,” she said, low and tense, “you can put me off this, but I’m going to have a place. I’m not going to stop at home.”

“Nobody wants you to stop at home,” he suddenly shouted, going livid with rage.

She said no more. Her nature had gone hard and smiling in its own arrogance, in its own antagonistic indifference to the rest of them. This was the state in which he wanted to kill her. She went singing into the parlour.

“C’EST LA MERE MICHEL QUI A PERDU SON CHAT, QUI CRI PAR LA FENETRE QU’EST-CE QUI LE LUI RENDRA — — ”

During the next days Ursula went about bright and hard, singing to herself, making love to the children, but her soul hard and cold with regard to her parents. Nothing more was said. The hardness and brightness lasted for four days. Then it began to break up. So at evening she said to her father:

“Have you spoken about a place for me?”

“I spoke to Mr. Burt.”

“What did he say?”

“There’s a committee meeting to-morrow. He’ll tell me on Friday.”

So she waited till Friday. Kingston-on-Thames had been an exciting dream. Here she could feel the hard, raw reality. So she knew that this would come to pass. Because nothing was ever fulfilled, she found, except in the hard limited reality. She did not want to be a teacher in Ilkeston, because she knew Ilkeston, and hated it. But she wanted to be free, so she must take her freedom where she could.

On Friday her father said there was a place vacant in Brinsley Street school. This could most probably be secured for her, at once, without the trouble of application.

Her heart halted. Brinsley Street was a school in a poor quarter, and she had had a taste of the common children of Ilkeston. They had shouted after her and thrown stones. Still, as a teacher, she would be in authority. And it was all unknown. She was excited. The very forest of dry, sterile brick had some fascination for her. It was so hard and ugly, so relentlessly ugly, it would purge her of some of her floating sentimentality.

She dreamed how she would make the little, ugly children love her. She would be so personal. Teachers were always so hard and impersonal. There was no vivid relationship. She would make everything personal and vivid, she would give herself, she would give, give, give all her great stores of wealth to her children, she would make them so happy, and they would prefer her to any teacher on the face of the earth.

At Christmas she would choose such fascinating Christmas cards for them, and she would give them such a happy party in one of the classrooms.

The headmaster, Mr. Harby, was a short, thick-set, rather common man, she thought. But she would hold before him the light of grace and refinement, he would have her in such high esteem before long. She would be the gleaming sun of the school, the children would blossom like little weeds, the teachers like tall, hard plants would burst into rare flower.

The Monday morning came. It was the end of September, and a drizzle of fine rain like veils round her, making her seem intimate, a world to herself. She walked forward to the new land. The old was blotted out. The veil would be rent that hid the new world. She was gripped hard with suspense as she went down the hill in the rain, carrying her dinner-bag.

Through the thin rain she saw the town, a black, extensive mount. She must enter in upon it. She felt at once a feeling of repugnance and of excited fulfilment. But she shrank.

She waited at the terminus for the tram. Here it was beginning. Before her was the station to Nottingham, whence Theresa had gone to school half an hour before; behind her was the little church school she had attended when she was a child, when her grandmother was alive. Her grandmother had been dead two years now. There was a strange woman at the Marsh, with her Uncle Fred, and a small baby. Behind her was Cossethay, and blackberries were ripe on the hedges.

As she waited at the tram-terminus she reverted swiftly to her childhood; her teasing grandfather, with his fair beard and blue eyes, and his big, monumental body; he had got drowned: her grandmother, whom Ursula would sometimes say she had loved more than anyone else in the world: the little church school, the Phillips boys; one was a soldier in the Life Guards now, one was a collier. With

a passion she clung to the past.

But as she dreamed of it, she heard the tram-car grinding round a bend, rumbling dully, she saw it draw into sight, and hum nearer. It sidled round the loop at the terminus, and came to a standstill, looming above her. Some shadowy grey people stepped from the far end, the conductor was walking in the puddles, swinging round the pole.

She mounted into the wet, comfortless tram, whose floor was dark with wet, whose windows were all steamed, and she sat in suspense. It had begun, her new existence.

One other passenger mounted — a sort of charwoman with a drab, wet coat. Ursula could not bear the waiting of the tram. The bell clanged, there was a lurch forward. The car moved cautiously down the wet street. She was being carried forward, into her new existence. Her heart burned with pain and suspense, as if something were cutting her living tissue.

Often, oh often the tram seemed to stop, and wet, cloaked people mounted and sat mute and grey in stiff rows opposite her, their umbrellas between their knees. The windows of the tram grew more steamy; opaque. She was shut in with these unliving, spectral people. Even yet it did not occur to her that she was one of them. The conductor came down issuing tickets. Each little ring of his clipper sent a pang of dread through her. But her ticket surely was different from the rest.

They were all going to work; she also was going to work. Her ticket was the same. She sat trying to fit in with them. But fear was at her bowels, she felt an unknown, terrible grip upon her.

At Bath Street she must dismount and change trams. She looked uphill. It seemed to lead to freedom. She remembered the many Saturday afternoons she had walked up to the shops. How free and careless she had been!

Ah, her tram was sliding gingerly downhill. She dreaded every yard of her conveyance. The car halted, she mounted hastily.

She kept turning her head as the car ran on, because she was uncertain of the street. At last, her heart a flame of suspense, trembling, she rose. The conductor rang the bell brusquely.

She was walking down a small, mean, wet street, empty of people. The school squatted low within its railed, asphalt yard, that shone black with rain. The building was grimy, and horrible, dry plants were shadowily looking through the windows.

She entered the arched doorway of the porch. The whole place seemed to have a threatening expression, imitating the church's architecture, for the purpose of domineering, like a gesture of vulgar authority. She saw that one pair of feet had

paddled across the flagstone floor of the porch. The place was silent, deserted, like an empty prison waiting the return of tramping feet.

Ursula went forward to the teachers' room that burrowed in a gloomy hole. She knocked timidly.

"Come in!" called a surprised man's voice, as from a prison cell. She entered the dark little room that never got any sun. The gas was lighted naked and raw. At the table a thin man in shirt-sleeves was rubbing a paper on a jellytray. He looked up at Ursula with his narrow, sharp face, said "Good morning," then turned away again, and stripped the paper off the tray, glancing at the violet-coloured writing transferred, before he dropped the curled sheet aside among a heap.

Ursula watched him fascinated. In the gaslight and gloom and the narrowness of the room, all seemed unreal.

"Isn't it a nasty morning," she said.

"Yes," he said, "it's not much of weather."

But in here it seemed that neither morning nor weather really existed. This place was timeless. He spoke in an occupied voice, like an echo. Ursula did not know what to say. She took off her waterproof.

"Am I early?" she asked.

The man looked first at a little clock, then at her. His eyes seemed to be sharpened to needle-points of vision.

"Twenty-five past," he said. "You're the second to come. I'm first this morning."

Ursula sat down gingerly on the edge of a chair, and watched his thin red hands rubbing away on the white surface of the paper, then pausing, pulling up a corner of the sheet, peering, and rubbing away again. There was a great heap of curled white-and-scribbled sheets on the table.

"Must you do so many?" asked Ursula.

Again the man glanced up sharply. He was about thirty or thirty-three years old, thin, greenish, with a long nose and a sharp face. His eyes were blue, and sharp as points of steel, rather beautiful, the girl thought.

"Sixty-three," he answered.

"So many!" she said, gently. Then she remembered.

"But they're not all for your class, are they?" she added.

"Why aren't they?" he replied, a fierceness in his voice.

Ursula was rather frightened by his mechanical ignoring of her, and his directness of statement. It was something new to her. She had never been treated like this before, as if she did not count, as if she were addressing a machine.

"It is too many," she said sympathetically.

“You’ll get about the same,” he said.

That was all she received. She sat rather blank, not knowing how to feel. Still she liked him. He seemed so cross. There was a queer, sharp, keen-edge feeling about him that attracted her and frightened her at the same time. It was so cold, and against his nature.

The door opened, and a short, neutral-tinted young woman of about twenty-eight appeared.

“Oh, Ursula!” the newcomer exclaimed. “You are here early! My word, I’ll warrant you don’t keep it up. That’s Mr. Williamson’s peg. This is yours. Standard Five teacher always has this. Aren’t you going to take your hat off?”

Miss Violet Harby removed Ursula’s waterproof from the peg on which it was hung, to one a little farther down the row. She had already snatched the pins from her own stuff hat, and jammed them through her coat. She turned to Ursula, as she pushed up her frizzed, flat, dun-coloured hair.

“Isn’t it a beastly morning,” she exclaimed, “beastly! And if there’s one thing I hate above another it’s a wet Monday morning; — pack of kids trailing in anyhow-nohow, and no holding ‘em — —”

She had taken a black pinafore from a newspaper package, and was tying it round her waist.

“You’ve brought an apron, haven’t you?” she said jerkily, glancing at Ursula. “Oh — you’ll want one. You’ve no idea what a sight you’ll look before half-past four, what with chalk and ink and kids’ dirty feet. — Well, I can send a boy down to mamma’s for one.”

“Oh, it doesn’t matter,” said Ursula.

“Oh, yes — I can send easily,” cried Miss Harby.

Ursula’s heart sank. Everybody seemed so cocksure and so bossy. How was she going to get on with such jolty, jerky, bossy people? And Miss Harby had not spoken a word to the man at the table. She simply ignored him. Ursula felt the callous crude rudeness between the two teachers.

The two girls went out into the passage. A few children were already clattering in the porch.

“Jim Richards,” called Miss Harby, hard and authoritative. A boy came sheepishly forward.

“Shall you go down to our house for me, eh?” said Miss Harby, in a commanding, condescending, coaxing voice. She did not wait for an answer. “Go down and ask mamma to send me one of my school pinas, for Miss Brangwen — shall you?”

The boy muttered a sheepish “Yes, miss,” and was moving away.

“Hey,” called Miss Harby. “Come here — now what are you going for? What

shall you say to mamma?"

"A school pina — —" muttered the boy.

"Please, Mrs. Harby, Miss Harby says will you send her another school pinafore for Miss Brangwen, because she's come without one."

"Yes, miss," muttered the boy, head ducked, and was moving off. Miss Harby caught him back, holding him by the shoulder.

"What are you going to say?"

"Please, Mrs. Harby, Miss Harby wants a pinny for Miss Brangwin," muttered the boy very sheepishly.

"Miss Brangwen!" laughed Miss Harby, pushing him away. "Here, you'd better have my umbrella — wait a minute."

The unwilling boy was rigged up with Miss Harby's umbrella, and set off.

"Don't take long over it," called Miss Harby, after him. Then she turned to Ursula, and said brightly:

"Oh, he's a caution, that lad — but not bad, you know."

"No," Ursula agreed, weakly.

The latch of the door clicked, and they entered the big room. Ursula glanced down the place. Its rigid, long silence was official and chilling. Half-way down was a glass partition, the doors of which were open. A clock ticked re-echoing, and Miss Harby's voice sounded double as she said:

"This is the big room — Standard Five-Six-and-Seven. — Here's your place — Five — —"

She stood in the near end of the great room. There was a small high teacher's desk facing a squadron of long benches, two high windows in the wall opposite.

It was fascinating and horrible to Ursula. The curious, unliving light in the room changed her character. She thought it was the rainy morning. Then she looked up again, because of the horrid feeling of being shut in a rigid, inflexible air, away from all feeling of the ordinary day; and she noticed that the windows were of ribbed, suffused glass.

The prison was round her now! She looked at the walls, colour washed, pale green and chocolate, at the large windows with frowsy geraniums against the pale glass, at the long rows of desks, arranged in a squadron, and dread filled her. This was a new world, a new life, with which she was threatened. But still excited, she climbed into her chair at her teacher's desk. It was high, and her feet could not reach the ground, but must rest on the step. Lifted up there, off the ground, she was in office. How queer, how queer it all was! How different it was from the mist of rain blowing over Cossethay. As she thought of her own village, a spasm of yearning crossed her, it seemed so far off, so lost to her.

She was here in this hard, stark reality — reality. It was queer that she should

call this the reality, which she had never known till to-day, and which now so filled her with dread and dislike, that she wished she might go away. This was the reality, and Cossethay, her beloved, beautiful, wellknown Cossethay, which was as herself unto her, that was minor reality. This prison of a school was reality. Here, then, she would sit in state, the queen of scholars! Here she would realise her dream of being the beloved teacher bringing light and joy to her children! But the desks before her had an abstract angularity that bruised her sentiment and made her shrink. She winced, feeling she had been a fool in her anticipations. She had brought her feelings and her generosity to where neither generosity nor emotion were wanted. And already she felt rebuffed, troubled by the new atmosphere, out of place.

She slid down, and they returned to the teacher's room. It was queer to feel that one ought to alter one's personality. She was nobody, there was no reality in herself, the reality was all outside of her, and she must apply herself to it.

Mr. Harby was in the teachers' room, standing before a big, open cupboard, in which Ursula could see piles of pink blotting-paper, heaps of shiny new books, boxes of chalk, and bottles of coloured inks. It looked a treasure store.

The schoolmaster was a short, sturdy man, with a fine head, and a heavy jowl. Nevertheless he was good-looking, with his shapely brows and nose, and his great, hanging moustache. He seemed absorbed in his work, and took no notice of Ursula's entry. There was something insulting in the way he could be so actively unaware of another person, so occupied.

When he had a moment of absence, he looked up from the table and said good-morning to Ursula. There was a pleasant light in his brown eyes. He seemed very manly and incontrovertible, like something she wanted to push over.

"You had a wet walk," he said to Ursula.

"Oh, I don't mind, I'm used to it," she replied, with a nervous little laugh.

But already he was not listening. Her words sounded ridiculous and babbling. He was taking no notice of her.

"You will sign your name here," he said to her, as if she were some child — "and the time when you come and go."

Ursula signed her name in the time book and stood back. No one took any further notice of her. She beat her brains for something to say, but in vain.

"I'd let them in now," said Mr. Harby to the thin man, who was very hastily arranging his papers.

The assistant teacher made no sign of acquiescence, and went on with what he was doing. The atmosphere in the room grew tense. At the last moment Mr. Brunt slipped into his coat.

“You will go to the girls’ lobby,” said the schoolmaster to Ursula, with a fascinating, insulting geniality, purely official and domineering.

She went out and found Miss Harby, and another girl teacher, in the porch. On the asphalt yard the rain was falling. A toneless bell tang-tang-tanged drearily overhead, monotonously, insistently. It came to an end. Then Mr. Brunt was seen, bare-headed, standing at the other gate of the school yard, blowing shrill blasts on a whistle and looking down the rainy, dreary street.

Boys in gangs and streams came trotting up, running past the master and with a loud clatter of feet and voices, over the yard to the boys’ porch. Girls were running and walking through the other entrance.

In the porch where Ursula stood there was a great noise of girls, who were tearing off their coats and hats, and hanging them on the racks bristling with pegs. There was a smell of wet clothing, a tossing out of wet, dragged hair, a noise of voices and feet.

The mass of girls grew greater, the rage around the pegs grew steadier, the scholars tended to fall into little noisy gangs in the porch. Then Violet Harby clapped her hands, clapped them louder, with a shrill “Quiet, girls, quiet!”

There was a pause. The hubbub died down but did not cease.

“What did I say?” cried Miss Harby, shrilly.

There was almost complete silence. Sometimes a girl, rather late, whirled into the porch and flung off her things.

“Leaders — in place,” commanded Miss Harby shrilly.

Pairs of girls in pinafores and long hair stood separate in the porch.

“Standard Four, Five, and Six — fall in,” cried Miss Harby.

There was a hubbub, which gradually resolved itself into three columns of girls, two and two, standing smirking in the passage. In among the peg-racks, other teachers were putting the lower classes into ranks.

Ursula stood by her own Standard Five. They were jerking their shoulders, tossing their hair, nudging, writhing, staring, grinning, whispering and twisting.

A sharp whistle was heard, and Standard Six, the biggest girls, set off, led by Miss Harby. Ursula, with her Standard Five, followed after. She stood beside a smirking, grinning row of girls, waiting in a narrow passage. What she was herself she did not know.

Suddenly the sound of a piano was heard, and Standard Six set off hollowly down the big room. The boys had entered by another door. The piano played on, a march tune, Standard Five followed to the door of the big room. Mr. Harby was seen away beyond at his desk. Mr. Brunt guarded the other door of the room. Ursula’s class pushed up. She stood near them. They glanced and smirked and shoved.

“Go on,” said Ursula.

They tittered.

“Go on,” said Ursula, for the piano continued.

The girls broke loosely into the room. Mr. Harby, who had seemed immersed in some occupation, away at his desk, lifted his head and thundered:

“Halt!”

There was a halt, the piano stopped. The boys who were just starting through the other door, pushed back. The harsh, subdued voice of Mr. Brunt was heard, then the booming shout of Mr. Harby, from far down the room:

“Who told Standard Five girls to come in like that?”

Ursula crimsoned. Her girls were glancing up at her, smirking their accusation.

“I sent them in, Mr. Harby,” she said, in a clear, struggling voice. There was a moment of silence. Then Mr. Harby roared from the distance.

“Go back to your places, Standard Five girls.”

The girls glanced up at Ursula, accusing, rather jeering, fugitive. They pushed back. Ursula’s heart hardened with ignominious pain.

“Forward — march,” came Mr. Brunt’s voice, and the girls set off, keeping time with the ranks of boys.

Ursula faced her class, some fifty-five boys and girls, who stood filling the ranks of the desks. She felt utterly nonexistent. She had no place nor being there. She faced the block of children.

Down the room she heard the rapid firing of questions. She stood before her class not knowing what to do. She waited painfully. Her block of children, fifty unknown faces, watched her, hostile, ready to jeer. She felt as if she were in torture over a fire of faces. And on every side she was naked to them. Of unutterable length and torture the seconds went by.

Then she gathered courage. She heard Mr. Brunt asking questions in mental arithmetic. She stood near to her class, so that her voice need not be raised too much, and faltering, uncertain, she said:

“Seven hats at twopence ha’penny each?”

A grin went over the faces of the class, seeing her commence. She was red and suffering. Then some hands shot up like blades, and she asked for the answer.

The day passed incredibly slowly. She never knew what to do, there came horrible gaps, when she was merely exposed to the children; and when, relying on some pert little girl for information, she had started a lesson, she did not know how to go on with it properly. The children were her masters. She deferred to them. She could always hear Mr. Brunt. Like a machine, always in the same hard, high, inhuman voice he went on with his teaching, oblivious of everything.

And before this inhuman number of children she was always at bay. She could not get away from it. There it was, this class of fifty collective children, depending on her for command, for command it hated and resented. It made her feel she could not breathe: she must suffocate, it was so inhuman. They were so many, that they were not children. They were a squadron. She could not speak as she would to a child, because they were not individual children, they were a collective, inhuman thing.

Dinner-time came, and stunned, bewildered, solitary, she went into the teachers' room for dinner. Never had she felt such a stranger to life before. It seemed to her she had just disembarked from some strange horrible state where everything was as in hell, a condition of hard, malevolent system. And she was not really free. The afternoon drew at her like some bondage.

The first week passed in a blind confusion. She did not know how to teach, and she felt she never would know. Mr. Harby came down every now and then to her class, to see what she was doing. She felt so incompetent as he stood by, bullying and threatening, so unreal, that she wavered, became neutral and nonexistent. But he stood there watching with the listening-genial smile of the eyes, that was really threatening; he said nothing, he made her go on teaching, she felt she had no soul in her body. Then he went away, and his going was like a derision. The class was his class. She was a wavering substitute. He thrashed and bullied, he was hated. But he was master. Though she was gentle and always considerate of her class, yet they belonged to Mr. Harby, and they did not belong to her. Like some invincible source of the mechanism he kept all power to himself. And the class owned his power. And in school it was power, and power alone that mattered.

Soon Ursula came to dread him, and at the bottom of her dread was a seed of hate, for she despised him, yet he was master of her. Then she began to get on. All the other teachers hated him, and fanned their hatred among themselves. For he was master of them and the children, he stood like a wheel to make absolute his authority over the herd. That seemed to be his one reason in life, to hold blind authority over the school. His teachers were his subjects as much as the scholars. Only, because they had some authority, his instinct was to detest them.

Ursula could not make herself a favourite with him. From the first moment she set hard against him. She set against Violet Harby also. Mr. Harby was, however, too much for her, he was something she could not come to grips with, something too strong for her. She tried to approach him as a young, bright girl usually approaches a man, expecting a little chivalrous courtesy. But the fact that she was a girl, a woman, was ignored or used as a matter for contempt against her. She did not know what she was, nor what she must be. She wanted to

remain her own responsive, personal self.

So she taught on. She made friends with the Standard Three teacher, Maggie Schofield. Miss Schofield was about twenty years old, a subdued girl who held aloof from the other teachers. She was rather beautiful, meditative, and seemed to live in another, lovelier world.

Ursula took her dinner to school, and during the second week ate it in Miss Schofield's room. Standard Three classroom stood by itself and had windows on two sides, looking on to the playground. It was a passionate relief to find such a retreat in the jarring school. For there were pots of chrysanthemums and coloured leaves, and a big jar of berries: there were pretty little pictures on the wall, photogravure reproductions from Greuze, and Reynolds's "Age of Innocence", giving an air of intimacy; so that the room, with its window space, its smaller, tidier desks, its touch of pictures and flowers, made Ursula at once glad. Here at last was a little personal touch, to which she could respond.

It was Monday. She had been at school a week and was getting used to the surroundings, though she was still an entire foreigner in herself. She looked forward to having dinner with Maggie. That was the bright spot in the day. Maggie was so strong and remote, walking with slow, sure steps down a hard road, carrying the dream within her. Ursula went through the class teaching as through a meaningless daze.

Her class tumbled out at midday in haphazard fashion. She did not realise what host she was gathering against herself by her superior tolerance, her kindness and her *laissezaller*. They were gone, and she was rid of them, and that was all. She hurried away to the teachers' room.

Mr. Brunt was crouching at the small stove, putting a little rice pudding into the oven. He rose then, and attentively poked in a small saucepan on the hob with a fork. Then he replaced the saucepan lid.

"Aren't they done?" asked Ursula gaily, breaking in on his tense absorption.

She always kept a bright, blithe manner, and was pleasant to all the teachers. For she felt like the swan among the geese, of superior heritage and belonging. And her pride at being the swan in this ugly school was not yet abated.

"Not yet," replied Mr. Brunt, laconic.

"I wonder if my dish is hot," she said, bending down at the oven. She half expected him to look for her, but he took no notice. She was hungry and she poked her finger eagerly in the pot to see if her brussels sprouts and potatoes and meat were ready. They were not.

"Don't you think it's rather jolly bringing dinner?" she said to Mr. Brunt.

"I don't know as I do," he said, spreading a serviette on a corner of the table, and not looking at her.

“I suppose it is too far for you to go home?”

“Yes,” he said. Then he rose and looked at her. He had the bluest, fiercest, most pointed eyes that she had ever met. He stared at her with growing fierceness.

“If I were you, Miss Brangwen,” he said, menacingly, “I should get a bit tighter hand over my class.”

Ursula shrank.

“Would you?” she asked, sweetly, yet in terror. “Aren’t I strict enough?”

“Because,” he repeated, taking no notice of her, “they’ll get you down if you don’t tackle ‘em pretty quick. They’ll pull you down, and worry you, till Harby gets you shifted — that’s how it’ll be. You won’t be here another six weeks” — and he filled his mouth with food — “if you don’t tackle ‘em and tackle ‘em quick.”

“Oh, but — —” Ursula said, resentfully, ruefully. The terror was deep in her.

“Harby’ll not help you. This is what he’ll do — he’ll let you go on, getting worse and worse, till either you clear out or he clears you out. It doesn’t matter to me, except that you’ll leave a class behind you as I hope I shan’t have to cope with.”

She heard the accusation in the man’s voice, and felt condemned. But still, school had not yet become a definite reality to her. She was shirking it. It was reality, but it was all outside her. And she fought against Mr. Brunt’s representation. She did not want to realise.

“Will it be so terrible?” she said, quivering, rather beautiful, but with a slight touch of condescension, because she would not betray her own trepidation.

“Terrible?” said the man, turning to his potatoes again. “I dunno about terrible.”

“I do feel frightened,” said Ursula. “The children seem so — —”

“What?” said Miss Harby, entering at that moment.

“Why,” said Ursula, “Mr. Brunt says I ought to tackle my class,” and she laughed uneasily.

“Oh, you have to keep order if you want to teach,” said Miss Harby, hard, superior, trite.

Ursula did not answer. She felt non valid before them.

“If you want to be let to live, you have,” said Mr. Brunt.

“Well, if you can’t keep order, what good are you?” said Miss Harby.

“An’ you’ve got to do it by yourself,” — his voice rose like the bitter cry of the prophets. “You’ll get no help from anybody.”

“Oh, indeed!” said Miss Harby. “Some people can’t be helped.” And she departed.

The air of hostility and disintegration, of wills working in antagonistic subordination, was hideous. Mr. Brunt, subordinate, afraid, acid with shame, frightened her. Ursula wanted to run. She only wanted to clear out, not to understand.

Then Miss Schofield came in, and with her another, more restful note. Ursula at once turned for confirmation to the newcomer. Maggie remained personal within all this unclean system of authority.

“Is the big Anderson here?” she asked of Mr. Brunt. And they spoke of some affair about two scholars, coldly, officially.

Miss Schofield took her brown dish, and Ursula followed with her own. The cloth was laid in the pleasant Standard Three room, there was a jar with two or three monthly roses on the table.

“It is so nice in here, you have made it different,” said Ursula gaily. But she was afraid. The atmosphere of the school was upon her.

“The big room,” said Miss Schofield, “ha, it’s misery to be in it!”

She too spoke with bitterness. She too lived in the ignominious position of an upper servant hated by the master above and the class beneath. She was, she knew, liable to attack from either side at any minute, or from both at once, for the authorities would listen to the complaints of parents, and both would turn round on the mongrel authority, the teacher.

So there was a hard, bitter withholding in Maggie Schofield even as she poured out her savoury mess of big golden beans and brown gravy.

“It is vegetarian hot-pot,” said Miss Schofield. “Would you like to try it?”

“I should love to,” said Ursula.

Her own dinner seemed coarse and ugly beside this savoury, clean dish.

“I’ve never eaten vegetarian things,” she said. “But I should think they can be good.”

“I’m not really a vegetarian,” said Maggie, “I don’t like to bring meat to school.”

“No,” said Ursula, “I don’t think I do either.”

And again her soul rang an answer to a new refinement, a new liberty. If all vegetarian things were as nice as this, she would be glad to escape the slight uncleanness of meat.

“How good!” she cried.

“Yes,” said Miss Schofield, and she proceeded to tell her the receipt. The two girls passed on to talk about themselves. Ursula told all about the High School, and about her matriculation, bragging a little. She felt so poor here, in this ugly place. Miss Schofield listened with brooding, handsome face, rather gloomy.

“Couldn’t you have got to some better place than this?” she asked at length.

“I didn’t know what it was like,” said Ursula, doubtfully.

“Ah!” said Miss Schofield, and she turned aside her head with a bitter motion.

“Is it as horrid as it seems?” asked Ursula, frowning lightly, in fear.

“It is,” said Miss Schofield, bitterly. “Ha! — it is hateful!”

Ursula’s heart sank, seeing even Miss Schofield in the deadly bondage.

“It is Mr. Harby,” said Maggie Schofield, breaking forth.

“I don’t think I could live again in the big room — Mr. Brunt’s voice and Mr. Harby — ah — — ”

She turned aside her head with a deep hurt. Some things she could not bear.

“Is Mr. Harby really horrid?” asked Ursula, venturing into her own dread.

“He! — why, he’s just a bully,” said Miss Schofield, raising her shamed dark eyes, that flamed with tortured contempt. “He’s not bad as long as you keep in with him, and refer to him, and do everything in his way — but — it’s all so mean! It’s just a question of fighting on both sides — and those great louts — — ”

She spoke with difficulty and with increased bitterness. She had evidently suffered. Her soul was raw with ignominy. Ursula suffered in response.

“But why is it so horrid?” she asked, helplessly.

“You can’t do anything,” said Miss Schofield. “He’s against you on one side and he sets the children against you on the other. The children are simply awful. You’ve got to make them do everything. Everything, everything has got to come out of you. Whatever they learn, you’ve got to force it into them — and that’s how it is.”

Ursula felt her heart fail inside her. Why must she grasp all this, why must she force learning on fifty-five reluctant children, having all the time an ugly, rude jealousy behind her, ready to throw her to the mercy of the herd of children, who would like to rend her as a weaker representative of authority. A great dread of her task possessed her. She saw Mr. Brunt, Miss Harby, Miss Schofield, all the schoolteachers, drudging unwillingly at the graceless task of compelling many children into one disciplined, mechanical set, reducing the whole set to an automatic state of obedience and attention, and then of commanding their acceptance of various pieces of knowledge. The first great task was to reduce sixty children to one state of mind, or being. This state must be produced automatically, through the will of the teacher, and the will of the whole school authority, imposed upon the will of the children. The point was that the headmaster and the teachers should have one will in authority, which should bring the will of the children into accord. But the headmaster was narrow and exclusive. The will of the teachers could not agree with his, their separate wills refused to be so subordinated. So there was a state of anarchy, leaving the final

judgment to the children themselves, which authority should exist.

So there existed a set of separate wills, each straining itself to the utmost to exert its own authority. Children will never naturally acquiesce to sitting in a class and submitting to knowledge. They must be compelled by a stronger, wiser will. Against which will they must always strive to revolt. So that the first great effort of every teacher of a large class must be to bring the will of the children into accordance with his own will. And this he can only do by an abnegation of his personal self, and an application of a system of laws, for the purpose of achieving a certain calculable result, the imparting of certain knowledge. Whereas Ursula thought she was going to become the first wise teacher by making the whole business personal, and using no compulsion. She believed entirely in her own personality.

So that she was in a very deep mess. In the first place she was offering to a class a relationship which only one or two of the children were sensitive enough to appreciate, so that the mass were left outsiders, therefore against her. Secondly, she was placing herself in passive antagonism to the one fixed authority of Mr. Harby, so that the scholars could more safely harry her. She did not know, but her instinct gradually warned her. She was tortured by the voice of Mr. Brunt. On it went, jarring, harsh, full of hate, but so monotonous, it nearly drove her mad: always the same set, harsh monotony. The man was become a mechanism working on and on and on. But the personal man was in subdued friction all the time. It was horrible — all hate! Must she be like this? She could feel the ghastly necessity. She must become the same — put away the personal self, become an instrument, an abstraction, working upon a certain material, the class, to achieve a set purpose of making them know so much each day. And she could not submit. Yet gradually she felt the invincible iron closing upon her. The sun was being blocked out. Often when she went out at playtime and saw a luminous blue sky with changing clouds, it seemed just a fantasy, like a piece of painted scenery. Her heart was so black and tangled in the teaching, her personal self was shut in prison, abolished, she was subjugate to a bad, destructive will. How then could the sky be shining? There was no sky, there was no luminous atmosphere of out-of-doors. Only the inside of the school was real — hard, concrete, real and vicious.

She would not yet, however, let school quite overcome her. She always said. "It is not a permanency, it will come to an end." She could always see herself beyond the place, see the time when she had left it. On Sundays and on holidays, when she was away at Cossethay or in the woods where the beech-leaves were fallen, she could think of St. Philip's Church School, and by an effort of will put it in the picture as a dirty little low-squatting building that made a very tiny

mound under the sky, while the great beech-woods spread immense about her, and the afternoon was spacious and wonderful. Moreover the children, the scholars, they were insignificant little objects far away, oh, far away. And what power had they over her free soul? A fleeting thought of them, as she kicked her way through the beech-leaves, and they were gone. But her will was tense against them all the time.

All the while, they pursued her. She had never had such a passionate love of the beautiful things about her. Sitting on top of the tram-car, at evening, sometimes school was swept away as she saw a magnificent sky settling down. And her breast, her very hands, clamoured for the lovely flare of sunset. It was poignant almost to agony, her reaching for it. She almost cried aloud seeing the sundown so lovely.

For she was held away. It was no matter how she said to herself that school existed no more once she had left it. It existed. It was within her like a dark weight, controlling her movement. It was in vain the high-spirited, proud young girl flung off the school and its association with her. She was Miss Brangwen, she was Standard Five teacher, she had her most important being in her work now.

Constantly haunting her, like a darkness hovering over her heart and threatening to swoop down over it at every moment, was the sense that somehow, somehow she was brought down. Bitterly she denied unto herself that she was really a schoolteacher. Leave that to the Violet Harbys. She herself would stand clear of the accusation. It was in vain she denied it.

Within herself some recording hand seemed to point mechanically to a negation. She was incapable of fulfilling her task. She could never for a moment escape from the fatal weight of the knowledge.

And so she felt inferior to Violet Harby. Miss Harby was a splendid teacher. She could keep order and inflict knowledge on a class with remarkable efficiency. It was no good Ursula's protesting to herself that she was infinitely, infinitely the superior of Violet Harby. She knew that Violet Harby succeeded where she failed, and this in a task which was almost a test of her. She felt something all the time wearing upon her, wearing her down. She went about in these first weeks trying to deny it, to say she was free as ever. She tried not to feel at a disadvantage before Miss Harby, tried to keep up the effect of her own superiority. But a great weight was on her, which Violet Harby could bear, and she herself could not.

Though she did not give in, she never succeeded. Her class was getting in worse condition, she knew herself less and less secure in teaching it. Ought she to withdraw and go home again? Ought she to say she had come to the wrong

place, and so retire? Her very life was at test.

She went on doggedly, blindly, waiting for a crisis. Mr. Harby had now begun to persecute her. Her dread and hatred of him grew and loomed larger and larger. She was afraid he was going to bully her and destroy her. He began to persecute her because she could not keep her class in proper condition, because her class was the weak link in the chain which made up the school.

One of the offences was that her class was noisy and disturbed Mr. Harby, as he took Standard Seven at the other end of the room. She was taking composition on a certain morning, walking in among the scholars. Some of the boys had dirty ears and necks, their clothing smelled unpleasantly, but she could ignore it. She corrected the writing as she went.

“When you say ‘their fur is brown’, how do you write ‘their’?” she asked.

There was a little pause; the boys were always jeeringly backward in answering. They had begun to jeer at her authority altogether.

“Please, miss, t-h-e-i-r”, spelled a lad, loudly, with a note of mockery.

At that moment Mr. Harby was passing.

“Stand up, Hill!” he called, in a big voice.

Everybody started. Ursula watched the boy. He was evidently poor, and rather cunning. A stiff bit of hair stood straight off his forehead, the rest fitted close to his meagre head. He was pale and colourless.

“Who told you to call out?” thundered Mr. Harby.

The boy looked up and down, with a guilty air, and a cunning, cynical reserve.

“Please, sir, I was answering,” he replied, with the same humble insolence.

“Go to my desk.”

The boy set off down the room, the big black jacket hanging in dejected folds about him, his thin legs, rather knocked at the knees, going already with the pauper’s crawl, his feet in their big boots scarcely lifted. Ursula watched him in his crawling, slinking progress down the room. He was one of her boys! When he got to the desk, he looked round, half furtively, with a sort of cunning grin and a pathetic leer at the big boys in Standard VII. Then, pitiable, pale, in his dejected garments, he lounged under the menace of the headmaster’s desk, with one thin leg crooked at the knee and the foot struck out sideways his hands in the low-hanging pockets of his man’s jacket.

Ursula tried to get her attention back to the class. The boy gave her a little horror, and she was at the same time hot with pity for him. She felt she wanted to scream. She was responsible for the boy’s punishment. Mr. Harby was looking at her handwriting on the board. He turned to the class.

“Pens down.”

The children put down their pens and looked up.

“Fold arms.”

They pushed back their books and folded arms.

Ursula, stuck among the back forms, could not extricate herself.

“What is your composition about?” asked the headmaster. Every hand shot up. “The — — ” stuttered some voice in its eagerness to answer.

“I wouldn’t advise you to call out,” said Mr. Harby. He would have a pleasant voice, full and musical, but for the detestable menace that always tailed in it. He stood unmoved, his eyes twinkling under his bushy black eyebrows, watching the class. There was something fascinating in him, as he stood, and again she wanted to scream. She was all jarred, she did not know what she felt.

“Well, Alice?” he said.

“The rabbit,” piped a girl’s voice.

“A very easy subject for Standard Five.”

Ursula felt a slight shame of incompetence. She was exposed before the class. And she was tormented by the contradictoriness of everything. Mr. Harby stood so strong, and so male, with his black brows and clear forehead, the heavy jaw, the big, overhanging moustache: such a man, with strength and male power, and a certain blind, native beauty. She might have liked him as a man. And here he stood in some other capacity, bullying over such a trifle as a boy’s speaking out without permission. Yet he was not a little, fussy man. He seemed to have some cruel, stubborn, evil spirit, he was imprisoned in a task too small and petty for him, which yet, in a servile acquiescence, he would fulfil, because he had to earn his living. He had no finer control over himself, only this blind, dogged, wholesale will. He would keep the job going, since he must. And this job was to make the children spell the word “caution” correctly, and put a capital letter after a full-stop. So at this he hammered with his suppressed hatred, always suppressing himself, till he was beside himself. Ursula suffered, bitterly as he stood, short and handsome and powerful, teaching her class. It seemed such a miserable thing for him to be doing. He had a decent, powerful, rude soul. What did he care about the composition on “The Rabbit”? Yet his will kept him there before the class, threshing the trivial subject. It was habit with him now, to be so little and vulgar, out of place. She saw the shamefulness of his position, felt the fettered wickedness in him which would blaze out into evil rage in the long run, so that he was like a persistent, strong creature tethered. It was really intolerable. The jarring was torture to her. She looked over the silent, attentive class that seemed to have crystallised into order and rigid, neutral form. This he had it in his power to do, to crystallise the children into hard, mute fragments, fixed under his will: his brute will, which fixed them by sheer force.

She too must learn to subdue them to her will: she must. For it was her duty,

since the school was such. He had crystallised the class into order. But to see him, a strong, powerful man, using all his power for such a purpose, seemed almost horrible. There was something hideous about it. The strange, genial light in his eye was really vicious, and ugly, his smile was one of torture. He could not be impersonal. He could not have a clear, pure purpose, he could only exercise his own brute will. He did not believe in the least in the education he kept inflicting year after year upon the children. So he must bully, only bully, even while it tortured his strong, wholesome nature with shame like a spur always galling. He was so blind and ugly and out of place. Ursula could not bear it as he stood there. The whole situation was wrong and ugly.

The lesson was finished, Mr. Harby went away. At the far end of the room she heard the whistle and the thud of the cane. Her heart stood still within her. She could not bear it, no, she could not bear it when the boy was beaten. It made her sick. She felt that she must go out of this school, this torture-place. And she hated the schoolmaster, thoroughly and finally. The brute, had he no shame? He should never be allowed to continue the atrocity of this bullying cruelty. Then Hill came crawling back, blubbing piteously. There was something desolate about this blubbing that nearly broke her heart. For after all, if she had kept her class in proper discipline, this would never have happened, Hill would never have called out and been caned.

She began the arithmetic lesson. But she was distracted. The boy Hill sat away on the back desk, huddled up, blubbing and sucking his hand. It was a long time. She dared not go near, nor speak to him. She felt ashamed before him. And she felt she could not forgive the boy for being the huddled, blubbing object, all wet and snivelled, which he was.

She went on correcting the sums. But there were too many children. She could not get round the class. And Hill was on her conscience. At last he had stopped crying, and sat bunched over his hands, playing quietly. Then he looked up at her. His face was dirty with tears, his eyes had a curious washed look, like the sky after rain, a sort of wanness. He bore no malice. He had already forgotten, and was waiting to be restored to the normal position.

“Go on with your work, Hill,” she said.

The children were playing over their arithmetic, and, she knew, cheating thoroughly. She wrote another sum on the blackboard. She could not get round the class. She went again to the front to watch. Some were ready. Some were not. What was she to do?

At last it was time for recreation. She gave the order to cease working, and in some way or other got her class out of the room. Then she faced the disorderly litter of blotted, uncorrected books, of broken rulers and chewed pens. And her

heart sank in sickness. The misery was getting deeper.

The trouble went on and on, day after day. She had always piles of books to mark, myriads of errors to correct, a heart-wearying task that she loathed. And the work got worse and worse. When she tried to flatter herself that the composition grew more alive, more interesting, she had to see that the handwriting grew more and more slovenly, the books more filthy and disgraceful. She tried what she could, but it was of no use. But she was not going to take it seriously. Why should she? Why should she say to herself, that it mattered, if she failed to teach a class to write perfectly neatly? Why should she take the blame unto herself?

Pay day came, and she received four pounds two shillings and one penny. She was very proud that day. She had never had so much money before. And she had earned it all herself. She sat on the top of the tram-car fingering the gold and fearing she might lose it. She felt so established and strong, because of it. And when she got home she said to her mother:

“It is pay day to-day, mother.”

“Ay,” said her mother, coolly.

Then Ursula put down fifty shillings on the table.

“That is my board,” she said.

“Ay,” said her mother, letting it lie.

Ursula was hurt. Yet she had paid her scot. She was free. She paid for what she had. There remained moreover thirty-two shillings of her own. She would not spend any, she who was naturally a spendthrift, because she could not bear to damage her fine gold.

She had a standing ground now apart from her parents. She was something else besides the mere daughter of William and Anna Brangwen. She was independent. She earned her own living. She was an important member of the working community. She was sure that fifty shillings a month quite paid for her keep. If her mother received fifty shillings a month for each of the children, she would have twenty pounds a month and no clothes to provide. Very well then.

Ursula was independent of her parents. She now adhered elsewhere. Now, the ‘Board of Education’ was a phrase that rang significant to her, and she felt Whitehall far beyond her as her ultimate home. In the government, she knew which minister had supreme control over Education, and it seemed to her that, in some way, he was connected with her, as her father was connected with her.

She had another self, another responsibility. She was no longer Ursula Brangwen, daughter of William Brangwen. She was also Standard Five teacher in St. Philip’s School. And it was a case now of being Standard Five teacher, and nothing else. For she could not escape.

Neither could she succeed. That was her horror. As the weeks passed on, there was no Ursula Brangwen, free and jolly. There was only a girl of that name obsessed by the fact that she could not manage her class of children. At week-ends there came days of passionate reaction, when she went mad with the taste of liberty, when merely to be free in the morning, to sit down at her embroidery and stitch the coloured silks was a passion of delight. For the prison house was always awaiting her! This was only a respite, as her chained heart knew well. So that she seized hold of the swift hours of the week-end, and wrung the last drop of sweetness out of them, in a little, cruel frenzy.

She did not tell anybody how this state was a torture to her. She did not confide, either to Gudrun or to her parents, how horrible she found it to be a schoolteacher. But when Sunday night came, and she felt the Monday morning at hand, she was strung up tight with dreadful anticipation, because the strain and the torture was near again.

She did not believe that she could ever teach that great, brutish class, in that brutal school: ever, ever. And yet, if she failed, she must in some way go under. She must admit that the man's world was too strong for her, she could not take her place in it; she must go down before Mr. Harby. And all her life henceforth, she must go on, never having freed herself of the man's world, never having achieved the freedom of the great world of responsible work. Maggie had taken her place there, she had even stood level with Mr. Harby and got free of him: and her soul was always wandering in far-off valleys and glades of poetry. Maggie was free. Yet there was something like subjection in Maggie's very freedom. Mr. Harby, the man, disliked the reserved woman, Maggie. Mr. Harby, the schoolmaster, respected his teacher, Miss Schofield.

For the present, however, Ursula only envied and admired Maggie. She herself had still to get where Maggie had got. She had still to make her footing. She had taken up a position on Mr. Harby's ground, and she must keep it. For he was now beginning a regular attack on her, to drive her away out of his school. She could not keep order. Her class was a turbulent crowd, and the weak spot in the school's work. Therefore she must go, and someone more useful must come in her place, someone who could keep discipline.

The headmaster had worked himself into an obsession of fury against her. He only wanted her gone. She had come, she had got worse as the weeks went on, she was absolutely no good. His system, which was his very life in school, the outcome of his bodily movement, was attacked and threatened at the point where Ursula was included. She was the danger that threatened his body with a blow, a fall. And blindly, thoroughly, moving from strong instinct of opposition, he set to work to expel her.

When he punished one of her children as he had punished the boy Hill, for an offence against himself, he made the punishment extra heavy with the significance that the extra stroke came in because of the weak teacher who allowed all these things to be. When he punished for an offence against her, he punished lightly, as if offences against her were not significant. Which all the children knew, and they behaved accordingly.

Every now and again Mr. Harby would swoop down to examine exercise books. For a whole hour, he would be going round the class, taking book after book, comparing page after page, whilst Ursula stood aside for all the remarks and fault-finding to be pointed at her through the scholars. It was true, since she had come, the composition books had grown more and more untidy, disorderly, filthy. Mr. Harby pointed to the pages done before her regime, and to those done after, and fell into a passion of rage. Many children he sent out to the front with their books. And after he had thoroughly gone through the silent and quivering class he caned the worst offenders well, in front of the others, thundering in real passion of anger and chagrin.

“Such a condition in a class, I can’t believe it! It is simply disgraceful! I can’t think how you have been let to get like it! Every Monday morning I shall come down and examine these books. So don’t think that because there is nobody paying any attention to you, that you are free to unlearn everything you ever learned, and go back till you are not fit for Standard Three. I shall examine all books every Monday — — ”

Then in a rage, he went away with his cane, leaving Ursula to confront a pale, quivering class, whose childish faces were shut in blank resentment, fear, and bitterness, whose souls were full of anger and contempt for her rather than of the master, whose eyes looked at her with the cold, inhuman accusation of children. And she could hardly make mechanical words to speak to them. When she gave an order they obeyed with an insolent off-handedness, as if to say: “As for you, do you think we would obey you, but for the master?” She sent the blubbing, caned boys to their seats, knowing that they too jeered at her and her authority, holding her weakness responsible for what punishment had overtaken them. And she knew the whole position, so that even her horror of physical beating and suffering sank to a deeper pain, and became a moral judgment upon her, worse than any hurt.

She must, during the next week, watch over her books, and punish any fault. Her soul decided it coldly. Her personal desire was dead for that day at least. She must have nothing more of herself in school. She was to be Standard Five teacher only. That was her duty. In school, she was nothing but Standard Five teacher. Ursula Brangwen must be excluded.

So that, pale, shut, at last distant and impersonal, she saw no longer the child, how his eyes danced, or how he had a queer little soul that could not be bothered with shaping handwriting so long as he dashed down what he thought. She saw no children, only the task that was to be done. And keeping her eyes there, on the task, and not on the child, she was impersonal enough to punish where she could otherwise only have sympathised, understood, and condoned, to approve where she would have been merely uninterested before. But her interest had no place any more.

It was agony to the impulsive, bright girl of seventeen to become distant and official, having no personal relationship with the children. For a few days, after the agony of the Monday, she succeeded, and had some success with her class. But it was a state not natural to her, and she began to relax.

Then came another infliction. There were not enough pens to go round the class. She sent to Mr. Harby for more. He came in person.

“Not enough pens, Miss Brangwen?” he said, with the smile and calm of exceeding rage against her.

“No, we are six short,” she said, quaking.

“Oh, how is that?” he said, menacingly. Then, looking over the class, he asked:

“How many are there here to-day?”

“Fifty-two,” said Ursula, but he did not take any notice, counting for himself.

“Fifty-two,” he said. “And how many pens are there, Staples?”

Ursula was now silent. He would not heed her if she answered, since he had addressed the monitor.

“That’s a very curious thing,” said Mr. Harby, looking over the silent class with a slight grin of fury. All the childish faces looked up at him blank and exposed.

“A few days ago there were sixty pens for this class — now there are forty-eight. What is forty-eight from sixty, Williams?” There was a sinister suspense in the question. A thin, ferret-faced boy in a sailor suit started up exaggeratedly.

“Please, sir!” he said. Then a slow, sly grin came over his face. He did not know. There was a tense silence. The boy dropped his head. Then he looked up again, a little cunning triumph in his eyes. “Twelve,” he said.

“I would advise you to attend,” said the headmaster dangerously. The boy sat down.

“Forty-eight from sixty is twelve: so there are twelve pens to account for. Have you looked for them, Staples?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Then look again.”

The scene dragged on. Two pens were found: ten were missing. Then the storm burst.

“Am I to have you thieving, besides your dirt and bad work and bad behaviour?” the headmaster began. “Not content with being the worst-behaved and dirtiest class in the school, you are thieves into the bargain, are you? It is a very funny thing! Pens don’t melt into the air: pens are not in the habit of mizzling away into nothing. What has become of them then? They must be somewhere. What has become of them? For they must be found, and found by Standard Five. They were lost by Standard Five, and they must be found.”

Ursula stood and listened, her heart hard and cold. She was so much upset, that she felt almost mad. Something in her tempted her to turn on the headmaster and tell him to stop, about the miserable pens. But she did not. She could not.

After every session, morning and evening, she had the pens counted. Still they were missing. And pencils and india-rubbers disappeared. She kept the class staying behind, till the things were found. But as soon as Mr. Harby had gone out of the room, the boys began to jump about and shout, and at last they bolted in a body from the school.

This was drawing near a crisis. She could not tell Mr. Harby because, while he would punish the class, he would make her the cause of the punishment, and her class would pay her back with disobedience and derision. Already there was a deadly hostility grown up between her and the children. After keeping in the class, at evening, to finish some work, she would find boys dodging behind her, calling after her: “Brangwen, Brangwen — Proud-acre.”

When she went into Ilkeston of a Saturday morning with Gudrun, she heard again the voices yelling after her:

“Brangwen, Brangwen.”

She pretended to take no notice, but she coloured with shame at being held up to derision in the public street. She, Ursula Brangwen of Cossethay, could not escape from the Standard Five teacher which she was. In vain she went out to buy ribbon for her hat. They called after her, the boys she tried to teach.

And one evening, as she went from the edge of the town into the country, stones came flying at her. Then the passion of shame and anger surpassed her. She walked on unheeding, beside herself. Because of the darkness she could not see who were those that threw. But she did not want to know.

Only in her soul a change took place. Never more, and never more would she give herself as individual to her class. Never would she, Ursula Brangwen, the girl she was, the person she was, come into contact with those boys. She would be Standard Five teacher, as far away personally from her class as if she had never set foot in St. Philip’s school. She would just obliterate them all, and keep

herself apart, take them as scholars only.

So her face grew more and more shut, and over her flayed, exposed soul of a young girl who had gone open and warm to give herself to the children, there set a hard, insentient thing, that worked mechanically according to a system imposed.

It seemed she scarcely saw her class the next day. She could only feel her will, and what she would have of this class which she must grasp into subjection. It was no good, any more, to appeal, to play upon the better feelings of the class. Her swift-working soul realised this.

She, as teacher, must bring them all as scholars, into subjection. And this she was going to do. All else she would forsake. She had become hard and impersonal, almost avengeful on herself as well as on them, since the stone throwing. She did not want to be a person, to be herself any more, after such humiliation. She would assert herself for mastery, be only teacher. She was set now. She was going to fight and subdue.

She knew by now her enemies in the class. The one she hated most was Williams. He was a sort of defective, not bad enough to be so classed. He could read with fluency, and had plenty of cunning intelligence. But he could not keep still. And he had a kind of sickness very repulsive to a sensitive girl, something cunning and etiolated and degenerate. Once he had thrown an ink-well at her, in one of his mad little rages. Twice he had run home out of class. He was a wellknown character.

And he grinned up his sleeve at this girl-teacher, sometimes hanging round her to fawn on her. But this made her dislike him more. He had a kind of leech-like power.

From one of the children she took a supple cane, and this she determined to use when real occasion came. One morning, at composition, she said to the boy Williams:

“Why have you made this blot?”

“Please, miss, it fell off my pen,” he whined out, in the mocking voice that he was so clever in using. The boys near snorted with laughter. For Williams was an actor, he could tickle the feelings of his hearers subtly. Particularly he could tickle the children with him into ridiculing his teacher, or indeed, any authority of which he was not afraid. He had that peculiar gaol instinct.

“Then you must stay in and finish another page of composition,” said the teacher.

This was against her usual sense of justice, and the boy resented it derisively. At twelve o’clock she caught him slinking out.

“Williams, sit down,” she said.

And there she sat, and there he sat, alone, opposite to her, on the back desk, looking up at her with his furtive eyes every minute.

“Please, miss, I’ve got to go an errand,” he called out insolently.

“Bring me your book,” said Ursula.

The boy came out, flapping his book along the desks. He had not written a line.

“Go back and do the writing you have to do,” said Ursula. And she sat at her desk, trying to correct books. She was trembling and upset. And for an hour the miserable boy writhed and grinned in his seat. At the end of that time he had done five lines.

“As it is so late now,” said Ursula, “you will finish the rest this evening.”

The boy kicked his way insolently down the passage.

The afternoon came again. Williams was there, glancing at her, and her heart beat thick, for she knew it was a fight between them. She watched him.

During the geography lesson, as she was pointing to the map with her cane, the boy continually ducked his whitish head under the desk, and attracted the attention of other boys.

“Williams,” she said, gathering her courage, for it was critical now to speak to him, “what are you doing?”

He lifted his face, the sore-rimmed eyes half smiling. There was something intrinsically indecent about him. Ursula shrank away.

“Nothing,” he replied, feeling a triumph.

“What are you doing?” she repeated, her heart-beat suffocating her.

“Nothing,” replied the boy, insolently, aggrieved, comic.

“If I speak to you again, you must go down to Mr. Harby,” she said.

But this boy was a match even for Mr. Harby. He was so persistent, so cringing, and flexible, he howled so when he was hurt, that the master hated more the teacher who sent him than he hated the boy himself. For of the boy he was sick of the sight. Which Williams knew. He grinned visibly.

Ursula turned to the map again, to go on with the geography lesson. But there was a little ferment in the class. Williams’ spirit infected them all. She heard a scuffle, and then she trembled inwardly. If they all turned on her this time, she was beaten.

“Please, miss — — ” called a voice in distress.

She turned round. One of the boys she liked was ruefully holding out a torn celluloid collar. She heard the complaint, feeling futile.

“Go in front, Wright,” she said.

She was trembling in every fibre. A big, sullen boy, not bad but very difficult, slouched out to the front. She went on with the lesson, aware that Williams was

making faces at Wright, and that Wright was grinning behind her. She was afraid. She turned to the map again. And she was afraid.

“Please, miss, Williams — — ” came a sharp cry, and a boy on the back row was standing up, with drawn, pained brows, half a mocking grin on his pain, half real resentment against Williams — “Please, miss, he’s nipped me,” — and he rubbed his leg ruefully.

“Come in front, Williams,” she said.

The rat-like boy sat with his pale smile and did not move.

“Come in front,” she repeated, definite now.

“I shan’t,” he cried, snarling, rat-like, grinning. Something went click in Ursula’s soul. Her face and eyes set, she went through the class straight. The boy cowered before her glowering, fixed eyes. But she advanced on him, seized him by the arm, and dragged him from his seat. He clung to the form. It was the battle between him and her. Her instinct had suddenly become calm and quick. She jerked him from his grip, and dragged him, struggling and kicking, to the front. He kicked her several times, and clung to the forms as he passed, but she went on. The class was on its feet in excitement. She saw it, and made no move.

She knew if she let go the boy he would dash to the door. Already he had run home once out of her class. So she snatched her cane from the desk, and brought it down on him. He was writhing and kicking. She saw his face beneath her, white, with eyes like the eyes of a fish, stony, yet full of hate and horrible fear. And she loathed him, the hideous writhing thing that was nearly too much for her. In horror lest he should overcome her, and yet at the heart quite calm, she brought down the cane again and again, whilst he struggled making inarticulate noises, and lunging vicious kicks at her. With one hand she managed to hold him, and now and then the cane came down on him. He writhed, like a mad thing. But the pain of the strokes cut through his writhing, vicious, coward’s courage, bit deeper, till at last, with a long whimper that became a yell, he went limp. She let him go, and he rushed at her, his teeth and eyes glinting. There was a second of agonised terror in her heart: he was a beast thing. Then she caught him, and the cane came down on him. A few times, madly, in a frenzy, he lunged and writhed, to kick her. But again the cane broke him, he sank with a howling yell on the floor, and like a beaten beast lay there yelling.

Mr. Harby had rushed up towards the end of this performance.

“What’s the matter?” he roared.

Ursula felt as if something were going to break in her.

“I’ve thrashed him,” she said, her breast heaving, forcing out the words on the last breath. The headmaster stood choked with rage, helpless. She looked at the writhing, howling figure on the floor.

“Get up,” she said. The thing writhed away from her. She took a step forward. She had realised the presence of the headmaster for one second, and then she was oblivious of it again.

“Get up,” she said. And with a little dart the boy was on his feet. His yelling dropped to a mad blubber. He had been in a frenzy.

“Go and stand by the radiator,” she said.

As if mechanically, blubbing, he went.

The headmaster stood robbed of movement or speech. His face was yellow, his hands twitched convulsively. But Ursula stood stiff not far from him. Nothing could touch her now: she was beyond Mr. Harby. She was as if violated to death.

The headmaster muttered something, turned, and went down the room, whence, from the far end, he was heard roaring in a mad rage at his own class.

The boy blubbered wildly by the radiator. Ursula looked at the class. There were fifty pale, still faces watching her, a hundred round eyes fixed on her in an attentive, expressionless stare.

“Give out the history readers,” she said to the monitors.

There was dead silence. As she stood there, she could hear again the ticking of the clock, and the chock of piles of books taken out of the low cupboard. Then came the faint flap of books on the desks. The children passed in silence, their hands working in unison. They were no longer a pack, but each one separated into a silent, closed thing.

“Take page 125, and read that chapter,” said Ursula.

There was a click of many books opened. The children found the page, and bent their heads obediently to read. And they read, mechanically.

Ursula, who was trembling violently, went and sat in her high chair. The blubbing of the boy continued. The strident voice of Mr. Brunt, the roar of Mr. Harby, came muffled through the glass partition. And now and then a pair of eyes rose from the reading-book, rested on her a moment, watchful, as if calculating impersonally, then sank again.

She sat still without moving, her eyes watching the class, unseeing. She was quite still, and weak. She felt that she could not raise her hand from the desk. If she sat there for ever, she felt she could not move again, nor utter a command. It was a quarter-past four. She almost dreaded the closing of the school, when she would be alone.

The class began to recover its ease, the tension relaxed. Williams was still crying. Mr. Brunt was giving orders for the closing of the lesson. Ursula got down.

“Take your place, Williams,” she said.

He dragged his feet across the room, wiping his face on his sleeve. As he sat down, he glanced at her furtively, his eyes still redder. Now he looked like some beaten rat.

At last the children were gone. Mr. Harby trod by heavily, without looking her way, or speaking. Mr. Brunt hesitated as she was locking her cupboard.

“If you settle Clarke and Letts in the same way, Miss Brangwen, you’ll be all right,” he said, his blue eyes glancing down in a strange fellowship, his long nose pointing at her.

“Shall I?” she laughed nervously. She did not want anybody to talk to her.

As she went along the street, clattering on the granite pavement, she was aware of boys dodging behind her. Something struck her hand that was carrying her bag, bruising her. As it rolled away she saw that it was a potato. Her hand was hurt, but she gave no sign. Soon she would take the tram.

She was afraid, and strange. It was to her quite strange and ugly, like some dream where she was degraded. She would have died rather than admit it to anybody. She could not look at her swollen hand. Something had broken in her; she had passed a crisis. Williams was beaten, but at a cost.

Feeling too much upset to go home, she rode a little farther into the town, and got down from the tram at a small tea-shop. There, in the dark little place behind the shop, she drank her tea and ate bread-and-butter. She did not taste anything. The taking of tea was just a mechanical action, to cover over her existence. There she sat in the dark, obscure little place, without knowing. Only unconsciously she nursed the back of her hand, which was bruised.

When finally she took her way home, it was sunset red across the west. She did not know why she was going home. There was nothing for her there. She had, true, only to pretend to be normal. There was nobody she could speak to, nowhere to go for escape. But she must keep on, under this red sunset, alone, knowing the horror in humanity, that would destroy her, and with which she was at war. Yet it had to be so.

In the morning again she must go to school. She got up and went without murmuring even to herself. She was in the hands of some bigger, stronger, coarser will.

School was fairly quiet. But she could feel the class watching her, ready to spring on her. Her instinct was aware of the class instinct to catch her if she were weak. But she kept cold and was guarded.

Williams was absent from school. In the middle of the morning there was a knock at the door: someone wanted the headmaster. Mr. Harby went out, heavily, angrily, nervously. He was afraid of irate parents. After a moment in the passage, he came again into school.

“Sturgess,” he called to one of his larger boys. “Stand in front of the class and write down the name of anyone who speaks. Will you come this way, Miss Brangwen.”

He seemed vindictively to seize upon her.

Ursula followed him, and found in the lobby a thin woman with a whitish skin, not ill-dressed in a grey costume and a purple hat.

“I called about Vernon,” said the woman, speaking in a refined accent. There was about the woman altogether an appearance of refinement and of cleanliness, curiously contradicted by her half beggar’s deportment, and a sense of her being unpleasant to touch, like something going bad inside. She was neither a lady nor an ordinary working man’s wife, but a creature separate from society. By her dress she was not poor.

Ursula knew at once that she was Williams’ mother, and that he was Vernon. She remembered that he was always clean, and well-dressed, in a sailor suit. And he had this same peculiar, half transparent unwholesomeness, rather like a corpse.

“I wasn’t able to send him to school to-day,” continued the woman, with a false grace of manner. “He came home last night so ill — he was violently sick — I thought I should have to send for the doctor. — You know he has a weak heart.”

The woman looked at Ursula with her pale, dead eyes.

“No,” replied the girl, “I did not know.”

She stood still with repulsion and uncertainty. Mr. Harby, large and male, with his overhanging moustache, stood by with a slight, ugly smile at the corner of his eyes. The woman went on insidiously, not quite human:

“Oh, yes, he has had heart disease ever since he was a child. That is why he isn’t very regular at school. And it is very bad to beat him. He was awfully ill this morning — I shall call on the doctor as I go back.”

“Who is staying with him now, then?” put in the deep voice of the schoolmaster, cunningly.

“Oh, I left him with a woman who comes in to help me — and who understands him. But I shall call in the doctor on my way home.”

Ursula stood still. She felt vague threats in all this. But the woman was so utterly strange to her, that she did not understand.

“He told me he had been beaten,” continued the woman, “and when I undressed him to put him to bed, his body was covered with marks — I could show them to any doctor.”

Mr Harby looked at Ursula to answer. She began to understand. The woman was threatening to take out a charge of assault on her son against her. Perhaps

she wanted money.

“I caned him,” she said. “He was so much trouble.”

“I’m sorry if he was troublesome,” said the woman, “but he must have been shamefully beaten. I could show the marks to any doctor. I’m sure it isn’t allowed, if it was known.”

“I caned him while he kept kicking me,” said Ursula, getting angry because she was half excusing herself, Mr. Harby standing there with the twinkle at the side of his eyes, enjoying the dilemma of the two women.

“I’m sure I’m sorry if he behaved badly,” said the woman. “But I can’t think he deserved beating as he has been. I can’t send him to school, and really can’t afford to pay the doctor. — Is it allowed for the teachers to beat the children like that, Mr. Harby?”

The headmaster refused to answer. Ursula loathed herself, and loathed Mr. Harby with his twinkling cunning and malice on the occasion. The other miserable woman watched her chance.

“It is an expense to me, and I have a great struggle to keep my boy decent.”

Ursula still would not answer. She looked out at the asphalt yard, where a dirty rag of paper was blowing.

“And it isn’t allowed to beat a child like that, I am sure, especially when he is delicate.”

Ursula stared with a set face on the yard, as if she did not hear. She loathed all this, and had ceased to feel or to exist.

“Though I know he is troublesome sometimes — but I think it was too much. His body is covered with marks.”

Mr. Harby stood sturdy and unmoved, waiting now to have done, with the twinkling, tiny wrinkles of an ironical smile at the corners of his eyes. He felt himself master of the situation.

“And he was violently sick. I couldn’t possibly send him to school to-day. He couldn’t keep his head up.”

Yet she had no answer.

“You will understand, sir, why he is absent,” she said, turning to Mr. Harby.

“Oh, yes,” he said, rough and off-hand. Ursula detested him for his male triumph. And she loathed the woman. She loathed everything.

“You will try to have it remembered, sir, that he has a weak heart. He is so sick after these things.”

“Yes,” said the headmaster, “I’ll see about it.”

“I know he is troublesome,” the woman only addressed herself to the male now — “but if you could have him punished without beating — he is really delicate.”

Ursula was beginning to feel upset. Harby stood in rather superb mastery, the woman cringing to him to tickle him as one tickles trout.

“I had come to explain why he was away this morning, sir. You will understand.”

She held out her hand. Harby took it and let it go, surprised and angry.

“Good morning,” she said, and she gave her gloved, seedy hand to Ursula. She was not ill-looking, and had a curious insinuating way, very distasteful yet effective.

“Good morning, Mr. Harby, and thank you.”

The figure in the grey costume and the purple hat was going across the school yard with a curious lingering walk. Ursula felt a strange pity for her, and revulsion from her. She shuddered. She went into the school again.

The next morning Williams turned up, looking paler than ever, very neat and nicely dressed in his sailor blouse. He glanced at Ursula with a half-smile: cunning, subdued, ready to do as she told him. There was something about him that made her shiver. She loathed the idea of having laid hands on him. His elder brother was standing outside the gate at playtime, a youth of about fifteen, tall and thin and pale. He raised his hat, almost like a gentleman. But there was something subdued, insidious about him too.

“Who is it?” said Ursula.

“It’s the big Williams,” said Violet Harby roughly. “She was here yesterday, wasn’t she?”

“Yes.”

“It’s no good her coming — her character’s not good enough for her to make any trouble.”

Ursula shrank from the brutality and the scandal. But it had some vague, horried fascination. How sordid everything seemed! She felt sorry for the queer woman with the lingering walk, and those queer, insidious boys. The Williams in her class was wrong somewhere. How nasty it was altogether.

So the battle went on till her heart was sick. She had several more boys to subjugate before she could establish herself. And Mr. Harby hated her almost as if she were a man. She knew now that nothing but a thrashing would settle some of the big louts who wanted to play cat and mouse with her. Mr. Harby would not give them the thrashing if he could help it. For he hated the teacher, the stuck-up, insolent high-school miss with her independence.

“Now, Wright, what have you done this time?” he would say genially to the boy who was sent to him from Standard Five for punishment. And he left the lad standing, lounging, wasting his time.

So that Ursula would appeal no more to the headmaster, but, when she was

driven wild, she seized her cane, and slashed the boy who was insolent to her, over head and ears and hands. And at length they were afraid of her, she had them in order.

But she had paid a great price out of her own soul, to do this. It seemed as if a great flame had gone through her and burnt her sensitive tissue. She who shrank from the thought of physical suffering in any form, had been forced to fight and beat with a cane and rouse all her instincts to hurt. And afterwards she had been forced to endure the sound of their blubbering and desolation, when she had broken them to order.

Oh, and sometimes she felt as if she would go mad. What did it matter, what did it matter if their books were dirty and they did not obey? She would rather, in reality, that they disobeyed the whole rules of the school, than that they should be beaten, broken, reduced to this crying, hopeless state. She would rather bear all their insults and insolences a thousand times than reduce herself and them to this. Bitterly she repented having got beside herself, and having tackled the boy she had beaten.

Yet it had to be so. She did not want to do it. Yet she had to. Oh, why, why had she leagued herself to this evil system where she must brutalise herself to live? Why had she become a schoolteacher, why, why?

The children had forced her to the beatings. No, she did not pity them. She had come to them full of kindness and love, and they would have torn her to pieces. They chose Mr. Harby. Well then, they must know her as well as Mr. Harby, they must first be subjugate to her. For she was not going to be made nought, no, neither by them, nor by Mr. Harby, nor by all the system around her. She was not going to be put down, prevented from standing free. It was not to be said of her, she could not take her place and carry out her task. She would fight and hold her place in this state also, in the world of work and man's convention.

She was isolated now from the life of her childhood, a foreigner in a new life, of work and mechanical consideration. She and Maggie, in their dinner-hours and their occasional teas at the little restaurant, discussed life and ideas. Maggie was a great suffragette, trusting in the vote. To Ursula the vote was never a reality. She had within her the strange, passionate knowledge of religion and living far transcending the limits of the automatic system that contained the vote. But her fundamental, organic knowledge had as yet to take form and rise to utterance. For her, as for Maggie, the liberty of woman meant something real and deep. She felt that somewhere, in something, she was not free. And she wanted to be. She was in revolt. For once she were free she could get somewhere. Ah, the wonderful, real somewhere that was beyond her, the somewhere that she felt deep, deep inside her.

In coming out and earning her own living she had made a strong, cruel move towards freeing herself. But having more freedom she only became more profoundly aware of the big want. She wanted so many things. She wanted to read great, beautiful books, and be rich with them; she wanted to see beautiful things, and have the joy of them for ever; she wanted to know big, free people; and there remained always the want she could put no name to.

It was so difficult. There were so many things, so much to meet and surpass. And one never knew where one was going. It was a blind fight. She had suffered bitterly in this school of St. Philip's. She was like a young filly that has been broken in to the shafts, and has lost its freedom. And now she was suffering bitterly from the agony of the shafts. The agony, the galling, the ignominy of her breaking in. This wore into her soul. But she would never submit. To shafts like these she would never submit for long. But she would know them. She would serve them that she might destroy them.

She and Maggie went to all kinds of places together, to big suffrage meetings in Nottingham, to concerts, to theatres, to exhibitions of pictures. Ursula saved her money and bought a bicycle, and the two girls rode to Lincoln, to Southwell, and into Derbyshire. They had an endless wealth of things to talk about. And it was a great joy, finding, discovering.

But Ursula never told about Winifred Inger. That was a sort of secret side-show to her life, never to be opened. She did not even think of it. It was the closed door she had not the strength to open.

Once she was broken in to her teaching, Ursula began gradually to have a new life of her own again. She was going to college in eighteen months' time. Then she would take her degree, and she would — ah, she would perhaps be a big woman, and lead a movement. Who knows? — At any rate she would go to college in eighteen months' time. All that mattered now was work, work.

And till college, she must go on with this teaching in St. Philip's School, which was always destroying her, but which she could now manage, without spoiling all her life. She would submit to it for a time, since the time had a definite limit.

The class-teaching itself at last became almost mechanical. It was a strain on her, an exhausting wearying strain, always unnatural. But there was a certain amount of pleasure in the sheer oblivion of teaching, so much work to do, so many children to see after, so much to be done, that one's self was forgotten. When the work had become like habit to her, and her individual soul was left out, had its growth elsewhere, then she could be almost happy.

Her real, individual self drew together and became more coherent during these two years of teaching, during the struggle against the odds of class teaching. It

was always a prison to her, the school. But it was a prison where her wild, chaotic soul became hard and independent. When she was well enough and not tired, then she did not hate the teaching. She enjoyed getting into the swing of work of a morning, putting forth all her strength, making the thing go. It was for her a strenuous form of exercise. And her soul was left to rest, it had the time of torpor in which to gather itself together in strength again. But the teaching hours were too long, the tasks too heavy, and the disciplinary condition of the school too unnatural for her. She was worn very thin and quivering.

She came to school in the morning seeing the hawthorn flowers wet, the little, rosy grains swimming in a bowl of dew. The larks quivered their song up into the new sunshine, and the country was so glad. It was a violation to plunge into the dust and greyness of the town.

So that she stood before her class unwilling to give herself up to the activity of teaching, to turn her energy, that longed for the country and for joy of early summer, into the dominating of fifty children and the transferring to them some morsels of arithmetic. There was a little absentness about her. She could not force herself into forgetfulness. A jar of buttercups and fool's-parsley in the window-bottom kept her away in the meadows, where in the lush grass the moon-daisies were half-submerged, and a spray of pink ragged robin. Yet before her were faces of fifty children. They were almost like big daisies in a dimness of the grass.

A brightness was on her face, a little unreality in her teaching. She could not quite see her children. She was struggling between two worlds, her own world of young summer and flowers, and this other world of work. And the glimmer of her own sunlight was between her and her class.

Then the morning passed with a strange far-awayness and quietness. Dinner-time came, when she and Maggie ate joyously, with all the windows open. And then they went out into St. Philip's churchyard, where was a shadowy corner under red hawthorn trees. And there they talked and read Shelley or Browning or some work about "Woman and Labour".

And when she went back to school, Ursula lived still in the shadowy corner of the graveyard, where pink-red petals lay scattered from the hawthorn tree, like myriad tiny shells on a beach, and a church bell sometimes rang sonorously, and sometimes a bird called out, whilst Maggie's voice went on low and sweet.

These days she was happy in her soul: oh, she was so happy, that she wished she could take her joy and scatter it in armfuls broadcast. She made her children happy, too, with a little tingling of delight. But to her, the children were not a school class this afternoon. They were flowers, birds, little bright animals, children, anything. They only were not Standard Five. She felt no responsibility

for them. It was for once a game, this teaching. And if they got their sums wrong, what matter? And she would take a pleasant bit of reading. And instead of history with dates, she would tell a lovely tale. And for grammar, they could have a bit of written analysis that was not difficult, because they had done it before:

“She shall be sportive as a fawn That wild with glee across the lawn Or up the mountain springs.”

She wrote that from memory, because it pleased her.

So the golden afternoon passed away and she went home happy. She had finished her day of school, and was free to plunge into the glowing evening of Cossethay. And she loved walking home. But it had not been school. It had been playing at school beneath red hawthorn blossom.

She could not go on like this. The quarterly examination was coming, and her class was not ready. It irritated her that she must drag herself away from her happy self, and exert herself with all her strength to force, to compel this heavy class of children to work hard at arithmetic. They did not want to work, she did not want to compel them. And yet, some second conscience gnawed at her, telling her the work was not properly done. It irritated her almost to madness, and she let loose all the irritation in the class. Then followed a day of battle and hate and violence, when she went home raw, feeling the golden evening taken away from her, herself incarcerated in some dark, heavy place, and chained there with a consciousness of having done badly at work.

What good was it that it was summer, that right till evening, when the corncrakes called, the larks would mount up into the light, to sing once more before nightfall. What good was it all, when she was out of tune, when she must only remember the burden and shame of school that day.

And still, she hated school. Still she cried, she did not believe in it. Why should the children learn, and why should she teach them? It was all so much milling the wind. What folly was it that made life into this, the fulfilling of some stupid, factitious duty? It was all so made up, so unnatural. The school, the sums, the grammar, the quarterly examinations, the registers — it was all a barren nothing!

Why should she give her allegiance to this world, and let it so dominate her, that her own world of warm sun and growing, sap-filled life was turned into nothing? She was not going to do it. She was not going to be a prisoner in the dry, tyrannical man-world. She was not going to care about it. What did it matter if her class did ever so badly in the quarterly examination. Let it — what did it matter?

Nevertheless, when the time came, and the report on her class was bad, she

was miserable, and the joy of the summer was taken away from her, she was shut up in gloom. She could not really escape from this world of system and work, out into her fields where she was happy. She must have her place in the working world, be a recognised member with full rights there. It was more important to her than fields and sun and poetry, at this time. But she was only the more its enemy.

It was a very difficult thing, she thought, during the long hours of intermission in the summer holidays, to be herself, her happy self that enjoyed so much to lie in the sun, to play and swim and be content, and also to be a schoolteacher getting results out of a class of children. She dreamed fondly of the time when she need not be a teacher any more. But vaguely, she knew that responsibility had taken place in her for ever, and as yet her prime business was to work.

The autumn passed away, the winter was at hand. Ursula became more and more an inhabitant of the world of work, and of what is called life. She could not see her future, but a little way off, was college, and to the thought of this she clung fixedly. She would go to college, and get her two or three years' training, free of cost. Already she had applied and had her place appointed for the coming year.

So she continued to study for her degree. She would take French, Latin, English, mathematics and botany. She went to classes in Ilkeston, she studied at evening. For there was this world to conquer, this knowledge to acquire, this qualification to attain. And she worked with intensity, because of a want inside her that drove her on. Almost everything was subordinated now to this one desire to take her place in the world. What kind of place it was to be she did not ask herself. The blind desire drove her on. She must take her place.

She knew she would never be much of a success as an elementary school teacher. But neither had she failed. She hated it, but she had managed it.

Maggie had left St. Philip's School, and had found a more congenial post. The two girls remained friends. They met at evening classes, they studied and somehow encouraged a firm hope each in the other. They did not know whither they were making, nor what they ultimately wanted. But they knew they wanted now to learn, to know and to do.

They talked of love and marriage, and the position of woman in marriage. Maggie said that love was the flower of life, and blossomed unexpectedly and without law, and must be plucked where it was found, and enjoyed for the brief hour of its duration.

To Ursula this was unsatisfactory. She thought she still loved Anton Skrebensky. But she did not forgive him that he had not been strong enough to acknowledge her. He had denied her. How then could she love him? How then

was love so absolute? She did not believe it. She believed that love was a way, a means, not an end in itself, as Maggie seemed to think. And always the way of love would be found. But whither did it lead?

“I believe there are many men in the world one might love — there is not only one man,” said Ursula.

She was thinking of Skrebensky. Her heart was hollow with the knowledge of Winifred Inger.

“But you must distinguish between love and passion,” said Maggie, adding, with a touch of contempt: “Men will easily have a passion for you, but they won’t love you.”

“Yes,” said Ursula, vehemently, the look of suffering, almost of fanaticism, on her face. “Passion is only part of love. And it seems so much because it can’t last. That is why passion is never happy.”

She was staunch for joy, for happiness, and permanency, in contrast with Maggie, who was for sadness, and the inevitable passing-away of things. Ursula suffered bitterly at the hands of life, Maggie was always single, always withheld, so she went in a heavy brooding sadness that was almost meat to her. In Ursula’s last winter at St. Philip’s the friendship of the two girls came to a climax. It was during this winter that Ursula suffered and enjoyed most keenly Maggie’s fundamental sadness of enclosedness. Maggie enjoyed and suffered Ursula’s struggles against the confines of her life. And then the two girls began to drift apart, as Ursula broke from that form of life wherein Maggie must remain enclosed.

CHAPTER 14

The Widening Circle

Maggie's people, the Schofields, lived in the large gardener's cottage, that was half a farm, behind Belcote Hall. The hall was too damp to live in, so the Schofields were caretakers, gamekeepers, farmers, all in one. The father was gamekeeper and stock-breeder, the eldest son was market-gardener, using the big hall gardens, the second son was farmer and gardener. There was a large family, as at Cossethay.

Ursula loved to stay at Belcote, to be treated as a grand lady by Maggie's brothers. They were good-looking men. The eldest was twenty-six years old. He was the gardener, a man not very tall, but strong and well made, with brown, sunny, easy eyes and a face handsomely hewn, brown, with a long fair moustache which he pulled as he talked to Ursula.

The girl was excited because these men attended to her when she came near. She could make their eyes light up and quiver, she could make Anthony, the eldest, twist and twist his moustache. She knew she could move them almost at will with her light laughter and chatter. They loved her ideas, watched her as she talked vehemently about politics or economics. And she, while she talked, saw the golden-brown eyes of Anthony gleam like the eyes of a satyr as they watched her. He did not listen to her words, he listened to her. It excited her.

He was like a faun pleased when she would go with him over his hothouses, to look at the green and pretty plants, at the pink primulas nodding among their leaves, and cinarrias flaunting purple and crimson and white. She asked about everything, and he told her very exactly and minutely, in a queer pedantic way that made her want to laugh. Yet she was really interested in what he did. And he had the curious light in his face, like the light in the eyes of the goat that was tethered by the farmyard gate.

She went down with him into the warmish cellar, where already in the darkness the little yellow knobs of rhubarb were coming. He held the lantern down to the dark earth. She saw the tiny knob-end of the rhubarb thrusting upwards upon the thick red stem, thrusting itself like a knob of flame through the soft soil. His face was turned up to her, the light glittered on his eyes and his teeth as he laughed, with a faint, musical neigh. He looked handsome. And she heard a new sound in her ears, the faintly-musical, neighing laugh of Anthony,

whose moustache twisted up, and whose eyes were luminous with a cold, steady, arrogant-laughing glare. There seemed a little prance of triumph in his movement, she could not rid herself of a movement of acquiescence, a touch of acceptance. Yet he was so humble, his voice was so caressing. He held his hand for her to step on when she must climb a wall. And she stepped on the living firmness of him, that quivered firmly under her weight.

She was aware of him as if in a mesmeric state. In her ordinary sense, she had nothing to do with him. But the peculiar ease and unnoticeableness of his entering the house, the power of his cold, gleaming light on her when he looked at her, was like a bewitchment. In his eyes, as in the pale grey eyes of a goat, there seemed some of that steady, hard fire of moonlight which has nothing to do with the day. It made her alert, and yet her mind went out like an extinguished thing. She was all senses, all her senses were alive.

Then she saw him on Sunday, dressed up in Sunday clothes, trying to impress her. And he looked ridiculous. She clung to the ridiculous effect of his stiff, Sunday clothes.

She was always conscious of some unfaithfulness to Maggie, on Anthony's score. Poor Maggie stood apart as if betrayed. Maggie and Anthony were enemies by instinct. Ursula had to go back to her friend brimming with affection and a poignancy of pity. Which Maggie received with a little stiffness. Then poetry and books and learning took the place of Anthony, with his goats' movements and his cold, gleaming humour.

While Ursula was at Belcote, the snow fell. In the morning, a covering of snow weighed on the rhododendron bushes.

"Shall we go out?" said Maggie.

She had lost some of her leader's sureness, and was now tentative, a little in reserve from her friend.

They took the key of the gate and wandered into the park. It was a white world on which dark trees and tree masses stood under a sky keen with frost. The two girls went past the hall, that was shuttered and silent, their footprints marking the snow on the drive. Down the park, a long way off, a man was carrying armfuls of hay across the snow. He was a small, dark figure, like an animal moving in its unawareness.

Ursula and Maggie went on exploring, down to a tinkling, chilly brook, that had worn the snow away in little scoops, and ran dark between. They saw a robin glance its bright eyes and burst scarlet and grey into the hedge, then some pertly-marked blue-tits scuffled. Meanwhile the brook slid on coldly, chuckling to itself.

The girls wandered across the snowy grass to where the artificial fish-ponds

lay under thin ice. There was a big tree with a thick trunk twisted with ivy, that hung almost horizontal over the ponds. Ursula climbed joyfully into this and sat amid bosses of bright ivy and dull berries. Some ivy leaves were like green spears held out, and tipped with snow. The ice was seen beneath them.

Maggie took out a book, and sitting lower down the trunk began to read Coleridge's "Christabel". Ursula half listened. She was wildly thrilled. Then she saw Anthony coming across the snow, with his confident, slightly strutting stride. His face looked brown and hard against the snow, smiling with a sort of tense confidence.

"Hello!" she called to him.

A response went over his face, his head was lifted in an answering, jerking gesture.

"Hello!" he said. "You're like a bird in there."

And Ursula's laugh rang out. She answered to the peculiar, reedy twang in his penetrating voice.

She did not think of Anthony, yet she lived in a sort of connection with him, in his world. One evening she met him as she was coming down the lane, and they walked side by side.

"I think it's so lovely here," she cried.

"Do you?" he said. "I'm glad you like it."

There was a curious confidence in his voice.

"Oh, I love it. What more does one want than to live in this beautiful place, and make things grow in your garden. It is like the Garden of Eden."

"Is it?" he said, with a little laugh. "Yes — well, it's not so bad — —" he was hesitating. The pale gleam was strong in his eyes, he was looking at her steadily, watching her, as an animal might. Something leaped in her soul. She knew he was going to suggest to her that she should be as he was.

"Would you like to stay here with me?" he asked, tentatively.

She blenched with fear and with the intense sensation of proffered licence suggested to her.

They had come to the gate.

"How?" she asked. "You aren't alone here."

"We could marry," he answered, in the strange, coldly-gleaming insinuating tone that chilled the sunshine into moonlight. All substantial things seemed transformed. Shadows and dancing moonlight were real, and all cold, inhuman, gleaming sensations. She realised with something like terror that she was going to accept this. She was going inevitably to accept him. His hand was reaching out to the gate before them. She stood still. His flesh was hard and brown and final. She seemed to be in the grip of some insult.

“I couldn’t,” she answered, involuntarily.

He gave the same brief, neighing little laugh, very sad and bitter now, and slotted back the bar of the gate. Yet he did not open. For a moment they both stood looking at the fire of sunset that quivered among the purple twigs of the trees. She saw his brown, hard, well-hewn face gleaming with anger and humiliation and submission. He was an animal that knows that it is subdued. Her heart flamed with sensation of him, of the fascinating thing he offered her, and with sorrow, and with an inconsolable sense of loneliness. Her soul was an infant crying in the night. He had no soul. Oh, and why had she? He was the cleaner.

She turned away, she turned round from him, and saw the east flushed strangely rose, the moon coming yellow and lovely upon a rosy sky, above the darkening, bluish snow. All this so beautiful, all this so lovely! He did not see it. He was one with it. But she saw it, and was one with it. Her seeing separated them infinitely.

They went on in silence down the path, following their different fates. The trees grew darker and darker, the snow made only a dimness in an unreal world. And like a shadow, the day had gone into a faintly luminous, snowy evening, while she was talking aimlessly to him, to keep him at a distance, yet to keep him near her, and he walked heavily. He opened the garden gate for her quietly, and she was entering into her own pleasures, leaving him outside the gate.

Then even whilst she was escaping, or trying to escape, this feeling of pain, came Maggie the next day, saying:

“I wouldn’t make Anthony love you, Ursula, if you don’t want him. It is not nice.”

“But, Maggie, I never made him love me,” cried Ursula, dismayed and suffering, and feeling as if she had done something base.

She liked Anthony, though. All her life, at intervals, she returned to the thought of him and of that which he offered. But she was a traveller, she was a traveller on the face of the earth, and he was an isolated creature living in the fulfilment of his own senses.

She could not help it, that she was a traveller. She knew Anthony, that he was not one. But oh, ultimately and finally, she must go on and on, seeking the goal that she knew she did draw nearer to.

She was wearing away her second and last cycle at St. Philip’s. As the months went she ticked them off, first October, then November, December, January. She was careful always to subtract a month from the remainder, for the summer holidays. She saw herself travelling round a circle, only an arc of which remained to complete. Then, she was in the open, like a bird tossed into mid-air,

a bird that had learned in some measure to fly.

There was college ahead; that was her mid-air, unknown, spacious. Come college, and she would have broken from the confines of all the life she had known. For her father was also going to move. They were all going to leave Cossethay.

Brangwen had kept his carelessness about his circumstances. He knew his work in the lace designing meant little to him personally, he just earned his wage by it. He did not know what meant much to him. Living close to Anna Brangwen, his mind was always suffused through with physical heat, he moved from instinct to instinct, groping, always groping on.

When it was suggested to him that he might apply for one of the posts as hand-work instructor, posts about to be created by the Nottingham Education Committee, it was as if a space had been given to him, into which he could remove from his hot, dusky enclosure. He sent in his application, confidently, expectantly. He had a sort of belief in his supernatural fate. The inevitable weariness of his daily work had stiffened some of his muscles, and made a slight deadness in his ruddy, alert face. Now he might escape.

He was full of the new possibilities, and his wife was acquiescent. She was willing now to have a change. She too was tired of Cossethay. The house was too small for the growing children. And since she was nearly forty years old, she began to come awake from her sleep of motherhood, her energy moved more outwards. The din of growing lives roused her from her apathy. She too must have her hand in making life. She was quite ready to move, taking all her brood. It would be better now if she transplanted them. For she had borne her last child, it would be growing up.

So that in her easy, unused fashion she talked plans and arrangements with her husband, indifferent really as to the method of the change, since a change was coming; even if it did not come in this way it would come in another.

The house was full of ferment. Ursula was wild with excitement. At last her father was going to be something, socially. So long, he had been a social cypher, without form or standing. Now he was going to be Art and Handwork Instructor for the County of Nottingham. That was really a status. It was a position. He would be a specialist in his way. And he was an uncommon man. Ursula felt they were all getting a foothold at last. He was coming to his own. Who else that she knew could turn out from his own fingers the beautiful things her father could produce? She felt he was certain of this new job.

They would move. They would leave this cottage at Cossethay which had grown too small for them; they would leave Cossethay, where the children had all been born, and where they were always kept to the same measure. For the

people who had known them as children along with the other village boys and girls would never, could never understand that they should grow up different. They had held “Urtler Brangwen” one of themselves, and had given her her place in her native village, as in a family. And the bond was strong. But now, when she was growing to something beyond what Cossethay would allow or understand, the bond between her and her old associates was becoming a bondage.

“ ‘Ello, Urs’ler, ‘ow are yer goin’ on?” they said when they met her. And it demanded of her in the old voice the old response. And something in her must respond and belong to people who knew her. But something else denied bitterly. What was true of her ten years ago was not true now. And something else which she was, and must be, they could neither see nor allow. They felt it there nevertheless, something beyond them, and they were injured. They said she was proud and conceited, that she was too big for her shoes nowadays. They said, she needn’t pretend, because they knew what she was. They had known her since she was born. They quoted this and that about her. And she was ashamed because she did feel different from the people she had lived amongst. It hurt her that she could not be at her ease with them any more. And yet — and yet — one’s kite will rise on the wind as far as ever one has string to let it go. It tugs and tugs and will go, and one is glad the further it goes, even if everybody else is nasty about it. So Cossethay hampered her, and she wanted to go away, to be free to fly her kite as high as she liked. She wanted to go away, to be free to stand straight up to her own height.

So that when she knew that her father had the new post, and that the family would move, she felt like skipping on the face of the earth, and making psalms of joy. The old, bound shell of Cossethay was to be cast off, and she was to dance away into the blue air. She wanted to dance and sing.

She made dreams of the new place she would live in, where stately cultured people of high feeling would be friends with her, and she would live with the noble in the land, moving to a large freedom of feeling. She dreamed of a rich, proud, simple girl-friend, who had never known Mr. Harby and his like, nor ever had a note in her voice of bonded contempt and fear, as Maggie had.

And she gave herself to all that she loved in Cossethay, passionately, because she was going away now. She wandered about to her favourite spots. There was a place where she went trespassing to find the snowdrops that grew wild. It was evening and the winter-darkened meadows were full of mystery. When she came to the woods an oak tree had been newly chopped down in the dell. Pale drops of flowers glimmered many under the hazels, and by the sharp, golden splinters of wood that were splashed about, the grey-green blades of snowdrop leaves

pricked unheeding, the drooping still little flowers were without heed.

Ursula picked some lovingly, in an ecstasy. The golden chips of wood shone yellow like sunlight, the snowdrops in the twilight were like the first stars of night. And she, alone amongst them, was wildly happy to have found her way into such a glimmering dusk, to the intimate little flowers, and the splash of wood chips like sunshine over the twilight of the ground. She sat down on the felled tree and remained awhile remote.

Going home, she left the purplish dark of the trees for the open lane, where the puddles shone long and jewel-like in the ruts, the land about her was darkened, and the sky a jewel overhead. Oh, how amazing it was to her! It was almost too much. She wanted to run, and sing, and cry out for very wildness and poignancy, but she could not run and sing and cry out in such a way as to cry out the deep things in her heart, so she was still, and almost sad with loneliness.

At Easter she went again to Maggie's home, for a few days. She was, however shy and fugitive. She saw Anthony, how suggestive he was to look on, and how his eyes had a sort of supplicating light, that was rather beautiful. She looked at him, and she looked again, for him to become real to her. But it was her own self that was occupied elsewhere. She seemed to have some other being.

And she turned to spring and the opening buds. There was a large pear tree by a wall, and it was full, thronged with tiny, grey-green buds, myriads. She stood before it arrested with delight, and a realisation went deep into her heart. There was so great a host in array behind the cloud of pale, dim green, so much to come forth — so much sunshine to pour down.

So the weeks passed on, trance-like and pregnant. The pear tree at Cossethay burst into bloom against the cottage-end, like a wave burst into foam. Then gradually the bluebells came, blue as water standing thin in the level places under the trees and bushes, flowing in more and more, till there was a flood of azure, and pale-green leaves burning, and tiny birds with fiery little song and flight. Then swiftly the flood sank and was gone, and it was summer.

There was to be no going to the seaside for a holiday. The holiday was the removal from Cossethay.

They were going to live near Willey Green, which place was most central for Brangwen. It was an old, quiet village on the edge of the thronged colliery-district. So that it served, in its quaintness of odd old cottages lingering in their sunny gardens, as a sort of bower or pleasaunce to the sprawling colliery-townlet of Beldover, a pleasant walk-round for the colliers on Sunday morning, before the public-houses opened.

In Willey Green stood the Grammar School where Brangwen was occupied for two days during the week, and where experiments in education were being

carried on.

Ursula wanted to live in Willey Green on the remoter side, towards Southwell, and Sherwood Forest. There it was so lovely and romantic. But out into the world meant out into the world. Will Brangwen must become modern.

He bought, with his wife's money, a fairly large house in the new, red-brick part of Beldover. It was a villa built by the widow of the late colliery manager, and stood in a quiet, new little side-street near the large church.

Ursula was rather sad. Instead of having arrived at distinction they had come to new red-brick suburbia in a grimy, small town.

Mrs. Brangwen was happy. The rooms were splendidly large — a splendid dining-room, drawing-room and kitchen, besides a very pleasant study downstairs. Everything was admirably appointed. The widow had settled herself in lavishly. She was a native of Beldover, and had intended to reign almost queen. Her bathroom was white and silver, her stairs were of oak, her chimney-pieces were massive and oaken, with bulging, columnar supports.

“Good and substantial,” was the keynote. But Ursula resented the stout, inflated prosperity implied everywhere. She made her father promise to chisel down the bulging oaken chimney-pieces, chisel them flat. That sort of important paunch was very distasteful to her. Her father was himself long and loosely built. What had he to do with so much “good and substantial” importance?

They bought a fair amount also of the widow's furniture. It was in common good taste — the great Wilton carpet, the large round table, the Chesterfield covered with glossy chintz in roses and birds. It was all really very sunny and nice, with large windows, and a view right across the shallow valley.

After all, they would be, as one of their acquaintances said, among the elite of Beldover. They would represent culture. And as there was no one of higher social importance than the doctors, the colliery-managers, and the chemists, they would shine, with their Della Robbia beautiful Madonna, their lovely reliefs from Donatello, their reproductions from Botticelli. Nay, the large photographs of the Primavera and the Aphrodite and the Nativity in the dining-room, the ordinary reception-room, would make dumb the mouth of Beldover.

And after all, it is better to be princess in Beldover than a vulgar nobody in the country.

There was great preparation made for the removal of the whole Brangwen family, ten in all. The house in Beldover was prepared, the house in Cossethay was dismantled. Come the end of the school-term the removal would begin.

Ursula left school at the end of July, when the summer holiday commenced. The morning outside was bright and sunny, and the freedom got inside the schoolroom this last day. It was as if the walls of the school were going to melt

away. Already they seemed shadowy and unreal. It was breaking-up morning. Soon scholars and teachers would be outside, each going his own way. The irons were struck off, the sentence was expired, the prison was a momentary shadow halting about them. The children were carrying away books and inkwell, and rolling up maps. All their faces were bright with gladness and goodwill. There was a bustle of cleaning and clearing away all marks of this last term of imprisonment. They were all breaking free. Busily, eagerly, Ursula made up her totals of attendances in the register. With pride she wrote down the thousands: to so many thousands of children had she given another sessions's lessons. It looked tremendous. The excited hours passed slowly in suspense. Then at last it was over. For the last time, she stood before her children whilst they said their prayers and sang a hymn. Then it was over.

“Good-bye, children,” she said. “I shall not forget you, and you must not forget me.”

“No, miss,” cried the children in chorus, with shining faces.

She stood smiling on them, moved, as they filed out. Then she gave her monitors their term sixpences, and they too departed. Cupboards were locked, blackboards washed, ink wells and dusters removed. The place stood bare and vacated. She had triumphed over it. It was a shell now. She had fought a good fight here, and it had not been altogether unenjoyable. She owed some gratitude even to this hard, vacant place, that stood like a memorial or a trophy. So much of her life had been fought for and won and lost here. Something of this school would always belong to her, something of her to it. She acknowledged it. And now came the leave-taking.

In the teachers' room the teachers were chatting and loitering, talking excitedly of where they were going: to the Isle of Man, to Llandudno, to Yarmouth. They were eager, and attached to each other, like comrades leaving a ship.

Then it was Mr. Harby's turn to make a speech to Ursula. He looked handsome, with his silver-grey temples and black brows, and his imperturbable male solidity.

“Well,” he said, “we must say good-bye to Miss Brangwen and wish her all good fortune for the future. I suppose we shall see her again some time, and hear how she is getting on.”

“Oh, yes,” said Ursula, stammering, blushing, laughing. “Oh, yes, I shall come and see you.”

Then she realised that this sounded too personal, and she felt foolish.

“Miss Schofield suggested these two books,” he said, putting a couple of volumes on the table: “I hope you will like them.”

Ursula feeling very shy picked up the books. There was a volume of Swinburne's poetry, and a volume of Meredith's.

"Oh, I shall love them," she said. "Thank you very much — thank you all so much — it is so — —"

She stuttered to an end, and very red, turned the leaves of the books eagerly, pretending to be taking the first pleasure, but really seeing nothing.

Mr. Harby's eyes were twinkling. He alone was at his ease, master of the situation. It was pleasing to him to make Ursula the gift, and for once extend good feeling to his teachers. As a rule, it was so difficult, each one was so strained in resentment under his rule.

"Yes," he said, "we hoped you would like the choice — —"

He looked with his peculiar, challenging smile for a moment, then returned to his cupboards.

Ursula felt very confused. She hugged her books, loving them. And she felt that she loved all the teachers, and Mr. Harby. It was very confusing.

At last she was out. She cast one hasty glance over the school buildings squatting on the asphalt yard in the hot, glistening sun, one look down the well-known road, and turned her back on it all. Something strained in her heart. She was going away.

"Well, good luck," said the last of the teachers, as she shook hands at the end of the road. "We'll expect you back some day."

He spoke in irony. She laughed, and broke away. She was free. As she sat on the top of the tram in the sunlight, she looked round her with tremendous delight. She had left something which had meant much to her. She would not go to school any more, and do the familiar things. Queer! There was a little pang amid her exultation, of fear, not of regret. Yet how she exulted this morning!

She was tremulous with pride and joy. She loved the two books. They were tokens to her, representing the fruit and trophies of her two years which, thank God, were over.

"To Ursula Brangwen, with best wishes for her future, and in warm memory of the time she spent in St. Philip's School," was written in the headmaster's neat, scrupulous handwriting. She could see the careful hand holding the pen, the thick fingers with tufts of black hair on the back of each one.

He had signed, all the teachers had signed. She liked having all their signatures. She felt she loved them all. They were her fellow-workers. She carried away from the school a pride she could never lose. She had her place as comrade and sharer in the work of the school, her fellow teachers had signed to her, as one of them. And she was one of all workers, she had put in her tiny brick to the fabric man was building, she had qualified herself as co-builder.

Then the day for the home removal came. Ursula rose early, to pack up the remaining goods. The carts arrived, lent by her uncle at the Marsh, in the lull between hay and corn harvest. The goods roped in the cart, Ursula mounted her bicycle and sped away to Beldover.

The house was hers. She entered its clean-scrubbed silence. The dining-room had been covered with a thick rush matting, hard and of the beautiful, luminous, clean colour of sun-dried reeds. The walls were pale grey, the doors were darker grey. Ursula admired it very much, as the sun came through the large windows, streaming in.

She flung open doors and windows to the sunshine. Flowers were bright and shining round the small lawn, which stood above the road, looking over the raw field opposite, which would later be built upon. No one came. So she wandered down the garden at the back of the wall. The eight bells of the church rang the hour. She could hear the many sounds of the town about her.

At last, the cart was seen coming round the corner, familiar furniture piled undignified on top, Tom, her brother, and Theresa, marching on foot beside the mass, proud of having walked ten miles or more, from the tram terminus. Ursula poured out beer, and the men drank thirstily, by the door. A second cart was coming. Her father appeared on his motor bicycle. There was the staggering transport of furniture up the steps to the little lawn, where it was deposited all pellmell in the sunshine, very queer and discomforting.

Brangwen was a pleasant man to work with, cheerful and easy. Ursula loved deciding him where the heavy things should stand. She watched anxiously the struggle up the steps and through the doorways. Then the big things were in, the carts set off again. Ursula and her father worked away carrying in all the light things that remained upon the lawn, and putting them in place. Dinner time came. They ate bread and cheese in the kitchen.

“Well, we’re getting on,” said Brangwen, cheerfully.

Two more loads arrived. The afternoon passed away in a struggle with the furniture, upstairs. Towards five o’clock, appeared the last loads, consisting also of Mrs. Brangwen and the younger children, driven by Uncle Fred in the trap. Gudrun had walked with Margaret from the station. The whole family had come.

“There!” said Brangwen, as his wife got down from the cart: “Now we’re all here.”

“Ay,” said his wife pleasantly.

And the very brevity, the silence of intimacy between the two made a home in the hearts of the children, who clustered round feeling strange in the new place.

Everything was at sixes and sevens. But a fire was made in the kitchen, the hearth-rug put down, the kettle set on the hob, and Mrs. Brangwen began

towards sunset to prepare the first meal. Ursula and Gudrun were slaving in the bedrooms, candles were rushing about. Then from the kitchen came the smell of ham and eggs and coffee, and in the gaslight, the scrambled meal began. The family seemed to huddle together like a little camp in a strange place. Ursula felt a load of responsibility upon her, caring for the half-little ones. The smallest kept near the mother.

It was dark, and the children went sleepy but excited to bed. It was a long time before the sound of voices died out. There was a tremendous sense of adventure.

In the morning everybody was awake soon after dawn, the children crying:

“When I wakened up I didn’t know where I was.”

There were the strange sounds of the town, and the repeated chiming of the big church bells, so much harsher and more insistent than the little bells of Cossethay. They looked through the windows past the other new red houses to the wooded hill across the valley. They had all a delightful sense of space and liberation, space and light and air.

But gradually all set to work. They were a careless, untidy family. Yet when once they set about to get the house in order, the thing went with felicity and quickness. By evening the place was roughly established.

They would not have a servant to live in the house, only a woman who could go home at night. And they would not even have the woman yet. They wanted to do as they liked in their own home, with no stranger in the midst.

CHAPTER 15

The Bitterness of Ecstasy

A storm of industry raged on in the house. Ursula did not go to college till October. So, with a distinct feeling of responsibility, as if she must express herself in this house, she laboured arranging, re-arranging, selecting, contriving.

She could use her father's ordinary tools, both for woodwork and metal-work, so she hammered and tinkered. Her mother was quite content to have the thing done. Brangwen was interested. He had a ready belief in his daughter. He himself was at work putting up his workshed in the garden.

At last she had finished for the time being. The drawingroom was big and empty. It had the good Wilton carpet, of which the family was so proud, and the large couch and large chairs covered with shiny chintz, and the piano, a little sculpture in plaster that Brangwen had done, and not very much more. It was too large and empty-feeling for the family to occupy very much. Yet they liked to know it was there, large and empty.

The home was the dining-room. There the hard rush floor-covering made the ground light, reflecting light upon the bottom their hearts; in the window-bay was a broad, sunny seat, the table was so solid one could not jostle it, and the chairs so strong one could knock them over without hurting them. The familiar organ that Brangwen had made stood on one side, looking peculiarly small, the sideboard was comfortably reduced to normal proportions. This was the family living-room.

Ursula had a bedroom to herself. It was really a servants' bedroom, small and plain. Its window looked over the back garden at other back gardens, some of them old and very nice, some of them littered with packing-cases, then at the backs of the houses whose fronts were the shops in High Street, or the genteel homes of the under-manager or the chief cashier, facing the chapel.

She had six weeks still before going to college. In this time she nervously read over some Latin and some botany, and fitfully worked at some mathematics. She was going into college as a teacher, for her training. But, having already taken her matriculation examination, she was entered for a university course. At the end of a year she would sit for the Intermediate Arts, then two years after for her B.A. So her case was not that of the ordinary school-teacher. She would be working among the private students who came only for pure education, not for

mere professional training. She would be of the elect.

For the next three years she would be more or less dependent on her parents again. Her training was free. All college fees were paid by the government, she had moreover a few pounds grant every year. This would just pay for her train fares and her clothing. Her parents would only have to feed her. She did not want to cost them much. They would not be well off. Her father would earn only two hundred a year, and a good deal of her mother's capital was spent in buying the house. Still, there was enough to get along with.

Gudrun was attending the Art School at Nottingham. She was working particularly at sculpture. She had a gift for this. She loved making little models in clay, of children or of animals. Already some of these had appeared in the Students' Exhibition in the Castle, and Gudrun was a distinguished person. She was chafing at the Art School and wanted to go to London. But there was not enough money. Neither would her parents let her go so far.

Theresa had left the High School. She was a great strapping, bold hussy, indifferent to all higher claims. She would stay at home. The others were at school, except the youngest. When term started, they would all be transferred to the Grammar School at Willey Green.

Ursula was excited at making acquaintances in Beldover. The excitement soon passed. She had tea at the clergyman's, at the chemist's, at the other chemist's, at the doctor's, at the under-manager's — then she knew practically everybody. She could not take people very seriously, though at the time she wanted to.

She wandered the country, on foot and on her bicycle, finding it very beautiful in the forest direction, between Mansfield and Southwell and Worksop. But she was here only skirmishing for amusement. Her real exploration would begin in college.

Term began. She went into town each day by train. The cloistered quiet of the college began to close around her.

She was not at first disappointed. The big college built of stone, standing in the quiet street, with a rim of grass and lime trees all so peaceful: she felt it remote, a magic land. Its architecture was foolish, she knew from her father. Still, it was different from that of all other buildings. Its rather pretty, plaything, Gothic form was almost a style, in the dirty industrial town.

She liked the hall, with its big stone chimney-piece and its Gothic arches supporting the balcony above. To be sure the arches were ugly, the chimney-piece of cardboard-like carved stone, with its armorial decoration, looked silly just opposite the bicycle stand and the radiator, whilst the great notice-board with its fluttering papers seemed to slam away all sense of retreat and mystery from the far wall. Nevertheless, amorphous as it might be, there was in it a

reminiscence of the wondrous, cloistral origin of education. Her soul flew straight back to the medieval times, when the monks of God held the learning of men and imparted it within the shadow of religion. In this spirit she entered college.

The harshness and vulgarity of the lobbies and cloak-rooms hurt her at first. Why was it not all beautiful? But she could not openly admit her criticism. She was on holy ground.

She wanted all the students to have a high, pure spirit, she wanted them to say only the real, genuine things, she wanted their faces to be still and luminous as the nuns' and the monks' faces.

Alas, the girls chattered and giggled and were nervous, they were dressed up and frizzed, the men looked mean and clownish.

Still, it was lovely to pass along the corridor with one's books in one's hands, to push the swinging, glass-panelled door, and enter the big room where the first lecture would be given. The windows were large and lofty, the myriad brown students' desks stood waiting, the great blackboard was smooth behind the rostrum.

Ursula sat beside her window, rather far back. Looking down, she saw the lime trees turning yellow, the tradesman's boy passing silent down the still, autumn-sunny street. There was the world, remote, remote.

Here, within the great, whispering sea-shell, that whispered all the while with reminiscence of all the centuries, time faded away, and the echo of knowledge filled the timeless silence.

She listened, she scribbled her notes with joy, almost with ecstasy, never for a moment criticising what she heard. The lecturer was a mouth-piece, a priest. As he stood, black-gowned, on the rostrum, some strands of the whispering confusion of knowledge that filled the whole place seemed to be singled out and woven together by him, till they became a lecture.

At first, she preserved herself from criticism. She would not consider the professors as men, ordinary men who ate bacon, and pulled on their boots before coming to college. They were the black-gowned priests of knowledge, serving for ever in a remote, hushed temple. They were the initiated, and the beginning and the end of the mystery was in their keeping.

Curious joy she had of the lectures. It was a joy to hear the theory of education, there was such freedom and pleasure in ranging over the very stuff of knowledge, and seeing how it moved and lived and had its being. How happy Racine made her! She did not know why. But as the big lines of the drama unfolded themselves, so steady, so measured, she felt a thrill as of being in the realm of the reality. Of Latin, she was doing Livy and Horace. The curious,

intimate, gossiping tone of the Latin class suited Horace. Yet she never cared for him, nor even Livy. There was an entire lack of sternness in the gossipy classroom. She tried hard to keep her old grasp of the Roman spirit. But gradually the Latin became mere gossip-stuff and artificiality to her, a question of manners and verboriousities.

Her terror was the mathematics class. The lecturer went so fast, her heart beat excitedly, she seemed to be straining every nerve. And she struggled hard, during private study, to get the stuff into control.

Then came the lovely, peaceful afternoons in the botany laboratory. There were few students. How she loved to sit on her high stool before the bench, with her pith and her razor and her material, carefully mounting her slides, carefully bringing her microscope into focus, then turning with joy to record her observation, drawing joyfully in her book, if the slide were good.

She soon made a college friend, a girl who had lived in Florence, a girl who wore a wonderful purple or figured scarf draped over a plain, dark dress. She was Dorothy Russell, daughter of a south-country advocate. Dorothy lived with a maiden aunt in Nottingham, and spent her spare moments slaving for the Women's Social and Political Union. She was quiet and intense, with an ivory face and dark hair looped plain over her ears. Ursula was very fond of her, but afraid of her. She seemed so old and so relentless towards herself. Yet she was only twenty-two. Ursula always felt her to be a creature of fate, like Cassandra.

The two girls had a close, stern friendship. Dorothy worked at all things with the same passion, never sparing herself. She came closest to Ursula during the botany hours. For she could not draw. Ursula made beautiful and wonderful drawings of the sections under the microscope, and Dorothy always came to learn the manner of the drawing.

So the first year went by, in magnificent seclusion and activity of learning. It was strenuous as a battle, her college life, yet remote as peace.

She came to Nottingham in the morning with Gudrun. The two sisters were distinguished wherever they went, slim, strong girls, eager and extremely sensitive. Gudrun was the more beautiful of the two, with her sleepy, half-languid girlishness that looked so soft, and yet was balanced and inalterable underneath. She wore soft, easy clothing, and hats which fell by themselves into a careless grace.

Ursula was much more carefully dressed, but she was self-conscious, always falling into depths of admiration of somebody else, and modelling herself upon this other, and so producing a hopeless incongruity. When she dressed for practical purposes she always looked well. In winter, wearing a tweed coat-and-skirt and a small hat of black fur pulled over her eager, palpitant face, she

seemed to move down the street in a drifting motion of suspense and exceeding sensitive receptivity.

At the end of the first year Ursula got through her Intermediate Arts examination, and there came a lull in her eager activities. She slackened off, she relaxed altogether. Worn nervous and inflammable by the excitement of the preparation for the examination, and by the sort of exaltation which carried her through the crisis itself, she now fell into a quivering passivity, her will all loosened.

The family went to Scarborough for a month. Gudrun and the father were busy at the handicraft holiday school there, Ursula was left a good deal with the children. But when she could, she went off by herself.

She stood and looked out over the shining sea. It was very beautiful to her. The tears rose hot in her heart.

Out of the far, far space there drifted slowly in to her a passionate, unborn yearning. "There are so many dawns that have not yet risen." It seemed as if, from over the edge of the sea, all the unrisen dawns were appealing to her, all her unborn soul was crying for the unrisen dawns.

As she sat looking out at the tender sea, with its lovely, swift glimmer, the sob rose in her breast, till she caught her lip suddenly under her teeth, and the tears were forcing themselves from her. And in her very sob, she laughed. Why did she cry? She did not want to cry. It was so beautiful that she laughed. It was so beautiful that she cried.

She glanced apprehensively round, hoping no one would see her in this state.

Then came a time when the sea was rough. She watched the water travelling in to the coast, she watched a big wave running unnoticed, to burst in a shock of foam against a rock, enveloping all in a great white beauty, to pour away again, leaving the rock emerged black and teeming. Oh, and if, when the wave burst into whiteness, it were only set free!

Sometimes she loitered along the harbour, looking at the sea-browned sailors, who, in their close blue jerseys, lounged on the harbour-wall, and laughed at her with impudent, communicative eyes.

There was established a little relation between her and them. She never would speak to them or know any more of them. Yet as she walked by and they leaned on the sea-wall, there was something between her and them, something keen and delightful and painful. She liked best the young one whose fair, salty hair tumbled over his blue eyes. He was so new and fresh and salt and not of this world.

From Scarborough she went to her Uncle Tom's. Winifred had a small baby, born at the end of the summer. She had become strange and alien to Ursula.

There was an unmentionable reserve between the two women. Tom Brangwen was an attentive father, a very domestic husband. But there was something spurious about his domesticity, Ursula did not like him any more. Something ugly, blatant in his nature had come out now, making him shift everything over to a sentimental basis. A materialistic unbeliever, he carried it all off by becoming full of human feeling, a warm, attentive host, a generous husband, a model citizen. And he was clever enough to rouse admiration everywhere, and to take in his wife sufficiently. She did not love him. She was glad to live in a state of complacent self-deception with him, she worked according to him.

Ursula was relieved to go home. She had still two peaceful years before her. Her future was settled for two years. She returned to college to prepare for her final examination.

But during this year the glamour began to depart from college. The professors were not priests initiated into the deep mysteries of life and knowledge. After all, they were only middle-men handling wares they had become so accustomed to that they were oblivious of them. What was Latin? — So much dry goods of knowledge. What was the Latin class altogether but a sort of second-hand curio shop, where one bought curios and learned the market-value of curios; dull curios too, on the whole. She was as bored by the Latin curiosities as she was by Chinese and Japanese curiosities in the antique shops. “Antiques” — the very word made her soul fall flat and dead.

The life went out of her studies, why, she did not know. But the whole thing seemed sham, spurious; spurious Gothic arches, spurious peace, spurious Latinity, spurious dignity of France, spurious naivete of Chaucer. It was a second-hand dealer’s shop, and one bought an equipment for an examination. This was only a little side-show to the factories of the town. Gradually the perception stole into her. This was no religious retreat, no perception of pure learning. It was a little apprentice-shop where one was further equipped for making money. The college itself was a little, slovenly laboratory for the factory.

A harsh and ugly disillusion came over her again, the same darkness and bitter gloom from which she was never safe now, the realisation of the permanent substratum of ugliness under everything. As she came to the college in the afternoon, the lawns were frothed with daisies, the lime trees hung tender and sunlit and green; and oh, the deep, white froth of the daisies was anguish to see.

For inside, inside the college, she knew she must enter the sham workshop. All the while, it was a sham store, a sham warehouse, with a single motive of material gain, and no productivity. It pretended to exist by the religious virtue of knowledge. But the religious virtue of knowledge was become a flunkey to the god of material success.

A sort of inertia came over her. Mechanically, from habit, she went on with her studies. But it was almost hopeless. She could scarcely attend to anything. At the Anglo-Saxon lecture in the afternoon, she sat looking down, out of the window, hearing no word, of Beowulf or of anything else. Down below, in the street, the sunny grey pavement went beside the palisade. A woman in a pink frock, with a scarlet sunshade, crossed the road, a little white dog running like a fleck of light about her. The woman with the scarlet sunshade came over the road, a lilt in her walk, a little shadow attending her. Ursula watched spell-bound. The woman with the scarlet sunshade and the flickering terrier was gone — and whither? Whither?

In what world of reality was the woman in the pink dress walking? To what warehouse of dead unreality was she herself confined?

What good was this place, this college? What good was Anglo-Saxon, when one only learned it in order to answer examination questions, in order that one should have a higher commercial value later on? She was sick with this long service at the inner commercial shrine. Yet what else was there? Was life all this, and this only? Everywhere, everything was debased to the same service. Everything went to produce vulgar things, to encumber material life.

Suddenly she threw over French. She would take honours in botany. This was the one study that lived for her. She had entered into the lives of the plants. She was fascinated by the strange laws of the vegetable world. She had here a glimpse of something working entirely apart from the purpose of the human world.

College was barren, cheap, a temple converted to the most vulgar, petty commerce. Had she not gone to hear the echo of learning pulsing back to the source of the mystery? — The source of mystery! And barrenly, the professors in their gowns offered commercial commodity that could be turned to good account in the examination room; ready-made stuff too, and not really worth the money it was intended to fetch; which they all knew.

All the time in the college now, save when she was labouring in her botany laboratory, for there the mystery still glimmered, she felt she was degrading herself in a kind of trade of sham jewjaws.

Angry and stiff, she went through her last term. She would rather be out again earning her own living. Even Brinsley Street and Mr. Harby seemed real in comparison. Her violent hatred of the Ilkeston School was nothing compared with the sterile degradation of college. But she was not going back to Brinsley Street either. She would take her B.A., and become a mistress in some Grammar School for a time.

The last year of her college career was wheeling slowly round. She could see

ahead her examination and her departure. She had the ash of disillusion gritting under her teeth. Would the next move turn out the same? Always the shining doorway ahead; and then, upon approach, always the shining doorway was a gate into another ugly yard, dirty and active and dead. Always the crest of the hill gleaming ahead under heaven: and then, from the top of the hill only another sordid valley full of amorphous, squalid activity.

No matter! Every hill-top was a little different, every valley was somehow new. Cossethay and her childhood with her father; the Marsh and the little Church school near the Marsh, and her grandmother and her uncles; the High School at Nottingham and Anton Skrebensky; Anton Skrebensky and the dance in the moonlight between the fires; then the time she could not think of without being blasted, Winifred Inger, and the months before becoming a school-teacher; then the horrors of Brinsley Street, lapsing into comparative peacefulness, Maggie, and Maggie's brother, whose influence she could still feel in her veins, when she conjured him up; then college, and Dorothy Russell, who was now in France, then the next move into the world again!

Already it was a history. In every phase she was so different. Yet she was always Ursula Brangwen. But what did it mean, Ursula Brangwen? She did not know what she was. Only she was full of rejection, of refusal. Always, always she was spitting out of her mouth the ash and grit of disillusion, of falsity. She could only stiffen in rejection, in rejection. She seemed always negative in her action.

That which she was, positively, was dark and unrevealed, it could not come forth. It was like a seed buried in dry ash. This world in which she lived was like a circle lighted by a lamp. This lighted area, lit up by man's completest consciousness, she thought was all the world: that here all was disclosed for ever. Yet all the time, within the darkness she had been aware of points of light, like the eyes of wild beasts, gleaming, penetrating, vanishing. And her soul had acknowledged in a great heave of terror only the outer darkness. This inner circle of light in which she lived and moved, wherein the trains rushed and the factories ground out their machine-produce and the plants and the animals worked by the light of science and knowledge, suddenly it seemed like the area under an arc-lamp, wherein the moths and children played in the security of blinding light, not even knowing there was any darkness, because they stayed in the light.

But she could see the glimmer of dark movement just out of range, she saw the eyes of the wild beast gleaming from the darkness, watching the vanity of the camp fire and the sleepers; she felt the strange, foolish vanity of the camp, which said "Beyond our light and our order there is nothing," turning their faces always

inward towards the sinking fire of illuminating consciousness, which comprised sun and stars, and the Creator, and the System of Righteousness, ignoring always the vast darkness that wheeled round about, with half-revealed shapes lurking on the edge.

Yea, and no man dared even throw a firebrand into the darkness. For if he did he was jeered to death by the others, who cried "Fool, anti-social knave, why would you disturb us with bogeys? There is no darkness. We move and live and have our being within the light, and unto us is given the eternal light of knowledge, we comprise and comprehend the innermost core and issue of knowledge. Fool and knave, how dare you belittle us with the darkness?"

Nevertheless the darkness wheeled round about, with grey shadow-shapes of wild beasts, and also with dark shadow-shapes of the angels, whom the light fenced out, as it fenced out the more familiar beasts of darkness. And some, having for a moment seen the darkness, saw it bristling with the tufts of the hyena and the wolf; and some having given up their vanity of the light, having died in their own conceit, saw the gleam in the eyes of the wolf and the hyena, that it was the flash of the sword of angels, flashing at the door to come in, that the angels in the darkness were lordly and terrible and not to be denied, like the flash of fangs.

It was a little while before Easter, in her last year of college, when Ursula was twenty-two years old, that she heard again from Skrebensky. He had written to her once or twice from South Africa, during the first months of his service out there in the war, and since had sent her a post-card every now and then, at ever longer intervals. He had become a first lieutenant, and had stayed out in Africa. She had not heard of him now for more than two years.

Often her thoughts returned to him. He seemed like the gleaming dawn, yellow, radiant, of a long, grey, ashy day. The memory of him was like the thought of the first radiant hours of morning. And here was the blank grey ashiness of later daytime. Ah, if he had only remained true to her, she might have known the sunshine, without all this toil and hurt and degradation of a spoiled day. He would have been her angel. He held the keys of the sunshine. Still he held them. He could open to her the gates of succeeding freedom and delight. Nay, if he had remained true to her, he would have been the doorway to her, into the boundless sky of happiness and plunging, inexhaustible freedom which was the paradise of her soul. Ah, the great range he would have opened to her, the illimitable endless space for self-realisation and delight for ever.

The one thing she believed in was in the love she had held for him. It remained shining and complete, a thing to hark back to. And she said to herself, when present things seemed a failure:

“Ah, I was fond of him,” as if with him the leading flower of her life had died.

Now she heard from him again. The chief effect was pain. The pleasure, the spontaneous joy was not there any longer. But her will rejoiced. Her will had fixed itself to him. And the old excitement of her dreams stirred and woke up. He was come, the man with the wondrous lips that could send the kiss wavering to the very end of all space. Was he come back to her? She did not believe.

My dear Ursula, I am back in England again for a few months before going out again, this time to India. I wonder if you still keep the memory of our times together. I have still got the little photograph of you. You must be changed since then, for it is about six years ago. I am fully six years older, — I have lived through another life since I knew you at Cossethay. I wonder if you would care to see me. I shall come up to Derby next week, and I would call in Nottingham, and we might have tea together. Will you let me know? I shall look for your answer.

Anton Skrebensky

Ursula had taken this letter from the rack in the hall at college, and torn it open as she crossed to the Women’s room. The world seemed to dissolve away from around her, she stood alone in clear air.

Where could she go, to be alone? She fled away, upstairs, and through the private way to the reference library. Seizing a book, she sat down and pondered the letter. Her heart beat, her limbs trembled. As in a dream, she heard one gong sound in the college, then, strangely, another. The first lecture had gone by.

Hurriedly she took one of her note-books and began to write.

“Dear Anton, Yes, I still have the ring. I should be very glad to see you again. You can come here to college for me, or I will meet you somewhere in the town. Will you let me know? Your sincere friend — — ”

Trembling, she asked the librarian, who was her friend, if he would give her an envelope. She sealed and addressed her letter, and went out, bare-headed, to post it. When it was dropped into the pillar-box, the world became a very still, pale place, without confines. She wandered back to college, to her pale dream, like a first wan light of dawn.

Skrebensky came one afternoon the following week. Day after day, she had hurried swiftly to the letter-rack on her arrival at college in the morning, and during the intervals between lectures. Several times, swiftly, with secretive fingers, she had plucked his letter down from its public prominence, and fled across the hall holding it fast and hidden. She read her letters in the botany laboratory, where her corner was always reserved to her.

Several letters, and then he was coming. It was Friday afternoon he appointed. She worked over her microscope with feverish activity, able to give only half her

attention, yet working closely and rapidly. She had on her slide some special stuff come up from London that day, and the professor was fussy and excited about it. At the same time, as she focused the light on her field, and saw the plant-animal lying shadowy in a boundless light, she was fretting over a conversation she had had a few days ago with Dr. Frankstone, who was a woman doctor of physics in the college.

“No, really,” Dr. Frankstone had said, “I don’t see why we should attribute some special mystery to life — do you? We don’t understand it as we understand electricity, even, but that doesn’t warrant our saying it is something special, something different in kind and distinct from everything else in the universe — do you think it does? May it not be that life consists in a complexity of physical and chemical activities, of the same order as the activities we already know in science? I don’t see, really, why we should imagine there is a special order of life, and life alone — — ”

The conversation had ended on a note of uncertainty, indefinite, wistful. But the purpose, what was the purpose? Electricity had no soul, light and heat had no soul. Was she herself an impersonal force, or conjunction of forces, like one of these? She looked still at the unicellular shadow that lay within the field of light, under her microscope. It was alive. She saw it move — she saw the bright mist of its ciliary activity, she saw the gleam of its nucleus, as it slid across the plane of light. What then was its will? If it was a conjunction of forces, physical and chemical, what held these forces unified, and for what purpose were they unified?

For what purpose were the incalculable physical and chemical activities nodalised in this shadowy, moving speck under her microscope? What was the will which nodalised them and created the one thing she saw? What was its intention? To be itself? Was its purpose just mechanical and limited to itself?

It intended to be itself. But what self? Suddenly in her mind the world gleamed strangely, with an intense light, like the nucleus of the creature under the microscope. Suddenly she had passed away into an intensely-gleaming light of knowledge. She could not understand what it all was. She only knew that it was not limited mechanical energy, nor mere purpose of self-preservation and self-assertion. It was a consummation, a being infinite. Self was a oneness with the infinite. To be oneself was a supreme, gleaming triumph of infinity.

Ursula sat abstracted over her microscope, in suspense. Her soul was busy, infinitely busy, in the new world. In the new world, Skrebensky was waiting for her — he would be waiting for her. She could not go yet, because her soul was engaged. Soon she would go.

A stillness, like passing away, took hold of her. Far off, down the corridors,

she heard the gong booming five o'clock. She must go. Yet she sat still.

The other students were pushing back their stools and putting their microscopes away. Everything broke into turmoil. She saw, through the window, students going down the steps, with books under their arms, talking, all talking.

A great craving to depart came upon her. She wanted also to be gone. She was in dread of the material world, and in dread of her own transfiguration. She wanted to run to meet Skrebensky — the new life, the reality.

Very rapidly she wiped her slides and put them back, cleared her place at the bench, active, active, active. She wanted to run to meet Skrebensky, hasten — hasten. She did not know what she was to meet. But it would be a new beginning. She must hurry.

She flitted down the corridor on swift feet, her razor and note-books and pencil in one hand, her pinafore over her arm. Her face was lifted and tense with eagerness. He might not be there.

Issuing from the corridor, she saw him at once. She knew him at once. Yet he was so strange. He stood with the curious self-effacing diffidence which so frightened her in well-bred young men whom she knew. He stood as if he wished to be unseen. He was very well-dressed. She would not admit to herself the chill like a sunshine of frost that came over her. This was he, the key, the nucleus to the new world.

He saw her coming swiftly across the hall, a slim girl in a white flannel blouse and dark skirt, with some of the abstraction and gleam of the unknown upon her, and he started, excited. He was very nervous. Other students were loitering about the hall.

She laughed, with a blind, dazzled face, as she gave him her hand. He too could not perceive her.

In a moment she was gone, to get her outdoor things. Then again, as when she had been at school, they walked out into the town to tea. And they went to the same tea-shop.

She knew a great difference in him. The kinship was there, the old kinship, but he had belonged to a different world from hers. It was as if they had cried a state of truce between him and her, and in this truce they had met. She knew, vaguely, in the first minute, that they were enemies come together in a truce. Every movement and word of his was alien to her being.

Yet still she loved the fine texture of his face, of his skin. He was rather browner, physically stronger. He was a man now. She thought his manliness made the strangeness in him. When he was only a youth, fluid, he was nearer to her. She thought a man must inevitably set into this strange separateness, cold otherness of being. He talked, but not to her. She tried to speak to him, but she

could not reach him.

He seemed so balanced and sure, he made such a confident presence. He was a great rider, so there was about him some of a horseman's sureness and habitual definiteness of decision, also some of the horseman's animal darkness. Yet his soul was only the more wavering, vague. He seemed made up of a set of habitual actions and decisions. The vulnerable, variable quick of the man was inaccessible. She knew nothing of it. She could only feel the dark, heavy fixity of his animal desire.

This dumb desire on his part had brought him to her? She was puzzled, hurt by some hopeless fixity in him, that terrified her with a cold feeling of despair. What did he want? His desires were so underground. Why did he not admit himself? What did he want? He wanted something that should be nameless. She shrank in fear.

Yet she flashed with excitement. In his dark, subterranean male soul, he was kneeling before her, darkly exposing himself. She quivered, the dark flame ran over her. He was waiting at her feet. He was helpless, at her mercy. She could take or reject. If she rejected him, something would die in him. For him it was life or death. And yet, all must be kept so dark, the consciousness must admit nothing.

"How long," she said, "are you staying in England?"

"I am not sure — but not later than July, I believe."

Then they were both silent. He was here, in England, for six months. They had a space of six months between them. He waited. The same iron rigidity, as if the world were made of steel, possessed her again. It was no use turning with flesh and blood to this arrangement of forged metal.

Quickly, her imagination adjusted itself to the situation.

"Have you an appointment in India?" she asked.

"Yes — I have just the six months' leave."

"Will you like being out there?"

"I think so — there's a good deal of social life, and plenty going on — hunting, polo — and always a good horse — and plenty of work, any amount of work."

He was always side-tracking, always side-tracking his own soul. She could see him so well out there, in India — one of the governing class, superimposed upon an old civilisation, lord and master of a clumsier civilisation than his own. It was his choice. He would become again an aristocrat, invested with authority and responsibility, having a great helpless populace beneath him. One of the ruling class, his whole being would be given over to the fulfilling and the executing of the better idea of the state. And in India, there would be real work to do. The

country did need the civilisation which he himself represented: it did need his roads and bridges, and the enlightenment of which he was part. He would go to India. But that was not her road.

Yet she loved him, the body of him, whatever his decisions might be. He seemed to want something of her. He was waiting for her to decide of him. It had been decided in her long ago, when he had kissed her first. He was her lover, though good and evil should cease. Her will never relaxed, though her heart and soul must be imprisoned and silenced. He waited upon her, and she accepted him. For he had come back to her.

A glow came into his face, into his fine, smooth skin, his eyes, gold-grey, glowed intimately to her. He burned up, he caught fire and became splendid, royal, something like a tiger. She caught his brilliant, burnished glamour. Her heart and her soul were shut away fast down below, hidden. She was free of them. She was to have her satisfaction.

She became proud and erect, like a flower, putting itself forth in its proper strength. His warmth invigorated her. His beauty of form, which seemed to glow out in contrast with the rest of people, made her proud. It was like deference to her, and made her feel as if she represented before him all the grace and flower of humanity. She was no mere Ursula Brangwen. She was Woman, she was the whole of Woman in the human order. All-containing, universal, how should she be limited to individuality?

She was exhilarated, she did not want to go away from him. She had her place by him. Who should take her away?

They came out of the cafe.

“Is there anything you would like to do?” he said. “Is there anything we can do?”

It was a dark, windy night in March.

“There is nothing to do,” she said.

Which was the answer he wanted.

“Let us walk then — where shall we walk?” he asked.

“Shall we go to the river?” she suggested, timidly.

In a moment they were on the tram, going down to Trent Bridge. She was so glad. The thought of walking in the dark, far-reaching water-meadows, beside the full river, transported her. Dark water flowing in silence through the big, restless night made her feel wild.

They crossed the bridge, descended, and went away from the lights. In an instant, in the darkness, he took her hand and they went in silence, with subtle feet treading the darkness. The town fumed away on their left, there were strange lights and sounds, the wind rushed against the trees, and under the bridge. They

walked close together, powerful in unison. He drew her very close, held her with a subtle, stealthy, powerful passion, as if they had a secret agreement which held good in the profound darkness. The profound darkness was their universe.

“It is like it was before,” she said.

Yet it was not in the least as it was before. Nevertheless his heart was perfectly in accord with her. They thought one thought.

“I knew I should come back,” he said at length.

She quivered.

“Did you always love me?” she asked.

The directness of the question overcame him, submerged him for a moment. The darkness travelled massively along.

“I had to come back to you,” he said, as if hypnotised. “You were always at the back of everything.”

She was silent with triumph, like fate.

“I loved you,” she said, “always.”

The dark flame leaped up in him. He must give her himself. He must give her the very foundations of himself. He drew her very close, and they went on in silence.

She started violently, hearing voices. They were near a stile across the dark meadows.

“It’s only lovers,” he said to her, softly.

She looked to see the dark figures against the fence, wondering that the darkness was inhabited.

“Only lovers will walk here to-night,” he said.

Then in a low, vibrating voice he told her about Africa, the strange darkness, the strange, blood fear.

“I am not afraid of the darkness in England,” he said. “It is soft, and natural to me, it is my medium, especially when you are here. But in Africa it seems massive and fluid with terror — not fear of anything — just fear. One breathes it, like the smell of blood. The blacks know it. They worship it, really, the darkness. One almost likes it — the fear — something sensual.”

She thrilled again to him. He was to her a voice out of the darkness. He talked to her all the while, in low tones, about Africa, conveying something strange and sensual to her: the negro, with his loose, soft passion that could envelop one like a bath. Gradually he transferred to her the hot, fecund darkness that possessed his own blood. He was strangely secret. The whole world must be abolished. He maddened her with his soft, cajoling, vibrating tones. He wanted her to answer, to understand. A turgid, teeming night, heavy with fecundity in which every molecule of matter grew big with increase, secretly urgent with fecund desire,

seemed to come to pass. She quivered, taut and vibrating, almost pained. And gradually, he ceased telling her of Africa, there came a silence, whilst they walked the darkness beside the massive river. Her limbs were rich and tense, she felt they must be vibrating with a low, profound vibration. She could scarcely walk. The deep vibration of the darkness could only be felt, not heard.

Suddenly, as they walked, she turned to him and held him fast, as if she were turned to steel.

“Do you love me?” she cried in anguish.

“Yes,” he said, in a curious, lapping voice, unlike himself. “Yes, I love you.”

He seemed like the living darkness upon her, she was in the embrace of the strong darkness. He held her enclosed, soft, unutterably soft, and with the unrelaxing softness of fate, the relentless softness of fecundity. She quivered, and quivered, like a tense thing that is struck. But he held her all the time, soft, unending, like darkness closed upon her, omnipresent as the night. He kissed her, and she quivered as if she were being destroyed, shattered. The lighted vessel vibrated, and broke in her soul, the light fell, struggled, and went dark. She was all dark, will-less, having only the receptive will.

He kissed her, with his soft, enveloping kisses, and she responded to them completely, her mind, her soul gone out. Darkness cleaving to darkness, she hung close to him, pressed herself into soft flow of his kiss, pressed herself down, down to the source and core of his kiss, herself covered and enveloped in the warm, fecund flow of his kiss, that travelled over her, flowed over her, covered her, flowed over the last fibre of her, so they were one stream, one dark fecundity, and she clung at the core of him, with her lips holding open the very bottommost source of him.

So they stood in the utter, dark kiss, that triumphed over them both, subjected them, knitted them into one fecund nucleus of the fluid darkness.

It was bliss, it was the nucleolating of the fecund darkness. Once the vessel had vibrated till it was shattered, the light of consciousness gone, then the darkness reigned, and the unutterable satisfaction.

They stood enjoying the unmitigated kiss, taking it, giving to it endlessly, and still it was not exhausted. Their veins fluttered, their blood ran together as one stream.

Till gradually a sleep, a heaviness settled on them, a drowse, and out of the drowse, a small light of consciousness woke up. Ursula became aware of the night around her, the water lapping and running full just near, the trees roaring and sighing in gusts of wind.

She kept near to him, in contact with him, but she became ever more and more herself. And she knew she must go to catch her train. But she did not want to

draw away from contact with him.

At length they roused and set out. No longer they existed in the unblemished darkness. There was the glitter of a bridge, the twinkle of lights across the river, the big flare of the town in front and on their right.

But still, dark and soft and incontestable, their bodies walked untouched by the lights, darkness supreme and arrogant.

“The stupid lights,” Ursula said to herself, in her dark sensual arrogance. “The stupid, artificial, exaggerated town, fuming its lights. It does not exist really. It rests upon the unlimited darkness, like a gleam of coloured oil on dark water, but what is it? — nothing, just nothing.”

In the tram, in the train, she felt the same. The lights, the civic uniform was a trick played, the people as they moved or sat were only dummies exposed. She could see, beneath their pale, wooden pretence of composure and civic purposefulness, the dark stream that contained them all. They were like little paper ships in their motion. But in reality each one was a dark, blind, eager wave urging blindly forward, dark with the same homogeneous desire. And all their talk and all their behaviour was sham, they were dressed-up creatures. She was reminded of the Invisible Man, who was a piece of darkness made visible only by his clothes.

During the next weeks, all the time she went about in the same dark richness, her eyes dilated and shining like the eyes of a wild animal, a curious half-smile which seemed to be gibing at the civic pretence of all the human life about her.

“What are you, you pale citizens?” her face seemed to say, gleaming. “You subdued beast in sheep’s clothing, you primeval darkness falsified to a social mechanism.”

She went about in the sensual subconsciousness all the time, mocking at the ready-made, artificial daylight of the rest.

“They assume selves as they assume suits of clothing,” she said to herself, looking in mocking contempt at the stiffened, neutralised men. “They think it better to be clerks or professors than to be the dark, fertile beings that exist in the potential darkness. What do you think you are?” her soul asked of the professor as she sat opposite him in class. “What do you think you are, as you sit there in your gown and your spectacles? You are a lurking, blood-sniffing creature with eyes peering out of the jungle darkness, snuffing for your desires. That is what you are, though nobody would believe it, and you would be the very last to allow it.”

Her soul mocked at all this pretence. Herself, she kept on pretending. She dressed herself and made herself fine, she attended her lectures and scribbled her notes. But all in a mood of superficial, mocking facility. She understood well

enough their two-and-two-make-four tricks. She was as clever as they were. But care! — did she care about their monkey tricks of knowledge or learning or civic deportment? She did not care in the least.

There was Skrebensky, there was her dark, vital self. Outside the college, the outer darkness, Skrebensky was waiting. On the edge of the night, he was attentive. Did he care?

She was free as a leopard that sends up its raucous cry in the night. She had the potent, dark stream of her own blood, she had the glimmering core of fecundity, she had her mate, her complement, her sharer in fruition. So, she had all, everything.

Skrebensky was staying in Nottingham all the time. He too was free. He knew no one in this town, he had no civic self to maintain. He was free. Their trams and markets and theatres and public meetings were a shaken kaleidoscope to him, he watched as a lion or a tiger may lie with narrowed eyes watching the people pass before its cage, the kaleidoscopic unreality of people, or a leopard lie blinking, watching the incomprehensible feats of the keepers. He despised it all — it was all non-existent. Their good professors, their good clergymen, their good political speakers, their good, earnest women — all the time he felt his soul was grinning, grinning at the sight of them. So many performing puppets, all wood and rag for the performance!

He watched the citizen, a pillar of society, a model, saw the stiff goat's legs, which have become almost stiffened to wood in the desire to make them puppet in their action, he saw the trousers formed to the puppet-action: man's legs, but man's legs become rigid and deformed, ugly, mechanical.

He was curiously happy, being alone, now. The glimmering grin was on his face. He had no longer any necessity to take part in the performing tricks of the rest. He had discovered the clue to himself, he had escaped from the show, like a wild beast escaped straight back into its jungle. Having a room in a quiet hotel, he hired a horse and rode out into the country, staying sometimes for the night in some village, and returning the next day.

He felt rich and abundant in himself. Everything he did was a voluptuous pleasure to him — either to ride on horseback, or to walk, or to lie in the sun, or to drink in a public-house. He had no use for people, nor for words. He had an amused pleasure in everything, a great sense of voluptuous richness in himself, and of the fecundity of the universal night he inhabited. The puppet shapes of people, their wood-mechanical voices, he was remote from them.

For there were always his meetings with Ursula. Very often, she did not go to college in the afternoon, but walked with him instead. Or he took a motor-car or a dog-cart and they drove into the country, leaving the car and going away by

themselves into the woods. He had not taken her yet. With subtle, instinctive economy, they went to the end of each kiss, each embrace, each pleasure in intimate contact, knowing subconsciously that the last was coming. It was to be their final entry into the source of creation.

She took him home, and he stayed a week-end at Beldover with her family. She loved having him in the house. Strange how he seemed to come into the atmosphere of her family, with his laughing, insidious grace. They all loved him, he was kin to them. His raillery, his warm, voluptuous mocking presence was meat and joy to the Brangwen household. For this house was always quivering with darkness, they put off their puppet form when they came home, to lie and drowse in the sun.

There was a sense of freedom amongst them all, of the undercurrent of darkness among them all. Yet here, at home, Ursula resented it. It became distasteful to her. And she knew that if they understood the real relationship between her and Skrebensky, her parents, her father in particular, would go mad with rage. So subtly, she seemed to be like any other girl who is more or less courted by a man. And she was like any other girl. But in her, the antagonism to the social imposition was for the time complete and final.

She waited, every moment of the day, for his next kiss. She admitted it to herself in shame and bliss. Almost consciously, she waited. He waited, but, until the time came, more unconsciously. When the time came that he should kiss her again, a prevention was an annihilation to him. He felt his flesh go grey, he was heavy with a corpse-like inanition, he did not exist, if the time passed unfulfilled.

He came to her finally in a superb consummation. It was very dark, and again a windy, heavy night. They had come down the lane towards Beldover, down to the valley. They were at the end of their kisses, and there was the silence between them. They stood as at the edge of a cliff, with a great darkness beneath.

Coming out of the lane along the darkness, with the dark space spreading down to the wind, and the twinkling lights of the station below, the far-off windy chuff of a shunting train, the tiny clink-clink-clink of the wagons blown between the wind, the light of Beldover-edge twinkling upon the blackness of the hill opposite, the glow of the furnaces along the railway to the right, their steps began to falter. They would soon come out of the darkness into the lights. It was like turning back. It was unfulfilment. Two quivering, unwilling creatures, they lingered on the edge of the darkness, peering out at the lights and the machine-glimmer beyond. They could not turn back to the world — they could not.

So lingering along, they came to a great oak tree by the path. In all its budding mass it roared to the wind, and its trunk vibrated in every fibre, powerful, indomitable.

“We will sit down,” he said.

And in the roaring circle under the tree, that was almost invisible yet whose powerful presence received them, they lay a moment looking at the twinkling lights on the darkness opposite, saw the sweeping brand of a train past the edge of their darkened field.

Then he turned and kissed her, and she waited for him. The pain to her was the pain she wanted, the agony was the agony she wanted. She was caught up, entangled in the powerful vibration of the night. The man, what was he? — a dark, powerful vibration that encompassed her. She passed away as on a dark wind, far, far away, into the pristine darkness of paradise, into the original immortality. She entered the dark fields of immortality.

When she rose, she felt strangely free, strong. She was not ashamed, — why should she be? He was walking beside her, the man who had been with her. She had taken him, they had been together. Whither they had gone, she did not know. But it was as if she had received another nature. She belonged to the eternal, changeless place into which they had leapt together.

Her soul was sure and indifferent of the opinion of the world of artificial light. As they went up the steps of the foot-bridge over the railway, and met the train-passengers, she felt herself belonging to another world, she walked past them immune, a whole darkness dividing her from them. When she went into the lighted dining-room at home, she was impervious to the lights and the eyes of her parents. Her everyday self was just the same. She merely had another, stronger self that knew the darkness.

This curious separate strength, that existed in darkness and pride of night, never forsook her. She had never been more herself. It could not occur to her that anybody, not even the young man of the world, Skrebensky, should have anything at all to do with her permanent self. As for her temporal, social self, she let it look after itself.

Her whole soul was implicated with Skrebensky — not the young man of the world, but the undifferentiated man he was. She was perfectly sure of herself, perfectly strong, stronger than all the world. The world was not strong — she was strong. The world existed only in a secondary sense: — she existed supremely.

She continued at college, in her ordinary routine, merely as a cover to her dark, powerful under-life. The fact of herself, and with her Skrebensky, was so powerful, that she took rest in the other. She went to college in the morning, and attended her classes, flowering, and remote.

She had lunch with him in his hotel; every evening she spent with him, either in town, at his rooms, or in the country. She made the excuse at home of evening

study for her degree. But she paid not the slightest attention to her study.

They were both absolute and happy and calm. The fact of their own consummate being made everything else so entirely subordinate that they were free. The only thing they wanted, as the days went by, was more time to themselves. They wanted the time to be absolutely their own.

The Easter vacation was approaching. They agreed to go right away. It would not matter if they did not come back. They were indifferent to the actual facts.

“I suppose we ought to get married,” he said, rather wistfully. It was so magnificently free and in a deeper world, as it was. To make public their connection would be to put it in range with all the things which nullified him, and from which he was for the moment entirely dissociated. If he married he would have to assume his social self. And the thought of assuming his social self made him at once diffident and abstract. If she were his social wife, if she were part of that complication of dead reality, then what had his under-life to do with her? One’s social wife was almost a material symbol. Whereas now she was something more vivid to him than anything in conventional life could be. She gave the complete lie to all conventional life, he and she stood together, dark, fluid, infinitely potent, giving the living lie to the dead whole which contained them.

He watched her pensive, puzzled face.

“I don’t think I want to marry you,” she said, her brow clouded.

It piqued him rather.

“Why not?” he asked.

“Let’s think about it afterwards, shall we?” she said.

He was crossed, yet he loved her violently.

“You’ve got a museau, not a face,” he said.

“Have I?” she cried, her face lighting up like a pure flame. She thought she had escaped. Yet he returned — he was not satisfied.

“Why?” he asked, “why don’t you want to marry me?”

“I don’t want to be with other people,” she said. “I want to be like this. I’ll tell you if ever I want to marry you.”

“All right,” he said.

He would rather the thing was left indefinite, and that she took the responsibility.

They talked of the Easter vacation. She thought only of complete enjoyment.

They went to an hotel in Piccadilly. She was supposed to be his wife. They bought a wedding-ring for a shilling, from a shop in a poor quarter.

They had revoked altogether the ordinary mortal world. Their confidence was like a possession upon them. They were possessed. Perfectly and supremely free

they felt, proud beyond all question, and surpassing mortal conditions.

They were perfect, therefore nothing else existed. The world was a world of servants whom one civilly ignored. Wherever they went, they were the sensuous aristocrats, warm, bright, glancing with pure pride of the senses.

The effect upon other people was extraordinary. The glamour was cast from the young couple upon all they came into contact with, waiters or chance acquaintances.

“Oui, Monsieur le baron,” she would reply with a mocking courtesy to her husband.

So they came to be treated as titled people. He was an officer in the engineers. They were just married, going to India immediately.

Thus a tissue of romance was round them. She believed she was a young wife of a titled husband on the eve of departure for India. This, the social fact, was a delicious make-belief. The living fact was that he and she were man and woman, absolute and beyond all limitation.

The days went by — they were to have three weeks together — in perfect success. All the time, they themselves were reality, all outside was tribute to them. They were quite careless about money, but they did nothing very extravagant. He was rather surprised when he found that he had spent twenty pounds in a little under a week, but it was only the irritation of having to go to the bank. The machinery of the old system lasted for him, not the system. The money simply did not exist.

Neither did any of the old obligations. They came home from the theatre, had supper, then flitted about in their dressing-gowns. They had a large bedroom and a corner sitting-room high up, remote and very cosy. They ate all their meals in their own rooms, attended by a young German called Hans, who thought them both wonderful, and answered assiduously:

“Gewiss, Herr Baron — bitte sehr, Frau Baronin.”

Often, they saw the pink of dawn away across the park. The tower of Westminster Cathedral was emerging, the lamps of Piccadilly, stringing away beside the trees of the park, were becoming pale and moth-like, the morning traffic was clock-clocking down the shadowy road, which had gleamed all night like metal, down below, running far ahead into the night, beneath the lamps, and which was now vague, as in a mist, because of the dawn.

Then, as the flush of dawn became stronger, they opened the glass doors and went on to the giddy balcony, feeling triumphant as two angels in bliss, looking down at the still sleeping world, which would wake to a dutiful, rumbling, sluggish turmoil of unreality.

But the air was cold. They went into their bedroom, and bathed before going

to bed, leaving the partition doors of the bath-room open, so that the vapour came into the bedroom and faintly dimmed the mirror. She was always in bed first. She watched him as he bathed, his quick, unconscious movements, the electric light glinting on his wet shoulders. He stood out of the bath, his hair all washed flat over his forehead, and pressed the water out of his eyes. He was slender, and, to her, perfect, a clean, straight-cut youth, without a grain of superfluous body. The brown hair on his body was soft and fine and adorable, he was all beautifully flushed, as he stood in the white bath-apartment.

He saw her warm, dark, lit-up face watching him from the pillow — yet he did not see it — it was always present, and was to him as his own eyes. He was never aware of the separate being of her. She was like his own eyes and his own heart beating to him.

So he went across to her, to get his sleeping suit. It was always a perfect adventure to go near to her. She put her arms round him, and snuffed his warm, softened skin.

“Scent,” she said.

“Soap,” he answered.

“Soap,” she repeated, looking up with bright eyes. They were both laughing, always laughing.

Soon they were fast asleep, asleep till midday, close together, sleeping one sleep. Then they awoke to the ever-changing reality of their state. They alone inhabited the world of reality. All the rest lived on a lower sphere.

Whatever they wanted to do, they did. They saw a few people — Dorothy, whose guest she was supposed to be, and a couple of friends of Skrebensky, young Oxford men, who called her Mrs. Skrebensky with entire simplicity. They treated her, indeed, with such respect, that she began to think she was really quite of the whole universe, of the old world as well as of the new. She forgot she was outside the pale of the old world. She thought she had brought it under the spell of her own, real world. And so she had.

In such ever-changing reality the weeks went by. All the time, they were an unknown world to each other. Every movement made by the one was a reality and an adventure to the other. They did not want outside excitements. They went to very few theatres, they were often in their sitting-room high up over Piccadilly, with windows open on two sides, and the door open on to the balcony, looking over the Green Park, or down upon the minute travelling of the traffic.

Then suddenly, looking at a sunset, she wanted to go. She must be gone. She must be gone at once. And in two hours' time they were at Charing Cross taking train for Paris. Paris was his suggestion. She did not care where it was. The great

joy was in setting out. And for a few days she was happy in the novelty of Paris.

Then, for some reason, she must call in Rouen on the way back to London. He had an instinctive mistrust of her desire for the place. But, perversely, she wanted to go there. It was as if she wanted to try its effect upon her.

For the first time, in Rouen, he had a cold feeling of death; not afraid of any other man, but of her. She seemed to leave him. She followed after something that was not him. She did not want him. The old streets, the cathedral, the age and the monumental peace of the town took her away from him. She turned to it as if to something she had forgotten, and wanted. This was now the reality; this great stone cathedral slumbering there in its mass, which knew no transience nor heard any denial. It was majestic in its stability, its splendid absoluteness.

Her soul began to run by itself. He did not realise, nor did she. Yet in Rouen he had the first deadly anguish, the first sense of the death towards which they were wandering. And she felt the first heavy yearning, heavy, heavy hopeless warning, almost like a deep, uneasy sinking into apathy, hopelessness.

They returned to London. But still they had two days. He began to tremble, he grew feverish with the fear of her departure. She had in her some fatal prescience, that made her calm. What would be, would be.

He remained fairly easy, however, still in his state of heightened glamour, till she had gone, and he had turned away from St. Pancras, and sat on the tram-car going up Pimlico to the "Angel", to Moorgate Street on Sunday evening.

Then the cold horror gradually soaked into him. He saw the horror of the City Road, he realised the ghastly cold sordidness of the tram-car in which he sat. Cold, stark, ashen sterility had him surrounded. Where then was the luminous, wonderful world he belonged to by rights? How did he come to be thrown on this refuse-heap where he was?

He was as if mad. The horror of the brick buildings, of the tram-car, of the ashen-grey people in the street made him reeling and blind as if drunk. He went mad. He had lived with her in a close, living, pulsing world, where everything pulsed with rich being. Now he found himself struggling amid an ashen-dry, cold world of rigidity, dead walls and mechanical traffic, and creeping, spectre-like people. The life was extinct, only ash moved and stirred or stood rigid, there was a horrible, clattering activity, a rattle like the falling of dry slag, cold and sterile. It was as if the sunshine that fell were unnatural light exposing the ash of the town, as if the lights at night were the sinister gleam of decomposition.

Quite mad, beside himself, he went to his club and sat with a glass of whisky, motionless, as if turned to clay. He felt like a corpse that is inhabited with just enough life to make it appear as any other of the spectral, unliving beings which we call people in our dead language. Her absence was worse than pain to him. It

destroyed his being.

Dead, he went on from lunch to tea. His face was all the time fixed and stiff and colourless, his life was a dry, mechanical movement. Yet even he wondered slightly at the awful misery that had overcome him. How could he be so ashlike and extinct? He wrote her a letter.

I have been thinking that we must get married before long. My pay will be more when I get out to India, we shall be able to get along. Or if you don't want to go to India, I could very probably stay here in England. But I think you would like India. You could ride, and you would know just everybody out there. Perhaps if you stay on to take your degree, we might marry immediately after that. I will write to your father as soon as I hear from you — —

He went on, disposing of her. If only he could be with her! All he wanted now was to marry her, to be sure of her. Yet all the time he was perfectly, perfectly hopeless, cold, extinct, without emotion or connection.

He felt as if his life were dead. His soul was extinct. The whole being of him had become sterile, he was a spectre, divorced from life. He had no fullness, he was just a flat shape. Day by day the madness accumulated in him. The horror of not-being possessed him.

He went here, there, and everywhere. But whatever he did, he knew that only the cipher of him was there, nothing was filled in. He went to the theatre; what he heard and saw fell upon a cold surface of consciousness, which was now all that he was, there was nothing behind it, he could have no experience of any sort. Mechanical registering took place in him, no more. He had no being, no contents. Neither had the people he came into contact with. They were mere permutations of known quantities. There was no roundness or fullness in this world he now inhabited, everything was a dead shape mental arrangement, without life or being.

Much of the time, he was with friends and comrades. Then he forgot everything. Their activities made up for his own negation, they engaged his negative horror.

He only became happy when he drank, and he drank a good deal. Then he was just the opposite to what he had been. He became a warm, diffuse, glowing cloud, in a warm, diffuse formless fashion. Everything melted down into a rosy glow, and he was the glow, and everything was the glow, everybody else was the glow, and it was very nice, very nice. He would sing songs, it was so nice.

Ursula went back to Beldover shut and firm. She loved Skrebensky, of that she was resolved. She would allow nothing else.

She read his long, obsessed letter about getting married and going to India, without any particular response. She seemed to ignore what he said about

marriage. It did not come home to her. He seemed, throughout the greater part of his letter, to be talking without much meaning.

She replied to him pleasantly and easily. She rarely wrote long letters.

India sounds lovely. I can just see myself on an elephant swaying between lanes of obsequious natives. But I don't know if father would let me go. We must see.

I keep living over again the lovely times we have had. But I don't think you liked me quite so much towards the end, did you? You did not like me when we left Paris. Why didn't you?

I love you very much. I love your body. It is so clear and fine. I am glad you do not go naked, or all the women would fall in love with you. I am very jealous of it, I love it so much.

He was more or less satisfied with this letter. But day after day he was walking about, dead, non-existent.

He could not come again to Nottingham until the end of April. Then he persuaded her to go with him for a week-end to a friend's house near Oxford. By this time they were engaged. He had written to her father, and the thing was settled. He brought her an emerald ring, of which she was very proud.

Her people treated her now with a little distance, as if she had already left them. They left her very much alone.

She went with him for the three days in the country house near Oxford. It was delicious, and she was very happy. But the thing she remembered most was when, getting up in the morning after he had gone back quietly to his own room, having spent the night with her, she found herself very rich in being alone, and enjoying to the full her solitary room, she drew up her blind and saw the plum trees in the garden below all glittering and snowy and delighted with the sunshine, in full bloom under a blue sky. They threw out their blossom, they flung it out under the blue heavens, the whitest blossom! How excited it made her.

She had to hurry through her dressing to go and walk in the garden under the plum trees, before anyone should come and talk to her. Out she slipped, and paced like a queen in fairy pleasaunces. The blossom was silver-shadowy when she looked up from under the tree at the blue sky. There was a faint scent, a faint noise of bees, a wonderful quickness of happy morning.

She heard the breakfast gong and went indoors.

"Where have you been?" asked the others.

"I had to go out under the plum trees," she said, her face glowing like a flower. "It is so lovely."

A shadow of anger crossed Skrebensky's soul. She had not wanted him to be

there. He hardened his will.

At night there was a moon, and the blossom glistened ghostly, they went together to look at it. She saw the moonlight on his face as he waited near her, and his features were like silver and his eyes in shadow were unfathomable. She was in love with him. He was very quiet.

They went indoors and she pretended to be tired. So she went quickly to bed.

“Don’t be long coming to me,” she whispered, as she was supposed to be kissing him good night.

And he waited, intent, obsessed, for the moment when he could come to her.

She enjoyed him, she made much of him. She liked to put her fingers on the soft skin of his sides, or on the softness of his back, when he made the muscles hard underneath, the muscles developed very strong through riding; and she had a great thrill of excitement and passion, because of the unimpressible hardness of his body, that was so soft and smooth under her fingers, that came to her with such absolute service.

She owned his body and enjoyed it with all the delight and carelessness of a possessor. But he had become gradually afraid of her body. He wanted her, he wanted her endlessly. But there had come a tension into his desire, a constraint which prevented his enjoying the delicious approach and the lovable close of the endless embrace. He was afraid. His will was always tense, fixed.

Her final examination was at midsummer. She insisted on sitting for it, although she had neglected her work during the past months. He also wanted her to go in for the degree. Then, he thought, she would be satisfied. Secretly he hoped she would fail, so that she would be more glad of him.

“Would you rather live in India or in England when we are married?” he asked her.

“Oh, in India, by far,” she said, with a careless lack of consideration which annoyed him.

Once she said, with heat:

“I shall be glad to leave England. Everything is so meagre and paltry, it is so unspiritual — I hate democracy.”

He became angry to hear her talk like this, he did not know why. Somehow, he could not bear it, when she attacked things. It was as if she were attacking him.

“What do you mean?” he asked her, hostile. “Why do you hate democracy?”

“Only the greedy and ugly people come to the top in a democracy,” she said, “because they’re the only people who will push themselves there. Only degenerate races are democratic.”

“What do you want then — an aristocracy?” he asked, secretly moved. He

always felt that by rights he belonged to the ruling aristocracy. Yet to hear her speak for his class pained him with a curious, painful pleasure. He felt he was acquiescing in something illegal, taking to himself some wrong, reprehensible advantages.

“I do want an aristocracy,” she cried. “And I’d far rather have an aristocracy of birth than of money. Who are the aristocrats now — who are chosen as the best to rule? Those who have money and the brains for money. It doesn’t matter what else they have: but they must have money-brains, — because they are ruling in the name of money.”

“The people elect the government,” he said.

“I know they do. But what are the people? Each one of them is a money-interest. I hate it, that anybody is my equal who has the same amount of money as I have. I know I am better than all of them. I hate them. They are not my equals. I hate equality on a money basis. It is the equality of dirt.”

Her eyes blazed at him, he felt as if she wanted to destroy him. She had gripped him and was trying to break him. His anger sprang up, against her. At least he would fight for his existence with her. A hard, blind resistance possessed him.

“I don’t care about money,” he said, “neither do I want to put my finger in the pie. I am too sensitive about my finger.”

“What is your finger to me?” she cried, in a passion. “You with your dainty fingers, and your going to India because you will be one of the somebodies there! It’s a mere dodge, your going to India.”

“In what way a dodge?” he cried, white with anger and fear.

“You think the Indians are simpler than us, and so you’ll enjoy being near them and being a lord over them,” she said. “And you’ll feel so righteous, governing them for their own good. Who are you, to feel righteous? What are you righteous about, in your governing? Your governing stinks. What do you govern for, but to make things there as dead and mean as they are here!”

“I don’t feel righteous in the least,” he said.

“Then what do you feel? It’s all such a nothingness, what you feel and what you don’t feel.”

“What do you feel yourself?” he said. “Aren’t you righteous in your own mind?”

“Yes, I am, because I’m against you, and all your old, dead things,” she cried.

She seemed, with the last words, uttered in hard knowledge, to strike down the flag that he kept flying. He felt cut off at the knees, a figure made worthless. A horrible sickness gripped him, as if his legs were really cut away, and he could not move, but remained a crippled trunk, dependent, worthless. The ghastly

sense of helplessness, as if he were a mere figure that did not exist vitally, made him mad, beside himself.

Now, even whilst he was with her, this death of himself came over him, when he walked about like a body from which all individual life is gone. In this state he neither heard nor saw nor felt, only the mechanism of his life continued.

He hated her, as far as, in this state, he could hate. His cunning suggested to him all the ways of making her esteem him. For she did not esteem him. He left her and did not write to her. He flirted with other women, with Gudrun.

This last made her very fierce. She was still fiercely jealous of his body. In passionate anger she upbraided him because, not being man enough to satisfy one woman, he hung round others.

“Don’t I satisfy you?” he asked of her, again going white to the throat.

“No,” she said. “You’ve never satisfied me since the first week in London. You never satisfy me now. What does it mean to me, your having me — ” She lifted her shoulders and turned aside her face in a motion of cold, indifferent worthlessness. He felt he would kill her.

When she had roused him to a pitch of madness, when she saw his eyes all dark and mad with suffering, then a great suffering overcame her soul, a great, unconquerable suffering. And she loved him. For, oh, she wanted to love him. Stronger than life or death was her craving to be able to love him.

And at such moments, when he was made with her destroying him, when all his complacency was destroyed, all his everyday self was broken, and only the stripped, rudimentary, primal man remained, demented with torture, her passion to love him became love, she took him again, they came together in an overwhelming passion, in which he knew he satisfied her.

But it all contained a developing germ of death. After each contact, her anguished desire for him or for that which she never had from him was stronger, her love was more hopeless. After each contact his mad dependence on her was deepened, his hope of standing strong and taking her in his own strength was weakened. He felt himself a mere attribute of her.

Whitsuntide came, just before her examination. She was to have a few days of rest. Dorothy had inherited her patrimony, and had taken a cottage in Sussex. She invited them to stay with her.

They went down to Dorothy’s neat, low cottage at the foot of the downs. Here they could do as they liked. Ursula was always yearning to go to the top of the downs. The white track wound up to the rounded summit. And she must go.

Up there, she could see the Channel a few miles away, the sea raised up and faintly glittering in the sky, the Isle of Wight a shadow lifted in the far distance, the river winding bright through the patterned plain to seaward, Arundel Castle a

shadowy bulk, and then the rolling of the high, smooth downs, making a high, smooth land under heaven, acknowledging only the heavens in their great, sun-glowing strength, and suffering only a few bushes to trespass on the intercourse between their great, unabateable body and the changeful body of the sky.

Below she saw the villages and the woods of the weald, and the train running bravely, a gallant little thing, running with all the importance of the world over the water meadows and into the gap of the downs, waving its white steam, yet all the while so little. So little, yet its courage carried it from end to end of the earth, till there was no place where it did not go. Yet the downs, in magnificent indifference, bearing limbs and body to the sun, drinking sunshine and sea-wind and sea-wet cloud into its golden skin, with superb stillness and calm of being, was not the downs still more wonderful? The blind, pathetic, energetic courage of the train as it steamed tinily away through the patterned levels to the sea's dimness, so fast and so energetic, made her weep. Where was it going? It was going nowhere, it was just going. So blind, so without goal or aim, yet so hasty! She sat on an old prehistoric earthwork and cried, and the tears ran down her face. The train had tunnelled all the earth, blindly, and uglily.

And she lay face downwards on the downs, that were so strong, that cared only for their intercourse with the everlasting skies, and she wished she could become a strong mound smooth under the sky, bosom and limbs bared to all winds and clouds and bursts of sunshine.

But she must get up again and look down from her foothold of sunshine, down and away at the patterned, level earth, with its villages and its smoke and its energy. So shortsighted the train seemed, running to the distance, so terrifying in their littleness the villages, with such pettiness in their activity.

Skrebensky wandered dazed, not knowing where he was or what he was doing with her. All her passion seemed to be to wander up there on the downs, and when she must descend to earth, she was heavy. Up there she was exhilarated and free.

She would not love him in a house any more. She said she hated houses, and particularly she hated beds. There was something distasteful in his coming to her bed.

She would stay the night on the downs, up there, he with her. It was midsummer, the days were glamorously long. At about half-past ten, when the bluey-black darkness had at last fallen, they took rugs and climbed the steep track to the summit of the downs, he and she.

Up there, the stars were big, the earth below was gone into darkness. She was free up there with the stars. Far out they saw tiny yellow lights — but it was very far out, at sea, or on land. She was free up among the stars.

She took off her clothes, and made him take off all his, and they ran over the smooth, moonless turf, a long way, more than a mile from where they had left their clothing, running in the dark, soft wind, utterly naked, as naked as the downs themselves. Her hair was loose and blew about her shoulders, she ran swiftly, wearing sandals when she set off on the long run to the dew-pond.

In the round dew-pond the stars were untroubled. She ventured softly into the water, grasping at the stars with her hands.

And then suddenly she started back, running swiftly. He was there, beside her, but only on sufferance. He was a screen for her fears. He served her. She took him, she clasped him, clenched him close, but her eyes were open looking at the stars, it was as if the stars were lying with her and entering the unfathomable darkness of her womb, fathoming her at last. It was not him.

The dawn came. They stood together on a high place, an earthwork of the stone-age men, watching for the light. It came over the land. But the land was dark. She watched a pale rim on the sky, away against the darkened land. The darkness became bluer. A little wind was running in from the sea behind. It seemed to be running to the pale rift of the dawn. And she and he darkly, on an outpost of the darkness, stood watching for the dawn.

The light grew stronger, gushing up against the dark sap-hire of the transparent night. The light grew stronger, whiter, then over it hovered a flush of rose. A flush of rose, and then yellow, pale, new-created yellow, the whole quivering and poisoning momentarily over the fountain on the sky's rim.

The rose hovered and quivered, burned, fused to flame, to a transient red, while the yellow urged out in great waves, thrown from the ever-increasing fountain, great waves of yellow flinging into the sky, scattering its spray over the darkness, which became bluer and bluer, paler, till soon it would itself be a radiance, which had been darkness.

The sun was coming. There was a quivering, a powerful terrifying swim of molten light. Then the molten source itself surged forth, revealing itself. The sun was in the sky, too powerful to look at.

And the ground beneath lay so still, so peaceful. Only now and again a cock crew. Otherwise, from the distant yellow hills to the pine trees at the foot of the downs, everything was newly washed into being, in a flood of new, golden creation.

It was so unutterably still and perfect with promise, the golden-lighted, distinct land, that Ursula's soul rocked and wept. Suddenly he glanced at her. The tears were running over her cheeks, her mouth was working strangely.

"What is the matter?" he asked.

After a moment's struggle with her voice.

“It is so beautiful,” she said, looking at the glowing, beautiful land. It was so beautiful, so perfect, and so unsullied.

He too realised what England would be in a few hours’ time — a blind, sordid, strenuous activity, all for nothing, fuming with dirty smoke and running trains and groping in the bowels of the earth, all for nothing. A ghastliness came over him.

He looked at Ursula. Her face was wet with tears, very bright, like a transfiguration in the refulgent light. Nor was his the hand to wipe away the burning, bright tears. He stood apart, overcome by a cruel ineffectuality.

Gradually a great, helpless sorrow was rising in him. But as yet he was fighting it away, he was struggling for his own life. He became very quiet and unaware of the things about him, awaiting, as it were, her judgment on him.

They returned to Nottingham, the time of her examination came. She must go to London. But she would not stay with him in an hotel. She would go to a quiet little pension near the British Museum.

Those quiet residential squares of London made a great impression on her mind. They were very complete. Her mind seemed imprisoned in their quietness. Who was going to liberate her?

In the evening, her practical examinations being over, he went with her to dinner at one of the hotels down the river, near Richmond. It was golden and beautiful, with yellow water and white and scarlet-striped boat-awnings, and blue shadows under the trees.

“When shall we be married?” he asked her, quietly, simply, as if it were a mere question of comfort.

She watched the changing pleasure-traffic of the river. He looked at her golden, puzzled museau. The knot gathered in his throat.

“I don’t know,” she said.

A hot grief gripped his throat.

“Why don’t you know — don’t you want to be married?” he asked her.

Her head turned slowly, her face, puzzled, like a boy’s face, expressionless because she was trying to think, looked towards his face. She did not see him, because she was pre-occupied. She did not quite know what she was going to say.

“I don’t think I want to be married,” she said, and her naive, troubled, puzzled eyes rested a moment on his, then travelled away, pre-occupied.

“Do you mean never, or not just yet?” he asked.

The knot in his throat grew harder, his face was drawn as if he were being strangled.

“I mean never,” she said, out of some far self which spoke for once beyond

her.

His drawn, strangled face watched her blankly for a few moments, then a strange sound took place in his throat. She started, came to herself, and, horrified, saw him. His head made a queer motion, the chin jerked back against the throat, the curious, crowing, hiccupping sound came again, his face twisted like insanity, and he was crying, crying blind and twisted as if something were broken which kept him in control.

“Tony — don’t,” she cried, starting up.

It tore every one of her nerves to see him. He made groping movements to get out of his chair. But he was crying uncontrollably, noiselessly, with his face twisted like a mask, contorted and the tears running down the amazing grooves in his cheeks. Blindly, his face always this horrible working mask, he groped for his hat, for his way down from the terrace. It was eight o’clock, but still brightly light. The other people were staring. In great agitation, part of which was exasperation, she stayed behind, paid the waiter with a half-sovereign, took her yellow silk coat, then followed Skrebensky.

She saw him walking with brittle, blind steps along the path by the river. She could tell by the strange stiffness and brittleness of his figure that he was still crying. Hurrying after him, running, she took his arm.

“Tony,” she cried, “don’t! Why are you like this? What are you doing this for? Don’t. It’s not necessary.”

He heard, and his manhood was cruelly, coldly defaced. Yet it was no good. He could not gain control of his face. His face, his breast, were weeping violently, as if automatically. His will, his knowledge had nothing to do with it. He simply could not stop.

She walked holding his arm, silent with exasperation and perplexity and pain. He took the uncertain steps of a blind man, because his mind was blind with weeping.

“Shall we go home? Shall we have a taxi?” she said.

He could pay no attention. Very flustered, very agitated, she signalled indefinitely to a taxi-cab that was going slowly by. The driver saluted and drew up. She opened the door and pushed Skrebensky in, then took her own place. Her face was uplifted, the mouth closed down, she looked hard and cold and ashamed. She winced as the driver’s dark red face was thrust round upon her, a full-blooded, animal face with black eyebrows and a thick, short-cut moustache.

“Where to, lady?” he said, his white teeth showing. Again for a moment she was flustered.

“Forty, Rutland Square,” she said.

He touched his cap and stolidly set the car in motion. He seemed to have a

league with her to ignore Skrebensky.

The latter sat as if trapped within the taxi-cab, his face still working, whilst occasionally he made quick slight movements of the head, to shake away his tears. He never moved his hands. She could not bear to look at him. She sat with face uplifted and averted to the window.

At length, when she had regained some control over herself, she turned again to him. He was much quieter. His face was wet, and twitched occasionally, his hands still lay motionless. But his eyes were quite still, like a washed sky after rain, full of a wan light, and quite steady, almost ghost-like.

A pain flamed in her womb, for him.

“I didn’t think I should hurt you,” she said, laying her hand very lightly, tentatively, on his arm. “The words came without my knowing. They didn’t mean anything, really.”

He remained quite still, hearing, but washed all wan and without feeling. She waited, looking at him, as if he were some curious, not-understandable creature.

“You won’t cry again, will you, Tony?”

Some shame and bitterness against her burned him in the question. She noticed how his moustache was soddened wet with tears. Taking her handkerchief, she wiped his face. The driver’s heavy, stolid back remained always turned to them, as if conscious but indifferent. Skrebensky sat motionless whilst Ursula wiped his face, softly, carefully, and yet clumsily, not as well as he would have wiped it himself.

Her handkerchief was too small. It was soon wet through. She groped in his pocket for his own. Then, with its more ample capacity, she carefully dried his face. He remained motionless all the while. Then she drew his cheek to hers and kissed him. His face was cold. Her heart was hurt. She saw the tears welling quickly to his eyes again. As if he were a child, she again wiped away his tears. By now she herself was on the point of weeping. Her underlip was caught between her teeth.

So she sat still, for fear of her own tears, sitting close by him, holding his hand warm and close and loving. Meanwhile the car ran on, and a soft, midsummer dusk began to gather. For a long while they sat motionless. Only now and again her hand closed more closely, lovingly, over his hand, then gradually relaxed.

The dusk began to fall. One or two lights appeared. The driver drew up to light his lamps. Skrebensky moved for the first time, leaning forward to watch the driver. His face had always the same still, clarified, almost childlike look, impersonal.

They saw the driver’s strange, full, dark face peering into the lamps under drawn brows. Ursula shuddered. It was the face almost of an animal yet of a

quick, strong, wary animal that had them within its knowledge, almost within its power. She clung closer to Krebensky.

“My love?” she said to him, questioningly, when the car was again running in full motion.

He made no movement or sound. He let her hold his hand, he let her reach forward, in the gathering darkness, and kiss his still cheek. The crying had gone by — he would not cry any more. He was whole and himself again.

“My love,” she repeated, trying to make him notice her. But as yet he could not.

He watched the road. They were running by Kensington Gardens. For the first time his lips opened.

“Shall we get out and go into the park,” he asked.

“Yes,” she said, quietly, not sure what was coming.

After a moment he took the tube from its peg. She saw the stout, strong, self-contained driver lean his head.

“Stop at Hyde Park Corner.”

The dark head nodded, the car ran on just the same.

Presently they pulled up. Skrebensky paid the man. Ursula stood back. She saw the driver salute as he received his tip, and then, before he set the car in motion, turn and look at her, with his quick, powerful, animal’s look, his eyes very concentrated and the whites of his eyes flickering. Then he drove away into the crowd. He had let her go. She had been afraid.

Skrebensky turned with her into the park. A band was still playing and the place was thronged with people. They listened to the ebbing music, then went aside to a dark seat, where they sat closely, hand in hand.

Then at length, as out of the silence, she said to him, wondering:

“What hurt you so?”

She really did not know, at this moment.

“When you said you wanted never to marry me,” he replied, with a childish simplicity.

“But why did that hurt you so?” she said. “You needn’t mind everything I say so particularly.”

“I don’t know — I didn’t want to do it,” he said, humbly, ashamed.

She pressed his hand warmly. They sat close together, watching the soldiers go by with their sweethearts, the lights trailing in myriads down the great thoroughfares that beat on the edge of the park.

“I didn’t know you cared so much,” she said, also humbly.

“I didn’t,” he said. “I was knocked over myself. — But I care — all the world.”

His voice was so quiet and colourless, it made her heart go pale with fear.

“My love!” she said, drawing near to him. But she spoke out of fear, not out of love.

“I care all the world — I care for nothing else — neither in life nor in death,” he said, in the same steady, colourless voice of essential truth.

“Than for what?” she murmured duskily.

“Than for you — to be with me.”

And again she was afraid. Was she to be conquered by this? She cowered close to him, very close to him. They sat perfectly still, listening to the great, heavy, beating sound of the town, the murmur of lovers going by, the footsteps of soldiers.

She shivered against him.

“You are cold?” he said.

“A little.”

“We will go and have some supper.”

He was now always quiet and decided and remote, very beautiful. He seemed to have some strange, cold power over her.

They went to a restaurant, and drank chianti. But his pale, wan look did not go away.

“Don’t leave me to-night,” he said at length, looking at her, pleading. He was so strange and impersonal, she was afraid.

“But the people of my place,” she said, quivering.

“I will explain to them — they know we are engaged.”

She sat pale and mute. He waited.

“Shall we go?” he said at length.

“Where?”

“To an hotel.”

Her heart was hardened. Without answering, she rose to acquiesce. But she was now cold and unreal. Yet she could not refuse him. It seemed like fate, a fate she did not want.

They went to an Italian hotel somewhere, and had a sombre bedroom with a very large bed, clean, but sombre. The ceiling was painted with a bunch of flowers in a big medallion over the bed. She thought it was pretty.

He came to her, and cleaved to her very close, like steel cleaving and clinching on to her. Her passion was roused, it was fierce but cold. But it was fierce, and extreme, and good, their passion this night. He slept with her fast in his arms. All night long he held her fast against him. She was passive, acquiescent. But her sleep was not very deep nor very real.

She woke in the morning to a sound of water dashed on a courtyard, to

sunlight streaming through a lattice. She thought she was in a foreign country. And Skrebensky was there an incubus upon her.

She lay still, thinking, whilst his arm was round her, his head against her shoulders, his body against hers, just behind her. He was still asleep.

She watched the sunshine coming in bars through the persiennes, and her immediate surroundings again melted away.

She was in some other land, some other world, where the old restraints had dissolved and vanished, where one moved freely, not afraid of one's fellow men, nor wary, nor on the defensive, but calm, indifferent, at one's ease. Vaguely, in a sort of silver light, she wandered at large and at ease. The bonds of the world were broken. This world of England had vanished away. She heard a voice in the yard below calling:

“O Giovann' — O'-O'-O'-Giovann' — — !”

And she knew she was in a new country, in a new life. It was very delicious to lie thus still, with one's soul wandering freely and simply in the silver light of some other, simpler, more finely natural world.

But always there was a foreboding waiting to command her. She became more aware of Skrebensky. She knew he was waking up. She must modify her soul, depart from her further world, for him.

She knew he was awake. He lay still, with a concrete stillness, not as when he slept. Then his arm tightened almost convulsively upon her, and he said, half timidly:

“Did you sleep well?”

“Very well.”

“So did I.”

There was a pause.

“And do you love me?” he asked.

She turned and looked at him searchingly. He seemed outside her.

“I do,” she said.

But she said it out of complacency and a desire not to be harried. There was a curious breach of silence between them, which frightened him.

They lay rather late, then he rang for breakfast. She wanted to be able to go straight downstairs and away from the place, when she got up. She was happy in this room, but the thought of the publicity of the hall downstairs rather troubled her.

A young Italian, a Sicilian, dark and slightly pock-marked, buttoned up in a sort of grey tunic, appeared with the tray. His face had an almost African imperturbability, impassive, incomprehensible.

“One might be in Italy,” Skrebensky said to him, genially. A vacant look,

almost like fear, came on the fellow's face. He did not understand.

"This is like Italy," Skrebensky explained.

The face of the Italian flashed with a non-comprehending smile, he finished setting out the tray, and was gone. He did not understand: he would understand nothing: he disappeared from the door like a half-domesticated wild animal. It made Ursula shudder slightly, the quick, sharp-sighted, intent animality of the man.

Skrebensky was beautiful to her this morning, his face softened and transfused with suffering and with love, his movements very still and gentle. He was beautiful to her, but she was detached from him by a chill distance. Always she seemed to be bearing up against the distance that separated them. But he was unaware. This morning he was transfused and beautiful. She admired his movements, the way he spread honey on his roll, or poured out the coffee.

When breakfast was over, she lay still again on the pillows, whilst he went through his toilet. She watched him, as he sponged himself, and quickly dried himself with the towel. His body was beautiful, his movements intent and quick, she admired him and she appreciated him without reserve. He seemed completed now. He aroused no fruitful fecundity in her. He seemed added up, finished. She knew him all round, not on any side did he lead into the unknown. Poignant, almost passionate appreciation she felt for him, but none of the dreadful wonder, none of the rich fear, the connection with the unknown, or the reverence of love. He was, however, unaware this morning. His body was quiet and fulfilled, his veins complete with satisfaction, he was happy, finished.

Again she went home. But this time he went with her. He wanted to stay by her. He wanted her to marry him. It was already July. In early September he must sail for India. He could not bear to think of going alone. She must come with him. Nervously, he kept beside her.

Her examination was finished, her college career was over. There remained for her now to marry or to work again. She applied for no post. It was concluded she would marry. India tempted her — the strange, strange land. But with the thought of Calcutta, or Bombay, or of Simla, and of the European population, India was no more attractive to her than Nottingham.

She had failed in her examination: she had gone down: she had not taken her degree. It was a blow to her. It hardened her soul.

"It doesn't matter," he said. "What are the odds, whether you are a Bachelor of Arts or not, according to the London University? All you know, you know, and if you are Mrs. Skrebensky, the B.A. is meaningless."

Instead of consoling her, this made her harder, more ruthless. She was now up against her own fate. It was for her to choose between being Mrs. Skrebensky,

even Baroness Skrebensky, wife of a lieutenant in the Royal Engineers, the Sappers, as he called them, living with the European population in India — or being Ursula Brangwen, spinster, school-mistress. She was qualified by her Intermediate Arts examination. She would probably even now get a post quite easily as assistant in one of the higher grade schools, or even in Willey Green School. Which was she to do?

She hated most of all entering the bondage of teaching once more. Very heartily she detested it. Yet at the thought of marriage and living with Skrebensky amid the European population in India, her soul was locked and would not budge. She had very little feeling about it: only there was a deadlock.

Skrebensky waited, she waited, everybody waited for the decision. When Anton talked to her, and seemed insidiously to suggest himself as a husband to her, she knew how utterly locked out he was. On the other hand, when she saw Dorothy, and discussed the matter, she felt she would marry him promptly, at once, as a sharp disavowal of adherence with Dorothy's views.

The situation was almost ridiculous.

"But do you love him?" asked Dorothy.

"It isn't a question of loving him," said Ursula. "I love him well enough — certainly more than I love anybody else in the world. And I shall never love anybody else the same again. We have had the flower of each other. But I don't care about love. I don't value it. I don't care whether I love or whether I don't, whether I have love or whether I haven't. What is it to me?"

And she shrugged her shoulders in fierce, angry contempt.

Dorothy pondered, rather angry and afraid.

"Then what do you care about?" she asked, exasperated.

"I don't know," said Ursula. "But something impersonal. Love — love — love — what does it mean — what does it amount to? So much personal gratification. It doesn't lead anywhere."

"It isn't supposed to lead anywhere, is it?" said Dorothy, satirically. "I thought it was the one thing which is an end in itself."

"Then what does it matter to me?" cried Ursula. "As an end in itself, I could love a hundred men, one after the other. Why should I end with a Skrebensky? Why should I not go on, and love all the types I fancy, one after another, if love is an end in itself? There are plenty of men who aren't Anton, whom I could love — whom I would like to love."

"Then you don't love him," said Dorothy.

"I tell you I do; — quite as much, and perhaps more than I should love any of the others. Only there are plenty of things that aren't in Anton that I would love in the other men."

“What, for instance?”

“It doesn’t matter. But a sort of strong understanding, in some men, and then a dignity, a directness, something unquestioned that there is in working men, and then a jolly, reckless passionateness that you see — a man who could really let go — —”

Dorothy could feel that Ursula was already hankering after something else, something that this man did not give her.

“The question is, what do you want,” propounded Dorothy. “Is it just other men?”

Ursula was silenced. This was her own dread. Was she just promiscuous?

“Because if it is,” continued Dorothy, “you’d better marry Anton. The other can only end badly.”

So out of fear of herself Ursula was to marry Skrebensky.

He was very busy now, preparing to go to India. He must visit relatives and contract business. He was almost sure of Ursula now. She seemed to have given in. And he seemed to become again an important, self-assured man.

It was the first week in August, and he was one of a large party in a bungalow on the Lincolnshire coast. It was a tennis, golf, motor-car, motor-boat party, given by his great-aunt, a lady of social pretensions. Ursula was invited to spend the week with the party.

She went rather reluctantly. Her marriage was more or less fixed for the twenty-eighth of the month. They were to sail for India on September the fifth. One thing she knew, in her subconsciousness, and that was, she would never sail for India.

She and Anton, being important guests on account of the coming marriage, had rooms in the large bungalow. It was a big place, with a great central hall, two smaller writing-rooms, and then two corridors from which opened eight or nine bedrooms. Skrebensky was put on one corridor, Ursula on the other. They felt very lost, in the crowd.

Being lovers, however, they were allowed to be out alone together as much as they liked. Yet she felt very strange, in this crowd of strange people, uneasy, as if she had no privacy. She was not used to these homogeneous crowds. She was afraid.

She felt different from the rest of them, with their hard, easy, shallow intimacy, that seemed to cost them so little. She felt she was not pronounced enough. It was a kind of hold-your-own unconventional atmosphere.

She did not like it. In crowds, in assemblies of people, she liked formality. She felt she did not produce the right effect. She was not effective: she was not beautiful: she was nothing. Even before Skrebensky she felt unimportant, almost

inferior. He could take his part very well with the rest.

He and she went out into the night. There was a moon behind clouds, shedding a diffused light, gleaming now and again in bits of smoky mother-of-pearl. So they walked together on the wet, ribbed sands near the sea, hearing the run of the long, heavy waves, that made a ghostly whiteness and a whisper.

He was sure of himself. As she walked, the soft silk of her dress — she wore a blue shantung, full-skirted — blew away from the sea and flapped and clung to her legs. She wished it would not. Everything seemed to give her away, and she could not rouse herself to deny, she was so confused.

He would lead her away to a pocket in the sandhills, secret amid the grey thorn-bushes and the grey, glassy grass. He held her close against him, felt all her firm, unutterably desirable mould of body through the fine fibre of the silk that fell about her limbs. The silk, slipping fierily on the hidden, yet revealed roundness and firmness of her body, her loins, seemed to run in him like fire, make his brain burn like brimstone. She liked it, the electric fire of the silk under his hands upon her limbs, the fire flew over her, as he drew nearer and nearer to discovery. She vibrated like a jet of electric, firm fluid in response. Yet she did not feel beautiful. All the time, she felt she was not beautiful to him, only exciting. She let him take her, and he seemed mad, mad with excited passion. But she, as she lay afterwards on the cold, soft sand, looking up at the blotted, faintly luminous sky, felt that she was as cold now as she had been before. Yet he, breathing heavily, seemed almost savagely satisfied. He seemed revenged.

A little wind wafted the sea grass and passed over her face. Where was the supreme fulfilment she would never enjoy? Why was she so cold, so unroused, so indifferent?

As they went home, and she saw the many, hateful lights of the bungalow, of several bungalows in a group, he said softly:

“Don’t lock your door.”

“I’d rather, here,” she said.

“No, don’t. We belong to each other. Don’t let us deny it.”

She did not answer. He took her silence for consent.

He shared his room with another man.

“I suppose,” he said, “it won’t alarm the house if I go across to happier regions.”

“So long as you don’t make a great row going, and don’t try the wrong door,” said the other man, turning in to sleep.

Skrebensky went out in his wide-striped sleeping suit. He crossed the big dining hall, whose low firelight smelled of cigars and whisky and coffee, entered the other corridor and found Ursula’s room. She was lying awake, wide-eyed

and suffering. She was glad he had come, if only for consolation. It was consolation to be held in his arms, to feel his body against hers. Yet how foreign his arms and body were! Yet still, not so horribly foreign and hostile as the rest of the house felt to her.

She did not know how she suffered in this house. She was healthy and exorbitantly full of interest. So she played tennis and learned golf, she rowed out and swam in the deep sea, and enjoyed it very much indeed, full of zest. Yet all the time, among those others, she felt shocked and wincing, as if her violently-sensitive nakedness were exposed to the hard, brutal, material impact of the rest of the people.

The days went by unmarked, in a full, almost strenuous enjoyment of one's own physique. Skrebensky was one among the others, till evening came, and he took her for himself. She was allowed a great deal of freedom and was treated with a good deal of respect, as a girl on the eve of marriage, about to depart for another continent.

The trouble began at evening. Then a yearning for something unknown came over her, a passion for something she knew not what. She would walk the foreshore alone after dusk, expecting, expecting something, as if she had gone to a rendezvous. The salt, bitter passion of the sea, its indifference to the earth, its swinging, definite motion, its strength, its attack, and its salt burning, seemed to provoke her to a pitch of madness, tantalizing her with vast suggestions of fulfilment. And then, for personification, would come Skrebensky, Skrebensky, whom she knew, whom she was fond of, who was attractive, but whose soul could not contain her in its waves of strength, nor his breast compel her in burning, salty passion.

One evening they went out after dinner, across the low golf links to the dunes and the sea. The sky had small, faint stars, all was still and faintly dark. They walked together in silence, then ploughed, labouring, through the heavy loose sand of the gap between the dunes. They went in silence under the even, faint darkness, in the darker shadow of the sandhills.

Suddenly, cresting the heavy, sandy pass, Ursula lifted her head, and shrank back, momentarily frightened. There was a great whiteness confronting her, the moon was incandescent as a round furnace door, out of which came the high blast of moonlight, over the seaward half of the world, a dazzling, terrifying glare of white light. They shrank back for a moment into shadow, uttering a cry. He felt his chest laid bare, where the secret was heavily hidden. He felt himself fusing down to nothingness, like a bead that rapidly disappears in an incandescent flame.

“How wonderful!” cried Ursula, in low, calling tones. “How wonderful!”

And she went forward, plunging into it. He followed behind. She too seemed to melt into the glare, towards the moon.

The sands were as ground silver, the sea moved in solid brightness, coming towards them, and she went to meet the advance of the flashing, buoyant water. She gave her breast to the moon, her belly to the flashing, heaving water. He stood behind, encompassed, a shadow ever dissolving.

She stood on the edge of the water, at the edge of the solid, flashing body of the sea, and the wave rushed over her feet.

“I want to go,” she cried, in a strong, dominant voice. “I want to go.”

He saw the moonlight on her face, so she was like metal, he heard her ringing, metallic voice, like the voice of a harpy to him.

She prowled, ranging on the edge of the water like a possessed creature, and he followed her. He saw the froth of the wave followed by the hard, bright water swirl over her feet and her ankles, she swung out her arms, to balance, he expected every moment to see her walk into the sea, dressed as she was, and be carried swimming out.

But she turned, she walked to him.

“I want to go,” she cried again, in the high, hard voice, like the scream of gulls.

“Where?” he asked.

“I don’t know.”

And she seized hold of his arm, held him fast, as if captive, and walked him a little way by the edge of the dazzling, dazing water.

Then there in the great flare of light, she clinched hold of him, hard, as if suddenly she had the strength of destruction, she fastened her arms round him and tightened him in her grip, whilst her mouth sought his in a hard, rending, ever-increasing kiss, till his body was powerless in her grip, his heart melted in fear from the fierce, beaked, harpy’s kiss. The water washed again over their feet, but she took no notice. She seemed unaware, she seemed to be pressing in her beaked mouth till she had the heart of him. Then, at last, she drew away and looked at him — looked at him. He knew what she wanted. He took her by the hand and led her across the foreshore, back to the sandhills. She went silently. He felt as if the ordeal of proof was upon him, for life or death. He led her to a dark hollow.

“No, here,” she said, going out to the slope full under the moonshine. She lay motionless, with wide-open eyes looking at the moon. He came direct to her, without preliminaries. She held him pinned down at the chest, awful. The fight, the struggle for consummation was terrible. It lasted till it was agony to his soul, till he succumbed, till he gave way as if dead, lay with his face buried, partly in

her hair, partly in the sand, motionless, as if he would be motionless now for ever, hidden away in the dark, buried, only buried, he only wanted to be buried in the goodly darkness, only that, and no more.

He seemed to swoon. It was a long time before he came to himself. He was aware of an unusual motion of her breast. He looked up. Her face lay like an image in the moonlight, the eyes wide open, rigid. But out of the eyes, slowly, there rolled a tear, that glittered in the moonlight as it ran down her cheek.

He felt as if as the knife were being pushed into his already dead body. With head strained back, he watched, drawn tense, for some minutes, watched the unaltering, rigid face like metal in the moonlight, the fixed, unseeing eye, in which slowly the water gathered, shook with glittering moonlight, then surcharged, brimmed over and ran trickling, a tear with its burden of moonlight, into the darkness, to fall in the sand.

He drew gradually away as if afraid, drew away — she did not move. He glanced at her — she lay the same. Could he break away? He turned, saw the open foreshore, clear in front of him, and he plunged away, on and on, ever farther from the horrible figure that lay stretched in the moonlight on the sands with the tears gathering and travelling on the motionless, eternal face.

He felt, if ever he must see her again, his bones must be broken, his body crushed, obliterated for ever. And as yet, he had the love of his own living body. He wandered on a long, long way, till his brain drew dark and he was unconscious with weariness. Then he curled in the deepest darkness he could find, under the sea-grass, and lay there without consciousness.

She broke from her tense cramp of agony gradually, though each movement was a goad of heavy pain. Gradually, she lifted her dead body from the sands, and rose at last. There was now no moon for her, no sea. All had passed away. She trailed her dead body to the house, to her room, where she lay down inert.

Morning brought her a new access of superficial life. But all within her was cold, dead, inert. Skrebensky appeared at breakfast. He was white and obliterated. They did not look at each other nor speak to each other. Apart from the ordinary, trivial talk of civil people, they were separate, they did not speak of what was between them during the remaining two days of their stay. They were like two dead people who dare not recognise, dare not see each other.

Then she packed her bag and put on her things. There were several guests leaving together, for the same train. He would have no opportunity to speak to her.

He tapped at her bedroom door at the last minute. She stood with her umbrella in her hand. He closed the door. He did not know what to say.

“Have you done with me?” he asked her at length, lifting his head.

“It isn’t me,” she said. “You have done with me — we have done with each other.”

He looked at her, at the closed face, which he thought so cruel. And he knew he could never touch her again. His will was broken, he was seared, but he clung to the life of his body.

“Well, what have I done?” he asked, in a rather querulous voice.

“I don’t know,” she said, in the same dull, feelingless voice. “It is finished. It had been a failure.”

He was silent. The words still burned his bowels.

“Is it my fault?” he said, looking up at length, challenging the last stroke.

“You couldn’t — — ” she began. But she broke down.

He turned away, afraid to hear more. She began to gather her bag, her handkerchief, her umbrella. She must be gone now. He was waiting for her to be gone.

At length the carriage came and she drove away with the rest. When she was out of sight, a great relief came over him, a pleasant banality. In an instant, everything was obliterated. He was childishly amiable and companionable all the day long. He was astonished that life could be so nice. It was better than it had been before. What a simple thing it was to be rid of her! How friendly and simple everything felt to him. What false thing had she been forcing on him?

But at night he dared not be alone. His room-mate had gone, and the hours of darkness were an agony to him. He watched the window in suffering and terror. When would this horrible darkness be lifted off him? Setting all his nerves, he endured it. He went to sleep with the dawn.

He never thought of her. Only his terror of the hours of night grew on him, obsessed him like a mania. He slept fitfully, with constant wakings of anguish. The fear wore away the core of him.

His plan was to sit up very late: drink in company until one or half-past one in the morning; then he would get three hours of sleep, of oblivion. It was light by five o’clock. But he was shocked almost to madness if he opened his eyes on the darkness.

In the daytime he was all right, always occupied with the thing of the moment, adhering to the trivial present, which seemed to him ample and satisfying. No matter how little and futile his occupations were, he gave himself to them entirely, and felt normal and fulfilled. He was always active, cheerful, gay, charming, trivial. Only he dreaded the darkness and silence of his own bedroom, when the darkness should challenge him upon his own soul. That he could not bear, as he could not bear to think about Ursula. He had no soul, no background. He never thought of Ursula, not once, he gave her no sign. She was the darkness,

the challenge, the horror. He turned to immediate things. He wanted to marry quickly, to screen himself from the darkness, the challenge of his own soul. He would marry his Colonel's daughter. Quickly, without hesitation, pursued by his obsession for activity, he wrote to this girl, telling her his engagement was broken — it had been a temporary infatuation which he less than any one else could understand now it was over — and could he see his very dear friend soon? He would not be happy till he had an answer.

He received a rather surprised reply from the girl, but she would be glad to see him. She was living with her aunt. He went down to her at once, and proposed to her the first evening. He was accepted. The marriage took place quietly within fourteen days' time. Ursula was not notified of the event. In another week, Skrebensky sailed with his new wife to India.

CHAPTER 16

The Rainbow

Ursula went home to Beldover faint, dim, closed up. She could scarcely speak or notice. It was as if her energy were frozen. Her people asked her what was the matter. She told them she had broken off the engagement with Skrebensky. They looked blank and angry. But she could not feel any more.

The weeks crawled by in apathy. He would have sailed for India now. She was scarcely interested. She was inert, without strength or interest.

Suddenly a shock ran through her, so violent that she thought she was struck down. Was she with child? She had been so stricken under the pain of herself and of him, this had never occurred to her. Now like a flame it took hold of her limbs and body. Was she with child?

In the first flaming hours of wonder, she did not know what she felt. She was as if tied to the stake. The flames were licking her and devouring her. But the flames were also good. They seemed to wear her away to rest. What she felt in her heart and her womb she did not know. It was a kind of swoon.

Then gradually the heaviness of her heart pressed and pressed into consciousness. What was she doing? Was she bearing a child? Bearing a child? To what?

Her flesh thrilled, but her soul was sick. It seemed, this child, like the seal set on her own nullity. Yet she was glad in her flesh that she was with child. She began to think, that she would write to Skrebensky, that she would go out to him, and marry him, and live simply as a good wife to him. What did the self, the form of life matter? Only the living from day to day mattered, the beloved existence in the body, rich, peaceful, complete, with no beyond, no further trouble, no further complication. She had been wrong, she had been arrogant and wicked, wanting that other thing, that fantastic freedom, that illusory, conceited fulfilment which she had imagined she could not have with Skrebensky. Who was she to be wanting some fantastic fulfilment in her life? Was it not enough that she had her man, her children, her place of shelter under the sun? Was it not enough for her, as it had been enough for her mother? She would marry and love her husband and fill her place simply. That was the ideal.

Suddenly she saw her mother in a just and true light. Her mother was simple and radically true. She had taken the life that was given. She had not, in her

arrogant conceit, insisted on creating life to fit herself. Her mother was right, profoundly right, and she herself had been false, trashy, conceited.

A great mood of humility came over her, and in this humility a bondaged sort of peace. She gave her limbs to the bondage, she loved the bondage, she called it peace. In this state she sat down to write to Skrebensky.

Since you left me I have suffered a great deal, and so have come to myself. I cannot tell you the remorse I feel for my wicked, perverse behaviour. It was given to me to love you, and to know your love for me. But instead of thankfully, on my knees, taking what God had given me, I must have the moon in my keeping, I must insist on having the moon for my own. Because I could not have it, everything else must go.

I do not know if you can ever forgive me. I could die with shame to think of my behaviour with you during our last times, and I don't know if I could ever bear to look you in the face again. Truly the best thing would be for me to die, and cover my fantasies for ever. But I find I am with child, so that cannot be.

It is your child, and for that reason I must revere it and submit my body entirely to its welfare, entertaining no thought of death, which once more is largely conceit. Therefore, because you once loved me, and because this child is your child, I ask you to have me back. If you will cable me one word, I will come to you as soon as I can. I swear to you to be a dutiful wife, and to serve you in all things. For now I only hate myself and my own conceited foolishness. I love you — I love the thought of you — you were natural and decent all through, whilst I was so false. Once I am with you again, I shall ask no more than to rest in your shelter all my life — —

This letter she wrote, sentence by sentence, as if from her deepest, sincerest heart. She felt that now, now, she was at the depths of herself. This was her true self, forever. With this document she would appear before God at the Judgment Day.

For what had a woman but to submit? What was her flesh but for childbearing, her strength for her children and her husband, the giver of life? At last she was a woman.

She posted her letter to his club, to be forwarded to him in Calcutta. He would receive it soon after his arrival in India — within three weeks of his arrival there. In a month's time she would receive word from him. Then she would go.

She was quite sure of him. She thought only of preparing her garments and of living quietly, peacefully, till the time when she should join him again and her history would be concluded for ever. The peace held like an unnatural calm for a long time. She was aware, however, of a gathering restiveness, a tumult impending within her. She tried to run away from it. She wished she could hear

from Skrebensky, in answer to her letter, so that her course should be resolved, she should be engaged in fulfilling her fate. It was this inactivity which made her liable to the revulsion she dreaded.

It was curious how little she cared about his not having written to her before. It was enough that she had sent her letter. She would get the required answer, that was all.

One afternoon in early October, feeling the seething rising to madness within her, she slipped out in the rain, to walk abroad, lest the house should suffocate her. Everywhere was drenched wet and deserted, the grimed houses glowed dull red, the butt houses burned scarlet in a gleam of light, under the glistening, blackish purple slates. Ursula went on towards Willey Green. She lifted her face and walked swiftly, seeing the passage of light across the shallow valley, seeing the colliery and its clouds of steam for a moment visionary in dim brilliance, away in the chaos of rain. Then the veils closed again. She was glad of the rain's privacy and intimacy.

Making on towards the wood, she saw the pale gleam of Willey Water through the cloud below, she walked the open space where hawthorn trees streamed like hair on the wind and round bushes were presences slowing through the atmosphere. It was very splendid, free and chaotic.

Yet she hurried to the wood for shelter. There, the vast booming overhead vibrated down and encircled her, tree-trunks spanned the circle of tremendous sound, myriads of tree-trunks, enormous and streaked black with water, thrust like stanchions upright between the roaring overhead and the sweeping of the circle underfoot. She glided between the tree-trunks, afraid of them. They might turn and shut her in as she went through their martialled silence.

So she flitted along, keeping an illusion that she was unnoticed. She felt like a bird that has flown in through the window of a hall where vast warriors sit at the board. Between their grave, booming ranks she was hastening, assuming she was unnoticed, till she emerged, with beating heart, through the far window and out into the open, upon the vivid green, marshy meadow.

She turned under the shelter of the common, seeing the great veils of rain swinging with slow, floating waves across the landscape. She was very wet and a long way from home, far enveloped in the rain and the waving landscape. She must beat her way back through all this fluctuation, back to stability and security.

A solitary thing, she took the track straight across the wilderness, going back. The path was a narrow groove in the turf between high, sere, tussocky grass; it was scarcely more than a rabbit run. So she moved swiftly along, watching her footing, going like a bird on the wind, with no thought, contained in motion. But

her heart had a small, living seed of fear, as she went through the wash of hollow space.

Suddenly she knew there was something else. Some horses were looming in the rain, not near yet. But they were going to be near. She continued her path, inevitably. They were horses in the lee of a clump of trees beyond, above her. She pursued her way with bent head. She did not want to lift her face to them. She did not want to know they were there. She went on in the wild track.

She knew the heaviness on her heart. It was the weight of the horses. But she would circumvent them. She would bear the weight steadily, and so escape. She would go straight on, and on, and be gone by.

Suddenly the weight deepened and her heart grew tense to bear it. Her breathing was laboured. But this weight also she could bear. She knew without looking that the horses were moving nearer. What were they? She felt the thud of their heavy hoofs on the ground. What was it that was drawing near her, what weight oppressing her heart? She did not know, she did not look.

Yet now her way was cut off. They were blocking her back. She knew they had gathered on a log bridge over the sedgy dike, a dark, heavy, powerfully heavy knot. Yet her feet went on and on. They would burst before her. They would burst before her. Her feet went on and on. And tense, and more tense became her nerves and her veins, they ran hot, they ran white hot, they must fuse and she must die.

But the horses had burst before her. In a sort of lightning of knowledge their movement travelled through her, the quiver and strain and thrust of their powerful flanks, as they burst before her and drew on, beyond.

She knew they had not gone, she knew they awaited her still. But she went on over the log bridge that their hoofs had churned and drummed, she went on, knowing things about them. She was aware of their breasts gripped, clenched narrow in a hold that never relaxed, she was aware of their red nostrils flaming with long endurance, and of their haunches, so rounded, so massive, pressing, pressing, pressing to burst the grip upon their breasts, pressing for ever till they went mad, running against the walls of time, and never bursting free. Their great haunches were smoothed and darkened with rain. But the darkness and wetness of rain could not put out the hard, urgent, massive fire that was locked within these flanks, never, never.

She went on, drawing near. She was aware of the great flash of hoofs, a bluish, iridescent flash surrounding a hollow of darkness. Large, large seemed the bluish, incandescent flash of the hoof-iron, large as a halo of lightning round the knotted darkness of the flanks. Like circles of lightning came the flash of hoofs from out of the powerful flanks.

They were awaiting her again. They had gathered under an oak tree, knotting their awful, blind, triumphing flanks together, and waiting, waiting. They were waiting for her approach. As if from a far distance she was drawing near, towards the line of twiggy oak trees where they made their intense darkness, gathered on a single bank.

She must draw near. But they broke away, they cantered round, making a wide circle to avoid noticing her, and cantered back into the open hillside behind her.

They were behind her. The way was open before her, to the gate in the high hedge in the near distance, so she could pass into the smaller, cultivated field, and so out to the high-road and the ordered world of man. Her way was clear. She lulled her heart. Yet her heart was couched with fear, couched with fear all along.

Suddenly she hesitated as if seized by lightning. She seemed to fall, yet found herself faltering forward with small steps. The thunder of horses galloping down the path behind her shook her, the weight came down upon her, down, to the moment of extinction. She could not look round, so the horses thundered upon her.

Cruelly, they swerved and crashed by on her left hand. She saw the fierce flanks crinkled and as yet inadequate, the great hoofs flashing bright as yet only brandished about her, and one by one the horses crashed by, intent, working themselves up.

They had gone by, brandishing themselves thunderously about her, enclosing her. They slackened their burst transport, they slowed down, and cantered together into a knot once more, in the corner by the gate and the trees ahead of her. They stirred, they moved uneasily, they settled their uneasy flanks into one group, one purpose. They were up against her.

Her heart was gone, she had no more heart. She knew she dare not draw near. That concentrated, knitted flank of the horse-group had conquered. It stirred uneasily, awaiting her, knowing its triumph. It stirred uneasily, with the uneasiness of awaited triumph. Her heart was gone, her limbs were dissolved, she was dissolved like water. All the hardness and looming power was in the massive body of the horse-group.

Her feet faltered, she came to a standstill. It was the crisis. The horses stirred their flanks uneasily. She looked away, failing. On her left, two hundred yards down the slope, the thick hedge ran parallel. At one point there was an oak tree. She might climb into the boughs of that oak tree, and so round and drop on the other side of the hedge.

Shuddering, with limbs like water, dreading every moment to fall, she began to work her way as if making a wide detour round the horse-mass. The horses

stirred their flanks in a knot against her. She trembled forward as if in a trance.

Then suddenly, in a flame of agony, she darted, seized the rugged knots of the oak tree and began to climb. Her body was weak but her hands were as hard as steel. She knew she was strong. She struggled in a great effort till she hung on the bough. She knew the horses were aware. She gained her foot-hold on the bough. The horses were loosening their knot, stirring, trying to realise. She was working her way round to the other side of the tree. As they started to canter towards her, she fell in a heap on the other side of the hedge.

For some moments she could not move. Then she saw through the rabbit-cleared bottom of the hedge the great, working hoofs of the horses as they cantered near. She could not bear it. She rose and walked swiftly, diagonally across the field. The horses galloped along the other side of the hedge to the corner, where they were held up. She could feel them there in their huddled group all the while she hastened across the bare field. They were almost pathetic, now. Her will alone carried her, till, trembling, she climbed the fence under a leaning thorn tree that overhung the grass by the high-road. The use went from her, she sat on the fence leaning back against the trunk of the thorn tree, motionless.

As she sat there, spent, time and the flux of change passed away from her, she lay as if unconscious upon the bed of the stream, like a stone, unconscious, unchanging, unchangeable, whilst everything rolled by in transience, leaving her there, a stone at rest on the bed of the stream, inalterable and passive, sunk to the bottom of all change.

She lay still a long time, with her back against the thorn tree trunk, in her final isolation. Some colliers passed, tramping heavily up the wet road, their voices sounding out, their shoulders up to their ears, their figures blotched and spectral in the rain. Some did not see her. She opened her eyes languidly as they passed by. Then one man going alone saw her. The whites of his eyes showed in his black face as he looked in wonderment at her. He hesitated in his walk, as if to speak to her, out of frightened concern for her. How she dreaded his speaking to her, dreaded his questioning her.

She slipped from her seat and went vaguely along the path — vaguely. It was a long way home. She had an idea that she must walk for the rest of her life, wearily, wearily. Step after step, step after step, and always along the wet, rainy road between the hedges. Step after step, step after step, the monotony produced a deep, cold sense of nausea in her. How profound was her cold nausea, how profound! That too plumbed the bottom. She seemed destined to find the bottom of all things to-day: the bottom of all things. Well, at any rate she was walking along the bottom-most bed — she was quite safe: quite safe, if she had to go on

and on for ever, seeing this was the very bottom, and there was nothing deeper. There was nothing deeper, you see, so one could not but feel certain, passive.

She arrived home at last. The climb up the hill to Beldover had been very trying. Why must one climb the hill? Why must one climb? Why not stay below? Why force one's way up the slope? Why force one's way up and up, when one is at the bottom? Oh, it was very trying, very wearying, very burdensome. Always burdens, always, always burdens. Still, she must get to the top and go home to bed. She must go to bed.

She got in and went upstairs in the dusk without its being noticed she was in such a sodden condition. She was too tired to go downstairs again. She got into bed and lay shuddering with cold, yet too apathetic to get up or call for relief. Then gradually she became more ill.

She was very ill for a fortnight, delirious, shaken and racked. But always, amid the ache of delirium, she had a dull firmness of being, a sense of permanency. She was in some way like the stone at the bottom of the river, inviolable and unalterable, no matter what storm raged in her body. Her soul lay still and permanent, full of pain, but itself for ever. Under all her illness, persisted a deep, inalterable knowledge.

She knew, and she cared no more. Throughout her illness, distorted into vague forms, persisted the question of herself and Skrebensky, like a gnawing ache that was still superficial, and did not touch her isolated, impregnable core of reality. But the corrosion of him burned in her till it burned itself out.

Must she belong to him, must she adhere to him? Something compelled her, and yet it was not real. Always the ache, the ache of unreality, of her belonging to Skrebensky. What bound her to him when she was not bound to him? Why did the falsity persist? Why did the falsity gnaw, gnaw, gnaw at her, why could she not wake up to clarity, to reality. If she could but wake up, if she could but wake up, the falsity of the dream, of her connection with Skrebensky, would be gone. But the sleep, the delirium pinned her down. Even when she was calm and sober she was in its spell.

Yet she was never in its spell. What extraneous thing bound her to him? There was some bond put upon her. Why could she not break it through? What was it? What was it?

In her delirium she beat and beat at the question. And at last her weariness gave her the answer — it was the child. The child bound her to him. The child was like a bond round her brain, tightened on her brain. It bound her to Skrebensky.

But why, why did it bind her to Skrebensky? Could she not have a child of herself? Was not the child her own affair? all her own affair? What had it to do

with him? Why must she be bound, aching and cramped with the bondage, to Skrebensky and Skrebensky's world? Anton's world: it became in her feverish brain a compression which enclosed her. If she could not get out of the compression she would go mad. The compression was Anton and Anton's world, not the Anton she possessed, but the Anton she did not possess, that which was owned by some other influence, by the world.

She fought and fought and fought all through her illness to be free of him and his world, to put it aside, to put it aside, into its place. Yet ever anew it gained ascendancy over her, it laid new hold on her. Oh, the unutterable weariness of her flesh, which she could not cast off, nor yet extricate. If she could but extricate herself, if she could but disengage herself from feeling, from her body, from all the vast encumbrances of the world that was in contact with her, from her father, and her mother, and her lover, and all her acquaintance.

Repeatedly, in an ache of utter weariness she repeated: "I have no father nor mother nor lover, I have no allocated place in the world of things, I do not belong to Beldover nor to Nottingham nor to England nor to this world, they none of them exist, I am trammelled and entangled in them, but they are all unreal. I must break out of it, like a nut from its shell which is an unreality."

And again, to her feverish brain, came the vivid reality of acorns in February lying on the floor of a wood with their shells burst and discarded and the kernel issued naked to put itself forth. She was the naked, clear kernel thrusting forth the clear, powerful shoot, and the world was a bygone winter, discarded, her mother and father and Anton, and college and all her friends, all cast off like a year that has gone by, whilst the kernel was free and naked and striving to take new root, to create a new knowledge of Eternity in the flux of Time. And the kernel was the only reality; the rest was cast off into oblivion.

This grew and grew upon her. When she opened her eyes in the afternoon and saw the window of her room and the faint, smoky landscape beyond, this was all husk and shell lying by, all husk and shell, she could see nothing else, she was enclosed still, but loosely enclosed. There was a space between her and the shell. It was burst, there was a rift in it. Soon she would have her root fixed in a new Day, her nakedness would take itself the bed of a new sky and a new air, this old, decaying, fibrous husk would be gone.

Gradually she began really to sleep. She slept in the confidence of her new reality. She slept breathing with her soul the new air of a new world. The peace was very deep and enriching. She had her root in new ground, she was gradually absorbed into growth.

When she woke at last it seemed as if a new day had come on the earth. How long, how long had she fought through the dust and obscurity, for this new

dawn? How frail and fine and clear she felt, like the most fragile flower that opens in the end of winter. But the pole of night was turned and the dawn was coming in.

Very far off was her old experience — Skrebensky, her parting with him — very far off. Some things were real; those first glamorous weeks. Before, these had seemed like hallucination. Now they seemed like common reality. The rest was unreal. She knew that Skrebensky had never become finally real. In the weeks of passionate ecstasy he had been with her in her desire, she had created him for the time being. But in the end he had failed and broken down.

Strange, what a void separated him and her. She liked him now, as she liked a memory, some bygone self. He was something of the past, finite. He was that which is known. She felt a poignant affection for him, as for that which is past. But, when she looked with her face forward, he was not. Nay, when she looked ahead, into the undiscovered land before her, what was there she could recognise but a fresh glow of light and inscrutable trees going up from the earth like smoke. It was the unknown, the unexplored, the undiscovered upon whose shore she had landed, alone, after crossing the void, the darkness which washed the New World and the Old.

There would be no child: she was glad. If there had been a child, it would have made little difference, however. She would have kept the child and herself, she would not have gone to Skrebensky. Anton belonged to the past.

There came the cablegram from Skrebensky: “I am married.” An old pain and anger and contempt stirred in her. Did he belong so utterly to the cast-off past? She repudiated him. He was as he was. It was good that he was as he was. Who was she to have a man according to her own desire? It was not for her to create, but to recognise a man created by God. The man should come from the Infinite and she should hail him. She was glad she could not create her man. She was glad she had nothing to do with his creation. She was glad that this lay within the scope of that vaster power in which she rested at last. The man would come out of Eternity to which she herself belonged.

As she grew better, she sat to watch a new creation. As she sat at her window, she saw the people go by in the street below, colliers, women, children, walking each in the husk of an old fruition, but visible through the husk, the swelling and the heaving contour of the new germination. In the still, silenced forms of the colliers she saw a sort of suspense, a waiting in pain for the new liberation; she saw the same in the false hard confidence of the women. The confidence of the women was brittle. It would break quickly to reveal the strength and patient effort of the new germination.

In everything she saw she grasped and groped to find the creation of the living

God, instead of the old, hard barren form of bygone living. Sometimes great terror possessed her. Sometimes she lost touch, she lost her feeling, she could only know the old horror of the husk which bound in her and all mankind. They were all in prison, they were all going mad.

She saw the stiffened bodies of the colliers, which seemed already enclosed in a coffin, she saw their unchanging eyes, the eyes of those who are buried alive: she saw the hard, cutting edges of the new houses, which seemed to spread over the hillside in their insentient triumph, the triumph of horrible, amorphous angles and straight lines, the expression of corruption triumphant and unopposed, corruption so pure that it is hard and brittle: she saw the dun atmosphere over the blackened hills opposite, the dark blotches of houses, slate roofed and amorphous, the old church-tower standing up in hideous obsolescence above raw new houses on the crest of the hill, the amorphous, brittle, hard edged new houses advancing from Beldover to meet the corrupt new houses from Lethley, the houses of Lethley advancing to mix with the houses of Hainor, a dry, brittle, terrible corruption spreading over the face of the land, and she was sick with a nausea so deep that she perished as she sat. And then, in the blowing clouds, she saw a band of faint iridescence colouring in faint colours a portion of the hill. And forgetting, startled, she looked for the hovering colour and saw a rainbow forming itself. In one place it gleamed fiercely, and, her heart anguished with hope, she sought the shadow of iris where the bow should be. Steadily the colour gathered, mysteriously, from nowhere, it took presence upon itself, there was a faint, vast rainbow. The arc bended and strengthened itself till it arched indomitable, making great architecture of light and colour and the space of heaven, its pedestals luminous in the corruption of new houses on the low hill, its arch the top of heaven.

And the rainbow stood on the earth. She knew that the sordid people who crept hard-scaled and separate on the face of the world's corruption were living still, that the rainbow was arched in their blood and would quiver to life in their spirit, that they would cast off their horny covering of disintegration, that new, clean, naked bodies would issue to a new germination, to a new growth, rising to the light and the wind and the clean rain of heaven. She saw in the rainbow the earth's new architecture, the old, brittle corruption of houses and factories swept away, the world built up in a living fabric of Truth, fitting to the over-arching heaven.

WOMEN IN LOVE



Women in Love was first published in 1920. It is the sequel to *The Rainbow* (1915), and follows the continuing loves and lives of the Brangwen sisters, Gudrun and Ursula. Gudrun Brangwen, an artist, pursues a destructive relationship with Gerald Crich, an industrialist. Lawrence contrasts this pair with the love that develops between Ursula and Rupert Birkin, an alienated intellectual who articulates many opinions associated with the author. The emotional relationships thus established are given further depth and tension by an unadmitted homoerotic attraction between Gerald and Rupert. The novel ranges over the whole of British society at the time of the First World War and eventually ends high up in the snows of the Swiss Alps. As with most of Lawrence's works, *Women in Love* caused controversy over its sexual subject matter.



Moorgreen Reservoir, where the drowning incident in Women in Love was based (Whilley Water)

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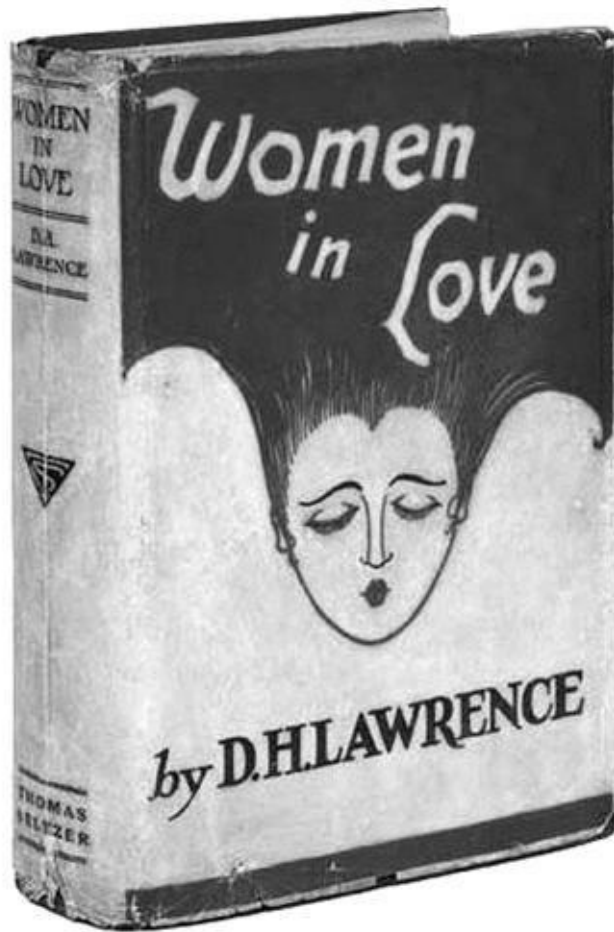
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The first edition

The relationship between four sensual people is limited:
They must find a new way.



LARRY KRAMER and MARTIN ROSEN present
ALAN BATES OLIVER REED
GLENDA JACKSON JENNIE LINDEN
is KEN RUSSELL'S film of
D. H. LAWRENCE'S
"WOMEN IN LOVE"
with ELEANOR BROWN
Written for the Screen and Produced by LARRY KRAMER Directed by KEN RUSSELL
Associate Producer Co-Producer by ROY BAIRD MARTIN ROSEN COLOR by DeLuxe
United Artists

The famous Ken Russell 1969 film adaptation

CHAPTER I.

SISTERS

Ursula and Gudrun Brangwen sat one morning in the window-bay of their father's house in Beldover, working and talking. Ursula was stitching a piece of brightly-coloured embroidery, and Gudrun was drawing upon a board which she held on her knee. They were mostly silent, talking as their thoughts strayed through their minds.

'Ursula,' said Gudrun, 'don't you REALLY WANT to get married?' Ursula laid her embroidery in her lap and looked up. Her face was calm and considerate.

'I don't know,' she replied. 'It depends how you mean.'

Gudrun was slightly taken aback. She watched her sister for some moments.

'Well,' she said, ironically, 'it usually means one thing! But don't you think anyhow, you'd be — ' she darkened slightly — 'in a better position than you are in now.'

A shadow came over Ursula's face.

'I might,' she said. 'But I'm not sure.'

Again Gudrun paused, slightly irritated. She wanted to be quite definite.

'You don't think one needs the EXPERIENCE of having been married?' she asked.

'Do you think it need BE an experience?' replied Ursula.

'Bound to be, in some way or other,' said Gudrun, coolly. 'Possibly undesirable, but bound to be an experience of some sort.'

'Not really,' said Ursula. 'More likely to be the end of experience.'

Gudrun sat very still, to attend to this.

'Of course,' she said, 'there's THAT to consider.' This brought the conversation to a close. Gudrun, almost angrily, took up her rubber and began to rub out part of her drawing. Ursula stitched absorbedly.

'You wouldn't consider a good offer?' asked Gudrun.

'I think I've rejected several,' said Ursula.

'REALLY!' Gudrun flushed dark — 'But anything really worth while? Have you REALLY?'

‘A thousand a year, and an awfully nice man. I liked him awfully,’ said Ursula.

‘Really! But weren’t you fearfully tempted?’

‘In the abstract but not in the concrete,’ said Ursula. ‘When it comes to the point, one isn’t even tempted — oh, if I were tempted, I’d marry like a shot. I’m only tempted NOT to.’ The faces of both sisters suddenly lit up with amusement.

‘Isn’t it an amazing thing,’ cried Gudrun, ‘how strong the temptation is, not to!’ They both laughed, looking at each other. In their hearts they were frightened.

There was a long pause, whilst Ursula stitched and Gudrun went on with her sketch. The sisters were women, Ursula twenty-six, and Gudrun twenty-five. But both had the remote, virgin look of modern girls, sisters of Artemis rather than of Hebe. Gudrun was very beautiful, passive, soft-skinned, soft-limbed. She wore a dress of dark-blue silky stuff, with ruches of blue and green linen lace in the neck and sleeves; and she had emerald-green stockings. Her look of confidence and diffidence contrasted with Ursula’s sensitive expectancy. The provincial people, intimidated by Gudrun’s perfect sang-froid and exclusive bareness of manner, said of her: ‘She is a smart woman.’ She had just come back from London, where she had spent several years, working at an art-school, as a student, and living a studio life.

‘I was hoping now for a man to come along,’ Gudrun said, suddenly catching her underlip between her teeth, and making a strange grimace, half sly smiling, half anguish. Ursula was afraid.

‘So you have come home, expecting him here?’ she laughed.

‘Oh my dear,’ cried Gudrun, strident, ‘I wouldn’t go out of my way to look for him. But if there did happen to come along a highly attractive individual of sufficient means — well — ’ she tailed off ironically. Then she looked searchingly at Ursula, as if to probe her. ‘Don’t you find yourself getting bored?’ she asked of her sister. ‘Don’t you find, that things fail to materialise? NOTHING MATERIALISES! Everything withers in the bud.’

‘What withers in the bud?’ asked Ursula.

‘Oh, everything — oneself — things in general.’ There was a pause, whilst each sister vaguely considered her fate.

‘It does frighten one,’ said Ursula, and again there was a pause. ‘But do you hope to get anywhere by just marrying?’

‘It seems to be the inevitable next step,’ said Gudrun. Ursula pondered this, with a little bitterness. She was a class mistress herself, in Willey Green Grammar School, as she had been for some years.

‘I know,’ she said, ‘it seems like that when one thinks in the abstract. But

really imagine it: imagine any man one knows, imagine him coming home to one every evening, and saying “Hello,” and giving one a kiss — ’

There was a blank pause.

‘Yes,’ said Gudrun, in a narrowed voice. ‘It’s just impossible. The man makes it impossible.’

‘Of course there’s children — ’ said Ursula doubtfully.

Gudrun’s face hardened.

‘Do you REALLY want children, Ursula?’ she asked coldly. A dazzled, baffled look came on Ursula’s face.

‘One feels it is still beyond one,’ she said.

‘DO you feel like that?’ asked Gudrun. ‘I get no feeling whatever from the thought of bearing children.’

Gudrun looked at Ursula with a masklike, expressionless face. Ursula knitted her brows.

‘Perhaps it isn’t genuine,’ she faltered. ‘Perhaps one doesn’t really want them, in one’s soul — only superficially.’ A hardness came over Gudrun’s face. She did not want to be too definite.

‘When one thinks of other people’s children — ’ said Ursula.

Again Gudrun looked at her sister, almost hostile.

‘Exactly,’ she said, to close the conversation.

The two sisters worked on in silence, Ursula having always that strange brightness of an essential flame that is caught, meshed, contravened. She lived a good deal by herself, to herself, working, passing on from day to day, and always thinking, trying to lay hold on life, to grasp it in her own understanding. Her active living was suspended, but underneath, in the darkness, something was coming to pass. If only she could break through the last integuments! She seemed to try and put her hands out, like an infant in the womb, and she could not, not yet. Still she had a strange prescience, an intimation of something yet to come.

She laid down her work and looked at her sister. She thought Gudrun so CHARMING, so infinitely charming, in her softness and her fine, exquisite richness of texture and delicacy of line. There was a certain playfulness about her too, such a piquancy or ironic suggestion, such an untouched reserve. Ursula admired her with all her soul.

‘Why did you come home, Prune?’ she asked.

Gudrun knew she was being admired. She sat back from her drawing and looked at Ursula, from under her finely-curved lashes.

‘Why did I come back, Ursula?’ she repeated. ‘I have asked myself a thousand times.’

‘And don’t you know?’

‘Yes, I think I do. I think my coming back home was just RECULER POUR MIEUX SAUTER.’

And she looked with a long, slow look of knowledge at Ursula.

‘I know!’ cried Ursula, looking slightly dazzled and falsified, and as if she did NOT know. ‘But where can one jump to?’

‘Oh, it doesn’t matter,’ said Gudrun, somewhat superbly. ‘If one jumps over the edge, one is bound to land somewhere.’

‘But isn’t it very risky?’ asked Ursula.

A slow mocking smile dawned on Gudrun’s face.

‘Ah!’ she said laughing. ‘What is it all but words!’ And so again she closed the conversation. But Ursula was still brooding.

‘And how do you find home, now you have come back to it?’ she asked.

Gudrun paused for some moments, coldly, before answering. Then, in a cold truthful voice, she said:

‘I find myself completely out of it.’

‘And father?’

Gudrun looked at Ursula, almost with resentment, as if brought to bay.

‘I haven’t thought about him: I’ve refrained,’ she said coldly.

‘Yes,’ wavered Ursula; and the conversation was really at an end. The sisters found themselves confronted by a void, a terrifying chasm, as if they had looked over the edge.

They worked on in silence for some time, Gudrun’s cheek was flushed with repressed emotion. She resented its having been called into being.

‘Shall we go out and look at that wedding?’ she asked at length, in a voice that was too casual.

‘Yes!’ cried Ursula, too eagerly, throwing aside her sewing and leaping up, as if to escape something, thus betraying the tension of the situation and causing a friction of dislike to go over Gudrun’s nerves.

As she went upstairs, Ursula was aware of the house, of her home round about her. And she loathed it, the sordid, too-familiar place! She was afraid at the depth of her feeling against the home, the milieu, the whole atmosphere and condition of this obsolete life. Her feeling frightened her.

The two girls were soon walking swiftly down the main road of Beldover, a wide street, part shops, part dwelling-houses, utterly formless and sordid, without poverty. Gudrun, new from her life in Chelsea and Sussex, shrank cruelly from this amorphous ugliness of a small colliery town in the Midlands. Yet forward she went, through the whole sordid gamut of pettiness, the long amorphous, gritty street. She was exposed to every stare, she passed on through

a stretch of torment. It was strange that she should have chosen to come back and test the full effect of this shapeless, barren ugliness upon herself. Why had she wanted to submit herself to it, did she still want to submit herself to it, the insufferable torture of these ugly, meaningless people, this defaced countryside? She felt like a beetle toiling in the dust. She was filled with repulsion.

They turned off the main road, past a black patch of common-garden, where sooty cabbage stumps stood shameless. No one thought to be ashamed. No one was ashamed of it all.

‘It is like a country in an underworld,’ said Gudrun. ‘The colliers bring it above-ground with them, shovel it up. Ursula, it’s marvellous, it’s really marvellous — it’s really wonderful, another world. The people are all ghouls, and everything is ghostly. Everything is a ghoulish replica of the real world, a replica, a ghoul, all soiled, everything sordid. It’s like being mad, Ursula.’

The sisters were crossing a black path through a dark, soiled field. On the left was a large landscape, a valley with collieries, and opposite hills with cornfields and woods, all blackened with distance, as if seen through a veil of crape. White and black smoke rose up in steady columns, magic within the dark air. Near at hand came the long rows of dwellings, approaching curved up the hill-slope, in straight lines along the brow of the hill. They were of darkened red brick, brittle, with dark slate roofs. The path on which the sisters walked was black, trodden-in by the feet of the recurrent colliers, and bounded from the field by iron fences; the stile that led again into the road was rubbed shiny by the moleskins of the passing miners. Now the two girls were going between some rows of dwellings, of the poorer sort. Women, their arms folded over their coarse aprons, standing gossiping at the end of their block, stared after the Brangwen sisters with that long, unwearying stare of aborigines; children called out names.

Gudrun went on her way half dazed. If this were human life, if these were human beings, living in a complete world, then what was her own world, outside? She was aware of her grass-green stockings, her large grass-green velour hat, her full soft coat, of a strong blue colour. And she felt as if she were treading in the air, quite unstable, her heart was contracted, as if at any minute she might be precipitated to the ground. She was afraid.

She clung to Ursula, who, through long usage was inured to this violation of a dark, uncreated, hostile world. But all the time her heart was crying, as if in the midst of some ordeal: ‘I want to go back, I want to go away, I want not to know it, not to know that this exists.’ Yet she must go forward.

Ursula could feel her suffering.

‘You hate this, don’t you?’ she asked.

‘It bewilders me,’ stammered Gudrun.

‘You won’t stay long,’ replied Ursula.

And Gudrun went along, grasping at release.

They drew away from the colliery region, over the curve of the hill, into the purer country of the other side, towards Willey Green. Still the faint glamour of blackness persisted over the fields and the wooded hills, and seemed darkly to gleam in the air. It was a spring day, chill, with snatches of sunshine. Yellow celandines showed out from the hedge-bottoms, and in the cottage gardens of Willey Green, currant-bushes were breaking into leaf, and little flowers were coming white on the grey alyssum that hung over the stone walls.

Turning, they passed down the high-road, that went between high banks towards the church. There, in the lowest bend of the road, low under the trees, stood a little group of expectant people, waiting to see the wedding. The daughter of the chief mine-owner of the district, Thomas Crich, was getting married to a naval officer.

‘Let us go back,’ said Gudrun, swerving away. ‘There are all those people.’

And she hung wavering in the road.

‘Never mind them,’ said Ursula, ‘they’re all right. They all know me, they don’t matter.’

‘But must we go through them?’ asked Gudrun.

‘They’re quite all right, really,’ said Ursula, going forward. And together the two sisters approached the group of uneasy, watchful common people. They were chiefly women, colliers’ wives of the more shiftless sort. They had watchful, underworld faces.

The two sisters held themselves tense, and went straight towards the gate. The women made way for them, but barely sufficient, as if grudging to yield ground. The sisters passed in silence through the stone gateway and up the steps, on the red carpet, a policeman estimating their progress.

‘What price the stockings!’ said a voice at the back of Gudrun. A sudden fierce anger swept over the girl, violent and murderous. She would have liked them all annihilated, cleared away, so that the world was left clear for her. How she hated walking up the churchyard path, along the red carpet, continuing in motion, in their sight.

‘I won’t go into the church,’ she said suddenly, with such final decision that Ursula immediately halted, turned round, and branched off up a small side path which led to the little private gate of the Grammar School, whose grounds adjoined those of the church.

Just inside the gate of the school shrubbery, outside the churchyard, Ursula sat down for a moment on the low stone wall under the laurel bushes, to rest. Behind her, the large red building of the school rose up peacefully, the windows

all open for the holiday. Over the shrubs, before her, were the pale roofs and tower of the old church. The sisters were hidden by the foliage.

Gudrun sat down in silence. Her mouth was shut close, her face averted. She was regretting bitterly that she had ever come back. Ursula looked at her, and thought how amazingly beautiful she was, flushed with discomfiture. But she caused a constraint over Ursula's nature, a certain weariness. Ursula wished to be alone, freed from the tightness, the enclosure of Gudrun's presence.

'Are we going to stay here?' asked Gudrun.

'I was only resting a minute,' said Ursula, getting up as if rebuked. 'We will stand in the corner by the fives-court, we shall see everything from there.'

For the moment, the sunshine fell brightly into the churchyard, there was a vague scent of sap and of spring, perhaps of violets from off the graves. Some white daisies were out, bright as angels. In the air, the unfolding leaves of a copper-beech were blood-red.

Punctually at eleven o'clock, the carriages began to arrive. There was a stir in the crowd at the gate, a concentration as a carriage drove up, wedding guests were mounting up the steps and passing along the red carpet to the church. They were all gay and excited because the sun was shining.

Gudrun watched them closely, with objective curiosity. She saw each one as a complete figure, like a character in a book, or a subject in a picture, or a marionette in a theatre, a finished creation. She loved to recognise their various characteristics, to place them in their true light, give them their own surroundings, settle them for ever as they passed before her along the path to the church. She knew them, they were finished, sealed and stamped and finished with, for her. There was none that had anything unknown, unresolved, until the Criches themselves began to appear. Then her interest was piqued. Here was something not quite so precluded.

There came the mother, Mrs Crich, with her eldest son Gerald. She was a queer unkempt figure, in spite of the attempts that had obviously been made to bring her into line for the day. Her face was pale, yellowish, with a clear, transparent skin, she leaned forward rather, her features were strongly marked, handsome, with a tense, unseeing, predatory look. Her colourless hair was untidy, wisps floating down on to her sac coat of dark blue silk, from under her blue silk hat. She looked like a woman with a monomania, furtive almost, but heavily proud.

Her son was of a fair, sun-tanned type, rather above middle height, well-made, and almost exaggeratedly well-dressed. But about him also was the strange, guarded look, the unconscious glisten, as if he did not belong to the same creation as the people about him. Gudrun lighted on him at once. There was

something northern about him that magnetised her. In his clear northern flesh and his fair hair was a glisten like sunshine refracted through crystals of ice. And he looked so new, unbroached, pure as an arctic thing. Perhaps he was thirty years old, perhaps more. His gleaming beauty, maleness, like a young, good-humoured, smiling wolf, did not blind her to the significant, sinister stillness in his bearing, the lurking danger of his unsubdued temper. 'His totem is the wolf,' she repeated to herself. 'His mother is an old, unbroken wolf.' And then she experienced a keen paroxysm, a transport, as if she had made some incredible discovery, known to nobody else on earth. A strange transport took possession of her, all her veins were in a paroxysm of violent sensation. 'Good God!' she exclaimed to herself, 'what is this?' And then, a moment after, she was saying assuredly, 'I shall know more of that man.' She was tortured with desire to see him again, a nostalgia, a necessity to see him again, to make sure it was not all a mistake, that she was not deluding herself, that she really felt this strange and overwhelming sensation on his account, this knowledge of him in her essence, this powerful apprehension of him. 'Am I REALLY singled out for him in some way, is there really some pale gold, arctic light that envelopes only us two?' she asked herself. And she could not believe it, she remained in a muse, scarcely conscious of what was going on around.

The bridesmaids were here, and yet the bridegroom had not come. Ursula wondered if something was amiss, and if the wedding would yet all go wrong. She felt troubled, as if it rested upon her. The chief bridesmaids had arrived. Ursula watched them come up the steps. One of them she knew, a tall, slow, reluctant woman with a weight of fair hair and a pale, long face. This was Hermione Roddice, a friend of the Criches. Now she came along, with her head held up, balancing an enormous flat hat of pale yellow velvet, on which were streaks of ostrich feathers, natural and grey. She drifted forward as if scarcely conscious, her long blanched face lifted up, not to see the world. She was rich. She wore a dress of silky, frail velvet, of pale yellow colour, and she carried a lot of small rose-coloured cyclamens. Her shoes and stockings were of brownish grey, like the feathers on her hat, her hair was heavy, she drifted along with a peculiar fixity of the hips, a strange unwilling motion. She was impressive, in her lovely pale-yellow and brownish-rose, yet macabre, something repulsive. People were silent when she passed, impressed, roused, wanting to jeer, yet for some reason silenced. Her long, pale face, that she carried lifted up, somewhat in the Rossetti fashion, seemed almost drugged, as if a strange mass of thoughts coiled in the darkness within her, and she was never allowed to escape.

Ursula watched her with fascination. She knew her a little. She was the most remarkable woman in the Midlands. Her father was a Derbyshire Baronet of the

old school, she was a woman of the new school, full of intellectuality, and heavy, nerve-worn with consciousness. She was passionately interested in reform, her soul was given up to the public cause. But she was a man's woman, it was the manly world that held her.

She had various intimacies of mind and soul with various men of capacity. Ursula knew, among these men, only Rupert Birkin, who was one of the school-inspectors of the county. But Gudrun had met others, in London. Moving with her artist friends in different kinds of society, Gudrun had already come to know a good many people of repute and standing. She had met Hermione twice, but they did not take to each other. It would be queer to meet again down here in the Midlands, where their social standing was so diverse, after they had known each other on terms of equality in the houses of sundry acquaintances in town. For Gudrun had been a social success, and had her friends among the slack aristocracy that keeps touch with the arts.

Hermione knew herself to be well-dressed; she knew herself to be the social equal, if not far the superior, of anyone she was likely to meet in Willey Green. She knew she was accepted in the world of culture and of intellect. She was a KULTURTRAGER, a medium for the culture of ideas. With all that was highest, whether in society or in thought or in public action, or even in art, she was at one, she moved among the foremost, at home with them. No one could put her down, no one could make mock of her, because she stood among the first, and those that were against her were below her, either in rank, or in wealth, or in high association of thought and progress and understanding. So, she was invulnerable. All her life, she had sought to make herself invulnerable, unassailable, beyond reach of the world's judgment.

And yet her soul was tortured, exposed. Even walking up the path to the church, confident as she was that in every respect she stood beyond all vulgar judgment, knowing perfectly that her appearance was complete and perfect, according to the first standards, yet she suffered a torture, under her confidence and her pride, feeling herself exposed to wounds and to mockery and to despite. She always felt vulnerable, vulnerable, there was always a secret chink in her armour. She did not know herself what it was. It was a lack of robust self, she had no natural sufficiency, there was a terrible void, a lack, a deficiency of being within her.

And she wanted someone to close up this deficiency, to close it up for ever. She craved for Rupert Birkin. When he was there, she felt complete, she was sufficient, whole. For the rest of time she was established on the sand, built over a chasm, and, in spite of all her vanity and securities, any common maid-servant of positive, robust temper could fling her down this bottomless pit of

insufficiency, by the slightest movement of jeering or contempt. And all the while the pensive, tortured woman piled up her own defences of aesthetic knowledge, and culture, and world-visions, and disinterestedness. Yet she could never stop up the terrible gap of insufficiency.

If only Birkin would form a close and abiding connection with her, she would be safe during this fretful voyage of life. He could make her sound and triumphant, triumphant over the very angels of heaven. If only he would do it! But she was tortured with fear, with misgiving. She made herself beautiful, she strove so hard to come to that degree of beauty and advantage, when he should be convinced. But always there was a deficiency.

He was perverse too. He fought her off, he always fought her off. The more she strove to bring him to her, the more he battled her back. And they had been lovers now, for years. Oh, it was so wearying, so aching; she was so tired. But still she believed in herself. She knew he was trying to leave her. She knew he was trying to break away from her finally, to be free. But still she believed in her strength to keep him, she believed in her own higher knowledge. His own knowledge was high, she was the central touchstone of truth. She only needed his conjunction with her.

And this, this conjunction with her, which was his highest fulfilment also, with the perverseness of a wilful child he wanted to deny. With the wilfulness of an obstinate child, he wanted to break the holy connection that was between them.

He would be at this wedding; he was to be groom's man. He would be in the church, waiting. He would know when she came. She shuddered with nervous apprehension and desire as she went through the church-door. He would be there, surely he would see how beautiful her dress was, surely he would see how she had made herself beautiful for him. He would understand, he would be able to see how she was made for him, the first, how she was, for him, the highest. Surely at last he would be able to accept his highest fate, he would not deny her.

In a little convulsion of too-tired yearning, she entered the church and looked slowly along her cheeks for him, her slender body convulsed with agitation. As best man, he would be standing beside the altar. She looked slowly, deferring in her certainty.

And then, he was not there. A terrible storm came over her, as if she were drowning. She was possessed by a devastating hopelessness. And she approached mechanically to the altar. Never had she known such a pang of utter and final hopelessness. It was beyond death, so utterly null, desert.

The bridegroom and the groom's man had not yet come. There was a growing consternation outside. Ursula felt almost responsible. She could not bear it that

the bride should arrive, and no groom. The wedding must not be a fiasco, it must not.

But here was the bride's carriage, adorned with ribbons and cockades. Gaily the grey horses curvetted to their destination at the church-gate, a laughter in the whole movement. Here was the quick of all laughter and pleasure. The door of the carriage was thrown open, to let out the very blossom of the day. The people on the roadway murmured faintly with the discontented murmuring of a crowd.

The father stepped out first into the air of the morning, like a shadow. He was a tall, thin, careworn man, with a thin black beard that was touched with grey. He waited at the door of the carriage patiently, self-obliterated.

In the opening of the doorway was a shower of fine foliage and flowers, a whiteness of satin and lace, and a sound of a gay voice saying:

'How do I get out?'

A ripple of satisfaction ran through the expectant people. They pressed near to receive her, looking with zest at the stooping blond head with its flower buds, and at the delicate, white, tentative foot that was reaching down to the step of the carriage. There was a sudden foaming rush, and the bride like a sudden surf-rush, floating all white beside her father in the morning shadow of trees, her veil flowing with laughter.

'That's done it!' she said.

She put her hand on the arm of her careworn, sallow father, and frothing her light draperies, proceeded over the eternal red carpet. Her father, mute and yellowish, his black beard making him look more careworn, mounted the steps stiffly, as if his spirit were absent; but the laughing mist of the bride went along with him undiminished.

And no bridegroom had arrived! It was intolerable for her. Ursula, her heart strained with anxiety, was watching the hill beyond; the white, descending road, that should give sight of him. There was a carriage. It was running. It had just come into sight. Yes, it was he. Ursula turned towards the bride and the people, and, from her place of vantage, gave an inarticulate cry. She wanted to warn them that he was coming. But her cry was inarticulate and inaudible, and she flushed deeply, between her desire and her wincing confusion.

The carriage rattled down the hill, and drew near. There was a shout from the people. The bride, who had just reached the top of the steps, turned round gaily to see what was the commotion. She saw a confusion among the people, a cab pulling up, and her lover dropping out of the carriage, and dodging among the horses and into the crowd.

'Tibs! Tibs!' she cried in her sudden, mocking excitement, standing high on the path in the sunlight and waving her bouquet. He, dodging with his hat in his

hand, had not heard.

‘Tibs!’ she cried again, looking down to him.

He glanced up, unaware, and saw the bride and her father standing on the path above him. A queer, startled look went over his face. He hesitated for a moment. Then he gathered himself together for a leap, to overtake her.

‘Ah-h-h!’ came her strange, intaken cry, as, on the reflex, she started, turned and fled, scudding with an unthinkable swift beating of her white feet and fraying of her white garments, towards the church. Like a hound the young man was after her, leaping the steps and swinging past her father, his supple haunches working like those of a hound that bears down on the quarry.

‘Ay, after her!’ cried the vulgar women below, carried suddenly into the sport.

She, her flowers shaken from her like froth, was steadying herself to turn the angle of the church. She glanced behind, and with a wild cry of laughter and challenge, veered, poised, and was gone beyond the grey stone buttress. In another instant the bridegroom, bent forward as he ran, had caught the angle of the silent stone with his hand, and had swung himself out of sight, his supple, strong loins vanishing in pursuit.

Instantly cries and exclamations of excitement burst from the crowd at the gate. And then Ursula noticed again the dark, rather stooping figure of Mr Crich, waiting suspended on the path, watching with expressionless face the flight to the church. It was over, and he turned round to look behind him, at the figure of Rupert Birkin, who at once came forward and joined him.

‘We’ll bring up the rear,’ said Birkin, a faint smile on his face.

‘Ay!’ replied the father laconically. And the two men turned together up the path.

Birkin was as thin as Mr Crich, pale and ill-looking. His figure was narrow but nicely made. He went with a slight trail of one foot, which came only from self-consciousness. Although he was dressed correctly for his part, yet there was an innate incongruity which caused a slight ridiculousness in his appearance. His nature was clever and separate, he did not fit at all in the conventional occasion. Yet he subordinated himself to the common idea, travestied himself.

He affected to be quite ordinary, perfectly and marvellously commonplace. And he did it so well, taking the tone of his surroundings, adjusting himself quickly to his interlocutor and his circumstance, that he achieved a verisimilitude of ordinary commonplaceness that usually propitiated his onlookers for the moment, disarmed them from attacking his singleness.

Now he spoke quite easily and pleasantly to Mr Crich, as they walked along the path; he played with situations like a man on a tight-rope: but always on a tight-rope, pretending nothing but ease.

‘I’m sorry we are so late,’ he was saying. ‘We couldn’t find a button-hook, so it took us a long time to button our boots. But you were to the moment.’

‘We are usually to time,’ said Mr Crich.

‘And I’m always late,’ said Birkin. ‘But today I was REALLY punctual, only accidentally not so. I’m sorry.’

The two men were gone, there was nothing more to see, for the time. Ursula was left thinking about Birkin. He piqued her, attracted her, and annoyed her.

She wanted to know him more. She had spoken with him once or twice, but only in his official capacity as inspector. She thought he seemed to acknowledge some kinship between her and him, a natural, tacit understanding, a using of the same language. But there had been no time for the understanding to develop. And something kept her from him, as well as attracted her to him. There was a certain hostility, a hidden ultimate reserve in him, cold and inaccessible.

Yet she wanted to know him.

‘What do you think of Rupert Birkin?’ she asked, a little reluctantly, of Gudrun. She did not want to discuss him.

‘What do I think of Rupert Birkin?’ repeated Gudrun. ‘I think he’s attractive — decidedly attractive. What I can’t stand about him is his way with other people — his way of treating any little fool as if she were his greatest consideration. One feels so awfully sold, oneself.’

‘Why does he do it?’ said Ursula.

‘Because he has no real critical faculty — of people, at all events,’ said Gudrun. ‘I tell you, he treats any little fool as he treats me or you — and it’s such an insult.’

‘Oh, it is,’ said Ursula. ‘One must discriminate.’

‘One MUST discriminate,’ repeated Gudrun. ‘But he’s a wonderful chap, in other respects — a marvellous personality. But you can’t trust him.’

‘Yes,’ said Ursula vaguely. She was always forced to assent to Gudrun’s pronouncements, even when she was not in accord altogether.

The sisters sat silent, waiting for the wedding party to come out. Gudrun was impatient of talk. She wanted to think about Gerald Crich. She wanted to see if the strong feeling she had got from him was real. She wanted to have herself ready.

Inside the church, the wedding was going on. Hermione Roddice was thinking only of Birkin. He stood near her. She seemed to gravitate physically towards him. She wanted to stand touching him. She could hardly be sure he was near her, if she did not touch him. Yet she stood subjected through the wedding service.

She had suffered so bitterly when he did not come, that still she was dazed.

Still she was gnawed as by a neuralgia, tormented by his potential absence from her. She had awaited him in a faint delirium of nervous torture. As she stood bearing herself pensively, the rapt look on her face, that seemed spiritual, like the angels, but which came from torture, gave her a certain poignancy that tore his heart with pity. He saw her bowed head, her rapt face, the face of an almost demoniacal ecstatic. Feeling him looking, she lifted her face and sought his eyes, her own beautiful grey eyes flaring him a great signal. But he avoided her look, she sank her head in torment and shame, the gnawing at her heart going on. And he too was tortured with shame, and ultimate dislike, and with acute pity for her, because he did not want to meet her eyes, he did not want to receive her flare of recognition.

The bride and bridegroom were married, the party went into the vestry. Hermione crowded involuntarily up against Birkin, to touch him. And he endured it.

Outside, Gudrun and Ursula listened for their father's playing on the organ. He would enjoy playing a wedding march. Now the married pair were coming! The bells were ringing, making the air shake. Ursula wondered if the trees and the flowers could feel the vibration, and what they thought of it, this strange motion in the air. The bride was quite demure on the arm of the bridegroom, who stared up into the sky before him, shutting and opening his eyes unconsciously, as if he were neither here nor there. He looked rather comical, blinking and trying to be in the scene, when emotionally he was violated by his exposure to a crowd. He looked a typical naval officer, manly, and up to his duty.

Birkin came with Hermione. She had a rapt, triumphant look, like the fallen angels restored, yet still subtly demoniacal, now she held Birkin by the arm. And he was expressionless, neutralised, possessed by her as if it were his fate, without question.

Gerald Crich came, fair, good-looking, healthy, with a great reserve of energy. He was erect and complete, there was a strange stealth glistening through his amiable, almost happy appearance. Gudrun rose sharply and went away. She could not bear it. She wanted to be alone, to know this strange, sharp inoculation that had changed the whole temper of her blood.

CHAPTER II.

SHORTLANDS

The Brangwens went home to Beldover, the wedding-party gathered at Shortlands, the Criches' home. It was a long, low old house, a sort of manor farm, that spread along the top of a slope just beyond the narrow little lake of Willey Water. Shortlands looked across a sloping meadow that might be a park, because of the large, solitary trees that stood here and there, across the water of the narrow lake, at the wooded hill that successfully hid the colliery valley beyond, but did not quite hide the rising smoke. Nevertheless, the scene was rural and picturesque, very peaceful, and the house had a charm of its own.

It was crowded now with the family and the wedding guests. The father, who was not well, withdrew to rest. Gerald was host. He stood in the homely entrance hall, friendly and easy, attending to the men. He seemed to take pleasure in his social functions, he smiled, and was abundant in hospitality.

The women wandered about in a little confusion, chased hither and thither by the three married daughters of the house. All the while there could be heard the characteristic, imperious voice of one Crich woman or another calling 'Helen, come here a minute,' 'Marjory, I want you — here.' 'Oh, I say, Mrs Witham — .' There was a great rustling of skirts, swift glimpses of smartly-dressed women, a child danced through the hall and back again, a maidservant came and went hurriedly.

Meanwhile the men stood in calm little groups, chatting, smoking, pretending to pay no heed to the rustling animation of the women's world. But they could not really talk, because of the glassy ravel of women's excited, cold laughter and running voices. They waited, uneasy, suspended, rather bored. But Gerald remained as if genial and happy, unaware that he was waiting or unoccupied, knowing himself the very pivot of the occasion.

Suddenly Mrs Crich came noiselessly into the room, peering about with her strong, clear face. She was still wearing her hat, and her sac coat of blue silk.

'What is it, mother?' said Gerald.

'Nothing, nothing!' she answered vaguely. And she went straight towards

Birkin, who was talking to a Crich brother-in-law.

‘How do you do, Mr Birkin,’ she said, in her low voice, that seemed to take no count of her guests. She held out her hand to him.

‘Oh Mrs Crich,’ replied Birkin, in his readily-changing voice, ‘I couldn’t come to you before.’

‘I don’t know half the people here,’ she said, in her low voice. Her son-in-law moved uneasily away.

‘And you don’t like strangers?’ laughed Birkin. ‘I myself can never see why one should take account of people, just because they happen to be in the room with one: why SHOULD I know they are there?’

‘Why indeed, why indeed!’ said Mrs Crich, in her low, tense voice. ‘Except that they ARE there. I don’t know people whom I find in the house. The children introduce them to me — ”Mother, this is Mr So-and-so.” I am no further. What has Mr So-and-so to do with his own name? — and what have I to do with either him or his name?’

She looked up at Birkin. She startled him. He was flattered too that she came to talk to him, for she took hardly any notice of anybody. He looked down at her tense clear face, with its heavy features, but he was afraid to look into her heavy-seeing blue eyes. He noticed instead how her hair looped in slack, slovenly strands over her rather beautiful ears, which were not quite clean. Neither was her neck perfectly clean. Even in that he seemed to belong to her, rather than to the rest of the company; though, he thought to himself, he was always well washed, at any rate at the neck and ears.

He smiled faintly, thinking these things. Yet he was tense, feeling that he and the elderly, estranged woman were conferring together like traitors, like enemies within the camp of the other people. He resembled a deer, that throws one ear back upon the trail behind, and one ear forward, to know what is ahead.

‘People don’t really matter,’ he said, rather unwilling to continue.

The mother looked up at him with sudden, dark interrogation, as if doubting his sincerity.

‘How do you mean, MATTER?’ she asked sharply.

‘Not many people are anything at all,’ he answered, forced to go deeper than he wanted to. ‘They jingle and giggle. It would be much better if they were just wiped out. Essentially, they don’t exist, they aren’t there.’

She watched him steadily while he spoke.

‘But we didn’t imagine them,’ she said sharply.

‘There’s nothing to imagine, that’s why they don’t exist.’

‘Well,’ she said, ‘I would hardly go as far as that. There they are, whether they exist or no. It doesn’t rest with me to decide on their existence. I only know that

I can't be expected to take count of them all. You can't expect me to know them, just because they happen to be there. As far as I go they might as well not be there.'

'Exactly,' he replied.

'Mightn't they?' she asked again.

'Just as well,' he repeated. And there was a little pause.

'Except that they ARE there, and that's a nuisance,' she said. 'There are my sons-in-law,' she went on, in a sort of monologue. 'Now Laura's got married, there's another. And I really don't know John from James yet. They come up to me and call me mother. I know what they will say — "how are you, mother?" I ought to say, "I am not your mother, in any sense." But what is the use? There they are. I have had children of my own. I suppose I know them from another woman's children.'

'One would suppose so,' he said.

She looked at him, somewhat surprised, forgetting perhaps that she was talking to him. And she lost her thread.

She looked round the room, vaguely. Birkin could not guess what she was looking for, nor what she was thinking. Evidently she noticed her sons.

'Are my children all there?' she asked him abruptly.

He laughed, startled, afraid perhaps.

'I scarcely know them, except Gerald,' he replied.

'Gerald!' she exclaimed. 'He's the most wanting of them all. You'd never think it, to look at him now, would you?'

'No,' said Birkin.

The mother looked across at her eldest son, stared at him heavily for some time.

'Ay,' she said, in an incomprehensible monosyllable, that sounded profoundly cynical. Birkin felt afraid, as if he dared not realise. And Mrs Crich moved away, forgetting him. But she returned on her traces.

'I should like him to have a friend,' she said. 'He has never had a friend.'

Birkin looked down into her eyes, which were blue, and watching heavily. He could not understand them. 'Am I my brother's keeper?' he said to himself, almost flippantly.

Then he remembered, with a slight shock, that that was Cain's cry. And Gerald was Cain, if anybody. Not that he was Cain, either, although he had slain his brother. There was such a thing as pure accident, and the consequences did not attach to one, even though one had killed one's brother in such wise. Gerald as a boy had accidentally killed his brother. What then? Why seek to draw a brand and a curse across the life that had caused the accident? A man can live by

accident, and die by accident. Or can he not? Is every man's life subject to pure accident, is it only the race, the genus, the species, that has a universal reference? Or is this not true, is there no such thing as pure accident? Has EVERYTHING that happens a universal significance? Has it? Birkin, pondering as he stood there, had forgotten Mrs Crich, as she had forgotten him.

He did not believe that there was any such thing as accident. It all hung together, in the deepest sense.

Just as he had decided this, one of the Crich daughters came up, saying:

'Won't you come and take your hat off, mother dear? We shall be sitting down to eat in a minute, and it's a formal occasion, darling, isn't it?' She drew her arm through her mother's, and they went away. Birkin immediately went to talk to the nearest man.

The gong sounded for the luncheon. The men looked up, but no move was made to the dining-room. The women of the house seemed not to feel that the sound had meaning for them. Five minutes passed by. The elderly manservant, Crowther, appeared in the doorway exasperatedly. He looked with appeal at Gerald. The latter took up a large, curved conch shell, that lay on a shelf, and without reference to anybody, blew a shattering blast. It was a strange rousing noise, that made the heart beat. The summons was almost magical. Everybody came running, as if at a signal. And then the crowd in one impulse moved to the dining-room.

Gerald waited a moment, for his sister to play hostess. He knew his mother would pay no attention to her duties. But his sister merely crowded to her seat. Therefore the young man, slightly too dictatorial, directed the guests to their places.

There was a moment's lull, as everybody looked at the BORS D'OEUVRES that were being handed round. And out of this lull, a girl of thirteen or fourteen, with her long hair down her back, said in a calm, self-possessed voice:

'Gerald, you forget father, when you make that unearthly noise.'

'Do I?' he answered. And then, to the company, 'Father is lying down, he is not quite well.'

'How is he, really?' called one of the married daughters, peeping round the immense wedding cake that towered up in the middle of the table shedding its artificial flowers.

'He has no pain, but he feels tired,' replied Winifred, the girl with the hair down her back.

The wine was filled, and everybody was talking boisterously. At the far end of the table sat the mother, with her loosely-looped hair. She had Birkin for a neighbour. Sometimes she glanced fiercely down the rows of faces, bending

forwards and staring unceremoniously. And she would say in a low voice to Birkin:

‘Who is that young man?’

‘I don’t know,’ Birkin answered discreetly.

‘Have I seen him before?’ she asked.

‘I don’t think so. I haven’t,’ he replied. And she was satisfied. Her eyes closed wearily, a peace came over her face, she looked like a queen in repose. Then she started, a little social smile came on her face, for a moment she looked the pleasant hostess. For a moment she bent graciously, as if everyone were welcome and delightful. And then immediately the shadow came back, a sullen, eagle look was on her face, she glanced from under her brows like a sinister creature at bay, hating them all.

‘Mother,’ called Diana, a handsome girl a little older than Winifred, ‘I may have wine, mayn’t I?’

‘Yes, you may have wine,’ replied the mother automatically, for she was perfectly indifferent to the question.

And Diana beckoned to the footman to fill her glass.

‘Gerald shouldn’t forbid me,’ she said calmly, to the company at large.

‘All right, Di,’ said her brother amiably. And she glanced challenge at him as she drank from her glass.

There was a strange freedom, that almost amounted to anarchy, in the house. It was rather a resistance to authority, than liberty. Gerald had some command, by mere force of personality, not because of any granted position. There was a quality in his voice, amiable but dominant, that cowed the others, who were all younger than he.

Hermione was having a discussion with the bridegroom about nationality.

‘No,’ she said, ‘I think that the appeal to patriotism is a mistake. It is like one house of business rivalling another house of business.’

‘Well you can hardly say that, can you?’ exclaimed Gerald, who had a real PASSION for discussion. ‘You couldn’t call a race a business concern, could you? — and nationality roughly corresponds to race, I think. I think it is MEANT to.’

There was a moment’s pause. Gerald and Hermione were always strangely but politely and evenly inimical.

‘DO you think race corresponds with nationality?’ she asked musingly, with expressionless indecision.

Birkin knew she was waiting for him to participate. And dutifully he spoke up.

‘I think Gerald is right — race is the essential element in nationality, in Europe at least,’ he said.

Again Hermione paused, as if to allow this statement to cool. Then she said with strange assumption of authority:

‘Yes, but even so, is the patriotic appeal an appeal to the racial instinct? Is it not rather an appeal to the proprietary instinct, the COMMERCIAL instinct? And isn’t this what we mean by nationality?’

‘Probably,’ said Birkin, who felt that such a discussion was out of place and out of time.

But Gerald was now on the scent of argument.

‘A race may have its commercial aspect,’ he said. ‘In fact it must. It is like a family. You MUST make provision. And to make provision you have got to strive against other families, other nations. I don’t see why you shouldn’t.’

Again Hermione made a pause, domineering and cold, before she replied: ‘Yes, I think it is always wrong to provoke a spirit of rivalry. It makes bad blood. And bad blood accumulates.’

‘But you can’t do away with the spirit of emulation altogether?’ said Gerald. ‘It is one of the necessary incentives to production and improvement.’

‘Yes,’ came Hermione’s sauntering response. ‘I think you can do away with it.’

‘I must say,’ said Birkin, ‘I detest the spirit of emulation.’ Hermione was biting a piece of bread, pulling it from between her teeth with her fingers, in a slow, slightly derisive movement. She turned to Birkin.

‘You do hate it, yes,’ she said, intimate and gratified.

‘Detest it,’ he repeated.

‘Yes,’ she murmured, assured and satisfied.

‘But,’ Gerald insisted, ‘you don’t allow one man to take away his neighbour’s living, so why should you allow one nation to take away the living from another nation?’

There was a long slow murmur from Hermione before she broke into speech, saying with a laconic indifference:

‘It is not always a question of possessions, is it? It is not all a question of goods?’

Gerald was nettled by this implication of vulgar materialism.

‘Yes, more or less,’ he retorted. ‘If I go and take a man’s hat from off his head, that hat becomes a symbol of that man’s liberty. When he fights me for his hat, he is fighting me for his liberty.’

Hermione was nonplussed.

‘Yes,’ she said, irritated. ‘But that way of arguing by imaginary instances is not supposed to be genuine, is it? A man does NOT come and take my hat from off my head, does he?’

‘Only because the law prevents him,’ said Gerald.

‘Not only,’ said Birkin. ‘Ninety-nine men out of a hundred don’t want my hat.’

‘That’s a matter of opinion,’ said Gerald.

‘Or the hat,’ laughed the bridegroom.

‘And if he does want my hat, such as it is,’ said Birkin, ‘why, surely it is open to me to decide, which is a greater loss to me, my hat, or my liberty as a free and indifferent man. If I am compelled to offer fight, I lose the latter. It is a question which is worth more to me, my pleasant liberty of conduct, or my hat.’

‘Yes,’ said Hermione, watching Birkin strangely. ‘Yes.’

‘But would you let somebody come and snatch your hat off your head?’ the bride asked of Hermione.

The face of the tall straight woman turned slowly and as if drugged to this new speaker.

‘No,’ she replied, in a low inhuman tone, that seemed to contain a chuckle.

‘No, I shouldn’t let anybody take my hat off my head.’

‘How would you prevent it?’ asked Gerald.

‘I don’t know,’ replied Hermione slowly. ‘Probably I should kill him.’

There was a strange chuckle in her tone, a dangerous and convincing humour in her bearing.

‘Of course,’ said Gerald, ‘I can see Rupert’s point. It is a question to him whether his hat or his peace of mind is more important.’

‘Peace of body,’ said Birkin.

‘Well, as you like there,’ replied Gerald. ‘But how are you going to decide this for a nation?’

‘Heaven preserve me,’ laughed Birkin.

‘Yes, but suppose you have to?’ Gerald persisted.

‘Then it is the same. If the national crown-piece is an old hat, then the thieving gent may have it.’

‘But CAN the national or racial hat be an old hat?’ insisted Gerald.

‘Pretty well bound to be, I believe,’ said Birkin.

‘I’m not so sure,’ said Gerald.

‘I don’t agree, Rupert,’ said Hermione.

‘All right,’ said Birkin.

‘I’m all for the old national hat,’ laughed Gerald.

‘And a fool you look in it,’ cried Diana, his pert sister who was just in her teens.

‘Oh, we’re quite out of our depths with these old hats,’ cried Laura Crich. ‘Dry up now, Gerald. We’re going to drink toasts. Let us drink toasts. Toasts —

glasses, glasses — now then, toasts! Speech! Speech!’

Birkin, thinking about race or national death, watched his glass being filled with champagne. The bubbles broke at the rim, the man withdrew, and feeling a sudden thirst at the sight of the fresh wine, Birkin drank up his glass. A queer little tension in the room roused him. He felt a sharp constraint.

‘Did I do it by accident, or on purpose?’ he asked himself. And he decided that, according to the vulgar phrase, he had done it ‘accidentally on purpose.’ He looked round at the hired footman. And the hired footman came, with a silent step of cold servant-like disapprobation. Birkin decided that he detested toasts, and footmen, and assemblies, and mankind altogether, in most of its aspects. Then he rose to make a speech. But he was somehow disgusted.

At length it was over, the meal. Several men strolled out into the garden. There was a lawn, and flower-beds, and at the boundary an iron fence shutting off the little field or park. The view was pleasant; a highroad curving round the edge of a low lake, under the trees. In the spring air, the water gleamed and the opposite woods were purplish with new life. Charming Jersey cattle came to the fence, breathing hoarsely from their velvet muzzles at the human beings, expecting perhaps a crust.

Birkin leaned on the fence. A cow was breathing wet hotness on his hand.

‘Pretty cattle, very pretty,’ said Marshall, one of the brothers-in-law. ‘They give the best milk you can have.’

‘Yes,’ said Birkin.

‘Eh, my little beauty, eh, my beauty!’ said Marshall, in a queer high falsetto voice, that caused the other man to have convulsions of laughter in his stomach.

‘Who won the race, Lupton?’ he called to the bridegroom, to hide the fact that he was laughing.

The bridegroom took his cigar from his mouth.

‘The race?’ he exclaimed. Then a rather thin smile came over his face. He did not want to say anything about the flight to the church door. ‘We got there together. At least she touched first, but I had my hand on her shoulder.’

‘What’s this?’ asked Gerald.

Birkin told him about the race of the bride and the bridegroom.

‘H’m!’ said Gerald, in disapproval. ‘What made you late then?’

‘Lupton would talk about the immortality of the soul,’ said Birkin, ‘and then he hadn’t got a button-hook.’

‘Oh God!’ cried Marshall. ‘The immortality of the soul on your wedding day! Hadn’t you got anything better to occupy your mind?’

‘What’s wrong with it?’ asked the bridegroom, a clean-shaven naval man, flushing sensitively.

‘Sounds as if you were going to be executed instead of married. THE IMMORTALITY OF THE SOUL!’ repeated the brother-in-law, with most killing emphasis.

But he fell quite flat.

‘And what did you decide?’ asked Gerald, at once pricking up his ears at the thought of a metaphysical discussion.

‘You don’t want a soul today, my boy,’ said Marshall. ‘It’d be in your road.’

‘Christ! Marshall, go and talk to somebody else,’ cried Gerald, with sudden impatience.

‘By God, I’m willing,’ said Marshall, in a temper. ‘Too much bloody soul and talk altogether — ’

He withdrew in a dudgeon, Gerald staring after him with angry eyes, that grew gradually calm and amiable as the stoutly-built form of the other man passed into the distance.

‘There’s one thing, Lupton,’ said Gerald, turning suddenly to the bridegroom. ‘Laura won’t have brought such a fool into the family as Lottie did.’

‘Comfort yourself with that,’ laughed Birkin.

‘I take no notice of them,’ laughed the bridegroom.

‘What about this race then — who began it?’ Gerald asked.

‘We were late. Laura was at the top of the churchyard steps when our cab came up. She saw Lupton bolting towards her. And she fled. But why do you look so cross? Does it hurt your sense of the family dignity?’

‘It does, rather,’ said Gerald. ‘If you’re doing a thing, do it properly, and if you’re not going to do it properly, leave it alone.’

‘Very nice aphorism,’ said Birkin.

‘Don’t you agree?’ asked Gerald.

‘Quite,’ said Birkin. ‘Only it bores me rather, when you become aphoristic.’

‘Damn you, Rupert, you want all the aphorisms your own way,’ said Gerald.

‘No. I want them out of the way, and you’re always shoving them in it.’

Gerald smiled grimly at this humorism. Then he made a little gesture of dismissal, with his eyebrows.

‘You don’t believe in having any standard of behaviour at all, do you?’ he challenged Birkin, censoriously.

‘Standard — no. I hate standards. But they’re necessary for the common ruck. Anybody who is anything can just be himself and do as he likes.’

‘But what do you mean by being himself?’ said Gerald. ‘Is that an aphorism or a cliché?’

‘I mean just doing what you want to do. I think it was perfect good form in Laura to bolt from Lupton to the church door. It was almost a masterpiece in

good form. It's the hardest thing in the world to act spontaneously on one's impulses — and it's the only really gentlemanly thing to do — provided you're fit to do it.'

'You don't expect me to take you seriously, do you?' asked Gerald.

'Yes, Gerald, you're one of the very few people I do expect that of.'

'Then I'm afraid I can't come up to your expectations here, at any rate. You think people should just do as they like.'

'I think they always do. But I should like them to like the purely individual thing in themselves, which makes them act in singleness. And they only like to do the collective thing.'

'And I,' said Gerald grimly, 'shouldn't like to be in a world of people who acted individually and spontaneously, as you call it. We should have everybody cutting everybody else's throat in five minutes.'

'That means YOU would like to be cutting everybody's throat,' said Birkin.

'How does that follow?' asked Gerald crossly.

'No man,' said Birkin, 'cuts another man's throat unless he wants to cut it, and unless the other man wants it cutting. This is a complete truth. It takes two people to make a murder: a murderer and a murderee. And a murderee is a man who is murderable. And a man who is murderable is a man who in a profound if hidden lust desires to be murdered.'

'Sometimes you talk pure nonsense,' said Gerald to Birkin. 'As a matter of fact, none of us wants our throat cut, and most other people would like to cut it for us — some time or other —'

'It's a nasty view of things, Gerald,' said Birkin, 'and no wonder you are afraid of yourself and your own unhappiness.'

'How am I afraid of myself?' said Gerald; 'and I don't think I am unhappy.'

'You seem to have a lurking desire to have your gizzard slit, and imagine every man has his knife up his sleeve for you,' Birkin said.

'How do you make that out?' said Gerald.

'From you,' said Birkin.

There was a pause of strange enmity between the two men, that was very near to love. It was always the same between them; always their talk brought them into a deadly nearness of contact, a strange, perilous intimacy which was either hate or love, or both. They parted with apparent unconcern, as if their going apart were a trivial occurrence. And they really kept it to the level of trivial occurrence. Yet the heart of each burned from the other. They burned with each other, inwardly. This they would never admit. They intended to keep their relationship a casual free-and-easy friendship, they were not going to be so unmanly and unnatural as to allow any heart-burning between them. They had

not the faintest belief in deep relationship between men and men, and their disbelief prevented any development of their powerful but suppressed friendliness.

CHAPTER III.

CLASS-ROOM

A school-day was drawing to a close. In the class-room the last lesson was in progress, peaceful and still. It was elementary botany. The desks were littered with catkins, hazel and willow, which the children had been sketching. But the sky had come overdark, as the end of the afternoon approached: there was scarcely light to draw any more. Ursula stood in front of the class, leading the children by questions to understand the structure and the meaning of the catkins.

A heavy, copper-coloured beam of light came in at the west window, gilding the outlines of the children's heads with red gold, and falling on the wall opposite in a rich, ruddy illumination. Ursula, however, was scarcely conscious of it. She was busy, the end of the day was here, the work went on as a peaceful tide that is at flood, hushed to retire.

This day had gone by like so many more, in an activity that was like a trance. At the end there was a little haste, to finish what was in hand. She was pressing the children with questions, so that they should know all they were to know, by the time the gong went. She stood in shadow in front of the class, with catkins in her hand, and she leaned towards the children, absorbed in the passion of instruction.

She heard, but did not notice the click of the door. Suddenly she started. She saw, in the shaft of ruddy, copper-coloured light near her, the face of a man. It was gleaming like fire, watching her, waiting for her to be aware. It startled her terribly. She thought she was going to faint. All her suppressed, subconscious fear sprang into being, with anguish.

'Did I startle you?' said Birkin, shaking hands with her. 'I thought you had heard me come in.'

'No,' she faltered, scarcely able to speak. He laughed, saying he was sorry. She wondered why it amused him.

'It is so dark,' he said. 'Shall we have the light?'

And moving aside, he switched on the strong electric lights. The class-room was distinct and hard, a strange place after the soft dim magic that filled it before

he came. Birkin turned curiously to look at Ursula. Her eyes were round and wondering, bewildered, her mouth quivered slightly. She looked like one who is suddenly wakened. There was a living, tender beauty, like a tender light of dawn shining from her face. He looked at her with a new pleasure, feeling gay in his heart, irresponsible.

‘You are doing catkins?’ he asked, picking up a piece of hazel from a scholar’s desk in front of him. ‘Are they as far out as this? I hadn’t noticed them this year.’

He looked absorbedly at the tassel of hazel in his hand.

‘The red ones too!’ he said, looking at the flickers of crimson that came from the female bud.

Then he went in among the desks, to see the scholars’ books. Ursula watched his intent progress. There was a stillness in his motion that hushed the activities of her heart. She seemed to be standing aside in arrested silence, watching him move in another, concentrated world. His presence was so quiet, almost like a vacancy in the corporate air.

Suddenly he lifted his face to her, and her heart quickened at the flicker of his voice.

‘Give them some crayons, won’t you?’ he said, ‘so that they can make the gynaecious flowers red, and the androgynous yellow. I’d chalk them in plain, chalk in nothing else, merely the red and the yellow. Outline scarcely matters in this case. There is just the one fact to emphasise.’

‘I haven’t any crayons,’ said Ursula.

‘There will be some somewhere — red and yellow, that’s all you want.’

Ursula sent out a boy on a quest.

‘It will make the books untidy,’ she said to Birkin, flushing deeply.

‘Not very,’ he said. ‘You must mark in these things obviously. It’s the fact you want to emphasise, not the subjective impression to record. What’s the fact? — red little spiky stigmas of the female flower, dangling yellow male catkin, yellow pollen flying from one to the other. Make a pictorial record of the fact, as a child does when drawing a face — two eyes, one nose, mouth with teeth — so — ’ And he drew a figure on the blackboard.

At that moment another vision was seen through the glass panels of the door. It was Hermione Roddice. Birkin went and opened to her.

‘I saw your car,’ she said to him. ‘Do you mind my coming to find you? I wanted to see you when you were on duty.’

She looked at him for a long time, intimate and playful, then she gave a short little laugh. And then only she turned to Ursula, who, with all the class, had been watching the little scene between the lovers.

‘How do you do, Miss Brangwen,’ sang Hermione, in her low, odd, singing fashion, that sounded almost as if she were poking fun. ‘Do you mind my coming in?’

Her grey, almost sardonic eyes rested all the while on Ursula, as if summing her up.

‘Oh no,’ said Ursula.

‘Are you SURE?’ repeated Hermione, with complete sang froid, and an odd, half-bullying effrontery.

‘Oh no, I like it awfully,’ laughed Ursula, a little bit excited and bewildered, because Hermione seemed to be compelling her, coming very close to her, as if intimate with her; and yet, how could she be intimate?

This was the answer Hermione wanted. She turned satisfied to Birkin.

‘What are you doing?’ she sang, in her casual, inquisitive fashion.

‘Catkins,’ he replied.

‘Really!’ she said. ‘And what do you learn about them?’ She spoke all the while in a mocking, half-teasing fashion, as if making game of the whole business. She picked up a twig of the catkin, piqued by Birkin’s attention to it.

She was a strange figure in the class-room, wearing a large, old cloak of greenish cloth, on which was a raised pattern of dull gold. The high collar, and the inside of the cloak, was lined with dark fur. Beneath she had a dress of fine lavender-coloured cloth, trimmed with fur, and her hat was close-fitting, made of fur and of the dull, green-and-gold figured stuff. She was tall and strange, she looked as if she had come out of some new, bizarre picture.

‘Do you know the little red ovary flowers, that produce the nuts? Have you ever noticed them?’ he asked her. And he came close and pointed them out to her, on the sprig she held.

‘No,’ she replied. ‘What are they?’

‘Those are the little seed-producing flowers, and the long catkins, they only produce pollen, to fertilise them.’

‘Do they, do they!’ repeated Hermione, looking closely.

‘From those little red bits, the nuts come; if they receive pollen from the long danglers.’

‘Little red flames, little red flames,’ murmured Hermione to herself. And she remained for some moments looking only at the small buds out of which the red flickers of the stigma issued.

‘Aren’t they beautiful? I think they’re so beautiful,’ she said, moving close to Birkin, and pointing to the red filaments with her long, white finger.

‘Had you never noticed them before?’ he asked.

‘No, never before,’ she replied.

‘And now you will always see them,’ he said.

‘Now I shall always see them,’ she repeated. ‘Thank you so much for showing me. I think they’re so beautiful — little red flames — ’

Her absorption was strange, almost rhapsodic. Both Birkin and Ursula were suspended. The little red pistillate flowers had some strange, almost mystic-passionate attraction for her.

The lesson was finished, the books were put away, at last the class was dismissed. And still Hermione sat at the table, with her chin in her hand, her elbow on the table, her long white face pushed up, not attending to anything. Birkin had gone to the window, and was looking from the brilliantly-lighted room on to the grey, colourless outside, where rain was noiselessly falling. Ursula put away her things in the cupboard.

At length Hermione rose and came near to her.

‘Your sister has come home?’ she said.

‘Yes,’ said Ursula.

‘And does she like being back in Beldover?’

‘No,’ said Ursula.

‘No, I wonder she can bear it. It takes all my strength, to bear the ugliness of this district, when I stay here. Won’t you come and see me? Won’t you come with your sister to stay at Breadalby for a few days? — do — ’

‘Thank you very much,’ said Ursula.

‘Then I will write to you,’ said Hermione. ‘You think your sister will come? I should be so glad. I think she is wonderful. I think some of her work is really wonderful. I have two water-wagtails, carved in wood, and painted — perhaps you have seen it?’

‘No,’ said Ursula.

‘I think it is perfectly wonderful — like a flash of instinct.’

‘Her little carvings ARE strange,’ said Ursula.

‘Perfectly beautiful — full of primitive passion — ’

‘Isn’t it queer that she always likes little things? — she must always work small things, that one can put between one’s hands, birds and tiny animals. She likes to look through the wrong end of the opera glasses, and see the world that way — why is it, do you think?’

Hermione looked down at Ursula with that long, detached scrutinising gaze that excited the younger woman.

‘Yes,’ said Hermione at length. ‘It is curious. The little things seem to be more subtle to her — ’

‘But they aren’t, are they? A mouse isn’t any more subtle than a lion, is it?’

Again Hermione looked down at Ursula with that long scrutiny, as if she were

following some train of thought of her own, and barely attending to the other's speech.

'I don't know,' she replied.

'Rupert, Rupert,' she sang mildly, calling him to her. He approached in silence.

'Are little things more subtle than big things?' she asked, with the odd grunt of laughter in her voice, as if she were making game of him in the question.

'Dunno,' he said.

'I hate subtleties,' said Ursula.

Hermione looked at her slowly.

'Do you?' she said.

'I always think they are a sign of weakness,' said Ursula, up in arms, as if her prestige were threatened.

Hermione took no notice. Suddenly her face puckered, her brow was knit with thought, she seemed twisted in troublesome effort for utterance.

'Do you really think, Rupert,' she asked, as if Ursula were not present, 'do you really think it is worth while? Do you really think the children are better for being roused to consciousness?'

A dark flash went over his face, a silent fury. He was hollow-cheeked and pale, almost unearthly. And the woman, with her serious, conscience-harrowing question tortured him on the quick.

'They are not roused to consciousness,' he said. 'Consciousness comes to them, willy-nilly.'

'But do you think they are better for having it quickened, stimulated? Isn't it better that they should remain unconscious of the hazel, isn't it better that they should see as a whole, without all this pulling to pieces, all this knowledge?'

'Would you rather, for yourself, know or not know, that the little red flowers are there, putting out for the pollen?' he asked harshly. His voice was brutal, scornful, cruel.

Hermione remained with her face lifted up, abstracted. He hung silent in irritation.

'I don't know,' she replied, balancing mildly. 'I don't know.'

'But knowing is everything to you, it is all your life,' he broke out. She slowly looked at him.

'Is it?' she said.

'To know, that is your all, that is your life — you have only this, this knowledge,' he cried. 'There is only one tree, there is only one fruit, in your mouth.'

Again she was some time silent.

‘Is there?’ she said at last, with the same untouched calm. And then in a tone of whimsical inquisitiveness: ‘What fruit, Rupert?’

‘The eternal apple,’ he replied in exasperation, hating his own metaphors.

‘Yes,’ she said. There was a look of exhaustion about her. For some moments there was silence. Then, pulling herself together with a convulsed movement, Hermione resumed, in a sing-song, casual voice:

‘But leaving me apart, Rupert; do you think the children are better, richer, happier, for all this knowledge; do you really think they are? Or is it better to leave them untouched, spontaneous. Hadn’t they better be animals, simple animals, crude, violent, ANYTHING, rather than this selfconsciousness, this incapacity to be spontaneous.’

They thought she had finished. But with a queer rumbling in her throat she resumed, ‘Hadn’t they better be anything than grow up crippled, crippled in their souls, crippled in their feelings — so thrown back — so turned back on themselves — incapable — ’ Hermione clenched her fist like one in a trance — ‘of any spontaneous action, always deliberate, always burdened with choice, never carried away.’

Again they thought she had finished. But just as he was going to reply, she resumed her queer rhapsody — ‘never carried away, out of themselves, always conscious, always selfconscious, always aware of themselves. Isn’t ANYTHING better than this? Better be animals, mere animals with no mind at all, than this, this NOTHINGNESS — ’

‘But do you think it is knowledge that makes us unliving and selfconscious?’ he asked irritably.

She opened her eyes and looked at him slowly.

‘Yes,’ she said. She paused, watching him all the while, her eyes vague. Then she wiped her fingers across her brow, with a vague weariness. It irritated him bitterly. ‘It is the mind,’ she said, ‘and that is death.’ She raised her eyes slowly to him: ‘Isn’t the mind — ’ she said, with the convulsed movement of her body, ‘isn’t it our death? Doesn’t it destroy all our spontaneity, all our instincts? Are not the young people growing up today, really dead before they have a chance to live?’

‘Not because they have too much mind, but too little,’ he said brutally.

‘Are you SURE?’ she cried. ‘It seems to me the reverse. They are overconscious, burdened to death with consciousness.’

‘Imprisoned within a limited, false set of concepts,’ he cried.

But she took no notice of this, only went on with her own rhapsodic interrogation.

‘When we have knowledge, don’t we lose everything but knowledge?’ she

asked pathetically. ‘If I know about the flower, don’t I lose the flower and have only the knowledge? Aren’t we exchanging the substance for the shadow, aren’t we forfeiting life for this dead quality of knowledge? And what does it mean to me, after all? What does all this knowing mean to me? It means nothing.’

‘You are merely making words,’ he said; ‘knowledge means everything to you. Even your animalism, you want it in your head. You don’t want to BE an animal, you want to observe your own animal functions, to get a mental thrill out of them. It is all purely secondary — and more decadent than the most hide-bound intellectualism. What is it but the worst and last form of intellectualism, this love of yours for passion and the animal instincts? Passion and the instincts — you want them hard enough, but through your head, in your consciousness. It all takes place in your head, under that skull of yours. Only you won’t be conscious of what ACTUALLY is: you want the lie that will match the rest of your furniture.’

Hermione set hard and poisonous against this attack. Ursula stood covered with wonder and shame. It frightened her, to see how they hated each other.

‘It’s all that Lady of Shalott business,’ he said, in his strong abstract voice. He seemed to be charging her before the unseeing air. ‘You’ve got that mirror, your own fixed will, your immortal understanding, your own tight conscious world, and there is nothing beyond it. There, in the mirror, you must have everything. But now you have come to all your conclusions, you want to go back and be like a savage, without knowledge. You want a life of pure sensation and “passion.”’

He quoted the last word satirically against her. She sat convulsed with fury and violation, speechless, like a stricken pythoness of the Greek oracle.

‘But your passion is a lie,’ he went on violently. ‘It isn’t passion at all, it is your WILL. It’s your bullying will. You want to clutch things and have them in your power. You want to have things in your power. And why? Because you haven’t got any real body, any dark sensual body of life. You have no sensuality. You have only your will and your conceit of consciousness, and your lust for power, to KNOW.’

He looked at her in mingled hate and contempt, also in pain because she suffered, and in shame because he knew he tortured her. He had an impulse to kneel and plead for forgiveness. But a bitterer red anger burned up to fury in him. He became unconscious of her, he was only a passionate voice speaking.

‘Spontaneous!’ he cried. ‘You and spontaneity! You, the most deliberate thing that ever walked or crawled! You’d be verily deliberately spontaneous — that’s you. Because you want to have everything in your own volition, your deliberate voluntary consciousness. You want it all in that loathsome little skull of yours, that ought to be cracked like a nut. For you’ll be the same till it is cracked, like

an insect in its skin. If one cracked your skull perhaps one might get a spontaneous, passionate woman out of you, with real sensuality. As it is, what you want is pornography — looking at yourself in mirrors, watching your naked animal actions in mirrors, so that you can have it all in your consciousness, make it all mental.’

There was a sense of violation in the air, as if too much was said, the unforgivable. Yet Ursula was concerned now only with solving her own problems, in the light of his words. She was pale and abstracted.

‘But do you really WANT sensuality?’ she asked, puzzled.

Birkin looked at her, and became intent in his explanation.

‘Yes,’ he said, ‘that and nothing else, at this point. It is a fulfilment — the great dark knowledge you can’t have in your head — the dark involuntary being. It is death to one’s self — but it is the coming into being of another.’

‘But how? How can you have knowledge not in your head?’ she asked, quite unable to interpret his phrases.

‘In the blood,’ he answered; ‘when the mind and the known world is drowned in darkness everything must go — there must be the deluge. Then you find yourself a palpable body of darkness, a demon — ’

‘But why should I be a demon — ?’ she asked.

‘“WOMAN WAILING FOR HER DEMON LOVER” — ’ he quoted — ‘why, I don’t know.’

Hermione roused herself as from a death — annihilation.

‘He is such a DREADFUL satanist, isn’t he?’ she drawled to Ursula, in a queer resonant voice, that ended on a shrill little laugh of pure ridicule. The two women were jeering at him, jeering him into nothingness. The laugh of the shrill, triumphant female sounded from Hermione, jeering him as if he were a neuter.

‘No,’ he said. ‘You are the real devil who won’t let life exist.’

She looked at him with a long, slow look, malevolent, supercilious.

‘You know all about it, don’t you?’ she said, with slow, cold, cunning mockery.

‘Enough,’ he replied, his face fixing fine and clear like steel. A horrible despair, and at the same time a sense of release, liberation, came over Hermione. She turned with a pleasant intimacy to Ursula.

‘You are sure you will come to Breadalby?’ she said, urging.

‘Yes, I should like to very much,’ replied Ursula.

Hermione looked down at her, gratified, reflecting, and strangely absent, as if possessed, as if not quite there.

‘I’m so glad,’ she said, pulling herself together. ‘Some time in about a fortnight. Yes? I will write to you here, at the school, shall I? Yes. And you’ll be

sure to come? Yes. I shall be so glad. Good-bye! Good-bye!

Hermione held out her hand and looked into the eyes of the other woman. She knew Ursula as an immediate rival, and the knowledge strangely exhilarated her. Also she was taking leave. It always gave her a sense of strength, advantage, to be departing and leaving the other behind. Moreover she was taking the man with her, if only in hate.

Birkin stood aside, fixed and unreal. But now, when it was his turn to bid good-bye, he began to speak again.

‘There’s the whole difference in the world,’ he said, ‘between the actual sensual being, and the vicious mental-deliberate profligacy our lot goes in for. In our night-time, there’s always the electricity switched on, we watch ourselves, we get it all in the head, really. You’ve got to lapse out before you can know what sensual reality is, lapse into unknowingness, and give up your volition. You’ve got to do it. You’ve got to learn not-to-be, before you can come into being.’

‘But we have got such a conceit of ourselves — that’s where it is. We are so conceited, and so unproud. We’ve got no pride, we’re all conceit, so conceited in our own papier-mache realised selves. We’d rather die than give up our little self-righteous self-opinionated self-will.’

There was silence in the room. Both women were hostile and resentful. He sounded as if he were addressing a meeting. Hermione merely paid no attention, stood with her shoulders tight in a shrug of dislike.

Ursula was watching him as if furtively, not really aware of what she was seeing. There was a great physical attractiveness in him — a curious hidden richness, that came through his thinness and his pallor like another voice, conveying another knowledge of him. It was in the curves of his brows and his chin, rich, fine, exquisite curves, the powerful beauty of life itself. She could not say what it was. But there was a sense of richness and of liberty.

‘But we are sensual enough, without making ourselves so, aren’t we?’ she asked, turning to him with a certain golden laughter flickering under her greenish eyes, like a challenge. And immediately the queer, careless, terribly attractive smile came over his eyes and brows, though his mouth did not relax.

‘No,’ he said, ‘we aren’t. We’re too full of ourselves.’

‘Surely it isn’t a matter of conceit,’ she cried.

‘That and nothing else.’

She was frankly puzzled.

‘Don’t you think that people are most conceited of all about their sensual powers?’ she asked.

‘That’s why they aren’t sensual — only sensuous — which is another matter.’

They're ALWAYS aware of themselves — and they're so conceited, that rather than release themselves, and live in another world, from another centre, they'd — '

'You want your tea, don't you,' said Hermione, turning to Ursula with a gracious kindness. 'You've worked all day — '

Birkin stopped short. A spasm of anger and chagrin went over Ursula. His face set. And he bade good-bye, as if he had ceased to notice her.

They were gone. Ursula stood looking at the door for some moments. Then she put out the lights. And having done so, she sat down again in her chair, absorbed and lost. And then she began to cry, bitterly, bitterly weeping: but whether for misery or joy, she never knew.

CHAPTER IV.

DIVER

The week passed away. On the Saturday it rained, a soft drizzling rain that held off at times. In one of the intervals Gudrun and Ursula set out for a walk, going towards Willey Water. The atmosphere was grey and translucent, the birds sang sharply on the young twigs, the earth would be quickening and hastening in growth. The two girls walked swiftly, gladly, because of the soft, subtle rush of morning that filled the wet haze. By the road the black-thorn was in blossom, white and wet, its tiny amber grains burning faintly in the white smoke of blossom. Purple twigs were darkly luminous in the grey air, high hedges glowed like living shadows, hovering nearer, coming into creation. The morning was full of a new creation.

When the sisters came to Willey Water, the lake lay all grey and visionary, stretching into the moist, translucent vista of trees and meadow. Fine electric activity in sound came from the dumbles below the road, the birds piping one against the other, and water mysteriously plashing, issuing from the lake.

The two girls drifted swiftly along. In front of them, at the corner of the lake, near the road, was a mossy boat-house under a walnut tree, and a little landing-stage where a boat was moored, wavering like a shadow on the still grey water, below the green, decayed poles. All was shadowy with coming summer.

Suddenly, from the boat-house, a white figure ran out, frightening in its swift sharp transit, across the old landing-stage. It launched in a white arc through the air, there was a bursting of the water, and among the smooth ripples a swimmer was making out to space, in a centre of faintly heaving motion. The whole otherworld, wet and remote, he had to himself. He could move into the pure translucency of the grey, uncreated water.

Gudrun stood by the stone wall, watching.

‘How I envy him,’ she said, in low, desirous tones.

‘Ugh!’ shivered Ursula. ‘So cold!’

‘Yes, but how good, how really fine, to swim out there!’ The sisters stood watching the swimmer move further into the grey, moist, full space of the water,

pulsing with his own small, invading motion, and arched over with mist and dim woods.

‘Don’t you wish it were you?’ asked Gudrun, looking at Ursula.

‘I do,’ said Ursula. ‘But I’m not sure — it’s so wet.’

‘No,’ said Gudrun, reluctantly. She stood watching the motion on the bosom of the water, as if fascinated. He, having swum a certain distance, turned round and was swimming on his back, looking along the water at the two girls by the wall. In the faint wash of motion, they could see his ruddy face, and could feel him watching them.

‘It is Gerald Crich,’ said Ursula.

‘I know,’ replied Gudrun.

And she stood motionless gazing over the water at the face which washed up and down on the flood, as he swam steadily. From his separate element he saw them and he exulted to himself because of his own advantage, his possession of a world to himself. He was immune and perfect. He loved his own vigorous, thrusting motion, and the violent impulse of the very cold water against his limbs, buoying him up. He could see the girls watching him a way off, outside, and that pleased him. He lifted his arm from the water, in a sign to them.

‘He is waving,’ said Ursula.

‘Yes,’ replied Gudrun. They watched him. He waved again, with a strange movement of recognition across the difference.

‘Like a Nibelung,’ laughed Ursula. Gudrun said nothing, only stood still looking over the water.

Gerald suddenly turned, and was swimming away swiftly, with a side stroke. He was alone now, alone and immune in the middle of the waters, which he had all to himself. He exulted in his isolation in the new element, unquestioned and unconditioned. He was happy, thrusting with his legs and all his body, without bond or connection anywhere, just himself in the watery world.

Gudrun envied him almost painfully. Even this momentary possession of pure isolation and fluidity seemed to her so terribly desirable that she felt herself as if damned, out there on the high-road.

‘God, what it is to be a man!’ she cried.

‘What?’ exclaimed Ursula in surprise.

‘The freedom, the liberty, the mobility!’ cried Gudrun, strangely flushed and brilliant. ‘You’re a man, you want to do a thing, you do it. You haven’t the THOUSAND obstacles a woman has in front of her.’

Ursula wondered what was in Gudrun’s mind, to occasion this outburst. She could not understand.

‘What do you want to do?’ she asked.

‘Nothing,’ cried Gudrun, in swift refutation. ‘But supposing I did. Supposing I want to swim up that water. It is impossible, it is one of the impossibilities of life, for me to take my clothes off now and jump in. But isn’t it RIDICULOUS, doesn’t it simply prevent our living!’

She was so hot, so flushed, so furious, that Ursula was puzzled.

The two sisters went on, up the road. They were passing between the trees just below Shortlands. They looked up at the long, low house, dim and glamorous in the wet morning, its cedar trees slanting before the windows. Gudrun seemed to be studying it closely.

‘Don’t you think it’s attractive, Ursula?’ asked Gudrun.

‘Very,’ said Ursula. ‘Very peaceful and charming.’

‘It has form, too — it has a period.’

‘What period?’

‘Oh, eighteenth century, for certain; Dorothy Wordsworth and Jane Austen, don’t you think?’

Ursula laughed.

‘Don’t you think so?’ repeated Gudrun.

‘Perhaps. But I don’t think the Criches fit the period. I know Gerald is putting in a private electric plant, for lighting the house, and is making all kinds of latest improvements.’

Gudrun shrugged her shoulders swiftly.

‘Of course,’ she said, ‘that’s quite inevitable.’

‘Quite,’ laughed Ursula. ‘He is several generations of youngness at one go. They hate him for it. He takes them all by the scruff of the neck, and fairly flings them along. He’ll have to die soon, when he’s made every possible improvement, and there will be nothing more to improve. He’s got GO, anyhow.’

‘Certainly, he’s got go,’ said Gudrun. ‘In fact I’ve never seen a man that showed signs of so much. The unfortunate thing is, where does his GO go to, what becomes of it?’

‘Oh I know,’ said Ursula. ‘It goes in applying the latest appliances!’

‘Exactly,’ said Gudrun.

‘You know he shot his brother?’ said Ursula.

‘Shot his brother?’ cried Gudrun, frowning as if in disapprobation.

‘Didn’t you know? Oh yes! — I thought you knew. He and his brother were playing together with a gun. He told his brother to look down the gun, and it was loaded, and blew the top of his head off. Isn’t it a horrible story?’

‘How fearful!’ cried Gudrun. ‘But it is long ago?’

‘Oh yes, they were quite boys,’ said Ursula. ‘I think it is one of the most

horrible stories I know.'

'And he of course did not know that the gun was loaded?'

'Yes. You see it was an old thing that had been lying in the stable for years. Nobody dreamed it would ever go off, and of course, no one imagined it was loaded. But isn't it dreadful, that it should happen?'

'Frightful!' cried Gudrun. 'And isn't it horrible too to think of such a thing happening to one, when one was a child, and having to carry the responsibility of it all through one's life. Imagine it, two boys playing together — then this comes upon them, for no reason whatever — out of the air. Ursula, it's very frightening! Oh, it's one of the things I can't bear. Murder, that is thinkable, because there's a will behind it. But a thing like that to HAPPEN to one —'

'Perhaps there WAS an unconscious will behind it,' said Ursula. 'This playing at killing has some primitive DESIRE for killing in it, don't you think?'

'Desire!' said Gudrun, coldly, stiffening a little. 'I can't see that they were even playing at killing. I suppose one boy said to the other, "You look down the barrel while I pull the trigger, and see what happens." It seems to me the purest form of accident.'

'No,' said Ursula. 'I couldn't pull the trigger of the emptiest gun in the world, not if some-one were looking down the barrel. One instinctively doesn't do it — one can't.'

Gudrun was silent for some moments, in sharp disagreement.

'Of course,' she said coldly. 'If one is a woman, and grown up, one's instinct prevents one. But I cannot see how that applies to a couple of boys playing together.'

Her voice was cold and angry.

'Yes,' persisted Ursula. At that moment they heard a woman's voice a few yards off say loudly:

'Oh damn the thing!' They went forward and saw Laura Crich and Hermione Roddice in the field on the other side of the hedge, and Laura Crich struggling with the gate, to get out. Ursula at once hurried up and helped to lift the gate.

'Thanks so much,' said Laura, looking up flushed and amazon-like, yet rather confused. 'It isn't right on the hinges.'

'No,' said Ursula. 'And they're so heavy.'

'Surprising!' cried Laura.

'How do you do,' sang Hermione, from out of the field, the moment she could make her voice heard. 'It's nice now. Are you going for a walk? Yes. Isn't the young green beautiful? So beautiful — quite burning. Good morning — good morning — you'll come and see me? — thank you so much — next week — yes — good-bye, g-o-o-d b-y-e.'

Gudrun and Ursula stood and watched her slowly waving her head up and down, and waving her hand slowly in dismissal, smiling a strange affected smile, making a tall queer, frightening figure, with her heavy fair hair slipping to her eyes. Then they moved off, as if they had been dismissed like inferiors. The four women parted.

As soon as they had gone far enough, Ursula said, her cheeks burning,

‘I do think she’s impudent.’

‘Who, Hermione Roddice?’ asked Gudrun. ‘Why?’

‘The way she treats one — impudence!’

‘Why, Ursula, what did you notice that was so impudent?’ asked Gudrun rather coldly.

‘Her whole manner. Oh, It’s impossible, the way she tries to bully one. Pure bullying. She’s an impudent woman. “You’ll come and see me,” as if we should be falling over ourselves for the privilege.’

‘I can’t understand, Ursula, what you are so much put out about,’ said Gudrun, in some exasperation. ‘One knows those women are impudent — these free women who have emancipated themselves from the aristocracy.’

‘But it is so UNNECESSARY — so vulgar,’ cried Ursula.

‘No, I don’t see it. And if I did — *pour moi, elle n’existe pas*. I don’t grant her the power to be impudent to me.’

‘Do you think she likes you?’ asked Ursula.

‘Well, no, I shouldn’t think she did.’

‘Then why does she ask you to go to Breadalby and stay with her?’

Gudrun lifted her shoulders in a low shrug.

‘After all, she’s got the sense to know we’re not just the ordinary run,’ said Gudrun. ‘Whatever she is, she’s not a fool. And I’d rather have somebody I detested, than the ordinary woman who keeps to her own set. Hermione Roddice does risk herself in some respects.’

Ursula pondered this for a time.

‘I doubt it,’ she replied. ‘Really she risks nothing. I suppose we ought to admire her for knowing she CAN invite us — school teachers — and risk nothing.’

‘Precisely!’ said Gudrun. ‘Think of the myriads of women that daren’t do it. She makes the most of her privileges — that’s something. I suppose, really, we should do the same, in her place.’

‘No,’ said Ursula. ‘No. It would bore me. I couldn’t spend my time playing her games. It’s *infra dig*.’

The two sisters were like a pair of scissors, snipping off everything that came athwart them; or like a knife and a whetstone, the one sharpened against the

other.

‘Of course,’ cried Ursula suddenly, ‘she ought to thank her stars if we will go and see her. You are perfectly beautiful, a thousand times more beautiful than ever she is or was, and to my thinking, a thousand times more beautifully dressed, for she never looks fresh and natural, like a flower, always old, thought-out; and we ARE more intelligent than most people.’

‘Undoubtedly!’ said Gudrun.

‘And it ought to be admitted, simply,’ said Ursula.

‘Certainly it ought,’ said Gudrun. ‘But you’ll find that the really chic thing is to be so absolutely ordinary, so perfectly commonplace and like the person in the street, that you really are a masterpiece of humanity, not the person in the street actually, but the artistic creation of her — ’

‘How awful!’ cried Ursula.

‘Yes, Ursula, it IS awful, in most respects. You daren’t be anything that isn’t amazingly A TERRE, SO much A TERRE that it is the artistic creation of ordinariness.’

‘It’s very dull to create oneself into nothing better,’ laughed Ursula.

‘Very dull!’ retorted Gudrun. ‘Really Ursula, it is dull, that’s just the word. One longs to be high-flown, and make speeches like Corneille, after it.’

Gudrun was becoming flushed and excited over her own cleverness.

‘Strut,’ said Ursula. ‘One wants to strut, to be a swan among geese.’

‘Exactly,’ cried Gudrun, ‘a swan among geese.’

‘They are all so busy playing the ugly duckling,’ cried Ursula, with mocking laughter. ‘And I don’t feel a bit like a humble and pathetic ugly duckling. I do feel like a swan among geese — I can’t help it. They make one feel so. And I don’t care what THEY think of me. FE M’EN FICHE.’

Gudrun looked up at Ursula with a queer, uncertain envy and dislike.

‘Of course, the only thing to do is to despise them all — just all,’ she said.

The sisters went home again, to read and talk and work, and wait for Monday, for school. Ursula often wondered what else she waited for, besides the beginning and end of the school week, and the beginning and end of the holidays. This was a whole life! Sometimes she had periods of tight horror, when it seemed to her that her life would pass away, and be gone, without having been more than this. But she never really accepted it. Her spirit was active, her life like a shoot that is growing steadily, but which has not yet come above ground.

CHAPTER V.

IN THE TRAIN

One day at this time Birkin was called to London. He was not very fixed in his abode. He had rooms in Nottingham, because his work lay chiefly in that town. But often he was in London, or in Oxford. He moved about a great deal, his life seemed uncertain, without any definite rhythm, any organic meaning.

On the platform of the railway station he saw Gerald Crich, reading a newspaper, and evidently waiting for the train. Birkin stood some distance off, among the people. It was against his instinct to approach anybody.

From time to time, in a manner characteristic of him, Gerald lifted his head and looked round. Even though he was reading the newspaper closely, he must keep a watchful eye on his external surroundings. There seemed to be a dual consciousness running in him. He was thinking vigorously of something he read in the newspaper, and at the same time his eye ran over the surfaces of the life round him, and he missed nothing. Birkin, who was watching him, was irritated by his duality. He noticed too, that Gerald seemed always to be at bay against everybody, in spite of his queer, genial, social manner when roused.

Now Birkin started violently at seeing this genial look flash on to Gerald's face, at seeing Gerald approaching with hand outstretched.

'Hallo, Rupert, where are you going?'

'London. So are you, I suppose.'

'Yes —'

Gerald's eyes went over Birkin's face in curiosity.

'We'll travel together if you like,' he said.

'Don't you usually go first?' asked Birkin.

'I can't stand the crowd,' replied Gerald. 'But third'll be all right. There's a restaurant car, we can have some tea.'

The two men looked at the station clock, having nothing further to say.

'What were you reading in the paper?' Birkin asked.

Gerald looked at him quickly.

'Isn't it funny, what they DO put in the newspapers,' he said. 'Here are two

leaders — ' he held out his DAILY TELEGRAPH, 'full of the ordinary newspaper cant — ' he scanned the columns down — 'and then there's this little — I dunno what you'd call it, essay, almost — appearing with the leaders, and saying there must arise a man who will give new values to things, give us new truths, a new attitude to life, or else we shall be a crumbling nothingness in a few years, a country in ruin — '

'I suppose that's a bit of newspaper cant, as well,' said Birkin.

'It sounds as if the man meant it, and quite genuinely,' said Gerald.

'Give it to me,' said Birkin, holding out his hand for the paper.

The train came, and they went on board, sitting on either side a little table, by the window, in the restaurant car. Birkin glanced over his paper, then looked up at Gerald, who was waiting for him.

'I believe the man means it,' he said, 'as far as he means anything.'

'And do you think it's true? Do you think we really want a new gospel?' asked Gerald.

Birkin shrugged his shoulders.

'I think the people who say they want a new religion are the last to accept anything new. They want novelty right enough. But to stare straight at this life that we've brought upon ourselves, and reject it, absolutely smash up the old idols of ourselves, that we sh'll never do. You've got very badly to want to get rid of the old, before anything new will appear — even in the self.'

Gerald watched him closely.

'You think we ought to break up this life, just start and let fly?' he asked.

'This life. Yes I do. We've got to bust it completely, or shrivel inside it, as in a tight skin. For it won't expand any more.'

There was a queer little smile in Gerald's eyes, a look of amusement, calm and curious.

'And how do you propose to begin? I suppose you mean, reform the whole order of society?' he asked.

Birkin had a slight, tense frown between the brows. He too was impatient of the conversation.

'I don't propose at all,' he replied. 'When we really want to go for something better, we shall smash the old. Until then, any sort of proposal, or making proposals, is no more than a tiresome game for self-important people.'

The little smile began to die out of Gerald's eyes, and he said, looking with a cool stare at Birkin:

'So you really think things are very bad?'

'Completely bad.'

The smile appeared again.

‘In what way?’

‘Every way,’ said Birkin. ‘We are such dreary liars. Our one idea is to lie to ourselves. We have an ideal of a perfect world, clean and straight and sufficient. So we cover the earth with foulness; life is a blotch of labour, like insects scurrying in filth, so that your collier can have a pianoforte in his parlour, and you can have a butler and a motor-car in your up-to-date house, and as a nation we can sport the Ritz, or the Empire, Gaby Deslys and the Sunday newspapers. It is very dreary.’

Gerald took a little time to re-adjust himself after this tirade.

‘Would you have us live without houses — return to nature?’ he asked.

‘I would have nothing at all. People only do what they want to do — and what they are capable of doing. If they were capable of anything else, there would be something else.’

Again Gerald pondered. He was not going to take offence at Birkin.

‘Don’t you think the collier’s PIANOFORTE, as you call it, is a symbol for something very real, a real desire for something higher, in the collier’s life?’

‘Higher!’ cried Birkin. ‘Yes. Amazing heights of upright grandeur. It makes him so much higher in his neighbouring collier’s eyes. He sees himself reflected in the neighbouring opinion, like in a Brocken mist, several feet taller on the strength of the pianoforte, and he is satisfied. He lives for the sake of that Brocken spectre, the reflection of himself in the human opinion. You do the same. If you are of high importance to humanity you are of high importance to yourself. That is why you work so hard at the mines. If you can produce coal to cook five thousand dinners a day, you are five thousand times more important than if you cooked only your own dinner.’

‘I suppose I am,’ laughed Gerald.

‘Can’t you see,’ said Birkin, ‘that to help my neighbour to eat is no more than eating myself. “I eat, thou eatest, he eats, we eat, you eat, they eat” — and what then? Why should every man decline the whole verb. First person singular is enough for me.’

‘You’ve got to start with material things,’ said Gerald. Which statement Birkin ignored.

‘And we’ve got to live for SOMETHING, we’re not just cattle that can graze and have done with it,’ said Gerald.

‘Tell me,’ said Birkin. ‘What do you live for?’

Gerald’s face went baffled.

‘What do I live for?’ he repeated. ‘I suppose I live to work, to produce something, in so far as I am a purposive being. Apart from that, I live because I am living.’

‘And what’s your work? Getting so many more thousands of tons of coal out of the earth every day. And when we’ve got all the coal we want, and all the plush furniture, and pianofortes, and the rabbits are all stewed and eaten, and we’re all warm and our bellies are filled and we’re listening to the young lady performing on the pianoforte — what then? What then, when you’ve made a real fair start with your material things?’

Gerald sat laughing at the words and the mocking humour of the other man. But he was cogitating too.

‘We haven’t got there yet,’ he replied. ‘A good many people are still waiting for the rabbit and the fire to cook it.’

‘So while you get the coal I must chase the rabbit?’ said Birkin, mocking at Gerald.

‘Something like that,’ said Gerald.

Birkin watched him narrowly. He saw the perfect good-humoured callousness, even strange, glistening malice, in Gerald, glistening through the plausible ethics of productivity.

‘Gerald,’ he said, ‘I rather hate you.’

‘I know you do,’ said Gerald. ‘Why do you?’

Birkin mused inscrutably for some minutes.

‘I should like to know if you are conscious of hating me,’ he said at last. ‘Do you ever consciously detest me — hate me with mystic hate? There are odd moments when I hate you starrily.’

Gerald was rather taken aback, even a little disconcerted. He did not quite know what to say.

‘I may, of course, hate you sometimes,’ he said. ‘But I’m not aware of it — never acutely aware of it, that is.’

‘So much the worse,’ said Birkin.

Gerald watched him with curious eyes. He could not quite make him out.

‘So much the worse, is it?’ he repeated.

There was a silence between the two men for some time, as the train ran on. In Birkin’s face was a little irritable tension, a sharp knitting of the brows, keen and difficult. Gerald watched him warily, carefully, rather calculatingly, for he could not decide what he was after.

Suddenly Birkin’s eyes looked straight and overpowering into those of the other man.

‘What do you think is the aim and object of your life, Gerald?’ he asked.

Again Gerald was taken aback. He could not think what his friend was getting at. Was he poking fun, or not?

‘At this moment, I couldn’t say off-hand,’ he replied, with faintly ironic

humour.

‘Do you think love is the be-all and the end-all of life?’ Birkin asked, with direct, attentive seriousness.

‘Of my own life?’ said Gerald.

‘Yes.’

There was a really puzzled pause.

‘I can’t say,’ said Gerald. ‘It hasn’t been, so far.’

‘What has your life been, so far?’

‘Oh — finding out things for myself — and getting experiences — and making things GO.’

Birkin knitted his brows like sharply moulded steel.

‘I find,’ he said, ‘that one needs some one REALLY pure single activity — I should call love a single pure activity. But I DON’T really love anybody — not now.’

‘Have you ever really loved anybody?’ asked Gerald.

‘Yes and no,’ replied Birkin.

‘Not finally?’ said Gerald.

‘Finally — finally — no,’ said Birkin.

‘Nor I,’ said Gerald.

‘And do you want to?’ said Birkin.

Gerald looked with a long, twinkling, almost sardonic look into the eyes of the other man.

‘I don’t know,’ he said.

‘I do — I want to love,’ said Birkin.

‘You do?’

‘Yes. I want the finality of love.’

‘The finality of love,’ repeated Gerald. And he waited for a moment.

‘Just one woman?’ he added. The evening light, flooding yellow along the fields, lit up Birkin’s face with a tense, abstract steadfastness. Gerald still could not make it out.

‘Yes, one woman,’ said Birkin.

But to Gerald it sounded as if he were insistent rather than confident.

‘I don’t believe a woman, and nothing but a woman, will ever make my life,’ said Gerald.

‘Not the centre and core of it — the love between you and a woman?’ asked Birkin.

Gerald’s eyes narrowed with a queer dangerous smile as he watched the other man.

‘I never quite feel it that way,’ he said.

‘You don’t? Then wherein does life centre, for you?’

‘I don’t know — that’s what I want somebody to tell me. As far as I can make out, it doesn’t centre at all. It is artificially held TOGETHER by the social mechanism.’

Birkin pondered as if he would crack something.

‘I know,’ he said, ‘it just doesn’t centre. The old ideals are dead as nails — nothing there. It seems to me there remains only this perfect union with a woman — sort of ultimate marriage — and there isn’t anything else.’

‘And you mean if there isn’t the woman, there’s nothing?’ said Gerald.

‘Pretty well that — seeing there’s no God.’

‘Then we’re hard put to it,’ said Gerald. And he turned to look out of the window at the flying, golden landscape.

Birkin could not help seeing how beautiful and soldierly his face was, with a certain courage to be indifferent.

‘You think its heavy odds against us?’ said Birkin.

‘If we’ve got to make our life up out of a woman, one woman, woman only, yes, I do,’ said Gerald. ‘I don’t believe I shall ever make up MY life, at that rate.’

Birkin watched him almost angrily.

‘You are a born unbeliever,’ he said.

‘I only feel what I feel,’ said Gerald. And he looked again at Birkin almost sardonically, with his blue, manly, sharp-lighted eyes. Birkin’s eyes were at the moment full of anger. But swiftly they became troubled, doubtful, then full of a warm, rich affectionateness and laughter.

‘It troubles me very much, Gerald,’ he said, wrinkling his brows.

‘I can see it does,’ said Gerald, uncovering his mouth in a manly, quick, soldierly laugh.

Gerald was held unconsciously by the other man. He wanted to be near him, he wanted to be within his sphere of influence. There was something very congenial to him in Birkin. But yet, beyond this, he did not take much notice. He felt that he, himself, Gerald, had harder and more durable truths than any the other man knew. He felt himself older, more knowing. It was the quick-changing warmth and venality and brilliant warm utterance he loved in his friend. It was the rich play of words and quick interchange of feelings he enjoyed. The real content of the words he never really considered: he himself knew better.

Birkin knew this. He knew that Gerald wanted to be FOND of him without taking him seriously. And this made him go hard and cold. As the train ran on, he sat looking at the land, and Gerald fell away, became as nothing to him.

Birkin looked at the land, at the evening, and was thinking: ‘Well, if mankind

is destroyed, if our race is destroyed like Sodom, and there is this beautiful evening with the luminous land and trees, I am satisfied. That which informs it all is there, and can never be lost. After all, what is mankind but just one expression of the incomprehensible. And if mankind passes away, it will only mean that this particular expression is completed and done. That which is expressed, and that which is to be expressed, cannot be diminished. There it is, in the shining evening. Let mankind pass away — time it did. The creative utterances will not cease, they will only be there. Humanity doesn't embody the utterance of the incomprehensible any more. Humanity is a dead letter. There will be a new embodiment, in a new way. Let humanity disappear as quick as possible.'

Gerald interrupted him by asking,
'Where are you staying in London?'

Birkin looked up.

'With a man in Soho. I pay part of the rent of a flat, and stop there when I like.'

'Good idea — have a place more or less your own,' said Gerald.

'Yes. But I don't care for it much. I'm tired of the people I am bound to find there.'

'What kind of people?'

'Art — music — London Bohemia — the most pettifogging calculating Bohemia that ever reckoned its pennies. But there are a few decent people, decent in some respects. They are really very thorough rejecters of the world — perhaps they live only in the gesture of rejection and negation — but negatively something, at any rate.'

'What are they? — painters, musicians?'

'Painters, musicians, writers — hangers-on, models, advanced young people, anybody who is openly at outs with the conventions, and belongs to nowhere particularly. They are often young fellows down from the University, and girls who are living their own lives, as they say.'

'All loose?' said Gerald.

Birkin could see his curiosity roused.

'In one way. Most bound, in another. For all their shockingness, all on one note.'

He looked at Gerald, and saw how his blue eyes were lit up with a little flame of curious desire. He saw too how good-looking he was. Gerald was attractive, his blood seemed fluid and electric. His blue eyes burned with a keen, yet cold light, there was a certain beauty, a beautiful passivity in all his body, his moulding.

‘We might see something of each other — I am in London for two or three days,’ said Gerald.

‘Yes,’ said Birkin, ‘I don’t want to go to the theatre, or the music hall — you’d better come round to the flat, and see what you can make of Halliday and his crowd.’

‘Thanks — I should like to,’ laughed Gerald. ‘What are you doing tonight?’

‘I promised to meet Halliday at the Pompadour. It’s a bad place, but there is nowhere else.’

‘Where is it?’ asked Gerald.

‘Piccadilly Circus.’

‘Oh yes — well, shall I come round there?’

‘By all means, it might amuse you.’

The evening was falling. They had passed Bedford. Birkin watched the country, and was filled with a sort of hopelessness. He always felt this, on approaching London.

His dislike of mankind, of the mass of mankind, amounted almost to an illness.

“‘Where the quiet coloured end of evening smiles Miles and miles — ”“ he was murmuring to himself, like a man condemned to death. Gerald, who was very subtly alert, wary in all his senses, leaned forward and asked smilingly:

‘What were you saying?’ Birkin glanced at him, laughed, and repeated:

“‘Where the quiet coloured end of evening smiles, Miles and miles, Over pastures where the something something sheep Half asleep — ”“

Gerald also looked now at the country. And Birkin, who, for some reason was now tired and dispirited, said to him:

‘I always feel doomed when the train is running into London. I feel such a despair, so hopeless, as if it were the end of the world.’

‘Really!’ said Gerald. ‘And does the end of the world frighten you?’

Birkin lifted his shoulders in a slow shrug.

‘I don’t know,’ he said. ‘It does while it hangs imminent and doesn’t fall. But people give me a bad feeling — very bad.’

There was a roused glad smile in Gerald’s eyes.

‘Do they?’ he said. And he watched the other man critically.

In a few minutes the train was running through the disgrace of outspread London. Everybody in the carriage was on the alert, waiting to escape. At last they were under the huge arch of the station, in the tremendous shadow of the town. Birkin shut himself together — he was in now.

The two men went together in a taxi-cab.

‘Don’t you feel like one of the damned?’ asked Birkin, as they sat in a little,

swiftly-running enclosure, and watched the hideous great street.

‘No,’ laughed Gerald.

‘It is real death,’ said Birkin.

CHAPTER VI.

CREME DE MENTHE

They met again in the cafe several hours later. Gerald went through the push doors into the large, lofty room where the faces and heads of the drinkers showed dimly through the haze of smoke, reflected more dimly, and repeated ad infinitum in the great mirrors on the walls, so that one seemed to enter a vague, dim world of shadowy drinkers humming within an atmosphere of blue tobacco smoke. There was, however, the red plush of the seats to give substance within the bubble of pleasure.

Gerald moved in his slow, observant, glistening-attentive motion down between the tables and the people whose shadowy faces looked up as he passed. He seemed to be entering in some strange element, passing into an illuminated new region, among a host of licentious souls. He was pleased, and entertained. He looked over all the dim, evanescent, strangely illuminated faces that bent across the tables. Then he saw Birkin rise and signal to him.

At Birkin's table was a girl with dark, soft, fluffy hair cut short in the artist fashion, hanging level and full almost like the Egyptian princess's. She was small and delicately made, with warm colouring and large, dark hostile eyes. There was a delicacy, almost a beauty in all her form, and at the same time a certain attractive grossness of spirit, that made a little spark leap instantly alight in Gerald's eyes.

Birkin, who looked muted, unreal, his presence left out, introduced her as Miss Darrington. She gave her hand with a sudden, unwilling movement, looking all the while at Gerald with a dark, exposed stare. A glow came over him as he sat down.

The waiter appeared. Gerald glanced at the glasses of the other two. Birkin was drinking something green, Miss Darrington had a small liqueur glass that was empty save for a tiny drop.

'Won't you have some more — ?'

'Brandy,' she said, sipping her last drop and putting down the glass. The waiter disappeared.

'No,' she said to Birkin. 'He doesn't know I'm back. He'll be terrified when

he sees me here.'

She spoke her r's like w's, lisping with a slightly babyish pronunciation which was at once affected and true to her character. Her voice was dull and toneless.

'Where is he then?' asked Birkin.

'He's doing a private show at Lady Snellgrove's,' said the girl. 'Warens is there too.'

There was a pause.

'Well, then,' said Birkin, in a dispassionate protective manner, 'what do you intend to do?'

The girl paused sullenly. She hated the question.

'I don't intend to do anything,' she replied. 'I shall look for some sittings tomorrow.'

'Who shall you go to?' asked Birkin.

'I shall go to Bentley's first. But I believe he's angwy with me for running away.'

'That is from the Madonna?'

'Yes. And then if he doesn't want me, I know I can get work with Carmarthen.'

'Carmarthen?'

'Lord Carmarthen — he does photographs.'

'Chiffon and shoulders —'

'Yes. But he's awfully decent.' There was a pause.

'And what are you going to do about Julius?' he asked.

'Nothing,' she said. 'I shall just ignore him.'

'You've done with him altogether?' But she turned aside her face sullenly, and did not answer the question.

Another young man came hurrying up to the table.

'Hallo Birkin! Hallo PUSSUM, when did you come back?' he said eagerly.

'Today.'

'Does Halliday know?'

'I don't know. I don't care either.'

'Ha-ha! The wind still sits in that quarter, does it? Do you mind if I come over to this table?'

'I'm talking to Wupert, do you mind?' she replied, coolly and yet appealingly, like a child.

'Open confession — good for the soul, eh?' said the young man. 'Well, so long.'

And giving a sharp look at Birkin and at Gerald, the young man moved off, with a swing of his coat skirts.

All this time Gerald had been completely ignored. And yet he felt that the girl was physically aware of his proximity. He waited, listened, and tried to piece together the conversation.

‘Are you staying at the flat?’ the girl asked, of Birkin.

‘For three days,’ replied Birkin. ‘And you?’

‘I don’t know yet. I can always go to Bertha’s.’ There was a silence.

Suddenly the girl turned to Gerald, and said, in a rather formal, polite voice, with the distant manner of a woman who accepts her position as a social inferior, yet assumes intimate CAMARADERIE with the male she addresses:

‘Do you know London well?’

‘I can hardly say,’ he laughed. ‘I’ve been up a good many times, but I was never in this place before.’

‘You’re not an artist, then?’ she said, in a tone that placed him an outsider.

‘No,’ he replied.

‘He’s a soldier, and an explorer, and a Napoleon of industry,’ said Birkin, giving Gerald his credentials for Bohemia.

‘Are you a soldier?’ asked the girl, with a cold yet lively curiosity.

‘No, I resigned my commission,’ said Gerald, ‘some years ago.’

‘He was in the last war,’ said Birkin.

‘Were you really?’ said the girl.

‘And then he explored the Amazon,’ said Birkin, ‘and now he is ruling over coal-mines.’

The girl looked at Gerald with steady, calm curiosity. He laughed, hearing himself described. He felt proud too, full of male strength. His blue, keen eyes were lit up with laughter, his ruddy face, with its sharp fair hair, was full of satisfaction, and glowing with life. He piqued her.

‘How long are you staying?’ she asked him.

‘A day or two,’ he replied. ‘But there is no particular hurry.’

Still she stared into his face with that slow, full gaze which was so curious and so exciting to him. He was acutely and delightfully conscious of himself, of his own attractiveness. He felt full of strength, able to give off a sort of electric power. And he was aware of her dark, hot-looking eyes upon him. She had beautiful eyes, dark, fully-opened, hot, naked in their looking at him. And on them there seemed to float a film of disintegration, a sort of misery and sullenness, like oil on water. She wore no hat in the heated cafe, her loose, simple jumper was strung on a string round her neck. But it was made of rich peach-coloured crepe-de-chine, that hung heavily and softly from her young throat and her slender wrists. Her appearance was simple and complete, really beautiful, because of her regularity and form, her soft dark hair falling full and

level on either side of her head, her straight, small, softened features, Egyptian in the slight fulness of their curves, her slender neck and the simple, rich-coloured smock hanging on her slender shoulders. She was very still, almost null, in her manner, apart and watchful.

She appealed to Gerald strongly. He felt an awful, enjoyable power over her, an instinctive cherishing very near to cruelty. For she was a victim. He felt that she was in his power, and he was generous. The electricity was turgid and voluptuously rich, in his limbs. He would be able to destroy her utterly in the strength of his discharge. But she was waiting in her separation, given.

They talked banalities for some time. Suddenly Birkin said:

‘There’s Julius!’ and he half rose to his feet, motioning to the newcomer. The girl, with a curious, almost evil motion, looked round over her shoulder without moving her body. Gerald watched her dark, soft hair swing over her ears. He felt her watching intensely the man who was approaching, so he looked too. He saw a pale, full-built young man with rather long, solid fair hair hanging from under his black hat, moving cumbrously down the room, his face lit up with a smile at once naive and warm, and vapid. He approached towards Birkin, with a haste of welcome.

It was not till he was quite close that he perceived the girl. He recoiled, went pale, and said, in a high squealing voice:

‘Pussum, what are YOU doing here?’

The cafe looked up like animals when they hear a cry. Halliday hung motionless, an almost imbecile smile flickering palely on his face. The girl only stared at him with a black look in which flared an unfathomable hell of knowledge, and a certain impotence. She was limited by him.

‘Why have you come back?’ repeated Halliday, in the same high, hysterical voice. ‘I told you not to come back.’

The girl did not answer, only stared in the same viscous, heavy fashion, straight at him, as he stood recoiled, as if for safety, against the next table.

‘You know you wanted her to come back — come and sit down,’ said Birkin to him.

‘No I didn’t want her to come back, and I told her not to come back. What have you come for, Pussum?’

‘For nothing from YOU,’ she said in a heavy voice of resentment.

‘Then why have you come back at ALL?’ cried Halliday, his voice rising to a kind of squeal.

‘She comes as she likes,’ said Birkin. ‘Are you going to sit down, or are you not?’

‘No, I won’t sit down with Pussum,’ cried Halliday.

‘I won’t hurt you, you needn’t be afraid,’ she said to him, very curtly, and yet with a sort of protectiveness towards him, in her voice.

Halliday came and sat at the table, putting his hand on his heart, and crying:

‘Oh, it’s given me such a turn! Pussum, I wish you wouldn’t do these things. Why did you come back?’

‘Not for anything from you,’ she repeated.

‘You’ve said that before,’ he cried in a high voice.

She turned completely away from him, to Gerald Crich, whose eyes were shining with a subtle amusement.

‘Were you ever vewy much afwaid of the savages?’ she asked in her calm, dull childish voice.

‘No — never very much afraid. On the whole they’re harmless — they’re not born yet, you can’t feel really afraid of them. You know you can manage them.’

‘Do you weally? Aren’t they very fierce?’

‘Not very. There aren’t many fierce things, as a matter of fact. There aren’t many things, neither people nor animals, that have it in them to be really dangerous.’

‘Except in herds,’ interrupted Birkin.

‘Aren’t there really?’ she said. ‘Oh, I thought savages were all so dangerous, they’d have your life before you could look round.’

‘Did you?’ he laughed. ‘They are over-rated, savages. They’re too much like other people, not exciting, after the first acquaintance.’

‘Oh, it’s not so very wonderfully brave then, to be an explorer?’

‘No. It’s more a question of hardships than of terrors.’

‘Oh! And weren’t you ever afraid?’

‘In my life? I don’t know. Yes, I’m afraid of some things — of being shut up, locked up anywhere — or being fastened. I’m afraid of being bound hand and foot.’

She looked at him steadily with her dark eyes, that rested on him and roused him so deeply, that it left his upper self quite calm. It was rather delicious, to feel her drawing his self-revelations from him, as from the very innermost dark marrow of his body. She wanted to know. And her dark eyes seemed to be looking through into his naked organism. He felt, she was compelled to him, she was fated to come into contact with him, must have the seeing him and knowing him. And this roused a curious exultance. Also he felt, she must relinquish herself into his hands, and be subject to him. She was so profane, slave-like, watching him, absorbed by him. It was not that she was interested in what he said; she was absorbed by his self-revelation, by HIM, she wanted the secret of him, the experience of his male being.

Gerald's face was lit up with an uncanny smile, full of light and rousedness, yet unconscious. He sat with his arms on the table, his sunbrowned, rather sinister hands, that were animal and yet very shapely and attractive, pushed forward towards her. And they fascinated her. And she knew, she watched her own fascination.

Other men had come to the table, to talk with Birkin and Halliday. Gerald said in a low voice, apart, to Pussum:

'Where have you come back from?'

'From the country,' replied Pussum, in a very low, yet fully resonant voice. Her face closed hard. Continually she glanced at Halliday, and then a black flare came over her eyes. The heavy, fair young man ignored her completely; he was really afraid of her. For some moments she would be unaware of Gerald. He had not conquered her yet.

'And what has Halliday to do with it?' he asked, his voice still muted.

She would not answer for some seconds. Then she said, unwillingly:

'He made me go and live with him, and now he wants to throw me over. And yet he won't let me go to anybody else. He wants me to live hidden in the country. And then he says I persecute him, that he can't get rid of me.'

'Doesn't know his own mind,' said Gerald.

'He hasn't any mind, so he can't know it,' she said. 'He waits for what somebody tells him to do. He never does anything he wants to do himself — because he doesn't know what he wants. He's a perfect baby.'

Gerald looked at Halliday for some moments, watching the soft, rather degenerate face of the young man. Its very softness was an attraction; it was a soft, warm, corrupt nature, into which one might plunge with gratification.

'But he has no hold over you, has he?' Gerald asked.

'You see he MADE me go and live with him, when I didn't want to,' she replied. 'He came and cried to me, tears, you never saw so many, saying HE COULDN'T bear it unless I went back to him. And he wouldn't go away, he would have stayed for ever. He made me go back. Then every time he behaves in this fashion. And now I'm going to have a baby, he wants to give me a hundred pounds and send me into the country, so that he would never see me nor hear of me again. But I'm not going to do it, after — '

A queer look came over Gerald's face.

'Are you going to have a child?' he asked incredulous. It seemed, to look at her, impossible, she was so young and so far in spirit from any child-bearing.

She looked full into his face, and her dark, inchoate eyes had now a furtive look, and a look of a knowledge of evil, dark and indomitable. A flame ran secretly to his heart.

‘Yes,’ she said. ‘Isn’t it beastly?’

‘Don’t you want it?’ he asked.

‘I don’t,’ she replied emphatically.

‘But — ’ he said, ‘how long have you known?’

‘Ten weeks,’ she said.

All the time she kept her dark, inchoate eyes full upon him. He remained silent, thinking. Then, switching off and becoming cold, he asked, in a voice full of considerate kindness:

‘Is there anything we can eat here? Is there anything you would like?’

‘Yes,’ she said, ‘I should adore some oysters.’

‘All right,’ he said. ‘We’ll have oysters.’ And he beckoned to the waiter.

Halliday took no notice, until the little plate was set before her. Then suddenly he cried:

‘Pussum, you can’t eat oysters when you’re drinking brandy.’

‘What has it go to do with you?’ she asked.

‘Nothing, nothing,’ he cried. ‘But you can’t eat oysters when you’re drinking brandy.’

‘I’m not drinking brandy,’ she replied, and she sprinkled the last drops of her liqueur over his face. He gave an odd squeal. She sat looking at him, as if indifferent.

‘Pussum, why do you do that?’ he cried in panic. He gave Gerald the impression that he was terrified of her, and that he loved his terror. He seemed to relish his own horror and hatred of her, turn it over and extract every flavour from it, in real panic. Gerald thought him a strange fool, and yet piquant.

‘But Pussum,’ said another man, in a very small, quick Eton voice, ‘you promised not to hurt him.’

‘I haven’t hurt him,’ she answered.

‘What will you drink?’ the young man asked. He was dark, and smooth-skinned, and full of a stealthy vigour.

‘I don’t like porter, Maxim,’ she replied.

‘You must ask for champagne,’ came the whispering, gentlemanly voice of the other.

Gerald suddenly realised that this was a hint to him.

‘Shall we have champagne?’ he asked, laughing.

‘Yes please, dwy,’ she lisped childishly.

Gerald watched her eating the oysters. She was delicate and finicking in her eating, her fingers were fine and seemed very sensitive in the tips, so she put her food apart with fine, small motions, she ate carefully, delicately. It pleased him very much to see her, and it irritated Birkin. They were all drinking champagne.

Maxim, the prim young Russian with the smooth, warm-coloured face and black, oiled hair was the only one who seemed to be perfectly calm and sober. Birkin was white and abstract, unnatural, Gerald was smiling with a constant bright, amused, cold light in his eyes, leaning a little protectively towards the Pussum, who was very handsome, and soft, unfolded like some red lotus in dreadful flowering nakedness, vainglorious now, flushed with wine and with the excitement of men. Halliday looked foolish. One glass of wine was enough to make him drunk and giggling. Yet there was always a pleasant, warm naivete about him, that made him attractive.

‘I’m not afraid of anything except black-beetles,’ said the Pussum, looking up suddenly and staring with her black eyes, on which there seemed an unseeing film of flame, fully upon Gerald. He laughed dangerously, from the blood. Her childish speech caressed his nerves, and her burning, filmed eyes, turned now full upon him, oblivious of all her antecedents, gave him a sort of licence.

‘I’m not,’ she protested. ‘I’m not afraid of other things. But black-beetles — ugh!’ she shuddered convulsively, as if the very thought were too much to bear.

‘Do you mean,’ said Gerald, with the punctiliousness of a man who has been drinking, ‘that you are afraid of the sight of a black-beetle, or you are afraid of a black-beetle biting you, or doing you some harm?’

‘Do they bite?’ cried the girl.

‘How perfectly loathsome!’ exclaimed Halliday.

‘I don’t know,’ replied Gerald, looking round the table. ‘Do black-beetles bite? But that isn’t the point. Are you afraid of their biting, or is it a metaphysical antipathy?’

The girl was looking full upon him all the time with inchoate eyes.

‘Oh, I think they’re beastly, they’re horrid,’ she cried. ‘If I see one, it gives me the creeps all over. If one were to crawl on me, I’m SURE I should die — I’m sure I should.’

‘I hope not,’ whispered the young Russian.

‘I’m sure I should, Maxim,’ she asseverated.

‘Then one won’t crawl on you,’ said Gerald, smiling and knowing. In some strange way he understood her.

‘It’s metaphysical, as Gerald says,’ Birkin stated.

There was a little pause of uneasiness.

‘And are you afraid of nothing else, Pussum?’ asked the young Russian, in his quick, hushed, elegant manner.

‘Not weally,’ she said. ‘I am afraid of some things, but not weally the same. I’m not afraid of BLOOD.’

‘Not afraid of blood!’ exclaimed a young man with a thick, pale, jeering face,

who had just come to the table and was drinking whisky.

The Pussum turned on him a sulky look of dislike, low and ugly.

‘Aren’t you really afraid of blod?’ the other persisted, a sneer all over his face.

‘No, I’m not,’ she retorted.

‘Why, have you ever seen blood, except in a dentist’s spittoon?’ jeered the young man.

‘I wasn’t speaking to you,’ she replied rather superbly.

‘You can answer me, can’t you?’ he said.

For reply, she suddenly jabbed a knife across his thick, pale hand. He started up with a vulgar curse.

‘Show’s what you are,’ said the Pussum in contempt.

‘Curse you,’ said the young man, standing by the table and looking down at her with acrid malevolence.

‘Stop that,’ said Gerald, in quick, instinctive command.

The young man stood looking down at her with sardonic contempt, a cowed, self-conscious look on his thick, pale face. The blood began to flow from his hand.

‘Oh, how horrible, take it away!’ squealed Halliday, turning green and averting his face.

‘D’you feel ill?’ asked the sardonic young man, in some concern. ‘Do you feel ill, Julius? Garn, it’s nothing, man, don’t give her the pleasure of letting her think she’s performed a feat — don’t give her the satisfaction, man — it’s just what she wants.’

‘Oh!’ squealed Halliday.

‘He’s going to cat, Maxim,’ said the Pussum warningly. The suave young Russian rose and took Halliday by the arm, leading him away. Birkin, white and diminished, looked on as if he were displeased. The wounded, sardonic young man moved away, ignoring his bleeding hand in the most conspicuous fashion.

‘He’s an awful coward, really,’ said the Pussum to Gerald. ‘He’s got such an influence over Julius.’

‘Who is he?’ asked Gerald.

‘He’s a Jew, really. I can’t bear him.’

‘Well, he’s quite unimportant. But what’s wrong with Halliday?’

‘Julius’s the most awful coward you’ve ever seen,’ she cried. ‘He always faints if I lift a knife — he’s tewwified of me.’

‘H’m!’ said Gerald.

‘They’re all afwaid of me,’ she said. ‘Only the Jew thinks he’s going to show his courage. But he’s the biggest coward of them all, really, because he’s afwaid what people will think about him — and Julius doesn’t care about that.’

‘They’ve a lot of valour between them,’ said Gerald good-humouredly.

The Pussum looked at him with a slow, slow smile. She was very handsome, flushed, and confident in dreadful knowledge. Two little points of light glinted on Gerald’s eyes.

‘Why do they call you Pussum, because you’re like a cat?’ he asked her.

‘I expect so,’ she said.

The smile grew more intense on his face.

‘You are, rather; or a young, female panther.’

‘Oh God, Gerald!’ said Birkin, in some disgust.

They both looked uneasily at Birkin.

‘You’re silent tonight, Wupert,’ she said to him, with a slight insolence, being safe with the other man.

Halliday was coming back, looking forlorn and sick.

‘Pussum,’ he said, ‘I wish you wouldn’t do these things — Oh!’ He sank in his chair with a groan.

‘You’d better go home,’ she said to him.

‘I WILL go home,’ he said. ‘But won’t you all come along. Won’t you come round to the flat?’ he said to Gerald. ‘I should be so glad if you would. Do — that’ll be splendid. I say?’ He looked round for a waiter. ‘Get me a taxi.’ Then he groaned again. ‘Oh I do feel — perfectly ghastly! Pussum, you see what you do to me.’

‘Then why are you such an idiot?’ she said with sullen calm.

‘But I’m not an idiot! Oh, how awful! Do come, everybody, it will be so splendid. Pussum, you are coming. What? Oh but you MUST come, yes, you must. What? Oh, my dear girl, don’t make a fuss now, I feel perfectly — Oh, it’s so ghastly — Ho! — er! Oh!’

‘You know you can’t drink,’ she said to him, coldly.

‘I tell you it isn’t drink — it’s your disgusting behaviour, Pussum, it’s nothing else. Oh, how awful! Libidnikov, do let us go.’

‘He’s only drunk one glass — only one glass,’ came the rapid, hushed voice of the young Russian.

They all moved off to the door. The girl kept near to Gerald, and seemed to be at one in her motion with him. He was aware of this, and filled with demonstration that his motion held good for two. He held her in the hollow of his will, and she was soft, secret, invisible in her stirring there.

They crowded five of them into the taxi-cab. Halliday lurched in first, and dropped into his seat against the other window. Then the Pussum took her place, and Gerald sat next to her. They heard the young Russian giving orders to the driver, then they were all seated in the dark, crowded close together, Halliday

groaning and leaning out of the window. They felt the swift, muffled motion of the car.

The Pussum sat near to Gerald, and she seemed to become soft, subtly to infuse herself into his bones, as if she were passing into him in a black, electric flow. Her being suffused into his veins like a magnetic darkness, and concentrated at the base of his spine like a fearful source of power. Meanwhile her voice sounded out reedy and nonchalant, as she talked indifferently with Birkin and with Maxim. Between her and Gerald was this silence and this black, electric comprehension in the darkness. Then she found his hand, and grasped it in her own firm, small clasp. It was so utterly dark, and yet such a naked statement, that rapid vibrations ran through his blood and over his brain, he was no longer responsible. Still her voice rang on like a bell, tinged with a tone of mockery. And as she swung her head, her fine mane of hair just swept his face, and all his nerves were on fire, as with a subtle friction of electricity. But the great centre of his force held steady, a magnificent pride to him, at the base of his spine.

They arrived at a large block of buildings, went up in a lift, and presently a door was being opened for them by a Hindu. Gerald looked in surprise, wondering if he were a gentleman, one of the Hindus down from Oxford, perhaps. But no, he was the man-servant.

‘Make tea, Hasan,’ said Halliday.

‘There is a room for me?’ said Birkin.

To both of which questions the man grinned, and murmured.

He made Gerald uncertain, because, being tall and slender and reticent, he looked like a gentleman.

‘Who is your servant?’ he asked of Halliday. ‘He looks a swell.’

‘Oh yes — that’s because he’s dressed in another man’s clothes. He’s anything but a swell, really. We found him in the road, starving. So I took him here, and another man gave him clothes. He’s anything but what he seems to be — his only advantage is that he can’t speak English and can’t understand it, so he’s perfectly safe.’

‘He’s very dirty,’ said the young Russian swiftly and silently.

Directly, the man appeared in the doorway.

‘What is it?’ said Halliday.

The Hindu grinned, and murmured shyly:

‘Want to speak to master.’

Gerald watched curiously. The fellow in the doorway was goodlooking and clean-limbed, his bearing was calm, he looked elegant, aristocratic. Yet he was half a savage, grinning foolishly. Halliday went out into the corridor to speak

with him.

‘What?’ they heard his voice. ‘What? What do you say? Tell me again. What? Want money? Want MORE money? But what do you want money for?’ There was the confused sound of the Hindu’s talking, then Halliday appeared in the room, smiling also foolishly, and saying:

‘He says he wants money to buy underclothing. Can anybody lend me a shilling? Oh thanks, a shilling will do to buy all the underclothes he wants.’ He took the money from Gerald and went out into the passage again, where they heard him saying, ‘You can’t want more money, you had three and six yesterday. You mustn’t ask for any more. Bring the tea in quickly.’

Gerald looked round the room. It was an ordinary London sitting-room in a flat, evidently taken furnished, rather common and ugly. But there were several negro statues, wood-carvings from West Africa, strange and disturbing, the carved negroes looked almost like the foetus of a human being. One was a woman sitting naked in a strange posture, and looking tortured, her abdomen stuck out. The young Russian explained that she was sitting in child-birth, clutching the ends of the band that hung from her neck, one in each hand, so that she could bear down, and help labour. The strange, transfixed, rudimentary face of the woman again reminded Gerald of a foetus, it was also rather wonderful, conveying the suggestion of the extreme of physical sensation, beyond the limits of mental consciousness.

‘Aren’t they rather obscene?’ he asked, disapproving.

‘I don’t know,’ murmured the other rapidly. ‘I have never defined the obscene. I think they are very good.’

Gerald turned away. There were one or two new pictures in the room, in the Futurist manner; there was a large piano. And these, with some ordinary London lodging-house furniture of the better sort, completed the whole.

The Pussum had taken off her hat and coat, and was seated on the sofa. She was evidently quite at home in the house, but uncertain, suspended. She did not quite know her position. Her alliance for the time being was with Gerald, and she did not know how far this was admitted by any of the men. She was considering how she should carry off the situation. She was determined to have her experience. Now, at this eleventh hour, she was not to be baulked. Her face was flushed as with battle, her eye was brooding but inevitable.

The man came in with tea and a bottle of Kummel. He set the tray on a little table before the couch.

‘Pussum,’ said Halliday, ‘pour out the tea.’

She did not move.

‘Won’t you do it?’ Halliday repeated, in a state of nervous apprehension.

‘I’ve not come back here as it was before,’ she said. ‘I only came because the others wanted me to, not for your sake.’

‘My dear Pussum, you know you are your own mistress. I don’t want you to do anything but use the flat for your own convenience — you know it, I’ve told you so many times.’

She did not reply, but silently, reservedly reached for the tea-pot. They all sat round and drank tea. Gerald could feel the electric connection between him and her so strongly, as she sat there quiet and withheld, that another set of conditions altogether had come to pass. Her silence and her immutability perplexed him. HOW was he going to come to her? And yet he felt it quite inevitable. He trusted completely to the current that held them. His perplexity was only superficial, new conditions reigned, the old were surpassed; here one did as one was possessed to do, no matter what it was.

Birkin rose. It was nearly one o’clock.

‘I’m going to bed,’ he said. ‘Gerald, I’ll ring you up in the morning at your place or you ring me up here.’

‘Right,’ said Gerald, and Birkin went out.

When he was well gone, Halliday said in a stimulated voice, to Gerald:

‘I say, won’t you stay here — oh do!’

‘You can’t put everybody up,’ said Gerald.

‘Oh but I can, perfectly — there are three more beds besides mine — do stay, won’t you. Everything is quite ready — there is always somebody here — I always put people up — I love having the house crowded.’

‘But there are only two rooms,’ said the Pussum, in a cold, hostile voice, ‘now Rupert’s here.’

‘I know there are only two rooms,’ said Halliday, in his odd, high way of speaking. ‘But what does that matter?’

He was smiling rather foolishly, and he spoke eagerly, with an insinuating determination.

‘Julius and I will share one room,’ said the Russian in his discreet, precise voice. Halliday and he were friends since Eton.

‘It’s very simple,’ said Gerald, rising and pressing back his arms, stretching himself. Then he went again to look at one of the pictures. Every one of his limbs was turgid with electric force, and his back was tense like a tiger’s, with slumbering fire. He was very proud.

The Pussum rose. She gave a black look at Halliday, black and deadly, which brought the rather foolishly pleased smile to that young man’s face. Then she went out of the room, with a cold good-night to them all generally.

There was a brief interval, they heard a door close, then Maxim said, in his

refined voice:

‘That’s all right.’

He looked significantly at Gerald, and said again, with a silent nod:

‘That’s all right — you’re all right.’

Gerald looked at the smooth, ruddy, comely face, and at the strange, significant eyes, and it seemed as if the voice of the young Russian, so small and perfect, sounded in the blood rather than in the air.

‘I’m all right then,’ said Gerald.

‘Yes! Yes! You’re all right,’ said the Russian.

Halliday continued to smile, and to say nothing.

Suddenly the Pussum appeared again in the door, her small, childish face looking sullen and vindictive.

‘I know you want to catch me out,’ came her cold, rather resonant voice. ‘But I don’t care, I don’t care how much you catch me out.’

She turned and was gone again. She had been wearing a loose dressing-gown of purple silk, tied round her waist. She looked so small and childish and vulnerable, almost pitiful. And yet the black looks of her eyes made Gerald feel drowned in some potent darkness that almost frightened him.

The men lit another cigarette and talked casually.

CHAPTER VII.

FETISH

In the morning Gerald woke late. He had slept heavily. Pussum was still asleep, sleeping childishly and pathetically. There was something small and curled up and defenceless about her, that roused an unsatisfied flame of passion in the young man's blood, a devouring avid pity. He looked at her again. But it would be too cruel to wake her. He subdued himself, and went away.

Hearing voices coming from the sitting-room, Halliday talking to Libidnikov, he went to the door and glanced in. He had on a silk wrap of a beautiful bluish colour, with an amethyst hem.

To his surprise he saw the two young men by the fire, stark naked. Halliday looked up, rather pleased.

'Good-morning,' he said. 'Oh — did you want towels?' And stark naked he went out into the hall, striding a strange, white figure between the unliving furniture. He came back with the towels, and took his former position, crouching seated before the fire on the fender.

'Don't you love to feel the fire on your skin?' he said.

'It IS rather pleasant,' said Gerald.

'How perfectly splendid it must be to be in a climate where one could do without clothing altogether,' said Halliday.

'Yes,' said Gerald, 'if there weren't so many things that sting and bite.'

'That's a disadvantage,' murmured Maxim.

Gerald looked at him, and with a slight revulsion saw the human animal, golden skinned and bare, somehow humiliating. Halliday was different. He had a rather heavy, slack, broken beauty, white and firm. He was like a Christ in a Pieta. The animal was not there at all, only the heavy, broken beauty. And Gerald realised how Halliday's eyes were beautiful too, so blue and warm and confused, broken also in their expression. The fireglow fell on his heavy, rather bowed shoulders, he sat slackly crouched on the fender, his face was uplifted, weak, perhaps slightly disintegrate, and yet with a moving beauty of its own.

'Of course,' said Maxim, 'you've been in hot countries where the people go

about naked.'

'Oh really!' exclaimed Halliday. 'Where?'

'South America — Amazon,' said Gerald.

'Oh but how perfectly splendid! It's one of the things I want most to do — to live from day to day without EVER putting on any sort of clothing whatever. If I could do that, I should feel I had lived.'

'But why?' said Gerald. 'I can't see that it makes so much difference.'

'Oh, I think it would be perfectly splendid. I'm sure life would be entirely another thing — entirely different, and perfectly wonderful.'

'But why?' asked Gerald. 'Why should it?'

'Oh — one would FEEL things instead of merely looking at them. I should feel the air move against me, and feel the things I touched, instead of having only to look at them. I'm sure life is all wrong because it has become much too visual — we can neither hear nor feel nor understand, we can only see. I'm sure that is entirely wrong.'

'Yes, that is true, that is true,' said the Russian.

Gerald glanced at him, and saw him, his suave, golden coloured body with the black hair growing fine and freely, like tendrils, and his limbs like smooth plant-stems. He was so healthy and well-made, why did he make one ashamed, why did one feel repelled? Why should Gerald even dislike it, why did it seem to him to detract from his own dignity. Was that all a human being amounted to? So uninspired! thought Gerald.

Birkin suddenly appeared in the doorway, in white pyjamas and wet hair, and a towel over his arm. He was aloof and white, and somehow evanescent.

'There's the bath-room now, if you want it,' he said generally, and was going away again, when Gerald called:

'I say, Rupert!'

'What?' The single white figure appeared again, a presence in the room.

'What do you think of that figure there? I want to know,' Gerald asked.

Birkin, white and strangely ghostly, went over to the carved figure of the negro woman in labour. Her nude, protuberant body crouched in a strange, clutching posture, her hands gripping the ends of the band, above her breast.

'It is art,' said Birkin.

'Very beautiful, it's very beautiful,' said the Russian.

They all drew near to look. Gerald looked at the group of men, the Russian golden and like a water-plant, Halliday tall and heavily, brokenly beautiful, Birkin very white and indefinite, not to be assigned, as he looked closely at the carven woman. Strangely elated, Gerald also lifted his eyes to the face of the wooden figure. And his heart contracted.

He saw vividly with his spirit the grey, forward-stretching face of the negro woman, African and tense, abstracted in utter physical stress. It was a terrible face, void, peaked, abstracted almost into meaninglessness by the weight of sensation beneath. He saw the Pussum in it. As in a dream, he knew her.

‘Why is it art?’ Gerald asked, shocked, resentful.

‘It conveys a complete truth,’ said Birkin. ‘It contains the whole truth of that state, whatever you feel about it.’

‘But you can’t call it HIGH art,’ said Gerald.

‘High! There are centuries and hundreds of centuries of development in a straight line, behind that carving; it is an awful pitch of culture, of a definite sort.’

‘What culture?’ Gerald asked, in opposition. He hated the sheer African thing.

‘Pure culture in sensation, culture in the physical consciousness, really ultimate PHYSICAL consciousness, mindless, utterly sensual. It is so sensual as to be final, supreme.’

But Gerald resented it. He wanted to keep certain illusions, certain ideas like clothing.

‘You like the wrong things, Rupert,’ he said, ‘things against yourself.’

‘Oh, I know, this isn’t everything,’ Birkin replied, moving away.

When Gerald went back to his room from the bath, he also carried his clothes. He was so conventional at home, that when he was really away, and on the loose, as now, he enjoyed nothing so much as full outrageousness. So he strode with his blue silk wrap over his arm and felt defiant.

The Pussum lay in her bed, motionless, her round, dark eyes like black, unhappy pools. He could only see the black, bottomless pools of her eyes. Perhaps she suffered. The sensation of her inchoate suffering roused the old sharp flame in him, a mordant pity, a passion almost of cruelty.

‘You are awake now,’ he said to her.

‘What time is it?’ came her muted voice.

She seemed to flow back, almost like liquid, from his approach, to sink helplessly away from him. Her inchoate look of a violated slave, whose fulfilment lies in her further and further violation, made his nerves quiver with acutely desirable sensation. After all, his was the only will, she was the passive substance of his will. He tingled with the subtle, biting sensation. And then he knew, he must go away from her, there must be pure separation between them.

It was a quiet and ordinary breakfast, the four men all looking very clean and bathed. Gerald and the Russian were both correct and COMME IL FAUT in appearance and manner, Birkin was gaunt and sick, and looked a failure in his attempt to be a properly dressed man, like Gerald and Maxim. Halliday wore

tweeds and a green flannel shirt, and a rag of a tie, which was just right for him. The Hindu brought in a great deal of soft toast, and looked exactly the same as he had looked the night before, statically the same.

At the end of the breakfast the Pussum appeared, in a purple silk wrap with a shimmering sash. She had recovered herself somewhat, but was mute and lifeless still. It was a torment to her when anybody spoke to her. Her face was like a small, fine mask, sinister too, masked with unwilling suffering. It was almost midday. Gerald rose and went away to his business, glad to get out. But he had not finished. He was coming back again at evening, they were all dining together, and he had booked seats for the party, excepting Birkin, at a music-hall.

At night they came back to the flat very late again, again flushed with drink. Again the man-servant — who invariably disappeared between the hours of ten and twelve at night — came in silently and inscrutably with tea, bending in a slow, strange, leopard-like fashion to put the tray softly on the table. His face was immutable, aristocratic-looking, tinged slightly with grey under the skin; he was young and good-looking. But Birkin felt a slight sickness, looking at him, and feeling the slight greyness as an ash or a corruption, in the aristocratic inscrutability of expression a nauseating, bestial stupidity.

Again they talked cordially and rousedly together. But already a certain friability was coming over the party, Birkin was mad with irritation, Halliday was turning in an insane hatred against Gerald, the Pussum was becoming hard and cold, like a flint knife, and Halliday was laying himself out to her. And her intention, ultimately, was to capture Halliday, to have complete power over him.

In the morning they all stalked and lounged about again. But Gerald could feel a strange hostility to himself, in the air. It roused his obstinacy, and he stood up against it. He hung on for two more days. The result was a nasty and insane scene with Halliday on the fourth evening. Halliday turned with absurd animosity upon Gerald, in the cafe. There was a row. Gerald was on the point of knocking-in Halliday's face; when he was filled with sudden disgust and indifference, and he went away, leaving Halliday in a foolish state of gloating triumph, the Pussum hard and established, and Maxim standing clear. Birkin was absent, he had gone out of town again.

Gerald was piqued because he had left without giving the Pussum money. It was true, she did not care whether he gave her money or not, and he knew it. But she would have been glad of ten pounds, and he would have been VERY glad to give them to her. Now he felt in a false position. He went away chewing his lips to get at the ends of his short clipped moustache. He knew the Pussum was merely glad to be rid of him. She had got her Halliday whom she wanted. She

wanted him completely in her power. Then she would marry him. She wanted to marry him. She had set her will on marrying Halliday. She never wanted to hear of Gerald again; unless, perhaps, she were in difficulty; because after all, Gerald was what she called a man, and these others, Halliday, Libidnikov, Birkin, the whole Bohemian set, they were only half men. But it was half men she could deal with. She felt sure of herself with them. The real men, like Gerald, put her in her place too much.

Still, she respected Gerald, she really respected him. She had managed to get his address, so that she could appeal to him in time of distress. She knew he wanted to give her money. She would perhaps write to him on that inevitable rainy day.

CHAPTER VIII.

BREADALBY

Breadalby was a Georgian house with Corinthian pillars, standing among the softer, greener hills of Derbyshire, not far from Cromford. In front, it looked over a lawn, over a few trees, down to a string of fish-ponds in the hollow of the silent park. At the back were trees, among which were to be found the stables, and the big kitchen garden, behind which was a wood.

It was a very quiet place, some miles from the high-road, back from the Derwent Valley, outside the show scenery. Silent and forsaken, the golden stucco showed between the trees, the house-front looked down the park, unchanged and unchanging.

Of late, however, Hermione had lived a good deal at the house. She had turned away from London, away from Oxford, towards the silence of the country. Her father was mostly absent, abroad, she was either alone in the house, with her visitors, of whom there were always several, or she had with her her brother, a bachelor, and a Liberal member of Parliament. He always came down when the House was not sitting, seemed always to be present in Breadalby, although he was most conscientious in his attendance to duty.

The summer was just coming in when Ursula and Gudrun went to stay the second time with Hermione. Coming along in the car, after they had entered the park, they looked across the dip, where the fish-ponds lay in silence, at the pillared front of the house, sunny and small like an English drawing of the old school, on the brow of the green hill, against the trees. There were small figures on the green lawn, women in lavender and yellow moving to the shade of the enormous, beautifully balanced cedar tree.

‘Isn’t it complete!’ said Gudrun. ‘It is as final as an old aquatint.’ She spoke with some resentment in her voice, as if she were captivated unwillingly, as if she must admire against her will.

‘Do you love it?’ asked Ursula.

‘I don’t LOVE it, but in its way, I think it is quite complete.’

The motor-car ran down the hill and up again in one breath, and they were

curving to the side door. A parlour-maid appeared, and then Hermione, coming forward with her pale face lifted, and her hands outstretched, advancing straight to the new-comers, her voice singing:

‘Here you are — I’m so glad to see you — ’ she kissed Gudrun — ‘so glad to see you — ’ she kissed Ursula and remained with her arm round her. ‘Are you very tired?’

‘Not at all tired,’ said Ursula.

‘Are you tired, Gudrun?’

‘Not at all, thanks,’ said Gudrun.

‘No — ’ drawled Hermione. And she stood and looked at them. The two girls were embarrassed because she would not move into the house, but must have her little scene of welcome there on the path. The servants waited.

‘Come in,’ said Hermione at last, having fully taken in the pair of them. Gudrun was the more beautiful and attractive, she had decided again, Ursula was more physical, more womanly. She admired Gudrun’s dress more. It was of green poplin, with a loose coat above it, of broad, dark-green and dark-brown stripes. The hat was of a pale, greenish straw, the colour of new hay, and it had a plaited ribbon of black and orange, the stockings were dark green, the shoes black. It was a good get-up, at once fashionable and individual. Ursula, in dark blue, was more ordinary, though she also looked well.

Hermione herself wore a dress of prune-coloured silk, with coral beads and coral coloured stockings. But her dress was both shabby and soiled, even rather dirty.

‘You would like to see your rooms now, wouldn’t you! Yes. We will go up now, shall we?’

Ursula was glad when she could be left alone in her room. Hermione lingered so long, made such a stress on one. She stood so near to one, pressing herself near upon one, in a way that was most embarrassing and oppressive. She seemed to hinder one’s workings.

Lunch was served on the lawn, under the great tree, whose thick, blackish boughs came down close to the grass. There were present a young Italian woman, slight and fashionable, a young, athletic-looking Miss Bradley, a learned, dry Baronet of fifty, who was always making witticisms and laughing at them heartily in a harsh, horse-laugh, there was Rupert Birkin, and then a woman secretary, a Fraulein Marz, young and slim and pretty.

The food was very good, that was one thing. Gudrun, critical of everything, gave it her full approval. Ursula loved the situation, the white table by the cedar tree, the scent of new sunshine, the little vision of the leafy park, with far-off deer feeding peacefully. There seemed a magic circle drawn about the place,

shutting out the present, enclosing the delightful, precious past, trees and deer and silence, like a dream.

But in spirit she was unhappy. The talk went on like a rattle of small artillery, always slightly sententious, with a sententiousness that was only emphasised by the continual crackling of a witticism, the continual spatter of verbal jest, designed to give a tone of flippancy to a stream of conversation that was all critical and general, a canal of conversation rather than a stream.

The attitude was mental and very wearying. Only the elderly sociologist, whose mental fibre was so tough as to be insentient, seemed to be thoroughly happy. Birkin was down in the mouth. Hermione appeared, with amazing persistence, to wish to ridicule him and make him look ignominious in the eyes of everybody. And it was surprising how she seemed to succeed, how helpless he seemed against her. He looked completely insignificant. Ursula and Gudrun, both very unused, were mostly silent, listening to the slow, rhapsodic sing-song of Hermione, or the verbal sallies of Sir Joshua, or the prattle of Fraulein, or the responses of the other two women.

Luncheon was over, coffee was brought out on the grass, the party left the table and sat about in lounge chairs, in the shade or in the sunshine as they wished. Fraulein departed into the house, Hermione took up her embroidery, the little Contessa took a book, Miss Bradley was weaving a basket out of fine grass, and there they all were on the lawn in the early summer afternoon, working leisurely and spattering with half-intellectual, deliberate talk.

Suddenly there was the sound of the brakes and the shutting off of a motor-car.

‘There’s Salsie!’ sang Hermione, in her slow, amusing sing-song. And laying down her work, she rose slowly, and slowly passed over the lawn, round the bushes, out of sight.

‘Who is it?’ asked Gudrun.

‘Mr Roddice — Miss Roddice’s brother — at least, I suppose it’s he,’ said Sir Joshua.

‘Salsie, yes, it is her brother,’ said the little Contessa, lifting her head for a moment from her book, and speaking as if to give information, in her slightly deepened, guttural English.

They all waited. And then round the bushes came the tall form of Alexander Roddice, striding romantically like a Meredith hero who remembers Disraeli. He was cordial with everybody, he was at once a host, with an easy, offhand hospitality that he had learned for Hermione’s friends. He had just come down from London, from the House. At once the atmosphere of the House of Commons made itself felt over the lawn: the Home Secretary had said such and

such a thing, and he, Roddice, on the other hand, thought such and such a thing, and had said so-and-so to the PM.

Now Hermione came round the bushes with Gerald Crich. He had come along with Alexander. Gerald was presented to everybody, was kept by Hermione for a few moments in full view, then he was led away, still by Hermione. He was evidently her guest of the moment.

There had been a split in the Cabinet; the minister for Education had resigned owing to adverse criticism. This started a conversation on education.

‘Of course,’ said Hermione, lifting her face like a rhapsodist, ‘there CAN be no reason, no EXCUSE for education, except the joy and beauty of knowledge in itself.’ She seemed to rumble and ruminate with subterranean thoughts for a minute, then she proceeded: ‘Vocational education ISN’T education, it is the close of education.’

Gerald, on the brink of discussion, sniffed the air with delight and prepared for action.

‘Not necessarily,’ he said. ‘But isn’t education really like gymnastics, isn’t the end of education the production of a well-trained, vigorous, energetic mind?’

‘Just as athletics produce a healthy body, ready for anything,’ cried Miss Bradley, in hearty accord.

Gudrun looked at her in silent loathing.

‘Well — ’ rumbled Hermione, ‘I don’t know. To me the pleasure of knowing is so great, so WONDERFUL — nothing has meant so much to me in all life, as certain knowledge — no, I am sure — nothing.’

‘What knowledge, for example, Hermione?’ asked Alexander.

Hermione lifted her face and rumbled —

‘M — m — m — I don’t know . . . But one thing was the stars, when I really understood something about the stars. One feels so UPLIFTED, so UNBOUNDED . . .’

Birkin looked at her in a white fury.

‘What do you want to feel unbounded for?’ he said sarcastically. ‘You don’t want to BE unbounded.’

Hermione recoiled in offence.

‘Yes, but one does have that limitless feeling,’ said Gerald. ‘It’s like getting on top of the mountain and seeing the Pacific.’

‘Silent upon a peak in Dariayn,’ murmured the Italian, lifting her face for a moment from her book.

‘Not necessarily in Dariayn,’ said Gerald, while Ursula began to laugh.

Hermione waited for the dust to settle, and then she said, untouched:

‘Yes, it is the greatest thing in life — to KNOW. It is really to be happy, to be

FREE.'

'Knowledge is, of course, liberty,' said Mattheson.

'In compressed tabloids,' said Birkin, looking at the dry, stiff little body of the Baronet. Immediately Gudrun saw the famous sociologist as a flat bottle, containing tabloids of compressed liberty. That pleased her. Sir Joshua was labelled and placed forever in her mind.

'What does that mean, Rupert?' sang Hermione, in a calm snub.

'You can only have knowledge, strictly,' he replied, 'of things concluded, in the past. It's like bottling the liberty of last summer in the bottled gooseberries.'

'CAN one have knowledge only of the past?' asked the Baronet, pointedly. 'Could we call our knowledge of the laws of gravitation for instance, knowledge of the past?'

'Yes,' said Birkin.

'There is a most beautiful thing in my book,' suddenly piped the little Italian woman. 'It says the man came to the door and threw his eyes down the street.'

There was a general laugh in the company. Miss Bradley went and looked over the shoulder of the Contessa.

'See!' said the Contessa.

'Bazarov came to the door and threw his eyes hurriedly down the street,' she read.

Again there was a loud laugh, the most startling of which was the Baronet's, which rattled out like a clatter of falling stones.

'What is the book?' asked Alexander, promptly.

'Fathers and Sons, by Turgenev,' said the little foreigner, pronouncing every syllable distinctly. She looked at the cover, to verify herself.

'An old American edition,' said Birkin.

'Ha! — of course — translated from the French,' said Alexander, with a fine declamatory voice. 'Bazarov ouvra la porte et jeta les yeux dans la rue.'

He looked brightly round the company.

'I wonder what the "hurriedly" was,' said Ursula.

They all began to guess.

And then, to the amazement of everybody, the maid came hurrying with a large tea-tray. The afternoon had passed so swiftly.

After tea, they were all gathered for a walk.

'Would you like to come for a walk?' said Hermione to each of them, one by one. And they all said yes, feeling somehow like prisoners marshalled for exercise. Birkin only refused.

'Will you come for a walk, Rupert?'

'No, Hermione.'

‘But are you SURE?’

‘Quite sure.’ There was a second’s hesitation.

‘And why not?’ sang Hermione’s question. It made her blood run sharp, to be thwarted in even so trifling a matter. She intended them all to walk with her in the park.

‘Because I don’t like trooping off in a gang,’ he said.

Her voice rumbled in her throat for a moment. Then she said, with a curious stray calm:

‘Then we’ll leave a little boy behind, if he’s sulky.’

And she looked really gay, while she insulted him. But it merely made him stiff.

She trailed off to the rest of the company, only turning to wave her handkerchief to him, and to chuckle with laughter, singing out:

‘Good-bye, good-bye, little boy.’

‘Good-bye, impudent hag,’ he said to himself.

They all went through the park. Hermione wanted to show them the wild daffodils on a little slope. ‘This way, this way,’ sang her leisurely voice at intervals. And they had all to come this way. The daffodils were pretty, but who could see them? Ursula was stiff all over with resentment by this time, resentment of the whole atmosphere. Gudrun, mocking and objective, watched and registered everything.

They looked at the shy deer, and Hermione talked to the stag, as if he too were a boy she wanted to wheedle and fondle. He was male, so she must exert some kind of power over him. They trailed home by the fish-ponds, and Hermione told them about the quarrel of two male swans, who had striven for the love of the one lady. She chuckled and laughed as she told how the ousted lover had sat with his head buried under his wing, on the gravel.

When they arrived back at the house, Hermione stood on the lawn and sang out, in a strange, small, high voice that carried very far:

‘Rupert! Rupert!’ The first syllable was high and slow, the second dropped down. ‘Roo-o-opert.’

But there was no answer. A maid appeared.

‘Where is Mr Birkin, Alice?’ asked the mild straying voice of Hermione. But under the straying voice, what a persistent, almost insane WILL!

‘I think he’s in his room, madam.’

‘Is he?’

Hermione went slowly up the stairs, along the corridor, singing out in her high, small call:

‘Ru-oo-pert! Ru-oo pert!’

She came to his door, and tapped, still crying: 'Roo-pert.'

'Yes,' sounded his voice at last.

'What are you doing?'

The question was mild and curious.

There was no answer. Then he opened the door.

'We've come back,' said Hermione. 'The daffodils are SO beautiful.'

'Yes,' he said, 'I've seen them.'

She looked at him with her long, slow, impassive look, along her cheeks.

'Have you?' she echoed. And she remained looking at him. She was stimulated above all things by this conflict with him, when he was like a sulky boy, helpless, and she had him safe at Breadalby. But underneath she knew the split was coming, and her hatred of him was subconscious and intense.

'What were you doing?' she reiterated, in her mild, indifferent tone. He did not answer, and she made her way, almost unconsciously into his room. He had taken a Chinese drawing of geese from the boudoir, and was copying it, with much skill and vividness.

'You are copying the drawing,' she said, standing near the table, and looking down at his work. 'Yes. How beautifully you do it! You like it very much, don't you?'

'It's a marvellous drawing,' he said.

'Is it? I'm so glad you like it, because I've always been fond of it. The Chinese Ambassador gave it me.'

'I know,' he said.

'But why do you copy it?' she asked, casual and sing-song. 'Why not do something original?'

'I want to know it,' he replied. 'One gets more of China, copying this picture, than reading all the books.'

'And what do you get?'

She was at once roused, she laid as it were violent hands on him, to extract his secrets from him. She MUST know. It was a dreadful tyranny, an obsession in her, to know all he knew. For some time he was silent, hating to answer her. Then, compelled, he began:

'I know what centres they live from — what they perceive and feel — the hot, stinging centrality of a goose in the flux of cold water and mud — the curious bitter stinging heat of a goose's blood, entering their own blood like an inoculation of corruptive fire — fire of the cold-burning mud — the lotus mystery.'

Hermione looked at him along her narrow, pallid cheeks. Her eyes were strange and drugged, heavy under their heavy, drooping lids. Her thin bosom

shrugged convulsively. He stared back at her, devilish and unchanging. With another strange, sick convulsion, she turned away, as if she were sick, could feel dissolution setting-in in her body. For with her mind she was unable to attend to his words, he caught her, as it were, beneath all her defences, and destroyed her with some insidious occult potency.

‘Yes,’ she said, as if she did not know what she were saying. ‘Yes,’ and she swallowed, and tried to regain her mind. But she could not, she was witless, decentralised. Use all her will as she might, she could not recover. She suffered the ghastliness of dissolution, broken and gone in a horrible corruption. And he stood and looked at her unmoved. She strayed out, pallid and preyed-upon like a ghost, like one attacked by the tomb-influences which dog us. And she was gone like a corpse, that has no presence, no connection. He remained hard and vindictive.

Hermione came down to dinner strange and sepulchral, her eyes heavy and full of sepulchral darkness, strength. She had put on a dress of stiff old greenish brocade, that fitted tight and made her look tall and rather terrible, ghastly. In the gay light of the drawing-room she was uncanny and oppressive. But seated in the half-light of the diningroom, sitting stiffly before the shaded candles on the table, she seemed a power, a presence. She listened and attended with a drugged attention.

The party was gay and extravagant in appearance, everybody had put on evening dress except Birkin and Joshua Mattheson. The little Italian Contessa wore a dress of tissue, of orange and gold and black velvet in soft wide stripes, Gudrun was emerald green with strange net-work, Ursula was in yellow with dull silver veiling, Miss Bradley was of grey, crimson and jet, Fraulein Marz wore pale blue. It gave Hermione a sudden convulsive sensation of pleasure, to see these rich colours under the candle-light. She was aware of the talk going on, ceaselessly, Joshua’s voice dominating; of the ceaseless pitter-patter of women’s light laughter and responses; of the brilliant colours and the white table and the shadow above and below; and she seemed in a swoon of gratification, convulsed with pleasure and yet sick, like a REVENANT. She took very little part in the conversation, yet she heard it all, it was all hers.

They all went together into the drawing-room, as if they were one family, easily, without any attention to ceremony. Fraulein handed the coffee, everybody smoked cigarettes, or else long warden pipes of white clay, of which a sheaf was provided.

‘Will you smoke? — cigarettes or pipe?’ asked Fraulein prettily. There was a circle of people, Sir Joshua with his eighteenth-century appearance, Gerald the amused, handsome young Englishman, Alexander tall and the handsome

politician, democratic and lucid, Hermione strange like a long Cassandra, and the women lurid with colour, all dutifully smoking their long white pipes, and sitting in a half-moon in the comfortable, soft-lighted drawing-room, round the logs that flickered on the marble hearth.

The talk was very often political or sociological, and interesting, curiously anarchistic. There was an accumulation of powerful force in the room, powerful and destructive. Everything seemed to be thrown into the melting pot, and it seemed to Ursula they were all witches, helping the pot to bubble. There was an elation and a satisfaction in it all, but it was cruelly exhausting for the newcomers, this ruthless mental pressure, this powerful, consuming, destructive mentality that emanated from Joshua and Hermione and Birkin and dominated the rest.

But a sickness, a fearful nausea gathered possession of Hermione. There was a lull in the talk, as it was arrested by her unconscious but all-powerful will.

‘Salsie, won’t you play something?’ said Hermione, breaking off completely. ‘Won’t somebody dance? Gudrun, you will dance, won’t you? I wish you would. Anche tu, Palestra, ballerai? — si, per piacere. You too, Ursula.’

Hermione rose and slowly pulled the gold-embroidered band that hung by the mantel, clinging to it for a moment, then releasing it suddenly. Like a priestess she looked, unconscious, sunk in a heavy half-trance.

A servant came, and soon reappeared with armfuls of silk robes and shawls and scarves, mostly oriental, things that Hermione, with her love for beautiful extravagant dress, had collected gradually.

‘The three women will dance together,’ she said.

‘What shall it be?’ asked Alexander, rising briskly.

‘Vergini Delle Rocchette,’ said the Contessa at once.

‘They are so languid,’ said Ursula.

‘The three witches from Macbeth,’ suggested Fraulein usefully. It was finally decided to do Naomi and Ruth and Orpah. Ursula was Naomi, Gudrun was Ruth, the Contessa was Orpah. The idea was to make a little ballet, in the style of the Russian Ballet of Pavlova and Nijinsky.

The Contessa was ready first, Alexander went to the piano, a space was cleared. Orpah, in beautiful oriental clothes, began slowly to dance the death of her husband. Then Ruth came, and they wept together, and lamented, then Naomi came to comfort them. It was all done in dumb show, the women danced their emotion in gesture and motion. The little drama went on for a quarter of an hour.

Ursula was beautiful as Naomi. All her men were dead, it remained to her only to stand alone in indomitable assertion, demanding nothing. Ruth, woman-

loving, loved her. Orpah, a vivid, sensational, subtle widow, would go back to the former life, a repetition. The interplay between the women was real and rather frightening. It was strange to see how Gudrun clung with heavy, desperate passion to Ursula, yet smiled with subtle malevolence against her, how Ursula accepted silently, unable to provide any more either for herself or for the other, but dangerous and indomitable, refuting her grief.

Hermione loved to watch. She could see the Contessa's rapid, stoat-like sensationalism, Gudrun's ultimate but treacherous cleaving to the woman in her sister, Ursula's dangerous helplessness, as if she were helplessly weighted, and unreleased.

'That was very beautiful,' everybody cried with one accord. But Hermione writhed in her soul, knowing what she could not know. She cried out for more dancing, and it was her will that set the Contessa and Birkin moving mockingly in Malbrouk.

Gerald was excited by the desperate cleaving of Gudrun to Naomi. The essence of that female, subterranean recklessness and mockery penetrated his blood. He could not forget Gudrun's lifted, offered, cleaving, reckless, yet withal mocking weight. And Birkin, watching like a hermit crab from its hole, had seen the brilliant frustration and helplessness of Ursula. She was rich, full of dangerous power. She was like a strange unconscious bud of powerful womanhood. He was unconsciously drawn to her. She was his future.

Alexander played some Hungarian music, and they all danced, seized by the spirit. Gerald was marvellously exhilarated at finding himself in motion, moving towards Gudrun, dancing with feet that could not yet escape from the waltz and the two-step, but feeling his force stir along his limbs and his body, out of captivity. He did not know yet how to dance their convulsive, rag-time sort of dancing, but he knew how to begin. Birkin, when he could get free from the weight of the people present, whom he disliked, danced rapidly and with a real gaiety. And how Hermione hated him for this irresponsible gaiety.

'Now I see,' cried the Contessa excitedly, watching his purely gay motion, which he had all to himself. 'Mr Birkin, he is a changer.'

Hermione looked at her slowly, and shuddered, knowing that only a foreigner could have seen and have said this.

'Cosa vuol dire, Palestra?' she asked, sing-song.

'Look,' said the Contessa, in Italian. 'He is not a man, he is a chameleon, a creature of change.'

'He is not a man, he is treacherous, not one of us,' said itself over in Hermione's consciousness. And her soul writhed in the black subjugation to him, because of his power to escape, to exist, other than she did, because he was

not consistent, not a man, less than a man. She hated him in a despair that shattered her and broke her down, so that she suffered sheer dissolution like a corpse, and was unconscious of everything save the horrible sickness of dissolution that was taking place within her, body and soul.

The house being full, Gerald was given the smaller room, really the dressing-room, communicating with Birkin's bedroom. When they all took their candles and mounted the stairs, where the lamps were burning subduedly, Hermione captured Ursula and brought her into her own bedroom, to talk to her. A sort of constraint came over Ursula in the big, strange bedroom. Hermione seemed to be bearing down on her, awful and inchoate, making some appeal. They were looking at some Indian silk shirts, gorgeous and sensual in themselves, their shape, their almost corrupt gorgeousness. And Hermione came near, and her bosom writhed, and Ursula was for a moment blank with panic. And for a moment Hermione's haggard eyes saw the fear on the face of the other, there was again a sort of crash, a crashing down. And Ursula picked up a shirt of rich red and blue silk, made for a young princess of fourteen, and was crying mechanically:

'Isn't it wonderful — who would dare to put those two strong colours together —'

Then Hermione's maid entered silently and Ursula, overcome with dread, escaped, carried away by powerful impulse.

Birkin went straight to bed. He was feeling happy, and sleepy. Since he had danced he was happy. But Gerald would talk to him. Gerald, in evening dress, sat on Birkin's bed when the other lay down, and must talk.

'Who are those two Brangwens?' Gerald asked.

'They live in Beldover.'

'In Beldover! Who are they then?'

'Teachers in the Grammar School.'

There was a pause.

'They are!' exclaimed Gerald at length. 'I thought I had seen them before.'

'It disappoints you?' said Birkin.

'Disappoints me! No — but how is it Hermione has them here?'

'She knew Gudrun in London — that's the younger one, the one with the darker hair — she's an artist — does sculpture and modelling.'

'She's not a teacher in the Grammar School, then — only the other?'

'Both — Gudrun art mistress, Ursula a class mistress.'

'And what's the father?'

'Handicraft instructor in the schools.'

'Really!'

‘Class-barriers are breaking down!’

Gerald was always uneasy under the slightly jeering tone of the other.

‘That their father is handicraft instructor in a school! What does it matter to me?’

Birkin laughed. Gerald looked at his face, as it lay there laughing and bitter and indifferent on the pillow, and he could not go away.

‘I don’t suppose you will see very much more of Gudrun, at least. She is a restless bird, she’ll be gone in a week or two,’ said Birkin.

‘Where will she go?’

‘London, Paris, Rome — heaven knows. I always expect her to sheer off to Damascus or San Francisco; she’s a bird of paradise. God knows what she’s got to do with Beldover. It goes by contraries, like dreams.’

Gerald pondered for a few moments.

‘How do you know her so well?’ he asked.

‘I knew her in London,’ he replied, ‘in the Algernon Strange set. She’ll know about Pussum and Libidnikov and the rest — even if she doesn’t know them personally. She was never quite that set — more conventional, in a way. I’ve known her for two years, I suppose.’

‘And she makes money, apart from her teaching?’ asked Gerald.

‘Some — irregularly. She can sell her models. She has a certain reclame.’

‘How much for?’

‘A guinea, ten guineas.’

‘And are they good? What are they?’

‘I think sometimes they are marvellously good. That is hers, those two wagtails in Hermione’s boudoir — you’ve seen them — they are carved in wood and painted.’

‘I thought it was savage carving again.’

‘No, hers. That’s what they are — animals and birds, sometimes odd small people in everyday dress, really rather wonderful when they come off. They have a sort of funniness that is quite unconscious and subtle.’

‘She might be a well-known artist one day?’ mused Gerald.

‘She might. But I think she won’t. She drops her art if anything else catches her. Her contrariness prevents her taking it seriously — she must never be too serious, she feels she might give herself away. And she won’t give herself away — she’s always on the defensive. That’s what I can’t stand about her type. By the way, how did things go off with Pussum after I left you? I haven’t heard anything.’

‘Oh, rather disgusting. Halliday turned objectionable, and I only just saved myself from jumping in his stomach, in a real old-fashioned row.’

Birkin was silent.

‘Of course,’ he said, ‘Julius is somewhat insane. On the one hand he’s had religious mania, and on the other, he is fascinated by obscenity. Either he is a pure servant, washing the feet of Christ, or else he is making obscene drawings of Jesus — action and reaction — and between the two, nothing. He is really insane. He wants a pure lily, another girl, with a baby face, on the one hand, and on the other, he MUST have the Pussum, just to defile himself with her.’

‘That’s what I can’t make out,’ said Gerald. ‘Does he love her, the Pussum, or doesn’t he?’

‘He neither does nor doesn’t. She is the harlot, the actual harlot of adultery to him. And he’s got a craving to throw himself into the filth of her. Then he gets up and calls on the name of the lily of purity, the baby-faced girl, and so enjoys himself all round. It’s the old story — action and reaction, and nothing between.’

‘I don’t know,’ said Gerald, after a pause, ‘that he does insult the Pussum so very much. She strikes me as being rather foul.’

‘But I thought you liked her,’ exclaimed Birkin. ‘I always felt fond of her. I never had anything to do with her, personally, that’s true.’

‘I liked her all right, for a couple of days,’ said Gerald. ‘But a week of her would have turned me over. There’s a certain smell about the skin of those women, that in the end is sickening beyond words — even if you like it at first.’

‘I know,’ said Birkin. Then he added, rather fretfully, ‘But go to bed, Gerald. God knows what time it is.’

Gerald looked at his watch, and at length rose off the bed, and went to his room. But he returned in a few minutes, in his shirt.

‘One thing,’ he said, seating himself on the bed again. ‘We finished up rather stormily, and I never had time to give her anything.’

‘Money?’ said Birkin. ‘She’ll get what she wants from Halliday or from one of her acquaintances.’

‘But then,’ said Gerald, ‘I’d rather give her her dues and settle the account.’

‘She doesn’t care.’

‘No, perhaps not. But one feels the account is left open, and one would rather it were closed.’

‘Would you?’ said Birkin. He was looking at the white legs of Gerald, as the latter sat on the side of the bed in his shirt. They were white-skinned, full, muscular legs, handsome and decided. Yet they moved Birkin with a sort of pathos, tenderness, as if they were childish.

‘I think I’d rather close the account,’ said Gerald, repeating himself vaguely.

‘It doesn’t matter one way or another,’ said Birkin.

‘You always say it doesn’t matter,’ said Gerald, a little puzzled, looking down

at the face of the other man affectionately.

‘Neither does it,’ said Birkin.

‘But she was a decent sort, really — ’

‘Render unto Caesarina the things that are Caesarina’s,’ said Birkin, turning aside. It seemed to him Gerald was talking for the sake of talking. ‘Go away, it wearies me — it’s too late at night,’ he said.

‘I wish you’d tell me something that DID matter,’ said Gerald, looking down all the time at the face of the other man, waiting for something. But Birkin turned his face aside.

‘All right then, go to sleep,’ said Gerald, and he laid his hand affectionately on the other man’s shoulder, and went away.

In the morning when Gerald awoke and heard Birkin move, he called out: ‘I still think I ought to give the Pussum ten pounds.’

‘Oh God!’ said Birkin, ‘don’t be so matter-of-fact. Close the account in your own soul, if you like. It is there you can’t close it.’

‘How do you know I can’t?’

‘Knowing you.’

Gerald meditated for some moments.

‘It seems to me the right thing to do, you know, with the Pussums, is to pay them.’

‘And the right thing for mistresses: keep them. And the right thing for wives: live under the same roof with them. *Integer vitae scelerisque purus* — ’ said Birkin.

‘There’s no need to be nasty about it,’ said Gerald.

‘It bores me. I’m not interested in your peccadilloes.’

‘And I don’t care whether you are or not — I am.’

The morning was again sunny. The maid had been in and brought the water, and had drawn the curtains. Birkin, sitting up in bed, looked lazily and pleasantly out on the park, that was so green and deserted, romantic, belonging to the past. He was thinking how lovely, how sure, how formed, how final all the things of the past were — the lovely accomplished past — this house, so still and golden, the park slumbering its centuries of peace. And then, what a snare and a delusion, this beauty of static things — what a horrible, dead prison Breadalby really was, what an intolerable confinement, the peace! Yet it was better than the sordid scrambling conflict of the present. If only one might create the future after one’s own heart — for a little pure truth, a little unflinching application of simple truth to life, the heart cried out ceaselessly.

‘I can’t see what you will leave me at all, to be interested in,’ came Gerald’s voice from the lower room. ‘Neither the Pussums, nor the mines, nor anything

else.'

'You be interested in what you can, Gerald. Only I'm not interested myself,' said Birkin.

'What am I to do at all, then?' came Gerald's voice.

'What you like. What am I to do myself?'

In the silence Birkin could feel Gerald musing this fact.

'I'm blest if I know,' came the good-humoured answer.

'You see,' said Birkin, 'part of you wants the Pussum, and nothing but the Pussum, part of you wants the mines, the business, and nothing but the business — and there you are — all in bits —'

'And part of me wants something else,' said Gerald, in a queer, quiet, real voice.

'What?' said Birkin, rather surprised.

'That's what I hoped you could tell me,' said Gerald.

There was a silence for some time.

'I can't tell you — I can't find my own way, let alone yours. You might marry,' Birkin replied.

'Who — the Pussum?' asked Gerald.

'Perhaps,' said Birkin. And he rose and went to the window.

'That is your panacea,' said Gerald. 'But you haven't even tried it on yourself yet, and you are sick enough.'

'I am,' said Birkin. 'Still, I shall come right.'

'Through marriage?'

'Yes,' Birkin answered obstinately.

'And no,' added Gerald. 'No, no, no, my boy.'

There was a silence between them, and a strange tension of hostility. They always kept a gap, a distance between them, they wanted always to be free each of the other. Yet there was a curious heart-straining towards each other.

'Salvator femininus,' said Gerald, satirically.

'Why not?' said Birkin.

'No reason at all,' said Gerald, 'if it really works. But whom will you marry?'

'A woman,' said Birkin.

'Good,' said Gerald.

Birkin and Gerald were the last to come down to breakfast. Hermione liked everybody to be early. She suffered when she felt her day was diminished, she felt she had missed her life. She seemed to grip the hours by the throat, to force her life from them. She was rather pale and ghastly, as if left behind, in the morning. Yet she had her power, her will was strangely pervasive. With the entrance of the two young men a sudden tension was felt.

She lifted her face, and said, in her amused sing-song:

‘Good morning! Did you sleep well? I’m so glad.’

And she turned away, ignoring them. Birkin, who knew her well, saw that she intended to discount his existence.

‘Will you take what you want from the sideboard?’ said Alexander, in a voice slightly suggesting disapprobation. ‘I hope the things aren’t cold. Oh no! Do you mind putting out the flame under the chafingdish, Rupert? Thank you.’

Even Alexander was rather authoritative where Hermione was cool. He took his tone from her, inevitably. Birkin sat down and looked at the table. He was so used to this house, to this room, to this atmosphere, through years of intimacy, and now he felt in complete opposition to it all, it had nothing to do with him. How well he knew Hermione, as she sat there, erect and silent and somewhat bemused, and yet so potent, so powerful! He knew her statically, so finally, that it was almost like a madness. It was difficult to believe one was not mad, that one was not a figure in the hall of kings in some Egyptian tomb, where the dead all sat immemorial and tremendous. How utterly he knew Joshua Mattheson, who was talking in his harsh, yet rather mincing voice, endlessly, endlessly, always with a strong mentality working, always interesting, and yet always known, everything he said known beforehand, however novel it was, and clever. Alexander the up-to-date host, so bloodlessly free-and-easy, Fraulein so prettily chiming in just as she should, the little Italian Countess taking notice of everybody, only playing her little game, objective and cold, like a weasel watching everything, and extracting her own amusement, never giving herself in the slightest; then Miss Bradley, heavy and rather subservient, treated with cool, almost amused contempt by Hermione, and therefore slighted by everybody — how known it all was, like a game with the figures set out, the same figures, the Queen of chess, the knights, the pawns, the same now as they were hundreds of years ago, the same figures moving round in one of the innumerable permutations that make up the game. But the game is known, its going on is like a madness, it is so exhausted.

There was Gerald, an amused look on his face; the game pleased him. There was Gudrun, watching with steady, large, hostile eyes; the game fascinated her, and she loathed it. There was Ursula, with a slightly startled look on her face, as if she were hurt, and the pain were just outside her consciousness.

Suddenly Birkin got up and went out.

‘That’s enough,’ he said to himself involuntarily.

Hermione knew his motion, though not in her consciousness. She lifted her heavy eyes and saw him lapse suddenly away, on a sudden, unknown tide, and the waves broke over her. Only her indomitable will remained static and

mechanical, she sat at the table making her musing, stray remarks. But the darkness had covered her, she was like a ship that has gone down. It was finished for her too, she was wrecked in the darkness. Yet the unfailing mechanism of her will worked on, she had that activity.

‘Shall we bathe this morning?’ she said, suddenly looking at them all.

‘Splendid,’ said Joshua. ‘It is a perfect morning.’

‘Oh, it is beautiful,’ said Fraulein.

‘Yes, let us bathe,’ said the Italian woman.

‘We have no bathing suits,’ said Gerald.

‘Have mine,’ said Alexander. ‘I must go to church and read the lessons. They expect me.’

‘Are you a Christian?’ asked the Italian Countess, with sudden interest.

‘No,’ said Alexander. ‘I’m not. But I believe in keeping up the old institutions.’

‘They are so beautiful,’ said Fraulein daintily.

‘Oh, they are,’ cried Miss Bradley.

They all trailed out on to the lawn. It was a sunny, soft morning in early summer, when life ran in the world subtly, like a reminiscence. The church bells were ringing a little way off, not a cloud was in the sky, the swans were like lilies on the water below, the peacocks walked with long, prancing steps across the shadow and into the sunshine of the grass. One wanted to swoon into the by-gone perfection of it all.

‘Good-bye,’ called Alexander, waving his gloves cheerily, and he disappeared behind the bushes, on his way to church.

‘Now,’ said Hermione, ‘shall we all bathe?’

‘I won’t,’ said Ursula.

‘You don’t want to?’ said Hermione, looking at her slowly.

‘No. I don’t want to,’ said Ursula.

‘Nor I,’ said Gudrun.

‘What about my suit?’ asked Gerald.

‘I don’t know,’ laughed Hermione, with an odd, amused intonation. ‘Will a handkerchief do — a large handkerchief?’

‘That will do,’ said Gerald.

‘Come along then,’ sang Hermione.

The first to run across the lawn was the little Italian, small and like a cat, her white legs twinkling as she went, ducking slightly her head, that was tied in a gold silk kerchief. She tripped through the gate and down the grass, and stood, like a tiny figure of ivory and bronze, at the water’s edge, having dropped off her towelling, watching the swans, which came up in surprise. Then out ran Miss

Bradley, like a large, soft plum in her dark-blue suit. Then Gerald came, a scarlet silk kerchief round his loins, his towels over his arms. He seemed to flaunt himself a little in the sun, lingering and laughing, strolling easily, looking white but natural in his nakedness. Then came Sir Joshua, in an overcoat, and lastly Hermione, striding with stiff grace from out of a great mantle of purple silk, her head tied up in purple and gold. Handsome was her stiff, long body, her straight-stepping white legs, there was a static magnificence about her as she let the cloak float loosely away from her striding. She crossed the lawn like some strange memory, and passed slowly and stately towards the water.

There were three ponds, in terraces descending the valley, large and smooth and beautiful, lying in the sun. The water ran over a little stone wall, over small rocks, splashing down from one pond to the level below. The swans had gone out on to the opposite bank, the reeds smelled sweet, a faint breeze touched the skin.

Gerald had dived in, after Sir Joshua, and had swum to the end of the pond. There he climbed out and sat on the wall. There was a dive, and the little Countess was swimming like a rat, to join him. They both sat in the sun, laughing and crossing their arms on their breasts. Sir Joshua swam up to them, and stood near them, up to his arm-pits in the water. Then Hermione and Miss Bradley swam over, and they sat in a row on the embankment.

‘Aren’t they terrifying? Aren’t they really terrifying?’ said Gudrun. ‘Don’t they look saurian? They are just like great lizards. Did you ever see anything like Sir Joshua? But really, Ursula, he belongs to the primeval world, when great lizards crawled about.’

Gudrun looked in dismay on Sir Joshua, who stood up to the breast in the water, his long, greyish hair washed down into his eyes, his neck set into thick, crude shoulders. He was talking to Miss Bradley, who, seated on the bank above, plump and big and wet, looked as if she might roll and slither in the water almost like one of the slithering sealions in the Zoo.

Ursula watched in silence. Gerald was laughing happily, between Hermione and the Italian. He reminded her of Dionysos, because his hair was really yellow, his figure so full and laughing. Hermione, in her large, stiff, sinister grace, leaned near him, frightening, as if she were not responsible for what she might do. He knew a certain danger in her, a convulsive madness. But he only laughed the more, turning often to the little Countess, who was flashing up her face at him.

They all dropped into the water, and were swimming together like a shoal of seals. Hermione was powerful and unconscious in the water, large and slow and powerful. Palestra was quick and silent as a water rat, Gerald wavered and

flickered, a white natural shadow. Then, one after the other, they waded out, and went up to the house.

But Gerald lingered a moment to speak to Gudrun.

‘You don’t like the water?’ he said.

She looked at him with a long, slow inscrutable look, as he stood before her negligently, the water standing in beads all over his skin.

‘I like it very much,’ she replied.

He paused, expecting some sort of explanation.

‘And you swim?’

‘Yes, I swim.’

Still he would not ask her why she would not go in then. He could feel something ironic in her. He walked away, piqued for the first time.

‘Why wouldn’t you bathe?’ he asked her again, later, when he was once more the properly-dressed young Englishman.

She hesitated a moment before answering, opposing his persistence.

‘Because I didn’t like the crowd,’ she replied.

He laughed, her phrase seemed to re-echo in his consciousness. The flavour of her slang was piquant to him. Whether he would or not, she signified the real world to him. He wanted to come up to her standards, fulfil her expectations. He knew that her criterion was the only one that mattered. The others were all outsiders, instinctively, whatever they might be socially. And Gerald could not help it, he was bound to strive to come up to her criterion, fulfil her idea of a man and a human-being.

After lunch, when all the others had withdrawn, Hermione and Gerald and Birkin lingered, finishing their talk. There had been some discussion, on the whole quite intellectual and artificial, about a new state, a new world of man. Supposing this old social state WERE broken and destroyed, then, out of the chaos, what then?

The great social idea, said Sir Joshua, was the SOCIAL equality of man. No, said Gerald, the idea was, that every man was fit for his own little bit of a task — let him do that, and then please himself. The unifying principle was the work in hand. Only work, the business of production, held men together. It was mechanical, but then society WAS a mechanism. Apart from work they were isolated, free to do as they liked.

‘Oh!’ cried Gudrun. ‘Then we shan’t have names any more — we shall be like the Germans, nothing but Herr Obermeister and Herr Untermeister. I can imagine it — ”I am Mrs Colliery-Manager Crich — I am Mrs Member-of-Parliament Roddice. I am Miss Art-Teacher Brangwen.” Very pretty that.’

‘Things would work very much better, Miss Art-Teacher Brangwen,’ said

Gerald.

‘What things, Mr Colliery-Manager Crich? The relation between you and me, PAR EXEMPLE?’

‘Yes, for example,’ cried the Italian. ‘That which is between men and women — !’

‘That is non-social,’ said Birkin, sarcastically.

‘Exactly,’ said Gerald. ‘Between me and a woman, the social question does not enter. It is my own affair.’

‘A ten-pound note on it,’ said Birkin.

‘You don’t admit that a woman is a social being?’ asked Ursula of Gerald.

‘She is both,’ said Gerald. ‘She is a social being, as far as society is concerned. But for her own private self, she is a free agent, it is her own affair, what she does.’

‘But won’t it be rather difficult to arrange the two halves?’ asked Ursula.

‘Oh no,’ replied Gerald. ‘They arrange themselves naturally — we see it now, everywhere.’

‘Don’t you laugh so pleasantly till you’re out of the wood,’ said Birkin.

Gerald knitted his brows in momentary irritation.

‘Was I laughing?’ he said.

‘IF,’ said Hermione at last, ‘we could only realise, that in the SPIRIT we are all one, all equal in the spirit, all brothers there — the rest wouldn’t matter, there would be no more of this carping and envy and this struggle for power, which destroys, only destroys.’

This speech was received in silence, and almost immediately the party rose from the table. But when the others had gone, Birkin turned round in bitter declamation, saying:

‘It is just the opposite, just the contrary, Hermione. We are all different and unequal in spirit — it is only the SOCIAL differences that are based on accidental material conditions. We are all abstractly or mathematically equal, if you like. Every man has hunger and thirst, two eyes, one nose and two legs. We’re all the same in point of number. But spiritually, there is pure difference and neither equality nor inequality counts. It is upon these two bits of knowledge that you must found a state. Your democracy is an absolute lie — your brotherhood of man is a pure falsity, if you apply it further than the mathematical abstraction. We all drank milk first, we all eat bread and meat, we all want to ride in motor-cars — therein lies the beginning and the end of the brotherhood of man. But no equality.

‘But I, myself, who am myself, what have I to do with equality with any other man or woman? In the spirit, I am as separate as one star is from another, as

different in quality and quantity. Establish a state on THAT. One man isn't any better than another, not because they are equal, but because they are intrinsically OTHER, that there is no term of comparison. The minute you begin to compare, one man is seen to be far better than another, all the inequality you can imagine is there by nature. I want every man to have his share in the world's goods, so that I am rid of his importunity, so that I can tell him: "Now you've got what you want — you've got your fair share of the world's gear. Now, you one-mouthed fool, mind yourself and don't obstruct me."“

Hermione was looking at him with leering eyes, along her cheeks. He could feel violent waves of hatred and loathing of all he said, coming out of her. It was dynamic hatred and loathing, coming strong and black out of the unconsciousness. She heard his words in her unconscious self, CONSCIOUSLY she was as if deafened, she paid no heed to them.

‘It SOUNDS like megalomania, Rupert,’ said Gerald, genially.

Hermione gave a queer, grunting sound. Birkin stood back.

‘Yes, let it,’ he said suddenly, the whole tone gone out of his voice, that had been so insistent, bearing everybody down. And he went away.

But he felt, later, a little compunction. He had been violent, cruel with poor Hermione. He wanted to recompense her, to make it up. He had hurt her, he had been vindictive. He wanted to be on good terms with her again.

He went into her boudoir, a remote and very cushiony place. She was sitting at her table writing letters. She lifted her face abstractedly when he entered, watched him go to the sofa, and sit down. Then she looked down at her paper again.

He took up a large volume which he had been reading before, and became minutely attentive to his author. His back was towards Hermione. She could not go on with her writing. Her whole mind was a chaos, darkness breaking in upon it, and herself struggling to gain control with her will, as a swimmer struggles with the swirling water. But in spite of her efforts she was borne down, darkness seemed to break over her, she felt as if her heart was bursting. The terrible tension grew stronger and stronger, it was most fearful agony, like being walled up.

And then she realised that his presence was the wall, his presence was destroying her. Unless she could break out, she must die most fearfully, walled up in horror. And he was the wall. She must break down the wall — she must break him down before her, the awful obstruction of him who obstructed her life to the last. It must be done, or she must perish most horribly.

Terribly shocks ran over her body, like shocks of electricity, as if many volts of electricity suddenly struck her down. She was aware of him sitting silently

there, an unthinkable evil obstruction. Only this blotted out her mind, pressed out her very breathing, his silent, stooping back, the back of his head.

A terrible voluptuous thrill ran down her arms — she was going to know her voluptuous consummation. Her arms quivered and were strong, immeasurably and irresistibly strong. What delight, what delight in strength, what delirium of pleasure! She was going to have her consummation of voluptuous ecstasy at last. It was coming! In utmost terror and agony, she knew it was upon her now, in extremity of bliss. Her hand closed on a blue, beautiful ball of lapis lazuli that stood on her desk for a paper-weight. She rolled it round in her hand as she rose silently. Her heart was a pure flame in her breast, she was purely unconscious in ecstasy. She moved towards him and stood behind him for a moment in ecstasy. He, closed within the spell, remained motionless and unconscious.

Then swiftly, in a flame that drenched down her body like fluid lightning and gave her a perfect, unutterable consummation, unutterable satisfaction, she brought down the ball of jewel stone with all her force, crash on his head. But her fingers were in the way and deadened the blow. Nevertheless, down went his head on the table on which his book lay, the stone slid aside and over his ear, it was one convulsion of pure bliss for her, lit up by the crushed pain of her fingers. But it was not somehow complete. She lifted her arm high to aim once more, straight down on the head that lay dazed on the table. She must smash it, it must be smashed before her ecstasy was consummated, fulfilled for ever. A thousand lives, a thousand deaths mattered nothing now, only the fulfilment of this perfect ecstasy.

She was not swift, she could only move slowly. A strong spirit in him woke him and made him lift his face and twist to look at her. Her arm was raised, the hand clasping the ball of lapis lazuli. It was her left hand, he realised again with horror that she was left-handed. Hurriedly, with a burrowing motion, he covered his head under the thick volume of Thucydides, and the blow came down, almost breaking his neck, and shattering his heart.

He was shattered, but he was not afraid. Twisting round to face her he pushed the table over and got away from her. He was like a flask that is smashed to atoms, he seemed to himself that he was all fragments, smashed to bits. Yet his movements were perfectly coherent and clear, his soul was entire and unsurprised.

‘No you don’t, Hermione,’ he said in a low voice. ‘I don’t let you.’

He saw her standing tall and livid and attentive, the stone clenched tense in her hand.

‘Stand away and let me go,’ he said, drawing near to her.

As if pressed back by some hand, she stood away, watching him all the time

without changing, like a neutralised angel confronting him.

‘It is not good,’ he said, when he had gone past her. ‘It isn’t I who will die. You hear?’

He kept his face to her as he went out, lest she should strike again. While he was on his guard, she dared not move. And he was on his guard, she was powerless. So he had gone, and left her standing.

She remained perfectly rigid, standing as she was for a long time. Then she staggered to the couch and lay down, and went heavily to sleep. When she awoke, she remembered what she had done, but it seemed to her, she had only hit him, as any woman might do, because he tortured her. She was perfectly right. She knew that, spiritually, she was right. In her own infallible purity, she had done what must be done. She was right, she was pure. A drugged, almost sinister religious expression became permanent on her face.

Birkin, barely conscious, and yet perfectly direct in his motion, went out of the house and straight across the park, to the open country, to the hills. The brilliant day had become overcast, spots of rain were falling. He wandered on to a wild valley-side, where were thickets of hazel, many flowers, tufts of heather, and little clumps of young firtrees, budding with soft paws. It was rather wet everywhere, there was a stream running down at the bottom of the valley, which was gloomy, or seemed gloomy. He was aware that he could not regain his consciousness, that he was moving in a sort of darkness.

Yet he wanted something. He was happy in the wet hillside, that was overgrown and obscure with bushes and flowers. He wanted to touch them all, to saturate himself with the touch of them all. He took off his clothes, and sat down naked among the primroses, moving his feet softly among the primroses, his legs, his knees, his arms right up to the arm-pits, lying down and letting them touch his belly, his breasts. It was such a fine, cool, subtle touch all over him, he seemed to saturate himself with their contact.

But they were too soft. He went through the long grass to a clump of young firtrees, that were no higher than a man. The soft sharp boughs beat upon him, as he moved in keen pangs against them, threw little cold showers of drops on his belly, and beat his loins with their clusters of soft-sharp needles. There was a thistle which pricked him vividly, but not too much, because all his movements were too discriminate and soft. To lie down and roll in the sticky, cool young hyacinths, to lie on one’s belly and cover one’s back with handfuls of fine wet grass, soft as a breath, soft and more delicate and more beautiful than the touch of any woman; and then to sting one’s thigh against the living dark bristles of the fir-boughs; and then to feel the light whip of the hazel on one’s shoulders, stinging, and then to clasp the silvery birch-trunk against one’s breast, its

smoothness, its hardness, its vital knots and ridges — this was good, this was all very good, very satisfying. Nothing else would do, nothing else would satisfy, except this coolness and subtlety of vegetation travelling into one's blood. How fortunate he was, that there was this lovely, subtle, responsive vegetation, waiting for him, as he waited for it; how fulfilled he was, how happy!

As he dried himself a little with his handkerchief, he thought about Hermione and the blow. He could feel a pain on the side of his head. But after all, what did it matter? What did Hermione matter, what did people matter altogether? There was this perfect cool loneliness, so lovely and fresh and unexplored. Really, what a mistake he had made, thinking he wanted people, thinking he wanted a woman. He did not want a woman — not in the least. The leaves and the primroses and the trees, they were really lovely and cool and desirable, they really came into the blood and were added on to him. He was enriched now immeasurably, and so glad.

It was quite right of Hermione to want to kill him. What had he to do with her? Why should he pretend to have anything to do with human beings at all? Here was his world, he wanted nobody and nothing but the lovely, subtle, responsive vegetation, and himself, his own living self.

It was necessary to go back into the world. That was true. But that did not matter, so one knew where one belonged. He knew now where he belonged. This was his place, his marriage place. The world was extraneous.

He climbed out of the valley, wondering if he were mad. But if so, he preferred his own madness, to the regular sanity. He rejoiced in his own madness, he was free. He did not want that old sanity of the world, which was become so repulsive. He rejoiced in the new-found world of his madness. It was so fresh and delicate and so satisfying.

As for the certain grief he felt at the same time, in his soul, that was only the remains of an old ethic, that bade a human being adhere to humanity. But he was weary of the old ethic, of the human being, and of humanity. He loved now the soft, delicate vegetation, that was so cool and perfect. He would overlook the old grief, he would put away the old ethic, he would be free in his new state.

He was aware of the pain in his head becoming more and more difficult every minute. He was walking now along the road to the nearest station. It was raining and he had no hat. But then plenty of cranks went out nowadays without hats, in the rain.

He wondered again how much of his heaviness of heart, a certain depression, was due to fear, fear lest anybody should have seen him naked lying against the vegetation. What a dread he had of mankind, of other people! It amounted almost to horror, to a sort of dream terror — his horror of being observed by

some other people. If he were on an island, like Alexander Selkirk, with only the creatures and the trees, he would be free and glad, there would be none of this heaviness, this misgiving. He could love the vegetation and be quite happy and unquestioned, by himself.

He had better send a note to Hermione: she might trouble about him, and he did not want the onus of this. So at the station, he wrote saying:

I will go on to town — I don't want to come back to Breadalby for the present. But it is quite all right — I don't want you to mind having biffed me, in the least. Tell the others it is just one of my moods. You were quite right, to biff me — because I know you wanted to. So there's the end of it.

In the train, however, he felt ill. Every motion was insufferable pain, and he was sick. He dragged himself from the station into a cab, feeling his way step by step, like a blind man, and held up only by a dim will.

For a week or two he was ill, but he did not let Hermione know, and she thought he was sulking; there was a complete estrangement between them. She became rapt, abstracted in her conviction of exclusive righteousness. She lived in and by her own self-esteem, conviction of her own rightness of spirit.

CHAPTER IX.

COAL-DUST

Going home from school in the afternoon, the Brangwen girls descended the hill between the picturesque cottages of Willey Green till they came to the railway crossing. There they found the gate shut, because the colliery train was rumbling nearer. They could hear the small locomotive panting hoarsely as it advanced with caution between the embankments. The one-legged man in the little signal-hut by the road stared out from his security, like a crab from a snail-shell.

Whilst the two girls waited, Gerald Crich trotted up on a red Arab mare. He rode well and softly, pleased with the delicate quivering of the creature between his knees. And he was very picturesque, at least in Gudrun's eyes, sitting soft and close on the slender red mare, whose long tail flowed on the air. He saluted the two girls, and drew up at the crossing to wait for the gate, looking down the railway for the approaching train. In spite of her ironic smile at his picturesqueness, Gudrun liked to look at him. He was well-set and easy, his face with its warm tan showed up his whitish, coarse moustache, and his blue eyes were full of sharp light as he watched the distance.

The locomotive chuffed slowly between the banks, hidden. The mare did not like it. She began to wince away, as if hurt by the unknown noise. But Gerald pulled her back and held her head to the gate. The sharp blasts of the chuffing engine broke with more and more force on her. The repeated sharp blows of unknown, terrifying noise struck through her till she was rocking with terror. She recoiled like a spring let go. But a glistening, half-smiling look came into Gerald's face. He brought her back again, inevitably.

The noise was released, the little locomotive with her clanking steel connecting-rod emerged on the highroad, clanking sharply. The mare rebounded like a drop of water from hot iron. Ursula and Gudrun pressed back into the hedge, in fear. But Gerald was heavy on the mare, and forced her back. It seemed as if he sank into her magnetically, and could thrust her back against herself.

'The fool!' cried Ursula loudly. 'Why doesn't he ride away till it's gone by?'

Gudrun was looking at him with black-dilated, spellbound eyes. But he sat glistening and obstinate, forcing the wheeling mare, which spun and swerved like a wind, and yet could not get out of the grasp of his will, nor escape from the mad clamour of terror that resounded through her, as the trucks thumped slowly, heavily, horrifying, one after the other, one pursuing the other, over the rails of the crossing.

The locomotive, as if wanting to see what could be done, put on the brakes, and back came the trucks rebounding on the iron buffers, striking like horrible cymbals, clashing nearer and nearer in frightful strident concussions. The mare opened her mouth and rose slowly, as if lifted up on a wind of terror. Then suddenly her fore feet struck out, as she convulsed herself utterly away from the horror. Back she went, and the two girls clung to each other, feeling she must fall backwards on top of him. But he leaned forward, his face shining with fixed amusement, and at last he brought her down, sank her down, and was bearing her back to the mark. But as strong as the pressure of his compulsion was the repulsion of her utter terror, throwing her back away from the railway, so that she spun round and round, on two legs, as if she were in the centre of some whirlwind. It made Gudrun faint with poignant dizziness, which seemed to penetrate to her heart.

‘No — ! No — ! Let her go! Let her go, you fool, you FOOL — !’ cried Ursula at the top of her voice, completely outside herself. And Gudrun hated her bitterly for being outside herself. It was unendurable that Ursula’s voice was so powerful and naked.

A sharpened look came on Gerald’s face. He bit himself down on the mare like a keen edge biting home, and FORCED her round. She roared as she breathed, her nostrils were two wide, hot holes, her mouth was apart, her eyes frenzied. It was a repulsive sight. But he held on her unrelaxed, with an almost mechanical relentlessness, keen as a sword pressing in to her. Both man and horse were sweating with violence. Yet he seemed calm as a ray of cold sunshine.

Meanwhile the eternal trucks were rumbling on, very slowly, treading one after the other, one after the other, like a disgusting dream that has no end. The connecting chains were grinding and squeaking as the tension varied, the mare pawed and struck away mechanically now, her terror fulfilled in her, for now the man encompassed her; her paws were blind and pathetic as she beat the air, the man closed round her, and brought her down, almost as if she were part of his own physique.

‘And she’s bleeding! She’s bleeding!’ cried Ursula, frantic with opposition and hatred of Gerald. She alone understood him perfectly, in pure opposition.

Gudrun looked and saw the trickles of blood on the sides of the mare, and she turned white. And then on the very wound the bright spurs came down, pressing relentlessly. The world reeled and passed into nothingness for Gudrun, she could not know any more.

When she recovered, her soul was calm and cold, without feeling. The trucks were still rumbling by, and the man and the mare were still fighting. But she herself was cold and separate, she had no more feeling for them. She was quite hard and cold and indifferent.

They could see the top of the hooded guard's-van approaching, the sound of the trucks was diminishing, there was hope of relief from the intolerable noise. The heavy panting of the half-stunned mare sounded automatically, the man seemed to be relaxing confidently, his will bright and unstained. The guard's-van came up, and passed slowly, the guard staring out in his transition on the spectacle in the road. And, through the man in the closed wagon, Gudrun could see the whole scene spectacularly, isolated and momentary, like a vision isolated in eternity.

Lovely, grateful silence seemed to trail behind the receding train. How sweet the silence is! Ursula looked with hatred on the buffers of the diminishing wagon. The gatekeeper stood ready at the door of his hut, to proceed to open the gate. But Gudrun sprang suddenly forward, in front of the struggling horse, threw off the latch and flung the gates asunder, throwing one-half to the keeper, and running with the other half, forwards. Gerald suddenly let go the horse and leaped forwards, almost on to Gudrun. She was not afraid. As he jerked aside the mare's head, Gudrun cried, in a strange, high voice, like a gull, or like a witch screaming out from the side of the road:

'I should think you're proud.'

The words were distinct and formed. The man, twisting aside on his dancing horse, looked at her in some surprise, some wondering interest. Then the mare's hoofs had danced three times on the drum-like sleepers of the crossing, and man and horse were bounding springily, unequally up the road.

The two girls watched them go. The gatekeeper hobbled thudding over the logs of the crossing, with his wooden leg. He had fastened the gate. Then he also turned, and called to the girls:

'A masterful young jockey, that; 'll have his own road, if ever anybody would.'

'Yes,' cried Ursula, in her hot, overbearing voice. 'Why couldn't he take the horse away, till the trucks had gone by? He's a fool, and a bully. Does he think it's manly, to torture a horse? It's a living thing, why should he bully it and torture it?'

There was a pause, then the gatekeeper shook his head, and replied:

‘Yes, it’s as nice a little mare as you could set eyes on — beautiful little thing, beautiful. Now you couldn’t see his father treat any animal like that — not you. They’re as different as they welly can be, Gerald Crich and his father — two different men, different made.’

Then there was a pause.

‘But why does he do it?’ cried Ursula, ‘why does he? Does he think he’s grand, when he’s bullied a sensitive creature, ten times as sensitive as himself?’

Again there was a cautious pause. Then again the man shook his head, as if he would say nothing, but would think the more.

‘I expect he’s got to train the mare to stand to anything,’ he replied. ‘A pure-bred Harab — not the sort of breed as is used to round here — different sort from our sort altogether. They say as he got her from Constantinople.’

‘He would!’ said Ursula. ‘He’d better have left her to the Turks, I’m sure they would have had more decency towards her.’

The man went in to drink his can of tea, the girls went on down the lane, that was deep in soft black dust. Gudrun was as if numbed in her mind by the sense of indomitable soft weight of the man, bearing down into the living body of the horse: the strong, indomitable thighs of the blond man clenching the palpitating body of the mare into pure control; a sort of soft white magnetic domination from the loins and thighs and calves, enclosing and encompassing the mare heavily into unutterable subordination, soft blood-subordination, terrible.

On the left, as the girls walked silently, the coal-mine lifted its great mounds and its patterned head-stocks, the black railway with the trucks at rest looked like a harbour just below, a large bay of railroad with anchored wagons.

Near the second level-crossing, that went over many bright rails, was a farm belonging to the collieries, and a great round globe of iron, a disused boiler, huge and rusty and perfectly round, stood silently in a paddock by the road. The hens were pecking round it, some chickens were balanced on the drinking trough, wagtails flew away in among trucks, from the water.

On the other side of the wide crossing, by the road-side, was a heap of pale-grey stones for mending the roads, and a cart standing, and a middle-aged man with whiskers round his face was leaning on his shovel, talking to a young man in gaiters, who stood by the horse’s head. Both men were facing the crossing.

They saw the two girls appear, small, brilliant figures in the near distance, in the strong light of the late afternoon. Both wore light, gay summer dresses, Ursula had an orange-coloured knitted coat, Gudrun a pale yellow, Ursula wore canary yellow stockings, Gudrun bright rose, the figures of the two women seemed to glitter in progress over the wide bay of the railway crossing, white

and orange and yellow and rose glittering in motion across a hot world silted with coal-dust.

The two men stood quite still in the heat, watching. The elder was a short, hard-faced energetic man of middle age, the younger a labourer of twenty-three or so. They stood in silence watching the advance of the sisters. They watched whilst the girls drew near, and whilst they passed, and whilst they receded down the dusty road, that had dwellings on one side, and dusty young corn on the other.

Then the elder man, with the whiskers round his face, said in a prurient manner to the young man:

‘What price that, eh? She’ll do, won’t she?’

‘Which?’ asked the young man, eagerly, with laugh.

‘Her with the red stockings. What d’you say? I’d give my week’s wages for five minutes; what! — just for five minutes.’

Again the young man laughed.

‘Your missis ‘ud have summat to say to you,’ he replied.

Gudrun had turned round and looked at the two men. They were to her sinister creatures, standing watching after her, by the heap of pale grey slag. She loathed the man with whiskers round his face.

‘You’re first class, you are,’ the man said to her, and to the distance.

‘Do you think it would be worth a week’s wages?’ said the younger man, musing.

‘Do I? I’d put ‘em bloody-well down this second — ’

The younger man looked after Gudrun and Ursula objectively, as if he wished to calculate what there might be, that was worth his week’s wages. He shook his head with fatal misgiving.

‘No,’ he said. ‘It’s not worth that to me.’

‘Isn’t?’ said the old man. ‘By God, if it isn’t to me!’

And he went on shovelling his stones.

The girls descended between the houses with slate roofs and blackish brick walls. The heavy gold glamour of approaching sunset lay over all the colliery district, and the ugliness overlaid with beauty was like a narcotic to the senses. On the roads silted with black dust, the rich light fell more warmly, more heavily, over all the amorphous squalor a kind of magic was cast, from the glowing close of day.

‘It has a foul kind of beauty, this place,’ said Gudrun, evidently suffering from fascination. ‘Can’t you feel in some way, a thick, hot attraction in it? I can. And it quite stupifies me.’

They were passing between blocks of miners’ dwellings. In the back yards of

several dwellings, a miner could be seen washing himself in the open on this hot evening, naked down to the loins, his great trousers of moleskin slipping almost away. Miners already cleaned were sitting on their heels, with their backs near the walls, talking and silent in pure physical well-being, tired, and taking physical rest. Their voices sounded out with strong intonation, and the broad dialect was curiously caressing to the blood. It seemed to envelop Gudrun in a labourer's caress, there was in the whole atmosphere a resonance of physical men, a glamorous thickness of labour and maleness, surcharged in the air. But it was universal in the district, and therefore unnoticed by the inhabitants.

To Gudrun, however, it was potent and half-repulsive. She could never tell why Beldover was so utterly different from London and the south, why one's whole feelings were different, why one seemed to live in another sphere. Now she realised that this was the world of powerful, underworld men who spent most of their time in the darkness. In their voices she could hear the voluptuous resonance of darkness, the strong, dangerous underworld, mindless, inhuman. They sounded also like strange machines, heavy, oiled. The voluptuousness was like that of machinery, cold and iron.

It was the same every evening when she came home, she seemed to move through a wave of disruptive force, that was given off from the presence of thousands of vigorous, underworld, half-automatised colliers, and which went to the brain and the heart, awaking a fatal desire, and a fatal callousness.

There came over her a nostalgia for the place. She hated it, she knew how utterly cut off it was, how hideous and how sickeningly mindless. Sometimes she beat her wings like a new Daphne, turning not into a tree but a machine. And yet, she was overcome by the nostalgia. She struggled to get more and more into accord with the atmosphere of the place, she craved to get her satisfaction of it.

She felt herself drawn out at evening into the main street of the town, that was uncreated and ugly, and yet surcharged with this same potent atmosphere of intense, dark callousness. There were always miners about. They moved with their strange, distorted dignity, a certain beauty, and unnatural stillness in their bearing, a look of abstraction and half resignation in their pale, often gaunt faces. They belonged to another world, they had a strange glamour, their voices were full of an intolerable deep resonance, like a machine's burring, a music more maddening than the siren's long ago.

She found herself, with the rest of the common women, drawn out on Friday evenings to the little market. Friday was pay-day for the colliers, and Friday night was market night. Every woman was abroad, every man was out, shopping with his wife, or gathering with his pals. The pavements were dark for miles around with people coming in, the little market-place on the crown of the hill,

and the main street of Beldover were black with thickly-crowded men and women.

It was dark, the market-place was hot with kerosene flares, which threw a ruddy light on the grave faces of the purchasing wives, and on the pale abstract faces of the men. The air was full of the sound of criers and of people talking, thick streams of people moved on the pavements towards the solid crowd of the market. The shops were blazing and packed with women, in the streets were men, mostly men, miners of all ages. Money was spent with almost lavish freedom.

The carts that came could not pass through. They had to wait, the driver calling and shouting, till the dense crowd would make way. Everywhere, young fellows from the outlying districts were making conversation with the girls, standing in the road and at the corners. The doors of the public-houses were open and full of light, men passed in and out in a continual stream, everywhere men were calling out to one another, or crossing to meet one another, or standing in little gangs and circles, discussing, endlessly discussing. The sense of talk, buzzing, jarring, half-secret, the endless mining and political wrangling, vibrated in the air like discordant machinery. And it was their voices which affected Gudrun almost to swooning. They aroused a strange, nostalgic ache of desire, something almost demoniacal, never to be fulfilled.

Like any other common girl of the district, Gudrun strolled up and down, up and down the length of the brilliant two-hundred paces of the pavement nearest the market-place. She knew it was a vulgar thing to do; her father and mother could not bear it; but the nostalgia came over her, she must be among the people. Sometimes she sat among the louts in the cinema: rakish-looking, unattractive louts they were. Yet she must be among them.

And, like any other common lass, she found her 'boy.' It was an electrician, one of the electricians introduced according to Gerald's new scheme. He was an earnest, clever man, a scientist with a passion for sociology. He lived alone in a cottage, in lodgings, in Willey Green. He was a gentleman, and sufficiently well-to-do. His landlady spread the reports about him; he WOULD have a large wooden tub in his bedroom, and every time he came in from work, he WOULD have pails and pails of water brought up, to bathe in, then he put on clean shirt and under-clothing EVERY day, and clean silk socks; fastidious and exacting he was in these respects, but in every other way, most ordinary and unassuming.

Gudrun knew all these things. The Brangwen's house was one to which the gossip came naturally and inevitably. Palmer was in the first place a friend of Ursula's. But in his pale, elegant, serious face there showed the same nostalgia that Gudrun felt. He too must walk up and down the street on Friday evening. So

he walked with Gudrun, and a friendship was struck up between them. But he was not in love with Gudrun; he REALLY wanted Ursula, but for some strange reason, nothing could happen between her and him. He liked to have Gudrun about, as a fellow-mind — but that was all. And she had no real feeling for him. He was a scientist, he had to have a woman to back him. But he was really impersonal, he had the fineness of an elegant piece of machinery. He was too cold, too destructive to care really for women, too great an egoist. He was polarised by the men. Individually he detested and despised them. In the mass they fascinated him, as machinery fascinated him. They were a new sort of machinery to him — but incalculable, incalculable.

So Gudrun strolled the streets with Palmer, or went to the cinema with him. And his long, pale, rather elegant face flickered as he made his sarcastic remarks. There they were, the two of them: two elegants in one sense: in the other sense, two units, absolutely adhering to the people, teeming with the distorted colliers. The same secret seemed to be working in the souls of all alike, Gudrun, Palmer, the rakish young bloods, the gaunt, middle-aged men. All had a secret sense of power, and of inexpressible destructiveness, and of fatal half-heartedness, a sort of rottenness in the will.

Sometimes Gudrun would start aside, see it all, see how she was sinking in. And then she was filled with a fury of contempt and anger. She felt she was sinking into one mass with the rest — all so close and intermingled and breathless. It was horrible. She stifled. She prepared for flight, feverishly she flew to her work. But soon she let go. She started off into the country — the darkish, glamorous country. The spell was beginning to work again.

CHAPTER X.

SKETCH-BOOK

One morning the sisters were sketching by the side of Willey Water, at the remote end of the lake. Gudrun had waded out to a gravelly shoal, and was seated like a Buddhist, staring fixedly at the water-plants that rose succulent from the mud of the low shores. What she could see was mud, soft, oozy, watery mud, and from its festering chill, water-plants rose up, thick and cool and fleshy, very straight and turgid, thrusting out their leaves at right angles, and having dark lurid colours, dark green and blotches of black-purple and bronze. But she could feel their turgid fleshy structure as in a sensuous vision, she KNEW how they rose out of the mud, she KNEW how they thrust out from themselves, how they stood stiff and succulent against the air.

Ursula was watching the butterflies, of which there were dozens near the water, little blue ones suddenly snapping out of nothingness into a jewel-life, a large black-and-red one standing upon a flower and breathing with his soft wings, intoxicatingly, breathing pure, ethereal sunshine; two white ones wrestling in the low air; there was a halo round them; ah, when they came tumbling nearer they were orangetips, and it was the orange that had made the halo. Ursula rose and drifted away, unconscious like the butterflies.

Gudrun, absorbed in a stupor of apprehension of surging water-plants, sat crouched on the shoal, drawing, not looking up for a long time, and then staring unconsciously, absorbedly at the rigid, naked, succulent stems. Her feet were bare, her hat lay on the bank opposite.

She started out of her trance, hearing the knocking of oars. She looked round. There was a boat with a gaudy Japanese parasol, and a man in white, rowing. The woman was Hermione, and the man was Gerald. She knew it instantly. And instantly she perished in the keen FRISSON of anticipation, an electric vibration in her veins, intense, much more intense than that which was always humming low in the atmosphere of Beldover.

Gerald was her escape from the heavy slough of the pale, underworld, automatic colliers. He started out of the mud. He was master. She saw his back,

the movement of his white loins. But not that — it was the whiteness he seemed to enclose as he bent forwards, rowing. He seemed to stoop to something. His glistening, whitish hair seemed like the electricity of the sky.

‘There’s Gudrun,’ came Hermione’s voice floating distinct over the water. ‘We will go and speak to her. Do you mind?’

Gerald looked round and saw the girl standing by the water’s edge, looking at him. He pulled the boat towards her, magnetically, without thinking of her. In his world, his conscious world, she was still nobody. He knew that Hermione had a curious pleasure in treading down all the social differences, at least apparently, and he left it to her.

‘How do you do, Gudrun?’ sang Hermione, using the Christian name in the fashionable manner. ‘What are you doing?’

‘How do you do, Hermione? I WAS sketching.’

‘Were you?’ The boat drifted nearer, till the keel ground on the bank. ‘May we see? I should like to SO much.’

It was no use resisting Hermione’s deliberate intention.

‘Well — ’ said Gudrun reluctantly, for she always hated to have her unfinished work exposed — ‘there’s nothing in the least interesting.’

‘Isn’t there? But let me see, will you?’

Gudrun reached out the sketch-book, Gerald stretched from the boat to take it. And as he did so, he remembered Gudrun’s last words to him, and her face lifted up to him as he sat on the swerving horse. An intensification of pride went over his nerves, because he felt, in some way she was compelled by him. The exchange of feeling between them was strong and apart from their consciousness.

And as if in a spell, Gudrun was aware of his body, stretching and surging like the marsh-fire, stretching towards her, his hand coming straight forward like a stem. Her voluptuous, acute apprehension of him made the blood faint in her veins, her mind went dim and unconscious. And he rocked on the water perfectly, like the rocking of phosphorescence. He looked round at the boat. It was drifting off a little. He lifted the oar to bring it back. And the exquisite pleasure of slowly arresting the boat, in the heavy-soft water, was complete as a swoon.

‘THAT’S what you have done,’ said Hermione, looking searchingly at the plants on the shore, and comparing with Gudrun’s drawing. Gudrun looked round in the direction of Hermione’s long, pointing finger. ‘That is it, isn’t it?’ repeated Hermione, needing confirmation.

‘Yes,’ said Gudrun automatically, taking no real heed.

‘Let me look,’ said Gerald, reaching forward for the book. But Hermione

ignored him, he must not presume, before she had finished. But he, his will as unthwarted and as unflinching as hers, stretched forward till he touched the book. A little shock, a storm of revulsion against him, shook Hermione unconsciously. She released the book when he had not properly got it, and it tumbled against the side of the boat and bounced into the water.

‘There!’ sang Hermione, with a strange ring of malevolent victory. ‘I’m so sorry, so awfully sorry. Can’t you get it, Gerald?’

This last was said in a note of anxious sneering that made Gerald’s veins tingle with fine hate for her. He leaned far out of the boat, reaching down into the water. He could feel his position was ridiculous, his loins exposed behind him.

‘It is of no importance,’ came the strong, clanging voice of Gudrun. She seemed to touch him. But he reached further, the boat swayed violently. Hermione, however, remained unperturbed. He grasped the book, under the water, and brought it up, dripping.

‘I’m so dreadfully sorry — dreadfully sorry,’ repeated Hermione. ‘I’m afraid it was all my fault.’

‘It’s of no importance — really, I assure you — it doesn’t matter in the least,’ said Gudrun loudly, with emphasis, her face flushed scarlet. And she held out her hand impatiently for the wet book, to have done with the scene. Gerald gave it to her. He was not quite himself.

‘I’m so dreadfully sorry,’ repeated Hermione, till both Gerald and Gudrun were exasperated. ‘Is there nothing that can be done?’

‘In what way?’ asked Gudrun, with cool irony.

‘Can’t we save the drawings?’

There was a moment’s pause, wherein Gudrun made evident all her refutation of Hermione’s persistence.

‘I assure you,’ said Gudrun, with cutting distinctness, ‘the drawings are quite as good as ever they were, for my purpose. I want them only for reference.’

‘But can’t I give you a new book? I wish you’d let me do that. I feel so truly sorry. I feel it was all my fault.’

‘As far as I saw,’ said Gudrun, ‘it wasn’t your fault at all. If there was any FAULT, it was Mr Crich’s. But the whole thing is ENTIRELY trivial, and it really is ridiculous to take any notice of it.’

Gerald watched Gudrun closely, whilst she repulsed Hermione. There was a body of cold power in her. He watched her with an insight that amounted to clairvoyance. He saw her a dangerous, hostile spirit, that could stand undiminished and unabated. It was so finished, and of such perfect gesture, moreover.

‘I’m awfully glad if it doesn’t matter,’ he said; ‘if there’s no real harm done.’

She looked back at him, with her fine blue eyes, and signalled full into his spirit, as she said, her voice ringing with intimacy almost caressive now it was addressed to him:

‘Of course, it doesn’t matter in the LEAST.’

The bond was established between them, in that look, in her tone. In her tone, she made the understanding clear — they were of the same kind, he and she, a sort of diabolic freemasonry subsisted between them. Henceforward, she knew, she had her power over him. Wherever they met, they would be secretly associated. And he would be helpless in the association with her. Her soul exulted.

‘Good-bye! I’m so glad you forgive me. Gooood-bye!’

Hermione sang her farewell, and waved her hand. Gerald automatically took the oar and pushed off. But he was looking all the time, with a glimmering, subtly-smiling admiration in his eyes, at Gudrun, who stood on the shoal shaking the wet book in her hand. She turned away and ignored the receding boat. But Gerald looked back as he rowed, beholding her, forgetting what he was doing.

‘Aren’t we going too much to the left?’ sang Hermione, as she sat ignored under her coloured parasol.

Gerald looked round without replying, the oars balanced and glancing in the sun.

‘I think it’s all right,’ he said good-humouredly, beginning to row again without thinking of what he was doing. And Hermione disliked him extremely for his good-humoured obliviousness, she was nullified, she could not regain ascendancy.

CHAPTER XI.

AN ISLAND

Meanwhile Ursula had wandered on from Willey Water along the course of the bright little stream. The afternoon was full of larks' singing. On the bright hill-sides was a subdued smoulder of gorse. A few forget-me-nots flowered by the water. There was a rousedness and a glancing everywhere.

She strayed absorbedly on, over the brooks. She wanted to go to the mill-pond above. The big mill-house was deserted, save for a labourer and his wife who lived in the kitchen. So she passed through the empty farm-yard and through the wilderness of a garden, and mounted the bank by the sluice. When she got to the top, to see the old, velvety surface of the pond before her, she noticed a man on the bank, tinkering with a punt. It was Birkin sawing and hammering away.

She stood at the head of the sluice, looking at him. He was unaware of anybody's presence. He looked very busy, like a wild animal, active and intent. She felt she ought to go away, he would not want her. He seemed to be so much occupied. But she did not want to go away. Therefore she moved along the bank till he would look up.

Which he soon did. The moment he saw her, he dropped his tools and came forward, saying:

'How do you do? I'm making the punt water-tight. Tell me if you think it is right.'

She went along with him.

'You are your father's daughter, so you can tell me if it will do,' he said.

She bent to look at the patched punt.

'I am sure I am my father's daughter,' she said, fearful of having to judge. 'But I don't know anything about carpentry. It LOOKS right, don't you think?'

'Yes, I think. I hope it won't let me to the bottom, that's all. Though even so, it isn't a great matter, I should come up again. Help me to get it into the water, will you?'

With combined efforts they turned over the heavy punt and set it afloat.

'Now,' he said, 'I'll try it and you can watch what happens. Then if it carries,

I'll take you over to the island.'

'Do,' she cried, watching anxiously.

The pond was large, and had that perfect stillness and the dark lustre of very deep water. There were two small islands overgrown with bushes and a few trees, towards the middle. Birkin pushed himself off, and veered clumsily in the pond. Luckily the punt drifted so that he could catch hold of a willow bough, and pull it to the island.

'Rather overgrown,' he said, looking into the interior, 'but very nice. I'll come and fetch you. The boat leaks a little.'

In a moment he was with her again, and she stepped into the wet punt.

'It'll float us all right,' he said, and manoeuvred again to the island.

They landed under a willow tree. She shrank from the little jungle of rank plants before her, evil-smelling figwort and hemlock. But he explored into it.

'I shall mow this down,' he said, 'and then it will be romantic — like Paul et Virginie.'

'Yes, one could have lovely Watteau picnics here,' cried Ursula with enthusiasm.

His face darkened.

'I don't want Watteau picnics here,' he said.

'Only your Virginie,' she laughed.

'Virginie enough,' he smiled wryly. 'No, I don't want her either.'

Ursula looked at him closely. She had not seen him since Breadalby. He was very thin and hollow, with a ghastly look in his face.

'You have been ill; haven't you?' she asked, rather repulsed.

'Yes,' he replied coldly.

They had sat down under the willow tree, and were looking at the pond, from their retreat on the island.

'Has it made you frightened?' she asked.

'What of?' he asked, turning his eyes to look at her. Something in him, inhuman and unmitigated, disturbed her, and shook her out of her ordinary self.

'It IS frightening to be very ill, isn't it?' she said.

'It isn't pleasant,' he said. 'Whether one is really afraid of death, or not, I have never decided. In one mood, not a bit, in another, very much.'

'But doesn't it make you feel ashamed? I think it makes one so ashamed, to be ill — illness is so terribly humiliating, don't you think?'

He considered for some minutes.

'May-be,' he said. 'Though one knows all the time one's life isn't really right, at the source. That's the humiliation. I don't see that the illness counts so much, after that. One is ill because one doesn't live properly — can't. It's the failure to

live that makes one ill, and humiliates one.'

'But do you fail to live?' she asked, almost jeering.

'Why yes — I don't make much of a success of my days. One seems always to be bumping one's nose against the blank wall ahead.'

Ursula laughed. She was frightened, and when she was frightened she always laughed and pretended to be jaunty.

'Your poor nose!' she said, looking at that feature of his face.

'No wonder it's ugly,' he replied.

She was silent for some minutes, struggling with her own self-deception. It was an instinct in her, to deceive herself.

'But I'M happy — I think life is AWFULLY jolly,' she said.

'Good,' he answered, with a certain cold indifference.

She reached for a bit of paper which had wrapped a small piece of chocolate she had found in her pocket, and began making a boat. He watched her without heeding her. There was something strangely pathetic and tender in her moving, unconscious finger-tips, that were agitated and hurt, really.

'I DO enjoy things — don't you?' she asked.

'Oh yes! But it infuriates me that I can't get right, at the really growing part of me. I feel all tangled and messed up, and I CAN'T get straight anyhow. I don't know what really to DO. One must do something somewhere.'

'Why should you always be DOING?' she retorted. 'It is so plebeian. I think it is much better to be really patrician, and to do nothing but just be oneself, like a walking flower.'

'I quite agree,' he said, 'if one has burst into blossom. But I can't get my flower to blossom anyhow. Either it is blighted in the bud, or has got the smother-fly, or it isn't nourished. Curse it, it isn't even a bud. It is a contravened knot.'

Again she laughed. He was so very fretful and exasperated. But she was anxious and puzzled. How was one to get out, anyhow. There must be a way out somewhere.

There was a silence, wherein she wanted to cry. She reached for another bit of chocolate paper, and began to fold another boat.

'And why is it,' she asked at length, 'that there is no flowering, no dignity of human life now?'

'The whole idea is dead. Humanity itself is dry-rotten, really. There are myriads of human beings hanging on the bush — and they look very nice and rosy, your healthy young men and women. But they are apples of Sodom, as a matter of fact, Dead Sea Fruit, gall-apples. It isn't true that they have any significance — their insides are full of bitter, corrupt ash.'

‘But there ARE good people,’ protested Ursula.

‘Good enough for the life of today. But mankind is a dead tree, covered with fine brilliant galls of people.’

Ursula could not help stiffening herself against this, it was too picturesque and final. But neither could she help making him go on.

‘And if it is so, WHY is it?’ she asked, hostile. They were rousing each other to a fine passion of opposition.

‘Why, why are people all balls of bitter dust? Because they won’t fall off the tree when they’re ripe. They hang on to their old positions when the position is over-past, till they become infested with little worms and dry-rot.’

There was a long pause. His voice had become hot and very sarcastic. Ursula was troubled and bewildered, they were both oblivious of everything but their own immersion.

‘But even if everybody is wrong — where are you right?’ she cried, ‘where are you any better?’

‘I? — I’m not right,’ he cried back. ‘At least my only rightness lies in the fact that I know it. I detest what I am, outwardly. I loathe myself as a human being. Humanity is a huge aggregate lie, and a huge lie is less than a small truth. Humanity is less, far less than the individual, because the individual may sometimes be capable of truth, and humanity is a tree of lies. And they say that love is the greatest thing; they persist in SAYING this, the foul liars, and just look at what they do! Look at all the millions of people who repeat every minute that love is the greatest, and charity is the greatest — and see what they are doing all the time. By their works ye shall know them, for dirty liars and cowards, who daren’t stand by their own actions, much less by their own words.’

‘But,’ said Ursula sadly, ‘that doesn’t alter the fact that love is the greatest, does it? What they DO doesn’t alter the truth of what they say, does it?’

‘Completely, because if what they say WERE true, then they couldn’t help fulfilling it. But they maintain a lie, and so they run amok at last. It’s a lie to say that love is the greatest. You might as well say that hate is the greatest, since the opposite of everything balances. What people want is hate — hate and nothing but hate. And in the name of righteousness and love, they get it. They distil themselves with nitroglycerine, all the lot of them, out of very love. It’s the lie that kills. If we want hate, let us have it — death, murder, torture, violent destruction — let us have it: but not in the name of love. But I abhor humanity, I wish it was swept away. It could go, and there would be no ABSOLUTE loss, if every human being perished tomorrow. The reality would be untouched. Nay, it would be better. The real tree of life would then be rid of the most ghastly, heavy crop of Dead Sea Fruit, the intolerable burden of myriad simulacra of people, an

infinite weight of mortal lies.'

'So you'd like everybody in the world destroyed?' said Ursula.

'I should indeed.'

'And the world empty of people?'

'Yes truly. You yourself, don't you find it a beautiful clean thought, a world empty of people, just uninterrupted grass, and a hare sitting up?'

The pleasant sincerity of his voice made Ursula pause to consider her own proposition. And really it WAS attractive: a clean, lovely, humanless world. It was the REALLY desirable. Her heart hesitated, and exulted. But still, she was dissatisfied with HIM.

'But,' she objected, 'you'd be dead yourself, so what good would it do you?'

'I would die like a shot, to know that the earth would really be cleaned of all the people. It is the most beautiful and freeing thought. Then there would NEVER be another foul humanity created, for a universal defilement.'

'No,' said Ursula, 'there would be nothing.'

'What! Nothing? Just because humanity was wiped out? You flatter yourself. There'd be everything.'

'But how, if there were no people?'

'Do you think that creation depends on MAN! It merely doesn't. There are the trees and the grass and birds. I much prefer to think of the lark rising up in the morning upon a humanless world. Man is a mistake, he must go. There is the grass, and hares and adders, and the unseen hosts, actual angels that go about freely when a dirty humanity doesn't interrupt them — and good pure-tissued demons: very nice.'

It pleased Ursula, what he said, pleased her very much, as a phantasy. Of course it was only a pleasant fancy. She herself knew too well the actuality of humanity, its hideous actuality. She knew it could not disappear so cleanly and conveniently. It had a long way to go yet, a long and hideous way. Her subtle, feminine, demoniacal soul knew it well.

'If only man was swept off the face of the earth, creation would go on so marvellously, with a new start, non-human. Man is one of the mistakes of creation — like the ichthyosauri. If only he were gone again, think what lovely things would come out of the liberated days; — things straight out of the fire.'

'But man will never be gone,' she said, with insidious, diabolical knowledge of the horrors of persistence. 'The world will go with him.'

'Ah no,' he answered, 'not so. I believe in the proud angels and the demons that are our fore-runners. They will destroy us, because we are not proud enough. The ichthyosauri were not proud: they crawled and floundered as we do. And besides, look at elder-flowers and bluebells — they are a sign that pure

creation takes place — even the butterfly. But humanity never gets beyond the caterpillar stage — it rots in the chrysalis, it never will have wings. It is anti-creation, like monkeys and baboons.’

Ursula watched him as he talked. There seemed a certain impatient fury in him, all the while, and at the same time a great amusement in everything, and a final tolerance. And it was this tolerance she mistrusted, not the fury. She saw that, all the while, in spite of himself, he would have to be trying to save the world. And this knowledge, whilst it comforted her heart somewhere with a little self-satisfaction, stability, yet filled her with a certain sharp contempt and hate of him. She wanted him to herself, she hated the Salvator Mundi touch. It was something diffuse and generalised about him, which she could not stand. He would behave in the same way, say the same things, give himself as completely to anybody who came along, anybody and everybody who liked to appeal to him. It was despicable, a very insidious form of prostitution.

‘But,’ she said, ‘you believe in individual love, even if you don’t believe in loving humanity — ?’

‘I don’t believe in love at all — that is, any more than I believe in hate, or in grief. Love is one of the emotions like all the others — and so it is all right whilst you feel it But I can’t see how it becomes an absolute. It is just part of human relationships, no more. And it is only part of ANY human relationship. And why one should be required ALWAYS to feel it, any more than one always feels sorrow or distant joy, I cannot conceive. Love isn’t a desideratum — it is an emotion you feel or you don’t feel, according to circumstance.’

‘Then why do you care about people at all?’ she asked, ‘if you don’t believe in love? Why do you bother about humanity?’

‘Why do I? Because I can’t get away from it.’

‘Because you love it,’ she persisted.

It irritated him.

‘If I do love it,’ he said, ‘it is my disease.’

‘But it is a disease you don’t want to be cured of,’ she said, with some cold sneering.

He was silent now, feeling she wanted to insult him.

‘And if you don’t believe in love, what DO you believe in?’ she asked mocking. ‘Simply in the end of the world, and grass?’

He was beginning to feel a fool.

‘I believe in the unseen hosts,’ he said.

‘And nothing else? You believe in nothing visible, except grass and birds? Your world is a poor show.’

‘Perhaps it is,’ he said, cool and superior now he was offended, assuming a

certain insufferable aloof superiority, and withdrawing into his distance.

Ursula disliked him. But also she felt she had lost something. She looked at him as he sat crouched on the bank. There was a certain priggish Sunday-school stiffness over him, priggish and detestable. And yet, at the same time, the moulding of him was so quick and attractive, it gave such a great sense of freedom: the moulding of his brows, his chin, his whole physique, something so alive, somewhere, in spite of the look of sickness.

And it was this duality in feeling which he created in her, that made a fine hate of him quicken in her bowels. There was his wonderful, desirable life-rapidity, the rare quality of an utterly desirable man: and there was at the same time this ridiculous, mean effacement into a Salvator Mundi and a Sunday-school teacher, a prig of the stiffest type.

He looked up at her. He saw her face strangely enkindled, as if suffused from within by a powerful sweet fire. His soul was arrested in wonder. She was enkindled in her own living fire. Arrested in wonder and in pure, perfect attraction, he moved towards her. She sat like a strange queen, almost supernatural in her glowing smiling richness.

‘The point about love,’ he said, his consciousness quickly adjusting itself, ‘is that we hate the word because we have vulgarised it. It ought to be prescribed, tabooed from utterance, for many years, till we get a new, better idea.’

There was a beam of understanding between them.

‘But it always means the same thing,’ she said.

‘Ah God, no, let it not mean that any more,’ he cried. ‘Let the old meanings go.’

‘But still it is love,’ she persisted. A strange, wicked yellow light shone at him in her eyes.

He hesitated, baffled, withdrawing.

‘No,’ he said, ‘it isn’t. Spoken like that, never in the world. You’ve no business to utter the word.’

‘I must leave it to you, to take it out of the Ark of the Covenant at the right moment,’ she mocked.

Again they looked at each other. She suddenly sprang up, turned her back to him, and walked away. He too rose slowly and went to the water’s edge, where, crouching, he began to amuse himself unconsciously. Picking a daisy he dropped it on the pond, so that the stem was a keel, the flower floated like a little water lily, staring with its open face up to the sky. It turned slowly round, in a slow, slow Dervish dance, as it veered away.

He watched it, then dropped another daisy into the water, and after that another, and sat watching them with bright, absolved eyes, crouching near on the

bank. Ursula turned to look. A strange feeling possessed her, as if something were taking place. But it was all intangible. And some sort of control was being put on her. She could not know. She could only watch the brilliant little discs of the daisies veering slowly in travel on the dark, lustrous water. The little flotilla was drifting into the light, a company of white specks in the distance.

‘Do let us go to the shore, to follow them,’ she said, afraid of being any longer imprisoned on the island. And they pushed off in the punt.

She was glad to be on the free land again. She went along the bank towards the sluice. The daisies were scattered broadcast on the pond, tiny radiant things, like an exaltation, points of exaltation here and there. Why did they move her so strongly and mystically?

‘Look,’ he said, ‘your boat of purple paper is escorting them, and they are a convoy of rafts.’

Some of the daisies came slowly towards her, hesitating, making a shy bright little cotillion on the dark clear water. Their gay bright candour moved her so much as they came near, that she was almost in tears.

‘Why are they so lovely,’ she cried. ‘Why do I think them so lovely?’

‘They are nice flowers,’ he said, her emotional tones putting a constraint on him.

‘You know that a daisy is a company of florets, a concourse, become individual. Don’t the botanists put it highest in the line of development? I believe they do.’

‘The compositae, yes, I think so,’ said Ursula, who was never very sure of anything. Things she knew perfectly well, at one moment, seemed to become doubtful the next.

‘Explain it so, then,’ he said. ‘The daisy is a perfect little democracy, so it’s the highest of flowers, hence its charm.’

‘No,’ she cried, ‘no — never. It isn’t democratic.’

‘No,’ he admitted. ‘It’s the golden mob of the proletariat, surrounded by a showy white fence of the idle rich.’

‘How hateful — your hateful social orders!’ she cried.

‘Quite! It’s a daisy — we’ll leave it alone.’

‘Do. Let it be a dark horse for once,’ she said: ‘if anything can be a dark horse to you,’ she added satirically.

They stood aside, forgetful. As if a little stunned, they both were motionless, barely conscious. The little conflict into which they had fallen had torn their consciousness and left them like two impersonal forces, there in contact.

He became aware of the lapse. He wanted to say something, to get on to a new more ordinary footing.

‘You know,’ he said, ‘that I am having rooms here at the mill? Don’t you think we can have some good times?’

‘Oh are you?’ she said, ignoring all his implication of admitted intimacy.

He adjusted himself at once, became normally distant.

‘If I find I can live sufficiently by myself,’ he continued, ‘I shall give up my work altogether. It has become dead to me. I don’t believe in the humanity I pretend to be part of, I don’t care a straw for the social ideals I live by, I hate the dying organic form of social mankind — so it can’t be anything but trumpery, to work at education. I shall drop it as soon as I am clear enough — tomorrow perhaps — and be by myself.’

‘Have you enough to live on?’ asked Ursula.

‘Yes — I’ve about four hundred a year. That makes it easy for me.’

There was a pause.

‘And what about Hermione?’ asked Ursula.

‘That’s over, finally — a pure failure, and never could have been anything else.’

‘But you still know each other?’

‘We could hardly pretend to be strangers, could we?’

There was a stubborn pause.

‘But isn’t that a half-measure?’ asked Ursula at length.

‘I don’t think so,’ he said. ‘You’ll be able to tell me if it is.’

Again there was a pause of some minutes’ duration. He was thinking.

‘One must throw everything away, everything — let everything go, to get the one last thing one wants,’ he said.

‘What thing?’ she asked in challenge.

‘I don’t know — freedom together,’ he said.

She had wanted him to say ‘love.’

There was heard a loud barking of the dogs below. He seemed disturbed by it. She did not notice. Only she thought he seemed uneasy.

‘As a matter of fact,’ he said, in rather a small voice, ‘I believe that is Hermione come now, with Gerald Crich. She wanted to see the rooms before they are furnished.’

‘I know,’ said Ursula. ‘She will superintend the furnishing for you.’

‘Probably. Does it matter?’

‘Oh no, I should think not,’ said Ursula. ‘Though personally, I can’t bear her. I think she is a lie, if you like, you who are always talking about lies.’ Then she ruminated for a moment, when she broke out: ‘Yes, and I do mind if she furnishes your rooms — I do mind. I mind that you keep her hanging on at all.’

He was silent now, frowning.

‘Perhaps,’ he said. ‘I don’t WANT her to furnish the rooms here — and I don’t keep her hanging on. Only, I needn’t be churlish to her, need I? At any rate, I shall have to go down and see them now. You’ll come, won’t you?’

‘I don’t think so,’ she said coldly and irresolutely.

‘Won’t you? Yes do. Come and see the rooms as well. Do come.’

CHAPTER XII.

CARPETING

He set off down the bank, and she went unwillingly with him. Yet she would not have stayed away, either.

‘We know each other well, you and I, already,’ he said. She did not answer.

In the large darkish kitchen of the mill, the labourer’s wife was talking shrilly to Hermione and Gerald, who stood, he in white and she in a glistening bluish foulard, strangely luminous in the dusk of the room; whilst from the cages on the walls, a dozen or more canaries sang at the top of their voices. The cages were all placed round a small square window at the back, where the sunshine came in, a beautiful beam, filtering through green leaves of a tree. The voice of Mrs Salmon shrilled against the noise of the birds, which rose ever more wild and triumphant, and the woman’s voice went up and up against them, and the birds replied with wild animation.

‘Here’s Rupert!’ shouted Gerald in the midst of the din. He was suffering badly, being very sensitive in the ear.

‘O-o-h them birds, they won’t let you speak — !’ shrilled the labourer’s wife in disgust. ‘I’ll cover them up.’

And she darted here and there, throwing a duster, an apron, a towel, a tablecloth over the cages of the birds.

‘Now will you stop it, and let a body speak for your row,’ she said, still in a voice that was too high.

The party watched her. Soon the cages were covered, they had a strange funereal look. But from under the towels odd defiant trills and bubblings still shook out.

‘Oh, they won’t go on,’ said Mrs Salmon reassuringly. ‘They’ll go to sleep now.’

‘Really,’ said Hermione, politely.

‘They will,’ said Gerald. ‘They will go to sleep automatically, now the impression of evening is produced.’

‘Are they so easily deceived?’ cried Ursula.

‘Oh, yes,’ replied Gerald. ‘Don’t you know the story of Fabre, who, when he was a boy, put a hen’s head under her wing, and she straight away went to sleep? It’s quite true.’

‘And did that make him a naturalist?’ asked Birkin.

‘Probably,’ said Gerald.

Meanwhile Ursula was peeping under one of the cloths. There sat the canary in a corner, bunched and fluffed up for sleep.

‘How ridiculous!’ she cried. ‘It really thinks the night has come! How absurd! Really, how can one have any respect for a creature that is so easily taken in!’

‘Yes,’ sang Hermione, coming also to look. She put her hand on Ursula’s arm and chuckled a low laugh. ‘Yes, doesn’t he look comical?’ she chuckled. ‘Like a stupid husband.’

Then, with her hand still on Ursula’s arm, she drew her away, saying, in her mild sing-song:

‘How did you come here? We saw Gudrun too.’

‘I came to look at the pond,’ said Ursula, ‘and I found Mr Birkin there.’

‘Did you? This is quite a Brangwen land, isn’t it!’

‘I’m afraid I hoped so,’ said Ursula. ‘I ran here for refuge, when I saw you down the lake, just putting off.’

‘Did you! And now we’ve run you to earth.’

Hermione’s eyelids lifted with an uncanny movement, amused but overwrought. She had always her strange, rapt look, unnatural and irresponsible.

‘I was going on,’ said Ursula. ‘Mr Birkin wanted me to see the rooms. Isn’t it delightful to live here? It is perfect.’

‘Yes,’ said Hermione, abstractedly. Then she turned right away from Ursula, ceased to know her existence.

‘How do you feel, Rupert?’ she sang in a new, affectionate tone, to Birkin.

‘Very well,’ he replied.

‘Were you quite comfortable?’ The curious, sinister, rapt look was on Hermione’s face, she shrugged her bosom in a convulsed movement, and seemed like one half in a trance.

‘Quite comfortable,’ he replied.

There was a long pause, whilst Hermione looked at him for a long time, from under her heavy, drugged eyelids.

‘And you think you’ll be happy here?’ she said at last.

‘I’m sure I shall.’

‘I’m sure I shall do anything for him as I can,’ said the labourer’s wife. ‘And I’m sure our master will; so I HOPE he’ll find himself comfortable.’

Hermione turned and looked at her slowly.

‘Thank you so much,’ she said, and then she turned completely away again. She recovered her position, and lifting her face towards him, and addressing him exclusively, she said:

‘Have you measured the rooms?’

‘No,’ he said, ‘I’ve been mending the punt.’

‘Shall we do it now?’ she said slowly, balanced and dispassionate.

‘Have you got a tape measure, Mrs Salmon?’ he said, turning to the woman.

‘Yes sir, I think I can find one,’ replied the woman, bustling immediately to a basket. ‘This is the only one I’ve got, if it will do.’

Hermione took it, though it was offered to him.

‘Thank you so much,’ she said. ‘It will do very nicely. Thank you so much.’ Then she turned to Birkin, saying with a little gay movement: ‘Shall we do it now, Rupert?’

‘What about the others, they’ll be bored,’ he said reluctantly.

‘Do you mind?’ said Hermione, turning to Ursula and Gerald vaguely.

‘Not in the least,’ they replied.

‘Which room shall we do first?’ she said, turning again to Birkin, with the same gaiety, now she was going to DO something with him.

‘We’ll take them as they come,’ he said.

‘Should I be getting your teas ready, while you do that?’ said the labourer’s wife, also gay because SHE had something to do.

‘Would you?’ said Hermione, turning to her with the curious motion of intimacy that seemed to envelop the woman, draw her almost to Hermione’s breast, and which left the others standing apart. ‘I should be so glad. Where shall we have it?’

‘Where would you like it? Shall it be in here, or out on the grass?’

‘Where shall we have tea?’ sang Hermione to the company at large.

‘On the bank by the pond. And WE’LL carry the things up, if you’ll just get them ready, Mrs Salmon,’ said Birkin.

‘All right,’ said the pleased woman.

The party moved down the passage into the front room. It was empty, but clean and sunny. There was a window looking on to the tangled front garden.

‘This is the dining room,’ said Hermione. ‘We’ll measure it this way, Rupert — you go down there — ’

‘Can’t I do it for you,’ said Gerald, coming to take the end of the tape.

‘No, thank you,’ cried Hermione, stooping to the ground in her bluish, brilliant foulard. It was a great joy to her to DO things, and to have the ordering of the job, with Birkin. He obeyed her subduedly. Ursula and Gerald looked on. It was a peculiarity of Hermione’s, that at every moment, she had one intimate, and

turned all the rest of those present into onlookers. This raised her into a state of triumph.

They measured and discussed in the dining-room, and Hermione decided what the floor coverings must be. It sent her into a strange, convulsed anger, to be thwarted. Birkin always let her have her way, for the moment.

Then they moved across, through the hall, to the other front room, that was a little smaller than the first.

‘This is the study,’ said Hermione. ‘Rupert, I have a rug that I want you to have for here. Will you let me give it to you? Do — I want to give it you.’

‘What is it like?’ he asked ungraciously.

‘You haven’t seen it. It is chiefly rose red, then blue, a metallic, mid-blue, and a very soft dark blue. I think you would like it. Do you think you would?’

‘It sounds very nice,’ he replied. ‘What is it? Oriental? With a pile?’

‘Yes. Persian! It is made of camel’s hair, silky. I think it is called Bergamos — twelve feet by seven — . Do you think it will do?’

‘It would DO,’ he said. ‘But why should you give me an expensive rug? I can manage perfectly well with my old Oxford Turkish.’

‘But may I give it to you? Do let me.’

‘How much did it cost?’

She looked at him, and said:

‘I don’t remember. It was quite cheap.’

He looked at her, his face set.

‘I don’t want to take it, Hermione,’ he said.

‘Do let me give it to the rooms,’ she said, going up to him and putting her hand on his arm lightly, pleadingly. ‘I shall be so disappointed.’

‘You know I don’t want you to give me things,’ he repeated helplessly.

‘I don’t want to give you THINGS,’ she said teasingly. ‘But will you have this?’

‘All right,’ he said, defeated, and she triumphed.

They went upstairs. There were two bedrooms to correspond with the rooms downstairs. One of them was half furnished, and Birkin had evidently slept there. Hermione went round the room carefully, taking in every detail, as if absorbing the evidence of his presence, in all the inanimate things. She felt the bed and examined the coverings.

‘Are you SURE you were quite comfortable?’ she said, pressing the pillow.

‘Perfectly,’ he replied coldly.

‘And were you warm? There is no down quilt. I am sure you need one. You mustn’t have a great pressure of clothes.’

‘I’ve got one,’ he said. ‘It is coming down.’

They measured the rooms, and lingered over every consideration. Ursula stood at the window and watched the woman carrying the tea up the bank to the pond. She hated the palaver Hermione made, she wanted to drink tea, she wanted anything but this fuss and business.

At last they all mounted the grassy bank, to the picnic. Hermione poured out tea. She ignored now Ursula's presence. And Ursula, recovering from her ill-humour, turned to Gerald saying:

'Oh, I hated you so much the other day, Mr Crich,'

'What for?' said Gerald, wincing slightly away.

'For treating your horse so badly. Oh, I hated you so much!'

'What did he do?' sang Hermione.

'He made his lovely sensitive Arab horse stand with him at the railway-crossing whilst a horrible lot of trucks went by; and the poor thing, she was in a perfect frenzy, a perfect agony. It was the most horrible sight you can imagine.'

'Why did you do it, Gerald?' asked Hermione, calm and interrogative.

'She must learn to stand — what use is she to me in this country, if she shies and goes off every time an engine whistles.'

'But why inflict unnecessary torture?' said Ursula. 'Why make her stand all that time at the crossing? You might just as well have ridden back up the road, and saved all that horror. Her sides were bleeding where you had spurred her. It was too horrible — !'

Gerald stiffened.

'I have to use her,' he replied. 'And if I'm going to be sure of her at ALL, she'll have to learn to stand noises.'

'Why should she?' cried Ursula in a passion. 'She is a living creature, why should she stand anything, just because you choose to make her? She has as much right to her own being, as you have to yours.'

'There I disagree,' said Gerald. 'I consider that mare is there for my use. Not because I bought her, but because that is the natural order. It is more natural for a man to take a horse and use it as he likes, than for him to go down on his knees to it, begging it to do as it wishes, and to fulfil its own marvellous nature.'

Ursula was just breaking out, when Hermione lifted her face and began, in her musing sing-song:

'I do think — I do really think we must have the COURAGE to use the lower animal life for our needs. I do think there is something wrong, when we look on every living creature as if it were ourselves. I do feel, that it is false to project our own feelings on every animate creature. It is a lack of discrimination, a lack of criticism.'

'Quite,' said Birkin sharply. 'Nothing is so detestable as the maudlin

attributing of human feelings and consciousness to animals.’

‘Yes,’ said Hermione, wearily, ‘we must really take a position. Either we are going to use the animals, or they will use us.’

‘That’s a fact,’ said Gerald. ‘A horse has got a will like a man, though it has no MIND strictly. And if your will isn’t master, then the horse is master of you. And this is a thing I can’t help. I can’t help being master of the horse.’

‘If only we could learn how to use our will,’ said Hermione, ‘we could do anything. The will can cure anything, and put anything right. That I am convinced of — if only we use the will properly, intelligibly.’

‘What do you mean by using the will properly?’ said Birkin.

‘A very great doctor taught me,’ she said, addressing Ursula and Gerald vaguely. ‘He told me for instance, that to cure oneself of a bad habit, one should FORCE oneself to do it, when one would not do it — make oneself do it — and then the habit would disappear.’

‘How do you mean?’ said Gerald.

‘If you bite your nails, for example. Then, when you don’t want to bite your nails, bite them, make yourself bite them. And you would find the habit was broken.’

‘Is that so?’ said Gerald.

‘Yes. And in so many things, I have MADE myself well. I was a very queer and nervous girl. And by learning to use my will, simply by using my will, I MADE myself right.’

Ursula looked all the white at Hermione, as she spoke in her slow, dispassionate, and yet strangely tense voice. A curious thrill went over the younger woman. Some strange, dark, convulsive power was in Hermione, fascinating and repelling.

‘It is fatal to use the will like that,’ cried Birkin harshly, ‘disgusting. Such a will is an obscenity.’

Hermione looked at him for a long time, with her shadowed, heavy eyes. Her face was soft and pale and thin, almost phosphorescent, her jaw was lean.

‘I’m sure it isn’t,’ she said at length. There always seemed an interval, a strange split between what she seemed to feel and experience, and what she actually said and thought. She seemed to catch her thoughts at length from off the surface of a maelstrom of chaotic black emotions and reactions, and Birkin was always filled with repulsion, she caught so infallibly, her will never failed her. Her voice was always dispassionate and tense, and perfectly confident. Yet she shuddered with a sense of nausea, a sort of seasickness that always threatened to overwhelm her mind. But her mind remained unbroken, her will was still perfect. It almost sent Birkin mad. But he would never, never dare to

break her will, and let loose the maelstrom of her subconsciousness, and see her in her ultimate madness. Yet he was always striking at her.

‘And of course,’ he said to Gerald, ‘horses HAVEN’T got a complete will, like human beings. A horse has no ONE will. Every horse, strictly, has two wills. With one will, it wants to put itself in the human power completely — and with the other, it wants to be free, wild. The two wills sometimes lock — you know that, if ever you’ve felt a horse bolt, while you’ve been driving it.’

‘I have felt a horse bolt while I was driving it,’ said Gerald, ‘but it didn’t make me know it had two wills. I only knew it was frightened.’

Hermione had ceased to listen. She simply became oblivious when these subjects were started.

‘Why should a horse want to put itself in the human power?’ asked Ursula. ‘That is quite incomprehensible to me. I don’t believe it ever wanted it.’

‘Yes it did. It’s the last, perhaps highest, love-impulse: resign your will to the higher being,’ said Birkin.

‘What curious notions you have of love,’ jeered Ursula.

‘And woman is the same as horses: two wills act in opposition inside her. With one will, she wants to subject herself utterly. With the other she wants to bolt, and pitch her rider to perdition.’

‘Then I’m a bolter,’ said Ursula, with a burst of laughter.

‘It’s a dangerous thing to domesticate even horses, let alone women,’ said Birkin. ‘The dominant principle has some rare antagonists.’

‘Good thing too,’ said Ursula.

‘Quite,’ said Gerald, with a faint smile. ‘There’s more fun.’

Hermione could bear no more. She rose, saying in her easy sing-song:

‘Isn’t the evening beautiful! I get filled sometimes with such a great sense of beauty, that I feel I can hardly bear it.’

Ursula, to whom she had appealed, rose with her, moved to the last impersonal depths. And Birkin seemed to her almost a monster of hateful arrogance. She went with Hermione along the bank of the pond, talking of beautiful, soothing things, picking the gentle cowslips.

‘Wouldn’t you like a dress,’ said Ursula to Hermione, ‘of this yellow spotted with orange — a cotton dress?’

‘Yes,’ said Hermione, stopping and looking at the flower, letting the thought come home to her and soothe her. ‘Wouldn’t it be pretty? I should LOVE it.’

And she turned smiling to Ursula, in a feeling of real affection.

But Gerald remained with Birkin, wanting to probe him to the bottom, to know what he meant by the dual will in horses. A flicker of excitement danced on Gerald’s face.

Hermione and Ursula strayed on together, united in a sudden bond of deep affection and closeness.

‘I really do not want to be forced into all this criticism and analysis of life. I really DO want to see things in their entirety, with their beauty left to them, and their wholeness, their natural holiness. Don’t you feel it, don’t you feel you CAN’T be tortured into any more knowledge?’ said Hermione, stopping in front of Ursula, and turning to her with clenched fists thrust downwards.

‘Yes,’ said Ursula. ‘I do. I am sick of all this poking and prying.’

‘I’m so glad you are. Sometimes,’ said Hermione, again stopping arrested in her progress and turning to Ursula, ‘sometimes I wonder if I OUGHT to submit to all this realisation, if I am not being weak in rejecting it. But I feel I CAN’T — I CAN’T. It seems to destroy EVERYTHING. All the beauty and the — and the true holiness is destroyed — and I feel I can’t live without them.’

‘And it would be simply wrong to live without them,’ cried Ursula. ‘No, it is so IRREVERENT to think that everything must be realised in the head. Really, something must be left to the Lord, there always is and always will be.’

‘Yes,’ said Hermione, reassured like a child, ‘it should, shouldn’t it? And Rupert — ’ she lifted her face to the sky, in a muse — ‘he CAN only tear things to pieces. He really IS like a boy who must pull everything to pieces to see how it is made. And I can’t think it is right — it does seem so irreverent, as you say.’

‘Like tearing open a bud to see what the flower will be like,’ said Ursula.

‘Yes. And that kills everything, doesn’t it? It doesn’t allow any possibility of flowering.’

‘Of course not,’ said Ursula. ‘It is purely destructive.’

‘It is, isn’t it!’

Hermione looked long and slow at Ursula, seeming to accept confirmation from her. Then the two women were silent. As soon as they were in accord, they began mutually to mistrust each other. In spite of herself, Ursula felt herself recoiling from Hermione. It was all she could do to restrain her revulsion.

They returned to the men, like two conspirators who have withdrawn to come to an agreement. Birkin looked up at them. Ursula hated him for his cold watchfulness. But he said nothing.

‘Shall we be going?’ said Hermione. ‘Rupert, you are coming to Shortlands to dinner? Will you come at once, will you come now, with us?’

‘I’m not dressed,’ replied Birkin. ‘And you know Gerald stickles for convention.’

‘I don’t stickle for it,’ said Gerald. ‘But if you’d got as sick as I have of rowdy go-as-you-please in the house, you’d prefer it if people were peaceful and conventional, at least at meals.’

‘All right,’ said Birkin.

‘But can’t we wait for you while you dress?’ persisted Hermione.

‘If you like.’

He rose to go indoors. Ursula said she would take her leave.

‘Only,’ she said, turning to Gerald, ‘I must say that, however man is lord of the beast and the fowl, I still don’t think he has any right to violate the feelings of the inferior creation. I still think it would have been much more sensible and nice of you if you’d trotted back up the road while the train went by, and been considerate.’

‘I see,’ said Gerald, smiling, but somewhat annoyed. ‘I must remember another time.’

‘They all think I’m an interfering female,’ thought Ursula to herself, as she went away. But she was in arms against them.

She ran home plunged in thought. She had been very much moved by Hermione, she had really come into contact with her, so that there was a sort of league between the two women. And yet she could not bear her. But she put the thought away. ‘She’s really good,’ she said to herself. ‘She really wants what is right.’ And she tried to feel at one with Hermione, and to shut off from Birkin. She was strictly hostile to him. But she was held to him by some bond, some deep principle. This at once irritated her and saved her.

Only now and again, violent little shudders would come over her, out of her subconsciousness, and she knew it was the fact that she had stated her challenge to Birkin, and he had, consciously or unconsciously, accepted. It was a fight to the death between them — or to new life: though in what the conflict lay, no one could say.

CHAPTER XIII.

MINO

The days went by, and she received no sign. Was he going to ignore her, was he going to take no further notice of her secret? A dreary weight of anxiety and acrid bitterness settled on her. And yet Ursula knew she was only deceiving herself, and that he would proceed. She said no word to anybody.

Then, sure enough, there came a note from him, asking if she would come to tea with Gudrun, to his rooms in town.

‘Why does he ask Gudrun as well?’ she asked herself at once. ‘Does he want to protect himself, or does he think I would not go alone?’ She was tormented by the thought that he wanted to protect himself. But at the end of all, she only said to herself:

‘I don’t want Gudrun to be there, because I want him to say something more to me. So I shan’t tell Gudrun anything about it, and I shall go alone. Then I shall know.’

She found herself sitting on the tram-car, mounting up the hill going out of the town, to the place where he had his lodging. She seemed to have passed into a kind of dream world, absolved from the conditions of actuality. She watched the sordid streets of the town go by beneath her, as if she were a spirit disconnected from the material universe. What had it all to do with her? She was palpitating and formless within the flux of the ghost life. She could not consider any more, what anybody would say of her or think about her. People had passed out of her range, she was absolved. She had fallen strange and dim, out of the sheath of the material life, as a berry falls from the only world it has ever known, down out of the sheath on to the real unknown.

Birkin was standing in the middle of the room, when she was shown in by the landlady. He too was moved outside himself. She saw him agitated and shaken, a frail, unsubstantial body silent like the node of some violent force, that came out from him and shook her almost into a swoon.

‘You are alone?’ he said.

‘Yes — Gudrun could not come.’

He instantly guessed why.

And they were both seated in silence, in the terrible tension of the room. She was aware that it was a pleasant room, full of light and very restful in its form — aware also of a fuchsia tree, with dangling scarlet and purple flowers.

‘How nice the fuchsias are!’ she said, to break the silence.

‘Aren’t they! Did you think I had forgotten what I said?’

A swoon went over Ursula’s mind.

‘I don’t want you to remember it — if you don’t want to,’ she struggled to say, through the dark mist that covered her.

There was silence for some moments.

‘No,’ he said. ‘It isn’t that. Only — if we are going to know each other, we must pledge ourselves for ever. If we are going to make a relationship, even of friendship, there must be something final and infallible about it.’

There was a clang of mistrust and almost anger in his voice. She did not answer. Her heart was too much contracted. She could not have spoken.

Seeing she was not going to reply, he continued, almost bitterly, giving himself away:

‘I can’t say it is love I have to offer — and it isn’t love I want. It is something much more impersonal and harder — and rarer.’

There was a silence, out of which she said:

‘You mean you don’t love me?’

She suffered furiously, saying that.

‘Yes, if you like to put it like that. Though perhaps that isn’t true. I don’t know. At any rate, I don’t feel the emotion of love for you — no, and I don’t want to. Because it gives out in the last issues.’

‘Love gives out in the last issues?’ she asked, feeling numb to the lips.

‘Yes, it does. At the very last, one is alone, beyond the influence of love. There is a real impersonal me, that is beyond love, beyond any emotional relationship. So it is with you. But we want to delude ourselves that love is the root. It isn’t. It is only the branches. The root is beyond love, a naked kind of isolation, an isolated me, that does NOT meet and mingle, and never can.’

She watched him with wide, troubled eyes. His face was incandescent in its abstract earnestness.

‘And you mean you can’t love?’ she asked, in trepidation.

‘Yes, if you like. I have loved. But there is a beyond, where there is not love.’

She could not submit to this. She felt it swooning over her. But she could not submit.

‘But how do you know — if you have never REALLY loved?’ she asked.

‘It is true, what I say; there is a beyond, in you, in me, which is further than

love, beyond the scope, as stars are beyond the scope of vision, some of them.'

'Then there is no love,' cried Ursula.

'Ultimately, no, there is something else. But, ultimately, there IS no love.'

Ursula was given over to this statement for some moments. Then she half rose from her chair, saying, in a final, repellent voice:

'Then let me go home — what am I doing here?'

'There is the door,' he said. 'You are a free agent.'

He was suspended finely and perfectly in this extremity. She hung motionless for some seconds, then she sat down again.

'If there is no love, what is there?' she cried, almost jeering.

'Something,' he said, looking at her, battling with his soul, with all his might.

'What?'

He was silent for a long time, unable to be in communication with her while she was in this state of opposition.

'There is,' he said, in a voice of pure abstraction; 'a final me which is stark and impersonal and beyond responsibility. So there is a final you. And it is there I would want to meet you — not in the emotional, loving plane — but there beyond, where there is no speech and no terms of agreement. There we are two stark, unknown beings, two utterly strange creatures, I would want to approach you, and you me. And there could be no obligation, because there is no standard for action there, because no understanding has been reaped from that plane. It is quite inhuman, — so there can be no calling to book, in any form whatsoever — because one is outside the pale of all that is accepted, and nothing known applies. One can only follow the impulse, taking that which lies in front, and responsible for nothing, asked for nothing, giving nothing, only each taking according to the primal desire.'

Ursula listened to this speech, her mind dumb and almost senseless, what he said was so unexpected and so untoward.

'It is just purely selfish,' she said.

'If it is pure, yes. But it isn't selfish at all. Because I don't KNOW what I want of you. I deliver MYSELF over to the unknown, in coming to you, I am without reserves or defences, stripped entirely, into the unknown. Only there needs the pledge between us, that we will both cast off everything, cast off ourselves even, and cease to be, so that that which is perfectly ourselves can take place in us.'

She pondered along her own line of thought.

'But it is because you love me, that you want me?' she persisted.

'No it isn't. It is because I believe in you — if I DO believe in you.'

'Aren't you sure?' she laughed, suddenly hurt.

He was looking at her steadfastly, scarcely heeding what she said.

‘Yes, I must believe in you, or else I shouldn’t be here saying this,’ he replied. ‘But that is all the proof I have. I don’t feel any very strong belief at this particular moment.’

She disliked him for this sudden relapse into weariness and faithlessness.

‘But don’t you think me good-looking?’ she persisted, in a mocking voice.

He looked at her, to see if he felt that she was good-looking.

‘I don’t FEEL that you’re good-looking,’ he said.

‘Not even attractive?’ she mocked, bitingly.

He knitted his brows in sudden exasperation.

‘Don’t you see that it’s not a question of visual appreciation in the least,’ he cried. ‘I don’t WANT to see you. I’ve seen plenty of women, I’m sick and weary of seeing them. I want a woman I don’t see.’

‘I’m sorry I can’t oblige you by being invisible,’ she laughed.

‘Yes,’ he said, ‘you are invisible to me, if you don’t force me to be visually aware of you. But I don’t want to see you or hear you.’

‘What did you ask me to tea for, then?’ she mocked.

But he would take no notice of her. He was talking to himself.

‘I want to find you, where you don’t know your own existence, the you that your common self denies utterly. But I don’t want your good looks, and I don’t want your womanly feelings, and I don’t want your thoughts nor opinions nor your ideas — they are all bagatelles to me.’

‘You are very conceited, Monsieur,’ she mocked. ‘How do you know what my womanly feelings are, or my thoughts or my ideas? You don’t even know what I think of you now.’

‘Nor do I care in the slightest.’

‘I think you are very silly. I think you want to tell me you love me, and you go all this way round to do it.’

‘All right,’ he said, looking up with sudden exasperation. ‘Now go away then, and leave me alone. I don’t want any more of your meretricious persiflage.’

‘Is it really persiflage?’ she mocked, her face really relaxing into laughter. She interpreted it, that he had made a deep confession of love to her. But he was so absurd in his words, also.

They were silent for many minutes, she was pleased and elated like a child. His concentration broke, he began to look at her simply and naturally.

‘What I want is a strange conjunction with you — ’ he said quietly; ‘not meeting and mingling — you are quite right — but an equilibrium, a pure balance of two single beings — as the stars balance each other.’

She looked at him. He was very earnest, and earnestness was always rather ridiculous, commonplace, to her. It made her feel unfree and uncomfortable. Yet

she liked him so much. But why drag in the stars.

‘Isn’t this rather sudden?’ she mocked.

He began to laugh.

‘Best to read the terms of the contract, before we sign,’ he said.

A young grey cat that had been sleeping on the sofa jumped down and stretched, rising on its long legs, and arching its slim back. Then it sat considering for a moment, erect and kingly. And then, like a dart, it had shot out of the room, through the open window-doors, and into the garden.

‘What’s he after?’ said Birkin, rising.

The young cat trotted lordly down the path, waving his tail. He was an ordinary tabby with white paws, a slender young gentleman. A crouching, fluffy, brownish-grey cat was stealing up the side of the fence. The Mino walked stately up to her, with manly nonchalance. She crouched before him and pressed herself on the ground in humility, a fluffy soft outcast, looking up at him with wild eyes that were green and lovely as great jewels. He looked casually down on her. So she crept a few inches further, proceeding on her way to the back door, crouching in a wonderful, soft, self-obliterating manner, and moving like a shadow.

He, going stately on his slim legs, walked after her, then suddenly, for pure excess, he gave her a light cuff with his paw on the side of her face. She ran off a few steps, like a blown leaf along the ground, then crouched unobtrusively, in submissive, wild patience. The Mino pretended to take no notice of her. He blinked his eyes superbly at the landscape. In a minute she drew herself together and moved softly, a fleecy brown-grey shadow, a few paces forward. She began to quicken her pace, in a moment she would be gone like a dream, when the young grey lord sprang before her, and gave her a light handsome cuff. She subsided at once, submissively.

‘She is a wild cat,’ said Birkin. ‘She has come in from the woods.’

The eyes of the stray cat flared round for a moment, like great green fires staring at Birkin. Then she had rushed in a soft swift rush, half way down the garden. There she paused to look round. The Mino turned his face in pure superiority to his master, and slowly closed his eyes, standing in statuesque young perfection. The wild cat’s round, green, wondering eyes were staring all the while like uncanny fires. Then again, like a shadow, she slid towards the kitchen.

In a lovely springing leap, like a wind, the Mino was upon her, and had boxed her twice, very definitely, with a white, delicate fist. She sank and slid back, unquestioning. He walked after her, and cuffed her once or twice, leisurely, with sudden little blows of his magic white paws.

‘Now why does he do that?’ cried Ursula in indignation.

‘They are on intimate terms,’ said Birkin.

‘And is that why he hits her?’

‘Yes,’ laughed Birkin, ‘I think he wants to make it quite obvious to her.’

‘Isn’t it horrid of him!’ she cried; and going out into the garden she called to the Mino:

‘Stop it, don’t bully. Stop hitting her.’

The stray cat vanished like a swift, invisible shadow. The Mino glanced at Ursula, then looked from her disdainfully to his master.

‘Are you a bully, Mino?’ Birkin asked.

The young slim cat looked at him, and slowly narrowed its eyes. Then it glanced away at the landscape, looking into the distance as if completely oblivious of the two human beings.

‘Mino,’ said Ursula, ‘I don’t like you. You are a bully like all males.’

‘No,’ said Birkin, ‘he is justified. He is not a bully. He is only insisting to the poor stray that she shall acknowledge him as a sort of fate, her own fate: because you can see she is fluffy and promiscuous as the wind. I am with him entirely. He wants superfine stability.’

‘Yes, I know!’ cried Ursula. ‘He wants his own way — I know what your fine words work down to — bossiness, I call it, bossiness.’

The young cat again glanced at Birkin in disdain of the noisy woman.

‘I quite agree with you, Miciotto,’ said Birkin to the cat. ‘Keep your male dignity, and your higher understanding.’

Again the Mino narrowed his eyes as if he were looking at the sun. Then, suddenly affecting to have no connection at all with the two people, he went trotting off, with assumed spontaneity and gaiety, his tail erect, his white feet blithe.

‘Now he will find the belle sauvage once more, and entertain her with his superior wisdom,’ laughed Birkin.

Ursula looked at the man who stood in the garden with his hair blowing and his eyes smiling ironically, and she cried:

‘Oh it makes me so cross, this assumption of male superiority! And it is such a lie! One wouldn’t mind if there were any justification for it.’

‘The wild cat,’ said Birkin, ‘doesn’t mind. She perceives that it is justified.’

‘Does she!’ cried Ursula. ‘And tell it to the Horse Marines.’

‘To them also.’

‘It is just like Gerald Crich with his horse — a lust for bullying — a real Wille zur Macht — so base, so petty.’

‘I agree that the Wille zur Macht is a base and petty thing. But with the Mino,

it is the desire to bring this female cat into a pure stable equilibrium, a transcendent and abiding RAPPORT with the single male. Whereas without him, as you see, she is a mere stray, a fluffy sporadic bit of chaos. It is a *volonte de pouvoir*, if you like, a will to ability, taking *pouvoir* as a verb.'

'Ah — ! Sophistries! It's the old Adam.'

'Oh yes. Adam kept Eve in the indestructible paradise, when he kept her single with himself, like a star in its orbit.'

'Yes — yes — ' cried Ursula, pointing her finger at him. 'There you are — a star in its orbit! A satellite — a satellite of Mars — that's what she is to be! There — there — you've given yourself away! You want a satellite, Mars and his satellite! You've said it — you've said it — you've dished yourself!'

He stood smiling in frustration and amusement and irritation and admiration and love. She was so quick, and so lambent, like discernible fire, and so vindictive, and so rich in her dangerous flamy sensitiveness.

'I've not said it at all,' he replied, 'if you will give me a chance to speak.'

'No, no!' she cried. 'I won't let you speak. You've said it, a satellite, you're not going to wriggle out of it. You've said it.'

'You'll never believe now that I HAVEN'T said it,' he answered. 'I neither implied nor indicated nor mentioned a satellite, nor intended a satellite, never.'

'YOU PREVARICATOR!' she cried, in real indignation.

'Tea is ready, sir,' said the landlady from the doorway.

They both looked at her, very much as the cats had looked at them, a little while before.

'Thank you, Mrs Daykin.'

An interrupted silence fell over the two of them, a moment of breach.

'Come and have tea,' he said.

'Yes, I should love it,' she replied, gathering herself together.

They sat facing each other across the tea table.

'I did not say, nor imply, a satellite. I meant two single equal stars balanced in conjunction — '

'You gave yourself away, you gave away your little game completely,' she cried, beginning at once to eat. He saw that she would take no further heed of his expostulation, so he began to pour the tea.

'What GOOD things to eat!' she cried.

'Take your own sugar,' he said.

He handed her her cup. He had everything so nice, such pretty cups and plates, painted with mauve-lustre and green, also shapely bowls and glass plates, and old spoons, on a woven cloth of pale grey and black and purple. It was very rich and fine. But Ursula could see Hermione's influence.

‘Your things are so lovely!’ she said, almost angrily.

‘I like them. It gives me real pleasure to use things that are attractive in themselves — pleasant things. And Mrs Daykin is good. She thinks everything is wonderful, for my sake.’

‘Really,’ said Ursula, ‘landladies are better than wives, nowadays. They certainly CARE a great deal more. It is much more beautiful and complete here now, than if you were married.’

‘But think of the emptiness within,’ he laughed.

‘No,’ she said. ‘I am jealous that men have such perfect landladies and such beautiful lodgings. There is nothing left them to desire.’

‘In the house-keeping way, we’ll hope not. It is disgusting, people marrying for a home.’

‘Still,’ said Ursula, ‘a man has very little need for a woman now, has he?’

‘In outer things, maybe — except to share his bed and bear his children. But essentially, there is just the same need as there ever was. Only nobody takes the trouble to be essential.’

‘How essential?’ she said.

‘I do think,’ he said, ‘that the world is only held together by the mystic conjunction, the ultimate unison between people — a bond. And the immediate bond is between man and woman.’

‘But it’s such old hat,’ said Ursula. ‘Why should love be a bond? No, I’m not having any.’

‘If you are walking westward,’ he said, ‘you forfeit the northern and eastward and southern direction. If you admit a unison, you forfeit all the possibilities of chaos.’

‘But love is freedom,’ she declared.

‘Don’t cant to me,’ he replied. ‘Love is a direction which excludes all other directions. It’s a freedom TOGETHER, if you like.’

‘No,’ she said, ‘love includes everything.’

‘Sentimental cant,’ he replied. ‘You want the state of chaos, that’s all. It is ultimate nihilism, this freedom-in-love business, this freedom which is love and love which is freedom. As a matter of fact, if you enter into a pure unison, it is irrevocable, and it is never pure till it is irrevocable. And when it is irrevocable, it is one way, like the path of a star.’

‘Ha!’ she cried bitterly. ‘It is the old dead morality.’

‘No,’ he said, ‘it is the law of creation. One is committed. One must commit oneself to a conjunction with the other — for ever. But it is not selfless — it is a maintaining of the self in mystic balance and integrity — like a star balanced with another star.’

‘I don’t trust you when you drag in the stars,’ she said. ‘If you were quite true, it wouldn’t be necessary to be so far-fetched.’

‘Don’t trust me then,’ he said, angry. ‘It is enough that I trust myself.’

‘And that is where you make another mistake,’ she replied. ‘You DON’T trust yourself. You don’t fully believe yourself what you are saying. You don’t really want this conjunction, otherwise you wouldn’t talk so much about it, you’d get it.’

He was suspended for a moment, arrested.

‘How?’ he said.

‘By just loving,’ she retorted in defiance.

He was still a moment, in anger. Then he said:

‘I tell you, I don’t believe in love like that. I tell you, you want love to administer to your egoism, to subserve you. Love is a process of subservience with you — and with everybody. I hate it.’

‘No,’ she cried, pressing back her head like a cobra, her eyes flashing. ‘It is a process of pride — I want to be proud — ’

‘Proud and subservient, proud and subservient, I know you,’ he retorted dryly. ‘Proud and subservient, then subservient to the proud — I know you and your love. It is a tick-tack, tick-tack, a dance of opposites.’

‘Are you sure?’ she mocked wickedly, ‘what my love is?’

‘Yes, I am,’ he retorted.

‘So cocksure!’ she said. ‘How can anybody ever be right, who is so cocksure? It shows you are wrong.’

He was silent in chagrin.

They had talked and struggled till they were both wearied out.

‘Tell me about yourself and your people,’ he said.

And she told him about the Brangwens, and about her mother, and about Skrebensky, her first love, and about her later experiences. He sat very still, watching her as she talked. And he seemed to listen with reverence. Her face was beautiful and full of baffled light as she told him all the things that had hurt her or perplexed her so deeply. He seemed to warm and comfort his soul at the beautiful light of her nature.

‘If she REALLY could pledge herself,’ he thought to himself, with passionate insistence but hardly any hope. Yet a curious little irresponsible laughter appeared in his heart.

‘We have all suffered so much,’ he mocked, ironically.

She looked up at him, and a flash of wild gaiety went over her face, a strange flash of yellow light coming from her eyes.

‘Haven’t we!’ she cried, in a high, reckless cry. ‘It is almost absurd, isn’t it?’

‘Quite absurd,’ he said. ‘Suffering bores me, any more.’

‘So it does me.’

He was almost afraid of the mocking recklessness of her splendid face. Here was one who would go to the whole lengths of heaven or hell, whichever she had to go. And he mistrusted her, he was afraid of a woman capable of such abandon, such dangerous thoroughness of destructivity. Yet he chuckled within himself also.

She came over to him and put her hand on his shoulder, looking down at him with strange golden-lighted eyes, very tender, but with a curious devilish look lurking underneath.

‘Say you love me, say “my love” to me,’ she pleaded

He looked back into her eyes, and saw. His face flickered with sardonic comprehension.

‘I love you right enough,’ he said, grimly. ‘But I want it to be something else.’

‘But why? But why?’ she insisted, bending her wonderful luminous face to him. ‘Why isn’t it enough?’

‘Because we can go one better,’ he said, putting his arms round her.

‘No, we can’t,’ she said, in a strong, voluptuous voice of yielding. ‘We can only love each other. Say “my love” to me, say it, say it.’

She put her arms round his neck. He enfolded her, and kissed her subtly, murmuring in a subtle voice of love, and irony, and submission:

‘Yes, — my love, yes, — my love. Let love be enough then. I love you then — I love you. I’m bored by the rest.’

‘Yes,’ she murmured, nestling very sweet and close to him.

CHAPTER XIV.

WATER-PARTY

Every year Mr Crich gave a more or less public water-party on the lake. There was a little pleasure-launch on Willey Water and several rowing boats, and guests could take tea either in the marquee that was set up in the grounds of the house, or they could picnic in the shade of the great walnut tree at the boat-house by the lake. This year the staff of the Grammar-School was invited, along with the chief officials of the firm. Gerald and the younger Criches did not care for this party, but it had become customary now, and it pleased the father, as being the only occasion when he could gather some people of the district together in festivity with him. For he loved to give pleasures to his dependents and to those poorer than himself. But his children preferred the company of their own equals in wealth. They hated their inferiors' humility or gratitude or awkwardness.

Nevertheless they were willing to attend at this festival, as they had done almost since they were children, the more so, as they all felt a little guilty now, and unwilling to thwart their father any more, since he was so ill in health. Therefore, quite cheerfully Laura prepared to take her mother's place as hostess, and Gerald assumed responsibility for the amusements on the water.

Birkin had written to Ursula saying he expected to see her at the party, and Gudrun, although she scorned the patronage of the Criches, would nevertheless accompany her mother and father if the weather were fine.

The day came blue and full of sunshine, with little wafts of wind. The sisters both wore dresses of white crepe, and hats of soft grass. But Gudrun had a sash of brilliant black and pink and yellow colour wound broadly round her waist, and she had pink silk stockings, and black and pink and yellow decoration on the brim of her hat, weighing it down a little. She carried also a yellow silk coat over her arm, so that she looked remarkable, like a painting from the Salon. Her appearance was a sore trial to her father, who said angrily:

'Don't you think you might as well get yourself up for a Christmas cracker, an'ha' done with it?'

But Gudrun looked handsome and brilliant, and she wore her clothes in pure defiance. When people stared at her, and giggled after her, she made a point of saying loudly, to Ursula:

'Regarde, regarde ces gens-la! Ne sont-ils pas des hiboux incroyables?' And

with the words of French in her mouth, she would look over her shoulder at the giggling party.

‘No, really, it’s impossible!’ Ursula would reply distinctly. And so the two girls took it out of their universal enemy. But their father became more and more enraged.

Ursula was all snowy white, save that her hat was pink, and entirely without trimming, and her shoes were dark red, and she carried an orange-coloured coat. And in this guise they were walking all the way to Shortlands, their father and mother going in front.

They were laughing at their mother, who, dressed in a summer material of black and purple stripes, and wearing a hat of purple straw, was setting forth with much more of the shyness and trepidation of a young girl than her daughters ever felt, walking demurely beside her husband, who, as usual, looked rather crumpled in his best suit, as if he were the father of a young family and had been holding the baby whilst his wife got dressed.

‘Look at the young couple in front,’ said Gudrun calmly. Ursula looked at her mother and father, and was suddenly seized with uncontrollable laughter. The two girls stood in the road and laughed till the tears ran down their faces, as they caught sight again of the shy, unworldly couple of their parents going on ahead.

‘We are roaring at you, mother,’ called Ursula, helplessly following after her parents.

Mrs Brangwen turned round with a slightly puzzled, exasperated look. ‘Oh indeed!’ she said. ‘What is there so very funny about ME, I should like to know?’

She could not understand that there could be anything amiss with her appearance. She had a perfect calm sufficiency, an easy indifference to any criticism whatsoever, as if she were beyond it. Her clothes were always rather odd, and as a rule slip-shod, yet she wore them with a perfect ease and satisfaction. Whatever she had on, so long as she was barely tidy, she was right, beyond remark; such an aristocrat she was by instinct.

‘You look so stately, like a country Baroness,’ said Ursula, laughing with a little tenderness at her mother’s naive puzzled air.

‘JUST like a country Baroness!’ chimed in Gudrun. Now the mother’s natural hauteur became self-conscious, and the girls shrieked again.

‘Go home, you pair of idiots, great giggling idiots!’ cried the father inflamed with irritation.

‘Mm-m-er!’ boomed Ursula, pulling a face at his crossness.

The yellow lights danced in his eyes, he leaned forward in real rage.

‘Don’t be so silly as to take any notice of the great gabies,’ said Mrs

Brangwen, turning on her way.

‘I’ll see if I’m going to be followed by a pair of giggling yelling jackanapes —’ he cried vengefully.

The girls stood still, laughing helplessly at his fury, upon the path beside the hedge.

‘Why you’re as silly as they are, to take any notice,’ said Mrs Brangwen also becoming angry now he was really enraged.

‘There are some people coming, father,’ cried Ursula, with mocking warning. He glanced round quickly, and went on to join his wife, walking stiff with rage. And the girls followed, weak with laughter.

When the people had passed by, Brangwen cried in a loud, stupid voice:

‘I’m going back home if there’s any more of this. I’m damned if I’m going to be made a fool of in this fashion, in the public road.’

He was really out of temper. At the sound of his blind, vindictive voice, the laughter suddenly left the girls, and their hearts contracted with contempt. They hated his words ‘in the public road.’ What did they care for the public road? But Gudrun was conciliatory.

‘But we weren’t laughing to HURT you,’ she cried, with an uncouth gentleness which made her parents uncomfortable. ‘We were laughing because we’re fond of you.’

‘We’ll walk on in front, if they are SO touchy,’ said Ursula, angry. And in this wise they arrived at Willey Water. The lake was blue and fair, the meadows sloped down in sunshine on one side, the thick dark woods dropped steeply on the other. The little pleasure-launch was fussing out from the shore, twanging its music, crowded with people, flapping its paddles. Near the boat-house was a throng of gaily-dressed persons, small in the distance. And on the high-road, some of the common people were standing along the hedge, looking at the festivity beyond, enviously, like souls not admitted to paradise.

‘My eye!’ said Gudrun, sotto voce, looking at the motley of guests, ‘there’s a pretty crowd if you like! Imagine yourself in the midst of that, my dear.’

Gudrun’s apprehensive horror of people in the mass unnerved Ursula. ‘It looks rather awful,’ she said anxiously.

‘And imagine what they’ll be like — IMAGINE!’ said Gudrun, still in that unnerving, subdued voice. Yet she advanced determinedly.

‘I suppose we can get away from them,’ said Ursula anxiously.

‘We’re in a pretty fix if we can’t,’ said Gudrun. Her extreme ironic loathing and apprehension was very trying to Ursula.

‘We needn’t stay,’ she said.

‘I certainly shan’t stay five minutes among that little lot,’ said Gudrun. They

advanced nearer, till they saw policemen at the gates.

‘Policemen to keep you in, too!’ said Gudrun. ‘My word, this is a beautiful affair.’

‘We’d better look after father and mother,’ said Ursula anxiously.

‘Mother’s PERFECTLY capable of getting through this little celebration,’ said Gudrun with some contempt.

But Ursula knew that her father felt uncouth and angry and unhappy, so she was far from her ease. They waited outside the gate till their parents came up. The tall, thin man in his crumpled clothes was unnerved and irritable as a boy, finding himself on the brink of this social function. He did not feel a gentleman, he did not feel anything except pure exasperation.

Ursula took her place at his side, they gave their tickets to the policeman, and passed in on to the grass, four abreast; the tall, hot, ruddy-dark man with his narrow boyish brow drawn with irritation, the fresh-faced, easy woman, perfectly collected though her hair was slipping on one side, then Gudrun, her eyes round and dark and staring, her full soft face impassive, almost sulky, so that she seemed to be backing away in antagonism even whilst she was advancing; and then Ursula, with the odd, brilliant, dazzled look on her face, that always came when she was in some false situation.

Birkin was the good angel. He came smiling to them with his affected social grace, that somehow was never QUITE right. But he took off his hat and smiled at them with a real smile in his eyes, so that Brangwen cried out heartily in relief:

‘How do you do? You’re better, are you?’

‘Yes, I’m better. How do you do, Mrs Brangwen? I know Gudrun and Ursula very well.’

His eyes smiled full of natural warmth. He had a soft, flattering manner with women, particularly with women who were not young.

‘Yes,’ said Mrs Brangwen, cool but yet gratified. ‘I have heard them speak of you often enough.’

He laughed. Gudrun looked aside, feeling she was being belittled. People were standing about in groups, some women were sitting in the shade of the walnut tree, with cups of tea in their hands, a waiter in evening dress was hurrying round, some girls were simpering with parasols, some young men, who had just come in from rowing, were sitting cross-legged on the grass, coatless, their shirt-sleeves rolled up in manly fashion, their hands resting on their white flannel trousers, their gaudy ties floating about, as they laughed and tried to be witty with the young damsels.

‘Why,’ thought Gudrun churlishly, ‘don’t they have the manners to put their

coats on, and not to assume such intimacy in their appearance.'

She abhorred the ordinary young man, with his hair plastered back, and his easy-going chumminess.

Hermione Roddice came up, in a handsome gown of white lace, trailing an enormous silk shawl blotched with great embroidered flowers, and balancing an enormous plain hat on her head. She looked striking, astonishing, almost macabre, so tall, with the fringe of her great cream-coloured vividly-blotched shawl trailing on the ground after her, her thick hair coming low over her eyes, her face strange and long and pale, and the blotches of brilliant colour drawn round her.

'Doesn't she look WEIRD!' Gudrun heard some girls titter behind her. And she could have killed them.

'How do you do!' sang Hermione, coming up very kindly, and glancing slowly over Gudrun's father and mother. It was a trying moment, exasperating for Gudrun. Hermione was really so strongly entrenched in her class superiority, she could come up and know people out of simple curiosity, as if they were creatures on exhibition. Gudrun would do the same herself. But she resented being in the position when somebody might do it to her.

Hermione, very remarkable, and distinguishing the Brangwens very much, led them along to where Laura Crich stood receiving the guests.

'This is Mrs Brangwen,' sang Hermione, and Laura, who wore a stiff embroidered linen dress, shook hands and said she was glad to see her. Then Gerald came up, dressed in white, with a black and brown blazer, and looking handsome. He too was introduced to the Brangwen parents, and immediately he spoke to Mrs Brangwen as if she were a lady, and to Brangwen as if he were NOT a gentleman. Gerald was so obvious in his demeanour. He had to shake hands with his left hand, because he had hurt his right, and carried it, bandaged up, in the pocket of his jacket. Gudrun was VERY thankful that none of her party asked him what was the matter with the hand.

The steam launch was fussing in, all its music jingling, people calling excitedly from on board. Gerald went to see to the debarkation, Birkin was getting tea for Mrs Brangwen, Brangwen had joined a Grammar-School group, Hermione was sitting down by their mother, the girls went to the landing-stage to watch the launch come in.

She hooted and tooted gaily, then her paddles were silent, the ropes were thrown ashore, she drifted in with a little bump. Immediately the passengers crowded excitedly to come ashore.

'Wait a minute, wait a minute,' shouted Gerald in sharp command.

They must wait till the boat was tight on the ropes, till the small gangway was

put out. Then they streamed ashore, clamouring as if they had come from America.

‘Oh it’s SO nice!’ the young girls were crying. ‘It’s quite lovely.’

The waiters from on board ran out to the boat-house with baskets, the captain lounged on the little bridge. Seeing all safe, Gerald came to Gudrun and Ursula.

‘You wouldn’t care to go on board for the next trip, and have tea there?’ he asked.

‘No thanks,’ said Gudrun coldly.

‘You don’t care for the water?’

‘For the water? Yes, I like it very much.’

He looked at her, his eyes searching.

‘You don’t care for going on a launch, then?’

She was slow in answering, and then she spoke slowly.

‘No,’ she said. ‘I can’t say that I do.’ Her colour was high, she seemed angry about something.

‘Un peu trop de monde,’ said Ursula, explaining.

‘Eh? TROP DE MONDE!’ He laughed shortly. ‘Yes there’s a fair number of ‘em.’

Gudrun turned on him brilliantly.

‘Have you ever been from Westminster Bridge to Richmond on one of the Thames steamers?’ she cried.

‘No,’ he said, ‘I can’t say I have.’

‘Well, it’s one of the most VILE experiences I’ve ever had.’ She spoke rapidly and excitedly, the colour high in her cheeks. ‘There was absolutely nowhere to sit down, nowhere, a man just above sang “Rocked in the Cradle of the Deep” the WHOLE way; he was blind and he had a small organ, one of those portable organs, and he expected money; so you can imagine what THAT was like; there came a constant smell of luncheon from below, and puffs of hot oily machinery; the journey took hours and hours and hours; and for miles, literally for miles, dreadful boys ran with us on the shore, in that AWFUL Thames mud, going in UP TO THE WAIST — they had their trousers turned back, and they went up to their hips in that indescribable Thames mud, their faces always turned to us, and screaming, exactly like carrion creatures, screaming “‘Ere y’are sir, ‘ere y’are sir, ‘ere y’are sir,” exactly like some foul carrion objects, perfectly obscene; and paterfamilias on board, laughing when the boys went right down in that awful mud, occasionally throwing them a ha’penny. And if you’d seen the intent look on the faces of these boys, and the way they darted in the filth when a coin was flung — really, no vulture or jackal could dream of approaching them, for foulness. I NEVER would go on a pleasure boat again — never.’

Gerald watched her all the time she spoke, his eyes glittering with faint rousedness. It was not so much what she said; it was she herself who roused him, roused him with a small, vivid pricking.

‘Of course,’ he said, ‘every civilised body is bound to have its vermin.’

‘Why?’ cried Ursula. ‘I don’t have vermin.’

‘And it’s not that — it’s the QUALITY of the whole thing — paterfamilias laughing and thinking it sport, and throwing the ha’pennies, and materfamilias spreading her fat little knees and eating, continually eating — ’ replied Gudrun.

‘Yes,’ said Ursula. ‘It isn’t the boys so much who are vermin; it’s the people themselves, the whole body politic, as you call it.’

Gerald laughed.

‘Never mind,’ he said. ‘You shan’t go on the launch.’

Gudrun flushed quickly at his rebuke.

There were a few moments of silence. Gerald, like a sentinel, was watching the people who were going on to the boat. He was very good-looking and self-contained, but his air of soldierly alertness was rather irritating.

‘Will you have tea here then, or go across to the house, where there’s a tent on the lawn?’ he asked.

‘Can’t we have a rowing boat, and get out?’ asked Ursula, who was always rushing in too fast.

‘To get out?’ smiled Gerald.

‘You see,’ cried Gudrun, flushing at Ursula’s outspoken rudeness, ‘we don’t know the people, we are almost COMPLETE strangers here.’

‘Oh, I can soon set you up with a few acquaintances,’ he said easily.

Gudrun looked at him, to see if it were ill-meant. Then she smiled at him.

‘Ah,’ she said, ‘you know what we mean. Can’t we go up there, and explore that coast?’ She pointed to a grove on the hillock of the meadow-side, near the shore half way down the lake. ‘That looks perfectly lovely. We might even bathe. Isn’t it beautiful in this light. Really, it’s like one of the reaches of the Nile — as one imagines the Nile.’

Gerald smiled at her factitious enthusiasm for the distant spot.

‘You’re sure it’s far enough off?’ he asked ironically, adding at once: ‘Yes, you might go there, if we could get a boat. They seem to be all out.’

He looked round the lake and counted the rowing boats on its surface.

‘How lovely it would be!’ cried Ursula wistfully.

‘And don’t you want tea?’ he said.

‘Oh,’ said Gudrun, ‘we could just drink a cup, and be off.’

He looked from one to the other, smiling. He was somewhat offended — yet sporting.

‘Can you manage a boat pretty well?’ he asked.

‘Yes,’ replied Gudrun, coldly, ‘pretty well.’

‘Oh yes,’ cried Ursula. ‘We can both of us row like water-spiders.’

‘You can? There’s light little canoe of mine, that I didn’t take out for fear somebody should drown themselves. Do you think you’d be safe in that?’

‘Oh perfectly,’ said Gudrun.

‘What an angel!’ cried Ursula.

‘Don’t, for MY sake, have an accident — because I’m responsible for the water.’

‘Sure,’ pledged Gudrun.

‘Besides, we can both swim quite well,’ said Ursula.

‘Well — then I’ll get them to put you up a tea-basket, and you can picnic all to yourselves, — that’s the idea, isn’t it?’

‘How fearfully good! How frightfully nice if you could!’ cried Gudrun warmly, her colour flushing up again. It made the blood stir in his veins, the subtle way she turned to him and infused her gratitude into his body.

‘Where’s Birkin?’ he said, his eyes twinkling. ‘He might help me to get it down.’

‘But what about your hand? Isn’t it hurt?’ asked Gudrun, rather muted, as if avoiding the intimacy. This was the first time the hurt had been mentioned. The curious way she skirted round the subject sent a new, subtle caress through his veins. He took his hand out of his pocket. It was bandaged. He looked at it, then put it in his pocket again. Gudrun quivered at the sight of the wrapped up paw.

‘Oh I can manage with one hand. The canoe is as light as a feather,’ he said. ‘There’s Rupert! — Rupert!’

Birkin turned from his social duties and came towards them.

‘What have you done to it?’ asked Ursula, who had been aching to put the question for the last half hour.

‘To my hand?’ said Gerald. ‘I trapped it in some machinery.’

‘Ugh!’ said Ursula. ‘And did it hurt much?’

‘Yes,’ he said. ‘It did at the time. It’s getting better now. It crushed the fingers.’

‘Oh,’ cried Ursula, as if in pain, ‘I hate people who hurt themselves. I can FEEL it.’ And she shook her hand.

‘What do you want?’ said Birkin.

The two men carried down the slim brown boat, and set it on the water.

‘You’re quite sure you’ll be safe in it?’ Gerald asked.

‘Quite sure,’ said Gudrun. ‘I wouldn’t be so mean as to take it, if there was the slightest doubt. But I’ve had a canoe at Arundel, and I assure you I’m perfectly

safe.'

So saying, having given her word like a man, she and Ursula entered the frail craft, and pushed gently off. The two men stood watching them. Gudrun was paddling. She knew the men were watching her, and it made her slow and rather clumsy. The colour flew in her face like a flag.

'Thanks awfully,' she called back to him, from the water, as the boat slid away. 'It's lovely — like sitting in a leaf.'

He laughed at the fancy. Her voice was shrill and strange, calling from the distance. He watched her as she paddled away. There was something childlike about her, trustful and deferential, like a child. He watched her all the while, as she rowed. And to Gudrun it was a real delight, in make-belief, to be the childlike, clinging woman to the man who stood there on the quay, so good-looking and efficient in his white clothes, and moreover the most important man she knew at the moment. She did not take any notice of the wavering, indistinct, lambent Birkin, who stood at his side. One figure at a time occupied the field of her attention.

The boat rustled lightly along the water. They passed the bathers whose striped tents stood between the willows of the meadow's edge, and drew along the open shore, past the meadows that sloped golden in the light of the already late afternoon. Other boats were stealing under the wooded shore opposite, they could hear people's laughter and voices. But Gudrun rowed on towards the clump of trees that balanced perfect in the distance, in the golden light.

The sisters found a little place where a tiny stream flowed into the lake, with reeds and flowery marsh of pink willow herb, and a gravelly bank to the side. Here they ran delicately ashore, with their frail boat, the two girls took off their shoes and stockings and went through the water's edge to the grass. The tiny ripples of the lake were warm and clear, they lifted their boat on to the bank, and looked round with joy. They were quite alone in a forsaken little stream-mouth, and on the knoll just behind was the clump of trees.

'We will bathe just for a moment,' said Ursula, 'and then we'll have tea.'

They looked round. Nobody could notice them, or could come up in time to see them. In less than a minute Ursula had thrown off her clothes and had slipped naked into the water, and was swimming out. Quickly, Gudrun joined her. They swam silently and blissfully for a few minutes, circling round their little stream-mouth. Then they slipped ashore and ran into the grove again, like nymphs.

'How lovely it is to be free,' said Ursula, running swiftly here and there between the tree trunks, quite naked, her hair blowing loose. The grove was of beech-trees, big and splendid, a steel-grey scaffolding of trunks and boughs, with

level sprays of strong green here and there, whilst through the northern side the distance glimmered open as through a window.

When they had run and danced themselves dry, the girls quickly dressed and sat down to the fragrant tea. They sat on the northern side of the grove, in the yellow sunshine facing the slope of the grassy hill, alone in a little wild world of their own. The tea was hot and aromatic, there were delicious little sandwiches of cucumber and of caviare, and winy cakes.

‘Are you happy, Prune?’ cried Ursula in delight, looking at her sister.

‘Ursula, I’m perfectly happy,’ replied Gudrun gravely, looking at the westering sun.

‘So am I.’

When they were together, doing the things they enjoyed, the two sisters were quite complete in a perfect world of their own. And this was one of the perfect moments of freedom and delight, such as children alone know, when all seems a perfect and blissful adventure.

When they had finished tea, the two girls sat on, silent and serene. Then Ursula, who had a beautiful strong voice, began to sing to herself, softly: ‘Annchen von Tharau.’ Gudrun listened, as she sat beneath the trees, and the yearning came into her heart. Ursula seemed so peaceful and sufficient unto herself, sitting there unconsciously crooning her song, strong and unquestioned at the centre of her own universe. And Gudrun felt herself outside. Always this desolating, agonised feeling, that she was outside of life, an onlooker, whilst Ursula was a partaker, caused Gudrun to suffer from a sense of her own negation, and made her, that she must always demand the other to be aware of her, to be in connection with her.

‘Do you mind if I do Dalcroze to that tune, Hurtler?’ she asked in a curious muted tone, scarce moving her lips.

‘What did you say?’ asked Ursula, looking up in peaceful surprise.

‘Will you sing while I do Dalcroze?’ said Gudrun, suffering at having to repeat herself.

Ursula thought a moment, gathering her straying wits together.

‘While you do — ?’ she asked vaguely.

‘Dalcroze movements,’ said Gudrun, suffering tortures of self-consciousness, even because of her sister.

‘Oh Dalcroze! I couldn’t catch the name. DO — I should love to see you,’ cried Ursula, with childish surprised brightness. ‘What shall I sing?’

‘Sing anything you like, and I’ll take the rhythm from it.’

But Ursula could not for her life think of anything to sing. However, she suddenly began, in a laughing, teasing voice:

‘My love — is a high-born lady — ’

Gudrun, looking as if some invisible chain weighed on her hands and feet, began slowly to dance in the eurythmic manner, pulsing and fluttering rhythmically with her feet, making slower, regular gestures with her hands and arms, now spreading her arms wide, now raising them above her head, now flinging them softly apart, and lifting her face, her feet all the time beating and running to the measure of the song, as if it were some strange incantation, her white, rapt form drifting here and there in a strange impulsive rhapsody, seeming to be lifted on a breeze of incantation, shuddering with strange little runs. Ursula sat on the grass, her mouth open in her singing, her eyes laughing as if she thought it was a great joke, but a yellow light flashing up in them, as she caught some of the unconscious ritualistic suggestion of the complex shuddering and waving and drifting of her sister’s white form, that was clutched in pure, mindless, tossing rhythm, and a will set powerful in a kind of hypnotic influence.

‘My love is a high-born lady — She is-s-s — rather dark than shady — ’ rang out Ursula’s laughing, satiric song, and quicker, fiercer went Gudrun in the dance, stamping as if she were trying to throw off some bond, flinging her hands suddenly and stamping again, then rushing with face uplifted and throat full and beautiful, and eyes half closed, sightless. The sun was low and yellow, sinking down, and in the sky floated a thin, ineffectual moon.

Ursula was quite absorbed in her song, when suddenly Gudrun stopped and said mildly, ironically:

‘Ursula!’

‘Yes?’ said Ursula, opening her eyes out of the trance.

Gudrun was standing still and pointing, a mocking smile on her face, towards the side.

‘Ugh!’ cried Ursula in sudden panic, starting to her feet.

‘They’re quite all right,’ rang out Gudrun’s sardonic voice.

On the left stood a little cluster of Highland cattle, vividly coloured and fleecy in the evening light, their horns branching into the sky, pushing forward their muzzles inquisitively, to know what it was all about. Their eyes glittered through their tangle of hair, their naked nostrils were full of shadow.

‘Won’t they do anything?’ cried Ursula in fear.

Gudrun, who was usually frightened of cattle, now shook her head in a queer, half-doubtful, half-sardonic motion, a faint smile round her mouth.

‘Don’t they look charming, Ursula?’ cried Gudrun, in a high, strident voice, something like the scream of a seagull.

‘Charming,’ cried Ursula in trepidation. ‘But won’t they do anything to us?’

Again Gudrun looked back at her sister with an enigmatic smile, and shook

her head.

‘I’m sure they won’t,’ she said, as if she had to convince herself also, and yet, as if she were confident of some secret power in herself, and had to put it to the test. ‘Sit down and sing again,’ she called in her high, strident voice.

‘I’m frightened,’ cried Ursula, in a pathetic voice, watching the group of sturdy short cattle, that stood with their knees planted, and watched with their dark, wicked eyes, through the matted fringe of their hair. Nevertheless, she sank down again, in her former posture.

‘They are quite safe,’ came Gudrun’s high call. ‘Sing something, you’ve only to sing something.’

It was evident she had a strange passion to dance before the sturdy, handsome cattle.

Ursula began to sing, in a false quavering voice:

‘Way down in Tennessee — ’

She sounded purely anxious. Nevertheless, Gudrun, with her arms outspread and her face uplifted, went in a strange palpitating dance towards the cattle, lifting her body towards them as if in a spell, her feet pulsing as if in some little frenzy of unconscious sensation, her arms, her wrists, her hands stretching and heaving and falling and reaching and reaching and falling, her breasts lifted and shaken towards the cattle, her throat exposed as in some voluptuous ecstasy towards them, whilst she drifted imperceptibly nearer, an uncanny white figure, towards them, carried away in its own rapt trance, ebbing in strange fluctuations upon the cattle, that waited, and ducked their heads a little in sudden contraction from her, watching all the time as if hypnotised, their bare horns branching in the clear light, as the white figure of the woman ebbed upon them, in the slow, hypnotising convulsion of the dance. She could feel them just in front of her, it was as if she had the electric pulse from their breasts running into her hands. Soon she would touch them, actually touch them. A terrible shiver of fear and pleasure went through her. And all the while, Ursula, spell-bound, kept up her high-pitched thin, irrelevant song, which pierced the fading evening like an incantation.

Gudrun could hear the cattle breathing heavily with helpless fear and fascination. Oh, they were brave little beasts, these wild Scotch bullocks, wild and fleecy. Suddenly one of them snorted, ducked its head, and backed.

‘Hue! Hi-eee!’ came a sudden loud shout from the edge of the grove. The cattle broke and fell back quite spontaneously, went running up the hill, their fleece waving like fire to their motion. Gudrun stood suspended out on the grass, Ursula rose to her feet.

It was Gerald and Birkin come to find them, and Gerald had cried out to

frighten off the cattle.

‘What do you think you’re doing?’ he now called, in a high, wondering vexed tone.

‘Why have you come?’ came back Gudrun’s strident cry of anger.

‘What do you think you were doing?’ Gerald repeated, automatically.

‘We were doing eurythmics,’ laughed Ursula, in a shaken voice.

Gudrun stood aloof looking at them with large dark eyes of resentment, suspended for a few moments. Then she walked away up the hill, after the cattle, which had gathered in a little, spell-bound cluster higher up.

‘Where are you going?’ Gerald called after her. And he followed her up the hill-side. The sun had gone behind the hill, and shadows were clinging to the earth, the sky above was full of travelling light.

‘A poor song for a dance,’ said Birkin to Ursula, standing before her with a sardonic, flickering laugh on his face. And in another second, he was singing softly to himself, and dancing a grotesque step-dance in front of her, his limbs and body shaking loose, his face flickering palely, a constant thing, whilst his feet beat a rapid mocking tattoo, and his body seemed to hang all loose and quaking in between, like a shadow.

‘I think we’ve all gone mad,’ she said, laughing rather frightened.

‘Pity we aren’t madder,’ he answered, as he kept up the incessant shaking dance. Then suddenly he leaned up to her and kissed her fingers lightly, putting his face to hers and looking into her eyes with a pale grin. She stepped back, affronted.

‘Offended — ?’ he asked ironically, suddenly going quite still and reserved again. ‘I thought you liked the light fantastic.’

‘Not like that,’ she said, confused and bewildered, almost affronted. Yet somewhere inside her she was fascinated by the sight of his loose, vibrating body, perfectly abandoned to its own dropping and swinging, and by the pallid, sardonic-smiling face above. Yet automatically she stiffened herself away, and disapproved. It seemed almost an obscenity, in a man who talked as a rule so very seriously.

‘Why not like that?’ he mocked. And immediately he dropped again into the incredibly rapid, slack-waggling dance, watching her malevolently. And moving in the rapid, stationary dance, he came a little nearer, and reached forward with an incredibly mocking, satiric gleam on his face, and would have kissed her again, had she not started back.

‘No, don’t!’ she cried, really afraid.

‘Cordelia after all,’ he said satirically. She was stung, as if this were an insult. She knew he intended it as such, and it bewildered her.

‘And you,’ she cried in retort, ‘why do you always take your soul in your mouth, so frightfully full?’

‘So that I can spit it out the more readily,’ he said, pleased by his own retort.

Gerald Crich, his face narrowing to an intent gleam, followed up the hill with quick strides, straight after Gudrun. The cattle stood with their noses together on the brow of a slope, watching the scene below, the men in white hovering about the white forms of the women, watching above all Gudrun, who was advancing slowly towards them. She stood a moment, glancing back at Gerald, and then at the cattle.

Then in a sudden motion, she lifted her arms and rushed sheer upon the long-horned bullocks, in shuddering irregular runs, pausing for a second and looking at them, then lifting her hands and running forward with a flash, till they ceased pawing the ground, and gave way, snorting with terror, lifting their heads from the ground and flinging themselves away, galloping off into the evening, becoming tiny in the distance, and still not stopping.

Gudrun remained staring after them, with a mask-like defiant face.

‘Why do you want to drive them mad?’ asked Gerald, coming up with her.

She took no notice of him, only averted her face from him. ‘It’s not safe, you know,’ he persisted. ‘They’re nasty, when they do turn.’

‘Turn where? Turn away?’ she mocked loudly.

‘No,’ he said, ‘turn against you.’

‘Turn against ME?’ she mocked.

He could make nothing of this.

‘Anyway, they gored one of the farmer’s cows to death, the other day,’ he said.

‘What do I care?’ she said.

‘I cared though,’ he replied, ‘seeing that they’re my cattle.’

‘How are they yours! You haven’t swallowed them. Give me one of them now,’ she said, holding out her hand.

‘You know where they are,’ he said, pointing over the hill. ‘You can have one if you’d like it sent to you later on.’

She looked at him inscrutably.

‘You think I’m afraid of you and your cattle, don’t you?’ she asked.

His eyes narrowed dangerously. There was a faint domineering smile on his face.

‘Why should I think that?’ he said.

She was watching him all the time with her dark, dilated, inchoate eyes. She leaned forward and swung round her arm, catching him a light blow on the face with the back of her hand.

‘That’s why,’ she said, mocking.

And she felt in her soul an unconquerable desire for deep violence against him. She shut off the fear and dismay that filled her conscious mind. She wanted to do as she did, she was not going to be afraid.

He recoiled from the slight blow on his face. He became deadly pale, and a dangerous flame darkened his eyes. For some seconds he could not speak, his lungs were so suffused with blood, his heart stretched almost to bursting with a great gush of ungovernable emotion. It was as if some reservoir of black emotion had burst within him, and swamped him.

‘You have struck the first blow,’ he said at last, forcing the words from his lungs, in a voice so soft and low, it sounded like a dream within her, not spoken in the outer air.

‘And I shall strike the last,’ she retorted involuntarily, with confident assurance. He was silent, he did not contradict her.

She stood negligently, staring away from him, into the distance. On the edge of her consciousness the question was asking itself, automatically:

‘Why ARE you behaving in this IMPOSSIBLE and ridiculous fashion.’ But she was sullen, she half shoved the question out of herself. She could not get it clean away, so she felt self-conscious.

Gerald, very pale, was watching her closely. His eyes were lit up with intent lights, absorbed and gleaming. She turned suddenly on him.

‘It’s you who make me behave like this, you know,’ she said, almost suggestive.

‘I? How?’ he said.

But she turned away, and set off towards the lake. Below, on the water, lanterns were coming alight, faint ghosts of warm flame floating in the pallor of the first twilight. The earth was spread with darkness, like lacquer, overhead was a pale sky, all primrose, and the lake was pale as milk in one part. Away at the landing stage, tiniest points of coloured rays were stringing themselves in the dusk. The launch was being illuminated. All round, shadow was gathering from the trees.

Gerald, white like a presence in his summer clothes, was following down the open grassy slope. Gudrun waited for him to come up. Then she softly put out her hand and touched him, saying softly:

‘Don’t be angry with me.’

A flame flew over him, and he was unconscious. Yet he stammered:

‘I’m not angry with you. I’m in love with you.’

His mind was gone, he grasped for sufficient mechanical control, to save himself. She laughed a silvery little mockery, yet intolerably caressive.

‘That’s one way of putting it,’ she said.

The terrible swooning burden on his mind, the awful swooning, the loss of all his control, was too much for him. He grasped her arm in his one hand, as if his hand were iron.

‘It’s all right, then, is it?’ he said, holding her arrested.

She looked at the face with the fixed eyes, set before her, and her blood ran cold.

‘Yes, it’s all right,’ she said softly, as if drugged, her voice crooning and witch-like.

He walked on beside her, a striding, mindless body. But he recovered a little as he went. He suffered badly. He had killed his brother when a boy, and was set apart, like Cain.

They found Birkin and Ursula sitting together by the boats, talking and laughing. Birkin had been teasing Ursula.

‘Do you smell this little marsh?’ he said, sniffing the air. He was very sensitive to scents, and quick in understanding them.

‘It’s rather nice,’ she said.

‘No,’ he replied, ‘alarming.’

‘Why alarming?’ she laughed.

‘It seethes and seethes, a river of darkness,’ he said, ‘putting forth lilies and snakes, and the ignis fatuus, and rolling all the time onward. That’s what we never take into count — that it rolls onwards.’

‘What does?’

‘The other river, the black river. We always consider the silver river of life, rolling on and quickening all the world to a brightness, on and on to heaven, flowing into a bright eternal sea, a heaven of angels thronging. But the other is our real reality — ’

‘But what other? I don’t see any other,’ said Ursula.

‘It is your reality, nevertheless,’ he said; ‘that dark river of dissolution. You see it rolls in us just as the other rolls — the black river of corruption. And our flowers are of this — our sea-born Aphrodite, all our white phosphorescent flowers of sensuous perfection, all our reality, nowadays.’

‘You mean that Aphrodite is really deathly?’ asked Ursula.

‘I mean she is the flowering mystery of the death-process, yes,’ he replied. ‘When the stream of synthetic creation lapses, we find ourselves part of the inverse process, the blood of destructive creation. Aphrodite is born in the first spasm of universal dissolution — then the snakes and swans and lotus — marsh-flowers — and Gudrun and Gerald — born in the process of destructive creation.’

‘And you and me — ?’ she asked.

‘Probably,’ he replied. ‘In part, certainly. Whether we are that, in toto, I don’t yet know.’

‘You mean we are flowers of dissolution — fleurs du mal? I don’t feel as if I were,’ she protested.

He was silent for a time.

‘I don’t feel as if we were, ALTOGETHER,’ he replied. ‘Some people are pure flowers of dark corruption — lilies. But there ought to be some roses, warm and flamy. You know Herakleitos says “a dry soul is best.” I know so well what that means. Do you?’

‘I’m not sure,’ Ursula replied. ‘But what if people ARE all flowers of dissolution — when they’re flowers at all — what difference does it make?’

‘No difference — and all the difference. Dissolution rolls on, just as production does,’ he said. ‘It is a progressive process — and it ends in universal nothing — the end of the world, if you like. But why isn’t the end of the world as good as the beginning?’

‘I suppose it isn’t,’ said Ursula, rather angry.

‘Oh yes, ultimately,’ he said. ‘It means a new cycle of creation after — but not for us. If it is the end, then we are of the end — fleurs du mal if you like. If we are fleurs du mal, we are not roses of happiness, and there you are.’

‘But I think I am,’ said Ursula. ‘I think I am a rose of happiness.’

‘Ready-made?’ he asked ironically.

‘No — real,’ she said, hurt.

‘If we are the end, we are not the beginning,’ he said.

‘Yes we are,’ she said. ‘The beginning comes out of the end.’

‘After it, not out of it. After us, not out of us.’

‘You are a devil, you know, really,’ she said. ‘You want to destroy our hope. You WANT US to be deathly.’

‘No,’ he said, ‘I only want us to KNOW what we are.’

‘Ha!’ she cried in anger. ‘You only want us to know death.’

‘You’re quite right,’ said the soft voice of Gerald, out of the dusk behind.

Birkin rose. Gerald and Gudrun came up. They all began to smoke, in the moments of silence. One after another, Birkin lighted their cigarettes. The match flickered in the twilight, and they were all smoking peacefully by the water-side. The lake was dim, the light dying from off it, in the midst of the dark land. The air all round was intangible, neither here nor there, and there was an unreal noise of banjos, or suchlike music.

As the golden swim of light overhead died out, the moon gained brightness, and seemed to begin to smile forth her ascendancy. The dark woods on the

opposite shore melted into universal shadow. And amid this universal under-shadow, there was a scattered intrusion of lights. Far down the lake were fantastic pale strings of colour, like beads of wan fire, green and red and yellow. The music came out in a little puff, as the launch, all illuminated, veered into the great shadow, stirring her outlines of half-living lights, puffing out her music in little drifts.

All were lighting up. Here and there, close against the faint water, and at the far end of the lake, where the water lay milky in the last whiteness of the sky, and there was no shadow, solitary, frail flames of lanterns floated from the unseen boats. There was a sound of oars, and a boat passed from the pallor into the darkness under the wood, where her lanterns seemed to kindle into fire, hanging in ruddy lovely globes. And again, in the lake, shadowy red gleams hovered in reflection about the boat. Everywhere were these noiseless ruddy creatures of fire drifting near the surface of the water, caught at by the rarest, scarce visible reflections.

Birkin brought the lanterns from the bigger boat, and the four shadowy white figures gathered round, to light them. Ursula held up the first, Birkin lowered the light from the rosy, glowing cup of his hands, into the depths of the lantern. It was kindled, and they all stood back to look at the great blue moon of light that hung from Ursula's hand, casting a strange gleam on her face. It flickered, and Birkin went bending over the well of light. His face shone out like an apparition, so unconscious, and again, something demoniacal. Ursula was dim and veiled, looming over him.

'That is all right,' said his voice softly.

She held up the lantern. It had a flight of storks streaming through a turquoise sky of light, over a dark earth.

'This is beautiful,' she said.

'Lovely,' echoed Gudrun, who wanted to hold one also, and lift it up full of beauty.

'Light one for me,' she said. Gerald stood by her, incapacitated. Birkin lit the lantern she held up. Her heart beat with anxiety, to see how beautiful it would be. It was primrose yellow, with tall straight flowers growing darkly from their dark leaves, lifting their heads into the primrose day, while butterflies hovered about them, in the pure clear light.

Gudrun gave a little cry of excitement, as if pierced with delight.

'Isn't it beautiful, oh, isn't it beautiful!'

Her soul was really pierced with beauty, she was translated beyond herself. Gerald leaned near to her, into her zone of light, as if to see. He came close to her, and stood touching her, looking with her at the primrose-shining globe. And

she turned her face to his, that was faintly bright in the light of the lantern, and they stood together in one luminous union, close together and ringed round with light, all the rest excluded.

Birkin looked away, and went to light Ursula's second lantern. It had a pale ruddy sea-bottom, with black crabs and sea-weed moving sinuously under a transparent sea, that passed into flamy ruddiness above.

'You've got the heavens above, and the waters under the earth,' said Birkin to her.

'Anything but the earth itself,' she laughed, watching his live hands that hovered to attend to the light.

'I'm dying to see what my second one is,' cried Gudrun, in a vibrating rather strident voice, that seemed to repel the others from her.

Birkin went and kindled it. It was of a lovely deep blue colour, with a red floor, and a great white cuttle-fish flowing in white soft streams all over it. The cuttle-fish had a face that stared straight from the heart of the light, very fixed and coldly intent.

'How truly terrifying!' exclaimed Gudrun, in a voice of horror. Gerald, at her side, gave a low laugh.

'But isn't it really fearful!' she cried in dismay.

Again he laughed, and said:

'Change it with Ursula, for the crabs.'

Gudrun was silent for a moment.

'Ursula,' she said, 'could you bear to have this fearful thing?'

'I think the colouring is LOVELY,' said Ursula.

'So do I,' said Gudrun. 'But could you BEAR to have it swinging to your boat? Don't you want to destroy it at ONCE?'

'Oh no,' said Ursula. 'I don't want to destroy it.'

'Well do you mind having it instead of the crabs? Are you sure you don't mind?'

Gudrun came forward to exchange lanterns.

'No,' said Ursula, yielding up the crabs and receiving the cuttle-fish.

Yet she could not help feeling rather resentful at the way in which Gudrun and Gerald should assume a right over her, a precedence.

'Come then,' said Birkin. 'I'll put them on the boats.'

He and Ursula were moving away to the big boat.

'I suppose you'll row me back, Rupert,' said Gerald, out of the pale shadow of the evening.

'Won't you go with Gudrun in the canoe?' said Birkin. 'It'll be more interesting.'

There was a moment's pause. Birkin and Ursula stood dimly, with their swinging lanterns, by the water's edge. The world was all illusive.

'Is that all right?' said Gudrun to him.

'It'll suit ME very well,' he said. 'But what about you, and the rowing? I don't see why you should pull me.'

'Why not?' she said. 'I can pull you as well as I could pull Ursula.'

By her tone he could tell she wanted to have him in the boat to herself, and that she was subtly gratified that she should have power over them both. He gave himself, in a strange, electric submission.

She handed him the lanterns, whilst she went to fix the cane at the end of the canoe. He followed after her, and stood with the lanterns dangling against his white-flannelled thighs, emphasising the shadow around.

'Kiss me before we go,' came his voice softly from out of the shadow above.

She stopped her work in real, momentary astonishment.

'But why?' she exclaimed, in pure surprise.

'Why?' he echoed, ironically.

And she looked at him fixedly for some moments. Then she leaned forward and kissed him, with a slow, luxurious kiss, lingering on the mouth. And then she took the lanterns from him, while he stood swooning with the perfect fire that burned in all his joints.

They lifted the canoe into the water, Gudrun took her place, and Gerald pushed off.

'Are you sure you don't hurt your hand, doing that?' she asked, solicitous. 'Because I could have done it PERFECTLY.'

'I don't hurt myself,' he said in a low, soft voice, that caressed her with inexpressible beauty.

And she watched him as he sat near her, very near to her, in the stern of the canoe, his legs coming towards hers, his feet touching hers. And she paddled softly, lingeringly, longing for him to say something meaningful to her. But he remained silent.

'You like this, do you?' she said, in a gentle, solicitous voice.

He laughed shortly.

'There is a space between us,' he said, in the same low, unconscious voice, as if something were speaking out of him. And she was as if magically aware of their being balanced in separation, in the boat. She swooned with acute comprehension and pleasure.

'But I'm very near,' she said caressively, gaily.

'Yet distant, distant,' he said.

Again she was silent with pleasure, before she answered, speaking with a

reedy, thrilled voice:

‘Yet we cannot very well change, whilst we are on the water.’ She caressed him subtly and strangely, having him completely at her mercy.

A dozen or more boats on the lake swung their rosy and moon-like lanterns low on the water, that reflected as from a fire. In the distance, the steamer twanged and thrummed and washed with her faintly-splashing paddles, trailing her strings of coloured lights, and occasionally lighting up the whole scene luridly with an effusion of fireworks, Roman candles and sheafs of stars and other simple effects, illuminating the surface of the water, and showing the boats creeping round, low down. Then the lovely darkness fell again, the lanterns and the little threaded lights glimmered softly, there was a muffled knocking of oars and a waving of music.

Gudrun paddled almost imperceptibly. Gerald could see, not far ahead, the rich blue and the rose globes of Ursula’s lanterns swaying softly cheek to cheek as Birkin rowed, and iridescent, evanescent gleams chasing in the wake. He was aware, too, of his own delicately coloured lights casting their softness behind him.

Gudrun rested her paddle and looked round. The canoe lifted with the lightest ebbing of the water. Gerald’s white knees were very near to her.

‘Isn’t it beautiful!’ she said softly, as if reverently.

She looked at him, as he leaned back against the faint crystal of the lantern-light. She could see his face, although it was a pure shadow. But it was a piece of twilight. And her breast was keen with passion for him, he was so beautiful in his male stillness and mystery. It was a certain pure effluence of maleness, like an aroma from his softly, firmly moulded contours, a certain rich perfection of his presence, that touched her with an ecstasy, a thrill of pure intoxication. She loved to look at him. For the present she did not want to touch him, to know the further, satisfying substance of his living body. He was purely intangible, yet so near. Her hands lay on the paddle like slumber, she only wanted to see him, like a crystal shadow, to feel his essential presence.

‘Yes,’ he said vaguely. ‘It is very beautiful.’

He was listening to the faint near sounds, the dropping of water-drops from the oar-blades, the slight drumming of the lanterns behind him, as they rubbed against one another, the occasional rustling of Gudrun’s full skirt, an alien land noise. His mind was almost submerged, he was almost transfused, lapsed out for the first time in his life, into the things about him. For he always kept such a keen attentiveness, concentrated and unyielding in himself. Now he had let go, imperceptibly he was melting into oneness with the whole. It was like pure, perfect sleep, his first great sleep of life. He had been so insistent, so guarded, all

his life. But here was sleep, and peace, and perfect lapsing out.

‘Shall I row to the landing-stage?’ asked Gudrun wistfully.

‘Anywhere,’ he answered. ‘Let it drift.’

‘Tell me then, if we are running into anything,’ she replied, in that very quiet, toneless voice of sheer intimacy.

‘The lights will show,’ he said.

So they drifted almost motionless, in silence. He wanted silence, pure and whole. But she was uneasy yet for some word, for some assurance.

‘Nobody will miss you?’ she asked, anxious for some communication.

‘Miss me?’ he echoed. ‘No! Why?’

‘I wondered if anybody would be looking for you.’

‘Why should they look for me?’ And then he remembered his manners. ‘But perhaps you want to get back,’ he said, in a changed voice.

‘No, I don’t want to get back,’ she replied. ‘No, I assure you.’

‘You’re quite sure it’s all right for you?’

‘Perfectly all right.’

And again they were still. The launch twanged and hooted, somebody was singing. Then as if the night smashed, suddenly there was a great shout, a confusion of shouting, warring on the water, then the horrid noise of paddles reversed and churned violently.

Gerald sat up, and Gudrun looked at him in fear.

‘Somebody in the water,’ he said, angrily, and desperately, looking keenly across the dusk. ‘Can you row up?’

‘Where, to the launch?’ asked Gudrun, in nervous panic.

‘Yes.’

‘You’ll tell me if I don’t steer straight,’ she said, in nervous apprehension.

‘You keep pretty level,’ he said, and the canoe hastened forward.

The shouting and the noise continued, sounding horrid through the dusk, over the surface of the water.

‘Wasn’t this BOUND to happen?’ said Gudrun, with heavy hateful irony. But he hardly heard, and she glanced over her shoulder to see her way. The half-dark waters were sprinkled with lovely bubbles of swaying lights, the launch did not look far off. She was rocking her lights in the early night. Gudrun rowed as hard as she could. But now that it was a serious matter, she seemed uncertain and clumsy in her stroke, it was difficult to paddle swiftly. She glanced at his face. He was looking fixedly into the darkness, very keen and alert and single in himself, instrumental. Her heart sank, she seemed to die a death. ‘Of course,’ she said to herself, ‘nobody will be drowned. Of course they won’t. It would be too extravagant and sensational.’ But her heart was cold, because of his sharp

impersonal face. It was as if he belonged naturally to dread and catastrophe, as if he were himself again.

Then there came a child's voice, a girl's high, piercing shriek:

'Di — Di — Di — Di — Oh Di — Oh Di — Oh Di!'

The blood ran cold in Gudrun's veins.

'It's Diana, is it,' muttered Gerald. 'The young monkey, she'd have to be up to some of her tricks.'

And he glanced again at the paddle, the boat was not going quickly enough for him. It made Gudrun almost helpless at the rowing, this nervous stress. She kept up with all her might. Still the voices were calling and answering.

'Where, where? There you are — that's it. Which? No — No-o-o. Damn it all, here, HERE — ' Boats were hurrying from all directions to the scene, coloured lanterns could be seen waving close to the surface of the lake, reflections swaying after them in uneven haste. The steamer hooted again, for some unknown reason. Gudrun's boat was travelling quickly, the lanterns were swinging behind Gerald.

And then again came the child's high, screaming voice, with a note of weeping and impatience in it now:

'Di — Oh Di — Oh Di — Di — !'

It was a terrible sound, coming through the obscure air of the evening.

'You'd be better if you were in bed, Winnie,' Gerald muttered to himself.

He was stooping unlacing his shoes, pushing them off with the foot. Then he threw his soft hat into the bottom of the boat.

'You can't go into the water with your hurt hand,' said Gudrun, panting, in a low voice of horror.

'What? It won't hurt.'

He had struggled out of his jacket, and had dropped it between his feet. He sat bare-headed, all in white now. He felt the belt at his waist. They were nearing the launch, which stood still big above them, her myriad lamps making lovely darts, and sinuous running tongues of ugly red and green and yellow light on the lustrous dark water, under the shadow.

'Oh get her out! Oh Di, DARLING! Oh get her out! Oh Daddy, Oh Daddy!' moaned the child's voice, in distraction. Somebody was in the water, with a life belt. Two boats paddled near, their lanterns swinging ineffectually, the boats nosing round.

'Hi there — Rockley! — hi there!'

'Mr Gerald!' came the captain's terrified voice. 'Miss Diana's in the water.'

'Anybody gone in for her?' came Gerald's sharp voice.

'Young Doctor Brindell, sir.'

‘Where?’

‘Can’t see no signs of them, sir. Everybody’s looking, but there’s nothing so far.’

There was a moment’s ominous pause.

‘Where did she go in?’

‘I think — about where that boat is,’ came the uncertain answer, ‘that one with red and green lights.’

‘Row there,’ said Gerald quietly to Gudrun.

‘Get her out, Gerald, oh get her out,’ the child’s voice was crying anxiously. He took no heed.

‘Lean back that way,’ said Gerald to Gudrun, as he stood up in the frail boat. ‘She won’t upset.’

In another moment, he had dropped clean down, soft and plumb, into the water. Gudrun was swaying violently in her boat, the agitated water shook with transient lights, she realised that it was faintly moonlight, and that he was gone. So it was possible to be gone. A terrible sense of fatality robbed her of all feeling and thought. She knew he was gone out of the world, there was merely the same world, and absence, his absence. The night seemed large and vacuous. Lanterns swayed here and there, people were talking in an undertone on the launch and in the boats. She could hear Winifred moaning: ‘OH DO FIND HER GERALD, DO FIND HER,’ and someone trying to comfort the child. Gudrun paddled aimlessly here and there. The terrible, massive, cold, boundless surface of the water terrified her beyond words. Would he never come back? She felt she must jump into the water too, to know the horror also.

She started, hearing someone say: ‘There he is.’ She saw the movement of his swimming, like a water-rat. And she rowed involuntarily to him. But he was near another boat, a bigger one. Still she rowed towards him. She must be very near. She saw him — he looked like a seal. He looked like a seal as he took hold of the side of the boat. His fair hair was washed down on his round head, his face seemed to glisten suavely. She could hear him panting.

Then he clambered into the boat. Oh, and the beauty of the subjection of his loins, white and dimly luminous as he climbed over the side of the boat, made her want to die, to die. The beauty of his dim and luminous loins as he climbed into the boat, his back rounded and soft — ah, this was too much for her, too final a vision. She knew it, and it was fatal. The terrible hopelessness of fate, and of beauty, such beauty!

He was not like a man to her, he was an incarnation, a great phase of life. She saw him press the water out of his face, and look at the bandage on his hand. And she knew it was all no good, and that she would never go beyond him, he

was the final approximation of life to her.

‘Put the lights out, we shall see better,’ came his voice, sudden and mechanical and belonging to the world of man. She could scarcely believe there was a world of man. She leaned round and blew out her lanterns. They were difficult to blow out. Everywhere the lights were gone save the coloured points on the sides of the launch. The blueygrey, early night spread level around, the moon was overhead, there were shadows of boats here and there.

Again there was a splash, and he was gone under. Gudrun sat, sick at heart, frightened of the great, level surface of the water, so heavy and deadly. She was so alone, with the level, unliving field of the water stretching beneath her. It was not a good isolation, it was a terrible, cold separation of suspense. She was suspended upon the surface of the insidious reality until such time as she also should disappear beneath it.

Then she knew, by a stirring of voices, that he had climbed out again, into a boat. She sat wanting connection with him. Strenuously she claimed her connection with him, across the invisible space of the water. But round her heart was an isolation unbearable, through which nothing would penetrate.

‘Take the launch in. It’s no use keeping her there. Get lines for the dragging,’ came the decisive, instrumental voice, that was full of the sound of the world.

The launch began gradually to beat the waters.

‘Gerald! Gerald!’ came the wild crying voice of Winifred. He did not answer. Slowly the launch drifted round in a pathetic, clumsy circle, and slunk away to the land, retreating into the dimness. The wash of her paddles grew duller. Gudrun rocked in her light boat, and dipped the paddle automatically to steady herself.

‘Gudrun?’ called Ursula’s voice.

‘Ursula!’

The boats of the two sisters pulled together.

‘Where is Gerald?’ said Gudrun.

‘He’s dived again,’ said Ursula plaintively. ‘And I know he ought not, with his hurt hand and everything.’

‘I’ll take him in home this time,’ said Birkin.

The boats swayed again from the wash of steamer. Gudrun and Ursula kept a look-out for Gerald.

‘There he is!’ cried Ursula, who had the sharpest eyes. He had not been long under. Birkin pulled towards him, Gudrun following. He swam slowly, and caught hold of the boat with his wounded hand. It slipped, and he sank back.

‘Why don’t you help him?’ cried Ursula sharply.

He came again, and Birkin leaned to help him in to the boat. Gudrun again

watched Gerald climb out of the water, but this time slowly, heavily, with the blind clambering motions of an amphibious beast, clumsy. Again the moon shone with faint luminosity on his white wet figure, on the stooping back and the rounded loins. But it looked defeated now, his body, it clambered and fell with slow clumsiness. He was breathing hoarsely too, like an animal that is suffering. He sat slack and motionless in the boat, his head blunt and blind like a seal's, his whole appearance inhuman, unknowing. Gudrun shuddered as she mechanically followed his boat. Birkin rowed without speaking to the landing-stage.

'Where are you going?' Gerald asked suddenly, as if just waking up.

'Home,' said Birkin.

'Oh no!' said Gerald imperiously. 'We can't go home while they're in the water. Turn back again, I'm going to find them.' The women were frightened, his voice was so imperative and dangerous, almost mad, not to be opposed.

'No!' said Birkin. 'You can't.' There was a strange fluid compulsion in his voice. Gerald was silent in a battle of wills. It was as if he would kill the other man. But Birkin rowed evenly and unswerving, with an inhuman inevitability.

'Why should you interfere?' said Gerald, in hate.

Birkin did not answer. He rowed towards the land. And Gerald sat mute, like a dumb beast, panting, his teeth chattering, his arms inert, his head like a seal's head.

They came to the landing-stage. Wet and naked-looking, Gerald climbed up the few steps. There stood his father, in the night.

'Father!' he said.

'Yes my boy? Go home and get those things off.'

'We shan't save them, father,' said Gerald.

'There's hope yet, my boy.'

'I'm afraid not. There's no knowing where they are. You can't find them. And there's a current, as cold as hell.'

'We'll let the water out,' said the father. 'Go home you and look to yourself. See that he's looked after, Rupert,' he added in a neutral voice.

'Well father, I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm afraid it's my fault. But it can't be helped; I've done what I could for the moment. I could go on diving, of course — not much, though — and not much use —'

He moved away barefoot, on the planks of the platform. Then he trod on something sharp.

'Of course, you've got no shoes on,' said Birkin.

'His shoes are here!' cried Gudrun from below. She was making fast her boat.

Gerald waited for them to be brought to him. Gudrun came with them. He pulled them on his feet.

‘If you once die,’ he said, ‘then when it’s over, it’s finished. Why come to life again? There’s room under that water there for thousands.’

‘Two is enough,’ she said murmuring.

He dragged on his second shoe. He was shivering violently, and his jaw shook as he spoke.

‘That’s true,’ he said, ‘maybe. But it’s curious how much room there seems, a whole universe under there; and as cold as hell, you’re as helpless as if your head was cut off.’ He could scarcely speak, he shook so violently. ‘There’s one thing about our family, you know,’ he continued. ‘Once anything goes wrong, it can never be put right again — not with us. I’ve noticed it all my life — you can’t put a thing right, once it has gone wrong.’

They were walking across the high-road to the house.

‘And do you know, when you are down there, it is so cold, actually, and so endless, so different really from what it is on top, so endless — you wonder how it is so many are alive, why we’re up here. Are you going? I shall see you again, shan’t I? Good-night, and thank you. Thank you very much!’

The two girls waited a while, to see if there were any hope. The moon shone clearly overhead, with almost impertinent brightness, the small dark boats clustered on the water, there were voices and subdued shouts. But it was all to no purpose. Gudrun went home when Birkin returned.

He was commissioned to open the sluice that let out the water from the lake, which was pierced at one end, near the high-road, thus serving as a reservoir to supply with water the distant mines, in case of necessity. ‘Come with me,’ he said to Ursula, ‘and then I will walk home with you, when I’ve done this.’

He called at the water-keeper’s cottage and took the key of the sluice. They went through a little gate from the high-road, to the head of the water, where was a great stone basin which received the overflow, and a flight of stone steps descended into the depths of the water itself. At the head of the steps was the lock of the sluice-gate.

The night was silver-grey and perfect, save for the scattered restless sound of voices. The grey sheen of the moonlight caught the stretch of water, dark boats plashed and moved. But Ursula’s mind ceased to be receptive, everything was unimportant and unreal.

Birkin fixed the iron handle of the sluice, and turned it with a wrench. The cogs began slowly to rise. He turned and turned, like a slave, his white figure became distinct. Ursula looked away. She could not bear to see him winding heavily and laboriously, bending and rising mechanically like a slave, turning the handle.

Then, a real shock to her, there came a loud splashing of water from out of the

dark, tree-filled hollow beyond the road, a splashing that deepened rapidly to a harsh roar, and then became a heavy, booming noise of a great body of water falling solidly all the time. It occupied the whole of the night, this great steady booming of water, everything was drowned within it, drowned and lost. Ursula seemed to have to struggle for her life. She put her hands over her ears, and looked at the high bland moon.

‘Can’t we go now?’ she cried to Birkin, who was watching the water on the steps, to see if it would get any lower. It seemed to fascinate him. He looked at her and nodded.

The little dark boats had moved nearer, people were crowding curiously along the hedge by the high-road, to see what was to be seen. Birkin and Ursula went to the cottage with the key, then turned their backs on the lake. She was in great haste. She could not bear the terrible crushing boom of the escaping water.

‘Do you think they are dead?’ she cried in a high voice, to make herself heard.

‘Yes,’ he replied.

‘Isn’t it horrible!’

He paid no heed. They walked up the hill, further and further away from the noise.

‘Do you mind very much?’ she asked him.

‘I don’t mind about the dead,’ he said, ‘once they are dead. The worst of it is, they cling on to the living, and won’t let go.’

She pondered for a time.

‘Yes,’ she said. ‘The FACT of death doesn’t really seem to matter much, does it?’

‘No,’ he said. ‘What does it matter if Diana Crich is alive or dead?’

‘Doesn’t it?’ she said, shocked.

‘No, why should it? Better she were dead — she’ll be much more real. She’ll be positive in death. In life she was a fretting, negated thing.’

‘You are rather horrible,’ murmured Ursula.

‘No! I’d rather Diana Crich were dead. Her living somehow, was all wrong. As for the young man, poor devil — he’ll find his way out quickly instead of slowly. Death is all right — nothing better.’

‘Yet you don’t want to die,’ she challenged him.

He was silent for a time. Then he said, in a voice that was frightening to her in its change:

‘I should like to be through with it — I should like to be through with the death process.’

‘And aren’t you?’ asked Ursula nervously.

They walked on for some way in silence, under the trees. Then he said,

slowly, as if afraid:

‘There is life which belongs to death, and there is life which isn’t death. One is tired of the life that belongs to death — our kind of life. But whether it is finished, God knows. I want love that is like sleep, like being born again, vulnerable as a baby that just comes into the world.’

Ursula listened, half attentive, half avoiding what he said. She seemed to catch the drift of his statement, and then she drew away. She wanted to hear, but she did not want to be implicated. She was reluctant to yield there, where he wanted her, to yield as it were her very identity.

‘Why should love be like sleep?’ she asked sadly.

‘I don’t know. So that it is like death — I DO want to die from this life — and yet it is more than life itself. One is delivered over like a naked infant from the womb, all the old defences and the old body gone, and new air around one, that has never been breathed before.’

She listened, making out what he said. She knew, as well as he knew, that words themselves do not convey meaning, that they are but a gesture we make, a dumb show like any other. And she seemed to feel his gesture through her blood, and she drew back, even though her desire sent her forward.

‘But,’ she said gravely, ‘didn’t you say you wanted something that was NOT love — something beyond love?’

He turned in confusion. There was always confusion in speech. Yet it must be spoken. Whichever way one moved, if one were to move forwards, one must break a way through. And to know, to give utterance, was to break a way through the walls of the prison as the infant in labour strives through the walls of the womb. There is no new movement now, without the breaking through of the old body, deliberately, in knowledge, in the struggle to get out.

‘I don’t want love,’ he said. ‘I don’t want to know you. I want to be gone out of myself, and you to be lost to yourself, so we are found different. One shouldn’t talk when one is tired and wretched. One Hamletises, and it seems a lie. Only believe me when I show you a bit of healthy pride and insouciance. I hate myself serious.’

‘Why shouldn’t you be serious?’ she said.

He thought for a minute, then he said, sulkily:

‘I don’t know.’ Then they walked on in silence, at outs. He was vague and lost.

‘Isn’t it strange,’ she said, suddenly putting her hand on his arm, with a loving impulse, ‘how we always talk like this! I suppose we do love each other, in some way.’

‘Oh yes,’ he said; ‘too much.’

She laughed almost gaily.

‘You’d have to have it your own way, wouldn’t you?’ she teased. ‘You could never take it on trust.’

He changed, laughed softly, and turned and took her in his arms, in the middle of the road.

‘Yes,’ he said softly.

And he kissed her face and brow, slowly, gently, with a sort of delicate happiness which surprised her extremely, and to which she could not respond. They were soft, blind kisses, perfect in their stillness. Yet she held back from them. It was like strange moths, very soft and silent, settling on her from the darkness of her soul. She was uneasy. She drew away.

‘Isn’t somebody coming?’ she said.

So they looked down the dark road, then set off again walking towards Beldover. Then suddenly, to show him she was no shallow prude, she stopped and held him tight, hard against her, and covered his face with hard, fierce kisses of passion. In spite of his otherness, the old blood beat up in him.

‘Not this, not this,’ he whimpered to himself, as the first perfect mood of softness and sleep-loveliness ebbed back away from the rushing of passion that came up to his limbs and over his face as she drew him. And soon he was a perfect hard flame of passionate desire for her. Yet in the small core of the flame was an unyielding anguish of another thing. But this also was lost; he only wanted her, with an extreme desire that seemed inevitable as death, beyond question.

Then, satisfied and shattered, fulfilled and destroyed, he went home away from her, drifting vaguely through the darkness, lapsed into the old fire of burning passion. Far away, far away, there seemed to be a small lament in the darkness. But what did it matter? What did it matter, what did anything matter save this ultimate and triumphant experience of physical passion, that had blazed up anew like a new spell of life. ‘I was becoming quite dead-alive, nothing but a word-bag,’ he said in triumph, scorning his other self. Yet somewhere far off and small, the other hovered.

The men were still dragging the lake when he got back. He stood on the bank and heard Gerald’s voice. The water was still booming in the night, the moon was fair, the hills beyond were elusive. The lake was sinking. There came the raw smell of the banks, in the night air.

Up at Shortlands there were lights in the windows, as if nobody had gone to bed. On the landing-stage was the old doctor, the father of the young man who was lost. He stood quite silent, waiting. Birkin also stood and watched, Gerald came up in a boat.

‘You still here, Rupert?’ he said. ‘We can’t get them. The bottom slopes, you know, very steep. The water lies between two very sharp slopes, with little branch valleys, and God knows where the drift will take you. It isn’t as if it was a level bottom. You never know where you are, with the dragging.’

‘Is there any need for you to be working?’ said Birkin. ‘Wouldn’t it be much better if you went to bed?’

‘To bed! Good God, do you think I should sleep? We’ll find ‘em, before I go away from here.’

‘But the men would find them just the same without you — why should you insist?’

Gerald looked up at him. Then he put his hand affectionately on Birkin’s shoulder, saying:

‘Don’t you bother about me, Rupert. If there’s anybody’s health to think about, it’s yours, not mine. How do you feel yourself?’

‘Very well. But you, you spoil your own chance of life — you waste your best self.’

Gerald was silent for a moment. Then he said:

‘Waste it? What else is there to do with it?’

‘But leave this, won’t you? You force yourself into horrors, and put a mill-stone of beastly memories round your neck. Come away now.’

‘A mill-stone of beastly memories!’ Gerald repeated. Then he put his hand again affectionately on Birkin’s shoulder. ‘God, you’ve got such a telling way of putting things, Rupert, you have.’

Birkin’s heart sank. He was irritated and weary of having a telling way of putting things.

‘Won’t you leave it? Come over to my place’ — he urged as one urges a drunken man.

‘No,’ said Gerald coaxingly, his arm across the other man’s shoulder. ‘Thanks very much, Rupert — I shall be glad to come tomorrow, if that’ll do. You understand, don’t you? I want to see this job through. But I’ll come tomorrow, right enough. Oh, I’d rather come and have a chat with you than — than do anything else, I verily believe. Yes, I would. You mean a lot to me, Rupert, more than you know.’

‘What do I mean, more than I know?’ asked Birkin irritably. He was acutely aware of Gerald’s hand on his shoulder. And he did not want this altercation. He wanted the other man to come out of the ugly misery.

‘I’ll tell you another time,’ said Gerald coaxingly.

‘Come along with me now — I want you to come,’ said Birkin.

There was a pause, intense and real. Birkin wondered why his own heart beat

so heavily. Then Gerald's fingers gripped hard and communicative into Birkin's shoulder, as he said:

'No, I'll see this job through, Rupert. Thank you — I know what you mean. We're all right, you know, you and me.'

'I may be all right, but I'm sure you're not, mucking about here,' said Birkin. And he went away.

The bodies of the dead were not recovered till towards dawn. Diana had her arms tight round the neck of the young man, choking him.

'She killed him,' said Gerald.

The moon sloped down the sky and sank at last. The lake was sunk to quarter size, it had horrible raw banks of clay, that smelled of raw rottenish water. Dawn roused faintly behind the eastern hill. The water still boomed through the sluice.

As the birds were whistling for the first morning, and the hills at the back of the desolate lake stood radiant with the new mists, there was a straggling procession up to Shortlands, men bearing the bodies on a stretcher, Gerald going beside them, the two grey-bearded fathers following in silence. Indoors the family was all sitting up, waiting. Somebody must go to tell the mother, in her room. The doctor in secret struggled to bring back his son, till he himself was exhausted.

Over all the outlying district was a hush of dreadful excitement on that Sunday morning. The colliery people felt as if this catastrophe had happened directly to themselves, indeed they were more shocked and frightened than if their own men had been killed. Such a tragedy in Shortlands, the high home of the district! One of the young mistresses, persisting in dancing on the cabin roof of the launch, wilful young madam, drowned in the midst of the festival, with the young doctor! Everywhere on the Sunday morning, the colliers wandered about, discussing the calamity. At all the Sunday dinners of the people, there seemed a strange presence. It was as if the angel of death were very near, there was a sense of the supernatural in the air. The men had excited, startled faces, the women looked solemn, some of them had been crying. The children enjoyed the excitement at first. There was an intensity in the air, almost magical. Did all enjoy it? Did all enjoy the thrill?

Gudrun had wild ideas of rushing to comfort Gerald. She was thinking all the time of the perfect comforting, reassuring thing to say to him. She was shocked and frightened, but she put that away, thinking of how she should deport herself with Gerald: act her part. That was the real thrill: how she should act her part.

Ursula was deeply and passionately in love with Birkin, and she was capable of nothing. She was perfectly callous about all the talk of the accident, but her estranged air looked like trouble. She merely sat by herself, whenever she could,

and longed to see him again. She wanted him to come to the house, — she would not have it otherwise, he must come at once. She was waiting for him. She stayed indoors all day, waiting for him to knock at the door. Every minute, she glanced automatically at the window. He would be there.

CHAPTER XV.

SUNDAY EVENING

As the day wore on, the life-blood seemed to ebb away from Ursula, and within the emptiness a heavy despair gathered. Her passion seemed to bleed to death, and there was nothing. She sat suspended in a state of complete nullity, harder to bear than death.

‘Unless something happens,’ she said to herself, in the perfect lucidity of final suffering, ‘I shall die. I am at the end of my line of life.’

She sat crushed and obliterated in a darkness that was the border of death. She realised how all her life she had been drawing nearer and nearer to this brink, where there was no beyond, from which one had to leap like Sappho into the unknown. The knowledge of the imminence of death was like a drug. Darkly, without thinking at all, she knew that she was near to death. She had travelled all her life along the line of fulfilment, and it was nearly concluded. She knew all she had to know, she had experienced all she had to experience, she was fulfilled in a kind of bitter ripeness, there remained only to fall from the tree into death. And one must fulfil one’s development to the end, must carry the adventure to its conclusion. And the next step was over the border into death. So it was then! There was a certain peace in the knowledge.

After all, when one was fulfilled, one was happiest in falling into death, as a bitter fruit plunges in its ripeness downwards. Death is a great consummation, a consummating experience. It is a development from life. That we know, while we are yet living. What then need we think for further? One can never see beyond the consummation. It is enough that death is a great and conclusive experience. Why should we ask what comes after the experience, when the experience is still unknown to us? Let us die, since the great experience is the one that follows now upon all the rest, death, which is the next great crisis in front of which we have arrived. If we wait, if we baulk the issue, we do but hang about the gates in undignified uneasiness. There it is, in front of us, as in front of Sappho, the illimitable space. Thereinto goes the journey. Have we not the courage to go on with our journey, must we cry ‘I daren’t’? On ahead we will

go, into death, and whatever death may mean. If a man can see the next step to be taken, why should he fear the next but one? Why ask about the next but one? Of the next step we are certain. It is the step into death.

‘I shall die — I shall quickly die,’ said Ursula to herself, clear as if in a trance, clear, calm, and certain beyond human certainty. But somewhere behind, in the twilight, there was a bitter weeping and a hopelessness. That must not be attended to. One must go where the unfaltering spirit goes, there must be no baulking the issue, because of fear. No baulking the issue, no listening to the lesser voices. If the deepest desire be now, to go on into the unknown of death, shall one forfeit the deepest truth for one more shallow?

‘Then let it end,’ she said to herself. It was a decision. It was not a question of taking one’s life — she would NEVER kill herself, that was repulsive and violent. It was a question of KNOWING the next step. And the next step led into the space of death. Did it? — or was there — ?

Her thoughts drifted into unconsciousness, she sat as if asleep beside the fire. And then the thought came back. The space o’ death! Could she give herself to it? Ah yes — it was a sleep. She had had enough So long she had held out; and resisted. Now was the time to relinquish, not to resist any more.

In a kind of spiritual trance, she yielded, she gave way, and all was dark. She could feel, within the darkness, the terrible assertion of her body, the unutterable anguish of dissolution, the only anguish that is too much, the far-off, awful nausea of dissolution set in within the body.

‘Does the body correspond so immediately with the spirit?’ she asked herself. And she knew, with the clarity of ultimate knowledge, that the body is only one of the manifestations of the spirit, the transmutation of the integral spirit is the transmutation of the physical body as well. Unless I set my will, unless I absolve myself from the rhythm of life, fix myself and remain static, cut off from living, absolved within my own will. But better die than live mechanically a life that is a repetition of repetitions. To die is to move on with the invisible. To die is also a joy, a joy of submitting to that which is greater than the known, namely, the pure unknown. That is a joy. But to live mechanised and cut off within the motion of the will, to live as an entity absolved from the unknown, that is shameful and ignominious. There is no ignominy in death. There is complete ignominy in an unreplenished, mechanised life. Life indeed may be ignominious, shameful to the soul. But death is never a shame. Death itself, like the illimitable space, is beyond our sullying.

Tomorrow was Monday. Monday, the beginning of another school-week! Another shameful, barren school-week, mere routine and mechanical activity. Was not the adventure of death infinitely preferable? Was not death infinitely

more lovely and noble than such a life? A life of barren routine, without inner meaning, without any real significance. How sordid life was, how it was a terrible shame to the soul, to live now! How much cleaner and more dignified to be dead! One could not bear any more of this shame of sordid routine and mechanical nullity. One might come to fruit in death. She had had enough. For where was life to be found? No flowers grow upon busy machinery, there is no sky to a routine, there is no space to a rotary motion. And all life was a rotary motion, mechanised, cut off from reality. There was nothing to look for from life — it was the same in all countries and all peoples. The only window was death. One could look out on to the great dark sky of death with elation, as one had looked out of the classroom window as a child, and seen perfect freedom in the outside. Now one was not a child, and one knew that the soul was a prisoner within this sordid vast edifice of life, and there was no escape, save in death.

But what a joy! What a gladness to think that whatever humanity did, it could not seize hold of the kingdom of death, to nullify that. The sea they turned into a murderous alley and a soiled road of commerce, disputed like the dirty land of a city every inch of it. The air they claimed too, shared it up, parcelled it out to certain owners, they trespassed in the air to fight for it. Everything was gone, walled in, with spikes on top of the walls, and one must ignominiously creep between the spiky walls through a labyrinth of life.

But the great, dark, illimitable kingdom of death, there humanity was put to scorn. So much they could do upon earth, the multifarious little gods that they were. But the kingdom of death put them all to scorn, they dwindled into their true vulgar silliness in face of it.

How beautiful, how grand and perfect death was, how good to look forward to. There one would wash off all the lies and ignominy and dirt that had been put upon one here, a perfect bath of cleanness and glad refreshment, and go unknown, unquestioned, unabased. After all, one was rich, if only in the promise of perfect death. It was a gladness above all, that this remained to look forward to, the pure inhuman otherness of death.

Whatever life might be, it could not take away death, the inhuman transcendent death. Oh, let us ask no question of it, what it is or is not. To know is human, and in death we do not know, we are not human. And the joy of this compensates for all the bitterness of knowledge and the sordidness of our humanity. In death we shall not be human, and we shall not know. The promise of this is our heritage, we look forward like heirs to their majority.

Ursula sat quite still and quite forgotten, alone by the fire in the drawing-room. The children were playing in the kitchen, all the others were gone to church. And she was gone into the ultimate darkness of her own soul.

She was startled by hearing the bell ring, away in the kitchen, the children came scudding along the passage in delicious alarm.

‘Ursula, there’s somebody.’

‘I know. Don’t be silly,’ she replied. She too was startled, almost frightened. She dared hardly go to the door.

Birkin stood on the threshold, his rain-coat turned up to his ears. He had come now, now she was gone far away. She was aware of the rainy night behind him.

‘Oh is it you?’ she said.

‘I am glad you are at home,’ he said in a low voice, entering the house.

‘They are all gone to church.’

He took off his coat and hung it up. The children were peeping at him round the corner.

‘Go and get undressed now, Billy and Dora,’ said Ursula. ‘Mother will be back soon, and she’ll be disappointed if you’re not in bed.’

The children, in a sudden angelic mood, retired without a word. Birkin and Ursula went into the drawing-room.

The fire burned low. He looked at her and wondered at the luminous delicacy of her beauty, and the wide shining of her eyes. He watched from a distance, with wonder in his heart, she seemed transfigured with light.

‘What have you been doing all day?’ he asked her.

‘Only sitting about,’ she said.

He looked at her. There was a change in her. But she was separate from him. She remained apart, in a kind of brightness. They both sat silent in the soft light of the lamp. He felt he ought to go away again, he ought not to have come. Still he did not gather enough resolution to move. But he was DE TROP, her mood was absent and separate.

Then there came the voices of the two children calling shyly outside the door, softly, with self-excited timidity:

‘Ursula! Ursula!’

She rose and opened the door. On the threshold stood the two children in their long nightgowns, with wide-eyed, angelic faces. They were being very good for the moment, playing the role perfectly of two obedient children.

‘Shall you take us to bed!’ said Billy, in a loud whisper.

‘Why you ARE angels tonight,’ she said softly. ‘Won’t you come and say good-night to Mr Birkin?’

The children merged shyly into the room, on bare feet. Billy’s face was wide and grinning, but there was a great solemnity of being good in his round blue eyes. Dora, peeping from the floss of her fair hair, hung back like some tiny Dryad, that has no soul.

‘Will you say good-night to me?’ asked Birkin, in a voice that was strangely soft and smooth. Dora drifted away at once, like a leaf lifted on a breath of wind. But Billy went softly forward, slow and willing, lifting his pinched-up mouth implicitly to be kissed. Ursula watched the full, gathered lips of the man gently touch those of the boy, so gently. Then Birkin lifted his fingers and touched the boy’s round, confiding cheek, with a faint touch of love. Neither spoke. Billy seemed angelic like a cherub boy, or like an acolyte, Birkin was a tall, grave angel looking down to him.

‘Are you going to be kissed?’ Ursula broke in, speaking to the little girl. But Dora edged away like a tiny Dryad that will not be touched.

‘Won’t you say good-night to Mr Birkin? Go, he’s waiting for you,’ said Ursula. But the girl-child only made a little motion away from him.

‘Silly Dora, silly Dora!’ said Ursula.

Birkin felt some mistrust and antagonism in the small child. He could not understand it.

‘Come then,’ said Ursula. ‘Let us go before mother comes.’

‘Who’ll hear us say our prayers?’ asked Billy anxiously.

‘Whom you like.’

‘Won’t you?’

‘Yes, I will.’

‘Ursula?’

‘Well Billy?’

‘Is it WHOM you like?’

‘That’s it.’

‘Well what is WHOM?’

‘It’s the accusative of who.’

There was a moment’s contemplative silence, then the confiding:

‘Is it?’

Birkin smiled to himself as he sat by the fire. When Ursula came down he sat motionless, with his arms on his knees. She saw him, how he was motionless and ageless, like some crouching idol, some image of a deathly religion. He looked round at her, and his face, very pale and unreal, seemed to gleam with a whiteness almost phosphorescent.

‘Don’t you feel well?’ she asked, in indefinable repulsion.

‘I hadn’t thought about it.’

‘But don’t you know without thinking about it?’

He looked at her, his eyes dark and swift, and he saw her revulsion. He did not answer her question.

‘Don’t you know whether you are unwell or not, without thinking about it?’

she persisted.

‘Not always,’ he said coldly.

‘But don’t you think that’s very wicked?’

‘Wicked?’

‘Yes. I think it’s CRIMINAL to have so little connection with your own body that you don’t even know when you are ill.’

He looked at her darkly.

‘Yes,’ he said.

‘Why don’t you stay in bed when you are seedy? You look perfectly ghastly.’

‘Offensively so?’ he asked ironically.

‘Yes, quite offensive. Quite repelling.’

‘Ah!! Well that’s unfortunate.’

‘And it’s raining, and it’s a horrible night. Really, you shouldn’t be forgiven for treating your body like it — you OUGHT to suffer, a man who takes as little notice of his body as that.’

‘ — takes as little notice of his body as that,’ he echoed mechanically.

This cut her short, and there was silence.

The others came in from church, and the two had the girls to face, then the mother and Gudrun, and then the father and the boy.

‘Good-evening,’ said Brangwen, faintly surprised. ‘Came to see me, did you?’

‘No,’ said Birkin, ‘not about anything, in particular, that is. The day was dismal, and I thought you wouldn’t mind if I called in.’

‘It HAS been a depressing day,’ said Mrs Brangwen sympathetically. At that moment the voices of the children were heard calling from upstairs: ‘Mother! Mother!’ She lifted her face and answered mildly into the distance: ‘I shall come up to you in a minute, Doysie.’ Then to Birkin: ‘There is nothing fresh at Shortlands, I suppose? Ah,’ she sighed, ‘no, poor things, I should think not.’

‘You’ve been over there today, I suppose?’ asked the father.

‘Gerald came round to tea with me, and I walked back with him. The house is overexcited and unwholesome, I thought.’

‘I should think they were people who hadn’t much restraint,’ said Gudrun.

‘Or too much,’ Birkin answered.

‘Oh yes, I’m sure,’ said Gudrun, almost vindictively, ‘one or the other.’

‘They all feel they ought to behave in some unnatural fashion,’ said Birkin. ‘When people are in grief, they would do better to cover their faces and keep in retirement, as in the old days.’

‘Certainly!’ cried Gudrun, flushed and inflammable. ‘What can be worse than this public grief — what is more horrible, more false! If GRIEF is not private, and hidden, what is?’

‘Exactly,’ he said. ‘I felt ashamed when I was there and they were all going about in a lugubrious false way, feeling they must not be natural or ordinary.’

‘Well — ’ said Mrs Brangwen, offended at this criticism, ‘it isn’t so easy to bear a trouble like that.’

And she went upstairs to the children.

He remained only a few minutes longer, then took his leave. When he was gone Ursula felt such a poignant hatred of him, that all her brain seemed turned into a sharp crystal of fine hatred. Her whole nature seemed sharpened and intensified into a pure dart of hate. She could not imagine what it was. It merely took hold of her, the most poignant and ultimate hatred, pure and clear and beyond thought. She could not think of it at all, she was translated beyond herself. It was like a possession. She felt she was possessed. And for several days she went about possessed by this exquisite force of hatred against him. It surpassed anything she had ever known before, it seemed to throw her out of the world into some terrible region where nothing of her old life held good. She was quite lost and dazed, really dead to her own life.

It was so completely incomprehensible and irrational. She did not know WHY she hated him, her hate was quite abstract. She had only realised with a shock that stunned her, that she was overcome by this pure transportation. He was the enemy, fine as a diamond, and as hard and jewel-like, the quintessence of all that was inimical.

She thought of his face, white and purely wrought, and of his eyes that had such a dark, constant will of assertion, and she touched her own forehead, to feel if she were mad, she was so transfigured in white flame of essential hate.

It was not temporal, her hatred, she did not hate him for this or for that; she did not want to do anything to him, to have any connection with him. Her relation was ultimate and utterly beyond words, the hate was so pure and gemlike. It was as if he were a beam of essential enmity, a beam of light that did not only destroy her, but denied her altogether, revoked her whole world. She saw him as a clear stroke of uttermost contradiction, a strange gemlike being whose existence defined her own non-existence. When she heard he was ill again, her hatred only intensified itself a few degrees, if that were possible. It stunned her and annihilated her, but she could not escape it. She could not escape this transfiguration of hatred that had come upon her.

CHAPTER XVI.

MAN TO MAN

He lay sick and unmoved, in pure opposition to everything. He knew how near to breaking was the vessel that held his life. He knew also how strong and durable it was. And he did not care. Better a thousand times take one's chance with death, than accept a life one did not want. But best of all to persist and persist and persist for ever, till one were satisfied in life.

He knew that Ursula was referred back to him. He knew his life rested with her. But he would rather not live than accept the love she proffered. The old way of love seemed a dreadful bondage, a sort of conscription. What it was in him he did not know, but the thought of love, marriage, and children, and a life lived together, in the horrible privacy of domestic and connubial satisfaction, was repulsive. He wanted something clearer, more open, cooler, as it were. The hot narrow intimacy between man and wife was abhorrent. The way they shut their doors, these married people, and shut themselves in to their own exclusive alliance with each other, even in love, disgusted him. It was a whole community of mistrustful couples insulated in private houses or private rooms, always in couples, and no further life, no further immediate, no disinterested relationship admitted: a kaleidoscope of couples, disjoined, separatist, meaningless entities of married couples. True, he hated promiscuity even worse than marriage, and a liaison was only another kind of coupling, reactionary from the legal marriage. Reaction was a greater bore than action.

On the whole, he hated sex, it was such a limitation. It was sex that turned a man into a broken half of a couple, the woman into the other broken half. And he wanted to be single in himself, the woman single in herself. He wanted sex to revert to the level of the other appetites, to be regarded as a functional process, not as a fulfilment. He believed in sex marriage. But beyond this, he wanted a further conjunction, where man had being and woman had being, two pure beings, each constituting the freedom of the other, balancing each other like two poles of one force, like two angels, or two demons.

He wanted so much to be free, not under the compulsion of any need for

unification, or tortured by unsatisfied desire. Desire and aspiration should find their object without all this torture, as now, in a world of plenty of water, simple thirst is inconsiderable, satisfied almost unconsciously. And he wanted to be with Ursula as free as with himself, single and clear and cool, yet balanced, polarised with her. The merging, the clutching, the mingling of love was become madly abhorrent to him.

But it seemed to him, woman was always so horrible and clutching, she had such a lust for possession, a greed of self-importance in love. She wanted to have, to own, to control, to be dominant. Everything must be referred back to her, to Woman, the Great Mother of everything, out of whom proceeded everything and to whom everything must finally be rendered up.

It filled him with almost insane fury, this calm assumption of the Magna Mater, that all was hers, because she had borne it. Man was hers because she had borne him. A Mater Dolorosa, she had borne him, a Magna Mater, she now claimed him again, soul and body, sex, meaning, and all. He had a horror of the Magna Mater, she was detestable.

She was on a very high horse again, was woman, the Great Mother. Did he not know it in Hermione. Hermione, the humble, the subservient, what was she all the while but the Mater Dolorosa, in her subservience, claiming with horrible, insidious arrogance and female tyranny, her own again, claiming back the man she had borne in suffering. By her very suffering and humility she bound her son with chains, she held him her everlasting prisoner.

And Ursula, Ursula was the same — or the inverse. She too was the awful, arrogant queen of life, as if she were a queen bee on whom all the rest depended. He saw the yellow flare in her eyes, he knew the unthinkable overweening assumption of primacy in her. She was unconscious of it herself. She was only too ready to knock her head on the ground before a man. But this was only when she was so certain of her man, that she could worship him as a woman worships her own infant, with a worship of perfect possession.

It was intolerable, this possession at the hands of woman. Always a man must be considered as the broken off fragment of a woman, and the sex was the still aching scar of the laceration. Man must be added on to a woman, before he had any real place or wholeness.

And why? Why should we consider ourselves, men and women, as broken fragments of one whole? It is not true. We are not broken fragments of one whole. Rather we are the singling away into purity and clear being, of things that were mixed. Rather the sex is that which remains in us of the mixed, the unresolved. And passion is the further separating of this mixture, that which is manly being taken into the being of the man, that which is womanly passing to

the woman, till the two are clear and whole as angels, the admixture of sex in the highest sense surpassed, leaving two single beings constellated together like two stars.

In the old age, before sex was, we were mixed, each one a mixture. The process of singling into individuality resulted into the great polarisation of sex. The womanly drew to one side, the manly to the other. But the separation was imperfect even then. And so our world-cycle passes. There is now to come the new day, when we are beings each of us, fulfilled in difference. The man is pure man, the woman pure woman, they are perfectly polarised. But there is no longer any of the horrible merging, mingling self-abnegation of love. There is only the pure duality of polarisation, each one free from any contamination of the other. In each, the individual is primal, sex is subordinate, but perfectly polarised. Each has a single, separate being, with its own laws. The man has his pure freedom, the woman hers. Each acknowledges the perfection of the polarised sex-circuit. Each admits the different nature in the other.

So Birkin meditated whilst he was ill. He liked sometimes to be ill enough to take to his bed. For then he got better very quickly, and things came to him clear and sure.

Whilst he was laid up, Gerald came to see him. The two men had a deep, uneasy feeling for each other. Gerald's eyes were quick and restless, his whole manner tense and impatient, he seemed strung up to some activity. According to conventionality, he wore black clothes, he looked formal, handsome and COMME IL FAUT. His hair was fair almost to whiteness, sharp like splinters of light, his face was keen and ruddy, his body seemed full of northern energy. Gerald really loved Birkin, though he never quite believed in him. Birkin was too unreal; — clever, whimsical, wonderful, but not practical enough. Gerald felt that his own understanding was much sounder and safer. Birkin was delightful, a wonderful spirit, but after all, not to be taken seriously, not quite to be counted as a man among men.

'Why are you laid up again?' he asked kindly, taking the sick man's hand. It was always Gerald who was protective, offering the warm shelter of his physical strength.

'For my sins, I suppose,' Birkin said, smiling a little ironically.

'For your sins? Yes, probably that is so. You should sin less, and keep better in health?'

'You'd better teach me.'

He looked at Gerald with ironic eyes.

'How are things with you?' asked Birkin.

'With me?' Gerald looked at Birkin, saw he was serious, and a warm light

came into his eyes.

‘I don’t know that they’re any different. I don’t see how they could be. There’s nothing to change.’

‘I suppose you are conducting the business as successfully as ever, and ignoring the demand of the soul.’

‘That’s it,’ said Gerald. ‘At least as far as the business is concerned. I couldn’t say about the soul, I’m sure.’

‘No.’

‘Surely you don’t expect me to?’ laughed Gerald.

‘No. How are the rest of your affairs progressing, apart from the business?’

‘The rest of my affairs? What are those? I couldn’t say; I don’t know what you refer to.’

‘Yes, you do,’ said Birkin. ‘Are you gloomy or cheerful? And what about Gudrun Brangwen?’

‘What about her?’ A confused look came over Gerald. ‘Well,’ he added, ‘I don’t know. I can only tell you she gave me a hit over the face last time I saw her.’

‘A hit over the face! What for?’

‘That I couldn’t tell you, either.’

‘Really! But when?’

‘The night of the party — when Diana was drowned. She was driving the cattle up the hill, and I went after her — you remember.’

‘Yes, I remember. But what made her do that? You didn’t definitely ask her for it, I suppose?’

‘I? No, not that I know of. I merely said to her, that it was dangerous to drive those Highland bullocks — as it IS. She turned in such a way, and said — “I suppose you think I’m afraid of you and your cattle, don’t you?” So I asked her “why,” and for answer she flung me a back-hander across the face.’

Birkin laughed quickly, as if it pleased him. Gerald looked at him, wondering, and began to laugh as well, saying:

‘I didn’t laugh at the time, I assure you. I was never so taken aback in my life.’

‘And weren’t you furious?’

‘Furious? I should think I was. I’d have murdered her for two pins.’

‘H’m!’ ejaculated Birkin. ‘Poor Gudrun, wouldn’t she suffer afterwards for having given herself away!’ He was hugely delighted.

‘Would she suffer?’ asked Gerald, also amused now.

Both men smiled in malice and amusement.

‘Badly, I should think; seeing how self-conscious she is.’

‘She is self-conscious, is she? Then what made her do it? For I certainly think

it was quite uncalled-for, and quite unjustified.'

'I suppose it was a sudden impulse.'

'Yes, but how do you account for her having such an impulse? I'd done her no harm.'

Birkin shook his head.

'The Amazon suddenly came up in her, I suppose,' he said.

'Well,' replied Gerald, 'I'd rather it had been the Orinoco.'

They both laughed at the poor joke. Gerald was thinking how Gudrun had said she would strike the last blow too. But some reserve made him keep this back from Birkin.

'And you resent it?' Birkin asked.

'I don't resent it. I don't care a tinker's curse about it.' He was silent a moment, then he added, laughing. 'No, I'll see it through, that's all. She seemed sorry afterwards.'

'Did she? You've not met since that night?'

Gerald's face clouded.

'No,' he said. 'We've been — you can imagine how it's been, since the accident.'

'Yes. Is it calming down?'

'I don't know. It's a shock, of course. But I don't believe mother minds. I really don't believe she takes any notice. And what's so funny, she used to be all for the children — nothing mattered, nothing whatever mattered but the children. And now, she doesn't take any more notice than if it was one of the servants.'

'No? Did it upset YOU very much?'

'It's a shock. But I don't feel it very much, really. I don't feel any different. We've all got to die, and it doesn't seem to make any great difference, anyhow, whether you die or not. I can't feel any GRIEF you know. It leaves me cold. I can't quite account for it.'

'You don't care if you die or not?' asked Birkin.

Gerald looked at him with eyes blue as the blue-fibred steel of a weapon. He felt awkward, but indifferent. As a matter of fact, he did care terribly, with a great fear.

'Oh,' he said, 'I don't want to die, why should I? But I never trouble. The question doesn't seem to be on the carpet for me at all. It doesn't interest me, you know.'

'TIMOR MORTIS CONTURBAT ME,' quoted Birkin, adding — 'No, death doesn't really seem the point any more. It curiously doesn't concern one. It's like an ordinary tomorrow.'

Gerald looked closely at his friend. The eyes of the two men met, and an

unspoken understanding was exchanged.

Gerald narrowed his eyes, his face was cool and unscrupulous as he looked at Birkin, impersonally, with a vision that ended in a point in space, strangely keen-eyed and yet blind.

‘If death isn’t the point,’ he said, in a strangely abstract, cold, fine voice — ‘what is?’ He sounded as if he had been found out.

‘What is?’ re-echoed Birkin. And there was a mocking silence.

‘There’s long way to go, after the point of intrinsic death, before we disappear,’ said Birkin.

‘There is,’ said Gerald. ‘But what sort of way?’ He seemed to press the other man for knowledge which he himself knew far better than Birkin did.

‘Right down the slopes of degeneration — mystic, universal degeneration. There are many stages of pure degradation to go through: agelong. We live on long after our death, and progressively, in progressive devolution.’

Gerald listened with a faint, fine smile on his face, all the time, as if, somewhere, he knew so much better than Birkin, all about this: as if his own knowledge were direct and personal, whereas Birkin’s was a matter of observation and inference, not quite hitting the nail on the head: — though aiming near enough at it. But he was not going to give himself away. If Birkin could get at the secrets, let him. Gerald would never help him. Gerald would be a dark horse to the end.

‘Of course,’ he said, with a startling change of conversation, ‘it is father who really feels it. It will finish him. For him the world collapses. All his care now is for Winnie — he must save Winnie. He says she ought to be sent away to school, but she won’t hear of it, and he’ll never do it. Of course she IS in rather a queer way. We’re all of us curiously bad at living. We can do things — but we can’t get on with life at all. It’s curious — a family failing.’

‘She oughtn’t to be sent away to school,’ said Birkin, who was considering a new proposition.

‘She oughtn’t. Why?’

‘She’s a queer child — a special child, more special even than you. And in my opinion special children should never be sent away to school. Only moderately ordinary children should be sent to school — so it seems to me.’

‘I’m inclined to think just the opposite. I think it would probably make her more normal if she went away and mixed with other children.’

‘She wouldn’t mix, you see. YOU never really mixed, did you? And she wouldn’t be willing even to pretend to. She’s proud, and solitary, and naturally apart. If she has a single nature, why do you want to make her gregarious?’

‘No, I don’t want to make her anything. But I think school would be good for

her.'

'Was it good for you?'

Gerald's eyes narrowed uglily. School had been torture to him. Yet he had not questioned whether one should go through this torture. He seemed to believe in education through subjection and torment.

'I hated it at the time, but I can see it was necessary,' he said. 'It brought me into line a bit — and you can't live unless you do come into line somewhere.'

'Well,' said Birkin, 'I begin to think that you can't live unless you keep entirely out of the line. It's no good trying to toe the line, when your one impulse is to smash up the line. Winnie is a special nature, and for special natures you must give a special world.'

'Yes, but where's your special world?' said Gerald.

'Make it. Instead of chopping yourself down to fit the world, chop the world down to fit yourself. As a matter of fact, two exceptional people make another world. You and I, we make another, separate world. You don't WANT a world same as your brothers-in-law. It's just the special quality you value. Do you WANT to be normal or ordinary! It's a lie. You want to be free and extraordinary, in an extraordinary world of liberty.'

Gerald looked at Birkin with subtle eyes of knowledge. But he would never openly admit what he felt. He knew more than Birkin, in one direction — much more. And this gave him his gentle love for the other man, as if Birkin were in some way young, innocent, child-like: so amazingly clever, but incurably innocent.

'Yet you are so banal as to consider me chiefly a freak,' said Birkin pointedly.

'A freak!' exclaimed Gerald, startled. And his face opened suddenly, as if lighted with simplicity, as when a flower opens out of the cunning bud. 'No — I never consider you a freak.' And he watched the other man with strange eyes, that Birkin could not understand. 'I feel,' Gerald continued, 'that there is always an element of uncertainty about you — perhaps you are uncertain about yourself. But I'm never sure of you. You can go away and change as easily as if you had no soul.'

He looked at Birkin with penetrating eyes. Birkin was amazed. He thought he had all the soul in the world. He stared in amazement. And Gerald, watching, saw the amazing attractive goodliness of his eyes, a young, spontaneous goodness that attracted the other man infinitely, yet filled him with bitter chagrin, because he mistrusted it so much. He knew Birkin could do without him — could forget, and not suffer. This was always present in Gerald's consciousness, filling him with bitter unbelief: this consciousness of the young, animal-like spontaneity of detachment. It seemed almost like hypocrisy and

lying, sometimes, oh, often, on Birkin's part, to talk so deeply and importantly.

Quite other things were going through Birkin's mind. Suddenly he saw himself confronted with another problem — the problem of love and eternal conjunction between two men. Of course this was necessary — it had been a necessity inside himself all his life — to love a man purely and fully. Of course he had been loving Gerald all along, and all along denying it.

He lay in the bed and wondered, whilst his friend sat beside him, lost in brooding. Each man was gone in his own thoughts.

'You know how the old German knights used to swear a BLUTBRUDERSCHAFT,' he said to Gerald, with quite a new happy activity in his eyes.

'Make a little wound in their arms, and rub each other's blood into the cut?' said Gerald.

'Yes — and swear to be true to each other, of one blood, all their lives. That is what we ought to do. No wounds, that is obsolete. But we ought to swear to love each other, you and I, implicitly, and perfectly, finally, without any possibility of going back on it.'

He looked at Gerald with clear, happy eyes of discovery. Gerald looked down at him, attracted, so deeply bonded in fascinated attraction, that he was mistrustful, resenting the bondage, hating the attraction.

'We will swear to each other, one day, shall we?' pleaded Birkin. 'We will swear to stand by each other — be true to each other — ultimately — infallibly — given to each other, organically — without possibility of taking back.'

Birkin sought hard to express himself. But Gerald hardly listened. His face shone with a certain luminous pleasure. He was pleased. But he kept his reserve. He held himself back.

'Shall we swear to each other, one day?' said Birkin, putting out his hand towards Gerald.

Gerald just touched the extended fine, living hand, as if withheld and afraid.

'We'll leave it till I understand it better,' he said, in a voice of excuse.

Birkin watched him. A little sharp disappointment, perhaps a touch of contempt came into his heart.

'Yes,' he said. 'You must tell me what you think, later. You know what I mean? Not sloppy emotionalism. An impersonal union that leaves one free.'

They lapsed both into silence. Birkin was looking at Gerald all the time. He seemed now to see, not the physical, animal man, which he usually saw in Gerald, and which usually he liked so much, but the man himself, complete, and as if fated, doomed, limited. This strange sense of fatality in Gerald, as if he were limited to one form of existence, one knowledge, one activity, a sort of

fatal halfness, which to himself seemed wholeness, always overcame Birkin after their moments of passionate approach, and filled him with a sort of contempt, or boredom. It was the insistence on the limitation which so bored Birkin in Gerald. Gerald could never fly away from himself, in real indifferent gaiety. He had a clog, a sort of monomania.

There was silence for a time. Then Birkin said, in a lighter tone, letting the stress of the contact pass:

‘Can’t you get a good governess for Winifred? — somebody exceptional?’

‘Hermione Roddice suggested we should ask Gudrun to teach her to draw and to model in clay. You know Winnie is astonishingly clever with that plasticine stuff. Hermione declares she is an artist.’ Gerald spoke in the usual animated, chatty manner, as if nothing unusual had passed. But Birkin’s manner was full of reminder.

‘Really! I didn’t know that. Oh well then, if Gudrun WOULD teach her, it would be perfect — couldn’t be anything better — if Winifred is an artist. Because Gudrun somewhere is one. And every true artist is the salvation of every other.’

‘I thought they got on so badly, as a rule.’

‘Perhaps. But only artists produce for each other the world that is fit to live in. If you can arrange THAT for Winifred, it is perfect.’

‘But you think she wouldn’t come?’

‘I don’t know. Gudrun is rather self-opinionated. She won’t go cheap anywhere. Or if she does, she’ll pretty soon take herself back. So whether she would condescend to do private teaching, particularly here, in Beldover, I don’t know. But it would be just the thing. Winifred has got a special nature. And if you can put into her way the means of being self-sufficient, that is the best thing possible. She’ll never get on with the ordinary life. You find it difficult enough yourself, and she is several skins thinner than you are. It is awful to think what her life will be like unless she does find a means of expression, some way of fulfilment. You can see what mere leaving it to fate brings. You can see how much marriage is to be trusted to — look at your own mother.’

‘Do you think mother is abnormal?’

‘No! I think she only wanted something more, or other than the common run of life. And not getting it, she has gone wrong perhaps.’

‘After producing a brood of wrong children,’ said Gerald gloomily.

‘No more wrong than any of the rest of us,’ Birkin replied. ‘The most normal people have the worst subterranean selves, take them one by one.’

‘Sometimes I think it is a curse to be alive,’ said Gerald with sudden impotent anger.

‘Well,’ said Birkin, ‘why not! Let it be a curse sometimes to be alive — at other times it is anything but a curse. You’ve got plenty of zest in it really.’

‘Less than you’d think,’ said Gerald, revealing a strange poverty in his look at the other man.

There was silence, each thinking his own thoughts.

‘I don’t see what she has to distinguish between teaching at the Grammar School, and coming to teach Win,’ said Gerald.

‘The difference between a public servant and a private one. The only nobleman today, king and only aristocrat, is the public, the public. You are quite willing to serve the public — but to be a private tutor — ’

‘I don’t want to serve either — ’

‘No! And Gudrun will probably feel the same.’

Gerald thought for a few minutes. Then he said:

‘At all events, father won’t make her feel like a private servant. He will be fussy and grateful enough.’

‘So he ought. And so ought all of you. Do you think you can hire a woman like Gudrun Brangwen with money? She is your equal like anything — probably your superior.’

‘Is she?’ said Gerald.

‘Yes, and if you haven’t the guts to know it, I hope she’ll leave you to your own devices.’

‘Nevertheless,’ said Gerald, ‘if she is my equal, I wish she weren’t a teacher, because I don’t think teachers as a rule are my equal.’

‘Nor do I, damn them. But am I a teacher because I teach, or a parson because I preach?’

Gerald laughed. He was always uneasy on this score. He did not WANT to claim social superiority, yet he WOULD not claim intrinsic personal superiority, because he would never base his standard of values on pure being. So he wobbled upon a tacit assumption of social standing. No, Birkin wanted him to accept the fact of intrinsic difference between human beings, which he did not intend to accept. It was against his social honour, his principle. He rose to go.

‘I’ve been neglecting my business all this while,’ he said smiling.

‘I ought to have reminded you before,’ Birkin replied, laughing and mocking.

‘I knew you’d say something like that,’ laughed Gerald, rather uneasily.

‘Did you?’

‘Yes, Rupert. It wouldn’t do for us all to be like you are — we should soon be in the cart. When I am above the world, I shall ignore all businesses.’

‘Of course, we’re not in the cart now,’ said Birkin, satirically.

‘Not as much as you make out. At any rate, we have enough to eat and drink

— ’

‘And be satisfied,’ added Birkin.

Gerald came near the bed and stood looking down at Birkin whose throat was exposed, whose tossed hair fell attractively on the warm brow, above the eyes that were so unchallenged and still in the satirical face. Gerald, full-limbed and turgid with energy, stood unwilling to go, he was held by the presence of the other man. He had not the power to go away.

‘So,’ said Birkin. ‘Good-bye.’ And he reached out his hand from under the bed-clothes, smiling with a glimmering look.

‘Good-bye,’ said Gerald, taking the warm hand of his friend in a firm grasp. ‘I shall come again. I miss you down at the mill.’

‘I’ll be there in a few days,’ said Birkin.

The eyes of the two men met again. Gerald’s, that were keen as a hawk’s, were suffused now with warm light and with unadmitted love, Birkin looked back as out of a darkness, unsounded and unknown, yet with a kind of warmth, that seemed to flow over Gerald’s brain like a fertile sleep.

‘Good-bye then. There’s nothing I can do for you?’

‘Nothing, thanks.’

Birkin watched the black-clothed form of the other man move out of the door, the bright head was gone, he turned over to sleep.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE INDUSTRIAL MAGNATE

In Beldover, there was both for Ursula and for Gudrun an interval. It seemed to Ursula as if Birkin had gone out of her for the time, he had lost his significance, he scarcely mattered in her world. She had her own friends, her own activities, her own life. She turned back to the old ways with zest, away from him.

And Gudrun, after feeling every moment in all her veins conscious of Gerald Crich, connected even physically with him, was now almost indifferent to the thought of him. She was nursing new schemes for going away and trying a new form of life. All the time, there was something in her urging her to avoid the final establishing of a relationship with Gerald. She felt it would be wiser and better to have no more than a casual acquaintance with him.

She had a scheme for going to St Petersburg, where she had a friend who was a sculptor like herself, and who lived with a wealthy Russian whose hobby was jewel-making. The emotional, rather rootless life of the Russians appealed to her. She did not want to go to Paris. Paris was dry, and essentially boring. She would like to go to Rome, Munich, Vienna, or to St Petersburg or Moscow. She had a friend in St Petersburg and a friend in Munich. To each of these she wrote, asking about rooms.

She had a certain amount of money. She had come home partly to save, and now she had sold several pieces of work, she had been praised in various shows. She knew she could become quite the 'go' if she went to London. But she knew London, she wanted something else. She had seventy pounds, of which nobody knew anything. She would move soon, as soon as she heard from her friends. Her nature, in spite of her apparent placidity and calm, was profoundly restless.

The sisters happened to call in a cottage in Willey Green to buy honey. Mrs Kirk, a stout, pale, sharp-nosed woman, sly, honied, with something shrewish and cat-like beneath, asked the girls into her toocosity, too tidy kitchen. There was a cat-like comfort and cleanliness everywhere.

'Yes, Miss Brangwen,' she said, in her slightly whining, insinuating voice, 'and how do you like being back in the old place, then?'

Gudrun, whom she addressed, hated her at once.

‘I don’t care for it,’ she replied abruptly.

‘You don’t? Ay, well, I suppose you found a difference from London. You like life, and big, grand places. Some of us has to be content with Willey Green and Beldover. And what do you think of our Grammar School, as there’s so much talk about?’

‘What do I think of it?’ Gudrun looked round at her slowly. ‘Do you mean, do I think it’s a good school?’

‘Yes. What is your opinion of it?’

‘I DO think it’s a good school.’

Gudrun was very cold and repelling. She knew the common people hated the school.

‘Ay, you do, then! I’ve heard so much, one way and the other. It’s nice to know what those that’s in it feel. But opinions vary, don’t they? Mr Crich up at Highclose is all for it. Ay, poor man, I’m afraid he’s not long for this world. He’s very poorly.’

‘Is he worse?’ asked Ursula.

‘Eh, yes — since they lost Miss Diana. He’s gone off to a shadow. Poor man, he’s had a world of trouble.’

‘Has he?’ asked Gudrun, faintly ironic.

‘He has, a world of trouble. And as nice and kind a gentleman as ever you could wish to meet. His children don’t take after him.’

‘I suppose they take after their mother?’ said Ursula.

‘In many ways.’ Mrs Krik lowered her voice a little. ‘She was a proud haughty lady when she came into these parts — my word, she was that! She mustn’t be looked at, and it was worth your life to speak to her.’ The woman made a dry, sly face.

‘Did you know her when she was first married?’

‘Yes, I knew her. I nursed three of her children. And proper little terrors they were, little fiends — that Gerald was a demon if ever there was one, a proper demon, ay, at six months old.’ A curious malicious, sly tone came into the woman’s voice.

‘Really,’ said Gudrun.

‘That wilful, masterful — he’d mastered one nurse at six months. Kick, and scream, and struggle like a demon. Many’s the time I’ve pinched his little bottom for him, when he was a child in arms. Ay, and he’d have been better if he’d had it pinched oftener. But she wouldn’t have them corrected — no-o, wouldn’t hear of it. I can remember the rows she had with Mr Crich, my word. When he’d got worked up, properly worked up till he could stand no more, he’d

lock the study door and whip them. But she paced up and down all the while like a tiger outside, like a tiger, with very murder in her face. She had a face that could LOOK death. And when the door was opened, she'd go in with her hands lifted — "What have you been doing to MY children, you coward." She was like one out of her mind. I believe he was frightened of her; he had to be driven mad before he'd lift a finger. Didn't the servants have a life of it! And didn't we used to be thankful when one of them caught it. They were the torment of your life.'

'Really!' said Gudrun.

'In every possible way. If you wouldn't let them smash their pots on the table, if you wouldn't let them drag the kitten about with a string round its neck, if you wouldn't give them whatever they asked for, every mortal thing — then there was a shine on, and their mother coming in asking — "What's the matter with him? What have you done to him? What is it, Darling?" And then she'd turn on you as if she'd trample you under her feet. But she didn't trample on me. I was the only one that could do anything with her demons — for she wasn't going to be bothered with them herself. No, SHE took no trouble for them. But they must just have their way, they mustn't be spoken to. And Master Gerald was the beauty. I left when he was a year and a half, I could stand no more. But I pinched his little bottom for him when he was in arms, I did, when there was no holding him, and I'm not sorry I did — '

Gudrun went away in fury and loathing. The phrase, 'I pinched his little bottom for him,' sent her into a white, stony fury. She could not bear it, she wanted to have the woman taken out at once and strangled. And yet there the phrase was lodged in her mind for ever, beyond escape. She felt, one day, she would HAVE to tell him, to see how he took it. And she loathed herself for the thought.

But at Shortlands the life-long struggle was coming to a close. The father was ill and was going to die. He had bad internal pains, which took away all his attentive life, and left him with only a vestige of his consciousness. More and more a silence came over him, he was less and less acutely aware of his surroundings. The pain seemed to absorb his activity. He knew it was there, he knew it would come again. It was like something lurking in the darkness within him. And he had not the power, or the will, to seek it out and to know it. There it remained in the darkness, the great pain, tearing him at times, and then being silent. And when it tore him he crouched in silent subjection under it, and when it left him alone again, he refused to know of it. It was within the darkness, let it remain unknown. So he never admitted it, except in a secret corner of himself, where all his never-revealed fears and secrets were accumulated. For the rest, he had a pain, it went away, it made no difference. It even stimulated him, excited

him.

But it gradually absorbed his life. Gradually it drew away all his potentiality, it bled him into the dark, it weaned him of life and drew him away into the darkness. And in this twilight of his life little remained visible to him. The business, his work, that was gone entirely. His public interests had disappeared as if they had never been. Even his family had become extraneous to him, he could only remember, in some slight non-essential part of himself, that such and such were his children. But it was historical fact, not vital to him. He had to make an effort to know their relation to him. Even his wife barely existed. She indeed was like the darkness, like the pain within him. By some strange association, the darkness that contained the pain and the darkness that contained his wife were identical. All his thoughts and understandings became blurred and fused, and now his wife and the consuming pain were the same dark secret power against him, that he never faced. He never drove the dread out of its lair within him. He only knew that there was a dark place, and something inhabiting this darkness which issued from time to time and rent him. But he dared not penetrate and drive the beast into the open. He had rather ignore its existence. Only, in his vague way, the dread was his wife, the destroyer, and it was the pain, the destruction, a darkness which was one and both.

He very rarely saw his wife. She kept her room. Only occasionally she came forth, with her head stretched forward, and in her low, possessed voice, she asked him how he was. And he answered her, in the habit of more than thirty years: 'Well, I don't think I'm any the worse, dear.' But he was frightened of her, underneath this safeguard of habit, frightened almost to the verge of death.

But all his life, he had been so constant to his lights, he had never broken down. He would die even now without breaking down, without knowing what his feelings were, towards her. All his life, he had said: 'Poor Christiana, she has such a strong temper.' With unbroken will, he had stood by this position with regard to her, he had substituted pity for all his hostility, pity had been his shield and his safeguard, and his infallible weapon. And still, in his consciousness, he was sorry for her, her nature was so violent and so impatient.

But now his pity, with his life, was wearing thin, and the dread almost amounting to horror, was rising into being. But before the armour of his pity really broke, he would die, as an insect when its shell is cracked. This was his final resource. Others would live on, and know the living death, the ensuing process of hopeless chaos. He would not. He denied death its victory.

He had been so constant to his lights, so constant to charity, and to his love for his neighbour. Perhaps he had loved his neighbour even better than himself — which is going one further than the commandment. Always, this flame had

burned in his heart, sustaining him through everything, the welfare of the people. He was a large employer of labour, he was a great mine-owner. And he had never lost this from his heart, that in Christ he was one with his workmen. Nay, he had felt inferior to them, as if they through poverty and labour were nearer to God than he. He had always the unacknowledged belief, that it was his workmen, the miners, who held in their hands the means of salvation. To move nearer to God, he must move towards his miners, his life must gravitate towards theirs. They were, unconsciously, his idol, his God made manifest. In them he worshipped the highest, the great, sympathetic, mindless Godhead of humanity.

And all the while, his wife had opposed him like one of the great demons of hell. Strange, like a bird of prey, with the fascinating beauty and abstraction of a hawk, she had beat against the bars of his philanthropy, and like a hawk in a cage, she had sunk into silence. By force of circumstance, because all the world combined to make the cage unbreakable, he had been too strong for her, he had kept her prisoner. And because she was his prisoner, his passion for her had always remained keen as death. He had always loved her, loved her with intensity. Within the cage, she was denied nothing, she was given all licence.

But she had gone almost mad. Of wild and overweening temper, she could not bear the humiliation of her husband's soft, half-appealing kindness to everybody. He was not deceived by the poor. He knew they came and sponged on him, and whined to him, the worse sort; the majority, luckily for him, were much too proud to ask for anything, much too independent to come knocking at his door. But in Beldover, as everywhere else, there were the whining, parasitic, foul human beings who come crawling after charity, and feeding on the living body of the public like lice. A kind of fire would go over Christiana Crich's brain, as she saw two more pale-faced, creeping women in objectionable black clothes, cringing lugubriously up the drive to the door. She wanted to set the dogs on them, 'Hi Rip! Hi Ring! Ranger! At 'em boys, set 'em off.' But Crowther, the butler, with all the rest of the servants, was Mr Crich's man. Nevertheless, when her husband was away, she would come down like a wolf on the crawling supplicants;

'What do you people want? There is nothing for you here. You have no business on the drive at all. Simpson, drive them away and let no more of them through the gate.'

The servants had to obey her. And she would stand watching with an eye like the eagle's, whilst the groom in clumsy confusion drove the lugubrious persons down the drive, as if they were rusty fowls, scuttling before him.

But they learned to know, from the lodge-keeper, when Mrs Crich was away, and they timed their visits. How many times, in the first years, would Crowther

knock softly at the door: 'Person to see you, sir.'

'What name?'

'Grocock, sir.'

'What do they want?' The question was half impatient, half gratified. He liked hearing appeals to his charity.

'About a child, sir.'

'Show them into the library, and tell them they shouldn't come after eleven o'clock in the morning.'

'Why do you get up from dinner? — send them off,' his wife would say abruptly.

'Oh, I can't do that. It's no trouble just to hear what they have to say.'

'How many more have been here today? Why don't you establish open house for them? They would soon oust me and the children.'

'You know dear, it doesn't hurt me to hear what they have to say. And if they really are in trouble — well, it is my duty to help them out of it.'

'It's your duty to invite all the rats in the world to gnaw at your bones.'

'Come, Christiana, it isn't like that. Don't be uncharitable.'

But she suddenly swept out of the room, and out to the study. There sat the meagre charity-seekers, looking as if they were at the doctor's.

'Mr Crich can't see you. He can't see you at this hour. Do you think he is your property, that you can come whenever you like? You must go away, there is nothing for you here.'

The poor people rose in confusion. But Mr Crich, pale and black-bearded and deprecating, came behind her, saying:

'Yes, I don't like you coming as late as this. I'll hear any of you in the morning part of the day, but I can't really do with you after. What's amiss then, Gittens. How is your Missis?'

'Why, she's sunk very low, Mester Crich, she's a'most gone, she is — '

Sometimes, it seemed to Mrs Crich as if her husband were some subtle funeral bird, feeding on the miseries of the people. It seemed to her he was never satisfied unless there was some sordid tale being poured out to him, which he drank in with a sort of mournful, sympathetic satisfaction. He would have no RAISON D'ETRE if there were no lugubrious miseries in the world, as an undertaker would have no meaning if there were no funerals.

Mrs Crich recoiled back upon herself, she recoiled away from this world of creeping democracy. A band of tight, baleful exclusion fastened round her heart, her isolation was fierce and hard, her antagonism was passive but terribly pure, like that of a hawk in a cage. As the years went on, she lost more and more count of the world, she seemed rapt in some glittering abstraction, almost purely

unconscious. She would wander about the house and about the surrounding country, staring keenly and seeing nothing. She rarely spoke, she had no connection with the world. And she did not even think. She was consumed in a fierce tension of opposition, like the negative pole of a magnet.

And she bore many children. For, as time went on, she never opposed her husband in word or deed. She took no notice of him, externally. She submitted to him, let him take what he wanted and do as he wanted with her. She was like a hawk that sullenly submits to everything. The relation between her and her husband was wordless and unknown, but it was deep, awful, a relation of utter inter-destruction. And he, who triumphed in the world, he became more and more hollow in his vitality, the vitality was bled from within him, as by some haemorrhage. She was hulked like a hawk in a cage, but her heart was fierce and undiminished within her, though her mind was destroyed.

So to the last he would go to her and hold her in his arms sometimes, before his strength was all gone. The terrible white, destructive light that burned in her eyes only excited and roused him. Till he was bled to death, and then he dreaded her more than anything. But he always said to himself, how happy he had been, how he had loved her with a pure and consuming love ever since he had known her. And he thought of her as pure, chaste; the white flame which was known to him alone, the flame of her sex, was a white flower of snow to his mind. She was a wonderful white snow-flower, which he had desired infinitely. And now he was dying with all his ideas and interpretations intact. They would only collapse when the breath left his body. Till then they would be pure truths for him. Only death would show the perfect completeness of the lie. Till death, she was his white snow-flower. He had subdued her, and her subjugation was to him an infinite chastity in her, a virginity which he could never break, and which dominated him as by a spell.

She had let go the outer world, but within herself she was unbroken and unimpaired. She only sat in her room like a moping, dishevelled hawk, motionless, mindless. Her children, for whom she had been so fierce in her youth, now meant scarcely anything to her. She had lost all that, she was quite by herself. Only Gerald, the gleaming, had some existence for her. But of late years, since he had become head of the business, he too was forgotten. Whereas the father, now he was dying, turned for compassion to Gerald. There had always been opposition between the two of them. Gerald had feared and despised his father, and to a great extent had avoided him all through boyhood and young manhood. And the father had felt very often a real dislike of his eldest son, which, never wanting to give way to, he had refused to acknowledge. He had ignored Gerald as much as possible, leaving him alone.

Since, however, Gerald had come home and assumed responsibility in the firm, and had proved such a wonderful director, the father, tired and weary of all outside concerns, had put all his trust of these things in his son, implicitly, leaving everything to him, and assuming a rather touching dependence on the young enemy. This immediately roused a poignant pity and allegiance in Gerald's heart, always shadowed by contempt and by unadmitted enmity. For Gerald was in reaction against Charity; and yet he was dominated by it, it assumed supremacy in the inner life, and he could not confute it. So he was partly subject to that which his father stood for, but he was in reaction against it. Now he could not save himself. A certain pity and grief and tenderness for his father overcame him, in spite of the deeper, more sullen hostility.

The father won shelter from Gerald through compassion. But for love he had Winifred. She was his youngest child, she was the only one of his children whom he had ever closely loved. And her he loved with all the great, overweening, sheltering love of a dying man. He wanted to shelter her infinitely, infinitely, to wrap her in warmth and love and shelter, perfectly. If he could save her she should never know one pain, one grief, one hurt. He had been so right all his life, so constant in his kindness and his goodness. And this was his last passionate righteousness, his love for the child Winifred. Some things troubled him yet. The world had passed away from him, as his strength ebbed. There were no more poor and injured and humble to protect and succour. These were all lost to him. There were no more sons and daughters to trouble him, and to weigh on him as an unnatural responsibility. These too had faded out of reality. All these things had fallen out of his hands, and left him free.

There remained the covert fear and horror of his wife, as she sat mindless and strange in her room, or as she came forth with slow, prowling step, her head bent forward. But this he put away. Even his life-long righteousness, however, would not quite deliver him from the inner horror. Still, he could keep it sufficiently at bay. It would never break forth openly. Death would come first.

Then there was Winifred! If only he could be sure about her, if only he could be sure. Since the death of Diana, and the development of his illness, his craving for surety with regard to Winifred amounted almost to obsession. It was as if, even dying, he must have some anxiety, some responsibility of love, of Charity, upon his heart.

She was an odd, sensitive, inflammable child, having her father's dark hair and quiet bearing, but being quite detached, momentaneous. She was like a changeling indeed, as if her feelings did not matter to her, really. She often seemed to be talking and playing like the gayest and most childish of children, she was full of the warmest, most delightful affection for a few things — for her

father, and for her animals in particular. But if she heard that her beloved kitten Leo had been run over by the motor-car she put her head on one side, and replied, with a faint contraction like resentment on her face: 'Has he?' Then she took no more notice. She only disliked the servant who would force bad news on her, and wanted her to be sorry. She wished not to know, and that seemed her chief motive. She avoided her mother, and most of the members of her family. She LOVED her Daddy, because he wanted her always to be happy, and because he seemed to become young again, and irresponsible in her presence. She liked Gerald, because he was so self-contained. She loved people who would make life a game for her. She had an amazing instinctive critical faculty, and was a pure anarchist, a pure aristocrat at once. For she accepted her equals wherever she found them, and she ignored with blithe indifference her inferiors, whether they were her brothers and sisters, or whether they were wealthy guests of the house, or whether they were the common people or the servants. She was quite single and by herself, deriving from nobody. It was as if she were cut off from all purpose or continuity, and existed simply moment by moment.

The father, as by some strange final illusion, felt as if all his fate depended on his ensuring to Winifred her happiness. She who could never suffer, because she never formed vital connections, she who could lose the dearest things of her life and be just the same the next day, the whole memory dropped out, as if deliberately, she whose will was so strangely and easily free, anarchistic, almost nihilistic, who like a soulless bird flits on its own will, without attachment or responsibility beyond the moment, who in her every motion snapped the threads of serious relationship with blithe, free hands, really nihilistic, because never troubled, she must be the object of her father's final passionate solicitude.

When Mr Crich heard that Gudrun Brangwen might come to help Winifred with her drawing and modelling he saw a road to salvation for his child. He believed that Winifred had talent, he had seen Gudrun, he knew that she was an exceptional person. He could give Winifred into her hands as into the hands of a right being. Here was a direction and a positive force to be lent to his child, he need not leave her directionless and defenceless. If he could but graft the girl on to some tree of utterance before he died, he would have fulfilled his responsibility. And here it could be done. He did not hesitate to appeal to Gudrun.

Meanwhile, as the father drifted more and more out of life, Gerald experienced more and more a sense of exposure. His father after all had stood for the living world to him. Whilst his father lived Gerald was not responsible for the world. But now his father was passing away, Gerald found himself left exposed and unready before the storm of living, like the mutinous first mate of a

ship that has lost his captain, and who sees only a terrible chaos in front of him. He did not inherit an established order and a living idea. The whole unifying idea of mankind seemed to be dying with his father, the centralising force that had held the whole together seemed to collapse with his father, the parts were ready to go asunder in terrible disintegration. Gerald was as if left on board of a ship that was going asunder beneath his feet, he was in charge of a vessel whose timbers were all coming apart.

He knew that all his life he had been wrenching at the frame of life to break it apart. And now, with something of the terror of a destructive child, he saw himself on the point of inheriting his own destruction. And during the last months, under the influence of death, and of Birkin's talk, and of Gudrun's penetrating being, he had lost entirely that mechanical certainty that had been his triumph. Sometimes spasms of hatred came over him, against Birkin and Gudrun and that whole set. He wanted to go back to the dullest conservatism, to the most stupid of conventional people. He wanted to revert to the strictest Toryism. But the desire did not last long enough to carry him into action.

During his childhood and his boyhood he had wanted a sort of savagedom. The days of Homer were his ideal, when a man was chief of an army of heroes, or spent his years in wonderful Odyssey. He hated remorselessly the circumstances of his own life, so much that he never really saw Beldover and the colliery valley. He turned his face entirely away from the blackened mining region that stretched away on the right hand of Shortlands, he turned entirely to the country and the woods beyond Willey Water. It was true that the panting and rattling of the coal mines could always be heard at Shortlands. But from his earliest childhood, Gerald had paid no heed to this. He had ignored the whole of the industrial sea which surged in coal-blackened tides against the grounds of the house. The world was really a wilderness where one hunted and swam and rode. He rebelled against all authority. Life was a condition of savage freedom.

Then he had been sent away to school, which was so much death to him. He refused to go to Oxford, choosing a German university. He had spent a certain time at Bonn, at Berlin, and at Frankfurt. There, a curiosity had been aroused in his mind. He wanted to see and to know, in a curious objective fashion, as if it were an amusement to him. Then he must try war. Then he must travel into the savage regions that had so attracted him.

The result was, he found humanity very much alike everywhere, and to a mind like his, curious and cold, the savage was duller, less exciting than the European. So he took hold of all kinds of sociological ideas, and ideas of reform. But they never went more than skin-deep, they were never more than a mental amusement. Their interest lay chiefly in the reaction against the positive order,

the destructive reaction.

He discovered at last a real adventure in the coal-mines. His father asked him to help in the firm. Gerald had been educated in the science of mining, and it had never interested him. Now, suddenly, with a sort of exultation, he laid hold of the world.

There was impressed photographically on his consciousness the great industry. Suddenly, it was real, he was part of it. Down the valley ran the colliery railway, linking mine with mine. Down the railway ran the trains, short trains of heavily laden trucks, long trains of empty wagons, each one bearing in big white letters the initials:

‘C.B.&Co.’

These white letters on all the wagons he had seen since his first childhood, and it was as if he had never seen them, they were so familiar, and so ignored. Now at last he saw his own name written on the wall. Now he had a vision of power.

So many wagons, bearing his initial, running all over the country. He saw them as he entered London in the train, he saw them at Dover. So far his power ramified. He looked at Beldover, at Selby, at Whatmore, at Lethley Bank, the great colliery villages which depended entirely on his mines. They were hideous and sordid, during his childhood they had been sores in his consciousness. And now he saw them with pride. Four raw new towns, and many ugly industrial hamlets were crowded under his dependence. He saw the stream of miners flowing along the causeways from the mines at the end of the afternoon, thousands of blackened, slightly distorted human beings with red mouths, all moving subjugate to his will. He pushed slowly in his motor-car through the little market-top on Friday nights in Beldover, through a solid mass of human beings that were making their purchases and doing their weekly spending. They were all subordinate to him. They were ugly and uncouth, but they were his instruments. He was the God of the machine. They made way for his motor-car automatically, slowly.

He did not care whether they made way with alacrity, or grudgingly. He did not care what they thought of him. His vision had suddenly crystallised. Suddenly he had conceived the pure instrumentality of mankind. There had been so much humanitarianism, so much talk of sufferings and feelings. It was ridiculous. The sufferings and feelings of individuals did not matter in the least. They were mere conditions, like the weather. What mattered was the pure instrumentality of the individual. As a man as of a knife: does it cut well? Nothing else mattered.

Everything in the world has its function, and is good or not good in so far as it fulfils this function more or less perfectly. Was a miner a good miner? Then he

was complete. Was a manager a good manager? That was enough. Gerald himself, who was responsible for all this industry, was he a good director? If he were, he had fulfilled his life. The rest was by-play.

The mines were there, they were old. They were giving out, it did not pay to work the seams. There was talk of closing down two of them. It was at this point that Gerald arrived on the scene.

He looked around. There lay the mines. They were old, obsolete. They were like old lions, no more good. He looked again. Pah! the mines were nothing but the clumsy efforts of impure minds. There they lay, abortions of a half-trained mind. Let the idea of them be swept away. He cleared his brain of them, and thought only of the coal in the under earth. How much was there?

There was plenty of coal. The old workings could not get at it, that was all. Then break the neck of the old workings. The coal lay there in its seams, even though the seams were thin. There it lay, inert matter, as it had always lain, since the beginning of time, subject to the will of man. The will of man was the determining factor. Man was the archgod of earth. His mind was obedient to serve his will. Man's will was the absolute, the only absolute.

And it was his will to subjugate Matter to his own ends. The subjugation itself was the point, the fight was the be-all, the fruits of victory were mere results. It was not for the sake of money that Gerald took over the mines. He did not care about money, fundamentally. He was neither ostentatious nor luxurious, neither did he care about social position, not finally. What he wanted was the pure fulfilment of his own will in the struggle with the natural conditions. His will was now, to take the coal out of the earth, profitably. The profit was merely the condition of victory, but the victory itself lay in the feat achieved. He vibrated with zest before the challenge. Every day he was in the mines, examining, testing, he consulted experts, he gradually gathered the whole situation into his mind, as a general grasps the plan of his campaign.

Then there was need for a complete break. The mines were run on an old system, an obsolete idea. The initial idea had been, to obtain as much money from the earth as would make the owners comfortably rich, would allow the workmen sufficient wages and good conditions, and would increase the wealth of the country altogether. Gerald's father, following in the second generation, having a sufficient fortune, had thought only of the men. The mines, for him, were primarily great fields to produce bread and plenty for all the hundreds of human beings gathered about them. He had lived and striven with his fellow owners to benefit the men every time. And the men had been benefited in their fashion. There were few poor, and few needy. All was plenty, because the mines were good and easy to work. And the miners, in those days, finding themselves

richer than they might have expected, felt glad and triumphant. They thought themselves well-off, they congratulated themselves on their good-fortune, they remembered how their fathers had starved and suffered, and they felt that better times had come. They were grateful to those others, the pioneers, the new owners, who had opened out the pits, and let forth this stream of plenty.

But man is never satisfied, and so the miners, from gratitude to their owners, passed on to murmuring. Their sufficiency decreased with knowledge, they wanted more. Why should the master be so out-of-all-proportion rich?

There was a crisis when Gerald was a boy, when the Masters' Federation closed down the mines because the men would not accept a reduction. This lock-out had forced home the new conditions to Thomas Crich. Belonging to the Federation, he had been compelled by his honour to close the pits against his men. He, the father, the Patriarch, was forced to deny the means of life to his sons, his people. He, the rich man who would hardly enter heaven because of his possessions, must now turn upon the poor, upon those who were nearer Christ than himself, those who were humble and despised and closer to perfection, those who were manly and noble in their labours, and must say to them: 'Ye shall neither labour nor eat bread.'

It was this recognition of the state of war which really broke his heart. He wanted his industry to be run on love. Oh, he wanted love to be the directing power even of the mines. And now, from under the cloak of love, the sword was cynically drawn, the sword of mechanical necessity.

This really broke his heart. He must have the illusion and now the illusion was destroyed. The men were not against HIM, but they were against the masters. It was war, and willy nilly he found himself on the wrong side, in his own conscience. Seething masses of miners met daily, carried away by a new religious impulse. The idea flew through them: 'All men are equal on earth,' and they would carry the idea to its material fulfilment. After all, is it not the teaching of Christ? And what is an idea, if not the germ of action in the material world. 'All men are equal in spirit, they are all sons of God. Whence then this obvious DISQUALITY?' It was a religious creed pushed to its material conclusion. Thomas Crich at least had no answer. He could but admit, according to his sincere tenets, that the disquality was wrong. But he could not give up his goods, which were the stuff of disquality. So the men would fight for their rights. The last impulses of the last religious passion left on earth, the passion for equality, inspired them.

Seething mobs of men marched about, their faces lighted up as for holy war, with a smoke of cupidity. How disentangle the passion for equality from the passion of cupidity, when begins the fight for equality of possessions? But the

God was the machine. Each man claimed equality in the Godhead of the great productive machine. Every man equally was part of this Godhead. But somehow, somewhere, Thomas Crich knew this was false. When the machine is the Godhead, and production or work is worship, then the most mechanical mind is purest and highest, the representative of God on earth. And the rest are subordinate, each according to his degree.

Riots broke out, Whatmore pit-head was in flames. This was the pit furthest in the country, near the woods. Soldiers came. From the windows of Shortlands, on that fatal day, could be seen the flare of fire in the sky not far off, and now the little colliery train, with the workmen's carriages which were used to convey the miners to the distant Whatmore, was crossing the valley full of soldiers, full of redcoats. Then there was the far-off sound of firing, then the later news that the mob was dispersed, one man was shot dead, the fire was put out.

Gerald, who was a boy, was filled with the wildest excitement and delight. He longed to go with the soldiers to shoot the men. But he was not allowed to go out of the lodge gates. At the gates were stationed sentries with guns. Gerald stood near them in delight, whilst gangs of derisive miners strolled up and down the lanes, calling and jeering:

'Now then, three ha'porth o'coppers, let's see thee shoot thy gun.' Insults were chalked on the walls and the fences, the servants left.

And all this while Thomas Crich was breaking his heart, and giving away hundreds of pounds in charity. Everywhere there was free food, a surfeit of free food. Anybody could have bread for asking, and a loaf cost only three-ha'pence. Every day there was a free tea somewhere, the children had never had so many treats in their lives. On Friday afternoon great basketfuls of buns and cakes were taken into the schools, and great pitchers of milk, the school children had what they wanted. They were sick with eating too much cake and milk.

And then it came to an end, and the men went back to work. But it was never the same as before. There was a new situation created, a new idea reigned. Even in the machine, there should be equality. No part should be subordinate to any other part: all should be equal. The instinct for chaos had entered. Mystic equality lies in abstraction, not in having or in doing, which are processes. In function and process, one man, one part, must of necessity be subordinate to another. It is a condition of being. But the desire for chaos had risen, and the idea of mechanical equality was the weapon of disruption which should execute the will of man, the will for chaos.

Gerald was a boy at the time of the strike, but he longed to be a man, to fight the colliers. The father however was trapped between two halftruths, and broken. He wanted to be a pure Christian, one and equal with all men. He even wanted to

give away all he had, to the poor. Yet he was a great promoter of industry, and he knew perfectly that he must keep his goods and keep his authority. This was as divine a necessity in him, as the need to give away all he possessed — more divine, even, since this was the necessity he acted upon. Yet because he did NOT act on the other ideal, it dominated him, he was dying of chagrin because he must forfeit it. He wanted to be a father of loving kindness and sacrificial benevolence. The colliers shouted to him about his thousands a year. They would not be deceived.

When Gerald grew up in the ways of the world, he shifted the position. He did not care about the equality. The whole Christian attitude of love and self-sacrifice was old hat. He knew that position and authority were the right thing in the world, and it was useless to cant about it. They were the right thing, for the simple reason that they were functionally necessary. They were not the be-all and the end-all. It was like being part of a machine. He himself happened to be a controlling, central part, the masses of men were the parts variously controlled. This was merely as it happened. As well get excited because a central hub drives a hundred outer wheels or because the whole universe wheels round the sun. After all, it would be mere silliness to say that the moon and the earth and Saturn and Jupiter and Venus have just as much right to be the centre of the universe, each of them separately, as the sun. Such an assertion is made merely in the desire of chaos.

Without bothering to THINK to a conclusion, Gerald jumped to a conclusion. He abandoned the whole democratic-equality problem as a problem of silliness. What mattered was the great social productive machine. Let that work perfectly, let it produce a sufficiency of everything, let every man be given a rational portion, greater or less according to his functional degree or magnitude, and then, provision made, let the devil supervene, let every man look after his own amusements and appetites, so long as he interfered with nobody.

So Gerald set himself to work, to put the great industry in order. In his travels, and in his accompanying readings, he had come to the conclusion that the essential secret of life was harmony. He did not define to himself at all clearly what harmony was. The word pleased him, he felt he had come to his own conclusions. And he proceeded to put his philosophy into practice by forcing order into the established world, translating the mystic word harmony into the practical word organisation.

Immediately he SAW the firm, he realised what he could do. He had a fight to fight with Matter, with the earth and the coal it enclosed. This was the sole idea, to turn upon the inanimate matter of the underground, and reduce it to his will. And for this fight with matter, one must have perfect instruments in perfect

organisation, a mechanism so subtle and harmonious in its workings that it represents the single mind of man, and by its relentless repetition of given movement, will accomplish a purpose irresistibly, inhumanly. It was this inhuman principle in the mechanism he wanted to construct that inspired Gerald with an almost religious exaltation. He, the man, could interpose a perfect, changeless, godlike medium between himself and the Matter he had to subjugate. There were two opposites, his will and the resistant Matter of the earth. And between these he could establish the very expression of his will, the incarnation of his power, a great and perfect machine, a system, an activity of pure order, pure mechanical repetition, repetition ad infinitum, hence eternal and infinite. He found his eternal and his infinite in the pure machine-principle of perfect co-ordination into one pure, complex, infinitely repeated motion, like the spinning of a wheel; but a productive spinning, as the revolving of the universe may be called a productive spinning, a productive repetition through eternity, to infinity. And this is the Godmotion, this productive repetition ad infinitum. And Gerald was the God of the machine, Deus ex Machina. And the whole productive will of man was the Godhead.

He had his life-work now, to extend over the earth a great and perfect system in which the will of man ran smooth and unthwarted, timeless, a Godhead in process. He had to begin with the mines. The terms were given: first the resistant Matter of the underground; then the instruments of its subjugation, instruments human and metallic; and finally his own pure will, his own mind. It would need a marvellous adjustment of myriad instruments, human, animal, metallic, kinetic, dynamic, a marvellous casting of myriad tiny wholes into one great perfect entirety. And then, in this case there was perfection attained, the will of the highest was perfectly fulfilled, the will of mankind was perfectly enacted; for was not mankind mystically contra-distinguished against inanimate Matter, was not the history of mankind just the history of the conquest of the one by the other?

The miners were overreached. While they were still in the toils of divine equality of man, Gerald had passed on, granted essentially their case, and proceeded in his quality of human being to fulfil the will of mankind as a whole. He merely represented the miners in a higher sense when he perceived that the only way to fulfil perfectly the will of man was to establish the perfect, inhuman machine. But he represented them very essentially, they were far behind, out of date, squabbling for their material equality. The desire had already transmuted into this new and greater desire, for a perfect intervening mechanism between man and Matter, the desire to translate the Godhead into pure mechanism.

As soon as Gerald entered the firm, the convulsion of death ran through the

old system. He had all his life been tortured by a furious and destructive demon, which possessed him sometimes like an insanity. This temper now entered like a virus into the firm, and there were cruel eruptions. Terrible and inhuman were his examinations into every detail; there was no privacy he would spare, no old sentiment but he would turn it over. The old grey managers, the old grey clerks, the doddering old pensioners, he looked at them, and removed them as so much lumber. The whole concern seemed like a hospital of invalid employees. He had no emotional qualms. He arranged what pensions were necessary, he looked for efficient substitutes, and when these were found, he substituted them for the old hands.

‘I’ve a pitiful letter here from Letherington,’ his father would say, in a tone of deprecation and appeal. ‘Don’t you think the poor fellow might keep on a little longer. I always fancied he did very well.’

‘I’ve got a man in his place now, father. He’ll be happier out of it, believe me. You think his allowance is plenty, don’t you?’

‘It is not the allowance that he wants, poor man. He feels it very much, that he is superannuated. Says he thought he had twenty more years of work in him yet.’

‘Not of this kind of work I want. He doesn’t understand.’

The father sighed. He wanted not to know any more. He believed the pits would have to be overhauled if they were to go on working. And after all, it would be worst in the long run for everybody, if they must close down. So he could make no answer to the appeals of his old and trusty servants, he could only repeat ‘Gerald says.’

So the father drew more and more out of the light. The whole frame of the real life was broken for him. He had been right according to his lights. And his lights had been those of the great religion. Yet they seemed to have become obsolete, to be superseded in the world. He could not understand. He only withdrew with his lights into an inner room, into the silence. The beautiful candles of belief, that would not do to light the world any more, they would still burn sweetly and sufficiently in the inner room of his soul, and in the silence of his retirement.

Gerald rushed into the reform of the firm, beginning with the office. It was needful to economise severely, to make possible the great alterations he must introduce.

‘What are these widows’ coals?’ he asked.

‘We have always allowed all widows of men who worked for the firm a load of coals every three months.’

‘They must pay cost price henceforward. The firm is not a charity institution, as everybody seems to think.’

Widows, these stock figures of sentimental humanitarianism, he felt a dislike

at the thought of them. They were almost repulsive. Why were they not immolated on the pyre of the husband, like the sati in India? At any rate, let them pay the cost of their coals.

In a thousand ways he cut down the expenditure, in ways so fine as to be hardly noticeable to the men. The miners must pay for the cartage of their coals, heavy cartage too; they must pay for their tools, for the sharpening, for the care of lamps, for the many trifling things that made the bill of charges against every man mount up to a shilling or so in the week. It was not grasped very definitely by the miners, though they were sore enough. But it saved hundreds of pounds every week for the firm.

Gradually Gerald got hold of everything. And then began the great reform. Expert engineers were introduced in every department. An enormous electric plant was installed, both for lighting and for haulage underground, and for power. The electricity was carried into every mine. New machinery was brought from America, such as the miners had never seen before, great iron men, as the cutting machines were called, and unusual appliances. The working of the pits was thoroughly changed, all the control was taken out of the hands of the miners, the butty system was abolished. Everything was run on the most accurate and delicate scientific method, educated and expert men were in control everywhere, the miners were reduced to mere mechanical instruments. They had to work hard, much harder than before, the work was terrible and heart-breaking in its mechanicalness.

But they submitted to it all. The joy went out of their lives, the hope seemed to perish as they became more and more mechanised. And yet they accepted the new conditions. They even got a further satisfaction out of them. At first they hated Gerald Crich, they swore to do something to him, to murder him. But as time went on, they accepted everything with some fatal satisfaction. Gerald was their high priest, he represented the religion they really felt. His father was forgotten already. There was a new world, a new order, strict, terrible, inhuman, but satisfying in its very destructiveness. The men were satisfied to belong to the great and wonderful machine, even whilst it destroyed them. It was what they wanted. It was the highest that man had produced, the most wonderful and superhuman. They were exalted by belonging to this great and superhuman system which was beyond feeling or reason, something really godlike. Their hearts died within them, but their souls were satisfied. It was what they wanted. Otherwise Gerald could never have done what he did. He was just ahead of them in giving them what they wanted, this participation in a great and perfect system that subjected life to pure mathematical principles. This was a sort of freedom, the sort they really wanted. It was the first great step in undoing, the first great

phase of chaos, the substitution of the mechanical principle for the organic, the destruction of the organic purpose, the organic unity, and the subordination of every organic unit to the great mechanical purpose. It was pure organic disintegration and pure mechanical organisation. This is the first and finest state of chaos.

Gerald was satisfied. He knew the colliers said they hated him. But he had long ceased to hate them. When they streamed past him at evening, their heavy boots slurring on the pavement wearily, their shoulders slightly distorted, they took no notice of him, they gave him no greeting whatever, they passed in a grey-black stream of unemotional acceptance. They were not important to him, save as instruments, nor he to them, save as a supreme instrument of control. As miners they had their being, he had his being as director. He admired their qualities. But as men, personalities, they were just accidents, sporadic little unimportant phenomena. And tacitly, the men agreed to this. For Gerald agreed to it in himself.

He had succeeded. He had converted the industry into a new and terrible purity. There was a greater output of coal than ever, the wonderful and delicate system ran almost perfectly. He had a set of really clever engineers, both mining and electrical, and they did not cost much. A highly educated man cost very little more than a workman. His managers, who were all rare men, were no more expensive than the old bungling fools of his father's days, who were merely colliers promoted. His chief manager, who had twelve hundred a year, saved the firm at least five thousand. The whole system was now so perfect that Gerald was hardly necessary any more.

It was so perfect that sometimes a strange fear came over him, and he did not know what to do. He went on for some years in a sort of trance of activity. What he was doing seemed supreme, he was almost like a divinity. He was a pure and exalted activity.

But now he had succeeded — he had finally succeeded. And once or twice lately, when he was alone in the evening and had nothing to do, he had suddenly stood up in terror, not knowing what he was. And he went to the mirror and looked long and closely at his own face, at his own eyes, seeking for something. He was afraid, in mortal dry fear, but he knew not what of. He looked at his own face. There it was, shapely and healthy and the same as ever, yet somehow, it was not real, it was a mask. He dared not touch it, for fear it should prove to be only a composition mask. His eyes were blue and keen as ever, and as firm in their sockets. Yet he was not sure that they were not blue false bubbles that would burst in a moment and leave clear annihilation. He could see the darkness in them, as if they were only bubbles of darkness. He was afraid that one day he

would break down and be a purely meaningless babble lapping round a darkness.

But his will yet held good, he was able to go away and read, and think about things. He liked to read books about the primitive man, books of anthropology, and also works of speculative philosophy. His mind was very active. But it was like a bubble floating in the darkness. At any moment it might burst and leave him in chaos. He would not die. He knew that. He would go on living, but the meaning would have collapsed out of him, his divine reason would be gone. In a strangely indifferent, sterile way, he was frightened. But he could not react even to the fear. It was as if his centres of feeling were drying up. He remained calm, calculative and healthy, and quite freely deliberate, even whilst he felt, with faint, small but final sterile horror, that his mystic reason was breaking, giving way now, at this crisis.

And it was a strain. He knew there was no equilibrium. He would have to go in some direction, shortly, to find relief. Only Birkin kept the fear definitely off him, saved him his quick sufficiency in life, by the odd mobility and changeableness which seemed to contain the quintessence of faith. But then Gerald must always come away from Birkin, as from a Church service, back to the outside real world of work and life. There it was, it did not alter, and words were futilities. He had to keep himself in reckoning with the world of work and material life. And it became more and more difficult, such a strange pressure was upon him, as if the very middle of him were a vacuum, and outside were an awful tension.

He had found his most satisfactory relief in women. After a debauch with some desperate woman, he went on quite easy and forgetful. The devil of it was, it was so hard to keep up his interest in women nowadays. He didn't care about them any more. A Pussum was all right in her way, but she was an exceptional case, and even she mattered extremely little. No, women, in that sense, were useless to him any more. He felt that his MIND needed acute stimulation, before he could be physically roused.

CHAPTER XVIII.

RABBIT

Gudrun knew that it was a critical thing for her to go to Shortlands. She knew it was equivalent to accepting Gerald Crich as a lover. And though she hung back, disliking the condition, yet she knew she would go on. She equivocated. She said to herself, in torment recalling the blow and the kiss, 'after all, what is it? What is a kiss? What even is a blow? It is an instant, vanished at once. I can go to Shortlands just for a time, before I go away, if only to see what it is like.' For she had an insatiable curiosity to see and to know everything.

She also wanted to know what Winifred was really like. Having heard the child calling from the steamer in the night, she felt some mysterious connection with her.

Gudrun talked with the father in the library. Then he sent for his daughter. She came accompanied by Mademoiselle.

'Winnie, this is Miss Brangwen, who will be so kind as to help you with your drawing and making models of your animals,' said the father.

The child looked at Gudrun for a moment with interest, before she came forward and with face averted offered her hand. There was a complete SANG FROID and indifference under Winifred's childish reserve, a certain irresponsible callousness.

'How do you do?' said the child, not lifting her face.

'How do you do?' said Gudrun.

Then Winifred stood aside, and Gudrun was introduced to Mademoiselle.

'You have a fine day for your walk,' said Mademoiselle, in a bright manner.

'QUITE fine,' said Gudrun.

Winifred was watching from her distance. She was as if amused, but rather unsure as yet what this new person was like. She saw so many new persons, and so few who became real to her. Mademoiselle was of no count whatever, the child merely put up with her, calmly and easily, accepting her little authority with faint scorn, compliant out of childish arrogance of indifference.

'Well, Winifred,' said the father, 'aren't you glad Miss Brangwen has come?

She makes animals and birds in wood and in clay, that the people in London write about in the papers, praising them to the skies.'

Winifred smiled slightly.

'Who told you, Daddie?' she asked.

'Who told me? Hermione told me, and Rupert Birkin.'

'Do you know them?' Winifred asked of Gudrun, turning to her with faint challenge.

'Yes,' said Gudrun.

Winifred readjusted herself a little. She had been ready to accept Gudrun as a sort of servant. Now she saw it was on terms of friendship they were intended to meet. She was rather glad. She had so many half inferiors, whom she tolerated with perfect good-humour.

Gudrun was very calm. She also did not take these things very seriously. A new occasion was mostly spectacular to her. However, Winifred was a detached, ironic child, she would never attach herself. Gudrun liked her and was intrigued by her. The first meetings went off with a certain humiliating clumsiness. Neither Winifred nor her instructress had any social grace.

Soon, however, they met in a kind of make-belief world. Winifred did not notice human beings unless they were like herself, playful and slightly mocking. She would accept nothing but the world of amusement, and the serious people of her life were the animals she had for pets. On those she lavished, almost ironically, her affection and her companionship. To the rest of the human scheme she submitted with a faint bored indifference.

She had a pekinese dog called Looloo, which she loved.

'Let us draw Looloo,' said Gudrun, 'and see if we can get his Looliness, shall we?'

'Darling!' cried Winifred, rushing to the dog, that sat with contemplative sadness on the hearth, and kissing its bulging brow. 'Darling one, will you be drawn? Shall its mummy draw its portrait?' Then she chuckled gleefully, and turning to Gudrun, said: 'Oh let's!'

They proceeded to get pencils and paper, and were ready.

'Beautifullest,' cried Winifred, hugging the dog, 'sit still while its mummy draws its beautiful portrait.' The dog looked up at her with grievous resignation in its large, prominent eyes. She kissed it fervently, and said: 'I wonder what mine will be like. It's sure to be awful.'

As she sketched she chuckled to herself, and cried out at times:

'Oh darling, you're so beautiful!'

And again chuckling, she rushed to embrace the dog, in penitence, as if she were doing him some subtle injury. He sat all the time with the resignation and

fretfulness of ages on his dark velvety face. She drew slowly, with a wicked concentration in her eyes, her head on one side, an intense stillness over her. She was as if working the spell of some enchantment. Suddenly she had finished. She looked at the dog, and then at her drawing, and then cried, with real grief for the dog, and at the same time with a wicked exultation:

‘My beautiful, why did they?’

She took her paper to the dog, and held it under his nose. He turned his head aside as in chagrin and mortification, and she impulsively kissed his velvety bulging forehead.

‘‘s a Loolie, ‘s a little Loozie! Look at his portrait, darling, look at his portrait, that his mother has done of him.’ She looked at her paper and chuckled. Then, kissing the dog once more, she rose and came gravely to Gudrun, offering her the paper.

It was a grotesque little diagram of a grotesque little animal, so wicked and so comical, a slow smile came over Gudrun’s face, unconsciously. And at her side Winifred chuckled with glee, and said:

‘It isn’t like him, is it? He’s much lovelier than that. He’s SO beautiful-mmm, Looloo, my sweet darling.’ And she flew off to embrace the chagrined little dog. He looked up at her with reproachful, saturnine eyes, vanquished in his extreme agedness of being. Then she flew back to her drawing, and chuckled with satisfaction.

‘It isn’t like him, is it?’ she said to Gudrun.

‘Yes, it’s very like him,’ Gudrun replied.

The child treasured her drawing, carried it about with her, and showed it, with a silent embarrassment, to everybody.

‘Look,’ she said, thrusting the paper into her father’s hand.

‘Why that’s Looloo!’ he exclaimed. And he looked down in surprise, hearing the almost inhuman chuckle of the child at his side.

Gerald was away from home when Gudrun first came to Shortlands. But the first morning he came back he watched for her. It was a sunny, soft morning, and he lingered in the garden paths, looking at the flowers that had come out during his absence. He was clean and fit as ever, shaven, his fair hair scrupulously parted at the side, bright in the sunshine, his short, fair moustache closely clipped, his eyes with their humorous kind twinkle, which was so deceptive. He was dressed in black, his clothes sat well on his well-nourished body. Yet as he lingered before the flower-beds in the morning sunshine, there was a certain isolation, a fear about him, as of something wanting.

Gudrun came up quickly, unseen. She was dressed in blue, with woollen yellow stockings, like the Bluecoat boys. He glanced up in surprise. Her

stockings always disconcerted him, the pale-yellow stockings and the heavy heavy black shoes. Winifred, who had been playing about the garden with Mademoiselle and the dogs, came flitting towards Gudrun. The child wore a dress of black-and-white stripes. Her hair was rather short, cut round and hanging level in her neck.

‘We’re going to do Bismarck, aren’t we?’ she said, linking her hand through Gudrun’s arm.

‘Yes, we’re going to do Bismarck. Do you want to?’

‘Oh yes-oh I do! I want most awfully to do Bismarck. He looks SO splendid this morning, so FIERCE. He’s almost as big as a lion.’ And the child chuckled sardonically at her own hyperbole. ‘He’s a real king, he really is.’

‘Bon jour, Mademoiselle,’ said the little French governess, wavering up with a slight bow, a bow of the sort that Gudrun loathed, insolent.

‘Winifred veut tant faire le portrait de Bismarck-! Oh, mais toute la matinee-”We will do Bismarck this morning!”-Bismarck, Bismarck, toujours Bismarck! C’est un lapin, n’est-ce pas, mademoiselle?’

‘Oui, c’est un grand lapin blanc et noir. Vous ne l’avez pas vu?’ said Gudrun in her good, but rather heavy French.

‘Non, mademoiselle, Winifred n’a jamais voulu me le faire voir. Tant de fois je le lui ai demande, “Qu’est ce donc que ce Bismarck, Winifred?” Mais elle n’a pas voulu me le dire. Son Bismarck, c’était un mystere.’

‘Oui, c’est un mystere, vraiment un mystere! Miss Brangwen, say that Bismarck is a mystery,’ cried Winifred.

‘Bismarck, is a mystery, Bismarck, c’est un mystere, der Bismarck, er ist ein Wunder,’ said Gudrun, in mocking incantation.

‘Ja, er ist ein Wunder,’ repeated Winifred, with odd seriousness, under which lay a wicked chuckle.

‘Ist er auch ein Wunder?’ came the slightly insolent sneering of Mademoiselle.

‘Doch!’ said Winifred briefly, indifferent.

‘Doch ist er nicht ein Konig. Beesmarck, he was not a king, Winifred, as you have said. He was only-il n’était que chancelier.’

‘Qu’est ce qu’un chancelier?’ said Winifred, with slightly contemptuous indifference.

‘A chancelier is a chancellor, and a chancellor is, I believe, a sort of judge,’ said Gerald coming up and shaking hands with Gudrun. ‘You’ll have made a song of Bismarck soon,’ said he.

Mademoiselle waited, and discreetly made her inclination, and her greeting.

‘So they wouldn’t let you see Bismarck, Mademoiselle?’ he said.

‘Non, Monsieur.’

‘Ay, very mean of them. What are you going to do to him, Miss Brangwen? I want him sent to the kitchen and cooked.’

‘Oh no,’ cried Winifred.

‘We’re going to draw him,’ said Gudrun.

‘Draw him and quarter him and dish him up,’ he said, being purposely fatuous.

‘Oh no,’ cried Winifred with emphasis, chuckling.

Gudrun detected the tang of mockery in him, and she looked up and smiled into his face. He felt his nerves caressed. Their eyes met in knowledge.

‘How do you like Shortlands?’ he asked.

‘Oh, very much,’ she said, with nonchalance.

‘Glad you do. Have you noticed these flowers?’

He led her along the path. She followed intently. Winifred came, and the governess lingered in the rear. They stopped before some veined salpiglossis flowers.

‘Aren’t they wonderful?’ she cried, looking at them absorbedly. Strange how her reverential, almost ecstatic admiration of the flowers caressed his nerves. She stooped down, and touched the trumpets, with infinitely fine and delicate-touching finger-tips. It filled him with ease to see her. When she rose, her eyes, hot with the beauty of the flowers, looked into his.

‘What are they?’ she asked.

‘Sort of petunia, I suppose,’ he answered. ‘I don’t really know them.’

‘They are quite strangers to me,’ she said.

They stood together in a false intimacy, a nervous contact. And he was in love with her.

She was aware of Mademoiselle standing near, like a little French beetle, observant and calculating. She moved away with Winifred, saying they would go to find Bismarck.

Gerald watched them go, looking all the while at the soft, full, still body of Gudrun, in its silky cashmere. How silky and rich and soft her body must be. An excess of appreciation came over his mind, she was the all-desirable, the all-beautiful. He wanted only to come to her, nothing more. He was only this, this being that should come to her, and be given to her.

At the same time he was finely and acutely aware of Mademoiselle’s neat, brittle finality of form. She was like some elegant beetle with thin ankles, perched on her high heels, her glossy black dress perfectly correct, her dark hair done high and admirably. How repulsive her completeness and her finality was! He loathed her.

Yet he did admire her. She was perfectly correct. And it did rather annoy him, that Gudrun came dressed in startling colours, like a macaw, when the family was in mourning. Like a macaw she was! He watched the lingering way she took her feet from the ground. And her ankles were pale yellow, and her dress a deep blue. Yet it pleased him. It pleased him very much. He felt the challenge in her very attire-she challenged the whole world. And he smiled as to the note of a trumpet.

Gudrun and Winifred went through the house to the back, where were the stables and the out-buildings. Everywhere was still and deserted. Mr Crich had gone out for a short drive, the stableman had just led round Gerald's horse. The two girls went to the hutch that stood in a corner, and looked at the great black-and-white rabbit.

'Isn't he beautiful! Oh, do look at him listening! Doesn't he look silly!' she laughed quickly, then added 'Oh, do let's do him listening, do let us, he listens with so much of himself;-don't you darling Bismarck?'

'Can we take him out?' said Gudrun.

'He's very strong. He really is extremely strong.' She looked at Gudrun, her head on one side, in odd calculating mistrust.

'But we'll try, shall we?'

'Yes, if you like. But he's a fearful kicker!'

They took the key to unlock the door. The rabbit exploded in a wild rush round the hutch.

'He scratches most awfully sometimes,' cried Winifred in excitement. 'Oh do look at him, isn't he wonderful!' The rabbit tore round the hutch in a hurry. 'Bismarck!' cried the child, in rousing excitement. 'How DREADFUL you are! You are beastly.' Winifred looked up at Gudrun with some misgiving in her wild excitement. Gudrun smiled sardonically with her mouth. Winifred made a strange crooning noise of unaccountable excitement. 'Now he's still!' she cried, seeing the rabbit settled down in a far corner of the hutch. 'Shall we take him now?' she whispered excitedly, mysteriously, looking up at Gudrun and edging very close. 'Shall we get him now?-' she chuckled wickedly to herself.

They unlocked the door of the hutch. Gudrun thrust in her arm and seized the great, lusty rabbit as it crouched still, she grasped its long ears. It set its four feet flat, and thrust back. There was a long scraping sound as it was hauled forward, and in another instant it was in mid-air, lunging wildly, its body flying like a spring coiled and released, as it lashed out, suspended from the ears. Gudrun held the black-and-white tempest at arms' length, averting her face. But the rabbit was magically strong, it was all she could do to keep her grasp. She almost lost her presence of mind.

‘Bismarck, Bismarck, you are behaving terribly,’ said Winifred in a rather frightened voice, ‘Oh, do put him down, he’s beastly.’

Gudrun stood for a moment astounded by the thunder-storm that had sprung into being in her grip. Then her colour came up, a heavy rage came over her like a cloud. She stood shaken as a house in a storm, and utterly overcome. Her heart was arrested with fury at the mindlessness and the bestial stupidity of this struggle, her wrists were badly scored by the claws of the beast, a heavy cruelty welled up in her.

Gerald came round as she was trying to capture the flying rabbit under her arm. He saw, with subtle recognition, her sullen passion of cruelty.

‘You should let one of the men do that for you,’ he said hurrying up.

‘Oh, he’s SO horrid!’ cried Winifred, almost frantic.

He held out his nervous, sinewy hand and took the rabbit by the ears, from Gudrun.

‘It’s most FEARFULLY strong,’ she cried, in a high voice, like the crying a seagull, strange and vindictive.

The rabbit made itself into a ball in the air, and lashed out, flinging itself into a bow. It really seemed demoniacal. Gudrun saw Gerald’s body tighten, saw a sharp blindness come into his eyes.

‘I know these beggars of old,’ he said.

The long, demon-like beast lashed out again, spread on the air as if it were flying, looking something like a dragon, then closing up again, inconceivably powerful and explosive. The man’s body, strung to its efforts, vibrated strongly. Then a sudden sharp, white-edged wrath came up in him. Swift as lightning he drew back and brought his free hand down like a hawk on the neck of the rabbit. Simultaneously, there came the unearthly abhorrent scream of a rabbit in the fear of death. It made one immense writhe, tore his wrists and his sleeves in a final convulsion, all its belly flashed white in a whirlwind of paws, and then he had slung it round and had it under his arm, fast. It cowered and skulked. His face was gleaming with a smile.

‘You wouldn’t think there was all that force in a rabbit,’ he said, looking at Gudrun. And he saw her eyes black as night in her pallid face, she looked almost unearthly. The scream of the rabbit, after the violent tussle, seemed to have torn the veil of her consciousness. He looked at her, and the whitish, electric gleam in his face intensified.

‘I don’t really like him,’ Winifred was crooning. ‘I don’t care for him as I do for Loozie. He’s hateful really.’

A smile twisted Gudrun’s face, as she recovered. She knew she was revealed. ‘Don’t they make the most fearful noise when they scream?’ she cried, the high

note in her voice, like a seagull's cry.

'Abominable,' he said.

'He shouldn't be so silly when he has to be taken out,' Winifred was saying, putting out her hand and touching the rabbit tentatively, as it skulked under his arm, motionless as if it were dead.

'He's not dead, is he Gerald?' she asked.

'No, he ought to be,' he said.

'Yes, he ought!' cried the child, with a sudden flush of amusement. And she touched the rabbit with more confidence. 'His heart is beating SO fast. Isn't he funny? He really is.'

'Where do you want him?' asked Gerald.

'In the little green court,' she said.

Gudrun looked at Gerald with strange, darkened eyes, strained with underworld knowledge, almost supplicating, like those of a creature which is at his mercy, yet which is his ultimate victor. He did not know what to say to her. He felt the mutual hellish recognition. And he felt he ought to say something, to cover it. He had the power of lightning in his nerves, she seemed like a soft recipient of his magical, hideous white fire. He was unconfident, he had qualms of fear.

'Did he hurt you?' he asked.

'No,' she said.

'He's an insensible beast,' he said, turning his face away.

They came to the little court, which was shut in by old red walls in whose crevices wall-flowers were growing. The grass was soft and fine and old, a level floor carpeting the court, the sky was blue overhead. Gerald tossed the rabbit down. It crouched still and would not move. Gudrun watched it with faint horror.

'Why doesn't it move?' she cried.

'It's skulking,' he said.

She looked up at him, and a slight sinister smile contracted her white face.

'Isn't it a FOOL!' she cried. 'Isn't it a sickening FOOL ?' The vindictive mockery in her voice made his brain quiver. Glancing up at him, into his eyes, she revealed again the mocking, white-cruel recognition. There was a league between them, abhorrent to them both. They were implicated with each other in abhorrent mysteries.

'How many scratches have you?' he asked, showing his hard forearm, white and hard and torn in red gashes.

'How really vile!' she cried, flushing with a sinister vision. 'Mine is nothing.'

She lifted her arm and showed a deep red score down the silken white flesh.

'What a devil!' he exclaimed. But it was as if he had had knowledge of her in

the long red rent of her forearm, so silken and soft. He did not want to touch her. He would have to make himself touch her, deliberately. The long, shallow red rip seemed torn across his own brain, tearing the surface of his ultimate consciousness, letting through the forever unconscious, unthinkable red ether of the beyond, the obscene beyond.

‘It doesn’t hurt you very much, does it?’ he asked, solicitous.

‘Not at all,’ she cried.

And suddenly the rabbit, which had been crouching as if it were a flower, so still and soft, suddenly burst into life. Round and round the court it went, as if shot from a gun, round and round like a furry meteorite, in a tense hard circle that seemed to bind their brains. They all stood in amazement, smiling uncannily, as if the rabbit were obeying some unknown incantation. Round and round it flew, on the grass under the old red walls like a storm.

And then quite suddenly it settled down, hobbled among the grass, and sat considering, its nose twitching like a bit of fluff in the wind. After having considered for a few minutes, a soft bunch with a black, open eye, which perhaps was looking at them, perhaps was not, it hobbled calmly forward and began to nibble the grass with that mean motion of a rabbit’s quick eating.

‘It’s mad,’ said Gudrun. ‘It is most decidedly mad.’

He laughed.

‘The question is,’ he said, ‘what is madness? I don’t suppose it is rabbit-mad.’

‘Don’t you think it is?’ she asked.

‘No. That’s what it is to be a rabbit.’

There was a queer, faint, obscene smile over his face. She looked at him and saw him, and knew that he was initiate as she was initiate. This thwarted her, and contravened her, for the moment.

‘God be praised we aren’t rabbits,’ she said, in a high, shrill voice.

The smile intensified a little, on his face.

‘Not rabbits?’ he said, looking at her fixedly.

Slowly her face relaxed into a smile of obscene recognition.

‘Ah Gerald,’ she said, in a strong, slow, almost man-like way. ‘-All that, and more.’ Her eyes looked up at him with shocking nonchalance.

He felt again as if she had torn him across the breast, dully, finally. He turned aside.

‘Eat, eat my darling!’ Winifred was softly conjuring the rabbit, and creeping forward to touch it. It hobbled away from her. ‘Let its mother stroke its fur then, darling, because it is so mysterious-’

CHAPTER XIX.

MOONY

After his illness Birkin went to the south of France for a time. He did not write, nobody heard anything of him. Ursula, left alone, felt as if everything were lapsing out. There seemed to be no hope in the world. One was a tiny little rock with the tide of nothingness rising higher and higher. She herself was real, and only herself — just like a rock in a wash of flood-water. The rest was all nothingness. She was hard and indifferent, isolated in herself.

There was nothing for it now, but contemptuous, resistant indifference. All the world was lapsing into a grey wish-wash of nothingness, she had no contact and no connection anywhere. She despised and detested the whole show. From the bottom of her heart, from the bottom of her soul, she despised and detested people, adult people. She loved only children and animals: children she loved passionately, but coldly. They made her want to hug them, to protect them, to give them life. But this very love, based on pity and despair, was only a bondage and a pain to her. She loved best of all the animals, that were single and unsocial as she herself was. She loved the horses and cows in the field. Each was single and to itself, magical. It was not referred away to some detestable social principle. It was incapable of soulfulness and tragedy, which she detested so profoundly.

She could be very pleasant and flattering, almost subservient, to people she met. But no one was taken in. Instinctively each felt her contemptuous mockery of the human being in himself, or herself. She had a profound grudge against the human being. That which the word 'human' stood for was despicable and repugnant to her.

Mostly her heart was closed in this hidden, unconscious strain of contemptuous ridicule. She thought she loved, she thought she was full of love. This was her idea of herself. But the strange brightness of her presence, a marvellous radiance of intrinsic vitality, was a luminousness of supreme repudiation, nothing but repudiation.

Yet, at moments, she yielded and softened, she wanted pure love, only pure

love. This other, this state of constant unfailing repudiation, was a strain, a suffering also. A terrible desire for pure love overcame her again.

She went out one evening, numbed by this constant essential suffering. Those who are timed for destruction must die now. The knowledge of this reached a finality, a finishing in her. And the finality released her. If fate would carry off in death or downfall all those who were timed to go, why need she trouble, why repudiate any further. She was free of it all, she could seek a new union elsewhere.

Ursula set off to Willey Green, towards the mill. She came to Willey Water. It was almost full again, after its period of emptiness. Then she turned off through the woods. The night had fallen, it was dark. But she forgot to be afraid, she who had such great sources of fear. Among the trees, far from any human beings, there was a sort of magic peace. The more one could find a pure loneliness, with no taint of people, the better one felt. She was in reality terrified, horrified in her apprehension of people.

She started, noticing something on her right hand, between the tree trunks. It was like a great presence, watching her, dodging her. She started violently. It was only the moon, risen through the thin trees. But it seemed so mysterious, with its white and deathly smile. And there was no avoiding it. Night or day, one could not escape the sinister face, triumphant and radiant like this moon, with a high smile. She hurried on, cowering from the white planet. She would just see the pond at the mill before she went home.

Not wanting to go through the yard, because of the dogs, she turned off along the hill-side to descend on the pond from above. The moon was transcendent over the bare, open space, she suffered from being exposed to it. There was a glimmer of nightly rabbits across the ground. The night was as clear as crystal, and very still. She could hear a distant coughing of a sheep.

So she swerved down to the steep, tree-hidden bank above the pond, where the alders twisted their roots. She was glad to pass into the shade out of the moon. There she stood, at the top of the fallen-away bank, her hand on the rough trunk of a tree, looking at the water, that was perfect in its stillness, floating the moon upon it. But for some reason she disliked it. It did not give her anything. She listened for the hoarse rustle of the sluice. And she wished for something else out of the night, she wanted another night, not this moon-brilliant hardness. She could feel her soul crying out in her, lamenting desolately.

She saw a shadow moving by the water. It would be Birkin. He had come back then, unawares. She accepted it without remark, nothing mattered to her. She sat down among the roots of the alder tree, dim and veiled, hearing the sound of the sluice like dew distilling audibly into the night. The islands were

dark and half revealed, the reeds were dark also, only some of them had a little frail fire of reflection. A fish leaped secretly, revealing the light in the pond. This fire of the chill night breaking constantly on to the pure darkness, repelled her. She wished it were perfectly dark, perfectly, and noiseless and without motion. Birkin, small and dark also, his hair tinged with moonlight, wandered nearer. He was quite near, and yet he did not exist in her. He did not know she was there. Supposing he did something he would not wish to be seen doing, thinking he was quite private? But there, what did it matter? What did the small priyacies matter? How could it matter, what he did? How can there be any secrets, we are all the same organisms? How can there be any secrecy, when everything is known to all of us?

He was touching unconsciously the dead husks of flowers as he passed by, and talking disconnectedly to himself.

‘You can’t go away,’ he was saying. ‘There IS no away. You only withdraw upon yourself.’

He threw a dead flower-husk on to the water.

‘An antiphony — they lie, and you sing back to them. There wouldn’t have to be any truth, if there weren’t any lies. Then one needn’t assert anything — ’

He stood still, looking at the water, and throwing upon it the husks of the flowers.

‘Cybele — curse her! The accursed Syria Dea! Does one begrudge it her? What else is there — ?’

Ursula wanted to laugh loudly and hysterically, hearing his isolated voice speaking out. It was so ridiculous.

He stood staring at the water. Then he stooped and picked up a stone, which he threw sharply at the pond. Ursula was aware of the bright moon leaping and swaying, all distorted, in her eyes. It seemed to shoot out arms of fire like a cuttle-fish, like a luminous polyp, palpitating strongly before her.

And his shadow on the border of the pond, was watching for a few moments, then he stooped and groped on the ground. Then again there was a burst of sound, and a burst of brilliant light, the moon had exploded on the water, and was flying asunder in flakes of white and dangerous fire. Rapidly, like white birds, the fires all broken rose across the pond, fleeing in clamorous confusion, battling with the flock of dark waves that were forcing their way in. The furthest waves of light, fleeing out, seemed to be clamouring against the shore for escape, the waves of darkness came in heavily, running under towards the centre. But at the centre, the heart of all, was still a vivid, incandescent quivering of a white moon not quite destroyed, a white body of fire writhing and striving and not even now broken open, not yet violated. It seemed to be drawing itself

together with strange, violent pangs, in blind effort. It was getting stronger, it was re-asserting itself, the inviolable moon. And the rays were hastening in in thin lines of light, to return to the strengthened moon, that shook upon the water in triumphant re-assumption.

Birkin stood and watched, motionless, till the pond was almost calm, the moon was almost serene. Then, satisfied of so much, he looked for more stones. She felt his invisible tenacity. And in a moment again, the broken lights scattered in explosion over her face, dazzling her; and then, almost immediately, came the second shot. The moon leapt up white and burst through the air. Darts of bright light shot asunder, darkness swept over the centre. There was no moon, only a battlefield of broken lights and shadows, running close together. Shadows, dark and heavy, struck again and again across the place where the heart of the moon had been, obliterating it altogether. The white fragments pulsed up and down, and could not find where to go, apart and brilliant on the water like the petals of a rose that a wind has blown far and wide.

Yet again, they were flickering their way to the centre, finding the path blindly, enviously. And again, all was still, as Birkin and Ursula watched. The waters were loud on the shore. He saw the moon regathering itself insidiously, saw the heart of the rose intertwining vigorously and blindly, calling back the scattered fragments, winning home the fragments, in a pulse and in effort of return.

And he was not satisfied. Like a madness, he must go on. He got large stones, and threw them, one after the other, at the white-burning centre of the moon, till there was nothing but a rocking of hollow noise, and a pond surged up, no moon any more, only a few broken flakes tangled and glittering broadcast in the darkness, without aim or meaning, a darkened confusion, like a black and white kaleidoscope tossed at random. The hollow night was rocking and crashing with noise, and from the sluice came sharp, regular flashes of sound. Flakes of light appeared here and there, glittering tormented among the shadows, far off, in strange places; among the dripping shadow of the willow on the island. Birkin stood and listened and was satisfied.

Ursula was dazed, her mind was all gone. She felt she had fallen to the ground and was spilled out, like water on the earth. Motionless and spent she remained in the gloom. Though even now she was aware, unseeing, that in the darkness was a little tumult of ebbing flakes of light, a cluster dancing secretly in a round, twining and coming steadily together. They were gathering a heart again, they were coming once more into being. Gradually the fragments caught together reunited, heaving, rocking, dancing, falling back as in panic, but working their way home again persistently, making semblance of fleeing away when they had

advanced, but always flickering nearer, a little closer to the mark, the cluster growing mysteriously larger and brighter, as gleam after gleam fell in with the whole, until a ragged rose, a distorted, frayed moon was shaking upon the waters again, re-asserted, renewed, trying to recover from its convulsion, to get over the disfigurement and the agitation, to be whole and composed, at peace.

Birkin lingered vaguely by the water. Ursula was afraid that he would stone the moon again. She slipped from her seat and went down to him, saying:

‘You won’t throw stones at it any more, will you?’

‘How long have you been there?’

‘All the time. You won’t throw any more stones, will you?’

‘I wanted to see if I could make it be quite gone off the pond,’ he said.

‘Yes, it was horrible, really. Why should you hate the moon? It hasn’t done you any harm, has it?’

‘Was it hate?’ he said.

And they were silent for a few minutes.

‘When did you come back?’ she said.

‘Today.’

‘Why did you never write?’

‘I could find nothing to say.’

‘Why was there nothing to say?’

‘I don’t know. Why are there no daffodils now?’

‘No.’

Again there was a space of silence. Ursula looked at the moon. It had gathered itself together, and was quivering slightly.

‘Was it good for you, to be alone?’ she asked.

‘Perhaps. Not that I know much. But I got over a good deal. Did you do anything important?’

‘No. I looked at England, and thought I’d done with it.’

‘Why England?’ he asked in surprise.

‘I don’t know, it came like that.’

‘It isn’t a question of nations,’ he said. ‘France is far worse.’

‘Yes, I know. I felt I’d done with it all.’

They went and sat down on the roots of the trees, in the shadow. And being silent, he remembered the beauty of her eyes, which were sometimes filled with light, like spring, suffused with wonderful promise. So he said to her, slowly, with difficulty:

‘There is a golden light in you, which I wish you would give me.’ It was as if he had been thinking of this for some time.

She was startled, she seemed to leap clear of him. Yet also she was pleased.

‘What kind of a light,’ she asked.

But he was shy, and did not say any more. So the moment passed for this time. And gradually a feeling of sorrow came over her.

‘My life is unfulfilled,’ she said.

‘Yes,’ he answered briefly, not wanting to hear this.

‘And I feel as if nobody could ever really love me,’ she said.

But he did not answer.

‘You think, don’t you,’ she said slowly, ‘that I only want physical things? It isn’t true. I want you to serve my spirit.’

‘I know you do. I know you don’t want physical things by themselves. But, I want you to give me — to give your spirit to me — that golden light which is you — which you don’t know — give it me — ’

After a moment’s silence she replied:

‘But how can I, you don’t love me! You only want your own ends. You don’t want to serve ME, and yet you want me to serve you. It is so one-sided!’

It was a great effort to him to maintain this conversation, and to press for the thing he wanted from her, the surrender of her spirit.

‘It is different,’ he said. ‘The two kinds of service are so different. I serve you in another way — not through YOURSELF — somewhere else. But I want us to be together without bothering about ourselves — to be really together because we ARE together, as if it were a phenomenon, not a not a thing we have to maintain by our own effort.’

‘No,’ she said, pondering. ‘You are just egocentric. You never have any enthusiasm, you never come out with any spark towards me. You want yourself, really, and your own affairs. And you want me just to be there, to serve you.’

But this only made him shut off from her.

‘Ah well,’ he said, ‘words make no matter, any way. The thing IS between us, or it isn’t.’

‘You don’t even love me,’ she cried.

‘I do,’ he said angrily. ‘But I want — ’ His mind saw again the lovely golden light of spring transfused through her eyes, as through some wonderful window. And he wanted her to be with him there, in this world of proud indifference. But what was the good of telling her he wanted this company in proud indifference. What was the good of talking, any way? It must happen beyond the sound of words. It was merely ruinous to try to work her by conviction. This was a paradisaical bird that could never be netted, it must fly by itself to the heart.

‘I always think I am going to be loved — and then I am let down. You DON’T love me, you know. You don’t want to serve me. You only want yourself.’

A shiver of rage went over his veins, at this repeated: ‘You don’t want to serve

me.’ All the paradisal disappeared from him.

‘No,’ he said, irritated, ‘I don’t want to serve you, because there is nothing there to serve. What you want me to serve, is nothing, mere nothing. It isn’t even you, it is your mere female quality. And I wouldn’t give a straw for your female ego — it’s a rag doll.’

‘Ha!’ she laughed in mockery. ‘That’s all you think of me, is it? And then you have the impudence to say you love me.’

She rose in anger, to go home.

You want the paradisal unknowing,’ she said, turning round on him as he still sat half-visible in the shadow. ‘I know what that means, thank you. You want me to be your thing, never to criticise you or to have anything to say for myself. You want me to be a mere THING for you! No thank you! IF you want that, there are plenty of women who will give it to you. There are plenty of women who will lie down for you to walk over them — GO to them then, if that’s what you want — go to them.’

‘No,’ he said, outspoken with anger. ‘I want you to drop your assertive WILL, your frightened apprehensive self-insistence, that is what I want. I want you to trust yourself so implicitly, that you can let yourself go.’

‘Let myself go!’ she re-echoed in mockery. ‘I can let myself go, easily enough. It is you who can’t let yourself go, it is you who hang on to yourself as if it were your only treasure. YOU — YOU are the Sunday school teacher — YOU — you preacher.’

The amount of truth that was in this made him stiff and unheeding of her.

‘I don’t mean let yourself go in the Dionysic ecstatic way,’ he said. ‘I know you can do that. But I hate ecstasy, Dionysic or any other. It’s like going round in a squirrel cage. I want you not to care about yourself, just to be there and not to care about yourself, not to insist — be glad and sure and indifferent.’

‘Who insists?’ she mocked. ‘Who is it that keeps on insisting? It isn’t ME!’

There was a weary, mocking bitterness in her voice. He was silent for some time.

‘I know,’ he said. ‘While ever either of us insists to the other, we are all wrong. But there we are, the accord doesn’t come.’

They sat in stillness under the shadow of the trees by the bank. The night was white around them, they were in the darkness, barely conscious.

Gradually, the stillness and peace came over them. She put her hand tentatively on his. Their hands clasped softly and silently, in peace.

‘Do you really love me?’ she said.

He laughed.

‘I call that your war-cry,’ he replied, amused.

‘Why!’ she cried, amused and really wondering.

‘Your insistence — Your war-cry — ”A Brangwen, A Brangwen” — an old battle-cry. Yours is, “Do you love me? Yield knave, or die.”’

‘No,’ she said, pleading, ‘not like that. Not like that. But I must know that you love me, mustn’t I?’

‘Well then, know it and have done with it.’

‘But do you?’

‘Yes, I do. I love you, and I know it’s final. It is final, so why say any more about it.’

She was silent for some moments, in delight and doubt.

‘Are you sure?’ she said, nestling happily near to him.

‘Quite sure — so now have done — accept it and have done.’

She was nestled quite close to him.

‘Have done with what?’ she murmured, happily.

‘With bothering,’ he said.

She clung nearer to him. He held her close, and kissed her softly, gently. It was such peace and heavenly freedom, just to fold her and kiss her gently, and not to have any thoughts or any desires or any will, just to be still with her, to be perfectly still and together, in a peace that was not sleep, but content in bliss. To be content in bliss, without desire or insistence anywhere, this was heaven: to be together in happy stillness.

For a long time she nestled to him, and he kissed her softly, her hair, her face, her ears, gently, softly, like dew falling. But this warm breath on her ears disturbed her again, kindled the old destructive fires. She cleaved to him, and he could feel his blood changing like quicksilver.

‘But we’ll be still, shall we?’ he said.

‘Yes,’ she said, as if submissively.

And she continued to nestle against him.

But in a little while she drew away and looked at him.

‘I must be going home,’ she said.

‘Must you — how sad,’ he replied.

She leaned forward and put up her mouth to be kissed.

‘Are you really sad?’ she murmured, smiling.

‘Yes,’ he said, ‘I wish we could stay as we were, always.’

‘Always! Do you?’ she murmured, as he kissed her. And then, out of a full throat, she crooned ‘Kiss me! Kiss me!’ And she cleaved close to him. He kissed her many times. But he too had his idea and his will. He wanted only gentle communion, no other, no passion now. So that soon she drew away, put on her hat and went home.

The next day however, he felt wistful and yearning. He thought he had been wrong, perhaps. Perhaps he had been wrong to go to her with an idea of what he wanted. Was it really only an idea, or was it the interpretation of a profound yearning? If the latter, how was it he was always talking about sensual fulfilment? The two did not agree very well.

Suddenly he found himself face to face with a situation. It was as simple as this: fatally simple. On the one hand, he knew he did not want a further sensual experience — something deeper, darker, than ordinary life could give. He remembered the African fetishes he had seen at Halliday's so often. There came back to him one, a statuette about two feet high, a tall, slim, elegant figure from West Africa, in dark wood, glossy and suave. It was a woman, with hair dressed high, like a melon-shaped dome. He remembered her vividly: she was one of his soul's intimates. Her body was long and elegant, her face was crushed tiny like a beetle's, she had rows of round heavy collars, like a column of quoits, on her neck. He remembered her: her astonishing cultured elegance, her diminished, beetle face, the astounding long elegant body, on short, ugly legs, with such protuberant buttocks, so weighty and unexpected below her slim long loins. She knew what he himself did not know. She had thousands of years of purely sensual, purely unspiritual knowledge behind her. It must have been thousands of years since her race had died, mystically: that is, since the relation between the senses and the outspoken mind had broken, leaving the experience all in one sort, mystically sensual. Thousands of years ago, that which was imminent in himself must have taken place in these Africans: the goodness, the holiness, the desire for creation and productive happiness must have lapsed, leaving the single impulse for knowledge in one sort, mindless progressive knowledge through the senses, knowledge arrested and ending in the senses, mystic knowledge in disintegration and dissolution, knowledge such as the beetles have, which live purely within the world of corruption and cold dissolution. This was why her face looked like a beetle's: this was why the Egyptians worshipped the ball-rolling scarab: because of the principle of knowledge in dissolution and corruption.

There is a long way we can travel, after the death-break: after that point when the soul in intense suffering breaks, breaks away from its organic hold like a leaf that falls. We fall from the connection with life and hope, we lapse from pure integral being, from creation and liberty, and we fall into the long, long African process of purely sensual understanding, knowledge in the mystery of dissolution.

He realised now that this is a long process — thousands of years it takes, after the death of the creative spirit. He realised that there were great mysteries to be

unsealed, sensual, mindless, dreadful mysteries, far beyond the phallic cult. How far, in their inverted culture, had these West Africans gone beyond phallic knowledge? Very, very far. Birkin recalled again the female figure: the elongated, long, long body, the curious unexpected heavy buttocks, the long, imprisoned neck, the face with tiny features like a beetle's. This was far beyond any phallic knowledge, sensual subtle realities far beyond the scope of phallic investigation.

There remained this way, this awful African process, to be fulfilled. It would be done differently by the white races. The white races, having the arctic north behind them, the vast abstraction of ice and snow, would fulfil a mystery of ice-destructive knowledge, snow-abstract annihilation. Whereas the West Africans, controlled by the burning death-abstraction of the Sahara, had been fulfilled in sun-destruction, the putrescent mystery of sun-rays.

Was this then all that remained? Was there left now nothing but to break off from the happy creative being, was the time up? Is our day of creative life finished? Does there remain to us only the strange, awful afterwards of the knowledge in dissolution, the African knowledge, but different in us, who are blond and blue-eyed from the north?

Birkin thought of Gerald. He was one of these strange white wonderful demons from the north, fulfilled in the destructive frost mystery. And was he fated to pass away in this knowledge, this one process of frost-knowledge, death by perfect cold? Was he a messenger, an omen of the universal dissolution into whiteness and snow?

Birkin was frightened. He was tired too, when he had reached this length of speculation. Suddenly his strange, strained attention gave way, he could not attend to these mysteries any more. There was another way, the way of freedom. There was the paradisaal entry into pure, single being, the individual soul taking precedence over love and desire for union, stronger than any pangs of emotion, a lovely state of free proud singleness, which accepted the obligation of the permanent connection with others, and with the other, submits to the yoke and leash of love, but never forfeits its own proud individual singleness, even while it loves and yields.

There was the other way, the remaining way. And he must run to follow it. He thought of Ursula, how sensitive and delicate she really was, her skin so over-fine, as if one skin were wanting. She was really so marvellously gentle and sensitive. Why did he ever forget it? He must go to her at once. He must ask her to marry him. They must marry at once, and so make a definite pledge, enter into a definite communion. He must set out at once and ask her, this moment. There was no moment to spare.

He drifted on swiftly to Beldover, half-unconscious of his own movement. He saw the town on the slope of the hill, not straggling, but as if walled-in with the straight, final streets of miners' dwellings, making a great square, and it looked like Jerusalem to his fancy. The world was all strange and transcendent.

Rosalind opened the door to him. She started slightly, as a young girl will, and said:

'Oh, I'll tell father.'

With which she disappeared, leaving Birkin in the hall, looking at some reproductions from Picasso, lately introduced by Gudrun. He was admiring the almost wizard, sensuous apprehension of the earth, when Will Brangwen appeared, rolling down his shirt sleeves.

'Well,' said Brangwen, 'I'll get a coat.' And he too disappeared for a moment. Then he returned, and opened the door of the drawing-room, saying:

'You must excuse me, I was just doing a bit of work in the shed. Come inside, will you.'

Birkin entered and sat down. He looked at the bright, reddish face of the other man, at the narrow brow and the very bright eyes, and at the rather sensual lips that unrolled wide and expansive under the black cropped moustache. How curious it was that this was a human being! What Brangwen thought himself to be, how meaningless it was, confronted with the reality of him. Birkin could see only a strange, inexplicable, almost patternless collection of passions and desires and suppressions and traditions and mechanical ideas, all cast unfused and disunited into this slender, bright-faced man of nearly fifty, who was as unresolved now as he was at twenty, and as uncreated. How could he be the parent of Ursula, when he was not created himself. He was not a parent. A slip of living flesh had been transmitted through him, but the spirit had not come from him. The spirit had not come from any ancestor, it had come out of the unknown. A child is the child of the mystery, or it is uncreated.

'The weather's not so bad as it has been,' said Brangwen, after waiting a moment. There was no connection between the two men.

'No,' said Birkin. 'It was full moon two days ago.'

'Oh! You believe in the moon then, affecting the weather?'

'No, I don't think I do. I don't really know enough about it.'

'You know what they say? The moon and the weather may change together, but the change of the moon won't change the weather.'

'Is that it?' said Birkin. 'I hadn't heard it.'

There was a pause. Then Birkin said:

'Am I hindering you? I called to see Ursula, really. Is she at home?'

'I don't believe she is. I believe she's gone to the library. I'll just see.'

Birkin could hear him enquiring in the dining-room.

‘No,’ he said, coming back. ‘But she won’t be long. You wanted to speak to her?’

Birkin looked across at the other man with curious calm, clear eyes.

‘As a matter of fact,’ he said, ‘I wanted to ask her to marry me.’

A point of light came on the golden-brown eyes of the elder man.

‘O-oh?’ he said, looking at Birkin, then dropping his eyes before the calm, steadily watching look of the other: ‘Was she expecting you then?’

‘No,’ said Birkin.

‘No? I didn’t know anything of this sort was on foot — ’ Brangwen smiled awkwardly.

Birkin looked back at him, and said to himself: ‘I wonder why it should be “on foot”!’ Aloud he said:

‘No, it’s perhaps rather sudden.’ At which, thinking of his relationship with Ursula, he added — ‘but I don’t know — ’

‘Quite sudden, is it? Oh!’ said Brangwen, rather baffled and annoyed.

‘In one way,’ replied Birkin, ‘ — not in another.’

There was a moment’s pause, after which Brangwen said:

‘Well, she pleases herself — ’

‘Oh yes!’ said Birkin, calmly.

A vibration came into Brangwen’s strong voice, as he replied:

‘Though I shouldn’t want her to be in too big a hurry, either. It’s no good looking round afterwards, when it’s too late.’

‘Oh, it need never be too late,’ said Birkin, ‘as far as that goes.’

‘How do you mean?’ asked the father.

‘If one repents being married, the marriage is at an end,’ said Birkin.

‘You think so?’

‘Yes.’

‘Ay, well that may be your way of looking at it.’

Birkin, in silence, thought to himself: ‘So it may. As for YOUR way of looking at it, William Brangwen, it needs a little explaining.’

‘I suppose,’ said Brangwen, ‘you know what sort of people we are? What sort of a bringing-up she’s had?’

“‘She”,’ thought Birkin to himself, remembering his childhood’s corrections, ‘is the cat’s mother.’

‘Do I know what sort of a bringing-up she’s had?’ he said aloud.

He seemed to annoy Brangwen intentionally.

‘Well,’ he said, ‘she’s had everything that’s right for a girl to have — as far as possible, as far as we could give it her.’

‘I’m sure she has,’ said Birkin, which caused a perilous full-stop. The father was becoming exasperated. There was something naturally irritant to him in Birkin’s mere presence.

‘And I don’t want to see her going back on it all,’ he said, in a clanging voice.

‘Why?’ said Birkin.

This monosyllable exploded in Brangwen’s brain like a shot.

‘Why! I don’t believe in your new-fangled ways and new-fangled ideas — in and out like a frog in a gallipot. It would never do for me.’

Birkin watched him with steady emotionless eyes. The radical antagonism in the two men was rousing.

‘Yes, but are my ways and ideas new-fangled?’ asked Birkin.

‘Are they?’ Brangwen caught himself up. ‘I’m not speaking of you in particular,’ he said. ‘What I mean is that my children have been brought up to think and do according to the religion I was brought up in myself, and I don’t want to see them going away from THAT.’

There was a dangerous pause.

‘And beyond that — ?’ asked Birkin.

The father hesitated, he was in a nasty position.

‘Eh? What do you mean? All I want to say is that my daughter’ — he tailed off into silence, overcome by futility. He knew that in some way he was off the track.

‘Of course,’ said Birkin, ‘I don’t want to hurt anybody or influence anybody. Ursula does exactly as she pleases.’

There was a complete silence, because of the utter failure in mutual understanding. Birkin felt bored. Her father was not a coherent human being, he was a roomful of old echoes. The eyes of the younger man rested on the face of the elder. Brangwen looked up, and saw Birkin looking at him. His face was covered with inarticulate anger and humiliation and sense of inferiority in strength.

‘And as for beliefs, that’s one thing,’ he said. ‘But I’d rather see my daughters dead tomorrow than that they should be at the beck and call of the first man that likes to come and whistle for them.’

A queer painful light came into Birkin’s eyes.

‘As to that,’ he said, ‘I only know that it’s much more likely that it’s I who am at the beck and call of the woman, than she at mine.’

Again there was a pause. The father was somewhat bewildered.

‘I know,’ he said, ‘she’ll please herself — she always has done. I’ve done my best for them, but that doesn’t matter. They’ve got themselves to please, and if they can help it they’ll please nobody BUT themselves. But she’s a right to

consider her mother, and me as well — ’

Brangwen was thinking his own thoughts.

‘And I tell you this much, I would rather bury them, than see them getting into a lot of loose ways such as you see everywhere nowadays. I’d rather bury them — ’

‘Yes but, you see,’ said Birkin slowly, rather wearily, bored again by this new turn, ‘they won’t give either you or me the chance to bury them, because they’re not to be buried.’

Brangwen looked at him in a sudden flare of impotent anger.

‘Now, Mr Birkin,’ he said, ‘I don’t know what you’ve come here for, and I don’t know what you’re asking for. But my daughters are my daughters — and it’s my business to look after them while I can.’

Birkin’s brows knitted suddenly, his eyes concentrated in mockery. But he remained perfectly stiff and still. There was a pause.

‘I’ve nothing against your marrying Ursula,’ Brangwen began at length. ‘It’s got nothing to do with me, she’ll do as she likes, me or no me.’

Birkin turned away, looking out of the window and letting go his consciousness. After all, what good was this? It was hopeless to keep it up. He would sit on till Ursula came home, then speak to her, then go away. He would not accept trouble at the hands of her father. It was all unnecessary, and he himself need not have provoked it.

The two men sat in complete silence, Birkin almost unconscious of his own whereabouts. He had come to ask her to marry him — well then, he would wait on, and ask her. As for what she said, whether she accepted or not, he did not think about it. He would say what he had come to say, and that was all he was conscious of. He accepted the complete insignificance of this household, for him. But everything now was as if fated. He could see one thing ahead, and no more. From the rest, he was absolved entirely for the time being. It had to be left to fate and chance to resolve the issues.

At length they heard the gate. They saw her coming up the steps with a bundle of books under her arm. Her face was bright and abstracted as usual, with the abstraction, that look of being not quite THERE, not quite present to the facts of reality, that galled her father so much. She had a maddening faculty of assuming a light of her own, which excluded the reality, and within which she looked radiant as if in sunshine.

They heard her go into the dining-room, and drop her armful of books on the table.

‘Did you bring me that Girl’s Own?’ cried Rosalind.

‘Yes, I brought it. But I forgot which one it was you wanted.’

‘You would,’ cried Rosalind angrily. ‘It’s right for a wonder.’

Then they heard her say something in a lowered tone.

‘Where?’ cried Ursula.

Again her sister’s voice was muffled.

Brangwen opened the door, and called, in his strong, brazen voice:

‘Ursula.’

She appeared in a moment, wearing her hat.

‘Oh how do you do!’ she cried, seeing Birkin, and all dazzled as if taken by surprise. He wondered at her, knowing she was aware of his presence. She had her queer, radiant, breathless manner, as if confused by the actual world, unreal to it, having a complete bright world of her self alone.

‘Have I interrupted a conversation?’ she asked.

‘No, only a complete silence,’ said Birkin.

‘Oh,’ said Ursula, vaguely, absent. Their presence was not vital to her, she was withheld, she did not take them in. It was a subtle insult that never failed to exasperate her father.

‘Mr Birkin came to speak to YOU, not to me,’ said her father.

‘Oh, did he!’ she exclaimed vaguely, as if it did not concern her. Then, recollecting herself, she turned to him rather radiantly, but still quite superficially, and said: ‘Was it anything special?’

‘I hope so,’ he said, ironically.

‘— To propose to you, according to all accounts,’ said her father.

‘Oh,’ said Ursula.

‘Oh,’ mocked her father, imitating her. ‘Have you nothing more to say?’

She winced as if violated.

‘Did you really come to propose to me?’ she asked of Birkin, as if it were a joke.

‘Yes,’ he said. ‘I suppose I came to propose.’ He seemed to fight shy of the last word.

‘Did you?’ she cried, with her vague radiance. He might have been saying anything whatsoever. She seemed pleased.

‘Yes,’ he answered. ‘I wanted to — I wanted you to agree to marry me.’

She looked at him. His eyes were flickering with mixed lights, wanting something of her, yet not wanting it. She shrank a little, as if she were exposed to his eyes, and as if it were a pain to her. She darkened, her soul clouded over, she turned aside. She had been driven out of her own radiant, single world. And she dreaded contact, it was almost unnatural to her at these times.

‘Yes,’ she said vaguely, in a doubting, absent voice.

Birkin’s heart contracted swiftly, in a sudden fire of bitterness. It all meant

nothing to her. He had been mistaken again. She was in some self-satisfied world of her own. He and his hopes were accidentals, violations to her. It drove her father to a pitch of mad exasperation. He had had to put up with this all his life, from her.

‘Well, what do you say?’ he cried.

She winced. Then she glanced down at her father, half-frightened, and she said:

‘I didn’t speak, did I?’ as if she were afraid she might have committed herself.

‘No,’ said her father, exasperated. ‘But you needn’t look like an idiot. You’ve got your wits, haven’t you?’

She ebbed away in silent hostility.

‘I’ve got my wits, what does that mean?’ she repeated, in a sullen voice of antagonism.

‘You heard what was asked you, didn’t you?’ cried her father in anger.

‘Of course I heard.’

‘Well then, can’t you answer?’ thundered her father.

‘Why should I?’

At the impertinence of this retort, he went stiff. But he said nothing.

‘No,’ said Birkin, to help out the occasion, ‘there’s no need to answer at once. You can say when you like.’

Her eyes flashed with a powerful light.

‘Why should I say anything?’ she cried. ‘You do this off your OWN bat, it has nothing to do with me. Why do you both want to bully me?’

‘Bully you! Bully you!’ cried her father, in bitter, rancorous anger. ‘Bully you! Why, it’s a pity you can’t be bullied into some sense and decency. Bully you! YOU’LL see to that, you self-willed creature.’

She stood suspended in the middle of the room, her face glimmering and dangerous. She was set in satisfied defiance. Birkin looked up at her. He too was angry.

‘But none is bullying you,’ he said, in a very soft dangerous voice also.

‘Oh yes,’ she cried. ‘You both want to force me into something.’

‘That is an illusion of yours,’ he said ironically.

‘Illusion!’ cried her father. ‘A self-opinionated fool, that’s what she is.’

Birkin rose, saying:

‘However, we’ll leave it for the time being.’

And without another word, he walked out of the house.

‘You fool! You fool!’ her father cried to her, with extreme bitterness. She left the room, and went upstairs, singing to herself. But she was terribly fluttered, as after some dreadful fight. From her window, she could see Birkin going up the

road. He went in such a blithe drift of rage, that her mind wondered over him. He was ridiculous, but she was afraid of him. She was as if escaped from some danger.

Her father sat below, powerless in humiliation and chagrin. It was as if he were possessed with all the devils, after one of these unaccountable conflicts with Ursula. He hated her as if his only reality were in hating her to the last degree. He had all hell in his heart. But he went away, to escape himself. He knew he must despair, yield, give in to despair, and have done.

Ursula's face closed, she completed herself against them all. Recoiling upon herself, she became hard and self-completed, like a jewel. She was bright and invulnerable, quite free and happy, perfectly liberated in her self-possession. Her father had to learn not to see her blithe obliviousness, or it would have sent him mad. She was so radiant with all things, in her possession of perfect hostility.

She would go on now for days like this, in this bright frank state of seemingly pure spontaneity, so essentially oblivious of the existence of anything but herself, but so ready and facile in her interest. Ah it was a bitter thing for a man to be near her, and her father cursed his fatherhood. But he must learn not to see her, not to know.

She was perfectly stable in resistance when she was in this state: so bright and radiant and attractive in her pure opposition, so very pure, and yet mistrusted by everybody, disliked on every hand. It was her voice, curiously clear and repellent, that gave her away. Only Gudrun was in accord with her. It was at these times that the intimacy between the two sisters was most complete, as if their intelligence were one. They felt a strong, bright bond of understanding between them, surpassing everything else. And during all these days of blind bright abstraction and intimacy of his two daughters, the father seemed to breathe an air of death, as if he were destroyed in his very being. He was irritable to madness, he could not rest, his daughters seemed to be destroying him. But he was inarticulate and helpless against them. He was forced to breathe the air of his own death. He cursed them in his soul, and only wanted, that they should be removed from him.

They continued radiant in their easy female transcendancy, beautiful to look at. They exchanged confidences, they were intimate in their revelations to the last degree, giving each other at last every secret. They withheld nothing, they told everything, till they were over the border of evil. And they armed each other with knowledge, they extracted the subtlest flavours from the apple of knowledge. It was curious how their knowledge was complementary, that of each to that of the other.

Ursula saw her men as sons, pitied their yearning and admired their courage,

and wondered over them as a mother wonders over her child, with a certain delight in their novelty. But to Gudrun, they were the opposite camp. She feared them and despised them, and respected their activities even overmuch.

‘Of course,’ she said easily, ‘there is a quality of life in Birkin which is quite remarkable. There is an extraordinary rich spring of life in him, really amazing, the way he can give himself to things. But there are so many things in life that he simply doesn’t know. Either he is not aware of their existence at all, or he dismisses them as merely negligible — things which are vital to the other person. In a way, he is not clever enough, he is too intense in spots.’

‘Yes,’ cried Ursula, ‘too much of a preacher. He is really a priest.’

‘Exactly! He can’t hear what anybody else has to say — he simply cannot hear. His own voice is so loud.’

‘Yes. He cries you down.’

‘He cries you down,’ repeated Gudrun. ‘And by mere force of violence. And of course it is hopeless. Nobody is convinced by violence. It makes talking to him impossible — and living with him I should think would be more than impossible.’

‘You don’t think one could live with him’ asked Ursula.

‘I think it would be too wearing, too exhausting. One would be shouted down every time, and rushed into his way without any choice. He would want to control you entirely. He cannot allow that there is any other mind than his own. And then the real clumsiness of his mind is its lack of self-criticism. No, I think it would be perfectly intolerable.’

‘Yes,’ assented Ursula vaguely. She only half agreed with Gudrun. ‘The nuisance is,’ she said, ‘that one would find almost any man intolerable after a fortnight.’

‘It’s perfectly dreadful,’ said Gudrun. ‘But Birkin — he is too positive. He couldn’t bear it if you called your soul your own. Of him that is strictly true.’

‘Yes,’ said Ursula. ‘You must have HIS soul.’

‘Exactly! And what can you conceive more deadly?’ This was all so true, that Ursula felt jarred to the bottom of her soul with ugly distaste.

She went on, with the discord jarring and jolting through her, in the most barren of misery.

Then there started a revulsion from Gudrun. She finished life off so thoroughly, she made things so ugly and so final. As a matter of fact, even if it were as Gudrun said, about Birkin, other things were true as well. But Gudrun would draw two lines under him and cross him out like an account that is settled. There he was, summed up, paid for, settled, done with. And it was such a lie. This finality of Gudrun’s, this dispatching of people and things in a sentence, it

was all such a lie. Ursula began to revolt from her sister.

One day as they were walking along the lane, they saw a robin sitting on the top twig of a bush, singing shrilly. The sisters stood to look at him. An ironical smile flickered on Gudrun's face.

'Doesn't he feel important?' smiled Gudrun.

'Doesn't he!' exclaimed Ursula, with a little ironical grimace. 'Isn't he a little Lloyd George of the air!'

'Isn't he! Little Lloyd George of the air! That's just what they are,' cried Gudrun in delight. Then for days, Ursula saw the persistent, obtrusive birds as stout, short politicians lifting up their voices from the platform, little men who must make themselves heard at any cost.

But even from this there came the revulsion. Some yellowhammers suddenly shot along the road in front of her. And they looked to her so uncanny and inhuman, like flaring yellow barbs shooting through the air on some weird, living errand, that she said to herself: 'After all, it is impudence to call them little Lloyd Georges. They are really unknown to us, they are the unknown forces. It is impudence to look at them as if they were the same as human beings. They are of another world. How stupid anthropomorphism is! Gudrun is really impudent, insolent, making herself the measure of everything, making everything come down to human standards. Rupert is quite right, human beings are boring, painting the universe with their own image. The universe is non-human, thank God.' It seemed to her irreverence, destructive of all true life, to make little Lloyd Georges of the birds. It was such a lie towards the robins, and such a defamation. Yet she had done it herself. But under Gudrun's influence: so she exonerated herself.

So she withdrew away from Gudrun and from that which she stood for, she turned in spirit towards Birkin again. She had not seen him since the fiasco of his proposal. She did not want to, because she did not want the question of her acceptance thrust upon her. She knew what Birkin meant when he asked her to marry him; vaguely, without putting it into speech, she knew. She knew what kind of love, what kind of surrender he wanted. And she was not at all sure that this was the kind of love that she herself wanted. She was not at all sure that it was this mutual unison in separateness that she wanted. She wanted unspeakable intimacies. She wanted to have him, utterly, finally to have him as her own, oh, so unspeakably, in intimacy. To drink him down — ah, like a life-draught. She made great professions, to herself, of her willingness to warm his foot-soles between her breasts, after the fashion of the nauseous Meredith poem. But only on condition that he, her lover, loved her absolutely, with complete self-abandon. And subtly enough, she knew he would never abandon himself

FINALLY to her. He did not believe in final self-abandonment. He said it openly. It was his challenge. She was prepared to fight him for it. For she believed in an absolute surrender to love. She believed that love far surpassed the individual. He said the individual was MORE than love, or than any relationship. For him, the bright, single soul accepted love as one of its conditions, a condition of its own equilibrium. She believed that love was EVERYTHING. Man must render himself up to her. He must be quaffed to the dregs by her. Let him be HER MAN utterly, and she in return would be his humble slave — whether she wanted it or not.

CHAPTER XX.

GLADIATORIAL

After the fiasco of the proposal, Birkin had hurried blindly away from Beldover, in a whirl of fury. He felt he had been a complete fool, that the whole scene had been a farce of the first water. But that did not trouble him at all. He was deeply, mockingly angry that Ursula persisted always in this old cry: 'Why do you want to bully me?' and in her bright, insolent abstraction.

He went straight to Shortlands. There he found Gerald standing with his back to the fire, in the library, as motionless as a man is, who is completely and emptily restless, utterly hollow. He had done all the work he wanted to do — and now there was nothing. He could go out in the car, he could run to town. But he did not want to go out in the car, he did not want to run to town, he did not want to call on the Thirlbys. He was suspended motionless, in an agony of inertia, like a machine that is without power.

This was very bitter to Gerald, who had never known what boredom was, who had gone from activity to activity, never at a loss. Now, gradually, everything seemed to be stopping in him. He did not want any more to do the things that offered. Something dead within him just refused to respond to any suggestion. He cast over in his mind, what it would be possible to do, to save himself from this misery of nothingness, relieve the stress of this hollowness. And there were only three things left, that would rouse him, make him live. One was to drink or smoke hashish, the other was to be soothed by Birkin, and the third was women. And there was no-one for the moment to drink with. Nor was there a woman. And he knew Birkin was out. So there was nothing to do but to bear the stress of his own emptiness.

When he saw Birkin his face lit up in a sudden, wonderful smile.

'By God, Rupert,' he said, 'I'd just come to the conclusion that nothing in the world mattered except somebody to take the edge off one's being alone: the right somebody.'

The smile in his eyes was very astonishing, as he looked at the other man. It was the pure gleam of relief. His face was pallid and even haggard.

'The right woman, I suppose you mean,' said Birkin spitefully.

'Of course, for choice. Failing that, an amusing man.'

He laughed as he said it. Birkin sat down near the fire.

'What were you doing?' he asked.

'I? Nothing. I'm in a bad way just now, everything's on edge, and I can neither work nor play. I don't know whether it's a sign of old age, I'm sure.'

'You mean you are bored?'

'Bored, I don't know. I can't apply myself. And I feel the devil is either very present inside me, or dead.'

Birkin glanced up and looked in his eyes.

'You should try hitting something,' he said.

Gerald smiled.

'Perhaps,' he said. 'So long as it was something worth hitting.'

'Quite!' said Birkin, in his soft voice. There was a long pause during which each could feel the presence of the other.

'One has to wait,' said Birkin.

'Ah God! Waiting! What are we waiting for?'

'Some old Johnny says there are three cures for ENNUI, sleep, drink, and travel,' said Birkin.

'All cold eggs,' said Gerald. 'In sleep, you dream, in drink you curse, and in travel you yell at a porter. No, work and love are the two. When you're not at work you should be in love.'

'Be it then,' said Birkin.

'Give me the object,' said Gerald. 'The possibilities of love exhaust themselves.'

'Do they? And then what?'

'Then you die,' said Gerald.

'So you ought,' said Birkin.

'I don't see it,' replied Gerald. He took his hands out of his trousers pockets, and reached for a cigarette. He was tense and nervous. He lit the cigarette over a lamp, reaching forward and drawing steadily. He was dressed for dinner, as usual in the evening, although he was alone.

'There's a third one even to your two,' said Birkin. 'Work, love, and fighting. You forget the fight.'

'I suppose I do,' said Gerald. 'Did you ever do any boxing — ?'

'No, I don't think I did,' said Birkin.

'Ay — ' Gerald lifted his head and blew the smoke slowly into the air.

'Why?' said Birkin.

'Nothing. I thought we might have a round. It is perhaps true, that I want

something to hit. It's a suggestion.'

'So you think you might as well hit me?' said Birkin.

'You? Well! Perhaps — ! In a friendly kind of way, of course.'

'Quite!' said Birkin, bitingly.

Gerald stood leaning back against the mantel-piece. He looked down at Birkin, and his eyes flashed with a sort of terror like the eyes of a stallion, that are bloodshot and overwrought, turned glancing backwards in a stiff terror.

'I fell that if I don't watch myself, I shall find myself doing something silly,' he said.

'Why not do it?' said Birkin coldly.

Gerald listened with quick impatience. He kept glancing down at Birkin, as if looking for something from the other man.

'I used to do some Japanese wrestling,' said Birkin. 'A Jap lived in the same house with me in Heidelberg, and he taught me a little. But I was never much good at it.'

'You did!' exclaimed Gerald. 'That's one of the things I've never ever seen done. You mean jiu-jitsu, I suppose?'

'Yes. But I am no good at those things — they don't interest me.'

'They don't? They do me. What's the start?'

'I'll show you what I can, if you like,' said Birkin.

'You will?' A queer, smiling look tightened Gerald's face for a moment, as he said, 'Well, I'd like it very much.'

'Then we'll try jiu-jitsu. Only you can't do much in a starched shirt.'

'Then let us strip, and do it properly. Hold a minute — ' He rang the bell, and waited for the butler.

'Bring a couple of sandwiches and a syphon,' he said to the man, 'and then don't trouble me any more tonight — or let anybody else.'

The man went. Gerald turned to Birkin with his eyes lighted.

'And you used to wrestle with a Jap?' he said. 'Did you strip?'

'Sometimes.'

'You did! What was he like then, as a wrestler?'

'Good, I believe. I am no judge. He was very quick and slippery and full of electric fire. It is a remarkable thing, what a curious sort of fluid force they seem to have in them, those people not like a human grip — like a polyp — '

Gerald nodded.

'I should imagine so,' he said, 'to look at them. They repel me, rather.'

'Repel and attract, both. They are very repulsive when they are cold, and they look grey. But when they are hot and roused, there is a definite attraction — a curious kind of full electric fluid — like eels.'

‘Well — yes — probably.’

The man brought in the tray and set it down.

‘Don’t come in any more,’ said Gerald.

The door closed.

‘Well then,’ said Gerald; ‘shall we strip and begin? Will you have a drink first?’

‘No, I don’t want one.’

‘Neither do I.’

Gerald fastened the door and pushed the furniture aside. The room was large, there was plenty of space, it was thickly carpeted. Then he quickly threw off his clothes, and waited for Birkin. The latter, white and thin, came over to him. Birkin was more a presence than a visible object, Gerald was aware of him completely, but not really visually. Whereas Gerald himself was concrete and noticeable, a piece of pure final substance.

‘Now,’ said Birkin, ‘I will show you what I learned, and what I remember. You let me take you so — ’ And his hands closed on the naked body of the other man. In another moment, he had Gerald swung over lightly and balanced against his knee, head downwards. Relaxed, Gerald sprang to his feet with eyes glittering.

‘That’s smart,’ he said. ‘Now try again.’

So the two men began to struggle together. They were very dissimilar. Birkin was tall and narrow, his bones were very thin and fine. Gerald was much heavier and more plastic. His bones were strong and round, his limbs were rounded, all his contours were beautifully and fully moulded. He seemed to stand with a proper, rich weight on the face of the earth, whilst Birkin seemed to have the centre of gravitation in his own middle. And Gerald had a rich, frictional kind of strength, rather mechanical, but sudden and invincible, whereas Birkin was abstract as to be almost intangible. He impinged invisibly upon the other man, scarcely seeming to touch him, like a garment, and then suddenly piercing in a tense fine grip that seemed to penetrate into the very quick of Gerald’s being.

They stopped, they discussed methods, they practised grips and throws, they became accustomed to each other, to each other’s rhythm, they got a kind of mutual physical understanding. And then again they had a real struggle. They seemed to drive their white flesh deeper and deeper against each other, as if they would break into a oneness. Birkin had a great subtle energy, that would press upon the other man with an uncanny force, weigh him like a spell put upon him. Then it would pass, and Gerald would heave free, with white, heaving, dazzling movements.

So the two men entwined and wrestled with each other, working nearer and

nearer. Both were white and clear, but Gerald flushed smart red where he was touched, and Birkin remained white and tense. He seemed to penetrate into Gerald's more solid, more diffuse bulk, to interfuse his body through the body of the other, as if to bring it subtly into subjection, always seizing with some rapid necromantic fore-knowledge every motion of the other flesh, converting and counteracting it, playing upon the limbs and trunk of Gerald like some hard wind. It was as if Birkin's whole physical intelligence interpenetrated into Gerald's body, as if his fine, sublimated energy entered into the flesh of the fuller man, like some potency, casting a fine net, a prison, through the muscles into the very depths of Gerald's physical being.

So they wrestled swiftly, rapturously, intent and mindless at last, two essential white figures working into a tighter closer oneness of struggle, with a strange, octopus-like knotting and flashing of limbs in the subdued light of the room; a tense white knot of flesh gripped in silence between the walls of old brown books. Now and again came a sharp gasp of breath, or a sound like a sigh, then the rapid thudding of movement on the thickly-carpeted floor, then the strange sound of flesh escaping under flesh. Often, in the white interlaced knot of violent living being that swayed silently, there was no head to be seen, only the swift, tight limbs, the solid white backs, the physical junction of two bodies clinched into oneness. Then would appear the gleaming, ruffled head of Gerald, as the struggle changed, then for a moment the dun-coloured, shadow-like head of the other man would lift up from the conflict, the eyes wide and dreadful and sightless.

At length Gerald lay back inert on the carpet, his breast rising in great slow panting, whilst Birkin kneeled over him, almost unconscious. Birkin was much more exhausted. He caught little, short breaths, he could scarcely breathe any more. The earth seemed to tilt and sway, and a complete darkness was coming over his mind. He did not know what happened. He slid forward quite unconscious, over Gerald, and Gerald did not notice. Then he was half-conscious again, aware only of the strange tilting and sliding of the world. The world was sliding, everything was sliding off into the darkness. And he was sliding, endlessly, endlessly away.

He came to consciousness again, hearing an immense knocking outside. What could be happening, what was it, the great hammer-stroke resounding through the house? He did not know. And then it came to him that it was his own heart beating. But that seemed impossible, the noise was outside. No, it was inside himself, it was his own heart. And the beating was painful, so strained, surcharged. He wondered if Gerald heard it. He did not know whether he were standing or lying or falling.

When he realised that he had fallen prostrate upon Gerald's body he wondered, he was surprised. But he sat up, steadying himself with his hand and waiting for his heart to become stiller and less painful. It hurt very much, and took away his consciousness.

Gerald however was still less conscious than Birkin. They waited dimly, in a sort of not-being, for many uncounted, unknown minutes.

'Of course — ' panted Gerald, 'I didn't have to be rough — with you — I had to keep back — my force — '

Birkin heard the sound as if his own spirit stood behind him, outside him, and listened to it. His body was in a trance of exhaustion, his spirit heard thinly. His body could not answer. Only he knew his heart was getting quieter. He was divided entirely between his spirit, which stood outside, and knew, and his body, that was a plunging, unconscious stroke of blood.

'I could have thrown you — using violence — ' panted Gerald. 'But you beat me right enough.'

'Yes,' said Birkin, hardening his throat and producing the words in the tension there, 'you're much stronger than I — you could beat me — easily.'

Then he relaxed again to the terrible plunging of his heart and his blood.

'It surprised me,' panted Gerald, 'what strength you've got. Almost supernatural.'

'For a moment,' said Birkin.

He still heard as if it were his own disembodied spirit hearing, standing at some distance behind him. It drew nearer however, his spirit. And the violent striking of blood in his chest was sinking quieter, allowing his mind to come back. He realised that he was leaning with all his weight on the soft body of the other man. It startled him, because he thought he had withdrawn. He recovered himself, and sat up. But he was still vague and unestablished. He put out his hand to steady himself. It touched the hand of Gerald, that was lying out on the floor. And Gerald's hand closed warm and sudden over Birkin's, they remained exhausted and breathless, the one hand clasped closely over the other. It was Birkin whose hand, in swift response, had closed in a strong, warm clasp over the hand of the other. Gerald's clasp had been sudden and momentaneous.

The normal consciousness however was returning, ebbing back. Birkin could breathe almost naturally again. Gerald's hand slowly withdrew, Birkin slowly, dazedly rose to his feet and went towards the table. He poured out a whiskey and soda. Gerald also came for a drink.

'It was a real set-to, wasn't it?' said Birkin, looking at Gerald with darkened eyes.

'God, yes,' said Gerald. He looked at the delicate body of the other man, and

added: 'It wasn't too much for you, was it?'

'No. One ought to wrestle and strive and be physically close. It makes one sane.'

'You do think so?'

'I do. Don't you?'

'Yes,' said Gerald.

There were long spaces of silence between their words. The wrestling had some deep meaning to them — an unfinished meaning.

'We are mentally, spiritually intimate, therefore we should be more or less physically intimate too — it is more whole.'

'Certainly it is,' said Gerald. Then he laughed pleasantly, adding: 'It's rather wonderful to me.' He stretched out his arms handsomely.

'Yes,' said Birkin. 'I don't know why one should have to justify oneself.'

'No.'

The two men began to dress.

'I think also that you are beautiful,' said Birkin to Gerald, 'and that is enjoyable too. One should enjoy what is given.'

'You think I am beautiful — how do you mean, physically?' asked Gerald, his eyes glistening.

'Yes. You have a northern kind of beauty, like light refracted from snow — and a beautiful, plastic form. Yes, that is there to enjoy as well. We should enjoy everything.'

Gerald laughed in his throat, and said:

'That's certainly one way of looking at it. I can say this much, I feel better. It has certainly helped me. Is this the Bruderschaft you wanted?'

'Perhaps. Do you think this pledges anything?'

'I don't know,' laughed Gerald.

'At any rate, one feels freer and more open now — and that is what we want.'

'Certainly,' said Gerald.

They drew to the fire, with the decanters and the glasses and the food.

'I always eat a little before I go to bed,' said Gerald. 'I sleep better.'

'I should not sleep so well,' said Birkin.

'No? There you are, we are not alike. I'll put a dressing-gown on.' Birkin remained alone, looking at the fire. His mind had reverted to Ursula. She seemed to return again into his consciousness. Gerald came down wearing a gown of broad-barred, thick black-and-green silk, brilliant and striking.

'You are very fine,' said Birkin, looking at the full robe.

'It was a caftan in Bokhara,' said Gerald. 'I like it.'

'I like it too.'

Birkin was silent, thinking how scrupulous Gerald was in his attire, how expensive too. He wore silk socks, and studs of fine workmanship, and silk underclothing, and silk braces. Curious! This was another of the differences between them. Birkin was careless and unimaginative about his own appearance.

‘Of course you,’ said Gerald, as if he had been thinking; ‘there’s something curious about you. You’re curiously strong. One doesn’t expect it, it is rather surprising.’

Birkin laughed. He was looking at the handsome figure of the other man, blond and comely in the rich robe, and he was half thinking of the difference between it and himself — so different; as far, perhaps, apart as man from woman, yet in another direction. But really it was Ursula, it was the woman who was gaining ascendance over Birkin’s being, at this moment. Gerald was becoming dim again, lapsing out of him.

‘Do you know,’ he said suddenly, ‘I went and proposed to Ursula Brangwen tonight, that she should marry me.’

He saw the blank shining wonder come over Gerald’s face.

‘You did?’

‘Yes. Almost formally — speaking first to her father, as it should be, in the world — though that was accident — or mischief.’

Gerald only stared in wonder, as if he did not grasp.

‘You don’t mean to say that you seriously went and asked her father to let you marry her?’

‘Yes,’ said Birkin, ‘I did.’

‘What, had you spoken to her before about it, then?’

‘No, not a word. I suddenly thought I would go there and ask her — and her father happened to come instead of her — so I asked him first.’

‘If you could have her?’ concluded Gerald.

‘Ye-es, that.’

‘And you didn’t speak to her?’

‘Yes. She came in afterwards. So it was put to her as well.’

‘It was! And what did she say then? You’re an engaged man?’

‘No, — she only said she didn’t want to be bullied into answering.’

‘She what?’

‘Said she didn’t want to be bullied into answering.’

‘“Said she didn’t want to be bullied into answering!” Why, what did she mean by that?’

Birkin raised his shoulders. ‘Can’t say,’ he answered. ‘Didn’t want to be bothered just then, I suppose.’

‘But is this really so? And what did you do then?’

‘I walked out of the house and came here.’

‘You came straight here?’

‘Yes.’

Gerald stared in amazement and amusement. He could not take it in.

‘But is this really true, as you say it now?’

‘Word for word.’

‘It is?’

He leaned back in his chair, filled with delight and amusement.

‘Well, that’s good,’ he said. ‘And so you came here to wrestle with your good angel, did you?’

‘Did I?’ said Birkin.

‘Well, it looks like it. Isn’t that what you did?’

Now Birkin could not follow Gerald’s meaning.

‘And what’s going to happen?’ said Gerald. ‘You’re going to keep open the proposition, so to speak?’

‘I suppose so. I vowed to myself I would see them all to the devil. But I suppose I shall ask her again, in a little while.’

Gerald watched him steadily.

‘So you’re fond of her then?’ he asked.

‘I think — I love her,’ said Birkin, his face going very still and fixed.

Gerald glistened for a moment with pleasure, as if it were something done specially to please him. Then his face assumed a fitting gravity, and he nodded his head slowly.

‘You know,’ he said, ‘I always believed in love — true love. But where does one find it nowadays?’

‘I don’t know,’ said Birkin.

‘Very rarely,’ said Gerald. Then, after a pause, ‘I’ve never felt it myself — not what I should call love. I’ve gone after women — and been keen enough over some of them. But I’ve never felt LOVE. I don’t believe I’ve ever felt as much LOVE for a woman, as I have for you — not LOVE. You understand what I mean?’

‘Yes. I’m sure you’ve never loved a woman.’

‘You feel that, do you? And do you think I ever shall? You understand what I mean?’ He put his hand to his breast, closing his fist there, as if he would draw something out. ‘I mean that — that I can’t express what it is, but I know it.’

‘What is it, then?’ asked Birkin.

‘You see, I can’t put it into words. I mean, at any rate, something abiding, something that can’t change — ’

His eyes were bright and puzzled.

‘Now do you think I shall ever feel that for a woman?’ he said, anxiously.

Birkin looked at him, and shook his head.

‘I don’t know,’ he said. ‘I could not say.’

Gerald had been on the QUI VIVE, as awaiting his fate. Now he drew back in his chair.

‘No,’ he said, ‘and neither do I, and neither do I.’

‘We are different, you and I,’ said Birkin. ‘I can’t tell your life.’

‘No,’ said Gerald, ‘no more can I. But I tell you — I begin to doubt it!’

‘That you will ever love a woman?’

‘Well — yes — what you would truly call love — ’

‘You doubt it?’

‘Well — I begin to.’

There was a long pause.

‘Life has all kinds of things,’ said Birkin. ‘There isn’t only one road.’

‘Yes, I believe that too. I believe it. And mind you, I don’t care how it is with me — I don’t care how it is — so long as I don’t feel — ’ he paused, and a blank, barren look passed over his face, to express his feeling — ‘so long as I feel I’ve LIVED, somehow — and I don’t care how it is — but I want to feel that — ’

‘Fulfilled,’ said Birkin.

‘We-ell, perhaps it is fulfilled; I don’t use the same words as you.’

‘It is the same.’

CHAPTER XXI.

THRESHOLD

Gudrun was away in London, having a little show of her work, with a friend, and looking round, preparing for flight from Beldover. Come what might she would be on the wing in a very short time. She received a letter from Winifred Crich, ornamented with drawings.

‘Father also has been to London, to be examined by the doctors. It made him very tired. They say he must rest a very great deal, so he is mostly in bed. He brought me a lovely tropical parrot in faience, of Dresden ware, also a man ploughing, and two mice climbing up a stalk, also in faience. The mice were Copenhagen ware. They are the best, but mice don’t shine so much, otherwise they are very good, their tails are slim and long. They all shine nearly like glass. Of course it is the glaze, but I don’t like it. Gerald likes the man ploughing the best, his trousers are torn, he is ploughing with an ox, being I suppose a German peasant. It is all grey and white, white shirt and grey trousers, but very shiny and clean. Mr Birkin likes the girl best, under the hawthorn blossom, with a lamb, and with daffodils painted on her skirts, in the drawing room. But that is silly, because the lamb is not a real lamb, and she is silly too.

‘Dear Miss Brangwen, are you coming back soon, you are very much missed here. I enclose a drawing of father sitting up in bed. He says he hopes you are not going to forsake us. Oh dear Miss Brangwen, I am sure you won’t. Do come back and draw the ferrets, they are the most lovely noble darlings in the world. We might carve them in holly-wood, playing against a background of green leaves. Oh do let us, for they are most beautiful.

‘Father says we might have a studio. Gerald says we could easily have a beautiful one over the stables, it would only need windows to be put in the slant of the roof, which is a simple matter. Then you could stay here all day and work, and we could live in the studio, like two real artists, like the man in the picture in the hall, with the frying-pan and the walls all covered with drawings. I long to be free, to live the free life of an artist. Even Gerald told father that only an artist is free, because he lives in a creative world of his own — ’

Gudrun caught the drift of the family intentions, in this letter. Gerald wanted her to be attached to the household at Shortlands, he was using Winifred as his stalking-horse. The father thought only of his child, he saw a rock of salvation in Gudrun. And Gudrun admired him for his perspicacity. The child, moreover, was really exceptional. Gudrun was quite content. She was quite willing, given a studio, to spend her days at Shortlands. She disliked the Grammar School already thoroughly, she wanted to be free. If a studio were provided, she would be free to go on with her work, she would await the turn of events with complete serenity. And she was really interested in Winifred, she would be quite glad to understand the girl.

So there was quite a little festivity on Winifred's account, the day Gudrun returned to Shortlands.

'You should make a bunch of flowers to give to Miss Brangwen when she arrives,' Gerald said smiling to his sister.

'Oh no,' cried Winifred, 'it's silly.'

'Not at all. It is a very charming and ordinary attention.'

'Oh, it is silly,' protested Winifred, with all the extreme MAUVAISE HONTE of her years. Nevertheless, the idea appealed to her. She wanted very much to carry it out. She flitted round the green-houses and the conservatory looking wistfully at the flowers on their stems. And the more she looked, the more she LONGED to have a bunch of the blossoms she saw, the more fascinated she became with her little vision of ceremony, and the more consumedly shy and self-conscious she grew, till she was almost beside herself. She could not get the idea out of her mind. It was as if some haunting challenge prompted her, and she had not enough courage to take it up. So again she drifted into the green-houses, looking at the lovely roses in their pots, and at the virginal cyclamens, and at the mystic white clusters of a creeper. The beauty, oh the beauty of them, and oh the paradisaal bliss, if she should have a perfect bouquet and could give it to Gudrun the next day. Her passion and her complete indecision almost made her ill.

At last she slid to her father's side.

'Daddie — ' she said.

'What, my precious?'

But she hung back, the tears almost coming to her eyes, in her sensitive confusion. Her father looked at her, and his heart ran hot with tenderness, an anguish of poignant love.

'What do you want to say to me, my love?'

'Daddie — !' her eyes smiled laconically — 'isn't it silly if I give Miss Brangwen some flowers when she comes?'

The sick man looked at the bright, knowing eyes of his child, and his heart

burned with love.

‘No, darling, that’s not silly. It’s what they do to queens.’

This was not very reassuring to Winifred. She half suspected that queens in themselves were a silliness. Yet she so wanted her little romantic occasion.

‘Shall I then?’ she asked.

‘Give Miss Brangwen some flowers? Do, Birdie. Tell Wilson I say you are to have what you want.’

The child smiled a small, subtle, unconscious smile to herself, in anticipation of her way.

‘But I won’t get them till tomorrow,’ she said.

‘Not till tomorrow, Birdie. Give me a kiss then — ’

Winifred silently kissed the sick man, and drifted out of the room. She again went the round of the green-houses and the conservatory, informing the gardener, in her high, peremptory, simple fashion, of what she wanted, telling him all the blooms she had selected.

‘What do you want these for?’ Wilson asked.

‘I want them,’ she said. She wished servants did not ask questions.

‘Ay, you’ve said as much. But what do you want them for, for decoration, or to send away, or what?’

‘I want them for a presentation bouquet.’

‘A presentation bouquet! Who’s coming then? — the Duchess of Portland?’

‘No.’

‘Oh, not her? Well you’ll have a rare poppy-show if you put all the things you’ve mentioned into your bouquet.’

‘Yes, I want a rare poppy-show.’

‘You do! Then there’s no more to be said.’

The next day Winifred, in a dress of silvery velvet, and holding a gaudy bunch of flowers in her hand, waited with keen impatience in the schoolroom, looking down the drive for Gudrun’s arrival. It was a wet morning. Under her nose was the strange fragrance of hot-house flowers, the bunch was like a little fire to her, she seemed to have a strange new fire in her heart. This slight sense of romance stirred her like an intoxicant.

At last she saw Gudrun coming, and she ran downstairs to warn her father and Gerald. They, laughing at her anxiety and gravity, came with her into the hall. The man-servant came hastening to the door, and there he was, relieving Gudrun of her umbrella, and then of her raincoat. The welcoming party hung back till their visitor entered the hall.

Gudrun was flushed with the rain, her hair was blown in loose little curls, she was like a flower just opened in the rain, the heart of the blossom just newly

visible, seeming to emit a warmth of retained sunshine. Gerald winced in spirit, seeing her so beautiful and unknown. She was wearing a soft blue dress, and her stockings were of dark red.

Winifred advanced with odd, stately formality.

‘We are so glad you’ve come back,’ she said. ‘These are your flowers.’ She presented the bouquet.

‘Mine!’ cried Gudrun. She was suspended for a moment, then a vivid flush went over her, she was as if blinded for a moment with a flame of pleasure. Then her eyes, strange and flaming, lifted and looked at the father, and at Gerald. And again Gerald shrank in spirit, as if it would be more than he could bear, as her hot, exposed eyes rested on him. There was something so revealed, she was revealed beyond bearing, to his eyes. He turned his face aside. And he felt he would not be able to avert her. And he writhed under the imprisonment.

Gudrun put her face into the flowers.

‘But how beautiful they are!’ she said, in a muffled voice. Then, with a strange, suddenly revealed passion, she stooped and kissed Winifred.

Mr Crich went forward with his hand held out to her.

‘I was afraid you were going to run away from us,’ he said, playfully.

Gudrun looked up at him with a luminous, roguish, unknown face.

‘Really!’ she replied. ‘No, I didn’t want to stay in London.’ Her voice seemed to imply that she was glad to get back to Shortlands, her tone was warm and subtly caressing.

‘That is a good thing,’ smiled the father. ‘You see you are very welcome here among us.’

Gudrun only looked into his face with dark-blue, warm, shy eyes. She was unconsciously carried away by her own power.

‘And you look as if you came home in every possible triumph,’ Mr Crich continued, holding her hand.

‘No,’ she said, glowing strangely. ‘I haven’t had any triumph till I came here.’

‘Ah, come, come! We’re not going to hear any of those tales. Haven’t we read notices in the newspaper, Gerald?’

‘You came off pretty well,’ said Gerald to her, shaking hands. ‘Did you sell anything?’

‘No,’ she said, ‘not much.’

‘Just as well,’ he said.

She wondered what he meant. But she was all aglow with her reception, carried away by this little flattering ceremonial on her behalf.

‘Winifred,’ said the father, ‘have you a pair of shoes for Miss Brangwen? You had better change at once — ’

Gudrun went out with her bouquet in her hand.

‘Quite a remarkable young woman,’ said the father to Gerald, when she had gone.

‘Yes,’ replied Gerald briefly, as if he did not like the observation.

Mr Crich liked Gudrun to sit with him for half an hour. Usually he was ashy and wretched, with all the life gnawed out of him. But as soon as he rallied, he liked to make believe that he was just as before, quite well and in the midst of life — not of the outer world, but in the midst of a strong essential life. And to this belief, Gudrun contributed perfectly. With her, he could get by stimulation those precious half-hours of strength and exaltation and pure freedom, when he seemed to live more than he had ever lived.

She came to him as he lay propped up in the library. His face was like yellow wax, his eyes darkened, as it were sightless. His black beard, now streaked with grey, seemed to spring out of the waxy flesh of a corpse. Yet the atmosphere about him was energetic and playful. Gudrun subscribed to this, perfectly. To her fancy, he was just an ordinary man. Only his rather terrible appearance was photographed upon her soul, away beneath her consciousness. She knew that, in spite of his playfulness, his eyes could not change from their darkened vacancy, they were the eyes of a man who is dead.

‘Ah, this is Miss Brangwen,’ he said, suddenly rousing as she entered, announced by the man-servant. ‘Thomas, put Miss Brangwen a chair here — that’s right.’ He looked at her soft, fresh face with pleasure. It gave him the illusion of life. ‘Now, you will have a glass of sherry and a little piece of cake. Thomas — ’

‘No thank you,’ said Gudrun. And as soon as she had said it, her heart sank horribly. The sick man seemed to fall into a gap of death, at her contradiction. She ought to play up to him, not to contravene him. In an instant she was smiling her rather roguish smile.

‘I don’t like sherry very much,’ she said. ‘But I like almost anything else.’

The sick man caught at this straw instantly.

‘Not sherry! No! Something else! What then? What is there, Thomas?’

‘Port wine — curacao — ’

‘I would love some curacao — ’ said Gudrun, looking at the sick man confidently.

‘You would. Well then Thomas, curacao — and a little cake, or a biscuit?’

‘A biscuit,’ said Gudrun. She did not want anything, but she was wise.

‘Yes.’

He waited till she was settled with her little glass and her biscuit. Then he was satisfied.

‘You have heard the plan,’ he said with some excitement, ‘for a studio for Winifred, over the stables?’

‘No!’ exclaimed Gudrun, in mock wonder.

‘Oh! — I thought Winnie wrote it to you, in her letter!’

‘Oh — yes — of course. But I thought perhaps it was only her own little idea — ’ Gudrun smiled subtly, indulgently. The sick man smiled also, elated.

‘Oh no. It is a real project. There is a good room under the roof of the stables — with sloping rafters. We had thought of converting it into a studio.’

‘How VERY nice that would be!’ cried Gudrun, with excited warmth. The thought of the rafters stirred her.

‘You think it would? Well, it can be done.’

‘But how perfectly splendid for Winifred! Of course, it is just what is needed, if she is to work at all seriously. One must have one’s workshop, otherwise one never ceases to be an amateur.’

‘Is that so? Yes. Of course, I should like you to share it with Winifred.’

‘Thank you SO much.’

Gudrun knew all these things already, but she must look shy and very grateful, as if overcome.

‘Of course, what I should like best, would be if you could give up your work at the Grammar School, and just avail yourself of the studio, and work there — well, as much or as little as you liked — ’

He looked at Gudrun with dark, vacant eyes. She looked back at him as if full of gratitude. These phrases of a dying man were so complete and natural, coming like echoes through his dead mouth.

‘And as to your earnings — you don’t mind taking from me what you have taken from the Education Committee, do you? I don’t want you to be a loser.’

‘Oh,’ said Gudrun, ‘if I can have the studio and work there, I can earn money enough, really I can.’

‘Well,’ he said, pleased to be the benefactor, ‘we can see about all that. You wouldn’t mind spending your days here?’

‘If there were a studio to work in,’ said Gudrun, ‘I could ask for nothing better.’

‘Is that so?’

He was really very pleased. But already he was getting tired. She could see the grey, awful semi-consciousness of mere pain and dissolution coming over him again, the torture coming into the vacancy of his darkened eyes. It was not over yet, this process of death. She rose softly saying:

‘Perhaps you will sleep. I must look for Winifred.’

She went out, telling the nurse that she had left him. Day by day the tissue of

the sick man was further and further reduced, nearer and nearer the process came, towards the last knot which held the human being in its unity. But this knot was hard and unrelaxed, the will of the dying man never gave way. He might be dead in nine-tenths, yet the remaining tenth remained unchanged, till it too was torn apart. With his will he held the unit of himself firm, but the circle of his power was ever and ever reduced, it would be reduced to a point at last, then swept away.

To adhere to life, he must adhere to human relationships, and he caught at every straw. Winifred, the butler, the nurse, Gudrun, these were the people who meant all to him, in these last resources. Gerald, in his father's presence, stiffened with repulsion. It was so, to a less degree, with all the other children except Winifred. They could not see anything but the death, when they looked at their father. It was as if some subterranean dislike overcame them. They could not see the familiar face, hear the familiar voice. They were overwhelmed by the antipathy of visible and audible death. Gerald could not breathe in his father's presence. He must get out at once. And so, in the same way, the father could not bear the presence of his son. It sent a final irritation through the soul of the dying man.

The studio was made ready, Gudrun and Winifred moved in. They enjoyed so much the ordering and the appointing of it. And now they need hardly be in the house at all. They had their meals in the studio, they lived there safely. For the house was becoming dreadful. There were two nurses in white, flitting silently about, like heralds of death. The father was confined to his bed, there was a come and go of SOTTO-VOCE sisters and brothers and children.

Winifred was her father's constant visitor. Every morning, after breakfast, she went into his room when he was washed and propped up in bed, to spend half an hour with him.

'Are you better, Daddie?' she asked him invariably.

And invariably he answered:

'Yes, I think I'm a little better, pet.'

She held his hand in both her own, lovingly and protectively. And this was very dear to him.

She ran in again as a rule at lunch time, to tell him the course of events, and every evening, when the curtains were drawn, and his room was cosy, she spent a long time with him. Gudrun was gone home, Winifred was alone in the house: she liked best to be with her father. They talked and prattled at random, he always as if he were well, just the same as when he was going about. So that Winifred, with a child's subtle instinct for avoiding the painful things, behaved as if nothing serious was the matter. Instinctively, she withheld her attention, and

was happy. Yet in her remoter soul, she knew as well as the adults knew: perhaps better.

Her father was quite well in his make-belief with her. But when she went away, he relapsed under the misery of his dissolution. But still there were these bright moments, though as his strength waned, his faculty for attention grew weaker, and the nurse had to send Winifred away, to save him from exhaustion.

He never admitted that he was going to die. He knew it was so, he knew it was the end. Yet even to himself he did not admit it. He hated the fact, mortally. His will was rigid. He could not bear being overcome by death. For him, there was no death. And yet, at times, he felt a great need to cry out and to wail and complain. He would have liked to cry aloud to Gerald, so that his son should be horrified out of his composure. Gerald was instinctively aware of this, and he recoiled, to avoid any such thing. This uncleanness of death repelled him too much. One should die quickly, like the Romans, one should be master of one's fate in dying as in living. He was convulsed in the clasp of this death of his father's, as in the coils of the great serpent of Laocoon. The great serpent had got the father, and the son was dragged into the embrace of horrifying death along with him. He resisted always. And in some strange way, he was a tower of strength to his father.

The last time the dying man asked to see Gudrun he was grey with near death. Yet he must see someone, he must, in the intervals of consciousness, catch into connection with the living world, lest he should have to accept his own situation. Fortunately he was most of his time dazed and half gone. And he spent many hours dimly thinking of the past, as it were, dimly re-living his old experiences. But there were times even to the end when he was capable of realising what was happening to him in the present, the death that was on him. And these were the times when he called in outside help, no matter whose. For to realise this death that he was dying was a death beyond death, never to be borne. It was an admission never to be made.

Gudrun was shocked by his appearance, and by the darkened, almost disintegrated eyes, that still were unconquered and firm.

'Well,' he said in his weakened voice, 'and how are you and Winifred getting on?'

'Oh, very well indeed,' replied Gudrun.

There were slight dead gaps in the conversation, as if the ideas called up were only elusive straws floating on the dark chaos of the sick man's dying.

'The studio answers all right?' he said.

'Splendid. It couldn't be more beautiful and perfect,' said Gudrun.

She waited for what he would say next.

‘And you think Winifred has the makings of a sculptor?’

It was strange how hollow the words were, meaningless.

‘I’m sure she has. She will do good things one day.’

‘Ah! Then her life won’t be altogether wasted, you think?’

Gudrun was rather surprised.

‘Sure it won’t!’ she exclaimed softly.

‘That’s right.’

Again Gudrun waited for what he would say.

‘You find life pleasant, it is good to live, isn’t it?’ he asked, with a pitiful faint smile that was almost too much for Gudrun.

‘Yes,’ she smiled — she would lie at random — ‘I get a pretty good time I believe.’

‘That’s right. A happy nature is a great asset.’

Again Gudrun smiled, though her soul was dry with repulsion. Did one have to die like this — having the life extracted forcibly from one, whilst one smiled and made conversation to the end? Was there no other way? Must one go through all the horror of this victory over death, the triumph of the integral will, that would not be broken till it disappeared utterly? One must, it was the only way. She admired the self-possession and the control of the dying man exceedingly. But she loathed the death itself. She was glad the everyday world held good, and she need not recognise anything beyond.

‘You are quite all right here? — nothing we can do for you? — nothing you find wrong in your position?’

‘Except that you are too good to me,’ said Gudrun.

‘Ah, well, the fault of that lies with yourself,’ he said, and he felt a little exultation, that he had made this speech.

He was still so strong and living! But the nausea of death began to creep back on him, in reaction.

Gudrun went away, back to Winifred. Mademoiselle had left, Gudrun stayed a good deal at Shortlands, and a tutor came in to carry on Winifred’s education. But he did not live in the house, he was connected with the Grammar School.

One day, Gudrun was to drive with Winifred and Gerald and Birkin to town, in the car. It was a dark, showery day. Winifred and Gudrun were ready and waiting at the door. Winifred was very quiet, but Gudrun had not noticed. Suddenly the child asked, in a voice of unconcern:

‘Do you think my father’s going to die, Miss Brangwen?’

Gudrun started.

‘I don’t know,’ she replied.

‘Don’t you truly?’

‘Nobody knows for certain. He MAY die, of course.’

The child pondered a few moments, then she asked:

‘But do you THINK he will die?’

It was put almost like a question in geography or science, insistent, as if she would force an admission from the adult. The watchful, slightly triumphant child was almost diabolical.

‘Do I think he will die?’ repeated Gudrun. ‘Yes, I do.’

But Winifred’s large eyes were fixed on her, and the girl did not move.

‘He is very ill,’ said Gudrun.

A small smile came over Winifred’s face, subtle and sceptical.

‘I don’t believe he will,’ the child asserted, mockingly, and she moved away into the drive. Gudrun watched the isolated figure, and her heart stood still. Winifred was playing with a little rivulet of water, absorbedly as if nothing had been said.

‘I’ve made a proper dam,’ she said, out of the moist distance.

Gerald came to the door from out of the hall behind.

‘It is just as well she doesn’t choose to believe it,’ he said.

Gudrun looked at him. Their eyes met; and they exchanged a sardonic understanding.

‘Just as well,’ said Gudrun.

He looked at her again, and a fire flickered up in his eyes.

‘Best to dance while Rome burns, since it must burn, don’t you think?’ he said.

She was rather taken aback. But, gathering herself together, she replied:

‘Oh — better dance than wail, certainly.’

‘So I think.’

And they both felt the subterranean desire to let go, to fling away everything, and lapse into a sheer unrestraint, brutal and licentious. A strange black passion surged up pure in Gudrun. She felt strong. She felt her hands so strong, as if she could tear the world asunder with them. She remembered the abandonments of Roman licence, and her heart grew hot. She knew she wanted this herself also — or something, something equivalent. Ah, if that which was unknown and suppressed in her were once let loose, what an orgiastic and satisfying event it would be. And she wanted it, she trembled slightly from the proximity of the man, who stood just behind her, suggestive of the same black licentiousness that rose in herself. She wanted it with him, this unacknowledged frenzy. For a moment the clear perception of this preoccupied her, distinct and perfect in its final reality. Then she shut it off completely, saying:

‘We might as well go down to the lodge after Winifred — we can get in the

care there.'

'So we can,' he answered, going with her.

They found Winifred at the lodge admiring the litter of purebred white puppies. The girl looked up, and there was a rather ugly, unseeing cast in her eyes as she turned to Gerald and Gudrun. She did not want to see them.

'Look!' she cried. 'Three new puppies! Marshall says this one seems perfect. Isn't it a sweetling? But it isn't so nice as its mother.' She turned to caress the fine white bull-terrier bitch that stood uneasily near her.

'My dearest Lady Crich,' she said, 'you are beautiful as an angel on earth. Angel — angel — don't you think she's good enough and beautiful enough to go to heaven, Gudrun? They will be in heaven, won't they — and ESPECIALLY my darling Lady Crich! Mrs Marshall, I say!'

'Yes, Miss Winifred?' said the woman, appearing at the door.

'Oh do call this one Lady Winifred, if she turns out perfect, will you? Do tell Marshall to call it Lady Winifred.'

'I'll tell him — but I'm afraid that's a gentleman puppy, Miss Winifred.'

'Oh NO!' There was the sound of a car. 'There's Rupert!' cried the child, and she ran to the gate.

Birkin, driving his car, pulled up outside the lodge gate.

'We're ready!' cried Winifred. 'I want to sit in front with you, Rupert. May I?'

'I'm afraid you'll fidget about and fall out,' he said.

'No I won't. I do want to sit in front next to you. It makes my feet so lovely and warm, from the engines.'

Birkin helped her up, amused at sending Gerald to sit by Gudrun in the body of the car.

'Have you any news, Rupert?' Gerald called, as they rushed along the lanes.

'News?' exclaimed Birkin.

'Yes,' Gerald looked at Gudrun, who sat by his side, and he said, his eyes narrowly laughing, 'I want to know whether I ought to congratulate him, but I can't get anything definite out of him.'

Gudrun flushed deeply.

'Congratulate him on what?' she asked.

'There was some mention of an engagement — at least, he said something to me about it.'

Gudrun flushed darkly.

'You mean with Ursula?' she said, in challenge.

'Yes. That is so, isn't it?'

'I don't think there's any engagement,' said Gudrun, coldly.

‘That so? Still no developments, Rupert?’ he called.

‘Where? Matrimonial? No.’

‘How’s that?’ called Gudrun.

Birkin glanced quickly round. There was irritation in his eyes also.

‘Why?’ he replied. ‘What do you think of it, Gudrun?’

‘Oh,’ she cried, determined to fling her stone also into the pool, since they had begun, ‘I don’t think she wants an engagement. Naturally, she’s a bird that prefers the bush.’ Gudrun’s voice was clear and gong-like. It reminded Rupert of her father’s, so strong and vibrant.

‘And I,’ said Birkin, his face playful but yet determined, ‘I want a binding contract, and am not keen on love, particularly free love.’

They were both amused. WHY this public avowal? Gerald seemed suspended a moment, in amusement.

‘Love isn’t good enough for you?’ he called.

‘No!’ shouted Birkin.

‘Ha, well that’s being over-refined,’ said Gerald, and the car ran through the mud.

‘What’s the matter, really?’ said Gerald, turning to Gudrun.

This was an assumption of a sort of intimacy that irritated Gudrun almost like an affront. It seemed to her that Gerald was deliberately insulting her, and infringing on the decent privacy of them all.

‘What is it?’ she said, in her high, repellent voice. ‘Don’t ask me! — I know nothing about ULTIMATE marriage, I assure you: or even penultimate.’

‘Only the ordinary unwarrantable brand!’ replied Gerald. ‘Just so — same here. I am no expert on marriage, and degrees of ultimateness. It seems to be a bee that buzzes loudly in Rupert’s bonnet.’

‘Exactly! But that is his trouble, exactly! Instead of wanting a woman for herself, he wants his IDEAS fulfilled. Which, when it comes to actual practice, is not good enough.’

‘Oh no. Best go slap for what’s womanly in woman, like a bull at a gate.’ Then he seemed to glimmer in himself. ‘You think love is the ticket, do you?’ he asked.

‘Certainly, while it lasts — you only can’t insist on permanency,’ came Gudrun’s voice, strident above the noise.

‘Marriage or no marriage, ultimate or penultimate or just so-so? — take the love as you find it.’

‘As you please, or as you don’t please,’ she echoed. ‘Marriage is a social arrangement, I take it, and has nothing to do with the question of love.’

His eyes were flickering on her all the time. She felt as if he were kissing her

freely and malevolently. It made the colour burn in her cheeks, but her heart was quite firm and unflinching.

‘You think Rupert is off his head a bit?’ Gerald asked.

Her eyes flashed with acknowledgment.

‘As regards a woman, yes,’ she said, ‘I do. There IS such a thing as two people being in love for the whole of their lives — perhaps. But marriage is neither here nor there, even then. If they are in love, well and good. If not — why break eggs about it!’

‘Yes,’ said Gerald. ‘That’s how it strikes me. But what about Rupert?’

‘I can’t make out — neither can he nor anybody. He seems to think that if you marry you can get through marriage into a third heaven, or something — all very vague.’

‘Very! And who wants a third heaven? As a matter of fact, Rupert has a great yearning to be SAFE — to tie himself to the mast.’

‘Yes. It seems to me he’s mistaken there too,’ said Gudrun. ‘I’m sure a mistress is more likely to be faithful than a wife — just because she is her OWN mistress. No — he says he believes that a man and wife can go further than any other two beings — but WHERE, is not explained. They can know each other, heavenly and hellish, but particularly hellish, so perfectly that they go beyond heaven and hell — into — there it all breaks down — into nowhere.’

‘Into Paradise, he says,’ laughed Gerald.

Gudrun shrugged her shoulders. ‘FE M’EN FICHE of your Paradise!’ she said.

‘Not being a Mohammedan,’ said Gerald. Birkin sat motionless, driving the car, quite unconscious of what they said. And Gudrun, sitting immediately behind him, felt a sort of ironic pleasure in thus exposing him.

‘He says,’ she added, with a grimace of irony, ‘that you can find an eternal equilibrium in marriage, if you accept the unison, and still leave yourself separate, don’t try to fuse.’

‘Doesn’t inspire me,’ said Gerald.

‘That’s just it,’ said Gudrun.

‘I believe in love, in a real ABANDON, if you’re capable of it,’ said Gerald.

‘So do I,’ said she.

‘And so does Rupert, too — though he is always shouting.’

‘No,’ said Gudrun. ‘He won’t abandon himself to the other person. You can’t be sure of him. That’s the trouble I think.’

‘Yet he wants marriage! Marriage — ET PUIS?’

‘Le paradis!’ mocked Gudrun.

Birkin, as he drove, felt a creeping of the spine, as if somebody was

threatening his neck. But he shrugged with indifference. It began to rain. Here was a change. He stopped the car and got down to put up the hood.

CHAPTER XXII.

WOMAN TO WOMAN

They came to the town, and left Gerald at the railway station. Gudrun and Winifred were to come to tea with Birkin, who expected Ursula also. In the afternoon, however, the first person to turn up was Hermione. Birkin was out, so she went in the drawing-room, looking at his books and papers, and playing on the piano. Then Ursula arrived. She was surprised, unpleasantly so, to see Hermione, of whom she had heard nothing for some time.

‘It is a surprise to see you,’ she said.

‘Yes,’ said Hermione — ‘I’ve been away at Aix — ’

‘Oh, for your health?’

‘Yes.’

The two women looked at each other. Ursula resented Hermione’s long, grave, downward-looking face. There was something of the stupidity and the unenlightened self-esteem of a horse in it. ‘She’s got a horse-face,’ Ursula said to herself, ‘she runs between blinkers.’ It did seem as if Hermione, like the moon, had only one side to her penny. There was no obverse. She stared out all the time on the narrow, but to her, complete world of the extant consciousness. In the darkness, she did not exist. Like the moon, one half of her was lost to life. Her self was all in her head, she did not know what it was spontaneously to run or move, like a fish in the water, or a weasel on the grass. She must always KNOW.

But Ursula only suffered from Hermione’s one-sidedness. She only felt Hermione’s cool evidence, which seemed to put her down as nothing. Hermione, who brooded and brooded till she was exhausted with the ache of her effort at consciousness, spent and ashen in her body, who gained so slowly and with such effort her final and barren conclusions of knowledge, was apt, in the presence of other women, whom she thought simply female, to wear the conclusions of her bitter assurance like jewels which conferred on her an unquestionable distinction, established her in a higher order of life. She was apt, mentally, to condescend to women such as Ursula, whom she regarded as purely emotional.

Poor Hermione, it was her one possession, this aching certainty of hers, it was her only justification. She must be confident here, for God knows, she felt rejected and deficient enough elsewhere. In the life of thought, of the spirit, she was one of the elect. And she wanted to be universal. But there was a devastating cynicism at the bottom of her. She did not believe in her own universals — they were sham. She did not believe in the inner life — it was a trick, not a reality. She did not believe in the spiritual world — it was an affectation. In the last resort, she believed in Mammon, the flesh, and the devil — these at least were not sham. She was a priestess without belief, without conviction, suckled in a creed outworn, and condemned to the reiteration of mysteries that were not divine to her. Yet there was no escape. She was a leaf upon a dying tree. What help was there then, but to fight still for the old, withered truths, to die for the old, outworn belief, to be a sacred and inviolate priestess of desecrated mysteries? The old great truths ~~BAD~~ been true. And she was a leaf of the old great tree of knowledge that was withering now. To the old and last truth then she must be faithful even though cynicism and mockery took place at the bottom of her soul.

‘I am so glad to see you,’ she said to Ursula, in her slow voice, that was like an incantation. ‘You and Rupert have become quite friends?’

‘Oh yes,’ said Ursula. ‘He is always somewhere in the background.’

Hermione paused before she answered. She saw perfectly well the other woman’s vaunt: it seemed truly vulgar.

‘Is he?’ she said slowly, and with perfect equanimity. ‘And do you think you will marry?’

The question was so calm and mild, so simple and bare and dispassionate that Ursula was somewhat taken aback, rather attracted. It pleased her almost like a wickedness. There was some delightful naked irony in Hermione.

‘Well,’ replied Ursula, ‘HE wants to, awfully, but I’m not so sure.’

Hermione watched her with slow calm eyes. She noted this new expression of vaunting. How she envied Ursula a certain unconscious positivity! even her vulgarity!

‘Why aren’t you sure?’ she asked, in her easy sing song. She was perfectly at her ease, perhaps even rather happy in this conversation. ‘You don’t really love him?’

Ursula flushed a little at the mild impertinence of this question. And yet she could not definitely take offence. Hermione seemed so calmly and sanely candid. After all, it was rather great to be able to be so sane.

‘He says it isn’t love he wants,’ she replied.

‘What is it then?’ Hermione was slow and level.

‘He wants me really to accept him in marriage.’

Hermione was silent for some time, watching Ursula with slow, pensive eyes.

‘Does he?’ she said at length, without expression. Then, rousing, ‘And what is it you don’t want? You don’t want marriage?’

‘No — I don’t — not really. I don’t want to give the sort of SUBMISSION he insists on. He wants me to give myself up — and I simply don’t feel that I CAN do it.’

Again there was a long pause, before Hermione replied:

‘Not if you don’t want to.’ Then again there was silence. Hermione shuddered with a strange desire. Ah, if only he had asked HER to subserve him, to be his slave! She shuddered with desire.

‘You see I can’t — ’

‘But exactly in what does — ’

They had both begun at once, they both stopped. Then, Hermione, assuming priority of speech, resumed as if wearily:

‘To what does he want you to submit?’

‘He says he wants me to accept him non-emotionally, and finally — I really don’t know what he means. He says he wants the demon part of himself to be mated — physically — not the human being. You see he says one thing one day, and another the next — and he always contradicts himself — ’

‘And always thinks about himself, and his own dissatisfaction,’ said Hermione slowly.

‘Yes,’ cried Ursula. ‘As if there were no-one but himself concerned. That makes it so impossible.’

But immediately she began to retract.

‘He insists on my accepting God knows what in HIM,’ she resumed. ‘He wants me to accept HIM as — as an absolute — But it seems to me he doesn’t want to GIVE anything. He doesn’t want real warm intimacy — he won’t have it — he rejects it. He won’t let me think, really, and he won’t let me FEEL — he hates feelings.’

There was a long pause, bitter for Hermione. Ah, if only he would have made this demand of her? Her he DROVE into thought, drove inexorably into knowledge — and then execrated her for it.

‘He wants me to sink myself,’ Ursula resumed, ‘not to have any being of my own — ’

‘Then why doesn’t he marry an odalisk?’ said Hermione in her mild sing-song, ‘if it is that he wants.’ Her long face looked sardonic and amused.

‘Yes,’ said Ursula vaguely. After all, the tiresome thing was, he did not want an odalisk, he did not want a slave. Hermione would have been his slave —

there was in her a horrible desire to prostrate herself before a man — a man who worshipped her, however, and admitted her as the supreme thing. He did not want an odalisk. He wanted a woman to TAKE something from him, to give herself up so much that she could take the last realities of him, the last facts, the last physical facts, physical and unbearable.

And if she did, would he acknowledge her? Would he be able to acknowledge her through everything, or would he use her just as his instrument, use her for his own private satisfaction, not admitting her? That was what the other men had done. They had wanted their own show, and they would not admit her, they turned all she was into nothingness. Just as Hermione now betrayed herself as a woman. Hermione was like a man, she believed only in men's things. She betrayed the woman in herself. And Birkin, would he acknowledge, or would he deny her?

'Yes,' said Hermione, as each woman came out of her own separate reverie. 'It would be a mistake — I think it would be a mistake — '

'To marry him?' asked Ursula.

'Yes,' said Hermione slowly — 'I think you need a man — soldierly, strong-willed — ' Hermione held out her hand and clenched it with rhapsodic intensity. 'You should have a man like the old heroes — you need to stand behind him as he goes into battle, you need to SEE his strength, and to HEAR his shout — . You need a man physically strong, and virile in his will, NOT a sensitive man — .' There was a break, as if the pythoness had uttered the oracle, and now the woman went on, in a rhapsody-wearied voice: 'And you see, Rupert isn't this, he isn't. He is frail in health and body, he needs great, great care. Then he is so changeable and unsure of himself — it requires the greatest patience and understanding to help him. And I don't think you are patient. You would have to be prepared to suffer — dreadfully. I can't TELL you how much suffering it would take to make him happy. He lives an INTENSELY spiritual life, at times — too, too wonderful. And then come the reactions. I can't speak of what I have been through with him. We have been together so long, I really do know him, I DO know what he is. And I feel I must say it; I feel it would be perfectly DISASTROUS for you to marry him — for you even more than for him.' Hermione lapsed into bitter reverie. 'He is so uncertain, so unstable — he wearies, and then reacts. I couldn't TELL you what his reactions are. I couldn't TELL you the agony of them. That which he affirms and loves one day — a little later he turns on it in a fury of destruction. He is never constant, always this awful, dreadful reaction. Always the quick change from good to bad, bad to good. And nothing is so devastating, nothing — '

'Yes,' said Ursula humbly, 'you must have suffered.'

An unearthly light came on Hermione's face. She clenched her hand like one inspired.

'And one must be willing to suffer — willing to suffer for him hourly, daily — if you are going to help him, if he is to keep true to anything at all — '

'And I don't WANT to suffer hourly and daily,' said Ursula. 'I don't, I should be ashamed. I think it is degrading not to be happy.'

Hermione stopped and looked at her a long time.

'Do you?' she said at last. And this utterance seemed to her a mark of Ursula's far distance from herself. For to Hermione suffering was the greatest reality, come what might. Yet she too had a creed of happiness.

'Yes,' she said. 'One SHOULD be happy — ' But it was a matter of will.

'Yes,' said Hermione, listlessly now, 'I can only feel that it would be disastrous, disastrous — at least, to marry in a hurry. Can't you be together without marriage? Can't you go away and live somewhere without marriage? I do feel that marriage would be fatal, for both of you. I think for you even more than for him — and I think of his health — '

'Of course,' said Ursula, 'I don't care about marriage — it isn't really important to me — it's he who wants it.'

'It is his idea for the moment,' said Hermione, with that weary finality, and a sort of SI JEUNESSE SAVAIT infallibility.

There was a pause. Then Ursula broke into faltering challenge.

'You think I'm merely a physical woman, don't you?'

'No indeed,' said Hermione. 'No, indeed! But I think you are vital and young — it isn't a question of years, or even of experience — it is almost a question of race. Rupert is race-old, he comes of an old race — and you seem to me so young, you come of a young, inexperienced race.'

'Do I!' said Ursula. 'But I think he is awfully young, on one side.'

'Yes, perhaps childish in many respects. Nevertheless — '

They both lapsed into silence. Ursula was filled with deep resentment and a touch of hopelessness. 'It isn't true,' she said to herself, silently addressing her adversary. 'It isn't true. And it is YOU who want a physically strong, bullying man, not I. It is you who want an unsensitive man, not I. You DON'T know anything about Rupert, not really, in spite of the years you have had with him. You don't give him a woman's love, you give him an ideal love, and that is why he reacts away from you. You don't know. You only know the dead things. Any kitchen maid would know something about him, you don't know. What do you think your knowledge is but dead understanding, that doesn't mean a thing. You are so false, and untrue, how could you know anything? What is the good of your talking about love — you untrue spectre of a woman! How can you know

anything, when you don't believe? You don't believe in yourself and your own womanhood, so what good is your conceited, shallow cleverness — !'

The two women sat on in antagonistic silence. Hermione felt injured, that all her good intention, all her offering, only left the other woman in vulgar antagonism. But then, Ursula could not understand, never would understand, could never be more than the usual jealous and unreasonable female, with a good deal of powerful female emotion, female attraction, and a fair amount of female understanding, but no mind. Hermione had decided long ago that where there was no mind, it was useless to appeal for reason — one had merely to ignore the ignorant. And Rupert — he had now reacted towards the strongly female, healthy, selfish woman — it was his reaction for the time being — there was no helping it all. It was all a foolish backward and forward, a violent oscillation that would at length be too violent for his coherency, and he would smash and be dead. There was no saving him. This violent and directionless reaction between animalism and spiritual truth would go on in him till he tore himself in two between the opposite directions, and disappeared meaninglessly out of life. It was no good — he too was without unity, without MIND, in the ultimate stages of living; not quite man enough to make a destiny for a woman.

They sat on till Birkin came in and found them together. He felt at once the antagonism in the atmosphere, something radical and insuperable, and he bit his lip. But he affected a bluff manner.

'Hello, Hermione, are you back again? How do you feel?'

'Oh, better. And how are you — you don't look well — '

'Oh! — I believe Gudrun and Winnie Crich are coming in to tea. At least they said they were. We shall be a tea-party. What train did you come by, Ursula?'

It was rather annoying to see him trying to placate both women at once. Both women watched him, Hermione with deep resentment and pity for him, Ursula very impatient. He was nervous and apparently in quite good spirits, chattering the conventional commonplaces. Ursula was amazed and indignant at the way he made small-talk; he was adept as any FAT in Christendom. She became quite stiff, she would not answer. It all seemed to her so false and so belittling. And still Gudrun did not appear.

'I think I shall go to Florence for the winter,' said Hermione at length.

'Will you?' he answered. 'But it is so cold there.'

'Yes, but I shall stay with Palestra. It is quite comfortable.'

'What takes you to Florence?'

'I don't know,' said Hermione slowly. Then she looked at him with her slow, heavy gaze. 'Barnes is starting his school of aesthetics, and Olandese is going to give a set of discourses on the Italian national policy-'

‘Both rubbish,’ he said.

‘No, I don’t think so,’ said Hermione.

‘Which do you admire, then?’

‘I admire both. Barnes is a pioneer. And then I am interested in Italy, in her coming to national consciousness.’

‘I wish she’d come to something different from national consciousness, then,’ said Birkin; ‘especially as it only means a sort of commercial-industrial consciousness. I hate Italy and her national rant. And I think Barnes is an amateur.’

Hermione was silent for some moments, in a state of hostility. But yet, she had got Birkin back again into her world! How subtle her influence was, she seemed to start his irritable attention into her direction exclusively, in one minute. He was her creature.

‘No,’ she said, ‘you are wrong.’ Then a sort of tension came over her, she raised her face like the pythoness inspired with oracles, and went on, in rhapsodic manner: ‘Il Sandro mi scrive che ha accolto il piu grande entusiasmo, tutti i giovani, e fanciulle e ragazzi, sono tutti — ’ She went on in Italian, as if, in thinking of the Italians she thought in their language.

He listened with a shade of distaste to her rhapsody, then he said:

‘For all that, I don’t like it. Their nationalism is just industrialism — that and a shallow jealousy I detest so much.’

‘I think you are wrong — I think you are wrong — ’ said Hermione. ‘It seems to me purely spontaneous and beautiful, the modern Italian’s PASSION, for it is a passion, for Italy, L’Italia — ’

‘Do you know Italy well?’ Ursula asked of Hermione. Hermione hated to be broken in upon in this manner. Yet she answered mildly:

‘Yes, pretty well. I spent several years of my girlhood there, with my mother. My mother died in Florence.’

‘Oh.’

There was a pause, painful to Ursula and to Birkin. Hermione however seemed abstracted and calm. Birkin was white, his eyes glowed as if he were in a fever, he was far too over-wrought. How Ursula suffered in this tense atmosphere of strained wills! Her head seemed bound round by iron bands.

Birkin rang the bell for tea. They could not wait for Gudrun any longer. When the door was opened, the cat walked in.

‘Micio! Micio!’ called Hermione, in her slow, deliberate sing-song. The young cat turned to look at her, then, with his slow and stately walk he advanced to her side.

‘Vieni — vieni qua,’ Hermione was saying, in her strange caressive,

protective voice, as if she were always the elder, the mother superior. 'Vieni dire Buon' Giorno alla zia. Mi ricorde, mi ricorde bene — non he vero, piccolo? E vero che mi ricordi? E vero?' And slowly she rubbed his head, slowly and with ironic indifference.

'Does he understand Italian?' said Ursula, who knew nothing of the language.

'Yes,' said Hermione at length. 'His mother was Italian. She was born in my waste-paper basket in Florence, on the morning of Rupert's birthday. She was his birthday present.'

Tea was brought in. Birkin poured out for them. It was strange how inviolable was the intimacy which existed between him and Hermione. Ursula felt that she was an outsider. The very tea-cups and the old silver was a bond between Hermione and Birkin. It seemed to belong to an old, past world which they had inhabited together, and in which Ursula was a foreigner. She was almost a parvenue in their old cultured milieu. Her convention was not their convention, their standards were not her standards. But theirs were established, they had the sanction and the grace of age. He and she together, Hermione and Birkin, were people of the same old tradition, the same withered deadening culture. And she, Ursula, was an intruder. So they always made her feel.

Hermione poured a little cream into a saucer. The simple way she assumed her rights in Birkin's room maddened and discouraged Ursula. There was a fatality about it, as if it were bound to be. Hermione lifted the cat and put the cream before him. He planted his two paws on the edge of the table and bent his gracious young head to drink.

'Sicuro che capisce italiano,' sang Hermione, 'non l'avra dimenticato, la lingua della Mamma.'

She lifted the cat's head with her long, slow, white fingers, not letting him drink, holding him in her power. It was always the same, this joy in power she manifested, peculiarly in power over any male being. He blinked forbearingly, with a male, bored expression, licking his whiskers. Hermione laughed in her short, grunting fashion.

'Ecco, il bravo ragazzo, come e superbo, questo!'

She made a vivid picture, so calm and strange with the cat. She had a true static impressiveness, she was a social artist in some ways.

The cat refused to look at her, indifferently avoided her fingers, and began to drink again, his nose down to the cream, perfectly balanced, as he lapped with his odd little click.

'It's bad for him, teaching him to eat at table,' said Birkin.

'Yes,' said Hermione, easily assenting.

Then, looking down at the cat, she resumed her old, mocking, humorous sing-

song.

‘Ti imparano fare brutte cose, brutte cose — ’

She lifted the Mino’s white chin on her forefinger, slowly. The young cat looked round with a supremely forbearing air, avoided seeing anything, withdrew his chin, and began to wash his face with his paw. Hermione grunted her laughter, pleased.

‘Bel giovanotto — ’ she said.

The cat reached forward again and put his fine white paw on the edge of the saucer. Hermione lifted it down with delicate slowness. This deliberate, delicate carefulness of movement reminded Ursula of Gudrun.

‘No! Non e permesso di mettere il zampino nel tondinetto. Non piace al babbo. Un signor gatto cosi selvatico — !’

And she kept her finger on the softly planted paw of the cat, and her voice had the same whimsical, humorous note of bullying.

Ursula had her nose out of joint. She wanted to go away now. It all seemed no good. Hermione was established for ever, she herself was ephemeral and had not yet even arrived.

‘I will go now,’ she said suddenly.

Birkin looked at her almost in fear — he so dreaded her anger. ‘But there is no need for such hurry,’ he said.

‘Yes,’ she answered. ‘I will go.’ And turning to Hermione, before there was time to say any more, she held out her hand and said ‘Good-bye.’

‘Good-bye — ’ sang Hermione, detaining the band. ‘Must you really go now?’

‘Yes, I think I’ll go,’ said Ursula, her face set, and averted from Hermione’s eyes.

‘You think you will — ’

But Ursula had got her hand free. She turned to Birkin with a quick, almost jeering: ‘Good-bye,’ and she was opening the door before he had time to do it for her.

When she got outside the house she ran down the road in fury and agitation. It was strange, the unreasoning rage and violence Hermione roused in her, by her very presence. Ursula knew she gave herself away to the other woman, she knew she looked ill-bred, uncouth, exaggerated. But she did not care. She only ran up the road, lest she should go back and jeer in the faces of the two she had left behind. For they outraged her.

CHAPTER XXIII.

EXCURSE

Next day Birkin sought Ursula out. It happened to be the half-day at the Grammar School. He appeared towards the end of the morning, and asked her, would she drive with him in the afternoon. She consented. But her face was closed and unresponding, and his heart sank.

The afternoon was fine and dim. He was driving the motor-car, and she sat beside him. But still her face was closed against him, unresponding. When she became like this, like a wall against him, his heart contracted.

His life now seemed so reduced, that he hardly cared any more. At moments it seemed to him he did not care a straw whether Ursula or Hermione or anybody else existed or did not exist. Why bother! Why strive for a coherent, satisfied life? Why not drift on in a series of accidents-like a picaresque novel? Why not? Why bother about human relationships? Why take them seriously-male or female? Why form any serious connections at all? Why not be casual, drifting along, taking all for what it was worth?

And yet, still, he was damned and doomed to the old effort at serious living.

'Look,' he said, 'what I bought.' The car was running along a broad white road, between autumn trees.

He gave her a little bit of screwed-up paper. She took it and opened it.

'How lovely,' she cried.

She examined the gift.

'How perfectly lovely!' she cried again. 'But why do you give them me?' She put the question offensively.

His face flickered with bored irritation. He shrugged his shoulders slightly.

'I wanted to,' he said, coolly.

'But why? Why should you?'

'Am I called on to find reasons?' he asked.

There was a silence, whilst she examined the rings that had been screwed up in the paper.

'I think they are BEAUTIFUL,' she said, 'especially this. This is wonderful-'

It was a round opal, red and fiery, set in a circle of tiny rubies.

‘You like that best?’ he said.

‘I think I do.’

‘I like the sapphire,’ he said.

‘This?’

It was a rose-shaped, beautiful sapphire, with small brilliants.

‘Yes,’ she said, ‘it is lovely.’ She held it in the light. ‘Yes, perhaps it IS the best-’

‘The blue-’ he said.

‘Yes, wonderful-’

He suddenly swung the car out of the way of a farm-cart. It tilted on the bank. He was a careless driver, yet very quick. But Ursula was frightened. There was always that something regardless in him which terrified her. She suddenly felt he might kill her, by making some dreadful accident with the motor-car. For a moment she was stony with fear.

‘Isn’t it rather dangerous, the way you drive?’ she asked him.

‘No, it isn’t dangerous,’ he said. And then, after a pause: ‘Don’t you like the yellow ring at all?’

It was a squarish topaz set in a frame of steel, or some other similar mineral, finely wrought.

‘Yes,’ she said, ‘I do like it. But why did you buy these rings?’

‘I wanted them. They are second-hand.’

‘You bought them for yourself?’

‘No. Rings look wrong on my hands.’

‘Why did you buy them then?’

‘I bought them to give to you.’

‘But why? Surely you ought to give them to Hermione! You belong to her.’

He did not answer. She remained with the jewels shut in her hand. She wanted to try them on her fingers, but something in her would not let her. And moreover, she was afraid her hands were too large, she shrank from the mortification of a failure to put them on any but her little finger. They travelled in silence through the empty lanes.

Driving in a motor-car excited her, she forgot his presence even.

‘Where are we?’ she asked suddenly.

‘Not far from Worksop.’

‘And where are we going?’

‘Anywhere.’

It was the answer she liked.

She opened her hand to look at the rings. They gave her SUCH pleasure, as

they lay, the three circles, with their knotted jewels, entangled in her palm. She would have to try them on. She did so secretly, unwilling to let him see, so that he should not know her finger was too large for them. But he saw nevertheless. He always saw, if she wanted him not to. It was another of his hateful, watchful characteristics.

Only the opal, with its thin wire loop, would go on her ring finger. And she was superstitious. No, there was ill-portent enough, she would not accept this ring from him in pledge.

‘Look,’ she said, putting forward her hand, that was half-closed and shrinking. ‘The others don’t fit me.’

He looked at the red-glinting, soft stone, on her over-sensitive skin.

‘Yes,’ he said.

‘But opals are unlucky, aren’t they?’ she said wistfully.

‘No. I prefer unlucky things. Luck is vulgar. Who wants what LUCK would bring? I don’t.’

‘But why?’ she laughed.

And, consumed with a desire to see how the other rings would look on her hand, she put them on her little finger.

‘They can be made a little bigger,’ he said.

‘Yes,’ she replied, doubtfully. And she sighed. She knew that, in accepting the rings, she was accepting a pledge. Yet fate seemed more than herself. She looked again at the jewels. They were very beautiful to her eyes-not as ornament, or wealth, but as tiny fragments of loveliness.

‘I’m glad you bought them,’ she said, putting her hand, half unwillingly, gently on his arm.

He smiled, slightly. He wanted her to come to him. But he was angry at the bottom of his soul, and indifferent. He knew she had a passion for him, really. But it was not finally interesting. There were depths of passion when one became impersonal and indifferent, unemotional. Whereas Ursula was still at the emotional personal level-always so abominably personal. He had taken her as he had never been taken himself. He had taken her at the roots of her darkness and shame-like a demon, laughing over the fountain of mystic corruption which was one of the sources of her being, laughing, shrugging, accepting, accepting finally. As for her, when would she so much go beyond herself as to accept him at the quick of death?

She now became quite happy. The motor-car ran on, the afternoon was soft and dim. She talked with lively interest, analysing people and their motives-Gudrun, Gerald. He answered vaguely. He was not very much interested any more in personalities and in people-people were all different, but they were all

enclosed nowadays in a definite limitation, he said; there were only about two great ideas, two great streams of activity remaining, with various forms of reaction therefrom. The reactions were all varied in various people, but they followed a few great laws, and intrinsically there was no difference. They acted and reacted involuntarily according to a few great laws, and once the laws, the great principles, were known, people were no longer mystically interesting. They were all essentially alike, the differences were only variations on a theme. None of them transcended the given terms.

Ursula did not agree-people were still an adventure to her-but-perhaps not as much as she tried to persuade herself. Perhaps there was something mechanical, now, in her interest. Perhaps also her interest was destructive, her analysing was a real tearing to pieces. There was an under-space in her where she did not care for people and their idiosyncracies, even to destroy them. She seemed to touch for a moment this undersilence in herself, she became still, and she turned for a moment purely to Birkin.

‘Won’t it be lovely to go home in the dark?’ she said. ‘We might have tea rather late-shall we?-and have high tea? Wouldn’t that be rather nice?’

‘I promised to be at Shortlands for dinner,’ he said.

‘But-it doesn’t matter-you can go tomorrow-’

‘Hermione is there,’ he said, in rather an uneasy voice. ‘She is going away in two days. I suppose I ought to say good-bye to her. I shall never see her again.’

Ursula drew away, closed in a violent silence. He knitted his brows, and his eyes began to sparkle again in anger.

‘You don’t mind, do you?’ he asked irritably.

‘No, I don’t care. Why should I? Why should I mind?’ Her tone was jeering and offensive.

‘That’s what I ask myself,’ he said; ‘why SHOULD you mind! But you seem to.’ His brows were tense with violent irritation.

‘I ASSURE you I don’t, I don’t mind in the least. Go where you belong-it’s what I want you to do.’

‘Ah you fool!’ he cried, ‘with your “go where you belong.” It’s finished between Hermione and me. She means much more to YOU, if it comes to that, than she does to me. For you can only revolt in pure reaction from her-and to be her opposite is to be her counterpart.’

‘Ah, opposite!’ cried Ursula. ‘I know your dodges. I am not taken in by your word-twisting. You belong to Hermione and her dead show. Well, if you do, you do. I don’t blame you. But then you’ve nothing to do with me.’

In his inflamed, overwrought exasperation, he stopped the car, and they sat there, in the middle of the country lane, to have it out. It was a crisis of war

between them, so they did not see the ridiculousness of their situation.

‘If you weren’t a fool, if only you weren’t a fool,’ he cried in bitter despair, ‘you’d see that one could be decent, even when one has been wrong. I WAS wrong to go on all those years with Hermione — it was a deathly process. But after all, one can have a little human decency. But no, you would tear my soul out with your jealousy at the very mention of Hermione’s name.’

‘I jealous! I — jealous! You ARE mistaken if you think that. I’m not jealous in the least of Hermione, she is nothing to me, not THAT!’ And Ursula snapped her fingers. ‘No, it’s you who are a liar. It’s you who must return, like a dog to his vomit. It is what Hermione STANDS FOR that I HATE. I HATE it. It is lies, it is false, it is death. But you want it, you can’t help it, you can’t help yourself. You belong to that old, deathly way of living — then go back to it. But don’t come to me, for I’ve nothing to do with it.’

And in the stress of her violent emotion, she got down from the car and went to the hedgerow, picking unconsciously some flesh-pink spindleberries, some of which were burst, showing their orange seeds.

‘Ah, you are a fool,’ he cried, bitterly, with some contempt.

‘Yes, I am. I AM a fool. And thank God for it. I’m too big a fool to swallow your cleverness. God be praised. You go to your women — go to them — they are your sort — you’ve always had a string of them trailing after you — and you always will. Go to your spiritual brides — but don’t come to me as well, because I’m not having any, thank you. You’re not satisfied, are you? Your spiritual brides can’t give you what you want, they aren’t common and fleshy enough for you, aren’t they? So you come to me, and keep them in the background! You will marry me for daily use. But you’ll keep yourself well provided with spiritual brides in the background. I know your dirty little game.’ Suddenly a flame ran over her, and she stamped her foot madly on the road, and he winced, afraid that she would strike him. ‘And I, I’M not spiritual enough, I’M not as spiritual as that Hermione — !’ Her brows knitted, her eyes blazed like a tiger’s. ‘Then go to her, that’s all I say, GO to her, GO. Ha, she spiritual — SPIRITUAL, she! A dirty materialist as she is. SHE spiritual? What does she care for, what is her spirituality? What IS it?’ Her fury seemed to blaze out and burn his face. He shrank a little. ‘I tell you it’s DIRT, DIRT, and nothing BUT dirt. And it’s dirt you want, you crave for it. Spiritual! Is THAT spiritual, her bullying, her conceit, her sordid materialism? She’s a fishwife, a fishwife, she is such a materialist. And all so sordid. What does she work out to, in the end, with all her social passion, as you call it. Social passion — what social passion has she? — show it me! — where is it? She wants petty, immediate POWER, she wants the illusion that she is a great woman, that is all. In her soul she’s a devilish

unbeliever, common as dirt. That's what she is at the bottom. And all the rest is pretence — but you love it. You love the sham spirituality, it's your food. And why? Because of the dirt underneath. Do you think I don't know the foulness of your sex life — and her's? — I do. And it's that foulness you want, you liar. Then have it, have it. You're such a liar.'

She turned away, spasmodically tearing the twigs of spindleberry from the hedge, and fastening them, with vibrating fingers, in the bosom of her coat.

He stood watching in silence. A wonderful tenderness burned in him, at the sight of her quivering, so sensitive fingers: and at the same time he was full of rage and callousness.

'This is a degrading exhibition,' he said coolly.

'Yes, degrading indeed,' she said. 'But more to me than to you.'

'Since you choose to degrade yourself,' he said. Again the flash came over her face, the yellow lights concentrated in her eyes.

'YOU!' she cried. 'You! You truth-lover! You purity-monger! It STINKS, your truth and your purity. It stinks of the offal you feed on, you scavenger dog, you eater of corpses. You are foul, FOUL and you must know it. Your purity, your candour, your goodness — yes, thank you, we've had some. What you are is a foul, deathly thing, obscene, that's what you are, obscene and perverse. You, and love! You may well say, you don't want love. No, you want YOURSELF, and dirt, and death — that's what you want. You are so PERVERSE, so death-eating. And then — '

'There's a bicycle coming,' he said, writhing under her loud denunciation.

She glanced down the road.

'I don't care,' she cried.

Nevertheless she was silent. The cyclist, having heard the voices raised in altercation, glanced curiously at the man, and the woman, and at the standing motor-car as he passed.

' — Afternoon,' he said, cheerfully.

'Good-afternoon,' replied Birkin coldly.

They were silent as the man passed into the distance.

A clearer look had come over Birkin's face. He knew she was in the main right. He knew he was perverse, so spiritual on the one hand, and in some strange way, degraded, on the other. But was she herself any better? Was anybody any better?

'It may all be true, lies and stink and all,' he said. 'But Hermione's spiritual intimacy is no rottener than your emotional-jealous intimacy. One can preserve the decencies, even to one's enemies: for one's own sake. Hermione is my enemy — to her last breath! That's why I must bow her off the field.'

‘You! You and your enemies and your bows! A pretty picture you make of yourself. But it takes nobody in but yourself. I JEALOUS! I! What I say,’ her voice sprang into flame, ‘I say because it is TRUE, do you see, because you are YOU, a foul and false liar, a whited sepulchre. That’s why I say it. And YOU hear it.’

‘And be grateful,’ he added, with a satirical grimace.

‘Yes,’ she cried, ‘and if you have a spark of decency in you, be grateful.’

‘Not having a spark of decency, however — ’ he retorted.

‘No,’ she cried, ‘you haven’t a SPARK. And so you can go your way, and I’ll go mine. It’s no good, not the slightest. So you can leave me now, I don’t want to go any further with you — leave me — ’

‘You don’t even know where you are,’ he said.

‘Oh, don’t bother, I assure you I shall be all right. I’ve got ten shillings in my purse, and that will take me back from anywhere YOU have brought me to.’ She hesitated. The rings were still on her fingers, two on her little finger, one on her ring finger. Still she hesitated.

‘Very good,’ he said. ‘The only hopeless thing is a fool.’

‘You are quite right,’ she said.

Still she hesitated. Then an ugly, malevolent look came over her face, she pulled the rings from her fingers, and tossed them at him. One touched his face, the others hit his coat, and they scattered into the mud.

‘And take your rings,’ she said, ‘and go and buy yourself a female elsewhere — there are plenty to be had, who will be quite glad to share your spiritual mess, — or to have your physical mess, and leave your spiritual mess to Hermione.’

With which she walked away, desultorily, up the road. He stood motionless, watching her sullen, rather ugly walk. She was sullenly picking and pulling at the twigs of the hedge as she passed. She grew smaller, she seemed to pass out of his sight. A darkness came over his mind. Only a small, mechanical speck of consciousness hovered near him.

He felt tired and weak. Yet also he was relieved. He gave up his old position. He went and sat on the bank. No doubt Ursula was right. It was true, really, what she said. He knew that his spirituality was concomitant of a process of depravity, a sort of pleasure in self-destruction. There really WAS a certain stimulant in self-destruction, for him — especially when it was translated spiritually. But then he knew it — he knew it, and had done. And was not Ursula’s way of emotional intimacy, emotional and physical, was it not just as dangerous as Hermione’s abstract spiritual intimacy? Fusion, fusion, this horrible fusion of two beings, which every woman and most men insisted on, was it not nauseous and horrible anyhow, whether it was a fusion of the spirit or of the emotional

body? Hermione saw herself as the perfect Idea, to which all men must come: And Ursula was the perfect Womb, the bath of birth, to which all men must come! And both were horrible. Why could they not remain individuals, limited by their own limits? Why this dreadful all-comprehensiveness, this hateful tyranny? Why not leave the other being, free, why try to absorb, or melt, or merge? One might abandon oneself utterly to the MOMENTS, but not to any other being.

He could not bear to see the rings lying in the pale mud of the road. He picked them up, and wiped them unconsciously on his hands. They were the little tokens of the reality of beauty, the reality of happiness in warm creation. But he had made his hands all dirty and gritty.

There was a darkness over his mind. The terrible knot of consciousness that had persisted there like an obsession was broken, gone, his life was dissolved in darkness over his limbs and his body. But there was a point of anxiety in his heart now. He wanted her to come back. He breathed lightly and regularly like an infant, that breathes innocently, beyond the touch of responsibility.

She was coming back. He saw her drifting desultorily under the high hedge, advancing towards him slowly. He did not move, he did not look again. He was as if asleep, at peace, slumbering and utterly relaxed.

She came up and stood before him, hanging her head.

‘See what a flower I found you,’ she said, wistfully holding a piece of purple-red bell-heather under his face. He saw the clump of coloured bells, and the tree-like, tiny branch: also her hands, with their over-fine, over-sensitive skin.

‘Pretty!’ he said, looking up at her with a smile, taking the flower. Everything had become simple again, quite simple, the complexity gone into nowhere. But he badly wanted to cry: except that he was weary and bored by emotion.

Then a hot passion of tenderness for her filled his heart. He stood up and looked into her face. It was new and oh, so delicate in its luminous wonder and fear. He put his arms round her, and she hid her face on his shoulder.

It was peace, just simple peace, as he stood folding her quietly there on the open lane. It was peace at last. The old, detestable world of tension had passed away at last, his soul was strong and at ease.

She looked up at him. The wonderful yellow light in her eyes now was soft and yielded, they were at peace with each other. He kissed her, softly, many, many times. A laugh came into her eyes.

‘Did I abuse you?’ she asked.

He smiled too, and took her hand, that was so soft and given.

‘Never mind,’ she said, ‘it is all for the good.’ He kissed her again, softly, many times.

‘Isn’t it?’ she said.

‘Certainly,’ he replied. ‘Wait! I shall have my own back.’

She laughed suddenly, with a wild catch in her voice, and flung her arms around him.

‘You are mine, my love, aren’t you?’ she cried straining him close.

‘Yes,’ he said, softly.

His voice was so soft and final, she went very still, as if under a fate which had taken her. Yes, she acquiesced — but it was accomplished without her acquiescence. He was kissing her quietly, repeatedly, with a soft, still happiness that almost made her heart stop beating.

‘My love!’ she cried, lifting her face and looking with frightened, gentle wonder of bliss. Was it all real? But his eyes were beautiful and soft and immune from stress or excitement, beautiful and smiling lightly to her, smiling with her. She hid her face on his shoulder, hiding before him, because he could see her so completely. She knew he loved her, and she was afraid, she was in a strange element, a new heaven round about her. She wished he were passionate, because in passion she was at home. But this was so still and frail, as space is more frightening than force.

Again, quickly, she lifted her head.

‘Do you love me?’ she said, quickly, impulsively.

‘Yes,’ he replied, not heeding her motion, only her stillness.

She knew it was true. She broke away.

‘So you ought,’ she said, turning round to look at the road. ‘Did you find the rings?’

‘Yes.’

‘Where are they?’

‘In my pocket.’

She put her hand into his pocket and took them out.

She was restless.

‘Shall we go?’ she said.

‘Yes,’ he answered. And they mounted to the car once more, and left behind them this memorable battle-field.

They drifted through the wild, late afternoon, in a beautiful motion that was smiling and transcendent. His mind was sweetly at ease, the life flowed through him as from some new fountain, he was as if born out of the cramp of a womb.

‘Are you happy?’ she asked him, in her strange, delighted way.

‘Yes,’ he said.

‘So am I,’ she cried in sudden ecstasy, putting her arm round him and clutching him violently against her, as he steered the motor-car.

‘Don’t drive much more,’ she said. ‘I don’t want you to be always doing something.’

‘No,’ he said. ‘We’ll finish this little trip, and then we’ll be free.’

‘We will, my love, we will,’ she cried in delight, kissing him as he turned to her.

He drove on in a strange new wakefulness, the tension of his consciousness broken. He seemed to be conscious all over, all his body awake with a simple, glimmering awareness, as if he had just come awake, like a thing that is born, like a bird when it comes out of an egg, into a new universe.

They dropped down a long hill in the dusk, and suddenly Ursula recognised on her right hand, below in the hollow, the form of Southwell Minster.

‘Are we here!’ she cried with pleasure.

The rigid, sombre, ugly cathedral was settling under the gloom of the coming night, as they entered the narrow town, the golden lights showed like slabs of revelation, in the shop-windows.

‘Father came here with mother,’ she said, ‘when they first knew each other. He loves it — he loves the Minster. Do you?’

‘Yes. It looks like quartz crystals sticking up out of the dark hollow. We’ll have our high tea at the Saracen’s Head.’

As they descended, they heard the Minster bells playing a hymn, when the hour had struck six.

Glory to thee my God this night
For all the blessings of the light —

So, to Ursula’s ear, the tune fell out, drop by drop, from the unseen sky on to the dusky town. It was like dim, bygone centuries sounding. It was all so far off. She stood in the old yard of the inn, smelling of straw and stables and petrol. Above, she could see the first stars. What was it all? This was no actual world, it was the dream-world of one’s childhood — a great circumscribed reminiscence. The world had become unreal. She herself was a strange, transcendent reality.

They sat together in a little parlour by the fire.

‘Is it true?’ she said, wondering.

‘What?’

‘Everything — is everything true?’

‘The best is true,’ he said, grimacing at her.

‘Is it?’ she replied, laughing, but unassured.

She looked at him. He seemed still so separate. New eyes were opened in her soul. She saw a strange creature from another world, in him. It was as if she were enchanted, and everything were metamorphosed. She recalled again the old

magic of the Book of Genesis, where the sons of God saw the daughters of men, that they were fair. And he was one of these, one of these strange creatures from the beyond, looking down at her, and seeing she was fair.

He stood on the hearth-rug looking at her, at her face that was upturned exactly like a flower, a fresh, luminous flower, glinting faintly golden with the dew of the first light. And he was smiling faintly as if there were no speech in the world, save the silent delight of flowers in each other. Smilingly they delighted in each other's presence, pure presence, not to be thought of, even known. But his eyes had a faintly ironical contraction.

And she was drawn to him strangely, as in a spell. Kneeling on the hearth-rug before him, she put her arms round his loins, and put her face against his thigh. Riches! Riches! She was overwhelmed with a sense of a heavenful of riches.

'We love each other,' she said in delight.

'More than that,' he answered, looking down at her with his glimmering, easy face.

Unconsciously, with her sensitive fingertips, she was tracing the back of his thighs, following some mysterious life-flow there. She had discovered something, something more than wonderful, more wonderful than life itself. It was the strange mystery of his life-motion, there, at the back of the thighs, down the flanks. It was a strange reality of his being, the very stuff of being, there in the straight downflow of the thighs. It was here she discovered him one of the sons of God such as were in the beginning of the world, not a man, something other, something more.

This was release at last. She had had lovers, she had known passion. But this was neither love nor passion. It was the daughters of men coming back to the sons of God, the strange inhuman sons of God who are in the beginning.

Her face was now one dazzle of released, golden light, as she looked up at him, and laid her hands full on his thighs, behind, as he stood before her. He looked down at her with a rich bright brow like a diadem above his eyes. She was beautiful as a new marvellous flower opened at his knees, a paradisaical flower she was, beyond womanhood, such a flower of luminousness. Yet something was tight and unfree in him. He did not like this crouching, this radiance — not altogether.

It was all achieved, for her. She had found one of the sons of God from the Beginning, and he had found one of the first most luminous daughters of men.

She traced with her hands the line of his loins and thighs, at the back, and a living fire ran through her, from him, darkly. It was a dark flood of electric passion she released from him, drew into herself. She had established a rich new circuit, a new current of passional electric energy, between the two of them,

released from the darkest poles of the body and established in perfect circuit. It was a dark fire of electricity that rushed from him to her, and flooded them both with rich peace, satisfaction.

‘My love,’ she cried, lifting her face to him, her eyes, her mouth open in transport.

‘My love,’ he answered, bending and kissing her, always kissing her.

She closed her hands over the full, rounded body of his loins, as he stooped over her, she seemed to touch the quick of the mystery of darkness that was bodily him. She seemed to faint beneath, and he seemed to faint, stooping over her. It was a perfect passing away for both of them, and at the same time the most intolerable accession into being, the marvellous fullness of immediate gratification, overwhelming, out-flooding from the source of the deepest life-force, the darkest, deepest, strangest life-source of the human body, at the back and base of the loins.

After a lapse of stillness, after the rivers of strange dark fluid richness had passed over her, flooding, carrying away her mind and flooding down her spine and down her knees, past her feet, a strange flood, sweeping away everything and leaving her an essential new being, she was left quite free, she was free in complete ease, her complete self. So she rose, stilly and blithe, smiling at him. He stood before her, glimmering, so awfully real, that her heart almost stopped beating. He stood there in his strange, whole body, that had its marvellous fountains, like the bodies of the sons of God who were in the beginning. There were strange fountains of his body, more mysterious and potent than any she had imagined or known, more satisfying, ah, finally, mystically-physically satisfying. She had thought there was no source deeper than the phallic source. And now, behold, from the smitten rock of the man’s body, from the strange marvellous flanks and thighs, deeper, further in mystery than the phallic source, came the floods of ineffable darkness and ineffable riches.

They were glad, and they could forget perfectly. They laughed, and went to the meal provided. There was a venison pasty, of all things, a large broad-faced cut ham, eggs and cresses and red beet-root, and medlars and apple-tart, and tea.

‘What GOOD things!’ she cried with pleasure. ‘How noble it looks! — shall I pour out the tea? — ’

She was usually nervous and uncertain at performing these public duties, such as giving tea. But today she forgot, she was at her ease, entirely forgetting to have misgivings. The tea-pot poured beautifully from a proud slender spout. Her eyes were warm with smiles as she gave him his tea. She had learned at last to be still and perfect.

‘Everything is ours,’ she said to him.

‘Everything,’ he answered.

She gave a queer little crowing sound of triumph.

‘I’m so glad!’ she cried, with unspeakable relief.

‘So am I,’ he said. ‘But I’m thinking we’d better get out of our responsibilities as quick as we can.’

‘What responsibilities?’ she asked, wondering.

‘We must drop our jobs, like a shot.’

A new understanding dawned into her face.

‘Of course,’ she said, ‘there’s that.’

‘We must get out,’ he said. ‘There’s nothing for it but to get out, quick.’

She looked at him doubtfully across the table.

‘But where?’ she said.

‘I don’t know,’ he said. ‘We’ll just wander about for a bit.’

Again she looked at him quizzically.

‘I should be perfectly happy at the Mill,’ she said.

‘It’s very near the old thing,’ he said. ‘Let us wander a bit.’

His voice could be so soft and happy-go-lucky, it went through her veins like an exhilaration. Nevertheless she dreamed of a valley, and wild gardens, and peace. She had a desire too for splendour — an aristocratic extravagant splendour. Wandering seemed to her like restlessness, dissatisfaction.

‘Where will you wander to?’ she asked.

‘I don’t know. I feel as if I would just meet you and we’d set off — just towards the distance.’

‘But where can one go?’ she asked anxiously. ‘After all, there is only the world, and none of it is very distant.’

‘Still,’ he said, ‘I should like to go with you — nowhere. It would be rather wandering just to nowhere. That’s the place to get to — nowhere. One wants to wander away from the world’s somewheres, into our own nowhere.’

Still she meditated.

‘You see, my love,’ she said, ‘I’m so afraid that while we are only people, we’ve got to take the world that’s given — because there isn’t any other.’

‘Yes there is,’ he said. ‘There’s somewhere where we can be free — somewhere where one needn’t wear much clothes — none even — where one meets a few people who have gone through enough, and can take things for granted — where you be yourself, without bothering. There is somewhere — there are one or two people — ’

‘But where — ?’ she sighed.

‘Somewhere — anywhere. Let’s wander off. That’s the thing to do — let’s wander off.’

‘Yes — ’ she said, thrilled at the thought of travel. But to her it was only travel.

‘To be free,’ he said. ‘To be free, in a free place, with a few other people!’

‘Yes,’ she said wistfully. Those ‘few other people’ depressed her.

‘It isn’t really a locality, though,’ he said. ‘It’s a perfected relation between you and me, and others — the perfect relation — so that we are free together.’

‘It is, my love, isn’t it,’ she said. ‘It’s you and me. It’s you and me, isn’t it?’ She stretched out her arms to him. He went across and stooped to kiss her face. Her arms closed round him again, her hands spread upon his shoulders, moving slowly there, moving slowly on his back, down his back slowly, with a strange recurrent, rhythmic motion, yet moving slowly down, pressing mysteriously over his loins, over his flanks. The sense of the awfulness of riches that could never be impaired flooded her mind like a swoon, a death in most marvellous possession, mystic-sure. She possessed him so utterly and intolerably, that she herself lapsed out. And yet she was only sitting still in the chair, with her hands pressed upon him, and lost.

Again he softly kissed her.

‘We shall never go apart again,’ he murmured quietly. And she did not speak, but only pressed her hands firmer down upon the source of darkness in him.

They decided, when they woke again from the pure swoon, to write their resignations from the world of work there and then. She wanted this.

He rang the bell, and ordered note-paper without a printed address. The waiter cleared the table.

‘Now then,’ he said, ‘yours first. Put your home address, and the date — then “Director of Education, Town Hall — Sir — ” Now then! — I don’t know how one really stands — I suppose one could get out of it in less than month — Anyhow “Sir — I beg to resign my post as classmistress in the Willey Green Grammar School. I should be very grateful if you would liberate me as soon as possible, without waiting for the expiration of the month’s notice.” That’ll do. Have you got it? Let me look. “Ursula Brangwen.” Good! Now I’ll write mine. I ought to give them three months, but I can plead health. I can arrange it all right.’

He sat and wrote out his formal resignation.

‘Now,’ he said, when the envelopes were sealed and addressed, ‘shall we post them here, both together? I know Jackie will say, “Here’s a coincidence!” when he receives them in all their identity. Shall we let him say it, or not?’

‘I don’t care,’ she said.

‘No — ?’ he said, pondering.

‘It doesn’t matter, does it?’ she said.

‘Yes,’ he replied. ‘Their imaginations shall not work on us. I’ll post yours here, mine after. I cannot be implicated in their imaginings.’

He looked at her with his strange, non-human singleness.

‘Yes, you are right,’ she said.

She lifted her face to him, all shining and open. It was as if he might enter straight into the source of her radiance. His face became a little distracted.

‘Shall we go?’ he said.

‘As you like,’ she replied.

They were soon out of the little town, and running through the uneven lanes of the country. Ursula nestled near him, into his constant warmth, and watched the pale-lit revelation racing ahead, the visible night. Sometimes it was a wide old road, with grass-spaces on either side, flying magic and elfin in the greenish illumination, sometimes it was trees looming overhead, sometimes it was bramble bushes, sometimes the walls of a crew-yard and the butt of a barn.

‘Are you going to Shortlands to dinner?’ Ursula asked him suddenly. He started.

‘Good God!’ he said. ‘Shortlands! Never again. Not that. Besides we should be too late.’

‘Where are we going then — to the Mill?’

‘If you like. Pity to go anywhere on this good dark night. Pity to come out of it, really. Pity we can’t stop in the good darkness. It is better than anything ever would be — this good immediate darkness.’

She sat wondering. The car lurched and swayed. She knew there was no leaving him, the darkness held them both and contained them, it was not to be surpassed. Besides she had a full mystic knowledge of his suave loins of darkness, dark-clad and suave, and in this knowledge there was some of the inevitability and the beauty of fate, fate which one asks for, which one accepts in full.

He sat still like an Egyptian Pharaoh, driving the car. He felt as if he were seated in immemorial potency, like the great carven statues of real Egypt, as real and as fulfilled with subtle strength, as these are, with a vague inscrutable smile on the lips. He knew what it was to have the strange and magical current of force in his back and loins, and down his legs, force so perfect that it stayed him immobile, and left his face subtly, mindlessly smiling. He knew what it was to be awake and potent in that other basic mind, the deepest physical mind. And from this source he had a pure and magic control, magical, mystical, a force in darkness, like electricity.

It was very difficult to speak, it was so perfect to sit in this pure living silence, subtle, full of unthinkable knowledge and unthinkable force, upheld

immemorially in timeless force, like the immobile, supremely potent Egyptians, seated forever in their living, subtle silence.

‘We need not go home,’ he said. ‘This car has seats that let down and make a bed, and we can lift the hood.’

She was glad and frightened. She cowered near to him.

‘But what about them at home?’ she said.

‘Send a telegram.’

Nothing more was said. They ran on in silence. But with a sort of second consciousness he steered the car towards a destination. For he had the free intelligence to direct his own ends. His arms and his breast and his head were rounded and living like those of the Greek, he had not the unawakened straight arms of the Egyptian, nor the sealed, slumbering head. A lambent intelligence played secondarily above his pure Egyptian concentration in darkness.

They came to a village that lined along the road. The car crept slowly along, until he saw the post-office. Then he pulled up.

‘I will send a telegram to your father,’ he said. ‘I will merely say “spending the night in town,” shall I?’

‘Yes,’ she answered. She did not want to be disturbed into taking thought.

She watched him move into the post-office. It was also a shop, she saw. Strange, he was. Even as he went into the lighted, public place he remained dark and magic, the living silence seemed the body of reality in him, subtle, potent, indiscoverable. There he was! In a strange uplift of elation she saw him, the being never to be revealed, awful in its potency, mystic and real. This dark, subtle reality of him, never to be translated, liberated her into perfection, her own perfected being. She too was dark and fulfilled in silence.

He came out, throwing some packages into the car.

‘There is some bread, and cheese, and raisins, and apples, and hard chocolate,’ he said, in his voice that was as if laughing, because of the unblemished stillness and force which was the reality in him. She would have to touch him. To speak, to see, was nothing. It was a travesty to look and to comprehend the man there. Darkness and silence must fall perfectly on her, then she could know mystically, in unrevealed touch. She must lightly, mindlessly connect with him, have the knowledge which is death of knowledge, the reality of surety in not-knowing.

Soon they had run on again into the darkness. She did not ask where they were going, she did not care. She sat in a fullness and a pure potency that was like apathy, mindless and immobile. She was next to him, and hung in a pure rest, as a star is hung, balanced unthinkably. Still there remained a dark lambency of anticipation. She would touch him. With perfect fine fingertips of reality she would touch the reality in him, the suave, pure, untranslatable reality of his loins

of darkness. To touch, mindlessly in darkness to come in pure touching upon the living reality of him, his suave perfect loins and thighs of darkness, this was her sustaining anticipation.

And he too waited in the magical steadfastness of suspense, for her to take this knowledge of him as he had taken it of her. He knew her darkly, with the fullness of dark knowledge. Now she would know him, and he too would be liberated. He would be night-free, like an Egyptian, steadfast in perfectly suspended equilibrium, pure mystic nodality of physical being. They would give each other this star-equilibrium which alone is freedom.

She saw that they were running among trees — great old trees with dying bracken undergrowth. The palish, gnarled trunks showed ghostly, and like old priests in the hovering distance, the fern rose magical and mysterious. It was a night all darkness, with low cloud. The motor-car advanced slowly.

‘Where are we?’ she whispered.

‘In Sherwood Forest.’

It was evident he knew the place. He drove softly, watching. Then they came to a green road between the trees. They turned cautiously round, and were advancing between the oaks of the forest, down a green lane. The green lane widened into a little circle of grass, where there was a small trickle of water at the bottom of a sloping bank. The car stopped.

‘We will stay here,’ he said, ‘and put out the lights.’

He extinguished the lamps at once, and it was pure night, with shadows of trees like realities of other, nightly being. He threw a rug on to the bracken, and they sat in stillness and mindless silence. There were faint sounds from the wood, but no disturbance, no possible disturbance, the world was under a strange ban, a new mystery had supervened. They threw off their clothes, and he gathered her to him, and found her, found the pure lambent reality of her forever invisible flesh. Quenched, inhuman, his fingers upon her unrevealed nudity were the fingers of silence upon silence, the body of mysterious night upon the body of mysterious night, the night masculine and feminine, never to be seen with the eye, or known with the mind, only known as a palpable revelation of living otherness.

She had her desire of him, she touched, she received the maximum of unspeakable communication in touch, dark, subtle, positively silent, a magnificent gift and give again, a perfect acceptance and yielding, a mystery, the reality of that which can never be known, vital, sensual reality that can never be transmuted into mind content, but remains outside, living body of darkness and silence and subtlety, the mystic body of reality. She had her desire fulfilled. He had his desire fulfilled. For she was to him what he was to her, the immemorial

magnificence of mystic, palpable, real otherness.

They slept the chilly night through under the hood of the car, a night of unbroken sleep. It was already high day when he awoke. They looked at each other and laughed, then looked away, filled with darkness and secrecy. Then they kissed and remembered the magnificence of the night. It was so magnificent, such an inheritance of a universe of dark reality, that they were afraid to seem to remember. They hid away the remembrance and the knowledge.

CHAPTER XXIV.

DEATH AND LOVE

Thomas Crich died slowly, terribly slowly. It seemed impossible to everybody that the thread of life could be drawn out so thin, and yet not break. The sick man lay unutterably weak and spent, kept alive by morphia and by drinks, which he sipped slowly. He was only half conscious — a thin strand of consciousness linking the darkness of death with the light of day. Yet his will was unbroken, he was integral, complete. Only he must have perfect stillness about him.

Any presence but that of the nurses was a strain and an effort to him now. Every morning Gerald went into the room, hoping to find his father passed away at last. Yet always he saw the same transparent face, the same dread dark hair on the waxen forehead, and the awful, inchoate dark eyes, which seemed to be decomposing into formless darkness, having only a tiny grain of vision within them.

And always, as the dark, inchoate eyes turned to him, there passed through Gerald's bowels a burning stroke of revolt, that seemed to resound through his whole being, threatening to break his mind with its clangour, and making him mad.

Every morning, the son stood there, erect and taut with life, gleaming in his blondness. The gleaming blondness of his strange, imminent being put the father into a fever of fretful irritation. He could not bear to meet the uncanny, downward look of Gerald's blue eyes. But it was only for a moment. Each on the brink of departure, the father and son looked at each other, then parted.

For a long time Gerald preserved a perfect sang froid, he remained quite collected. But at last, fear undermined him. He was afraid of some horrible collapse in himself. He had to stay and see this thing through. Some perverse will made him watch his father drawn over the borders of life. And yet, now, every day, the great red-hot stroke of horrified fear through the bowels of the son struck a further inflammation. Gerald went about all day with a tendency to cringe, as if there were the point of a sword of Damocles pricking the nape of his neck.

There was no escape — he was bound up with his father, he had to see him through. And the father's will never relaxed or yielded to death. It would have to snap when death at last snapped it, — if it did not persist after a physical death. In the same way, the will of the son never yielded. He stood firm and immune, he was outside this death and this dying.

It was a trial by ordeal. Could he stand and see his father slowly dissolve and disappear in death, without once yielding his will, without once relenting before the omnipotence of death. Like a Red Indian undergoing torture, Gerald would experience the whole process of slow death without wincing or flinching. He even triumphed in it. He somehow WANTED this death, even forced it. It was as if he himself were dealing the death, even when he most recoiled in horror. Still, he would deal it, he would triumph through death.

But in the stress of this ordeal, Gerald too lost his hold on the outer, daily life. That which was much to him, came to mean nothing. Work, pleasure — it was all left behind. He went on more or less mechanically with his business, but this activity was all extraneous. The real activity was this ghastly wrestling for death in his own soul. And his own will should triumph. Come what might, he would not bow down or submit or acknowledge a master. He had no master in death.

But as the fight went on, and all that he had been and was continued to be destroyed, so that life was a hollow shell all round him, roaring and clattering like the sound of the sea, a noise in which he participated externally, and inside this hollow shell was all the darkness and fearful space of death, he knew he would have to find reinforcements, otherwise he would collapse inwards upon the great dark void which circled at the centre of his soul. His will held his outer life, his outer mind, his outer being unbroken and unchanged. But the pressure was too great. He would have to find something to make good the equilibrium. Something must come with him into the hollow void of death in his soul, fill it up, and so equalise the pressure within to the pressure without. For day by day he felt more and more like a bubble filled with darkness, round which whirled the iridescence of his consciousness, and upon which the pressure of the outer world, the outer life, roared vastly.

In this extremity his instinct led him to Gudrun. He threw away everything now — he only wanted the relation established with her. He would follow her to the studio, to be near her, to talk to her. He would stand about the room, aimlessly picking up the implements, the lumps of clay, the little figures she had cast — they were whimsical and grotesque — looking at them without perceiving them. And she felt him following her, dogging her heels like a doom. She held away from him, and yet she knew he drew always a little nearer, a little nearer.

‘I say,’ he said to her one evening, in an odd, unthinking, uncertain way, ‘won’t you stay to dinner tonight? I wish you would.’

She started slightly. He spoke to her like a man making a request of another man.

‘They’ll be expecting me at home,’ she said.

‘Oh, they won’t mind, will they?’ he said. ‘I should be awfully glad if you’d stay.’

Her long silence gave consent at last.

‘I’ll tell Thomas, shall I?’ he said.

‘I must go almost immediately after dinner,’ she said.

It was a dark, cold evening. There was no fire in the drawing-room, they sat in the library. He was mostly silent, absent, and Winifred talked little. But when Gerald did rouse himself, he smiled and was pleasant and ordinary with her. Then there came over him again the long blanks, of which he was not aware.

She was very much attracted by him. He looked so preoccupied, and his strange, blank silences, which she could not read, moved her and made her wonder over him, made her feel reverential towards him.

But he was very kind. He gave her the best things at the table, he had a bottle of slightly sweet, delicious golden wine brought out for dinner, knowing she would prefer it to the burgundy. She felt herself esteemed, needed almost.

As they took coffee in the library, there was a soft, very soft knocking at the door. He started, and called ‘Come in.’ The timbre of his voice, like something vibrating at high pitch, unnerved Gudrun. A nurse in white entered, half hovering in the doorway like a shadow. She was very good-looking, but strangely enough, shy and self-mistrusting.

‘The doctor would like to speak to you, Mr Crich,’ she said, in her low, discreet voice.

‘The doctor!’ he said, starting up. ‘Where is he?’

‘He is in the diningroom.’

‘Tell him I’m coming.’

He drank up his coffee, and followed the nurse, who had dissolved like a shadow.

‘Which nurse was that?’ asked Gudrun.

‘Miss Inglis — I like her best,’ replied Winifred.

After a while Gerald came back, looking absorbed by his own thoughts, and having some of that tension and abstraction which is seen in a slightly drunken man. He did not say what the doctor had wanted him for, but stood before the fire, with his hands behind his back, and his face open and as if rapt. Not that he was really thinking — he was only arrested in pure suspense inside himself, and

thoughts wafted through his mind without order.

‘I must go now and see Mama,’ said Winifred, ‘and see Dadda before he goes to sleep.’

She bade them both good-night.

Gudrun also rose to take her leave.

‘You needn’t go yet, need you?’ said Gerald, glancing quickly at the clock.’ It is early yet. I’ll walk down with you when you go. Sit down, don’t hurry away.’

Gudrun sat down, as if, absent as he was, his will had power over her. She felt almost mesmerised. He was strange to her, something unknown. What was he thinking, what was he feeling, as he stood there so rapt, saying nothing? He kept her — she could feel that. He would not let her go. She watched him in humble submissiveness.

‘Had the doctor anything new to tell you?’ she asked, softly, at length, with that gentle, timid sympathy which touched a keen fibre in his heart. He lifted his eyebrows with a negligent, indifferent expression.

‘No — nothing new,’ he replied, as if the question were quite casual, trivial. ‘He says the pulse is very weak indeed, very intermittent — but that doesn’t necessarily mean much, you know.’

He looked down at her. Her eyes were dark and soft and unfolded, with a stricken look that roused him.

‘No,’ she murmured at length. ‘I don’t understand anything about these things.’

‘Just as well not,’ he said. ‘I say, won’t you have a cigarette? — do!’ He quickly fetched the box, and held her a light. Then he stood before her on the hearth again.

‘No,’ he said, ‘we’ve never had much illness in the house, either — not till father.’ He seemed to meditate a while. Then looking down at her, with strangely communicative blue eyes, that filled her with dread, he continued: ‘It’s something you don’t reckon with, you know, till it is there. And then you realise that it was there all the time — it was always there — you understand what I mean? — the possibility of this incurable illness, this slow death.’

He moved his feet uneasily on the marble hearth, and put his cigarette to his mouth, looking up at the ceiling.

‘I know,’ murmured Gudrun: ‘it is dreadful.’

He smoked without knowing. Then he took the cigarette from his lips, bared his teeth, and putting the tip of his tongue between his teeth spat off a grain of tobacco, turning slightly aside, like a man who is alone, or who is lost in thought.

‘I don’t know what the effect actually IS, on one,’ he said, and again he

looked down at her. Her eyes were dark and stricken with knowledge, looking into his. He saw her submerged, and he turned aside his face. 'But I absolutely am not the same. There's nothing left, if you understand what I mean. You seem to be clutching at the void — and at the same time you are void yourself. And so you don't know what to DO.'

'No,' she murmured. A heavy thrill ran down her nerves, heavy, almost pleasure, almost pain. 'What can be done?' she added.

He turned, and flipped the ash from his cigarette on to the great marble hearthstones, that lay bare in the room, without fender or bar.

'I don't know, I'm sure,' he replied. 'But I do think you've got to find some way of resolving the situation — not because you want to, but because you've GOT to, otherwise you're done. The whole of everything, and yourself included, is just on the point of caving in, and you are just holding it up with your hands. Well, it's a situation that obviously can't continue. You can't stand holding the roof up with your hands, for ever. You know that sooner or later you'll HAVE to let go. Do you understand what I mean? And so something's got to be done, or there's a universal collapse — as far as you yourself are concerned.'

He shifted slightly on the hearth, crunching a cinder under his heel. He looked down at it. Gudrun was aware of the beautiful old marble panels of the fireplace, swelling softly carved, round him and above him. She felt as if she were caught at last by fate, imprisoned in some horrible and fatal trap.

'But what CAN be done?' she murmured humbly. 'You must use me if I can be of any help at all — but how can I? I don't see how I CAN help you.'

He looked down at her critically.

'I don't want you to HELP,' he said, slightly irritated, 'because there's nothing to be DONE. I only want sympathy, do you see: I want somebody I can talk to sympathetically. That eases the strain. And there IS nobody to talk to sympathetically. That's the curious thing. There IS nobody. There's Rupert Birkin. But then he ISN'T sympathetic, he wants to DICTATE. And that is no use whatsoever.'

She was caught in a strange snare. She looked down at her hands.

Then there was the sound of the door softly opening. Gerald started. He was chagrined. It was his starting that really startled Gudrun. Then he went forward, with quick, graceful, intentional courtesy.

'Oh, mother!' he said. 'How nice of you to come down. How are you?'

The elderly woman, loosely and bulkily wrapped in a purple gown, came forward silently, slightly hulked, as usual. Her son was at her side. He pushed her up a chair, saying 'You know Miss Brangwen, don't you?'

The mother glanced at Gudrun indifferently.

‘Yes,’ she said. Then she turned her wonderful, forget-me-not blue eyes up to her son, as she slowly sat down in the chair he had brought her.

‘I came to ask you about your father,’ she said, in her rapid, scarcely-audible voice. ‘I didn’t know you had company.’

‘No? Didn’t Winifred tell you? Miss Brangwen stayed to dinner, to make us a little more lively — ’

Mrs Crich turned slowly round to Gudrun, and looked at her, but with unseeing eyes.

‘I’m afraid it would be no treat to her.’ Then she turned again to her son. ‘Winifred tells me the doctor had something to say about your father. What is it?’

‘Only that the pulse is very weak — misses altogether a good many times — so that he might not last the night out,’ Gerald replied.

Mrs Crich sat perfectly impassive, as if she had not heard. Her bulk seemed hunched in the chair, her fair hair hung slack over her ears. But her skin was clear and fine, her hands, as she sat with them forgotten and folded, were quite beautiful, full of potential energy. A great mass of energy seemed decaying up in that silent, hulking form.

She looked up at her son, as he stood, keen and soldierly, near to her. Her eyes were most wonderfully blue, bluer than forget-me-nots. She seemed to have a certain confidence in Gerald, and to feel a certain motherly mistrust of him.

‘How are YOU?’ she muttered, in her strangely quiet voice, as if nobody should hear but him. ‘You’re not getting into a state, are you?’

You’re not letting it make you hysterical?’

The curious challenge in the last words startled Gudrun.

‘I don’t think so, mother,’ he answered, rather coldly cheery.

‘Somebody’s got to see it through, you know.’

‘Have they? Have they?’ answered his mother rapidly. ‘Why should YOU take it on yourself? What have you got to do, seeing it through. It will see itself through. You are not needed.’

‘No, I don’t suppose I can do any good,’ he answered. ‘It’s just how it affects us, you see.’

‘You like to be affected — don’t you? It’s quite nuts for you? You would have to be important. You have no need to stop at home. Why don’t you go away!’

These sentences, evidently the ripened grain of many dark hours, took Gerald by surprise.

‘I don’t think it’s any good going away now, mother, at the last minute,’ he said, coldly.

‘You take care,’ replied his mother. ‘You mind YOURSELF — that’s your

business. You take too much on yourself. You mind YOURSELF, or you'll find yourself in Queer Street, that's what will happen to you. You're hysterical, always were.'

'I'm all right, mother,' he said. 'There's no need to worry about ME, I assure you.'

'Let the dead bury their dead — don't go and bury yourself along with them — that's what I tell you. I know you well enough.'

He did not answer this, not knowing what to say. The mother sat bunched up in silence, her beautiful white hands, that had no rings whatsoever, clasping the pommels of her arm-chair.

'You can't do it,' she said, almost bitterly. 'You haven't the nerve. You're as weak as a cat, really — always were. Is this young woman staying here?'

'No,' said Gerald. 'She is going home tonight.'

'Then she'd better have the dog-cart. Does she go far?'

'Only to Beldover.'

'Ah!' The elderly woman never looked at Gudrun, yet she seemed to take knowledge of her presence.

'You are inclined to take too much on yourself, Gerald,' said the mother, pulling herself to her feet, with a little difficulty.

'Will you go, mother?' he asked, politely.

'Yes, I'll go up again,' she replied. Turning to Gudrun, she bade her 'Good-night.' Then she went slowly to the door, as if she were unaccustomed to walking. At the door she lifted her face to him, implicitly. He kissed her.

'Don't come any further with me,' she said, in her barely audible voice. 'I don't want you any further.'

He bade her good-night, watched her across to the stairs and mount slowly. Then he closed the door and came back to Gudrun. Gudrun rose also, to go.

'A queer being, my mother,' he said.

'Yes,' replied Gudrun.

'She has her own thoughts.'

'Yes,' said Gudrun.

Then they were silent.

'You want to go?' he asked. 'Half a minute, I'll just have a horse put in — '

'No,' said Gudrun. 'I want to walk.'

He had promised to walk with her down the long, lonely mile of drive, and she wanted this.

'You might JUST as well drive,' he said.

'I'd MUCH RATHER walk,' she asserted, with emphasis.

'You would! Then I will come along with you. You know where your things

are? I'll put boots on.'

He put on a cap, and an overcoat over his evening dress. They went out into the night.

'Let us light a cigarette,' he said, stopping in a sheltered angle of the porch. 'You have one too.'

So, with the scent of tobacco on the night air, they set off down the dark drive that ran between close-cut hedges through sloping meadows.

He wanted to put his arm round her. If he could put his arm round her, and draw her against him as they walked, he would equilibrate himself. For now he felt like a pair of scales, the half of which tips down and down into an indefinite void. He must recover some sort of balance. And here was the hope and the perfect recovery.

Blind to her, thinking only of himself, he slipped his arm softly round her waist, and drew her to him. Her heart fainted, feeling herself taken. But then, his arm was so strong, she quailed under its powerful close grasp. She died a little death, and was drawn against him as they walked down the stormy darkness. He seemed to balance her perfectly in opposition to himself, in their dual motion of walking. So, suddenly, he was liberated and perfect, strong, heroic.

He put his hand to his mouth and threw his cigarette away, a gleaming point, into the unseen hedge. Then he was quite free to balance her.

'That's better,' he said, with exultancy.

The exultation in his voice was like a sweetish, poisonous drug to her. Did she then mean so much to him! She sipped the poison.

'Are you happier?' she asked, wistfully.

'Much better,' he said, in the same exultant voice, 'and I was rather far gone.'

She nestled against him. He felt her all soft and warm, she was the rich, lovely substance of his being. The warmth and motion of her walk suffused through him wonderfully.

'I'm SO glad if I help you,' she said.

'Yes,' he answered. 'There's nobody else could do it, if you wouldn't.'

'That is true,' she said to herself, with a thrill of strange, fatal elation.

As they walked, he seemed to lift her nearer and nearer to himself, till she moved upon the firm vehicle of his body.

He was so strong, so sustaining, and he could not be opposed. She drifted along in a wonderful interfusion of physical motion, down the dark, blowy hillside. Far across shone the little yellow lights of Beldover, many of them, spread in a thick patch on another dark hill. But he and she were walking in perfect, isolated darkness, outside the world.

'But how much do you care for me!' came her voice, almost querulous. 'You

see, I don't know, I don't understand!'

'How much!' His voice rang with a painful elation. 'I don't know either — but everything.' He was startled by his own declaration. It was true. So he stripped himself of every safeguard, in making this admission to her. He cared everything for her — she was everything.

'But I can't believe it,' said her low voice, amazed, trembling. She was trembling with doubt and exultance. This was the thing she wanted to hear, only this. Yet now she heard it, heard the strange clapping vibration of truth in his voice as he said it, she could not believe. She could not believe — she did not believe. Yet she believed, triumphantly, with fatal exultance.

'Why not?' he said. 'Why don't you believe it? It's true. It is true, as we stand at this moment — ' he stood still with her in the wind; 'I care for nothing on earth, or in heaven, outside this spot where we are. And it isn't my own presence I care about, it is all yours. I'd sell my soul a hundred times — but I couldn't bear not to have you here. I couldn't bear to be alone. My brain would burst. It is true.' He drew her closer to him, with definite movement.

'No,' she murmured, afraid. Yet this was what she wanted. Why did she so lose courage?

They resumed their strange walk. They were such strangers — and yet they were so frightfully, unthinkably near. It was like a madness. Yet it was what she wanted, it was what she wanted. They had descended the hill, and now they were coming to the square arch where the road passed under the colliery railway. The arch, Gudrun knew, had walls of squared stone, mossy on one side with water that trickled down, dry on the other side. She had stood under it to hear the train rumble thundering over the logs overhead. And she knew that under this dark and lonely bridge the young colliers stood in the darkness with their sweethearts, in rainy weather. And so she wanted to stand under the bridge with HER sweetheart, and be kissed under the bridge in the invisible darkness. Her steps dragged as she drew near.

So, under the bridge, they came to a standstill, and he lifted her upon his breast. His body vibrated taut and powerful as he closed upon her and crushed her, breathless and dazed and destroyed, crushed her upon his breast. Ah, it was terrible, and perfect. Under this bridge, the colliers pressed their lovers to their breast. And now, under the bridge, the master of them all pressed her to himself? And how much more powerful and terrible was his embrace than theirs, how much more concentrated and supreme his love was, than theirs in the same sort! She felt she would swoon, die, under the vibrating, inhuman tension of his arms and his body — she would pass away. Then the unthinkable high vibration slackened and became more undulating. He slackened and drew her with him to

stand with his back to the wall.

She was almost unconscious. So the colliers' lovers would stand with their backs to the walls, holding their sweethearts and kissing them as she was being kissed. Ah, but would their kisses be fine and powerful as the kisses of the firm-mouthed master? Even the keen, short-cut moustache — the colliers would not have that.

And the colliers' sweethearts would, like herself, hang their heads back limp over their shoulder, and look out from the dark archway, at the close patch of yellow lights on the unseen hill in the distance, or at the vague form of trees, and at the buildings of the colliery wood-yard, in the other direction.

His arms were fast around her, he seemed to be gathering her into himself, her warmth, her softness, her adorable weight, drinking in the suffusion of her physical being, avidly. He lifted her, and seemed to pour her into himself, like wine into a cup.

'This is worth everything,' he said, in a strange, penetrating voice.

So she relaxed, and seemed to melt, to flow into him, as if she were some infinitely warm and precious suffusion filling into his veins, like an intoxicant. Her arms were round his neck, he kissed her and held her perfectly suspended, she was all slack and flowing into him, and he was the firm, strong cup that receives the wine of her life. So she lay cast upon him, stranded, lifted up against him, melting and melting under his kisses, melting into his limbs and bones, as if he were soft iron becoming surcharged with her electric life.

Till she seemed to swoon, gradually her mind went, and she passed away, everything in her was melted down and fluid, and she lay still, become contained by him, sleeping in him as lightning sleeps in a pure, soft stone. So she was passed away and gone in him, and he was perfected.

When she opened her eyes again, and saw the patch of lights in the distance, it seemed to her strange that the world still existed, that she was standing under the bridge resting her head on Gerald's breast. Gerald — who was he? He was the exquisite adventure, the desirable unknown to her.

She looked up, and in the darkness saw his face above her, his shapely, male face. There seemed a faint, white light emitted from him, a white aura, as if he were visitor from the unseen. She reached up, like Eve reaching to the apples on the tree of knowledge, and she kissed him, though her passion was a transcendent fear of the thing he was, touching his face with her infinitely delicate, encroaching wondering fingers. Her fingers went over the mould of his face, over his features. How perfect and foreign he was — ah how dangerous! Her soul thrilled with complete knowledge. This was the glistening, forbidden apple, this face of a man. She kissed him, putting her fingers over his face, his

eyes, his nostrils, over his brows and his ears, to his neck, to know him, to gather him in by touch. He was so firm, and shapely, with such satisfying, inconceivable shapeliness, strange, yet unutterably clear. He was such an unutterable enemy, yet glistening with uncanny white fire. She wanted to touch him and touch him and touch him, till she had him all in her hands, till she had strained him into her knowledge. Ah, if she could have the precious KNOWLEDGE of him, she would be filled, and nothing could deprive her of this. For he was so unsure, so risky in the common world of day.

‘You are so BEAUTIFUL,’ she murmured in her throat.

He wondered, and was suspended. But she felt him quiver, and she came down involuntarily nearer upon him. He could not help himself. Her fingers had him under their power. The fathomless, fathomless desire they could evoke in him was deeper than death, where he had no choice.

But she knew now, and it was enough. For the time, her soul was destroyed with the exquisite shock of his invisible fluid lightning. She knew. And this knowledge was a death from which she must recover. How much more of him was there to know? Ah much, much, many days harvesting for her large, yet perfectly subtle and intelligent hands upon the field of his living, radio-active body. Ah, her hands were eager, greedy for knowledge. But for the present it was enough, enough, as much as her soul could bear. Too much, and she would shatter herself, she would fill the fine vial of her soul too quickly, and it would break. Enough now — enough for the time being. There were all the after days when her hands, like birds, could feed upon the fields of his mystical plastic form — till then enough.

And even he was glad to be checked, rebuked, held back. For to desire is better than to possess, the finality of the end was dreaded as deeply as it was desired.

They walked on towards the town, towards where the lamps threaded singly, at long intervals down the dark high-road of the valley. They came at length to the gate of the drive.

‘Don’t come any further,’ she said.

‘You’d rather I didn’t?’ he asked, relieved. He did not want to go up the public streets with her, his soul all naked and alight as it was.

‘Much rather — good-night.’ She held out her hand. He grasped it, then touched the perilous, potent fingers with his lips.

‘Good-night,’ he said. ‘Tomorrow.’

And they parted. He went home full of the strength and the power of living desire.

But the next day, she did not come, she sent a note that she was kept indoors

by a cold. Here was a torment! But he possessed his soul in some sort of patience, writing a brief answer, telling her how sorry he was not to see her.

The day after this, he stayed at home — it seemed so futile to go down to the office. His father could not live the week out. And he wanted to be at home, suspended.

Gerald sat on a chair by the window in his father's room. The landscape outside was black and winter-sodden. His father lay grey and ashen on the bed, a nurse moved silently in her white dress, neat and elegant, even beautiful. There was a scent of eau-de-cologne in the room. The nurse went out of the room, Gerald was alone with death, facing the winter-black landscape.

'Is there much more water in Denley?' came the faint voice, determined and querulous, from the bed. The dying man was asking about a leakage from Willey Water into one of the pits.

'Some more — we shall have to run off the lake,' said Gerald.

'Will you?' The faint voice filtered to extinction. There was dead stillness. The grey-faced, sick man lay with eyes closed, more dead than death. Gerald looked away. He felt his heart was seared, it would perish if this went on much longer.

Suddenly he heard a strange noise. Turning round, he saw his father's eyes wide open, strained and rolling in a frenzy of inhuman struggling. Gerald started to his feet, and stood transfixed in horror.

'Wha-a-ah-h-h-' came a horrible choking rattle from his father's throat, the fearful, frenzied eye, rolling awfully in its wild fruitless search for help, passed blindly over Gerald, then up came the dark blood and mess pumping over the face of the agonised being. The tense body relaxed, the head fell aside, down the pillow.

Gerald stood transfixed, his soul echoing in horror. He would move, but he could not. He could not move his limbs. His brain seemed to re-echo, like a pulse.

The nurse in white softly entered. She glanced at Gerald, then at the bed.

'Ah!' came her soft whimpering cry, and she hurried forward to the dead man. 'Ah-h!' came the slight sound of her agitated distress, as she stood bending over the bedside. Then she recovered, turned, and came for towel and sponge. She was wiping the dead face carefully, and murmuring, almost whimpering, very softly: 'Poor Mr Crich! — Poor Mr Crich! Poor Mr Crich!'

'Is he dead?' clanged Gerald's sharp voice.

'Oh yes, he's gone,' replied the soft, moaning voice of the nurse, as she looked up at Gerald's face. She was young and beautiful and quivering. A strange sort of grin went over Gerald's face, over the horror. And he walked out

of the room.

He was going to tell his mother. On the landing he met his brother Basil.

‘He’s gone, Basil,’ he said, scarcely able to subdue his voice, not to let an unconscious, frightening exultation sound through.

‘What?’ cried Basil, going pale.

Gerald nodded. Then he went on to his mother’s room.

She was sitting in her purple gown, sewing, very slowly sewing, putting in a stitch then another stitch. She looked up at Gerald with her blue undaunted eyes.

‘Father’s gone,’ he said.

‘He’s dead? Who says so?’

‘Oh, you know, mother, if you see him.’

She put her sewing down, and slowly rose.

‘Are you going to see him?’ he asked.

‘Yes,’ she said

By the bedside the children already stood in a weeping group.

‘Oh, mother!’ cried the daughters, almost in hysterics, weeping loudly.

But the mother went forward. The dead man lay in repose, as if gently asleep, so gently, so peacefully, like a young man sleeping in purity. He was still warm. She stood looking at him in gloomy, heavy silence, for some time.

‘Ay,’ she said bitterly, at length, speaking as if to the unseen witnesses of the air. ‘You’re dead.’ She stood for some minutes in silence, looking down. ‘Beautiful,’ she asserted, ‘beautiful as if life had never touched you — never touched you. God send I look different. I hope I shall look my years, when I am dead. Beautiful, beautiful,’ she crooned over him. ‘You can see him in his teens, with his first beard on his face. A beautiful soul, beautiful — ’ Then there was a tearing in her voice as she cried: ‘None of you look like this, when you are dead! Don’t let it happen again.’ It was a strange, wild command from out of the unknown. Her children moved unconsciously together, in a nearer group, at the dreadful command in her voice. The colour was flushed bright in her cheek, she looked awful and wonderful. ‘Blame me, blame me if you like, that he lies there like a lad in his teens, with his first beard on his face. Blame me if you like. But you none of you know.’ She was silent in intense silence.

Then there came, in a low, tense voice: ‘If I thought that the children I bore would lie looking like that in death, I’d strangle them when they were infants, yes — ’

‘No, mother,’ came the strange, clarion voice of Gerald from the background, ‘we are different, we don’t blame you.’

She turned and looked full in his eyes. Then she lifted her hands in a strange half-gesture of mad despair.

‘Pray!’ she said strongly. ‘Pray for yourselves to God, for there’s no help for you from your parents.’

‘Oh mother!’ cried her daughters wildly.

But she had turned and gone, and they all went quickly away from each other.

When Gudrun heard that Mr Crich was dead, she felt rebuked. She had stayed away lest Gerald should think her too easy of winning. And now, he was in the midst of trouble, whilst she was cold.

The following day she went up as usual to Winifred, who was glad to see her, glad to get away into the studio. The girl had wept, and then, too frightened, had turned aside to avoid any more tragic eventuality. She and Gudrun resumed work as usual, in the isolation of the studio, and this seemed an immeasurable happiness, a pure world of freedom, after the aimlessness and misery of the house. Gudrun stayed on till evening. She and Winifred had dinner brought up to the studio, where they ate in freedom, away from all the people in the house.

After dinner Gerald came up. The great high studio was full of shadow and a fragrance of coffee. Gudrun and Winifred had a little table near the fire at the far end, with a white lamp whose light did not travel far. They were a tiny world to themselves, the two girls surrounded by lovely shadows, the beams and rafters shadowy overhead, the benches and implements shadowy down the studio.

‘You are cosy enough here,’ said Gerald, going up to them.

There was a low brick fireplace, full of fire, an old blue Turkish rug, the little oak table with the lamp and the white-and-blue cloth and the dessert, and Gudrun making coffee in an odd brass coffee-maker, and Winifred scalding a little milk in a tiny saucepan.

‘Have you had coffee?’ said Gudrun.

‘I have, but I’ll have some more with you,’ he replied.

‘Then you must have it in a glass — there are only two cups,’ said Winifred.

‘It is the same to me,’ he said, taking a chair and coming into the charmed circle of the girls. How happy they were, how cosy and glamorous it was with them, in a world of lofty shadows! The outside world, in which he had been transacting funeral business all the day was completely wiped out. In an instant he snuffed glamour and magic.

They had all their things very dainty, two odd and lovely little cups, scarlet and solid gilt, and a little black jug with scarlet discs, and the curious coffee-machine, whose spirit-flame flowed steadily, almost invisibly. There was the effect of rather sinister richness, in which Gerald at once escaped himself.

They all sat down, and Gudrun carefully poured out the coffee.

‘Will you have milk?’ she asked calmly, yet nervously poisoning the little black jug with its big red dots. She was always so completely controlled, yet so bitterly

nervous.

‘No, I won’t,’ he replied.

So, with a curious humility, she placed him the little cup of coffee, and herself took the awkward tumbler. She seemed to want to serve him.

‘Why don’t you give me the glass — it is so clumsy for you,’ he said. He would much rather have had it, and seen her daintily served. But she was silent, pleased with the disparity, with her self-abasement.

‘You are quite EN MENAGE,’ he said.

‘Yes. We aren’t really at home to visitors,’ said Winifred.

‘You’re not? Then I’m an intruder?’

For once he felt his conventional dress was out of place, he was an outsider.

Gudrun was very quiet. She did not feel drawn to talk to him. At this stage, silence was best — or mere light words. It was best to leave serious things aside. So they talked gaily and lightly, till they heard the man below lead out the horse, and call it to ‘back-back!’ into the dog-cart that was to take Gudrun home. So she put on her things, and shook hands with Gerald, without once meeting his eyes. And she was gone.

The funeral was detestable. Afterwards, at the tea-table, the daughters kept saying — ‘He was a good father to us — the best father in the world’ — or else — ‘We shan’t easily find another man as good as father was.’

Gerald acquiesced in all this. It was the right conventional attitude, and, as far as the world went, he believed in the conventions. He took it as a matter of course. But Winifred hated everything, and hid in the studio, and cried her heart out, and wished Gudrun would come.

Luckily everybody was going away. The Criches never stayed long at home. By dinner-time, Gerald was left quite alone. Even Winifred was carried off to London, for a few days with her sister Laura.

But when Gerald was really left alone, he could not bear it. One day passed by, and another. And all the time he was like a man hung in chains over the edge of an abyss. Struggle as he might, he could not turn himself to the solid earth, he could not get footing. He was suspended on the edge of a void, writhing. Whatever he thought of, was the abyss — whether it were friends or strangers, or work or play, it all showed him only the same bottomless void, in which his heart swung perishing. There was no escape, there was nothing to grasp hold of. He must writhe on the edge of the chasm, suspended in chains of invisible physical life.

At first he was quiet, he kept still, expecting the extremity to pass away, expecting to find himself released into the world of the living, after this extremity of penance. But it did not pass, and a crisis gained upon him.

As the evening of the third day came on, his heart rang with fear. He could not bear another night. Another night was coming on, for another night he was to be suspended in chain of physical life, over the bottomless pit of nothingness. And he could not bear it. He could not bear it. He was frightened deeply, and coldly, frightened in his soul. He did not believe in his own strength any more. He could not fall into this infinite void, and rise again. If he fell, he would be gone for ever. He must withdraw, he must seek reinforcements. He did not believe in his own single self, any further than this.

After dinner, faced with the ultimate experience of his own nothingness, he turned aside. He pulled on his boots, put on his coat, and set out to walk in the night.

It was dark and misty. He went through the wood, stumbling and feeling his way to the Mill. Birkin was away. Good — he was half glad. He turned up the hill, and stumbled blindly over the wild slopes, having lost the path in the complete darkness. It was boring. Where was he going? No matter. He stumbled on till he came to a path again. Then he went on through another wood. His mind became dark, he went on automatically. Without thought or sensation, he stumbled unevenly on, out into the open again, fumbling for stiles, losing the path, and going along the hedges of the fields till he came to the outlet.

And at last he came to the high road. It had distracted him to struggle blindly through the maze of darkness. But now, he must take a direction. And he did not even know where he was. But he must take a direction now. Nothing would be resolved by merely walking, walking away. He had to take a direction.

He stood still on the road, that was high in the utterly dark night, and he did not know where he was. It was a strange sensation, his heart beating, and ringed round with the utterly unknown darkness. So he stood for some time.

Then he heard footsteps, and saw a small, swinging light. He immediately went towards this. It was a miner.

‘Can you tell me,’ he said, ‘where this road goes?’

‘Road? Ay, it goes ter Whatmore.’

‘Whatmore! Oh thank you, that’s right. I thought I was wrong. Good-night.’

‘Good-night,’ replied the broad voice of the miner.

Gerald guessed where he was. At least, when he came to Whatmore, he would know. He was glad to be on a high road. He walked forward as in a sleep of decision.

That was Whatmore Village — ? Yes, the King’s Head — and there the hall gates. He descended the steep hill almost running. Winding through the hollow, he passed the Grammar School, and came to Willey Green Church. The churchyard! He halted.

Then in another moment he had clambered up the wall and was going among the graves. Even in this darkness he could see the heaped pallor of old white flowers at his feet. This then was the grave. He stooped down. The flowers were cold and clammy. There was a raw scent of chrysanthemums and tube-roses, deadened. He felt the clay beneath, and shrank, it was so horribly cold and sticky. He stood away in revulsion.

Here was one centre then, here in the complete darkness beside the unseen, raw grave. But there was nothing for him here. No, he had nothing to stay here for. He felt as if some of the clay were sticking cold and unclean, on his heart. No, enough of this.

Where then? — home? Never! It was no use going there. That was less than no use. It could not be done. There was somewhere else to go. Where?

A dangerous resolve formed in his heart, like a fixed idea. There was Gudrun — she would be safe in her home. But he could get at her — he would get at her. He would not go back tonight till he had come to her, if it cost him his life. He staked his all on this throw.

He set off walking straight across the fields towards Beldover. It was so dark, nobody could ever see him. His feet were wet and cold, heavy with clay. But he went on persistently, like a wind, straight forward, as if to his fate. There were great gaps in his consciousness. He was conscious that he was at Winthorpe hamlet, but quite unconscious how he had got there. And then, as in a dream, he was in the long street of Beldover, with its street-lamps.

There was a noise of voices, and of a door shutting loudly, and being barred, and of men talking in the night. The ‘Lord Nelson’ had just closed, and the drinkers were going home. He had better ask one of these where she lived — for he did not know the side streets at all.

‘Can you tell me where Somerset Drive is?’ he asked of one of the uneven men.

‘Where what?’ replied the tipsy miner’s voice.

‘Somerset Drive.’

‘Somerset Drive! — I’ve heard o’ such a place, but I couldn’t for my life say where it is. Who might you be wanting?’

‘Mr Brangwen — William Brangwen.’

‘William Brangwen — ? — ?’

‘Who teaches at the Grammar School, at Willey Green — his daughter teaches there too.’

‘O-o-o-oh, Brangwen! NOW I’ve got you. Of COURSE, William Brangwen! Yes, yes, he’s got two lasses as teachers, aside hisself. Ay, that’s him — that’s him! Why certainly I know where he lives, back your life I do! Yi — WHAT

place do they ca' it?'

'Somerset Drive,' repeated Gerald patiently. He knew his own colliers fairly well.

'Somerset Drive, for certain!' said the collier, swinging his arm as if catching something up. 'Somerset Drive — yi! I couldn't for my life lay hold o' the lercality o' the place. Yis, I know the place, to be sure I do — '

He turned unsteadily on his feet, and pointed up the dark, nighdeserted road.

'You go up theer — an' you ta'e th' first — yi, th' first turnin' on your left — o' that side — past Withamses tuffy shop — '

'I know,' said Gerald.

'Ay! You go down a bit, past wheer th' water-man lives — and then Somerset Drive, as they ca' it, branches off on 't right hand side — an' there's nowt but three houses in it, no more than three, I believe, — an' I'm a'most certain as theirs is th' last — th' last o' th' three — you see — '

'Thank you very much,' said Gerald. 'Good-night.'

And he started off, leaving the tipsy man there standing rooted.

Gerald went past the dark shops and houses, most of them sleeping now, and twisted round to the little blind road that ended on a field of darkness. He slowed down, as he neared his goal, not knowing how he should proceed. What if the house were closed in darkness?

But it was not. He saw a big lighted window, and heard voices, then a gate banged. His quick ears caught the sound of Birkin's voice, his keen eyes made out Birkin, with Ursula standing in a pale dress on the step of the garden path. Then Ursula stepped down, and came along the road, holding Birkin's arm.

Gerald went across into the darkness and they dawdled past him, talking happily, Birkin's voice low, Ursula's high and distinct. Gerald went quickly to the house.

The blinds were drawn before the big, lighted window of the diningroom. Looking up the path at the side he could see the door left open, shedding a soft, coloured light from the hall lamp. He went quickly and silently up the path, and looked up into the hall. There were pictures on the walls, and the antlers of a stag — and the stairs going up on one side — and just near the foot of the stairs the half opened door of the diningroom.

With heart drawn fine, Gerald stepped into the hall, whose floor was of coloured tiles, went quickly and looked into the large, pleasant room. In a chair by the fire, the father sat asleep, his head tilted back against the side of the big oak chimney piece, his ruddy face seen foreshortened, the nostrils open, the mouth fallen a little. It would take the merest sound to wake him.

Gerald stood a second suspended. He glanced down the passage behind him. It

was all dark. Again he was suspended. Then he went swiftly upstairs. His senses were so finely, almost supernaturally keen, that he seemed to cast his own will over the half-unconscious house.

He came to the first landing. There he stood, scarcely breathing. Again, corresponding to the door below, there was a door again. That would be the mother's room. He could hear her moving about in the candlelight. She would be expecting her husband to come up. He looked along the dark landing.

Then, silently, on infinitely careful feet, he went along the passage, feeling the wall with the extreme tips of his fingers. There was a door. He stood and listened. He could hear two people's breathing. It was not that. He went stealthily forward. There was another door, slightly open. The room was in darkness. Empty. Then there was the bathroom, he could smell the soap and the heat. Then at the end another bedroom — one soft breathing. This was she.

With an almost occult carefulness he turned the door handle, and opened the door an inch. It creaked slightly. Then he opened it another inch — then another. His heart did not beat, he seemed to create a silence about himself, an obliviousness.

He was in the room. Still the sleeper breathed softly. It was very dark. He felt his way forward inch by inch, with his feet and hands. He touched the bed, he could hear the sleeper. He drew nearer, bending close as if his eyes would disclose whatever there was. And then, very near to his face, to his fear, he saw the round, dark head of a boy.

He recovered, turned round, saw the door ajar, a faint light revealed. And he retreated swiftly, drew the door to without fastening it, and passed rapidly down the passage. At the head of the stairs he hesitated. There was still time to flee.

But it was unthinkable. He would maintain his will. He turned past the door of the parental bedroom like a shadow, and was climbing the second flight of stairs. They creaked under his weight — it was exasperating. Ah what disaster, if the mother's door opened just beneath him, and she saw him! It would have to be, if it were so. He held the control still.

He was not quite up these stairs when he heard a quick running of feet below, the outer door was closed and locked, he heard Ursula's voice, then the father's sleepy exclamation. He pressed on swiftly to the upper landing.

Again a door was ajar, a room was empty. Feeling his way forward, with the tips of his fingers, travelling rapidly, like a blind man, anxious lest Ursula should come upstairs, he found another door. There, with his preternaturally fine sense alert, he listened. He heard someone moving in bed. This would be she.

Softly now, like one who has only one sense, the tactile sense, he turned the latch. It clicked. He held still. The bed-clothes rustled. His heart did not beat.

Then again he drew the latch back, and very gently pushed the door. It made a sticking noise as it gave.

‘Ursula?’ said Gudrun’s voice, frightened. He quickly opened the door and pushed it behind him.

‘Is it you, Ursula?’ came Gudrun’s frightened voice. He heard her sitting up in bed. In another moment she would scream.

‘No, it’s me,’ he said, feeling his way towards her. ‘It is I, Gerald.’

She sat motionless in her bed in sheer astonishment. She was too astonished, too much taken by surprise, even to be afraid.

‘Gerald!’ she echoed, in blank amazement. He had found his way to the bed, and his outstretched hand touched her warm breast blindly. She shrank away.

‘Let me make a light,’ she said, springing out.

He stood perfectly motionless. He heard her touch the match-box, he heard her fingers in their movement. Then he saw her in the light of a match, which she held to the candle. The light rose in the room, then sank to a small dimness, as the flame sank down on the candle, before it mounted again.

She looked at him, as he stood near the other side of the bed. His cap was pulled low over his brow, his black overcoat was buttoned close up to his chin. His face was strange and luminous. He was inevitable as a supernatural being. When she had seen him, she knew. She knew there was something fatal in the situation, and she must accept it. Yet she must challenge him.

‘How did you come up?’ she asked.

‘I walked up the stairs — the door was open.’

She looked at him.

‘I haven’t closed this door, either,’ he said. She walked swiftly across the room, and closed her door, softly, and locked it. Then she came back.

She was wonderful, with startled eyes and flushed cheeks, and her plait of hair rather short and thick down her back, and her long, fine white night-dress falling to her feet.

She saw that his boots were all clayey, even his trousers were plastered with clay. And she wondered if he had made footprints all the way up. He was a very strange figure, standing in her bedroom, near the tossed bed.

‘Why have you come?’ she asked, almost querulous.

‘I wanted to,’ he replied.

And this she could see from his face. It was fate.

‘You are so muddy,’ she said, in distaste, but gently.

He looked down at his feet.

‘I was walking in the dark,’ he replied. But he felt vividly elated. There was a pause. He stood on one side of the tumbled bed, she on the other. He did not

even take his cap from his brows.

‘And what do you want of me,’ she challenged.

He looked aside, and did not answer. Save for the extreme beauty and mystic attractiveness of this distinct, strange face, she would have sent him away. But his face was too wonderful and undiscovered to her. It fascinated her with the fascination of pure beauty, cast a spell on her, like nostalgia, an ache.

‘What do you want of me?’ she repeated in an estranged voice.

He pulled off his cap, in a movement of dream-liberation, and went across to her. But he could not touch her, because she stood barefoot in her night-dress, and he was muddy and damp. Her eyes, wide and large and wondering, watched him, and asked him the ultimate question.

‘I came — because I must,’ he said. ‘Why do you ask?’

She looked at him in doubt and wonder.

‘I must ask,’ she said.

He shook his head slightly.

‘There is no answer,’ he replied, with strange vacancy.

There was about him a curious, and almost godlike air of simplicity and native directness. He reminded her of an apparition, the young Hermes.

‘But why did you come to me?’ she persisted.

‘Because — it has to be so. If there weren’t you in the world, then I shouldn’t be in the world, either.’

She stood looking at him, with large, wide, wondering, stricken eyes. His eyes were looking steadily into hers all the time, and he seemed fixed in an odd supernatural steadfastness. She sighed. She was lost now. She had no choice.

‘Won’t you take off your boots,’ she said. ‘They must be wet.’

He dropped his cap on a chair, unbuttoned his overcoat, lifting up his chin to unfasten the throat buttons. His short, keen hair was ruffled. He was so beautifully blond, like wheat. He pulled off his overcoat.

Quickly he pulled off his jacket, pulled loose his black tie, and was unfastening his studs, which were headed each with a pearl. She listened, watching, hoping no one would hear the starched linen crackle. It seemed to snap like pistol shots.

He had come for vindication. She let him hold her in his arms, clasp her close against him. He found in her an infinite relief. Into her he poured all his pent-up darkness and corrosive death, and he was whole again. It was wonderful, marvellous, it was a miracle. This was the everrecurrent miracle of his life, at the knowledge of which he was lost in an ecstasy of relief and wonder. And she, subject, received him as a vessel filled with his bitter potion of death. She had no power at this crisis to resist. The terrible frictional violence of death filled her,

and she received it in an ecstasy of subjection, in throes of acute, violent sensation.

As he drew nearer to her, he plunged deeper into her enveloping soft warmth, a wonderful creative heat that penetrated his veins and gave him life again. He felt himself dissolving and sinking to rest in the bath of her living strength. It seemed as if her heart in her breast were a second unconquerable sun, into the glow and creative strength of which he plunged further and further. All his veins, that were murdered and lacerated, healed softly as life came pulsing in, stealing invisibly in to him as if it were the all-powerful effluence of the sun. His blood, which seemed to have been drawn back into death, came ebbing on the return, surely, beautifully, powerfully.

He felt his limbs growing fuller and flexible with life, his body gained an unknown strength. He was a man again, strong and rounded. And he was a child, so soothed and restored and full of gratitude.

And she, she was the great bath of life, he worshipped her. Mother and substance of all life she was. And he, child and man, received of her and was made whole. His pure body was almost killed. But the miraculous, soft effluence of her breast suffused over him, over his seared, damaged brain, like a healing lymph, like a soft, soothing flow of life itself, perfect as if he were bathed in the womb again.

His brain was hurt, seared, the tissue was as if destroyed. He had not known how hurt he was, how his tissue, the very tissue of his brain was damaged by the corrosive flood of death. Now, as the healing lymph of her effluence flowed through him, he knew how destroyed he was, like a plant whose tissue is burst from inwards by a frost.

He buried his small, hard head between her breasts, and pressed her breasts against him with his hands. And she with quivering hands pressed his head against her, as he lay suffused out, and she lay fully conscious. The lovely creative warmth flooded through him like a sleep of fecundity within the womb. Ah, if only she would grant him the flow of this living effluence, he would be restored, he would be complete again. He was afraid she would deny him before it was finished. Like a child at the breast, he cleaved intensely to her, and she could not put him away. And his seared, ruined membrane relaxed, softened, that which was seared and stiff and blasted yielded again, became soft and flexible, palpitating with new life. He was infinitely grateful, as to God, or as an infant is at its mother's breast. He was glad and grateful like a delirium, as he felt his own wholeness come over him again, as he felt the full, unutterable sleep coming over him, the sleep of complete exhaustion and restoration.

But Gudrun lay wide awake, destroyed into perfect consciousness. She lay

motionless, with wide eyes staring motionless into the darkness, whilst he was sunk away in sleep, his arms round her.

She seemed to be hearing waves break on a hidden shore, long, slow, gloomy waves, breaking with the rhythm of fate, so monotonously that it seemed eternal. This endless breaking of slow, sullen waves of fate held her life a possession, whilst she lay with dark, wide eyes looking into the darkness. She could see so far, as far as eternity — yet she saw nothing. She was suspended in perfect consciousness — and of what was she conscious?

This mood of extremity, when she lay staring into eternity, utterly suspended, and conscious of everything, to the last limits, passed and left her uneasy. She had lain so long motionless. She moved, she became self-conscious. She wanted to look at him, to see him.

But she dared not make a light, because she knew he would wake, and she did not want to break his perfect sleep, that she knew he had got of her.

She disengaged herself, softly, and rose up a little to look at him. There was a faint light, it seemed to her, in the room. She could just distinguish his features, as he slept the perfect sleep. In this darkness, she seemed to see him so distinctly. But he was far off, in another world. Ah, she could shriek with torment, he was so far off, and perfected, in another world. She seemed to look at him as at a pebble far away under clear dark water. And here was she, left with all the anguish of consciousness, whilst he was sunk deep into the other element of mindless, remote, living shadow-gleam. He was beautiful, far-off, and perfected. They would never be together. Ah, this awful, inhuman distance which would always be interposed between her and the other being!

There was nothing to do but to lie still and endure. She felt an overwhelming tenderness for him, and a dark, under-stirring of jealous hatred, that he should lie so perfect and immune, in an other-world, whilst she was tormented with violent wakefulness, cast out in the outer darkness.

She lay in intense and vivid consciousness, an exhausting superconsciousness. The church clock struck the hours, it seemed to her, in quick succession. She heard them distinctly in the tension of her vivid consciousness. And he slept as if time were one moment, unchanging and unmoving.

She was exhausted, wearied. Yet she must continue in this state of violent active superconsciousness. She was conscious of everything — her childhood, her girlhood, all the forgotten incidents, all the unrealised influences and all the happenings she had not understood, pertaining to herself, to her family, to her friends, her lovers, her acquaintances, everybody. It was as if she drew a glittering rope of knowledge out of the sea of darkness, drew and drew and drew it out of the fathomless depths of the past, and still it did not come to an end,

there was no end to it, she must haul and haul at the rope of glittering consciousness, pull it out phosphorescent from the endless depths of the unconsciousness, till she was weary, aching, exhausted, and fit to break, and yet she had not done.

Ah, if only she might wake him! She turned uneasily. When could she rouse him and send him away? When could she disturb him? And she relapsed into her activity of automatic consciousness, that would never end.

But the time was drawing near when she could wake him. It was like a release. The clock had struck four, outside in the night. Thank God the night had passed almost away. At five he must go, and she would be released. Then she could relax and fill her own place. Now she was driven up against his perfect sleeping motion like a knife white-hot on a grindstone. There was something monstrous about him, about his juxtaposition against her.

The last hour was the longest. And yet, at last it passed. Her heart leapt with relief — yes, there was the slow, strong stroke of the church clock — at last, after this night of eternity. She waited to catch each slow, fatal reverberation. ‘Three — four — five!’ There, it was finished. A weight rolled off her.

She raised herself, leaned over him tenderly, and kissed him. She was sad to wake him. After a few moments, she kissed him again. But he did not stir. The darling, he was so deep in sleep! What a shame to take him out of it. She let him lie a little longer. But he must go — he must really go.

With full over-tenderness she took his face between her hands, and kissed his eyes. The eyes opened, he remained motionless, looking at her. Her heart stood still. To hide her face from his dreadful opened eyes, in the darkness, she bent down and kissed him, whispering:

‘You must go, my love.’

But she was sick with terror, sick.

He put his arms round her. Her heart sank.

‘But you must go, my love. It’s late.’

‘What time is it?’ he said.

Strange, his man’s voice. She quivered. It was an intolerable oppression to her.

‘Past five o’clock,’ she said.

But he only closed his arms round her again. Her heart cried within her in torture. She disengaged herself firmly.

‘You really must go,’ she said.

‘Not for a minute,’ he said.

She lay still, nestling against him, but unyielding.

‘Not for a minute,’ he repeated, clasping her closer.

‘Yes,’ she said, unyielding, ‘I’m afraid if you stay any longer.’

There was a certain coldness in her voice that made him release her, and she broke away, rose and lit the candle. That then was the end.

He got up. He was warm and full of life and desire. Yet he felt a little bit ashamed, humiliated, putting on his clothes before her, in the candlelight. For he felt revealed, exposed to her, at a time when she was in some way against him. It was all very difficult to understand. He dressed himself quickly, without collar or tie. Still he felt full and complete, perfected. She thought it humiliating to see a man dressing: the ridiculous shirt, the ridiculous trousers and braces. But again an idea saved her.

‘It is like a workman getting up to go to work,’ thought Gudrun. ‘And I am like a workman’s wife.’ But an ache like nausea was upon her: a nausea of him.

He pushed his collar and tie into his overcoat pocket. Then he sat down and pulled on his boots. They were sodden, as were his socks and trouser-bottoms. But he himself was quick and warm.

‘Perhaps you ought to have put your boots on downstairs,’ she said.

At once, without answering, he pulled them off again, and stood holding them in his hand. She had thrust her feet into slippers, and flung a loose robe round her. She was ready. She looked at him as he stood waiting, his black coat buttoned to the chin, his cap pulled down, his boots in his hand. And the passionate almost hateful fascination revived in her for a moment. It was not exhausted. His face was so warm-looking, wide-eyed and full of newness, so perfect. She felt old, old. She went to him heavily, to be kissed. He kissed her quickly. She wished his warm, expressionless beauty did not so fatally put a spell on her, compel her and subjugate her. It was a burden upon her, that she resented, but could not escape. Yet when she looked at his straight man’s brows, and at his rather small, well-shaped nose, and at his blue, indifferent eyes, she knew her passion for him was not yet satisfied, perhaps never could be satisfied. Only now she was weary, with an ache like nausea. She wanted him gone.

They went downstairs quickly. It seemed they made a prodigious noise. He followed her as, wrapped in her vivid green wrap, she preceded him with the light. She suffered badly with fear, lest her people should be roused. He hardly cared. He did not care now who knew. And she hated this in him. One MUST be cautious. One must preserve oneself.

She led the way to the kitchen. It was neat and tidy, as the woman had left it. He looked up at the clock — twenty minutes past five. Then he sat down on a chair to put on his boots. She waited, watching his every movement. She wanted it to be over, it was a great nervous strain on her.

He stood up — she unbolted the back door, and looked out. A cold, raw night,

not yet dawn, with a piece of a moon in the vague sky. She was glad she need not go out.

‘Good-bye then,’ he murmured.

‘I’ll come to the gate,’ she said.

And again she hurried on in front, to warn him of the steps. And at the gate, once more she stood on the step whilst he stood below her.

‘Good-bye,’ she whispered.

He kissed her dutifully, and turned away.

She suffered torments hearing his firm tread going so distinctly down the road. Ah, the insensitiveness of that firm tread!

She closed the gate, and crept quickly and noiselessly back to bed. When she was in her room, and the door closed, and all safe, she breathed freely, and a great weight fell off her. She nestled down in bed, in the groove his body had made, in the warmth he had left. And excited, worn-out, yet still satisfied, she fell soon into a deep, heavy sleep.

Gerald walked quickly through the raw darkness of the coming dawn. He met nobody. His mind was beautifully still and thoughtless, like a still pool, and his body full and warm and rich. He went quickly along towards Shortlands, in a grateful self-sufficiency.

CHAPTER XXV.

MARRIAGE OR NOT

The Brangwen family was going to move from Beldover. It was necessary now for the father to be in town.

Birkin had taken out a marriage licence, yet Ursula deferred from day to day. She would not fix any definite time — she still wavered. Her month's notice to leave the Grammar School was in its third week. Christmas was not far off.

Gerald waited for the Ursula-Birkin marriage. It was something crucial to him.

'Shall we make it a double-barrelled affair?' he said to Birkin one day.

'Who for the second shot?' asked Birkin.

'Gudrun and me,' said Gerald, the venturesome twinkle in his eyes.

Birkin looked at him steadily, as if somewhat taken aback.

'Serious — or joking?' he asked.

'Oh, serious. Shall I? Shall Gudrun and I rush in along with you?'

'Do by all means,' said Birkin. 'I didn't know you'd got that length.'

'What length?' said Gerald, looking at the other man, and laughing.

'Oh yes, we've gone all the lengths.'

'There remains to put it on a broad social basis, and to achieve a high moral purpose,' said Birkin.

'Something like that: the length and breadth and height of it,' replied Gerald, smiling.

'Oh well,' said Birkin, 'it's a very admirable step to take, I should say.'

Gerald looked at him closely.

'Why aren't you enthusiastic?' he asked. 'I thought you were such dead nuts on marriage.'

Birkin lifted his shoulders.

'One might as well be dead nuts on noses. There are all sorts of noses, snub and otherwise-'

Gerald laughed.

'And all sorts of marriage, also snub and otherwise?' he said.

'That's it.'

‘And you think if I marry, it will be snub?’ asked Gerald quizzically, his head a little on one side.

Birkin laughed quickly.

‘How do I know what it will be!’ he said. ‘Don’t lambaste me with my own parallels-’

Gerald pondered a while.

‘But I should like to know your opinion, exactly,’ he said.

‘On your marriage? — or marrying? Why should you want my opinion? I’ve got no opinions. I’m not interested in legal marriage, one way or another. It’s a mere question of convenience.’

Still Gerald watched him closely.

‘More than that, I think,’ he said seriously. ‘However you may be bored by the ethics of marriage, yet really to marry, in one’s own personal case, is something critical, final-’

‘You mean there is something final in going to the registrar with a woman?’

‘If you’re coming back with her, I do,’ said Gerald. ‘It is in some way irrevocable.’

‘Yes, I agree,’ said Birkin.

‘No matter how one regards legal marriage, yet to enter into the married state, in one’s own personal instance, is final-’

‘I believe it is,’ said Birkin, ‘somewhere.’

‘The question remains then, should one do it,’ said Gerald.

Birkin watched him narrowly, with amused eyes.

‘You are like Lord Bacon, Gerald,’ he said. ‘You argue it like a lawyer — or like Hamlet’s to-be-or-not-to-be. If I were you I would NOT marry: but ask Gudrun, not me. You’re not marrying me, are you?’

Gerald did not heed the latter part of this speech.

‘Yes,’ he said, ‘one must consider it coldly. It is something critical. One comes to the point where one must take a step in one direction or another. And marriage is one direction-’

‘And what is the other?’ asked Birkin quickly.

Gerald looked up at him with hot, strangely-conscious eyes, that the other man could not understand.

‘I can’t say,’ he replied. ‘If I knew THAT — ’ He moved uneasily on his feet, and did not finish.

‘You mean if you knew the alternative?’ asked Birkin. ‘And since you don’t know it, marriage is a PIS ALLER.’

Gerald looked up at Birkin with the same hot, constrained eyes.

‘One does have the feeling that marriage is a PIS ALLER,’ he admitted.

‘Then don’t do it,’ said Birkin. ‘I tell you,’ he went on, ‘the same as I’ve said before, marriage in the old sense seems to me repulsive. EGOISME A DEUX is nothing to it. It’s a sort of tacit hunting in couples: the world all in couples, each couple in its own little house, watching its own little interests, and stewing in its own little privacy — it’s the most repulsive thing on earth.’

‘I quite agree,’ said Gerald. ‘There’s something inferior about it. But as I say, what’s the alternative.’

‘One should avoid this HOME instinct. It’s not an instinct, it’s a habit of cowardliness. One should never have a HOME.’

‘I agree really,’ said Gerald. ‘But there’s no alternative.’

‘We’ve got to find one. I do believe in a permanent union between a man and a woman. Chopping about is merely an exhaustive process. But a permanent relation between a man and a woman isn’t the last word — it certainly isn’t.’

‘Quite,’ said Gerald.

‘In fact,’ said Birkin, ‘because the relation between man and woman is made the supreme and exclusive relationship, that’s where all the tightness and meanness and insufficiency comes in.’

‘Yes, I believe you,’ said Gerald.

‘You’ve got to take down the love-and-marriage ideal from its pedestal. We want something broader. I believe in the ADDITIONAL perfect relationship between man and man — additional to marriage.’

‘I can never see how they can be the same,’ said Gerald.

‘Not the same — but equally important, equally creative, equally sacred, if you like.’

‘I know,’ said Gerald, ‘you believe something like that. Only I can’t FEEL it, you see.’ He put his hand on Birkin’s arm, with a sort of deprecating affection. And he smiled as if triumphantly.

He was ready to be doomed. Marriage was like a doom to him. He was willing to condemn himself in marriage, to become like a convict condemned to the mines of the underworld, living no life in the sun, but having a dreadful subterranean activity. He was willing to accept this. And marriage was the seal of his condemnation. He was willing to be sealed thus in the underworld, like a soul damned but living forever in damnation. But he would not make any pure relationship with any other soul. He could not. Marriage was not the committing of himself into a relationship with Gudrun. It was a committing of himself in acceptance of the established world, he would accept the established order, in which he did not livingly believe, and then he would retreat to the underworld for his life. This he would do.

The other way was to accept Rupert’s offer of alliance, to enter into the bond

of pure trust and love with the other man, and then subsequently with the woman. If he pledged himself with the man he would later be able to pledge himself with the woman: not merely in legal marriage, but in absolute, mystic marriage.

Yet he could not accept the offer. There was a numbness upon him, a numbness either of unborn, absent volition, or of atrophy. Perhaps it was the absence of volition. For he was strangely elated at Rupert's offer. Yet he was still more glad to reject it, not to be committed.

CHAPTER XXVI.

A CHAIR

There was a jumble market every Monday afternoon in the old market-place in town. Ursula and Birkin strayed down there one afternoon. They had been talking of furniture, and they wanted to see if there was any fragment they would like to buy, amid the heaps of rubbish collected on the cobble-stones.

The old market-square was not very large, a mere bare patch of granite setts, usually with a few fruit-stalls under a wall. It was in a poor quarter of the town. Meagre houses stood down one side, there was a hosiery factory, a great blank with myriad oblong windows, at the end, a street of little shops with flagstone pavement down the other side, and, for a crowning monument, the public baths, of new red brick, with a clock-tower. The people who moved about seemed stumpy and sordid, the air seemed to smell rather dirty, there was a sense of many mean streets ramifying off into warrens of meanness. Now and again a great chocolate-and-yellow tramcar ground round a difficult bend under the hosiery factory.

Ursula was superficially thrilled when she found herself out among the common people, in the jumbled place piled with old bedding, heaps of old iron, shabby crockery in pale lots, muffled lots of unthinkable clothing. She and Birkin went unwillingly down the narrow aisle between the rusty wares. He was looking at the goods, she at the people.

She excitedly watched a young woman, who was going to have a baby, and who was turning over a mattress and making a young man, down-at-heel and dejected, feel it also. So secretive and active and anxious the young woman seemed, so reluctant, slinking, the young man. He was going to marry her because she was having a child.

When they had felt the mattress, the young woman asked the old man seated on a stool among his wares, how much it was. He told her, and she turned to the young man. The latter was ashamed, and selfconscious. He turned his face away, though he left his body standing there, and muttered aside. And again the woman anxiously and actively fingered the mattress and added up in her mind and

bargained with the old, unclean man. All the while, the young man stood by, shamefaced and down-at-heel, submitting.

‘Look,’ said Birkin, ‘there is a pretty chair.’

‘Charming!’ cried Ursula. ‘Oh, charming.’

It was an arm-chair of simple wood, probably birch, but of such fine delicacy of grace, standing there on the sordid stones, it almost brought tears to the eyes. It was square in shape, of the purest, slender lines, and four short lines of wood in the back, that reminded Ursula of harpstrings.

‘It was once,’ said Birkin, ‘gilded — and it had a cane seat. Somebody has nailed this wooden seat in. Look, here is a trifle of the red that underlay the gilt. The rest is all black, except where the wood is worn pure and glossy. It is the fine unity of the lines that is so attractive. Look, how they run and meet and counteract. But of course the wooden seat is wrong — it destroys the perfect lightness and unity in tension the cane gave. I like it though — ’

‘Ah yes,’ said Ursula, ‘so do I.’

‘How much is it?’ Birkin asked the man.

‘Ten shillings.’

‘And you will send it — ?’

It was bought.

‘So beautiful, so pure!’ Birkin said. ‘It almost breaks my heart.’ They walked along between the heaps of rubbish. ‘My beloved country — it had something to express even when it made that chair.’

‘And hasn’t it now?’ asked Ursula. She was always angry when he took this tone.

‘No, it hasn’t. When I see that clear, beautiful chair, and I think of England, even Jane Austen’s England — it had living thoughts to unfold even then, and pure happiness in unfolding them. And now, we can only fish among the rubbish heaps for the remnants of their old expression. There is no production in us now, only sordid and foul mechanicalness.’

‘It isn’t true,’ cried Ursula. ‘Why must you always praise the past, at the expense of the present? REALLY, I don’t think so much of Jane Austen’s England. It was materialistic enough, if you like — ’

‘It could afford to be materialistic,’ said Birkin, ‘because it had the power to be something other — which we haven’t. We are materialistic because we haven’t the power to be anything else — try as we may, we can’t bring off anything but materialism: mechanism, the very soul of materialism.’

Ursula was subdued into angry silence. She did not heed what he said. She was rebelling against something else.

‘And I hate your past. I’m sick of it,’ she cried. ‘I believe I even hate that old

chair, though it IS beautiful. It isn't MY sort of beauty. I wish it had been smashed up when its day was over, not left to preach the beloved past to us. I'm sick of the beloved past.'

'Not so sick as I am of the accursed present,' he said.

'Yes, just the same. I hate the present — but I don't want the past to take its place — I don't want that old chair.'

He was rather angry for a moment. Then he looked at the sky shining beyond the tower of the public baths, and he seemed to get over it all. He laughed.

'All right,' he said, 'then let us not have it. I'm sick of it all, too. At any rate one can't go on living on the old bones of beauty.'

'One can't,' she cried. 'I DON'T want old things.'

'The truth is, we don't want things at all,' he replied. 'The thought of a house and furniture of my own is hateful to me.'

This startled her for a moment. Then she replied:

'So it is to me. But one must live somewhere.'

'Not somewhere — anywhere,' he said. 'One should just live anywhere — not have a definite place. I don't want a definite place. As soon as you get a room, and it is COMPLETE, you want to run from it. Now my rooms at the Mill are quite complete, I want them at the bottom of the sea. It is a horrible tyranny of a fixed milieu, where each piece of furniture is a commandment-stone.'

She clung to his arm as they walked away from the market.

'But what are we going to do?' she said. 'We must live somehow. And I do want some beauty in my surroundings. I want a sort of natural GRANDEUR even, SPLENDOR.'

'You'll never get it in houses and furniture — or even clothes. Houses and furniture and clothes, they are all terms of an old base world, a detestable society of man. And if you have a Tudor house and old, beautiful furniture, it is only the past perpetuated on top of you, horrible. And if you have a perfect modern house done for you by Poiret, it is something else perpetuated on top of you. It is all horrible. It is all possessions, possessions, bullying you and turning you into a generalisation. You have to be like Rodin, Michelangelo, and leave a piece of raw rock unfinished to your figure. You must leave your surroundings sketchy, unfinished, so that you are never contained, never confined, never dominated from the outside.'

She stood in the street contemplating.

'And we are never to have a complete place of our own — never a home?' she said.

'Pray God, in this world, no,' he answered.

'But there's only this world,' she objected.

He spread out his hands with a gesture of indifference.

‘Meanwhile, then, we’ll avoid having things of our own,’ he said.

‘But you’ve just bought a chair,’ she said.

‘I can tell the man I don’t want it,’ he replied.

She pondered again. Then a queer little movement twitched her face.

‘No,’ she said, ‘we don’t want it. I’m sick of old things.’

‘New ones as well,’ he said.

They retraced their steps.

There — in front of some furniture, stood the young couple, the woman who was going to have a baby, and the narrow-faced youth. She was fair, rather short, stout. He was of medium height, attractively built. His dark hair fell sideways over his brow, from under his cap, he stood strangely aloof, like one of the damned.

‘Let us give it to THEM,’ whispered Ursula. ‘Look they are getting a home together.’

‘I won’t aid abet them in it,’ he said petulantly, instantly sympathising with the aloof, furtive youth, against the active, procreant female.

‘Oh yes,’ cried Ursula. ‘It’s right for them — there’s nothing else for them.’

‘Very well,’ said Birkin, ‘you offer it to them. I’ll watch.’

Ursula went rather nervously to the young couple, who were discussing an iron washstand — or rather, the man was glancing furtively and wonderingly, like a prisoner, at the abominable article, whilst the woman was arguing.

‘We bought a chair,’ said Ursula, ‘and we don’t want it. Would you have it? We should be glad if you would.’

The young couple looked round at her, not believing that she could be addressing them.

‘Would you care for it?’ repeated Ursula. ‘It’s really VERY pretty — but — but — ’ she smiled rather dazzlingly.

The young couple only stared at her, and looked significantly at each other, to know what to do. And the man curiously obliterated himself, as if he could make himself invisible, as a rat can.

‘We wanted to GIVE it to you,’ explained Ursula, now overcome with confusion and dread of them. She was attracted by the young man. He was a still, mindless creature, hardly a man at all, a creature that the towns have produced, strangely pure-bred and fine in one sense, furtive, quick, subtle. His lashes were dark and long and fine over his eyes, that had no mind in them, only a dreadful kind of subject, inward consciousness, glazed and dark. His dark brows and all his lines, were finely drawn. He would be a dreadful, but wonderful lover to a woman, so marvellously contributed. His legs would be

marvellously subtle and alive, under the shapeless, trousers, he had some of the fineness and stillness and silkiness of a dark-eyed, silent rat.

Ursula had apprehended him with a fine FRISSON of attraction. The full-built woman was staring offensively. Again Ursula forgot him.

‘Won’t you have the chair?’ she said.

The man looked at her with a sideways look of appreciation, yet faroff, almost insolent. The woman drew herself up. There was a certain costermonger richness about her. She did not know what Ursula was after, she was on her guard, hostile. Birkin approached, smiling wickedly at seeing Ursula so nonplussed and frightened.

‘What’s the matter?’ he said, smiling. His eyelids had dropped slightly, there was about him the same suggestive, mocking secrecy that was in the bearing of the two city creatures. The man jerked his head a little on one side, indicating Ursula, and said, with curious amiable, jeering warmth:

‘What she want? — eh?’ An odd smile writhed his lips.

Birkin looked at him from under his slack, ironical eyelids.

‘To give you a chair — that — with the label on it,’ he said, pointing.

The man looked at the object indicated. There was a curious hostility in male, outlawed understanding between the two men.

‘What’s she want to give it US for, guvnor,’ he replied, in a tone of free intimacy that insulted Ursula.

‘Thought you’d like it — it’s a pretty chair. We bought it and don’t want it. No need for you to have it, don’t be frightened,’ said Birkin, with a wry smile.

The man glanced up at him, half inimical, half recognising.

‘Why don’t you want it for yourselves, if you’ve just bought it?’ asked the woman coolly. ‘Taint good enough for you, now you’ve had a look at it. Frightened it’s got something in it, eh?’

She was looking at Ursula, admiringly, but with some resentment.

‘I’d never thought of that,’ said Birkin. ‘But no, the wood’s too thin everywhere.’

‘You see,’ said Ursula, her face luminous and pleased. ‘WE are just going to get married, and we thought we’d buy things. Then we decided, just now, that we wouldn’t have furniture, we’d go abroad.’

The full-built, slightly blowsy city girl looked at the fine face of the other woman, with appreciation. They appreciated each other. The youth stood aside, his face expressionless and timeless, the thin line of the black moustache drawn strangely suggestive over his rather wide, closed mouth. He was impassive, abstract, like some dark suggestive presence, a gutter-presence.

‘It’s all right to be some folks,’ said the city girl, turning to her own young

man. He did not look at her, but he smiled with the lower part of his face, putting his head aside in an odd gesture of assent. His eyes were unchanging, glazed with darkness.

‘Cawsts something to change your mind,’ he said, in an incredibly low accent.

‘Only ten shillings this time,’ said Birkin.

The man looked up at him with a grimace of a smile, furtive, unsure.

‘Cheap at ‘arf a quid, guvnor,’ he said. ‘Not like getting divawced.’

‘We’re not married yet,’ said Birkin.

‘No, no more aren’t we,’ said the young woman loudly. ‘But we shall be, a Saturday.’

Again she looked at the young man with a determined, protective look, at once overbearing and very gentle. He grinned sicklily, turning away his head. She had got his manhood, but Lord, what did he care! He had a strange furtive pride and slinking singleness.

‘Good luck to you,’ said Birkin.

‘Same to you,’ said the young woman. Then, rather tentatively: ‘When’s yours coming off, then?’

Birkin looked round at Ursula.

‘It’s for the lady to say,’ he replied. ‘We go to the registrar the moment she’s ready.’

Ursula laughed, covered with confusion and bewilderment.

‘No ‘urry,’ said the young man, grinning suggestive.

‘Oh, don’t break your neck to get there,’ said the young woman. ‘‘Slike when you’re dead — you’re long time married.’

The young man turned aside as if this hit him.

‘The longer the better, let us hope,’ said Birkin.

‘That’s it, guvnor,’ said the young man admiringly. ‘Enjoy it while it larsts — niver whip a dead donkey.’

‘Only when he’s shamming dead,’ said the young woman, looking at her young man with caressive tenderness of authority.

‘Aw, there’s a difference,’ he said satirically.

‘What about the chair?’ said Birkin.

‘Yes, all right,’ said the woman.

They trailed off to the dealer, the handsome but abject young fellow hanging a little aside.

‘That’s it,’ said Birkin. ‘Will you take it with you, or have the address altered.’

‘Oh, Fred can carry it. Make him do what he can for the dear old ‘ome.’

‘Mike use of’im,’ said Fred, grimly humorous, as he took the chair from the dealer. His movements were graceful, yet curiously abject, slinking.

“Ere’s mother’s cosy chair,’ he said. ‘Warnts a cushion.’ And he stood it down on the market stones.

‘Don’t you think it’s pretty?’ laughed Ursula.

‘Oh, I do,’ said the young woman.

“Ave a sit in it, you’ll wish you’d kept it,’ said the young man.

Ursula promptly sat down in the middle of the market-place.

‘Awfully comfortable,’ she said. ‘But rather hard. You try it.’ She invited the young man to a seat. But he turned uncouthly, awkwardly aside, glancing up at her with quick bright eyes, oddly suggestive, like a quick, live rat.

‘Don’t spoil him,’ said the young woman. ‘He’s not used to arm-chairs, ‘e isn’t.

The young man turned away, and said, with averted grin:

‘Only warnts legs on ‘is.’

The four parted. The young woman thanked them.

‘Thank you for the chair — it’ll last till it gives way.’

‘Keep it for an ornymment,’ said the young man.

‘Good afternoon — Good afternoon,’ said Ursula and Birkin.

‘Goo’-luck to you,’ said the young man, glancing and avoiding Birkin’s eyes, as he turned aside his head.

The two couples went asunder, Ursula clinging to Birkin’s arm. When they had gone some distance, she glanced back and saw the young man going beside the full, easy young woman. His trousers sank over his heels, he moved with a sort of slinking evasion, more crushed with odd selfconsciousness now he had the slim old arm-chair to carry, his arm over the back, the four fine, square tapering legs swaying perilously near the granite setts of the pavement. And yet he was somewhere indomitable and separate, like a quick, vital rat. He had a queer, subterranean beauty, repulsive too.

‘How strange they are!’ said Ursula.

‘Children of men,’ he said. ‘They remind me of Jesus: “The meek shall inherit the earth.”’

‘But they aren’t the meek,’ said Ursula.

‘Yes, I don’t know why, but they are,’ he replied.

They waited for the tramcar. Ursula sat on top and looked out on the town. The dusk was just dimming the hollows of crowded houses.

‘And are they going to inherit the earth?’ she said.

‘Yes — they.’

‘Then what are we going to do?’ she asked. ‘We’re not like them — are we? We’re not the meek?’

‘No. We’ve got to live in the chinks they leave us.’

‘How horrible!’ cried Ursula. ‘I don’t want to live in chinks.’

‘Don’t worry,’ he said. ‘They are the children of men, they like market-places and street-corners best. That leaves plenty of chinks.’

‘All the world,’ she said.

‘Ah no — but some room.’

The tramcar mounted slowly up the hill, where the ugly winter-grey masses of houses looked like a vision of hell that is cold and angular. They sat and looked. Away in the distance was an angry redness of sunset. It was all cold, somehow small, crowded, and like the end of the world.

‘I don’t mind it even then,’ said Ursula, looking at the repulsiveness of it all. ‘It doesn’t concern me.’

‘No more it does,’ he replied, holding her hand. ‘One needn’t see. One goes one’s way. In my world it is sunny and spacious —’

‘It is, my love, isn’t it?’ she cried, hugging near to him on the top of the tramcar, so that the other passengers stared at them.

‘And we will wander about on the face of the earth,’ he said, ‘and we’ll look at the world beyond just this bit.’

There was a long silence. Her face was radiant like gold, as she sat thinking.

‘I don’t want to inherit the earth,’ she said. ‘I don’t want to inherit anything.’

He closed his hand over hers.

‘Neither do I. I want to be disinherited.’

She clasped his fingers closely.

‘We won’t care about ANYTHING,’ she said.

He sat still, and laughed.

‘And we’ll be married, and have done with them,’ she added.

Again he laughed.

‘It’s one way of getting rid of everything,’ she said, ‘to get married.’

‘And one way of accepting the whole world,’ he added.

‘A whole other world, yes,’ she said happily.

‘Perhaps there’s Gerald — and Gudrun —’ he said.

‘If there is there is, you see,’ she said. ‘It’s no good our worrying. We can’t really alter them, can we?’

‘No,’ he said. ‘One has no right to try — not with the best intentions in the world.’

‘Do you try to force them?’ she asked.

‘Perhaps,’ he said. ‘Why should I want him to be free, if it isn’t his business?’

She paused for a time.

‘We can’t MAKE him happy, anyhow,’ she said. ‘He’d have to be it of himself.’

‘I know,’ he said. ‘But we want other people with us, don’t we?’

‘Why should we?’ she asked.

‘I don’t know,’ he said uneasily. ‘One has a hankering after a sort of further fellowship.’

‘But why?’ she insisted. ‘Why should you hanker after other people? Why should you need them?’

This hit him right on the quick. His brows knitted.

‘Does it end with just our two selves?’ he asked, tense.

‘Yes — what more do you want? If anybody likes to come along, let them. But why must you run after them?’

His face was tense and unsatisfied.

‘You see,’ he said, ‘I always imagine our being really happy with some few other people — a little freedom with people.’

She pondered for a moment.

‘Yes, one does want that. But it must HAPPEN. You can’t do anything for it with your will. You always seem to think you can FORCE the flowers to come out. People must love us because they love us — you can’t MAKE them.’

‘I know,’ he said. ‘But must one take no steps at all? Must one just go as if one were alone in the world — the only creature in the world?’

‘You’ve got me,’ she said. ‘Why should you NEED others? Why must you force people to agree with you? Why can’t you be single by yourself, as you are always saying? You try to bully Gerald — as you tried to bully Hermione. You must learn to be alone. And it’s so horrid of you. You’ve got me. And yet you want to force other people to love you as well. You do try to bully them to love you. And even then, you don’t want their love.’

His face was full of real perplexity.

‘Don’t I?’ he said. ‘It’s the problem I can’t solve. I KNOW I want a perfect and complete relationship with you: and we’ve nearly got it — we really have. But beyond that. DO I want a real, ultimate relationship with Gerald? Do I want a final, almost extra-human relationship with him — a relationship in the ultimate of me and him — or don’t I?’

She looked at him for a long time, with strange bright eyes, but she did not answer.

CHAPTER XXVII.

FLITTING

That evening Ursula returned home very bright-eyed and wondrous — which irritated her people. Her father came home at suppertime, tired after the evening class, and the long journey home. Gudrun was reading, the mother sat in silence.

Suddenly Ursula said to the company at large, in a bright voice, ‘Rupert and I are going to be married tomorrow.’

Her father turned round, stiffly.

‘You what?’ he said.

‘Tomorrow!’ echoed Gudrun.

‘Indeed!’ said the mother.

But Ursula only smiled wonderfully, and did not reply.

‘Married tomorrow!’ cried her father harshly. ‘What are you talking about.’

‘Yes,’ said Ursula. ‘Why not?’ Those two words, from her, always drove him mad. ‘Everything is all right — we shall go to the registrar’s office-’

There was a second’s hush in the room, after Ursula’s blithe vagueness.

‘REALLY, Ursula!’ said Gudrun.

‘Might we ask why there has been all this secrecy?’ demanded the mother, rather superbly.

‘But there hasn’t,’ said Ursula. ‘You knew.’

‘Who knew?’ now cried the father. ‘Who knew? What do you mean by your “you knew”?’

He was in one of his stupid rages, she instantly closed against him.

‘Of course you knew,’ she said coolly. ‘You knew we were going to get married.’

There was a dangerous pause.

‘We knew you were going to get married, did we? Knew! Why, does anybody know anything about you, you shifty bitch!’

‘Father!’ cried Gudrun, flushing deep in violent remonstrance. Then, in a cold, but gentle voice, as if to remind her sister to be tractable: ‘But isn’t it a FEARFULLY sudden decision, Ursula?’ she asked.

‘No, not really,’ replied Ursula, with the same maddening cheerfulness. ‘He’s been WANTING me to agree for weeks — he’s had the licence ready. Only I — I wasn’t ready in myself. Now I am ready — is there anything to be disagreeable about?’

‘Certainly not,’ said Gudrun, but in a tone of cold reproof. ‘You are perfectly free to do as you like.’

“‘Ready in yourself’ — YOURSELF, that’s all that matters, isn’t it! “I wasn’t ready in myself,”“ he mimicked her phrase offensively. ‘You and YOURSELF, you’re of some importance, aren’t you?’

She drew herself up and set back her throat, her eyes shining yellow and dangerous.

‘I am to myself,’ she said, wounded and mortified. ‘I know I am not to anybody else. You only wanted to BULLY me — you never cared for my happiness.’

He was leaning forward watching her, his face intense like a spark.

‘Ursula, what are you saying? Keep your tongue still,’ cried her mother.

Ursula swung round, and the lights in her eyes flashed.

‘No, I won’t,’ she cried. ‘I won’t hold my tongue and be bullied. What does it matter which day I get married — what does it MATTER! It doesn’t affect anybody but myself.’

Her father was tense and gathered together like a cat about to spring.

‘Doesn’t it?’ he cried, coming nearer to her. She shrank away.

‘No, how can it?’ she replied, shrinking but stubborn.

‘It doesn’t matter to ME then, what you do — what becomes of you?’ he cried, in a strange voice like a cry.

The mother and Gudrun stood back as if hypnotised.

‘No,’ stammered Ursula. Her father was very near to her. ‘You only want to-’

She knew it was dangerous, and she stopped. He was gathered together, every muscle ready.

‘What?’ he challenged.

‘Bully me,’ she muttered, and even as her lips were moving, his hand had caught her smack at the side of the face and she was sent up against the door.

‘Father!’ cried Gudrun in a high voice, ‘it is impossible!’

He stood unmoving. Ursula recovered, her hand was on the door handle. She slowly drew herself up. He seemed doubtful now.

‘It’s true,’ she declared, with brilliant tears in her eyes, her head lifted up in defiance. ‘What has your love meant, what did it ever mean? — bullying, and denial-it did-’

He was advancing again with strange, tense movements, and clenched fist, and

the face of a murderer. But swift as lightning she had flashed out of the door, and they heard her running upstairs.

He stood for a moment looking at the door. Then, like a defeated animal, he turned and went back to his seat by the fire.

Gudrun was very white. Out of the intense silence, the mother's voice was heard saying, cold and angry:

'Well, you shouldn't take so much notice of her.'

Again the silence fell, each followed a separate set of emotions and thoughts.

Suddenly the door opened again: Ursula, dressed in hat and furs, with a small valise in her hand:

'Good-bye!' she said, in her maddening, bright, almost mocking tone. 'I'm going.'

And in the next instant the door was closed, they heard the outer door, then her quick steps down the garden path, then the gate banged, and her light footfall was gone. There was a silence like death in the house.

Ursula went straight to the station, hastening heedlessly on winged feet. There was no train, she must walk on to the junction. As she went through the darkness, she began to cry, and she wept bitterly, with a dumb, heart-broken, child's anguish, all the way on the road, and in the train. Time passed unheeded and unknown, she did not know where she was, nor what was taking place. Only she wept from fathomless depths of hopeless, hopeless grief, the terrible grief of a child, that knows no extenuation.

Yet her voice had the same defensive brightness as she spoke to Birkin's landlady at the door.

'Good evening! Is Mr Birkin in? Can I see him?'

'Yes, he's in. He's in his study.'

Ursula slipped past the woman. His door opened. He had heard her voice.

'Hello!' he exclaimed in surprise, seeing her standing there with the valise in her hand, and marks of tears on her face. She was one who wept without showing many traces, like a child.

'Do I look a sight?' she said, shrinking.

'No — why? Come in,' he took the bag from her hand and they went into the study.

There — immediately, her lips began to tremble like those of a child that remembers again, and the tears came rushing up.

'What's the matter?' he asked, taking her in his arms. She sobbed violently on his shoulder, whilst he held her still, waiting.

'What's the matter?' he said again, when she was quieter. But she only pressed her face further into his shoulder, in pain, like a child that cannot tell.

‘What is it, then?’ he asked. Suddenly she broke away, wiped her eyes, regained her composure, and went and sat in a chair.

‘Father hit me,’ she announced, sitting bunched up, rather like a ruffled bird, her eyes very bright.

‘What for?’ he said.

She looked away, and would not answer. There was a pitiful redness about her sensitive nostrils, and her quivering lips.

‘Why?’ he repeated, in his strange, soft, penetrating voice.

She looked round at him, rather defiantly.

‘Because I said I was going to be married tomorrow, and he bullied me.’

‘Why did he bully you?’

Her mouth dropped again, she remembered the scene once more, the tears came up.

‘Because I said he didn’t care — and he doesn’t, it’s only his domineeringness that’s hurt — ’ she said, her mouth pulled awry by her weeping, all the time she spoke, so that he almost smiled, it seemed so childish. Yet it was not childish, it was a mortal conflict, a deep wound.

‘It isn’t quite true,’ he said. ‘And even so, you shouldn’t SAY it.’

‘It IS true — it IS true,’ she wept, ‘and I won’t be bullied by his pretending it’s love — when it ISN’T — he doesn’t care, how can he — no, he can’t-’

He sat in silence. She moved him beyond himself.

‘Then you shouldn’t rouse him, if he can’t,’ replied Birkin quietly.

‘And I HAVE loved him, I have,’ she wept. ‘I’ve loved him always, and he’s always done this to me, he has — ’

‘It’s been a love of opposition, then,’ he said. ‘Never mind — it will be all right. It’s nothing desperate.’

‘Yes,’ she wept, ‘it is, it is.’

‘Why?’

‘I shall never see him again — ’

‘Not immediately. Don’t cry, you had to break with him, it had to be — don’t cry.’

He went over to her and kissed her fine, fragile hair, touching her wet cheeks gently.

‘Don’t cry,’ he repeated, ‘don’t cry any more.’

He held her head close against him, very close and quiet.

At last she was still. Then she looked up, her eyes wide and frightened.

‘Don’t you want me?’ she asked.

‘Want you?’ His darkened, steady eyes puzzled her and did not give her play.

‘Do you wish I hadn’t come?’ she asked, anxious now again for fear she might

be out of place.

‘No,’ he said. ‘I wish there hadn’t been the violence — so much ugliness — but perhaps it was inevitable.’

She watched him in silence. He seemed deadened.

‘But where shall I stay?’ she asked, feeling humiliated.

He thought for a moment.

‘Here, with me,’ he said. ‘We’re married as much today as we shall be tomorrow.’

‘But — ’

‘I’ll tell Mrs Varley,’ he said. ‘Never mind now.’

He sat looking at her. She could feel his darkened steady eyes looking at her all the time. It made her a little bit frightened. She pushed her hair off her forehead nervously.

‘Do I look ugly?’ she said.

And she blew her nose again.

A small smile came round his eyes.

‘No,’ he said, ‘fortunately.’

And he went across to her, and gathered her like a belonging in his arms. She was so tenderly beautiful, he could not bear to see her, he could only bear to hide her against himself. Now; washed all clean by her tears, she was new and frail like a flower just unfolded, a flower so new, so tender, so made perfect by inner light, that he could not bear to look at her, he must hide her against himself, cover his eyes against her. She had the perfect candour of creation, something translucent and simple, like a radiant, shining flower that moment unfolded in primal blessedness. She was so new, so wonder-clear, so undimmed. And he was so old, so steeped in heavy memories. Her soul was new, undefined and glimmering with the unseen. And his soul was dark and gloomy, it had only one grain of living hope, like a grain of mustard seed. But this one living grain in him matched the perfect youth in her.

‘I love you,’ he whispered as he kissed her, and trembled with pure hope, like a man who is born again to a wonderful, lively hope far exceeding the bounds of death.

She could not know how much it meant to him, how much he meant by the few words. Almost childish, she wanted proof, and statement, even over-statement, for everything seemed still uncertain, unfixed to her.

But the passion of gratitude with which he received her into his soul, the extreme, unthinkable gladness of knowing himself living and fit to unite with her, he, who was so nearly dead, who was so near to being gone with the rest of his race down the slope of mechanical death, could never be understood by her.

He worshipped her as age worships youth, he gloried in her, because, in his one grain of faith, he was young as she, he was her proper mate. This marriage with her was his resurrection and his life.

All this she could not know. She wanted to be made much of, to be adored. There were infinite distances of silence between them. How could he tell her of the immanence of her beauty, that was not form, or weight, or colour, but something like a strange, golden light! How could he know himself what her beauty lay in, for him. He said 'Your nose is beautiful, your chin is adorable.' But it sounded like lies, and she was disappointed, hurt. Even when he said, whispering with truth, 'I love you, I love you,' it was not the real truth. It was something beyond love, such a gladness of having surpassed oneself, of having transcended the old existence. How could he say "I" when he was something new and unknown, not himself at all? This I, this old formula of the age, was a dead letter.

In the new, superfine bliss, a peace superseding knowledge, there was no I and you, there was only the third, unrealised wonder, the wonder of existing not as oneself, but in a consummation of my being and of her being in a new one, a new, paradisaic unit regained from the duality. Nor can I say 'I love you,' when I have ceased to be, and you have ceased to be: we are both caught up and transcended into a new oneness where everything is silent, because there is nothing to answer, all is perfect and at one. Speech travels between the separate parts. But in the perfect One there is perfect silence of bliss.

They were married by law on the next day, and she did as he bade her, she wrote to her father and mother. Her mother replied, not her father.

She did not go back to school. She stayed with Birkin in his rooms, or at the Mill, moving with him as he moved. But she did not see anybody, save Gudrun and Gerald. She was all strange and wondering as yet, but relieved as by dawn.

Gerald sat talking to her one afternoon in the warm study down at the Mill. Rupert had not yet come home.

'You are happy?' Gerald asked her, with a smile.

'Very happy!' she cried, shrinking a little in her brightness.

'Yes, one can see it.'

'Can one?' cried Ursula in surprise.

He looked up at her with a communicative smile.

'Oh yes, plainly.'

She was pleased. She meditated a moment.

'And can you see that Rupert is happy as well?'

He lowered his eyelids, and looked aside.

'Oh yes,' he said.

‘Really!’

‘Oh yes.’

He was very quiet, as if it were something not to be talked about by him. He seemed sad.

She was very sensitive to suggestion. She asked the question he wanted her to ask.

‘Why don’t you be happy as well?’ she said. ‘You could be just the same.’

He paused a moment.

‘With Gudrun?’ he asked.

‘Yes!’ she cried, her eyes glowing. But there was a strange tension, an emphasis, as if they were asserting their wishes, against the truth.

‘You think Gudrun would have me, and we should be happy?’ he said.

‘Yes, I’m SURE!’ she cried.

Her eyes were round with delight. Yet underneath she was constrained, she knew her own insistence.

‘Oh, I’m SO glad,’ she added.

He smiled.

‘What makes you glad?’ he said.

‘For HER sake,’ she replied. ‘I’m sure you’d — you’re the right man for her.’

‘You are?’ he said. ‘And do you think she would agree with you?’

‘Oh yes!’ she exclaimed hastily. Then, upon reconsideration, very uneasy: ‘Though Gudrun isn’t so very simple, is she? One doesn’t know her in five minutes, does one? She’s not like me in that.’ She laughed at him with her strange, open, dazzled face.

‘You think she’s not much like you?’ Gerald asked.

She knitted her brows.

‘Oh, in many ways she is. But I never know what she will do when anything new comes.’

‘You don’t?’ said Gerald. He was silent for some moments. Then he moved tentatively. ‘I was going to ask her, in any case, to go away with me at Christmas,’ he said, in a very small, cautious voice.

‘Go away with you? For a time, you mean?’

‘As long as she likes,’ he said, with a deprecating movement.

They were both silent for some minutes.

‘Of course,’ said Ursula at last, ‘she MIGHT just be willing to rush into marriage. You can see.’

‘Yes,’ smiled Gerald. ‘I can see. But in case she won’t — do you think she would go abroad with me for a few days — or for a fortnight?’

‘Oh yes,’ said Ursula. ‘I’d ask her.’

‘Do you think we might all go together?’

‘All of us?’ Again Ursula’s face lighted up. ‘It would be rather fun, don’t you think?’

‘Great fun,’ he said.

‘And then you could see,’ said Ursula.

‘What?’

‘How things went. I think it is best to take the honeymoon before the wedding — don’t you?’

She was pleased with this MOT. He laughed.

‘In certain cases,’ he said. ‘I’d rather it were so in my own case.’

‘Would you!’ exclaimed Ursula. Then doubtingly, ‘Yes, perhaps you’re right. One should please oneself.’

Birkin came in a little later, and Ursula told him what had been said.

‘Gudrun!’ exclaimed Birkin. ‘She’s a born mistress, just as Gerald is a born lover — AMANT EN TITRE. If as somebody says all women are either wives or mistresses, then Gudrun is a mistress.’

‘And all men either lovers or husbands,’ cried Ursula. ‘But why not both?’

‘The one excludes the other,’ he laughed.

‘Then I want a lover,’ cried Ursula.

‘No you don’t,’ he said.

‘But I do,’ she wailed.

He kissed her, and laughed.

It was two days after this that Ursula was to go to fetch her things from the house in Beldover. The removal had taken place, the family had gone. Gudrun had rooms in Willey Green.

Ursula had not seen her parents since her marriage. She wept over the rupture, yet what was the good of making it up! Good or not good, she could not go to them. So her things had been left behind and she and Gudrun were to walk over for them, in the afternoon.

It was a wintry afternoon, with red in the sky, when they arrived at the house. The windows were dark and blank, already the place was frightening. A stark, void entrance-hall struck a chill to the hearts of the girls.

‘I don’t believe I dare have come in alone,’ said Ursula. ‘It frightens me.’

‘Ursula!’ cried Gudrun. ‘Isn’t it amazing! Can you believe you lived in this place and never felt it? How I lived here a day without dying of terror, I cannot conceive!’

They looked in the big dining-room. It was a good-sized room, but now a cell would have been lovelier. The large bay windows were naked, the floor was stripped, and a border of dark polish went round the tract of pale boarding.

In the faded wallpaper were dark patches where furniture had stood, where pictures had hung. The sense of walls, dry, thin, flimsy-seeming walls, and a flimsy flooring, pale with its artificial black edges, was neutralising to the mind. Everything was null to the senses, there was enclosure without substance, for the walls were dry and papery. Where were they standing, on earth, or suspended in some cardboard box? In the hearth was burnt paper, and scraps of half-burnt paper.

‘Imagine that we passed our days here!’ said Ursula.

‘I know,’ cried Gudrun. ‘It is too appalling. What must we be like, if we are the contents of THIS!’

‘Vile!’ said Ursula. ‘It really is.’

And she recognised half-burnt covers of ‘Vogue’ — half-burnt representations of women in gowns — lying under the grate.

They went to the drawing-room. Another piece of shut-in air; without weight or substance, only a sense of intolerable papery imprisonment in nothingness. The kitchen did look more substantial, because of the red-tiled floor and the stove, but it was cold and horrid.

The two girls tramped hollowly up the bare stairs. Every sound reechoed under their hearts. They tramped down the bare corridor. Against the wall of Ursula’s bedroom were her things — a trunk, a work-basket, some books, loose coats, a hat-box, standing desolate in the universal emptiness of the dusk.

‘A cheerful sight, aren’t they?’ said Ursula, looking down at her forsaken possessions.

‘Very cheerful,’ said Gudrun.

The two girls set to, carrying everything down to the front door. Again and again they made the hollow, reechoing transit. The whole place seemed to resound about them with a noise of hollow, empty futility. In the distance the empty, invisible rooms sent forth a vibration almost of obscenity. They almost fled with the last articles, into the out-of-door.

But it was cold. They were waiting for Birkin, who was coming with the car. They went indoors again, and upstairs to their parents’ front bedroom, whose windows looked down on the road, and across the country at the black-barred sunset, black and red barred, without light.

They sat down in the window-seat, to wait. Both girls were looking over the room. It was void, with a meaninglessness that was almost dreadful.

‘Really,’ said Ursula, ‘this room COULDN’T be sacred, could it?’

Gudrun looked over it with slow eyes.

‘Impossible,’ she replied.

‘When I think of their lives — father’s and mother’s, their love, and their

marriage, and all of us children, and our bringing-up — would you have such a life, Prune?’

‘I wouldn’t, Ursula.’

‘It all seems so NOTHING — their two lives — there’s no meaning in it. Really, if they had NOT met, and NOT married, and not lived together — it wouldn’t have mattered, would it?’

‘Of course — you can’t tell,’ said Gudrun.

‘No. But if I thought my life was going to be like it — Prune,’ she caught Gudrun’s arm, ‘I should run.’

Gudrun was silent for a few moments.

‘As a matter of fact, one cannot contemplate the ordinary life — one cannot contemplate it,’ replied Gudrun. ‘With you, Ursula, it is quite different. You will be out of it all, with Birkin. He’s a special case. But with the ordinary man, who has his life fixed in one place, marriage is just impossible. There may be, and there ARE, thousands of women who want it, and could conceive of nothing else. But the very thought of it sends me MAD. One must be free, above all, one must be free. One may forfeit everything else, but one must be free — one must not become 7, Pinchbeck Street — or Somerset Drive — or Shortlands. No man will be sufficient to make that good — no man! To marry, one must have a free lance, or nothing, a comrade-in-arms, a Glckstritter. A man with a position in the social world — well, it is just impossible, impossible!’

‘What a lovely word — a Glckstritter!’ said Ursula. ‘So much nicer than a soldier of fortune.’

‘Yes, isn’t it?’ said Gudrun. ‘I’d tilt the world with a Glckstritter. But a home, an establishment! Ursula, what would it mean? — think!’

‘I know,’ said Ursula. ‘We’ve had one home — that’s enough for me.’

‘Quite enough,’ said Gudrun.

‘The little grey home in the west,’ quoted Ursula ironically.

‘Doesn’t it sound grey, too,’ said Gudrun grimly.

They were interrupted by the sound of the car. There was Birkin. Ursula was surprised that she felt so lit up, that she became suddenly so free from the problems of grey homes in the west.

They heard his heels click on the hall pavement below.

‘Hello!’ he called, his voice echoing alive through the house. Ursula smiled to herself. HE was frightened of the place too.

‘Hello! Here we are,’ she called downstairs. And they heard him quickly running up.

‘This is a ghostly situation,’ he said.

‘These houses don’t have ghosts — they’ve never had any personality, and

only a place with personality can have a ghost,' said Gudrun.

'I suppose so. Are you both weeping over the past?'

'We are,' said Gudrun, grimly.

Ursula laughed.

'Not weeping that it's gone, but weeping that it ever WAS,' she said.

'Oh,' he replied, relieved.

He sat down for a moment. There was something in his presence, Ursula thought, lambent and alive. It made even the impertinent structure of this null house disappear.

'Gudrun says she could not bear to be married and put into a house,' said Ursula meaningful — they knew this referred to Gerald.

He was silent for some moments.

'Well,' he said, 'if you know beforehand you couldn't stand it, you're safe.'

'Quite!' said Gudrun.

'Why DOES every woman think her aim in life is to have a hubby and a little grey home in the west? Why is this the goal of life? Why should it be?' said Ursula.

'Il faut avoir le respect de ses btises,' said Birkin.

'But you needn't have the respect for the BETISE before you've committed it,' laughed Ursula.

'Ah then, des betises du papa?'

'Et de la maman,' added Gudrun satirically.

'Et des voisins,' said Ursula.

They all laughed, and rose. It was getting dark. They carried the things to the car. Gudrun locked the door of the empty house. Birkin had lighted the lamps of the automobile. It all seemed very happy, as if they were setting out.

'Do you mind stopping at Coulsons. I have to leave the key there,' said Gudrun.

'Right,' said Birkin, and they moved off.

They stopped in the main street. The shops were just lighted, the last miners were passing home along the causeways, half-visible shadows in their grey pit-dirt, moving through the blue air. But their feet rang harshly in manifold sound, along the pavement.

How pleased Gudrun was to come out of the shop, and enter the car, and be borne swiftly away into the downhill of palpable dusk, with Ursula and Birkin! What an adventure life seemed at this moment! How deeply, how suddenly she envied Ursula! Life for her was so quick, and an open door — so reckless as if not only this world, but the world that was gone and the world to come were nothing to her. Ah, if she could be JUST LIKE THAT, it would be perfect.

For always, except in her moments of excitement, she felt a want within herself. She was unsure. She had felt that now, at last, in Gerald's strong and violent love, she was living fully and finally. But when she compared herself with Ursula, already her soul was jealous, unsatisfied. She was not satisfied — she was never to be satisfied.

What was she short of now? It was marriage — it was the wonderful stability of marriage. She did want it, let her say what she might. She had been lying. The old idea of marriage was right even now — marriage and the home. Yet her mouth gave a little grimace at the words. She thought of Gerald and Shortlands — marriage and the home! Ah well, let it rest! He meant a great deal to her — but — ! Perhaps it was not in her to marry. She was one of life's outcasts, one of the drifting lives that have no root. No, no it could not be so. She suddenly conjured up a rosy room, with herself in a beautiful gown, and a handsome man in evening dress who held her in his arms in the firelight, and kissed her. This picture she entitled 'Home.' It would have done for the Royal Academy.

'Come with us to tea — DO,' said Ursula, as they ran nearer to the cottage of Willey Green.

'Thanks awfully — but I MUST go in — ' said Gudrun. She wanted very much to go on with Ursula and Birkin.

That seemed like life indeed to her. Yet a certain perversity would not let her.

'Do come — yes, it would be so nice,' pleaded Ursula.

'I'm awfully sorry — I should love to — but I can't — really — '

She descended from the car in trembling haste.

'Can't you really!' came Ursula's regretful voice.

'No, really I can't,' responded Gudrun's pathetic, chagrined words out of the dusk.

'All right, are you?' called Birkin.

'Quite!' said Gudrun. 'Good-night!'

'Good-night,' they called.

'Come whenever you like, we shall be glad,' called Birkin.

'Thank you very much,' called Gudrun, in the strange, twanging voice of lonely chagrin that was very puzzling to him. She turned away to her cottage gate, and they drove on. But immediately she stood to watch them, as the car ran vague into the distance. And as she went up the path to her strange house, her heart was full of incomprehensible bitterness.

In her parlour was a long-case clock, and inserted into its dial was a ruddy, round, slant-eyed, joyous-painted face, that wagged over with the most ridiculous ogle when the clock ticked, and back again with the same absurd glad-eye at the next tick. All the time the absurd smooth, brown-ruddy face gave her

an obtrusive 'glad-eye.' She stood for minutes, watching it, till a sort of maddened disgust overcame her, and she laughed at herself hollowly. And still it rocked, and gave her the glad-eye from one side, then from the other, from one side, then from the other. Ah, how unhappy she was! In the midst of her most active happiness, ah, how unhappy she was! She glanced at the table. Gooseberry jam, and the same home-made cake with too much soda in it! Still, gooseberry jam was good, and one so rarely got it.

All the evening she wanted to go to the Mill. But she coldly refused to allow herself. She went the next afternoon instead. She was happy to find Ursula alone. It was a lovely, intimate secluded atmosphere. They talked endlessly and delightedly. 'Aren't you FEARFULLY happy here?' said Gudrun to her sister glancing at her own bright eyes in the mirror. She always envied, almost with resentment, the strange positive fullness that subsisted in the atmosphere around Ursula and Birkin.

How really beautifully this room is done,' she said aloud. 'This hard plaited matting — what a lovely colour it is, the colour of cool light!'

And it seemed to her perfect.

'Ursula,' she said at length, in a voice of question and detachment, 'did you know that Gerald Crich had suggested our going away all together at Christmas?'

'Yes, he's spoken to Rupert.'

A deep flush dyed Gudrun's cheek. She was silent a moment, as if taken aback, and not knowing what to say.

'But don't you thing,' she said at last, 'it is AMAZINGLY COOL !'

Ursula laughed.

'I like him for it,' she said.

Gudrun was silent. It was evident that, whilst she was almost mortified by Gerald's taking the liberty of making such a suggestion to Birkin, yet the idea itself attracted her strongly.

'There's rather lovely simplicity about Gerald, I think,' said Ursula, 'so defiant, somehow! Oh, I think he's VERY lovable.'

Gudrun did not reply for some moments. She had still to get over the feeling of insult at the liberty taken with her freedom.

'What did Rupert say — do you know?' she asked.

'He said it would be most awfully jolly,' said Ursula.

Again Gudrun looked down, and was silent.

'Don't you think it would?' said Ursula, tentatively. She was never quite sure how many defences Gudrun was having round herself.

Gudrun raised her face with difficulty and held it averted.

‘I think it MIGHT be awfully jolly, as you say,’ she replied. ‘But don’t you think it was an unpardonable liberty to take — to talk of such things to Rupert — who after all — you see what I mean, Ursula — they might have been two men arranging an outing with some little TYPE they’d picked up. Oh, I think it’s unforgivable, quite!’ She used the French word ‘TYPE.’

Her eyes flashed, her soft face was flushed and sullen. Ursula looked on, rather frightened, frightened most of all because she thought Gudrun seemed rather common, really like a little TYPE. But she had not the courage quite to think this — not right out.

‘Oh no,’ she cried, stammering. ‘Oh no — not at all like that — oh no! No, I think it’s rather beautiful, the friendship between Rupert and Gerald. They just are simple — they say anything to each other, like brothers.’

Gudrun flushed deeper. She could not BEAR it that Gerald gave her away — even to Birkin.

‘But do you think even brothers have any right to exchange confidences of that sort?’ she asked, with deep anger.

‘Oh yes,’ said Ursula. ‘There’s never anything said that isn’t perfectly straightforward. No, the thing that’s amazed me most in Gerald — how perfectly simple and direct he can be! And you know, it takes rather a big man. Most of them MUST be indirect, they are such cowards.’

But Gudrun was still silent with anger. She wanted the absolute secrecy kept, with regard to her movements.

‘Won’t you go?’ said Ursula. ‘Do, we might all be so happy! There is something I LOVE about Gerald — he’s MUCH more lovable than I thought him. He’s free, Gudrun, he really is.’

Gudrun’s mouth was still closed, sullen and ugly. She opened it at length.

‘Do you know where he proposes to go?’ she asked.

‘Yes — to the Tyrol, where he used to go when he was in Germany — a lovely place where students go, small and rough and lovely, for winter sport!’

Through Gudrun’s mind went the angry thought — ‘they know everything.’

‘Yes,’ she said aloud, ‘about forty kilometres from Innsbruck, isn’t it?’

‘I don’t know exactly where — but it would be lovely, don’t you think, high in the perfect snow — ?’

‘Very lovely!’ said Gudrun, sarcastically.

Ursula was put out.

‘Of course,’ she said, ‘I think Gerald spoke to Rupert so that it shouldn’t seem like an outing with a TYPE — ’

‘I know, of course,’ said Gudrun, ‘that he quite commonly does take up with that sort.’

‘Does he!’ said Ursula. ‘Why how do you know?’

‘I know of a model in Chelsea,’ said Gudrun coldly. Now Ursula was silent. ‘Well,’ she said at last, with a doubtful laugh, ‘I hope he has a good time with her.’ At which Gudrun looked more glum.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

GUDRUN IN THE POMPADOUR

Christmas drew near, all four prepared for flight. Birkin and Ursula were busy packing their few personal things, making them ready to be sent off, to whatever country and whatever place they might choose at last. Gudrun was very much excited. She loved to be on the wing.

She and Gerald, being ready first, set off via London and Paris to Innsbruck, where they would meet Ursula and Birkin. In London they stayed one night. They went to the music-hall, and afterwards to the Pompadour Cafe.

Gudrun hated the Cafe, yet she always went back to it, as did most of the artists of her acquaintance. She loathed its atmosphere of petty vice and petty jealousy and petty art. Yet she always called in again, when she was in town. It was as if she HAD to return to this small, slow, central whirlpool of disintegration and dissolution: just give it a look.

She sat with Gerald drinking some sweetish liqueur, and staring with black, sullen looks at the various groups of people at the tables. She would greet nobody, but young men nodded to her frequently, with a kind of sneering familiarity. She cut them all. And it gave her pleasure to sit there, cheeks flushed, eyes black and sullen, seeing them all objectively, as put away from her, like creatures in some menagerie of apish degraded souls. God, what a foul crew they were! Her blood beat black and thick in her veins with rage and loathing. Yet she must sit and watch, watch. One or two people came to speak to her. From every side of the Cafe, eyes turned half furtively, half jeeringly at her, men looking over their shoulders, women under their hats.

The old crowd was there, Carlyon in his corner with his pupils and his girl, Halliday and Libidnikov and the Pussum — they were all there. Gudrun watched Gerald. She watched his eyes linger a moment on Halliday, on Halliday's party. These last were on the look-out — they nodded to him, he nodded again. They giggled and whispered among themselves. Gerald watched them with the steady twinkle in his eyes. They were urging the Pussum to something.

She at last rose. She was wearing a curious dress of dark silk splashed and

spattered with different colours, a curious motley effect. She was thinner, her eyes were perhaps hotter, more disintegrated. Otherwise she was just the same. Gerald watched her with the same steady twinkle in his eyes as she came across. She held out her thin brown hand to him.

‘How are you?’ she said.

He shook hands with her, but remained seated, and let her stand near him, against the table. She nodded blackly to Gudrun, whom she did not know to speak to, but well enough by sight and reputation.

‘I am very well,’ said Gerald. ‘And you?’

‘Oh I’m all wight. What about Wupert?’

‘Rupert? He’s very well, too.’

‘Yes, I don’t mean that. What about him being married?’

‘Oh — yes, he is married.’

The Pussum’s eyes had a hot flash.

‘Oh, he’s weally bwrought it off then, has he? When was he married?’

‘A week or two ago.’

‘Weally! He’s never written.’

‘No.’

‘No. Don’t you think it’s too bad?’

This last was in a tone of challenge. The Pussum let it be known by her tone, that she was aware of Gudrun’s listening.

‘I suppose he didn’t feel like it,’ replied Gerald.

‘But why didn’t he?’ pursued the Pussum.

This was received in silence. There was an ugly, mocking persistence in the small, beautiful figure of the short-haired girl, as she stood near Gerald.

‘Are you staying in town long?’ she asked.

‘Tonight only.’

‘Oh, only tonight. Are you coming over to speak to Julius?’

‘Not tonight.’

‘Oh very well. I’ll tell him then.’ Then came her touch of diablerie. ‘You’re looking awf’lly fit.’

‘Yes — I feel it.’ Gerald was quite calm and easy, a spark of satiric amusement in his eye.

‘Are you having a good time?’

This was a direct blow for Gudrun, spoken in a level, toneless voice of callous ease.

‘Yes,’ he replied, quite colourlessly.

‘I’m awf’lly sorry you aren’t coming round to the flat. You aren’t very faithful to your fwriends.’

‘Not very,’ he said.

She nodded them both ‘Good-night’, and went back slowly to her own set. Gudrun watched her curious walk, stiff and jerking at the loins. They heard her level, toneless voice distinctly.

‘He won’t come over; — he is otherwise engaged,’ it said. There was more laughter and lowered voices and mockery at the table.

‘Is she a friend of yours?’ said Gudrun, looking calmly at Gerald.

‘I’ve stayed at Halliday’s flat with Birkin,’ he said, meeting her slow, calm eyes. And she knew that the Pussum was one of his mistresses — and he knew she knew.

She looked round, and called for the waiter. She wanted an iced cocktail, of all things. This amused Gerald — he wondered what was up.

The Halliday party was tipsy, and malicious. They were talking out loudly about Birkin, ridiculing him on every point, particularly on his marriage.

‘Oh, DON’T make me think of Birkin,’ Halliday was squealing. ‘He makes me perfectly sick. He is as bad as Jesus. “Lord, WHAT must I do to be saved!”’

He giggled to himself tipsily.

‘Do you remember,’ came the quick voice of the Russian, ‘the letters he used to send. “Desire is holy-”’

‘Oh yes!’ cried Halliday. ‘Oh, how perfectly splendid. Why, I’ve got one in my pocket. I’m sure I have.’

He took out various papers from his pocket book.

‘I’m sure I’ve — HIC! OH DEAR! — got one.’

Gerald and Gudrun were watching absorbedly.

‘Oh yes, how perfectly — HIC! — splendid! Don’t make me laugh, Pussum, it gives me the hiccup. Hic! — ’ They all giggled.

‘What did he say in that one?’ the Pussum asked, leaning forward, her dark, soft hair falling and swinging against her face. There was something curiously indecent, obscene, about her small, longish, dark skull, particularly when the ears showed.

‘Wait — oh do wait! NO-O, I won’t give it to you, I’ll read it aloud. I’ll read you the choice bits, — hic! Oh dear! Do you think if I drink water it would take off this hiccup? HIC! Oh, I feel perfectly helpless.’

‘Isn’t that the letter about uniting the dark and the light — and the Flux of Corruption?’ asked Maxim, in his precise, quick voice.

‘I believe so,’ said the Pussum.

‘Oh is it? I’d forgotten — HIC! — it was that one,’ Halliday said, opening the letter. ‘HIC! Oh yes. How perfectly splendid! This is one of the best. “There is a phase in every race — ”’ he read in the sing-song, slow, distinct voice of a

clergyman reading the Scriptures, “When the desire for destruction overcomes every other desire. In the individual, this desire is ultimately a desire for destruction in the self” — HIC! — ’ he paused and looked up.

‘I hope he’s going ahead with the destruction of himself,’ said the quick voice of the Russian. Halliday giggled, and lolled his head back, vaguely.

‘There’s not much to destroy in him,’ said the Pussum. ‘He’s so thin already, there’s only a fag-end to start on.’

‘Oh, isn’t it beautiful! I love reading it! I believe it has cured my hiccup!’ squealed Halliday. ‘Do let me go on. “It is a desire for the reduction process in oneself, a reducing back to the origin, a return along the Flux of Corruption, to the original rudimentary conditions of being — !” Oh, but I DO think it is wonderful. It almost supersedes the Bible-’

‘Yes — Flux of Corruption,’ said the Russian, ‘I remember that phrase.’

‘Oh, he was always talking about Corruption,’ said the Pussum. ‘He must be corrupt himself, to have it so much on his mind.’

‘Exactly!’ said the Russian.

‘Do let me go on! Oh, this is a perfectly wonderful piece! But do listen to this. “And in the great retrogression, the reducing back of the created body of life, we get knowledge, and beyond knowledge, the phosphorescent ecstasy of acute sensation.” Oh, I do think these phrases are too absurdly wonderful. Oh but don’t you think they ARE — they’re nearly as good as Jesus. “And if, Julius, you want this ecstasy of reduction with the Pussum, you must go on till it is fulfilled. But surely there is in you also, somewhere, the living desire for positive creation, relationships in ultimate faith, when all this process of active corruption, with all its flowers of mud, is transcended, and more or less finished — ” I do wonder what the flowers of mud are. Pussum, you are a flower of mud.’

‘Thank you — and what are you?’

‘Oh, I’m another, surely, according to this letter! We’re all flowers of mud — FLEURS — HIC! DU MAL! It’s perfectly wonderful, Birkin harrowing Hell — harrowing the Pompadour — HIC!’

‘Go on — go on,’ said Maxim. ‘What comes next? It’s really very interesting.’

‘I think it’s awful cheek to write like that,’ said the Pussum.

‘Yes — yes, so do I,’ said the Russian. ‘He is a megalomaniac, of course, it is a form of religious mania. He thinks he is the Saviour of man — go on reading.’

‘Surely,’ Halliday intoned, “surely goodness and mercy hath followed me all the days of my life — ”’ he broke off and giggled. Then he began again, intoning like a clergyman. “Surely there will come an end in us to this desire — for the constant going apart, — this passion for putting asunder — everything — ourselves, reducing ourselves part from part — reacting in intimacy only for

destruction, — using sex as a great reducing agent, reducing the two great elements of male and female from their highly complex unity — reducing the old ideas, going back to the savages for our sensations, — always seeking to LOSE ourselves in some ultimate black sensation, mindless and infinite — burning only with destructive fires, raging on with the hope of being burnt out utterly — ”“

‘I want to go,’ said Gudrun to Gerald, as she signalled the waiter. Her eyes were flashing, her cheeks were flushed. The strange effect of Birkin’s letter read aloud in a perfect clerical sing-song, clear and resonant, phrase by phrase, made the blood mount into her head as if she were mad.

She rose, whilst Gerald was paying the bill, and walked over to Halliday’s table. They all glanced up at her.

‘Excuse me,’ she said. ‘Is that a genuine letter you are reading?’

‘Oh yes,’ said Halliday. ‘Quite genuine.’

‘May I see?’

Smiling foolishly he handed it to her, as if hypnotised.

‘Thank you,’ she said.

And she turned and walked out of the Cafe with the letter, all down the brilliant room, between the tables, in her measured fashion. It was some moments before anybody realised what was happening.

From Halliday’s table came half articulate cries, then somebody booed, then all the far end of the place began booing after Gudrun’s retreating form. She was fashionably dressed in blackish-green and silver, her hat was brilliant green, like the sheen on an insect, but the brim was soft dark green, a falling edge with fine silver, her coat was dark green, lustrous, with a high collar of grey fur, and great fur cuffs, the edge of her dress showed silver and black velvet, her stockings and shoes were silver grey. She moved with slow, fashionable indifference to the door. The porter opened obsequiously for her, and, at her nod, hurried to the edge of the pavement and whistled for a taxi. The two lights of a vehicle almost immediately curved round towards her, like two eyes.

Gerald had followed in wonder, amid all the booing, not having caught her misdeed. He heard the Pussum’s voice saying:

‘Go and get it back from her. I never heard of such a thing! Go and get it back from her. Tell Gerald Crich — there he goes — go and make him give it up.’

Gudrun stood at the door of the taxi, which the man held open for her.

‘To the hotel?’ she asked, as Gerald came out, hurriedly.

‘Where you like,’ he answered.

‘Right!’ she said. Then to the driver, ‘Wagstaff’s — Barton Street.’

The driver bowed his head, and put down the flag.

Gudrun entered the taxi, with the deliberate cold movement of a woman who is well-dressed and contemptuous in her soul. Yet she was frozen with overwrought feelings. Gerald followed her.

‘You’ve forgotten the man,’ she said coolly, with a slight nod of her hat. Gerald gave the porter a shilling. The man saluted. They were in motion.

‘What was all the row about?’ asked Gerald, in wondering excitement.

‘I walked away with Birkin’s letter,’ she said, and he saw the crushed paper in her hand.

His eyes glittered with satisfaction.

‘Ah!’ he said. ‘Splendid! A set of jackasses!’

‘I could have KILLED them!’ she cried in passion. ‘DOGS! — they are dogs! Why is Rupert such a FOOL as to write such letters to them? Why does he give himself away to such canaille? It’s a thing that CANNOT BE BORNE.’

Gerald wondered over her strange passion.

And she could not rest any longer in London. They must go by the morning train from Charing Cross. As they drew over the bridge, in the train, having glimpses of the river between the great iron girders, she cried:

‘I feel I could NEVER see this foul town again — I couldn’t BEAR to come back to it.’

CHAPTER XXIX.

CONTINENTAL

Ursula went on in an unreal suspense, the last weeks before going away. She was not herself, — she was not anything. She was something that is going to be — soon — soon — very soon. But as yet, she was only imminent.

She went to see her parents. It was a rather stiff, sad meeting, more like a verification of separateness than a reunion. But they were all vague and indefinite with one another, stiffened in the fate that moved them apart.

She did not really come to until she was on the ship crossing from Dover to Ostend. Dimly she had come down to London with Birkin, London had been a vagueness, so had the train-journey to Dover. It was all like a sleep.

And now, at last, as she stood in the stern of the ship, in a pitch-dark, rather blowy night, feeling the motion of the sea, and watching the small, rather desolate little lights that twinkled on the shores of England, as on the shores of nowhere, watched them sinking smaller and smaller on the profound and living darkness, she felt her soul stirring to awake from its anaesthetic sleep.

‘Let us go forward, shall we?’ said Birkin. He wanted to be at the tip of their projection. So they left off looking at the faint sparks that glimmered out of nowhere, in the far distance, called England, and turned their faces to the unfathomed night in front.

They went right to the bows of the softly plunging vessel. In the complete obscurity, Birkin found a comparatively sheltered nook, where a great rope was coiled up. It was quite near the very point of the ship, near the black, unpierced space ahead. There they sat down, folded together, folded round with the same rug, creeping in nearer and ever nearer to one another, till it seemed they had crept right into each other, and become one substance. It was very cold, and the darkness was palpable.

One of the ship’s crew came along the deck, dark as the darkness, not really visible. They then made out the faintest pallor of his face. He felt their presence, and stopped, unsure — then bent forward. When his face was near them, he saw the faint pallor of their faces. Then he withdrew like a phantom. And they watched him without making any sound.

They seemed to fall away into the profound darkness. There was no sky, no earth, only one unbroken darkness, into which, with a soft, sleeping motion, they

seemed to fall like one closed seed of life falling through dark, fathomless space.

They had forgotten where they were, forgotten all that was and all that had been, conscious only in their heart, and there conscious only of this pure trajectory through the surpassing darkness. The ship's prow cleaved on, with a faint noise of cleavage, into the complete night, without knowing, without seeing, only surging on.

In Ursula the sense of the unrealised world ahead triumphed over everything. In the midst of this profound darkness, there seemed to glow on her heart the effulgence of a paradise unknown and unrealised. Her heart was full of the most wonderful light, golden like honey of darkness, sweet like the warmth of day, a light which was not shed on the world, only on the unknown paradise towards which she was going, a sweetness of habitation, a delight of living quite unknown, but hers infallibly. In her transport she lifted her face suddenly to him, and he touched it with his lips. So cold, so fresh, so sea-clear her face was, it was like kissing a flower that grows near the surf.

But he did not know the ecstasy of bliss in fore-knowledge that she knew. To him, the wonder of this transit was overwhelming. He was falling through a gulf of infinite darkness, like a meteorite plunging across the chasm between the worlds. The world was torn in two, and he was plunging like an unlit star through the ineffable rift. What was beyond was not yet for him. He was overcome by the trajectory.

In a trance he lay enfolding Ursula round about. His face was against her fine, fragile hair, he breathed its fragrance with the sea and the profound night. And his soul was at peace; yielded, as he fell into the unknown. This was the first time that an utter and absolute peace had entered his heart, now, in this final transit out of life.

When there came some stir on the deck, they roused. They stood up. How stiff and cramped they were, in the night-time! And yet the paradisaic glow on her heart, and the unutterable peace of darkness in his, this was the all-in-all.

They stood up and looked ahead. Low lights were seen down the darkness. This was the world again. It was not the bliss of her heart, nor the peace of his. It was the superficial unreal world of fact. Yet not quite the old world. For the peace and the bliss in their hearts was enduring.

Strange, and desolate above all things, like disembarking from the Styx into the desolated underworld, was this landing at night. There was the raw, half-lighted, covered-in vastness of the dark place, boarded and hollow underfoot, with only desolation everywhere. Ursula had caught sight of the big, pallid, mystic letters 'OSTEND,' standing in the darkness. Everybody was hurrying with a blind, insect-like intentness through the dark grey air, porters were calling

in un-English English, then trotting with heavy bags, their colourless blouses looking ghostly as they disappeared; Ursula stood at a long, low, zinc-covered barrier, along with hundreds of other spectral people, and all the way down the vast, raw darkness was this low stretch of open bags and spectral people, whilst, on the other side of the barrier, pallid officials in peaked caps and moustaches were turning the underclothing in the bags, then scrawling a chalk-mark.

It was done. Birkin snapped the hand bags, off they went, the porter coming behind. They were through a great doorway, and in the open night again — ah, a railway platform! Voices were still calling in inhuman agitation through the dark-grey air, spectres were running along the darkness between the train.

‘Koln — Berlin — ’ Ursula made out on the boards hung on the high train on one side.

‘Here we are,’ said Birkin. And on her side she saw: ‘Elsass — Lothringen — Luxembourg, Metz — Basle.’

‘That was it, Basle!’

The porter came up.

‘A Bale — deuxieme classe? — Voila!’ And he clambered into the high train. They followed. The compartments were already some of them taken. But many were dim and empty. The luggage was stowed, the porter was tipped.

‘Nous avons encore — ?’ said Birkin, looking at his watch and at the porter.

‘Encore une demi-heure.’ With which, in his blue blouse, he disappeared. He was ugly and insolent.

‘Come,’ said Birkin. ‘It is cold. Let us eat.’

There was a coffee-wagon on the platform. They drank hot, watery coffee, and ate the long rolls, split, with ham between, which were such a wide bite that it almost dislocated Ursula’s jaw; and they walked beside the high trains. It was all so strange, so extremely desolate, like the underworld, grey, grey, dirt grey, desolate, forlorn, nowhere — grey, dreary nowhere.

At last they were moving through the night. In the darkness Ursula made out the flat fields, the wet flat dreary darkness of the Continent. They pulled up surprisingly soon — Bruges! Then on through the level darkness, with glimpses of sleeping farms and thin poplar trees and deserted high-roads. She sat dismayed, hand in hand with Birkin. He pale, immobile like a REVENANT himself, looked sometimes out of the window, sometimes closed his eyes. Then his eyes opened again, dark as the darkness outside.

A flash of a few lights on the darkness — Ghent station! A few more spectres moving outside on the platform — then the bell — then motion again through the level darkness. Ursula saw a man with a lantern come out of a farm by the railway, and cross to the dark farm-buildings. She thought of the Marsh, the old,

intimate farm-life at Cossethay. My God, how far was she projected from her childhood, how far was she still to go! In one life-time one travelled through aeons. The great chasm of memory from her childhood in the intimate country surroundings of Cossethay and the Marsh Farm — she remembered the servant Tilly, who used to give her bread and butter sprinkled with brown sugar, in the old living-room where the grandfather clock had two pink roses in a basket painted above the figures on the face — and now when she was travelling into the unknown with Birkin, an utter stranger — was so great, that it seemed she had no identity, that the child she had been, playing in Cossethay churchyard, was a little creature of history, not really herself.

They were at Brussels — half an hour for breakfast. They got down. On the great station clock it said six o'clock. They had coffee and rolls and honey in the vast desert refreshment room, so dreary, always so dreary, dirty, so spacious, such desolation of space. But she washed her face and hands in hot water, and combed her hair — that was a blessing.

Soon they were in the train again and moving on. The greyness of dawn began. There were several people in the compartment, large florid Belgian business-men with long brown beards, talking incessantly in an ugly French she was too tired to follow.

It seemed the train ran by degrees out of the darkness into a faint light, then beat after beat into the day. Ah, how weary it was! Faintly, the trees showed, like shadows. Then a house, white, had a curious distinctness. How was it? Then she saw a village — there were always houses passing.

This was an old world she was still journeying through, winter-heavy and dreary. There was plough-land and pasture, and copses of bare trees, copses of bushes, and homesteads naked and work-bare. No new earth had come to pass.

She looked at Birkin's face. It was white and still and eternal, too eternal. She linked her fingers imploringly in his, under the cover of her rug. His fingers responded, his eyes looked back at her. How dark, like a night, his eyes were, like another world beyond! Oh, if he were the world as well, if only the world were he! If only he could call a world into being, that should be their own world!

The Belgians left, the train ran on, through Luxembourg, through Alsace-Lorraine, through Metz. But she was blind, she could see no more. Her soul did not look out.

They came at last to Basle, to the hotel. It was all a drifting trance, from which she never came to. They went out in the morning, before the train departed. She saw the street, the river, she stood on the bridge. But it all meant nothing. She remembered some shops — one full of pictures, one with orange velvet and ermine. But what did these signify? — nothing.

She was not at ease till they were in the train again. Then she was relieved. So long as they were moving onwards, she was satisfied. They came to Zurich, then, before very long, ran under the mountains, that were deep in snow. At last she was drawing near. This was the other world now.

Innsbruck was wonderful, deep in snow, and evening. They drove in an open sledge over the snow: the train had been so hot and stifling. And the hotel, with the golden light glowing under the porch, seemed like a home.

They laughed with pleasure when they were in the hall. The place seemed full and busy.

‘Do you know if Mr and Mrs Crich — English — from Paris, have arrived?’ Birkin asked in German.

The porter reflected a moment, and was just going to answer, when Ursula caught sight of Gudrun sauntering down the stairs, wearing her dark glossy coat, with grey fur.

‘Gudrun! Gudrun!’ she called, waving up the well of the staircase. ‘Shu-hu!’

Gudrun looked over the rail, and immediately lost her sauntering, diffident air. Her eyes flashed.

‘Really — Ursula!’ she cried. And she began to move downstairs as Ursula ran up. They met at a turn and kissed with laughter and exclamations inarticulate and stirring.

‘But!’ cried Gudrun, mortified. ‘We thought it was TOMORROW you were coming! I wanted to come to the station.’

‘No, we’ve come today!’ cried Ursula. ‘Isn’t it lovely here!’

‘Adorable!’ said Gudrun. ‘Gerald’s just gone out to get something. Ursula, aren’t you FEARFULLY tired?’

‘No, not so very. But I look a filthy sight, don’t I!’

‘No, you don’t. You look almost perfectly fresh. I like that fur cap IMMENSELY!’ She glanced over Ursula, who wore a big soft coat with a collar of deep, soft, blond fur, and a soft blond cap of fur.

‘And you!’ cried Ursula. ‘What do you think YOU look like!’

Gudrun assumed an unconcerned, expressionless face.

‘Do you like it?’ she said.

‘It’s VERY fine!’ cried Ursula, perhaps with a touch of satire.

‘Go up — or come down,’ said Birkin. For there the sisters stood, Gudrun with her hand on Ursula’s arm, on the turn of the stairs half way to the first landing, blocking the way and affording full entertainment to the whole of the hall below, from the door porter to the plump Jew in black clothes.

The two young women slowly mounted, followed by Birkin and the waiter.

‘First floor?’ asked Gudrun, looking back over her shoulder.

‘Second Madam — the lift!’ the waiter replied. And he darted to the elevator to forestall the two women. But they ignored him, as, chattering without heed, they set to mount the second flight. Rather chagrined, the waiter followed.

It was curious, the delight of the sisters in each other, at this meeting. It was as if they met in exile, and united their solitary forces against all the world. Birkin looked on with some mistrust and wonder.

When they had bathed and changed, Gerald came in. He looked shining like the sun on frost.

‘Go with Gerald and smoke,’ said Ursula to Birkin. ‘Gudrun and I want to talk.’

Then the sisters sat in Gudrun’s bedroom, and talked clothes, and experiences. Gudrun told Ursula the experience of the Birkin letter in the cafe. Ursula was shocked and frightened.

‘Where is the letter?’ she asked.

‘I kept it,’ said Gudrun.

‘You’ll give it me, won’t you?’ she said.

But Gudrun was silent for some moments, before she replied:

‘Do you really want it, Ursula?’

‘I want to read it,’ said Ursula.

‘Certainly,’ said Gudrun.

Even now, she could not admit, to Ursula, that she wanted to keep it, as a memento, or a symbol. But Ursula knew, and was not pleased. So the subject was switched off.

‘What did you do in Paris?’ asked Ursula.

‘Oh,’ said Gudrun laconically — ‘the usual things. We had a FINE party one night in Fanny Bath’s studio.’

‘Did you? And you and Gerald were there! Who else? Tell me about it.’

‘Well,’ said Gudrun. ‘There’s nothing particular to tell. You know Fanny is FRIGHTFULLY in love with that painter, Billy Macfarlane. He was there — so Fanny spared nothing, she spent VERY freely. It was really remarkable! Of course, everybody got fearfully drunk — but in an interesting way, not like that filthy London crowd. The fact is these were all people that matter, which makes all the difference. There was a Roumanian, a fine chap. He got completely drunk, and climbed to the top of a high studio ladder, and gave the most marvellous address — really, Ursula, it was wonderful! He began in French — *La vie, c’est une affaire d’ames imperiales* — in a most beautiful voice — he was a fine-looking chap — but he had got into Roumanian before he had finished, and not a soul understood. But Donald Gilchrist was worked to a frenzy. He dashed his glass to the ground, and declared, by God, he was glad he

had been born, by God, it was a miracle to be alive. And do you know, Ursula, so it was — ’ Gudrun laughed rather hollowly.

‘But how was Gerald among them all?’ asked Ursula.

‘Gerald! Oh, my word, he came out like a dandelion in the sun! HE’S a whole saturnalia in himself, once he is roused. I shouldn’t like to say whose waist his arm did not go round. Really, Ursula, he seems to reap the women like a harvest. There wasn’t one that would have resisted him. It was too amazing! Can you understand it?’

Ursula reflected, and a dancing light came into her eyes.

‘Yes,’ she said. ‘I can. He is such a whole-hogger.’

‘Whole-hogger! I should think so!’ exclaimed Gudrun. ‘But it is true, Ursula, every woman in the room was ready to surrender to him. Chanticleer isn’t in it — even Fanny Bath, who is GENUINELY in love with Billy Macfarlane! I never was more amazed in my life! And you know, afterwards — I felt I was a whole ROOMFUL of women. I was no more myself to him, than I was Queen Victoria. I was a whole roomful of women at once. It was most astounding! But my eye, I’d caught a Sultan that time — ’

Gudrun’s eyes were flashing, her cheek was hot, she looked strange, exotic, satiric. Ursula was fascinated at once — and yet uneasy.

They had to get ready for dinner. Gudrun came down in a daring gown of vivid green silk and tissue of gold, with green velvet bodice and a strange black-and-white band round her hair. She was really brilliantly beautiful and everybody noticed her. Gerald was in that full-blooded, gleaming state when he was most handsome. Birkin watched them with quick, laughing, half-sinister eyes, Ursula quite lost her head. There seemed a spell, almost a blinding spell, cast round their table, as if they were lighted up more strongly than the rest of the dining-room.

‘Don’t you love to be in this place?’ cried Gudrun. ‘Isn’t the snow wonderful! Do you notice how it exalts everything? It is simply marvellous. One really does feel LIBERMENSCHLICH — more than human.’

‘One does,’ cried Ursula. ‘But isn’t that partly the being out of England?’

‘Oh, of course,’ cried Gudrun. ‘One could never feel like this in England, for the simple reason that the damper is NEVER lifted off one, there. It is quite impossible really to let go, in England, of that I am assured.’

And she turned again to the food she was eating. She was fluttering with vivid intensity.

‘It’s quite true,’ said Gerald, ‘it never is quite the same in England. But perhaps we don’t want it to be — perhaps it’s like bringing the light a little too near the powder-magazine, to let go altogether, in England. One is afraid what

might happen, if EVERYBODY ELSE let go.'

'My God!' cried Gudrun. 'But wouldn't it be wonderful, if all England did suddenly go off like a display of fireworks.'

'It couldn't,' said Ursula. 'They are all too damp, the powder is damp in them.'

'I'm not so sure of that,' said Gerald.

'Nor I,' said Birkin. 'When the English really begin to go off, EN MASSE, it'll be time to shut your ears and run.'

'They never will,' said Ursula.

'We'll see,' he replied.

'Isn't it marvellous,' said Gudrun, 'how thankful one can be, to be out of one's country. I cannot believe myself, I am so transported, the moment I set foot on a foreign shore. I say to myself "Here steps a new creature into life."'

'Don't be too hard on poor old England,' said Gerald. 'Though we curse it, we love it really.'

To Ursula, there seemed a fund of cynicism in these words.

'We may,' said Birkin. 'But it's a damnably uncomfortable love: like a love for an aged parent who suffers horribly from a complication of diseases, for which there is no hope.'

Gudrun looked at him with dilated dark eyes.

'You think there is no hope?' she asked, in her pertinent fashion.

But Birkin backed away. He would not answer such a question.

'Any hope of England's becoming real? God knows. It's a great actual unreality now, an aggregation into unreality. It might be real, if there were no Englishmen.'

'You think the English will have to disappear?' persisted Gudrun. It was strange, her pointed interest in his answer. It might have been her own fate she was inquiring after. Her dark, dilated eyes rested on Birkin, as if she could conjure the truth of the future out of him, as out of some instrument of divination.

He was pale. Then, reluctantly, he answered:

'Well — what else is in front of them, but disappearance? They've got to disappear from their own special brand of Englishness, anyhow.'

Gudrun watched him as if in a hypnotic state, her eyes wide and fixed on him.

'But in what way do you mean, disappear? — ' she persisted.

'Yes, do you mean a change of heart?' put in Gerald.

'I don't mean anything, why should I?' said Birkin. 'I'm an Englishman, and I've paid the price of it. I can't talk about England — I can only speak for myself.'

‘Yes,’ said Gudrun slowly, ‘you love England immensely, IMMENSELY, Rupert.’

‘And leave her,’ he replied.

‘No, not for good. You’ll come back,’ said Gerald, nodding sagely.

‘They say the lice crawl off a dying body,’ said Birkin, with a glare of bitterness. ‘So I leave England.’

‘Ah, but you’ll come back,’ said Gudrun, with a sardonic smile.

‘Tant pis pour moi,’ he replied.

‘Isn’t he angry with his mother country!’ laughed Gerald, amused.

‘Ah, a patriot!’ said Gudrun, with something like a sneer.

Birkin refused to answer any more.

Gudrun watched him still for a few seconds. Then she turned away. It was finished, her spell of divination in him. She felt already purely cynical. She looked at Gerald. He was wonderful like a piece of radium to her. She felt she could consume herself and know ALL, by means of this fatal, living metal. She smiled to herself at her fancy. And what would she do with herself, when she had destroyed herself? For if spirit, if integral being is destructible, Matter is indestructible.

He was looking bright and abstracted, puzzled, for the moment. She stretched out her beautiful arm, with its fluff of green tulle, and touched his chin with her subtle, artist’s fingers.

‘What are they then?’ she asked, with a strange, knowing smile.

‘What?’ he replied, his eyes suddenly dilating with wonder.

‘Your thoughts.’

Gerald looked like a man coming awake.

‘I think I had none,’ he said.

‘Really!’ she said, with grave laughter in her voice.

And to Birkin it was as if she killed Gerald, with that touch.

‘Ah but,’ cried Gudrun, ‘let us drink to Britannia — let us drink to Britannia.’

It seemed there was wild despair in her voice. Gerald laughed, and filled the glasses.

‘I think Rupert means,’ he said, ‘that NATIONALLY all Englishmen must die, so that they can exist individually and — ’

‘Supernationally — ’ put in Gudrun, with a slight ironic grimace, raising her glass.

The next day, they descended at the tiny railway station of Hohenhausen, at the end of the tiny valley railway. It was snow everywhere, a white, perfect cradle of snow, new and frozen, sweeping up on either side, black crags, and white sweeps of silver towards the blue pale heavens.

As they stepped out on the naked platform, with only snow around and above, Gudrun shrank as if it chilled her heart.

‘My God, Jerry,’ she said, turning to Gerald with sudden intimacy, ‘you’ve done it now.’

‘What?’

She made a faint gesture, indicating the world on either hand.

‘Look at it!’

She seemed afraid to go on. He laughed.

They were in the heart of the mountains. From high above, on either side, swept down the white fold of snow, so that one seemed small and tiny in a valley of pure concrete heaven, all strangely radiant and changeless and silent.

‘It makes one feel so small and alone,’ said Ursula, turning to Birkin and laying her hand on his arm.

‘You’re not sorry you’ve come, are you?’ said Gerald to Gudrun.

She looked doubtful. They went out of the station between banks of snow.

‘Ah,’ said Gerald, sniffing the air in elation, ‘this is perfect. There’s our sledge. We’ll walk a bit — we’ll run up the road.’

Gudrun, always doubtful, dropped her heavy coat on the sledge, as he did his, and they set off. Suddenly she threw up her head and set off scudding along the road of snow, pulling her cap down over her ears. Her blue, bright dress fluttered in the wind, her thick scarlet stockings were brilliant above the whiteness. Gerald watched her: she seemed to be rushing towards her fate, and leaving him behind. He let her get some distance, then, loosening his limbs, he went after her.

Everywhere was deep and silent snow. Great snow-eaves weighed down the broad-roofed Tyrolese houses, that were sunk to the window-sashes in snow. Peasant-women, full-skirted, wearing each a cross-over shawl, and thick snow-boots, turned in the way to look at the soft, determined girl running with such heavy fleetness from the man, who was overtaking her, but not gaining any power over her.

They passed the inn with its painted shutters and balcony, a few cottages, half buried in the snow; then the snow-buried silent sawmill by the roofed bridge, which crossed the hidden stream, over which they ran into the very depth of the untouched sheets of snow. It was a silence and a sheer whiteness exhilarating to madness. But the perfect silence was most terrifying, isolating the soul, surrounding the heart with frozen air.

‘It’s a marvellous place, for all that,’ said Gudrun, looking into his eyes with a strange, meaning look. His soul leapt.

‘Good,’ he said.

A fierce electric energy seemed to flow over all his limbs, his muscles were surcharged, his hands felt hard with strength. They walked along rapidly up the snow-road, that was marked by withered branches of trees stuck in at intervals. He and she were separate, like opposite poles of one fierce energy. But they felt powerful enough to leap over the confines of life into the forbidden places, and back again.

Birkin and Ursula were running along also, over the snow. He had disposed of the luggage, and they had a little start of the sledges. Ursula was excited and happy, but she kept turning suddenly to catch hold of Birkin's arm, to make sure of him.

'This is something I never expected,' she said. 'It is a different world, here.'

They went on into a snow meadow. There they were overtaken by the sledge, that came tinkling through the silence. It was another mile before they came upon Gudrun and Gerald on the steep up-climb, beside the pink, half-buried shrine.

Then they passed into a gulley, where were walls of black rock and a river filled with snow, and a still blue sky above. Through a covered bridge they went, drumming roughly over the boards, crossing the snow-bed once more, then slowly up and up, the horses walking swiftly, the driver cracking his long whip as he walked beside, and calling his strange wild HUE-HUE!, the walls of rock passing slowly by, till they emerged again between slopes and masses of snow. Up and up, gradually they went, through the cold shadow-radiance of the afternoon, silenced by the imminence of the mountains, the luminous, dazing sides of snow that rose above them and fell away beneath.

They came forth at last in a little high table-land of snow, where stood the last peaks of snow like the heart petals of an open rose. In the midst of the last deserted valleys of heaven stood a lonely building with brown wooden walls and white heavy roof, deep and deserted in the waste of snow, like a dream. It stood like a rock that had rolled down from the last steep slopes, a rock that had taken the form of a house, and was now half-buried. It was unbelievable that one could live there uncrushed by all this terrible waste of whiteness and silence and clear, upper, ringing cold.

Yet the sledges ran up in fine style, people came to the door laughing and excited, the floor of the hostel rang hollow, the passage was wet with snow, it was a real, warm interior.

The newcomers tramped up the bare wooden stairs, following the serving woman. Gudrun and Gerald took the first bedroom. In a moment they found themselves alone in a bare, smallish, close-shut room that was all of golden-coloured wood, floor, walls, ceiling, door, all of the same warm gold panelling

of oiled pine. There was a window opposite the door, but low down, because the roof sloped. Under the slope of the ceiling were the table with wash-hand bowl and jug, and across, another table with mirror. On either side the door were two beds piled high with an enormous blue-checked overbolster, enormous.

This was all — no cupboard, none of the amenities of life. Here they were shut up together in this cell of golden-coloured wood, with two blue checked beds. They looked at each other and laughed, frightened by this naked nearness of isolation.

A man knocked and came in with the luggage. He was a sturdy fellow with flattish cheek-bones, rather pale, and with coarse fair moustache. Gudrun watched him put down the bags, in silence, then tramp heavily out.

‘It isn’t too rough, is it?’ Gerald asked.

The bedroom was not very warm, and she shivered slightly.

‘It is wonderful,’ she equivocated. ‘Look at the colour of this panelling — it’s wonderful, like being inside a nut.’

He was standing watching her, feeling his short-cut moustache, leaning back slightly and watching her with his keen, undaunted eyes, dominated by the constant passion, that was like a doom upon him.

She went and crouched down in front of the window, curious.

‘Oh, but this — !’ she cried involuntarily, almost in pain.

In front was a valley shut in under the sky, the last huge slopes of snow and black rock, and at the end, like the navel of the earth, a white-folded wall, and two peaks glimmering in the late light. Straight in front ran the cradle of silent snow, between the great slopes that were fringed with a little roughness of pine-trees, like hair, round the base. But the cradle of snow ran on to the eternal closing-in, where the walls of snow and rock rose impenetrable, and the mountain peaks above were in heaven immediate. This was the centre, the knot, the navel of the world, where the earth belonged to the skies, pure, unapproachable, impassable.

It filled Gudrun with a strange rapture. She crouched in front of the window, clenching her face in her hands, in a sort of trance. At last she had arrived, she had reached her place. Here at last she folded her venture and settled down like a crystal in the navel of snow, and was gone.

Gerald bent above her and was looking out over her shoulder. Already he felt he was alone. She was gone. She was completely gone, and there was icy vapour round his heart. He saw the blind valley, the great cul-de-sac of snow and mountain peaks, under the heaven. And there was no way out. The terrible silence and cold and the glamorous whiteness of the dusk wrapped him round, and she remained crouching before the window, as at a shrine, a shadow.

‘Do you like it?’ he asked, in a voice that sounded detached and foreign. At least she might acknowledge he was with her. But she only averted her soft, mute face a little from his gaze. And he knew that there were tears in her eyes, her own tears, tears of her strange religion, that put him to nought.

Quite suddenly, he put his hand under her chin and lifted up her face to him. Her dark blue eyes, in their wetness of tears, dilated as if she was startled in her very soul. They looked at him through their tears in terror and a little horror. His light blue eyes were keen, small-pupilled and unnatural in their vision. Her lips parted, as she breathed with difficulty.

The passion came up in him, stroke after stroke, like the ringing of a bronze bell, so strong and unflawed and indomitable. His knees tightened to bronze as he hung above her soft face, whose lips parted and whose eyes dilated in a strange violation. In the grasp of his hand her chin was unutterably soft and silken. He felt strong as winter, his hands were living metal, invincible and not to be turned aside. His heart rang like a bell clanging inside him.

He took her up in his arms. She was soft and inert, motionless. All the while her eyes, in which the tears had not yet dried, were dilated as if in a kind of swoon of fascination and helplessness. He was superhumanly strong, and unflawed, as if invested with supernatural force.

He lifted her close and folded her against him. Her softness, her inert, relaxed weight lay against his own surcharged, bronze-like limbs in a heaviness of desirability that would destroy him, if he were not fulfilled. She moved convulsively, recoiling away from him. His heart went up like a flame of ice, he closed over her like steel. He would destroy her rather than be denied.

But the overweening power of his body was too much for her. She relaxed again, and lay loose and soft, panting in a little delirium. And to him, she was so sweet, she was such bliss of release, that he would have suffered a whole eternity of torture rather than forego one second of this pang of unsurpassable bliss.

‘My God,’ he said to her, his face drawn and strange, transfigured, ‘what next?’

She lay perfectly still, with a still, child-like face and dark eyes, looking at him. She was lost, fallen right away.

‘I shall always love you,’ he said, looking at her.

But she did not hear. She lay, looking at him as at something she could never understand, never: as a child looks at a grown-up person, without hope of understanding, only submitting.

He kissed her, kissed her eyes shut, so that she could not look any more. He wanted something now, some recognition, some sign, some admission. But she only lay silent and child-like and remote, like a child that is overcome and

cannot understand, only feels lost. He kissed her again, giving up.

‘Shall we go down and have coffee and Kuchen?’ he asked.

The twilight was falling slate-blue at the window. She closed her eyes, closed away the monotonous level of dead wonder, and opened them again to the everyday world.

‘Yes,’ she said briefly, regaining her will with a click. She went again to the window. Blue evening had fallen over the cradle of snow and over the great pallid slopes. But in the heaven the peaks of snow were rosy, glistening like transcendent, radiant spikes of blossom in the heavenly upper-world, so lovely and beyond.

Gudrun saw all their loveliness, she KNEW how immortally beautiful they were, great pistils of rose-coloured, snow-fed fire in the blue twilight of the heaven. She could SEE it, she knew it, but she was not of it. She was divorced, debarred, a soul shut out.

With a last look of remorse, she turned away, and was doing her hair. He had unstrapped the luggage, and was waiting, watching her. She knew he was watching her. It made her a little hasty and feverish in her precipitation.

They went downstairs, both with a strange other-world look on their faces, and with a glow in their eyes. They saw Birkin and Ursula sitting at the long table in a corner, waiting for them.

‘How good and simple they look together,’ Gudrun thought, jealously. She envied them some spontaneity, a childish sufficiency to which she herself could never approach. They seemed such children to her.

‘Such good Kranzkuchen!’ cried Ursula greedily. ‘So good!’

‘Right,’ said Gudrun. ‘Can we have Kaffee mit Kranzkuchen?’ she added to the waiter.

And she seated herself on the bench beside Gerald. Birkin, looking at them, felt a pain of tenderness for them.

‘I think the place is really wonderful, Gerald,’ he said; ‘prachtvoll and wunderbar and wunderschön and unbeschreiblich and all the other German adjectives.’

Gerald broke into a slight smile.

‘I like it,’ he said.

The tables, of white scrubbed wood, were placed round three sides of the room, as in a Gasthaus. Birkin and Ursula sat with their backs to the wall, which was of oiled wood, and Gerald and Gudrun sat in the corner next them, near to the stove. It was a fairly large place, with a tiny bar, just like a country inn, but quite simple and bare, and all of oiled wood, ceilings and walls and floor, the only furniture being the tables and benches going round three sides, the great

green stove, and the bar and the doors on the fourth side. The windows were double, and quite uncurtained. It was early evening.

The coffee came — hot and good — and a whole ring of cake.

‘A whole Kuchen!’ cried Ursula. ‘They give you more than us! I want some of yours.’

There were other people in the place, ten altogether, so Birkin had found out: two artists, three students, a man and wife, and a Professor and two daughters — all Germans. The four English people, being newcomers, sat in their coign of vantage to watch. The Germans peeped in at the door, called a word to the waiter, and went away again. It was not meal-time, so they did not come into this dining-room, but betook themselves, when their boots were changed, to the Reunionsaal.

The English visitors could hear the occasional twanging of a zither, the strumming of a piano, snatches of laughter and shouting and singing, a faint vibration of voices. The whole building being of wood, it seemed to carry every sound, like a drum, but instead of increasing each particular noise, it decreased it, so that the sound of the zither seemed tiny, as if a diminutive zither were playing somewhere, and it seemed the piano must be a small one, like a little spinet.

The host came when the coffee was finished. He was a Tyrolese, broad, rather flat-cheeked, with a pale, pock-marked skin and flourishing moustaches.

‘Would you like to go to the Reunionsaal to be introduced to the other ladies and gentlemen?’ he asked, bending forward and smiling, showing his large, strong teeth. His blue eyes went quickly from one to the other — he was not quite sure of his ground with these English people. He was unhappy too because he spoke no English and he was not sure whether to try his French.

‘Shall we go to the Reunionsaal, and be introduced to the other people?’ repeated Gerald, laughing.

There was a moment’s hesitation.

‘I suppose we’d better — better break the ice,’ said Birkin.

The women rose, rather flushed. And the Wirt’s black, beetle-like, broad-shouldered figure went on ignominiously in front, towards the noise. He opened the door and ushered the four strangers into the play-room.

Instantly a silence fell, a slight embarrassment came over the company. The newcomers had a sense of many blond faces looking their way. Then, the host was bowing to a short, energetic-looking man with large moustaches, and saying in a low voice:

‘Herr Professor, darf ich vorstellen-’

The Herr Professor was prompt and energetic. He bowed low to the English

people, smiling, and began to be a comrade at once.

‘Nehmen die Herrschaften teil an unserer Unterhaltung?’ he said, with a vigorous suavity, his voice curling up in the question.

The four English people smiled, lounging with an attentive uneasiness in the middle of the room. Gerald, who was spokesman, said that they would willingly take part in the entertainment. Gudrun and Ursula, laughing, excited, felt the eyes of all the men upon them, and they lifted their heads and looked nowhere, and felt royal.

The Professor announced the names of those present, SANS CEREMONIE. There was a bowing to the wrong people and to the right people. Everybody was there, except the man and wife. The two tall, clear-skinned, athletic daughters of the professor, with their plain-cut, dark blue blouses and loden skirts, their rather long, strong necks, their clear blue eyes and carefully banded hair, and their blushes, bowed and stood back; the three students bowed very low, in the humble hope of making an impression of extreme good-breeding; then there was a thin, dark-skinned man with full eyes, an odd creature, like a child, and like a troll, quick, detached; he bowed slightly; his companion, a large fair young man, stylishly dressed, blushed to the eyes and bowed very low.

It was over.

‘Herr Loerke was giving us a recitation in the Cologne dialect,’ said the Professor.

‘He must forgive us for interrupting him,’ said Gerald, ‘we should like very much to hear it.’

There was instantly a bowing and an offering of seats. Gudrun and Ursula, Gerald and Birkin sat in the deep sofas against the wall. The room was of naked oiled panelling, like the rest of the house. It had a piano, sofas and chairs, and a couple of tables with books and magazines. In its complete absence of decoration, save for the big, blue stove, it was cosy and pleasant.

Herr Loerke was the little man with the boyish figure, and the round, full, sensitive-looking head, and the quick, full eyes, like a mouse’s. He glanced swiftly from one to the other of the strangers, and held himself aloof.

‘Please go on with the recitation,’ said the Professor, suavely, with his slight authority. Loerke, who was sitting hunched on the piano stool, blinked and did not answer.

‘It would be a great pleasure,’ said Ursula, who had been getting the sentence ready, in German, for some minutes.

Then, suddenly, the small, unresponding man swung aside, towards his previous audience and broke forth, exactly as he had broken off; in a controlled, mocking voice, giving an imitation of a quarrel between an old Cologne woman

and a railway guard.

His body was slight and unformed, like a boy's, but his voice was mature, sardonic, its movement had the flexibility of essential energy, and of a mocking penetrating understanding. Gudrun could not understand a word of his monologue, but she was spell-bound, watching him. He must be an artist, nobody else could have such fine adjustment and singleness. The Germans were doubled up with laughter, hearing his strange droll words, his droll phrases of dialect. And in the midst of their paroxysms, they glanced with deference at the four English strangers, the elect. Gudrun and Ursula were forced to laugh. The room rang with shouts of laughter. The blue eyes of the Professor's daughters were swimming over with laughter-tears, their clear cheeks were flushed crimson with mirth, their father broke out in the most astonishing peals of hilarity, the students bowed their heads on their knees in excess of joy. Ursula looked round amazed, the laughter was bubbling out of her involuntarily. She looked at Gudrun. Gudrun looked at her, and the two sisters burst out laughing, carried away. Loerke glanced at them swiftly, with his full eyes. Birkin was sniggering involuntarily. Gerald Crich sat erect, with a glistening look of amusement on his face. And the laughter crashed out again, in wild paroxysms, the Professor's daughters were reduced to shaking helplessness, the veins of the Professor's neck were swollen, his face was purple, he was strangled in ultimate, silent spasms of laughter. The students were shouting half-articulated words that tailed off in helpless explosions. Then suddenly the rapid patter of the artist ceased, there were little whoops of subsiding mirth, Ursula and Gudrun were wiping their eyes, and the Professor was crying loudly.

'Das war ausgezeichnet, das war famos — '

'Wirklich famos,' echoed his exhausted daughters, faintly.

'And we couldn't understand it,' cried Ursula.

'Oh leider, leider!' cried the Professor.

'You couldn't understand it?' cried the Students, let loose at last in speech with the newcomers. 'Ja, das ist wirklich schade, das ist schade, gnadige Frau. Wissen Sie — '

The mixture was made, the newcomers were stirred into the party, like new ingredients, the whole room was alive. Gerald was in his element, he talked freely and excitedly, his face glistened with a strange amusement. Perhaps even Birkin, in the end, would break forth. He was shy and withheld, though full of attention.

Ursula was prevailed upon to sing 'Annie Lowrie,' as the Professor called it. There was a hush of EXTREME deference. She had never been so flattered in her life. Gudrun accompanied her on the piano, playing from memory.

Ursula had a beautiful ringing voice, but usually no confidence, she spoiled everything. This evening she felt conceited and untrammelled. Birkin was well in the background, she shone almost in reaction, the Germans made her feel fine and infallible, she was liberated into overweening self-confidence. She felt like a bird flying in the air, as her voice soared out, enjoying herself extremely in the balance and flight of the song, like the motion of a bird's wings that is up in the wind, sliding and playing on the air, she played with sentimentality, supported by rapturous attention. She was very happy, singing that song by herself, full of a conceit of emotion and power, working upon all those people, and upon herself, exerting herself with gratification, giving immeasurable gratification to the Germans.

At the end, the Germans were all touched with admiring, delicious melancholy, they praised her in soft, reverent voices, they could not say too much.

‘Wie schon, wie ruhend! Ach, die Schottischen Lieder, sie haben so viel Stimmung! Aber die gnadige Frau hat eine WUNDERBARE Stimme; die gnadige Frau ist wirklich eine Kunstlerin, aber wirklich!’

She was dilated and brilliant, like a flower in the morning sun. She felt Birkin looking at her, as if he were jealous of her, and her breasts thrilled, her veins were all golden. She was as happy as the sun that has just opened above clouds. And everybody seemed so admiring and radiant, it was perfect.

After dinner she wanted to go out for a minute, to look at the world. The company tried to dissuade her — it was so terribly cold. But just to look, she said.

They all four wrapped up warmly, and found themselves in a vague, unsubstantial outdoors of dim snow and ghosts of an upper-world, that made strange shadows before the stars. It was indeed cold, bruisingly, frighteningly, unnaturally cold. Ursula could not believe the air in her nostrils. It seemed conscious, malevolent, purposive in its intense murderous coldness.

Yet it was wonderful, an intoxication, a silence of dim, unrealised snow, of the invisible intervening between her and the visible, between her and the flashing stars. She could see Orion sloping up. How wonderful he was, wonderful enough to make one cry aloud.

And all around was this cradle of snow, and there was firm snow underfoot, that struck with heavy cold through her boot-soles. It was night, and silence. She imagined she could hear the stars. She imagined distinctly she could hear the celestial, musical motion of the stars, quite near at hand. She seemed like a bird flying amongst their harmonious motion.

And she clung close to Birkin. Suddenly she realised she did not know what

he was thinking. She did not know where he was ranging.

‘My love!’ she said, stopping to look at him.

His face was pale, his eyes dark, there was a faint spark of starlight on them. And he saw her face soft and upturned to him, very near. He kissed her softly.

‘What then?’ he asked.

‘Do you love me?’ she asked.

‘Too much,’ he answered quietly.

She clung a little closer.

‘Not too much,’ she pleaded.

‘Far too much,’ he said, almost sadly.

‘And does it make you sad, that I am everything to you?’ she asked, wistful. He held her close to him, kissing her, and saying, scarcely audible:

‘No, but I feel like a beggar — I feel poor.’

She was silent, looking at the stars now. Then she kissed him.

‘Don’t be a beggar,’ she pleaded, wistfully. ‘It isn’t ignominious that you love me.’

‘It is ignominious to feel poor, isn’t it?’ he replied.

‘Why? Why should it be?’ she asked. He only stood still, in the terribly cold air that moved invisibly over the mountain tops, folding her round with his arms.

‘I couldn’t bear this cold, eternal place without you,’ he said. ‘I couldn’t bear it, it would kill the quick of my life.’

She kissed him again, suddenly.

‘Do you hate it?’ she asked, puzzled, wondering.

‘If I couldn’t come near to you, if you weren’t here, I should hate it. I couldn’t bear it,’ he answered.

‘But the people are nice,’ she said.

‘I mean the stillness, the cold, the frozen eternity,’ he said.

She wondered. Then her spirit came home to him, nestling unconscious in him.

‘Yes, it is good we are warm and together,’ she said.

And they turned home again. They saw the golden lights of the hotel glowing out in the night of snow-silence, small in the hollow, like a cluster of yellow berries. It seemed like a bunch of sun-sparks, tiny and orange in the midst of the snow-darkness. Behind, was a high shadow of a peak, blotting out the stars, like a ghost.

They drew near to their home. They saw a man come from the dark building, with a lighted lantern which swung golden, and made that his dark feet walked in a halo of snow. He was a small, dark figure in the darkened snow. He unlatched the door of an outhouse. A smell of cows, hot, animal, almost like

beef, came out on the heavily cold air. There was a glimpse of two cattle in their dark stalls, then the door was shut again, and not a chink of light showed. It had reminded Ursula again of home, of the Marsh, of her childhood, and of the journey to Brussels, and, strangely, of Anton Skrebensky.

Oh, God, could one bear it, this past which was gone down the abyss? Could she bear, that it ever had been! She looked round this silent, upper world of snow and stars and powerful cold. There was another world, like views on a magic lantern; The Marsh, Cossethay, Ilkeston, lit up with a common, unreal light. There was a shadowy unreal Ursula, a whole shadow-play of an unreal life. It was as unreal, and circumscribed, as a magic-lantern show. She wished the slides could all be broken. She wished it could be gone for ever, like a lantern-slide which was broken. She wanted to have no past. She wanted to have come down from the slopes of heaven to this place, with Birkin, not to have toiled out of the murk of her childhood and her upbringing, slowly, all soiled. She felt that memory was a dirty trick played upon her. What was this decree, that she should 'remember'? Why not a bath of pure oblivion, a new birth, without any recollections or blemish of a past life. She was with Birkin, she had just come into life, here in the high snow, against the stars. What had she to do with parents and antecedents? She knew herself new and unbegotten, she had no father, no mother, no anterior connections, she was herself, pure and silvery, she belonged only to the oneness with Birkin, a oneness that struck deeper notes, sounding into the heart of the universe, the heart of reality, where she had never existed before.

Even Gudrun was a separate unit, separate, separate, having nothing to do with this self, this Ursula, in her new world of reality. That old shadow-world, the actuality of the past — ah, let it go! She rose free on the wings of her new condition.

Gudrun and Gerald had not come in. They had walked up the valley straight in front of the house, not like Ursula and Birkin, on to the little hill at the right. Gudrun was driven by a strange desire. She wanted to plunge on and on, till she came to the end of the valley of snow. Then she wanted to climb the wall of white finality, climb over, into the peaks that sprang up like sharp petals in the heart of the frozen, mysterious navel of the world. She felt that there, over the strange blind, terrible wall of rocky snow, there in the navel of the mystic world, among the final cluster of peaks, there, in the infolded navel of it all, was her consummation. If she could but come there, alone, and pass into the infolded navel of eternal snow and of uprising, immortal peaks of snow and rock, she would be a oneness with all, she would be herself the eternal, infinite silence, the sleeping, timeless, frozen centre of the All.

They went back to the house, to the Reunionsaal. She was curious to see what was going on. The men there made her alert, roused her curiosity. It was a new taste of life for her, they were so prostrate before her, yet so full of life.

The party was boisterous; they were dancing all together, dancing the Schuhplatteln, the Tyrolese dance of the clapping hands and tossing the partner in the air at the crisis. The Germans were all proficient — they were from Munich chiefly. Gerald also was quite passable. There were three zithers twanging away in a corner. It was a scene of great animation and confusion. The Professor was initiating Ursula into the dance, stamping, clapping, and swinging her high, with amazing force and zest. When the crisis came even Birkin was behaving manfully with one of the Professor's fresh, strong daughters, who was exceedingly happy. Everybody was dancing, there was the most boisterous turmoil.

Gudrun looked on with delight. The solid wooden floor resounded to the knocking heels of the men, the air quivered with the clapping hands and the zither music, there was a golden dust about the hanging lamps.

Suddenly the dance finished, Loerke and the students rushed out to bring in drinks. There was an excited clamour of voices, a clinking of mug-lids, a great crying of 'Prosit — Prosit!' Loerke was everywhere at once, like a gnome, suggesting drinks for the women, making an obscure, slightly risky joke with the men, confusing and mystifying the waiter.

He wanted very much to dance with Gudrun. From the first moment he had seen her, he wanted to make a connection with her. Instinctively she felt this, and she waited for him to come up. But a kind of sulkiness kept him away from her, so she thought he disliked her.

'Will you schuhplatteln, gnadige Frau?' said the large, fair youth, Loerke's companion. He was too soft, too humble for Gudrun's taste. But she wanted to dance, and the fair youth, who was called Leitner, was handsome enough in his uneasy, slightly abject fashion, a humility that covered a certain fear. She accepted him as a partner.

The zithers sounded out again, the dance began. Gerald led them, laughing, with one of the Professor's daughters. Ursula danced with one of the students, Birkin with the other daughter of the Professor, the Professor with Frau Kramer, and the rest of the men danced together, with quite as much zest as if they had had women partners.

Because Gudrun had danced with the well-built, soft youth, his companion, Loerke, was more pettish and exasperated than ever, and would not even notice her existence in the room. This piqued her, but she made up to herself by dancing with the Professor, who was strong as a mature, well-seasoned bull, and

as full of coarse energy. She could not bear him, critically, and yet she enjoyed being rushed through the dance, and tossed up into the air, on his coarse, powerful impetus. The Professor enjoyed it too, he eyed her with strange, large blue eyes, full of galvanic fire. She hated him for the seasoned, semi-paternal animalism with which he regarded her, but she admired his weight of strength.

The room was charged with excitement and strong, animal emotion. Loerke was kept away from Gudrun, to whom he wanted to speak, as by a hedge of thorns, and he felt a sardonic ruthless hatred for this young love-companion, Leitner, who was his penniless dependent. He mocked the youth, with an acid ridicule, that made Leitner red in the face and impotent with resentment.

Gerald, who had now got the dance perfectly, was dancing again with the younger of the Professor's daughters, who was almost dying of virgin excitement, because she thought Gerald so handsome, so superb. He had her in his power, as if she were a palpitating bird, a fluttering, flushing, bewildered creature. And it made him smile, as she shrank convulsively between his hands, violently, when he must throw her into the air. At the end, she was so overcome with prostrate love for him, that she could scarcely speak sensibly at all.

Birkin was dancing with Ursula. There were odd little fires playing in his eyes, he seemed to have turned into something wicked and flickering, mocking, suggestive, quite impossible. Ursula was frightened of him, and fascinated. Clear, before her eyes, as in a vision, she could see the sardonic, licentious mockery of his eyes, he moved towards her with subtle, animal, indifferent approach. The strangeness of his hands, which came quick and cunning, inevitably to the vital place beneath her breasts, and, lifting with mocking, suggestive impulse, carried her through the air as if without strength, through blackmagic, made her swoon with fear. For a moment she revolted, it was horrible. She would break the spell. But before the resolution had formed she had submitted again, yielded to her fear. He knew all the time what he was doing, she could see it in his smiling, concentrated eyes. It was his responsibility, she would leave it to him.

When they were alone in the darkness, she felt the strange, licentiousness of him hovering upon her. She was troubled and repelled. Why should he turn like this?

'What is it?' she asked in dread.

But his face only glistened on her, unknown, horrible. And yet she was fascinated. Her impulse was to repel him violently, break from this spell of mocking brutishness. But she was too fascinated, she wanted to submit, she wanted to know. What would he do to her?

He was so attractive, and so repulsive at one. The sardonic suggestivity that

flickered over his face and looked from his narrowed eyes, made her want to hide, to hide herself away from him and watch him from somewhere unseen.

‘Why are you like this?’ she demanded again, rousing against him with sudden force and animosity.

The flickering fires in his eyes concentrated as he looked into her eyes. Then the lids drooped with a faint motion of satiric contempt. Then they rose again to the same remorseless suggestivity. And she gave way, he might do as he would. His licentiousness was repulsively attractive. But he was self-responsible, she would see what it was.

They might do as they liked — this she realised as she went to sleep. How could anything that gave one satisfaction be excluded? What was degrading? Who cared? Degrading things were real, with a different reality. And he was so unabashed and unrestrained. Wasn’t it rather horrible, a man who could be so soulful and spiritual, now to be so — she balked at her own thoughts and memories: then she added — so bestial? So bestial, they two! — so degraded! She winced. But after all, why not? She exulted as well. Why not be bestial, and go the whole round of experience? She exulted in it. She was bestial. How good it was to be really shameful! There would be no shameful thing she had not experienced. Yet she was unabashed, she was herself. Why not? She was free, when she knew everything, and no dark shameful things were denied her.

Gudrun, who had been watching Gerald in the Reunionsaal, suddenly thought:

‘He should have all the women he can — it is his nature. It is absurd to call him monogamous — he is naturally promiscuous. That is his nature.’

The thought came to her involuntarily. It shocked her somewhat. It was as if she had seen some new MENE! MENE! upon the wall. Yet it was merely true. A voice seemed to have spoken it to her so clearly, that for the moment she believed in inspiration.

‘It is really true,’ she said to herself again.

She knew quite well she had believed it all along. She knew it implicitly. But she must keep it dark — almost from herself. She must keep it completely secret. It was knowledge for her alone, and scarcely even to be admitted to herself.

The deep resolve formed in her, to combat him. One of them must triumph over the other. Which should it be? Her soul steeled itself with strength. Almost she laughed within herself, at her confidence. It woke a certain keen, half contemptuous pity, tenderness for him: she was so ruthless.

Everybody retired early. The Professor and Loerke went into a small lounge to drink. They both watched Gudrun go along the landing by the railing upstairs.

‘Ein schönes Frauenzimmer,’ said the Professor.

‘Ja!’ asserted Loerke, shortly.

Gerald walked with his queer, long wolf-steps across the bedroom to the window, stooped and looked out, then rose again, and turned to Gudrun, his eyes sharp with an abstract smile. He seemed very tall to her, she saw the glisten of his whitish eyebrows, that met between his brows.

‘How do you like it?’ he said.

He seemed to be laughing inside himself, quite unconsciously. She looked at him. He was a phenomenon to her, not a human being: a sort of creature, greedy.

‘I like it very much,’ she replied.

‘Who do you like best downstairs?’ he asked, standing tall and glistening above her, with his glistening stiff hair erect.

‘Who do I like best?’ she repeated, wanting to answer his question, and finding it difficult to collect herself. ‘Why I don’t know, I don’t know enough about them yet, to be able to say. Who do YOU like best?’

‘Oh, I don’t care — I don’t like or dislike any of them. It doesn’t matter about me. I wanted to know about you.’

‘But why?’ she asked, going rather pale. The abstract, unconscious smile in his eyes was intensified.

‘I wanted to know,’ he said.

She turned aside, breaking the spell. In some strange way, she felt he was getting power over her.

‘Well, I can’t tell you already,’ she said.

She went to the mirror to take out the hairpins from her hair. She stood before the mirror every night for some minutes, brushing her fine dark hair. It was part of the inevitable ritual of her life.

He followed her, and stood behind her. She was busy with bent head, taking out the pins and shaking her warm hair loose. When she looked up, she saw him in the glass standing behind her, watching unconsciously, not consciously seeing her, and yet watching, with finepupilled eyes that SEEMED to smile, and which were not really smiling.

She started. It took all her courage for her to continue brushing her hair, as usual, for her to pretend she was at her ease. She was far, far from being at her ease with him. She beat her brains wildly for something to say to him.

‘What are your plans for tomorrow?’ she asked nonchalantly, whilst her heart was beating so furiously, her eyes were so bright with strange nervousness, she felt he could not but observe. But she knew also that he was completely blind, blind as a wolf looking at her. It was a strange battle between her ordinary consciousness and his uncanny, black-art consciousness.

‘I don’t know,’ he replied, ‘what would you like to do?’

He spoke emptily, his mind was sunk away.

‘Oh,’ she said, with easy protestation, ‘I’m ready for anything — anything will be fine for ME, I’m sure.’

And to herself she was saying: ‘God, why am I so nervous — why are you so nervous, you fool. If he sees it I’m done for forever — you KNOW you’re done for forever, if he sees the absurd state you’re in.’

And she smiled to herself as if it were all child’s play. Meanwhile her heart was plunging, she was almost fainting. She could see him, in the mirror, as he stood there behind her, tall and over-arching — blond and terribly frightening. She glanced at his reflection with furtive eyes, willing to give anything to save him from knowing she could see him. He did not know she could see his reflection. He was looking unconsciously, glisteningly down at her head, from which the hair fell loose, as she brushed it with wild, nervous hand. She held her head aside and brushed and brushed her hair madly. For her life, she could not turn round and face him. For her life, SHE COULD NOT. And the knowledge made her almost sink to the ground in a faint, helpless, spent. She was aware of his frightening, impending figure standing close behind her, she was aware of his hard, strong, unyielding chest, close upon her back. And she felt she could not bear it any more, in a few minutes she would fall down at his feet, grovelling at his feet, and letting him destroy her.

The thought pricked up all her sharp intelligence and presence of mind. She dared not turn round to him — and there he stood motionless, unbroken. Summoning all her strength, she said, in a full, resonant, nonchalant voice, that was forced out with all her remaining self-control:

‘Oh, would you mind looking in that bag behind there and giving me my — ’

Here her power fell inert. ‘My what — my what — ?’ she screamed in silence to herself.

But he had started round, surprised and startled that she should ask him to look in her bag, which she always kept so VERY private to herself.

She turned now, her face white, her dark eyes blazing with uncanny, overwrought excitement. She saw him stooping to the bag, undoing the loosely buckled strap, unattentive.

‘Your what?’ he asked.

‘Oh, a little enamel box — yellow — with a design of a cormorant plucking her breast — ’

She went towards him, stooping her beautiful, bare arm, and deftly turned some of her things, disclosing the box, which was exquisitely painted.

‘That is it, see,’ she said, taking it from under his eyes.

And he was baffled now. He was left to fasten up the bag, whilst she swiftly did up her hair for the night, and sat down to unfasten her shoes. She would not

turn her back to him any more.

He was baffled, frustrated, but unconscious. She had the whip hand over him now. She knew he had not realised her terrible panic. Her heart was beating heavily still. Fool, fool that she was, to get into such a state! How she thanked God for Gerald's obtuse blindness. Thank God he could see nothing.

She sat slowly unlacing her shoes, and he too commenced to undress. Thank God that crisis was over. She felt almost fond of him now, almost in love with him.

'Ah, Gerald,' she laughed, caressively, teasingly, 'Ah, what a fine game you played with the Professor's daughter — didn't you now?'

'What game?' he asked, looking round.

'ISN'T she in love with you — oh DEAR, isn't she in love with you!' said Gudrun, in her gayest, most attractive mood.

'I shouldn't think so,' he said.

'Shouldn't think so!' she teased. 'Why the poor girl is lying at this moment overwhelmed, dying with love for you. She thinks you're WONDERFUL — oh marvellous, beyond what man has ever been. REALLY, isn't it funny?'

'Why funny, what is funny?' he asked.

'Why to see you working it on her,' she said, with a half reproach that confused the male conceit in him. 'Really Gerald, the poor girl — !'

'I did nothing to her,' he said.

'Oh, it was too shameful, the way you simply swept her off her feet.'

'That was Schuhplatteln,' he replied, with a bright grin.

'Ha — ha — ha!' laughed Gudrun.

Her mockery quivered through his muscles with curious re-echoes. When he slept he seemed to crouch down in the bed, lapped up in his own strength, that yet was hollow.

And Gudrun slept strongly, a victorious sleep. Suddenly, she was almost fiercely awake. The small timber room glowed with the dawn, that came upwards from the low window. She could see down the valley when she lifted her head: the snow with a pinkish, half-revealed magic, the fringe of pine-trees at the bottom of the slope. And one tiny figure moved over the vaguely-illuminated space.

She glanced at his watch; it was seven o'clock. He was still completely asleep. And she was so hard awake, it was almost frightening — a hard, metallic wakefulness. She lay looking at him.

He slept in the subjection of his own health and defeat. She was overcome by a sincere regard for him. Till now, she was afraid before him. She lay and thought about him, what he was, what he represented in the world. A fine,

independent will, he had. She thought of the revolution he had worked in the mines, in so short a time. She knew that, if he were confronted with any problem, any hard actual difficulty, he would overcome it. If he laid hold of any idea, he would carry it through. He had the faculty of making order out of confusion. Only let him grip hold of a situation, and he would bring to pass an inevitable conclusion.

For a few moments she was borne away on the wild wings of ambition. Gerald, with his force of will and his power for comprehending the actual world, should be set to solve the problems of the day, the problem of industrialism in the modern world. She knew he would, in the course of time, effect the changes he desired, he could re-organise the industrial system. She knew he could do it. As an instrument, in these things, he was marvellous, she had never seen any man with his potentiality. He was unaware of it, but she knew.

He only needed to be hitched on, he needed that his hand should be set to the task, because he was so unconscious. And this she could do. She would marry him, he would go into Parliament in the Conservative interest, he would clear up the great muddle of labour and industry. He was so superbly fearless, masterful, he knew that every problem could be worked out, in life as in geometry. And he would care neither about himself nor about anything but the pure working out of the problem. He was very pure, really.

Her heart beat fast, she flew away on wings of elation, imagining a future. He would be a Napoleon of peace, or a Bismarck — and she the woman behind him. She had read Bismarck's letters, and had been deeply moved by them. And Gerald would be freer, more dauntless than Bismarck.

But even as she lay in fictitious transport, bathed in the strange, false sunshine of hope in life, something seemed to snap in her, and a terrible cynicism began to gain upon her, blowing in like a wind. Everything turned to irony with her: the last flavour of everything was ironical. When she felt her pang of undeniable reality, this was when she knew the hard irony of hopes and ideas.

She lay and looked at him, as he slept. He was sheerly beautiful, he was a perfect instrument. To her mind, he was a pure, inhuman, almost superhuman instrument. His instrumentality appealed so strongly to her, she wished she were God, to use him as a tool.

And at the same instant, came the ironical question: 'What for?' She thought of the colliers' wives, with their linoleum and their lace curtains and their little girls in high-laced boots. She thought of the wives and daughters of the pit-managers, their tennis-parties, and their terrible struggles to be superior each to the other, in the social scale. There was Shortlands with its meaningless distinction, the meaningless crowd of the Criches. There was London, the House

of Commons, the extant social world. My God!

Young as she was, Gudrun had touched the whole pulse of social England. She had no ideas of rising in the world. She knew, with the perfect cynicism of cruel youth, that to rise in the world meant to have one outside show instead of another, the advance was like having a spurious half-crown instead of a spurious penny. The whole coinage of valuation was spurious. Yet of course, her cynicism knew well enough that, in a world where spurious coin was current, a bad sovereign was better than a bad farthing. But rich and poor, she despised both alike.

Already she mocked at herself for her dreams. They could be fulfilled easily enough. But she recognised too well, in her spirit, the mockery of her own impulses. What did she care, that Gerald had created a richly-paying industry out of an old worn-out concern? What did she care? The worn-out concern and the rapid, splendidly organised industry, they were bad money. Yet of course, she cared a great deal, outwardly — and outwardly was all that mattered, for inwardly was a bad joke.

Everything was intrinsically a piece of irony to her. She leaned over Gerald and said in her heart, with compassion:

‘Oh, my dear, my dear, the game isn’t worth even you. You are a fine thing really — why should you be used on such a poor show!’

Her heart was breaking with pity and grief for him. And at the same moment, a grimace came over her mouth, of mocking irony at her own unspoken tirade. Ah, what a farce it was! She thought of Parnell and Katherine O’Shea. Parnell! After all, who can take the nationalisation of Ireland seriously? Who can take political Ireland really seriously, whatever it does? And who can take political England seriously? Who can? Who can care a straw, really, how the old patched-up Constitution is tinkered at any more? Who cares a button for our national ideas, any more than for our national bowler hat? Aha, it is all old hat, it is all old bowler hat!

That’s all it is, Gerald, my young hero. At any rate we’ll spare ourselves the nausea of stirring the old broth any more. You be beautiful, my Gerald, and reckless. There ARE perfect moments. Wake up, Gerald, wake up, convince me of the perfect moments. Oh, convince me, I need it.

He opened his eyes, and looked at her. She greeted him with a mocking, enigmatic smile in which was a poignant gaiety. Over his face went the reflection of the smile, he smiled, too, purely unconsciously.

That filled her with extraordinary delight, to see the smile cross his face, reflected from her face. She remembered that was how a baby smiled. It filled her with extraordinary radiant delight.

‘You’ve done it,’ she said.

‘What?’ he asked, dazed.

‘Convinced me.’

And she bent down, kissing him passionately, passionately, so that he was bewildered. He did not ask her of what he had convinced her, though he meant to. He was glad she was kissing him. She seemed to be feeling for his very heart to touch the quick of him. And he wanted her to touch the quick of his being, he wanted that most of all.

Outside, somebody was singing, in a manly, reckless handsome voice:

‘Mach mir auf, mach mir auf, du Stolze,

Mach mir ein Feuer von Holze.

Vom Regen bin ich nass

Vom Regen bin ich nass-’

Gudrun knew that that song would sound through her eternity, sung in a manly, reckless, mocking voice. It marked one of her supreme moments, the supreme pangs of her nervous gratification. There it was, fixed in eternity for her.

The day came fine and bluish. There was a light wind blowing among the mountain tops, keen as a rapier where it touched, carrying with it a fine dust of snow-powder. Gerald went out with the fine, blind face of a man who is in his state of fulfilment. Gudrun and he were in perfect static unity this morning, but unseeing and unwitting. They went out with a toboggan, leaving Ursula and Birkin to follow.

Gudrun was all scarlet and royal blue — a scarlet jersey and cap, and a royal blue skirt and stockings. She went gaily over the white snow, with Gerald beside her, in white and grey, pulling the little toboggan. They grew small in the distance of snow, climbing the steep slope.

For Gudrun herself, she seemed to pass altogether into the whiteness of the snow, she became a pure, thoughtless crystal. When she reached the top of the slope, in the wind, she looked round, and saw peak beyond peak of rock and snow, bluish, transcendent in heaven. And it seemed to her like a garden, with the peaks for pure flowers, and her heart gathering them. She had no separate consciousness for Gerald.

She held on to him as they went sheering down over the keen slope. She felt as if her senses were being whetted on some fine grindstone, that was keen as flame. The snow sprinted on either side, like sparks from a blade that is being sharpened, the whiteness round about ran swifter, swifter, in pure flame the white slope flew against her, and she fused like one molten, dancing globule,

rushed through a white intensity. Then there was a great swerve at the bottom, when they swung as it were in a fall to earth, in the diminishing motion.

They came to rest. But when she rose to her feet, she could not stand. She gave a strange cry, turned and clung to him, sinking her face on his breast, fainting in him. Utter oblivion came over her, as she lay for a few moments abandoned against him.

‘What is it?’ he was saying. ‘Was it too much for you?’

But she heard nothing.

When she came to, she stood up and looked round, astonished. Her face was white, her eyes brilliant and large.

‘What is it?’ he repeated. ‘Did it upset you?’

She looked at him with her brilliant eyes that seemed to have undergone some transfiguration, and she laughed, with a terrible merriment.

‘No,’ she cried, with triumphant joy. ‘It was the complete moment of my life.’

And she looked at him with her dazzling, overweening laughter, like one possessed. A fine blade seemed to enter his heart, but he did not care, or take any notice.

But they climbed up the slope again, and they flew down through the white flame again, splendidly, splendidly. Gudrun was laughing and flashing, powdered with snow-crystals, Gerald worked perfectly. He felt he could guide the toboggan to a hair-breadth, almost he could make it pierce into the air and right into the very heart of the sky. It seemed to him the flying sledge was but his strength spread out, he had but to move his arms, the motion was his own. They explored the great slopes, to find another slide. He felt there must be something better than they had known. And he found what he desired, a perfect long, fierce sweep, sheering past the foot of a rock and into the trees at the base. It was dangerous, he knew. But then he knew also he would direct the sledge between his fingers.

The first days passed in an ecstasy of physical motion, sleighing, skiing, skating, moving in an intensity of speed and white light that surpassed life itself, and carried the souls of the human beings beyond into an inhuman abstraction of velocity and weight and eternal, frozen snow.

Gerald’s eyes became hard and strange, and as he went by on his skis he was more like some powerful, fateful sigh than a man, his muscles elastic in a perfect, soaring trajectory, his body projected in pure flight, mindless, soulless, whirling along one perfect line of force.

Luckily there came a day of snow, when they must all stay indoors: otherwise Birkin said, they would all lose their faculties, and begin to utter themselves in cries and shrieks, like some strange, unknown species of snow-creatures.

It happened in the afternoon that Ursula sat in the Reunionsaal talking to Loerke. The latter had seemed unhappy lately. He was lively and full of mischievous humour, as usual.

But Ursula had thought he was sulky about something. His partner, too, the big, fair, good-looking youth, was ill at ease, going about as if he belonged to nowhere, and was kept in some sort of subjection, against which he was rebelling.

Loerke had hardly talked to Gudrun. His associate, on the other hand, had paid her constantly a soft, over-deferential attention. Gudrun wanted to talk to Loerke. He was a sculptor, and she wanted to hear his view of his art. And his figure attracted her. There was the look of a little wastrel about him, that intrigued her, and an old man's look, that interested her, and then, beside this, an uncanny singleness, a quality of being by himself, not in contact with anybody else, that marked out an artist to her. He was a chatterer, a magpie, a maker of mischievous word-jokes, that were sometimes very clever, but which often were not. And she could see in his brown, gnome's eyes, the black look of inorganic misery, which lay behind all his small buffoonery.

His figure interested her — the figure of a boy, almost a street arab. He made no attempt to conceal it. He always wore a simple loden suit, with knee breeches. His legs were thin, and he made no attempt to disguise the fact: which was of itself remarkable, in a German. And he never ingratiated himself anywhere, not in the slightest, but kept to himself, for all his apparent playfulness.

Leitner, his companion, was a great sportsman, very handsome with his big limbs and his blue eyes. Loerke would go tobogganning or skating, in little snatches, but he was indifferent. And his fine, thin nostrils, the nostrils of a pure-bred street arab, would quiver with contempt at Leitner's splodgering gymnastic displays. It was evident that the two men who had travelled and lived together, sharing the same bedroom, had now reached the stage of loathing. Leitner hated Loerke with an injured, writhing, impotent hatred, and Loerke treated Leitner with a fine-quivering contempt and sarcasm. Soon the two would have to go apart.

Already they were rarely together. Leitner ran attaching himself to somebody or other, always deferring, Loerke was a good deal alone. Out of doors he wore a Westphalian cap, a close brown-velvet head with big brown velvet flaps down over his ears, so that he looked like a lop-eared rabbit, or a troll. His face was brown-red, with a dry, bright skin, that seemed to crinkle with his mobile expressions. His eyes were arresting — brown, full, like a rabbit's, or like a troll's, or like the eyes of a lost being, having a strange, dumb, depraved look of

knowledge, and a quick spark of uncanny fire. Whenever Gudrun had tried to talk to him he had shied away unresponsive, looking at her with his watchful dark eyes, but entering into no relation with her. He had made her feel that her slow French and her slower German, were hateful to him. As for his own inadequate English, he was much too awkward to try it at all. But he understood a good deal of what was said, nevertheless. And Gudrun, piqued, left him alone.

This afternoon, however, she came into the lounge as he was talking to Ursula. His fine, black hair somehow reminded her of a bat, thin as it was on his full, sensitive-looking head, and worn away at the temples. He sat hunched up, as if his spirit were bat-like. And Gudrun could see he was making some slow confidence to Ursula, unwilling, a slow, grudging, scanty self-revelation. She went and sat by her sister.

He looked at her, then looked away again, as if he took no notice of her. But as a matter of fact, she interested him deeply.

‘Isn’t it interesting, Prune,’ said Ursula, turning to her sister, ‘Herr Loerke is doing a great frieze for a factory in Cologne, for the outside, the street.’

She looked at him, at his thin, brown, nervous hands, that were prehensile, and somehow like talons, like ‘griffes,’ inhuman.

‘What IN?’ she asked.

‘AUS WAS?’ repeated Ursula.

‘GRANIT,’ he replied.

It had become immediately a laconic series of question and answer between fellow craftsmen.

‘What is the relief?’ asked Gudrun.

‘Alto relieveo.’

‘And at what height?’

It was very interesting to Gudrun to think of his making the great granite frieze for a great granite factory in Cologne. She got from him some notion of the design. It was a representation of a fair, with peasants and artisans in an orgy of enjoyment, drunk and absurd in their modern dress, whirling ridiculously in roundabouts, gaping at shows, kissing and staggering and rolling in knots, swinging in swing-boats, and firing down shooting galleries, a frenzy of chaotic motion.

There was a swift discussion of technicalities. Gudrun was very much impressed.

‘But how wonderful, to have such a factory!’ cried Ursula. ‘Is the whole building fine?’

‘Oh yes,’ he replied. ‘The frieze is part of the whole architecture. Yes, it is a colossal thing.’

Then he seemed to stiffen, shrugged his shoulders, and went on:

‘Sculpture and architecture must go together. The day for irrelevant statues, as for wall pictures, is over. As a matter of fact sculpture is always part of an architectural conception. And since churches are all museum stuff, since industry is our business, now, then let us make our places of industry our art — our factory-area our Parthenon, ECCO!’

Ursula pondered.

‘I suppose,’ she said, ‘there is no NEED for our great works to be so hideous.’

Instantly he broke into motion.

‘There you are!’ he cried, ‘there you are! There is not only NO NEED for our places of work to be ugly, but their ugliness ruins the work, in the end. Men will not go on submitting to such intolerable ugliness. In the end it will hurt too much, and they will wither because of it. And this will wither the WORK as well. They will think the work itself is ugly: the machines, the very act of labour. Whereas the machinery and the acts of labour are extremely, maddeningly beautiful. But this will be the end of our civilisation, when people will not work because work has become so intolerable to their senses, it nauseates them too much, they would rather starve. THEN we shall see the hammer used only for smashing, then we shall see it. Yet here we are — we have the opportunity to make beautiful factories, beautiful machine-houses — we have the opportunity —’

Gudrun could only partly understand. She could have cried with vexation.

‘What does he say?’ she asked Ursula. And Ursula translated, stammering and brief. Loerke watched Gudrun’s face, to see her judgment.

‘And do you think then,’ said Gudrun, ‘that art should serve industry?’

‘Art should INTERPRET industry, as art once interpreted religion,’ he said.

‘But does your fair interpret industry?’ she asked him.

‘Certainly. What is man doing, when he is at a fair like this? He is fulfilling the counterpart of labour — the machine works him, instead of he the machine. He enjoys the mechanical motion, in his own body.’

‘But is there nothing but work — mechanical work?’ said Gudrun.

‘Nothing but work!’ he repeated, leaning forward, his eyes two darkneses, with needle-points of light. ‘No, it is nothing but this, serving a machine, or enjoying the motion of a machine — motion, that is all. You have never worked for hunger, or you would know what god governs us.’

Gudrun quivered and flushed. For some reason she was almost in tears.

‘No, I have not worked for hunger,’ she replied, ‘but I have worked!’

‘Travaille — lavorato?’ he asked. ‘E che lavoro — che lavoro? Quel travail est-ce que vous avez fait?’

He broke into a mixture of Italian and French, instinctively using a foreign language when he spoke to her.

‘You have never worked as the world works,’ he said to her, with sarcasm.

‘Yes,’ she said. ‘I have. And I do — I work now for my daily bread.’

He paused, looked at her steadily, then dropped the subject entirely. She seemed to him to be trifling.

‘But have YOU ever worked as the world works?’ Ursula asked him.

He looked at her untrusting.

‘Yes,’ he replied, with a surly bark. ‘I have known what it was to lie in bed for three days, because I had nothing to eat.’

Gudrun was looking at him with large, grave eyes, that seemed to draw the confession from him as the marrow from his bones. All his nature held him back from confessing. And yet her large, grave eyes upon him seemed to open some valve in his veins, and involuntarily he was telling.

‘My father was a man who did not like work, and we had no mother. We lived in Austria, Polish Austria. How did we live? Ha! — somehow! Mostly in a room with three other families — one set in each corner — and the W.C. in the middle of the room — a pan with a plank on it — ha! I had two brothers and a sister — and there might be a woman with my father. He was a free being, in his way — would fight with any man in the town — a garrison town — and was a little man too. But he wouldn’t work for anybody — set his heart against it, and wouldn’t.’

‘And how did you live then?’ asked Ursula.

He looked at her — then, suddenly, at Gudrun.

‘Do you understand?’ he asked.

‘Enough,’ she replied.

Their eyes met for a moment. Then he looked away. He would say no more.

‘And how did you become a sculptor?’ asked Ursula.

‘How did I become a sculptor — ’ he paused. ‘Dunque — ’ he resumed, in a changed manner, and beginning to speak French — ‘I became old enough — I used to steal from the market-place. Later I went to work — imprinted the stamp on clay bottles, before they were baked. It was an earthenware-bottle factory. There I began making models. One day, I had had enough. I lay in the sun and did not go to work. Then I walked to Munich — then I walked to Italy — begging, begging everything.’

‘The Italians were very good to me — they were good and honourable to me. From Bozen to Rome, almost every night I had a meal and a bed, perhaps of straw, with some peasant. I love the Italian people, with all my heart.

‘Dunque, adesso — maintenant — I earn a thousand pounds in a year, or I earn two thousand — ’

He looked down at the ground, his voice tailing off into silence.

Gudrun looked at his fine, thin, shiny skin, reddish-brown from the sun, drawn tight over his full temples; and at his thin hair — and at the thick, coarse, brush-like moustache, cut short about his mobile, rather shapeless mouth.

‘How old are you?’ she asked.

He looked up at her with his full, elfin eyes startled.

‘WIE ALT?’ he repeated. And he hesitated. It was evidently one of his reticencies.

‘How old are YOU?’ he replied, without answering.

‘I am twenty-six,’ she answered.

‘Twenty-six,’ he repeated, looking into her eyes. He paused. Then he said:

‘UND IHR HERR GEMAHLE, WIE ALT IS ER?’

‘Who?’ asked Gudrun.

‘Your husband,’ said Ursula, with a certain irony.

‘I haven’t got a husband,’ said Gudrun in English. In German she answered,

‘He is thirty-one.’

But Loerke was watching closely, with his uncanny, full, suspicious eyes. Something in Gudrun seemed to accord with him. He was really like one of the ‘little people’ who have no soul, who has found his mate in a human being. But he suffered in his discovery. She too was fascinated by him, fascinated, as if some strange creature, a rabbit or a bat, or a brown seal, had begun to talk to her. But also, she knew what he was unconscious of, his tremendous power of understanding, of apprehending her living motion. He did not know his own power. He did not know how, with his full, submerged, watchful eyes, he could look into her and see her, what she was, see her secrets. He would only want her to be herself — he knew her verily, with a subconscious, sinister knowledge, devoid of illusions and hopes.

To Gudrun, there was in Loerke the rock-bottom of all life. Everybody else had their illusion, must have their illusion, their before and after. But he, with a perfect stoicism, did without any before and after, dispensed with all illusion. He did not deceive himself in the last issue. In the last issue he cared about nothing, he was troubled about nothing, he made not the slightest attempt to be at one with anything. He existed a pure, unconnected will, stoical and momentaneous. There was only his work.

It was curious too, how his poverty, the degradation of his earlier life, attracted her. There was something insipid and tasteless to her, in the idea of a gentleman, a man who had gone the usual course through school and university. A certain violent sympathy, however, came up in her for this mud-child. He seemed to be the very stuff of the underworld of life. There was no going beyond

him.

Ursula too was attracted by Loerke. In both sisters he commanded a certain homage. But there were moments when to Ursula he seemed indescribably inferior, false, a vulgarism.

Both Birkin and Gerald disliked him, Gerald ignoring him with some contempt, Birkin exasperated.

‘What do the women find so impressive in that little brat?’ Gerald asked.

‘God alone knows,’ replied Birkin, ‘unless it’s some sort of appeal he makes to them, which flatters them and has such a power over them.’

Gerald looked up in surprise.

‘DOES he make an appeal to them?’ he asked.

‘Oh yes,’ replied Birkin. ‘He is the perfectly subjected being, existing almost like a criminal. And the women rush towards that, like a current of air towards a vacuum.’

‘Funny they should rush to that,’ said Gerald.

‘Makes one mad, too,’ said Birkin. ‘But he has the fascination of pity and repulsion for them, a little obscene monster of the darkness that he is.’

Gerald stood still, suspended in thought.

‘What DO women want, at the bottom?’ he asked.

Birkin shrugged his shoulders.

‘God knows,’ he said. ‘Some satisfaction in basic repulsion, it seems to me. They seem to creep down some ghastly tunnel of darkness, and will never be satisfied till they’ve come to the end.’

Gerald looked out into the mist of fine snow that was blowing by. Everywhere was blind today, horribly blind.

‘And what is the end?’ he asked.

Birkin shook his head.

‘I’ve not got there yet, so I don’t know. Ask Loerke, he’s pretty near. He is a good many stages further than either you or I can go.’

‘Yes, but stages further in what?’ cried Gerald, irritated.

Birkin sighed, and gathered his brows into a knot of anger.

‘Stages further in social hatred,’ he said. ‘He lives like a rat, in the river of corruption, just where it falls over into the bottomless pit. He’s further on than we are. He hates the ideal more acutely. He HATES the ideal utterly, yet it still dominates him. I expect he is a Jew — or part Jewish.’

‘Probably,’ said Gerald.

‘He is a gnawing little negation, gnawing at the roots of life.’

‘But why does anybody care about him?’ cried Gerald.

‘Because they hate the ideal also, in their souls. They want to explore the

sewers, and he's the wizard rat that swims ahead.'

Still Gerald stood and stared at the blind haze of snow outside.

'I don't understand your terms, really,' he said, in a flat, doomed voice. 'But it sounds a rum sort of desire.'

'I suppose we want the same,' said Birkin. 'Only we want to take a quick jump downwards, in a sort of ecstasy — and he ebbs with the stream, the sewer stream.'

Meanwhile Gudrun and Ursula waited for the next opportunity to talk to Loerke. It was no use beginning when the men were there. Then they could get into no touch with the isolated little sculptor. He had to be alone with them. And he preferred Ursula to be there, as a sort of transmitter to Gudrun.

'Do you do nothing but architectural sculpture?' Gudrun asked him one evening.

'Not now,' he replied. 'I have done all sorts — except portraits — I never did portraits. But other things —'

'What kind of things?' asked Gudrun.

He paused a moment, then rose, and went out of the room. He returned almost immediately with a little roll of paper, which he handed to her. She unrolled it. It was a photogravure reproduction of a statuette, signed F. Loerke.

'That is quite an early thing — NOT mechanical,' he said, 'more popular.'

The statuette was of a naked girl, small, finely made, sitting on a great naked horse. The girl was young and tender, a mere bud. She was sitting sideways on the horse, her face in her hands, as if in shame and grief, in a little abandon. Her hair, which was short and must be flaxen, fell forward, divided, half covering her hands.

Her limbs were young and tender. Her legs, scarcely formed yet, the legs of a maiden just passing towards cruel womanhood, dangled childishly over the side of the powerful horse, pathetically, the small feet folded one over the other, as if to hide. But there was no hiding. There she was exposed naked on the naked flank of the horse.

The horse stood stock still, stretched in a kind of start. It was a massive, magnificent stallion, rigid with pent-up power. Its neck was arched and terrible, like a sickle, its flanks were pressed back, rigid with power.

Gudrun went pale, and a darkness came over her eyes, like shame, she looked up with a certain supplication, almost slave-like. He glanced at her, and jerked his head a little.

'How big is it?' she asked, in a toneless voice, persisting in appearing casual and unaffected.

'How big?' he replied, glancing again at her. 'Without pedestal — so high —'

he measured with his hand — 'with pedestal, so — '

He looked at her steadily. There was a little brusque, turgid contempt for her in his swift gesture, and she seemed to cringe a little.

'And what is it done in?' she asked, throwing back her head and looking at him with affected coldness.

He still gazed at her steadily, and his dominance was not shaken.

'Bronze — green bronze.'

'Green bronze!' repeated Gudrun, coldly accepting his challenge. She was thinking of the slender, immature, tender limbs of the girl, smooth and cold in green bronze.

'Yes, beautiful,' she murmured, looking up at him with a certain dark homage. He closed his eyes and looked aside, triumphant.

'Why,' said Ursula, 'did you make the horse so stiff? It is as stiff as a block.'

'Stiff?' he repeated, in arms at once.

'Yes. LOOK how stock and stupid and brutal it is. Horses are sensitive, quite delicate and sensitive, really.'

He raised his shoulders, spread his hands in a shrug of slow indifference, as much as to inform her she was an amateur and an impertinent nobody.

'Wissen Sie,' he said, with an insulting patience and condescension in his voice, 'that horse is a certain FORM, part of a whole form. It is part of a work of art, a piece of form. It is not a picture of a friendly horse to which you give a lump of sugar, do you see — it is part of a work of art, it has no relation to anything outside that work of art.'

Ursula, angry at being treated quite so insultingly DE HAUT EN BAS, from the height of esoteric art to the depth of general exoteric amateurism, replied, hotly, flushing and lifting her face.

'But it IS a picture of a horse, nevertheless.'

He lifted his shoulders in another shrug.

'As you like — it is not a picture of a cow, certainly.'

Here Gudrun broke in, flushed and brilliant, anxious to avoid any more of this, any more of Ursula's foolish persistence in giving herself away.

'What do you mean by "it is a picture of a horse?"' she cried at her sister. 'What do you mean by a horse? You mean an idea you have in YOUR head, and which you want to see represented. There is another idea altogether, quite another idea. Call it a horse if you like, or say it is not a horse. I have just as much right to say that YOUR horse isn't a horse, that it is a falsity of your own make-up.'

Ursula wavered, baffled. Then her words came.

'But why does he have this idea of a horse?' she said. 'I know it is his idea. I

know it is a picture of himself, really — ’

Loerke snorted with rage.

‘A picture of myself!’ he repeated, in derision. ‘Wissen sie, gnadige Frau, that is a Kunstwerk, a work of art. It is a work of art, it is a picture of nothing, of absolutely nothing. It has nothing to do with anything but itself, it has no relation with the everyday world of this and other, there is no connection between them, absolutely none, they are two different and distinct planes of existence, and to translate one into the other is worse than foolish, it is a darkening of all counsel, a making confusion everywhere. Do you see, you MUST NOT confuse the relative work of action, with the absolute world of art. That you MUST NOT DO.’

‘That is quite true,’ cried Gudrun, let loose in a sort of rhapsody. ‘The two things are quite and permanently apart, they have NOTHING to do with one another. I and my art, they have nothing to do with each other. My art stands in another world, I am in this world.’

Her face was flushed and transfigured. Loerke who was sitting with his head ducked, like some creature at bay, looked up at her, swiftly, almost furtively, and murmured,

‘Ja — so ist es, so ist es.’

Ursula was silent after this outburst. She was furious. She wanted to poke a hole into them both.

‘It isn’t a word of it true, of all this harangue you have made me,’ she replied flatly. ‘The horse is a picture of your own stock, stupid brutality, and the girl was a girl you loved and tortured and then ignored.’

He looked up at her with a small smile of contempt in his eyes. He would not trouble to answer this last charge.

Gudrun too was silent in exasperated contempt. Ursula WAS such an insufferable outsider, rushing in where angels would fear to tread. But then — fools must be suffered, if not gladly.

But Ursula was persistent too.

‘As for your world of art and your world of reality,’ she replied, ‘you have to separate the two, because you can’t bear to know what you are. You can’t bear to realise what a stock, stiff, hide-bound brutality you ARE really, so you say “it’s the world of art.” The world of art is only the truth about the real world, that’s all — but you are too far gone to see it.’

She was white and trembling, intent. Gudrun and Loerke sat in stiff dislike of her. Gerald too, who had come up in the beginning of the speech, stood looking at her in complete disapproval and opposition. He felt she was undignified, she put a sort of vulgarity over the esotericism which gave man his last distinction.

He joined his forces with the other two. They all three wanted her to go away. But she sat on in silence, her soul weeping, throbbing violently, her fingers twisting her handkerchief.

The others maintained a dead silence, letting the display of Ursula's obtrusiveness pass by. Then Gudrun asked, in a voice that was quite cool and casual, as if resuming a casual conversation:

'Was the girl a model?'

'Nein, sie war kein Modell. Sie war eine kleine Malschulerin.'

'An art-student!' replied Gudrun.

And how the situation revealed itself to her! She saw the girl art-student, unformed and of pernicious recklessness, too young, her straight flaxen hair cut short, hanging just into her neck, curving inwards slightly, because it was rather thick; and Loerke, the well-known master-sculptor, and the girl, probably well-brought-up, and of good family, thinking herself so great to be his mistress. Oh how well she knew the common callousness of it all. Dresden, Paris, or London, what did it matter? She knew it.

'Where is she now?' Ursula asked.

Loerke raised his shoulders, to convey his complete ignorance and indifference.

'That is already six years ago,' he said; 'she will be twenty-three years old, no more good.'

Gerald had picked up the picture and was looking at it. It attracted him also. He saw on the pedestal, that the piece was called 'Lady Godiva.'

'But this isn't Lady Godiva,' he said, smiling good-humouredly. 'She was the middle-aged wife of some Earl or other, who covered herself with her long hair.'

'A la Maud Allan,' said Gudrun with a mocking grimace.

'Why Maud Allan?' he replied. 'Isn't it so? I always thought the legend was that.'

'Yes, Gerald dear, I'm quite SURE you've got the legend perfectly.'

She was laughing at him, with a little, mock-caressive contempt.

'To be sure, I'd rather see the woman than the hair,' he laughed in return.

'Wouldn't you just!' mocked Gudrun.

Ursula rose and went away, leaving the three together.

Gudrun took the picture again from Gerald, and sat looking at it closely.

'Of course,' she said, turning to tease Loerke now, 'you UNDERSTOOD your little Malschulerin.'

He raised his eyebrows and his shoulders in a complacent shrug.

'The little girl?' asked Gerald, pointing to the figure.

Gudrun was sitting with the picture in her lap. She looked up at Gerald, full

into his eyes, so that he seemed to be blinded.

‘DIDN’T he understand her!’ she said to Gerald, in a slightly mocking, humorous playfulness. ‘You’ve only to look at the feet — AREN’T they darling, so pretty and tender — oh, they’re really wonderful, they are really — ’

She lifted her eyes slowly, with a hot, flaming look into Loerke’s eyes. His soul was filled with her burning recognition, he seemed to grow more uppish and lordly.

Gerald looked at the small, sculptured feet. They were turned together, half covering each other in pathetic shyness and fear. He looked at them a long time, fascinated. Then, in some pain, he put the picture away from him. He felt full of barrenness.

‘What was her name?’ Gudrun asked Loerke.

‘Annette von Weck,’ Loerke replied reminiscent. ‘Ja, sie war hubsch. She was pretty — but she was tiresome. She was a nuisance, — not for a minute would she keep still — not until I’d slapped her hard and made her cry — then she’d sit for five minutes.’

He was thinking over the work, his work, the all important to him.

‘Did you really slap her?’ asked Gudrun, coolly.

He glanced back at her, reading her challenge.

‘Yes, I did,’ he said, nonchalant, ‘harder than I have ever beat anything in my life. I had to, I had to. It was the only way I got the work done.’

Gudrun watched him with large, dark-filled eyes, for some moments. She seemed to be considering his very soul. Then she looked down, in silence.

‘Why did you have such a young Godiva then?’ asked Gerald. ‘She is so small, besides, on the horse — not big enough for it — such a child.’

A queer spasm went over Loerke’s face.

‘Yes,’ he said. ‘I don’t like them any bigger, any older. Then they are beautiful, at sixteen, seventeen, eighteen — after that, they are no use to me.’

There was a moment’s pause.

‘Why not?’ asked Gerald.

Loerke shrugged his shoulders.

‘I don’t find them interesting — or beautiful — they are no good to me, for my work.’

‘Do you mean to say a woman isn’t beautiful after she is twenty?’ asked Gerald.

‘For me, no. Before twenty, she is small and fresh and tender and slight. After that — let her be what she likes, she has nothing for me. The Venus of Milo is a bourgeoisie — so are they all.’

‘And you don’t care for women at all after twenty?’ asked Gerald.

‘They are no good to me, they are of no use in my art,’ Loerke repeated impatiently. ‘I don’t find them beautiful.’

‘You are an epicure,’ said Gerald, with a slight sarcastic laugh.

‘And what about men?’ asked Gudrun suddenly.

‘Yes, they are good at all ages,’ replied Loerke. ‘A man should be big and powerful — whether he is old or young is of no account, so he has the size, something of massiveness and — and stupid form.’

Ursula went out alone into the world of pure, new snow. But the dazzling whiteness seemed to beat upon her till it hurt her, she felt the cold was slowly strangling her soul. Her head felt dazed and numb.

Suddenly she wanted to go away. It occurred to her, like a miracle, that she might go away into another world. She had felt so doomed up here in the eternal snow, as if there were no beyond.

Now suddenly, as by a miracle she remembered that away beyond, below her, lay the dark fruitful earth, that towards the south there were stretches of land dark with orange trees and cypress, grey with olives, that ilex trees lifted wonderful plummy tufts in shadow against a blue sky. Miracle of miracles! — this utterly silent, frozen world of the mountain-tops was not universal! One might leave it and have done with it. One might go away.

She wanted to realise the miracle at once. She wanted at this instant to have done with the snow-world, the terrible, static ice-built mountain tops. She wanted to see the dark earth, to smell its earthy fecundity, to see the patient wintry vegetation, to feel the sunshine touch a response in the buds.

She went back gladly to the house, full of hope. Birkin was reading, lying in bed.

‘Rupert,’ she said, bursting in on him. ‘I want to go away.’

He looked up at her slowly.

‘Do you?’ he replied mildly.

She sat by him and put her arms round his neck. It surprised her that he was so little surprised.

‘Don’t YOU?’ she asked troubled.

‘I hadn’t thought about it,’ he said. ‘But I’m sure I do.’

She sat up, suddenly erect.

‘I hate it,’ she said. ‘I hate the snow, and the unnaturalness of it, the unnatural light it throws on everybody, the ghastly glamour, the unnatural feelings it makes everybody have.’

He lay still and laughed, meditating.

‘Well,’ he said, ‘we can go away — we can go tomorrow. We’ll go tomorrow to Verona, and find Romeo and Juliet, and sit in the amphitheatre — shall we?’

Suddenly she hid her face against his shoulder with perplexity and shyness. He lay so untrammelled.

‘Yes,’ she said softly, filled with relief. She felt her soul had new wings, now he was so uncaring. ‘I shall love to be Romeo and Juliet,’ she said. ‘My love!’

‘Though a fearfully cold wind blows in Verona,’ he said, ‘from out of the Alps. We shall have the smell of the snow in our noses.’

She sat up and looked at him.

‘Are you glad to go?’ she asked, troubled.

His eyes were inscrutable and laughing. She hid her face against his neck, clinging close to him, pleading:

‘Don’t laugh at me — don’t laugh at me.’

‘Why how’s that?’ he laughed, putting his arms round her.

‘Because I don’t want to be laughed at,’ she whispered.

He laughed more, as he kissed her delicate, finely perfumed hair.

‘Do you love me?’ she whispered, in wild seriousness.

‘Yes,’ he answered, laughing.

Suddenly she lifted her mouth to be kissed. Her lips were taut and quivering and strenuous, his were soft, deep and delicate. He waited a few moments in the kiss. Then a shade of sadness went over his soul.

‘Your mouth is so hard,’ he said, in faint reproach.

‘And yours is so soft and nice,’ she said gladly.

‘But why do you always grip your lips?’ he asked, regretful.

‘Never mind,’ she said swiftly. ‘It is my way.’

She knew he loved her; she was sure of him. Yet she could not let go a certain hold over herself, she could not bear him to question her. She gave herself up in delight to being loved by him. She knew that, in spite of his joy when she abandoned herself, he was a little bit saddened too. She could give herself up to his activity. But she could not be herself, she DARED not come forth quite nakedly to his nakedness, abandoning all adjustment, lapsing in pure faith with him. She abandoned herself to HIM, or she took hold of him and gathered her joy of him. And she enjoyed him fully. But they were never QUITE together, at the same moment, one was always a little left out. Nevertheless she was glad in hope, glorious and free, full of life and liberty. And he was still and soft and patient, for the time.

They made their preparations to leave the next day. First they went to Gudrun’s room, where she and Gerald were just dressed ready for the evening indoors.

‘Prune,’ said Ursula, ‘I think we shall go away tomorrow. I can’t stand the snow any more. It hurts my skin and my soul.’

‘Does it really hurt your soul, Ursula?’ asked Gudrun, in some surprise. ‘I can believe quite it hurts your skin — it is TERRIBLE. But I thought it was ADMIRABLE for the soul.’

‘No, not for mine. It just injures it,’ said Ursula.

‘Really!’ cried Gudrun.

There was a silence in the room. And Ursula and Birkin could feel that Gudrun and Gerald were relieved by their going.

‘You will go south?’ said Gerald, a little ring of uneasiness in his voice.

‘Yes,’ said Birkin, turning away. There was a queer, indefinable hostility between the two men, lately. Birkin was on the whole dim and indifferent, drifting along in a dim, easy flow, unnoticing and patient, since he came abroad, whilst Gerald on the other hand, was intense and gripped into white light, agonistes. The two men revoked one another.

Gerald and Gudrun were very kind to the two who were departing, solicitous for their welfare as if they were two children. Gudrun came to Ursula’s bedroom with three pairs of the coloured stockings for which she was notorious, and she threw them on the bed. But these were thick silk stockings, vermilion, cornflower blue, and grey, bought in Paris. The grey ones were knitted, seamless and heavy. Ursula was in raptures. She knew Gudrun must be feeling VERY loving, to give away such treasures.

‘I can’t take them from you, Prune,’ she cried. ‘I can’t possibly deprive you of them — the jewels.’

‘AREN’T they jewels!’ cried Gudrun, eyeing her gifts with an envious eye. ‘AREN’T they real lambs!’

‘Yes, you MUST keep them,’ said Ursula.

‘I don’t WANT them, I’ve got three more pairs. I WANT you to keep them — I want you to have them. They’re yours, there — ’

And with trembling, excited hands she put the coveted stockings under Ursula’s pillow.

‘One gets the greatest joy of all out of really lovely stockings,’ said Ursula.

‘One does,’ replied Gudrun; ‘the greatest joy of all.’

And she sat down in the chair. It was evident she had come for a last talk. Ursula, not knowing what she wanted, waited in silence.

‘Do you FEEL, Ursula,’ Gudrun began, rather sceptically, that you are going-away-forever, never-to-return, sort of thing?’

‘Oh, we shall come back,’ said Ursula. ‘It isn’t a question of train-journeys.’

‘Yes, I know. But spiritually, so to speak, you are going away from us all?’

Ursula quivered.

‘I don’t know a bit what is going to happen,’ she said. ‘I only know we are

going somewhere.'

Gudrun waited.

'And you are glad?' she asked.

Ursula meditated for a moment.

'I believe I am VERY glad,' she replied.

But Gudrun read the unconscious brightness on her sister's face, rather than the uncertain tones of her speech.

'But don't you think you'll WANT the old connection with the world — father and the rest of us, and all that it means, England and the world of thought — don't you think you'll NEED that, really to make a world?'

Ursula was silent, trying to imagine.

'I think,' she said at length, involuntarily, 'that Rupert is right — one wants a new space to be in, and one falls away from the old.'

Gudrun watched her sister with impassive face and steady eyes.

'One wants a new space to be in, I quite agree,' she said. 'But I think that a new world is a development from this world, and that to isolate oneself with one other person, isn't to find a new world at all, but only to secure oneself in one's illusions.'

Ursula looked out of the window. In her soul she began to wrestle, and she was frightened. She was always frightened of words, because she knew that mere word-force could always make her believe what she did not believe.

'Perhaps,' she said, full of mistrust, of herself and everybody. 'But,' she added, 'I do think that one can't have anything new whilst one cares for the old — do you know what I mean? — even fighting the old is belonging to it. I know, one is tempted to stop with the world, just to fight it. But then it isn't worth it.'

Gudrun considered herself.

'Yes,' she said. 'In a way, one is of the world if one lives in it. But isn't it really an illusion to think you can get out of it? After all, a cottage in the Abruzzi, or wherever it may be, isn't a new world. No, the only thing to do with the world, is to see it through.'

Ursula looked away. She was so frightened of argument.

'But there CAN be something else, can't there?' she said. 'One can see it through in one's soul, long enough before it sees itself through in actuality. And then, when one has seen one's soul, one is something else.'

'CAN one see it through in one's soul?' asked Gudrun. 'If you mean that you can see to the end of what will happen, I don't agree. I really can't agree. And anyhow, you can't suddenly fly off on to a new planet, because you think you can see to the end of this.'

Ursula suddenly straightened herself.

‘Yes,’ she said. ‘Yes — one knows. One has no more connections here. One has a sort of other self, that belongs to a new planet, not to this. You’ve got to hop off.’

Gudrun reflected for a few moments. Then a smile of ridicule, almost of contempt, came over her face.

‘And what will happen when you find yourself in space?’ she cried in derision. ‘After all, the great ideas of the world are the same there. You above everybody can’t get away from the fact that love, for instance, is the supreme thing, in space as well as on earth.’

‘No,’ said Ursula, ‘it isn’t. Love is too human and little. I believe in something inhuman, of which love is only a little part. I believe what we must fulfil comes out of the unknown to us, and it is something infinitely more than love. It isn’t so merely HUMAN.’

Gudrun looked at Ursula with steady, balancing eyes. She admired and despised her sister so much, both! Then, suddenly she averted her face, saying coldly, uglily:

‘Well, I’ve got no further than love, yet.’

Over Ursula’s mind flashed the thought: ‘Because you never HAVE loved, you can’t get beyond it.’

Gudrun rose, came over to Ursula and put her arm round her neck.

‘Go and find your new world, dear,’ she said, her voice clanging with false benignity. ‘After all, the happiest voyage is the quest of Rupert’s Blessed Isles.’

Her arm rested round Ursula’s neck, her fingers on Ursula’s cheek for a few moments. Ursula was supremely uncomfortable meanwhile. There was an insult in Gudrun’s protective patronage that was really too hurting. Feeling her sister’s resistance, Gudrun drew awkwardly away, turned over the pillow, and disclosed the stockings again.

‘Ha — ha!’ she laughed, rather hollowly. ‘How we do talk indeed — new worlds and old — !’

And they passed to the familiar worldly subjects.

Gerald and Birkin had walked on ahead, waiting for the sledge to overtake them, conveying the departing guests.

‘How much longer will you stay here?’ asked Birkin, glancing up at Gerald’s very red, almost blank face.

‘Oh, I can’t say,’ Gerald replied. ‘Till we get tired of it.’

‘You’re not afraid of the snow melting first?’ asked Birkin.

Gerald laughed.

‘Does it melt?’ he said.

‘Things are all right with you then?’ said Birkin.

Gerald screwed up his eyes a little.

‘All right?’ he said. ‘I never know what those common words mean. All right and all wrong, don’t they become synonymous, somewhere?’

‘Yes, I suppose. How about going back?’ asked Birkin.

‘Oh, I don’t know. We may never get back. I don’t look before and after,’ said Gerald.

‘NOR pine for what is not,’ said Birkin.

Gerald looked into the distance, with the small-pupilled, abstract eyes of a hawk.

‘No. There’s something final about this. And Gudrun seems like the end, to me. I don’t know — but she seems so soft, her skin like silk, her arms heavy and soft. And it withers my consciousness, somehow, it burns the pith of my mind.’ He went on a few paces, staring ahead, his eyes fixed, looking like a mask used in ghastly religions of the barbarians. ‘It blasts your soul’s eye,’ he said, ‘and leaves you sightless. Yet you WANT to be sightless, you WANT to be blasted, you don’t want it any different.’

He was speaking as if in a trance, verbal and blank. Then suddenly he braced himself up with a kind of rhapsody, and looked at Birkin with vindictive, cowed eyes, saying:

‘Do you know what it is to suffer when you are with a woman? She’s so beautiful, so perfect, you find her SO GOOD, it tears you like a silk, and every stroke and bit cuts hot — ha, that perfection, when you blast yourself, you blast yourself! And then — ’ he stopped on the snow and suddenly opened his clenched hands — ‘it’s nothing — your brain might have gone charred as rags — and — ’ he looked round into the air with a queer histrionic movement ‘it’s blasting — you understand what I mean — it is a great experience, something final — and then — you’re shrivelled as if struck by electricity.’ He walked on in silence. It seemed like bragging, but like a man in extremity bragging truthfully.

‘Of course,’ he resumed, ‘I wouldn’t NOT have had it! It’s a complete experience. And she’s a wonderful woman. But — how I hate her somewhere! It’s curious — ’

Birkin looked at him, at his strange, scarcely conscious face. Gerald seemed blank before his own words.

‘But you’ve had enough now?’ said Birkin. ‘You have had your experience. Why work on an old wound?’

‘Oh,’ said Gerald, ‘I don’t know. It’s not finished — ’

And the two walked on.

‘I’ve loved you, as well as Gudrun, don’t forget,’ said Birkin bitterly. Gerald

looked at him strangely, abstractedly.

‘Have you?’ he said, with icy scepticism. ‘Or do you think you have?’ He was hardly responsible for what he said.

The sledge came. Gudrun dismounted and they all made their farewell. They wanted to go apart, all of them. Birkin took his place, and the sledge drove away leaving Gudrun and Gerald standing on the snow, waving. Something froze Birkin’s heart, seeing them standing there in the isolation of the snow, growing smaller and more isolated.

CHAPTER XXX.

SNOWED UP

When Ursula and Birkin were gone, Gudrun felt herself free in her contest with Gerald. As they grew more used to each other, he seemed to press upon her more and more. At first she could manage him, so that her own will was always left free. But very soon, he began to ignore her female tactics, he dropped his respect for her whims and her privacies, he began to exert his own will blindly, without submitting to hers.

Already a vital conflict had set in, which frightened them both. But he was alone, whilst already she had begun to cast round for external resource.

When Ursula had gone, Gudrun felt her own existence had become stark and elemental. She went and crouched alone in her bedroom, looking out of the window at the big, flashing stars. In front was the faint shadow of the mountain-knot. That was the pivot. She felt strange and inevitable, as if she were centred upon the pivot of all existence, there was no further reality.

Presently Gerald opened the door. She knew he would not be long before he came. She was rarely alone, he pressed upon her like a frost, deadening her.

‘Are you alone in the dark?’ he said. And she could tell by his tone he resented it, he resented this isolation she had drawn round herself. Yet, feeling static and inevitable, she was kind towards him.

‘Would you like to light the candle?’ she asked.

He did not answer, but came and stood behind her, in the darkness.

‘Look,’ she said, ‘at that lovely star up there. Do you know its name?’

He crouched beside her, to look through the low window.

‘No,’ he said. ‘It is very fine.’

‘ISN’T it beautiful! Do you notice how it darts different coloured fires — it flashes really superbly — ’

They remained in silence. With a mute, heavy gesture she put her hand on his knee, and took his hand.

‘Are you regretting Ursula?’ he asked.

‘No, not at all,’ she said. Then, in a slow mood, she asked:

‘How much do you love me?’

He stiffened himself further against her.

‘How much do you think I do?’ he asked.

‘I don’t know,’ she replied.

‘But what is your opinion?’ he asked.

There was a pause. At length, in the darkness, came her voice, hard and indifferent:

‘Very little indeed,’ she said coldly, almost flippant.

His heart went icy at the sound of her voice.

‘Why don’t I love you?’ he asked, as if admitting the truth of her accusation, yet hating her for it.

‘I don’t know why you don’t — I’ve been good to you. You were in a FEARFUL state when you came to me.’

Her heart was beating to suffocate her, yet she was strong and unrelenting.

‘When was I in a fearful state?’ he asked.

‘When you first came to me. I HAD to take pity on you. But it was never love.’

It was that statement ‘It was never love,’ which sounded in his ears with madness.

‘Why must you repeat it so often, that there is no love?’ he said in a voice strangled with rage.

‘Well you don’t THINK you love, do you?’ she asked.

He was silent with cold passion of anger.

‘You don’t think you CAN love me, do you?’ she repeated almost with a sneer.

‘No,’ he said.

‘You know you never HAVE loved me, don’t you?’

‘I don’t know what you mean by the word ‘love,’ he replied.

‘Yes, you do. You know all right that you have never loved me. Have you, do you think?’

‘No,’ he said, prompted by some barren spirit of truthfulness and obstinacy.

‘And you never WILL love me,’ she said finally, ‘will you?’

There was a diabolic coldness in her, too much to bear.

‘No,’ he said.

‘Then,’ she replied, ‘what have you against me!’

He was silent in cold, frightened rage and despair. ‘If only I could kill her,’ his heart was whispering repeatedly. ‘If only I could kill her — I should be free.’

It seemed to him that death was the only severing of this Gordian knot.

‘Why do you torture me?’ he said.

She flung her arms round his neck.

‘Ah, I don’t want to torture you,’ she said pityingly, as if she were comforting a child. The impertinence made his veins go cold, he was insensible. She held her arms round his neck, in a triumph of pity. And her pity for him was as cold as stone, its deepest motive was hate of him, and fear of his power over her, which she must always counterfoil.

‘Say you love me,’ she pleaded. ‘Say you will love me for ever — won’t you — won’t you?’

But it was her voice only that coaxed him. Her senses were entirely apart from him, cold and destructive of him. It was her overbearing WILL that insisted.

‘Won’t you say you’ll love me always?’ she coaxed. ‘Say it, even if it isn’t true — say it Gerald, do.’

‘I will love you always,’ he repeated, in real agony, forcing the words out.

She gave him a quick kiss.

‘Fancy your actually having said it,’ she said with a touch of raillery.

He stood as if he had been beaten.

‘Try to love me a little more, and to want me a little less,’ she said, in a half contemptuous, half coaxing tone.

The darkness seemed to be swaying in waves across his mind, great waves of darkness plunging across his mind. It seemed to him he was degraded at the very quick, made of no account.

‘You mean you don’t want me?’ he said.

‘You are so insistent, and there is so little grace in you, so little fineness. You are so crude. You break me — you only waste me — it is horrible to me.’

‘Horrible to you?’ he repeated.

‘Yes. Don’t you think I might have a room to myself, now Ursula has gone? You can say you want a dressing room.’

‘You do as you like — you can leave altogether if you like,’ he managed to articulate.

‘Yes, I know that,’ she replied. ‘So can you. You can leave me whenever you like — without notice even.’

The great tides of darkness were swinging across his mind, he could hardly stand upright. A terrible weariness overcame him, he felt he must lie on the floor. Dropping off his clothes, he got into bed, and lay like a man suddenly overcome by drunkenness, the darkness lifting and plunging as if he were lying upon a black, giddy sea. He lay still in this strange, horrific reeling for some time, purely unconscious.

At length she slipped from her own bed and came over to him. He remained rigid, his back to her. He was all but unconscious.

She put her arms round his terrifying, insentient body, and laid her cheek against his hard shoulder.

‘Gerald,’ she whispered. ‘Gerald.’

There was no change in him. She caught him against her. She pressed her breasts against his shoulders, she kissed his shoulder, through the sleeping jacket. Her mind wondered, over his rigid, unliving body. She was bewildered, and insistent, only her will was set for him to speak to her.

‘Gerald, my dear!’ she whispered, bending over him, kissing his ear.

Her warm breath playing, flying rhythmically over his ear, seemed to relax the tension. She could feel his body gradually relaxing a little, losing its terrifying, unnatural rigidity. Her hands clutched his limbs, his muscles, going over him spasmodically.

The hot blood began to flow again through his veins, his limbs relaxed.

‘Turn round to me,’ she whispered, forlorn with insistence and triumph.

So at last he was given again, warm and flexible. He turned and gathered her in his arms. And feeling her soft against him, so perfectly and wondrously soft and recipient, his arms tightened on her. She was as if crushed, powerless in him. His brain seemed hard and invincible now like a jewel, there was no resisting him.

His passion was awful to her, tense and ghastly, and impersonal, like a destruction, ultimate. She felt it would kill her. She was being killed.

‘My God, my God,’ she cried, in anguish, in his embrace, feeling her life being killed within her. And when he was kissing her, soothing her, her breath came slowly, as if she were really spent, dying.

‘Shall I die, shall I die?’ she repeated to herself.

And in the night, and in him, there was no answer to the question.

And yet, next day, the fragment of her which was not destroyed remained intact and hostile, she did not go away, she remained to finish the holiday, admitting nothing. He scarcely ever left her alone, but followed her like a shadow, he was like a doom upon her, a continual ‘thou shalt,’ ‘thou shalt not.’ Sometimes it was he who seemed strongest, whist she was almost gone, creeping near the earth like a spent wind; sometimes it was the reverse. But always it was this eternal see-saw, one destroyed that the other might exist, one ratified because the other was nulled.

‘In the end,’ she said to herself, ‘I shall go away from him.’

‘I can be free of her,’ he said to himself in his paroxysms of suffering.

And he set himself to be free. He even prepared to go away, to leave her in the lurch. But for the first time there was a flaw in his will.

‘Where shall I go?’ he asked himself.

‘Can’t you be self-sufficient?’ he replied to himself, putting himself upon his pride.

‘Self-sufficient!’ he repeated.

It seemed to him that Gudrun was sufficient unto herself, closed round and completed, like a thing in a case. In the calm, static reason of his soul, he recognised this, and admitted it was her right, to be closed round upon herself, self-complete, without desire. He realised it, he admitted it, it only needed one last effort on his own part, to win for himself the same completeness. He knew that it only needed one convulsion of his will for him to be able to turn upon himself also, to close upon himself as a stone fixes upon itself, and is impervious, self-completed, a thing isolated.

This knowledge threw him into a terrible chaos. Because, however much he might mentally WILL to be immune and self-complete, the desire for this state was lacking, and he could not create it. He could see that, to exist at all, he must be perfectly free of Gudrun, leave her if she wanted to be left, demand nothing of her, have no claim upon her.

But then, to have no claim upon her, he must stand by himself, in sheer nothingness. And his brain turned to nought at the idea. It was a state of nothingness. On the other hand, he might give in, and fawn to her. Or, finally, he might kill her. Or he might become just indifferent, purposeless, dissipated, momentaneous. But his nature was too serious, not gay enough or subtle enough for mocking licentiousness.

A strange rent had been torn in him; like a victim that is torn open and given to the heavens, so he had been torn apart and given to Gudrun. How should he close again? This wound, this strange, infinitely-sensitive opening of his soul, where he was exposed, like an open flower, to all the universe, and in which he was given to his complement, the other, the unknown, this wound, this disclosure, this unfolding of his own covering, leaving him incomplete, limited, unfinished, like an open flower under the sky, this was his cruellest joy. Why then should he forego it? Why should he close up and become impervious, immune, like a partial thing in a sheath, when he had broken forth, like a seed that has germinated, to issue forth in being, embracing the unrealised heavens.

He would keep the unfinished bliss of his own yearning even through the torture she inflicted upon him. A strange obstinacy possessed him. He would not go away from her whatever she said or did. A strange, deathly yearning carried him along with her. She was the determinating influence of his very being, though she treated him with contempt, repeated rebuffs, and denials, still he would never be gone, since in being near her, even, he felt the quickening, the going forth in him, the release, the knowledge of his own limitation and the

magic of the promise, as well as the mystery of his own destruction and annihilation.

She tortured the open heart of him even as he turned to her. And she was tortured herself. It may have been her will was stronger. She felt, with horror, as if he tore at the bud of her heart, tore it open, like an irreverent persistent being. Like a boy who pulls off a fly's wings, or tears open a bud to see what is in the flower, he tore at her privacy, at her very life, he would destroy her as an immature bud, torn open, is destroyed.

She might open towards him, a long while hence, in her dreams, when she was a pure spirit. But now she was not to be violated and ruined. She closed against him fiercely.

They climbed together, at evening, up the high slope, to see the sunset. In the finely breathing, keen wind they stood and watched the yellow sun sink in crimson and disappear. Then in the east the peaks and ridges glowed with living rose, incandescent like immortal flowers against a brown-purple sky, a miracle, whilst down below the world was a bluish shadow, and above, like an annunciation, hovered a rosy transport in mid-air.

To her it was so beautiful, it was a delirium, she wanted to gather the glowing, eternal peaks to her breast, and die. He saw them, saw they were beautiful. But there arose no clamour in his breast, only a bitterness that was visionary in itself. He wished the peaks were grey and unbeautiful, so that she should not get her support from them. Why did she betray the two of them so terribly, in embracing the glow of the evening? Why did she leave him standing there, with the ice-wind blowing through his heart, like death, to gratify herself among the rosy snow-tips?

'What does the twilight matter?' he said. 'Why do you grovel before it? Is it so important to you?'

She winced in violation and in fury.

'Go away,' she cried, 'and leave me to it. It is beautiful, beautiful,' she sang in strange, rhapsodic tones. 'It is the most beautiful thing I have ever seen in my life. Don't try to come between it and me. Take yourself away, you are out of place —'

He stood back a little, and left her standing there, statue-like, transported into the mystic glowing east. Already the rose was fading, large white stars were flashing out. He waited. He would forego everything but the yearning.

'That was the most perfect thing I have ever seen,' she said in cold, brutal tones, when at last she turned round to him. 'It amazes me that you should want to destroy it. If you can't see it yourself, why try to debar me?' But in reality, he had destroyed it for her, she was straining after a dead effect.

‘One day,’ he said, softly, looking up at her, ‘I shall destroy YOU, as you stand looking at the sunset; because you are such a liar.’

There was a soft, voluptuous promise to himself in the words. She was chilled but arrogant.

‘Ha!’ she said. ‘I am not afraid of your threats!’ She denied herself to him, she kept her room rigidly private to herself. But he waited on, in a curious patience, belonging to his yearning for her.

‘In the end,’ he said to himself with real voluptuous promise, ‘when it reaches that point, I shall do away with her.’ And he trembled delicately in every limb, in anticipation, as he trembled in his most violent accesses of passionate approach to her, trembling with too much desire.

She had a curious sort of allegiance with Loerke, all the while, now, something insidious and traitorous. Gerald knew of it. But in the unnatural state of patience, and the unwillingness to harden himself against her, in which he found himself, he took no notice, although her soft kindness to the other man, whom he hated as a noxious insect, made him shiver again with an access of the strange shuddering that came over him repeatedly.

He left her alone only when he went skiing, a sport he loved, and which she did not practise. The he seemed to sweep out of life, to be a projectile into the beyond. And often, when he went away, she talked to the little German sculptor. They had an invariable topic, in their art.

They were almost of the same ideas. He hated Mestrovic, was not satisfied with the Futurists, he liked the West African wooden figures, the Aztec art, Mexican and Central American. He saw the grotesque, and a curious sort of mechanical motion intoxicated him, a confusion in nature. They had a curious game with each other, Gudrun and Loerke, of infinite suggestivity, strange and leering, as if they had some esoteric understanding of life, that they alone were initiated into the fearful central secrets, that the world dared not know. Their whole correspondence was in a strange, barely comprehensible suggestivity, they kindled themselves at the subtle lust of the Egyptians or the Mexicans. The whole game was one of subtle inter-suggestivity, and they wanted to keep it on the plane of suggestion. From their verbal and physical nuances they got the highest satisfaction in the nerves, from a queer interchange of half-suggested ideas, looks, expressions and gestures, which were quite intolerable, though incomprehensible, to Gerald. He had no terms in which to think of their commerce, his terms were much too gross.

The suggestion of primitive art was their refuge, and the inner mysteries of sensation their object of worship. Art and Life were to them the Reality and the Unreality.

‘Of course,’ said Gudrun, ‘life doesn’t REALLY matter — it is one’s art which is central. What one does in one’s life has PEU DE RAPPORT, it doesn’t signify much.’

‘Yes, that is so, exactly,’ replied the sculptor. ‘What one does in one’s art, that is the breath of one’s being. What one does in one’s life, that is a bagatelle for the outsiders to fuss about.’

It was curious what a sense of elation and freedom Gudrun found in this communication. She felt established for ever. Of course Gerald was BAGATELLE. Love was one of the temporal things in her life, except in so far as she was an artist. She thought of Cleopatra — Cleopatra must have been an artist; she reaped the essential from a man, she harvested the ultimate sensation, and threw away the husk; and Mary Stuart, and the great Rachel, panting with her lovers after the theatre, these were the exoteric exponents of love. After all, what was the lover but fuel for the transport of this subtle knowledge, for a female art, the art of pure, perfect knowledge in sensuous understanding.

One evening Gerald was arguing with Loerke about Italy and Tripoli. The Englishman was in a strange, inflammable state, the German was excited. It was a contest of words, but it meant a conflict of spirit between the two men. And all the while Gudrun could see in Gerald an arrogant English contempt for a foreigner. Although Gerald was quivering, his eyes flashing, his face flushed, in his argument there was a brusqueness, a savage contempt in his manner, that made Gudrun’s blood flare up, and made Loerke keen and mortified. For Gerald came down like a sledge-hammer with his assertions, anything the little German said was merely contemptible rubbish.

At last Loerke turned to Gudrun, raising his hands in helpless irony, a shrug of ironical dismissal, something appealing and child-like.

‘Sehen sie, gnadige Frau-’ he began.

‘Bitte sagen Sie nicht immer, gnadige Frau,’ cried Gudrun, her eyes flashing, her cheeks burning. She looked like a vivid Medusa. Her voice was loud and clamorous, the other people in the room were startled.

‘Please don’t call me Mrs Crich,’ she cried aloud.

The name, in Loerke’s mouth particularly, had been an intolerable humiliation and constraint upon her, these many days.

The two men looked at her in amazement. Gerald went white at the cheek-bones.

‘What shall I say, then?’ asked Loerke, with soft, mocking insinuation.

‘Sagen Sie nur nicht das,’ she muttered, her cheeks flushed crimson. ‘Not that, at least.’

She saw, by the dawning look on Loerke’s face, that he had understood. She

was NOT Mrs Crich! So-o-, that explained a great deal.

‘Soll ich Fraulein sagen?’ he asked, malevolently.

‘I am not married,’ she said, with some hauteur.

Her heart was fluttering now, beating like a bewildered bird. She knew she had dealt a cruel wound, and she could not bear it.

Gerald sat erect, perfectly still, his face pale and calm, like the face of a statue. He was unaware of her, or of Loerke or anybody. He sat perfectly still, in an unalterable calm. Loerke, meanwhile, was crouching and glancing up from under his ducked head.

Gudrun was tortured for something to say, to relieve the suspense. She twisted her face in a smile, and glanced knowingly, almost sneering, at Gerald.

‘Truth is best,’ she said to him, with a grimace.

But now again she was under his domination; now, because she had dealt him this blow; because she had destroyed him, and she did not know how he had taken it. She watched him. He was interesting to her. She had lost her interest in Loerke.

Gerald rose at length, and went over in a leisurely still movement, to the Professor. The two began a conversation on Goethe.

She was rather piqued by the simplicity of Gerald’s demeanour this evening. He did not seem angry or disgusted, only he looked curiously innocent and pure, really beautiful. Sometimes it came upon him, this look of clear distance, and it always fascinated her.

She waited, troubled, throughout the evening. She thought he would avoid her, or give some sign. But he spoke to her simply and unemotionally, as he would to anyone else in the room. A certain peace, an abstraction possessed his soul.

She went to his room, hotly, violently in love with him. He was so beautiful and inaccessible. He kissed her, he was a lover to her. And she had extreme pleasure of him. But he did not come to, he remained remote and candid, unconscious. She wanted to speak to him. But this innocent, beautiful state of unconsciousness that had come upon him prevented her. She felt tormented and dark.

In the morning, however, he looked at her with a little aversion, some horror and some hatred darkening into his eyes. She withdrew on to her old ground. But still he would not gather himself together, against her.

Loerke was waiting for her now. The little artist, isolated in his own complete envelope, felt that here at last was a woman from whom he could get something. He was uneasy all the while, waiting to talk with her, subtly contriving to be near her. Her presence filled him with keenness and excitement, he gravitated cunningly towards her, as if she had some unseen force of attraction.

He was not in the least doubtful of himself, as regards Gerald. Gerald was one of the outsiders. Loerke only hated him for being rich and proud and of fine appearance. All these things, however, riches, pride of social standing, handsome physique, were externals. When it came to the relation with a woman such as Gudrun, he, Loerke, had an approach and a power that Gerald never dreamed of.

How should Gerald hope to satisfy a woman of Gudrun's calibre? Did he think that pride or masterful will or physical strength would help him? Loerke knew a secret beyond these things. The greatest power is the one that is subtle and adjusts itself, not one which blindly attacks. And he, Loerke, had understanding where Gerald was a calf. He, Loerke, could penetrate into depths far out of Gerald's knowledge. Gerald was left behind like a postulant in the ante-room of this temple of mysteries, this woman. But he Loerke, could he not penetrate into the inner darkness, find the spirit of the woman in its inner recess, and wrestle with it there, the central serpent that is coiled at the core of life.

What was it, after all, that a woman wanted? Was it mere social effect, fulfilment of ambition in the social world, in the community of mankind? Was it even a union in love and goodness? Did she want 'goodness'? Who but a fool would accept this of Gudrun? This was but the street view of her wants. Cross the threshold, and you found her completely, completely cynical about the social world and its advantages. Once inside the house of her soul and there was a pungent atmosphere of corrosion, an inflamed darkness of sensation, and a vivid, subtle, critical consciousness, that saw the world distorted, horrific.

What then, what next? Was it sheer blind force of passion that would satisfy her now? Not this, but the subtle thrills of extreme sensation in reduction. It was an unbroken will reacting against her unbroken will in a myriad subtle thrills of reduction, the last subtle activities of analysis and breaking down, carried out in the darkness of her, whilst the outside form, the individual, was utterly unchanged, even sentimental in its poses.

But between two particular people, any two people on earth, the range of pure sensational experience is limited. The climax of sensual reaction, once reached in any direction, is reached finally, there is no going on. There is only repetition possible, or the going apart of the two protagonists, or the subjugating of the one will to the other, or death.

Gerald had penetrated all the outer places of Gudrun's soul. He was to her the most crucial instance of the existing world, the NE PLUS ULTRA of the world of man as it existed for her. In him she knew the world, and had done with it. Knowing him finally she was the Alexander seeking new worlds. But there WERE no new worlds, there were no more MEN, there were only creatures,

little, ultimate CREATURES like Loerke. The world was finished now, for her. There was only the inner, individual darkness, sensation within the ego, the obscene religious mystery of ultimate reduction, the mystic frictional activities of diabolic reducing down, disintegrating the vital organic body of life.

All this Gudrun knew in her subconsciousness, not in her mind. She knew her next step-she knew what she should move on to, when she left Gerald. She was afraid of Gerald, that he might kill her. But she did not intend to be killed. A fine thread still united her to him. It should not be HER death which broke it. She had further to go, a further, slow exquisite experience to reap, unthinkable subtleties of sensation to know, before she was finished.

Of the last series of subtleties, Gerald was not capable. He could not touch the quick of her. But where his ruder blows could not penetrate, the fine, insinuating blade of Loerke's insect-like comprehension could. At least, it was time for her now to pass over to the other, the creature, the final craftsman. She knew that Loerke, in his innermost soul, was detached from everything, for him there was neither heaven nor earth nor hell. He admitted no allegiance, he gave no adherence anywhere. He was single and, by abstraction from the rest, absolute in himself.

Whereas in Gerald's soul there still lingered some attachment to the rest, to the whole. And this was his limitation. He was limited, BORNE, subject to his necessity, in the last issue, for goodness, for righteousness, for oneness with the ultimate purpose. That the ultimate purpose might be the perfect and subtle experience of the process of death, the will being kept unimpaired, that was not allowed in him. And this was his limitation.

There was a hovering triumph in Loerke, since Gudrun had denied her marriage with Gerald. The artist seemed to hover like a creature on the wing, waiting to settle. He did not approach Gudrun violently, he was never ill-timed. But carried on by a sure instinct in the complete darkness of his soul, he corresponded mystically with her, imperceptibly, but palpably.

For two days, he talked to her, continued the discussions of art, of life, in which they both found such pleasure. They praised the by-gone things, they took a sentimental, childish delight in the achieved perfections of the past. Particularly they liked the late eighteenth century, the period of Goethe and of Shelley, and Mozart.

They played with the past, and with the great figures of the past, a sort of little game of chess, or marionettes, all to please themselves. They had all the great men for their marionettes, and they two were the God of the show, working it all. As for the future, that they never mentioned except one laughed out some mocking dream of the destruction of the world by a ridiculous catastrophe of

man's invention: a man invented such a perfect explosive that it blew the earth in two, and the two halves set off in different directions through space, to the dismay of the inhabitants: or else the people of the world divided into two halves, and each half decided IT was perfect and right, the other half was wrong and must be destroyed; so another end of the world. Or else, Loerke's dream of fear, the world went cold, and snow fell everywhere, and only white creatures, polar-bears, white foxes, and men like awful white snow-birds, persisted in ice cruelty.

Apart from these stories, they never talked of the future. They delighted most either in mocking imaginations of destruction, or in sentimental, fine marionette-shows of the past. It was a sentimental delight to reconstruct the world of Goethe at Weimar, or of Schiller and poverty and faithful love, or to see again Jean Jacques in his quakings, or Voltaire at Ferney, or Frederick the Great reading his own poetry.

They talked together for hours, of literature and sculpture and painting, amusing themselves with Flaxman and Blake and Fuseli, with tenderness, and with Feuerbach and Bocklin. It would take them a life-time, they felt to live again, IN PETTO, the lives of the great artists. But they preferred to stay in the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries.

They talked in a mixture of languages. The ground-work was French, in either case. But he ended most of his sentences in a stumble of English and a conclusion of German, she skilfully wove herself to her end in whatever phrase came to her. She took a peculiar delight in this conversation. It was full of odd, fantastic expression, of double meanings, of evasions, of suggestive vagueness. It was a real physical pleasure to her to make this thread of conversation out of the different-coloured stands of three languages.

And all the while they two were hovering, hesitating round the flame of some invisible declaration. He wanted it, but was held back by some inevitable reluctance. She wanted it also, but she wanted to put it off, to put it off indefinitely, she still had some pity for Gerald, some connection with him. And the most fatal of all, she had the reminiscent sentimental compassion for herself in connection with him. Because of what HAD been, she felt herself held to him by immortal, invisible threads—because of what HAD been, because of his coming to her that first night, into her own house, in his extremity, because —

Gerald was gradually overcome with a revulsion of loathing for Loerke. He did not take the man seriously, he despised him merely, except as he felt in Gudrun's veins the influence of the little creature. It was this that drove Gerald wild, the feeling in Gudrun's veins of Loerke's presence, Loerke's being, flowing dominant through her.

‘What makes you so smitten with that little vermin?’ he asked, really puzzled. For he, man-like, could not see anything attractive or important AT ALL in Loerke. Gerald expected to find some handsomeness or nobleness, to account for a woman’s subjection. But he saw none here, only an insect-like repulsiveness.

Gudrun flushed deeply. It was these attacks she would never forgive.

‘What do you mean?’ she replied. ‘My God, what a mercy I am NOT married to you!’

Her voice of flouting and contempt scotched him. He was brought up short. But he recovered himself.

‘Tell me, only tell me,’ he reiterated in a dangerous narrowed voice — ‘tell me what it is that fascinates you in him.’

‘I am not fascinated,’ she said, with cold repelling innocence.

‘Yes, you are. You are fascinated by that little dry snake, like a bird gaping ready to fall down its throat.’

She looked at him with black fury.

‘I don’t choose to be discussed by you,’ she said.

‘It doesn’t matter whether you choose or not,’ he replied, ‘that doesn’t alter the fact that you are ready to fall down and kiss the feet of that little insect. And I don’t want to prevent you — do it, fall down and kiss his feet. But I want to know, what it is that fascinates you — what is it?’

She was silent, suffused with black rage.

‘How DARE you come brow-beating me,’ she cried, ‘how dare you, you little squire, you bully. What right have you over me, do you think?’

His face was white and gleaming, she knew by the light in his eyes that she was in his power — the wolf. And because she was in his power, she hated him with a power that she wondered did not kill him. In her will she killed him as he stood, effaced him.

‘It is not a question of right,’ said Gerald, sitting down on a chair. She watched the change in his body. She saw his clenched, mechanical body moving there like an obsession. Her hatred of him was tinged with fatal contempt.

‘It’s not a question of my right over you — though I HAVE some right, remember. I want to know, I only want to know what it is that subjugates you to that little scum of a sculptor downstairs, what it is that brings you down like a humble maggot, in worship of him. I want to know what you creep after.’

She stood over against the window, listening. Then she turned round.

‘Do you?’ she said, in her most easy, most cutting voice. ‘Do you want to know what it is in him? It’s because he has some understanding of a woman, because he is not stupid. That’s why it is.’

A queer, sinister, animal-like smile came over Gerald’s face.

‘But what understanding is it?’ he said. ‘The understanding of a flea, a hopping flea with a proboscis. Why should you crawl abject before the understanding of a flea?’

There passed through Gudrun’s mind Blake’s representation of the soul of a flea. She wanted to fit it to Loerke. Blake was a clown too. But it was necessary to answer Gerald.

‘Don’t you think the understanding of a flea is more interesting than the understanding of a fool?’ she asked.

‘A fool!’ he repeated.

‘A fool, a conceited fool — a Dummkopf,’ she replied, adding the German word.

‘Do you call me a fool?’ he replied. ‘Well, wouldn’t I rather be the fool I am, than that flea downstairs?’

She looked at him. A certain blunt, blind stupidity in him palled on her soul, limiting her.

‘You give yourself away by that last,’ she said.

He sat and wondered.

‘I shall go away soon,’ he said.

She turned on him.

‘Remember,’ she said, ‘I am completely independent of you — completely. You make your arrangements, I make mine.’

He pondered this.

‘You mean we are strangers from this minute?’ he asked.

She halted and flushed. He was putting her in a trap, forcing her hand. She turned round on him.

‘Strangers,’ she said, ‘we can never be. But if you WANT to make any movement apart from me, then I wish you to know you are perfectly free to do so. Do not consider me in the slightest.’

Even so slight an implication that she needed him and was depending on him still was sufficient to rouse his passion. As he sat a change came over his body, the hot, molten stream mounted involuntarily through his veins. He groaned inwardly, under its bondage, but he loved it. He looked at her with clear eyes, waiting for her.

She knew at once, and was shaken with cold revulsion. HOW could he look at her with those clear, warm, waiting eyes, waiting for her, even now? What had been said between them, was it not enough to put them worlds asunder, to freeze them forever apart! And yet he was all transfused and roused, waiting for her.

It confused her. Turning her head aside, she said:

‘I shall always TELL you, whenever I am going to make any change — ’

And with this she moved out of the room.

He sat suspended in a fine recoil of disappointment, that seemed gradually to be destroying his understanding. But the unconscious state of patience persisted in him. He remained motionless, without thought or knowledge, for a long time. Then he rose, and went downstairs, to play at chess with one of the students. His face was open and clear, with a certain innocent LAISSER-ALLER that troubled Gudrun most, made her almost afraid of him, whilst she disliked him deeply for it.

It was after this that Loerke, who had never yet spoken to her personally, began to ask her of her state.

‘You are not married at all, are you?’ he asked.

She looked full at him.

‘Not in the least,’ she replied, in her measured way. Loerke laughed, wrinkling up his face oddly. There was a thin wisp of his hair straying on his forehead, she noticed that his skin was of a clear brown colour, his hands, his wrists. And his hands seemed closely prehensile. He seemed like topaz, so strangely brownish and pellucid.

‘Good,’ he said.

Still it needed some courage for him to go on.

‘Was Mrs Birkin your sister?’ he asked.

‘Yes.’

‘And was SHE married?’

‘She was married.’

‘Have you parents, then?’

‘Yes,’ said Gudrun, ‘we have parents.’

And she told him, briefly, laconically, her position. He watched her closely, curiously all the while.

‘So!’ he exclaimed, with some surprise. ‘And the Herr Crich, is he rich?’

‘Yes, he is rich, a coal owner.’

‘How long has your friendship with him lasted?’

‘Some months.’

There was a pause.

‘Yes, I am surprised,’ he said at length. ‘The English, I thought they were so — cold. And what do you think to do when you leave here?’

‘What do I think to do?’ she repeated.

‘Yes. You cannot go back to the teaching. No — ’ he shrugged his shoulders — ’that is impossible. Leave that to the CANAILLE who can do nothing else. You, for your part — you know, you are a remarkable woman, eine seltsame Frau. Why deny it — why make any question of it? You are an extraordinary

woman, why should you follow the ordinary course, the ordinary life?’

Gudrun sat looking at her hands, flushed. She was pleased that he said, so simply, that she was a remarkable woman. He would not say that to flatter her — he was far too self-opinionated and objective by nature. He said it as he would say a piece of sculpture was remarkable, because he knew it was so.

And it gratified her to hear it from him. Other people had such a passion to make everything of one degree, of one pattern. In England it was chic to be perfectly ordinary. And it was a relief to her to be acknowledged extraordinary. Then she need not fret about the common standards.

‘You see,’ she said, ‘I have no money whatsoever.’

‘Ach, money!’ he cried, lifting his shoulders. ‘When one is grown up, money is lying about at one’s service. It is only when one is young that it is rare. Take no thought for money — that always lies to hand.’

‘Does it?’ she said, laughing.

‘Always. The Gerald will give you a sum, if you ask him for it — ’

She flushed deeply.

‘I will ask anybody else,’ she said, with some difficulty — ‘but not him.’

Loerke looked closely at her.

‘Good,’ he said. ‘Then let it be somebody else. Only don’t go back to that England, that school. No, that is stupid.’

Again there was a pause. He was afraid to ask her outright to go with him, he was not even quite sure he wanted her; and she was afraid to be asked. He begrudged his own isolation, was VERY chary of sharing his life, even for a day.

‘The only other place I know is Paris,’ she said, ‘and I can’t stand that.’

She looked with her wide, steady eyes full at Loerke. He lowered his head and averted his face.

‘Paris, no!’ he said. ‘Between the RELIGION D’AMOUR, and the latest ‘ism, and the new turning to Jesus, one had better ride on a carrousel all day. But come to Dresden. I have a studio there — I can give you work, — oh, that would be easy enough. I haven’t seen any of your things, but I believe in you. Come to Dresden — that is a fine town to be in, and as good a life as you can expect of a town. You have everything there, without the foolishness of Paris or the beer of Munich.’

He sat and looked at her, coldly. What she liked about him was that he spoke to her simple and flat, as to himself. He was a fellow craftsman, a fellow being to her, first.

‘No — Paris,’ he resumed, ‘it makes me sick. Pah — l’amour. I detest it. L’amour, l’amore, die Liebe — I detest it in every language. Women and love,

there is no greater tedium,' he cried.

She was slightly offended. And yet, this was her own basic feeling. Men, and love — there was no greater tedium.

'I think the same,' she said.

'A bore,' he repeated. 'What does it matter whether I wear this hat or another. So love. I needn't wear a hat at all, only for convenience. Neither need I love except for convenience. I tell you what, gnadige Frau — ' and he leaned towards her — then he made a quick, odd gesture, as of striking something aside — 'gnadige Fraulein, never mind — I tell you what, I would give everything, everything, all your love, for a little companionship in intelligence — ' his eyes flickered darkly, evilly at her. 'You understand?' he asked, with a faint smile. 'It wouldn't matter if she were a hundred years old, a thousand — it would be all the same to me, so that she can UNDERSTAND.' He shut his eyes with a little snap.

Again Gudrun was rather offended. Did he not think her good looking, then? Suddenly she laughed.

'I shall have to wait about eighty years to suit you, at that!' she said. 'I am ugly enough, aren't I?'

He looked at her with an artist's sudden, critical, estimating eye.

'You are beautiful,' he said, 'and I am glad of it. But it isn't that — it isn't that,' he cried, with emphasis that flattered her. 'It is that you have a certain wit, it is the kind of understanding. For me, I am little, chetif, insignificant. Good! Do not ask me to be strong and handsome, then. But it is the ME — ' he put his fingers to his mouth, oddly — 'it is the ME that is looking for a mistress, and my ME is waiting for the THEE of the mistress, for the match to my particular intelligence. You understand?'

'Yes,' she said, 'I understand.'

'As for the other, this amour — ' he made a gesture, dashing his hand aside, as if to dash away something troublesome — 'it is unimportant, unimportant. Does it matter, whether I drink white wine this evening, or whether I drink nothing? IT DOES NOT MATTER, it does not matter. So this love, this amour, this BAISER. Yes or no, soit ou soit pas, today, tomorrow, or never, it is all the same, it does not matter — no more than the white wine.'

He ended with an odd dropping of the head in a desperate negation. Gudrun watched him steadily. She had gone pale.

Suddenly she stretched over and seized his hand in her own.

'That is true,' she said, in rather a high, vehement voice, 'that is true for me too. It is the understanding that matters.'

He looked up at her almost frightened, furtive. Then he nodded, a little

sullenly. She let go his hand: he had made not the lightest response. And they sat in silence.

‘Do you know,’ he said, suddenly looking at her with dark, self-important, prophetic eyes, ‘your fate and mine, they will run together, till — ’ and he broke off in a little grimace.

‘Till when?’ she asked, blanched, her lips going white. She was terribly susceptible to these evil prognostications, but he only shook his head.

‘I don’t know,’ he said, ‘I don’t know.’

Gerald did not come in from his skiing until nightfall, he missed the coffee and cake that she took at four o’clock. The snow was in perfect condition, he had travelled a long way, by himself, among the snow ridges, on his skis, he had climbed high, so high that he could see over the top of the pass, five miles distant, could see the Marienhutte, the hostel on the crest of the pass, half buried in snow, and over into the deep valley beyond, to the dusk of the pine trees. One could go that way home; but he shuddered with nausea at the thought of home; — one could travel on skis down there, and come to the old imperial road, below the pass. But why come to any road? He revolted at the thought of finding himself in the world again. He must stay up there in the snow forever. He had been happy by himself, high up there alone, travelling swiftly on skis, taking far flights, and skimming past the dark rocks veined with brilliant snow.

But he felt something icy gathering at his heart. This strange mood of patience and innocence which had persisted in him for some days, was passing away, he would be left again a prey to the horrible passions and tortures.

So he came down reluctantly, snow-burned, snow-estranged, to the house in the hollow, between the knuckles of the mountain tops. He saw its lights shining yellow, and he held back, wishing he need not go in, to confront those people, to hear the turmoil of voices and to feel the confusion of other presences. He was isolated as if there were a vacuum round his heart, or a sheath of pure ice.

The moment he saw Gudrun something jolted in his soul. She was looking rather lofty and superb, smiling slowly and graciously to the Germans. A sudden desire leapt in his heart, to kill her. He thought, what a perfect voluptuous fulfilment it would be, to kill her. His mind was absent all the evening, estranged by the snow and his passion. But he kept the idea constant within him, what a perfect voluptuous consummation it would be to strangle her, to strangle every spark of life out of her, till she lay completely inert, soft, relaxed for ever, a soft heap lying dead between his hands, utterly dead. Then he would have had her finally and for ever; there would be such a perfect voluptuous finality.

Gudrun was unaware of what he was feeling, he seemed so quiet and amiable, as usual. His amiability even made her feel brutal towards him.

She went into his room when he was partially undressed. She did not notice the curious, glad gleam of pure hatred, with which he looked at her. She stood near the door, with her hand behind her.

‘I have been thinking, Gerald,’ she said, with an insulting nonchalance, ‘that I shall not go back to England.’

‘Oh,’ he said, ‘where will you go then?’

But she ignored his question. She had her own logical statement to make, and it must be made as she had thought it.

‘I can’t see the use of going back,’ she continued. ‘It is over between me and you — ’

She paused for him to speak. But he said nothing. He was only talking to himself, saying ‘Over, is it? I believe it is over. But it isn’t finished. Remember, it isn’t finished. We must put some sort of a finish on it. There must be a conclusion, there must be finality.’

So he talked to himself, but aloud he said nothing whatever.

‘What has been, has been,’ she continued. ‘There is nothing that I regret. I hope you regret nothing — ’

She waited for him to speak.

‘Oh, I regret nothing,’ he said, accommodatingly.

‘Good then,’ she answered, ‘good then. Then neither of us cherishes any regrets, which is as it should be.’

‘Quite as it should be,’ he said aimlessly.

She paused to gather up her thread again.

‘Our attempt has been a failure,’ she said. ‘But we can try again, elsewhere.’

A little flicker of rage ran through his blood. It was as if she were rousing him, goading him. Why must she do it?

‘Attempt at what?’ he asked.

‘At being lovers, I suppose,’ she said, a little baffled, yet so trivial she made it all seem.

‘Our attempt at being lovers has been a failure?’ he repeated aloud.

To himself he was saying, ‘I ought to kill her here. There is only this left, for me to kill her.’ A heavy, overcharged desire to bring about her death possessed him. She was unaware.

‘Hasn’t it?’ she asked. ‘Do you think it has been a success?’

Again the insult of the flippant question ran through his blood like a current of fire.

‘It had some of the elements of success, our relationship,’ he replied. ‘It — might have come off.’

But he paused before concluding the last phrase. Even as he began the

sentence, he did not believe in what he was going to say. He knew it never could have been a success.

‘No,’ she replied. ‘You cannot love.’

‘And you?’ he asked.

Her wide, dark-filled eyes were fixed on him, like two moons of darkness.

‘I couldn’t love YOU,’ she said, with stark cold truth.

A blinding flash went over his brain, his body jolted. His heart had burst into flame. His consciousness was gone into his wrists, into his hands. He was one blind, incontinent desire, to kill her. His wrists were bursting, there would be no satisfaction till his hands had closed on her.

But even before his body swerved forward on her, a sudden, cunning comprehension was expressed on her face, and in a flash she was out of the door. She ran in one flash to her room and locked herself in. She was afraid, but confident. She knew her life trembled on the edge of an abyss. But she was curiously sure of her footing. She knew her cunning could outwit him.

She trembled, as she stood in her room, with excitement and awful exhilaration. She knew she could outwit him. She could depend on her presence of mind, and on her wits. But it was a fight to the death, she knew it now. One slip, and she was lost. She had a strange, tense, exhilarated sickness in her body, as one who is in peril of falling from a great height, but who does not look down, does not admit the fear.

‘I will go away the day after tomorrow,’ she said.

She only did not want Gerald to think that she was afraid of him, that she was running away because she was afraid of him. She was not afraid of him, fundamentally. She knew it was her safeguard to avoid his physical violence. But even physically she was not afraid of him. She wanted to prove it to him. When she had proved it, that, whatever he was, she was not afraid of him; when she had proved THAT, she could leave him forever. But meanwhile the fight between them, terrible as she knew it to be, was inconclusive. And she wanted to be confident in herself. However many terrors she might have, she would be unafraid, uncowed by him. He could never cow her, nor dominate her, nor have any right over her; this she would maintain until she had proved it. Once it was proved, she was free of him forever.

But she had not proved it yet, neither to him nor to herself. And this was what still bound her to him. She was bound to him, she could not live beyond him. She sat up in bed, closely wrapped up, for many hours, thinking endlessly to herself. It was as if she would never have done weaving the great provision of her thoughts.

‘It isn’t as if he really loved me,’ she said to herself. ‘He doesn’t. Every

woman he comes across he wants to make her in love with him. He doesn't even know that he is doing it. But there he is, before every woman he unfurls his male attractiveness, displays his great desirability, he tries to make every woman think how wonderful it would be to have him for a lover. His very ignoring of the women is part of the game. He is never UNCONSCIOUS of them. He should have been a cockerel, so he could strut before fifty females, all his subjects. But really, his Don Juan does NOT interest me. I could play Dona Juanita a million times better than he plays Juan. He bores me, you know. His maleness bores me. Nothing is so boring, so inherently stupid and stupidly conceited. Really, the fathomless conceit of these men, it is ridiculous — the little strutters.

'They are all alike. Look at Birkin. Built out of the limitation of conceit they are, and nothing else. Really, nothing but their ridiculous limitation and intrinsic insignificance could make them so conceited.

'As for Loerke, there is a thousand times more in him than in a Gerald. Gerald is so limited, there is a dead end to him. He would grind on at the old mills forever. And really, there is no corn between the millstones any more. They grind on and on, when there is nothing to grind — saying the same things, believing the same things, acting the same things. Oh, my God, it would wear out the patience of a stone.

'I don't worship Loerke, but at any rate, he is a free individual. He is not stiff with conceit of his own maleness. He is not grinding dutifully at the old mills. Oh God, when I think of Gerald, and his work — those offices at Beldover, and the mines — it makes my heart sick. What HAVE I to do with it — and him thinking he can be a lover to a woman! One might as well ask it of a self-satisfied lamp-post. These men, with their eternal jobs — and their eternal mills of God that keep on grinding at nothing! It is too boring, just boring. However did I come to take him seriously at all!

'At least in Dresden, one will have one's back to it all. And there will be amusing things to do. It will be amusing to go to these eurythmic displays, and the German opera, the German theatre. It WILL be amusing to take part in German Bohemian life. And Loerke is an artist, he is a free individual. One will escape from so much, that is the chief thing, escape so much hideous boring repetition of vulgar actions, vulgar phrases, vulgar postures. I don't delude myself that I shall find an elixir of life in Dresden. I know I shan't. But I shall get away from people who have their own homes and their own children and their own acquaintances and their own this and their own that. I shall be among people who DON'T own things and who HAVEN'T got a home and a domestic servant in the background, who haven't got a standing and a status and a degree and a circle of friends of the same. Oh God, the wheels within wheels of people,

it makes one's head tick like a clock, with a very madness of dead mechanical monotony and meaninglessness. How I HATE life, how I hate it. How I hate the Gerald, that they can offer one nothing else.

'Shortlands! — Heavens! Think of living there, one week, then the next, and THEN THE THIRD —

'No, I won't think of it — it is too much.'

And she broke off, really terrified, really unable to bear any more.

The thought of the mechanical succession of day following day, day following day, AD INFINITUM, was one of the things that made her heart palpitate with a real approach of madness. The terrible bondage of this tick-tack of time, this twitching of the hands of the clock, this eternal repetition of hours and days — oh God, it was too awful to contemplate. And there was no escape from it, no escape.

She almost wished Gerald were with her to save her from the terror of her own thoughts. Oh, how she suffered, lying there alone, confronted by the terrible clock, with its eternal tick-tack. All life, all life resolved itself into this: tick-tack, tick-tack, tick-tack; then the striking of the hour; then the tick-tack, tick-tack, and the twitching of the clock-fingers.

Gerald could not save her from it. He, his body, his motion, his life — it was the same ticking, the same twitching across the dial, a horrible mechanical twitching forward over the face of the hours. What were his kisses, his embraces. She could hear their tick-tack, tick-tack.

Ha — ha — she laughed to herself, so frightened that she was trying to laugh it off — ha — ha, how maddening it was, to be sure, to be sure!

Then, with a fleeting self-conscious motion, she wondered if she would be very much surprised, on rising in the morning, to realise that her hair had turned white. She had FELT it turning white so often, under the intolerable burden of her thoughts, and her sensations. Yet there it remained, brown as ever, and there she was herself, looking a picture of health.

Perhaps she was healthy. Perhaps it was only her unabateable health that left her so exposed to the truth. If she were sickly she would have her illusions, imaginations. As it was, there was no escape. She must always see and know and never escape. She could never escape. There she was, placed before the clock-face of life. And if she turned round as in a railway station, to look at the bookstall, still she could see, with her very spine, she could see the clock, always the great white clock-face. In vain she fluttered the leaves of books, or made statuettes in clay. She knew she was not REALLY reading. She was not REALLY working. She was watching the fingers twitch across the eternal, mechanical, monotonous clock-face of time. She never really lived, she only

watched. Indeed, she was like a little, twelve-hour clock, vis-a-vis with the enormous clock of eternity — there she was, like Dignity and Impudence, or Impudence and Dignity.

The picture pleased her. Didn't her face really look like a clock dial — rather roundish and often pale, and impassive. She would have got up to look, in the mirror, but the thought of the sight of her own face, that was like a twelve-hour clock-dial, filled her with such deep terror, that she hastened to think of something else.

Oh, why wasn't somebody kind to her? Why wasn't there somebody who would take her in their arms, and hold her to their breast, and give her rest, pure, deep, healing rest. Oh, why wasn't there somebody to take her in their arms and fold her safe and perfect, for sleep. She wanted so much this perfect enfolded sleep. She lay always so unsheathed in sleep. She would lie always unsheathed in sleep, unrelieved, unsaved. Oh, how could she bear it, this endless unrelief, this eternal unrelief.

Gerald! Could he fold her in his arms and sheathe her in sleep? Ha! He needed putting to sleep himself — poor Gerald. That was all he needed. What did he do, he made the burden for her greater, the burden of her sleep was the more intolerable, when he was there. He was an added weariness upon her unripening nights, her unfruitful slumbers. Perhaps he got some repose from her. Perhaps he did. Perhaps this was what he was always dogging her for, like a child that is famished, crying for the breast. Perhaps this was the secret of his passion, his forever unquenched desire for her — that he needed her to put him to sleep, to give him repose.

What then! Was she his mother? Had she asked for a child, whom she must nurse through the nights, for her lover. She despised him, she despised him, she hardened her heart. An infant crying in the night, this Don Juan.

Ooh, but how she hated the infant crying in the night. She would murder it gladly. She would stifle it and bury it, as Hetty Sorrell did. No doubt Hetty Sorrell's infant cried in the night — no doubt Arthur Donnithorne's infant would. Ha — the Arthur Donnithornes, the Gerald's of this world. So manly by day, yet all the while, such a crying of infants in the night. Let them turn into mechanisms, let them. Let them become instruments, pure machines, pure wills, that work like clock-work, in perpetual repetition. Let them be this, let them be taken up entirely in their work, let them be perfect parts of a great machine, having a slumber of constant repetition. Let Gerald manage his firm. There he would be satisfied, as satisfied as a wheelbarrow that goes backwards and forwards along a plank all day — she had seen it.

The wheelbarrow — the one humble wheel — the unit of the firm. Then the

cart, with two wheels; then the truck, with four; then the donkey-engine, with eight, then the winding-engine, with sixteen, and so on, till it came to the miner, with a thousand wheels, and then the electrician, with three thousand, and the underground manager, with twenty thousand, and the general manager with a hundred thousand little wheels working away to complete his make-up, and then Gerald, with a million wheels and cogs and axles.

Poor Gerald, such a lot of little wheels to his make-up! He was more intricate than a chronometer-watch. But oh heavens, what weariness! What weariness, God above! A chronometer-watch — a beetle — her soul fainted with utter ennui, from the thought. So many wheels to count and consider and calculate! Enough, enough — there was an end to man's capacity for complications, even. Or perhaps there was no end.

Meanwhile Gerald sat in his room, reading. When Gudrun was gone, he was left stupefied with arrested desire. He sat on the side of the bed for an hour, stupefied, little strands of consciousness appearing and reappearing. But he did not move, for a long time he remained inert, his head dropped on his breast.

Then he looked up and realised that he was going to bed. He was cold. Soon he was lying down in the dark.

But what he could not bear was the darkness. The solid darkness confronting him drove him mad. So he rose, and made a light. He remained seated for a while, staring in front. He did not think of Gudrun, he did not think of anything.

Then suddenly he went downstairs for a book. He had all his life been in terror of the nights that should come, when he could not sleep. He knew that this would be too much for him, to have to face nights of sleeplessness and of horrified watching the hours.

So he sat for hours in bed, like a statue, reading. His mind, hard and acute, read on rapidly, his body understood nothing. In a state of rigid unconsciousness, he read on through the night, till morning, when, weary and disgusted in spirit, disgusted most of all with himself, he slept for two hours.

Then he got up, hard and full of energy. Gudrun scarcely spoke to him, except at coffee when she said:

'I shall be leaving tomorrow.'

'We will go together as far as Innsbruck, for appearance's sake?' he asked.

'Perhaps,' she said.

She said 'Perhaps' between the sips of her coffee. And the sound of her taking her breath in the word, was nauseous to him. He rose quickly to be away from her.

He went and made arrangements for the departure on the morrow. Then, taking some food, he set out for the day on the skis. Perhaps, he said to the Wirt,

he would go up to the Marienhutte, perhaps to the village below.

To Gudrun this day was full of a promise like spring. She felt an approaching release, a new fountain of life rising up in her. It gave her pleasure to dawdle through her packing, it gave her pleasure to dip into books, to try on her different garments, to look at herself in the glass. She felt a new lease of life was come upon her, and she was happy like a child, very attractive and beautiful to everybody, with her soft, luxuriant figure, and her happiness. Yet underneath was death itself.

In the afternoon she had to go out with Loerke. Her tomorrow was perfectly vague before her. This was what gave her pleasure. She might be going to England with Gerald, she might be going to Dresden with Loerke, she might be going to Munich, to a girl-friend she had there. Anything might come to pass on the morrow. And today was the white, snowy iridescent threshold of all possibility. All possibility — that was the charm to her, the lovely, iridescent, indefinite charm, — pure illusion All possibility — because death was inevitable, and NOTHING was possible but death.

She did not want things to materialise, to take any definite shape. She wanted, suddenly, at one moment of the journey tomorrow, to be wafted into an utterly new course, by some utterly unforeseen event, or motion. So that, although she wanted to go out with Loerke for the last time into the snow, she did not want to be serious or businesslike.

And Loerke was not a serious figure. In his brown velvet cap, that made his head as round as a chestnut, with the brown-velvet flaps loose and wild over his ears, and a wisp of elf-like, thin black hair blowing above his full, elf-like dark eyes, the shiny, transparent brown skin crinkling up into odd grimaces on his small-featured face, he looked an odd little boy-man, a bat. But in his figure, in the greeny loden suit, he looked CHETIF and puny, still strangely different from the rest.

He had taken a little toboggan, for the two of them, and they trudged between the blinding slopes of snow, that burned their now hardening faces, laughing in an endless sequence of quips and jests and polyglot fancies. The fancies were the reality to both of them, they were both so happy, tossing about the little coloured balls of verbal humour and whimsicality. Their natures seemed to sparkle in full interplay, they were enjoying a pure game. And they wanted to keep it on the level of a game, their relationship: SUCH a fine game.

Loerke did not take the tobogganning very seriously. He put no fire and intensity into it, as Gerald did. Which pleased Gudrun. She was weary, oh so weary of Gerald's gripped intensity of physical motion. Loerke let the sledge go wildly, and gaily, like a flying leaf, and when, at a bend, he pitched both her and

him out into the snow, he only waited for them both to pick themselves up unhurt off the keen white ground, to be laughing and pert as a pixie. She knew he would be making ironical, playful remarks as he wandered in hell — if he were in the humour. And that pleased her immensely. It seemed like a rising above the dreariness of actuality, the monotony of contingencies.

They played till the sun went down, in pure amusement, careless and timeless. Then, as the little sledge twirled riskily to rest at the bottom of the slope,

‘Wait!’ he said suddenly, and he produced from somewhere a large thermos flask, a packet of Keks, and a bottle of Schnapps.

‘Oh Loerke,’ she cried. ‘What an inspiration! What a COMBLE DE JOIE INDEED! What is the Schnapps?’

He looked at it, and laughed.

‘Heidelbeer!’ he said.

‘No! From the bilberries under the snow. Doesn’t it look as if it were distilled from snow. Can you — ’ she sniffed, and sniffed at the bottle — ‘can you smell bilberries? Isn’t it wonderful? It is exactly as if one could smell them through the snow.’

She stamped her foot lightly on the ground. He kneeled down and whistled, and put his ear to the snow. As he did so his black eyes twinkled up.

‘Ha! Ha!’ she laughed, warmed by the whimsical way in which he mocked at her verbal extravagances. He was always teasing her, mocking her ways. But as he in his mockery was even more absurd than she in her extravagances, what could one do but laugh and feel liberated.

She could feel their voices, hers and his, ringing silvery like bells in the frozen, motionless air of the first twilight. How perfect it was, how VERY perfect it was, this silvery isolation and interplay.

She sipped the hot coffee, whose fragrance flew around them like bees murmuring around flowers, in the snowy air, she drank tiny sips of the Heidelbeerwasser, she ate the cold, sweet, creamy wafers. How good everything was! How perfect everything tasted and smelled and sounded, here in this utter stillness of snow and falling twilight.

‘You are going away tomorrow?’ his voice came at last.

‘Yes.’

There was a pause, when the evening seemed to rise in its silent, ringing pallor infinitely high, to the infinite which was near at hand.

‘WOHIN?’

That was the question — WOHIN? Whither? WOHIN? What a lovely word! She NEVER wanted it answered. Let it chime for ever.

‘I don’t know,’ she said, smiling at him.

He caught the smile from her.

‘One never does,’ he said.

‘One never does,’ she repeated.

There was a silence, wherein he ate biscuits rapidly, as a rabbit eats leaves.

‘But,’ he laughed, ‘where will you take a ticket to?’

‘Oh heaven!’ she cried. ‘One must take a ticket.’

Here was a blow. She saw herself at the wicket, at the railway station. Then a relieving thought came to her. She breathed freely.

‘But one needn’t go,’ she cried.

‘Certainly not,’ he said.

‘I mean one needn’t go where one’s ticket says.’

That struck him. One might take a ticket, so as not to travel to the destination it indicated. One might break off, and avoid the destination. A point located. That was an idea!

‘Then take a ticket to London,’ he said. ‘One should never go there.’

‘Right,’ she answered.

He poured a little coffee into a tin can.

‘You won’t tell me where you will go?’ he asked.

‘Really and truly,’ she said, ‘I don’t know. It depends which way the wind blows.’

He looked at her quizzically, then he pursed up his lips, like Zephyrus, blowing across the snow.

‘It goes towards Germany,’ he said.

‘I believe so,’ she laughed.

Suddenly, they were aware of a vague white figure near them. It was Gerald. Gudrun’s heart leapt in sudden terror, profound terror. She rose to her feet.

‘They told me where you were,’ came Gerald’s voice, like a judgment in the whitish air of twilight.

‘MARIA! You come like a ghost,’ exclaimed Loerke.

Gerald did not answer. His presence was unnatural and ghostly to them.

Loerke shook the flask — then he held it inverted over the snow. Only a few brown drops trickled out.

‘All gone!’ he said.

To Gerald, the smallish, odd figure of the German was distinct and objective, as if seen through field glasses. And he disliked the small figure exceedingly, he wanted it removed.

Then Loerke rattled the box which held the biscuits.

‘Biscuits there are still,’ he said.

And reaching from his seated posture in the sledge, he handed them to

Gudrun. She fumbled, and took one. He would have held them to Gerald, but Gerald so definitely did not want to be offered a biscuit, that Loerke, rather vaguely, put the box aside. Then he took up the small bottle, and held it to the light.

‘Also there is some Schnapps,’ he said to himself.

Then suddenly, he elevated the bottle gallantly in the air, a strange, grotesque figure leaning towards Gudrun, and said:

‘Gnadiges Fraulein,’ he said, ‘wohl — ’

There was a crack, the bottle was flying, Loerke had started back, the three stood quivering in violent emotion.

Loerke turned to Gerald, a devilish leer on his bright-skinned face.

‘Well done!’ he said, in a satirical demoniac frenzy. ‘C’est le sport, sans doute.’

The next instant he was sitting ludicrously in the snow, Gerald’s fist having rung against the side of his head. But Loerke pulled himself together, rose, quivering, looking full at Gerald, his body weak and furtive, but his eyes demoniacal with satire.

‘Vive le heros, vive — ’

But he flinched, as, in a black flash Gerald’s fist came upon him, banged into the other side of his head, and sent him aside like a broken straw.

But Gudrun moved forward. She raised her clenched hand high, and brought it down, with a great downward stroke on to the face and on to the breast of Gerald.

A great astonishment burst upon him, as if the air had broken. Wide, wide his soul opened, in wonder, feeling the pain. Then it laughed, turning, with strong hands outstretched, at last to take the apple of his desire. At last he could finish his desire.

He took the throat of Gudrun between his hands, that were hard and indomitably powerful. And her throat was beautifully, so beautifully soft, save that, within, he could feel the slippery chords of her life. And this he crushed, this he could crush. What bliss! Oh what bliss, at last, what satisfaction, at last! The pure zest of satisfaction filled his soul. He was watching the unconsciousness come unto her swollen face, watching the eyes roll back. How ugly she was! What a fulfilment, what a satisfaction! How good this was, oh how good it was, what a God-given gratification, at last! He was unconscious of her fighting and struggling. The struggling was her reciprocal lustful passion in this embrace, the more violent it became, the greater the frenzy of delight, till the zenith was reached, the crisis, the struggle was overborne, her movement became softer, appeased.

Loerke roused himself on the snow, too dazed and hurt to get up. Only his eyes were conscious.

‘Monsieur!’ he said, in his thin, roused voice: ‘Quand vous aurez fini — ’

A revulsion of contempt and disgust came over Gerald’s soul. The disgust went to the very bottom of him, a nausea. Ah, what was he doing, to what depths was he letting himself go! As if he cared about her enough to kill her, to have her life on his hands!

A weakness ran over his body, a terrible relaxing, a thaw, a decay of strength. Without knowing, he had let go his grip, and Gudrun had fallen to her knees. Must he see, must he know?

A fearful weakness possessed him, his joints were turned to water. He drifted, as on a wind, veered, and went drifting away.

‘I didn’t want it, really,’ was the last confession of disgust in his soul, as he drifted up the slope, weak, finished, only sheering off unconsciously from any further contact. ‘I’ve had enough — I want to go to sleep. I’ve had enough.’ He was sunk under a sense of nausea.

He was weak, but he did not want to rest, he wanted to go on and on, to the end. Never again to stay, till he came to the end, that was all the desire that remained to him. So he drifted on and on, unconscious and weak, not thinking of anything, so long as he could keep in action.

The twilight spread a weird, unearthly light overhead, bluish-rose in colour, the cold blue night sank on the snow. In the valley below, behind, in the great bed of snow, were two small figures: Gudrun dropped on her knees, like one executed, and Loerke sitting propped up near her. That was all.

Gerald stumbled on up the slope of snow, in the bluish darkness, always climbing, always unconsciously climbing, weary though he was. On his left was a steep slope with black rocks and fallen masses of rock and veins of snow slashing in and about the blackness of rock, veins of snow slashing vaguely in and about the blackness of rock. Yet there was no sound, all this made no noise.

To add to his difficulty, a small bright moon shone brilliantly just ahead, on the right, a painful brilliant thing that was always there, unremitting, from which there was no escape. He wanted so to come to the end — he had had enough. Yet he did not sleep.

He surged painfully up, sometimes having to cross a slope of black rock, that was blown bare of snow. Here he was afraid of falling, very much afraid of falling. And high up here, on the crest, moved a wind that almost overpowered him with a sleep-heavy iciness. Only it was not here, the end, and he must still go on. His indefinite nausea would not let him stay.

Having gained one ridge, he saw the vague shadow of something higher in

front. Always higher, always higher. He knew he was following the track towards the summit of the slopes, where was the marienhutte, and the descent on the other side. But he was not really conscious. He only wanted to go on, to go on whilst he could, to move, to keep going, that was all, to keep going, until it was finished. He had lost all his sense of place. And yet in the remaining instinct of life, his feet sought the track where the skis had gone.

He slithered down a sheer snow slope. That frightened him. He had no alpenstock, nothing. But having come safely to rest, he began to walk on, in the illuminated darkness. It was as cold as sleep. He was between two ridges, in a hollow. So he swerved. Should he climb the other ridge, or wander along the hollow? How frail the thread of his being was stretched! He would perhaps climb the ridge. The snow was firm and simple. He went along. There was something standing out of the snow. He approached, with dimmest curiosity.

It was a half-buried Crucifix, a little Christ under a little sloping hood, at the top of a pole. He sheered away. Somebody was going to murder him. He had a great dread of being murdered. But it was a dread which stood outside him, like his own ghost.

Yet why be afraid? It was bound to happen. To be murdered! He looked round in terror at the snow, the rocking, pale, shadowy slopes of the upper world. He was bound to be murdered, he could see it. This was the moment when the death was uplifted, and there was no escape.

Lord Jesus, was it then bound to be — Lord Jesus! He could feel the blow descending, he knew he was murdered. Vaguely wandering forward, his hands lifted as if to feel what would happen, he was waiting for the moment when he would stop, when it would cease. It was not over yet.

He had come to the hollow basin of snow, surrounded by sheer slopes and precipices, out of which rose a track that brought one to the top of the mountain. But he wandered unconsciously, till he slipped and fell down, and as he fell something broke in his soul, and immediately he went to sleep.

CHAPTER XXXI.

EXEUNT

When they brought the body home, the next morning, Gudrun was shut up in her room. From her window she saw men coming along with a burden, over the snow. She sat still and let the minutes go by.

There came a tap at her door. She opened. There stood a woman, saying softly, oh, far too reverently:

‘They have found him, madam!’

‘Il est mort?’

‘Yes — hours ago.’

Gudrun did not know what to say. What should she say? What should she feel? What should she do? What did they expect of her? She was coldly at a loss.

‘Thank you,’ she said, and she shut the door of her room. The woman went away mortified. Not a word, not a tear — ha! Gudrun was cold, a cold woman.

Gudrun sat on in her room, her face pale and impassive. What was she to do? She could not weep and make a scene. She could not alter herself. She sat motionless, hiding from people. Her one motive was to avoid actual contact with events. She only wrote out a long telegram to Ursula and Birkin.

In the afternoon, however, she rose suddenly to look for Loerke. She glanced with apprehension at the door of the room that had been Gerald’s. Not for worlds would she enter there.

She found Loerke sitting alone in the lounge. She went straight up to him.

‘It isn’t true, is it?’ she said.

He looked up at her. A small smile of misery twisted his face. He shrugged his shoulders.

‘True?’ he echoed.

‘We haven’t killed him?’ she asked.

He disliked her coming to him in such a manner. He raised his shoulders wearily.

‘It has happened,’ he said.

She looked at him. He sat crushed and frustrated for the time being, quite as

emotionless and barren as herself. My God! this was a barren tragedy, barren, barren.

She returned to her room to wait for Ursula and Birkin. She wanted to get away, only to get away. She could not think or feel until she had got away, till she was loosed from this position.

The day passed, the next day came. She heard the sledge, saw Ursula and Birkin alight, and she shrank from these also.

Ursula came straight up to her.

‘Gudrun!’ she cried, the tears running down her cheeks. And she took her sister in her arms. Gudrun hid her face on Ursula’s shoulder, but still she could not escape the cold devil of irony that froze her soul.

‘Ha, ha!’ she thought, ‘this is the right behaviour.’

But she could not weep, and the sight of her cold, pale, impassive face soon stopped the fountain of Ursula’s tears. In a few moments, the sisters had nothing to say to each other.

‘Was it very vile to be dragged back here again?’ Gudrun asked at length.

Ursula looked up in some bewilderment.

‘I never thought of it,’ she said.

‘I felt a beast, fetching you,’ said Gudrun. ‘But I simply couldn’t see people. That is too much for me.’

‘Yes,’ said Ursula, chilled.

Birkin tapped and entered. His face was white and expressionless. She knew he knew. He gave her his hand, saying:

‘The end of THIS trip, at any rate.’

Gudrun glanced at him, afraid.

There was silence between the three of them, nothing to be said. At length Ursula asked in a small voice:

‘Have you seen him?’

He looked back at Ursula with a hard, cold look, and did not trouble to answer.

‘Have you seen him?’ she repeated.

‘I have,’ he said, coldly.

Then he looked at Gudrun.

‘Have you done anything?’ he said.

‘Nothing,’ she replied, ‘nothing.’

She shrank in cold disgust from making any statement.

‘Loerke says that Gerald came to you, when you were sitting on the sledge at the bottom of the Rudelbahn, that you had words, and Gerald walked away. What were the words about? I had better know, so that I can satisfy the

authorities, if necessary.’

Gudrun looked up at him, white, childlike, mute with trouble.

‘There weren’t even any words,’ she said. ‘He knocked Loerke down and stunned him, he half strangled me, then he went away.’

To herself she was saying:

‘A pretty little sample of the eternal triangle!’ And she turned ironically away, because she knew that the fight had been between Gerald and herself and that the presence of the third party was a mere contingency — an inevitable contingency perhaps, but a contingency none the less. But let them have it as an example of the eternal triangle, the trinity of hate. It would be simpler for them.

Birkin went away, his manner cold and abstracted. But she knew he would do things for her, nevertheless, he would see her through. She smiled slightly to herself, with contempt. Let him do the work, since he was so extremely GOOD at looking after other people.

Birkin went again to Gerald. He had loved him. And yet he felt chiefly disgust at the inert body lying there. It was so inert, so coldly dead, a carcase, Birkin’s bowels seemed to turn to ice. He had to stand and look at the frozen dead body that had been Gerald.

It was the frozen carcase of a dead male. Birkin remembered a rabbit which he had once found frozen like a board on the snow. It had been rigid like a dried board when he picked it up. And now this was Gerald, stiff as a board, curled up as if for sleep, yet with the horrible hardness somehow evident. It filled him with horror. The room must be made warm, the body must be thawed. The limbs would break like glass or like wood if they had to be straightened.

He reached and touched the dead face. And the sharp, heavy bruise of ice bruised his living bowels. He wondered if he himself were freezing too, freezing from the inside. In the short blond moustache the life-breath was frozen into a block of ice, beneath the silent nostrils. And this was Gerald!

Again he touched the sharp, almost glittering fair hair of the frozen body. It was icy-cold, hair icy-cold, almost venomous. Birkin’s heart began to freeze. He had loved Gerald. Now he looked at the shapely, strange-coloured face, with the small, fine, pinched nose and the manly cheeks, saw it frozen like an ice-pebble — yet he had loved it. What was one to think or feel? His brain was beginning to freeze, his blood was turning to ice-water. So cold, so cold, a heavy, bruising cold pressing on his arms from outside, and a heavier cold congealing within him, in his heart and in his bowels.

He went over the snow slopes, to see where the death had been. At last he came to the great shallow among the precipices and slopes, near the summit of the pass. It was a grey day, the third day of greyness and stillness. All was white,

icy, pallid, save for the scoring of black rocks that jutted like roots sometimes, and sometimes were in naked faces. In the distance a slope sheered down from a peak, with many black rock-slides.

It was like a shallow pot lying among the stone and snow of the upper world. In this pot Gerald had gone to sleep. At the far end, the guides had driven iron stakes deep into the snow-wall, so that, by means of the great rope attached, they could haul themselves up the massive snow-front, out on to the jagged summit of the pass, naked to heaven, where the Marienhutte hid among the naked rocks. Round about, spiked, slashed snow-peaks pricked the heaven.

Gerald might have found this rope. He might have hauled himself up to the crest. He might have heard the dogs in the Marienhutte, and found shelter. He might have gone on, down the steep, steep fall of the south-side, down into the dark valley with its pines, on to the great Imperial road leading south to Italy.

He might! And what then? The Imperial road! The south? Italy? What then? Was it a way out? It was only a way in again. Birkin stood high in the painful air, looking at the peaks, and the way south. Was it any good going south, to Italy? Down the old, old Imperial road?

He turned away. Either the heart would break, or cease to care. Best cease to care. Whatever the mystery which has brought forth man and the universe, it is a non-human mystery, it has its own great ends, man is not the criterion. Best leave it all to the vast, creative, non-human mystery. Best strive with oneself only, not with the universe.

‘God cannot do without man.’ It was a saying of some great French religious teacher. But surely this is false. God can do without man. God could do without the ichthyosauri and the mastodon. These monsters failed creatively to develop, so God, the creative mystery, dispensed with them. In the same way the mystery could dispense with man, should he too fail creatively to change and develop. The eternal creative mystery could dispose of man, and replace him with a finer created being. Just as the horse has taken the place of the mastodon.

It was very consoling to Birkin, to think this. If humanity ran into a CUL DE SAC and expended itself, the timeless creative mystery would bring forth some other being, finer, more wonderful, some new, more lovely race, to carry on the embodiment of creation. The game was never up. The mystery of creation was fathomless, infallible, inexhaustible, forever. Races came and went, species passed away, but ever new species arose, more lovely, or equally lovely, always surpassing wonder. The fountain-head was incorruptible and unsearchable. It had no limits. It could bring forth miracles, create utter new races and new species, in its own hour, new forms of consciousness, new forms of body, new units of being. To be man was as nothing compared to the possibilities of the

creative mystery. To have one's pulse beating direct from the mystery, this was perfection, unutterable satisfaction. Human or inhuman mattered nothing. The perfect pulse throbbed with indescribable being, miraculous unborn species.

Birkin went home again to Gerald. He went into the room, and sat down on the bed. Dead, dead and cold!

Imperial Caesar dead, and turned to clay
Would stop a hole to keep the wind away.

There was no response from that which had been Gerald. Strange, congealed, icy substance — no more. No more!

Terrribly weary, Birkin went away, about the day's business. He did it all quietly, without bother. To rant, to rave, to be tragic, to make situations — it was all too late. Best be quiet, and bear one's soul in patience and in fullness.

But when he went in again, at evening, to look at Gerald between the candles, because of his heart's hunger, suddenly his heart contracted, his own candle all but fell from his hand, as, with a strange whimpering cry, the tears broke out. He sat down in a chair, shaken by a sudden access. Ursula who had followed him, recoiled aghast from him, as he sat with sunken head and body convulsively shaken, making a strange, horrible sound of tears.

'I didn't want it to be like this — I didn't want it to be like this,' he cried to himself. Ursula could but think of the Kaiser's: 'Ich habe es nicht gewollt.' She looked almost with horror on Birkin.

Suddenly he was silent. But he sat with his head dropped, to hide his face. Then furtively he wiped his face with his fingers. Then suddenly he lifted his head, and looked straight at Ursula, with dark, almost vengeful eyes.

'He should have loved me,' he said. 'I offered him.'

She, afraid, white, with mute lips answered:

'What difference would it have made!'

'It would!' he said. 'It would.'

He forgot her, and turned to look at Gerald. With head oddly lifted, like a man who draws his head back from an insult, half haughtily, he watched the cold, mute, material face. It had a bluish cast. It sent a shaft like ice through the heart of the living man. Cold, mute, material! Birkin remembered how once Gerald had clutched his hand, with a warm, momentaneous grip of final love. For one second — then let go again, let go for ever. If he had kept true to that clasp, death would not have mattered. Those who die, and dying still can love, still believe, do not die. They live still in the beloved. Gerald might still have been living in the spirit with Birkin, even after death. He might have lived with his friend, a further life.

But now he was dead, like clay, like bluish, corruptible ice. Birkin looked at the pale fingers, the inert mass. He remembered a dead stallion he had seen: a dead mass of maleness, repugnant. He remembered also the beautiful face of one whom he had loved, and who had died still having the faith to yield to the mystery. That dead face was beautiful, no one could call it cold, mute, material. No one could remember it without gaining faith in the mystery, without the soul's warming with new, deep life-trust.

And Gerald! The denier! He left the heart cold, frozen, hardly able to beat. Gerald's father had looked wistful, to break the heart: but not this last terrible look of cold, mute Matter. Birkin watched and watched.

Ursula stood aside watching the living man stare at the frozen face of the dead man. Both faces were unmoved and unmoving. The candle-flames flickered in the frozen air, in the intense silence.

'Haven't you seen enough?' she said.

He got up.

'It's a bitter thing to me,' he said.

'What — that he's dead?' she said.

His eyes just met hers. He did not answer.

'You've got me,' she said.

He smiled and kissed her.

'If I die,' he said, 'you'll know I haven't left you.'

'And me?' she cried.

'And you won't have left me,' he said. 'We shan't have any need to despair, in death.'

She took hold of his hand.

'But need you despair over Gerald?' she said.

'Yes,' he answered.

They went away. Gerald was taken to England, to be buried. Birkin and Ursula accompanied the body, along with one of Gerald's brothers. It was the Crich brothers and sisters who insisted on the burial in England. Birkin wanted to leave the dead man in the Alps, near the snow. But the family was strident, loudly insistent.

Gudrun went to Dresden. She wrote no particulars of herself. Ursula stayed at the Mill with Birkin for a week or two. They were both very quiet.

'Did you need Gerald?' she asked one evening.

'Yes,' he said.

'Aren't I enough for you?' she asked.

'No,' he said. 'You are enough for me, as far as a woman is concerned. You are all women to me. But I wanted a man friend, as eternal as you and I are

eternal.'

'Why aren't I enough?' she said. 'You are enough for me. I don't want anybody else but you. Why isn't it the same with you?'

'Having you, I can live all my life without anybody else, any other sheer intimacy. But to make it complete, really happy, I wanted eternal union with a man too: another kind of love,' he said.

'I don't believe it,' she said. 'It's an obstinacy, a theory, a perversity.'

'Well — ' he said.

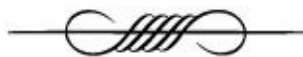
'You can't have two kinds of love. Why should you!'

It seems as if I can't,' he said. 'Yet I wanted it.'

'You can't have it, because it's false, impossible,' she said.

'I don't believe that,' he answered.

THE LOST GIRL



Lawrence started to write 200 pages of this novel in 1913 and abandoned it, before completing the novel in 1920. *The Lost Girl* is often regarded as Lawrence's forgotten novel, and is a passionate tale of longing and sexual defiance, of devastation and destitution. The story features Alvina Houghton, the daughter of a widowed Midlands draper, who comes of age just as her father's business is failing. In a desperate attempt to regain his fortune and secure his daughter's proper upbringing, James Houghton buys a theater. Among the traveling performers he employs is Ciccio, a sensual Italian who immediately captures Alvina's attention. Fleeing with him to Naples, she leaves her safe world behind and enters one of sexual awakening, desire, and fleeting freedom.



Lawrence and his wife Freida, 1927

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CHAPTER I

THE DECLINE OF MANCHESTER HOUSE

Take a mining townlet like Woodhouse, with a population of ten thousand people, and three generations behind it. This space of three generations argues a certain well-established society. The old "County" has fled from the sight of so much disembowelled coal, to flourish on mineral rights in regions still idyllic. Remains one great and inaccessible magnate, the local coal owner: three generations old, and clambering on the bottom step of the "County," kicking off the mass below. Rule him out.

A well established society in Woodhouse, full of fine shades, ranging from the dark of coal-dust to grit of stone-mason and sawdust of timber-merchant, through the lustre of lard and butter and meat, to the perfume of the chemist and the disinfectant of the doctor, on to the serene gold-tarnish of bank-managers, cashiers for the firm, clergymen and such-like, as far as the automobile refulgence of the general-manager of all the collieries. Here the *ne plus ultra*. The general manager lives in the shrubberied seclusion of the so-called Manor. The genuine Hall, abandoned by the "County," has been taken over as offices by the firm.

Here we are then: a vast substratum of colliers; a thick sprinkling of tradespeople intermingled with small employers of labour and diversified by elementary schoolmasters and nonconformist clergy; a higher layer of bank-managers, rich millers and well-to-do ironmasters, episcopal clergy and the managers of collieries, then the rich and sticky cherry of the local coal-owner glistening over all.

Such the complicated social system of a small industrial town in the Midlands of England, in this year of grace 1920. But let us go back a little. Such it was in the last calm year of plenty, 1913.

A calm year of plenty. But one chronic and dreary malady: that of the odd women. Why, in the name of all prosperity, should every class but the lowest in such a society hang overburdened with Dead Sea fruit of odd women, unmarried,

unmarriageable women, called old maids? Why is it that every tradesman, every schoolmaster, every bank-manager, and every clergyman produces one, two, three or more old maids? Do the middle-classes, particularly the lower middle-classes, give birth to more girls than boys? Or do the lower middle-class men assiduously climb up or down, in marriage, thus leaving their true partners stranded? Or are middle-class women very squeamish in their choice of husbands?

However it be, it is a tragedy. Or perhaps it is not.

Perhaps these unmarried women of the middle-classes are the famous sexless-workers of our ant-industrial society, of which we hear so much. Perhaps all they lack is an occupation: in short, a job. But perhaps we might hear their own opinion, before we lay the law down.

In Woodhouse, there was a terrible crop of old maids among the “nobs,” the tradespeople and the clergy. The whole town of women, colliers’ wives and all, held its breath as it saw a chance of one of these daughters of comfort and woe getting off. They flocked to the well-to-do weddings with an intoxication of relief. For let class-jealousy be what it may, a woman hates to see another woman left stalely on the shelf, without a chance. They all *wanted* the middle-class girls to find husbands. Every one wanted it, including the girls themselves. Hence the dismalness.

Now James Houghton had only one child: his daughter Alvina. Surely Alvina Houghton —

But let us retreat to the early eighties, when Alvina was a baby: or even further back, to the palmy days of James Houghton. In his palmy days, James Houghton was *crème de la crème* of Woodhouse society. The house of Houghton had always been well-to-do: tradespeople, we must admit; but after a few generations of affluence, tradespeople acquire a distinct *cachet*. Now James Houghton, at the age of twenty-eight, inherited a splendid business in Manchester goods, in Woodhouse. He was a tall, thin, elegant young man with side-whiskers, genuinely refined, somewhat in the Bulwer style. He had a taste for elegant conversation and elegant literature and elegant Christianity: a tall, thin, brittle young man, rather fluttering in his manner, full of facile ideas, and with a beautiful speaking voice: most beautiful. Withal, of course, a tradesman. He courted a small, dark woman, older than himself, daughter of a Derbyshire squire. He expected to get at least ten thousand pounds with her. In which he was disappointed, for he got only eight hundred. Being of a romantic-commercial nature, he never forgave her, but always treated her with the most elegant courtesy. To see him peel and prepare an apple for her was an exquisite sight. But that peeled and quartered apple was her portion. This elegant Adam of

commerce gave Eve her own back, nicely cored, and had no more to do with her. Meanwhile Alvina was born.

Before all this, however, before his marriage, James Houghton had built Manchester House. It was a vast square building — vast, that is, for Woodhouse — standing on the main street and highroad of the small but growing town. The lower front consisted of two fine shops, one for Manchester goods, one for silk and woollens. This was James Houghton's commercial poem.

For James Houghton was a dreamer, and something of a poet: commercial, be it understood. He liked the novels of George Macdonald, and the fantasies of that author, extremely. He wove one continual fantasy for himself, a fantasy of commerce. He dreamed of silks and poplins, luscious in texture and of unforeseen exquisiteness: he dreamed of carriages of the "County" arrested before his windows, of exquisite women ruffling charmed, entranced to his counter. And charming, entrancing, he served them his lovely fabrics, which only he and they could sufficiently appreciate. His fame spread, until Alexandra, Princess of Wales, and Elizabeth, Empress of Austria, the two best-dressed women in Europe, floated down from heaven to the shop in Woodhouse, and sallied forth to show what could be done by purchasing from James Houghton.

We cannot say why James Houghton failed to become the Liberty or the Snelgrove of his day. Perhaps he had too much imagination. Be that as it may, in those early days when he brought his wife to her new home, his window on the Manchester side was a foam and a may-blossom of muslins and prints, his window on the London side was an autumn evening of silks and rich fabrics. What wife could fail to be dazzled! But she, poor darling, from her stone hall in stony Derbyshire, was a little bit repulsed by the man's dancing in front of his stock, like David before the ark.

The home to which he brought her was a monument. In the great bedroom over the shop he had his furniture *built*: built of solid mahogany: oh too, too solid. No doubt he hopped or skipped himself with satisfaction into the monstrous matrimonial bed: it could only be mounted by means of a stool and chair. But the poor, secluded little woman, older than he, must have climbed up with a heavy heart, to lie and face the gloomy Bastille of mahogany, the great cupboard opposite, or to turn wearily sideways to the great cheval mirror, which performed a perpetual and hideous bow before her grace. Such furniture! It could never be removed from the room.

The little child was born in the second year. And then James Houghton decamped to a small, half-furnished bedroom at the other end of the house, where he slept on a rough board and played the anchorite for the rest of his days. His wife was left alone with her baby and the built-in furniture. She developed

heart disease, as a result of nervous repressions.

But like a butterfly James fluttered over his fabrics. He was a tyrant to his shop-girls. No French marquis in a Dickens' novel could have been more elegant and *raffiné* and heartless. The girls detested him. And yet, his curious refinement and enthusiasm bore them away. They submitted to him. The shop attracted much curiosity. But the poor-spirited Woodhouse people were weak buyers. They wearied James Houghton with their demand for common zephyrs, for red flannel which they would scallop with black worsted, for black alpacas and bombazines and merinos. He fluffed out his silk-striped muslins, his India cotton-prints. But the natives shied off as if he had offered them the poisoned robes of Herakles.

There was a sale. These sales contributed a good deal to Mrs. Houghton's nervous heart-disease. They brought the first signs of wear and tear into the face of James Houghton. At first, of course, he merely marked down, with discretion, his less-expensive stock of prints and muslins, nuns-veilings and muslin delaines, with a few fancy braidings and trimmings in guimp or bronze to enliven the affair. And Woodhouse bought cautiously.

After the sale, however, James Houghton felt himself at liberty to plunge into an orgy of new stock. He flitted, with a tense look on his face, to Manchester. After which huge bundles, bales and boxes arrived in Woodhouse, and were dumped on the pavement of the shop. Friday evening came, and with it a revelation in Houghton's window: the first piques, the first strangely-woven and honey-combed toilet covers and bed quilts, the first frill-caps and aprons for maid-servants: a wonder in white. That was how James advertised it. "A Wonder in White." Who knows but that he had been reading Wilkie Collins' famous novel!

As the nine days of the wonder-in-white passed and receded, James disappeared in the direction of London. A few Fridays later he came out with his Winter Touch. Weird and wonderful winter coats, for ladies — everything James handled was for ladies, he scorned the coarser sex — : weird and wonderful winter coats for ladies, of thick, black, pock-marked cloth, stood and flourished their bear-fur cuffs in the back-ground, while tippetts, boas, muffs and winter-fancies coquetted in front of the window-space. Friday-night crowds gathered outside: the gas-lamps shone their brightest: James Houghton hovered in the back-ground like an author on his first night in the theatre. The result was a sensation. Ten villages stared and crushed round the plate glass. It was a sensation: but what sensation! In the breasts of the crowd, wonder, admiration, *fear*, and ridicule. Let us stress the word *fear*. The inhabitants of Woodhouse were afraid lest James Houghton should impose his standards upon them. His

goods were in excellent taste: but his customers were in as bad taste as possible. They stood outside and pointed, giggled, and jeered. Poor James, like an author on his first night, saw his work fall more than flat.

But still he believed in his own excellence: and quite justly. What he failed to perceive was that the crowd hated excellence. Woodhouse wanted a gently graduated progress in mediocrity, a mediocrity so stale and flat that it fell outside the imagination of any sensitive mortal. Woodhouse wanted a series of vulgar little thrills, as one tawdry mediocrity was imported from Nottingham or Birmingham to take the place of some tawdry mediocrity which Nottingham and Birmingham had already discarded. That Woodhouse, as a very condition of its own being, hated any approach to originality or real taste, this James Houghton could never learn. He thought he had not been clever enough, when he had been far, far too clever already. He always thought that Dame Fortune was a capricious and fastidious dame, a sort of Elizabeth of Austria or Alexandra, Princess of Wales, elegant beyond his grasp. Whereas Dame Fortune, even in London or Vienna, let alone in Woodhouse, was a vulgar woman of the middle and lower middle-class, ready to put her heavy foot on anything that was not vulgar, machine-made, and appropriate to the herd. When he saw his delicate originalities, as well as his faint flourishes of draper's fantasy, squashed flat under the calm and solid foot of vulgar Dame Fortune, he fell into fits of depression bordering on mysticism, and talked to his wife in a vague way of higher influences and the angel Israfel. She, poor lady, was thoroughly scared by Israfel, and completely unhooked by the vagaries of James.

At last — we hurry down the slope of James' misfortunes — the real days of Houghton's Great Sales began. Houghton's Great Bargain Events were really events. After some years of hanging on, he let go splendidly. He marked down his prints, his chintzes, his dimities and his veilings with a grand and lavish hand. Bang went his blue pencil through 3/11, and nobly he subscribed 1/0³/₄. Prices fell like nuts. A lofty one-and-eleven rolled down to six-three, 1/6 magically shrank into 4³/₄d, whilst good solid prints exposed themselves at 3³/₄d per yard.

Now this was really an opportunity. Moreover the goods, having become a little stale during their years of ineffectuality, were beginning to approximate to the public taste. And besides, good sound stuff it was, no matter what the pattern. And so the little Woodhouse girls went to school in petties and drawers made of material which James had destined for fair summer dresses: petties and drawers of which the little Woodhouse girls were ashamed, for all that. For if they should chance to turn up their little skirts, be sure they would raise a chorus among their companions: "Yah-h-h, yer've got Houghton's threp'ny draws on!"

All this time James Houghton walked on air. He still saw the Fata Morgana snatching his fabrics round her lovely form, and pointing him to wealth untold. True, he became also Superintendent of the Sunday School. But whether this was an act of vanity, or whether it was an attempt to establish an Entente Cordiale with higher powers, who shall judge.

Meanwhile his wife became more and more an invalid; the little Alvina was a pretty, growing child. Woodhouse was really impressed by the sight of Mrs. Houghton, small, pale and withheld, taking a walk with her dainty little girl, so fresh in an ermine tippet and a muff. Mrs. Houghton in shiny black bear's-fur, the child in the white and spotted ermine, passing silent and shadowy down the street, made an impression which the people did not forget.

But Mrs. Houghton had pains at her heart. If, during her walk, she saw two little boys having a scrimmage, she had to run to them with pence and entreaty, leaving them dumbfounded, whilst she leaned blue at the lips against a wall. If she saw a carter crack his whip over the ears of the horse, as the horse laboured uphill, she had to cover her eyes and avert her face, and all her strength left her.

So she stayed more and more in her room, and the child was given to the charge of a governess. Miss Frost was a handsome, vigorous young woman of about thirty years of age, with grey-white hair and gold-rimmed spectacles. The white hair was not at all tragical: it was a family *trait*.

Miss Frost mattered more than any one else to Alvina Houghton, during the first long twenty-five years of the girl's life. The governess was a strong, generous woman, a musician by nature. She had a sweet voice, and sang in the choir of the chapel, and took the first class of girls in the Sunday-School of which James Houghton was Superintendent. She disliked and rather despised James Houghton, saw in him elements of a hypocrite, detested his airy and gracious selfishness, his lack of human feeling, and most of all, his fairy fantasy. As James went further into life, he became a dreamer. Sad indeed that he died before the days of Freud. He enjoyed the most wonderful and fairy-like dreams, which he could describe perfectly, in charming, delicate language. At such times his beautifully modulated voice all but sang, his grey eyes gleamed fiercely under his bushy, hairy eyebrows, his pale face with its side-whiskers had a strange lueur, his long thin hands fluttered occasionally. He had become meagre in figure, his skimpy but genteel coat would be buttoned over his breast, as he recounted his dream-adventures, adventures that were half Edgar Allan Poe, half Andersen, with touches of Vathek and Lord Byron and George Macdonald: perhaps more than a touch of the last. Ladies were always struck by these accounts. But Miss Frost never felt so strongly moved to impatience as when she was within hearing.

For twenty years, she and James Houghton treated each other with a courteous distance. Sometimes she broke into open impatience with him, sometimes he answered her tartly: "Indeed, indeed! Oh, indeed! Well, well, I'm sorry you find it so —" as if the injury consisted in her finding it so. Then he would flit away to the Conservative Club, with a fleet, light, hurried step, as if pressed by fate. At the club he played chess — at which he was excellent — and conversed. Then he flitted back at half-past twelve, to dinner.

The whole morale of the house rested immediately on Miss Frost. She saw her line in the first year. She must defend the little Alvina, whom she loved as her own, and the nervous, petulant, heart-stricken woman, the mother, from the vagaries of James. Not that James had any vices. He did not drink or smoke, was abstemious and clean as an anchorite, and never lowered his fine tone. But still, the two unprotected ones must be sheltered from him. Miss Frost imperceptibly took into her hands the reins of the domestic government. Her rule was quiet, strong, and generous. She was not seeking her own way. She was steering the poor domestic ship of Manchester House, illuminating its dark rooms with her own sure, radiant presence: her silver-white hair, and her pale, heavy, reposeful face seemed to give off a certain radiance. She seemed to give weight, ballast, and repose to the staggering and bewildered home. She controlled the maid, and suggested the meals — meals which James ate without knowing what he ate. She brought in flowers and books, and, very rarely, a visitor. Visitors were out of place in the dark sombreness of Manchester House. Her flowers charmed the petulant invalid, her books she sometimes discussed with the airy James: after which discussions she was invariably filled with exasperation and impatience, whilst James invariably retired to the shop, and was heard raising his musical voice, which the work-girls hated, to one or other of the work-girls.

James certainly had an irritating way of speaking of a book. He talked of incidents, and effects, and suggestions, as if the whole thing had just been a sensational-aesthetic attribute to himself. Not a grain of human feeling in the man, said Miss Frost, flushing pink with exasperation. She herself invariably took the human line.

Meanwhile the shops began to take on a hopeless and frowsy look. After ten years' sales, spring sales, summer sales, autumn sales, winter sales, James began to give up the drapery dream. He himself could not bear any more to put the heavy, pock-holed black cloth coat, with wild bear cuffs and collar, on to the stand. He had marked it down from five guineas to one guinea, and then, oh ignoble day, to ten-and-six. He nearly kissed the gipsy woman with a basket of tin saucepan-lids, when at last she bought it for five shillings, at the end of one of his winter sales. But even she, in spite of the bitter sleety day, would not put

the coat on in the shop. She carried it over her arm down to the Miners' Arms. And later, with a shock that really hurt him, James, peeping bird-like out of his shop door, saw her sitting driving a dirty rag-and-bone cart with a green-white, mouldy pony, and flourishing her arms like some wild and hairy-decorated squaw. For the long bear-fur, wet with sleet, seemed like a chevaux de frise of long porcupine quills round her forearms and her neck. Yet such good, such wonderful material! James eyed it for one moment, and then fled like a rabbit to the stove in his back regions.

The higher powers did not seem to fulfil the terms of treaty which James hoped for. He began to back out from the Entente. The Sunday School was a great trial to him. Instead of being carried away by his grace and eloquence, the nasty louts of colliery boys and girls openly banged their feet and made deafening noises when he tried to speak. He said many acid and withering things, as he stood there on the rostrum. But what is the good of saying acid things to those little fiends and gallbladders, the colliery children. The situation was saved by Miss Frost's sweeping together all the big girls, under her surveillance, and by her organizing that the tall and handsome blacksmith who taught the lower boys should extend his influence over the upper boys. His influence was more than effectual. It consisted in gripping any recalcitrant boy just above the knee, and jesting with him in a jocular manner, in the dialect. The blacksmith's hand was all a blacksmith's hand need be, and his dialect was as broad as could be wished. Between the grip and the homely idiom no boy could endure without squealing. So the Sunday School paid more attention to James, whose prayers were beautiful. But then one of the boys, a protege of Miss Frost, having been left for half an hour in the obscure room with Mrs. Houghton, gave away the secret of the blacksmith's grip, which secret so haunted the poor lady that it marked a stage in the increase of her malady, and made Sunday afternoon a nightmare to her. And then James Houghton resented something in the coarse Scotch manner of the minister of that day. So that the superintendency of the Sunday School came to an end.

At the same time, Solomon had to divide his baby. That is, he let the London side of his shop to W. H. Johnson, the tailor and haberdasher, a parvenu little fellow whose English would not bear analysis. Bitter as it was, it had to be. Carpenters and joiners appeared, and the premises were completely severed. From her room in the shadows at the back the invalid heard the hammering and sawing, and suffered. W. H. Johnson came out with a spick-and-span window, and had his wife, a shrewd, quiet woman, and his daughter, a handsome, loud girl, to help him on Friday evenings. Men flocked in — even women, buying their husbands a sixpence-halfpenny tie. They could have bought a tie for four-

three from James Houghton. But no, they would rather give sixpence-halfpenny for W. H. Johnson's fresh but rubbishy stuff. And James, who had tried to rise to another successful sale, saw the streams pass into the other doorway, and heard the heavy feet on the hollow boards of the other shop: his shop no more.

After this cut at his pride and integrity he lay in retirement for a while, mystically inclined. Probably he would have come to Swedenborg, had not his clipt wings spread for a new flight. He hit upon the brilliant idea of working up his derelict fabrics into ready-mades: not men's clothes, oh no: women's, or rather, ladies'. Ladies' Tailoring, said the new announcement.

James Houghton was happy once more. A zig-zag wooden stairway was rigged up the high back of Manchester House. In the great lofts sewing-machines of various patterns and movements were installed. A manageress was advertised for, and work-girls were hired. So a new phase of life started. At half-past six in the morning there was a clatter of feet and of girls' excited tongues along the back-yard and up the wooden stairway outside the back wall. The poor invalid heard every clack and every vibration. She could never get over her nervous apprehension of an invasion. Every morning alike, she felt an invasion of some enemy was breaking in on her. And all day long the low, steady rumble of sewing-machines overhead seemed like the low drumming of a bombardment upon her weak heart. To make matters worse, James Houghton decided that he must have his sewing-machines driven by some extra-human force. He installed another plant of machinery — acetylene or some such contrivance — which was intended to drive all the little machines from one big belt. Hence a further throbbing and shaking in the upper regions, truly terrible to endure. But, fortunately or unfortunately, the acetylene plant was not a success. Girls got their thumbs pierced, and sewing machines absolutely refused to stop sewing, once they had started, and absolutely refused to start, once they had stopped. So that after a while, one loft was reserved for disused and rusty, but expensive engines.

Dame Fortune, who had refused to be taken by fine fabrics and fancy trimmings, was just as reluctant to be captured by ready-mades. Again the good dame was thoroughly lower middle-class. James Houghton designed "robes." Now Robes were the mode. Perhaps it was Alexandra, Princess of Wales, who gave glory to the slim, glove-fitting Princess Robe. Be that as it may, James Houghton designed robes. His work-girls, a race even more callous than shop-girls, proclaimed the fact that James tried-on his own inventions upon his own elegant thin person, before the privacy of his own cheval mirror. And even if he did, why not? Miss Frost, hearing this legend, looked sideways at the enthusiast.

Let us remark in time that Miss Frost had already ceased to draw any maintenance from James Houghton. Far from it, she herself contributed to the

upkeep of the domestic hearth and board. She had fully decided never to leave her two charges. She knew that a governess was an impossible item in Manchester House, as things went. And so she trudged the country, giving music lessons to the daughters of tradesmen and of colliers who boasted pianofortes. She even taught heavy-handed but dauntless colliers, who were seized with a passion to “play.” Miles she trudged, on her round from village to village: a white-haired woman with a long, quick stride, a strong figure, and a quick, handsome smile when once her face awoke behind her gold-rimmed glasses. Like many short-sighted people, she had a certain intent look of one who goes her own way.

The miners knew her, and entertained the highest respect and admiration for her. As they streamed in a grimy stream home from pit, they diverged like some magic dark river from off the pavement into the horse-way, to give her room as she approached. And the men who knew her well enough to salute her, by calling her name “Miss Frost!” giving it the proper intonation of salute, were fussy men indeed. “She’s a lady if ever there was one,” they said. And they meant it. Hearing her name, poor Miss Frost would flash a smile and a nod from behind her spectacles, but whose black face she smiled to she never, or rarely knew. If she did chance to get an inkling, then gladly she called in reply “Mr. Lamb,” or “Mr. Calladine.” In her way she was a proud woman, for she was regarded with cordial respect, touched with veneration, by at least a thousand colliers, and by perhaps as many colliers’ wives. That is something, for any woman.

Miss Frost charged fifteen shillings for thirteen weeks’ lessons, two lessons a week. And at that she was considered rather dear. She was supposed to be making money. What money she made went chiefly to support the Houghton household. In the meanwhile she drilled Alvina thoroughly in theory and pianoforte practice, for Alvina was naturally musical, and besides this she imparted to the girl the elements of a young lady’s education, including the drawing of flowers in watercolour, and the translation of a Lamartine poem.

Now incredible as it may seem, fate threw another prop to the falling house of Houghton, in the person of the manageress of the work-girls, Miss Pinnegar. James Houghton complained of Fortune, yet to what other man would Fortune have sent two such women as Miss Frost and Miss Pinnegar, *gratis*? Yet there they were. And doubtful if James was ever grateful for their presence.

If Miss Frost saved him from heaven knows what domestic debacle and horror, Miss Pinnegar saved him from the workhouse. Let us not mince matters. For a dozen years Miss Frost supported the heart-stricken, nervous invalid, Clariss Houghton: for more than twenty years she cherished, tended and

protected the young Alvina, shielding the child alike from a neurotic mother and a father such as James. For nearly twenty years she saw that food was set on the table, and clean sheets were spread on the beds: and all the time remained virtually in the position of an outsider, without one grain of established authority.

And then to find Miss Pinnegar! In her way, Miss Pinnegar was very different from Miss Frost. She was a rather short, stout, mouse-coloured, creepy kind of woman with a high colour in her cheeks, and dun, close hair like a cap. It was evident she was not a lady: her grammar was not without reproach. She had pale grey eyes, and a padding step, and a soft voice, and almost purplish cheeks. Mrs. Houghton, Miss Frost, and Alvina did not like her. They suffered her unwillingly.

But from the first she had a curious ascendancy over James Houghton. One would have expected his aesthetic eye to be offended. But no doubt it was her voice: her soft, near, sure voice, which seemed almost like a secret touch upon her hearer. Now many of her hearers disliked being secretly touched, as it were beneath their clothing. Miss Frost abhorred it: so did Mrs. Houghton. Miss Frost's voice was clear and straight as a bell-note, open as the day. Yet Alvina, though in loyalty she adhered to her beloved Miss Frost, did not really mind the quiet suggestive power of Miss Pinnegar. For Miss Pinnegar was not vulgarly insinuating. On the contrary, the things she said were rather clumsy and downright. It was only that she seemed to weigh what she said, secretly, before she said it, and then she approached as if she would slip it into her hearer's consciousness without his being aware of it. She seemed to slide her speeches unnoticed into one's ears, so that one accepted them without the slightest challenge. That was just her manner of approach. In her own way, she was as loyal and unselfish as Miss Frost. There are such poles of opposition between honesties and loyalties.

Miss Pinnegar had the *second* class of girls in the Sunday School, and she took second, subservient place in Manchester House. By force of nature, Miss Frost took first place. Only when Miss Pinnegar spoke to Mr. Houghton — nay, the very way she addressed herself to him — "What do *you* think, Mr. Houghton?" — then there seemed to be assumed an immediacy of correspondence between the two, and an unquestioned priority in their unison, his and hers, which was a cruel thorn in Miss Frost's outspoken breast. This sort of secret intimacy and secret exulting in having, *really*, the chief power, was most repugnant to the white-haired woman. Not that there was, in fact, any secrecy, or any form of unwarranted correspondence between James Houghton and Miss Pinnegar. Far from it. Each of them would have found any suggestion

of such a possibility repulsive in the extreme. It was simply an implicit correspondence between their two psyches, an immediacy of understanding which preceded all expression, tacit, wireless.

Miss Pinnegar lived in: so that the household consisted of the invalid, who mostly sat, in her black dress with a white lace collar fastened by a twisted gold brooch, in her own dim room, doing nothing, nervous and heart-suffering; then James, and the thin young Alvina, who adhered to her beloved Miss Frost, and then these two strange women. Miss Pinnegar never lifted up her voice in household affairs: she seemed, by her silence, to admit her own inadequacy in culture and intellect, when topics of interest were being discussed, only coming out now and then with defiant platitudes and truisms — for almost defiantly she took the commonplace, vulgarian point of view; yet after everything she would turn with her quiet, triumphant assurance to James Houghton, and start on some point of business, soft, assured, ascendant. The others shut their ears.

Now Miss Pinnegar had to get her footing slowly. She had to let James run the gamut of his creations. Each Friday night new wonders, robes and ladies' "suits" — the phrase was very new — garnished the window of Houghton's shop. It was one of the sights of the place, Houghton's window on Friday night. Young or old, no individual, certainly no female left Woodhouse without spending an excited and usually hilarious ten minutes on the pavement under the window. Muffled shrieks of young damsels who had just got their first view, guffaws of sympathetic youths, continued giggling and expostulation and "Eh, but what price the umbrella skirt, my girl!" and "You'd like to marry me in *that*, my boy — what? not half!" — or else "Eh, now, if you'd seen me in *that* you'd have fallen in love with me at first sight, shouldn't you?" — with a probable answer "I should have fallen over myself making haste to get away" — loud guffaws: — all this was the regular Friday night's entertainment in Woodhouse. James Houghton's shop was regarded as a weekly comic issue. His piqué costumes with glass buttons and sort of steel-trimming collars and cuffs were immortal.

But why, once more, drag it out. Miss Pinnegar served in the shop on Friday nights. She stood by her man. Sometimes when the shrieks grew loudest she came to the shop door and looked with her pale grey eyes at the ridiculous mob of lasses in tam-o-shanters and youths half buried in caps. And she imposed a silence. They edged away.

Meanwhile Miss Pinnegar pursued the sober and even tenor of her own way. Whilst James lashed out, to use the local phrase, in robes and "suits," Miss Pinnegar steadily ground away, producing strong, indestructible shirts and singlets for the colliers, sound, serviceable aprons for the colliers' wives, good print dresses for servants, and so on. She executed no flights of fancy. She had

her goods made to suit her people. And so, underneath the foam and froth of James' creative adventure flowed a slow but steady stream of output and income. The women of Woodhouse came at last to *depend* on Miss Pinnegar. Growing lads in the pit reduce their garments to shreds with amazing expedition. "I'll go to Miss Pinnegar for thy shirts this time, my lad," said the harassed mothers, "and see if *they'll* stand thee." It was almost like a threat. But it served Manchester House.

James bought very little stock in these days: just remnants and pieces for his immortal robes. It was Miss Pinnegar who saw the travellers and ordered the unions and calicoes and grey flannel. James hovered round and said the last word, of course. But what was his last word but an echo of Miss Pinnegar's penultimate! He was not interested in unions and twills.

His own stock remained on hand. Time, like a slow whirl-pool churned it over into sight and out of sight, like a mass of dead seaweed in a backwash. There was a regular series of sales fortnightly. The display of "creations" fell off. The new entertainment was the Friday-night's sale. James would attack some portion of his stock, make a wild jumble of it, spend a delirious Wednesday and Thursday marking down, and then open on Friday afternoon. In the evening there was a crush. A good moire underskirt for one-and-eleven-three was not to be neglected, and a handsome string-lace collarette for six-three would iron out and be worth at least three-and-six. That was how it went: it would nearly all of it iron out into something really nice, poor James' crumpled stock. His fine, semi-transparent face flushed pink, his eyes flashed as he took in the sixpences and handed back knots of tape or packets of pins for the notorious farthings. What matter if the farthing change had originally cost him a halfpenny! His shop was crowded with women peeping and pawing and turning things over and commenting in loud, unfeeling tones. For there were still many comic items. Once, for example, he suddenly heaped up piles of hats, trimmed and untrimmed, the weirdest, sauciest, most screaming shapes. Woodhouse enjoyed itself that night.

And all the time, in her quiet, polite, think-the-more fashion Miss Pinnegar waited on the people, showing them considerable forbearance and just a tinge of contempt. She became very tired those evenings — her hair under its invisible hairnet became flatter, her cheeks hung down purplish and mottled. But while James stood she stood. The people did not like her, yet she influenced them. And the stock slowly wilted, withered. Some was scrapped. The shop seemed to have digested some of its indigestible contents.

James accumulated sixpences in a miserly fashion. Luckily for her work-girls, Miss Pinnegar took her own orders, and received payments for her own

productions. Some of her regular customers paid her a shilling a week — or less. But it made a small, steady income. She reserved her own modest share, paid the expenses of her department, and left the residue to James.

James had accumulated sixpences, and made a little space in his shop. He had desisted from “creations.” Time now for a new flight. He decided it was better to be a manufacturer than a tradesman. His shop, already only half its original size, was again too big. It might be split once more. Rents had risen in Woodhouse. Why not cut off another shop from his premises?

No sooner said than done. In came the architect, with whom he had played many a game of chess. Best, said the architect, take off one good-sized shop, rather than halve the premises. James would be left a little cramped, a little tight, with only one-third of his present space. But as we age we dwindle.

More hammering and alterations, and James found himself cooped in a long, long narrow shop, very dark at the back, with a high oblong window and a door that came in at a pinched corner. Next door to him was a cheerful new grocer of the cheap and florid type. The new grocer whistled “Just Like the Ivy,” and shouted boisterously to his shop-boy. In his doorway, protruding on James’ sensitive vision, was a pyramid of sixpence-halfpenny tins of salmon, red, shiny tins with pink halved salmon depicted, and another yellow pyramid of fourpence-halfpenny tins of pineapple. Bacon dangled in pale rolls almost over James’ doorway, whilst straw and paper, redolent of cheese, lard, and stale eggs filtered through the threshold.

This was coming down in the world, with a vengeance. But what James lost downstairs he tried to recover upstairs. Heaven knows what he would have done, but for Miss Pinnegar. She kept her own workrooms against him, with a soft, heavy, silent tenacity that would have beaten stronger men than James. But his strength lay in his pliability. He rummaged in the empty lofts, and among the discarded machinery. He rigged up the engines afresh, bought two new machines, and started an elastic department, making elastic for garters and for hat-chins.

He was immensely proud of his first cards of elastic, and saw Dame Fortune this time fast in his yielding hands. But, becoming used to disillusionment, he almost welcomed it. Within six months he realized that every inch of elastic cost him exactly sixty per cent. more than he could sell it for, and so he scrapped his new department. Luckily, he sold one machine and even gained two pounds on it.

After this, he made one last effort. This was hosiery webbing, which could be cut up and made into as-yet-unheard-of garments. Miss Pinnegar kept her thumb on this enterprise, so that it was not much more than abortive. And then James

left her alone.

Meanwhile the shop slowly churned its oddments. Every Thursday afternoon James sorted out tangles of bits and bobs, antique garments and occasional finds. With these he trimmed his window, so that it looked like a historical museum, rather soiled and scrappy. Indoors he made baskets of assortments: threepenny, sixpenny, ninepenny and shilling baskets, rather like a bran pie in which everything was a plum. And then, on Friday evening, thin and alert he hovered behind the counter, his coat shabbily buttoned over his narrow chest, his face agitated. He had shaved his side-whiskers, so that they only grew becomingly as low as his ears. His rather large, grey moustache was brushed off his mouth. His hair, gone very thin, was brushed frail and floating over his baldness. But still a gentleman, still courteous, with a charming voice he suggested the possibilities of a pad of green parrots' tail-feathers, or of a few yards of pink-pearl trimming or of old chenille fringe. The women would pinch the thick, exquisite old chenille fringe, delicate and faded, curious to feel its softness. But they wouldn't give threepence for it. Tapes, ribbons, braids, buttons, feathers, jabots, bussels, appliqués, fringes, jet-trimmings, bugle-trimmings, bundles of old coloured machine-lace, many bundles of strange cord, in all colours, for old-fashioned braid-patterning, ribbons with H.M.S. Birkenhead, for boys' sailor caps — everything that nobody wanted, did the women turn over and over, till they chanced on a find. And James' quick eyes watched the slow surge of his flotsam, as the pot boiled but did not boil away. Wonderful that he did not think of the days when these bits and bobs were new treasures. But he did not.

And at his side Miss Pinnegar quietly took orders for shirts, discussed and agreed, made measurements and received instalments.

The shop was now only opened on Friday afternoons and evenings, so every day, twice a day, James was seen dithering bareheaded and hastily down the street, as if pressed by fate, to the Conservative Club, and twice a day he was seen as hastily returning, to his meals. He was becoming an old man: his daughter was a young woman: but in his own mind he was just the same, and his daughter was a little child, his wife a young invalid whom he must charm by some few delicate attentions — such as the peeled apple.

At the club he got into more mischief. He met men who wanted to extend a brickfield down by the railway. The brickfield was called Klondyke. James had now a new direction to run in: down hill towards Bagthorpe, to Klondyke. Big penny-daisies grew in tufts on the brink of the yellow clay at Klondyke, yellow eggs-and-bacon spread their midsummer mats of flower. James came home with clay smeared all over him, discoursing brilliantly on grit and paste and presses and kilns and stamps. He carried home a rough and pinkish brick, and gloated

over it. It was a hard brick, it was a non-porous brick. It was an ugly brick, painfully heavy and parched-looking.

This time he was sure: Dame Fortune would rise like Persephone out of the earth. He was all the more sure, because other men of the town were in with him at this venture: sound, moneyed grocers and plumbers. They were all going to become rich.

Klondyke lasted a year and a half, and was not so bad, for in the end, all things considered, James had lost not more than five per cent. of his money. In fact, all things considered, he was about square. And yet he felt Klondyke as the greatest blow of all. Miss Pinnegar would have aided and abetted him in another scheme, if it would but have cheered him. Even Miss Frost was nice with him. But to no purpose. In the year after Klondyke he became an old man, he seemed to have lost all his feathers, he acquired a plucked, tottering look.

Yet he roused up, after a coal-strike. Throttle-Ha'penny put new life into him. During a coal-strike the miners themselves began digging in the fields, just near the houses, for the surface coal. They found a plentiful seam of drossy, yellowish coal behind the Methodist New Connection Chapel. The seam was opened in the side of a bank, and approached by a footrill, a sloping shaft down which the men walked. When the strike was over, two or three miners still remained working the soft, drossy coal, which they sold for eight-and-sixpence a ton — or sixpence a hundredweight. But a mining population scorned such dirt, as they called it.

James Houghton, however, was seized with a desire to work the Connection Meadow seam, as he called it. He gathered two miner partners — he trotted endlessly up to the field, he talked, as he had never talked before, with innumerable colliers. Everybody he met he stopped, to talk Connection Meadow.

And so at last he sank a shaft, sixty feet deep, rigged up a corrugated-iron engine-house with a winding-engine, and lowered his men one at a time down the shaft, in a big bucket. The whole affair was ricketty, amateurish, and twopenny. The name Connection Meadow was forgotten within three months. Everybody knew the place as Throttle-Ha'penny. "What!" said a collier to his wife: "have we got no coal? You'd better get a bit from Throttle-Ha'penny."

"Nay," replied the wife, "I'm sure I shan't. I'm sure I shan't burn that muck, and smother myself with white ash."

It was in the early Throttle-Ha'penny days that Mrs. Houghton died. James Houghton cried, and put a black band on his Sunday silk hat. But he was too feverishly busy at Throttle-Ha'penny, selling his hundredweights of ash-pit fodder, as the natives called it, to realize anything else.

He had three men and two boys working his pit, besides a superannuated old man driving the winding engine. And in spite of all jeering, he flourished.

Shabby old coal-carts rambled up behind the New Connection, and filled from the pit-bank. The coal improved a little in quality: it was cheap and it was handy. James could sell at last fifty or sixty tons a week: for the stuff was easy getting. And now at last he was actually handling money. He saw millions ahead.

This went on for more than a year. A year after the death of Mrs. Houghton, Miss Frost became ill and suddenly died. Again James Houghton cried and trembled. But it was Throttle-Ha'penny that made him tremble. He trembled in all his limbs, at the touch of success. He saw himself making noble provision for his only daughter.

But alas — it is wearying to repeat the same thing over and over. First the Board of Trade began to make difficulties. Then there was a fault in the seam. Then the roof of Throttle-Ha'penny was so loose and soft, James could not afford timber to hold it up. In short, when his daughter Alvina was about twenty-seven years old, Throttle-Ha'penny closed down. There was a sale of poor machinery, and James Houghton came home to the dark, gloomy house — to Miss Pinnegar and Alvina.

It was a pinched, dreary house. James seemed down for the last time. But Miss Pinnegar persuaded him to take the shop again on Friday evening. For the rest, faded and peaked, he hurried shadowily down to the club.

CHAPTER II

THE RISE OF ALVINA HOUGHTON

The heroine of this story is Alvina Houghton. If we leave her out of the first chapter of her own story it is because, during the first twenty-five years of her life, she really was left out of count, or so overshadowed as to be negligible. She and her mother were the phantom passengers in the ship of James Houghton's fortunes.

In Manchester House, every voice lowered its tone. And so from the first Alvina spoke with a quiet, refined, almost convent voice. She was a thin child with delicate limbs and face, and wide, grey-blue, ironic eyes. Even as a small girl she had that odd ironic tilt of the eyelids which gave her a look as if she were hanging back in mockery. If she were, she was quite unaware of it, for under Miss Frost's care she received no education in irony or mockery. Miss Frost was straightforward, good-humoured, and a little earnest. Consequently Alvina, or Vina as she was called, understood only the explicit mode of good-humoured straightforwardness.

It was doubtful which shadow was greater over the child: that of Manchester House, gloomy and a little sinister, or that of Miss Frost, benevolent and protective. Sufficient that the girl herself worshipped Miss Frost: or believed she did.

Alvina never went to school. She had her lessons from her beloved governess, she worked at the piano, she took her walks, and for social life she went to the Congregational Chapel, and to the functions connected with the chapel. While she was little, she went to Sunday School twice and to Chapel once on Sundays. Then occasionally there was a magic lantern or a penny reading, to which Miss Frost accompanied her. As she grew older she entered the choir at chapel, she attended Christian Endeavour and P. S. A., and the Literary Society on Monday evenings. Chapel provided her with a whole social activity, in the course of which she met certain groups of people, made certain friends, found opportunity for strolls into the country and jaunts to the local entertainments. Over and above

this, every Thursday evening she went to the subscription library to change the week's supply of books, and there again she met friends and acquaintances. It is hard to overestimate the value of church or chapel — but particularly chapel — as a social institution, in places like Woodhouse. The Congregational Chapel provided Alvina with a whole outer life, lacking which she would have been poor indeed. She was not particularly religious by inclination. Perhaps her father's beautiful prayers put her off. So she neither questioned nor accepted, but just let be.

She grew up a slim girl, rather distinguished in appearance, with a slender face, a fine, slightly arched nose, and beautiful grey-blue eyes over which the lids tilted with a very odd, sardonic tilt. The sardonic quality was, however, quite in abeyance. She was ladylike, not vehement at all. In the street her walk had a delicate, lingering motion, her face looked still. In conversation she had rather a quick, hurried manner, with intervals of well-bred repose and attention. Her voice was like her father's, flexible and curiously attractive.

Sometimes, however, she would have fits of boisterous hilarity, not quite natural, with a strange note half pathetic, half jeering. Her father tended to a supercilious, sneering tone. In Vina it came out in mad bursts of hilarious jeering. This made Miss Frost uneasy. She would watch the girl's strange face, that could take on a gargoyle look. She would see the eyes rolling strangely under sardonic eyelids, and then Miss Frost would feel that never, never had she known anything so utterly alien and incomprehensible and unsympathetic as her own beloved Vina. For twenty years the strong, protective governess reared and tended her lamb, her dove, only to see the lamb open a wolf's mouth, to hear the dove utter the wild cackle of a daw or a magpie, a strange sound of derision. At such times Miss Frost's heart went cold within her. She dared not realize. And she chid and checked her ward, restored her to the usual impulsive, affectionate demureness. Then she dismissed the whole matter. It was just an accidental aberration on the girl's part from her own true nature. Miss Frost taught Alvina thoroughly the qualities of her own true nature, and Alvina believed what she was taught. She remained for twenty years the demure, refined creature of her governess' desire. But there was an odd, derisive look at the back of her eyes, a look of old knowledge and deliberate derision. She herself was unconscious of it. But it was there. And this it was, perhaps, that scared away the young men.

Alvina reached the age of twenty-three, and it looked as if she were destined to join the ranks of the old maids, so many of whom found cold comfort in the Chapel. For she had no suitors. True there were extraordinarily few young men of her class — for whatever her condition, she had certain breeding and inherent culture — in Woodhouse. The young men of the same social standing as herself

were in some curious way outsiders to her. Knowing nothing, yet her ancient sapience went deep, deeper than Woodhouse could fathom. The young men did not like her for it. They did not like the tilt of her eyelids.

Miss Frost, with anxious foreseeing, persuaded the girl to take over some pupils, to teach them the piano. The work was distasteful to Alvina. She was not a good teacher. She persevered in an off-hand way, somewhat indifferent, albeit dutiful.

When she was twenty-three years old, Alvina met a man called Graham. He was an Australian, who had been in Edinburgh taking his medical degree. Before going back to Australia, he came to spend some months practising with old Dr. Fordham in Woodhouse — Dr. Fordham being in some way connected with his mother.

Alexander Graham called to see Mrs. Houghton. Mrs. Houghton did not like him. She said he was creepy. He was a man of medium height, dark in colouring, with very dark eyes, and a body which seemed to move inside his clothing. He was amiable and polite, laughed often, showing his teeth. It was his teeth which Miss Frost could not stand. She seemed to see a strong mouthful of cruel, compact teeth. She declared he had dark blood in his veins, that he was not a man to be trusted, and that never, never would he make any woman's life happy.

Yet in spite of all, Alvina was attracted by him. The two would stay together in the parlour, laughing and talking by the hour. What they could find to talk about was a mystery. Yet there they were, laughing and chatting, with a running insinuating sound through it all which made Miss Frost pace up and down unable to bear herself.

The man was always running in when Miss Frost was out. He contrived to meet Alvina in the evening, to take a walk with her. He went a long walk with her one night, and wanted to make love to her. But her upbringing was too strong for her.

“Oh no,” she said. “We are only friends.”

He knew her upbringing was too strong for him also.

“We're more than friends,” he said. “We're more than friends.”

“I don't think so,” she said.

“Yes we are,” he insisted, trying to put his arm round her waist. “Oh, don't!” she cried. “Let us go home.”

And then he burst out with wild and thick protestations of love, which thrilled her and repelled her slightly.

“Anyhow I must tell Miss Frost,” she said.

“Yes, yes,” he answered. “Yes, yes. Let us be engaged at once.”

As they passed under the lamps he saw her face lifted, the eyes shining, the

delicate nostrils dilated, as of one who scents battle and laughs to herself. She seemed to laugh with a certain proud, sinister recklessness. His hands trembled with desire.

So they were engaged. He bought her a ring, an emerald set in tiny diamonds. Miss Frost looked grave and silent, but would not openly deny her approval.

“You like him, don’t you? You don’t dislike him?” Alvina insisted.

“I don’t dislike him,” replied Miss Frost. “How can I? He is a perfect stranger to me.”

And with this Alvina subtly contented herself. Her father treated the young man with suave attention, punctuated by fits of jerky hostility and jealousy. Her mother merely sighed, and took *sal volatile*.

To tell the truth, Alvina herself was a little repelled by the man’s love-making. She found him fascinating, but a trifle repulsive. And she was not sure whether she hated the repulsive element, or whether she rather gloried in it. She kept her look of arch, half-derisive recklessness, which was so unbearably painful to Miss Frost, and so exciting to the dark little man. It was a strange look in a refined, really virgin girl — oddly sinister. And her voice had a curious bronze-like resonance that acted straight on the nerves of her hearers: unpleasantly on most English nerves, but like fire on the different susceptibilities of the young man — the darkie, as people called him.

But after all, he had only six weeks in England, before sailing to Sydney. He suggested that he and Alvina should marry before he sailed. Miss Frost would not hear of it. He must see his people first, she said.

So the time passed, and he sailed. Alvina missed him, missed the extreme excitement of him rather than the human being he was. Miss Frost set to work to regain her influence over her ward, to remove that arch, reckless, almost lewd look from the girl’s face. It was a question of heart against sensuality. Miss Frost tried and tried to wake again the girl’s loving heart — which loving heart was certainly not occupied by that man. It was a hard task, an anxious, bitter task Miss Frost had set herself.

But at last she succeeded. Alvina seemed to thaw. The hard shining of her eyes softened again to a sort of demureness and tenderness. The influence of the man was revoked, the girl was left uninhabited, empty and uneasy.

She was due to follow her Alexander in three months’ time, to Sydney. Came letters from him, en route — and then a cablegram from Australia. He had arrived. Alvina should have been preparing her trousseau, to follow. But owing to her change of heart, she lingered indecisive.

“Do you love him, dear?” said Miss Frost with emphasis, knitting her thick, passionate, earnest eyebrows. “Do you love him sufficiently? *That’s* the point.”

The way Miss Frost put the question implied that Alvina did not and could not love him — because Miss Frost could not. Alvina lifted her large, blue eyes, confused, half-tender towards her governess, half shining with unconscious derision.

“I don’t really know,” she said, laughing hurriedly. “I don’t really.” Miss Frost scrutinized her, and replied with a meaningful: “Well — !”

To Miss Frost it was clear as daylight. To Alvina not so. In her periods of lucidity, when she saw as clear as daylight also, she certainly did not love the little man. She felt him a terrible outsider, an inferior, to tell the truth. She wondered how he could have the slightest attraction for her. In fact she could not understand it at all. She was as free of him as if he had never existed. The square green emerald on her finger was almost nonsensical. She was quite, quite sure of herself.

And then, most irritating, a complete *volte face* in her feelings. The clear-as-daylight mood disappeared as daylight is bound to disappear. She found herself in a night where the little man loomed large, terribly large, potent and magical, while Miss Frost had dwindled to nothingness. At such times she wished with all her force that she could travel like a cablegram to Australia. She felt it was the only way. She felt the dark, passionate receptivity of Alexander overwhelmed her, enveloped her even from the Antipodes. She felt herself going distracted — she felt she was going out of her mind. For she could not act.

Her mother and Miss Frost were fixed in one line. Her father said: “Well, of course, you’ll do as you think best. There’s a great risk in going so far — a great risk. You would be entirely unprotected.”

“I don’t mind being unprotected,” said Alvina perversely. “Because you don’t understand what it means,” said her father.

He looked at her quickly. Perhaps he understood her better than the others.

“Personally,” said Miss Pinnegar, speaking of Alexander, “I don’t care for him. But every one has their own taste.”

Alvina felt she was being overborne, and that she was letting herself be overborne. She was half relieved. She seemed to nestle into the well-known surety of Woodhouse. The other unknown had frightened her.

Miss Frost now took a definite line.

“I feel you don’t love him, dear. I’m almost sure you don’t. So now you have to choose. Your mother dreads your going — she dreads it. I am certain you would never see her again. She says she can’t bear it — she can’t bear the thought of you out there with Alexander. It makes her shudder. She suffers dreadfully, you know. So you will have to choose, dear. You will have to choose for the best.”

Alvina was made stubborn by pressure. She herself had come fully to believe that she did not love him. She was quite sure she did not love him. But out of a certain perversity, she wanted to go.

Came his letter from Sydney, and one from his parents to her and one to her parents. All seemed straightforward — not very cordial, but sufficiently. Over Alexander's letter Miss Frost shed bitter tears. To her it seemed so shallow and heartless, with terms of endearment stuck in like exclamation marks. He seemed to have no thought, no feeling for the girl herself. All he wanted was to hurry her out there. He did not even mention the grief of her parting from her English parents and friends: not a word. Just a rush to get her out there, winding up with "And now, dear, I shall not be myself till I see you here in Sydney — Your ever-loving Alexander." A selfish, sensual creature, who would forget the dear little Vina in three months, if she did not turn up, and who would neglect her in six months, if she did. Probably Miss Frost was right.

Alvina knew the tears she was costing all round. She went upstairs and looked at his photograph — his dark and impertinent muzzle. Who was *he*, after all? She did not know him. With cold eyes she looked at him, and found him repugnant.

She went across to her governess's room, and found Miss Frost in a strange mood of trepidation.

"Don't trust me, dear, don't trust what I say," poor Miss Frost ejaculated hurriedly, even wildly. "Don't notice what I have said. Act for yourself, dear. Act for yourself entirely. I am sure I am wrong in trying to influence you. I know I am wrong. It is wrong and foolish of me. Act just for yourself, dear — the rest doesn't matter. The rest doesn't matter. Don't take *any* notice of what I have said. I know I am wrong."

For the first time in her life Alvina saw her beloved governess flustered, the beautiful white hair looking a little draggled, the grey, nearsighted eyes, so deep and kind behind the gold-rimmed glasses, now distracted and scared. Alvina immediately burst into tears and flung herself into the arms of Miss Frost. Miss Frost also cried as if her heart would break, catching her indrawn breath with a strange sound of anguish, forlornness, the terrible crying of a woman with a loving heart, whose heart has never been able to relax. Alvina was hushed. In a second, she became the elder of the two. The terrible poignancy of the woman of fifty-two, who now at last had broken down, silenced the girl of twenty-three, and roused all her passionate tenderness. The terrible sound of "Never now, never now — it is too late," which seemed to ring in the curious, indrawn cries of the elder woman, filled the girl with a deep wisdom. She knew the same would ring in her mother's dying cry. Married or unmarried, it was the same —

the same anguish, realized in all its pain after the age of fifty — the loss in never having been able to relax, to submit.

Alvina felt very strong and rich in the fact of her youth. For her it was not too late. For Miss Frost it was for ever too late.

“I don’t want to go, dear,” said Alvina to the elder woman. “I know I don’t care for him. He is nothing to me.”

Miss Frost became gradually silent, and turned aside her face. After this there was a hush in the house. Alvina announced her intention of breaking off her engagement. Her mother kissed her, and cried, and said, with the selfishness of an invalid:

“I couldn’t have parted with you, I couldn’t.” Whilst the father said: “I think you are wise, Vina. I have thought a lot about it.”

So Alvina packed up his ring and his letters and little presents, and posted them over the seas. She was relieved, really: as if she had escaped some very trying ordeal. For some days she went about happily, in pure relief. She loved everybody. She was charming and sunny and gentle with everybody, particularly with Miss Frost, whom she loved with a deep, tender, rather sore love. Poor Miss Frost seemed to have lost a part of her confidence, to have taken on a new wistfulness, a new silence and remoteness. It was as if she found her busy contact with life a strain now. Perhaps she was getting old. Perhaps her proud heart had given way.

Alvina had kept a little photograph of the man. She would often go and look at it. Love? — no, it was not love! It was something more primitive still. It was curiosity, deep, radical, burning curiosity. How she looked and looked at his dark, impertinent-seeming face. A flicker of derision came into her eyes. Yet still she looked.

In the same manner she would look into the faces of the young men of Woodhouse. But she never found there what she found in her photograph. They all seemed like blank sheets of paper in comparison. There was a curious pale surface-look in the faces of the young men of Woodhouse: or, if there was some underneath suggestive power, it was a little abject or humiliating, inferior, common. They were all either blank or common.

CHAPTER III

THE MATERNITY NURSE

Of course Alvina made everybody pay for her mood of submission and sweetness. In a month's time she was quite intolerable.

"I can't stay here all my life," she declared, stretching her eyes in a way that irritated the other inmates of Manchester House extremely. "I know I can't. I can't bear it. I simply can't bear it, and there's an end of it. I can't, I tell you. I can't bear it. I'm buried alive — simply buried alive. And it's more than I can stand. It is, really."

There was an odd clang, like a taunt, in her voice. She was trying them all.

"But what do you want, dear?" asked Miss Frost, knitting her dark brows in agitation.

"I want to go away," said Alvina bluntly.

Miss Frost gave a slight gesture with her right hand, of helpless impatience. It was so characteristic, that Alvina almost laughed. "But where do you want to go?" asked Miss Frost.

"I don't know. I don't care," said Alvina. "Anywhere, if I can get out of Woodhouse."

"Do you wish you had gone to Australia?" put in Miss Pinnegar.

"No, I don't wish I had gone to Australia," retorted Alvina with a rude laugh. "Australia isn't the only other place besides Woodhouse."

Miss Pinnegar was naturally offended. But the curious insolence which sometimes came out in the girl was inherited direct from her father.

"You see, dear," said Miss Frost, agitated: "if you knew what you wanted, it would be easier to see the way."

"I want to be a nurse," rapped out Alvina.

Miss Frost stood still, with the stillness of a middle-aged disapproving woman, and looked at her charge. She believed that Alvina was just speaking at random. Yet she dared not check her, in her present mood.

Alvina was indeed speaking at random. She had never thought of being a

nurse — the idea had never entered her head. If it had she would certainly never have entertained it. But she had heard Alexander speak of Nurse This and Sister That. And so she had rapped out her declaration. And having rapped it out, she prepared herself to stick to it. Nothing like leaping before you look.

“A nurse!” repeated Miss Frost. “But do you feel yourself fitted to be a nurse? Do you think you could bear it?”

“Yes, I’m sure I could,” retorted Alvina. “I want to be a maternity nurse — ” She looked strangely, even outrageously, at her governess. “I want to be a maternity nurse. Then I shouldn’t have to attend operations.” And she laughed quickly.

Miss Frost’s right hand beat like a wounded bird. It was reminiscent of the way she beat time, insistently, when she was giving music lessons, sitting close beside her pupils at the piano. Now it beat without time or reason. Alvina smiled brightly and cruelly.

“Whatever put such an idea into your head, Vina?” asked poor Miss Frost.

“I don’t know,” said Alvina, still more archly and brightly. “Of course you don’t mean it, dear,” said Miss Frost, quailing. “Yes, I do. Why should I say it if I don’t.”

Miss Frost would have done anything to escape the arch, bright, cruel eyes of her charge.

“Then we must think about it,” she said, numbly. And she went away.

Alvina floated off to her room, and sat by the window looking down on the street. The bright, arch look was still on her face. But her heart was sore. She wanted to cry, and fling herself on the breast of her darling. But she couldn’t. No, for her life she couldn’t. Some little devil sat in her breast and kept her smiling archly.

Somewhat to her amazement, he sat steadily on for days and days. Every minute she expected him to go. Every minute she expected to break down, to burst into tears and tenderness and reconciliation. But no — she did not break down. She persisted. They all waited for the old loving Vina to be herself again. But the new and recalcitrant Vina still shone hard. She found a copy of *The Lancet*, and saw an advertisement of a home in Islington where maternity nurses would be fully trained and equipped in six months’ time. The fee was sixty guineas. Alvina declared her intention of departing to this training home. She had two hundred pounds of her own, bequeathed by her grandfather.

In Manchester House they were all horrified — not moved with grief, this time, but shocked. It seemed such a repulsive and indelicate step to take. Which it was. And which, in her curious perverseness, Alvina must have intended it to be. Mrs. Houghton assumed a remote air of silence, as if she did not hear any

more, did not belong. She lapsed far away. She was really very weak. Miss Pinnegar said: "Well, really, if she wants to do it, why, she might as well try." And, as often with Miss Pinnegar, this speech seemed to contain a veiled threat.

"A maternity nurse!" said James Houghton. "A maternity nurse! What exactly do you mean by a maternity nurse?"

"A trained mid-wife," said Miss Pinnegar curtly. "That's it, isn't it? It is as far as I can see. A trained mid-wife."

"Yes, of course," said Alvina brightly.

"But — !" stammered James Houghton, pushing his spectacles up on to his forehead, and making his long fleece of painfully thin hair uncover his baldness. "I can't understand that any young girl of any — any upbringing, any upbringing whatever, should want to choose such a — such — an — occupation. I can't understand it."

"Can't you?" said Alvina brightly.

"Oh, well, if she *does* — " said Miss Pinnegar cryptically.

Miss Frost said very little. But she had serious confidential talks with Dr. Fordham. Dr. Fordham didn't approve, certainly he didn't — but neither did he see any great harm in it. At that time it was rather the thing for young ladies to enter the nursing profession, if their hopes had been blighted or checked in another direction! And so, enquiries were made. Enquiries were made.

The upshot was, that Alvina was to go to Islington for her six months' training. There was a great bustle, preparing her nursing outfit. Instead of a trousseau, nurse's uniforms in fine blue-and-white stripe, with great white aprons. Instead of a wreath of orange blossom, a rather chic nurse's bonnet of blue silk, and for a trailing veil, a blue silk fall.

Well and good! Alvina expected to become frightened, as the time drew near. But no, she wasn't a bit frightened. Miss Frost watched her narrowly. Would there not be a return of the old, tender, sensitive, shrinking Vina — the exquisitely sensitive and nervous, loving girl? No, astounding as it may seem, there was no return of such a creature. Alvina remained bright and ready, the half-hilarious clang remained in her voice, taunting. She kissed them all good-bye, brightly and sprightlily, and off she set. She wasn't nervous.

She came to St. Pancras, she got her cab, she drove off to her destination — and as she drove, she looked out of the window. Horrid, vast, stony, dilapidated, crumbly-stuccoed streets and squares of Islington, grey, grey, greyer by far than Woodhouse, and interminable. How exceedingly sordid and disgusting! But instead of being repelled and heartbroken, Alvina enjoyed it. She felt her trunk rumble on the top of the cab, and still she looked out on the ghastly dilapidated flat facades of Islington, and still she smiled brightly, as if there were some

charm in it all. Perhaps for her there was a charm in it all. Perhaps it acted like a tonic on the little devil in her breast. Perhaps if she had seen tufts of snowdrops — it was February — and yew-hedges and cottage windows, she would have broken down. As it was, she just enjoyed it. She enjoyed glimpsing in through uncurtained windows, into sordid rooms where human beings moved as if sordidly unaware. She enjoyed the smell of a toasted bloater, rather burnt. So common! so indescribably common! And she detested bloaters, because of the hairy feel of the spines in her mouth. But to smell them like this, to know that she was in the region of “penny beef-steaks,” gave her a perverse pleasure.

The cab stopped at a yellow house at the corner of a square where some shabby bare trees were flecked with bits of blown paper, bits of paper and refuse cluttered inside the round railings of each tree. She went up some dirty-yellowish steps, and rang the “Patients’” bell, because she knew she ought not to ring the “Tradesmen’s.” A servant, not exactly dirty, but unattractive, let her into a hall painted a dull drab, and floored with cocoa-matting, otherwise bare. Then up bare stairs to a room where a stout, pale common woman with two warts on her face, was drinking tea. It was three o’clock. This was the matron. The matron soon deposited her in a bedroom, not very small, but bare and hard and dusty-seeming, and there left her. Alvina sat down on her chair, looked at her box opposite her, looked round the uninviting room, and smiled to herself. Then she rose and went to the window: a very dirty window, looking down into a sort of well of an area, with other wells ranging along, and straight opposite like a reflection another solid range of back-premises, with iron stair-ways and horrid little doors and washing and little W. C.’s and people creeping up and down like vermin. Alvina shivered a little, but still smiled. Then slowly she began to take off her hat. She put it down on the drab-painted chest of drawers.

Presently the servant came in with a tray, set it down, lit a naked gas-jet, which roared faintly, and drew down a crackly dark-green blind, which showed a tendency to fly back again alertly to the ceiling.

“Thank you,” said Alvina, and the girl departed.

Then Miss Houghton drank her black tea and ate her bread and margarine.

Surely enough books have been written about heroines in similar circumstances. There is no need to go into the details of Alvina’s six months in Islington.

The food was objectionable — yet Alvina got fat on it. The air was filthy — and yet never had her colour been so warm and fresh, her skin so soft. Her companions were almost without exception vulgar and coarse — yet never had she got on so well with women of her own age — or older than herself. She was ready with a laugh and a word, and though she was unable to venture on

indecencies herself, yet she had an amazing faculty for looking knowing and indecent beyond words, rolling her eyes and pitching her eyebrows in a certain way — oh, it was quite sufficient for her companions! And yet, if they had ever actually demanded a dirty story or a really open indecency from her, she would have been floored.

But she enjoyed it. Amazing how she enjoyed it. She did not care how revolting and indecent these nurses were — she put on a look as if she were in with it all, and it all passed off as easy as winking. She swung her haunches and arched her eyes with the best of them. And they behaved as if she were exactly one of themselves. And yet, with the curious cold tact of women, they left her alone, one and all, in private: just ignored her.

It is truly incredible how Alvina became blooming and bouncing at this time. Nothing shocked her, nothing upset her. She was always ready with her hard, nurse's laugh and her nurse's quips. No one was better than she at *double-entendres*. No one could better give the nurse's leer. She had it all in a fortnight. And never once did she feel anything but exhilarated and in full swing. It seemed to her she had not a moment's time to brood or reflect about things — she was too much in the swing. Every moment, in the swing, living, or active in full swing. When she got into bed she went to sleep. When she awoke, it was morning, and she got up. As soon as she was up and dressed she had somebody to answer, something to say, something to do. Time passed like an express train — and she seemed to have known no other life than this.

Not far away was a lying-in hospital. A dreadful place it was. There she had to go, right off, and help with cases. There she had to attend lectures and demonstrations. There she met the doctors and students. Well, a pretty lot they were, one way and another. When she had put on flesh and become pink and bouncing she was just their sort: just their very ticket. Her voice had the right twang, her eyes the right roll, her haunches the right swing. She seemed altogether just the ticket. And yet she wasn't.

It would be useless to say she was not shocked. She was profoundly and awfully shocked. Her whole state was perhaps largely the result of shock: a sort of play-acting based on hysteria. But the dreadful things she saw in the lying-in hospital, and afterwards, went deep, and finished her youth and her tutelage for ever. How many infernos deeper than Miss Frost could ever know, did she not travel? the inferno of the human animal, the human organism in its convulsions, the human social beast in its abjection and its degradation.

For in her latter half she had to visit the slum cases. And such cases! A woman lying on a bare, filthy floor, a few old coats thrown over her, and vermin crawling everywhere, in spite of sanitary inspectors. But what did the woman,

the sufferer, herself care! She ground her teeth and screamed and yelled with pains. In her calm periods she lay stupid and indifferent — or she cursed a little. But abject, stupid indifference was the bottom of it all: abject, brutal indifference to everything — yes, everything. Just a piece of female functioning, no more.

Alvina was supposed to receive a certain fee for these cases she attended in their homes. A small proportion of her fee she kept for herself, the rest she handed over to the Home. That was the agreement. She received her grudging fee callously, threatened and exacted it when it was not forthcoming. Ha! — if they didn't have to pay you at all, these slum-people, they would treat you with more contempt than if you were one of themselves. It was one of the hardest lessons Alvina had to learn — to bully these people, in their own hovels, into some sort of obedience to her commands, and some sort of respect for her presence. She had to fight tooth and nail for this end. And in a week she was as hard and callous to them as they to her. And so her work was well done. She did not hate them. There they were. They had a certain life, and you had to take them at their own worth in their own way. What else! If one should be gentle, one was gentle. The difficulty did not lie there. The difficulty lay in being sufficiently rough and hard: that was the trouble. It cost a great struggle to be hard and callous enough. Glad she would have been to be allowed to treat them quietly and gently, with consideration. But pah — it was not their line. They wanted to be callous, and if you were not callous to match, they made a fool of you and prevented your doing your work.

Was Alvina her own real self all this time? The mighty question arises upon us, what is one's own real self? It certainly is not what we think we are and ought to be. Alvina had been bred to think of herself as a delicate, tender, chaste creature with unselfish inclinations and a pure, "high" mind. Well, so she was, in the more-or-less exhausted part of herself. But high-mindedness had really come to an end with James Houghton, had really reached the point, not only of pathetic, but of dry and anti-human, repulsive quixotry. In Alvina high-mindedness was already stretched beyond the breaking point. Being a woman of some flexibility of temper, wrought through generations to a fine, pliant hardness, she flew back. She went right back on high-mindedness. Did she thereby betray it?

We think not. If we turn over the head of the penny and look at the tail, we don't thereby deny or betray the head. We do but adjust it to its own complement. And so with high-mindedness. It is but one side of the medal — the crowned reverse. On the obverse the three legs still go kicking the soft-footed spin of the universe, the dolphin flirts and the crab leers.

So Alvina spun her medal, and her medal came down tails. Heads or tails?

Heads for generations. Then tails. See the poetic justice.

Now Alvina decided to accept the decision of her fate. Or rather, being sufficiently a woman, she didn't decide anything. She was her own fate. She went through her training experiences like another being. She was not herself, said Everybody. When she came home to Woodhouse at Easter, in her bonnet and cloak, Everybody was simply knocked out. Imagine that this frail, pallid, diffident girl, so ladylike, was now a rather fat, warm-coloured young woman, strapping and strong-looking, and with a certain bounce. Imagine her mother's startled, almost expiring:

"Why, Vina dear!"

Vina laughed. She knew how they were all feeling.

"At least it agrees with your *health*," said her father, sarcastically, to which Miss Pinnegar answered:

"Well, that's a good deal."

But Miss Frost said nothing the first day. Only the second day, at breakfast, as Alvina ate rather rapidly and rather well, the white-haired woman said quietly, with a tinge of cold contempt:

"How changed you are, dear!"

"Am I?" laughed Alvina. "Oh, not really." And she gave the arch look with her eyes, which made Miss Frost shudder.

Inwardly, Miss Frost shuddered, and abstained from questioning. Alvina was always speaking of the doctors: Doctor Young and Doctor Headley and Doctor James. She spoke of theatres and music-halls with these young men, and the jolly good time she had with them. And her blue-grey eyes seemed to have become harder and greyer, lighter somehow. In her wistfulness and her tender pathos, Alvina's eyes would deepen their blue, so beautiful. And now, in her floridity, they were bright and arch and light-grey. The deep, tender, flowery blue was gone for ever. They were luminous and crystalline, like the eyes of a changeling.

Miss Frost shuddered, and abstained from question. She wanted, she *needed* to ask of her charge: "Alvina, have you betrayed yourself with any of these young men?" But coldly her heart abstained from asking — or even from seriously thinking. She left the matter untouched for the moment. She was already too much shocked.

Certainly Alvina represented the young doctors as very nice, but rather fast young fellows. "My word, you have to have your wits about you with them!" Imagine such a speech from a girl tenderly nurtured: a speech uttered in her own home, and accompanied by a florid laugh, which would lead a chaste, generous woman like Miss Frost to imagine — well, she merely abstained from imagining

anything. She had that strength of mind. She never for one moment attempted to answer the question to herself, as to whether Alvina had betrayed herself with any of these young doctors, or not. The question remained stated, but completely unanswered — coldly awaiting its answer. Only when Miss Frost kissed Alvina good-bye at the station, tears came to her eyes, and she said hurriedly, in a low voice:

“Remember we are all praying for you, dear!”

“No, don’t do that!” cried Alvina involuntarily, without knowing what she said.

And then the train moved out, and she saw her darling standing there on the station, the pale, well-modelled face looking out from behind the gold-rimmed spectacles, wistfully, the strong, rather stout figure standing very still and unchangeable, under its coat and skirt of dark purple, the white hair glistening under the folded dark hat. Alvina threw herself down on the seat of her carriage. She loved her darling. She would love her through eternity. She knew she was right — amply and beautifully right, her darling, her beloved Miss Frost. Eternally and gloriously right.

And yet — and yet — it was a right which was fulfilled. There were other rights. There was another side to the medal. Purity and high-mindedness — the beautiful, but unbearable tyranny. The beautiful, unbearable tyranny of Miss Frost! It was time now for Miss Frost to die. It was time for that perfected flower to be gathered to immortality. A lovely *immortel*. But an obstruction to other, purple and carmine blossoms which were in bud on the stem. A lovely edelweiss — but time it was gathered into eternity. Black-purple and red anemones were due, real Adonis blood, and strange individual orchids, spotted and fantastic. Time for Miss Frost to die. She, Alvina, who loved her as no one else would ever love her, with that love which goes to the core of the universe, knew that it was time for her darling to be folded, oh, so gently and softly, into immortality. Mortality was busy with the day after her day. It was time for Miss Frost to die. As Alvina sat motionless in the train, running from Woodhouse to Tibshelf, it decided itself in her.

She was glad to be back in Islington, among all the horrors of her confinement cases. The doctors she knew hailed her. On the whole, these young men had not any too deep respect for the nurses as a whole. Why drag in respect? Human functions were too obviously established to make any great fuss about. And so the doctors put their arms round Alvina’s waist, because she was plump, and they kissed her face, because the skin was soft. And she laughed and squirmed a little, so that they felt all the more her warmth and softness under their arm’s pressure.

“It’s no use, you know,” she said, laughing rather breathless, but looking into their eyes with a curious definite look of unchangeable resistance. This only piqued them.

“What’s no use?” they asked.

She shook her head slightly.

“It isn’t any use your behaving like that with me,” she said, with the same challenging definiteness, finality: a flat negative.

“Who’re you telling?” they said.

For she did not at all forbid them to “behave like that.” Not in the least. She almost encouraged them. She laughed and arched her eyes and flirted. But her backbone became only the stronger and firmer. Soft and supple as she was, her backbone never yielded for an instant. It could not. She had to confess that she liked the young doctors. They were alert, their faces were clean and bright-looking. She liked the sort of intimacy with them, when they kissed her wrestled in the empty laboratories or corridors — often in the intervals of most critical and appalling cases. She liked their arm round her waist, the kisses as she reached back her face, straining away, the sometimes desperate struggles. They took unpardonable liberties. They pinched her haunches and attacked her in unheard-of ways. Sometimes her blood really came up in the fight, and she felt as if, with her hands, she could tear any man, any male creature, limb from limb. A super-human, voltaic force filled her. For a moment she surged in massive, inhuman, female strength. The men always wilted. And invariably, when they wilted, she touched them with a sudden gentle touch, pitying. So that she always remained friends with them. When her curious Amazonic power left her again, and she was just a mere woman, she made shy eyes at them once more, and treated them with the inevitable female-to-male homage.

The men liked her. They cocked their eyes at her, when she was not looking, and wondered at her. They wondered over her. They had been beaten by her, every one of them. But they did not openly know it. They looked at her, as if she were Woman itself, some creature not quite personal. What they noticed, all of them, was the way her brown hair looped over her ears. There was something chaste, and noble, and war-like about it. The remote quality which hung about her in the midst of her intimacies and her frequencies, nothing high or lofty, but something given to the struggle and as yet invincible in the struggle, made them seek her out.

They felt safe with her. They knew she would not let them down. She would not intrigue into marriage, or try and make use of them in any way. She didn’t care about them. And so, because of her isolate self-sufficiency in the fray, her wild, overweening backbone, they were ready to attend on her and serve her.

Headley in particular hoped he might overcome her. He was a well-built fellow with sandy hair and a pugnacious face. The battle-spirit was really roused in him, and he heartily liked the woman. If he could have overcome her he would have been mad to marry her.

With him, she summoned up all her mettle. She had never to be off her guard for a single minute. The treacherous suddenness of his attack — for he was treachery itself — had to be met by the voltaic suddenness of her resistance and counter-attack. It was nothing less than magical the way the soft, slumbering body of the woman could leap in one jet into terrible, overwhelming voltaic force, something strange and massive, at the first treacherous touch of the man's determined hand. His strength was so different from hers — quick, muscular, lambent. But hers was deep and heaving, like the strange heaving of an earthquake, or the heave of a bull as it rises from earth. And by sheer non-human power, electric and paralysing, she could overcome the brawny red-headed fellow.

He was nearly a match for her. But she did not like him. The two were enemies — and good acquaintances. They were more or less matched. But as he found himself continually foiled, he became sulky, like a bear with a sore head. And then she avoided him.

She really liked Young and James much better. James was a quick, slender, dark-haired fellow, a gentleman, who was always trying to catch her out with his quickness. She liked his fine, slim limbs, and his exaggerated generosity. He would ask her out to ridiculously expensive suppers, and send her sweets and flowers, fabulously *recherché*. He was always immaculately well-dressed.

“Of course, as a lady *and* a nurse,” he said to her, “you are two sorts of women in one.”

But she was not impressed by his wisdom.

She was most strongly inclined to Young. He was a plump young man of middle height, with those blue eyes of a little boy which are so knowing: particularly of a woman's secrets. It is a strange thing that these childish men have such a deep, half-perverse knowledge of the other sex. Young was certainly innocent as far as acts went. Yet his hair was going thin at the crown already.

He also played with her — being a doctor, and she a nurse who encouraged it. He too touched her and kissed her: and did not rouse her to contest. For his touch and his kiss had that nearness of a little boy's, which nearly melted her. She could almost have succumbed to him. If it had not been that with him there was no question of succumbing. She would have had to take him between her hands and caress and cajole him like a cherub, into a fall. And though she would have liked to do so, yet that inflexible stiffness of her backbone prevented her. She

could not do as she liked. There was an inflexible fate within her, which shaped her ends.

Sometimes she wondered to herself, over her own virginity. Was it worth much, after all, behaving as she did? Did she care about it, anyhow? Didn't she rather despise it? To sin in thought was as bad as to sin in act. If the thought was the same as the act, how much more was her behaviour equivalent to a whole committal? She wished she were wholly committed. She wished she had gone the whole length.

But sophistry and wishing did her no good. There she was, still isolate. And still there was that in her which would preserve her intact, sophistry and deliberate intention notwithstanding. Her time was up. She was returning to Woodhouse virgin as she had left it. In a measure she felt herself beaten. Why? Who knows. But so it was, she felt herself beaten, condemned to go back to what she was before. Fate had been too strong for her and her desires: fate which was not an external association of forces, but which was integral in her own nature. Her own inscrutable nature was her fate: sore against her will.

It was August when she came home, in her nurse's uniform. She was beaten by fate, as far as chastity and virginity went. But she came home with high material hopes. Here was James Houghton's own daughter. She had an affluent future ahead of her. A fully-qualified maternity nurse, she was going to bring all the babies of the district easily and triumphantly into the world. She was going to charge the regulation fee of two guineas a case: and even on a modest estimate of ten babies a month, she would have twenty guineas. For well-to-do mothers she would charge from three to five guineas. At this calculation she would make an easy three hundred a year, without slaving either. She would be independent, she could laugh every one in the face.

She bounced back into Woodhouse to make her fortune.

CHAPTER IV

TWO WOMEN DIE

It goes without saying that Alvina Houghton did not make her fortune as a maternity nurse. Being her father's daughter, we might almost expect that she did not make a penny. But she did — just a few pence. She had exactly four cases — and then no more.

The reason is obvious. Who in Woodhouse was going to afford a two-guinea nurse, for a confinement? And who was going to engage Alvina Houghton, even if they were ready to stretch their purse-strings? After all, they all knew her as *Miss Houghton*, with a stress on the *Miss*, and they could not conceive of her as *Nurse Houghton*. Besides, there seemed something positively indecent in technically engaging one who was so much part of themselves. They all preferred either a simple mid-wife, or a nurse procured out of the unknown by the doctor.

If Alvina wanted to make her fortune — or even her living — she should have gone to a strange town. She was so advised by every one she knew. But she never for one moment reflected on the advice. She had become a maternity nurse in order to practise in Woodhouse, just as James Houghton had purchased his elegancies to sell in Woodhouse. And father and daughter alike calmly expected Woodhouse demand to rise to their supply. So both alike were defeated in their expectations.

For a little while Alvina flaunted about in her nurse's uniform. Then she left it off. And as she left it off she lost her bounce, her colour, and her flesh. Gradually she shrank back to the old, slim, reticent pallor, with eyes a little too large for her face. And now it seemed her face was a little too long, a little gaunt. And in her civilian clothes she seemed a little dowdy, shabby. And altogether, she looked older: she looked more than her age, which was only twenty-four years. Here was the old Alvina come back, rather battered and deteriorated, apparently. There was even a tiny touch of the trollops in her dowdiness — so the shrewd-eyed collier-wives decided. But she was a lady still, and unbeaten.

Undeniably she was a lady. And that was rather irritating to the well-to-do and florid daughter of W. H. Johnson, next door but one. Undeniably a lady, and undeniably unmastered. This last was irritating to the good-natured but easy-coming young men in the Chapel Choir, where she resumed her seat. These young men had the good nature of dogs that wag their tails and expect to be patted. And Alvina did not pat them. To be sure, a pat from such a shabbily-black-kid-gloved hand would not have been so flattering — she need not imagine it! The way she hung back and looked at them, the young men, as knowing as if she were a prostitute, and yet with the well-bred indifference of a lady — well, it was almost offensive.

As a matter of fact, Alvina was detached for the time being from her interest in young men. Manchester House had settled down on her like a doom. There was the quartered shop, through which one had to worm one's encumbered way in the gloom — unless one liked to go miles round a back street, to the yard entry. There was James Houghton, faintly powdered with coal-dust, flitting back and forth in a fever of nervous frenzy, to Throttle-Ha'penny — so carried away that he never saw his daughter at all the first time he came in, after her return. And when she reminded him of her presence, with her — "Hello, father!" — he merely glanced hurriedly at her, as if vexed with her interruption, and said:

"Well, Alvina, you're back. You're back to find us busy." And he went off into his ecstasy again.

Mrs. Houghton was now very weak, and so nervous in her weakness that she could not bear the slightest sound. Her greatest horror was lest her husband should come into the room. On his entry she became blue at the lips immediately, so he had to hurry out again. At last he stayed away, only hurriedly asking, each time he came into the house, "How is Mrs. Houghton? Ha!" Then off into uninterrupted Throttle-Ha'penny ecstasy once more.

When Alvina went up to her mother's room, on her return, all the poor invalid could do was to tremble into tears, and cry faintly: "Child, you look dreadful. It isn't you."

This from the pathetic little figure in the bed had struck Alvina like a blow.

"Why not, mother?" she asked.

But for her mother she had to remove her nurse's uniform. And at the same time, she had to constitute herself nurse. Miss Frost, and a woman who came in, and the servant had been nursing the invalid between them. Miss Frost was worn and rather heavy: her old buoyancy and brightness was gone. She had become irritable also. She was very glad that Alvina had returned to take this responsibility of nursing off her shoulders. For her wonderful energy had ebbed and oozed away.

Alvina said nothing, but settled down to her task. She was quiet and technical with her mother. The two loved one another, with a curious impersonal love which had not a single word to exchange: an almost after-death love. In these days Mrs. Houghton never talked — unless to fret a little. So Alvina sat for many hours in the lofty, sombre bedroom, looking out silently on the street, or hurriedly rising to attend the sick woman. For continually came the fretful murmur:

“Vina!”

To sit still — who knows the long discipline of it, nowadays, as our mothers and grandmothers knew. To sit still, for days, months, and years — perforce to sit still, with some dignity of tranquil bearing. Alvina was old-fashioned. She had the old, womanly faculty for sitting quiet and collected — not indeed for a life-time, but for long spells together. And so it was during these months nursing her mother. She attended constantly on the invalid: she did a good deal of work about the house: she took her walks and occupied her place in the choir on Sunday mornings. And yet, from August to January, she seemed to be seated in her chair in the bedroom, sometimes reading, but mostly quite still, her hands quietly in her lap, her mind subdued by musing. She did not even think, not even remember. Even such activity would have made her presence too disturbing in the room. She sat quite still, with all her activities in abeyance — except that strange will-to-passivity which was by no means a relaxation, but a severe, deep, soul-discipline.

For the moment there was a sense of prosperity — or probable prosperity, in the house. And there was an abundance of Throttle-Ha’penny coal. It was dirty ashy stuff. The lower bars of the grate were constantly blanked in with white powdery ash, which it was fatal to try to poke away. For if you poked and poked, you raised white cumulus clouds of ash, and you were left at last with a few darkening and sulphurous embers. But even so, by continuous application, you could keep the room moderately warm, without feeling you were consuming the house’s meat and drink in the grate. Which was one blessing.

The days, the months darkened past, and Alvina returned to her old thinness and pallor. Her forearms were thin, they rested very still in her lap, there was a ladylike stillness about them as she took her walk, in her lingering, yet watchful fashion. She saw everything. Yet she passed without attracting any attention.

Early in the year her mother died. Her father came and wept self-conscious tears, Miss Frost cried a little, painfully. And Alvina cried also: she did not quite know why or wherefore. Her poor mother! Alvina had the old-fashioned wisdom to let be, and not to think. After all, it was not for her to reconstruct her parents’ lives. She came after them. Her day was not their day, their life was not hers.

Returning up-channel to re-discover their course was quite another matter from flowing downstream into the unknown, as they had done thirty years before. This supercilious and impertinent exploration of the generation gone by, by the present generation, is nothing to our credit. As a matter of fact, no generation repeats the mistakes of the generation ahead, any more than any river repeats its course. So the young need not be so proud of their superiority over the old. The young generation glibly makes its own mistakes: and how detestable these new mistakes are, why, only the future will be able to tell us. But be sure they are quite as detestable, quite as full of lies and hypocrisy, as any of the mistakes of our parents. There is no such thing as *absolute* wisdom.

Wisdom has reference only to the past. The future remains for ever an infinite field for mistakes. You can't know beforehand.

So Alvina refrained from pondering on her mother's life and fate. Whatever the fate of the mother, the fate of the daughter will be otherwise. That is organically inevitable. The business of the daughter is with her own fate, not with her mother's.

Miss Frost however meditated bitterly on the fate of the poor dead woman. Bitterly she brooded on the lot of woman. Here was Clariss Houghton, married, and a mother — and dead. What a life! Who was responsible? James Houghton. What ought James Houghton to have done differently? Everything. In short, he should have been somebody else, and not himself. Which is the *reductio ad absurdum* of idealism. The universe should be something else, and not what it is: so the nonsense of idealistic conclusion. The cat should not catch the mouse, the mouse should not nibble holes in the table-cloth, and so on and so on, in the House that Jack Built.

But Miss Frost sat by the dead in grief and despair. This was the end of another woman's life: such an end! Poor Clariss: guilty James. Yet why? Why was James more guilty than Clariss? Is the only aim and end of a man's life, to make some woman, or parcel of women, happy? Why? Why should anybody expect to be *made happy*, and develop heart-disease if she isn't? Surely Clariss' heart-disease was a more emphatic sign of obstinate self-importance than ever James' shop-windows were. She expected to be *made happy*. Every woman in Europe and America expects it. On her own head then if she is made unhappy: for her expectation is arrogant and impertinent. The be-all and end-all of life doesn't lie in feminine happiness — or in any happiness. Happiness is a sort of soap-tablet — he won't be happy till he gets it,' and when he's got it, the precious baby, it'll cost him his eyes and his stomach. Could anything be more puerile than a mankind howling because it isn't happy: like a baby in the bath!

Poor Clariss, however, was dead — and if she had developed heart-disease

because she wasn't happy, well, she had died of her own heart-disease, poor thing. Wherein lies every moral that mankind can wish to draw.

Miss Frost wept in anguish, and saw nothing but another woman betrayed to sorrow and a slow death. Sorrow and a slow death, because a man had married her. Miss Frost wept also for herself, for her own sorrow and slow death. Sorrow and slow death, because a man had *not* married her. Wretched man, what is he to do with these exigent and never-to-be-satisfied women? Our mothers pined because our fathers drank and were rakes. Our wives pine because we are virtuous but inadequate. Who is this sphinx, this woman? Where is the Oedipus that will solve her riddle of happiness, and then strangle her? — only to marry his own mother!

In the months that followed her mother's death, Alvina went on the same, in abeyance. She took over the housekeeping, and received one or two overflow pupils from Miss Frost, young girls to whom she gave lessons in the dark drawing-room of Manchester House. She was busy — chiefly with housekeeping. There seemed a great deal to put in order after her mother's death.

She sorted all her mother's clothes — expensive, old-fashioned clothes, hardly worn. What was to be done with them? She gave them away, without consulting anybody. She kept a few private things, she inherited a few pieces of jewellery. Remarkable how little trace her mother left — hardly a trace.

She decided to move into the big, monumental bedroom in front of the house. She liked space, she liked the windows. She was strictly mistress, too. So she took her place. Her mother's little sitting-room was cold and disused.

Then Alvina went through all the linen. There was still abundance, and it was all sound. James had had such large ideas of setting up house, in the beginning. And now he begrudged the household expenses, begrudged the very soap and candles, and even would have liked to introduce margarine instead of butter. This last degradation the women refused. But James was above food.

The old Alvina seemed completely herself again. She was quiet, dutiful, affectionate. She appealed in her old, childish way to Miss Frost, and Miss Frost called her "Dear!" with all the old protective gentleness. But there was a difference. Underneath her appearance of appeal, Alvina was almost coldly independent. She did what she thought she would. The old manner of intimacy persisted between her and her darling. And perhaps neither of them knew that the intimacy itself had gone. But it had. There was no spontaneous interchange between them. It was a kind of deadlock. Each knew the great love she felt for the other. But now it was a love static, inoperative. The warm flow did not run any more. Yet each would have died for the other, would have done anything to spare the other hurt.

Miss Frost was becoming tired, dragged looking. She would sink into a chair as if she wished never to rise again — never to make the effort. And Alvina quickly would attend on her, bring her tea and take away her music, try to make everything smooth. And continually the young woman exhorted the elder to work less, to give up her pupils. But Miss Frost answered quickly, nervously:

“When I don’t work I shan’t live.”

“But why — ?” came the long query from Alvina. And in her expostulation there was a touch of mockery for such a creed.

Miss Frost did not answer. Her face took on a greyish tinge.

In these days Alvina struck up an odd friendship with Miss Pinnegar, after so many years of opposition. She felt herself more in sympathy with Miss Pinnegar — it was so easy to get on with her, she left so much unsaid. What was left unsaid mattered more to Alvina now than anything that was expressed. She began to hate outspokenness and direct speaking-forth of the whole mind. It nauseated her. She wanted tacit admission of difference, not open, wholehearted communication. And Miss Pinnegar made this admission all along. She never made you feel for an instant that she was one with you. She was never even near. She kept quietly on her own ground, and left you on yours. And across the space came her quiet commonplaces — but fraught with space.

With Miss Frost all was openness, explicit and downright. Not that Miss Frost trespassed. She was far more well-bred than Miss Pinnegar. But her very breeding had that Protestant, northern quality which assumes that we have all the same high standards, really, and all the same divine nature, intrinsically. It is a fine assumption. But willy-nilly, it sickened Alvina at this time.

She preferred Miss Pinnegar, and admired Miss Pinnegar’s humble wisdom with a new admiration. The two were talking of Dr. Headley, who, they read in the newspaper, had disgraced himself finally.

“I suppose,” said Miss Pinnegar, “it takes his sort to make all sorts.”

Such bits of homely wisdom were like relief from cramp and pain, to Alvina. “It takes his sort to make all sorts.” It took her sort too. And it took her father’s sort — as well as her mother’s and Miss Frost’s. It took every sort to make all sorts. Why have standards and a regulation pattern? Why have a human criterion? There’s the point! Why, in the name of all the free heavens, have human criteria? Why? Simply for bullying and narrowness.

Alvina felt at her ease with Miss Pinnegar. The two women talked away to one another, in their quiet moments: and slipped apart like conspirators when Miss Frost came in: as if there was something to be ashamed of. If there was, heaven knows what it might have been, for their talk was ordinary enough. But Alvina liked to be with Miss Pinnegar in the kitchen. Miss Pinnegar wasn’t

competent and masterful like Miss Frost: she was ordinary and uninspired, with quiet, unobserved movements. But she was deep, and there was some secret satisfaction in her very quality of secrecy.

So the days and weeks and months slipped by, and Alvina was hidden like a mole in the dark chambers of Manchester House, busy with cooking and cleaning and arranging, getting the house in her own order, and attending to her pupils. She took her walk in the afternoon. Once and only once she went to Throttle-Ha'penny, and, seized with sudden curiosity, insisted on being wound down in the iron bucket to the little workings underneath. Everything was quite tidy in the short gang-ways down below, timbered and in sound order. The miners were competent enough. But water dripped dismally in places, and there was a stale feeling in the air.

Her father accompanied her, pointed her to the seam of yellow-flecked coal, the shale and the bind, the direction of the trend. He had already an airy-fairy kind of knowledge of the whole affair, and seemed like some not quite trustworthy conjuror who had conjured it all up by sleight of hand. In the background the miners stood grey and ghostly, in the candle-light, and seemed to listen sardonically. One of them, facile in his subordinate way as James in his authoritative, kept chiming in:

“Ay, that’s the road it goes, Miss Huffen — yis, yo’ll see th’ roof theer bellies down a bit — s’ loose. No, you dunna get th’ puddin’ stones i’ this pit — s’ not deep enough. Eh, they come down on you plumb, as if th’ roof had laid its egg on you. Ay, it runs a bit thin down here — six inches. You see th’ bed’s soft, it’s a sort o’ clay-bind, it’s not clunch such as you get deeper. Oh, it’s easy workin’ — you don’t have to knock your guts out. There’s no need for shots, Miss Huffen — we bring it down — you see here — ” And he stooped, pointing to a shallow, shelving excavation which he was making under the coal. The working was low, you must stoop all the time. The roof and the timbered sides of the way seemed to press on you. It was as if she were in her tomb for ever, like the dead and everlasting Egyptians. She was frightened, but fascinated. The collier kept on talking to her, stretching his bare, grey-black hairy arm across her vision, and pointing with his knotted hand. The thick-wicked tallow candles guttered and smelled. There was a thickness in the air, a sense of dark, fluid presence in the thick atmosphere, the dark, fluid, viscous voice of the collier making a broad-vowelled, clapping sound in her ear. He seemed to linger near her as if he knew — as if he knew — what? Something for ever unknowable and inadmissible, something that belonged purely to the underground: to the slaves who work underground: knowledge humiliated, subjected, but ponderous and inevitable. And still his voice went on clapping in her ear, and still his presence edged near

her, and seemed to impinge on her — a smallish, semi-grotesque, grey-obscure figure with a naked brandished forearm: not human: a creature of the subterranean world, melted out like a bat, fluid. She felt herself melting out also, to become a mere vocal ghost, a presence in the thick atmosphere. Her lungs felt thick and slow, her mind dissolved, she felt she could cling like a bat in the long swoon of the crannied, underworld darkness. Cling like a bat and sway for ever swooning in the draughts of the darkness —

When she was up on the earth again she blinked and peered at the world in amazement. What a pretty, luminous place it was, carved in substantial luminosity. What a strange and lovely place, bubbling iridescent-golden on the surface of the underworld. Iridescent golden — could anything be more fascinating! Like lovely glancing surface on fluid pitch. But a velvet surface. A velvet surface of golden light, velvet-pile of gold and pale luminosity, and strange beautiful elevations of houses and trees, and depressions of fields and roads, all golden and floating like atmospheric majolica. Never had the common ugliness of Woodhouse seemed so entrancing. She thought she had never seen such beauty — a lovely luminous majolica, living and palpitating, the glossy, svelte world-surface, the exquisite face of all the darkness. It was like a vision. Perhaps gnomes and subterranean workers, enslaved in the era of light, see with such eyes. Perhaps that is why they are absolutely blind to conventional ugliness. For truly nothing could be more hideous than Woodhouse, as the miners had built it and disposed it. And yet, the very cabbage-stumps and rotten fences of the gardens, the very back-yards were instinct with magic, molten as they seemed with the bubbling-up of the under-darkness, bubbling up of majolica weight and luminosity, quite ignorant of the sky, heavy and satisfying.

Slaves of the underworld! She watched the swing of the grey colliers along the pavement with a new fascination, hypnotized by a new vision. Slaves — the underground trolls and iron-workers, magic, mischievous, and enslaved, of the ancient stories. But tall — the miners seemed to her to loom tall and grey, in their enslaved magic. Slaves who would cause the superimposed day-order to fall. Not because, individually, they wanted to. But because, collectively, something bubbled up in them, the force of darkness which had no master and no control. It would bubble and stir in them as earthquakes stir the earth. It would be simply disastrous, because it had no master. There was no dark master in the world. The puerile world went on crying out for a new Jesus, another Saviour from the sky, another heavenly superman. When what was wanted was a Dark Master from the underworld.

So they streamed past her, home from work — grey from head to foot, distorted in shape, cramped, with curious faces that came out pallid from under

their dirt. Their walk was heavy-footed and slurring, their bearing stiff and grotesque. A stream they were — yet they seemed to her to loom like strange, valid figures of fairy-lore, unrealized and as yet unexperienced. The miners, the iron-workers, those who fashion the stuff of the underworld.

As it always comes to its children, the nostalgia of the repulsive, heavy-footed Midlands came over her again, even whilst she was there in the midst. The curious, dark, inexplicable and yet insatiable craving — as if for an earthquake. To feel the earth heave and shudder and shatter the world from beneath. To go down in the debacle.

And so, in spite of everything, poverty, dowdiness, obscurity, and nothingness, she was content to stay in abeyance at home for the time. True, she was filled with the same old, slow, dreadful craving of the Midlands: a craving insatiable and inexplicable. But the very craving kept her still. For at this time she did not translate it into a desire, or need, for love. At the back of her mind somewhere was the fixed idea, the fixed intention of finding love, a man. But as yet, at this period, the idea was in abeyance, it did not act. The craving that possessed her as it possesses everybody, in a greater or less degree, in those parts, sustained her darkly and unconsciously.

A hot summer waned into autumn, the long, bewildering days drew in, the transient nights, only a few breaths of shadow between noon and noon, deepened and strengthened. A restlessness came over everybody. There was another short strike among the miners. James Houghton, like an excited beetle, scurried to and fro, feeling he was making his fortune. Never had Woodhouse been so thronged on Fridays with purchasers and money-spenders. The place seemed surcharged with life.

Autumn lasted beautiful till end of October. And then, suddenly, cold rain, endless cold rain, and darkness heavy, wet, ponderous. Through the wind and rain it was a toil to move. Poor Miss Frost, who had seemed almost to blossom again in the long hot days, regaining a free cheerfulness that amounted almost to liveliness, and who even caused a sort of scandal by her intimacy with a rather handsome but common stranger, an insurance agent who had come into the place with a good, unused tenor voice — now she wilted again. She had given the rather florid young man tea in her room, and had laboured away at his fine, metallic voice, correcting him and teaching him and laughing with him and spending really a remarkable number of hours alone with him in her room in Woodhouse — for she had given up tramping the country, and had hired a music-room in a quiet street, where she gave her lessons. And the young man had hung round, and had never wanted to go away. They would prolong their tête-à-tête and their singing on till ten o'clock at night, and Miss Frost would

return to Manchester House flushed and handsome and a little shy, while the young man, who was common, took on a new boldness in the streets. He had auburn hair, high colouring, and a rather challenging bearing. He took on a new boldness, his own estimate of himself rose considerably, with Miss Frost and his trained voice to justify him. He was a little insolent and condescending to the natives, who disliked him. For their lives they could not imagine what Miss Frost could find in him. They began even to dislike her, and a pretty scandal was started about the pair, in the pleasant room where Miss Frost had her piano, her books, and her flowers. The scandal was as unjust as most scandals are. Yet truly, all that summer and autumn Miss Frost had a new and slightly aggressive cheerfulness and humour. And Manchester House saw little of her, comparatively.

And then, at the end of September, the young man was removed by his Insurance Company to another district. And at the end of October set in the most abominable and unbearable weather, deluges of rain and north winds, cutting the tender, summer-unfolded people to pieces. Miss Frost wilted at once. A silence came over her. She shuddered when she had to leave the fire. She went in the morning to her room, and stayed there all the day, in a hot, close atmosphere, shuddering when her pupils brought the outside weather with them to her.

She was always subject to bronchitis. In November she had a bad bronchitis cold. Then suddenly one morning she could not get up. Alvina went in and found her semi-conscious.

The girl was almost mad. She flew to the rescue. She despatched her father instantly for the doctor, she heaped the sticks in the bedroom grate and made a bright fire, she brought hot milk and brandy.

"Thank you, dear, thank you. It's a bronchial cold," whispered Miss Frost hurriedly, trying to sip the milk. She could not. She didn't want it.

"I've sent for the doctor," said Alvina, in her cool voice, wherein none the less there rang the old hesitancy of sheer love.

Miss Frost lifted her eyes:

"There's no need," she said and she smiled winsomely at Alvina.

It was pneumonia. Useless to talk of the distracted anguish of Alvina during the next two days. She was so swift and sensitive in her nursing, she seemed to have second sight. She talked to nobody. In her silence her soul was along with the soul of her darling. The long semi-consciousness and the tearing pain of pneumonia, the anguished sickness.

But sometimes the grey eyes would open and smile with delicate winsomeness at Alvina, and Alvina smiled back, with a cheery, answering winsomeness. But that costs something.

On the evening of the second day, Miss Frost got her hand from under the bedclothes, and laid it on Alvina's hand. Alvina leaned down to her.

"Everything is for you, my love," whispered Miss Frost, looking with strange eyes on Alvina's face.

"Don't talk, Miss Frost," moaned Alvina.

"Everything is for you," murmured the sick woman — "except —" and she enumerated some of her legacies which showed her generous, thoughtful nature.

"Yes, I shall remember," said Alvina, beyond tears now.

Miss Frost smiled with her old bright, wonderful look, that had a touch of queenliness in it.

"Kiss me, dear," she whispered.

Alvina kissed her, and could not suppress the whimpering of her too-much grief.

The night passed slowly. Sometimes the grey eyes of the sick woman rested dark, dilated, haggard on Alvina's face, with a heavy, almost accusing look, sinister. Then they closed again. And sometimes they looked pathetic, with a mute, stricken appeal. Then again they closed — only to open again tense with pain. Alvina wiped her blood-phlegmed lips.

In the morning she died — lay there haggard, death-smearing, with her lovely white hair smeared also, and disorderly: she who had been so beautiful and clean always.

Alvina knew death — which is untellable. She knew that her darling carried away a portion of her own soul into death.

But she was alone. And the agony of being alone, the agony of grief, passionate, passionate grief for her darling who was torn into death — the agony of self-reproach, regret; the agony of remembrance; the agony of the looks of the dying woman, winsome, and sinisterly accusing, and pathetically, despairingly appealing — probe after probe of mortal agony, which throughout eternity would never lose its power to pierce to the quick!

Alvina seemed to keep strangely calm and aloof all the days after the death. Only when she was alone she suffered till she felt her heart really broke.

"I shall never feel anything any more," she said in her abrupt way to Miss Frost's friend, another woman of over fifty.

"Nonsense, child!" expostulated Mrs. Lawson gently.

"I shan't! I shall never have a heart to feel anything any more," said Alvina, with a strange, distraught roll of the eyes.

"Not like this, child. But you'll feel other things —"

"I haven't the heart," persisted Alvina.

"Not yet," said Mrs. Lawson gently. "You can't expect — But time — time

brings back — ”

“Oh well — but I don’t believe it,” said Alvina.

People thought her rather hard. To one of her gossips Miss Pinnegar confessed:

“I thought she’d have felt it more. She cared more for her than she did for her own mother — and her mother knew it. Mrs. Houghton complained bitterly, sometimes, that *she* had *no* love. They were everything to one another, Miss Frost and Alvina. I should have thought she’d have felt it more. But you never know. A good thing if she doesn’t, really.”

Miss Pinnegar herself did not care one little bit that Miss Frost was dead. She did not feel herself implicated.

The nearest relatives came down, and everything was settled. The will was found, just a brief line on a piece of notepaper expressing a wish that Alvina should have everything. Alvina herself told the verbal requests. All was quietly fulfilled.

As it might well be. For there was nothing to leave. Just sixty-three pounds in the bank — no more: then the clothes, piano, books and music. Miss Frost’s brother had these latter, at his own request: the books and music, and the piano. Alvina inherited the few simple trinkets, and about forty-five pounds in money.

“Poor Miss Frost,” cried Mrs. Lawson, weeping rather bitterly — ”she saved nothing for herself. You can see why she never wanted to grow old, so that she couldn’t work. You can see. It’s a shame, it’s a shame, one of the best women that ever trod earth.”

Manchester House settled down to its deeper silence, its darker gloom. Miss Frost was irreparably gone. With her, the reality went out of the house. It seemed to be silently waiting to disappear. And Alvina and Miss Pinnegar might move about and talk in vain. They could never remove the sense of waiting to finish: it was all just waiting to finish. And the three, James and Alvina and Miss Pinnegar, waited lingering through the months, for the house to come to an end. With Miss Frost its spirit passed away: it was no more. Dark, empty-feeling, it seemed all the time like a house just before a sale.

CHAPTER V

THE BEAU

Throttle-Ha'penny worked fitfully through the winter, and in the spring broke down. By this time James Houghton had a pathetic, childish look which touched the hearts of Alvina and Miss Pinnegar. They began to treat him with a certain feminine indulgence, as he fluttered round, agitated and bewildered. He was like a bird that has flown into a room and is exhausted, enfeebled by its attempts to fly through the false freedom of the window-glass. Sometimes he would sit moping in a corner, with his head under his wing. But Miss Pinnegar chased him forth, like the stealthy cat she was, chased him up to the workroom to consider some detail of work, chased him into the shop to turn over the old debris of the stock. At one time he showed the alarming symptom of brooding over his wife's death. Miss Pinnegar was thoroughly scared. But she was not inventive. It was left to Alvina to suggest: "Why doesn't father let the shop, and some of the house?"

Let the shop! Let the last inch of frontage on the street! James thought of it. Let the shop! Permit the name of Houghton to disappear from the list of tradesmen? Withdraw? Disappear? Become a nameless nobody, occupying obscure premises?

He thought about it. And thinking about it, became so indignant at the thought that he pulled his scattered energies together within his frail frame. And then he came out with the most original of all his schemes. Manchester House was to be fitted up as a boarding-house for the better classes, and was to make a fortune catering for the needs of these gentry, who had now nowhere to go. Yes, Manchester House should be fitted up as a sort of quiet family hotel for the better classes. The shop should be turned into an elegant hall-entrance, carpeted, with a hall-porter and a wide plate-glass door, round-arched, in the round arch of which the words: "Manchester House" should appear large and distinguished, making an arch also, whilst underneath, more refined and smaller, should show the words: "Private Hotel." James was to be proprietor and secretary, keeping

the books and attending to correspondence: Miss Pinnegar was to be manageress, superintending the servants and directing the house, whilst Alvina was to occupy the equivocal position of "hostess." She was to shake hands with the guests: she was to play the piano, and she was to nurse the sick. For in the prospectus James would include: "Trained nurse always on the premises."

"Why!" cried Miss Pinnegar, for once brutally and angrily hostile to him: "You'll make it sound like a private lunatic asylum."

"Will you explain why?" answered James tartly.

For himself, he was enraptured with the scheme. He began to tot up ideas and expenses. There would be the handsome entrance and hall: there would be an extension of the kitchen and scullery: there would be an installing of new hot-water and sanitary arrangements: there would be a light lift-arrangement from the kitchen: there would be a handsome glazed balcony or loggia or terrace on the first floor at the back, over the whole length of the back-yard. This loggia would give a wonderful outlook to the south-west and the west. In the immediate foreground, to be sure, would be the yard of the livery-stables and the rather slummy dwellings of the colliers, sloping downhill. But these could be easily overlooked, for the eye would instinctively wander across the green and shallow valley, to the long upslope opposite, showing the Manor set in its clump of trees, and farms and haystacks pleasantly dotted, and moderately far off coal-mines with twinkling headstocks and narrow railway-lines crossing the arable fields, and heaps of burning slag. The balcony or covered terrace — James settled down at last to the word *terrace* — was to be one of the features of the house: *the* feature. It was to be fitted up as a sort of elegant lounging restaurant. Elegant teas, at two-and-six per head, and elegant suppers, at five shillings without wine, were to be served here.

As a teetotaller and a man of ascetic views, James, in his first shallow moments, before he thought about it, assumed that his house should be entirely non-alcoholic. A temperance house! Already he winced. We all know what a provincial Temperance Hotel is. Besides, there is magic in the sound of wine. *Wines Served*. The legend attracted him immensely — as a teetotaller, it had a mysterious, hypnotic influence. He must have wines. He knew nothing about them. But Alfred Swayn, from the Liquor Vaults, would put him in the running in five minutes.

It was most curious to see Miss Pinnegar turtle up' at the mention of this scheme. When first it was disclosed to her, her colour came up like a turkey's in a flush of indignant anger.

"It's ridiculous. It's just ridiculous!" she blurted, bridling and ducking her head and turning aside, like an indignant turkey.

“Ridiculous! Why? Will you explain why!” retorted James, turtling also.

“It’s absolutely ridiculous!” she repeated, unable to do more than splutter.

“Well, we’ll see,” said James, rising to superiority.

And again he began to dart absorbedly about, like a bird building a nest. Miss Pinnegar watched him with a sort of sullen fury. She went to the shop door to peep out after him. She saw him slip into the Liquor Vaults, and she came back to announce to Alvina:

“He’s taken to drink!”

“Drink?” said Alvina.

“That’s what it is,” said Miss Pinnegar vindictively. “Drink!”

Alvina sank down and laughed till she was weak. It all seemed really too funny to her — too funny.

“I can’t see what it is to laugh at,” said Miss Pinnegar. “Disgraceful — it’s disgraceful! But I’m not going to stop to be made a fool of. I shall be no manageress, I tell you. It’s absolutely ridiculous. Who does he think will come to the place? He’s out of his mind — and it’s drink; that’s what it is! Going into the Liquor Vaults at ten o’clock in the morning! That’s where he gets his ideas — out of whiskey — or brandy! But he’s not going to make a fool of me.”

“Oh dear!” sighed Alvina, laughing herself into composure and a little weariness. “I know it’s *perfectly* ridiculous. We shall have to stop him.”

“I’ve said all I can say,” blurted Miss Pinnegar.

As soon as James came in to a meal, the two women attacked him. “But father,” said Alvina, “there’ll be nobody to come.”

“Plenty of people — plenty of people,” said her father. “Look at The Shakespeare’s Head, in Knarborough.”

“Knarborough! Is this Knarborough!” blurted Miss Pinnegar. “Where are the business men here? Where are the foreigners coming here for business, where’s our lace-trade and our stocking-trade?”

“There *are* business men,” said James. “And there are ladies.”

“Who,” retorted Miss Pinnegar, “is going to give half-a-crown for a tea? They expect tea and bread-and-butter for fourpence, and cake for sixpence, and apricots or pineapple for ninepence, and ham-and-tongue for a shilling, and fried ham and eggs and jam and cake as much as they can eat for one-and-two. If they expect a knife-and-fork tea for a shilling, what are you going to give them for half-a-crown?”

“I know what I shall offer,” said James. “And we may make it two shillings.” Through his mind flitted the idea of 1/11½ — but he rejected it. “You don’t realize that I’m catering for a higher class of custom — ”

“But there *isn’t* any higher class in Woodhouse, father,” said Alvina, unable to

restrain a laugh.

“If you create a supply you create a demand,” he retorted.

“But how can you create a supply of better class people?” asked Alvina mockingly.

James took on his refined, abstracted look, as if he were preoccupied on higher planes. It was the look of an obstinate little boy who poses on the side of the angels — or so the women saw it.

Miss Pinnegar was prepared to combat him now by sheer weight of opposition. She would pitch her dead negative will obstinately against him. She would not speak to him, she would not observe his presence, she was stone deaf and stone blind: there was no James. This nettled him. And she miscalculated him. He merely took another circuit, and rose another flight higher on the spiral of his spiritual egotism. He believed himself finely and sacredly in the right, that he was frustrated by lower beings, above whom it was his duty to rise, to soar. So he soared to serene heights, and his Private Hotel seemed a celestial injunction, an erection on a higher plane.

He saw the architect: and then, with his plans and schemes, he saw the builder and contractor. The builder gave an estimate of six or seven hundred — but James had better see the plumber and fitter who was going to install the new hot water and sanitary system. James was a little dashed. He had calculated much less. Having only a few hundred pounds in possession after Throttle-Ha’penny, he was prepared to mortgage Manchester House if he could keep in hand a sufficient sum of money for the running of his establishment for a year. He knew he would have to sacrifice Miss Pinnegar’s workroom. He knew, and he feared Miss Pinnegar’s violent and unmitigated hostility. Still — his obstinate spirit rose — he was quite prepared to risk everything on this last throw.

Miss Allsop, daughter of the builder, called to see Alvina. The Allsops were great Chapel people, and Cassie Allsop was one of the old maids. She was thin and nipped and wistful looking, about forty-two years old. In private, she was tyrannously exacting with the servants, and spiteful, rather mean with her motherless nieces. But in public she had this nipped, wistful look.

Alvina was surprised by this visit. When she found Miss Allsop at the back door, all her inherent hostility awoke.

“Oh, is it you, Miss Allsop! Will you come in.”

They sat in the middle room, the common living room of the house.

“I called,” said Miss Allsop, coming to the point at once, and speaking in her Sunday-school-teacher voice, “to ask you if you know about this Private Hotel scheme of your father’s?”

“Yes,” said Alvina.

“Oh, you do! Well, we wondered.. Mr. Houghton came to father about the building alterations yesterday. They’ll be awfully expensive.”

“Will they?” said Alvina, making big, mocking eyes.

“Yes, very. What do *you* think of the scheme?”

“I? — well — !” Alvina hesitated, then broke into a laugh. “To tell the truth I haven’t thought much about it at all.”

“Well I think you should,” said Miss Allsop severely. “Father’s sure it won’t pay — and it will cost I don’t know how much. It is bound to be a dead loss. And your father’s getting on. You’ll be left stranded in the world without a penny to bless yourself with. I think it’s an awful outlook for you.”

“Do you?” said Alvina.

Here she was, with a bang, planked upon the shelf among the old maids.

“Oh, I do. Sincerely! I should do all I could to prevent him, if I were you.”

Miss Allsop took her departure. Alvina felt herself jolted in her mood. An old maid along with Cassie Allsop! — and James Houghton fooling about with the last bit of money, mortgaging Manchester House up to the hilt. Alvina sank in a kind of weary mortification, in which *her* peculiar obstinacy persisted devilishly and spitefully. “Oh well, so be it,” said her spirit vindictively. “Let the meagre, mean, despicable fate fulfil itself.” Her old anger against her father arose again.

Arthur Witham, the plumber, came in with James Houghton to examine the house. Arthur Witham was also one of the Chapel men — as had been his common, interfering, uneducated father before him. The father had left each of his sons a fair little sum of money, which Arthur, the eldest, had already increased tenfold. He was sly and slow and uneducated also, and spoke with a broad accent. But he was not bad-looking, a tight fellow with big blue eyes, who aspired to keep his “h’s” in the right place, and would have been a gentleman if he could.

Against her usual habit, Alvina joined the plumber and her father in the scullery. Arthur Witham saluted her with some respect. She liked his blue eyes and tight figure. He was keen and sly in business, very watchful, and slow to commit himself. Now he poked and peered and crept under the sink. Alvina watched him half disappear — she handed him a candle — and she laughed to herself seeing his tight, well-shaped hind-quarters protruding from under the sink like the wrong end of a dog from a kennel. He was keen after money, was Arthur — and bossy, creeping slyly after his own self-importance and power. He wanted power — and he would creep quietly after it till he got it: as much as he was capable of. His “h’s” were a barbed-wire fence and entanglement, preventing his unlimited progress.

He emerged from under the sink, and they went to the kitchen and afterwards

upstairs. Alvina followed them persistently, but a little aloof, and silent. When the tour of inspection was almost over, she said innocently:

“Won’t it cost a great deal?”

Arthur Witham slowly shook his head. Then he looked at her. She smiled rather archly into his eyes.

“It won’t be done for nothing,” he said, looking at her again. “We can go into that later,” said James, leading off the plumber.

“Good morning, Miss Houghton,” said Arthur Witham. “Good morning, Mr. Witham,” replied Alvina brightly.

But she lingered in the background, and as Arthur Witham was going she heard him say: “Well, I’ll work it out, Mr. Houghton. I’ll work it out, and let you know tonight. I’ll get the figures by tonight.”

The younger man’s tone was a little off-hand, just a little supercilious with her father, she thought. James’s star was setting.

In the afternoon, directly after dinner, Alvina went out. She entered the shop, where sheets of lead and tins of paint and putty stood about, varied by sheets of glass and fancy paper. Lottie Witham, Arthur’s wife, appeared. She was a woman of thirty-five, a bit of a shrew, with social ambitions and no children.

“Is Mr. Witham in?” said Alvina.

Mrs. Witham eyed her.

“I’ll see,” she answered, and she left the shop.

Presently Arthur entered, in his shirt-sleeves: rather attractive-looking.

“I don’t know what you’ll think of me, and what I’ve come for,” said Alvina, with hurried amiability. Arthur lifted his blue eyes to her, and Mrs. Witham appeared in the background, in the inner doorway.

“Why, what is it?” said Arthur stolidly.

“Make it as dear as you can, for father,” said Alvina, laughing nervously.

Arthur’s blue eyes rested on her face. Mrs. Witham advanced into the shop.

“Why? What’s that for?” asked Lottie Witham shrewdly.

Alvina turned to the woman.

“Don’t say anything,” she said. “But we don’t want father to go on with this scheme. It’s bound to fail. And Miss Pinnegar and I can’t have anything to do with it anyway. I shall go away.”

“It’s bound to fail,” said Arthur Witham stolidly.

“And father has no money, I’m sure,” said Alvina.

Lottie Witham eyed the thin, nervous face of Alvina. For some reason, she liked her. And of course, Alvina was *considered* a lady in Woodhouse. That was what it had come to, with James’s declining fortunes: she was merely considered a lady. The consideration was no longer indisputable.

“Shall you come in a minute?” said Lottie Witham, lifting the flap of the counter. It was a rare and bold stroke on Mrs. Witham’s part. Alvina’s immediate instinct was to refuse. But she liked Arthur Witham, in his shirt sleeves.

“Well — I must be back in a minute,” she said, as she entered the embrasure of the counter. She felt as if she were really venturing on new ground. She was led into the new drawing-room, done in new peacock-and-bronze brocade furniture, with gilt and brass and white walls. This was the Withams’ new house, and Lottie was proud of it. The two women had a short confidential chat. Arthur lingered in the doorway a while, then went away.

Alvina did not really like Lottie Witham. Yet the other woman was sharp and shrewd in the uptake, and for some reason she fancied Alvina. So she was invited to tea at Manchester House.

After this, so many difficulties rose up in James Houghton’s way that he was worried almost out of his life. His two women left him alone. Outside difficulties multiplied on him till he abandoned his scheme — he was simply driven out of it by untoward circumstances.

Lottie Witham came to tea, and was shown over Manchester House. She had no opinion at all of Manchester House — wouldn’t hang a cat in such a gloomy hole. *Still*, she was rather impressed by the sense of superiority.

“Oh my goodness!” she exclaimed as she stood in Alvina’s bedroom, and looked at the enormous furniture, the lofty tableland of the bed.

“Oh my goodness! I wouldn’t sleep in *that* for a trifle, by myself! Aren’t you frightened out of your life? Even if I had Arthur at one side of me, I should be that frightened on the other side I shouldn’t know what to do. Do you sleep here by yourself?”

“Yes,” said Alvina laughing. “I haven’t got an Arthur, even for one side.”

“Oh, my word, you’d want a husband on both sides, in that bed,” said Lottie Witham.

Alvina was asked back to tea — on Wednesday afternoon, closing day. Arthur was there to tea — very ill at ease and feeling as if his hands were swollen. Alvina got on better with his wife, who watched closely to learn from her guest the secret of repose. The indefinable repose and inevitability of a lady — even of a lady who is nervous and agitated — this was the problem which occupied Lottie’s shrewd and active, but lower-class mind. She even did not resent Alvina’s laughing attempts to draw out the clumsy Arthur: because Alvina was a lady, and her tactics must be studied.

Alvina really liked Arthur, and thought a good deal about him — heaven knows why. He and Lottie were quite happy together, and he was absorbed in his

petty ambitions. In his limited way, he was invincibly ambitious. He would end by making a sufficient fortune, and by being a town councillor and a J.P. But beyond Woodhouse he did not exist. Why then should Alvina be attracted by him? Perhaps because of his "closeness," and his secret determinedness.

When she met him in the street she would stop him — though he was always busy — and make him exchange a few words with her. And when she had tea at his house, she would try to rouse his attention. But though he looked at her, steadily, with his blue eyes, from under his long lashes, still, she knew, he looked at her objectively. He never conceived any connection with her whatsoever.

It was Lottie who had a scheming mind. In the family of three brothers there was one — not black sheep, but white. There was one who was climbing out, to be a gentleman. This was Albert, the second brother. He had been a school-teacher in Woodhouse: had gone out to South Africa and occupied a post in a sort of Grammar School in one of the cities of Cape Colony. He had accumulated some money, to add to his patrimony. Now he was in England, at Oxford, where he would take his belated degree. When he had got his degree, he would return to South Africa to become head of his school, at seven hundred a year.

Albert was thirty-two years old, and unmarried. Lottie was determined he should take back to the Cape a suitable wife: presumably Alvina. He spent his vacations in Woodhouse — and he was only in his first year at Oxford. Well now, what could be more suitable — a young man at Oxford, a young lady in Woodhouse. Lottie told Alvina all about him, and Alvina was quite excited to meet him. She imagined him a taller, more fascinating, educated Arthur.

For the fear of being an old maid, the fear of her own virginity was really gaining on Alvina. There was a terrible sombre futility, nothingness, in Manchester House. She was twenty-six years old. Her life was utterly barren now Miss Frost had gone. She was shabby and penniless, a mere household drudge: for James begrudged even a girl to help in the kitchen. She was looking faded and worn. Panic, the terrible and deadly panic which overcomes so many unmarried women at about the age of thirty, was beginning to overcome her. She would not care about marriage, if even she had a lover. But some sort of terror hunted her to the search of a lover. She would become loose, she would become a prostitute, she said to herself, rather than die off like Cassie Allsop and the rest, wither slowly and ignominiously and hideously on the tree. She would rather kill herself.

But it needs a certain natural gift to become a loose woman or a prostitute. If you haven't got the qualities which attract loose men, what are you to do?

Supposing it isn't in your nature to attract loose and promiscuous men! Why, then you can't be a prostitute, if you try your head off nor even a loose woman. Since *willing* won't do it. It requires a second party to come to an agreement.

Therefore all Alvina's desperate and profligate schemes and ideas fell to nought before the inexorable in her nature. And the inexorable in her nature was highly exclusive and selective, an inevitable negation of looseness or prostitution. Hence men were afraid of her — of her power, once they had committed themselves. She would involve and lead a man on, she would destroy him rather than not get of him what she wanted. And what she wanted was something serious and risky. Not mere marriage — oh dear no! But a profound and dangerous interrelationship. As well ask the paddlers in the small surf of passion to plunge themselves into the heaving gulf of mid-ocean. Bah, with their trousers turned up to their knees it was enough for them to wet their toes in the dangerous sea. They were having nothing to do with such desperate nereids as Alvina.

She had cast her mind on Arthur. Truly ridiculous. But there was something compact and energetic and wilful about him that she magnified tenfold and so obtained, imaginatively, an attractive lover. She brooded her days shabbily away in Manchester House, busy with housework drudgery. Since the collapse of Throttle-Ha'penny, James Houghton had become so stingy that it was like an inflammation in him. A silver sixpence had a pale and celestial radiance which he could not forego, a nebulous whiteness which made him feel he had heaven in his hold. How then could he let it go. Even a brown penny seemed alive and pulsing with mysterious blood, potent, magical. He loved the flock of his busy pennies, in the shop, as if they had been divine bees bringing him sustenance from the infinite. But the pennies he saw dribbling away in household expenses troubled him acutely, as if they were live things leaving his fold. It was a constant struggle to get from him enough money for necessities.

And so the household diet became meagre in the extreme, the coal was eked out inch by inch, and when Alvina must have her boots mended she must draw on her own little stock of money. For James Houghton had the impudence to make her an allowance of two shillings a week. She was very angry. Yet her anger was of that dangerous, half-ironical sort which wears away its subject and has no outward effect. A feeling of half-bitter mockery kept her going. In the ponderous, rather sordid nullity of Manchester House she became shadowy and absorbed, absorbed in nothing in particular, yet absorbed. She was always more or less busy: and certainly there was always something to be done, whether she did it or not.

The shop was opened once a week, on Friday evenings. James Houghton

prowled round the warehouses in Knarborough and picked up job lots of stuff, with which he replenished his shabby window. But his heart was not in the business. Mere tenacity made him hover on with it.

In midsummer Albert Witham came to Woodhouse, and Alvina was invited to tea. She was very much excited. All the time imagining Albert a taller, finer Arthur, she had abstained from actually fixing her mind upon this latter little man. Picture her disappointment when she found Albert quite unattractive. He was tall and thin and brittle, with a pale, rather dry, flattish face, and with curious pale eyes. His impression was one of uncanny flatness, something like a lemon sole. Curiously flat and fish-like he was, one might have imagined his backbone to be spread like the backbone of a sole or a plaice. His teeth were sound, but rather large and yellowish and flat. A most curious person.

He spoke in a slightly mouthing way, not well bred in spite of Oxford. There was a distinct Woodhouse twang. He would never be a gentleman if he lived for ever. Yet he was not ordinary. Really an odd fish: quite interesting, if one could get over the feeling that one was looking at him through the glass wall of an aquarium: that most horrifying of all boundaries between two worlds. In an aquarium fish seem to come smiling broadly to the doorway, and there to stand talking to one, in a mouthing fashion, awful to behold. For one hears no sound from all their mouthing and staring conversation. Now although Albert Witham had a good strong voice, which rang like water among rocks in her ear, still she seemed never to hear a word he was saying. He smiled down at her and fixed her and swayed his head, and said quite original things, really. For he was a genuine odd fish. And yet she seemed to hear no sound, no word from him: nothing came to her. Perhaps as a matter of fact fish do actually pronounce streams of watery words, to which we, with our aerial-resonant ears, are deaf for ever.

The odd thing was that this odd fish seemed from the very first to imagine she had accepted him as a follower. And he was quite prepared to follow. Nay, from the very first moment he was smiling on her with a sort of complacent delight — compassionate, one might almost say — as if there was a full understanding between them. If only she could have got into the right state of mind, she would really rather have liked him. He smiled at her, and said really interesting things between his big teeth. There was something rather nice about him. But, we must repeat, it was as if the glass wall of an aquarium divided them.

Alvina looked at Arthur. Arthur was short and dark-haired and nicely coloured. But, now his brother was there, he too seemed to have a dumb, aqueous silence, fish-like and aloof, about him. He seemed to swim like a fish in his own little element. Strange it all was, like Alice in Wonderland. Alvina understood now Lottie's strained sort of thinness, a haggard, sinewy, sea-weedy

look. The poor thing was all the time swimming for her life.

For Alvina it was a most curious tea-party. She listened and smiled and made vague answers to Albert, who leaned his broad, thin brittle shoulders towards her. Lottie seemed rather shadowily to preside. But it was Arthur who came out into communication. And now, uttering his rather broad-mouthed speeches, she seemed to hear in him a quieter, subtler edition of his father. His father had been a little, terrifically loud-voiced, hard-skinned man, amazingly uneducated and amazingly bullying, who had tyrannized for many years over the Sunday School children during morning service. He had been an odd-looking creature with round grey whiskers: to Alvina, always a creature, never a man: an atrocious leprecaun from under the Chapel floor. And how he used to dig the children in the back with his horrible iron thumb, if the poor things happened to whisper or nod in chapel!

These were his children — most curious chips of the old block. Who ever would have believed she would have been taking tea with them. “Why don’t you have a bicycle, and go out on it?” Arthur was saying.

“But I can’t ride,” said Alvina.

“You’d learn in a couple of lessons. There’s nothing in riding a bicycle.”

“I don’t believe I ever should,” laughed Alvina.

“You don’t mean to say you’re nervous?” said Arthur rudely and sneeringly.

“I *am*,” she persisted.

“You needn’t be nervous with me,” smiled Albert broadly, with his odd, genuine gallantry. “I’ll hold you on.”

“But I haven’t got a bicycle,” said Alvina, feeling she was slowly colouring to a deep, uneasy blush.

“You can have mine to learn on,” said Lottie. “Albert will look after it.”

“There’s your chance,” said Arthur rudely. “Take it while you’ve got it.”

Now Alvina did not want to learn to ride a bicycle. The two Miss Carlins, two more old maids, had made themselves ridiculous for ever by becoming twin cycle fiends. And the horrible energetic strain of peddling a bicycle over miles and miles of high-way did not attract Alvina at all. She was completely indifferent to sight-seeing and scouring about. She liked taking a walk, in her lingering indifferent fashion. But rushing about in any way was hateful to her. And then, to be taught to ride a bicycle by Albert Witham! Her very soul stood still.

“Yes,” said Albert, beaming down at her from his strange pale eyes. “Come on. When will you have your first lesson?”

“Oh,” cried Alvina in confusion. “I can’t promise. I haven’t time, really.”

“Time!” exclaimed Arthur rudely. “But what do you do wi’ yourself all day?”

“I have to keep house,” she said, looking at him archly.

“House! You can put a chain round its neck, and tie it up,” he retorted.

Albert laughed, showing all his teeth.

“I’m sure you find plenty to do, with everything on your hands,” said Lottie to Alvina.

“I do!” said Alvina. “By evening I’m quite tired — though you mayn’t believe it, since you say I do nothing,” she added, laughing confusedly to Arthur.

But he, hard-headed little fortune-maker, replied:

“You have a girl to help you, don’t you!”

Albert, however, was beaming at her sympathetically.

“You have too much to do indoors,” he said. “It would do you good to get a bit of exercise out of doors. Come down to the Coach Road tomorrow afternoon, and let me give you a lesson. Go on.”

Now the coach-road was a level drive between beautiful park-like grass-stretches, down in the valley. It was a delightful place for learning to ride a bicycle, but open in full view of all the world. Alvina would have died of shame. She began to laugh nervously and hurriedly at the very thought.

“No, I can’t. I really can’t. Thanks, awfully,” she said.

“Can’t you really!” said Albert. “Oh well, we’ll say another day, shall we?”

“When I feel I can,” she said.

“Yes, when you feel like it,” replied Albert.

“That’s more it,” said Arthur. “It’s not the time. It’s the nervousness.” Again Albert beamed at her sympathetically, and said:

“Oh, I’ll hold you. You needn’t be afraid.”

“But I’m not afraid,” she said.

“You won’t say you are,” interposed Arthur. “Women’s faults mustn’t be owned up to.”

Alvina was beginning to feel quite dazed. Their mechanical, overbearing way was something she was unaccustomed to. It was like the jaws of a pair of insentient iron pincers. She rose, saying she must go.

Albert rose also, and reached for his straw hat, with its coloured band.

“I’ll stroll up with you, if you don’t mind,” he said. And he took his place at her side along the Knarborough Road, where everybody turned to look. For, of course, he had a sort of fame in Woodhouse. She went with him laughing and chatting. But she did not feel at all comfortable. He seemed so pleased. Only he was not pleased with *her*. He was pleased with himself on her account: inordinately pleased with himself. In his world, as in a fish’s, there was but his own swimming self: and if he chanced to have something swimming alongside and doing him credit, why, so much the more complacently he smiled.

He walked stiff and erect, with his head pressed rather back, so that he always seemed to be advancing from the head and shoulders, in a flat kind of advance, horizontal. He did not seem to be walking with his whole body. His manner was oddly gallant, with a gallantry that completely missed the individual in the woman, circled round her and flew home gratified to his own hive. The way he raised his hat, the way he inclined and smiled flatly, even rather excitedly, as he talked, was all a little discomfiting and comical.

He left her at the shop door, saying:

“I shall see you again, I hope.”

“Oh, yes,” she replied, rattling the door anxiously, for it was locked. She heard her father’s step at last tripping down the shop.

“Good-evening, Mr. Houghton,” said Albert suavely and with a certain confidence, as James peered out.

“Oh, good-evening!” said James, letting Alvina pass, and shutting the door in Albert’s face.

“Who was that?” he asked her sharply.

“Albert Witham,” she replied.

“What has *he* got to do with you?” said James shrewishly. “Nothing, I hope.”

She fled into the obscurity of Manchester House, out of the grey summer evening. The Withams threw her off her pivot, and made her feel she was not herself. She felt she didn’t know, she couldn’t feel, she was just scattered and decentralized. And she was rather afraid of the Witham brothers. She might be their victim. She intended to avoid them.

The following days she saw Albert, in his Norfolk jacket and flannel trousers and his straw hat, strolling past several times and looking in through the shop door and up at the upper windows. But she hid herself thoroughly. When she went out, it was by the back way. So she avoided him.

But on Sunday evening, there he sat, rather stiff and brittle in the old Withams’ pew, his head pressed a little back, so that his face and neck seemed slightly flattened. He wore very low, turn-down starched collars that showed all his neck. And he kept looking up at her during the service — she sat in the choir-loft — gazing up at her with apparently love-lorn eyes and a faint, intimate smile — the sort of *je-sais-tout* look of a private swain. Arthur also occasionally cast a judicious eye on her, as if she were a chimney that needed repairing, and he must estimate the cost, and whether it was worth it.

Sure enough, as she came out through the narrow choir gate into Knarborough Road, there was Albert stepping forward like a policeman, and saluting her and smiling down on her.

“I don’t know if I’m presuming — ” he said, in a mock deferential way that

showed he didn't imagine he *could* presume.

"Oh, not at all," said Alvina airily. He smiled with assurance. "You haven't got any engagement, then, for this evening?" he said. "No," she replied simply.

"We might take a walk. What do you think?" he said, glancing down the road in either direction.

What, after all, was she to think? All the girls were pairing off with the boys for the after-chapel stroll and spoon.

"I don't mind," she said.

"But I can't go far. I've got to be in at nine."

"Which way shall we go?" he said.

He steered off, turned downhill through the common gardens, and proposed to take her the not-very-original walk up Flint's Lane, and along the railway line — the colliery railway, that is — then back up the Marlpool Road: a sort of circle. She agreed.

They did not find a great deal to talk about. She questioned him about his plans, and about the Cape. But save for bare outlines, which he gave readily enough, he was rather close.

"What do you do on Sunday nights as a rule?" he asked her.

"Oh, I have a walk with Lucy Grainger — or I go down to Hallam's or go home," she answered.

"You don't go walks with the fellows, then?"

"Father would never have it," she replied.

"What will he say now?" he asked, with self-satisfaction. "Goodness knows!" she laughed.

"Goodness usually does," he answered archly.

When they came to the rather stumbly railway, he said:

"Won't you take my arm?" — offering her the said member. "Oh, I'm all right," she said. "Thanks,"

"Go on," he said, pressing a little nearer to her, and offering his arm. "There's nothing against it, is there?"

"Oh, it's not that," she said.

And feeling in a false position, she took his arm, rather unwillingly. He drew a little nearer to her, and walked with a slight prance.

"We get on better, don't we?" he said, giving her hand the tiniest squeeze with his arm against his side.

"Much!" she replied, with a laugh.

Then he lowered his voice oddly.

"It's many a day since I was on this railroad," he said.

"Is this one of your old walks?" she asked, malicious.

“Yes, I’ve been it once or twice — with girls that are all married now.”

“Didn’t you want to marry?” she asked.

“Oh, I don’t know. I may have done. But it never came off, somehow. I’ve sometimes thought it never would come off.”

“Why?”

“I don’t know, exactly. It didn’t seem to, you know. Perhaps neither of us was properly inclined.”

“I should think so,” she said.

“And yet,” he admitted slyly, “I should *like* to marry — ” To this she did not answer.

“Shouldn’t you?” he continued.

“When I meet the right man,” she laughed.

“That’s it,” he said. “There, that’s just it! And you *haven’t* met him?” His voice seemed smiling with a sort of triumph, as if he had caught her out.

“Well — once I thought I had — when I was engaged to Alexander.”

“But you found you were mistaken?” he insisted.

“No. Mother was so ill at the time — ”

“There’s always something to consider,” he said.

She kept on wondering what she should do if he wanted to kiss her. The mere incongruity of such a desire on his part formed a problem. Luckily, for this evening he formulated no desire, but left her in the shop-door soon after nine, with the request:

“I shall see you in the week, shan’t I?”

“I’m not sure. I can’t promise now,” she said hurriedly. “Goodnight.”

What she felt chiefly about him was a decentralized perplexity, very much akin to no feeling at all.

“Who do you think took me for a walk, Miss Pinnegar?” she said, laughing, to her confidante.

“I can’t imagine,” replied Miss Pinnegar, eyeing her.

“You never would imagine,” said Alvina. “Albert Witham.”

“Albert Witham!” exclaimed Miss Pinnegar, standing quite motionless.

“It may well take your breath away,” said Alvina.

“No, it’s not that!” hurriedly expostulated Miss Pinnegar. “Well — ! Well, I declare! — ” and then, on a new note: “Well, he’s very eligible, I think.”

“Most eligible!” replied Alvina.

“Yes, he is,” insisted Miss Pinnegar. “I think it’s very good.”

“What’s very good?” asked Alvina.

Miss Pinnegar hesitated. She looked at Alvina. She reconsidered. “Of course he’s not the man I should have imagined for you, but — ”

“You think he’ll do?” said Alvina.

“Why not?” said Miss Pinnegar. “Why shouldn’t he do — if you like him.”

“Ah — !” cried Alvina, sinking on the sofa with laugh. “That’s it.”

“Of course you couldn’t have anything to do with him if you don’t care for him,” pronounced Miss Pinnegar.

Albert continued to hang around. He did not make any direct attack for a few days. Suddenly one evening he appeared at the back door with a bunch of white stocks in his hand. His face lit up with a sudden, odd smile when she opened the door — a broad, pale-gleaming, remarkable smile.

“Lottie wanted to know if you’d come to tea tomorrow,” he said straight out, looking at her with the pale light in his eyes, that smiled palely right into her eyes, but did not see her at all. He was waiting on the doorstep to come in.

“Will you come in?” said Alvina. “Father is in.”

“Yes, I don’t mind,” he said, pleased. He mounted the steps, still holding his bunch of white stocks.

James Houghton screwed round in his chair and peered over his spectacles to see who was coming.

“Father,” said Alvina, “you know Mr. Witham, don’t you?”

James Houghton half rose. He still peered over his glasses at the intruder.

“Well — I do by sight. How do you do?”

He held out his frail hand.

Albert held back, with the flowers in his own hand, and giving his broad, pleased, pale-gleaming smile from father to daughter, he said:

“What am I to do with these? Will you accept them, Miss Houghton?” He stared at her with shining, pallid smiling eyes.

“Are they for me?” she said, with false brightness. “Thank you.”

James Houghton looked over the top of his spectacles, searchingly, at the flowers, as if they had been a bunch of white and sharp-toothed ferrets. Then he looked as suspiciously at the hand which Albert at last extended to him. He shook it slightly, and said:

“Take a seat.”

“I’m afraid I’m disturbing you in your reading,” said Albert, still having the drawn, excited smile on his face.

“Well — ” said James Houghton. “The light is fading.”

Alvina came in with the flowers in a jar. She set them on the table.

“Haven’t they a lovely scent?” she said.

“Do you think so?” he replied, again with the excited smile. There was a pause. Albert, rather embarrassed, reached forward, saying:

“May I see what you’re reading!” And he turned over the book. “Tommy and

Grizel! Oh yes! What do you think of it?"

"Well," said James, "I am only in the beginning."

"I think it's interesting, myself," said Albert, "as a study of a man who can't get away from himself. You meet a lot of people like that. What I wonder is why they find it such a drawback."

"Find what a drawback?" asked James.

"Not being able to get away from themselves. That self-consciousness. It hampers them, and interferes with their power of action. Now I wonder why self-consciousness should hinder a man in his action? Why does it cause misgiving? I think I'm self-conscious, but I don't think I have so many misgivings. I don't see that they're necessary."

"Certainly I think Tommy is a weak character. I believe he's a despicable character," said James.

"No, I don't know so much about that," said Albert. "I shouldn't say weak, exactly. He's only weak in one direction. No, what I wonder is why he feels guilty. If you feel self-conscious, there's no need to feel guilty about it, is there?"

He stared with his strange, smiling stare at James.

"I shouldn't say so," replied James. "But if a man never knows his own mind, he certainly can't be much of a man."

"I don't see it," replied Albert. "What's the matter is that he feels guilty for not knowing his own mind. That's the unnecessary part. The guilty feeling —"

Albert seemed insistent on this point, which had no particular interest for James.

"Where we've got to make a change," said Albert, "is in the feeling that other people have a right to tell us what we ought to feel and do. Nobody knows what another man ought to feel. Every man has his own special feelings, and his own right to them. That's where it is with education. You ought not to want all your children to feel alike. Their natures are all different, and so they should all feel different, about practically everything."

"There would be no end to the confusion," said James.

"There needn't be any confusion to speak of. You agree to a number of rules and conventions and laws, for social purposes. But in private you feel just as you do feel, without occasion for trying to feel something else."

"I don't know," said James. "There are certain feelings common to humanity, such as love, and honour, and truth."

"Would you call them feelings?" said Albert. "I should say what is common is the idea. The idea is common to humanity, once you've put it into words. But the feeling varies with every man. The same idea represents a different kind of

feeling in every different individual. It seems to me that's what we've got to recognize if we're going to do anything with education. We don't want to produce mass feelings. Don't you agree?"

Poor James was too bewildered to know whether to agree or not to agree.

"Shall we have a light, Alvina?" he said to his daughter.

Alvina lit the incandescent gas-jet that hung in the middle of the room. The hard white light showed her somewhat haggard-looking as she reached up to it. But Albert watched her, smiling abstractedly. It seemed as if his words came off him without affecting him at all. He did not think about what he was feeling, and he did not feel what he was thinking about. And therefore she hardly heard what he said. Yet she believed he was clever.

It was evident Albert was quite blissfully happy, in his own way, sitting there at the end of the sofa not far from the fire, and talking animatedly. The uncomfortable thing was that though he talked in the direction of his interlocutor, he did not speak *to* him: merely said his words towards him. James, however, was such an airy feather himself he did not remark this, but only felt a little self-important at sustaining such a subtle conversation with a man from Oxford. Alvina, who never expected to be interested in clever conversations, after a long experience of her father, found her expectation justified again. She was not interested.

The man was quite nicely dressed, in the regulation tweed jacket and flannel trousers and brown shoes. He was even rather smart, judging from his yellow socks and yellow-and-brown tie. Miss Pinnegar eyed him with approval when she came in.

"Good-evening!" she said, just a trifle condescendingly, as she shook hands. "How do you find Woodhouse, after being away so long?" Her way of speaking was so quiet, as if she hardly spoke aloud.

"Well," he answered. "I find it the same in many ways."

"You wouldn't like to settle here again?"

"I don't think I should. It feels a little cramped, you know, after a new country. But it has its attractions." Here he smiled meaningful.

"Yes," said Miss Pinnegar. "I suppose the old connections count for something."

"They do. Oh decidedly they do. There's no associations like the old ones." He smiled flatly as he looked towards Alvina.

"You find it so, do you!" returned Miss Pinnegar. "You don't find that the new connections make up for the old?"

"Not altogether, they don't. There's something missing — " Again he looked towards Alvina. But she did not answer his look.

“Well,” said Miss Pinnegar. “I’m glad we still count for something, in spite of the greater attractions. How long have you in England?”

“Another year. Just a year. This time next year I expect I shall be sailing back to the Cape.” He smiled as if in anticipation. Yet it was hard to believe that it mattered to him — or that anything mattered.

“And is Oxford agreeable to you?” she asked.

“Oh, yes. I keep myself busy.”

“What are your subjects?” asked James.

“English and History. But I do mental science for my own interest.”

Alvina had taken up a piece of sewing. She sat under the light, brooding a little. What *had* all this to do with her. The man talked on, and beamed in her direction. And she felt a little important. But moved or touched? — not the least in the world.

She wondered if any one would ask him to supper — bread and cheese and currant-loaf, and water, was all that offered. No one asked him, and at last he rose.

“Show Mr. Witham out through the shop, Alvina,” said Miss Pinnegar.

Alvina piloted the man through the long, dark, encumbered way of the shop. At the door he said:

“You’ve never said whether you’re coming to tea on Thursday.”

“I don’t think I can,” said Alvina.

He seemed rather taken aback.

“Why?” he said. “What stops you?”

“I’ve so much to do.”

He smiled slowly and satirically.

“Won’t it keep?” he said.

“No, really. I can’t come on Thursday — thank you so much. Goodnight!” She gave him her hand and turned quickly into the shop, closing the door. He remained standing in the porch, staring at the closed door. Then, lifting his lip, he turned away.

“Well,” said Miss Pinnegar decidedly, as Alvina reentered. “You can say what you like — but I think he’s *very pleasant, very pleasant.*”

“Extremely intelligent,” said James Houghton, shifting in his chair. “I was awfully bored,” said Alvina.

They both looked at her, irritated.

After this she really did what she could to avoid him. When she saw him sauntering down the street in all his leisure, a sort of anger possessed her. On Sunday, she slipped down from the choir into the Chapel, and out through the main entrance, whilst he awaited her at the small exit. And by good luck, when

he called one evening in the week, she was out. She returned down the yard. And there, through the uncurtained window, she saw him sitting awaiting her. Without a thought, she turned on her heel and fled away. She did not come in till he had gone.

“How late you are!” said Miss Pinnegar. “Mr. Witham was here till ten minutes ago.”

“Yes,” laughed Alvina. “I came down the yard and saw him. So I went back till he’d gone.”

Miss Pinnegar looked at her in displeasure:

“I suppose you know your own mind,” she said.

“How do you explain such behaviour?” said her father pettishly.

“I didn’t want to meet him,” she said.

The next evening was Saturday. Alvina had inherited Miss Frost’s task of attending to the Chapel flowers once a quarter. She had been round the gardens of her friends, and gathered the scarlet and hot yellow and purple flowers of August, asters, red stocks, tall Japanese sunflowers, coreopsis, geraniums. With these in her basket she slipped out towards evening, to the Chapel. She knew Mr. Calladine, the caretaker would not lock up till she had been.

The moment she got inside the Chapel — it was a big, airy, pleasant building — she heard hammering from the organ-loft, and saw the flicker of a candle. Some workman busy before Sunday. She shut the baize door behind her, and hurried across to the vestry, for vases, then out to the tap, for water. All was warm and still.

It was full early evening. The yellow light streamed through the side windows, the big stained-glass window at the end was deep and full of glowing colour, in which the yellows and reds were richest. Above in the organ-loft the hammering continued. She arranged her flowers in many vases, till the communion table was like the window, a tangle of strong yellow, and crimson, and purple, and bronze-green. She tried to keep the effect light and kaleidoscopic, an interplay of tossed pieces of strong, hot colour, vibrating and lightly intermingled. It was very gorgeous, for a communion table. But the day of white lilies was over.

Suddenly there was a terrific crash and bang and tumble, up in the organ-loft, followed by a cursing.

“Are you hurt?” called Alvina, looking up into space. The candle had disappeared.

But there was no reply. Feeling curious, she went out of the Chapel to the stairs in the side porch, and ran up to the organ. She went round the side — and there she saw a man in his shirt-sleeves sitting crouched in the obscurity on the floor between the organ and the wall of the back, while a collapsed pair of steps

lay between her and him. It was too dark to see who it was.

“That rotten pair of steps came down with me,” said the infuriated voice of Arthur Witham, “and about broke my leg.”

Alvina advanced towards him, picking her way over the steps. He was sitting nursing his leg.

“Is it bad?” she asked, stooping towards him.

In the shadow he lifted up his face. It was pale, and his eyes were savage with anger. Her face was near his.

“It is bad,” he said furious because of the shock. The shock had thrown him off his balance.

“Let me see,” she said.

He removed his hands from clasping his shin, some distance above the ankle. She put her fingers over the bone, over his stocking, to feel if there was any fracture. Immediately her fingers were wet with blood. Then he did a curious thing. With both his hands he pressed her hand down over his wounded leg, pressed it with all his might, as if her hand were a plaster. For some moments he sat pressing her hand over his broken shin, completely oblivious, as some people are when they have had a shock and a hurt, intense on one point of consciousness only, and for the rest unconscious.

Then he began to come to himself. The pain modified itself. He could not bear the sudden acute hurt to his shin. That was one of his sensitive, unbearable parts.

“The bone isn’t broken,” she said professionally. “But you’d better get the stocking out of it.”

Without a thought, he pulled his trouser-leg higher and rolled down his stocking, extremely gingerly, and sick with pain. “Can you show a light?” he said.

She found the candle. And she knew where matches always rested, on a little ledge of the organ. So she brought him a light, whilst he examined his broken shin. The blood was flowing, but not so much. It was a nasty cut bruise, swelling and looking very painful. He sat looking at it absorbedly, bent over it in the candle-light.

“It’s not so very bad, when the pain goes off,” she said, noticing the black hairs of his shin. “We’d better tie it up. Have you got a handkerchief?”

“It’s in my jacket,” he said.

She looked round for his jacket. He annoyed her a little, by being completely oblivious of her. She got his handkerchief and wiped her fingers on it. Then of her own kerchief she made a pad for the wound.

“Shall I tie it up, then?” she said.

But he did not answer. He sat still nursing his leg, looking at his hurt, while

the blood slowly trickled down the wet hairs towards his ankle. There was nothing to do but wait for him.

“Shall I tie it up, then?” she repeated at length, a little impatient. So he put his leg a little forward.

She looked at the wound, and wiped it a little. Then she folded the pad of her own handkerchief, and laid it over the hurt. And again he did the same thing, he took her hand as if it were a plaster, and applied it to his wound, pressing it cautiously but firmly down. She was rather angry. He took no notice of her at all. And she, waiting, seemed to go into a dream, a sleep, her arm trembled a little, stretched out and fixed. She seemed to lose count, under the firm compression he imposed on her. It was as if the pressure on her hand pressed her into oblivion.

“Tie it up,” he said briskly.

And she, obedient, began to tie the bandage with numb fingers. He seemed to have taken the use out of her.

When she had finished, he scrambled to his feet, looked at the organ which he was repairing, and looked at the collapsed pair of steps.

“A rotten pair of things to have, to put a man’s life in danger,” he said, towards the steps. Then stubbornly, he rigged them up again, and stared again at his interrupted job.

“You won’t go on, will you?” she asked.

“It’s got to be done, Sunday tomorrow,” he said. “If you’d hold them steps a minute! There isn’t more than a minute’s fixing to do. It’s all done, but fixing.”

“Hadn’t you better leave it,” she said.

“Would you mind holding the steps, so that they don’t let me down again,” he said. Then he took the candle, and hobbled stubbornly and angrily up again, with spanner and hammer. For some minutes he worked, tapping and readjusting, whilst she held the rickety steps and stared at him from below, the shapeless bulk of his trousers. Strange the difference — she could not help thinking it — between the vulnerable hairy, and somehow childish leg of the real man, and the shapeless form of these workmen’s trousers. The kernel, the man himself — seemed so tender — the covering so stiff and insentient.

And was he not going to speak to her — not one human word of recognition? Men are the most curious and unreal creatures. After all he had made use of her. Think how he had pressed her hand gently but firmly down, down over his bruise, how he had taken the virtue out of her, till she felt all weak and dim. And after that was he going to relapse into his tough and ugly workman’s hide, and treat her as if *she* were a pair of steps, which might let him down or hold him up, as might be.

As she stood clinging to the steps she felt weak and a little hysterical. She

wanted to summon her strength, to have her own back from him. After all he had taken the virtue from her, he might have the grace to say thank you, and treat her as if she were a human being.

At last he left off tinkering, and looked round.

“Have you finished?” she said.

“Yes,” he answered crossly.

And taking the candle he began to clamber down. When he got to the bottom he crouched over his leg and felt the bandage.

“That gives you what for,” he said, as if it were her fault. “Is the bandage holding?” she said.

“I think so,” he answered churlishly.

“Aren’t you going to make sure?” she said.

“Oh, it’s all right,” he said, turning aside and taking up his tools. “I’ll make my way home.”

“So will I,” she answered.

She took the candle and went a little in front. He hurried into his coat and gathered his tools, anxious to get away. She faced him, holding the candle.

“Look at my hand,” she said, holding it out. It was smeared with blood, as was the cuff of her dress — a black-and-white striped cotton dress.

“Is it hurt?” he said.

“No, but look at it. Look here!” She showed the bloodstains on her dress.

“It’ll wash out,” he said, frightened of her.

“Yes, so it will. But for the present it’s there. Don’t you think you ought to thank me?”

He recoiled a little.

“Yes,” he said. “I’m very much obliged.”

“You ought to be more than that,” she said.

He did not answer, but looked her up and down.

“We’ll be going down,” he said. “We s’ll have folks talking.”

Suddenly she began to laugh. It seemed so comical. What a position! The candle shook as she laughed. What a man, answering her like a little automaton! Seriously, quite seriously he said it to her — “We s’ll have folks talking!” She laughed in a breathless, hurried way, as they tramped downstairs.

At the bottom of the stairs Calladine, the caretaker, met them. He was a tall thin man with a black moustache — about fifty years old. “Have you done for tonight, all of you?” he said, grinning in echo to Alvina’s still fluttering laughter.

“That’s a nice rotten pair of steps you’ve got up there for a deathtrap,” said Arthur angrily. “Come down on top of me, and I’m lucky I haven’t got my leg broken. It is near enough.”

“Come down with you, did they?” said Calladine good-humouredly. “I never knowed ‘em come down wi’ me.”

“You ought to, then. My leg’s as near broke as it can be.”

“What, have you hurt yourself?”

“I should think I have. Look here — ” And he began to pull up his trouser leg. But Alvina had given the candle to Calladine, and fled. She had a last view of Arthur stooping over his precious leg, while Calladine stooped his length and held down the candle.

When she got home she took off her dress and washed herself hard and washed the stained sleeve, thoroughly, thoroughly, and threw away the wash water and rinsed the wash-bowls with fresh water, scrupulously. Then she dressed herself in her black dress once more, did her hair, and went downstairs.

But she could not sew — and she could not settle down. It was Saturday evening, and her father had opened the shop, Miss Pinnegar had gone to Knarborough. She would be back at nine o’clock. Alvina set about to make a mock woodcock, or a mock something or other, with cheese and an egg and bits of toast. Her eyes were dilated and as if amused, mocking, her face quivered a little with irony that was not all enjoyable.

“I’m glad you’ve come,” said Alvina, as Miss Pinnegar entered. “The supper’s just done. I’ll ask father if he’ll close the shop.”

Of course James would not close the shop, though he was merely wasting light. He nipped in to eat his supper, and started out again with a mouthful the moment he heard the ping of the bell. He kept his customers chatting as long as he could. His love for conversation had degenerated into a spasmodic passion for chatter.

Alvina looked across at Miss Pinnegar, as the two sat at the meagre supper-table. Her eyes were dilated and arched with a mocking, almost satanic look.

“I’ve made up my mind about Albert Witham,” said Alvina. Miss Pinnegar looked at her.

“Which way?” she asked, demurely, but a little sharp.

“It’s all off,” said Alvina, breaking into a nervous laugh.

“Why? What has happened?”

“Nothing has happened. I can’t stand him.”

“Why? — suddenly — ” said Miss Pinnegar.

“It’s not sudden,” laughed Alvina. “Not at all. I can’t stand him. I never could. And I won’t try. There! Isn’t that plain?” And she went off into her hurried laugh, partly at herself, partly at Arthur, partly at Albert, partly at Miss Pinnegar.

“Oh, well, if you’re so sure — ” said Miss Pinnegar rather bitinglly.

“I *am* quite sure — ” said Alvina. “I’m quite certain.”

“Cock-sure people are often most mistaken,” said Miss Pinnegar. “I’d rather have my own mistakes than somebody else’s rights,” said Alvina.

“Then don’t expect anybody to pay for your mistakes,” said Miss Pinnegar.

“It would be all the same if I did,” said Alvina.

When she lay in bed, she stared at the light of the street-lamp on the wall. She was thinking busily: but heaven knows what she was thinking. She had sharpened the edge of her temper. She was waiting till tomorrow. She was waiting till she saw Albert Witham. She wanted to finish off with him. She was keen to cut clean through any correspondence with him. She stared for many hours at the light of the street-lamp, and there was a narrowed look in her eyes.

The next day she did not go to Morning Service, but stayed at home to cook the dinner. In the evening she sat in her place in the choir. In the Withams’ pew sat Louie and Albert — no Arthur. Albert kept glancing up. Alvina could not bear the sight of him — she simply could not bear the sight of him. Yet in her low, sweet voice she sang the alto to the hymns, right to the vesper:

“Lord keep us safe this night Secure from all our fears, May angels guard us while we sleep Till morning light appears — ”

As she sang her alto, and as the soft and emotional harmony of the vesper swelled luxuriously through the chapel, she was peeping over her folded hands at Lottie’s hat. She could not bear Lottie’s hats. There was something aggressive and vulgar about them. And she simply detested the look of the back of Albert’s head, as he too stooped to the vesper prayer. It looked mean and rather common. She remembered Arthur had the same look, bending to prayer. There! — why had she not seen it before! That petty, vulgar little look! How could she have thought twice of Arthur. She had made a fool of herself, as usual. Him and his little leg. She grimaced round the chapel, waiting for people to bob up their heads and take their departure.

At the gate Albert was waiting for her. He came forward lifting his hat with a smiling and familiar “Good evening!”

“Good evening,” she murmured.

“It’s ages since I’ve seen you,” he said. “And I’ve looked out for you everywhere.”

It was raining a little. She put up her umbrella.

“You’ll take a little stroll. The rain isn’t much,” he said.

“No, thank you,” she said. “I must go home.”

“Why, what’s your hurry! Walk as far as Beeby Bridge. Go on.”

“No, thank you.”

“How’s that? What makes you refuse?”

“I don’t want to.”

He paused and looked down at her. The cold and supercilious look of anger, a little spiteful, came into his face.

“Do you mean because of the rain?” he said.

“No. I hope you don’t mind. But I don’t want to take any more walks. I don’t mean anything by them.”

“Oh, as for that,” he said, taking the words out of her mouth. “Why should you mean anything by them!” He smiled down on her. She looked him straight in the face.

“But I’d rather not take any more walks, thank you — none at all,” she said, looking him full in the eyes.

“You wouldn’t!” he replied, stiffening.

“Yes. I’m quite sure,” she said.

“As sure as all that, are you!” he said, with a sneering grimace. He stood eyeing her insolently up and down.

“Goodnight,” she said. His sneering made her furious. Putting her umbrella between him and her, she walked off.

“Goodnight then,” he replied, unseen by her. But his voice was sneering and impotent.

She went home quivering. But her soul was burning with satisfaction. She had shaken them off.

Later she wondered if she had been unkind to him. But it was done — and done for ever. *Vogue la galère.*

CHAPTER VI

HOUGHTON'S LAST ENDEAVOUR

The trouble with her ship was that it would *not* sail. It rode waterlogged in the rotting port of home. All very well to have wild, reckless moods of irony and independence, if you have to pay for them by withering dustily on the shelf.

Alvina fell again into humility and fear: she began to show symptoms of her mother's heart trouble. For day followed day, month followed month, season after season went by, and she grubbed away like a housemaid in Manchester House, she hurried round doing the shopping, she sang in the choir on Sundays, she attended the various chapel events, she went out to visit friends, and laughed and talked and played games. But all the time, what was there actually in her life? Not much. She was withering towards old-maiddom. Already in her twenty-eighth year, she spent her days grubbing in the house, whilst her father became an elderly, frail man still too lively in mind and spirit. Miss Pinnegar began to grow grey and elderly too, money became scarcer and scarcer, there was a black day ahead when her father would die and the home be broken up, and she would have to tackle life as a worker.

There lay the only alternative: in work. She might slave her days away teaching the piano, as Miss Frost had done: she might find a subordinate post as nurse: she might sit in the cash-desk of some shop. Some work of some sort would be found for her. And she would sink into the routine of her job, as did so many women, and grow old and die, chattering and fluttering. She would have what is called her independence. But, seriously faced with that treasure, and without the option of refusing it, strange how hideous she found it.

Work! — a job! More even than she rebelled against the Withams did she rebel against a job. Albert Witham was distasteful to her — or rather, he was not exactly distasteful, he was chiefly incongruous. She could never get over the feeling that he was mouthing and smiling at her through the glass wall of an aquarium, he being on the watery side. Whether she would ever be able to take to his strange and dishuman element, who knows? Anyway it would be some sort of an adventure: better than a job. She rebelled with all her backbone against the word *job*. Even the substitutes, *employment* or *work*, were detestable,

unbearable. Emphatically, she did not want to work for a wage. It was too humiliating. Could anything be more *infra dig* than the performing of a set of special actions day in day out, for a life-time, in order to receive some shillings every seventh day. Shameful! A condition of shame. The most vulgar, sordid and humiliating of all forms of slavery: so mechanical. Far better be a slave outright, in contact with all the whims and impulses of a human being, than serve some mechanical routine of modern work.

She trembled with anger, impotence, and fear. For months, the thought of Albert was a torment to her. She might have married him. He would have been strange, a strange fish. But were it not better to take the strange leap, over into his element, than to condemn oneself to the routine of a job? He would have been curious and dishuman. But after all, it would have been an experience. In a way, she liked him. There was something odd and integral about him, which she liked. He was not a liar. In his own line, he was honest and direct. Then he would take her to South Africa: a whole new *milieu*. And perhaps she would have children. She shivered a little. No, not his children! He seemed so curiously cold-blooded. And yet, why not? Why not his curious, pale, half cold-blooded children, like little fishes of her own? Why not? Everything was possible: and even desirable, once one could see the strangeness of it. Once she could plunge through the wall of the aquarium! Once she could kiss him!

Therefore Miss Pinnegar's quiet harping on the string was unbearable.

"I can't understand that you disliked Mr. Witham so much?" said Miss Pinnegar.

"We never can understand those things," said Alvina. "I can't understand why I dislike tapioca and arrowroot — but I do."

"That's different," said Miss Pinnegar shortly.

"It's no more easy to understand," said Alvina.

"Because there's no need to understand it," said Miss Pinnegar. "And is there need to understand the other?"

"Certainly. I can see nothing wrong with him," said Miss Pinnegar.

Alvina went away in silence. This was in the first months after she had given Albert his dismissal. He was at Oxford again — would not return to Woodhouse till Christmas. Between her and the Woodhouse Withams there was a decided coldness. They never looked at her now — nor she at them.

None the less, as Christmas drew near Alvina worked up her feelings. Perhaps she would be reconciled to him. She would slip across and smile to him. She would take the plunge, once and for all — and kiss him and marry him and bear the little half-fishes, his children. She worked herself into quite a fever of anticipation.

But when she saw him, the first evening, sitting stiff and staring flatly in front of him in Chapel, staring away from everything in the world, at heaven knows what — just as fishes stare — then his dishumanness came over her again like an arrest, and arrested all her flights of fancy. He stared flatly in front of him, and flatly set a wall of oblivion between him and her. She trembled and let be.

After Christmas, however, she had nothing at all to think forward to. And it was then she seemed to shrink: she seemed positively to shrink. “You never spoke to Mr. Witham?” Miss Pinnegar asked.

“He never spoke to me,” replied Alvina.

“He raised his hat to me.”

“*You* ought to have married him, Miss Pinnegar,” said Alvina. “He would have been right for you.” And she laughed rather mockingly.

“There is no need to make provision for me,” said Miss Pinnegar.

And after this, she was a long time before she forgave Alvina, and was really friendly again. Perhaps she would never have forgiven her if she had not found her weeping rather bitterly in her mother’s abandoned sitting-room.

Now so far, the story of Alvina is commonplace enough. It is more or less the story of thousands of girls. They all find work. It is the ordinary solution of everything. And if we were dealing with an ordinary girl we should have to carry on mildly and dully down the long years of employment; or, at the best, marriage with some dull schoolteacher or office-clerk.

But we protest that Alvina is not ordinary. Ordinary people, ordinary fates. But extraordinary people, extraordinary fates. Or else no fate at all. The all-to-one-pattern modern system is too much for most extraordinary individuals. It just kills them off or throws them disused aside.

There have been enough stories about ordinary people. I should think the Duke of Clarence must even have found malmsey nauseating, when he choked and went purple and was really asphyxiated in a butt of it. And ordinary people are no malmsey. Just ordinary tap-water. And we have been drenched and deluged and so nearly drowned in perpetual floods of ordinariness, that tap-water tends to become a really hateful fluid to us. We loathe its out-of-the-tap tastelessness. We detest ordinary people. We are in peril of our lives from them: and in peril of our souls too, for they would damn us one and all to the ordinary. Every individual should, by nature, have his extraordinary points. But nowadays you may look for them with a microscope, they are so worn-down by the regular machine-friction of our average and mechanical days.

There was no hope for Alvina in the ordinary. If help came, it would have to come from the extraordinary. Hence the extreme peril of her case. Hence the bitter fear and humiliation she felt as she drudged shabbily on in Manchester

House, hiding herself as much as possible from public view. Men can suck the heady juice of exalted self-importance from the bitter weed of failure — failures are usually the most conceited of men: even as was James Houghton. But to a woman, failure is another matter. For her it means failure to live, failure to establish her own life on the face of the earth. And this is humiliating, the ultimate humiliation.

And so the slow years crept round, and the completed coil of each one was a further heavy, strangling noose. Alvina had passed her twenty-sixth, twenty-seventh, twenty-eighth and even her twenty-ninth year. She was in her thirtieth. It ought to be a laughing matter. But it isn't.

Ach, schon zwanzig Ach, schon zwanzig Immer noch durch's Leben tanz' ich Jeder, Jeder will mich küssen Mir das Leben zu versüssen.

Ach, schon dreissig Ach, schon dreissig Immer Mädchen, Mädchen heiss' ich. In dem Zopf schon graue Härchen Ach, wie schnell vergehn die Jährchen.

Ach, schon vierzig Ach, schon vierzig Und noch immer Keiner find 'sich. Im gesicht schon graue Flecken Ach, das muss im Spiegel stecken.

Ach, schon fünfzig Ach, schon fünfzig Und noch immer Keiner will 'mich; Soll ich mich mit Bänden zieren Soll ich einen Schleier führen? Dann heisst's, die Alte putzt sich, Sie ist fu'fzig, sie ist fu'fzig.

True enough, in Alvina's pig-tail of soft brown the grey hairs were already showing. True enough, she still preferred to be thought of as a girl. And the slow-footed years, so heavy in passing, were so imperceptibly numerous in their accumulation.

But we are not going to follow our song to its fatal and dreary conclusion. Presumably, the *ordinary* old-maid heroine nowadays is destined to die in her fifties, she is not allowed to be the long-liver of the bygone novels. Let the song suffice her.

James Houghton had still another kick in him. He had one last scheme up his sleeve. Looking out on a changing world, it was the popular novelties which had the last fascination for him. The Skating Rink, like another Charybdis, had all but entangled him in its swirl as he pushed painfully off from the rocks of Throttle-Ha'penny. But he had escaped, and for almost three years had lain obscurely in port, like a frail and finished bark, selling the last of his bits and bobs, and making little splashes in warehouse-oddments. Miss Pinnegar thought he had really gone quiet.

But alas, at that degenerated and shabby, down-at-heel club he met another tempter: a plump man who had been in the music-hall line as a sort of agent. This man had catered for the little shows of little towns. He had been in America, out West, doing shows there. He had trailed his way back to England,

where he had left his wife and daughter. But he did not resume his family life. Wherever he was, his wife was a hundred miles away. Now he found himself more or less stranded in Woodhouse. He had *nearly* fixed himself up with a music-hall in the Potteries — as manager: he had all-but got such another place at Ickley, in Derbyshire: he had forced his way through the industrial and mining townlets, prospecting for any sort of music-hall or show from which he could get a picking. And now, in very low water, he found himself at Woodhouse.

Woodhouse had a cinema already: a famous Empire run-up by Jordan, the sly builder and decorator who had got on so surprisingly. In James's younger days, Jordan was an obscure and illiterate nobody. And now he had a motor car, and looked at the tottering James with sardonic contempt, from under his heavy, heavy-lidded dark eyes. He was rather stout, frail in health, but silent and insuperable, was A. W Jordan.

"I missed a chance there," said James, fluttering. "I missed a rare chance there. I ought to have been first with a cinema."

He admitted as much to Mr. May, the stranger who was looking for some sort of "managing" job. Mr. May, who also was plump and who could hold his tongue, but whose pink, fat face and light-blue eyes had a loud look, for all that, put the speech in his pipe and smoked it. Not that he smoked a pipe: always cigarettes. But he seized on James's admission, as something to be made the most of.

Now Mr. May's mind, though quick, was pedestrian, not winged. He had come to Woodhouse not to look at Jordan's "Empire," but at the temporary wooden structure that stood in the old Cattle Market "Wright's Cinematograph and Variety Theatre." Wright's was not a superior show, like the Woodhouse Empire. Yet it was always packed with colliers and work-lasses. But unfortunately there was no chance of Mr. May's getting a finger in the Cattle Market pie. Wright's was a family affair. Mr. and Mrs. Wright and a son and two daughters with their husbands: a tight old lock-up family concern. Yet it was the kind of show that appealed to Mr. May: pictures between the turns. The cinematograph was but an item in the program, amidst the more thrilling incidents — to Mr. May — of conjurors, popular songs, five-minute farces, performing birds, and comics. Mr. May was too human to believe that a show should consist entirely of the dithering eye-ache of a film.

He was becoming really depressed by his failure to find any opening. He had his family to keep — and though his honesty was of the variety sort, he had a heavy conscience in the direction of his wife and daughter. Having been so long in America, he had acquired American qualities, one of which was this heavy sort of private innocence, coupled with complacent and natural unscrupulousness

in “matters of business.” A man of some odd sensitiveness in material things, he liked to have his clothes neat and spick, his linen immaculate, his face clean-shaved like a cherub. But alas, his clothes were now old-fashioned, so that their rather expensive smartness was detrimental to his chances, in spite of their scrupulous look of having come almost new out of the bandbox that morning. His rather small felt hats still curved jauntily over his full pink face. But his eyes looked lugubrious, as if he felt he had not deserved so much bad luck, and there were bilious lines beneath them.

So Mr. May, in his room in the Moon and Stars, which was the best inn in Woodhouse — he must have a good hotel — lugubriously considered his position. Woodhouse offered little or nothing. He must go to Alfreton. And would he find anything there? Ah, where, where in this hateful world was there refuge for a man saddled with responsibilities, who wanted to do his best and was given no opportunity? Mr. May had travelled in his Pullman car and gone straight to the best hotel in the town, like any other American with money — in America. He had done it smart, too. And now, in this grubby penny-picking England, he saw his boots being worn-down at the heel, and was afraid of being stranded without cash even for a railway ticket. If he had to clear out without paying his hotel bill — well, that was the world’s fault. He had to live. But he must perforce keep enough in hand for a ticket to Birmingham. He always said his wife was in London. And he always walked down to Lumley to post his letters. He was full of evasions.

So again he walked down to Lumley to post his letters. And he looked at Lumley. And he found it a damn god-forsaken hell of a hole. It was a long straggle of a dusty road down in the valley, with a pale-grey dust and spatter from the pottery, and big chimneys bellying forth black smoke right by the road. Then there was a short cross-way, up which one saw the iron foundry, a black and rusty place. A little further on was the railway junction, and beyond that, more houses stretching to Hathersedge, where the stocking factories were busy. Compared with Lumley, Woodhouse, whose church could be seen sticking up proudly and vulgarly on an eminence, above trees and meadow-slopes, was an idyllic heaven.

Mr. May turned in to the Derby Hotel to have a small whiskey. And of course he entered into conversation.

“You seem somewhat quiet at Lumley,” he said, in his odd, refined-showman’s voice. “Have you *nothing at all* in the way of amusement?”

“They all go up to Woodhouse, else to Hathersedge.”

“But couldn’t you support some place of your own — some *rival* to Wright’s Variety?”

“Ay — ’appen — if somebody started it.”

And so it was that James was inoculated with the idea of starting a cinema on the virgin soil of Lumley. To the women he said not a word. But on the very first morning that Mr. May broached the subject, he became a new man. He fluttered like a boy, he fluttered as if he had just grown wings.

“Let us go down,” said Mr. May, “and look at a site. You pledge yourself to nothing — you don’t compromise yourself. You merely have a site in your mind.”

And so it came to pass that, next morning, this oddly assorted couple went down to Lumley together. James was very shabby, in his black coat and dark grey trousers, and his cheap grey cap. He bent forward as he walked, and still nipped along hurriedly, as if pursued by fate. His face was thin and still handsome. Odd that his cheap cap, by incongruity, made him look more a gentleman. But it did. As he walked he glanced alertly hither and thither, and saluted everybody.

By his side, somewhat tight and tubby, with his chest out and his head back, went the prim figure of Mr. May, reminding one of a consequential bird of the smaller species. His plumbago-grey suit fitted exactly — save that it was perhaps a little tight. The jacket and waistcoat were bound with silk braid of exactly the same shade as the cloth. His soft collar, immaculately fresh, had a dark stripe like his shirt. His boots were black, with grey suede uppers: but a *little* down at heel. His dark-grey hat was jaunty. Altogether he looked very spruce, though a *little* behind the fashions: very pink faced, though his blue eyes were bilious beneath: very much on the spot, although the spot was the wrong one.

They discoursed amiably as they went, James bending forward, Mr. May bending back. Mr. May took the refined man-of-the-world tone.

“Of course,” he said — he used the two words very often, and pronounced the second, rather mincingly, to rhyme with *sauce*: “Of course,” said Mr. May, “it’s a disgusting place — *disgusting!* I never was in a worse, in all the *cauce* of my travels. But *then* — that isn’t the point — ”

He spread his plump hands from his immaculate shirt-cuffs.

“No, it isn’t. Decidedly it isn’t. That’s beside the point altogether. What we want — ” began James.

“Is an audience — of *cauce* — ! And we have it — ! Virgin soil — !”

“Yes, decidedly. Untouched! An unspoiled market.”

“An unspoiled market!” reiterated Mr. May, in full confirmation, though with a faint flicker of a smile. “How very *fortunate* for us.”

“Properly handled,” said James. “Properly handled.”

“Why yes — of *cauce*! Why *shouldn't* we handle it properly!”

“Oh, we shall manage that, we shall manage that,” came the quick, slightly husky voice of James.

“Of *cauce* we shall! Why bless my life, if we can't manage an audience in Lumley, what *can* we do.”

“We have a guide in the matter of their taste,” said James. “We can see what Wright's are doing — and Jordan's — and we can go to Hathersedge and Knarborough and Alfreton — beforehand, that is — ”

“Why certainly — if you think it's *necessary*. I'll do all that for you. *And* I'll interview the managers and the performers themselves — as if I were a journalist, don't you see. I've done a fair amount of journalism, and nothing easier than to get cards from various newspapers.”

“Yes, that's a good suggestion,” said James. “As if you were going to write an account in the newspapers — excellent.”

“And so simple! You pick up just *all* the information you require.”

“Decidedly — decidedly!” said James.

And so behold our two heroes sniffing round the sordid backs and wasted meadows and marshy places of Lumley. They found one barren patch where two caravans were standing. A woman was peeling potatoes, sitting on the bottom step of her caravan. A half-caste girl came up with a large pale-blue enamelled jug of water. In the background were two booths covered up with coloured canvas. Hammering was heard inside.

“Good-morning!” said Mr. May, stopping before the woman. “‘Tisn't fair time, is it?”

“No, it's no fair,” said the woman.

“I see. You're just on your own. Getting on all right?”

“Fair,” said the woman.

“Only fair! Sorry. Good-morning.”

Mr. May's quick eye, roving round, had seen a negro stoop from under the canvas that covered one booth. The negro was thin, and looked young but rather frail, and limped. His face was very like that of the young negro in Watteau's drawing — pathetic, wistful, north-bitten. In an instant Mr. May had taken all in: the man was the woman's husband — they were acclimatized in these regions: the booth where he had been hammering was a Hoop-La. The other would be a cocoanut-shy. Feeling the instant American dislike for the presence of a negro, Mr. May moved off with James.

They found out that the woman was a Lumley woman, that she had two children, that the negro was a most quiet and respectable chap, but that the family kept to itself, and didn't mix up with Lumley.

“I should think so,” said Mr. May, a little disgusted even at the suggestion.

Then he proceeded to find out how long they had stood on this ground — three months — how long they would remain — only another week, then they were moving off to Alfreton fair — who was the owner of the pitch — Mr. Bows, the butcher. Ah! And what was the ground used for? Oh, it was building land. But the foundation wasn’t very good.

“The very thing! Aren’t we *fortunate!*” cried Mr. May, perking up the moment they were in the street. But this cheerfulness and brisk perkiness was a great strain on him. He missed his eleven o’clock whiskey terribly — terribly — his pick-me-up! And he daren’t confess it to James, who, he knew, was T-T. So he dragged his weary and hollow way up to Woodhouse, and sank with a long “Oh!” of nervous exhaustion in the private bar of the Moon and Stars. He wrinkled his short nose. The smell of the place was distasteful to him. The *disgusting* beer that the colliers drank. Oh! — he *was* so tired. He sank back with his whiskey and stared blankly, dismally in front of him. Beneath his eyes he looked more bilious still. He felt thoroughly out of luck, and petulant.

None the less he sallied out with all his old bright perkiness, the next time he had to meet James. He hadn’t yet broached the question of costs. When would he be able to get an advance from James? He *must* hurry the matter forward. He brushed his crisp, curly brown hair carefully before the mirror. How grey he was at the temples! No wonder, dear me, with such a life! He was in his shirt-sleeves. His waistcoat, with its grey satin back, fitted him tightly. He had filled out — but he hadn’t developed a corporation. Not at all. He looked at himself sideways, and feared dismally he was thinner. He was one of those men who carry themselves in a birdie fashion, so that their tail sticks out a little behind, jauntily. How wonderfully the satin of his waistcoat had worn! He looked at his shirt-cuffs. They were going. Luckily, when he had had the shirts made he had secured enough material for the renewing of cuffs and neck-bands. He put on his coat, from which he had flicked the faintest suspicion of dust, and again settled himself to go out and meet James on the question of an advance. He simply must have an advance.

He didn’t get it that day, none the less. The next morning he was ringing for his tea at six o’clock. And before ten he had already flitted to Lumley and back, he had already had a word with Mr. Bows, about that pitch, and, overcoming all his repugnance, a word with the quiet, frail, sad negro, about Alfreton fair, and the chance of buying some sort of collapsible building, for his cinematograph.

With all this news he met James — not at the shabby club, but in the deserted reading-room of the so-called Artizans Hall — where never an artizan entered, but only men of James’s class. Here they took the chess-board and pretended to

start a game. But their conversation was rapid and secretive.

Mr. May disclosed all his discoveries. And then he said, tentatively:

“Hadn’t we better think about the financial part now? If we’re going to look round for an erection — ” curious that he always called it an erection — ”we shall have to know what we are going to spend.”

“Yes — yes. Well — ” said James vaguely, nervously, giving a glance at Mr. May. Whilst Mr. May abstractedly fingered his black knight.

“You see at the moment,” said Mr. May, “I have no funds that I can represent in cash. I have no doubt a little *later* — if we need it — I can find a few hundreds. Many things are *due* — numbers of things. But it is so difficult to *collect* one’s dues, particularly from America.” He lifted his blue eyes to James Houghton. “Of course we can *delay* for some time, until I get my supplies. Or I can act just as your manager — you can *employ* me — ”

He watched James’s face. James looked down at the chess-board. He was fluttering with excitement. He did not want a partner. He wanted to be in this all by himself. He hated partners.

“You will agree to be manager, at a fixed salary?” said James hurriedly and huskily, his fine fingers slowly rubbing each other, along the sides.

“Why yes, willingly, if you’ll give me the option of becoming your partner upon terms of mutual agreement, later on.”

James did not quite like this.

“What terms are you thinking of?” he asked.

“Well, it doesn’t matter for the moment. Suppose for the moment I enter an engagement as your manager, at a salary, let us say, of — of what, do you think?”

“So much a week?” said James pointedly.

“Hadn’t we better make it monthly?”

The two men looked at one another.

“With a month’s notice on either hand?” continued Mr. May. “How much?” said James, avaricious.

Mr. May studied his own nicely kept hands.

“Well, I don’t see how I can do it under twenty pounds a month. Of course it’s ridiculously low. In America I *never* accepted less than three hundred dollars a month, and that was my poorest and lowest. But of *cauce*, England’s not America — more’s the pity.”

But James was shaking his head in a vibrating movement. “Impossible!” he replied shrewdly. “Impossible! Twenty pounds a month? Impossible. I couldn’t do it. I couldn’t think of it.”

“Then name a figure. Say what you *can* think of,” retorted Mr. May, rather

annoyed by this shrewd, shaking head of a doddering provincial, and by his own sudden collapse into mean subordination.

“I can’t make it more than ten pounds a month,” said James sharply.

“What!” screamed Mr. May. “What am I to live on? What is my wife to live on?”

“I’ve got to make it pay,” said James. “If I’ve got to make it pay, I must keep down expenses at the beginning.”

“No, — on the contrary. You must be prepared to spend something at the beginning. If you go in a pinch-and-scrape fashion in the beginning, you will get nowhere at all. Ten pounds a month! Why it’s impossible! Ten pounds a month! But how am I to *live*?”

James’s head still vibrated in a negative fashion. And the two men came to no agreement *that* morning. Mr. May went home more sick and weary than ever, and took his whiskey more biliously. But James was lit with the light of battle.

Poor Mr. May had to gather together his wits and his sprightliness for his next meeting. He had decided he must make a percentage in other ways. He schemed in all known ways. He would accept the ten pounds — but really, did ever you hear of anything so ridiculous in your life, *ten pounds*! — dirty old screw, dirty, screwing old woman! He would accept the ten pounds; but he would get his own back.

He flitted down once more to the negro, to ask him of a certain wooden show-house, with section sides and roof, an old travelling theatre which stood closed on Selverhay Common, and might probably be sold. He pressed across once more to Mr. Bows. He wrote various letters and drew up certain notes. And the next morning, by eight o’clock, he was on his way to Selverhay: walking, poor man, the long and uninteresting seven miles on his small and rather tight-shod feet, through country that had been once beautiful but was now scrubbled all over with mining villages, on and on up heavy hills and down others, asking his way from uncouth clowns, till at last he came to the Common, which wasn’t a Common at all, but a sort of village more depressing than usual: naked, high, exposed to heaven and to full barren view.

There he saw the theatre-booth. It was old and sordid-looking, painted dark-red and dishevelled with narrow, tattered announcements. The grass was growing high up the wooden sides. If only it wasn’t rotten? He crouched and probed and pierced with his penknife, till a country-policeman in a high helmet like a jug saw him, got off his bicycle and came stealthily across the grass wheeling the same bicycle, and startled poor Mr. May almost into apoplexy by demanding behind him, in a loud voice:

“What’re you after?”

Mr. May rose up with flushed face and swollen neck-veins, holding his penknife in his hand.

“Oh,” he said, “good-morning.” He settled his waistcoat and glanced over the tall, lanky constable and the glittering bicycle. “I was taking a look at this old erection, with a view to buying it. I’m afraid it’s going rotten from the bottom.”

“Shouldn’t wonder,” said the policeman suspiciously, watching Mr. May shut the pocket knife.

“I’m afraid that makes it useless for my purpose,” said Mr. May. The policeman did not deign to answer.

“Could you tell me where I can find out about it, anyway?” Mr. May used his most affable, man of the world manner. But the policeman continued to stare him up and down, as if he were some marvellous specimen unknown on the normal, honest earth.

“What, find out?” said the constable.

“About being able to buy it,” said Mr. May, a little testily. It was with great difficulty he preserved his man-to-man openness and brightness. “They aren’t here,” said the constable.

“Oh indeed! Where *are* they? And *who* are they?”

The policeman eyed him more suspiciously than ever.

“Cowlard’s their name. An’ they live in Offerton when they aren’t travelling.”

“Cowlard — thank you.” Mr. May took out his pocket-book. “C-o-w-l-a-r-d — is that right? And the address, please?”

“I dunno th’ street. But you can find out from the Three Bells. That’s Missis’ sister.”

“The Three Bells — thank you. Offerton did you say?”

“Yes.”

“Offerton! — where’s that?”

“About eight mile.”

“Really — and how do you get there?”

“You can walk — or go by train.”

“Oh, there is a station?”

“Station!” The policeman looked at him as if he were either a criminal or a fool.

“Yes. There *is* a station there?”

“Ay — biggest next to Chesterfield — ”

Suddenly it dawned on Mr. May.

“Oh-h!” he said. “You mean *Alfreton* — ”

“Alfreton, yes.” The policeman was now convinced the man was a wrong-’un. But fortunately he was not a pushing constable, he did not want to rise in the

police-scale: thought himself safest at the bottom.

“And which is the way to the station here?” asked Mr. May. “Do yer want Pinxon or Bull’ill?”

“Pinxon or Bull’ill?”

“There’s two,” said the policeman.

“For Selverhay?” asked Mr. May.

“Yes, them’s the two.”

“And which is the best?”

“Depends what trains is runnin’. Sometimes yer have to wait an hour or two — ”

“You don’t know the trains, do you — ?”

“There’s one in th’ afternoon — but I don’t know if it’d be gone by the time you get down.”

“To where?”

“Bull’ill.”

“Oh Bull’ill! Well, perhaps I’ll try. Could you tell me the way?”

When, after an hour’s painful walk, Mr. May came to Bullwell Station and found there was no train till six in the evening, he felt he was earning every penny he would ever get from Mr. Houghton.

The first intelligence which Miss Pinnegar and Alvina gathered of the coming adventure was given them when James announced that he had let the shop to Marsden, the grocer next door. Marsden had agreed to take over James’s premises at the same rent as that of the premises he already occupied, and moreover to do all alterations and put in all fixtures himself. This was a grand scoop for James: not a penny was it going to cost him, and the rent was clear profit.

“But when?” cried Miss Pinnegar.

“He takes possession on the first of October.”

“Well — it’s a good idea. The shop isn’t worth while,” said Miss Pinnegar.

“Certainly it isn’t,” said James, rubbing his hands: a sign that he was rarely excited and pleased.

“And you’ll just retire, and live quietly,” said Miss Pinnegar.

“I shall see,” said James. And with those fatal words he wafted away to find Mr. May.

James was now nearly seventy years old. Yet he nipped about like a leaf in the wind. Only, it was a frail leaf.

“Father’s got something going,” said Alvina, in a warning voice.

“I believe he has,” said Miss Pinnegar pensively. “I wonder what it is, now.”

“I can’t imagine,” laughed Alvina. “But I’ll bet it’s something awful — else

he'd have told us."

"Yes," said Miss Pinnegar slowly. "Most likely he would. I wonder what it can be."

"I haven't an idea," said Alvina.

Both women were so retired, they had heard nothing of James's little trips down to Lumley. So they watched like cats for their man's return, at dinner-time.

Miss Pinnegar saw him coming along talking excitedly to Mr. May, who, all in grey, with his chest perkily stuck out like a robin, was looking rather pinker than usual. Having come to an agreement, he had ventured on whiskey and soda in honour, and James had actually taken a glass of port.

"Alvina!" Miss Pinnegar called discreetly down the shop. "Alvina! Quick!"

Alvina flew down to peep round the corner of the shop window. There stood the two men, Mr. May like a perky, pink-faced grey bird standing cocking his head in attention to James Houghton, and occasionally catching James by the lapel of his coat, in a vain desire to get a word in, whilst James's head nodded and his face simply wagged with excited speech, as he skipped from foot to foot, and shifted round his listener.

"Who *ever* can that common-looking man be?" said Miss Pinnegar, her heart going down to her boots.

"I can't imagine," said Alvina, laughing at the comic sight. "Don't you think he's dreadful?" said the poor elderly woman. "Perfectly impossible. Did ever you see such a pink face?"

"*And the braid binding!*" said Miss Pinnegar in indignation. "Father might almost have sold him the suit," said Alvina.

"Let us hope he hasn't sold your father, that's all," said Miss Pinnegar.

The two men had moved a few steps further towards home, and the women prepared to flee indoors. Of course it was frightfully wrong to be standing peeping in the high street at all. But who could consider the proprieties now?

"They've stopped again," said Miss Pinnegar, recalling Alvina.

The two men were having a few more excited words, their voices just audible.

"I do wonder who he can be," murmured Miss Pinnegar miserably. "In the theatrical line, I'm sure," declared Alvina.

"Do you think so?" said Miss Pinnegar. "Can't be! Can't be!"

"He couldn't be anything else, don't you think?"

"Oh I *can't* believe it, I can't."

But now Mr. May had laid his detaining hand on James's arm. And now he was shaking his employer by the hand. And now James, in his cheap little cap, was smiling a formal farewell. And Mr. May, with a graceful wave of his grey-suede-gloved hand, was turning back to the Moon and Stars, strutting, whilst

James was running home on tip-toe, in his natural hurry.

Alvina hastily retreated, but Miss Pinnegar stood it out. James started as he nipped into the shop entrance, and found her confronting him. "Oh — Miss Pinnegar!" he said, and made to slip by her.

"Who was that man?" she asked sharply, as if James were a child whom she could endure no more.

"Eh? I beg your pardon?" said James, starting back.

"Who was that man?"

"Eh? Which man?"

James was a little deaf, and a little husky.

"The man — " Miss Pinnegar turned to the door. "There! That man!"

James also came to the door, and peered out as if he expected to see a sight. The sight of Mr. May's tight and perky back, the jaunty little hat and the grey suede hands retreating quite surprised him. He was angry at being introduced to the sight.

"Oh," he said. "That's my manager." And he turned hastily down the shop, asking for his dinner.

Miss Pinnegar stood for some moments in pure oblivion in the shop entrance. Her consciousness left her. When she recovered, she felt she was on the brink of hysteria and collapse. But she hardened herself once more, though the effort cost her a year of her life. She had never collapsed, she had never fallen into hysteria.

She gathered herself together, though bent a little as from a blow, and, closing the shop door, followed James to the living room, like the inevitable. He was eating his dinner, and seemed oblivious of her entry. There was a smell of Irish stew.

"What manager?" said Pinnegar, short, silent, and inevitable in the doorway.

But James was in one of his abstractions, his trances.

"What manager?" persisted Miss Pinnegar.

But he still bent unknowing over his plate and gobbled his Irish stew.

"Mr. Houghton!" said Miss Pinnegar, in a sudden changed voice. She had gone a livid yellow colour. And she gave a queer, sharp little rap on the table with her hand.

James started. He looked up bewildered, as one startled out of sleep.

"Eh?" he said, gaping. "Eh?"

"Answer me," said Miss Pinnegar. "What manager?"

"Manager? Eh? Manager? What manager?"

She advanced a little nearer, menacing in her black dress. James shrank.

"What manager?" he re-echoed. "My manager. The manager of my cinema."

Miss Pinnegar looked at him, and looked at him, and did not speak. In that

moment all the anger which was due to him from all womanhood was silently discharged at him, like a black bolt of silent electricity. But Miss Pinnegar, the engine of wrath, felt she would burst.

“Cinema! Cinema! Do you mean to tell me — ” but she was really suffocated, the vessels of her heart and breast were bursting. She had to lean her hand on the table.

It was a terrible moment. She looked ghastly and terrible, with her mask-like face and her stony eyes and her bluish lips. Some fearful thunderbolt seemed to fall. James withered, and was still. There was silence for minutes, a suspension.

And in those minutes, she finished with him. She finished with him for ever. When she had sufficiently recovered, she went to her chair, and sat down before her plate. And in a while she began to eat, as if she were alone.

Poor Alvina, for whom this had been a dreadful and uncalled-for moment, had looked from one to another, and had also dropped her head to her plate. James too, with bent head, had forgotten to eat. Miss Pinnegar ate very slowly, alone.

“Don’t you want your dinner, Alvina?” she said at length. “Not as much as I did,” said Alvina.

“Why not?” said Miss Pinnegar. She sounded short, almost like Miss Frost. Oddly like Miss Frost.

Alvina took up her fork and began to eat automatically.

“I always think,” said Miss Pinnegar, “Irish stew is more tasty with a bit of Swede” in it.”

“So do I, really,” said Alvina. “But Swedes aren’t come yet.”

“Oh! Didn’t we have some on Tuesday?”

“No, they were yellow turnips — but they weren’t Swedes.”

“Well then, yellow turnip. I like a little yellow turnip,” said Miss Pinnegar.

“I might have put some in, if I’d known,” said Alvina.

“Yes. We will another time,” said Miss Pinnegar.

Not another word about the cinema: not another breath. As soon as James had eaten his plum tart, he ran away.

“What can he have been doing?” said Alvina when he had gone. “Buying a cinema show — and that man we saw is his manager. It’s quite simple.”

“But what are we going to do with a cinema show?” said Alvina.

“It’s what is *he* going to do. It doesn’t concern me. It’s no concern of mine. I shall not lend him anything, I shall not think about it, it will be the same to me as if there *were* no cinema. Which is all I have to say,” announced Miss Pinnegar.

“But he’s gone and done it,” said Alvina.

“Then let him go through with it. It’s no affair of mine. After all, your father’s affairs don’t concern me. It would be impertinent of me to introduce myself into

them.”

“They don’t concern *me* very much,” said Alvina.

“You’re different. You’re his daughter. He’s no connection of mine, I’m glad to say. I pity your mother.”

“Oh, but he was always alike,” said Alvina.

“That’s where it is,” said Miss Pinnegar.

There was something fatal about her feelings. Once they had gone cold, they would never warm up again. As well try to warm up a frozen mouse. It only putrifies.

But poor Miss Pinnegar after this looked older, and seemed to get a little round-backed. And the things she said reminded Alvina so often of Miss Frost.

James fluttered into conversation with his daughter the next evening, after Miss Pinnegar had retired.

“I told you I had bought a cinematograph building,” said James. “We are negotiating for the machinery now: the dynamo and so on.”

“But where is it to be?” asked Alvina.

“Down at Lumley. I’ll take you and show you the site tomorrow. The building — it is a frame-section travelling theatre — will arrive on Thursday — next Thursday.”

“But who is in with you, father?”

“I am quite alone — quite alone,” said James Houghton. “I have found an excellent manager, who knows the whole business thoroughly — a Mr. May. Very nice man. Very nice man.”

“Rather short and dressed in grey?”

“Yes. And I have been thinking — if Miss Pinnegar will take the cash and issue tickets: if she will take over the ticket-office: and you will play the piano: and if Mr. May learns the control of the machine — he is having lessons now — : and if I am the indoors attendant, we shan’t need any more staff.”

“Miss Pinnegar won’t take the cash, father.”

“Why not? Why not?”

“I can’t say why not. But she won’t do anything — and if I were you I wouldn’t ask her.”

There was a pause.

“Oh, well,” said James, huffy. “She isn’t indispensable.”

And Alvina was to play the piano! Here was a blow for her! She hurried off to her bedroom to laugh and cry at once. She just saw herself at that piano, banging off the *Merry Widow Waltz*, and, in tender moments, *The Rosary*. Time after time, *The Rosary*. While the pictures flickered and the audience gave shouts and some grubby boy called “Chot-let, penny a bar! Chot-let, penny a bar! Chot-let,

penny a bar!” away she banged at another tune.

What a sight for the gods! She burst out laughing. And at the same time, she thought of her mother and Miss Frost, and she cried as if her heart would break. And then all kinds of comic and incongruous tunes came into her head. She imagined herself dressing up with most priceless variations. *Linger Longer Lucy*, for example. She began to spin imaginary harmonies and variations in her head, upon the theme of *Linger Longer Lucy*.

Linger longer Lucy, linger longer Loo. How I love to linger longer linger long o’ you. Listen while I sing, love, promise you’ll be true, And linger longer longer linger longer Loo.

All the tunes that used to make Miss Frost so angry. All the Dream Waltzes and Maiden’s Prayers, and the awful songs.

For in Spooney-ooney Island Is there any one cares for me? In Spooney-ooney Island Why surely there ought to be.

Poor Miss Frost! Alvina imagined herself leading a chorus of collier louts, in a bad atmosphere of “Woodbines” and oranges, during the intervals when the pictures had collapsed.

How’d you like to spoon with me? How’d you like to spoon with me? (_Why ra-ther!_)

Underneath the oak-tree nice and shady Calling me your tootsey-wootsey lady? How’d you like to hug and squeeze, (_Just try me!_)

Dandle me upon your knee, Calling me your little lovey-dovey How’d you like to spoon with me? (_Oh-h — Go on!_)

Alvina worked herself into quite a fever, with her imaginings. In the morning she told Miss Pinnegar.

“Yes,” said Miss Pinnegar, “you see me issuing tickets, don’t you? Yes — well. I’m afraid he will have to do that part himself. And you’re going to play the piano. It’s a disgrace! It’s a disgrace! It’s a disgrace! It’s a mercy Miss Frost and your mother are dead. He’s lost every bit of shame — every bit — if he ever had any — which I doubt very much. Well, all I can say, I’m glad I am not concerned. And I’m sorry for you, for being his daughter. I’m heart sorry for you, I am. Well, well — no sense of shame — no sense of shame — ”

And Miss Pinnegar padded out of the room.

Alvina walked down to Lumley and was shown the site and was introduced to Mr. May. He bowed to her in his best American fashion, and treated her with admirable American deference.

“Don’t you think,” he said to her, “it’s an admirable scheme?”

“Wonderful,” she replied.

“Of cauce,” he said, “the erection will be a merely temporary one. Of cauce it

won't be anything to *look* at: just an old wooden travelling theatre. But *then* — all we need is to make a start.”

“And you are going to work the film?” she asked.

“Yes,” he said with pride, “I spend every evening with the operator at Marsh's in Knarborough. Very interesting I find it — very interesting indeed. And *you* are going to play the piano?” he said, perking his head on one side and looking at her archly.

“So father says,” she answered.

“But what do *you* say?” queried Mr. May.

“I suppose I don't have any say.”

“Oh but *surely*. Surely you won't do it if you don't wish to. That would never do. Can't we hire some young fellow — ?” And he turned to Mr. Houghton with a note of query.

“Alvina can play as well as anybody in Woodhouse,” said James. “We mustn't add to our expenses. And wages in particular — ”

“But surely Miss Houghton will have her wage. The labourer is worthy of his hire. Surely! Even of *her* hire, to put it in the feminine. And for the same wage you could get some unimportant fellow with strong wrists. I'm afraid it will tire Miss Houghton to death — ”

“I don't think so,” said James. “I don't think so. Many of the turns she will not need to accompany — ”

“Well, if it comes to that,” said Mr. May, “I can accompany some of them myself, when I'm not operating the film. I'm not an expert pianist — but I can play a little, you know — ” And he trilled his fingers up and down an imaginary keyboard in front of Alvina, cocking his eye at her smiling a little archly.

“I'm sure,” he continued, “I can accompany anything except a man juggling dinner-plates — and then I'd be afraid of making him drop the plates. But songs — oh, songs! *Con molto espressione!*”

And again he trilled the imaginary keyboard, and smiled his rather fat cheeks at Alvina.

She began to like him. There was something a little dainty about him, when you knew him better — really rather fastidious. A showman, true enough! Blatant too. But fastidiously so.

He came fairly frequently to Manchester House after this. Miss Pinnegar was rather stiff with him and he did not like her. But he was very happy sitting chatting tête-à-tête with Alvina.

“Where is your wife?” said Alvina to him.

“My wife! Oh, don't speak of *her*,” he said comically. “She's in London.”

“Why not speak of her?” asked Alvina.

“Oh, every reason for not speaking of her. We don’t get on at *all* well, she and I.”

“What a pity,” said Alvina.

“Dreadful pity! But what are you to do?” He laughed comically. Then he became grave. “No,” he said. “She’s an impossible person.”

“I see,” said Alvina.

“I’m sure you *don’t* see,” said Mr. May. “Don’t — ” and here he laid his hand on Alvina’s arm — “don’t run away with the idea that she’s *immoral!* You’d never make a greater mistake. Oh dear me, no. Morality’s her strongest point. Live on three lettuce leaves, and give the rest to the char. That’s her. Oh, dreadful times we had in those first years. We only lived together for three years. But dear *me!* how awful it was!”

“Why?”

“There was no pleasing the woman. She wouldn’t eat. If I said to her ‘What shall we have for supper, Grace?’ as sure as anything she’d answer ‘Oh, I shall take a bath when I go to bed — that will be my supper.’ She was one of these advanced vegetarian women, don’t you know.”

“How extraordinary!” said Alvina.

“Extraordinary! I should think so. Extraordinary hard lines on *me*. And she wouldn’t let *me* eat either. She followed me to the kitchen in a *fury* while I cooked for myself. Why imagine! I prepared a dish of champignons: oh, most *beautiful* champignons, beautiful — and I put them on the stove to fry in butter: beautiful young champignons. I’m hanged if she didn’t go into the kitchen while my back was turned, and pour a pint of old carrot-water into the pan. I was *furious*. Imagine! — beautiful fresh young champignons — ”

“Fresh mushrooms,” said Alvina.

“Mushrooms — most beautiful things in the world. Oh! don’t you think so?” And he rolled his eyes oddly to heaven.

“They *are* good,” said Alvina.

“I should say so. And swamped — *swamped* with her dirty old carrot water. Oh I was so angry. And all she could say was, ‘Well, I didn’t want to waste it!’ Didn’t want to waste her old carrot water, and so *ruined* my champignons. *Can* you imagine such a person?”

“It must have been trying.”

“I should think it was. I lost weight. I lost I don’t know how many pounds, the first year I was married to that woman. She hated me to eat. Why, one of her great accusations against me, at the last, was when she said: ‘I’ve looked round the larder,’ she said to me, ‘and seen it was quite empty, and I thought to myself *Now* he *can’t* cook a supper! And *then* you did!’ There! What do you think of

that? The spite of it! ‘And *then* you did!’

“What did she expect you to live on?” asked Alvina.

“Nibble a lettuce leaf with her, and drink water from the tap — and then elevate myself with a Bernard Shaw pamphlet. That was the sort of woman she was. All it gave *me* was gas in the stomach.”

“So overbearing!” said Alvina.

“Oh!” he turned his eyes to heaven, and spread his hands. “I didn’t believe my senses. I didn’t know such people existed. And her friends! Oh the dreadful friends she had — these Fabians!” Oh, their eugenics. They wanted to examine my private morals, for eugenic reasons. Oh, you can’t imagine such a state. Worse than the Spanish Inquisition. And I stood it for three years. *How* I stood it, I don’t know — ”

“Now don’t you see her?”

“Never! I never let her know where I am! But I *support* her, of *cauce*.”

“And your daughter?”

“Oh, she’s the dearest child in the world. I saw her at a friend’s when I came back from America. Dearest little thing in the world. But of *cauce* suspicious of me. Treats me as if she didn’t *know* me — ”

“What a pity!”

“Oh — unbearable!” He spread his plump, manicured hands, on one finger of which was a green intaglio ring.

“How old is your daughter?”

“Fourteen.”

“What is her name?”

“Lemma. She was born in Rome, where I was managing for Miss Maud Callum, the *danseuse*.”

Curious the intimacy Mr. May established with Alvina at once. But it was all purely verbal, descriptive. He made no physical advances. On the contrary, he was like a dove-grey, disconsolate bird pecking the crumbs of Alvina’s sympathy, and cocking his eye all the time to watch that she did not advance one step towards him. If he had seen the least sign of coming-on-ness in her, he would have fluttered off in a great dither. Nothing *horrified* him more than a woman who was coming-on towards him. It horrified him, it exasperated him, it made him hate the whole tribe of women: horrific two-legged cats without whiskers. If he had been a bird, his innate horror of a cat would have been such. He liked the *angel*, and particularly the angel-mother in woman. Oh! — that he worshipped. But coming-on-ness!

So he never wanted to be seen out-of-doors with Alvina; if he met her in the street he bowed and passed on: bowed very deep and reverential, indeed, but

passed on, with his little back a little more strutting and assertive than ever. Decidedly he turned his back on her in public.

But Miss Pinnegar, a regular old, grey, dangerous she-puss, eyed him from the corner of her pale eye, as he turned tail.

“So unmanly!” she murmured. “In his dress, in his way, in everything — so unmanly.”

“If I was you, Alvina,” she said, “I shouldn’t see so much of Mr. May, in the drawing-room. People will talk.”

“I should almost feel flattered,” laughed Alvina.

“What do you mean?” snapped Miss Pinnegar.

None the less, Mr. May was dependable in matters of business. He was up at half-past five in the morning, and by seven was well on his way. He sailed like a stiff little ship before a steady breeze, hither and thither, out of Woodhouse and back again, and across from side to side. Sharp and snappy, he was, on the spot. He trussed himself up, when he was angry or displeased, and sharp, snip-snap came his words, rather like scissors.

“But how is it — ” he attacked Arthur Witham — ”that the gas isn’t connected with the main yet? It was to be ready yesterday.”

“We’ve had to wait for the fixings for them brackets,” said Arthur.

“*Had to wait for fixings!* But didn’t you know a fortnight ago that you’d want the fixings?”

“I thought we should have some as would do.”

“Oh! you thought so! Really! Kind of you to think so. And have you just thought about those that are coming, or have you made sure?”

Arthur looked at him sullenly. He hated him. But Mr. May’s sharp touch was not to be foiled.

“I hope you’ll go further than *thinking*,” said Mr. May. “Thinking seems such a slow process. And when do you expect the fittings — ?”

“Tomorrow.”

“What! Another day! Another day *still!* But you’re strangely indifferent to time, in your line of business. Oh! *Tomorrow!* Imagine it! Two days late already, and then *tomorrow!* Well I hope by tomorrow you mean *Wednesday*, and not tomorrow’s tomorrow, or some other absurd and fanciful date that you’ve just *thought about*. But now, *do* have the thing finished by tomorrow — ” here he laid his hand cajoling on Arthur’s arm. “You promise me it will all be ready by tomorrow, don’t you?”

“Yes, I’ll do it if anybody could do it.”

“Don’t say ‘if anybody could do it.’ Say it shall be done.”

“It shall if I can possibly manage it — ”

“Oh — very well then. Mind you manage it — and thank you very much. I shall be *most* obliged, if it *is* done.”

Arthur was annoyed, but he was kept to the scratch. And so, early in October the place was ready, and Woodhouse was plastered with placards announcing “Houghton’s Pleasure Palace.” Poor Mr. May could not but see an irony in the Palace part of the phrase. “We can guarantee the *pleasure*,” he said. “But personally, I feel I can’t take the responsibility for the palace.”

But James, to use the vulgar expression, was in his eye-holes. “Oh, father’s in his eye-holes,” said Alvina to Mr. May.

“Oh!” said Mr. May, puzzled and concerned.

But it merely meant that James was having the time of his life. He was drawing out announcements. First was a batch of vermilion strips, with the mystic script, in big black letters: Houghton’s Picture Palace, underneath which, quite small: Opens at Lumley on October 7th, at 6:30 P.M. Everywhere you went, these vermilion and black bars sprang from the wall at you. Then there were other notices, in delicate pale-blue and pale red, like a genuine theatre notice, giving full programs. And beneath these a broad-letter notice announced, in green letters on a yellow ground: “Final and Ultimate Clearance Sale at Houghton’s, Knarborough Road, on Friday, September 30th. Come and Buy Without Price.”

James was in his eye-holes. He collected all his odds and ends from every corner of Manchester House. He sorted them in heaps, and marked the heaps in his own mind. And then he let go. He pasted up notices all over the window and all over the shop: “Take what you want and Pay what you Like.”

He and Miss Pinnegar kept shop. The women flocked in. They turned things over. It nearly killed James to take the prices they offered. But take them he did. But he exacted that they should buy one article at a time. “One piece at a time, if you don’t mind,” he said, when they came up with their three-a-penny handfuls. It was not till later in the evening that he relaxed this rule.

Well, by eleven o’clock he had cleared out a good deal — really, a very great deal — and many women had bought what they didn’t want, at their own figure. Feverish but content, James shut the shop for the last time. Next day, by eleven, he had removed all his belongings, the door that connected the house with the shop was screwed up fast, the grocer strolled in and looked round his bare extension, took the key from James, and immediately set his boy to paste a new notice in the window, tearing down all James’s announcements. Poor James had to run round, down Knarborough Road, and down Wellington Street as far as the Livery Stable, then down long narrow passages, before he could get into his own house, from his own shop.

But he did not mind. Every hour brought the first performance of his Pleasure Palace nearer. He was satisfied with Mr. May: he had to admit that he was satisfied with Mr. May. The Palace stood firm at last — oh, it was so rickety when it arrived! — and it glowed with a new coat, all over, of dark-red paint, like oxblood. It was tittivated up with a touch of lavender and yellow round the door and round the decorated wooden eaving. It had a new wooden slope up to the doors — and inside, a new wooden floor, with red-velvet seats in front, before the curtain, and old chapel-pews behind. The collier youths recognized the pews.

“Hey! These ‘ere’s the pews out of the old Primitive Chapel.”

“Sorry ah! We’n come ter hear t’ parson.”

Theme for endless jokes. And the Pleasure Palace was christened, in some lucky stroke, Houghton’s Endeavour, a reference to that particular Chapel effort called the Christian Endeavour, where Alvina and Miss Pinnegar both figured.

“Wheer art off, Sorry?”

“Lumley.”

“Houghton’s Endeavour?”

“Ah.”

“Rotten.”

So, when one laconic young collier accosted another. But we anticipate.

Mr. May had worked hard to get a program for the first week. His pictures were: “The Human Bird,” which turned out to be a ski-ing film from Norway, purely descriptive; “The Pancake,” a humorous film: and then his grand serial: “The Silent Grip.” And then, for Turns, his first item was Miss Poppy Traherne, a lady in innumerable petticoats, who could whirl herself into anything you like, from an arum lily in green stockings to a rainbow and a Catherine wheel and a cup-and-saucer: marvellous, was Miss Poppy Traherne. The next turn was The Baxter Brothers, who ran up and down each other’s backs and up and down each other’s front, and stood on each other’s heads and on their own heads, and perched for a moment on each other’s shoulders, as if each of them was a flight of stairs with a landing, and the three of them were three flights, three storeys up, the top flight continually running down and becoming the bottom flight, while the middle flight collapsed and became a horizontal corridor.

Alvina had to open the performance by playing an overture called “Welcome All”: a ridiculous piece. She was excited and unhappy. On the Monday morning there was a rehearsal, Mr. May conducting. She played “Welcome All,” and then took the thumbed sheets which Miss Poppy Traherne carried with her. Miss Poppy was rather exacting. As she whirled her skirts she kept saying: “A little faster, please” — “A little slower” — in a rather haughty, official voice that was

somewhat muffled by the swim of her drapery. "Can you give it *expression*?" she cried, as she got the arum lily in full blow, and there was a sound of real ecstasy in her tones. But why she should have called "Stronger! Stronger!" as she came into being as a cup and saucer, Alvina could not imagine: unless Miss Poppy was fancying herself a strong cup of tea.

However, she subsided into her mere self, panted frantically, and then, in a hoarse voice, demanded if she was in the bare front of the show. She scorned to count "Welcome All." Mr. May said Yes. She was the first item. Whereupon she began to raise a dust. Mr. Houghton said, hurriedly interposing, that he meant to make a little opening speech. Miss Poppy eyed him as if he were a cuckoo-clock, and she had to wait till he'd finished cuckooing. Then she said:

"That's not every night. There's six nights to a week." James was properly snubbed. It ended by Mr. May metamorphizing himself into a pug dog: he said he had got the "costoom" in his bag: and doing a lump-of-sugar scene with one of the Baxter Brothers, as a brief first item. Miss Poppy's professional virginity was thus saved from outrage.

At the back of the stage there was half-a-yard of curtain screening the two dressing-rooms, ladies and gents. In her spare time Alvina sat in the ladies' dressing room, or in its lower doorway, for there was not room right inside. She watched the ladies making up — she gave some slight assistance. She saw the men's feet, in their shabby pumps, on the other side of the curtain, and she heard the men's gruff voices. Often a slangy conversation was carried on through the curtain — for most of the turns were acquainted with each other: very affable before each other's faces, very sniffy behind each other's backs.

Poor Alvina was in a state of bewilderment. She was extremely nice — oh, much too nice with the female turns. They treated her with a sort of off-hand friendliness, and they snubbed and patronized her and were a little spiteful with her because Mr. May treated her with attention and deference. She felt bewildered, a little excited, and as if she was not herself.

The first evening actually came. Her father had produced a pink crêpe de Chine blouse and a back-comb massed with brilliants — both of which she refused to wear. She stuck to her black blouse and black shirt, and her simple hair-dressing. Mr. May said "Of cauce! She wasn't intended to attract attention to herself." Miss Pinnegar actually walked down the hill with her, and began to cry when she saw the oxblood red erection, with its gas-flares in front. It was the first time she had seen it. She went on with Alvina to the little stage door at the back, and up the steps into the scrap of dressing-room. But she fled out again from the sight of Miss Poppy in her yellow hair and green knickers with green-lace frills. Poor Miss Pinnegar! She stood outside on the trodden grass behind

the Band of Hope, and really cried. Luckily she had put a veil on.

She went valiantly round to the front entrance, and climbed the steps. The crowd was just coming. There was James's face peeping inside the little ticket-window.

"One!" he said officially, pushing out the ticket. And then he recognized her. "Oh," he said, "*You're* not going to pay."

"Yes I am," she said, and she left her fourpence, and James's coppery, grimy fingers scooped it in, as the youth behind Miss Pinnegar shoved her forward.

"Ail way down, fourpenny," said the man at the door, poking her in the direction of Mr. May, who wanted to put her in the red velvet. But she marched down one of the pews, and took her seat.

The place was crowded with a whooping, whistling, excited audience. The curtain was down. James had let it out to his fellow tradesmen, and it represented a patchwork of local adverts. There was a fat porker and a fat pork-pie, and the pig was saying: "You all know where to find me. Inside the crust at Frank Churchill's, Knarborough Road, Woodhouse." Round about the name of W. H. Johnson floated a bowler hat, a collar-and-necktie, a pair of braces and an umbrella. And so on and so on. It all made you feel very homely. But Miss Pinnegar was sadly hot and squeezed in her pew.

Time came, and the colliers began to drum their feet. It was exactly the excited, crowded audience Mr. May wanted. He darted out to drive James round in front of the curtain. But James, fascinated by raking in the money so fast, could not be shifted from the pay-box, and the two men nearly had a fight. At last Mr. May was seen shooing James, like a scuffled chicken, down the side gangway and on to the stage.

James before the illuminated curtain of local adverts, bowing and beginning and not making a single word audible! The crowd quieted itself, the eloquence flowed on. The crowd was sick of James, and began to shuffle. "Come down, come down!" hissed Mr. May frantically from in front. But James did not move. He would flow on all night. Mr. May waved excitedly at Alvina, who sat obscurely at the piano, and darted on to the stage. He raised his voice and drowned James. James ceased to wave his penny-blackened hands, Alvina struck up "Welcome All" as loudly and emphatically as she could.

And all the time Miss Pinnegar sat like a sphinx — like a sphinx. What she thought she did not know herself. But stolidly she stared at James, and anxiously she glanced sideways at the pounding Alvina. She knew Alvina had to pound until she received the cue that Mr. May was fitted in his pug-dog "Costoom."

A twitch of the curtain. Alvina wound up her final flourish, the curtain rose, and:

“Well really!” said Miss Pinnegar, out loud.

There was Mr. May as a pug dog begging, too lifelike and too impossible. The audience shouted. Alvina sat with her hands in her lap. The Pug was a great success.

Curtain! A few bars of Toreador — and then Miss Poppy’s sheets of music. Soft music. Miss Poppy was on the ground under a green scarf. And so the accumulating dilation, on to the whirling climax of the perfect arum lily. Sudden curtain, and a yell of ecstasy from the colliers. Of all blossoms, the arum, the arum lily is most mystical and portentous.

Now a crash and rumble from Alvina’s piano. This is the storm from whence the rainbow emerges. Up goes the curtain — Miss Poppy twirling till her skirts lift as in a breeze, rise up and become a rainbow above her now darkened legs. The footlights are all but extinguished. Miss Poppy is all but extinguished also.

The rainbow is not so moving as the arum lily. But the Catherine wheel, done at the last moment on one leg and then an amazing leap into the air backwards, again brings down the house.

Miss Poppy herself sets all store on her cup and saucer. But the audience, vulgar as ever, cannot quite see it.

And so, Alvina slips away with Miss Poppy’s music-sheets, while Mr. May sits down like a professional at the piano and makes things fly for the up-and-down-stairs Baxter Bros. Meanwhile, Alvina’s pale face hovering like a ghost in the side darkness, as it were under the stage.

The lamps go out: gurglings and kissings — and then the dither on the screen: “The Human Bird,” in awful shivery letters. It’s not a very good machine, and Mr. May is not a very good operator. Audience distinctly critical. Lights up — an “Chot-let, penny a bar! Chot-let, penny a bar!” even as in Alvina’s dream — and then “The Pancake” — so the first half over. Lights up for the interval.

Miss Pinnegar sighed and folded her hands. She looked neither to right nor to left. In spite of herself, in spite of outraged shame and decency, she was excited. But she felt such excitement was not wholesome. In vain the boy most pertinently yelled “Chot-let” at her. She looked neither to right nor left. But when she saw Alvina nodding to her with a quick smile from the side gangway under the stage, she almost burst into tears. It was too much for her, all at once. And Alvina looked almost indecently excited. As she slipped across in front of the audience, to the piano, to play the seductive “Dream Waltz!” she looked almost fussy, like her father. James, needless to say, flittered and hurried hither and thither around the audience and the stage, like a wagtail on the brink of a pool.

The second half consisted of a comic drama acted by two Baxter Bros.,

disguised as women, and Miss Poppy disguised as a man — with a couple of locals thrown in to do the guardsman and the Count. This went very well. The winding up was the first instalment of “The Silent Grip.”

When lights went up and Alvina solemnly struck “God Save Our Gracious King,” the audience was on its feet and not very quiet, evidently hissing with excitement like doughnuts in the pan even when the pan is taken off the fire. Mr. Houghton thanked them for their courtesy and attention, and hoped — And nobody took the slightest notice.

Miss Pinnegar stayed last, waiting for Alvina. And Alvina, in her excitement, waited for Mr. May and her father.

Mr. May fairly pranced into the empty hall.

“Well!” he said, shutting both his fists and flourishing them in Miss Pinnegar’s face. “How did it go?”

“I think it went very well,” she said.

“Very well! I should think so, indeed. It went like a house on fire. What? Didn’t it?” And he laughed a high, excited little laugh.

James was counting pennies for his life, in the cash-place, and dropping them into a Gladstone bag. The others had to wait for him. At last he locked his bag.

“Well,” said Mr. May, “done well?”

“Fairly well,” said James, huskily excited. “Fairly well.”

“Only fairly? Oh-h!” And Mr. May suddenly picked up the bag. James turned as if he would snatch it from him. “Well! Feel that, for fairly well!” said Mr. May, handing the bag to Alvina.

“Goodness!” she cried, handing it to Miss Pinnegar.

“Would you believe it?” said Miss Pinnegar, relinquishing it to James. But she spoke coldly, aloof.

Mr. May turned off the gas at the meter, came talking through the darkness of the empty theatre, picking his way with a flash-light.

“C’est le premier pas qui coute,” he said, in a sort of American French, as he locked the doors and put the key in his pocket. James tripped silently alongside, bowed under the weight of his Gladstone bag of pennies.

“How much have we taken, father?” asked Alvina gaily.

“I haven’t counted,” he snapped.

When he got home he hurried upstairs to his bare chamber. He swept his table clear, and then, in an expert fashion, he seized handfuls of coin and piled them in little columns on his board. There was an army of fat pennies, a dozen to a column, along the back, rows and rows of fat brown rank-and-file. In front of these, rows of slim halfpence, like an advance-guard. And commanding all, a stout column of half-crowns, a few stoutish and important florin-figures, like

general and colonels, then quite a file of shillings, like so many captains, and a little cloud of silvery lieutenant sixpences. Right at the end, like a frail drummer boy, a thin stick of threepenny pieces.

There they all were: burly dragoons of stout pennies, heavy and holding their ground, with a screen of halfpenny light infantry, officered by the immovable half-crown general, who in his turn was flanked by all his staff of florin colonels and shilling captains, from whom lightly moved the nimble six-penny lieutenants all ignoring the wan, frail Joey of the threepenny-bits.

Time after time James ran his almighty eye over his army. He loved them. He loved to feel that his table was pressed down, that it groaned under their weight. He loved to see the pence, like innumerable pillars of cloud, standing waiting to lead on into wildernesses of unopened resource, while the silver, as pillars of light, should guide the way down the long night of fortune. Their weight sank sensually into his muscle, and gave him gratification. The dark redness of bronze, like full-blooded fleas, seemed alive and pulsing, the silver was magic as if winged.

CHAPTER VII

NATCHA-KEE-TAWARA

Mr. May and Alvina became almost inseparable, and Woodhouse buzzed with scandal. Woodhouse could not believe that Mr. May was absolutely final in his horror of any sort of coming-on-ness in a woman. It could not believe that he was only so fond of Alvina because she was like a sister to him, poor, lonely, harassed soul that he was: a pure sister who really hadn't any body. For although Mr. May was rather fond, in an epicurean way, of his own body, yet other people's bodies rather made him shudder. So that his grand utterance on Alvina was: "She's not physical, she's mental."

He even explained to her one day how it was, in his naïve fashion.

"There are two kinds of friendships," he said, "physical and mental. The physical is a thing of the moment. Of cauce you quite *like* the individual, you remain quite nice with them, and so on, — to keep the thing as decent as possible. It is quite decent, so long as you keep it so. But it is a thing of the moment. Which you know. It may last a week or two, or a month or two. But you know from the beginning it is going to end — quite finally — quite soon. You take it for what it is. But it's so different with the mental friendships. *They* are lasting. They are eternal — if anything human (he said yuman) ever is eternal, ever *can* be eternal." He pressed his hands together in an odd cherubic manner. He was quite sincere: if man ever *can* be quite sincere.

Alvina was quite content to be one of his mental and eternal friends, or rather *friendships* — since she existed in *abstractu* as far as he was concerned. For she did not find him at all physically moving. Physically he was not there: he was oddly an absentee. But his naïveté roused the serpent's tooth of her bitter irony.

"And your wife?" she said to him.

"Oh, my wife! Dreadful thought! *There* I made the great mistake of trying to find the two in one person! And *didn't* I fall between two stools! Oh dear, *didn't* I? Oh, I fell between the two stools beautifully, beautifully! And *then* — she nearly set the stools on top of me. I thought I should never get up again. When I

was physical, she was mental — Bernard Shaw and cold baths for supper! — and when I was mental she was physical, and threw her arms round my neck. In the morning, mark you. Always in the morning, when I was on the alert for business. Yes, invariably. What do you think of it? Could the devil himself have invented anything more trying? Oh dear me, don't mention it. Oh, what a time I had! Wonder I'm alive. Yes, really! Although you smile.”

Alvina did more than smile. She laughed outright. And yet she remained good friends with the odd little man.

He bought himself a new, smart overcoat, that fitted his figure, and a new velour hat. And she even noticed, one day when he was curling himself up cosily on the sofa, that he had pale blue silk underwear, and purple silk suspenders. She wondered where he got them, and how he afforded them. But there they were.

James seemed for the time being wrapt in his undertaking — particularly in the takings part of it. He seemed for the time being contented — or nearly so, nearly so. Certainly there was money coming in. But then he had to pay off all he had borrowed to buy his erection and its furnishings, and a bulk of pennies sublimated into a very small £.S.D. account, at the bank.

The Endeavour was successful — yes, it was successful. But not overwhelmingly so. On wet nights Woodhouse did not care to trail down to Lumley. And then Lumley was one of those depressed, negative spots on the face of the earth which have no pull at all. In that region of sharp hills with fine hill-brows, and shallow, rather dreary canal-valleys, it was the places on the hill-brows, like Woodhouse and Hathersedge and Rapton which flourished, while the dreary places down along the canals existed only for work-places, not for life and pleasure. It was just like James to have planted his endeavour down in the stagnant dust and rust of potteries and foundries, where no illusion could bloom.

He had dreamed of crowded houses every night, and of raised prices. But there was no probability of his being able to raise his prices. He had to figure lower than the Woodhouse Empire. He was second-rate from the start. His hope now lay in the tramway which was being built from Knarborough away through the country — a black country indeed — through Woodhouse and Lumley and Hathersedge, to Rap-ton. When once this tramway-system was working, he would have a supply of youths and lasses always on tap, as it were. So he spread his rainbow wings towards the future, and began to say:

“When we've got the trams, I shall buy a new machine and finer lenses, and I shall extend my premises.”

Mr. May did not talk business to Alvina. He was terribly secretive with respect to business. But he said to her once, in the early year following their opening:

“Well, how do you think we’re doing, Miss Houghton?”

“We’re not doing any better than we did at first, I think,” she said. “No,” he answered. “No! That’s true. That’s perfectly true. But why? They seem to like the programs.”

“I think they do,” said Alvina. “I think they like them when they’re there. But isn’t it funny, they don’t seem to want to come to them. I know they always talk as if we were second-rate. And they only come because they can’t get to the Empire, or up to Hathersedge. We’re a stop-gap. I know we are.”

Mr. May looked down in the mouth. He cocked his blue eyes at her, miserable and frightened. Failure began to frighten him abjectly. “Why do you think that is?” he said.

“I don’t believe they like the turns,” she said.

“But look how they applaud them! *Look* how pleased they are!”

“I know. I know they like them once they’re there, and they see them. But they don’t come again. They crowd the Empire — and the Empire is only pictures now: and it’s much cheaper to run.”

He watched her dismally.

“I can’t believe they want nothing but pictures. I can’t believe they want everything in the flat,” he said, coaxing and miserable. He himself was not interested in the film. His interest was still the human interest in living performers and their living feats. “Why,” he continued, “they are ever so much more excited after a good turn, than after any film.”

“I know they are,” said Alvina. “But I don’t believe they want to be excited in that way.”

“In what way?” asked Mr. May plaintively.

“By the things which the artistes do. I believe they’re jealous.”

“Oh nonsense!” exploded Mr. May, starting as if he had been shot. Then he laid his hand on her arm. “But forgive my rudeness! I don’t mean it, of *cauce!* But do you mean to say that these collier louts and factory girls are jealous of the things the artistes do, because they could never do them themselves?”

“I’m sure they are,” said Alvina.

“But I *can’t* believe it,” said Mr. May, pouting up his mouth and smiling at her as if she were a whimsical child. “What a low opinion you have of human nature!”

“Have I?” laughed Alvina. “I’ve never reckoned it up. But I’m sure that these common people here are jealous if anybody does anything or has anything they can’t have themselves.”

“I can’t believe it,” protested Mr. May “Could they be so *silly!* And then why aren’t they jealous of the extraordinary things which are done on the film?”

“Because they don’t see the flesh-and-blood people. I’m sure that’s it. The film is only pictures, like pictures in the *Daily Mirror*. And pictures don’t have any feelings apart from their own feelings. I mean the feelings of the people who watch them. Pictures don’t have any life except in the people who watch them. And that’s why they like them. Because they make them feel that they are everything.”

“The pictures make the colliers and lasses feel that they themselves are everything? But how? They identify themselves with the heroes and heroines on the screen?”

“Yes — they take it all to themselves — and there isn’t anything except themselves. I know it’s like that. It’s because they can spread themselves over a film, and they *can’t* over a living performer. They’re up against the performer himself. And they hate it.”

Mr. May watched her long and dismally

“I *can’t* believe people are like that! — sane people!” he said. “Why, to me the whole joy is in the living personality, the curious *personality* of the artiste. That’s what I enjoy so much.”

“I know. But that’s where you’re different from them.”

“But *am* I?”

“Yes. You’re not as up to the mark as they are.”

“Not up to the mark? What do you mean? Do you mean they are more intelligent?”

“No, but they’re more modern. You like things which aren’t yourself. But they don’t. They hate to admire anything that they can’t take to themselves. They hate anything that isn’t themselves. And that’s why they like pictures. It’s all themselves to them, all the time.”

He still puzzled.

“You know I don’t follow you,” he said, a little mocking, as if she were making a fool of herself.

“Because you don’t know them. You don’t know the common people. You don’t know how conceited they are.”

He watched her a long time.

“And you think we ought to cut out the variety, and give nothing but pictures, like the Empire?” he said.

“I believe it takes best,” she said.

“And costs less,” he answered. “But *then!* It’s so dull. Oh my *word*, it’s so dull. I don’t think I could bear it.”

“And our pictures aren’t good enough,” she said. “We should have to get a new machine, and pay for the expensive films. Our pictures do shake, and our

films are rather ragged.”

“But then, *surely* they’re good enough!” he said.

That was how matters stood. The Endeavour paid its way, and made just a margin of profit — no more. Spring went on to summer, and then there was a very shadowy margin of profit. But James was not at all daunted. He was waiting now for the trams, and building up hopes since he could not build in bricks and mortar.

The navvies were busy in troops along the Knarborough Road, and down Lumley Hill. Alvina became quite used to them. As she went down the hill soon after six o’clock in the evening, she met them trooping home. And some of them she liked. There was an outlawed look about them as they swung along the pavement — some of them; and there was a certain lurking set of the head which rather frightened her because it fascinated her. There was one tall young fellow with a red face and fair hair, who looked as if he had fronted the seas and the arctic sun. He looked at her. They knew each other quite well, in passing. And he would glance at perky Mr. May. Alvina tried to fathom what the young fellow’s look meant. She wondered what he thought of Mr. May.

She was surprised to hear Mr. May’s opinion of the navy.

“*He’s* a handsome young man, now!” exclaimed her companion one evening as the navvies passed. And all three turned round, to find all three turning round. Alvina laughed, and made eyes. At that moment she would cheerfully have gone along with the navy. She was getting so tired of Mr. May’s quiet prance.

On the whole, Alvina enjoyed the cinema and the life it brought her. She accepted it. And she became somewhat vulgarized in her bearing. She was *déclassée*: she had lost her class altogether. The other daughters of respectable tradesmen avoided her now, or spoke to her only from a distance. She was supposed to be “carrying on” with Mr. May.

Alvina did not care. She rather liked it. She liked being *déclassé*. She liked feeling an outsider. At last she seemed to stand on her own ground. She laughed to herself as she went back and forth from Woodhouse to Lumley, between Manchester House and the Pleasure Palace. She laughed when she saw her father’s theatre-notices plastered about. She laughed when she saw his thrilling announcements in the *Woodhouse Weekly*. She laughed when she knew that all the Woodhouse youths recognized her, and looked on her as one of their inferior entertainers. She was off the map: and she liked it.

For after all, she got a good deal of fun out of it. There was not only the continual activity. There were the artistes. Every week she met a new set of stars — three or four as a rule. She rehearsed with them on Monday afternoons, and she saw them every evening, and twice a week at matinees. James now gave two

performances each evening — and he always had *some* audience. So that Alvina had opportunity to come into contact with all the odd people of the inferior stage. She found they were very much of a type: a little frowsy, a little flea-bitten as a rule, indifferent to ordinary morality, and philosophical even if irritable. They were often very irritable. And they had always a certain fund of callous philosophy. Alvina did not *like* them — you were not supposed, really, to get deeply emotional over them. But she found it amusing to see them all and know them all. It was so different from Woodhouse, where everything was priced and ticketed. These people were nomads. They didn't care a straw who you were or who you weren't. They had a most irritable professional vanity, and that was all. It was most odd to watch them. They weren't very squeamish. If the young gentlemen liked to peep round the curtain when the young lady was in her knickers: oh, well, she rather roundly told them off, perhaps, but nobody minded. The fact that ladies wore knickers and black silk stockings thrilled nobody, any more than grease-paint or false moustaches thrilled. It was all part of the stockin-trade. As for immorality — well, what did it amount to? Not a great deal. Most of the men cared far more about a drop of whiskey than about any more carnal vice, and most of the girls were good pals with each other, men were only there to act with: even if the act was a private love-farce of an improper description. What's the odds? You couldn't get excited about it: not as a rule.

Mr. May usually took rooms for the artistes in a house down in Lumley. When any one particular was coming, he would go to a rather better-class widow in Woodhouse. He never let Alvina take any part in the making of these arrangements, except with the widow in Woodhouse, who had long ago been a servant at Manchester House, and even now came in to do cleaning.

Odd, eccentric people they were, these entertainers. Most of them had a streak of imagination, and most of them drank. Most of them were middle-aged. Most of them had an abstracted manner; in ordinary life, they seemed left aside, somehow. Odd, extraneous creatures, often a little depressed, feeling life slip away from them. The cinema was killing them.

Alvina had quite a serious flirtation with a man who played a flute and piccolo. He was about fifty years old, still handsome, and growing stout. When sober, he was completely reserved. When rather drunk, he talked charmingly and amusingly — oh, most charmingly. Alvina quite loved him. But alas, *how* he drank! But what a charm he had! He went, and she saw him no more.

The usual rather American-looking, clean-shaven, slightly pasty young man left Alvina quite cold, though he had an amiable and truly chivalrous *galanterie*. He was quite likeable. But so unattractive. Alvina was more fascinated by the

odd fish: like the lady who did marvellous things with six ferrets, or the Jap who was tattooed all over, and had the most amazing strong wrists, so that he could throw down any collier, with one turn of the hand. Queer cuts these! — but just a little bit beyond her. She watched them rather from a distance. She wished she could jump across the distance. Particularly with the Jap, who was almost quite naked, but clothed with the most exquisite tattooing. Never would she forget the eagle that flew with terrible spread wings between his shoulders, or the strange mazy pattern that netted the roundness of his buttocks. He was not very large, but nicely shaped, and with no hair on his smooth, tattooed body. He was almost blue in colour — that is, his tattooing was blue, with pickings of brilliant vermilion: as for instance round the nipples, and in a strange red serpent's-jaws over the navel. A serpent went round his loins and haunches. He told her how many times he had had blood-poisoning, during the process of his tattooing. He was a queer, black-eyed creature, with a look of silence and toad-like lewdness. He frightened her. But when he was dressed in common clothes, and was just a cheap, shoddy-looking European Jap, he was more frightening still. For his face — he was not tattooed above a certain ring low on his neck — was yellow and flat and basking with one eye open, like some age-old serpent. She felt he was smiling horribly all the time: lewd, unthinkable. A strange sight he was in Woodhouse, on a sunny morning; a shabby-looking bit of riff-raff of the East, rather down at the heel. Who could have imagined the terrible eagle of his shoulders, the serpent of his loins, his supple, magic skin?

The summer passed again, and autumn. Winter was a better time for James Houghton. The trams, moreover, would begin to run in January.

He wanted to arrange a good program for the week when the trams started. A long time head, Mr. May prepared it. The one item was the Natcha-Kee-Tawara Troupe. The Natcha-Kee-Tawara Troupe consisted of five persons, Madame Rochard and four young men. They were a strictly Red Indian troupe. But one of the young men, the German Swiss, was a famous yodeller, and another, the French Swiss, was a good comic with a French accent, whilst Madame and the German did a screaming two-person farce. Their great turn, of course, was the Natcha-Kee-Tawara Red Indian scene.

The Natcha-Kee-Tawaras were due in the third week in January, arriving from the Potteries on the Sunday evening. When Alvina came in from Chapel that Sunday evening, she found her widow, Mrs. Rollings, seated in the living room talking with James, who had an anxious look. Since opening the Pleasure Palace James was less regular at Chapel. And moreover, he was getting old and shaky, and Sunday was the one evening he might spend in peace. Add that on this particular black Sunday night it was sleeting dismally outside, and James had

already a bit of a cough, and we shall see that he did right to stay at home.

Mrs. Rollings sat nursing a bottle. She was to go to the chemist for some cough-cure, because Madame had got a bad cold. The chemist was gone to Chapel — he wouldn't open till eight.

Madame and the four young men had arrived at about six. Madame, said Mrs. Rollings, was a little fat woman, and she was complaining all the time that she had got a cold on her chest, laying her hand on her chest and trying her breathing and going "He-e-e-er! Herr!" to see if she could breathe properly. She, Mrs. Rollings, had suggested that Madame should put her feet in hot mustard and water, but Madame said she must have something to clear her chest. The four young men were four nice civil young fellows. They evidently liked Madame. Madame had insisted on cooking the chops for the young men. She herself had eaten one, but she laid her hand on her chest when she swallowed. One of the young men had gone out to get her some brandy, and he had come back with half-a-dozen large bottles of Bass as well.

Mr. Houghton was very much concerned over Madame's cold. He asked the same questions again and again, to try and make sure how bad it was. But Mrs. Rollings didn't seem quite to know. James wrinkled his brow. Supposing Madame could not take her part! He was most anxious.

"Do you think you might go across with Mrs. Rollings and see how this woman is, Alvina?" he said to his daughter.

"I should think you'll never turn Alvina out on such a night," said Miss Pinnegar. "And besides, it isn't right. Where is Mr. May? It's his business to go."

"Oh!" returned Alvina. "I don't mind going. Wait a minute, I'll see if we haven't got some of those pastilles for burning. If it's very bad, I can make one of those plasters mother used."

And she ran upstairs. She was curious to see what Madame and her four young men were like.

With Mrs. Rollings she called at the chemist's back door, and then they hurried through the sleet to the widow's dwelling. It was not far. As they went up the entry they heard the sound of voices. But in the kitchen all was quiet. The voices came from the front room.

Mrs. Rollings tapped.

"Come in!" said a rather sharp voice. Alvina entered on the widow's heels.

"I've brought you the cough stuff," said the widow. "And Miss Huff'n's come as well, to see how you was."

Four young men were sitting round the table in their shirt-sleeves, with bottles of Bass. There was much cigarette smoke. By the fire, which was burning

brightly, sat a plump, pale woman with dark bright eyes and finely-drawn eyebrows: she might be any age between forty and fifty. There were grey threads in her tidy black hair. She was neatly dressed in a well-made black dress with a small lace collar. There was a slight look of self-commiseration on her face. She had a cigarette between her drooped fingers.

She rose as if with difficulty, and held out her plump hand, on which four or five rings showed. She had dropped the cigarette unnoticed into the hearth.

“How do you do,” she said. “I didn’t catch your name.” Madame’s voice was a little plaintive and plangent now, like a bronze reed mournfully vibrating.

“Alvina Houghton,” said Alvina.

“Daughter of him as owns the thee-etter where you’re goin’ to act,” interposed the widow.

“Oh yes! Yes! I see. Miss Houghton. I didn’t know how it was said. Huffton — yes? Miss Houghton. I’ve got a bad cold on my chest — ” laying her plump hand with the rings on her plump bosom. “But let me introduce you to my young men — ” A wave of the plump hand, whose forefinger was very slightly cigarette-stained, towards the table.

The four young men had risen, and stood looking at Alvina and Madame. The room was small, rather bare, with horse-hair and white-crochet antimacassars and a linoleum floor. The table also was covered with a brightly-patterned American oil-cloth, shiny but clean. A naked gas-jet hung over it. For furniture, there were just chairs, arm-chairs, table, and a horse-hair antimacassar-ed sofa. Yet the little room seemed very full — full of people, young men with smart waistcoats and ties, but without coats.

“That is Max,” said Madame. “I shall tell you only their names, and not their family names, because that is easier for you — ”

In the meantime Max had bowed. He was a tall Swiss with almond eyes and a flattish face and a rather stiff, ramrod figure.

“And that is Louis — ” Louis bowed gracefully. He was a Swiss Frenchman, moderately tall, with prominent cheek-bones and a wing of glossy black hair falling on his temple.

“And that is Géoffroi — Geoffrey — ” Geoffrey made his bow — a broad-shouldered, watchful, taciturn man from Alpine France.

“And that is Francesco — Frank — ” Francesco gave a faint curl of his lip, half smile, as he saluted her involuntarily in a military fashion. He was dark, rather tall and loose, with yellow-tawny eyes. He was an Italian from the south. Madame gave another look at him. “He doesn’t like his English name of Frank. You will see, he pulls a face. No, he doesn’t like it. We call him Ciccio also — ” But Ciccio was dropping his head sheepishly, with the same faint smile on his

face, half grimace, and stooping to his chair, wanting to sit down.

“These are my family of young men,” said Madame. “We are drawn from three races, though only Ciccio is not of our mountains. Will you please to sit down.”

They all took their chairs. There was a pause.

“My young men drink a little beer, after their horrible journey. As a rule, I do not like them to drink. But tonight they have a little beer. I do not take any myself, because I am afraid of inflaming myself.” She laid her hand on her breast, and took long, uneasy breaths. “I feel it. I feel it *here*.” She patted her breast. “It makes me afraid for tomorrow. Will you perhaps take a glass of beer? Ciccio, ask for another glass — ” Ciccio, at the end of the table, did not rise, but looked round at Alvina as if he presumed there would be no need for him to move. The odd, supercilious curl of the lip persisted. Madame glared at him. But he turned the handsome side of his cheek towards her, with the faintest flicker of a sneer.

“No, thank you. I never take beer,” said Alvina hurriedly.

“No? Never? Oh!” Madame folded her hands, but her black eyes still darted venom at Ciccio. The rest of the young men fingered their glasses and put their cigarettes to their lips and blew the smoke down their noses, uncomfortably.

Madame closed her eyes and leaned back a moment. Then her face looked transparent and pallid, there were dark rings under her eyes, the beautifully-brushed hair shone dark like black glass above her ears. She was obviously unwell. The young men looked at her, and muttered to one another.

“I’m afraid your cold is rather bad,” said Alvina. “Will you let me take your temperature?”

Madame started and looked frightened.

“Oh, I don’t think you should trouble to do that,” she said.

Max, the tall, highly-coloured Swiss, turned to her, saying:

“Yes, you must have your temperature taken, and then we s’ll know, shan’t we. I had a hundred and five when we were in Redruth.”

Alvina had taken the thermometer from her pocket. Ciccio meanwhile muttered something in French — evidently something rude — meant for Max.

“What shall I do if I can’t work tomorrow!” moaned Madame, seeing Alvina hold up the thermometer towards the light. “Max, what shall we do?”

“You will stay in bed, and we must do the White Prisoner scene,” said Max, rather staccato and official.

Ciccio curled his lip and put his head aside. Alvina went across to Madame with the thermometer. Madame lifted her plump hand and fended off Alvina, while she made her last declaration:

“Never — never have I missed my work, for a single day, for ten years. Never. If I am going to lie abandoned, I had better die at once.”

“Lie abandoned!” said Max. “You know you won’t do no such thing. What are you talking about?”

“Take the thermometer,” said Geoffrey roughly, but with feeling.

“Tomorrow, see, you will be well quite certain!” said Louis. Madame mournfully shook her head, opened her mouth, and sat back with closed eyes and the stump of the thermometer comically protruding from a corner of her lips. Meanwhile Alvina took her plump white wrist and felt her pulse.

“We can practise — ” began Geoffrey.

“Sh!” said Max, holding up his finger and looking anxiously at Alvina and Madame, who still leaned back with the stump of the thermometer jauntily perking up from her pursed mouth, while her face was rather ghastly.

Max and Louis watched anxiously. Geoffrey sat blowing the smoke down his nose, while Ciccio callously lit another cigarette, striking a match on his boot-heel and puffing from under the tip of his rather long nose. Then he took the cigarette from his mouth, turned his head, slowly spat on the floor, and rubbed his foot on his spit. Max flapped his eyelids and looked all disdain, murmuring something about “ein schmutziges italienisches Volk,” whilst Louis, refusing either to see or to hear, framed the word “chien” on his lips.

Then quick as lightning both turned their attention again to Madame.

Her temperature was a hundred and two.

“You’d better go to bed,” said Alvina. “Have you eaten anything?”

“One little mouthful,” said Madame plaintively.

Max sat looking pale and stricken, Louis had hurried forward to take Madame’s hand. He kissed it quickly, then turned aside his head because of the tears in his eyes. Geoffrey gulped beer in large throatfuls, and Ciccio, with his head bent, was watching from under his eyebrows.

“I’ll run round for the doctor — ” said Alvina.

“Don’t! Don’t do that, my dear! Don’t you go and do that! I’m likely to a temperature — ”

“Liable to a temperature,” murmured Louis pathetically. “I’ll go to bed,” said Madame, obediently rising.

“Wait a bit. I’ll see if there’s a fire in the bedroom,” said Alvina.

“Oh, my dear, you are too good. Open the door for her, Ciccio — ”

Ciccio reached across at the door, but was too late. Max had hastened to usher Alvina out. Madame sank back in her chair.

“Never for ten years,” she was wailing. “Quoi faire, h, quoi faire! Que ferez-vous, mes pauvres, sans votre Kishwégin. Que vais-je faire, mourir dans un tel

pays! La bonne demoiselle — la bonne demoiselleelle a du coeur. Elle pourrait aussi être belle, s'il y avait un peu plus de chair. Max, liebster, schau ich Behr elend aus? Ach, oh jeh, oh jeh!”

“Ach nein, Madame, ach nein. Nicht so furchtbar elend,” said Max.

“Manca it cuore solamente al Ciccio,” moaned Madame. “Che natura povera, senza sentimento — niente di bello. Ahimé, che amico, che ragazzo duro, aspero —”

“Trova?” said Ciccio, with a curl of the lip. He looked, as he dropped his long, beautiful lashes, as if he might weep for all that, if he were not bound to be misbehaving just now.

So Madame moaned in four languages as she posed pallid in her arm-chair. Usually she spoke in French only, with her young men. But this was an extra occasion.

“La pauvre Kishwégin!” murmured Madame. “Elle va finir au monde. Elle passe — la pauvre Kishwégin.”

Kishwégin was Madame’s Red Indian name, the name under which she danced her Squaw’s fire-dance.

Now that she knew she was ill, Madame seemed to become more ill. Her breath came in little pants. She had a pain in her side. A feverish flush seemed to mount her cheek. The young men were all extremely uncomfortable. Louis did not conceal his tears. Only Ciccio kept the thin smile on his lips, and added to Madame’s annoyance and pain.

Alvina came down to take her to bed. The young men all rose, and kissed Madame’s hand as she went out: her poor jewelled hand, that was faintly perfumed with eau de Cologne. She spoke an appropriate good-night, to each of them.

“Good-night, my faithful Max, I trust myself to you. Good-night, Louis, the tender heart. Good-night valiant Geoffrey. Ah Ciccio, do not add to the weight of my heart. Be good *braves*, all, be brothers in one accord. One little prayer for poor Kishwégin. Good-night!”

After which valediction she slowly climbed the stairs, putting her hand on her knee at each step, with the effort.

“No — no,” she said to Max, who would have followed to her assistance. “Do not come up. No — no!”

Her bedroom was tidy and proper.

“Tonight,” she moaned, “I shan’t be able to see that the boys’ rooms are well in order. They are not to be trusted, no. They need an overseeing eye: especially Ciccio; especially Ciccio!”

She sank down by the fire and began to undo her dress.

“You must let me help you,” said Alvina. “You know I have been a nurse.”

“Ah, you are too kind, too kind, dear young lady. I am a lonely old woman. I am not used to attentions. Best leave me.”

“Let me help you,” said Alvina.

“Alas, ahimé! Who would have thought Kishwégin would need help. I danced last night with the boys in the theatre in Leek: and tonight I am put to bed in — what is the name of this place, dear? — It seems I don’t remember it.”

“Woodhouse,” said Alvina.

“Woodhouse! Woodhouse! Is there not something called Woodlouse? I believe. Ugh, horrible! Why is it horrible?”

Alvina quickly undressed the plump, trim little woman. She seemed so soft. Alvina could not imagine how she could be a dancer on the stage, strenuous. But Madame’s softness could flash into wild energy, sudden convulsive power, like a cuttle-fish. Alvina brushed out the long black hair, and plaited it lightly. Then she got Madame into bed.

“Ah,” sighed Madame, “the good bed! The good bed! But cold — it is so cold. Would you hang up my dress, dear, and fold my stockings?”

Alvina quickly folded and put aside the dainty underclothing. queer, dainty woman, was Madame, even to her wonderful threaded black-and-gold garters.

“My poor boys — no Kishwégin tomorrow! You don’t think I need see a priest, dear? A priest!” said Madame, her teeth chattering.

“Priest! Oh no! You’ll be better when we can get you warm. I think it’s only a chill. Mrs. Rollings is warming a blanket — ”

Alvina ran downstairs. Max opened the sitting-room door and stood watching at the sound of footsteps. His rather bony fists were clenched beneath his loose shirt-cuffs, his eyebrows tragically lifted.

“Is she much ill?” he asked.

“I don’t know. But I don’t think so. Do you mind heating the blanket while Mrs. Rollings makes thin gruel?”

Max and Louis stood heating blankets. Louis’ trousers were cut rather tight at the waist, and gave him a female look. Max was straight and stiff. Mrs. Rollings asked Geoffrey to fill the coal-scuttles and carry one upstairs. Geoffrey obediently went out with a lantern to the coal-shed. Afterwards he was to carry up the horse-hair arm-chair.

“I must go home for some things,” said Alvina to Ciccio. “Will you come and carry them for me?”

He started up, and with one movement threw away his cigarette. He did not look at Alvina. His beautiful lashes seemed to screen his eyes. He was fairly tall, but loosely built for an Italian, with slightly sloping shoulders. Alvina noticed

the brown, slender Mediterranean hand, as he put his fingers to his lips. It was a hand such as she did not know, prehensile and tender and dusky. With an odd graceful slouch he went into the passage and reached for his coat.

He did not say a word, but held aloof as he walked with Alvina.

“I’m sorry for Madame,” said Alvina, as she hurried rather breathless through the night. “She does think for you men.”

But Ciccio vouchsafed no answer, and walked with his hands in the pockets of his water-proof, wincing from the weather.

“I’m afraid she will never be able to dance tomorrow,” said Alvina. “You think she won’t be able?” he said.

“I’m almost sure she won’t.”

After which he said nothing, and Alvina also kept silence till they came to the black dark passage and encumbered yard at the back of the house.

“I don’t think you can see at all,” she said. “It’s this way.” She groped for him in the dark, and met his groping hand.

“This way,” she said.

It was curious how light his fingers were in their clasp — almost like a child’s touch. So they came under the light from the window of the sitting-room.

Alvina hurried indoors, and the young man followed.

“I shall have to stay with Madame tonight,” she explained hurriedly. “She’s feverish, but she may throw it off if we can get her into a sweat.” And Alvina ran upstairs collecting things necessary. Ciccio stood back near the door, and answered all Miss Pinnegar’s entreaties to come to the fire with a shake of the head and a slight smile of the lips, bashful and stupid.

“But do come and warm yourself before you go out again,” said Miss Pinnegar, looking at the man as he drooped his head in the distance. He still shook dissent, but opened his mouth at last.

“It makes it colder after,” he said, showing his teeth in a slight, stupid smile.

“Oh well, if you think so,” said Miss Pinnegar, nettled. She couldn’t make heads or tails of him, and didn’t try,

When they got back, Madame was light-headed, and talking excitedly of her dance, her young men. The three young men were terrified. They had got the blankets scorching hot. Alvina smeared the plasters and applied them to Madame’s side, where the pain was. What a white-skinned, soft, plump child she seemed! Her pain meant a touch of pleurisy, for sure. The men hovered outside the door. Alvina wrapped the poor patient in the hot blankets, got a few spoonfuls of hot gruel and whiskey down her throat, fastened her down in bed, lowered the light and banished the men from the stairs. Then she sat down to watch. Madame chafed, moaned, murmured feverishly. Alvina soothed her, and

put her hands in bed. And at last the poor dear became quiet. Her brow was faintly moist. She fell into a quiet sleep, perspiring freely. Alvina watched her still, soothed her when she suddenly started and began to break out of the bedclothes, quieted her, pressed her gently, firmly down, folded her tight and made her submit to the perspiration against which, in convulsive starts, she fought and strove, crying that she was suffocating, she was too hot, too hot.

“Lie still, lie still,” said Alvina. “You must keep warm.”

Poor Madame moaned. How she hated seething in the bath of her own perspiration. Her wilful nature rebelled strongly. She would have thrown aside her coverings and gasped into the cold air, if Alvina had not pressed her down with that soft, inevitable pressure.

So the hours passed, till about one o’clock, when the perspiration became less profuse, and the patient was really better, really quieter. Then Alvina went downstairs for a moment. She saw the light still burning in the front room. Tapping, she entered. There sat Max by the fire, a picture of misery, with Louis opposite him, nodding asleep after his tears. On the sofa Geoffrey snored lightly, while Ciccio sat with his head on the table, his arms spread out, dead asleep. Again she noticed the tender, dusky Mediterranean hands, the slender wrists, slender for a man naturally loose and muscular.

“Haven’t you gone to bed?” whispered Alvina. “Why?”

Louis started awake. Max, the only stubborn watcher, shook his head lugubriously.

“But she’s better,” whispered Alvina. “She’s perspired. She’s better. She’s sleeping naturally.”

Max stared with round, sleep-whitened, owlish eyes, pessimistic and sceptical:

“Yes,” persisted Alvina. “Come and look at her. But don’t wake her, whatever you do.”

Max took off his slippers and rose to his tall height. Louis, like a scared chicken, followed. Each man held his slippers in his hand. They noiselessly entered and peeped stealthily over the heaped bedclothes. Madame was lying, looking a little flushed and very girlish, sleeping lightly, with a strand of black hair stuck to her cheek, and her lips lightly parted.

Max watched her for some moments. Then suddenly he straightened himself, pushed back his brown hair that was brushed up in the German fashion, and crossed himself, dropping his knee as before an altar; crossed himself and dropped his knee once more; and then a third time crossed himself and inclined before the altar. Then he straightened himself again, and turned aside.

Louis also crossed himself. His tears burst out. He bowed and took the edge of a blanket to his lips, kissing it reverently. Then he covered his face with his

hand.

Meanwhile Madame slept lightly and innocently on.

Alvina turned to go. Max silently followed, leading Louis by the arm. When they got downstairs, Max and Louis threw themselves in each other's arms, and kissed each other on either cheek, gravely, in Continental fashion.

"She is better," said Max gravely, in French.

"Thanks to God," replied Louis.

Alvina witnessed all this with some amazement. The men did not heed her. Max went over and shook Geoffrey, Louis put his hand on Ciccio's shoulder. The sleepers were difficult to wake. The wakers shook the sleeping, but in vain. At last Geoffrey began to stir. But in vain Louis lifted Ciccio's shoulders from the table. The head and the hands dropped inert. The long black lashes lay motionless, the rather long, fine Greek nose drew the same light breaths, the mouth remained shut. Strange fine black hair, he had, close as fur, animal, and naked, frail-seeming, tawny hands. There was a silver ring on one hand.

Alvina suddenly seized one of the inert hands that slid on the tablecloth as Louis shook the young man's shoulders. Tight she pressed the hand. Ciccio opened his tawny-yellowish eyes, that seemed to have been put in with a dirty finger, as the saying goes, owing to the sootiness of the lashes and brows. He was quite drunk with his first sleep, and saw nothing.

"Wake up," said Alvina, laughing, pressing his hand again.

He lifted his head once more, suddenly clasped her hand, his eyes came to consciousness, his hand relaxed, he recognized her, and he sat back in his chair, turning his face aside and lowering his lashes.

"Get up, great beast," Louis was saying softly in French, pushing him as ox-drivers sometimes push their oxen. Ciccio staggered to his feet.

"She is better," they told him. "We are going to bed."

They took their candles and trooped off upstairs, each one bowing to Alvina as he passed. Max solemnly, Louis gallant, the other two dumb and sleepy. They occupied the two attic chambers.

Alvina carried up the loose bed from the sofa, and slept on the floor before the fire in Madame's room.

Madame slept well and long, rousing and stirring and settling off again. It was eight o'clock before she asked her first question. Alvina was already up.

"Oh — alors — Then I am better, I am quite well. I can dance today."

"I don't think today," said Alvina. "But perhaps tomorrow."

"No, today," said Madame. "I can dance today, because I am quite well. I am Kishwégin."

"You are better. But you must lie still today. Yes, really — you will find you

are weak when you try to stand.”

Madame watched Alvina’s thin face with sullen eyes.

“You are an Englishwoman, severe and materialist,” she said.

Alvina started and looked round at her with wide blue eyes.

“Why?” she said. There was a wan, pathetic look about her, a sort of heroism which Madame detested, but which now she found touching. “Come!” said Madame, stretching out her plump jewelled hand. “Come, I am an ungrateful woman. Come, they are not good for you, the people, I see it. Come to me.”

Alvina went slowly to Madame, and took the outstretched hand. Madame kissed her hand, then drew her down and kissed her on either cheek, gravely, as the young men had kissed each other.

“You have been good to Kishwégin, and Kishwégin has a heart that remembers. There, Miss Houghton, I shall do what you tell me. Kishwégin obeys you.” And Madame patted Alvina’s hand and nodded her head sagely.

“Shall I take your temperature?” said Alvina.

“Yes, my dear, you shall. You shall bid me, and I shall obey.”

So Madame lay back on her pillow, submissively pursing the thermometer between her lips and watching Alvina with black eyes.

“It’s all right,” said Alvina, as she looked at the thermometer. “Normal.”

“Normal!” re-echoed Madame’s rather guttural voice. “Good! Well, then when shall I dance?”

Alvina turned and looked at her.

“I think, truly,” said Alvina, “it shouldn’t be before Thursday or Friday.”

“Thursday!” repeated Madame. “You say Thursday?” There was a note of strong rebellion in her voice.

“You’ll be so weak. You’ve only just escaped pleurisy. I can only say what I truly think, can’t I?”

“Ah, you Englishwomen,” said Madame, watching with black eyes. “I think you like to have your own way. In all things, to have your own way. And over all people. You are so good, to have your own way. Yes, you good Englishwomen. Thursday. Very well, it shall be Thursday. Till Thursday, then, Kishwégin does not exist.”

And she subsided, already rather weak, upon her pillow again. When she had taken her tea and was washed and her room was tidied, she summoned the young men. Alvina had warned Max that she wanted Madame to be kept as quiet as possible this day.

As soon as the first of the four appeared, in his shirt-sleeves and his slippers, in the doorway, Madame said:

“Ah, there you are, my young men! Come in! Come in! It is not Kishwégin

addresses you. Kishwégin does not exist till Thursday, as the English demoiselle makes it." She held out her hand, faintly perfumed with eau de Cologne — the whole room smelled of eau de Cologne — and Max stooped his brittle spine and kissed it. She touched his cheek gently with her other hand.

"My faithful Max, my support."

Louis came smiling with a bunch of violets and pinky anemones. He laid them down on the bed before her, and took her hand, bowing and kissing it reverently.

"You are better, dear Madame?" he said, smiling long at her.

"Better, yes, gentle Louis. And better for thy flowers, chivalric heart." She put the violets and anemones to her face with both hands, and then gently laid them aside to extend her hand to Geoffrey.

"The good Geoffrey will do his best, while there is no Kishwégin?" she said as he stooped to her salute.

"Bien sùr," Madame."

"Ciccio, a button off thy shirt-cuff. Where is my needle?" She looked round the room as Ciccio kissed her hand.

"Did you want anything?" said Alvina, who had not followed the French.

"My needle, to sew on this button. It is there, in the silk bag."

"I will do it," said Alvina.

"Thank you."

While Alvina sewed on the button, Madame spoke to her young men, principally to Max. They were to obey Max, she said, for he was their eldest brother. This afternoon they would practise well the scene of the White Prisoner. Very carefully they must practise, and they must find some one who would play the young squaw — for in this scene she had practically nothing to do, the young squaw, but just sit and stand. Miss Houghton — but ah, Miss Houghton must play the piano, she could not take the part of the young squaw. Some other then.

While the interview was going on, Mr. May arrived, full of concern. "Shan't we have the procession!" he cried.

"Ah, the procession!" cried Madame.

The Natcha-Kee-Tawara Troupe upon request would signalize its entry into any town by a procession. The young men were dressed as Indian *braves*, and headed by Kishwégin they rode on horseback through the main streets. Ciccio, who was the crack horseman, having served a very well-known horsey Marchese in an Italian cavalry regiment, did a bit of show riding.

Mr. May was very keen on the procession. He had the horses in readiness. The morning was faintly sunny, after the sleet and bad weather. And now he arrived to find Madame in bed and the young men holding council with her.

"How very unfortunate!" cried Mr. May. "How very unfortunate!"

“Dreadful! Dreadful!” wailed Madame from the bed.

“But can’t we do *anything*?”

“Yes — you can do the White Prisoner scene — the young men can do that, if you find a dummy squaw. Ah, I think I must get up after all.”

Alvina saw the look of fret and exhaustion in Madame’s face.

“Won’t you all go downstairs now?” said Alvina. “Mr. Max knows what you must do.”

And she shoed the five men out of the bedroom.

“I must get up. I won’t dance. I will be a dummy. But I must be there. It is too dre-eadful, too dre-eadful!” wailed Madame.

“Don’t take any notice of them. They can manage by themselves. Men are such babies. Let them carry it through by themselves.”

“Children — they are all children!” wailed Madame. “All children! And so, what will they do without their old *_gouvernante?* *My poor braves_*, what will they do without Kishwégin? It is too dreadful, too dre-eadful, yes. The poor Mr. May — so *disappointed*.”

“Then let him be disappointed,” cried Alvina, as she forcibly tucked up Madame and made her lie still.

“You are hard! You are a hard Englishwoman. All alike. All alike!” Madame subsided fretfully and weakly. Alvina moved softly about. And in a few minutes Madame was sleeping again.

Alvina went downstairs. Mr. May was listening to Max, who was telling in German all about the White Prisoner scene. Mr. May had spent his boyhood in a German school. He cocked his head on one side, and, laying his hand on Max’s arm, entertained him in odd German. The others were silent. Ciccio made no pretence of listening, but smoked and stared at his own feet. Louis and Geoffrey half understood, so Louis nodded with a look of deep comprehension, whilst Geoffrey uttered short, snappy “Ja! — Ja! — Doch! — Eben!” rather irrelevant.

“I’ll be the squaw,” cried Mr. May in English, breaking off and turning round to the company. He perked up his head in an odd, parrot-like fashion. “*I’ll* be the squaw! What’s her name? Kishwégin? I’ll be Kishwégin.” And he bridled and beamed self-consciously.

The two tall Swiss looked down on him, faintly smiling. Ciccio, sitting with his arms on his knees on the sofa, screwed round his head and watched the phenomenon of Mr. May with inscrutable, expressionless attention.

“Let us go,” said Mr. May, bubbling with new importance. “Let us go and rehearse *this morning*, and let us do the procession this afternoon, when the colliers are just coming home. There! What? Isn’t that exactly the idea? Well! Will you be ready at once, *now*?”

He looked excitedly at the young men. They nodded with slow gravity, as if they were already *braves*. And they turned to put on their boots. Soon they were all trooping down to Lumley, Mr. May prancing like a little circus-pony beside Alvina, the four young men rolling ahead.

“What do you think of it?” cried Mr. May. “We’ve saved the situation — what? Don’t you think so? Don’t you think we can congratulate ourselves.”

They found Mr. Houghton fussing about in the theatre. He was on tenterhooks of agitation, knowing Madame was ill.

Max gave a brilliant display of yodelling.

“But I must *explain* to them,” cried Mr. May. “I must *explain* to them what yodel means.”

And turning to the empty theatre, he began, stretching forth his hand.

“In the high Alps of Switzerland, where eternal snows and glaciers reign over luscious meadows full of flowers, if you should chance to awaken, as I have done, in some lonely wooden farm amid the mountain pastures, you — er — you — let me see — if you — no — if you should chance to *spend the night* in some lonely wooden farm, amid the upland pastures, dawn will awake you with a wild, inhuman song, you will open your eyes to the first gleam of icy, eternal sunbeams, your ears will be ringing with weird singing, that has no words and no meaning, but sounds as if some wild and icy god were warbling to himself as he wandered among the peaks of dawn. You look forth across the flowers to the blue snow, and you see, far off, a small figure of a man moving among the grass. It is a peasant singing his mountain song, warbling like some creature that lifted up its voice on the edge of the eternal snows, before the human race began — ”

During this oration James Houghton sat with his chin in his hand, devoured with bitter jealousy, measuring Mr. May’s eloquence. And then he started, as Max, tall and handsome now in Tyrolese costume, white shirt and green, square braces, short trousers of chamois leather stitched with green and red, firm-planted naked knees, naked ankles and heavy shoes, warbled his native Yodel strains, a piercing and disturbing sound. He was flushed, erect, keen tempered and fierce and mountainous. There was a fierce, icy passion in the man. Alvina began to understand Madame’s subjection to him.

Louis and Geoffrey did a farce dialogue, two foreigners at the same moment spying a purse in the street, struggling with each other and protesting they wanted to take it to the policeman, Ciccio, who stood solid and ridiculous. Mr. Houghton nodded slowly and gravely, as if to give his measured approval.

Then all retired to dress for the great scene. Alvina practised the music Madame carried with her. If Madame found a good pianist, she welcomed the accompaniment: if not, she dispensed with it.

“Am I all right?” said a smirking voice.

And there was Kishwégin, dusky, coy, with long black hair and a short chamois dress, gaiters and moccasins and bare arms: so coy, and so smirking. Alvina burst out laughing.

“But shan’t I do?” protested Mr. May, hurt.

“Yes, you’re wonderful,” said Alvina, choking. “But I must laugh.”

“But why? Tell me why?” asked Mr. May anxiously “Is it my *appearance* you laugh at, or is it only *me*? If it’s me I don’t mind. But if it’s my appearance, tell me so.”

Here an appalling figure of Ciccio in war-paint strolled on to the stage. He was naked to the waist, wore scalp-fringed trousers, was dusky-red-skinned, had long black hair and eagle’s feathers — only two feathers — and a face wonderfully and terribly painted with white, red, yellow, and black lines. He was evidently pleased with himself. His curious soft slouch, and curious way of lifting his lip from his white teeth, in a sort of smile, was very convincing.

“You haven’t got the girdle,” he said, touching Mr. May’s plump waist — “and some flowers in your hair.”

Mr. May here gave a sharp cry and a jump. A bear on its hind legs, slow, shambling, rolling its loose shoulders, was stretching a paw towards him. The bear dropped heavily on four paws again, and a laugh came from its muzzle.

“You won’t have to dance,” said Geoffrey out of the bear.

“Come and put in the flowers,” said Mr. May anxiously, to Alvina.

In the dressing-room, the dividing-curtain was drawn. Max, in deerskin trousers but with unpainted torso looked very white and strange as he put the last touches of war-paint on Louis’ face. He glanced round at Alvina, then went on with his work. There was a sort of nobility about his erect white form and stiffly-carried head, the semi-luminous brown hair. He seemed curiously superior.

Alvina adjusted the maidenly Mr. May. Louis arose, a *brave* like Ciccio, in war-paint even more hideous. Max slipped on a tattered hunting-shirt and cartridge belt. His face was a little darkened. He was the white prisoner.

They arranged the scenery, while Alvina watched. It was soon done. A back cloth of tree-trunks and dark forest: a wigwam, a fire, and a cradle hanging from a pole. As they worked, Alvina tried in vain to dissociate the two *braves* from their war-paint. The lines were drawn so cleverly that the grimace of ferocity was fixed and horrible, so that even in the quiet work of scene-shifting Louis’ stiffish, female grace seemed full of latent cruelty, whilst Ciccio’s more muscular slouch made her feel slue would not trust him for one single moment. Awful things men were, savage, cruel, underneath their civilization.

The scene had its beauty. It began with Kishwégin alone at the door of the

wigwam, cooking, listening, giving an occasional push to the hanging cradle, and, if only Madame were taking the part, crooning an Indian cradle-song. Enter the *brave* Louis with his white prisoner, Max, who has his hands bound to his side. Kishwégin gravely salutes her husband — the bound prisoner is seated by the fire — Kishwégin serves food, and asks permission to feed the prisoner. The *brave* Louis, hearing a sound, starts up with his bow and arrow. There is a dumb scene of sympathy between Kishwégin and the prisoner — the prisoner wants his bonds cut. Re-enter the *brave* Louis — he is angry with Kishwégin — enter the *brave* Ciccio hauling a bear, apparently dead. Kishwégin examines the bear, Ciccio examines the prisoner. Ciccio tortures the prisoner, makes him stand, makes him caper unwillingly. Kishwégin swings the cradle and croons. The men rise once more and bend over the prisoner. As they do so, there is a muffled roar. The bear is sitting up. Louis swings round, and at the same moment the bear strikes him down. Ciccio springs forward and stabs the bear, then closes with it. Kishwégin runs and cuts the prisoner's bonds. He rises, and stands trying to lift his numbed and powerless arms, while the bear slowly crushes Ciccio, and Kishwégin kneels over her husband. The bear drops Ciccio lifeless, and turns to Kishwégin. At that moment Max manages to kill the bear — he takes Kishwégin by the hand and kneels with her beside the dead Louis.

It was wonderful how well the men played their different parts. But Mr. May was a little too frisky as Kishwégin. However, it would do.

Ciccio got dressed as soon as possible, to go and look at the horses hired for the afternoon procession. Alvina accompanied him, Mr. May and the others were busy.

“You know I think it's quite wonderful, your scene,” she said to Ciccio.

He turned and looked down at her. His yellow, dusky-set eyes rested on her good-naturedly, without seeing her, his lip curled in a self-conscious, contemptuous sort of smile.

“Not without Madame,” he said, with the slow, half-sneering, stupid smile. “Without Madame — ” he lifted his shoulders and spread his hands and tilted his brows — “fool's play, you know.”

“No,” said Alvina. “I think Mr. May is good, considering. What does Madame *do*?” she asked a little jealously.

“Do?” He looked down at her with the same long, half-sardonic look of his yellow eyes, like a cat looking casually at a bird which flutters past. And again he made his shrugging motion. “She does it all, really. The others — they are nothing — what they are Madame has made them. And now they think they've done it all, you see. You see, that's it.”

“But how has Madame made it all? Thought it out, you mean?”

“Thought it out, yes. And then *done* it. You should see her dance — ah! You should see her dance round the bear, when I bring him in! Ah, a beautiful thing, you know. She claps her hand — ” And Ciccio stood still in the street, with his hat cocked a little on one side, rather common-looking, and he smiled along his fine nose at Alvina, and he clapped his hands lightly, and he tilted his eyebrows and his eyelids as if facially he were imitating a dance, and all the time his lips smiled stupidly. As he gave a little assertive shake of his head, finishing, there came a great yell of laughter from the opposite pavement, where a gang of pottery lasses, in aprons all spattered with grey clay, and hair and boots and skin spattered with pallid spots, had stood to watch. The girls opposite shrieked again, for all the world like a gang of grey baboons. Ciccio turned round and looked at them with a sneer along his nose. They yelled the louder. And he was horribly uncomfortable, walking there beside Alvina with his rather small and effeminately-shod feet.

“How stupid they are,” said Alvina. “I’ve got used to them.”

“They should be — ” he lifted his hand with a sharp, vicious movement — ”*smacked*” he concluded, lowering his hand again. “Who is going to do it?” said Alvina.

He gave a Neapolitan grimace, and twiddled the fingers of one hand outspread in the air, as if to say: “There you are! You’ve got to thank the fools who’ve failed to do it.”

“Why do you all love Madame so much?” Alvina asked.

“How, love?” he said, making a little grimace. “We like her — we love her — as if she were a mother. You say *love* — ” He raised his shoulders slightly, with a shrug. And all the time he looked down at Alvina from under his dusky eyelashes, as if watching her sideways, and his mouth had the peculiar, stupid, self-conscious, half-jeering smile. Alvina was a little bit annoyed. But she felt that a great instinctive good-naturedness came out of him, he was self-conscious and constrained, knowing she did not follow his language of gesture. For him, it was not yet quite natural to express himself in speech. Gesture and grimace were instantaneous, and spoke worlds of things, if you would but accept them.

But certainly he was stupid, in her sense of the word. She could hear Mr. May’s verdict of him: “Like a child, you know, just as charming and just as tiresome and just as stupid.”

“Where is your home?” she asked him.

“In Italy.” She felt a fool.

“Which part?” she insisted.

“Naples,” he said, looking down at her sideways, searchingly. “It must be lovely,” she said.

“Ha — !” He threw his head on one side and spread out his hands, as if to say — “What do you want, if you don’t find Naples lovely.”

“I should like to see it. But I shouldn’t like to die,” she said. “What?”

“They say ‘See Naples and die,’” she laughed.

He opened his mouth, and understood. Then he smiled at her directly.

“You know what that means?” he said cutely. “It means see Naples and die afterwards. Don’t die *before* you’ve seen it.” He smiled with a knowing smile.

“I see! I see!” she cried. “I never thought of that.”

He was pleased with her surprise and amusement.

“Ah Naples!” he said. “She is lovely — ” He spread his hand across the air in front of him — “The sea — and Posilippo — and Sorrento — and Capri — Ah-h! You’ve never been out of England?”

“No,” she said. “I should love to go.”

He looked down into her eyes. It was his instinct to say at once he would take her.

“You’ve seen nothing — nothing,” he said to her.

“But if Naples is so lovely, how could you leave it?” she asked. “What?”

She repeated her question. For answer, he looked at her, held out his hand, and rubbing the ball of his thumb across the tips of his fingers, said, with a fine, handsome smile:

“Pennies! Money! You can’t earn money in Naples. Ah, Naples is beautiful, but she is poor. You live in the sun, and you earn fourteen, fifteen pence a day — ”

“Not enough,” she said.

He put his head on one side and tilted his brows, as if to say “What are you to do?” And the smile on his mouth was sad, fine, and charming. There was an indefinable air of sadness or wistfulness about him, something so robust and fragile at the same time, that she was drawn in a strange way.

“But you’ll go back?” she said.

“Where?”

“To Italy. To Naples.”

“Yes, I shall go back to Italy,” he said, as if unwilling to commit himself. “But perhaps I shan’t go back to Naples.”

“Never?”

“Ah, never! I don’t say never. I shall go to Naples, to see my mother’s sister. But I shan’t go to live — ”

“Have you a mother and father?”

“I? No! I have a brother and two sisters — in America. Parents, none. They are dead.”

“And you wander about the world — ” she said.

He looked at her, and made a slight, sad gesture, indifferent also. “But you have Madame for a mother,” she said.

He made another gesture this time: pressed down the corners of his mouth as if he didn’t like it. Then he turned with the slow, fine smile.

“Does a man want two mothers? Eh?” he said, as if he posed a conundrum.

“I shouldn’t think so,” laughed Alvina.

He glanced at her to see what she meant, what she understood. “My mother is dead, see!” he said. “Frenchwomen — Frenchwomen they have their babies till they are a hundred — ”

“What do you mean?” said Alvina, laughing.

“A Frenchman is a little man when he’s seven years old — and if his mother comes, he is a little baby boy when he’s seventy. Do you know that?”

“I *didn’t* know it,” said Alvina.

“But now — you do,” he said, lurching round a corner with her.

They had come to the stables. Three of the horses were there, including the thoroughbred Ciccio was going to ride. He stood and examined the beasts critically. Then he spoke to them with strange sounds, patted them, stroked them down, felt them, slid his hand down them, over them, under them, and felt their legs.

Then, he looked up from stooping there under the horses, with a long, slow look of his yellow eyes, at Alvina. She felt unconsciously flattered. His long, yellow look lingered, holding her eyes. She wondered what he was thinking. Yet he never spoke. He turned again to the horses. They seemed to understand him, to prick up alert.

“This is mine,” he said, with his hand on the neck of the old thoroughbred. It was a bay with a white blaze.

“I think he’s nice,” she said. “He seems so sensitive.”

“In England,” he answered suddenly, “horses live a long time, because they *don’t* live — never alive — see? In England railway-engines are alive, and horses go on wheels.” He smiled into her eyes as if she understood. She was a trifle nervous as he smiled at her from out of the stable, so yellow-eyed and half-mysterious, derisive. Her impulse was to turn and go away from the stable. But a deeper impulse made her smile into his face, as she said to him:

“They like you to touch them.”

“Who?” His eyes kept hers. Curious how *dark* they seemed, with only a yellow ring of pupil. He was looking right into her, beyond her usual self, impersonal.

“The horses,” she said. She was afraid of his long, cat-like look. Yet she felt

convinced of his ultimate good-nature. He seemed to her to be the only passionately good-natured man she had ever seen. She watched him vaguely, with strange vague trust, implicit belief in him. In him — in what?

That afternoon the colliers trooping home in the winter afternoon were rejoiced with a spectacle: Kishwégin, in her deerskin, fringed gaiters and fringed frock of deerskin, her long hair down her back, and with marvellous cloths and trappings on her steed, riding astride on a tall white horse, followed by Max in chieftain's robes and chieftain's long head-dress of dyed feathers, then by the others in war-paint and feathers and brilliant Navajo blankets. They carried bows and spears. Ciccio was without his blanket, naked to the waist, in war-paint, and brandishing a long spear. He dashed up from the rear, saluted the chieftain with his arm and his spear on high as he swept past, suddenly drew up his rearing steed, and trotted slowly back again, making his horse perform its paces. He was extraordinarily velvety and alive on horseback.

Crowds of excited, shouting children ran chattering along the pavements. The colliers, as they tramped grey and heavy, in an intermittent stream uphill from the low grey west, stood on the pavement in wonder as the cavalcade approached and passed, jingling the silver bells of its trappings, vibrating the wonderful colours of the barred blankets and saddle cloths, the scarlet wool of the accoutrements, the bright tips of feathers. Women shrieked as Ciccio, in his war-paint, wheeled near the pavement. Children screamed and ran. The colliers shouted. Ciccio smiled in his terrifying war-paint, brandished his spear and trotted softly, like a flower on its stem, round to the procession.

Miss Pinnegar and Alvina and James Houghton had come round into Knarborough Road to watch. It was a great moment. Looking along the road they saw all the shop-keepers at their doors, the pavements eager. And then, in the distance, the white horse jingling its trappings of scarlet hair and bells, with the dusky Kishwégin sitting on the saddle-blanket of brilliant, lurid stripes, sitting impassive and all dusky above that intermittent flashing of colour: then the chieftain, dark-faced, erect, easy, swathed in a white blanket, with scarlet and black stripes, and all his strange crest of white, tip-dyed feathers swaying down his back: as he came nearer one saw the wolfskin and the brilliant moccasins against the black sides of his horse: Louis and Geoffrey followed, lurid, horrid in the face, wearing blankets with stroke after stroke of blazing colour upon their duskiness, and sitting stern, holding their spears: lastly, Ciccio, on his bay horse with a green seat, flickering hither and thither in the rear, his feathers swaying, his horse sweating, his face ghastlily smiling in its war-paint. So they advanced down the grey pallor of Knarborough Road, in the late wintry afternoon. Somewhere the sun was setting, and far overhead was a flush of orange.

“Well I never!” murmured Miss Pinnegar. “Well I never!”

The strange savageness of the striped Navajo blankets seemed to her unsettling, advancing down Knarborough Road: she examined Kishwégin curiously.

“Can you *believe* that that’s Mr. May — he’s exactly like a girl. Well, well — it makes you wonder what is and what isn’t. But aren’t they good? What? Most striking. Exactly like Indians. You can’t believe your eyes. My word what a terrifying race they — ” Here she uttered a scream and ran back clutching the wall as Ciccio swept past, brushing her with his horse’s tail, and actually swinging his spear so as to touch Alvina and James Houghton lightly with the butt of it. James too started with a cry, the mob at the corner screamed. But Alvina caught the slow, mischievous smile as the painted horror showed his teeth in passing; she was able to flash back an excited laugh. She felt his yellow-tawny eyes linger on her, in that one second, as if negligently.

“I call that too much!” Miss Pinnegar was crying, thoroughly upset. “Now that was unnecessary! Why it was enough to scare one to death. Besides, it’s dangerous. It ought to be put a stop to. I don’t believe in letting these show-people have liberties.”

The cavalcade was slowly passing, with its uneasy horses and its flare of striped colour and its silent riders. Ciccio was trotting softly back, on his green saddle-cloth, suave as velvet, his dusky, naked torso beautiful.

“Eh, you’d think he’d get his death,” the women in the crowd were saying.

“A proper savage one, that. Makes your blood run cold — ”

“Ay, an’ a man for all that, take’s painted face for what’s worth. A tidy man, I say.”

He did not look at Alvina. The faint, mischievous smile uncovered his teeth. He fell in suddenly behind Geoffrey, with a jerk of his steed, calling out to Geoffrey in Italian.

It was becoming cold. The cavalcade fell into a trot, Mr. May shaking rather badly. Ciccio halted, rested his lance against a lamp-post, switched his green blanket from beneath him, flung it round him as he sat, and darted off. They had all disappeared over the brow of Lumley Hill, descending. He was gone too. In the wintry twilight the crowd began, lingeringly, to turn away. And in some strange way, it manifested its disapproval of the spectacle: as grown-up men and women, they were a little bit insulted by such a show. It was an anachronism. They wanted a direct appeal to the mind. Miss Pinnegar expressed it.

“Well,” she said, when she was safely back in Manchester House, with the gas lighted, and as she was pouring the boiling water into the tea-pot, “You may say what you like. It’s interesting in a way, just to show what savage Red-Indians

were like. But it's childish. It's only childishness. I can't understand, myself, how people can go on liking shows. Nothing happens. It's not like the cinema, where you see it all and take it all in at once; you know everything at a glance. You don't know anything by looking at these people. You know they're only men dressed up, for money. I can't see why you should encourage it. I don't hold with idle show-people, parading round, I don't, myself. I like to go to the cinema once a week. It's instruction, you take it all in at a glance, all you need to know, and it lasts you for a week. You can get to know everything about people's actual lives from the cinema. I don't see why you want people dressing up and showing off."

They sat down to their tea and toast and marmalade, during this harangue. Miss Pinnegar was always like a douche of cold water to Alvina, bringing her back to consciousness after a delicious excitement. In a minute Madame and Ciccio and all seemed to become unreal — the actual unrealities: while the ragged dithering pictures of the film were actual, real as the day. And Alvina was always put out when this happened. She really hated Miss Pinnegar. Yet she had nothing to answer. They were unreal, Madame and Ciccio and the rest. Ciccio was just a fantasy blown in on the wind, to blow away again. The real, permanent thing was Woodhouse, the *semper idem* Knarborough Road, and the unchangeable grubby gloom of Manchester House, with the stuffy, padding Miss Pinnegar, and her father, whose fingers, whose very soul seemed dirty with pennies. These were the solid, permanent fact. These were life itself. And Ciccio, splashing up on his bay horse and green cloth, he was a mountebank and an extraneous nonentity, a coloured old rag blown down the Knarborough Road into Limbo. Into Limbo. Whilst Miss Pinnegar and her father sat frowstily on for ever, eating their toast and cutting off the crust, and sipping their third cup of tea. They would never blow away — never, never. Woodhouse was there to eternity. And the Natcha-Kee-Tawara Troupe was blowing like a rag of old paper into Limbo. Nothingness! Poor Madame! Poor gallant histrionic Madame! The frowsy Miss Pinnegar could crumple her up and throw her down the utilitarian drain, and have done with her. Whilst Miss Pinnegar lived on for ever.

This put Alvina into a sharp temper.

"Miss Pinnegar," she said. "I do think you go on in the most unattractive way sometimes. You're a regular spoil-sport."

"Well," said Miss Pinnegar tartly. "I don't approve of your way of sport, I'm afraid."

"You can't disapprove of it as much as I hate your spoil-sport existence," said Alvina in a flare.

"Alvina, are you mad!" said her father.

“Wonder I’m not,” said Alvina, “considering what my life is.”

CHAPTER VIII

CICCIO

Madame did not pick up her spirits, after her cold. For two days she lay in bed, attended by Mrs. Rollings and Alvina and the young men. But she was most careful never to give any room for scandal. The young men might not approach her save in the presence of some third party. And then it was strictly a visit of ceremony or business.

“Oh, your Woodhouse, how glad I shall be when I have left it,” she said to Alvina. “I feel it is unlucky for me.”

“Do you?” said Alvina. “But if you’d had this bad cold in some places, you might have been much worse, don’t you think?”

“Oh my dear!” cried Madame. “Do you think I could confuse you in my dislike of this Woodhouse? Oh no! You are not Woodhouse. On the contrary, I think it is unkind for you also, this place. You look — also — what shall I say — thin, not very happy.”

It was a note of interrogation.

“I’m sure I dislike Woodhouse much more than you can,” replied Alvina.

“I am sure. Yes! I am sure. I see it. Why don’t you go away? Why don’t you marry?”

“Nobody wants to marry me,” said Alvina.

Madame looked at her searchingly, with shrewd black eyes under her arched eyebrows.

“How!” she exclaimed. “How don’t they? You are not bad looking, only a little too thin — too haggard — ”

She watched Alvina. Alvina laughed uncomfortably.

“Is there *nobody*?” persisted Madame.

“Not now,” said Alvina. “Absolutely nobody.” She looked with a confused laugh into Madame’s strict black eyes. “You see I didn’t care for the Woodhouse young men, either. I *couldn’t*.”

Madame nodded slowly up and down. A secret satisfaction came over her

pallid, waxy countenance, in which her black eyes were like twin swift extraneous creatures: oddly like two bright little dark animals in the snow.

“Sure!” she said, sapient. “Sure! How could you? But there are other men besides these here — ” She waved her hand to the window. “I don’t meet them, do I?” said Alvina.

“No, not often. But sometimes! sometimes!”

There was a silence between the two women, very pregnant. “Englishwomen,” said Madame, “are so practical. Why are they?”

“I suppose they can’t help it,” said Alvina. “But they’re not half so practical and clever as *you*, Madame.”

“Oh la — la! I am practical differently. I am practical impractically — ” she stumbled over the words. “But your Sue now, in *Jude the Obscure* — is it not an interesting book? And is she not always too practically practical. If she had been impractically practical she could have been quite happy. Do you know what I mean? — no. But she is ridiculous. Sue: so Anna Karénine. Ridiculous both. Don’t you think?”

“Why?” said Alvina.

“Why did they both make everybody unhappy, when they had the man they wanted, and enough money? I think they are both so silly. If they had been beaten, they would have lost all their practical ideas and troubles, merely forgot them, and been happy enough. I am a woman who says it. Such ideas they have are not tragical. No, not at all. They are nonsense, you see, nonsense. That is all. Nonsense. Sue and Anna, they are — nonsensical. That is all. No tragedy whatsoever. Nonsense. I am a woman. I know men also. And I know nonsense when I see it. Englishwomen are all nonsense: the worst women in the world for nonsense.”

“Well, I am English,” said Alvina.

“Yes, my dear, you are English. But you are not necessarily so nonsensical. Why are you at all?”

“Nonsensical?” laughed Alvina. “But I don’t know what you call my nonsense.”

“Ah,” said Madame wearily. “They never understand. But I like you, my dear. I am an old woman — ”

“Younger than I,” said Alvina.

“Younger than you, because I am practical from the heart, and not only from the head. You are not practical from the heart. And yet you have a heart.”

“But all Englishwomen have good hearts,” protested Alvina.

“No! No!” objected Madame. “They are all ve-ry kind, and ve-ry practical with their kindness. But they have no heart in all their kindness. It is all head, all

head: the kindness of the head.”

“I can’t agree with you,” said Alvina.

“No. No. I don’t expect it. But I don’t mind. You are very kind to me, and I thank you. But it is from the head, you see. And so I thank you from the head. From the heart — no.”

Madame plucked her white fingers together and laid them on her breast with a gesture of repudiation. Her black eyes stared spitefully.

“But Madame,” said Alvina, nettled, “I should never be half such a good business woman as you. Isn’t that from the head?”

“Ha! Of course! Of course you wouldn’t be a good business woman. Because you are kind from the head. I — ” she tapped her forehead and shook her head — ”I am not kind from the head. From the head I am business-woman, good business-woman. Of course I am a good business-woman — of course! But — ” here she changed her expression, widened her eyes, and laid her hand on her breast — ”when the heart speaks — then I listen with the heart. I do not listen with the head. The heart hears the heart. The head — that is another thing. But you have blue eyes, you cannot understand. Only dark eyes — ” She paused and mused.

“And what about yellow eyes?” asked Alvina, laughing.

Madame darted a look at her, her lips curling with a very faint, fine smile of derision. Yet for the first time her black eyes dilated and became warm.

“Yellow eyes like Ciccio’s?” she said, with her great watchful eyes and her smiling, subtle mouth. “They are the darkest of all.” And she shook her head roguishly.

“Are they!” said Alvina confusedly, feeling a blush burning up her throat into her face.

“Ha — ha!” laughed Madame. “Ha-ha! I am an old woman, you see. My heart is old enough to be kind, and my head is old enough to be clever. My heart is kind to few people — very few — especially in this England. My young men know that. But perhaps to you it is kind.”

“Thank you,” said Alvina.

“There! From the head *Thank you*. It is not well done, you see. You see!”

But Alvina ran away in confusion. She felt Madame was having her on a string.

Mr. May enjoyed himself hugely playing Kishwégin. When Madame came downstairs Louis, who was a good satirical mimic, imitated him. Alvina happened to come into their sitting-room in the midst of their bursts of laughter. They all stopped and looked at her cautiously.

“Continuez! Continuez!” said Madame to Louis. And to Alvina: “Sit down,

my dear, and see what a good actor we have in our Louis.”

Louis glanced round, laid his head a little on one side and drew in his chin, with Mr. May’s smirk exactly, and wagging his tail slightly, he commenced to play the false Kishwégin. He sidled and bridled and ejaculated with raised hands, and in the dumb show the tall Frenchman made such a ludicrous caricature of Mr. Houghton’s manager that Madame wept again with laughter, whilst Max leaned back against the wall and giggled continuously like some pot involuntarily boiling. Geoffrey spread his shut fists across the table and shouted with laughter, Ciccio threw back his head and showed all his teeth in a loud laugh of delighted derision. Alvina laughed also. But she flushed. There was a certain biting, annihilating quality in Louis’ derision of the absentee. And the others enjoyed it so much. At moments Alvina caught her lip between her teeth, it was so screamingly funny, and so annihilating. She laughed in spite of herself. In spite of herself she was shaken into a convulsion of laughter. Louis was masterful — he mastered her psyche. She laughed till her head lay helpless on the chair, she could not move. Helpless, inert she lay, in her orgasm of laughter. The end of Mr. May. Yet she was hurt.

And then Madame wiped her own shrewd black eyes, and nodded slow approval. Suddenly Louis started and held up a warning finger. They all at once covered their smiles and pulled themselves together. Only Alvina lay silently laughing.

“Oh, good morning, Mrs. Rollings!” they heard Mr. May’s voice. “Your company is lively. Is Miss Houghton here? May I go through?” They heard his quick little step and his quick little tap.

“Come in,” called Madame.

The Natcha-Kee-Tawaras all sat with straight faces. Only poor Alvina lay back in her chair in a new weak convulsion. Mr. May glanced quickly round, and advanced to Madame.

“Oh, good-morning, Madame, so glad to see you downstairs,” he said, taking her hand and bowing ceremoniously. “Excuse my intruding on your mirth!” He looked archly round. Alvina was still incompetent. She lay leaning sideways in her chair, and could not even speak to him.

“It was evidently a good joke,” he said. “May I hear it too?”

“Oh,” said Madame, drawling. “It was no joke. It was only Louis making a fool of himself, doing a turn.”

“Must have been a good one,” said Mr. May. “Can’t we put it on?”

“No,” drawled Madame, “it was nothing — just a nonsensical mood of the moment. Won’t you sit down? You would like a little whiskey? — yes?”

Max poured out whiskey and water for Mr. May.

Alvina sat with her face averted, quiet, but unable to speak to Mr. May. Max and Louis had become polite. Geoffrey stared with his big, dark-blue eyes stolidly at the newcomer. Ciccio leaned with his arms on his knees, looking sideways under his long lashes at the inert Alvina.

“Well,” said Madame, “and are you satisfied with your houses?”

“Oh yes,” said Mr. May. “Quite! The two nights have been excellent. Excellent!”

“Ah — I am glad. And Miss Houghton tells me I should not dance tomorrow, it is too soon.”

“Miss Houghton *knows*,” said Mr. May archly.

“Of course!” said Madame. “I must do as she tells me.”

“Why yes, since it is for your good, and not hers.”

“Of course! Of course! It is very kind of her.”

“Miss Houghton is *most* kind — to *every one*,” said Mr. May.

“I am sure,” said Madame. “And I am very glad you have been such a good Kishwégin. That is very nice also.”

“Yes,” replied Mr. May. “I begin to wonder if I have mistaken my vocation. I should have been *on* the boards, instead of behind them.”

“No doubt,” said Madame. “But it is a little late — ”

The eyes of the foreigners, watching him, flattered Mr. May.

“I’m afraid it is,” he said. “Yes. Popular taste is a mysterious thing. How do you feel, now? Do you feel they appreciate your work as much as they did?”

Madame watched him with her black eyes.

“No,” she replied. “They don’t. The pictures are driving us away. Perhaps we shall last for ten years more. And after that, we are finished.”

“You think so,” said Mr. May, looking serious.

“I am sure,” she said, nodding sagely.

“But why is it?” said Mr. May, angry and petulant.

“Why is it? I don’t know. I don’t know. The pictures are cheap, and they are easy, and they cost the audience nothing, no feeling of the heart, no appreciation of the spirit, cost them nothing of these. And so they like them, and they don’t like us, because they must *feel* the things we do, from the heart, and appreciate them from the spirit. There!”

“And they don’t want to appreciate and to feel?” said Mr. May.

“No. They don’t want. They want it all through the eye, and finished — so! Just curiosity, impertinent curiosity. That’s all. In all countries, the same. And so — in ten years’ time — no more Kishwégin at all.”

“No. Then what future have you?” said Mr. May gloomily.

“I may be dead — who knows. If not, I shall have my little apartment in

Lausanne, or in Bellizona, and I shall be a bourgeoisie once more, and the good Catholic which I am.”

“Which I am also,” said Mr. May.

“So! Are you? An American Catholic?”

“Well — English — Irish — American.”

“So!”

Mr. May never felt more gloomy in his life than he did that day. Where, finally, was he to rest his troubled head?

There was not all peace in the Natcha-Kee-Tawara group either. For Thursday, there was to be a change of program — “Kishwégin’s Wedding — ” (with the white prisoner, be it said) — was to take the place of the previous scene. Max of course was the director of the rehearsal. Madame would not come near the theatre when she herself was not to be acting.

Though very quiet and unobtrusive as a rule, Max could suddenly assume an air of *hauteur* and overbearing which was really very annoying. Geoffrey always fumed under it. But Ciccio it put into unholy, ungovernable tempers. For Max, suddenly, would reveal his contempt of the Eytalian, as he called Ciccio, using the Cockney word.

“Bah! quelle tête de veau,” said Max, suddenly contemptuous and angry because Ciccio, who really was slow at taking in the things said to him, had once more failed to understand.

“Comment?” queried Ciccio, in his slow, derisive way.

“*Comment.*” sneered Max, in echo. “*What? What? Why what did I say? Calf’s-head I said. Pig’s-head, if that seems more suitable to you.*”

“To whom? To me or to you?” said Ciccio, sidling up.

“To you, lout of an Italian.”

Max’s colour was up, he held himself erect, his brown hair seemed to rise erect from his forehead, his blue eyes glared fierce.

“That is to say, to me, from an uncivilized German pig, ah? ah?”

All this in French. Alvina, as she sat at the piano, saw Max tall and blanched with anger; Ciccio with his neck stuck out, oblivious and convulsed with rage, stretching his neck at Max. All were in ordinary dress, but without coats, acting in their shirt-sleeves. Ciccio was clutching a property knife.

“Now! None of that! None of that!” said Mr. May, peremptory. But Ciccio, stretching forward taut and immobile with rage, was quite unconscious. His hand was fast on his stage knife.

“A dirty Eytalian,” said Max, in English, turning to Mr. May. “They understand nothing.”

But the last word was smothered in Ciccio’s spring and stab. Max half started

on to his guard, received the blow on his collar-bone, near the pommel of the shoulder, reeled round on top of Mr. May, whilst Ciccio sprang like a cat down from the stage and bounded across the theatre and out of the door, leaving the knife rattling on the boards behind him. Max recovered and sprang like a demon, white with rage, straight out into the theatre after him.

“Stop — stop — !” cried Mr. May.

“Hake, Max! Max, Max, attends!” cried Louis and Geoffrey, as Louis sprang down after his friend. Thud went the boards again, with the spring of a man.

Alvina, who had been seated waiting at the piano below, started up and overturned her chair as Ciccio rushed past her. Now Max, white, with set blue eyes, was upon her.

“Don’t — !” she cried, lifting her hand to stop his progress. He saw her, swerved, and hesitated, turned to leap over the seats and avoid her, when Louis caught him and flung his arms round him.

“Max — attends, ami! Laisse le partir. Max, to sais que je t’aime. Tu le sais, ami. Tu le sais. Laisse le patir.”

Max and Louis wrestled together in the gangway, Max looking down with hate on his friend. But Louis was determined also, he wrestled as fiercely as Max, and at last the latter began to yield. He was panting and beside himself. Louis still held him by the hand and by the arm.

“Let him go, brother, he isn’t worth it. What does he understand, Max, dear brother, what does he understand? These fellows from the south, they are half children, half animal. They don’t know what they are doing. Has he hurt you, dear friend? Has he hurt you? It was a dummy knife, but it was a heavy blow — the dog of an Italian. Let us see.”

So gradually Max was brought to stand still. From under the edge of his waistcoat, on the shoulder, the blood was already staining the shirt. “Are you cut, brother, brother?” said Louis. “Let us see.”

Max now moved his arm with pain. They took off his waistcoat and pushed back his shirt. A nasty blackening wound, with the skin broken. “If the bone isn’t broken!” said Louis anxiously. “If the bone isn’t broken! Lift thy arm, frère — lift. It hurts you — so — No — no — it is not broken — no — the bone is not broken.”

“There is no bone broken, I know,” said Max.

“The animal. He hasn’t done *that*, at least.”

“Where do you imagine he’s gone?” asked Mr. May.

The foreigners shrugged their shoulders, and paid no heed. There was no more rehearsal.

“We had best go home and speak to Madame,” said Mr. May, who was very

frightened for his evening performance.

They locked up the Endeavour. Alvina was thinking of Ciccio. He was gone in his shirt sleeves. She had taken his jacket and hat from the dressing-room at the back, and carried them under her rain-coat, which she had on her arm.

Madame was in a state of perturbation. She had heard some one come in at the back, and go upstairs, and go out again. Mrs. Rollings had told her it was the Italian, who had come in in his shirt-sleeves and gone out in his black coat and black hat, taking his bicycle, without saying a word. Poor Madame! She was struggling into her shoes, she had her hat on, when the others arrived.

“What is it?” she cried.

She heard a hurried explanation from Louis.

“Ah, the animal, the animal, he wasn’t worth all my pains!” cried poor Madame, sitting with one shoe off and one shoe on. “Why, Max, why didst thou not remain man enough to control that insulting mountain temper of thine. Have I not said, and said, and said that in the Natcha-Kee-Tawara there was but one nation, the Red Indian, and but one tribe, the tribe of Kishwe? And now thou hast called him a dirty Italian, or a dog of an Italian, and he has behaved like an animal. Too much, too much of an animal, too little *esprit*.” But thou, Max, art almost as bad. Thy temper is a devil’s, which maybe is worse than an animal’s. Ah, this Woodhouse, a curse is on it, I know it is. Would we were away from it. Will the week never pass? We shall have to find Ciccio. Without him the company is ruined — until I get a substitute. I must get a substitute. And how? — and where? — in this country? — tell me that. I am tired of Natcha-Kee-Tawara. There is no true tribe of Kishwe — no, never. I have had enough of Natcha-Kee-Tawara. Let us break up, let us part, my braves, let us say adieu here in this *funeste* Woodhouse.”

“Oh, Madame, dear Madame,” said Louis, “let us hope. Let us swear a closer fidelity, dear Madame, our Kishwégin. Let us never part. Max, thou dost not want to part, brother, well-loved? Thou dost not want to part, brother whom I love? And thou, Geoffrey, thou — ”

Madame burst into tears, Louis wept too, even Max turned aside his face, with tears. Alvina stole out of the room, followed by Mr. May. In a while Madame came out to them.

“Oh,” she said. “You have not gone away! We are wondering which way Ciccio will have gone, on to Knarborough or to Marchay. Geoffrey will go on his bicycle to find him. But shall it be to Knarborough or to Marchay?”

“Ask the policeman in the market-place,” said Alvina. “He’s sure to have noticed him, because Ciccio’s yellow bicycle is so uncommon.”

Mr. May tripped out on this errand, while the others discussed among

themselves where Ciccio might be.

Mr. May returned, and said that Ciccio had ridden off down the Knarborough Road. It was raining slightly.

“Ah!” said Madame. “And now how to find him, in that great town. I am afraid he will leave us without pity.”

“Surely he will want to speak to Geoffrey before he goes,” said Louis. “They were always good friends.”

They all looked at Geoffrey. He shrugged his broad shoulders. “Always good friends,” he said. “Yes. He will perhaps wait for me at his cousin’s in Battersea.” In Knarborough, I don’t know.”

“How much money had he?” asked Mr. May.

Madame spread her hands and lifted her shoulders.

“Who knows?” she said.

“These Italians,” said Louis, turning to Mr. May. “They have always money. In another country, they will not spend one sou if they can help. They are like this — ” And he made the Neapolitan gesture drawing in the air with his fingers.

“But would he abandon you all without a word?” cried Mr. May. “Yes! Yes!” said Madame, with a sort of stoic pathos. “*He* would. He alone would do such a thing. But he would do it.”

“And what point would he make for?”

“What point? You mean where would he go? To Battersea, no doubt, to his cousin — and then to Italy, if he thinks he has saved enough money to buy land, or whatever it is.”

“And so good-bye to him,” said Mr. May bitterly.

“Geoffrey ought to know,” said Madame, looking at Geoffrey. Geoffrey shrugged his shoulders, and would not give his comrade away.

“No,” he said. “I don’t know. He will leave a message at Battersea, I know. But I don’t know if he will go to Italy.”

“And you don’t know where to find him in Knarborough?” asked Mr. May, sharply, very much on the spot.

“No — I don’t. Perhaps at the station he will go by train to London.” It was evident Geoffrey was not going to help Mr. May.

“Alors!” said Madame, cutting through this futility. “Go thou to Knarborough, Geoffrey, and see — and be back at the theatre for work. Go now. And if thou can’st find him, bring him again to us. Tell him to come out of kindness to me. Tell him.”

And she waved the young man away. He departed on his nine mile ride through the rain to Knarborough.

“They know,” said Madame. “They know each other’s places. It is a little

more than a year since we came to Knarborough. But they will remember.”

Geoffrey rode swiftly as possible through the mud. He did not care very much whether he found his friend or not. He liked the Italian, but he never looked on him as a permanency. He knew Ciccio was dissatisfied, and wanted a change. He knew that Italy was pulling him away from the troupe, with which he had been associated now for three years or more. And the Swiss from Martigny knew that the Neapolitan would go, breaking all ties, one day suddenly back to Italy. It was so, and Geoffrey was philosophical about it.

He rode into town, and the first thing he did was to seek out the music-hall artistes at their lodgings. He knew a good many of them. They gave him a welcome and a whiskey — but none of them had seen Ciccio. They sent him off to other artistes, other lodging-houses. He went the round of associates known and unknown, of lodgings strange and familiar, of third-rate possible public houses. Then he went to the Italians down in the Marsh — he knew these people always ask for one another. And then, hurrying, he dashed to the Midland Station, and then to the Great Central Station, asking the porters on the London departure platform if they had seen his pal, a man with a yellow bicycle, and a black bicycle cape. All to no purpose.

Geoffrey hurriedly lit his lamp and swung off in the dark back to Woodhouse. He was a powerfully built, imperturbable fellow. He pressed slowly uphill through the streets, then ran downhill into the darkness of the industrial country. He had continually to cross the new tram-lines, which were awkward, and he had occasionally to dodge the brilliantly-illuminated tram-cars which threaded their way across-country through so much darkness. All the time it rained, and his back wheel slipped under him, in the mud and on the new tram-track.

As he pressed in the long darkness that lay between Slaters Mill and Durbeyhouses, he saw a light ahead — another cyclist. He moved to his side of the road. The light approached very fast. It was a strong acetylene flare. He watched it. A flash and a splash and he saw the humped back of what was probably Ciccio going by at a great pace on the low racing machine.

“Hi Cic’ — ! Ciccio!” he yelled, dropping off his own bicycle.

“Ha-er-er!” he heard the answering shout, unmistakably Italian, way down the darkness.

He turned — saw the other cyclist had stopped. The flare swung round, and Ciccio softly rode up. He dropped off beside Geoffrey. “Toi!” said Ciccio.

“Hé! Où vas-tu?”

“Hé!” ejaculated Ciccio.

Their conversation consisted a good deal in noises variously ejaculated.

“Coming back?” asked Geoffrey.

“Where’ve you been?” retorted Ciccio.

“Knarborough — looking for thee. Where have you — ?”

“Buckled my front wheel at Durbeyhouses.”

“Come off?”

“Hé!”

“Hurt?”

“Nothing.”

“Max is all right.”

“Merde!”

“Come on, come back with me.”

“Nay.” Ciccio shook his head.

“Madame’s crying. Wants thee to come back.”

Ciccio shook his head.

“Come on, Cic’ — ” said Geoffrey.

Ciccio shook his head.

“Never?” said Geoffrey.

“Basta — had enough,” said Ciccio, with an invisible grimace. “Come for a bit, and we’ll clear together.”

Ciccio again shook his head.

“What, is it adieu?”

Ciccio did not speak.

“Don’t go, comrade,” said Geoffrey.

“Faut,” said Ciccio, slightly derisive.

“Eh alors! I’d like to come with thee. What?”

“Where?”

“Doesn’t matter. Thou’rt going to Italy?”

“Who knows! — seems so.”

“I’d like to go back.”

“Eh alors!” Ciccio half veered round.

“Wait for me a few days,” said Geoffrey.

“Where?”

“See you tomorrow in Knarborough. Go to Mrs. Pym’s, Hampden Street. Gittiventi is there. Right, eh?”

“I’ll think about it.”

“Eleven o’clock, eh?”

“I’ll think about it.”

“Friends ever — Ciccio — eh?” Geoffrey held out his hand.

Ciccio slowly took it. The two men leaned to each other and kissed farewell, on either cheek.

“Tomorrow, Cic’ — ”

“Au revoir, Gigi.”

Ciccio dropped on to his bicycle and was gone in a breath. Geoffrey waited a moment for a tram which was rushing brilliantly up to him in the rain. Then he mounted and rode in the opposite direction. He went straight down to Lumley, and Madame had to remain on tenterhooks till ten o’clock.

She heard the news, and said:

“Tomorrow I go to fetch him.” And with this she went to bed.

In the morning she was up betimes, sending a note to Alvina. Alvina appeared at nine o’clock.

“You will come with me?” said Madame. “Come. Together we will go to Knarborough and bring back the naughty Ciccio. Come with me, because I haven’t all my strength. Yes, you will? Good! Good! Let us tell the young men, and we will go now, on the tram-car.”

“But I am not properly dressed,” said Alvina.

“Who will see?” said Madame. “Come, let us go.”

They told Geoffrey they would meet him at the corner of Hampden Street at five minutes to eleven.

“You see,” said Madame to Alvina, “they are very funny, these young men, particularly Italians. You must never let them think you have caught them. Perhaps he will not let us see him — who knows? Perhaps he will go off to Italy all the same.”

They sat in the bumping tram-car, a long and wearying journey. And then they tramped the dreary, hideous streets of the manufacturing town. At the corner of the street they waited for Geoffrey, who rode up muddily on his bicycle.

“Ask Ciccio to come out to us, and we will go and drink coffee at the Geisha Restaurant — or tea or something,” said Madame.

Again the two women waited wearily at the street-end. At last Geoffrey returned, shaking his head.

“He won’t come?” cried Madame.

“No.”

“He says he is going back to Italy?”

“To London.”

“It is the same. You can never trust them. Is he quite obstinate?” Geoffrey lifted his shoulders. Madame could see the beginnings of defection in him too. And she was tired and dispirited.

“We shall have to finish the Natcha-Kee-Tawara, that is all,” she said fretfully.

Geoffrey watched her stolidly, impassively.

“Dost thou want to go with him?” she asked suddenly.

Geoffrey smiled sheepishly, and his colour deepened. But he did not speak.

“Go then — ” she said. “Go then! Go with him! But for the sake of my honour, finish this week at Woodhouse. Can I make Miss Houghton’s father lose these two nights? Where is your shame? Finish this week and then go, go — But finish this week. Tell Francesco that. I have finished with him. But let him finish this engagement. Don’t put me to shame, don’t destroy my honour, and the honour of the Natcha-Kee-Tawara. Tell him that.”

Geoffrey turned again into the house. Madame, in her chic little black hat and spotted veil, and her trim black coat-and-skirt, stood there at the street-corner staring before her, shivering a little with cold, but saying no word of any sort.

Again Geoffrey appeared out of the doorway. His face was impassive.

“He says he doesn’t want,” he said.

“Ah!” she cried suddenly in French, “the ungrateful, the animal! He shall suffer. See if he shall not suffer. The low canaille, without faith or feeling. My Max, thou wert right. Ah, such canaille should be beaten, as dogs are beaten, till they follow at heel. Will no one beat him for me, no one? Yes. Go back. Tell him before he leaves England he shall feel the hand of Kishwégin, and it shall be heavier than the Black Hand. Tell him that, the coward, that causes a woman’s word to be broken against her will. Ah, canaille, canaille! Neither faith nor feeling, neither faith nor feeling. Trust them not, dogs of the south.” She took a few agitated steps down the pavement. Then she raised her veil to wipe away her tears of anger and bitter disappointment.

“Wait a bit,” said Alvina. “I’ll go.” She was touched.

“No. Don’t you!” cried Madame.

“Yes I will,” she said. The light of battle was in her eyes. “You’ll come with me to the door,” she said to Geoffrey.

Geoffrey started obediently, and led the way up a long narrow stair, covered with yellow-and-brown oilcloth, rather worn, on to the top of the house.

“Ciccio,” he said, outside the door.

“Oui!” came the curly voice of Ciccio.

Geoffrey opened the door. Ciccio was sitting on a narrow bed, in a rather poor attic, under the steep slope of the roof.

“Don’t come in,” said Alvina to Geoffrey, looking over her shoulder at him as she entered. Then she closed the door behind her, and stood with her back to it, facing the Italian. He sat loose on the bed, a cigarette between his fingers, dropping ash on the bare boards between his feet. He looked up curiously at Alvina. She stood watching him with wide, bright blue eyes, smiling slightly, and saying nothing. He looked up at her steadily, on his guard, from under his

long black lashes.

“Won’t you come?” she said, smiling and looking into his eyes. He flicked off the ash of his cigarette with his little finger. She wondered why he wore the nail of his little finger so long, so very long. Still she smiled at him, and still he gave no sign.

“Do come!” she urged, never taking her eyes from him.

He made not the slightest movement, but sat with his hands dropped between his knees, watching her, the cigarette wavering up its blue thread of smoke.

“Won’t you?” she said, as she stood with her back to the door. “Won’t you come?” She smiled strangely and vividly.

Suddenly she took a pace forward, stooped, watching his face as if timidly, caught his brown hand in her own and lifted it towards herself. His hand started, dropped the cigarette, but was not withdrawn.

“You will come, won’t you?” she said, smiling gently into his strange, watchful yellow eyes, that looked fixedly into hers, the dark pupil opening round and softening. She smiled into his softening round eyes, the eyes of some animal which stares in one of its silent, gentler moments. And suddenly she kissed his hand, kissed it twice, quickly, on the fingers and the back. He wore a silver ring. Even as she kissed his fingers with her lips, the silver ring seemed to her a symbol of his subjection, inferiority. She drew his hand slightly. And he rose to his feet.

She turned round and took the door-handle, still holding his fingers in her left hand.

“You are coming, aren’t you?” she said, looking over her shoulder into his eyes. And taking consent from his unchanging eyes, she let go his hand and slightly opened the door. He turned slowly, and taking his coat from a nail, slung it over his shoulders and drew it on. Then he picked up his hat, and put his foot on his half-smoked cigarette, which lay smoking still. He followed her out of the room, walking with his head rather forward, in the half loutish, sensual-subjected way of the Italians.

As they entered the street, they saw the trim, French figure of Madame standing alone, as if abandoned. Her face was very white under her spotted veil, her eyes very black. She watched Ciccio following behind Alvina in his dark, hang-dog fashion, and she did not move a muscle until he came to a standstill in front of her. She was watching his face.

“Te voila donc!” she said, without expression. “Allons boire un café, hé? Let us go and drink some coffee.” She had now put an inflection of tenderness into her voice. But her eyes were black with anger. Ciccio smiled slowly, the slow, fine, stupid smile, and turned to walk alongside.

Madame said nothing as they went. Geoffrey passed on his bicycle, calling out that he would go straight to Woodhouse.

When the three sat with their cups of coffee, Madame pushed up her veil just above her eyes, so that it was a black band above her brows. Her face was pale and full like a child's, but almost stonily expressionless, her eyes were black and inscrutable. She watched both Ciccio and Alvina with her black, inscrutable looks.

"Would you like also biscuits with your coffee, the two of you?" she said, with an amiable intonation which her strange black looks belied.

"Yes," said Alvina. She was a little flushed, as if defiant, while Ciccio sat sheepishly, turning aside his ducked head, the slow, stupid, yet fine smile on his lips.

"And no more trouble with Max, hein? — you Ciccio?" said Madame, still with the amiable intonation and the same black, watching eyes. "No more of these stupid scenes, hein? What? Do you answer me.

"No more from me," he said, looking up at her with a narrow, catlike look in his derisive eyes.

"Ho? No? No more? Good then! It is good! We are glad, aren't we, Miss Houghton, that Ciccio has come back and there are to be no more rows? — hein? — aren't we?"

"I'm awfully glad," said Alvina.

"Awfully glad — yes — awfully glad! You hear, you Ciccio. And you remember another time. What? Don't you? Hé"

He looked up at her, the slow, derisive smile curling his lips. "Sure," he said slowly, with subtle intonation.

"Yes. Good! Well then! Well then! We are all friends. We are all friends, aren't we, all the Natcha-Kee-Tawaras? Hé? What you think? What you say?"

"Yes," said Ciccio, again looking up at her with his yellow, glinting eyes.

"All right! All right then! It is all right — forgotten — " Madame sounded quite frank and restored. But the sullen watchfulness in her eyes, and the narrowed look in Ciccio's, as he glanced at her, showed another state behind the obviousness of the words. "And Miss Houghton is one of us! Yes? She has united us once more, and so she has become one of us." Madame smiled strangely from her blank, round white face.

"I should love to be one of the Natcha-Kee-Tawaras," said Alvina.

"Yes — well — why not? Why not become one? Why not? What you say, Ciccio? You can play the piano, perhaps do other things. Perhaps better than Kishwégin. What you say, Ciccio, should she not join us? Is she not one of us?"

He smiled and showed his teeth but did not answer.

“Well, what is it? Say then? Shall she not?”

“Yes,” said Ciccio, unwilling to commit himself.

“Yes, so I say! So I say. Quite a good idea! We will think of it, and speak perhaps to your father, and you shall come! Yes.”

So the two women returned to Woodhouse by the tram-car, while Ciccio rode home on his bicycle. It was surprising how little Madame and Alvina found to say to one another.

Madame effected the reunion of her troupe, and all seemed pretty much as before. She had decided to dance the next night, the Saturday night. On Sunday the party would leave for Warsall, about thirty miles away, to fulfil their next engagement.

That evening Ciccio, whenever he had a moment to spare, watched Alvina. She knew it. But she could not make out what his watching meant. In the same way he might have watched a serpent, had he found one gliding in the theatre. He looked at her sideways, furtively, but persistently. And yet he did not want to meet her glance. He avoided her, and watched her. As she saw him standing, in his negligent, muscular, slouching fashion, with his head dropped forward, and his eyes sideways, sometimes she disliked him. But there was a sort of *finesse* about his face. His skin was delicately tawny, and slightly lustrous. The eyes were set in so dark, that one expected them to be black and flashing. And then one met the yellow pupils, sulphureous and remote. It was like meeting a lion. His long, fine nose, his rather long, rounded chin and curling lips seemed refined through ages of forgotten culture. He was waiting: silent there, with something muscular and remote about his very droop, he was waiting. What for? Alvina could not guess. She wanted to meet his eye, to have an open understanding with him. But he would not. When she went up to talk to him, he answered in his stupid fashion, with a smile of the mouth and no change of the eyes, saying nothing at all. Obstinate he held away from her. When he was in his war-paint, for one moment she hated his muscular, handsome, downward-drooping torso: so stupid and full. The fine sharp uprightness of Max seemed much finer, clearer, more manly. Ciccio’s velvety, suave heaviness, the very heave of his muscles, so full and softly powerful, sickened her.

She flashed away angrily on her piano. Madame, who was dancing Kishwégin on the last evening, cast sharp glances at her. Alvina had avoided Madame as Ciccio had avoided Alvina — elusive and yet conscious, a distance, and yet a connection.

Madame danced beautifully. No denying it, she was an artist. She became something quite different: fresh, virginal, pristine, a magic creature flickering there. She was infinitely delicate and attractive. Her braves became glamorous

and heroic at once, and magically she cast her spell over them. It was all very well for Alvina to bang the piano crossly. She could not put out the glow which surrounded Kishwégin and her troupe. Ciccio was handsome now: without war-paint, and roused, fearless and at the same time suggestive, a dark, mysterious glamour on his face, passionate and remote. A stranger — and so beautiful. Alvina flashed at the piano, almost in tears. She hated his beauty. It shut her apart. She had nothing to do with it.

Madame, with her long dark hair hanging in finely-brushed tresses, her cheek burning under its dusky stain, was another creature. How soft she was on her feet. How humble and remote she seemed, as across a chasm from the men. How submissive she was, with an eternity of inaccessible submission. Her hovering dance round the dead bear was exquisite: her dark, secretive curiosity, her admiration of the massive, male strength of the creature, her quivers of triumph over the dead beast, her cruel exultation, and her fear that he was not really dead. It was a lovely sight, suggesting the world's morning, before Eve had bitten any white-fleshed apple, whilst she was still dusky, dark-eyed, and still. And then her stealthy sympathy with the white prisoner! Now indeed she was the dusky Eve tempted into knowledge. Her fascination was ruthless. She knelt by the dead brave, her husband, as she had knelt by the bear: in fear and admiration and doubt and exultation. She gave him the least little push with her foot. Dead meat like the bear! And a flash of delight went over her, that changed into a sob of mortal anguish. And then, flickering, wicked, doubtful, she watched Ciccio wrestling with the bear.

She was the clue to all the action, was Kishwégin. And her dark *braves* seemed to become darker, more secret, malevolent, burning with a cruel fire, and at the same time wistful, knowing their end. Ciccio laughed in a strange way, as he wrestled with the bear, as he had never laughed on the previous evenings. The sound went out into the audience, a soft, malevolent, derisive sound. And when the bear was supposed to have crushed him, and he was to have fallen, he reeled out of the bear's arms and said to Madame, in his derisive voice:

“Vivo sempre, Madame.” And then he fell.

Madame stopped as if shot, hearing his words: “I am still alive, Madame.” She remained suspended motionless, suddenly wilted. Then all at once her hand went to her mouth with a scream:

“The Bear!”

So the scene concluded itself. But instead of the tender, half-wistful triumph of Kishwégin, a triumph electric as it should have been when she took the white man's hand and kissed it, there was a doubt, a hesitancy, a nullity, and Max did not quite know what to do.

After the performance, neither Madame nor Max dared say anything to Ciccio about his innovation into the play. Louis felt he had to speak — it was left to him.

“I say, Cic’ — ” he said, “why did you change the scene? It might have spoiled everything if Madame wasn’t such a genius. Why did you say that?”

“Why,” said Ciccio, answering Louis’ French in Italian, “I am tired of being dead, you see.”

Madame and Max heard in silence.

When Alvina had played *God Save the King* she went round behind the stage. But Ciccio and Geoffrey had already packed up the property, and left. Madame was talking to James Houghton. Louis and Max were busy together. Mr. May came to Alvina.

“Well,” he said. “That closes another week. I think we’ve done very well, in face of difficulties, don’t you?”

“Wonderfully,” she said.

But poor Mr. May spoke and looked pathetically. He seemed to feel forlorn. Alvina was not attending to him. Her eye was roving. She took no notice of him.

Madame came up.

“Well, Miss Houghton,” she said, “time to say good-bye, I suppose.”

“How do you feel after dancing?” asked Alvina.

“Well — not so strong as usual — but not so bad, you know. I shall be all right — thanks to you. I think your father is more ill than I. To me he looks very ill.”

“Father wears himself away,” said Alvina.

“Yes, and when we are no longer young, there is not so much to wear. Well, I must thank you once more — ”

“What time do you leave in the morning?”

“By the train at half-past ten. If it doesn’t rain, the young men will cycle — perhaps all of them. Then they will go when they like — ”

“I will come round to say good-bye — ” said Alvina.

“Oh no — don’t disturb yourself — ”

“Yes, I want to take home the things — the kettle for the bronchitis, and those things — ”

“Oh thank you very much — but don’t trouble yourself. I will send Ciccio with them — or one of the others — ”

“I should like to say good-bye to you all,” persisted Alvina. Madame glanced round at Max and Louis.

“Are we not all here? No. The two have gone. No! Well! Well what time will you come?”

“About nine?”

“Very well, and I leave at ten. Very well. Then au revoir till the morning. Good-night.”

“Good-night,” said Alvina. Her colour was rather flushed.

She walked up with Mr. May, and hardly noticed he was there. After supper, when James Houghton had gone up to count his pennies, Alvina said to Miss Pinnegar:

“Don’t you think father looks rather seedy, Miss Pinnegar?”

“I’ve been thinking so a long time,” said Miss Pinnegar tartly. “What do you think he ought to do?”

“He’s killing himself down there, in all weathers and freezing in that box-office, and then the bad atmosphere. He’s killing himself, that’s all.”

“What can we do?”

“Nothing so long as there’s that place down there. Nothing at all.” Alvina thought so too. So she went to bed.

She was up in time, and watching the clock. It was a grey morning, but not raining. At five minutes to nine, she hurried off to Mrs. Rollings. In the back yard the bicycles were out, glittering and muddy according to their owners. Ciccio was crouching mending a tire, crouching balanced on his toes, near the earth. He turned like a quick-eared animal glancing up as she approached, but did not rise.

“Are you getting ready to go?” she said, looking down at him. He screwed his head round to her unwillingly, upside down, his chin tilted up at her. She did not know him thus inverted. Her eyes rested on his face, puzzled. His chin seemed so large, aggressive. He was a little bit repellent and brutal, inverted. Yet she continued:

“Would you help me to carry back the things we brought for Madame?”

He rose to his feet, but did not look at her. He was wearing broken cycling shoes. He stood looking at his bicycle tube.

“Not just yet,” she said. “I want to say good-bye to Madame. Will you come in half an hour?”

“Yes, I will come,” he said, still watching his bicycle tube, which sprawled nakedly on the floor. The forward drop of his head was curiously beautiful to her, the straight, powerful nape of the neck, the delicate shape of the back of the head, the black hair. The way the neck sprang from the strong, loose shoulders was beautiful. There was something mindless but *intent* about the forward reach of his head. His face seemed colourless, neutral-tinted and expressionless.

She went indoors. The young men were moving about making preparations.

“Come upstairs, Miss Houghton!” called Madame’s voice from above. Alvina

mounted, to find Madame packing.

“It is an uneasy moment, when we are busy to move,” said Madame, looking up at Alvina as if she were a stranger.

“I’m afraid I’m in the way. But I won’t stay a minute.”

“Oh, it is all right. Here are the things you brought — ” Madame indicated a little pile — ”and thank you *very* much, *very* much. I feel you saved my life. And now let me give you one little token of my gratitude. It is not much, because we are not millionaires in the Natcha-Kee-Tawara. Just a little remembrance of our troublesome visit to Woodhouse.”

She presented Alvina with a pair of exquisite bead moccasins, woven in a weird, lovely pattern, with soft deerskin soles and sides.

“They belong to Kishwégin, so it is Kishwégin who gives them to you, because she is grateful to you for saving her life, or at least from a long illness.”

“Oh — but I don’t want to take them — ” said Alvina.

“You don’t like them? Why?”

“I think they’re lovely, lovely! But I don’t want to take them from you — ”

“If I give them, you do not take them from me. You receive them. He?” And Madame pressed back the slippers, opening her plump jewelled hands in a gesture of finality.

“But I don’t like to take *these*,” said Alvina. “I feel they belong to Natcha-Kee-Tawara. And I don’t want to rob Natcha-Kee-Tawara, do I? Do take them back.”

“No, I have given them. You cannot rob Natcha-Kee-Tawara in taking a pair of shoes — impossible!”

“And I’m sure they are much too small for me.”

“Ha!” exclaimed Madame. “It is that! Try.”

“I know they are,” said Alvina, laughing confusedly.

She sat down and took off her own shoe. The moccasin was a little too short — just a little. But it was charming on the foot, charming.

“Yes,” said Madame. “It is too short. Very well. I must find you something else.”

“Please don’t,” said Alvina. “Please don’t find me anything. I don’t want anything. Please!”

“What?” said Madame, eyeing her closely. “You don’t want? Why? You don’t want anything from Natcha-Kee-Tawara, or from Kishwégin? He? From which?”

“Don’t give me anything, please,” said Alvina.

“All right! All right then. I won’t. I won’t give you anything. I can’t give you anything you want from Natcha-Kee-Tawara.”

And Madame busied herself again with the packing.

"I'm awfully sorry you are going," said Alvina.

"Sorry? Why? Yes, so am I sorry we shan't see you any more. Yes, so I am. But perhaps we shall see you another time — he? I shall send you a post-card. Perhaps I shall send one of the young men on his bicycle, to bring you something which I shall buy for you. Yes? Shall I?"

"Oh! I should be awfully glad — but don't buy — " Alvina checked herself in time. "Don't buy anything. Send me a little thing from Natcha-Kee-Tawara. I love the slippers — "

"But they are too small," said Madame, who had been watching her with black eyes that read every motive. Madame too had her avaricious side, and was glad to get back the slippers. "Very well — very well, I will do that. I will send you some small thing from Natcha-Kee-Tawara, and one of the young men shall bring it. Perhaps Ciccio? Hé?"

"Thank you so much," said Alvina, holding out her hand. "Goodbye. I'm so sorry you're going."

"Well — well! We are not going so very far. Not so very far. Perhaps we shall see each other another day. It may be. Goodbye!"

Madame took Alvina's hand, and smiled at her winsomely all at once, kindly, from her inscrutable black eyes. A sudden unusual kindness. Alvina flushed with surprise and a desire to cry.

"Yes. I am sorry you are not with Natcha-Kee-Tawara. But we shall see. Goodbye. I shall do my packing."

Alvina carried down the things she had to remove. Then she went to say good-bye to the young men, who were in various stages of their toilet. Max alone was quite presentable.

Ciccio was just putting on the outer cover of his front tire. She watched his brown thumbs press it into place. He was quick and sure, much more capable, and even masterful, than you would have supposed, seeing his tawny Mediterranean hands. He spun the wheel round, patting it lightly.

"Is it finished?"

"Yes, I think." He reached his pump and blew up the tire. She watched his softly-applied force. What physical, muscular force there was in him. Then he swung round the bicycle, and stood it again on its wheels. After which he quickly folded his tools.

"Will you come now?" she said.

He turned, rubbing his hands together, and drying them on an old cloth. He went into the house, pulled on his coat and his cap, and picked up the things from the table.

“Where are you going?” Max asked.

Ciccio jerked his head towards Alvina.

“Oh, allow me to carry them, Miss Houghton. He is not fit — ” said Max.

True, Ciccio had no collar on, and his shoes were burst.

“I don’t mind,” said Alvina hastily. “He knows where they go. He brought them before.”

“But I will carry them. I am dressed. Allow me — ” and he began to take the things. “You get dressed, Ciccio.”

Ciccio looked at Alvina.

“Do you want?” he said, as if waiting for orders.

“Do let Ciccio take them,” said Alvina to Max. “Thank you ever so much. But let him take them.”

So Alvina marched off through the Sunday morning streets, with the Italian, who was down at heel and encumbered with an armful of sick-room apparatus. She did not know what to say, and he said nothing.

“We will go in this way,” she said, suddenly opening the hall door. She had unlocked it before she went out, for that entrance was hardly ever used. So she showed the Italian into the sombre drawing-room, with its high black bookshelves with rows and rows of calf-bound volumes, its old red and flowered carpet, its grand piano littered with music. Ciccio put down the things as she directed, and stood with his cap in his hands, looking aside.

“Thank you so much,” she said, lingering.

He curled his lips in a faint deprecatory smile.

“Nothing,” he murmured.

His eye had wandered uncomfortably up to a portrait on the wall. “That was my mother,” said Alvina.

He glanced down at her, but did not answer.

“I am so sorry you’re going away,” she said nervously. She stood looking up at him with wide blue eyes.

The faint smile grew on the lower part of his face, which he kept averted. Then he looked at her.

“We have to move,” he said, with his eyes watching her reservedly, his mouth twisting with a half-bashful smile.

“Do you like continually going away?” she said, her wide blue eyes fixed on his face.

He nodded slightly.

“We have to do it. I like it.”

What he said meant nothing to him. He now watched her fixedly, with a slightly mocking look, and a reserve he would not relinquish. “Do you think I

shall ever see you again?" she said.

"Should you like — ?" he answered, with a sly smile and a faint shrug.

"I should like awfully — " a flush grew on her cheek. She heard Miss Pinnegar's scarcely audible step approaching.

He nodded at her slightly, watching her fixedly, turning up the corners of his eyes slyly, his nose seeming slyly to sharpen.

"All right. Next week, eh? In the morning?"

"Do!" cried Alvina, as Miss Pinnegar came through the door. He glanced quickly over his shoulder.

"Oh!" cried Miss Pinnegar. "I couldn't imagine who it was." She eyed the young fellow sharply.

"Couldn't you?" said Alvina. "We brought back these things."

"Oh yes. Well — you'd better come into the other room, to the fire," said Miss Pinnegar.

"I shall go along. Goodbye!" said Ciccio, and with a slight bow to Alvina, and a still slighter to Miss Pinnegar, he was out of the room and out of the front door, as if turning tail.

"I suppose they're going this morning," said Miss Pinnegar.

CHAPTER IX

ALVINA BECOMES ALLAYE

Alvina wept when the Natchas had gone. She loved them so much, she wanted to be with them. Even Ciccio she regarded as only one of the Natchas. She looked forward to his coming as to a visit from the troupe.

How dull the theatre was without them! She was tired of the Endeavour. She wished it did not exist. The rehearsal on the Monday morning bored her terribly. Her father was nervous and irritable. The previous week had tried him sorely. He had worked himself into a state of nervous apprehension such as nothing would have justified, unless perhaps, if the wooden walls of the Endeavour had burnt to the ground, with James inside victimized like another Samson. He had developed a nervous horror of all artistes. He did not feel safe for one single moment whilst he depended on a single one of them.

“We shall have to convert into all pictures,” he said in a nervous fever to Mr. May. “Don’t make any more engagements after the end of next month.”

“Really!” said Mr. May. “Really! Have you quite decided?”

“Yes quite! Yes quite!” James fluttered. “I have written about a new machine, and the supply of films from Chanticlers.”

“Really!” said Mr. May. “Oh well then, in that case — ” But he was filled with dismay and chagrin.

“Of cauce,” he said later to Alvina, “I can’t *possibly* stop on if we are nothing but a picture show!” And he arched his blanched and dismal eyelids with ghastly finality.

“Why?” cried Alvina.

“Oh — why!” He was rather ironic. “Well, it’s not my line at *all*. I’m not a *film-operator!*” And he put his head on one side with a grimace of contempt and superiority.

“But you are, as well,” said Alvina.

“Yes, *as well*. But not *_only!* *You may_* wash the dishes in the scullery. But you’re not only the *char*, are you?”

“But is it the same?” cried Alvina.

“Of cauce!” cried Mr. May. “Of *cauce* it’s the same.”

Alvina laughed, a little heartlessly, into his pallid, stricken eyes. "But what will you do?" she asked.

"I shall have to look for something else," said the injured but dauntless little man. "There's nothing *else*, is there?"

"Wouldn't you stay on?" she asked.

"I wouldn't think of it. I wouldn't think of it." He turtled like an injured pigeon.

"Well," she said, looking laconically into his face: "It's between you and father — "

"Of *cauce!*" he said. "Naturally! Where else — !" But his tone was a little spiteful, as if he had rested his last hopes on Alvina.

Alvina went away. She mentioned the coming change to Miss Pinnegar.

"Well," said Miss Pinnegar, judicious but aloof, "it's a move in the right direction. But I doubt if it'll do any good."

"Do you?" said Alvina. "Why?"

"I don't believe in the place, and I never did," declared Miss Pinnegar. "I don't believe any good will come of it."

"But why?" persisted Alvina. "What makes you feel so sure about it?"

"I don't know. But that's how I feel. And I have from the first. It was wrong from the first. It was wrong to begin it."

"But why?" insisted Alvina, laughing.

"Your father had no business to be led into it. He'd no business to touch this show business. It isn't like him. It doesn't belong to him. He's gone against his own nature and his own life."

"Oh but," said Alvina, "father was a showman even in the shop. He always was. Mother said he was like a showman in a booth."

Miss Pinnegar was taken aback.

"Well!" she said sharply. "If *that's* what you've seen in him!" — there was a pause. "And in that case," she continued tartly, "I think some of the showman has come out in his daughter! or show-woman! — which doesn't improve it, to my idea."

"Why is it any worse?" said Alvina. "I enjoy it — and so does father."

"No," cried Miss Pinnegar. "There you're wrong! There you make a mistake. It's all against his better nature."

"Really!" said Alvina, in surprise. "What a new idea! But which is father's better nature?"

"You may not know it," said Miss Pinnegar coldly, "and if so, I can never tell you. But that doesn't alter it." She lapsed into dead silence for a moment. Then suddenly she broke out, vicious and cold: "He'll go on till he's killed himself,

and *then* he'll know."

The little adverb *then* came whistling across the space like a bullet. It made Alvina pause. Was her father going to die? She reflected. Well, all men must die.

She forgot the question in others that occupied her. First, could she bear it, when the Endeavour was turned into another cheap and nasty film-shop? The strange figures of the artistes passing under her observation had really entertained her, week by week. Some weeks they had bored her, some weeks she had detested them, but there was always a chance in the coming week. Think of the Natcha-Kee-Tawaras!

She thought too much of the Natcha-Kee-Tawaras. She knew it. And she tried to force her mind to the contemplation of the new state of things, when she banged at the piano to a set of dithering and boring pictures. There would be her father, herself, and Mr. May — or a new operator, a new manager. The new manager! — she thought of him for a moment — and thought of the mechanical factory-faced persons who *managed* Wright's and the Woodhouse Empire.

But her mind fell away from this barren study. She was obsessed by the Natcha-Kee-Tawaras. They seemed to have fascinated her. Which of them it was, or what it was that had cast the spell over her, she did not know. But she was as if hypnotized. She longed to be with them. Her soul gravitated towards them all the time.

Monday passed, and Ciccio did not come: Tuesday passed: and Wednesday. In her soul she was sceptical of their keeping their promise — either Madame or Ciccio. Why should they keep their promise? She knew what these nomadic artistes were. And her soul was stubborn within her.

On Wednesday night there was another sensation at the Endeavour. Mr. May found James Houghton fainting in the box-office after the performance had begun. What to do? He could not interrupt Alvina, nor the performance. He sent the chocolate-and-orange boy across to the Pear Tree for brandy.

James revived. "I'm all right," he said, in a brittle fashion. "I'm all right. Don't bother." So he sat with his head on his hand in the box-office, and Mr. May had to leave him to operate the film.

When the interval arrived, Mr. May hurried to the box-office, a narrow hole that James could just sit in, and there he found the invalid in the same posture, semi-conscious. He gave him more brandy.

"I'm all right, I tell you," said James, his eyes flaring. "Leave me alone." But he looked anything but all right.

Mr. May hurried for Alvina. When the daughter entered the ticket place, her father was again in a state of torpor.

"Father," she said, shaking his shoulder gently. "What's the matter." He

murmured something, but was incoherent. She looked at his face. It was grey and blank.

“We shall have to get him home,” she said. “We shall have to get a cab.”

“Give him a little brandy,” said Mr. May.

The boy was sent for the cab, James swallowed a spoonful of brandy. He came to himself irritably.

“What? What,” he said. “I won’t have all this fuss. Go on with the performance, there’s no need to bother about me.” His eye was wild. “You must go home, father,” said Alvina.

“Leave me alone! Will you leave me alone! Hecored by women all my life — hecored by women — first one, then another. I won’t stand it — I won’t stand it — ” He looked at Alvina with a look of frenzy as he lapsed again, fell with his head on his hands on his ticket-board. Alvina looked at Mr. May.

“We must get him home,” she said. She covered him up with a coat, and sat by him. The performance went on without music. At last the cab came. James, unconscious, was driven up to Woodhouse. He had to be carried indoors. Alvina hurried ahead to make a light in the dark passage.

“Father’s ill!” she announced to Miss Pinnegar.

“Didn’t I say so!” said Miss Pinnegar, starting from her chair.

The two women went out to meet the cab-man, who had James in his arms.

“Can you manage?” cried Alvina, showing a light.

“He doesn’t weigh much,” said the man.

“Tu-tu-tu-tu-to-tu!” went Miss Pinnegar’s tongue, in a rapid tut-tut of distress. “What have I said, now,” she exclaimed. “What have I said all along?”

James was laid on the sofa. His eyes were half-shut. They made him drink brandy, the boy was sent for the doctor, Alvina’s bed was warmed. The sick man was got to bed. And then started another vigil. Alvina sat up in the sick room. James started and muttered, but did not regain consciousness. Dawn came, and he was the same. Pneumonia and pleurisy and a touch of meningitis. Alvina drank her tea, took a little breakfast, and went to bed at about nine o’clock in the morning, leaving James in charge of Miss Pinnegar. Time was all deranged.

Miss Pinnegar was a nervous nurse. She sat in horror and apprehension, her eyebrows raised, starting and looking at James in terror whenever he made a noise. She hurried to him and did what she could. But one would have said she was repulsed, she found her task unconsciously repugnant.

During the course of the morning Mrs. Rollings came up and said that the Italian from last week had come, and could he speak to Miss Houghton.

“Tell him she’s resting, and Mr. Houghton is seriously ill,” said Miss Pinnegar sharply.

When Alvina came downstairs at about four in the afternoon she found a package: a comb of carved bone, and a message from Madame: "To Miss Houghton, with kindest greetings and most sincere thanks from Kishwégin."

The comb with its carved, beast-faced serpent was her portion. Alvina asked if there had been any other message. None.

Mr. May came in, and stayed for a dismal half-hour. Then Alvina went back to her nursing. The patient was no better, still unconscious. Miss Pinnegar came down, red eyed and sullen looking. The condition of James gave little room for hope.

In the early morning he died. Alvina called Mrs. Rollings, and they composed the body. It was still only five o'clock, and not light. Alvina went to lie down in her father's little, rather chilly chamber at the end of the corridor. She tried to sleep, but could not. At half-past seven she arose, and started the business of the new day. The doctor came — she went to the registrar — and so on.

Mr. May came. It was decided to keep open the theatre. He would find some one else for the piano, some one else to issue the tickets.

In the afternoon arrived Frederick Houghton, James's cousin and nearest relative. He was a middle-aged, blond, florid, church-going draper from Knarborough, well-to-do and very *bourgeois*. He tried to talk to Alvina in a fatherly fashion, or a friendly, or a helpful fashion. But Alvina could not listen to him. He got on her nerves.

Hearing the gate bang, she rose and hurried to the window. She was in the drawing-room with her cousin, to give the interview its proper air of solemnity. She saw Ciccio rearing his yellow bicycle against the wall, and going with his head forward along the narrow, dark way of the back yard, to the scullery door.

"Excuse me a minute," she said to her cousin, who looked up irritably as she left the room.

She was just in time to open the door as Ciccio tapped. She stood on the doorstep above him. He looked up, with a faint smile, from under his black lashes.

"How nice of you to come," she said. But her face was blanched and tired, without expression. Only her large eyes looked blue in their tiredness, as she glanced down at Ciccio. He seemed to her far away.

"Madame asks how is Mr. Houghton," he said.

"Father! He died this morning," she said quietly.

"He died!" exclaimed the Italian, a flash of fear and dismay going over his face.

"Yes — this morning." She had neither tears nor emotion, but just looked down on him abstractedly, from her height on the kitchen step. He dropped his

eyes and looked at his feet. Then he lifted his eyes again, and looked at her. She looked back at him, as from across a distance. So they watched each other, as strangers across a wide, abstract distance.

He turned and looked down the dark yard, towards the gate where he could just see the pale grey tire of his bicycle, and the yellow mudguard. He seemed to be reflecting. If he went now, he went for ever. Involuntarily he turned and lifted his face again towards Alvina, as if studying her curiously. She remained there on the doorstep, neutral, blanched, with wide, still, neutral eyes. She did not seem to see him. He studied her with alert, yellow-dusky, inscrutable eyes, until she met his look. And then he gave the faintest gesture with his head, as of summons towards him. Her soul started, and died in her. And again he gave the slight, almost imperceptible jerk of the head, backwards and sideways, as if summoning her towards him. His face too was closed and expressionless. But in his eyes, which kept hers, there was a dark flicker of ascendancy. He was going to triumph over her. She knew it. And her soul sank as if it sank out of her body. It sank away out of her body, left her there powerless, soulless.

And yet as he turned, with his head stretched forward, to move away: as he glanced slightly over his shoulder: she stepped down from the step, down to his level, to follow him. He went ducking along the dark yard, nearly to the gate. Near the gate, near his bicycle, was a corner made by a shed. Here he turned, lingeringly, to her, and she lingered in front of him.

Her eyes were wide and neutral and submissive, with a new, awful submission as if she had lost her soul. So she looked up at him, like a victim. There was a faint smile in his eyes. He stretched forward over her.

“You love me? Yes? — Yes?” he said, in a voice that seemed like a palpable contact on her.

“Yes,” she whispered involuntarily, soulless, like a victim. He put his arm round her, subtly, and lifted her.

“Yes,” he re-echoed, almost mocking in his triumph. “Yes. Yes!” And smiling, he kissed her, delicately, with a certain finesse of knowledge. She moaned in spirit, in his arms, felt herself dead, dead. And he kissed her with a finesse, a passionate finesse which seemed like coals of fire on her head.

They heard footsteps. Miss Pinnegar was coming to look for her. Ciccio set her down, looked long into her eyes, inscrutably, smiling, and said:

“I come tomorrow.”

With which he ducked and ran out of the yard, picking up his bicycle like a feather, and, taking no notice of Miss Pinnegar, letting the yard-door bang to behind him.

“Alvina!” said Miss Pinnegar.

But Alvina did not answer. She turned, slipped past, ran indoors and upstairs to the little bare bedroom she had made her own. She locked the door and kneeled down on the floor, bowing down her head to her knees in a paroxysm on the floor. In a paroxysm — because she loved him. She doubled herself up in a paroxysm on her knees on the floor — because she loved him. It was far more like pain, like agony, than like joy. She swayed herself to and fro in a paroxysm of unbearable sensation, because she loved him.

Miss Pinnegar came and knocked at the door.

“Alvina! Alvina! Oh, you are there! Whatever are you doing? Aren’t you coming down to speak to your cousin?”

“Soon,” said Alvina.

And taking a pillow from the bed, she crushed it against herself and swayed herself unconsciously, in her orgasm of unbearable feeling. Right in her bowels she felt it — the terrible, unbearable feeling. How could she bear it.

She crouched over until she became still. A moment of stillness seemed to cover her like sleep: an eternity of sleep in that one second. Then she roused and got up. She went to the mirror, still, evanescent, and tidied her hair, smoothed her face. She was so still, so remote, she felt that nothing, nothing could ever touch her.

And so she went downstairs, to that horrible cousin of her father’s. She seemed so intangible, remote and virginal, that her cousin and Miss Pinnegar both failed to make anything of her. She answered their questions simply, but did not talk. They talked to each other. And at last the cousin went away, with a profound dislike of Miss Alvina.

She did not notice. She was only glad he was gone. And she went about for the rest of the day elusive and vague. She slept deeply that night, without dreams.

The next day was Saturday. It came with a great storm of wind and rain and hail: a fury. Alvina looked out in dismay. She knew Ciccio would not be able to come — he could not cycle, and it was impossible to get by train and return the same day. She was almost relieved. She was relieved by the intermission of fate, she was thankful for the day of neutrality.

In the early afternoon came a telegram: Coming both tomorrow morning deepest sympathy Madame. Tomorrow was Sunday: and the funeral was in the afternoon. Alvina felt a burning inside her, thinking of Ciccio. She winced — and yet she wanted him to come. Terribly she wanted him to come.

She showed the telegram to Miss Pinnegar.

“Good gracious!” said the weary Miss Pinnegar. “Fancy those people. And I warrant they’ll want to be at the funeral. As if he was anything to *them* — ”

“I think it’s very nice of her,” said Alvina.

“Oh well,” said Miss Pinnegar. “If you think so. I don’t fancy he would have wanted such people following, myself. And what does she mean by *both*. Who’s the other?” Miss Pinnegar looked sharply at Alvina.

“Ciccio,” said Alvina.

“The Italian! Why goodness me! What’s *he* coming for? I can’t make you out, Alvina. Is that his name, Chicho? I never heard such a name. Doesn’t sound like a name at all to me. There won’t be room for them in the cabs.”

“We’ll order another.”

“More expense. I never knew such impertinent people — ”

But Alvina did not hear her. On the next morning she dressed herself carefully in her new dress. It was black voile. Carefully she did her hair. Ciccio and Madame were coming. The thought of Ciccio made her shudder. She hung about, waiting. Luckily none of the funeral guests would arrive till after one o’clock. Alvina sat listless, musing, by the fire in the drawing-room. She left everything now to Miss Pinnegar and Mrs. Rollings. Miss Pinnegar, red-eyed and yellow-skinned, was irritable beyond words.

It was nearly mid-day when Alvina heard the gate. She hurried to open the front door. Madame was in her little black hat and her black spotted veil, Ciccio in a black overcoat was closing the yard door behind her.

“Oh, my dear girl!” Madame cried, trotting forward with outstretched black-kid hands, one of which held an umbrella: “I am so shocked — I am so shocked to hear of your poor father. Am I to believe it? — am I really? No, I can’t.”

She lifted her veil, kissed Alvina, and dabbed her eyes. Ciccio came up the steps. He took off his hat to Alvina, smiled slightly as he passed her. He looked rather pale, constrained. She closed the door and ushered them into the drawing-room.

Madame looked round like a bird, examining the room and the furniture. She was evidently a little impressed. But all the time she was uttering her condolences.

“Tell me, poor girl, how it happened?”

“There isn’t much to tell,” said Alvina, and she gave the brief account of James’s illness and death.

“Worn out! Worn out!” Madame said, nodding slowly up and down. Her black veil, pushed up, sagged over her brows like a mourning band. “You cannot afford to waste the stamina. And will you keep on the theatre — with Mr. May — ?”

Ciccio was sitting looking towards the fire. His presence made Alvina tremble. She noticed how the fine black hair of his head showed no parting at all

— it just grew like a close cap, and was pushed aside at the forehead. Sometimes he looked at her, as Madame talked, and again looked at her, and looked away.

At last Madame came to a halt. There was a long pause. “You will stay to the funeral?” said Alvina.

“Oh my dear, we shall be too much — ”

“No,” said Alvina. “I have arranged for you — ”

“There! You think of everything. But I will come, not Ciccio. He will not trouble you.”

Ciccio looked up at Alvina.

“I should like him to come,” said Alvina simply. But a deep flush began to mount her face. She did not know where it came from, she felt so cold. And she wanted to cry.

Madame watched her closely.

“Siamo di accordo,” came the voice of Ciccio.

Alvina and Madame both looked at him. He sat constrained, with his face averted, his eyes dropped, but smiling.

Madame looked closely at Alvina.

“Is it true what he says?” she asked.

“I don’t understand him,” said Alvina. “I don’t understand what he said.”

“That you have agreed with him — ”

Madame and Ciccio both watched Alvina as she sat in her new black dress. Her eyes involuntarily turned to his.

“I don’t know,” she said vaguely. “Have I — ?” and she looked at him. Madame kept silence for some moments. Then she said gravely: “Well! — yes! — well!” She looked from one to another. “Well, there is a lot to consider. But if you have decided — ”

Neither of them answered. Madame suddenly rose and went to Alvina. She kissed her on either cheek.

“I shall protect you,” she said.

Then she returned to her seat.

“What have you said to Miss Houghton?” she said suddenly to Ciccio, tackling him direct, and speaking coldly.

He looked at Madame with a faint derisive smile. Then he turned to Alvina. She bent her head and blushed.

“Speak then,” said Madame, “you have a reason.” She seemed mistrustful of him.

But he turned aside his face, and refused to speak, sitting as if he were unaware of Madame’s presence.

“Oh well,” said Madame. “I shall be there, Signorino.”

She spoke with a half-playful threat. Ciccio curled his lip. "You do not know him yet," she said, turning to Alvina.

"I know that," said Alvina, offended. Then she added: "Wouldn't you like to take off your hat?"

"If you truly wish me to stay," said Madame.

"Yes, please do. And will you hang your coat in the hall?" she said to Ciccio.

"Oh!" said Madame roughly. "He will not stay to eat. He will go out to somewhere."

Alvina looked at him.

"Would you rather?" she said.

He looked at her with sardonic yellow eyes.

"If you want," he said, the awkward, derisive smile curling his lips and showing his teeth.

She had a moment of sheer panic. Was he just stupid and bestial? The thought went clean through her. His yellow eyes watched her sardonically. It was the clean modelling of his dark, other-world face that decided her — for it sent the deep spasm across her.

"I'd like you to stay," she said.

A smile of triumph went over his face. Madame watched him stonily as she stood beside her chair, one hand lightly balanced on her hip. Alvina was reminded of Kishwégin. But even in Madame's stony mistrust there was an element of attraction towards him. He had taken his cigarette case from his pocket.

"On ne fume pas dans le salon," said Madame brutally.

"Will you put your coat in the passage? — and do smoke if you wish," said Alvina.

He rose to his feet and took off his overcoat. His face was obstinate and mocking. He was rather floridly dressed, though in black, and wore boots of black patent leather with tan uppers. Handsome he was — but undeniably in bad taste. The silver ring was still on his finger — and his close, fine, unparted hair went badly with smart English clothes. He looked common — Alvina confessed it. And her heart sank. But what was she to do? He evidently was not happy. Obstinacy made him stick out the situation.

Alvina and Madame went upstairs. Madame wanted to see the dead James. She looked at his frail, handsome, ethereal face, and crossed herself as she wept.

"Un bel homme, cependant," she whispered. "Mort en un jour. C'est trop fort, voyez!" And she sniggered with fear and sobs.

They went down to Alvina's bare room. Madame glanced round, as she did in every room she entered.

“This was father’s bedroom,” said Alvina. “The other was mine. He wouldn’t have it anything but like this — bare.”

“Nature of a monk, a hermit,” whispered Madame. “Who would have thought it! Ah, the men, the men!”

And she unpinned her hat and patted her hair before the small mirror, into which she had to peep to see herself. Alvina stood waiting.

“And now — ” whispered Madame, suddenly turning: “What about this Ciccio, hein?” It was ridiculous that she would not raise her voice above a whisper, upstairs there. But so it was.

She scrutinized Alvina with her eyes of bright black glass. Alvina looked back at her, but did not know what to say.

“What about him, hein? Will you marry him? Why will you?”

“I suppose because I like him,” said Alvina, flushing.

Madame made a little grimace.

“Oh yes!” she whispered, with a contemptuous mouth. “Oh yes! — because you like him! But you know nothing of him — nothing. How can you like him, not knowing him? He may be a real bad character. How would you like him then?”

“He isn’t, is he?” said Alvina.

“I don’t know. I don’t know. He may be. Even I, I don’t know him — no, though he has been with me for three years. What is he? He is a man of the people, a boatman, a labourer, an artist’s model. He sticks to nothing — ”

“How old is he?” asked Alvina.

“He is twenty-five — a boy only. And you? You are older.”

“Thirty,” confessed Alvina.

“Thirty! Well now — so much difference! How can you trust him? How can you? Why does he want to marry you — why?”

“I don’t know — ” said Alvina.

“No, and I don’t know. But I know something of these Italian men, who are labourers in every country, just labourers and under-men always, always down, down, down — ” And Madame pressed her spread palms downwards. “And so — when they have a chance to come up — ” she raised her hand with a spring — ”they are very conceited, and they take their chance. He will want to rise, by you, and you will go down, with him. That is how it is. I have seen it before — yes — more than one time — ”

“But,” said Alvina, laughing ruefully. “He can’t rise much because of me, can he?”

“How not? How not? In the first place, you are English, and he thinks to rise by that. Then you are not of the lower class, you are of the higher class, the class

of the masters, such as employ Ciccio and men like him. How will he not rise in the world by you? Yes, he will rise very much. Or he will draw you down, down — Yes, one or another. And then he thinks that now you have money — now your father is dead — ” here Madame glanced apprehensively at the closed door — ”and they all like money, yes, very much, all Italians — ”

“Do they?” said Alvina, scared. “I’m sure there won’t *be* any money. I’m sure father is in debt.”

“What? You think? Do you? Really? Oh poor Miss Houghton! Well — and will you tell Ciccio that? Eh? Hein?”

“Yes — certainly — if it matters,” said poor Alvina.

“Of course it matters. Of course it matters very much. It matters to him. Because he will not have much. He saves, saves, saves, as they all do, to go back to Italy and buy a piece of land. And if he has you, it will cost him much more, he cannot continue with Natcha-Kee-Tawara. All will be much more difficult — ”

“Oh, I will tell him in time,” said Alvina, pale at the lips.

“You will tell him! Yes. That is better. And then you will see. But he is obstinate — as a mule. And if he will still have you, then you must think. Can you live in England as the wife of a labouring man, a dirty Eytalian, as they all say? It is serious. It is not pleasant for you, who have not known it. I also have not known it. But I have seen — ” Alvina watched with wide, troubled eyes, while Madame darted looks, as from bright, deep black glass.

“Yes,” said Alvina. “I should hate being a labourer’s wife in a nasty little house in a street — ”

“In a house?” cried Madame. “It would not be in a house. They live many together in one house. It would be two rooms, or even one room, in another house with many people not quite clean, you see — ”

Alvina shook her head.

“I couldn’t stand that,” she said finally.

“No!” Madame nodded approval. “No! you could not. They live in a bad way, the Italians. They do not know the English home — never. They don’t like it. Nor do they know the Swiss clean and proper house. No. They don’t understand. They run into their holes to sleep or to shelter, and that is all.”

“The same in Italy?” said Alvina.

“Even more — because there it is sunny very often — ”

“And you don’t need a house,” said Alvina. “I should like that.”

“Yes, it is nice — but you don’t know the life. And you would be alone with people like animals. And if you go to Italy he will beat you — he will beat you — ”

“If I let him,” said Alvina.

“But you can’t help it, away there from everybody. Nobody will help you. If you are a wife in Italy, nobody will help you. You are his property, when you marry by Italian law. It is not like England. There is no divorce in Italy. And if he beats you, you are helpless — ”

“But why should he beat me?” said Alvina. “Why should he want to?”

“They do. They are so jealous. And then they go into their ungovernable tempers, horrible tempers — ”

“Only when they are provoked,” said Alvina, thinking of Max. “Yes, but you will not know what provokes him. Who can say when he will be provoked? And then he beats you — ”

There seemed to be a gathering triumph in Madame’s bright black eyes. Alvina looked at her, and turned to the door.

“At any rate I know now,” she said, in rather a flat voice.

“And it is *true*. It is all of it true,” whispered Madame vindictively. Alvina wanted to run from her.

“I *must* go to the kitchen,” she said. “Shall we go down?”

Alvina did not go into the drawing-room with Madame. She was too much upset, and she had almost a horror of seeing Ciccio at that moment.

Miss Pinnegar, her face stained carmine by the fire, was helping Mrs. Rollings with the dinner.

“Are they both staying, or only one?” she said tartly.

“Both,” said Alvina, busying herself with the gravy, to hide her distress and confusion.

“The man as well,” said Miss Pinnegar. “What does the woman want to bring *him* for? I’m sure I don’t know what your father would say a common show-fellow, *looks* what he is — and staying to dinner.”

Miss Pinnegar was thoroughly out of temper as she tried the potatoes. Alvina set the table. Then she went to the drawing-room. “Will you come to dinner?” she said to her two guests.

Ciccio rose, threw his cigarette into the fire, and looked round. Outside was a faint, watery sunshine: but at least it was out of doors. He felt himself imprisoned and out of his element. He had an irresistible impulse to go.

When he got into the hall he laid his hand on his hat. The stupid, constrained smile was on his face.

“I’ll go now,” he said.

“We have set the table for you,” said Alvina.

“Stop now, since you have stopped for so long,” said Madame, darting her black looks at him.

But he hurried on his coat, looking stupid. Madame lifted her eyebrows disdainfully.

“This is polite behaviour!” she said sarcastically.

Alvina stood at a loss.

“You return to the funeral?” said Madame coldly.

He shook his head.

“When you are ready to go,” he said.

“At four o’clock,” said Madame, “when the funeral has come home. Then we shall be in time for the train.”

He nodded, smiled stupidly, opened the door, and went.

“This is just like him, to be so — so — ” Madame could not express herself as she walked down to the kitchen.

“Miss Pinnegar, this is Madame,” said Alvina.

“How do you do?” said Miss Pinnegar, a little distant and condescending. Madame eyed her keenly.

“Where is the man? I don’t know his name,” said Miss Pinnegar. “He wouldn’t stay,” said Alvina. “What is his name, Madame?”

“Marasca — Francesco. Francesco Marasca — Neapolitan.”

“Marasca!” echoed Alvina.

“It has a bad sound — a sound of a bad augury, bad sign,” said Madame. “Ma-rà-sca!” She shook her head at the taste of the syllables.

“Why do you think so?” said Alvina. “Do you think there is a meaning in sounds? goodness and badness?”

“Yes,” said Madame. “Certainly. Some sounds are good, they are for life, for creating, and some sounds are bad, they are for destroying. Ma-rà-sca! — that is bad, like swearing.”

“But what sort of badness? What does it do?” said Alvina.

“What does it do? It sends life down — down — instead of lifting it up.”

“Why should things always go up? Why should life always go up?” said Alvina.

“I don’t know,” said Madame, cutting her meat quickly. There was a pause.

“And what about other names,” interrupted Miss Pinnegar, a little lofty. “What about Houghton, for example?”

Madame put down her fork, but kept her knife in her hand. She looked across the room, not at Miss Pinnegar.

“Houghton — ! Huff-ton!” she said. “When it is said, it has a sound *against*: that is, against the neighbour, against humanity. But when it is written *Houghton!* then it is different, it is *for*.”

“It is always pronounced *Huff-ton*,” said Miss Pinnegar.

“By us,” said Alvina.

“We ought to know,” said Miss Pinnegar.

Madame turned to look at the unhappy, elderly woman. “You are a relative of the family?” she said.

“No, not a relative. But I’ve been here many years,” said Miss Pinnegar.

“Oh, yes!” said Madame. Miss Pinnegar was frightfully affronted. The meal, with the three women at table, passed painfully.

Miss Pinnegar rose to go upstairs and weep. She felt very forlorn. Alvina rose to wipe the dishes, hastily, because the funeral guests would all be coming. Madame went into the drawing-room to smoke her sly cigarette.

Mr. May was the first to turn up for the lugubrious affair: very tight and tailored, but a little extinguished, all in black. He never wore black, and was very unhappy in it, being almost morbidly sensitive to the impression the colour made on him. He was set to entertain Madame.

She did not pretend distress, but sat black-eyed and watchful, very much her business self.

“What about the theatre? — will it go on?” she asked.

“Well I don’t know. I don’t know Miss Houghton’s intentions,” said Mr. May. He was a little stilted today.

“It’s hers?” said Madame.

“Why, as far as I understand — ”

“And if she wants to sell out — ?”

Mr. May spread his hands, and looked dismal, but distant. “You should form a company, and carry on — ” said Madame.

Mr. May looked even more distant, drawing himself up in an odd fashion, so that he looked as if he were trussed. But Madame’s shrewd black eyes and busy mind did not let him off.

“Buy Miss Houghton out — ” said Madame shrewdly.

“Of course,” said Mr. May. “Miss Houghton herself must decide.”

“Oh sure — ! You — are you married?”

“Yes.”

“Your wife here?”

“My wife is in London.”

“And children — ?”

“A daughter.”

Madame slowly nodded her head up and down, as if she put thousands of two-and-two’s together.

“You think there will be much to come to Miss Houghton?” she said. “Do you mean property? I really can’t say. I haven’t enquired.”

“No, but you have a good idea, eh?”

“I’m afraid I haven’t.”

“No! Well! It won’t be much, then?”

“Really, I don’t know. I should say, not a *large* fortune — !”

“No — eh?” Madame kept him fixed with her black eyes. “Do you think the other one will get anything?”

“The *other one* — ?” queried Mr. May, with an uprising cadence. Madame nodded slightly towards the kitchen.

“The old one — the Miss — Miss Pin — Pinny — what you call her.”

“Miss Pinnegar! The manageress of the work-girls? Really, I don’t know at all — ” Mr. May was most freezing.

“Ha — ha! Ha — ha!” mused Madame quietly. Then she asked: “Which work-girls do you say?”

And she listened astutely to Mr. May’s forced account of the workroom upstairs, extorting all the details she desired to gather. Then there was a pause. Madame glanced round the room.

“Nice house!” she said. “Is it their own?”

“So I *believe* — ”

Again Madame nodded sagely. “Debts perhaps — eh? Mortgage — ” and she looked slyly sardonic.

“Really!” said Mr. May, bouncing to his feet. “Do you mind if I go to speak to Mrs. Rollings — ”

“Oh no — go along,” said Madame, and Mr. May skipped out in a temper.

Madame was left alone in her comfortable chair, studying details of the room and making accounts in her own mind, until the actual funeral guests began to arrive. And then she had the satisfaction of sizing them up. Several arrived with wreaths. The coffin had been carried down and laid in the small sitting-room — Mrs. Houghton’s sitting-room. It was covered with white wreaths and streamers of purple ribbon. There was a crush and a confusion.

And then at last the hearse and the cabs had arrived — the coffin was carried out — Alvina followed, on the arm of her father’s cousin, whom she disliked. Miss Pinnegar marshalled the other mourners. It was a wretched business.

But it was a great funeral. There were nine cabs, besides the hearse — Woodhouse had revived its ancient respect for the house of Houghton. A posse of minor tradesmen followed the cabs — all in black and with black gloves. The richer tradesmen sat in the cabs.

Poor Alvina, this was the only day in all her life when she was the centre of public attention. For once, every eye was upon her, every mind was thinking about her. Poor Alvina! said every member of the Woodhouse “middle class”:

Poor Alvina Houghton, said every collier's wife. Poor thing, left alone — and hardly a penny to bless herself with. Lucky if she's not left with a pile of debts. James Houghton ran through some money in his day. Ay, if she had her rights she'd be a rich woman. Why, her mother brought three or four thousands with her. Ay, but James sank it all in Throttle-Ha'penny and Klondyke and the Endeavour. Well, he was his own worst enemy. He paid his way. I'm not so sure about that. Look how he served his wife, and now Alvina. I'm not so sure he was his own worst enemy. He was bad enough enemy to his own flesh and blood. Ah well, he'll spend no more money, anyhow. No, he went sudden, didn't he? But he was getting very frail, if you noticed. Oh yes, why he fair seemed to totter down to Lumley. Do you reckon as that place pays its way? What, the Endeavour? — they say it does. They say it makes a nice bit. Well, it's mostly pretty full. Ay, it is. Perhaps it won't be now Mr. Houghton's gone. Perhaps not. I wonder if he *will* leave much. I'm sure he won't. Everything he's got's mortgaged up to the hilt. He'll leave debts, you see if he doesn't. What is she going to do then? She'll have to go out of Manchester House — her and Miss Pinnegar. Wonder what she'll do. Perhaps she'll take up that nursing. She never made much of that, did she — and spent a sight of money on her training, they say. She's a bit like her father in the business line — all flukes. Pity some nice young man doesn't turn up and marry her. I don't know, she doesn't seem to hook on, does she? Why she's never had a proper boy. They make out she was engaged once. Ay, but nobody ever saw him, and it was off as soon as it was on. Can you remember she went with Albert Witham for a bit. Did she? No, I never knew. When was that? Why, when he was at Oxford, you know, learning for his head master's place. Why didn't she marry him then? Perhaps he never asked her. Ay, there's that to it. She'd have looked down her nose at him, times gone by. Ay, but that's all over, my boy. She'd snap at anybody now. Look how she carries on with that manager. Why, *that's* something awful. Haven't you ever watched her in the Cinema? She never lets him alone. And it's anybody alike. Oh, she doesn't respect herself. I don't consider. No girl who respected herself would go on as she does, throwing herself at every feller's head. Does she, though? Ay, any performer or anybody. She's a tidy age, though. She's not much chance of getting off. How old do you reckon she is? Must be well over thirty. You never say. Well, she *looks* it. She does begu — a dragged old maid. Oh but she sprightles up a bit sometimes. Ay, when she thinks she's hooked on to somebody. I wonder why she never did take? It's funny. Oh, she was too high and mighty before, and now it's too late. Nobody wants her. And she's got no relations to go to either, has she? No, that's her father's cousin who she's walking with. Look, they're coming. He's a fine-looking man, isn't he? You'd

have thought they'd have buried Miss Frost beside Mrs. Houghton. You would, wouldn't you? I should think Alvina will lie by Miss Frost. They say the grave was made for both of them. Ay, she was a lot more of a mother to her than her own mother. She *was* good to them, Miss Frost was. Alvina thought the world of her. That's her stone — look, down there. Not a very grand one, considering. No, it isn't. Look, there's room for Alvina's name underneath. Sh! —

Alvina had sat back in the cab and watched from her obscurity the many faces on the street: so familiar, so familiar, familiar as her own face. And now she seemed to see them from a great distance, out of her darkness. Her big cousin sat opposite her — how she disliked his presence.

In chapel she cried, thinking of her mother, and Miss Frost, and her father. She felt so desolate — it all seemed so empty. Bitterly she cried, when she bent down during the prayer. And her crying started Miss Pinnegar, who cried almost as bitterly. It was all rather horrible. The afterwards — the horrible afterwards.

There was the slow progress to the cemetery. It was a dull, cold day. Alvina shivered as she stood on the bleak hillside, by the open grave. Her coat did not seem warm enough, her old black seal-skin furs were not much protection. The minister stood on the plank by the grave, and she stood near, watching the white flowers blowing in the cold wind. She had watched them for her mother — and for Miss Frost. She felt a sudden clinging to Miss Pinnegar. Yet they would have to part. Miss Pinnegar had been so fond of her father, in a quaint, reserved way. Poor Miss Pinnegar, that was all life had offered her. Well, after all, it had been a home and a home life. To which home and home life Alvina now clung with a desperate yearning, knowing inevitably she was going to lose it, now her father was gone. Strange, that he was gone. But he was weary, worn very thin and weary. He had lived his day. How different it all was, now, at his death, from the time when Alvina knew him as a little child and thought him such a fine gentleman. You live and learn and lose.

For one moment she looked at Madame, who was shuddering with cold, her face hidden behind her black spotted veil. But Madame seemed immensely remote: so unreal. And Ciccio — what was his name? She could not think of it. What was it? She tried to think of Madame's slow enunciation. Marasca — maraschino. Marasca! Maraschino! What was maraschino? Where had she heard it. Cudgelling her brains, she remembered the doctors, and the suppers after the theatre. And maraschino — why, that was the favourite white liqueur of the innocent Dr. Young. She could remember even now the way he seemed to smack his lips, saying the word *maraschino*. Yet she didn't think much of it. Hot, bitterish stuff — nothing: not like green Chartreuse, which Dr. James gave her. Maraschino! Yes, that was it. Made from cherries. Well, Ciccio's name was

nearly the same. Ridiculous! But she supposed Italian words were a good deal alike.

Ciccio, the marasca, the bitter cherry, was standing on the edge of the crowd, looking on. He had no connection whatever with the proceedings — stood outside, self-conscious, uncomfortable, bitten by the wind, and hating the people who stared at him. He saw the trim, plump figure of Madame, like some trim plump partridge among a flock of barn-yard fowls. And he depended on her presence. Without her, he would have felt too horribly uncomfortable on that raw hillside. She and he were in some way allied. But these others, how alien and uncouth he felt them. Impressed by their fine clothes, the English working-classes were none the less barbarians to him, uncivilized: just as he was to them an uncivilized animal. Uncouth, they seemed to him, all raw angles and harshness, like their own weather. Not that he thought about them. But he felt it in his flesh, the harshness and discomfort of them. And Alvina was one of them. As she stood there by the grave, pale and pinched and reserved looking, she was of a piece with the hideous cold grey discomfort of the whole scene. Never had anything been more uncongenial to him. He was dying to get away — to clear out. That was all he wanted. Only some southern obstinacy made him watch, from the duskiness of his face, the pale, reserved girl at the grave. Perhaps he even disliked her, at that time. But he watched in his dislike.

When the ceremony was over, and the mourners turned away to go back to the cabs, Madame pressed forward to Alvina.

“I shall say good-bye now, Miss Houghton. We must go to the station for the train. And thank you, thank you. Goodbye.”

“But — ” Alvina looked round.

“Ciccio is there. I see him. We must catch the train.”

“Oh but — won’t you drive? Won’t you ask Ciccio to drive with you in the cab? Where is he?”

Madame pointed him out as he hung back among the graves, his black hat cocked a little on one side. He was watching. Alvina broke away from her cousin, and went to him.

“Madame is going to drive to the station,” she said. “She wants you to get in with her.”

He looked round at the cabs.

“All right,” he said, and he picked his way across the graves to Madame, following Alvina.

“So, we go together in the cab,” said Madame to him. Then: “Goodbye, my dear Miss Houghton. Perhaps we shall meet once more. Who knows? My heart is with you, my dear.” She put her arms round Alvina and kissed her, a little

theatrically. The cousin looked on, very much aloof. Ciccio stood by.

“Come then, Ciccio,” said Madame.

“Goodbye,” said Alvina to him. “You’ll come again, won’t you?” She looked at him from her strained, pale face.

“All right,” he said, shaking her hand loosely. It sounded hopelessly indefinite.

“You will come, won’t you?” she repeated, staring at him with strained, unseeing blue eyes.

“All right,” he said, ducking and turning away.

She stood quite still for a moment, quite lost. Then she went on with her cousin to her cab, home to the funeral tea.

“Goodbye!” Madame fluttered a black-edged handkerchief. But Ciccio, most uncomfortable in his four-wheeler, kept hidden.

The funeral tea, with its baked meats and sweets, was a terrible affair. But it came to an end, as everything comes to an end, and Miss Pinnegar and Alvina were left alone in the emptiness of Manchester House.

“If you weren’t here, Miss Pinnegar, I should be quite by myself,” said Alvina, blanched and strained.

“Yes. And so should I without you,” said Miss Pinnegar doggedly. They looked at each other. And that night both slept in Miss Pinnegar’s bed, out of sheer terror of the empty house.

During the days following the funeral, no one could have been more tiresome than Alvina. James had left everything to his daughter, excepting some rights in the work-shop, which were Miss Pinnegar’s. But the question was, how much did “everything” amount to? There was something less than a hundred pounds in the bank. There was a mortgage on Manchester House. There were substantial bills owing on account of the Endeavour. Alvina had about a hundred pounds left from the insurance money, when all funeral expenses were paid. Of that she was sure, and of nothing else.

For the rest, she was almost driven mad by people coming to talk to her. The lawyer came, the clergyman came, her cousin came, the old, stout, prosperous tradesmen of Woodhouse came, Mr. May came, Miss Pinnegar came. And they all had schemes, and they all had advice. The chief plan was that the theatre should be sold up: and that Manchester House should be sold, reserving a lease on the top floor, where Miss Pinnegar’s workrooms were: that Miss Pinnegar and Alvina should move into a small house, Miss Pinnegar keeping the workroom, Alvina giving music-lessons: that the two women should be partners in the work-shop.

There were other plans, of course. There was a faction against the chapel

faction, which favoured the plan sketched out above. The theatre faction, including Mr. May and some of the more florid tradesmen, favoured the risking of everything in the Endeavour. Alvina was to be the proprietress of the Endeavour, she was to run it on some sort of successful lines, and abandon all other enterprise. Minor plans included the election of Alvina to the post of parish nurse, at six pounds a month: a small private school; a small haberdashery shop; and a position in the office of her cousin's Knarborough business. To one and all Alvina answered with a tantalizing: "I don't know what I'm going to do. I don't know. I can't say yet. I shall see. I shall see." Till one and all became angry with her. They were all so benevolent, and all so sure that they were proposing the very best thing she could do. And they were all nettled, even indignant that she did not jump at their proposals. She listened to them all. She even invited their advice. Continually she said: "Well, what do *you* think of it?" And she repeated the chapel plan to the theatre group, the theatre plan to the chapel party, the nursing to the pianoforte proposers, the haberdashery shop to the private school advocates. "Tell me what *you* think," she said repeatedly. And they all told her they thought *their* plan was best. And bit by bit she told every advocate the proposal of every other advocate. "Well, Lawyer Beeby thinks — " and "Well now, Mr. Clay, the minister, advises — " and so on and so on, till it was all buzzing through thirty benevolent and officious heads. And thirty benevolently-officious wills were striving to plant each one its own particular scheme of benevolence. And Alvina, naive and pathetic, egged them all on in their strife, without even knowing what she was doing. One thing only was certain. Some obstinate will in her own self absolutely refused to have her mind made up. She would *not* have her mind made up for her, and she would not make it up for herself. And so everybody began to say "I'm getting tired of her. You talk to her, and you get no forrarder. She slips off to something else. I'm not going to bother with her any more." In truth, Woodhouse was in a fever, for three weeks or more, arranging Alvina's unarrangeable future for her. Offers of charity were innumerable — for three weeks.

Meanwhile, the lawyer went on with the proving of the will and the drawing up of a final account of James's property; Mr. May went on with the Endeavour, though Alvina did not go down to play; Miss Pinnegar went on with the work-girls: and Alvina went on unmaking her mind.

Ciccio did not come during the first week. Alvina had a post-card from Madame, from Cheshire: rather far off. But such was the buzz and excitement over her material future, such a fever was worked up round about her that Alvina, the petty-propertied heroine of the moment, was quite carried away in a storm of schemes and benevolent suggestions. She answered Madame's post-

card, but did not give much thought to the Natcha-Kee-Tawaras. As a matter of fact, she was enjoying a real moment of importance, there at the centre of Woodhouse's rather domineering benevolence: a benevolence which she unconsciously, but systematically frustrated. All this scheming for selling out and making reservations and hanging on and fixing prices and getting private bids for Manchester House and for the Endeavour, the excitement of forming a Limited Company to run the Endeavour, of seeing a lawyer about the sale of Manchester House and the auctioneer about the sale of the furniture, of receiving men who wanted to pick up the machines upstairs cheap, and of keeping everything dangling, deciding nothing, putting everything off till she had seen somebody else, this for the moment fascinated her, went to her head. It was not until the second week had passed that her excitement began to merge into irritation, and not until the third week had gone by that she began to feel herself entangled in an asphyxiating web of indecision, and her heart began to sing because Ciccio had never turned up. Now she would have given anything to see the Natcha-Kee-Tawaras again. But she did not know where they were. Now she began to loathe the excitement of her property: doubtfully hers, every stick of it. Now she would give anything to get away from Woodhouse, from the horrible buzz and entanglement of her sordid affairs. Now again her wild recklessness came over her.

She suddenly said she was going away somewhere: she would not say where. She cashed all the money she could: a hundred-and-twenty-five pounds. She took the train to Cheshire, to the last address of the Natcha-Kee-Tawaras: she followed them to Stockport: and back to Chinley: and there she was stuck for the night. Next day she dashed back almost to Woodhouse, and swerved round to Sheffield. There, in that black town, thank heaven, she saw their announcement on the wall. She took a taxi to their theatre, and then on to their lodgings. The first thing she saw was Louis, in his shirt sleeves, on the landing above.

She laughed with excitement and pleasure. She seemed another woman. Madame looked up, almost annoyed, when she entered.

"I couldn't keep away from you, Madame," she cried.

"Evidently," said Madame.

Madame was darning socks for the young men. She was a wonderful mother for them, sewed for them, cooked for them, looked after them most carefully. Not many minutes was Madame idle.

"Do you mind?" said Alvina.

Madame darned for some moments without answering. "And how is everything at Woodhouse?" she asked.

"I couldn't bear it any longer. I couldn't bear it. So I collected all the money I

could, and ran away. Nobody knows where I am.”

Madame looked up with bright, black, censorious eyes, at the flushed girl opposite. Alvina had a certain strangeness and brightness, which Madame did not know, and a frankness which the Frenchwoman mistrusted, but found disarming.

“And all the business, the will and all?” said Madame.

“They’re still fussing about it.”

“And there is some money?”

“I have got a hundred pounds here,” laughed Alvina. “What there will be when everything is settled, I don’t know. But not very much, I’m sure of that.”

“How much do you think? A thousand pounds?”

“Oh, it’s just possible, you know. But it’s just as likely there won’t be another penny — ”

Madame nodded slowly, as always when she did her calculations. “And if there is nothing, what do you intend?” said Madame. “I don’t know,” said Alvina brightly.

“And if there is something?”

“I don’t know either. But I thought, if you would let me play for you, I could keep myself for some time with my own money. You said perhaps I might be with the Natcha-Kee-Tawaras. I wish you would let me.”

Madame bent her head so that nothing showed but the bright black folds of her hair. Then she looked up, with a slow, subtle, rather jeering smile.

“Ciccio didn’t come to see you, hein?”

“No,” said Alvina. “Yet he promised.”

Again Madame smiled sardonically.

“Do you call it a promise?” she said. “You are easy to be satisfied with a word. A hundred pounds? No more?”

“A hundred and twenty — ”

“Where is it?”

“In my bag at the station — in notes. And I’ve got a little here — ” Alvina opened her purse, and took out some little gold and silver.

“At the station!” exclaimed Madame, smiling grimly: “Then perhaps you have nothing.”

“Oh, I think it’s quite safe, don’t you — ?”

“Yes — maybe — since it is England. And you think a hundred and twenty pounds is enough?”

“What for?”

“To satisfy Ciccio.”

“I wasn’t thinking of him,” cried Alvina.

“No?” said Madame ironically. “I can propose it to him. Wait one moment.” She went to the door and called Ciccio.

He entered, looking not very good-tempered.

“Be so good, my dear,” said Madame to him, “to go to the station and fetch Miss Houghton’s little bag. You have got the ticket, have you?” Alvina handed the luggage ticket to Madame. “Midland Railway,” said Madame. “And, Ciccio, you are listening — ? Mind! There is a hundred and twenty pounds of Miss Houghton’s money in the bag. You hear? Mind it is not lost.”

“It’s all I have,” said Alvina.

“For the time, for the time — till the will is proved, it is all the cash she has. So mind doubly. You hear?”

“All right,” said Ciccio.

“Tell him what sort of a bag, Miss Houghton,” said Madame. Alvina told him. He ducked and went. Madame listened for his final departure. Then she nodded sagely at Alvina.

“Take off your hat and coat, my dear. Soon we will have tea — when Cic’ returns. Let him think, let him think what he likes. So much money is certain, perhaps there will be more. Let him think. It will make all the difference that there is so much cash — yes, so much — ”

“But would it *really* make a difference to him?” cried Alvina.

“Oh my dear!” exclaimed Madame. “Why should it not? We are on earth, where we must eat. We are not in Paradise. If it were a thousand pounds, then he would want very badly to marry you. But a hundred and twenty is better than a blow to the eye, eh? Why sure!”

“It’s dreadful, though — !” said Alvina.

“Oh la-la! Dreadful! If it was Max, who is sentimental, then no, the money is nothing. But all the others — why, you see, they are men, and they know which side to butter their bread. Men are like cats, my dear, they don’t like their bread without butter. Why should they? Nor do I, nor do I.”

“Can I help with the darning?” said Alvina.

“Hein? I shall give you Ciccio’s socks, yes? He pushes holes in the toes — you see?” Madame poked two fingers through the hole in the toe of a red-and-black sock, and smiled a little maliciously at Alvina.

“I don’t mind which sock I darn,” she said.

“No? You don’t? Well then, I give you another. But if you like I will speak to him — ”

“What to say?” asked Alvina.

“To say that you have so much money, and hope to have more. And that you like him — Yes? Am I right? You like him very much? — hein? Is it so?”

“And then what?” said Alvina.

“That he should tell me if he should like to marry you also — quite simply. What? Yes?”

“No,” said Alvina. “Don’t say anything — not yet.”

“Hé? Not yet? Not yet. All right, not yet then. You will see — ”

Alvina sat darning the sock and smiling at her own shamelessness. The point that amused her most of all was the fact that she was not by any means sure she wanted to marry him. There was Madame spinning her web like a plump prolific black spider. There was Ciccio, the unrestful fly. And there was herself, who didn’t know in the least what she was doing. There sat two of them, Madame and herself, darning socks in a stuffy little bedroom with a gas fire, as if they had been born to it. And after all, Woodhouse wasn’t fifty miles away.

Madame went downstairs to get tea ready. Wherever she was, she superintended the cooking and the preparation of meals for her young men, scrupulous and quick. She called Alvina downstairs. Ciccio came in with the bag.

“See, my dear, that your money is safe,” said Madame.

Alvina unfastened her bag and counted the crisp white notes.

“And now,” said Madame, “I shall lock it in my little bank, yes, where it will be safe. And I shall give you a receipt, which the young men will witness.”

The party sat down to tea, in the stuffy sitting-room.

“Now, boys,” said Madame, “what do you say? Shall Miss Houghton join the Natcha-Kee-Tawaras? Shall she be our pianist?”

The eyes of the four young men rested on Alvina. Max, as being the responsible party, looked business-like. Louis was tender, Geoffrey round-eyed and inquisitive, Ciccio furtive.

“With great pleasure,” said Max. “But can the Natcha-Kee-Tawaras afford to pay a pianist for themselves?”

“No,” said Madame. “No. I think not. Miss Houghton will come for one month, to prove, and in that time she shall pay for herself. Yes? So she fancies it.”

“Can we pay her expenses?” said Max.

“No,” said Alvina. “Let me pay everything for myself, for a month. I should like to be with you, awfully — ”

She looked across with a look half mischievous, half beseeching at the erect Max. He bowed as he sat at table.

“I think we shall all be honoured,” he said.

“Certainly,” said Louis, bowing also over his tea-cup.

Geoffrey inclined his head, and Ciccio lowered his eyelashes in indication of

agreement.

“Now then,” said Madame briskly, “we are all agreed. Tonight we will have a bottle of wine on it. Yes, gentlemen? What d’you say? Chianti — hein?”

They all bowed above the table.

“And Miss Houghton shall have her professional name, eh? Because we cannot say Miss Houghton — what?”

“Do call me Alvina,” said Alvina.

“Alvina — Al-vy-na! No, excuse me, my dear, I don’t like it. I don’t like this ‘vy’ sound. Tonight we shall find a name.”

After tea they inquired for a room for Alvina. There was none in the house. But two doors away was another decent lodging-house, where a bedroom on the top floor was found for her.

“I think you are very well here,” said Madame.

“Quite nice,” said Alvina, looking round the hideous little room, and remembering her other term of probation, as a maternity nurse.

She dressed as attractively as possible, in her new dress of black voile, and imitating Madame, she put four jewelled rings on her fingers. As a rule she only wore the mourning-rite of black enamel and diamond, which had been always on Miss Frost’s finger. Now she left off this, and took four diamond rings, and one good sapphire. She looked at herself in her mirror as she had never done before, really interested in the effect she made. And in her dress she pinned a valuable old ruby brooch.

Then she went down to Madame’s house. Madame eyed her shrewdly, with just a touch of jealousy: the eternal jealousy that must exist between the plump, pale partridge of a Frenchwoman, whose black hair is so glossy and tidy, whose black eyes are so acute, whose black dress is so neat and *chic*, and the rather thin Englishwoman in soft voile, with soft, rather loose brown hair and demure, blue-grey eyes.

“Oh — a difference — what a difference! When you have a little more flesh — then — ” Madame made a slight click with her tongue. “What a good brooch, eh?” Madame fingered the brooch. “Old paste — old paste — antique — ”

“No,” said Alvina. “They are real rubies. It was my great-grandmother’s.”

“Do you mean it? Real? Are you sure — ”

“I think I’m quite sure.”

Madame scrutinized the jewels with a fine eye.

“Hm!” she said. And Alvina did not know whether she was sceptical, or jealous, or admiring, or really impressed.

“And the diamonds are real?” said Madame, making Alvina hold up her hands.

“I’ve always understood so,” said Alvina.

Madame scrutinized, and slowly nodded her head. Then she looked into Alvina’s eyes, really a little jealous.

“Another four thousand francs there,” she said, nodding sagely. “Really!” said Alvina.

“For sure. It’s enough — it’s enough — ”

And there was a silence between the two women.

The young men had been out shopping for the supper. Louis, who knew where to find French and German stuff, came in with bundles, Ciccio returned with a couple of flasks, Geoffrey with sundry moist papers of edibles. Alvina helped Madame to put the anchovies and sardines and tunny and ham and salami on various plates, she broke off a bit of fern from one of the flower-pots, to stick in the pork-pie, she set the table with its ugly knives and forks and glasses. All the time her rings sparkled, her red brooch sent out beams, she laughed and was gay, she was quick, and she flattered Madame by being very deferential to her. Whether she was herself or not, in the hideous, common, stuffy sitting-room of the lodging-house she did not know or care. But she felt excited and gay. She knew the young men were watching her. Max gave his assistance wherever possible. Geoffrey watched her rings, half spell-bound. But Alvina was concerned only to flatter the plump, white, soft vanity of Madame. She carefully chose for Madame the finest plate, the clearest glass, the whitest-hafted knife, the most delicate fork. All of which Madame saw, with acute eyes.

At the theatre the same: Alvina played for Kishwégin, only for Kishwégin. And Madame had the time of her life.

“You know, my dear,” she said afterward to Alvina, “I understand sympathy in music. Music goes straight to the heart.” And she kissed Alvina on both cheeks, throwing her arms round her neck dramatically.

“I’m so glad,” said the wily Alvina.

And the young men stirred uneasily, and smiled furtively.

They hurried home to the famous supper. Madame sat at one end of the table, Alvina at the other. Madame had Max and Louis by her side, Alvina had Ciccio and Geoffrey. Ciccio was on Alvina’s right hand: a delicate hint.

They began with hors d’oeuvres and tumblers three parts full of Chianti. Alvina wanted to water her wine, but was not allowed to insult the sacred liquid. There was a spirit of great liveliness and conviviality. Madame became paler, her eyes blacker, with the wine she drank, her voice became a little raucous.

“Tonight,” she said, “the Natcha-Kee-Tawaras make their feast of affiliation. The white daughter has entered the tribe of the Hironnelles, swallows that pass from land to land, and build their nests between roof and wall. A new swallow, a

new Huron from the tents of the pale-face, from the lodges of the north, from the tribe of the Yenghees.” Madame’s black eyes glared with a kind of wild triumph down the table at Alvina. “Nameless, without having a name, comes the maiden with the red jewels, dark-hearted, with the red beams. Wine from the pale-face shadows, drunken wine for Kishwégin, strange wine for the braves in their nostrils, Vaali, *à vous*.”

Madame lifted her glass.

“Vaali, drink to her — *Boire à elle* — ” She thrust her glass forwards in the air. The young men thrust their glasses up towards Alvina, in a cluster. She could see their mouths all smiling, their teeth white as they cried in their throats: “Vaali! Vaali! *Boire à vous*.”

Ciccio was near to her. Under the table he laid his hand on her knee. Quickly she put forward her hand to protect herself. He took her hand, and looked at her along the glass as he drank. She saw his throat move as the wine went down it. He put down his glass, still watching her.

“Vaali!” he said, in his throat. Then across the table “Hé, Gigi-Viale! *Le Petit Chemin! Comment? Me prends-tu? L’allée* — ”

There came a great burst of laughter from Louis.

“It is good, it is good!” he cried. “Oh Madame! Viale, it is Italian for the little way, the alley. That is too rich.”

Max went off into a high and ribald laugh.

“*L’allée italienne!*” he said, and shouted with laughter.

“Alley or avenue, what does it matter,” cried Madame in French, “so long as it is a good journey.”

Here Geoffrey at last saw the joke. With a strange determined flourish he filled his glass, cocking up his elbow.

“*A toi, Cic’ — et bon voyage!*” he said, and then he tilted up his chin and swallowed in great throatfuls.

“Certainly! Certainly!” cried Madame. “To thy good journey, my Ciccio, for thou art not a great traveller — ”

“*Na, pour ça, y’a plus d’une voie,*” said Geoffrey.

During this passage in French Alvina sat with very bright eyes looking from one to another, and not understanding. But she knew it was something improper, on her account. Her eyes had a bright, slightly-bewildered look as she turned from one face to another. Ciccio had let go her hand, and was wiping his lips with his fingers. He too was a little self-conscious.

“*Assez de cette éternelle voix italienne,*” said Madame. “*Courage, courage au chemin d’Angleterre.*”

“*Assez de cette éternelle voix rauque,*” said Ciccio, looking round. Madame

suddenly pulled herself together.

“They will not have my name. They will call you Allay!” she said to Alvina. “Is it good? Will it do?”

“Quite,” said Alvina.

And she could not understand why Gigi, and then the others after him, went off into a shout of laughter. She kept looking round with bright, puzzled eyes. Her face was slightly flushed and tender looking, she looked naïve, young.

“Then you will become one of the tribe of Natcha-Kee-Tawara, of the name Allaye? Yes?”

“Yes,” said Alvina.

“And obey the strict rules of the tribe. Do you agree?”

“Yes.”

“Then listen.” Madame primmed and preened herself like a black pigeon, and darted glances out of her black eyes.

“We are one tribe, one nation — say it.”

“We are one tribe, one nation,” repeated Alvina.

“Say all,” cried Madame.

“We are one tribe, one nation — ” they shouted, with varying accent. “Good!” said Madame. “And nonation do we know but the nation of the Hironnelles — ”

“No nation do we know but the nation of the Hironnelles,” came the ragged chant of strong male voices, resonant and gay with mockery.

“Hurons — Hironnelles, means *swallows*,” said Madame.

“Yes, I know,” said Alvina.

“So! you know! Well, then! We know no nation but the Hironnelles.”

“WE HAVE NO LAW BUT HURON LAW!”

“We have no law but Huron law!” sang the response, in a deep, sardonic chant.

“WE HAVE NO LAWGIVER EXCEPT KISHWÉGIN.”

“We have no lawgiver except Kishwégin,” they sang sonorous.

“WE HAVE NO HOME BUT THE TENT OF KISHWÉGIN.”

“We have no home but the tent of Kishwégin.”

“THERE IS NO GOOD BUT THE GOOD OF NATCHA-KEE-TAWARA.”

“There is no good but the good of Natcha-Kee-Tawara.”

“WE ARE THE HIRONDELLES.”

“We are the Hironnelles.”

“WE ARE KISHWÉGIN.”

“We are Kishwégin.”

“WE ARE MONDAGUA.”

“We are Mondagua — ”

“WE ARE ATONQUOIS — ”

“We are Atonquois — ”

“WE ARE PACOHUILA — ”

“We are Pacohuila — ”

“WE ARE WALGATCHKA — ”

“We are Walgatchka — ”

“WE ARE ALLAYE — ”

“We are Allaye — ”

“La musica! Pacohuila, la musica!” cried Madame, starting to her feet and sounding frenzied.

Ciccio got up quickly and took his mandoline from its case.

“A — A — Ai — Aii — eee — ya — ” began Madame, with a long, faint wail. And on the wailing mandoline the music started. She began to dance a slight but intense dance. Then she waved for a partner, and set up a tarantella wail. Louis threw off his coat and sprang to tarantella attention, Ciccio rang out the peculiar tarantella, and Madame and Louis danced in the tight space.

“Brava — Brava!” cried the others, when Madame sank into her place. And they crowded forward to kiss her hand. One after the other, they kissed her fingers, whilst she laid her left hand languidly on the head of one man after another, as she sat slightly panting. Ciccio however did not come up, but sat faintly twanging the mandoline. Nor did Alvina leave her place.

“Pacohuila!” cried Madame, with an imperious gesture. “Allaye! Come — ”

Ciccio laid down his mandoline and went to kiss the fingers of Kishwégin. Alvina also went forward. Madame held out her hand. Alvina kissed it. Madame laid her hand on the head of Alvina.

“This is the squaw Allaye, this is the daughter of Kishwégin,” she said, in her Tawara manner.

“And where is the *brave* of Allaye, where is the arm that upholds the daughter of Kishwégin, which of the Swallows spreads his wings over the gentle head of the new one!”

“Pacohuila!” said Louis.

“Pacohuila! Pacohuila! Pacohuila!” said the others.

“Spread soft wings, spread dark-roofed wings, Pacohuila,” said Kishwégin, and Ciccio, in his shirt-sleeves solemnly spread his arms.

“Stoop, stoop, Allaye, beneath the wings of Pacohuila,” said Kishwégin, faintly pressing Alvina on the shoulder.

Alvina stooped and crouched under the right arm of Pacohuila. “Has the bird flown home?” chanted Kishwégin, to one of the strains of their music.

“The bird is home — ” chanted the men.

“Is the nest warm?” chanted Kishwégin.

“The nest is warm.”

“Does the he-bird stoop — ?”

“He stoops.

“Who takes Allaye?”

“Pacohuila.”

Ciccio gently stooped and raised Alvina to her feet.

“C’est ça!” said Madame, kissing her. “And now, children, unless the Sheffield policeman will knock at our door, we must retire to our wigwams all — ”

Ciccio was watching Alvina. Madame made him a secret, imperative gesture that he should accompany the young woman.

“You have your key, Allaye?” she said.

“Did I have a key?” said Alvina.

Madame smiled subtly as she produced a latch-key.

“Kishwégin must open your doors for you all,” she said. Then, with a slight flourish, she presented the key to Ciccio. “I give it to him? Yes?” she added, with her subtle, malicious smile.

Ciccio, smiling slightly, and keeping his head ducked, took the key. Alvina looked brightly, as if bewildered, from one to another.

“Also the light!” said Madame, producing a pocket flashlight, which she triumphantly handed to Ciccio. Alvina watched him. She noticed how he dropped his head forward from his straight, strong shoulders, how beautiful that was, the strong, forward-inclining nape and back of the head. It produced a kind of dazed submission in her, the drugged sense of unknown beauty.

“And so good-night, Allaye — bonne nuit, fille des Tawara.” Madame kissed her, and darted black, unaccountable looks at her.

Each *brave* also kissed her hand, with a profound salute. Then the men shook hands warmly with Ciccio, murmuring to him.

He did not put on his hat nor his coat, but ran round as he was to the neighbouring house with her, and opened the door. She entered, and he followed, flashing on the light. So she climbed weakly up the dusty, drab stairs, he following. When she came to her door, she turned and looked at him. His face was scarcely visible, it seemed, and yet so strange and beautiful. It was the unknown beauty which almost killed her.

“You aren’t coming?” she quavered.

He gave an odd, half-gay, half-mocking twitch of his thick dark brows, and began to laugh silently. Then he nodded again, laughing at her boldly, carelessly, triumphantly, like the dark Southerner he was. Her instinct was to defend

herself. When suddenly she found herself in the dark.

She gasped. And as she gasped, he quite gently put her inside her room, and closed the door, keeping one arm round her all the time. She felt his heavy muscular predominance. So he took her in both arms, powerful, mysterious, horrible in the pitch dark. Yet the sense of the unknown beauty of him weighed her down like some force. If for one moment she would have escaped from that black spell of his beauty, she would have been free. But she could not. He was awful to her, shameless so that she died under his shamelessness, his smiling, progressive shamelessness. Yet she could not see him ugly. If only she could, for one second, have seen him ugly, he would not have killed her and made her his slave as he did. But the spell was on her, of his darkness and unfathomed handsomeness. And he killed her. He simply took her and assassinated her. How she suffered no one can tell. Yet all the time, his lustrous dark beauty, unbearable.

When later she pressed her face on his chest and cried, he held her gently as if she was a child, but took no notice, and she felt in the darkness that he smiled. It was utterly dark, and she knew he smiled, and she began to get hysterical. But he only kissed her, his smiling deepening to a heavy laughter, silent and invisible, but sensible, as he carried her away once more. He intended her to be his slave, she knew. And he seemed to throw her down and suffocate her like a wave. And she could have fought, if only the sense of his dark, rich handsomeness had not numbed her like a venom. So she washed suffocated in his passion.

In the morning when it was light he turned and looked at her from under his long black lashes, a long, steady, cruel, faintly-smiling look from his tawny eyes, searching her as if to see whether she were still alive. And she looked back at him, heavy-eyed and half subjected. He smiled slightly at her, rose, and left her. And she turned her face to the wall, feeling beaten. Yet not quite beaten to death. Save for the fatal numbness of her love for him, she could still have escaped him. But she lay inert, as if envenomed. He wanted to make her his slave.

When she went down to the Natcha-Kee-Tawaras for breakfast she found them waiting for her. She was rather frail and tender-looking, with wondering eyes that showed she had been crying.

“Come, daughter of the Tawaras,” said Madame brightly to her. “We have been waiting for you. Good-morning, and all happiness, eh? Look, it is a gift-day for you — ”

Madame smilingly led Alvina to her place. Beside her plate was a bunch of violets, a bunch of carnations, a pair of exquisite bead moccasins, and a pair of fine doeskin gloves delicately decorated with feather-work on the cuffs. The slippers were from Kishwégin, the gloves from Mondagua, the carnations from

Atonquois, the violets from Walgatchka — all *To the Daughter of the Tawaras, Allaye*, as it said on the little cards.

“The gift of Pacohuila you know,” said Madame, smiling. “The brothers of Pacohuila are your brothers.”

One by one they went to her and each one laid the back of her fingers against his forehead, saying in turn:

“I am your brother Mondagua, Allaye!”

“I am your brother Atonquois, Allaye!”

“I am your brother Walgatchka, Allaye, best brother, you know — ” So spoke Geoffrey, looking at her with large, almost solemn eyes of affection. Alvina smiled a little wanly, wondering where she was. It was all so solemn. Was it all mockery, play-acting? She felt bitterly inclined to cry.

Meanwhile Madame came in with the coffee, which she always made herself, and the party sat down to breakfast. Ciccio sat on Alvina’s right, but he seemed to avoid looking at her or speaking to her. All the time he looked across the table, with the half-asserted, knowing look in his eyes, at Gigi: and all the time he addressed himself to Gigi, with the throaty, rich, plangent quality in his voice, that Alvina could not bear, it seemed terrible to her: and he spoke in French: and the two men seemed to be exchanging unspeakable communications. So that Alvina, for all her wistfulness and subjectedness, was at last seriously offended. She rose as soon as possible from table. In her own heart she wanted attention and public recognition from Ciccio — none of which she got. She returned to her own house, to her own room, anxious to tidy everything, not wishing to have her landlady in the room. And she half expected Ciccio to come to speak to her.

As she was busy washing a garment in the bowl, her landlady knocked and entered. She was a rough and rather beery-looking Yorkshire woman, not attractive.

“Oh, yo’n made yer bed then, han’ yer!”

“Yes,” said Alvina. “I’ve done everything.”

“I see yer han. Yo’n bin sharp.”

Alvina did not answer.

“Seems yer doin’ yersen a bit o’ weshin’.”

Still Alvina didn’t answer.

“Yo’ can ‘ing it i’ th’ back yard.”

“I think it’ll dry here,” said Alvina.

“Isna much dryin’ up here. Send us howd when ‘t’s ready. Yo’ll ‘appen be wantin’ it. I can dry it off for yer t’ kitchen. You don’t take a drop o’ nothink, do yer?”

“No,” said Alvina. “I don’t like it.”

“Summat a bit stronger ‘n ‘t bottle, my sakes alive! Well, yo mun ha’e yer fling, like t’ rest. But coom na, which on ‘em is it? I catched sight on ‘im goin’ out, but I didna ma’e out then which on ‘em it wor. He — eh, it’s a pity you don’t take a drop of nothink, it’s a world’s pity. Is it the fairest on ‘em, the tallest.”

“No,” said Alvina. “The darkest one.”

“Oh ay! Well, ‘s a strappin’ anuff feller, for them as goes that road. I thought Madame was partikler. I s’ll charge yer a bit more, yer know. I s’ll ‘ave to make a bit out of it. I’m partikler as a rule. I don’t like ‘em comin’ in an’ goin’ out, you know. Things get said. You look so quiet, you do. Come now, it’s worth a hextra quart to me, else I shan’t have it, I shan’t. You can’t make as free as all that with the house, you know, be it what it may — ”

She stood red-faced and dour in the doorway. Alvina quietly gave her half-a-sovereign.

“Nay, lass,” said the woman, “if you share niver a drop o’ th’ lashins, you mun split it. Five shillin’s is oceans, ma wench. I’m not down on you — not me. On’y we’ve got to keep up appearances a bit, you know. Dash my rags, it’s a caution!”

“I haven’t got five shillings — ” said Alvina.

“Yer’ve not? All right, gi’e ‘s ha ‘efcrown today, an’ t’other termorrer. It’ll keep, it’ll keep. God bless you for a good wench. A’ open ‘eart ‘s worth all your bum-righteousness. It is for me. An’ a sight more. You’re all right, ma wench, you’re all right — ”

And the rather bleary woman went nodding away.

Alvina ought to have minded. But she didn’t. She even laughed into her ricketty mirror. At the back of her thoughts, all she minded was that Ciccio did not pay her some attention. She really expected him now to come to speak to her. If she could have imagined how far he was from any such intention.

So she loitered unwillingly at her window high over the grey, hard, cobbled street, and saw her landlady hastening along the black asphalt pavement, her dirty apron thrown discreetly over what was most obviously a quart jug. She followed the squat, intent figure with her eye, to the public-house at the corner. And then she saw Ciccio humped over his yellow bicycle, going for a steep and perilous ride with Gigi.

Still she lingered in her sordid room. She could feel Madame was expecting her. But she felt inert, weak, incommunicative. Only a real fear of offending Madame drove her down at last.

Max opened the door to let her in.

“Ah!” he said. “You’ve come. We were wondering about you.”

“Thank you,” she said, as she passed into the dirty hall where still two bicycles stood.

“Madame is in the kitchen,” he said.

Alvina found Madame trussed in a large white apron, busy rubbing a yellow-fleshed hen with lemon, previous to boiling.

“Ah!” said Madame. “So there you are! I have been out and done my shopping, and already begun to prepare the dinner. Yes, you may help me. Can you wash leeks? Yes? Every grain of sand? Shall I trust you then — ?”

Madame usually had a kitchen to herself, in the morning. She either ousted her landlady, or used her as second cook. For Madame was a gourmet, if not gourmand. If she inclined towards self-indulgence in any direction, it was in the direction of food. She *loved* a good table. And hence the Tawaras saved less money than they might. She was an exacting, tormenting, bullying cook. Alvina, who knew well enough how to prepare a simple dinner, was offended by Madame’s exactions. Madame turning back the green leaves of a leek, and hunting a speck of earth down into the white, like a flea in a bed, was too much for Alvina.

“I’m afraid I shall never be particular enough,” she said. “Can’t I do anything else for you?”

“For me? I need nothing to be done for me. But for the young men — yes, I will show you in one minute — ”

And she took Alvina upstairs to her room, and gave her a pair of the thin leather trousers fringed with hair, belonging to one of the braves. A seam had ripped. Madame gave Alvina a fine awl and some waxed thread.

“The leather is not good in these things of Gigi’s,” she said. “It is badly prepared. See, like this.” And she showed Alvina another place where the garment was repaired. “Keep on your apron. At the weekend you must fetch more clothes, not spoil this beautiful gown of voile. Where have you left your diamonds? What? In your room? Are they locked? Oh my dear — !” Madame turned pale and darted looks of fire at Alvina. “If they are stolen — !” she cried. “Oh! I have become quite weak, hearing you!” She panted and shook her head. “If they are not stolen, you have the Holy Saints alone to be thankful for keeping them. But run, run!”

And Madame really stamped her foot.

“Bring me everything you’ve got — every *thing* that is valuable. I shall lock it up. How *can* you — ”

Alvina was hustled off to her lodging. Fortunately nothing was gone. She brought all to Madame, and Madame fingered the treasures lovingly.

“Now what you want you must ask me for,” she said.

With what close curiosity Madame examined the ruby brooch. "You can have that if you like, Madame," said Alvina.

"You mean — what?"

"I will give you that brooch if you like to take it — "

"Give me this — !" cried Madame, and a flash went over her face. Then she changed into a sort of wheedling. "No — no. I shan't take it! I shan't take it. You don't want to give away such a thing."

"I don't mind," said Alvina. "Do take it if you like it."

"Oh no! Oh no! I can't take it. A beautiful thing it is, really. It would be worth over a thousand francs, because I believe it is quite genuine."

"I'm sure it's genuine," said Alvina. "Do have it since you like it."

"Oh, I can't! I can't! — "

"Yes do — "

"The beautiful red stones! — antique gems, antique gems — ! And do you really give it to me?"

"Yes, I should like to."

"You are a girl with a noble heart — " Madame threw her arms round Alvina's neck, and kissed her. Alvina felt very cool about it. Madame locked up the jewels quickly, after one last look.

"My fowl," she said, "which must not boil too fast."

At length Alvina was called down to dinner. The young men were at table, talking as young men do, not very interestingly. After the meal, Ciccio sat and twanged his mandoline, making its crying noise vibrate through the house.

"I shall go and look at the town," said Alvina.

"And who shall go with you?" asked Madame.

"I will go alone," said Alvina, "unless you will come, Madame."

"Alas no, I can't. I can't come. Will you really go alone?"

"Yes, I want to go to the women's shops," said Alvina.

"You want to! All right then! And you will come home at teatime, yes?"

As soon as Alvina had gone out Ciccio put away his mandoline and lit a cigarette. Then after a while he hailed Geoffrey, and the two young men sallied forth. Alvina, emerging from a draper's shop in Rotherhampton Broadway, found them loitering on the pavement outside. And they strolled along with her. So she went into a shop that sold ladies' underwear, leaving them on the pavement. She stayed as long as she could. But there they were when she came out. They had endless lounging patience.

"I thought you would be gone on," she said.

"No hurry," said Ciccio, and he took away her parcels from her, as if he had a right. She wished he wouldn't tilt the flap of his black hat over one eye, and she

wished there wasn't quite so much waist-line in the cut of his coat, and that he didn't smoke cigarettes against the end of his nose in the street. But wishing wouldn't alter him. He strayed alongside as if he half belonged, and half didn't — most irritating.

She wasted as much time as possible in the shops, then they took the tram home again. Ciccio paid the three fares, laying his hand restrainingly on Gigi's hand, when Gigi's hand sought pence in his trouser pocket, and throwing his arm over his friend's shoulder, in affectionate but vulgar triumph, when the fares were paid. Alvina was on her high horse.

They tried to talk to her, they tried to ingratiate themselves — but she wasn't having any. She talked with icy pleasantness. And so the teatime passed, and the time after tea. The performance went rather mechanically, at the theatre, and the supper at home, with bottled beer and boiled ham, was a conventionally cheerful affair. Even Madame was a little afraid of Alvina this evening.

"I am tired, I shall go early to my room," said Alvina.

"Yes, I think we are all tired," said Madame.

"Why is it?" said Max metaphysically — "why is it that two merry evenings never follow one behind the other."

"Max, beer makes thee a *farceur* of a fine quality," said Madame. Alvina rose.

"Please don't get up," she said to the others. "I have my key and can see quite well," she said. "Good-night all."

They rose and bowed their good-nights. But Ciccio, with an obstinate and ugly little smile on his face, followed her.

"Please don't come," she said, turning at the street door. But obstinately he lounged into the street with her. He followed her to her door.

"Did you bring the flashlight?" she said. "The stair is so dark."

He looked at her, and turned as if to get the light. Quickly she opened the house-door and slipped inside, shutting it sharply in his face. He stood for some moments looking at the door, and an ugly little look mounted his straight nose. He too turned indoors.

Alvina hurried to bed and slept well. And the next day the same, she was all icy pleasantness. The Natcha-Kee-Tawaras were a little bit put out by her. She was a spoke in their wheel, a scotch to their facility. She made them irritable. And that evening — it was Friday — Ciccio did not rise to accompany her to her house. And she knew they were relieved that she had gone.

That did not please her. The next day, which was Saturday, the last and greatest day of the week, she found herself again somewhat of an outsider in the troupe. The tribe had assembled in its old unison. She was the intruder, the interloper. And Ciccio never looked at her, only showed her the half-averted side

of his cheek, on which was a slightly jeering, ugly look.

“Will you go to Woodhouse tomorrow?” Madame asked her, rather coolly. They none of them called her Allaye any more.

“I’d better fetch some things, hadn’t I?” said Alvina.

“Certainly, if you think you will stay with us.”

This was a nasty slap in the face for her. But:

“I want to,” she said.

“Yes! Then you will go to Woodhouse tomorrow, and come to Mansfield on Monday morning? Like that shall it be? You will stay one night at Woodhouse?”

Through Alvina’s mind flitted the rapid thought — “They want an evening without me.” Her pride mounted obstinately. She very nearly said — “I may stay in Woodhouse altogether.” But she held her tongue.

After all, they were very common people. They ought to be glad to have her. Look how Madame snapped up that brooch! And look what an uncouth lout Ciccio was! After all, she was demeaning herself shamefully staying with them in common, sordid lodgings. After all, she had been bred up differently from that. They had horribly low standards — such low standards — not only of morality, but of life altogether. Really, she had come down in the world, conforming to such standards of life. She evoked the images of her mother and Miss Frost: ladies, and noble women both. Whatever could she be thinking of herself!

However, there was time for her to retrace her steps. She had not given herself away. Except to Ciccio. And her heart burned when she thought of him, partly with anger and mortification, partly, alas, with undeniable and unsatisfied love. Let her bridle as she might, her heart burned, and she wanted to look at him, she wanted him to notice her. And instinct told her that he might ignore her for ever. She went to her room an unhappy woman, and wept and fretted till morning, chafing between humiliation and yearning.

CHAPTER X

THE FALL OF MANCHESTER HOUSE

Alvina rose chastened and wistful. As she was doing her hair, she heard the plaintive nasal sound of Ciccio's mandoline. She looked down the mixed vista of back-yards and little gardens, and was able to catch sight of a portion of Ciccio, who was sitting on a box in the blue-brick yard of his house, bare-headed and in his shirt-sleeves, twitching away at the wailing mandoline. It was not a warm morning, but there was a streak of sunshine. Alvina had noticed that Ciccio did not seem to feel the cold, unless it were a wind or a driving rain. He was playing the wildly-yearning Neapolitan songs, of which Alvina knew nothing. But, although she only saw a section of him, the glimpse of his head was enough to rouse in her that overwhelming fascination, which came and went in spells. His remoteness, his southernness, something velvety and dark. So easily she might miss him altogether! Within a hair's-breadth she had let him disappear.

She hurried down. Geoffrey opened the door to her. She smiled at him in a quick, luminous smile, a magic change in her.

"I could hear Ciccio playing," she said.

Geoffrey spread his rather thick lips in a smile, and jerked his head in the direction of the back door, with a deep, intimate look into Alvina's eyes, as if to say his friend was love-sick.

"Shall I go through?" said Alvina.

Geoffrey laid his large hand on her shoulder for a moment, looked into her eyes, and nodded. He was a broad-shouldered fellow, with a rather flat, handsome face, well-coloured, and with the look of the Alpine ox about him, slow, eternal, even a little mysterious. Alvina was startled by the deep, mysterious look in his dark-fringed ox-eyes. The odd arch of his eyebrows made him suddenly seem not quite human to her. She smiled to him again, startled. But he only inclined his head, and with his heavy hand on her shoulder gently impelled her towards Ciccio.

When she came out at the back she smiled straight into Ciccio's face, with her

sudden, luminous smile. His hand on the mandoline trembled into silence. He sat looking at her with an instant re-establishment of knowledge. And yet she shrank from the long, inscrutable gaze of his black-set, tawny eyes. She resented him a little. And yet she went forward to him and stood so that her dress touched him. And still he gazed up at her, with the heavy, unspeaking look, that seemed to bear her down: he seemed like some creature that was watching her for his purposes. She looked aside at the black garden, which had a wiry gooseberry bush.

“You will come with me to Woodhouse?” she said.

He did not answer till she turned to him again. Then, as she met his eyes,

“To Woodhouse?” he said, watching her, to fix her.

“Yes,” she said, a little pale at the lips.

And she saw his eternal smile of triumph slowly growing round his mouth. She wanted to cover his mouth with her hand. She preferred his tawny eyes with their black brows and lashes. His eyes watched her as a cat watches a bird, but without the white gleam of ferocity. In his eyes was a deep, deep sun-warmth, something fathomless, deepening black and abysmal, but somehow sweet to her.

“Will you?” she repeated.

But his eyes had already begun to glimmer their consent. He turned aside his face, as if unwilling to give a straight answer.

“Yes,” he said.

“Play something to me,” she cried.

He lifted his face to her, and shook his head slightly.

“Yes do,” she said, looking down on him.

And he bent his head to the mandoline, and suddenly began to sing a Neapolitan song, in a faint, compressed head-voice, looking up at her again as his lips moved, looking straight into her face with a curious mocking caress as the muted *voix blanche* came through his lips at her, amid the louder quavering of the mandoline. The sound penetrated her like a thread of fire, hurting, but delicious, the high thread of his voice. She could see the Adam’s apple move in his throat, his brows tilted as he looked along his lashes at her all the time. Here was the strange sphinx singing again, and herself between its paws! She seemed almost to melt into his power.

Madame intervened to save her.

“What, serenade before breakfast! You have strong stomachs, I say. Eggs and ham are more the question, hein? Come, you smell them, don’t you?”

A flicker of contempt and derision went over Ciccio’s face as he broke off and looked aside.

“I prefer the serenade,” said Alvina. “I’ve had ham and eggs before.”

“You do, hein? Well — always, you won’t. And now you must eat the ham and eggs, however. Yes? Isn’t it so?”

Ciccio rose to his feet, and looked at Alvina: as he would have looked at Gigi, had Gigi been there. His eyes said unspeakable things about Madame. Alvina flashed a laugh, suddenly. And a good-humoured, half-mocking smile came over his face too.

They turned to follow Madame into the house. And as Alvina went before him, she felt his fingers stroke the nape of her neck, and pass in a soft touch right down her back. She started as if some unseen creature had stroked her with its paw, and she glanced swiftly round, to see the face of Ciccio mischievous behind her shoulder.

“Now I think,” said Madame, “that today we all take the same train. We go by the Great Central as far as the junction, together. Then you, Allaye, go on to Knarborough, and we leave you until tomorrow. And now there is not much time.”

“I am going to Woodhouse,” said Ciccio in French.

“You also! By the train, or the bicycle?”

“Train,” said Ciccio.

“Waste so much money?”

Ciccio raised his shoulders slightly.

When breakfast was over, and Alvina had gone to her room, Geoffrey went out into the back yard, where the bicycles stood.

“Cic’,” he said. “I should like to go with thee to Woodhouse. Come on bicycle with me.”

Ciccio shook his head.

“I’m going in train with *her*,” he said.

Geoffrey darkened with his heavy anger.

“I would like to see how it is, there, *chez elle*,” he said.

“Ask *her*,” said Ciccio.

Geoffrey watched him suddenly.

“Thou forsakest me,” he said. “I would like to see it, there.”

“Ask *her*,” repeated Ciccio. “Then come on bicycle.”

“You’re content to leave me,” muttered Geoffrey.

Ciccio touched his friend on his broad cheek, and smiled at him with affection.

“I don’t leave thee, Gigi. I asked thy advice. You said, Go. But come. Go and ask *her*, and then come. Come on bicycle, eh? Ask *her*! Go on! Go and ask *her*.”

Alvina was surprised to hear a tap at her door, and Gigi’s voice, in his strong foreign accent:

“Mees Houghton, I carry your bag.”

She opened her door in surprise. She was all ready.

“There it is,” she said, smiling at him.

But he confronted her like a powerful ox, full of dangerous force. Her smile had reassured him.

“Na, Allaye,” he said, “tell me something.”

“What?” laughed Alvina.

“Can I come to Woodhouse?”

“When?”

“Today. Can I come on bicycle, to tea, eh? At your house with you and Ciccio? Eh?”

He was smiling with a thick, doubtful, half sullen smile.

“Do!” said Alvina.

He looked at her with his large, dark-blue eyes.

“Really, eh?” he said, holding out his large hand.

She shook hands with him warmly.

“Yes, really!” she said. “I wish you would.”

“Good,” he said, a broad smile on his thick mouth. And all the time he watched her curiously, from his large eyes.

“Ciccio — a good chap, eh?” he said.

“Is he?” laughed Alvina.

“Ha-a — !” Gigi shook his head solemnly. “The best!” He made such solemn eyes, Alvina laughed. He laughed too, and picked up her bag as if it were a bubble.

“Na Cic’ — ” he said, as he saw Ciccio in the street. “Sommes d’accord.”

“Ben!” said Ciccio, holding out his hand for the bag. “Donne.”

“Ne-ne,” said Gigi, shrugging.

Alvina found herself on the new and busy station that Sunday morning, one of the little theatrical company. It was an odd experience. They were so obviously a theatrical company — people apart from the world. Madame was darting her black eyes here and there, behind her spotted veil, and standing with the ostensible self-possession of her profession. Max was circling round with large strides, round a big black box on which the red words Natcha-Kee-Tawara showed mystic, and round the small bunch of stage fittings at the end of the platform. Louis was waiting to get the tickets, Gigi and Ciccio were bringing up the bicycles. They were a whole train of departure in themselves, busy, bustling, cheerful — and curiously apart, vagrants.

Alvina strolled away towards the half-open bookstall. Geoffrey was standing monumental between her and the company. She returned to him.

“What time shall we expect you?” she said.

He smiled at her in his broad, friendly fashion.

“Expect me to be there? Why — ” he rolled his eyes and proceeded to calculate. “At four o’clock.”

“Just about the time when we get there,” she said.

He looked at her sagely, and nodded.

They were a good-humoured company in the railway carriage. The men smoked cigarettes and tapped off the ash on the heels of their boots, Madame watched every traveller with professional curiosity. Max scrutinized the newspaper, Lloyds, and pointed out items to Louis, who read them over Max’s shoulder, Ciccio suddenly smacked Geoffrey on the thigh, and looked laughing into his face. So till they arrived at the junction. And then there was a kissing and a taking of farewells, as if the company were separating for ever. Louis darted into the refreshment bar and returned with little pies and oranges, which he deposited in the carriage, Madame presented Alvina with a packet of chocolate. And it was “Good-bye, good-bye, Allaye! Good-bye, Ciccio! Bon voyage. Have a good time, both.”

So Alvina sped on in the fast train to Knarborough with Ciccio.

“I *do* like them all,” she said.

He opened his mouth slightly and lifted his head up and down. She saw in the movement how affectionate he was, and in his own way, how emotional. He loved them all. She put her hand to his. He gave her hand one sudden squeeze, of physical understanding, then left it as if nothing had happened. There were other people in the carriage with them. She could not help feeling how sudden and lovely that moment’s grasp of his hand was: so warm, so whole.

And thus they watched the Sunday morning landscape slip by, as they ran into Knarborough. They went out to a little restaurant to eat. It was one o’clock.

“Isn’t it strange, that we are travelling together like this?” she said, as she sat opposite him.

He smiled, looking into her eyes.

“You think it’s strange?” he said, showing his teeth slightly. “Don’t you?” she cried.

He gave a slight, laconic laugh.

“And I can hardly bear it that I love you so much,” she said, quavering, across the potatoes.

He glanced furtively round, to see if any one was listening, if any one might hear. He would have hated it. But no one was near. Beneath the tiny table, he took her two knees between his knees, and pressed them with a slow, immensely powerful pressure. Helplessly she put her hand across the table to him. He

covered it for one moment with his hand, then ignored it. But her knees were still between the powerful, living vice of his knees.

“Eat!” he said to her, smiling, motioning to her plate. And he relaxed her.

They decided to go out to Woodhouse on the tram-car, a long hour’s ride. Sitting on the top of the covered car, in the atmosphere of strong tobacco smoke, he seemed self-conscious, withdrawn into his own cover, so obviously a dark-skinned foreigner. And Alvina, as she sat beside him, was reminded of the woman with the negro husband, down in Lumley. She understood the woman’s reserve. She herself felt, in the same way, something of an outcast, because of the man at her side. An outcast! And glad to be an outcast. She clung to Ciccio’s dark, despised foreign nature. She loved it, she worshipped it, she defied all the other world. Dark, he sat beside her, drawn in to himself, overcast by his presumed inferiority among these northern industrial people. And she was with him, on his side, outside the pale of her own people.

There were already acquaintances on the tram. She nodded in answer to their salutation, but so obviously from a distance, that they kept turning round to eye her and Ciccio. But they left her alone. The breach between her and them was established for ever — and it was her will which established it.

So up and down the weary hills of the hilly, industrial countryside, till at last they drew near to Woodhouse. They passed the ruins of Throttle-Ha’penny, and Alvina glanced at it indifferent. They ran along the Knarborough Road. A fair number of Woodhouse young people were strolling along the pavements in their Sunday clothes. She knew them all. She knew Lizzie Bates’s fox furs, and Fanny Clough’s lilac costume, and Mrs. Smitham’s winged hat. She knew them all. And almost inevitably the old Woodhouse feeling began to steal over her, she was glad they could not see her, she was a little ashamed of Ciccio. She wished, for the moment, Ciccio were not there. And .as the time came to get down, she looked anxiously back and forth to see at which halt she had better descend — where fewer people would notice her. But then she threw her scruples to the wind, and descended into the staring, Sunday afternoon street, attended by Ciccio, who carried her bag. She knew she was a marked figure.

They slipped round to Manchester House. Miss Pinnegar expected Alvina, but by the train, which came later. So she had to be knocked up, for she was lying down. She opened the door looking a little patched in her cheeks, because of her curious colouring, and a little forlorn, and a little dumpy, and a little irritable.

“I didn’t know there’d be two of you,” was her greeting.

“Didn’t you,” said Alvina, kissing her. “Ciccio came to carry my bag.”

“Oh,” said Miss Pinnegar. “How do you do?” and she thrust out her hand to him. He shook it loosely.

“I had your wire,” said Miss Pinnegar. “You said the train. Mrs. Rollings is coming in at four again — ”

“Oh all right — ” said Alvina.

The house was silent and afternoon-like. Ciccio took off his coat and sat down in Mr. Houghton’s chair. Alvina told him to smoke. He kept silent and reserved. Miss Pinnegar, a poor, patch-cheeked, rather round-backed figure with grey-brown fringe, stood as if she did not quite know what to say or do.

She followed Alvina upstairs to her room.

“I can’t think why you bring *him* here,” snapped Miss Pinnegar. “I don’t know what you’re thinking about. The whole place is talking already.”

“I don’t care,” said Alvina. “I like him.”

“Oh — for shame!” cried Miss Pinnegar, lifting her hand with Miss Frost’s helpless, involuntary movement. “What do you think of yourself? And your father a month dead.”

“It doesn’t matter. Father *is* dead. And I’m sure the dead don’t mind.”

“I never *knew* such things as you say.”

“Why? I mean them.”

Miss Pinnegar stood blank and helpless.

“You’re not asking him to stay the night,” she blurted.

“Yes. And I’m going back with him to Madame tomorrow. You know I’m part of the company now, as pianist.”

“And are you going to marry him?”

“I don’t know.”

“How *can* you say you don’t know! Why, it’s awful. You make me feel I shall go out of my mind.”

“But I *don’t* know,” said Alvina.

“It’s incredible! Simply incredible! I believe you’re out of your senses. I used to think sometimes there was something wrong with your mother. And that’s what it is with you. You’re not quite right in your mind. You need to be looked after.”

“Do I, Miss Pinnegar! Ah, well, don’t you trouble to look after me, will you?”

“No one will if I don’t.”

“I hope no one will.”

There was a pause.

“I’m ashamed to live another day in Woodhouse,” said Miss Pinnegar.

“I’m leaving it for ever,” said Alvina.

“I should think so,” said Miss Pinnegar.

Suddenly she sank into a chair, and burst into tears, wailing:

“Your poor father! Your poor father!”

“I’m sure the dead are all right. Why must you pity him?”

“You’re a lost girl!” cried Miss Pinnegar.

“Am I really?” laughed Alvina. It sounded funny.

“Yes, you’re a lost girl,” sobbed Miss Pinnegar, on a final note of despair.

“I like being lost,” said Alvina.

Miss Pinnegar wept herself into silence. She looked huddled and forlorn. Alvina went to her and laid her hand on her shoulder.

“Don’t fret, Miss Pinnegar,” she said. “Don’t be silly. I love to be with Ciccio and Madame. Perhaps in the end I shall marry him. But if I don’t — ” her hand suddenly gripped Miss Pinnegar’s heavy arm till it hurt — ”I wouldn’t lose a minute of him, no, not for anything would I.”

Poor Miss Pinnegar dwindled, convinced.

“You make it hard for *me*, in Woodhouse,” she said, hopeless. “Never mind,” said Alvina, kissing her. “Woodhouse isn’t heaven and earth.”

“It’s been my home for forty years.”

“It’s been mine for thirty. That’s why I’m glad to leave it.” There was a pause.

“I’ve been thinking,” said Miss Pinnegar, “about opening a little business in Tamworth. You know the Watsons are there.”

“I believe you’d be happy,” said Alvina.

Miss Pinnegar pulled herself together. She had energy and courage still.

“I don’t want to stay here, anyhow,” she said. “Woodhouse has nothing for me any more.”

“Of course it hasn’t,” said Alvina. “I think you’d be happier away from it.”

“Yes — probably I should — now!”

None the less, poor Miss Pinnegar was grey-haired, she was almost a dumpy, odd old woman.

They went downstairs. Miss Pinnegar put on the kettle. “Would you like to see the house?” said Alvina to Ciccio.

He nodded. And she took him from room to room. His eyes looked quickly and curiously over everything, noticing things, but without criticism.

“This was my mother’s little sitting-room,” she said. “She sat here for years, in this chair.”

“Always here?” he said, looking into Alvina’s face.

“Yes. She was ill with her heart. This is another photograph of her. I’m not like her.”

“Who is *that*?” he asked, pointing to a photograph of the handsome, white-haired Miss Frost.

“That was Miss Frost, my governess. She lived here till she died. I loved her — she meant everything to me.”

“She also dead — ?”

“Yes, five years ago.”

They went to the drawing-room. He laid his hand on the keys of the piano, sounding a chord.

“Play,” she said.

He shook his head, smiling slightly. But he wished her to play. She sat and played one of Kishwégin’s pieces. He listened, faintly smiling. “Fine piano — eh?” he said, looking into her face.

“I like the tone,” she said.

“Is it yours?”

“The piano? Yes. I suppose everything is mine — in name at least. I don’t know how father’s affairs are really.”

He looked at her, and again his eye wandered over the room. He saw a little coloured portrait of a child with a fleece of brownish-gold hair and surprised eyes, in a pale-blue stiff frock with a broad dark-blue sash.

“You?” he said.

“Do you recognize me?” she said. “Aren’t I comical?”

She took him upstairs — first to the monumental bedroom. “This was mother’s room,” she said. “Now it is mine.”

He looked at her, then at the things in the room, then out of the window, then at her again. She flushed, and hurried to show him his room, and the bath-room. Then she went downstairs.

He kept glancing up at the height of the ceilings, the size of the rooms, taking in the size and proportion of the house, and the quality of the fittings.

“It is a big house,” he said. “Yours?”

“Mine in name,” said Alvina. “Father left all to me — and his debts as well, you see.”

“Much debts?”

“Oh yes! I don’t quite know how much. But perhaps more debts than there is property. I shall go and see the lawyer in the morning. Perhaps there will be nothing at all left for me, when everything is paid.”

She had stopped on the stairs, telling him this, turning round to him, who was on the steps above. He looked down on her, calculating. Then he smiled sourly.

“Bad job, eh, if it is all gone — !” he said.

“I don’t mind, really, if I can live,” she said.

He spread his hands, deprecating, not understanding. Then he glanced up the stairs and along the corridor again, and downstairs into the hall.

“A fine big house. Grand if it was yours,” he said.

“I wish it were,” she said rather pathetically, “if you like it so much.” He

shrugged his shoulders.

“He!” he said. “How not like it!”

“I don’t like it,” she said. “Think it’s a gloomy miserable hole. I hate it. I’ve lived here all my life and seen everything bad happen here. I hate it.”

“Why?” he said, with a curious, sarcastic intonation.

“It’s a bad job it isn’t yours, for certain,” he said, as they entered the living-room, where Miss Pinnegar sat cutting bread and butter.

“What?” said Miss Pinnegar sharply.

“The house,” said Alvina.

“Oh well, we don’t know. We’ll hope for the best,” replied Miss Pinnegar, arranging the bread and butter on the plate. Then, rather tart, she added: “It *is* a bad job. And a good many things are a bad job, besides that. If Miss Houghton had what she *ought* to have, things would be very different, I assure you.”

“Oh yes,” said Ciccio, to whom this address was directed.

“Very different indeed. If all the money hadn’t been — lost — in the way it has, Miss Houghton wouldn’t be playing the piano, for one thing, in a cinematograph show.”

“No, perhaps not,” said Ciccio.

“Certainly not. It’s not the right thing for her to be doing, *at all!*”

“You think not?” said Ciccio.

“Do you imagine it is?” said Miss Pinnegar, turning point blank on him as he sat by the fire.

He looked curiously at Miss Pinnegar, grinning slightly. “He!” he said. “How do I know!”

“I should have thought it was obvious,” said Miss Pinnegar. “He!” he ejaculated, not fully understanding.

“But of course those that are used to nothing better can’t see anything but what they’re used to,” she said, rising and shaking the crumbs from her black silk apron, into the fire. He watched her.

Miss Pinnegar went away into the scullery. Alvina was laying a fire in the drawing-room. She came with a dust-pan to take some coal from the fire of the living-room.

“What do you want?” said Ciccio, rising. And he took the shovel from her hand.

“Big, hot fires, aren’t they?” he said, as he lifted the burning coals from the glowing mass of the grate.

“Enough,” said Alvina. “Enough! We’ll put it in the drawing-room.” He carried the shovel of flaming, smoking coals to the other room, and threw them in the grate on the sticks, watching Alvina put on more pieces of coal.

“Fine, a fire! Quick work, eh? A beautiful thing, a fire! You know what they say in my place: You can live without food, but you can’t live without fire.”

“But I thought it was always hot in Naples,” said Alvina.

“No, it isn’t. And my village, you know, when I was small boy, that was in the mountains, an hour quick train from Naples. Cold in the winter, hot in the summer — ”

“As cold as England?” said Alvina.

“Hé — and colder. The wolves come down. You could hear them crying in the night, in the frost — ”

“How terrifying — !” said Alvina.

“And they will kill the dogs! Always they kill the dogs. You know, they hate dogs, wolves do.” He made a queer noise, to show how wolves hate dogs. Alvina understood, and laughed.

“So should I, if I was a wolf,” she said.

“Yes — eh?” His eyes gleamed on her for a moment. “Ah but, the poor dogs! You find them bitten — carried away among the trees or the stones, hard to find them, poor things, the next day.”

“How frightened they must be — !” said Alvina.

“Frightened — hu!” he made sudden gesticulations and ejaculations, which added volumes to his few words.

“And did you like it, your village?” she said.

He put his head on one side in deprecation.

“No,” he said, “because, you see — he, there is nothing to do — no money — work — work — work — no life — you see nothing. When I was a small boy my father, he died, and my mother comes with me to Naples. Then I go with the little boats on the sea — fishing, carrying people — ” He flourished his hand as if to make her understand all the things that must be wordless. He smiled at her — but there was a faint, poignant sadness and remoteness in him, a beauty of old fatality, and ultimate indifference to fate.

“And were you very poor?”

“Poor? — why yes! Nothing. Rags — no shoes — bread, little fish from the sea — shell-fish — ”

His hands flickered, his eyes rested on her with a profound look of knowledge. And it seemed, in spite of all, one state she was very much the same to him as another, poverty was as much life as affluence. Only he had a sort of jealous idea that it was humiliating to be poor, and so, for vanity’s sake, he would have possessions. The countless generations of civilization behind him had left him an instinct of the world’s meaninglessness. Only his little modern education made money and independence an *idée fixe*. Old instinct told him the world was

nothing. But modern education, so shallow, was much more efficacious than instinct. It drove him to make a show of himself to the world. Alvina watching him, as if hypnotized, saw his old beauty, formed through civilization after civilization; and at the same time she saw his modern vulgarian-ism, and decadence.

“And when you go back, you will go back to your old village?” she said.

He made a gesture with his head and shoulders, evasive, noncommittal.

“I don’t know, you see,” he said.

“What is the name of it?”

“Pescocalascio.” He said the word subduedly, unwillingly. “Tell me again,” said Alvina.

“Pescocalascio.”

She repeated it.

“And tell me how you spell it,” she said.

He fumbled in his pocket for a pencil and a piece of paper. She rose and brought him an old sketch-book. He wrote, slowly, but with the beautiful Italian hand, the name of his village.

“And write your name,” she said.

“Marasca Francesco,” he wrote.

“And write the name of your father and mother,” she said. He looked at her enquiringly.

“I want to see them,” she said.

“Marasca Giovanni,” he wrote, and under that “Califano Maria.”

She looked at the four names, in the graceful Italian script. And one after the other she read them out. He corrected her, smiling gravely. When she said them properly, he nodded.

“Yes,” he said. “That’s it. You say it well.”

At that moment Miss Pinnegar came in to say Mrs. Rollings had seen another of the young men riding down the street.

“That’s Gigi! He doesn’t know how to come here,” said Ciccio, quickly taking his hat and going out to find his friend.

Geoffrey arrived, his broad face hot and perspiring.

“Couldn’t you find it?” said Alvina.

“I find the house, but I couldn’t find no door,” said Geoffrey.

They all laughed, and sat down to tea. Geoffrey and Ciccio talked to each other in French, and kept each other in countenance. Fortunately for them, Madame had seen to their table-manners. But still they were far too free and easy to suit Miss Pinnegar.

“Do you know,” said Ciccio in French to Geoffrey, “what a fine house this

is?”

“No,” said Geoffrey, rolling his large eyes round the room, and speaking with his cheek stuffed out with food. “Is it?”

“Ah — if it was *hers*, you know — ”

And so, after tea, Ciccio said to Alvina:

“Shall you let Geoffrey see the house?”

The tour commenced again. Geoffrey, with his thick legs planted apart, gazed round the rooms, and made his comments in French to Ciccio. When they climbed the stairs, he fingered the big, smooth mahogany bannister-rail. In the bedroom he stared almost dismayed at the colossal bed and cupboard. In the bath-room he turned on the old-fashioned, silver taps.

“Here is my room — ” said Ciccio in French.

“Assez éloigné!” replied Gigi. Ciccio also glanced along the corridor. “Yes,” he said. “But an open course — ”

“Look, my boy — if you could marry *this* — ” meaning the house. “Ha, she doesn’t know if it’s hers any more! Perhaps the debts cover every bit of it.”

“Don’t say so! Na, that’s a pity, that’s a pity! La pauvre fille — pauvre demoiselle!” lamented Geoffrey.

“Isn’t it a pity! What dost say?”

“A thousand pities! A thousand pities! Look, my boy, love needs no havings, but marriage does. Love is for all, even the grasshoppers. But marriage means a kitchen. That’s how it is. La pauvre demoiselle; c’est malheur pour elle.”

“That’s true,” said Ciccio. “Et aussi pour moi. For me as well.”

“For thee as well, cher! Perhaps — ” said Geoffrey, laying his arm on Ciccio’s shoulder, and giving him a sudden hug. They smiled to each other.

“Who knows!” said Ciccio.

“Who knows, truly, my Cic’.”

As they went downstairs to rejoin Alvina, whom they heard playing on the piano in the drawing-room, Geoffrey peeped once more into the big bedroom.

“Tu n’es jamais monté si haut, mon beau. Pour moi, ça serait difficile de m’élever. J’aurais bien peur, moi. Tu to trouves aussi un peu ébahi, hein? n’est-ce pas?”

“Y’a place pour trois,” said Ciccio.

“Non, je crêverais, la haut. Pas pour moi!”

And they went laughing downstairs.

Miss Pinnegar was sitting with Alvina, determined not to go to Chapel this evening. She sat, rather hulked, reading a novel. Alvina flirted with the two men, played the piano to them, and suggested a game of cards.

“Oh, Alvina, you will never bring out the cards tonight!” expostulated poor

Miss Pinnegar.

“But, Miss Pinnegar, it can’t possibly hurt anybody.”

“You know what I think — and what your father thought — and your mother and Miss Frost — ”

“You see I think it’s only prejudice,” said Alvina.

“Oh very well!” said Miss Pinnegar angrily.

And closing her book, she rose and went to the other room.

Alvina brought out the cards, and a little box of pence which remained from Endeavour harvests. At that moment there was a knock. It was Mr. May. Miss Pinnegar brought him in, in triumph.

“Oh!” he said. “Company! I heard you’d come, Miss Houghton, so I *hastened* to pay my compliments. I didn’t know you had *company*. How do you do, Francesco! How do you do, Geoffrey. Comment allez-vous, alors?”

“Bien!” said Geoffrey. “You are going to take a hand?”

“Cards on Sunday evening! Dear me, what a revolution! Of course, I’m not *bigoted*. If Miss Houghton asks me — ”

Miss Pinnegar looked solemnly at Alvina.

“Yes, do take a hand, Mr. May,” said Alvina.

“Thank you, I will then, if I may. Especially as I see those tempting piles of pennies and ha’pennies. Who is bank, may I ask? Is Miss Pinnegar going to play too?”

But Miss Pinnegar had turned her poor, bowed back, and departed. “I’m afraid she’s offended,” said Alvina.

“But why? We don’t put *her* soul in danger, do we now? I’m a good Catholic, you know, I *can’t* do with these provincial little creeds. Who deals? Do you, Miss Houghton? But I’m afraid we shall have a rather *dry* game? What? Isn’t that your opinion?”

The other men laughed.

“If Miss Houghton would just *allow* me to run round and bring something in. Yes? May I? That would be so much more cheerful. What is your choice, gentlemen?”

“Beer,” said Ciccio, and Geoffrey nodded.

“Beer! Oh really! Extraor’nary! I always take a little whiskey myself. What kind of beer? Ale? — or bitter? I’m afraid I’d better bring bottles. Now how can I secrete them? You haven’t a small travelling case, Miss Houghton? Then I shall look as if I’d just been taking a *journey*. Which I have — to the Sun and back: and if *that* isn’t far enough, even for Miss Pinnegar and John Wesley, why, I’m sorry.”

Alvina produced the travelling case.

“Excellent!” he said. “Excellent! It will hold half-a-dozen beautifully. Now —” he fell into a whisper — “hadn’t I better sneak out at the front door, and so escape the clutches of the watch-dog?”

Out he went, on tip-toe, the other two men grinning at him. Fortunately there were glasses, the best old glasses, in the side cupboard in the drawing room. But unfortunately, when Mr. May returned, a corkscrew was in request. So Alvina stole to the kitchen. Miss Pinnegar sat dumpeed by the fire, with her spectacles and her book. She watched like a lynx as Alvina returned. And she saw the tell-tale corkscrew. So she dumpeed a little deeper in her chair.

“There was a sound of revelry by night!” For Mr. May, after a long depression, was in high feather. They shouted, positively shouted over their cards, they roared with excitement, expostulation, and laughter. Miss Pinnegar sat through it all. But at one point she could bear it no longer.

The drawing-room door opened, and the dumpy, hulked, faded woman in a black serge dress stood like a rather squat avenging angel in the doorway.

“What would your *father* say to this?” she said sternly.

The company suspended their laughter and their cards, and looked around. Miss Pinnegar wilted and felt strange under so many eyes. “Father!” said Alvina. “But why father?”

“You lost girl!” said Miss Pinnegar, backing out and closing the door. Mr. May laughed so much that he knocked his whiskey over. “There,” he cried, helpless, “look what she’s cost me!” And he went off into another paroxysm, swelling like a turkey.

Ciccio opened his mouth, laughing silently.

“Lost girl! Lost girl! How lost, when you are at home?” said Geoffrey, making large eyes and looking hither and thither as if *he* had lost something.

They all went off again in a muffled burst.

“No but, really,” said Mr. May, “drinking and card-playing with strange men in the drawing-room on Sunday evening, of *cauce* it’s scandalous. It’s *terrible*! I don’t know how ever you’ll be saved, after such a sin. And in Manchester House, too — !” He went off into another silent, turkey-scarlet burst of mirth, wriggling in his chair and squealing faintly: “Oh, I love it, I love it! *You lost girl*! Why of *cauce* she’s lost! And Miss Pinnegar has only just found it out Who *wouldn’t* be lost? Why even Miss Pinnegar would be lost if she could. Of *cauce* she would! Quite natch’ral!”

Mr. May wiped his eyes, with his handkerchief which had unfortunately mopped up his whiskey.

So they played on, till Mr. May and Geoffrey had won all the pennies, except twopence of Ciccio’s. Alvina was in debt.

“Well I think it’s been a most agreeable game,” said Mr. May. “Most agreeable! Don’t you all?”

The two other men smiled and nodded.

“I’m only sorry to think Miss Houghton has *lost* so steadily all evening. Really quite remarkable. But *then* — you see — I comfort myself with the reflection ‘Lucky in cards, unlucky in love.’ I’m certainly *hounded* with misfortune in love. And I’m *sure* Miss Houghton would rather be unlucky in cards than in love. What, isn’t it so?”

“Of course,” said Alvina.

“There, you see, *of cauce!* Well, all we can do after that is to wish her success in love. Isn’t that so, gentlemen? I’m sure *we* are all quite willing to do our best to contribute to it. Isn’t it so, gentlemen? Aren’t we all ready to do our best to contribute to Miss Houghton’s happiness in love? Well then, let us drink to it.” He lifted his glass, and bowed to Alvina. “With *every* wish for your success in love, Miss Houghton, and your *devoted* servant — ” He bowed and drank.

Geoffrey made large eyes at her as he held up his glass.

“*I* know you’ll come out all right in love, *I* know,” he said heavily. “And you, Ciccio? Aren’t you drinking?” said Mr. May.

Ciccio held up his glass, looked at Alvina, made a little mouth at her, comical, and drank his beer.

“Well,” said Mr. May, “*beer* must confirm it, since words won’t.”

“What time is it?” said Alvina. “We must have supper.”

It was past nine o’clock. Alvina rose and went to the kitchen, the men trailing after her. Miss Pinnegar was not there. She was not anywhere.

“Has she gone to bed?” said Mr. May. And he crept stealthily upstairs on tip-toe, a comical, flush-faced, tubby little man. He was familiar with the house. He returned prancing.

“I heard her cough,” he said. “There’s a light under her door. She’s gone to bed. Now haven’t I always said she was a good soul? I shall drink her health. Miss Pinnegar — ” and he bowed stiffly in the direction of the stair — “your health, and a *good night’s rest*”

After which, giggling gaily, he seated himself at the head of the table and began to carve the cold mutton.

“And where are the Natcha-Kee-Tawaras this week?” he asked. They told him.

“Oh? And you two are cycling back to the camp of Kishwégin tonight? We mustn’t prolong our cheerfulness *too* far.”

“Ciccio is staying to help me with my bag tomorrow,” said Alvina. “You know I’ve joined the Tawaras permanently — as pianist.”

“No, I didn’t know that! Oh really! Really! Oh! Well! I see! Permanently! Yes, I am surprised! Yes! As pianist? And if I might ask, what is your share of the tribal income?”

“That isn’t met,” said Alvina.

“No! Exactly! Exactly! It *wouldn’t* be settled yet. And you say it is a permanent engagement? Of *cauce*, at such a figure.”

“Yes, it is a permanent engagement,” said Alvina.

“Really! What a blow you give me! You won’t come back to the Endeavour? What? Not at all?”

“No,” said Alvina. “I shall sell out of the Endeavour.”

“Really! You’ve decided, have you? Oh! This is news to me. And is *this* quite final, too?”

“Quite,” said Alvina.

“I see! Putting two and two together, if I may say so — ” and he glanced from her to the young men — ”I *see*. Most decidedly, most one-sidedly, if I may use the vulgarism, I *see* — *e* — *e!* Oh! but what a blow you give me! What a blow you give me!”

“Why?” said Alvina.

“What’s to become of the Endeavour? and consequently, of poor me?”

“Can’t you keep it going? — form a company?”

“I’m afraid I can’t. I’ve done my best. But I’m afraid, you know, you’ve landed me.”

“I’m so sorry,” said Alvina. “I hope not.”

“Thank you for the *hope*,” said Mr. May sarcastically.

“They say hope is sweet. I begin to find it a little *bitter!*”

Poor man, he had already gone quite yellow in the face. Ciccio and Geoffrey watched him with dark-seeing eyes.

“And when are you going to let this fatal decision take effect?” asked Mr. May.

“I’m going to see the lawyer tomorrow, and I’m going to tell him to sell everything and clear up as soon as possible,” said Alvina. “Sell everything! This house, and all it contains?”

“Yes,” said Alvina. “Everything.”

“Really!” Mr. May seemed smitten quite dumb. “I feel as if the world had suddenly come to an end,” he said.

“But hasn’t your world often come to an end before?” said Alvina.

“Well — I suppose, once or twice. But *never* quite on top of me, you see, before — ”

There was a silence.

“And have you told Miss Pinnegar?” said Mr. May.

“Not finally. But she has decided to open a little business in Tamworth, where she has relations.”

“Has she! And are you *really* going to *tour* with these young people — ?” he indicated Ciccio and Gigi. “And at *no* salary!” His voice rose. “Why! It’s almost *White Slave Traffic*,” on Madame’s part. Upon my word!”

“I don’t think so,” said Alvina. “Don’t you see that’s insulting.”

“*Insulting!* Well, I don’t know. I think it’s the *truth* — ”

“Not to be said to me, for all that,” said Alvina, quivering with anger.

“Oh!” perked Mr. May, yellow with strange rage. “Oh! I mustn’t say what I think! Oh!”

“Not if you think those things — ” said Alvina.

“Oh really! The difficulty is, you see, I’m afraid I *do* think them — ” Alvina watched him with big, heavy eyes.

“Go away,” she said. “Go away! I won’t be insulted by you.”

“No *indeed!*” cried Mr. May, starting to his feet, his eyes almost bolting from his head. “No *indeed!* I wouldn’t *think* of insulting you in the presence of these two young gentlemen.”

Ciccio rose slowly, and with a slow, repeated motion of the head, indicated the door.

“Allez!” he said.

“*Certainement!*” cried Mr. May, flying at Ciccio, verbally, like an enraged hen yellow at the gills. “*Certainement!* Je m’en vais. Cette compagnie n’est pas de ma choix.”

“Allez!” said Ciccio, more loudly.

And Mr. May strutted out of the room like a bird bursting with its own rage. Ciccio stood with his hands on the table, listening. They heard Mr. May slam the front door.

“Gone!” said Geoffrey.

Ciccio smiled sneeringly.

“Voyez, un cochon de lait,” said Gigi amply and calmly.

Ciccio sat down in his chair. Geoffrey poured out some beer for him, saying:

“Drink, my Cic’, the bubble has burst, prfff!” And Gigi knocked in his own puffed cheek with his fist. “Allaye, my dear, your health! We are the Tawaras. We are Allaye! We are Pacohuila! We are Walgatchka! Allons! The milk-pig is stewed and eaten. Voila!” He drank, smiling broadly.

“One by one,” said Geoffrey, who was a little drunk: “One by one we put them out of the field, they are *hors de combat*. Who remains? Pacohuila, Walgatchka, Allaye — ”

He smiled very broadly. Alvina was sitting sunk in thought and torpor after her sudden anger.

“Allaye, what do you think about? You are the bride of Tawara,” said Geoffrey.

Alvina looked at him, smiling rather wanly.

“And who is Tawara?” she asked.

He raised his shoulders and spread his hands and swayed his head from side to side, for all the world like a comic mandarin.

“There!” he cried. “The question! Who is Tawara? Who? Tell me! Ciccio is he — and I am he — and Max and Louis — ” he spread his hand to the distant members of the tribe.

“I can’t be the bride of all four of you,” said Alvina, laughing.

“No — no! No — no! Such a thing does not come into my mind. But you are the Bride of Tawara. You dwell in the tent of Pacohuila. And comes the day, should it ever be so, there is no room for you in the tent of Pacohuila, then the lodge of Walgatchka the bear is open for you. Open, yes, wide open — ” He spread his arms from his ample chest, at the end of the table. “Open, and when Allaye enters, it is the lodge of Allaye, Walgatchka is the bear that serves Allaye. By the law of the Pale Face, by the law of the Yenghees, by the law of the Fransayes, Walgatchka shall be husband-bear to Allaye, that day she lifts the door-curtain of his tent — ”

He rolled his eyes and looked around. Alvina watched him. “But I might be afraid of a husband-bear,” she said.

Geoffrey got on to his feet.

“By the Manitou,” he said, “the head of the bear Walgatchka is humble — ” here Geoffrey bowed his head — ”his teeth are as soft as lilies — ” here he opened his mouth and put his finger on his small close teeth — ”his hands are as soft as bees that stroke a flower — ” here he spread his hands and went and suddenly flopped on his knees beside Alvina, showing his hands and his teeth still, and rolling his eyes. “Allaye can have no fear at all of the bear Walgatchka,” he said, looking up at her comically.

Ciccio, who had been watching and slightly grinning, here rose to his feet and took Geoffrey by the shoulder, pulling him up.

“Basta!” he said. “Tu es saoul. You are drunk, my Gigi. Get up. How are you going to ride to Mansfield, hein? — great beast.”

“Ciccio,” said Geoffrey solemnly. “I love thee, I love thee as a brother, and also more. I love thee as a brother, my Ciccio, as thou knowest. But — ” and he puffed fiercely — ”I am the slave of Allaye, I am the tame bear of Allaye.”

“Get up,” said Ciccio, “get up! Per bacco! She doesn’t want a tame bear.” He

smiled down on his friend.

Geoffrey rose to his feet and flung his arms round Ciccio.

“Cic’,” he besought him. “Cic’ — I love thee as a brother. But let me be the tame bear of Allaye, let me be the gentle bear of Allaye.”

“All right,” said Ciccio. “Thou art the tame bear of Allaye.” Geoffrey strained Ciccio to his breast.

“Thank you! Thank you! Salute me, my own friend.”

And Ciccio kissed him on either cheek. Whereupon Geoffrey immediately flopped on his knees again before Alvina, and presented her his broad, rich-coloured cheek.

“Salute your bear, Allaye,” he cried. “Salute your slave, the tame bear Walgatchka, who is a wild bear for all except Allaye and his brother Pacohuila the Puma.” Geoffrey growled realistically as a wild bear as he kneeled before Alvina, presenting his cheek.

Alvina looked at Ciccio, who stood above, watching. Then she lightly kissed him on the cheek, and said:

“Won’t you go to bed and sleep?”

Geoffrey staggered to his feet, shaking his head.

“No — no — ” he said. “No — no! Walgatchka must travel to the tent of Kishwégin, to the Camp of the Tawaras.”

“Not tonight, *mon brave*,” said Ciccio. “Tonight we stay here, hein. Why separate, hein? — frère?”

Geoffrey again clasped Ciccio in his arms.

“Pacohuila and Walgatchka are blood-brothers, two bodies, one blood. One blood, in two bodies; one stream, in two valleys: one lake, between two mountains.”

Here Geoffrey gazed with large, heavy eyes on Ciccio. Alvina brought a candle and lighted it.

“You will manage in the one room?” she said. “I will give you another pillow.”

She led the way upstairs. Geoffrey followed, heavily. Then Ciccio.

On the landing Alvina gave them the pillow and the candle, smiled, bade them good-night in a whisper, and went downstairs again. She cleared away the supper and carried away all glasses and bottles from the drawing-room. Then she washed up, removing all traces of the feast. The cards she restored to their old mahogany box. Manchester House looked itself again.

She turned off the gas at the meter, and went upstairs to bed. From the far room she could hear the gentle, but profound vibrations of Geoffrey’s snoring. She was tired after her day: too tired to trouble about anything any more.

But in the morning she was first downstairs. She heard Miss Pinnegar, and hurried. Hastily she opened the windows and doors to drive away the smell of beer and smoke. She heard the men rumbling in the bath-room. And quickly she prepared breakfast and made a fire. Mrs. Rollings would not appear till later in the day. At a quarter to seven Miss Pinnegar came down, and went into the scullery to make her tea.

“Did both the men stay?” she asked.

“Yes, they both slept in the end room,” said Alvina.

Miss Pinnegar said no more, but padded with her tea and her boiled egg into the living room. In the morning she was wordless.

Ciccio came down, in his shirt-sleeves as usual, but wearing a collar. He greeted Miss Pinnegar politely.

“Good-morning!” she said, and went on with her tea.

Geoffrey appeared. Miss Pinnegar glanced once at him, sullenly, and briefly answered his good-morning. Then she went on with her egg, slow and persistent in her movements, mum.

The men went out to attend to Geoffrey’s bicycle. The morning was slow and grey, obscure. As they pumped up the tires, they heard some one padding behind. Miss Pinnegar came and unbolted the yard door, but ignored their presence. Then they saw her return and slowly mount the outer stair-ladder, which went up to the top floor. Two minutes afterwards they were startled by the irruption of the work-girls. As for the work-girls, they gave quite loud, startled squeals, suddenly seeing the two men on their right hand, in the obscure morning. And they lingered on the stair-way to gaze in rapt curiosity, poking and whispering, until Miss Pinnegar appeared overhead, and sharply rang a bell which hung beside the entrance door of the workrooms.

After which excitements Geoffrey and Ciccio went in to breakfast, which Alvina had prepared.

“You have done it all, eh?” said Ciccio, glancing round.

“Yes. I’ve made breakfast for years, now,” said Alvina.

“Not many more times here, eh?” he said, smiling significantly. “I hope not,” said Alvina.

Ciccio sat down almost like a husband — as if it were his right. Geoffrey was very quiet this morning. He ate his breakfast, and rose to go.

“I shall see you soon,” he said, smiling sheepishly and bowing to Alvina. Ciccio accompanied him to the street.

When Ciccio returned, Alvina was once more washing dishes. “What time shall we go?” he said.

“We’ll catch the one train. I must see the lawyer this morning.”

“And what shall you say to him?”

“I shall tell him to sell everything — ”

“And marry me?”

She started, and looked at him.

“You don’t want to marry, do you?” she said.

“Yes, I do.”

“Wouldn’t you rather wait, and see — ”

“What?” he said.

“See if there is any money.”

He watched her steadily, and his brow darkened.

“Why?” he said.

She began to tremble.

“You’d like it better if there was money”

A slow, sinister smile came on his mouth. His eyes never smiled, except to Geoffrey, when a flood of warm, laughing light sometimes suffused them.

“You think I should!”

“Yes. It’s true, isn’t it? You would!”

He turned his eyes aside, and looked at her hands as she washed the forks. They trembled slightly. Then he looked back at her eyes again, that were watching him large and wistful and a little accusing.

His impudent laugh came on his face.

“Yes,” he said, “it is always better if there is money” He put his hand on her, and she winced. “But I marry you for love, you know. You know what love is — ” And he put his arms round her, and laughed down into her face.

She strained away.

“But you can have love without marriage,” she said. “You know that.”

“All right! All right! Give me love, eh? I want that.”

She struggled against him.

“But not now,” she said.

She saw the light in his eyes fix determinedly, and he nodded. “Now!” he said. “Now!”

His yellow-tawny eyes looked down into hers, alien and overbearing.

“I can’t,” she struggled. “I can’t now.”

He laughed in a sinister way: yet with a certain warm-heartedness. “Come to that big room — ” he said.

Her face flew fixed into opposition.

“I can’t now, really,” she said grimly.

His eyes looked down at hers. Her eyes looked back at him, hard and cold and determined. They remained motionless for some seconds. Then, a stray wisp of

her hair catching his attention, desire filled his heart, warm and full, obliterating his anger in the combat. For a moment he softened. He saw her hardness becoming more assertive, and he wavered in sudden dislike, and almost dropped her. Then again the desire flushed his heart, his smile became reckless of her, and he picked her right up.

“Yes,” he said. “Now.”

For a second, she struggled frenziedly. But almost instantly she recognized how much stronger he was, and she was still, mute and motionless with anger. White, and mute, and motionless, she was taken to her room. And at the back of her mind all the time she wondered at his deliberate recklessness of her. Recklessly, he had his will of her — but deliberately, and thoroughly, not rushing to the issue, but taking everything he wanted of her, progressively, and fully, leaving her stark, with nothing, nothing of herself — nothing.

When she could lie still she turned away from him, still mute. And he lay with his arms over her, motionless. Noises went on, in the street, overhead in the workroom. But theirs was complete silence.

At last he rose and looked at her.

“Love is a fine thing, Allaye,” he said.

She lay mute and unmoving. He approached, laid his hand on her breast, and kissed her.

“Love,” he said, asserting, and laughing.

But still she was completely mute and motionless. He threw bedclothes over her and went downstairs, whistling softly.

She knew she would have to break her own trance of obstinacy. So she snuggled down into the bedclothes, shivering deliciously, for her skin had become chilled. She didn't care a bit, really, about her own downfall. She snuggled deliciously in the sheets, and admitted to herself that she loved him. In truth, she loved him — and she was laughing to herself.

Luxuriously, she resented having to get up and tackle her heap of broken garments. But she did it. She took other clothes, adjusted her hair, tied on her apron, and went downstairs once more. She could not find Ciccio: he had gone out. A stray cat darted from the scullery, and broke a plate in her leap. Alvina found her washing-up water cold. She put on more, and began to dry her dishes.

Ciccio returned shortly, and stood in the doorway looking at her. She turned to him, unexpectedly laughing.

“What do you think of yourself?” she laughed.

“Well,” he said, with a little nod, and a furtive look of triumph about him, evasive. He went past her and into the room. Her inside burned with love for him: so elusive, so beautiful, in his silent passing out of her sight. She wiped her

dishes happily. Why was she so absurdly happy, she asked herself? And why did she still fight so hard against the sense of his dark, unseizable beauty? Unseizable, for ever unseizable! That made her almost his slave. She fought against her own desire to fall at his feet. Ridiculous to be so happy.

She sang to herself as she went about her work downstairs. Then she went upstairs, to do the bedrooms and pack her bag. At ten o'clock she was to go to the family lawyer.

She lingered over her possessions: what to take, and what not to take. And so doing she wasted her time. It was already ten o'clock when she hurried downstairs. He was sitting quite still, waiting. He looked up at her.

"Now I must hurry," she said. "I don't think I shall be more than an hour."

He put on his hat and went out with her.

"I shall tell the lawyer I am engaged to you. Shall I?" she asked.

"Yes," he said. "Tell him what you like." He was indifferent.

"Because," said Alvina gaily, "we can please ourselves what we do, whatever we say. I shall say we think of getting married in the summer, when we know each other better, and going to Italy."

"Why shall you say all that?" said Ciccio.

"Because I shall *have* to give some account of myself, or they'll make me do something I don't want to do. You might come to the lawyer's with me, will you? He's an awfully nice old man. Then he'd believe in you."

But Ciccio shook his head.

"No," he said. "I shan't go. He doesn't want to see *me*."

"Well, if you don't want to. But I remember your name, Francesco Marasca, and I remember Pescocalascio."

Ciccio heard in silence, as they walked the half-empty, Monday-morning street of Woodhouse. People kept nodding to Alvina. Some hurried inquisitively across to speak to her and look at Ciccio. Ciccio however stood aside and turned his back.

"Oh yes," Alvina said. "I am staying with friends, here and there, for a few weeks. No, I don't know when I shall be back. Good-bye!"

"You're looking well, Alvina," people said to her. "I think you're looking wonderful. A change does you good."

"It does, doesn't it," said Alvina brightly. And she was pleased she was looking well.

"Well, good-bye for a minute," she said, glancing smiling into his eyes and nodding to him, as she left him at the gate of the lawyer's house, by the ivy-covered wall.

The lawyer was a little man, all grey. Alvina had known him since she was a

child: but rather as an official than an individual. She arrived all smiling in his room. He sat down and scrutinized her sharply, officially, before beginning.

“Well, Miss Houghton, and what news have you?”

“I don’t think I’ve any, Mr. Beeby. I came to you for news.”

“Ah!” said the lawyer, and he fingered a paper-weight that covered a pile of papers. “I’m afraid there is nothing very pleasant, unfortunately. And nothing very unpleasant either, for that matter.” He gave her a shrewd little smile.

“Is the will proved?”

“Not yet. But I expect it will be through in a few days’ time.”

“And are all the claims in?”

“Yes. I *think* so. I think so!” And again he laid his hand on the pile of papers under the paper-weight, and ran through the edges with the tips of his fingers.

“All those?” said Alvina.

“Yes,” he said quietly. It sounded ominous.

“Many!” said Alvina.

“A fair amount! A fair amount! Let me show you a statement.”

He rose and brought her a paper. She made out, with the lawyer’s help, that the claims against her father’s property exceeded the gross estimate of his property by some seven hundred pounds.

“Does it mean we owe seven hundred pounds?” she asked.

“That is only on the *estimate* of the property. It might, of course, realize much more, when sold — or it might realize less.”

“How awful!” said Alvina, her courage sinking.

“Unfortunate! Unfortunate! However, I don’t think the realization of the property would amount to less than the estimate. I don’t think so.”

“But even then,” said Alvina. “There is sure to be something owing — ”

She saw herself saddled with her father’s debts.

“I’m afraid so,” said the lawyer.

“And then what?” said Alvina.

“Oh — the creditors will have to be satisfied with a little less than they claim, I suppose. Not a very great deal, you see. I don’t expect they will complain a great deal. In fact, some of them will be less badly off than they feared. No, on that score we need not trouble further. Useless if we do, anyhow. But now, about yourself. Would you like me to try to compound with the creditors, so that you could have some sort of provision? They are mostly people who know you, know your condition: and I might try — ”

“Try what?” said Alvina.

“To make some sort of compound. Perhaps you might retain a lease of Miss Pinnegar’s workrooms. Perhaps even something might be done about the

cinematograph. What would you like — ?”

Alvina sat still in her chair, looking through the window at the ivy sprays, and the leaf buds on the lilac. She felt she could not, she could not cut off every resource. In her own heart she had confidently expected a few hundred pounds: even a thousand or more. And that would make her *something* of a catch, to people who had nothing. But now! — nothing! — nothing at the back of her but her hundred pounds. When that was gone — !

In her dilemma she looked at the lawyer.

“You didn’t expect it would be quite so bad?” he said.

“I think I didn’t,” she said.

“No. Well — it might have been worse.”

Again he waited. And again she looked at him vacantly

“What do you think?” he said.

For answer, she only looked at him with wide eyes.

“Perhaps you would rather decide later.”

“No,” she said. “No. It’s no use deciding later.”

The lawyer watched her with curious eyes, his hand beat a little impatiently.

“I will do my best,” he said, “to get what I can for you.”

“Oh well!” she said. “Better let everything go. I don’t *want* to hang on. Don’t bother about me at all. I shall go away, anyhow.”

“You will go away?” said the lawyer, and he studied his finger-nails. “Yes. I shan’t stay here.”

“Oh! And may I ask if you have any definite idea, where you will go?”

“I’ve got an engagement as pianist, with a travelling theatrical company”

“Oh indeed!” said the lawyer, scrutinizing her sharply. She stared away vacantly out of the window. He took to the attentive study of his finger-nails once more. “And at a sufficient salary?”

“Quite sufficient, thank you,” said Alvina.

“Oh! Well! Well now! — ” He fidgetted a little. “You see, we are all old neighbours and connected with your father for many years. We — that is the persons interested, and myself — would not like to think that you were driven out of Woodhouse — er — er — destitute. If — er — we could come to some composition — make some arrangement that would be agreeable to you, and would, in some measure, secure you a means of livelihood — ”

He watched Alvina with sharp blue eyes. Alvina looked back at him, still vacantly.

“No — thanks awfully!” she said. “But don’t bother. I’m going away”

“With the travelling theatrical company?”

“Yes.”

The lawyer studied his finger-nails intensely

“Well,” he said, feeling with a finger-tip an imaginary roughness of one nail-edge. “Well, in that case — In that case — Supposing you have made an irrevocable decision — ”

He looked up at her sharply. She nodded slowly, like a porcelain mandarin.

“In that case,” he said, “we must proceed with the valuation and the preparation for the sale.”

“Yes,” she said faintly.

“You realize,” he said, “that everything in Manchester House, except your private personal property, and that of Miss Pinnegar, belongs to the claimants, your father’s creditors, and may not be removed from the house.”

“Yes,” she said.

“And it will be necessary to make an account of everything in the house. So if you and Miss Pinnegar will put your possessions strictly apart — But I shall see Miss Pinnegar during the course of the day. Would you ask her to call about seven — I think she is free then — ”

Alvina sat trembling.

“I shall pack my things today,” she said.

“Of course,” said the lawyer, “any little things to which you may be attached the claimants would no doubt wish you to regard as your own. For anything of greater value — your piano, for example — I should have to make a personal request — ”

“Oh, I don’t want anything — ” said Alvina.

“No? Well! You will see. You will be here a few days?”

“No,” said Alvina. “I’m going away today.”

“Today! Is that also irrevocable?”

“Yes. I must go this afternoon.”

“On account of your engagement? May I ask where your company is performing this week? Far away?”

“Mansfield!”

“Oh! Well then, in case I particularly wished to see you, you could come over?”

“If necessary” said Alvina. “But I don’t want to come to Woodhouse unless it is necessary. Can’t we write?”

“Yes — certainly! Certainly! — most things! Certainly! And now — ”

He went into certain technical matters, and Alvina signed some documents. At last she was free to go. She had been almost an hour in the room.

“Well, good-morning, Miss Houghton. You will hear from me, and I from you. I wish you a pleasant experience in your new occupation. You are not

leaving Woodhouse for ever.”

“Good-bye!” she said. And she hurried to the road.

Try as she might, she felt as if she had had a blow which knocked her down. She felt she had had a blow.

At the lawyer’s gate she stood a minute. There, across a little hollow, rose the cemetery hill. There were her graves: her mother’s, Miss Frost’s, her father’s. Looking, she made out the white cross at Miss Frost’s grave, the grey stone at her parents’. Then she turned slowly, under the church wall, back to Manchester House.

She felt humiliated. She felt she did not want to see anybody at all. She did not want to see Miss Pinnegar, nor the Natcha-Kee-Tawaras: and least of all, Ciccio. She felt strange in Woodhouse, almost as if the ground had risen from under her feet and hit her over the mouth. The fact that Manchester House and its very furniture was under seal to be sold on behalf of her father’s creditors made her feel as if all her Woodhouse life had suddenly gone smash. She loathed the thought of Manchester House. She loathed staying another minute in it.

And yet she did not want to go to the Natcha-Kee-Tawaras either. The church clock above her clanged eleven. She ought to take the twelve-forty train to Mansfield. Yet instead of going home she turned off down the alley towards the fields and the brook.

How many times had she gone that road! How many times had she seen Miss Frost bravely striding home that way, from her music-pupils. How many years had she noticed a particular wild cherry-tree come into blossom, a particular bit of black-thorn scatter its whiteness in among the pleached twigs of a hawthorn hedge. How often, how many springs had Miss Frost come home with a bit of this black-thorn in her hand!

Alvina did *not* want to go to Mansfield that afternoon. She felt insulted. She knew she would be much cheaper in Madame’s eyes. She knew her own position with the troupe would be humiliating. It would be openly a little humiliating. But it would be much more maddeningly humiliating to stay in Woodhouse and experience the full flavour of Woodhouse’s calculated benevolence. She hardly knew which was worse: the cool look of insolent half-contempt, half-satisfaction with which Madame would receive the news of her financial downfall, or the officious patronage which she would meet from the Woodhouse magnates. She knew exactly how Madame’s black eyes would shine, how her mouth would curl with a sneering, slightly triumphant smile, as she heard the news. And she could hear the bullying tone in which Henry Wagstaff would dictate the Woodhouse benevolence to her. She wanted to go away from them all — from them all — for ever.

Even from Ciccio. For she felt he insulted her too. Subtly, they all did it. They had regard for her possibilities as an heiress. Five hundred, even two hundred pounds would have made all the difference. Useless to deny it. Even to Ciccio. Ciccio would have had a lifelong respect for her, if she had come with even so paltry a sum as two hundred pounds. Now she had nothing, he would coolly withhold this respect. She felt he might jeer at her. And she could not get away from this feeling.

Mercifully she had the bit of ready money. And she had a few trinkets which might be sold. Nothing else. Mercifully, for the mere moment, she was independent.

Whatever else she did, she must go back and pack. She must pack her two boxes, and leave them ready. For she felt that once she had left, she could never come back to Woodhouse again. If England had cliffs all round — why, when there was nowhere else to go and no getting beyond, she could walk over one of the cliffs. Meanwhile, she had her short run before her. She banked hard on her independence.

So she turned back to the town. She would not be able to take the twelve-forty train, for it was already mid-day. But she was glad. She wanted some time to herself. She would send Ciccio on. Slowly she climbed the familiar hill — slowly — and rather bitterly. She felt her native place insulted her: and she felt the Natchas insulted her. In the midst of the insult she remained isolated upon herself, and she wished to be alone.

She found Ciccio waiting at the end of the yard: eternally waiting, it seemed. He was impatient.

“You’ve been a long time,” he said.

“Yes,” she answered.

“We shall have to make haste to catch the train.”

“I can’t go by this train. I shall have to come on later. You can just eat a mouthful of lunch, and go now.”

They went indoors. Miss Pinnegar had not yet come down. Mrs. Rollings was busily peeling potatoes.

“Mr. Marasca is going by the train, he’ll have to have a little cold meat,” said Alvina. “Would you mind putting it ready while I go upstairs?”

“Sharpes and Fullbankses sent them bills,” said Mrs. Rollings. Alvina opened them, and turned pale. It was thirty pounds, the total funeral expenses. She had completely forgotten them.

“And Mr. Atterwell wants to know what you’d like put on th’ headstone for your father — if you’d write it down.”

“All right.”

Mrs. Rollings popped on the potatoes for Miss Pinnegar's dinner, and spread the cloth for Ciccio. When he was eating, Miss Pinnegar came in. She inquired for Alvina — and went upstairs.

"Have you had your dinner?" she said. For there was Alvina sitting writing a letter.

"I'm going by a later train," said Alvina.

"Both of you?"

"No. He's going now."

Miss Pinnegar came downstairs again, and went through to the scullery. When Alvina came down, she returned to the living room.

"Give this letter to Madame," Alvina said to Ciccio. "I shall be at the hall by seven tonight. I shall go straight there."

"Why can't you come now?" said Ciccio.

"I can't possibly," said Alvina. "The lawyer has just told me father's debts come to much more than everything is worth. Nothing is ours — not even the plate you're eating from. Everything is under seal to be sold to pay off what is owing. So I've got to get my own clothes and boots together, or they'll be sold with the rest. Mr. Beeby wants you to go round at seven this evening, Miss Pinnegar — before I forget."

"Really!" gasped Miss Pinnegar. "Really! The house and the furniture and everything got to be sold up? Then we're on the streets! I can't believe it."

"So he told me," said Alvina.

"But how positively awful," said Miss Pinnegar, sinking motionless into a chair.

"It's not more than I expected," said Alvina. "I'm putting my things into my two trunks, and I shall just ask Mrs. Slaney to store them for me. Then I've the bag I shall travel with."

"Really!" gasped Miss Pinnegar. "I can't believe it! And when have we got to get out?"

"Oh, I don't think there's a desperate hurry. They'll take an inventory of all the things, and we can live on here till they're actually ready for the sale."

"And when will that be?"

"I don't know. A week or two."

"And is the cinematograph to be sold the same?"

"Yes — everything! The piano — even mother's portrait — "

"It's impossible to believe it," said Miss Pinnegar. "It's impossible. He can never have left things so bad."

"Ciccio," said Alvina. "You'll really have to go if you are to catch the train. You'll give Madame my letter, won't you? I should hate you to miss the train. I

know she can't bear me already, for all the fuss and upset I cause."

Ciccio rose slowly, wiping his mouth.

"You'll be there at seven o'clock?" he said.

"At the theatre," she replied.

And without more ado, he left.

Mrs. Rollings came in.

"You've heard?" said Miss Pinnegar dramatically.

"I heard somethink," said Mrs. Rollings.

"Sold up! Everything to be sold up. Every stick and rag! I never thought I should live to see the day," said Miss Pinnegar.

"You might almost have expected it," said Mrs. Rollings. "But you're all right, yourself, Miss Pinnegar. Your money isn't with his, is it?"

"No," said Miss Pinnegar. "What little I have put by is safe. But it's not enough to live on. It's not enough to keep me, even supposing I only live another ten years. If I only spend a pound a week, it costs fifty-two pounds a year. And for ten years, look at it, it's five hundred and twenty pounds. And you couldn't say less. And I haven't half that amount. I never had more than a wage, you know. Why, Miss Frost earned a good deal more than I do. And *she* didn't leave much more than fifty. Where's the money to come from — ?"

"But if you've enough to start a little business — " said Alvina.

"Yes, it's what I shall *have* to do. It's what I shall have to do. And then what about you? What about you?"

"Oh, don't bother about me," said Alvina.

"Yes, it's all very well, don't bother. But when you come to my age, you know you've *got* to bother, and bother a great deal, if you're not going to find yourself in a position you'd be sorry for. You *have* to bother. And *you'll* have to bother before you've done."

"Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof," said Alvina. "Ha, sufficient for a good many days, it seems to me."

Miss Pinnegar was in a real temper. To Alvina this seemed an odd way of taking it. The three women sat down to an uncomfortable dinner of cold meat and hot potatoes and warmed-up pudding.

"But whatever you do," pronounced Miss Pinnegar; "whatever you do, and however you strive, in this life, you're knocked down in the end. You're always knocked down."

"It doesn't matter," said Alvina, "if it's only in the end. It doesn't matter if you've had your life."

"You've never had your life, till you're dead," said Miss Pinnegar. "And if you work and strive, you've a right to the fruits of your work."

“It doesn’t matter,” said Alvina laconically, “so long as you’ve enjoyed working and striving.”

But Miss Pinnegar was too angry to be philosophic. Alvina knew it was useless to be either angry or otherwise emotional. None the less, she also felt as if she had been knocked down. And she almost envied poor Miss Pinnegar the prospect of a little, day-by-day haberdashery shop in Tamworth. Her own problem seemed so much more menacing. “Answer or die,” said the Sphinx of fate. Miss Pinnegar could answer her own fate according to its question. She could say “haberdashery shop,” and her sphinx would recognize this answer as true to nature, and would be satisfied. But every individual has his own, or her own fate, and her own sphinx. Alvina’s sphinx was an old, deep thoroughbred, she would take no mongrel answers. And her thoroughbred teeth were long and sharp. To Alvina, the last of the fantastic but purebred race of Houghton, the problem of her fate was terribly abstruse.

The only thing to do was not to solve it: to stray on, and answer fate with whatever came into one’s head. No good striving with fate. Trust to a lucky shot, or take the consequences.

“Miss Pinnegar,” said Alvina. “Have we any money in hand?”

“There is about twenty pounds in the bank. It’s all shown in my books,” said Miss Pinnegar.

“We couldn’t take it, could we?”

“Every penny shows in the books.”

Alvina pondered again.

“Are there more bills to come in?” she asked. “I mean my bills. Do I owe anything?”

“I don’t think you do,” said Miss Pinnegar.

“I’m going to keep the insurance money, any way. They can say what they like. I’ve got it, and I’m going to keep it.”

“Well,” said Miss Pinnegar, “it’s not my business. But there’s Sharps and Fullbanks to pay.”

“I’ll pay those,” said Alvina. “You tell Atterwell what to put on father’s stone. How much does it cost?”

“Five shillings a letter, you remember.”

“Well, we’ll just put the name and the date. How much will that be? James Houghton. Born 17th January — ”

“You’ll have to put ‘Also of,’” said Miss Pinnegar.

“Also of — ” said Alvina. “One — two — three — four — five — six — Six letters — thirty shillings. Seems an awful lot for *Also of* — ”

“But you can’t leave it out,” said Miss Pinnegar. “You can’t economize over

that.”

“I begrudge it,” said Alvina.

CHAPTER XI

HONOURABLE ENGAGEMENT

For days, after joining the Natcha-Kee-Tawaras, Alvina was very quiet, subdued, and rather remote, sensible of her humiliating position as a hanger-on. They none of them took much notice of her. They drifted on, rather disjointedly. The cordiality, the *joie de vivre* did not revive. Madame was a little irritable, and very exacting, and inclined to be spiteful. Ciccio went his way with Geoffrey.

In the second week, Madame found out that a man had been surreptitiously inquiring about them at their lodgings, from the landlady and the landlady's blowsy daughter. It must have been a detective — some shoddy detective. Madame waited. Then she sent Max over to Mansfield, on some fictitious errand. Yes, the lousy-looking dogs of detectives had been there too, making the most minute enquiries as to the behaviour of the Natcha-Kee-Tawaras, what they did, how their sleeping was arranged, how Madame addressed the men, what attitude the men took towards Alvina.

Madame waited again. And again, when they moved to Doncaster, the same two mongrel-looking fellows were lurking in the street, and plying the inmates of their lodging-house with questions. All the Natchas caught sight of the men. And Madame cleverly wormed out of the righteous and respectable landlady what the men had asked. Once more it was about the sleeping accommodation — whether the landlady heard anything in the night — whether she noticed anything in the bedrooms, in the beds.

No doubt about it, the Natcha-Kee-Tawaras were under suspicion. They were being followed, and watched. What for? Madame made a shrewd guess. "They want to say we are immoral foreigners," she said.

"But what have our personal morals got to do with them?" said Max angrily.

"Yes — but the English! They are so pure," said Madame.

"You know," said Louis, "somebody must have put them up to it —"

"Perhaps," said Madame, "somebody on account of Allaye." Alvina went white.

“Yes,” said Geoffrey. “White Slave Traffic! Mr. May said it.” Madame slowly nodded.

“Mr. May!” she said. “Mr. May! It is he. He knows all about morals — and immortals. Yes, I know. Yes — yes — yes! He suspects all our immoral doings, *mes braves*.”

“But there aren’t any, except mine,” cried Alvina, pale to the lips. “You! You! There you are!” Madame smiled archly, and rather mockingly.

“What are we to do?” said Max, pale on the cheekbones.

“Curse them! Curse them!” Louis was muttering, in his rolling accent.

“Wait,” said Madame. “Wait. They will not do anything to us. You are only dirty foreigners, *mes braves*. At the most they will ask us only to leave their pure country.”

“We don’t interfere with none of them,” cried Max.

“Curse them,” muttered Louis.

“Never mind, *mon cher*. You are in a pure country. Let us wait.”

“If you think it’s me,” said Alvina, “I can go away.”

“Oh, my dear, you are only the excuse,” said Madame, smiling indulgently at her. “Let us wait, and see.”

She took it smilingly. But her cheeks were white as paper, and her eyes black as drops of ink, with anger.

“Wait and see!” she chanted ironically. “Wait and see! If we must leave the dear country — then *adieu!*” And she gravely bowed to an imaginary England.

“I feel it’s my fault. I feel I ought to go away,” cried Alvina, who was terribly distressed, seeing Madame’s glitter and pallor, and the black brows of the men. Never had Ciccio’s brow looked so ominously black. And Alvina felt it was all her fault. Never had she experienced such a horrible feeling: as if something repulsive were creeping on her from behind. Every minute of these weeks was a horror to her: the sense of the low-down dogs of detectives hanging round, sliding behind them, trying to get hold of some clear proof of immorality on their part. And then — the unknown vengeance of the authorities. All the repulsive secrecy, and all the absolute power of the police authorities. The sense of a great malevolent power which had them all the time in its grip, and was watching, feeling, waiting to strike the morbid blow: the sense of the utter helplessness of individuals who were not even accused, only watched and enmeshed! the feeling that they, the Natcha-Kee-Tawaras, herself included, must be monsters of hideous vice, to have provoked all this: and yet the sane knowledge that they, none of them, were monsters of vice; this was quite killing. The sight of a policeman would send up Alvina’s heart in a flame of fear, agony; yet she knew she had nothing legally to be afraid of. Every knock at the door

was horrible.

She simply could not understand it. Yet there it was: they were watched, followed. Of that there was no question. And all she could imagine was that the troupe was secretly accused of White Slave Traffic by somebody in Woodhouse. Probably Mr. May had gone the round of the benevolent magnates of Woodhouse, concerning himself with her virtue, and currying favour with his concern. Of this she became convinced, that it was concern for her virtue which had started the whole business: and that the first instigator was Mr. May, who had got round some vulgar magistrate or County Councillor.

Madame did not consider Alvina's view very seriously. She thought it was some personal malevolence against the Tawaras themselves, probably put up by some other professionals, with whom Madame was not popular.

Be that as it may, for some weeks they went about in the shadow of this repulsive finger which was following after them, to touch them and destroy them with the black smear of shame. The men were silent and inclined to be sulky. They seemed to hold together. They seemed to be united into a strong, four-square silence and tension. They kept to themselves — and Alvina kept to herself — and Madame kept to herself. So they went about.

And slowly the cloud melted. It never broke. Alvina felt that the very force of the sullen, silent fearlessness and fury in the Tawaras had prevented its bursting. Once there had been a weakening, a cringing, they would all have been lost. But their hearts hardened with black, indomitable anger. And the cloud melted, it passed away. There was no sign.

Early summer was now at hand. Alvina no longer felt at home with the Natchas. While the trouble was hanging over, they seemed to ignore her altogether. The men hardly spoke to her. They hardly spoke to Madame, for that matter. They kept within the four-square enclosure of themselves.

But Alvina felt herself particularly excluded, left out. And when the trouble of the detectives began to pass off, and the men became more cheerful again, wanted her to jest and be familiar with them, she responded verbally, but in her heart there was no response.

Madame had been quite generous with her. She allowed her to pay for her room, and the expense of travelling. But she had her food with the rest. Wherever she was, Madame bought the food for the party, and cooked it herself. And Alvina came in with the rest: she paid no board.

She waited, however, for Madame to suggest a small salary — or at least, that the troupe should pay her living expenses. But Madame did not make such a suggestion. So Alvina knew that she was not very badly wanted. And she guarded her money, and watched for some other opportunity.

It became her habit to go every morning to the public library of the town in which she found herself, to look through the advertisements: advertisements for maternity nurses, for nursery governesses, pianists, travelling companions, even ladies' maids. For some weeks she found nothing, though she wrote several letters.

One morning Ciccio, who had begun to hang round her again, accompanied her as she set out to the library. But her heart was closed against him.

"Why are you going to the library?" he asked her. It was in Lancaster.

"To look at the papers and magazines."

"Ha-a! To find a job, eh?"

His cuteness startled her for a moment.

"If I found one I should take it," she said.

"He! I know that," he said.

It so happened that that very morning she saw on the notice-board of the library an announcement that the Borough Council wished to engage the services of an experienced maternity nurse, applications to be made to the medical board. Alvina wrote down the directions. Ciccio watched her.

"What is a maternity nurse?" he said.

"An *accoucheuse!*" she said. "The nurse who attends when babies are born."

"Do you know how to do that?" he said, incredulous, and jeering slightly.

"I was trained to do it," she said.

He said no more, but walked by her side as she returned to the lodgings. As they drew near the lodgings, he said:

"You don't want to stop with us any more?"

"I can't," she said.

He made a slight, mocking gesture.

"I can't," he repeated. "Why do you always say you can't?"

"Because I can't," she said.

"Pff — !" he went, with a whistling sound of contempt.

But she went indoors to her room. Fortunately, when she had finally cleared her things from Manchester House, she had brought with her her nurse's certificate, and recommendations from doctors. She wrote out her application, took the tram to the Town Hall and dropped it in the letter-box there. Then she wired home to her doctor for another reference. After which she went to the library and got out a book on her subject. If summoned, she would have to go before the medical board on Monday. She had a week. She read and pondered hard, recalling all her previous experience and knowledge.

She wondered if she ought to appear before the board in uniform. Her nurse's dresses were packed in her trunk at Mrs. Slaney's, in Woodhouse. It was now

May. The whole business at Woodhouse was finished. Manchester House and all the furniture was sold to some boot-and-shoe people: at least the boot-and-shoe people had the house. They had given four thousand pounds for it — which was above the lawyer's estimate. On the other hand, the theatre was sold for almost nothing. It all worked out that some thirty-three pounds, which the creditors made up to fifty pounds, remained for Alvina. She insisted on Miss Pinnegar's having half of this. And so that was all over. Miss Pinnegar was already in Tamworth, and her little shop would be opened next week. She wrote happily and excitedly about it.

Sometimes fate acts swiftly and without a hitch. On Thursday Alvina received her notice that she was to appear before the Board on the following Monday. And yet she could not bring herself to speak of it to Madame till the Saturday evening. When they were all at supper, she said:

"Madame, I applied for a post of maternity nurse, to the Borough of Lancaster."

Madame raised her eyebrows. Ciccio had said nothing.

"Oh really! You never told me."

"I thought it would be no use if it all came to nothing. They want me to go and see them on Monday, and then they will decide — "

"Really! Do they! On Monday? And then if you get this work you will stay here? Yes?"

"Yes, of course."

"Of course! Of course! Yes! H'm! And if not?"

The two women looked at each other.

"What?" said Alvina.

"If you *don't* get it — ! You are not *sure*?"

"No," said Alvina. "I am not a bit sure."

"Well then — ! Now! And if you don't get it — ?"

"What shall I do, you mean?"

"Yes, what shall you do?"

"I don't know."

"How! you don't know! Shall you come back to us, then?"

"I will if you like — "

"If I like! If *I* like! Come, it is not a question of if *I* like. It is what do you want to do yourself."

"I feel you don't want me very badly," said Alvina.

"Why? Why do you feel? Who makes you? Which of us makes you feel so? Tell me."

"Nobody in particular. But I feel it."

“Oh we-ell! If nobody makes you, and yet you feel it, it must be in yourself, don't you see? Eh? Isn't it so?”

“Perhaps it is,” admitted Alvina.

“We-ell then! We-ell — ” So Madame gave her her congé. “But if you like to come back — if you *laike* — then — ” Madame shrugged her shoulders — “you must come, I suppose.”

“Thank you,” said Alvina.

The young men were watching. They seemed indifferent. Ciccio turned aside, with his faint, stupid smile.

In the morning Madame gave Alvina all her belongings, from the little safe she called her bank.

“There is the money — so — and so — and so — that is correct. Please count it once more! — ” Alvina counted it and kept it clutched in her hand. “And there are your rings, and your chain, and your locketsee — all — everything — ! But not the brooch. Where is the brooch? Here! Shall I give it back, hein?”

“I gave it to you,” said Alvina, offended. She looked into Madame's black eyes. Madame dropped her eyes.

“Yes, you gave it. But I thought, you see, as you have now not much mo-oney, perhaps you would like to take it again — ”

“No, thank you,” said Alvina, and she went away, leaving Madame with the red brooch in her plump hand.

“Thank goodness I've given her something valuable,” thought Alvina to herself, as she went trembling to her room.

She had packed her bag. She had to find new rooms. She bade goodbye to the Natcha-Kee-Tawaras. Her face was cold and distant, but she smiled slightly as she bade them goodbye.

“And perhaps,” said Madame, “perhaps you will come to Wigan tomorrow afternoon — or evening? Yes?”

“Thank you,” said Alvina.

She went out and found a little hotel, where she took her room for the night, explaining the cause of her visit to Lancaster. Her heart was hard and burning. A deep, burning, silent anger against everything possessed her, and a profound indifference to mankind.

And therefore, the next day, everything went as if by magic. She had decided that at the least sign of indifference from the medical board people she would walk away, take her bag, and go to Windermere. She had never been to the Lakes. And Windermere was not far off. She would not endure one single hint of contumely from any one else. She would go straight to Windermere, to see the big lake. Why not do as she wished! She could be quite happy by herself among

the lakes. And she would be absolutely free, absolutely free. She rather looked forward to leaving the Town Hall, hurrying to take her bag and off to the station and freedom. Hadn't she still got about a hundred pounds? Why bother for one moment? To be quite alone in the whole world — and quite, quite free, with her hundred pounds — the prospect attracted her sincerely.

And therefore, everything went charmingly at the Town Hall. The medical board were charming to her — charming. There was no hesitation at all. From the first moment she was engaged. And she was given a pleasant room in a hospital in a garden, and the matron was charming to her, and the doctors most courteous.

When could she undertake to commence her duties? When did they want her? The very *moment* she could come. She could begin tomorrow — but she had no uniform. Oh, the matron would lend her uniform and aprons, till her box arrived.

So there she was — by afternoon installed in her pleasant little room looking on the garden, and dressed in a nurse's uniform. It was all sudden like magic. She had wired to Madame, she had wired for her box. She was another person.

Needless to say, she was glad. Needless to say that, in the morning, when she had thoroughly bathed, and dressed in clean clothes, and put on the white dress, the white apron, and the white cap, she felt another person. So clean, she felt, so thankful! Her skin seemed caressed and live with cleanliness and whiteness, luminous she felt. It was so different from being with the Natchas.

In the garden the snowballs, guelder-roses, swayed softly among green foliage, there was pink may-blossom, and single scarlet may-blossom, and underneath the young green of the trees, irises rearing purple and moth-white. A young gardener was working — and a convalescent slowly trailed a few paces.

Having ten minutes still, Alvina sat down and wrote to Ciccio: "I am glad I have got this post as nurse here. Every one is most kind, and I feel at home already. I feel quite happy here. I shall think of my days with the Natcha-Kee-Tawaras, and of you, who were such a stranger to me. Goodbye. — A. H."

This she addressed and posted. No doubt Madame would find occasion to read it. But let her.

Alvina now settled down to her new work. There was of course a great deal to do, for she had work both in the hospital and out in the town, though chiefly out in the town. She went rapidly from case to case, as she was summoned. And she was summoned at all hours. So that it was tiring work, which left her no time to herself, except just in snatches.

She had no serious acquaintance with anybody, she was too busy. The matron and sisters and doctors and patients were all part of her day's work, and she regarded them as such. The men she chiefly ignored: she felt much more friendly

with the matron. She had many a cup of tea and many a chat in the matron's room, in the quiet, sunny afternoons when the work was not pressing. Alvina took her quiet moments when she could: for she never knew when she would be rung up by one or other of the doctors in the town.

And so, from the matron, she learned to crochet. It was work she had never taken to. But now she had her ball of cotton and her hook, and she worked away as she chatted. She was in good health, and she was getting fatter again. With the Natcha-Kee-Tawaras, she had improved a good deal, her colour and her strength had returned. But undoubtedly the nursing life, arduous as it was, suited her best. She became a handsome, reposeful woman, jolly with the other nurses, really happy with her friend the matron, who was well-bred and wise, and never over-intimate.

The doctor with whom Alvina had most to do was a Dr. Mitchell, a Scotchman. He had a large practice among the poor, and was an energetic man. He was about fifty-four years old, tall, largely-built, with a good figure, but with extraordinarily large feet and hands. His face was red and clean-shaven, his eyes blue, his teeth very good. He laughed and talked rather mouthingly. Alvina, who knew what the nurses told her, knew that he had come as a poor boy and bottle-washer to Dr. Robertson, a fellow-Scotchman, and that he had made his way up gradually till he became a doctor himself, and had an independent practice. Now he was quite rich — and a bachelor. But the nurses did not set their bonnets at him very much, because he was rather mouthy and overbearing.

In the houses of the poor he was a great autocrat.

“What is that stuff you've got there!” he inquired largely, seeing a bottle of somebody's Soothing Syrup by a poor woman's bedside. “Take it and throw it down the sink, and the next time you want a soothing syrup put a little boot-blackening in hot water. It'll do you just as much good.”

Imagine the slow, pompous, large-mouthed way in which the red-faced, handsomely-built man pronounced these words, and you realize why the poor set such store by him.

He was eagle-eyed. Wherever he went, there was a scuffle directly his foot was heard on the stairs. And he knew they were hiding something. He sniffed the air: he glanced round with a sharp eye: and during the course of his visit picked up a blue mug which was pushed behind the looking-glass. He peered inside — and smelled it.

“Stout?” he said, in a tone of indignant inquiry: God-Almighty would presumably take on just such a tone, finding the core of an apple flung away among the dead-nettle of paradise: “Stout! Have you been drinking stout?” This as he gazed down on the wan mother in the bed.

“They gave me a drop, doctor. I felt that low.”

The doctor marched out of the room, still holding the mug in his hand. The sick woman watched him with haunted eyes. The attendant women threw up their hands and looked at one another. Was he going for ever? There came a sudden smash. The doctor had flung the blue mug downstairs. He returned with a solemn stride.

“There!” he said. “And the next person that gives you stout will be thrown down along with the mug.”

“Oh doctor, the bit o’ comfort!” wailed the sick woman. “It ud never do me no harm.”

“Harm! Harm! With a stomach as weak as yours! Harm! Do you know better than I do? What have I come here for? To be told by you what will do you harm and what won’t? It appears to me you need no doctor here, you know everything already — ”

“Oh no, doctor. It’s not like that. But when you feel as if you’d sink through the bed, an’ you don’t know what to do with yourself — ”

“Take a little beef-tea, or a little rice pudding. Take *nourishment*, don’t take that muck. Do you hear — ” charging upon the attendant women, who shrank against the wall — ”she’s to have nothing alcoholic at all, and don’t let me catch you giving it her.”

“They say there’s nobbut fower per cent. i’ stout,” retorted the daring female.

“Fower per cent,” mimicked the doctor brutally. “Why, what does an ignorant creature like you know about fower per cent.”

The woman muttered a little under her breath.

“What? Speak out. Let me hear what you’ve got to say, my woman. I’ve no doubt it’s something for my benefit — ”

But the affronted woman rushed out of the room, and burst into tears on the landing. After which Dr. Mitchell, mollified, largely told the patient how she was to behave, concluding:

“Nourishment! Nourishment is what you want. Nonsense, don’t tell me you can’t take it. Push it down if it won’t go down by itself — ”

“Oh doctor — ”

“Don’t say *oh doctor* to me. Do as I tell you. That’s *your* business.” After which he marched out, and the rattle of his motor car was shortly heard.

Alvina got used to scenes like these. She wondered why the people stood it. But soon she realized that they loved it — particularly the women.

“Oh, nurse, stop till Dr. Mitchell’s been. I’m scared to death of him, for fear he’s going to shout at me.”

“Why does everybody put up with him?” asked innocent Alvina.

“Oh, he’s good-hearted, nurse, he *does* feel for you.”

And everywhere it was the same: “Oh, he’s got a heart, you know. He’s rough, but he’s got a heart. I’d rather have him than your smarmy slormin sort. Oh, you feel safe with Dr. Mitchell, I don’t care what you say.”

But to Alvina this peculiar form of blustering, bullying heart which had all the women scurrying like chickens was not particularly attractive.

The men did not like Dr. Mitchell, and would not have him if possible. Yet since he was club doctor and panel doctor, they had to submit. The first thing he said to a sick or injured labourer, invariably, was:

“And keep off the beer.”

“Oh ay!”

“Keep off the beer, or I shan’t set foot in this house again.”

“Tha’s got a red enough face on thee, tha nedna shout.”

“My face is red with exposure to all weathers, attending ignorant people like you. I never touch alcohol in any form.”

“No, an’ I dunna. I drink a drop o’ beer, if that’s what you ca’ touchin’ alcohol. An’ I’m none th’ wuss for it, tha sees.”

“You’ve heard what I’ve told you.”

“Ah, I have.”

“And if you go on with the beer, you may go on with curing yourself. *I* shan’t attend you. You know I mean what I say, Mrs. Larrick” — this to the wife.

“I do, doctor. And I know it’s true what you say. An’ I’m at him night an’ day about it — ”

“Oh well, if he will hear no reason, he must suffer for it. He mustn’t think *I*’m going to be running after him, if he disobeys my orders.” And the doctor stalked off, and the woman began to complain.

None the less the women had their complaints against Dr. Mitchell. If ever Alvina entered a clean house on a wet day, she was sure to hear the housewife chuntering.

“Oh my lawd, come in nurse! What a day! Doctor’s not been yet. And he’s bound to come now I’ve just cleaned up, trapesin’ wi’ his gret feet. He’s got the biggest understandin’s of any man i’ Lancaster. My husband says they’re the best pair o’ pasties th’ kingdom. An’ he does make such a mess, for he never stops to wipe his feet on th’ mat, marches straight up your clean stairs — ”

“Why don’t you tell him to wipe his feet?” said Alvina.

“Oh my word! Fancy me telling him! He’d jump down my throat with both feet afore I’d opened my mouth. He’s not to be spoken to, he isn’t. He’s my-lord, he is. You mustn’t look, or you’re done for.”

Alvina laughed. She knew they all liked him for brow-beating them, and

having a heart over and above.

Sometimes he was given a good hit — though nearly always by a man. It happened he was in a workman's house when the man was at dinner.

"Canna yer gi'e a man summat better nor this 'ere pap, Missis?" said the hairy husband, turning up his nose at the rice pudding.

"Oh go on," cried the wife. "I hadna time for owt else." Dr. Mitchell was just stooping his handsome figure in the doorway.

"Rice pudding!" he exclaimed largely. "You couldn't have anything more wholesome and nourishing. I have a rice pudding every day of my life — every day of my life, I do."

The man was eating his pudding and pearling his big moustache copiously with it. He did not answer.

"Do you doctor!" cried the woman. "And never no different."

"Never," said the doctor.

"Fancy that! You're that fond of them?"

"I find they agree with me. They are light and digestible. And my stomach is as weak as a baby's."

The labourer wiped his big moustache on his sleeve.

"Mine isna, tha sees," he said, "so pap's no use. 'S watter ter me. I want ter feel as I've had summat: a bit o' suetty dumplin' an' a pint o' hale, summat ter fill th' hole up. An' tha'd be th' same if tha did my work."

"If I did your work," sneered the doctor. "Why I do ten times the work that any one of you does. It's just the work that has ruined my digestion, the never getting a quiet meal, and never a whole night's rest. When do you think *I* can sit at table and digest my dinner? I have to be off looking after people like you —"

"Eh, tha can ta'e th' titty-bottle wi' thee," said the labourer.

But Dr. Mitchell was furious for weeks over this. It put him in a black rage to have his great manliness insulted. Alvina was quietly amused.

The doctor began by being rather lordly and condescending with her. But luckily she felt she knew her work at least as well as he knew it. She smiled and let him condescend. Certainly she neither feared nor even admired him. To tell the truth, she rather disliked him: the great, red-faced bachelor of fifty-three, with his bald spot and his stomach as weak as a baby's, and his mouthing imperiousness and his good heart which was as selfish as it could be. Nothing can be more cocksuredly selfish than a good heart which believes in its own beneficence. He was a little too much the teetotaller on the one hand to be so largely manly on the other. Alvina preferred the labourers with their awful long moustaches that got full of food. And he was a little too loud-mouthedly lordly to be in human good taste.

As a matter of fact, he was conscious of the fact that he had risen to be a gentleman. Now if a man is conscious of being a *gentleman*, he is bound to be a little less than a *man*. But if he is gnawed with anxiety lest he may *not* be a gentleman, he is only pitiable. There is a third case, however. If a man must loftily, by his manner, assert that he is *now* a gentleman, he shows himself a clown. For Alvina, poor Dr. Mitchell fell into this third category, of clowns. She tolerated him good-humouredly, as women so often tolerate ninnies and *poseurs*. She smiled to herself when she saw his large and important presence on the board. She smiled when she saw him at a sale, buying the grandest pieces of antique furniture. She smiled when he talked of going up to Scotland, for grouse shooting, or of snatching an hour on Sunday morning, for golf. And she talked him over, with quiet, delicate malice, with the matron. He was no favourite at the hospital.

Gradually Dr. Mitchell's manner changed towards her. From his imperious condescension he took to a tone of uneasy equality. This did not suit him. Dr. Mitchell had no equals: he had only the vast stratum of inferiors, towards whom he exercised his quite profitable beneficence — it brought him in about two thousand a year: and then his superiors, people who had been born with money. It was the tradesmen and professionals who had started at the bottom and clambered to the motor-car footing, who distressed him. And therefore, whilst he treated Alvina on this uneasy tradesman footing, he felt himself in a false position.

She kept her attitude of quiet amusement, and little by little he sank. From being a lofty creature soaring over her head, he was now like a big fish poking its nose above water and making eyes at her. He treated her with rather presuming deference.

"You look tired this morning," he barked at her one hot day. "I think it's thunder," she said.

"Thunder! Work, you mean," and he gave a slight smile. "I'm going to drive you back."

"Oh no, thanks, don't trouble! I've got to call on the way."

"Where have you got to call?"

She told him.

"Very well. That takes you no more than five minutes. I'll wait for you. Now take your cloak."

She was surprised. Yet, like other women, she submitted.

As they drove he saw a man with a barrow of cucumbers. He stopped the car and leaned towards the man.

"Take that barrow-load of poison and *bury* it!" he shouted, in his strong voice.

The busy street hesitated.

“What’s that, mister?” replied the mystified hawker.

Dr. Mitchell pointed to the green pile of cucumbers.

“Take that barrow-load of poison, and bury it,” he called, “before you do anybody any more harm with it.”

“What barrow-load of poison’s that?” asked the hawker, approaching. A crowd began to gather.

“What barrow-load of poison is that!” repeated the doctor. “Why your barrow-load of cucumbers.”

“Oh,” said the man, scrutinizing his cucumbers carefully. To be sure, some were a little yellow at the end. “How’s that? Cumbers is right enough: fresh from market this morning.”

“Fresh or not fresh,” said the doctor, mouthing his words distinctly, “you might as well put poison into your stomach, as those things. Cucumbers are the worst thing you can eat.”

“Oh!” said the man, stuttering. “That’s ‘appen for them as doesn’t like them. I niver knowed a cumber do *me* no harm, an’ I eat ‘em like a happple.” Whereupon the hawker took a “cumber” from his barrow, bit off the end, and chewed it till the sap squirted. “What’s wrong with that?” he said, holding up the bitten cucumber.

“I’m not talking about what’s wrong with that,” said the doctor. “My business is what’s wrong with the stomach it goes into. I’m a doctor. And I know that those things cause me half my work. They cause half the internal troubles people suffer from in summertime.”

“Oh ay! That’s no loss to you, is it? Me an’ you’s partners. More cumbers I sell, more graft for you, ‘cordin’ to that. What’s wrong then. *Cumbers! Fine fresh Cum-berrrs! All fresh and juisty, all cheap and tasty — !*” yelled the man.

“I am a doctor not only to cure illness, but to prevent it where I can. And cucumbers are poison to everybody.”

“*Cumbers! Cumbers! Fresh cumbers!*” yelled the man.

Dr. Mitchell started his car.

“When will they learn intelligence?” he said to Alvina, smiling and showing his white, even teeth.

“I don’t care, you know, myself,” she said. “I should always let people do what they wanted — ”

“Even if you knew it would do them harm?” he queried, smiling with amiable condescension.

“Yes, why not! It’s their own affair. And they’ll do themselves harm one way or another.”

“And you wouldn’t try to prevent it?”

“You might as well try to stop the sea with your fingers.”

“You think so?” smiled the doctor. “I see, you are a pessimist. You are a pessimist with regard to human nature.”

“Am I?” smiled Alvina, thinking the rose would smell as sweet. It seemed to please the doctor to find that Alvina was a pessimist with regard to human nature. It seemed to give her an air of distinction. In his eyes, she seemed distinguished. He was in a fair way to dote on her.

She, of course, when he began to admire her, liked him much better, and even saw graceful, boyish attractions in him. There was really something childish about him. And this something childish, since it looked up to her as if she were the saving grace, naturally flattered her and made her feel gentler towards him.

He got in the habit of picking her up in his car, when he could. And he would tap at the matron’s door, smiling and showing all his beautiful teeth, just about tea-time.

“May I come in?” His voice sounded almost flirty.

“Certainly.”

“I see you’re having tea! Very nice, a cup of tea at this hour!”

“Have one too, doctor.”

“I will with pleasure.” And he sat down wreathed with smiles. Alvina rose to get a cup. “I didn’t intend to disturb you, nurse,” he said. “Men are always intruders,” he smiled to the matron.

“Sometimes,” said the matron, “women are charmed to be intruded upon.”

“Oh really!” his eyes sparkled. “Perhaps *you* wouldn’t say so, nurse?” he said, turning to Alvina. Alvina was just reaching at the cupboard. Very charming she looked, in her fresh dress and cap and soft brown hair, very attractive her figure, with its full, soft loins. She turned round to him.

“Oh yes,” she said. “I quite agree with the matron.”

“Oh, you do!” He did not quite know how to take it. “But you mind being disturbed at your tea, I am sure.”

“No,” said Alvina. “We are so used to being disturbed.”

“Rather weak, doctor?” said the matron, pouring the tea. “Very weak, please.”

The doctor was a little laboured in his gallantry, but unmistakably gallant. When he was gone, the matron looked demure, and Alvina confused. Each waited for the other to speak.

“Don’t you think Dr. Mitchell is quite coming out?” said Alvina.

“Quite! *Quite* the ladies’ man! I wonder who it is can be *bringing* him out. A very praiseworthy work, I am sure.” She looked wickedly at Alvina.

“No, don’t look at me,” laughed Alvina, “*I* know nothing about it.”

“Do you think it may be *me!*” said the matron, mischievous. “I’m sure of it, matron! He begins to show some taste at last.”

“There now!” said the matron. “I shall put my cap straight.” And she went to the mirror, fluffing her hair and settling her cap.

“There!” she said, bobbing a little curtsey to Alvina.

They both laughed, and went off to work.

But there was no mistake, Dr. Mitchell was beginning to expand. With Alvina he quite unbent, and seemed even to sun himself when she was near, to attract her attention. He smiled and smirked and became oddly self-conscious: rather uncomfortable. He liked to hang over her chair, and he made a great event of offering her a cigarette whenever they met, although he himself never smoked. He had a gold cigarette case.

One day he asked her in to see his garden. He had a pleasant old square house with a big walled garden. He showed her his flowers and his wall-fruit, and asked her to eat his strawberries. He bade her admire his asparagus. And then he gave her tea in the drawing-room, with strawberries and cream and cakes, of all of which he ate nothing. But he smiled expansively all the time. He was a made man: and now he was really letting himself go, luxuriating in everything; above all, in Alvina, who poured tea gracefully from the old Georgian tea-pot, and smiled so pleasantly above the Queen Anne tea-cups.

And she, wicked that she was, admired every detail of his drawing-room. It was a pleasant room indeed, with roses outside the French door, and a lawn in sunshine beyond, with bright red flowers in beds. But indoors, it was insistently antique. Alvina admired the Jacobean sideboard and the Jacobean arm-chairs and the Hepplewhite wall-chairs and the Sheraton settee and the Chippendale stands and the Axminster carpet and the bronze clock with Shakespeare and Ariosto reclining on it — yes, she even admired Shakespeare on the clock — and the ormolu cabinet and the bead-work foot-stools and the dreadful Sèvres dish with a cherub in it and — but why enumerate. She admired *everything!* And Dr. Mitchell’s heart expanded in his bosom till he felt it would burst, unless he either fell at her feet or did something extraordinary. He had never even imagined what it was to be so expanded: what a delicious feeling. He could have kissed her feet in an ecstasy of wild expansion. But habit, so far, prevented his doing more than beam.

Another day he said to her, when they were talking of age:

“You are as young as you feel. Why, when I was twenty I felt I had all the cares and responsibility of the world on my shoulders. And now I am middle-aged more or less, I feel as light as if I were just beginning life.” He beamed down at her.

“Perhaps you are only just beginning your own life,” she said. “You have lived for your work till now.”

“It may be that,” he said. “It may be that up till now I have lived for others, for my patients. And now perhaps I may be allowed to live a little more for myself.” He beamed with real luxury, saw the real luxury of life begin.

“Why shouldn’t you?” said Alvina.

“Oh yes, I intend to,” he said, with confidence.

He really, by degrees, made up his mind to marry now, and to retire in part from his work. That is, he would hire another assistant, and give himself a fair amount of leisure. He was inordinately proud of his house. And now he looked forward to the treat of his life: hanging round the woman he had made his wife, following her about, feeling proud of her and his house, talking to her from morning till night, really finding himself in her. When he had to go his rounds she would go with him in the car: he made up his mind she would be willing to accompany him. He would teach her to drive, and they would sit side by side, she driving him and waiting for him. And he would run out of the houses of his patients, and find her sitting there, and he would get in beside her and feel so snug and so sure and so happy as she drove him off to the next case, he informing her about his work.

And if ever she did not go out with him, she would be there on the doorstep waiting for him the moment she heard the car. And they would have long, cosy evenings together in the drawing-room, as he luxuriated in her very presence. She would sit on his knees and they would be snug for hours, before they went warmly and deliciously to bed. And in the morning he need not rush off. He would loiter about with her, they would loiter down the garden looking at every new flower and every new fruit, she would wear fresh flowery dresses and no cap on her hair, he would never be able to tear himself away from her. Every morning it would be unbearable to have to tear himself away from her, and every hour he would be rushing back to her. They would be simply everything to one another. And how he would enjoy it! Ah!

He pondered as to whether he would have children. A child would take her away from him. That was his first thought. But then — ! Ah well, he would have to leave it till the time. Love’s young dream is never so delicious as at the virgin age of fifty-three.

But he was quite cautious. He made no definite advances till he had put a plain question. It was August Bank Holiday, that for ever black day of the declaration of war, when his question was put. For this year of our story is the fatal year 1914.

There was quite a stir in the town over the declaration of war. But most people

felt that the news was only intended to give an extra thrill to the all-important event of Bank Holiday. Half the world had gone to Blackpool or Southport, the other half had gone to the Lakes or into the country. Lancaster was busy with a sort of fête, notwithstanding. And as the weather was decent, everybody was in a real holiday mood.

So that Dr. Mitchell, who had contrived to pick up Alvina at the Hospital, contrived to bring her to his house at half-past three, for tea.

“What do you think of this new war?” said Alvina.

“Oh, it will be over in six weeks,” said the doctor easily. And there they left it. Only, with a fleeting thought, Alvina wondered if it would affect the Natcha-Kee-Tawaras. She had never heard any more of them.

“Where would you have liked to go today?” said the doctor, turning to smile at her as he drove the car.

“I think to Windermere — into the Lakes,” she said.

“We might make a tour of the Lakes before long,” he said. She was not thinking, so she took no particular notice of the speech. “How nice!” she said vaguely.

“We could go in the car, and take them as we chose,” said the doctor.

“Yes,” she said, wondering at him now.

When they had had tea, quietly and gallantly tête-à-tête in his drawing-room, he asked her if she would like to see the other rooms of the house. She thanked him, and he showed her the substantial oak dining-room, and the little room with medical works and a revolving chair, which he called his study: then the kitchen and the pantry, the housekeeper looking askance; then upstairs to his bedroom, which was very fine with old mahogany tall-boys and silver candle-sticks on the dressing-table, and brushes with green ivory backs, and a hygienic white bed and straw mats: then the visitors’ bedroom corresponding, with its old satin-wood furniture and cream-coloured chairs with large, pale-blue cushions, and a pale carpet with reddish wreaths. Very nice, lovely, awfully nice, I do like that, isn’t that beautiful, I’ve never seen anything like that! came the gratifying fireworks of admiration from Alvina. And he smiled and gloated. But in her mind she was thinking of Manchester House, and how dark and horrible it was, how she hated it, but how it had impressed Ciccio and Geoffrey, how they would have loved to feel themselves masters of it, and how done in the eye they were. She smiled to herself rather grimly. For this afternoon she was feeling unaccountably uneasy and wistful, yearning into the distance again: a trick she thought she had happily lost.

The doctor dragged her up even to the slanting attics. He was a big man, and he always wore navy blue suits, well-tailored and immaculate. Unconsciously

she felt that big men in good navy-blue suits, especially if they had reddish faces and rather big feet and if their hair was wearing thin, were a special type all to themselves, solid and rather namby-pamby and tiresome.

“What very nice attics! I think the many angles which the roof makes, the different slants, you know, are so attractive. Oh, and the fascinating little window!” She crouched in the hollow of the small dormer window. “Fascinating! See the town and the hills! I know I should want this room for my own.”

“Then have it,” he said. “Have it for *one* of your own.”

She crept out of the window recess and looked up at him. He was leaning forward to her, smiling, self-conscious, tentative, and eager. She thought it best to laugh it off.

“I was only talking like a child, from the imagination,” she said.

“I quite understand that,” he replied deliberately. “But I am speaking what I *mean* — ”

She did not answer, but looked at him reproachfully. He was smiling and smirking broadly at her.

“Won’t you marry me, and come and have this garret for your own?” He spoke as if he were offering her a chocolate. He smiled with curious uncertainty.

“I don’t know,” she said vaguely.

His smile broadened.

“Well now,” he said, “make up your mind. I’m not good at *talking* about love, you know. But I think I’m pretty good at *feeling* it, you know. I want you to come here and be happy: with me.” He added the two last words as a sort of sly post-scriptum, and as if to commit himself finally.

“But I’ve never thought about it,” she said, rapidly cogitating.

“I know you haven’t. But think about it now — ” He began to be hugely pleased with himself. “Think about it now. And tell me if you could put up with *me*, as well as the garret.” He beamed and put his head a little on one side — rather like Mr. May, for one second. But he was much more dangerous than Mr. May. He was overbearing, and had the devil’s own temper if he was thwarted. This she knew. He was a big man in a navy blue suit, with very white teeth.

Again she thought she had better laugh it off.

“It’s you I *am* thinking about,” she laughed, flirting still. “It’s you I *am* wondering about.”

“Well,” he said, rather pleased with himself, “you wonder about me till you’ve made up your mind — ”

“I will — ” she said, seizing the opportunity. “I’ll wonder about you till I’ve made up my mind — shall I?”

“Yes,” he said. “That’s what I wish you to do. And the next time I ask you, you’ll let me know. That’s it, isn’t it?” He smiled indulgently down on her: thought her face young and charming, charming.

“Yes,” she said. “But don’t ask me too soon, will you?”

“How, too soon — ?” He smiled delightedly.

“You’ll give me time to wonder about you, won’t you? You won’t ask me again this month, will you?”

“This month?” His eyes beamed with pleasure. He enjoyed the procrastination as much as she did. “But the month’s only just begun! However! Yes, you shall have your way. I won’t ask you again this month.”

“And I’ll promise to wonder about you all the month,” she laughed. “That’s a bargain,” he said.

They went downstairs, and Alvina returned to her duties. She was very much excited, very much excited indeed. A big, well-to-do man in a navy blue suit, of handsome appearance, aged fifty-three, with white teeth and a delicate stomach: it *was* exciting. A sure position, a very nice home and lovely things in it, once they were dragged about a bit. And of course he’d adore her. That went without saying. She was as fussy as if some one had given her a lovely new pair of boots. She was really fussy and pleased with herself and *quite* decided she’d take it all on. That was how it put itself to her: she would take it all on.

Of course there was the man himself to consider. But he was quite presentable. There was nothing at all against it: nothing at all. If he had pressed her during the first half of the month of August, he would almost certainly have got her. But he only beamed in anticipation.

Meanwhile the stir and restlessness of the war had begun, and was making itself felt even in Lancaster. And the excitement and the unease began to wear through Alvina’s rather glamorous fussiness. Some of her old fretfulness came back on her. Her spirit, which had been as if asleep these months, now woke rather irritably, and chafed against its collar. Who was this elderly man, that she should marry him? Who was he, that she should be kissed by him. Actually kissed and fondled by him! Repulsive. She avoided him like the plague. Fancy reposing against his broad, navy blue waistcoat! She started as if she had been stung. Fancy seeing his red, smiling face just above hers, coming down to embrace her! She pushed it away with her open hand. And she ran away, to avoid the thought.

And yet! And yet! She would be so comfortable, she would be so well-off for the rest of her life. The hateful problem of material circumstance would be solved for ever. And she knew well how hateful material circumstances can make life.

Therefore, she could not decide in a hurry. But she bore poor Dr. Mitchell a deep grudge, that he could not grant her all the advantages of his offer, and excuse her the acceptance of him himself. She dared not decide in a hurry. And this very fear, like a yoke on her, made her resent the man who drove her to decision.

Sometimes she rebelled. Sometimes she laughed unpleasantly in the man's face: though she dared not go *too* far: for she was a little afraid of him and his rabid temper, also. In her moments of sullen rebellion she thought of Natcha-Kee-Tawara. She thought of them deeply. She wondered where they were, what they were doing, how the war had affected them. Poor Geoffrey was a Frenchman — he would have to go to France to fight. Max and Louis were Swiss, it would not affect them: nor Ciccio, who was Italian. She wondered if the troupe was in England: if they would continue together when Geoffrey was gone. She wondered if they thought of her. She felt they did. She felt they did not forget her. She felt there was a connection.

In fact, during the latter part of August she wondered a good deal more about the Natchas than about Dr. Mitchell. But wondering about the Natchas would not help her. She felt, if she knew where they were, she would fly to them. But then she knew she wouldn't.

When she was at the station she saw crowds and bustle. People were seeing their young men off. Beer was flowing: sailors on the train were tipsy: women were holding young men by the lapel of the coat. And when the train drew away, the young men waving, the women cried aloud and sobbed after them.

A chill ran down Alvina's spine. This was another matter, apart from her Dr. Mitchell. It made him feel very unreal, trivial. She did not know what she was going to do. She realized she must do something — take some part in the wild dislocation of life. She knew that she would put off Dr. Mitchell again.

She talked the matter over with the matron. The matron advised her to procrastinate. Why not volunteer for war-service? True, she was a maternity nurse, and this was hardly the qualification needed for the nursing of soldiers. But still, she *was* a nurse.

Alvina felt this was the thing to do. Everywhere was a stir and a seethe of excitement. Men were active, women were needed too. She put down her name on the list of volunteers for active service. This was on the last day of August.

On the first of September Dr. Mitchell was round at the hospital early, when Alvina was just beginning her morning duties there. He went into the matron's room, and asked for Nurse Houghton. The matron left them together.

The doctor was excited. He smiled broadly, but with a tension of nervous excitement. Alvina was troubled. Her heart beat fast.

“Now!” said Dr. Mitchell. “What have you to say to me?”

She looked up at him with confused eyes. He smiled excitedly and meaningful at her, and came a little nearer.

“Today is the day when you answer, isn’t it?” he said. “Now then, let me hear what you have to say.”

But she only watched him with large, troubled eyes, and did not speak. He came still nearer to her.

“Well then,” he said, “I am to take it that silence gives consent.” And he laughed nervously, with nervous anticipation, as he tried to put his arm round her. But she stepped suddenly back.

“No, not yet,” she said.

“Why?” he asked.

“I haven’t given my answer,” she said.

“Give it then,” he said, testily.

“I’ve volunteered for active service,” she stammered. “I felt I ought to do something.”

“Why?” he asked. He could put a nasty intonation into that monosyllable. “I should have thought you would answer me first.”

She did not answer, but watched him. She did not like him.

“I only signed yesterday,” she said.

“Why didn’t you leave it till tomorrow? It would have looked better.” He was angry. But he saw a half-frightened, half-guilty look on her face, and during the weeks of anticipation he had worked himself up.

“But put that aside,” he smiled again, a little dangerously. “You have still to answer my question. Having volunteered for war service doesn’t prevent your being engaged to me, does it?”

Alvina watched him with large eyes. And again he came very near to her, so that his blue-serge waistcoat seemed to impinge on her, and his purplish red face was above her.

“I’d rather not be engaged, under the circumstances,” she said. “Why?” came the nasty monosyllable. “What have the circumstances got to do with it?”

“Everything is so uncertain,” she said. “I’d rather wait.”

“Wait! Haven’t you waited long enough? There’s nothing at all to prevent your getting engaged to me now. Nothing whatsoever! Come now. I’m old enough not to be played with. And I’m much too much in love with you to let you go on indefinitely like this. Come now!” He smiled imminent, and held out his large hand for her hand. “Let me put the ring on your finger. It will be the proudest day of my life when I make you my wife. Give me your hand — ”

Alvina was wavering. For one thing, mere curiosity made her want to see the

ring. She half lifted her hand. And but for the knowledge that he would kiss her, she would have given it. But he would kiss her — and against that she obstinately set her will. She put her hand behind her back, and looked obstinately into his eyes.

“Don’t play a game with me,” he said dangerously.

But she only continued to look mockingly and obstinately into his eyes.

“Come,” he said, beckoning for her to give her hand.

With a barely perceptible shake of the head, she refused, staring at him all the time. His ungovernable temper got the better of him. He saw red, and without knowing, seized her by the shoulder, swung her back, and thrust her, pressed her against the wall as if he would push her through it. His face was blind with anger, like a hot, red sun. Suddenly, almost instantaneously, he came to himself again and drew back his hands, shaking his right hand as if some rat had bitten it.

“I’m sorry!” he shouted, beside himself. “I’m sorry. I didn’t mean it. I’m sorry.” He dithered before her.

She recovered her equilibrium, and, pale to the lips, looked at him with sombre eyes.

“I’m sorry!” he continued loudly, in his strange frenzy like a small boy. “Don’t remember! Don’t remember! Don’t think I did it.”

His face was a kind of blank, and unconsciously he wrung the hand that had gripped her, as if it pained him. She watched him, and wondered why on earth all this frenzy. She was left rather cold, she did not at all feel the strong feelings he seemed to expect of her. There was nothing so very unnatural, after all, in being bumped up suddenly against the wall. Certainly her shoulder hurt where he had gripped it. But there were plenty of worse hurts in the world. She watched him with wide, distant eyes.

And he fell on his knees before her, as she backed against the bookcase, and he caught hold of the edge of her dress-bottom, drawing it to him. Which made her rather abashed, and much more uncomfortable.

“Forgive me!” he said. “Don’t remember! Forgive me! Love me! Love me! Forgive me and love me! Forgive me and love me!”

As Alvina was looking down dismayed on the great, red-faced, elderly man, who in his crying-out showed his white teeth like a child, and as she was gently trying to draw her skirt from his clutch, the door opened, and there stood the matron, in her big frilled cap. Alvina glanced at her, flushed crimson and looked down to the man. She touched his face with her hand.

“Never mind,” she said. “It’s nothing. Don’t think about it.” He caught her hand and clung to it.

“Love me! Love me! Love me!” he cried.

The matron softly closed the door again, withdrawing.

“Love me! Love me!”

Alvina was absolutely dumbfounded by this scene. She had no idea men did such things. It did not touch her, it dumbfounded her.

The doctor, clinging to her hand, struggled to his feet and flung his arms round her, clasping her wildly to him.

“You love me! You love me, don’t you?” he said, vibrating and beside himself as he pressed her to his breast and hid his face against her hair. At such a moment, what was the good of saying she didn’t? But she didn’t. Pity for his shame, however, kept her silent, motionless and silent in his arms, smothered against the blue-serge waistcoat of his broad breast.

He was beginning to come to himself. He became silent. But he still strained her fast, he had no idea of letting her go.

“You will take my ring, won’t you?” he said at last, still in the strange, lamentable voice. “You will take my ring.”

“Yes,” she said coldly. Anything for a quiet emergence from this scene.

He fumbled feverishly in his pocket with one hand, holding her still fast by the other arm. And with one hand he managed to extract the ring from its case, letting the case roll away on the floor. It was a diamond solitaire.

“Which finger? Which finger is it?” he asked, beginning to smile rather weakly. She extricated her hand, and held out her engagement finger. Upon it was the mourning-ring Miss Frost had always worn. The doctor slipped the diamond solitaire above the mourning ring, and folded Alvina to his breast again.

“Now,” he said, almost in his normal voice. “Now I know you love me.” The pleased self-satisfaction in his voice made her angry. She managed to extricate herself.

“You will come along with me now?” he said.

“I can’t,” she answered. “I must get back to my work here.”

“Nurse Allen can do that.”

“I’d rather not.”

“Where are you going today?”

She told him her cases.

“Well, you will come and have tea with me. I shall expect you to have tea with me every day.”

But Alvina was straightening her crushed cap before the mirror, and did not answer.

“We can see as much as we like of each other now we’re engaged,” he said, smiling with satisfaction.

“I wonder where the matron is,” said Alvina, suddenly going into the cool white corridor. He followed her. And they met the matron just coming out of the ward.

“Matron!” said Dr. Mitchell, with a return of his old mouthing importance. “You may congratulate Nurse Houghton and me on our engagement — ” He smiled largely.

“I may congratulate *you*, you mean,” said the matron.

“Yes, of course. And both of us, since we are now one,” he replied.

“Not quite, yet,” said the matron gravely.

And at length she managed to get rid of him.

At once she went to look for Alvina, who had gone to her duties.

“Well, I *suppose* it is all right,” said the matron gravely.

“No it isn’t,” said Alvina. ‘I shall never marry him.’

“Ah, never is a long while! Did he hear me come in?”

“No, I’m sure he didn’t.”

“Thank goodness for that.’

“Yes indeed! It was perfectly horrible. Following me round on his knees and shouting for me to love him! Perfectly horrible!”

“Well,” said the matron. ‘You never know what men will do till you’ve known them. And then you need be surprised at nothing, *nothing*. I’m surprised at nothing they do — ’

“I must say,” said Alvina, “I was surprised. Very unpleasantly.”

“But you accepted him — ’

“Anything to quieten him — like a hysterical child.”

“Yes, but I’m not sure you haven’t taken a very risky way of quietening him, giving him what he wanted — ”

“I think,” said Alvina, “I can look after myself. I may be moved any day now.”

“Well — !” said the matron. “He may prevent your getting moved, you know. He’s on the board. And if he says you are indispensable — ”

This was a new idea for Alvina to cogitate. She had counted on a speedy escape. She put his ring in her apron pocket, and there she forgot it until he pounced on her in the afternoon, in the house of one of her patients. He waited for her, to take her off.

“Where is your ring?” he said.

And she realized that it lay in the pocket of a soiled, discarded apron — perhaps lost for ever.

“I shan’t wear it on duty,” she said. “You know that.”

She had to go to tea with him. She avoided his love-making, by telling him

any sort of spooniness revolted her. And he was too much an old bachelor to take easily to a fondling habit — before marriage, at least. So he mercifully left her alone: he was on the whole devoutly thankful she wanted to be left alone. But he wanted her to be there. That was his greatest craving. He wanted her to be always there. And so he craved for marriage: to possess her entirely, and to have her always there with him, so that he was never alone. Alone and apart from all the world: but by her side, always by her side.

“Now when shall we fix the marriage?” he said. “It is no good putting it back. We both know what we are doing. And now the engagement is announced — ”

He looked at her anxiously. She could see the hysterical little boy under the great, authoritative man.

“Oh, not till after Christmas!” she said.

“After Christmas!” he started as if he had been bitten. “Nonsense! It’s nonsense to wait so long. Next month, at the latest.”

“Oh no,” she said. “I don’t think so soon.”

“Why not? The sooner the better. You had better send in your resignation at once, so that you’re free.”

“Oh but is there any need? I may be transferred for war service.”

“That’s not likely. You’re our only maternity nurse — ”

And so the days went by. She had tea with him practically every afternoon, and she got used to him. They discussed the furnishing — she could not help suggesting a few alterations, a few arrangements according to *her* idea. And he drew up a plan of a wedding tour in Scotland. Yet she was quite certain she would not marry him. The matron laughed at her certainty. “You will drift into it,” she said. “He is tying you down by too many little threads.”

“Ah, well, you’ll see!” said Alvina.

“Yes,” said the matron. “I *shall* see.”

And it was true that Alvina’s will was indeterminate, at this time. She was *resolved* not to marry. But her will, like a spring that is hitched somehow, did not fly direct against the doctor. She had sent in her resignation, as he suggested. But not that she might be free to marry him, but that she might be at liberty to flee him. So she told herself. Yet she worked into his hands.

One day she sat with the doctor in the car near the station — it was towards the end of September — held up by a squad of soldiers in khaki, who were marching off with their band wildly playing, to embark on the special troop train that was coming down from the north. The town was in great excitement. War-fever was spreading everywhere. Men were rushing to enlist — and being constantly rejected, for it was still the days of regular standards.

As the crowds surged on the pavement, as the soldiers tramped to the station,

as the traffic waited, there came a certain flow in the opposite direction. The 4:15 train had come in. People were struggling along with luggage, children were running with spades and buckets, cabs were crawling along with families: it was the seaside people coming home. Alvina watched the two crowds mingle.

And as she watched she saw two men, one carrying a mandoline case and a suit-case which she knew. It was Ciccio. She did not know the other man; some theatrical individual. The two men halted almost near the car, to watch the band go by. Alvina saw Ciccio quite near to her. She would have liked to squirt water down his brown, handsome, oblivious neck. She felt she hated him. He stood there, watching the music, his lips curling in his faintly-derisive Italian manner, as he talked to the other man. His eyelashes were as long and dark as ever, his eyes had still the attractive look of being set in with a smutty finger. He had got the same brownish suit on, which she disliked, the same black hat set slightly, jauntily over one eye. He looked common: and yet with that peculiar southern aloofness which gave him a certain beauty and distinction in her eyes. She felt she hated him, rather. She felt she had been let down by him.

The band had passed. A child ran against the wheel of the standing car. Alvina suddenly reached forward and made a loud, screeching flourish on the hooter. Every one looked round, including the laden, tramping soldiers.

“We can’t move yet,” said Dr. Mitchell.

But Alvina was looking at Ciccio at that moment. He had turned with the rest, looking inquiringly at the car. And his quick eyes, the whites of which showed so white against his duskiness, the yellow pupils so non-human, met hers with a quick flash of recognition. His mouth began to curl in a smile of greeting. But she stared at him without moving a muscle, just blankly stared, abstracting every scrap of feeling, even of animosity or coldness, out of her gaze. She saw the smile die on his lips, his eyes glance sideways, and again sideways, with that curious animal shyness which characterized him. It was as if he did not want to see her looking at him, and ran from side to side like a caged weasel, avoiding her blank, glaucous look.

She turned pleasantly to Dr. Mitchell.

“What did you say?” she asked sweetly.

CHAPTER XII

ALLAYE ALSO IS ENGAGED

Alvina found it pleasant to be respected as she was respected in Lancaster. It is not only the prophet who hath honour *save* in his own country: it is every one with individuality. In this northern town Alvina found that her individuality really told. Already she belonged to the revered caste of medicine-men. And into the bargain she was a personality, a person.

Well and good. She was not going to cheapen herself. She felt that even in the eyes of the natives — the well-to-do part, at least — she lost a *little* of her distinction when she was engaged to Dr. Mitchell. The engagement had been announced in *The Times*, *The Morning Post*, *The Manchester Guardian*, and the local *News*. No fear about its being known. And it cast a slight slur of vulgar familiarity over her. In Woodhouse, she knew, it elevated her in the common esteem tremendously. But she was no longer in Woodhouse. She was in Lancaster. And in Lancaster her engagement pigeon-holed her. Apart from Dr. Mitchell she had a magic potentiality. Connected with him, she was a known and labelled quantity.

This she gathered from her contact with the local gentry. The matron was a woman of family, who somehow managed, in her big, white, frilled cap, to be distinguished like an abbess of old. The really toney women of the place came to take tea in her room, and these little teas in the hospital were like a little elegant female conspiracy. There was a slight flavour of art and literature about. The matron had known Walter Pater, in the somewhat remote past.

Alvina was admitted to these teas with the few women who formed the toney intellectual elite of this northern town. There was a certain freemasonry in the matron's room. The matron, a lady-doctor, a clergyman's daughter, and the wives of two industrial magnates of the place, these five, and then Alvina, formed the little group. They did not meet a great deal outside the hospital. But they always met with that curious female freemasonry which can form a law unto itself even among most conventional women. They talked as they would

never talk before men, or before feminine outsiders. They threw aside the whole vestment of convention. They discussed plainly the things they thought about — even the most secret — and they were quite calm about the things they did — even the most impossible. Alvina felt that her transgression was a very mild affair, and that her engagement was really *infra dig*.

“And are you going to marry him?” asked Mrs. Tuke, with a long, cool look.

“I can’t *imagine* myself — ” said Alvina.

“Oh, but so many things happen outside one’s imagination. That’s where your body has you. I can’t *imagine* that I’m going to have a child — ” She lowered her eyelids wearily and sardonically over her large eyes.

Mrs. Tuke was the wife of the son of a local manufacturer. She was about twenty-eight years old, pale, with great dark-grey eyes and an arched nose and black hair, very like a head on one of the lovely Syracusan coins. The odd look of a smile which wasn’t a smile, at the corners of the mouth, the arched nose, and the slowness of the big, full, classic eyes gave her the dangerous Greek look of the Syracusan women of the past: the dangerous, heavily-civilized women of old Sicily: those who laughed about the latomia.

“But do you think you can have a child without wanting it *at all*?” asked Alvina.

“Oh, but there isn’t *one bit* of me wants it, not *one bit*. My *flesh* doesn’t want it. And my mind doesn’t — yet there it is!” She spread her fine hands with a flicker of inevitability.

“Something must want it,” said Alvina.

“Oh!” said Mrs. Tuke. “The universe is one big machine, and we’re just part of it.” She flicked out her grey silk handkerchief, and dabbed her nose, watching with big, black-grey eyes the fresh face of Alvina.

“There’s not *one bit* of me concerned in having this child,” she persisted to Alvina. “My flesh isn’t concerned, and my mind isn’t. *And yet!* — *le voilà!* — I’m just *planté*. I can’t *imagine* why I married Tommy. And yet — I did — !” She shook her head as if it was all just beyond her, and the pseudo-smile at the corners of her ageless mouth deepened.

Alvina was to nurse Mrs. Tuke. The baby was expected at the end of August. But already the middle of September was here, and the baby had not arrived.

The Tukes were not very rich — the young ones, that is. Tommy wanted to compose music, so he lived on what his father gave him. His father gave him a little house outside the town, a house furnished with expensive bits of old furniture, in a way that the townspeople thought insane. But there you are — Effie would insist on dabbing a rare bit of yellow brocade on the wall, instead of a picture, and in painting apple-green shelves in the recesses of the whitewashed

wall of the dining-room. Then she enamelled the hall-furniture yellow, and decorated it with curious green and lavender lines and flowers, and had unearthly cushions and Sardinian pottery with unspeakable peaked griffins.

What were you to make of such a woman! Alvina slept in her house these days, instead of at the hospital. For Effie was a very bad sleeper. She would sit up in bed, the two glossy black plaits hanging beside her white, arch face, wrapping loosely round her dressing-gown of a sort of plumbago-coloured, dark-grey silk lined with fine silk of metallic blue, and there, ivory and jet-black and grey like black-lead, she would sit in the white bed-clothes flicking her handkerchief and revealing a flicker of kingfisher-blue silk and white silk night dress, complaining of her neuritis nerve and her own impossible condition, and begging Alvina to stay with her another half-hour, and suddenly studying the big, blood-red stone on her finger as if she was reading something in it.

“I believe I shall be like the woman in the *Cent Nouvelles* and carry my child for five years. Do you know that story? She said that eating a parsley leaf on which bits of snow were sticking started the child in her. It might just as well — ”

Alvina would laugh and get tired. There was about her a kind of half bitter sanity and nonchalance which the nervous woman liked.

One night as they were sitting thus in the bedroom, at nearly eleven o'clock, they started and listened. Dogs in the distance had also started to yelp. A mandoline was wailing its vibration in the night outside, rapidly, delicately quivering. Alvina went pale. She knew it was Ciccio. She had seen him lurking in the streets of the town, but had never spoken to him.

“What’s this?” cried Mrs. Tuke, cocking her head on one side. “Music! A mandoline! How extraordinary! Do you think it’s a serenade? — ” And she lifted her brows archly.

“I should think it is,” said Alvina.

“How extraordinary! What a moment to choose to serenade the lady! *Isn’t* it like life — ! I *must* look at it — ”

She got out of bed with some difficulty, wrapped her dressing-gown round her, pushed her feet into slippers, and went to the window. She opened the sash. It was a lovely moonlight night of September. Below lay the little front garden, with its short drive and its iron gates that closed on the high-road. From the shadow of the high-road came the noise of the mandoline.

“Hello, Tommy!” called Mrs. Tuke to her husband, whom she saw on the drive below her. “How’s your musical ear — ?”

“All right. Doesn’t it disturb you?” came the man’s voice from the moonlight below.

“Not a bit. I like it. I’m waiting for the voice. ‘*O Richard, O mon roi!*’ — -”
But the music had stopped.

“There!” cried Mrs. Tuke. “You’ve frightened him off! And we’re dying to be serenaded, aren’t we, nurse?” She turned to Alvina. “Do give me my fur, will you? Thanks so much. Won’t you open the other window and look out there — ?”

Alvina went to the second window. She stood looking out.

“Do play again!” Mrs. Tuke called into the night. “Do sing something.” And with her white arm she reached for a glory rose that hung in the moonlight from the wall, and with a flash of her white arm she flung it toward the garden wall — ineffectually, of course.

“Won’t you play again?” she called into the night, to the unseen. “Tommy, go indoors, the bird won’t sing when you’re about.”

“It’s an Italian by the sound of him. Nothing I hate more than emotional Italian music. Perfectly nauseating.”

“Never mind, dear. I know it sounds as if all their insides were coming out of their mouth. But we want to be serenaded, don’t we, nurse? — ”

Alvina stood at her window, but did not answer.

“Ah-h?” came the odd query from Mrs. Tuke. “Don’t you like it?”

“Yes,” said Alvina. “Very much.”

“And aren’t you dying for the song?”

“Quite.”

“There!” cried Mrs. Tuke, into the moonlight. “Una canzone bella-bella — molto bella — ”

She pronounced her syllables one by one, calling into the night. It sounded comical. There came a rude laugh from the drive below.

“Go indoors, Tommy! He won’t sing if you’re there. Nothing will sing if you’re there,” called the young woman.

They heard a footstep on the gravel, and then the slam of the hall door.

“Now!” cried Mrs. Tuke.

They waited. And sure enough, came the fine tinkle of the mandoline, and after a few moments, the song. It was one of the well-known Neapolitan songs, and Ciccio sang it as it should be sung.

Mrs. Tuke went across to Alvina.

“Doesn’t he put his bowels into it — ?” she said, laying her hand on her own full figure, and rolling her eyes mockingly. “I’m sure it’s more effective than senna-pods.”

Then she returned to her own window, huddled her furs over her breast, and rested her white elbows in the moonlight.

“Torn’ a Surrientu, Fammi campar — ”

The song suddenly ended, in a clamorous, animal sort of yearning. Mrs. Tuke was quite still, resting her chin on her fingers. Alvina also was still. Then Mrs. Tuke slowly reached for the rose-buds on the old wall.

“Molta bella!” she cried, half ironically. “Molta bella! Je vous envoie une rose — ” And she threw the roses out on to the drive. A man’s figure was seen hovering outside the gate, on the high-road. “Entrez!” called Mrs. Tuke. “Entrez! Prenez votre rose. Come in and take your rose.”

The man’s voice called something from the distance.

“What?” cried Mrs. Tuke.

“Je ne peux pas entrer.”

“Vous ne pouvez pas entrer? Pourquoi alors! La porte n’est pas fermée a clef. Entrez donc!”

“Non. On n’entre pas — ” called the well-known voice of Ciccio.

“Quoi faire, alors! Alvina, take him the rose to the gate, will you? Yes do! Their singing is horrible, I think. I can’t go down to him. But do take him the roses, and see what he looks like. Yes do!” Mrs. Tuke’s eyes were arched and excited. Alvina looked at her slowly. Alvina also was smiling to herself.

She went slowly down the stairs and out of the front door. From a bush at the side she pulled two sweet-smelling roses. Then in the drive she picked up Effie’s flowers. Ciccio was standing outside the gate.

“Allaye!” he said, in a soft, yearning voice.

“Mrs. Tuke sent you these roses,” said Alvina, putting the flowers through the bars of the gate.

“Allaye!” he said, caressing her hand, kissing it with a soft, passionate, yearning mouth. Alvina shivered. Quickly he opened the gate and drew her through. He drew her into the shadow of the wall, and put his arms round her, lifting her from her feet with passionate yearning.

“Allaye!” he said. “I love you, Allaye, my beautiful, Allaye. I love you, Allaye!” He held her fast to his breast and began to walk away with her. His throbbing, muscular power seemed completely to envelop her. He was just walking away with her down the road, clinging fast to her, enveloping her.

“Nurse! Nurse! I can’t see you! Nurse! — ” came the long call of Mrs. Tuke through the night. Dogs began to bark.

“Put me down,” murmured Alvina. “Put me down, Ciccio.”

“Come with me to Italy. Come with me to Italy, Allaye. I can’t go to Italy by myself, Allaye. Come with me, be married to me — Allaye, Allaye — ”

His voice was a strange, hoarse whisper just above her face, he still held her in his throbbing, heavy embrace.

“Yes — yes!” she whispered. “Yes — yes! But put me down, Ciccio. Put me down.”

“Come to Italy with me, Allaye. Come with me,” he still reiterated, in a voice hoarse with pain and yearning.

“Nurse! Nurse! Wherever are you? Nurse! I want you,” sang the uneasy, querulous voice of Mrs. Tuke.

“Do put me down!” murmured Alvina, stirring in his arms.

He slowly relaxed his clasp, and she slid down like rain to earth. But still he clung to her.

“Come with me, Allaye! Come with me to Italy!” he said.

She saw his face, beautiful, non-human in the moonlight, and she shuddered slightly.

“Yes!” she said. “I will come. But let me go now. Where is your mandoline?”

He turned round and looked up the road.

“Nurse! You absolutely *must* come. I can’t bear it,” cried the strange voice of Mrs. Tuke.

Alvina slipped from the man, who was a little bewildered, and through the gate into the drive.

“You must come!” came the voice in pain from the upper window. Alvina ran upstairs. She found Mrs. Tuke crouched in a chair, with a drawn, horrified, terrified face. As her pains suddenly gripped her, she uttered an exclamation, and pressed her clenched fists hard on her face. “The pains have begun,” said Alvina, hurrying to her.

“Oh, it’s horrible! It’s horrible! I don’t want it!” cried the woman in travail. Alvina comforted her and reassured her as best she could. And from outside, once more, came the despairing howl of the Neapolitan song, animal and inhuman on the night.

“E to dic’ Io part’, addio! T’alluntare di sta core, Nel paese del amore Tien’ o cor’ di non turnar’ — Ma nun me lasciar’ — ”

It was almost unendurable. But suddenly Mrs. Tuke became quite still, and sat with her fists clenched on her knees, her two jet-black plaits dropping on either side of her ivory face, her big eyes fixed staring into space. At the line —

Ma nun me lasciar’ —

she began to murmur softly to herself — “Yes, it’s dreadful! It’s horrible! I can’t understand it. What does it mean, that noise? It’s as bad as these pains. What does it mean? What does he say? I can understand a little Italian — ” She paused. And again came the sudden complaint:

Ma nun me lasciar’ —

“Ma nun me lasciar’ — !” she murmured, repeating the music. “That means

— Don't leave me! Don't leave me! But why? Why shouldn't one human being go away from another? What does it mean? That *awful* noise! Isn't love the most horrible thing! I think it's horrible. It just does one in, and turns one into a sort of howling animal. I'm howling with one sort of pain, he's howling with another. Two hellish animals howling through the night! I'm not myself, he's not himself. Oh, I think it's horrible. What does he look like, Nurse? Is he beautiful? Is he a great hefty brute?"

She looked with big, slow, enigmatic eyes at Alvina.

"He's a man I knew before," said Alvina.

Mrs. Tuke's face woke from its half-trance.

"Really! Oh! A man you knew before! Where?"

"It's a long story," said Alvina. "In a travelling music-hall troupe."

"In a travelling music-hall troupe! How extraordinary! Why, how did you come across such an individual — ?"

Alvina explained as briefly as possible. Mrs. Tuke watched her.

"Really!" she said. "You've done all those things!" And she scrutinized Alvina's face. "You've had some effect on him, that's evident," she said. Then she shuddered, and dabbed her nose with her handkerchief. "Oh, the flesh is a *beastly* thing!" she cried. "To make a man howl outside there like that, because you're here. And to make me howl because I've got a child inside me. It's unbearable! What does he look like, really?"

"I don't know," said Alvina. "Not extraordinary. Rather a hefty brute — "

Mrs. Tuke glanced at her, to detect the irony.

"I should like to see him," she said. "Do you think I might?"

"I don't know," said Alvina, non-committal.

"Do you think he might come up? Ask him. Do let me see him."

"Do you really want to?" said Alvina.

"Of course — " Mrs. Tuke watched Alvina with big, dark, slow eyes. Then she dragged herself to her feet. Alvina helped her into bed.

"Do ask him to come up for a minute," Effie said. "We'll give him a glass of Tommy's famous port. Do let me see him. Yes do!" She stretched out her long white arm to Alvina, with sudden imploring.

Alvina laughed, and turned doubtfully away.

The night was silent outside. But she found Ciccio leaning against a gate-pillar. He started up.

"Allaye!" he said.

"Will you come in for a moment? I can't leave Mrs. Tuke."

Ciccio obediently followed Alvina into the house and up the stairs, without a word. He was ushered into the bedroom. He drew back when he saw Effie in the

bed, sitting with her long plaits and her dark eyes, and the subtle-seeming smile at the corners of her mouth.

“Do come in!” she said. “I want to thank you for the music. Nurse says it was for her, but I enjoyed it also. Would you tell me the words? I think it’s a wonderful song.”

Ciccio hung back against the door, his head dropped, and the shy, suspicious, faintly malicious smile on his face.

“Have a glass of port, do!” said Effie. “Nurse, give us all one. I should like one too. And a biscuit.” Again she stretched out her long white arm from the sudden blue lining of her wrap, suddenly, as if taken with the desire. Ciccio shifted on his feet, watching Alvina pour out the port.

He swallowed his in one swallow, and put aside his glass.

“Have some more!” said Effie, watching over the top of her glass.

He smiled faintly, stupidly, and shook his head.

“Won’t you? Now tell me the words of the song — ”

He looked at her from out of the dusky hollows of his brow, and did not answer. The faint, stupid half-smile, half-sneer was on his lips. “Won’t you tell them me? I understood one line — ”

Ciccio smiled more pronouncedly as he watched her, but did not speak.

“I understood one line,” said Effie, making big eyes at him. “*Ma non me lasciare — Don’t leave me!* There, isn’t that it?”

He smiled, stirred on his feet, and nodded.

“Don’t leave me! There, I knew it was that. Why don’t you want Nurse to leave you? Do you want her to be with you *every minute?*”

He smiled a little contemptuously, awkwardly, and turned aside his face, glancing at Alvina. Effie’s watchful eyes caught the glance. It was swift, and full of the terrible yearning which so horrified her.

At the same moment a spasm crossed her face, her expression went blank.

“Shall we go down?” said Alvina to Ciccio.

He turned immediately, with his cap in his hand, and followed. In the hall he pricked up his ears as he took the mandoline from the chest. He could hear the stifled cries and exclamations from Mrs. Tuke. At the same moment the door of the study opened, and the musician, a burly fellow with troubled hair, came out.

“Is that Mrs. Tuke?” he snapped anxiously.

“Yes. The pains have begun,” said Alvina.

“Oh God! And have you left her!” He was quite irascible. “Only for a minute,” said Alvina.

But with a *Pf!* of angry indignation, he was climbing the stairs. “She is going to have a child,” said Alvina to Ciccio. “I shall have to go back to her.” And she

held out her hand.

He did not take her hand, but looked down into her face with the same slightly distorted look of overwhelming yearning, yearning heavy and unbearable, in which he was carried towards her as on a flood.

“Allaye!” he said, with a faint lift of the lip that showed his teeth, like a pained animal: a curious sort of smile. He could not go away. “I shall have to go back to her,” she said.

“Shall you come with me to Italy, Allaye?”

“Yes. Where is Madame?”

“Gone! Gigi — all gone.”

“Gone where?”

“Gone back to France — called up.”

“And Madame and Louis and Max?”

“Switzerland.”

He stood helplessly looking at her.

“Well, I must go,” she said.

He watched her with his yellow eyes, from under his long black lashes, like some chained animal, haunted by doom. She turned and left him standing.

She found Mrs. Tuke wildly clutching the edge of the sheets, and crying: “No, Tommy dear. I’m awfully fond of you, you know I am. But go away. Oh God, go away. And put a space between us. Put a space between us!” she almost shrieked.

He pushed up his hair. He had been working on a big choral work which he was composing, and by this time he was almost demented.

“Can’t you stand my presence!” he shouted, and dashed downstairs.

“Nurse!” cried Effie. “It’s *no use* trying to get a grip on life. You’re just at the mercy of *Forces*,” she shrieked angrily.

“Why not?” said Alvina. “There are good life-forces. Even the will of God is a life-force.”

“You don’t understand! I want to be *myself* And I’m *not* myself. I’m just torn to pieces by *Forces*. It’s horrible — ”

“Well, it’s not my fault. I didn’t make the universe,” said Alvina. “If you have to be torn to pieces by forces, well, you have. Other forces will put you together again.”

“I don’t want them to. I want to be myself. I don’t want to be nailed together like a chair, with a hammer. I want to be myself.”

“You won’t be nailed together like a chair. You should have faith in life.”

“But I hate life. It’s nothing but a mass of forces. *I* am intelligent. Life isn’t intelligent. Look at it at this moment. Do you call this intelligent? Oh — Oh! It’s

horrible! Oh — !” She was wild and sweating with her pains. Tommy flounced out downstairs, beside himself. He was heard talking to some one in the moonlight outside. To Ciccio. He had already telephoned wildly for the doctor. But the doctor had replied that Nurse would ring him up.

The moment Mrs. Tuke recovered her breath she began again.

“I hate life, and faith, and such things. Faith is only fear. And life is a mass of unintelligent forces to which intelligent beings are submitted. Prostituted. Oh — oh!! — prostituted — ”

“Perhaps life itself is something bigger than intelligence,” said Alvina.

“Bigger than intelligence!” shrieked Effie. “*Nothing* is bigger than intelligence. Your man is a hefty brute. His yellow eyes *aren’t* intelligent. They’re *animal* — ”

“No,” said Alvina. “Something else. I wish he didn’t attract me — ”

“There! Because you’re not content to be at the mercy of *Forces!*” cried Effie. “I’m not. I’m not. I want to be myself. And so forces tear me to pieces! Tear me to pie — eee — Oh-h-h! No! — ”

Downstairs Tommy had walked Ciccio back into the house again, and the two men were drinking port in the study, discussing Italy, for which Tommy had a great sentimental affection, though he hated all Italian music after the younger Scarlatti. They drank port all through the night, Tommy being strictly forbidden to interfere upstairs, or even to fetch the doctor. They drank three and a half bottles of port, and were discovered in the morning by Alvina fast asleep in the study, with the electric light still burning. Tommy slept with his fair and ruffled head hanging over the edge of the couch like some great loose fruit, Ciccio was on the floor, face downwards, his face in his folded arms.

Alvina had a great difficulty in waking the inert Ciccio. In the end, she had to leave him and rouse Tommy first: who in rousing fell off the sofa with a crash which woke him disagreeably. So that he turned on Alvina in a fury, and asked her what the hell she thought she was doing. In answer to which Alvina held up a finger warningly, and Tommy, suddenly remembering, fell back as if he had been struck.

“She is sleeping now,” said Alvina.

“Is it a boy or a girl?” he cried.

“It isn’t born yet,” she said.

“Oh God, it’s an accursed fugue!” cried the bemused Tommy. After which they proceeded to wake Ciccio, who was like the dead doll in *Petrushka*, all loose and floppy. When he was awake, however, he smiled at Alvina, and said: “Allaye!”

The dark, waking smile upset her badly.

CHAPTER XIII

THE WEDDED WIFE

The upshot of it all was that Alvina ran away to Scarborough without telling anybody. It was in the first week in October. She asked for a week-end, to make some arrangements for her marriage. The marriage was presumably with Dr. Mitchell — though she had given him no definite word. However, her month's notice was up, so she was legally free. And therefore she packed a rather large bag with all her ordinary things, and set off in her everyday dress, leaving the nursing paraphernalia behind.

She knew Scarborough quite well: and quite quickly found rooms which she had occupied before, in a boarding-house where she had stayed with Miss Frost long ago. Having recovered from her journey, she went out on to the cliffs on the north side. It was evening, and the sea was before her. What was she to do?

She had run away from both men — from Ciccio as well as from Mitchell. She had spent the last fortnight more or less avoiding the pair of them. Now she had a moment to herself. She was even free from Mrs. Tuke, who in her own way was more exacting than the men. Mrs. Tuke had a baby daughter, and was getting well. Ciccio was living with the Tukes. Tommy had taken a fancy to him and had half engaged him as a sort of personal attendant: the sort of thing Tommy would do, not having paid his butcher's bills.

So Alvina sat on the cliffs in a mood of exasperation. She was sick of being badgered about. She didn't really want to marry anybody. Why should she? She was thankful beyond measure to be by herself. How sick she was of other people and their importunities! What was she to do? She decided to offer herself again, in a little while, for war service — in a new town this time. Meanwhile she wanted to be by herself.

She made excursions, she walked on the moors, in the brief but lovely days of early October. For three days it was all so sweet and lovely — perfect liberty, pure, almost paradisaical.

The fourth day it rained: simply rained all day long, and was cold, dismal,

disheartening beyond words. There she sat, stranded in the dismalness, and knew no way out. She went to bed at nine o'clock, having decided in a jerk to go to London and find work in the war-hospitals at once: not to leave off until she had found it.

But in the night she dreamed that Alexander, her first fiance, was with her on the quay of some harbour, and was reproaching her bitterly, even reviling her, for having come too late, so that they had missed their ship. They were there to catch the boat — and she, for dilatoriness, was an hour late, and she could see the broad stern of the steamer not far off. Just an hour late. She showed Alexander her watch — exactly ten o'clock, instead of nine. And he was more angry than ever, because her watch was slow. He pointed to the harbour clock — it was ten minutes past ten.

When she woke up she was thinking of Alexander. It was such a long time since she had thought of him. She wondered if he had a right to be angry with her.

The day was still grey, with sweepy rain-clouds on the sea — gruesome, objectionable. It was a prolongation of yesterday. Well, despair was no good, and being miserable was no good either. She got no satisfaction out of either mood. The only thing to do was to act: seize hold of life and wring its neck.

She took the time-table that hung in the hall: the time-table, that magic carpet of today. When in doubt, move. This was the maxim. Move. Where to?

Another click of a resolution. She would wire to Ciccio and meet him — where? York — Leeds — Halifax — ? She looked up the places in the time-table, and decided on Leeds. She wrote out a telegram, that she would be at Leeds that evening. Would he get it in time? Chance it.

She hurried off and sent the telegram. Then she took a little luggage, told the people of her house she would be back next day, and set off. She did not like whirling in the direction of Lancaster. But no matter.

She waited a long time for the train from the north to come in. The first person she saw was Tommy. He waved to her and jumped from the moving train.

“I say!” he said. “So glad to see you! Ciccio is with me. Effie insisted on my coming to see you.”

There was Ciccio climbing down with the bag. A sort of servant! This was too much for her.

“So you came with your valet?” she said, as Ciccio stood with the bag.

“Not a bit,” said Tommy, laying his hand on the other man’s shoulder. “We’re the best of friends. I don’t carry bags because my heart is rather groggy. I say, nurse, excuse me, but I like you better in uniform. Black doesn’t suit you. You don’t *mind* — ”

“Yes, I do. But I’ve only got black clothes, except uniforms.”

“Well look here now — ! You’re not going on anywhere tonight, are you?”

“It is too late.”

“Well now, let’s turn into the hotel and have a talk. I’m acting under Effie’s orders, as you may gather — ”

At the hotel Tommy gave her a letter from his wife: to the tune of — don’t marry this Italian, you’ll put yourself in a wretched hole, and one wants to avoid getting into holes. *I know* — concluded Effie, on a sinister note.

Tommy sang another tune. Ciccio was a lovely chap, a rare chap, a treat. He, Tommy, could quite understand any woman’s wanting to marry him — didn’t agree a bit with Effie. But marriage, you know, was so final. And then with this war on: you never knew how things might turn out: a foreigner and all that. And then — you won’t mind what I say — ? We won’t talk about class and that rot. If the man’s good enough, he’s good enough by himself. But is he your intellectual equal, nurse? After all, it’s a big point. You don’t want to marry a man you can’t talk to. Ciccio’s a treat to be with, because he’s so natural. But it isn’t a *mental* treat —

Alvina thought of Mrs. Tuke, who complained that Tommy talked music and pseudo-philosophy *by the hour* when he was wound up. She saw Effie’s long, outstretched arm of repudiation and weariness.

“Of course!” — another of Mrs. Tuke’s exclamations. “Why not *be* atavistic if you *can* be, and follow at a man’s heel just because he’s a man. Be like barbarous women, a slave.”

During all this, Ciccio stayed out of the room, as bidden. It was not till Alvina sat before her mirror that he opened her door softly, and entered.

“I come in,” he said, and he closed the door.

Alvina remained with her hair-brush suspended, watching him. He came to her, smiling softly, to take her in his arms. But she put the chair between them.

“Why did you bring Mr. Tuke?” she said.

He lifted his shoulders.

“I haven’t brought him,” he said, watching her.

“Why did you show him the telegram?”

“It was Mrs. Tuke took it.”

“Why did you give it her?”

“It was she who gave it me, in her room. She kept it in her room till I came and took it.”

“All right,” said Alvina. “Go back to the Tukes.” And she began again to brush her hair.

Ciccio watched her with narrowing eyes.

“What you mean?” he said. “I shan’t go, Allaye. You come with me.”

“Ha!” she sniffed scornfully. “I shall go where I like.”

But slowly he shook his head.

“You’ll come, Allaye,” he said. “You come with me, with Ciccio.” She shuddered at the soft, plaintive entreaty.

“How can I go with you? How can I depend on you at all?”

Again he shook his head. His eyes had a curious yellow fire, beseeching, plaintive, with a demon quality of yearning compulsion.

“Yes, you come with me, Allaye. You come with me, to Italy. You don’t go to that other man. He is too old, not healthy. You come with me to Italy. Why do you send a telegram?”

Alvina sat down and covered her face, trembling.

“I can’t! I can’t! I can’t!” she moaned. “I can’t do it.”

“Yes, you come with me. I have money. You come with me, to my place in the mountains, to my uncle’s house. Fine house, you like it. Come with me, Allaye.”

She could not look at him.

“Why do you want me?” she said.

“Why I want you?” He gave a curious laugh, almost of ridicule. “I don’t know that. You ask me another, eh?”

She was silent, sitting looking downwards.

“I can’t, I think,” she said abstractedly, looking up at him.

He smiled, a fine, subtle smile, like a demon’s, but inexpressibly gentle. He made her shiver as if she was mesmerized. And he was reaching forward to her as a snake reaches, nor could she recoil.

“You come, Allaye,” he said softly, with his foreign intonation. “You come. You come to Italy with me. Yes?” He put his hand on her, and she started as if she had been struck. But his hands, with the soft, powerful clasp, only closed her faster.

“Yes?” he said. “Yes? All right, eh? All right!” — he had a strange mesmeric power over her, as if he possessed the sensual secrets, and she was to be subjected.

“I can’t,” she moaned, trying to struggle. But she was powerless.

Dark and insidious he was: he had no regard for her. How could a man’s movements be so soft and gentle, and yet so inhumanly regardless! He had no regard for her. Why didn’t she revolt? Why couldn’t she? She was as if bewitched. She couldn’t fight against her bewitchment. Why? Because he seemed to her beautiful, so beautiful. And this left her numb, submissive. Why must she see him beautiful? Why was she will-less? She felt herself like one of

the old sacred prostitutes: a sacred prostitute.

In the morning, very early, they left for Scarborough, leaving a letter for the sleeping Tommy. In Scarborough they went to the registrar's office: they could be married in a fortnight's time. And so the fortnight passed, and she was under his spell. Only she knew it. She felt extinguished. Ciccio talked to her: but only ordinary things. There was no wonderful intimacy of speech, such as she had always imagined, and always craved for. No. He loved her — but it was in a dark, mesmeric way, which did not let her be herself. His love did not stimulate her or excite her. It extinguished her. She had to be the quiescent, obscure woman: she felt as if she were veiled. Her thoughts were dim, in the dim back regions of consciousness — yet, somewhere, she almost exulted. Atavism! Mrs. Tuke's word would play in her mind. Was it atavism, this sinking into extinction under the spell of Ciccio? Was it atavism, this strange, sleep-like submission to his being? Perhaps it was. Perhaps it was. But it was also heavy and sweet and rich. Somewhere, she was content. Somewhere even she was vastly proud of the dark veiled eternal loneliness she felt, under his shadow.

And so it had to be. She shuddered when she touched him, because he was so beautiful, and she was so submitted. She quivered when he moved as if she were his shadow. Yet her mind remained distantly clear. She would criticize him, find fault with him, the things he did. But *ultimately* she could find no fault with him. She had lost the power. She didn't care. She had lost the power to care about his faults. Strange, sweet, poisonous indifference! She was drugged. And she knew it. Would she ever wake out of her dark, warm coma? She shuddered, and hoped not. Mrs. Tuke would say atavism. Atavism! The word recurred curiously.

But under all her questionings she felt well; a nonchalance deep as sleep, a passivity and indifference so dark and sweet she felt it must be evil. Evil! She was evil. And yet she had no power to be otherwise. They were legally married. And she was glad. She was relieved by knowing she could not escape. She was Mrs. Marasca. What was the good of trying to be Miss Houghton any longer? Marasca, the bitter cherry. Some dark poison fruit she had eaten. How glad she was she had eaten it! How beautiful he was! And no one saw it but herself. For her it was so potent it made her tremble when she noticed him. His beauty, his dark shadow. Ciccio really was much handsomer since his marriage. He seemed to emerge. Before, he had seemed to make himself invisible in the streets, in England, altogether. But now something unfolded in him, he was a potent, glamorous presence, people turned to watch him. There was a certain dark, leopard-like pride in the air about him, something that the English people watched.

He wanted to go to Italy. And now it was *his* will which counted. Alvina, as

his wife, must submit. He took her to London the day after the marriage. He wanted to get away to Italy. He did not like being in England, a foreigner, amid the beginnings of the spy craze.

In London they stayed at his cousin's house. His cousin kept a restaurant in Battersea, and was a flourishing London Italian, a real London product with all the good English virtues of cleanliness and honesty added to an Italian shrewdness. His name was Giuseppe Califano, and he was pale, and he had four children of whom he was very proud. He received Alvina with an affable respect, as if she were an asset in the family, but as if he were a little uneasy and disapproving. She had *come down* in marrying Ciccio. She had lost caste. He rather seemed to exult over her degradation. For he was a northernized Italian, he had accepted English standards. His children were English brats. He almost patronized Alvina.

But then a long, slow look from her remote blue eyes brought him up sharp, and he envied Ciccio suddenly, he was almost in love with her himself. She disturbed him. She disturbed him in his new English aplomb of a London *restaurateur*, and she disturbed in him the old Italian dark soul, to which he was renegade. He tried treating her as an English lady. But the slow, remote look in her eyes made this fall flat. He had to be Italian.

And he was jealous of Ciccio. In Ciccio's face was a lurking smile, and round his fine nose there seemed a subtle, semi-defiant triumph. After all, he had triumphed over his well-to-do, Anglicized cousin. With a stealthy, leopard-like pride Ciccio went through the streets of London in those wild early days of war. He was the one victor, arching stealthily over the vanquished north.

Alvina saw nothing of all these complexities. For the time being, she was all dark and potent. Things were curious to her. It was curious to be in Battersea, in this English-Italian household, where the children spoke English more readily than Italian. It was strange to be high over the restaurant, to see the trees of the park, to hear the clang of trams. It was strange to walk out and come to the river. It was strange to feel the seethe of war and dread in the air. But she did not question. She seemed steeped in the passional influence of the man, as in some narcotic. She even forgot Mrs. Tuke's atavism. Vague and unquestioning she went through the days, she accompanied Ciccio into town, she went with him to make purchases, or she sat by his side in the music hall, or she stayed in her room and sewed, or she sat at meals with the Califanos, a vague brightness on her face. And Mrs. Califano was very nice to her, very gentle, though with a suspicion of malicious triumph, mockery, beneath her gentleness. Still, she was nice and womanly, hovering as she was between her English emancipation and her Italian subordination. She half pitied Alvina, and was more than half jealous

of her.

Alvina was aware of nothing — only of the presence of Ciccio. It was his physical presence which cast a spell over her. She lived within his aura. And she submitted to him as if he had extended his dark nature over her. She knew nothing about him. She lived mindlessly within his presence, quivering within his influence, as if his blood beat in her. She knew she was subjected. One tiny corner of her knew, and watched.

He was very happy, and his face had a real beauty. His eyes glowed with lustrous secrecy, like the eyes of some victorious, happy wild creature seen remote under a bush. And he was very good to her. His tenderness made her quiver into a swoon of complete self-forgetfulness, as if the flood-gates of her depths opened. The depth of his warm, mindless, enveloping love was immeasurable. She felt she could sink forever into his warm, pulsating embrace.

Afterwards, later on, when she was inclined to criticize him, she would remember the moment when she saw his face at the Italian Consulate in London. There were many people at the consulate, clamouring for passports — a wild and ill-regulated crowd. They had waited their turn and got inside — Ciccio was not good at pushing his way. And inside a courteous tall old man with a white beard had lifted the flap for Alvina to go inside the office and sit down to fill the form. She thanked the old man, who bowed as if he had a reputation to keep up.

Ciccio followed, and it was he who had to sit down and fill up the form, because she did not understand the Italian questions. She stood at his side, watching the excited, laughing, noisy, east-end Italians at the desk. The whole place had a certain free-and-easy confusion, a human, unofficial, muddling liveliness which was not quite like England, even though it was in the middle of London.

“What was your mother’s name?” Ciccio was asking her. She turned to him. He sat with the pen perched flourishingly at the end of his fingers, suspended in the serious and artistic business of filling in a form. And his face had a dark luminousness, like a dark transparence which was shut and has now expanded. She quivered, as if it was more than she could bear. For his face was open like a flower right to the depths of his soul, a dark, lovely translucency, vulnerable to the deep quick of his soul. The lovely, rich darkness of his southern nature, so different from her own, exposing itself now in its passional vulnerability, made her go white with a kind of fear. For an instant, her face seemed drawn and old as she looked down at him, answering his questions. Then her eyes became sightless with tears, she stooped as if to look at his writing, and quickly kissed his fingers that held the pen, there in the midst of the crowded, vulgar Consulate.

He stayed suspended, again looking up at her with the bright, unfolded eyes of

a wild creature which plays and is not seen. A faint smile, very beautiful to her, was on his face. What did he see when he looked at her? She did not know, she did not know. And she would never know. For an instant, she swore inside herself that God himself should not take her away from this man. She would commit herself to him through every eternity. And then the vagueness came over her again, she turned aside, photographically seeing the crowd in the Consulate, but really unconscious. His movement as he rose seemed to move her in her sleep, she turned to him at once.

It was early in November before they could leave for Italy, and her dim, lustrous state lasted all the time. She found herself at Charing Cross in the early morning, in all the bustle of catching the Continental train. Giuseppe was there, and Gemma his wife, and two of the children, besides three other Italian friends of Ciccio. They all crowded up the platform. Giuseppe had insisted that Ciccio should take second-class tickets. They were very early. Alvina and Ciccio were installed in a second-class compartment, with all their packages, Ciccio was pale, yellowish under his tawny skin, and nervous. He stood excitedly on the platform talking in Italian — or rather, in his own dialect — whilst Alvina sat quite still in her corner. Sometimes one of the women or one of the children came to say a few words to her, or Giuseppe hurried to her with illustrated papers. They treated her as if she were some sort of invalid or angel, now she was leaving. But most of their attention they gave to Ciccio, talking at him rapidly all at once, whilst he answered, and glanced in this way and that, under his fine lashes, and smiled his old, nervous, meaningless smile. He was curiously upset.

Time came to shut the doors. The women and children kissed Alvina, saying:

“You’ll be all right, eh? Going to Italy — !” And then profound and meaningful nods, which she could not interpret, but which were fraught surely with good-fellowship.

Then they all kissed Ciccio. The men took him in their arms and kissed him on either cheek, the children lifted their faces in eager anticipation of the double kiss. Strange, how eager they were for this embrace — how they all kept taking Ciccio’s hand, one after the other, whilst he smiled constrainedly and nervously.

CHAPTER XIV

THE JOURNEY ACROSS

The train began to move. Giuseppe ran alongside, holding Ciccio's hand still; the women and children were crying and waving their handkerchiefs, the other men were shouting messages, making strange, eager gestures. And Alvina sat quite still, wonderingly. And so the big, heavy train drew out, leaving the others small and dim on the platform. It was foggy, the river was a sea of yellow beneath the ponderous iron bridge. The morning was dim and dank.

The train was very full. Next to Alvina sat a trim French-woman reading *L'Aiglon*. There was a terrible encumbrance of packages and luggage everywhere. Opposite her sat Ciccio, his black overcoat open over his pale-grey suit, his black hat a little over his left eye. He glanced at her from time to time, smiling constrainedly. She remained very still. They ran through Bromley and out into the open country. It was grey, with shivers of grey sunshine. On the downs there was thin snow. The air in the train was hot, heavy with the crowd and tense with excitement and uneasiness. The train seemed to rush ponderously, massively, across the Weald.'

And so, through Folkestone to the sea. There was sun in the sky now, and white clouds, in the sort of hollow sky-dome above the grey earth with its horizon walls of fog. The air was still. The sea heaved with a sucking noise inside the dock. Alvina and Ciccio sat aft on the second-class deck, their bags near them. He put a white muffler round himself, Alvina hugged herself in her beaver scarf and muff. She looked tender and beautiful in her still vagueness, and Ciccio, hovering about her, was beautiful too, his estrangement gave him a certain wistful nobility which for the moment put him beyond all class inferiority. The passengers glanced at them across the magic of estrangement.

The sea was very still. The sun was fairly high in the open sky, where white cloud-tops showed against the pale, wintry blue. Across the sea came a silver sun-track. And Alvina and Ciccio looked at the sun, which stood a little to the right of the ship's course.

“The sun!” said Ciccio, nodding towards the orb and smiling to her. “I love it,” she said.

He smiled again, silently. He was strangely moved: she did not know why.

The wind was cold over the wintry sea, though the sun’s beams were warm. They rose, walked round the cabins. Other ships were at sea — destroyers and battleships, grey, low, and sinister on the water. Then a tall bright schooner glimmered far down the channel. Some brown fishing smacks kept together. All was very still in the wintry sunshine of the Channel.

So they turned to walk to the stern of the boat. And Alvina’s heart suddenly contracted. She caught Ciccio’s arm, as the boat rolled gently. For there behind, behind all the sunshine, was England. England, beyond the water, rising with ash-grey, corpse-grey cliffs, and streaks of snow on the downs above. England, like a long, ash-grey coffin slowly submerging. She watched it, fascinated and terrified. It seemed to repudiate the sunshine, to remain unilluminated, long and ash-grey and dead, with streaks of snow like cerements. That was England! Her thoughts flew to Woodhouse, the grey centre of it all. Home!

Her heart died within her. Never had she felt so utterly strange and far-off. Ciccio at her side was as nothing, as spell-bound she watched, away off, behind all the sunshine and the sea, the grey, snow-streaked substance of England slowly receding and sinking, submerging. She felt she could not believe it. It was like looking at something else. What? It was like a long, ash-grey coffin, winter, slowly submerging in the sea. England?

She turned again to the sun. But clouds and veils were already weaving in the sky. The cold was beginning to soak in, moreover. She sat very still for a long time, almost an eternity. And when she looked round again there was only a bank of mist behind, beyond the sea: a bank of mist, and a few grey, stalking ships. She must watch for the coast of France.

And there it was already, looming up grey and amorphous, patched with snow. It had a grey, heaped, sordid look in the November light. She had imagined Boulogne gay and brilliant. Whereas it was more grey and dismal than England. But not that magical, mystic, phantom look.

The ship slowly put about, and backed into the harbour. She watched the quay approach. Ciccio was gathering up the luggage. Then came the first cry one ever hears: “_Porteur! Porteur! Want a porteur?_” A porter in a blouse strung the luggage on his strap, and Ciccio and Alvina entered the crush for the exit and the passport inspection. There was a tense, eager, frightened crowd, and officials shouting directions in French and English. Alvina found herself at last before a table where bearded men in uniforms were splashing open the big pink sheets of the English passports: she felt strange and uneasy, that her passport was

unimpressive and Italian. The official scrutinized her, and asked questions of Ciccio. Nobody asked her anything — she might have been Ciccio’s shadow. So they went through to the vast, crowded cavern of a Customs house, where they found their porter waving to them in the mob. Ciccio fought in the mob while the porter whisked off Alvina to get seats in the big train. And at last she was planted once more in a seat, with Ciccio’s place reserved beside her. And there she sat, looking across the railway lines at the harbour, in the last burst of grey sunshine. Men looked at her, officials stared at her, soldiers made remarks about her. And at last, after an eternity, Ciccio came along the platform, the porter trotting behind.

They sat and ate the food they had brought, and drank wine and tea. And after weary hours the train set off through snow-patched country to Paris. Everywhere was crowded, the train was stuffy without being warm. Next to Alvina sat a large, fat, youngish Frenchman who overflowed over her in a hot fashion. Darkness began to fall. The train was very late. There were strange and frightening delays. Strange lights appeared in the sky, everybody seemed to be listening for strange noises. It was all such a whirl and confusion that Alvina lost count, relapsed into a sort of stupidity. Gleams, flashes, noises and then at last the frenzy of Paris.

It was night, a black city, and snow falling, and no train that night across to the Gare de Lyon. In a state of semi-stupefaction after all the questionings and examinings and blusterings, they were finally allowed to go straight across Paris. But this meant another wild tussle with a Paris taxi-driver, in the filtering snow. So they were deposited in the Gare de Lyon.

And the first person who rushed upon them was Geoffrey, in a rather grimy private’s uniform. He had already seen some hard service, and had a wild, bewildered look. He kissed Ciccio and burst into tears on his shoulder, there in the great turmoil of the entrance hall of the Gare de Lyon. People looked, but nobody seemed surprised. Geoffrey sobbed, and the tears came silently down Ciccio’s cheeks.

“I’ve waited for you since five o’clock, and I’ve got to go back now. Ciccio! Ciccio! I wanted so badly to see you. I shall never see thee again, brother, my brother!” cried Gigi, and a sob shook him.

“Gigi! Mon Gigi. Tu as donc reçu ma lettre?”

“Yesterday. O Ciccio, Ciccio, I shall die without thee!”

“But no, Gigi, frère. You won’t die.”

“Yes, Ciccio, I shall. I know I shall.”

“I say *no*, brother,” said Ciccio. But a spasm suddenly took him, he pulled off his hat and put it over his face and sobbed into it.

“Adieu, ami! Adieu!” cried Gigi, clutching the other man’s arm. Ciccio took his hat from his tear-stained face and put it on his head. Then the two men embraced.

“*Toujours à toi!*” said Geoffrey, with a strange, solemn salute in front of Ciccio and Alvina. Then he turned on his heel and marched rapidly out of the station, his soiled soldier’s overcoat flapping in the wind at the door. Ciccio watched him go. Then he turned and looked with haunted eyes into the eyes of Alvina. And then they hurried down the desolate platform in the darkness. Many people, Italians, largely, were camped waiting there, while bits of snow wavered down. Ciccio bought food and hired cushions. The train backed in. There was a horrible fight for seats, men scrambling through windows. Alvina got a place — but Ciccio had to stay in the corridor.

Then the long night journey through France, slow and blind. The train was now so hot that the iron plate on the floor burnt Alvina’s feet. Outside she saw glimpses of snow. A fat Italian hotel-keeper put on a smoking cap, covered the light, and spread himself before Alvina. In the next carriage a child was screaming. It screamed all the night — all the way from Paris to Chambéry it screamed. The train came to sudden halts, and stood still in the snow. The hotel-keeper snored. Alvina became almost comatose, in the burning heat of the carriage. And again the train rumbled on. And again she saw glimpses of stations, glimpses of snow, through the chinks in the curtained windows. And again there was a jerk and a sudden halt, a drowsy mutter from the sleepers, somebody uncovering the light, and somebody covering it again, somebody looking out, somebody tramping down the corridor, the child screaming.

The child belonged to two poor Italians — Milanese — a shred of a thin little man, and a rather loose woman. They had five tiny children, all boys: and the four who could stand on their feet all wore scarlet caps. The fifth was a baby. Alvina had seen a French official yelling at the poor shred of a young father on the platform.

When morning came, and the bleary people pulled the curtains, it was a clear dawn, and they were in the south of France. There was no sign of snow. The landscape was half southern, half Alpine. White houses with brownish tiles stood among almond trees and cactus. It was beautiful, and Alvina felt she had known it all before, in a happier life. The morning was graceful almost as spring. She went out in the corridor to talk to Ciccio.

He was on his feet with his back to the inner window, rolling slightly to the motion of the train. His face was pale, he had that sombre, haunted, unhappy look. Alvina, thrilled by the southern country, was smiling excitedly.

“This is my first morning abroad,” she said.

“Yes,” he answered.

“I love it here,” she said. “Isn’t this like Italy?”

He looked darkly out of the window, and shook his head.

But the sombre look remained on his face. She watched him. And her heart sank as she had never known it sink before.

“Are you thinking of Gigi?” she said.

He looked at her, with a faint, unhappy, bitter smile, but he said nothing. He seemed far off from her. A wild unhappiness beat inside her breast. She went down the corridor, away from him, to avoid this new agony, which after all was not her agony. She listened to the chatter of French and Italian in the corridor. She felt the excitement and terror of France, inside the railway carriage: and outside she saw white oxen slowly ploughing, beneath the lingering yellow poplars of the sub-Alps, she saw peasants looking up, she saw a woman holding a baby to her breast, watching the train, she saw the excited, yeasty crowds at the station. And they passed a river, and a great lake. And it all seemed bigger, nobler than England. She felt vaster influences spreading around, the Past was greater, more magnificent in these regions. For the first time the nostalgia of the vast Roman and classic world took possession of her. And she found it splendid. For the first time she opened her eyes on a continent, the Alpine core of a continent. And for the first time she realized what it was to escape from the smallish perfection of England, into the grander imperfection of a great continent.

Near Chambéry they went down for breakfast to the restaurant car. And secretly, she was very happy. Ciccio’s distress made her uneasy. But underneath she was extraordinarily relieved and glad. Ciccio did not trouble her very much. The sense of the bigness of the lands about her, the excitement of travelling with Continental people, the pleasantness of her coffee and rolls and honey, the feeling that vast events were taking place — all this stimulated her. She had brushed, as it were, the fringe of the terror of the war and the invasion. Fear was seething around her. And yet she was excited and glad. The vast world was in one of its convulsions, and she was moving amongst it. Somewhere, she believed in the convulsion, the event elated her.

The train began to climb up to Modane. How wonderful the Alps were! — what a bigness, an unbreakable power was in the mountains! Up and up the train crept, and she looked at the rocky slopes, the glistening peaks of snow in the blue heaven, the hollow valleys with fir trees and low-roofed houses. There were quarries near the railway, and men working. There was a strange mountain town, dirty-looking. And still the train climbed up and up, in the hot morning sunshine, creeping slowly round the mountain loops, so that a little brown dog from one of

the cottages ran alongside the train for a long way, barking at Alvina, even running ahead of the creeping, snorting train, and barking at the people ahead. Alvina, looking out, saw the two unfamiliar engines snorting out their smoke round the bend ahead. And the morning wore away to midday.

Ciccio became excited as they neared Modane, the frontier station. His eye lit up again, he pulled himself together for the entrance into Italy. Slowly the train rolled in to the dismal station. And then a confusion indescribable, of porters and masses of luggage, the unspeakable crush and crowd at the customs barriers, the more intense crowd through the passport office, all like a madness.

They were out on the platform again, they had secured their places. Ciccio wanted to have luncheon in the station restaurant. They went through the passages. And there in the dirty station gangways and big corridors dozens of Italians were lying on the ground, men, women, children, camping with their bundles and packages in heaps. They were either emigrants or refugees. Alvina had never seen people herd about like cattle, dumb, brute cattle. It impressed her. She could not grasp that an Italian labourer would lie down just where he was tired, in the street, on a station, in any corner, like a dog.

In the afternoon they were slipping down the Alps towards Turin. And everywhere was snow — deep, white, wonderful snow, beautiful and fresh, glistening in the afternoon light all down the mountain slopes, on the railway track, almost seeming to touch the train. And twilight was falling. And at the stations people crowded in once more.

It had been dark a long time when they reached Turin. Many people alighted from the train, many surged to get in. But Ciccio and Alvina had seats side by side. They were becoming tired now. But they were in Italy. Once more they went down for a meal. And then the train set off again in the night for Alessandria and Genoa, Pisa and Rome.

It was night, the train ran better, there was a more easy sense in Italy. Ciccio talked a little with other travelling companions. And Alvina settled her cushion, and slept more or less till Genoa. After the long wait at Genoa she dozed off again. She woke to see the sea in the moonlight beneath her — a lovely silvery sea, coming right to the carriage. The train seemed to be tripping on the edge of the Mediterranean, round bays, and between dark rocks and under castles, a night-time fairy-land, for hours. She watched spell-bound: spell-bound by the magic of the world itself. And she thought to herself “Whatever life may be, and whatever horror men have made of it, the world is a lovely place, a magic place, something to marvel over. The world is an amazing place.”

This thought dozed her off again. Yet she had a consciousness of tunnels and hills and of broad marshes pallid under a moon and a coming dawn. And in the

dawn there was Pisa. She watched the word hanging in the station in the dimness: "Pisa." Ciccio told her people were changing for Florence. It all seemed wonderful to her — wonderful. She sat and watched the black station — then she heard the sound of the child's trumpet. And it did not occur to her to connect the train's moving on with the sound of the trumpet.

But she saw the golden dawn, a golden sun coming out of level country. She loved it. She loved being in Italy. She loved the lounging carelessness of the train, she liked having Italian money, hearing the Italians round her — though they were neither as beautiful nor as melodious as she expected. She loved watching the glowing antique landscape. She read and read again: "E pericoloso sporgersi," and "E vietato fumare," and the other little magical notices on the carriages. Ciccio told her what they meant, and how to say them. And sympathetic Italians opposite at once asked him if they were married and who and what his bride was, and they gazed at her with bright, approving eyes, though she felt terribly bedraggled and travel-worn.

"You come from England? Yes! Nice contry!" said a man in a corner, leaning forward to make this display of his linguistic capacity. "Not so nice as this," said Alvina.

"Eh?"

Alvina repeated herself.

"Not so nice? Oh? No! Fog, eh!" The fat man whisked his fingers in the air, to indicate fog in the atmosphere. "But nice contry! Very — *convenient*."

He sat up in triumph, having achieved this word. And the conversation once more became a spatter of Italian. The women were very interested. They looked at Alvina, at every atom of her. And she divined that they were wondering if she was already with child. Sure enough, they were asking Ciccio in Italian if she was "making him a baby." But he shook his head and did not know, just a bit constrained. So they ate slices of sausages and bread and fried rice-balls, with wonderfully greasy fingers, and they drank red wine in big throatfuls out of bottles, and they offered their fare to Ciccio and Alvina, and were charmed when she said to Ciccio she *would* have some bread and sausage. He picked the strips off the sausage for her with his fingers, and made her a sandwich with a roll. The women watched her bite it, and bright-eyed and pleased they said, nodding their heads —

"Buono? Buono?"

And she, who knew this word, understood, and replied:

"Yes, good! Buono!" nodding her head likewise. Which caused immense satisfaction. The women showed the whole paper of sausage slices, and nodded and beamed and said:

“Se vuole ancora — !”

And Alvina bit her wide sandwich, and smiled, and said:

“Yes, awfully nice!”

And the women looked at each other and said something, and Ciccio interposed, shaking his head. But one woman ostentatiously wiped a bottle mouth with a clean handkerchief, and offered the bottle to Alvina, saying:

“Vino buono. Vecchio! Vecchio!” nodding violently and indicating that she should drink. She looked at Ciccio, and he looked back at her, doubtfully.

“Shall I drink some?” she said.

“If you like,” he replied, making an Italian gesture of indifference.

So she drank some of the wine, and it dribbled on to her chin. She was not good at managing a bottle. But she liked the feeling of warmth it gave her. She was very tired.

“Si piace? Piace?”

“Do you like it,” interpreted Ciccio.

“Yes, very much. What is very much?” she asked of Ciccio. “Molto.”

“Si, molto. Of course, I knew molto, from music,” she added.

The women made noises, and smiled and nodded, and so the train pulsed on till they came to Rome. There was again the wild scramble with luggage, a general leave taking, and then the masses of people on the station at Rome. *Roma! Roma!* What was it to Alvina but a name, and a crowded, excited station, and Ciccio running after the luggage, and the pair of them eating in a station restaurant?

Almost immediately after eating, they were in the train once more, with new fellow travellers, running south this time towards Naples. In a daze of increasing weariness Alvina watched the dreary, to her sordid-seeming Campagna that skirts the railway, the broken aqueduct trailing in the near distance over the stricken plain. She saw a tram-car, far out from everywhere, running up to cross the railway. She saw it was going to Frascati.

And slowly the hills approached — they passed the vines of the foothills, the reeds, and were among the mountains. Wonderful little towns perched fortified on rocks and peaks, mountains rose straight up off the level plain, like old topographical prints, rivers wandered in the wild, rocky places, it all seemed ancient and shaggy, savage still, under all its remote civilization, this region of the Alban Mountains south of Rome. So the train clambered up and down, and went round corners.

They had not far to go now. Alvina was almost too tired to care what it would be like. They were going to Ciccio’s native village. They were to stay in the house of his uncle, his mother’s brother. This uncle had been a model in London.

He had built a house on the land left by Ciccio's grandfather. He lived alone now, for his wife was dead and his children were abroad. Giuseppe was his son: Giuseppe of Battersea, in whose house Alvina had stayed.

This much Alvina knew. She knew that a portion of the land down at Pescocalascio belonged to Ciccio: a bit of half-savage, ancient earth that had been left to his mother by old Francesco Califano, her hard-grinding peasant father. This land remained integral in the property, and was worked by Ciccio's two uncles, Pancrazio and Giovanni. Pancrazio was the well-to-do uncle, who had been a model and had built a "villa." Giovanni was not much good. That was how Ciccio put it.

They expected Pancrazio to meet them at the station. Ciccio collected his bundles and put his hat straight and peered out of the window into the steep mountains of the afternoon. There was a town in the opening between steep hills, a town on a flat plain that ran into the mountains like a gulf. The train drew up. They had arrived.

Alvina was so tired she could hardly climb down to the platform. It was about four o'clock. Ciccio looked up and down for Pancrazio, but could not see him. So he put his luggage into a pile on the platform, told Alvina to stand by it, whilst he went off for the registered boxes. A porter came and asked her questions, of which she understood nothing. Then at last came Ciccio, shouldering one small trunk, whilst a porter followed, shouldering another. Out they trotted, leaving Alvina abandoned with the pile of hand luggage. She waited. The train drew out. Ciccio and the porter came bustling back. They took her out through the little gate, to where, in the flat desert space behind the railway, stood two great drab motor-omnibuses, and a rank of open carriages. Ciccio was handing up the handbags to the roof of one of the big post-omnibuses. When it was finished the man on the roof came down, and Ciccio gave him and the station porter each sixpence. The station-porter immediately threw his coin on the ground with a gesture of indignant contempt, spread his arms wide and expostulated violently. Ciccio expostulated back again, and they pecked at each other, verbally, like two birds. It ended by the rolling up of the burly, black moustached driver of the omnibus. Whereupon Ciccio quite amicably gave the porter two nickel twopences in addition to the sixpence, whereupon the porter quite lovingly wished him "buon' viaggio."

So Alvina was stowed into the body of the omnibus, with Ciccio at her side. They were no sooner seated than a voice was heard, in beautifully-modulated English:

"You are here! Why how have I missed you?"

It was Pancrazio, a smallish, rather battered-looking, shabby Italian of sixty or

more, with a big moustache and reddish-rimmed eyes and a deeply-lined face. He was presented to Alvina.

“How have I missed you?” he said. “I was on the station when the train came, and I did not see you.”

But it was evident he had taken wine. He had no further opportunity to talk. The compartment was full of large, mountain-peasants with black hats and big cloaks and overcoats. They found Pancrazio a seat at the far end, and there he sat, with his deeply-lined, impassive face and slightly glazed eyes. He had yellow-brown eyes like Ciccio. But in the uncle the eyelids dropped in a curious, heavy way, the eyes looked dull like those of some old, rakish tom-cat, they were slightly rimmed with red. A curious person! And his English, though slow, was beautifully pronounced. He glanced at Alvina with slow, impersonal glances, not at all a stare. And he sat for the most part impassive and abstract as a Red Indian.

At the last moment a large black priest was crammed in, and the door shut behind him. Every available seat was let down and occupied. The second great post-omnibus rolled away, and then the one for Mola followed, rolling Alvina and Ciccio over the next stage of their journey.

The sun was already slanting to the mountain tops, shadows were falling on the gulf of the plain. The omnibus charged at a great speed along a straight white road, which cut through the cultivated level straight towards the core of the mountain. By the road-side, peasant men in cloaks, peasant women in full-gathered dresses with white bodices or blouses having great full sleeves, tramped in the ridge of grass, driving cows or goats, or leading heavily-laden asses. The women had coloured kerchiefs on their heads, like the women Alvina remembered at the Sunday-School treats, who used to tell fortunes with green little love-birds. And they all tramped along towards the blue shadow of the closing-in mountains, leaving the peaks of the town behind on the left.

At a branch-road the ‘bus suddenly stopped, and there it sat calmly in the road beside an icy brook, in the falling twilight. Great moth-white oxen waved past, drawing a long, low load of wood; the peasants left behind began to come up again, in picturesque groups. The icy brook tinkled, goats, pigs and cows wandered and shook their bells along the grassy borders of the road and the flat, unbroken fields, being driven slowly home. Peasants jumped out of the omnibus on to the road, to chat — and a sharp air came in. High overhead, as the sun went down, was the curious icy radiance of snow mountains, and a pinkness, while shadow deepened in the valley.

At last, after about half an hour, the youth who was conductor of the omnibus came running down the wild side-road, everybody clambered in, and away the

vehicle charged, into the neck of the plain. With a growl and a rush it swooped up the first loop of the ascent. Great precipices rose on the right, the ruddiness of sunset above them. The road wound and swirled, trying to get up the pass. The omnibus pegged slowly up, then charged round a corner, swirled into another loop, and pegged heavily once more. It seemed dark between the closing-in mountains. The rocks rose very high, the road looped and swerved from one side of the wide defile to the other, the vehicle pulsed and persisted. Sometimes there was a house, sometimes a wood of oak-trees, sometimes the glimpse of a ravine, then the tall white glisten of snow above the earthly blackness. And still they went on and on, up the darkness.

Peering ahead, Alvina thought she saw the hollow between the peaks, which was the top of the pass. And every time the omnibus took a new turn, she thought it was coming out on the top of this hollow between the heights. But no — the road coiled right away again.

A wild little village came in sight. This was the destination. Again no. Only the tall, handsome mountain youth who had sat across from her, descended grumbling because the 'bus had brought him past his road, the driver having refused to pull up. Everybody expostulated with him, and he dropped into the shadow. The big priest squeezed into his place. The 'bus wound on and on, and always towards that hollow sky-line between the high peaks.

At last they ran up between buildings nipped between high rock-faces, and out into a little market-place, the crown of the pass. The luggage was got out and lifted down. Alvina descended. There she was, in a wild centre of an old, unfinished little mountain town. The facade of a church rose from a small eminence. A white road ran to the right, where a great open valley showed faintly beyond and beneath. Low, squalid sort of buildings stood around — with some high buildings. And there were bare little trees. The stars were in the sky, the air was icy. People stood darkly, excitedly about, women with an odd, shell-pattern head-dress of gofered linen, something like a parlour-maid's cap, came and stared hard. They were hard-faced mountain women.

Pancrazio was talking to Ciccio in dialect.

"I couldn't get a cart to come down," he said in English. "But I shall find one here. Now what will you do? Put the luggage in Grazia's place while you wait? —"

They went across the open place to a sort of shop called the Post Restaurant. It was a little hole with an earthen floor and a smell of cats. Three crones were sitting over a low brass brazier, in which charcoal and ashes smouldered. Men were drinking. Ciccio ordered coffee with rum — and the hard-faced Grazia, in her unfresh head-dress, dabbled the little dirty coffee-cups in dirty water, took

the coffee-pot out of the ashes, poured in the old black boiling coffee three parts full, and slopped the cup over with rum. Then she dashed in a spoonful of sugar, to add to the pool in the saucer, and her customers were served.

However, Ciccio drank up, so Alvina did likewise, burning her lips smartly. Ciccio paid and ducked his way out.

“Now what will you buy?” asked Pancrazio.

“Buy?” said Ciccio.

“Food,” said Pancrazio. “Have you brought food?”

“No,” said Ciccio.

So they trailed up stony dark ways to a butcher, and got a big red slice of meat; to a baker, and got enormous flat loaves. Sugar and coffee they bought. And Pancrazio lamented in his elegant English that no butter was to be obtained. Everywhere the hard-faced women came and stared into Alvina’s face, asking questions. And both Ciccio and Pancrazio answered rather coldly, with some *hauteur*. There was evidently not too much intimacy between the people of Pescocalascio and these semi-townfolk of Ossona. Alvina felt as if she were in a strange, hostile country, in the darkness of the savage little mountain town.

At last they were ready. They mounted into a two-wheeled cart, Alvina and Ciccio behind, Pancrazio and the driver in front, the luggage promiscuous. The bigger things were left for the morrow. It was icy cold, with a flashing darkness. The moon would not rise till later.

And so, without any light but that of the stars, the cart went spanking and rattling downhill, down the pale road which wound down the head of the valley to the gulf of darkness below. Down in the darkness into the darkness they rattled, wildly, and without heed, the young driver making strange noises to his dim horse, cracking a whip and asking endless questions of Pancrazio.

Alvina sat close to Ciccio. He remained almost impassive. The wind was cold, the stars flashed. And they rattled down the rough, broad road under the rocks, down and down in the darkness. Ciccio sat crouching forwards, staring ahead. Alvina was aware of mountains, rocks, and stars.

“I didn’t know it was so *wild!*” she said.

“It is not much,” he said. There was a sad, plangent note in his voice. He put his hand upon her.

“You don’t like it?” he said.

“I think it’s lovely — wonderful,” she said, dazed.

He held her passionately. But she did not feel she needed protecting. It was all wonderful and amazing to her. She could not understand why he seemed upset and in a sort of despair. To her there was magnificence in the lustrous stars and the steepnesses, magic, rather terrible and grand.

They came down to the level valley bed, and went rolling along. There was a house, and a lurid red fire burning outside against the wall, and dark figures about it.

“What is that?” she said. “What are they doing?”

“I don’t know,” said Ciccio. “Cosa fanno li — eh?”

“Ka — ? Fanno it buga’ — ” said the driver.

“They are doing some washing,” said Pancrazio, explanatory. “Washing!” said Alvina.

“Boiling the clothes,” said Ciccio.

On the cart rattled and bumped, in the cold night, down the highway in the valley. Alvina could make out the darkness of the slopes. Overhead she saw the brilliance of Orion. She felt she was quite, quite lost. She had gone out of the world, over the border, into some place of mystery. She was lost to Woodhouse, to Lancaster, to England — all lost.

They passed through a darkness of woods, with a swift sound of cold water. And then suddenly the cart pulled up. Some one came out of a lighted doorway in the darkness.

“We must get down here — the cart doesn’t go any further,” said Pancrazio.

“Are we there?” said Alvina.

“No, it is about a mile. But we must leave the cart.”

Ciccio asked questions in Italian. Alvina climbed down.

“Good-evening! Are you cold?” came a loud, raucous, American-Italian female voice. It was another relation of Ciccio’s. Alvina stared and looked at the handsome, sinister, raucous-voiced young woman who stood in the light of the doorway.

“Rather cold,” she said.

“Come in, and warm yourself,” said the young woman.

“My sister’s husband lives here,” explained Pancrazio.

Alvina went through the doorway into the room. It was a sort of inn. On the earthen floor glowed a great round pan of charcoal, which looked like a flat pool of fire. Men in hats and cloaks sat at a table playing cards by the light of a small lamp, a man was pouring wine. The room seemed like a cave.

“Warm yourself,” said the young woman, pointing to the flat disc of fire on the floor. She put a chair up to it, and Alvina sat down. The men in the room stared, but went on noisily with their cards. Ciccio came in with luggage. Men got up and greeted him effusively, watching Alvina between whites as if she were some alien creature. Words of American sounded among the Italian dialect.

There seemed to be a confab of some sort, aside. Ciccio came and said to her:

“They want to know if we will stay the night here.”

“I would rather go on home,” she said.

He averted his face at the word home.

“You see,” said Pancrazio, “I think you might be more comfortable here, than in my poor house. You see I have no woman to care for it — ”

Alvina glanced round the cave of a room, at the rough fellows in their black hats. She was thinking how she would be “more comfortable” here.

“I would rather go on,” she said.

“Then we will get the donkey,” said Pancrazio stoically. And Alvina followed him out on to the high-road.

From a shed issued a smallish, brigand-looking fellow carrying a lantern. He had his cloak over his nose and his hat over his eyes. His legs were bundled with white rag, crossed and crossed with hide straps, and he was shod in silent skin sandals.

“This is my brother Giovanni,” said Pancrazio. “He is not quite sensible.” Then he broke into a loud flood of dialect.

Giovanni touched his hat to Alvina, and gave the lantern to Pancrazio. Then he disappeared, returning in a few moments with the ass. Ciccio came out with the baggage, and by the light of the lantern the things were slung on either side of the ass, in a rather precarious heap. Pancrazio tested the rope again.

“There! Go on, and I shall come in a minute.”

“Ay-er-er!” cried Giovanni at the ass, striking the flank of the beast. Then he took the leading rope and led up on the dark highway, stalking with his dingy white legs under his muffled cloak, leading the ass. Alvina noticed the shuffle of his skin-sandalled feet, the quiet step of the ass.

She walked with Ciccio near the side of the road. He carried the lantern. The ass with its load plodded a few steps ahead. There were trees on the road-side, and a small channel of invisible but noisy water. Big rocks jutted sometimes. It was freezing, the mountain high-road was congealed. High stars flashed overhead.

“How strange it is!” said Alvina to Ciccio. “Are you glad you have come home?”

“It isn’t my home,” he replied, as if the word fretted him. “Yes, I like to see it again. But it isn’t the place for young people to live in. You will see how you like it.”

She wondered at his uneasiness. It was the same in Pancrazio. The latter now came running to catch them up.

“I think you will be tired,” he said. “You ought to have stayed at my relation’s house down there.”

“No, I am not tired,” said Alvina. “But I’m hungry.”

“Well, we shall eat something when we come to my house.”

They plodded in the darkness of the valley high-road. Pancrazio took the lantern and went to examine the load, hitching the ropes. A great flat loaf fell out, and rolled away, and smack came a little valise. Pancrazio broke into a flood of dialect to Giovanni, handing him the lantern. Ciccio picked up the bread and put it under his arm.

“Break me a little piece,” said Alvina.

And in the darkness they both chewed bread.

After a while, Pancrazio halted with the ass just ahead, and took the lantern from Giovanni.

“We must leave the road here,” he said.

And with the lantern he carefully, courteously showed Alvina a small track descending in the side of the bank, between bushes. Alvina ventured down the steep descent, Pancrazio following showing a light. In the rear was Giovanni, making noises at the ass. They all picked their way down into the great white-bouldered bed of a mountain river. It was a wide, strange bed of dry boulders, pallid under the stars. There was a sound of a rushing river, glacial-sounding. The place seemed wild and desolate. In the distance was a darkness of bushes, along the far shore.

Pancrazio swinging the lantern, they threaded their way through the uneven boulders till they came to the river itself — not very wide, but rushing fast. A long, slender, drooping plank crossed over. Alvina crossed rather tremulous, followed by Pancrazio with the light, and Ciccio with the bread and the valise. They could hear the click of the ass and the ejaculations of Giovanni.

Pancrazio went back over the stream with the light. Alvina saw the dim ass come up, wander uneasily to the stream, plant his fore legs, and sniff the water, his nose right down.

“Er! Err!” cried Pancrazio, striking the beast on the flank.

But it only lifted its nose and turned aside. It would not take the stream. Pancrazio seized the leading rope angrily and turned upstream.

“Why were donkeys made! They are beasts without sense,” his voice floated angrily across the chill darkness.

Ciccio laughed. He and Alvina stood in the wide, stony river-bed, in the strong starlight, watching the dim figures of the ass and the men crawl upstream with the lantern.

Again the same performance, the white muzzle of the ass stooping down to sniff the water suspiciously, his hind-quarters tilted up with the load. Again the angry yells and blows from Pancrazio. And the ass seemed to be taking the water. But no! After a long deliberation he drew back. Angry language sounded

through the crystal air. The group with the lantern moved again upstream, becoming smaller.

Alvina and Ciccio stood and watched. The lantern looked small up the distance. But there — a clocking, shouting, splashing sound. “He is going over,” said Ciccio.

Pancrazio came hurrying back to the plank with the lantern. “Oh the stupid beast! I could kill him!” cried he.

“Isn’t he used to the water?” said Alvina.

“Yes, he is. But he won’t go except where he thinks he will go. You might kill him before he should go.”

They picked their way across the river bed, to the wild scrub and bushes of the farther side. There they waited for the ass, which came up clicking over the boulders, led by the patient Giovanni. And then they took a difficult, rocky track ascending between banks. Alvina felt the uneven scramble a great effort. But she got up. Again they waited for the ass. And then again they struck off to the right, under some trees.

A house appeared dimly.

“Is that it?” said Alvina.

“No. It belongs to me. But that is not my house. A few steps further. Now we are on my land.”

They were treading a rough sort of grass-land — and still climbing. It ended in a sudden little scramble between big stones, and suddenly they were on the threshold of a quite important-looking house: but it was all dark.

“Oh!” exclaimed Pancrazio, “they have done nothing that I told them.” He made queer noises of exasperation.

“What?” said Alvina.

“Neither made a fire nor anything. Wait a minute — ”

The ass came up. Ciccio, Alvina, Giovanni and the ass waited in the frosty starlight under the wild house. Pancrazio disappeared round the back. Ciccio talked to Giovanni. He seemed uneasy, as if he felt depressed.

Pancrazio returned with the lantern, and opened the big door. Alvina followed him into a stone-floored, wide passage, where stood farm implements, where a little of straw and beans lay in a corner, and whence rose bare wooden stairs. So much she saw in the glimpse of lantern-light, as Pancrazio pulled the string and entered the kitchen: a dim-walled room with a vaulted roof and a great dark, open hearth, fireless: a bare room, with a little rough dark furniture: an unswept stone floor: iron-barred windows, rather small, in the deep-thickness of the wall, one-half shut with a drab shutter. It was rather like a room on the stage, gloomy, not meant to be lived in.

“I will make a light,” said Pancrazio, taking a lamp from the mantelpiece, and proceeding to wind it up.

Ciccio stood behind Alvina, silent. He had put down the bread and valise on a wooden chest. She turned to him.

“It’s a beautiful room,” she said.

Which, with its high, vaulted roof, its dirty whitewash, its great black chimney, it really was. But Ciccio did not understand. He smiled gloomily.

The lamp was lighted. Alvina looked round in wonder.

“Now I will make a fire. You, Ciccio, will help Giovanni with the donkey,” said Pancrazio, scuttling with the lantern.

Alvina looked at the room. There was a wooden settle in front of the hearth, stretching its back to the room. There was a little table under a square, recessed window, on whose sloping ledge were newspapers, scattered letters, nails and a hammer. On the table were dried beans and two maize cobs. In a corner were shelves, with two chipped enamel plates, and a small table underneath, on which stood a bucket of water with a dipper. Then there was a wooden chest, two little chairs, and a litter of faggots, cane, wine-twigs, bare maize-hubs, oak-twigs filling the corner by the hearth.

Pancrazio came scrambling in with fresh faggots.

“They have not done what I told them, the tiresome people!” he said. “I told them to make a fire and prepare the house. You will be uncomfortable in my poor home. I have no woman, nothing, everything is wrong — ”

He broke the pieces of cane and kindled them in the hearth. Soon there was a good blaze. Ciccio came in with the bags and the food.

“I had better go upstairs and take my things off,” said Alvina. “I am so hungry.”

“You had better keep your coat on,” said Pancrazio. “The room is cold.” Which it was, ice-cold. She shuddered a little. She took off her hat and fur.

“Shall we fry some meat?” said Pancrazio.

He took a frying-pan, found lard in the wooden chest — it was the food-chest — and proceeded to fry pieces of meat in a frying-pan over the fire. Alvina wanted to lay the table. But there was no cloth.

“We will sit here, as I do, to eat,” said Pancrazio. He produced two enamel plates and one soup-plate, three penny iron forks and two old knives, and a little grey, coarse salt in a wooden bowl. These he placed on the seat of the settle in front of the fire. Ciccio was silent.

The settle was dark and greasy. Alvina feared for her clothes. But she sat with her enamel plate and her impossible fork, a piece of meat and a chunk of bread, and ate. It was difficult — but the food was good, and the fire blazed. Only there

was a film of wood-smoke in the room, rather smarting. Ciccio sat on the settle beside her, and ate in large mouthfuls.

“I think it’s fun,” said Alvina.

He looked at her with dark, haunted, gloomy eyes. She wondered what was the matter with him.

“Don’t you think it’s fun?” she said, smiling.

He smiled slowly.

“You won’t like it,” he said.

“Why not?” she cried, in panic lest he prophesied truly.

Pancrazio scuttled in and out with the lantern. He brought wrinkled pears, and green, round grapes, and walnuts, on a white cloth, and presented them.

“I think my pears are still good,” he said. “You must eat them, and excuse my uncomfortable house.”

Giovanni came in with a big bowl of soup and a bottle of milk. There was room only for three on the settle before the hearth. He pushed his chair among the litter of fire-kindling, and sat down. He had bright, bluish eyes, and a fattish face — was a man of about fifty, but had a simple, kindly, slightly imbecile face. All the men kept their hats on.

The soup was from Giovanni’s cottage. It was for Pancrazio and him. But there was only one spoon. So Pancrazio ate a dozen spoonfuls, and handed the bowl to Giovanni — who protested and tried to refuse — but accepted, and ate ten spoonfuls, then handed the bowl back to his brother, with the spoon. So they finished the bowl between them. Then Pancrazio found wine — a whitish wine, not very good, for which he apologized. And he invited Alvina to coffee. Which she accepted gladly.

For though the fire was warm in front, behind was very cold. Pancrazio stuck a long pointed stick down the handle of a saucepan, and gave this utensil to Ciccio, to hold over the fire and scald the milk, whilst he put the tin coffee-pot in the ashes. He took a long iron tube or blow-pipe, which rested on two little feet at the far end. This he gave to Giovanni to blow the fire.

Giovanni was a fire-worshipper. His eyes sparkled as he took the blowing tube. He put fresh faggots behind the fire — though Pancrazio forbade him. He arranged the burning faggots. And then softly he blew a red-hot fire for the coffee.

“Banta! Basta!” said Ciccio. But Giovanni blew on, his eyes sparkling, looking to Alvina. He was making the fire beautiful for her.

There was one cup, one enamelled mug, one little bowl. This was the coffee-service. Pancrazio noisily ground the coffee. He seemed to do everything, old, stooping as he was.

At last Giovanni took his leave — the kettle which hung on the hook over the fire was boiling over. Ciccio burnt his hand lifting it off. And at last, at last Alvina could go to bed.

Pancrazio went first with the candle — then Ciccio with the black kettle — then Alvina. The men still had their hats on. Their boots tramped noisily on the bare stairs.

The bedroom was very cold. It was a fair-sized room with a concrete floor and white walls, and window-door opening on a little balcony. There were two high white beds on opposite sides of the room. The wash-stand was a little tripod thing.

The air was very cold, freezing, the stone floor was dead cold to the feet. Ciccio sat down on a chair and began to take off his boots. She went to the window. The moon had risen. There was a flood of light on dazzling white snow tops, glimmering and marvellous in the evanescent night. She went out for a moment on to the balcony. It was a wonder-world: the moon over the snow heights, the pallid valley-bed away below; the river hoarse, and round about her, scrubby, blue-dark foothills with twiggy trees. Magical it all was — but so cold. “You had better shut the door,” said Ciccio.

She came indoors. She was dead tired, and stunned with cold, and hopelessly dirty after that journey. Ciccio had gone to bed without washing.

“Why does the bed rustle?” she asked him.

It was stuffed with dry maize-leaves, the dry sheathes from the cobs — stuffed enormously high. He rustled like a snake among dead foliage.

Alvina washed her hands. There was nothing to do with the water but throw it out of the door. Then she washed her face, thoroughly, in good hot water. What a blessed relief! She sighed as she dried herself.

“It does one good!” she sighed.

Ciccio watched her as she quickly brushed her hair. She was almost stupefied with weariness and the cold, bruising air. Blindly she crept into the high, rustling bed. But it was made high in the middle. And it was icy cold. It shocked her almost as if she had fallen into water. She shuddered, and became semi-conscious with fatigue. The blankets were heavy, heavy. She was dazed with excitement and wonder. She felt vaguely that Ciccio was miserable, and wondered why.

She woke with a start an hour or so later. The moon was in the room. She did not know where she was. And she was frightened. And she was cold. A real terror took hold of her. Ciccio in his bed was quite still. Everything seemed electric with horror. She felt she would die instantly, everything was so terrible around her. She could not move. She felt that everything around her was horrific,

extinguishing her, putting her out. Her very being was threatened. In another instant she would be transfixed.

Making a violent effort she sat up. The silence of Ciccio in his bed was as horrible as the rest of the night. She had a horror of him also. What would she do, where should she flee? She was lost — lost — lost utterly.

The knowledge sank into her like ice. Then deliberately she got out of bed and went across to him. He was horrible and frightening, but he was warm. She felt his power and his warmth invade her and extinguish her. The mad and desperate passion that was in him sent her completely unconscious again, completely unconscious.

CHAPTER XV

THE PLACE CALLED CALIFANO

There is no mistake about it, Alvina was a lost girl. She was cut off from everything she belonged to. Ovid isolated in Thrace' might well lament. The soul itself needs its own mysterious nourishment. This nourishment lacking, nothing is well.

At Pescocalascio it was the mysterious influence of the mountains and valleys themselves which seemed always to be annihilating the Englishwoman: nay, not only her, but the very natives themselves. Ciccio and Pancrazio clung to her, essentially, as if she saved them also from extinction. It needed all her courage. Truly, she had to support the souls of the two men.

At first she did not realize. She was only stunned with the strangeness of it all: startled, half-enraptured with the terrific beauty of the place, half-horrified by its savage annihilation of her. But she was stunned. The days went by.

It seems there are places which resist us, which have the power to overthrow our psychic being. It seems as if every country has its potent negative centres, localities which savagely and triumphantly refuse our living culture. And Alvina had struck one of them, here on the edge of the Abruzzi.

She was not in the village of Pescocalascio itself. That was a long hour's walk away. Pancrazio's house was the chief of a tiny hamlet of three houses, called Califano because the Califanos had made it. There was the ancient, savage hole of a house, quite windowless, where Pancrazio and Ciccio's mother had been born: the family home. Then there was Pancrazio's villa. And then, a little below, another newish, modern house in a sort of wild meadow, inhabited by the peasants who worked the land. Ten minutes' walk away was another cluster of seven or eight houses, where Giovanni lived. But there was no shop, no post nearer than Pescocalascio, an hour's heavy road up deep and rocky, wearying tracks.

And yet, what could be more lovely than the sunny days: pure, hot, blue days among the mountain foothills: irregular, steep little hills half wild with twiggy

brown oak-trees and marshes and broom heaths, half cultivated, in a wild, scattered fashion. Lovely, in the lost hollows beyond a marsh, to see Ciccio slowly ploughing with two great white oxen: lovely to go with Pancrazio down to the wild scrub that bordered the river-bed, then over the white-bouldered, massive desert and across stream to the other scrubby savage shore, and so up to the highroad. Pancrazio was very happy if Alvina would accompany him. He liked it that she was not afraid. And her sense of the beauty of the place was an infinite relief to him.

Nothing could have been more marvellous than the winter twilight. Sometimes Alvina and Pancrazio were late returning with the ass. And then gingerly the ass would step down the steep banks, already beginning to freeze when the sun went down. And again and again he would balk the stream, while a violet-blue dusk descended on the white, wide stream-bed, and the scrub and lower hills became dark, and in heaven, oh, almost unbearably lovely, the snow of the near mountains was burning rose, against the dark-blue heavens. How unspeakably lovely it was, no one could ever tell, the grand, pagan twilight of the valleys, savage, cold, with a sense of ancient gods who knew the right for human sacrifice. It stole away the soul of Alvina. She felt transfigured in it, clairvoyant in another mystery of life. A savage hardness came in her heart. The gods who had demanded human sacrifice were quite right, immutably right. The fierce, savage gods who dipped their lips in blood, these were the true gods.

The terror, the agony, the nostalgia of the heathen past was a constant torture to her mediumistic soul. She did not know what it was. But it was a kind of neuralgia in the very soul, never to be located in the human body, and yet physical. Coming over the brow of a heathy, rocky hillock, and seeing Ciccio beyond leaning deep over the plough, in his white shirt-sleeves following the slow, waving, moth-pale oxen across a small track of land turned up in the heathen hollow, her soul would go all faint, she would almost swoon with realization of the world that had gone before. And Ciccio was so silent, there seemed so much dumb magic and anguish in him, as if he were for ever afraid of himself and the thing he was. He seemed, in his silence, to *concentrate* upon her so terribly. She believed she would not live.

Sometimes she would go gathering acorns, large, fine acorns, a precious crop in that land where the fat pig was almost an object of veneration. Silently she would crouch filling the pannier. And far off she would hear the sound of Giovanni chopping wood, of Ciccio calling to the oxen or Pancrazio making noises to the ass, or the sound of a peasant's mattock. Over all the constant speech of the passing river, and the real breathing presence of the upper snows. And a wild, terrible happiness would take hold of her, beyond despair, but very

like despair. No one would ever find her. She had gone beyond the world into the pre-world, she had reopened on the old eternity.

And then Maria, the little elvish old wife of Giovanni, would come up with the cows. One cow she held by a rope round its horns, and she hauled it from the patches of young corn into the rough grass, from the little plantation of trees in among the heath. Maria wore the full-pleated white-sleeved dress of the peasants, and a red kerchief on her head. But her dress was dirty, and her face was dirty, and the big gold rings of her ears hung from ears which perhaps had never been washed. She was rather smoke-dried too, from perpetual wood-smoke.

Maria in her red kerchief hauling the white cow, and screaming at it, would come laughing towards Alvina, who was rather afraid of cows. And then, screaming high in dialect, Maria would talk to her. Alvina smiled and tried to understand. Impossible. It was not strictly a human speech. It was rather like the crying of half-articulate animals. It certainly was not Italian. And yet Alvina by dint of constant hearing began to pick up the coagulated phrases.

She liked Maria. She liked them all. They were all very kind to her, as far as they knew. But they did not know. And they were kind with each other. For they all seemed lost, like lost, forlorn aborigines, and they treated Alvina as if she were a higher being. They loved her that she would strip maize-cobs or pick acorns. But they were all anxious to serve her. And it seemed as if they needed some one to serve. It seemed as if Alvina, the Englishwoman, had a certain magic glamour for them, and so long as she was happy, it was a supreme joy and relief to them to have her there. But it seemed to her she would not live.

And when she was unhappy! Ah, the dreadful days of cold rain mingled with sleet, when the world outside was more than impossible, and the house inside was a horror. The natives kept themselves alive by going about constantly working, dumb and elemental. But what was Alvina to do?

For the house was unspeakable. The only two habitable rooms were the kitchen and Alvina's bedroom: and the kitchen, with its little grated windows high up in the wall, one of which had a broken pane and must keep one-half of its shutters closed, was like a dark cavern vaulted and bitter with wood-smoke. Seated on the settle before the fire, the hard, greasy settle, Alvina could indeed keep the fire going, with faggots of green oak. But the smoke hurt her chest, she was not clean for one moment, and she could do nothing else. The bedroom again was just impossibly cold. And there was no other place. And from far away came the wild braying of an ass, primeval and desperate in the snow.

The house was quite large; but uninhabitable. Downstairs, on the left of the wide passage where the ass occasionally stood out of the weather, and where the

chickens wandered in search of treasure, was a big, long apartment where Pancrazio kept implements and tools and potatoes and pumpkins, and where four or five rabbits hopped unexpectedly out of the shadows. Opposite this, on the right, was the cantina, a dark place with wine-barrels and more agricultural stores. This was the whole of the downstairs.

Going upstairs, half way up, at the turn of the stairs was the opening of a sort of barn, a great wire-netting behind which showed a glow of orange maize-cobs and some wheat. Upstairs were four rooms. But Alvina's room alone was furnished. Pancrazio slept in the unfurnished bedroom opposite, on a pile of old clothes. Beyond was a room with litter in it, a chest of drawers, and rubbish of old books and photographs Pancrazio had brought from England. There was a battered photograph of Lord Leighton, among others. The fourth room, approached through the corn-chamber, was always locked.

Outside was just as hopeless. There had been a little garden within the stone enclosure. But fowls, geese, and the ass had made an end of this. Fowl-droppings were everywhere, indoors and out, the ass left his pile of droppings to steam in the winter air on the threshold, while his heart-rending bray rent the air. Roads there were none: only deep tracks, like profound ruts with rocks in them, in the hollows, and rocky, grooved tracks over the brows. The hollow grooves were full of mud and water, and one struggled slipperily from rock to rock, or along narrow grass-ledges.

What was to be done, then, on mornings that were dark with sleet? Pancrazio would bring a kettle of hot water at about half-past eight. For had he not travelled Europe with English gentlemen, as a sort of model-valet! Had he not loved his English gentlemen? Even now, he was infinitely happier performing these little attentions for Alvina than attending to his wretched domains.

Ciccio rose early, and went about in the hap-hazard, useless way of Italians all day long, getting nothing done. Alvina came out of the icy bedroom to the black kitchen. Pancrazio would be gallantly heating milk for her, at the end of a long stick. So she would sit on the settle and drink her coffee and milk, into which she dipped her dry bread. Then the day was before her.

She washed her cup and her enamelled plate, and she tried to clean the kitchen. But Pancrazio had on the fire a great black pot, dangling from the chain. He was boiling food for the eternal pig — the only creature for which any cooking was done. Ciccio was tramping in with faggots. Pancrazio went in and out, back and forth from his pot.

Alvina stroked her brow and decided on a method. Once she was rid of Pancrazio, she would wash every cup and plate and utensil in boiling water. Well, at last Pancrazio went off with his great black pan, and she set to. But

there were not six pieces of crockery in the house, and not more than six cooking utensils. These were soon scrubbed. Then she scrubbed the two little tables and the shelves. She lined the food-chest with clean paper. She washed the high window-ledges and the narrow mantel-piece, that had large mounds of dusty candle-wax, in deposits. Then she tackled the settle. She scrubbed it also. Then she looked at the floor. And even she, English housewife as she was, realized the futility of trying to wash it. As well try to wash the earth itself outside. It was just a piece of stone-laid earth. She swept it as well as she could, and made a little order in the faggot-heap in the corner. Then she washed the little, high-up windows, to try and let in light.

And what was the difference? A dank wet soapy smell, and not much more. Maria had kept scuffling admiringly in and out, crying her wonderment and approval. She had most ostentatiously chased out an obtrusive hen, from this temple of cleanliness. And that was all.

It was hopeless. The same black walls, the same floor, the same cold from behind, the same green-oak wood-smoke, the same bucket of water from the well — the same come-and-go of aimless busy men, the same cackle of wet hens, the same hopeless nothingness.

Alvina stood up against it for a time. And then she caught a bad cold, and was wretched. Probably it was the wood-smoke. But her chest was raw, she felt weak and miserable. She could not sit in her bedroom, for it was too cold. If she sat in the darkness of the kitchen she was hurt with smoke, and perpetually cold behind her neck. And Pancrazio rather resented the amount of faggots consumed for nothing. The only hope would have been in work. But there was nothing in that house to be done. How could she even sew?

She was to prepare the mid-day and evening meals. But with no pots, and over a smoking wood fire, what could she prepare? Black and greasy, she boiled potatoes and fried meat in lard, in a long-handled frying pan. Then Pancrazio decreed that Maria should prepare macaroni with the tomato sauce, and thick vegetable soup, and sometimes polenta. This coarse, heavy food was wearying beyond words.

Alvina began to feel she would die, in the awful comfortless meaninglessness of it all. True, sunny days returned and some magic. But she was weak and feverish with her cold, which would not get better. So that even in the sunshine the crude comfortlessness and inferior savagery of the place only repelled her.

The others were depressed when she was unhappy.

“Do you wish you were back in England?” Ciccio asked her, with a little sardonic bitterness in his voice. She looked at him without answering. He ducked and went away.

“We will make a fire-place in the other bedroom,” said Pancrazio.

No sooner said than done. Ciccio persuaded Alvina to stay in bed a few days. She was thankful to take refuge. Then she heard a rare come-and-go. Pancrazio, Ciccio, Giovanni, Maria and a mason all set about the fire-place. Up and down stairs they went, Maria carrying stone and lime on her head, and swerving in Alvina’s doorway, with her burden perched aloft, to shout a few unintelligible words. In the intervals of lime-carrying she brought the invalid her soup or her coffee or her hot milk.

It turned out quite a good job — a pleasant room with two windows, that would have all the sun in the afternoon, and would see the mountains on one hand, the far-off village perched up on the other. When she was well enough they set off one early Monday morning to the market in Ossona. They left the house by star-light, but dawn was coming by the time they reached the river. At the highroad, Pancrazio harnessed the ass, and after endless delay they jogged off to Ossona. The dawning mountains were wonderful, dim-green and mauve and rose, the ground rang with frost. Along the roads many peasants were trooping to market, women in their best dresses, some of thick heavy silk with the white, full-sleeved bodices, dresses green, lavender, dark-red, with gay kerchiefs on the head: men muffled in cloaks, treading silently in their pointed skin sandals: asses with loads, carts full of peasants, a belated cow.

The market was lovely, there in the crown of the pass, in the old town, on the frosty sunny morning. Bulls, cows, sheep, pigs, goats stood and lay about under the bare little trees on the platform high over the valley: some one had kindled a great fire of brush-wood, and men crowded round, out of the blue frost. From laden asses vegetables were unloaded, from little carts all kinds of things, boots, pots, tin-ware, hats, sweet-things, and heaps of corn and beans and seeds. By eight o’clock in the December morning the market was in full swing: a great crowd of handsome mountain people, all peasants, nearly all in costume, with different head-dresses.

Ciccio and Pancrazio and Alvina went quietly about. They bought pots and pans and vegetables and sweet-things and thick rush matting and two wooden arm-chairs and one old soft arm-chair, going quietly and bargaining modestly among the crowd, as Anglicized Italians do.

The sun came on to the market at about nine o’clock, and then, from the terrace of the town gate, Alvina looked down on the wonderful sight of all the coloured dresses of the peasant women, the black hats of the men, the heaps of goods, the squealing pigs, the pale lovely cattle, the many tethered asses — and she wondered if she would die before she became one with it altogether. It was impossible for her to become one with it altogether. Ciccio would have to take

her to England again, or to America. He was always hinting at America.

But then, Italy might enter the war. Even here it was the great theme of conversation. She looked down on the seethe of the market. The sun was warm on her. Ciccio and Pancrazio were bargaining for two cowskin rugs: she saw Ciccio standing with his head rather forward. Her husband! She felt her heart die away within her.

All those other peasant women, did they feel as she did? — the same sort of acquiescent passion, the same lapse of life? She believed they did. The same helpless passion for the man, the same remoteness from the world's actuality? Probably, under all their tension of money and money-grubbing and vindictive mountain morality and rather horrible religion, probably they felt the same. She was one with them. But she could never endure it for a life-time. It was only a test on her. Ciccio must take her to America, or England — to America preferably.

And even as he turned to look for her, she felt a strange thrilling in her bowels: a sort of trill strangely within her, yet extraneous to her. She caught her hand to her flank. And Ciccio was looking up for her from the market beneath, searching with that quick, hasty look. He caught sight of her. She seemed to glow with a delicate light for him, there beyond all the women. He came straight towards her, smiling his slow, enigmatic smile. He could not bear it if he lost her. She knew how he loved her — almost inhumanly, elementally, without communication. And she stood with her hand to her side, her face frightened. She hardly noticed him. It seemed to her she was with child. And yet in the whole market-place she was aware of nothing but him.

“We have bought the skins,” he said. “Twenty-seven lire each.”

She looked at him, his dark skin, his golden eyes — so near to her, so unified with her, yet so incommunicably remote. How far off was his being from hers!

“I believe I'm going to have a child,” she said.

“Eh?” he ejaculated quickly. But he had understood. His eyes shone weirdly on her. She felt the strange terror and loveliness of his passion. And she wished she could lie down there by that town gate, in the sun, and swoon for ever unconscious. Living was almost too great a demand on her. His yellow, luminous eyes watched her and enveloped her. There was nothing for her but to yield, yield, yield. And yet she could not sink to earth.

She saw Pancrazio carrying the skins to the little cart, which was tilted up under a small, pale-stemmed tree on the platform above the valley. Then she saw him making his way quickly back through the crowd, to rejoin them.

“Did you feel something?” said Ciccio.

“Yes — here — !” she said, pressing her hand on her side as the sensation

trilled once more upon her consciousness. She looked at him with remote, frightened eyes.

“That’s good — ” he said, his eyes full of a triumphant, incommunicable meaning.

“Well! — And now,” said Pancrazio, coming up, “shall we go and eat something?”

They jogged home in the little flat cart in the wintry afternoon. It was almost night before they had got the ass untackled from the shafts, at the wild lonely house where Pancrazio left the cart. Giovanni was there with the lantern. Ciccio went on ahead with Alvina, whilst the others stood to load up the ass by the high-way.

Ciccio watched Alvina carefully. When they were over the river, and among the dark scrub, he took her in his arms and kissed her with long, terrible passion. She saw the snow-ridges flare with evening, beyond his cheek. They had glowed dawn as she crossed the river outwards, they were white-fiery now in the dusk sky as she returned. What strange valley of shadow was she threading? What was the terrible man’s passion that haunted her like a dark angel? Why was she so much beyond herself?

CHAPTER XVI

SUSPENSE

Christmas was at hand. There was a heap of maize cobs still unstripped. Alvina sat with Ciccio stripping them, in the corn-place.

“Will you be able to stop here till the baby is born?” he asked her.

She watched the films of the leaves come off from the burning gold maize cob under his fingers, the long, ruddy cone of fruition. The heap of maize on one side burned like hot sunshine, she felt it really gave off warmth, it glowed, it burned. On the other side the filmy, crackly, sere sheaths were also faintly sunny. Again and again the long, red-gold, full ear of corn came clear in his hands, and was put gently aside. He looked up at her, with his yellow eyes.

“Yes, I think so,” she said. “Will you?”

“Yes, if they let me. I should like it to be born here.”

“Would you like to bring up a child here?” she asked.

“You wouldn’t be happy here, so long,” he said, sadly.

“Would you?”

He slowly shook his head: indefinite.

She was settling down. She had her room upstairs, her cups and plates and spoons, her own things. Pancrazio had gone back to his old habit, he went across and ate with Giovanni and Maria, Ciccio and Alvina had their meals in their pleasant room upstairs. They were happy alone. Only sometimes the terrible influence of the place preyed on her.

However, she had a clean room of her own, where she could sew and read. She had written to the matron and Mrs. Tuke, and Mrs. Tuke had sent books. Also she helped Ciccio when she could, and Maria was teaching her to spin the white sheep’s wool into coarse thread.

This morning Pancrazio and Giovanni had gone off somewhere, Alvina and Ciccio were alone on the place, stripping the last maize. Suddenly, in the grey morning air, a wild music burst out: the drone of a bagpipe, and a man’s high voice half singing, half yelling a brief verse, at the end of which a wild flourish

on some other reedy wood instrument. Alvina sat still in surprise. It was a strange, high, rapid, yelling music, the very voice of the mountains. Beautiful, in our musical sense of the word, it was not. But oh, the magic, the nostalgia of the untamed, heathen past which it evoked.

“It is for Christmas,” said Ciccio. “They will come every day now.”

Alvina rose and went round to the little balcony. Two men stood below, amid the crumbling of finely falling snow. One, the elder, had a bagpipe whose bag was patched with shirting; the younger was dressed in greenish clothes, he had his face lifted, and was yelling the verses of the unintelligible Christmas ballad: short, rapid verses, followed by a brilliant flourish on a short wooden pipe he held ready in his hand. Alvina felt he was going to be out of breath. But no, rapid and high came the next verse, verse after verse, with the wild scream on the little new pipe in between, over the roar of the bagpipe. And the crumbs of snow were like a speckled veil, faintly drifting the atmosphere and powdering the littered threshold where they stood — a threshold littered with faggots, leaves, straw, fowls and geese and ass droppings, and rag thrown out from the house, and pieces of paper.

The carol suddenly ended, the young man snatched off his hat to Alvina who stood above, and in the same breath he was gone, followed by the bagpipe. Alvina saw them dropping hurriedly down the incline between the twiggy wild oaks.

“They will come every day now, till Christmas,” said Ciccio. “They go to every house.”

And sure enough, when Alvina went down, in the cold, silent house, and out to the well in the still crumbling snow, she heard the sound far off, strange, yelling, wonderful: and the same ache for she knew not what overcame her, so that she felt one might go mad, there in the veiled silence of these mountains, in the great hilly valley cut off from the world.

Ciccio worked all day on the land or round about. He was building a little earth closet also: the obvious and unscreened place outside was impossible. It was curious how little he went to Pescocalascio, how little he mixed with the natives. He seemed always to withhold something from them. Only with his relatives, of whom he had many, he was more free, in a kind of family intimacy.

Yet even here he was guarded. His uncle at the mill, an unwashed, fat man with a wife who tinkled with gold and grime, and who shouted a few lost words of American, insisted on giving Alvina wine and a sort of cake made with cheese and rice. Ciccio too was feasted, in the dark hole of a room. And the two natives seemed to press their cheer on Alvina and Ciccio whole-heartedly.

“How nice they are!” said Alvina when she had left. “They give so freely.”

But Ciccio smiled a wry smile, silent.

“Why do you make a face?” she said.

“It’s because you are a foreigner, and they think you will go away again,” he said.

“But I should have thought that would make them less generous,” she said.

“No. They like to give to foreigners. They don’t like to give to the people here. Giocomo puts water in the wine which he sells to the people who go by. And if I leave the donkey in her shed, I give Marta Maria something, or the next time she won’t let me have it. Ha, they are — they are sly ones, the people here.”

“They are like that everywhere,” said Alvina.

“Yes. But nowhere they say so many bad things about people as here — nowhere where I have ever been.”

It was strange to Alvina to feel the deep-bed-rock distrust which all the hill-peasants seemed to have of one another. They were watchful, venomous, dangerous.

“Ah,” said Pancrazio, “I am glad there is a woman in my house once more.”

“But did *nobody* come in and do for you before?” asked Alvina. “Why didn’t you pay somebody?”

“Nobody will come,” said Pancrazio, in his slow, aristocratic English. “Nobody will come, because I am a man, and if somebody should see her at my house, they will all talk.”

“Talk!” Alvina looked at the deeply-lined man of sixty-six. “But what will they say?”

“Many bad things. Many bad things indeed. They are not good people here. All saying bad things, and all jealous. They don’t like me because I have a house — they think I am too much a *signore*. They say to me ‘Why do you think you are a signore?’ Oh, they are bad people, envious, you cannot have anything to do with them.”

“They are nice to me,” said Alvina.

“They think you will go away. But if you stay, they will say bad things. You must wait. Oh, they are evil people, evil against one another, against everybody but strangers who don’t know them — ”

Alvina felt the curious passion in Pancrazio’s voice, the passion of a man who has lived for many years in England and known the social confidence of England, and who, coming back, is deeply injured by the ancient malevolence of the remote, somewhat gloomy hill-peasantry. She understood also why he was so glad to have her in his house, so proud, why he loved serving her. She seemed to see a fairness, a luminousness in the northern soul, something free, touched with divinity such as “these people here” lacked entirely.

When she went to Ossoa with him, she knew everybody questioned him about her and Ciccio. She began to get the drift of the questions — which Pancrazio answered with reserve.

“And how long are they staying?”

This was an invariable, envious question. And invariably Pancrazio answered with a reserved —

“Some months. As long as they like.”

And Alvina could feel waves of black envy go out against Pancrazio, because she was domiciled with him, and because she sat with him in the flat cart, driving to Ossoa.

Yet Pancrazio himself was a study. He was thin, and very shabby, and rather out of shape. Only in his yellow eyes lurked a strange sardonic fire, and a leer which puzzled her. When Ciccio happened to be out in the evening he would sit with her and tell her stories of Lord Leighton and Millais and Alma Tadema and other academicians dead and living. There would sometimes be a strange passivity on his worn face, an impassive, almost Red Indian look. And then again he would stir into a curious, arch, malevolent laugh, for all the world like a debauched old tom-cat. His narration was like this: either simple, bare, stoical, with a touch of nobility; or else satiric, malicious, with a strange, rather repellent jeering.

“Leighton — he wasn’t Lord Leighton then — he wouldn’t have me to sit for him, because my figure was too poor, he didn’t like it. He liked fair young men, with plenty of flesh. But once, when he was doing a picture — I don’t know if you know it? It is a crucifixion, with a man on a cross, and — ” He described the picture. “No! Well, the model had to be tied hanging on to a wooden cross. And it made you suffer! Ah!” Here the odd, arch, diabolic yellow flare lit up through the stoicism of Pancrazio’s eyes. “Because Leighton, he was cruel to his model. He wouldn’t let you rest. ‘Damn you, you’ve got to keep still till I’ve finished with you, you devil,’ so he said. Well, for this man on the cross, he couldn’t get a model who would do it for him. They all tried it once, but they would not go again. So they said to him, he must try Califano, because Califano was the only man who would stand it. At last then he sent for me. ‘I don’t like your damned figure, Califano,’ he said to me ‘but nobody will do this if you won’t. Now will you do it?’ ‘Yes!’ I said, ‘I will.’ So he tied me up on the cross. And he paid me well, so I stood it. Well, he kept me tied up, hanging you know forwards naked on this cross, for four hours. And then it was luncheon. And after luncheon he would tie me again. Well, I suffered. I suffered so much, that I must lean against the wall to support me to walk home. And in the night I could not sleep, I could cry with the pains in my arms and my ribs, I had no sleep. ‘You’ve said you’d do

it, so now you must,' he said to me. 'And I will do it,' I said. And so he tied me up. This cross, you know, was on a little raised place — I don't know what you call it — ”

“A platform,” suggested Alvina.

“A platform. Now one day when he came to do something to me, when I was tied up, he slipped back over this platform, and he pulled me, who was tied on the cross, with him. So we all fell down, he with the naked man on top of him, and the heavy cross on top of us both. I could not move, because I was tied. And it was so, with me on top of him, and the heavy cross, that he could not get out. So he had to lie shouting underneath me until some one came to the studio to untie me. No, we were not hurt, because the top of the cross fell so that it did not crush us. 'Now you have had a taste of the cross,' I said to him. 'Yes, you devil, but I shan't let you off,' he said to me.

“To make the time go he would ask me questions. Once he said, 'Now, Califano, what time is it? I give you three guesses, and if you guess right once I give you sixpence.' So I guessed three o'clock. 'That's one. Now then, what time is it?' Again, three o'clock. 'That's two guesses gone, you silly devil. Now then, what time is it?' So now I was obstinate, and I said *Three o'clock*. He took out his watch. 'Why damn you, how did you know? I give you a shilling — ' It was three o'clock, as I said, so he gave me a shilling instead of sixpence as he had said — ”

It was strange, in the silent winter afternoon, downstairs in the black kitchen, to sit drinking a cup of tea with Pancrazio and hearing these stories of English painters. It was strange to look at the battered figure of Pancrazio, and think how much he had been crucified through the long years in London, for the sake of late Victorian art. It was strangest of all to see through his yellow, often dull, red-rimmed eyes these blithe and well-conditioned painters. Pancrazio looked on them admiringly and contemptuously, as an old, rakish tom-cat might look on such frivolous well-groomed young gentlemen.

As a matter of fact Pancrazio had never been rakish or debauched, but mountain-moral, timid. So that the queer, half-sinister drop of his eyelids was curious, and the strange, wicked yellow flare that came into his eyes was almost frightening. There was in the man a sort of sulphur-yellow flame of passion which would light up in his battered body and give him an almost diabolic look. Alvina felt that if she were left much alone with him she would need all her English ascendancy not to be afraid of him.

It was a Sunday morning just before Christmas when Alvina and Ciccio and Pancrazio set off for Pescocalascio for the first time. Snow had fallen — not much round the house, but deep between the banks as they climbed. And the sun

was very bright. So that the mountains were dazzling. The snow was wet on the roads. They wound between oak-trees and under the broom-scrub, climbing over the jumbled hills that lay between the mountains, until the village came near. They got on to a broader track, where the path from a distant village joined theirs. They were all talking, in the bright clear air of the morning.

A little man came down an upper path. As he joined them near the village he hailed them in English:

“Good morning. Nice morning.”

“Does everybody speak English here?” asked Alvina.

“I have been eighteen years in Glasgow. I am only here for a trip.”

He was a little Italian shop-keeper from Glasgow. He was most friendly, insisted on paying for drinks, and coffee and almond biscuits for Alvina. Evidently he also was grateful to Britain.

The village was wonderful. It occupied the crown of an eminence in the midst of the wide valley. From the terrace of the high-road the valley spread below, with all its jumble of hills, and two rivers, set in the walls of the mountains, a wide space, but imprisoned. It glistened with snow under the blue sky. But the lowest hollows were brown. In the distance, Ossoa hung at the edge of a platform. Many villages clung like pale swarms of birds to the far slopes, or perched on the hills beneath. It was a world within a world, a valley of many hills and townlets and streams shut in beyond access.

Pescocalascio itself was crowded. The roads were sloppy with snow. But none the less, peasants in full dress, their feet soaked in the skin sandals, were trooping in the sun, purchasing, selling, bargaining for cloth, talking all the time. In the shop, which was also a sort of inn, an ancient woman was making coffee over a charcoal brazier, while a crowd of peasants sat at the tables at the back, eating the food they had brought.

Post was due at midday. Ciccio went to fetch it, whilst Pancrazio took Alvina to the summit, to the castle. There, in the level region, boys were snowballing and shouting. The ancient castle, badly cracked by the last earthquake, looked wonderfully down on the valley of many hills beneath, Califano a speck down the left, Ossoa a blot to the right, suspended, its towers and its castle clear in the light. Behind the castle of Pescocalascio was a deep, steep valley, almost a gorge, at the bottom of which a river ran, and where Pancrazio pointed out the electricity works of the village, deep in the gloom. Above this gorge, at the end, rose the long slopes of the mountains, up to the vivid snow — and across again was the wall of the Abruzzi.

They went down, past the ruined houses broken by the earthquake. Ciccio still had not come with the post. A crowd surged at the post-office door, in a steep,

black, wet side-street. Alvina's feet were sodden. Pancrazio took her to the place where she could drink coffee and a strega, to make her warm. On the platform of the highway, above the valley, people were parading in the hot sun. Alvina noticed some ultra-smart young men. They came up to Pancrazio, speaking English. Alvina hated their Cockney accent and florid showy vulgar presence. They were more models. Pancrazio was cool with them.

Alvina sat apart from the crowd of peasants, on a chair the old crone had ostentatiously dusted for her. Pancrazio ordered beer for himself. Ciccio came with letters — long-delayed letters, that had been censored. Alvina's heart went down.

The first she opened was from Miss Pinnegar — all war and fear and anxiety. The second was a letter, a real insulting letter from Dr. Mitchell. "I little thought, at the time when I was hoping to make you my wife, that you were carrying on with a dirty Italian organ-grinder. So your fair-seeming face covered the schemes and vice of your true nature. Well, I can only thank Providence which spared me the disgust and shame of marrying you, and I hope that, when I meet you on the streets of Leicester Square, I shall have forgiven you sufficiently to be able to throw you a coin — "

Here was a pretty little epistle! In spite of herself, she went pale and trembled. She glanced at Ciccio. Fortunately he was turning round talking to another man. She rose and went to the ruddy brazier, as if to warm her hands. She threw on the screwed-up letter. The old crone said something unintelligible to her. She watched the letter catch fire — glanced at the peasants at the table — and out at the wide, wild valley. The world beyond could not help, but it still had the power to injure one here. She felt she had received a bitter blow. A black hatred for the Mitchells of this world filled her.

She could hardly bear to open the third letter. It was from Mrs. Tuke, and again, all war. Would Italy join the Allies? She ought to, her every interest lay that way. Could Alvina bear to be so far off, when such terrible events were happening near home? Could she possibly be happy? Nurses were so valuable now. She, Mrs. Tuke, had volunteered. She would do whatever she could. She had had to leave off nursing Jenifer, who had an *excellent* Scotch nurse, much better than a mother. Well, Alvina and Mrs. Tuke might yet meet in some hospital in France. So the letter ended.

Alvina sat down, pale and trembling. Pancrazio was watching her curiously.

"Have you bad news?" he asked.

"Only the war."

"Ha!" and the Italian gesture of half-bitter "what can one do?"

They were talking war — all talking war. The dandy young models had left

England because of the war, expecting Italy to come in. And everybody talked, talked, talked. Alvina looked round her. It all seemed alien to her, bruising upon the spirit.

“Do you think I shall ever be able to come here alone and do my shopping by myself?” she asked.

“You must never come alone,” said Pancrazio, in his curious, benevolent courtesy. “Either Ciccio or I will come with you. You must never come so far alone.”

“Why not?” she said.

“You are a stranger here. You are not a contadina — ” Alvina could feel the oriental idea of women, which still leaves its mark on the Mediterranean, threatening her with surveillance and subjection. She sat in her chair, with cold wet feet, looking at the sunshine outside, the wet snow, the moving figures in the strong light, the men drinking at the counter, the cluster of peasant women bargaining for dress-material. Ciccio was still turning talking in the rapid way to his neighbour. She knew it was war. She noticed the movement of his finely-modelled cheek, a little sallow this morning.

And she rose hastily.

“I want to go into the sun,” she said.

When she stood above the valley in the strong, tiring light, she glanced round. Ciccio inside the shop had risen, but he was still turning to his neighbour and was talking with all his hands and all his body. He did not talk with his mind and lips alone. His whole physique, his whole living body spoke and uttered and emphasized itself.

A certain weariness possessed her. She was beginning to realize something about him: how he had no sense of home and domestic life, as an Englishman has. Ciccio’s home would never be his castle. His castle was the piazza of Pescocalascio. His home was nothing to him but a possession, and a hole to sleep in. He didn’t live in it. He lived in the open air, and in the community. When the true Italian came out in him, his veriest home was the piazza of Pescocalascio, the little sort of market-place where the roads met in the village, under the castle, and where the men stood in groups and talked, talked, talked. This was where Ciccio belonged: his active, mindful self. His active, mindful self was none of hers. She only had his passive self, and his family passion. His masculine mind and intelligence had its home in the little public square of his village. She knew this as she watched him now, with all his body talking politics. He could not break off till he had finished. And then, with a swift, intimate handshake to the group with whom he had been engaged, he came away, putting all his interest off from himself.

She tried to make him talk and discuss with her. But he wouldn't. An obstinate spirit made him darkly refuse masculine conversation with her.

"If Italy goes to war, you will have to join up?" she asked him. "Yes," he said, with a smile at the futility of the question. "And I shall have to stay here?"

He nodded, rather gloomily.

"Do you want to go?" she persisted.

"No, I don't want to go."

"But you think Italy ought to join in?"

"Yes, I do."

"Then you *do* want to go — "

"I want to go if Italy goes in — and she ought to go in — "

Curious, he was somewhat afraid of her, he half venerated her, and half despised her. When she tried to make him discuss, in the masculine way, he shut obstinately against her, something like a child, and the slow, fine smile of dislike came on his face. Instinctively he shut off all masculine communication from her, particularly politics and religion. He would discuss both, violently, with other men. In politics he was something of a Socialist, in religion a free-thinker. But all this had nothing to do with Alvina. He would not enter on a discussion in English.

Somewhere in her soul, she knew the finality of his refusal to hold discussion with a woman. So, though at times her heart hardened with indignant anger, she let herself remain outside. The more so, as she felt that in matters intellectual he was rather stupid. Let him go to the piazza or to the wine-shop, and talk.

To do him justice, he went little. Pescocalascio was only half his own village. The nostalgia, the campanilismo from which Italians suffer, the craving to be in sight of the native church-tower, to stand and talk in the native market place or piazza, this was only half formed in Ciccio, taken away as he had been from Pescocalascio when so small a boy. He spent most of his time working in the fields and woods, most of his evenings at home, often weaving a special kind of fish-net or net-basket from fine, frail strips of cane. It was a work he had learned at Naples long ago. Alvina meanwhile would sew for the child, or spin wool. She became quite clever at drawing the strands of wool from her distaff, rolling them fine and even between her fingers, and keeping her bobbin rapidly spinning away below, dangling at the end of the thread. To tell the truth, she was happy in the quietness with Ciccio, now they had their own pleasant room. She loved his presence. She loved the quality of his silence, so rich and physical. She felt he was never very far away: that he was a good deal a stranger in Califano, as she was: that he clung to her presence as she to his. Then Pancrazio also contrived to serve her and shelter her, he too, loved her for being there. They both revered her

because she was with child. So that she lived more and more in a little, isolate, illusory, wonderful world then, content, moreover, because the living cost so little. She had sixty pounds of her own money, always intact in the little case. And after all, the highway beyond the river led to Ossona, and Ossona gave access to the railway, and the railway would take her anywhere.

So the month of January passed, with its short days and its bits of snow and bursts of sunshine. On sunny days Alvina walked down to the desolate river-bed, which fascinated her. When Pancrazio was carrying up stone or lime on the ass, she accompanied him. And Pancrazio was always carrying up something, for he loved the extraneous jobs like building a fire-place much more than the heavy work of the land. Then she would find little tufts of wild narcissus among the rocks, gold-centred pale little things, many on one stem. And their scent was powerful and magical, like the sound of the men who came all those days and sang before Christmas. She loved them. There was green hellebore too, a fascinating plant — and one or two little treasures, the last of the rose-coloured Alpine cyclamens, near the earth, with snake-skin leaves, and so rose, so rose, like violets for shadowiness. She sat and cried over the first she found: heaven knows why.

In February, as the days opened, the first almond trees flowered among grey olives, in warm, level corners between the hills. But it was March before the real flowering began. And then she had continual bowl-fuls of white and blue violets, she had sprays of almond blossom, silver-warm and lustrous, then sprays of peach and apricot, pink and fluttering. It was a great joy to wander looking for flowers. She came upon a bankside all wide with lavender crocuses. The sun was on them for the moment, and they were opened flat, great five-pointed, seven-pointed lilac stars, with burning centres, burning with a strange lavender flame, as she had seen some metal burn lilac-flamed in the laboratory of the hospital at Islington. All down the oak-dry bankside they burned their great exposed stars. And she felt like going down on her knees and bending her forehead to the earth in an oriental submission, they were so royal, so lovely, so supreme. She came again to them in the morning, when the sky was grey, and they were closed, sharp clubs, wonderfully fragile on their stems of sap, among leaves and old grass and wild periwinkle. They had wonderful dark stripes running up their cheeks, the crocuses, like the clear proud stripes on a badger's face, or on some proud cat. She took a handful of the sappy, shut, striped flames. In her room they opened into a grand bowl of lilac fire.

March was a lovely month. The men were busy in the hills. She wandered, extending her range. Sometimes with a strange fear. But it was a fear of the elements rather than of man. One day she went along the high-road with her

letters, towards the village of Casa Latina. The high-road was depressing, wherever there were houses. For the houses had that sordid, ramshackle, slummy look almost invariable on an Italian high-road. They were patched with a hideous, greenish mould-colour, blotched, as if with leprosy. It frightened her, till Pancrazio told her it was only the copper sulphate that had sprayed the vines hitched on to the walls. But none the less the houses were sordid, unkempt, shimmy. One house by itself could make a complete slum.

Casa Latina was across the valley, in the shadow. Approaching it were rows of low cabins — fairly new. They were the one-storey dwellings commanded after the earthquake. And hideous they were. The village itself was old, dark, in perpetual shadow of the mountain. Streams of cold water ran around it. The piazza was gloomy, forsaken. But there was a great, twin-towered church, wonderful from outside.

She went inside, and was almost sick with repulsion. The place was large, whitewashed, and crowded with figures in glass cases and *ex voto* offerings. The lousy-looking, dressed-up dolls, life size and tinselly, that stood in the glass cases; the blood-streaked Jesus on the crucifix; the mouldering, mumbling, filthy peasant women on their knees; all the sense of trashy, repulsive, degraded fetish-worship was too much for her. She hurried out, shrinking from the contamination of the dirty leather door-curtain.

Enough of Casa Latina. She would never go there again. She was beginning to feel that, if she lived in this part of the world at all, she must avoid the *inside* of it. She must never, if she could help it, enter into any interior but her own — neither into house nor church nor even shop or post-office, if she could help it. The moment she went through a door the sense of dark repulsiveness came over her. If she was to save her sanity she must keep to the open air, and avoid any contact with human interiors. When she thought of the insides of the native people she shuddered with repulsion, as in the great, degraded church of Casa Latina. They were horrible.

Yet the outside world was so fair. Corn and maize were growing green and silken, vines were in the small bud. Everywhere little grape hyacinths hung their blue bells. It was a pity they reminded her of the many-breasted Artemis, a picture of whom, or of whose statue, she had seen somewhere. Artemis with her clusters of breasts was horrible to her, now she had come south: nauseating beyond words. And the milky grape hyacinths reminded her.

She turned with thankfulness to the magenta anemones that were so gay. Some one told her that wherever Venus had shed a tear for Adonis, one of these flowers had sprung. They were not tear-like. And yet their red-purple silkiness had something pre-world about it, at last. The more she wandered, the more the

shadow of the by-gone pagan world seemed to come over her. Sometimes she felt she would shriek and go mad, so strong was the influence on her, something pre-world and, it seemed to her now, vindictive. She seemed to feel in the air strange Furies, Lemures, things that had haunted her with their tomb-frenzied vindictiveness since she was a child and had pored over the illustrated Classical Dictionary. Black and cruel presences were in the under-air. They were furtive and slinking. They bewitched you with loveliness, and lurked with fangs to hurt you afterwards. There it was: the fangs sheathed in beauty: the beauty first, and then, horribly, inevitably, the fangs.

Being a great deal alone, in the strange place, fancies possessed her, people took on strange shapes. Even Ciccio and Pancrazio. And it came that she never wandered far from the house, from her room, after the first months. She seemed to hide herself in her room. There she sewed and spun wool and read, and learnt Italian. Her men were not at all anxious to teach her Italian. Indeed her chief teacher, at first, was a young fellow called Bussolo. He was a model from London, and he came down to Califano sometimes, hanging about, anxious to speak English.

Alvina did not care for him. He was a dandy with pale grey eyes and a heavy figure. Yet he had a certain penetrating intelligence.

“No, this country is a country for old men. It is only for old men,” he said, talking of Pescocalascio. “You won’t stop here. Nobody young can stop here.”

The odd plangent certitude in his voice penetrated her. And all the young people said the same thing. They were all waiting to go away. But for the moment the war held them up.

Ciccio and Pancrazio were busy with the vines. As she watched them hoeing, crouching, tying, tending, grafting, mindless and utterly absorbed, hour after hour, day after day, thinking vines, living vines, she wondered they didn’t begin to sprout vine-buds and vine stems from their own elbows and neck-joints. There was something to her unnatural in the quality of the attention the men gave to the wine. It was a sort of worship, almost a degradation again. And heaven knows, Pancrazio’s wine was poor enough, his grapes almost invariably bruised with hail-stones, and half-rotten instead of ripe.

The loveliness of April came, with hot sunshine. Astonishing the ferocity of the sun, when he really took upon himself to blaze. Alvina was amazed. The burning day quite carried her away. She loved it: it made her quite careless about everything, she was just swept along in the powerful flood of the sunshine. In the end, she felt that intense sunlight had on her the effect of night: a sort of darkness, and a suspension of life. She had to hide in her room till the cold wind blew again.

Meanwhile the declaration of war drew nearer, and became inevitable. She knew Ciccio would go. And with him went the chance of her escape. She steeled herself to bear the agony of the knowledge that he would go, and she would be left alone in this place, which sometimes she hated with a hatred unspeakable. After a spell of hot, intensely dry weather she felt she would die in this valley, wither and go to powder as some exposed April roses withered and dried into dust against a hot wall. Then the cool wind came in a storm, the next day there was grey sky and soft air. The rose-coloured wild gladioli among the young green corn were a dream of beauty, the morning of the world. The lovely, pristine morning of the world, before our epoch began. Rose-red gladioli among corn, in among the rocks, and small irises, black-purple and yellow blotched with brown, like a wasp, standing low in little desert places, that would seem forlorn but for this weird, dark-lustrous magnificence. Then there were the tiny irises, only one finger tall, growing in dry places, frail as crocuses, and much tinier, and blue, blue as the eye of the morning heaven, which was a morning earlier, more pristine than ours. The lovely translucent pale irises, tiny and morning-blue, they lasted only a few hours. But nothing could be more exquisite, like gods on earth. It was the flowers that brought back to Alvina the passionate nostalgia for the place. The human influence was a bit horrible to her. But the flowers that came out and uttered the earth in magical expression, they cast a spell on her, bewitched her and stole her own soul away from her.

She went down to Ciccio where he was weeding armfuls of rose-red gladioli from the half-grown wheat, and cutting the lushness of the first weedy herbage. He threw down his sheaves of gladioli, and with his sickle began to cut the forest of bright yellow corn-marigolds. He looked intent, he seemed to work feverishly.

“Must they all be cut?” she said, as she went to him.

He threw aside the great armful of yellow flowers, took off his cap, and wiped the sweat from his brow. The sickle dangled loose in his hand.

“We have declared war,” he said.

In an instant she realized that she had seen the figure of the old post-carrier dodging between the rocks. Rose-red and gold-yellow of the flowers swam in her eyes. Ciccio’s dusk-yellow eyes were watching her. She sank on her knees on a sheaf of corn-marigolds. Her eyes, watching him, were vulnerable as if stricken to death. Indeed she felt she would die.

“You will have to go?” she said.

“Yes, we shall all have to go.” There seemed a certain sound of triumph in his voice. Cruel!

She sank lower on the flowers, and her head dropped. But she would not be beaten. She lifted her face.

“If you are very long,” she said, “I shall go to England. I can’t stay here very long without you.”

“You will have Pancrazio — and the child,” he said.

“Yes. But I shall still be myself. I can’t stay here very long without you. I shall go to England.”

He watched her narrowly.

“I don’t think they’ll let you,” he said.

“Yes they will.”

At moments she hated him. He seemed to want to crush her altogether. She was always making little plans in her mind — how she could get out of that great cruel valley and escape to Rome, to English people. She would find the English Consul and he would help her. She would do anything rather than be really crushed. She knew how easy it would be, once her spirit broke, for her to die and be buried in the cemetery at Pescocalascio.

And they would all be so sentimental about her — just as Pancrazio was. She felt that in some way Pancrazio had killed his wife — not consciously, but unconsciously, as Ciccio might kill *her*. Pancrazio would tell Alvina about his wife and her ailments. And he seemed always anxious to prove that he had been so good to her. No doubt he had been good to her, also. But there was something underneath — malevolent in his spirit, some caged-in sort of cruelty, malignant beyond his control. It crept out in his stories. And it revealed itself in his fear of his dead wife. Alvina knew that in the night the elderly man was afraid of his dead wife, and of her ghost or her avenging spirit. He would huddle over the fire in fear. In the same way the cemetery had a fascination of horror for him — as, she noticed, for most of the natives. It was an ugly, square place, all stone slabs and wall-cupboards, enclosed in foursquare stone walls, and lying away beneath Pescocalascio village obvious as if it were on a plate.

“That is our cemetery,” Pancrazio said, pointing it out to her, “where we shall all be carried some day.”

And there was fear, horror in his voice. He told her how the men had carried his wife there — a long journey over the hill-tracks, almost two hours.

These were days of waiting — horrible days of waiting for Ciccio to be called up. One batch of young men left the village — and there was a lugubrious sort of saturnalia, men and women alike got rather drunk, the young men left amid howls of lamentation and shrieks of distress. Crowds accompanied them to Ossoa, whence they were marched towards the railway. It was a horrible event.

A shiver of horror and death went through the valley. In a lugubrious way, they seemed to enjoy it.

“You’ll never be satisfied till you’ve gone,” she said to Ciccio. “Why don’t

they be quick and call you?”

“It will be next week,” he said, looking at her darkly. In the twilight he came to her, when she could hardly see him.

“Are you sorry you came here with me, Allaye?” he asked. There was malice in the very question.

She put down the spoon and looked up from the fire. He stood shadowy, his head ducked forward, the firelight faint on his enigmatic, timeless, half-smiling face.

“I’m not sorry,” she answered slowly, using all her courage. “Because I love you — ”

She crouched quite still on the hearth. He turned aside his face. After a moment or two he went out. She stirred her pot slowly and sadly. She had to go downstairs for something.

And there on the landing she saw him standing in the darkness with his arm over his face, as if fending a blow.

“What is it?” she said, laying her hand on him. He uncovered his face.

“I would take you away if I could,” he said.

“I can wait for you,” she answered.

He threw himself in a chair that stood at a table there on the broad landing, and buried his head in his arms.

“Don’t wait for me! Don’t wait for me!” he cried, his voice muffled. “Why not?” she said, filled with terror. He made no sign. “Why not?” she insisted. And she laid her fingers on his head.

He got up and turned to her.

“I love you, even if it kills me,” she said.

But he only turned aside again, leaned his arm against the wall, and hid his face, utterly noiseless.

“What is it?” she said. “What is it? I don’t understand.” He wiped his sleeve across his face, and turned to her.

“I haven’t any hope,” he said, in a dull, dogged voice.

She felt her heart and the child die within her.

“Why?” she said.

Was she to bear a hopeless child?

“You *have* hope. Don’t make a scene,” she snapped. And she went downstairs, as she had intended.

And when she got into the kitchen, she forgot what she had come for. She sat in the darkness on the seat, with all life gone dark and still, death and eternity settled down on her. Death and eternity were settled down on her as she sat alone. And she seemed to hear him moaning upstairs — “I can’t come back. I

can't come back." She heard it. She heard it so distinctly, that she never knew whether it had been an actual utterance, or whether it was her inner ear which had heard the inner, unutterable sound. She wanted to answer, to call to him. But she could not. Heavy, mute, powerless, there she sat like a lump of darkness, in that doomed Italian kitchen. "I can't come back." She heard it so fatally.

She was interrupted by the entrance of Pancrazio.

"Oh!" he cried, startled when, having come near the fire, he caught sight of her. And he said something, frightened, in Italian.

"Is it you? Why are you in the darkness?" he said.

"I am just going upstairs again."

"You frightened me."

She went up to finish the preparing of the meal. Ciccio came down to Pancrazio. The latter had brought a newspaper. The two men sat on the settle, with the lamp between them, reading and talking the news.

Ciccio's group was called up for the following week, as he had said. The departure hung over them like a doom. Those were perhaps the worst days of all: the days of the impending departure. Neither of them spoke about it.

But the night before he left she could bear the silence no more.

"You will come back, won't you?" she said, as he sat motionless in his chair in the bedroom. It was a hot, luminous night. There was still a late scent of orange blossom from the garden, the nightingale was shaking the air with his sound. At times other, honey scents wafted from the hills.

"You will come back?" she insisted.

"Who knows?" he replied.

"If you make up your mind to come back, you will come back. We have our fate in our hands," she said.

He smiled slowly.

"You think so?" he said.

"I know it. If you don't come back it will be because you don't want to — no other reason. It won't be because you can't. It will be because you don't want to."

"Who told you so?" he asked, with the same cruel smile. "I know it," she said.

"All right," he answered.

But he still sat with his hands abandoned between his knees. "So make up your mind," she said.

He sat motionless for a long while: while she undressed and brushed her hair and went to bed. And still he sat there unmoving, like a corpse. It was like having some unnatural, doomed, unbearable presence in the room. She blew out the light, that she need not see him. But in the darkness it was worse.

At last he stirred — he rose. He came hesitating across to her.

“I’ll come back, Allaye,” he said quietly. “Be damned to them all.” She heard unspeakable pain in his voice.

“To whom?” she said, sitting up.

He did not answer, but put his arms round her.

“I’ll come back, and we’ll go to America,” he said.

“You’ll come back to me,” she whispered, in an ecstasy of pain and relief. It was not her affair, where they should go, so long as he really returned to her.

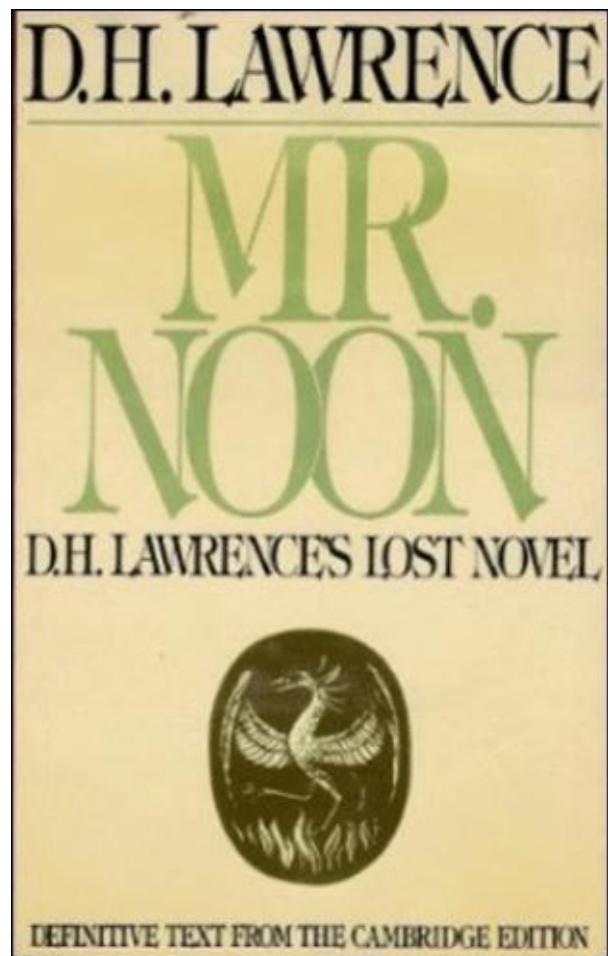
“I’ll come back,” he said.

“Sure?” she whispered, straining him to her.

MR NOON



This unfinished novel was drafted between 1920 and 1921 and then abandoned by Lawrence. It now exists in two parts. The first part was published posthumously by Martin Secker as a long short story titled *A Modern Lover* in 1934. The second fragment was finally published in 1984 and describes the experiences of the main character during his elopement to the continent. The novel is believed to be autobiographical in places.



The 1984 first edition of Lawrence's 'lost novel'

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MR NOON

PART I.

Chapter I.

Attack on Mr Noon.

Her very stillness, as she sat bent upon her book, gradually made him uncomfortable. He twisted over, sprawling in his arm-chair, and pretended to go on with his perusal of the New Age. But neither Mr Orage nor Miss Tina could carry him on the wings of the spirit this afternoon. He kept glancing at his wife, whose intensified stillness would have told a 'cuter man that she knew he was fidgetting, and then glancing at the window, and round the room. It was a rainy, dark Sunday afternoon. He ought to be very cosy, in the quiet by the roasting fire. But he was bored, and he wanted to be amused.

He perched his pince-nez on his nose and looked with an intellectual eye on his paper once more. Perhaps the light was fading. He twisted to look at the window. The aspidistras and ferns were not inspiring: it was still far from nightfall. He twisted the other way, to look at the little round clock on the mantel-piece. No use suggesting a meal, yet. He gave a heavy sigh, and rattled the leaves of the New Age.

But no response: no response. The little red metal devils frisked as ever on the mantel-piece, his own pet devils. Having gone back on the Lord, he signified his revolt by establishing a little company of scarlet, tail-flourishing gentry on his sitting-room mantel-piece. But it was only half-past three, and there was nothing to be done. He would not insult himself by nodding off to sleep. So again he perched his pince-nez on his nose, and began to have a grudge against his wife. After all, what was she so absorbed in!

She was a woman of about forty, stoutish, with very dark, glossy brown hair coiled on her head. She sat sunk deep in a chair, with her feet on a little footstool, and her spectacles right away on the tip of her nose. He, of course, did not observe that she never turned the page of her absorbing book.

His blue eye strayed petulantly to the fire. Ah-ha! Here he was in demand. In the well of the grate a mass of fire glowed scarlet like his devils, with a dark, half-burnt coal resting above. He crouched before the curb and took the poker with satisfaction. Biff! A well-aimed blow, he could congratulate himself on it. The excellent coal burst like magic into a bunch of flames.

"That's better!" he said heartily.

And he remained crouching before the fire, in his loose homespun clothes. He

was handsome, with a high forehead and a small beard, a socialist, something like Shakspeare's bust to look at, but more refined. He had an attractive, boyish nape of the neck, for a man of forty-five, no longer thin.

So he crouched gazing into the hot, spurting, glowing fire. He was a pure idealist, something of a Christ, but with an intruding touch of the goat. His eyelids dropped oddly, goatlike, as he remained abstracted before the fire.

His wife roused, and cleared her throat.

"Were you sleeping, Missis?" he asked her in a jocular manner of accusation, screwing round to look at her. She had a full, soft, ivory-pale face, and dark eyes with heavy shadows under them. She took her spectacles off her nose-tip.

"No," she said, in the same sparring humour. "I was not."

"May I ask you what was the last sentence you read?"

"You may ask. But you mayn't expect me to answer."

"I'll bet not," he laughed. "It would be the tail-end of a dream, if you did."

"No, it would not," she said. "Not even a day-dream."

"What, were you as sound as all that?" he said.

But she began rustling her book, rather ostentatiously. He crouched watching her. The coil of hair was rust-brown, on her dark, glossy head. Her hair became reddish towards the ends. It piqued him still, after twenty years of marriage. But since the top of her head was all she showed him, he went back to his big chair, and screwed himself in with his legs underneath him, though he was a biggish man, and once again settled his pince-nez. In a man who doesn't smoke or drink, an eyeglass or a pair of pince-nez can become a vice.

"Ay-y-y!" he sighed to himself, as he tried to find excitement in the well-filled pages of the New Statesman. He kept his quick ears attentive to the outside. The church clock sounded four. Some people passed, voices chattering. He got up to look. Girls going by. He would have liked a chat, a bit of fun with them. With a longing, half-leering eye he looked down from the window.

"It's about lighting-up time Mrs Goddard, isn't it?" he said to his wife.

"Yes, I suppose it is," she said abstractedly.

He bustled round with the matches, lit three gas-jets, drew the curtains, and rocked on his heels with his hands in his pockets and his back to the fire. This was the precious Sunday afternoon. Every week-day he was at the office. Sunday was a treasure-day to the two of them. They were socialists and vegetarians. So, in fine weather they tramped off into the country. In bad weather they got up late, had a substantial meal towards the end of the morning, and another in the early evening. None of the horrors of Sunday joints.

Lewie rocked on his heels on the hearth, with his back to the fire and his hands in his pockets, whistling faintly.

“You might chop some wood,” said Patty.

“I was just thinking so,” he said, with rather a resentful cheerfulness in his acquiescence.

However, off he went to the back yard, and Patty could hear him letting off some of his steam on the wood, whilst he kept up all the time a brilliant whistling. It wouldn't be Lewie if he didn't make himself heard wherever he was.

She mused on, in the brilliantly-lighted, hot room. She seemed very still, like a cat. Yet the dark lines under her eyes were marked. Her skin was of that peculiar transparency often noticed in vegetarians and idealists. Her husband's was the same: as if the blood were lighter, more limpid, nearer to acid in the veins. All the time, she heard her husband so plainly. He always sounded in her universe: always. And she was tired: just tired. They were an ideal married couple, she and he. But something was getting on her nerves.

He appeared after a time.

“Can't see any more,” he said. “Beastly rain still. The Unco Guid will want their just umbrellas tonight. I'm afraid there'll be a fair amount of pew-timber showing beneath the reverend eyes, moreover. There's nothing parsons hate more than the sight of bare pew-timber. They don't mind a bare bread-board half as much. — That reminds me, Mrs Goddard, what about tea?”

“What about it?” she answered, screwing up her face at him slightly, in a sort of smile. He looked down at her from under his eyelids.

“Is that intended as a piece of cheek?” he asked.

“Yes, it might be,” she said.

“I won't stand it.”

“I wouldn't. I wouldn't. No man ever does,” she quizzed.

“When a woman begins to give her husband cheek — ”

“Go and put the kettle on.”

“I've got to go and get the tea, have I?” he asked.

“Yes, if you want it so early, you have. It's only five o'clock.”

“The wiles and circumventions of a woman's heart, not to mention her tongue, would cheat ten Esaus out of ten birthrights a day.”

“All right then put the kettle on.”

“You have any more of your impudence, Patty Goddard, and I won't, so I tell you straight.”

“I'm dumb,” she said.

“My word, then I'll make haste and clear out, while the victory is yet mine.”

So he retreated to the kitchen, and his brilliant whistling kept her fully informed of his existence down the long length of the passage. Nay, even if he

went out of actual earshot, he seemed to be ringing her up all the time on some viewless telephone. The man was marvellous. His voice could speak to her across a hundred miles of space; if he went to America, verily, she would hear him invisibly as if he was in the back kitchen. The connection between a mother and her infant was as nothing compared to the organic or telepathic connection between her and Lewie. It was a connection which simply was never broken. And not a peaceful, quiet unison. But unquiet, as if he was always talking, always slightly forcing her attention, as now by his whistling in the kitchen. When he was right away from her, he still could make some sort of soundless noise which she was forced to hear and attend to. Lewie, Lewie, her soul sounded with the noise of him as a shell with the sea. It excited her, it pleased her, it saved her from ever feeling lonely. She loved it, she felt immensely pleased and flattered. But the dark lines came under her eyes, and she felt sometimes as if she would go mad with irritation.

He was fumbling at the door, and she knew he was balancing the full tray on his knee whilst he turned the doorhandle. She listened. He was very clever at these tricks, but she must listen, for fear.

“Well of all the idle scawd-rags!” he said as he entered with the tray.

“I’m the idlest, I know it,” she said laughing. She had in fact known that she ought to spread the cloth in readiness for his coming. But today a kind of inertia held her.

“How much does that admission cost you?” bantered Lewie, as he flapped the white cloth on to the round table.

“Less than the effort of getting up and laying the cloth,” she laughed.

“Ay, such a lot,” he said. He liked doing the things, really, on these days when the work-woman was absent.

There were buttered eggs in little casseroles; there was a stilton cheese, a salad, a pudding of chestnuts and cream, celery, cakes, pastry, jam, and preserved ginger: there were delicate blue Nankin cups, and berries and leaves in a jar. It had never ceased to be a delightful picnic á deux. It was so this evening still. But there was an underneath strain, unaccountable, that made them both listen for some relief.

They had passed the eggs and cheese and pudding stage, and reached the little cakes and tarts, when they heard the front gate bang.

“Who’s this!” said Lewie, rising quickly and going to light the hall lamp. The bell pinged.

Patty listened with her ears buttoned back.

“I wondered if you’d be at home — ” — a man’s bass voice.

“Ay, we’re at home. Come in,” — Lewie’s voice, heartily. He was nothing if

not hospitable. Patty could tell he did not know who his visitor was.

“Oh Mr Noon, is it you? Glad to see you. Take your coat off. Ay? Are you wet? Have you walked? — You’ve just come right for a cup of tea. Ay, come in.”

Mr Noon! Patty had risen hastily, hearing the name. She stood in the sitting-room doorway in her soft dress of dark-brown poplin trimmed with silk brocade in orange and brown. She was waiting. The visitor came forward.

“How nice of you to come,” she said. “Where have you been for so long? We haven’t seen you for ages. — You’re sure your feet aren’t wet? Let Lewie give you a pair of slippers.”

“Ay, come on,” said Lewie heartily.

Mr Noon, in a bass voice, said he had come on the motor-bicycle, and that he had left his overalls at The Sun. He was a young man of twenty-five or twenty-six, with broad, rather stiff shoulders and a dark head somewhat too small for these shoulders. His face was fresh, his mouth full and pursed, his eye also rather full, dark-blue, and abstracted. His appearance was correct enough, black coat and a dark blue tie tied in a bow. He did not look like a socialist.

The whole character of the room was now changed. It was evident the Goddards were pleased, rather flattered to entertain their visitor. Yet his hands were red, and his voice rather uncouth. But there was a considerable force in him. He ate the food they gave him as if he liked it.

“Now tell us,” said Patty, “what brings you to Woodhouse on a night like this.”

“Not any desire to sit at the feet of one of our famous administers of the gospel, I’ll warrant,” said Lewie.

“No,” said Noon. “I’d got an appointment and was here a bit too soon, so I wondered if you’d mind if I called.”

“Ah — !” exclaimed Patty. His answer was hardly flattering. “Of course! Of course! You may just as well wait here as at a street corner, or in a public-house.”

“The public-houses, my dear Patty, don’t open till half-past six, so that they shan’t get an unfair start of the House of the Lord,” said Lewie.

“No, of course,” said Patty. “But you won’t have to hurry away at once I hope,” she added, to Gilbert Noon.

“I can stop till about half-past seven,” said that gentleman.

“Till chapel comes out,” said Lewie drily.

“Ha-a-a!” laughed Patty, half-scornfully, half-bitterly, as if she had found him out.

“That’s it,” said Mr Noon, going rather red.

“Which of the tabernacles is it then?” asked Lewie. “We’d better know, to start you off in good time. Pentecost is half an hour earlier than the others, and Church is about ten minutes before the Congregational. Wesleyan is the last, because the Reverend Mr Flewitt is newly arrived on the circuit, and wants to sweep the chapel very clean of sin, being a new broom.”

“Congregational,” said Mr Noon.

“Ha-ha! Ha-ha!” said Patty teasingly. She was really rather chagrined. “You’re quite sure the fair flame will have come out on such a night?”

“No, I’m not sure,” said Mr Noon, rather awkwardly.

“Many waters cannot quench love, Patty Goddard,” said Lewie.

“They can put a considerable damper on it,” replied Patty.

Gilbert Noon laughed.

“They can that,” he replied.

“You speak as if you knew,” laughed Patty, knitting her brow.

But Gilbert only shook his head.

“Ah well,” said Patty, looking at the clock. “We can just clear away and settle down for an hour’s talk, anyhow. I’ve lots of things to ask you. Do smoke if you’d care to.”

Lewie, a non-smoker, hurried up with a box of cigarettes. But the young man preferred a pipe. They were soon all seated round the fire.

The reason the Goddards made so much of Gilbert Noon was because he was so clever. His father owned a woodyard in Whetstone, six miles away, and was comfortably well off, but stingy. Gilbert, the only son, had started his career as an elementary school-teacher, but had proved so sharp at mathematics, music, and science that he had won several scholarships, had gone up to Cambridge, and might have had a Fellowship if only he had stayed and worked. But he would neither work nor stay at the university, although he was accounted one of the most brilliant of the young mathematicians. He came back to Whetstone with his degree, and started the old round of Whetstone life, carousing in common public-houses, playing his violin for vulgar dances, “hops” as they were called, and altogether demeaning himself. He had a post as Science Master in Haysfall Technical School, another five miles from Whetstone, and so far, Haysfall shut its ears to Whetstone misdemeanours. Gilbert’s native town, a raw industrial place, was notorious for its roughs.

Occasionally Mr Noon, being somewhat of a celebrity in the countryside, would give popular lectures on scientific subjects. Lewie Goddard was secretary for the Woodhouse Literary Society, and as such had had much pride in securing Gilbert on several occasions. Gilbert’s lectures to the people were really excellent: so simple, and so entertaining. His account of Mars, with lantern

slides, thrilled Woodhouse to the marrow. And particularly it thrilled Patty. Mars, its canals and its inhabitants and its what-not: ah, how wonderful it was! And how wonderful was Mr Noon, with his rough bass voice, roughly and laconically and yet with such magic and power landing her on another planet. Mephistopheles himself, in a good-natured mood, could not have been more fascinating than the rough young man who stood on the rostrum and pointed at the lantern sheet with a long wand, or whose ruddy face was lit up at his dark-lantern, as he glanced at his notes.

So had started the Noon-Goddard acquaintance, which had not as yet ripened into a friendship. The Goddards warmly invited Gilbert, but he rarely came. And his social uncouthness, though acceptable in the Midlands as a sign of manliness, was rather annoying sometimes to a woman.

He sat now with a big pipe in his fist, smoking clouds of smoke and staring abstractedly into the fire. He wore a ring with a big red stone on one finger. Patty wondered at him, really. He made no effort to be pleasant, so his hostess fluttered her two neat little feet on her footstool, settled herself deep in her chair, and lifted her sewing from under a cushion. She perched her spectacles away on the slope of her nose, then looked up at Gilbert from under her dark eyebrows.

“You won’t be shocked if I stitch on the Sabbath, and sew clothes for the devil?” she asked.

“Me?” said Gilbert. “Better the day, better the deed.”

“So they say,” retorted Patty sarcastically. But it was lost on him.

“I’d rather clothe the devil than those up-aloft,” said Lewie. “He stands more need. Why he’s never a rag to his back. Not even a pair of bathing drawers, much less an immortal mantle. Funny thing that.”

“Beauty is best unadorned,” said Patty. “Then the angels and the Lord must be pretty unbeautiful, under all their robes and spangles,” said Lewie.

But Mr Noon was not attentive. Patty called a sort of hush. From the midst of it, she inquired in a small, searching voice: “And what are you doing with yourself these days, Mr Noon?”

“Me? Making stinks at Haysfall.”

“Chemical, I hope, not moral,” said Lewie.

“And what are you doing at Whetstone?” asked Patty.

Gilbert took his pipe from his mouth and looked at her.

“Pretty much as usual,” he said.

She laughed quickly.

“And what is that?” she said. “Are you working at anything?”

He reached forward and knocked his pipe on the fire-bar. “I’m doing a bit,” he said. “Of what?” she asked.

“Oh — thesis for my M.A. — maths. — And composing a bit as well.”

“Composing music? But how splendid! What is it?”

“A violin concerto.”

“Mayn’t we hear it?”

“It wouldn’t mean anything to you — too abstract.”

“But mayn’t we hear it?”

“Ay — you might some time — when I can arrange it.”

“Do arrange it. Do!”

“Yes, do,” put in Lewie.

“It’s not finished,” said Gilbert.

“But when it is,” said Patty. “You will finish it, won’t you?”

“I hope so, some day.”

She stuck her needle in her sewing, and looked up, and mused.

“I think of all the wonderful things to create,” she said, “music is the most difficult. I can never understand how you begin. And do you prefer music to your mathematics?”

“They run into one another — they’re nearly the same thing,” he said. “Besides it isn’t any good. It’s too abstract and dry for anybody but me, what I write.”

“Can’t you make it less abstract?” she said.

He looked at her.

“Somehow I can’t,” he said; and she saw a flutter of trouble in him.

“Why?” she asked.

“I don’t know, I’m sure. I know it hasn’t got the right touch. It’s more a musical exercise than a new piece of work. — I only do it for a bit of pastime. It’ll never amount to anything.”

“Oh, surely not. You who have such talents — ”

“Who?” said Gilbert scoffingly.

“You. You have wonderful talents.”

“I’m glad to hear it. Where are they?” asked Gilbert.

“In your head, I suppose.”

“Ay, and there they can stop, for all they’re worth — ”

“Nay now — ” began Lewie.

“But why? But why?” rushed in Patty. “Don’t you want to make anything of your life? Don’t you want to produce something that will help us poor mortals out of the slough?”

“Slough?” said Gilbert. “What I should do would only make the slough deeper.”

“Oh come! Come! Think of the joy I got out of your lecture.”

He looked at her, smiling faintly.

“A pack of lies,” he said.

“What?” she cried. “Didn’t I get joy out of it?”

He had got his pipe between his pouting lips again, and had closed his brow.

“What is lies?” she persisted.

“Mars,” he said. “A nice little fairy-tale. You only like it better than Arabian Nights.”

“Oh come — !” she cried in distress.

“Ay, we like it better than Arabian Nights,” said Lewie.

“I know you do,” said Gilbert. “I’ll tell you another some time.”

“Oh but come! — come!” said Patty. “Is nothing real? Or nothing true?”

“Not that I know of,” said Gilbert. “In that line.”

“Why, dear me, how surprising,” said Patty, puzzled. “Surely you believe in your own work?”

“Yes, I believe in mathematics.”

“Well then — ” she said.

He took his pipe from his mouth, and looked at her.

“There isn’t any well then” he said.

“Why not?”

“Mathematics is mathematics, the plane of abstraction and perfection. Life is life, and is neither abstraction nor perfection.”

“But it has to do with both,” she protested.

“Art has. Life hasn’t.”

“Life doesn’t matter to you, then?”

“No, why should it?”

The answer staggered her.

“How can anything matter, if life doesn’t matter?” she said.

“How could anything matter, if life mattered?” he replied. “Life is incompatible with perfection, or with infinity, or with eternity. You’ve got to turn to mathematics, or to art.”

She was completely bewildered.

“I don’t believe it,” she cried.

“Ay well,” he retorted, knocking out his pipe.

“You’re young yet. You’ll find that life matters before you’ve done,” she said.

“I’m quite willing,” he said.

“No,” she said, “you’re not.” Suddenly her ivory face flushed red. “Indeed you’re not willing. When do you ever give life a chance?”

“Me?” he said. “Always.”

“No, you don’t. Excuse my contradicting you. You never give life a chance.

Look how you treat women!”

He looked round at her in wonder.

“How do I?” he said. “What women?”

“Yes, how do you — !” She stumbled, and hesitated. “Confess it’s a girl you’re going to meet tonight,” she continued, plunging. “I’m old enough to be able to speak. You’ve never really had a mother. You don’t know how you treat women. Confess you’re going to meet a girl.”

“Yes — what by that?”

“And confess she’s not your equal.”

“Nay, I don’t see it.”

“Yes you do. Yes you do. How do you look on her? Do you look on her as you do on your mathematics? Ha — you know what a difference there is.”

“Bound to be,” he said. “Bound to be a difference.”

“Yes, bound to be. And the girl bound to be an inferior — a mere plaything — not as serious as your chemical apparatus, even.”

“Different,” protested Gilbert. “All the difference in the world.”

“Of course,” said Patty. “And who sinks down in the scale of the difference. Who does? The girl. — I won’t ask you who the girl is — I know nothing about her. But what is she to you? A trivial Sunday-night bit of fun: isn’t she? — isn’t she now?”

“Ay, she’s good fun, if I must say it.”

“She is! Exactly! She’s good fun,” cried Patty bitterly.

“Good fun, and nothing else. What a humiliation for her, poor thing!”

“I don’t think she finds it so,” said Gilbert.

“No I’ll bet she doesn’t,” laughed Lewie, with his goat’s laugh.

“She doesn’t. She doesn’t,” cried Patty. “But how cruel, that she doesn’t! How cruel for her!”

“I don’t see it at all. She’s on the look-out for me as much as I am for her,” said Gilbert.

“Yes probably. Probably. And perhaps even more. And what is her life going to be afterwards? And you, what is your life going to be? What are you going to find in it, when you get tired of your bit of fun, and all women are trivial or dirty amusements to you? What then?”

“Nay, I’ll tell you when I know,” he answered.

“You won’t. You won’t. By that time you’ll be as stale as they are, and you’ll have lost everything but your mathematics and science — even if you’ve not lost them. I pity you. I pity you. You may well despise life. But I pity you. Life will despise you, and you’ll know it.”

“Why, where am I wrong?” asked Gilbert awkwardly.

“Where? For shame! Isn’t a woman a human being? And isn’t a human being more than your science and stuff?”

“Not to me, you know,” he said. “Except in one way.”

“Ay,” laughed Lewie. “There’s always the exception, my boy.”

There was a moment’s pause.

“Well,” said Patty, resuming her sewing. “For your mother’s sake, I’m glad she can never hear you, never know. If she was a woman, it would break her heart.”

But Gilbert could not see it. He smoked obstinately until Lewie reminded him that he must depart for his rendez-vous.

Patty smiled at him as she shook hands, but rather constrainedly.

“Come in whenever you are near, and you feel like it,” she said.

“Thank you.”

Lewie sped his parting guest, and had full sympathy with him, saying:

“I’m all for a bit of fun, you know.”

Chapter II.

Spoon.

Patty stitched on in silence, angry and bitter. Lewie fidgetted and whistled. "He's got his human side to him right enough," he said, to make a breach in Patty's silence, which buzzed inaudibly and angrily on the atmosphere.

"Human!" she repeated. "Yes, call it human! A yellow dog on the streets has more humanity."

"Nay — nay," said Lewie testily. "Don't get your hair off, Mrs Goddard. We aren't angels yet, thank heaven. Besides, there's no harm in it. A young chap goes out on Sunday night for a bit of a spoon. What is it but natural?"

He rocked easily and fussily on the hearth-rug, his legs apart. She looked up, quite greenish in her waxen pallor, with anger.

"You think it natural, do you?" she retorted. "Then I'm sorry for you. Spoon! A bit of a spoon — " she uttered the word as if it was full of castor-oil.

Her husband looked down on her with a touch of the old goat's leer.

"Don't forget you've been spoony enough in your day, Patty Goddard," he said.

She became suddenly still, musing.

"I suppose I have. I suppose I have," she mused, with disgust. "And I can't bear myself when I think of it."

"Oh really!" said her husband sarcastically. "It's hard lines on you all of a sudden, my dear." He knew that if she had been spoony with anybody, it was with him.

But yellow-waxy with distaste, she put aside her sewing and went out. He listened, and followed her in a few minutes down to the kitchen, hearing dishes clink.

"What are you doing?" he asked her.

"Washing-up."

"Won't Mrs Prince do it tomorrow?"

And to show his anger, he went away without drying the pots for her.

Spoon! "You've been spoony enough in your day, Patty Goddard." — Spoony! Spooning! The very mental sound of the word turned her stomach acid. In her anger she felt she could throw all her past, with the dishwater, down the sink. But after all, if Gilbert Noon had been spooning with her instead of with

some girl, some bit of fluff, she might not have felt such gall in her veins.

She knew all about it, as Lewie had said. She knew exactly what Sunday night meant, in the dark, wintry, rainy Midlands. It meant all the young damsels coming out of chapel or of church, brazen young things from fifteen upwards, and being accompanied or met by young louts who would touch their exaggerated caps awkwardly: it meant strolling off to some dark and sheltered corner, passage, entry, porch, shop-door, shed, anywhere where two creatures might stand and squeeze together and spoon. Yes, spoon. Not even kiss and cuddle, merely: spoon. Spooning was a fine art, whereas kissing and cuddling are calf-processes.

Mr Gilbert had gone off for his Sunday-night's spoon, and her veins, the veins of a woman of forty, tingled with rage against him. She knew so much more.

But Sunday night, oh Sunday night: how she loathed it. There was a sort of Last Day suspense about it. Monday, and Monday morning's work-day grip, was very near. The iron hand was open to seize its subjects. And the emotional luxury and repletion of Sunday deepened into a sort of desperation as the hour of sleep and Monday approached. There must be a climax — there must be a consummation. Chapel did not finish it off sufficiently. The elder men dashed off for a drink, the women went to each other's houses for an intense gossip and a bit of supper, the young people went off for a spoon. It was the recognised thing to do — only very stiff-necked parents found any fault. The iron grip of Monday was closing. Meanwhile, dear young things, while the frisson of approaching captivity goes through you to add an intenser sting to your bliss, spoon, dears, spoon.

Mr Noon waited on the edge of the kerb, on the side of the road opposite the chapel. They were late coming out. The big but rather flimsy stained-glass window shed its colours on the muddy road, and Gilbert impassively contemplated the paucity of the geometric design of the tracery. He had contemplated it before. He contemplated it again as he stood in the rain with his coat-collar turned up and listened to the emotional moan of the vesper-verse which closed the last prayer. He objected to the raspberry-juice aerated-water melody and harmony, but had heard it before. Other louts were lurking in the shelter like spiders down the road, ready to pounce on the emerging female flies.

Yes, the congregation was beginning to filter out: the spider-youths who scorned to go to chapel emerged from their lairs. Their cigarette-ends, before only smellable, now became visible. The young dogs waited to snap up their fluffy rabbits.

People oozed through the chapel gateway, expanded into umbrellas, and said, of the rain: "Well I never, it's as hard as ever!" — and called "Goodnight then.

So long! See you soon! Too-ra-loo! Keep smiling! — ” and so on. Brave young dogs of fellows sniffed across the road. Sanctioned young hussies seized the arm of the “boy,” who had his cap over his nose and his cigarette under his nose, his coat-collar turned up, and they set off down the road. Trickling dark streams of worshippers ebbed in opposite directions down the rainy night.

Mr Noon was a stranger, and really too old for this business of waiting at the chapel gate. But since he had never got fixed up with a permanent girl, what was he to do? And he had the appointment. So, feeling rather self-conscious, he loitered like a pale ghost on the edge of the chapel stream.

She did not appear. It suddenly occurred to him that young people were emerging from the darkness of the tiny gateway at the other end of the chapel shrubbery, where there was no light. Sure enough, through that needle’s eye the choir were being threaded out; and he remembered she was in the choir. He strolled along on the pavement opposite.

Of course he heard her voice.

“It’s fair sickening. You’d think the Lord liked rain, for it pours every blessed Sunday. There comes Freddy! Oh Agatha, you are short-sighted, can’t see your own boy. Hello Fred.”

A tall youth in a bowler hat had stalked up to the two girls, who were dim under the trees on the wet pavement.

“Hello you two! How’s things?”

“Oh swimming,” came Emmie’s voice.

“You don’t mean to say you’re on the shelf tonight, Emmie?” sounded the young man’s resonant voice.

“‘Pears as if I am: though it’s not the oven shelf this time, my lad. What?”

“But aren’t you expecting anybody?”

“Shut up. — Well, Goodnight Agatha — see you Wednesday. Goodnight Freddy. Lovely night for ducks.”

“Ay, an’ tad-poles,” came Freddy’s guffaw. “So long.”

She had caught sight of Gilbert on the opposite pavement, and came prancing across the muddy road to him, saying in a guarded voice:

“Hello! Thought you hadn’t come.”

“Yes, I’m here.”

“Hold on a minute.”

She darted from him and went to speak to another girl. In a moment she was back at his side.

“Come on,” she said. “I don’t want our Dad to see me. I just said to our Sis I was going to Hackett’s for a book. Come on.”

She tripped swiftly along the pavement. She was a little thing, in a mackintosh

and a black velvet cap. A lamp's light showed her escaping fair hair, which curled more in the wet. She carried an umbrella.

"Coming under?" she said to him, half raking him in with the umbrella. He avoided her.

"No. I don't want it all down my neck."

"All right. Stop where you are. — Goodness, aren't we late! I thought father Dixon was never going to dry up. Have you been waiting long?"

"No. I went to Lewie Goddard's."

"Did you! Isn't he soft? But I like Lewie."

They passed along the pavement for two hundred yards, till they came to the big dark windows of the Co-operative Stores. In the midst of the range of dark buildings was a great closed doorway, where on weekdays the drays entered to the yard and the storehouse.

Emmie put down her umbrella, and glanced along the road.

"Half a tick!" she said.

She went to the big doors, and pushed her finger through a round hole. A latch clicked, and she opened a sort of little wicket in the big doors. It was left open for the bakers.

"Come on," she said.

And stepping through, she disappeared in the darkness. He stepped after her, and she closed the door behind him.

"All right here," she whispered, drawing him on.

He found himself in the wide passage or archway between the two departments of the stores, where the vans unloaded. Beyond was rainy darkness, brilliant lights of a smallish building in the near distance down the yard, lights which emanated and revealed ghosts of old packing cases and crates in the yard's chaos. Inside the passage it was very dark.

Emmie piloted him to the further end, then she climbed a step into a doorway recess.

"Come up," she said, tugging his arm.

He came up, and they stowed themselves in the doorway recess, for the spoon.

He realised, whilst she was stuffing her velvet cap in her pocket, that there were other couples in the entry — he became aware of muffled, small sounds, and then of bits of paleness and deeper darkness in the dark corners and doorway recesses. They were not alone in their spooning, he and Emmie. Lucky they had found an empty corner. He liked the invisible other presences, with their faint, ruffling sounds. The outside light from the street-lamps showed faintly under the great doors, there was a continuous echo of passing feet. Away in the yard, the wind blew the rain, and sometimes the broken packing cases rattled hollowly,

and sometimes a wet puff caught him and Emmie. There were sounds from the brilliantly-lighted bakery in the small distance.

Emmie, in her wet mackintosh, cuddled into his arms. He was famous as a spooner, and she was famous as a sport. They had known each other, off and on, for years. She was a school-teacher, three years his junior; he had seen her first at the Pupil Teacher's Centre. Both having a sort of reputation to keep up, they were a little bit excited.

A small, wriggling little thing, she nestled up to him in the darkness, and felt his warm breath on her wet-frizzy hair. She gave a convulsive little movement, and subsided in his embrace. He was slowly, softly kissing her, with prefatory kisses. Yes, his reputation as a spoon would not belie him. He had lovely lips for kissing: soft, hardly touching you, and yet melting you. She quivered with epicurean anticipation.

As a matter of fact, he had that pouting mouth which is shown in Shelley's early portraits, and of which the poet, apparently, was rather proud.

He was continually touching her brow with his mouth, then lifting his face sharply, as a horse does when flies tease it, putting aside her rainy, fine bits of hair. Soft, soft came his mouth towards her brow, then quick he switched his face, as the springy curls tickled him.

"Half a mo," she said suddenly.

She unfastened his wet overcoat, and thrust her hands under his warm jacket. He likewise unfastened her mackintosh, and held her warm and tender. Then his kisses began again, wandering along the roots of her hair, on her forehead, his mouth slowly moving forward in a browsing kind of fashion. She sighed with happiness, and seemed to melt nearer and nearer to him. He settled her in his arms, whilst she clung dreamily to the warmth of his shoulders, like a drowsy fly on the November window-pane.

Since the spoon is one of the essential mysteries of modern love, particularly English modern love, let us clasp our hands before its grail-like effulgence. For although all readers belonging to the upper classes; and what reader doesn't belong to the upper classes; will deny any acquaintance with any spoon but the metallic object, we regret to have to implicate the whole of the English race, from princes downwards, in the mystic business.

Dear reader, have we not all left off believing in positive evil? And therefore is it not true that the seducer, invaluable to fiction, is dead? The seducer and the innocent maid are no more. We live in better days.

There are only spooners now, a worldful of spoons. Those wicked young society people, those fast young aristocrats, ah, how soft as butter their souls are really, tender as melted butter their sinfulness, in our improved age. Don't talk of

lust, it isn't fair. How can such creamy feelings be lustful! And those Oxfordly young men with their chorus girls — ah God, how wistful their hearts and pure their faces, really! — not to speak of their minds. Then look at young colliers and factory lasses, they fairly reek with proper sentiment.

It doesn't matter what you do — only how you do it. — Isn't that the sincerest of modern maxims? — And don't we all do it nicely and con molto espressione? You know we do. So little grossness nowadays, and so much dear reciprocal old-bean-iness! How can there be any real wrong in it? Old wives tales! There is no wrong in it. We are all so perfectly sweet about it all, and on such a sympathetic plane.

Why bother about spades being spades any more? It isn't the point. Adam no more delves than Eve spins, in our day. Nous avons changé tout cela. Call a spoon a spoon if you like. But don't drag in garden implements. It's almost as bad as the Greeks with their horrid plough metaphor.

Ah, dear reader, you don't need me to tell you how to sip love with a spoon, to get the juice out of it. You know well enough. But you will be obliged to me, I am sure, if I pull down that weary old scarecrow of a dark designing seducer, and the alpaca bogey of lust. There is no harm in us any more, is there now? Our ways are so improved: so spiritualised, really. What harm is there in a bit of a spoon? And if it goes rather far: even very far: well, what by that! As we said before, it depends how you go, not where you go. And there is nothing low about our goings, even if we go to great lengths. A spoon isn't a spade, thank goodness. As for a plough — don't mention it. No, let us keep the spoon of England bright, between us.

Mr Noon was a first-rate spoon — the rhyme is unfortunate, though in truth, to be a first-rate spoon a man must be something of a poet. With his mouth he softly moved back the hair from her brow, in slow, dreamy movements, most faintly touching her forehead with the red of his lips, hardly perceptible, and then drawing aside her hair with his firmer mouth, slowly, with a long movement. She thrilled delicately, softly tuning up, in the dim, continuous, negligent caress. Innumerable pleasant flushes passed along her arms and breasts, melting her into a sweet ripeness.

Let us mention that this melting and ripening capacity is one of the first qualities for a good modern daughter of Venus, a perfect sweetness in a love-making girl, the affectionate comradeship of a dear girl deepening to a voluptuous enveloping warmth, a bath for the soft Narcissus, into which he slips with voluptuous innocence.

His mouth wandered, wandered, almost touched her ear. She felt the first deep flame run over her. But no — he went away again: over her brow, through the

sharp roughness of her brows, to her eyes. He closed her eyes, he kissed her eyes shut. She felt her eyes closing, closing, she felt herself falling, falling, as one falls asleep. Only she was falling deeper, deeper than sleep. He was kissing her eyes slowly, drowsily, deeply, soft, deep, deep kisses. And she was sinking backward, and swaying, sinking deep, deep, into the depths beyond vision: and swaying, swaying, as a stone sways as it sinks through deep water. And it was delicious: she knew how delicious it was. She was sunk below vision, she swayed suspended in the depths, like a stone that can sink no more.

He was kissing her, she hardly knew where. But in her depths she quivered anew, for a new leap, or a deeper plunge. He had found the soft down that lay back beyond her cheeks, near the roots of her ears. And his mouth stirred it delicately, as infernal angels stir the fires with glass rods, or a dog on the scent stirs the grass till the game starts from cover.

A little shudder ran through her, and she seemed to leap nearer to him, and then to melt in a new fusion. Slowly, slowly she was fusing once more, deeper and deeper, enveloping him all the while with her arms as if she were some iridescent sphere of flame half-enclosing him: a sort of Watts picture.

A deep pulse beat, a pulse of expectation. She was waiting, waiting for him to kiss her ears. Ah, how she waited for it! Only that. Only let him kiss her ears, and it was a consummation.

But no! He had left her, and wandered away to the soft little kiss-curls in the nape of her neck: the soft, warm, sweet little nape of her neck. His warm breath was among the most delicate fibrils of her hair. She contracted with a sharp convulsion, like tickling. Delicious thrills ran down her spine, before he gave her the full assurance, and kissed her soft, deep, full among the fine curls central in the nape of her neck. She seemed to be lifted into the air as a bit of paper lifts itself up to a piece of warm amber. Her hands fluttered, fluttered on his shoulders, she was rising up on the air like Simon Magus. Let us hope Mr Noon will not let her down too sharp.

No! No! Even as she rose in the air she felt his breath running warm at the gates of her ears. Her lips came apart, she panted with acute anticipation. Ah! — Ah! — and softly came his full, fathomless kiss, softly her ear was quenched in darkness. He took the small, fine contours subtly between his lips, he closed deeper, and with a second reeling swoon she reeled down again and fell, fell through a deeper, darker sea. Depth doubled on depth, darkness on darkness. She had sunk back to the root-stream, beyond sight and hearing.

Now surely it was finished. Occultists tell us that hearing is the most radical of all the senses: that, at a crisis, all sensation can be summed up in the perfected sensation of sound. Surely then it was accomplished. At each new phase she felt

she had melted, had sunk to the very bottom. And every time, oh bliss of it, came a new crisis, and she swooned downwards, down a deeper depth, to a new, fathomless, oscillating rest. Oscillating at the deeps of intoxication, as now.

Yet still there was a tiny core of unquenched desire. She seemed to melt and become tinier: and yet she swung in an immeasurable, hungry rhythm, like a meteorite that has fallen through worlds of space, yet still swings, not yet burnt out, caught in some unstable equilibrium between the forces of the planets. So she hung and quivered in immeasurable space.

For sometimes it seemed to her drunken consciousness that she was high, high in space, yet not beyond all worlds, the net of the stars. And sometimes it seemed she was sunk, sunk to immeasurable depths, yet not quite to extinction.

His mouth was coming slowly nearer to her mouth; and yet not approaching. Approaching without disclosing its direction. Loitering, circumventing, and then suddenly taking the breath from her nostrils. For a second she died in the strange sweetness and anguish of suffocation. He had closed her nostrils for ever with a kiss, and she was sleeping, dying in sweet fathomless insentience. Death, and the before-birth sleep.

Yet, not quite. Even now, not quite. One spark persisted and waited in her. Frail little breaths came through her parted lips. It was the brink of ecstasy and extinction. She cleaved to him beyond measure, as if she would reach beyond herself. With a sudden lacerating motion she tore her face from his, aside. She held it back, her mouth unclosed. And obedient down came his mouth on her unclosed mouth, darkness closed on darkness, so she melted completely, fused, and was gone.

She sank, sank with him, right away. Or rising, he lifted her into the oneness with him, up, up, and beyond, into the infinite. It seemed to him she was the heavier, rounded breath which he enwreathed in the perfected bubble flame of himself. So they floated as a perfect bubble, beyond the reach even of space. Beyond height and depth, beyond gravitation. Out in the beyond, suspended in the perfection.

Who knows if they breathed, if they lived!

But all the time, of course, each of them had a secondary mundane consciousness. Each of them was aware of the entry, the other spooners, and the passers-by outside. Each of them attended minutely when one pair of spooners crept through the gap in the big doors, to go home. They were all there, mark you. None of your bestial loss of faculties.

— We have risen to great heights, dear reader, and sunk to great depths. Yet we have hardly fathomed the heights and depths of the spoon in the Co-op. entry. Don't you wish you were as good at it as Noon and Emmie? Practise then:

and you too may swing suspended in the heights, or depths, of infinity, like the popular picture we used to see over the railway bookstalls, winged spooners mid-heaven in the blue ether. Ah, we are all so clean, nowadays: fine clean young men, infinitely spoony, and clean young spoony maidens to match. Nothing earthy, not we. All in mid-air, our goings on.

Till her mouth fell away, and her head fell aside. He turned his face aside from her, and they breathed their slow, inert breaths apart. They kept their faces apart from each other. And gradually conscious sight returned into the open mirrors of her eyes, gradually wakeful discrimination busied itself in the re-echoing cavities of her ears. Noises which she had heard all the time, she now admitted into her audience. Gradually. It could not be done, or should not be done, all in a smack.

— Ah, the spoon, the perfect spoon! In its mystic bowl all men are one, and so are all women. Champagne and shoulders, poetry and long scarves, loftiness, altruism, souls, hard work, conscience, sacrifice, all fuse into perfect oneness in the spoon. All Whitman's Songs of Himself and Other People lie in the hollow of a spoon. If you seek the Infinite and the Nirvana, look not to death nor the after-life, nor yet to pure abstraction: but into the hollow spoon.

Gilbert was staring down the opposite direction under lifted, Mephistophelian brows. And seeing, of course, the ghostly chaos of packing cases in the rain, and the strong beams from the bakery windows.

The small sound of church chimes in the night! Emmie broke away from him abruptly.

"I s'll have to be going. I s'll cop it from my Dad."

He lost his balance and stepped down from the step of the doorway embrasure with a jerk, cramped. He felt rather vague and uncomfortable.

She was pushing at her hair, and pulling her cap on. There was a flutter and rustle of her mackintosh. She stepped down from the step, and shook herself. He would move towards the door.

"My gamp!" she said quickly, snatching the article out of a corner in the recess. Then briskly she went forward to the dark wall of the doors. The little round hole showed. In an instant he saw a framed picture of wet pavements and passers-by, and a scarlet cart, which he knew carried the mail, splashing phantom through the mud.

Ah, dear reader, I hope you are not feeling horribly superior. You would never call an umbrella a broolly, much less a gamp. And you have never so much as seen a Co-op. entry. But don't on this small account sniff at Emmie. No, in that notorious hour when a woman is alone with her own heart, really enjoying herself, ask yourself if your spoon is brighter than Emmie's, if your spooner is

better than Gilbert. Nay, if you prefer love and lover, say love and lover to yourself. It all amounts to the same. But in communion with your naked heart, say whether you have reached Gilbertian heights and Emmelian profundities of the human kiss — or whether you have something to learn even from our poor pair.

Chapter III.

Gilbert Licks the Spoon.

Let none complain that I pry indecently into the privacies of the spoon. A spoon is an open mirror, necessarily a public concern. I do but walk down the public road, past the Co-op. entry, and see Emmie and Mr Noon stepping guildlessly forth through the aperture in the big doors, as integral a part of the Sunday night as is the darkness itself, or me in my after-service expansion of soul; and since all is told to me, in the innocent act of slipping through the Co-op. aperture, I tell all again including the innocence.

Neither let the experts and raffinés of the spoon object that my account is but the bare outline of what actually is. I insist that this is the summary and essence of all that is above-board in spooning. There are variations on the spoon. There are tricks, dear reader. In the old days wicked black silk bed-sheets, for example. Ah, but mere interlarded tricks. Different seasoning, the soup is the same. I have heard too of Frenchy, and even of Neapolitan spooning, which I should not like to speak of from hearsay. There are all kinds of kissings. Every nation, every city, every individual introduces a special and individual touch. There are dodges and peculiarities which I leave to experience and to other novelists. I concern myself with the essential English kiss, within the spoon. Yes, and with the basis of the essential: in short, the radical Co-op. entry spoon of the common people, that has neither champagne and shoulders, nor yet cocktails and fard to embellish it and to obscure its pure simplicity. I am no dealer in abnormalities. Far from it. I take the thing at its best, as one should. I speak of the spoon pure and simple, the spoon of our clean-minded age, from which we sip love's limpidest sweets. Ah infinite spoon-moments! dear spoon-memories!

Mr Noon, however, was in no such complacent mood as ours.

"It's not raining so much, I shan't bother with the brolly," said Emmie, turning her Noon-kissed face to the dim moist heavens. "That was half-past I heard strike. I s'll be in a row with our Dad if I don't hop it."

She spoke rather breathlessly as she tripped along.

"Why what's the matter with him?" asked Gilbert irritably, turning traitor to the spoon-grail in the very moment when he had quaffed his dose.

"Because he's a wire-whiskered nuisance, and I've got to be in by quarter to ten, because he's on night duty."

“What would he do if you weren’t in by quarter to ten?”

“Ay, you ask me! Make my life a blooming hell. — Oh — !” and she stopped for a second in the road — “now I haven’t got a book, and I told our Sis I was calling for one. Little fool! Little fool I am! Drat!” And she stamped her foot. “You haven’t got a book on you? He’s sure to twig. Oh what a bally nuisance!”

Gilbert fortunately had in his pocket a volume on Conic Sections, and this Emmie at once appropriated, hugging it under her arm.

She ran tripping forward, Gilbert strode beside her. She lived down in the valley, about a mile out of Woodhouse. She was uneasy now because of her father, and had almost forgotten Mr Noon, at her side.

He, however, had not forgotten her. A black vindictiveness had come over him.

“What time does your father go to work?” he asked. He knew that Mr Bostock had a job on the railway.

“Ten. He’s on duty at ten: and it takes him quarter of an hour to get there, or he says so. It would take me about five minutes. Like him to make a mountain of it.”

“Come out a bit after he’s gone,” suggested Gilbert.

“Go on!” said Emmie, with suggestive sharpness.

Now this was not the first of Emmie’s spoons — even with Gilbert. And she was quite prepared for after-spoon developments — even naughty ones. So that when she said “Go on,” she was merely non-committal.

She knew that young men would frequently follow up a nice innocent lovely spoon with a certain half-tiresome persistence in going further. Half-tiresome, because it is the last step which may cost. And yet rather wickedly nice, you know. Remember that Emmie is a sport, and that in defiance of fathers and stone tablets there is also bliss. And moreover the man who is a true and faithful spoon makes this ultimate so dear, such a last clean sweep in sympathy! Ah, talk not of grossness in this soft and sympathising conjunction! Don’t you agree, dear reader?

“You’ll come, won’t you?” said Gilbert.

“Let’s see how the land lies, first,” she replied. “You needn’t wait if I don’t come out and cooey.”

By Cooey she meant call a soft, lurking Coo-ee! to him.

Gilbert was behaving in the accepted way — or one of the ways — of after-spoon, and she took no alarm. He was quiet, and seemed persuasive. His silence came suggestive and rather pleading to her, as they hurried down the hill. She was a sport — and she liked a man who could come on: one who pressed fearless forward, a Galahad of sentiment, to the bitter end. Bitter! Well, bitter-

sweet. Oh gentle joust of ultimate sentiment, oh last sweet throw of love, wherein we fall, spoon-overthrown! Shall I be Minnesinger of the spoon?

But alas, there is a fly in the ointment. There is a snake in the grass. It is in Gilbert's mood. Alas, poor Emmie. She is mistaken about his soft, sweet, sinful coming-on. Instead of being in the melting stage, just ready to melt right down with her, the final fuse within the spoon, he is horrid. Ah, in the last coming on, how gentle is the Galahad of kisses, how subtle his encroachment to the goal! But Gilbert was a snake in the grass. He was irritable, in a temper, and would not let her go though he did not really want her. Why he was in a temper, and why he hated her he did not know. Doubtful if he ever knew his own state of feeling. Beware, gentle reader! For if in the course of soft and kissy love you once get out of the melting spoon-mood, there is hell to pay, both for you and for her.

Emmie's garden gate opened from a little path between two hedges that led from the high-road between cottage gardens to the field stile. The two arrived at the bottom of the hill and crossed the road to where the path, called a twitchel, opened between thick hedges.

"Don't come down the twitchel," she said to him in a low tone. "I'll bet he's watching. — If I can slip out when he's gone I shall cooey. Au revoy."

She disappeared between the dark hedges of the twitchel, and shordy he heard her gate clash. He loitered about again, and was in a temper because he was kept waiting. He was in a rage with himself, so turned his wrath against circumstances.

He was in a rage. He did really like women — so he put it to himself. There was nothing he liked better than to have one in his arms — his own phraseology again. And Emmie was a regular little sport, a regular little sport. He admired her. And he fidgetted about in a temper waiting for her. Black devils frisked in his veins, and pricked him with their barbed tails. He was full of little devils. Alas, he had fallen from the white election of the spoon. He plunged into the twitchel, saw the row of cottages, of which hers was the end one; saw the lighted window, heard voices; heard a man's voice from the back premises, from the back door, and plunged on. He clambered over the stile and went forward down the black, muddy field-path towards the canals. No good going very far, however.

He heard a step behind him, and listened. Her father, ten to one. He loitered on the dark, open field. The man came nearer. Glancing round, Gilbert saw the dark whiskers on the pallid face, and sent out a wave of hatred. He loitered whilst her father strode past him, on into the night. Then he turned back towards the cottage.

He had been in a similar situation more than once. Nay, for the young fellows

of the colliery-places like Whetstone and Woodhouse, for the young bloods who had a bit of dash of warmth about them, the situation was almost traditional. Bostock, Emmie's father, had done the same, and worse, many a time in his day. So had old Noon, Gilbert's father. Gilbert was but keeping up a human tradition. And yet he was in a temper about it. He sort of felt himself in a ready-made circumstance, going through a ready-made act, and he was thoroughly annoyed with everything. Yes, he was, in Woodhouse phraseology, a womaniser: and he knew it: and he meant to be a womaniser. So why make any bones about his present situation? But his temper mounted. Yes, he would be a womaniser. He prided himself on it. Wasn't "Down Among the Dead Men" one of his favourite songs? Fine tune too.

"And may Confusion still pursue The senseless woman-hating crew "

Alas, he would be a womaniser. Yet he kicked with fury against the universal spoon. He fought like a fly in oil.

Meanwhile Emmie indoors was going through her own little act. She enjoyed play-acting. She had lied like a little trooper to her father, having a sulky innocence-suspected look which he exacted, and a pert tongue which he threatened with extraction. For Alf Bostock had been a womaniser both before and after his marriage to his mild, lax Jinny: and him a man with a swarm of little children. She had no rosy time of it. Till he got kicked out of his job; and suddenly became religious, with all the ferocity of an old trotter. So he proceeded to put his children through the paces of narrow-pathdom. His poor Jinny was always wax, but his own offspring tended to bristle. And Emmie, who was perhaps his favourite — a pretty, taking, sharp-answering little thing, with a way of her own — she was his special enemy as she grew up. A roaming bitch, he called her in his wrath. And it was curiously appropriate, for she had the alert, inquisitive, tail-in-the-air appearance of a bitch who has run away and finds the world an adventure, as she tripped the streets.

Once the tyrant was gone, Emmie was quite equal to any occasion. She had retreated upstairs, as if to bed, before his departure. Now down she came again.

"Hey, our mother, I'll have my supper now in peace," she said, taking a knife and going into the pantry for bread and cheese and cake.

"There's a bit of apple-pie if you'd like it," said her indulgent, easy mother.

Emmie walked out with the pie-dish, and sat scraping it with a spoon.

"I've got my lessons to do yet," she said cheerfully.

"Be ashamed," said her mother. "Last minute."

"Make use of the fag-ends of time," said Emmie.

"Ay, fag-ends," said her mother.

Emmie spread her books on the table under the lamp, to write the compulsory

notes for the morrow's lessons. She pulled her hair untidy on her brow as she did so.

"Go to bed, Mother Bostock," she said to her mother. "Don't sit dropping off in that chair. How do you think anybody can make notes, when they have to watch for your head dropping on to the floor. Get up. Go on."

"Ay," said her mother amiably. "How long shall you be?"

"About twenty minutes I should think. Go on now — go to bed. You know you'll get a crick in your neck."

"Ay, you'd like to think so," said her mother, weakly rising and obeying. "I shall listen for you, now," she added from the foot of the stairs.

"Go on — I shan't be a minute if you leave me in peace."

And Mrs Bostock slowly mounted the creaky stairs. Emmie scribbled away in her flighty fashion for some time, pausing occasionally to listen. At length she shut her books and stretched her arms. Then with startling suddenness she blew out the lamp. After which she stood in the darkness and listened.

All seemed quiet. She slipped to the back door and pushed away the bar. Closing the door behind her, she sauntered down the front path with all her leisurely assurance and bravado. The sense of danger was salt to her. The rain was now only very slight. Glancing over the hedge on the left, she could see, through the clearing darkness, the far-off lamps of the station and the junction sidings where her father would by now be safely occupied. So much for him.

She reached the gate and peered down the dark twitchel.

"Coo-ee!" she called, very softly.

And the dark shadow of Gilbert was approaching.

"Think I was never coming?" she said.

"I wondered," he answered.

They stood for a moment with the gate between them.

"How are you feeling?" she asked.

"All right. Coming out?"

"No, you come in." And she opened the gate for him to enter the dark garden.

"Ma's put her light out. Sleeping the sleep of the nagged by now, I bet. My Dad's gone."

"I'm not going in the house," said Gilbert suspiciously.

"Nobody asked you."

She led him down the little winding side-path, in the wintry garden, between the currant bushes, to a little greenhouse. The door was locked, but the key was on the nail. She knew the greenhouse of old. It was pretty small, but she knew how to move the plants and arrange things. Luckily there were not many plants to move.

“Hold on a bit,” she whispered to Gilbert, who hung in the doorway whilst she made a place.

Meanwhile, we are sorry to say, the enemy was on their tracks. Alf Bostock should not have been a railwayman, but a policeman. Now that he was a reformed character, the policeman in him had no rest. Before Emmie arrived home, at a quarter to ten, he had been in the back yard listening for her. He had heard her voice speaking to Mr Noon, though he had not caught what she said. But he had smelled a rat. And he was a very keen rat-catcher these days.

Therefore he did nothing that could betray his suspicions, and he set off to work a few minutes earlier than he need in order that he might turn back and do a bit of spying. When he passed the more-than-doubtful figure of Mr Noon in the field the smell of the rat was very hot in his nostrils. Like the wicked, he exulted, and said Ha — Ha! He let Gilbert return towards the cottage.

And then the reformed parent swerved from his way to his work, made a bend over the sodden field in the black darkness, and came to the big hedge at the bottom of his garden, near the summer-house. There, among the old nettles, he crouched and watched. He heard Gilbert champing in the twitchel and away on the high-road, and prepared the net for the bird. He saw his wife’s candle go upstairs, and at once supposed that she, poor thing, was conniving at her daughter’s shame. He saw his wife’s candle go out — heard Mr Gilbert champ and chafe and light a pipe — and at last, Ah-ha! — saw the kitchen go suddenly dark.

Yes, there she was, the little bitch, prancing her shadowy, leisurely way towards the gate, and staring at the hedge where he crouched as if she too could smell a rat. He ducked low, and watched.

“Coo-ee!”

He heard it, and his veins tingled. He’d give her Coo-ee, else his name wasn’t Alfred.

Up comes the Johnny to the gate. Who could he be? But wait a bit. Wait a bit. He’d follow soon and find out.

Hush! He strained his ears in vain to hear what they were murmuring. He rose to his feet, and cracked a stick. He would stalk them. Then all at once he ducked again under the hedge. Inside the garden, they were coming towards him. His nerves were keen on the alert, to gather if they had heard him.

But they, poor darlings, were all unsuspecting. Alf Bostock crouched on his heels. His greenhouse! His little glass-house. She was opening the door with the key. Well of all the evil, low little bitches, if she wasn’t a sly one. For a second his mind reverted to his own youthful escapades, and the girls he despised so much for escapading with him. For it is a peculiarity of his type, that the more

they run after sin, the more contempt they feel for their partner in sinning, the more insufferably superior they rise in their own esteem. Till nowadays, he would spoon with nobody but his Saviour. In religion he was still oh, so spoony. So spoony, listening to the sermon, so spoony saying his prayers. Ah, such relish! With women he had always been rather gross. No wonder he hated Emmie for bringing it home to him again, now that his higher nature had triumphed.

He'd kill her. He'd flay her. He'd torture her. Wouldn't he! My word wouldn't he! What? Was she going to shame him, her father? Was he going to be shamed and disgraced by her. His indignation rose to an inquisitorial pitch. At the thought of the shame and disgrace he might incur through her, he could have burnt her at the stake cheerfully, over a slow fire. Him to be shamed and disgraced by a daughter of his! Was anything on earth more monstrous? The strumpet. The bitch. Hark at her clicking the flower-pots, shifting the plants. He'd give her shift the plants. He'd show her. He longed to torture her. Back went his mind over past events. Now he knew. Now he knew how the pink primulas had been smashed and re-potted before he got home. Now he knew a thousand things. If his daughter had been the Whore of Babylon herself her father could not have painted her with a more lurid striping of sin. She was a marvel of lust and degradation, and defamation of his fair repute. But he'd show her. He'd show her.

They had gone into the greenhouse and shut the door on themselves. Well and good — they had fastened themselves in their own trap. He straightened his creaking knees and drew himself upright. He was cold, damp, and cramped: and all this added venom to his malignancy.

Lurching awkwardly, he shambled along the grass to the stile, climbed, and went along the twitchel to his own gate. If it cost him his job once more, he'd settle this little game. Wouldn't he just. He'd show them. He'd show them.

He was in such a rage, as he drew near the greenhouse, he went so slowly, on tiptoe, that he seemed to emanate in hate, rather than to walk to the threshold of the poor little place. He got there, and stood still. He stood evilly and malignantly still, and listened: listened, with all his 'cute attention and shameful old knowledge.

Poor Emmie. She thought she'd got a demon inside the greenhouse: she little suspected a devil outside. Gilbert did not make her happy any more. Instead of being nice and soft and spoony, and pleasant in his coming on, he was rough and hard. She was startled, jarred in her rather melty mood. She hadn't bargained for this. If she had not possessed a rather catty courage, she would have cried out. But her soul rose against him, and she hated him.

And then, at an awful moment, the door slowly opened, and she gave an awful, stifled yell.

“What’s going on in there?” came a beastly, policeman’s voice.

Emmie heard it, and seemed to fall for a moment into a fit, paralysed. Gilbert was arrested, perfectly still.

“You’re coming out there, aren’t you?” said the voice. “Come on, let’s see who you are.”

And there was a little rattling sound of a box of matches. He was going to strike a light. Emmie was making a funny little sound, as if she had fallen into icy water. Gilbert, on his knees, turned. He saw the stooping figure, stooping policeman-like in the doorway, and black rage burst his head like a bomb. He crouched and leapt like a beast, but aimed too high, and only caught the cap and hair of his assailant. The two men went with a crash down upon a gooseberry bush.

Emmie had leaped to her feet with another hoarse cry. The men were a confused heap. She heard gurgling curses from her father. She gave a third, raven-like cry, and sped straight down the garden, through the gate, and away into the night.

A window had opened, and a frightened voice was saying:

“What’s amiss? Who is it? Is it you Emmie? Who is it?”

Children’s voices were calling “Mother! Mother!”

Gilbert had risen to his feet, but the other man clung after him, determined not to let him go, frenzied like some lurking creature of prey. In a convulsion of revolt, Gilbert flung the gripping horror from him, madly: flung himself free, and turned blindly to escape. He was through the gate, down the twitchel and over the stile in one moment, making for the dark country, whereas Emmie had made for the lights of Woodhouse.

The disorder of his clothing impeded his running. He heard the other man rushing to the stile. He turned, in the darkness of the open field, and said loudly:

“Come on, and I’ll kill you.”

By the sound of his voice, he probably would have done so.

Women and children were screaming from the house. The other man thought better of it, and turned back. Gilbert, standing there on the defensive, adjusted himself and waited. No one came. He walked away into the night. He had lost his cap in the fray.

Chapter IV.

Aphrodite and the Cow.

During the week that followed, Gilbert heard nothing of Emmie or of the Sunday-night affair. He was busy at Haysfall during the day, and during some of the evenings. He might have made an opportunity for running over to Woodhouse: but he didn't.

Sunday came again: a fine day for once, dim-blue and wintry. Gilbert looked out of his window upon it when he got up, and after breakfast went out into the woodyard. Tall yellow timbers reared up into the sky, leaning to one another and crossing in the air. Planks, correctly arranged in squares, with a space between each plank, stood seasoning. In the shed were planks and poles in solid piles. Near a chopping-block was a pile of split faggots, while huge trunks of trees, oak and elm, stripped of branches, lay aside like swathed corpses. Gilbert noticed the star-shaped cracks that ran from the centres of the trunk-bottoms, thought of the plant-histology, and in a dim sort of way calculated the combination of forces that had brought about the fissures. He ran his finger over a heavy-grained oak surface, and to him it was an exquisite pleasure, vibrating in his veins like music, to realise the flexible but grandly-based rhythm in the morphological structure of the tree, right from the root-tip through the sound trunk, right out to a leaf-tip: wonderful concatenation and association of cells, incalculable and yet so genetic in their rhythm, unfolding the vast unsymmetrical symmetry of the tree. What he loved so much in plant morphology was, that given a fixed mathematical basis, the final evolution was so incalculable. It pleased him to trace inherent individual qualities in each separate organic growth, qualities which were over and above the fixed qualities belonging to the genus and the species, and which could not really be derived by a chain of evolutionary cause-and-effect. Could they? Could the individual peculiarities all derive from the chain of cause and effect? He mused abstractedly. The question piqued him. He had almost decided not. The one little element of individuality, not attributable to any cause, fascinated him always in plants and trees. He longed to make quite sure of it. He longed to feel it musically. In plants it seemed to him so profoundly suggestive, the odd aloneness of the separate self in each specimen. He longed to hear the new note of this in music. But his longing was vague, far removed from the intensity of action.

He dawdled the morning away, with his pipe. There were things he ought to do. But he could not begin. He sat in the kitchen by the fire, glancing over the large pages of Lloyd's Weekly, the lurid Sunday paper, whilst the woman made pies and an apple dumpling, and continually pushed past him to the oven: whilst the saucepans bubbled and sent off first a smell of pudding-cloth, then a scent of vegetable steam: whilst the meat sizzled in the oven, and his father came and went, fidgetty, and drank a glass of beer between-whiles.

Between father and son there was not much correspondence. The old man was mean, and he kept his heart also to himself. He looked with a jealous eye on his son, half-scorning him because he did no real work, nothing in the woodyard, for example, and in the other half admiring him for being so clever. At the bottom he was domineeringly gratified to have the lad at home, though he found every manner of fault with him. His only other child, a girl, a woman now, was married with children of her own, and because she needed a little more money, the old man was secretly determined to leave all to Gilbert.

A few instincts Gilbert had of a gentleman so-called. He could not bear to sit down to dinner unshaven and with no collar on, as his father did. So, judging from the smell of the sirloin that it was nearly done, he went upstairs to his room and shaved and dressed. His bedroom was bare and tidy. There was not a picture, not a book. From the window he looked down on the woodyard. But next to his bedroom was a sort of study, with many books, and a piano, a violin and music-stand, piles and sheets of music. This room too was tidy and clean, though Gilbert tidied and cleaned it all himself.

Being dressed, he went and touched his violin: but he did not want to play. He turned over a sheet of music: but did not want to look at it. He waited for the woman to call him to dinner.

After dinner, he had still his mind to make up. He went out to his motor-cycle and got it ready. He went indoors and put on his rubbers. He pushed off, and was running noiselessly down Whetstone's steep main street, past tram-cars and saunterers, before he knew where he was going.

And then, after all, he turned towards Woodhouse. In half an hour he was there, and had put up his cycle. Coming out brushed and tidy on to the Knarborough Road, he hesitated which way to turn. Therefore he did not turn, but walked forward.

And whom should he see but Patty Goddard walking down the rather empty street: it was too soon for the afternoon chapel people, and the men were having a last drink before half-past two. Patty, in a dark, wine-coloured coat and skirt and dark silk hat, with grey gloves and very carefully-chosen shoes, walking by herself with her pale, full, ivory face towards the afternoon sun! She smiled

across the road to him, and nodded. He strode over to her.

“Oh — ! I thought you might come this afternoon or evening,” she said, and he felt a touch of significance in her voice, and was uncomfortable.

“Is Lewie there?” he asked, jerking his head in the direction of the house.

“No. He’s gone to an I. L. P. meeting in Knarborough. I expect him back about six. Did you want him?”

Again her dark eyes seemed to glance up at him with a certain mocking spite.

“No — no,” said Gilbert.

“Another appointment, perhaps?” smiled Patty maliciously.

“No, I haven’t. I’ve got nothing to do.”

“Oh well then, if you’d care to take a walk. I’m just enjoying the sun while it lasts.”

“Yes, if you don’t mind.”

And he took his place at her side. She was pleased. But today her pleasure was qualified, though she kept the qualification a secret. She made no more mention of the previous Sunday, and the conversation between them was rather lame.

They descended the hill in the pleasant afternoon, and came to the damp, mossy old park wall, under the trees. Patty stopped before the unimposing, wooden park gate.

“I thought I’d walk across the park,” she said. “Lewie has managed to get the key.”

So Gilbert opened the gate, and they walked along the pink-coloured drive, between the greenish winter grass. The old hall was shut up, everywhere seemed abandoned in the wintry sunshine of the afternoon. Just before they came to the second gate, the gate of the forlorn garden, Patty went to a huge beech-tree, and smilingly took out a pair of rubber overshoes.

“We keep all kinds of surprises here,” she said. “But I love to walk across the grass past the brook. I love the sound of water so much, and the berries are so beautiful this year.”

It was true. The dark, shaggy, hairy hawthorn-trees had a purplish-burning look, they were still so heavy with haws. They stood about fairly numerous in the near part of the park. Gilbert and Patty walked along the crest of the stagnant, artificial ponds, that lay melancholy in their abandon below the old house. Then Patty led the way across the rough grass, to the brook which rattled and clucked under deep hedges. Gilbert helped her to pick scarlet rose-berries, and black privet berries, and white snow-berries from the bushes that grew rampant down by the brook. Patty flushed with exercise and pleasure. She was happy gathering the wet, bright, cold berries on their twigs and branches, she was excited being helped by the young man near her. It was such a pungent chill

isolation, this of theirs down in the hollow of the forsaken park, the open country, pathless, stretching the dim beyond.

“Aren’t they beautiful! Aren’t they lovely!” said Patty, holding out the bunch between her white hands. The scarlet and black and white-heavy berries looked well in her hands. Her pale face was almost like an ivory snow-berry itself, set with dark, half-tired, half-malicious eyes. Her mouth set in an odd way, a slight grimace of malice against life. She had had such a happy married life, such a perfect love with Lewie.

She stepped forward over the grass, a cloud on her flushed, strange face of a woman of forty who has been married for twenty years in what she considers an ideal happiness.

“Tell me now,” she said to him, with her intensive seriousness of a franchised woman, “how you look on marriage.” And she glanced at him furtively, a touch of unconscious, general malevolence between her brows.

“Marriage? Me? Why I don’t know,” came Gilbert’s gruff voice. Then he stood still, to ponder. She watched his face. He looked forwards and upwards, into space. “I shall marry some day,” he said.

“You will? But what sort of woman? What sort of marriage will it be?”

He pondered still.

“Why,” he said, “a woman with brains, I think. A woman who could stand on her own feet, not one who would cling to me. I shouldn’t mind, you know, what she did. If she liked another man, all right. We could be good pals. Oh, I should want a woman to do as she liked.”

Patty watched him sardonically, then strode on a few paces.

“You would? You think you would?” she replied, and the sardonic touch sounded in her voice. She was thinking how young he was, and how full of mental conceit. He glanced down at her, and his full, dark blue eye met her brown, onyx-bright eye. A flush came over her face, and a doubt over his mind, or his spirit, rather.

“I think so,” he said.

“Yes, you think so,” she replied quietly, walking on. He followed in silence.

“Why?” he said. “Don’t you?”

She stopped and turned round to him, smiling suddenly her face seeming to flicker all over with a strange, ivory-coloured flame, amid which her eyes showed dark.

“Ah!” she said. “What a difference there is between what you think now and what you’ll think afterwards!”

She was usually rather uncouth in expressing herself, and he, for the moment, was dazzled, had lost his feet. He only looked at her, at her strange, changed,

almost uncanny face, so tense in its laughing. Something stirred in his veins. Something completely unusual awoke in him.

He had never had any real contact with a woman: only with tarts and bits of girls and sports like Emmie. Other women, such as Patty, had always been to him dresses with faces. And now, to his terror, something else seemed to be emerging from her face, a new Aphrodite from the stiff dark sea of middle-aged matronliness, an Aphrodite drenched with knowledge, rising in a full, ivory-soft nudity, infinitely more alluring than anything flapperdom could offer. Some veil was rent in his consciousness, and he remained a moment lost, open-mouthed. Patty dropped her eyes, and her smile became small and a little weary.

She had had to try to beat the flappers and the sports. She had had to try to break the spoon spell: which was the spell of her marriage, alas. And she saw the beginnings of victory. But she was frightened. After all, she too was very fixed in her old way of life, up to the neck in the stiff wave of her fine serge dress. And to rise like Aphrodite — ah, after all — ! There were so many considerations. Perhaps she was more frightened even than he.

He remained bemused, suddenly realising the soft, full Aphrodite steeped in the old sea of matrimony, and ready to rise, perhaps: rise from the correct, wine-coloured coat and skirt of fine serge in all her exquisite fulness and softness of forty years, and all the darkness of a finished past in her eyes. A finished past. The sense of it came over him with a shock. He looked at her — but she was walking slowly, with bent head. He saw the outline of her forty-year-old cheek, full and ivory-white: he saw the bowed head. And in the flame that ran from his heels to his head all the Emmies of the world withered and were gone like so many shavings.

“What do you think of marriage yourself?” he blurted out.

“Ah!” — she only half looked at him, frowning the question, and answering archly: “I don’t think about it, for myself. I have it behind me. You have it ahead of you. There’s a difference.”

He watched her, puzzling over her. She would not look at him, except with a screwed-up, baffling sort of smile. He pondered in his logical way.

“But what you have behind you, have I got that in front of me?” he asked, putting himself in Lewie’s place for all the past years, and not feeling himself fit.

Patty was caught in the net of her own words.

“No,” she said, seriously, becoming again the clumsy, thinking-woman. “No! You’re a generation younger than that. You’re bound to start different from where we started. But you’ve got to start somewhere.”

Her phrases came out clumsily.

“Perhaps where you left off,” he said, inspired.

She flushed suddenly like a red camellia flower. She was very like a camellia flower: usually creamy-white, now rose.

“Yes,” she said, in her suffragette voice now. “Very probably where we leave off! Very probably.” She was retreating on to safe ground: the platform of Woman. He felt it: and still, in his one-sighted way, was looking for the full, soft, pale Aphrodite.

“Then I should want a woman who’s been through it all,” he said, logically infallible.

She winced, and retreated further on to the dry boards of the theoretic platform.

“I don’t know. I shouldn’t like to be so sure. There are many kinds of women in the world: many more than you have ever dreamed of. You don’t see them — but they’re there. You see little — remarkably little, if I may have the impudence to say so.”

And she smiled at him in the old, matronly, woman-who-thinks fashion. But it had no effect this time, because, between the blinkers of his logical concentration, he was looking ahead along his own road.

“Yes — I think that’s true. I think that’s true. But you won’t get me to believe that you can find me a girl, a woman under thirty, who can start where a woman of your age and experience leaves off. You won’t get me to believe it.”

“Why not?” she cried. “Can you judge, now? Can you, of all men judge? Can you even have any idea where it is that a woman of my age and experience leaves off? How do you know?”

Now she was fencing with other weapons, trying to flirt with him. But she had reckoned without her host. She was not prepared for the blinkers of concentration which shut out from this Balaam’s ass of a mathematician all the side-tracks into which she would cajole him, and sent him straight ahead with his nose against the opposing angel.

He looked straight down on her, with full, dark blue eye. And she, suddenly caught as by an apparition, was so startled that she let the crinkly smile fall from her face, and the fencing cunning drop like a mask from her eyes. For a second she met his look of strange inquiry, and it was more than she could bear. Her heart ceased beating, she wilted backwards. Mercifully, he began to speak.

“I’ve just realised something,” he said. “And you can’t make me believe different till I realise something else.”

What she heard in this speech was that he loved her: loved not the girl in her, nor the independent, modern, theorising woman Lewie had loved; not that, but the soft, full, strange, unmated Aphrodite of forty, who had been through all the ideal raptures of love and marriage and modern motherhood, through it all, and

through the foam of the fight for freedom, the sea of ideal right and wrong, and now was emerging, slowly, mysteriously, ivory-white and soft, woman still, leaving the sea of all her past, nay, the sea of all the extant human world behind her, and rising with dark eyes of age and experience, and a few grey hairs among the dark; soft, full-bodied, mature, and woman still, unpossessed, unknown of men, unfathomed, unexplored, belonging nowhere and to no one, only to the unknown distance, the untrodden shore of all the sea of all the unknown knowledge. Aphrodite, mistress, mother of all the worlds of unknown knowledge that lie over our horizon, she felt him looking at her with strange full eyes, seeing her in her unguessed ivory-soft nudity, the darkness of her promise in her eyes, the woman of forty, and desiring her with a profound desire that seemed like a deep, far-off bell booming, or a sea coming up.

And her strength ebbed, it was too much for her.

“Hadn’t we better be turning home?” she asked, wide-eyed and pathetic.

“Ay, I suppose we had,” he answered automatic.

And they veered on the wintry grass, in the pale-coloured wintry afternoon. They had walked to the far end of the park, where it was open like a wide, rough meadow. At this end some rather shaggy cattle were out to pasture, winter-rough creatures. Some rough horses were in a far corner, by the fence.

Patty was looking round her, with a sort of anxious look on her face. She wanted to get back, back on to the road: above all, back into her own pleasant room, with her feet on her own hassock.

“You don’t mind cows, do you?” asked Gilbert, noticing her anxiety.

“No. I don’t like them though — not too near. I didn’t know these were here.”

“They’re all right,” said Gilbert.

“Oh yes, I’m sure they are,” she said. But she hurried rather nervously. Glancing round, she said anxiously:

“Do you think that one means mischief?”

He saw a heifer putting her head down.

“No,” he said negligently. He had no natural fear of cattle.

“She does,” said Patty vehemently. “She’s coming.”

“Not she,” said Gilbert easily.

But Patty was looking round in fear.

“Where can I go?” she cried.

“Don’t bother,” he said.

But she glanced round and gave a cry.

“She’s coming.” And she started running forward, blindly, with little, frightened steps. Patty was making for the brook, as the nearest safety.

Gilbert turned round. And sure enough, the heifer, with her head down, was

running forward in that straight line of vicious intent which cows have when they do mean mischief. Gilbert was startled. Patty's nervousness unnerved him also. His instinct was to take to his heels. But he remained where he was, in a moment of stupefaction.

The heifer was going for Mrs Goddard. She was a dark-red creature with sharp horns. Gilbert gave a shout, and running forwards to the vicious, disagreeable-tempered beast, he flung his cherry-wood walking-stick at her. It caught her on the neck and rattled in her horns. She wavered, shook her head, and stopped. Gilbert took off his overcoat, and whirling it by the sleeve, walked towards her. She watched — snorted — suddenly with a round swerve made off, galloping into the distance, her tail in the air, female and defiant.

“She's gone. Don't run. She's all right,” he called to the speeding Patty.

Patty glanced round with a white face of anguish.

“No. She'll come again,” she said, in a stifled voice. And she pressed forward.

“She won't. You needn't hurry,” said Gilbert, hastening after the dark little form of the woman, who pressed forward blindly, with hurried steps. He followed at some distance behind her, having recovered his stick.

The cow had stopped, and was watching. When he looked again, she had her head down and was coming on again.

“Damn the thing!” he exclaimed, in nervousness and anger. And stick in one hand, overcoat in the other, he started walking towards the animal, like some nervous toreador.

The cow ran at him. He threw his overcoat right in her face, and turned and ran also for a few paces. When he looked round, the cow was galloping in a funny, jerky zigzag, with his overcoat hanging on one horn, stumbling, snorting, shaking her head. There went his overcoat.

Patty was at the brook, climbing down among the bushes. The cow was prancing and jerking in the near distance, floundering with the black overcoat. He stood with his stick, and waited. He wanted his coat.

So he set off after the cow. She was a rare scarecrow, plunging and ducking in fear and fury. He pursued her as she dodged, shouting after her. At last she trod on the coat and got it off her horn, and went galloping away. He recovered his garment and returned after Patty.

She had scrambled through the deep brook and up the other bank, and was leaning against a tree with her eyes shut, faint. Her feet were full of water, there was brown earth on her skirt at the knee, where she had scrambled, and her breast was heaving, she could not speak.

When he came up he was filled with consternation.

“Has it upset you?” he asked, not knowing what to do.

“Frightened me,” she murmured, gasping. She was ill. She could not stand up. She subsided at the foot of the tree, with her head dropped.

He stood near, looking on in distress and anxiety. He did not know in the least what to do. He wanted to put his coat for her to sit on, but did not like to disturb her. Her head was dropped as if she was unconscious, but her bosom laboured.

He waited, in nervous, irritable suspense. Her breathing seemed to be quieter. At last she lifted her head. Her face was paper-white, there were dark lines under her eyes, her eyes seemed dimmed.

“I’m sorry to give you so much trouble,” she said, rather ghosdily. “But it’s my heart. It gives way — on these occasions.”

She seemed a shattered, elderly woman. He felt pity, distress, shame, and irritation.

At last she put her hand on the earth to rise. He assisted her, and steadied her. He had seen her overshoes full of water.

“Let me take off your goloshes,” he said.

She leaned against the tree as he did so. He saw her nice shoes were wet too. And he wiped her skirt with his handkerchief where it was soiled.

“Thank you! Thank you!” she said. “It’s awfully weak of me. But I can’t help it.” She closed her eyes, haggardly.

“Don’t you bother. Let me do what I can for you,” he answered kindly.

“Thank you. I’m feeling better now.”

He waited still for her, as she leaned against the tree.

“If it weren’t for my heart — ” she said, looking at him with an abstract, hopeless smile. She was scarcely aware who he was.

“Yes, you can do nothing when your heart goes,” he said sympathetically.

At last she drew herself together, haggard-looking.

“I’ll see if I can walk,” she said, her mouth thin and pinched and frightened. He held her by the arm to support her, and wished they were both out of the situation.

So they crossed the meadow, crept through a fence into a bit of an orchard, and through the orchard gate into the road. She suffered agonies of self-consciousness because people saw them, and agonies of self-consciousness all the way home, because of her appearance. It seemed a cruel long way. And Gilbert at her side took step after step, and thought to himself his luck was out as regards women. As a matter of fact, the accident of the cow was rather a bitter blow to him, though he formulated nothing in his consciousness. Still, he felt that his heart had wakened and risen, and been knocked back again with a mallet-stroke. But he took it rather for granted that life was like that.

As for poor Patty, she felt humiliated, and was rather petulant. She recovered

from her shock as she walked home, but her face did not lose all its haggardness and its broken look. And she wanted Lewie. She badly wanted Lewie to come home. She wanted him to be there. The presence of this other man was a strain on her. She wanted her husband.

Chapter V.

Choir Correspondence.

This same evening, Emmie sat in the choir-loft in chapel and warbled with her pleasant little voice. She was looking rather nipped, having had a bad week of it. But tonight she was on the wing again, and perking up her indomitable little head under her jaunty brown velour hat. Still, it was rather an effort. The enemy sat below, inimical. His stiff, thin figure rose at the end of the family pew, he looked as if butter wouldn't melt in his mouth, he sat so meek and still, with such a pietistic look on his face as he gazed up to the pulpit. Anyone would have imagined that the plump minister in a black B.A. gown shed out some mild incandescent light as he fluttered his plump hands, such a wistful effulgence seemed to linger on Alf Bostock's rapt, black-whiskered face. He looked almost lovely, the demon: he was rather good-looking. Emmie spitefully itched to throw things in his rapt mug. But her hate went deep just now — down to rebellion level. The poor mother sat next the father, rather reddish and mottled in complexion, of no particular expression at all, except that she appeared submissive and seemed to be taking a rest, just sitting still. Her lilac hat looked as if it had been in the weather: a look her hats were apt to get, in spite of all her daughters could do. After the mother came a row of Bostocks, dear little Fra-Angelico-faced girls and rather long-nosed sons. The biggest son sat at the remote end of the pew, a long lad of nineteen, mild-looking, balancing the sermon-imbibing father who sat next the aisle, with his hands folded in his black-trousered lap.

Emmie was struggling hard to spread her game little wings.

But they felt rather numb, after the treatment she had undergone. She watched the little minister. He was very plump, and rather ridiculous, perched on a stool in the pulpit and gyrating his pretty hands, as his voice soared and sank in leisurely, elegant measure. He was rather a comic: but Emmie liked him. He was nothing if not indulgent and good-natured. She would almost have liked to flirt with him. He loved his preaching, seemed to be swimming like some elegant little merman in the waters of his eloquence. A spirit of mischief spread its spoiled, storm-beaten wings in her eyes.

Just in front of her, among the altos, sat Agatha Sharp, next to Alvina Houghton. Agatha was one of Emmie's pals, a school-teacher like herself, but

much better behaved. Tall and slim, the girl in the altos sat looking her best, her boy being in a pew away below, facing her.

Emmie twitched and fidgetted, glanced bird-like down on the bonnets and parted hair in the chapel, and shifted on her seat like a fidgetty bird on a bough, looking down on a motionless congregation, sermon-drugged. She knocked down her anthem-sheet, and picked it up again: sat with it in her lap: took a hymn book, fished a stump of pencil from her pocket and began to scribble on her anthem-sheet, on the back.

“Lovely spoon last week with G.N. — Eh, what do you think. Wire-whiskers came back from work and caught us. Oh my, Agatha, I nearly had a fit. G.N. and W-W. went for one another and I ran off — thought I was never going back home.”

She folded down the anthem-sheet like a game of consequences, reached over and poked her friend in the back. Agatha looked round. Emmie gave her the paper and pencil. Agatha, flushing and looking demure, bowed her head to read the paper. Then she too put the pencil to her lips, scribbled, and put her hand behind her back without turning round. Emmie fished up the paper and pencil.

“Do you mean after chapel? Wherever did you go?”

Emmie sucked her pencil and scribbled.

“About half-past ten. He caught us in our greenhouse. I’d got no hat on nor anything. I ran without knowing where I was going, to Lewie Goddard’s.”

She poked Agatha in the back. Instead of looking round, Agatha curled her hand behind her. Emmie deposited the paper in the fingers of her friend. Alvina Houghton, who disapproved of Emmie, looked round rather snappily. Emmie turned up her nose.

Back came the paper.

“You bad wench. How did you go home. Have you seen G.N. since.”

Emmie snatched up the paper, sucked her pencil and scribbled hastily.

“I stopped all night at Goddards’. Mrs G. rather snipey. Lewie went down home and told our Dad a thing or two. I was awfully bad — they thought I was going to be really badly. So did I. I didn’t go to school Monday — stopped in bed at Goddards, and went home in the afternoon. Our Dad hasn’t spoken to me since.”

Again Agatha felt a poke in the back. Again she curled her hand behind her. And again Alvina Houghton glanced round frowning coldly, while Cissie Gittens glanced inquiringly over her shoulder. The choir was beginning to concentrate upon this correspondence. Even some of the audience were noticing a new centre of disturbance. And the clergyman, poor man, was becoming decidedly irritable in delivery, fidgetting on his footstool.

Back came the paper from Agatha.

“You are an awful bad catamaran. Haven’t you seen G.N. since?”

Emmie got the paper, and industriously popped her pencil to her lips.

“No, I’ve never been out. He wouldn’t let me. Never saw you Wednesday. He’s trying his hardest to get G.N.’s name. He’s got his cap. But he’s never asked me. He bothers our mother, and the others. He’d better not ask me.”

The paper went and returned.

“This will be a lesson to you, my lady. What will he do if he gets G.N.’s name? Did they really hit one another? Didn’t he see G.N. — Oh I do think it’s awful.”

Emmie seized this message, and wrote:

“They were down in a gooseberry bush when I scooted for my life. Look at the scratches on W-W’s ear. It was pitch dark. He says I’m never going to be out again after dark. Aren’t I? I’m not frightened of him. But he’s not going to get Great Northern’s name. Our mother doesn’t know either. They’re all trying to guess. Do you think he’ll come tonight. Can’t see him if he does. You’ll have to tell him Agatha. He’s the best spoon out. But tell him not to come again — not just yet. I’m going to be a reformed character, and stick to Walter George. What? See me — ”

A poke in Agatha’s back.

And at the same time the minister raised his fat, nearsighted, pince-nezzed face, that was red as a boiled shrimp. Agatha was reading in sublime unconsciousness, when the whole congregation woke from its sermonial somnolence with a shudder as if someone had scratched on a slate a long shriek with a screeching pencil. So did the changed note in the minister’s sweet-oil voice set their teeth on edge like vinegar.

“I should be glad if the interruptions from the choir could be brought to an end. I have continued as long as I could without observation, but further continuance is impossible. Either the unseemly correspondence in the choir-gallery must cease, or I must close for this evening — ”

A moment’s pause and readjustment.

“Please let the passing of papers cease,” continued the allforgiving minister. “I should be extremely sorry to hurt any individual feelings. But I speak out of painful necessity, after considerable endurance. I cannot continue under the strain of the previous distraction.”

He was nettled, but with christian forbearance already rubbed dockleaves on the sting, adjusted his eyeglasses, looked down at his notes, and, still red as a boiled shrimp, picked up his oratorical voice, which somehow he seemed to have dropped and left in the distance. The sermon began to trickle its suave flow

again.

But the congregation! The congregation was electrified. Every eye was on the choir-gallery, except only the eyes of those who sat in the rather select pews beneath the said gallery. And these, the nobs, so far forgot themselves as to screw their necks and look up at the sloping roof near above them, as if their X-ray eyes could pierce the flooring and distinguish the offender by his, or her, shoe-soles. Sternly and indignantly they stared at the little roof over their heads, above which roof, they knew, were perched the choral angels of the chapel. Fallen angels indeed.

In the choir itself consternation and indignation struggled in every breast. As the Roman emperors were jealous and suspicious of any society which leagued itself together within the body politic, so are christian ministers obliged to beware of the wheels within wheels of their church. A choir is an unpaid, independent body, highly oligarchic and given to insubordination. For music, said to be a soothing art, produces the most wayward members of the christian community. If the army caused the fall of emperor after emperor, how many christian ministers are unpleasantly thrown from the pulpit in these self-governing churches by the machinations of the obstreperous choir. So little Daddy Dixon, as he was half-affectionately called, had better beware how he rushes with his angry lamb's bleat of expostulation into this mountainous nest of bears and she-bears.

From consternation the choir quickly passed to indignation.

Poor Agatha sat with her crimson face buried in her bosom, screened by her broad black hat. Emmie, the impudent, sat with her nose in the air, looking guilty. Alvina Houghton and Cissie Gittens kept glancing round at her, damnatory. The other members glanced at Emmie, and then turned their indignant looks to one another, before they directed them in a volume against the little minister, perched there just beneath them on his little stool, continuing his little sermon, mildly flourishing his deprecating, plump hand out of the black wing of his gown. Emmie might be guilty of slight misdemeanour. But then, was she not an old member of the sacred choral college. And was this privileged body to be submitted to the injury and ignominy of a public rebuke from the pulpit? From Daddy Dixon, moreover, that plump lamb! Bears and she-bears uttered inaudible growls, and flounced on their seats, crackled their music sheets, and altogether behaved like a mutiny on the upper deck.

Alf Bostock, however, sat with a wolf's eye glaring greenly up at his perky daughter. Mrs Bostock's brows were knitted with ancient perplexity as she too looked upwards, on her right. The boy Bostocks had gone red to their ears, of course. They seized every available opportunity of going red to the ears.

Came the closing hymn, sung by the choir as if they had grit between their teeth. Meanwhile the poor parson sat in the pulpit with his brow in his hand, drawing upon himself the full and viscous flow of sympathy from the congregation, the extra venom of the choir, who stood upright in their dimmish loft like a crowd of demons on the war-path.

Poor Norman Dixon prayed, in the final prayer, that hearts might be kept from anger and turned away from wrath, and oh, if we, whose sacred duty it is to guide the way along the path of Right, if we should stumble and catch our feet against the stones of passion, may we in our humble repentance before Thee, beseech that our stumblings shall not cause others to fall, but shall rather show them the difficulties of the way, and assist them to walk in uprightness and love, remembering that each has his own burden to bear along the difficult journey of life, and that he who adds weight to his brother's burden does not thereby make lighter his own, but brings weariness and sorrow where before was joy. For oh, let us beware of our own thoughtlessness

This homily, though intended of course for the Almighty, the choir set down to their own account, and determined not to be mollified all at once. No indeed. If Norman Dixon stumbled, it was his own toe he must blame, not somebody else's stone that lay in the way. Let him pick his way through the stones. What else was he a minister of the gospel for? — And the congregation half agreed. After all, he could have spoken later on, in private, and not have caused a public scandal. Everybody is so eager to pull the chair of authority from under the poor devil whom they have chosen to sit down in it.

Only one member of the congregation agreed and more than agreed with plump Norman in the pulpit. We know who this member was. He proceeded to gnash his teeth in preparation.

Emmie knew well enough the fat was in the fire, and therefore she was dumb when the choir rather grittily moaned the emotional vesper.

“Lord keep us safe this night Secure from all our fears May angels guard us while we sleep Till morning light appears.”

The bass curved up and the treble curved down in the luscious melody, and Emmie tried to gather her wits. Things were already at a breaking point between her and her pa.

As the choir trooped down the stairs after service, venting their indignation, Emmie hurried and caught her friend by the arm.

“Oh I say Agatha, damn Norman Dixon. What had he got to go and put his foot in it for. — I say, if he's waiting — you know — you'll tell him, won't you? Oh an' I say, I've got a book of his. Tell him I s'll leave it for him at Lewie Goddard's, shall you. I fair forgot it till tonight, when I was thinking of last

week. Oh I'm fair sick of things, Agatha. I'm sure I wish I was dead, I'm that persecuted. You know my Dad's made my mother swear she'll tell him everything what I do. She told me herself he had. And what do you think, he can wring anything out of her, the inquisition devil. He'd better not try-it on me though, or he'll get more than he's bargained for. I tell you what, Agatha, I could fair jump in the cut, I could, I'm that harassed and tormented. And all by that old fool. And what's more, what right has he! I'm over twenty-one. I hope his rabbits'll die, for I hate him. — Eh, Agatha. And tell him — you know — that I can't get his cap back for him. My father's got it, trying to get a clue from it. But he won't then, because it was bought at Parkers in Knarborough, and hasn't got a name or anything in. I got it out of my mother, all that. But Lewie Goddard'll stand by me. An' I shall run away to our Fan's if he gives me any more bother — ”

They had reached the needle's eye gate by which the choir emerged from the chapel precincts. Emmie glanced swiftly round. Yes, there was Gilbert on the opposite pavement. She pinched Agatha's arm excitedly.

“He's come, Agatha. You tell him. And if he wants to see me, tell him — ”

“You're coming, there, aren't you?” said a policeman-like voice. We know whose.

“Yes I am,” said Emmie sullenly. Then: “Goodnight Agatha. Hope I shall see you Wednesday.”

And she followed her irate parent, who joined her forlorn mother at the big gate, and the family trailed off in a disconsolate Sunday-night crowd.

Agatha meanwhile went across the road.

“Good-evening Mr Noon. Excuse me. Emmie can't come tonight. She told me about last week. You know, don't you — ?”

“Yes,” said Gilbert. “Mr Goddard told me about it. Hasn't she been to Chapel then? Wasn't that she?”

“Yes. Her father made her go home. He's in another of his tantrums now. Oh — here's my boy! Can I introduce you — ?”

And Agatha went on to communicate all Emmie's commissions.

“All right,” said Gilbert. “Give her these when you see her. I shall go to Goddards' for the book.”

He gave Agatha the inevitable packet of chocolates, and turned away. Ah spoony chocolates! 'Tis you who have made the cocoa fortunes. And now Gilbert will buy no more. Lewie had given him a lively description of Emmie's plight on the previous Sunday night, how she had seemed to be losing her reason; and all the things he, Lewie, had said to her father, first oil then vinegar; and how Bostock had been brought to promise to say nothing to the girl; how he

had kept his promise, but had been up to Patty to find out if she could tell him what the fellow's name was. Of course she couldn't. Of course Emmie hadn't mentioned the name to them. — This with one of Lewie's side-looks, which told Gilbert that the Goddards knew only too well. Moreover he remembered that Emmie was going to leave the book, for him, at Lewie's. Whereupon he had something else to put in his pipe and smoke. — And Alf Bostock was a nasty customer, Lewie said, one of your reformed ones.

Chapter VI.

The Sack.

Meanwhile a pretty kettle of fish was preparing for Mr Noon. He smelled nothing of it for some days. Neither did he go over to Woodhouse, but let matters remain where they were. He was annoyed and irritated by the whole business. The thought of Emmie now gave him a prickly unpleasant sensation in his skin, and made him knit his brows irritably. He had been relieved that he could not see her on the Sunday evening, and after receiving her message he hoped the whole affair was finished. Never would he start such a mess again: never. For the whole world of spooning, bits of fluff, jolly good sports, bits of hot stuff and the like he now felt a prickly repulsion, an irritable distaste. No more of that for him.

But wait a bit. Let him not holloa till he is out of the wood.

He did not go to the Goddards' either, because he felt that Patty had been making a butt of him. Yes, while he was feeling such a hero in the park, she was laughing up her sleeve at him.

“While from the dark park, hark “

The ridiculous Tom Hood line ran in his mind. Yes, he was a fool, a born fool and a made fool, both, and he felt in a state of intense irritation against everybody he knew and the whole circumstance of his life.

To crown which, on Thursday he received a note, at school, requesting him to attend a meeting in camera of the Higher Grade Committee, at Knarborough, at seven in the evening — signed M. Britten.

Haysfall Technical School was under the control of the Education Committee, which had its seat in the county town of Knarborough. M. Britten was Minnie Britten, secretary for the above: and secretary for everything else into which she could poke her nose. Gilbert knew her: a woman with grey hair and a black hat, in a tremendous hurry of mental responsibility and importance, always scuffling in when she wasn't wanted and setting all the leaves fluttering with her strained sense of duty and her exaggerated sense of importance. Heaven knows how much she cost the County in petrol, for she was not out of the official motor-car ever for a longer space than half-an-hour. Her superior, Jimmy Blount, a youngish bald man with an eyeglass, Clerk for Education for the county, let her flutter the doves at will. He, poor devil, was harassed by the officious

interference of the innumerable little gods who have education at heart and can make an official's chair uncomfortable. Mrs Britten then — we forgot to mention she was married — darted about the county wherever she felt she was in request, like some spider dashing from the centre of its web along the lines every time it feels or imagines it feels a disturbance. Of course Mrs Britten did actually rush into a lot of educational bothers: which proves, of course, that the bothers existed. Whether her rushes made matters any better, we leave to the imagination of any individual who has ever had the misfortune and humiliation to be connected with our educational system.

Mrs Britten then: she was a B.A. also, and felt that her education was unquestionable. She wrote pamphlets on Education, and was surprised, yes surprised, if at least every head teacher in every school did not show an acquaintance with their contents. She was Secretary for the Children's Holiday Fund, and an assiduous collector therefor. A footpad, even a burglar with a revolver is answerable. But Mrs Britten was unanswerable, especially to poor quaking elementary school-teachers, to whom she was the *Dea ex machina*. She forced the reluctant sixpences out of them, and let her sun shine on schools whose contribution to the Fund was highest. She was an opponent of Feeding the Children — we must refer to her pamphlet on the subject for the reason why. In fact she was for or against innumerable things, so that it was a wonder her hair hadn't all disappeared, instead of being merely stone grey at forty. She was honest, of course. She was kind, as goes without saying. She had lots of brains. She was hard and straightforward and downright enough. Wonderful what a lot of virtues she managed to have in a hurry. Though she wasn't at all a new broom, she swept the dust from pillar to post, and left everybody spitting, till some poor devil got the dust-pan and collected the dirt.

Mr Noon knew her. We've all known her. Such conscientious people don't let themselves remain unknown. She rather approved of Mr Noon — because he was so clever, and had brought the remnants of such a reputation with him from Cambridge. She even rather toadied to him — in a mental kind of way. Spiteful female teachers said she wouldn't at all mind setting her black hat at him: but this isn't true. Mrs Britten was merely *Minerva* extending her grace and craving a little adulation in return. She heard — oh yes, she heard of his peccadilloes. What escaped her? But, curiously enough, she was rather more indulgent to him because of them. If he had been so brilliant and impregnable, her wing might not have covered him. But if not her intellectual, at least he might be her moral chicken.

Therefore Gilbert felt no particular qualm when he received the note summoning him to the meeting in camera. Rather he poured a little ointment on

his prickly, nettle-rashed vanity, and concluded they were going to consult him, privately, upon some matter connected with the school, probably the fitting up of a laboratory for technical chemistry.

So he put his best suit on, tied his tie to his taste, and whizzed over on the motor-cycle to the county town. When he arrived at the town hall, the porter told him the meeting was already sitting. He went to the waiting-room, and there sat cooling his heels. Doubtful if even now he smelled the above-mentioned fish, which were stewed and nearly ready for him in the next room.

A bell rang. A clerk went into the meeting-room, returned, and ushered in Mr Noon. Mrs Britten was at the head of a long table round which were seated the various members of the committee, mostly fat fossils and important persons of complete insignificance. Mrs Britten rose to her feet.

“Ah, good-evening Mr Noon. Will you sit there — !” — and she indicated a chair at the doorwards end of the table, opposite herself. Gilbert said Good-evening, and looking very fresh and spruce, seated himself in the chair indicated. Meanwhile, down either side of the black-leathered table the members of the committee, their faces very distinct owing to the shaded lights that hung over the table and cast all the glow down on them, looked steadfastly and mutely at Mr Noon, as if they had expected some inhabitant of Mars to make his appearance. Gilbert suddenly felt like a baby that has fallen to the bottom of the sea and finds all the lobsters staring at him in the under-sea light. So they stared, like inquiring lobsters, and he felt like a baby, with his fresh face and pouting mouth.

But Mrs Britten had seated herself once more, and stretching out her arms on the table in a very-much-herself fashion, she held certain papers within the full glare of the lamp, and began:

“We are sorry, Mr Noon, to have to call this meeting tonight to consider the subject in hand. Yesterday a formal report was made and signed in my presence which, although it does not directly affect the concerns of this Committee, yet may prejudice your successful work in the Haysfall Technical School seriously. Is not that so, gentlemen?”

The lobsters buzzed and nodded in the submarine glare. They no longer looked at Mr Noon, but studiously away from him. He sat looking rather wonder-stricken and stupid, with his pouting mouth a shade open.

“Therefore we have decided to put the matter before you openly, and hear your account. We are sorry to have to intrude on your private life, but we do feel that the interests of the school where you are doing such good work are at stake.”

“Quite!” said one of the lobsters distinctly and emphatically. Gilbert’s eye strayed wonderingly to him.

“We are met here in camera, even without a clerk. If we can clear the matter

up satisfactorily, nothing more shall be heard of it. We are prepared to forget all about it.”

“Oh certainly, certainly,” barked a couple of lobsters.

At this time Mr Noon’s attention was interrupted by his recalling the story about a certain French poet who was seen slowly leading a lobster by a blue ribbon along one of the boulevards. When a friend asked why, why?, the poet replied wistfully: “You see they don’t bark.”

Gilbert wondered if they really did never bark, or if, underwater, they rushed out of their rock-kennels and snapped and yapped at the heels of the passing fishes. This fancy caused him to hear only a wave-lapping sound for a few moments, which wave-lapping sound was actually Mrs Britten’s going on. He came to himself when she flapped a paper to attract his rather vacant-looking attention. He stared alert at the paper, and heard her portentous reading.

“I wish to make known to the Members of the Knarborough Education Committee that Gilbert Noon, science-teacher in Haysfall Technical School, has been carrying on with my daughter, Emma Grace Bostock, and has had criminal commerce with her. He has got my daughter into trouble, and ruined her life. I wish to know whether such a man is fit to be a teacher of young boys and girls, and if nothing is going to be done in the matter by the Knarborough Education Committee. Signed Alfred Wright Bostock — ”

Mrs Britten’s level voice came coldly to an end, and she looked keenly at Mr Gilbert. He sat staring at some invisible point above the middle of the table, and was quite inscrutable.

“We feel,” said Mrs Britten, “how delicate the matter is. We wish above all things not to trespass. But we find we must have an answer from your own mouth. The meeting is private — everything will be kept in strictest privacy. Will you tell us, please, whether this statement by the man Bostock is altogether false?”

Gilbert still stared at the invisible point and looked absent. There was a dead silence which began to get awkward.

“Yes or no, Mr Noon?” said Mrs Britten gently.

Still the vacant Gilbert stared at a point in space, and the lobsters began to squiggle in their arm-chairs.

“We have your interest at heart, Mr Noon. Please believe it. But we are bound, bound to have the interest of your school and scholars also at heart. If the matter had not been formally forced upon our attention, as I may say, we might have let gossip continue its gossiping. But the man Bostock seems to be a determined individual, capable of creating considerable annoyance. We thought it best to try to settle the matter quietly and as privately as possible. We have the greatest

possible esteem for your services: we would not like to lose them. And so we are met here tonight to do what we can.

“Answer then simply, yes or no. Is this statement made by the man Bostock utterly false, or must we consider it? It is completely false? — yes? — ”

The lobsters glued their eyes on Mr Noon’s face. He looked up and along at Mrs Britten: surely she was a Jewess by birth. A thousand to one on it she was a benevolent Jewess by birth.

“All right then,” he said gruffly, leaning forward on the table and half-rising, pushing his chair scraping back: “I’ll send in my resignation.”

He stood leaning forward for one second at the table, looking at the confounded lobsters.

“No no, Mr Noon! Please! Please sit down! Please! Please! Do sit down. Please do! Please!” Mrs Britten had risen to her feet in her earnest agitation. She seemed really so concerned for his welfare that he wavered, and half sat down.

“Certainly! Take your seat, young man,” said one of the lobsters, who evidently owned employees.

“I’ll send in my resignation,” barked Gilbert, sending his chair back with a jerk and opening the door before any lobster could disentangle himself from his lobster-pot of a round official chair.

“Oh don’t let him go!” cried Mrs Britten, with a wail of distress. There was a clinking and scraping of lobster-pots and one lobster-voice shouted — ”Here! Here you!” But Gilbert was going down the wide, dim stone stairs three at a time, not running, but lunging down, smack, smack, smack, three steps at a time. He bumped aside the porter and took his hat and coat, and in another second was going out of the front doors of the Town Hall, hearing the last of Mrs Britten’s voice wailing from the semi-darkness up aloft the stairs:

“Please, Mr Noon! Please come back!”

All her nice little game of that evening was spoilt. Oh, what a temper she was in, and how she longed to box the ears of all the lobsters, particularly the one who had “young-manned” the truant. Oh how she hated the lobsters, over whom she queened it so regally. Oh how she itched to smack their faces and tell them what she thought of them. A Jewess born!

But she did none of these things. She only said:

“He will send in his resignation tomorrow.”

“And it will be accepted,” barked a lobster.

“Sine die,” yapped another, though nobody knew what he meant by it, or whether it was English which they hadn’t quite caught.

Chapter VII.

Jaw.

Gilbert's kettle of fish had been all lobsters but one: but that didn't make it any the sweeter.

The next day was Saturday: half-day at school. His one fear was that Mrs Britten would pounce on him. If she did, he would put her off with vague promises and sweetnesses. For he was determined to have done with Haysfall, Whetstone, Woodhouse, Britten-women, Goddard-women, Emmie-women, all his present life and circumstance, all in one smack. Men at some times are masters of their fates, and this was one of Mr Gilbert's times. The wonder is he did not break his neck at it, or get locked up, for he rode his motor-cycle at many forbidden miles an hour, so anxious he was to get home. He was so anxious to have between his fingers the Lachesis shears of his thread of fate, in the shape of a fountain pen. He could snip off the thread of his Haysfall life in about three strokes — "I beg to resign my post in Haysfall Technical School, and wish to leave at the very earliest opportunity." That was all he would say. And he was itching to say it. His motor-cycle fairly jumped over the dark roads from Knarborough to Whetstone.

He arrived, wrote out his resignation, and sat down to think.

In the first place he was clearing out. He was going to Germany, as he had often said he would, to study for his doctorate.

That was settled. But —

And there were rather serious buts.

Criminal correspondence with Emmie had got her into trouble and ruined her life. Did that mean she was going to have a baby? Lord save us, he hoped not. And even if she was, whose baby was it going to be? He felt in no mood at all for fatherhood, but decided, since he was running away, he had better see Emmie again and make it as square with her as possible.

Which meant also going to the Goddards.

And would that damned Mrs Britten fasten on him tomorrow? He knew she would on Monday if not tomorrow. Saturday morning, he knew, she was busier and fuller up than ever, if that were possible. The thing was, to get away without seeing her. Could he clear out after tomorrow morning? Not put in any further

appearance at the school after the morrow?

That remained to decide.

Then money. He had no money. He never had any money, though his father said that when he was his age, meaning Gilbert's, he had saved a hundred and seventy pounds out of thirty shillings a week. Gilbert would have been glad of the hundred and seventy pounds if he'd saved them, but he hadn't. How was he to clear out with about fifty-five shillings, which was all he had.

He must get something out of his father, that was all. And sell his motor-cycle. Ay, sell his motor-cycle. Leave that also for the morrow. Sufficient unto the day *etc.*

Of course he'd brought it all on himself. And he didn't seriously care either. One must bring one thing or another on oneself.

There was his father just come in from having half a pint at the Holly Bush. Down he went. His father was sitting in the many-staved arm-chair, almost a lobster-pot, the throne of the house. Gilbert sat on the sofa opposite. The father began to unfasten his boots.

"Father," said Gilbert. "I'm chucking Haysfall Technical."

"Oh ay," replied his parent.

"I'm thinking of going to Germany."

"Are you!"

"I'm going to work there for my doctorate."

"Doctorate? Oh yes."

"Doctor of Science, you know."

"Ay! Ay!"

"It would do me a lot of good, you know."

"It would, would it?"

"I should get a much better job than ever I can get now."

"Yes — yes."

"The only thing is funds."

"Funds. Yes."

"It'll cost me a bit at first, only at first."

"Where? In Germany? Oh yes."

"Yes."

"Ay."

This passionate conversation between father and son was drawing to an inevitable close.

"You don't see your way to helping me a bit, Dad?"

"Helping you, child! I'm always helping you."

"Yes, but a bit extra."

“Nay, how can I help you if you go to foreign parts.”

“By setting me up with a few quid.”

“A few quid. Why — you can stop at home an’ have board an’ lodging for nothing. What’s t’ want to be goin’ to Geermanny for!”

“For my doctorate.”

“Doctrat be — hanged.”

“Nay father.”

“Thou’rt doin’ right enough as t’art.”

“No, I’m going to Germany.”

“Tha art?”

“Yes.”

“Oh — all right.”

“You see father, I want a few quid to start off with.”

“Save ‘em then, my boy.”

“I haven’t saved them, Dad, and you have. So you give me a few.”

“Tha does talk.”

“Ay — what else should I do!”

“Save thy wind.”

“Like you save your money?”

“Ay — t’same.”

“And you won’t give me any?”

“Tha’lt get th’ lot when I’m gone.”

“But I don’t want you gone, and I want a little money.”

“Want. Want. What art doin’ wi’ wants? Tha should ha’e th’ fulness, not th’ want.”

“So I should if you’d give it me.”

“Nay, I can niver put th’ fat off my own belly on to thine.”

“I don’t want your fat — I want about fifty pounds.”

“That is my fat.”

“You know it isn’t.”

“I know it is.”

“Won’t you give them me?”

“Tha’lt get all when I’ve gone.”

“I want it now.”

“Ay, me an’ all. I want it now.”

Whereupon Gilbert rose and went upstairs again. His father was a lobster.

The next morning passed without any descent of Mrs Britten. He got on his bicycle and left Haysfall for good, taking his few personal possessions with him from the big red school.

Arriving at Whetstone at one o'clock, he immediately went and bargained with an acquaintance who, he knew, wanted his motor-cycle. The man offered fifteen pounds. The thing was worth a good forty.

“Give me twenty, or I’ll ride it to London and sell it there.”

It was agreed he was to have his twenty, and hand over the cycle the next day, Sunday. So he went home for dinner, did not speak to his father, with whom he was angry, hurried through his meal, and shoved off with his motor-bike again.

Chapter VIII.

His Might-have-been Mother-in-law.

At Woodhouse, Patty opened the door to him. She started, and looked embarrassed.

“Is it you Mr Noon! Come in.” Then in a lower tone: “I’ve got Mrs Bostock here. Poor thing, I’m sorry for her. But perhaps you’d rather not see her?”

“What do you think?” he said.

Patty pursed up her mouth.

“Oh — as you please. She’s quite harmless.”

“All right.”

He took off his hat and marched into the room. Mrs Bostock fluttered from her chair. Patty came in wagging herself fussily as she walked, and arching her eyebrows with her conspicuously subtle smile.

“What a coincidence, Mrs Bostock! This is Mr Noon.”

Mrs Bostock, who at a nearer view was seen to have a slipshod, amiable cunning in her eyes, shook hands and said she hoped she saw him well. Patty settled herself with her ivory hands in her dark-brown lap, and her ivory face flickering its important smile, and looked from one to the other of her guests.

“How remarkable you should have come just at this minute, Mr Noon! Mrs Bostock has just brought this book of yours. I believe you lent it Emmie.”

Gilbert eyed the treatise on conic sections.

“Yes,” he said, “I did.”

“It was my mistake as did it,” said Mrs Bostock, with that slipshod repentance of her nature. “I picked it up and said ‘Whose is this book about Comic Sections?’ I thought it was a comic, you see, not noticing. And our Dad twigged it at once. ‘Give it here,’ he said. And he opened it and saw the name. If I’d seen it I should have put it back on the shelf and said nothing.”

“How very unfortunate,” Patty said. “May I see?”

She took the book, read the title, and laughed sharply.

“A mathematical work?” she said, wrinkling up her eyes at Gilbert. Not that she knew any more about it, really, than Mrs Bostock did. She saw the Trinity College stamp, and the name, Gilbert Noon, written on the fly leaf.

“What a curious handwriting you have, Mr Noon,” she said, looking up at him from under her dark brows. He did not answer. People had said it so often. He

wrote in an odd, upright manner, rather as if his letters were made up out of crochets and quavers and semibreves, very picturesque and neat.

"If I'd opened it I should have guessed, though I didn't know the name any more than he did. But our Dad was too sharp for me. I tried to pass it off. It was no good though," said Mrs Bostock. She had a half-amused look, as if the intrigue pleased her.

"So it all came out?" asked Patty.

"Ay, I'm sorry to say. As soon as our Emmie come in he showed it her and said 'I'm goin' to Haysfall Technical with this.' And she, silly like, instead of passing it off, flew at him and tried to snatch it from him. That just pleased our Dad. I said to her after: 'Why you silly thing, what did you let on for? Why didn't you make out you knew nothing!' And then she flew at me."

"You must have had a trying time between the two," said Patty, wrinkling her brows at Noon.

"Oh, I have, I can tell you. He vowed he'd go up to the Tech. with the book, and she said if he did she'd jump in th' cut. I kept saying to her, why don't you pass it off with a laugh. But she seemed as if she'd gone beyond it. So he kept the book till this morning. She told me she'd promised to leave it here."

"You knew," said Patty; "that Emmie had run away?"

"No," said Gilbert.

"Gone to our Fanny's at Eakrast," said Mrs Bostock. "I had a letter from our Fanny next day, saying she was bad in bed. I should have gone over but I've got Elsie with measles."

"You have your hands full," said Patty.

"I have, I tell you. I said to our Dad, you can do nothing but drive things from bad to worse. Our Fanny had had the doctor in to her, and he says it's neuralgia of the stomach. Awful, isn't it! I know neuralgia of the face is bad enough. I said to our Dad, well, I said, I don't know whether she's paying for her own wickedness or for your nasty temper to her, but she's paying, anyhow."

"Poor Emmie. And she's such a gay young thing by nature," said Patty.

"Oh, she's full of life. But a wilful young madam, and can be snappy enough with the children. I've said to her many a time, you're like your Dad, you keep your smiles in the crown of your hat, and only put 'em on when you're going out. She can be a cat, I tell you, at home. She makes her father worse than he would be."

"I suppose she does," said Patty.

"Oh, he gets fair wild, and then tries to blame me. I say to him, she's your daughter, I didn't whistle her out o' th' moon. He's not bad, you know, if you let him be. He wants managng, then he's all right. Men doesn't have to be told too

much, and it's no good standing up to them. That's where our Emmie makes her mistake. She will fly back at him, instead of keeping quiet. I'm sure, if you answer him back, it's like pouring paraffin to put a fire out. He flares up till I'm frightened."

"I'm afraid," laughed Patty grimly, "I should have to stand up to him."

"That's our Emmie. I tell him, if he will make schoolteachers of them, he must expect them to have tongues in their heads. — " Then she turned to Gilbert. "He never did nothing about your book, did he?"

"Yes," said Gilbert. "I've got the sack."

"Oh how disgusting!" cried Patty.

"Ay, a lot of good that'll do," said Mrs Bostock. "It's like him though. He'll pull the house down if the chimney smokes."

"When are you leaving?" said Patty.

"This week-end."

"Can you believe it!" said Mrs Bostock.

Patty mused for a time.

"Well," she said, "I must say, your husband has caused a marvellous lot of mischief, Mrs Bostock. He's fouled his own nest, indeed he has; done a lot of damage to others and no good to himself."

"No, it's just like him — but there you are. Those that won't be ruled can't be schooled."

"What is Emmie going to do then?" Gilbert asked.

"Don't ask me, Mr Noon. She'll come back when she's better, I should think: silly thing she is, going off like it."

"What is her address?"

"Were you thinking of going over on your motor-bike? Well, I'll back she'll be pleased. Care of Mrs Harold Wagstaff, School House, Eakrast. He's one of the schoolmasters, you know, Fanny's husband. A clever young fellow, come out first class at college. I'm sure you'd get on with him. It's the fourth house down the lane after the church — house and school combined. You can't miss it. But it's a very quiet place, you know. I bet they're not sorry for a bit of company."

Gilbert looked down his nose rather, for Mrs Bostock continually glanced sideways at him, approvingly, and he knew she was quite comfortable, assuming in him a prospective, or at least a possible son-in-law. Not that she was making any efforts herself towards the status of mother-in-law. But there was never any knowing what the young people would do, and she was quite willing, whichever way it was. She was quite ready to be agreeable, whichever way things went.

And this was almost as disconcerting to Mr Gilbert as the old man's tantrum

of hostility had been. Moreover that neuralgia of the stomach was worrying him. How easily it might mean an incipient Noon — or, since it is a wise father that knows his own child — an incipient little Emmie, an Emmeling. The thought of this potential Emmeling was rather seriously disconcerting to our friend. He had certain standards of his own, one of them being a sort of feeling that if you put your foot in it, you must clean your own shoe, and not expect someone else to do it. At the same time he was determined to clear out of the whole show.

Mrs Bostock rose, and must be hurrying back to her home. Gilbert rose too.

“Oh but you’ll stay and have a cup of tea,” Patty cried. “You’re sure you can’t stay, Mrs Bostock?”

“I can’t, thank you. I s’ll have our master home at half-past five, and the children’s teas to get, besides our Elsie. Thank you all the same, I’m sure. I’m sure you and Mr Goddard has been very kind to our Emmie. I’m sure I don’t know what she’d have done without Mr Goddard.”

“Oh he’s a friend in need,” said Patty, with a curl of the lip.

“He is, bless him.”

And the mother of the Bostocks took her leave.

Patty rang at once for tea, and sat herself down by the fire in the twilight. Gilbert had remained. It was too late to get to Eakrast that night.

“Well,” said Patty, setting her skirts over her knees in a way she had: “you’ve had quite an adventure.” And she smiled her wrinkled smile. She reminded Gilbert for a moment of one of those wrinkle-faced ivory demons from China. But that was because he was in a temper, and rather in a funk.

“If you look on it as an adventure,” he said.

“Well — how else? Not as a tragedy, I hope. And not altogether a comedy. Too many people have had to smart. I guess Emmie Bostock feels anything but comic at this moment.” This in an admonitory tone.

“Why?” said Gilbert.

“Why!” replied Patty, curling her lip in some scorn of such a question. “I should have thought it was very obvious. A poor girl lying ill — ”

“What of?”

“Well — neuralgia of the stomach, they say. I expect it’s some sort of gastritis — ”

“You don’t think it’s a baby — ”

Even Patty started at the bluntness of the question.

“No. I can’t say. I’ve had no suggestion of such a thing. I hope not, indeed. That would be a calamity. Did you say you were going over?”

“Yes. I’m going to ask her.”

“Yes. So you should. And if it were so — would you marry her?”

“What do you think?”

“I don’t know. What do you fee?”

“Me? Nothing very pleasant.”

“No — so I should imagine, so I should imagine. You’ve got yourself into a nasty position — ”

“Not I. If a lot of fools make a lot of fuss, why should I blame myself for something that’s only natural, anyhow.”

“Natural — yes — maybe. But if Emmie Bostock is going to become a mother, and you’re not going to marry her — or perhaps you are — ”

“No I’m not.”

“No, you’re not! Well then!”

“I can’t help it,” said Gilbert.

“That is no solution of her problem,” said Patty.

“I didn’t invent the problem,” said Gilbert.

“Who did then?”

“Her father, society, and fools.”

“You had no hand in it, then. You had no finger in the pie?”

“Be hanged to fingers,” said Gilbert.

“Well then!” said Patty, starting and looking round as the woman came in with the tray.

“Do you mind lighting up, Mrs Prince!”

Then, changing the subject slightly, she spoke of Lewie and his doings, until the woman went out of the room.

“Mind,” said Patty, pouring out the tea. “I’m not so foolish as to think that you ought to marry the girl, if she is in trouble — ”

“Thank you,” said Gilbert, taking his cup.

“No. I think that would be throwing good money after bad, so to speak. But surely some of the responsibility is yours. The woman isn’t going to be left to suffer everything.”

“What a damned lot of fool’s rot it is,” said Gilbert, becoming angry as he felt the crown of fatherhood being pressed rather prickly on his brow.

“Yes, it is! It is! There should be a provision for the woman in these matters. There should be a State Endowment of Motherhood, there should be a removal of the disgraceful stigma on bastardy. There should be. But there isn’t. And so what are you going to do?”

“Find out first,” said Gilbert, rising and buttoning his coat.

“Oh, but finish your tea,” said Patty.

“I’ve done, thank you.”

“But you can’t ride to Eakrast tonight.”

“Yes I can.”

“Dear me. But leave it till tomorrow — do. Wait till Lewie comes.”

“No thanks. I’ll go and make sure, anyhow.”

As a matter of fact, State Endowment of Motherhood and the stigma on bastardy had done for him. The wind had gone all out of his sails as completely as if Patty had put two cannon-balls through him, and the ship of his conversation could make no more headway on the ruffled waters of her tea-table. Was he to lie there like a water-logged hulk? Was he to sit in that smothering arm-chair with his cup on his knee and a scone in his fingers, sinking deeper and deeper through the springs of the chair like a leaky wreck foundering? Thank Goodness his legs had taken the matter into their own hands — pardon the Irishism — and had jerked him on to his feet.

Chapter IX.

Emmie at Eakrast.

Emmie, we had forgotten to say, was engaged to Walter George all the time she was carrying-on with Mr Noon. The fact so easily slipped her memory that it slipped ours. We ought to have mentioned it sooner, for the sake of Alfred Bostock even.

To be sure, Emmie had been engaged several times. She got engaged in peacetime as easily as other women do in war-time. On every possible occasion she accepted a ring: varying in value from ten shillings to three pounds. Almost every time she sent the ring back when the affair was over. Twice the young men had generously said she could keep it. Hence the three ornaments which decked her fingers, and of which she was justly proud.

One she wore ostentatiously on her engagement finger. It was one of those remade rubies, quite red and nice, and Emmie felt she could honestly say it was a real stone. It tied her to Walter George quite closely. She had shown it with pleasure to Gilbert, and told him its history. And he had wondered if he was bound by the laws of Emmie-gallantry to offer himself as an engagee. There wouldn't be much harm in it. And Emmie would so lightly commit pre-wedding bigamy, and there is safety in numbers.

But he hadn't gone so far, and Emmie had no ring of his. These rings, she loved them, they were her trophies and her romances, her scalp-fringe and her forget-me-not wreaths, her dried roses pressed into sound £. s. d.

Walter George was a quite nice boy: we are going to make his acquaintance. He was a clerk, and quite a gendeman. Let us say it softly, for fear of offending a more-than-sacred institution, he was a bank-clerk. He had walked out with Emmie all the time he was in Woodhouse, and she had hardly found an opportunity for a stroll with anyone else. Cruel authority, however, had moved him to the newly-opened branch of the London and Provincial bank in Warsop. He departed, deeply regretting the soft and cuddly Emmie, who made love an easy and simple path for him. For the ease and simplicity of his paths of love he was wise enough to be thankful. Therefore, when rumour whispered poison-gas in his ear, he looked at other maidens, and imagined himself cuddling with them in a dark entry, and wiped his ears. Emmie was Emmie. So far, she belonged to herself. His nature, being easy like hers, though less flighty, comprehended her

sufficiently to realise that she was sipping all the flowers of love in her singleness in order to store the honey-jars of connubial felicity for him. The honey might be no more than golden syrup, but he would never know the difference. And therefore, so long as Emmie had the decency not to offend him too openly, he had the sense not to peep round the corner after her when she left him.

Some men want the path of love to run pleasantly between allotment gardens stocked with cabbages and potatoes and an occasional sweet-william: some men want rose-avenues and trickling streams, and so scratch themselves and get gnat-bitten: some want to scale unheard-of heights, roped to some extraordinary female of their fancy — chacun a son gout. Walter George was born in the era of allotment gardens, and thus Providence had provided for his marital Saturday afternoons. Which is saying a good deal. He was a bank-clerk too, and wanted to have an easy conscience and a dressy spouse. Church parade every Sunday morning was an institution to him. And he had quite a lot of cuddly lovey-doveyness. If anyone can mention to me a better recipe for a husband, I shall be glad to write it down.

Emmie took him seriously. Roses and rapture were good fun, but the cauliflower was the abiding blossom. Co-op. entries might have their thrill, but she was not one of those whose fanatic idealism insists on spending a life-time in such places. No, she would rather forfeit her chances of heaven than her chance of a home of her own where she could keep warm like a cat, and eat her cauliflower of a Sunday dinner.

In short, Emmie was au fond, very sensible, much more sensible than her father. She knew even better than he that the cauliflower is the flower of human happiness, and that rose-leaves act like senna. All very well to purge off the follies of youth with red, or better still with pink roses. And she was sooner purged than her father. If only he had understood, he would have slept better in his bed. But, seeing his own more frenzied colics revived in the vagaries of his Emmie, he reacted more violently than he need have done, and that largely from fear. Once his daughter had run away he began to realise this.

Having thus apologised for our characters, and demonstrated that they have a bed-rock of common-sense; having revealed their acquaintance with the fact that rose-leaves bring belly-aches, and that cauliflowers are delicious, and that Sunday dinner is the key-stone of the domestic arch, on which repeated arches all society rests; having proved, in short, that the Bostocks are of the bulldog breed, full of sound British sense; let us go on with our story with more self-satisfaction than heretofore.

Emmie arrived at her sister Fanny's with real pains rending her. She knew it

was rose-leaves, but blamed her father. In fact she was in a state of subdued hysteria. So she took to her bed, and decided to turn over a new leaf. No, not a rose-leaf. She decided, if possible, to open the last long chapter of a woman's life, headed Marriage. She intended it to be a long and quite banal chapter, cauliflower and lovey-doves. Having at the moment a variety of pains in her inside, dubbed neuralgia of the stomach, she developed some of her own father's reactionary hatred against the immortal rose. And though her hatred would lose its violence as the pains passed off: though it would decline into mere indifference, like her mother's, except she would retain a little crisp flirtiness of manner, to show she kept her end up: still, this sound and sensible emotion, this fundamental detestation of rose-leaves because she knew what rose-leaves were (just like her father: a piece of impudent assurance too); this dislike of the immortal rose, and a consequent exaltation of the solid cauliflower would henceforth be the directing force of her life.

Warsop — and with this word the story gets on its feet again — lies but ten miles from Eakrast, across the forest. After two days of temper, hysteria, neuralgia of the stomach, after-effect of rose-leaves, or whatever it may have been, Emmie began to recover her common-sense. She had eaten the rose, and would make an ass of herself no more. So she lay and plotted for settling down in life.

The school and school-house were one building. In the front, the long school-room faced the road: at the back, the house-premises and garden looked to the fields and the distant forest.

Fanny, Emmie's sister, was a dark, rather big-nosed girl, very good-natured. She had been married for a year, and had a baby. She received Emmie without too much surprise or consternation. In Fanny's sky the weather always blew over.

"Don't bother. It'll blow over," she said to Emmie as she said all her life to herself.

She put her sister on the sofa, covered her up, and gave her a hot cup of tea; then she waited for Harold to come in. Emmie could hear Harold, on the other side of the wall, talking away at the scholars.

"Now then, Salt, what river comes next? Witham Welland Nene and Great Ouse — what comes after that? Don't you know? Do you know what your own name is? What? Oh, you do, do you. What is it? What? Salt! And if the Salt hath lost its savour? You don't know, do you. No, you wouldn't. Tell him what river comes next, Poole."

Emmie guessed it was Geography: therefore probably near the end of the afternoon. Listening, she could occasionally hear a shrill word from the assistant

teacher, a girl, who was apparently taking sewing. There were only about forty-five scholars in the whole school.

The itch came over the rose-leaf-griped girl, to be down in the school-room taking a lesson. She longed to begin with a “Now then — .” Fanny had been a teacher, and had helped Harold till the advent of the baby. When the baby was a bit older, she would get a servant and go into the school again with Harold. It was so handy. You could just pop in and turn the pudding while the children were doing their drawing. You could pop in and put the kettle on at half-past three, and at four o’clock you would find it singing nicely.

Emmie envied Fanny her little school and school-house. As for Harold, he was all right. He was very respectable and a bit of a mardy, perhaps — but he was all right.

“Hello Emmie. We weren’t expecting you,” he said when he came in from school and found her at tea with Fanny and the baby. He talked in the rather mouthing fashion which teachers often have in the Midlands. “Have you got holidays at Woodhouse then?” he continued, his first thought of course, being school.

“No, I’ve come away from our Dad for a bit.”

“Oh! I thought perhaps you’d closed for measles. We’ve twelve absent this afternoon. — What’s amiss then.”

“Oh, same old song. Our Dad nagging the life out of me till I can’t put up with it. I thought I’d come here a bit if you’d have me.”

“Yes, you’re welcome. But won’t your Dad be more wild than ever? What about school?”

“I’ve sent to tell them I’m bad. And I am an’ all. I’m feeling damn bad, Harold!”

“Are you, why what’s wrong?”

“I’ve got a cramp in my inside till I don’t know what to do with myself. I had to sit down about six times coming from the station.”

“And she’s not eaten a thing,” said Fanny.

“Looks to me as if she’d better go to bed,” said the sympathetic Harold. “I’ve had a sore throat for this last week. I’ve been thinking, Fanny — have you got that linseed in th’ oven?”

Fanny had.

“You’d better look at it an’ see it’s not too dry. I sent Bendey for a stick of Spanish juice. You’d perhaps have some of that Emmie. I know it’s an old-fashioned remedy, but it does me more good than these modern preparations like aspirin and camphorated chlorodyne and such.”

Fanny meanwhile was at the oven looking into a steamy stew-jar, from which

came a strange odour of flax-seeds. She stirred the brown, pulpy, porridgy mass, and Harold came to look.

“It would do with a drop more water, dear, don’t you think it would?” he said to Fanny, putting his arm round her neck as they both stared into the stew-jar, she crouching on the hearth-rug.

“Just a drop,” said Fanny. “Take it from the kettle.”

And between them they concocted the mess.

On the other side of the tall range which prevented, or which was to prevent the baby from walking into the fire, in future days, the bedding was airing.

“Should you like to go to bed now, Emmie?” asked Harold in concern.

“Oh, I can wait,” said Emmie.

“You needn’t wait,” said Harold, disturbed to see her sitting there mute with a pinched-up face, doubling herself over as twinges caught her.

“I’ll make your bed directly I’ve fed baby,” said Fanny, picking up the infant that was crying crossly for food.

“I can do it,” said Harold. Like a good economical soul and husband, he had taken his jacket off when he came in, and was in his shirtsleeves. “I’ll take th’ oven shelf up, Fanny,” he added.

“Take the bottom one,” said Fanny, who was faintly squeezing her breast between two fingers as she directed the nipple to the infant. “It’s not so red-hot as the top one.”

Harold wrapped the oven shelf in an old piece of blanket, and took it upstairs with him and the candle, for a bed-warmer. In the spare bedroom he went methodically about, making up the bed.

“I tell you what,” he said as he came down, “I’ll put that oil-stove up there a bit, to warm the air. It comes rather cold.”

And he rubbed his arms, through his shirtsleeves.

Another half-hour, then, saw Emmie in a warm bed, in company of the oven shelf against which she knew she’d knock her toe. She screwed herself up upon her pains, which, though genuine enough, seemed to proceed from a sort of crossness which she could not get over. The little paraffin oil-stove shed its low light and its curious flat oil-flame warmth across the atmosphere. Harold appeared with a cup of the brown, slimy steaming linseed-and-liquorice stew and pressed her to drink it.

“I take a lot of it, and find it does me worlds of good. I think it’s the oil, myself. I’m sure it’s better than cod-liver oil. Your skin gets so nice and soft if you take it regular.”

But Emmie, her naturally fluffy hair rather astray over the pillow, her little brows rather tense, would not look at it.

“Don’t come near me, my lad. I don’t want to be looked at,” she said, half hiding her crossness in a sort of gruffness.

“Is it all that bad. I’ll go down and make you a bran-bag, should I? — You’ve not lost your good looks, anyhow. — But should I make a bran-bag for you?”

“Ay — ” said Emmie.

Down he went, found there was no bran, put his hat and coat on and went down the lane to borrow some: returned, and stuffed it into a flat flannel bag, put this between two plates in the oven, to heat, and finally carried it, piping hot, up to Emmie, who gratefully hugged it against her.

“Thank you, my old chuck,” she said to him. “It’s rosy, that is.”

“Perhaps that’ll shift it,” said Harold.

“Ay — perhaps.”

But she had her pains all through the night, and said in the morning she hadn’t slept a wink. She looked peaked, and Harold was bothered, so he sent a note for the doctor: much against Emmie’s will. The doctor said it was neuralgia of the stomach, and Emmie said it felt like it. Harold made Fanny write to Woodhouse, and in the school-room from time to time he would raise his voice a little and say:

“Less noise there down at that end! You know what I’ve told you. You know how poorly Miss Bostock is, in bed in the house. Think of others besides yourselves.”

And the scholars duly hushed themselves, and felt important, having somebody poorly in bed in the school-house.

That evening Harold came up to Emmie for a fatherly talk.

“What’s wrong between you an’ Dad more than usual?” he asked.

“Oh nothing,” said Emmie.

“Nay, come, it’s not nothing. It must be something rather special, if you’ve not told Fanny yet.”

“I don’t feel like talking, either,” she said.

“You’d better tell us. You’d feel better if you got it off your chest.”

“There’s nothing to tell,” said Emmie.

“Nay,” expostulated the young man. “If that’s the way you feel towards me and Fanny, then we know how matters stand.”

Emmie sulked in the bed with her new bran-bag, and Harold sat in the chair beside the little oil-stove — there was no fireplace in the bedroom — and felt offended.

“Oh damn you,” said Emmie. “You’re an old nuisance.”

“Ay, I know I’m an old nuisance, if I don’t just please you altogether,” said Harold, rather flattered than otherwise. “But it’s for your own good I ask you.

It's nothing to me personally — except I always want to do my best for you and for all of you, for Fanny's sake. Though it isn't so very much I can do. Still, I'll do my bit whenever I get a chance."

There was a slight pause after this oration.

"I had a walk with Gilbert Noon, if you want to know," said Emmie.

"What, with Gilbert Noon from Haysfall Technical? I should have thought he'd have known better. And did your Dad catch you?"

"Yes."

"And what did he say?"

"He knocked Gilbert Noon's cap off, and had his own cap knocked off back again, and they both fell down in the dark in a gooseberry bush, and all the blame laid on me, of course."

"You don't mean to say so! Did they go for one another?"

"I didn't stop to look. Our Dad's a devil — an interfering spying devil. He'll kill me before he's done."

And Emmie pulled the sheet over her face and blubbered underneath it. Poor Harold, who was in a whirlpool of emotion, sat pale as death in the chair, and felt like offering himself up as a burnt offering, if he could but find an altar with a fire going.

"Well now," he said at length. "You shouldn't let it get on your nerves. Dad means well, I suppose, only he goes a funny way about it. What do you take it to heart for? You can stop here for a bit till things blow over. Have you written to Walter George?"

He waited with beating heart for an answer. No answer: though a certain stilling of the under-sheet waters.

"Have you written to Walter George, Emmie?" asked Harold once more, in an excruciatingly gentle and pained voice.

A sniff from under the sheet.

"No" — from under the sheet.

Harold watched the sheet-top, which had grown damp during the bad weather, and, to its mournful blotting-paper blankness he said, tender, anxious, treading gingerly on the hot bricks of emotion:

"And aren't you going to?"

No answer from under the sheet.

"You're going to, aren't you Emmie?"

No motion from under the winter-landscape of a sheet.

"You're not in love with Gilbert Noon, are you Emmie? You'd never make such a mistake."

"No I'm not, fat-head."

This barked out from under the sheet gave Harold hopes of the re-emergence of the crocuses and scyllas of Emmie's head. Surely a thaw had set in beneath the damp snow-scape of the sheet.

"Well I'm glad to hear that, at any rate. Because I'm sure it would be a mistake. I'm sure Walter George is the man for you, Emmie; though I must say your treatment of him is such as most men wouldn't stand. I know I shouldn't. But he hasn't got a jealous nature, and that's why he's the right sort for you. — My word, if your Fanny treated me as you treat him, there'd be some fat in the fire, I can tell you. Somebody would have to look out. But different men, different ways. He's not a jealous nature, thank goodness."

Out popped crocuses, scyllas, christmas roses and japonica buds in one burst from beneath the wintry landscape. In short, Emmie's head came out of the sheet, and her nose was so red with crying that we felt constrained to make the japonica flower too early.

"Different men have different ways of showing it, you mean," she snapped. "He won't have any occasion to be jealous, once he isn't a hundred miles off. So there! I know what I'm doing."

"Well, I've always said so. I've said to him more than once, 'she'll be as true as wax once the knot is tied, Walter George, but she's not the one to leave at a loose end.' And he sees it plain enough. Only he doesn't think he's in a position yet —

"But I tell you what! Why don't you come here and help me? Miss Tewson is leaving at the end of February. You come here and help me, and you could see a bit more of one another while you make your minds up."

Harold had his little plan. Indeed, life is made up of little plans which people manufacture for one another's benefit. But this little plan Emmie had fore-ordained herself. It had occurred to her when she heard Miss Tewson's treble chiming after Harold's baritone in the school beneath. She wanted a little peace.

And so she began to feel somewhat better, and the pains began to diminish.

"You write him a note," said Harold, "and I'll ride over tomorrow night and take it him, and ask him to come over for the week-end. How about that, now? Does that suit?"

"I'll see," said Emmie.

But Harold knew the victory was won, and he went to bed with his Fanny as pleased as if all the angels were patting him on the back. And his Fanny was quite content that the marigolds of his self-satisfaction should shed themselves in her lap.

In the morning Emmie wrote to Walter George.

"Dear old bean-pod Lo and behold I'm at our Fanny's, and bad in bed, and

that mad with myself I could swear like a trooper. Come over and cheer me up a bit if you can. If you can't, come over to the funeral. Ollivoy! E.B.”

Ollivoy was Emmie's little pleasantry, substituted for au revoir. Sometimes she wrote olive-oil instead.

The day was Friday. She listened to the business of the school, and at last felt happier in bed. She felt what a luxury it was, to lie in bed and hear school going on: hateful school. She heard the children go shouting out, at midday, into the rain. There was rain on the window and on the wet bare creeper stalks. She wondered if Harold would ride ten miles through the weather.

Listening, she heard thud-thud-thud, and realised it was Fanny knocking with the poker on the fire-back downstairs, to summon Harold in from the school-room. This was Fanny's wireless message to her overdue schoolmaster. Presently the sister, rather blowsy but pleasant-looking, came up with stewed rabbit and a baked onion. Harold had thought out the baked onion. It was such a good receipt for earache and neuralgia of the face — a hot onion placed against the ear: therefore why not just as good taken internally, for neuralgia of the stomach. Nourishing as well. He explained to the two sisters, who had been school-teachers as well as he, what proportion of sugar there was in onions, and what proportion of other matter: something very encouraging, though we forget exactly the ratio. So Emmie plunged her fork into the nutritious bulb, which sent its fumes wildly careering round the room, and even tickled the nostrils of afternoon scholars, so that they became hungry again at five past two. We little know the far-reaching results of our smallest actions.

Chapter X.

Introduces Walter George.

The afternoon, thank goodness, cleared up, and Harold prepared his acetylene lamp till the whole village knew he was going to ride out on his bicycle, and wondered if Miss Bostock was taken worse, you know.

He reached Warsop by half-past six, having ridden against the wind. Walter George did not come in till seven, because the bank was doing overtime. When he came, Harold greeted him as man to man, and met with a similar greeting back again.

Walter George — his family name was Whiffen, since trifles matter — was a nice, well-built, plump lad of twenty-one, with round rosy cheeks and neat hair cut rather long and brushed carefully sideways: not backwards: who looked exactly like a choir-boy grown into a High-School boy, and a High-School boy grown into a bank-clerk, and a bank-clerk just budding for a nice, confidential, comfortable-looking, eminently satisfactory manager of a little bank in some little industrial place in the provinces. Already he inspired confidence, he looked so like the right kind of choir-boy grown into the right kind of high-school boy, the kind that mothers find so satisfactory as a product of their own.

And indubitably he was gone on Emmie. We prefer the slang, as having finer shades than the cant though correct phrase in love with. In-love-with means just anything. But to be gone on somebody is quite different from being smitten by her, or sweet on her, or barmy over her. Walter George was gone on Emmie, and he was neither smitten by her nor barmy over her.

“Hello Harold! You’re a stranger.”

Walter George Whiffen was just a tinge patronising towards the bicycle-bespattered, wind-harrowed young schoolmaster.

“You’ve not ridden over from Eakrast?”

Why, you bank-clerk, do you think he’d flown over, with bicycle clips round his trouser-ankles and spots of mud on his nose.

“Yes, I’ve come with a message for you.”

“For me?”

Immediately Walter George’s rosy face looked anxious.

“We’ve got Emmie bad at our house.”

The choir-boy — he was no more at this moment — looked with round eyes

on Harold.

“Bad!” he re-echoed. “How long?”

“Oh, since Tuesday. She’s been in a rare way, I tell you: awful amount of pain.”

“Where?”

“Why, the doctor says neuralgia of the stomach, but I say it was more like cramp of the stomach. We were up half the night two nights with hot bran-bags. I thought she’d go off any minute, as true as I’m here I did. She couldn’t speak, and her face went that funny. Cramp of the stomach catches you and you die like a fly, almost before you know where you are. I was thankful when she came round a bit, with hot bran-bags and hot water-bottles to her feet, I can tell you.”

The choir-boy stood with his mouth open and his eyes blue and round, and did not say a word for some moments.

“Had she got it when she came?” he asked at length.

“Bad, she had. She’d got it bad when I came in and found her at tea-time. It took her I don’t know how long to walk from the station. She had to keep sitting down by the roadside, and going off in a dead faint. — It’s a thousand wonders she ever got to our house: our Fanny says so an’ all.”

The choir-boy’s pleasant mouth, that still looked more like chocolate than cigarettes, began to quiver, and he turned aside his face as his eyes filled with tears. Harold, also moved too deeply, turned his pale and hollow face in the opposite direction, and so they remained for some minutes like a split statue of Janus, looking two ways.

“Did she ask for me?” quavered the choir-boy’s voice in the east.

“She did,” sounded the schoolmaster’s voice from the west. “She sent you a note.” And he took the missive from his pocket.

Then the two halves of the Janus statue turned to one another as if for the first time, and the choir-boy wiped his eyes with a dashing and gentlemanly silk handkerchief which he had bought for himself at the best shop in Warsop. Having wiped his eyes he took the letter. Having read the contents he looked at the envelope. After which he kissed the note-paper, and let Harold see him do it. Harold approved heartily, and knew that was how he himself would feel if it was Fanny. The hearts of the two young men beat as one.

“Poor little child,” said the high-school boy, wiping his eyes again. “How did she get it?”

“It’s nerves, you know. She’s a bundle of nerves — / know from Fanny. She lives on her spirit, till her nerves break down. And she’d had a row with her father again. He doesn’t understand her a bit.” This last from the psychological schoolmaster with some spleen.

“Had he been tormenting her?” asked the bank-clerk.

“Why he makes her life a misery,” said the schoolmaster, with a curl of the lip.

The bank-clerk, almost a man now, looked aside and became red with profound indignation.

“She’s only a bit of a thing you know,” he said brokenly.

“I tell you,” rejoined Harold. “She ran away to Fanny and me for a bit of protection.”

“Damned devil,” murmured the bank-clerk, making his brows heavy against the bugbear.

“Oh but she’s a king to what she was,” said Harold. “And that’s one thing, she’ll be better nearly as sudden as she got bad: I’m hoping so, anyhow. She’s eating a bit today. She seemed fair comforted when I told her to ask you over for the week-end, and when I said she could stop with us and take Miss Tewson’s place. Don’t you think that would be better all round?”

“Yes — ” but the young gentleman wasn’t listening. “I’ll ride back with you tonight.”

“Oh I shouldn’t,” said Harold. “Can’t you come tomorrow and stop over Sunday? That’s what we were counting on.”

“Yes, I shall be only too glad. But I’ll see her tonight.”

The high-school boy had no sooner uttered this resolve, and was fixing his clouded brow like another Roland, than his landlady tapped at the door and hovered half way into the little parlour. She was a nice old lady with a lace cap.

“Your pardon, young gentlemen — but tea is ready for you.”

“Oh!” and the high-school boy became the incipient bank-manager. He put his hand lightly through Harold’s arm. “Come on. We have dinner at one o’clock here, and a late tea. Mrs Slater can’t cope with dinner at night. We’ll sit down, shall we?” And he led the half-willing Harold to the door.

“No thanks,” said Harold. “I’ll be off. I had my tea before I came. I’d better be getting back.”

“Oh no you won’t — not till you’ve had a cup of tea.” And he led his friend hospitably across the little hall or entrance passage, to where his landlady stood hovering in the doorway of the little dining-room.

“Mrs Slater — you know Mr Wagstaff, don’t you?”

“Indeed I do. Indeed I do. Come and sit down both of you.”

She spoke in a small, piping voice, quite briskly for the sake of the young men. But her face looked remote, as if she hardly belonged. She seemed to be looking across the gulfs which separate us from early Victorian days, a little dazedly and wanly.

Walter George, of course, did not dream of going without his tea. He ate large quantities of toast and bloater-paste and jam and cake, and Harold tucked in also. And the little woman in a lace cap looked at them from far away behind the teapot — not that it was geographically far away, only ethnologically — and was glad they were there, but seemed a little bewildered, as if she could hardly understand their language.

Harold, as appetite began to be appeased, demonstrated methodically to the bank-clerk that it was no use his, Walter George's, riding to Eakrast tonight, that he would only knock himself up for tomorrow and spoil Emmie's chance of a perfect recovery and her bliss in a perfect meeting. Of which the young gentleman allowed himself to be convinced. Therefore he begged to be allowed to write a line in answer to Emmie's. Therefore Harold sat on pins and needles while the young Tristan covered much paper. Harold, of course, was thinking of Fanny and the baby, and how they'd be getting nervous *etc. etc.*

But at length Walter George sealed his letter and addressed it to Miss E. Bostock. He wrung Harold's hand in the highroad, and watched the acetylene flare elope down the hill.

Chapter XI.

Lovers' Meeting.

“My precious, poor little thing, I felt my heart was breaking when Harold told me the news. Little was I expecting such a shock as I came in late from the bank, where we are doing overtime for the next fortnight. Little did I think you were so near, and in such a condition. I almost broke down completely when Harold told me. I wanted to come at once, but by the time I had had my tea and given Harold a cup it was after eight o'clock, and he said you'd be settling down for the night before I could get to Eakrast. Not wishing to imperil your night's rest, I have put off coming to my own little angel till tomorrow, but oh, I don't know how I keep away, for I feel my heart torn for you. I have never had a greater shock than when I heard of your illness. I picture you so small and fragile, with your beautiful baby face, and could kill myself to think of all you have had to suffer. Why these things should be, I don't know. I only know it shall not happen again if I can help it.

Well, my darling little treasure, Harold is waiting for this, so I must not keep him. What a splendid fellow he is. How thankful I am to heaven that you have his roof to shelter you and his arm to sustain you. He is indeed a man in a thousand, in a million I might say. I shall never be sufficiently grateful to him for taking care of you at this critical juncture. But when I think of your father I feel that never can the name of father cross my lips to him. He is not my idea of a father, though unfortunately his type is only too common in the world. Why are children given to such men, who are not fit even to have a dog?

Oh, my little child-love, I long to see your flower-face again. If I am not unexpectedly detained I shall be at Eakrast by three o'clock tomorrow, but don't be anxious if I am a little later. Man proposes, God disposes — unless there is really the devil having a share in the matter, which I believe sincerely there is, otherwise you would not be suffering as you are. I hope the pains are gone, or at least diminished by now. I cannot bear to think of you in agony, and am afraid Mrs Slater may see in my face what I feel.

Well goodbye my own sweetest little kitten and angel. I feel I can't wait till tomorrow to fold you in my arms and tell you once more how I love you. Oh if we could only unite our perfect love and be as happy as Harold and Fanny. I feel we must risk it very soon, funds or no funds. This kind of thing must not and

shall not continue.

With one last kiss from your unhappy lover, and one last hug before you go to sleep I am your own ever-loving Walter George Whiffen.”

Emmie read this effusion once more when she woke in the morning, and was satisfied. It was what she expected, in the agreeable line, and what can woman have more? What can satisfy her better, than to get what she expects? Emmie, moreover, knew what to expect, for she had had various such letters from various authors. Walter George was perhaps the most elegant of her correspondents, though not the lengthiest. She had known one young collier who would run to six pages of his own emotions over her baby face *etc.* Oh, she knew all about her baby face and “our perfect love.” This same perfect love seemed to pop up like a mushroom, even on the shallow soil of a picture-postcard from the sea-side. Oh, we little know, we trembling fiction-writers, how much perfect love there is in the post at this minute. A penny stamp will carry it about hither and thither like a dust-storm through our epistolary island. For in this democratic age love dare not show his face, even for five minutes, not even to a young tram-conductor, unless in the light of perfection.

So Emmie took her perfect love with her breakfast bacon, and remembered that morning had been at seven some little while back, at which hour God is particularly in His heaven, and that hence, according to Mr Browning, all was well with the world. Like any other school-teacher, she had a number of “repetition” odds and ends of poetry in her stock-cupboard. So why shouldn’t she, as well as some Earl’s daughter, enrich the dip of her bacon with Browning, to borrow Hood’s pun.

The day was fine, and her only problem was whether to get up or not. She would have had no problem if only she had brought her sky-blue woolly dressing jacket along with her. Failing this, how would she manage in a white Shetland shawl of baby’s, and Fanny’s best nighty? She decided she would manage.

The morning was fine. Harold went pelting off on his bicycle to buy a few extra provisions. Emmie had the baby in bed with her, and smelt Fanny’s cakes and pies cooking down below. Dinner was a scratch meal of sausages, and Emmie had an egg instead.

Harold brought her some sprigs of yellow jasmine to put by her bed, and tittivated up the room a bit, according to his and her fancy. Then he left her with her toilet requisites. She was a quick, natty creature. She washed and changed in a few minutes, and did her hair. When Harold tapped, to carry away the wash-water, asking if he could come in, she answered yes, and went on with her job.

She was propped up in bed, with a silver-backed mirror propped facing her,

against her knees, and she was most carefully, most judiciously powdering her face and touching up her lips with colour. Harold stood with the pail in his hand and watched her.

“Well if you don’t take the biscuit!” he said.

“Which biscuit?” she said absorbedly. “Hand me the towel.”

And she concentrated once more on her nose, which was her Achilles’ heel, her sore point.

“You fast little madam,” said Harold. His Fanny never “made up.” He wouldn’t have stood it. But he quite liked it in Emmie. And he loved being present during the mysteries of the process.

“Go on,” she said. “I feel so bare and brazen without a whiff of powder on my nose.”

He gave a shout of laughter.

“I like that,” he said.

“It’s a fact though. I feel as uncomfortable without a bit of powder as if I’d forgot to put my stockings on.”

“Well it never struck me in that light before. We live and learn. I bet you think other women barefaced hussies, if they don’t powder.”

“They are. They don’t know how to make the best of themselves, and then they show the cheek of the Old Lad.”

She put her head sideways, screwed her mouth a little, and carefully, very carefully put on a stroke of rouge.

“You think it improves you, do you?” he asked, standing with the pail in his hand, and watching curiously.

“Why,” she said, not taking her eyes off the mirror. “What do you think yourself?”

“Me? Nay, I’m no judge.”

“Oh well, now you’ve said it. People who are no judge generally do the judging.”

He felt pinched in his conscience.

“Ay, well — I think I like the genuine article best,” he said walking away.

“Go on, you’re no judge,” she said coldly.

She finished her toilet, disposed her shawl carefully, and proceeded to the last task of polishing her nails. She looked at her hands. How beautiful they had become whilst she was in bed: how white and smooth! What lovely little hands she had! She thought to herself she had never seen such beautiful hands on anybody else. She looked at them, and polished her small finger-nails with consummate satisfaction. Then she tried her rings first on one finger and then on another, and thought the bits of gold and colour showed up the loveliness of the

skin. She enjoyed herself for half an hour, fiddling with her own hands and admiring them and wondering over their superiority to all other hands.

We feel bound to show our spite by saying her hands were rather meaningless in their prettiness.

While thus engaged she heard a loud prring — prring of a bicycle bell outside in the road. Heavens! And it was only a quarter to four. She hastily dropped her scissors into the little drawer, and took the sevenpenny copy of the *Girl of the Limberlost* into one hand, and her best hanky in the other. So equipped, and framed behind by the linen and crochet-edging of one of Fanny's best pillow-slips, she was prepared.

She heard voices, and heavy feet on the stairs. It was her *Childe Rolande* to the dark tower come, ushered up by Harold.

She looked for him as he came through the doorway, and he looked for her as he crossed the threshold. Never was so mutual a greeting of tender faces. He was carrying a bunch of pheasant's-eye narcissus and mimosa: luckily it was Saturday, and he could get them at the shop.

"Hello old thing!" sounded his overcharged voice.

"Hello!" her deep, significant brevity.

And he bent over the bed, and she put her arms round his shoulders, and they silently kissed, and Harold in the doorway felt how beautiful and how right it was. We only wish there might be a few more ands, to prolong the scene indefinitely.

But Walter George slowly disengaged himself and stood up, whilst she gazed upward at him. His hair was beautifully brushed and parted at the side, and he looked down at her. Their looks indeed were locked. He silently laid the flowers at her side, and sank down on one knee beside the bed. But the bed was rather high, and if he kneeled right down he was below the emotional and dramatic level. So he could only sink down on one poised foot, like a worshipper making his deep reverence before the altar, in a Catholic church, and staying balanced low on one toe. It was rather a gymnastic feat. But then what did Walter George do his Sandow exercises for in the morning, if not to fit him for these perfect motions.

So he springily half-kneeled beside the bed, and kept his face at the true barometric level of tenderness. His one arm was placed lightly around her, his other gently held her little wrist. She lay rather sideways, propped on her pillows, and they looked into each other's eyes. If Harold had not been there to spectate they would have done just the same for their own benefit. Their faces were near to one another, they gazed deep into each other's eyes. Worlds passed between them, as goes without saying.

“Are you poorly, my love?” asked Walter George Whiffen, in a tone so exquisitely adjusted to the emotional level as to bring tears to the eyes.

“Getting better,” she murmured, and Harold thought that never, never would he have thought Emmie’s little voice could be so rich with tenderness.

He was turning to steal away, feeling he could no longer intrude in the sacred scene, and the two dramatists were just feeling disappointed that he was going, when fate caused a rift in the lute.

Fanny, like a scientific school-teacher, polished her bedroom floors. The mat on which Childe Rolande was so springily poised on one foot slid back under the pressure of the same foot, so his face went floundering in the bed. And when, holding the side of the bed, he tried to rise on the same original foot, the mat again wasn’t having any, so his head ducked down like an ass shaking flies off its ears. When at last he scrambled to his feet he was red in the face, and Emmie had turned and lifted the beautiful flowers between her hands.

“I tell our Fanny we shall be breaking our necks on these floors before we’ve done,” said Harold, pouring his ever-ready spikenard.

“Don’t they smell lovely!” said Emmie, holding up the flowers to the nose of Walter George.

“They aren’t too strong for you, are they?”

“They might be at night.”

“Should I put them in water for you?” interrupted Harold.

“Ay, do my dear,” said Emmie benevolently to him.

And he went away for a jar, pleased as a dog with two tails. When the flowers were arranged, he spoke for the last time.

“You don’t feel this room cold, do you, Walter George?”

“Not a bit,” said Walter George.

“Then I’ll go and see what Fanny is doing.”

Now the perfect lovers were left together, and tenderness fairly smoked in the room. They kissed, and held each other in their arms, and felt superlative. Walter George had been wise enough to take a chair, abandoning that kneeling curtseying-knight posture. So he was at liberty to take Emmie right in his arms, without fear of the ground giving way beneath him. And he folded her to his bosom, and felt he was shielding her from the blasts of fate. Soft, warm, tender little bud of love, she would unfold in the greenhouse of his bosom. Soft, warm, tender through her thin nightgown, she sent the blood to his head till he seemed to fly with her through dizzy space, to dare the terrors of the illimitable. Warm, and tender, and yielding, she made him so wildly sure of his desire for her that his manliness was now beyond question. He was a man among men henceforth, and would not be abashed before any of the old stagers. Heaven save and bless us, how badly

he did but want her, and what a pleasure it was to be so sure of the fact.

“I tell you what,” he said. “We’ll get married and risk it.”

“Risk what?”

“Why everything. We will, shall we. I can’t stand it any longer.”

“But what about everybody?” said Emmie.

“Everybody can go to hell.”

And here we say, as Napoleon said of Goethe:

“Voilà un homme.”

He held her in his arms. And this was serious spooning. This was actual love-making, to develop into marriage. It was cuddly rather than spoony: the real thing, and they knew it. Ah, when two hearts mean business, what a different affair it is from when they only flutter for sport! From the budding passion in the Eakrast bedroom many a firm cauliflower would blossom, in after days, many a Sunday dinner would ripen into fruit.

The lovers were very cosy, murmuring their little conversation between their kisses. The course of their true-love was as plain as a pike-staff. It led to a little house in a new street, and an allotment garden not far off. And the way thither, with kisses and the little plannings, was as sweet as if it had led to some detached villa, or even to one of the stately homes of England. It is all the same in the end: safe as houses, as the saying goes. Emmie was now taking the right turning, such as you have taken, gentle reader, you who sit in your comfortable home with this book on your knee. Give her then your blessing, for she hardly needs it any more, and play a tune for her on the piano.

“The cottage homes of England How thick they crowd the land.”

Or if that isn’t good enough for you:

“The stately homes of England Are furnished like a dream.”

Play the tune, and let that be your portion, for you are not going to take any part in the burning bliss of buying the furniture, or the tragedy of the wedding-presents.

“There’s a little grey home in the west.”

Pleasantly the hours passed. The party gathered for a common chat in Emmie’s bedroom before supper. The table was laid downstairs, and there was polony as well as cheese and cocoa, all waiting invitingly: the cocoa still in its tin, but standing at attention on the table. The clock ticked, the baby was in bed, the kitchen was a cosy feast, if only they would come down and tackle it. The clock struck ten.

And still the party in the bedroom did not break up. Still the supper waited

below. Emmie was making her droll speeches, Harold was exercising his dry wit, and the high-school boy was laughing out loud, and Fanny was saying: "Oh my word, what about baby?" Whereupon they all lifted a listening ear.

Chapter XII.

The Interloper.

In one of these moments of strained attention a motor-cycle was heard slowly pulsing down the road outside. It came to a stop. The strength of its white lights showed under the bedroom blind, in spite of Emmie's lamp. She knew at once what it was, and restraint came over her.

In another minute there was the crunching of a footstep on the path below, and a loud knock at the back door. The company in the bedroom looked at one another in consternation, even affright. Harold summoned his master-of-the-house courage and went downstairs. The three in the bedroom listened with beating hearts.

"Is this Mr Wagstaff's?"

"Yes."

"Is Miss Bostock here?"

"Yes."

"Can I see her?"

"She's in bed."

"Ay, her mother told me she was bad. Is she asleep?"

"No, she's not asleep."

"Can I speak to her a minute?"

"Who is it?"

"Gilbert Noon."

"Oh! Is it anything particular?"

"No. But I just want to speak to her. Just tell her, will you?"

Harold was so flustered he went upstairs and said:

"Gilbert Noon wants to see Emmie."

Childe Rolande and Fanny stood open-mouthed.

"All right, let him come up then," said Emmie sharply.

"Should I?" said Harold.

"Don't look so ormin'. Let him come up," repeated Emmie in the same sharp tone.

Harold looked at her strangely, looked round the room in bewilderment. They listened while he went downstairs. Gilbert still stood outside in the dark.

"Shall you come up?" said Harold.

And after a moment.

“There’s the stairfoot here. Let me get a candle.”

“I can see,” said the bass voice.

The light of the little bedroom lamp showed on the landing at the top of the stairs.

Heavy feet were ascending. Emmie gathered her shawl on her breast. Gilbert appeared in his rubber overalls in the doorway, his face cold-looking, his hair on end after having taken his cap off.

“Good-evening,” he said, standing back in the doorway at the sight of the company.

“Do you know Mr Whiffen, Mr Noon?” said Emmie sharply. “My elect, so to speak.”

Gilbert shook hands with Childe Rolande, then with Fanny, whom he knew slightly, and then with Harold, to whom he was now introduced. Harold had gone rather stiff and solemn, like an actor in a play.

There was a moment’s pause.

“Well, how are we?” said Gilbert rather awkwardly to Emmie.

“Oh, just about in the pink, like,” she replied. She was cross, and showed it.

He was rather disconcerted.

“I saw your mother this afternoon,” he began.

“Where?” she snapped. “Sit down some of you, and make a bit of daylight. It’s like being in a wood.”

Fanny handed Gilbert a chair, Childe Rolande sat assertively on the bed, at the foot, and Harold went to the next bedroom and was heard bumping the legs of a chair as he carried it in, while Fanny looked agonies for baby.

“Where did you see mother?” asked Fanny pleasandy.

“At Lewie Goddard’s.”

“And she was all right?”

“Yes — seemed so. Worried, you know.”

“What, about Emmie?”

“Yes — and one of the children with measles: but getting better, I believe.”

“Tissie hasn’t got them then?” asked Fanny.

“I didn’t hear your mother say so.”

“Because when they start, they usually go through the house. I hope baby won’t catch them.”

“There’s no reason why she should, is there?”

“Oh, they’re very bad in Eakrast “

And Emmie, Walter George, and Harold sat like stuffed ducks while this conversation wound its way through all the circumstances of measles in the

Warsop Vale region.

Emmie had not told Walter George about Gilbert and the fracas. She had warned the other two not to speak of it. And now she was in such a temper she could not, for her life, think of anything to say. She sat propped up in bed, looking very blooming, but with a frown between her little brows. She twisted and twisted her ring with its big ruby, round and round her finger, and grew more tense as she felt the Fanny-Gilbert conversation running down. She had asked Harold to bring Gilbert up because she always preferred to trust rather to her ready wit than to her powers for inventing a plausible lie in answer to troublesome questions. And now she was as stupid as a stuffed owl, and couldn't say a word. The conversation died, there was an awful vacuum of a pause. Meanwhile Emmie sat in the bed with her head dropped, twisting and twisting her ring. In another minute she would be flying into tears: and Walter George sat near her feet worse than a monument.

Harold Hardraade lifted his head.

"You came on a motor-bike didn't you, Mr Noon?"

"Yes," said Gilbert.

"I thought I heard one come up the lane."

"I lost my way the other side of Blidworth and got to Sutton before I knew where I was. And then coming through Huthwaite I had something wrong with my engine, and had to stop and have that seen to."

"My word, you have had a journey. What time did you start?"

"Why I was coming down Woodhouse hill at a quarter to six."

"My word, and it's after ten. You've been out of your road some."

"I have. I don't know these roads round here, and it's like riding in a puzzle."

"Oh, the roads through the forest and round-about, they're very misleading. You'd best have come through Thoresby, you know. It's a bit longer, but it's a better road. What made you go Blidworth way?"

Started an itinerary conversation between the motor-cyclist and the push-cyclist, whilst Emmie still turned her ring, and Childe Rolande stared inquiringly and rather mortified at the newcomer. He resented the intrusion deeply. Not only was he forced to smell a rat, but even he must have the rat thrust under his nostrils. He sat rather stiff on the bed, and turned the side of his rosy cheek unrelentingly towards the bothered Emmie.

The itinerary conversation slowed down, and Fanny felt she must get out of it. She couldn't stand it.

"I'll go and make the cocoa," she said, rising. "You'll have a cup of cocoa, won't you, Mr Noon?"

"No thanks, I won't trouble you."

“Yes do. It’s no trouble. I’ll make you one then. Harold you’ll go to baby if he cries.”

“All right,” said Harold.

And when Fanny departed a hoar-frost of silence once more settled on the dislocated party. Harold began to get a resigned martyr-at-the-stake look, Walter George was becoming thoroughly sulky, and Emmie was breathing short. Gilbert sat looking rather vacant — a trick he had when he was ill at ease.

Suddenly came a thin wail from the unknown.

“There’s baby,” said Harold, and with all the alacrity of a young husband he quitted the room.

The frost now became a black frost. It seemed as if each of the three of them remaining in the bedroom would have been killed rather than utter a word to either of the others. A deadlock! Lips and hearts were padlocked. The trinity sat as if enchanted in a crystal pillar of dense and stupid silence. Emmie felt the pains coming on again, Gilbert felt how cold his feet were with the cycling, and Walter George felt that a can-opener would never open his heart or lips again. He was soldered down.

From the next bedroom they could hear all the soothing sounds of the young husband, sounds anything but soothing to one who is not a first-born and an infant in arms. From below they heard the clink of tea-spoons and smelled the steam of stirring cocoa. And suddenly Gilbert lifted his head.

“What ring is that?” he asked.

Emmie started, and stared defiantly.

“What, this? It’s my engagement ring.”

“Mine,” said Childe Rolande, with a sulky yelp. Whereupon he became nearly as red as the re-composed ruby.

And immediately the frost settled down again, the padlocks snapped shut, and the solder went hard in the burning lid-joints of Walter-George’s heart. For a few seconds, Gilbert went to sleep, the cold air having numbed him. Walter George sat on the edge of the bed and looked over blackly at his toe-tips. Emmie tried to scheme, and almost got hold of the tail of a solution, when it evaded her again.

A soft, very soft, fear-of-waking-baby voice floated like a vapour up the stairs.

“Cocoa’s ready.”

Gilbert woke and looked round at the door, but did not stir. Childe Rolande did not bend his gloomy looks, but stretched his neck downwards over the bed-edge and stubbornly contemplated his nice brown shoes as if he had heard no sound.

“Go and have your cocoa,” said Emmie, speaking to t’other-or-which, as the saying is. But she was completely ineffectual. Gilbert sat dreamily, vacandy on,

and Childe Rolande sank his chin nearer and nearer his knees, as he perched on the edge of the bed like some ungraceful bird.

Emmie now gave way to resignation. Was she not the base of this obtuse-angled triangle, this immortal trinity, this framework of the universe? It was not for her to break the three-cornered tension. Let fate have its way. If Gilbert had not given himself to vacancy the problem might seriously have concerned him: how to resolve an obtuse-angled triangle into a square of the same dimensions. But he was glotzing, if we may borrow the word.

But eternity has rested long enough on this tripod footing, the universe has been framed quite long enough inside a triangle, and the doctrine of the trinity has had its day. Time now the sacred figure, which magicians declare to be malevolent, dissolved into its constituents, or disappeared in a resultant of forces.

Oh Deus ex machina, get up steam and come to our assistance, for this obtuse-angled triangle looks as if it would sit there stupidly forever in the spare bedroom at Eakrast. Which would be a serious misfortune to us, who have to make our bread and butter chronicling the happy marriage and the prize-taking cauliflowers of Emmie and Walter George, and the further lapses of Mr Noon.

So, Deus ex machina, come. Come, God in the Machine, Come! Be invoked! Puff thy blessed steam, or even run by electricity, but come, oh Machine-God, thou Wheel of Fate and Fortune, spin thy spokes of destiny and roll into the Eakrast bedroom, lest Time stand still and Eternity remain a deadlock.

Is our prayer in vain? We fear it is. The God in the machine is perhaps too busy elsewhere. Alas, no wheel will incline its axle in our direction, no petrol will vaporise into spirit for our sakes. Emmie, and Childe Rolande, and Mr Noon may sit forever in the Eakrast bedroom.

Well then, let them. Let them go to hell. We can at least be as manly as Walter George, in our heat of the moment.

Gentle reader, this is the end of Mr Noon and Emmie. If you really must know, Emmie married Walter George, who reared prize cauliflowers, whilst she reared dear little Georgian children, and all went happy ever after.

As for Mr Noon! Ah, Mr Noon! There is a second volume in store for you, dear reader. Pray heaven there may not be a third.

But the second volume is in pickle. The cow in this vol. having jumped over the moon, in the next the dish, dear reader, shall run away with the spoon. Scandalous the elopement, and a decree nisi for the fork. Which is something to look forward to.

PART II.

Chapter XIII.

High Germany.

The sun was shining brightly when Mr Noon awoke in his bedroom in the ancient and beer-brewing city of Munich, capital of Bavaria, queen of the lovely southern lands of Germany. Does not the Marienkirche lift her twin brown cupolas capped with green copper over roofs and palaces and look pleasantly round her this morning? For behold, the snow is melting, and is piled in heaps in the thawing streets. Behold, the sun is shining, and the time of the singing of the birds has almost come. Behold, the long, watchful line of the ice-pale Alps stands like a row of angels with flaming swords in the distance, barring us from the paradise of the South. Behold the land of the thawing snow stretches northward and westward to the lakes like chrysoprase this morning, and the foothills of more Alps, and the rolling plains of Germany, and the islands of the west. Yes, the islands of the west, meaning the British Isles. We will say Islands of the Blest, if you wish it, gentle reader.

Well then, here you are and the rolling plains of Germany, and the islands of the Blest. Yes, the islands of the Blest, meaning the British Isles. Now you've got it.

After which I hope I can say what I like. For if that sop doesn't sweeten Cerberus, I hope it'll choke him.

No, I'm not going to tell you how Mr Noon got out of the Eakrast bedroom; I am not. Eat the sop I've given you, and don't ask for more till I've got up the steep incline of the next page and have declined like a diminished traveller over the brow of the third.

You'll not hear another word about Emmie. In fact there is no Emmie. I saw someone coming down the street when I was in Woodhouse last Christmas, and I thought I knew her walk. She was in a pale-coloured fur coat and a cap of black-seal-fur, and she had a little girl by the hand, a little girl clad in a white curly-woolly coat and white woollen gaiters. "Dear me," thought I, "what a lot of gentry crops up in Woodhouse nowadays."

So I crossed the road, beaming becomingly.

"Why how are you E "

But the child raised its round blue eyes, and I saw a chorister hovering.

“Mrs Whiffen,” I concluded.

“Quite well thanks. How are you?”

How brisk, how sharp, how rapped out, how coined in the mint of the realm! If the head of King George had been embossed on every one of her words, as it is on pennies, it could not have given a sounder ring of respectability and genuine currency. I felt like a man who is caught trying to change a bad shilling, and hurriedly fished a few half-pence of well-worn small-talk out of my purse, and rushed the risky shilling back to cover. I wouldn't have pronounced the name Emmie, not for worlds, in the presence of that fur coat and infant.

There! I said you wouldn't hear another word about Emmie, and you haven't. If I have mentioned Mrs Whiffen, as she sauntered down Knarborough Road in a pale-coloured fur coat and a black seal-coney cap, leading a little woolly-curly, gaitered girl by the hand, I have done so designedly, to prevent your thinking, gentle reader, that I have no presentable acquaintances at all.

And Mr Noon! You have heard that he awoke in his bedroom in the ancient, royal, and beer-brewing city of Munich. Well, and what by that? Is there anything wrong with it? I expect you are waiting for me to continue that the bedroom was a room in a brothel: or in a third-rate and shady hotel: or in a garret, or in a messy artistic-bohemian house where a lot of lousy painters and students worked their abominations. Oh, I know you, gentle reader. In your silent way you would like to browbeat me into it. But I've kicked over the traces at last, and I shall kick out the splashboard of this apple-cart if I have any more expectations to put up with.

Mr Noon awoke in none of these places. He awoke in a very nice bedroom with a parquet floor and very nice Biedermeier furniture of golden-coloured satin-wood or something of that sort, with a couple of handsome dark-red-and-dark-blue oriental rugs lying on the lustrous amber polish of the parquet floor. He awoke with his nose trying to emerge over the white cumulous cloud of his swollen but downy overbolster. He awoke with the sun coming through the double windows, with a handful of gentian looking very blue on his round Biedermeier table, and a servant in a dark-red cotton dress entering with a cup of eight-o'clock tea. He sat up quite comfortably in bed to take his tea, and said Guten Morgen to Julie. I say he sat up comfortably because the air in the room was dulcet and warm, for the house had central heating.

Now, gende reader, I had better give you time to readjust yourself. You had better go upstairs and change your dress and above all, your house shoes. You had better tell the maid to light the drawing-room fire, or light it yourself if there is nothing else for it. In the Isles of the Blest every house has its drawing-room, and the drawing-room fire is always lighted to receive company.

“Let your light so shine — ”

And while you are changing your dress let me explain that we stand upon another footing now. Not that we have lost a leg in Badajos’s breaches, but that we have gone up a peg or two. Man is mercurial, and goes up and down in the social scale like a barometer in the weather. This I hope you will allow, gentle reader, even if you be at the moment perched high upon Mount Batten, or on that Windsorial eminence which you share with nothing but soap.

What is man, his days are as grass. Though he rise today above the vulgar democratic leaves of grass as high as a towering stalk of fools-parsley, tomorrow the scythe of the mower will leave him as low as the dandelion. What is a social status nowadays? The wind passeth over it and it is gone, though the place thereof may see it again next summer, even the crown of the cow-parsnip soaring above the herd of green.

While you are changing your dress, gentle reader, don’t get in a stew because you have never heard of Biedermeier or because you don’t know what Bavaria is doing in connection with such a disreputable land as Germany. Bavaria can’t help it, and Biedermeier doesn’t matter. We can’t all be born in the Isles of the Blest; only a few of us fortunate ones: *Te Deum laudamus*.

Let me re-introduce you, by your leave, to Mr Noon. Kindly forget that it ever rhymed with spoon. In German a spoon is a *Löffel*, and Noon is now. It isn’t my fault that Noon is Now in German — but so it is. So pray cast out of your mind that spoon association, and be prepared for the reincarnation of Mr Now. Noon is Now. That is, he is at his zenith, and you, gentle reader, may even belong to the afternoon.

“Gentle reader, may I introduce you — Mr Noon.”

Bow, gentle reader, bow across space to Munich, ancient capital of ancient kings, known to the British youth on the beautiful postage-stamps. Beautiful postage-stamps of Bavaria, Bayern so beautifully lettered, do they now stamp black ink words of obliteration across you? Ah well, they didn’t in Mr Noon’s day. And therefore, gentle reader, be on your best behaviour at once, for the ancient and royal court is only just round the corner, and who knows what *Kammerjunker* or what *Lady in Waiting* may be casting a supercilious eye over your manners.

“The Herr Professor is already there,” said the maidservant, tapping and entering once more as Mr Noon tied his bow tie: the identical tie he had tied for Patty and for Emmie.

“Right,” said Mr Noon.

And in another moment he was striding across the amber flooring of the hall, to the breakfast room.

“Ha! There you are. Julie! Julie!” sang the Herr Professor, covering his fretful impatience with a certain jocularly. He was a smallish man with white hair and big white moustache and little white imperial and very blue eyes and a face not very old. In fact he was just over fifty, and restless and fidgety. He had spent ten years in England, so spoke English well, if in the rather hard-breathing, German fashion. How Gilbert came to be living in his flat I shan’t tell you. I am sick of these explanations. Sufficient that the Herr Professor was called Alfred Kramer, and that he held a chair in the university.

He had brought various little English fads with him to Munich, and one of these was Quaker Oats. Julie appeared with the plates of Quaker Oats, and the two men sat down opposite one another. The professor — we will call him Alfred and so spite all titled Germany — seemed to be pondering. He tucked his napkin under his chin and ate his porridge without saying a word. Catching sight of a spot on the linen tablecloth, he poked it with a carefully-manicured fingernail, like a child. His eyes had a petulant look.

Gilbert, who was not to be outmatched in a game of silence, contented himself with his own thoughts. He half-divined the petulance and fussiness of his host, and therefore withheld his attention. Though he lived with the professor house-free, he gave certain valuable assistance with a book his host was providing, and felt he earned his salt. He knew that Alfred at the bottom was glad of his presence. For the fretful, petulant professor was one of those Germans who find the presence of an Englishman soothing and reassuring, seem to derive a certain stability from it. And therefore Gilbert took no notice of moods, and Alfred was careful not to be really offensive.

He was a sensitive soul, really, the fussy, rather woe-begone looking little man. And he was by nature liberal. But, in spite of his moderate riches and his position, he felt himself at some sort of disadvantage before the world, and so was often irritable and tiresome.

This was one of his mornings of tiresomeness. Gilbert had a faculty of abstraction or of vacancy, whichever you like, which made him the most feasible companion to such a man. He said nothing, but dreamed, or mused, or abstracted, whichever it was, and took his egg in its little silver cup, and helped himself to honey, and handed his cup to the professor without further thought. And if Alfred in his spirit was mortified because Gilbert’s cup came too soon, and took a bigger proportion of the coffee than the little man liked, and if his sense of proprietorship writhed to see his guest make so free in the matter of honey, still, the host with his little imperial under his thickish mouth managed to expend all his exasperation inside himself, which was a relief, really. It was a relief that the small brimstone fires of his irritable meannesses set nobody else’s

corn-ricks alight. He begrudged the unearning Englishman his bigger share of coffee, and he almost wanted to snatch the honey dish off the table. Yet all the time he knew so well that such irritability and such small meanness and grudging were beneath him, beneath his intellectual temper if not his housekeeping one, that he only bounced on his chair and spied out the spots or flaws in the fine linen cloth, or the scratches on the silver. So did the poor professor keep the smallness of the flesh in check by the greatness of the restraining mind. He told himself quite plainly that if his guest ate a pot of honey every morning — which he didn't — what were the odds to a man with an income of two-hundred-thousand marks. No odds at all. And yet, poor Alfred, he twitched on his chair at every spoonful after the third, and the mongrel dogs of the flesh almost jerked the leash out of the controlling hand of the mind.

But not quite. Which was always a great cause of self-satisfaction to poor Alfred. He was pettyfogging in his blood, and he knew it. So he admired Gilbert's sang froid with the honey more even than he hated it; for in the mind, at least, the little professor was a free soul, even if he had never found a von. In the mind he was superior, and he knew that it behoved him to be superior somewhere, he, with his queasy spirit. If he had given way to his own littlenesses, then he would have condemned himself to the society of natures as little as his own. Which, to a man of his squeamishness and intellectual intelligence, would have been a worse mortification than death itself. So he put up with the pin-pricks of his stingy flesh, for fear of the sword-thrust in his freer spirit. Almost he loved Gilbert for administering the pin-pricks with so cool and unconscious a hand. He loved his own little whippings, for he knew they were good for him. Perhaps if he lived to be a hundred he would be able to sit sunnily in his chair while the guest scraped the dish and licked the honey-spoon. Perhaps he would even tell Julie to put a new pot on the table. Who knows the ductibility of human forbearance.

In one direction, however, poor Alfred's idealistic forbearance had been drawn out too fine, almost to breaking point. It is curious how much easier it is to be idealistic over big things than over little: how much easier it is to give a hundred pounds for the Home for the One-legged, than to see a guest take ten spoonfuls of honey: how much easier it is to die a heroic death than to get over one's foibles.

How thin Alfred's idealism had stretched his human sensibility at one point, and that the most important, the following conversations will show.

"Na!" said the professor suddenly, breaking the spell. "What are you going to do today?"

The day was Sunday, when everybody must do something.

“Nothing in particular,” said Gilbert. He had a few acquaintances with whom he might talk his head off, in the Court Brewery or the Hahn Cafe. Or he could go to Pinak-otheks or Glyptotheks or to music. All remained to be seen.

“I am going to work,” said the professor crossly.

“You don’t want me, do you?” said Gilbert.

“No — no. No — no. I have something prepared in my mind — ” the professor emphasised this word in a fine resonant voice, and put his fingertip to his fine forehead, as if the something prepared was a rare old cup of tea for the universe. But alas, the professor was only nervously joking. Though he worked and fussed and wrote and theorised and popped up hither and thither like some unexpected rabbit in the warren of learning and theory, it was all artificial to him. He was missing something. He was missing something. What was it? It was life. He was missing life, with his books and his theory and papers. The mental part of him was overstrained and ennuyé, and yet what was he to do. He was damned to theorise.

For sure he had a drop too much of Jewish blood in his veins, and so we must not take him as typical of the sound and all-too-serious German professors for whom the word is God, though the Word is not with God, but with them, the professors thereof.

Alfred — we can’t help saying poor Alfred — boomed out the Word with the best of them. And since he was a very shrewd little person, with generation after generation of Rabbinical training behind him, he could lick the usual German professor with his left hand, at intellectualising. And he knew it. Hence the boom of his voice:

“I’m going to work.”

But Gilbert belonged to his private life, and so he did not mind letting Gilbert hear the half-jocular frisky boom, he did not mind revealing to his young acquaintance that he was going to let himself off in a whoop of self-importance, and that he knew it.

So off he trotted to his study, after having informed Julie that he was working, and that niemand and nichts, nothing and nobody should disturb him. For the Word was with him that morning.

Once in his study the frisky jocular and importance fell from him. Out of his depression he had worked it all up, for Gilbert’s sake. The whoop would not come off. Alas, he felt dry and anxious. Books, books, books! Blotting paper, and paper, and gold pen. The neat and spotless and roomy writing desk, the date calendar, the nibs, the reference books, the god-knows-what of a rich learned man in his study. Ach Gott, there it all was, and he was missing something.

Alfred looked at it all, and the little tense pleat came childishly between his

forehead. He sighed, and said: “Ach!

Ach jeh! Wo ist ?” And he fiddled among the pens and among the papers, though he had lost nothing and was looking for nothing. His nervous anticipation of authorship was all a fraud. Now he was in the study he seemed to have shrunk, to have gone littler: for he was little to start with. A great nervous weight was upon him. Books, paper, pens, ink. Books! walls and bastions, buttresses and gables of books!

Imagine it, for a white-haired little man of fifty-three, who has booked it all his life, and who has moreover twenty-three Rabbinical ancestors in a straight line behind him! For a little man who suddenly imagines Life to be something and the Word a mere bauble in the hands of buffoons like himself. Finds himself strangely anxious, books showering down on his head like the ruins of Carthage, while all the time he wants life, life, whatever life may be. Finds himself anxious — to be with young people, to share their existence, their youth.

He sighed again and dipped his pen, seated himself like a little boy in his chair, and drew his paper to him. He arranged it, he squared it, he settled it in the centre of his blotting paper with the nicest precision, touching it along the edges with his nervous, fussy fingertips. That was life. To take a sheet of paper, to arrange it, to settle it, to open the ink-pot, to put the sealing-wax in its right place — all that was life. But to write, to put down words! Alas, to the poor professor this was anti-life itself, the most foolish of papery illusions. That Life with a big L was also an illusion of his, he had not yet realised.

So he fidgetted and sighed and scribbled a dozen words in his bad handwriting and reached for a reference book and it wasn't there because it never was there but on the fourth shelf of the B block and so he frowned and felt he might get in a temper with Julie and he got up and hunted for the book and found it where he knew it was and busily rattled the leaves over looking for his reference: found it, and hastily scribbled it down on his paper. And that was the only bit of his morning's work which he enjoyed.

He was scribbling a few more irritable words when he heard a step in the hall. Yes! And the clink of a walking-stick being taken from the hall-stand. Ach! — the unbearable — there was Gilbert going out: going out to the morning, and to life.

“Gilbert! Gil — bert!” he sang, in his resonant, musical voice. And he listened, his blue eyes round and childish and vaguely desperate. We must mention that he was the youngest child of elderly parents.

He was just starting out of his chair when he heard Gilbert's step on the polished parquet floor, so he settled himself and poised his pen, like a man torn between two desires. The serious thought-line was adjusted in his brows.

“Ach Gilbert, weiss’ du — ?” he began in his breathless, anxious German. Then he changed to English. He liked flourishing his English. “Ach, I can’t find the second volume of Ammermeister’s Theorie des Unbewussten. It ought to be on the second shelf. Do you know where it is?”

Gilbert was dressed for out-doors, overcoat and stick and hat on his head. Life — life!

He strolled to the second shelf of the D block and produced the book.

“Oh yes! How silly of me. Thank you. Thank you!” — and then the anxious-theoretic-author voice changed to one more flippant: “Where are you going?”

“A walk.”

“Where will you go?”

“Just a stroll.”

“In the country — or in Munich?”

“Oh, I shan’t go out into the country. Isn’t there too much snow?”

“We-ell!” the professor pursed his lips. “For young and adventurous persons like me — ” he boomed jocularly — ”there is not too much. I tell you, I like it. I like these days when the snow is melting, and you have patches, patches of the world coming through. I like it. I like the sun, even when it makes me feel my rheumatism. Ah, when we get old, we like even our Schmerzen — Well? Don’t we? You are young still. Only wait — only wait. — But seriously, I like these days among the best of the year. The snow is going, going, the sun is come, come, and gentian and the pink flowers are on the patches. Ah — ” — and here he looked through the double windows at the trees of the Ludwigshöhe as they stood bare-twigged in the sunshine — ”I am tempted. I am tempted. What do you say? What do you say to my lazy and unworthy suggestion? My lazy and unworthy suggestion! What?”

“I’ve not heard it,” said Gilbert.

“No, you haven’t,” said the professor. “But you shall. What do you say if we go into the country and look at my little piece of land where I am going to build my little wooden house, my dog-kennel I shall call it. I shall call it the dog-kennel. I shall call it Vow-Wow. Vow-wow-wow!” and the professor rubbed his hands and imitated a dog barking. Then he glanced again brightly at Gilbert.

“What? What do you say? Shall we run away from work — ” boom that word as he did — “and go and look at my house? Yes? Shall we?”

“I should like to,” said Gilbert decidedly.

“Yes, you would! Then we will go. We will go and look at the land for my little Vow-Wow — ” He fell into a sort of students’ chant as he jumped from his chair and pressed the bell for Julie.

“But now then, when is there a train?”

He darted his nose into a time-table.

“Sonntag — Sonntag — Sonntag — Isartalbahn — Isartalbahn — Ommerhausen — Ommerhausen — Yes, we have it — halb-neun — a quarter to eleven — a quarter to eleven — Sundays — yes. Will that do? Yes? Will it?” he looked up excitedly at Gilbert.

“Just right,” said Gilbert.

“Yes.”

Enter Julie. The professor countermanded dinner, and ordered boots and wraps.

“We will run away from work like two bad boys — ” boom the word boys — ”and we will look at the seat for my little Vow-Wow. Seat you say? — or site? Site of course. And we’ll be Off to Philadelphia in the mo-orning.” Chant the last words all out of tune.

They set off, the professor in knee-breeches and cloak, Gilbert in mountain-boots and English leather gaiters. Alfred was as happy as a school-boy. He rattled away in English as they sat in the little train running down the Isar valley. They travelled third class, in those wooden carriages where one can see the heads of one’s fellow-travellers in the other compartments. Students were there with guitars and little accordions, there were snatches of song. Soldiers in Bavarian blue leaned out of the carriage windows in spite of the cold air, and with frost-reddened faces watched the landscape and shouted in Bavarian dialect the length of the carriage.

The train ran comfortably beside the high-road, whose snow was melted, or lay in mounds at the road-side. Students in groups were strolling down the road, between the high, wind-tired pear trees and apple trees. Men from the mountains, in short leathern trousers and bare knees, like footballers, short little embroidered jackets, and a chamois-tail in their green hats, jumped on the train at the station. There was a sparkle and crackle of energy everywhere on the sunny Sunday morning after the winter.

And Gilbert loved it: he loved the snow-ruddy men from the Alp foothills, so hardy-seeming, with their hard, handsome knees like Highlanders, and their large blue eyes, and their curiously handsome plastique, form and mould. He loved the peasant women trudging along the road from church, in their full blue dresses and dark silk aprons and funny cup-and-saucer black hats. They all stood to look at the little train, which rattled along beside the road, unfenced and unhampered, as tram-cars run in England, and everybody made jokes to them or about them.

Alfred and Gilbert got down at Ommerhausen and quickly left the muddy village. The peasants, pious catholics, were coming from mass, from the church

which reared high its white neck, capped by a small, black, Byzantine-looking cupola. The churches are so characteristic that the sight of one will send the whole violent nostalgia of the Bavarian highlands into the heart even of a stranger. So Gilbert, in the midst of Bavaria, was seized with the strange passion for the place. He went with Alfred across the levels, where the snow lay only in pieces here and there: over the rushing little streams, towards the nestling village of Genbach, whose white farms with their great roofs and low balconies clustered round the toy-looking church. It was a tiny village — not more than a dozen houses on the slope of a hill, near the edge of the forest.

The sun was hot. Alfred had taken off his cloak and slung it through his little knapsack. Gilbert did the same with his overcoat — and took off his cap and stuffed it in his pocket. Then the two men turned round to survey the world.

The great Isar valley lay beneath them in the spring morning, the pale, icy green river winding its way from the far Alps, coming as it were down the long stairs of the far foothills, between shoals of pinkish sand, a wide, pale river-bed coming from far off, with the river twisting from side to side between the dark pine-woods. The mountains, a long rank, were bright in heaven, glittering their snow under the horizon. Villages with the white-and-black churches lay in the valley and on the opposite hill-slope. It was a lovely, ringing, morning-bright world, for the Englishman vast and glamorous. The sense of space was an intoxication for him. He felt he could walk without stopping on to the far north-eastern magic of Russia, or south to Italy. All the big, spreading glamour of mediaeval Europe seemed to envelop him.

“Na! Isn’t it beautiful?” said the professor.

“Beautiful,” said Gilbert.

The bigness: that was what he loved so much. The bigness, and the sense of an infinite multiplicity of connections. There seemed to run gleams and shadows from the vast spaces of Russia, a yellow light seemed to struggle through the great Alp-knot from Italy, magical Italy, while from the north, from the massive lands of Germany, and from far-off Scandinavia one could feel a whiteness, a northern, sub-arctic whiteness. Many magical lands, many magical peoples, all magnetic and strange, uniting to form the vast patchwork of Europe. The glamorous vast multiplicity, all made up of differences, mediaeval, romantic differences, this seemed to break his soul like a chrysalis into a new life.

For the first time he saw England from the outside: tiny she seemed, and tight, and so partial. Such a little bit among all the vast rest. Whereas till now she had seemed all-in-all in herself. Now he knew it was not so. Her all-in-allness was a delusion of her natives. Her marvellous truths and standards and ideals were just local, not universal. They were just a piece of local pattern, in what was really a

vast, complicated, far-reaching design.

So he watched the glitter of the range of Alps towards the Tyrol: he saw the pale-green Isar climbing down her curved levels, coming towards him, making for Munich and then Austria, the Danube, the enormous meanderings of the Danube. He saw the white road, which seemed to him to lead to Russia. And he became unEnglished. His tight and exclusive nationality seemed to break down in his heart. He loved the world in its multiplicity, not in its horrible oneness, uniformity, homogeneity. He loved the rich and free variegation of Europe, the manyness. His old obtuseness, which saw everything alike, in one term, fell from his eyes and from his soul, and he felt rich. There were so many, many lands and peoples besides himself and his own land. And all were magically different, and it was so nice to be one among many, to feel the horrible imprisoning oneness and insularity collapsed, a real delusion broken, and to know that the universal ideals and morals were after all only local and temporal.

Gilbert smoked his pipe, and pondered. He seemed to feel a new salt running vital in his veins, a new, free vibration in all his nerves, like a bird that has got out of a cage, and even out of the room wherein the cage hung.

He trudged with the professor up a slope to a brow of the hill. And there, in an angle of the forest, was Alfred's new bit of land. It faced the south-west, looked right across the wide valley to the hills and the high peaks in heaven. Behind, on two sides, was forest of fir and great beech-trees. A snug place with a great scoop of the world in front.

"You know," said the professor, as they paraded round the split-wood fence, "I have one hobby, and that is houses. My brother has the same. I have a house in Gottingen and a house in Maulberg and a house on the Starnbergersee. Now I am going to have my little Vow-Wow. And I shall have it here."

They walked through a tuft of snow to a spot on the brow of the slope.

"Here!" said Alfred. "What do you think?"

Gilbert stood and looked out at the snow peaks that bounded the far horizon, one looking over the other's shoulder in the remote sky. And as he looked he seemed rooted to the spot.

"Yes," he said. "Build it here."

"You know," said Alfred, "it is a model I saw at the exhibition — a little model wooden house. I have signed the contract, and everything will be complete by June, and it will cost ten thousand Marks. It is not cheap, but not so very dear. Hein? And it will be my little Vow-Wow."

"But what will you do with it?" asked Gilbert.

"What shall I do with it? I shall use it for a summer-house for myself, and the children will stay with me, and my wife — and it will be very nice. What? Don't

you think? Eh?"

"Yes," said Gilbert. "I do."

"And if you like you can stay here too."

"I wish I may."

"You wish you may — Well, you shall. In June: in June all will be ready. I shall give you a room of your own."

Gilbert had spied sparks of blue in the steep bank facing the sun, just below where he was standing. He went down and saw, for the first time in his life, blue gentian flowers open after the snow. They were low in the rough grass on the bank, and so blue, again his heart seemed to break one of its limits, and take a larger swing. So blue, so much more than heaven blue: blue from the whiteness of snow and the intensity of ice. He touched the perfect petals with his finger.

"The first gentian! Yes?" said Alfred, coming jerkily down and picking a few buds. "I must take them to show Marianne."

Gilbert heard a noise. He looked up. A deer was running across the little clearing. It must have leaped from out of the fir-trees over the split-wood fence. Now it ran swifdy, on slender legs, straight to the fence on the beech side of the forest. It put its head back, and with the swift, frail feet ran along the side of the fence, seeking a way out. It started as Gilbert rose, twitching with alarm, and turning on its light haunches, ran quickly, almost without weight, back along the fence. It was puzzled finding no exit.

"Na, a Rehbock!" said Alfred. "You see, it must have jumped over the fence. There! I thought the fence was high enough. But the children will like it. Won't they, don't you think?"

Gilbert was watching the animal, the delicate white marking of the rump, on which the tail lay in a pattern; the flatness of the haunches, the beautiful softness of the ruddy fleece. The little stag swerved, became frightened at the continual obstacle, turned, and came running forward again.

"Shall I open the gate for him and let him out?" said Alfred, going forward.

The deer was now terrified. It laid back its head and bounded by the fence. In a sudden gust of terror it sprang like the wind at the fence, showing its whitish belly, lifting its little feet clear, and alighting with a jerk like a puff of wind in the free forest, where it galloped away through the great beech-trunks, scarcely visible over the beech-leaves patched with snow. It was gone like a bit of magic, and Gilbert felt himself possessed.

The two men went back into the village to the inn, where they sat at the bare wooden benches and ate boiled pork and sauerkraut and good black bread and mountain butter and a delicious ring of cake, and drank beer, while the peasants and farmers and foresters smoked big pipes and talked, and were festive.

After dinner they rose again.

“Now we will walk to the Starnberg lake and see my wife and my mother-in-law. Yes? Shall we do so? Can you walk so far?”

“How far?”

“Oh, about eight miles, eight miles. But in the wood there will be snow.”

So they set off. In the wood, as Alfred said, there was snow. Going between the great beech-trees, some of which lay prostrate, there were only patches of snow. But on the paths between the great, dry trunks of the firs there was deep snow still, heavy walking. The fir-woods were dark and vast, impenetrable, and frightening. Gilbert thought of the old Hercynian forest, and did not wonder at the Roman terror. For in the dark and bristly fir-trees, in their vast crowded ranks, the dimness and the subtly crackling silence, there was something as it were of anti-life, wolvisch, magical.

Both men were tired by the time they came to the top of the last hill and looked down on the long, pale lake of Starnberg. They wound down past one of the royal casdes, or villas, and waited on the little landing-stage for the steamer which was to take them to their destination. The afternoon was fading towards evening, lights were beginning to twinkle by the pleasure-lake, the cafes were already lighted up, and Alfred and Gilbert were growing cold and tired by the time they had their place on the steamer. They were going only two stations down, to pay a visit to Alfred’s mother-in-law.

It was dusk by the time they arrived and rang the bell.

“Ho Marta!” cried the professor to the maid who opened to him, a handsome girl. “Is the Baroness at home? Is anybody here?”

“Yes, Herr Professor. The Frau Professor and the Herr Professor Sartorius.”

“Ach, are they also here? Ach — so! All right. All right. We will go up. Are they taking tea? So! So. We have just come right. Two more cups. Ach! Ach! We are rather tired. We have come on foot from Ommerhausen. Yes, I will take off my shoes. I will take off my shoes. Ach! Ach!” and the professor seated himself wearily and a little stiffly in a chair in the hall, while the maid, who had taken his hat and cloak and knapsack and stick, now hurried away for shoes. “Ach! If I don’t have my rheumatism tomorrow!” The professor spoke in English now, and put his hand on his hip. “I fear it! I fear it! Oh!” and he gave a twinge with his face. “Ach, Marta, my rheumatism!” he lamented as the girl came back with patent-leather shoes. So she kneeled to unfasten his thick shoes. She was a dark, lovely girl with thick black eyebrows and a plait of black hair going right round her well-shaped head. She wore a peasant-dress of mid-blue colour with sprigged roses, close fitting at the breast, full skirted, and a fine white apron, bib-less. She quickly drew off the professor’s heavy boots, hurried

away with them, and came back with a pair of heelless pantoffles.

“Shoes there are no more,” she said, dangling the pantoffles. She had a rich, mantling colour under her dark skin, and that curious fecund virginity of a mountain-catholic peasant.

“Ach! Ach! Only pantoffeln! Well — what do you say?” and the professor turned boisterously to Gilbert, changing into English. “It is a choice of evils. Which do you choose? Boots or slippers with no heels? Hein? Say the word, say the word.”

For once Gilbert was embarrassed. Marta was looking at him, and dangling the Japanese slippers. She had beautiful large grey eyes, slow and steady. He was rather carried away by her. Her brightish blue dress with the rose-sprigs was so telling. He looked at the professor, who, rigged out in neat patent-leather shoes, was rather pleased with his advantage.

“Well, what do you say? Say the word! Say the word!” sang the little professor in his resonant voice, his tired pale-blue eyes looking jocular.

At that juncture they heard a door open upstairs, and looking up, saw a woman in a dull-green silk dress leaning over the rails.

“Ach, is it you, Alfred!” she said, in an odd, cultured voice, half familiar, half excited.

“Ho Louise! Ho, you are there,” sang the little professor.

“Ja! Ja! We didn’t expect you.”

“I didn’t expect myself — ha-ha. Nor did I expect you. Ludwig is also there? Yes. Ha! Well! How is everybody? Thou? The children.”

Louise was coming down the stairs, slowly. She was a very beautiful woman, with rich, pomegranate colouring and a beautifully chiselled face. Her soft dark-brown hair hung rather loose over her ears, coiled in a simple knot behind. She wore a long, beautiful scarf, frail and full of dull glimmers of greens and black and dead white. She was one of the women who naturally have a long scarf draping the shoulders, a look of wearing a robe rather than a modern dress.

“Ja — all well. You too? Good!” and Louise reached the bottom stair. She was looking at Gilbert. He had no more eyes for Marta, now Louise had come. The beauty of the mistress, rich in colour as that of the maid, had a lovely, pure, soft-cut form, outdazzling the more oxen charm of the peasant girl. Louise knew her power.

“Mr Noon,” said Alfred in English. “You have never met my wife. Well, she is here. Louise, you know of Mr Noon, I told you of him in my letter to Dresden.”

“How do you do?” said Louise, in slow, but very charming English, giving her hand to Gilbert, and narrowing her beautiful grey eyes in an odd way of scrutiny

she had. "And so you come all the way on foot? — Oh, my English, it is very bad, but you will forgive me. — Well then, come and have some tea. And bread and butter. Yes, I know you Englishmen, you want bread and butter with your tea. Come then."

She turned to Marta, and saw the straw slippers.

"Aber — ! But what are you doing with the pantoffles, Marta?" she laughed mockingly.

"The gentleman will change his boots," said the grave-eyed peasant girl.

"Ah — yes! Yes!" said Louise, looking at Gilbert's wet and muddy boots.

"I'm not fit to come up either way," said Gilbert.

"Not fit? Oh yes. Take the pantoffles. Oh, what does it matter? Yes, take them. We are simple people here. — Yes Marta," she added in German — "take the gentleman's boots."

And Marta kneeled beautifully at Gilbert's feet. He blushed to his ears, and Louise saw it.

"No — no," he said in his German. "I will do it."

"Oh let her! let her!" cried Louise. "What does it matter? She is used."

And so Gilbert sat confused whilst the beautiful, still peasant girl unfastened his thick boots and pulled them off. He pushed his feet into the straw slippers.

"And now come," said Louise. "More cups, Marta, and some bread-and-butter — do you know?"

Gilbert paddled up in the heelless sandals, and felt a rare fool. He found himself in a long, yellow-amber-coloured room. A handsome white-haired lady with an arched nose rose from her chair and looked at Gilbert under her white, raised eyebrows, whilst she addressed Alfred in German, in a rather high voice.

"Oh yea, Alfred, and hast thou come all the way on foot, thou young fellow, thou! Hast thou no respect for thy white moustaches and little beard? Ach, the man, he runs across the land like a ferret."

With which she turned to Gilbert. She was rather stout and handsome, in a black silk dress with a jabot of Venetian point, flaky, old lace.

"How do you do," she sang, in slow, high-pitched English, on a note of lament. "And must we speak English? No — it is too difficult — I can it no more. You will speak Gairman. — Come, my son-in-law has brought you through the country in the weather. Oh yea! Sit down please."

But there was a third occupant of the room — Professor Ludwig Sartorius, from Bonn. He was a middle-aged man with a dark-brown beard streaked with grey, a bald forehead, and little, nervous, irascible dark eyes. He was well dressed in the English manner, in grey, carefully tailored and booted: and he wore a handsome tie of an orange colour. Evidently something of a gallant: but

of the irascible sort. He shook hands with Gilbert, and seated himself abruptly, only getting out the usual "How do you do," pronounced very German.

The party now settled themselves. The Baroness was at the tea-table, lighting the spirit under the silver kettle. Professor Sartorius sprang up to do it for her, as if a gun had gone off, and fumbled wildly in his well-flattened pockets for matches.

"Oh sit still, sit still, Professor Sartorius," said the Baroness, striking her matches calmly. "I am old enough to light my own tea-kettle, at my age — " And she peered with shrewd, rather screwed-up blue eyes at the spirit-flame. It was evident there was no love lost between her and the gallant professor. He sat down looking crosser than ever, whilst poor little Alfred, with his pink face and white hair, shone like a daisy.

"Ah, Ludwig," said the Frau Professor, "tell Alfred about Wendolf."

The younger professor turned and began in German in a rather snarling voice. The Frau Professor — we will call her Louise, because she is Alfred's wife, and it is shorter — settled her skirts and turned her low chair towards Gilbert. The softened light fell from behind her, and threw a shadow from her soft dark hair and her long dark lashes, upon her cheek. Marta came in with a tray, and Gilbert again turned fascinated to the full, dark, motionless face of the girl, with its unspeaking closed lips and meeting dark brows, as she stooped with the tray full under the rim of the lamp which stood on the tea-table. Mediaeval, remote, and impressive her face seemed, banded above with the black plait of hair.

Louise, sunk in her low chair, her dark-green dress with its pale, metallic lustre falling rather full round her feet, shaded her brow with her hand and watched Gilbert's face. It looked to her young, and alert, and self-possessed, with its narrow, fine brows, and full dark-blue eyes, and pouting mouth. She watched him closely.

"You look at the maid," she said in a mocking voice. "Is she not beautiful?"

Gilbert had been vaguely watching, not criticising, so it was in a hadn't-thought-of-it tone he answered:

"Yes, I think she is."

"Quite a beautiful type. She is a peasant from the mountains, and she is in love with a young forester, and she will soon marry him. She has been with me since she was almost a child, and we lo-ove her."

Gilbert turned to Louise. She spoke the word lo-ove as if it were difficult to say, dragging it out and breaking the vowel. And she was looking up at him from under her shading hand, half-laughing, half-wistful, her grey eyes with their dark light looking soft and vulnerable. She was really very beautiful. The warmth of her colouring and the softness of her hair seemed to give her a warm, almost

winsome glow. Odd, the half-laughing winsomeness, with a touch of irony and a touch of pathos. Gilbert watched her with round eyes.

“Is this your house then?” asked Gilbert.

“No, it is Mama’s. And Marta is lent. My house is at Maulberg, and my children. Today I have come to see Mama, and so I meet you. — Well — I shall be very banal, and ask you if you like Munich. Yes, you do? Oh, I am glad. Yes, I like it as much as any town in Germany, though I like Dresden almost as much. And you get on with your work? — Oh, I am glad. Yes, I am sure you will do well at Munich for a year, then I think you must go to Gottingen. Yes, Gottingen will be better for you in a year.”

“I must find some way of earning money,” said Gilbert.

“Ach, money. Do not bother, it will come.”

“What makes you know?” laughed Gilbert.

“Ah — ” and she made an odd gesture of reckless indifference — “it always comes in these days. — And when you have your doctorate, you will write? — yes? You will write, and go to England to be a professor?”

“I don’t know,” said Gilbert. “What should I write — unless I try music?”

“Music! But music! But music is not pure mathematics, nor applied mathematics.” She laughed in a quick, girlish way, ironical too. “You will write music for England? — Well do! do! — And what will you write? An opera to begin with, I am sure.”

“No,” said Gilbert.

“Oh, you are joking! Everyone who writes music writes an opera in the first place. When he is an old man perhaps he will try to write just a song to sell to the music-hall, and so make money. Yes? Isn’t it so?”

“I don’t know,” said Gilbert.

“Perhaps you will begin with writing a song for the music-hall, out of your mathematics? Yes? Do you think? ‘Just like the ivy on the old garden wa-all.’ So!”

“No,” laughed Gilbert. “I’ll do the opera in preference.”

“Ach yes! And then the ivy. I must sing English songs in French, and then I know they are funny. Before this I am troubled, you know. But I like the ivy —

‘Et comme le lierre Je vous grimperai — ’”

“Ha-ha-ha!” rattled out Professor Sartorius, and he said in German: “That is a famous song, Louise, ‘Et comme le lierre je vous grimperai.’” He tried to put some tune to it, but was tuneless. So he rattled with laughter, and added: “But where have you found it?”

“Oh, it is English. But I am so unsure, I feel I may be moved by English, so I must put it in French to be sure.”

“What is the English, what is the English?” cried Alfred, speaking up.

“Mr Noon will sing it to us, yes?”

But Gilbert shook his head.

“Then shall I sing it? You would like? — Ya, Mama, don’t look down your nose at me.

‘Jost like the ivee
On the old garden wa-all
Cling-ging so tightly
What e’er may befall — ’

Nein! Nein! I can’t sing any more.”

“What e’er may be — what?” cried Alfred.

“Be-fall!” said Louise, full-sounding.

“Yes — yes. Be-fall.”

“But finish the chorus,” said Gilbert.

“There is no je-vous-grimperai,” said Alfred, professorial.

“Ah, it is later.

‘As you grow older
I’ll be constantly true
And jost like the ivy
I’ll cling to you.’“

The professors burst into laughter.

“Nein!” said the Baroness. “No, it is too stupid. Louise, du Papagei, we are all highly-educated people here, God be praised. Mr Noon — another cup of tea. Yes — Yes.”

“Aren’t German music-hall songs funny?” asked Gilbert.

“Oh yes! Oh yes! But only, you see, the funniness is different. But they are as bad. Oh yes. — You must forgive me for laughing. Only the song was told me in Dresden — ” and she began to laugh — “and I thought it was so funny — ”

“Yes — yes — ” cried the Baroness, knitting her brows and crooking her fingers — “I’ll cling to you.’“

“Yes, like ivy,” cried Louise, laughing till tears came to her eyes.

“On an old wall, ach yea!” cried the Baroness, also shaking with laughter.

“Constantly true!” cried Louise, suffocated.

“Constantly true!” repeated the Baroness, her fine, mephi-stophelian white eyebrows going up her forehead in sardonic laughter as her sides shook.

“Constant and true,” said Gilbert.

“Oh — I am wrong — I am wrong. Mama — Constant and true, do you hear,” and after making a mock-solemn face, she again laid her hand on the arm of her chair and sat weak with laughter, while the Baroness rocked behind her tea-table.

The men were more uneasy.

“Really comic,” Ludwig was murmuring in German, looking cross.

“Silly! Silly! They are too silly” said Alfred.

And Gilbert sat and looked with round eyes at the two women.

“Yes, yes,” sighed Louise. “It is too silly “ Then she changed her tone. “But you don’t mind, Mr Noon, if we laugh. Ah, one must laugh sometimes. Does it matter what at?”

“Not a bit,” said Gilbert.

“No, I think not.”

The conversation now lapsed into German, and Gilbert followed with a little difficulty. The big professor theorised on the one hand, the little professor theorised on the other, and they wrangled with a noise like tearing calico, whilst the Baroness sat in impatience, throwing in a curt phrase now and then, and Louise sat in her low chair like a lovely Athena balancing the professorial scales first this way, then that, and seeming passionately interested and looking very beautiful. Gilbert watched with wondering eyes. It all seemed so strange. And why did Louise care whether the immature manuscript of Faust, which the great Goethe had commanded to be burnt and which his tender friend had not burnt, why should anyone care whether the world saw this manuscript or did not see it? Care ethically, at least. Why should this moral debate be raging between the two professors, balanced by the beautiful woman who was all the time stealing from Athena to give to Aphrodite, or stealing from Aphrodite to give to Athena.

Gilbert sat on ignored, and began not to hear. The women were soon sensitive of this.

“Now — enough! Enough!” put in the Baroness. “Goethe should burn his own old papers. And if he didn’t, then let him not mind who scrubs the pans out with them. Let every man burn his own rubbish.”

“No, Mama, it is a genuine question,” said Louise.

“Yes, Mother-in-law,” said the little professor. “My work is my intimate property — *etc. etc. etc.*” We won’t hear them out, as we agree with the Baroness.

“Oh yea, one can say so much about nothing,” protested the Baroness. “Are you eating here?”

“No,” cried Louise, rising. “We must go.”

“No thank you,” cried Alfred. “We must catch the seven-fifteen train. Louise, how are you going home?”

“We came in a motor-car,” said Louise, whilst Ludwig stood with drawn brows, his little eyes darting from side to side.

A maid was sent to summon the car. Alfred and Gilbert watched Louise drive away with Professor Sartorius. Then they two prepared to catch the train for Munich.

“Ah, the Sartorius,” sang the Baroness in her high, lament-voice, “he talks so much. Alfred, when you come to tea with me please do not climb up from the ivy on the wall to the godlike Goethe. Goethe is so beautiful in himself, but not when he is torn to pieces between you and the Sartorius. Let the sartor stick to his patching, or we will call him snipper and Schneider — Sartorius.”

It was unfortunate that the “ius” of the Bonn professor’s name should always get on the nerves of the Baroness: but so it did.

Chapter XIV.

Snowflower.

Looking back over the last chapter, I become aware of an unkept promise. No one will have noticed it but myself, and nobody will care a straw even when it is pointed out. Confess, gentle reader — I call you gentle, as a child says “Nice doggie” because it is so scared of the beast; — confess that you don’t know what promise I mean. Oh, I am not offended.

But I am exact. Now my critic in the Observer of December 1920 says I am out on the quest of some blotched lily of beauty, some fleur du mal, like the defunct Aubrey Beardsley. We live and learn, and I am very pleased indeed to shake hands with the outre-tombe Monsieur Beardsley. On the other hand, I am told that I am not like Swift. I am not out on the search for truth. So the infernal Dean can call me a Yahoo if he likes. I parade with my spangled lily down the avenues of time.

Yet, gentle reader — don’t bite then, don’t bite — I am really quite fond of truth: and even of keeping my word. Which is more than can be said of a certain Dean. And therefore, I recall to you a promise I made.

I said I would indicate, in the following conversation, — or conversations, I forget which — what was the reason of the tenuity of the scarlet thread of human feeling binding the little professor Alfred Kramer to his fellows. That scarlet thread is thin: very thin: spider-web thin. And why? — In professor Alfred, I mean —

Why? That’s what I promised to reveal in further conversations. As a matter of fact I thought the professor was going to unbosom to Gilbert Noon. And he never unbosomed, which is rather a let-down for me.

Pray excuse the unbecoming word let-down, gentle reader. That’s what it is to come of humble origin: these abominable hyphenations rear their flattened heads from among the nettles of the unchastened vocabulary. How a Times critic dropped on me for using the word toney! I’m sure I never knew it wasn’t toney any more to say toney. Because once it was quite toney, I’m sure. Perhaps I even meant then. But now I’m being almost modern, so I shall eschew toney, and yet not eschew let-down. I tell you, gentle reader, it was a let-down.

In the Orient Express, which in those paradisaical days ran to the Morgenland via Munich and Vienna, sat a lady who ought to have got out at Frankfort. Why then

is she spinning on towards the Austrian frontier?

The answer is simple. At dinner, on the train, she sat at a tiny table face to face with a little Japanese. The lady was fair and fresh-faced and just over thirty: the Japanese was a Japanese, presumably about the same age as herself, discounting the aeons of his ancestors. Over the Moselle wine, the two talked in English. Useless to repeat what they said. Sufficient that they talked in English, and as they talked, the face of the woman shone like a flower in the sun, and flashes of strange light seemed to go over the little Japanese face opposite her. Why this strange and electric connection should suddenly have started across a tiny table in an express train, who knows. Suffice that by the time the oranges and apples and nuts were bounced on to the table, the woman had felt a quiet, strangely powerful, hand grip her knee under the board, and linger with a slow, intense, magnetic pressure. She was so startled that her will-power deserted her for the moment, and she sat gazing with transfixed bright eyes into the face of the little Japanese, which was bent down near the white cloth, as the young man stooped ostensibly to pick up his table-napkin.

The sad, almost saurian eyes of the Oriental gazed fixedly into the green-grey eyes of the woman, till she felt she would do anything, anything for him. Then came coffee, and the soft voice of the stranger inviting her to drink a liqueur with him. She would take a Benedictine. Yes, she would take a Benedictine. And as the waiter filled her little glass she felt the two legs of the stranger pressing her knees between his own, under the table, a long, slow, invidious pressure, with all the Japanese magnetic muscular force, while the sad, saurian, oriental face still watched hers. She drank her Benedictine in a little throatful, and by the time it was swallowed she had lost all sense of her surroundings.

The Japanese invited her to go down with him to the saloon car. She went, and sat by him, and he talked to her with his slow quiet voice, and she answered with her bright voice. And the train flew on, and still they sat side by side in the saloon, and still they talked.

Till she felt the jar of the brakes: and she heard the porters yelling Munchen. Munchen — how was that possible? She gave a cry, and collected her wraps and her valise.

“Are we in Munich?”

“Yes, in Munich.”

In dazed bewilderment she was climbing out of the train, and the Japanese was following in his slow oriental fashion, watching. He decided not to leave the train.

And so it was that Gilbert, reading in bed just after midnight, heard the bell ring in the distant kitchen — and ring again — and again. Till he became

uneasy, and went into the passage. And heard a desperate peal. So he shouted for Julie: and got no answer.

The Herr Professor was away: so, apparently, was Julie, in this carousing city of Munich. So Gilbert, who didn't possess a dressing-gown, went in his pyjamas and opened the door of the flat. And there stood the above-mentioned lady, bright-faced, with her furs and wraps and her valise.

“Ist der Herr Professor Kramer nicht zu Hause?”

The question came in German.

“Isn't Professor Kramer at home?”

“No — he is in Gottingen for three days.”

“And is no one there? Julie?”

“She doesn't seem to be here.”

“Oh dear!” A hesitation on the doorstep. “Professor Kramer is my cousin. I forgot to get out at Frankfort, and it took all my money. Can you lend me ten Mark for the taxi?”

“Yes,” said Gilbert.

“Oh dear,” said the woman, “I am such a fool.” And sighing wearily she came into the hall and threw her wraps and valise on to a seat, whilst Gilbert, in his faded flannel pyjamas, went into his room for the money.

“Ah thank you,” she said. “I must go down and pay! Ah me, I am such a fool.”

Whereupon she ran down the stairs, and Gilbert heard her speaking first to the night-porter, then outside to the taxi-man. He remained in the doorway, and saw her rise like a Wagner Goddess through the floor, in the lift.

“Oh danke!” she cried to the night-porter, and came rushing into the flat again. She shut the door behind her.

“Ah Gott sei dank! Aren't I hopeless? But who are you? I don't know you, do I?”

All this in German.

“No,” said Gilbert. “I am staying with Professor Kramer.”

“But are you German?”

“No — ”

“Ah, you are English — !” and here the conversation breaks into English. “I come from America. I am going home to my parents — they are in Frankfort expecting me now. Ach, what a fool I am, I came straight through. Poor papa — I know he is at the station. Oh dear, I hate myself. I just slept and didn't wake.”

This, as we see, is a complete lie: but then how can a woman confess to a knee-pressing Japanese in a dining car?

Poor Gilbert still stood in the hall in his pyjamas, and felt not so frightfully uncomfortable.

The woman was already so flustered, he did not matter very much. She took off her hat and dropped it unheeding on the couch in the hall, and lifted her soft, dark-fair hair from her brow with her fingers.

“Poor Papa, he will be in such a rage.”

“Perhaps I can telegraph to him,” said Gilbert.

“Can one telegraph now? — Or telephone perhaps? But I don’t know the number. Perhaps we could find it. Oh yes.”

The two went into the study and hunted the telephone books. They found the address — and succeeded after a while in getting the connection.

“Ach Papa — is it you? Oh, I’m in Munich. Think of it. Yes, I slept! Yes! And you were there all the while! Oh dear! No — no — I didn’t have any dinner. I was so tired. No — no. Ach, I hate myself. What? What? Yes. Tomorrow. But I must sleep. When? Yes. No — no, it’s no good. No — he’s not here — only the servant. — Ach, Papa, you dear Papa, I hate myself. No, but I could cry. And were you fearfully disappointed — no — no — you? — yes. Dear Papa, and how are you? And Mama? — Good — Good! I’m awfully glad. — I’m dying to be with you — dying. — Yes. — ” A pause. “Ah Mama, are you there? Ah, what am I for a stupid ass! Yes, yes, I know how you’ll scold me. Never mind, I deserve it. I do. What? What? You can’t be as cross as I am. Yes, good. No, only Julie. You were in bed — yes — Papa still waiting? Oh dear. No, don’t be too cross. No — you’re not surprised. No — No — No “

The conversation drifted to an end, and the woman hung up the receiver. Then she rose from the chair, and for the first time looked at Gilbert. He, for modesty’s sake, had put on his overcoat. She was wearing a dark-blue coat and skirt.

“Well!” she said, in English, scrutinising him.

“Are you hungry?”

“Rather. But where is Julie.”

He spread out his hands in a faint gesture.

“When the cat is away the mouse will play. Is that it?” said the woman. “Poor Julie, she will feel dropped on. I shall have to promise not to tell Alfred. What did you say your name was?”

“Gilbert Noon” — and he spelled it.

“Gilbert Noon — rather nice,” she said. “Mine is Mrs Johanna Keighley. My husband is an American doctor, and I am just come home to see my mother and father. And this is how I bring it off.”

“Bad luck,” he said.

“Isn’t it! And just like me.”

“Like you, or your luck?” asked Gilbert.

“Me! Me! I’m afraid it’s me. I’m awful, I really am. My husband would be so disgusted. Ach, but it’s lovely to be back. We live in Boston, and I hate it. So dull, so dull. I’m always pining to be here again. I’m German, and I love Germany Do you know where the pantry is? My husband is an Englishman too, but we went to America the first year I was married. — Oh America — I don’t know what to say to it.”

Gilbert in his overcoat, the full-breasted woman in her delicate, dark-coloured blouse went down to the kitchen quarters, switching on lights till the whole flat was aglare. As they were making a collection of cold meat and sausages and cheese and sweets a form suddenly appeared in the open doorway. It was the truant Julie.

“Ach, Frau Doktor — !”

“Ja, Julie! Ja! Yes! What time is this to be coming in, you? I come from the train and the strange gentleman must let me in. Good for you that the Herr Professor is far enough away. But I want to eat — I am so hungry. Make me an omelette, will you — with four eggs: or with six, and the gentleman will eat some.”

“No,” protested Gilbert. “No.”

Julie, who looked flushed and guilty, with her hair astray, flung off her things and darted into her apron. Her kitchen was spotless: not only clean, but of that purity of texture as if the very cast iron of the stove had never known the common, contaminating earth, but had been born out of a black, clean cloud of the sky.

When the two returned to the long drawing-room, Julie darted round switching off the lights. Whatever would the Herr Professor have said to such a mass of brilliance.

“And what are you doing in Munich?” Johanna asked of Gilbert. Whereupon he told her, as briefly as possible. He looked rather a comic figure, sitting there buttoned up in a thick dark-brown overcoat, which would keep sliding apart and exposing his pyjamad knees, so that he was as self-conscious as an elderly woman with short skirts.

“And are you happy here?” asked Johanna.

“Oh yes — very.”

“And is Alfred nice with you, and not too fussy?”

“Very nice.”

“And do you have a good time with the Hebers and the Wolfstangels and Alastair and all those?”

“Yes — quite. I’ve got no money you see, except the little bit I make one way and another — nothing. So I have to go gendy, you know.”

“Oh, but in Munich one doesn’t need money. It’s the loveliest town [in] the world for that. Don’t you think? You can be at court and have a pink flannelette petty, and nobody minds.”

“Why should they?” said Gilbert.

“Well it is rather horrid, pink flannelette. Oh, but if it weren’t for my children, I’d come and live in Munich like a shot.”

“Have you children?”

“Two lovely little boys. They are dears.”

“In America.”

“Yes — so far away.”

“Couldn’t you bring them?”

“No, it’s such a bother dragging children about.”

“Don’t you miss them frightfully?”

“No — not unless I start thinking about them. They’re there, you know — like the sun or the Frauenkirche.”

“Yes, I suppose they’re all right.”

“Yes. I’ve got a perfect German nurse for them. I believe she’s much better with them than I am, though I rather hate her bossy little ways. Let’s go and eat.”

They returned to the dining-room, and Julie carefully switched off the light after them.

So, instead of facing the little white-bearded professor, Gilbert sat facing a young and lovely, glowing woman. His double-breasted overcoat was buttoned over his breast, his fresh face and pouting lips perched above inquiringly. The woman was glowing with zest and animation, her grey-green eyes laughed and lighted, she laughed with her wide mouth and showed all her beautiful teeth. Her hair was soft and brownish and took glints, her throat, as it rose from the fine texture of her blouse, that was dark blue-and-red frail stuff transparent over white, rose like a lovely little column, so soft and warm and curd-white. She was full-bosomed, and full of life, gleaming with life, like a flower in the sun, and like a cat that looks round in the sunshine and finds it good.

Now Gilbert was an impressionable young man, who never left off being smitten. Whether it was the fluff and cuddliness of Emmie, or the ivory irony and slowness of Patty, or the dark-browed peasant passivity of the catholic Marta, or the glow of the learned and wistful and uncertain Louise, he was sure to be smitten. Now he was struck all of a heap, so much so that he did not even know he was smitten at all, but only watched and listened, was all eyes and ears and soul-attentiveness, with no saving afterthought to steady him.

Johanna liked him. Women did like him as a rule, with his full, dark-blue eyes, his pouting lips, and his musician’s hands.

“Tell me about your home, in England,” she said.

He told her about his father, and Whetstone.

“Oh,” she cried, “I know those Midlands. They are a dark, dreary hole in the face of the earth. And did you never have a mother, then?”

“Not to remember.”

“Well I think you’re lucky. Mothers are awful things nowadays, don’t you think?”

Gilbert had not been accustomed to think so, therefore he inquired “why?”

“Don’t you think they all want to swallow their children again, like the Greek myth? — who was the man? — There isn’t a man worth having, nowadays, who can get away from his mother. Their mothers are all in love with them, and they’re all in love with their mothers, and what are we poor women to do?”

“Do you do so badly?” asked Gilbert.

“Yes! Yes! You don’t believe it!” She made round solemnish eyes at him. “But it’s true. It’s true.”

“In what way,” said Gilbert.

“One wants a man to oneself, and one gets a mother’s darling. — You don’t know what it means. They’re all Hamlets, obsessed by their mothers, and we’re supposed to be all Ophelias, and go and drown ourselves.”

“But you’re not on the way to the water, are you?” asked Gilbert/

“No,” she cried, with a shout of laughter. “No, I’m not. Neither am I going to put rue and rosemary in my hair, though they’d all like to make me. — Ha — mother-love. It is the most awful self-swallowing thing.”

“You’ve got a mother-in-law, then?”

“Yes, but she’s a dear, really. She loves her husband. She’s quite beautiful, really. No, my husband isn’t like that. He wants to set me on a throne and kiss my feet. You don’t know how uncomfortable I feel.”

“I can believe it,” said Gilbert.

“Can you? Can you? Well I’m glad you can. I hate a throne, it’s so hard and uncomfortable. And I don’t think I’m a white snowflower, do you?”

He looked at her across the table.

“I shouldn’t say so,” he said.

“No by Jove! Anything but. Oh, if he knew. — Do you know, he is quite capable of killing me because I’m not a white snowflower. Don’t you think it’s absurd? When I’m a born dandelion. I was born to get the sun. I love love, and I hate worship. Don’t you agree?”

“Yes, quite,” said Gilbert, shaking his head solemnly.

“To sit and be worshipped all my life by one solemn ass — well, it’s not good enough. There are lots of men in the world — such lovely men, I think. There

was a little Japanese in the train. Don't you think they're fascinating — so quick and on the spot."

"Yes — !" said Gilbert doubtfully.

"I should love a little Japanese baby: brown and solemn and so different. I think they're dears."

"Have you ever seen one?"

"Yes, haven't you? The first I saw was when I was quite a girl — you know I'm thirty-two, and have a son of twelve. And it was the dearest little thing — a father and a mother Japanese in awful European clothes, carrying this dear little brown baby. It was in Florence, and the people ran after them in crowds, perfectly fascinated. So that they had to get a carriage and drive off. Oh I can remember them so well. And I always knew after that that I wanted a brown baby. Yet there I've got an honest English husband and two sweet boys, and I'm adored for being a white snowflower. Don't you think it's strange?"

"Very."

"No you don't! You think it's quite right, I know you do, you Englishman. You all want a white snowflower in your button-hole. Say you do, now."

"Well, I don't know much about white snowflowers, so perhaps it's no good my saying."

"Oh you cautious Englander. And aren't you in love with anybody now?"

"No, nobody in particular."

"Nobody in particular! That sounds just like you. When you can't have a snowflower you have some perfectly impossible horizontales. Oh, the English and the Americans, with their snowflowers and their saintly mothers and their unmentionable incidents in the background! It's all such a lie."

"Nay," said Gilbert. "I never have anything to do with horizontales. No, I left England because of a girl."

And he told the story of himself and Emmie.

"It does sound awful," she said. "So common and unrelieved. I don't like it."

"No, neither do I," said Gilbert.

"But you did it, and therefore you must have liked it. Oh, I can't bear to think of love made so low."

"You like love on a high plane?" said Gilbert.

"Yes! Yes! There must be something ideal about it."

"Japanese?" said Gilbert ironically.

"Yes. I think they're so wonderful."

"Perhaps I think Emmie wonderful," said Gilbert.

"Oh no! Oh no! How can you. Such a common little thing, and rather a minx, I'll bet."

“And what about a Japanese? Isn’t he common? Isn’t he an ugly toad?”

“No! No! It’s an ugliness that fascinates me. — No! No! I hate commonness. The commonest man I’ve ever had is my husband, really. — No, I had a wonderful lover — a doctor and a philosopher, here in Munich. Oh, I loved him so much — and I waited for his letters — ”

“When, before you were married?”

“Oh no. It is only two years ago. He was Louise’s lover first. It was he who freed me, really. I was just the conventional wife, simply getting crazy boxed up. But he was wonderful, Eberhard. Ah, I did love him.”

“And don’t you any more?”

“No — no! I knew it was no good. When I’d been with him — I was only with him two weeks — two separate weeks — here, and in Utrecht. He was a marvellous lover — but I knew it was no good. He never let one sleep. He talked and talked. Oh he was so marvellous. I once went with him to a zoo place. And you know he could work up the animals, by merely looking at them, till they nearly went mad.”

“A psychiatrist.”

“Perhaps! Perhaps! He took drugs. And he never slept. He just never slept. And he wouldn’t let you sleep either. And he talked to you while he was loving you. He was wonderful, but he was awful. — He would have sent me mad. Perhaps I am a bit mad now. — But he was my first lover — four years ago.”

“And where is he now?”

“I don’t know. In Berlin or somewhere. He simply lives on drugs. And he was so beautiful, like a white Dionysos. He never writes. But Louise will know. She was his wife’s best friend. But Wilhelmine never tried to keep him. You couldn’t try to keep a man like that. — The only thing I couldn’t quite stand, was that he would have two women, or more, going at the same time. And I couldn’t bear it.”

“No,” said Gilbert, who was becoming depressed. “But why did you think he was so wonderful.”

“Oh, he was a genius — a genius at love. He understood so much. And then he made one feel so free. He was almost the first psychoanalyst, you know — he was Viennese too, and far, far more brilliant than Freud. They were all friends. But Eberhard was spiritual — he may have been demoniacal, but he was spiritual. Which Freud isn’t, don’t you think.”

“I don’t think Freud is spiritual,” said Gilbert. “But what was it that Eberhard taught you, that made you feel so free?”

“He made me believe in love — in the sacredness of love. He made me see that marriage and all those things are based on fear. How can love be wrong? It

is the jealousy and grudging that is wrong. Love is so much greater than the individual. Individuals are so poor and mean. — And then there can't be love without sex. Eberhard taught me that. And it is so true. Love is sex. But you can have your sex all in your head, like the saints did. But that I call a sort of perversion. Don't you? Sex is sex, and ought to find its expression in the proper way — don't you think. And there is no strong feeling aroused in anybody that doesn't have an element of sex in it — don't you think?"

These theories were not new to Gilbert. How could they be, in the professor's house? But he had never given them serious attention. Now, with the gleaming, distraught woman opposite him, he was troubled by the ideas. He was troubled, and depressed. It all saddened him, and he did not agree, but did not know what to say.

"I never know quite what you mean by sex," he said.

"Just sex. It is the kind of magnetism that holds people together, and which is bigger than individuals."

"But you don't have sexual connection with everybody," said Gilbert, in opposition.

"Not directly — but indirectly."

"Nay," he said. "I don't see that. Sex is either direct sex, or it is something else which I don't call sex."

"But don't you see," she said, "sex is always being perverted into something else — all the time."

"Ay," said Gilbert. "And perhaps something else is always being perverted into sex."

"Yes," she said. "Yes."

It was evident she was all distraught, bewildered, roused, and yet not having any direction.

"Of course," she said, "I daren't tell Everard. When I try to tell him, he sneers. I tried to tell him about Eberhard. But he wouldn't let me. He didn't want to know. And he would kill me rather than know. Isn't it strange. — And yet the secrecy almost sends me mad. — Why can't I tell him?"

"It isn't a pretty thing for a man to hear — from his wife," said Gilbert.

"But why? It isn't unnatural. And he's my husband. And he lets me do what I like. He lets me come to Germany for three months at a time, and he is quite happy there in Boston, with his work, and his love for me as a snowflower. Why won't he let me tell him I'm not a snowflower? I do tell him that. But why won't he let me tell him about Eberhard? He knows, at the bottom. He knows. In his unconscious, he knows I'm not faithful to him. But he would kill me rather than let me tell him. And that is what is so awful to me. I feel it is awful — I live in a

lie, and it sends me mad. But what am I to do?"

"Write to him, and tell him."

"Yes, but it seems cowardly. And one writes all the wrong things. And then he's one of the people who make it just impossible. He would never face it — never. He would just make horrors for himself and me and the children, and it wouldn't be faced at the end. He might commit murder, but he would funk facing what I've done and what I am. You see it's what I am that he's got to see, and which he never will see. Whatever Eberhard was, he was something which Everard, my husband, never could be: something wonderful, something beautiful, and something so much more intense and real. Well, I can't help it that I needed that, can I? I did need it. I was just arrested without it. — And Everard would just either kill me or show off in some other way like a maniac, if I tried to tell him. Why will men never know their own limitation?"

"Will women?" said Gilbert.

"Oh much sooner. — You see I could always be friends with Everard: even be married to him. I am fond of him, really. But I did love Eberhard — and my husband would have to admit it. I loved Eberhard. And I rather love Freyling and Berry. I do, and so I do. It's no use denying it. And I won't deny it. Why should I deny them any more than Everard? Why should I?"

Gilbert sat with his head dropped, and did not answer. Johanna watched him.

"Ah!" she said, with a distraught, reckless sigh. "It is all so complicated, I feel sometimes I might go mad. Why is it all so complicated? Why can't we admit love simply, and not go into paroxysms about it?"

"Perhaps it isn't natural to be simple about it," said Gilbert. "Perhaps it would be unnatural if Everard, your husband, let you do as you do and knew about it."

"But why can it be any more natural, his just refusing to know? He only refuses to know. And if that is natural, well, better be educated beyond nature."

"Probably," said Gilbert.

"You know that's what makes me hate him. I don't hate him. I'm fond of him really. And it sends me mad to have to hate him, when I'm fond of him. But I shall go mad if I have to live with him. Because I've got to keep it all secret, and that just does for me."

"Why don't you tell him, then?"

"I've tried. Ha, haven't I tried, God knows. But he'd expect me to be a weeping Magdalen, which I'm not: repenting at his feet, which would be just a lie. I loved Eberhard, God knows I loved him: and I'll never go back on it. And I love Berry and Freyling, but not so much. And I'm fond of Everard. And they're all true, so I shan't deny any of them. But I hate Everard, really, for making me lie. I hate him for it, with a deep, deep hatred. He has made me lie, and I can't do

it any more. I can't do it."

"Then don't," said Gilbert. "Write and tell him."

"I don't know what he'd do to the children."

"Nothing," said Gilbert. "Be tragic over them."

"But I don't want him to be tragic over them. — It might all be so simple."

"While you've got people, things never will be simple," said Gilbert.

"No, I suppose they won't. — But I'm not going to be self-sacrificing. Since Eberhard, I can't even if I want to. I can't, I really disbelieve in it."

"So do I," said Gilbert.

They relapsed into silence.

"Well — " she sighed after a while, looking up with her bright, reckless, rather pathetic smile again. "There it is!"

"Yes," said Gilbert. "There it is."

"Goodness!" she cried, looking at the clock. "It's nearly three."

"It is," said Gilbert.

She rose, letting her serviette drop on the floor, and turned towards the door.

"Well goodnight," she said, holding out her hand.

"Goodnight," said Gilbert, shaking hands.

"You wouldn't like to come to me?" she said, looking direct at him.

"When?" he asked, looking back into her eyes.

"Tonight," she said.

He was silent for a moment, looking unconsciously at her.

"Yes," he said, and was surprised that his lungs had no breath.

"In about ten minutes," she said, turning away.

Chapter XV.

Jupiter Tonans.

To say that Johanna and Gilbert found that famous first night of theirs a success would be false. It was not a success for either of them. The passion did not get free in either, and therefore neither of them felt satisfied or assuaged or fulfilled. And yet in the morning they were rather happy. They were happy just being together. The very fact that the attempt at passion had failed for the moment kindled a deeper gratification in companionship. They were delighted like two children at being together.

“What are you doing today?” cried Johanna at breakfast — which was at half-past ten.

“Alfred is coming back this afternoon,” said Gilbert.

“Oh dear! And tomorrow I must go to Frankfort. Isn’t it maddening! — Shall we go out?”

“Yes,” said Gilbert — though he should have gone to the university.

Therefore they wandered through the streets of the town till midday, then took the train to the mountains. They went to Kochel, to the Kochelsee. It is a little, deep, dark-watered lake. The day was sunny, with a vivid radiance enhanced by the not-far-off flashing of many snows and spear-heads of mountains. At the foot of the Alps, among the foot-hills, there are bogs where the peasants cut turf. The two walked across the bogs, picking blue gentian and delicate pink primulas and bog-flowers like violets. In the village they bought food and oranges — which Gilbert liked because the peasant woman who sold them called them Apfelsinen, apples, feminine apples. By the side of a little white shrine they sat in the sun, listening to the Alpine gurgling of running waters, smelling the tang of ice and bog in the sunshine, and eating the black bread, which is so very good with mountain butter, and the slices of rare good sausage, and sipping the Schnapps from a tiny shilling bottle, and hearing the cow-bells tong-tong-tong, behind the fir-trees at the back, and seeing the mountains in heaven pale and radiant.

“If I were you,” said Gilbert, “I shouldn’t go back to America.”

He was holding her hand quietly in his.

“When, never? Oh, I must.”

“But I should write and tell Everard.”

“What?”

“That you won’t come back.”

“But he’d want to know why.”

“Because you are staying with me.”

She was quite still, whilst the cow-bells clonked from the slopes above, and a peasant far off yodelled in the spring air.

“But I must go back, mustn’t I?” she said wistfully. “I’d love not to. — But I must.”

“Write and tell him you are with me.”

“Must I?”

“Yes.”

“I am frightened.”

“What’s the good of being frightened. — It would be better if you told him to his face. But you can’t. So write. Write tonight.”

“And say what?”

“That you are with me.”

“But shall I?”

“Yes. Write openly. Then let things develop.”

“I’m afraid to.”

“But you must.”

“Are you sure?”

“Yes I am.”

“I’m frightened.”

And she clung to his fingers. He stared away into the marshes of the foot-hills, where clumps of birch-trees balanced magically in the air, on silver stems, radiant almost as the mountains are radiant, yet near, and alive.

“Are you sure I must?” she said. His face, so still, looking into the distance and seeming devoid of feeling, frightened her.

“Yes, you know I am.”

But she knitted her woman’s brows, and thought of things he did not think of: her children, her many years of married life in England and America, her parents: all the old scheme of things. She knew he thought of nothing: only he looked away into the distance. And she didn’t remind him. She let his far-awayness decide.

As the afternoon wore on they rose and went to the lake. It was deep and dark blue, dark green, heavily ice-cold. There was a little pier, a little wooden jetty near a small bathing establishment that was shut. They sat on this jetty and dipped their feet in the heavy, clear water, and watched the light on the steep slopes opposite, and the deep shadows infolded in the encroaching mountains.

They seemed quite alone — there was nobody else.

After a while she got up and went away, through the shrubby walks by the water — a sort of hand-breadth of deserted pleasure ground. He stayed fastening his boots.

She drifted on alone, with head dropped, brooding. It was her instinct to get away and be alone. She came to the mountain high-road. Bullocks with a load of wood were slowly swinging along. Some soldiers passed. And she walked towards the infolding of the mountains, and still did not look up.

Then suddenly she remembered she was alone. She looked along the white, lost road, that ran between birch-trees. She turned. The soldiers were looking back at her. The scarlet band of their round caps showed so plainly above their ruddy, rude, peasant faces. She was frightened. Always fear took possession of her when she found herself alone in lonely places: a strange fear of men, of being attacked.

Why didn't Gilbert come? Why wasn't he in sight? She hurried towards the little pleasure ground. But the seats were bare. She went round the paths between the shrubs. But there was no sign of him. The world seemed strangely empty, void, and fear overcame her.

Bewildered she hurried to the little jetty. There she had left him, sitting at the end with his feet dangling over, not touching the water. Now it was empty. There was nobody. The sense of emptiness in the air was overwhelming.

Could it be possible he had slipped in and was drowned? She went forward trembling along the jetty, and peered into the deep, ice-heavy water. Oh god, was he gone? Was he gone down then? Terror mounted into her heart. She kneeled on the end of the jetty and peered down into the water. Could she see something down there? Could she?

She started up and looked round in horror. The sombre mountains stood almost upon her. She looked back at the little pleasure grounds. Empty. It was all empty, empty. He was drowned in the dark, still water of the Kochelsee, and there was a terrifying absence in all the chill air. She stared round. She called, and called again. No one answered.

Wildly she hurried towards the station. She asked a peasant woman if she had seen her husband — Mein Mann. But the woman had not seen Gilbert. Johanna arrived at the small terminus station. Nobody there. She asked a porter. Nothing.

And she felt sure he was drowned. She felt sure he was drowned. He was drowned, and she was alone, and what should she do. She felt a thrill of horror, and somewhere else, a pang of relief that the great solitude surrounded her again. In the midst of terrible fear, an awful void, there was a tiny motion of gratification that she was free. For in a way, she feared him — she had an

incomprehensible small dread of him.

But her chief feeling was one of bewildered terror. As yet she spoke to no one. But she raced back along the white, empty high-road towards the lake. That was where he was: in the lake at the end of the jetty. It fascinated her, drew her on.

And as she raced in the frenzy of her heart, she saw him coming, a solitary figure, along the high-road towards her. Ah! All the tension dropped from her. He was there. And yet her heart was still aching from its strain.

“Where have you been? I thought you were drowned,” she cried almost angrily, as he approached her.

“Drowned! Why? I’ve been looking for you.”

“But where? Where? I’ve been nowhere? What have you been doing?” Her voice was peremptory and rather angry still.

“I came out on to the road and turned towards the village, thinking I was following you. I can’t have been two minutes behind you — not two minutes. Which way did you go?”

He too was rather angry, having been wandering in bewilderment and fear, looking for her. And neither of them could believe that such a small thing should have shattered them as this half-hour’s evasion had shattered them. The effect was by no means in proportion to the cause. And as they stood looking at one another in angry relief, there on the high-road, they knew it.

“I thought you were drowned. I was sure you were drowned,” she insisted.

“But why should I be drowned?” he answered irritably.

“I thought you’d fallen in the lake.”

“Am I such a fool?”

“Heaven knows. But I was sure.”

“Ah well then, you had no need to be sure.”

They walked slowly towards the station, a curious couple. But once in the train, she was glad again of his presence. He relieved her from the world. She was afraid of the world:

terrified of its sentence on her. It seemed to emit a horrible police-suspicion of her, which maddened her with fear and unease. And this man seemed to relieve her of it — though she did not know why. He made her feel quiet. And he too rested within her presence, and looked out from the little inaccessible conning-tower of his submerged spirit upon the world, as if the world were some endless streaming phenomenon. Without noticing one another, they gave each other a strange ease in the midst of a life that was alien to them both.

They arrived at the flat in town to find Alfred irritably expecting them, waiting for dinner.

“Ho! Johanna! You are a nice girl. You are a nice girl!” he cried in English.

“So you slept in the train while your father and mother were waiting for you! Well, you are a dutiful loving daughter. You are a nice vestal. Ho! Julie told me. And where have you been? Do you know Mr Noon?”

“Quite well,” laughed Johanna significantly.

“Quite well! Quite well! Well, that is quick work. And behind my back! And when do you go to Frankfort?”

“Tomorrow.”

“Tomorrow! Well, it is lucky, because Professor Hartstein is coming and I shall want your room.”

“Don’t you like it that I came here and settled myself in? — But I had no money — I spent it all and hadn’t enough to pay the auto.”

“Ach, what a girl, what a girl! What should you do if you had no relations to go to? Well? What? Ha! What would you do without your relations?”

“Ya, Alfred, in a world where all men are brothers, you know — ”

“And all women sisters! Yes, I know. I know! Well. And where have you been? What have you been doing with yourself? Well? What? Have you been to see Louise? Have you been to see your cousin. Because I am only your cousin-in-law, remember. I am only your cousin-in-law. — How do you say that in English — ?” he turned to Mr Noon.

“The same,” said Gilbert.

“Well! Well! You haven’t told me where you have been, and what you have been doing.”

“Ach, du guter Alfred — we’ve been to Kochel.”

“To Kochel? To Kochel! But why? And who is we? Did Louise go?”

“No. Louise doesn’t know I’m here. Mr Noon and I went.”

“So! You two! You two! And what would your dear husband say? — your dear forsaken husband. — Ach, you know, Gilbert — ” said the professor, turning to Noon, “these women have no conscience AT ALL. It is an awful family of women: an awful family for women: I don’t know which. I married one, so I know. I know, who am a-telling of you. Well — well! Well — well! — And how goes it with you then, Johanna? Eh? Eh?”

“Well, thank you,” she said mockingly.

“Well, eh? Ah well, all I can say, Gilbert, is that I am sorry for you. I am SORRY for you.”

“Green grapes, green grapes, you old fox, you!” cried Johanna. The conversation, if such it can be called, had lapsed into German.

“Ah well, we shall see who pulls the longest face when he’s eaten the grapes,” said Alfred. Then rather pettishly, pantingly. “Ach! Ach! I’ve got such a headache. Ach, such a headache.”

“You want your dinner,” said Johanna, “and so do I.”

“No! No! I have had it all day. Ach, such a headache!” And he rested his head on his hand and made miserable eyes.

“Ja, du arner Alfred!” said Johanna, in a tone of commiseration, as to a spoilt child. “Go and wash thy face in hot water — really hot water — and then let us have dinner.”

“Nein! Nein! Hot water won’t do it any good,” lamented Alfred peevishly.

“Perhaps senna,” said Johanna brightly, going away.

Alfred was in one of his pets. He was very much put out at arriving home and finding no one there. He thought he was angry at the way people appropriated his hospitality, and never gave him a thought. So he said ach!, and turned his shoulder to Gilbert, and would not speak; thus betraying his displeasure. So Gilbert also went away.

Johanna was hovering in the doorway of her room as he went down the passage. A bright, roused look was on her face. She lifted her eyelids with a strange flare of invitation, like a bird lifting its wings. And for the first time the passion broke like lightning out of Gilbert’s blood: for the first time in his life. He went into her room with her and shut the door. The sultriness and lethargy of his soul had broken into a storm of desire for her, a storm which shook and swept him at varying intervals all his life long.

Oh wonderful desire: violent, genuine desire! Oh magnificence of stormy, elemental desire, which is at once so elemental and so intensely individual! Oh storms of acute sex passion, which shatter the soul, and re-make it, as summer is made up out of the debacle of thunder! Oh cataclysm of fulminous desire in the soul: oh new uprising from the cataclysm. This is a trick of resurrection worth two.

The cyclone of actual desire — not mere titillation and functional gratification — or any other -ation — broke now for the first time upon Gilbert, and flung him down the wind. Not, dear moralist, to break him against the buttresses of some christian cathedral which rose in his path. Not at all. It flung him smack through the cathedrals like a long-shotted shell. Heaven knows where it did not fling him. I’ll tell you later on.

But for the moment, I insist on apostrophising desire, intense individual desire, in order to give my hero time. Oh thunder-god, who sends the white passion of pure, sensual desire upon us, breaking through the sultry rottenness of our old blood like jagged lightning, and switching us into a new dynamic reaction, hail! Oh thunder-god, god of the dangerous bolts — ! — No, gentle reader, please don’t interrupt, I am not going to open the door of Johanna’s room, not until Mr Noon opens it himself. I’ve been caught that way before. I

have opened the door for you, and the moment you gave your first squeal in rushed the private detective you had kept in the background. Thank you, gentle reader, you can open your own doors. I am busy apostrophising Jupiter Tonans, Zeus of the thunder-bolt, the almighty Father of passion and sheer desire. I'm not talking about your little messy feelings and licentiousnesses, either. I'm talking about desire. So don't interrupt. Am I writing this book, or are you? Let me tell you, even if, gentle reader, you happen to be a wonderful, chirping, gentle, soft-billed gosling of a critic, gentilissimo, I am writing this book, and it is not being chirped out by you. That is the mistake you make, gentle critic. You think I ought to write down what you chirpingly dictate to me. But you're wrong, you fluffy little thing. I'm writing this book myself, and nobody is chirping it out to me like a piece of dictation. — Oh Jupiter Tonans, oh God of great desire, oh Storm-Father, I pour out my wine to you! Let the lightning play in my blood, let the —

“Johanna! Jo — han — nah — h — h!”

That is the voice of Alfred, calling from the door of the drawing-room in long-drawn musicality, high-low.

“Din — nerrr! Essenrin! Kommm!”

“Ja — ah — h!” piped the shrill voice of Johanna from behind the ever-closed door. “Kdm — me — e — !”

And in two more minutes she appeared, bright, a little dazzled, and very handsome. Alfred still stood waiting in the doorway of the drawing-room; a small, correct figure with a white imperial.

“Where is Mr Noo — oon?” he asked, still singing.

“Mr Noo — oo — n!” sang Johanna in antiphony. And she led her cousin-in-law into the dining-room.

Critic, gentle reader, I shall not say a word about Mr Noon's movements. Suffice that he walked in a dignified manner into the dining-room, wearing a neat bow tie, just as Julie was removing the soup plates.

“Late! Late!” cried Alfred. “Has your toilet taken you so lo — ong?” Pray reverse the intonation of the last word: start low, and go high.

Gilbert seemed not to hear, but sat and ate his soup quickly. He too was fresh in the face.

“He looks very clean and nice,” said Johanna.

“Ye — es! Quite a nice young man,” said Alfred, whose attention was now, fortunately, attracted by the good brown lump of larded venison on the dish before him.

Chapter XVI.

Detsch.

The home of Johanna's parents was not in Frankfort, but in Detsch, a small but important military city where her father, Wilhelm Freiherr von Hebenitz, held a moderately important office under government.

In Frankfort the family assembled, and moved on to Detsch: at least the Baron and Baroness and their daughter Johanna arrived in the home city shortly after the events related in the last chapter. Johanna was scolded and spoiled, and all the delicacies of south Germany — whose name was legion — were set on the table for her.

Detsch was much warmer than Munich. So Johanna sunned herself, and flirted with her old friend Rudolf von Daumling, a rather wistful cavalry officer with a decided wife. Rudolf was thin and pleasant-looking, and still, at the age of thirty-eight, wrote little poems for his own delectation. Johanna had a certain fondness for him: *der gute Rudolf*. He was one of the men who didn't fit the army. Now he is dead: killed in action the first month of the war.

We mention him gently. He was not happy with his wife, who wounded his over-sensitive spirit. Therefore, though he lived under the same roof as she, he did not live with her actually. He was sad and wistful, and did not know what he lived for.

Johanna, of course, who took her sex as a religion, felt herself bound to administer the cup of consolation to him. He had thought his days of love and love-making were over.

"Ah, you!" cried Johanna to him — but not in his wife's hearing. "You are a young man, and awfully good-looking.

You might give any woman a good time. Why do you sit moping?"

So he told her, and she pooh-poohed him. And so the fires began to beat up in Rudolf's breast, the sun came out on his brow, faintly.

"But you don't love me, Johanna," he said.

"Yes, I do; why not?"

Which is one way of putting it. Why not?

But in Detsch Johanna was well known, and Captain von Daumling even better. Moreover there was his unhappy, lynx-eyed wife, with whom he lived and did not live. But Johanna sailed bravely on. She found occasion to draw her

old Rudolf to her breast, and even further.

“Ja du!” she said to him, teasing. “Du! You! You, to say you can’t love any more.”

And he laughed, and blushed, and was restored in his manliness. For, in spite of Tolstoi and chastity, he had found his own impotent purity unmanly, and a sense of humiliation ate into him like a canker. Now that Johanna had demonstrated his almost splendid capabilities, he felt he had been rather a fool. And he was rather pleased with himself.

But — ! But — ! He wanted love. And Johanna only loved him because — why not? Well, and why not?

It ought to be a sufficient reason. But alas, Rudolf, although a cavalry officer, belonged to the wistful of this world. And why-not? wasn’t enough. He wanted flaming affirmation. Therefore he blew this little why-not fire faint-heartedly.

And so on for a week. Oh, things go quickly! On the seventh day Johanna was waiting in the station at Detsch, all agog. In whizzed the train for Paris, out stepped Mr Noon, in a new suit and with a gladstone bag.

“I was awfully afraid you wouldn’t come,” said Johanna.

“Here I am,” said Gilbert.

After which Johanna felt a perhaps even purer compassion for her poor Rudolf. And he, to his credit, found compassion even more humiliating than impotence. Whereupon he wrote quite long poems, in which Gilbert unwittingly fluttered as a dark Ungliicksrabe, raven of woe.

Now my latest critic complains that my heroines show no spark of nobility: never did show any spark of nobility, and never do: perchance never will. Speriamo.

But I ask you, especially you, gentle reader, whether it is not a noble deed to give to a poor self-mistrustful Rudolf substantial proof of his own virility. We say substantial advisedly. Nothing ideal and in the air. Substantial proof of his own abundantly adequate virility. Would it have been more noble, under the circumstances, to give him the baby’s dummy-teat of ideal sympathy and a kind breast? Should she have said: “Dear Rudolf, our two spirits, divested of this earthy dross of physicality, shall fly untrammelled.” Should she once more have done the pure and pitiful touch? Should she have proceeded to embrace the dear depressed Captain of the fifth regiment in the spirit, to whoosh with him in unison of pure love through the blue empyrean, as poor Paolo and Francesca were forced to whoosh on the black winds of hell? Would this have been noble? Is the baby’s dummy-teat really the patent of true female spirituality and nobility, or is it just a fourpence-halfpenny fraud? Gentle reader, I know your answer. But unfortunately my critics are usually of the sterner sex, which sex by

now is so used to the dummy, that its gentle lips flutter if the indiarubber gag of female spiritual nobility is taken away for one moment.

That is why I am continually addressing myself to you, gende reader, and not to the sterner sex. The sterner sex either sucks away at its dummy with such perfect innocent complacency, or else howls with such perfectly pitiful abandon after the lost dummy, that I won't really address the darling any more.

Gende reader, gentile lecteuse, gentilissima lettrice, don't you agree with me that Magdalen had only one fall, and that was when she fell to feet-washing. What a pity, what a thousand pities! However, it can't be helped. Fall she did, and spilt her spikenard. No use crying over spilt spikenard either. But let me help you up, dear Magdalen, and let everybody wash his own feet. That's sound logic, I believe.

The poor Hauptmann Rudolf von Daumling, however, was crying. He was crying for a dummy, and to have his not-particularly-beautiful feet washed with spikenard and long hair. Poor Johanna — how we throw that little adjective of condolence from side to side: poor Johanna had gone to the wrong shop with her wares. The above-mentioned substantial proof only proved a larger thorn in the flesh of the poetic captain, a thorn which had ceased to rankle, and now rankled again. Therefore his poetry, like pus, flowed from the wound. We are sorry to be distasteful, but so it strikes us. Fortunately the war came in time, and allowed him to fling his dross of flesh disdainfully down the winds of death, so that now he probably flies in all kinds of comforted glory. I hope really he's not flying in our common air, for I shouldn't like to breathe him. That is really my greatest trouble with disembodied spirits. I am so afraid of breathing them in, mixed up with air, and getting bronchitis from them.

Well, my dear Johanna has so far showed no spark of nobility, and if I can help it, she never shall. Therefore, oh sterner sex, bend your agitated brows away from this page, and suck your dummy of sympathy in peace. Far be it from me to disturb you. I am only too thankful if you'll keep the indiarubber gag between your quivering, innocent lips. So, darling, don't look at the nasty book any more: don't you then: there, there, don't cry, my pretty.

No one really takes more trouble soothing and patting his critics on the back than I do. But alas, all my critics are troubled with wind.

Now Mr Noon had a new suit on, grey with a brown thread in it: and a new grey hat: and he looked quite laa-di-dah.

Johanna eyed him with approval. This is still in Detsch station, with a porter standing holding the bag.

“Where am I going to put up?” asked Gilbert.

“Will you go to the Wolkenhof? They know us there. We always put friends

up there. It's a sort of family hotel place, not expensive."

"It had better not be," said Gilbert; "for I've got just a hundred and twenty Marks — just six pounds sterling."

"In the world?" said Johanna.

"In the universe, till my father dies — and probably even then."

"Well," said Johanna, "I can give you some. Everard sent me a hundred dollars."

"Wait a bit," said Gilbert.

They drove to the Wolkenhof, a big, dull, brown place. Gilbert had a big attic under the roof, and looked down on streets and soldiers and drill-yards.

"I shan't have to know you very well," said Johanna. "You're only just an acquaintance — or a friend, but not very intimate, you know."

"All right," said Gilbert.

Whereupon she left him.

He wandered about the old town. It was full of soldiers and officers: an endless parade of blue, waspy officers with swords and cloaks, who put his back up. They seemed to have favorite restaurants, and our Gilbert was always wonderstruck, when by accident he found himself in one of these restaurants and sat eating his asparagus — very good asparagus — and heard the clash of spurs in the doorway, saw the martial and supercilious salute. It did not occur to his north-country innocence that they were despising him and being in some way offensive. But he felt uncomfortable, and rather angry with everything. Up and down his spine went a creepy uncomfortableness and unease. But still, to him the brilliant blue officers were only wonder-figures, he had no human connection with them. Their heel-clicking, their super-martial salutes, their silver sword-points and their flowing cloaks — all this was a sort of spectacle to him, upon which he looked with curious wondering detachment. If they eyed him down their noses, from under the brim of their super-martial caps, well, he thought, this is only correct military deportment. He was himself so remote and civilian that the officers might have put fingers to their noses at him, with both hands, and he would only have found it some novel correctness in military deportment. If they had flourished naked swords before his blinking eyes, he would have smiled and bowed, thinking it all an essential part of the military mystery. Those were days of unblemished civilian innocence.

Yet he was uncomfortable in Detsch. The German language seemed to strangle in his throat. He couldn't get it out. And he seemed not to be in his own skin. Which is a nasty feeling.

Johanna met him in the cathedral square and took him to the Wilhelmgarten, where her mother was waiting. The Baroness von Hebenitz was pleasant and

curious about him. She kept glancing at him, as women of fifty-five will glance. She knew he was Johanna's latest gallant, and wondered what to make of him. She summoned all her English, and asked him to take coffee there in the gardens.

The Wilhelmgarten was lovely with masses of lilac and laburnum in full bloom. The cathedral with its many spires, like a hedgehog pricking its ears, was in the background. Away down on the left wound the river, through the ancient houses of the old town. It was sunny and lovely and four-o'clock. But Gilbert was somewhat bewildered. He ate apple-cake and rich cream, and drank his cafe au lait there with the two women in the open air, whilst a military band played not far off, and elegant waspy officers paraded with super-elegant ladies in enormous Paris hats and glove-fitting dresses of lace or silk.

It was all so strange — the sunshine was so strong, the lilacs were like wonderful cathedrals of blossom, so full and massively in flower, the officers glittered and clicked in their pale blue and silver and scarlet. The Baroness talked in English and German, catching her breath oddly between the words. Johanna, in a dress of dull, smoke-coloured gauze stuff, with a delicate black hat, looked somehow strange to him. She was so shining, so assured, so super. There was no getting away from that curious German exaggeration.

Gilbert had noticed, at the entrance to the gardens, a board which said that it was forbidden to speak French in the Wilhelmgarten. There was a strange sense of unreality: intense, marvellous sunshine, massive, amazing flowers, and people all gleaming and assertive as if they sent out little flashes. It was uncomfortable and intensified, as if everything were focussed here under a burning-glass. The German language seemed to sparkle and crackle like fireworks going off. The women — it was so near to France — all looked so French and yet not French, so curiously definite. Everything was assertive — so assertive that Gilbert, with his sensitive musician's tissue, felt often that he could not breathe.

He let the Baroness pay for the tea, and wondered afterwards if that was wrong. Johanna seemed assertive and self-brilliant like everybody else. She left him, saying she would call at the Wolkenhof next morning at ten.

So he roamed round the old, debated town, which all the time glittered with the military as with pale-blue glass. He was at a hopeless loose end, and not himself, not in his own skin. At nine o'clock he was thankful to climb upstairs to his big attic. And then he stood for a long time at the window, looking down at the strange, tiny marionette threading of people in the street below, far below, the lights glittering, and listening to the bugles and strange sounds from the barracks opposite.

The next day was Sunday. He would not see Johanna till after lunch. So he

watched the amazing military parade of pale-blue officers and dazzling women, hard-souled, strange, either inhuman, or super-human men, not like men at all — all showing themselves off like splinters of bright-coloured opaque glass, there in the open place before the ancient, dark-grey cathedral. It was after mass, so Gilbert went in and looked at the shadowy, incense-perfumed interior — tall and gothic, tall like a forest of stupendously tall trees, from the low-stranded floor. It was all rather too much for him.

Johanna met him, and they walked into the country: flat, fortified, depressing country. They walked along a canal, and saw squadron after squadron of blue infantry thresh heavily, with that awful German rhythm of march, along the white road coming in from the country.

Johanna was important with news. She had a cable from Everard. “Believe you have gone with Berry. Wire ganz richtig or nicht wahr.”

Gilbert looked a little pale. To be sure he wasn’t Berry, but he feared that Noon would smell no sweeter.

“Have you answered?” he asked.

“No,” she said. “Why should I hurry!”

“Shall you wire ganz richtig?”

“How can I?”

Now ganz richtig means quite right, and nicht wahr means not true. Poor Everard was not quite right.

Gilbert asked about Berry: and Johanna told him all about the American: a fair, pleasant young business man, in the same matrimonial situation and of the same age as Rudolf, but of the mercurial rather than the despondent form of idealism.

“We were always motoring away into the country — but he’s the kind of irresponsible, all-above-board man people don’t talk about. He’s awfully nice, really. I hope you’ll meet him one day. We did awfully nice things. One day, deep in the forest, I took all my things off and ran naked through the trees. He said I was Daphne. I believe he loved it. But I was too much for him, really: though he laved me as a friend, he loved me quite wildly as a friend. But I was too much for him otherwise.”

“So you’ve not come away with Berry!”

“No I haven’t, have I,” she laughed.

“Why don’t you wire — Nicht Beere aber Mittag? — Not Berry but Noon?”

“Yes. It would be all up,” she said.

“Let it be all up. Don’t you want to?”

“I’m not so sure,” she said.

“Cable halb richtig — half right,” he said.

“Oh, I can’t,” she said.

She decided she would not cable till the morrow. Louise, her school-sister, was coming from Munich, arriving that evening: and Lotte, Johanna’s own sister, was arriving from Vienna next day.

Gilbert was now becoming rather depressed. He could see it was impossible for Johanna to go back to Boston: and it seemed to him inevitable that she should stay with him. And it depressed him — the tangle and nastiness of it all. He felt in a shabby and questionable position, hanging on there unacknowledged in that unnatural military town. And whether he would or not, he suffered from the peculiar assertive German callousness, he felt he was always being bumped. He rather blankly hung on, being of the bulldog breed.

The next morning Johanna came to his room at the Wolkenhof at ten in the morning. He heard a tap — opened — and there she was, radiant on the doorstep. They felt remote in that high attic. He locked the door.

Later on, talking almost to herself as she tidied her hair before his mirror, she said:

“Do you know, I was rather frightened that you weren’t a good lover. But it isn’t every man who can love a woman three times in a quarter of an hour — so well — is it — ?” and she looked round at him with a radiant and triumphant face, holding his comb in one hand. He almost blushed.

“How should I know?” he muttered, turning aside.

“I assure you it isn’t,” she said.

Vaguely through his mind went the thought — That’s the price she takes me at. Which thought was followed by a second: Yes, and I’d rather.

And yes, gentle reader — I hope to heaven the sterner sex has left off reading before now, so that I may address you alone — Yes, gentle reader, and at what better price can a woman take a man for good? A woman may have the most marvellous pure esteem for a man: but is that any reason why she should sleep with him? She may feel her soul carried away to mid-heaven by him: but does it therefore follow that she should unfasten her garters? They may behold in each other all sorts of spiritual, aesthetic, ethical, and intellectual miracles: but will this undo one single unrelenting button? It won’t. Then why on earth urge people to marry in Tolstoyan spiritual rapture, when as far as marriage goes, spirits, like angels, n ‘ont pas de quoi.

I can see absolutely no sounder ground for a permanent marriage than Johanna’s — three times in a quarter of an hour, and so well. Then you know what you’re in for. Then you’re down at the bed-rock of marriage. And why, gentle reader, the sterner sex — I won’t accuse you yourself; — why the sterner sex should have such a craving for the wings the wings of a dove, far away, far

away from the bed-rock of marriage to fly, I really don't know. Why he wants to soar in mid-heaven with a dummy in his enraptured lips, I cannot tell. It is one of the many mysteries.

“Bing — bang — bump goes the hammer on the anvil.”

Well, and life is a thing which is hammered out between the hammer and the anvil, it isn't a feather wafted downwards from the flight of some soothing, sanctified dove. Man is a smith, and it behoves him to smite while the iron is hot, if ever he is to get any shape into life, or any sharpness on his plough-share.

Johanna and Gilbert went downstairs a little timorously. The Wolkenhof, where Baron von Hebenitz put all his guests, was quite famous as a semi-religious kind of family hotel — a tiny touch of the Y.M.C.A. about it. Johanna did not want to meet on the stairs the old Countess Kippenkegel, a chronic family friend and bygone lady-in-waiting of the Saxon court.

However, she met no one worse than the rather severe Swiss manageress, whom she greeted in her most innocent, naive, disarming fashion.

Johanna had agreed to meet Louise at the cathedral. The three were to talk-it-over.

Louise in the sunshine of the cathedral square, wearing a dress of fine, pale-purple cloth, was evidently about to rob Athena to pay Aphrodite.

“How do you do?” she smiled to Mr Noon. “I had not expected to meet you here in soch circumstances! Yes?”

Her manner was decidedly ironic.

“Hardly,” said Gilbert.

“Hardly, you say!” laughed Louise, knitting her brows in a cogitating way she had. “That is very nice. I like your hardly! Now, where shall we go to have a quiet talk. Shall we have chocolate at Beltrand's — yes?”

“Nein,” said Johanna. “Kein chocolat, Louise.”

“No! Oh very well. Then let us go into the French park.”

So they went into the old, deserted, rather depressing park, and Louise took matters into her own hands. That is, first she took from her bag the cablegram.

“Now then,” she said, “we must settle this difficolty. — Believe you have gone with Berry. Wire ganz richtig or nicht wahr. — Well — ”

And she looked up at Gilbert and smiled her odd, wicked, sisterly smile.

“Well — ” she repeated, with all the irony of Athena cum Aphrodite — “I think you are not this Berry — this black berry, whoever he may be — ”

“Nein Louise — er war nicht schwarz,” said Johanna. “He wasn't black. He was beautiful like ripe wheat.”

“Ach, you simple soul, you! Ach, ripe wheat! What next! Ach — this cranberry. — But we are very wicked, to joke over this serious business. Ach — ”

poor Everard. I am sure it is very dreadful for him.”

She knew Everard well: he and she detested one another. They understood one another too well. They had worked together at Heidelberg.

Louise smoothed the telegram once more on her knee, with her well-gloved hand.

“Ganz richtig oder nicht wahr,” she repeated musingly. “But it is certainly not true: you are not this Berry. Ach, best cable not true. Best cable not true. Think of the life that is coming. Think of Johanna’s children. Ach, all the years which are before you. Best cable nicht wahr — much better — much better.”

“No,” said Gilbert. “She can’t go back. There’d be a catastrophe.”

“But why! But why! Why should there? Ach, he does not want to be told anything except nicht wahr. He does not want the truth. He wants only to be — to be assured, made sure. And for this he does not want the truth — not all the truth — only just the little bit which is comfortable — ha — !” and she laughed an odd, half bitter, half pathetic laugh. “You are so young, Mr Noon. When you are older you will not ask for the wolf’s head. You will not wish it — ha! You will want only three little hairs from his tail, to prove to you that he is a dead wolf. — Ja, Johanna, das ist wirklich so — ” and again she laughed her brief, hot, tired, cynical little laugh.

“Yes, I believe it,” said Johanna. “He wants to be told the comforting lie. But what about me?”

“Eben!” cried Louise. “He wants the comfortable lie — and with that you are caught.”

“Wire,” said Gilbert, “wire not quite true, name wrong — ”

“Yes,” laughed Louise. “That is very nice. Wrong name — wrong Berry — not bil-berry but cran-berry. That is very nice — ”

She mused to a moment’s silence, then resumed:

“But we must not joke. It is not a laughing matter. Ach, you poor Johanna, how can I think of your years in front. Ach, it is so difficult. There are the children — there is money — there is everything.”

“Oh,” cried Johanna, “there is quite as much on the other side.”

But there was a dismal silence in the park, whilst Gilbert looked at a massive horse-chestnut tree in full flower. What was life but a complication of artificial difficulties.

“I think,” said Louise, “it is best to cable nicht wahr, and wait for a time. Later — later — ”

“Yes perhaps — ” said Johanna.

“Don’t you think, Mr Noon?” said Louise.

“No,” said Gilbert. “It’s not a bit of good going on that way any further. Best

make a clean cut. Best wire ganz richtig — it will save a calamity. There will only be a calamity later on.”

“Yes — yes — you think — ” mused Louise.

“But it isn’t quite right” said Johanna. “There isn’t any Berry.”

“There is me,” said Gilbert.

“Yes, there is you,” said Louise, with doubtful intonation. Gilbert flushed, and went pale.

“Wire that it is another man,” said he, with his immovable, pale-faced obstinacy.

“But think — think what it means!” cried Johanna.

“I know without thinking. There’s nothing else to do. Say another man.”

“Shall I?” wavered Johanna.

“Ach — but you don’t know what you are doing!” cried Louise. “You are so young — you are so young, Mr Noon. You are younger than Johanna. Think what will happen — ach — I can’t think of it. You have no work — no money. Let there be time. Let Johanna have time. You must not hurry her in such a thing. Let her take time.”

There was silence. Gilbert became paler and paler. He hated the park, and the morning sunshine, and the chestnut-trees in flower. They all looked to him like cardboard.

“Yes, is it not better so?” persisted Louise.

“No,” said Gilbert. “She must wire the truth.”

“Ach must — must. There can be no must,” said Louise, rather cuttingly. “And the truth is nicht wahr. It is so simple.” She laughed cynically.

“Yes,” said Gilbert. “The truth isn’t true.”

“The truth isn’t true,” repeated Louise. “No — the truth is never true, Mr Noon. You are so young, you do not know what it means.” She laughed hollowly.

It is a stagey thing to say. But then Louise had a queer, tired, devilish hollow little laugh of her own.

“Wire another man,” said Gilbert to Johanna.

“Must I?” she said.

“Ach Hannele, du bist so dumm!” cried Louise. “There can be no must.”

She seemed to be brooding a bitter end of meditation, as she sat with her knee crossed, her veil loose on her brow, looking across the park.

“I think you must,” said Gilbert to Johanna.

“And shall I do as you tell me? What shall I say?” asked Johanna.

“Say another man — ” said Gilbert.

Louise had listened in silence to this little dialogue, almost as if she did not

hear. Now she put in.

“Another man!” she laughed. “Oh, it sounds so nice. I like it very much. Another man.”

“Shall I say that?” said Johanna.

“Yes, say that,” said Gilbert.

“Must I?” said Johanna.

“Yes.”

Louise rose to her feet.

“Oh you young people!” she said. “Come, I must go. Mr Noon, I must take Johanna away to our mother.”

“You will telegraph before you go home?” said Gilbert to Johanna.

“Yes — yes — ” said Johanna nervously.

“And you’ll say what I told you?”

He looked into her eyes.

“Yes, I promise,” she said, still waveringly.

“Come! Come!” said Louise. “Ach what are you doing? You do not know.”

They walked across the hateful park, into which wild horses would not have dragged Mr Gilbert again. He loathed everything he was in for. And yet he was in for it, so there was nothing to be done.

Louise got a taxi, and drove off with Johanna. Both had lowered their veils. Both waved to him triumphantly as they drove off between the avenue of trees. And if anything can be more hateful to a man than to have two females driving triumphantly off in a taxi, and waving to him as they leave him stranded in uncertainty, hanging at a loose end, then tell me what it is.

He rambled round the attractive but to him hateful old town of Detsch, and in perfect misery had his hair cut. The barber was French, and talked anti-German.

With a trimmed head Gilbert looked for luncheon — found a little place where working men ate, and where he had Frankfurter sausages and sauerkraut and felt horribly conspicuous. Then he went home and lay down on the bed.

Johanna was coming some time during the afternoon. And he felt wretched, and not in his own skin. He felt thoroughly humiliated, and now knew he was embarking on a new little sea of ignominy. He writhed under all the ignominy.

There was a tap at the door. It was Johanna. She entered in silence, looking worried.

“Did you wire?” he said.

“Yes.”

“What?”

“I said Nicht Berry — Schreibe — Not Berry, am writing.”

“You sent that?”

“Yes, I sent it before I got home — from the Friedrichstrasse post office. — Oh, Mama is in such a state. She wants to see you too.”

“And have you written?”

“No — but I’m going to today.”

“What is the address? I’ll write too.”

“Will you? To Everard?” she said doubtfully.

“Yes. What is the address?”

“What will you say?” she asked.

“Exactly what is.”

“And what is? Tell me what you’ll say.”

“That you will stay with me — that you are living with me now — and that you won’t go back.”

He was anything but happy and assured. But a strange, pale fixity was on him. He said what he had to say, without giving it thought. In a process of strange abstraction his mind had decided without thinking. And this seemed to mesmerise Johanna.

“Will you say that?” she said wistfully.

“Yes — what is the address?”

He went to the table and took a piece of paper. He stood there in his shirtsleeves. Johanna, in a lovely dress of dull reddish cashmere, wearing a close toque made all of darkish bird’s breast-feathers, stood in the light of the window, wondering and half wistful like a child. He looked at her, from his pallid, gloomy face.

“What is the address?” he repeated.

“Dr Everard “ and she answered automatically, whilst he wrote what she said.

“I shall write to him tonight,” he said, laying down the pencil.

“Shall you?” she said wonderingly.

He looked at her, then he locked the door.

“Do you want me?” she said.

“Yes.”

“Do you want me always?”

“Yes.”

“Are you sure?”

“Yes.”

“You don’t say it very brightly.”

“No.”

“My love — ”

She could see the sombre fire of passion in his eyes and his clouded brow. He resented so bitterly all the complication and humiliation. No man felt the sting of

humiliation more keenly than he, or resented it more deeply and lastingly. He resented the rising tide of black, sewer-like ignominy that was just going to envelop him. He was heavy with deep, sullen resentment. And yet, like fate, his soul was fixed. Johanna was going to stay with him. She was with him now. In the midst of it all he was to enjoy her, she him.

She was quite ready to enjoy him — far more ready than he was to enjoy her. She could soon abandon herself to passion and delicious pleasure. But he came dense and crude.

None the less she admired him.

“What a wonderful shape you are here!” she said, running her fingertips over the front contour of the big hip bone. He was rather bony. He wondered over her appreciation of him:

something very unexpected in it. But he liked it, and his desire spread new wings.

The course of true love is said never to run true. But never did the course of any love run so jagged as that of Johanna and Mr Noon. The wonder is, it ever got there at all.

And yet, perhaps, a jagged, twisty, water-fally, harassed stream is the most fascinating to follow. It has a thousand unexpected thrills and adventures in it. Let those who love peace seek peace and pursue it. We are not so keen on peace. To be a fat cow in a fat pasture is not our ideal. Away with your stodgy and suety peace. Let us have a continual risk and tumble and the unceasing spur of jeopardy on our flank to make us jump and fly down the wind. None of your fat grazing-grounds for us. If we are to have yon tasty tuft of grass, or yon patch of sweet-herb, we’ve got to hop perilously down a precipice for it. And that is what we prefer. God, I don’t want to sup life with a spoon. I’d rather go lean-bellied till I’d caught my bird.

Which all goes to prove that the critic who says I am on the search for beauty rather than truth may be right. He can read this book and make certain. He says I am Aubrey Beardsley rather than Swift. So that all you have to fear, gentle reader, is some exquisite tail-piece to Salome. I’ll do my best for you. If you have misgivings, leave off now.

“Quick, sharp, on the alert Let every gentleman put on his shirt!

And, oh, quick if you please Let every lady get on her chemise!”

Never was such a pair of unfortunate interrupted lovers. As in Macbeth, there came a knocking at the door. Johanna, in the arms of Gilbert, gave an awful start. He sat up and listened, with visions of husbands, police, incensed official Barons and what-not coursing through his mind.

“Bang-bang-bang-bang!” came the double knock. Whoever it was, they would

have heard the voices of the guilty pair. The door-handle gave a little squeak of protest as the unknown horror tried it from outside. Luckily the door was locked.

“Bang-bang-bang!” came the officious knock. And still dead silence in the room, where the guilty pair lay on the bed with beating hearts.

“See who it is,” whispered Johanna, pushing him from her.

And then he saw her, in *puris naturalibus*, flee swiftly, white and naked, behind a curtain which hung across a corner, huddling there with her feet, and the tip of her shoulder, and then, as she stooped, that exquisite finale of Salome showing round and white behind the curtain, before the dazed eyes of Gilbert.

He was in no better plight than she: not a rag, not a stitch on him, and there he stood in the middle of the room listening to that diabolical knocking and vacantly watching the come and go of the exquisite tail-piece to Johanna, as she stooped to unravel her stockings.

And why, under such circumstances, should she be putting on her grey silk stockings, and routing for her garters with rosebuds on them. Why oh why, in the shipwreck of nudity, cling to the straw of a grey silk stocking.

Rap-rap-rap! This was not to be borne. The vacant Gilbert was man enough upon necessity: necessity it had to be, however: and necessity it now was. Therefore he reached down his double-breasted brown overcoat, and wrapped it round him as far as possible. It went round him well enough, but it left his bare neck sticking out at the top, and half a yard of bare shins sticking out at the bottom. No help for it. He unlocked and opened the door, holding it and barring the entrance of — that damned Swiss manageress. His hair was ruffled and on end, he looked at the precise female with his vacant, unassailable eye.

“Die gnadige Frau ist da? — Is the lady there?”

“Wie? — What?”

“Die Frau Doktor is da? — The Mrs Doctor is there?”

“Wie? — What?”

“Madame, est-elle ici? — Is Madam here?”

Gilbert shook his head solemnly.

“Non, elle n’est pas ici.”

Heaven knows why he chose to answer the French and not the German.

The Swiss woman looked at him: he looked at her.

“Elle n’est pas ici?” she repeated.

“Non. Non!” and Gilbert looked into the room behind him, vacantly. He saw Johanna’s now stockinged ankles behind the linen curtain.

“Non! Elle n’est pas ici,” he said with the innocent “pipe of half awakened bird.” He looked into the hard black eyes of the venomous manageress mildly.

The manageress looked various volumes and daggers back at him, but as she

did not proceed to throw them he let her look.

“Merci,” she said reluctantly: very reluctantly. She had lost the battle. And she turned away.

And as he saw her back, Gilbert became aware of his own hairy shins, and agonies of confusion went over him. He locked the door stupefied with confusion.

“Oh God, I must get out of this!” cried Johanna, springing from behind the curtain in her grey silk stockings, rosebud garters, and cambric chemise. Gilbert, still clasped in his brown overcoat, watched her as she flew into her lacey-white knickers, her pretty, open work French stays, her grey silk petty and her reddish dress. She tied the tapes and snapped the press-studs like lightning. In a moment she was tying her shoe-laces. And then she had only to poke her hair more or less under the dusky-lustrous feather toque, and fling the lace scarf over her shoulders, and she was ready.

“Goodbye!” she said, looking at him with wide scared eyes. “I hope before God she won’t make a row. — I’ll go down.”

She was much more scared than Gilbert would have thought. But in a moment she was gone — her red dress and white scarf and soft-feathered head flashed across the landing and was gone.

He proceeded to dress himself, feeling a new rage at his new mess. But there was nothing for it but just to go on. And when there is nothing for it but just to go on, why, one goes on.

So he went downstairs — without mishap. And at the bottom he heard loud laughing talking voices from the lounge. Johanna for certain. Yes, there was Johanna talking to a handsome, ultra-fashionable woman who had daring dark eyes and looked like a cocotte.

This was Johanna’s sister Lotte, descended from the chic of Vienna.

“Ja Lotte — le voila — le faux Monsieur Berry.”

“Bonjour M’sieur,” said Lotte, holding out an elegant white-kid-gloved hand. “Vous n’etes pas Berry, alors!”

Gilbert bowed, and his eye caught a spark from Lotte’s.

“Safe — safe!” cried Johanna to him in English. “Oh, I had the fright of my life.”

“Ai-da!” said Lotte. “I doan spik English. Je vous ai fait un mauvais tour, hein? Mille pardons! I did you a bad turn. I asked the woman if Johanna was here, and she said she thought she was upstairs. So I said Tell her please. Of course, if I had known — ” Lotte made dark, wicked eyes at Gilbert — ”I should have said Pray don’t disturb her.” She put on an engaged look, and smoothed her gloves like a woman just going out, and arched her eyebrows in a rather

becoming pantomime. "But I have made a serious faux pas."

And she bridled, displeased with herself.

"However," she continued, "all can be finished in the next chapter. I am going."

She once more made eyes at Gilbert, and held out her hand.

"I come with you, Lotte," said Johanna.

And once more Gilbert watched two women sail off in a taxi-cab, whilst he was left stranded in that accursed, blaring, military town. And what was worse, he had lost another of his skins now, and felt more raw than he cared to admit even to himself. He loathed the black-eyed Swiss manageress, with her face like a pair of scissors. And he hated her hotel: family indeed!

The twilight of the same day saw Johanna walking sentimentally with Captain von Daumling, who was sparkling in his blue and pink uniform, but whose heart was veiled in a grey chiffon of tears. They strayed unconsciously to the spiney cathedral.

"Let us go," said Rudolf, "and light a candle to our love, on the altar of the Virgin."

"Yes, do let us," cried Johanna, thrilled to her soul.

Now that the candle of Rudolfs brief passion was drooping and almost spent, its ruddy light dwindling to the smallest pale wick-glow, Johanna was thrilled to her marrow to stick up a good stout candle of wax to burn on the altar of the Virgin. In the dusk of the tall, forested cathedral, with the gorgeous windows glowing but shedding no light, they crept on the low strand of the floor, and the captain's spurs tinkled melancholy, a tiny sound low on the floor of the vast, branching shadow of the interior. Johanna was not a catholic, but she loved her cathedral. Its slender, shafted upsoaring affected her deliriously. She crept across the forlorn floor to the flickering altar of the Virgin, whilst the Captain of the Fifth trod softly, holding the stout wax candle between his fingers, at her side.

It was a hushed moment. He lighted the wick of his new pale candle at one of the candles already burning, and then stuck it, like a new pale tree, a new wasting column of life, on one of the expiring sockets. After which he came and kneeled at Johanna's side, and they knew a perfect unison.

Oh white, oh waxen candle of purified love, how still, how golden the flame of the spirit hovers upon you, while the wax lasts. Oh beautiful tall erect candle of chastened aspiration, how soothing is the sight of you to a soul perplexed and suffering. Nay, quench the dusky, crimson-burning torch of unhallowed passion, scatter its lurid blood-flame, crush it down to next to nothingness, put it in your pocket and forget it. And light a six-franc waxen candle upon the altar of uplifted aspiration, and pray a little prayer to the Virgin and the Unbegotten.

And prepare to consume this six-francs-worth of material wax, this mundane flesh: prepare, oh prepare to struggle as a guttering flame struggles with the wick, for release. For release into the infinite. Rudolf watched the sunken, flapping flame of somebody else's candle beating its wings to escape into the boundless eternity, and he pressed his hands to his breast. To escape — ah, to escape from the limitations of this five-franc mould of a corpus!

Johanna meanwhile watched the same sunk flame flapping and fighting for life, fighting, sipping, sipping avidly at the spent wax, and yet, in spite of all its struggles forced to go, forced to leave the lovely warm place of presence, to be driven over the threshold of existence into the howling wilderness of infinite chaos, where the world is void and dark. So there she knelt with luxurious tears in her eyes. I say luxurious. For after all it wasn't her candle, it was only the cavalry captain's. And he was no longer indispensable.

They were both sad, but for different reasons. They both saw the candle-flame shuddering in its frail mortality, and felt the vast shadow of eternity branching overhead. And they both had pangs: widely differing pangs.

So, gentle reader, before you light your next candle to the Virgin, make up your mind which emotion you're going to get out of it: whether you're going to see the immortal soul escaping at last into freedom and bliss, on a strong draught of uplift; or whether you're going to lament "Alas, gone out, gone out!"

Let us invoke the great spirit of Uplift. Oh Uplift, Uplift, that which carries us beyond ourselves, how much bigger we are than ever we were intended to be when we whirl with thy wind in our skirts, heavenwards. Oh mighty rushing wind, oh universal Uplift, carry us above our own high-water-mark and make us boundless. Blow us into the mid-heaven's zenith till this poor earth is no more than a speck of dust in our eye, and we are so god-almighty elevated that there's nothing either here nor in kingdom come but we can look down on it. Dear draughty uplift, bellow out our skirts and trouser-legs like zeppelin balloons, till we whirl straddling up into the sky, whence we can look down on our fellow-men. Oh holy uplift, let us look down on our fellow-men: in love of course! Let us look down on our fellow-men, as pathetic, tearful Gods look down on mankind, pitiful, all pitiful and all benign. Oh, as we straddle in mid-heaven with the sanctified wind of Uplift bellowing up our trouser-legs and ballooning our trouser-seat so that we float butt-end uppermost, oh then, then oh then we spread our arms to mankind away below there, we gather humanity like a tray of silk-worm cocoons to our beneficent bosom, and we fairly reel in mid-air with charitable feeling. Of course our trousers are sound, so we are safe. We are none of your arse-patched mundane sitters. We are the uplift-wooshers, who dribble the Pluto-drizzle of charity over the world. It's a risky thing to do, of course, if

your trouser-seat is worn a little thin. The balloon of the spiritual inflatus might then burst and let you down flop on that same pathetic mankind, which will not welcome you at all if you come cropping down like a brick-bat. In fact, in these days of risky tailors, it isn't half such a safe thing as it used to be, to go wooshing up in the air on the draught of sanctified Uplift. In fact I should warn people to beware of entertaining charitable and benevolent feelings just now, till they are quite sure their material gas-envelope is quite sound. Let them rub and feel their trouser-seat and their backside carefully, to make sure it is a sound vacuum, and that it will act as a trustworthy float when it is filled with the spirit of uplift, most vacuous of all vacuities. I say the trouser-seat, because of course that is the obvious pouch or inflatus-bladder of Uplift. Ah humanity, humanity, let your posterior forever not exist, save as a vacuum. Queens of Spain have no legs, but all lofty mankind has no backside: not a bit of it. Nothing there. Nothing twin-protuberant and kickable. Only the float-void.

But dear me, we become lyrical. Let us return to our muttons; Johanna of the golden fleece, and poor dear shorn lamb of a Gilbert, who lost another skin in his encounter yesterday with the Swiss Manageress. I think that Swiss Manageress ought not easily to be forgiven: for sure she was an upliftress.

But it was yesterday. And now surely, surely the wind is going to be tempered to the shorn lamb. Tempered indeed. Damned ill-tempered.

In Detsch at that moment the May fair was being held, the Maimesse. It had great attraction for Gilbert. He went and stared long at the booths, the woman in red satin with six monkeys; the prize-fighter who had such horrible bulk of arm-flesh in his shapeless, folded arms, and such a rudiment of a face, and no back to his head, a sickly object; at the dancers in sequins and the pictures of La Belle Turque and the family of jugglers; and the rather old-fashioned roundabouts. It was not like an English fair: nothing of our mechanical spick-and-spanness and superior vulgarity. There was here a deeper, more suggestive, more physical vulgarity, something ancient and coarse. The language was either French patois — which was more frequent — or crude German.

Since Monsieur Gilbert was uneasy, wretched inside his remaining skin in this town of Detsch, all on edge and bored, at a loose end, and semi-stupefied, he found this fair a sort of god-send. He could stand staring like any boor, for hours: not really attentive, but at any rate not so acutely burdened with himself. And the ancient pagan grossness, something Mediaeval and Roman even, in the brutality of the fair, interested him. It was as if the modern squeamishness had hardly affected this last remnant of coarse old Europe.

So he stared and strolled, and felt for some reason less of a stranger here than in the town itself. Some sort of Latin or Gallic crudity in the fair gave him a

sense of familiarity, old blood-association, whereas the purely Germanic influence seemed always to put him outside his own skin, and make him so ill at ease he could not remain still for a minute.

As he strolled, behold, Johanna and Lotte coming brilliant and laughing and elegant through the fair. He rushed up.

“This is all right,” he said. “Are you going to any of the shows?”

And he put himself at their side.

Lotte gave him her hand and said Guten Morgen in her deep, nonchalant voice. But Johanna said fiercely, in a half whispering voice:

“Go away! Go away, Papa is just behind! Go away, he is not to see you! Go away, you don’t know us.”

Gilbert went pale and looked at Johanna.

“Allez! Allez done!” said Lotte, in her deep, sardonic voice. “Et au revoir. Mauvaise occasion!” And she nodded her head, and made eyes at him.

Fumbling with his hat, he stepped back. And glancing round he saw Louise with a smallish man in a German crush-hat and upturned moustaches. Louise made frightened eyes at him that he should withdraw. The Baron had not noticed him.

He left the fair-ground at once, and walked straight out, and out over the bridge, and up the hill, and away from the town, through the vineyards where peasants were working, through the deep lane, uphill, uphill towards a village.

On a sort of platform or wide terrace on the brow of the hill he sat down. Below lay the town and the canals and the fortifications and the plain. He did not look out. Black rage was in his heart.

The wide level place on the brow of the slope was the real centre of the village. Horse-chestnut trees, deep in new leaf and flower, made flat shade. A blue soldier was exercising a bright brown horse in and out of the horizontal shade. Other greyish soldiers stood near the parapet, looking out. Down on the high-road below, where they were looking, some artillery was rattling along far away, a cavalcade.

Gilbert felt it was all strange — just strange. In the old vineyards on the slope out here in the country there was a strong sense of Rome — old Rome. This was old Roman territory. But in the school beyond the chestnut trees he could hear the children saying their lessons in German — a queer sound to him.

The soldiers made him feel uneasy. He went across the place into the village — an old, French seeming village, where still he felt the old Roman influence. He went into a clean, old-fashioned inn. A tall, black-eyed man, peasant-farmer and inn-keeper, brought him wine and bread and sausage. And they talked in slow French. And in the black eyes of the inn-keeper was a sort of slow,

implacable malice. He had a son — in France, and a daughter — in France. With his laconic, malicious smile he said that they spoke no German. His children were educated in France: if they were educated here, they would be forced to speak German. He did not intend that they should speak German. He smiled slowly and maliciously.

And Gilbert sympathised sincerely. This rampant Germanism of Detsch was beginning to gall him: a hateful, insulting militarism that made a man's blood turn to poison. It was so force, unnatural too. It wasn't like the quiet lovely German villages of the Black Forest, or the beery roisterousness of Munich. It was an insulting display of militaristic insolence and parvenu imperialism. The whole thing was a presumption, a deliberate, insolent, Germanistic insult to everybody, even to the simpler Germans themselves. The spirit was detestably ill-bred, such a mechanical heel-clicking assumption of haughtiness without any deep, real human pride. When men of a great nation go a bit beyond themselves, and foster a cock-a- doodling haughtiness and a supercilious insolence in their own breasts, well, then they are asking for it, whoever they may be. There is such a thing as passional violence, and that is natural: there is such a thing as profound, deep-rooted human pride, even haughtiness. But that self-conscious conceit and insolence of Detsch had nothing to be said for it, it was all worked up deliberately.

In a temper Gilbert went back to town. Far from having had the wind tempered to him, the wind had taken a bit more skin off. He was angry, and rawer than ever. But at evening he sat in his room, so remote and still, and gradually he recovered somewhat. And then, on a large sheet of paper, he wrote a letter to Johanna's husband.

“Dear Doctor X, I hope you will not mind if I write to you direct.

I am here in Detsch with Johanna, and I have asked her to tell you everything openly. I love her. It is no use making a calamity of things. What is done is done, and there remains only to make the best of it. Johanna is in a queer state, mentally and nervously. I know it would be fatal for her to come back to America. You must know yourself that her state is not normal. One day you will be perhaps grateful to me for saving you from something worse than this “

So Mr Gilbert ran himself down his sheet of foolscap, saying what he actually thought and felt, without imagining the husband at the other end of the communication. He did not talk about love and tears: only that this was something which had come to pass, and which, given Johanna's state of mind, was bound to come to pass, and which coming to pass might have taken a far more painful form, bringing far more nastiness and misery than at present. Therefore it remained for him, Everard, and for himself, Gilbert Noon, to work

for the best solution of the difficulty, and to try not to make further disaster.

Which screed of half-innocent earnestness Gilbert signed, and sealed, and addressed, and went out into the night and posted. Which was another finality secured. It is just as well to have a faculty for intense abstraction and impersonality, but it is very dangerous to use it. However, Gilbert poured out this private effusion from his abstracting soul, and committed it to fate and the international post.

We shall notice a few little gusts of uplift. Our young mathematical friend could not be English without being a bit of a St. George. Behold, Johanna posing as the fair Sabra, with a huge dragon of nerves and theories and unscrupulous German theorists just about to devour her, all unbeknown to her fatherly husband, when up rides St. George in the shape of Mr Noon, and proceeds to settle the brute. How very agreeable! Yes, he saved his own moral bacon when he waved that red-cross flag of greater disaster under Everard's far-off nose. And yet, he was right. The fair Johanna was in the dragon's mouth, and the brave Saint Gilbert hadn't half settled the reptile yet. In fact he hadn't begun. But he spoke as heroes speak before the fight: as if it was finished.

The next morning he met Johanna — and what did they do? Ah friends, you would perhaps expect them to go into the cathedral and light a still fatter ghostly candle. No, Gilbert was not in a candle-lighting mood. The dark red torch of his wicked passion was feeling a bit quenched for the moment, but he was prepared to blow on the spark. Therefore he drifted with Johanna away from the town, down across the river. There at the side of the high-road were green thick trees, and narrow paths into the seeming wood. It looked very and parvenu imperialism. The whole thing was a presumption, a deliberate, insolent, Germanistic insult to everybody, even to the simpler Germans themselves. The spirit was detestably ill-bred, such a mechanical heel-clicking assumption of haughtiness without any deep, real human pride. When men of a great nation go a bit beyond themselves, and foster a cock-a-doodling haughtiness and a supercilious insolence in their own breasts, well, then they are asking for it, whoever they may be. There is such a thing as passional violence, and that is natural: there is such a thing as profound, deep-rooted human pride, even haughtiness. But that self-conscious conceit and insolence of Detsch had nothing to be said for it, it was all worked up deliberately.

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“Shall we go down there?” said Gilbert, pointing to the path that went straight from the high-road rather sombrely under the trees and into the unknown. To be sure there was some sort of not-very-new-looking notice-board: but why notice notice-boards.

“Yes,” said Johanna. “It looks nice.”

So they strayed down the narrow, tree-crowded, sombre path, on and on till they came to an opening. It was rather romantic. There was a smooth greensward bank, very square and correct, and a sort of greensward dry moat, and a high greensward bastion opposite, all soft and still and lovely, with a spot of sunshine shining on it, and the trees around. So in this green seclusion the two sat down, looking at the romantic velvety slopes and moated formality of their quiet nook, and feeling very remote and nice, like Hansel and Gretel, or the Babes in the Wood.

Johanna put her hand in his as they sat side by side in the spot of sunshine, and musingly, gently he turned the jewelled rings on her soft finger.

“I wrote to Everard,” he said.

“Did you! What did you say?”

Gilbert told her.

“I wrote to him too,” she said.

“And what did you say?”

“I said I didn’t think I could ever go back.”

“You should have said you were sure,” said Gilbert.

“Oh, but one must go gently.”

“Do you call this going gently?” he asked.

“With Everard. I mustn’t give him too great a shock.”

“But you won’t go back.”

“No,” she said, rather indefinitely. “Don’t you want me “You know all about that. What are we going to do?” He seemed indefinite now.

“Why — shall we go somewhere — later?” she said.

“Where?”

“I thought to Munich. We might go to Louise. I love the Isar valley — don’t you?”

“I do,” he said. “Go there as man and wife?”

“Dare we?” she said.

“Yes.”

“But they know I’ve got a husband in America.”

“Let them know. I can be he.”

“It would be rather fun,” she said.

“And we could find some little place, and live cheap.”

“Oh, cheap as dirt in Bavaria. I don’t mind what we do so long as I can get away from all that awful Boston business. Oh, you don’t know how I suffered being a correct, highly-thought-of doctor’s wife among all those good middle-class people. Ah the agony, when I think of standing on deck and seeing that town again — seeing Everard waiting for me there! No, I couldn’t do it. It is real agony.”

“Weren’t they nice with you?”

“Oh, they were! They were awfully nice. That made it all the more horrible. I never felt I could breathe among them. I never felt I could breathe — never — not till I was on board the ship and coming to Germany. All the rest of the time I simply couldn’t get a deep breath — I don’t know why.”

She put her hand on her breast and breathed to the depths of her magnificent chest.

“Oh, you don’t know what I suffered. Because they were all so nice to me. I used to think — Oh, if they knew, if they knew about me! — That was after Eberhard. I’m sure I wonder I’m not mad. I got into such a state of terror. I am terrified. I’m so terrified I know I shall go mad if ever I set foot on Boston dock again. I’m not the sort that gets ill, I’m the sort that goes mad. Everard says so himself.”

Gilbert looked at her. Fortunately for him he simply could not understand it. He could not understand her terror — her almost criminal terror, that would drive her to unknown lengths and horrors.

“Well, you needn’t go back,” he said.

“No, I don’t think I can.”

“But we shall have no money.”

“Ah, I don’t mind about money. I don’t care. I’d rather live in a cave than in one of those houses. Yet I loved my house. It was called Marvell. It was so sunny, and I loved the garden. I loved making it all myself. — But the terrors, the horrors I’ve felt in that house are indescribable. — I don’t want to live like that. I don’t want to live like the middle classes. I’d rather live in a cave. If we have no money, let’s find a cave and live there.”

“We can’t,” said Gilbert.

“Why not. People used to. Why are you so damned civilised. I should love it.”

“No you wouldn’t,” he said.

“How do you know? I should love it. Anything to get out of that horror.”

“You might negatively love it: but you wouldn’t positively. No, if we’ve got to live, we’ve got to be moderately comfortable, moderately decent.”

“What an old stager you are! What a conventional civilised creature! Ha, I could fling it all away. I could live in a cave.”

“I couldn’t — not in this climate,” said Gilbert.

“Why not? It could have a door. — But oh, if we do go right away together, let us be like tramps. I feel such an outcast, such an outcast. And oh, how I hate them for making me feel it. I hate them. They like to make you feel a pariah.”

“Then why give in to their likings. They’ll never make me feel a pariah,” said Gilbert.

“You wait. Wait till you’ve been as I have been — all of them loving you and admiring you, and you knowing what they’d do to you if they found out.”

“What would they do?”

“What wouldn’t they! — And they were so nice on the other hand. His parents — they are such dear old people, in England. I love them really. I do hope they’ll never know, it would break their hearts.”

“Pah,” said Gilbert. “Nice people have the toughest hearts as a rule.”

“Why? Why do you say that? — But it is all so horrible! The awful things I’ve done — how I’ve lied. It has nearly sent me mad. I am a bit mad.”

“Well, then make an end of it. Break it clean off — and we’ll go right away together.”

He was holding her hand between his.

“Ah, it would be lovely!” she sighed. “It would be lovely. — Let us go right away — let us disappear. And never, never let us have a house and live among people again — never, never. Never let us be among people as if we were one of them — never. I couldn’t bear it all over again.”

“Don’t bother about them — they don’t matter,” said he soothingly, kissing her soft fingers.

“Ah but they do. How they matter when one is penned in among them. Think of it, I’ve been married and penned in with them for twelve years. And it’s four years since Eberhard. He showed me one could be free. But he didn’t take me away — he didn’t take me away. And how I waited — ah God, how I waited for him. — And then I really believed that one shouldn’t wait for one man. That is the mistake. I believe he is right there. One should love all men: all men are loveable somewhere.”

“But why love all men? You are only one person. You aren’t a universal. You’re just a specific unit.”

“Why aren’t I universal? I’ve got two hands and two feet, like all women. And I do understand something in every man I meet — I do. And in nice men I understand such a lot that I feel forced to love them — I feel forced.”

“Oh Good God!” he said. “Do you love for what you can understand?”

“Yes!” she cried. “Why not?”

“I usually hate what I understand. If I love it must be something I can’t

understand.”

“Well,” she said, “and there’s something in everybody. In every man there’s something I can understand — sometimes so deeply. And that makes me love him. And there’s something I can’t understand. And that makes me go on loving him till I do understand it.”

“My sacred God!” exclaimed Gilbert irreverently. “Your love is a blooming understood affair. I’d rather have mathematics.”

“It is something like mathematics — except that it’s life. Something to know in every man — and something to solve. One can do an awful lot for a man through love.”

“You might as well call yourself Panacea — ,” he said sarcastically.

“Well — why not? I am something of a Panacea — I know I am. And I know love is the only panacea — and where we make a mistake is that we don’t use it or let it be used.”

“A damned patent medicine that poisons more than it cures.”

“Don’t you believe in love?” she cried, snatching away her hand.

“Not in general love.”

“What in then?”

“In particular love I may believe.”

“Oh may you!” she mocked. “And what do you mean by particular love? Just keeping one person all for yourself! Ah, I know the horrors of that. It is all based on jealousy. I think the noblest thing is to overcome jealousy.”

“I don’t,” said Gilbert. “Jealousy is as natural as love or laughter. You might as well overcome everything and have done with it all straight off.”

“No! No!” she said. “Jealousy is mean and horrible — and marriage is vile and possessive. I do believe in love: in all love. And I believe one should love as much as ever one can. I do. Eberhard taught me a great deal. He was wonderful!”

“Do you believe you can be here and in Boston at one and the same time?” asked Gilbert.

“In a way, I am.”

“In a way! In a way! Damn your ways. Damn your spirit. You may be here and in Boston in the spirit, all at once. But I can’t do with spirit. Can your body be here and in Boston at one and the same minute? Can it?”

“No — that’s its limitation.”

“Ah! Then I’m all for limitation.”

“You would be: like the rest of men.”

“All excepting the wonderful Eberhard! — You can’t be here and in America, physically, at once. Limitation or not, you’ve got to abide by it. And it’s the

same with physical love. You can't be physically in love with more than one man at the same time. It can't be done. You can be spiritually in love with everybody at once, and take all men under your skirts in the same instant, like a Watts picture. But that's not physical. That's merely spiritual. And there's a difference."

"There isn't a difference unless we make it."

"Can you be physically in Boston and Detsch at the same moment? Can you physically take two men at once? If there is physical love, it is exclusive. It is exclusive. It's only spiritual love that is all-embracing. And I'm off spiritual love. I don't want it. It stinks. I want exclusive physical love. — There may be aberrations. But the real fact in physical love is the exclusiveness: once the love is really there."

"But I thought I loved Everard — "

"Thought! Thought! You've thought too much. I should leave off thinking, if I were you."

"Yes, you're just like all men. You'd like me to."

But at this point a brutal interruption.

Ah, gentle reader, however you may disapprove of Johanna and Mr Noon, be a little gentle with them, they have known so many brutal interruptions.

A fellow in a blue uniform and a peaked cap and carrying a gun, creeping forward with the loathsome exultant officiousness of all police or soldier individuals on duty, and of German specimens in particular.

"Was machen Sie hier?"

Imagine the foul sound of the German officious insolence the lump of a police-soldier put in these words, as he looked down his nose at the offending couple. They had jumped to their feet seeing him creep on them.

"What are you doing here?" said the sergeant.

"What are we doing here!" said Johanna, her pride of birth and authority springing like flame to her eyes. "And who are you, to come asking. What do you want?"

Gilbert was staggered by the sudden authoritative fury with which Johanna towered and flared at the lump of a sergeant. But he, in all the majesty of his duty, was not to be abashed.

"Ja, was machen Sie hier!" he repeated with calm insolence. "You know these are the fortifications." He spoke as if he had two culprits in his power.

"Fortifications! What fortifications indeed." cried Johanna. "We walked here two minutes from the high-road."

"You are two foreigners. I have heard you for the last quarter of an hour."

"What a beast!"

“Foreigners! Take care what you say. I am German, and my father is Baron von Hebenitz — ”

“And the gentleman — ?” sneered the sergeant, a cunning, solid lump of a fellow.

“The gentleman is English,” said Johanna.

“So! — Have you any papers?” — he turned now to Gilbert.

But Gilbert was looking with such a pale face and such dark round eyes that he did not understand.

“He wants to know if you have any papers,” said Johanna.

“Papers — ” said Gilbert, feeling in the pocket of his new suit. “No — I’ve only this — ” and he took out a letter addressed to a friend of his in the Rhine province.

The soldier or police individual, whatever he was, took the letter and scrutinised the address.

“It is forbidden to enter the fortifications,” he said, looking up with his impertinent officiousness. “You saw the notice. And since you are foreigners — ”

“Do you know that I am no foreigner!” cried Johanna in a flame of fury — the sergeant almost cowered — almost. His sacred duty saved him. “Have I not said my father is the Baron von Hebenitz. Do you know the Baron von Hebenitz? Have you never heard of him?”

She lapsed now into jeering sarcasm.

“Yes, I have heard of him,” said the creature. — “And the Herre is Englishman?”

“Yes — and what does it matter!” She proceeded to swallow some of her fury. — “Cannot one sit and talk. What harm does it do?”

She was breaking into a flirtatious, cajoling laugh, after having been white at the nose with fury.

“Yes — how does one know,” said the sergeant. “I have my orders to arrest anyone within the fortifications.”

“Oh, how stupid!” said Johanna. “We didn’t know at all that we were in any fortifications — ”

“There is the sign-board — ”

“Ach, why don’t you paint it orange and violet, so that one could see it!” — She was smiling a little tenderly at him. He was not really such a bad-looking young fellow, apart from his dummified duty.

“Ja, that is not my affair — ” he said. “It is my duty to arrest you both — ”

“Oh yea!” cried Johanna. “And we are still so young. — But it is absurd — we have done nothing but walk six yards and sit down and talk. — You can refer to

my father — and to Captain von Daumling — they will give you guarantees.” She was rather frightened.

“Yes,” said the sergeant. “Your address?”

And he drew forth a paper and pencil, and wrote Johanna’s address.

“And the address of the gentleman?”

This also he wrote down.

“And inquiries will be made from the Herr Baron,” he said — rather mollified, and a little pleasanter, but still duty-bound like a brass-bound time-piece.

Johanna and Gilbert took themselves off, whilst the dutiful soldier followed them down the little path.

Once free in the high-road Johanna began to exclaim:

“What fools! What fools we are! Of course I ought to have known. Now there’ll be a hell of a fuss, and they will go to Papa.”

“But there is nothing to make a fuss about,” said Gilbert. His English innocence still seemed to him unassailable. Alas, he has learnt better — or worse.

“Ha — you know what fussers they are, with their damned fortifications. Why do they leave them open to the public! Why don’t they put some notice! Oh what a curse! — You will have to meet Papa.”

To Gilbert it all seemed rather a mountainous mole-hill. But he had a’ creepy feeling down his spine that anything uncomfortable might happen in this beady Detsch. The grating sound of officious, aggressive militarism was getting on his nerves and making him feel almost guilty of something — perhaps of being a mere civilian. He began to look behind him, as if he really were going to be arrested. He was half afraid to go to his room for fear it might be under military seal. He felt suspect, and whoever feels suspect feels infect, as if he were infected with some mysterious indefinable disease.

However, his room was all quiet. Johanna called for him in the afternoon to take him to call on her mother and father. Very stiff, badly at a disadvantage, he climbed the stairs.

The Baron and Baroness were both in the drawing-room.

“Oh, you are so seelly, to go there,” said the Baroness, in her fragmentary English.

The Baron bowed stiffly, military fashion, and shook hands. Gilbert never had a bow in him. And as for kissing the Baroness’ hand — you might as well have asked him to kiss her toe and have done with it. Hence a little added stiffness in the Baron’s salute.

“Sie sprechen Deutsch — oder franzozisch? — Vous parlez franqais?”

“Oui,” said Gilbert, monosyllabic.

The Baron put him down as an ill-mannered lout with no breeding. Gilbert, tongue-tied, and everything-else-tied, felt that these grating German good manners were apish showing-off. But alas, he was at a disadvantage.

The Baroness called him to take his tea, to ask if he would have meelk. He said he wouldn't, and went with his cup to the window. There the Baron, who scorned tea, joined him.

"Vous fumez?" said the little gentleman, offering a cigarette-case.

"Merci," said Gilbert, taking a cigarette and getting most hopelessly entangled with it and his tea-cup. The Baron gave him a match, and with tea-cup shivering nervously in his left hand our young friend lit his cigarette.

"Vous etes longtemps en Allemagne?" asked the Baron.

Poor Gilbert stumbled with his French. The two men eyed one another. The Baron was rather elegant and *comme il faut*, with his hair and his moustaches on end. He was small, but carried himself as if he were big. His manners had that precise assertiveness of a German who is sure of himself and feels himself slightly superior. These manners always petrified Gilbert into rigidity. Only his eye remained clear and candid. He looked at the Baron with this curious indomitable candour, and the Baron glanced back at him rather fierily and irritably. So, like two very strange dogs, they stood in the window and eyed one another, and Gilbert stuttered hopeless French. He sounded a hopeless fool: he behaved like an unmitigated clown: only the insuperable candid stillness of his dark-blue eye saved him at all. But the Baron was impatient.

"Vous etes a Munich, ma fille m'a dit. La Baviere vous plait?"

"Oui! Oui! Beaucoup. Et la peuple est tres interessante."

"Le peuple — oui," said the Baron.

And that put the stopper on it. Our friend stood corrected, and not another sound would come out of him. — Oh these weary dreary banalities in a foreign language!

Johanna came to the rescue, and ended the ridiculous interview as soon as possible. And now Gilbert was carted off to interview dear Rudolf. He felt like an image of the Virgin being wheeled round.

Rudolf was in undress uniform, smoking a cigarette — a fresh-faced, ingenuous fellow gone somewhat bald in front, prematurely, and, thank goodness, wearing his moustaches quite short and unassuming. Altogether he was unassuming. Johanna, in her bright flirtatious way — gentle reader, do forgive words like flirtatious, they are so apt — told the story with laughter, and once more the *ceillades*, or fusillade of glances went on between the two gentlemen. Rudolf had large blue eyes — really rather nice. But he eyed his supplanter and said nothing. It seemed to Gilbert that neither himself nor Rudolf

said one single word during the interview. Probably that was an illusion. But certain it was that Johanna was almost ignored, whilst the two males exchanged this series of looks.

Now Gilbert had this one saving advantage. He went so stiff and absent in wrong company that he seemed an absolute imbecile. No one can blame the Baron for calling him, when affairs grew hot, later on, an ungebildeter Simpel, a gewöhnlicher Lump: very nasty things to be called: uneducated simpleton, and common lout. Common lout is especially nasty; yet it was not, from one point of view, unapt. And still, though in every other bit of him the young gentleman became a semi-imbecile, still, in the middle of his eye remained a certain impregnable self-possession, candour, and naturalness. Now the Baron had long lost his own candour and naturalness, therefore when he saw it so quiet in the middle of Gilbert's dark-blue eye, like the evening star showing on a stormy sky, he was unsettled, he felt he must call names. And poor Rudolf had so absolutely lost his self-possession, that he saw in Gilbert a strange menace: this thin, this silent individual, this raven of woe, as the poem later on put it.

Well, the raven of woe said Guten Abend to the blue-eyed, bald-fronted young captain, and took his departure. A solitary and hopping raven, he went through the Frenchy, raspigly-Germanised streets of the city till he found a restaurant where he could go in and eat. And even then, when at the end of the meal the waiter said Fruit ou fromage? — he only answered with a troubled stare.

“Fruit ou fromage?” repeated the waiter, raising his voice.

A troubled, anxious stare from friend Gilbert.

“Obst oder Kase?” snapped the waiter.

A look of greater bewilderment.

“Obst oder Kase? Fruit ou fromage? Obst oder Kase?” shouted the waiter in exasperation.

Two consternated blue eyes and a slightly open, pouting mouth, and a brow of agony, for answer.

“Imbecile!” muttered the waiter, and flounced away.

Gilbert understood this.

Back came the waiter, and bounced a piece of gorgonzola uncompromisingly under imbecile's nose. And then Gilbert heard it all — Fruit ou fromage — Obst oder Kase — He heard it all, and he recognised the appalling sounds as perfectly familiar words. But something had gone wrong with his works, and he only just had enough wits to remember that the word cafe meant a black substance, usually liquid, in a small cup.

He hurried away from the restaurant, feeling that he was really going beyond himself in the direction of idiocy. Detsch was really taking off a skin too many.

So he wandered through the horrible, wide, new desert avenues or boulevards which the Germans had made round the old town, and felt like a lost soul. And then if an old woman with a huge bundle didn't stop him and ask him something.

To his infinite relief, he realised that she wanted the railway station. He pointed and said:

“Darunten — links.”

“Danke sehr,” said the old woman, and off she lugged with her bundle.

Gilbert faced his hotel. His room, thank heaven, was untouched. He stood at the window and looked at the lights of the great barracks, and at the tiny officers in cloaks, far away under the street-lamps below. It was raining. Tiny umbrellas swam like black unicellular organisms through the zones of lamp-light, taxi-cabs jarred their brakes almost like a Prussian officer speaking.

Next morning came Johanna with that infallible diplomat, Louise.

“Yes — !” Louise's cogitating, brow-wrinkled manner. “It would be best if you should leave Detsch. You will not go far. We think Trier. We think if you go to Trier, then Johanna can join you in a few days. It is only two hours in the train. Johanna will come to you. She will come.”

Gilbert looked at Johanna.

“I shall come. On Tuesday I shall come,” she said.

“And stay?” said Gilbert.

“Yes,” said Johanna. “I shall come and stay.”

“Ach! Hannele!” exclaimed Louise, putting her hand to her brow. “It is so difficult. You see, it is such a peety that you had to go to her father — ” Louise turned to Gilbert. “Now he asks so many questions, and it is difficult to make him quiet. And then the military authorities! Ach yes! Ach yes! It is better you go to Trier, much better. It is not far, and Johanna will come. You will go? Yes? Tomorrow morning?”

“Yes,” said Gilbert.

“That is good. That is good. Better that you are alone also for a few days, to know your mind. Ach, you will see things all so much clearer. — And we, we shall decide something.”

“You will come on Tuesday?” said Gilbert to Johanna.

“Yes, on Tuesday. I shall come to you on Tuesday.”

“Yes! Yes! On Tuesday,” said Louise. “And we must all do what we can to find the right way. Ach, it is so difficult. There are so many things to consider — ach, so many, many things. We must take time. — And you will go by the half-past-ten train in the morning? Yes?”

“Yes,” said Gilbert.

“I shall come and see you off,” said Johanna.

“Ach, it is such a peety that Johanna’s father had to be told of you. Now he suspects so much, and he will not be made quiet. He is afraid that Johanna leaves her husband. He is very much against such a thing. So you will see we have a great deal of trouble at home. Yes! You understand?”

“Yes, I understand,” said Gilbert stubbornly.

Louise smiled at him from narrowed eyes. She could be queer and winsome and sympathetic: sisterly, so close and sisterly. But his face was still too stiff to relax. He felt he was on toast. They had got him on toast. Perhaps Louise loved to torture him — and loved him because she could torture him.

Next morning Johanna was at the station. She gave him seventy Marks — seventy shillings. Lotte, who was rich, had given her a hundred Mark note. Gilbert took the money, since he hadn’t enough, and he knew it would be merely futile to make more fuss. So he took the money: and again Johanna promised to come on Tuesday — the day was then Friday.

And so he sat in the third-class carriage and drew out of the station, watching Johanna’s face retreat into the distance. She seemed isolated in the world — as he knew himself to be isolated in the world. And he loved her. And destiny seemed inevitably to unite him to her. It was so inevitable that he did not question it. It was so. Only it was all taking place rather jaggedly. But then destiny was like that: rather a jagged unpleasant business: even love. He accepted it as such, and sat still with his fate, whilst the train ran on through the wonderful, so Roman regions of the Moselle valley, which gave him a keener sense of the Roman Empire of great days than ever Italy could do. And he was leaving Detsch: which place he hated with so deep a hatred, with all its uniforms and its verbotens.

Chapter XVII.

Lily of the Valley.

“Well!” thought Gilbert to himself. “This is a love affair, by Jove!” And he wished himself joy of it.

He was settled in a little, comfortable enough hotel in Trier, on the main street leading from the station: a small place for commercial travellers.

The morning after his arrival he went out into the town. It was sunny, and Saturday. In the old market-place the peasant women sat under the great umbrellas, like grasshoppers under toadstools, and sold their produce: green vegetables and pinkish carrots and white asparagus, eggs and butter, such a bursting abundance of everything, and everything so dirt cheap. There were also bunches of lilies of the valley — round bouquets of wild lilies of the valley, the pale greenish grains of the buds floating on the whiteness of the dense-packed flowers. And some had fringes of slipper orchids. How lovely they were.

Gilbert stood in the market-place looking at them and smelling the perfume, which was perhaps his favorite: at any rate, for the moment. When one smells violets, there is no scent imaginable more lovely: when one smells jasmine, again perfection. So he sniffed the watery fragrance of the clusters of lilies of the valley, and thought of love affairs and delicate romance, and rather longed to flutter into amorous ecstasies like a true young lover. But alas, even in the lily the scent, not only of tears, but of soap that smarts in the eye.

Ought one to be like a lily! — a lovely ethereal presence? Much of a lily his life was! Much of a lily he was himself. Not even a rank tiger-lily.

Man is born to ponder.

“Alas!” thought Gilbert. “My lily is Johanna, and in some ways she’s more like a blunderbuss.”

And then he began to imagine the true lily-maid: the virgin, the pure, the modest, the pale. Heaven above save us from any more Lilies.

He strode manfully out of the market, with his pipe between his teeth. No, damn it all, what was the good of love that wasn’t a fight! What was the good of anything that wasn’t a fight. Be damned, he did not care to fancy mingling with a woman, as if he and she were two spoonfuls of honey put into the same pot.

Lily! A lily has a ferocious tangle of roots underneath. Ach, in the cold, horrible earth its roots probe and fight and suck. He didn’t want his lily a

plucked blossom, all very nice and fair. No, good heaven, let us have the whole party: the tangle of deep, unspeakable passions, the rage of downward shooting desires! Ah, all the terrible and unspeakable things that happen to a lily of the valley as it wrestles and writhes in the corrosive sod. Right then! He was ready for the fight and writhing and wrestling in the soul's underground. Passion is always a fight, desire is always a strife. Hurray then for the fight and the strife. Let it never end, or we are picked blossoms.

The thought came to him on the cathedral steps. It is a massive, heavy round-bowed Dom, much more congenial to Gilbert than the soaring of Detsch's singing stone, as somebody has called the cathedral. Our mathematical hero loved the heavy, downward-plunging masses of the ancient building, the for him gorgeous, ponderous return to earth, the down-thrust, and again the down-thrust.

This was like roots again. And this was what he wanted. Damn it, he didn't want to be a picked blossom, like the rest of cultured civilised people. Picked blossoms, stuck in a nice aesthetic jar: there they are, while the water goes stagnant and rots. Picked blossoms! Myriads of sweet lilies — in blue vases. Damn the female lilies in blue vases. He wanted a lily with her roots deep down in the muck, fast, gripped, triumphant rooted in the muck. Then she could wither and grow old, and yet not die. Unlike one of these picked, spiritual, cultured lilies, that wither once and for all in a vase of putrifying water. Pah.

No, he was not going to try and idealise his love. Heaven save us. We pick it in the bud, and achieve its undoing. He was going to wrestle with it in the dark, down underground, in the damp, rotting, pungent earth. Long live the roots in the muck! The fight, thank God, is for ever.

Oh, you may have your blossom. But humanly, you mayn't pick it: or even force it. There's the blossom right enough. Even he, Gilbert, had written a bit of real music these last days. Even he felt great lovelinesses. But he felt the acrid, deep-down battling under the sod still more strongly. Rooted in battle he was. So be it. Thank God the battle is never quite won. It always has a new phase tomorrow. No Nirvana, thank you. God is very good to us. Supposing we were given our imbecile Nirvanas and heavens, what mugs we should look. Luckily we get a kick in the backside from a sane deity, if we try and sit too long on our raptures. Get on then! Get off that rapture! Enough of that lovey-dovey eternity stunt. And if you won't, take a kick in the backside. For in spite of all rhapsody, there is no man breathing but has a posterior, and no man breathing can abstract and spiritualise a well-kicked bottom into song. Thank the Lord for that, and give us a strong toe-cap.

Gilbert's host at the Griinwald was very inquisitive about Gilbert. The host was young — not more than thirty-three. He and his wife ran the hotel between

them. He spoke English: had been Steward on the Nili boats, and on the Nord-Deutscher-Lloyd boats. And, although rather a nice young fellow, he was curious about his visitor. Not many people, foreigners, came to Trier: and none of them put up at the little Griinwald.

What was Gilbert doing there? This was the question rampant in Fritz's mind. So much so that our innocent friend felt called upon to give an explanation.

And this is how he did it.

"I am waiting for my wife."

"Your wife!"

"Yes. She is in Detsch."

"Your wife is in Detsch?"

"Yes, with her mother and father."

"Oh, then your wife is German?"

"Yes, she is German. But she has been a good many years in England."

"Ah yes! You have been married a good many years?"

"Well — some."

"So! And your wife will join you here — ?" which meant, in the Griinwald Gasthaus.

"Yes," said Gilbert. "She is coming on Tuesday."

"Ah — On Tuesday! And shall you want another room? — or better a room with two beds?"

"A room with two beds."

"And shall we put them together — " Fritz closed his two hands — "Or apart" — and he sundered his prayer-joined palms.

"Together," said Gilbert.

"Ah together! Good!"

So do we count our chickens before they are hatched. Or rather, so do we build our nest before we have a hen to sit in it.

Gilbert wrote to Johanna and said how he was waiting for her and they must not part again, and Johanna wrote and said how she was dying to come.

He waited for Tuesday. He played his fiddle, he stared into the Moselle, he raced over the hills. More soldiers.

Bolting out of the town, musing, he came to a dead halt one morning hearing men's martial voices singing — God Save the King! His heart quite stood still. Never had it had the same sound. —

So he made out a barracks, and a drill-ground, and a company of soldiers marching to the solid, ominous tune.

"God save our Gracious King

Long live our noble King.”

The Englishman stood and felt quite faint. Heavy, male, massive voices plunging out the rhythm with strange, deep force, march-rhythm, but not meant for the feet, meant for the heart's stroke. Was it possible the banal tune could come out with such a terrible, ponderous, splendid heart-stroke, stroke after stroke welding the deep heart into black iron! Men's voices in terrifying martial unison, like some great tolling bell.

For a few moments Gilbert stood stunned. And then he gathered courage to listen. And then he realised the words.

“Heil Dir im Sieger Kranz — ”

Strange! Something seemed to knock at his consciousness — something he refused to admit. Wherever he was in Germany, the soldiery made a deep impression on him. But he did not take them quite for real.

They frightened him. Another day, just outside Trier he met a long cavalcade of horse-soldiers with guns coming down a little hill between yellow earthy banks. And he stood aside under the bank as they rode by — a long time. And he watched them all. And for some reason, fear knocked also at this inner consciousness, though he would not admit it.

They were handsome, on the whole, the cavalry: so strong, so healthy looking, powerful, with that strange military beauty which one never saw in England. How far they were from him! What a gulf! Yet he almost envied them, he, in his incurable civilian innocence. So clatter-clatter-clatter he watched them retreat, and looked after the strong retreating backs. Ah, the man's world! The fighting world. The strange glamour of the string of cavalry riding through the vineyards towards the Moselle.

“Will you come and see your room?” said the young host Fritz when Gilbert returned.

Gilbert went. It was a pleasant big room with a large bed. And our hero actually went out and bought a bunch of the above-mentioned lilies.

“But you will stay where you are till tomorrow?” said the host.

“Oh yes,” said Gilbert. And he sat reading *Jugend* and waiting for tomorrow. There was a joke about a mouse-trap and the bait.

“What is Speck?” asked Gilbert.

“Speck?” said the host, coming and bending over the paper. “Oh — Speck! That is bacon.”

Gilbert never forgot the German for bacon. Let us hope, gentle reader, you may also remember.

On the morrow arrived Johanna, the Baroness in a black silk coat, and Lotte in

Parisian black and white, made substantial by Vienna.

“Bonjour!” cried Lotte, making dark, flashing eyes. “Moi, je ne suis pas de l’ambassade. Je m’en vais. Je viendrai te trouver, Mere.”

And she jumped into a taxi, and drove off to see the sights.

Gilbert was somewhat taken aback by the family arrival: and Johanna in a new rose-coloured erection of a Viennese hat, that didn’t suit her, and no more luggage than a pocket-handkerchief.

“And how do you like to be in Trier? It is a nice town. You have seen the Dom and the “ so the Baroness made polite conversation as the three walked towards the Griinwald — three or four minutes walk from the station. He felt he could hardly speak to Johanna in that rose-pink erection of a bishop’s mitre.

“You will have coffee!” said Gilbert.

So the three sat at one of the little tables just outside the hotel door, in the sunshine of the street.

“Would you like to see the room first?” said Gilbert to Johanna.

“Oh — ” she stammered. “I’m not staying.”

He looked at her.

“I had to promise Papa to come back with Mama and Lotte. He’d never have let me come if I hadn’t. Oh, I’ve had an awful time of it with them.”

Gilbert sat down.

“Ja! Wissen Sie — ” began the Baroness, in a quaint, plangent, lamentoso voice. “Yes, you see, her father can’t allow it. He can’t allow his daughter to go off in this way. You must excuse her. She must go back tonight. I must take her back tonight — ”

Fritz brought coffee and sweet cakes. The Baroness interrupted herself, but immediately resumed in her high, crying voice, sometimes German, sometimes English.

“Her father is a gentleman and an officer. He fears very much for his daughter’s name and all the trouble and the shame. Ah, you do not know. You have not thought of it all. Ah, you must think much more. You cannot begin this thing in such a way, like a glass of wine. It cannot be done so. It is a dreadful thing for Johanna — ”

The Baroness sipped her coffee and straightened her hat, which had a disposition to go sideways.

“You know how hard, how ha-aarrd it is for her here in Germany. You know the divorce is three years — hier in Deutschland die Scheidung braucht drei Jahren, three years, drei Jahrelang. And in America it is much quicker. Ach, yes! If she does not go back to that Boston — ach, poor Hannele, she doesn’t like it at all there — then she must wait, the divorce must be in America. It takes much

shorter, only six months, only three months even. Only three months! And here it takes three years — three ye-ears! Ja!”

Fritz was hovering in the background drinking in every word. Johanna was rapidly eating the sweet cakes, one after the other, like a goat nibbling leaves. The Baroness’ hat went on one side, and she resumed:

“Yes, he must make the divorce in America. Yes, her husband must make her a divorce. He must make her a divorce. Yes, he must. That is what you want, is it not so? You want that she should have the divorce?”

“Yes,” said Gilbert.

“Yes! Oh yes! Oh yes, he must. Her husband must make the divorce over there in America. It is much easier. And much queecker! Only three months. And here in Deutschland three years! Three years! Drei Jahren! Ach, it is too lo-ong, too lo-ong.”

The three years, drei Jahren rang through and through Gilbert’s brain. But still he did not see the point.

“But in the meantime?” he said.

“Ja — in the mean time — she must come back to Detsch to her father — and we must think of the best way. You are young, you do not think. You do not know what you are doing. — She is a mother with two little children — Oh yea, it is dreadful. Ach, afterwards! Afterwards! It is this we must think of.”

This was just what Gilbert did not intend to think of. Indeed, he did not intend to think at all. In his mind, or soul, Johanna was predestined to stay with him, and there was no thinking to be done. If one must reckon the costs, at least let us have the dinner first and reckon afterwards. No matter what the cost is, if we’ve once had the dinner nobody can take it from us. And life is often called a feast. But society is a mean host, the modern world is a paltry kind of inn.

Now the poor Baroness felt very much as Gilbert himself felt. She would much rather have left her daughter comfortably behind with her young lover. But oh dear, was she not saddled with a mother’s duties. And having had all her life to enjoy an unfaithful, gambling husband, she naturally felt that a legal position was the only sure thing in a woman’s life. It was the only sure thing she had had. And here was Johanna going to play skittles with her legal surety: and for what? — for an escapade with an unknown young fellow of the lower classes, without money. Oh dear oh dear — the man was right enough. The Baroness quite liked him, and if he had been no more than a transient lover she would have winked quite gratefully at him. After all, she did not wish her daughters to know nothing but the long tied-up widowhood she had known herself.

But afterwards! afterwards! The money, the never-ending irritation of moneylessness — money was always lacking in the Hebenitz household. — And

then the children — the two little children! Ach no, no, it was too hard for the Baroness. Why should all this misery and distraction take place! So, like a floundering swimmer who has lost his nerve, she lectured Gilbert, rather pathetically, and Gilbert got into a bull's rage.

“You are young, ach, so young! You do not know the world, you do not know to keep a woman. Ach, you have all your life before you, and you would take a woman who has two children and a husband! Oh yea! Oh yea! Think what you do. Think what you do! You will spoil your life. You will spoil your life. And also Johanna's life! Oh no! Ach, nein, es ist zuviel. Better you should go back to England.”

And she looked at him under her black eyebrows, and he scowled heavily in response. She could see he had no intention of going back to England.

“Better you go to England,” she insisted.

“No,” he said.

“You don't want? Ach! Well, you must go somewhere and wait for her. You must wait — ”

“There's Lotte!” cried Johanna. And sure enough there was Lotte coasting by gaily in her taxi, waving a handkerchief to the party at the little table.

“Gleich! Fiinf Minuten!” called the Baroness in a quaint, high shout, after the retreating car. Then, her face all lifted in upward-tending wrinkles of worry, she resumed to Gilbert.

“And Johanna's father must write to her husband, and ask him for the divorce, if still she will not go back. And the divorce must be in America. But what will you do? How will you keep a woman? Where will you find the money?”

She looked at Gilbert from under her knitted brows, and he scowled back. “Ach, all things are against it. All things. — So you must wait. You must wait. I must take her back to her father tonight, and you must wait. You must go away somewhere where you can forget this. — And then her husband must give her the divorce — ”

So she went on, round and round in the same wheel, till Lotte appeared once more in the taxi.

“Shall we go for a walk?” said Johanna to him.

“Yes,” he answered.

“And you will bring her back at four o'clock — please? Yes? You will promise.”

“Yes,” he said.

“Oh thank you. Thank you. Her father is promised that she shall come home with me. Danke! Danke! Ja, auf wieder-sehen — Vier Uhr, weiss du, Hannele.”

Johanna moved off, and Gilbert, glancing round, saw the Baroness' ample rear

climbing into the motor-car. In another moment she drove by, looking like a child that has just got out of a row, and is going to enjoy itself.

Gilbert and Johanna walked away into the country, and she told him what a life they were leading her at home. Her father was dead against any breach with her husband.

“Poor Papa,” she said. “He is so unhappy. He said to me, ‘My Child, I know the world.’ But I said to him, ‘Not the best, Papa. Not the best. You don’t know that.’ And he didn’t answer. Poor Papa!”

“I don’t see what the world, or knowing the world has got to do with it,” said Gilbert.

“Ah, but they get so upset. And they are so frightened. I believe poor Papa sees a lost woman in me. Poor Papa, with his Elena in the background, and his illegitimate son! How else could he see it.”

“Then why should he look! It’s not his affair.”

“Oh yes. Poor Papa. He does love me, in a way. And he was awfully fond of Everard. — Ach, it is all such a bother.”

“What shall you do then?”

“Oh I don’t know. Go back and let them talk. — But you — what shall you do?”

“I shall go to Joseph Heysers at Wensdorf, and wait.”

“Shall you wait? And will you come to me when I tell you?”

“Yes. But don’t be too long. How long do you think?”

“Ah!” she sighed. “I don’t know. They give me a hell of a time. I’m almost out of my mind. Ah, and they all say they love me. Ah — it is too much. What am I to do?”

“Let us go away together.”

“Yes! Yes! I know. But I’ve promised to go back tonight.”

“In a few days then. Don’t stop long, or God knows what will happen to you.”

“I know. They will drive me mad.”

“Then don’t stop long. And I will come whenever you let me know — and wherever you tell me.”

“Yes! Yes! If only I could get away.”

They walked away into the country, she holding his hand. In a world of floating straws he seemed for the moment solid.

So they stayed and kissed and made love in a dry ditch under a beech-tree. This was not the matrimonial bed Gilbert had prepared. But still, it was something. And that is always better than nothing.

So Johanna returned to Detsch, and saw the look of relief come over her father’s face when he caught sight of her in the railway carriage. He had come to

the station to meet the train.

Gilbert returned to the Grúnwald.

“So the gnadige Frau is not staying?” said Fritz.

“No! She has had to go back to Detsch with her mother.”

“But I have changed all your things, and prepared the big room.” The innkeeper’s tone was rather aggrieved, and there was a touch of impertinence.

“Yes. I know that. But she couldn’t stay.”

Gilbert closed so definitely, that the man said no more.

“I shall be going away tomorrow,” said Gilbert.

“In the morning?”

“Yes.”

“Very well.”

And so our hero went up to the room that smelled of lilies of the valley. And he slept alone in the big matrimonial bed. And next day he sat in the train and wound that wonderful way all along the Moselle valley to the Rhine at Coblenz — where he changed, and crossed the river — and changed again, and caught the train north for Cologne.

Chapter XVIII.

The First Round.

Dear Gilbert was not in one of his brilliant moods. He sat in a third-class carriage gazing vacantly out of the window of the Cologne express, while the peasants eyed him curiously. The ticket collector came slamming the doors. He glared at Gilbert's ticket — then glared at Gilbert — and broke into a torrent of abuse in a vile Rhenish accent: again, we must say, like the tearing of badly made calico. Snarling and flourishing in the pretty Prussian official manner in front of the offender's nose, whilst all the others in the carriage looked either virtuous or rebuked! Snarl snarl snarl went the beady person — and Gilbert's brain turned to cork. He heard objectionable noises, but like a drowning man with the roar of eternity in his ears, he made out no earthly sense.

Till at last, funf Mark fiinfzig. Five and sixpence! — the damned fellow wanted five-and-sixpence! Out came the money, scribble went the ticket collector, and pushed a scrap of paper in the offender's face.

“Ich verstehe gar nicht,” said Gilbert, like a turning worm. “I don't understand at all.”

The ticket collector looked as if he would eat him in silence.

“Zuschlagen — zuschlagen — ” he snarled — and names of stations — Ehrenbreitstein, Niederlahnstein.

“Was meint zuschlagen?” said our innocent.

The ticket collector turned up his nose as if he meant to take Gilbert's scalp with it. Then he departed, slamming the door. The peasants made round eyes, and Gilbert tried etymologically to extract some meaning out of the marvellous word zuschlagen.

Since he was destined to live and learn, he learned later that if when changing trains you take a Swift-train, whereas the previous train was but a Hurry-train, then you must present your ticket at the ticket-office of the change station, and zuschlagen — pay the transfer. All of which is system — wonderful system.

We would here offer an address to System, and German system in particular, if it weren't already a thing of the past. Ah System, thou fallen but not yet shattered god of a mechanical age.

Dear Gilbert mused on the god-almighty ferocity of Prussian officials. Nay, the shabbiest porter was an Olympic — or at least a Wotan God — once he had

put his holy cap on. And all the mere civilians grovelled before a peak-official-cap as before some nimbus. What a funny world! They saw in it the symbol of Germanic Over-Allness.

Gazing on the great Rhine — Rhenus Flux — with its castles and its cardboard scenery, our hero thought of Rome and the naked great Germanic tribes: of the amazing Middle Ages: and then of Luther and the Thirty Years War — and then of Frederick and the great Goethe.

Oh Goethe, what a fool you were. If only someone had given you a good kick in your toga-seat, when you were godlifying yourself and olympising yourself and setting up the stunt of German Godlikeness and superhumanness, what a lot it would have saved the world, and Germany in particular. If only Napoleon had not been taken in. If only that usually sensible person had exclaimed, not voila un homme! but voila un dieu gratuitel, and given the gratuitous God-Goethe a good old Napoleonic kick in the rump! Oh weh! Oh woe! When will mankind learn the right use of toe-caps and posteriors! It would save so many cannons later on.

Musing somewhat in this strain, our friend changed once more, and once more got into a simple Hurry-train. It was six o'clock when he changed for the last time, at Hennef. Every time he changed he seemed to metamorphose.

Hennef was a station in the midst of water-meadows. There was a stream of full, swift, silent water, and marsh-plants, and evening beginning to glow over the remote Rhineland.

He sat by the stream under the evening, while some birds swung past, and he felt himself in the middle of nowhere. And a great peace like an annunciation seemed to settle on his soul. He looked at the glowing west, the lush green water-land beneath. And he thought of Johanna, and felt filled with peace and an assurance that surpassed anything he had known: such a lovely sense of fulfilment in the future: peace like a full river flowing, flowing far-off, into the sunset. He sat quite still, near the station, waiting for his connection. And he felt a beautiful calm, a glamorous, holy calm, as if a sacred light were in the evening air.

And when he clambered into the mere Person-train, the Bummelzug that trotted in the open by the road-side, he was quite still and happy. There was the high-road in the twilight — and a stream — and the thick trees of the forest. And a lovely peace and bigness and breathing-room, such as he always imagined in the Middle-Ages: a peace not made up of quietness or of lovey-doveyness, but of room, room to move and breathe.

And now, gentle reader — aha, I feel you shy at those two words. Yes, I admit it, they are my Dilly-Dilly-Dilly, come and be killed. Yes, I am going to

apostrophise or moralise: and why shouldn't I? If you don't want to read, turn on to page Gentle reader, I am going to let the cat out of the bag. I am going to do so, because I never ask anyone, even the most desirous, to buy a pig in a poke. After this very nice little peace-like-a-river touch, I am going to let the cat out of the bag. For I'm sure if I don't, you'll be yelling and saying I promised you two turtle-doves in a cage. Gentle reader, I have not got two turtle-doves in a cage for you. I'm sorry, but I'm not a dove and pigeon merchant.

An anonymous lady — she may even be yourself, gentle reader — once wrote to me thus: “You, who can write so beautifully of stars and flowers, why will you grovel in the ditch?” I might answer her — or you, gentle reader — thus: “You, who wear such nice suede shoes, why do you blow your nose?”

However, gentle reader, I must invite you to grovel in the ditch with me. I am not a dove and pigeon merchant. Out of this very promising-looking bag of a story, which I have this minute shown you tied with a pretty blue ribbon of peace, I am going to let out, — what? — the cat! I am going to let the cat out of the bag. Or even two whirling, fur-flying cats, all claws and sparks.

Gentle reader, this peace was not the peace of the amorous coo of the ring-dove. Gentle reader, it was not the silent bliss of two elective affinities who were just about to fuse and make a holy and eternal oneness. It was the bridal peace — surely we are entitled to a little Wagnerian language here: it was the bridal peace of Gilbert and Johanna. It was the grail hovering before our hero, shedding its effulgence upon him.

It was the peace, gentle reader, of one who has found his opposite, his complementary opposite, and his meet adversary. The pleasant darling, he didn't know it. And he wasn't going to tumble to it till he'd had so many tumbles he was quite knocked out of his original shape. But whether he knew it or not isn't the point. I know it, and I'm telling this history. And I like to let my cat out of the bag right off, so that nobody shall think it's a chaste unicorn or a pair of doves in a cage.

Dear Gilbert, he had found his mate and his match. He had found one who would give him tit for tat, and tittle for tattle. He had found his soul's affinity, and his body's mate: a she-cat who would give him claw for claw, a bitch who would give him snarl for snarl, a falcon who would demand an eye for an eye. Here's to them!

The love of two splendid opposites. My dear — I mean you, gentle reader — all life and splendour is made up out of the union of indomitable opposites. We live, all of us balanced delicately on the rainbow, which is born of pure light and pure water. Think, gentle reader: out of the perfect consummating of sun and rain leaps the all-promising rainbow: leap also the yellow-and-white daisies,

pink-and-gold roses, good green cabbages, caterpillars, serpents and all the rest. Out of what, gentle reader? The moment's matching of the two terrible opposites, fire and water. The two eternal, universal enemies, you call them? I call them the man and the woman of the material universe, father and mother of all things. If you don't believe me, that's your affair.

Tell me, why are all royal things brindled: the tiger with his pointed flames of black and fire, the eagle with his bars of dusk and glow, the golden lion with his mane of smoke? It is, gentle reader, the eternal opposite elements lying side by side in him, magnificently juxtaposed, royally wedded, as man and woman lie like fire and smoke in the marriage bed, or like dark-rippled water.

Opposites! The magnificence of opposites. Not the horrible sticky merge of like things. The fight, gentle reader, the fight! Up boys, and at 'em! — 'em, of course, meaning the women. Up boys, and at 'em!

Oh heaven, save me from a morass of people all alike to one another. The sharpest divergencies possible, the most miraculous of superb differences.

Opposition! Wonderful opposition! The whole universe rests on the magical opposition of fire and water, sun and rain. Is not every plant brindled? — dark and damp below earth, sunny above. Do not the watery thread-tender streams run forward to touch the thread-tender fiery beamlets of the sun, in every growing plant and every unfolding flower. Is it not a lion running out of the fiery desert, to meet a lioness of shadow? And is not the mating always half a fight. At least half a fight. Is not the very embrace at least half a fight. At least half a fight. Before a plant adds one new cell to its growing tip, has it not been the living battle field and marriage bed of fire and water: both. Is not the marriage bed a fiery battle field, as well as a perfect communion, both simultaneously. Till we know this, we know nothing. And till we fight our fights like splendid royal tigers, in the wonderful connubial rage, we are nothing. We are at a dead-lock: either water-logged, or gone woody and dry. Water-logged and fat, or woody and dry and sapless.

Beautiful brindled creatures of fire and darkness, sun and smoke. What is your darkness but shadow, and what is your shadow but watery intervention, the cloud in the sun, against the sun. — Beautiful brindled creatures, snakes and tortoises, fish and wild-geese, tigers, wolves, trees. Only men are all white or all black. But then mankind itself is brindled. Never forget it.

Our Gilbert arrived at Wensdorf late at night, and was received and feasted by his friend and his friend's wife Ulma. Joseph was a small official for the district.

And Gilbert was happy in the little flat over the village street where the oxen-wagons trundled slowly, far away in the Rhenish hinterland. He listened to the bells in the pointed steeple of the Lutheran church playing hard against the bells

of the white catholic church. He saw the streams of peasants flowing in opposite directions and turning up their noses at one another. He drank beer in the vaulted chamber, where Joseph smoked his long pipe and talked in dialect and got mellow with the cronies of the inn. It seemed almost like the Middle-Ages: save of course for the recurrent stridency of Deutschland Uber Alles which crept out.

He liked Ulma, and her traditional German housekeeping. He liked the great basket of different breads, white bread and black bread and grey bread and Pommeland bread and Pumpnickel and Kringeln: always a choice of five different sorts of bread. Then the lovely linen and silver in abundance, in the quite small flat.

Then the long walks between the old, ragged, blossoming pear-trees of the unknown high-roads, to villages that never were and never will be known, lost behind great woods or great arable stretches: the sense of being in an upland region, yet having no big hills: the sense of the great lands going on and on, and not coming anywhere: the feeling of the ageless Rhine, some forty miles away. They drove in a little carriage far off: and always the same country. They went to a fair, and drank all manner of Schnapps and bought all manner of wonderful cakes, hearts and houses and horses and angels and children, every imaginable thing in sweet, spicy honey-tasting cakes. On a Sunday they went down to the Rhine and sailed on a steamer and went to some high, famous castle. And Gilbert did not like the Sunday crowd at all.

But he was really happy. So he wrote Johanna rather lofty and sweet letters, saying he would wait till she was ready, and have faith in her. And that when she sent for him he would come. And that he would abide by her decision, and trust her through eternity. And that his life was only a waiting, only a waiting for her. But he would leave her free to bid him stay or come. — And similar things he wrote in answer to the managing Louise, and to the troubled Baroness: very lofty sounding and nice.

Which was all very well for him, while he was having a jolly good time with Joseph and Ulma far away from the scene of battles, in the Rhineland. He managed moreover to get twelve pounds from England.

Meanwhile Johanna was having no such rosy time in Detsch. Her father worried her — though what was the good! The first *cris de coeur*, and the first volleys of abuse began to arrive from America. There was no light and no clear counsel anywhere, none.

Till Johanna declared she would go mad. And the whole household in Detsch began to go off its head. And so Johanna escaped to Louise in Munich. Where she took to her bed and would not stir for two days.

After which she wired to Gilbert that he should come to Munich. And he

wired he would come next week. Next week!

However, till next week he would not come. So Johanna devoured her uncertainty. Then next week came. He set his teeth, packed his traps, bade a lingering farewell to the Rhineland, and set off on the twenty-hour journey down to Munich.

He arrived at Munich late at night — there was Johanna shining in the crowd in the darkness.

“You’ve come!” was all she said.

And in the background little Alfred, Johanna’s escort.

“Ha-ha! Ha-ha!” he said, shaking hands with his friend and pupil. “The return of the truant! The return of the Bad Boy! Well I never! Well I nevah!”

And, accompanied by a porter with the luggage, they turned out of the station.

“Goodnight, you two! See you soo-oon!” sang Alfred, suddenly waving his walking-stick and disappearing.

Gilbert looked in surprise, but the little figure was already disappearing under the lamps.

“We’ll stay in an hotel tonight,” said Johanna. “And tomorrow we’ll go out to Louise. Do you want to eat?”

The hotel was near: they were soon installed: and soon launched on the wild seas of the bridal bed. It is usual in books to avoid such topics, so we will merely mention them. We wish to hint that Gilbert, in spite of his various gallant adventures, was but an acolyte at the Dionysic or Priapic altar. He was a raw hand.

Now in no field of human activity is so much rare adjustment and well-balanced niceness required as in the service of the great Priapic god. Your libertine, with his thousand experiences and his many dodges, your Don Juan and Dona Juanita, they are always only apprentices: life-long apprentices. Your Don Juan is a life-long apprentice, who could never master his craft.

Should a man really become a master, then, in the Priapic craft? Ah yes, gentle reader. Ah yes! When all is said and done, the Father of life is a passionate begetter, not an ideal. The ideal is but a nice little end in itself. But the creative cycle is one strange, incalculable, passionate round, eternal.

Let us confess our belief: our deep, our religious belief. The great eternity of creation does not lie in the spirit, in the ideal. It lies in the everlasting and incalculable throb of passion and desire. The ideal is but the iridescence of the strange flux. Life does not begin in the mind: or in some ideal spirit. Life begins in the deep, the indescribable sensual throb of desire, pre-mental.

What is the soul, gentle reader? What is your soul, what is my soul? It is not some evaporated spirit. Ah no. It is that deep core of individual unity where life

itself, the very God, throbs incalculably, whose throbbing unfolds the leaves and stem of the body, and brings forth the flower of the mind and the spirit. But the spirit is not the soul. Ah no. The soul has its deep fibrilled foliage in the damp earth, has its dark leaves in the air, it tosses the flower of the spirit like a bauble, a lovely plaything, on to the winds of time. Man can live without spirit or ideal, as dark pine-trees live without flowers: dark and sap-powerful. But without the deep sensual soul man is even inconceivable. This angel business, this spirit nonsense! Even spirits, such as really exist, are potent sensual entities.

If you would like to get at the secret of tree worship — Druid and Germanic, nay, universal — then realise the dark, sap-powerful, flowerless tree of the mindless, non-spiritual, sensual soul.

Gentle reader, our era has landed in the ail de sac of the spirit and the ideal. And I, poor darling, grope my way back to the tree of life, on which Jesus was crucified. He did so want to be a free, abstract spirit, like a thought. And he was crucified upon the tree of the eternal, primal sensual soul, which is man's first and greatest being. Now I, gentle reader, love my tree. And if my mind, my spirit, my conscious consciousness blossom upon the tree of me for a little while, then sheds its petals and is gone, well, that is its affair. I don't like dried flowers, immortels. I love my tree. And the tree of life itself never dies, however many blossoms and leaves may fall and turn to dust. I place my immortality in the dark sap of life, stream of eternal blood. And as for my mind and spirit — this book, for example, all my books — I toss them out like so much transient tree-blossom and foliated leaves, on to the winds of time. The static, written-down eternity is nothing to me: or rather, it is only a lovely side-show, almost a bauble: but lovely. Yes I love it — the spirit, the mind, the ideal. But not primarily. The primal soul I see in the face of the donkey that is tied to my gate, and which shifts its long ears. The dark, sensual soul, and that gorgeous mystery of sensual individuality.

Enough! Basta! Revenons a nos deux moutons. Let us return once more to our two sheep, Mr Gilbert and Mistress Johanna. We left them in the Priapic bed, and there we find them again, you will no doubt be glad to hear.

“Man survives earthquakes, epidemics, the horrors of disease, and all the agonies of the soul, but as long as time lasts his most excruciating tragedy is, has been, and will be — the tragedy of the bedroom.”

Pray note the inverted commas. I am quoting the great Leo Tolstoi, who, in such matters — matters of didactic judgment, I mean — seems to me a quite comical fool.

Friends, let us put our money on the tragedy of the bedroom. I could do with tragedy if it weren't so very sorry for itself: if it would only admit how it

enjoyed itself in its throes.

To return to our two tragedians. — The Priapic mysteries are not tricks. They can't be learned with the head, nor dictated from the mind, nor practised by deliberate intent. You can no more bring about, deliberately, a splendid passional sexual storm between yourself and your woman than you can bring about a thunderstorm in the air. All the little tricks, all the intensifications of will remain no more than tricks and will-pressure. You have got to release from mental control the deep springs of passion: and after that there has got to be the leap to polarised adjustment with the woman. And these two things are deep mysteries. It takes us a long time, us, to release the profound desires from all mental control. Even the young animals, it is terrible to them, and difficult. And as for the leaping into the chasm to pure connection with the woman, that needs a basic courage and a strange concerted unison between the two protagonists, which life alone can give. It is absolutely useless going to a prostitute or a libertine. The deep accustomedness of marriage is the only way of preparation. Only those who know one another in the intricate dark ways of physical custom can pass through the seven dark hells and the seven bright heavens of sensual fulfilment. And this is why marriage is sacred. And this is perhaps the secret of the English greatness. The English have gone far into the depths of marriage, far down the sensual avenues of the marriage bed, and they have not so easily, like the French or Germans or other nations, given up and turned to prostitution or chastity or some other pis aller.

But now alas the English adventure has broken down. There is no going on. There is cul de sac and white-livered fawning.

Mr Gilbert, therefore — we will get back to our tragedians — was no very wonderful experience for Johanna, though she was a wonderful experience to him. To tell the truth, Johanna had had far more sensual satisfaction out of her husband, Everard, than out of her other lovers. Everard was a dark-eyed, handsome man, rather stiff and marquis-like, learned and a bit sarcastic. He loved his Johanna violently: and he loved his learning with an almost mediaeval passion.

There you are, then. As a husband he was darkly, furiously sensual — in his hour: and, in his hour, deeply satisfying to the woman. Yet here she was, racing round and looking for sexual love, and taking it from men who could not give her half the passional gratification and fulfilment Everard had given. Which is the perversity of women.

But hold a minute. Women are not so perverse as men would like to find them.

Everard's nature was basically sensual. But this he hid — though mind you,

he was au fond proud of it. Secretly, almost diabolically he flattered himself on his dark, sensual prowess: and not without reason. But he had to keep it lurking in secret. Openly: ah, openly, he was all for the non-existence of such things.

He had a terrible passion for Johanna — and he craved madly that it should remain a tacit secret even between him and her. Let it remain in the dark. He kneeled before her, he kissed her feet in a frenzy of craving sensual desire. If she would give him his tremendous gratification, he would sacrifice his very soul for her. Truly. He would sacrifice his individual male soul for her.

So you see, he did not ask and take his terrific sexual gratification as if it was something natural and true to marriage. He asked for it, he craved for it as if in some way it were a sin. The terrific, the magnificent black sin of sensual marriage: the gorgeous legal sin, which one was proud of, but which one kept dark: which one hated to think of in the open day, but which one lusted for by night.

Ah, he could not bear to be consciously reminded of it. And so he called Johanna his snowflower, his white snowflower. He liked to think of her as an eternal white virgin whom he was almost violating.

So that she should continue in this wise, he kneeled before her, he gave her everything. He gave her all the money he had, and perfect, perfect freedom. Nay, he would gladly have borne that she had lovers, if only she would have pretended it was not so.

This is typical of him. In the daytime, he had no lower man. In the night-time, he had nothing else. He was madly sensitive about this. Though he would read his Rabelais, and make risky jokes, and admire his Maupassant — though he seemed the very freest of the free — yet he had a weak horror of any sensual or really physical reference by day.

For example, a water-closet was a place which really must not exist for him, in his world. There was an end of it. We may well call it Number O, or even doubly nought, Number 00. It is twice nought.

Now Johanna, in her reckless and unEnglish way, instead of with circumspection looking if the coast was clear, would dash off recklessly to this 00, this non-existent place. She would seize the door-handle, and if it would not open, shake the door fiercely. For of course, if one wants to go somewhere, one wants to go. An Italian, finding the non-existent door locked, invariably puts his shoulder to it and proceeds to burst the hinges. But this aside.

There would Johanna seize this nameless door-handle and twist and pull, till from within came the snarl of a wounded and enraged tiger.

“Oh, are you there!” she would exclaim, and stand aside.

And presendy would emerge Everard, handsome and white with rage,

trembling with fury.

“Are you mad, woman!” he would snarl as he passed her.

“But why? Are you the only man in the world that never must go to the W?” she would jeer.

He would only grind his teeth. At such moments his hate of her was diabolical, inhuman.

Now perhaps we may judge Everard: the darkly-passionate, upright, unmercenary man, noble enough, whose sensual secrecy and weakness in this direction prevents him from ever being quite loveable. Whatever we are, this we must stand by. If we are sensual, and deeply, utterly so, then let us not be humble about it. Man has his native right to his dark, flaming, sensual fulfilment. It is incumbent upon him, and upon his honour he must get this fulfilment. Shall he creep then for it, and grovel for it: even under the permission of the law? Shall he? If he does, he will pay the price.

For the sensual humbleness in her husband threw Johanna off her balance. It made her distraught, and at last even vindictive. For is it not a maddening thing for a woman to have the deep sensual relation so insulted, written Number O, like a W.C. Johanna turned against her husband, and because he was humble, she trampled on him. It is the fate of slaves. Because he was craving, she flouted him. Yet she feared him, as one fears a lurking beast. She feared him as one fears a cringing beast, that may fly at one's throat.

Look you then! Everard was a true Englishman. Milton, Wordsworth, Dickens, Hardy, even Tennyson, these are the truly sensual poets of England: great men they are, perhaps the greatest. But they are the great sensual non-admitters. There is a doom on them.

And of such non-admitting, cowering sensualists, Tolstoi is the flagrant example.

There are the other people — the non-sensual, quite spiritual poets like Shelley. These, having nothing much to admit, admit it openly. Even Swinburne. But the true dark ones have much to admit, therefore they are the more convulsive in their retention.

What is to be done? Are we to fly off at the spiritual tangent, like Milton or Tolstoi? or at the intellectual, like Everard and very many more? — or at the romantic and fantastic? — or at the sensuous like Keats? — or at the hopeless tragic, like Hardy. Hardy is the last word, and reaches the verge of the ridiculous, which Conrad passes.

We've got to start all afresh, and laugh at the W.C., and give reverence and honorable fear to the passional sensual fulfilment.

Now Johanna, after Everard, was aiming in the Shelley direction, at the mid-

heaven spiritual, which is still sexual but quite spiritually so. Sex as open and as common and as simple as any other human conversation. And this, we urge, is a quite logical conclusion of the spiritual programme. If In the beginning was the Word — then sex is a word also. — And we know that the Word is one word for all of us. Therefore why not free sexual love, as free as human speech?

Why not? Because the a priori are all wrong. In the beginning was not the Word, but something from which the Word merely proceeded later on. Let us stick to the first and greatest god, and let the Logos look after itself. The first, great, passionately generating God.

So Gilbert seemed a really lovely and spiritual lover to Johanna. He was really frightened, like Everard. But gathering his courage in both his hands, he managed to look on the naked woman of his desire without starting to grovel. Which, if you have profound desire, isn't so easy. You either grovel or overween. Or else, grovelling, you overween. To be neither more nor less than just yourself on such an occasion: well, that takes time and a sound heart.

In the morning they were happy. The coffee, the lovely new crisp rolls, the honey, the Alp butter — how good it seemed, all of it. Gilbert was very joyful to be back in Munich. And as they sat at breakfast, they heard the strange, heavy thresh-thresh-thresh of marching soldiers. They went to the window. A squadron of blue Bavarian infantry marching heavily past. Strange and heart-penetrating the sound of their motion — so rhythmic, with a sound like a heavy lash.

They were not to stay in Munich. Alfred had appearances to consider. Gilbert would not go back to the university. He dropped all that. Johanna had promised to go out with Gilbert to Louise at Schloss Wolfratsberg.

Therefore the two sauntered in Munich till after lunch, then took the train towards the mountains. It was a dull day, rather cold, with some rain.

Louise sat in her rather dark, warm sitting-room, that had grey linen walls, and dark oriental carpets, and dark, shapely furniture, and many of the pale-yellow books that are current in France and Germany. She was writing, but she put away her pen. She seemed to Gilbert like some spider spinning in a jewelled web: or like a dark, magical Lady of Shalott who never looked out of the window, but sat weaving heaven knows what.

“So, you have come back again!” she gave her hand to Gilbert and smiled at him oddly. Beautiful she was. She had lovely white, well-shapen teeth, small and attractive. And in her big, dark-grey eyes a half-laugh, mocking, yet as if misted with tears. In an instant Gilbert fell again under the fascination she had thrown over him before.

“And what will you do? Ach! What will you do-oo?”

She sat down and glanced at him wickedly from under her long lashes — but

with a half winsome wickedness, mingled with benevolence and kindness.

“What shall I do?” said Gilbert, abstract.

The fire went bright in her eyes.

“Ach, you ask me! You ask me! Come, that is strange. How shall I know? — Now you have come back to Johanna — Ah, Johanna, I have a letter for thee — from thine husband — ”

Incredible irony in the last phrase.

“Oh yea!” cried Johanna. “Where is it?”

Louise produced the letter, Johanna went with it to a window. Louise resumed her seat opposite Gilbert. He glanced at the proud figure of Johanna, as she stood in the window-light — then back, abstractedly, at Louise.

“And you will give up your studies?” she said.

“I think so. What good are they?”

“Yes, what good is anything, if you talk so! What good is your coming with Johanna? Much bad, surely: and what good? Yes?”

Gilbert looked back at her. She could not get over a certain distant untouchedness in his eyes.

“Yes,” he said. “Nothing’s any good unless you feel it is good.”

“But your studies! Do you then feel they are no good?”

“Yes.”

“Ach! But what will your life be?”

“I don’t know.”

“No! You don’t know. You don’t know! — And poor Johanna! I am afraid it will be a tragedy for both of you.”

He seemed to listen to what she said: and then to listen to something inside himself. It was curious, how indifferent he felt about it.

“Oh,” he said, “I’m not tragical. I don’t believe in tragedy.”

“You don’t believe — But that is good! Can there be no tragedy without a belief in tragedy?” She laughed hollowly and ironical.

“Perhaps not,” he said. He had never thought of it.

Johanna came forward with a rather loud sigh.

“Ha-a! Poor Everard! Er ist doch so schwer.”

And she gave the letter to Louise.

“Shall I read?” said Louise, looking up at Johanna. Then she knitted her brows.

“Ach, I remember this writing so well, Hannele: so tidy, so neat and tidy! Is it not good to write so plainly!”

And she curled her voice mockingly. She had hated Everard, fourteen years before.

“Ja, aber er ist dumm — ” she broke out in ejaculations as she read. “That is good! Ha! Ha! But he is so stupid — so stu-upid! One does not write such things to a woman. — What does he mean — when you accost him in Piccadilly he will hand you over to the police? What does he mean — Piccadilly?”

“When I am a prostitute — ” laughed Johanna.

“Ach nein! Ach nein! Das ist Frechheit. The man is impudent. Ach, I have no patience! — But do not trouble, Hannele — it is words, words, words — ! — No, to such a man thou canst not go back. No, that is impossible. No, we must not think of it. Thou canst depend on me. No, to such a person one does not give one’s life. But see what he says — the dustman! The dustman! To his own wife — ”

“But he is mad just now, Louise. We mustn’t mind what he says,” replied Johanna.

“Is he mad? Or is he not only bourgeois? Oh, he is impudent, with his rights of a husband. Ach, you poor Johanna, to give your life to such a man.”

“But poor Everard!” said Johanna. “Think what he must feel.”

“Ach!” cried Louise impatiently. “Is this the letter of a man? Does he call himself man?”

“No, he’s a mad beast just now,” said Johanna.

“Ja, du gute Hannele! A mad beast!” Louise laughed her hollow little laugh. “He is not mad but he makes himself so. Ach, men are not mad, but showing off. Oh yea, all Englishmen are Hamlets, they are so self-conscious over their feelings, and they are therefore so false. Ah, so false! They flatter themselves they feel so much that they are mad. It is a self-flattery, this madness.”

“Not all of it,” said Johanna. “And it is dangerous, I know.”

“Yes — yes! Sometimes! Sometimes! Sometimes they make themselves so mad, in their fine frenzy, that they kill someone. But not often. Not often, you good Hannele. Ach, you are such a good simple soul. — If I have hysterics I am not going to jump in the river. It is too cold. — And these men with their tragical man-hysterics! — ach, es ist so saudumm. — It is words, words, words — ”

She concluded with her hollow, mocking laugh. Gilbert, who was at the bookshelves, looking over the books, listened with one wide ear open. He had found a book of folk-songs, a collection he had never seen. These he was studying. But more, he was attending inwardly to the two women.

“Would you like to read the letter?” said Johanna to him.

“But Johanna! Why will you do such a thing? Why trouble him with such a — such a — ” cried Louise.

But Gilbert had taken the letter. As he read it he turned pale. It was indeed a frenzy, full of abuse, madness, hate, and various other things. “I am going mad,

and my children will be left fatherless to a depraved mother.”

His eyes darkened as he read. A certain anger filled his soul.

“He is a fool!” he said bitterly, as he handed back the sheets. But poor Gilbert, he was white to the lips.

“Indeed he is a fool! How can a man write such things — ach! — and post it on a steamer to travel across the many-many miles of sea! — No, I have not patience — ”

Louise made a gesture of dismissal.

“But Louise, think how he must suffer!” said Johanna.

“Ach, yes! And think how much, how very much he thinks about his sufferings! So self-conscious and self-pitying! Does he think of you, of his own real self? — or of anything? — only his own foolish feelings.”

“Feelings aren’t so foolish.”

“Yes — yes! Yes — yes! When people have feelings and must think about them — ach, I have not patience to hear another word. Enough! Enough! Basta! Take thy letter and thy husband away. — Mr Noon, what book have you found?”

He brought her the volume of songs.

“I am glad,” she said, glancing at him winsomely and mischievously, “that you are not a tragical man. You have said it. Oh, you must not forget it. Johanna will be so very tragic, if you will let her.”

Poor Gilbert tried to smile — but it was a pale effort. The other man’s letter upset him profoundly.

Louise had decided that the best thing would be for Gilbert and Johanna to go to Kloster Schaeftlarn, some few stations further up the line, and stay there for a while, since they were determined to live openly together. Evening saw them setting off once more. It was raining. They stood with their baggage on the station and waited in the dark and the wet, to carry them to the unknown destination. It was the last train.

When it arrived, it was nearly empty. So they sat in the bare third-class carriage, and Gilbert felt rather wan. They rattled through the night, and arrived at Kloster Schaeftlarn. They descended at a tiny station, in the midst of profound darkness and pouring rain. Complete and staggering darkness enveloped the fragment of a railway-station.

“Where is the village? Where is the Post Hotel?” Johanna asked of the porter.

It was about eight minutes away. There was no such thing as a carriage. If they would wait while he put out the lights and shut the station, he would accompany them and carry the bags.

They waited. Out went the station lights. Bang went the door. And into the night they plunged, in the pouring rain. They walked across a stone-flagged track

through deep, dark, wet meadow-land: then past the white gable and black balcony of a farm. Then there was a glimmer of light — and a big building. It was the Inn of the Post — a country public-house.

They found themselves in a big room where peasants sat at the tables with huge mugs of beer. A sort of tramp was devouring food, his head in his plate, in a corner. The landlady was a hard, large, cross woman.

Yes, they could have a bedroom with two beds — yes, for two shillings a night. This was Whitsuntide charge. So Gilbert and Johanna followed up the broad stairs, to a vast, dim passage or upper hall, a great place full of varying smells — straw and beans among them. They were given a large, rather bare room, with huge feather beds that seemed inflated.

And here the newly-wed, if we may use the adjective, couple stood and looked at one another. A big, bare, farm-bedroom. A lurid oleograph of Mary with seven swords in her heart. Darkness and rain outside. And down below, heavy voices of the highland peasants.

“Well, here we are!” said Johanna, not very cheerfully.

“And here we’re going to stop for a time,” he answered, a little gruesomely.

“We may as well change our shoes,” she commented.

They went down and had dinner in the big public-room, that had tables round the walls. Farmers and peasants stared fixedly. Two huge dogs, and one little one, came prancing in and began to mouth Johanna and Gilbert. A boy entered with a lantern. And then a young woman brought a huge tureen of soup, spread a little cloth, and in the near corner of the common room the young couple sat alone and ate their meal, while the great dogs pranced round, and the big men shouted to the creatures, and wiped the beer from their big moustaches with the two front fingers.

Johanna was happy — it was adventure she wanted — and now she had got it. She was free. As she sat in the great, old Gasthaus, the handsome farmer men of Bavaria looking over their pot-lids at her with the half-hostile, challenging mountain stare, and as she heard the uncouth dialect, felt the subdued catholic savageness in the indomitable atmosphere about her, she spread her wings and took a new breath. She had escaped. She had escaped. From Boston and her house and servants, from her husband and his social position, from all the horror of that middle-class milieu, she had broken free, and she sat in a big, common room in a half deserted old inn at the foot of the Bavarian Alps, and breathed the ancient, half-savage tang of snow and passion in the air. The old, catholic, untamed spirit of the Tyrolese! How handsome and how fierce these men could be! She was happy.

She and Gilbert crowded into one of the beds, under one of the great feather

overbolsters, which rode upon them like a cumulous cloud. The darkness was intensely dark. There was a wild, strange scent in the air, a strange thrill. They held fast together like children in the darkness, and spent part of the night capturing the cumulous cloud, which showed a disposition to float away and leave some portion either of her or of him exposed to the cool air.

The morning was a dream of beauty. If you do not know the Tyrol in Spring, gentle reader, you don't, and there's an end of it. But Gilbert and Johanna stood at their window in the early morning and looked out in bliss. The mountains in the distance sparkled blue with snow and ice. The foot-hills were green-golden, and the wonderful meadows, a sea of blue and yellow flowers, surged nearer in the pure, transcendent light. The magic of it! A few great trees by the road, and two farm-houses with enormous sweeping roofs, white gables and black balconies! And then a pond, and a bridge downhill, and most lovely birch-trees standing translucent and gleaming along the wet, white way between the river-meadows. And everything crystal-pure, having the magic of snow-Alpine perfection. The crystal, paradisal calm of everything on such a morning is such as only the great snow-radiant north can offer: the sheer heavenliness that is in gentian flowers and the curve-horned chamois.

Ah the abundance, the wonderful abundance of those days — heaven and earth abundant. The various new little breads that smell so sweet with coffee, the hard clear butter, the mountain honey. For a moment of perfection, give me such a morning, such a world, and my new little breads.

Outside the inn-door was the village green — or village square. There was the high-necked white church, like a bird, with the black cupola in heaven. There was the white convent, where a few nuns still taught the children and young women. There were three or four great farm-houses: and opposite the inn-door, big trees and little wooden tables. It was all uplifted with pure morning-shine, warm, strong sunshine of heaven's fountain. Three bullock wagons came slowly along the white road through the open square, the drivers cracked long whips, and looked with their sharp blue eyes at the two strangers. Softly swung the necks of the pale cattle. It was morning in the world.

The village was tiny — just a few farms — no shop at all. It was very still, now the convent was suppressed. It had had active mediaeval days.

Gilbert suddenly found himself almost transportedly happy. It was a god-world: but strange northern gods. Nay, it was so wonderful, crystal, high, and gentian-flowered! Was it not almost superhuman? It went to the soul like a god-madness.

The river flowed full and swift, white-green, hissing from the glaciers. The flat meadows from Schaeftlarn to Maierhof were a miracle: deep, waist-deep in

flowers, where the pale-gold spheres of the great ranunculus floated like marvellous bubbles, lovely, heaven-pale globe-flowers. It was hard not to believe in the old, white-skinned muscular gods, whom Wagner travestied. Surely Siegfried tramped through such spring meadows, breaking the god-blond globe-flowers against his fierce, naked knees. Surely for him the birch-trees shook their luminous green fleece in heaven, poised on a trunk-beam of icy light.

How lovely the birch-trees were, on either side the road, and loitering in clusters in the ice-shimmering distance! They cannot be themselves beyond the smell of ice. Here they were glamorous with the heroic light of the sagas, shaking and communing in the magical, north-seeming air, flashing the ice-white brand of their stems.

And then the foot-hills were tangled with bell-flowers, tresses and tresses of myriad weightless blue bell-flowers among the gold and green of the grass, the white and gold of great daisies, the pink of evanescent flowers. Blue, blue, tangled, aerial blue, and white and gold, among an evanescence of liquid green and pink. MacWhirter's picture in the Tate, of Spring in the Tyrol, would be correct if it had only a little more of the sense of lightness, transfusion of cold luminousness, nothing heavy: ice-colours gleaming in blossom.

Gilbert and Johanna would sit together in the sun, talking, watching the flash of the mountains, hearing the magical tong-tong of the cow-bells, and finding themselves outside the world, in the confines of a northern heaven. Johanna wore a smoke-blue gauze dress and a white hat, and was like the landscape. Gilbert watched and wondered, with his soul unfolded and his mind asleep. A wonderful deep peace flowed underneath his consciousness, like a river.

They would walk far off, sometimes up the hills through the woods, sometimes across the bogs that were full of floating flowers, and cut into dark-brown channels. The peat was stored in long dark heaps. In the distance a broad-roofed farm seemed to settle its wings low over its white walls. Sometimes they went by the river with their backs to the mountains, and sat upon the great heaps of logs that had been floated down, and now were piled beside the living birch-trees.

Returning at evening, the glow-worms were shining in the grass, low-down, their strong, electric-green lights seeming to give off a sudden joyous sound. There was a faint scent of birch-trees, and ice-water, and spring in the dusky air. And everywhere, in the forest-tangle of deep grass, the sudden jewel-lamps of the glow-worms, sending a faint, smoky, witchlike gleam upon the surrounding grass-stems. So that one could easily imagine oneself a tiny gnome, down in a jungle of ferocious tall grass. Gilbert would stoop and watch them, sitting crouched on his heels at the silent road-side, watching the living, entangled stars

emit their luminous fume, lighting up a tiny, tiny grass-stemmed world of their own. He watched and watched, and was bewitched. Meanwhile Johanna stood talking behind him, and the night stars came out overhead. A half moon was in the sky.

They went slowly towards the dark, tree-clustered village. At the bend of the road was one of the usual crucifixes, with the Christ spread under the hood. Gilbert glanced up at the Christus. He too was pale, lurking spread-eagled in the crucifix shadow.

“Good-evening, Mister,” said the man on the road, looking up and addressing the Christus in the crucified shadow.

“How are you?”

The air was dark and mountain-horrific around. Gilbert’s voice, addressing the Christ on the Cross, terrified Johanna.

“No don’t!” she cried, catching his arm. “Don’t! It frightens me.

“Why?” he said. “Can’t I have a word with him?”

“No,” she said. “Don’t! I was educated in a convent.”

“And I in a Board school.” He turned again to the Christ. “How are you, Mister? Glad to meet you,” he continued. “Shan’t you come down? Come down a bit. You must be stiff. You give me the arm-ache to look at you. Come down! Come and have a drink. You’ve been up there long enough. Come and have a drop.”

“Heilige Maria!” said Johanna, crossing herself. Then to him: “I won’t hear it. It scares me. No, I’m going.”

And she set off up the dark road.

“What’s the odds!” he said, going after her. “A drop of Dunkels would do him good. He can’t spend all time up there. I don’t begrudge him a century or two — but there’s a time to hang on a cross, and there’s a time to get down and go your ways, it seems to me.”

But Johanna only reiterated:

“It scares me. It scares me. I’m still too catholic.”

At their bedroom window at the Post Johanna stood smoking a cigarette and looking out. The moonlight fell on a great horse-chestnut tree, on its white candles and black, palm-foliage. There was a pond too, with reeds. And the frogs were singing loudly under the great, risen moon. They were whirring and rattling and simmering like a pot on a crackling fire. And Johanna was thinking of her children, as she stood there in her nightdress looking out, and smoking her cigarette. At last Gilbert came and stood by her.

“Think of my little boys!” she said.

“Why think of them!” he said. “They are all right.”

“Are they! Without their mother!”

“But you wouldn’t go back till August, anyhow. You weren’t due to go back till August.”

There was a pleading in his voice. She flung away the end of her cigarette, into the night. The frogs simmered and rattled outside. She turned and threw her arms round his neck, and gave him a hard kiss. And they went to their narrow, passionate bed.

But in the night he woke with a click, to realise she was awake.

“Aren’t you asleep?” he asked, in fear.

“These beds are too small for two,” she answered, in a hard, wounding voice.

“Why, they haven’t been! There’s been room till now.”

“Why should you have everything your way?”

It is amazing how wounding a woman can make her tone, like the cut of a blunt, horrible knife, irrespective of her words.

“My way?” He was a raw hand, and frankly puzzled.

“I can’t stand this,” she said, and with a horrible kick she kicked away the feather overbolster and got out of bed.

“Where are you going?” he asked.

“To the other bed.”

“But why?”

“Because I want to be alone.”

“Why?”

She vouchsafed no answer, but darted into the other bed and enveloped herself in the overbolster like a viper darting to cover.

He was now hard awake. The moon had set, and it was dark. It was very dark, so dark that he could not even see the window. He knew the direction of the other bed, where Johanna had gone. And from this direction he felt strange, terrible currents of malevolent force vibrating out on the intense darkness. The room was so dark, he felt it must be some dungeon, some awful prison. And the darkness seemed imprisoned and horrific, like being buried alive. He knew it was no use speaking to Johanna. She was as it were the spider at the core of the horror. Sometimes the darkness in the room bristled like a black wolf’s hide. He lay in horror. Then he became semi-conscious.

Then again he woke with horror. There was a pallor — something horrible was coming. Something pallid and fearful was coming from the distance. He lay staring, while his heart felt ruptured; staring, staring at the pallid presence.

Then enough day-consciousness returned, and he sort of realised that it was dawn at the window. A strange, seething blister upon the darkness. Dawn at the window. A big, white, horrible, intensifying blotch on the darkness. Dawn at the

window. Dawn at the window. Seething, seething — he could almost hear it! — seething with a pale, maleficent, leprous sound. But dawn! Dawn at the window. Could he make out the window-frame? Could he distinguish the centre-bar? Light seething like some fatal steam on the black solidity of the darkness: seething, seething its way in, like a disease.

Thus within him the normal day-consciousness fought with the awful night consciousness, which sees the invisible forces. He watched as from the depths of a cavern the light gather at the window. But himself he lay far back, still night-logged, and his heart seemed ruptured. He had once had a bad rheumatic fever, and his heart was not so strong.

Gradually, gradually day came. And with it the night consciousness faded. With day, a certain normality re-established itself again. But he did not forget. He never forgot again. It was as if this night a breach was made in the walls of his house of life, so that he looked out on the prowling winds of chaos and horror. And somehow, Johanna had done it. But probably it was his own fault. Johanna could be horrible like some were-wolf that ate men's hearts: only their hearts. His heart still pained him in his left breast. — But probably, probably he had brought it to pass upon himself. There can be no were-wolf unless men loose it upon themselves. He must have wanted it.

It was full daylight. He saw Johanna sleeping, curled on her pillow. Everything seemed natural. His torn, ruptured consciousness relaxed. And soon he went to sleep, and slept deeply. And when he awoke, he had forgotten.

He had forgotten, she had forgotten. They had breakfast out of doors under the big trees. The table-cloth was of yellow and white checks. Chaffinches came hopping on the table, almost on to their plates.

“Aren't they awfully nice!” said Johanna. “You know that when the Lord was painting the birds, He had no colour left for the chaffinch. So He just wiped his brushes on him.”

Chaffinches! Flutter and dabs of yellow and red! And a yellow and white table-cloth! And a sumptuous morning, with the last white clouds walking slowly out of a superb sky, as if loath to go. Gilbert never forgot it.

And a little later, as they sat on one of their favorite benches, on a hill under a wood, beside a white shrine, looking at the perfect heaven-array of mountains drawn up in the morning sunshine, far off, while myriads and myriads of dandelion seed-heads stood in the grass that sloped down from their feet, round globes of mist resting in their myriads, big, fairy worlds of mist in a congregation, his heart reminded him of the night. He and she were hand in hand, in peace.

“The night was a failure,” he said.

“It was, wasn’t it?”

“Well, why not?”

“Ha — I suppose one can’t always be happy,” she sighed. And she sighed rather bitterly, as if against fate.

So there you are, gentle reader. It isn’t my fault if I can’t give you an idyll of coos. It would be a good deal easier for me too. I feel, with Johanna, as if I could sigh against fate.

Not that fate would care. And that’s where it is, gentle reader. It’s no good sighing against the bull Typhon. You’ve got to take him by the horns.

And so, gentle reader — ! But why the devil should I always gentle-reader you. You’ve been gentle reader for this last two hundred years. Time you too had a change. Time you became rampageous reader, ferocious reader, surly, rabid reader, hellcat of a reader, a tartar, a termagant, a tanger. — And so, hellcat of a reader, let me tell you, with a flea in your ear, that all the ring-dove sonata you’ll get out of me you’ve got already, and for the rest you’ve got to hear the howl of tom-cats like myself and she-cats like yourself, going it tooth and nail.

I sometimes wish it weren’t so. I wish we could sing the old, old song.

“List to the sound of coo-oo-oo, of coo-oo-oo, of coooo Sounding for me and you-ou-ou, for me-ee-ee and you-ouu

Whether in storm or cloud you go, or under skies of blueoo Nothing can sever, I will be ever, true to my coo-oo-ooooo!”

But, my dear reader, you’ve sung that song to rags, till there isn’t a coo left in the universe. So now you’ve got to listen to the fire-works, and the fire-and-water fizzing and cat-fight of my precious protagonists.

And remember, gent — damn it all. I’ll begin again. Remember, you girning, snarl-voiced hell-bird of a detestable reader that you are, remember that the fight doesn’t take place because Little Jack Horner ate all the pie, or because Little Bo-peep didn’t mend Jack’s socks, or didn’t cook his dinner. Remember, you bitch, that the fight is over nothing at all, if it isn’t everything. Remember that Jack and Jill are both decent people, not particularly bad-tempered, and not mean at all.

Therefore you sniffing mongrel bitch of a reader, you can’t sniff out any specific why or any specific wherefore, with your carrion-smelling psycho-analysing nose, because there is no why and wherefore. If fire meets water there’s sure to be a dust. That’s the why and wherefore.

Of course, as I’ve said before, fire and water may meet in sweet lovey-doveyness, as rain and sun in spring meet with a kiss, as earth-water trips forward in a growing plant to embrace the alighting sun-heat in a fecund embrace. But that is only half the show. And unfortunately this half is over, for

the moment.

Our fathers and christian forbears have done us in. They have kept the lovey-dovey show going so strong for such a long time, that, like summer in September, it is temporarily played out. Hiss, bang, fizz, the fire and water are having a spell of hard fight, before they can settle down to the next bout of lovey-dovey. All right then, fiery one, spit on your hands and go for him. It will clear the air, consume the flabby masses of humanity, and make way for a splendider time. Make a ring then, readers, round Gilbert and Johanna.

Chapter XIX.

Louise, like a goddess in the machine, appears and disappears. She appeared at Schaeftlarn after our hero and heroine had been there for six days, and said that there was a flat, a country flat, belonging to one of her friends, in the village of Ommerbach, five miles the other side of Schloss Wolfratsberg. This flat Johanna and Gilbert might inhabit, free, gratis and for nothing, until August and the summer holidays. It would be much cheaper.

Off set our friends again. They paid their bill and departed from Kloster Schaeftlarn with regret. They had loved it.

Back they went down the railway, to Ommerbach. Ommerbach was the least of villages. It contained exactly seven houses: three farms, the station house, two smaller houses, and then Frau Breitgau's. It lay in a knot on the high-road that came trailing nakedly, through open spaces, along the valley-side from Munich towards the mountains.

Frau Breitgau's house was the first in the village — and it was a shop. It was new. On the ground floor was Frau Breitgau's shop, and Frau Breitgau, like a round, shiny, rosy sausage that has been dipped in hot water, and Herr Breitgau, with a long grey brown-fringed moustache which looked as if it had grown into a long grey weed hanging over the rim of a beer-pot. The second floor we have nothing to do with. The top floor was the flat destined for our pair of finches. It was perched high up. From the sitting-room and from the adjacent bedroom opened the wooden balcony, which looked down over the lost high-road, past the big, broad-spread farm, over the rye-fields and fir-woods down to the river, then at the far-off up-slope. There was besides a little kitchen that looked over the station at the flashing Alps: a spare bedroom, and a water-closet. It was small, rather bare, but complete. There was one big deep sofa, splendid, in the sitting-room: a white bed in the bedroom: copper pots in the kitchen. The two finches whistled with pleasure.

Here they installed themselves, and blessed Louise for a fairy god-mother. And they proceeded to live for nothing. A huge loaf of black bread, almost enough for a week, cost sixpence: and this, eaten with thick firm Alp-grass butter was food for the gods. Ah, how good that black rye-bread is, when it is pure and well-made. The best of bread. A great pound of fresh butter, just made, cost ninepence. For a shilling they had fifteen or eighteen eggs. For threepence a vast jug of milk. For ninepence a pot of farm honey. For sixpence sweet honey-

cakes.

Behold then Frau Breitgau beaming in the door with the milk, and Gilbert in pyjamas and Johanna in her blue silk dressing-gown. Behold Gilbert running down to Frau Breitgau's shop, for liver-sausage, or a cudet of Ripperle, or Schnapps, or whatever it was, and struggling with a conversation in strong Bayrisch, with the happy Frau or the beer-dim Herr. Behold our couple living in a land of milk and honey and joyful abundance, for fifteen shillings a week for the two of them. Oh wonderful days of smiling, careless plenty. Oh days gone by! Oh bitter regret. Why are eggs a shilling each? Why can't one have honey any more? What has happened to God's tall rye, that the black bread should taste of the dust-bin?

Lovely material plenty! If one can live for fifteen shillings a week, then one can live for three months on ten pounds. And with a hundred pounds a year one is a lord. Ah days gone by!

The storm was brewing in the soul of man, nevertheless. Johanna and Gilbert perched in their nest and surveyed the long white high-road come winding through the rye, between blasted fruit-trees. Bullock wagons slowly approached — or a great motor van charged out from the city — or peasants passed on foot. And sometimes, in the sweltering days, it was soldiers.

They would hear a far-off jingle and clatter and a fine threshing sound. A cloud of dust far off. And then soldiers on horseback galloping importantly forward, three, two young ones and an old one. The old one trotted up the little bank to Frau Breitgau's shop-door, until his horse almost had its nose on the counter. Then there was a loud shouting of commands. Meanwhile a blue lieutenant had reined up under the trees by the farm-door, and was shouting commands also. Then the three fore-runners rode on.

Immediately there was a struggle below: Frau Breitgau and Herr Breitgau tussling with a tub, a wide open tub, which they deposited just by the post where they might one day have a gate. Under the lilac bushes at the farm other great tubs rolled out. Then there was a trotting of farmhands and of Breitgaus with pails of water, which they poured splashing into the tubs.

Meanwhile the column of dust grew higher, more silvery, between the tall green rye: the sound of innumerable feet filled the valley. So, they hove in sight round the bend. Horsemen — blue horsemen — and then long trains of grey artillery winding round the corner of the tall rye, with a flash of accoutrements and a strange muffled trotting noise that made the heart beat. In the sunshine of the balcony above, Gilbert and Johanna watched in silence.

Back the out-riders went galloping — nearer and nearer came the strange, slow-hasty cavalcade. They were level with the house. There was a wheeling of

officers, a flashing of shouts and commands. The artillery had half drawn rein — but forward it went again. Endless threaded the horsemen, and the grey gun-carriages drawn by four or six horses, and the strange, sinister grey wagons. What is more horrible than the neutral grey of war-implements. Ach, for the days of scarlet and silver and black plumes! No more! This hideous neuter, grey neuter of machine mouths.

The fearful ruffling noise went on. Bright horses, brown and chestnut and black — thank god they too are not painted neuter grey — streamed loosely on, their ruddy-faced riders sweating in their dark blue uniforms. Dust rose, wheels rattled, hoofs chattered and chuffed.

Then came a shout, and at last all came to a standstill. In front of the house was a gun with six horses, and a young, strong, handsome fellow riding one of the leaders. He had a spur on one heel, and he rode a bright bay horse. And Gilbert noticed with a start that the belly of the bright bay was wounded with the spur, bloody.

Another shout, and down swung the riders, rushing to the water-tubs. They took off their caps, and their hair was wet with sweat. Gilbert watched his young rider crouch over the tub and put his face in the water and drink. He had a strong body, under the blue cloth, and the back of his neck was ruddy and handsome. He drank, then rose up with his mouth and chin dripping. He wiped himself on his white, blue-bordered handkerchief, rubbed his hair and breathed deep, looking round.

Then he looked at his horse. And suddenly, furtively he ran with water in a dipper, and furtively washed the red wound on the belly, washed it carefully. And he kicked white dust over the blood spots on the road. And he glanced round apprehensively. And the bay horse twitched.

There was a tossing of horses' heads, a springy, gingerly trotting of officers on horseback, a rubbing of sweat-moist hair, a strange scent of soldiers and horses, a jingle and shuffle and a low run of voices, varied by shouts. And then a wait: a long wait in the hot sun. Three elegant officers were gathered, their horses' heads together, under a deep green tree by the green farm-railing. Why were they waiting? Why were they waiting? It seemed an eternity before they would ride on and leave the road empty.

But at last came the order. The riders with their strong, heavy-muscled legs swung into the saddle. There was a hitch and strain of harness. Then forward again, with that strange pace of artillery, straining forward, as if with haste, and yet without swiftness. Grey gun-carriages — sweating horses, blue horse-riders, and lastly curious grey wagons rolled on. Rolled on, and left the empty country behind, the rye gleaming in the sun, the road white, the tubs empty, water

splashed around them — and a wet mark in the road where the youth had washed his scored horse.

Gilbert watched the last horse-flanks disappear round the corner of the white, low-roofed farm — and then he stared in silence across the shallow, sun-shimmering valley. And stared with regret — a deep regret. He forgot the woman at his side — and love, and happiness. And his heart burned to be with the men, the strange, dark, heavy soldier, so young and strong with life, reckless and sensual. He wanted it — he wanted it — and not only life with a woman. The thrill of soldiery went heavily through his blood: the glamour of the dark, positive fighting spirit.

So he and Johanna cooked their eggs and their asparagus and ate their Swiss cheese in the clear light in silence. A great silence seemed to have come over him; the deep longing, and the far off desire to be with men, with men alone, active, reckless, dangerous, on the brink of death: to be away from woman, beyond her, on the borders.

But the longing was so deep, it was all indefinite and as yet unconscious, or semi-conscious. Brought up in the great tradition of love and peace, how could he even recognise his own desire for death-struggles and the womanless life? Yet the desire lay at the bottom of it, as of every man.

“They enjoy their soldiering,” he said to Johanna.

“Oh, they hate it. They hate it,” she cried. “How many of them go away because of it!”

“They love it, all the same.”

“How can you say so. Ha, I know what it means! — that horrible, vile discipline, and the agonies they suffer. They used to talk to me when I was a child. Papa used to have soldiers to work in the garden, and they always scolded me for talking to them. And I used to throw fruit to them into the barracks ground from our high wall at the end of the garden, and the officers were furious with me. — And then, when I was a child, I knew. I knew how they suffered under it, what agony it was to their pride.”

“They must want it. They must want even the vile discipline and the humiliation. They must, or they wouldn’t have it. People don’t have things they don’t want.”

“Not at all! Not at all! How can they alter it? How can you say they like it? How do you know. You don’t know.”

“I know what I know.”

“You know what you think you know — rubbish! You talk rubbish sometimes. — You ask them if they like it, and see. They’re all dying to be out of it.”

“They think they are.”

“They are\” she cried. “Why are you such a fool! — Why look — when they meet one another, you can hear them — they say fifty-five! or a hundred and eighty! — or five hundred! — And that means how many day’s service they still have. You can often hear it, in Bavaria.”

“I don’t believe it, for all that,” he said.

“Ah, because you are a conceited ass,” she said angrily, whisking away the plates.

They set off walking in the country. They were out of doors all day, in sunny weather. Sometimes they went through the woods, sometimes they walked to Schloss Wolfratsberg, sometimes they went into the deep tangle of the river-bed. And by the water they would sit and watch the timber rafts come down the pale-green, fizzy river — rafts woven together, floating from the mountains, and steered by two raftsmen with long poles or oars. And again the nostalgia for the man’s life would come over Gilbert — life apart from the woman — life without domesticity or marital implication — the single life of men active together. The raftsmen were blonde, ruddy men with hard muscles, not like the peasants. The peasants were full, muscular men, often handsome too. But the mountain woodsmen were like hawks, with their keen, unseeing faces and their bare, fierce knees under the little, wide leather breeches, like football-breeches.

By the Isar the roses were out, wild roses, but red, almost scarlet red. And columbines and the last lilies still lurked on the steep, moist, hidden banks. The river made many twists — there were many shoals of pink sand and gravel — the stream broke up into various arms. And sometimes the rafts coming sailing down would get caught, and in spite of all efforts the raftsmen would be fast.

In one deep little corner, in an arm of the stream, Gilbert and Johanna would sometimes bathe. The water was cold, but wonderful once one was in. Johanna was a better swimmer than Gilbert — he was no water fowl. But she rocked on the water like a full water lily, her white and gold breasts of a deep-bosomed woman of thirty-two swaying slightly to the stream, her white knees coming up like buds, her face flushed and laughing.

“How lovely! How lovely!” she cried, in the water-ecstasy.

But he was lean and dry-souled, he never could know the water-ecstasy. And as she rolled over in the pallid, pure, bluey-effervescent stream, and he saw her magnificent broad white shoulders and her knot of hair, envy, and an almost hostile desire filled him. She came from the water full-blown like a water-flower, naked and delighted with her element. And she lay spread in the sun on the clean shingle. And he sat in his lean, unyielding nudity upon a great pinkish boulder, and he looked at her, still with the dark eyes of a half-hostile desire and

envy. Strange enemies they were, as a white seagull and a gold land-hawk are enemies. And he brooded, looking at her as her strong bosom rose and fell, and the full breasts lay sideways. And with a sort of inward rage he wished he could see her without any darkness of desire disturbing his soul.

Fool that he was. As if there were not sufficient dead eyes of insentience in the world, without his wishing to escape from the sacred magnetism of desire. But it was a chain that held this land-hawk by the leg: as it held that white seagull by the wing. And in their hour they both struggled against the bond.

Ah the history of man and woman: it is a long history of their struggles to be free of one another. Egyptian king-gods, and christian crucifixion, they are only dodges to escape the fatal bond that binds man to woman and woman to man, and makes each the limit of the other. Oh what a limitation is this woman to me! And oh what a limitation am I to her almighty womanliness.

And so it is, the two raging at one another. And sometimes one wins, and the other goes under. And then the battle is reversed. And sometimes the two fly asunder, and men are all soldiers and women all weavers. And sometimes all women become as men, as in England, so that the men need no longer be manly. And sometimes all men become as women, so the women need no longer be womanly. And sometimes — but oh so rarely — man remains man, and woman woman, and in their difference they meet and are very happy.

But man must remain man, and woman woman. There is something manly in the soul of a man which is beyond woman, and in which she has no part. And there is something in woman, particularly in motherhood, in which man has no part, and can have no part. For a woman to trespass into man's extremity is poison, and for a man to trespass into woman's final remoteness is misery.

So there we are — the old, the eternal game of man and woman: the time-balancing oscillation of eternity. In this we live, and from this our lives are made. There is a duality in opposition, between man and woman. There is a dual life-polarity. And the one half can never usurp the other half — the one pole can never replace the other. It is the basis of the life-mystery.

The universe swings in a same dual polarity. Let scientists say what they will, the sun is but one pole of our gravitation. There is another: perhaps the moon: perhaps the invisible. But between a dual polarity our round earth swings on her course. If there were but one pole, and that the sun, then she would fall into the sun. Which she does not.

Many times, perhaps most times, Gilbert and Johanna were completely happy. But again, each tugged the leash. He wanted life to be all his life, male; she wanted life to be all her life, female. And sometimes he fell under her tugging, and sometimes she fell under his. And then there was war.

For a woman doesn't want a man she can conquer: no, though she fight like hell for conquest. And the same with a man. Oh horrible submission, especially in marriage are you the foulest of treacheries! Never submit, never abandon yourself completely. This is the last word to every man and woman.

Ultimately, a woman wants a man who, by entering into complete relationship with her, will keep her in her own polarity and equipoise, true to herself. The man wants the same of a woman. It is the eternal oscillating balance of the universe. It is the timeless inter-related duality of fire and water. Let life overbalance in either direction, and there is a fight, a terrific struggle to get back the balance. And let the mechanistic intervention of some fixed ideal neutralise the incalculable ebb-and-flow of the two principles, and a raging madness will supervene in the world. A madness which is pleasantly accumulating in mankind today.

Gilbert and Johanna were mostly very happy. She was wild with pleasure at release from conventional life. She would dance in her glowing, full bodied nudity round and round the flat, and she made him dance also, in his more intense, white and ruddy-haired nudity. He was stiff and constrained. There was an intense fierce reserve and stiffness in him. His whiteness was very white and hard, his hair was black, but his body hair ruddy-brown. She was full and soft and gold-white, with delicate soft hair.

"Dance," she said to him. "Dance!"

And with her arms spread on the air, she floated round in triumph. And he, ashamed to be ashamed, danced in correspondence, with a jerky, male stiffness that seemed to her odd and strange. Woosh she went, veering as on a current of water down the passage, looping her soft nudity and her soft, soft-stemmed hands in a loop round the little kitchen, and floating back into the sitting-room, where he was dancing with odd, jerky, nigger-like motions which seemed to her so comical and curious. Why on earth dance like that, when one could swim deliciously on the air! And him, he wondered how one could abandon oneself to swim on the air, when one was sharp and intensely local. So she swam around him, and drooped her soft-stemmed hand over his hard, naked shoulder. And he came with his comical quick motions, and put his thin, hard naked arm round her full soft waist. And she shouted with pleasure and triumph, and his eyes twinkled sardonically.

To be free! To be free, Great God! Not furtive and orgiastic at night, and stiff in a linen collar of correctitude during the day. Whether Gilbert liked it or not, she insisted on floating round in her soft, ambient nudity in the morning or the afternoon, if she felt like it. And she made him float, or paddle likewise. And he, as we said before, was ashamed to be ashamed.

Likewise she insisted on going barefoot, though the roads were stony and painful. So off they trudged, both barefoot, on the roads through the forest, and they got sole-sore and he became cross. And at evening a doe ran across the skyline, so fleet. And as they came home, the fireflies were threading in and out of the tall, tall dark rye, carrying their little explosive lanterns in their tails.

“I love you! I love you, you dears, you dears!” she cried to the fireflies. “I wish I was a firefly.”

“Don’t gush,” said he.

“You — who are you?” she cried at him.

“And what are you, for a firefly?” he said.

“Go away, you spoil everything. — You dear, you dear fireflies, I love you. I wish I was one of you, to swim through the tops of the rye. Oh, I do! I should love it. I should love to be a firefly, and not bother with tiresome men and their pettiness any more.”

“You might be less of a fool, if you were a firefly,” he said to her. “You’re too big a fool to be a human being.”

“Oh God! Oh God!” she cried, lifting her hands to the deity. “Why am I persecuted by this person at my side.”

“Because you ask for it,” said he.

“Go away! Go away! I want to be happy. I want to be happy with the lovely fireflies.”

“Yes, you might ask them first, before you go butting in.”

“They’ll be glad of me,” she said.

“By God, then they’re welcome.”

“Go away! Go home, you hateful thing.”

“Come away, you ass. Don’t slobber any more.”

“Slobber! If you weren’t a dried English stick, you’d know it wasn’t slobber.”

“And being a dried English stick, I just know it is.”

“You would. There isn’t a drop of sap in you.”

“And you’re going squashy and over-ripe.”

“Oh, but isn’t he a devill Now he’s spoiled my fireflies.”

And she went home in a dudgeon, and spent the rest of the evening making a marvellous painting on brown paper, of fireflies in the corn. And he stood on the balcony, and looked at the fireflies drifting in and out of the darkness, weaving and waving in the dark air beneath him. And the night was a great concave of darkness. And the river sounded as in a sea-shell. And an owl flew hooting with a little sob. And the great concave of darkness in front seemed vast, and bristling with fir-trees and mysterious northern, eastern lands.

Again they walked the miles across to the Lake of Starnberg. Ah, how Gilbert

loved to emerge from the forests into the wide, half-marshy corn-lands. There lay the broad-roofed farms: there rose a tall white church, black-capped. A hare rushed along the road-side: a deer flashed across out of the tall rye, and ran again into the deep corn. Then she turned, and spread her wide ears, up to the chin in corn, and watched our pair of finches. And her fawn, lost in the high corn of the opposite side of the way, made a great rustling, and whimpered and cried like a child for its mother. The doe flashed back at a tangent, and called to her fawn from the hill crest. Then off they trotted, into the forest edge.

Gilbert and Johanna walked through the shallow lands. A peasant, and his wife in the great blue-cotton trousers of the marsh-women were earning their hay off the hay-sticks in their arms, and loading it on the cart, where their little boy trod it down.

Coming to the village with the trees and the tall black and white church, on the opposite crest, Johanna and Gilbert arrived at an inn, and went into the inn-garden for dinner. They were eating their soup when in chattered a class of school-boys, two by two, with their teacher in attendance. He had the self-important self-conscious look of a teacher. The boys seemed happy, carrying their jackets. After a delay and a flutter and a few reprimands, they were arranged at a long table for dinner, a chattering pleased little crowd.

Gilbert watched them ominously. A sort of horror overcame him. He could not think of his own teaching days now, without horror. To be a school-teacher: he looked at the quite pleasant German specimen. — But the ignominy of it! The horror of the hideous tangled captivity.

Ah liberty, liberty, the sweetest of all things: freedom to possess one's body and soul, to be master of one's own days. Not many souls are fit for freedom. Most get bored, or nervous, or foolish. Let them have jobs, let such have their time allotted to them. But for the free soul liberty is essential, and a job is a thing to be contemplated with horror and hatred.

It was full summer-time, and wild strawberries were ripe along the forest hedges. Gilbert and Johanna gathered them in big leaves, and tasted all the fragrance of the wild native world in them, the fierceness of the lost winter.

And again the post arrived from America, and more torrents of abuse, rage, grief, despair and self-pity. Everard wrote also to the Baron, and the family clock began to whirr again. The Baron wrote to Johanna, and added his praise to that of the injured husband. His daughter was ruining the family honor. Marriage was a social institution, and whoever attacked the social fabric deserved to be treated as a criminal and coerced into submission. A private excursion in the fields of adultery-was perhaps to be condoned.

The Baron knew he was on thin ice, on the marriage question. Had he not his

own illegitimate menage, under the rose? But he kept his position. The institution was to be supported, the individual might do as he liked — under the rose. “Ach yea!” said Lotte. “If the bed isn’t roses the bedcover is.” So she went in and out among the rose-bushes, and hid, not behind the fig-leaf, but behind this same immortal rose.

Johanna was not hiding: and here came the difficulty. The Baron stormed against the paltry and mischievous Alfred, the intriguing Louise, and the gullible fool of a Johanna. “Do you think any man will marry you again after you have made such an exposure of yourself?” he wrote. And getting hotter, he continued: “But if ever you bring this ill-bred, common, penniless lout to my house, I shall kick him down the stairs.”

“Ach Papa,” wrote Johanna. “Don’t you talk of kicking, with so much gout in your feet.”

Long, sombre, semi-mystical poems arrived from Rudolf. The raven of woe had made off with the pearl of the north, and hidden it in some unclean cranny. But was no falcon on the wing?

No, dear Rudolf, no falcon was on the wing. He sat with his posterior on his chair in his study and wrote inky poems.

And then the Baroness, Johanna’s mother, fluttered near. She arrived in Munich, and descended for the moment on Alfred. Alfred and Louise meanwhile sardonically pulled both ways.

Arrived the Baroness’ letter from Munich, to Gilbert in German. “Think what you do. Think what position you can give my daughter. She has been used to a comfortable and honorable life, and she must not be brought down to degradation. Her father was a cultured nobleman of high family, and how could he bear to think of his daughter going about the country homeless, living on charity, with a strange man, like a tramp. Yes, like a tramp trailing across the country.”

The Baroness had a real style of her own. Gilbert spit on his hands, and tackled the German language. He would answer Dutch with Dutch. “Your daughter wishes to stay with me, I do not detain her against her will. So long as she wishes to stay, I shall never ask her to go away. I am no more master of her actions than is anyone else. I shall stand by her as long as ever she asks for it, or wishes it, or will have it. Her marriage in America is a disaster for her. I want her to stay with me. We are not tramps nor living on charity, since nobody gives us anything. I do what I can do — and it can’t be otherwise.”

And then, lo and behold, Johanna, happening to go into the kitchen one rainy morning just after midday, just after the midday train had gone down the line, saw a figure which surely was familiar coming down the path from the station: a

sturdy, even burly figure in a black coat and skirt, and a white chiffon scarf, and an insecure boat-shaped hat, bobbing along under an umbrella.

The Baroness, by all the powers. Johanna rushed into the bedroom, where Gilbert was sitting stark naked, his feet under him, musing on the bed.

“Mama!” said Johanna, flinging off her blue silk wrap and appearing like a Rubens’ Venus.

“What?” said Gilbert.

“Quick! There’s Mama! Coming from the station. Thank the Lord I saw her.”

And Johanna flew into her chemise, whilst Gilbert got into his shirt.

By the time the Baroness had had a word with Frau Breitgau, and had struggled up the stairs, two correct young people were standing on their feet, dressed and ready. But alas, they both, and he in particular, had that soft, vague, warm look in their eyes and in their faces, that tender afterglow of a fierce round of love and passion.

Into this mild, dawn-tender, rosy half-awakenedness came the Baroness, like the black and ponderous blast of Boreas. Gilbert was bewildered at being honored so unexpectedly, but as yet he was unsuspecting. He took the umbrella of the visitor, and gave her a seat on the honorable and comfortable deep sofa. Then he took a chair at the desk, where he had the evening before been working at music.

There was a lull. And then suddenly, like a bomb which has been quietly steaming and then goes off, the Baroness went off. She planted her knees square, she pushed the hat off her forehead, she let her white chiffon scarf hang loose. And then, in a child’s high, strange lament voice, she turned to Gilbert and began.

It would be useless to repeat what she said. Poor Gilbert, the dawn-rose going more and more bewildered in his eyes, his mouth coming apart, his face growing pale, seemed to shrink in his chair — and shrank and shrank, as if he would get down between the two legs of the pedestal desk, and there, like an abashed dog retreated in its kennel, bark uncertainly at the intruder.

On and on went the Baroness. It was not abuse — not at all. It was like a child in a dream going on and on, in a high, plaintive, half-distracted voice. She said everything she had said before, and everything that she would inevitably say. She said all the things that had come into her mind, all the things she had put into her letter. She reminded him of poor Johanna’s unhappy future — and of the children. — ”Ja, und Sie wissen nicht was eine Mutter von zwei Kindern ist. Das wissen Sie nicht. — Ja, und ich meine, ihr Vater ist ein adlicher, hochgebildeter Mann — Ja, und wenn Sie Geld hatten — Ja, und ihr Mann ist doch so gut, so gelernt, und so beriihmt dort in Amerika — Ja und was fur ein Leben ist es dann

fur Sie. Oh jeh, noch so jung und unerfahren sind Sie — ”

“ — Yes, and you don't know what a Mother of two children is — Yes, and I must say, her father is a cultured nobleman — Yes, and if you had any money even — Yes, and her husband is really so good, so kind, so learned, and so famous there in America. — Yes, and what kind of life is it for you? Oh dear, you are so young and inexperienced — oh dear, what a sad and heavy fate you take on your young shoulders — Oh, what a sad and heavy fate. Oh dear, it is good you have no mother, for what should she say. — But why will you do this thing? Why will you do it. — And yes, even if Johanna says she is happy now, think in six months! In six months! Oh poor Johanna, my poor Hannele. And her two children. Ach, and she a mother with two children. That you don't understand. You are young, you don't understand. No, what a sad life you make for yourself — ah, I cannot think of it — such a sad life for you. — And yes, what will you do when the Herr Doktor wants this house? Oh yea, then you have no roof to your heads! Homeless, like a pair of tramps — like a pair of tramps — and her father is really such a cultured nobleman “

On and on went the Baroness' voice. She seemed to think of everything, and like a bird flying high against a wind, she rose and sank, rose and sank, and began again, almost breathless, with her — Und ja — Und ja — Und ja!

Our young male finch shrank and shrank behind the pedestal desk, and said never a word, not one single word. When the Baroness said — Do you understand? — he only gazed at her in silence. And Johanna, much more on the spot, gazed on the pair of them in a kind of indignation. She could not forget, not for a second, how the dawn-rose on her morning's bout of passionate connection was being blotted out, blotted out under the Baronessial Boreas.

“Aber nein Mama! Aber das ist dumm! Aber was meinst du, Mama!” she shouted from time to time. But the Baroness, like a dog that is howling at the moon, only cast a glance at her unheeding out of the farthest corner of her eye, cast an unheeding corner of a glance at the interruption, and went on with her long, long howl at the moon. Which moon was friend Gilbert, who gazed and gaped moon-white and moon-silent, and seemed as if shortly he would sink behind the horizon of the pedestal desk. There was a dark, unseeing, obstinate look in his eye. Johanna would not have been at all surprised if he had started to bark.

And then, almost suddenly, like a sudden wind that drops, the Baroness was silent. There was a painful lull in the room.

“But Mama!” said Johanna. “Why didn't you say you were coming?”

The question was pointed.

“Ach, I am not staying. I am going to Louise's,” said the Baroness, catching

her chiffon scarf and grasping for her umbrella.

“But won’t you have some lunch?” said Johanna.

“No! No! Thank you! Thank you! I am going.”

And the elderly lady rose to her feet, sturdily.

“But you will eat something?” said Johanna.

“Nein! Nein!”

“Goodbye Mama!” called Johanna cheerfully.

“Ja, goodbye Johanna. — Goodbye Mr Noon. I mean not to be unkind, you know — ” this bit in English.

That long, eternal “you kno-ow” of foreigners. The Baroness wrinkled a distressed face at him, shook hands, and left, obdurately refusing to stay another minute, although her train was not till a quarter to two.

Johanna closed the door behind her mother, and did not go downstairs with her.

“Well, I call that an irruption!” she said.

“So do I,” said Gilbert vaguely.

“Just in our lovely morning “ There was a pause: “But I call it mean. I call it mean to burst on us like that! What right has she?”

And Johanna flounced into the bedroom. Then she flounced back.

“But what do you let it upset you for?” she said. “You look so ridiculous! You shrank and shrank till I thought you’d disappear between the legs of the desk. — And not a word. Not a word did you say! But not a word! Pouf! I think it’s so ridiculous — ”

She went out to the kitchen with a poof! of laughter. Then she called:

“Come and look.”

Gilbert went. Away below they saw the Baroness going sturdily up the incline to the railway, in the rain.

“Look at her! Look at her! How long has she got to wait?”

“An hour,” said Gilbert. “Ought I to go to her?”

“Go to her? What for? She doesn’t want you.”

“She’s had no lunch.”

“Oh well, she’s had her satisfaction schimpfing. I don’t forgive it her. Look at her now! Doesn’t she look a sight in the rain! What right had she to spring on us like that! I call it mean of them — mean! — Now let her stand in the station — And now she’ll go to Louise’s and make more mischief. But I’m on my guard against them in the future. — Mean! And our lovely morning. And you — you. What do you look such a muff for? Why do you look as if you were going to hide in the desk hole? A rare fool you looked too.”

Gilbert did not answer, but his eyes were dark and full of remembrance.

“Ach Mama!” said Johanna, addressing the figure in the rain. “You always were clumsy and ungraceful. And a sight you look, standing on the station. You’ve made a rare angel of yourself this day. And I don’t forgive it you! — And you — ” she turned on Gilbert. “You are worse than she is — shrinking and being such a muff. — Bah, a man! You never said one word!”

“Why should I?”

“Why not? Pouf!” — and again Johanna broke into a mocking laugh. “But I’m going to eat, anyhow. And I’m going to have eggs and bacon. Are you?”

“Yes,” said Gilbert, eyeing with the greatest discomfort the stout black figure on the little railway station. And he had no peace till the train came — when they both ran to the kitchen and watched the Baroness climb in — and watched the train steam off.

“We’ll be on our guards, after this,” said Johanna.

“How?” said Gilbert.

“Yes, that’s just it. Springing upon one — !! — Yah, fools always do rush in! — What does she care, really, about me? Not a rap! She’s only frightened of the world. That’s all she cares. I shan’t forgive it her. — And you’re a fool, I don’t forgive you for taking it so tragically — ”

Johanna was mistaken, however. Gilbert was only deeply bewildered by this bruit pour tine omelette. But she was deeply offended that he had cut such a poor figure. In her own mind, she felt he ought to have risen and said: “Madame la Baronne, this is not to the point. Allow me to offer you a little refreshment.” Instead of which he had sat with a pale face and round eyes and shrinking body. For in Gilbert’s world people did not make speeches. At the bottom of his soul he too was profoundly angry. Johanna was furious because she was humiliated by her own family, and because he allowed her to be humiliated. He was furious because he had, he felt, been wantonly trespassed upon. But this was his private affair.

The next day they went to Schloss Wolfratsberg, to see Louise. Wolfratsberg was a big village, a township. And here the soldiers were quartered. Crossing the wide bridge over the river, he saw the soldiers washing their clothes in the stream, ruddy and laughing. In the town soldiers stood, dark blue, at every corner: the place seemed coloured with them. Even in Louise’s villa two privates were quartered — she would not be bothered with an officer. Gilbert saw them loitering, smoking their pipes, their tunics unbuttoned, in the little plantation behind the house. And he heard them chaffing Marta, and singing risky love-songs to her.

Marta appeared, her round head braided with her black plait, her grey eyes full of light, her face warm and dusky with that mediaeval reserve. She glanced a

strange flash at Gilbert. And for the moment he wished with all his soul that he was back again among the common people: that he was lounging with his pipe in the plantation with the two privates, and making love to the dark, proud, promising Marta. He felt sick of women who talked and discussed and had privileges, of a theoretic life. Oh if only he was with the common soldiers! — the man's reckless, manly life of indifference and blood-satisfaction and mental stupidity.

But alas, some invisible pale intervened between him and the lounging, unbuttoned soldiers. He had to go upstairs, to Louise's room with its grey linen walls and its yellow silk curtains and dark furniture. And he had to listen to these two ladies, Johanna and Louise, in their endless talking-it-out: the reckless voice of Johanna beginning — "Aber Louise — " and the musical, sardonic voice of Louise responding: "Ja, Johanna, Ja. Das mein ich auch. Aber "

That terrible aber — that eternal but. Hamlet would really have had some occasion to say Aber mich keiti Abern.

Of course nothing important eventuated at Wolfratsberg. Next morning Gilbert worked at his music. He had found various old books of songs at Louise's house, and these songs he set about transcribing, translating, and preparing for schools. A certain rather facile inspiration, a little fever of work was upon him, and he got on quite well, and forgot the various other matters. Johanna curled up on the sofa and read book after book, scattering the volumes round her on the floor like bones round the door of a dog's kennel.

In the afternoon they walked out towards the river woods. They went through the tall, ripening rye. Poppies were out, and magenta corn-cockles, and bits of blue chicory. But Johanna, instead of walking along with him, walked behind, with a curious trailing motion of her feet. At first he did not notice. And then his spine began to creep. He glanced round irritably. And again his spine began to creep, he felt as if someone were going to stick him in the neck. So he waited for her to come up, and passed some casual remark as she joined him.

But when he went forward, he again felt her behind him — she would not keep up. And again the vile feeling went up and down his spine. He felt he would hutch his shoulders, as if really expecting a stab in the neck.

"Why do you walk behind?" he said.

"Why shouldn't I? I can walk where I like."

He looked at her. She had an irritating way of trailing one foot out, having her feet wide apart, and one foot on one side. A white anger began to mount his cheek.

"You won't walk after me like that," he said. "I won't have it."

"Why not? The road is not yours. I can go where I like."

“Not behind me.”

“Why not!”

And she stood at a distance, eyeing him. He turned on his way. And she followed trailing after him. And rage ran up and down his spine, feeling her as it were jeering and destroying him from behind.

Again he waited.

“Go in front,” he said.

“Why should I?”

“Go in front. Or keep level,” he said.

“No. Why should I? I can go where I like.”

She stood at a little distance, eyeing him. And he hated her. So they both stood on the path, waiting. Still they waited.

After a while he shrugged his shoulders, and walked forward, determined to take no notice. But when he came to the woods, and still she dogged him, at a dozen paces behind, jeering at him malevolently, he felt, then he could stand it no more.

He turned suddenly and went back towards her.

“I’m going home,” he said, striding savagely.

“Goodbye. Enjoy yourself!” she cried jeeringly. And he felt her watching him, jeering, as he went through the rye.

However, he hurried forward towards the house, indifferent to her now. He took a book and sat down at the desk. And after a short time he heard her coming up the stairs. She was always afraid to be alone in the lonely country.

She went straight into the bedroom, without speaking. He glanced from under his brows, hoping she would be softened.

He was terrified lest love should cease to be love. She came back out of the bedroom.

“Shall we have some tea?” she said.

“Yes. Shall I make some?”

“Do.”

He went into the kitchen and made tea. She curled up on the sofa with another book. He hoped it was all going to be cosy again.

They had tea. Evening came — and they talked desultorily. He hoped everything was all right. But she took her book, and he went to his songs. As he was working he suddenly heard her Pough! of laughter, and glanced up. She was curled on the sofa, her face and eyes were shining curiously, and her head was pressed back as a cobra presses back its head, flattening its neck.

“I must think of you and Mama,” she said. “You looked such a fool.”

He moved the green-shaded reading lamp to one side.

“Why?” he said.

“Shrinking in your chair. Why were you so frightened?”

“Frightened? When was I frightened?”

“You were terrified — of Mama.”

“That’s a lie.”

“No, not at all. I could see you. You looked terrified — and you were.”

“I was not terrified. It’s ridiculous.”

“But why did you go so little? You went so small in your chair, I thought you were going to vanish altogether.”

“What should I do?”

“But why were you so overwhelmed? Why did you shrink so small? I was simply astonished.”

“I didn’t shrink at all. What could I say to a woman with white hair — what could I say? What was the good of saying anything?”

“Yes, but why should you go pale and shrink six sizes smaller than before. It was a sight to see you.”

“You shouldn’t have looked then. You shouldn’t have let me in for it. She’s your damned mother.”

“I let you in for it! I! You let yourself in for it. And then you shrivel up — ” she puffed with laughter.

“Have you said about enough?” he said, leaning forward over the desk, and his eyes beginning to burn.

“What am I saying? I’m just telling you.”

“Have you about finished?”

“No. Not at all. I want to know why you look such a fool.”

A blacker shadow went over his face.

“Because you, blast you, make a fool of me,” he said sullenly.

“You must be a poor creature,” she said, “if an old woman’s schimping makes you want to crawl under the desk.” And she laughed unpleasantly. “I thought you were going to bark at her — ” she laughed more — ”bark at her like a dog.”

But he, looking daggers, rose and went to the open door, to look at the night from the balcony. She got down from the sofa and confronted him.

“I thought you were going to crawl under here like a dog in a kennel — ” her head dropped loose with laughter — ”and bark — bark at Mama!” She laughed till she was weak. And he only stood and looked at her with black eyes of fury. Because he was sore with many unallevied humiliations, a little blinded by his own sore head.

“Look!” she cried. “Look!” — and she moved the paper-basket, and crept into

the space between the two sides of the desk. He stood stock still, and his cheek went yellow with fury and humiliation. She was so weak with laughter, that her forehead sank to the floor, as she kneeled bunched up under the desk. Then she looked up and barked at him.

“Wuff! Wuff-wuff-wuff! Wuff!”

After which she collapsed with another little shriek of laughter.

He could see it was funny. But like a bear with a sore nose, his soreness was too big for him. He went livid with anger.

“Now stop!” he said. And the sound of his voice startled her. She looked up at him.

“Now stop!” he said.

And his face was transfigured. She did not know it. It was a mask of strange, impersonal, blind fury. She crawled out from under the desk, and rose to her feet.

“Can’t you stand a joke?” she said.

“I’ve had enough!” he answered, and his eyes came upon her with a black leap.

“But why? Are you such a poor thing you can’t stand being laughed at sometimes? You looked a big enough fool!”

But his eyes only watched her from the white blotch of his face. And she winced. It wasn’t a human being looking at her. Out of a ghastly mask a black, horrible force seemed to be streaming. She winced, and was frightened. Oh God, these Englishmen, what depths of horrors had they at the bottom of their souls! She was rather frightened of him, as of a mad thing.

“Can I never laugh at you?” she said.

“Not more than enough,” he said.

She could see his heart beating in his throat. And still the black, impersonal, horrible look lingered on his brow and in his eyes, his face was void.

“And must you say when it’s enough?” she asked, almost submissively. She was afraid of him as she might be of a rock which was just going to fall.

“Yes,” he said. And he looked full into her again. And she was frightened — not of him, personally — but of some powerful impersonal force of which he was only the vehicle: a force which he hardly could contain, and which seemed ready to break horribly out of him.

She became quite still, went and curled up with her book again. He sat motionless at the desk, his heart plunging violently, a sort of semi-conscious swoon drowsing his brain. He had almost forgotten, forgotten these horrible rages. When he was a boy of thirteen his sister could taunt them up in him. And he knew he could have murdered her. But that was long ago, and he had

forgotten. Now suddenly the black storm had broken out again. And he was no longer a boy. He was a man now.

He sat with his head dropped — brooding, oblivious in a kind of dark, intense inwardness. There was an unspeakable silence in the room. She glanced at him from time to time. But he was motionless and as if invisible to her.

Rather nervously she slipped from her sofa and came and crouched at his side, and very timidly put her hand on his knee. He did not move. But awful fire of desire went through him at once, so that his limbs felt like molten iron. He could not move.

“Are you cross with me?” she said wistfully. And her hand sank closer on his knee.

He turned and looked down at her. A strange, almost unseeing expansion was in his eyes, as he looked on her. And he saw her face luminous, clear, frail, like a sky after a thunder-rain, shining with tender frail light. And in his breast and in his heart the great throbs of love-passion struck and struck again, till he felt he would die if he did not have her. And yet he did not move.

“Say you’re not cross! Say it!” she murmured. And she put her arms round his hips, as he sat in the chair and she crouched before him. And he took her in his arms — her soft, deep breasts, her soft sides — !

Ah God, the terrible agony and bliss of sheer passion, sheer, surpassing desire. The agony and bliss of such an embrace, the very brink of death, and yet the sheer overwhelming wave of life itself. Ach, how awful and utterly unexpected it is, before it happens: like drowning, or like birth. How fearful, how causeless, how forever voiceless.

Gilbert afterwards lay shattered, his old soul, his old mind and psyche shattered and gone. And he lay prostrate, a new thing, a new creature: a prostrate, naked, new thing.

And he and Johanna slept, with his arm round her, and her breast, one breast, in his hand: the perfect, consummating sleep of true, terrible marriage. As a new-born child sleeps at the breast, so the newly-naked, shattered, new-born couple sleep together upon the heaving wave of the invisible creative life, side by side, two together, enveloped in fruition.

Ah gentle reader, what have we done! What have we done, that sex, and the sacred, awful communion should have become degraded into a thing of shame, excused only by the accident of procreation, or the perversion of spiritual union. It is no spiritual union. It is the living blood-soul in each being palpitating from the shock of a new metamorphosis. What have we done, that men and women should have so far lost themselves, and lost one another, that marriage has become a mere affair of comradeship, “pals,” or brother-and-sister business, or

spiritual unison, or prostitution? Ah God, God, why do we always try to run away from our own splendour. Why are we all such Jonahs? And why must I be the whale to swim back to the right shore with you, gentle reader.

Marriage, gentle reader, rests upon the root-quivering of the awful, surpassing sex embrace, full and unspeakable. It is a terrible adjustment of two fearful opposites, their approach to a final crisis of contact, and then the flash and explosion, as when lightning is released. And then, the two, the man and the woman, quiver in a newness. This is the real creation: not the accident of childbirth, but the miracle of man-birth and woman-birth. No matter how many children are born, each one of them has still to be man-born, or woman-born, later on. And failing this second birth, there is no life but bread and butter and machine toys: no living life.

And the man-birth and the woman-birth lasts a life long, and is never finished. Spasm after spasm we are born into manhood and womanhood, and there is no end to the pure creative process. Man is born into further manhood, forever: and woman into further womanhood.

And it is no good trying to force it. It must come of itself. It is no use having ideals — they only hinder. One must have the pride and dignity of one's own naked, unabateable soul: no more.

Don't strive after finality. Nothing is final except an idea, or an ideal. That can never grow. But eternity is, livingly, the unceasing creation after creation after creation, and heaven is to live onwards, and hell is to hold back. Ah, how many times have I, myself, been shattered and born again, how many times still do I hope to be shattered and born again, still, while I live. In death I do not know, do not ask. Life is my affair.

“And oh that a man would arise in me That the man I am might cease to be.”

Which is putting it backwards. The shattering comes before the arising. So let us pray for our shattering, gentle reader, if we pray at all. And we, who have paid such exaggerated respect for the Gethsemanes and Whitsuntides of renunciation, let us now proceed to pay a deeper, and at last real respect for the Gethsemanes and Whitsuntides of the life-passion itself, the surging life-passion which we will never, never deny, however many ideal gods may ask it.

The year was passing on. The rye was ripe, and the farmhands were out in a line, mowing with the scythe. The corn was tall, taller than the men who stooped and swayed in a slanting line, downhill towards the wood's edge. Gilbert would stand a long time on his high balcony, watching them work in the misty morning, watching them come in at noon-day, when the farm-bell rang, watching the dusk gather over them. And always, he wished he were one with them — even with the laborers who worked and whetted their scythes and sat

down to rest under the shade of the standing corn. To be at one with men in a physical activity. Why could he not? He had only his life with Johanna, and the bit of work he was doing.

The life with Johanna was his all-in-all: the work was secondary. Work was always a solitary, private business with him. It did not unite him with mankind.

Why could he not really mix and mingle with men? For he could not. He could be free and easy and familiar — but from any sort of actual intimacy or commingling, or even unison, something in his heart held back, tugged him back as by a string round his heart. He had no comrade, no actual friend. Casual friends he had in plenty — and he was quite popular. He had even friends who wrote and said they loved him. But the moment he read the words his heart shut like a trap, and would not open. — As far as men were concerned he was cut off — and more or less he knew it. He could share their company and their casual activities, their evenings and their debates and their excursions, but one with them he was not, ever, and he really knew it. As far as men went, he was a separate, unmixing specimen.

Yet he wanted, wanted to have friends and a common activity. At the bottom of his heart he set an immense value on friendship — eternal, manly friendship. And even he longed for association with other men, in some activity. He had almost envied the soldiers — now he almost envied the mowers. Not quite. Not altogether.

Because, of course, he had mixed hard enough with men all his life. He knew what they were. He knew that they had no wonderful secret — none: rather a wonderful lack of secret. He knew they were like ants, that toil automatically in concert because they have no meaning, singly. Singly, men had no meaning. In their concerted activities, soldier or labor, they had all their significance.

And so Gilbert felt himself cut off from one half of man's life. With a curious, blank certainty he knew it, as he leaned on the balcony, high up, and watched the men at work. Because he could never be an ant in the colony, or a soldier in the hive, he must stand outside of life, outside the man's life, the world activity, in a way, divorced.

He must make all his life with Johanna, and with his work. He would finish his book of songs before August. And he had written down a sketch of a symphony which he knew in his heart was genuine from him. So much for that.

And he clung with intensity to Johanna. Since he had been with her, and his old closed heart had broken open, he knew that she and he were fate and life to one another. She was his one connection in the universe. And because he had no other connection, and could have no other, apparently; and also because, since his old, closed, more-or-less self-sufficient heart had been broken open, and set

in a pulsing correspondence with the soul of the woman, he could no longer live alone; therefore he grasped at Johanna with a kind of frenzy.

The family was working once more for a reunion with Everard. Everard had written saying that he would allow Johanna to have a flat in New York, with her boys, if she would live there in complete honor, as his wife; personally, he could never return to her, as a husband.

This seemed a very fine offer, and a very satisfactory capitulation, in the eyes of the Baron and family. All pressure was to be brought to bear. Johanna was invited again by Louise to Wolfratsberg. Gilbert accompanied her: and was rather coldly received, and made to feel an interloper.

“Tonight,” said the officious Louise, “Johanna will stay here. Because there is much to talk about, which we must say ALONE.”

Whereupon, it being evening, Gilbert said Goodnight to Johanna, and Johanna said Goodnight to him. She half expected, and wished, that he would command, or at least request her to refuse Louise, and to return to Ommerbach with him. He did neither. It was part of his nature, that, cost what it might, everyone must make his own, or her own decision for herself. So he said Goodnight, and Johanna rather mockingly called Goodnight back again.

“You will come tomorrow?” he said, looking at her.

She always quailed when he looked direct at her, and asked her a stripped question.

“Yes,” she said, a little grudgingly. “I’ll come.”

“In the morning?”

“In the morning or in the afternoon.”

“Yes — yes — she shall come. Do not fear,” laughed Louise rather jeeringly.

Gilbert looked at them both with black eyes, and took his leave. He walked back, up the steep hill through the wood, and along the high Landstrasse by the railway and the rye. Night fell, and a moon hung low down. The road was silent, and strangely foreign to him in the night. It seemed to him that it ran towards Russia — he could feel Russia at the end of the road — and that the century was not his own century. England was all switched off, gone out of connection. One might imagine wolves.

He looked round at the bristling shadows. He saw the white, foreign road. And something in his wrists, and in his heart, seemed to be swollen turgid almost to bursting. In his wrists particularly. He veered slowly right round, in a circle, and felt Europe, strange lands, wheeling slowly round him. And he felt he was mad: like a hub of a wheeling continent. And it seemed the skies would break. And his wrists felt turgid, swollen. And very dim in his consciousness was a thought of Johanna in Wolfratsberg being talked to by that infernal Louise: infernal, that

was what she was.

At last he came to the house, and entered the silent, empty, dark flat. He went out on to the balcony and hung over the night, hearing the distant hoarseness of the river, seeing the bristling of fir-trees in the dark, and remaining himself suspended.

When a man's life has been broken open, and its single flow definitely connected with the life-flow in another being, so that some invisible pulsing life-blood flows between their two selves all the time, some current of invisible vital flow, then it is a horror and a madness to derange this flow. And strange, very strange Gilbert felt that night on the balcony: untellable: deranged in soul, in life-self, not in mind. He knew, with stark, deranged inevitability, that Johanna was his fate, he was to be balanced in changeless vital correspondence with her: or else there was before him a wandering incompleteness like idiocy.

However, he went to bed: and awoke after a short time with agony: and looked at the empty pillow at his side: and for a moment it was as if she was dead.

After which he lay watching for the dawn, and the sound of the farm-bells. And never, in all his life, was he more grateful for any sound than for the sound of the jangle-jangling farm-bell in the whitish dawn. He went out at once on to the road. And there, strange enough, was a hunter or forester, in the first dawn-light, walking with a dead deer slung over his shoulder. It was tied by its four little feet, in a bunch, and its head hung back. It was hard to forget.

Soon the laborers came out of the farm, into the morning-chill, dew-drenched world. And he watched them go down the slope with their scythes. And the sun came up. And he thanked God there was sun, and sweet day, and that his soul's insanity was soothed.

He hung on during the day. Johanna did not come till four o'clock: and then, with Louise and Professor Sartorius. Gilbert made the tea. The conversation was German and critical — and it turned on Goethe. Gilbert said Goethe was cold, less than human, nasty and functional, scientific in the worst sense: that where man should have a reverent soul, Goethe had only a nasty scientific inspiration. He talked, saying what he really felt. It all arose out of a volume of Goethe's lyrics which Louise had bestowed on him. He talked as one is used to talk, openly.

He was therefore startled when Professor Sartorius bounced up as if a cracker had gone off in his trouser-seat, said he could hear no more of this from one who knew nothing about the great Goethe, ganz und gar nichts, gabbled Danke schon for the tea, seized his hat and made for the door. There he looked round.

"You are coming?" he said to Louise.

“Ja — Ja — ! — Goodbye — ” said Louise to Gilbert, pursing her mouth. “You see we think very much of Goethe — and perhaps you speak without understanding him at all. Yes? — don’t you think?”

Gilbert did not answer, and they went.

“I said what I think, and I believe it’s true,” he said, looking at Johanna with hot, angry eyes.

“I shouldn’t wonder,” she said.

And she liked him for raising the professorial dust.

They were silent for some moments.

“Are you glad I’ve come?” she said.

“I knew you’d come,” he answered, speaking more jauntily now she was actually here.

“But did you want me?”

He looked at her, a dark look. He could not bear such questions. He was queer to her — incomprehensible. He did not seem a bit glad. Yet she was awfully glad to be with him again — inexpressibly. Why wasn’t he festive too? Oh she was so glad. She had escaped again. Queer and sombre and inscrutable he was. Why didn’t he say anything.

“You are glad, aren’t you, that I’ve come back to you?” she said, looking round the room with pleasure.

“Why should you ever stay away!” he replied, with a good deal of resentment showing.

“Oh, I should think I can stay away one night,” she replied lightly, flattered.

“But Louise is a treacherous creature, really,” she said.

“Why?”

He still did not believe in the tricks of the other woman.

Johanna was rather piqued that he did not make a fuss of her: did not make love to her. But he didn’t. He was silent, and rather withheld. Inside him his soul was gripped and tense, as from the shock, and from a certain desperate clutching at certainty. He had had a shock: and his soul was desperate. It is a horrible thing for a man to realise, not so much in his mind as in his soul, that his very life, his very being depends upon his connection with another being. It is a terrible thing to realise that our soul’s sanity and integrity depends upon the adjustment of another individual to ourself: that if this individual, wantonly or by urgency break the adjustment and depart, the soul must bleed to death, not whole, and not quite sane.

This pretty piece of knowledge Gilbert realised in his clairvoyant depths. And it shook him profoundly at the time, so that he could not gather himself together, or come forth, or be free. He could not finally trust Johanna: there was some

strain of volition in his heart. So his love-making was gripped and intense and almost cruel.

Two nights after this he awoke again with a start. He felt at once that Johanna was not at his side. In the same instant he heard a low, muffled sound that seemed to shatter his heart.

He sat up. There was a white blotch beneath the low window. It was Johanna crouching there, sobbing.

“What is it? Why are you there?”

“Nothing,” she sobbed.

“Why have you got up? You’ll be cold.”

“Oh no — oh no — ” she sobbed.

“But what’s the matter? Come back to bed.”

“No — No — no-o!” she sobbed madly.

The night and the dark room seemed to bristle with the sound.

“What is the matter? Is anything wrong?” he said. At last he was perhaps full awake: if man is ever full awake in the middle of the sleep-night.

“No — no! Leave me alone! Leave me alone!” she sobbed in a wild despair.

He rose in pure bewilderment, and went to her.

“But what is it,” he said, taking her gently in his arms as he crouched beside her. “Tell me what it is.”

“Oh, you are cruel to me, you are cruel to me, you are — ” she sobbed, with the strange, irrational continuance of a child.

“I? Why? How? How am I cruel to you?”

“You are! You torture me. You torture me — yes — you do!”

“But how? How? I don’t torture you. — You are cold. You are quite cold. Come to bed. You are cold.”

“No. No. You don’t love me. You are cruel to me. Oh, you are cruel to me, you are.”

“But come to bed — you are so cold — come to bed and tell me how. Come to bed and tell me how — come and be warm.”

“You’ll torture me. You’ll torture me.”

“No no! I’ll only make you warm. Come. Come.”

At last, still sobbing in the curious abandon, she let herself be led back to the bed. He took her in his arms, and wrapped the bedclothes round her closely, and wrapped her with himself drawing her in to his breast, and putting his cheek down upon her round, soft head, so that he seemed to have folded her all together.

“You are cruel! You are cruel to me,” she sobbed, sobbing more violently, but with the curious heavy remoteness departing from the sound.

“But I’m not!” he said. “I’m not. How am I? I love you. I love you. I only love you. And I love nothing but you in all the world — nothing in all the world. How am I?”

“You are. You don’t really love me.”

“I do. I do nothing else. What have you got in this state for? It’s ridiculous. And you are cold through.”

He gathered her closer and closer. Her sobbing was subsiding.

“Because you don’t love me,” she sobbed, “and it makes you cruel to me. You torture me.”

“I don’t,” he said, clutching her nearer. “Tell me how. — Are you getting warm now?”

“Yes,” she piped faintly.

“And it’s nonsense,” he said. “I do love you, my love. If only I didn’t love you so much. — You’re so cold still. Why are you so silly? Why are you so silly. You startled me horribly.”

“But you don’t know.”

“Yes I do! My love! My pigeon. Be warm, be warm, my love — be warm with me.”

She wriggled and nestled nearer, and gave a little shuddering sound.

“Now you’re getting warm,” he sang softly, in a monotone. “Now you’re getting warm with me. Aren’t you, my love. We’re getting warm, so warm, aren’t we.”

She nestled nearer and nearer in his arms, seeming to get smaller, whilst he seemed to grow bigger in the darkness.

“To say I don’t love you! To say such things!” he whispered into her hair. ‘.’To say I don’t love you — ! when — oh God!” And he clung to her and enfolded her as a tree enfolds a great stone with its roots. And she nestled in silence enveloped by him.

So they were happy again, and restored — but a little more frightened than before. They had both had a lesson — and each began to fear the other, and to fear the inter-relation: perhaps a wholesome fear.

As Johanna sat in bed having her coffee she brooded as her plaits dangled. He sat on a chair by the bed, where he had carried the little table and the tray. He too was quiet. His heart was still again.

“Oh but Louise is wicked!” said Johanna, between the sips of her coffee. “She’s wicked.”

“Why?” he asked. When he was quiet and happy in his heart he did not pay much attention.

“She’s wicked. She’d like to injure us. She’d like to damage our love, now she

thinks it is really there. Oh, she's a wicked one. I shall beware of her in the future."

"Yes," he said.

"I shan't let her play her tricks with me again. She thinks me a fool. But I've found her out."

It was an unwelcome letter which arrived from Everard that morning. This time it was abuse — and warning. "And what kind of life do you hope to have with that lout?" wrote the husband. "He will not treat you as I have done. He will not give you what I have given you. Take care, or before you have finished he will beat you. Men of that sort are not to be trusted."

Johanna threw these letters aside rather easily. But for Gilbert they were a sore trial. They seemed to insult him in his soul. And he felt in the wrong, confronted with them. For which, once more, he was a fool. But centuries of insistence have contrived to put him in the wrong — and he was a child of the old culture. It took some time for him to roll the centuries and their tablets of stone out of his spirit.

They walked in the woods, where the shade was grateful. The little birds, tree-creepers, ran up and down the trunks of the beeches like odd flies, and squirrels came, with their snaky, undulating leap running from tree to tree, darting up a round trunk, and peeping from the edge at our friends. Gilbert nodded at them, and they chatter-chatter-chattered at him.

Gilbert finished his book of songs, and posted it off to London. The correspondence with Everard continued. August was drawing near — and then Ommerbach was no longer a place of refuge. After two more weeks, what were they to do, he and Johanna? They did not know.

As they were walking homewards in the lovely warm July evening, they heard a motor-car behind them, running out from Munich. They stood aside on the grass to let it pass, when, to their surprise, the face of Louise appeared in the window. She waved to them, and immediately called to the driver to stop.

"Yes," she said, "from here I will walk on." She paid the driver, and turned to Gilbert.

"I want," she said, "to have a talk with you. You will walk with me? — yes?"

She was in her dark-green silk town dress, and was looking very beautiful and rich.

"No," said Johanna. "He has a cold, and is tired."

"You are too tired? Yes? Oh, I can walk alone."

"No, I am not tired," he said.

"Are you sure?" said Louise.

"He is tired, and he's got a cold," said Johanna.

“Oh, Johanna — er ist doch ein Mann — he really is a man, and can speak for himself,” said Louise.

“Will you go?” said Johanna.

“Yes, I will walk along. I shan’t be very long,” he said.

“Goodbye,” cried Johanna. And she went into the house in a fury. Gilbert wondered at her unkindness.

He and Louise continued along the evening road together. And she had a heart to heart with him. She was very nice — very sweet — very kind: and so thoughtful for him, so thoughtful for him. He expanded and opened to her, and spread out his soul for her and his thoughts like a dish of hors d’oeuvres for her. And she tasted these hors d’oeuvres of him, and found them rather piquant, although he was a naive youngling, of course, compared to the all-knowing professors of Germany.

And so she talked seriously to him — about Johanna and his future and her future. And she said she believed that Johanna loved him, but oh, oh it would be so hard, and did he really think love was so important.

And, yes he did, said naive Gilbert. What else mattered. And “Yes. Yes. I know,” replied Louise — but what of all the other difficulties. And Gilbert said they couldn’t be helped. And Louise asked did he want to marry Johanna, if the divorce could be brought about. And he said he did. And she asked him, ah, life was so complicated — might he not change: he was young, he was fresh to life: might he not love some other woman? Johanna was older than he, and mother of two children. Would he not find it a burden, later, and wish to love some young girl, some young creature fresh to life — whom he could make all his own: a little like Marta — came the wicked suggestion. Johanna could never be all his, for had not twelve years of her life belonged to another man! — *etc. etc.*

To all of which our hero, strutting very heroic and confidential and like a warbling Minnesinger beside the beautiful, expensive woman, along the twilight road, replied in extenso, giving his reasons and his ideas and his deductions, and all he thought upon the matter, all he had thought in the past, all he would think in the future, and he sounded very sweet, a soul of honey and fine steel, of course. And Louise sipped it all, and estimated the honey for what it was worth, and the steel for what it also was worth, and found him a naive babbler, of course, compared to a German professor, but none the less, not unsympathetic to herself.

So they parted at last, at the entrance to Wolfratsberg, both in a whoosh of wonderful sympathetic understanding, after their Rausch of soul-communion. And he walked back the long five miles with a prancing step, fancying himself somewhat, and intensely flattered by the attentive Louise: and she went on to her

house, brooding and feeling triumphant that she had still got her finger in Johanna's pie.

Meanwhile Johanna sat at home gnawing her wrath, her anxiety, and her fingers. When our bright-eyed Gilbert landed back at last, she broke out on him.

"You must have been all the way."

"To the beginning of the village."

"The more fool you. You know you are dead tired."

"No I'm not. And how could I refuse to go with her?"

"Easily enough. She could have gone on in the taxi. But you are a simple fool. Any woman who likes to give you a flattering look, or ask you for something, can dangle you after her at the end of a piece of string. Interfering minx that she is! And you to be taken in, after the other day. I bet you poured yourself out to her."

"No I didn't. We only talked."

"What else should you do! I know what talk means, with folks like you and her. Nasty soul messing, that's what! What did she want? What had she got up her sleeve?"

"Nothing. She only talked about how we should manage — and what there was to consider."

"You are a fool — I hate you. Talking it over with her — everything — everything — I know. How much you love me and are ready to sacrifice for me. I hate you. I hate you. You are always ready for a soul mess with one of her sort. Don't come near me."

"But it wasn't a soul mess."

"It was. I can see it in your face. I hate you when you look like that. And after the other day too. You know what she wants. You know what she's after. She wants to make mischief between us."

Gilbert didn't feel guilty of the mischief part of it — perhaps a little ashamed of the deep, soulful confidence — his dish of *hors d'auvres*. But in one respect he was not like Johanna. Talk, sympathy, soul-truck had very little influence on his actions. He did not act from the same centres as he talked from, and sympathised from, and soul-communed from. — Whereas Johanna was very risky to meddle with. Set a cycle of ideas and emotions going in her, and heaven knows how fatally logical she might be in her resultant action. Hence his unreasoning horror of her loss the other day. And hence her not unwarranted anxiety this evening. But the same logic did not apply to him as to her.

However, this storm blew over also, though not without a certain damage done.

It was necessary to decide what move to make. Louise had become suddenly

quite friendly. She came to tea.

“Have you never been to Italy? Oh but it is lovely! Why not go there? Why not go, and walk some of the distance!”

“But money?” said Gilbert.

“Ach money! Money will come.”

Again she said it. And he was all his life grateful to her for the laconic indifference with which she said it. For some reason, he believed her. “Money will come.”

Then why not go to Italy? Why not act on Louise’s suggestion?

Our pair of finches grew wildly excited, ready for flight.

Money would come. It didn’t mean that Louise, or anyone else, was ready to give it, for all that. However, Gilbert had nine pounds, and Johanna six.

To Italy, then. Why not?

To Italy!

Chapter XX.

Over the Hills.

Johanna's rather rickety trunk and Gilbert's rather flimsy bags were put on the railway to travel by themselves to Kufstein, on the Austrian frontier. Peace go with them.

Our hero and heroine arose at dawn one morning in early August, a little nervous and feeling very strange at setting off on foot to cross the Alps and conquer the south. They had about thirteen pounds between them, and heaven knows what in front of them.

It was nearly seven when they set out. Gilbert called at the little station to see if the bags had gone. They had gone. Then goodbye, Ommerbach! Goodbye little flat, and balcony over the wild road! Goodbye farm-bells that had jangled in so many of the crises of our couple! Goodbye little village of seven houses.

The morning was dewy but sunny, and the pale blue chicory had opened its sky-sparkles by the road. Gilbert put a sprig in his coat. He had his brown knapsack on his back, his old brown hat on his head. Johanna had her lighter grey knapsack on her back, her old panama with a cherry ribbon on her head — and she wore her dark cotton voile dress. So they took to the road — feeling rather unsure, but in a mood for going on and on, inevitably.

By eight o'clock they were on the hill above Schloss Wolfratsberg, looking down on that ancient townlet, whose chimneys smoked blue, whose two tall-necked churches lifted their bird-head cupolas, whose river ran hastily under two bridges, whose water-poplar trees were tall and plummy, whose saw-mill made a just audible sound. Touching sight, an ancient, remote little town sending up its morning woodsmoke, down below beside its river.

So they descended, and bought a spirit-machine and a saucepan, methylated spirit, bread, butter and sausage. Then they crept through the long, attractive old street on tip-toe, for fear that Louise should spy them from her villa above, or that Louise's servants or children should pounce on them.

But heaven be praised, they passed unchallenged, and merged into the water-meadows beyond the town. There they sat down a minute on a bench, and heard the church bells, and watched the women washing linen in the river. Well Goodbye Wolfratsberg! There is a long road ahead, over the mountains and into the unknown.

In the middle of the morning they sat in a pine-wood a little way back from the road and ate bread and sausage and drank Frau Breitgau's Schnapps from a little bottle. A peasant with his dog, passing along the high-road through the trees, shouted a greeting and wished a pleasant wedding. Whereupon they both felt uneasy, as if he knew their involved circumstances.

They took to the road again. The sky was cloudy, and looked like rain. So when they came to a station on the little railway, they waited for a train, and rode ten miles to the terminus. There they descended, and took the high-road towards Austria. It wound at the very toes of the mountains. The steep slopes and cliffs came down on the right. On the left was a deep wood — and sometimes a marsh flat.

Darker grew the sky — down came the rain, the uncompromising mountain rain. In the grey, disconsolate, Alpine downpour they trudged on, Johanna in her burberry, he in his shower-coat. The cherry ribbon began to run streaks into Johanna's panama, whose brim drooped into her neck. Drops of water trickled down her back. Gilbert's trouser-bottoms flapped his wet ankles. The black pine-trees over the road drooped grimly, as if promising rain for ever. And this was the first afternoon.

"Bad luck!" said Gilbert.

"Isn't it," she cried.

"But I don't mind," said he.

"I rather like it, really," said she.

"So do I," he chimed.

In which frame of mind they trudged on to a village. They entered the inn. Farmers and wagoners had been driven in by the rain, and sat with their beer and pipes. Johanna ordered scrambled eggs with ham, and wrung out her skirt-bottoms. Then the two wet ones sat on a bench and waited for their eggs.

One lonely man sat near — one of the odd, rather woebegone figures that always appear in an inn, no matter where. He bowed to the wet finches, and asked them if they came far. Johanna told him. And of course she said, in German:

"We want to walk to Italy."

"You and your husband?"

"Yes."

"Ja — that's famous, now! That is remarkable!"

The other peasants were listening — a handsome, black-eyed man, a large, blond, taciturn Bavarian farmer, and two others.

Then the little unfortunate told his tale of woe. He was a shoemaker and — But there is not space for his tale. Suffice that Johanna gave him a shilling —

and he peered at it as if it were the egg of a bird of Paradise in his palm — and suddenly he spat on it, reverently — and tears came to his eyes, and he bowed three times, to Johanna, and once to Gilbert — and disappeared into the rain. And of course Johanna cried — and wiped her eyes and laughed — and the dish of orange-golden eggs appeared smoking. With black beer, thin raw ham, butter, and black bread, scrambled eggs are royal. Johanna and Gilbert ate in wistful sentimental emotion, heartily.

The men at the opposite table, under the picture of Franz Joseph, watched with all their eyes. Then the black-eyed one called the usual question:

“But you are not German, lady?”

And she gave the inevitable answer:

“Yes — and my man is English.”

Followed a lively little dialogue in Tyrolese and high German, which Gilbert could not understand. But the men were flirting with all their might with Johanna. Even the taciturn farmer of fifty put up his moustaches and flushed and became handsome. Johanna liked him better than the black-eyed one.

They asked if Gilbert could understand — and when Johanna said, not the dialect, then they began to make rather broad jokes about him, in the dialect. About his not understanding — about his silence and his youth.

“You don’t like a German husband, then, gracious lady?”

“Ja! Ja! Auch!” laughed Johanna. “Also! Also!”

After which there was such a flame of male ardour around in the room, that she was frightened, and rose to go. It had almost ceased raining.

Gilbert watched the men with dark, watchful eyes.

“There are good beds here, good, warm German beds, and everything that such a fine Frauenzimmer can wish. Will you go, then?” cried the farmer.

“Yes, yes! We must go,” cried Johanna, rather scared.

The two swung into their knapsacks. The men got up and shouted Good journey! and various other things, and bade goodbye rather jeeringly to Gilbert. He knew they jeered at him, but he did not care.

So they went in their damp clothes down the wet road to Bad Tollingen. They arrived at this little summer-resort at about half-past six — and wandered looking for a room. They found one in a small house for four shillings. It was quite comfortable, but Johanna declared she smelled stables and a slaughter-house. Gilbert smelled something, but nothing so lurid.

So they changed what they could, ate some food out of their knapsack in their room, to save expense. Then they sallied out. There was a small summer-theatre, so they paid their shilling and listened to a Vienna comedy.

The next day was sunny again. As soon as possible they were out of the house

where they had slept and where Johanna had smelled so acutely. Oh the joy of getting out of an hotel, or a lodging-house, in the morning, of clearing out for good! Never to see it again!

They bought food and set out again. Johanna had a pound of peaches — rather hard. They drifted on all day — camping at intervals to make food. In the afternoon they were in the high, wild rocky valley of the young Isar. Woodsmen, like wild, sharp men from the Sagas, were busy with the rafts. At five o'clock Johanna and Gilbert decided to climb over the neck of a pass between two valleys, by a footpath. It would save ten miles of road.

So they sat by a waterfall and made tea from the ringing water, under a birch-tree. A grasshopper, a wonderful green war-horse of some tiny mediaeval knight sprang on to Gilbert's knee, and he watched it with wonder. He felt it musically — it had a certain magic, which he felt as music. Johanna gathered tall, black-blue gentians that stood in the shadow.

Then they started up the path. It was supposed to be eight miles — two hours and a half. They climbed up through the alp-meadows and entered the higher woods, where the whortleberries were bushy. And all at once the path became indefinite. However, they followed a track along the saddle of a hill, among trees and whortleberries.

Then the track fizzled out. What to do? Gilbert thought he saw a path on the opposite hill, in among scattered trees and rocks. So down they went, down to the stream-bed. And Gilbert clambered up the opposite slope. Johanna behind saw him, with his shower-coat dangling, his knapsack a great hump on his back, as he scrambled earnestly up the steep slope, clinging to rocks.

"The camel! The camel!" she screamed from her opposite bank. "You look such a sight! You look such a sight — like a camel with a hump!" So she screamed from the distance, and she laughed with derision. Perhaps his earnest, anxious haste for a path drove her to ridicule.

However, he got to the top — and found a proper track.

"Come on! Come on!" he called. "It's getting late."

She came reluctantly, being in one of her perverse moods. In the thin wood-spaces as she came along she found wild strawberries. "Such lovely ones!" she shouted from the distance.

"Come on!"

"So good!"

"Come on!"

They were on the high saddle of a hill, among trees and rocks. And the dusk was falling — and already it was cold, sharp cold. Yet in the distance he could see her panama hat stooping and stooping.

“It’s getting dark,” he shouted.

“Lovely big strawberries!” she screamed in reply.

“I’m going ahead.”

“Wait! Wait! I’ve found a patch.”

There she was stooping. But he strode ahead. It was getting dark. And he did not want to sleep on damp ground in the extreme mountain cold. So he went on without her. And she was frightened, and came half running, calling to him to wait.

“You see the night,” he said angrily.

“But such heavenly strawberries you never did taste.”

“Sleep with them then,” he said angrily, striding on. He was anxious for some sort of shelter.

They were on a rough, rocky track among trees. It was almost night, and ice-scent strong in the air. He was silent, and she was now frightened.

“We shall find a hay-hut on one of the Alps,” she said.

“Let us then,” he replied.

On they went in the next-to-darkness. And suddenly, at a bend of the road among thick trees, a little hut. They opened the door. It was a tiny chapel, with two benches that would seat four persons each, and a tiny altar. He struck a match and lighted the altar candles. The floor was boarded, and quite dry. If one moved the benches, two people could just lie there: it was just big enough.

All his anxiety disappeared. He looked at the doll which represented the virgin, at the hideous paper and rag flowers of the altar, and at the innumerable little ex voto pictures that hung on the walls.

“We can sleep here,” he said. “We are all right.”

“Where?” she said.

“On the floor.”

“I’m sure we could find a hay-hut if we went on.”

“I’m not going on.”

“Do think! It’s so uncomfortable here.”

“It’s dry and weather-tight. What more do you want.”

He took a candle from the altar and climbed on a bench, looking at the ex voto pictures. They were excellent naive little paintings on wood: a woman in a huge bed, and a man and his five children kneeling in a queue across the bedroom, with joined hands., and the virgin in a cloud coming through the ceiling: a field of catde just like a Noah’s ark set out: a man with a huge rock falling on his bent leg, and blood squashing out sky-high: a woman falling downstairs into her kitchen, and Mary, in a blue cloak, looking down in mild amazement from the ceiling beams: a man up to his waist in water, his arms thrown up, drowning, and

Mary in a blue cloak on a white cloud high above: and so on and so on, a whole gallery. Gilbert was fascinated.

“Do come! Do let us find a hay-hut,” cried Johanna.

For some reason she was mad to sleep in one of the Alpine log hay-houses.

“We are well here,” he replied, standing on the bench with the candle. He glanced at her who stood outside by the bushes.

“No! No!” she said. “The hard floor.”

“But dry and warm. What more do you want.”

He had found a picture which fascinated him: a prison cell, with chains and fetters hanging on the wall, and Mary in a blue cloak prison-breaking through the roof. Then the verse.

“Du heilige IVlutter von Rerelmos Ich bitte mach mir mein Sohn von Gefangenschaft los.

Mach ihn von Eisen und Banden frei Wenn es dein Heilige Wille sei.

Anna Eichberg. 1775.”

Poor Anna Eichberg, with her son in prison in 1775, praying for him to the virgin. Why was he in prison? And whose prison. Gilbert felt he must know.

Johanna, returning from her excursion, saw through the open door of the wooden shrine how he stood on a seat with the candle and peered at this picture, and gaped and mused.

“I’ve found one,” she cried in triumph.

“Come and look,” he said.

“No. Come quick. I’ve found a lovely hay-hut.”

“I’m sure we’re better here.”

“No. No. Come.”

Reluctantly he obeyed. He blew out the candles and followed up the dark path. After a hundred yards it suddenly emerged in a great open darkness — the saddle of the pass — and twenty yards further on was the dark hay-house, built of logs, and roofed, but with a space of two yards between the roof and the top of the low log walls.

Gilbert climbed in and explored. In the higher, rear half the hay went practically to the roof. In the lower half it was a little less than the log walls.

“Isn’t it lovely! Isn’t it perfect,” cried Johanna.

They decided to eat. There were two bits of meat, and four little breads: all the rest eaten. An icy wind was blowing through the col. They went to the back of the hay-hut, and with difficulty got more or less out of the icy draught, so that they could fry the meat in the little saucepan over the spirit-flame. The night had become very dark. They crouched round the blue, restless flame of the spirit-machine, and heard the wind, and heard the meat faintly frizzle. Then they ate in

the darkness, feeling the cold almost resound in the upper air.

They clambered up the ill-joining logs into the hut or barn. Gentle reader, never spend the night in an Alpine hay-hut if you have a chapel handy.

“Isn’t it lovely! Isn’t it perfect!” cried Johanna.

“Yes,” said Gilbert, who was growing colder each moment.

He carefully hung the knapsacks where he could lay hands on them: carefully placed the hats: then carefully buried his boots and Johanna’s shoes in the deep hay, in the faint hopes that the hay might dry them, for they were sodden. Then he took off his waistcoat and spread it for a sort of pillow for the two of them.

All this was done in pitch darkness, for how shall one strike matches in a barn of loose hay. Then the two buried themselves in a deep hole in the hay, and piled the hay above themselves, and thought they were all right. Johanna was in ecstasies. At last she had got away from her Marvell villa, Boston, and all civilisation, and was sleeping like a tramp. She wanted to be made love to there in the darkness of the hay: so she was made love to: and at length the two disposed themselves for sleep. They clung close together, and put the coats over them, and piled the hay above the coats.

“It’s lovely, lovely!” said Johanna.

But alas, gentle reader. Worse than fleas, worse even than mosquitoes on a sultry night is hay. It trickles insidiously in. It trickles and tickles your face, it goes in your ears and down your neck and is round your waist. The tickling becomes an intolerable irritation, then an inflammation.

Also a waistcoat is a bad pillowslip. You find your face in the arm-holes every other minute, in all the horror of hay in the night.

And then, gentle reader, there were chinks in the log walls, and there was the space above. So on top swept the ice wind. And below, through the chinks and through all the hay the icy point of the draught was slowly but surely and deadlily inserted.

Our tired pair of finches slept — but slept in the slowly trickling irritation of hay, and the slowly encroaching blade of ice-cold wind. Then they heard it rain — but for a mercy the roof was tight. They woke and woke and woke, and every time colder and colder and colder, and more and more irritated into frenzy by the filtering-in of the hay, on their faces, in their nostrils and ears, and under their clothing. To be cold, and galled with irritation. Oh gentle reader.

At last there was a sort of false dawn. And they got up. Gilbert put on his waistcoat and soddened boots — ice cold, ice cold. In the ghastly corpse-light of the dawn they looked out. They were at the top of a pass, in a sort of kettle among the mountains, peaks rising round. The rain, just a bit higher, was snow.

He hunted for sticks to make a fire for tea — all the spirit gone — and she

went for water. Her shoes were so sodden she went barefoot — over the icy, piercing points of the mown Alp. A good penance for romance. At last she found water oozing up through the grass in a sort of marsh.

He coaxed a wretched fire between stones behind the log-house, as much out of the wind as possible. Then they drank tea and ate the last stale little breads — about two ounces each. That was the end of it.

Dawn among the peaks around their Alp was ghastly grey. And in this ice-cold greyness, in sodden boots and skirt-bottoms, they set off, like two ghosts. And they had not gone a hundred yards before they saw a light — and someone with a lantern — and heard a cow moo.

It was a forlorn, dismal little summer farm, inhabited only for some months in the year. Drawing nearer, they saw in the dismal light of the increasing dawn a thin, stooping man moving with a lantern in the cow-house — then another man came out of the house, on the stone track through the filth. No, the second man was a woman — a thin, gaunt, extinguished looking woman, fairly young. She wore the big canvas trousers, tighter at the ankles, which the peasant women wear in the marshes. She was a rather weak man, save for her knob of dun-coloured hair screwed up behind.

Johanna and Gilbert went forward, in the morning-pallor. The man and the woman stood suspiciously. The farm was hardly more than a hovel — squalid. And the two figures seemed silence-extinguished. They made a great impression on Gilbert: like two wasted, stupefied, dreary birds, immured in that kettle of the pass in the cold.

Johanna asked the way. And the woman answered in a high, screaming voice, again like a desert bird. She pointed to a curving track. It was two hours. Evidently it was almost a violation to the woman to have to speak — the noise was a violation of the intolerable overshadowed, upper silence.

Gilbert was glad to drop on to the rock path, downwards, down a gorge, out of that moist Alp. Water roared and roared below. The black-blue greater gentian stood very tall, and the starry-white Grass of Parnassus opened its watery flowers.

Down the gorge they went. It was steep, and they moved fast, and at last grew quite hot. At about eight o'clock they came to a village of about four houses. At the first house — it was fairly large, and all lined with wood — they asked for coffee. Yes, they could have it. The woman was fresh-faced and pleasant. A boy was crying by the big green stove. Outside rain, mountain rain was falling.

At length came good hot milk and coffee. Then the man came in. He was a strapping, hard-looking mountaineer. He said he was a forester — the region was famous for chamois. The Crown Prince came every summer to shoot chamois.

He brought photographs of the royal highness — and a letter which the prince had written him: Dear Karl. It was a simple, natural little letter.

“My sister knows the Kronprinz — she had dancing lessons with him,” said Johanna. So Karl, the forester was suitably impressed. And our pair of finches decided to go to bed. It was pouring with rain: that awful Alpine rain which comes straight down and seems like the wet creation of the world.

Oh a good, deep down bed, with down bolsters deep above one! Tired, inflamed with hay and cold, they slept in their separate beds, glad to be apart. In extremity, one is alone. We are born single and we die singly. All the better for all of us.

They got up at about two o'clock. The rain was falling like doomsday. At four there was a post-omnibus which ran to the Achen lake, to Scholastika. They decided to take it.

At least they had dry clothes. So they sat in the bumping omnibus with two other people, on clammy wash-leather seats, and they charged through deep valleys of everlasting rain.

It was a surprise to come to Scholastika — a dark, deep lake — and find summer visitors in the hotel — a small hotel, rough and countrified. But there was no bed. They were directed to a big farmhouse, across a long flagged track through the marshy flat water-meadows heading the lake. Yes, and they got a room. Upstairs was an enormous wide corridor from which the doors opened. At one end was a broad balcony — at the other end a great barn full of hay and corn. So that as one came out of one's bedroom door one turned towards the great cavern of hay. And if one went to the edge, one saw the horns of cattle below.

The bedroom was large, with old painted Tyrolese furniture, and great blue-and-white check overbolsters. Johanna insisted on going to bed at once. So there she lay, with her fine nose just emerging from under the great bolster.

Gilbert must go and forage for food. Again, in the yellowish evening he went across the meadow at the head of the gloomy lake. And at the hotel place he was given bread, eggs, cheese, and butter — and it all cost so little. He was in Austria, for the woman asked him for Krones and Hellers. She took German money just the same. Different the people seemed here — soft, vague, easy-going, not so fierce and hostile as the Bavarian highlanders. He was in Austria, in easy Austria. And the slight fear that hung over one in Germany — an instinctive uneasy resentment of all the officialdom — did not exist any more. Pleasant, easy, happy-go-lucky Austria!

He went home pleased. People had been nice with him. The things cost nothing. He had got methylated spirit. So there in the bedroom, whilst Johanna

lay in bed, he made tea, and fried eggs in butter, and they had their meal. How-pleasant it was — with the wettish gold evening fading over the narrow-ended lake and the black mountains, and in the bedroom a smell of tea and fried eggs, and Johanna sitting up in bed and eating her food with joy, and more eggs spitting away in the little saucepan on the floor. Food, delicious food — how good it is when it comes haphazard, round the frail camp-fire of a little spirit-machine, in a safe bedroom far from everywhere, with yellow, wet evening falling over a rather sinister lake, and painted Tyrolese furniture, with roses and peasant tulips, looking on indoors.

Next morning they were off again, on foot. The lake was a very dark blue, ink blue, the trees tall, and some already turning gold. On the elevated road they went above the lake, right from one end to the other. And then the road plunged down-hill, towards the open.

They came in the afternoon to the wide, open place, where the railway went to Italy, and the imperial road. Here again it was warm and sweet and summery. Grapes and peaches were abundant in the shops. There was a strange touch of the south.

But now the luggage remained to be fetched from the frontier. Back along the line they travelled by the evening train, and they slept that night in steep, famous Kufstein, under its dark castle. Gilbert loved the mediaeval imperial feeling of these places. Old emperors of the Holy Roman Empire had left their mark. All seemed still feudal, feudal on an imperial scale.

At the station they hunted for their boxes. Johanna extracted her necessities, there in the vast shed of the customs deposit. And then they gave up their goods once more to the railway. Amazing reliable days of speed and easy management. Everything happened so easily, and yet so well. Wonderful lost world!

They went over the bridge, and Gilbert walked across, past the blue post, to the blue letter box just inside the German frontier. And there he posted his letters. Then they took the train back to their breaking-off point.

They decided to stay at Eckershofen, in the heart of the Tyrol. It was a village at the head of a long, big valley. Arrived finally, they looked for a room, and found one in a farmhouse at the end of the village, for about one-and-twopence a day. The house stood beside a rushing, deafening stream that roared beneath a bridge under the village street. At first Johanna and Gilbert heard nothing but the roar of rock-torn waters. But soon they began to be unaware of the noise.

In Eckershofen they decided to camp and rest for a time. They could still live for about fifteen shillings a week each. In their bedroom they made coffee in the morning. Sometimes they picnicked out for the day meals, sometimes they cooked little roasts of veal, or beef, or kidneys, over the spirit in the bedroom.

Gilbert was happy here. Three streams, and three valleys converged and met near the house. The great flat-sided slope came down from a great height across the valley, streaked with snow. The village with its low-roofed houses, seeming only just to have shaken the snow off itself and taken to the sun, was pleasant, congenial. There was a strange, mediaeval Catholicism everywhere. To see the peasants take off their hats and sink their heads as they passed the shrines and crucifixes was to be switched back into a dark, violent age. It was no lip-service, no formula. Nor was it the fetish-worship of the south. It was an almost Russian, dark mysticism, a worship of cruelty and pain and torture and death: a dark death worship. And startlingly frequent in the gloomy valleys and on the steep pathslopes were the Christs, old and young. Some were ancient Christs, of grey-silvery aged wood. Some were new, and terrible: life-sized, realistic, powerful young men, on the cross, in a death agony: white and distorted.

For the first time in his life a certain ancient root-fear awoke in Gilbert's heart, or even deeper, in his bowels, as he came across these terrible crucifixes in the shadow and the roar of water by the roadside. He knew then, he knew once more the ancient Roman terror of the northern, tree-dark gods. He felt his breast bristle with the curious primeval horror of the great Hercynian wood, of the tree-worship of the Celts and the pristine, awful blond races. Here it lurked, as a sort of Satanism, in these valleys.

The high-road ended at Eckershofen. Beyond, only mule-tracks. And the muleteers with their strings of mules, fierce, bygone looking men, hueing and slashing up the hills, would suddenly change as they drew near a shrine or a crucifix. Suddenly a silence, a darkness, a shadow came over them. They advanced insidiously, taking off their hats to the great Christ. And then Gilbert's heart stood still. He knew it was not Christ. It was an older, more fearful god, tree-terrible.

Even in the peasant greetings — Servus! or Gruss-Gott — he seemed to hear something — something pre-Roman, northern, frightening: the bristling of wolves in the darkness of the north night, the flash of the aurora borealis, the mystery of blond forgotten gods. Overhead always the looming of great heights. And mankind creeping furtive in the valleys, as if by some dread permission.

Once Gilbert and Johanna went into the common inn, at evening, where zithers were twanging and men were dancing the Schuhplattler in their heavy mountain shoes. There was a violent commotion, a violent noise, and a sense of violent animal spirits. Gilbert, with his fatal reserve, hung back from mingling. Besides he could not dance the dance. But Johanna, watching with bright excited face, was invited and accepted. In all the fume and dust she was carried into the dance by a lusty villager with long moustaches and a little Tyrolese hat. How

powerful and muscular he was, the coarse male animal with his large, curious blue eyes! He caught her beneath the breasts with his big hands and threw her into the air, at the moment of dance crisis, and stamped his great shod feet like a bull. And Johanna gave a cry of unconsciousness, such as a woman gives in her crisis of embrace. And the peasant flashed his big blue eyes on her, and caught her again.

Gilbert, watching, saw the flame of anticipation over the man. Johanna was in a Bavarian peasant-dress, tight at the breasts, full-skirted, with a rose silk apron. And the peasant desired her, with his powerful mountain loins and broad shoulders. And Gilbert sympathised with him. But also he was unhappy. He saw that legitimately Johanna was the bride of the mountaineer that night. He saw also that she would never submit. She would not have love without some sort of spiritual recognition. Given the spiritual recognition, she was a queen, more a queen the more men loved her. But the peasant's was the other kind of desire: the male desire for possession of the female, not the spiritual man offering himself up sexually. She would get no worship from the mountaineer: only lusty mating and possession. And she would never capitulate her female castle of pre-eminence. She would go down before no male. The male must go down before her. "On your knees, oh man!" was her command in love. Useless to command this all-muscular peasant. So she withdrew. She said Danke-schon, and withdrew. And Gilbert saw the animal chagrin in the other man. The lady had let him down. The lady would let him down as long as time lasted. He would have to forfeit his male lustihood, she would yield only to worship, not to the male overweening possession. And he did not yet understand how to forfeit his hardy male lustihood.

Gilbert was in a bad mood. He knew that at the bottom Johanna hated the peasant. How she would hate him if she were given into his possession! And yet how excited she was. And he, Gilbert, must be the instrument to satisfy her roused excitement. It by no means flattered or pleased him. He sympathised with the peasant. Johanna was a fraud.

Sentimentally his mind reverted to Emmie. He had written her an occasional letter, in answer to little letters from her. So now in the farmhouse by the rushing stream he remembered her again: and remembered his sister Violet: and wrote picture-postcards to both of them. And out of the few words breathed a touch of yearning we're-so-fond-of-one-another sentiment.

Johanna, a lynx without scruples, read everything he wrote. He rather liked this trespass upon his privacy. For, not being at all sure about his own emotions, it rather pleased him to see Johanna play skittles with them.

Johanna read the two postcards, and her colour rose. She knew all about

Emmie. Gilbert, a real son of his times, had told Johanna everything: particularly everything he should not have told her.

“You’re writing again to that impossible little Emmie!” she cried.

“Why shouldn’t I?”

“But I thought you’d finished with her.”

“I can send her a postcard,” he declared.

“I call it filthy, messing on with her.”

“Not at all.”

“Messing. Just messing. — Talking to her about mountains! — Pah! — Oh well — ” and she flung the cards aside. “Write your messy postcards if you want to. But it’s an unclean carrying-on for a man in your position.”

“Not at all. I do remember her.”

“Remember! You and your remembering! Slopping to your sister, and that impossible little Emmie! How manly you are!”

“And will be,” said he.

“But you’re not going to send her this card — you’re not.” And Johanna snatched it up and tore it in four pieces. “There!” And she threw the pieces down. She was a bit scared now.

He looked at her, and his face was dark. He looked at the torn card. And he said nothing. Amid his anger, he admired Johanna. Mistrusting his own emotions, and fearing his own sentiment, he was glad of a decided action on her part. Yet he was angry with her for her insolence.

However, he said nothing. But he gathered up the torn pieces, and put on his hat to go and post the card to his sister Violet. His thoughts and emotions were bubbling. And the bottommost thought and emotion was Damn Emmie! He stood on the bridge and pulled off the Austrian stamp. Then he threw the torn bits into the stream. And he never wrote to the damsel again. But he posted his card to Violet.

The valley began to depress him. The great slopes shelving upwards, far overhead: the sudden dark, hairy ravines in which he was trapped: all made him feel he was caught, shut in down below there. He felt tiny, like a dwarf among the great thighs and ravines of the mountains. There is a Baudelaire poem which tells of Nature, like a vast woman lying spread, and man, a tiny insect, creeping between her knees and under her thighs, fascinated. Gilbert felt a powerful revulsion against the great slopes and particularly against the tree-dark, hairy ravines in which he was caught.

Bilberries were ripe, and cranberries. Sometimes he and Johanna would lunch in a dark wood, and blacken their mouths with bilberries. Sometimes they would eat in a sunny place, where cranberries like tiny apples, like coral, in clusters

shone rosy. There were many butterflies in these open sunny places.

Came letters again from Everard — and a tiny note from one of the boys, the elder. Johanna cried and looked queer. The little scrap of a note from her son upset her far more than all the ravings of her husband. But she backed away — she fought off her realisation.

To Gilbert, Everard was much more real than the children. He read the other man's letters: "I have been mad, but for my children's sake I try to keep my sanity. But when I look at the future before me, it is all I can do to prevent myself from beating out my brains against the wall — I cannot stay here in Boston, where everything is leaking out. The looks of sympathy are too much for me, and the knowledge that they all condemn you and look on you as a fallen woman, a pariah in society, makes me lose my reason. Think, woman, think what you have done. Think of the lives you have wrecked. Think of the simple pride and happiness of my aged parents, who loved you, who are loving you even now, in their ignorance — you will send my old father to the grave, killed by his son's dishonor, and you will poison the innocent belief of my faithful mother. You have darkened forever the lives of your children, and branded their foreheads with their mother's shame. As for me, I do not live any longer, except as a broken, meaningless automaton, which works for the sake of my children, whom I must save out of the inferno of their mother's infamy, though every act I make is a new death to me

"Ah me — !" sighed Johanna as she read. It was very upsetting. But after all, there are so many other things than the things people choose to write or think. Johanna knew well enough that at the bottom Everard was infinitely relieved — that he raved the harder in order not to know his own relief. The almost diabolical connubial tension that had existed between him and Johanna was breaking him far more inevitably than this shock of her departure would break him. This shock was like an operation which removes the fatal malady: critical, but a salvation in the end.

Gilbert however had not been through the marriage school, so he took Everard almost at face value. He imagined a dark-eyed, aristocratic-looking, handsome man with grey temples and greying moustache tortured under the stars, away there in Boston, tortured with tortures more than man can bear. And the crucifixes hanging over the Alpine paths, over the little, wistful summer flowers: the strange, deathly, veined pallor of the Grass of Parnassus flowers, in dark, marshy places; the intense gloom of the ravines, with rushing water; and the strange dark eyes of some of the lean peasant men who came over the slopes with their oxen filled our young hero with an almost preternatural apprehension.

Once at twilight he was watching again a dead Christ on a Cross: a dead,

naked man dropping forward realistically on the nails, above the darkening highway. And at that moment a bullock-wagon was heard slowly descending from above. Gilbert turned and watched in silence. Slowly, strangely the foreheads of the cattle swayed nearer, with the soft, static step of oxen placing their feet. And when they were abreast the driver, crouched between the shafts, looked up at Gilbert. And from the dark eyes, from the aloof, handsome face seemed to come such a strange look, that Gilbert winced and turned instinctively away, to the dead, dropping burden of the Christ.

It was a dark look, torture, and hate: so it seemed to our friend. A dark look from a passionate face — from the face of a man dying on the cross of passion — tortured to death — having chosen the death — yet at the last moment black with hate and accusation. It is no joke being crucified on the cross of sex-passion and love. And at the last moment — at the last moment breaks out the black hate against the death-dealers, against the death itself.

The bullock-wagon clattered on. Johanna had drifted down the road. At Gilbert's feet the mountain pansies still pricked their little ears, in the underlight. Above, the Christ dropped slack on his nails. And Gilbert remembered Everard's letter: "I gave you everything. I would have been cut to pieces for you." And he shivered.

For the first time in his life, he knew what it was to be hated. He had seen clearly Everard's black, helpless eyes of hate, bottomless hate. The dark mountains seemed to reverberate with it.

"So he hates me," thought Gilbert to himself.

And he shrank from the knowledge — it was a piece of pure knowledge, and it seemed to project his soul naked out of his body, among the darkening hills.

To be hated — fathomlessly hated. He knew it among the terrible, black-gulfed mountains.

And he tried to shrink away: to shrink far away. "I would have been cut to pieces for you." The words made him sick. Fancy wanting to be cut to pieces for somebody — nay, by somebody one loves! How fearful — how foul! "I gave you everything, body and soul." Perhaps it was not true. But in so far as it was true, why this horrible sexual self-sacrifice in marriage? Surely it was obscene.

Supposing Pontius Pilate had come at the last hour to Calvary, and said "No more of this unclean business!" Suppose he had ordered Jesus to be taken down, restored, healed, and sent home to live. Would the world have been worse? Would it?

The position was, in a degree, Everard's. His marriage was an awful torture to him. Yet he wanted to die of it. And now Johanna had left him, so that he must live. The terrible sexual-passional crucifixion was interrupted — and the

crucified husband taken down, told to live.

And on Master Gilbert devolved the responsibility for the interruption. He knew it. And at the bottom of his soul he believed that Everard should be grateful. Should be. Perhaps even was — or would be in the end. Grateful that another man had taken this wife away from him — this Gethsemane cup. Gilbert would have to swallow the same cup: but with a different stomach, surely.

At the bottom of his soul he firmly believed that Everard should be grateful to him. But the bottom of one's soul is rather a remote region. And for the present he had to realise the blind, black hate that was surging against him. To be hated — to be blackly, blindly, fathomlessly hated!

He shrank, and there came on his face the wistful, wondering look of an animal shot in mid-flight — a look which Johanna detested. She had been sufficiently cursed by the wounded-animal look. She preferred the light of battle. But as yet Gilbert was down and wincing.

Chapter XXI.

Over the Gemserjoch.

Arrived a friend — a botanising youth of twenty-one, a Londoner whom Gilbert had known in England and again in Munich. He was called Terry — an ardent youth of Fabian parents, who had been given a rare good time all his life, and who expected the jolly game to continue. He was of that ephemeral school of young people who were to be quite quite natural, impulsive and charming, in touch with the most advanced literature. He wore a homespun jacket and flannel trousers and an old hat and a rag of a tie, and was a nice, quaint youth, ten times more sophisticated than our pair of finches, but quite amiable, sophisticated. He swam in a fierce river, he clambered over mountains, he collected flowers and pressed them in a blotting-paper book, and he talked mysteriously and sententiously, in a hushed, cultured voice, and was never offensive.

He was a great camper-out. If they had been in the wilds of Australia it could not have been more thorough. Down they clambered to black depths between the cliffs — they got on to a bushy island in mid-stream — they roasted pieces of veal on sticks before a fire, far away down there in the gloom. Then Terry flung himself into a water-fall pool.

At night — he had a room in the same farm-house — they improvised ballets. The Russian Ballet with Anna Pavlova and Nijinsky had just come to London. Neither Gilbert nor Johanna knew it. But Terry drilled them. He was a brawny fellow. He stripped himself naked save for a pair of drawers and a great scarlet turban and sat in a corner intensely playing knuckle-stones. Gilbert, feeling rather a fool, sat on the bed in Johanna's dressing-gown, turned the scarlet side outwards, and with a great orange and lemon scarf round his head, and being Holofernes. Johanna, handsomely rigged in shawls, was to be Judith charming the captain.

So Terry, as a slave, squatted in his corner and buried himself in his knuckle-stone business. Gilbert and Johanna were deeply impressed. Johanna began to swim forward like a houri or a Wagner heroine, to Gilbert, who was perched cross-legged, in the scarlet-silk wadded dressing-gown, upon the large bed. But Gilbert looked so uneasy and Johanna herself felt such a fool she fell to laughing, and laughed till her shawl arrangements fell away. Then the slave in

the corner grew really angry, and it was all a fiasco. But both of them wondered at Terry: he was really angry.

Next day arrived a second young man, an American, acquaintance of Johanna. He came from Odessa, where he had been vowing eternal love to a Russian girl whom he had known as a political refugee in London. This young man's name was Stanley. He was handsome and American-aristocratic, with large dark eyes and attractive lean face and American degage elegance. He was twenty-two years old. There was something very American about his slender silk ankles and doe-skin shoes. But he had been educated in England and spoke English without trace.

Of course he was dead with fatigue after the journey. He made those dark, arch, American eyes at Johanna, rather yearning you know, and in a whimsical fashion told all about his love affair: all about it, don't you know: rather humorously. And he wasn't sure now whether his heart's compass hadn't shifted a few points. No — oh no — he was less bowled of a heap than he thought he would be.

Oh dear, that Russian life — what would his own dear mother say to it! What would his mother say when she knew he was with the errant Mrs Everard. Oh dear oh dear, he was always tipping a little fat in his dear mother's steady if neurotic American fire. But there you are — men shouldn't have mothers.

Stanley, however, had a mother. Gentle reader — which reminds me, I've not spoken to you for at least twenty pages, gentle reader. I hope you're not sulking, and on the brink of closing this friendly book for ever. Gentle reader, we're going from bad to worse. Never say you weren't warned. Stanley had a nervous, cultured, dear mother away in America.

— The roses round the door Make me love mother more But when they're in the bud She scarcely stirs my blood —

Even that bit of poetry I stole.

Stanley was always talking about his mother. But though he was quite a well-bred young man, even I daren't transcribe his language faithfully.

"Oh, my mother!" he moaned. "She is a bitch."

"But you love her," said Johanna.

"Me! Love her! Not at any price. I'm her only son. She knows what I think of her."

"I'm sure she does," said Johanna. "She knows you can't do without her."

"Me do without her? Her and her nerves. Why if it's a south wind she hates me and if it's an east wind she prays for me. Oh dear oh Lor! And nobody loves me."

"Ah, you! Too many people love you," said Johanna.

“None! None!”

“What about Katinka?”

“She’s a little bitch. What’s the good of her loving me? Besides, she doesn’t really. — Nobody loves me! Nobody loves me!” And he ran out and leapt on to the parapet of the bridge, and ran there riskily and funnily, like a boy, or like a dog. His black hair was brushed straight back, he had a beautiful profile, pale, with an arched nose and a well-shaped brow. His delicate ankles in their purple socks showed as he ran backwards and forwards there in the air, to the amazement of the villagers. He was looking for the postman. His letters having been forwarded to Terry’s care, he was nervously wanting some communication, something to come and reassure him.

The postman came and brought him one letter. He read it unheeding and rushed again into the house.

“Nobody loves me! Nobody’s ever going to love me,” he wailed.

Terry understood and was amused. Gilbert looked on in wonder. He did not know the spoiled, well-to-do sons of a Fabian sort of middle-class, whose parents had given them such a happy picknicky childhood and youth that manhood was simply in the way. Yet there was a charm, a wilful, spoilt charm about Stanley. He had a shrewd petulant humour, and was no fool. An engineer by training, he went into the little electric works by the stream, and examined the machinery and the dynamos. How quiet his touch was then. And what a still concentration there was in his interest. But the moment he had seen everything, and was through with it, he broke into his wails about being loved.

He liked to walk with Johanna and be half mothered by her, completely admired by her. He could be so charming in his winsome fretfulness. And, like a queer mother’s child, he understood so much of a woman’s feelings, particularly of her nerves. He discussed Everard and the children with much length and earnestness, in private with Johanna. And she unbosomed herself to him as she never could to Gilbert. About Gilbert there was something resistant, just resistant. But Stanley could be a pure sympathetic, nerve-corresponding creature. She thought any woman might love him. And besides, she knew he was rather brilliant as an engineer. Terry said so. And she had seen his quiet, potent touch on the machinery.

Like Gilbert, he was very sensitive to the crucifixes with which the valleys abounded. Either at the foot or at the head of the cross were usually the sacred initials, INRI, on a scroll.

“Inry!” said Stanley. “Another Inry! Have they none of them got any homes to go to and any mothers? Lor lummy, Hinry! Woman, what have I to do with thee?” He strayed on inconsequently, singing:

“Henery the eighth I am I am Henery the eighth I am.”

“We have a friend,” said Johanna, “a Baron Potowski. And he was an only son, and his mother adored him. But when he was a student he was very wild. So one day his mother came to Bonn to see him, and she met him in the street, and he was very drunk. ‘Ach Heinrich! Heinrich!’ — ‘Weib, ich kenne dich nicht!’ he said to her solemnly, and he marched on. Poor Frau von Potowski. It nearly broke her heart.”

“Weib, ich kenne dich nicht!” repeated Stanley with joy. “Woman, I know thee not. I’ll cable it to my mother if she doesn’t send me something tomorrow.”

“But it isn’t that in the English bible,” said Johanna.

“Woman, what have I to do with thee? — But I like Weib, ich kenne dich nicht. I shall cable that to my mother.”

“You won’t be so horrid to her,” said Johanna.

“Isn’t she horrid to me? Doesn’t she pray for me, and have another bout of nerves? Doesn’t she make the house smell of valerian? Isn’t she a bitch? Has she written to me since I’m back from Odessa? Weib, ich kenne dich nicht.”

“Jawohl!” said Johanna.

Stanley’s mother was to come to London, and he was to meet her there.

“Oh my poor father, won’t he be glad to be rid of her for a bit. But fancy a woman who swallows valerian! He bears with her, he bears with her. I tell her, she’s like a sick persian cat.

Oh my poor father! And he’s stood it for nearly thirty years. Of course she’ll never die.”

“No, you’re too bad. You don’t want her to die.”

“I do! I do! I’m going to tell her I’m pining for her death.”

“She’ll only laugh.”

“No she won’t. She’ll swallow valerian, like a bewitched cat, and threaten to pray for me. Let her if she dares! I’ve promised her, if she prays for me again what’ll happen to her. — Hello Inry! You’re there again, are you? My compliments to Maria. Lord what a lot of Inrys she brought forth at a shot.

‘Ennery the eighth I am. I got married to the woman next door She’d been married seven times before And every time ‘twas an Ennery, She never had a Willie nor a Sam; I’m the eighth old man called Ennery, Ennery the Eighth I am.’“

“Aren’t you wicked!” said Johanna.

“Me? I’m mother’s little pet lamb. I’m Ennery the eighty-eighth I am I am. And you’re an adulteress you are. You’re a Scarlet Letter. So don’t you go saying nothing to me, so there.”

“I’m glad I’m a red letter. Most folks are dead letters,” said Johanna.

“Paste restantes, like my mother. She’s a blooming belated poste restante. She’s a fermo in posta she is.”

“And you love her.”

“Lor’ golly, I don’t and never did. I hate and abominate her for a bitch. I’m always telling her. But it doesn’t seem to do her much good.”

The party decided to move on. Johanna and Gilbert had been a fortnight in one place. Time to go. So they packed up once more and put their goods on the railway. Then, four together, they prepared to set off into the mountains, to cross the Gemserjoch and descend to the Imperial Road again well below the Brenner, on the southern slope.

At the last moment arrived a postcard from Stanley’s mother. She was in London — “and have had so many headaches since I am here that I have had several nuits blanches — ”

“Lor-lummy!” cried Stanley, “hark at her! Writes a postcard to say she’s had several nuits blanches. Oh, why has nobody ever smacked it out of her. Nuits blanches\ My poor father. He married her for her beauty, and wasn’t he taken in! Got a nuit blanche instead — a damn blanché bad egg. Golly, I can’t stand that woman any longer. Here, take her postcard.”

And he tore it in bits and flung it into the stream, which now had a second set of fragments to carry towards the Danube.

So they set off, Stanley fuming about nuits blanches — his mother’s white nights of sleeplessness — Terry murmuring esoterically about the marvels of eurythmics — Johanna shocked and a little bewildered, but withal charmed by the graceless son, and Gilbert silently wondering. Of course there were all kinds of worlds besides his own. Meanwhile the stream ran hastily on below, in the opposite direction.

They took the high-road inwards, into the knot of the valley. The high-road ended, they followed the bridle-path in the ravine. Here, in the gloom, stood one of the largest crucifixes.

“Goodbye Inry,” said Stanley to the figure. “See you later, old boy. Best wishes to Maria.”

“I do wish you wouldn’t,” said Johanna. “It really makes me unhappy.”

“There y’are, Inry!” said Stanley, turning round to the figure. “Here’s another of ‘em. Another nuit-blancher. Another Blanche newter. Lor-lummy, Blanche neuter. We’ve struck it Inry. Shake hands on it, old sport. So long. See you later, as the hymn says.

“We’re marching to Zion Beautiful beautiful Zion ““

They crossed the covered bridge, which always appealed to Gilbert’s fancy, and proceeded along the other side of the ravine. From time to time Terry, whose

knapsack was enormous because of his blotting-paper book and press-covers, went scrambling up or scrambling down the ravine, for a yellow violet or a bit of butterwort or some other flower. Sometimes they met a couple of pack mules, sometimes a priest. Servus! Servus! came the greeting. On straggled the four. Each one had a rucksack. It was a fine day, so Johanna's was bulky with her burberry. She had her old panama hat.

At noon they made a fire, grilled bits of meat and made scrambled eggs. Terry had a famous receipt for scrambled eggs, so he took off his coat and rolled up his sleeves and altogether was as portentous as an alchemist concocting the elixir of life. Stanley did nothing, but complained and wailed whimsically. They went on to the next village where they bought food — then on till dusk, which found them in a high, shallow open valley, grassy, rather forlorn, high up under heaven. They had been climbing all the time. Behind them, about three miles back, was the village where they had bought food — the last village till they came once more to the world's roads, over the southern slope. In front, nothing they could be sure of. But in the meadow, a block-house for hay — another hay-hut.

So they all voted for it. It was of two storeys, with a platform round the upper storey. Up they climbed, and Terry, who always had the scientific and alchemistic theories, decided where it would be safe to cook the food, so as not to burn the place down.

Dusk had well fallen. It was cold — very cold. Part of a moon was low in the sky, and a smell of snow. There were no high peaks near — only upper, roundish rock-slopes on which lay slashes of snow. In the darkening twilight they crouched over the spirit lamps on the platform of the hay-hut, trying to keep off the cold draughts from the flame. No living creatures were in sight — nor cows nor human habitation. Only the slopes beyond, the shallow, shorn meadow near, the rocky bridle-path and a little stream between rocks and marshy places.

Terry in triumph, always more like an occult alchemist than a mere cook, mysteriously brought off the ham and eggs. They ate rapidly and rather silently, inside the hay-loft in the almost-darkness. Stanley complained because he lost his slice of sausage. Then mysteriously they packed up and prepared for sleep. Terry of course gave a brief exhibition of how to sleep in a hay-hut, in deep hay. One made a hole as deep as possible, and *etc. etc. etc.* and finally one was buried completely under three feet of hay.

“You don't need any breathing hole,” said Terry in answer to Gilbert's expostulation. “The atmosphere travels quite freely through hay, and the small amount of retardation is only just enough to ensure warmth.”

This being so, Johanna and Gilbert prepared a large matrimonial burrow for

the two of them, whilst at brief distances the two men burrowed in separate holes. It was quite dark. The faintness of the moon was gone again under clouds, there was wind hissing. But heaven be praised, this hay-house was solider than that other, warmer. Gilbert, staring through his hay, could not make out the cracks in the door — it was so dark altogether.

Johanna drew him into an embrace. The other men were so near — yet it was so dark. She seemed so fierce. And he let himself go, buried there in darkness and in hay. Buried — fiercely active, but buried. Buried alive. He felt as the creatures must do, which live in lairs deep under the earth, and know their passions there. Deep under hay and darkness.

The night passed fairly well. It was warm, and therefore the irritation of hay was not intolerable. Yet by the first greyings of dawn all were up, and Terry had discovered how to make the tea safely inside the hut, among the hay near the door. It was cold and rather blowy outside. And they did not want some farmer to come and abuse them before they had had their tea and were ready to go. So they moved rather stealthily.

The dawn came grey outside. It had snowed in the night — heavy snow — but not quite down to their level. The road and the grass-alp were still free. But on the slope just above — it seemed only a few yards above — there was snow, and great snow-slopes of deep, new white snow just beyond them. Strange it was to see it, when the August morning began to be blue and the sunlight clear. It was a lovely morning after all. When they came to a stream — their own was but a trickle — they washed and were refreshed. But not inwardly warmed. So they were glad when they came to a single wooden house which provided refreshments for mountain excursionists. There they could have hot coffee and milk, plenty, and fried eggs and ham. It was good — especially the hot, rich milk: so restoring.

Other excursionists came, footing the same way.

The four went on, Gilbert and Terry usually botanising together, Johanna and Stanley talking. The sun came suddenly quite fierce, quite fiercely hot. There were little fir-trees, little woods of fir, and many cranberries, many clusters of scarlet and coral cranberries in tufts everywhere, on the rocks overhead and the rocks beneath, as they climbed the winding mule-path upwards. They ate cranberries all the afternoon, after having had a jolly lunch near another small hut for travellers, which sold some food and sweet fruit syrups.

It was about five o'clock when they came at last to the top of the climb — into a shallow last valley, where stood a house of brown wood, the accommodation for travellers this side the pass. Other walkers, mountaineers, excursionists, four or five, were here for the night. Our pedestrians got their rooms, had coffee and

cake, and went out to look at the world, as the night fell.

It was a wonderful place — the last upland cradle where the summer grass grew. At the end, about a mile off, was a vast precipice, like a wall, and beyond that a cluster of mountain peaks, in heaven alone, snow and sky-rock. That was the end.

But nearer, on the flanks, were the last fir-trees, rather wispy and cold-shrivelled, growing in patches. Between these, and around them, the rock avalanches, like terrific arrested floods of rock and stones. Then smoothish rocky-grassy slopes. While in the valley bed itself, great rocks cropped out naked, there was the inevitable hay-house like another rock all alone, there were strange marshes with vegetation, that curious cold-bitten, cold-shrunk vegetation.

Gilbert went botanising with Terry up one of the rock rivers round the corner of the trees. And what looked like a slope of stones, when they clambered up amongst it was a jagged mass of great broken rocks that had wedged and ceased to slip. It was rather terrifying, as the silent, icy twilight drew on, to be jumping one's way across these jagged massive avalanches. Even the fir-trees and some of the green growth that Terry was exploring grew out of the hollows between the blocks of avalanche rock. And the tiny stream-bed was so deep and difficult in the side of the great slope, once one was in it.

Gilbert was really rather frightened. There was something terrific about this upper world. Things which looked small and near were rather far, and when one reached them, they were big, great masses where one expected stones, jagged valley where one saw just a hollow groove. He had climbed alone rather high — and he suddenly realised how tiny he was — no bigger than a fly. Such terrible, such raw, such stupendous masses of the rock-element heaved and confused. Such terrible order in it all. He looked at the inaccessible, dread-holy peaks of snow and black rock beyond the precipice — and the vast slopes opposite, the vast slope on which he was overwhelmed, the fir-trees just below like a hairy fringe. It all looked of a comfortable human size. And now that he was scrambling between fierce rocks which had looked to him like stones, now he felt all the suspended mass of unutterably fierce rocks round him, he knew it was not human, not life-size. It was all bigger than life-size, much bigger, and fearful.

He clambered and jumped down again, hastening to get back. He wanted to get back, back to the level of the cranberries and the grass, back to the path, to the house. He had lost Terry, and was alone.

It did not take him very long to get down. He seemed to be climbing down out of the light into a trough of substantial shadow. He threaded his way through the

marshy place, where some hay was still hung out like washing to dry, upon the cross-sticks. As he got near the house he heard the tong-tong of the cow-bells, and saw the cows being driven into their house. At the front door of the accommodation house stood a mule whose packs were being unladen. Somebody was playing a zither.

He went upstairs, but Johanna was not there. Stooping to look out of the window, he saw the flush of evening on the peaks. Strange and icy the heart became — without human emotion — up here: abstracted, in the eternal loneliness. The eternal and everlasting loneliness. And the beauty of it, and the richness of it. The everlasting isolation in loneliness, while the sun comes and goes, and night falls and rises. The heart in its magnificent isolation like a peak in heaven, forever. The beauty, the beauty of fate, which decrees that in our supremacy we are single and alone, like peaks that finish off in their perfect isolation in the ether. The ultimate perfection of being quite alone.

It seemed to be getting dark. Yellow lamp-light streamed out below, from the doorway. Where was Johanna? He went downstairs to look. She was not in the one public-room — where was a bar and the tables at which one ate. Terry was there with his almighty blotting-paper book. Gilbert went to the door. There was Johanna sauntering up with Stanley.

“Where have you been?” said Gilbert.

“We went a walk — that way — ” and she pointed across the grass to the left, through rocks, towards the hay-house in the darkening distance. “Where did you go?”

“I climbed to get up.”

“Isn’t it wonderful!”

“Yes. Do you like it here, Stanley?” asked Gilbert.

“Marvellous!” said Stanley. “Marvellous.”

“Can we eat soon?” asked Johanna.

“I don’t know,” said Gilbert.

Before long they were eating hot broth, and lumps of boiled beef — and after that an omelette with jam — at one of the little tables in the public-room that was just the bar-room of a public-house, quite bare of ornament, but warmed by a big glazed stove. It was warm, and they ate and were happy.

After supper Johanna walked for a few minutes with Gilbert, holding his arm. Stars were in the sky, big, bright, splendid.

“It’s so marvellous,” she said, “it frightens me.”

“So it does me.”

They went soon indoors, and to bed. Somebody, somewhere at the back, was playing a zither — and making love. The sound was unmistakeable. Everybody

went to bed by nine o'clock. The upstairs was icy cold: the bedrooms just bare cells, two single beds in the finches' room. Gilbert felt he had never got into such a thoroughly cold bed. Johanna cried to him to come and help her to get warm. But it was impossible to sleep two in one small bed. So after a while he hopped back. And once one was warm one was very warm under the huge down bolster, which seemed to rise like a balloon above the sleepers' noses.

The morning came clear and sunny. Our four were rather excited at the thought of crossing the Gemserjoch, over the ridge to the south slope. This side still was Germany, with the north behind it. The other side was the southern Tyrol, all Italy in front. Even geographically, one can pass so definite a turning-point.

There were various other pedestrians, tourists, setting off from the wooden rest-house to cross the pass. They had guides too. The guides said there was much snow: that the boots and shoes of the four were too thin. But if people walked over a pass quite easily in thick boots they could walk in thinner ones. Our four would not saddle themselves with a guide: they had no belief in any difficulties.

So, in the first sunshine, they set off, climbing gently the rocky, roundish slope. Flat iron peaks, slashed fierce with snow, stood away to the right. There was a thin but a very cold wind under a sharp sun.

It was a long, high-up, naked slope, not very steep. There were no more trees, the Alp-roses were tiny shrubs — then they left off. The road was almost pure rock, with pockets and patches of snow here and there. The first great pads of snow, silvery edged. And still the road wound, dipped into a scooped hollow, and inclined up again, naked among the great harsh rocks, over tracts of snow, over iron-bare rock surfaces, always aloft under a clear blue heaven. It was cold in the wind, hot in the sun. But they all felt light and excited. Every little crest ahead seemed the summit.

In a hollow of rock was a last little crucifix — the small wooden Christ all silvery-naked, a bit of old oak, under his hood. And neither Stanley nor Gilbert made any jokes. He was so old and rudimentary.

So they walked and climbed and crossed slanting slopes for two or three hours. The road was quite easy to follow — no difficulty of any sort. At length they came to a last strange and desolate hollow, a sort of pot with precipice walls on the right. Over the ridge they came, and down the long, slanting track between huge boulders and masses of rock, down into the shallow prison. How was one to get out? They scanned and scanned ahead: but only precipices, and impassable rock-masses, and a thin water-fall. The water fell into the wide, shallow summit-valley. How did it get out again. They could not see.

The sun fell into this shallow, rocky, desolate place as into a rugged bowl. There was no snow, save in patches where there was shadow, under some rocks and in some stony pits. Our four slanted still on, into the prison. It seemed impossible there was a way out. A sort of summit rock-trap.

And yet, when they got almost to the face of the precipice on the far side, suddenly the path turned to the left, and there, almost like a ladder sideways against the steep face went a slanting, stony ledge, and the road up it. They climbed, and sweated, and were excited. This must be the top.

They emerged between rocks and pools and hillocks of rock — and then, it was the top. Smooth as plates of iron, a flat summit, with great films of snow like silver plating on the black bronze-iron. And a wind, a painful cold wind. And low in the near-distance a brown shelter-hut with people there. And beyond the brow, a great peak, a magnificent wedge of iron thrust into the upper air, and slashed with snow-slashes as if it were dazzlingly alive, so brilliant and living the snow-stripes on its aloof dark body. For Gilbert, it was one of the perfect things of all his life, that peak, that single great sky-living blade of rock. He tramped across the snow-slush, he tramped across the slanting, difficult slope of deep snow, over the bare, iron and snow-bound flatfish top. He felt the awful wind, so slow yet so killing. He saw the people, guides and tourists at the hut — he passed the house itself and smelled wood-smoke. But he wanted only one thing — to come to the further, southern brink of the summit, and look across, across clear space, at that marvellous god-proud aloof pyramid of a peak, flashing its snow-stripes like some snow-beast, and bluing the clear air beyond.

They came to the rounded curve of the down-slope. Beyond, mountain tops. They went on, till they could see beneath the whole slope — where vegetation began, and shrubs, and trees, and the dense greenery. — It was a deep valley, narrow, and full of trees and verdure, far away below sinking to a still visible high-road. And it was so sunny, so sunny and warm.

So they sat in a shelter of rocks in the full sun, no wind, no wind at all. It was about midday. Gilbert had to go to a brow to look clear at his queen. She was beyond this valley — and beyond other valleys. Other, blunter peaks rose about her. Yet she lifted her marvellous dark slopes clear, a marvellous prism of substance in the ether, rayed with her snow as with lightning-strokes. Beyond — and crystal — and almost mathematically pure.

And he was satisfied — one of the eternal satisfactions that man can find on his life-way. He felt a pure, immortal satisfaction — a perfected aloneness.

So he was glad to be back in the nook of sun, eating with the others. There was not much food either. They promised themselves a meal when they were down.

They began quickly to descend into the steep narrow valley. Far below, their track could be glimpsed, going down to the pale thread of a high-road that lay between black pine-trees in the profundity. And they counted their progress: there they entered the zone of scrubby vegetation — there the first hairy little trees — there was alp-meadow — there were oak-trees, far down.

It was already another world. Sun and profusion already.

One must change one's heart as one crosses that rock-plated, snow-sloped flat top.

Down and down, down a rocky, curving path. How tiring it is, descending. How quick one is — and yet the desired zones of the meadow alp and the oak-trees, how far still. They passed the fir-scrubs. They wound across the grassy dip, over a stream. There were alpine roses in flower still — as there had been on the other side, coming up. They went between rocks and big fir-trees. There were yellow rock-roses in flower, and comfrey. They came to the oaks. And the road broadened now into a proper bridle-path. In the warm shadow they descended. But tired — almost too tired to notice.

In the middle afternoon they emerged, over the last bank, over a stream, and on to the white wide high-road. Ah, how different it seemed. They were hot. There seemed a heat, a relaxation already in the air. And a darkness. It seemed very dark down there in the valley, in the deep cleft between the pine-trees.

So they found the inn, and drank beer and ate good food, and discussed the next day. Stanley and Terry, the moment they were down on the high-road, feeling themselves beyond the Brenner, wanted to get back. They wanted to get back at once to Munich, where their goods were. They asked how far the nearest station was — twelve miles. Quite easy to do it that evening. And they looked up trains. They could catch the express from Italy. It stopped at Sterzing at ten o'clock at night.

So on the road again. There were some beautiful tufts of flowers in the shade by the stream, in that deep valley: cranesbill, and dark gentian, and yellow flowers. They went into a shrine. It was all hung with ex voto arms and legs and bits of people, in wax. And in the back sat a ghastly life-size Christ, streaked livid with blood, and with an awful, dying, almost murderous-looking face. He was so powerful too — and like a man in the flush of life who realises he has just been murdered.

“There's Inry selling joints,” said Stanley sardonically. But Gilbert was startled, shocked, and he could not forget. Why? Why this awful thing in a fine, big new shrine? Why this.

They walked on — and Johanna complained she was tired. They lingered haphazard in a saw-mill by the road: watching the saw-threads eat across the sweet

wood, the saw-dust fall like meal: watching the great long planks move slowly: watching the oil-sticky cog-wheels slowly turn, and the great centre beam turn from the outer wheel: watching the water in the black sluice drop on the creaking wheel: and hearing all the noises, smelling the sweet scents and the dank scents: watching the men, who were quite friendly. They seemed happy, the men in the saw-mill. They had dark eyes, and looked well. They smiled.

But yet, there was something in reserve — something at the back of their eyes. Gilbert tried to connect it with the ghastly Christ on the road behind. But it was too difficult, and he was tired.

They crossed the log bridge over the stream. It was falling dusk. They were still in the narrow valley. Johanna complained bitterly of being tired. But Gilbert had one of his nervous fevers. He felt they must reach Pfitzen that night. They must reach Pfitzen. And Johanna would not hurry. She would not walk on.

“We must get to Pfitzen, and it’s getting dark. Why do you stand there staring at the water. You must come on.”

“I won’t come on. Why should I? I won’t come on. Don’t bully.”

“We must get to Pfitzen,” persisted he.

“Leave me alone. Go yourself to Pfitzen. Leave me alone.”

She loitered, she lingered, and he chafed like a mad-man at the bit. Stanley said nothing, but meandered rather stupidly at the side of the road. It was Terry who took up the cudgels.

“Why should Johanna hurry if she’s tired? Why should she go to Pfitzen tonight if she doesn’t want to? She’s not going to Pfitzen tonight.”

“No, I don’t want to,” she said.

Gilbert was silent. The moment Terry turned on him, he realised that there was absolutely no need to get to Pfitzen. He realised that his fever, his frenzy was something unnatural. He realised that Johanna might actually be too tired. So he was silent, and wondered at himself. Yet he was angry at Terry’s interference. And from straining, urging, tugging at Johanna he became suddenly released, separate.

At nightfall they came to an inn by the road-side: quite a large inn, but no sign of any village. It was quite alone in the still narrow valley. And Gilbert felt afraid. A distinct sense of fear possessed him.

Yet the landlord, a burly, handsome man was pleasant, even attractive. He lighted the lamp that hung from the ceiling, and promised food. He gave Johanna and Gilbert an enormous bedroom on the ground floor — a vast dark place, quite comfortable and nice: and the two young men a room above.

So the four tired ones sat round a little table in the public bar-room. No one came to the inn. They saw only the burly, genial host. And they waited and

waited, and studied the map that hung on the wall. It seemed very dark outside.

There were still seven miles to the nearest station. The two youths seemed determined to leave that night. Johanna begged them to stay just one day — one day together at Sterzing. Gilbert also begged them. But no. They must go. They must go. There was a fast train stopped at Sterzing at a quarter to five in the morning. They would rise at three, and walk on. It was decided.

So the four friends sat round the table in the public-house, and talked it all out. Terry and Stanley were quite determined: they would rise at three and make good speed to the station:

and by tomorrow afternoon they would be in Munich — Johanna and Gilbert would sleep on — and then take their vague way southwards. It was all settled.

Dinner came, good soup and boiled meat and cabbage. The two young men settled with the host: he gave them an alarm clock. The four friends made plans for meeting again. Under the hanging lamp in the inn-bar they talked of the future.

“It’s been so lovely knowing you both,” said Johanna. “I feel it can’t come to an end.”

“We won’t let it,” said Gilbert. “I believe one should keep one’s friendships forever: even put a bit of eternal feeling into them.”

“There is that feeling in me,” murmured Terry rather impressively.

“Oh yes. I’m game,” said Stanley.

And so — they would all go to bed.

“Goodbye!” said Johanna to Stanley. “You’ll come and see us wherever we are, won’t you?”

“I will,” said Stanley.

“Goodbye Terry. I am so glad of you in the world,” she said to the other.

“Not as glad as I am of you,” murmured Terry, and he kissed her fingers.

“Goodbye,” said Gilbert to Stanley. “You will come and see us.”

“Yes thanks — I should like it awfully.”

“Goodbye Terry — remember me to your mother and father. Tell them what a good time we’ve had. I shall see you all again — and we’ll have a longer holiday together another time, shall we?”

“Yes. We will. Goodbye Noon. Remember I love you,” and Terry looked at Gilbert protectively. Gilbert laughed — it seemed so comic.

So, in the inn passage, they parted, and Johanna and Gilbert went with their candle into their vast bedroom, to sleep.

Chapter XXII.

A Setback.

When Gilbert and Johanna woke it was a lovely sunny morning.

“Have they gone, I wonder,” said Gilbert.

“Yes,” said Johanna. “I heard them.”

“Did you? Did you hear them go out?”

“Yes. I heard the alarm, and I heard them go past our door: ever so quietly.”

“Isn’t it queer to be without them!” said he.

“Quite. — Yes, it’s awfully queer. I miss them, don’t you? I like them awfully. Do you? Do you like Stanley?” asked Johanna.

“I like him even better than Terry. He’s more real.”

“Yes, that’s what I feel. I think he’s amazingly attractive. Now why doesn’t a young man like that do something with his life — something that matters — I’m sure he could,” said she.

“Oh yes,” he answered. “I believe he could too — if he ever got started.”

“Of course!” she cried. “What he wants is a woman behind him. What good are his silly little Katinkas to him? And really, his mother must be awful for him.”

“Yes,” said Gilbert.

It was true, he missed the two young men, particularly Stanley. He missed him almost acutely — missed the sort of heightening of life that the American youth had brought, the thrill, the excitement. It was as if Stanley’s presence sent little thrills through the air, as electricity thrills through water. And this acted as a stimulant, almost like a drug on the nerves of the pair of finches. And now it was taken away, they felt an emptiness, a wanting.

But the morning was lovely. They had coffee in the little arbour of the small garden of the inn, just across the road from the house itself. Roses were blooming on the lattice, and deep purple and crimson convolvulus, like wine-stains. Lovely to sit in the sun in the stillness. They both felt tired. The excitement gone, their energy seemed to collapse.

So they walked rather slowly, rather with difficulty, to the old town of Sterzing, where they arrived in the afternoon. The old, picturesque street, the handsome old tower, the mediaeval houses made Gilbert think again of the emperors of the Middle Ages. Sterzing is on the old imperial road. And in the

sunshine, with people going lazily, and women sitting in the street under their green umbrellas selling black grapes and white grapes, and pears and peaches, and the old pointed houses rearing above the narrow, sunny flagged street, and the great tower rearing up to look, like some burly but competent feudal baron, and the shadows falling so dark and the sun so very bright — why, it all had that unspeakable charm of the real old Germany, before science came, and the horrible German theorising. The lovely old Germany that roamed along, so individualistic and vigorous under its lords, but so careless, so deep with life force. Alas and alas for Prussian officialdom — horrible scientific rectitude.

Gilbert felt rather in an alas-and-alas mood. His spirits had all gone flat. And Johanna complained of being tired — she was tired, she wanted to rest. They bought grapes in the street, and looked for a house. They soon found one: an old house in the High Street, with a thin, peeping old woman. Yes, she had a room: it cost two and six a day. Yes, they could have it for a day or two.

So they installed themselves, and Johanna lay on the bed, and he sat and looked out of the window. Then he walked again in the town, to buy food. There was such a charm about the High Street itself — the meandering, magical charm of the Middle Ages, when the world was still full of unknown potencies and undiscovered worlds and undefined deities. But alas — Gilbert looked at it all through the greenish glass of spirits gone flat and meagre. — Also here was the first ripening touch of the south — Italy, the warring Italy of Popes and Emperors. He felt how glamorous, how blood-rich it had been. — But alas, walk towards the station you saw the new, thin-spirited scientific world: the big new tenement buildings, the gasometers, the factory. You felt the North German with his inhuman cold-blooded theorising and mechanising.

They stayed their few days in Sterzing: never very happy. Johanna was disinclined to move — and Gilbert went mad if he had to sit long in the bedroom. It was clean and pleasant. But the sense of the dark, unknown house all around him, with its lurking inmates of whom he saw nothing, its unrevealing silence and its truly mediaeval gloom, its passages, its formlessness, all this he could not bear. At least he could not bear to be shut up in it.

Most typical was the privy: one could not call it a W.C. This was a little cupboard on the same floor as the bedrooms, right in the centre of the house. It had absolutely no communication with the air outside, and at midday was completely dark, so that one must take a candle. It was very like those stair-cupboards on the landing under the stairs of the upper floor, where the dirty linen basket stands: so dark, so shut in. But it was not under any stairs. Heaven knows how it was let in between the bedroom walls. But there it was. It had no water — nothing: but consisted simply of a long shaft which descended into

unknown and unknowable depths. And most peculiar was the smell. It was not so ordinarily offensive. It was rather such an acute ammonia as to make one catch the breath — like breathing smelling-salts. Gilbert always felt that it really might explode if one went in with a light: and how go in without a light.

This privy was typical of the Tyrol, in so far as it consisted of a long dark pit-shaft from the upper floor down to unknown depths. But its absolute buried darkness in the core of the house was a more city-like, and perhaps mediaeval feature. Anyhow our friends never forgot it.

Do not grumble, gentle reader, at this description. Don't talk to me about bad taste. You will only reveal your own. Strange are the ways of men. And since these are the ways we have to follow, why make any pretence.

As much as possible Gilbert and Johanna went out into the country. It was queer, rather formless country, among mountains that seemed suddenly to have become low. And there were one or two factories — and great new macadamised roads — and further out, a big sanatorium among woods and among giant rhododendron bushes. Sterzing too seemed to lie in a wide, shallow round pot. Far off, one could see pine-forests on the up-slope, and white roads, far off, trailing upwards and into the unknown.

After a few days they set off again with their knapsacks on their backs. They were recovering, and instead of half-faint reelings of spirit, backward towards Munich and Stanley and England, they set their breasts forward towards the unknown.

Gilbert did not want to follow the modern road to Bozen. Neither did he want to take the great high-road to Meran. He made out a path up a long valley, and decided that in one long day's walk they could do the twenty-five miles to the rest-house on top of the Neering pass. Then from the summit of the pass down to Meran.

It was Sunday, and the bells were ringing for Mass in the fresh morning when they set out. They took a path across the water-meadows, past a strange old ruined church — then the high-road by the river, on till they came to a Sunday-morning village. The women were at the water-fountain with their brass pails, the men were in their black Sunday clothes. Men were out with guns and dogs.

Then they left the high-road and took the bridle-path. It climbed under trees from one side to the other of the valley. By midday they found themselves fairly high up. Shy, wildish, wondering mountain peasants went along the road, queer thin men. High up on the opposite mountain flank, beyond the trees, they could see a little village clustered like stones, with broad roofs on which large stones rested. So they continued, always following the same stream, apparently, through the afternoon. The air became wilder, the mountain hamlets more

desolate: just little bunches of houses set down among manure heaps and grassy springs and stones, without any semblance of street, any unity. And the peasants up here — always tall, thin, somewhat bird-like, inhuman creatures, stared hard at our two travellers, and gave no greeting. Johanna felt rather frightened. Nobody wore Sunday clothes. It was like a weekday, save for a certain Sabbath emptiness of feeling — work being half-gripped.

By five o'clock they had passed the last hamlet, and seemed to be nearing the end of the valley. The stream had petered out into thin channels among marsh and stones. The path had become almost indistinct. The valley had widened into a desolate sort of bay. In the bed of this bay went the path, between huge rolled-down rocks, and over the stream again and again, and beside the last marsh. There a youth and a ragged girl were driving home two cows: the tong-tong of the melancholy cow-bells. Away in front could be seen the cliffs and inaccessible slopes that closed in the valley. Shadows seemed to be gathering. Johanna was frightened.

She asked the youth if this was the path up to the Neering hut. With great difficulty she got an answer. Which way did the path go up? — At last he waved his hand vaguely to the right. How far was the hut from the top of the path? — Perhaps an hour.

“An hour from the top!” cried Johanna. “I am dead already.”

“Probably it isn't,” said Gilbert. “The map gives it about a quarter of a mile.”

They went on — the youth and the cows clambered up the slope towards the last hamlet: five forlorn, squalid houses which Gilbert and Johanna had seen above them perched on a little table, half an hour ago.

So they plunged on and on, across the desolate, end-of- the-world valley-head, towards the cliffs and the shutting-in slopes. It was evening, and the air was thin and cold, making the heart beat. The track, instead of swerving to the right, swerved to the left, and over a water-fall. There was the hoarse noise of water among vast, loose stones, in the pale, colourless evening. Gilbert pressed forward, Johanna began to lose her nerve.

“I shall never get up there,” she said, eyeing the rock-slopes. “How do we get out?”

“The path will take us.”

The path veered to the right, and began to climb with a vengeance. It was as Johanna had said — this was no mule-track. One had to clamber in foot-holes up rocks like the side of a house. And Johanna kept repeating:

“I shall never get up here. I tell you I'm too tired. I can't do it. I can't do it.”

Gilbert took her knapsack and clambered up the next piece.

“Come. You must come,” he said, standing there and looking at her.

“I can’t.”

“Very well then, I shall just go on without you.”

For as a matter of fact it was not at all dangerous or even difficult. Only, with the high thin air, and the fatigue, it was terribly strenuous, the heart beat wildly, and the cold made them feel faint. Gilbert stood half-way up the slope — they had perhaps climbed the most jagged piece. The path looked plainer above.

But the moonless night was really falling. It was already dusk. And the world was desert, a cold desert of rock. He looked back, from the cliff-face on which he stood, over the stony bay of the valley-head just beneath, on towards the dim bush-scrub, into the dark valley mouth. Not a sound save water. Not a sign of life. Nothing, but the bareness of rock masses, and a sort of savage world away below. Above, the slope going up like a great bastion, a sky-line dark against a darkening sky, with the first stars.

“I can’t come. Oh I can’t come any further. I can’t come any further!” she cried like a child below, bursting into tears.

“You can come perfectly easily. Good God, what a mardy baby. I’m going now without you.”

And he turned to clamber still up.

“Wait! Wait for me!” she wailed. And up she came, regaining her composure as she did so.

As she drew nearer, he moved on ahead.

“Wait for me. Wait for me!” she cried imperiously. “Wait! I want to tell you something.”

He stood on the stony-rocky little path on the slope-face, with the black mass of the valley-head curving round, and the gulf of the darkening valley away below. Already stars were out. But he thought he could see on the sky-line the depression where the path would emerge, over a sort of rock-studded shoulder. So he waited for her, wondering what would be over the top.

“Listen,” she said. “I want to tell you something. I want to tell you.”

“What?” said he.

“I want to tell you. Stanley had me the night before last.”

Everything went vague around them.

“Where?”

“The evening when we slept at the Gemserjoch hut.”

The vagueness deepened. Night, loneliness, danger, all merged.

“But when?”

“When we went for a walk — and you went with Terry. He had me in the hay-hut — he told me he wanted me so badly — .”

He looked at her as she stood a little below him in the dusk of that Sunday

evening, there in the coldness on the face of the valley-head. She was vague in the darkening twilight. And it was such a surprise to him, that he did not know what to feel, or if he felt anything at all. It was such a complete and unexpected statement that it had not really any meaning for him. He turned vaguely and went clambering up the path, while she followed in silence behind. And so they climbed for some time.

Suddenly he turned to her — she was close behind him. He dropped her knapsack and threw his arms around her.

“Never mind, my love,” he said. “Never mind. Never mind. We do things we don’t know we’re doing.”

And he kissed her and clung to her passionately in a sudden passion of self-annihilation. His soul opened, and he gave himself up. He rose above the new thrust on wings of death. He kissed her and kissed her, and kept on saying:

“We do things we don’t know we are doing. And they don’t signify. They don’t signify really, do they? They don’t really mean anything, do they? I love you — and so what does it matter!”

“No, it doesn’t matter,” said Johanna a little testily. She was quite mute and unresponsive under his kisses, and quite unyielding under his embrace as he clasped her to his bosom.

Johanna did not at all care for the conclusion “that it did not matter.” Those marvellous pearls of spiritual love. “I love you — and so what does it matter!” fell on completely stony ground. She felt rather caught-out by his passionate spiritual forgiveness: put in a falser position than ever. So she took up her own knapsack, and they resumed their scramble up the hill-face. It really was not very far now. In about ten minutes they wound their way out on to the shoulder, between wild rocks. It was quite dark, save for the stars. And perfectly silent and summit-stern. And very cold, extremely cold.

But he could still make out the path. So he pushed on, and in a few minutes, to his great relief, saw a yellow light shining in the darkness ahead.

“There — that’s it,” he said.

And his chief anxiety fell away from him.

“Thank God,” said Johanna.

It was nearly nine o’clock when they reached the wooden rest-house. They ate and went to bed in the ice-cold bedroom. And there he loved her with a wild self-abandon. But she kept something hard against him in the middle of her heart. She could not forgive him for his forgiveness of her. After all, forgiveness is a humiliating thing to the one forgiven. And she did not choose such humiliation. Moreover she did not like his convulsion of selflessness by means of which he soared above a fact which she faced him with: thereby leaving her

still saddled with the self-same burdening fact. He seemed to have put her more in the wrong, and assumed a further innocent glory himself. She could not sleep, because her brain was hard.

He however slept the sleep of the innocent and the exalted. He woke rather late, feeling still exalted. It was another sunny morning. He thought of Johanna's piece of news, but still did not have any clear feelings about it. He did not attempt to realise it imaginatively. On the contrary, he left it as a mere statement, without real emotional force. And he liked Stanley — he had liked him all along: so why pretend to hate him now? And he believed people must do what they want to do. And he knew that Johanna believed in much love, a la Magdalen. "For she hath loved much." And he himself, Gilbert, he could stand aside for a moment.

"Didn't you know? Didn't you suspect anything?" said Johanna, rather gloomy.

"No," he answered, with his strange clear face of innocence. "No — never. It wouldn't have occurred to me."

And half she felt enmeshed, even a little fascinated by his clear, strange, beautiful look of innocent exaltation. And half she hated him for it. It seemed so false and unmanly. Hateful unmanly unsubstantial look of beauty!

"Well," she said. "It wasn't much, anyhow. It meant nothing to me. I believe he was impotent."

Gilbert looked at her. This brought him to earth a little. And for the first time he felt a pang of hate and contempt for Stanley.

"It meant nothing to me," she said gloomily.

He did not answer. The words fell into the deep geysers of his soul, leaving it apparently untroubled. But in the end the irritable waters would boil up over this same business.

They decided to take the high-road to Meran. There it ran, the looping white mountain high-road, in a loop past the hut. It was the Meran road. Gilbert looked back over the path they had come last night. It was a sort of moor-track between low heath and great standing boulders. It came from over the brow of nowhere.

So they took the high-road in the opposite direction. It looped and looped across the broad slope of the pass-head. And in one place there was a little, wind-withered crucifix. And one leg of the grey old wood had broken at the knee, and hung swinging in the wind from its nail. Funny the Christ looked, like a one-legged soldier: but pitiful, forlorn, the ancient, snow-harried little crucifix, all falling to bits, standing back among moor-like heath from the road.

As the day went on, as they wound and wound round the long, many loops of the road, seeing the sun-dim country away below, with its valley and other hills,

a certain heaviness, darkness came over Gilbert. As a heaviness and an inert darkness follows most exaltations. He felt he could not see the world. His soul was rather dreary and hard. And he wished he could get back his own real, genuine self.

So they tramped on the whole day. He watched for newnesses in the landscape. The one pleasure still was the new world ahead. He liked the southern plumage of the trees, the feeling of sun and luxuriance.

But about four in the afternoon he suddenly stopped. They had come to a river side — and in front was a forge where a cart was standing. The river was pale-green and full.

“Why!” he said, and his heart fell bang down into his boots. She looked at him.

“Haven’t we come back to Sterzing?” he said.

“No! How can we! How can we!”

But they had. They walked along the road — and they were made certain. They reached the woods, and the place where yesterday’s bridle-path branched off. They had come back to Sterzing.

In the overclouded evening, grey and dismal, they trudged back the long familiar mile-and-a-half into the familiar town. It was really a bitter blow — really a bitter blow. With shame and ignominy Gilbert crept along the High Street, and past their lodging-house. He had a horror lest the landlady should see them.

“Well,” said Johanna. “We’d better go back to our old room.”

“I couldn’t stop in Sterzing,” he said, with that peculiar pallid finality there was no answering.

“What will you do then?”

“Take the train to Bozen.”

So they passed through the town and along the embankment to the station. There was a train at half-past six. He bought second class tickets, because they were both so tired. And soon they sat in the warm, brilliant, beautifully-appointed train — it was the Rome express, running swiftly and smoothly south.

But Gilbert’s soul was full of bitterness. Not the news of Johanna, but the taking the wrong road, the finding himself back on his own traces was bitter to him. He felt, somehow, foiled, cast back, thrown down again. He would never walk from the Neering pass to Meran — he would never see Meran — there was some part of his life lost to him. There was some part of his life lost to him. There was some part of his life lost to him. He felt it with hateful fatality. Because he had taken the wrong road. He had made a mistake. He hated now, with deep, acid hatred, to think of the scene on the path of the pass-head:

Johanna's confession and his passionate getting over it. He hated to think of it. His soul was all gone acid and hard.

Johanna was hungry, and insisted on having dinner on the train. So they sat amid smart people, who eyed them in their shabbiness. And they ate their swaying soup on the luxurious train. And Gilbert paid, and begrudged the money, and begrudged the tip he had to leave for the superior waiter.

For the joint stock of money was getting low — it was getting seriously low. And here was another thing that tightened his nerves and irritated his spirit. They had hardly any money — and yet they were spinning south in a luxurious dining car — whither — and why, God alone knew.

Bozen was quite dark. They found themselves walking under huge high walls — railway embankment walls, or something like that. But enormous, stupendous walls in the darkness, under which they crept.

They came into the streets. Question of finding a room. This, in a town, was always a great bugbear to both of them. Each hated asking: simply hated it. And yet they had to look for a room in a house. If they went to hotels, their money would fizzle into nothing.

This night Gilbert had one of his paralysed stupid fits. He would not, could not ask. Behold then Johanna going into a sort of public-house, and asking the old harridan. Four shillings. — "But that is too much," said Johanna.

"Go and find something cheaper," yelled the old harridan, while the drinking men laughed.

Nice recollections of Bozen.

However, after three shots they found a room — more or less all right — for three shillings. How much better and cleaner, besides infinitely cheaper, rooms were before the war!

Chapter XXIII.

They arrived in Trento — by train — to find all at once that no one understood them. It was really the southern slope now. From the train they had watched the grapes hanging so black under the leaves, and women and men among the vines looking up. Vintage had begun. The world had changed.

One felt it immediately. The station at Trento was still Austrian — there one was still on Germanic ground. But the moment one was outside, in the piazza with its gaudy flowers, and in the streets of the town, one knew one had passed the mysterious dividing line. It was a sunny afternoon. But the streets had that dark, furtive air, as if everybody were watching like suspicious animals from the depths of cavernous houses. The shops indeed were open: but seemed to be abandoned, neglected. That secret, forlorn, suspicious atmosphere that pervades all southern towns the moment one leaves the main street was very evident in Trento. Gilbert and Johanna both felt it for the first time. And Gilbert was thrilled, and Johanna all at once felt homeless, like a waif.

They had not much money, and they wanted to eat, having had no midday meal. So they entered a small, simple-looking cafe, and asked for eggs and milk. The man looked at them with a negative look and answered:

“Non parliamo tedesco.”

Johanna repeated her question in German.

“Non si capisce. Non facciamo mangiare.”

The man shook his head, and stood there blank, neuter, negative: a hostile cypher in the atmosphere.

Neither Gilbert nor Johanna understood one single word of Italian. The waiter made not the faintest attempt to understand or to cope with them. He just presented a dead negation of anything they might be or request. Which so bewildered them that they sat at a little table.

“Che cosa desidera?” said the neutral native, in a way that would put you off desiring anything.

Johanna tried French, and asked for milk. Was there milk? And since no Italian could be considered anything but a perfect Frenchman as far as the sister language is concerned, the native replied:

“Oui, il y est du lait.”

Whereupon Johanna ordered two glasses of milk — which came. Then she proceeded to eggs — there were no eggs: — bread — there was no bread. The

waiter brought two biscuits each. So the pair of finches sat in perfect bewilderment and ate this most unsatisfactory lunch.

“What do they mean by it?” cried Johanna. “It’s an Austrian town.”

“They don’t want to understand,” said Gilbert, who remembered the black, big-nosed French inn-keeper at the village outside Detsch.

“But how monstrous!” cried Johanna. “One must eat.”

They set out to try again: a rather superior cafe this time, with a clean German fresh-air look about it. Here there must be something. In they went.

The first waiter, a boy, mumbled something in Italian: the marble-topped tables looked arid: was the scene going to repeat itself. But no: a clean little man in a white jacket, and what did they want? To eat. He was sorry, but there was nothing to eat. Not even eggs and bread? He was sorry, but they didn’t have eggs, and the morning bread was finished, and the afternoon bread had not come yet. — Could one then get nothing to eat in this holy town of Trento? — Yes, one must go to the large restaurant there — there — he pointed to the corner. Danke schon! and Bitte! — and they departed again.

“Anyhow he was nice,” said Johanna.

“Oh yes!” said Gilbert.

Strange and silent and empty the town seemed in the sunny afternoon — a new, strange, dead-seeming atmosphere. Rather panic-stricken at having to go to the huge-looking restaurant — which for sure would cost huge sums — and yet of necessity driven to eat, — they entered the place. Innumerable void tables — everybody had eaten long ago. But a grubby waiter in a grubby evening suit that bagged greenly wherever it could bag. A German-Austrian, however. Quite plain sailing.

And at last the food came — rather cold. Johanna ate eagerly, and they drank beer with relish.

“So this is Trento!” said she. “I’d heard of it — but I never thought I should find it like this.”

“No — ” he said. “I rather like it.”

“Ye-es — ” she said, very doubtfully.

To tell the truth, the warm, half-desolate, half-furtive indifference of the first southern town he had ever known appealed to him. The indefinable slackness, the sense that nobody is on the spot, and nobody cares, and life trails on, nobody ever taking it in hand, was rather fascinating to him. He could feel the curious half-listless indifference of the south — and through it all something pagan, only half moral, not alert. To Johanna it was a new experience: but she recoiled.

It was three o’clock by the time they had eaten. They went out and rather aimlessly trailed the streets of the town. There seemed to be absolutely nothing

to look at — except a few shops. A few quite good, modern shops — and the rest the repelling-looking Italian frowstiness. The only thing they bought was a German-Italian dictionary: one of those little red objects. They sat among the trees and shrubs of the public gardens to study this awhile. Then they set off once more to look round.

“We’ll see if we can find a furnished apartment — either today or tomorrow,” he said.

“We will,” replied Johanna, with a sinking heart.

They climbed up the narrow, steep streets, upwards, till they could emerge and look out. This was what Gilbert wanted. And when they emerged, they were more or less above the town, which lay on the side of a hill like an amphitheatre — or a section of an amphitheatre. Beyond was the country — rather like a low, stony, dreary amphitheatre. It was autumnal, buff-coloured, and looked dry, with that curious ancient dryness of bygone civilisations.

“The Romans! Doesn’t one feel the Romans!” said Gilbert, spell-bound.

“One does!” said Johanna, grimly. To her fresh, northern, forest-leaved soul it was indescribably hideous, the dry vineyards on their terraced hills, the low, bare, treeless slopes.

“We’ll look for rooms in the morning,” he said.

She did not answer for a moment.

“Where are we going to sleep tonight?” she said.

It was the old problem. So they went down and wandered the terribly unpromising streets of Trento. There was nothing they dare tackle — not even the large hotel with innumerable pale-blue, elegant, plump, femalish Austrian officers. So they went back to the restaurant — and could they have a room. Yes, certainly.

They followed the green-mossed waiter through endless passages and stairs, of an evidently huge house. And they came to a large, very lofty bedroom with two beds and monumental furniture which looked as if it had stood there and never been looked at for centuries, and wall-paper with nasty smears on it, and a rather sticky tiled floor. Very well — that would do — repugnant though it was.

They went to the station where they had deposited their knapsacks, and felt relieved that there was a place where they might sit alone. Night came — and they hung in the windows, looking into the street far below. There were innumerable soldiers: German-Austrians, friendly, lively, and noisy in an alien land. They all seemed to appear towards nightfall. In the day they must have been out marching or exercising.

The barracks was across the road, a little further down the street. Johanna and Gilbert watched the soldiers at the windows. They shouted and sang. And

somebody on a cornet played yip-i-addy! with terrible eclat. Strange the American noise sounded, ripping out like bright brass on the darkness of this far-off, world-lost, meaningless barren town. Then at nine o'clock came the imperious bugle-call to turn in. The whole town seemed to ring with military bugles.

In the morning Gilbert and Johanna woke at five, to another bugle-call. They lay and dozed uneasily, aware of the great noise of soldiers. Then more bugles, and more noise of soldiers. And the sun coming up warm. They got up and looked out at the soldiers.

It was decided that after breakfast they would go out and look for an apartment: look for an apartment in Trento! First, however, look for the privy. Gilbert was sent to scout. He found a large, high apartment — a long room. It had a stone floor, that was most unsavourily wet — and along the wall ran a low stone trough, about a foot high. Whoever liked used this trough — who didn't, used the floor. Do not, gentle reader, attempt to imagine this privy. Gilbert reported it to Johanna as impossible. And as he took a handkerchief out of his knapsack he saw a bug slowly walking up the wall of their bedroom. So they put their knapsacks on their backs, went downstairs and paid the bill: not very dear.

The first thing was to deposit their knapsacks at the station once more. For sanitary arrangements the station was just a horror. Then into the town to look for rooms. They had learnt two words of Italian for the purpose: camera, a room, and affitare, to let. And so they hunted up the chaos of streets jammed dark and unsavoury on the hill side. They saw a notice — and they climbed a dark stair. But evidently lots of people lived up this stair, in the ancient warren of a narrow house.

Gilbert, as usual, flatly refused to commit himself to the act of asking. Johanna took her courage, and knocked at one of the old doors: and knocked again. From the inner darkness appeared a yellow, evil old crone.

“Er — er — camera — affitare — affitarsi — ” stammered poor Johanna.

The old crone mumbled something vindictive and completely unintelligible, and shut the door in Johanna's face with a clap. Our pair of finches slunk down that vile stair. They had not imagined they could feel so diminished. Still they persisted for some time in the jumbled, gutter-like streets. And then they descended into the more wholesome town, into the open.

They sat in the Piazza di Dante and surveyed the new statue of that uncongenial poet, and the trees and plots of grass. And Johanna in her old panama that was hopelessly and forever streaked with dye that had run out of the cherry ribbon; in a burberry that sagged at the sides like a tramp-woman's; and in a weary battered frock of dark cotton voile; poor Johanna sat on a seat in the

Piazza di Dante, in that ghastly town of Trento, and sobbed bitterly.

“There’s nothing to cry for!” said Gilbert. “You needn’t cry. There’s no harm done. We’ll go somewhere else.”

But to his bewilderment, she just sat and sobbed. He thought she would ride cheerfully over everything, and was quite bewildered and infinitely troubled to see her sobbing and saying nothing there on the bench in the Piazza di Dante, in the sunshine, where women and soldiers and officers were passing between the grass-plots, and two workmen, gardeners, were busy near some shrubs.

“Let us go to the station and look,” he said. “Don’t cry. It’s no use crying. Why do you cry? There’s nothing to cry for. It’s all right. Everything is all right.”

But sanitary arrangements and one thing and another had unnerved her. However, at length she blew her nose and wiped her eyes and accompanied him rather disconsolately to the station — to look.

Looking, they saw a poster showing the Lake of Garda, with Riva, at the head of the lake, described as a glowing autumn resort.

“Shall we go to Riva?” said Gilbert.

“Yes!” said Johanna, once more joyfully. “There will be a lake, and lovely water. I think it’s so horrible and waterless here. It will be lovely, lovely, lovely! I adored Lake Maggiore. I know I shall love it.”

When was there a train? There was a train then due: and a crowd of peasants, thick, solid, round the ticket office. Gilbert got the knapsacks from the deposit, and entered the fringe of the crowd. The crowd of peasants — all men — pressed tighter, more madly on the ticket office. Many were workmen going down the line — who the others were, heaven knows. The bell rang — the train was coming — and still that mad wedge of angry peasants and laborers at the ticket office. More bells rang — somebody shouted that the train was in sight. Somebody went into the ticket office. A clerk appeared in the doorway, and beckoned Gilbert in. Like a lord, Gilbert followed into the privacy of the ticket office. The train thundered in meanwhile. Our hero asked for two third-class to Riva. The great train stood hissing in the station, Johanna stood frenzied by the footboard. Then up dashed Gilbert, with his tickets and his change and his knapsack, and they climbed into their carriage. And the great train rolled on — towards Verona, which was not far off.

Ah, it seemed so pleasant in that airy third-class carriage, with the yellow wooden seats and the open space all down.

The sun was shining brightly outside, from a blue sky. Innumerable clusters of black grapes — miles and miles — dangled under leaves of the vines, and men in broad straw hats, and women with their heads bound in coloured kerchiefs

looked up at the train. The other passengers were poor people — pleasant, simple, and excited at being in the express train. Ah it was all so nice, so pleasant! The two knapsacks sat on the rack, next to the big, blue-check peasant bundles. What an escape from hell into a sort of sweet, sunny, roaming heaven.

They changed from the big train before reaching the frontier, and got into a side train. Strange the scenery was. There were vineyards — and then patches of tall maize, very tall, and sere yellow — and then groves of mulberry trees — and then water, and tall high reeds, like bamboo, tall canes leaning in dishevel — and odd pink villages, all sunny — and odd clusters of cypress trees — and then craggy rocks and juniper slopes — and then dark rocks and a water-fall — and a few bunches of dark orange trees.

It all seemed so luxuriant, almost tropical — and all so sun-tissued. The leaves, the earth, the plant-stems, all seemed rather like heat-fabrications: whereas in England and Germany all nature is built of water, transfigured water. But no — here already Gilbert saw, as by an inspiration, the magic of tigerish heat-substance, sharp leaves and blades built of heat, and black, black, impenetrably dark grapes, and pale grapes like drops of slow, stealthy light dripping. He loved it, and they were both inordinately happy. He imagined rice-fields on a flat piece of plain.

So Riva: and there the lake-head glittering in the sun. They left their knapsacks at the station and set off along the white, hot, dusty road to the little town, which was near. Carriages were rolling along, containing, like flowers in a flower-bowl, an inevitable plump sky-blue officer with a rose-red sash and white cap, and a lady with an enormous enormous hat with feathers, and a décolleté bosom with necklaces. Under the trees of the avenue other little officers were strolling alert, all beautiful and sky-blue, with sashes and glitter, all plump, and with very tight military trousers of thin fine cloth, making the virility of the plump, brisk captains almost unnecessarily conspicuous.

Poor Johanna — forced to keep on that hideous dark green burberry with its drooping sides, because her dress beneath was not much better than a tatter: forced to wear that drooping, drip-stained, weather-battered panama: and accompanied perforce by Gilbert, whose travel-worn trousers had frayed at the heel, and whose hat was all that remained of it. Poor Johanna! Those were the days of huge huge hats and satin walking-out dresses. It was a hot September afternoon — officers were strolling or more often driving out with these gorgeous ladies. And poor Johanna trailed round the length of the avenue from the station, to the quay of the lake, and into the town for food. In a thick, heavy dark burberry all fallen out of shape, and a panama hat likewise.

Gilbert was fortunately oblivious of her distress. To him Riva was lovely. In

the first place, near the quay of the lake rose the wide ancient tower with its great blue clock-face that showed the hours up to twenty-four. There was the rippling, living lake, with its darkish, black-blue pellucid water, so alive. And there were boats with vivid yellow sails, and red-and- orange sails, and boats with two white sails crossed like sharp white wings. And there was a friendliness, a glitter, an easiness that was delightful beyond words, southern in its easiness, and northern in its alert charm.

Ah charming plump officers of the Austrian army, whoever found fault with you, with your uniforms of exquisite fine blue cloth, fitting like a skin, and your virility so amiably in evidence, and your peacocking so inoffensive and good-humoured. What a genial, cosy, elegant holiday-feeling you created, you and your cocottes! — So different from those Prussian wasps of Detsch.

If Johanna had not been extinguished in that burberry she would have been blissfully happy. Gilbert was blissfully happy. They ate in a lovely inn-garden, and it did not seem expensive.

When Gilbert had paid for the dinner he had left one English sovereign and a few Austrian Heller. Just a little over a pound, in all the world.

“We can always pawn my watch or your rings,” he said, “if nothing comes.”

“Of course we can,” she said easily.

“But something will come.”

Remained, however, the eternal problem: to find a room in which they could live, and where they could make their own meals. They set out on the vague search, wandering on a wide road out of the little town. And fortune led them, as fortune always led them when they were happy. They came, after five minutes, to a nice-looking square villa behind a high garden-wall. The villa had blue decorations inserted over the windows. It was called Villa Florian. And it said, in French, Apartment to Let.

Would it be too expensive! Heaven save it would not. In trepidation they rang. Johanna was thinking of their appearance — with horror! and he was thinking, with fear, of the scornful people turning them away because the price was too much for them.

A gentle little Italian old maid, so fluttered that she spoke only Italian. And she would bring her sister. An inevitable old-maid sister who has importantly to be “fetched.” The important sister of the two. But a lady, and still gentle, with Venetian delicate breeding. And yes — there was a room: such a sunny room with three windows: and when Johanna asked, trembling, how much, it was only three and sixpence a day. Johanna looked at Gilbert.

“Alors — ” the conversation had lapsed from the little lady’s excruciated German.

“Combien?” said Gilbert — oh vile word.

And with joy they stayed. And Johanna explained to the two little elderly sisters — the Miss Florians. And they were grave and delightful, and treated Johanna like the baroness she had been brought up as, so she was mollified and happy.

When the little ladies had left them, they looked round their room with perfect joy. So clean, so fresh, so airy and sweet, so northern in all this. And then a lovely medallion of flowers on the ceiling just over the beds. This was the real Italy. To be sure, the political border was about five miles off, down the lake. Nevertheless, they had reached the land of painted ceilings, and they hailed it with joy, little knowing the horrors that would accumulate overhead, thicker and thicker, as they went further south. This painted ceiling was nothing but charming. It had only a band and lines of delicate colour round the edges, and this medallion of flowers, a pink rose and blue plumbago flowers and white jasmine packed together, just over Gilbert’s bed. He lay and looked at it and felt very happy indeed, that first sunny morning.

Outside in the garden were fig-trees and vines and dark, shady trees. And before Johanna was dressed, the maid had tapped, and would they care for figs. And there was a beautiful plate of golden figs, those little, soft, deep-yellow figs that burst and have a pellucid gold twilight inside. All nicely piled on vine-leaves. A gift from the little ladies. What could be more charming, to our doubtful and impoverished finches.

They were really happy in Riva: rather guilty feeling in the bedroom when they made their own tea and boiled their own egg for breakfast. For surely the little ladies might expect to send in coffee and milk. But no — oh precious economy. The fugitives could make tea and buy their own food for a mere trifle. And when you haven’t more than twenty-five shillings in the world! Gilbert had written to England.

Carefully they cleared up their crumbs and tidied the bedroom. And the little ladies didn’t mind in the least, though Gilbert always felt sure they did.

Johanna’s one grief was that she had no clothes. The luggage had been left at Bozen, and would take a couple of days. However, she got her frock ironed, and she bought a new ribbon for that hat, and some of the fringe was clipped from Gilbert’s frayed trouser-bottoms. Moreover everybody treated them with respect, everybody was charming in Riva. Perhaps it was because they were happy, but at any rate things seemed to go well.

They loved the place: the old clock-tower, the massive dark waters of the lake, the gorgeous sails that were bright as flowers, the hot September sun, and the profusion of fruit. Black grapes, white grapes, muscatel grapes, black figs,

yellow figs, pears, apples, pomegranates — an overwhelming abundance of fruit everywhere, for twopence or threepence a pound. Gilbert and Johanna would buy lunch, and go into the old grove of olives above the shore, and there they would boil their eggs and make their tea and eat their fruit, and sit in the hot September afternoon watching the lake glitter, and feeling the mellowness of the world, the rich, ripe beauty of this Italian, sub-Alpine world, its remoteness and its big indifference. Why have problems!

And for some time there was no problem: except that poor Johanna, suddenly, had a touch of autumn colic. And she who had a passion for figs, and adored muscatel grapes, must see all Pomona's profusion around her yet not dare to taste. Gilbert selfishly bought his basketfuls, and ate them alone. Judge that this was a grief to Madame Johanna. It was her only real grief in Riva.

In Riva too something seemed to come loose in Gilbert's soul, quite suddenly. Quite suddenly, in the night one night he touched Johanna as she lay asleep with her back to him, touching him, and something broke alive in his soul that had been dead before. A sudden shock of new experience. Ach sweetness, the intolerable sensual sweetness, the silken, fruitlike sweetness of her loins that touched him, as she lay with her back to him — his soul broke like a dry rock that breaks and gushes into life. Ach richness — unspeakable and untellable richness. Ach bliss — deep, sensual, silken bliss! It was as if the old sky cracked, curled, and peeled away, leaving a great new sky, a great new pellucid empyrean that had never been breathed before. Exquisite deep possibilities of life, magnificent life which had not been life before. Loveliness which made his arms live with delight, and made his knees seem to blossom with unfolded delight. Now all his life he had been accustomed to know his arms and knees as mere limbs and joints for use. Now suddenly like bare branches that burst into blossom they seemed to be quivering with flowers of exquisite appreciation, exquisite, exquisite appreciation of her. He had never known that one could enjoy the most exquisite appreciation of the warm, silken woman, not in one's mind or breast, but deep in one's limbs and loins.

Behold a new Gilbert. Once the old skies have shrivelled, useless to try and retain their ancient, withered significance. Useless to try and have the old values. They have gone.

So it is with man, gende reader. There are worlds within worlds within worlds of unknown life and joy inside him. But every time, it needs a sort of cataclysm to get out of the old world into the new. It needs a very painful shedding of an old skin. It needs a fight with the matrix of the old era, a bitter struggle to the death with the old, warm, well-known mother of our days. Fight the old, enclosing mother of our days — fight her to the death — and defeat her — and

then we shall burst out into a new heaven and a new earth, delicious. But it won't come out of lovey-doveyness. It will come out of the sheer, pure, consummated fight, where the soul fights blindly for air, for life, a new space. The matrix of the old mother-days and mother-idea is hell beyond hell at last: that which nourished us and our race becomes the intolerable dry prison of our death. Which is the history of man.

And once it has become an intolerable prison, it is no use presuming what is outside. We don't know what is outside — we can never know till we get out. We have therefore got to fight and fight and fight ourselves sick, to get out. Hence the Germans really made a right move, when they made the war. Death to the old enshrouding body politic, the old womb-idea of our era!

Master Gilbert could never have known what lay outside his rather dry, restless life-mode. From his Emmies and so on he could never have deduced it. If he had married some really nice woman: for of course, gentle reader, we have decided long ago that none of my heroines are really nice women; then he would never have broken out of the dry integument that enclosed him. He would have withered with the really nice woman inside the enclosure. For the act of birth, dear reader, really is not and cannot be a really nice business. It is a bloody and horrid and gruesome affair. And that is what we must face.

Whatever Master Gilbert had set himself to postulate, as the new world he was seeking, he would never have been able to hit upon this new, profound bliss in a dawning sensual soul. He would not have conceived, as you cannot conceive, gentle reader, that a man should possibly have a sensual soul. A sensual soul. Are not the two words just contradictory?

Ah no, gentle reader, once your ideal sky has withered and shown you a much vaster universe, a much wider world, a wonderful, unbreathed firmament. When that has happened you will realise that the ideal sky of our day is a horrible low ceiling under which we stifle to death. To you it is the sky, the infinite, the all-beautiful, the ne plus ultra. To Master Gilbert, after his sudden seeing-forth, it was a painted ceiling of the most detestable stifling plaster-and-distemper stuff. To be sure the painted ceiling of the old ideal doesn't fall all in one smash. It first gives a little crack, yielding to pressure. And through that little crack one has one's first glimpse, as Gilbert had his first sudden newness of experience and life-comprehension in Riva. Afterwards one loses the crack, and sits just as tight under the painted ceiling. Even one chants the praise of the ideal, the infinite, the spiritual. But one will come to the crack again, and madly fight to get a further glimpse, madly and frenziedly struggle with the dear old infinite. And thus rip just a little wider gap in it, just a little wider: after tearing oneself considerably.

Do not imagine, ungentle reader, that by just chasing women you will ever get

anywhere. Gilbert might have had a thousand Emmies, and even a thousand really nice women, and yet never have cracked the womb. It needed the incalculable fight such as he fought, unconscious and willy-nilly, with his German Johanna: and such as I fight with you, oh gentle but rather cowardly and imbecile reader: for such, really, I find you.

For the time, in Riva, he was not only happy but he was a new creature in a new world. And at such times, as usual, nice things happened. The first was that one morning, again before they were up, a knock and the maid with a large hat-box for the Signora: addressed to Frau Johanna Noon, from Vienna. Johanna was nowadays Mrs Noon by name if not by nature.

“My sister Lotte!” cried Johanna in excitement, leaping out of bed to undo the hat-box.

Behold then — an enormous black hat of chiffon velvet and black plumes — huge: a smaller hat of silky woven straw, very soft: a complicated Paquin dress of frail, dark-blue, stone-blue silky velvet and purplish heavy embroidery, for evening wear: a complicated whitey-blue petticoat of very soft silk: a voluminous dressing-gown wrap of thin silk and endless lace:

a chemise of more lace than linen: two pairs of high laced shoes, of greeny grey thin kid with black patent golosh

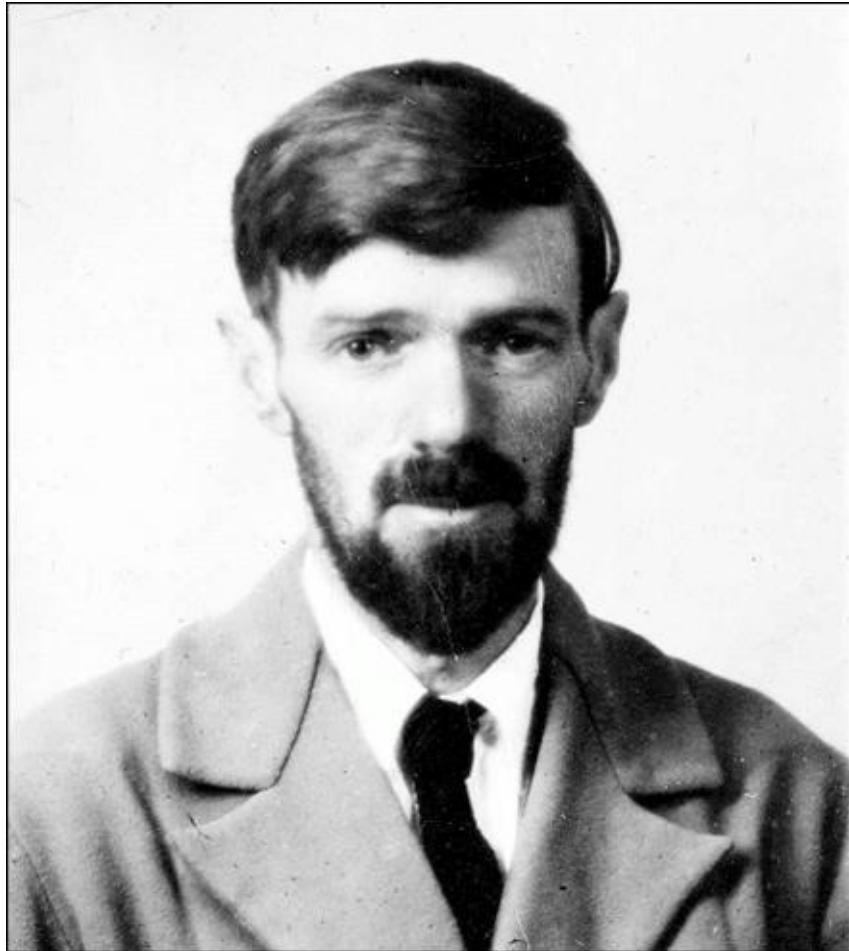
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AARON'S ROD



This novel was started in 1917 and published in 1922. The protagonist is Aaron Sisson, who is a union official in the coal mines of the English Midlands, trapped in a stale marriage. He is also an amateur, but talented, flautist. At the start of the story he walks out on his wife and two children and decides on impulse to visit Italy. His dream is to become recognised as a professional musician. During his travels he encounters and befriends Rawdon Lilly, a Lawrence-like writer who nurses Aaron back to health when he is taken ill in post-war London. Having recovered his health, Aaron arrives in Florence. Here he moves in intellectual and artistic circles, argues about politics, leadership and submission, and has an affair with an aristocratic lady. The novel ends with an anarchist or fascist explosion that destroys Aaron's instrument. Many incidents in the novel have direct parallels with events in Lawrence's own life.

The biblical title refers to the rod of Aaron in the Old Testament, Moses' brother who built the Golden Calf in the desert for the worship of the Israelites. The rod, his divine symbol of authority and independence, finds its echo in the flute of Aaron Sissons.



Lawrence at the time of publication

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CHAPTER I. THE BLUE BALL

There was a large, brilliant evening star in the early twilight, and underfoot the earth was half frozen. It was Christmas Eve. Also the War was over, and there was a sense of relief that was almost a new menace. A man felt the violence of the nightmare released now into the general air. Also there had been another wrangle among the men on the pit-bank that evening.

Aaron Sisson was the last man on the little black railway-line climbing the hill home from work. He was late because he had attended a meeting of the men on the bank. He was secretary to the Miners Union for his colliery, and had heard a good deal of silly wrangling that left him nettled.

He strode over a stile, crossed two fields, strode another stile, and was in the long road of colliers' dwellings. Just across was his own house: he had built it himself. He went through the little gate, up past the side of the house to the back. There he hung a moment, glancing down the dark, wintry garden.

"My father — my father's come!" cried a child's excited voice, and two little girls in white pinafores ran out in front of his legs.

"Father, shall you set the Christmas Tree?" they cried. "We've got one!"

"Afore I have my dinner?" he answered amiably.

"Set it now. Set it now. — We got it through Fred Alton."

"Where is it?"

The little girls were dragging a rough, dark object out of a corner of the passage into the light of the kitchen door.

"It's a beauty!" exclaimed Millicent.

"Yes, it is," said Marjory.

"I should think so," he replied, striding over the dark bough. He went to the back kitchen to take off his coat.

"Set it now, Father. Set it now," clamoured the girls.

"You might as well. You've left your dinner so long, you might as well do it now before you have it," came a woman's plangent voice, out of the brilliant light of the middle room.

Aaron Sisson had taken off his coat and waistcoat and his cap. He stood bare-headed in his shirt and braces, contemplating the tree.

"What am I to put it in?" he queried. He picked up the tree, and held it erect by the topmost twig. He felt the cold as he stood in the yard coatless, and he twitched his shoulders.

“Isn’t it a beauty!” repeated Millicent.

“Ay! — lop-sided though.”

“Put something on, you two!” came the woman’s high imperative voice, from the kitchen.

“We aren’t cold,” protested the girls from the yard.

“Come and put something on,” insisted the voice. The man started off down the path, the little girls ran grumbling indoors. The sky was clear, there was still a crystalline, non-luminous light in the under air.

Aaron rummaged in his shed at the bottom of the garden, and found a spade and a box that was suitable. Then he came out to his neat, bare, wintry garden. The girls flew towards him, putting the elastic of their hats under their chins as they ran. The tree and the box lay on the frozen earth. The air breathed dark, frosty, electric.

“Hold it up straight,” he said to Millicent, as he arranged the tree in the box. She stood silent and held the top bough, he filled in round the roots.

When it was done, and pressed in, he went for the wheelbarrow. The girls were hovering excited round the tree. He dropped the barrow and stooped to the box. The girls watched him hold back his face — the boughs pricked him.

“Is it very heavy?” asked Millicent.

“Ay!” he replied, with a little grunt. Then the procession set off — the trundling wheelbarrow, the swinging hissing tree, the two excited little girls. They arrived at the door. Down went the legs of the wheelbarrow on the yard. The man looked at the box.

“Where are you going to have it?” he called.

“Put it in the back kitchen,” cried his wife.

“You’d better have it where it’s going to stop. I don’t want to hawk it about.”

“Put it on the floor against the dresser, Father. Put it there,” urged Millicent.

“You come and put some paper down, then,” called the mother hastily.

The two children ran indoors, the man stood contemplative in the cold, shrugging his uncovered shoulders slightly. The open inner door showed a bright linoleum on the floor, and the end of a brown side-board on which stood an aspidistra.

Again with a wrench Aaron Sisson lifted the box. The tree pricked and stung. His wife watched him as he entered staggering, with his face averted.

“Mind where you make a lot of dirt,” she said.

He lowered the box with a little jerk on to the spread-out newspaper on the floor. Soil scattered.

“Sweep it up,” he said to Millicent.

His ear was lingering over the sudden, clutching hiss of the tree-boughs.

A stark white incandescent light filled the room and made everything sharp and hard. In the open fire-place a hot fire burned red. All was scrupulously clean and perfect. A baby was cooing in a rocker-less wicker cradle by the hearth. The mother, a slim, neat woman with dark hair, was sewing a child's frock. She put this aside, rose, and began to take her husband's dinner from the oven.

"You stopped confabbing long enough tonight," she said.

"Yes," he answered, going to the back kitchen to wash his hands.

In a few minutes he came and sat down to his dinner. The doors were shut close, but there was a draught, because the settling of the mines under the house made the doors not fit. Aaron moved his chair, to get out of the draught. But he still sat in his shirt and trousers.

He was a good-looking man, fair, and pleasant, about thirty-two years old. He did not talk much, but seemed to think about something. His wife resumed her sewing. She was acutely aware of her husband, but he seemed not very much aware of her.

"What were they on about today, then?" she said.

"About the throw-in."

"And did they settle anything?"

"They're going to try it — and they'll come out if it isn't satisfactory."

"The butties won't have it, I know," she said. He gave a short laugh, and went on with his meal.

The two children were squatted on the floor by the tree. They had a wooden box, from which they had taken many little newspaper packets, which they were spreading out like wares.

"Don't open any. We won't open any of them till we've taken them all out — and then we'll undo one in our turns. Then we s'll both undo equal," Millicent was saying.

"Yes, we'll take them ALL out first," re-echoed Marjory.

"And what are they going to do about Job Arthur Freer? Do they want him?" A faint smile came on her husband's face.

"Nay, I don't know what they want. — Some of 'em want him — whether they're a majority, I don't know."

She watched him closely.

"Majority! I'd give 'em majority. They want to get rid of you, and make a fool of you, and you want to break your heart over it. Strikes me you need something to break your heart over."

He laughed silently.

"Nay," he said. "I s'll never break my heart."

"You'll go nearer to it over that, than over anything else: just because a lot of

ignorant monkeys want a monkey of their own sort to do the Union work, and jabber to them, they want to get rid of you, and you eat your heart out about it. More fool you, that's all I say — more fool you. If you cared for your wife and children half what you care about your Union, you'd be a lot better pleased in the end. But you care about nothing but a lot of ignorant colliers, who don't know what they want except it's more money just for themselves. Self, self, self — that's all it is with them — and ignorance.”

“You'd rather have self without ignorance?” he said, smiling finely.

“I would, if I've got to have it. But what I should like to see is a man that has thought for others, and isn't all self and politics.”

Her color had risen, her hand trembled with anger as she sewed. A blank look had come over the man's face, as if he did not hear or heed any more. He drank his tea in a long draught, wiped his moustache with two fingers, and sat looking abstractedly at the children.

They had laid all the little packets on the floor, and Millicent was saying:

“Now I'll undo the first, and you can have the second. I'll take this — ”

She unwrapped the bit of newspaper and disclosed a silvery ornament for a Christmas tree: a frail thing like a silver plum, with deep rosy indentations on each side.

“Oh!” she exclaimed. “Isn't it LOVELY!” Her fingers cautiously held the long bubble of silver and glowing rose, cleaving to it with a curious, irritating possession. The man's eyes moved away from her. The lesser child was fumbling with one of the little packets.

“Oh!” — a wail went up from Millicent. “You've taken one! — You didn't wait.” Then her voice changed to a motherly admonition, and she began to interfere. “This is the way to do it, look! Let me help you.”

But Marjory drew back with resentment.

“Don't, Millicent! — Don't!” came the childish cry. But Millicent's fingers itched.

At length Marjory had got out her treasure — a little silvery bell with a glass top hanging inside. The bell was made of frail glassy substance, light as air.

“Oh, the bell!” rang out Millicent's clanging voice. “The bell! It's my bell. My bell! It's mine! Don't break it, Marjory. Don't break it, will you?”

Marjory was shaking the bell against her ear. But it was dumb, it made no sound.

“You'll break it, I know you will. — You'll break it. Give it ME — ” cried Millicent, and she began to take away the bell. Marjory set up an expostulation.

“LET HER ALONE,” said the father.

Millicent let go as if she had been stung, but still her brassy, impudent voice

persisted:

“She’ll break it. She’ll break it. It’s mine — ”

“You undo another,” said the mother, politic.

Millicent began with hasty, itching fingers to uncloset another package.

“Aw — aw Mother, my peacock — aw, my peacock, my green peacock!” Lavishly she hovered over a sinuous greenish bird, with wings and tail of spun glass, pearly, and body of deep electric green.

“It’s mine — my green peacock! It’s mine, because Marjory’s had one wing off, and mine hadn’t. My green peacock that I love! I love it!” She swung it softly from the little ring on its back. Then she went to her mother.

“Look, Mother, isn’t it a beauty?”

“Mind the ring doesn’t come out,” said her mother. “Yes, it’s lovely!” The girl passed on to her father.

“Look, Father, don’t you love it!”

“Love it?” he re-echoed, ironical over the word love.

She stood for some moments, trying to force his attention. Then she went back to her place.

Marjory had brought forth a golden apple, red on one cheek, rather garish.

“Oh!” exclaimed Millicent feverishly, instantly seized with desire for what she had not got, indifferent to what she had. Her eye ran quickly over the packages. She took one.

“Now!” she exclaimed loudly, to attract attention. “Now! What’s this? — What’s this? What will this beauty be?”

With finicky fingers she removed the newspaper. Marjory watched her wide-eyed. Millicent was self-important.

“The blue ball!” she cried in a climax of rapture. “I’ve got THE BLUE BALL.”

She held it gloating in the cup of her hands. It was a little globe of hardened glass, of a magnificent full dark blue color. She rose and went to her father.

“It was your blue ball, wasn’t it, father?”

“Yes.”

“And you had it when you were a little boy, and now I have it when I’m a little girl.”

“Ay,” he replied drily.

“And it’s never been broken all those years.”

“No, not yet.”

“And perhaps it never will be broken.” To this she received no answer.

“Won’t it break?” she persisted. “Can’t you break it?”

“Yes, if you hit it with a hammer,” he said.

“Aw!” she cried. “I don’t mean that. I mean if you just drop it. It won’t break if you drop it, will it?”

“I dare say it won’t.”

“But WILL it?”

“I sh’d think not.”

“Should I try?”

She proceeded gingerly to let the blue ball drop, it bounced dully on the floor-covering.

“Oh-h-h!” she cried, catching it up. “I love it.”

“Let ME drop it,” cried Marjory, and there was a performance of admonition and demonstration from the elder sister.

But Millicent must go further. She became excited.

“It won’t break,” she said, “even if you toss it up in the air.”

She flung it up, it fell safely. But her father’s brow knitted slightly. She tossed it wildly: it fell with a little splashing explosion: it had smashed. It had fallen on the sharp edge of the tiles that protruded under the fender.

“NOW what have you done!” cried the mother.

The child stood with her lip between her teeth, a look, half, of pure misery and dismay, half of satisfaction, on her pretty sharp face.

“She wanted to break it,” said the father.

“No, she didn’t! What do you say that for!” said the mother. And Millicent burst into a flood of tears.

He rose to look at the fragments that lay splashed on the floor.

“You must mind the bits,” he said, “and pick ‘em all up.”

He took one of the pieces to examine it. It was fine and thin and hard, lined with pure silver, brilliant. He looked at it closely. So — this was what it was. And this was the end of it. He felt the curious soft explosion of its breaking still in his ears. He threw his piece in the fire.

“Pick all the bits up,” he said. “Give over! give over! Don’t cry any more.” The good-natured tone of his voice quieted the child, as he intended it should.

He went away into the back kitchen to wash himself. As he was bending his head over the sink before the little mirror, lathering to shave, there came from outside the dissonant voices of boys, pouring out the dregs of carol-singing.

“While Shep-ep-ep-herds watched — ”

He held his soapy brush suspended for a minute. They called this singing! His mind flitted back to early carol music. Then again he heard the vocal violence outside.

“Aren’t you off there!” he called out, in masculine menace. The noise stopped, there was a scuffle. But the feet returned and the voices resumed. Almost

immediately the door opened, boys were heard muttering among themselves. Millicent had given them a penny. Feet scraped on the yard, then went thudding along the side of the house, to the street.

To Aaron Sisson, this was home, this was Christmas: the unspeakably familiar. The war over, nothing was changed. Yet everything changed. The scullery in which he stood was painted green, quite fresh, very clean, the floor was red tiles. The wash-copper of red bricks was very red, the mangle with its put-up board was white-scrubbed, the American oil-cloth on the table had a gay pattern, there was a warm fire, the water in the boiler hissed faintly. And in front of him, beneath him as he leaned forward shaving, a drop of water fell with strange, incalculable rhythm from the bright brass tap into the white enamelled bowl, which was now half full of pure, quivering water. The war was over, and everything just the same. The acute familiarity of this house, which he had built for his marriage twelve years ago, the changeless pleasantness of it all seemed unthinkable. It prevented his thinking.

When he went into the middle room to comb his hair he found the Christmas tree sparkling, his wife was making pastry at the table, the baby was sitting up propped in cushions.

“Father,” said Millicent, approaching him with a flat blue-and-white angel of cotton-wool, and two ends of cotton — ”tie the angel at the top.”

“Tie it at the top?” he said, looking down.

“Yes. At the very top — because it’s just come down from the sky.”

“Ay my word!” he laughed. And he tied the angel.

Coming downstairs after changing he went into the icy cold parlour, and took his music and a small handbag. With this he retreated again to the back kitchen. He was still in trousers and shirt and slippers: but now it was a clean white shirt, and his best black trousers, and new pink and white braces. He sat under the gas-jet of the back kitchen, looking through his music. Then he opened the bag, in which were sections of a flute and a piccolo. He took out the flute, and adjusted it. As he sat he was physically aware of the sounds of the night: the bubbling of water in the boiler, the faint sound of the gas, the sudden crying of the baby in the next room, then noises outside, distant boys shouting, distant rags of carols, fragments of voices of men. The whole country was roused and excited.

The little room was hot. Aaron rose and opened a square ventilator over the copper, letting in a stream of cold air, which was grateful to him. Then he cocked his eye over the sheet of music spread out on the table before him. He tried his flute. And then at last, with the odd gesture of a diver taking a plunge, he swung his head and began to play. A stream of music, soft and rich and fluid, came out of the flute. He played beautifully. He moved his head and his raised

bare arms with slight, intense movements, as the delicate music poured out. It was sixteenth-century Christmas melody, very limpid and delicate.

The pure, mindless, exquisite motion and fluidity of the music delighted him with a strange exasperation. There was something tense, exasperated to the point of intolerable anger, in his good-humored breast, as he played the finely-spun peace-music. The more exquisite the music, the more perfectly he produced it, in sheer bliss; and at the same time, the more intense was the maddened exasperation within him.

Millicent appeared in the room. She fidgetted at the sink. The music was a bugbear to her, because it prevented her from saying what was on her own mind. At length it ended, her father was turning over the various books and sheets. She looked at him quickly, seizing her opportunity.

“Are you going out, Father?” she said.

“Eh?”

“Are you going out?” She twisted nervously.

“What do you want to know for?”

He made no other answer, and turned again to the music. His eye went down a sheet — then over it again — then more closely over it again.

“Are you?” persisted the child, balancing on one foot.

He looked at her, and his eyes were angry under knitted brows.

“What are you bothering about?” he said.

“I’m not bothering — I only wanted to know if you were going out,” she pouted, quivering to cry.

“I expect I am,” he said quietly.

She recovered at once, but still with timidity asked:

“We haven’t got any candles for the Christmas tree — shall you buy some, because mother isn’t going out?”

“Candles!” he repeated, settling his music and taking up the piccolo.

“Yes — shall you buy us some, Father? Shall you?”

“Candles!” he repeated, putting the piccolo to his mouth and blowing a few piercing, preparatory notes.

“Yes, little Christmas-tree candles — blue ones and red ones, in boxes — Shall you, Father?”

“We’ll see — if I see any — ”

“But SHALL you?” she insisted desperately. She wisely mistrusted his vagueness.

But he was looking unheeding at the music. Then suddenly the piccolo broke forth, wild, shrill, brilliant. He was playing Mozart. The child’s face went pale with anger at the sound. She turned, and went out, closing both doors behind her

to shut out the noise.

The shrill, rapid movement of the piccolo music seemed to possess the air, it was useless to try to shut it out. The man went on playing to himself, measured and insistent. In the frosty evening the sound carried. People passing down the street hesitated, listening. The neighbours knew it was Aaron practising his piccolo. He was esteemed a good player: was in request at concerts and dances, also at swell balls. So the vivid piping sound tickled the darkness.

He played on till about seven o'clock; he did not want to go out too soon, in spite of the early closing of the public houses. He never went with the stream, but made a side current of his own. His wife said he was contrary. When he went into the middle room to put on his collar and tie, the two little girls were having their hair brushed, the baby was in bed, there was a hot smell of mince-pies baking in the oven.

"You won't forget our candles, will you, Father?" asked Millicent, with assurance now.

"I'll see," he answered.

His wife watched him as he put on his overcoat and hat. He was well-dressed, handsome-looking. She felt there was a curious glamour about him. It made her feel bitter. He had an unfair advantage — he was free to go off, while she must stay at home with the children.

"There's no knowing what time you'll be home," she said.

"I shan't be late," he answered.

"It's easy to say so," she retorted, with some contempt. He took his stick, and turned towards the door.

"Bring the children some candles for their tree, and don't be so selfish," she said.

"All right," he said, going out.

"Don't say ALL RIGHT if you never mean to do it," she cried, with sudden anger, following him to the door.

His figure stood large and shadowy in the darkness.

"How many do you want?" he said.

"A dozen," she said. "And holders too, if you can get them," she added, with barren bitterness.

"Yes — all right," he turned and melted into the darkness. She went indoors, worn with a strange and bitter flame.

He crossed the fields towards the little town, which once more fumed its lights under the night. The country ran away, rising on his right hand. It was no longer a great bank of darkness. Lights twinkled freely here and there, though forlornly, now that the war-time restrictions were removed. It was no glitter of pre-war

nights, pit-heads glittering far-off with electricity. Neither was it the black gulf of the war darkness: instead, this forlorn sporadic twinkling.

Everybody seemed to be out of doors. The hollow dark countryside re-echoed like a shell with shouts and calls and excited voices. Restlessness and nervous excitement, nervous hilarity were in the air. There was a sense of electric surcharge everywhere, frictional, a neurasthenic haste for excitement.

Every moment Aaron Sisson was greeted with Good-night — Good-night, Aaron — Good-night, Mr. Sisson. People carrying parcels, children, women, thronged home on the dark paths. They were all talking loudly, declaiming loudly about what they could and could not get, and what this or the other had lost.

When he got into the main street, the only street of shops, it was crowded. There seemed to have been some violent but quiet contest, a subdued fight, going on all the afternoon and evening: people struggling to buy things, to get things. Money was spent like water, there was a frenzy of money-spending. Though the necessities of life were in abundance, still the people struggled in frenzy for cheese, sweets, raisins, pork-stuff, even for flowers and holly, all of which were scarce, and for toys and knick-knacks, which were sold out. There was a wild grumbling, but a deep satisfaction in the fight, the struggle. The same fight and the same satisfaction in the fight was witnessed whenever a tram-car stopped, or when it heaved its way into sight. Then the struggle to mount on board became desperate and savage, but stimulating. Souls surcharged with hostility found now some outlet for their feelings.

As he came near the little market-place he bethought himself of the Christmas-tree candles. He did not intend to trouble himself. And yet, when he glanced in passing into the sweet-shop window, and saw it bare as a board, the very fact that he probably could not buy the things made him hesitate, and try.

“Have you got any Christmas-tree candles?” he asked as he entered the shop.

“How many do you want?”

“A dozen.”

“Can’t let you have a dozen. You can have two boxes — four in a box — eight. Six-pence a box.”

“Got any holders?”

“Holders? Don’t ask. Haven’t seen one this year.”

“Got any toffee — ?”

“Cough-drops — two-pence an ounce — nothing else left.”

“Give me four ounces.”

He watched her weighing them in the little brass scales.

“You’ve not got much of a Christmas show,” he said.

“Don’t talk about Christmas, as far as sweets is concerned. They ought to have allowed us six times the quantity — there’s plenty of sugar, why didn’t they? We s’ll have to enjoy ourselves with what we’ve got. We mean to, anyhow.”

“Ay,” he said.

“Time we had a bit of enjoyment, THIS Christmas. They ought to have made things more plentiful.”

“Yes,” he said, stuffing his package in his pocket.

CHAPTER II. ROYAL OAK

The war had killed the little market of the town. As he passed the market place on the brow, Aaron noticed that there were only two miserable stalls. But people crowded just the same. There was a loud sound of voices, men's voices. Men pressed round the doorways of the public-houses.

But he was going to a pub out of town. He descended the dark hill. A street-lamp here and there shed parsimonious light. In the bottoms, under the trees, it was very dark. But a lamp glimmered in front of the "Royal Oak." This was a low white house sunk three steps below the highway. It was darkened, but sounded crowded.

Opening the door, Sisson found himself in the stone passage. Old Bob, carrying three cans, stopped to see who had entered — then went on into the public bar on the left. The bar itself was a sort of little window-sill on the right: the pub was a small one. In this window-opening stood the landlady, drawing and serving to her husband. Behind the bar was a tiny parlour or den, the landlady's preserve.

"Oh, it's you," she said, bobbing down to look at the newcomer. None entered her bar-parlour unless invited.

"Come in," said the landlady. There was a peculiar intonation in her complacent voice, which showed she had been expecting him, a little irritably.

He went across into her bar-parlour. It would not hold more than eight or ten people, all told — just the benches along the walls, the fire between — and two little round tables.

"I began to think you weren't coming," said the landlady, bringing him a whiskey.

She was a large, stout, high-coloured woman, with a fine profile, probably Jewish. She had chestnut-coloured eyes, quick, intelligent. Her movements were large and slow, her voice laconic.

"I'm not so late, am I?" asked Aaron.

"Yes, you are late, I should think." She looked up at the little clock. "Close on nine."

"I did some shopping," said Aaron, with a quick smile.

"Did you indeed? That's news, I'm sure. May we ask what you bought?"

This he did not like. But he had to answer.

"Christmas-tree candles, and toffee."

“For the little children? Well you’ve done well for once! I must say I recommend you. I didn’t think you had so much in you.”

She sat herself down in her seat at the end of the bench, and took up her knitting. Aaron sat next to her. He poured water into his glass, and drank.

“It’s warm in here,” he said, when he had swallowed the liquor.

“Yes, it is. You won’t want to keep that thick good overcoat on,” replied the landlady.

“No,” he said, “I think I’ll take it off.”

She watched him as he hung up his overcoat. He wore black clothes, as usual. As he reached up to the pegs, she could see the muscles of his shoulders, and the form of his legs. Her reddish-brown eyes seemed to burn, and her nose, that had a subtle, beautiful Hebraic curve, seemed to arch itself. She made a little place for him by herself, as he returned. She carried her head thrown back, with dauntless self-sufficiency.

There were several colliers in the room, talking quietly. They were the superior type all, favoured by the landlady, who loved intellectual discussion. Opposite, by the fire, sat a little, greenish man — evidently an oriental.

“You’re very quiet all at once, Doctor,” said the landlady in her slow, laconic voice.

“Yes. — May I have another whiskey, please?” She rose at once, powerfully energetic.

“Oh, I’m sorry,” she said. And she went to the bar.

“Well,” said the little Hindu doctor, “and how are things going now, with the men?”

“The same as ever,” said Aaron.

“Yes,” said the stately voice of the landlady. “And I’m afraid they will always be the same as ever. When will they learn wisdom?”

“But what do you call wisdom?” asked Sherardy, the Hindu. He spoke with a little, childish lisp.

“What do I call wisdom?” repeated the landlady. “Why all acting together for the common good. That is wisdom in my idea.”

“Yes, very well, that is so. But what do you call the common good?” replied the little doctor, with childish pertinence.

“Ay,” said Aaron, with a laugh, “that’s it.” The miners were all stirring now, to take part in the discussion.

“What do I call the common good?” repeated the landlady. “That all people should study the welfare of other people, and not only their own.”

“They are not to study their own welfare?” said the doctor.

“Ah, that I did not say,” replied the landlady. “Let them study their own

welfare, and that of others also.”

“Well then,” said the doctor, “what is the welfare of a collier?”

“The welfare of a collier,” said the landlady, “is that he shall earn sufficient wages to keep himself and his family comfortable, to educate his children, and to educate himself; for that is what he wants, education.”

“Ay, happen so,” put in Brewitt, a big, fine, good-humoured collier. “Happen so, Mrs. Houseley. But what if you haven’t got much education, to speak of?”

“You can always get it,” she said patronizing.

“Nay — I’m blest if you can. It’s no use tryin’ to educate a man over forty — not by book-learning. That isn’t saying he’s a fool, neither.”

“And what better is them that’s got education?” put in another man. “What better is the manager, or th’ under-manager, than we are? — Pender’s yaller enough i’ th’ face.”

“He is that,” assented the men in chorus.

“But because he’s yellow in the face, as you say, Mr. Kirk,” said the landlady largely, “that doesn’t mean he has no advantages higher than what you have got.”

“Ay,” said Kirk. “He can ma’e more money than I can — that’s about a’ as it comes to.”

“He can make more money,” said the landlady. “And when he’s made it, he knows better how to use it.”

““Appen so, an’ a’! — What does he do, more than eat and drink and work? — an’ take it out of hisself a sight harder than I do, by th’ looks of him. — What’s it matter, if he eats a bit more or drinks a bit more — ”

“No,” reiterated the landlady. “He not only eats and drinks. He can read, and he can converse.”

“Me an’ a’,” said Tom Kirk, and the men burst into a laugh. “I can read — an’ I’ve had many a talk an’ conversation with you in this house, Mrs. Houseley — am havin’ one at this minute, seemingly.”

“SEEMINGLY, you are,” said the landlady ironically. “But do you think there would be no difference between your conversation, and Mr. Pender’s, if he were here so that I could enjoy his conversation?”

“An’ what difference would there be?” asked Tom Kirk. “He’d go home to his bed just the same.”

“There, you are mistaken. He would be the better, and so should I, a great deal better, for a little genuine conversation.”

“If it’s conversation as ma’es his behind drop — ” said Tom Kirk. “An’ puts th’ bile in his face — ” said Brewitt. There was a general laugh.

“I can see it’s no use talking about it any further,” said the landlady, lifting her

head dangerously.

“But look here, Mrs. Houseley, do you really think it makes much difference to a man, whether he can hold a serious conversation or not?” asked the doctor.

“I do indeed, all the difference in the world — To me, there is no greater difference, than between an educated man and an uneducated man.”

“And where does it come in?” asked Kirk.

“But wait a bit, now,” said Aaron Sisson. “You take an educated man — take Pender. What’s his education for? What does he scheme for? — What does he contrive for? What does he talk for? — ”

“For all the purposes of his life,” replied the landlady.

“Ay, an’ what’s the purpose of his life?” insisted Aaron Sisson.

“The purpose of his life,” repeated the landlady, at a loss. “I should think he knows that best himself.”

“No better than I know it — and you know it,” said Aaron.

“Well,” said the landlady, “if you know, then speak out. What is it?”

“To make more money for the firm — and so make his own chance of a rise better.”

The landlady was baffled for some moments. Then she said:

“Yes, and suppose that he does. Is there any harm in it? Isn’t it his duty to do what he can for himself? Don’t you try to earn all you can?”

“Ay,” said Aaron. “But there’s soon a limit to what I can earn. — It’s like this. When you work it out, everything comes to money. Reckon it as you like, it’s money on both sides. It’s money we live for, and money is what our lives is worth — nothing else. Money we live for, and money we are when we’re dead: that or nothing. An’ it’s money as is between the masters and us. There’s a few educated ones got hold of one end of the rope, and all the lot of us hanging on to th’ other end, an’ we s’ll go on pulling our guts out, time in, time out — ”

“But they’ve got th’ long end o’ th’ rope, th’ masters has,” said Brewitt.

“For as long as one holds, the other will pull,” concluded Aaron Sisson philosophically.

“An’ I’m almighty sure o’ that,” said Kirk. There was a little pause.

“Yes, that’s all there is in the minds of you men,” said the landlady. “But what can be done with the money, that you never think of — the education of the children, the improvement of conditions — ”

“Educate the children, so that they can lay hold of the long end of the rope, instead of the short end,” said the doctor, with a little giggle.

“Ay, that’s it,” said Brewitt. “I’ve pulled at th’ short end, an’ my lads may do th’ same.”

“A selfish policy,” put in the landlady.

“Selfish or not, they may do it.”

“Till the crack o’ doom,” said Aaron, with a glistening smile.

“Or the crack o’ th’ rope,” said Brewitt.

“Yes, and THEN WHAT?” cried the landlady.

“Then we all drop on our backsides,” said Kirk. There was a general laugh, and an uneasy silence.

“All I can say of you men,” said the landlady, “is that you have a narrow, selfish policy. — Instead of thinking of the children, instead of thinking of improving the world you live in — ”

“We hang on, British bulldog breed,” said Brewitt. There was a general laugh.

“Yes, and little wiser than dogs, wrangling for a bone,” said the landlady.

“Are we to let t’ other side run off wi’ th’ bone, then, while we sit on our stunts an’ yowl for it?” asked Brewitt.

“No indeed. There can be wisdom in everything. — It’s what you DO with the money, when you’ve got it,” said the landlady, “that’s where the importance lies.”

“It’s Missis as gets it,” said Kirk. “It doesn’t stop wi’ us.” “Ay, it’s the wife as gets it, ninety per cent,” they all concurred.

“And who SHOULD have the money, indeed, if not your wives? They have everything to do with the money. What idea have you, but to waste it!”

“Women waste nothing — they couldn’t if they tried,” said Aaron Sisson.

There was a lull for some minutes. The men were all stimulated by drink. The landlady kept them going. She herself sipped a glass of brandy — but slowly. She sat near to Sisson — and the great fierce warmth of her presence enveloped him particularly. He loved so to luxuriate, like a cat, in the presence of a violent woman. He knew that tonight she was feeling very nice to him — a female glow that came out of her to him. Sometimes when she put down her knitting, or took it up again from the bench beside him, her fingers just touched his thigh, and the fine electricity ran over his body, as if he were a cat tingling at a caress.

And yet he was not happy — nor comfortable. There was a hard, opposing core in him, that neither the whiskey nor the woman could dissolve or soothe, tonight. It remained hard, nay, became harder and more deeply antagonistic to his surroundings, every moment. He recognised it as a secret malady he suffered from: this strained, unacknowledged opposition to his surroundings, a hard core of irrational, exhausting withholding of himself. Irritating, because he still WANTED to give himself. A woman and whiskey, these were usually a remedy — and music. But lately these had begun to fail him. No, there was something in him that would not give in — neither to the whiskey, nor the woman, nor even the music. Even in the midst of his best music, it sat in the middle of him, this

invisible black dog, and growled and waited, never to be cajoled. He knew of its presence — and was a little uneasy. For of course he wanted to let himself go, to feel rosy and loving and all that. But at the very thought, the black dog showed its teeth.

Still he kept the beast at bay — with all his will he kept himself as it were genial. He wanted to melt and be rosy, happy.

He sipped his whiskey with gratification, he luxuriated in the presence of the landlady, very confident of the strength of her liking for him. He glanced at her profile — that fine throw-back of her hostile head, wicked in the midst of her benevolence; that subtle, really very beautiful delicate curve of her nose, that moved him exactly like a piece of pure sound. But tonight it did not overcome him. There was a devilish little cold eye in his brain that was not taken in by what he saw.

A terrible obstinacy located itself in him. He saw the fine, rich-coloured, secretive face of the Hebrew woman, so loudly self-righteous, and so dangerous, so destructive, so lustful — and he waited for his blood to melt with passion for her. But not tonight. Tonight his innermost heart was hard and cold as ice. The very danger and lustfulness of her, which had so pricked his senses, now made him colder. He disliked her at her tricks. He saw her once too often. Her and all women. Bah, the love game! And the whiskey that was to help in the game! He had drowned himself once too often in whiskey and in love. Now he floated like a corpse in both, with a cold, hostile eye.

And at least half of his inward fume was anger because he could no longer drown. Nothing would have pleased him better than to feel his senses melting and swimming into oneness with the dark. But impossible! Cold, with a white fury inside him, he floated wide eyed and apart as a corpse. He thought of the gentle love of his first married years, and became only whiter and colder, set in more intense obstinacy. A wave of revulsion lifted him.

He became aware that he was deadly antagonistic to the landlady, that he disliked his whole circumstances. A cold, diabolical consciousness detached itself from his state of semi-intoxication.

“Is it pretty much the same out there in India?” he asked of the doctor, suddenly.

The doctor started, and attended to him on his own level.

“Probably,” he answered. “It is worse.”

“Worse!” exclaimed Aaron Sisson. “How’s that?”

“Why, because, in a way the people of India have an easier time even than the people of England. Because they have no responsibility. The British Government takes the responsibility. And the people have nothing to do, except their bit of

work — and talk perhaps about national rule, just for a pastime.”

“They have to earn their living?” said Sisson.

“Yes,” said the little doctor, who had lived for some years among the colliers, and become quite familiar with them. “Yes, they have to earn their living — and then no more. That’s why the British Government is the worst thing possible for them. It is the worst thing possible. And not because it is a bad government. Really, it is not a bad government. It is a good one — and they know it — much better than they would make for themselves, probably. But for that reason it is so very bad.”

The little oriental laughed a queer, sniggering laugh. His eyes were very bright, dilated, completely black. He was looking into the ice-blue, pointed eyes of Aaron Sisson. They were both intoxicated — but grimly so. They looked at each other in elemental difference.

The whole room was now attending to this new conversation: which they all accepted as serious. For Aaron was considered a special man, a man of peculiar understanding, even though as a rule he said little.

“If it is a good government, doctor, how can it be so bad for the people?” said the landlady.

The doctor’s eyes quivered for the fraction of a second, as he watched the other man. He did not look at the landlady.

“It would not matter what kind of mess they made — and they would make a mess, if they governed themselves, the people of India. They would probably make the greatest muddle possible — and start killing one another. But it wouldn’t matter if they exterminated half the population, so long as they did it themselves, and were responsible for it.”

Again his eyes dilated, utterly black, to the eyes of the other man, and an arch little smile flickered on his face.

“I think it would matter very much indeed,” said the landlady. “They had far better NOT govern themselves.”

She was, for some reason, becoming angry. The little greenish doctor emptied his glass, and smiled again.

“But what difference does it make,” said Aaron Sisson, “whether they govern themselves or not? They only live till they die, either way.” And he smiled faintly. He had not really listened to the doctor. The terms “British Government,” and “bad for the people — good for the people,” made him malevolently angry.

The doctor was nonplussed for a moment. Then he gathered himself together.

“It matters,” he said; “it matters. — People should always be responsible for themselves. How can any people be responsible for another race of people, and

for a race much older than they are, and not at all children.”

Aaron Sisson watched the other’s dark face, with its utterly exposed eyes. He was in a state of semi-intoxicated anger and clairvoyance. He saw in the black, void, glistening eyes of the oriental only the same danger, the same menace that he saw in the landlady. Fair, wise, even benevolent words: always the human good speaking, and always underneath, something hateful, something detestable and murderous. Wise speech and good intentions — they were invariably maggoty with these secret inclinations to destroy the man in the man. Whenever he heard anyone holding forth: the landlady, this doctor, the spokesman on the pit bank: or when he read the all-righteous newspaper; his soul curdled with revulsion as from something foul. Even the infernal love and good-will of his wife. To hell with good-will! It was more hateful than ill-will. Self-righteous bullying, like poison gas!

The landlady looked at the clock.

“Ten minutes to, gentlemen,” she said coldly. For she too knew that Aaron was spoiled for her for that night.

The men began to take their leave, shakily. The little doctor seemed to evaporate. The landlady helped Aaron on with his coat. She saw the curious whiteness round his nostrils and his eyes, the fixed hellish look on his face.

“You’ll eat a mince-pie in the kitchen with us, for luck?” she said to him, detaining him till last.

But he turned laughing to her.

“Nay,” he said, “I must be getting home.”

He turned and went straight out of the house. Watching him, the landlady’s face became yellow with passion and rage.

“That little poisonous Indian viper,” she said aloud, attributing Aaron’s mood to the doctor. Her husband was noisily bolting the door.

Outside it was dark and frosty. A gang of men lingered in the road near the closed door. Aaron found himself among them, his heart bitterer than steel.

The men were dispersing. He should take the road home. But the devil was in it, if he could take a stride in the homeward direction. There seemed a wall in front of him. He veered. But neither could he take a stride in the opposite direction. So he was destined to veer round, like some sort of weather-cock, there in the middle of the dark road outside the “Royal Oak.”

But as he turned, he caught sight of a third exit. Almost opposite was the mouth of Shottle Lane, which led off under trees, at right angles to the highroad, up to New Brunswick Colliery. He veered towards the off-chance of this opening, in a delirium of icy fury, and plunged away into the dark lane, walking slowly, on firm legs.

CHAPTER III. "THE LIGHTED TREE"

It is remarkable how many odd or extraordinary people there are in England. We hear continual complaints of the stodgy dullness of the English. It would be quite as just to complain of their freakish, unusual characters. Only en masse the metal is all Britannia.

In an ugly little mining town we find the odd ones just as distinct as anywhere else. Only it happens that dull people invariably meet dull people, and odd individuals always come across odd individuals, no matter where they may be. So that to each kind society seems all of a piece.

At one end of the dark tree-covered Shottle Lane stood the "Royal Oak" public house; and Mrs. Houseley was certainly an odd woman. At the other end of the lane was Shottle House, where the Bricknells lived; the Bricknells were odd, also. Alfred Bricknell, the old man, was one of the partners in the Colliery firm. His English was incorrect, his accent, broad Derbyshire, and he was not a gentleman in the snobbish sense of the word. Yet he was well-to-do, and very stuck-up. His wife was dead.

Shottle House stood two hundred yards beyond New Brunswick Colliery. The colliery was imbedded in a plantation, whence its burning pit-hill glowed, fumed, and stank sulphur in the nostrils of the Bricknells. Even war-time efforts had not put out this refuse fire. Apart from this, Shottle House was a pleasant square house, rather old, with shrubberies and lawns. It ended the lane in a dead end. Only a field-path trekked away to the left.

On this particular Christmas Eve Alfred Bricknell had only two of his children at home. Of the others, one daughter was unhappily married, and away in India weeping herself thinner; another was nursing her babies in Streatham. Jim, the hope of the house, and Julia, now married to Robert Cunningham, had come home for Christmas.

The party was seated in the drawing-room, that the grown-up daughters had made very fine during their periods of courtship. Its walls were hung with fine grey canvas, it had a large, silvery grey, silky carpet, and the furniture was covered with dark green silky material. Into this reticence pieces of futurism, Omega cushions and Van-Gogh-like pictures exploded their colours. Such chic would certainly not have been looked for up Shottle Lane.

The old man sat in his high grey arm-chair very near an enormous coal fire. In this house there was no coal-rationing. The finest coal was arranged to obtain a

gigantic glow such as a coal-owner may well enjoy, a great, intense mass of pure red fire. At this fire Alfred Bricknell toasted his tan, lambs-wool-lined slippers.

He was a large man, wearing a loose grey suit, and sprawling in the large grey arm-chair. The soft lamp-light fell on his clean, bald, Michael-Angelo head, across which a few pure hairs glittered. His chin was sunk on his breast, so that his sparse but strong-haired white beard, in which every strand stood distinct, like spun glass lithe and elastic, curved now upwards and inwards, in a curious curve returning upon him. He seemed to be sunk in stern, prophet-like meditation. As a matter of fact, he was asleep after a heavy meal.

Across, seated on a pouffe on the other side of the fire, was a cameo-like girl with neat black hair done tight and bright in the French mode. She had strangely-drawn eyebrows, and her colour was brilliant. She was hot, leaning back behind the shaft of old marble of the mantel-piece, to escape the fire. She wore a simple dress of apple-green satin, with full sleeves and ample skirt and a tiny bodice of green cloth. This was Josephine Ford, the girl Jim was engaged to.

Jim Bricknell himself was a tall big fellow of thirty-eight. He sat in a chair in front of the fire, some distance back, and stretched his long legs far in front of him. His chin too was sunk on his breast, his young forehead was bald, and raised in odd wrinkles, he had a silent half-grin on his face, a little tipsy, a little satyr-like. His small moustache was reddish.

Behind him a round table was covered with cigarettes, sweets, and bottles. It was evident Jim Bricknell drank beer for choice. He wanted to get fat — that was his idea. But he couldn't bring it off: he was thin, though not too thin, except to his own thinking.

His sister Julia was bunched up in a low chair between him and his father. She too was a tall stag of a thing, but she sat bunched up like a witch. She wore a wine-purple dress, her arms seemed to poke out of the sleeves, and she had dragged her brown hair into straight, untidy strands. Yet she had real beauty. She was talking to the young man who was not her husband: a fair, pale, fattish young fellow in pince-nez and dark clothes. This was Cyril Scott, a friend.

The only other person stood at the round table pouring out red wine. He was a fresh, stoutish young Englishman in khaki, Julia's husband, Robert Cunningham, a lieutenant about to be demobilised, when he would become a sculptor once more. He drank red wine in large throatfuls, and his eyes grew a little moist. The room was hot and subdued, everyone was silent.

"I say," said Robert suddenly, from the rear — "anybody have a drink? Don't you find it rather hot?"

"Is there another bottle of beer there?" said Jim, without moving, too settled even to stir an eye-lid.

“Yes — I think there is,” said Robert.

“Thanks — don’t open it yet,” murmured Jim.

“Have a drink, Josephine?” said Robert.

“No thank you,” said Josephine, bowing slightly.

Finding the drinks did not go, Robert went round with the cigarettes. Josephine Ford looked at the white rolls.

“Thank you,” she said, and taking one, suddenly licked her rather full, dry red lips with the rapid tip of her tongue. It was an odd movement, suggesting a snake’s flicker. She put her cigarette between her lips, and waited. Her movements were very quiet and well bred; but perhaps too quiet, they had the dangerous impassivity of the Bohemian, Parisian or American rather than English.

“Cigarette, Julia?” said Robert to his wife.

She seemed to start or twitch, as if dazed. Then she looked up at her husband with a queer smile, puckering the corners of her eyes. He looked at the cigarettes, not at her. His face had the blunt voluptuous gravity of a young lion, a great cat. She kept him standing for some moments impassively. Then suddenly she hung her long, delicate fingers over the box, in doubt, and spasmodically jabbed at the cigarettes, clumsily raking one out at last.

“Thank you, dear — thank you,” she cried, rather high, looking up and smiling once more. He turned calmly aside, offering the cigarettes to Scott, who refused.

“Oh!” said Julia, sucking the end of her cigarette. “Robert is so happy with all the good things — aren’t you dear?” she sang, breaking into a hurried laugh. “We aren’t used to such luxurious living, we aren’t — ARE WE DEAR — No, we’re not such swells as this, we’re not. Oh, ROBBIE, isn’t it all right, isn’t it just all right?” She tailed off into her hurried, wild, repeated laugh. “We’re so happy in a land of plenty, AREN’T WE DEAR?”

“Do you mean I’m greedy, Julia?” said Robert.

“Greedy! — Oh, greedy! — he asks if he’s greedy? — no you’re not greedy, Robbie, you’re not greedy. I want you to be happy.”

“I’m quite happy,” he returned.

“Oh, he’s happy! — Really! — he’s happy! Oh, what an accomplishment! Oh, my word!” Julia puckered her eyes and laughed herself into a nervous twitching silence.

Robert went round with the matches. Julia sucked her cigarette.

“Give us a light, Robbie, if you ARE happy!” she cried.

“It’s coming,” he answered.

Josephine smoked with short, sharp puffs. Julia sucked wildly at her light.

Robert returned to his red wine. Jim Bricknell suddenly roused up, looked round on the company, smiling a little vacuously and showing his odd, pointed teeth.

“Where’s the beer?” he asked, in deep tones, smiling full into Josephine’s face, as if she were going to produce it by some sleight of hand. Then he wheeled round to the table, and was soon pouring beer down his throat as down a pipe. Then he dropped supine again. Cyril Scott was silently absorbing gin and water.

“I say,” said Jim, from the remote depths of his sprawling. “Isn’t there something we could do to while the time away?”

Everybody suddenly laughed — it sounded so remote and absurd.

“What, play bridge or poker or something conventional of that sort?” said Josephine in her distinct voice, speaking to him as if he were a child.

“Oh, damn bridge,” said Jim in his sleep-voice. Then he began pulling his powerful length together. He sat on the edge of his chair-seat, leaning forward, peering into all the faces and grinning.

“Don’t look at me like that — so long — ” said Josephine, in her self-contained voice. “You make me uncomfortable.” She gave an odd little grunt of a laugh, and the tip of her tongue went over her lips as she glanced sharply, half furtively round the room.

“I like looking at you,” said Jim, his smile becoming more malicious.

“But you shouldn’t, when I tell you not,” she returned.

Jim twisted round to look at the state of the bottles. The father also came awake. He sat up.

“Isn’t it time,” he said, “that you all put away your glasses and cigarettes and thought of bed?”

Jim rolled slowly round towards his father, sprawling in the long chair.

“Ah, Dad,” he said, “tonight’s the night! Tonight’s some night, Dad. — You can sleep any time — ” his grin widened — ”but there aren’t many nights to sit here — like this — Eh?”

He was looking up all the time into the face of his father, full and nakedly lifting his face to the face of his father, and smiling fixedly. The father, who was perfectly sober, except for the contagion from the young people, felt a wild tremor go through his heart as he gazed on the face of his boy. He rose stiffly.

“You want to stay?” he said. “You want to stay! — Well then — well then, I’ll leave you. But don’t be long.” The old man rose to his full height, rather majestic. The four younger people also rose respectfully — only Jim lay still prostrate in his chair, twisting up his face towards his father.

“You won’t stay long,” said the old man, looking round a little bewildered. He was seeking a responsible eye. Josephine was the only one who had any feeling

for him.

“No, we won’t stay long, Mr. Bricknell,” she said gravely.

“Good night, Dad,” said Jim, as his father left the room.

Josephine went to the window. She had rather a stiff, poupee walk.

“How is the night?” she said, as if to change the whole feeling in the room. She pushed back the thick grey-silk curtains. “Why?” she exclaimed. “What is that light burning? A red light?”

“Oh, that’s only the pit-bank on fire,” said Robert, who had followed her.

“How strange! — Why is it burning now?”

“It always burns, unfortunately — it is most consistent at it. It is the refuse from the mines. It has been burning for years, in spite of all efforts to the contrary.”

“How very curious! May we look at it?” Josephine now turned the handle of the French windows, and stepped out.

“Beautiful!” they heard her voice exclaim from outside.

In the room, Julia laid her hand gently, protectively over the hand of Cyril Scott.

“Josephine and Robert are admiring the night together!” she said, smiling with subtle tenderness to him.

“Naturally! Young people always do these romantic things,” replied Cyril Scott. He was twenty-two years old, so he could afford to be cynical.

“Do they? — Don’t you think it’s nice of them?” she said, gently removing her hand from his. His eyes were shining with pleasure.

“I do. I envy them enormously. One only needs to be sufficiently naive,” he said.

“One does, doesn’t one!” cooed Julia.

“I say, do you hear the bells?” said Robert, poking his head into the room.

“No, dear! Do you?” replied Julia.

“Bells! Hear the bells! Bells!” exclaimed the half-tipsy and self-conscious Jim. And he rolled in his chair in an explosion of sudden, silent laughter, showing his mouthful of pointed teeth, like a dog. Then he gradually gathered himself together, found his feet, smiling fixedly.

“Pretty cool night!” he said aloud, when he felt the air on his almost bald head. The darkness smelt of sulphur.

Josephine and Robert had moved out of sight. Julia was abstracted, following them with her eyes. With almost supernatural keenness she seemed to catch their voices from the distance.

“Yes, Josephine, WOULDN’T that be AWFULLY ROMANTIC!” — she suddenly called shrilly.

The pair in the distance started.

“What — !” they heard Josephine’s sharp exclamation.

“What’s that? — What would be romantic?” said Jim as he lurched up and caught hold of Cyril Scott’s arm.

“Josephine wants to make a great illumination of the grounds of the estate,” said Julia, magniloquent.

“No — no — I didn’t say it,” remonstrated Josephine.

“What Josephine said,” explained Robert, “was simply that it would be pretty to put candles on one of the growing trees, instead of having a Christmas-tree indoors.”

“Oh, Josephine, how sweet of you!” cried Julia.

Cyril Scott giggled.

“Good egg! Champion idea, Josey, my lass. Eh? What — !” cried Jim. “Why not carry it out — eh? Why not? Most attractive.” He leaned forward over Josephine, and grinned.

“Oh, no!” expostulated Josephine. “It all sounds so silly now. No. Let us go indoors and go to bed.”

“NO, Josephine dear — No! It’s a LOVELY IDEA!” cried Julia. “Let’s get candles and lanterns and things — ”

“Let’s!” grinned Jim. “Let’s, everybody — let’s.”

“Shall we really?” asked Robert. “Shall we illuminate one of the fir-trees by the lawn?”

“Yes! How lovely!” cried Julia. “I’ll fetch the candles.”

“The women must put on warm cloaks,” said Robert.

They trooped indoors for coats and wraps and candles and lanterns. Then, lighted by a bicycle lamp, they trooped off to the shed to twist wire round the candles for holders. They clustered round the bench.

“I say,” said Julia, “doesn’t Cyril look like a pilot on a stormy night! Oh, I say — !” and she went into one of her hurried laughs.

They all looked at Cyril Scott, who was standing sheepishly in the background, in a very large overcoat, smoking a large pipe. The young man was uncomfortable, but assumed a stoic air of philosophic indifference.

Soon they were busy round a prickly fir-tree at the end of the lawn. Jim stood in the background vaguely staring. The bicycle lamp sent a beam of strong white light deep into the uncanny foliage, heads clustered and hands worked. The night above was silent, dim. There was no wind. In the near distance they could hear the panting of some engine at the colliery.

“Shall we light them as we fix them,” asked Robert, “or save them for one grand rocket at the end?”

“Oh, as we do them,” said Cyril Scott, who had lacerated his fingers and wanted to see some reward.

A match spluttered. One naked little flame sprang alight among the dark foliage. The candle burned tremulously, naked. They all were silent.

“We ought to do a ritual dance! We ought to worship the tree,” sang Julia, in her high voice.

“Hold on a minute. We’ll have a little more illumination,” said Robert.

“Why yes. We want more than one candle,” said Josephine.

But Julia had dropped the cloak in which she was huddled, and with arms slung asunder was sliding, waving, crouching in a pas seul before the tree, looking like an animated bough herself.

Jim, who was hugging his pipe in the background, broke into a short, harsh, cackling laugh.

“Aren’t we fools!” he cried. “What? Oh, God’s love, aren’t we fools!”

“No — why?” cried Josephine, amused but resentful.

But Jim vouchsafed nothing further, only stood like a Red Indian gripping his pipe.

The beam of the bicycle-lamp moved and fell upon the hands and faces of the young people, and penetrated the recesses of the secret trees. Several little tongues of flame clipped sensitive and ruddy on the naked air, sending a faint glow over the needle foliage. They gave a strange, perpendicular aspiration in the night. Julia waved slowly in her tree dance. Jim stood apart, with his legs straddled, a motionless figure.

The party round the tree became absorbed and excited as more ruddy tongues of flame pricked upward from the dark tree. Pale candles became evident, the air was luminous. The illumination was becoming complete, harmonious.

Josephine suddenly looked round.

“Why-y-y!” came her long note of alarm.

A man in a bowler hat and a black overcoat stood on the edge of the twilight.

“What is it?” cried Julia.

“Homo sapiens!” said Robert, the lieutenant. “Hand the light, Cyril.” He played the beam of light full on the intruder; a man in a bowler hat, with a black overcoat buttoned to his throat, a pale, dazed, blinking face. The hat was tilted at a slightly jaunty angle over the left eye, the man was well-featured. He did not speak.

“Did you want anything?” asked Robert, from behind the light.

Aaron Sisson blinked, trying to see who addressed him. To him, they were all illusory. He did not answer.

“Anything you wanted?” repeated Robert, military, rather peremptory.

Jim suddenly doubled himself up and burst into a loud harsh cackle of laughter. Whoop! he went, and doubled himself up with laughter. Whoop! Whoop! he went, and fell on the ground and writhed with laughter. He was in that state of intoxication when he could find no release from maddening self-consciousness. He knew what he was doing, he did it deliberately. And yet he was also beside himself, in a sort of hysterics. He could not help himself in exasperated self-consciousness.

The others all began to laugh, unavoidably. It was a contagion. They laughed helplessly and foolishly. Only Robert was anxious.

"I'm afraid he'll wake the house," he said, looking at the doubled up figure of Jim writhing on the grass and whooping loudly.

"Or not enough," put in Cyril Scott. He twigged Jim's condition.

"No — no!" cried Josephine, weak with laughing in spite of herself. "No — it's too long — I'm like to die laughing — "

Jim embraced the earth in his convulsions. Even Robert shook quite weakly with laughter. His face was red, his eyes full of dancing water. Yet he managed to articulate.

"I say, you know, you'll bring the old man down." Then he went off again into spasms.

"Hu! Hu!" whooped Jim, subsiding. "Hu!"

He rolled over on to his back, and lay silent. The others also became weakly silent.

"What's amiss?" said Aaron Sisson, breaking this spell.

They all began to laugh again, except Jim, who lay on his back looking up at the strange sky.

"What're you laughing at?" repeated Aaron.

"We're laughing at the man on the ground," replied Josephine. "I think he's drunk a little too much."

"Ay," said Aaron, standing mute and obstinate.

"Did you want anything?" Robert enquired once more.

"Eh?" Aaron looked up. "Me? No, not me." A sort of inertia kept him rooted. The young people looked at one another and began to laugh, rather embarrassed.

"Another!" said Cyril Scott cynically.

They wished he would go away. There was a pause.

"What do you reckon stars are?" asked the sepulchral voice of Jim. He still lay flat on his back on the grass.

Josephine went to him and pulled at his coat.

"Get up," she said. "You'll take cold. Get up now, we're going indoors."

"What do you reckon stars are?" he persisted.

Aaron Sisson stood on the edge of the light, smilingly staring at the scene, like a boy out of his place, but stubbornly keeping his ground.

“Get up now,” said Josephine. “We’ve had enough.” But Jim would not move.

Robert went with the bicycle lamp and stood at Aaron’s side.

“Shall I show you a light to the road — you’re off your track,” he said. “You’re in the grounds of Shottle House.”

“I can find my road,” said Aaron. “Thank you.”

Jim suddenly got up and went to peer at the stranger, poking his face close to Aaron’s face.

“Right-o,” he replied. “You’re not half a bad sort of chap — Cheery-o! What’s your drink?”

“Mine — whiskey,” said Aaron.

“Come in and have one. We’re the only sober couple in the bunch — what?” cried Jim.

Aaron stood unmoving, static in everything. Jim took him by the arm affectionately. The stranger looked at the flickering tree, with its tiers of lights.

“A Christmas tree,” he said, jerking his head and smiling.

“That’s right, old man,” said Jim, seeming thoroughly sober now. “Come indoors and have a drink.”

Aaron Sisson negatively allowed himself to be led off. The others followed in silence, leaving the tree to flicker the night through. The stranger stumbled at the open window-door.

“Mind the step,” said Jim affectionately.

They crowded to the fire, which was still hot. The newcomer looked round vaguely. Jim took his bowler hat and gave him a chair. He sat without looking round, a remote, abstract look on his face. He was very pale, and seemed inwardly absorbed.

The party threw off their wraps and sat around. Josephine turned to Aaron Sisson, who sat with a glass of whiskey in his hand, rather slack in his chair, in his thickish overcoat. He did not want to drink. His hair was blond, quite tidy, his mouth and chin handsome but a little obstinate, his eyes inscrutable. His pallor was not natural to him. Though he kept the appearance of a smile, underneath he was hard and opposed. He did not wish to be with these people, and yet, mechanically, he stayed.

“Do you feel quite well?” Josephine asked him.

He looked at her quickly.

“Me?” he said. He smiled faintly. “Yes, I’m all right.” Then he dropped his head again and seemed oblivious.

“Tell us your name,” said Jim affectionately.

The stranger looked up.

“My name’s Aaron Sisson, if it’s anything to you,” he said.

Jim began to grin.

“It’s a name I don’t know,” he said. Then he named all the party present. But the stranger hardly heeded, though his eyes looked curiously from one to the other, slow, shrewd, clairvoyant.

“Were you on your way home?” asked Robert, huffy.

The stranger lifted his head and looked at him.

“Home!” he repeated. “No. The other road — ” He indicated the direction with his head, and smiled faintly.

“Beldover?” inquired Robert.

“Yes.”

He had dropped his head again, as if he did not want to look at them.

To Josephine, the pale, impassive, blank-seeming face, the blue eyes with the smile which wasn’t a smile, and the continual dropping of the well-shaped head was curiously affecting. She wanted to cry.

“Are you a miner?” Robert asked, *de haute en bas*.

“No,” cried Josephine. She had looked at his hands.

“Men’s checkweighman,” replied Aaron. He had emptied his glass. He put it on the table.

“Have another?” said Jim, who was attending fixedly, with curious absorption, to the stranger.

“No,” cried Josephine, “no more.”

Aaron looked at Jim, then at her, and smiled slowly, with remote bitterness. Then he lowered his head again. His hands were loosely clasped between his knees.

“What about the wife?” said Robert — the young lieutenant.

“What about the wife and kiddies? You’re a married man, aren’t you?”

The sardonic look of the stranger rested on the subaltern.

“Yes,” he said.

“Won’t they be expecting you?” said Robert, trying to keep his temper and his tone of authority.

“I expect they will — ”

“Then you’d better be getting along, hadn’t you?”

The eyes of the intruder rested all the time on the flushed subaltern. The look on Aaron’s face became slowly satirical.

“Oh, dry up the army touch,” said Jim contemptuously, to Robert. “We’re all civvies here. We’re all right, aren’t we?” he said loudly, turning to the stranger with a grin that showed his pointed teeth.

Aaron gave a brief laugh of acknowledgement.

“How many children have you?” sang Julia from her distance.

“Three.”

“Girls or boys?”

“Girls.”

“All girls? Dear little things! How old?”

“Oldest eight — youngest nine months — ”

“So small!” sang Julia, with real tenderness now — Aaron dropped his head. “But you’re going home to them, aren’t you?” said Josephine, in whose eyes the tears had already risen. He looked up at her, at her tears. His face had the same pale perverse smile.

“Not tonight,” he said.

“But why? You’re wrong!” cried Josephine.

He dropped his head and became oblivious.

“Well!” said Cyril Scott, rising at last with a bored exclamation. “I think I’ll retire.”

“Will you?” said Julia, also rising. “You’ll find your candle outside.”

She went out. Scott bade good night, and followed her. The four people remained in the room, quite silent. Then Robert rose and began to walk about, agitated.

“Don’t you go back to ‘em. Have a night out. You stop here tonight,” Jim said suddenly, in a quiet intimate tone.

The stranger turned his head and looked at him, considering.

“Yes?” he said. He seemed to be smiling coldly.

“Oh, but!” cried Josephine. “Your wife and your children! Won’t they be awfully bothered? Isn’t it awfully unkind to them?”

She rose in her eagerness. He sat turning up his face to her. She could not understand his expression.

“Won’t you go home to them?” she said, hysterical.

“Not tonight,” he replied quietly, again smiling.

“You’re wrong!” she cried. “You’re wrong!” And so she hurried out of the room in tears.

“Er — what bed do you propose to put him in?” asked Robert rather officer-like.

“Don’t propose at all, my lad,” replied Jim, ironically — he did not like Robert. Then to the stranger he said:

“You’ll be all right on the couch in my room? — it’s a good couch, big enough, plenty of rugs — ” His voice was easy and intimate.

Aaron looked at him, and nodded.

They had another drink each, and at last the two set off, rather stumbling, upstairs. Aaron carried his bowler hat with him.

Robert remained pacing in the drawing-room for some time. Then he went out, to return in a little while. He extinguished the lamps and saw that the fire was safe. Then he went to fasten the window-doors securely. Outside he saw the uncanny glimmer of candles across the lawn. He had half a mind to go out and extinguish them — but he did not. So he went upstairs and the house was quiet. Faint crumbs of snow were falling outside.

When Jim woke in the morning Aaron had gone. Only on the floor were two packets of Christmas-tree candles, fallen from the stranger's pockets. He had gone through the drawing-room door, as he had come. The housemaid said that while she was cleaning the grate in the dining-room she heard someone go into the drawing-room: a parlour-maid had even seen someone come out of Jim's bedroom. But they had both thought it was Jim himself, for he was an unsettled house mate.

There was a thin film of snow, a lovely Christmas morning.

CHAPTER IV. "THE PILLAR OF SALT"

Our story will not yet see daylight. A few days after Christmas, Aaron sat in the open shed at the bottom of his own garden, looking out on the rainy darkness. No one knew he was there. It was some time after six in the evening.

From where he sat, he looked straight up the garden to the house. The blind was not drawn in the middle kitchen, he could see the figures of his wife and one child. There was a light also in the upstairs window. His wife was gone upstairs again. He wondered if she had the baby ill. He could see her figure vaguely behind the lace curtains of the bedroom. It was like looking at his home through the wrong end of a telescope. Now the little girls had gone from the middle room: only to return in a moment.

His attention strayed. He watched the light falling from the window of the next-door house. Uneasily, he looked along the whole range of houses. The street sloped down-hill, and the backs were open to the fields. So he saw a curious succession of lighted windows, between which jutted the intermediary back premises, scullery and outhouse, in dark little blocks. It was something like the keyboard of a piano: more still, like a succession of musical notes. For the rectangular planes of light were of different intensities, some bright and keen, some soft, warm, like candle-light, and there was one surface of pure red light, one or two were almost invisible, dark green. So the long scale of lights seemed to trill across the darkness, now bright, now dim, swelling and sinking. The effect was strange.

And thus the whole private life of the street was threaded in lights. There was a sense of indecent exposure, from so many backs. He felt himself almost in physical contact with this contiguous stretch of back premises. He heard the familiar sound of water gushing from the sink in to the grate, the dropping of a pail outside the door, the clink of a coal shovel, the banging of a door, the sound of voices. So many houses cheek by jowl, so many squirming lives, so many back yards, back doors giving on to the night. It was revolting.

Away in the street itself, a boy was calling the newspaper: " — 'NING POST! — 'NING PO-O-ST!" It was a long, melancholy howl, and seemed to epitomise the whole of the dark, wet, secretive, thickly-inhabited night. A figure passed the window of Aaron's own house, entered, and stood inside the room talking to Mrs. Sisson. It was a young woman in a brown mackintosh and a black hat. She stood under the incandescent light, and her hat nearly knocked the globe. Next

door a man had run out in his shirt sleeves: this time a young, dark-headed collier running to the gate for a newspaper, running bare-headed, coatless, slippered in the rain. He had got his news-sheet, and was returning. And just at that moment the young man's wife came out, shading her candle with a lading tin. She was going to the coal-house for some coal. Her husband passed her on the threshold. She could be heard breaking the bits of coal and placing them on the dustpan. The light from her candle fell faintly behind her. Then she went back, blown by a swirl of wind. But again she was at the door, hastily standing her iron shovel against the wall. Then she shut the back door with a bang. These noises seemed to scrape and strike the night.

In Aaron's own house, the young person was still talking to Mrs. Sisson. Millicent came out, sheltering a candle with her hand. The candle blew out. She ran indoors, and emerged again, her white pinafore fluttering. This time she performed her little journey safely. He could see the faint glimmer of her candle emerging secretly from the closet.

The young person was taking her leave. He could hear her sympathetic — "Well — good night! I hope she'll be no worse. Good night Mrs. Sisson!" She was gone — he heard the windy bang of the street-gate. Presently Millicent emerged again, flitting indoors.

So he rose to his feet, balancing, swaying a little before he started into motion, as so many colliers do. Then he moved along the path towards the house, in the rain and darkness, very slowly edging forwards.

Suddenly the door opened. His wife emerged with a pail. He stepped quietly aside, on to his side garden, among the sweet herbs. He could smell rosemary and sage and hyssop. A low wall divided his garden from his neighbour's. He put his hand on it, on its wetness, ready to drop over should his wife come forward. But she only threw the contents of her pail on the garden and retired again. She might have seen him had she looked. He remained standing where he was, listening to the trickle of rain in the water-butt. The hollow countryside lay beyond him. Sometimes in the windy darkness he could see the red burn of New Brunswick bank, or the brilliant jewels of light clustered at Bestwood Colliery. Away in the dark hollow, nearer, the glare of the electric power-station disturbed the night. So again the wind swirled the rain across all these hieroglyphs of the countryside, familiar to him as his own breast.

A motorcar was labouring up the hill. His trained ear attended to it unconsciously. It stopped with a jar. There was a bang of the yard-gate. A shortish dark figure in a bowler hat passed the window. Millicent was drawing down the blind. It was the doctor. The blind was drawn, he could see no more.

Stealthily he began to approach the house. He stood by the climbing rose of

the porch, listening. He heard voices upstairs. Perhaps the children would be downstairs. He listened intently. Voices were upstairs only. He quietly opened the door. The room was empty, save for the baby, who was cooing in her cradle. He crossed to the hall. At the foot of the stairs he could hear the voice of the Indian doctor: "Now little girl, you must just keep still and warm in bed, and not cry for the moon." He said "de moon," just as ever. — Marjory must be ill.

So Aaron quietly entered the parlour. It was a cold, clammy room, dark. He could hear footsteps passing outside on the asphalt pavement below the window, and the wind howling with familiar cadence. He began feeling for something in the darkness of the music-rack beside the piano. He touched and felt — he could not find what he wanted. Perplexed, he turned and looked out of the window. Through the iron railing of the front wall he could see the little motorcar sending its straight beams of light in front of it, up the street.

He sat down on the sofa by the window. The energy had suddenly left all his limbs. He sat with his head sunk, listening. The familiar room, the familiar voice of his wife and his children — he felt weak as if he were dying. He felt weak like a drowning man who acquiesces in the waters. His strength was gone, he was sinking back. He would sink back to it all, float henceforth like a drowned man.

So he heard voices coming nearer from upstairs, feet moving. They were coming down.

"No, Mrs. Sisson, you needn't worry," he heard the voice of the doctor on the stairs. "If she goes on as she is, she'll be all right. Only she must be kept warm and quiet — warm and quiet — that's the chief thing."

"Oh, when she has those bouts I can't bear it," Aaron heard his wife's voice.

They were downstairs. Their feet click-clicked on the tiled passage. They had gone into the middle room. Aaron sat and listened.

"She won't have any more bouts. If she does, give her a few drops from the little bottle, and raise her up. But she won't have any more," the doctor said.

"If she does, I s'll go off my head, I know I shall."

"No, you won't. No, you won't do anything of the sort. You won't go off your head. You'll keep your head on your shoulders, where it ought to be," protested the doctor.

"But it nearly drives me mad."

"Then don't let it. The child won't die, I tell you. She will be all right, with care. Who have you got sitting up with her? You're not to sit up with her tonight, I tell you. Do you hear me?"

"Miss Smitham's coming in. But it's no good — I shall have to sit up. I shall HAVE to."

“I tell you you won’t. You obey ME. I know what’s good for you as well as for her. I am thinking of you as much as of her.”

“But I can’t bear it — all alone.” This was the beginning of tears. There was a dead silence — then a sound of Millicent weeping with her mother. As a matter of fact, the doctor was weeping too, for he was an emotional sympathetic soul, over forty.

“Never mind — never mind — you aren’t alone,” came the doctor’s matter-of-fact voice, after a loud nose-blowing. “I am here to help you. I will do whatever I can — whatever I can.”

“I can’t bear it. I can’t bear it,” wept the woman.

Another silence, another nose-blowing, and again the doctor:

“You’ll HAVE to bear it — I tell you there’s nothing else for it. You’ll have to bear it — but we’ll do our best for you. I will do my best for you — always — ALWAYS — in sickness or out of sickness — There!” He pronounced there oddly, not quite dhere.

“You haven’t heard from your husband?” he added.

“I had a letter — ” — sobs — ”from the bank this morning.”

“FROM DE BANK?”

“Telling me they were sending me so much per month, from him, as an allowance, and that he was quite well, but he was travelling.”

“Well then, why not let him travel? You can live.”

“But to leave me alone,” there was burning indignation in her voice. “To go off and leave me with every responsibility, to leave me with all the burden.”

“Well I wouldn’t trouble about him. Aren’t you better off without him?”

“I am. I am,” she cried fiercely. “When I got that letter this morning, I said MAY EVIL BEFALL YOU, YOU SELFISH DEMON. And I hope it may.”

“Well-well, well-well, don’t fret. Don’t be angry, it won’t make it any better, I tell you.”

“Angry! I AM angry. I’m worse than angry. A week ago I hadn’t a grey hair in my head. Now look here — ” There was a pause.

“Well-well, well-well, never mind. You will be all right, don’t you bother. Your hair is beautiful anyhow.”

“What makes me so mad is that he should go off like that — never a word — coolly takes his hook. I could kill him for it.”

“Were you ever happy together?”

“We were all right at first. I know I was fond of him. But he’d kill anything. — He kept himself back, always kept himself back, couldn’t give himself — ”

There was a pause.

“Ah well,” sighed the doctor. “Marriage is a mystery. I’m glad I’m not

entangled in it.”

“Yes, to make some woman’s life a misery. — I’m sure it was death to live with him, he seemed to kill everything off inside you. He was a man you couldn’t quarrel with, and get it over. Quiet — quiet in his tempers, and selfish through and through. I’ve lived with him twelve years — I know what it is. Killing! You don’t know what he was — ”

“I think I knew him. A fair man? Yes?” said the doctor.

“Fair to look at. — There’s a photograph of him in the parlour — taken when he was married — and one of me. — Yes, he’s fairhaired.”

Aaron guessed that she was getting a candle to come into the parlour. He was tempted to wait and meet them — and accept it all again. Devilishly tempted, he was. Then he thought of her voice, and his heart went cold. Quick as thought, he obeyed his first impulse. He felt behind the couch, on the floor where the curtains fell. Yes — the bag was there. He took it at once. In the next breath he stepped out of the room and tip-toed into the passage. He retreated to the far end, near the street door, and stood behind the coats that hung on the hall-stand.

At that moment his wife came into the passage, holding a candle. She was red-eyed with weeping, and looked frail.

“Did YOU leave the parlour door open?” she asked of Millicent, suspiciously.

“No,” said Millicent from the kitchen.

The doctor, with his soft, Oriental tread followed Mrs. Sisson into the parlour. Aaron saw his wife hold up the candle before his portrait and begin to weep. But he knew her. The doctor laid his hand softly on her arm, and left it there, sympathetically. Nor did he remove it when Millicent stole into the room, looking very woe-begone and important. The wife wept silently, and the child joined in.

“Yes, I know him,” said the doctor. “If he thinks he will be happier when he’s gone away, you must be happier too, Mrs. Sisson. That’s all. Don’t let him triumph over you by making you miserable. You enjoy yourself as well. You’re only a girl — -”

But a tear came from his eye, and he blew his nose vigorously on a large white silk handkerchief, and began to polish his pince nez. Then he turned, and they all bundled out of the room.

The doctor took his departure. Mrs. Sisson went almost immediately upstairs, and Millicent shortly crept after her. Then Aaron, who had stood motionless as if turned to a pillar of salt, went quietly down the passage and into the living room. His face was very pale, ghastly-looking. He caught a glimpse of himself in the mirror over the mantel, as he passed, and felt weak, as if he were really a criminal. But his heart did not relax, nevertheless. So he hurried into the night,

down the garden, climbed the fence into the field, and went away across the field in the rain, towards the highroad.

He felt sick in every fibre. He almost hated the little handbag he carried, which held his flute and piccolo. It seemed a burden just then — a millstone round his neck. He hated the scene he had left — and he hated the hard, inviolable heart that stuck unchanging in his own breast.

Coming to the highroad, he saw a tall, luminous tram-car roving along through the rain. The trams ran across country from town to town. He dared not board, because people knew him. So he took a side road, and walked in a detour for two miles. Then he came out on the highroad again and waited for a tram-car. The rain blew on his face. He waited a long time for the last car.

CHAPTER V. AT THE OPERA

A friend had given Josephine Ford a box at the opera for one evening; our story continues by night. The box was large and important, near the stage. Josephine and Julia were there, with Robert and Jim — also two more men. The women sat in the front of the box, conspicuously. They were both poor, they were rather excited. But they belonged to a set which looked on social triumphs as a downfall that one allows oneself. The two men, Lilly and Struthers, were artists, the former literary, the latter a painter. Lilly sat by Josephine in the front of the box: he was her little lion of the evening.

Few women can sit in the front of a big box, on a crowded and full-swing opera night, without thrilling and dilating. There is an intoxication in being thus thrust forward, conspicuous and enhanced, right in the eye of the vast crowd that lines the hollow shell of the auditorium. Thus even Josephine and Julia leaned their elbows and poised their heads regally, looking condescendingly down upon the watchful world. They were two poor women, having nothing to do with society. Half bohemians.

Josephine was an artist. In Paris she was a friend of a very fashionable dressmaker and decorator, master of modern elegance. Sometimes she designed dresses for him, and sometimes she accepted from him a commission to decorate a room. Usually at her last sou, it gave her pleasure to dispose of costly and exquisite things for other people, and then be rid of them.

This evening her dress was a simple, but a marvellously poised thing of black and silver: in the words of the correct journal. With her tight, black, bright hair, her arched brows, her dusky-ruddy face and her bare shoulders; her strange equanimity, her long, slow, slanting looks; she looked foreign and frightening, clear as a cameo, but dark, far off. Julia was the English beauty, in a lovely blue dress. Her hair was becomingly untidy on her low brow, her dark blue eyes wandered and got excited, her nervous mouth twitched. Her high-pitched, sing-song voice and her hurried laugh could be heard in the theatre. She twisted a beautiful little fan that a dead artist had given her.

Not being fashionable, they were in the box when the overture began. The opera was Verdi — Aida. If it is impossible to be in an important box at the opera without experiencing the strange intoxication of social pre-eminence, it is just as impossible to be there without some feeling of horror at the sight the stage presents.

Josephine leaned her elbow and looked down: she knew how arresting that proud, rather stiff bend of her head was. She had some aboriginal American in her blood. But as she looked, she pursed her mouth. The artist in her forgot everything, she was filled with disgust. The sham Egypt of Aida hid from her nothing of its shame. The singers were all colour-washed, deliberately colour-washed to a bright orange tint. The men had oblong dabs of black wool under their lower lip; the beard of the mighty Pharaohs. This oblong dab shook and wagged to the singing.

The vulgar bodies of the fleshy women were unendurable. They all looked such good meat. Why were their haunches so prominent? It was a question Josephine could not solve. She scanned their really expensive, brilliant clothing. It was nearly right — nearly splendid. It only lacked that last subtlety which the world always lacks, the last final clinching which puts calm into a sea of fabric, and yet is the opposite pole to machine fixity.

But the leading tenor was the chief pain. He was large, stout, swathed in a cummerbund, and looked like a eunuch. This fattish, emasculated look seems common in stage heroes — even the extremely popular. The tenor sang bravely, his mouth made a large, coffin-shaped, yawning gap in his orange face, his little beard fluttered oddly, like a tail. He turned up his eyes to Josephine's box as he sang — that being the regulation direction. Meanwhile his abdomen shook as he caught his breath, the flesh of his fat, naked arms swayed.

Josephine looked down with the fixed gravity of a Red Indian, immovable, inscrutable. It was not till the scene was ended that she lifted her head as if breaking a spell, sent the point of her tongue rapidly over her dried lips, and looked round into the box. Her brown eyes expressed shame, fear, and disgust. A curious grimace went over her face — a grimace only to be expressed by the exclamation *Merde!* But she was mortally afraid of society, and its fixed institutions. Rapidly she scanned the eyes of her friends in the box. She rested on the eyes of Lilly, a dark, ugly man.

"Isn't it nasty?" she said.

"You shouldn't look so closely," he said. But he took it calmly, easily, whilst she felt floods of burning disgust, a longing to destroy it all.

"Oh-ho-ho!" laughed Julia. "It's so fu-nny — so funny!"

"Of course we are too near," said Robert.

"Say you admire that pink fondant over there," said Struthers, indicating with his eyebrows a blond large woman in white satin with pink edging, who sat in a box opposite, on the upper tier.

"Oh, the fondant — exactly — the fondant! Yes, I admire her immensely! Isn't she exactly IT!" sang Julia.

Josephine was scanning the auditorium. So many myriads of faces — like beads on a bead-work pattern — all bead-work, in different layers. She bowed to various acquaintances — mostly Americans in uniform, whom she had known in Paris. She smiled to Lady Cochrane, two boxes off — Lady Cochrane had given her the box. But she felt rather coldly towards her.

The curtain rose, the opera wound its slow length along. The audience loved it. They cheered with mad enthusiasm. Josephine looked down on the choppy sea of applause, white gloves clapping, heads shaking. The noise was strange and rattling. What a curious multiple object a theatre-audience was! It seemed to have a million heads, a million hands, and one monstrous, unnatural consciousness. The singers appeared before the curtain — the applause rose up like clouds of dust.

“Oh, isn’t it too wonderful!” cried Julia. “I am wild with excitement. Are you all of you?”

“Absolutely wild,” said Lilly laconically.

“Where is Scott to-night?” asked Struthers.

Julia turned to him and gave him a long, queer look from her dark blue eyes.

“He’s in the country,” she said, rather enigmatic.

“Don’t you know, he’s got a house down in Dorset,” said Robert, verbally rushing in. “He wants Julia to go down and stay.”

“Is she going?” said Lilly.

“She hasn’t decided,” replied Robert.

“Oh! What’s the objection?” asked Struthers.

“Well, none whatsoever, as far as can be seen, except that she can’t make up her mind,” replied Robert.

“Julia’s got no mind,” said Jim rudely.

“Oh! Hear the brotherly verdict!” laughed Julia hurriedly.

“You mean to go down to Dorset alone!” said Struthers.

“Why not?” replied Robert, answering for her.

“And stay how long?”

“Oh — as long as it lasts,” said Robert again.

“Starting with eternity,” said Lilly, “and working back to a fortnight.”

“And what’s the matter? — looks bad in the eyes of the world?”

“Yes — about that. Afraid of compromising herself — ”

Lilly looked at them.

“Depends what you take the world to mean. Do you mean us in this box, or the crew outside there?” he jerked his head towards the auditorium.

“Do you think, Lilly, that we’re the world?” said Robert ironically.

“Oh, yes, I guess we’re shipwrecked in this box, like Robinson Crusoes. And

what we do on our own little island matters to us alone. As for the infinite crowds of howling savages outside there in the unspeakable, all you've got to do is mind they don't scrap you."

"But WON'T they?" said Struthers.

"Not unless you put your head in their hands," said Lilly.

"I don't know — " said Jim.

But the curtain had risen, they hushed him into silence.

All through the next scene, Julia puzzled herself, as to whether she should go down to the country and live with Scott. She had carried on a nervous kind of amour with him, based on soul sympathy and emotional excitement. But whether to go and live with him? She didn't know if she wanted to or not: and she couldn't for her life find out. She was in that nervous state when desire seems to evaporate the moment fulfilment is offered.

When the curtain dropped she turned.

"You see," she said, screwing up her eyes, "I have to think of Robert." She cut the word in two, with an odd little hitch in her voice — "ROB-ert."

"My dear Julia, can't you believe that I'm tired of being thought of," cried Robert, flushing.

Julia screwed up her eyes in a slow smile, oddly cogitating.

"Well, who AM I to think of?" she asked.

"Yourself," said Lilly.

"Oh, yes! Why, yes! I never thought of that!" She gave a hurried little laugh. "But then it's no FUN to think about oneself," she cried flatly. "I think about ROB-ert, and SCOTT." She screwed up her eyes and peered oddly at the company.

"Which of them will find you the greatest treat," said Lilly sarcastically.

"Anyhow," interjected Robert nervously, "it will be something new for Scott."

"Stale buns for you, old boy," said Jim drily.

"I don't say so. But — " exclaimed the flushed, full-blooded Robert, who was nothing if not courteous to women.

"How long ha' you been married? Eh?" asked Jim.

"Six years!" sang Julia sweetly.

"Good God!"

"You see," said Robert, "Julia can't decide anything for herself. She waits for someone else to decide, then she puts her spoke in."

"Put it plainly — " began Struthers.

"But don't you know, it's no USE putting it plainly," cried Julia.

"But DO you want to be with Scott, out and out, or DON'T you?" said Lilly.

"Exactly!" chimed Robert. "That's the question for you to answer Julia."

“I WON’T answer it,” she cried. “Why should I?” And she looked away into the restless hive of the theatre. She spoke so wildly that she attracted attention. But it half pleased her. She stared abstractedly down at the pit.

The men looked at one another in some comic consternation.

“Oh, damn it all!” said the long Jim, rising and stretching himself. “She’s dead nuts on Scott. She’s all over him. She’d have eloped with him weeks ago if it hadn’t been so easy. She can’t stand it that Robert offers to hand her into the taxi.”

He gave his malevolent grin round the company, then went out. He did not reappear for the next scene.

“Of course, if she loves Scott — ” began Struthers.

Julia suddenly turned with wild desperation, and cried:

“I like him tremendously — tre-men-dous-ly! He DOES understand.”

“Which we don’t,” said Robert.

Julia smiled her long, odd smile in their faces: one might almost say she smiled in their teeth.

“What do YOU think, Josephine?” asked Lilly.

Josephine was leaning forward. She started. Her tongue went rapidly over her lips. “Who — ? I — ?” she exclaimed.

“Yes.”

“I think Julia should go with Scott,” said Josephine. “She’ll bother with the idea till she’s done it. She loves him, really.”

“Of course she does,” cried Robert.

Julia, with her chin resting on her arms, in a position which irritated the neighbouring Lady Cochrane sincerely, was gazing with unseeing eyes down upon the stalls.

“Well then — ” began Struthers. But the music struck up softly. They were all rather bored. Struthers kept on making small, half audible remarks — which was bad form, and displeased Josephine, the hostess of the evening.

When the curtain came down for the end of the act, the men got up. Lilly’s wife, Tanny, suddenly appeared. She had come on after a dinner engagement.

“Would you like tea or anything?” Lilly asked.

The women refused. The men filtered out on to the crimson and white, curving corridor. Julia, Josephine and Tanny remained in the box. Tanny was soon hitched on to the conversation in hand.

“Of course,” she replied, “one can’t decide such a thing like drinking a cup of tea.”

“Of course, one can’t, dear Tanny,” said Julia.

“After all, one doesn’t leave one’s husband every day, to go and live with

another man. Even if one looks on it as an experiment — .”

“It’s difficult!” cried Julia. “It’s difficult! I feel they all want to FORCE me to decide. It’s cruel.”

“Oh, men with their beastly logic, their either-this-or-that stunt, they are an awful bore. — But of course, Robert can’t love you REALLY, or he’d want to keep you. I can see Lilly discussing such a thing for ME. But then you don’t love Robert either,” said Tanny.

“I do! Oh, I do, Tanny! I DO love him, I love him dearly. I think he’s beautiful. Robert’s beautiful. And he NEEDS me. And I need him too. I need his support. Yes, I do love him.”

“But you like Scott better,” said Tanny.

“Only because he — he’s different,” sang Julia, in long tones. “You see Scott has his art. His art matters. And ROB-ert — Robert is a dilettante, don’t you think — he’s dilettante — ” She screwed up her eyes at Tanny. Tanny cogitated.

“Of course I don’t think that matters,” she replied.

“But it does, it matters tremendously, dear Tanny, tremendously.”

“Of course,” Tanny sheered off. “I can see Scott has great attractions — a great warmth somewhere — ”

“Exactly!” cried Julia. “He UNDERSTANDS!”

“And I believe he’s a real artist. You might even work together. You might write his librettos.”

“Yes! — Yes! — ” Julia spoke with a long, pondering hiss.

“It might be AWFULLY nice,” said Tanny rapturously.

“Yes! — It might! — It might — !” pondered Julia. Suddenly she gave herself a shake. Then she laughed hurriedly, as if breaking from her line of thought.

“And wouldn’t Robert be an AWFULLY nice lover for Josephine! Oh, wouldn’t that be splendid!” she cried, with her high laugh.

Josephine, who had been gazing down into the orchestra, turned now, flushing darkly.

“But I don’t want a lover, Julia,” she said, hurt.

“Josephine dear! Dear old Josephine! Don’t you really! Oh, yes, you do. — I want one so BADLY,” cried Julia, with her shaking laugh. “Robert’s awfully good to me. But we’ve been married six years. And it does make a difference, doesn’t it, Tanny dear?”

“A great difference,” said Tanny.

“Yes, it makes a difference, it makes a difference,” mused Julia. “Dear old Rob-ert — I wouldn’t hurt him for worlds. I wouldn’t. Do you think it would hurt Robert?”

She screwed up her eyes, looking at Tanny.

“Perhaps it would do Robert good to be hurt a little,” said Tanny. “He’s so well-nourished.”

“Yes! — Yes! — I see what you mean, Tanny! — Poor old ROB-ert! Oh, poor old Rob-ert, he’s so young!”

“He DOES seem young,” said Tanny. “One doesn’t forgive it.”

“He is young,” said Julia. “I’m five years older than he. He’s only twenty-seven. Poor Old Robert.”

“Robert is young, and inexperienced,” said Josephine, suddenly turning with anger. “But I don’t know why you talk about him.”

“Is he inexperienced, Josephine dear? IS he?” sang Julia. Josephine flushed darkly, and turned away.

“Ah, he’s not so innocent as all that,” said Tanny roughly. “Those young young men, who seem so fresh, they’re deep enough, really. They’re far less innocent really than men who are experienced.”

“They are, aren’t they, Tanny,” repeated Julia softly. “They’re old — older than the Old Man of the Seas, sometimes, aren’t they? Incredibly old, like little boys who know too much — aren’t they? Yes!” She spoke quietly, seriously, as if it had struck her.

Below, the orchestra was coming in. Josephine was watching closely. Julia became aware of this.

“Do you see anybody we know, Josephine?” she asked.

Josephine started.

“No,” she said, looking at her friends quickly and furtively.

“Dear old Josephine, she knows all sorts of people,” sang Julia.

At that moment the men returned.

“Have you actually come back!” exclaimed Tanny to them. They sat down without answering. Jim spread himself as far as he could, in the narrow space. He stared upwards, wrinkling his ugly, queer face. It was evident he was in one of his moods.

“If only somebody loved me!” he complained. “If only somebody loved me I should be all right. I’m going to pieces.” He sat up and peered into the faces of the women.

“But we ALL love you,” said Josephine, laughing uneasily. “Why aren’t you satisfied?”

“I’m not satisfied. I’m not satisfied,” murmured Jim.

“Would you like to be wrapped in swaddling bands and laid at the breast?” asked Lilly, disagreeably.

Jim opened his mouth in a grin, and gazed long and malevolently at his questioner.

“Yes,” he said. Then he sprawled his long six foot of limb and body across the box again.

“You should try loving somebody, for a change,” said Tanny. “You’ve been loved too often. Why not try and love somebody?”

Jim eyed her narrowly.

“I couldn’t love YOU,” he said, in vicious tones.

“A la bonne heure!” said Tanny.

But Jim sank his chin on his chest, and repeated obstinately:

“I want to be loved.”

“How many times have you been loved?” Robert asked him. “It would be rather interesting to know.”

Jim looked at Robert long and slow, but did not answer.

“Did you ever keep count?” Tanny persisted.

Jim looked up at her, malevolent.

“I believe I did,” he replied.

“Forty is the age when a man should begin to reckon up,” said Lilly.

Jim suddenly sprang to his feet, and brandished his fists.

“I’ll pitch the lot of you over the bloody rail,” he said.

He glared at them, from under his bald, wrinkled forehead. Josephine glanced round. She had become a dusky white colour. She was afraid of him, and she disliked him intensely nowadays.

“Do you recognise anyone in the orchestra?” she asked.

The party in the box had become dead silent. They looked down. The conductor was at his stand. The music began. They all remained silent and motionless during the next scene, each thinking his own thoughts. Jim was uncomfortable. He wanted to make good. He sat with his elbows on his knees, grinning slightly, looking down. At the next interval he stood up suddenly.

“It IS the chap — What?” he exclaimed excitedly, looking round at his friends.

“Who?” said Tanny.

“It IS he?” said Josephine quietly, meeting Jim’s eye.

“Sure!” he barked.

He was leaning forward over the ledge, rattling a programme in his hand, as if trying to attract attention. Then he made signals.

“There you are!” he exclaimed triumphantly. “That’s the chap.”

“Who? Who?” they cried.

But neither Jim nor Josephine would vouchsafe an answer.

The next was the long interval. Jim and Josephine gazed down at the orchestra. The musicians were laying aside their instruments and rising. The

ugly fire-curtain began slowly to descend. Jim suddenly bolted out.

“Is it that man Aaron Sisson?” asked Robert.

“Where? Where?” cried Julia. “It can’t be.”

But Josephine’s face was closed and silent. She did not answer.

The whole party moved out on to the crimson-carpeted gangway. Groups of people stood about chatting, men and women were passing along, to pay visits or to find drinks. Josephine’s party stared around, talking desultorily. And at length they perceived Jim stalking along, leading Aaron Sisson by the arm. Jim was grinning, the flautist looked unwilling. He had a comely appearance, in his white shirt — a certain comely blondness and repose. And as much a gentleman as anybody.

“Well!” cried Josephine to him. “How do you come here?”

“I play the flute,” he answered, as he shook hands.

The little crowd stood in the gangway and talked.

“How wonderful of you to be here!” cried Julia.

He laughed.

“Do you think so?” he answered.

“Yes, I do. — It seems so FAR from Shottle House and Christmas Eve. — Oh, wasn’t it exciting!” cried Julia.

Aaron looked at her, but did not answer.

“We’ve heard all about you,” said Tanny playfully.

“Oh, yes,” he replied.

“Come!” said Josephine, rather irritated. “We crowd up the gangway.” And she led the way inside the box.

Aaron stood and looked down at the dishevelled theatre.

“You get all the view,” he said.

“We do, don’t we!” cried Julia.

“More than’s good for us,” said Lilly.

“Tell us what you are doing. You’ve got a permanent job?” asked Josephine.

“Yes — at present.”

“Ah! It’s more interesting for you than at Beldover.”

She had taken her seat. He looked down at her dusky young face. Her voice was always clear and measured.

“It’s a change,” he said, smiling.

“Oh, it must be more than that,” she said. “Why, you must feel a whole difference. It’s a whole new life.”

He smiled, as if he were laughing at her silently. She flushed.

“But isn’t it?” she persisted.

“Yes. It can be,” he replied.

He looked as if he were quietly amused, but dissociated. None of the people in the box were quite real to him. He was not really amused. Julia found him dull, stupid. Tanny also was offended that he could not perceive her. The men remained practically silent.

“You’re a chap I always hoped would turn up again,” said Jim.

“Oh, yes!” replied Aaron, smiling as if amused.

“But perhaps he doesn’t like us! Perhaps he’s not glad that we turned up,” said Julia, leaving her sting.

The flautist turned and looked at her.

“You can’t REMEMBER us, can you?” she asked.

“Yes,” he said. “I can remember you.”

“Oh,” she laughed. “You are unflattering.”

He was annoyed. He did not know what she was getting at.

“How are your wife and children?” she asked spitefully.

“All right, I think.”

“But you’ve been back to them?” cried Josephine in dismay.

He looked at her, a slow, half smiling look, but did not speak.

“Come and have a drink. Damn the women,” said Jim uncouthly, seizing Aaron by the arm and dragging him off.

CHAPTER VI. TALK

The party stayed to the end of the interminable opera. They had agreed to wait for Aaron. He was to come around to the vestibule for them, after the show. They trooped slowly downstairs into the crush of the entrance hall. Chattering, swirling people, red carpet, palms green against cream-and-gilt walls, small whirlpools of life at the open, dark doorways, men in opera hats steering decisively about-it was the old scene. But there were no taxis — absolutely no taxis. And it was raining. Fortunately the women had brought shoes. They slipped these on. Jim rocked through the crowd, in his tall hat, looking for the flautist.

At last Aaron was found — wearing a bowler hat. Julia groaned in spirit. Josephine's brow knitted. Not that anybody cared, really. But as one must frown at something, why not at the bowler hat? Acquaintances and elegant young men in uniforms insisted on rushing up and bowing and exchanging a few words, either with Josephine, or Jim, or Julia, or Lilly. They were coldly received. The party veered out into the night.

The women hugged their wraps about them, and set off sharply, feeling some repugnance for the wet pavements and the crowd. They had not far to go — only to Jim's rooms in Adelphi. Jim was leading Aaron, holding him by the arm and slightly pinching his muscles. It gave him great satisfaction to have between his fingers the arm-muscles of a working-man, one of the common people, the fons et origo of modern life. Jim was talking rather vaguely about Labour and Robert Smillie, and Bolshevism. He was all for revolution and the triumph of labour.

So they arrived, mounted a dark stair, and entered a large, handsome room, one of the Adams rooms. Jim had furnished it from Heale's with striped hangings, green and white and yellow and dark purple, and with a green-and-black checked carpet, and great stripe-covered chairs and Chesterfield. A big gas-fire was soon glowing in the handsome old fire-place, the panelled room seemed cosy.

While Jim was handing round drinks and sandwiches, and Josephine was making tea, Robert played Bach on the piano — the pianola, rather. The chairs and lounge were in a half-circle round the fire. The party threw off their wraps and sank deep into this expensive comfort of modern bohemia. They needed the Bach to take away the bad taste that Aida had left in their mouths. They needed the whiskey and curacao to rouse their spirits. They needed the profound

comfort in which to sink away from the world. All the men, except Aaron, had been through the war in some way or other. But here they were, in the old setting exactly, the old bohemian routine.

The bell rang, Jim went downstairs. He returned shortly with a frail, elegant woman — fashionable rather than bohemian. She was cream and auburn, Irish, with a slightly-lifted upper lip that gave her a pathetic look. She dropped her wrap and sat down by Julia, taking her hand delicately.

“How are you, darling?” she asked.

“Yes — I’m happy,” said Julia, giving her odd, screwed-up smile.

The pianola stopped, they all chatted indiscriminately. Jim was watching the new-comer — Mrs. Browning — with a concentrated wolfish grin.

“I like her,” he said at last. “I’ve seen her before, haven’t I? — I like her awfully.”

“Yes,” said Josephine, with a slight grunt of a laugh. “He wants to be loved.”

“Oh,” cried Clariss. “So do I!”

“Then there you are!” cried Tanny.

“Alas, no, there we aren’t,” cried Clariss. She was beautiful too, with her lifted upper-lip. “We both want to be loved, and so we miss each other entirely. We run on in two parallel lines, that can never meet.” She laughed low and half sad.

“Doesn’t SHE love you?” said Aaron to Jim amused, indicating Josephine. “I thought you were engaged.”

“HER!” leered Jim vindictively, glancing at Josephine. “She doesn’t love me.”

“Is that true?” asked Robert hastily, of Josephine.

“Why,” she said, “yes. Why should he make me say out here that I don’t love him!”

“Got you my girl,” said Jim.

“Then it’s no engagement?” said Robert.

“Listen to the row fools make, rushing in,” said Jim maliciously.

“No, the engagement is broken,” said Josephine.

“World coming to pieces bit by bit,” said Lilly. Jim was twisting in his chair, and looking like a Chinese dragon, diabolical. The room was uneasy.

“What gives you such a belly-ache for love, Jim?” said Lilly, “or for being loved? Why do you want so badly to be loved?”

“Because I like it, damn you,” barked Jim. “Because I’m in need of it.”

None of them quite knew whether they ought to take it as a joke. It was just a bit too real to be quite pleasant.

“Why are you such a baby?” said Lilly. “There you are, six foot in length, have been a cavalry officer and fought in two wars, and you spend your time crying for somebody to love you. You’re a comic.”

“Am I though?” said Jim. “I’m losing life. I’m getting thin.”

“You don’t look as if you were losing life,” said Lilly.

“Don’t I? I am, though. I’m dying.”

“What of? Lack of life?”

“That’s about it, my young cock. Life’s leaving me.”

“Better sing Tosti’s Farewell to it.”

Jim who had been sprawling full length in his arm-chair, the centre of interest of all the company, suddenly sprang forward and pushed his face, grinning, in the face of Lilly.

“You’re a funny customer, you are,” he said.

Then he turned round in his chair, and saw Clariss sitting at the feet of Julia, with one white arm over her friend’s knee. Jim immediately stuck forward his muzzle and gazed at her. Clariss had loosened her masses of thick, auburn hair, so that it hung half free. Her face was creamy pale, her upper lip lifted with odd pathos! She had rose-rubies in her ears.

“I like HER,” said Jim. “What’s her name?”

“Mrs. Browning. Don’t be so rude,” said Josephine.

“Browning for gravies. Any relation of Robert?”

“Oh, yes! You ask my husband,” came the slow, plangent voice of Clariss.

“You’ve got a husband, have you?”

“Rather! Haven’t I, Juley?”

“Yes,” said Julia, vaguely and wispily. “Yes, dear, you have.”

“And two fine children,” put in Robert.

“No! You don’t mean it!” said Jim. “Who’s your husband? Anybody?”

“Rather!” came the deep voice of Clariss. “He sees to that.”

Jim stared, grinning, showing his pointed teeth, reaching nearer and nearer to Clariss who, in her frail scrap of an evening dress, amethyst and silver, was sitting still in the deep black hearth-rug, her arm over Julia’s knee, taking very little notice of Jim, although he amused her.

“I like you awfully, I say,” he repeated.

“Thanks, I’m sure,” she said.

The others were laughing, sprawling in their chairs, and sipping curacao and taking a sandwich or a cigarette. Aaron Sisson alone sat upright, smiling flickeringly. Josephine watched him, and her pointed tongue went from time to time over her lips.

“But I’m sure,” she broke in, “this isn’t very interesting for the others. Awfully boring! Don’t be silly all the time, Jim, or we must go home.”

Jim looked at her with narrowed eyes. He hated her voice. She let her eye rest on his for a moment. Then she put her cigarette to her lips. Robert was watching

them both.

Josephine took her cigarette from her lips again.

“Tell us about yourself, Mr. Sisson,” she said. “How do you like being in London?”

“I like London,” said Aaron.

Where did he live? Bloomsbury. Did he know many people? No — nobody except a man in the orchestra. How had he got his job? Through an agent. *Etc. Etc.*

“What do you make of the miners?” said Jim, suddenly taking a new line.

“Me?” said Sisson. “I don’t make anything of them.”

“Do you think they’ll make a stand against the government?”

“What for?”

“Nationalisation.”

“They might, one day.”

“Think they’d fight?”

“Fight?”

“Yes.”

Aaron sat laughing.

“What have they to fight for?”

“Why, everything! What haven’t they to fight for?” cried Josephine fiercely. “Freedom, liberty, and escape from this vile system. Won’t they fight for that?”

Aaron sat smiling, slowly shaking his head.

“Nay,” he said, “you mustn’t ask me what they’ll do — I’ve only just left them, for good. They’ll do a lot of cavilling.”

“But won’t they ACT?” cried Josephine.

“Act?” said Aaron. “How, act?”

“Why, defy the government, and take things in their own hands,” said Josephine.

“They might, some time,” said Aaron, rather indifferent.

“I wish they would!” cried Josephine. “My, wouldn’t I love it if they’d make a bloody revolution!”

They were all looking now at her. Her black brows were twitching, in her black and silver dress she looked like a symbol of young disaster.

“Must it be bloody, Josephine?” said Robert.

“Why, yes. I don’t believe in revolutions that aren’t bloody,” said Josephine. “Wouldn’t I love it! I’d go in front with a red flag.”

“It would be rather fun,” said Tanny.

“Wouldn’t it!” cried Josephine.

“Oh, Josey, dear!” cried Julia hysterically. “Isn’t she a red-hot Bolsher! I

should be frightened.”

“No!” cried Josephine. “I should love it.”

“So should I,” said Jim, in a luscious sort of voice. “What price machine-guns at the end of the Strand! That’s a day to live for, what?”

“Ha! Ha!” laughed Clariss, with her deep laugh. “We’d all Bolsh together. I’d give the cheers.”

“I wouldn’t mind getting killed. I’d love it, in a real fight,” said Josephine.

“But, Josephine,” said Robert, “don’t you think we’ve had enough of that sort of thing in the war? Don’t you think it all works out rather stupid and unsatisfying?”

“Ah, but a civil war would be different. I’ve no interest in fighting Germans. But a civil war would be different.”

“That’s a fact, it would,” said Jim.

“Only rather worse,” said Robert.

“No, I don’t agree,” cried Josephine. “You’d feel you were doing something, in a civil war.”

“Pulling the house down,” said Lilly.

“Yes,” she cried. “Don’t you hate it, the house we live in — London — England — America! Don’t you hate them?”

“I don’t like them. But I can’t get much fire in my hatred. They pall on me rather,” said Lilly.

“Ay!” said Aaron, suddenly stirring in his chair.

Lilly and he glanced at one another with a look of recognition.

“Still,” said Tanny, “there’s got to be a clearance some day or other.”

“Oh,” drawled Clariss. “I’m all for a clearance. I’m all for pulling the house down. Only while it stands I do want central heating and a good cook.”

“May I come to dinner?” said Jim.

“Oh, yes. You’d find it rather domestic.”

“Where do you live?”

“Rather far out now — Amersham.”

“Amersham? Where’s that — ?”

“Oh, it’s on the map.”

There was a little lull. Jim gulped down a drink, standing at the sideboard. He was a tall, fine, soldierly figure, and his face, with its little sandy moustache and bald forehead, was odd. Aaron Sisson sat watching him, unconsciously.

“Hello you!” said Jim. “Have one?”

Aaron shook his head, and Jim did not press him. It saved the drinks.

“You believe in love, don’t you?” said Jim, sitting down near Aaron, and grinning at him.

“Love!” said Aaron.

“LOVE! he says,” mocked Jim, grinning at the company.

“What about it, then?” asked Aaron.

“It’s life! Love is life,” said Jim fiercely.

“It’s a vice, like drink,” said Lilly.

“Eh? A vice!” said Jim. “May be for you, old bird.”

“More so still for you,” said Lilly.

“It’s life. It’s life!” reiterated Jim. “Don’t you agree?” He turned wolfishly to Clariss.

“Oh, yes — every time — ” she drawled, nonchalant.

“Here, let’s write it down,” said Lilly. He found a blue pencil and printed in large letters on the old creamy marble of the mantel-piece panel: — LOVE IS LIFE.

Julia suddenly rose and flung her arms asunder wildly.

“Oh, I hate love. I hate it,” she protested.

Jim watched her sardonically.

“Look at her!” he said. “Look at Lesbia who hates love.”

“No, but perhaps it is a disease. Perhaps we are all wrong, and we can’t love properly,” put in Josephine.

“Have another try,” said Jim, — ”I know what love is. I’ve thought about it. Love is the soul’s respiration.”

“Let’s have that down,” said Lilly.

LOVE IS THE SOUL’S RESPIRATION. He printed it on the old mantel-piece.

Jim eyed the letters.

“It’s right,” he said. “Quite right. When you love, your soul breathes in. If you don’t breathe in, you suffocate.”

“What about breathing out?” said Robert. “If you don’t breathe out, you asphyxiate.”

“Right you are, Mock Turtle — ” said Jim maliciously.

“Breathing out is a bloody revolution,” said Lilly.

“You’ve hit the nail on the head,” said Jim solemnly.

“Let’s record it then,” said Lilly. And with the blue pencil he printed:

WHEN YOU LOVE, YOUR SOUL BREATHES IN —

WHEN YOUR SOUL BREATHES OUT, IT’S A BLOODY REVOLUTION.

“I say Jim,” he said. “You must be busting yourself, trying to breathe in.”

“Don’t you be too clever. I’ve thought about it,” said Jim. “When I’m in love, I get a great inrush of energy. I actually feel it rush in — here!” He poked his finger on the pit of his stomach. “It’s the soul’s expansion. And if I can’t get

these rushes of energy, I'M DYING, AND I KNOW I AM."

He spoke the last words with sudden ferocity and desperation.

"All I know is," said Tanny, "you don't look it."

"I AM. I am." Jim protested. "I'm dying. Life's leaving me."

"Maybe you're choking with love," said Robert. "Perhaps you have breathed in so much, you don't know how to let it go again. Perhaps your soul's got a crick in it, with expanding so much."

"You're a bloody young sucking pig, you are," said Jim.

"Even at that age, I've learned my manners," replied Robert.

Jim looked round the party. Then he turned to Aaron Sisson.

"What do you make of 'em, eh?" he said.

Aaron shook his head, and laughed.

"Me?" he said.

But Jim did not wait for an answer.

"I've had enough," said Tanny suddenly rising. "I think you're all silly. Besides, it's getting late."

"She!" said Jim, rising and pointing luridly to Clariss. "She's Love. And HE's the Working People. The hope is these two — " He jerked a thumb at Aaron Sisson, after having indicated Mrs. Browning.

"Oh, how awfully interesting. It's quite a long time since I've been a personification. — I suppose you've never been one before?" said Clariss, turning to Aaron in conclusion.

"No, I don't think I have," he answered.

"I hope personification is right. — Ought to be allegory or something else?" This from Clariss to Robert.

"Or a parable, Clariss," laughed the young lieutenant.

"Goodbye," said Tanny. "I've been awfully bored."

"Have you?" grinned Jim. "Goodbye! Better luck next time."

"We'd better look sharp," said Robert, "if we want to get the tube."

The party hurried through the rainy narrow streets down to the Embankment station. Robert and Julia and Clariss were going west, Lilly and his wife were going to Hampstead, Josephine and Aaron Sisson were going both to Bloomsbury.

"I suppose," said Robert, on the stairs — "Mr. Sisson will see you to your door, Josephine. He lives your way."

"There's no need at all," said Josephine.

The four who were going north went down to the low tube level. It was nearly the last train. The station was half deserted, half rowdy, several fellows were drunk, shouting and crowing. Down there in the bowels of London, after

midnight, everything seemed horrible and unnatural.

“How I hate this London,” said Tanny. She was half Norwegian, and had spent a large part of her life in Norway, before she married Lilly.

“Yes, so do I,” said Josephine. “But if one must earn one’s living one must stay here. I wish I could get back to Paris. But there’s nothing doing for me in France. — When do you go back into the country, both of you?”

“Friday,” said Lilly.

“How lovely for you! — And when will you go to Norway, Tanny?”

“In about a month,” said Tanny.

“You must be awfully pleased.”

“Oh — thankful — THANKFUL to get out of England — ”

“I know. That’s how I feel. Everything is so awful — so dismal and dreary, I find it — ”

They crowded into the train. Men were still yelling like wild beasts — others were asleep — soldiers were singing.

“Have you really broken your engagement with Jim?” shrilled Tanny in a high voice, as the train roared.

“Yes, he’s impossible,” said Josephine. “Perfectly hysterical and impossible.”

“And SELFISH — ” cried Tanny.

“Oh terribly — ” cried Josephine.

“Come up to Hampstead to lunch with us,” said Lilly to Aaron.

“Ay — thank you,” said Aaron.

Lilly scribbled directions on a card. The hot, jaded midnight underground rattled on. Aaron and Josephine got down to change trains.

CHAPTER VII. THE DARK SQUARE GARDEN

Josephine had invited Aaron Sisson to dinner at a restaurant in Soho, one Sunday evening. They had a corner to themselves, and with a bottle of Burgundy she was getting his history from him.

His father had been a shaft-sinker, earning good money, but had been killed by a fall down the shaft when Aaron was only four years old. The widow had opened a shop: Aaron was her only child. She had done well in her shop. She had wanted Aaron to be a schoolteacher. He had served three years apprenticeship, then suddenly thrown it up and gone to the pit.

“But why?” said Josephine.

“I couldn’t tell you. I felt more like it.”

He had a curious quality of an intelligent, almost sophisticated mind, which had repudiated education. On purpose he kept the midland accent in his speech. He understood perfectly what a personification was — and an allegory. But he preferred to be illiterate.

Josephine found out what a miner’s checkweighman was. She tried to find out what sort of wife Aaron had — but, except that she was the daughter of a publican and was delicate in health, she could learn nothing.

“And do you send her money?” she asked.

“Ay,” said Aaron. “The house is mine. And I allow her so much a week out of the money in the bank. My mother left me a bit over a thousand when she died.”

“You don’t mind what I say, do you?” said Josephine.

“No I don’t mind,” he laughed.

He had this pleasant-seeming courteous manner. But he really kept her at a distance. In some things he reminded her of Robert: blond, erect, nicely built, fresh and English-seeming. But there was a curious cold distance to him, which she could not get across. An inward indifference to her — perhaps to everything. Yet his laugh was so handsome.

“Will you tell me why you left your wife and children? — Didn’t you love them?”

Aaron looked at the odd, round, dark muzzle of the girl. She had had her hair bobbed, and it hung in odd dark folds, very black, over her ears.

“Why I left her?” he said. “For no particular reason. They’re all right without me.”

Josephine watched his face. She saw a pallor of suffering under its freshness,

and a strange tension in his eyes.

“But you couldn’t leave your little girls for no reason at all — ”

“Yes, I did. For no reason — except I wanted to have some free room round me — to loose myself — ”

“You mean you wanted love?” flashed Josephine, thinking he said lose.

“No, I wanted fresh air. I don’t know what I wanted. Why should I know?”

“But we must know: especially when other people will be hurt,” said she.

“Ah, well! A breath of fresh air, by myself. I felt forced to feel — I feel if I go back home now, I shall be FORCED — forced to love — or care — or something.”

“Perhaps you wanted more than your wife could give you,” she said.

“Perhaps less. She’s made up her mind she loves me, and she’s not going to let me off.”

“Did you never love her?” said Josephine.

“Oh, yes. I shall never love anybody else. But I’m damned if I want to be a lover any more. To her or to anybody. That’s the top and bottom of it. I don’t want to CARE, when care isn’t in me. And I’m not going to be forced to it.”

The fat, aproned French waiter was hovering near. Josephine let him remove the plates and the empty bottle.

“Have more wine,” she said to Aaron.

But he refused. She liked him because of his dead-level indifference to his surroundings. French waiters and foreign food — he noticed them in his quick, amiable-looking fashion — but he was indifferent. Josephine was piqued. She wanted to pierce this amiable aloofness of his.

She ordered coffee and brandies.

“But you don’t want to get away from EVERYTHING, do you? I myself feel so LOST sometimes — so dreadfully alone: not in a silly sentimental fashion, because men keep telling me they love me, don’t you know. But my LIFE seems alone, for some reason — ”

“Haven’t you got relations?” he said.

“No one, now mother is dead. Nothing nearer than aunts and cousins in America. I suppose I shall see them all again one day. But they hardly count over here.”

“Why don’t you get married?” he said. “How old are you?”

“I’m twenty-five. How old are you?”

“Thirty-three.”

“You might almost be any age. — I don’t know why I don’t get married. In a way, I hate earning my own living — yet I go on — and I like my work — ”

“What are you doing now?”

“I’m painting scenery for a new play — rather fun — I enjoy it. But I often wonder what will become of me.”

“In what way?”

She was almost affronted.

“What becomes of me? Oh, I don’t know. And it doesn’t matter, not to anybody but myself.”

“What becomes of anybody, anyhow? We live till we die. What do you want?”

“Why, I keep saying I want to get married and feel sure of something. But I don’t know — I feel dreadful sometimes — as if every minute would be the last. I keep going on and on — I don’t know what for — and IT keeps going on and on — goodness knows what it’s all for.”

“You shouldn’t bother yourself,” he said. “You should just let it go on and on — ”

“But I MUST bother,” she said. “I must think and feel — ”

“You’ve no occasion,” he said.

“How — ?” she said, with a sudden grunting, unhappy laugh. Then she lit a cigarette.

“No,” she said. “What I should really like more than anything would be an end of the world. I wish the world would come to an end.”

He laughed, and poured his drops of brandy down his throat.

“It won’t, for wishing,” he said.

“No, that’s the awful part of it. It’ll just go on and on — Doesn’t it make you feel you’d go mad?”

He looked at her and shook his head.

“You see it doesn’t concern me,” he said. “So long as I can float by myself.”

“But ARE you SATISFIED!” she cried.

“I like being by myself — I hate feeling and caring, and being forced into it. I want to be left alone — ”

“You aren’t very polite to your hostess of the evening,” she said, laughing a bit miserably.

“Oh, we’re all right,” he said. “You know what I mean — ”

“You like your own company? Do you? — Sometimes I think I’m nothing when I’m alone. Sometimes I think I surely must be nothing — nothingness.”

He shook his head.

“No,” he said. “No. I only want to be left alone.”

“Not to have anything to do with anybody?” she queried ironically.

“Not to any extent.”

She watched him — and then she bubbled with a laugh.

“I think you’re funny,” she said. “You don’t mind?”

“No — why — It’s just as you see it. — Jim Bricknell’s a rare comic, to my eye.”

“Oh, him! — no, not actually. He’s self-conscious and selfish and hysterical. It isn’t a bit funny after a while.”

“I only know what I’ve seen,” said Aaron. “You’d both of you like a bloody revolution, though.”

“Yes. Only when it came he wouldn’t be there.”

“Would you?”

“Yes, indeed I would. I would give everything to be in it. I’d give heaven and earth for a great big upheaval — and then darkness.”

“Perhaps you’ll get it, when you die,” said Aaron.

“Oh, but I don’t want to die and leave all this standing. I hate it so.”

“Why do you?”

“But don’t you?”

“No, it doesn’t really bother me.”

“It makes me feel I can’t live.”

“I can’t see that.”

“But you always disagree with one!” said Josephine. “How do you like Lilly? What do you think of him?”

“He seems sharp,” said Aaron.

“But he’s more than sharp.”

“Oh, yes! He’s got his finger in most pies.”

“And doesn’t like the plums in any of them,” said Josephine tartly.

“What does he do?”

“Writes — stories and plays.”

“And makes it pay?”

“Hardly at all. — They want us to go. Shall we?” She rose from the table. The waiter handed her her cloak, and they went out into the blowy dark night. She folded her wrap round her, and hurried forward with short, sharp steps. There was a certain Parisian chic and mincingness about her, even in her walk: but underneath, a striding, savage suggestion as if she could leg it in great strides, like some savage squaw.

Aaron pressed his bowler hat down on his brow.

“Would you rather take a bus?” she said in a high voice, because of the wind.

“I’d rather walk.”

“So would I.”

They hurried across the Charing Cross Road, where great buses rolled and rocked, crammed with people. Her heels clicked sharply on the pavement, as

they walked east. They crossed Holborn, and passed the Museum. And neither of them said anything.

When they came to the corner, she held out her hand.

“Look!” she said. “Don’t come any further: don’t trouble.”

“I’ll walk round with you: unless you’d rather not.”

“No — But do you want to bother?”

“It’s no bother.”

So they pursued their way through the high wind, and turned at last into the old, beautiful square. It seemed dark and deserted, dark like a savage wilderness in the heart of London. The wind was roaring in the great bare trees of the centre, as if it were some wild dark grove deep in a forgotten land.

Josephine opened the gate of the square garden with her key, and let it slam to behind him.

“How wonderful the wind is!” she shrilled. “Shall we listen to it for a minute?”

She led him across the grass past the shrubs to the big tree in the centre. There she climbed up to a seat. He sat beside her. They sat in silence, looking at the darkness. Rain was blowing in the wind. They huddled against the big tree-trunk, for shelter, and watched the scene.

Beyond the tall shrubs and the high, heavy railings the wet street gleamed silently. The houses of the Square rose like a cliff on this inner dark sea, dimly lighted at occasional windows. Boughs swayed and sang. A taxi-cab swirled round a corner like a cat, and purred to a standstill. There was a light of an open hall door. But all far away, it seemed, unthinkably far away. Aaron sat still and watched. He was frightened, it all seemed so sinister, this dark, bristling heart of London. Wind boomed and tore like waves ripping a shingle beach. The two white lights of the taxi stared round and departed, leaving the coast at the foot of the cliffs deserted, faintly spilled with light from the high lamp. Beyond there, on the outer rim, a policeman passed solidly.

Josephine was weeping steadily all the time, but inaudibly. Occasionally she blew her nose and wiped her face. But he had not realized. She hardly realized herself. She sat near the strange man. He seemed so still and remote — so fascinating.

“Give me your hand,” she said to him, subduedly.

He took her cold hand in his warm, living grasp. She wept more bitterly. He noticed at last.

“Why are you crying?” he said.

“I don’t know,” she replied, rather matter-of-fact, through her tears.

So he let her cry, and said no more, but sat with her cold hand in his warm,

easy clasp.

“You’ll think me a fool,” she said. “I don’t know why I cry.”

“You can cry for nothing, can’t you?” he said.

“Why, yes, but it’s not very sensible.”

He laughed shortly.

“Sensible!” he said.

“You are a strange man,” she said.

But he took no notice.

“Did you ever intend to marry Jim Bricknell?” he asked.

“Yes, of course.”

“I can’t imagine it,” he said.

“Why not?”

Both were watching blankly the roaring night of mid-London, the phantasmagoric old Bloomsbury Square. They were still hand in hand.

“Such as you shouldn’t marry,” he said.

“But why not? I want to.”

“You think you do.”

“Yes indeed I do.”

He did not say any more.

“Why shouldn’t I?” she persisted. “I don’t know — ”

And again he was silent.

“You’ve known some life, haven’t you?” he asked.

“Me? Why?”

“You seem to.”

“Do I? I’m sorry. Do I seem vicious? — No, I’m not vicious. — I’ve seen some life, perhaps — in Paris mostly. But not much. Why do you ask?”

“I wasn’t thinking.”

“But what do you mean? What are you thinking?”

“Nothing. Nothing.”

“Don’t be so irritating,” said she.

But he did not answer, and she became silent also. They sat hand in hand.

“Won’t you kiss me?” came her voice out of the darkness.

He waited some moments, then his voice sounded gently, half mocking, half reproachful.

“Nay!” he said.

“Why not?”

“I don’t want to.”

“Why not?” she asked.

He laughed, but did not reply.

She sat perfectly still for some time. She had ceased to cry. In the darkness her face was set and sullen. Sometimes a spray of rain blew across it. She drew her hand from his, and rose to her feet.

“Ill go in now,” she said.

“You’re not offended, are you?” he asked.

“No. Why?”

They stepped down in the darkness from their perch.

“I wondered.”

She strode off for some little way. Then she turned and said:

“Yes, I think it is rather insulting.”

“Nay,” he said. “Not it! Not it!”

And he followed her to the gate.

She opened with her key, and they crossed the road to her door.

“Good-night,” she said, turning and giving him her hand.

“You’ll come and have dinner with me — or lunch — will you? When shall we make it?” he asked.

“Well, I can’t say for certain — I’m very busy just now. I’ll let you know.”

A policeman shed his light on the pair of them as they stood on the step.

“All right,” said Aaron, dropping back, and she hastily opened the big door, and entered.

CHAPTER VIII. A PUNCH IN THE WIND

The Lillys had a labourer's cottage in Hampshire — pleasant enough. They were poor. Lilly was a little, dark, thin, quick fellow, his wife was strong and fair. They had known Robert and Julia for some years, but Josephine and Jim were new acquaintances, — fairly new.

One day in early spring Lilly had a telegram, "Coming to see you arrive 4:30 — Bricknell." He was surprised, but he and his wife got the spare room ready. And at four o'clock Lilly went off to the station. He was a few minutes late, and saw Jim's tall, rather elegant figure stalking down the station path. Jim had been an officer in the regular army, and still spent hours with his tailor. But instead of being a soldier he was a sort of socialist, and a red-hot revolutionary of a very ineffectual sort.

"Good lad!" he exclaimed, as Lilly came up. "Thought you wouldn't mind."

"Not at all. Let me carry your bag." Jim had a bag and a knapsack.

"I had an inspiration this morning," said Jim. "I suddenly saw that if there was a man in England who could save me, it was you."

"Save you from what?" asked Lilly, rather abashed.

"Eh — ?" and Jim stooped, grinning at the smaller man.

Lilly was somewhat puzzled, but he had a certain belief in himself as a saviour. The two men tramped rather incongruously through the lanes to the cottage.

Tanny was in the doorway as they came up the garden path.

"So nice to see you! Are you all right?" she said.

"A-one!" said Jim, grinning. "Nice of you to have me."

"Oh, we're awfully pleased."

Jim dropped his knapsack on the broad sofa.

"I've brought some food," he said.

"Have you! That's sensible of you. We can't get a great deal here, except just at week-ends," said Tanny.

Jim fished out a pound of sausages and a pot of fish paste.

"How lovely the sausages," said Tanny. "We'll have them for dinner tonight — and we'll have the other for tea now. You'd like a wash?"

But Jim had already opened his bag, taken off his coat, and put on an old one.

"Thanks," he said.

Lilly made the tea, and at length all sat down.

“Well how unexpected this is — and how nice,” said Tanny.

“Jolly — eh?” said Jim.

He ate rapidly, stuffing his mouth too full.

“How is everybody?” asked Tanny.

“All right. Julia’s gone with Cyril Scott. Can’t stand that fellow, can you? What?”

“Yes, I think he’s rather nice,” said Tanny. “What will Robert do?”

“Have a shot at Josephine, apparently.”

“Really? Is he in love with her? I thought so. And she likes him too, doesn’t she?” said Tanny.

“Very likely,” said Jim.

“I suppose you’re jealous,” laughed Tanny.

“Me!” Jim shook his head. “Not a bit. Like to see the ball kept rolling.”

“What have you been doing lately?”

“Been staying a few days with my wife.”

“No, really! I can’t believe it.”

Jim had a French wife, who had divorced him, and two children. Now he was paying visits to this wife again: purely friendly. Tanny did most of the talking. Jim excited her, with his way of looking in her face and grinning wolfishly, and at the same time asking to be saved.

After tea, he wanted to send telegrams, so Lilly took him round to the village postoffice. Telegrams were a necessary part of his life. He had to be suddenly starting off to keep sudden appointments, or he felt he was a void in the atmosphere. He talked to Lilly about social reform, and so on. Jim’s work in town was merely nominal. He spent his time wavering about and going to various meetings, philandering and weeping.

Lilly kept in the back of his mind the Saving which James had come to look for. He intended to do his best. After dinner the three sat cosily round the kitchen fire.

“But what do you really think will happen to the world?” Lilly asked Jim, amid much talk.

“What? There’s something big coming,” said Jim.

“Where from?”

“Watch Ireland, and watch Japan — they’re the two poles of the world,” said Jim.

“I thought Russia and America,” said Lilly.

“Eh? What? Russia and America! They’ll depend on Ireland and Japan. I know it. I’ve had a vision of it. Ireland on this side and Japan on the other — they’ll settle it.”

“I don’t see how,” said Lilly.

“I don’t see HOW — But I had a vision of it.”

“What sort of vision?”

“Couldn’t describe it.”

“But you don’t think much of the Japanese, do you?” asked Lilly.

“Don’t I! Don’t I!” said Jim. “What, don’t you think they’re wonderful?”

“No. I think they’re rather unpleasant.”

“I think the salvation of the world lies with them.”

“Funny salvation,” said Lilly. “I think they’re anything but angels.”

“Do you though? Now that’s funny. Why?”

“Looking at them even. I knew a Russian doctor who’d been through the Russo-Japanese war, and who had gone a bit cracked. He said he saw the Japs rush a trench. They threw everything away and flung themselves through the Russian fire and simply dropped in masses. But those that reached the trenches jumped in with bare hands on the Russians and tore their faces apart and bit their throats out — fairly ripped the faces off the bone. — It had sent the doctor a bit cracked. He said the wounded were awful, — their faces torn off and their throats mangled — and dead Japs with flesh between the teeth — God knows if it’s true. But that’s the impression the Japanese had made on this man. It had affected his mind really.”

Jim watched Lilly, and smiled as if he were pleased.

“No — really — !” he said.

“Anyhow they’re more demon than angel, I believe,” said Lilly.

“Oh, no, Rawdon, but you always exaggerate,” said Tanny.

“Maybe,” said Lilly.

“I think Japanese are fascinating — fascinating — so quick, and such FORCE in them — ”

“Rather! — eh?” said Jim, looking with a quick smile at Tanny.

“I think a Japanese lover would be marvellous,” she laughed riskily.

“I s’d think he would,” said Jim, screwing up his eyes.

“Do you hate the normal British as much as I do?” she asked him.

“Hate them! Hate them!” he said, with an intimate grin.

“Their beastly virtue,” said she. “And I believe there’s nobody more vicious underneath.”

“Nobody!” said Jim.

“But you’re British yourself,” said Lilly to Jim.

“No, I’m Irish. Family’s Irish — my mother was a Fitz-patrick.”

“Anyhow you live in England.”

“Because they won’t let me go to Ireland.”

The talk drifted. Jim finished up all the beer, and they prepared to go to bed. Jim was a bit tipsy, grinning. He asked for bread and cheese to take upstairs.

“Will you have supper?” said Lilly. He was surprised, because Jim had eaten strangely much at dinner.

“No — where’s the loaf?” And he cut himself about half of it. There was no cheese.

“Bread’ll do,” said Jim.

“Sit down and eat it. Have cocoa with it,” said Tanny.

“No, I like to have it in my bedroom.”

“You don’t eat bread in the night?” said Lilly.

“I do.”

“What a funny thing to do.”

The cottage was in darkness. The Lillys slept soundly. Jim woke up and chewed bread and slept again. In the morning at dawn he rose and went downstairs. Lilly heard him roaming about — heard the woman come in to clean — heard them talking. So he got up to look after his visitor, though it was not seven o’clock, and the woman was busy. — But before he went down, he heard Jim come upstairs again.

Mrs. Short was busy in the kitchen when Lilly went down.

“The other gentleman have been down, Sir,” said Mrs. Short. “He asked me where the bread and butter were, so I said should I cut him a piece. But he wouldn’t let me do it. I gave him a knife and he took it for himself, in the pantry.”

“I say, Bricknell,” said Lilly at breakfast time, “why do you eat so much bread?”

“I’ve got to feed up. I’ve been starved during this damned war.”

“But hunks of bread won’t feed you up.”

“Gives the stomach something to work at, and prevents it grinding on the nerves,” said Jim.

“But surely you don’t want to keep your stomach always full and heavy.”

“I do, my boy. I do. It needs keeping solid. I’m losing life, if I don’t. I tell you I’m losing life. Let me put something inside me.”

“I don’t believe bread’s any use.”

During breakfast Jim talked about the future of the world.

“I reckon Christ’s the finest thing time has ever produced,” said he; “and will remain it.”

“But you don’t want crucifixions ad infinitum,” said Lilly.

“What? Why not?”

“Once is enough — and have done.”

“Don’t you think love and sacrifice are the finest things in life?” said Jim, over his bacon.

“Depends WHAT love, and what sacrifice,” said Lilly. “If I really believe in an Almighty God, I am willing to sacrifice for Him. That is, I’m willing to yield my own personal interest to the bigger creative interest. — But it’s obvious Almighty God isn’t mere Love.”

“I think it is. Love and only love,” said Jim. “I think the greatest joy is sacrificing oneself to love.”

“To SOMEONE you love, you mean,” said Tanny.

“No I don’t. I don’t mean someone at all. I mean love — love — love. I sacrifice myself to love. I reckon that’s the highest man is capable of.”

“But you can’t sacrifice yourself to an abstract principle,” said Tanny.

“That’s just what you can do. And that’s the beauty of it. Who represents the principle doesn’t matter. Christ is the principle of love,” said Jim.

“But no!” said Tanny. “It MUST be more individual. It must be SOMEBODY you love, not abstract love in itself. How can you sacrifice yourself to an abstraction.”

“Ha, I think Love and your Christ detestable,” said Lilly — “a sheer ignominy.”

“Finest thing the world has produced,” said Jim.

“No. A thing which sets itself up to be betrayed! No, it’s foul. Don’t you see it’s the Judas principle you really worship. Judas is the real hero. But for Judas the whole show would have been manque.”

“Oh yes,” said Jim. “Judas was inevitable. I’m not sure that Judas wasn’t the greatest of the disciples — and Jesus knew it. I’m not sure Judas wasn’t the disciple Jesus loved.”

“Jesus certainly encouraged him in his Judas tricks,” said Tanny.

Jim grinned knowingly at Lilly.

“Then it was a nasty combination. And anything which turns on a Judas climax is a dirty show, to my thinking. I think your Judas is a rotten, dirty worm, just a dirty little self-conscious sentimental twister. And out of all Christianity he is the hero today. When people say Christ they mean Judas. They find him luscious on the palate. And Jesus fostered him — ” said Lilly.

“He’s a profound figure, is Judas. It’s taken two thousand years to begin to understand him,” said Jim, pushing the bread and marmalade into his mouth.

“A traitor is a traitor — no need to understand any further. And a system which rests all its weight on a piece of treachery makes that treachery not only inevitable but sacred. That’s why I’m sick of Christianity. — At any rate this modern Christ-mongery.”

“The finest thing the world has produced, or ever will produce — Christ and Judas — ” said Jim.

“Not to me,” said Lilly. “Foul combination.”

It was a lovely morning in early March. Violets were out, and the first wild anemones. The sun was quite warm. The three were about to take out a picnic lunch. Lilly however was suffering from Jim’s presence.

“Jolly nice here,” said Jim. “Mind if I stay till Saturday?”

There was a pause. Lilly felt he was being bullied, almost obscenely bullied. Was he going to agree? Suddenly he looked up at Jim.

“I’d rather you went tomorrow,” he said.

Tanny, who was sitting opposite Jim, dropped her head in confusion.

“What’s tomorrow?” said Jim.

“Thursday,” said Lilly.

“Thursday,” repeated Jim. And he looked up and got Lilly’s eye. He wanted to say “Friday then?”

“Yes, I’d rather you went Thursday,” repeated Lilly.

“But Rawdon — !” broke in Tanny, who was suffering. She stopped, however.

“We can walk across country with you some way if you like,” said Lilly to Jim. It was a sort of compromise.

“Fine!” said Jim. “We’ll do that, then.”

It was lovely sunshine, and they wandered through the woods. Between Jim and Tanny was a sort of growing rapprochement, which got on Lilly’s nerves.

“What the hell do you take that beastly personal tone for?” cried Lilly at Tanny, as the three sat under a leafless great beech-tree.

“But I’m not personal at all, am I, Mr. Bricknell?” said Tanny.

Jim watched Lilly, and grinned pleasedly.

“Why shouldn’t you be, anyhow?” he said.

“Yes!” she retorted. “Why not!”

“Not while I’m here. I loathe the slimy creepy personal intimacy. — ‘Don’t you think, Mr. Bricknell, that it’s lovely to be able to talk quite simply to somebody? Oh, it’s such a relief, after most people — -’” Lilly mimicked his wife’s last speech savagely.

“But I MEAN it,” cried Tanny. “It is lovely.”

“Dirty messing,” said Lilly angrily.

Jim watched the dark, irascible little man with amusement. They rose, and went to look for an inn, and beer. Tanny still clung rather stickily to Jim’s side.

But it was a lovely day, the first of all the days of spring, with crocuses and wall-flowers in the cottage gardens, and white cocks crowing in the quiet hamlet.

When they got back in the afternoon to the cottage, they found a telegram for

Jim. He let the Lillys see it — "Meet you for a walk on your return journey Lois." At once Tanny wanted to know all about Lois. Lois was a nice girl, well-to-do middle-class, but also an actress, and she would do anything Jim wanted.

"I must get a wire to her to meet me tomorrow," he said. "Where shall I say?"

Lilly produced the map, and they decided on time and station at which Lois coming out of London, should meet Jim. Then the happy pair could walk along the Thames valley, spending a night perhaps at Marlowe, or some such place.

Off went Jim and Lilly once more to the postoffice. They were quite good friends. Having so inhospitably fixed the hour of departure, Lilly wanted to be nice. Arrived at the postoffice, they found it shut: half-day closing for the little shop.

"Well," said Lilly. "We'll go to the station."

They proceeded to the station — found the station-master — were conducted down to the signal-box. Lilly naturally hung back from people, but Jim was hobnob with the station-master and the signal man, quite officer-and-my-men kind of thing. Lilly sat out on the steps of the signal-box, rather ashamed, while the long telegram was shouted over the telephone to the junction town — first the young lady and her address, then the message "Meet me X. station 3:40 tomorrow walk back great pleasure Jim."

Anyhow that was done. They went home to tea. After tea, as the evening fell, Lilly suggested a little stroll in the woods, while Tanny prepared the dinner. Jim agreed, and they set out. The two men wandered through the trees in the dusk, till they came to a bank on the farther edge of the wood. There they sat down.

And there Lilly said what he had to say. "As a matter of fact," he said, "it's nothing but love and self-sacrifice which makes you feel yourself losing life."

"You're wrong. Only love brings it back — and wine. If I drink a bottle of Burgundy I feel myself restored at the middle — right here! I feel the energy back again. And if I can fall in love — But it's becoming so damned hard — "

"What, to fall in love?" asked Lilly.

"Yes."

"Then why not leave off trying! What do you want to poke yourself and prod yourself into love, for?"

"Because I'm DEAD without it. I'm dead. I'm dying."

"Only because you force yourself. If you drop working yourself up — "

"I shall die. I only live when I can fall in love. Otherwise I'm dying by inches. Why, man, you don't know what it was like. I used to get the most grand feelings — like a great rush of force, or light — a great rush — right here, as I've said, at the solar plexus. And it would come any time — anywhere — no matter where I was. And then I was all right.

“All right for what? — for making love?”

“Yes, man, I was.”

“And now you aren’t? — Oh, well, leave love alone, as any twopenny doctor would tell you.”

“No, you’re off it there. It’s nothing technical. Technically I can make love as much as you like. It’s nothing a doctor has any say in. It’s what I feel inside me. I feel the life going. I know it’s going. I never get those inrushes now, unless I drink a jolly lot, or if I possibly could fall in love. Technically, I’m potent all right — oh, yes!”

“You should leave yourself and your inrushes alone.”

“But you can’t. It’s a sort of ache.”

“Then you should stiffen your backbone. It’s your backbone that matters. You shouldn’t want to abandon yourself. You shouldn’t want to fling yourself all loose into a woman’s lap. You should stand by yourself and learn to be by yourself. Why don’t you be more like the Japanese you talk about? Quiet, aloof little devils. They don’t bother about being loved. They keep themselves taut in their own selves — there, at the bottom of the spine — the devil’s own power they’ve got there.”

Jim mused a bit.

“Think they have?” he laughed. It seemed comic to him.

“Sure! Look at them. Why can’t you gather yourself there?”

“At the tail?”

“Yes. Hold yourself firm there.”

Jim broke into a cackle of a laugh, and rose. The two went through the dark woods back to the cottage. Jim staggered and stumbled like a drunken man: or worse, like a man with locomotor ataxia: as if he had no power in his lower limbs.

“Walk there — !” said Lilly, finding him the smoothest bit of the dark path. But Jim stumbled and shambled, in a state of nauseous weak relaxation. However, they reached the cottage: and food and beer — and Tanny, piqued with curiosity to know what the men had been saying privately to each other.

After dinner they sat once more talking round the fire.

Lilly sat in a small chair facing the fire, the other two in the armchairs on either side the hearth.

“How nice it will be for you, walking with Lois towards London tomorrow,” gushed Tanny sentimentally.

“Good God!” said Lilly. “Why the dickens doesn’t he walk by himself, without wanting a woman always there, to hold his hand.”

“Don’t be so spiteful,” said Tanny. “YOU see that you have a woman always

there, to hold YOUR hand.”

“My hand doesn’t need holding,” snapped Lilly.

“Doesn’t it! More than most men’s! But you’re so beastly ungrateful and mannish. Because I hold you safe enough all the time you like to pretend you’re doing it all yourself.”

“All right. Don’t drag yourself in,” said Lilly, detesting his wife at that moment. “Anyhow,” and he turned to Jim, “it’s time you’d done slobbering yourself over a lot of little women, one after the other.”

“Why shouldn’t I, if I like it?” said Jim.

“Yes, why not?” said Tanny.

“Because it makes a fool of you. Look at you, stumbling and staggering with no use in your legs. I’d be ashamed if I were you.”

“Would you?” said Jim.

“I would. And it’s nothing but your wanting to be loved which does it. A maudlin crying to be loved, which makes your knees all go rickety.”

“Think that’s it?” said Jim.

“What else is it. You haven’t been here a day, but you must telegraph for some female to be ready to hold your hand the moment you go away. And before she lets go, you’ll be wiring for another. YOU WANT TO BE LOVED, you want to be loved — a man of your years. It’s disgusting — ”

“I don’t see it. I believe in love — ” said Jim, watching and grinning oddly.

“Bah, love! Messing, that’s what it is. It wouldn’t matter if it did you no harm. But when you stagger and stumble down a road, out of sheer sloppy relaxation of your will — -”

At this point Jim suddenly sprang from his chair at Lilly, and gave him two or three hard blows with his fists, upon the front of the body. Then he sat down in his own chair again, saying sheepishly:

“I knew I should have to do it, if he said any more.”

Lilly sat motionless as a statue, his face like paper. One of the blows had caught him rather low, so that he was almost winded and could not breathe. He sat rigid, paralysed as a winded man is. But he wouldn’t let it be seen. With all his will he prevented himself from gasping. Only through his parted lips he drew tiny gasps, controlled, nothing revealed to the other two. He hated them both far too much.

For some minutes there was dead silence, whilst Lilly silently and viciously fought for his breath. Tanny opened her eyes wide in a sort of pleased bewilderment, and Jim turned his face aside, and hung his clasped hands between his knees.

“There’s a great silence, suddenly!” said Tanny.

“What is there to say?” ejaculated Lilly rapidly, with a spoonful of breath which he managed to compress and control into speech. Then he sat motionless again, concerned with the business of getting back his wind, and not letting the other two see.

Jim jerked in his chair, and looked round.

“It isn’t that I don’t like the man,” he said, in a rather small voice. “But I knew if he went on I should have to do it.”

To Lilly, rigid and physically preoccupied, there sounded a sort of self-consciousness in Jim’s voice, as if the whole thing had been semi-deliberate. He detected the sort of maudlin deliberateness which goes with hysterics, and he was colder, more icy than ever.

Tanny looked at Lilly, puzzled, bewildered, but still rather pleased, as if she demanded an answer. None being forthcoming, she said:

“Of course, you mustn’t expect to say all those things without rousing a man.”

Still Lilly did not answer. Jim glanced at him, then looked at Tanny.

“It isn’t that I don’t like him,” he said, slowly. “I like him better than any man I’ve ever known, I believe.” He clasped his hands and turned aside his face.

“Judas!” flashed through Lilly’s mind.

Again Tanny looked for her husband’s answer.

“Yes, Rawdon,” she said. “You can’t say the things you do without their having an effect. You really ask for it, you know.”

“It’s no matter.” Lilly squeezed the words out coldly. “He wanted to do it, and he did it.”

A dead silence ensued now. Tanny looked from man to man.

“I could feel it coming on me,” said Jim.

“Of course!” said Tanny. “Rawdon doesn’t know the things he says.” She was pleased that he had had to pay for them, for once.

It takes a man a long time to get his breath back, after a sharp blow in the wind. Lilly was managing by degrees. The others no doubt attributed his silence to deep or fierce thoughts. It was nothing of the kind, merely a cold struggle to get his wind back, without letting them know he was struggling: and a sheer, stock-stiff hatred of the pair of them.

“I like the man,” said Jim. “Never liked a man more than I like him.” He spoke as if with difficulty.

“The man” stuck safely in Lilly’s ears.

“Oh, well,” he managed to say. “It’s nothing. I’ve done my talking and had an answer, for once.”

“Yes, Rawdy, you’ve had an answer, for once. Usually you don’t get an answer, you know — and that’s why you go so far — in the things you say. Now

you'll know how you make people feel.”

“Quite!” said Lilly.

“I don't feel anything. I don't mind what he says,” said Jim.

“Yes, but he ought to know the things he DOES say,” said Tanny. “He goes on, without considering the person he's talking to. This time it's come back on him. He mustn't say such personal things, if he's not going to risk an answer.”

“I don't mind what he says. I don't mind a bit,” said Jim.

“Nor do I mind,” said Lilly indifferently. “I say what I feel — You do as you feel — There's an end of it.”

A sheepish sort of silence followed this speech. It was broken by a sudden laugh from Tanny.

“The things that happen to us!” she said, laughing rather shrilly. “Suddenly, like a thunderbolt, we're all struck into silence!”

“Rum game, eh!” said Jim, grinning.

“Isn't it funny! Isn't life too funny!” She looked again at her husband. “But, Rawdy, you must admit it was your own fault.”

Lilly's stiff face did not change.

“Why FAULT!” he said, looking at her coldly. “What is there to talk about?”

“Usually there's so much,” she said sarcastically.

A few phrases dribbled out of the silence. In vain Jim, tried to get Lilly to thaw, and in vain Tanny gave her digs at her husband. Lilly's stiff, inscrutable face did not change, he was polite and aloof. So they all went to bed.

In the morning, the walk was to take place, as arranged, Lilly and Tanny accompanying Jim to the third station across country. The morning was lovely, the country beautiful. Lilly liked the countryside and enjoyed the walk. But a hardness inside himself never relaxed. Jim talked a little again about the future of the world, and a higher state of Christlikeness in man. But Lilly only laughed. Then Tanny managed to get ahead with Jim, sticking to his side and talking sympathetic personalities. But Lilly, feeling it from afar, ran after them and caught them up. They were silent.

“What was the interesting topic?” he said cuttingly.

“Nothing at all!” said Tanny, nettled. “Why must you interfere?”

“Because I intend to,” said Lilly.

And the two others fell apart, as if severed with a knife. Jim walked rather sheepishly, as if cut out.

So they came at last past the canals to the wayside station: and at last Jim's train came. They all said goodbye. Jim and Tanny were both waiting for Lilly to show some sign of real reconciliation. But none came. He was cheerful and aloof.

“Goodbye,” he said to Jim. “Hope Lois will be there all right. Third station on. Goodbye! Goodbye!”

“You’ll come to Rackham?” said Jim, leaning out of the train.

“We should love to,” called Tanny, after the receding train.

“All right,” said Lilly, non-committal.

But he and his wife never saw Jim again. Lilly never intended to see him: a devil sat in the little man’s breast.

“You shouldn’t play at little Jesus, coming so near to people, wanting to help them,” was Tanny’s last word.

CHAPTER IX. LOW-WATER MARK

Tanny went away to Norway to visit her people, for the first time for three years. Lilly did not go: he did not want to. He came to London and settled in a room over Covent Garden market. The room was high up, a fair size, and stood at the corner of one of the streets and the market itself, looking down on the stalls and the carts and the arcade. Lilly would climb out of the window and sit for hours watching the behaviour of the great draught-horses which brought the mountains of boxes and vegetables. Funny half-human creatures they seemed, so massive and fleshy, yet so Cockney. There was one which could not bear donkeys, and which used to stretch out its great teeth like some massive serpent after every poor diminutive ass that came with a coster's barrow. Another great horse could not endure standing. It would shake itself and give little starts, and back into the heaps of carrots and broccoli, whilst the driver went into a frenzy of rage.

There was always something to watch. One minute it was two great loads of empty crates, which in passing had got entangled, and reeled, leaning to fall disastrously. Then the drivers cursed and swore and dismounted and stared at their jeopardised loads: till a thin fellow was persuaded to scramble up the airy mountains of cages, like a monkey. And he actually managed to put them to rights. Great sigh of relief when the vans rocked out of the market.

Again there was a particular page-boy in buttons, with a round and perky behind, who nimbly carried a tea-tray from somewhere to somewhere, under the arches beside the market. The great brawny porters would tease him, and he would stop to give them cheek. One afternoon a giant lunged after him: the boy darted gracefully among the heaps of vegetables, still bearing aloft his tea-tray, like some young blue-buttoned acolyte fleeing before a false god. The giant rolled after him — when alas, the acolyte of the tea-tray slipped among the vegetables, and down came the tray. Then tears, and a roar of unfeeling mirth from the giants. Lilly felt they were going to make it up to him.

Another afternoon a young swell sauntered persistently among the vegetables, and Lilly, seated in his high little balcony, wondered why. But at last, a taxi, and a very expensive female, in a sort of silver brocade gown and a great fur shawl and ospreys in her bonnet. Evidently an assignation. Yet what could be more conspicuous than this elegant pair, picking their way through the cabbage-leaves?

And then, one cold grey afternoon in early April, a man in a black overcoat and a bowler hat, walking uncertainly. Lilly had risen and was just retiring out of the chill, damp air. For some reason he lingered to watch the figure. The man was walking east. He stepped rather insecurely off the pavement, and wavered across the setts between the wheels of the standing vans. And suddenly he went down. Lilly could not see him on the ground, but he saw some van-men go forward, and he saw one of them pick up the man's hat.

"I'd better go down," said Lilly to himself.

So he began running down the four long flights of stone stairs, past the many doors of the multifarious business premises, and out into the market. A little crowd had gathered, and a large policeman was just rowing into the centre of the interest. Lilly, always a hoverer on the edge of public commotions, hung now hesitating on the outskirts of the crowd.

"What is it?" he said, to a rather sniffy messenger boy.

"Drunk," said the messenger boy: except that, in unblushing cockney, he pronounced it "Drank."

Lilly hung further back on the edge of the little crowd.

"Come on here. Where d' you want to go?" he heard the hearty tones of the policeman.

"I'm all right. I'm all right," came the testy drunken answer.

"All right, are yer! All right, and then some, — come on, get on your pins."

"I'm all right! I'm all right."

The voice made Lilly peer between the people. And sitting on the granite setts, being hauled up by a burly policeman, he saw our acquaintance Aaron, very pale in the face and a little dishevelled.

"Like me to tuck the sheets round you, shouldn't you? Fancy yourself snug in bed, don't you? You won't believe you're right in the way of traffic, will you now, in Covent Garden Market? Come on, we'll see to you." And the policeman hoisted the bitter and unwilling Aaron.

Lilly was quickly at the centre of the affair, unobtrusive like a shadow, different from the other people.

"Help him up to my room, will you?" he said to the constable. "Friend of mine."

The large constable looked down on the bare-headed wispy, unobtrusive Lilly with good-humoured suspicion and incredulity. Lilly could not have borne it if the policeman had uttered any of this cockney suspicion, so he watched him. There was a great gulf between the public official and the odd, quiet little individual — yet Lilly had his way.

"Which room?" said the policeman, dubious.

Lilly pointed quickly round. Then he said to Aaron:

“Were you coming to see me, Sisson? You’ll come in, won’t you?”

Aaron nodded rather stupidly and testily. His eyes looked angry. Somebody stuck his hat on his head for him, and made him look a fool. Lilly took it off again, and carried it for him. He turned and the crowd eased. He watched Aaron sharply, and saw that it was with difficulty he could walk. So he caught him by the arm on the other side from the policeman, and they crossed the road to the pavement.

“Not so much of this sort of thing these days,” said the policeman.

“Not so much opportunity,” said Lilly.

“More than there was, though. Coming back to the old days, like. Working round, bit by bit.”

They had arrived at the stairs. Aaron stumbled up.

“Steady now! Steady does it!” said the policeman, steering his charge. There was a curious breach of distance between Lilly and the constable.

At last Lilly opened his own door. The room was pleasant. The fire burned warm, the piano stood open, the sofa was untidy with cushions and papers. Books and papers covered the big writing desk. Beyond the screen made by the bookshelves and the piano were two beds, with washstand by one of the large windows, the one through which Lilly had climbed.

The policeman looked round curiously.

“More cosy here than in the lock-up, sir!” he said.

Lilly laughed. He was hastily clearing the sofa.

“Sit on the sofa, Sisson,” he said.

The policeman lowered his charge, with a —

“Right we are, then!”

Lilly felt in his pocket, and gave the policeman half a crown. But he was watching Aaron, who sat stupidly on the sofa, very pale and semi-conscious.

“Do you feel ill, Sisson?” he said sharply.

Aaron looked back at him with heavy eyes, and shook his head slightly.

“I believe you are,” said Lilly, taking his hand.

“Might be a bit o’ this flu, you know,” said the policeman.

“Yes,” said Lilly. “Where is there a doctor?” he added, on reflection.

“The nearest?” said the policeman. And he told him. “Leave a message for you, Sir?”

Lilly wrote his address on a card, then changed his mind.

“No, I’ll run round myself if necessary,” he said.

And the policeman departed.

“You’ll go to bed, won’t you?” said Lilly to Aaron, when the door was shut.

Aaron shook his head sulkily.

“I would if I were you. You can stay here till you’re all right. I’m alone, so it doesn’t matter.”

But Aaron had relapsed into semi-consciousness. Lilly put the big kettle on the gas stove, the little kettle on the fire. Then he hovered in front of the stupefied man. He felt uneasy. Again he took Aaron’s hand and felt the pulse.

“I’m sure you aren’t well. You must go to bed,” he said. And he kneeled and unfastened his visitor’s boots. Meanwhile the kettle began to boil, he put a hot-water bottle into the bed.

“Let us get your overcoat off,” he said to the stupefied man. “Come along.” And with coaxing and pulling and pushing he got off the overcoat and coat and waistcoat.

At last Aaron was undressed and in bed. Lilly brought him tea. With a dim kind of obedience he took the cup and would drink. He looked at Lilly with heavy eyes.

“I gave in, I gave in to her, else I should ha’ been all right,” he said.

“To whom?” said Lilly.

“I gave in to her — and afterwards I cried, thinking of Lottie and the children. I felt my heart break, you know. And that’s what did it. I should have been all right if I hadn’t given in to her — ”

“To whom?” said Lilly.

“Josephine. I felt, the minute I was loving her, I’d done myself. And I had. Everything came back on me. If I hadn’t given in to her, I should ha’ kept all right.”

“Don’t bother now. Get warm and still — ”

“I felt it — I felt it go, inside me, the minute I gave in to her. It’s perhaps killed me.”

“No, not it. Never mind, be still. Be still, and you’ll be all right in the morning.”

“It’s my own fault, for giving in to her. If I’d kept myself back, my liver wouldn’t have broken inside me, and I shouldn’t have been sick. And I knew — ”

“Never mind now. Have you drunk your tea? Lie down. Lie down, and go to sleep.”

Lilly pushed Aaron down in the bed, and covered him over. Then he thrust his hands under the bedclothes and felt his feet — still cold. He arranged the water bottle. Then he put another cover on the bed.

Aaron lay still, rather grey and peaked-looking, in a stillness that was not healthy. For some time Lilly went about stealthily, glancing at his patient from

time to time. Then he sat down to read.

He was roused after a time by a moaning of troubled breathing and a fretful stirring in the bed. He went across. Aaron's eyes were open, and dark looking.

"Have a little hot milk," said Lilly.

Aaron shook his head faintly, not noticing.

"A little Bovril?"

The same faint shake.

Then Lilly wrote a note for the doctor, went into the office on the same landing, and got a clerk, who would be leaving in a few minutes, to call with the note. When he came back he found Aaron still watching.

"Are you here by yourself?" asked the sick man.

"Yes. My wife's gone to Norway."

"For good?"

"No," laughed Lilly. "For a couple of months or so. She'll come back here: unless she joins me in Switzerland or somewhere."

Aaron was still for a while.

"You've not gone with her," he said at length.

"To see her people? No, I don't think they want me very badly — and I didn't want very badly to go. Why should I? It's better for married people to be separated sometimes."

"Ay!" said Aaron, watching the other man with fever-darkened eyes.

"I hate married people who are two in one — stuck together like two jujube lozenges," said Lilly.

"Me an' all. I hate 'em myself," said Aaron.

"Everybody ought to stand by themselves, in the first place — men and women as well. They can come together, in the second place, if they like. But nothing is any good unless each one stands alone, intrinsically."

"I'm with you there," said Aaron. "If I'd kep' myself to myself I shouldn't be bad now — though I'm not very bad. I s'll be all right in the morning. But I did myself in when I went with another woman. I felt myself go — as if the bile broke inside me, and I was sick."

"Josephine seduced you?" laughed Lilly.

"Ay, right enough," replied Aaron grimly. "She won't be coming here, will she?"

"Not unless I ask her."

"You won't ask her, though?"

"No, not if you don't want her."

"I don't."

The fever made Aaron naive and communicative, unlike himself. And he

knew he was being unlike himself, he knew that he was not in proper control of himself, so he was unhappy, uneasy.

“I’ll stop here the night then, if you don’t mind,” he said.

“You’ll have to,” said Lilly. “I’ve sent for the doctor. I believe you’ve got the flu.”

“Think I have?” said Aaron frightened.

“Don’t be scared,” laughed Lilly.

There was a long pause. Lilly stood at the window looking at the darkening market, beneath the street-lamps.

“I s’ll have to go to the hospital, if I have,” came Aaron’s voice.

“No, if it’s only going to be a week or a fortnight’s business, you can stop here. I’ve nothing to do,” said Lilly.

“There’s no occasion for you to saddle yourself with me,” said Aaron dejectedly.

“You can go to your hospital if you like — or back to your lodging — if you wish to,” said Lilly. “You can make up your mind when you see how you are in the morning.”

“No use going back to my lodgings,” said Aaron.

“I’ll send a telegram to your wife if you like,” said Lilly.

Aaron was silent, dead silent, for some time.

“Nay,” he said at length, in a decided voice. “Not if I die for it.”

Lilly remained still, and the other man lapsed into a sort of semi-sleep, motionless and abandoned. The darkness had fallen over London, and away below the lamps were white.

Lilly lit the green-shaded reading lamp over the desk. Then he stood and looked at Aaron, who lay still, looking sick. Rather beautiful the bones of the countenance: but the skull too small for such a heavy jaw and rather coarse mouth. Aaron half-opened his eyes, and writhed feverishly, as if his limbs could not be in the right place. Lilly mended the fire, and sat down to write. Then he got up and went downstairs to unfasten the street door, so that the doctor could walk up. The business people had gone from their various holes, all the lower part of the tall house was in darkness.

Lilly waited and waited. He boiled an egg and made himself toast. Aaron said he might eat the same. Lilly cooked another egg and took it to the sick man. Aaron looked at it and pushed it away with nausea. He would have some tea. So Lilly gave him tea.

“Not much fun for you, doing this for somebody who is nothing to you,” said Aaron.

“I shouldn’t if you were unsympathetic to me,” said Lilly. “As it is, it’s

happened so, and so we'll let be."

"What time is it?"

"Nearly eight o'clock."

"Oh, my Lord, the opera."

And Aaron got half out of bed. But as he sat on the bedside he knew he could not safely get to his feet. He remained a picture of dejection.

"Perhaps we ought to let them know," said Lilly.

But Aaron, blank with stupid misery, sat huddled there on the bedside without answering.

"I'll run round with a note," said Lilly. "I suppose others have had flu, besides you. Lie down!"

But Aaron stupidly and dejectedly sat huddled on the side of the bed, wearing old flannel pyjamas of Lilly's, rather small for him. He felt too sick to move.

"Lie down! Lie down!" said Lilly. "And keep still while I'm gone. I shan't be more than ten minutes."

"I don't care if I die," said Aaron.

Lilly laughed.

"You're a long way from dying," said he, "or you wouldn't say it."

But Aaron only looked up at him with queer, far-off, haggard eyes, something like a criminal who is just being executed.

"Lie down!" said Lilly, pushing him gently into the bed. "You won't improve yourself sitting there, anyhow."

Aaron lay down, turned away, and was quite still. Lilly quietly left the room on his errand.

The doctor did not come until ten o'clock: and worn out with work when he did come.

"Isn't there a lift in this establishment?" he said, as he groped his way up the stone stairs. Lilly had heard him, and run down to meet him.

The doctor poked the thermometer under Aaron's tongue and felt the pulse. Then he asked a few questions: listened to the heart and breathing.

"Yes, it's the flu," he said curtly. "Nothing to do but to keep warm in bed and not move, and take plenty of milk and liquid nourishment. I'll come round in the morning and give you an injection. Lungs are all right so far."

"How long shall I have to be in bed?" said Aaron.

"Oh — depends. A week at least."

Aaron watched him sullenly — and hated him. Lilly laughed to himself. The sick man was like a dog that is ill but which growls from a deep corner, and will bite if you put your hand in. He was in a state of black depression.

Lilly settled him down for the night, and himself went to bed. Aaron squirmed

with heavy, pained limbs, the night through, and slept and had bad dreams. Lilly got up to give him drinks. The din in the market was terrific before dawn, and Aaron suffered bitterly.

In the morning he was worse. The doctor gave him injections against pneumonia.

“You wouldn’t like me to wire to your wife?” said Lilly.

“No,” said Aaron abruptly. “You can send me to the hospital. I’m nothing but a piece of carrion.”

“Carrion!” said Lilly. “Why?”

“I know it. I feel like it.”

“Oh, that’s only the sort of nauseated feeling you get with flu.”

“I’m only fit to be thrown underground, and made an end of. I can’t stand myself — ”

He had a ghastly, grey look of self-repulsion.

“It’s the germ that makes you feel like that,” said Lilly. “It poisons the system for a time. But you’ll work it off.”

At evening he was no better, the fever was still high. Yet there were no complications — except that the heart was irregular.

“The one thing I wonder,” said Lilly, “is whether you hadn’t better be moved out of the noise of the market. It’s fearful for you in the early morning.”

“It makes no difference to me,” said Aaron.

The next day he was a little worse, if anything. The doctor knew there was nothing to be done. At evening he gave the patient a calomel pill. It was rather strong, and Aaron had a bad time. His burning, parched, poisoned inside was twisted and torn. Meanwhile carts banged, porters shouted, all the hell of the market went on outside, away down on the cobble setts. But this time the two men did not hear.

“You’ll feel better now,” said Lilly, “after the operation.”

“It’s done me harm,” cried Aaron fretfully. “Send me to the hospital, or you’ll repent it. Get rid of me in time.”

“Nay,” said Lilly. “You get better. Damn it, you’re only one among a million.”

Again over Aaron’s face went the ghastly grimace of self-repulsion.

“My soul’s gone rotten,” he said.

“No,” said Lilly. “Only toxin in the blood.”

Next day the patient seemed worse, and the heart more irregular. He rested badly. So far, Lilly had got a fair night’s rest. Now Aaron was not sleeping, and he seemed to struggle in the bed.

“Keep your courage up, man,” said the doctor sharply. “You give way.”

Aaron looked at him blackly, and did not answer.

In the night Lilly was up time after time. Aaron would slip down on his back, and go semi-conscious. And then he would awake, as if drowning, struggling to move, mentally shouting aloud, yet making no sound for some moments, mentally shouting in frenzy, but unable to stir or make a sound. When at last he got some sort of physical control he cried: "Lift me up! Lift me up!"

Lilly hurried and lifted him up, and he sat panting with a sobbing motion, his eyes gloomy and terrified, more than ever like a criminal who is just being executed. He drank brandy, and was laid down on his side.

"Don't let me lie on my back," he said, terrified. "No, I won't," said Lilly. Aaron frowned curiously on his nurse. "Mind you don't let me," he said, exacting and really terrified.

"No, I won't let you."

And now Lilly was continually crossing over and pulling Aaron on to his side, whenever he found him slipped down on his back.

In the morning the doctor was puzzled. Probably it was the toxin in the blood which poisoned the heart. There was no pneumonia. And yet Aaron was clearly growing worse. The doctor agreed to send in a nurse for the coming night.

"What's the matter with you, man!" he said sharply to his patient. "You give way! You give way! Can't you pull yourself together?"

But Aaron only became more gloomily withheld, retracting from life. And Lilly began to be really troubled. He got a friend to sit with the patient in the afternoon, whilst he himself went out and arranged to sleep in Aaron's room, at his lodging.

The next morning, when he came in, he found the patient lying as ever, in a sort of heap in the bed. Nurse had had to lift him up and hold him up again. And now Aaron lay in a sort of semi-stupor of fear, frustrated anger, misery and self-repulsion: a sort of interlocked depression.

The doctor frowned when he came. He talked with the nurse, and wrote another prescription. Then he drew Lilly away to the door.

"What's the matter with the fellow?" he said. "Can't you rouse his spirit? He seems to be sulking himself out of life. He'll drop out quite suddenly, you know, if he goes on like this. Can't you rouse him up?"

"I think it depresses him partly that his bowels won't work. It frightens him. He's never been ill in his life before," said Lilly.

"His bowels won't work if he lets all his spirit go, like an animal dying of the sulks," said the doctor impatiently. "He might go off quite suddenly — dead before you can turn round —"

Lilly was properly troubled. Yet he did not quite know what to do. It was early

afternoon, and the sun was shining into the room. There were daffodils and anemones in a jar, and freesias and violets. Down below in the market were two stalls of golden and blue flowers, gay.

“The flowers are lovely in the spring sunshine,” said Lilly. “I wish I were in the country, don’t you? As soon as you are better we’ll go. It’s been a terrible cold, wet spring. But now it’s going to be nice. Do you like being in the country?”

“Yes,” said Aaron.

He was thinking of his garden. He loved it. Never in his life had he been away from a garden before.

“Make haste and get better, and we’ll go.”

“Where?” said Aaron.

“Hampshire. Or Berkshire. Or perhaps you’d like to go home? Would you?”

Aaron lay still, and did not answer.

“Perhaps you want to, and you don’t want to,” said Lilly. “You can please yourself, anyhow.”

There was no getting anything definite out of the sick man — his soul seemed stuck, as if it would not move.

Suddenly Lilly rose and went to the dressing-table.

“I’m going to rub you with oil,” he said. “I’m going to rub you as mothers do their babies whose bowels don’t work.”

Aaron frowned slightly as he glanced at the dark, self-possessed face of the little man.

“What’s the good of that?” he said irritably. “I’d rather be left alone.”

“Then you won’t be.”

Quickly he uncovered the blond lower body of his patient, and began to rub the abdomen with oil, using a slow, rhythmic, circulating motion, a sort of massage. For a long time he rubbed finely and steadily, then went over the whole of the lower body, mindless, as if in a sort of incantation. He rubbed every speck of the man’s lower body — the abdomen, the buttocks, the thighs and knees, down to the feet, rubbed it all warm and glowing with camphorated oil, every bit of it, chafing the toes swiftly, till he was almost exhausted. Then Aaron was covered up again, and Lilly sat down in fatigue to look at his patient.

He saw a change. The spark had come back into the sick eyes, and the faint trace of a smile, faintly luminous, into the face. Aaron was regaining himself. But Lilly said nothing. He watched his patient fall into a proper sleep.

And he sat and watched him sleep. And he thought to himself: “I wonder why I do it. I wonder why I bother with him.... Jim ought to have taught me my lesson. As soon as this man’s really better he’ll punch me in the wind,

metaphorically if not actually, for having interfered with him. And Tanny would say, he was quite right to do it. She says I want power over them. What if I do? They don't care how much power the mob has over them, the nation, Lloyd George and Northcliffe and the police and money. They'll yield themselves up to that sort of power quickly enough, and immolate themselves pro bono publico by the million. And what's the bonum publicum but a mob power? Why can't they submit to a bit of healthy individual authority? The fool would die, without me: just as that fool Jim will die in hysterics one day. Why does he last so long!

"Tanny's the same. She does nothing really but resist me: my authority, or my influence, or just ME. At the bottom of her heart she just blindly and persistently opposes me. God knows what it is she opposes: just me myself. She thinks I want her to submit to me. So I do, in a measure natural to our two selves. Somewhere, she ought to submit to me. But they all prefer to kick against the pricks. Not that THEY get many pricks. I get them. Damn them all, why don't I leave them alone? They only grin and feel triumphant when they've insulted one and punched one in the wind.

"This Aaron will do just the same. I like him, and he ought to like me. And he'll be another Jim: he WILL like me, if he can knock the wind out of me. A lot of little Stavrogins coming up to whisper affectionately, and biting one's ear.

"But anyhow I can soon see the last of this chap: and him the last of all the rest. I'll be damned for ever if I see their Jims and Roberts and Julias and Scotts any more. Let them dance round their insipid hell-broth. Thin tack it is.

"There's a whole world besides this little gang of Europeans. Except, dear God, that they've exterminated all the peoples worth knowing. I can't do with folk who teem by the billion, like the Chinese and Japs and orientals altogether. Only vermin teem by the billion. Higher types breed slower. I would have loved the Aztecs and the Red Indians. I KNOW they hold the element in life which I am looking for — they had living pride. Not like the flea-bitten Asiatics — even niggers are better than Asiatics, though they are wallowers — the American races — and the South Sea Islanders — the Marquesans, the Maori blood. That was the true blood. It wasn't frightened. All the rest are craven — Europeans, Asiatics, Africans — everyone at his own individual quick craven and cringing: only conceited in the mass, the mob. How I hate them: the mass-bullies, the individual Judases.

"Well, if one will be a Jesus he must expect his Judas. That's why Abraham Lincoln gets shot. A Jesus makes a Judas inevitable. A man should remain himself, not try to spread himself over humanity. He should pivot himself on his own pride.

"I suppose really I ought to have packed this Aaron off to the hospital. Instead

of which here am I rubbing him with oil to rub the life into him. And I KNOW he'll bite me, like a warmed snake, the moment he recovers. And Tanny will say 'Quite right, too,' I shouldn't have been so intimate. No, I should have left it to mechanical doctors and nurses.

"So I should. Everything to its own. And Aaron belongs to this little system, and Jim is waiting to be psychoanalysed, and Tanny is waiting for her own glorification.

"All right, Aaron. Last time I break my bread for anybody, this is. So get better, my flautist, so that I can go away.

"It was easy for the Red Indians and the Others to take their hook into death. They might have stayed a bit longer to help one to defy the white masses.

"I'll make some tea — "

Lilly rose softly and went across to the fire. He had to cross a landing to a sort of little lavatory, with a sink and a tap, for water. The clerks peeped out at him from an adjoining office and nodded. He nodded, and disappeared from their sight as quickly as possible, with his kettle. His dark eyes were quick, his dark hair was untidy, there was something silent and withheld about him. People could never approach him quite ordinarily.

He put on the kettle, and quietly set cups and plates on a tray. The room was clean and cosy and pleasant. He did the cleaning himself, and was as efficient and inobtrusive a housewife as any woman. While the kettle boiled, he sat darning the socks which he had taken off Aaron's feet when the flautist arrived, and which he had washed. He preferred that no outsider should see him doing these things. Yet he preferred also to do them himself, so that he should be independent of outside aid.

His face was dark and hollow, he seemed frail, sitting there in the London afternoon darning the black woollen socks. His full brow was knitted slightly, there was a tension. At the same time, there was an indomitable stillness about him, as it were in the atmosphere about him. His hands, though small, were not very thin. He bit off the wool as he finished his darn.

As he was making the tea he saw Aaron rouse up in bed.

"I've been to sleep. I feel better," said the patient, turning round to look what the other man was doing. And the sight of the water steaming in a jet from the teapot seemed attractive.

"Yes," said Lilly. "You've slept for a good two hours."

"I believe I have," said Aaron.

"Would you like a little tea?"

"Ay — and a bit of toast."

"You're not supposed to have solid food. Let me take your temperature."

The temperature was down to a hundred, and Lilly, in spite of the doctor, gave Aaron a piece of toast with his tea, enjoining him not to mention it to the nurse.

In the evening the two men talked.

“You do everything for yourself, then?” said Aaron.

“Yes, I prefer it.”

“You like living all alone?”

“I don’t know about that. I never have lived alone. Tanny and I have been very much alone in various countries: but that’s two, not one.”

“You miss her then?”

“Yes, of course. I missed her horribly in the cottage, when she’d first gone. I felt my heart was broken. But here, where we’ve never been together, I don’t notice it so much.”

“She’ll come back,” said Aaron.

“Yes, she’ll come back. But I’d rather meet her abroad than here — and get on a different footing.”

“Why?”

“Oh, I don’t know. There’s something with marriage altogether, I think. *Egoisme a deux* — ”

“What’s that mean?”

“*Egoisme a deux*? Two people, one egoism. Marriage is a self-conscious egoistic state, it seems to me.”

“You’ve got no children?” said Aaron.

“No. Tanny wants children badly. I don’t. I’m thankful we have none.”

“Why?”

“I can’t quite say. I think of them as a burden. Besides, there ARE such millions and billions of children in the world. And we know well enough what sort of millions and billions of people they’ll grow up into. I don’t want to add my quota to the mass — it’s against my instinct — ”

“Ay!” laughed Aaron, with a curt acquiescence.

“Tanny’s furious. But then, when a woman has got children, she thinks the world wags only for them and her. Nothing else. The whole world wags for the sake of the children — and their sacred mother.”

“Ay, that’s DAMNED true,” said Aaron.

“And myself, I’m sick of the children stunt. Children are all right, so long as you just take them for what they are: young immature things like kittens and half-grown dogs, nuisances, sometimes very charming. But I’ll be hanged if I can see anything high and holy about children. I should be sorry, too, it would be so bad for the children. Young brats, tiresome and amusing in turns.”

“When they don’t give themselves airs,” said Aaron.

“Yes, indeed. Which they do half the time. Sacred children, and sacred motherhood, I’m absolutely fed stiff by it. That’s why I’m thankful I have no children. Tanny can’t come it over me there.”

“It’s a fact. When a woman’s got her children, by God, she’s a bitch in the manger. You can starve while she sits on the hay. It’s useful to keep her pups warm.”

“Yes.”

“Why, you know,” Aaron turned excitedly in the bed, “they look on a man as if he was nothing but an instrument to get and rear children. If you have anything to do with a woman, she thinks it’s because you want to get children by her. And I’m damned if it is. I want my own pleasure, or nothing: and children be damned.”

“Ah, women — THEY must be loved, at any price!” said Lilly. “And if you just don’t want to love them — and tell them so — what a crime.”

“A crime!” said Aaron. “They make a criminal of you. Them and their children be cursed. Is my life given me for nothing but to get children, and work to bring them up? See them all in hell first. They’d better die while they’re children, if childhood’s all that important.”

“I quite agree,” said Lilly. “If childhood is more important than manhood, then why live to be a man at all? Why not remain an infant?”

“Be damned and blasted to women and all their importances,” cried Aaron. “They want to get you under, and children is their chief weapon.”

“Men have got to stand up to the fact that manhood is more than childhood — and then force women to admit it,” said Lilly. “But the rotten whiners, they’re all grovelling before a baby’s napkin and a woman’s petticoat.”

“It’s a fact,” said Aaron. But he glanced at Lilly oddly, as if suspiciously. And Lilly caught the look. But he continued:

“And if they think you try to stand on your legs and walk with the feet of manhood, why, there isn’t a blooming father and lover among them but will do his best to get you down and suffocate you — either with a baby’s napkin or a woman’s petticoat.”

Lilly’s lips were curling; he was dark and bitter.

“Ay, it is like that,” said Aaron, rather subduedly.

“The man’s spirit has gone out of the world. Men can’t move an inch unless they can grovel humbly at the end of the journey.”

“No,” said Aaron, watching with keen, half-amused eyes.

“That’s why marriage wants readjusting — or extending — to get men on to their own legs once more, and to give them the adventure again. But men won’t stick together and fight for it. Because once a woman has climbed up with her

children, she'll find plenty of grovellers ready to support her and suffocate any defiant spirit. And women will sacrifice eleven men, fathers, husbands, brothers and lovers, for one baby — or for her own female self-conceit — ”

“She will that,” said Aaron.

“And can you find two men to stick together, without feeling criminal, and without cringing, and without betraying one another? You can't. One is sure to go fawning round some female, then they both enjoy giving each other away, and doing a new grovel before a woman again.”

“Ay,” said Aaron.

After which Lilly was silent.

CHAPTER X. THE WAR AGAIN

“One is a fool,” said Lilly, “to be lachrymose. The thing to do is to get a move on.”

Aaron looked up with a glimpse of a smile. The two men were sitting before the fire at the end of a cold, wet April day: Aaron convalescent, somewhat chastened in appearance.

“Ay,” he said rather sourly. “A move back to Guilford Street.”

“Oh, I meant to tell you,” said Lilly. “I was reading an old Baden history. They made a law in 1528 — not a law, but a regulation — that: if a man forsakes his wife and children, as now so often happens, the said wife and children are at once to be dispatched after him. I thought that would please you. Does it?”

“Yes,” said Aaron briefly.

“They would have arrived the next day, like a forwarded letter.”

“I should have had to get a considerable move on, at that rate,” grinned Aaron.

“Oh, no. You might quite like them here.” But Lilly saw the white frown of determined revulsion on the convalescent’s face.

“Wouldn’t you?” he asked.

Aaron shook his head.

“No,” he said. And it was obvious he objected to the topic. “What are you going to do about your move on?”

“Me!” said Lilly. “I’m going to sail away next week — or steam dirtily away on a tramp called the Maud Allen Wing.”

“Where to?”

“Malta.”

“Where from?”

“London Dock. I fixed up my passage this morning for ten pounds. I am cook’s assistant, signed on.”

Aaron looked at him with a little admiration.

“You can take a sudden jump, can’t you?” he said.

“The difficulty is to refrain from jumping: overboard or anywhere.”

Aaron smoked his pipe slowly.

“And what good will Malta do you?” he asked, envious.

“Heaven knows. I shall cross to Syracuse, and move up Italy.”

“Sounds as if you were a millionaire.”

“I’ve got thirty-five pounds in all the world. But something will come along.”

“I’ve got more than that,” said Aaron.

“Good for you,” replied Lilly.

He rose and went to the cupboard, taking out a bowl and a basket of potatoes. He sat down again, paring the potatoes. His busy activity annoyed Aaron.

“But what’s the good of going to Malta? Shall YOU be any different in yourself, in another place? You’ll be the same there as you are here.”

“How am I here?”

“Why, you’re all the time grinding yourself against something inside you. You’re never free. You’re never content. You never stop chafing.”

Lilly dipped his potato into the water, and cut out the eyes carefully. Then he cut it in two, and dropped it in the clean water of the second bowl. He had not expected this criticism.

“Perhaps I don’t,” said he.

“Then what’s the use of going somewhere else? You won’t change yourself.”

“I may in the end,” said Lilly.

“You’ll be yourself, whether it’s Malta or London,” said Aaron.

“There’s a doom for me,” laughed Lilly. The water on the fire was boiling. He rose and threw in salt, then dropped in the potatoes with little plops. “There there are lots of mes. I’m not only just one proposition. A new place brings out a new thing in a man. Otherwise you’d have stayed in your old place with your family.”

“The man in the middle of you doesn’t change,” said Aaron.

“Do you find it so?” said Lilly.

“Ay. Every time.”

“Then what’s to be done?”

“Nothing, as far as I can see. You get as much amusement out of life as possible, and there’s the end of it.”

“All right then, I’ll get the amusement.”

“Ay, all right then,” said Aaron. “But there isn’t anything wonderful about it. You talk as if you were doing something special. You aren’t. You’re no more than a man who drops into a pub for a drink, to liven himself up a bit. Only you give it a lot of names, and make out as if you were looking for the philosopher’s stone, or something like that. When you’re only killing time like the rest of folks, before time kills you.”

Lilly did not answer. It was not yet seven o’clock, but the sky was dark. Aaron sat in the firelight. Even the saucepan on the fire was silent. Darkness, silence, the firelight in the upper room, and the two men together.

“It isn’t quite true,” said Lilly, leaning on the mantelpiece and staring down into the fire.

“Where isn’t it? You talk, and you make a man believe you’ve got something he hasn’t got? But where is it, when it comes to? What have you got, more than me or Jim Bricknell! Only a bigger choice of words, it seems to me.”

Lilly was motionless and inscrutable like a shadow.

“Does it, Aaron!” he said, in a colorless voice.

“Yes. What else is there to it?” Aaron sounded testy.

“Why,” said Lilly at last, “there’s something. I agree, it’s true what you say about me. But there’s a bit of something else. There’s just a bit of something in me, I think, which ISN’T a man running into a pub for a drink — ”

“And what — ?”

The question fell into the twilight like a drop of water falling down a deep shaft into a well.

“I think a man may come into possession of his own soul at last — as the Buddhists teach — but without ceasing to love, or even to hate. One loves, one hates — but somewhere beyond it all, one understands, and possesses one’s soul in patience and in peace — ”

“Yes,” said Aaron slowly, “while you only stand and talk about it. But when you’ve got no chance to talk about it — and when you’ve got to live — you don’t possess your soul, neither in patience nor in peace, but any devil that likes possesses you and does what it likes with you, while you fridge yourself and fray yourself out like a worn rag.”

“I don’t care,” said Lilly, “I’m learning to possess my soul in patience and in peace, and I know it. And it isn’t a negative Nirvana either. And if Tanny possesses her own soul in patience and peace as well — and if in this we understand each other at last — then there we are, together and apart at the same time, and free of each other, and eternally inseparable. I have my Nirvana — and I have it all to myself. But more than that. It coincides with her Nirvana.”

“Ah, yes,” said Aaron. “But I don’t understand all that word-splitting.”

“I do, though. You learn to be quite alone, and possess your own soul in isolation — and at the same time, to be perfectly WITH someone else — that’s all I ask.”

“Sort of sit on a mountain top, back to back with somebody else, like a couple of idols.”

“No — because it isn’t a case of sitting — or a case of back to back. It’s what you get to after a lot of fighting and a lot of sensual fulfilment. And it never does away with the fighting and with the sensual passion. It flowers on top of them, and it would never flower save on top of them.”

“What wouldn’t?”

“The possessing one’s own soul — and the being together with someone else

in silence, beyond speech.”

“And you’ve got them?”

“I’ve got a BIT of the real quietness inside me.”

“So has a dog on a mat.”

“So I believe, too.”

“Or a man in a pub.”

“Which I don’t believe.”

“You prefer the dog?”

“Maybe.”

There was silence for a few moments.

“And I’m the man in the pub,” said Aaron.

“You aren’t the dog on the mat, anyhow.”

“And you’re the idol on the mountain top, worshipping yourself.”

“You talk to me like a woman, Aaron.”

“How do you talk to ME, do you think?”

“How do I?”

“Are the potatoes done?”

Lilly turned quickly aside, and switched on the electric light. Everything changed. Aaron sat still before the fire, irritated. Lilly went about preparing the supper.

The room was pleasant at night. Two tall, dark screens hid the two beds. In front, the piano was littered with music, the desk littered with papers. Lilly went out on to the landing, and set the chops to grill on the gas stove. Hastily he put a small table on the hearth-rug, spread it with a blue-and-white cloth, set plates and glasses. Aaron did not move. It was not his nature to concern himself with domestic matters — and Lilly did it best alone.

The two men had an almost uncanny understanding of one another — like brothers. They came from the same district, from the same class. Each might have been born into the other’s circumstance. Like brothers, there was a profound hostility between them. But hostility is not antipathy.

Lilly’s skilful housewifery always irritated Aaron: it was so self-sufficient. But most irritating of all was the little man’s unconscious assumption of priority. Lilly was actually unaware that he assumed this quiet predominance over others. He mashed the potatoes, he heated the plates, he warmed the red wine, he whisked eggs into the milk pudding, and served his visitor like a housemaid. But none of this detracted from the silent assurance with which he bore himself, and with which he seemed to domineer over his acquaintance.

At last the meal was ready. Lilly drew the curtains, switched off the central light, put the green-shaded electric lamp on the table, and the two men drew up

to the meal. It was good food, well cooked and hot. Certainly Lilly's hands were no longer clean: but it was clean dirt, as he said.

Aaron sat in the low arm-chair at table. So his face was below, in the full light. Lilly sat high on a small chair, so that his face was in the green shadow. Aaron was handsome, and always had that peculiar well-dressed look of his type. Lilly was indifferent to his own appearance, and his collar was a rag.

So the two men ate in silence. They had been together alone for a fortnight only: but it was like a small eternity. Aaron was well now — only he suffered from the depression and the sort of fear that follows influenza.

"When are you going?" he asked irritably, looking up at Lilly, whose face hovered in that green shadow above, and worried him.

"One day next week. They'll send me a telegram. Not later than Thursday."

"You're looking forward to going?" The question was half bitter.

"Yes. I want to get a new tune out of myself."

"Had enough of this?"

"Yes."

A flush of anger came on Aaron's face.

"You're easily on, and easily off," he said, rather insulting.

"Am I?" said Lilly. "What makes you think so?"

"Circumstances," replied Aaron sourly.

To which there was no answer. The host cleared away the plates, and put the pudding on the table. He pushed the bowl to Aaron.

"I suppose I shall never see you again, once you've gone," said Aaron.

"It's your choice. I will leave you an address."

After this, the pudding was eaten in silence.

"Besides, Aaron," said Lilly, drinking his last sip of wine, "what do you care whether you see me again or not? What do you care whether you see anybody again or not? You want to be amused. And now you're irritated because you think I am not going to amuse you any more: and you don't know who is going to amuse you. I admit it's a dilemma. But it's a hedonistic dilemma of the commonest sort."

"I don't know hedonistic. And supposing I am as you say — are you any different?"

"No, I'm not very different. But I always persuade myself there's a bit of difference. Do you know what Josephine Ford confessed to me? She's had her lovers enough. 'There isn't any such thing as love, Lilly,' she said. 'Men are simply afraid to be alone. That is absolutely all there is in it: fear of being alone.'"

"What by that?" said Aaron.

“You agree?”

“Yes, on the whole.”

“So do I — on the whole. And then I asked her what about woman. And then she said with a woman it wasn’t fear, it was just boredom. A woman is like a violinist: any fiddle, any instrument rather than empty hands and no tune going.”

“Yes — what I said before: getting as much amusement out of life as possible,” said Aaron.

“You amuse me — and I’ll amuse you.”

“Yes — just about that.”

“All right, Aaron,” said Lilly. “I’m not going to amuse you, or try to amuse you any more.”

“Going to try somebody else; and Malta.”

“Malta, anyhow.”

“Oh, and somebody else — in the next five minutes.”

“Yes — that also.”

“Goodbye and good luck to you.”

“Goodbye and good luck to you, Aaron.”

With which Lilly went aside to wash the dishes. Aaron sat alone under the zone of light, turning over a score of Pelleas. Though the noise of London was around them, it was far below, and in the room was a deep silence. Each of the men seemed invested in his own silence.

Aaron suddenly took his flute, and began trying little passages from the opera on his knee. He had not played since his illness. The noise came out a little tremulous, but low and sweet. Lilly came forward with a plate and a cloth in his hand.

“Aaron’s rod is putting forth again,” he said, smiling.

“What?” said Aaron, looking up.

“I said Aaron’s rod is putting forth again.”

“What rod?”

“Your flute, for the moment.”

“It’s got to put forth my bread and butter.”

“Is that all the buds it’s going to have?”

“What else!”

“Nay — that’s for you to show. What flowers do you imagine came out of the rod of Moses’s brother?”

“Scarlet runners, I should think if he’d got to live on them.”

“Scarlet enough, I’ll bet.”

Aaron turned unnoticing back to his music. Lilly finished the wiping of the dishes, then took a book and sat on the other side of the table.

“It’s all one to you, then,” said Aaron suddenly, “whether we ever see one another again?”

“Not a bit,” said Lilly, looking up over his spectacles. “I very much wish there might be something that held us together.”

“Then if you wish it, why isn’t there?”

“You might wish your flute to put out scarlet-runner flowers at the joints.”

“Ay — I might. And it would be all the same.”

The moment of silence that followed was extraordinary in its hostility.

“Oh, we shall run across one another again some time,” said Aaron.

“Sure,” said Lilly. “More than that: I’ll write you an address that will always find me. And when you write I will answer you.”

He took a bit of paper and scribbled an address. Aaron folded it and put it into his waistcoat pocket. It was an Italian address.

“But how can I live in Italy?” he said. “You can shift about. I’m tied to a job.”

“You — with your budding rod, your flute — and your charm — you can always do as you like.”

“My what?”

“Your flute and your charm.”

“What charm?”

“Just your own. Don’t pretend you don’t know you’ve got it. I don’t really like charm myself; too much of a trick about it. But whether or not, you’ve got it.”

“It’s news to me.”

“Not it.”

“Fact, it is.”

“Ha! Somebody will always take a fancy to you. And you can live on that, as well as on anything else.”

“Why do you always speak so despisingly?”

“Why shouldn’t I?”

“Have you any right to despise another man?”

“When did it go by rights?”

“No, not with you.”

“You answer me like a woman, Aaron.”

Again there was a space of silence. And again it was Aaron who at last broke it.

“We’re in different positions, you and me,” he said.

“How?”

“You can live by your writing — but I’ve got to have a job.”

“Is that all?” said Lilly.

“Ay. And plenty. You’ve got the advantage of me.”

“Quite,” said Lilly. “But why? I was a dirty-nosed little boy when you were a clean-nosed little boy. And I always had more patches on my breeches than you: neat patches, too, my poor mother! So what’s the good of talking about advantages? You had the start. And at this very moment you could buy me up, lock, stock, and barrel. So don’t feel hard done by. It’s a lie.”

“You’ve got your freedom.”

“I make it and I take it.”

“Circumstances make it for you.”

“As you like.”

“You don’t do a man justice,” said Aaron.

“Does a man care?”

“He might.”

“Then he’s no man.”

“Thanks again, old fellow.”

“Welcome,” said Lilly, grimacing.

Again Aaron looked at him, baffled, almost with hatred. Lilly grimaced at the blank wall opposite, and seemed to ruminate. Then he went back to his book. And no sooner had he forgotten Aaron, reading the fantasies of a certain Leo Frobenius, than Aaron must stride in again.

“You can’t say there isn’t a difference between your position and mine,” he said pertinently.

Lilly looked darkly over his spectacles.

“No, by God,” he said. “I should be in a poor way otherwise.”

“You can’t say you haven’t the advantage — your JOB gives you the advantage.”

“All right. Then leave it out with my job, and leave me alone.”

“That’s your way of dodging it.”

“My dear Aaron, I agree with you perfectly. There is no difference between us, save the fictitious advantage given to me by my job. Save for my job — which is to write lies — Aaron and I are two identical little men in one and the same little boat. Shall we leave it at that, now?”

“Yes,” said Aaron. “That’s about it.”

“Let us shake hands on it — and go to bed, my dear chap. You are just recovering from influenza, and look paler than I like.”

“You mean you want to be rid of me,” said Aaron.

“Yes, I do mean that,” said Lilly.

“Ay,” said Aaron.

And after a few minutes more staring at the score of Pelleas, he rose, put the score away on the piano, laid his flute beside it, and retired behind the screen. In

silence, the strange dim noise of London sounding from below, Lilly read on about the Kabyles. His soul had the faculty of divesting itself of the moment, and seeking further, deeper interests. These old Africans! And Atlantis! Strange, strange wisdom of the Kabyles! Old, old dark Africa, and the world before the flood! How jealous Aaron seemed! The child of a jealous God. A jealous God! Could any race be anything but despicable, with such an antecedent?

But no, persistent as a jealous God himself, Aaron reappeared in his pyjamas, and seated himself in his chair.

“What is the difference then between you and me, Lilly?” he said.

“Haven’t we shaken hands on it — a difference of jobs.”

“You don’t believe that, though, do you?”

“Nay, now I reckon you’re trespassing.”

“Why am I? I know you don’t believe it.”

“What do I believe then?” said Lilly.

“You believe you know something better than me — and that you are something better than me. Don’t you?”

“Do YOU believe it?”

“What?”

“That I AM something better than you, and that I KNOW something better?”

“No, because I don’t see it,” said Aaron.

“Then if you don’t see it, it isn’t there. So go to bed and sleep the sleep of the just and the convalescent. I am not to be badgered any more.”

“Am I badgering you?” said Aaron.

“Indeed you are.”

“So I’m in the wrong again?”

“Once more, my dear.”

“You’re a God-Almighty in your way, you know.”

“So long as I’m not in anybody else’s way — Anyhow, you’d be much better sleeping the sleep of the just. And I’m going out for a minute or two. Don’t catch cold there with nothing on —

“I want to catch the post,” he added, rising.

Aaron looked up at him quickly. But almost before there was time to speak, Lilly had slipped into his hat and coat, seized his letters, and gone.

It was a rainy night. Lilly turned down King Street to walk to Charing Cross. He liked being out of doors. He liked to post his letters at Charing Cross post office. He did not want to talk to Aaron any more. He was glad to be alone.

He walked quickly down Villiers Street to the river, to see it flowing blackly towards the sea. It had an endless fascination for him: never failed to soothe him and give him a sense of liberty. He liked the night, the dark rain, the river, and

even the traffic. He enjoyed the sense of friction he got from the streaming of people who meant nothing to him. It was like a fox slipping alert among unsuspecting cattle.

When he got back, he saw in the distance the lights of a taxi standing outside the building where he lived, and heard a thumping and hallooing. He hurried forward.

It was a man called Herbertson.

“Oh, why, there you are!” exclaimed Herbertson, as Lilly drew near. “Can I come up and have a chat?”

“I’ve got that man who’s had flu. I should think he is gone to bed.”

“Oh!” The disappointment was plain. “Well, look here I’ll just come up for a couple of minutes.” He laid his hand on Lilly’s arm. “I heard you were going away. Where are you going?”

“Malta.”

“Malta! Oh, I know Malta very well. Well now, it’ll be all right if I come up for a minute? I’m not going to see much more of you, apparently.” He turned quickly to the taxi. “What is it on the clock?”

The taxi was paid, the two men went upstairs. Aaron was in bed, but he called as Lilly entered the room.

“Hullo!” said Lilly. “Not asleep? Captain Herbertson has come in for a minute.”

“Hope I shan’t disturb you,” said Captain Herbertson, laying down his stick and gloves, and his cap. He was in uniform. He was one of the few surviving officers of the Guards, a man of about forty-five, good-looking, getting rather stout. He settled himself in the chair where Aaron had sat, hitching up his trousers. The gold identity plate, with its gold chain, fell conspicuously over his wrist.

“Been to ‘Rosemary,’“ he said. “Rotten play, you know — but passes the time awfully well. Oh, I quite enjoyed it.”

Lilly offered him Sauterne — the only thing in the house.

“Oh, yes! How awfully nice! Yes, thanks, I shall love it. Can I have it with soda? Thanks! Do you know, I think that’s the very best drink in the tropics: sweet white wine, with soda? Yes — well! — Well — now, why are you going away?”

“For a change,” said Lilly.

“You’re quite right, one needs a change now the damned thing is all over. As soon as I get out of khaki I shall be off. Malta! Yes! I’ve been in Malta several times. I think Valletta is quite enjoyable, particularly in winter, with the opera. Oh — er — how’s your wife? All right? Yes! — glad to see her people again.

Bound to be — Oh, by the way, I met Jim Bricknell. Sends you a message hoping you'll go down and stay — down at Captain Bingham's place in Surrey, you know. Awfully queer lot down there. Not my sort, no. You won't go down? No, I shouldn't. Not the right sort of people."

Herbertson rattled away, rather spasmodic. He had been through the very front hell of the war — and like every man who had, he had the war at the back of his mind, like an obsession. But in the meantime, he skirmished.

"Yes. I was on guard one day when the Queen gave one of her tea-parties to the blind. Awful affair. But the children are awfully nice children. Prince of Wales awfully nice, almost too nice. Prince Henry smart boy, too — oh, a smart boy. Queen Mary poured the tea, and I handed round bread and butter. She told me I made a very good waiter. I said, Thank you, Madam. But I like the children. Very different from the Battenbergs. Oh! — " he wrinkled his nose. "I can't stand the Battenbergs."

"Mount Battens," said Lilly.

"Yes! Awful mistake, changing the royal name. They were Guelfs, why not remain it? Why, I'll tell you what Battenberg did. He was in the Guards, too — "

The talk flowed on: about royalty and the Guards, Buckingham Palace and St. James.

"Rather a nice story about Queen Victoria. Man named Joyce, something or other, often used to dine at the Palace. And he was an awfully good imitator — really clever, you know. Used to imitate the Queen. 'Mr. Joyce,' she said, 'I hear your imitation is very amusing. Will you do it for us now, and let us see what it is like?' 'Oh, no, Madam! I'm afraid I couldn't do it now. I'm afraid I'm not in the humour.' But she would have him do it. And it was really awfully funny. He had to do it. You know what he did. He used to take a table-napkin, and put it on with one corner over his forehead, and the rest hanging down behind, like her veil thing. And then he sent for the kettle-lid. He always had the kettle-lid, for that little crown of hers. And then he impersonated her. But he was awfully good — so clever. 'Mr. Joyce,' she said. 'We are not amused. Please leave the room.' Yes, that is exactly what she said: 'WE are not amused — please leave the room.' I like the WE, don't you? And he a man of sixty or so. However, he left the room and for a fortnight or so he wasn't invited — Wasn't she wonderful — Queen Victoria?"

And so, by light transitions, to the Prince of Wales at the front, and thus into the trenches. And then Herbertson was on the subject he was obsessed by. He had come, unconsciously, for this and this only, to talk war to Lilly: or at Lilly. For the latter listened and watched, and said nothing. As a man at night helplessly takes a taxi to find some woman, some prostitute, Herbertson had

almost unthinkingly got into a taxi and come battering at the door in Covent Garden, only to talk war to Lilly, whom he knew very little. But it was a driving instinct — to come and get it off his chest.

And on and on he talked, over his wine and soda. He was not conceited — he was not showing off — far from it. It was the same thing here in this officer as it was with the privates, and the same with this Englishman as with a Frenchman or a German or an Italian. Lilly had sat in a cowshed listening to a youth in the north country: he had sat on the corn-straw that the oxen had been treading out, in Calabria, under the moon: he had sat in a farm-kitchen with a German prisoner: and every time it was the same thing, the same hot, blind, anguished voice of a man who has seen too much, experienced too much, and doesn't know where to turn. None of the glamour of returned heroes, none of the romance of war: only a hot, blind, mesmerised voice, going on and on, mesmerised by a vision that the soul cannot bear.

In this officer, of course, there was a lightness and an appearance of bright diffidence and humour. But underneath it all was the same as in the common men of all the combatant nations: the hot, seared burn of unbearable experience, which did not heal nor cool, and whose irritation was not to be relieved. The experience gradually cooled on top: but only with a surface crust. The soul did not heal, did not recover.

“I used to be awfully frightened,” laughed Herbertson. “Now you say, Lilly, you'd never have stood it. But you would. You're nervous — and it was just the nervous ones that did stand it. When nearly all our officers were gone, we had a man come out — a man called Margeritson, from India — big merchant people out there. They all said he was no good — not a bit of good — nervous chap. No good at all. But when you had to get out of the trench and go for the Germans he was perfect — perfect — It all came to him then, at the crisis, and he was perfect.

“Some things frighten one man, and some another. Now shells would never frighten me. But I couldn't stand bombs. You could tell the difference between our machines and the Germans. Ours was a steady noise — drrrrrrrr! — but their's was heavy, drrrrRURUrrrrRURU! — My word, that got on my nerves....

“No I was never hit. The nearest thing was when I was knocked down by an exploding shell — several times that — you know. When you shout like mad for the men to come and dig you out, under all the earth. And my word, you do feel frightened then.” Herbertson laughed with a twinkling motion to Lilly. But between his brows there was a tension like madness.

“And a funny thing you know — how you don't notice things. In — let me see — 1916, the German guns were a lot better than ours. Ours were old, and when

they're old you can't tell where they'll hit: whether they'll go beyond the mark, or whether they'll fall short. Well, this day our guns were firing short, and killing our own men. We'd had the order to charge, and were running forward, and I suddenly felt hot water spurting on my neck — ” He put his hand to the back of his neck and glanced round apprehensively. “It was a chap called Innes — Oh, an awfully decent sort — people were in the Argentine. He'd been calling out to me as we were running, and I was just answering. When I felt this hot water on my neck and saw him running past me with no head — he'd got no head, and he went running past me. I don't know how far, but a long way.... Blood, you know — Yes — well —

“Oh, I hated Chelsea — I loathed Chelsea — Chelsea was purgatory to me. I had a corporal called Wallace — he was a fine chap — oh, he was a fine chap — six foot two — and about twenty-four years old. He was my stand-back. Oh, I hated Chelsea, and parades, and drills. You know, when it's drill, and you're giving orders, you forget what order you've just given — in front of the Palace there the crowd don't notice — but it's AWFUL for you. And you know you daren't look round to see what the men are doing. But Wallace was splendid. He was just behind me, and I'd hear him, quite quiet you know, ‘It's right wheel, sir.’ Always perfect, always perfect — yes — well....

“You know you don't get killed if you don't think you will. Now I never thought I should get killed. And I never knew a man get killed if he hadn't been thinking he would. I said to Wallace I'd rather be out here, at the front, than at Chelsea. I hated Chelsea — I can't tell you how much. ‘Oh no, sir!’ he said. ‘I'd rather be at Chelsea than here. I'd rather be at Chelsea. There isn't hell like this at Chelsea.’ We'd had orders that we were to go back to the real camp the next day. ‘Never mind, Wallace,’ I said. ‘We shall be out of this hell-on-earth tomorrow.’ And he took my hand. We weren't much for showing feeling or anything in the guards. But he took my hand. And we climbed out to charge — Poor fellow, he was killed — ” Herbertson dropped his head, and for some moments seemed to go unconscious, as if struck. Then he lifted his face, and went on in the same animated chatty fashion: “You see, he had a presentiment. I'm sure he had a presentiment. None of the men got killed unless they had a presentiment — like that, you know....”

Herbertson nodded keenly at Lilly, with his sharp, twinkling, yet obsessed eyes. Lilly wondered why he made the presentiment responsible for the death — which he obviously did — and not vice versa. Herbertson implied every time, that you'd never get killed if you could keep yourself from having a presentiment. Perhaps there was something in it. Perhaps the soul issues its own ticket of death, when it can stand no more. Surely life controls life: and not

accident.

“It’s a funny thing what shock will do. We had a sergeant and he shouted to me. Both his feet were off — both his feet, clean at the ankle. I gave him morphia. You know officers aren’t allowed to use the needle — might give the man blood poisoning. You give those tabloids. They say they act in a few minutes, but they DON’T. It’s a quarter of an hour. And nothing is more demoralising than when you have a man, wounded, you know, and crying out. Well, this man I gave him the morphia before he got over the stunning, you know. So he didn’t feel the pain. Well, they carried him in. I always used to like to look after my men. So I went next morning and I found he hadn’t been removed to the Clearing Station. I got hold of the doctor and I said, ‘Look here! Why hasn’t this man been taken to the Clearing Station?’ I used to get excited. But after some years they’d got used to me. ‘Don’t get excited, Herbertson, the man’s dying.’ ‘But,’ I said, ‘he’s just been talking to me as strong as you are.’ And he had — he’d talk as strong and well as you or me, then go quiet for a bit. I said I gave him the morphia before he came round from the stunning. So he’d felt nothing. But in two hours he was dead. The doctor says that the shock does it like that sometimes. You can do nothing for them. Nothing vital is injured — and yet the life is broken in them. Nothing can be done — funny thing — Must be something in the brain — ”

“It’s obviously not the brain,” said Lilly. “It’s deeper than the brain.”

“Deeper,” said Herbertson, nodding.

“Funny thing where life is. We had a lieutenant. You know we all buried our own dead. Well, he looked as if he was asleep. Most of the chaps looked like that.” Herbertson closed his eyes and laid his face aside, like a man asleep and dead peacefully. “You very rarely see a man dead with any other look on his face — you know the other look. — ” And he clenched his teeth with a sudden, momentaneous, ghastly distortion. — ”Well, you’d never have known this chap was dead. He had a wound here — in the back of the head — and a bit of blood on his hand — and nothing else, nothing. Well, I said we’d give him a decent burial. He lay there waiting — and they’d wrapped him in a filthy blanket — you know. Well, I said he should have a proper blanket. He’d been dead lying there a day and a half you know. So I went and got a blanket, a beautiful blanket, out of his private kit — his people were Scotch, well-known family — and I got the pins, you know, ready to pin him up properly, for the Scots Guards to bury him. And I thought he’d be stiff, you see. But when I took him by the arms, to lift him on, he sat up. It gave me an awful shock. ‘Why he’s alive!’ I said. But they said he was dead. I couldn’t believe it. It gave me an awful shock. He was as flexible as you or me, and looked as if he was asleep. You couldn’t believe he

was dead. But we pinned him up in his blanket. It was an awful shock to me. I couldn't believe a man could be like that after he'd been dead two days....

"The Germans were wonderful with the machine guns — it's a wicked thing, a machine gun. But they couldn't touch us with the bayonet. Every time the men came back they had bayonet practice, and they got awfully good. You know when you thrust at the Germans — so — if you miss him, you bring your rifle back sharp, with a round swing, so that the butt comes up and hits up under the jaw. It's one movement, following on with the stab, you see, if you miss him. It was too quick for them — But bayonet charge was worst, you know. Because your man cries out when you catch him, when you get him, you know. That's what does you....

"No, oh no, this was no war like other wars. All the machinery of it. No, you couldn't stand it, but for the men. The men are wonderful, you know. They'll be wiped out.... No, it's your men who keep you going, if you're an officer.... But there'll never be another war like this. Because the Germans are the only people who could make a war like this — and I don't think they'll ever do it again, do you?

"Oh, they were wonderful, the Germans. They were amazing. It was incredible, what they invented and did. We had to learn from them, in the first two years. But they were too methodical. That's why they lost the war. They were too methodical. They'd fire their guns every ten minutes — regular. Think of it. Of course we knew when to run, and when to lie down. You got so that you knew almost exactly what they'd do — if you'd been out long enough. And then you could time what you wanted to do yourselves.

"They were a lot more nervous than we were, at the last. They sent up enough light at night from their trenches — you know, those things that burst in the air like electric light — we had none of that to do — they did it all for us — lit up everything. They were more nervous than we were...."

It was nearly two o'clock when Herbertson left. Lilly, depressed, remained before the fire. Aaron got out of bed and came uneasily to the fire.

"It gives me the bellyache, that damned war," he said.

"So it does me," said Lilly. "All unreal."

"Real enough for those that had to go through it."

"No, least of all for them," said Lilly sullenly. "Not as real as a bad dream. Why the hell don't they wake up and realise it!"

"That's a fact," said Aaron. "They're hypnotised by it."

"And they want to hypnotise me. And I won't be hypnotised. The war was a lie and is a lie and will go on being a lie till somebody busts it."

"It was a fact — you can't bust that. You can't bust the fact that it happened."

“Yes you can. It never happened. It never happened to me. No more than my dreams happen. My dreams don’t happen: they only seem.”

“But the war did happen, right enough,” smiled Aaron palely.

“No, it didn’t. Not to me or to any man, in his own self. It took place in the automatic sphere, like dreams do. But the ACTUAL MAN in every man was just absent — asleep — or drugged — inert — dream-logged. That’s it.”

“You tell ‘em so,” said Aaron.

“I do. But it’s no good. Because they won’t wake up now even — perhaps never. They’ll all kill themselves in their sleep.”

“They wouldn’t be any better if they did wake up and be themselves — that is, supposing they are asleep, which I can’t see. They are what they are — and they’re all alike — and never very different from what they are now.”

Lilly stared at Aaron with black eyes.

“Do you believe in them less than I do, Aaron?” he asked slowly.

“I don’t even want to believe in them.”

“But in yourself?” Lilly was almost wistful — and Aaron uneasy.

“I don’t know that I’ve any more right to believe in myself than in them,” he replied. Lilly watched and pondered.

“No,” he said. “That’s not true — I KNEW the war was false: humanly quite false. I always knew it was false. The Germans were false, we were false, everybody was false.”

“And not you?” asked Aaron shrewishly.

“There was a wakeful, self-possessed bit of me which knew that the war and all that horrible movement was false for me. And so I wasn’t going to be dragged in. The Germans could have shot my mother or me or what they liked: I wouldn’t have joined the WAR. I would like to kill my enemy. But become a bit of that huge obscene machine they called the war, that I never would, no, not if I died ten deaths and had eleven mothers violated. But I would like to kill my enemy: Oh, yes, more than one enemy. But not as a unit in a vast obscene mechanism. That never: no, never.”

Poor Lilly was too earnest and vehement. Aaron made a fine nose. It seemed to him like a lot of words and a bit of wriggling out of a hole.

“Well,” he said, “you’ve got men and nations, and you’ve got the machines of war — so how are you going to get out of it? League of Nations?”

“Damn all leagues. Damn all masses and groups, anyhow. All I want is to get MYSELF out of their horrible heap: to get out of the swarm. The swarm to me is nightmare and nullity — horrible helpless writhing in a dream. I want to get myself awake, out of it all — all that mass-consciousness, all that mass-activity — it’s the most horrible nightmare to me. No man is awake and himself. No man

who was awake and in possession of himself would use poison gases: no man. His own awake self would scorn such a thing. It's only when the ghastly mob-sleep, the dream helplessness of the mass-psyche overcomes him, that he becomes completely base and obscene."

"Ha — well," said Aaron. "It's the wide-awake ones that invent the poison gas, and use it. Where should we be without it?"

Lilly started, went stiff and hostile.

"Do you mean that, Aaron?" he said, looking into Aaron's face with a hard, inflexible look.

Aaron turned aside half sheepishly.

"That's how it looks on the face of it, isn't it?" he said.

"Look here, my friend, it's too late for you to be talking to me about the face of things. If that's how you feel, put your things on and follow Herbertson. Yes — go out of my room. I don't put up with the face of things here."

Aaron looked at him in cold amazement.

"It'll do tomorrow morning, won't it?" he asked rather mocking.

"Yes," said Lilly coldly. "But please go tomorrow morning."

"Oh, I'll go all right," said Aaron. "Everybody's got to agree with you — that's your price."

But Lilly did not answer. Aaron turned into bed, his satirical smile under his nose. Somewhat surprised, however, at this sudden turn of affairs.

As he was just going to sleep, dismissing the matter, Lilly came once more to his bedside, and said, in a hard voice:

"I'm NOT going to pretend to have friends on the face of things. No, and I don't have friends who don't fundamentally agree with me. A friend means one who is at one with me in matters of life and death. And if you're at one with all the rest, then you're THEIR friend, not mine. So be their friend. And please leave me in the morning. You owe me nothing, you have nothing more to do with me. I have had enough of these friendships where I pay the piper and the mob calls the tune.

"Let me tell you, moreover, your heroic Herbertsons lost us more than ever they won. A brave ant is a damned cowardly individual. Your heroic officers are a sad sight AFTERWARDS, when they come home. Bah, your Herbertson! The only justification for war is what we learn from it. And what have they learnt? — Why did so many of them have presentiments, as he called it? Because they could feel inside them, there was nothing to come after. There was no life-courage: only death-courage. Nothing beyond this hell — only death or love — languishing — "

"What could they have seen, anyhow?" said Aaron.

“It’s not what you see, actually. It’s the kind of spirit you keep inside you: the life spirit. When Wallace had presentiments, Herbertson, being officer, should have said: ‘None of that, Wallace. You and I, we’ve got to live and make life smoke.’ — Instead of which he let Wallace be killed and his own heart be broken. Always the death-choice — And we won’t, we simply will not face the world as we’ve made it, and our own souls as we find them, and take the responsibility. We’ll never get anywhere till we stand up man to man and face EVERYTHING out, and break the old forms, but never let our own pride and courage of life be broken.”

Lilly broke off, and went silently to bed. Aaron turned over to sleep, rather resenting the sound of so many words. What difference did it make, anyhow? In the morning, however, when he saw the other man’s pale, closed, rather haughty face, he realised that something had happened. Lilly was courteous and even affable: but with a curious cold space between him and Aaron. Breakfast passed, and Aaron knew that he must leave. There was something in Lilly’s bearing which just showed him the door. In some surprise and confusion, and in some anger, not unmingled with humorous irony, he put his things in his bag. He put on his hat and coat. Lilly was seated rather stiffly writing.

“Well,” said Aaron. “I suppose we shall meet again.”

“Oh, sure to,” said Lilly, rising from his chair. “We are sure to run across one another.”

“When are you going?” asked Aaron.

“In a few days’ time.”

“Oh, well, I’ll run in and see you before you go, shall I?”

“Yes, do.”

Lilly escorted his guest to the top of the stairs, shook hands, and then returned into his own room, closing the door on himself.

Aaron did not find his friend at home when he called. He took it rather as a slap in the face. But then he knew quite well that Lilly had made a certain call on his, Aaron’s soul: a call which he, Aaron, did not at all intend to obey. If in return the soul-caller chose to shut his street-door in the face of the world-friend — well, let it be quits. He was not sure whether he felt superior to his unworldly enemy or not. He rather thought he did.

CHAPTER XI. MORE PILLAR OF SALT

The opera season ended, Aaron was invited by Cyril Scott to join a group of musical people in a village by the sea. He accepted, and spent a pleasant month. It pleased the young men musically-inclined and bohemian by profession to patronise the flautist, whom they declared marvellous. Bohemians with well-to-do parents, they could already afford to squander a little spasmodic and self-gratifying patronage. And Aaron did not mind being patronised. He had nothing else to do.

But the party broke up early in September. The flautist was detained a few days at a country house, for the amusement of the guests. Then he left for London.

In London he found himself at a loose end. A certain fretful dislike of the patronage of indifferent young men, younger than himself, and a certain distaste for regular work in the orchestra made him look round. He wanted something else. He wanted to disappear again. Qualms and emotions concerning his abandoned family overcame him. The early, delicate autumn affected him. He took a train to the Midlands.

And again, just after dark, he strolled with his little bag across the field which lay at the end of his garden. It had been mown, and the grass was already growing long. He stood and looked at the line of back windows, lighted once more. He smelled the scents of autumn, phlox and moist old vegetation and corn in sheaf. A nostalgia which was half at least revulsion affected him. The place, the home, at once fascinated and revolted him.

Sitting in his shed, he scrutinised his garden carefully, in the starlight. There were two rows of beans, rather disshevelled. Near at hand the marrow plants sprawled from their old bed. He could detect the perfume of a few carnations. He wondered who it was had planted the garden, during his long absence. Anyhow, there it was, planted and fruited and waning into autumn.

The blind was not drawn. It was eight o'clock. The children were going to bed. Aaron waited in his shed, his bowels stirred with violent but only half-admitted emotions. There was his wife, slim and graceful, holding a little mug to the baby's mouth. And the baby was drinking. She looked lonely. Wild emotions attacked his heart. There was going to be a wild and emotional reconciliation.

Was there? It seemed like something fearful and imminent. A passion arose in him, a craving for the violent emotional reconciliation. He waited impatiently for

the children to be gone to bed, gnawed with restless desire.

He heard the clock strike nine, then half-past, from the village behind. The children would be asleep. His wife was sitting sewing some little frock. He went lingering down the garden path, stooping to lift the fallen carnations, to see how they were. There were many flowers, but small. He broke one off, then threw it away. The golden rod was out. Even in the little lawn there were asters, as of old.

His wife started to listen, hearing his step. He was filled with a violent conflict of tenderness, like a sickness. He hesitated, tapping at the door, and entered. His wife started to her feet, at bay.

“What have you come for!” was her involuntary ejaculation.

But he, with the familiar odd jerk of his head towards the garden, asked with a faint smile:

“Who planted the garden?”

And he felt himself dropping into the twang of the vernacular, which he had discarded.

Lottie only stood and stared at him, objectively. She did not think to answer. He took his hat off, and put it on the dresser. Again the familiar act maddened her.

“What have you come for?” she cried again, with a voice full of hate. Or perhaps it was fear and doubt and even hope as well. He heard only hate.

This time he turned to look at her. The old dagger was drawn in her.

“I wonder,” he said, “myself.”

Then she recovered herself, and with trembling hand picked up her sewing again. But she still stood at bay, beyond the table. She said nothing. He, feeling tired, sat down on the chair nearest the door. But he reached for his hat, and kept it on his knee. She, as she stood there unnaturally, went on with her sewing. There was silence for some time. Curious sensations and emotions went through the man’s frame seeming to destroy him. They were like electric shocks, which he felt she emitted against him. And an old sickness came in him again. He had forgotten it. It was the sickness of the unrecognised and incomprehensible strain between him and her.

After a time she put down her sewing, and sat again in her chair.

“Do you know how vilely you’ve treated me?” she said, staring across the space at him. He averted his face.

Yet he answered, not without irony.

“I suppose so.”

“And why?” she cried. “I should like to know why.”

He did not answer. The way she rushed in made him go vague.

“Justify yourself. Say why you’ve been so vile to me. Say what you had against me,” she demanded.

“What I HAD against her,” he mused to himself: and he wondered that she used the past tense. He made no answer.

“Accuse me,” she insisted. “Say what I’ve done to make you treat me like this. Say it. You must THINK it hard enough.”

“Nay,” he said. “I don’t think it.”

This speech, by which he merely meant that he did not trouble to formulate any injuries he had against her, puzzled her.

“Don’t come pretending you love me, NOW. It’s too late,” she said with contempt. Yet perhaps also hope.

“You might wait till I start pretending,” he said.

This enraged her.

“You vile creature!” she exclaimed. “Go! What have you come for?”

“To look at YOU,” he said sarcastically.

After a few minutes she began to cry, sobbing violently into her apron. And again his bowels stirred and boiled.

“What have I done! What have I done! I don’t know what I’ve done that he should be like this to me,” she sobbed, into her apron. It was childish, and perhaps true. At least it was true from the childish part of her nature. He sat gloomy and uneasy.

She took the apron from her tear-stained face, and looked at him. It was true, in her moments of roused exposure she was a beautiful woman — a beautiful woman. At this moment, with her flushed, tear-stained, wilful distress, she was beautiful.

“Tell me,” she challenged. “Tell me! Tell me what I’ve done. Tell me what you have against me. Tell me.”

Watching like a lynx, she saw the puzzled, hurt look in his face. Telling isn’t so easy — especially when the trouble goes too deep for conscious comprehension. He couldn’t tell what he had against her. And he had not the slightest intention of doing what she would have liked him to do, starting to pile up detailed grievances. He knew the detailed grievances were nothing in themselves.

“You CAN’T,” she cried vindictively. “You CAN’T. You CAN’T find anything real to bring against me, though you’d like to. You’d like to be able to accuse me of something, but you CAN’T, because you know there isn’t anything.”

She watched him, watched. And he sat in the chair near the door, without moving.

“You’re unnatural, that’s what you are,” she cried. “You’re unnatural. You’re not a man. You haven’t got a man’s feelings. You’re nasty, and cold, and unnatural. And you’re a coward. You’re a coward. You run away from me, without telling me what you’ve got against me.”

“When you’ve had enough, you go away and you don’t care what you do,” he said, epigrammatic.

She paused a moment.

“Enough of what?” she said. “What have you had enough of? Of me and your children? It’s a nice manly thing to say. Haven’t I loved you? Haven’t I loved you for twelve years, and worked and slaved for you and tried to keep you right? Heaven knows where you’d have been but for me, evil as you are at the bottom. You’re evil, that’s what it is — and weak. You’re too weak to love a woman and give her what she wants: too weak. Unmanly and cowardly, he runs away.”

“No wonder,” he said.

“No,” she cried. “It IS no wonder, with a nature like yours: weak and unnatural and evil. It IS no wonder.”

She became quiet — and then started to cry again, into her apron. Aaron waited. He felt physically weak.

“And who knows what you’ve been doing all these months?” she wept. “Who knows all the vile things you’ve been doing? And you’re the father of my children — the father of my little girls — and who knows what vile things he’s guilty of, all these months?”

“I shouldn’t let my imagination run away with me,” he answered. “I’ve been playing the flute in the orchestra of one of the theatres in London.”

“Ha!” she cried. “It’s more than that. Don’t think I’m going to believe you. I know you, with your smooth-sounding lies. You’re a liar, as you know. And I know you’ve been doing other things besides play a flute in an orchestra. You! — as if I don’t know you. And then coming crawling back to me with your lies and your pretense. Don’t think I’m taken in.”

“I should be sorry,” he said.

“Coming crawling back to me, and expecting to be forgiven,” she went on. “But no — I don’t forgive — and I can’t forgive — never — not as long as I live shall I forgive what you’ve done to me.”

“You can wait till you’re asked, anyhow,” he said.

“And you can wait,” she said. “And you shall wait.” She took up her sewing, and stitched steadily, as if calmly. Anyone glancing in would have imagined a quiet domestic hearth at that moment. He, too, feeling physically weak, remained silent, feeling his soul absent from the scene.

Again she suddenly burst into tears, weeping bitterly.

“And the children,” she sobbed, rocking herself with grief and chagrin. “What have I been able to say to the children — what have I been able to tell them?”

“What HAVE you told them?” he asked coldly.

“I told them you’d gone away to work,” she sobbed, laying her head on her arms on the table. “What else could I tell them? I couldn’t tell them the vile truth about their father. I couldn’t tell THEM how evil you are.” She sobbed and moaned.

He wondered what exactly the vile truth would have been, had she started to tell it. And he began to feel, coldly and cynically, that among all her distress there was a luxuriating in the violent emotions of the scene in hand, and the situation altogether.

Then again she became quiet, and picked up her sewing. She stitched quietly, wistfully, for some time. Then she looked up at him — a long look of reproach, and sombre accusation, and wifely tenderness. He turned his face aside.

“You know you’ve been wrong to me, don’t you?” she said, half wistfully, half menacing.

He felt her wistfulness and her menace tearing him in his bowels and loins.

“You do know, don’t you?” she insisted, still with the wistful appeal, and the veiled threat.

“You do, or you would answer,” she said. “You’ve still got enough that’s right in you, for you to know.”

She waited. He sat still, as if drawn by hot wires.

Then she slipped across to him, put her arms round him, sank on her knees at his side, and sank her face against his thigh.

“Say you know how wrong you are. Say you know how cruel you’ve been to me,” she pleaded. But under her female pleading and appeal he felt the iron of her threat.

“You DO know it,” she murmured, looking up into his face as she crouched by his knee. “You DO know it. I can see in your eyes that you know it. And why have you come back to me, if you don’t know it! Why have you come back to me? Tell me!” Her arms gave him a sharp, compulsory little clutch round the waist. “Tell me! Tell me!” she murmured, with all her appeal liquid in her throat.

But him, it half overcame, and at the same time, horrified. He had a certain horror of her. The strange liquid sound of her appeal seemed to him like the swaying of a serpent which mesmerises the fated, fluttering, helpless bird. She clasped her arms round him, she drew him to her, she half roused his passion. At the same time she coldly horrified and repelled him. He had not the faintest feeling, at the moment, of his own wrong. But she wanted to win his own self-betrayal out of him. He could see himself as the fascinated victim, falling to this

cajoling, awful woman, the wife of his bosom. But as well, he had a soul outside himself, which looked on the whole scene with cold revulsion, and which was as unchangeable as time.

“No,” he said. “I don’t feel wrong.”

“You DO!” she said, giving him a sharp, admonitory clutch. “You DO. Only you’re silly, and obstinate, babyish and silly and obstinate. An obstinate little boy — you DO feel wrong. And you ARE wrong. And you’ve got to say it.”

But quietly he disengaged himself and got to his feet, his face pale and set, obstinate as she said. He put his hat on, and took his little bag. She watched him curiously, still crouching by his chair.

“I’ll go,” he said, putting his hand on the latch.

Suddenly she sprang to her feet and clutched him by the shirt-neck, her hand inside his soft collar, half strangling him.

“You villain,” she said, and her face was transfigured with passion as he had never seen it before, horrible. “You villain!” she said thickly. “What have you come here for?”

His soul went black as he looked at her. He broke her hand away from his shirt collar, bursting the stud-holes. She recoiled in silence. And in one black, unconscious movement he was gone, down the garden and over the fence and across the country, swallowed in a black unconsciousness.

She, realising, sank upon the hearth-rug and lay there curled upon herself. She was defeated. But she, too, would never yield. She lay quite motionless for some time. Then she got up, feeling the draught on the floor. She closed the door, and drew down the blind. Then she looked at her wrist, which he had gripped, and which pained her. Then she went to the mirror and looked for a long time at her white, strained, determined face. Come life, come death, she, too would never yield. And she realised now that he would never yield.

She was faint with weariness, and would be glad to get to bed and sleep.

Aaron meanwhile had walked across the country and was looking for a place to rest. He found a cornfield with a half-built stack, and sheaves in stook. Ten to one some tramp would have found the stack. He threw a dozen sheaves together and lay down, looking at the stars in the September sky. He, too, would never yield. The illusion of love was gone for ever. Love was a battle in which each party strove for the mastery of the other’s soul. So far, man had yielded the mastery to woman. Now he was fighting for it back again. And too late, for the woman would never yield.

But whether woman yielded or not, he would keep the mastery of his own soul and conscience and actions. He would never yield himself up to her judgment again. He would hold himself forever beyond her jurisdiction.

Henceforth, life single, not life double.

He looked at the sky, and thanked the universe for the blessedness of being alone in the universe. To be alone, to be oneself, not to be driven or violated into something which is not oneself, surely it is better than anything. He thought of Lottie, and knew how much more truly herself she was when she was alone, with no man to distort her. And he was thankful for the division between them. Such scenes as the last were too horrible and unreal.

As for future unions, too soon to think about it. Let there be clean and pure division first, perfected singleness. That is the only way to final, living unison: through sheer, finished singleness.

CHAPTER XII. NOVARA

Having no job for the autumn, Aaron fidgetted in London. He played at some concerts and some private shows. He was one of an odd quartette, for example, which went to play to Lady Artemis Hooper, when she lay in bed after her famous escapade of falling through the window of her taxi-cab. Aaron had that curious knack, which belongs to some people, of getting into the swim without knowing he was doing it. Lady Artemis thought his flute lovely, and had him again to play for her. Aaron looked at her and she at him. She, as she reclined there in bed in a sort of half-light, well made-up, smoking her cigarettes and talking in a rather raucous voice, making her slightly rasping witty comments to the other men in the room — of course there were other men, the audience — was a shock to the flautist. This was the bride of the moment! Curious how raucous her voice sounded out of the cigarette smoke. Yet he liked her — the reckless note of the modern, social freebooter. In himself was a touch of the same quality.

“Do you love playing?” she asked him.

“Yes,” he said, with that shadow of irony which seemed like a smile on his face.

“Live for it, so to speak,” she said.

“I make my living by it,” he said.

“But that’s not really how you take it?” she said. He eyed her. She watched him over her cigarette. It was a personal moment.

“I don’t think about it,” he said.

“I’m sure you don’t. You wouldn’t be so good if you did. You’re awfully lucky, you know, to be able to pour yourself down your flute.”

“You think I go down easy?” he laughed.

“Ah!” she replied, flicking her cigarette broadcast. “That’s the point. What should you say, Jimmy?” she turned to one of the men. He screwed his eyeglass nervously and stiffened himself to look at her.

“I — I shouldn’t like to say, off-hand,” came the small-voiced, self-conscious answer. And Jimmy bridled himself and glanced at Aaron.

“Do you find it a tight squeeze, then?” she said, turning to Aaron once more.

“No, I can’t say that,” he answered. “What of me goes down goes down easy enough. It’s what doesn’t go down.”

“And how much is that?” she asked, eyeing him.

“A good bit, maybe,” he said.

“Slops over, so to speak,” she retorted sarcastically. “And which do you enjoy more, trickling down your flute or slopping over on to the lap of Mother Earth — of Miss, more probably!”

“Depends,” he said.

Having got him a few steps too far upon the personal ground, she left him to get off by himself.

So he found London got on his nerves. He felt it rubbed him the wrong way. He was flattered, of course, by his own success — and felt at the same time irritated by it. This state of mind was by no means acceptable. Wherever he was he liked to be given, tacitly, the first place — or a place among the first. Among the musical people he frequented, he found himself on a callow kind of equality with everybody, even the stars and aristocrats, at one moment, and a backstairs outsider the next. It was all just as the moment demanded. There was a certain excitement in slithering up and down the social scale, one minute chatting in a personal *tete-a-tete* with the most famous, or notorious, of the society beauties: and the next walking in the rain, with his flute in a bag, to his grubby lodging in Bloomsbury. Only the excitement roused all the savage sarcasm that lay at the bottom of his soul, and which burned there like an unhealthy bile.

Therefore he determined to clear out — to disappear. He had a letter from Lilly, from Novara. Lilly was drifting about. Aaron wrote to Novara, and asked if he should come to Italy, having no money to speak of. “Come if you want to. Bring your flute. And if you’ve no money, put on a good suit of clothes and a big black hat, and play outside the best cafe in any Italian town, and you’ll collect enough to get on with.”

It was a sporting chance. Aaron packed his bag and got a passport, and wrote to Lilly to say he would join him, as invited, at Sir William Franks’. He hoped Lilly’s answer would arrive before he left London. But it didn’t.

Therefore behold our hero alighting at Novara, two hours late, on a wet, dark evening. He hoped Lilly would be there: but nobody. With some slight dismay he faced the big, crowded station. The stream of people carried him automatically through the barrier, a porter having seized his bag, and volleyed various unintelligible questions at him. Aaron understood not one word. So he just wandered after the blue blouse of the porter.

The porter deposited the bag on the steps of the station front, fired off more questions and gesticulated into the half-illuminated space of darkness outside the station. Aaron decided it meant a cab, so he nodded and said “Yes.” But there were no cabs. So once more the blue-bloused porter slung the big bag and the little bag on the strap over his shoulder, and they plunged into the night, towards

some lights and a sort of theatre place.

One carriage stood there in the rain — yes, and it was free.

“Keb? Yes — orright — sir. Whe’to? Where you go? Sir William Franks? Yes, I know. Long way go — go long way. Sir William Franks.”

The cabman spattered his few words of English. Aaron gave the porter an English shilling. The porter let the coin lie in the middle of his palm, as if it were a live beetle, and darted to the light of the carriage to examine the beast, exclaiming volubly. The cabman, wild with interest, peered down from the box into the palm of the porter, and carried on an impassioned dialogue. Aaron stood with one foot on the step.

“What you give — he? One franc?” asked the driver.

“A shilling,” said Aaron.

“One sheeling. Yes. I know that. One sheeling English” — and the driver went off into impassioned exclamations in Torinese. The porter, still muttering and holding his hand as if the coin might sting him, filtered away.

“Orright. He know — sheeling — orright. English moneys, eh? Yes, he know. You get up, sir.”

And away went Aaron, under the hood of the carriage, clattering down the wide darkness of Novara, over a bridge apparently, past huge rain-wet statues, and through more rainy, half-lit streets.

They stopped at last outside a sort of park wall with trees above. The big gates were just beyond.

“Sir William Franks — there.” In a mixture of Italian and English the driver told Aaron to get down and ring the bell on the right. Aaron got down and in the darkness was able to read the name on the plate.

“How much?” said Aaron to the driver.

“Ten franc,” said the fat driver.

But it was his turn now to screw down and scrutinise the pink ten-shilling note. He waved it in his hand.

“Not good, eh? Not good moneys?”

“Yes,” said Aaron, rather indignantly. “Good English money. Ten shillings. Better than ten francs, a good deal. Better — better — ”

“Good — you say? Ten sheeling — ” The driver muttered and muttered, as if dissatisfied. But as a matter of fact he stowed the note in his waistcoat pocket with considerable satisfaction, looked at Aaron curiously, and drove away.

Aaron stood there in the dark outside the big gates, and wished himself somewhere else. However, he rang the bell. There was a huge barking of dogs on the other side. Presently a light switched on, and a woman, followed by a man, appeared cautiously, in the half-opened doorway.

“Sir William Franks?” said Aaron.

“Si, signore.”

And Aaron stepped with his two bags inside the gate. Huge dogs jumped round. He stood in the darkness under the trees at the foot of the park. The woman fastened the gate — Aaron saw a door — and through an uncurtained window a man writing at a desk — rather like the clerk in an hotel office. He was going with his two bags to the open door, when the woman stopped him, and began talking to him in Italian. It was evident he must not go on. So he put down the bags. The man stood a few yards away, watchfully.

Aaron looked down at the woman and tried to make out something of what she was saying, but could not. The dogs still barked spasmodically, drops fell from the tall, dark trees that rose overhead.

“Is Mr. Lilly here? Mr. Lilly?” he asked.

“Signor Lillee. No, Signore — ”

And off the woman went in Italian. But it was evident Lilly was not at the house. Aaron wished more than ever he had not come, but had gone to an hotel.

He made out that the woman was asking him for his name — ”Meester — ? Meester — ?” she kept saying, with a note of interrogation.

“Sisson. Mr. Sisson,” said Aaron, who was becoming impatient. And he found a visiting card to give her. She seemed appeased — said something about telephone — and left him standing.

The rain had ceased, but big drops were shaken from the dark, high trees. Through the uncurtained window he saw the man at the desk reach the telephone. There was a long pause. At length the woman came back and motioned to him to go up — up the drive which curved and disappeared under the dark trees.

“Go up there?” said Aaron, pointing.

That was evidently the intention. So he picked up his bags and strode forward, from out of the circle of electric light, up the curved drive in the darkness. It was a steep incline. He saw trees and the grass slopes. There was a tang of snow in the air.

Suddenly, up ahead, a brilliant light switched on. He continued uphill through the trees along the path, towards it, and at length, emerged at the foot of a great flight of steps, above which was a wide glass entrance, and an Italian manservant in white gloves hovering as if on the brink.

Aaron emerged from the drive and climbed the steps. The manservant came down two steps and took the little bag. Then he ushered Aaron and the big bag into a large, pillared hall, with thick Turkish carpet on the floor, and handsome appointments. It was spacious, comfortable and warm; but somewhat

pretentious; rather like the imposing hall into which the heroine suddenly enters on the film.

Aaron dropped his heavy bag, with relief, and stood there, hat in hand, in his damp overcoat in the circle of light, looking vaguely at the yellow marble pillars, the gilded arches above, the shadowy distances and the great stairs. The butler disappeared — reappeared in another moment — and through an open doorway came the host. Sir William was a small, clean old man with a thin, white beard and a courtly deportment, wearing a black velvet dinner jacket faced with purple silk.

“How do you do, Mr. Sisson. You come straight from England?”

Sir William held out his hand courteously and benevolently, smiling an old man’s smile of hospitality.

“Mr. Lilly has gone away?” said Aaron.

“Yes. He left us several days ago.”

Aaron hesitated.

“You didn’t expect me, then?”

“Yes, oh, yes. Yes, oh, yes. Very glad to see you — well, now, come in and have some dinner — ”

At this moment Lady Franks appeared — short, rather plump, but erect and definite, in a black silk dress and pearls round her throat.

“How do you do? We are just at dinner,” she said. “You haven’t eaten? No — well, then — would you like a bath now, or — ?”

It was evident the Franks had dispensed much hospitality: much of it charitable. Aaron felt it.

“No,” he said. “I’ll wash my hands and come straight in, shall I?”

“Yes, perhaps that would be better — ”

“I’m afraid I am a nuisance.”

“Not at all — Beppe — ” and she gave instructions in Italian.

Another footman appeared, and took the big bag. Aaron took the little one this time. They climbed the broad, turning stairs, crossed another handsome lounge, gilt and ormolu and yellow silk chairs and scattered copies of *The Graphic* or of *Country Life*, then they disappeared through a doorway into a much narrower flight of stairs. Man can so rarely keep it up all the way, the grandeur.

Two black and white chamber-maids appeared. Aaron found himself in a blue silk bedroom, and a footman unstrapping his bag, which he did not want unstrapped. Next minute he was beckoned and allured by the Italian servants down the corridor, and presented to the handsome, spacious bathroom, which was warm and creamy-coloured and glittering with massive silver and mysterious with up-to-date conveniences. There he was left to his own devices,

and felt like a small boy finding out how it works. For even the mere turning on of the taps was a problem in silver mechanics.

In spite of all the splendours and the elaborated convenience, he washed himself in good hot water, and wished he were having a bath, chiefly because of the wardrobe of marvellous Turkish towels. Then he clicked his way back to his bedroom, changed his shirt and combed his hair in the blue silk bedroom with the Greuze picture, and felt a little dim and superficial surprise. He had fallen into country house parties before, but never into quite such a plushy sense of riches. He felt he ought to have his breath taken away. But alas, the cinema has taken our breath away so often, investing us in all the splendours of the splendidest American millionaire, or all the heroics and marvels of the Somme or the North Pole, that life has now no magnate richer than we, no hero nobler than we have been, on the film. Connu! Connu! Everything life has to offer is known to us, couldn't be known better, from the film.

So Aaron tied his tie in front of a big Venice mirror, and nothing was a surprise to him. He found a footman hovering to escort him to the dining-room — a real Italian footman, uneasy because milady's dinner was unsettled. He entered the rather small dining-room, and saw the people at table.

He was told various names: bowed to a young, slim woman with big blue eyes and dark hair like a photograph, then to a smaller rather colourless young woman with a large nose: then to a stout, rubicund, bald colonel, and to a tall, thin, Oxford-looking major with a black patch over his eye — both these men in khaki: finally to a good-looking, well-nourished young man in a dinner-jacket, and he sat down to his soup, on his hostess' left hand. The colonel sat on her right, and was confidential. Little Sir William, with his hair and his beard white like spun glass, his manner very courteous and animated, the purple facings of his velvet jacket very impressive, sat at the far end of the table jesting with the ladies and showing his teeth in an old man's smile, a little bit affected, but pleasant, wishing everybody to be happy.

Aaron ate his soup, trying to catch up. Milady's own confidential Italian butler, fidelity itself, hovered quivering near, spiritually helping the newcomer to catch up. Two nice little entree dishes, specially prepared for Aaron to take the place of the bygone fish and vol au-vents of the proper dinner, testified to the courtesy and charity of his hostess.

Well, eating rapidly, he had more or less caught up by the time the sweets came. So he swallowed a glass of wine and looked round. His hostess with her pearls, and her diamond star in her grey hair, was speaking of Lilly and then of music to him.

"I hear you are a musician. That's what I should have been if I had had my

way.”

“What instrument?” asked Aaron.

“Oh, the piano. Yours is the flute, Mr. Lilly says. I think the flute can be so attractive. But I feel, of course you have more range with the piano. I love the piano — and orchestra.”

At that moment, the colonel and hostess-duties distracted her. But she came back in snatches. She was a woman who reminded him a little of Queen Victoria; so assured in her own room, a large part of her attention always given to the successful issue of her duties, the remainder at the disposal of her guests. It was an old-fashioned, not unpleasant feeling: like retrospect. But she had beautiful, big, smooth emeralds and sapphires on her fingers. Money! What a curious thing it is! Aaron noticed the deference of all the guests at table: a touch of obsequiousness: before the money! And the host and hostess accepted the deference, nay, expected it, as their due. Yet both Sir William and Lady Franks knew that it was only money and success. They had both a certain afterthought, knowing dimly that the game was but a game, and that they were the helpless leaders in the game. They had a certain basic ordinariness which prevented their making any great hits, and which kept them disillusioned all the while. They remembered their poor and insignificant days.

“And I hear you were playing in the orchestra at Covent Garden. We came back from London last week. I enjoyed Beecham’s operas so much.”

“Which do you like best?” said Aaron.

“Oh, the Russian. I think Ivan. It is such fine music.”

“I find Ivan artificial.”

“Do you? Oh, I don’t think so. No, I don’t think you can say that.”

Aaron wondered at her assurance. She seemed to put him just a tiny bit in his place, even in an opinion on music. Money gave her that right, too. Curious — the only authority left. And he deferred to her opinion: that is, to her money. He did it almost deliberately. Yes — what did he believe in, besides money? What does any man? He looked at the black patch over the major’s eye. What had he given his eye for? — the nation’s money. Well, and very necessary, too; otherwise we might be where the wretched Austrians are. Instead of which — how smooth his hostess’ sapphires!

“Of course I myself prefer Moussorgsky,” said Aaron. “I think he is a greater artist. But perhaps it is just personal preference.”

“Yes. Boris is wonderful. Oh, some of the scenes in Boris!”

“And even more Kovantchina,” said Aaron. “I wish we could go back to melody pure and simple. Yet I find Kovantchina, which is all mass music practically, gives me more satisfaction than any other opera.”

“Do you really? I shouldn’t say so: oh, no — but you can’t mean that you would like all music to go back to melody pure and simple! Just a flute — just a pipe! Oh, Mr. Sisson, you are bigoted for your instrument. I just LIVE in harmony — chords, chords!” She struck imaginary chords on the white damask, and her sapphires swam blue. But at the same time she was watching to see if Sir William had still got beside his plate the white medicine cachet which he must swallow at every meal. Because if so, she must remind him to swallow it. However, at that very moment, he put it on his tongue. So that she could turn her attention again to Aaron and the imaginary chord on the white damask; the thing she just lived in. But the rubicund bald colonel, more rubicund after wine, most rubicund now the Marsala was going, snatched her attention with a burly homage to her femininity, and shared his fear with her with a boyish gallantry.

When the women had gone up, Sir William came near and put his hand on Aaron’s shoulder. It was evident the charm was beginning to work. Sir William was a self-made man, and not in the least a snob. He liked the fundamental ordinariness in Aaron, the commonness of the common man.

“Well now, Mr. Sisson, we are very glad to see you! Very glad, indeed. I count Mr. Lilly one of the most interesting men it has ever been my good fortune to know. And so for your own sake, and for Mr. Lilly’s sake, we are very glad to see you. Arthur, my boy, give Mr. Sisson some Marsala — and take some yourself.”

“Thank you, Sir,” said the well-nourished young man in nice evening clothes. “You’ll take another glass yourself, Sir?”

“Yes, I will, I will. I will drink a glass with Mr. Sisson. Major, where are you wandering off to? Come and take a glass with us, my boy.”

“Thanks, Sir William,” drawled the young major with the black patch.

“Now, Colonel — I hope you are in good health and spirits.”

“Never better, Sir William, never better.”

“I’m very glad to hear it; very glad indeed. Try my Marsala — I think it is quite good. Port is beyond us for the moment — for the moment — ”

And the old man sipped his brown wine, and smiled again. He made quite a handsome picture: but he was frail.

“And where are you bound, Mr. Sisson? Towards Rome?”

“I came to meet Lilly,” said Aaron.

“Ah! But Lilly has fled over the borders by this time. Never was such a man for crossing frontiers. Wonderful person, to be able to do it.”

“Where has he gone?” said Aaron.

“I think to Geneva for the moment. But he certainly talked of Venice. You yourself have no definite goal?”

“No.”

“Ah! You have not come to Italy to practice your art?”

“I shall HAVE to practice it: or else — no, I haven’t come for that.”

“Ah, you will HAVE to practice it. Ah, yes! We are all under the necessity to eat. And you have a family in England? Am I not right?”

“Quite. I’ve got a family depending on me.”

“Yes, then you must practice your art: you must practice your art. Well — shall we join the ladies? Coffee will no doubt be served.”

“Will you take my arm, Sir?” said the well-nourished Arthur.

“Thank you, thank you,” the old man motioned him away.

So they went upstairs to where the three women were sitting in the library round the fire, chattering not very interested. The entry of Sir William at once made a stir.

The girl in white, with the biggish nose, fluttered round him. She was Arthur’s wife. The girl in soft blue spread herself on the couch: she was the young Major’s wife, and she had a blue band round her hair. The Colonel hovered stout and fidgetty round Lady Franks and the liqueur stand. He and the Major were both in khaki — belonging to the service on duty in Italy still.

Coffee appeared — and Sir William doled out creme de menthe. There was no conversation — only tedious words. The little party was just commonplace and dull — boring. Yet Sir William, the self-made man, was a study. And the young, Oxford-like Major, with his English diffidence and his one dark, pensive, baffled eye was only waiting to be earnest, poor devil.

The girl in white had been a sort of companion to Lady Franks, so that Arthur was more or less a son-in-law. In this capacity, he acted. Aaron strayed round uneasily looking at the books, bought but not read, and at the big pictures above. It was Arthur who fetched out the little boxes containing the orders conferred on Sir William for his war-work: and perhaps more, for the many thousands of pounds he had spent on his war-work.

There were three orders: one British, and quite important, a large silver star for the breast: one Italian, smaller, and silver and gold; and one from the State of Ruritania, in silver and red-and-green enamel, smaller than the others.

“Come now, William,” said Lady Franks, “you must try them all on. You must try them all on together, and let us see how you look.”

The little, frail old man, with his strange old man’s blue eyes and his old man’s perpetual laugh, swelled out his chest and said:

“What, am I to appear in all my vanities?” And he laughed shortly.

“Of course you are. We want to see you,” said the white girl.

“Indeed we do! We shouldn’t mind all appearing in such vanities — what,

Lady Franks!” boomed the Colonel.

“I should think not,” replied his hostess. “When a man has honours conferred on him, it shows a poor spirit if he isn’t proud of them.”

“Of course I am proud of them!” said Sir William. “Well then, come and have them pinned on. I think it’s wonderful to have got so much in one life-time — wonderful,” said Lady Franks.

“Oh, Sir William is a wonderful man,” said the Colonel. “Well — we won’t say so before him. But let us look at him in his orders.”

Arthur, always ready on these occasions, had taken the large and shining British star from its box, and drew near to Sir William, who stood swelling his chest, pleased, proud, and a little wistful.

“This one first, Sir,” said Arthur.

Sir William stood very still, half tremulous, like a man undergoing an operation.

“And it goes just here — the level of the heart. This is where it goes.” And carefully he pinned the large, radiating ornament on the black velvet dinner-jacket of the old man.

“That is the first — and very becoming,” said Lady Franks.

“Oh, very becoming! Very becoming!” said the tall wife of the Major — she was a handsome young woman of the tall, frail type.

“Do you think so, my dear?” said the old man, with his eternal smile: the curious smile of old people when they are dead.

“Not only becoming, Sir,” said the Major, bending his tall, slim figure forwards. “But a reassuring sign that a nation knows how to distinguish her valuable men.”

“Quite!” said Lady Franks. “I think it is a very great honour to have got it. The king was most gracious, too — Now the other. That goes beside it — the Italian —”

Sir William stood there undergoing the operation of the pinning-on. The Italian star being somewhat smaller than the British, there was a slight question as to where exactly it should be placed. However, Arthur decided it: and the old man stood before the company with his two stars on his breast.

“And now the Ruritanian,” said Lady Franks eagerly.

“That doesn’t go on the same level with the others, Lady Franks,” said Arthur. “That goes much lower down — about here.”

“Are you sure?” said Lady Franks. “Doesn’t it go more here?”

“No no, no no, not at all. Here! Isn’t it so, Sybil?”

“Yes, I think so,” said Sybil.

Old Sir William stood quite silent, his breast prepared, peering over the

facings of his coat to see where the star was going. The Colonel was called in, and though he knew nothing about it, he agreed with Arthur, who apparently did know something. So the star was pinned quite low down. Sir William, peeping down, exclaimed:

“Well, that is most curious now! I wear an order over the pit of my stomach! I think that is very curious: a curious place to wear an order.”

“Stand up! Stand up and let us look!” said Lady Franks. “There now, isn’t it handsome? And isn’t it a great deal of honour for one man? Could he have expected so much, in one life-time? I call it wonderful. Come and look at yourself, dear” — and she led him to a mirror.

“What’s more, all thoroughly deserved,” said Arthur.

“I should think so,” said the Colonel, fidgetting.

“Ah, yes, nobody has deserved them better,” cooed Sybil.

“Nor on more humane and generous grounds,” said the Major, sotto voce.

“The effort to save life, indeed,” returned the Major’s young wife: “splendid!”

Sir William stood naively before the mirror and looked at his three stars on his black velvet dinner-jacket.

“Almost directly over the pit of my stomach,” he said. “I hope that is not a decoration for my greedy APPETITE.” And he laughed at the young women.

“I assure you it is in position, Sir,” said Arthur. “Absolutely correct. I will read it out to you later.”

“Aren’t you satisfied? Aren’t you a proud man! Isn’t it wonderful?” said Lady Franks. “Why, what more could a man want from life? He could never EXPECT so much.”

“Yes, my dear. I AM a proud man. Three countries have honoured me — ” There was a little, breathless pause.

“And not more than they ought to have done,” said Sybil.

“Well! Well! I shall have my head turned. Let me return to my own humble self. I am too much in the stars at the moment.”

Sir William turned to Arthur to have his decorations removed. Aaron, standing in the background, felt the whole scene strange, childish, a little touching. And Lady Franks was so obviously trying to console her husband: to console the frail, excitable old man with his honours. But why console him? Did he need consolation? And did she? It was evident that only the hard-money woman in her put any price on the decorations.

Aaron came forward and examined the orders, one after the other. Just metal playthings of curious shiny silver and gilt and enamel. Heavy the British one — but only like some heavy buckle, a piece of metal merely when one turned it over. Somebody dropped the Italian cross, and there was a moment of horror.

But the lump of metal took no hurt. Queer to see the things stowed in their boxes again. Aaron had always imagined these mysterious decorations as shining by nature on the breasts of heroes. Pinned-on pieces of metal were a considerable come-down.

The orders were put away, the party sat round the fire in the comfortable library, the men sipping more creme de menthe, since nothing else offered, and the couple of hours in front promising the tedium of small-talk of tedious people who had really nothing to say and no particular originality in saying it.

Aaron, however, had reckoned without his host. Sir William sat upright in his chair, with all the determination of a frail old man who insists on being level with the young. The new guest sat in a lower chair, smoking, that curious glimmer on his face which made him so attractive, and which only meant that he was looking on the whole scene from the outside, as it were, from beyond a fence. Sir William came almost directly to the attack.

“And so, Mr. Sisson, you have no definite purpose in coming to Italy?”

“No, none,” said Aaron. “I wanted to join Lilly.”

“But when you had joined him — ?”

“Oh, nothing — stay here a time, in this country, if I could earn my keep.”

“Ah! — earn your keep? So you hope to earn your keep here? May I ask how?”

“By my flute.”

“Italy is a poor country.”

“I don’t want much.”

“You have a family to provide for.”

“They are provided for — for a couple of years.”

“Oh, indeed! Is that so?”

The old man got out of Aaron the detailed account of his circumstances — how he had left so much money to be paid over to his wife, and had received only a small amount for himself.

“I see you are like Lilly — you trust to Providence,” said Sir William.

“Providence or fate,” said Aaron.

“Lilly calls it Providence,” said Sir William. “For my own part, I always advise Providence plus a banking account. I have every belief in Providence, plus a banking account. Providence and no banking account I have observed to be almost invariably fatal. Lilly and I have argued it. He believes in casting his bread upon the waters. I sincerely hope he won’t have to cast himself after his bread, one of these days. Providence with a banking account. Believe in Providence once you have secured enough to live on. I should consider it disastrous to believe in Providence BEFORE. One can never be SURE of

Providence.”

“What can you be sure of, then?” said Aaron.

“Well, in moderation, I can believe in a little hard cash, and in my own ability to earn a little hard cash.”

“Perhaps Lilly believes in his own ability, too.”

“No. Not so. Because he will never directly work to earn money. He works — and works quite well, I am told: but only as the spirit moves him, and never with any eye to the market. Now I call that TEMPTING Providence, myself. The spirit may move him in quite an opposite direction to the market — then where is Lilly? I have put it to him more than once.”

“The spirit generally does move him dead against the market,” said Aaron. “But he manages to scrape along.”

“In a state of jeopardy: all the time in a state of jeopardy,” said the old man. “His whole existence, and that of his wife, is completely precarious. I found, in my youth, the spirit moved me to various things which would have left me and my wife starving. So I realised in time, this was no good. I took my spirit in hand, therefore, and made him pull the cart which mankind is riding in. I harnessed him to the work of productive labour. And so he brought me my reward.”

“Yes,” said Aaron. “But every man according to his belief.”

“I don’t see,” said Sir William, “how a man can BELIEVE in a Providence unless he sets himself definitely to the work of earning his daily bread, and making provision for future needs. That’s what Providence means to me — making provision for oneself and one’s family. Now, Mr. Lilly — and you yourself — you say you believe in a Providence that does NOT compel you to earn your daily bread, and make provision. I confess myself I cannot see it: and Lilly has never been able to convince me.”

“I don’t believe in a kind-hearted Providence,” said Aaron, “and I don’t believe Lilly does. But I believe in chance. I believe, if I go my own way, without tying my nose to a job, chance will always throw something in my way: enough to get along with.”

“But on what do you base such a very unwarrantable belief?”

“I just feel like that.”

“And if you are ever quite without success — and nothing to fall back on?”

“I can work at something.”

“In case of illness, for example?”

“I can go to a hospital — or die.”

“Dear me! However, you are more logical than Lilly. He seems to believe that he has the Invisible — call it Providence if you will — on his side, and that this

Invisible will never leave him in the lurch, or let him down, so long as he sticks to his own side of the bargain, and NEVER works for his own ends. I don't quite see how he works. Certainly he seems to me a man who squanders a great deal of talent unworthily. Yet for some reason or other he calls this true, genuine activity, and has a contempt for actual work by which a man makes provision for his years and for his family. In the end, he will have to fall back on charity. But when I say so, he denies it, and says that in the end we, the men who work and make provision, will have to fall back on him. Well, all I can say is, that SO FAR he is in far greater danger of having to fall back on me, than I on him."

The old man sat back in his chair with a little laugh of triumph. But it smote almost devilishly on Aaron's ears, and for the first time in his life he felt that there existed a necessity for taking sides.

"I don't suppose he will do much falling back," he said.

"Well, he is young yet. You are both young. You are squandering your youth. I am an old man, and I see the end."

"What end, Sir William?"

"Charity — and poverty — and some not very congenial 'job,' as you call it, to put bread in your mouth. No, no, I would not like to trust myself to your Providence, or to your Chance. Though I admit your Chance is a sounder proposition than Lilly's Providence. You speculate with your life and your talent. I admit the nature which is a born speculator. After all, with your flute, you will speculate in other people's taste for luxury, as a man may speculate in theatres or trains de luxe. You are the speculator. That may be your way of wisdom. But Lilly does not even speculate. I cannot see his point. I cannot see his point. I cannot see his point. Yet I have the greatest admiration for his mentality."

The old man had fired up during this conversation — and all the others in the room had gone silent. Lady Franks was palpably uneasy. She alone knew how frail the old man was — frailer by far than his years. She alone knew what fear of his own age, what fear of death haunted him now: fear of his own non-existence. His own old age was an agony to him; worse than an agony, a horror. He wanted to be young — to live, to live. And he was old, he was breaking up. The glistening youth of Aaron, the impetuosity of Lilly fascinated him. And both these men seemed calmly to contradict his own wealth and honours.

Lady Franks tried to turn off the conversation to the trickles of normal chit-chat. The Colonel was horribly bored — so were all the women — Arthur was indifferent. Only the young Major was implicated, troubled in his earnest and philosophic spirit.

"What I can't see," he said, "is the place that others have in your scheme."

“Is isn’t a scheme,” said Aaron.

“Well then, your way of life. Isn’t it pretty selfish, to marry a woman and then expect her to live on very little indeed, and that always precarious, just because you happen to believe in Providence or in Chance: which I think worse? What I don’t see is where others come in. What would the world be like if everybody lived that way?”

“Other people can please themselves,” said Aaron.

“No, they can’t — because you take first choice, it seems to me. Supposing your wife — or Lilly’s wife — asks for security and for provision, as Sir William says. Surely she has a right to it.”

“If I’ve no right to it myself — and I HAVE no right to it, if I don’t want it — then what right has she?”

“Every right, I should say. All the more since you are improvident.”

“Then she must manage her rights for herself. It’s no good her foisting her rights on to me.”

“Isn’t that pure selfishness?”

“It may be. I shall send my wife money as long as I’ve money to send.”

“And supposing you have none?”

“Then I can’t send it — and she must look out for herself.”

“I call that almost criminal selfishness.”

“I can’t help it.”

The conversation with the young Major broke off.

“It is certainly a good thing for society that men like you and Mr. Lilly are not common,” said Sir William, laughing.

“Becoming commoner every day, you’ll find,” interjaculated the Colonel.

“Indeed! Indeed! Well. May we ask you another question, Mr. Sisson? I hope you don’t object to our catechism?”

“No. Nor your judgment afterwards,” said Aaron, grinning.

“Then upon what grounds did you abandon your family? I know it is a tender subject. But Lilly spoke of it to us, and as far I could see....”

“There were no grounds,” said Aaron. “No, there weren’t I just left them.”

“Mere caprice?”

“If it’s a caprice to be begotten — and a caprice to be born — and a caprice to die — then that was a caprice, for it was the same.”

“Like birth or death? I don’t follow.”

“It happened to me: as birth happened to me once — and death will happen. It was a sort of death, too: or a sort of birth. But as undeniable as either. And without any more grounds.”

The old, tremulous man, and the young man were watching one another.

“A natural event,” said Sir William.

“A natural event,” said Aaron.

“Not that you loved any other woman?”

“God save me from it.”

“You just left off loving?”

“Not even that. I went away.”

“What from?”

“From it all.”

“From the woman in particular?”

“Oh, yes. Yes. Yes, that.”

“And you couldn’t go back?”

Aaron shook his head.

“Yet you can give no reasons?”

“Not any reasons that would be any good. It wasn’t a question of reasons. It was a question of her and me and what must be. What makes a child be born out of its mother to the pain and trouble of both of them? I don’t know.”

“But that is a natural process.”

“So is this — or nothing.”

“No,” interposed the Major. “Because birth is a universal process — and yours is a specific, almost unique event.”

“Well, unique or not, it so came about. I didn’t ever leave off loving her — not as far as I know. I left her as I shall leave the earth when I die — because it has to be.”

“Do you know what I think it is, Mr. Sisson?” put in Lady Franks. “I think you are just in a wicked state of mind: just that. Mr. Lilly, too. And you must be very careful, or some great misfortune will happen to you.”

“It may,” said Aaron.

“And it will, mark my word, it will.”

“You almost wish it might, as a judgment on me,” smiled Aaron.

“Oh, no, indeed. I should only be too sorry. But I feel it will, unless you are careful.”

“I’ll be careful, then.”

“Yes, and you can’t be too careful.”

“You make me frightened.”

“I would like to make you very frightened indeed, so that you went back humbly to your wife and family.”

“It would HAVE to be a big fright then, I assure you.”

“Ah, you are really heartless. It makes me angry.”

She turned angrily aside.

“Well, well! Well, well! Life! Life! Young men are a new thing to me!” said Sir William, shaking his head. “Well, well! What do you say to whiskey and soda, Colonel?”

“Why, delighted, Sir William,” said the Colonel, bouncing up.

“A night-cap, and then we retire,” said Lady Franks.

Aaron sat thinking. He knew Sir William liked him: and that Lady Franks didn't. One day he might have to seek help from Sir William. So he had better placate milady. Wrinkling the fine, half mischievous smile on his face, and trading on his charm, he turned to his hostess.

“You wouldn't mind, Lady Franks, if I said nasty things about my wife and found a lot of fault with her. What makes you angry is that I know it is not a bit more her fault than mine, that we come apart. It can't be helped.”

“Oh, yes, indeed. I disapprove of your way of looking at things altogether. It seems to me altogether cold and unmanly and inhuman. Thank goodness my experience of a man has been different.”

“We can't all be alike, can we? And if I don't choose to let you see me crying, that doesn't prove I've never had a bad half hour, does it? I've had many — ay, and a many.”

“Then why are you so WRONG, so wrong in your behaviour?”

“I suppose I've got to have my bout out: and when it's out, I can alter.”

“Then I hope you've almost had your bout out,” she said.

“So do I,” said he, with a half-repentant, half-depressed look on his attractive face. The corners of his mouth grimaced slightly under his moustache.

“The best thing you can do is to go straight back to England, and to her.”

“Perhaps I'd better ask her if she wants me, first,” he said drily.

“Yes, you might do that, too.” And Lady Franks felt she was quite getting on with her work of reform, and the restoring of woman to her natural throne. Best not go too fast, either.

“Say when,” shouted the Colonel, who was manipulating the syphon.

“When,” said Aaron.

The men stood up to their drinks.

“Will you be leaving in the morning, Mr. Sisson?” asked Lady Franks.

“May I stay till Monday morning?” said Aaron. They were at Saturday evening.

“Certainly. And you will take breakfast in your room: we all do. At what time? Half past eight?”

“Thank you very much.”

“Then at half past eight the man will bring it in. Goodnight.”

Once more in his blue silk bedroom, Aaron grimaced to himself and stood in

the middle of the room grimacing. His hostess' admonitions were like vitriol in his ears. He looked out of the window. Through the darkness of trees, the lights of a city below. Italy! The air was cold with snow. He came back into his soft, warm room. Luxurious it was. And luxurious the deep, warm bed.

He was still asleep when the man came noiselessly in with the tray: and it was morning. Aaron woke and sat up. He felt that the deep, warm bed, and the soft, warm room had made him sleep too well: robbed him of his night, like a narcotic. He preferred to be more uncomfortable and more aware of the flight of the dark hours. It seemed numbing.

The footman in his grey house-jacket was neat and Italian and sympathising. He gave good-morning in Italian — then softly arranged the little table by the bedside, and put out the toast and coffee and butter and boiled egg and honey, with silver and delicate china. Aaron watched the soft, catlike motions of the man. The dark eyes glanced once at the blond man, leaning on his elbow on the pillow. Aaron's face had that watchful, half-amused expression. The man said something in Italian. Aaron shook his head, laughed, and said:

“Tell me in English.”

The man went softly to the window curtains, and motioned them with his hand.

“Yes, do,” said Aaron.

So the man drew the buff-coloured silk curtains: and Aaron, sitting in bed, could see away beyond red roofs of a town, and in the further heaven great snowy mountains.

“The Alps,” he said in surprise.

“Gli Alpi — si, signore.” The man bowed, gathered up Aaron's clothes, and silently retired.

Aaron watched through the window. It was a frosty morning at the end of September, with a clear blue morning-sky, Alpine, and the watchful, snow-streaked mountain tops bunched in the distance, as if waiting. There they were, hovering round, circling, waiting. They reminded him of marvellous striped sky-panthers circling round a great camp: the red-roofed city. Aaron looked, and looked again. In the near distance, under the house elm-tree tops were yellowing. He felt himself changing inside his skin.

So he turned away to his coffee and eggs. A little silver egg-cup with a curious little frill round it: honey in a frail, iridescent glass bowl, gold-iridescent: the charm of delicate and fine things. He smiled half mockingly to himself. Two instincts played in him: the one, an instinct for fine, delicate things: he had attractive hands; the other, an inclination to throw the dainty little table with all its niceties out of the window. It evoked a sort of devil in him.

He took his bath: the man had brought back his things: he dressed and went downstairs. No one in the lounge: he went down to the ground floor: no one in the big hall with its pillars of yellow marble and its gold arches, its enormous, dark, bluey-red carpet. He stood before the great glass doors. Some red flowers still were blooming in the tubs, on the steps, handsome: and beautiful chrysanthemums in the wide portico. Beyond, yellow leaves were already falling on the green grass and the neat drive. Everywhere was silent and empty. He climbed the wide stairs, sat in the long, upper lounge where the papers were. He wanted his hat and coat, and did not know where to find them. The windows looked on to a terraced garden, the hill rising steeply behind the house. He wanted to go out.

So he opened more doors, and in a long drawing-room came upon five or six manservants, all in the grey house-jackets, all clean-shaven, neat, with neat black hair, all with dusters or brushes or feather brooms, and all frolicking, chattering, playing like so many monkeys. They were all of the same neat, smallish size. They were all laughing. They rolled back a great rug as if it were some football game, one flew at the curtains. And they merely looked at Aaron and went on chattering, and laughing and dusting.

Surprised, and feeling that he trespassed, he stood at the window a moment looking out. The noise went on behind him. So he turned, smiling, and asked for his hat, pointing to his head. They knew at once what he wanted. One of the fellows beckoned him away, down to the hall and to the long cupboard place where hats and coats and sticks were hung. There was his hat; he put it on, while the man chattered to him pleasantly and unintelligibly, and opened for him the back door, into the garden.

CHAPTER XIII. WIE ES IHNEN GEFÄLLT

The fresh morning air comes startling after a central heated house. So Aaron found it. He felt himself dashing up the steps into the garden like a bird dashing out of a trap where it has been caught: that warm and luxurious house. Heaven bless us, we who want to save civilisation. We had better make up our minds what of it we want to save. The kernel may be all well and good. But there is precious little kernel, to a lot of woolly stuffing and poisonous rind.

The gardens to Sir William's place were not imposing, and still rather war-neglected. But the pools of water lay smooth in the bright air, the flowers showed their colour beside the walks. Many birds dashed about, rather bewildered, having crossed the Alps in their migration southwards. Aaron noted with gratification a certain big magnificence, a certain reckless powerfulness in the still-blossoming, harsh-coloured, autumn flowers. Distinct satisfaction he derived from it.

He wandered upwards, up the succeeding flights of step; till he came to the upper rough hedge, and saw the wild copse on the hill-crest just above. Passing through a space in the hedge, he climbed the steep last bit of Sir William's lane. It was a little vineyard, with small vines and yellowing leaves. Everywhere the place looked neglected — but as if man had just begun to tackle it once more.

At the very top, by the wild hedge where spindle-berries hung pink, seats were placed, and from here the view was very beautiful. The hill dropped steep beneath him. A river wound on the near side of the city, crossed by a white bridge. The city lay close clustered, ruddy on the plains, glittering in the clear air with its flat roofs and domes and square towers, strangely naked-seeming in the clear, clean air. And massive in the further nearness, snow-streaked mountains, the tiger-like Alps. Tigers prowling between the north and the south. And this beautiful city lying nearest exposed. The snow-wind brushed her this morning like the icy whiskers of a tiger. And clear in the light lay Novara, wide, fearless, violent Novara. Beautiful the perfect air, the perfect and unblemished Alp-sky. And like the first southern flower, Novara.

Aaron sat watching in silence. Only the uneasy birds rustled. He watched the city and the winding river, the bridges, and the imminent Alps. He was on the south side. On the other side of the time barrier. His old, sleepy English nature was startled in its sleep. He felt like a man who knows it is time to wake up, and who doesn't want to wake up, to face the responsibility of another sort of day.

To open his darkest eyes and wake up to a new responsibility. Wake up and enter on the responsibility of a new self in himself. Ach, the horror of responsibility! He had all his life slept and shelved the burden. And he wanted to go on sleeping. It was so hateful to have to get a new grip on his own bowels, a new hard recklessness into his heart, a new and responsible consciousness into his mind and soul. He felt some finger prodding, prodding, prodding him awake out of the sleep of pathos and tragedy and spasmodic passion, and he wriggled, unwilling, oh, most unwilling to undertake the new business.

In fact he ran away again. He gave a last look at the town and its white-fanged mountains, and descended through the garden, round the way of the kitchen garden and garage and stables and pecking chickens, back to the house again. In the hall still no one. He went upstairs to the long lounge. There sat the rubicund, bald, boy-like Colonel reading the Graphic. Aaron sat down opposite him, and made a feeble attempt at conversation. But the Colonel wasn't having any. It was evident he didn't care for the fellow — Mr. Aaron, that is. Aaron therefore dried up, and began to sit him out, with the aid of The Queen. Came a servant, however, and said that the Signor Colonello was called up from the hospital, on the telephone. The Colonel once departed, Aaron fled again, this time out of the front doors, and down the steep little park to the gates.

Huge dogs and little dogs came bounding forward. Out of the lodge came the woman with the keys, smiling very pleasantly this morning. So, he was in the street. The wide road led him inevitably to the big bridge, with the violent, physical stone statue-groups. Men and women were moving about, and he noticed for the first time the littleness and the momentaneousness of the Italians in the street. Perhaps it was the wideness of the bridge and the subsequent big, open boulevard. But there it was: the people seemed little, upright brisk figures moving in a certain isolation, like tiny figures on a big stage. And he felt himself moving in the space between. All the northern cosiness gone. He was set down with a space round him.

Little trams flitted down the boulevard in the bright, sweet light. The barbers' shops were all busy, half the Novarese at that moment ambushed in lather, full in the public gaze. A shave is nothing if not a public act, in the south. At the little outdoor tables of the cafes a very few drinkers sat before empty coffee-cups. Most of the shops were shut. It was too soon after the war for life to be flowing very fast. The feeling of emptiness, of neglect, of lack of supplies was evident everywhere.

Aaron strolled on, surprised himself at his gallant feeling of liberty: a feeling of bravado and almost swaggering carelessness which is Italy's best gift to an Englishman. He had crossed the dividing line, and the values of life, though

ostensibly and verbally the same, were dynamically different. Alas, however, the verbal and the ostensible, the accursed mechanical ideal gains day by day over the spontaneous life-dynamic, so that Italy becomes as idea-bound and as automatic as England: just a business proposition.

Coming to the station, he went inside. There he saw a money-changing window which was open, so he planked down a five-pound note and got two-hundred-and-ten lire. Here was a start. At a bookstall he saw a man buy a big timetable with a large railway map in it. He immediately bought the same. Then he retired to a corner to get his whereabouts.

In the morning he must move: where? He looked on the map. The map seemed to offer two alternatives, Milan and Genoa. He chose Milan, because of its musical associations and its cathedral. Milano then. Strolling and still strolling, he found the boards announcing Arrivals and Departures. As far as he could make out, the train for Milan left at 9:00 in the morning.

So much achieved, he left the big desolating caravanserai of the station. Soldiers were camped in every corner, lying in heaps asleep. In their grey-green uniform, he was surprised at their sturdy limbs and uniformly short stature. For the first time, he saw the cock-feathers of the Bersaglieri. There seemed a new life-quality everywhere. Many worlds, not one world. But alas, the one world triumphing more and more over the many worlds, the big oneness swallowing up the many small diversities in its insatiable gnawing appetite, leaving a dreary sameness throughout the world, that means at last complete sterility.

Aaron, however, was too new to the strangeness, he had no eye for the horrible sameness that was spreading like a disease over Italy from England and the north. He plunged into the space in front of the station, and took a new, wide boulevard. To his surprise he ran towards a big and over-animated statue that stood resolutely with its back to the magnificent snow-domes of the wild Alps. Wolves in the street could not have startled him more than those magnificent fierce-gleaming mountains of snow at the street-end, beyond the statue. He stood and wondered, and never thought to look who the gentleman was. Then he turned right round, and began to walk home.

Luncheon was at one o'clock. It was half-past twelve when he rang at the lodge gates. He climbed through the leaves of the little park, on a side-path, rather reluctantly towards the house. In the hall Lady Franks was discussing with Arthur a fat Pekinese who did not seem very well. She was sure the servants did not obey her orders concerning the Pekinese bitch. Arthur, who was more than indifferent, assured her they did. But she seemed to think that the whole of the male human race was in league against the miserable specimen of a she-dog. She almost cried, thinking her Queenie might by some chance meet with, perhaps, a

harsh word or look. Queenie apparently fattened on the secret detestation of the male human species.

“I can’t bear to think that a dumb creature might be ill-treated,” she said to Aaron. “Thank goodness the Italians are better than they used to be.”

“Are they better than they used to be?”

“Oh, much. They have learnt it from us.”

She then enquired if her guest had slept, and if he were rested from his journey. Aaron, into whose face the faint snow-wind and the sun had brought a glow, replied that he had slept well and enjoyed the morning, thank you. Whereupon Lady Franks knitted her brows and said Sir William had had such a bad night. He had not been able to sleep, and had got up and walked about the room. The least excitement, and she dreaded a break-down. He must have absolute calm and restfulness.

“There’s one for you and your jawing last night, Aaron, my boy!” said our hero to himself.

“I thought Sir William seemed so full of life and energy,” he said, aloud.

“Ah, did you! No, he WANTS to be. But he can’t do it. He’s very much upset this morning. I have been very anxious about him.”

“I am sorry to hear that.”

Lady Franks departed to some duty. Aaron sat alone before the fire. It was a huge fireplace, like a dark chamber shut in by tall, finely-wrought iron gates. Behind these iron gates of curly iron the logs burned and flickered like leopards slumbering and lifting their heads within their cage. Aaron wondered who was the keeper of the savage element, who it was that would open the iron grille and throw on another log, like meat to the lions. To be sure the fire was only to be looked at: like wild beasts in the Zoo. For the house was warm from roof to floor. It was strange to see the blue air of sunlight outside, the yellow-edged leaves falling in the wind, the red flowers shaking.

The gong sounded softly through the house. The Colonel came in heartily from the garden, but did not speak to Aaron. The Major and his wife came pallid down the stairs. Lady Franks appeared, talking domestic-secretarial business with the wife of Arthur. Arthur, well-nourished and half at home, called down the stairs. And then Sir William descended, old and frail now in the morning, shaken: still he approached Aaron heartily, and asked him how he did, and how he had spent his morning. The old man who had made a fortune: how he expected homage: and how he got it! Homage, like most things, is just a convention and a social trick. Aaron found himself paying homage, too, to the old man who had made a fortune. But also, exacting a certain deference in return, from the old man who had made a fortune. Getting it, too. On what

grounds? Youth, maybe. But mostly, scorn for fortunes and fortune-making. Did he scorn fortunes and fortune-making? Not he, otherwise whence this homage for the old man with much money? Aaron, like everybody else, was rather paralysed by a million sterling, personified in one old man. Paralysed, fascinated, overcome. All those three. Only having no final control over his own make-up, he could not drive himself into the money-making or even into the money-having habit. And he had just wit enough to threaten Sir William's golden king with his own ivory queen and knights of wilful life. And Sir William quaked.

"Well, and how have you spent your morning?" asked the host.

"I went first to look at the garden."

"Ah, not much to see now. They have been beautiful with flowers, once. But for two and a half years the house has been a hospital for officers — and even tents in the park and garden — as many as two hundred wounded and sick at a time. We are only just returning to civil life. And flowers need time. Yes — yes — British officers — for two and a half years. But did you go up, now, to the belvedere?"

"To the top — where the vines are? I never expected the mountains."

"You never expected the mountains? Pray, why not? They are always there!"

"But I was never there before. I never knew they were there, round the town. I didn't expect it like that."

"Ah! So you found our city impressive?"

"Very! Ah, very! A new world to me. I feel I've come out of myself."

"Yes, it is a wonderful sight — a wonderful sight — But you have not been INTO the town?"

"Yes. I saw the men being shaved, and all the soldiers at the station: and a statue, and mountains behind it. Oh, I've had a full morning."

"A full morning! That is good, that is good!" The old man looked again at the younger man, and seemed to get life from him, to live in him vicariously.

"Come," said the hostess. "Luncheon."

Aaron sat again on his hostess' left hand. The Colonel was more affable now it was meal-time. Sir William was again in a good humour, chaffing the young ladies with an old man's gallantry. But now he insisted on drawing Aaron into the play. And Aaron did not want to be drawn. He did not one bit want to chaffer gallantries with the young women. Between him and Sir William there was a curious rivalry — unconscious on both sides. The old knight had devoted an energetic, adventurous, almost an artistic nature to the making of his fortune and the developing of later philanthropies. He had no children. Aaron was devoting a similar nature to anything but fortune-making and philanthropy. The one held

life to be a storing-up of produce and a conservation of energy: the other held life to be a sheer spending of energy and a storing-up of nothing but experience. There they were, in opposition, the old man and the young. Sir William kept calling Aaron into the chaffer at the other end of the table: and Aaron kept on refusing to join. He hated long distance answers, anyhow. And in his mood of the moment he hated the young women. He had a conversation with Arthur about statues: concerning which Aaron knew nothing, and Arthur less than nothing. Then Lady Franks turned the conversation to the soldiers at the station, and said how Sir William had equipped rest-huts for the Italian privates, near the station: but that such was the jealousy and spite of the Italian Red Cross — or some such body, locally — that Sir William's huts had been left empty — standing unused — while the men had slept on the stone floor of the station, night after night, in icy winter. There was evidently much bitter feeling as a result of Sir William's philanthropy. Apparently even the honey of lavish charity had turned to gall in the Italian mouth: at least the official mouth. Which gall had been spat back at the charitable, much to his pain. It is in truth a difficult world, particularly when you have another race to deal with. After which came the beef-olives.

“Oh,” said Lady Franks, “I had such a dreadful dream last night, such a dreadful dream. It upset me so much. I have not been able to get over it all day.”

“What was it?” said Aaron. “Tell it, and break it.”

“Why,” said his hostess, “I dreamed I was asleep in my room — just as I actually was — and that it was night, yet with a terrible sort of light, like the dead light before dawn, so that one could see. And my maid Giuseppina came running into my room, saying: ‘Signora! Signora! Si alza! Subito! Signora! Vengono su!’ — and I said, ‘Chi? Chi sono chi vengono? Chi?’ — ‘I Novaresi! I Novaresi vengono su. Vengono qui!’ — I got out of bed and went to the window. And there they were, in the dead light, rushing up to the house, through the trees. It was so awful, I haven't been able to forget it all day.”

“Tell me what the words are in English,” said Aaron.

“Why,” she said, “get up, get up — the Novaresi, the people of Novara are coming up — vengono su — they are coming up — the Novara people — work-people. I can't forget it. It was so real, I can't believe it didn't actually happen.”

“Ah,” said Aaron. “It will never happen. I know, that whatever one foresees, and FEELS has happened, never happens in real life. It sort of works itself off through the imagining of it.”

“Well, it was almost more real to me than real life,” said his hostess.

“Then it will never happen in real life,” he said.

Luncheon passed, and coffee. The party began to disperse — Lady Franks to

answer more letters, with the aid of Arthur's wife — some to sleep, some to walk. Aaron escaped once more through the big gates. This time he turned his back on the town and the mountains, and climbed up the hill into the country. So he went between the banks and the bushes, watching for unknown plants and shrubs, hearing the birds, feeling the influence of a new soil. At the top of the hill he saw over into vineyards, and a new strange valley with a winding river, and jumbled, entangled hills. Strange wild country so near the town. It seemed to keep an almost virgin wildness — yet he saw the white houses dotted here and there.

Just below him was a peasant house: and on a little loggia in the sun two peasants in white shirtsleeves and black Sunday suits were sitting drinking wine, and talking, talking. Peasant youths in black hats, their sweethearts in dark stuff dresses, wearing no hat, but a black silk or a white silk scarf, passed slowly along the little road just below the ridge. None looked up to see Aaron sitting there alone. From some hidden place somebody was playing an accordion, a jerky sound in the still afternoon. And away beyond lay the unchanging, mysterious valley, and the infolding, mysterious hills of Italy.

Returning back again another way, he lost himself at the foot of the hill in new and deserted suburb streets — unfinished streets of seemingly unfinished houses. Then a sort of boulevard where bourgeois families were taking the Sunday afternoon walk: stout papas, stout, pallid mamas in rather cheap black fur, little girls very much dressed, and long lads in short socks and round sailor caps, ribbons fluttering. Alien they felt, alien, alien, as a bourgeois crowd always does, but particularly a foreign, Sunday-best bourgeois crowd. Aaron wandered and wandered, finding the tram terminus and trying blank, unfinished street after street. He had a great disinclination to ask his way.

At last he recognised the bank and the little stream of water that ran along the street side. So he was back in time for tea. A hospital nurse was there, and two other strange women. Arthur played the part of host. Sir William came in from a walk with the dogs, but retired to his room without taking tea.

And so the evening fell. Aaron sat in the hall at some distance from the fire, which burned behind its wrought iron gates. He was tired now with all his impressions, and dispirited. He thought of his wife and children at home: of the church-bells ringing so loudly across the field beyond his garden end: of the dark-clad people trailing unevenly across the two paths, one to the left, one to the right, forking their way towards the houses of the town, to church or to chapel: mostly to chapel. At this hour he himself would be dressed in his best clothes, tying his bow, ready to go out to the public house. And his wife would be resenting his holiday departure, whilst she was left fastened to the children.

Rather tired and dispirited in this alien place, he wondered if he wished himself back. But the moment he actually realised himself at home, and felt the tension of barrenness which it meant, felt the curious and deadly opposition of his wife's will against his own nature, the almost nauseating ache which it amounted to, he pulled himself together and rejoiced again in his new surroundings. Her will, her will, her terrible, implacable, cunning will! What was there in the female will so diabolical, he asked himself, that it could press like a flat sheet of iron against a man all the time? The female will! He realised now that he had a horror of it. It was flat and inflexible as a sheet of iron. But also it was cunning as a snake that could sing treacherous songs.

Of two people at a deadlock, he always reminded himself, there is not one only wholly at fault. Both must be at fault. Having a detached and logical soul, he never let himself forget this truth. Take Lottie! He had loved her. He had never loved any other woman. If he had had his other affairs — it was out of spite or defiance or curiosity. They meant nothing. He and Lottie had loved one another. And the love had developed almost at once into a kind of combat. Lottie had been the only child of headstrong, well-to-do parents. He also had been the only child of his widowed mother. Well then, both he and Lottie had been brought up to consider themselves the first in whatsoever company they found themselves. During the early months of the marriage he had, of course, continued the spoiling of the young wife. But this never altered the fact that, by his very nature, he considered himself as first and almost as single in any relationship. First and single he felt, and as such he bore himself. It had taken him years to realise that Lottie also felt herself first and single: under all her whimsicalness and fretfulness was a conviction as firm as steel: that she, as woman, was the centre of creation, the man was but an adjunct. She, as woman, and particularly as mother, was the first great source of life and being, and also of culture. The man was but the instrument and the finisher. She was the source and the substance.

Sure enough, Lottie had never formulated this belief inside herself. But it was formulated for her in the whole world. It is the substantial and professed belief of the whole white world. She did but inevitably represent what the whole world around her asserted: the life-centrality of woman. Woman, the life-bearer, the life-source.

Nearly all men agree to the assertion. Practically all men, even while demanding their selfish rights as superior males, tacitly agree to the fact of the sacred life-bearing priority of woman. Tacitly, they yield the worship to that which is female. Tacitly, they conspire to agree that all that is productive, all that is fine and sensitive and most essentially noble, is woman. This, in their

productive and religious souls, they believe. And however much they may react against the belief, loathing their women, running to prostitutes, or beer or anything, out of reaction against this great and ignominious dogma of the sacred priority of women, still they do but profane the god they worship. Profaning woman, they still inversely worship her.

But in Aaron was planted another seed. He did not know it. He started off on the good old tack of worshipping his woman while his heart was honest, and profaning her in his fits of temper and revolt. But he made a bad show. Born in him was a spirit which could not worship woman: no, and would not. Could not and would not. It was not in him. In early days, he tried to pretend it was in him. But through his plaintive and homage-rendering love of a young husband was always, for the woman, discernible the arrogance of self-unyielding male. He never yielded himself: never. All his mad loving was only an effort. Afterwards, he was as devilishly unyielded as ever. And it was an instinct in her, that her man must yield to her, so that she should envelop him yielding, in her all-beneficent love. She was quite sure that her love was all-beneficent. Of this no shadow of doubt. She was quite sure that the highest her man could ever know or ever reach, was to be perfectly enveloped in her all-beneficent love. This was her idea of marriage. She held it not as an idea, but as a profound impulse and instinct: an instinct developed in her by the age in which she lived. All that was deepest and most sacred in her feeling centred in this belief.

And he outraged her! Oh, from the first day and the first night, she felt he outraged her. True, for some time she had been taken in by his manifest love. But though you can deceive the conscious mind, you can never deceive the deep, unconscious instinct. She could never understand whence arose in her, almost from the first days of marriage with him, her terrible paroxysms of hatred for him. She was in love with him: ah, heaven, how maddeningly she was in love with him: a certain unseizable beauty that was his, and which fascinated her as a snake a bird. But in revulsion, how she hated him! How she abhorred him! How she despised and shuddered at him! He seemed a horrible thing to her.

And then again, oh, God, the agony of her desire for him. The agony of her long, long desire for him. He was a passionate lover. He gave her, ostensibly, all she asked for. He withheld from her nothing, no experience, no degree of intimacy. She was his initiate, or he hers.

And yet, oh, horror for a woman, he withheld everything from her. He withheld the very centre of himself. For a long time, she never realised. She was dazed and maddened only. But as months of married experience passed into years of married torment, she began to understand. It was that, after their most tremendous, and, it seemed to her, heaven-rending passion — yea, when for her

every veil seemed rent and a terrible and sacred creative darkness covered the earth — then — after all this wonder and miracle — in crept a poisonous grey snake of disillusionment, a poisonous grey snake of disillusion that bit her to madness, so that she really was a mad woman, demented.

Why? Why? He never gave himself. He never came to her, really. He withheld himself. Yes, in those supreme and sacred times which for her were the whole culmination of life and being, the ecstasy of unspeakable passional conjunction, he was not really hers. He was withheld. He withheld the central core of himself, like the devil and hell-fiend he was. He cheated and made play with her tremendous passional soul, her sacred sex passion, most sacred of all things for a woman. All the time, some central part of him stood apart from her, aside, looking on.

Oh, agony and horror for a passionate, fierce-hearted woman! She who loved him. She who loved him to madness. She who would have died for him. She who did die with him, many terrible and magnificent connubial deaths, in his arms, her husband.

Her husband! How bitter the word grew to her! Her husband! and him never once given, given wholly to her! Her husband — and in all the frenzied finality of desire, she never fully possessed him, not once. No, not once. As time went on, she learned it for inevitable. Not once!

And then, how she hated him! Cheated, foiled, betrayed, forced to love him or to hate him: never able to be at peace near him nor away from him: poor Lottie, no wonder she was as a mad woman. She was strictly as a woman demented, after the birth of her second child. For all her instinct, all her impulse, all her desire, and above all, all her will, was to possess her man in very fulness once: just once: and once and for all. Once, just once: and it would be once and for all.

But never! Never! Not once! Never! Not for one single solitary second! Was it not enough to send a woman mad! Was it not enough to make her demented! Yes, and mad she was. She made his life a hell for him. She bit him to the bone with her frenzy of rage, chagrin, and agony. She drove him mad, too: mad, so that he beat her: mad so that he longed to kill her. But even in his greatest rages it was the same: he never finally lost himself: he remained, somewhere in the centre, in possession of himself. She sometimes wished he would kill her: or that she would kill him. Neither event happened.

And neither of them understood what was happening. How should they? They were both dazed, horrified, and mortified. He took to leaving her alone as much as was possible. But when he had to come home, there was her terrible will, like a flat, cold snake coiled round his soul and squeezing him to death. Yes, she did not relent. She was a good wife and mother. All her duties she fulfilled. But she

was not one to yield. He must yield. That was written in eternal letters, on the iron tablet of her will. He must yield. She the woman, the mother of his children, how should she ever even think to yield? It was unthinkable. He, the man, the weak, the false, the treacherous, the half-hearted, it was he who must yield. Was not hers the divine will and the divine right? Ha, she would be less than woman if she ever capitulated, abandoned her divine responsibility as woman! No, he must yield.

So, he was unfaithful to her. Piling reproach after reproach upon himself, he added adultery to his brutality. And this was the beginning of the end. She was more than maddened: but he began to grow silent, unresponsive, as if he did not hear her. He was unfaithful to her: and oh, in such a low way. Such shame, such shame! But he only smiled carelessly now, and asked her what she wanted. She had asked for all she got. That he reiterated. And that was all he would do.

Terrible was, that she found even his smile of insolent indifference half-beautiful. Oh, bitter chain to bear! But she summoned up all her strange woman's will. She fought against his fascination, the fascination he exerted over her. With fearful efforts of will she fought against it, and mastered it. And then, suddenly, horror and agony of it, up it would rush in her again, her unbearable desire for him, the longing for his contact, his quality of beauty.

That was a cross hard to bear. Yet even that she bore. And schooled herself into a fretful, petulant manner of indifference. Her odd, whimsical petulance hid a will which he, and he alone, knew to be stronger than steel, strong as a diabolical, cold, grey snake that presses and presses and cannot-relax: nay, cannot relax. She became the same as he. Even in her moments of most passionate desire for him, the cold and snake-like tension of her will never relaxed, and the cold, snake-like eye of her intention never closed.

So, till it reached a deadlock. Each will was wound tense, and so fixed. Fixed! There was neither any relaxing or any increase of pressure. Fixed. Hard like a numbness, a grip that was solidifying and turning to stone.

He realised, somehow, that at this terrible passive game of fixed tension she would beat him. Her fixed female soul, her wound-up female will would solidify into stone — whereas his must break. In him something must break. It was a cold and fatal deadlock, profitless. A life-automatism of fixed tension that suddenly, in him, did break. His will flew loose in a recoil: a recoil away from her. He left her, as inevitably as a broken spring flies out from its hold.

Not that he was broken. He would not do her even that credit. He had only flown loose from the old centre-fixture. His will was still entire and unabated. Only he did not know: he did not understand. He swung wildly about from place to place, as if he were broken.

Then suddenly, on this Sunday evening in the strange country, he realised something about himself. He realised that he had never intended to yield himself fully to her or to anything: that he did not intend ever to yield himself up entirely to her or to anything: that his very being pivoted on the fact of his isolate self-responsibility, aloneness. His intrinsic and central aloneness was the very centre of his being. Break it, and he broke his being. Break this central aloneness, and he broke everything. It was the great temptation, to yield himself: and it was the final sacrilege. Anyhow, it was something which, from his profoundest soul, he did not intend to do. By the innermost isolation and singleness of his own soul he would abide though the skies fell on top of one another, and seven heavens collapsed.

Vaguely he realised this. And vaguely he realised that this had been the root cause of his strife with Lottie: Lottie, the only person who had mattered at all to him in all the world: save perhaps his mother. And his mother had not mattered, no, not one-half nor one-fifth what Lottie had mattered. So it was: there was, for him, only her significant in the universe. And between him and her matters were as they were.

He coldly and terribly hated her, for a moment. Then no more. There was no solution. It was a situation without a solution. But at any rate, it was now a defined situation. He could rest in peace.

Thoughts something in this manner ran through Aaron's subconscious mind as he sat still in the strange house. He could not have fired it all off at any listener, as these pages are fired off at any chance reader. Nevertheless there it was, risen to half consciousness in him. All his life he had hated knowing what he felt. He had wilfully, if not consciously, kept a gulf between his passional soul and his open mind. In his mind was pinned up a nice description of himself, and a description of Lottie, sort of authentic passports to be used in the conscious world. These authentic passports, self-describing: nose short, mouth normal, etc.; he had insisted that they should do all the duty of the man himself. This ready-made and very banal idea of himself as a really quite nice individual: eyes blue, nose short, mouth normal, chin normal; this he had insisted was really himself. It was his conscious mask.

Now at last, after years of struggle, he seemed suddenly to have dropped his mask on the floor, and broken it. His authentic self-describing passport, his complete and satisfactory idea of himself suddenly became a rag of paper, ridiculous. What on earth did it matter if he was nice or not, if his chin was normal or abnormal.

His mask, his idea of himself dropped and was broken to bits. There he sat now maskless and invisible. That was how he strictly felt: invisible and

undefined, rather like Wells' Invisible Man. He had no longer a mask to present to people: he was present and invisible: they could not really think anything about him, because they could not really see him. What did they see when they looked at him? Lady Franks, for example. He neither knew nor cared. He only knew he was invisible to himself and everybody, and that all thinking about what he was like was only a silly game of Mrs. Mackenzie's Dead.

So there. The old Aaron Sisson was as if painfully transmuted, as the Invisible Man when he underwent his transmutations. Now he was gone, and no longer to be seen. His visibility lost for ever.

And then what? Sitting there as an invisible presence, the preconceived world melted also and was gone. Lady Franks, Sir William, all the guests, they talked and maneuvered with their visible personalities, manipulating the masks of themselves. And underneath there was something invisible and dying — something fading, wilting: the essential plasm of themselves: their invisible being.

Well now, and what next? Having in some curious manner tumbled from the tree of modern knowledge, and cracked and rolled out from the shell of the preconceived idea of himself like some dark, night-lustrous chestnut from the green ostensibility of the burr, he lay as it were exposed but invisible on the floor, knowing, but making no conceptions: knowing, but having no idea. Now that he was finally unmasked and exposed, the accepted idea of himself cracked and rolled aside like a broken chestnut-burr, the mask split and shattered, he was at last quiet and free. He had dreaded exposure: and behold, we cannot be exposed, for we are invisible. We cannot be exposed to the looks of others, for our very being is night-lustrous and unseeable. Like the Invisible Man, we are only revealed through our clothes and our masks.

In his own powerful but subconscious fashion Aaron realized this. He was a musician. And hence even his deepest ideas: were not word-ideas, his very thoughts were not composed of words and ideal concepts. They too, his thoughts and his ideas, were dark and invisible, as electric vibrations are invisible no matter how many words they may purport. If I, as a word-user, must translate his deep conscious vibrations into finite words, that is my own business. I do but make a translation of the man. He would speak in music. I speak with words.

The inaudible music of his conscious soul conveyed his meaning in him quite as clearly as I convey it in words: probably much more clearly. But in his own mode only: and it was in his own mode only he realised what I must put into words. These words are my own affair. His mind was music.

Don't grumble at me then, gentle reader, and swear at me that this damned fellow wasn't half clever enough to think all these smart things, and realise all

these fine-drawn-out subtleties. You are quite right, he wasn't, yet it all resolved itself in him as I say, and it is for you to prove that it didn't.

In his now silent, maskless state of wordless comprehension, he knew that he had never wanted to surrender himself utterly to Lottie: nor to his mother: nor to anybody. The last extreme of self-abandon in love was for him an act of false behaviour. His own nature inside him fated him not to take this last false step, over the edge of the abyss of selflessness. Even if he wanted to, he could not. He might struggle on the edge of the precipice like an assassin struggling with his own soul, but he could not conquer. For, according to all the current prejudice and impulse in one direction, he too had believed that the final achievement, the consummation of human life, was this flinging oneself over the precipice, down the bottomless pit of love. Now he realised that love, even in its intensest, was only an attribute of the human soul: one of its incomprehensible gestures. And to fling down the whole soul in one gesture of finality in love was as much a criminal suicide as to jump off a church-tower or a mountain-peak. Let a man give himself as much as he liked in love, to seven thousand extremities, he must never give himself away. The more generous and the more passionate a soul, the more it gives itself. But the more absolute remains the law, that it shall never give itself away. Give thyself, but give thyself not away. That is the lesson written at the end of the long strange lane of love.

The idee fixe of today is that every individual shall not only give himself, but shall achieve the last glory of giving himself away. And since this takes two — you can't even make a present of yourself unless you've got somebody to receive the present; since this last extra-divine act takes two people to perform it, you've got to take into count not only your giver but your receiver. Who is going to be the giver and who the receiver.

Why, of course, in our long-drawn-out Christian day, man is given and woman is recipient. Man is the gift, woman the receiver. This is the sacrament we live by; the holy Communion we live for. That man gives himself to woman in an utter and sacred abandon, all, all, all himself given, and taken. Woman, eternal woman, she is the communicant. She receives the sacramental body and spirit of the man. And when she's got it, according to her passionate and all-too-sacred desire, completely, when she possesses her man at last finally and ultimately, without blemish or reservation in the perfection of the sacrament: then, also, poor woman, the blood and the body of which she has partaken become insipid or nauseous to her, she is driven mad by the endless meal of the marriage sacrament, poisoned by the sacred communion which was her goal and her soul's ambition.

We have pushed a process into a goal. The aim of any process is not the

perpetuation of that process, but the completion thereof. Love is a process of the incomprehensible human soul: love also incomprehensible, but still only a process. The process should work to a completion, not to some horror of intensification and extremity wherein the soul and body ultimately perish. The completion of the process of love is the arrival at a state of simple, pure self-possession, for man and woman. Only that. Which isn't exciting enough for us sensationalists. We prefer abysses and maudlin self-abandon and self-sacrifice, the degeneration into a sort of slime and merge.

Perhaps, truly, the process of love is never accomplished. But it moves in great stages, and at the end of each stage a true goal, where the soul possesses itself in simple and generous singleness. Without this, love is a disease.

So Aaron, crossing a certain border-line and finding himself alone completely, accepted his loneliness or singleness as a fulfilment, a state of fulfilment. The long fight with Lottie had driven him at last to himself, so that he was quiet as a thing which has its root deep in life, and has lost its anxiety. As for considering the lily, it is not a matter of consideration. The lily toils and spins hard enough, in her own way. But without that strain and that anxiety with which we try to weave ourselves a life. The lily is life-rooted, life-central. She cannot worry. She is life itself, a little, delicate fountain playing creatively, for as long or as short a time as may be, and unable to be anxious. She may be sad or sorry, if the north wind blows. But even then, anxious she cannot be. Whether her fountain play or cease to play, from out the cold, damp earth, she cannot be anxious. She may only be glad or sorry, and continue her way. She is perfectly herself, whatever befall! even if frosts cut her off. Happy lily, never to be saddled with an idee fixe, never to be in the grip of a monomania for happiness or love or fulfilment. It is not *laissez aller*. It is life-rootedness. It is being by oneself, life-living, like the much-mooted lily. One toils, one spins, one strives: just as the lily does. But like her, taking one's own life-way amidst everything, and taking one's own life-way alone. Love too. But there also, taking one's way alone, happily alone in all the wonders of communion, swept up on the winds, but never swept away from one's very self. Two eagles in mid-air, maybe, like Whitman's *Dalliance of Eagles*. Two eagles in mid-air, grappling, whirling, coming to their intensification of love-oneness there in mid-air. In mid-air the love consummation. But all the time each lifted on its own wings: each bearing itself up on its own wings at every moment of the mid-air love consummation. That is the splendid love-way.

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The party was festive at dinner-time, the women in their finest dresses, new flowers on the table, the best wine going. It was Sunday evening. Aaron too was

dressed — and Lady Franks, in black lace and pearls, was almost gay. There were quails for dinner. The Colonel was quite happy. An air of conviviality gathered round the table during the course of the meal.

“I hope,” said Aaron, “that we shall have some music tonight.”

“I want so much to hear your flute,” said his hostess.

“And I your piano,” he said.

“I am very weak — very out of practise. I tremble at the thought of playing before a musician. But you must not be too critical.”

“Oh,” said Aaron, “I am not a man to be afraid of.”

“Well, we will see,” said Lady Franks. “But I am afraid of music itself.”

“Yes,” said Aaron. “I think it is risky.”

“Risky! I don’t see that! Music risky? Bach? Beethoven! No, I don’t agree. On the contrary, I think it is most elevating — most morally inspiring. No, I tremble before it because it is so wonderful and elevating.”

“I often find it makes me feel diabolical,” said he.

“That is your misfortune, I am sure,” said Lady Franks. “Please do take another — but perhaps you don’t like mushrooms?”

Aaron quite liked mushrooms, and helped himself to the entree.

“But perhaps,” said she, “you are too modern. You don’t care for Bach or Beethoven or Chopin — dear Chopin.”

“I find them all quite as modern as I am.”

“Is that so! Yes. For myself I am quite old-fashioned — though I can appreciate Strauss and Stravinsky as well, some things. But my old things — ah, I don’t think the moderns are so fine. They are not so deep. They haven’t fathomed life so deeply.” Lady Franks sighed faintly.

“They don’t care for depths,” said Aaron.

“No, they haven’t the capacity. But I like big, deep music. Oh, I love orchestra. But my instrument is the piano. I like the great masters, Bach, Beethoven. They have such faith. You were talking of faith — believing that things would work out well for you in the end. Beethoven inspires that in me, too.”

“He makes you feel that all will be well with you at last?”

“Yes, he does. He makes me feel faith in my PERSONAL destiny. And I do feel that there is something in one’s special fate. I feel that I myself have a special kind of fate, that will always look after me.”

“And you can trust to it?”

“Yes, I can. It ALWAYS turns out right. I think something has gone wrong — and then, it always turns out right. Why when we were in London — when we were at lunch one morning it suddenly struck me, haven’t I left my fur cloak

somewhere? It was rather cold, so I had taken it with me, and then never put it on. And I hadn't brought it home. I had left it somewhere. But whether in a taxi, or in a shop, or in a little show of pictures I had been to, I couldn't remember. I COULD NOT remember. And I thought to myself: have I lost my cloak? I went round to everywhere I could think of: no-trace of it. But I didn't give it up. Something prompted me not to give it up: quite distinctly, I felt something telling me that I should get it back. So I called at Scotland Yard and gave the information. Well, two days later I had a notice from Scotland Yard, so I went. And there was my cloak. I had it back. And that has happened to me almost every time. I almost always get my things back. And I always feel that something looks after me, do you know: almost takes care of me."

"But do you mean when you lose things — or in your life?"

"I mean when I lose things — or when I want to get something I want — I am very nearly ALWAYS successful. And I always feel there is some sort of higher power which does it for me."

"Finds your cloak for you."

"Yes. Wasn't it extraordinary? I felt when I saw my cloak in Scotland Yard: There, I KNEW I should recover you. And I always feel, as I say, that there is some higher power which helps me. Do you feel the same?"

"No, not that way, worse luck. I lost a batch of music a month ago which didn't belong to me — and which I couldn't replace. But I never could recover it: though I'm sure nobody wanted it."

"How very unfortunate! Whereas my fur cloak was just the thing that gets stolen most."

"I wished some power would trace my music: but apparently we aren't all gifted alike with guardian angels."

"Apparently not. And that is how I regard it: almost as a gift, you know, that my fairy godmother gave me in my cradle."

"For always recovering your property?"

"Yes — and succeeding in my undertakings."

"I'm afraid I had no fairy godmother."

"Well — I think I had. And very glad I am of it."

"Why, yes," said Aaron, looking at his hostess.

So the dinner sailed merrily on.

"But does Beethoven make you feel," said Aaron as an afterthought, "in the same way — that you will always find the things you have lost?"

"Yes — he makes me feel the same faith: that what I lose will be returned to me. Just as I found my cloak. And that if I enter into an undertaking, it will be successful."

“And your life has been always successful?”

“Yes — almost always. We have succeeded with almost everything.”

“Why, yes,” said Aaron, looking at her again.

But even so, he could see a good deal of hard wornness under her satisfaction. She had had her suffering, sure enough. But none the less, she was in the main satisfied. She sat there, a good hostess, and expected the homage due to her success. And of course she got it. Aaron himself did his little share of shoe-licking, and swallowed the taste of boot-polish with a grimace, knowing what he was about.

The dinner wound gaily to an end. The ladies retired. Sir William left his seat of honour at the end of the table and came and sat next to Aaron, summoning the other three men to cluster near.

“Now, Colonel,” said the host, “send round the bottle.”

With a flourish of the elbow and shoulder, the Colonel sent on the port, actually port, in those bleak, post-war days!

“Well, Mr. Sisson,” said Sir William, “we will drink to your kind Providence: providing, of course, that we shall give no offence by so doing.”

“No, sir; no, sir! The Providence belonged to Mr. Lilly. Mr. Sisson put his money on kindly fortune, I believe,” said Arthur, who rosy and fresh with wine, looked as if he would make a marvelous *bonne bouchee* for a finely-discriminating cannibal.

“Ah, yes, indeed! A much more ingratiating lady to lift our glasses to. Mr. Sisson’s kindly fortune. *Fortuna gentil-issima!* Well, Mr. Sisson, and may your Lady Fortune ever smile on you.”

Sir William lifted his glass with an odd little smirk, some touch of a strange, prim old satyr lurking in his oddly inclined head. Nay, more than satyr: that curious, rather terrible iron demon that has fought with the world and wrung wealth from it, and which knows all about it. The devilish spirit of iron itself, and iron machines. So, with his strange, old smile showing his teeth rather terribly, the old knight glowered sightlessly over his glass at Aaron. Then he drank: the strange, careful, old-man’s gesture in drinking.

“But,” said Aaron, “if Fortune is a female — -”

“Fortune! Fortune! Why, Fortune is a lady. What do you say, Major?”

“She has all the airs of one, Sir William,” said the Major, with the wistful grimness of his age and culture. And the young fellow stared like a crucified cyclops from his one eye: the black shutter being over the other.

“And all the graces,” capped Sir William, delighted with himself.

“Oh, quite!” said the Major. “For some, all the airs, and for others, all the graces.”

“Faint heart ne’er won fair lady, my boy,” said Sir William. “Not that your heart is faint. On the contrary — as we know, and your country knows. But with Lady Fortune you need another kind of stout heart — oh, quite another kind.”

“I believe it, sir: and the kind of stout heart which I am afraid I haven’t got,” said the Major.

“What!” said the old man. “Show the white feather before you’ve tackled the lady! Fill the Major’s glass, Colonel. I am quite sure we will none of us ever say die.”

“Not likely. Not if we know it,” said the Colonel, stretching himself heartily inside his tunic. He was becoming ruddier than the cherry. All he cared about at the moment was his gay little port glass. But the Major’s young cheek was hollow and sallow, his one eye terribly pathetic.

“And you, Mr. Sisson,” said Sir William, “mean to carry all before you by taking no thought for the morrow. Well, now, we can only wish you success.”

“I don’t want to carry all before me,” said Aaron. “I should be sorry. I want to walk past most of it.”

“Can you tell us where to? I am intrigued, as Sybil says, to know where you will walk to. Come now. Enlighten us.”

“Nowhere, I suppose.”

“But is that satisfactory? Can you find it satisfactory?”

“Is it even true?” said the Major. “Isn’t it quite as positive an act to walk away from a situation as to walk towards it?”

“My dear boy, you can’t merely walk away from a situation. Believe that. If you walk away from Rome, you walk into the Maremma, or into the Alban Hills, or into the sea — but you walk into something. Now if I am going to walk away from Rome, I prefer to choose my direction, and therefore my destination.”

“But you can’t,” said the Major.

“What can’t you?”

“Choose. Either your direction or your destination.” The Major was obstinate.

“Really!” said Sir William. “I have not found it so. I have not found it so. I have had to keep myself hard at work, all my life, choosing between this or that.”

“And we,” said the Major, “have no choice, except between this or nothing.”

“Really! I am afraid,” said Sir William, “I am afraid I am too old — or too young — which shall I say? — to understand.”

“Too young, sir,” said Arthur sweetly. “The child was always father to the man, I believe.”

“I confess the Major makes me feel childish,” said the old man. “The choice between this or nothing is a puzzler to me. Can you help me out, Mr. Sisson?”

What do you make of this this-or-nothing business? I can understand neck-or-nothing — -”

“I prefer the NOTHING part of it to the THIS part of it,” said Aaron, grinning.

“Colonel,” said the old man, “throw a little light on this nothingness.”

“No, Sir William,” said the Colonel. “I am all right as I am.”

“As a matter of fact, so are we all, perfectly A-one,” said Arthur.

Aaron broke into a laugh.

“That’s the top and bottom of it,” he laughed, flushed with wine, and handsome. We’re all as right as ninepence. Only it’s rather nice to talk.”

“There!” said Sir William. “We’re all as right as ninepence! We’re all as right ninepence. So there well leave it, before the Major has time to say he is twopence short.” Laughing his strange old soundless laugh, Sir William rose and made a little bow. “Come up and join the ladies in a minute or two,” he said. Arthur opened the door for him and he left the room.

The four men were silent for a moment — then the Colonel whipped up the decanter and filled his glass. Then he stood up and clinked glasses with Aaron, like a real old sport.

“Luck to you,” he said.

“Thanks,” said Aaron.

“You’re going in the morning?” said Arthur.

“Yes,” said Aaron.

“What train?” said Arthur.

“Eight-forty.”

“Oh — then we shan’t see you again. Well — best of luck.”

“Best of luck — ” echoed the Colonel.

“Same to you,” said Aaron, and they all peered over their glasses and quite loved one another for a rosy minute.

“I should like to know, though,” said the hollow-cheeked young Major with the black flap over his eye, “whether you do really mean you are all right — that it is all right with you — or whether you only say so to get away from the responsibility.”

“I mean I don’t really care — I don’t a damn — let the devil take it all.”

“The devil doesn’t want it, either,” said the Major.

“Then let him leave it. I don’t care one single little curse about it all.”

“Be damned. What is there to care about?” said the Colonel.

“Ay, what?” said Aaron.

“It’s all the same, whether you care or don’t care. So I say it’s much easier not to care,” said Arthur.

“Of course it is,” said the Colonel gaily.

“And I think so, too,” said Aaron.

“Right you are! We’re all as right as ninepence — what? Good old sport! Here’s yours!” cried the Colonel.

“We shall have to be going up,” said Arthur, wise in his generation.

As they went into the hall, Arthur suddenly put one arm round Aaron’s waist, and one arm round the Colonel’s, and the three did a sudden little barn-dance towards the stairs. Arthur was feeling himself quite let loose again, back in his old regimental mess.

Approaching the foot of the stairs, he let go again. He was in that rosy condition when united-we-stand. But unfortunately it is a complicated job to climb the stairs in unison. The whole lot tends to fall backwards. Arthur, therefore, rosy, plump, looking so good to eat, stood still a moment in order to find his own neatly-slippered feet. Having found them, he proceeded to put them carefully one before the other, and to his enchantment found that this procedure was carrying him magically up the stairs. The Colonel, like a drowning man, clutched feebly for the straw of the great stair-rail — and missed it. He would have gone under, but that Aaron’s hand gripped his arm. So, orientating once more like a fragile tendril, he reached again for the banister rail, and got it. After which, lifting his feet as if they were little packets of sand tied to his trouser buttons, he manipulated his way upwards. Aaron was in that pleasant state when he saw what everybody else was doing and was unconscious of what he did himself. Whilst tall, gaunt, erect, like a murdered Hamlet resurrected in khaki, with the terrible black shutter over his eye, the young Major came last.

Arthur was making a stern fight for his composure. His whole future depended on it. But do what he would, he could not get the flushed, pleased, mess-happy look off his face. The Colonel, oh, awful man, did a sort of plump roly-poly-cake-walk, like a fat boy, right to the very door of that santum-sanctorum, the library. Aaron was inwardly convulsed. Even the Major laughed.

But Arthur stiffened himself militarily and cleared his throat. All four started to compose themselves, like actors going on the stage, outside that library door. And then Arthur softly, almost wistfully, opened and held the door for the others to pass. The Colonel slunk meekly in, and sat in a chair in the background. The Major stalked in expressionless, and hovered towards the sofa where his wife sat.

There was a rather cold-water-down-your-back feeling in the library. The ladies had been waiting for coffee. Sir William was waiting, too. Therefore in a little tension, half silent, the coffee was handed round. Lady Franks was discussing something with Arthur’s wife. Arthur’s wife was in a cream lace dress, and looking what is called lovely. The Major’s wife was in amethyst

chiffon with dark-red roses, and was looking blindingly beautiful. The Colonel was looking into his coffee-cup as wistfully as if it contained the illusion of tawny port. The Major was looking into space, as if there and there alone, *etc.* Arthur was looking for something which Lady Franks had asked for, and which he was much too flushed to find. Sir William was looking at Aaron, and preparing for another *coeur a coeur*.

“Well,” he said, “I doubt if you will care for Milan. It is one of the least Italian of all the towns, in my opinion. Venice, of course, is a thing apart. I cannot stand, myself, that miserable specimen the modern Roman. He has most of the vices of the old Romans and none of the virtues. The most congenial town, perhaps, for a stranger, is Florence. But it has a very bad climate.”

Lady Franks rose significantly and left the room, accompanied by Arthur’s wife. Aaron knew, silently, that he was summoned to follow. His hostess had her eye on him this evening. But always postponing his obedience to the cool commands of women, he remained talking with his host in the library, and sipping *creme de menthe*! Came the ripple of the pianoforte from the open doorway down at the further end of the room. Lady Franks was playing, in the large drawing-room. And the ripple of the music contained in it the hard insistence of the little woman’s will. Coldly, and decidedly, she intended there should be no more unsettling conversations for the old Sir William. Aaron was to come forthwith into the drawing room. Which Aaron plainly understood — and so he didn’t go. No, he didn’t go, though the pianoforte rippled and swelled in volume. No, and he didn’t go even when Lady Franks left off playing and came into the library again. There he sat, talking with Sir William. Let us do credit to Lady Franks’ will-power, and admit that the talk was quite empty and distracted — none of the depths and skirmishes of the previous occasions. None the less, the talk continued. Lady Franks retired, discomfited, to her piano again. She would never break in upon her lord.

So now Aaron relented. He became more and more distracted. Sir William wandered away like some restless, hunted soul. The Colonel still sat in his chair, nursing his last drop of *creme de menthe* resentfully. He did not care for the green toffee-stuff. Arthur was busy. The Major lay sprawled in the last stages of everything on the sofa, holding his wife’s hand. And the music came pathetically through the open folding-doors. Of course, she played with feeling — it went without saying. Aaron’s soul felt rather tired. But she had a touch of discrimination also.

He rose and went to the drawing-room. It was a large, vacant-seeming, Empire sort of drawing-room, with yellow silk chairs along the walls and yellow silk panels upon the walls, and a huge, vasty crystal chandelier hanging from a

faraway-above ceiling. Lady Franks sat at a large black Bechstein piano at one end of this vacant yellow state-room. She sat, a little plump elderly lady in black lace, for all the world like Queen Victoria in Max Beerbohm's drawing of Alfred Tennyson reading to her Victorian Majesty, with space before her. Arthur's wife was bending over some music in a remote corner of the big room.

Aaron seated himself on one of the chairs by the wall, to listen. Certainly it was a beautiful instrument. And certainly, in her way, she loved it. But Aaron remembered an anthem in which he had taken part as a boy.

His eye is on the sparrow
So I know He watches me.

For a long time he had failed to catch the word sparrow, and had heard:

His eye is on the spy-hole
So I know He watches me.

Which was just how it had all seemed to him, as a boy.

Now, as ever, he felt the eye was on the spy-hole. There sat the woman playing music. But her inward eye was on the spy-hole of her vital affairs — her domestic arrangements, her control of her household, guests and husband included. The other eye was left for the music, don't you know.

Sir William appeared hovering in the doorway, not at all liking the defection of Mr. Aaron. Then he retreated. He seemed not to care for music. The Major's wife hovered — felt it her duty to aude, or play audience — and entered, seating herself in a breath of lilac and amethyst again at the near distance. The Major, after a certain beating about the bush, followed and sat wrapt in dim contemplation near his wife. Arthur luckily was still busy with something.

Aaron of course made proper musical remarks in the intervals — Arthur's wife sorted out more pieces. Arthur appeared — and then the Colonel. The Colonel tip-toed beautifully across the wide blank space of the Empire room, and seated himself on a chair, rather in the distance, with his back to the wall, facing Aaron. When Lady Franks finished her piece, to everybody's amazement the Colonel clapped gaily to himself and said Bravo! as if at a Cafe Chantant, looking round for his glass. But there was no glass. So he crossed his neatly-khakied legs, and looked rapt again.

Lady Franks started with a vivace Schumann piece. Everybody listened in sanctified silence, trying to seem to like it. When suddenly our Colonel began to spring and bounce in his chair, slinging his loose leg with a kind of rapture up and down in the air, and capering upon his posterior, doing a sitting-down jig to the Schumann vivace. Arthur, who had seated himself at the farthest extremity of the room, winked with wild bliss at Aaron. The Major tried to look as if he noticed nothing, and only succeeded in looking agonised. His wife studied the

point of her silver shoe minutely, and peeped through her hair at the performance. Aaron grimly chuckled, and loved the Colonel with real tenderness.

And the game went on while the vivace lasted. Up and down bounced the plump Colonel on his chair, kicking with his bright, black-patent toe higher and higher, getting quite enthusiastic over his jig. Rosy and unabashed, he was worthy of the great nation he belonged to. The broad-seated Empire chair showed no signs of giving way. Let him enjoy himself, away there across the yellow Sahara of this silk-panelled salon. Aaron felt quite cheered up.

“Well, now,” he thought to himself, “this man is in entire command of a very important branch of the British Service in Italy. We are a great race still.”

But Lady Franks must have twigged. Her playing went rather stiff. She came to the end of the vivace movement, and abandoned her piece.

“I always prefer Schumann in his vivace moods,” said Aaron.

“Do you?” said Lady Franks. “Oh, I don’t know.”

It was now the turn of Arthur’s wife to sing. Arthur seemed to get further away: if it was possible, for he was at the remotest remote end of the room, near the gallery doors. The Colonel became quiet, pensive. The Major’s wife eyed the young woman in white lace, and seemed not to care for lace. Arthur seemed to be trying to push himself backwards through the wall. Lady Franks switched on more lights into the vast and voluminous crystal chandelier which hung like some glory-cloud above the room’s centre. And Arthur’s wife sang sweet little French songs, and Ye Banks and Braes, and Caro mio ben, which goes without saying: and so on. She had quite a nice voice and was quite adequately trained. Which is enough said. Aaron had all his nerves on edge.

Then he had to play the flute. Arthur strolled upstairs with him, arm-in-arm, where he went to fetch his instrument.

“I find music in the home rather a strain, you know,” said Arthur.

“Cruel strain. I quite agree,” said Aaron.

“I don’t mind it so much in the theatre — or even a concert — where there are a lot of other people to take the edge off — But after a good dinner — ”

“It’s medicine,” said Aaron.

“Well, you know, it really is, to me. It affects my inside.” Aaron laughed. And then, in the yellow drawing-room, blew into his pipe and played. He knew so well that Arthur, the Major, the Major’s wife, the Colonel, and Sir William thought it merely an intolerable bore. However, he played. His hostess even accompanied him in a Mozart bit.

CHAPTER XIV. XX SETTEMBRE

Aaron was awakened in the morning by the soft entrance of the butler with the tray: it was just seven o'clock. Lady Franks' household was punctual as the sun itself.

But our hero roused himself with a wrench. The very act of lifting himself from the pillow was like a fight this morning. Why? He recognized his own wrench, the pain with which he struggled under the necessity to move. Why shouldn't he want to move? Why not? Because he didn't want the day in front — the plunge into a strange country, towards nowhere, with no aim in view. True, he said that ultimately he wanted to join Lilly. But this was hardly more than a sop, an excuse for his own irrational behaviour. He was breaking loose from one connection after another; and what for? Why break every tie? Snap, snap, snap went the bonds and ligatures which bound him to the life that had formed him, the people he had loved or liked. He found all his affections snapping off, all the ties which united him with his own people coming asunder. And why? In God's name, why? What was there instead?

There was nothingness. There was just himself, and blank nothingness. He had perhaps a faint sense of Lilly ahead of him; an impulse in that direction, or else merely an illusion. He could not persuade himself that he was seeking for love, for any kind of unison or communion. He knew well enough that the thought of any loving, any sort of real coming together between himself and anybody or anything, was just objectionable to him. No — he was not moving towards anything: he was moving almost violently away from everything. And that was what he wanted. Only that. Only let him not run into any sort of embrace with anything or anybody — this was what he asked. Let no new connection be made between himself and anything on earth. Let all old connections break. This was his craving.

Yet he struggled under it this morning as under the lid of a tomb. The terrible sudden weight of inertia! He knew the tray stood ready by the bed: he knew the automobile would be at the door at eight o'clock, for Lady Franks had said so, and he half divined that the servant had also said so: yet there he lay, in a kind of paralysis in this bed. He seemed for the moment to have lost his will. Why go forward into more nothingness, away from all that he knew, all he was accustomed to and all he belonged to?

However, with a click he sat up. And the very instant he had poured his coffee

from the little silver coffee-pot into his delicate cup, he was ready for anything and everything. The sense of silent adventure took him, the exhilarated feeling that he was fulfilling his own inward destiny. Pleasant to taste was the coffee, the bread, the honey — delicious.

The man brought his clothes, and again informed him that the automobile would be at the door at eight o'clock: or at least so he made out.

"I can walk," said Aaron.

"Milady ha comandato l'automobile," said the man softly.

It was evident that if Milady had ordered it, so it must be.

So Aaron left the still-sleeping house, and got into the soft and luxurious car. As he dropped through the park he wondered that Sir William and Lady Franks should be so kind to him: a complete stranger. But so it was. There he sat in their car. He wondered, also, as he ran over the bridge and into the city, whether this soft-running automobile would ever rouse the socialistic bile of the work-people. For the first time in his life, as he sat among the snug cushions, he realised what it might be to be rich and uneasy: uneasy, even if not afraid, lurking there inside an expensive car. — Well, it wasn't much of a sensation anyhow: and riches were stuffy, like wadded upholstery on everything. He was glad to get out into the fresh air of the common crowd. He was glad to be in the bleak, not-very-busy station. He was glad to be part of common life. For the very atmosphere of riches seems to be stuffed and wadded, never any real reaction. It was terrible, as if one's very body, shoulders and arms, were upholstered and made cushiony. Ugh, but he was glad to shake off himself the atmosphere of wealth and motor-cars, to get out of it all. It was like getting out of quilted clothes.

"Well," thought Aaron, "if this is all it amounts to, to be rich, you can have riches. They talk about money being power. But the only sort of power it has over me is to bring on a kind of numbness, which I fairly hate. No wonder rich people don't seem to be really alive."

The relief of escaping quite took away his self-conscious embarrassment at the station. He carried his own bags, bought a third-class ticket, and got into the train for Milan without caring one straw for the comments or the looks of the porters.

It began to rain. The rain ran across the great plain of north Italy. Aaron sat in his wood-seated carriage and smoked his pipe in silence, looking at the thick, short Lombards opposite him without heeding them. He paid hardly any outward attention to his surroundings, but sat involved in himself.

In Milan he had been advised to go to the Hotel Britannia, because it was not expensive, and English people went there. So he took a carriage, drove round the green space in front of Milan station, and away into the town. The streets were

busy, but only half-heartedly so.

It must be confessed that every new move he made was rather an effort. Even he himself wondered why he was struggling with foreign porters and foreign cabmen, being talked at and not understanding a word. But there he was. So he went on with it.

The hotel was small and congenial. The hotel porter answered in English. Aaron was given a little room with a tiny balcony, looking on to a quiet street. So, he had a home of his own once more. He washed, and then counted his money. Thirty-seven pounds he had: and no more. He stood on the balcony and looked at the people going by below. Life seems to be moving so quick, when one looks down on it from above.

Across the road was a large stone house with its green shutters all closed. But from the flagpole under the eaves, over the central window of the uppermost floor — the house was four storeys high — waved the Italian flag in the melancholy damp air. Aaron looked at it — the red, white and green tricolour, with the white cross of Savoy in the centre. It hung damp and still. And there seemed a curious vacancy in the city — something empty and depressing in the great human centre. Not that there was really a lack of people. But the spirit of the town seemed depressed and empty. It was a national holiday. The Italian flag was hanging from almost every housefront.

It was about three o'clock in the afternoon. Aaron sat in the restaurant of the hotel drinking tea, for he was rather tired, and looking through the thin curtains at the little square outside, where people passed: little groups of dark, aimless-seeming men, a little bit poorer looking — perhaps rather shorter in stature — but very much like the people in any other town. Yet the feeling of the city was so different from that of London. There seemed a curious emptiness. The rain had ceased, but the pavements were still wet. There was a tension.

Suddenly there was a noise of two shots, fired in rapid succession. Aaron turned startled to look into the quiet piazza. And to his amazement, the pavements were empty, not a soul was in sight. Two minutes before the place was busy with passers-by, and a newspaper man selling the *Corriere*, and little carriages rattling through. Now, as if by magic, nobody, nothing. It was as if they had all melted into thin air.

The waiter, too, was peeping behind the curtain. A carriage came trotting into the square — an odd man took his way alone — the traffic began to stir once more, and people reappeared as suddenly as they had disappeared. Then the waiter ran hastily and furtively out and craned his neck, peering round the square. He spoke with two youths — rather loutish youths. Then he returned to his duty in the hotel restaurant.

“What was it? What were the shots?” Aaron asked him.

“Oh — somebody shooting at a dog,” said the man negligently.

“At a dog!” said Aaron, with round eyes.

He finished his tea, and went out into the town. His hotel was not far from the cathedral square. Passing through the arcade, he came in sight of the famous cathedral with its numerous spines pricking into the afternoon air. He was not as impressed as he should have been. And yet there was something in the northern city — this big square with all the trams threading through, the little yellow Continental trams: and the spiny bulk of the great cathedral, like a grey-purple sea-urchin with many spines, on the one side, the ornamental grass-plots and flower beds on the other: the big shops going all along the further strands, all round: and the endless restless nervous drift of a north Italian crowd, so nervous, so twitchy; nervous and twitchy as the slipping past of the little yellow tram-cars; it all affected him with a sense of strangeness, nervousness, and approaching winter. It struck him the people were afraid of themselves: afraid of their own souls, and that which was in their own souls.

Turning up the broad steps of the cathedral, he entered the famous building. The sky had cleared, and the freshened light shone coloured in living tablets round the wonderful, towering, rose-hearted dusk of the great church. At some altars lights flickered uneasily. At some unseen side altar mass was going on, and a strange ragged music fluttered out on the incense-dusk of the great and lofty interior, which was all shadow, all shadow, hung round with jewel tablets of light. Particularly beautiful the great east bay, above the great altar. And all the time, over the big-patterned marble floor, the faint click and rustle of feet coming and going, coming and going, like shallow uneasy water rustled back and forth in a trough. A white dog trotted pale through the under-dusk, over the pale, big-patterned floor. Aaron came to the side altar where mass was going on, candles ruddily wavering. There was a small cluster of kneeling women — a ragged handful of on-looking men — and people wandering up and wandering away, young women with neatly dressed black hair, and shawls, but without hats; fine young women in very high heels; young men with nothing to do; ragged men with nothing to do. All strayed faintly clicking over the slabbed floor, and glanced at the flickering altar where the white-surpliced boys were curtsying and the white-and-gold priest bowing, his hands over his breast, in the candle-light. All strayed, glanced, lingered, and strayed away again, as if the spectacle were not sufficiently holding. The bell chimed for the elevation of the Host. But the thin trickle of people trickled the same, uneasily, over the slabbed floor of the vastly-upreaching shadow-foliaged cathedral.

The smell of incense in his nostrils, Aaron went out again by a side door, and

began to walk along the pavements of the cathedral square, looking at the shops. Some were closed, and had little notices pinned on them. Some were open, and seemed half-stocked with half-elegant things. Men were carrying newspapers. In the cafes a few men were seated drinking vermouth. In the doorway of the restaurants waiters stood inert, looking out on the streets. The curious heart-eating ennui of the big town on a holiday came over our hero. He felt he must get out, whatever happened. He could not bear it.

So he went back to his hotel and up to his room. It was still only five o'clock. And he did not know what to do with himself. He lay down on the bed, and looked at the painting on his bedroom ceiling. It was a terrible business in reekitt's blue and brown gold, with awful heraldic beasts, rather worm-wriggly, displayed in a blue field.

As he lay thinking of nothing and feeling nothing except a certain weariness, or dreariness, or tension, or God-knows-what, he heard a loud hoarse noise of humanity in the distance, something frightening. Rising, he went on to his little balcony. It was a sort of procession, or march of men, here and there a red flag fluttering from a man's fist. There had been a big meeting, and this was the issue. The procession was irregular, but powerful, men four abreast. They emerged irregularly from the small piazza to the street, calling and vociferating. They stopped before a shop and clotted into a crowd, shouting, becoming vicious. Over the shop-door hung a tricolour, a national flag. The shop was closed, but the men began to knock at the door. They were all workmen, some in railway men's caps, mostly in black felt hats. Some wore red cotton neck-ties. They lifted their faces to the national flag, and as they shouted and gesticulated Aaron could see their strong teeth in their jaws. There was something frightening in their lean, strong Italian jaws, something inhuman and possessed-looking in their foreign, southern-shaped faces, so much more formed and demon-looking than northern faces. They had a demon-like set purpose, and the noise of their voices was like a jarring of steel weapons. Aaron wondered what they wanted. There were no women — all men — a strange male, slashing sound. Vicious it was — the head of the procession swirling like a little pool, the thick wedge of the procession beyond, flecked with red flags.

A window opened above the shop, and a frowsty-looking man, yellow-pale, was quickly and nervously hauling in the national flag. There were shouts of derision and mockery — a great overtone of acrid derision — the flag and its owner ignominiously disappeared. And the procession moved on. Almost every shop had a flag flying. And every one of these flags now disappeared, quickly or slowly, sooner or later, in obedience to the command of the vicious, derisive crowd, that marched and clotted slowly down the street, having its own way.

Only one flag remained flying — the big tricolour that floated from the top storey of the house opposite Aaron's hotel. The ground floor of this house consisted of shop-premises — now closed. There was no sign of any occupant. The flag floated inert aloft.

The whole crowd had come to a stop immediately below the hotel, and all were now looking up at the green and white and red tricolour which stirred damply in the early evening light, from under the broad eaves of the house opposite. Aaron looked at the long flag, which drooped almost unmoved from the eaves-shadow, and he half expected it to furl itself up of its own accord, in obedience to the will of the masses. Then he looked down at the packed black shoulders of the mob below, and at the curious clustering pattern of a sea of black hats. He could hardly see anything but hats and shoulders, uneasily moving like boiling pitch away beneath him. But the shouts began to come up hotter and hotter. There had been a great ringing of a door-bell and battering on the shop-door. The crowd — the swollen head of the procession — talked and shouted, occupying the centre of the street, but leaving the pavement clear. A woman in a white blouse appeared in the shop-door. She came out and looked up at the flag and shook her head and gesticulated with her hands. It was evidently not her flag — she had nothing to do with it. The leaders again turned to the large house-door, and began to ring all the bells and to knock with their knuckles. But no good — there was no answer. They looked up again at the flag. Voices rose ragged and ironical. The woman explained something again. Apparently there was nobody at home in the upper floors — all entrance was locked — there was no caretaker. Nobody owned the flag. There it hung under the broad eaves of the strong stone house, and didn't even know that it was guilty. The woman went back into her shop and drew down the iron shutter from inside.

The crowd, nonplussed, now began to argue and shout and whistle. The voices rose in pitch and derision. Steam was getting up. There hung the flag. The procession crowded forward and filled the street in a mass below. All the rest of the street was empty and shut up. And still hung the showy rag, red and white and green, up aloft.

Suddenly there was a lull — then shouts, half-encouraging, half-derisive. And Aaron saw a smallish-black figure of a youth, fair-haired, not more than seventeen years old, clinging like a monkey to the front of the house, and by the help of the heavy drain-pipe and the stone-work ornamentation climbing up to the stone ledge that ran under ground-floor windows, up like a sudden cat on to the projecting footing. He did not stop there, but continued his race like some frantic lizard running up the great wall-front, working away from the noise

below, as if in sheer fright. It was one unending wriggling movement, sheer up the front of the impassive, heavy stone house.

The flag hung from a pole under one of the windows of the top storey — the third floor. Up went the wriggling figure of the possessed youth. The cries of the crowd below were now wild, ragged ejaculations of excitement and encouragement. The youth seemed to be lifted up, almost magically on the intense upreaching excitement of the massed men below. He passed the ledge of the first floor, like a lizard he wriggled up and passed the ledge or coping of the second floor, and there he was, like an upward-climbing shadow, scrambling on to the coping of the third floor. The crowd was for a second electrically still as the boy rose there erect, cleaving to the wall with the tips of his fingers.

But he did not hesitate for one breath. He was on his feet and running along the narrow coping that went across the house under the third floor windows, running there on that narrow footing away above the street, straight to the flag. He had got it — he had clutched it in his hand, a handful of it. Exactly like a great flame rose the simultaneous yell of the crowd as the boy jerked and got the flag loose. He had torn it down. A tremendous prolonged yell, touched with a snarl of triumph, and searing like a puff of flame, sounded as the boy remained for one moment with the flag in his hand looking down at the crowd below. His face was odd and elated and still. Then with the slightest gesture he threw the flag from him, and Aaron watched the gaudy remnant falling towards the many faces, whilst the noise of yelling rose up unheard.

There was a great clutch and hiss in the crowd. The boy still stood unmoved, holding by one hand behind him, looking down from above, from his dangerous elevation, in a sort of abstraction.

And the next thing Aaron was conscious of was the sound of trumpets. A sudden startling challenge of trumpets, and out of nowhere a sudden rush of grey-green carabinieri battering the crowd wildly with truncheons. It was so sudden that Aaron heard nothing any more. He only saw.

In utmost amazement he saw the greeny-grey uniformed carabinieri rushing thick and wild and indiscriminate on the crowd: a sudden new excited crowd in uniforms attacking the black crowd, beating them wildly with truncheons. There was a seething moment in the street below. And almost instantaneously the original crowd burst into a terror of frenzy. The mob broke as if something had exploded inside it. A few black-hatted men fought furiously to get themselves free of the hated soldiers; in the confusion bunches of men staggered, reeled, fell, and were struggling among the legs of their comrades and of the carabinieri. But the bulk of the crowd just burst and fled — in every direction. Like drops of water they seemed to fly up at the very walls themselves. They darted into any

entry, any doorway. They sprang up the walls and clambered into the ground-floor windows. They sprang up the walls on to window-ledges, and then jumped down again, and ran — clambering, wriggling, darting, running in every direction; some cut, blood on their faces, terror or frenzy of flight in their hearts. Not so much terror as the frenzy of running away. In a breath the street was empty.

And all the time, there above on the stone coping stood the long-faced, fair-haired boy, while four stout carabinieri in the street below stood with uplifted revolvers and covered him, shouting that if he moved they would shoot. So there he stood, still looking down, still holding with his left hand behind him, covered by the four revolvers. He was not so much afraid as twitchily self-conscious because of his false position.

Meanwhile down below the crowd had dispersed — melted momentarily. The carabinieri were busy arresting the men who had fallen and been trodden underfoot, or who had foolishly let themselves be taken; perhaps half a dozen men, half a dozen prisoners; less rather than more. The sergeant ordered these to be secured between soldiers. And last of all the youth up above, still covered by the revolvers, was ordered to come down. He turned quite quietly, and quite humbly, cautiously picked his way along the coping towards the drain-pipe. He reached this pipe and began, in humiliation, to climb down. It was a real climb down.

Once in the street he was surrounded by the grey uniforms. The soldiers formed up. The sergeant gave the order. And away they marched, the dejected youth a prisoner between them.

Then were heard a few scattered yells of derision and protest, a few shouts of anger and derision against the carabinieri. There were once more gangs of men and groups of youths along the street. They sent up an occasional shout. But always over their shoulders, and pretending it was not they who shouted. They were all cowed and hangdog once more, and made not the slightest effort to save the youth. Nevertheless, they prowled and watched, ready for the next time.

So, away went the prisoner and the grey-green soldiers, and the street was left to the little gangs and groups of hangdog, discontented men, all thoroughly out of countenance. The scene was ended.

Aaron looked round, dazed. And then for the first time he noticed, on the next balcony to his own, two young men: young gentlemen, he would have said. The one was tall and handsome and well-coloured, might be Italian. But the other with his pale thin face and his rimless monocle in his eye, he was surely an Englishman. He was surely one of the young officers shattered by the war. A look of strange, arch, bird-like pleasure was on his face at this moment: if one

could imagine the gleaming smile of a white owl over the events that had just passed, this was the impression produced on Aaron by the face of the young man with the monocle. The other youth, the ruddy, handsome one, had knitted his brows in mock distress, and was glancing with a look of shrewd curiosity at Aaron, and with a look of almost self-satisfied excitement first to one end of the street, then to the other.

“But imagine, Angus, it’s all over!” he said, laying his hand on the arm of the monocled young man, and making great eyes — not without a shrewd glance in Aaron’s direction.

“Did you see him fall!” replied Angus, with another strange gleam.

“Yes. But was he HURT — ?”

“I don’t know. I should think so. He fell right back out of that on to those stones!”

“But how perfectly AWFUL! Did you ever see anything like it?”

“No. It’s one of the funniest things I ever did see. I saw nothing quite like it, even in the war — ”

Here Aaron withdrew into his room. His mind and soul were in a whirl. He sat down in his chair, and did not move again for a great while. When he did move, he took his flute and played he knew not what. But strange, strange his soul passed into his instrument. Or passed half into his instrument. There was a big residue left, to go bitter, or to ferment into gold old wine of wisdom.

He did not notice the dinner gong, and only the arrival of the chamber-maid, to put the wash-table in order, sent him down to the restaurant. The first thing he saw, as he entered, was the two young Englishmen seated at a table in a corner just behind him. Their hair was brushed straight back from their foreheads, making the sweep of the head bright and impeccable, and leaving both the young faces clear as if in cameo. Angus had laid his monocle on the table, and was looking round the room with wide, light-blue eyes, looking hard, like some bird-creature, and seeming to see nothing. He had evidently been very ill: was still very ill. His cheeks and even his jaw seemed shrunken, almost withered. He forgot his dinner: or he did not care for it. Probably the latter.

“What do you think, Francis,” he said, “of making a plan to see Florence and Sienna and Orvieto on the way down, instead of going straight to Rome?” He spoke in precise, particularly-enunciated words, in a public-school manner, but with a strong twang of South Wales.

“Why, Angus,” came the graceful voice of Francis, “I thought we had settled to go straight through via Pisa.” Francis was graceful in everything — in his tall, elegant figure, in the poses of his handsome head, in the modulation of his voice.

“Yes, but I see we can go either way — either Pisa or Florence. And I thought

it might be nice to look at Florence and Sienna and Orvieto. I believe they're very lovely," came the soft, precise voice of Angus, ending in a touch of odd emotion on the words "very lovely," as if it were a new experience to him to be using them.

"I'm SURE they're marvellous. I'm quite sure they're marvellously beautiful," said Francis, in his assured, elegant way. "Well, then, Angus — suppose we do that, then? — When shall we start?"

Angus was the nervous insister. Francis was quite occupied with his own thoughts and calculations and curiosity. For he was very curious, not to say inquisitive. And at the present moment he had a new subject to ponder.

This new subject was Aaron, who sat with his back to our new couple, and who, with his fine sharp ears, caught every word that they said. Aaron's back was broad enough, and his shoulders square, and his head rather small and fairish and well-shaped — and Francis was intrigued. He wanted to know, was the man English. He looked so English — yet he might be — he might perhaps be Danish, Scandinavian, or Dutch. Therefore, the elegant young man watched and listened with all his ears.

The waiter who had brought Aaron his soup now came very free and easy, to ask for further orders.

"What would you like to drink? Wine? Chianti? Or white wine? Or beer?" — The old-fashioned "Sir" was dropped. It is too old-fashioned now, since the war.

"What SHOULD I drink?" said Aaron, whose acquaintance with wines was not very large.

"Half-litre of Chianti: that is very good," said the waiter, with the air of a man who knew only too well how to bring up his betters, and train them in the way they should go.

"All right," said Aaron.

The welcome sound of these two magic words, All Right! was what the waiter most desired. "All right! Yes! All Right!" This is the pith, the marrow, the sum and essence of the English language to a southerner. Of course it is not all right. It is Or-rye — and one word at that. The blow that would be given to most foreign waiters, if they were forced to realize that the famous orye was really composed of two words, and spelt all right, would be too cruel, perhaps.

"Half litre Chianti. Orye," said the waiter. And we'll let him say it.

"ENGLISH!" whispered Francis melodramatically in the ear of Angus. "I THOUGHT so. The flautist."

Angus put in his monocle, and stared at the oblivious shoulders of Aaron, without apparently seeing anything. "Yes. Obviously English," said Angus, pursing like a bird.

“Oh, but I heard him,” whispered Francis emphatically. “Quite,” said Angus. “But quite inoffensive.”

“Oh, but Angus, my dear — he’s the FLAUTIST. Don’t you remember? The divine bit of Scriabin. At least I believe it was Scriabin. — But PERFECTLY DIVINE!!! I adore the flute above all things — ” And Francis placed his hand on Angus’ arm, and rolled his eyes — Lay this to the credit of a bottle of Lacrimae Cristi, if you like.

“Yes. So do I,” said Angus, again looking archly through the monocle, and seeing nothing. “I wonder what he’s doing here.”

“Don’t you think we might ASK him?” said Francis, in a vehement whisper. “After all, we are the only three English people in the place.”

“For the moment, apparently we are,” said Angus. “But the English are all over the place wherever you go, like bits of orange peel in the street. Don’t forget that, Francesco.”

“No, Angus, I don’t. The point is, his flute is PERFECTLY DIVINE — and he seems quite attractive in himself. Don’t you think so?”

“Oh, quite,” said Angus, whose observations had got no further than the black cloth of the back of Aaron’s jacket. That there was a man inside he had not yet paused to consider.

“Quite a musician,” said Francis.

“The hired sort,” said Angus, “most probably.”

“But he PLAYS — he plays most marvellously. THAT you can’t get away from, Angus.”

“I quite agree,” said Angus.

“Well, then? Don’t you think we might hear him again? Don’t you think we might get him to play for us? — But I should love it more than anything.”

“Yes, I should, too,” said Angus. “You might ask him to coffee and a liqueur.”

“I should like to — most awfully. But do you think I might?”

“Oh, yes. He won’t mind being offered a coffee and liqueur. We can give him something decent — Where’s the waiter?” Angus lifted his pinched, ugly bare face and looked round with weird command for the waiter. The waiter, having not much to do, and feeling ready to draw these two weird young birds, allowed himself to be summoned.

“Where’s the wine list? What liqueurs have you got?” demanded Angus abruptly.

The waiter rattled off a list, beginning with Strega and ending with cherry brandy.

“Grand Marnier,” said Angus. “And leave the bottle.”

Then he looked with arch triumph at Francis, like a wicked bird. Francis bit

his finger moodily, and glowered with handsome, dark-blue uncertain eyes at Mr. Aaron, who was just surveying the Frutte, which consisted of two rather old pomegranates and various pale yellow apples, with a sprinkling of withered dried figs. At the moment, they all looked like a Natura Morta arrangement.

“But do you think I might — ?” said Francis moodily. Angus pursed his lips with a reckless brightness.

“Why not? I see no reason why you shouldn’t,” he said. Whereupon Francis cleared his throat, disposed of his serviette, and rose to his feet, slowly but gracefully. Then he composed himself, and took on the air he wished to assume at the moment. It was a nice degage air, half naive and half enthusiastic. Then he crossed to Aaron’s table, and stood on one lounging hip, gracefully, and bent forward in a confidential manner, and said:

“Do excuse me. But I MUST ask you if it was you we heard playing the flute so perfectly wonderfully, just before dinner.”

The voice was confidential and ingratiating. Aaron, relieved from the world’s stress and seeing life anew in the rosy glow of half a litre of good old Chianti — the war was so near but gone by — looked up at the dark blue, ingenuous, well-adapted eyes of our friend Francis, and smiling, said:

“Yes, I saw you on the balcony as well.”

“Oh, did you notice us?” plunged Francis. “But wasn’t it an extraordinary affair?”

“Very,” said Aaron. “I couldn’t make it out, could you?”

“Oh,” cried Francis. “I never try. It’s all much too new and complicated for me. — But perhaps you know Italy?”

“No, I don’t,” said Aaron.

“Neither do we. And we feel rather stunned. We had only just arrived — and then — Oh!” Francis put up his hand to his comely brow and rolled his eyes. “I feel perfectly overwhelmed with it still.”

He here allowed himself to sink friendlily into the vacant chair opposite Aaron’s.

“Yes, I thought it was a bit exciting,” said Aaron. “I wonder what will become of him — ”

“ — Of the one who climbed for the flag, you mean? No! — But wasn’t it perfectly marvellous! Oh, incredible, quite incredible! — And then your flute to finish it all! Oh! I felt it only wanted that. — I haven’t got over it yet. But your playing was MARVELLOUS, really marvellous. Do you know, I can’t forget it. You are a professional musician, of course.”

“If you mean I play for a living,” said Aaron. “I have played in orchestras in London.”

“Of course! Of course! I knew you must be a professional. But don’t you give private recitals, too?”

“No, I never have.”

“Oh!” cried Francis, catching his breath. “I can’t believe it. But you play MARVELLOUSLY! Oh, I just loved it, it simply swept me away, after that scene in the street. It seemed to sum it all up, you know.”

“Did it,” said Aaron, rather grimly.

“But won’t you come and have coffee with us at our table?” said Francis. “We should like it most awfully if you would.”

“Yes, thank you,” said Aaron, half-rising.

“But you haven’t had your dessert,” said Francis, laying a fatherly detaining hand on the arm of the other man. Aaron looked at the detaining hand.

“The dessert isn’t much to stop for,” he said. “I can take with me what I want.” And he picked out a handful of dried figs.

The two went across to Angus’ table.

“We’re going to take coffee together,” said Francis complacently, playing the host with a suave assurance that was rather amusing and charming in him.

“Yes. I’m very glad,” said Angus. Let us give the show away: he was being wilfully nice. But he was quite glad; to be able to be so nice. Anything to have a bit of life going: especially a bit of pleased life. He looked at Aaron’s comely, wine-warmed face with gratification.

“Have a Grand Marnier,” he said. “I don’t know how bad it is. Everything is bad now. They lay it down to the war as well. It used to be quite a decent drink. What the war had got to do with bad liqueurs, I don’t know.”

Aaron sat down in a chair at their table.

“But let us introduce ourselves,” said Francis. “I am Francis — or really Franz Dekker — And this is Angus Guest, my friend.”

“And my name is Aaron Sisson.”

“What! What did you say?” said Francis, leaning forward. He, too, had sharp ears.

“Aaron Sisson.”

“Aaron Sisson! Oh, but how amusing! What a nice name!”

“No better than yours, is it?”

“Mine! Franz Dekker! Oh, much more amusing, I think,” said Francis archly.

“Oh, well, it’s a matter of opinion. You’re the double decker, not me.”

“The double decker!” said Francis archly. “Why, what do you mean! — ” He rolled his eyes significantly. “But may I introduce my friend Angus Guest.”

“You’ve introduced me already, Francesco,” said Angus.

“So sorry,” said Francis.

“Guest!” said Aaron.

Francis suddenly began to laugh.

“May he not be Guest?” he asked, fatherly.

“Very likely,” said Aaron. “Not that I was ever good at guessing.”

Francis tilted his eyebrows. Fortunately the waiter arrived with the coffee.

“Tell me,” said Francis, “will you have your coffee black, or with milk?” He was determined to restore a tone of sobriety.

The coffee was sipped in sober solemnity.

“Is music your line as well, then?” asked Aaron.

“No, we’re painters. We’re going to work in Rome.”

“To earn your living?”

“Not yet.”

The amount of discretion, modesty, and reserve which Francis put into these two syllables gave Aaron to think that he had two real young swells to deal with.

“No,” continued Francis. “I was only JUST down from Oxford when the war came — and Angus had been about ten months at the Slade — But I have always painted. — So now we are going to work, really hard, in Rome, to make up for lost time. — Oh, one has lost so much time, in the war. And such PRECIOUS time! I don’t know if ever one will even be able to make it up again.” Francis tilted his handsome eyebrows and put his head on one side with a wise-distressed look.

“No,” said Angus. “One will never be able to make it up. What is more, one will never be able to start again where one left off. We’re shattered old men, now, in one sense. And in another sense, we’re just pre-war babies.”

The speech was uttered with an odd abruptness and didacticism which made Aaron open his eyes. Angus had that peculiar manner: he seemed to be haranguing himself in the circle of his own thoughts, not addressing himself to his listener.

So his listener listened on the outside edge of the young fellow’s crowded thoughts. Francis put on a distressed air, and let his attention wander. Angus pursed his lips and his eyes were stretched wide with a kind of pleasure, like a wicked owl which has just joyfully hooted an ill omen.

“Tell me,” said Francis to Aaron. “Where were YOU all the time during the war?”

“I was doing my job,” said Aaron. Which led to his explaining his origins.

“Really! So your music is quite new! But how interesting!” cried Francis.

Aaron explained further.

“And so the war hardly affected you? But what did you FEEL about it, privately?”

“I didn’t feel much. I didn’t know what to feel. Other folks did such a lot of feeling, I thought I’d better keep my mouth shut.”

“Yes, quite!” said Angus. “Everybody had such a lot of feelings on somebody else’s behalf, that nobody ever had time to realise what they felt themselves. I know I was like that. The feelings all came on to me from the outside: like flies settling on meat. Before I knew where I was I was eaten up with a swarm of feelings, and I found myself in the trenches. God knows what for. And ever since then I’ve been trying to get out of my swarm of feelings, which buzz in and out of me and have nothing to do with me. I realised it in hospital. It’s exactly like trying to get out of a swarm of nasty dirty flies. And every one you kill makes you sick, but doesn’t make the swarm any less.”

Again Angus pursed and bridled and looked like a pleased, wicked white owl. Then he polished his monocle on a very choice silk handkerchief, and fixed it unseeing in his left eye.

But Francis was not interested in his friend’s experiences. For Francis had had a job in the War Office — whereas Angus was a war-hero with shattered nerves. And let him depreciate his own experiences as much as he liked, the young man with the monocle kept tight hold on his prestige as a war hero. Only for himself, though. He by no means insisted that anyone else should be war-bitten.

Francis was one of those men who, like women, can set up the sympathetic flow and make a fellow give himself away without realising what he is doing. So there sat our friend Aaron, amusingly unbosoming himself of all his history and experiences, drawn out by the arch, subtle attentiveness of the handsome Francis. Angus listened, too, with pleased amusedness on his pale, emaciated face, pursing his shrunken jaw. And Aaron sipped various glasses of the liqueur, and told all his tale as if it was a comedy. A comedy it seemed, too, at that hour. And a comedy no doubt it was. But mixed, like most things in this life. Mixed.

It was quite late before this seance broke up: and the waiter itching to get rid of the fellows.

“Well, now,” said Francis, as he rose from the table and settled his elegant waist, resting on one hip, as usual. “We shall see you in the morning, I hope. You say you are going to Venice. Why? Have you some engagement in Venice?”

“No,” said Aaron. “I only was going to look for a friend — Rawdon Lilly.”

“Rawdon Lilly! Why, is he in Venice? Oh, I’ve heard SUCH a lot about him. I should like so much to meet him. But I heard he was in Germany — ”

“I don’t know where he is.”

“Angus! Didn’t we hear that Lilly was in Germany?”

“Yes, in Munich, being psychoanalysed, I believe it was.”

Aaron looked rather blank.

“But have you anything to take you to Venice? It’s such a bad climate in the winter. Why not come with us to Florence?” said Francis.

Aaron wavered. He really did not know what to do.

“Think about it,” said Francis, laying his hand on Aaron’s arm. “Think about it tonight. And we’ll meet in the morning. At what time?”

“Any time,” said Aaron.

“Well, say eleven. We’ll meet in the lounge here at eleven. Will that suit you? All right, then. It’s so awfully nice meeting you. That marvellous flute. — And think about Florence. But do come. Don’t disappoint us.”

The two young men went elegantly upstairs.

CHAPTER XV. A RAILWAY JOURNEY

The next day but one, the three set off for Florence. Aaron had made an excursion from Milan with the two young heroes, and dined with them subsequently at the most expensive restaurant in the town. Then they had all gone home — and had sat in the young men's bedroom drinking tea, whilst Aaron played the flute. Francis was really musical, and enchanted. Angus enjoyed the novelty, and the moderate patronage he was able to confer. And Aaron felt amused and pleased, and hoped he was paying for his treat.

So behold them setting off for Florence in the early morning. Angus and Francis had first-class tickets: Aaron took a third-class.

“Come and have lunch with us on the train,” said Angus. “I'll order three places, and we can lunch together.”

“Oh, I can buy a bit of food at the station,” said Aaron.

“No, come and lunch with us. It will be much nicer. And we shall enjoy it as well,” said Angus.

“Of course! Ever so much nicer! Of course!” cried Francis. “Yes, why not, indeed! Why should you hesitate?”

“All right, then,” said Aaron, not without some feeling of constraint.

So they separated. The young men settled themselves amidst the red plush and crochet-work, looking, with their hair plastered smoothly back, quite as first class as you could wish, creating quite the right impression on the porters and the travelling Italians. Aaron went to his third-class, further up the train.

“Well, then, au revoir, till luncheon,” cried Francis.

The train was fairly full in the third and second classes. However, Aaron got his seat, and the porter brought on his bags, after disposing of the young men's luggage. Aaron gave the tip uneasily. He always hated tipping — it seemed humiliating both ways. And the airy aplomb of the two young cavaliers, as they settled down among the red plush and the obsequiousness, and said “Well, then, au revoir till luncheon,” was peculiarly unsettling: though they did not intend it so.

“The porter thinks I'm their servant — their valet,” said Aaron to himself, and a curious half-amused, half-contemptuous look flickered on his face. It annoyed him. The falsity occasioned by the difference in the price of the tickets was really humiliating. Aaron had lived long enough to know that as far as manhood and intellect went — nay, even education — he was not the inferior of the two

young “gentlemen.” He knew quite well that, as far as intrinsic nature went, they did not imagine him an inferior: rather the contrary. They had rather an exaggerated respect for him and his life-power, and even his origin. And yet — they had the inestimable cash advantage — and they were going to keep it. They knew it was nothing more than an artificial cash superiority. But they gripped it all the more intensely. They were the upper middle classes. They were Eton and Oxford. And they were going to hang on to their privileges. In these days, it is a fool who abdicates before he’s forced to. And therefore:

“Well, then — au revoir till luncheon.”

They were being so awfully nice. And inwardly they were not condescending. But socially, they just had to be. The world is made like that. It wasn’t their own private fault. It was no fault at all. It was just the mode in which they were educated, the style of their living. And as we know, *le style, c’est l’homme*.

Angus came of very wealthy iron people near Merthyr. Already he had a very fair income of his own. As soon as the law-business concerning his father’s and his grandfather’s will was settled, he would be well off. And he knew it, and valued himself accordingly. Francis was the son of a highly-esteemed barrister and politician of Sydney, and in his day would inherit his father’s lately-won baronetcy. But Francis had not very much money: and was much more class-flexible than Angus. Angus had been born in a house with a park, and of awful, hard-willed, money-bound people. Francis came of a much more adventurous, loose, excitable family, he had the colonial newness and adaptability. He knew, for his own part, that class superiority was just a trick, nowadays. Still, it was a trick that paid. And a trick he was going to play as long as it did pay.

While Aaron sat, a little pale at the gills, immobile, ruminating these matters, a not very pleasant look about his nose-end, he heard a voice:

“Oh, there you ARE! I thought I’d better come and see, so that we can fetch you at lunch time. — You’ve got a seat? Are you quite comfortable? Is there anything I could get you? Why, you’re in a non-smoker! — But that doesn’t matter, everybody will smoke. Are you sure you have everything? Oh, but wait just one moment — ”

It was Francis, long and elegant, with his straight shoulders and his coat buttoned to show his waist, and his face so well-formed and so modern. So modern, altogether. His voice was pleasantly modulated, and never hurried. He now looked as if a thought had struck him. He put a finger to his brow, and hastened back to his own carriage. In a minute, he returned with a new London literary magazine.

“Something to read — I shall have to FLY — See you at lunch,” and he had turned and elegantly hastened, but not too fast, back to his carriage. The porter

was holding the door for him. So Francis looked pleasantly hurried, but by no means rushed. Oh, dear, no. He took his time. It was not for him to bolt and scramble like a mere Italian.

The people in Aaron's carriage had watched the apparition of the elegant youth intently. For them, he was a being from another sphere — no doubt a young milordo with power wealth, and glamorous life behind him. Which was just what Francis intended to convey. So handsome — so very, very impressive in all his elegant calm showiness. He made such a bella figura. It was just what the Italians loved. Those in the first class regions thought he might even be an Italian, he was so attractive.

The train in motion, the many Italian eyes in the carriage studied Aaron. He, too, was good-looking. But by no means as fascinating as the young milordo. Not half as sympathetic. No good at all at playing a role. Probably a servant of the young signori.

Aaron stared out of the window, and played the one single British role left to him, that of ignoring his neighbours, isolating himself in their midst, and minding his own business. Upon this insular trick our greatness and our predominance depends — such as it is. Yes, they might look at him. They might think him a servant or what they liked. But he was inaccessible to them. He isolated himself upon himself, and there remained.

It was a lovely day, a lovely, lovely day of early autumn. Over the great plain of Lombardy a magnificent blue sky glowed like mid-summer, the sun shone strong. The great plain, with its great stripes of cultivation — without hedges or boundaries — -how beautiful it was! Sometimes he saw oxen ploughing. Sometimes. Oh, so beautiful, teams of eight, or ten, even of twelve pale, great soft oxen in procession, ploughing the dark velvety earth, a driver with a great whip at their head, a man far behind holding the plough-shafts. Beautiful the soft, soft plunging motion of oxen moving forwards. Beautiful the strange, snaky lifting of the muzzles, the swaying of the sharp horns. And the soft, soft crawling motion of a team of oxen, so invisible, almost, yet so inevitable. Now and again straight canals of water flashed blue. Now and again the great lines of grey-silvery poplars rose and made avenues or lovely grey airy quadrangles across the plain. Their top boughs were spangled with gold and green leaf. Sometimes the vine-leaves were gold and red, a patterning. And the great square farm-homesteads, white, red-roofed, with their out-buildings, stood naked amid the lands, without screen or softening. There was something big and exposed about it all. No more the cosy English ambushed life, no longer the cosy littleness of the landscape. A bigness — and nothing to shelter the unshrinking spirit. It was all exposed, exposed to the sweep of plain, to the high, strong sky, and to human

gaze. A kind of boldness, an indifference. Aaron was impressed and fascinated. He looked with new interest at the Italians in the carriage with him — for this same boldness and indifference and exposed gesture. And he found it in them, too. And again it fascinated him. It seemed so much bigger, as if the walls of life had fallen. Nay, the walls of English life will have to fall.

Sitting there in the third-class carriage, he became happy again. The presence of his fellow-passengers was not so hampering as in England. In England, everybody seems held tight and gripped, nothing is left free. Every passenger seems like a parcel holding his string as fast as he can about him, lest one corner of the wrapper should come undone and reveal what is inside. And every other passenger is forced, by the public will, to hold himself as tight-bound also. Which in the end becomes a sort of self-conscious madness.

But here, in the third class carriage, there was no tight string round every man. They were not all trussed with self-conscious string as tight as capons. They had a sufficient amount of callousness and indifference and natural equanimity. True, one of them spat continually on the floor, in large spits. And another sat with his boots all unlaced and his collar off, and various important buttons undone. They did not seem to care if bits of themselves did show, through the gaps in the wrapping. Aaron winced — but he preferred it to English tightness. He was pleased, he was happy with the Italians. He thought how generous and natural they were.

So the towns passed by, and the hours, and he seemed at last to have got outside himself and his old conditions. It seemed like a great escape. There was magic again in life — real magic. Was it illusion, or was it genuine? He thought it was genuine, and opened his soul as if there was no danger.

Lunch-time came. Francis summoned Aaron down the rocking tram. The three men had a table to themselves, and all felt they were enjoying themselves very much indeed. Of course Francis and Angus made a great impression again. But in the dining car were mostly middle-class, well-to-do Italians. And these did not look upon our two young heroes as two young wonders. No, rather with some criticism, and some class-envy. But they were impressed. Oh, they were impressed! How should they not be, when our young gentlemen had such an air! Aaron was conscious all the time that the fellow-diners were being properly impressed by the flower of civilisation and the salt of the earth, namely, young, well-to-do Englishmen. And he had a faint premonition, based on experience perhaps, that fellow-passengers in the end never forgive the man who has “impressed” them. Mankind loves being impressed. It asks to be impressed. It almost forces those whom it can force to play a role and to make an impression. And afterwards, never forgives.

When the train ran into Bologna Station, they were still in the restaurant car. Nor did they go at once to their seats. Angus had paid the bill. There was three-quarters-of-an-hour's wait in Bologna.

"You may as well come down and sit with us," said Francis. "We've got nobody in our carriage, so why shouldn't we all stay together during the wait. You kept your own seat, I suppose."

No, he had forgotten. So when he went to look for it, it was occupied by a stout man who was just taking off his collar and wrapping a white kerchief round his neck. The third class carriages were packed. For those were early days after the war, while men still had pre-war notions and were poor. Ten months would steal imperceptibly by, and the mysterious revolution would be effected. Then, the second class and the first class would be packed, indescribably packed, crowded, on all great trains: and the third class carriages, lo and behold, would be comparatively empty. Oh, marvellous days of bankruptcy, when nobody will condescend to travel third!

However, these were still modest, sombre months immediately after the peace. So a large man with a fat neck and a white kerchief, and his collar over his knee, sat in Aaron's seat. Aaron looked at the man, and at his own luggage overhead. The fat man saw him looking and stared back: then stared also at the luggage overhead: and with his almost invisible north-Italian gesture said much plainer than words would have said it: "Go to hell. I'm here and I'm going to stop here."

There was something insolent and unbearable about the look — and about the rocky fixity of the large man. He sat as if he had insolently taken root in his seat. Aaron flushed slightly. Francis and Angus strolled along the train, outside, for the corridor was already blocked with the mad Bologna rush, and the baggage belonging. They joined Aaron as he stood on the platform.

"But where is YOUR SEAT?" cried Francis, peering into the packed and jammed compartments of the third class.

"That man's sitting in it."

"Which?" cried Francis, indignant.

"The fat one there — with the collar on his knee."

"But it was your seat — !"

Francis' gorge rose in indignation. He mounted into the corridor. And in the doorway of the compartment he bridled like an angry horse rearing, bridling his head. Poising himself on one hip, he stared fixedly at the man with the collar on his knee, then at the baggage aloft. He looked down at the fat man as a bird looks down from the eaves of a house. But the man looked back with a solid, rock-like impudence, before which an Englishman quails: a jeering, immovable insolence, with a sneer round the nose and a solid-seated posterior.

“But,” said Francis in English — none of them had any Italian yet. “But,” said Francis, turning round to Aaron, “that was YOUR SEAT?” and he flung his long fore-finger in the direction of the fat man’s thighs.

“Yes!” said Aaron.

“And he’s TAKEN it — !” cried Francis in indignation.

“And knows it, too,” said Aaron.

“But — !” and Francis looked round imperiously, as if to summon his bodyguard. But bodyguards are no longer forthcoming, and train-guards are far from satisfactory. The fat man sat on, with a sneer-grin, very faint but very effective, round his nose, and a solidly-planted posterior. He quite enjoyed the pantomime of the young foreigners. The other passengers said something to him, and he answered laconic. Then they all had the faint sneer-grin round their noses. A woman in the corner grinned jeeringly straight in Francis’ face. His charm failed entirely this time: and as for his commandingness, that was ineffectual indeed. Rage came up in him.

“Oh well — something must be done,” said he decisively. “But didn’t you put something in the seat to RESERVE it?”

“Only that New Statesman — but he’s moved it.”

The man still sat with the invisible sneer-grin on his face, and that peculiar and immovable plant of his Italian posterior.

“Mais — cette place etait RESERVEE — ” said Francis, moving to the direct attack.

The man turned aside and ignored him utterly — then said something to the men opposite, and they all began to show their teeth in a grin.

Francis was not so easily foiled. He touched the man on the arm. The man looked round threateningly, as if he had been struck.

“Cette place est reservee — par ce Monsieur — ” said Francis with hauteur, though still in an explanatory tone, and pointing to Aaron.

The Italian looked him, not in the eyes, but between the eyes, and sneered full in his face. Then he looked with contempt at Aaron. And then he said, in Italian, that there was room for such snobs in the first class, and that they had not any right to come occupying the place of honest men in the third.

“Gia! Gia!” barked the other passengers in the carriage.

“Loro possono andare prima classe — PRIMA CLASSA!” said the woman in the corner, in a very high voice, as if talking to deaf people, and pointing to Aaron’s luggage, then along the train to the first class carriages.

“C’e posto la,” said one of the men, shrugging his shoulders.

There was a jeering quality in the hard insolence which made Francis go very red and Augustus very white. Augustus stared like a death’s-head behind his monocle,

with death-blue eyes.

“Oh, never mind. Come along to the first class. I’ll pay the difference. We shall be much better all together. Get the luggage down, Francis. It wouldn’t be possible to travel with this lot, even if he gave up the seat. There’s plenty of room in our carriage — and I’ll pay the extra,” said Angus.

He knew there was one solution — and only one — Money.

But Francis bit his finger. He felt almost beside himself — and quite powerless. For he knew the guard of the train would jeer too. It is not so easy to interfere with honest third-class Bolognesi in Bologna station, even if they have taken another man’s seat. Powerless, his brow knitted, and looking just like Mephistopheles with his high forehead and slightly arched nose, Mephistopheles in a rage, he hauled down Aaron’s bag and handed it to Angus. So they transferred themselves to the first-class carriage, while the fat man and his party in the third-class watched in jeering, triumphant silence. Solid, planted, immovable, in static triumph.

So Aaron sat with the others amid the red plush, whilst the train began its long slow climb of the Apennines, stinking sulphurous through tunnels innumerable. Wonderful the steep slopes, the great chestnut woods, and then the great distances glimpsed between the heights, Firenzuola away and beneath, Turneresque hills far off, built of heaven-bloom, not of earth. It was cold at the summit-station, ice and snow in the air, fierce. Our travellers shrank into the carriage again, and wrapped themselves round.

Then the train began its long slither downhill, still through a whole necklace of tunnels, which fortunately no longer stank. So down and down, till the plain appears in sight once more, the Arno valley. But then began the inevitable hitch that always happens in Italian travel. The train began to hesitate — to falter to a halt, whistling shrilly as if in protest: whistling pip-pip-pip in expostulation as it stood forlorn among the fields: then stealing forward again and stealthily making pace, gathering speed, till it had got up a regular spurt: then suddenly the brakes came on with a jerk, more faltering to a halt, more whistling and pip-pip-pipping, as the engine stood jingling with impatience: after which another creak and splash, and another choking off. So on till they landed in Prato station: and there they sat. A fellow passenger told them, there was an hour to wait here: an hour. Something had happened up the line.

“Then I propose we make tea,” said Angus, beaming.

“Why not! Of course. Let us make tea. And I will look for water.”

So Aaron and Francis went to the restaurant bar and filled the little pan at the tap. Angus got down the red picnic case, of which he was so fond, and spread out the various arrangements on the floor of the coupe. He soon had the spirit-

lamp burning, the water heating. Francis proposed that he and Aaron should dash into Prato and see what could be bought, whilst the tea was in preparation. So off they went, leaving Angus like a busy old wizard manipulating his arrangements on the floor of the carriage, his monocle beaming with bliss. The one fat fellow — passenger with a lurid striped rug over his knees watched with acute interest. Everybody who passed the doorway stood to contemplate the scene with pleasure. Officials came and studied the situation with appreciation. Then Francis and Aaron returned with a large supply of roast chestnuts, piping hot, and hard dried plums, and good dried figs, and rather stale rusks. They found the water just boiling, Angus just throwing in the tea-egg, and the fellow-passenger just poking his nose right in, he was so thrilled.

Nothing pleased Angus so much as thus pitching camp in the midst of civilisation. The scrubby newspaper packets of chestnuts, plums, figs and rusks were spread out: Francis flew for salt to the man at the bar, and came back with a little paper of rock-salt: the brown tea was dispensed in the silver-fitted glasses from the immortal luncheon-case: and the picnic was in full swing. Angus, being in the height of his happiness, now sat on the seat cross-legged, with his feet under him, in the authentic Buddha fashion, and on his face the queer rapt alert look, half a smile, also somewhat Buddhistic, holding his glass of brown tea in his hand. He was as rapt and immobile as if he really were in a mystic state. Yet it was only his delight in the tea-party. The fellow-passenger peered at the tea, and said in broken French, was it good. In equally fragmentary French Francis said very good, and offered the fat passenger some. He, however, held up his hand in protest, as if to say not for any money would he swallow the hot-watery stuff. And he pulled out a flask of wine. But a handful of chestnuts he accepted.

The train-conductor, ticket-collector, and the heavy green soldier who protected them, swung open the door and stared attentively. The fellow passenger addressed himself to these new-comers, and they all began to smile good-naturedly. Then the fellow-passenger — he was stout and fifty and had a brilliant striped rug always over his knees — pointed out the Buddha-like position of Angus, and the three in-starers smiled again. And so the fellow-passenger thought he must try too. So he put aside his rug, and lifted his feet from the floor, and took his toes in his hands, and tried to bring his legs up and his feet under him. But his knees were fat, his trousers in the direst extreme of peril, and he could no more manage it than if he had tried to swallow himself. So he desisted suddenly, rather scared, whilst the three bunched and official heads in the doorway laughed and jested at him, showing their teeth and teasing him. But on our gypsy party they turned their eyes with admiration. They loved the novelty and the fun. And on the thin, elegant Angus in his new London clothes,

they looked really puzzled, as he sat there immobile, gleaming through his monocle like some Buddha going wicked, perched cross-legged and ecstatic on the red velvet seat. They marvelled that the lower half of him could so double up, like a foot-rule. So they stared till they had seen enough. When they suddenly said “Buon ‘appetito,” withdrew their heads and shoulders, slammed the door, and departed.

Then the train set off also — and shortly after six arrived in Florence. It was debated what should Aaron do in Florence. The young men had engaged a room at Bertolini’s hotel, on the Lungarno. Bertolini’s was not expensive — but Aaron knew that his friends would not long endure hotel life. However, he went along with the other two, trusting to find a cheaper place on the morrow.

It was growing quite dark as they drove to the hotel, but still was light enough to show the river rustling, the Ponte Vecchio spanning its little storeys across the flood, on its low, heavy piers: and some sort of magic of the darkening, varied houses facing, on the other side of the stream. Of course they were all enchanted.

“I knew,” said Francis, “we should love it.”

Aaron was told he could have a little back room and pension terms for fifteen lire a day, if he stayed at least fifteen days. The exchange was then at forty-five. So fifteen lire meant just six-shillings-and-six pence a day, without extras. Extras meant wine, tea, butter, and light. It was decided he should look for something cheaper next day.

By the tone of the young men, he now gathered that they would prefer it if he took himself off to a cheaper place. They wished to be on their own.

“Well, then,” said Francis, “you will be in to lunch here, won’t you? Then we’ll see you at lunch.”

It was as if both the young men had drawn in their feelers now. They were afraid of finding the new man an incubus. They wanted to wash their hands of him. Aaron’s brow darkened.

“Perhaps it was right your love to dissemble
But why did you kick me down stairs?...”

Then morning found him out early, before his friends had arisen. It was sunny again. The magic of Florence at once overcame him, and he forgot the bore of limited means and hotel costs. He went straight out of the hotel door, across the road, and leaned on the river parapet. There ran the Arno: not such a flood after all, but a green stream with shoals of pebbles in its course. Across, and in the delicate shadow of the early sun, stood the opposite Lungarno, the old flat houses, pink, or white, or grey stone, with their green shutters, some closed, some opened. It had a flowery effect, the skyline irregular against the morning light. To the right the delicate Trinita bridge, to the left, the old bridge with its

little shops over the river. Beyond, towards the sun, glimpses of green, sky-bloomed country: Tuscany.

There was a noise and clatter of traffic: boys pushing hand-barrows over the cobble-stones, slow bullocks stepping side by side, and shouldering one another affectionately, drawing a load of country produce, then horses in great brilliant scarlet cloths, like vivid palls, slowly pulling the long narrow carts of the district: and men hu-huing! — and people calling: all the sharp, clattering morning noise of Florence.

“Oh, Angus! Do come and look! OH, so lovely!”

Glancing up, he saw the elegant figure of Francis, in fine coloured-silk pyjamas, perched on a small upper balcony, turning away from the river towards the bedroom again, his hand lifted to his lips, as if to catch there his cry of delight. The whole pose was classic and effective: and very amusing. How the Italians would love it!

Aaron slipped back across the road, and walked away under the houses towards the Ponte Vecchio. He passed the bridge — and passed the Uffizi — watching the green hills opposite, and San Miniato. Then he noticed the over-dramatic group of statuary in the Piazza Mentana — male and physical and melodramatic — and then the corner house. It was a big old Florentine house, with many green shutters and wide eaves. There was a notice plate by the door — ”Pension Nardini.”

He came to a full stop. He stared at the notice-plate, stared at the glass door, and turning round, stared at the over-pathetic dead soldier on the arm of his over-heroic pistol-firing comrade; Mentana — and the date! Aaron wondered what and where Mentana was. Then at last he summoned his energy, opened the glass door, and mounted the first stairs.

He waited some time before anybody appeared. Then a maid-servant.

“Can I have a room?” said Aaron.

The bewildered, wild-eyed servant maid opened a door and showed him into a heavily-gilt, heavily-plush drawing-room with a great deal of frantic grandeur about it. There he sat and cooled his heels for half an hour. Arrived at length a stout young lady — handsome, with big dark-blue Italian eyes — but anaemic and too stout.

“Oh!” she said as she entered, not knowing what else to say.

“Good-morning,” said Aaron awkwardly.

“Oh, good-morning! English! Yes! Oh, I am so sorry to keep you, you know, to make you wait so long. I was upstairs, you know, with a lady. Will you sit?”

“Can I have a room?” said Aaron.

“A room! Yes, you can.”

“What terms?”

“Terms! Oh! Why, ten francs a day, you know, pension — if you stay — How long will you stay?”

“At least a month, I expect.”

“A month! Oh yes. Yes, ten francs a day.”

“For everything?”

“Everything. Yes, everything. Coffee, bread, honey or jam in the morning: lunch at half-past twelve; tea in the drawing-room, half-past four: dinner at half-past seven: all very nice. And a warm room with the sun — Would you like to see?”

So Aaron was led up the big, rambling old house to the top floor — then along a long old corridor — and at last into a big bedroom with two beds and a red tiled floor — a little dreary, as ever — but the sun just beginning to come in, and a lovely view on to the river, towards the Ponte Vecchio, and at the hills with their pines and villas and verdure opposite.

Here he would settle. The signorina would send a man for his bags, at half past two in the afternoon.

At luncheon Aaron found the two friends, and told them of his move.

“How very nice for you! Ten francs a day — but that is nothing. I am so pleased you’ve found something. And when will you be moving in?” said Francis.

“At half-past two.”

“Oh, so soon. Yes, just as well. — But we shall see you from time to time, of course. What did you say the address was? Oh, yes — just near the awful statue. Very well. We can look you up any time — and you will find us here. Leave a message if we should happen not to be in — we’ve got lots of engagements — ”

CHAPTER XVI. FLORENCE

The very afternoon after Aaron's arrival in Florence the sky became dark, the wind cold, and rain began steadily to fall. He sat in his big, bleak room above the river, and watched the pale green water fused with yellow, the many-threaded streams fuse into one, as swiftly the surface flood came down from the hills. Across, the dark green hills looked darker in the wet, the umbrella pines held up in vain above the villas. But away below, on the Lungarno, traffic rattled as ever.

Aaron went down at five o'clock to tea, and found himself alone next a group of women, mostly Swedes or Danish or Dutch, drinking a peculiar brown herb-brew which tasted like nothing else on earth, and eating two thick bits of darkish bread smeared with a brown smear which hoped it was jam, but hoped in vain. Unhappily he sat in the gilt and red, massively ornate room, while the foreign women eyed him. Oh, bitter to be a male under such circumstances.

He escaped as soon as possible back to his far-off regions, lonely and cheerless, away above. But he rather liked the far-off remoteness in the big old Florentine house: he did not mind the peculiar dark, unc cosy dreariness. It was not really dreary: only indifferent. Indifferent to comfort, indifferent to all homeliness and cosiness. The over-big furniture trying to be impressive, but never to be pretty or bright or cheerful. There it stood, ugly and apart. And there let it stand. — Neither did he mind the lack of fire, the cold sombreness of his big bedroom. At home, in England, the bright grate and the ruddy fire, the thick hearth-rug and the man's arm-chair, these had been inevitable. And now he was glad to get away from it all. He was glad not to have a cosy hearth, and his own arm-chair. He was glad to feel the cold, and to breathe the unwarmed air. He preferred the Italian way of no fires, no heating. If the day was cold, he was willing to be cold too. If it was dark, he was willing to be dark. The cosy brightness of a real home — it had stifled him till he felt his lungs would burst. The horrors of real domesticity. No, the Italian brutal way was better.

So he put his overcoat over his knee, and studied some music he had bought in Milan: some Pergolesi and the Scarlatti he liked, and some Corelli. He preferred frail, sensitive, abstract music, with not much feeling in it, but a certain limpidity and purity. Night fell as he sat reading the scores. He would have liked to try certain pieces on his flute. But his flute was too sensitive, it winced from the new strange surroundings, and would not blossom.

Dinner sounded at last — at eight o'clock, or something after. He had to learn

to expect the meals always forty minutes late. Down he went, down the long, dark, lonely corridors and staircases. The dining room was right downstairs. But he had a little table to himself near the door, the elderly women were at some little distance. The only other men were Agostino, the unshapely waiter, and an Italian duke, with wife and child and nurse, the family sitting all together at a table halfway down the room, and utterly pre-occupied with a little yellow dog.

However, the food was good enough, and sufficient, and the waiter and the maid-servant cheerful and bustling. Everything felt happy-go-lucky and informal, there was no particular atmosphere. Nobody put on any airs, because nobody in the Nardini took any notice if they did. The little ducal dog yapped, the ducal son shouted, the waiter dropped half a dozen spoons, the old women knitted during the waits, and all went off so badly that it was quite pleasant. Yes, Aaron preferred it to Bertolini's, which was trying to be efficient and correct: though not making any strenuous effort. Still, Bertolini's was much more up to the scratch, there was the tension of proper standards. Whereas here at Nardini's, nothing mattered very much.

It was November. When he got up to his far-off room again, Aaron felt almost as if he were in a castle with the drawbridge drawn up. Through the open window came the sound of the swelling Arno, as it rushed and rustled along over its gravel-shoals. Lights spangled the opposite side. Traffic sounded deep below. The room was not really cold, for the summer sun so soaks into these thick old buildings, that it takes a month or two of winter to soak it out. — The rain still fell.

In the morning it was still November, and the dawn came slowly. And through the open window was the sound of the river's rushing. But the traffic started before dawn, with a bang and a rattle of carts, and a bang and jingle of tram-cars over the not-distant bridge. Oh, noisy Florence! At half-past seven Aaron rang for his coffee: and got it at a few minutes past eight. The signorina had told him to take his coffee in bed.

Rain was still falling. But towards nine o'clock it lifted, and he decided to go out. A wet, wet world. Carriages going by, with huge wet shiny umbrellas, black and with many points, erected to cover the driver and the tail of the horse and the box-seat. The hood of the carriage covered the fare. Clatter-clatter through the rain. Peasants with long wagons and slow oxen, and pale-green huge umbrellas erected for the driver to walk beneath. Men tripping along in cloaks, shawls, umbrellas, anything, quite unconcerned. A man loading gravel in the river-bed, in spite of the wet. And innumerable bells ringing: but innumerable bells. The great soft trembling of the cathedral bell felt in all the air.

Anyhow it was a new world. Aaron went along close to the tall thick houses,

following his nose. And suddenly he caught sight of the long slim neck of the Palazzo Vecchio up above, in the air. And in another minute he was passing between massive buildings, out into the Piazza della Signoria. There he stood still and looked round him in real surprise, and real joy. The flat empty square with its stone paving was all wet. The great buildings rose dark. The dark, sheer front of the Palazzo Vecchio went up like a cliff, to the battlements, and the slim tower soared dark and hawk-like, crested, high above. And at the foot of the cliff stood the great naked David, white and stripped in the wet, white against the dark, warm-dark cliff of the building — and near, the heavy naked men of Bandinelli.

The first thing he had seen, as he turned into the square, was the back of one of these Bandinelli statues: a great naked man of marble, with a heavy back and strong naked flanks over which the water was trickling. And then to come immediately upon the David, so much whiter, glistening skin-white in the wet, standing a little forward, and shrinking.

He may be ugly, too naturalistic, too big, and anything else you like. But the David in the Piazza della Signoria, there under the dark great palace, in the position Michelangelo chose for him, there, standing forward stripped and exposed and eternally half-shrinking, half — wishing to expose himself, he is the genius of Florence. The adolescent, the white, self-conscious, physical adolescent: enormous, in keeping with the stark, grim, enormous palace, which is dark and bare as he is white and bare. And behind, the big, lumpy Bandinelli men are in keeping too. They may be ugly — but they are there in their place, and they have their own lumpy reality. And this morning in the rain, standing unbroken, with the water trickling down their flanks and along the inner side of their great thighs, they were real enough, representing the undaunted physical nature of the heavier Florentines.

Aaron looked and looked at the three great naked men. David so much white, and standing forward, self-conscious: then at the great splendid front of the Palazzo Vecchio: and at the fountain splashing water upon its wet, wet figures; and the distant equestrian statue; and the stone-flagged space of the grim square. And he felt that here he was in one of the world's living centres, here, in the Piazza della Signoria. The sense of having arrived — of having reached a perfect centre of the human world: this he had.

And so, satisfied, he turned round to look at the bronze Perseus which rose just above him. Benvenuto Cellini's dark hero looked female, with his plump hips and his waist, female and rather insignificant: graceful, and rather vulgar. The clownish Bandinellis were somehow more to the point. — Then all the statuary in the Loggia! But that is a mistake. It looks too much like the yard of a

monumental mason.

The great, naked men in the rain, under the dark-grey November sky, in the dark, strong inviolable square! The wonderful hawk-head of the old palace. The physical, self-conscious adolescent, Michelangelo's David, shrinking and exposing himself, with his white, slack limbs! Florence, passionate, fearless Florence had spoken herself out. — Aaron was fascinated by the Piazza della Signoria. He never went into the town, nor returned from it to his lodging, without contriving to pass through the square. And he never passed through it without satisfaction. Here men had been at their intensest, most naked pitch, here, at the end of the old world and the beginning of the new. Since then, always rather puling and apologetic.

Aaron felt a new self, a new life-urge rising inside himself. Florence seemed to start a new man in him. It was a town of men. On Friday morning, so early, he heard the traffic. Early, he watched the rather low, two-wheeled traps of the peasants spanking recklessly over the bridge, coming in to town. And then, when he went out, he found the Piazza della Signoria packed with men: but all, all men. And all farmers, land-owners and land-workers. The curious, fine-nosed Tuscan farmers, with their half-sardonic, amber-coloured eyes. Their curious individuality, their clothes worn so easy and reckless, their hats with the personal twist. Their curious full oval cheeks, their tendency to be too fat, to have a belly and heavy limbs. Their close-sitting dark hair. And above all, their sharp, almost acrid, mocking expression, the silent curl of the nose, the eternal challenge, the rock-bottom unbelief, and the subtle fearlessness. The dangerous, subtle, never-dying fearlessness, and the acrid unbelief. But men! Men! A town of men, in spite of everything. The one manly quality, undying, acrid fearlessness. The eternal challenge of the un-quenched human soul. Perhaps too acrid and challenging today, when there is nothing left to challenge. But men — who existed without apology and without justification. Men who would neither justify themselves nor apologize for themselves. Just men. The rarest thing left in our sweet Christendom.

Altogether Aaron was pleased with himself, for being in Florence. Those were early days after the war, when as yet very few foreigners had returned, and the place had the native sombreness and intensity. So that our friend did not mind being alone.

The third day, however, Francis called on him. There was a tap at the bedroom door, and the young man entered, all eyes of curiosity.

“Oh, there you ARE!” he cried, flinging his hand and twisting his waist and then laying his hand on his breast. “Such a LONG way up to you! But miles — ! Well, how are you? Are you quite all right here? You are? I'm so glad — we've

been so rushed, seeing people that we haven't had a MINUTE. But not a MINUTE! People! People! People! Isn't it amazing how many there are, and how many one knows, and gets to know! But amazing! Endless acquaintances! — Oh, and such quaint people here! so ODD! So MORE than odd! Oh, extraordinary — !” Francis chuckled to himself over the extraordinariness. Then he seated himself gracefully at Aaron's table. “Oh, MUSIC! What? Corelli! So interesting! So very CLEVER, these people, weren't they! — Corelli and the younger Scarlatti and all that crowd.” Here he closed the score again. “But now — LOOK! Do you want to know anybody here, or don't you? I've told them about you, and of course they're dying to meet you and hear you play. But I thought it best not to mention anything about — about your being hard-up, and all that. I said you were just here on a visit. You see with this kind of people I'm sure it's much the best not to let them start off by thinking you will need them at all — or that you MIGHT need them. Why give yourself away, anyhow? Just meet them and take them for what they're worth — and then you can see. If they like to give you an engagement to play at some show or other — well, you can decide when the time comes whether you will accept. Much better that these kind of people shouldn't get it into their heads at once that they can hire your services. It doesn't do. They haven't enough discrimination for that. Much best make rather a favour of it, than sort of ask them to hire you. — Don't you agree? Perhaps I'm wrong.”

Aaron sat and listened and wondered at the wisdom and the genuine kindness of the young beau. And more still, he wondered at the profound social disillusionment. This handsome collie dog was something of a social wolf, half showing his fangs at the moment. But with genuine kindheartedness for another wolf. Aaron was touched.

“Yes, I think that's the best way,” he said.

“You do! Yes, so do I. Oh, they are such QUEER people! Why is it, do you think, that English people abroad go so very QUEER — so ultra-English — INCREDIBLE! — and at the same time so perfectly impossible? But impossible! Pathological, I assure you. — And as for their sexual behaviour — oh, dear, don't mention it. I assure you it doesn't bear mention. — And all quite flagrant, quite unabashed — under the cover of this fanatical Englishness. But I couldn't begin to TELL you all the things. It's just incredible.”

Aaron wondered how on earth Francis had been able to discover and bear witness to so much that was incredible, in a bare two days. But a little gossip, and an addition of lurid imagination will carry you anywhere.

“Well now,” said Francis. “What are you doing today?”

Aaron was not doing anything in particular.

“Then will you come and have dinner with us — ?”

Francis fixed up the time and the place — a small restaurant at the other end of the town. Then he leaned out of the window.

“Fascinating place! Oh, fascinating place!” he said, soliloquy. “And you’ve got a superb view. Almost better than ours, I think. — Well then, half-past seven. We’re meeting a few other people, mostly residents or people staying some time. We’re not inviting them. Just dropping in, you know — a little restaurant. We shall see you then! Well then, a rivederci till this evening. — So glad you like Florence! I’m simply loving it — revelling. And the pictures! — Oh — ”

The party that evening consisted all of men: Francis and Angus, and a writer, James Argyle, and little Algy Constable, and tiny Louis Mee, and deaf Walter Rosen. They all snapped and rattled at one another, and were rather spiteful but rather amusing. Francis and Angus had to leave early. They had another appointment. And James Argyle got quite tipsy, and said to Aaron:

“But, my boy, don’t let yourself be led astray by the talk of such people as Algy. Beware of them, my boy, if you’ve a soul to save. If you’ve a soul to save!” And he swallowed the remains of his litre.

Algy’s nose trembled a little, and his eyes blinked. “And if you’ve a soul to LOSE,” he said, “I would warn you very earnestly against Argyle.” Whereupon Algy shut one eye and opened the other so wide, that Aaron was almost scared. “Quite right, my boy. Ha! Ha! Never a truer thing said! Ha-ha-ha.” Argyle laughed his Mephistophelian tipsy laugh. “They’ll teach you to save. Never was such a lot of ripe old savers! Save their old trouser-buttons! Go to them if you want to learn to save. Oh, yes, I advise it seriously. You’ll lose nothing — not even a reputation. — You may lose a SOUL, of course. But that’s a detail, among such a hoard of banknotes and trouser-buttons. Ha-ha! What’s a soul, to them — ?”

“What is it to you, is perhaps the more pertinent question,” said Algy, flapping his eyelids like some crazy owl. “It is you who specialise in the matter of soul, and we who are in need of enlightenment — ”

“Yes, very true, you ARE! You ARE in need of enlightenment. A set of benighted wise virgins. Ha-ha-ha! That’s good, that — benighted wise virgins! What — ” Argyle put his red face near to Aaron’s, and made a moue, narrowing his eyes quizzically as he peered up from under his level grey eyebrows. “Sit in the dark to save the lamp-oil — And all no good to them. — When the bridegroom cometh — ! Ha-ha! Good that! Good, my boy! — The bridegroom — ” he giggled to himself. “What about the bridegroom, Algy, my boy? Eh? What about him? Better trim your wick, old man, if it’s not too late — ”

“We were talking of souls, not wicks, Argyle,” said Algy.

“Same thing. Upon my soul it all amounts to the same thing. Where’s the soul in a man that hasn’t got a bedfellow — eh? — answer me that! Can’t be done you know. Might as well ask a virgin chicken to lay you an egg.”

“Then there ought to be a good deal of it about,” said Algy.

“Of what? Of soul? There ought to be a good deal of soul about? — Ah, because there’s a good deal of — , you mean. — Ah, I wish it were so. I wish it were so. But, believe me, there’s far more damned chastity in the world, than anything else. Even in this town. — Call it chastity, if you like. I see nothing in it but sterility. It takes a rat to praise long tails. Impotence set up the praise of chastity — believe me or not — but that’s the bottom of it. The virtue is made out of the necessity. — Ha-ha-ha! — Like them! Like them! Ha-ha! Saving their souls! Why they’d save the waste matter of their bodies if they could. Grieves them to part with it. — Ha! ha! — ha!”

There was a pause. Argyle was in his cups, which left no more to be said. Algy, quivering and angry, looked disconcertingly round the room as if he were quite calm and collected. The deaf Jewish Rosen was smiling down his nose and saying: “What was that last? I didn’t catch that last,” cupping his ear with his hand in the frantic hope that someone would answer. No one paid any heed.

“I shall be going,” said Algy, looking round. Then to Aaron he said, “You play the flute, I hear. May we hear you some time?”

“Yes,” said Aaron, non-committal.

“Well, look here — come to tea tomorrow. I shall have some friends, and Del Torre will play the piano. Come to tea tomorrow, will you?”

“Thank you, I will.”

“And perhaps you’ll bring your flute along.”

“Don’t you do any such thing, my boy. Make them entertain YOU, for once. — They’re always squeezing an entertainment out of somebody — ” and Argyle desperately emptied the remains of Algy’s wine into his own glass: whilst Algy stood as if listening to something far off, and blinking terribly.

“Anyhow,” he said at length, “you’ll come, won’t you? And bring the flute if you feel like it.”

“Don’t you take that flute, my boy,” persisted Argyle. “Don’t think of such a thing. If they want a concert, let them buy their tickets and go to the Teatro Diana. Or to Marchesa del Torre’s Saturday morning. She can afford to treat them.” Algy looked at Argyle, and blinked. “Well,” he said. “I hope you’ll get home all right, Argyle.”

“Thank you for your courtesy, Algy. Won’t you lend me your arm?”

As Algy was small and frail, somewhat shaky, and as Argyle was a finely

built, heavy man of fifty or more, the slap was unkind.

“Afraid I can’t tonight. Good-night — ”

Algy departed, so did little Mee, who had sat with a little delighted disapproval on his tiny, bird-like face, without saying anything. And even the Jew Rosen put away his deaf-machine and began awkwardly to take his leave. His long nose was smiling to itself complacently at all the things Argyle had been saying.

When he, too, had gone, Argyle arched his brows at Aaron, saying:

“Oh, my dear fellow, what a lot they are! — Little Mee — looking like an innocent little boy. He’s over seventy if he’s a day. Well over seventy. Well, you don’t believe me. Ask his mother — ask his mother. She’s ninety-five. Old lady of ninety-five — ” Argyle even laughed himself at his own preposterousness.

“And then Algy — Algy’s not a fool, you know. Oh, he can be most entertaining, most witty, and amusing. But he’s out of place here. He should be in Kensington, dandling round the ladies’ drawing rooms and making his mots. They’re rich, you know, the pair of them. Little Mee used to boast that he lived on eleven-and-three-pence a week. Had to, poor chap. But then what does a white mouse like that need? Makes a heavy meal on a cheese-paring. Luck, you know — but of course he’s come into money as well. Rich as Croesus, and still lives on nineteen-and-two-pence a week. Though it’s nearly double, of course, what it used to be. No wonder he looks anxious. They disapprove of me — oh, quite right, quite right from their own point of view. Where would their money be otherwise? It wouldn’t last long if I laid hands on it — ” he made a devilish quizzing face. “But you know, they get on my nerves. Little old maids, you know, little old maids. I’m sure I’m surprised at their patience with me. — But when people are patient with you, you want to spit gall at them. Don’t you? Ha-ha-ha! Poor old Algy. — Did I lay it on him tonight, or did I miss him?”

“I think you got him,” said Aaron.

“He’ll never forgive me. Depend on it, he’ll never forgive me. Ha-ha! I like to be unforgiven. It adds ZEST to one’s intercourse with people, to know that they’ll never forgive one. Ha-ha-ha! Little old maids, who do their knitting with their tongues. Poor old Algy — he drops his stitches now. Ha-ha-ha! — Must be eighty, I should say.”

Aaron laughed. He had never met a man like Argyle before — and he could not help being charmed. The other man had a certain wicked whimsicality that was very attractive, when levelled against someone else, and not against oneself. He must have been very handsome in his day, with his natural dignity, and his clean-shaven strong square face. But now his face was all red and softened and inflamed, his eyes had gone small and wicked under his bushy grey brows. Still

he had a presence. And his grey hair, almost gone white, was still handsome.

“And what are you going to do in Florence?” asked Argyle.

Aaron explained.

“Well,” said Argyle. “Make what you can out of them, and then go. Go before they have time to do the dirty on you. If they think you want anything from them, they’ll treat you like a dog, like a dog. Oh, they’re very frightened of anybody who wants anything of them: frightened to death. I see nothing of them. — Live by myself — see nobody. Can’t stand it, you know: their silly little teaparties — simply can’t stand it. No, I live alone — and shall die alone. — At least, I sincerely hope so. I should be sorry to have any of them hanging round.”

The restaurant was empty, the pale, malarial waiter — he had of course contracted malaria during the war — was looking purple round the eyes. But Argyle callously sat on. Aaron therefore rose to his feet.

“Oh, I’m coming, I’m coming,” said Argyle.

He got unsteadily to his feet. The waiter helped him on with his coat: and he put a disreputable-looking little curly hat on his head. Then he took his stick.

“Don’t look at my appearance, my dear fellow,” said Argyle. “I am frayed at the wrists — look here!” He showed the cuffs of his overcoat, just frayed through. “I’ve got a trunkful of clothes in London, if only somebody would bring it out to me. — Ready then! Avanti!”

And so they passed out into the still rainy street. Argyle lived in the very centre of the town: in the Cathedral Square. Aaron left him at his hotel door.

“But come and see me,” said Argyle. “Call for me at twelve o’clock — or just before twelve — and let us have luncheon together. What! Is that all right? — Yes, come just before twelve. — When? — Tomorrow? Tomorrow morning? Will you come tomorrow?”

Aaron said he would on Monday.

“Monday, eh! You say Monday! Very well then. Don’t you forget now. Don’t you forget. For I’ve a memory like a vice. I shan’t forget. — Just before twelve then. And come right up. I’m right under the roof. In Paradise, as the porter always says. Siamo nel paradiso. But he’s a cretin. As near Paradise as I care for, for it’s devilish hot in summer, and damned cold in winter. Don’t you forget now — Monday, twelve o’clock.”

And Argyle pinched Aaron’s arm fast, then went unsteadily up the steps to his hotel door.

The next day at Algy’s there was a crowd Algy had a very pleasant flat indeed, kept more scrupulously neat and finicking than ever any woman’s flat was kept. So today, with its bowls of flowers and its pictures and books and old furniture, and Algy, very nicely dressed, fluttering and blinking and making

really a charming host, it was all very delightful to the little mob of visitors. They were a curious lot, it is true: everybody rather exceptional. Which though it may be startling, is so very much better fun than everybody all alike. Aaron talked to an old, old Italian elegant in side-curls, who peeled off his grey gloves and studied his formalities with a delightful Mid-Victorian dash, and told stories about a plaint which Lady Surry had against Lord Marsh, and was quite incomprehensible. Out rolled the English words, like plums out of a burst bag, and all completely unintelligible. But the old beau was supremely satisfied. He loved talking English, and holding his listeners spell-bound.

Next to Aaron on the sofa sat the Marchesa del Torre, an American woman from the Southern States, who had lived most of her life in Europe. She was about forty years of age, handsome, well-dressed, and quiet in the buzz of the teaparty. It was evident she was one of Algy's lionesses. Now she sat by Aaron, eating nothing, but taking a cup of tea and keeping still. She seemed sad — or not well perhaps. Her eyes were heavy. But she was very carefully made up, and very well dressed, though simply: and sitting there, full-bosomed, rather sad, remote-seeming, she suggested to Aaron a modern Cleopatra brooding, Anthony-less.

Her husband, the Marchese, was a little intense Italian in a colonel's grey uniform, cavalry, leather gaiters. He had blue eyes, his hair was cut very short, his head looked hard and rather military: he would have been taken for an Austrian officer, or even a German, had it not been for the peculiar Italian sprightliness and touch of grimace in his mobile countenance. He was rather like a gnome — not ugly, but odd.

Now he came and stood opposite to Signor di Lanti, and quizzed him in Italian. But it was evident, in quizzing the old buck, the little Marchese was hovering near his wife, in ear-shot. Algy came up with cigarettes, and she at once began to smoke, with that peculiar heavy intensity of a nervous woman.

Aaron did not say anything — did not know what to say. He was peculiarly conscious of the woman sitting next to him, her arm near his. She smoked heavily, in silence, as if abstracted, a sort of cloud on her level, dark brows. Her hair was dark, but a softish brown, not black, and her skin was fair. Her bosom would be white. — Why Aaron should have had this thought, he could not for the life of him say.

Manfredi, her husband, rolled his blue eyes and grimaced as he laughed at old Lanti. But it was obvious that his attention was diverted sideways, towards his wife. Aaron, who was tired of nursing a tea-cup, placed it on a table and resumed his seat in silence. But suddenly the little Marchese whipped out his cigarette-case, and making a little bow, presented it to Aaron, saying:

“Won’t you smoke?”

“Thank you,” said Aaron.

“Turkish that side — Virginia there — you see.”

“Thank you, Turkish,” said Aaron.

The little officer in his dove-grey and yellow uniform snapped his box shut again, and presented a light.

“You are new in Florence?” he said, as he presented the match.

“Four days,” said Aaron.

“And I hear you are musical.”

“I play the flute — no more.”

“Ah, yes — but then you play it as an artist, not as an accomplishment.”

“But how do you know?” laughed Aaron.

“I was told so — and I believe it.”

“That’s nice of you, anyhow — But you are a musician too.”

“Yes — we are both musicians — my wife and I.”

Manfredi looked at his wife. She flicked the ash off her cigarette.

“What sort?” said Aaron.

“Why, how do you mean, what sort? We are dilettanti, I suppose.”

“No — what is your instrument? The piano?”

“Yes — the pianoforte. And my wife sings. But we are very much out of practice. I have been at the war four years, and we have had our home in Paris. My wife was in Paris, she did not wish to stay in Italy alone. And so — you see — everything goes — ”

“But you will begin again?”

“Yes. We have begun already. We have music on Saturday mornings. Next Saturday a string quartette, and violin solos by a young Florentine woman — a friend — very good indeed, daughter of our Professor Tortoli, who composes — as you may know — ”

“Yes,” said Aaron.

“Would you care to come and hear — ?”

“Awfully nice if you would — ” suddenly said the wife, quite simply, as if she had merely been tired, and not talking before.

“I should like to very much — ”

“Do come then.”

While they were making the arrangements, Algy came up in his blandest manner.

“Now Marchesa — might we hope for a song?”

“No — I don’t sing any more,” came the slow, contralto reply.

“Oh, but you can’t mean you say that deliberately — ”

“Yes, quite deliberately — ” She threw away her cigarette and opened her little gold case to take another.

“But what can have brought you to such a disastrous decision?”

“I can’t say,” she replied, with a little laugh. “The war, probably.”

“Oh, but don’t let the war deprive us of this, as of everything else.”

“Can’t be helped,” she said. “I have no choice in the matter. The bird has flown — ” She spoke with a certain heavy languor.

“You mean the bird of your voice? Oh, but that is quite impossible. One can hear it calling out of the leaves every time you speak.”

“I’m afraid you can’t get him to do any more than call out of the leaves.”

“But — but — pardon me — is it because you don’t intend there should be any more song? Is that your intention?”

“That I couldn’t say,” said the Marchesa, smoking, smoking.

“Yes,” said Manfredi. “At the present time it is because she WILL not — not because she cannot. It is her will, as you say.”

“Dear me! Dear me!” said Algy. “But this is really another disaster added to the war list. — But — but — will none of us ever be able to persuade you?” He smiled half cajoling, half pathetic, with a prodigious flapping of his eyes.

“I don’t know,” said she. “That will be as it must be.”

“Then can’t we say it must be SONG once more?”

To this sally she merely laughed, and pressed out her half-smoked cigarette.

“How very disappointing! How very cruel of — of fate — and the war — and — and all the sum total of evils,” said Algy.

“Perhaps — ” here the little and piquant host turned to Aaron.

“Perhaps Mr. Sisson, your flute might call out the bird of song. As thrushes call each other into challenge, you know. Don’t you think that is very probable?”

“I have no idea,” said Aaron.

“But you, Marchesa. Won’t you give us hope that it might be so?”

“I’ve no idea, either,” said she. “But I should very much like to hear Mr. Sisson’s flute. It’s an instrument I like extremely.”

“There now. You see you may work the miracle, Mr. Sisson. Won’t you play to us?”

“I’m afraid I didn’t bring my flute along,” said Aaron “I didn’t want to arrive with a little bag.”

“Quite!” said Algy. “What a pity it wouldn’t go in your pocket.”

“Not music and all,” said Aaron.

“Dear me! What a comble of disappointment. I never felt so strongly, Marchesa, that the old life and the old world had collapsed. — Really — I shall soon have to try to give up being cheerful at all.”

“Don’t do that,” said the Marchesa. “It isn’t worth the effort.”

“Ah! I’m glad you find it so. Then I have hope.”

She merely smiled, indifferent.

The teaparty began to break up — Aaron found himself going down the stairs with the Marchesa and her husband. They descended all three in silence, husband and wife in front. Once outside the door, the husband asked:

“How shall we go home, dear? Tram or carriage — ?” It was evident he was economical.

“Walk,” she said, glancing over her shoulder at Aaron. “We are all going the same way, I believe.”

Aaron said where he lived. They were just across the river. And so all three proceeded to walk through the town.

“You are sure it won’t be too much for you — too far?” said the little officer, taking his wife’s arm solicitously. She was taller than he. But he was a spirited fellow.

“No, I feel like walking.”

“So long as you don’t have to pay for it afterwards.”

Aaron gathered that she was not well. Yet she did not look ill — unless it were nerves. She had that peculiar heavy remote quality of pre-occupation and neurosis.

The streets of Florence were very full this Sunday evening, almost impassable, crowded particularly with gangs of grey-green soldiers. The three made their way brokenly, and with difficulty. The Italian was in a constant state of returning salutes. The grey-green, sturdy, unsoldierly soldiers looked at the woman as she passed.

“I am sure you had better take a carriage,” said Manfredi.

“No — I don’t mind it.”

“Do you feel at home in Florence?” Aaron asked her.

“Yes — as much as anywhere. Oh, yes — quite at home.”

“Do you like it as well as anywhere?” he asked.

“Yes — for a time. Paris for the most part.”

“Never America?”

“No, never America. I came when I was quite a little girl to Europe — Madrid — Constantinople — Paris. I hardly knew America at all.”

Aaron remembered that Francis had told him, the Marchesa’s father had been ambassador to Paris.

“So you feel you have no country of your own?”

“I have Italy. I am Italian now, you know.”

Aaron wondered why she spoke so muted, so numbed. Manfredi seemed

really attached to her — and she to him. They were so simple with one another.

They came towards the bridge where they should part.

“Won’t you come and have a cocktail?” she said.

“Now?” said Aaron.

“Yes. This is the right time for a cocktail. What time is it, Manfredi?”

“Half past six. Do come and have one with us,” said the Italian. “We always take one about this time.”

Aaron continued with them over the bridge. They had the first floor of an old palazzo opposite, a little way up the hill. A man-servant opened the door.

“If only it will be warm,” she said. “The apartment is almost impossible to keep warm. We will sit in the little room.”

Aaron found himself in a quite warm room with shaded lights and a mixture of old Italian stiffness and deep soft modern comfort. The Marchesa went away to take off her wraps, and the Marchese chatted with Aaron. The little officer was amiable and kind, and it was evident he liked his guest.

“Would you like to see the room where we have music?” he said. “It is a fine room for the purpose — we used before the war to have music every Saturday morning, from ten to twelve: and all friends might come. Usually we had fifteen or twenty people. Now we are starting again. I myself enjoy it so much. I am afraid my wife isn’t so enthusiastic as she used to be. I wish something would rouse her up, you know. The war seemed to take her life away. Here in Florence are so many amateurs. Very good indeed. We can have very good chamber-music indeed. I hope it will cheer her up and make her quite herself again. I was away for such long periods, at the front. — And it was not good for her to be alone. — I am hoping now all will be better.”

So saying, the little, odd officer switched on the lights of the long salon. It was a handsome room in the Italian mode of the Empire period — beautiful old faded tapestry panels — reddish — and some ormolu furniture — and other things mixed in — rather conglomerate, but pleasing, all the more pleasing. It was big, not too empty, and seemed to belong to human life, not to show and shut-upedness. The host was happy showing it.

“Of course the flat in Paris is more luxurious than this,” he said. “But I prefer this. I prefer it here.” There was a certain wistfulness as he looked round, then began to switch off the lights.

They returned to the little salotta. The Marchesa was seated in a low chair. She wore a very thin white blouse, that showed her arms and her throat. She was a full-breasted, soft-skinned woman, though not stout.

“Make the cocktails then, Manfredi,” she said. “Do you find this room very cold?” she asked of Aaron.

“Not a bit cold,” he said.

“The stove goes all the time,” she said, “but without much effect.”

“You wear such thin clothes,” he said.

“Ah, no, the stove should give heat enough. Do sit down. Will you smoke? There are cigarettes — and cigars, if you prefer them.”

“No, I’ve got my own, thanks.”

She took her own cigarette from her gold case.

“It is a fine room, for music, the big room,” said he.

“Yes, quite. Would you like to play for us some time, do you think?”

“Do you want me to? I mean does it interest you?”

“What — the flute?”

“No — music altogether — ”

“Music altogether — ! Well! I used to love it. Now — I’m not sure. Manfredi lives for it, almost.”

“For that and nothing else?” asked Aaron.

“No, no! No, no! Other things as well.”

“But you don’t like it much any more?”

“I don’t know. Perhaps I don’t. I’m not sure.”

“You don’t look forward to the Saturday mornings?” he asked.

“Perhaps I don’t — but for Manfredi’s sake, of course, I do. But for his sake more than my own, I admit. And I think he knows it.”

“A crowd of people in one’s house — ” said Aaron.

“Yes, the people. But it’s not only that. It’s the music itself — I think I can’t stand it any more. I don’t know.”

“Too emotional? Too much feeling for you?”

“Yes, perhaps. But no. What I can’t stand is chords, you know: harmonies. A number of sounds all sounding together. It just makes me ill. It makes me feel so sick.”

“What — do you want discords? — dissonances?”

“No — they are nearly as bad. No, it’s just when any number of musical notes, different notes, come together, harmonies or discords. Even a single chord struck on the piano. It makes me feel sick. I just feel as if I should retch. Isn’t it strange? Of course, I don’t tell Manfredi. It would be too cruel to him. It would cut his life in two.”

“But then why do you have the music — the Saturdays — then?”

“Oh, I just keep out of the way as much as possible. I’m sure you feel there is something wrong with me, that I take it as I do,” she added, as if anxious: but half ironical.

“No — I was just wondering — I believe I feel something the same myself. I

know orchestra makes me blind with hate or I don't know what. But I want to throw bombs."

"There now. It does that to me, too. Only now it has fairly got me down, and I feel nothing but helpless nausea. You know, like when you are seasick."

Her dark-blue, heavy, haunted-looking eyes were resting on him as if she hoped for something. He watched her face steadily, a curious intelligence flickering on his own.

"Yes," he said. "I understand it. And I know, at the bottom, I'm like that. But I keep myself from realising, don't you know? Else perhaps, where should I be? Because I make my life and my living at it, as well."

"At music! Do you! But how bad for you. But perhaps the flute is different. I have a feeling that it is. I can think of one single pipe-note — yes, I can think of it quite, quite calmly. And I can't even think of the piano, or of the violin with its tremolo, or of orchestra, or of a string quartette — or even a military band — I can't think of it without a shudder. I can only bear drum-and-fife. Isn't it crazy of me — but from the other, from what we call music proper, I've endured too much. But bring your flute one day. Bring it, will you? And let me hear it quite alone. Quite, quite alone. I think it might do me an awful lot of good. I do, really. I can imagine it." She closed her eyes and her strange, sing-song lapsing voice came to an end. She spoke almost like one in a trance — or a sleep-walker.

"I've got it now in my overcoat pocket," he said, "if you like."

"Have you? Yes!" She was never hurried: always slow and resonant, so that the echoes of her voice seemed to linger. "Yes — do get it. Do get it. And play in the other room — quite — quite without accompaniment. Do — and try me."

"And you will tell me what you feel?"

"Yes."

Aaron went out to his overcoat. When he returned with his flute, which he was screwing together, Manfredi had come with the tray and the three cocktails. The Marchesa took her glass.

"Listen, Manfredi," she said. "Mr. Sisson is going to play, quite alone in the sala. And I am going to sit here and listen."

"Very well," said Manfredi. "Drink your cocktail first. Are you going to play without music?"

"Yes," said Aaron.

"I'll just put on the lights for you."

"No — leave it dark. Enough light will come in from here."

"Sure?" said Manfredi.

"Yes."

The little soldier was an intruder at the moment. Both the others felt it so. But

they bore him no grudge. They knew it was they who were exceptional, not he. Aaron swallowed his drink, and looked towards the door.

“Sit down, Manfredi. Sit still,” said the Marchesa.

“Won’t you let me try some accompaniment?” said the soldier.

“No. I shall just play a little thing from memory,” said Aaron.

“Sit down, dear. Sit down,” said the Marchesa to her husband.

He seated himself obediently. The flash of bright yellow on the grey of his uniform seemed to make him like a chaffinch or a gnome.

Aaron retired to the other room, and waited awhile, to get back the spell which connected him with the woman, and gave the two of them this strange isolation, beyond the bounds of life, as it seemed.

He caught it again. And there, in the darkness of the big room, he put his flute to his lips, and began to play. It was a clear, sharp, lilted run-and-fall of notes, not a tune in any sense of the word, and yet a melody, a bright, quick sound of pure animation, a bright, quick, animate noise, running and pausing. It was like a bird’s singing, in that it had no human emotion or passion or intention or meaning — a ripple and poise of animate sound. But it was unlike a bird’s singing, in that the notes followed clear and single one after the other, in their subtle gallop. A nightingale is rather like that — a wild sound. To read all the human pathos into nightingales’ singing is nonsense. A wild, savage, non-human lurch and squander of sound, beautiful, but entirely unaesthetic.

What Aaron was playing was not of his own invention. It was a bit of mediaeval phrasing written for the pipe and the viol. It made the piano seem a ponderous, nerve-wracking steam-roller of noise, and the violin, as we know it, a hateful wire-drawn nerve-torturer.

After a little while, when he entered the smaller room again, the Marchesa looked full into his face.

“Good!” she said. “Good!”

And a gleam almost of happiness seemed to light her up. She seemed like one who had been kept in a horrible enchanted castle — for years and years. Oh, a horrible enchanted castle, with wet walls of emotions and ponderous chains of feelings and a ghastly atmosphere of must-be. She felt she had seen through the opening door a crack of sunshine, and thin, pure, light outside air, outside, beyond this dank and beastly dungeon of feelings and moral necessity. Ugh! — she shuddered convulsively at what had been. She looked at her little husband. Chains of necessity all round him: a little jailor. Yet she was fond of him. If only he would throw away the castle keys. He was a little gnome. What did he clutch the castle-keys so tight for?

Aaron looked at her. He knew that they understood one another, he and she.

Without any moral necessity or any other necessity. Outside — they had got outside the castle of so-called human life. Outside the horrible, stinking human castle Of life. A bit of true, limpid freedom. Just a glimpse.

“Charming!” said the Marchese. “Truly charming! But what was it you played?”

Aaron told him.

“But truly delightful. I say, won’t you play for us one of these Saturdays? And won’t you let me take the accompaniment? I should be charmed, charmed if you would.”

“All right,” said Aaron.

“Do drink another cocktail,” said his hostess.

He did so. And then he rose to leave.

“Will you stay to dinner?” said the Marchesa. “We have two people coming — two Italian relatives of my husband. But — ”

No, Aaron declined to stay to dinner.

“Then won’t you come on — let me see — on Wednesday? Do come on Wednesday. We are alone. And do bring the flute. Come at half-past six, as today, will you? Yes?”

Aaron promised — and then he found himself in the street. It was half-past seven. Instead of returning straight home, he crossed the Ponte Vecchio and walked straight into the crowd. The night was fine now. He had his overcoat over his arm, and in a sort of trance or frenzy, whirled away by his evening’s experience, and by the woman, he strode swiftly forward, hardly heeding anything, but rushing blindly on through all the crowd, carried away by his own feelings, as much as if he had been alone, and all these many people merely trees.

Leaving the Piazza Vittorio Emmanuele a gang of soldiers suddenly rushed round him, buffeting him in one direction, whilst another gang, swinging round the corner, threw him back helpless again into the midst of the first gang. For some moments he struggled among the rude, brutal little mob of grey-green coarse uniforms that smelt so strong of soldiers. Then, irritated, he found himself free again, shaking himself and passing on towards the cathedral. Irritated, he now put on his overcoat and buttoned it to the throat, closing himself in, as it were, from the brutal insolence of the Sunday night mob of men. Before, he had been walking through them in a rush of naked feeling, all exposed to their tender mercies. He now gathered himself together.

As he was going home, suddenly, just as he was passing the Bargello, he stopped. He stopped, and put his hand to his breast pocket. His letter-case was gone. He had been robbed. It was as if lightning ran through him at that moment,

as if a fluid electricity rushed down his limbs, through the sluice of his knees, and out at his feet, leaving him standing there almost unconscious. For a moment unconscious and superconscious he stood there. He had been robbed. They had put their hand in his breast and robbed him. If they had stabbed him, it could hardly have had a greater effect on him.

And he had known it. He had known it. When the soldiers jostled him so evilly they robbed him. And he knew it. He had known it as if it were fate. Even as if it were fated beforehand.

Feeling quite weak and faint, as if he had really been struck by some evil electric fluid, he walked on. And as soon as he began to walk, he began to reason. Perhaps his letter-case was in his other coat. Perhaps he had not had it with him at all. Perhaps he was feeling all this, just for nothing. Perhaps it was all folly.

He hurried forward. He wanted to make sure. He wanted relief. It was as if the power of evil had suddenly seized him and thrown him, and he wanted to say it was not so, that he had imagined it all, conjured it up. He did not want to admit the power of evil — particularly at that moment. For surely a very ugly evil spirit had struck him, in the midst of that gang of Italian soldiers. He knew it — it had pierced him. It had got him.

But he wanted to say it was not so. Reaching the house, he hastened upwards to his far-off, lonely room, through the dark corridors. Once in his own apartment, he shut the door and switched on the light, a sensation like fear at his heart. Then he searched his other pockets. He looked everywhere. In vain.

In vain, truly enough. For he knew the thing was stolen. He had known it all along. The soldiers had deliberately plotted, had deliberately rushed him and taken his purse. They must have watched him previously. They must have grinned, and jeered at him.

He sat down in a chair, to recover from the shock. The pocket-book contained four hundred francs, three one-pound notes, and various letters and private effects. Well, these were lost. But it was not so much the loss as the assault on his person that caused him to feel so stricken. He felt the jeering, gibing blows they had given as they jostled him.

And now he sat, weak in every limb, and said to himself: “Yes — and if I hadn’t rushed along so full of feeling: if I hadn’t exposed myself: if I hadn’t got worked up with the Marchesa, and then rushed all kindled through the streets, without reserve, it would never have happened. I gave myself away: and there was someone ready to snatch what I gave. I gave myself away. It is my own fault. I should have been on my guard. I should be always on my guard: always, always. With God and the devil both, I should be on my guard. Godly or

devilish, I should hold fast to my reserve and keep on the watch. And if I don't, I deserve what I get."

But still he sat in his chair in his bedroom, dazed. One part of his soul was saying emphatically: It serves you right. It is nothing but right. It serves everybody right who rushes enkindled through the street, and trusts implicitly in mankind and in the life-spirit, as if mankind and the life-spirit were a playground for enkindled individuals. It serves you right. You have paid about twelve pounds sterling for your lesson. Fool, you might have known beforehand, and then you needn't have paid at all. You can ill afford twelve pounds sterling, you fool. But since paid you have, then mind, mind the lesson is learned. Never again. Never expose yourself again. Never again absolute trust. It is a blasphemy against life, is absolute trust. Has a wild creature ever absolute trust? It minds itself. Sleeping or waking it is on its guard. And so must you be, or you'll go under. Sleeping or waking, man or woman, God or the devil, keep your guard over yourself. Keep your guard over yourself, lest worse befall you. No man is robbed unless he incites a robber. No man is murdered unless he attracts a murderer. Then be not robbed: it lies within your own power. And be not murdered. Or if you are, you deserve it. Keep your guard over yourself, now, always and forever. Yes, against God quite as hard as against the devil. He's fully as dangerous to you....

Thus thinking, not in his mind but in his soul, his active, living soul, he gathered his equanimity once more, and accepted the fact. So he rose and tidied himself for dinner. His face was now set, and still. His heart also was still — and fearless. Because its sentinel was stationed. Stationed, stationed for ever.

And Aaron never forgot. After this, it became essential to him to feel that the sentinel stood guard in his own heart. He felt a strange unease the moment he was off his guard. Asleep or awake, in the midst of the deepest passion or the suddenest love, or in the throes of greatest excitement or bewilderment, somewhere, some corner of himself was awake to the fact that the sentinel of the soul must not sleep, no, never, not for one instant.

CHAPTER XVII. HIGH UP OVER THE CATHEDRAL SQUARE

Aaron and Lilly sat in Argyle's little loggia, high up under the eaves of the small hotel, a sort of long attic-terrace just under the roof, where no one would have suspected it. It was level with the grey conical roof of the Baptistery. Here sat Aaron and Lilly in the afternoon, in the last of the lovely autumn sunshine. Below, the square was already cold in shadow, the pink and white and green Baptistery rose lantern-shaped as from some sea-shore, cool, cold and wan now the sun was gone. Black figures, innumerable black figures, curious because they were all on end, up on end — Aaron could not say why he expected them to be horizontal — little black figures upon end, like fishes that swim on their tails, wiggled endlessly across the piazza, little carriages on natural all-fours rattled tinily across, the yellow little tram-cars, like dogs slipped round the corner. The balcony was so high up, that the sound was ineffectual. The upper space, above the houses, was nearer than the under-currents of the noisy town. Sunlight, lovely full sunlight, lingered warm and still on the balcony. It caught the facade of the cathedral sideways, like the tips of a flower, and sideways lit up the stem of Giotto's tower, like a lily stem, or a long, lovely pale pink and white and green pistil of the lily of the cathedral. Florence, the flowery town. Firenze — Firenze — the flowery town: the red lilies. The Fiorentini, the flower-souled. Flowers with good roots in the mud and muck, as should be: and fearless blossoms in air, like the cathedral and the tower and the David.

"I love it," said Lilly. "I love this place, I love the cathedral and the tower. I love its pinkness and its paleness. The Gothic souls find fault with it, and say it is gimcrack and tawdry and cheap. But I love it, it is delicate and rosy, and the dark stripes are as they should be, like the tiger marks on a pink lily. It's a lily, not a rose; a pinky white lily with dark tigery marks. And heavy, too, in its own substance: earth-substance, risen from earth into the air: and never forgetting the dark, black-fierce earth — I reckon here men for a moment were themselves, as a plant in flower is for the moment completely itself. Then it goes off. As Florence has gone off. No flowers now. But it HAS flowered. And I don't see why a race should be like an aloe tree, flower once and die. Why should it? Why not flower again? Why not?"

"If it's going to, it will," said Aaron. "Our deciding about it won't alter it."

“The decision is part of the business.”

Here they were interrupted by Argyle, who put his head through one of the windows. He had flecks of lather on his reddened face.

“Do you think you’re wise now,” he said, “to sit in that sun?”

“In November?” laughed Lilly.

“Always fear the sun when there’s an ‘r’ in the month,” said Argyle. “Always fear it ‘r’ or no ‘r,’ I say. I’m frightened of it. I’ve been in the South, I know what it is. I tell you I’m frightened of it. But if you think you can stand it — well — ”

“It won’t last much longer, anyhow,” said Lilly.

“Too long for me, my boy. I’m a shady bird, in all senses of the word, in all senses of the word. — Now are you comfortable? What? Have another cushion? A rug for your knees? You’re quite sure now? Well, wait just one moment till the waiter brings up a syphon, and you shall have a whiskey and soda. Precious — oh, yes, very precious these days — like drinking gold. Thirty-five lire a bottle, my boy!” Argyle pulled a long face, and made a noise with his lips. “But I had this bottle given me, and luckily you’ve come while there’s a drop left. Very glad you have! Very glad you have.”

Here he poked a little table through the window, and put a bottle and two glasses, one a tooth-glass, upon it. Then he withdrew again to finish shaving. The waiter presently hobbled up with the syphon and third glass. Argyle pushed his head through the window, that was only a little higher than the balcony. He was soon neatly shaved, and was brushing his hair.

“Go ahead, my boys, go ahead with that whiskey!” he said.

“We’ll wait for you,” said Lilly.

“No, no, don’t think of it. However, if you will, I shall be one minute only — one minute only. I’ll put on the water for the tea now. Oh, damned bad methylated spirit they sell now! And six francs a litre! Six francs a litre! I don’t know what I’m going to do, the air I breathe costs money nowadays — Just one moment and I’ll be with you! Just one moment — ”

In a very little while he came from the tiny attic bedroom, through the tiniest cupboard of a sitting-room under the eaves, where his books were, and where he had hung his old red India tapestries — or silk embroideries — and he emerged there up above the world on the loggia.

“Now then — siamo nel paradiso, eh? Paradisal enough for you, is it?”

“The devil looking over Lincoln,” said Lilly laughing, glancing up into Argyle’s face.

“The devil looking over Florence would feel sad,” said Argyle. “The place is fast growing respectable — Oh, piety makes the devil chuckle. But

respectability, my boy, argues a serious diminution of spunk. And when the spunk diminishes we-ell — it's enough to make the most sturdy devil look sick. What? No doubt about it, no doubt whatever — There — !” he had just finished settling his tie and buttoning his waistcoat. “How do I look, eh? Presentable? — I've just had this suit turned. Clever little tailor across the way there. But he charged me a hundred and twenty francs.” Argyle pulled a face, and made the little trumping noise with his lips. “However — not bad, is it? — He had to let in a bit at the back of the waistcoat, and a gusset, my boy, a gusset — in the trousers back. Seems I've grown in the arsal region. Well, well, might do worse. — Is it all right?”

Lilly eyed the suit.

“Very nice. Very nice indeed. Such a good cloth! That makes all the difference.”

“Oh, my dear fellow, all the difference! This suit is eleven years old — eleven years old. But beautiful English cloth — before the war, before the war!”

“It looks quite wonderfully expensive and smart now,” said Lilly.

“Expensive and smart, eh! Ha-ha-ha! Well, it cost me a hundred and twenty francs to have it turned, and I found that expensive enough. Well, now, come —” here Argyle's voice took on a new gay cheer. “A whiskey and soda, Lilly? Say when! Oh, nonsense, nonsense! You're going to have double that. You're no lily of the valley here, remember. Not with me. Not likely. Siamo nel paradiso, remember.”

“But why should we drink your whiskey? Tea would do for us just as well.”

“Not likely! Not likely! When I have the pleasure of your company, my boy, we drink a glass of something, unless I am utterly stripped. Say when, Aaron.”

“When,” said Aaron.

Argyle at last seated himself heavily in a small chair. The sun had left the loggia, but was glowing still on Giotto's tower and the top of the cathedral facade, and on the remoter great red-tiled dome.

“Look at my little red monthly rose,” said Argyle. “Wonderful little fellow! I wouldn't have anything happen to him for the world. Oh, a bacchic little chap. I made Pasquale wear a wreath of them on his hair. Very becoming they were, very. — Oh, I've had a charming show of flowers. Wonderful creatures sunflowers are.” They got up and put their heads over the balcony, looking down on the square below. “Oh, great fun, great fun. — Yes, I had a charming show of flowers, charming. — Zinnias, petunias, ranunculus, sunflowers, white stocks — oh, charming. Look at that bit of honeysuckle. You see the berries where his flowers were! Delicious scent, I assure you.”

Under the little balcony wall Argyle had put square red-tiled pots, all round,

and in these still bloomed a few pansies and asters, whilst in a corner a monthly rose hung flowers like round blood-drops. Argyle was as tidy and scrupulous in his tiny rooms and his balcony as if he were a first-rate sea-man on a yacht. Lilly remarked on this.

“Do you see signs of the old maid coming out in me? Oh, I don’t doubt it. I don’t doubt it. We all end that way. Age makes old maids of us all. And Tanny is all right, you say? Bring her to see me. Why didn’t she come today?”

“You know you don’t like people unless you expect them.”

“Oh, but my dear fellow! — You and Tanny; you’d be welcome if you came at my busiest moment. Of course you would. I’d be glad to see you if you interrupted me at any crucial moment. — I am alone now till August. Then we shall go away together somewhere. But you and Tanny; why, there’s the world, and there’s Lilly: that’s how I put it, my boy.”

“All right, Argyle. — Hoflichkeiten.”

“What? Gar keine Hoflichkeiten. Wahrhaftiger Kerl bin ich. — When am I going to see Tanny? When are you coming to dine with me?”

“After you’ve dined with us — say the day after tomorrow.”

“Right you are. Delighted — . Let me look if that water’s boiling.” He got up and poked half himself inside the bedroom. “Not yet. Damned filthy methylated spirit they sell.”

“Look,” said Lilly. “There’s Del Torre!”

“Like some sort of midge, in that damned grey-and-yellow uniform. I can’t stand it, I tell you. I can’t stand the sight of any more of these uniforms. Like a blight on the human landscape. Like a blight. Like green-flies on rose-trees, smother-flies. Europe’s got the smother-fly in these infernal shoddy militarists.”

“Del Torre’s coming out of it as soon as he can,” said Lilly.

“I should think so, too.”

“I like him myself — very much. Look, he’s seen us! He wants to come up, Argyle.”

“What, in that uniform! I’ll see him in his grandmother’s crinoline first.”

“Don’t be fanatical, it’s bad taste. Let him come up a minute.”

“Not for my sake. But for yours, he shall,” Argyle stood at the parapet of the balcony and waved his arm. “Yes, come up,” he said, “come up, you little mistkafer — what the Americans call a bug. Come up and be damned.”

Of course Del Torre was too far off to hear this exhortation. Lilly also waved to him — and watched him pass into the doorway far below.

“I’ll rinse one of these glasses for him,” said Argyle.

The Marchese’s step was heard on the stone stairs: then his knock.

“Come in! Come in!” cried Argyle from the bedroom, where he was rinsing

the glass. The Marchese entered, grinning with his curious, half courteous greeting. "Go through — go through," cried Argyle. "Go on to the loggia — and mind your head. Good heavens, mind your head in that doorway."

The Marchese just missed the top of the doorway as he climbed the abrupt steps on to the loggia. — There he greeted Lilly and Aaron with hearty handshakes.

"Very glad to see you — very glad, indeed!" he cried, grinning with excited courtesy and pleasure, and covering Lilly's hand with both his own gloved hands. "When did you come to Florence?"

There was a little explanation. Argyle shoved the last chair — it was a luggage stool — through the window.

"All I can do for you in the way of a chair," he said.

"Ah, that is all right," said the Marchese. "Well, it is very nice up here — and very nice company. Of the very best, the very best in Florence."

"The highest, anyhow," said Argyle grimly, as he entered with the glass. "Have a whiskey and soda, Del Torre. It's the bottom of the bottle, as you see."

"The bottom of the bottle! Then I start with the tail-end, yes!" He stretched his blue eyes so that the whites showed all round, and grinned a wide, gnome-like grin.

"You made that start long ago, my dear fellow. Don't play the ingenue with me, you know it won't work. Say when, my man, say when!"

"Yes, when," said Del Torre. "When did I make that start, then?"

"At some unmentionably young age. Chickens such as you soon learn to cheep."

"Chickens such as I soon learn to cheap," repeated Del Torre, pleased with the verbal play. "What is cheap, please? What is TO CHEAP?"

"Cheep! Cheep!" squeaked Argyle, making a face at the little Italian, who was perched on one strap of the luggage-stool. "It's what chickens say when they're poking their little noses into new adventures — naughty ones."

"Are chickens naughty? Oh! I thought they could only be good!"

"Featherless chickens like yourself, my boy."

"Oh, as for featherless — then there is no saying what they will do. — " And here the Marchese turned away from Argyle with the inevitable question to Lilly:

"Well, and how long will you stay in Florence?"

Lilly did not know: but he was not leaving immediately.

"Good! Then you will come and see us at once...."

Argyle rose once more, and went to make the tea. He shoved a lump of cake — or rather panetone, good currant loaf — through the window, with a knife to

cut it.

“Help yourselves to the panetone,” he said. “Eat it up. The tea is coming at once. You’ll have to drink it in your glasses, there’s only one old cup.”

The Marchese cut the cake, and offered pieces. The two men took and ate.

“So you have already found Mr. Sisson!” said Del Torre to Lilly.

“Ran straight into him in the Via Nazionale,” said Lilly.

“Oh, one always runs into everybody in Florence. We are all already acquainted: also with the flute. That is a great pleasure.”

“So I think. — Does your wife like it, too?”

“Very much, indeed! She is quite eprise. I, too, shall have to learn to play it.”

“And run the risk of spoiling the shape of your mouth — like Alcibiades.”

“Is there a risk? Yes! Then I shan’t play it. My mouth is too beautiful. — But Mr. Sisson has not spoilt his mouth.”

“Not yet,” said Lilly. “Give him time.”

“Is he also afraid — like Alcibiades?”

“Are you, Aaron?” said Lilly.

“What?”

“Afraid of spoiling your beauty by screwing your mouth to the flute?”

“I look a fool, do I, when I’m playing?” said Aaron.

“Only the least little bit in the world,” said Lilly. “The way you prance your head, you know, like a horse.”

“Ah, well,” said Aaron. “I’ve nothing to lose.”

“And were you surprised, Lilly, to find your friend here?” asked Del Torre.

“I ought to have been. But I wasn’t really.”

“Then you expected him?”

“No. It came naturally, though. — But why did you come, Aaron? What exactly brought you?”

“Accident,” said Aaron.

“Ah, no! No! There is no such thing as accident,” said the Italian. “A man is drawn by his fate, where he goes.”

“You are right,” said Argyle, who came now with the teapot. “A man is drawn — or driven. Driven, I’ve found it. Ah, my dear fellow, what is life but a search for a friend? A search for a friend — that sums it up.”

“Or a lover,” said the Marchese, grinning.

“Same thing. Same thing. My hair is white — but that is the sum of my whole experience. The search for a friend.” There was something at once real and sentimental in Argyle’s tone.

“And never finding?” said Lilly, laughing.

“Oh, what would you? Often finding. Often finding. And losing, of course. —

A life's history. Give me your glass. Miserable tea, but nobody has sent me any from England — ”

“And you will go on till you die, Argyle?” said Lilly. “Always seeking a friend — and always a new one?”

“If I lose the friend I've got. Ah, my dear fellow, in that case I shall go on seeking. I hope so, I assure you. Something will be very wrong with me, if ever I sit friendless and make no search.”

“But, Argyle, there is a time to leave off.”

“To leave off what, to leave off what?”

“Having friends: or a friend, rather: or seeking to have one.”

“Oh, no! Not at all, my friend. Not at all! Only death can make an end of that, my friend. Only death. And I should say, not even death. Not even death ends a man's search for a friend. That is my belief. You may hang me for it, but I shall never alter.”

“Nay,” said Lilly. “There is a time to love, and a time to leave off loving.”

“All I can say to that is that my time to leave off hasn't come yet,” said Argyle, with obstinate feeling.

“Ah, yes, it has. It is only a habit and an idea you stick to.”

“Indeed, it is no such thing. Indeed, it is no such thing. It is a profound desire and necessity: and what is more, a belief.”

“An obstinate persistency, you mean,” said Lilly.

“Well, call it so if it pleases you. It is by no means so to me.” There was a brief pause. The sun had left the cathedral dome and the tower, the sky was full of light, the square swimming in shadow.

“But can a man live,” said the Marchese, “without having something he lives for: something he wishes for, or longs for, and tries that he may get?”

“Impossible! Completely impossible!” said Argyle. “Man is a seeker, and except as such, he has no significance, no importance.”

“He bores me with his seeking,” said Lilly. “He should learn to possess himself — to be himself — and keep still.”

“Ay, perhaps so,” said Aaron. “Only — ”

“But my dear boy, believe me, a man is never himself save in the supreme state of love: or perhaps hate, too, which amounts to the same thing. Never really himself. — Apart from this he is a tram-driver or a money-shoveller or an idea-machine. Only in the state of love is he really a man, and really himself. I say so, because I know,” said Argyle.

“Ah, yes. That is one side of the truth. It is quite true, also. But it is just as true to say, that a man is never less himself, than in the supreme state of love. Never less himself, than then.”

“Maybe! Maybe! But what could be better? What could be better than to lose oneself with someone you love, entirely, and so find yourself. Ah, my dear fellow, that is my creed, that is my creed, and you can’t shake me in it. Never in that. Never in that.”

“Yes, Argyle,” said Lilly. “I know you’re an obstinate love-apostle.”

“I am! I am! And I have certain standards, my boy, and certain ideals which I never transgress. Never transgress. And never abandon.”

“All right, then, you are an incurable love-maker.”

“Pray God I am,” said Argyle.

“Yes,” said the Marchese. “Perhaps we are all so. What else do you give? Would you have us make money? Or do you give the centre of your spirit to your work? How is it to be?”

“I don’t vitally care either about money or my work or — ” Lilly faltered.

“Or what, then?”

“Or anything. I don’t really care about anything. Except that — ”

“You don’t care about anything? But what is that for a life?” cried the Marchese, with a hollow mockery.

“What do YOU care for?” asked Lilly.

“Me? I care for several things. I care for my wife. I care for love. And I care to be loved. And I care for some pleasures. And I care for music. And I care for Italy.”

“You are well off for cares,” said Lilly.

“And you seem to me so very poor,” said Del Torre.

“I should say so — if he cares for nothing,” interjaculaed Argyle. Then he clapped Lilly on the shoulder with a laugh. “Ha! Ha! Ha! — But he only says it to tease us,” he cried, shaking Lilly’s shoulder. “He cares more than we do for his own way of loving. Come along, don’t try and take us in. We are old birds, old birds,” said Argyle. But at that moment he seemed a bit doddering.

“A man can’t live,” said the Italian, “without an object.”

“Well — and that object?” said Lilly.

“Well — it may be many things. Mostly it is two things. — love, and money. But it may be many things: ambition, patriotism, science, art — many things. But it is some objective. Something outside the self. Perhaps many things outside the self.”

“I have had only one objective all my life,” said Argyle. “And that was love. For that I have spent my life.”

“And the lives of a number of other people, too,” said Lilly.

“Admitted. Oh, admitted. It takes two to make love: unless you’re a miserable — ”

“Don’t you think,” said Aaron, turning to Lilly, “that however you try to get away from it, if you’re not after money, and can’t fit yourself into a job — you’ve got to, you’ve got to try and find something else — somebody else — somebody. You can’t really be alone.”

“No matter how many mistakes you’ve made — you can’t really be alone — ?” asked Lilly.

“You can be alone for a minute. You can be alone just in that minute when you’ve broken free, and you feel heart thankful to be alone, because the other thing wasn’t to be borne. But you can’t keep on being alone. No matter how many times you’ve broken free, and feel, thank God to be alone (nothing on earth is so good as to breathe fresh air and be alone), no matter how many times you’ve felt this — it wears off every time, and you begin to look again — and you begin to roam round. And even if you won’t admit it to yourself, still you are seeking — seeking. Aren’t you? Aren’t you yourself seeking?”

“Oh, that’s another matter,” put in Argyle. “Lilly is happily married and on the shelf. With such a fine woman as Tanny I should think so — RATHER! But his is an exceptional nature, and an exceptional case. As for me, I made a hell of my marriage, and I swear it nearly sent me to hell. But I didn’t forswear love, when I forswore marriage and woman. Not by ANY means.”

“Are you not seeking any more, Lilly?” asked the Marchese. “Do you seek nothing?”

“We married men who haven’t left our wives, are we supposed to seek anything?” said Lilly. “Aren’t we perfectly satisfied and in bliss with the wonderful women who honour us as wives?”

“Ah, yes, yes!” said the Marchese. “But now we are not speaking to the world. Now we try to speak of that which we have in our centre of our hearts.”

“And what have we there?” said Lilly.

“Well — shall I say? We have unrest. We have another need. We have something that hurts and eats us, yes, eats us inside. Do I speak the truth?”

“Yes. But what is the something?”

“I don’t know. I don’t know. But it is something in love, I think. It is love itself which gnaws us inside, like a cancer,” said the Italian.

“But why should it? Is that the nature of love?” said Lilly.

“I don’t know. Truly. I don’t know. — But perhaps it is in the nature of love — I don’t know. — But I tell you, I love my wife — she is very dear to me. I admire her, I trust her, I believe her. She is to me much more than any woman, more even than my mother. — And so, I am very happy. I am very happy, she is very happy, in our love and our marriage. — But wait. Nothing has changed — the love has not changed: it is the same. — And yet we are NOT happy. No, we

are not happy. I know she is not happy, I know I am not — ”

“Why should you be?” said Lilly.

“Yes — and it is not even happiness,” said the Marchese, screwing up his face in a painful effort of confession. “It is not even happiness. No, I do not ask to be happy. Why should I? It is childish — but there is for both of us, I know it, something which bites us, which eats us within, and drives us, drives us, somewhere, we don’t know where. But it drives us, and eats away the life — and yet we love each other, and we must not separate — Do you know what I mean? Do you understand me at all in what I say? I speak what is true.”

“Yes, I understand. I’m in the same dilemma myself. — But what I want to hear, is WHY you think it is so. Why is it?”

“Shall I say what I think? Yes? And you can tell me if it is foolish to you. — Shall I tell you? Well. Because a woman, she now first wants the man, and he must go to her because he is wanted. Do you understand? — You know — supposing I go to a woman — supposing she is my wife — and I go to her, yes, with my blood all ready, because it is I who want. Then she puts me off. Then she says, not now, not now, I am tired, I am not well. I do not feel like it. She puts me off — till I am angry or sorry or whatever I am — but till my blood has gone down again, you understand, and I don’t want her any more. And then she puts her arms round me, and caresses me, and makes love to me — till she rouses me once more. So, and so she rouses me — and so I come to her. And I love her, it is very good, very good. But it was she who began, it was her initiative, you know. — I do not think, in all my life, my wife has loved me from my initiative, you know. She will yield to me — because I insist, or because she wants to be a good submissive wife who loves me. So she will yield to me. But ah, what is it, you know? What is it a woman who allows me, and who has no answer? It is something worse than nothing — worse than nothing. And so it makes me very discontented and unbelieving. — If I say to her, she says it is not true — not at all true. Then she says, all she wants is that I should desire her, that I should love her and desire her. But even that is putting her will first. And if I come to her so, if I come to her of my own desire, then she puts me off. She puts me off, or she only allows me to come to her. Even now it is the same after ten years, as it was at first. But now I know, and for many years I did not know — ”

The little man was intense. His face was strained, his blue eyes so stretched that they showed the whites all round. He gazed into Lilly’s face.

“But does it matter?” said Lilly slowly, “in which of you the desire initiates? Isn’t the result the same?”

“It matters. It matters — ” cried the Marchese.

“Oh, my dear fellow, how MUCH it matters — ” interrupted Argyle sagely.

“Ay!” said Aaron.

The Marchese looked from one to the other of them.

“It matters!” he cried. “It matters life or death. It used to be, that desire started in the man, and the woman answered. It used to be so for a long time in Italy. For this reason the women were kept away from the men. For this reason our Catholic religion tried to keep the young girls in convents, and innocent, before marriage. So that with their minds they should not know, and should not start this terrible thing, this woman’s desire over a man, beforehand. This desire which starts in a woman’s head, when she knows, and which takes a man for her use, for her service. This is Eve. Ah, I hate Eve. I hate her, when she knows, and when she WILLS. I hate her when she will make of me that which serves her desire. — She may love me, she may be soft and kind to me, she may give her life for me. But why? Only because I am HERS. I am that thing which does her most intimate service. She can see no other in me. And I may be no other to her — ”

“Then why not let it be so, and be satisfied?” said Lilly.

“Because I cannot. I cannot. I would. But I cannot. The Borghesia — the citizens — the bourgeoisie, they are the ones who can. Oh, yes. The bourgeoisie, the shopkeepers, these serve their wives so, and their wives love them. They are the marital maquereaux — the husband-maquereau, you know. Their wives are so stout and happy, and they dote on their husbands and always betray them. So it is with the bourgeoisie. She loves her husband so much, and is always seeking to betray him. Or she is a Madame Bovary, seeking for a scandal. But the bourgeois husband, he goes on being the same. He is the horse, and she the driver. And when she says gee-up, you know — then he comes ready, like a hired maquereau. Only he feels so good, like a good little boy at her breast. And then there are the nice little children. And so they keep the world going. — But for me — ” he spat suddenly and with frenzy on the floor.

“You are quite right, my boy,” said Argyle. “You are quite right. They’ve got the start of us, the women: and we’ve got to canter when they say gee-up. I — oh, I went through it all. But I broke the shafts and smashed the matrimonial cart, I can tell you, and I didn’t care whether I smashed her up along with it or not. I didn’t care one single bit, I assure you. — And here I am. And she is dead and buried these dozen years. Well — well! Life, you know, life. And women oh, they are the very hottest hell once they get the start of you. There’s NOTHING they won’t do to you, once they’ve got you. Nothing they won’t do to you. Especially if they love you. Then you may as well give up the ghost: or smash the cart behind you, and her in it. Otherwise she will just harry you into submission, and make a dog of you, and cuckold you under your nose. And

you'll submit. Oh, you'll submit, and go on calling her my darling. Or else, if you won't submit, she'll do for you. Your only chance is to smash the shafts, and the whole matrimonial cart. Or she'll do for you. For a woman has an uncanny, hellish strength — she's a she-bear and a wolf, is a woman when she's got the start of you. Oh, it's a terrible experience, if you're not a bourgeois, and not one of the knuckling-under money-making sort."

"Knuckling-under sort. Yes. That is it," said the Marchese.

"But can't there be a balancing of wills?" said Lilly.

"My dear boy, the balance lies in that, that when one goes up, the other goes down. One acts, the other takes. It is the only way in love — And the women are nowadays the active party. Oh, yes, not a shadow of doubt about it. They take the initiative, and the man plays up. That's how it is. The man just plays up. — Nice manly proceeding, what!" cried Argyle.

"But why can't man accept it as the natural order of things?" said Lilly. "Science makes it the natural order."

"All my — — to science," said Argyle. "No man with one drop of real spunk in him can stand it long."

"Yes! Yes! Yes!" cried the Italian. "Most men want it so. Most men want only, that a woman shall want them, and they shall then play up to her when she has roused them. Most men want only this: that a woman shall choose one man out, to be her man, and he shall worship her and come up when she shall provoke him. Otherwise he is to keep still. And the woman, she is quite sure of her part. She must be loved and adored, and above all, obeyed, particularly in her sex desire. There she must not be thwarted, or she becomes a devil. And if she is obeyed, she becomes a misunderstood woman with nerves, looking round for the next man whom she can bring under. So it is."

"Well," said Lilly. "And then what?"

"Nay," interrupted Aaron. "But do you think it's true what he says? Have you found it like that? You're married. Has your experience been different, or the same?"

"What was yours?" asked Lilly.

"Mine was the same. Mine was the same, if ever it was," said Aaron.

"And mine was EXTREMELY similar," said Argyle with a grimace.

"And yours, Lilly?" asked the Marchese anxiously.

"Not very different," said Lilly.

"Ah!" cried Del Torre, jerking up erect as if he had found something.

"And what's your way out?" Aaron asked him.

"I'm not out — so I won't holloa," said Lilly. "But Del Torre puts it best. — What do you say is the way out, Del Torre?"

“The way out is that it should change: that the man should be the asker and the woman the answerer. It must change.”

“But it doesn’t. Prrr!” Argyle made his trumpeting noise.

“Does it?” asked Lilly of the Marchese.

“No. I think it does not.”

“And will it ever again?”

“Perhaps never.”

“And then what?”

“Then? Why then man seeks a pis-aller. Then he seeks something which will give him answer, and which will not only draw him, draw him, with a terrible sexual will. — So he seeks young girls, who know nothing, and so cannot force him. He thinks he will possess them while they are young, and they will be soft and responding to his wishes. — But in this, too, he is mistaken. Because now a baby of one year, if it be a female, is like a woman of forty, so is its will made up, so it will force a man.”

“And so young girls are no good, even as a pis-aller.”

“No good — because they are all modern women. Every one, a modern woman. Not one who isn’t.”

“Terrible thing, the modern woman,” put in Argyle.

“And then — ?”

“Then man seeks other forms of loves, always seeking the loving response, you know, of one gentler and tenderer than himself, who will wait till the man desires, and then will answer with full love. — But it is all pis-aller, you know.”

“Not by any means, my boy,” cried Argyle.

“And then a man naturally loves his own wife, too, even if it is not bearable to love her.”

“Or one leaves her, like Aaron,” said Lilly.

“And seeks another woman, so,” said the Marchese.

“Does he seek another woman?” said Lilly. “Do you, Aaron?”

“I don’t WANT to,” said Aaron. “But — I can’t stand by myself in the middle of the world and in the middle of people, and know I am quite by myself, and nowhere to go, and nothing to hold on to. I can for a day or two — But then, it becomes unbearable as well. You get frightened. You feel you might go funny — as you would if you stood on this balcony wall with all the space beneath you.”

“Can’t one be alone — quite alone?” said Lilly.

“But no — it is absurd. Like Saint Simeon Stylites on a pillar. But it is absurd!” cried the Italian.

“I don’t mean like Simeon Stylites. I mean can’t one live with one’s wife, and

be fond of her: and with one's friends, and enjoy their company: and with the world and everything, pleasantly: and yet KNOW that one is alone? Essentially, at the very core of me, alone. Eternally alone. And choosing to be alone. Not sentimental or LONELY. Alone, choosing to be alone, because by one's own nature one is alone. The being with another person is secondary," said Lilly.

"One is alone," said Argyle, "in all but love. In all but love, my dear fellow. And then I agree with you."

"No," said Lilly, "in love most intensely of all, alone."

"Completely incomprehensible," said Argyle. "Amounts to nothing."

"One man is but a part. How can he be so alone?" said the Marchese.

"In so far as he is a single individual soul, he IS alone — ipso facto. In so far as I am I, and only I am I, and I am only I, in so far, I am inevitably and eternally alone, and it is my last blessedness to know it, and to accept it, and to live with this as the core of my self-knowledge."

"My dear boy, you are becoming metaphysical, and that is as bad as softening of the brain," said Argyle.

"All right," said Lilly.

"And," said the Marchese, "it may be so by REASON. But in the heart — ? Can the heart ever beat quite alone? Plop! Plop! — Can the heart beat quite alone, alone in all the atmosphere, all the space of the universe? Plop! Plop! Plop! — Quite alone in all the space?" A slow smile came over the Italian's face. "It is impossible. It may eat against the heart of other men, in anger, all in pressure against the others. It may beat hard, like iron, saying it is independent. But this is only beating against the heart of mankind, not alone. — But either with or against the heart of mankind, or the heart of someone, mother, wife, friend, children — so must the heart of every man beat. It is so."

"It beats alone in its own silence," said Lilly.

The Italian shook his head.

"We'd better be going inside, anyhow," said Argyle. "Some of you will be taking cold."

"Aaron," said Lilly. "Is it true for you?"

"Nearly," said Aaron, looking into the quiet, half-amused, yet frightening eyes of the other man. "Or it has been."

"A miss is as good as a mile," laughed Lilly, rising and picking up his chair to take it indoors. And the laughter of his voice was so like a simple, deliberate amiability, that Aaron's heart really stood still for a second. He knew that Lilly was alone — as far as he, Aaron, was concerned. Lilly was alone — and out of his isolation came his words, indifferent as to whether they came or not. And he left his friends utterly to their own choice. Utterly to their own choice. Aaron felt

that Lilly was there, existing in life, yet neither asking for connection nor preventing any connection. He was present, he was the real centre of the group. And yet he asked nothing of them, and he imposed nothing. He left each to himself, and he himself remained just himself: neither more nor less. And there was a finality about it, which was at once maddening and fascinating. Aaron felt angry, as if he were half insulted by the other man's placing the gift of friendship or connection so quietly back in the giver's hands. Lilly would receive no gift of friendship in equality. Neither would he violently refuse it. He let it lie unmarked. And yet at the same time Aaron knew that he could depend on the other man for help, nay, almost for life itself — so long as it entailed no breaking of the intrinsic isolation of Lilly's soul. But this condition was also hateful. And there was also a great fascination in it.

CHAPTER XVIII. THE MARCHESA

So Aaron dined with the Marchesa and Manfredi. He was quite startled when his hostess came in: she seemed like somebody else. She seemed like a demon, her hair on her brows, her terrible modern elegance. She wore a wonderful gown of thin blue velvet, of a lovely colour, with some kind of gauzy gold-threaded filament down the sides. It was terribly modern, short, and showed her legs and her shoulders and breast and all her beautiful white arms. Round her throat was a collar of dark-blue sapphires. Her hair was done low, almost to the brows, and heavy, like an Aubrey Beardsley drawing. She was most carefully made up — yet with that touch of exaggeration, lips slightly too red, which was quite intentional, and which frightened Aaron. He thought her wonderful, and sinister. She affected him with a touch of horror. She sat down opposite him, and her beautifully shapen legs, in frail, goldish stockings, seemed to glisten metallic naked, thrust from out of the wonderful, wonderful skin, like periwinkle-blue velvet. She had tapestry shoes, blue and gold: and almost one could see her toes: metallic naked. The gold-threaded gauze slipped at her side. Aaron could not help watching the naked-seeming arch of her foot. It was as if she were dusted with dark gold-dust upon her marvellous nudity.

She must have seen his face, seen that he was ebloui.

“You brought the flute?” she said, in that toneless, melancholy, unstriving voice of hers. Her voice alone was the same: direct and bare and quiet.

“Yes.”

“Perhaps I shall sing later on, if you’ll accompany me. Will you?”

“I thought you hated accompaniments.”

“Oh, no — not just unison. I don’t mean accompaniment. I mean unison. I don’t know how it will be. But will you try?”

“Yes, I’ll try.”

“Manfredi is just bringing the cocktails. Do you think you’d prefer orange in yours?”

“Ill have mine as you have yours.”

“I don’t take orange in mine. Won’t you smoke?”

The strange, naked, remote-seeming voice! And then the beautiful firm limbs thrust out in that dress, and nakedly dusky as with gold-dust. Her beautiful woman’s legs, slightly glistening, duskily. His one abiding instinct was to touch them, to kiss them. He had never known a woman to exercise such power over

him. It was a bare, occult force, something he could not cope with.

Manfredi came in with the little tray. He was still in uniform.

“Hello!” cried the little Italian. “Glad to see you — well, everything all right? Glad to hear it. How is the cocktail, Nan?”

“Yes,” she said. “All right.”

“One drop too much peach, eh?”

“No, all right.”

“Ah,” and the little officer seated himself, stretching his gaitered legs as if gaily. He had a curious smiling look on his face, that Aaron thought also diabolical — and almost handsome. Suddenly the odd, laughing, satanic beauty of the little man was visible.

“Well, and what have you been doing with yourself?” said he. “What did you do yesterday?”

“Yesterday?” said Aaron. “I went to the Uffizi.”

“To the Uffizi? Well! And what did you think of it?”

“Very fine.”

“I think it is. I think it is. What pictures did you look at?”

“I was with Dekker. We looked at most, I believe.”

“And what do you remember best?”

“I remember Botticelli’s Venus on the Shell.”

“Yes! Yes! — ” said Manfredi. “I like her. But I like others better. You thought her a pretty woman, yes?”

“No — not particularly pretty. But I like her body. And I like the fresh air. I like the fresh air, the summer sea-air all through it — through her as well.”

“And her face?” asked the Marchesa, with a slow, ironic smile.

“Yes — she’s a bit baby-faced,” said Aaron.

“Trying to be more innocent than her own common-sense will let her,” said the Marchesa.

“I don’t agree with you, Nan,” said her husband. “I think it is just that wistfulness and innocence which makes her the true Venus: the true modern Venus. She chooses NOT to know too much. And that is her attraction. Don’t you agree, Aaron? Excuse me, but everybody speaks of you as Aaron. It seems to come naturally. Most people speak of me as Manfredi, too, because it is easier, perhaps, than Del Torre. So if you find it easier, use it. Do you mind that I call you Aaron?”

“Not at all. I hate Misters, always.”

“Yes, so do I. I like one name only.”

The little officer seemed very winning and delightful to Aaron this evening — and Aaron began to like him extremely. But the dominating consciousness in the

room was the woman's.

"DO you agree, Mr. Sisson?" said the Marchesa. "Do you agree that the mock-innocence and the sham-wistfulness of Botticelli's Venus are her great charms?"

"I don't think she is at all charming, as a person," said Aaron. "As a particular woman, she makes no impression on me at all. But as a picture — and the fresh air, particularly the fresh air. She doesn't seem so much a woman, you know, as the kind of out-of-doors morning-feelings at the seaside."

"Quite! A sort of sea-scape of a woman. With a perfectly sham innocence. Are you as keen on innocence as Manfredi is?"

"Innocence?" said Aaron. "It's the sort of thing I don't have much feeling about."

"Ah, I know you," laughed the soldier wickedly. "You are the sort of man who wants to be Anthony to Cleopatra. Ha-ha!"

Aaron winced as if struck. Then he too smiled, flattered. Yet he felt he had been struck! Did he want to be Anthony to Cleopatra? Without knowing, he was watching the Marchesa. And she was looking away, but knew he was watching her. And at last she turned her eyes to his, with a slow, dark smile, full of pain and fuller still of knowledge. A strange, dark, silent look of knowledge she gave him: from so far away, it seemed. And he felt all the bonds that held him melting away. His eyes remained fixed and gloomy, but with his mouth he smiled back at her. And he was terrified. He knew he was sulking towards her — sulking towards her. And he was terrified. But at the back of his mind, also, he knew there was Lilly, whom he might depend on. And also he wanted to sink towards her. The flesh and blood of him simply melted out, in desire towards her. Cost what may, he must come to her. And yet he knew at the same time that, cost what may, he must keep the power to recover himself from her. He must have his cake and eat it.

And she became Cleopatra to him. "Age cannot wither, nor custom stale — " To his instinctive, unwilling fancy, she was Cleopatra.

They went in to dinner, and he sat on her right hand. It was a smallish table, with a very few daisy-flowers: everything rather frail, and sparse. The food the same — nothing very heavy, all rather exquisite. They drank hock. And he was aware of her beautiful arms, and her bosom; her low-crowded, thick hair, parted in the centre: the sapphires on her throat, the heavy rings on her fingers: and the paint on her lips, the fard. Something deep, deep at the bottom of him hovered upon her, cleaved to her. Yet he was as if sightless, in a stupor. Who was she, what was she? He had lost all his grasp. Only he sat there, with his face turned to hers, or to her, all the time. And she talked to him. But she never looked at him.

Indeed she said little. It was the husband who talked. His manner towards Aaron was almost caressive. And Aaron liked it. The woman was silent mostly, and seemed remote. And Aaron felt his life ebb towards her. He felt the marvellousness, the rich beauty of her arms and breast. And the thought of her gold-dusted smooth limbs beneath the table made him feel almost an idiot.

The second wine was a gold-coloured Moselle, very soft and rich and beautiful. She drank this with pleasure, as one who understands. And for dessert there was a dish of cacchi — that orange-coloured, pulpy Japanese fruit — persimmons. Aaron had never eaten these before. Soft, almost slimy, of a wonderful colour, and of a flavour that had sunk from harsh astringency down to that first decay-sweetness which is all autumn-rich. The Marchese loved them, and scooped them out with his spoon. But she ate none.

Aaron did not know what they talked about, what was said. If someone had taken his mind away altogether, and left him with nothing but a body and a spinal consciousness, it would have been the same.

But at coffee the talk turned to Manfredi's duties. He would not be free from the army for some time yet. On the morrow, for example, he had to be out and away before it was day. He said he hated it, and wanted to be a free man once more. But it seemed to Aaron he would be a very bored man, once he was free. And then they drifted on to talk of the palazzo in which was their apartment.

"We've got such a fine terrace — you can see it from your house where you are," said Manfredi. "Have you noticed it?"

"No," said Aaron.

"Near that tuft of palm-trees. Don't you know?"

"No," said Aaron.

"Let us go out and show it him," said the Marchesa.

Manfredi fetched her a cloak, and they went through various doors, then up some steps. The terrace was broad and open. It looked straight across the river at the opposite Lungarno: and there was the thin-necked tower of the Palazzo Vecchio, and the great dome of the cathedral in the distance, in shadow-bulk in the cold-aired night of stars. Little trams were running brilliant over the flat new bridge on the right. And from a garden just below rose a tuft of palm-trees.

"You see," said the Marchesa, coming and standing close to Aaron, so that she just touched him, "you can know the terrace, just by these palm trees. And you are in the Nardini just across there, are you? On the top floor, you said?"

"Yes, the top floor — one of the middle windows, I think."

"One that is always open now — and the others are shut. I have noticed it, not connecting it with you."

"Yes, my window is always open."

She was leaning very slightly against him, as he stood. And he knew, with the same kind of inevitability with which he knew he would one day die, that he would be the lover of this woman. Nay, that he was her lover already.

“Don’t take cold,” said Manfredi.

She turned at once indoors. Aaron caught a faint whiff of perfume from the little orange trees in tubs round the wall.

“Will you get the flute?” she said as they entered.

“And will you sing?” he answered.

“Play first,” she said.

He did as she wished. As the other night, he went into the big music-room to play. And the stream of sound came out with the quick wild imperiousness of the pipe. It had an immediate effect on her. She seemed to relax the peculiar, drug-like tension which was upon her at all ordinary times. She seemed to go still, and yielding. Her red mouth looked as if it might moan with relief. She sat with her chin dropped on her breast, listening. And she did not move. But she sat softly, breathing rather quick, like one who has been hurt, and is soothed. A certain womanly naturalness seemed to soften her.

And the music of the flute came quick, rather brilliant like a call-note, or like a long quick message, half command. To her it was like a pure male voice — as a blackbird’s when he calls: a pure male voice, not only calling, but telling her something, telling her something, and soothing her soul to sleep. It was like the fire-music putting Brunnhilde to sleep. But the pipe did not flicker and sink. It seemed to cause a natural relaxation in her soul, a peace. Perhaps it was more like waking to a sweet, morning awakening, after a night of tormented, painful tense sleep. Perhaps more like that.

When Aaron came in, she looked at him with a gentle, fresh smile that seemed to make the fard on her face look like a curious tiredness, which now she might recover from. And as the last time, it was difficult for her to identify this man with the voice of the flute. It was rather difficult. Except that, perhaps, between his brows was something of a doubt, and in his bearing an aloofness that made her dread he might go away and not come back. She could see it in him, that he might go away and not come back.

She said nothing to him, only just smiled. And the look of knowledge in her eyes seemed, for the moment, to be contained in another look: a look of faith, and at last happiness. Aaron’s heart stood still. No, in her moment’s mood of faith and at last peace, life-trust, he was perhaps more terrified of her than in her previous sinister elegance. His spirit started and shrank. What was she going to ask of him?

“I am so anxious that you should come to play one Saturday morning,” said

Manfredi. "With an accompaniment, you know. I should like so much to hear you with piano accompaniment."

"Very well," said Aaron.

"Will you really come? And will you practise with me, so that I can accompany you?" said Manfredi eagerly.

"Yes. I will," said Aaron.

"Oh, good! Oh, good! Look here, come in on Friday morning and let us both look through the music."

"If Mr. Sisson plays for the public," said the Marchesa, "he must not do it for charity. He must have the proper fee."

"No, I don't want it," said Aaron.

"But you must earn money, mustn't you?" said she.

"I must," said Aaron. "But I can do it somewhere else."

"No. If you play for the public, you must have your earnings. When you play for me, it is different."

"Of course," said Manfredi. "Every man must have his wage. I have mine from the Italian government — -"

After a while, Aaron asked the Marchesa if she would sing.

"Shall I?" she said.

"Yes, do."

"Then I will sing alone first, to let you see what you think of it — I shall be like Trilby — I won't say like Yvette Guilbert, because I daren't. So I will be like Trilby, and sing a little French song. Though not Malbrouck, and without a Svengali to keep me in tune."

She went near the door, and stood with her hands by her side. There was something wistful, almost pathetic now, in her elegance.

Derriere chez mon pere
Vole vole mon coeur, vole!
Derriere chez mon pere
Il y a un pommier doux.
Tout doux, et iou
Et iou, tout doux.
Il y a un pommier doux.
Trois belles princesses
Vole vole mon coeur, vole!
Trois belles princesses
Sont assis dessous.
Tout doux, et iou
Et iou, tout doux.

Sont asses dessous.”

She had a beautiful, strong, sweet voice. But it was faltering, stumbling and sometimes it seemed to drop almost to speech. After three verses she faltered to an end, bitterly chagrined.

“No,” she said. “It’s no good. I can’t sing.” And she dropped in her chair.

“A lovely little tune,” said Aaron. “Haven’t you got the music?”

She rose, not answering, and found him a little book.

“What do the words mean?” he asked her.

She told him. And then he took his flute.

“You don’t mind if I play it, do you?” he said.

So he played the tune. It was so simple. And he seemed to catch the lilt and the timbre of her voice.

“Come and sing it while I play — ” he said.

“I can’t sing,” she said, shaking her head rather bitterly.

“But let us try,” said he, disappointed.

“I know I can’t,” she said. But she rose.

He remained sitting at the little table, the book propped up under the reading lamp. She stood at a little distance, unhappy.

“I’ve always been like that,” she said. “I could never sing music, unless I had a thing drilled into me, and then it wasn’t singing any more.”

But Aaron wasn’t heeding. His flute was at his mouth, he was watching her. He sounded the note, but she did not begin. She was twisting her handkerchief. So he played the melody alone. At the end of the verse, he looked up at her again, and a half mocking smile played in his eyes. Again he sounded the note, a challenge. And this time, as at his bidding, she began to sing. The flute instantly swung with a lovely soft firmness into the song, and she wavered only for a minute or two. Then her soul and her voice got free, and she sang — she sang as she wanted to sing, as she had always wanted to sing, without that awful scotch, that impediment inside her own soul, which prevented her.

She sang free, with the flute gliding along with her. And oh, how beautiful it was for her! How beautiful it was to sing the little song in the sweetness of her own spirit. How sweet it was to move pure and unhampered at last in the music! The lovely ease and lilt of her own soul in its motion through the music! She wasn’t aware of the flute. She didn’t know there was anything except her own pure lovely song-drift. Her soul seemed to breathe as a butterfly breathes, as it rests on a leaf and slowly breathes its wings. For the first time! For the first time her soul drew its own deep breath. All her life, the breath had caught half-way. And now she breathed full, deep, to the deepest extent of her being.

And oh, it was so wonderful, she was dazed. The song ended, she stood with a

dazed, happy face, like one just coming awake. And the fard on her face seemed like the old night-crust, the bad sleep. New and luminous she looked out. And she looked at Aaron with a proud smile.

“Bravo, Nan! That was what you wanted,” said her husband.

“It was, wasn’t it?” she said, turning a wondering, glowing face to him.

His face looked strange and withered and gnome-like, at the moment.

She went and sat in her chair, quite silent, as if in a trance. The two men also sat quite still. And in the silence a little drama played itself between the three, of which they knew definitely nothing. But Manfredi knew that Aaron had done what he himself never could do, for this woman. And yet the woman was his own woman, not Aaron’s. And so, he was displaced. Aaron, sitting there, glowed with a sort of triumph. He had performed a little miracle, and felt himself a little wonder-worker, to whom reverence was due. And as in a dream the woman sat, feeling what a joy it was to float and move like a swan in the high air, flying upon the wings of her own spirit. She was as a swan which never before could get its wings quite open, and so which never could get up into the open, where alone it can sing. For swans, and storks make their music only when they are high, high up in the air. Then they can give sound to their strange spirits. And so, she.

Aaron and Manfredi kept their faces averted from one another and hardly spoke to one another. It was as if two invisible hands pushed their faces apart, away, averted. And Aaron’s face glimmered with a little triumph, and a little grimace of obstinacy. And the Italian’s face looked old, rather monkey-like, and of a deep, almost stone-bare bitterness. The woman looked wondering from one man to the other — wondering. The glimmer of the open flower, the wonder-look, still lasted. And Aaron said in his heart, what a goodly woman, what a woman to taste and enjoy. Ah, what a woman to enjoy! And was it not his privilege? Had he not gained it?

His manhood, or rather his maleness, rose powerfully in him, in a sort of mastery. He felt his own power, he felt suddenly his own virile title to strength and reward. Suddenly, and newly flushed with his own male super-power, he was going to have his reward. The woman was his reward. So it was, in him. And he cast it over in his mind. He wanted her — ha, didn’t he! But the husband sat there, like a soap-stone Chinese monkey, greyish-green. So, it would have to be another time.

He rose, therefore, and took his leave.

“But you’ll let us do that again, won’t you?” said she.

“When you tell me, I’ll come,” said he.

“Then I’ll tell you soon,” said she.

So he left, and went home to his own place, and there to his own remote room. As he laid his flute on the table he looked at it and smiled. He remembered that Lilly had called it Aaron's Rod.

"So you blossom, do you? — and thorn as well," said he.

For such a long time he had been gripped inside himself, and withheld. For such a long time it had been hard and unyielding, so hard and unyielding. He had wanted nothing, his desire had kept itself back, fast back. For such a long time his desire for woman had withheld itself, hard and resistant. All his deep, desirous blood had been locked, he had wanted nobody, and nothing. And it had been hard to live, so. Without desire, without any movement of passionate love, only gripped back in recoil! That was an experience to endure.

And now came his desire back. But strong, fierce as iron. Like the strength of an eagle with the lightning in its talons. Something to glory in, something overweening, the powerful male passion, arrogant, royal, Jove's thunderbolt. Aaron's black rod of power, blossoming again with red Florentine lilies and fierce thorns. He moved about in the splendour of his own male lightning, invested in the thunder of the male passion-power. He had got it back, the male godliness, the male godhead.

So he slept, and dreamed violent dreams of strange, black strife, something like the street-riot in Milan, but more terrible. In the morning, however, he cared nothing about his dreams. As soon as it was really light, he rose, and opened his window wide. It was a grey, slow morning. But he saw neither the morning nor the river nor the woman walking on the gravel river-bed with her goose nor the green hill up to San Miniato. He watched the tuft of palm-trees, and the terrace beside it. He could just distinguish the terrace clearly, among the green of foliage. So he stood at his window for a full hour, and did not move. Motionless, planted, he stood and watched that terrace across above the Arno. But like a statue.

After an hour or so, he looked at his watch. It was nine o'clock. So he rang for his coffee, and meanwhile still stood watching the terrace on the hill. He felt his turn had come. The phoenix had risen in fire again, out of the ashes.

Therefore at ten o'clock he went over the bridge. He wrote on the back of his card a request, would she please let him have the little book of songs, that he might practise them over. The manservant went, and came back with the request that Aaron should wait. So Aaron entered, while the man took his hat.

The manservant spoke only French and Spanish, no English. He was a Spaniard, with greyish hair and stooping shoulders, and dark, mute-seeming eyes. He spoke as little as possible. The Marchesa had inherited him from her father.

Aaron sat in the little sitting-room and waited. After a rather long time the Marchesa came in — wearing a white, thin blouse and a blue skirt. She was hardly made up at all. She had an odd pleased, yet brooding look on her face as she gave Aaron her hand. Something brooded between her brows. And her voice was strange, with a strange, secret undertone, that he could not understand. He looked up at her. And his face was bright, and his knees, as he sat, were like the knees of the gods.

“You wanted the book of chansons?” she said.

“I wanted to learn your tunes,” he replied.

“Yes. Look — here it is!” And she brought him the little yellow book. It was just a hand-book, with melody and words only, no accompaniment. So she stood offering him the book, but waiting as if for something else, and standing as if with another meaning.

He opened the leaves at random.

“But I ought to know which ones you sing,” said he, rising and standing by her side with the open book.

“Yes,” she said, looking over his arm. He turned the pages one by one. “Trois jeunes tambours,” said she. “Yes, that.... Yes, En passant par la Lorraine.... Aupres de ma blonde.... Oh, I like that one so much — ” He stood and went over the tune in his mind.

“Would you like me to play it?” he said.

“Very much,” said she.

So he got his flute, propped up the book against a vase, and played the tune, whilst she hummed it fragmentarily. But as he played, he felt that he did not cast the spell over her. There was no connection. She was in some mysterious way withstanding him. She was withstanding him, and his male super-power, and his thunderbolt desire. She was, in some indescribable way, throwing cold water over his phoenix newly risen from the ashes of its nest in flames.

He realised that she did not want him to play. She did not want him to look at the songs. So he put the book away, and turned round, rather baffled, not quite sure what was happening, yet feeling she was withstanding him. He glanced at her face: it was inscrutable: it was her Cleopatra face once more, yet with something new and warm in it. He could not understand it. What was it in her face that puzzled him? Almost angered him? But she could not rob him of his male power, she could not divest him of his concentrated force.

“Won’t you take off your coat?” she said, looking at him with strange, large dark eyes. A strange woman, he could not understand her. Yet, as he sat down again, having removed his overcoat, he felt her looking at his limbs, his physical

body. And this went against him, he did not want it. Yet quite fixed in him too was the desire for her, her beautiful white arms, her whole soft white body. And such desire he would not contradict nor allow to be contradicted. It was his will also. Her whole soft white body — to possess it in its entirety, its fulness.

“What have you to do this morning?” she asked him.

“Nothing,” he said. “Have you?” He lifted his head and looked at her.

“Nothing at all,” said she.

And then they sat in silence, he with his head dropped. Then again he looked at her.

“Shall we be lovers?” he said.

She sat with her face averted, and did not answer. His heart struck heavily, but he did not relax.

“Shall we be lovers?” came his voice once more, with the faintest touch of irony.

Her face gradually grew dusky. And he wondered very much to see it.

“Yes,” said she, still not looking at him. “If you wish.”

“I do wish,” he said. And all the time he sat with his eyes fixed on her face, and she sat with her face averted.

“Now?” he said. “And where?”

Again she was silent for some moments, as if struggling with herself. Then she looked at him — a long, strange, dark look, incomprehensible, and which he did not like.

“You don’t want emotions? You don’t want me to say things, do you?” he said.

A faint ironic smile came on her face.

“I know what all that is worth,” she said, with curious calm equanimity. “No, I want none of that.”

“Then — ?”

But now she sat gazing on him with wide, heavy, incomprehensible eyes. It annoyed him.

“What do you want to see in me?” he asked, with a smile, looking steadily back again.

And now she turned aside her face once more, and once more the dusky colour came in her cheek. He waited.

“Shall I go away?” he said at length.

“Would you rather?” she said, keeping her face averted.

“No,” he said.

Then again she was silent.

“Where shall I come to you?” he said.

She paused a moment still, then answered:

“I’ll go to my room.”

“I don’t know which it is,” he said.

“I’ll show it you,” she said.

“And then I shall come to you in ten minutes. In ten minutes,” he reiterated.

So she rose, and led the way out of the little salon. He walked with her to the door of her room, bowed his head as she looked at him, holding the door handle; and then he turned and went back to the drawing-room, glancing at his watch.

In the drawing-room he stood quite still, with his feet apart, and waited. He stood with his hands behind him, and his feet apart, quite motionless, planted and firm. So the minutes went by unheeded. He looked at his watch. The ten minutes were just up. He had heard footsteps and doors. So he decided to give her another five minutes. He wished to be quite sure that she had had her own time for her own movements.

Then at the end of the five minutes he went straight to her room, entered, and locked the door behind him. She was lying in bed, with her back to him.

He found her strange, not as he had imagined her. Not powerful, as he had imagined her. Strange, in his arms she seemed almost small and childish, whilst in daily life she looked a full, womanly woman. Strange, the naked way she clung to him! Almost like a sister, a younger sister! Or like a child! It filled him with a curious wonder, almost a bewilderment. In the dark sightlessness of passion, she seemed almost like a clinging child in his arms. And yet like a child who in some deep and essential way mocked him. In some strange and incomprehensible way, as a girl-child blindly obstinate in her deepest nature, she was against him. He felt she was not his woman. Through him went the feeling, “This is not my woman.”

When, after a long sleep, he awoke and came fully to himself, with that click of awakeness which is the end, the first shades were closing on the afternoon. He got up and reached for his watch.

“Quarter past four,” he said.

Her eyes stretched wide with surprise as she looked at him. But she said nothing. The same strange and wide, perhaps insatiable child-like curiosity was in her eyes as she watched him. He dressed very quickly. And her eyes were wide, and she said no single word.

But when he was dressed, and bent over her to say goodbye, she put her arms round him, that seemed such frail and childish arms now, yet withal so deadly in power. Her soft arms round his neck, her tangle of hair over his face. And yet, even as he kissed her, he felt her deadly. He wanted to be gone. He wanted to get out of her arms and her clinging and her tangle of hair and her curiosity and her

strange and hateful power.

“You’ll come again. We’ll be like this again?” she whispered.

And it was hard for him to realise that this was that other woman, who had sat so silently on the sofa, so darkly and reservedly, at the tea at Algy’s.

“Yes! I will! Goodbye now!” And he kissed her, and walked straight out of the room. Quickly he took his coat and his hat, quickly, and left the house. In his nostrils was still the scent with which the bed linen was faintly scented — he did not know what it was. But now he wiped his face and his mouth, to wipe it away.

He had eaten nothing since coffee that morning, and was hungry, faint-feeling. And his face, and his mind, felt withered. Curiously he felt blasted as if blighted by some electricity. And he knew, he knew quite well he was only in possession of a tithe of his natural faculties. And in his male spirit he felt himself hating her: hating her deeply, damnably. But he said to himself: “No, I won’t hate her. I won’t hate her.”

So he went on, over the Ponte Vecchio, where the jeweller’s windows on the bridge were already blazing with light, on into the town. He wanted to eat something, so he decided to go to a shop he knew, where one could stand and eat good tiny rolls split into truffle or salami sandwiches, and drink Marsala. So one after the other he ate little truffle rolls, and drank a few glasses of Marsala. And then he did not know what to do. He did not want to eat any more, he had had what he wanted. His hunger had been more nervous than sensual.

So he went into the street. It was just growing dark and the town was lighting up. He felt curiously blazed, as if some flame or electric power had gone through him and withered his vital tissue. Blazed, as if some kind of electric flame had run over him and withered him. His brain felt withered, his mind had only one of its many-sighted eyes left open and unscorched. So many of the eyes of his mind were scorched now and sightless.

Yet a restlessness was in his nerves. What should he do? He remembered he had a letter in his pocket from Sir William Franks. Sir William had still teased him about his fate and his providence, in which he, Aaron, was supposed to trust. “I shall be very glad to hear from you, and to know how your benevolent Providence — or was yours a Fate — has treated you since we saw you — -”

So, Aaron turned away, and walked to the post office. There he took paper, and sat down at one of the tables in the writing room, and wrote his answer. It was very strange, writing thus when most of his mind’s eyes were scorched, and it seemed he could hardly see to hold the pen, to drive it straight across the paper. Yet write he must. And most of his faculties being quenched or blasted for the moment, he wrote perhaps his greatest, or his innermost, truth. — “I don’t want my Fate or my Providence to treat me well. I don’t want kindness or

love. I don't believe in harmony and people loving one another. I believe in the fight and in nothing else. I believe in the fight which is in everything. And if it is a question of women, I believe in the fight of love, even if it blinds me. And if it is a question of the world, I believe in fighting it and in having it hate me, even if it breaks my legs. I want the world to hate me, because I can't bear the thought that it might love me. For of all things love is the most deadly to me, and especially from such a repulsive world as I think this is...."

Well, here was a letter for a poor old man to receive. But, in the dryness of his withered mind, Aaron got it out of himself. When a man writes a letter to himself, it is a pity to post it to somebody else. Perhaps the same is true of a book.

His letter written, however, he stamped it and sealed it and put it in the box. That made it final. Then he turned towards home. One fact remained unbroken in the debris of his consciousness: that in the town was Lilly: and that when he needed, he could go to Lilly: also, that in the world was Lottie, his wife: and that against Lottie, his heart burned with a deep, deep, almost unreachable bitterness. — Like a deep burn on his deepest soul, Lottie. And like a fate which he resented, yet which steadied him, Lilly.

He went home and lay on his bed. He had enough self-command to hear the gong and go down to dinner. White and abstract-looking, he sat and ate his dinner. And then, thank God, he could go to bed, alone, in his own cold bed, alone, thank God. To be alone in the night! For this he was unspeakably thankful.

CHAPTER XIX. CLEOPATRA, BUT NOT ANTHONY

Aaron awoke in the morning feeling better, but still only a part himself. The night alone had restored him. And the need to be alone still was his greatest need. He felt an intense resentment against the Marchesa. He felt that somehow, she had given him a scorpion. And his instinct was to hate her. And yet he avoided hating her. He remembered Lilly — and the saying that one must possess oneself, and be alone in possession of oneself. And somehow, under the influence of Lilly, he refused to follow the reflex of his own passion. He refused to hate the Marchesa. He did like her. He did esteem her. And after all, she too was struggling with her fate. He had a genuine sympathy with her. Nay, he was not going to hate her.

But he could not see her. He could not bear the thought that she might call and see him. So he took the tram to Settignano, and walked away all day into the country, having bread and sausage in his pocket. He sat for long hours among the cypress trees of Tuscany. And never had any trees seemed so like ghosts, like soft, strange, pregnant presences. He lay and watched tall cypresses breathing and communicating, faintly moving and as it were walking in the small wind. And his soul seemed to leave him and to go far away, far back, perhaps, to where life was all different and time passed otherwise than time passes now. As in clairvoyance he perceived it: that our life is only a fragment of the shell of life. That there has been and will be life, human life such as we do not begin to conceive. Much that is life has passed away from men, leaving us all mere bits. In the dark, mindful silence and inflection of the cypress trees, lost races, lost language, lost human ways of feeling and of knowing. Men have known as we can no more know, have felt as we can no more feel. Great life-realities gone into the darkness. But the cypresses commemorate. In the afternoon, Aaron felt the cypresses rising dark about him, like so many high visitants from an old, lost, lost subtle world, where men had the wonder of demons about them, the aura of demons, such as still clings to the cypresses, in Tuscany.

All day, he did not make up his mind what he was going to do. His first impulse was never to see her again. And this was his intention all day. But as he went home in the tram he softened, and thought. Nay, that would not be fair. For how had she treated him, otherwise than generously.

She had been generous, and the other thing, that he felt blasted afterwards, which was his experience, that was fate, and not her fault. So he must see her again. He must not act like a churl. But he would tell her — he would tell her that he was a married man, and that though he had left his wife, and though he had no dogma of fidelity, still, the years of marriage had made a married man of him, and any other woman than his wife was a strange woman to him, a violation. “I will tell her,” he said to himself, “that at the bottom of my heart I love Lottie still, and that I can’t help it. I believe that is true. It isn’t love, perhaps. But it is marriage. I am married to Lottie. And that means I can’t be married to another woman. It isn’t my nature. And perhaps I can’t bear to live with Lottie now, because I am married and not in love. When a man is married, he is not in love. A husband is not a lover. Lilly told me that: and I know it’s true now. Lilly told me that a husband cannot be a lover, and a lover cannot be a husband. And that women will only have lovers now, and never a husband. Well, I am a husband, if I am anything. And I shall never be a lover again, not while I live. No, not to anybody. I haven’t it in me. I’m a husband, and so it is finished with me as a lover. I can’t be a lover any more, just as I can’t be aged twenty any more. I am a man now, not an adolescent. And to my sorrow I am a husband to a woman who wants a lover: always a lover. But all women want lovers. And I can’t be it any more. I don’t want to. I have finished that. Finished for ever: unless I become senile — -”

Therefore next day he gathered up his courage. He would not have had courage unless he had known that he was not alone. The other man was in the town, and from this fact he derived his strength: the fact that Lilly was there. So at teatime he went over the river, and rang at her door. Yes, she was at home, and she had other visitors. She was wearing a beautiful soft afternoon dress, again of a blue like chicory-flowers, a pale, warm blue. And she had cornflowers in her belt: heaven knows where she had got them.

She greeted Aaron with some of the childish shyness. He could tell that she was glad he had come, and that she had wondered at his not coming sooner. She introduced him to her visitors: two young ladies and one old lady and one elderly Italian count. The conversation was mostly in French or Italian, so Aaron was rather out of it.

However, the visitors left fairly early, so Aaron stayed them out. When they had gone, he asked:

“Where is Manfredi?”

“He will come in soon. At about seven o’clock.”

Then there was a silence again.

“You are dressed fine today,” he said to her.

“Am I?” she smiled.

He was never able to make out quite what she felt, what she was feeling. But she had a quiet little air of proprietorship in him, which he did not like.

“You will stay to dinner tonight, won’t you?” she said.

“No — not tonight,” he said. And then, awkwardly, he added: “You know. I think it is better if we are friends — not lovers. You know — I don’t feel free. I feel my wife, I suppose, somewhere inside me. And I can’t help it — -”

She bent her head and was silent for some moments. Then she lifted her face and looked at him oddly.

“Yes,” she said. “I am sure you love your wife.”

The reply rather staggered him — and to tell the truth, annoyed him.

“Well,” he said. “I don’t know about love. But when one has been married for ten years — and I did love her — then — some sort of bond or something grows. I think some sort of connection grows between us, you know. And it isn’t natural, quite, to break it. — Do you know what I mean?”

She paused a moment. Then, very softly, almost gently, she said:

“Yes, I do. I know so well what you mean.”

He was really surprised at her soft acquiescence. What did she mean?

“But we can be friends, can’t we?” he said.

“Yes, I hope so. Why, yes! Goodness, yes! I should be sorry if we couldn’t be friends.”

After which speech he felt that everything was all right — everything was A-one. And when Manfredi came home, the first sound he heard was the flute and his wife’s singing.

“I’m so glad you’ve come,” his wife said to him. “Shall we go into the sala and have real music? Will you play?”

“I should love to,” replied the husband.

Behold them then in the big drawing-room, and Aaron and the Marchese practising together, and the Marchesa singing an Italian folk-song while her husband accompanied her on the pianoforte. But her singing was rather strained and forced. Still, they were quite a little family, and it seemed quite nice. As soon as she could, the Marchesa left the two men together, whilst she sat apart. Aaron and Manfredi went through old Italian and old German music, tried one thing and then another, and seemed quite like brothers. They arranged a piece which they should play together on a Saturday morning, eight days hence.

The next day, Saturday, Aaron went to one of the Del Torre music mornings. There was a string quartette — and a violin soloist — and the Marchese at the piano. The audience, some dozen or fourteen friends, sat at the near end of the room, or in the smaller salotta, whilst the musicians performed at the further end

of the room. The Lillys were there, both Tanny and her husband. But apart from these, Aaron knew nobody, and felt uncomfortable. The Marchesa gave her guests little sandwiches and glasses of wine or Marsala or vermouth, as they chose. And she was quite the hostess: the well-bred and very simple, but still the conventional hostess. Aaron did not like it. And he could see that Lilly too was unhappy. In fact, the little man bolted the moment he could, dragging after him the indignant Tanny, who was so looking forward to the excellent little sandwiches. But no — Lilly just rudely bolted. Aaron followed as soon as he could.

“Will you come to dinner tomorrow evening?” said his hostess to him as he was leaving. And he agreed. He had really resented seeing her as a conventional hostess, attending so charmingly to all the other people, and treating him so merely as one of the guests, among many others. So that when at the last moment she quietly invited him to dinner next day, he was flattered and accepted at once.

The next day was Sunday — the seventh day after his coming together with the Marchesa — which had taken place on the Monday. And already he was feeling much less dramatic in his decision to keep himself apart from her, to be merely friends. Already the memory of the last time was fanning up in him, not as a warning but as a terrible incitement. Again the naked desire was getting hold of him, with that peculiar brutal powerfulness which startled him and also pleased him.

So that by the time Sunday morning came, his recoil had exhausted itself, and he was ready again, eager again, but more wary this time. He sat in his room alone in the morning, playing his flute, playing over from memory the tunes she loved, and imagining how he and she would get into unison in the evening. His flute, his Aaron’s rod, would blossom once again with splendid scarlet flowers, the red Florentine lilies. It was curious, the passion he had for her: just unalloyed desire, and nothing else. Something he had not known in his life before. Previously there had been always some personal quality, some sort of personal tenderness. But here, none. She did not seem to want it. She seemed to hate it, indeed. No, all he felt was stark, naked desire, without a single pretension. True enough, his last experience had been a warning to him. His desire and himself likewise had broken rather disastrously under the proving. But not finally broken. He was ready again. And with all the sheer powerful insolence of desire he looked forward to the evening. For he almost expected Manfredi would not be there. The officer had said something about having to go to Padua on the Saturday afternoon.

So Aaron went skipping off to his appointment, at seven o’clock. Judge of his

chagrin, then, when he found already seated in the salotta an elderly, quite well-known, very cultured and very well-connected English authoress. She was charming, in her white hair and dress of soft white wool and white lace, with a long chain of filigree gold beads, like bubbles. She was charming in her old-fashioned manner too, as if the world were still safe and stable, like a garden in which delightful culture, and choice ideas bloomed safe from wind and weather. Alas, never was Aaron more conscious of the crude collapse in the world than when he listened to this animated, young-seeming lady from the safe days of the seventies. All the old culture and choice ideas seemed like blowing bubbles. And dear old Corinna Wade, she seemed to be blowing bubbles still, as she sat there so charming in her soft white dress, and talked with her bright animation about the influence of woman in Parliament and the influence of woman in the Periclean day. Aaron listened spell-bound, watching the bubbles float round his head, and almost hearing them go pop.

To complete the party arrived an elderly litterateur who was more proud of his not-very-important social standing than of his literature. In fact he was one of those English snobs of the old order, living abroad. Perfectly well dressed for the evening, his grey hair and his prim face was the most well-dressed thing to be met in North Italy.

“Oh, so glad to see you, Mr. French. I didn’t know you were in Florence again. You make that journey from Venice so often. I wonder you don’t get tired of it,” cried Corinna Wade.

“No,” he said. “So long as duty to England calls me to Florence, I shall come to Florence. But I can LIVE in no town but Venice.”

“No, I suppose you can’t. Well, there is something special about Venice: having no streets and no carriages, and moving about in a gondola. I suppose it is all much more soothing.”

“Much less nerve-racking, yes. And then there is a quality in the whole life. Of course I see few English people in Venice — only the old Venetian families, as a rule.”

“Ah, yes. That must be very interesting. They are very exclusive still, the Venetian noblesse?” said Miss Wade.

“Oh, very exclusive,” said Mr. French. “That is one of the charms. Venice is really altogether exclusive. It excludes the world, really, and defies time and modern movement. Yes, in spite of the steamers on the canal, and the tourists.”

“That is so. That is so. Venice is a strange back-water. And the old families are very proud still, in these democratic days. They have a great opinion of themselves, I am told.”

“Well,” said Mr. French. “Perhaps you know the rhyme:

“Veneziano gran’ Signore
Padovano buon’ dottore.
Vicenzese mangia il gatto
Veronese tutto matto — -”

“How very amusing!” said Miss Wade. “Veneziana gran’ Signore. The Venetian is a great gentleman! Yes, I know they are all convinced of it. Really, how very amusing, in these advanced days. To be born a Venetian, is to be born a great gentleman! But this outdoes divine right of king.”

“To be born a Venetian GENTLEMAN, is to be born a great gentleman,” said Mr. French, rather fussily.

“You seriously think so?” said Miss Wade. “Well now, what do you base your opinion on?”

Mr. French gave various bases for his opinion.

“Yes — interesting. Very interesting. Rather like the Byzantines — lingering on into far other ages. Anna Comnena always charmed me very much. HOW she despised the flower of the north — even Tancred! And so the lingering Venetian families! And you, in your palazzo on the Grand Canal: you are a northern barbarian civilised into the old Venetian Signoria. But how very romantic a situation!”

It was really amusing to see the old maid, how she skirmished and hit out gaily, like an old jaunty free lance: and to see the old bachelor, how prim he was, and nervy and fussy and precious, like an old maid.

But need we say that Mr. Aaron felt very much out of it. He sat and listened, with a sardonic small smile on his face and a sardonic gleam in his blue eyes, that looked so very blue on such an occasion. He made the two elderly people uncomfortable with his silence: his democratic silence, Miss Wade might have said.

However, Miss Wade lived out towards Galuzzo, so she rose early, to catch her tram. And Mr. French gallantly and properly rose to accompany her, to see her safe on board. Which left Aaron and the Marchesa alone.

“What time is Manfredi coming back?” said he.

“Tomorrow,” replied she.

There was a pause.

“Why do you have those people?” he asked.

“Who?”

“Those two who were here this evening.”

“Miss Wade and Mr. French? — Oh, I like Miss Wade so very much. She is so refreshing.”

“Those old people,” said Aaron. “They licked the sugar off the pill, and go on

as if everything was toffee. And we've got to swallow the pill. It's easy to be refreshing — -"

"No, don't say anything against her. I like her so much."

"And him?"

"Mr. French! — Well, he's perhaps a little like the princess who felt the pea through three feather-beds. But he can be quite witty, and an excellent conversationalist, too. Oh yes, I like him quite well."

"Matter of taste," said Aaron.

They had not much to say to one another. The time passed, in the pauses. He looked at his watch.

"I shall have to go," he said.

"Won't you stay?" she said, in a small, muted voice.

"Stay all night?" he said.

"Won't you?"

"Yes," he said quietly. Did he not feel the strength of his desire on him.

After which she said no more. Only she offered him whiskey and soda, which he accepted.

"Go then," he said to her. "And I'll come to you. — Shall I come in fifteen minutes?"

She looked at him with strange, slow dark eyes. And he could not understand.

"Yes," she said. And she went.

And again, this night as before, she seemed strangely small and clinging in his arms. And this night he felt his passion drawn from him as if a long, live nerve were drawn out from his body, a long live thread of electric fire, a long, living nerve finely extracted from him, from the very roots of his soul. A long fine discharge of pure, bluish fire, from the core of his soul. It was an excruciating, but also an intensely gratifying sensation.

This night he slept with a deeper obliviousness than before. But ah, as it grew towards morning how he wished he could be alone.

They must stay together till the day was light. And she seemed to love clinging to him and curling strangely on his breast. He could never reconcile it with her who was a hostess entertaining her guests. How could she now in a sort of little ecstasy curl herself and nestle herself on his, Aaron's breast, tangling his face all over with her hair. He verily believed that this was what she really wanted of him: to curl herself on his naked breast, to make herself small, small, to feel his arms around her, while he himself was remote, silent, in some way inaccessible. This seemed almost to make her beside herself with gratification. But why, why? Was it because he was one of her own race, and she, as it were, crept right home to him?

He did not know. He only knew it had nothing to do with him: and that, save out of complaisance, he did not want it. It simply blasted his own central life. It simply blighted him.

And she clung to him closer. Strange, she was afraid of him! Afraid of him as of a fetish! Fetish afraid, and fetish-fascinated! Or was her fear only a delightful game of cat and mouse? Or was the fear genuine, and the delight the greater: a sort of sacrilege? The fear, and the dangerous, sacrilegious power over that which she feared.

In some way, she was not afraid of him at all. In some other way she used him as a mere magic implement, used him with the most amazing priestess-craft. Himself, the individual man which he was, this she treated with an indifference that was startling to him.

He forgot, perhaps, that this was how he had treated her. His famous desire for her, what had it been but this same attempt to strike a magic fire out of her, for his own ecstasy. They were playing the same game of fire. In him, however, there was all the time something hard and reckless and defiant, which stood apart. She was absolutely gone in her own incantations. She was absolutely gone, like a priestess utterly involved in her terrible rites. And he was part of the ritual only, God and victim in one. God and victim! All the time, God and victim. When his aloof soul realised, amid the welter of incantation, how he was being used, — not as himself but as something quite different — God and victim — then he dilated with intense surprise, and his remote soul stood up tall and knew itself alone. He didn't want it, not at all. He knew he was apart. And he looked back over the whole mystery of their love-contact. Only his soul was apart.

He was aware of the strength and beauty and godlikeness that his breast was then to her — the magic. But himself, he stood far off, like Moses' sister Miriam. She would drink the one drop of his innermost heart's blood, and he would be carrion. As Cleopatra killed her lovers in the morning. Surely they knew that death was their just climax. They had approached the climax. Accept then.

But his soul stood apart, and could have nothing to do with it. If he had really been tempted, he would have gone on, and she might have had his central heart's blood. Yes, and thrown away the carrion. He would have been willing.

But fatally, he was not tempted. His soul stood apart and decided. At the bottom of his soul he disliked her. Or if not her, then her whole motive. Her whole life-mode. He was neither God nor victim: neither greater nor less than himself. His soul, in its isolation as she lay on his breast, chose it so, with the soul's inevitability. So, there was no temptation.

When it was sufficiently light, he kissed her and left her. Quietly he left the silent flat. He had some difficulty in unfastening the various locks and bars and catches of the massive door downstairs, and began, in irritation and anger, to feel he was a prisoner, that he was locked in. But suddenly the ponderous door came loose, and he was out in the street. The door shut heavily behind him, with a shudder. He was out in the morning streets of Florence.

CHAPTER XX. THE BROKEN ROD

The day was rainy. Aaron stayed indoors alone, and copied music and slept. He felt the same stunned, withered feeling as before, but less intensely, less disastrously, this time. He knew now, without argument or thought that he would never go again to the Marchesa: not as a lover. He would go away from it all. He did not dislike her. But he would never see her again. A great gulf had opened, leaving him alone on the far side.

He did not go out till after dinner. When he got downstairs he found the heavy night-door closed. He wondered: then remembered the Signorina's fear of riots and disturbances. As again he fumbled with the catches, he felt that the doors of Florence were trying to prevent his egress. However, he got out.

It was a very dark night, about nine o'clock, and deserted seeming. He was struck by the strange, deserted feeling of the city's atmosphere. Yet he noticed before him, at the foot of the statue, three men, one with a torch: a long torch with naked flames. The men were stooping over something dark, the man with the torch bending forward too. It was a dark, weird little group, like Mediaeval Florence. Aaron lingered on his doorstep, watching. He could not see what they were doing. But now, the two were crouching down; over a long dark object on the ground, and the one with the torch bending also to look. What was it? They were just at the foot of the statue, a dark little group under the big pediment, the torch-flames weirdly flickering as the torch-bearer moved and stooped lower to the two crouching men, who seemed to be kneeling.

Aaron felt his blood stir. There was something dark and mysterious, stealthy, in the little scene. It was obvious the men did not want to draw attention, they were so quiet and furtive-seeming. And an eerie instinct prevented Aaron's going nearer to look. Instead, he swerved on to the Lungarno, and went along the top of the square, avoiding the little group in the centre. He walked the deserted dark-seeming street by the river, then turned inwards, into the city. He was going to the Piazza Vittoria Emmanuele, to sit in the cafe which is the centre of Florence at night. There he could sit for an hour, and drink his vermouth and watch the Florentines.

As he went along one of the dark, rather narrow streets, he heard a hurrying of feet behind him. Glancing round, he saw the torch-bearer coming along at a trot, holding his flaming torch up in front of him as he trotted down the middle of the narrow dark street. Aaron shrank under the wall. The trotting torch-bearer drew

near, and now Aaron perceived the other two men slowly trotting behind, stealthily, bearing a stretcher on which a body was wrapped up, completely and darkly covered. The torch-bearer passed, the men with the stretcher passed too, hastily and stealthily, the flickering flames revealing them. They took no notice of Aaron, no notice of anything, but trotted softly on towards the centre of the city. Their queer, quick footsteps echoed down the distance. Then Aaron too resumed his way.

He came to the large, brilliantly-lighted cafe. It was Sunday evening, and the place was full. Men, Florentines, many, many men sat in groups and in twos and threes at the little marble tables. They were mostly in dark clothes or black overcoats. They had mostly been drinking just a cup of coffee — others however had glasses of wine or liquor. But mostly it was just a little coffee-tray with a tiny coffee pot and a cup and saucer. There was a faint film of tobacco smoke. And the men were all talking: talking, talking with that peculiar intensity of the Florentines. Aaron felt the intense, compressed sound of many half-secret voices. For the little groups and couples abated their voices, none wished that others should hear what they said.

Aaron was looking for a seat — there was no table to him — when suddenly someone took him by the arm. It was Argyle.

“Come along, now! Come and join us. Here, this way! Come along!”

Aaron let himself be led away towards a corner. There sat Lilly and a strange man: called Levison. The room was warm. Aaron could never bear to be too hot. After sitting a minute, he rose and took off his coat, and hung it on a stand near the window. As he did so he felt the weight of his flute — it was still in his pocket. And he wondered if it was safe to leave it.

“I suppose no one will steal from the overcoat pockets,” he said, as he sat down.

“My dear chap, they’d steal the gold filling out of your teeth, if you happened to yawn,” said Argyle. “Why, have you left valuables in your overcoat?”

“My flute,” said Aaron.

“Oh, they won’t steal that,” said Argyle.

“Besides,” said Lilly, “we should see anyone who touched it.”

And so they settled down to the vermouth.

“Well,” said Argyle, “what have you been doing with yourself, eh? I haven’t seen a glimpse of you for a week. Been going to the dogs, eh?”

“Or the bitches,” said Aaron.

“Oh, but look here, that’s bad! That’s bad! I can see I shall have to take you in hand, and commence my work of reform. Oh, I’m a great reformer, a Zwingli and Savonarola in one. I couldn’t count the number of people I’ve led into the

right way. It takes some finding, you know. Strait is the gate — damned strait sometimes. A damned tight squeeze....” Argyle was somewhat intoxicated. He spoke with a slight slur, and laughed, really tickled at his own jokes. The man Levison smiled acquiescent. But Lilly was not listening. His brow was heavy and he seemed abstracted. He hardly noticed Aaron’s arrival.

“Did you see the row yesterday?” asked Levison.

“No,” said Aaron. “What was it?”

It was the socialists. They were making a demonstration against the imprisonment of one of the railway-strikers. I was there. They went on all right, with a good bit of howling and gibing: a lot of young louts, you know. And the shop-keepers shut up shop, and nobody showed the Italian flag, of course. Well, when they came to the Via Benedetto Croce, there were a few mounted carabinieri. So they stopped the procession, and the sergeant said that the crowd could continue, could go on where they liked, but would they not go down the Via Verrocchio, because it was being repaired, the roadway was all up, and there were piles of cobble stones. These might prove a temptation and lead to trouble. So would the demonstrators not take that road — they might take any other they liked. — Well, the very moment he had finished, there was a revolver shot, he made a noise, and fell forward over his horse’s nose. One of the anarchists had shot him. Then there was hell let loose, the carabinieri fired back, and people were bolting and fighting like devils. I cleared out, myself. But my God — what do you think of it?”

“Seems pretty mean,” said Aaron.

“Mean! — He had just spoken them fair — they could go where they liked, only would they not go down the one road, because of the heap of stones. And they let him finish. And then shot him dead.”

“Was he dead?” said Aaron.

“Yes — killed outright, the Nazione says.”

There was a silence. The drinkers in the cafe all continued to talk vehemently, casting uneasy glances.

“Well,” said Argyle, “if you let loose the dogs of war, you mustn’t expect them to come to heel again in five minutes.”

“But there’s no fair play about it, not a bit,” said Levison.

“Ah, my dear fellow, are you still so young and callow that you cherish the illusion of fair play?” said Argyle.

“Yes, I am,” said Levison.

“Live longer and grow wiser,” said Argyle, rather contemptuously.

“Are you a socialist?” asked Levison.

“Am I my aunt Tabitha’s dachshund bitch called Bella,” said Argyle, in his

musical, indifferent voice. “Yes, Bella’s her name. And if you can tell me a damner name for a dog, I shall listen, I assure you, attentively.”

“But you haven’t got an aunt called Tabitha,” said Aaron.

“Haven’t I? Oh, haven’t I? I’ve got TWO aunts called Tabitha: if not more.”

“They aren’t of any vital importance to you, are they?” said Levison.

“Not the very least in the world — if it hadn’t been that my elder Aunt Tabitha had christened her dachshund bitch Bella. I cut myself off from the family after that. Oh, I turned over a new leaf, with not a family name on it. Couldn’t stand Bella amongst the rest.”

“You must have strained most of the gnats out of your drink, Argyle,” said Lilly, laughing.

“Assiduously! Assiduously! I can’t stand these little vermin. Oh, I am quite indifferent about swallowing a camel or two — or even a whole string of dromedaries. How charmingly Eastern that sounds! But gnats! Not for anything in the world would I swallow one.”

“You’re a bit of a SOCIALIST though, aren’t you?” persisted Levison, now turning to Lilly.

“No,” said Lilly. “I was.”

“And am no more,” said Argyle sarcastically. “My dear fellow, the only hope of salvation for the world lies in the re-institution of slavery.”

“What kind of slavery?” asked Levison.

“Slavery! SLAVERY! When I say SLAVERY I don’t mean any of your damned modern reform cant. I mean solid sound slavery on which the Greek and the Roman world rested. FAR finer worlds than ours, my dear chap! Oh FAR finer! And can’t be done without slavery. Simply can’t be done. — Oh, they’ll all come to realise it, when they’ve had a bit more of this democratic washer-women business.”

Levison was laughing, with a slight sneer down his nose. “Anyhow, there’s no immediate danger — or hope, if you prefer it — of the re-instituting of classic slavery,” he said.

“Unfortunately no. We are all such fools,” said Argyle.

“Besides,” said Levison, “who would you make slaves of?”

“Everybody, my dear chap: beginning with the idealists and the theorising Jews, and after them your nicely-bred gentlemen, and then perhaps, your profiteers and Rothschilds, and ALL politicians, and ending up with the proletariat,” said Argyle.

“Then who would be the masters? — the professional classes, doctors and lawyers and so on?”

“What? Masters. They would be the sewerage slaves, as being those who had

made most smells.” There was a moment’s silence.

“The only fault I have to find with your system,” said Levison, rather acidly, “is that there would be only one master, and everybody else slaves.”

“Do you call that a fault? What do you want with more than one master? Are you asking for several? — Well, perhaps there’s cunning in THAT. — Cunning devils, cunning devils, these theorising slaves — ” And Argyle pushed his face with a devilish leer into Aaron’s face. “Cunning devils!” he reiterated, with a slight tipsy slur. “That be-fouled Epictetus wasn’t the last of ‘em — nor the first. Oh, not by any means, not by any means.”

Here Lilly could not avoid a slight spasm of amusement. “But returning to serious conversation,” said Levison, turning his rather sallow face to Lilly. “I think you’ll agree with me that socialism is the inevitable next step — ”

Lilly waited for some time without answering. Then he said, with unwilling attention to the question: “I suppose it’s the logically inevitable next step.”

“Use logic as lavatory paper,” cried Argyle harshly. “Yes — logically inevitable — and humanly inevitable at the same time. Some form of socialism is bound to come, no matter how you postpone it or try variations,” said Levison.

“All right, let it come,” said Lilly. “It’s not my affair, neither to help it nor to keep it back, or even to try varying it.”

“There I don’t follow you,” said Levison. “Suppose you were in Russia now — ”

“I watch it I’m not.”

“But you’re in Italy, which isn’t far off. Supposing a socialist revolution takes place all around you. Won’t that force the problem on you? — It is every man’s problem,” persisted Levison.

“Not mine,” said Lilly.

“How shall you escape it?” said Levison.

“Because to me it is no problem. To Bolsh or not to Bolsh, as far as my mind goes, presents no problem. Not any more than to be or not to be. To be or not to be is simply no problem — ”

“No, I quite agree, that since you are already existing, and since death is ultimately inevitable, to be or not to be is no sound problem,” said Levison. “But the parallel isn’t true of socialism. That is not a problem of existence, but of a certain mode of existence which centuries of thought and action on the part of Europe have now made logically inevitable for Europe. And therefore there is a problem. There is more than a problem, there is a dilemma. Either we must go to the logical conclusion — or — ”

“Somewhere else,” said Lilly.

“Yes — yes. Precisely! But where ELSE? That’s the one half of the problem:

supposing you do not agree to a logical progression in human social activity. Because after all, human society through the course of ages only enacts, spasmodically but still inevitably, the logical development of a given idea.”

“Well, then, I tell you. — The idea and the ideal has for me gone dead — dead as carrion — ”

“Which idea, which ideal precisely?”

“The ideal of love, the ideal that it is better to give than to receive, the ideal of liberty, the ideal of the brotherhood of man, the ideal of the sanctity of human life, the ideal of what we call goodness, charity, benevolence, public spiritedness, the ideal of sacrifice for a cause, the ideal of unity and unanimity — all the lot — all the whole beehive of ideals — has all got the modern bee-disease, and gone putrid, stinking. — And when the ideal is dead and putrid, the logical sequence is only stink. — Which, for me, is the truth concerning the ideal of good, peaceful, loving humanity and its logical sequence in socialism and equality, equal opportunity or whatever you like. — But this time he stinketh — and I’m sorry for any Christus who brings him to life again, to stink livingly for another thirty years: the beastly Lazarus of our idealism.”

“That may be true for you — ”

“But it’s true for nobody else,” said Lilly. “All the worse for them. Let them die of the bee-disease.”

“Not only that,” persisted Levison, “but what is your alternative? Is it merely nihilism?”

“My alternative,” said Lilly, “is an alternative for no one but myself, so I’ll keep my mouth shut about it.”

“That isn’t fair.”

“I tell you, the ideal of fairness stinks with the rest. — I have no obligation to say what I think.”

“Yes, if you enter into conversation, you have — ”

“Bah, then I didn’t enter into conversation. — The only thing is, I agree in the rough with Argyle. You’ve got to have a sort of slavery again. People are not MEN: they are insects and instruments, and their destiny is slavery. They are too many for me, and so what I think is ineffectual. But ultimately they will be brought to agree — after sufficient extermination — and then they will elect for themselves a proper and healthy and energetic slavery.”

“I should like to know what you mean by slavery. Because to me it is impossible that slavery should be healthy and energetic. You seem to have some other idea in your mind, and you merely use the word slavery out of exasperation — ”

“I mean it none the less. I mean a real committal of the life-issue of inferior

beings to the responsibility of a superior being.”

“It’ll take a bit of knowing, who are the inferior and which is the superior,” said Levison sarcastically.

“Not a bit. It is written between a man’s brows, which he is.”

“I’m afraid we shall all read differently.”

“So long as we’re liars.”

“And putting that question aside: I presume that you mean that this committal of the life-issue of inferior beings to someone higher shall be made voluntarily — a sort of voluntary self-gift of the inferiors — ”

“Yes — more or less — and a voluntary acceptance. For it’s no pretty gift, after all. — But once made it must be held fast by genuine power. Oh yes — no playing and fooling about with it. Permanent and very efficacious power.”

“You mean military power?”

“I do, of course.”

Here Levison smiled a long, slow, subtle smile of ridicule. It all seemed to him the preposterous pretentiousness of a megalomaniac — one whom, after a while, humanity would probably have the satisfaction of putting into prison, or into a lunatic asylum. And Levison felt strong, overwhelmingly strong, in the huge social power with which he, insignificant as he was, was armed against such criminal-imbecile pretensions as those above set forth. Prison or the lunatic asylum. The face of the fellow gloated in these two inevitable engines of his disapproval.

“It will take you some time before you’ll get your doctrines accepted,” he said.

“Accepted! I’d be sorry. I don’t want a lot of swine snouting and sniffing at me with their acceptance. — Bah, Levison — one can easily make a fool of you. Do you take this as my gospel?”

“I take it you are speaking seriously.”

Here Lilly broke into that peculiar, gay, whimsical smile.

“But I should say the blank opposite with just as much fervour,” he declared.

“Do you mean to say you don’t MEAN what you’ve been saying?” said Levison, now really looking angry.

“Why, I’ll tell you the real truth,” said Lilly. “I think every man is a sacred and holy individual, NEVER to be violated; I think there is only one thing I hate to the verge of madness, and that is BULLYING. To see any living creature BULLIED, in any way, almost makes a murderer of me. That is true. Do you believe it — ?”

“Yes,” said Levison unwillingly. “That may be true as well. You have no doubt, like most of us, got a complex nature which — ”

C R A S H!

There intervened one awful minute of pure shock, when the soul was in darkness.

Out of this shock Aaron felt himself issuing amid a mass of terrible sensations: the fearful blow of the explosion, the noise of glass, the hoarse howl of people, the rushing of men, the sudden gulf, the awful gulping whirlpool of horror in the social life.

He stood in agony and semi-blindness amid a chaos. Then as he began to recover his consciousness, he found himself standing by a pillar some distance from where he had been sitting: he saw a place where tables and chairs were all upside down, legs in the air, amid debris of glass and breakage: he saw the cafe almost empty, nearly everybody gone: he saw the owner, or the manager, advancing aghast to the place of debris: he saw Lilly standing not far off, white as a sheet, and as if unconscious. And still he had no idea of what had happened. He thought perhaps something had broken down. He could not understand.

Lilly began to look round. He caught Aaron's eye. And then Aaron began to approach his friend.

"What is it?" he asked.

"A bomb," said Lilly.

The manager, and one old waiter, and three or four youths had now advanced to the place of debris. And now Aaron saw that a man was lying there — and horror, blood was running across the floor of the cafe. Men began now hastily to return to the place. Some seized their hats and departed again at once. But many began to crowd in — a black eager crowd of men pressing to where the bomb had burst — where the man was lying. It was rather dark, some of the lamps were broken — but enough still shone. Men surged in with that eager, excited zest of people, when there has been an accident. Grey carabinieri, and carabinieri in the cocked hat and fine Sunday uniform pressed forward officiously.

"Let us go," said Lilly.

And he went to the far corner, where his hat hung. But Aaron looked in vain for his own hat. The bomb had fallen near the stand where he had hung it and his overcoat.

"My hat and coat?" he said to Lilly.

Lilly, not very tall, stood on tiptoe. Then he climbed on a chair and looked round. Then he squeezed past the crowd.

Aaron followed. On the other side of the crowd excited angry men were wrestling over overcoats that were mixed up with a broken marble table-top. Aaron spied his own black hat under the sofa near the wall. He waited his turn and then in the confusion pressed forward to where the coats were. Someone had

dragged out his, and it lay on the floor under many feet. He managed, with a struggle, to get it from under the feet of the crowd. He felt at once for his flute. But his trampled, torn coat had no flute in its pocket. He pushed and struggled, caught sight of a section, and picked it up. But it was split right down, two silver stops were torn out, and a long thin splch of wood was curiously torn off. He looked at it, and his heart stood still. No need to look for the rest.

He felt utterly, utterly overcome — as if he didn't care what became of him any further. He didn't care whether he were hit by a bomb, or whether he himself threw the next bomb, and hit somebody. He just didn't care any more about anything in life or death. It was as if the reins of his life slipped from his hands. And he would let everything run where it would, so long as it did run.

Then he became aware of Lilly's eyes on him — and automatically he joined the little man.

“Let us go,” said Lilly.

And they pushed their way through the door. The police were just marching across the square. Aaron and Lilly walked in the opposite direction. Groups of people were watching. Suddenly Lilly swerved — in the middle of the road was a large black glisten of blood, trickling horribly. A wounded man had run from the blow and fallen here.

Aaron did not know where he was going. But in the Via Tournabuoni Lilly turned towards the Arno, and soon they were on the Ponte Santa Trinita.

“Who threw the bomb?” said Aaron.

“I suppose an anarchist.”

“It's all the same,” said Aaron.

The two men, as if unable to walk any further, leaned on the broad parapet of the bridge and looked at the water in the darkness of the still, deserted night. Aaron still had his flute section in his hand, his overcoat over his arm.

“Is that your flute?” asked Lilly.

“Bit of it. Smashed.”

“Let me look.”

He looked, and gave it back.

“No good,” he said.

“Oh, no,” said Aaron.

“Throw it in the river, Aaron,” said Lilly.

Aaron turned and looked at him.

“Throw it in the river,” repeated Lilly. “It's an end.”

Aaron nervelessly dropped the flute into the stream. The two men stood leaning on the bridge-parapet, as if unable to move.

“We shall have to go home,” said Lilly. “Tanny may hear of it and be

anxious.”

Aaron was quite dumbfounded by the night’s event: the loss of his flute. Here was a blow he had not expected. And the loss was for him symbolic. It chimed with something in his soul: the bomb, the smashed flute, the end.

“There goes Aaron’s Rod, then,” he said to Lilly.

“It’ll grow again. It’s a reed, a water-plant — you can’t kill it,” said Lilly, unheeding.

“And me?”

“You’ll have to live without a rod, meanwhile.”

To which pleasant remark Aaron made no reply.

CHAPTER XXI. WORDS

He went home to bed: and dreamed a strange dream. He dreamed that he was in a country with which he was not acquainted. Night was coming on, and he had nowhere to sleep. So he passed the mouth of a sort of cave or house, in which a woman, an old woman, sat. Therefore he entered, and though he could not understand the language, still his second self understood. The cave was a house: and men came home from work. His second self assumed that they were tin-miners.

He wandered uneasily to and fro, no one taking any particular notice of him. And he realized that there was a whole vast country spreading, a sort of underworld country, spreading away beyond him. He wandered from vast apartment to apartment, down narrow corridors like the roads in a mine. In one of the great square rooms, the men were going to eat. And it seemed to him that what they were going to eat was a man, naked man. But his second self knew that what appeared to his eyes as a man was really a man's skin stuffed tight with prepared meat, as the skin of a Bologna sausage. This did not prevent his seeing the naked man who was to be eaten walk slowly and stiffly across the gangway and down the corridor. He saw him from behind. It was a big handsome man in the prime of life, quite naked and perhaps stupid. But of course he was only a skin stuffed with meat, whom the grey tin-miners were going to eat.

Aaron, the dream-Aaron, turned another way, and strayed along the vast square rooms, cavern apartments. He came into one room where there were many children, all in white gowns. And they were all busily putting themselves to bed, in the many beds scattered about the room at haphazard. And each child went to bed with a wreath of flowers on its head, white flowers and pink, so it seemed. So there they all lay, in their flower-crowns in the vast space of the rooms. And Aaron went away.

He could not remember the following part. Only he seemed to have passed through many grey domestic apartments, where were all women, all greyish in their clothes and appearance, being wives of the underground tin-miners. The men were away and the dream-Aaron remembered with fear the food they were to eat.

The next thing he could recall was, that he was in a boat. And now he was most definitely two people. His invisible, conscious self, what we have called his

second self, hovered as it were before the prow of the boat, seeing and knowing, but unseen. His other self, the palpable Aaron, sat as a passenger in the boat, which was being rowed by the unknown people of this underworld. They stood up as they thrust the boat along. Other passengers were in the boat too, women as well, but all of them unknown people, and not noticeable.

The boat was upon a great lake in the underworld country, a lake of dark blue water, but crystal clear and very beautiful in colour. The second or invisible Aaron sat in the prow and watched the fishes swimming suspended in the clear, beautiful dark-blue water. Some were pale fish, some frightening-looking, like centipedes swimming, and some were dark fish, of definite form, and delightful to watch.

The palpable or visible Aaron sat at the side of the boat, on the end of the middle seat, with his naked right elbow leaning out over the side. And now the boat entered upon shallows. The impalpable Aaron in the bows saw the whitish clay of the bottom swirl up in clouds at each thrust of the oars, whitish-clayey clouds which would envelope the strange fishes in a sudden mist. And on the right hand of the course stakes stood up in the water, at intervals, to mark the course.

The boat must pass very near these stakes, almost touching. And Aaron's naked elbow was leaning right over the side. As they approached the first stake, the boatmen all uttered a strange cry of warning, in a foreign language. The flesh-and-blood Aaron seemed not even to hear. The invisible Aaron heard, but did not comprehend the words of the cry.

So the naked elbow struck smartly against the stake as the boat passed.

The rowers rowed on. And still the flesh-and-blood Aaron sat with his arm over the side. Another stake was nearing. "Will he heed, will he heed?" thought the anxious second self. The rowers gave the strange warning cry. He did not heed, and again the elbow struck against the stake as the boat passed. And yet the flesh-and-blood Aaron sat on and made no sign. There were stakes all along this shallow part of the lake. Beyond was deep water again. The invisible Aaron was becoming anxious. "Will he never hear? Will he never heed? Will he never understand?" he thought. And he watched in pain for the next stake. But still the flesh-and-blood Aaron sat on, and though the rowers cried so acutely that the invisible Aaron almost understood their very language, still the Aaron seated at the side heard nothing, and his elbow struck against the third stake.

This was almost too much. But after a few moments, as the boat rowed on, the palpable Aaron changed his position as he sat, and drew in his arm: though even now he was not aware of any need to do so. The invisible Aaron breathed with relief in the bows, the boat swung steadily on, into the deep, unfathomable water

again.

They were drawing near a city. A lake-city, like Mexico. They must have reached a city, because when Aaron woke up and tried to piece together the dream of which these are mere fragments, he could remember having just seen an idol. An Astarte he knew it as, seated by the road, and in her open lap, were some eggs: smallish hen's eggs, and one or two bigger eggs, like swan's, and one single little roll of bread. These lay in the lap of the roadside Astarte.... And then he could remember no more.

He woke, and for a minute tried to remember what he had been dreaming, and what it all meant. But he quickly relinquished the effort. So he looked at his watch: it was only half-past three. He had one of those American watches with luminous, phosphorescent figures and fingers. And tonight he felt afraid of its eerily shining face.

He was awake a long time in the dark — for two hours, thinking and not thinking, in that barren state which is not sleep, nor yet full wakefulness, and which is a painful strain. At length he went to sleep again, and did not wake till past eight o'clock. He did not ring for his coffee till nine.

Outside was a bright day — but he hardly heeded it. He lay profitlessly thinking. With the breaking of the flute, that which was slowly breaking had finally shattered at last. And there was nothing ahead: no plan, no prospect. He knew quite well that people would help him: Francis Dekker or Angus Guest or the Marchese or Lilly. They would get him a new flute, and find him engagements. But what was the good? His flute was broken, and broken finally. The bomb had settled it. The bomb had settled it and everything. It was an end, no matter how he tried to patch things up. The only thing he felt was a thread of destiny attaching him to Lilly. The rest had all gone as bare and bald as the dead orb of the moon. So he made up his mind, if he could, to make some plan that would bring his life together with that of his evanescent friend.

Lilly was a peculiar bird. Clever and attractive as he undoubtedly was, he was perhaps the most objectionable person to know. It was stamped on his peculiar face. Aaron thought of Lilly's dark, ugly face, which had something that lurked in it as a creature under leaves. Then he thought of the wide-apart eyes, with their curious candour and surety. The peculiar, half-veiled surety, as if nothing, nothing could overcome him. It made people angry, this look of silent, indifferent assurance. "Nothing can touch him on the quick, nothing can really GET at him," they felt at last. And they felt it with resentment, almost with hate. They wanted to be able to get at him. For he was so open-seeming, so very outspoken. He gave himself away so much. And he had no money to fall back on. Yet he gave himself away so easily, paid such attention, almost deference to

any chance friend. So they all thought: Here is a wise person who finds me the wonder which I really am. — And lo and behold, after he had given them the trial, and found their inevitable limitations, he departed and ceased to heed their wonderful existence. Which, to say the least of it, was fraudulent and damnable. It was then, after his departure, that they realised his basic indifference to them, and his silent arrogance. A silent arrogance that knew all their wisdom, and left them to it.

Aaron had been through it all. He had started by thinking Lilly a peculiar little freak: gone on to think him a wonderful chap, and a bit pathetic: progressed, and found him generous, but overbearing: then cruel and intolerant, allowing no man to have a soul of his own: then terribly arrogant, throwing a fellow aside like an old glove which is in holes at the finger-ends. And all the time, which was most beastly, seeing through one. All the time, freak and outsider as he was, Lilly knew. He knew, and his soul was against the whole world.

Driven to bay, and forced to choose. Forced to choose, not between life and death, but between the world and the uncertain, assertive Lilly. Forced to choose, and yet, in the world, having nothing left to choose. For in the world there was nothing left to choose, unless he would give in and try for success. Aaron knew well enough that if he liked to do a bit of buttering, people would gladly make a success of him, and give him money and success. He could become quite a favourite.

But no! If he had to give in to something: if he really had to give in, and it seemed he had: then he would rather give in to the little Lilly than to the beastly people of the world. If he had to give in, then it should be to no woman, and to no social ideal, and to no social institution. No! — if he had to yield his wilful independence, and give himself, then he would rather give himself to the little, individual man than to any of the rest. For to tell the truth, in the man was something incomprehensible, which had dominion over him, if he chose to allow it.

As he lay pondering this over, escaping from the cul de sac in which he had been running for so long, by yielding to one of his pursuers: yielding to the peculiar mastery of one man's nature rather than to the quicksands of woman or the stinking bogs of society: yielding, since yield he must, in some direction or other: yielding in a new direction now, to one strange and incalculable little individual: as Aaron lay so relaxing, finding a peculiar delight in giving his soul to his mind's hero, the self-same hero tapped and entered.

"I wondered," he said, "if you'd like to walk into the country with me: it is such a nice day. I thought you might have gone out already. But here you are in bed like a woman who's had a baby. — You're all right, are you?"

“Yes,” said Aaron. “I’m all right.”

“Miserable about your flute? — Ah, well, there are more flutes. Get up then.”
And Lilly went to the window, and stood looking out at the river.

“We’re going away on Thursday,” he said.

“Where to?” said Aaron.

“Naples. We’ve got a little house there for the winter — in the country, not far from Sorrento — I must get a bit of work done, now the winter is coming. And forget all about everything and just live with life. What’s the good of running after life, when we’ve got it in us, if nobody prevents us and obstructs us?”

Aaron felt very queer.

“But for how long will you settle down — ?” he asked.

“Oh, only the winter. I am a vagrant really: or a migrant. I must migrate. Do you think a cuckoo in Africa and a cuckoo in Essex is one AND the same bird? Anyhow, I know I must oscillate between north and south, so oscillate I do. It’s just my nature. All people don’t have the same needs.”

“Perhaps not,” said Aaron, who had risen and was sitting on the side of the bed.

“I would very much like to try life in another continent, among another race. I feel Europe becoming like a cage to me. Europe may be all right in herself. But I find myself chafing. Another year I shall get out. I shall leave Europe. I begin to feel caged.”

“I guess there are others that feel caged, as well as you,” said Aaron.

“I guess there are.”

“And maybe they haven’t a chance to get out.”

Lilly was silent a moment. Then he said:

“Well, I didn’t make life and society. I can only go my own way.”

Aaron too was silent. A deep disappointment was settling over his spirit.

“Will you be alone all winter?”

“Just myself and Tanny,” he answered. “But people always turn up.”

“And then next year, what will you do?”

“Who knows? I may sail far off. I should like to. I should like to try quite a new life-mode. This is finished in me — and yet perhaps it is absurd to go further. I’m rather sick of seekers. I hate a seeker.”

“What,” said Aaron rather sarcastically — “those who are looking for a new religion?”

“Religion — and love — and all that. It’s a disease now.”

“Oh, I don’t know,” said Aaron. “Perhaps the lack of love and religion is the disease.”

“Ah — bah! The grinding the old millstones of love and God is what ails us,

when there's no more grist between the stones. We've ground love very small. Time to forget it. Forget the very words religion, and God, and love — then have a shot at a new mode. But the very words rivet us down and don't let us move. Rivets, and we can't get them out."

"And where should we be if we could?" said Aaron.

"We might begin to be ourselves, anyhow."

"And what does that mean?" said Aaron. "Being yourself — what does it mean?"

"To me, everything."

"And to most folks, nothing. They've got to have a goal."

"There is no goal. I loathe goals more than any other impertinence. Gaols, they are. Bah — jails and jailers, gaols and gaolers — -"

"Wherever you go, you'll find people with their noses tied to some goal," said Aaron.

"Their wagon hitched to a star — which goes round and round like an ass in a gin," laughed Lilly. "Be damned to it."

Aaron got himself dressed, and the two men went out, took a tram and went into the country. Aaron could not help it — Lilly put his back up. They came to a little inn near a bridge, where a broad stream rustled bright and shallow. It was a sunny warm day, and Aaron and Lilly had a table outside under the thin trees at the top of the bank above the river. The yellow leaves were falling — the Tuscan sky was turquoise blue. In the stream below three naked boys still adventurously bathed, and lay flat on the shingle in the sun. A wagon with two pale, loving, velvety oxen drew slowly down the hill, looking at each step as if they were going to come to rest, to move no more. But still they stepped forward. Till they came to the inn, and there they stood at rest. Two old women were picking the last acorns under three scrubby oak-trees, whilst a girl with bare feet drove her two goats and a sheep up from the water-side towards the women. The girl wore a dress that had been blue, perhaps indigo, but which had faded to the beautiful lavender-purple colour which is so common, and which always reminded Lilly of purple anemones in the south.

The two friends sat in the sun and drank red wine. It was midday. From the thin, square belfry on the opposite hill the bells had rung. The old women and the girl squatted under the trees, eating their bread and figs. The boys were dressing, fluttering into their shirts on the stream's shingle. A big girl went past, with somebody's dinner tied in a red kerchief and perched on her head. It was one of the most precious hours: the hour of pause, noon, and the sun, and the quiet acceptance of the world. At such a time everything seems to fall into a true relationship, after the strain of work and of urge.

Aaron looked at Lilly, and saw the same odd, distant look on his face as on the face of some animal when it lies awake and alert, yet perfectly at one with its surroundings. It was something quite different from happiness: an alert enjoyment of rest, an intense and satisfying sense of centrality. As a dog when it basks in the sun with one eye open and winking: or a rabbit quite still and wide-eyed, with a faintly-twitching nose. Not passivity, but alert enjoyment of being central, life-central in one's own little circumambient world.

They sat thus still — or lay under the trees — for an hour and a half. Then Lilly paid the bill, and went on.

“What am I going to do this winter, do you think?” Aaron asked.

“What do you want to do?”

“Nay, that's what I want to know.”

“Do you want anything? I mean, does something drive you from inside?”

“I can't just rest,” said Aaron.

“Can't you settle down to something? — to a job, for instance?”

“I've not found the job I could settle down to, yet,” said Aaron.

“Why not?”

“It's just my nature.”

“Are you a seeker? Have you got a divine urge, or need?”

“How do I know?” laughed Aaron. “Perhaps I've got a DAMNED urge, at the bottom of me. I'm sure it's nothing divine.”

“Very well then. Now, in life, there are only two great dynamic urges — do you believe me — ?”

“How do I know?” laughed Aaron. “Do you want to be believed?”

“No, I don't care a straw. Only for your own sake, you'd better believe me.”

“All right then — what about it?”

“Well, then, there are only two great dynamic urges in LIFE: love and power.”

“Love and power?” said Aaron. “I don't see power as so very important.”

“You don't see because you don't look. But that's not the point. What sort of urge is your urge? Is it the love urge?”

“I don't know,” said Aaron.

“Yes, you do. You know that you have got an urge, don't you?”

“Yes — ” rather unwillingly Aaron admitted it.

“Well then, what is it? Is it that you want to love, or to be obeyed?”

“A bit of both.”

“All right — a bit of both. And what are you looking for in love? — A woman whom you can love, and who will love you, out and out and all in all and happy ever after sort of thing?”

“That's what I started out for, perhaps,” laughed Aaron.

“And now you know it’s all my eye!” Aaron looked at Lilly, unwilling to admit it. Lilly began to laugh.

“You know it well enough,” he said. “It’s one of your lost illusions, my boy. Well, then, what next? Is it a God you’re after? Do you want a God you can strive to and attain, through love, and live happy ever after, countless millions of eternities, immortality and all that? Is this your little dodge?”

Again Aaron looked at Lilly with that odd double look of mockery and unwillingness to give himself away.

“All right then. You’ve got a love-urge that urges you to God; have you? Then go and join the Buddhists in Burmah, or the newest fangled Christians in Europe. Go and stick your head in a bush of Nirvana or spiritual perfection. Trot off.”

“I won’t,” said Aaron.

“You must. If you’ve got a love-urge, then give it its fulfilment.”

“I haven’t got a love-urge.”

“You have. You want to get excited in love. You want to be carried away in love. You want to whoosh off in a nice little love whoosh and love yourself. Don’t deny it. I know you do. You want passion to sweep you off on wings of fire till you surpass yourself, and like the swooping eagle swoop right into the sun. I know you, my love-boy.”

“Not any more — not any more. I’ve been had too often,” laughed Aaron.

“Bah, it’s a lesson men never learn. No matter how sick they make themselves with love, they always rush for more, like a dog to his vomit.”

“Well, what am I to do then, if I’m not to love?” cried Aaron.

“You want to go on, from passion to passion, from ecstasy to ecstasy, from triumph to triumph, till you can whoosh away into glory, beyond yourself, all bonds loosened and happy ever after. Either that or Nirvana, opposite side of the medal.”

“There’s probably more hate than love in me,” said Aaron.

“That’s the recoil of the same urge. The anarchist, the criminal, the murderer, he is only the extreme lover acting on the recoil. But it is love: only in recoil. It flies back, the love-urge, and becomes a horror.”

“All right then. I’m a criminal and a murderer,” said Aaron.

“No, you’re not. But you’ve a love-urge. And perhaps on the recoil just now. But listen to me. It’s no good thinking the love-urge is the one and only. Niente! You can whoosh if you like, and get excited and carried away loving a woman, or humanity, or God. Swoop away in the love direction till you lose yourself. But that’s where you’re had. You can’t lose yourself. You can try. But you might just as well try to swallow yourself. You’ll only bite your fingers off in the

attempt. You can't lose yourself, neither in woman nor humanity nor in God. You've always got yourself on your hands in the end: and a very raw and jaded and humiliated and nervous-neurasthenic self it is, too, in the end. A very nasty thing to wake up to is one's own raw self after an excessive love-whoosh. Look even at President Wilson: he love-whooshed for humanity, and found in the end he'd only got a very sorry self on his hands.

"So leave off. Leave off, my boy. Leave off love-whooshing. You can't lose yourself, so stop trying. The responsibility is on your own shoulders all the time, and no God which man has ever struck can take it off. You ARE yourself and so BE yourself. Stick to it and abide by it. Passion or no passion, ecstasy or no ecstasy, urge or no urge, there's no goal outside you, where you can consummate like an eagle flying into the sun, or a moth into a candle. There's no goal outside you — and there's no God outside you. No God, whom you can get to and rest in. None. It's a case of:

'Trot, trot to market, to buy a penny bun,
And trot, trot back again, as fast as you can run.'

But there's no God outside you, whom you can rise to or sink to or swoop away to. You can't even gum yourself to a divine Nirvana moon. Because all the time you've got to eat your dinner and digest it. There is no goal outside you. None.

"There is only one thing, your own very self. So you'd better stick to it. You can't be any bigger than just yourself, so you needn't drag God in. You've got one job, and no more. There inside you lies your own very self, like a germinating egg, your precious Easter egg of your own soul. There it is, developing bit by bit, from one single egg-cell which you were at your conception in your mother's womb, on and on to the strange and peculiar complication in unity which never stops till you die — if then. You've got an innermost, integral unique self, and since it's the only thing you have got or ever will have, don't go trying to lose it. You've got to develop it, from the egg into the chicken, and from the chicken into the one-and-only phoenix, of which there can only be one at a time in the universe. There can only be one of you at a time in the universe — and one of me. So don't forget it. Your own single oneness is your destiny. Your destiny comes from within, from your own self-form. And you can't know it beforehand, neither your destiny nor your self-form. You can only develop it. You can only stick to your own very self, and NEVER betray it. And by so sticking, you develop the one and only phoenix of your own self, and you unfold your own destiny, as a dandelion unfolds itself into a dandelion, and not into a stick of celery.

"Remember this, my boy: you've never got to deny the Holy Ghost which is

inside you, your own soul's self. Never. Or you'll catch it. And you've never got to think you'll dodge the responsibility of your own soul's self, by loving or sacrificing or Nirvaning — or even anarchising and throwing bombs. You never will....”

Aaron was silenced for a moment by this flood of words. Then he said smiling:

“So I'd better sit tight on my soul, till it hatches, had I?”

“Oh, yes. If your soul's urge urges you to love, then love. But always know that what you are doing is the fulfilling of your own soul's impulse. It's no good trying to act by prescription: not a bit. And it's no use getting into frenzies. If you've got to go in for love and passion, go in for them. But they aren't the goal. They're a mere means: a life-means, if you will. The only goal is the fulfilling of your own soul's active desire and suggestion. Be passionate as much as ever it is your nature to be passionate, and deeply sensual as far as you can be. Small souls have a small sensuality, deep souls a deep one. But remember, all the time, the responsibility is upon your own head, it all rests with your own lonely soul, the responsibility for your own action.”

“I never said it didn't,” said Aaron.

“You never said it did. You never accepted. You thought there was something outside, to justify you: God, or a creed, or a prescription. But remember, your soul inside you is your only Godhead. It develops your actions within you as a tree develops its own new cells. And the cells push on into buds and boughs and flowers. And these are your passion and your acts and your thoughts and expressions, your developing consciousness. You don't know beforehand, and you can't. You can only stick to your own soul through thick and thin.

“You are your own Tree of Life, roots and limbs and trunk. Somewhere within the wholeness of the tree lies the very self, the quick: its own innate Holy Ghost. And this Holy Ghost puts forth new buds, and pushes past old limits, and shakes off a whole body of dying leaves. And the old limits hate being empassed, and the old leaves hate to fall. But they must, if the tree-soul says so....”

They had sat again during this harangue, under a white wall. Aaron listened more to the voice than the words. It was more the sound value which entered his soul, the tone, the strange speech-music which sank into him. The sense he hardly heeded. And yet he understood, he knew. He understood, oh so much more deeply than if he had listened with his head. And he answered an objection from the bottom of his soul.

“But you talk,” he said, “as if we were like trees, alone by ourselves in the world. We aren't. If we love, it needs another person than ourselves. And if we hate, and even if we talk.”

“Quite,” said Lilly. “And that’s just the point. We’ve got to love and hate moreover — and even talk. But we haven’t got to fix on any one of these modes, and say that’s the only mode. It is such imbecility to say that love and love alone must rule. It is so obviously not the case. Yet we try and make it so.”

“I feel that,” said Aaron. “It’s all a lie.”

“It’s worse. It’s a half lie. But listen. I told you there were two urges — two great life-urges, didn’t I? There may be more. But it comes on me so strongly, now, that there are two: love, and power. And we’ve been trying to work ourselves, at least as individuals, from the love-urge exclusively, hating the power-urge, and repressing it. And now I find we’ve got to accept the very thing we’ve hated.

“We’ve exhausted our love-urge, for the moment. And yet we try to force it to continue working. So we get inevitably anarchy and murder. It’s no good. We’ve got to accept the power motive, accept it in deep responsibility, do you understand me? It is a great life motive. It was that great dark power-urge which kept Egypt so intensely living for so many centuries. It is a vast dark source of life and strength in us now, waiting either to issue into true action, or to burst into cataclysm. Power — the power-urge. The will-to-power — but not in Nietzsche’s sense. Not intellectual power. Not mental power. Not conscious will-power. Not even wisdom. But dark, living, fructifying power. Do you know what I mean?”

“I don’t know,” said Aaron.

“Take what you call love, for example. In the real way of love, the positive aim is to make the other person — or persons — happy. It devotes itself to the other or to others. But change the mode. Let the urge be the urge of power. Then the great desire is not happiness, neither of the beloved nor of oneself. Happiness is only one of many states, and it is horrible to think of fixing us down to one state. The urge of power does not seek for happiness any more than for any other state. It urges from within, darkly, for the displacing of the old leaves, the inception of the new. It is powerful and self-central, not seeking its centre outside, in some God or some beloved, but acting indomitably from within itself.

“And of course there must be one who urges, and one who is impelled. Just as in love there is a beloved and a lover: The man is supposed to be the lover, the woman the beloved. Now, in the urge of power, it is the reverse. The woman must submit, but deeply, deeply submit. Not to any foolish fixed authority, not to any foolish and arbitrary will. But to something deep, deeper. To the soul in its dark motion of power and pride. We must reverse the poles. The woman must now submit — but deeply, deeply, and richly! No subservience. None of that. No slavery. A deep, unfathomable free submission.”

“You’ll never get it,” said Aaron.

“You will, if you abandon the love idea and the love motive, and if you stand apart, and never bully, never force from the conscious will. That’s where Nietzsche was wrong. His was the conscious and benevolent will, in fact, the love-will. But the deep power-urge is not conscious of its aims: and it is certainly not consciously benevolent or love-directed. — Whatever else happens, somewhere, sometime, the deep power-urge in man will have to issue forth again, and woman will submit, livingly, not subjectedly.”

“She never will,” persisted Aaron. “Anything else will happen, but not that.”

“She will,” said Lilly, “once man disengages himself from the love-mode, and stands clear. Once he stands clear, and the other great urge begins to flow in him, then the woman won’t be able to resist. Her own soul will wish to yield itself.”

“Woman yield — ?” Aaron re-echoed.

“Woman — and man too. Yield to the deep power-soul in the individual man, and obey implicitly. I don’t go back on what I said before. I do believe that every man must fulfil his own soul, every woman must be herself, herself only, not some man’s instrument, or some embodied theory. But the mode of our being is such that we can only live and have our being whilst we are implicit in one of the great dynamic modes. We MUST either love, or rule. And once the love-mode changes, as change it must, for we are worn out and becoming evil in its persistence, then the other mode will take place in us. And there will be profound, profound obedience in place of this love-crying, obedience to the incalculable power-urge. And men must submit to the greater soul in a man, for their guidance: and women must submit to the positive power-soul in man, for their being.”

“You’ll never get it,” said Aaron.

“You will, when all men want it. All men say, they want a leader. Then let them in their souls submit to some greater soul than theirs. At present, when they say they want a leader, they mean they want an instrument, like Lloyd George. A mere instrument for their use. But it’s more than that. It’s the reverse. It’s the deep, fathomless submission to the heroic soul in a greater man. You, Aaron, you too have the need to submit. You, too, have the need livingly to yield to a more heroic soul, to give yourself. You know you have. And you know it isn’t love. It is life-submission. And you know it. But you kick against the pricks. And perhaps you’d rather die than yield. And so, die you must. It is your affair.”

There was a long pause. Then Aaron looked up into Lilly’s face. It was dark and remote-seeming. It was like a Byzantine eikon at the moment.

“And whom shall I submit to?” he said.

“Your soul will tell you,” replied the other.

THE END

KANGAROO



This novel was first published in 1923 and is set in Australia. It is an account of a visit to New South Wales by an English writer named Richard Lovat Somers, and his German wife Harriet, in the early 1920s. This appears to be semi-autobiographical, based on a three-month visit to Australia by Lawrence and his wife Frieda in 1922.



Lawrence in Australia

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CHAPTER 1. TORESTIN.

A bunch of workmen were lying on the grass of the park beside Macquarie Street, in the dinner hour. It was winter, the end of May, but the sun was warm, and they lay there in shirt-sleeves, talking. Some were eating food from paper packages. They were a mixed lot — taxi-drivers, a group of builders who were putting a new inside into one of the big houses opposite, and then two men in blue overalls, some sort of mechanics. Squatting and lying on the grassy bank beside the broad tarred road where taxis and hansom cabs passed continually, they had that air of owning the city which belongs to a good Australian.

Sometimes, from the distance behind them, came the faintest squeal of singing from out of the “fortified” Conservatorium of Music. Perhaps it was one of these faintly wafted squeals that made a blue-overalled fellow look round, lifting his thick eyebrows vacantly. His eyes immediately rested on two figures approaching from the direction of the conservatorium, across the grass-lawn. One was a mature, handsome, fresh-faced woman, who might have been Russian. Her companion was a smallish man, pale-faced, with a dark beard. Both were well-dressed, and quiet, with that quiet self-possession which is almost unnatural nowadays. They looked different from other people.

A smile flitted over the face of the man in the overalls — or rather a grin. Seeing the strange, foreign-looking little man with the beard and the absent air of self-possession walking unheeding over the grass, the workman instinctively grinned. A comical-looking bloke! Perhaps a Bolshy.

The foreign-looking little stranger turned his eyes and caught the workman grinning. Half-sheepishly, the mechanic had eased round to nudge his mate to look also at the comical-looking bloke. And the bloke caught them both. They wiped the grin off their faces. Because the little bloke looked at them quite straight, so observant, and so indifferent. He saw that the mechanic had a fine face, and pleasant eyes, and that the grin was hardly more than a city habit. The man in the blue overalls looked into the distance, recovering his dignity after the encounter.

So the pair of strangers passed on, across the wide asphalt road to one of the tall houses opposite. The workman looked at the house into which they had entered.

“What d’you make of them, Dug?” asked the one in the overalls.

“Dunno! Fritzie, most likely.”

“They were talking English.”

“Would be, naturally — what yer expect?”

“I don’t think they were German.”

“Don’t yer, Jack? Mebbe they weren’t then.”

Dug was absolutely unconcerned. But Jack was piqued by the funny little bloke.

Unconsciously he watched the house across the road. It was a more-or-less expensive boarding-house. There appeared the foreign little bloke dumping down a gladstone bag at the top of the steps that led from the porch to the street, and the woman, the wife apparently, was coming out and dumping down a black hat-box. Then the man made another excursion into the house, and came out with another bag, which he likewise dumped down at the top of the steps. Then he had a few words with the wife, and scanned the street.

“Wants a taxi,” said Jack to himself.

There were two taxis standing by the kerb near the open grassy slope of the park, opposite the tall brown houses. The foreign-looking bloke came down the steps and across the wide asphalt road to them. He looked into one, and then into the other. Both were empty. The drivers were lying on the grass smoking an after-luncheon cigar.

“Bloke wants a taxi,” said Jack.

“Could ha’ told YOU that,” said the nearest driver. But nobody moved.

The stranger stood on the pavement beside the big, cream-coloured taxi, and looked across at the group of men on the grass. He did not want to address them.

“Want a taxi?” called Jack.

“Yes. Where are the drivers?” replied the stranger, in unmistakable English: English of the old country.

“Where d’you want to go?” called the driver of the cream-coloured taxi, without rising from the grass.

“Murdoch Street.”

“Murdoch Street? What number?”

“Fifty-one.”

“Neighbour of yours, Jack,” said Dug, turning to his mate.

“Taking it furnished, four guineas a week,” said Jack in a tone of information.

“All right,” said the driver of the cream-coloured taxi, rising at last from the grass. “I’ll take you.”

“Go across to 120 first,” said the little bloke, pointing to the house. “There’s my wife and the bags. But look!” he added quickly. “You’re not going to charge me a shilling each for the bags.”

“What bags? Where are they?”

“There at the top of the steps.”

“All right, I’ll pull across and look at ‘em.”

The bloke walked across, and the taxi at length curved round after him. The stranger had carried his bags to the foot of the steps: two ordinary-sized gladstones, and one smallish square hat-box. There they stood against the wall. The taxi-driver poked out his head to look at them. He surveyed them steadily. The stranger stood at bay.

“Shilling apiece, them bags,” said the driver laconically.

“Oh no. The tariff is threepence,” cried the stranger.

“Shilling apiece, them bags,” repeated the driver. He was one of the proletariat that has learnt the uselessness of argument.

“That’s not just, the tariff is threepence.”

“All right, if you don’t want to pay the fare, don’t engage the car, that’s all. Them bags is a shilling apiece.”

“Very well, I don’t want to pay so much.”

“Oh, all right. If you don’t, you won’t. But they’ll cost you a shilling apiece on a taxi, an’ there you are.”

“Then I don’t want a taxi.”

“Then why don’t you say so. There’s no harm done. I don’t want to charge you for pulling across here to look at the bags. If you don’t want a taxi, you don’t. I suppose you know your own mind.”

Thus saying he pushed off the brakes and the taxi slowly curved round on the road to resume its previous stand.

The strange little bloke and his wife stood at the foot of the steps beside the bags, looking angry. And then a hansom-cab came clock-clocking slowly along the road, also going to draw up for the dinner hour at the quiet place opposite. But the driver spied the angry couple.

“Want a cab, sir?”

“Yes, but I don’t think you can get the bags on.”

“How many bags?”

“Three. These three,” and he kicked them with his toe, angrily.

The hansom-driver looked down from his Olympus. He was very red-faced, and a little bit humble.

“Them three? Oh yes! Easy! Easy! Get ‘em on easy. Get them on easy, no trouble at all.” And he clambered down from his perch, and resolved into a little red-faced man, rather beery and henpecked-looking. He stood gazing at the bags. On one was printed the name: “R.L. Somers.”

“R.L. SOMERS! All right, you get in, sir and madam. You get in. Where d’you want to go? Station?”

“No. Fifty-one Murdoch Street.”

“All right, all right, I’ll take you. Fairish long way, but we’ll be there under an hour.”

Mr. Somers and his wife got into the cab. The cabby left the doors flung wide open, and piled the three bags there like a tower in front of his two fares. The hat-box was on top, almost touching the brown hairs of the horse’s tail, and perching gingerly.

“If you’ll keep a hand on that, now, to steady it,” said the cabby.

“All right,” said Somers.

The man climbed to his perch, and the hansom and the extraneous tower began to joggle away into the town. The group of workmen were still lying on the grass. But Somers did not care about them. He was safely jogging with his detested baggage to his destination.

“Aren’t they VILE!” said Harriet, his wife.

“It’s God’s Own Country, as they always tell you,” said Somers. “The hansom-man was quite nice.”

“But the taxi-drivers! And the man charged you eight shillings on Saturday for what would be two shillings in London!”

“He rooked me. But there you are, in a free country, it’s the man who makes you pay who is free — free to charge you what he likes, and you’re forced to pay it. That’s what freedom amounts to. They’re free to charge, and you are forced to pay.”

In which state of mind they jogged through the city, catching a glimpse from the top of a hill of the famous harbour spreading out with its many arms and legs. Or at least they saw one bay with warships and steamers lying between the houses and the wooded, bank-like shores, and they saw the centre of the harbour, and the opposite squat cliffs — the whole low wooded table-land reddened with suburbs and interrupted by the pale spaces of the many-lobed harbour. The sky had gone grey, and the low table-land into which the harbour intrudes squatted dark-looking and monotonous and sad, as if lost on the face of the earth: the same Australian atmosphere, even here within the area of huge, restless, modern Sydney, whose million inhabitants seem to slip like fishes from one side of the harbour to another.

Murdoch Street was an old sort of suburb, little squat bungalows with corrugated iron roofs, painted red. Each little bungalow was set in its own hand-breadth of ground, surrounded by a little wooden palisade fence. And there went the long street, like a child’s drawing, the little square bungalows dot-dot-dot, close together and yet apart, like modern democracy, each one fenced round with a square rail fence. The street was wide, and strips of worn grass took the place

of kerb-stones. The stretch of macadam in the middle seemed as forsaken as a desert, as the hansom clock-clicked along it.

Fifty-one had its name painted by the door. Somers had been watching these names. He had passed “Elite” and “Tres Bon” and “The Angels’ Roost” and “The Better ‘Ole’“. He rather hoped for one of the Australian names, Wallamby or Wagga-Wagga. When he had looked at the house and agreed to take it for three months, it had been dusk, and he had not noticed the name. He hoped it would not be U-An-Me, or even Stella Maris.

“Forestin,” he said, reading the flourishing T as an F. “What language do you imagine that is?”

“It’s T, not F,” said Harriet.

“Torestin,” he said, pronouncing it like Russian. “Must be a native word.”

“No,” said Harriet. “It means ‘To rest in’.” She didn’t even laugh at him. He became painfully silent.

Harriet didn’t mind very much. They had been on the move for four months, and she felt if she could but come to anchor somewhere in a corner of her own, she wouldn’t much care where it was, or whether it was called Torestin or Angels Roost or even Tres Bon.

It was, thank heaven, quite a clean little bungalow, with just commonplace furniture, nothing very preposterous. Before Harriet had even taken her hat off she removed four pictures from the wall, and the red plush tablecloth from the table. Somers had disconsolately opened the bags, so she fished out an Indian sarong of purplish shot colour, to try how it would look across the table. But the walls were red, of an awful deep bluey red, that looks so fearful with dark-oak fittings and furniture: or dark-stained jarrah, which amounts to the same thing; and Somers snapped, looking at the purple sarong — a lovely thing in itself:

“Not with red walls.”

“No, I suppose not,” said Harriet, disappointed. “We can easily colour-wash them white — or cream.”

“What, start colour-washing walls?”

“It would only take half a day.”

“That’s what we come to a new land for — to God’s Own Country — to start colour-washing walls in a beastly little suburban bungalow? That we’ve hired for three months and mayn’t live in three weeks!”

“Why not? You must have walls.”

“I suppose you must,” he said, going away to inspect the two little bedrooms, and the kitchen, and the outside. There was a scrap of garden at the back, with a path down the middle, and a fine Australian tree at the end, a tree with pale bark and no leaves, but big tufts of red, spikey flowers. He looked at the flowers in

wonder. They were apparently some sort of bean flower, in sharp tufts, like great red spikes of stiff wisteria, curving upwards, not dangling. They looked handsome against the blue sky: but again, extraneous. More like scarlet cockatoos perched in the bare tree, than natural growing flowers. Queer burning red, and hard red flowers! They call it coral tree.

There was a little round summer-house also, with a flat roof and steps going up. Somers mounted, and found that from the lead-covered roof of the little round place he could look down the middle harbour, and even see the low gateway, the low headlands with the lighthouse, opening to the full Pacific. There was the way out to the open Pacific, the white surf breaking. A tramp steamer was just coming in, under her shaft of black smoke.

But near at hand nothing but bungalows — street after street. This was one of the old-fashioned bits of Sydney. A little further off the streets of proper brick houses clustered. But here on this hill the original streets of bungalow places remained almost untouched, still hinting at the temporary shacks run up in the wilderness.

Somers felt a little uneasy because he could look down into the whole range of his neighbours' gardens and back premises. He tried not to look at them. But Harriet had come climbing after him to survey the world, and she began:

"Isn't it lovely up here! Do you see the harbour? — and the way we came in! Look, look, I remember looking out of the porthole and seeing that lighthouse, just as we came in — and those little brown cliffs. Oh, but it's a wonderful harbour. What it must have been when it was first discovered. And now all these little dog-kennelly houses, and everything. But this next garden is lovely; have you seen the — what are they, the lovely flowers?"

"Dahlias."

"But did ever you see such dahlias! Are you sure they're dahlias? They're like pink chrysanthemums — and like roses — oh, lovely! But all these little dog-kennels — awful pigging suburban place — and sort of lousy. Is this all men can do with a new country? Look at those tin cans!"

"What do you expect them to do. Rome was not built in a day."

"Oh, but they might make it nice. Look at all the little backs: like chicken houses with chicken runs. They call this making a new country, do they?"

"Well, how would you start making a new country yourself?" asked Somers, a little impatiently.

"I wouldn't have towns — and corrugated iron — and millions of little fences — and empty tins."

"No, you'd have old chateaus and Tudor manors."

They went down, hearing a banging at the back door, and seeing a tradesman

with a basket on his arm. And for the rest of the day they were kept busy going to the door to tell the inexhaustible tradespeople that they were now fixed up with grocer and butcher and baker and all the rest. Night came on, and Somers sat on his tub of a summer-house looking at the lights glittering thick in swarms in the various hollows down to the water, and the lighthouses flashing in the distance, and ship lights on the water, and the dark places thinly sprinkled with lights. It wasn't like a town, it was like a whole country, with towns and bays and darkneses. And all lying mysteriously within the Australian underdark, that peculiar lost, weary aloofness of Australia. There was the vast town of Sydney. And it didn't seem to be real, it seemed to be sprinkled on the surface of a darkness into which it never penetrated.

Somers sighed and shivered and went down to the house. It was chilly. Why had he come? Why, oh why? What was he looking for? Reflecting for a moment, he imagined he knew what he had come for. But he wished he had not come to Australia, for all that.

He was a man with an income of four hundred a year, and a writer of poems and essays. In Europe, he had made up his mind that everything was done for, played out, finished, and he must go to a new country. The newest country: young Australia. Now he had tried Western Australia, and had looked at Adelaide and Melbourne. And the vast, uninhabited land frightened him. It seemed so hoary and lost, so unapproachable. The sky was pure, crystal pure and blue, of a lovely pale blue colour: the air was wonderful, new and unbreathed: and there were great distances. But the bush, the grey, charred bush. It scared him. As a poet, he felt himself entitled to all kinds of emotions and sensations which an ordinary man would have repudiated. Therefore he let himself feel all sorts of things about the bush. It was so phantom-like, so ghostly, with its tall pale trees and many dead trees, like corpses, partly charred by bush fires: and then the foliage so dark, like grey-green iron. And then it was so deathly still. Even the few birds seemed to be swamped in silence. Waiting, waiting — the bush seemed to be hoarily waiting. And he could not penetrate into its secret. He couldn't get at it. Nobody could get at it. What was it waiting for?

And then one night at the time of the full moon he walked alone into the bush. A huge electric moon, huge, and the tree-trunks like naked pale aborigines among the dark-soaked foliage, in the moonlight. And not a sign of life — not a vestige.

Yet something. Something big and aware and hidden! He walked on, had walked a mile or so into the bush, and had just come to a clump of tall, nude, dead trees, shining almost phosphorescent with the moon, when the terror of the bush overcame him. He had looked so long at the vivid moon, without thinking.

And now, there was something among the trees, and his hair began to stir with terror, on his head. There was a presence. He looked at the weird, white, dead trees, and into the hollow distances of the bush. Nothing! Nothing at all. He turned to go home. And then immediately the hair on his scalp stirred and went icy cold with terror. What of? He knew quite well it was nothing. He knew quite well. But with his spine cold like ice, and the roots of his hair seeming to freeze, he walked on home, walked firmly and without haste. For he told himself he refused to be afraid, though he admitted the icy sensation of terror. But then to experience terror is not the same thing as to admit fear into the conscious soul. Therefore he refused to be afraid.

But the horrid thing in the bush! He schemed as to what it would be. It must be the spirit of the place. Something fully evoked to-night, perhaps provoked, by that unnatural West-Australian moon. Provoked by the moon, the roused spirit of the bush. He felt it was watching, and waiting. Following with certainty, just behind his back. It might have reached a long black arm and gripped him. But no, it wanted to wait. It was not tired of watching its victim. An alien people — a victim. It was biding its time with a terrible ageless watchfulness, waiting for a far-off end, watching the myriad intruding white men.

This was how Richard Lovat Somers figured it out to himself, when he got back into safety in the scattered township in the clearing on the hill-crest, and could see far off the fume of Perth and Fremantle on the sea-shore, and the tiny sparkling of a farther-off lighthouse on an island. A marvellous night, raving with moonlight — and somebody burning off the bush in a ring of sultry red fire under the moon in the distance, a slow ring of creeping red fire, like some ring of fireflies, upon the far-off darkness of the land's body, under the white blaze of the moon above.

It is always a question whether there is any sense in taking notice of a poet's fine feelings. The poet himself has misgivings about them. Yet a man ought to feel something, at night under such a moon.

Richard S. had never quite got over that glimpse of terror in the Westralian bush. Pure foolishness, of course, but there's no telling where a foolishness may nip you. And, now that night had settled over Sydney, and the town and harbour were sparkling unevenly below, with reddish-seeming sparkles, whilst overhead the marvellous Southern Milky Way was tilting uncomfortably to the south, instead of crossing the zenith; the vast myriads of swarming stars that cluster all along the milky way, in the Southern sky, and the Milky Way itself leaning heavily to the south, so that you feel all on one side if you look at it; the Southern sky at night, with that swarming Milky Way all bushy with stars, and yet with black gaps, holes in the white star-road, while misty blotches of star-

mist float detached, like cloud-vapours, in the side darkness, away from the road; the wonderful Southern night-sky, that makes a man feel so lonely, alien: with Orion standing on his head in the west, and his sword-belt upside down, and his Dog-star prancing in mid-heaven, high above him; and with the Southern Cross insignificantly mixed in with the other stars, democratically inconspicuous; well then, now that night had settled down over Sydney, and all this was happening overhead, for R.L. Somers and a few more people, our poet once more felt scared and anxious. Things seemed so different. Perhaps everything WAS different from all he had known. Perhaps if St. Paul and Hildebrand and Darwin had lived south of the equator, we might have known the world all different, quite different. But it is useless iffing. Sufficient that Somers went indoors into his little bungalow, and found his wife setting the table for supper, with cold meat and salad.

“The only thing that’s really cheap,” said Harriet, “is meat. That huge piece cost two shillings. There’s nothing to do but to become savage and carnivorous — if you can.”

“The kangaroo and the dingo are the largest fauna in Australia,” said Somers. “And the dingo is probably introduced.”

“But it’s very good meat,” said Harriet.

“I know that,” said he.

The hedge between number fifty-one and number fifty was a rather weary hedge with a lot of dead branches in it, on the Somers’ side. Yet it grew thickly, with its dark green, slightly glossy leaves. And it had little pinky-green flowers just coming out: sort of pink pea-flowers. Harriet went nosing round for flowers. Their garden was just trodden grass with the remains of some bushes and a pumpkin vine. So she went picking sprigs from the intervening hedge, trying to smell a bit of scent in them, but failing. At one place the hedge was really thin, and so of course she stood to look through into the next patch.

“Oh, but these dahlias are really marvellous. You MUST come and look,” she sang out to Somers.

“Yes, I know, I’ve seen them,” he replied rather crossly, knowing that the neighbours would hear her. Harriet was so blithely unconscious of people on the other side of hedges. As far as she was concerned, they ought not to be there: even if they were in their own garden.

“You must come and look, though. Lovely! Real plum colour, and the loveliest velvet. You must come.”

He left off sweeping the little yard, which was the job he had set himself for the moment, and walked across the brown grass to where Harriet stood peeping through the rift in the dead hedge, her head tied in a yellow, red-spotted duster.

And of course, as Somers was peeping beside her, the neighbour who belonged to the garden must come backing out of the shed and shoving a motor-cycle down the path, smoking a short little pipe meanwhile. It was the man in blue overalls, the one named Jack. Somers knew him at once, though there were now no blue overalls. And the man was staring hard at the dead place in the hedge, where the faces of Harriet and Richard were seen peeping. Somers then behaved as usual on such occasions, just went stony and stared unseeing in another direction; as if quite unaware that the dahlias had an owner with a motor-cycle: any other owner than God, indeed. Harriet nodded a confused and rather distant "Good morning." The man just touched his cap, very cursory, and nodded, and said good morning across his pipe, with his teeth clenched, and strode round the house with his machine.

"Why must you go yelling for other people to hear you?" said Somers to Harriet.

"Why shouldn't they hear me!" retorted Harriet.

The day was Saturday. Early in the afternoon Harriet went to the little front gate because she heard a band: or the rudiments of a band. Nothing would have kept her indoors when she heard a trumpet, not six wild Somerses. It was some very spanking Boy Scouts marching out. There were only six of them, but the road was hardly big enough to hold them. Harriet leaned on the gate in admiration of their dashing broad hats and thick calves. As she stood there she heard a voice:

"Would you care for a few dahlias? I believe you like them."

She started and turned. Bold as she was in private, when anybody addressed her in the open, any stranger, she wanted to bolt. But it was the fifty neighbour, the female neighbour, a very good-looking young woman, with loose brown hair and brown eyes and a warm complexion. The brown eyes were now alert with question and with offering, and very ready to be huffy, or even nasty, if the offering were refused. Harriet was too well-bred.

"Oh, thank you very much," she said, "but isn't it a pity to cut them?"

"Oh, not at all. My husband will cut you some with pleasure. Jack! — Jack!" she called.

"Hello!" came the masculine voice.

"Will you cut a few dahlias for Mrs — er — I don't know your name" — she flashed a soft, warm, winning look at Harriet, and Harriet flushed slightly. "For the people next door," concluded the offerer.

"Somers — S-O-M-E-R-S." Harriet spelled it out.

"Oh, Somers!" exclaimed the neighbour woman, with a gawky little jerk, like a schoolgirl. "Mr. and Mrs. Somers," she reiterated, with a little laugh.

“That’s it,” said Harriet.

“I saw you come yesterday, and I wondered — we hadn’t heard the name of who was coming.” She was still rather gawky and schoolgirlish in her manner, half shy, half brusque.

“No, I suppose not,” said Harriet, wondering why the girl didn’t tell her own name now.

“That’s your husband who has the motor-bike?” said Harriet.

“Yes, that’s right. That’s him. That’s my husband, Jack, Mr. Callcott.”

“Mr. Callcott, oh!” said Harriet, as if she were mentally abstracted trying to spell the word.

Somers, in the little passage inside his house, heard all this with inward curses. “That’s done it!” he groaned to himself. He’d got neighbours now.

And sure enough, in a few minutes came Harriet’s gushing cries of joy and admiration: “Oh, how lovely! how marvellous! but can they really be dahlias? I’ve never seen such dahlias! they’re really too beautiful! But you shouldn’t give them me, you shouldn’t.”

“Why not?” cried Mrs. Callcott in delight.

“So many. And isn’t it a pity to cut them?” This, rather wistfully, to the masculine silence of Jack.

“Oh no, they want cutting as they come, or the blooms get smaller,” said Jack, masculine and benevolent.

“And scent! — they have scent!” cried Harriet, sniffing at her velvety bouquet.

“They have a little — not much though. Flowers don’t have much scent in Australia,” deprecated Mrs. Callcott.

“Oh, I must show them to my husband,” cried Harriet, half starting from the fence. Then she lifted up her voice:

“Lovat!” she called. “Lovat! You **MUST** come. Come here! Come and see! Lovat!”

“What?”

“Come. Come and see.”

This dragged the bear out of his den: Mr. Somers, twisting sour smiles of graciousness on his pale, bearded face, crossed the verandah and advanced towards the division fence, on the other side of which stood his Australian neighbour in shirt-sleeves, with a comely young wife very near to him, whilst on this side stood Harriet with a bunch of pink and purple ragged dahlias, and an expression of joyous friendliness, which Somers knew to be false, upon her face.

“Look what Mrs. Callcott has given me! Aren’t they exquisite?” cried Harriet, rather exaggerated.

“Awfully nice,” said Somers, bowing slightly to Mrs. Callcott, who looked uneasy, and to Mr. Callcott — otherwise Jack.

“Got here all right in the hansom, then?” said Jack.

Somers laughed — and he could be charming when he laughed — as he met the other man’s eye.

“My wrist got tired, propping up the luggage all the way,” he replied.

“Ay, there’s not much waste ground in a hansom. You can’t run up a spare bed in the parlour, so to speak. But it saved you five bob.”

“Oh, at least ten, between me and a Sydney taxi driver.”

“Yes, they’ll do you down if they can — that is, if you let ‘em. I have a motor-bike, so I can afford to let ‘em get the wind up. Don’t depend on ‘em, you see. That’s the point.”

“It is, I’m afraid.”

The two men looked at each other curiously. And Mrs. Callcott looked at Somers with bright, brown, alert eyes, like a bird that has suddenly caught sight of something. A new sort of bird to her was this little man with a beard. He wasn’t handsome and impressive like his wife. No, he was odd. But then he had a touch of something, the magic of the old world that she had never seen, the old culture, the old glamour. She thought that, because he had a beard and wore a little green house-jacket, he was probably a socialist.

The Somers now had neighbours: somewhat to the chagrin of Richard Lovat. He had come to this new country, the youngest country on the globe, to start a new life and flutter with a new hope. And he started with a rabid desire not to see anything and not to speak one single word to any single body — except Harriet, whom he snapped at hard enough. To be sure, the mornings sometimes won him over. They were so blue and pure: the blue harbour like a lake among the land, so pale blue and heavenly, with its hidden and half-hidden lobes intruding among the low, dark-brown cliffs, and among the dark-looking tree-covered shores, and up to the bright red suburbs. But the land, the ever-dark bush that was allowed to come to the shores of the harbour! It was strange that, with the finest of new air dimming to a lovely pale blue in the distance, and with the loveliest stretches of pale blue water, the tree-covered land should be so gloomy and lightless. It is the sun-refusing leaves of the gum-trees that are like dark, hardened flakes of rubber.

He was not happy, there was no pretending he was. He longed for Europe with hungry longing: Florence, with Giotto’s pale tower: or the Pincio at Rome: or the woods in Berkshire — heavens, the English spring with primroses under the bare hazel bushes, and thatched cottages among plum blossom. He felt he would have given anything on earth to be in England. It was May — end of May — almost

bluebell time, and the green leaves coming out on the hedges. Or the tall corn under the olives in Sicily. Or London Bridge, with all the traffic on the river. Or Bavaria with gentian and yellow globe flowers, and the Alps still icy. Oh God, to be in Europe, lovely, lovely Europe that he had hated so thoroughly and abused so vehemently, saying it was moribund and stale and finished. The fool was himself. He had got out of temper, and so had called Europe moribund: assuming that he himself, of course, was not moribund, but sprightly and chirpy and too vital, as the Americans would say, for Europe. Well, if a man wants to make a fool of himself, it is as well to let him.

Somers wandered disconsolate through the streets of Sydney, forced to admit that there were fine streets, like Birmingham for example; that the parks and the Botanical Gardens were handsome and well-kept; that the harbour, with all the two-decker brown ferry-boats sliding continuously from the Circular Quay, was an extraordinary place. But oh, what did he care about it all! In Martin Place he longed for Westminster, in Sussex Street he almost wept for Covent Garden and St. Martin's Lane, at the Circular Quay he pined for London Bridge. It was all London without being London. Without any of the lovely old glamour that invests London. This London of the Southern hemisphere was all, as it were, made in five minutes, a substitute for the real thing. Just a substitute — as margarine is a substitute for butter. And he went home to the little bungalow bitterer than ever, pining for England.

But if he hated the town so much, why did he stay? Oh, he had a fanciful notion that if he was really to get to know anything at all about a country, he must live for a time in the principal city. So he had condemned himself to three months at least. He told himself to comfort himself that at the end of three months he would take the steamer across the Pacific, homewards, towards Europe. He felt a long navel string fastening him to Europe, and he wanted to go back, to go home. He would stay three months. Three month's penalty for having forsworn Europe. Three months in which to get used to this Land of the Southern Cross. Cross indeed! A new crucifixion. And then away, homewards!

The only time he felt at all happy was when he had reassured himself that by August, he would be taking his luggage on to a steamer. That soothed him.

He understood now that the Romans had preferred death to exile. He could sympathise now with Ovid on the Danube, hungering for Rome and blind to the land around him, blind to the savages. So Somers felt blind to Australia, and blind to the uncouth Australians. To him they were barbarians. The most loutish Neapolitan loafer was nearer to him in pulse than these British Australians with their aggressive familiarity. He surveyed them from an immense distance, with a kind of horror.

Of course he was bound to admit that they ran their city very well, as far as he could see. Everything was very easy, and there was no fuss. Amazing how little fuss and bother there was — on the whole. Nobody seemed to bother, there seemed to be no policemen and no authority, the whole thing went by itself, loose and easy, without any bossing. No real authority — no superior classes — hardly even any boss. And everything rolling along as easily as a full river, to all appearances.

That's where it was. Like a full river of life, made up of drops of water all alike. Europe is really established upon the aristocratic principle. Remove the sense of class distinction, of higher and lower, and you have anarchy in Europe. Only nihilists aim at the removal of all class distinction, in Europe.

But in Australia, it seemed to Somers, the distinction was already gone. There was really no class distinction. There was a difference of money and of "smartness". But nobody felt BETTER than anybody else, or higher; only better-off. And there is all the difference in the world between feeling BETTER than your fellow man, and merely feeling BETTER-OFF.

Now Somers was English by blood and education, and though he had no antecedents whatsoever, yet he felt himself to be one of the RESPONSIBLE members of society, as contrasted with the innumerable IRRESPONSIBLE members. In old, cultured, ethical England this distinction is radical between the responsible members of society and the irresponsible. It is even a categorical distinction. It is a caste distinction, a distinction in the very being. It is the distinction between the proletariat and the ruling classes.

But in Australia nobody is supposed to rule, and nobody does rule, so the distinction falls to the ground. The proletariat appoints men to administer the law, not to rule. These ministers are not really responsible, any more than the housemaid is responsible. The proletariat is all the time responsible, the only source of authority. The will of the people. The ministers are merest instruments.

Somers for the first time felt himself immersed in real democracy — in spite of all disparity in wealth. The instinct of the place was absolutely and flatly democratic, a terre democratic. Demos was here his own master, undisputed, and therefore quite calm about it. No need to get the wind up at all over it; it was a granted condition of Australia, that Demos was his own master.

And this was what Richard Lovat Somers could not stand. You may be the most liberal Englishman, and yet you cannot fail to see the categorical difference between the responsible and the irresponsible classes. You cannot fail to admit the necessity for RULE. Either you admit yourself an anarchist, or you admit the necessity for RULE — in England. The working classes in England feel just the same about it as do the upper classes. Any working man who sincerely feels

himself a responsible member of society feels it his duty to exercise authority in some way or other. And the irresponsible working man likes to feel there is a strong boss at the head, if only so that he can grumble at him satisfactorily. Europe is established on the instinct of authority: "Thou shalt." The only alternative is anarchy.

Somers was a true Englishman, with an Englishman's hatred of anarchy, and an Englishman's instinct for authority. So he felt himself at a discount in Australia. In Australia authority was a dead letter. There was no giving of orders here; or, if orders were given, they would not be received as such. A man in one position might make a suggestion to a man in another position, and this latter might or might not accept the suggestion, according to his disposition. Australia was not yet in a state of anarchy. England had as yet at least nominal authority. But let the authority be removed, and then! For it is notorious, when it comes to constitutions, how much there is in a name.

Was all that stood between Australia and anarchy just a name? — the name of England, Britain, Empire, Viceroy, or Governor General, or Governor? The shadow of the old sceptre, the mere sounding of a name? Was it just the hollow word "Authority", sounding across seven thousand miles of sea, that kept Australia from Anarchy? Australia — Authority — Anarchy: a multiplication of the alpha.

So Richard Lovat cogitated as he roamed about uneasily. Not that he knew all about it. Nobody knows all about it. And those that fancy they know ALMOST all about it are usually most wrong. A man must have SOME ideas about the thing he's up against, otherwise he's a simple wash-out.

But Richard WAS wrong. Given a good temper and a genuinely tolerant nature — both of which the Australians seem to have in a high degree — you can get on for quite a long time without "rule". For quite a long time the thing just goes by itself.

Is it merely running down, however, like a machine running on but gradually running down?

Ah, questions!

CHAPTER 2. NEIGHBOURS.

THE Somers-Callcott acquaintance did not progress very rapidly, after the affair of the dahlias. Mrs. Callcott asked Mrs. Somers across to look at their cottage, and Mrs. Somers went. Then Mrs. Somers asked Mrs. Callcott back again. But both times Mr. Somers managed to be out of the way, and managed to cast an invisible frost over the rencontre. He was not going to be dragged in, no, he was not. He very much wanted to borrow a pair of pincers and a chopper for an hour, to pull out a few nails, and to split his little chunks of kindling that the dealer had sent too thick. And the Callcotts were very ready to lend anything, if they were only asked for it. But no, Richard Lovat wasn't going to ask. Neither would he buy a chopper, because the travelling expenses had reduced him to very low water. He preferred to wrestle with the chunks of jarrah every morning.

Mrs. Somers and Mrs. Callcott continued, however, to have a few friendly words across the fence. Harriet learned that Jack was foreman in a motor-works place, that he had been wounded in the jaw in the war, that the surgeons had not been able to extract the bullet, because there was nothing for it to "back up against" — and so he had carried the chunk of lead in his gizzard for ten months, till suddenly it had rolled into his throat and he had coughed it out. The jeweller had wanted Mrs. Callcott to have it mounted in a brooch or a hatpin. It was a round ball of lead, from a shell, as big as a marble, and weighing three or four ounces. Mrs. Callcott had recoiled from this suggestion, so an elegant little stand had been made, like a little lamp-post on a polished wood base, and the black little globe of lead dangled by a fine chain like an arc-lamp from the top of the toy lamp-post. It was now a mantelpiece ornament.

All this Harriet related to the indignant Lovat, though she wisely suppressed the fact that Mrs. Callcott had suggested that "perhaps Mr. Somers might like to have a look at it."

Lovat was growing more used to Australia — or to the "cottage" in Murdoch Road, and the view of the harbour from the tub-top of his summer-house. You couldn't call that all "Australia" — but then one man can't bite off a continent in a mouthful, and you must start to nibble somewhere. He and Harriet took numerous trips in the ferry steamers to the many nooks and corners of the harbour. One day their ferry steamer bumped into a collier that was heading for the harbour outlet — or rather, their ferry boat headed across the nose of the collier, so the collier bumped into them and had his nose put out of joint. There

was a considerable amount of yelling, but the ferry boat slid flatly away towards Manly, and Harriet's excitement subsided.

It was Sunday, and a lovely sunny day of Australian winter. Manly is the bathing suburb of Sydney — one of them. You pass quite close to the wide harbour gate, The Heads, on the ferry steamer. Then you land on the wharf, and walk up the street, like a bit of Margate with seaside shops and restaurants, till you come out on a promenade at the end, and there is the wide Pacific rolling in on the yellow sand: the wide fierce sea, that makes all the built-over land dwindle into non-existence. At least there was a heavy swell on, so the Pacific belied its name and crushed the earth with its rollers. Perhaps the heavy, earth-despising swell is part of its pacific nature.

Harriet, of course, was enraptured, and declared she could not be happy till she had lived beside the Pacific. They bought food and ate it by the sea. Then Harriet was chilled, so they went to a restaurant for a cup of soup. When they were again in the street Harriet realized that she hadn't got her yellow scarf: her big, silky yellow scarf that was so warm and lovely. She declared she had left it in the eating-house, and they went back at once for it. The girls in the eating-house — the waitresses — said, in their cheeky Cockney Australian that they "hedn't seen it", and that the "next people who kyme arfter must 'ev tyken it".

Anyhow, it was gone — and Harriet furious, feeling as if there had been a thief in the night. In this unhappy state of affairs Somers suggested they should sit on the tram-car and go somewhere. They sat on the tram-car and ran for miles along a coast with ragged bush loused over with thousands of small promiscuous bungalows, built of everything from patchwork of kerosene tin up to fine red brick and stucco, like Margate. Not far off the Pacific boomed. But fifty yards inland started these bits of swamp, and endless promiscuity of "cottages".

The tram took them five or six miles, to the terminus. This was the end of everywhere, with new "stores" — that is, flyblown shops with corrugated iron roofs — and with a tramshelter, and little house-agents' booths plastered with signs — and more "cottages"; that is, bungalows of corrugated iron or brick — and bits of swamp or "lagoon" where the sea had got in and couldn't get out. The happy couple had a drink of sticky aerated waters in one of the "stores", then walked up a wide sand-road dotted on either side with small bungalows, beyond the backs of which lay a whole aura of rusty tin cans chucked over the back fence. They came to the ridge of sand, and again the pure, long-rolling Pacific.

"I love the sea," said Harriet.

"I wish," said Lovat, "it would send a wave about fifty feet high round the whole coast of Australia."

“You are so bad-tempered,” said Harriet. “Why don’t you see the lovely things!”

“I do, by contrast.”

So they sat on the sands, and he peeled pears and buried the peel in the yellow sand. It was winter, and the shore was almost deserted. But the sun was warm as an English May.

Harriet felt she absolutely must live by the sea, so they wandered along a wide, rutted space of deep sand, looking at the “cottages” on either side. They had impossible names. But in themselves, many of them were really nice. Yet there they stood like so many forlorn chicken-houses, each on its own oblong patch of land, with a fence between it and its neighbour. There was something indescribably weary and dreary about it. The very ground the houses stood on seemed weary and drabbed, almost asking for rusty tin cans. And so many pleasant little bungalows set there in an improvised road, wide and weary — and then the effort had lapsed. The tin shacks were almost a relief. They did not call for geraniums and lobelias, as did the pretty Hampstead Garden Suburb “cottages”. And these latter might call, but they called in vain. They got bits of old paper and tins.

Yet Harriet absolutely wanted to live by the sea, so they stopped before each bungalow that was to be let furnished. The estate agents went in for abbreviations. On the boards at the corner of the fences it said either “4 Sale” or “2 Let”. Probably there was a colonial intention of jocularly. But it was almost enough for Somers. He would have died rather than have put himself into one of those cottages.

The road ended on the salt pool where the sea had ebbed in. Across was a state reserve — a bit of aboriginal Australia, with gum trees and empty spaces beyond the flat salt waters. Near at hand a man was working away, silently loading a boat with beach-sand, upon the lagoon. To the right the sea was rolling on the shore, and spurting high on some brown rocks. Two men in bathing suits were running over the spit of sand from the lagoon to the surf, where two women in “waders”, those rubber paddling-drawers into which we bundle our children at the seaside, were paddling along the fringe of the foam. A blond young man wearing a jacket over his bathing suit walked by with two girls. He had huge massive legs, astonishing. And near at hand Somers saw another youth lying on the warm sand-hill in the sun. He had rolled in the dry sand while he was wet, so he was hardly distinguishable. But he lay like an animal on his face in the sun, and again Somers wondered at the thick legs. They seemed to run to leg, these people. Three boys, one a lad of fifteen or so, came out of the warm lagoon in their bathing suits to roll in the sand and play. The big lad crawled on all fours

and the little one rode on his back, and pitched off into the sand. They were extraordinarily like real young animals, mindless as opossums, lunging about.

This was Sunday afternoon. The sun was warm. The lonely man was just pushing off his boat on the lagoon. It sat deep in the water, half full of sand. Somers and Harriet lay on the sand-bank. Strange it was. And it HAD a sort of fascination. Freedom! That's what they always say. "You feel free in Australia." And so you do. There is a great relief in the atmosphere, a relief from tension, from pressure. An absence of control or will or form. The sky is open above you, and the air is open around you. Not the old closing-in of Europe.

But what then? The VACANCY of this freedom is almost terrifying. In the openness and the freedom this new chaos, this litter of bungalows and tin cans scattered for miles and miles, this Englishness all crumbled out into formlessness and chaos. Even the heart of Sydney itself — an imitation of London and New York, without any core or pith of meaning. Business going on full speed: but only because it is the other end of English and American business.

The absence of any inner meaning: and at the same time the great sense of vacant spaces. The sense of irresponsible freedom. The sense of do-as-you-please liberty. And all utterly uninteresting. What is more hopelessly uninteresting than accomplished liberty? Great swarming, teeming Sydney flowing out into these myriads of bungalows, like shallow waters spreading, undyked. And what then? Nothing. No inner life, no high command, no interest in anything, finally.

Somers turned over and shut his eyes. New countries were more problematic than old ones. One loved the sense of release from old pressure and old tight control, from the old world of water-tight compartments. This was Sunday afternoon, but with none of the surfeited dreariness of English Sunday afternoons. It was still a raw loose world. All Sydney would be out by the sea or in the bush, a roving, unbroken world. They all rushed from where they were to somewhere else, on holidays. And to-morrow they'd all be working away, with just as little meaning, working without any meaning, playing without any meaning; and yet quite strenuous at it all. It was just dazing. Even the rush for money had no real pip in it. They really cared very little for the power that money can give. And except for the sense of power, that had no real significance here. When all is said and done, even money is not much good where there is no genuine culture. Money is a means to rising to a higher, subtler, fuller state of consciousness, or nothing. And when you flatly don't want a fuller consciousness, what good is your money to you? Just to chuck about and gamble with. Even money is a European invention — European and American. It has no real magic in Australia.

Poor Richard Lovat wearied himself to death struggling with the problem of himself, and calling it Australia. There was no actual need for him to struggle with Australia: he must have done it in the hedonistic sense, to please himself. But it wore him to rags.

Harriet sat up and began dusting the sand from her coat — Lovat did likewise. Then they rose to be going back to the tram-car. There was a motor-car standing on the sand of the road near the gate of the end house. The end house was called St. Columb, and Somers' heart flew to Cornwall. It was quite a nice little place, standing on a bluff of sand sideways above the lagoon.

"I wouldn't mind that," said Harriet, looking up at St. Columb.

But Somers did not answer. He was shut against any of these humiliating little bungalows. "Love's Harbour" he was just passing by, and it was "4 Sale". It would be. He ploughed grimly through the sand. "Arcady" — "Stella Maris" — "Racketty-Coo."

"I say!" called a voice from behind.

It was Mrs. Callcott running unevenly over the sand after them, the colour high in her cheeks. She wore a pale grey crepe de chine dress and grey suede shoes. Some distance behind her Jack Callcott was following, in his shirt-sleeves.

"Fancy you being here!" gasped Mrs. Callcott, and Harriet was so flustered she could only cry:

"Oh, how do you do!" — and effusively shake hands, as if she were meeting some former acquaintance on Piccadilly. The shaking hands quite put Mrs. Callcott off her track. She felt it almost an affront, and went red. Her husband sauntered up and put his hands in his pockets, to avoid mistakes.

"Ha, what are YOU doing here," he said to the Somers pair. "Wouldn't you like a cup of tea?"

Harriet glanced at Richard Lovat. He was smiling faintly.

"Oh, we should LOVE it," she replied to Mr. Callcott. "But where? — have you got a house here?"

"My sister has the end house," said he.

"Oh, but — will she want us?" cried Harriet, backing out.

The Callcotts stood for a moment silent.

"Yes, if you like to come," said Jack. And it was evident he was aware of Somers' desire to avoid contact.

"Well, I should be awfully grateful," said Harriet. "Wouldn't you, Lovat?"

"Yes," he said, smiling to himself, feeling Jack's manly touch of contempt for all this hedging.

So off they went to "St. Columb". The sister was a brown-eyed Australian

with a decided manner, kindly, but a little suspicious of the two newcomers. Her husband was a young Cornishman, rather stout and short and silent. He had his hair cut round at the back, in a slightly rounded line above a smooth, sunburnt, reddened nape of the neck. Somers found out later that this young Cornishman — his name was Trehwella — had married his brother's widow. Mrs. Callcott supplied Harriet later on with all the information concerning her sister-in-law. The first Trehwella, Alfred John, had died two years ago, leaving his wife with a neat sum of money and this house, "St. Columb", and also with a little girl named Gladys, who came running in shaking her long brown hair just after the Somers appeared. So the present Trehwellas were a newly-married couple. The present husband, William James, went round in a strange, silent fashion helping his wife Rose to prepare tea.

The bungalow was pleasant, a large room facing the sea, with verandahs and other little rooms opening off. There were many family photographs, and a framed medal and ribbon and letter praising the first Trehwella. Mrs. Trehwella was alert and watchful, and decided to be genteel. So the party sat around in the basket chairs and on the settles under the windows, instead of sitting at table for tea. And William James silently but willingly carried round the bread and butter and the cakes.

He was a queer young man, with an Irish-looking face, rather pale, an odd kind of humour in his grey eye and in the corners of his pursed mouth. But he spoke never a word. It was hard to decide his age — probably about thirty — a little younger than his wife. He seemed silently pleased about something — perhaps his marriage. Somers noticed that the whites of his eyes were rather bloodshot. He had been in Australia since he was a boy of fifteen — he had come with his brother — from St. Columb, near Newquay — St. Columb Major. So much Somers elicited.

"Well, how do you like Sydney?" came the inevitable question from Mrs. Trehwella.

"The harbour, I think, is wonderful," came Somers' invariable answer.

"It is a fine harbour, isn't it. And Sydney is a fine town. Oh yes, I've lived there all my life."

The conversation languished. Callcott was silent, and William James seemed as if he were never anything else. Even the little girl fluttered into a whisper and went still again. Everybody was a little embarrassed, rather stiff: too genteel, or not genteel enough. And the men seemed absolute logs.

"You don't think much of Australia, then?" said Jack to Somers.

"Why," answered the latter, "how am I to judge! I haven't even seen the fringe of it."

“Oh, it’s mostly fringe,” said Jack. “But it hasn’t made a good impression on you?”

“I don’t know yet. My feelings are mixed. The COUNTRY seems to me to have a fascination — strange — .”

“But you don’t take to the Aussies, at first sight. Bit of a collision between their aura and yours,” smiled Jack.

“Maybe that’s what it is,” said Somers. “That’s a useful way of putting it. I can’t help my aura colliding, can I?”

“Of course you can’t. And if it’s a tender sort of aura, of course it feels the bump.”

“Oh, don’t talk about it,” cried Harriet. “He must be just one big bump, by the way he grumbles.”

They all laughed — perhaps a trifle uneasily.

“I thought so,” said Jack. “What made you come here? Thought you’d like to write about it?”

“I thought I might like to live here — and write here,” replied Somers smiling.

“Write about the bushrangers and the heroine lost in the bush and wandering into a camp of bullies?” said Jack.

“Maybe,” said Somers.

“Do you mind if I ask you what sort of things you do write?” said Jack, with some delicacy.

“Oh — poetry — essays.”

“Essays about what?”

“Oh — rubbish mostly.”

There was a moment’s pause.

“Oh, Lovat, don’t be so silly. You KNOW you don’t think your essays rubbish,” put in Harriet. “They’re about life, and democracy, and equality, and all that sort of thing,” Harriet explained.

“Oh, yes?” said Jack. “I’d like to read some.”

“Well,” hesitated Harriet, “He can lend you a volume — you’ve got some with you, haven’t you?” she added, turning to Somers.

“I’ve got one,” admitted that individual, looking daggers at her.

“Well, you’ll lend it to Mr. Callcott, won’t you?”

“If he wants it. But it will only bore him.”

“I might rise up to it, you know,” said Jack laconically, “if I bring all my mental weight to bear on it.”

Somers flushed, and laughed at the contradiction in metaphor.

“It’s not the loftiness,” he said, rather amused. “It’s that people just don’t care to hear some things.”

“Well, let me try,” said Jack. “We’re a new country — and we’re out to learn.”

“That’s exactly what we’re not,” broke out William James, with a Cornish accent and a blurt of a laugh. “We’re out to show to everybody that we know everything there is to be known.”

“That’s some of us,” said Jack.

“And most of us,” said William James.

“Have it your own way, boy. But let us speak for the minority. And there’s a minority that knows we’ve got to learn a big lesson — and that’s willing to learn it.”

Again there was silence. The women seemed almost effaced.

“There’s one thing,” thought Somers to himself, “when these Colonials DO speak seriously, they speak like men, not like babies.” He looked up at Jack.

“It’s the world that’s got to learn a lesson,” he said. “Not only Australia.” His tone was acid and sinister. And he looked with his hard, pale blue eyes at Callcott. Callcott’s eyes, brown and less concentrated, less hard, looked back curiously at the other man.

“Possibly it is,” he said. “But my job is Australia.”

Somers watched him. Callcott had a pale, clean-shaven, lean face with close-shut lips. But his lips weren’t bitten in until they just formed a slit, as they so often are in Colonials. And his eyes had a touch of mystery, of aboriginal darkness.

“Do you care very much for Australia?” said Somers, a little wistfully.

“I believe I do,” said Jack. “But if I was out of a job like plenty of other unlucky diggers, I suppose I should care more about getting a job.”

“But you care very much about your Australia?”

“My Australia? Yes, I own about seven acres of it, all told. I suppose I care very much about that. I pay my taxes on it, all right.”

“No, but the future of Australia.”

“You’ll never see me on a platform shouting about it.”

The Lovats said they must be going.

“If you like to crowd in,” said Jack, “we can take you in the car. We can squeeze in Mr. Somers in front, and there’ll be plenty of room for the others at the back, if Gladys sits on her Dad’s knee.”

This time Somers accepted at once. He felt the halting refusals were becoming ridiculous.

They left at sunset. The west, over the land, was a clear gush of light up from the departed sun. The east, over the Pacific, was a tall concave of rose-coloured clouds, a marvellous high apse. Now the bush had gone dark and spectral again,

on the right hand. You might still imagine inhuman presences moving among the gum trees. And from time to time, on the left hand, they caught sight of the long green rollers of the Pacific, with the star-white foam, and behind that the dusk-green sea glimmered over with smoky rose, reflected from the eastern horizon where the bank of flesh-rose colour and pure smoke-blue lingered a long time, like magic, as if the sky's rim were cooling down. It seemed to Somers characteristic of Australia, this far-off flesh-rose bank of colour on the sky's horizon, so tender and unvisited, topped with the smoky, beautiful blueness. And then the thickness of the night's stars overhead, and one star very brave in the last effulgence of sunset, westward over the continent. As soon as night came, all the raggletaggle of amorphous white settlements disappeared, and the continent of the Kangaroo reassumed its strange, unvisited glamour, a kind of virgin sensual aloofness.

Somers sat in front between Jack and Victoria Callcott, because he was so slight. He made himself as small as he could, like the ham in the sandwich. When he looked her way, he found Victoria watching him under her lashes, and as she met his eyes, she flared into a smile that filled him with wonder. She had such a charming, innocent look, like an innocent girl, naive and a little gawky. Yet the strange exposed smile she gave him in the dusk. It puzzled him to know what to make of it. Like an offering — and yet innocent. Perhaps like the sacred prostitutes of the temple: acknowledgement of the sacredness of the act. He chose not to think of it, and stared away across the bonnet of the car at the fading land.

Queer, thought Somers, this girl at once sees perhaps the most real me, and most women take me for something I am not at all. Queer to be recognized at once, as if one were of the same family.

He had to admit that he was flattered also. She seemed to see the wonder in him. And she had none of the European women's desire to make a conquest of him, none of that feminine rapacity which is so hateful in the old world. She seemed like an old Greek girl bringing an offering to the altar of the mystic Bacchus. The offering of herself.

Her husband sat steering the car and smoking his short pipe in silence. He seemed to have something to think about. At least he had considerable power of silence, a silence which made itself felt. Perhaps he knew his wife much better than anyone else. At any rate he did not feel it necessary to keep an eye on her. If she liked to look at Somers with a strange, exposed smile, that was her affair. She could do as she liked in that direction, so far as he, Jack Callcott, was concerned. She was his wife: she knew it, and he knew it. And it was quite established and final. So long as she did not betray what was between her and

him, as husband and wife, she could do as she liked with the rest of herself. And he could, quite rightly, trust her to be faithful to that undefinable relation which subsisted between them as man and wife. He didn't pretend and didn't want to occupy the whole field of her consciousness.

And in just the same way, that bond which connected himself with her, he would always keep unbroken for his part. But that did not mean that he was sworn body and soul to his wife. Oh no. There was a good deal of him which did not come into the marriage bond, and with all this part of himself he was free to make the best he could, according to his own idea. He loved her, quite sincerely, for her naive sophisticated innocence which allowed him to be unknown to her, except in so far as they were truly and intimately related. It was the innocence which has been through the fire, and knows its own limitations. In the same way he quite consciously chose not to know anything more about her than just so much as entered into the absolute relationship between them. He quite definitely did not want to absorb her, or to occupy the whole field of her nature. He would trust her to go her own way, only keeping her to the pledge that was between them. What this pledge consisted in he did not try to define. It was something indefinite: the field of contact between their two personalities. Where their two personalities met and joined, they were one, and pledged to permanent fidelity. But that part in each of them which did not belong to the other was free from all enquiry or even from knowledge. Each silently consented to leave the other in large part unknown, unknown in word and deed and very being. They didn't WANT to know — too much knowledge would be like shackles.

Such marriage is established on a very subtle sense of honour and of individual integrity. It seems as if each race and continent has its own marriage instinct. And the instinct that develops in Australia will certainly not be the same as the instinct that develops in America. And each people must follow its own instinct, if it is to live, not matter whether the marriage law be universal or not.

The Callcotts had come to no agreement, verbally, as to their marriage. They had not thought it out. They were Australians, of strongly, subtly-developed desire for freedom, and with considerable indifference to old formulae and the conventions based thereon. So they took their stand instinctively and calmly. Jack had defined his stand as far as he found necessary. If his wife was good to him and satisfied him in so far as HE went, then he was pledged to trust her to do as she liked outside his ken, outside his range. He would make a cage for nobody. This he openly propounded to his mates: to William James, for example, and later to Somers. William James said yes, but thought the more. Somers was frankly disturbed, not liking the thought of applying the same prescription to his own marriage.

They put down the Trehellas at their house in North Sydney, and went on to Murdoch Road over the ferry. Jack had still to take the car down to the garage in town. Victoria said she would prepare the high tea which takes the place of dinner and supper in Australia, against his return. So Harriet boldly invited them to this high tea — a real substantial meal in her own house. Victoria was to help her prepare it, and Jack was to come straight back to Torestin. Victoria was as pleased as a lamb with two tails over this arrangement, and went in to change her dress.

Somers knew why Harriet had launched this invitation. It was because she had had a wonderfully successful cooking morning. Like plenty of other women Harriet had learned to cook during war-time, and now she loved it, once in a while. This had been one of the whiles. Somers had stoked the excellent little stove, and peeled the apples and potatoes and onions and pumpkin, and looked after the meat and the sauces, while Harriet had lashed out in pies and tarts and little cakes and baked custard. She now surveyed her prize Beeton shelf with love, and began to whisk up a mayonnaise for potato salad.

Victoria appeared in a pale gauze dress of pale pink with little dabs of gold — a sort of tea-party dress — and with her brown hair loosely knotted behind, and with innocent sophistication pulled a bit untidy over her womanly forehead, she looked winsome. Her colour was very warm, and she was gawkily excited. Harriet put on an old yellow silk frock, and Somers changed into a dark suit. For tea there was cold roast pork with first-class brown crackling on it, and potato salad, beetroot, and lettuce, and apple chutney; then a dressed lobster — or crayfish, very good, pink and white; and then apple pie and custard-tarts and cakes and a dish of apples and passion fruits and oranges, a pine-apple and some bananas: and of course big cups of tea, breakfast-cups.

Victoria and Harriet were delighted, Somers juggled with colour-schemes on the table, the one central room in the bungalow was brilliantly lighted, and the kettle sang on the hearth. After months of India, with all the Indian decorum and two silent men-servants waiting at table: and after the old-fashioned gentility of the P. and O. steamer, Somers and Harriet felt this show rather a come-down maybe, but still good fun. Victoria felt it was almost “society”. They waited for Jack.

Jack arrived bending forward rather in the doorway, a watchful look on his pale, clean-shaven face, and that atmosphere of silence about him which is characteristic of many Australians.

“Kept you waiting?” he asked.

“We were just ready for you,” said Harriet.

Jack had to carve the meat, because Somers was so bad at it and didn’t like

doing it. Harriet poured the great cups of tea. Callcott looked with a quick eye round the table to see exactly what he wanted to eat, and Victoria peeped through her lashes to see exactly how Harriet behaved. As Harriet always behaved in the vaguest manner possible, and ate her sweets with her fish-fork and her soup with her pudding spoon, a study of her table manners was not particularly profitable.

To Somers it was like being back twenty-five years, back in an English farmhouse in the Midlands, at Sunday tea. He had gone a long way from the English Midlands, and got out of the way of them. Only to find them here again, with hardly a change. To Harriet it was all novel and fun. But Richard Lovat felt vaguely depressed.

The pleasant heartiness of the life he had known as a boy now depressed him. He hated the promiscuous mixing in of all the company, the lack of reserve in manner. He had preferred India for that: the gulf between the native servants and the whites kept up a sort of tone. He had learned to be separate, to talk across a slight distance. And that was an immense relief to him, because it was really more his nature. Now he found himself soused again in the old familiar jolly and cosy, spirit of his childhood and boyhood, and he was depressed.

Jack, of course, had a certain reserve. But of a different sort. Not a physical reserve. He did keep his coat on, but he might as well have sat there in his shirt-sleeves. His very silence was, so to speak, in its shirt-sleeves.

There was a curious battle in silence going on between the two men. To Harriet, all this familiar shirt-sleeve business was just fun, the charades. In her most gushing genial moments she was still only masquerading inside her class — the “upper” class of Europe. But Somers was of the people himself, and he had that alert INSTINCT of the common people, the instinctive knowledge of what his neighbour was wanting and thinking, and the instinctive necessity to answer. With the other classes, there is a certain definite breach between individual and individual, and not much goes across except what is intended to go across. But with the common people, and with most Australians, there is no breach. The communication is silent and involuntary, the give and take flows like waves from person to person, and each one knows: unless he is foiled by speech. Each one knows in silence, reciprocates in silence, and the talk as a rule just babbles on, on the surface. This is the common people among themselves. But there is this difference in Australia. Each individual seems to feel himself pledged to put himself aside, to keep himself at least half out of count. The whole geniality is based on a sort of code of “You put yourself aside, and I’ll put myself aside.” This is done with a watchful will: a sort of duel. And above this, a great geniality. But the continual holding most of himself aside, out of count,

makes a man go blank in his withheld self. And that, too, is puzzling.

Probably this is more true of the men than of the women. Probably women change less, from land to land, play fewer “code” tricks with themselves. At any rate, Harriet and Victoria got on like a house on fire, and as they were both beautiful women, and both looking well as they talked, everything seemed splendid. But Victoria was really paying just a wee bit of homage all the time, homage to the superior class.

As for the two men: Somers SEEMED a gentleman, and Jack didn’t want to be a gentleman. Somers SEEMED a real gentleman. And yet Jack recognized in him at once the intuitive response which only subsists, normally, between members of the same class: between the common people. Perhaps the best of the upper classes have the same intuitive understanding of their fellow-man: but there is always a certain reserve in the response, a preference for the non-intuitive forms of communication, for deliberate speech. What is not said is supposed not to exist: that is almost code of honour with the other classes. With the true common people, only that which is NOT said is of any vital significance.

Which brings us back to Jack and Somers. The one thing Somers had kept, and which he possessed in a very high degree, was the power of intuitive communication with others. Much as he wanted to be alone, to stand clear from the weary business of unanimity with everybody, he had never chosen really to suspend this power of intuitive response: not till he was personally offended, and then it switched off and became a blank wall. But the smallest act of real kindness would call it back to life again.

Jack had been generous, and Somers liked him. Therefore he could not withhold his soul from responding to him, in a measure. And Jack, what did he want? He saw this other little fellow, a gentleman, apparently, and yet different, not exactly a gentleman. And he wanted to know him, to talk to him. He wanted to get at the bottom of him. For there was something about Somers — he might be a German, he might be a bolshevist, he might be anything, and he MUST be something, because he was different, a gentleman and not a gentleman. He was different because, when he looked at you, he knew you more or less in your own terms, not as an outsider. He looked at you as if he were one of your own sort. He answered you intuitively as if he were one of your own sort. And yet he had the speech and the clear definiteness of a gentleman. Neither one thing nor the other. And he seemed to know a lot, Jack was sure that Somers knew a lot, and could tell him a lot, if he would but let it out.

If he had been just a gentleman, of course, Jack would never have thought of wanting him to open out. Because a gentleman has nothing to open towards a

man of the people. He can only talk, and the working man can only listen across a distance. But seeing that this little fellow was born a gentleman and not a gentleman; seeing he was just like one of yourselves, and yet had all the other qualities of a gentleman: why, you might just as well get the secret out of him.

Somers knew the attitude, and was not going to be drawn. He talked freely and pleasantly enough — but never as Jack wanted. He knew well enough what Jack wanted: which was that they should talk together as man to man — as pals, you know, with a little difference. But Somers would never be pals with any man. It wasn't in his nature. He talked pleasantly and familiarly — fascinating to Victoria, who sat with her brown eyes watching him, while she clung to Jack's arm on the sofa. When Somers was talking and telling, it was fascinating, and his quick, mobile face changed and seemed full of magic. Perhaps it was difficult to locate any definite SOMERS, any one individual in all this ripple of animation and communication. The man himself seemed lost in the bright aura of his rapid consciousness. This fascinated Victoria: she of course imagined some sort of God in the fiery bush. But Jack was mistrustful. He mistrusted all this bright quickness. If there was an individual inside the brightly-burning bush of consciousness, let him come out, man to man. Even if it was a sort of God in the bush, let him come out, man to man. Otherwise let him be considered a sort of mountebank, a show-man, too clever by half.

Somers knew pretty well Jack's estimation of him. Jack, sitting there smoking his little short pipe, with his lovely wife in her pink georgette frock hanging on to his side, and the watchful look on his face, was the manly man, the consciously manly man. And he had just a bit of contempt for the brilliant little fellow opposite, and he felt just a bit uneasy because the same little fellow laughed at his "manliness", knowing it didn't go right through. It takes more than "manliness" to make a man.

Somers' very brilliance had an overtone of contempt in it, for the other man. The women, of course, not demanding any orthodox "manliness", didn't mind the knock at Jack's particular sort. And to them Somers' chief fascination lay in the fact that he was never "pals". They were too deeply women to care for the sham of pals.

So Jack went home after a whisky and soda with his nose a little bit out of joint. The little man was never going to be pals, that was the first fact to be digested. And he couldn't be despised as a softy, he was too keen; he just laughed at the other man's attempt at despising him. Yet Jack did want to get at him, somehow or other.

CHAPTER 3. LARBOARD WATCH AHOY!

“What do you think of things in general?” Callcott asked of Somers one evening, a fortnight or so after their first encounter. They were getting used to one another: and they liked one another, in a separated sort of way. When neither of them was on the warpath, they were quite happy together. They played chess together now and then, a wild and haphazard game. Somers invented quite brilliant attacks, and rushed in recklessly, occasionally wiping Jack off the board in a quarter of an hour. But he was very careless of his defence. The other man played at this. To give Callcott justice, he was more accustomed to draughts than to chess, and Somers had never played draughts, not to remember. So Jack played a draughts game, aiming at seizing odd pieces. It wasn't Somers' idea of chess, so he wouldn't take the trouble to defend himself. His men fell to this ambush, and he lost the game. Because at the end, when he had only one or two pieces to attack, Jack was very clever at cornering, having the draughts moves off by heart.

“But it isn't chess,” protested Somers.

“You've lost, haven't you?” said Jack.

“Yes. And I shall always lose that way. I can't piggle with those draughtsmen dodges.”

“Ah well, if I can win that way, I have to do it. I don't know the game as well as you do,” said Jack. And there was a quiet sense of victory, “done you down”, in his tones. Somers required all his dignity not to become angry. But he shrugged his shoulders.

Sometimes, too, if he suggested a game, Callcott would object that he had something he must do. Lovat took the slight rebuff without troubling. Then an hour or an hour and a half later, Callcott would come tapping at the door, and would enter saying:

“Well, if you are ready for a game.”

And Lovat would unsuspectingly acquiesce. But on these occasions Jack had been silently, secretly accumulating his forces; there was a silence, almost a stealth in his game. And at the same time his bearing was soft, as it were submissive, and Somers was put quite off his guard. He began to play with his usual freedom. And then Jack wiped the floor with his little neighbour: simply wiped the floor with him, and left him gasping. One, two, three games — it was the same every time.

“But I can’t see the board,” cried Somers, startled. “I can hardly distinguish black from white.”

He was really distressed. It was true what he said. He was as if stupefied, as if some drug had been injected straight into his brain. For his life he could not gather his consciousness together — not till he realised the state he was in. And then he refused to try. Jack gave a quiet little laugh. There was on his face a subtle little smile of satisfaction. He had done his high-flying opponent down. He was the better man.

After the first evening that this had taken place, Somers was much more wary of his neighbour, much less ready to open towards him than he had been. HE NEVER AGAIN INVITED JACK TO A GAME OF CHESS. And when Callcott suggested a game, Somers played, but coldly, without the recklessness and the laughter which were the chief charm of his game. And Jack was once more snubbed, put back into second place. Then once he was reduced, Somers began to relent, and the old guerilla warfare started again.

The moment Somers heard this question of Jack’s: “What do you think of things in general?” — he went on his guard.

“The man is trying to draw me, to fool me,” he said to himself. He knew by a certain quiet, almost sly intention in Jack’s voice, and a certain deference in his bearing. It was this false deference he was most wary of. This was the Judas approach.

“How in general?” he asked. “Do you mean the cosmos?”

“No,” said Jack, foiled in his first move. He had been through the Australian high-school course, and was accustomed to think for himself. Over a great field he was quite indifferent to thought, and hostile to consciousness. It seemed to him more manly to be unconscious, even blank, to most of the great questions. But on his own subjects, Australian politics, Japan, and machinery, he thought straight and manly enough. And when he met a man whose being puzzled him, he wanted to get at the bottom of that, too. He looked up at Somers with a searching, penetrating, inimical look, that he tried to cover with an appearance of false deference. For he was always aware of the big empty spaces of his own consciousness; like his country, a vast empty “desert” at the centre of him.

“No,” he repeated. “I mean the world — economics and politics. The welfare of the world.”

“It’s no good asking me,” said Somers. “Since the war burst my bubble of humanity I’m a pessimist, a black pessimist about the present human world.”

“You think it’s going to the bad?” said Jack, still drawing him with the same appearance of deference, of wanting to hear.

“Yes, I do. Faster or slower. Probably I shall never see any great change in my

lifetime, but the tendency is all downhill, in my opinion. But then I'm a pessimist, so you needn't bother about my opinion."

Somers wanted to let it all go at that. But Callcott persisted.

"Do you think there'll be more wars? Do you think Germany will be in a position to fight again very soon?"

"Bah, you bolster up an old bogey out here. Germany is the bogey of yesterday, not of to-morrow."

"She frightened us out of our sleep before," said Jack, resentful.

"And now, for the time being, she's done. As a war-machine she's done, and done for ever. So much scrap-iron, her iron fist."

"You think so?" said Jack, with all the animosity of a returned hero who wants to think his old enemy the one and only bugbear, and who feels quite injured if you tell him there's no more point in his old hate.

"That's my opinion. Of course I may be wrong."

"Yes, you may," said Jack.

"Sure," said Somers. And there was silence. This time Somers smiled a little to himself.

"And what do you consider, then, is the bogey of to-morrow?" asked Jack at length, in a rather small, unwilling voice.

"I don't really know. What should you say?"

"Me? I wanted to hear what you have to say."

"And I'd rather hear what you have to say," laughed Somers.

There was a pause. Jack seemed to be pondering. At last he came out with his bluff, manly Australian self.

"If you ask me," he said, "I should say that Labour is the bogey you speak of."

Again Somers knew that this was a draw. "He wants to find out if I'm socialist or anti," he thought to himself.

"You think Labour is a menace to society?" he returned.

"Well," Jack hedged. "I won't say that Labour is the menace, exactly. Perhaps the state of affairs forces Labour to be the menace."

"Oh, quite. But what's the state of affairs?"

"That's what nobody seems to know."

"So it's quite safe to lay the blame on," laughed Somers. He looked with real dislike at the other man, who sat silent and piqued and rather diminished: "Coming here just to draw me and get to know what's inside me!" he said to himself angrily. And he would carry the conversation no further. He would not even offer Jack a whisky and soda. "No," he thought to himself. "If he trespasses on my hospitality, coming creeping in here, into my house, just to draw me and get the better of me, underhandedly, then I'll pour no drink for him. He can go

back to where he came from.” But Somers was mistaken. He only didn’t understand Jack’s way of leaving seven-tenths of himself out of any intercourse. Richard wanted the whole man there, openly. And Jack wanted his own way, of seven-tenths left out.

So that after a while Jack rose slowly, saying:

“Well, I’ll be turning in. It’s work to-morrow for some of us.”

“If we’re lucky enough to have jobs,” laughed Somers.

“Or luckier still, to have the money so that we don’t need a job,” returned Jack.

“Think how bored most folks would be on a little money and no settled occupation,” said Somers.

“Yes, I might be myself,” said Jack, honestly admitting it, and at the same time slightly despising the man who had no job, and therefore no significance in life.

“Why, of course.”

When Callcott came over to Torestin, either Victoria came with him, or she invited Harriet across to Wyewurk. Wyewurk was the name of Jack’s bungalow. It had been built by a man who had inherited from an aunt a modest income, and who had written thus permanently his retort against society on his door.

“Wyewurk?” said Jack. “Because you’ve jolly well got to.”

The neighbours nearly always spoke of their respective homes by their elegant names. “Won’t Mrs. Somers go across to Wyewurk, Vicky said. She’s making a blouse or something, sewing some old bits of rag together — or new bits — and I expect she’ll need a pageful of advice about it.” This was what Jack had said. Harriet had gone with apparent alacrity, but with real resentment. She had never in all her life had “neighbours”, and she didn’t know what neighbouring really meant. She didn’t care for it, on trial. Not after she and Victoria had said and heard most of the things they wanted to say and hear. But they liked each other also. And though Victoria could be a terribly venomous little cat, once she unsheathed her claws and became rather “common”, still, so long as her claws were sheathed her paws were quite velvety and pretty, she was winsome and charming to Harriet, a bit deferential before her, which flattered the other woman. And then, lastly, Victoria had quite a decent piano, and played nicely, whereas Harriet had a good voice, and played badly. So that often, as the two men played chess or had one of their famous encounters, they would hear Harriet’s strong, clear voice singing Schubert or Schumann or French or English folk songs, whilst Victoria played. And both women were happy, because though Victoria was fond of music and had an instinct for it, her knowledge of songs was slight, and to be learning these old English and old French melodies,

as well as the German and the Italian songs, was a real adventure and a pleasure to her.

They were still singing when Jack returned.

“Still at it!” he said manfully, from the background chewing his little pipe.

Harriet looked round. She was just finishing the joyous moan of *Plaisir d’amour*, a song she loved because it tickled her so. “*Dure toute la vie — i-i — ie — i — e*,” she sang the concluding words at him, laughing in his face.

“You’re back early,” she said.

“Felt a mental twilight coming on,” he said, “so thought we’d better close down for the night.”

Harriet divined that, to use her expression, Somers had been “disagreeable to him”.

“Don’t you sing?” she cried.

“Me! Have you ever heard a cow at a gate when she wants to come in and be milked?”

“Oh, he does!” cried Victoria. “He sang a duet at the Harbour Lights Concert.”

“There!” cried Harriet. “How exciting! What duet did he sing?”

“Larboard Watch ahoy!”

“Oh! Oh! I know that,” cried Harriet remembering a farmer friend of Somers’, who had initiated her into the thrilling harmony, down in Cornwall.

“There wasn’t a soul left in the hall, when we’d finished, except Victoria and the other chap’s wife,” said Jack.

“Oh, what a fib. They applauded like anything, and made you give an encore.”

“Ay, and we didn’t know another bally duet between us, so we had to sing Larboard Watch over again. It was Larboard Alarm Clock by the time we got to the end of it, it went off with such a rattle.”

“Oh, do let us sing it,” said Harriet. “You must help me when I go wrong, because I don’t know it well.”

“What part do you want to sing?” said Jack.

“Oh, I sing the first part.”

“Nay,” said Jack. “I sing that part myself. I’m a high tenor, I am, once I get the wind up.”

“I couldn’t possibly sing the alto,” said Harriet.

“Oh, Jack, do sing the alto,” said Victoria. “Go on, do! I’ll help you.”

“Oh well, if you’ll go bail for me, I don’t care what I do,” said Jack.

And very shortly Somers heard a gorgeous uproar in Wyewurk. Harriet breaking down occasionally and being picked up. She insisted on keeping on till she had it perfect, and the other two banged and warbled away with no signs of fatigue. So that they were still hailing the Larboard Watch Ahoy when the clock

struck eleven.

Then when silence did ensue for a moment, Mrs. Callcott came flying over to Torestin.

“Oh, Mr. Somers, won’t you come and have a drink with Jack? Mrs. Somers is having a glass of hop bitters.”

When Somers entered the living room of Wyewurk, Jack looked up at him with a smile and a glow in his dark eyes, almost like love.

“Beer?” he said.

“What’s the alternative?”

“Nothing but gas-water.”

“Then beer.”

Harriet and Victoria were still at the piano, excitedly talking songs. Harriet was teaching Victoria to pronounce the words of a Schubert song: for there was still one person in the world unacquainted with: “Du bist wie eine Blume.” And Victoria was singing it in a wavering, shy little voice.

“Let’s drink our beer by the kitchen fire,” said Jack. “Then we shall be able to hear ourselves speak, which is more than we can do in this aviary.”

Somers solemnly followed into the tiny kitchen, and they sat in front of the still hot stove.

“The women will keep up the throat-stretching for quite a time yet,” said Jack.

“If we let them. It’s getting late.”

“Oh, I’ve just started my second awakening — feel as sharp as a new tin-tack.”

“Talking about pessimism,” he resumed after a pause. “There’s some of us here that feels things are pretty shaky, you know.” He spoke in a subdued, important sort of voice.

“What is shaky — Australian finance?”

“Ay, Australian everything.”

“Well, it’s pretty much the same in every country. Where there’s such a lot of black smoke there’s not a very big fire. The world’s been going to the dogs ever since it started to toddle, apparently.”

“Ay, I suppose it has. But it’ll get there one day. At least Australia will.”

“What kind of dogs?”

“Maybe financial smash, and then hell to pay all round. Maybe, you know. We’ve got to think about it.”

Somers watched him for some moments with serious eyes. Jack seemed as if he were a little bit drunk. Yet he had only drunk a glass of lager beer. He wasn’t drunk. But his face had changed, it had a kind of eagerness, and his eyes glowed big. Strange, he seemed, as if in a slight ecstasy.

“It may be,” said Somers slowly. “I am neither a financier nor a politician. It seems as if the next thing to come a cropper were capital: now there are no more kings to speak of. It may be the middle classes are coming smash — which is the same thing as finance — as capital. But also it may not be. I’ve given up trying to know.”

“What will be will be, eh,” said Jack with a smile.

“I suppose so, in this matter.”

“Ay, but, look here, I believe it’s right what you say. The middle classes ARE coming down. What do they sit on? — they sit on money, on capital. And this country is as good as bankrupt, so then what have they left to stand on?”

“They say most countries are really bankrupt. But if they agree among themselves to carry on, the word doesn’t amount to much.”

“Oh, but it does. It amounts to a hell of a lot, here in this country. If it ever came to the push, and the state was bankrupt, there’d be no holding New South Wales in.”

“The state never will be bankrupt.”

“Won’t it? Won’t there be a financial smash, a proper cave-in, before we’re much older? Won’t there? We’ll see. But look here, do you care if there is?”

“I don’t know what it means, so I can’t say. Theoretically I don’t mind a bit if international finance goes bust: if it can go bust.”

“Never mind about theoretically. You’d like to see the power of money, the power of capital, BROKE. Would you or wouldn’t you?”

Somers watched the excited, handsome face opposite him, and answered slowly:

“Theoretically, yes. Actually, I really don’t know.”

“Oh to hell with your theoretically. Drown it. Speak like a man with some feeling in your guts. You either would or wouldn’t. Don’t leave your shirt-tail hanging out, with a theoretically. Would you or wouldn’t you?”

Somers laughed.

“Why, yes, I would,” he said, “and be damned to everything.”

“Shake,” cried Jack, stretching over. And he took Somers’ small hand between both his own. “I knew,” he said in a broken voice, “that we was mates.”

Somers was rather bewildered.

“But you know,” he said, “I never take any part in politics at all. They aren’t my affair.”

“They’re not! They’re not! You’re quite right. You’re quite right, you are. You’re a damned sight too good to be mixing up in any dirty politics. But all I want is that your feelings should be the same as mine, and they are, thank my stars, they are.”

By this time Somers was almost scared.

“But why should you care?” he said, with some reserve. The other however did not heed him.

“You’re not with the middle classes, as you call them, the money-men, as I call them, and I know you’re not. And if you’re not with them you’re against them.”

“My father was a working-man. I come from the working people. My sympathy is with them, when it’s with anybody, I assure you.”

Jack stared at Somers wide-eyed, a smile gathering round his mouth.

“Your father was a working-man, was he? Is that really so? Well, that IS a surprise! And yet,” he changed his tone, “no, it isn’t. I might have known. Of course I might. How should I have felt for you as I did, the very first minute I saw you, if it hadn’t been so. Of course you’re one of us: same flesh and blood, same clay. Only you’ve had the advantages of a money-man. But you’ve stuck true to your flesh and blood, which is what most of them don’t do. They turn into so much dirt, like the washings in the pan, a lot of dirt to a very little gold. Well, well, and your father was a working man! And you now being as you are! Wonderful what we may be, isn’t it?”

“It is indeed,” said Somers, who was infinitely more amazed at the present Jack, than ever Jack could be at him.

“Well, well, that brings us a great deal nearer than ever, that does,” said Callcott, looking at Somers with glowing, smiling eyes which the other man could not quite understand, eyes with something desirous, and something perhaps fanatical in them. Somers could not understand. As for the being brought nearer to Callcott, that was apparently entirely a matter of Jack’s own feeling. Somers himself had never felt more alone and far off. Yet he trembled at the other man’s strange fervour. He vibrated helplessly in some sort of troubled response.

The vibration from the two men had by this time quite penetrated into the other room and into the consciousness of the two women. Harriet came in all wondering and full of alert curiosity. She looked from one to the other, saw the eyes of both men shining, saw the puzzled, slightly scared look on her husband’s face, and the glowing handsomeness on Jack’s, and she wondered more than ever.

“What are you two men talking about?” she asked pointedly. “You look very much moved about something.”

“Moved!” laughed Jack, “We’re doing fifty miles an hour, and not turning a hair.”

“I’m glad I’m not going with you then,” said Harriet. “It’s much too late at

night for me for that sort of thing.”

Victoria went over to her husband and stood close at his side, ruffling up his brown, short, crisp, bright hair.

“Doesn’t he talk nonsense, Mrs. Somers, doesn’t he talk nonsense,” the young wife crooned, in her singing, contralto voice, as she looked down at him.

Harriet started at the sudden revelation of palpitating intimacy. She wanted to go away, quick. So did Somers. But neither Jack nor Victoria wanted them to go.

Jack was looking up at Victoria with a curious smile, touched with a leer. It gave his face, his rather long, clean-shaven face with the thick eyebrows, most extraordinarily the look of an old mask. One of those old Greek masks that give a fixed mockery to every feeling. Leering up at his young wife with the hearty leer of a player masked as a faun that is at home, on its own ground. Both Harriet and Somers felt amazed, as if they had strayed into the wrong wood.

“You talk all the sense, don’t you, kiddie?” he said, with a strong Australian accent again. And as he spoke with his face upturned to her, his Adam’s apple moved in his strong white throat as if it chuckled.

“Of course I do,” she crooned in her mocking, crooning contralto. “Of course I do.”

He put his arm round her hips. They continued to look into each other’s faces.

“It’s awfully late. We shall have simply to fly to bed. I’m so sleepy now. Good-night. Thank you so much for the singing. I enjoyed it awfully. Good-night!”

Victoria looked up with a brightly-flushed face, entirely unashamed, her eyes glowing like an animal’s. Jack relaxed his grip of her, but did not rise. He looked at the Somers pair with eyes gone dusky, as if unseeing, and the mask-like smile lingering on his face like the reflection from some fire, curiously natural, not even grotesque.

“Find your way across all right?” he said. “Good-night! Good-night!” But he was as unaware of them, actually, as if they did not exist within his ken.

“Well,” said Harriet, as they closed the door of Torestin. “I think they might have waited just TWO minutes before they started their love making. After all, one doesn’t want to be implicated, does one?”

“One emphatically doesn’t,” said Somers.

“Really, it was as if he’d got his arm round all the four of us! Horrid!” said Harriet resentfully.

“He felt he had, I’m sure,” said Somers.

It was a period when Sydney was again suffering from a bubonic plague scare: a very mild scare, some fifteen cases to a million people, according to the newspapers. But the town was placarded with notices “Keep your town clean,”

and there was a stall in Martin Place where you could write your name down and become a member of a cleanliness league, or something to that effect.

The battle was against rats, fleas, and dirt. The plague affects rats first, said the notices, then fleas, and then man. All citizens were called upon to wage war with the vermin mentioned. Alas, there was no need to call on Somers to wage the war. The first morning they had awakened in Torestin, it was to a slight uneasy feeling of uncleanness. Harriet, who hated the thought of contamination, found the apples gnawed, when she went to take one to eat before breakfast. And rat dirt, she said, everywhere.

Then had started such a cleaning, such a scouring, such a stopping of holes, as Torestin had never known. Somers sourly re-christened the house Toscrubin. And after that, every night he had the joyful business of setting two rat-traps, those traps with the powerful fly-back springs. Which springs were a holy terror to him, for he knew his fingers would break like pipe-stems if the spring flew back on them. And almost every morning he had the nauseous satisfaction of finding a rat pinned by its nose in the trap, its eyes bulging out, a blot of deep red blood just near. Sometimes two rats. They were not really ugly, save for their tails. Smallish rats, perhaps only half grown, and with black, silky fur. Not like the brown rats he had known in the English country.

But big or little, ugly or not ugly, they were very objectionable to him, and he hated to have to start the day by casting one or more corpses gingerly, by the tip of the tail, into the garbage tin. He railed against the practice of throwing cans and everything promiscuously on to any bit of waste ground. It seemed to his embittered fancy that Sydney harbour, and all the coast of New South Wales, was moving with this pest. It reminded him of the land of Egypt, under the hand of the Lord: plagues of mice and rats and rabbits and snails and all manner of crawling things. And then he would say: "Perhaps it must be so in a new country." For all that, the words "new country" had become like acid between his teeth. He was always recalling what Flinders Petrie says somewhere: "A colony is no younger than the parent country." Perhaps it is even older, one step further gone.

This evening — or rather midnight — he went to the back kitchen to put every scrap of any sort of food beyond rat-reach, and to bait the two traps with bits of cheese-rind. Then he bent back the two murderous springs, and the traps were ready. He washed his hands hard from the contamination of them. Then he went into the garden, even climbed the tub-like summer house, to have a last look at the world. There was a big slip of very bright moon risen, and the harbour was faintly distinct.

Now that night had fallen, the wind was from the land, and cold. He turned to

go indoors. And as he did so he heard a motor-car run quickly along the road, and saw the bright lights come to a stop at the gate of Wyewurk. Wyewurk was in darkness already. But a man left the car and came along the path to the house, giving a peculiar whistle as he did so. He went round to the back door and knocked sharply, once, twice, in a peculiar way. Then he whistled and knocked again. After which he must have heard an answer, for he waited quietly.

In a few minutes more the lights switched on and the door opened; Jack was there in his pyjamas.

“That you, Jaz boy?” he said in a quiet tone. “Why the blazes didn’t you come half an hour sooner, or half a minute later? You got me just as I’d taken the jump, and I fell all over the bloomin’ hedge. Come in. You’ll make a nervous wreck of me between you.”

The figure entered. It was William James, the brother-in-law. Somers heard him go again in about ten minutes. But Harriet did not notice.

CHAPTER 4. JACK AND JAZ.

The following evening Somers could feel waves of friendliness coming across the hedge, from Victoria. And she kept going out to the gate to look for Jack, who was late returning home. And as she went, she always looked long towards the verandah of Torestin, to catch sight of the Somers.

Somers felt the yearning and amicable advance in the atmosphere. For some time he disregarded it. Then at last he went out to look at the nightfall. It was early June. The sun had set beyond the land, casting a premature shadow of night. But the eastern sky was very beautiful, full of pure, pure light, the light of the southern seas, next the Antarctic. There was a great massive cloud settling low, and it was all gleaming, a golden, physical glow. Then across the upper sky trailed a thin line of little dark clouds, like a line of porpoises swimming in the extremely beautiful clarity.

“Isn’t it a lovely evening again?” Victoria called to him as he stood on the summer-house top.

“Very lovely. Australia never ceases to be a wonderland for me, at nightfall,” he answered.

“Aha!” she said. “You are fond of the evening?”

He had come down from his point of vantage, and they stood near together by the fence.

“In Europe I always like morning best — much best. I can’t say what it is I find so magical in the evening here.”

“No!” she replied, looking upwards round the sky. “It’s going to rain.”

“What makes you think so?” he asked.

“It looks like it — and it feels like it. I expect Jack will be here before it comes on.”

“He’s late to-night, is he?”

“Yes. He said he might be. Is it six o’clock?”

“No, it’s only a little after five.”

“Is it? I needn’t be expecting him yet, then. He won’t be home till quarter past six.” She was silent for a while. “We shall soon have the shortest day,” she said. “I am glad when it has gone. I always miss Jack so much when the evening comes, and he isn’t home. You see I was used to a big family, and it seems a bit lonely to me yet, all alone in the cottage. That’s why we’re so glad to have you and Mrs. Somers next door. We get on so well, don’t we? Yes, it’s surprising. I

always felt nervous of English people before. But I love Mrs. Somers. I think she's lovely."

"You haven't been married long?" asked Somers.

"Not quite a year. It seems a long time in some ways. I wouldn't be without Jack, not for anything. But I do miss my family. We were six of us all at home together, and it makes such a difference, being all alone."

"Was your home in Sydney?"

"No, on the South Coast — dairy-farming. No, my father was a surveyor, so was his father before him. Both in New South Wales. Then he gave it up and started this farm down south. Oh yes, I liked it — I love home. I love going down home. I've got a cottage down there that father gave me when I got married. You must come down with us some time when the people that are in it go. It's right on the sea. Do you think you and Mrs. Somers would like it?"

"I'm sure we should."

"And will you come with us for a week-end? The people in it are leaving next week. We let it furnished."

"We should like to very much indeed," said Somers, being polite over it because he felt a little unsure still, whether he wanted to be so intimate. But Victoria seemed so wistful.

"We feel so ourselves with you and Mrs. Somers," said Victoria. "And yet you're so different from us, and yet we feel so much ourselves with you."

"But we're not different," he protested.

"Yes, you are — coming from home. It's mother who always called England home. She was English. She always spoke so prettily. She came from Somerset. Yes, she died about five years ago. Then I was mother of the family. Yes, I am the eldest, except Alfred. Yes, they're all at home. Alfred is a mining engineer — there are coal mines down the South Coast. He was with Jack in the war, on the same job. Jack was a Captain and Alfred was a Lieutenant. But they drop all the army names now. That's how I came to know Jack: through Alfred. Jack always calls him Fred."

"You didn't know him before the war?"

"No, not till he came home. Alfred used to talk about him in his letters, but I never thought then I should marry him. They are great friends yet, the two of them."

The rain that she had prophesied now began to fall — big straight drops, that resounded on the tin roofs of the houses.

"Won't you come in and sit with us till Jack comes?" asked Somers. "You'll feel dreary, I know."

"Oh, don't think I said it for that," said Victoria.

“Come round, though,” said Somers. And they both ran indoors out of the rain. Lightning had started to stab in the south-western sky, and clouds were shoving slowly up.

Victoria came round and sat talking, telling of her home on the south coast. It was only about fifty miles from Sydney, but it seemed another world to her. She was so quiet and simple, now, that both the Somers felt drawn to her, and glad that she was sitting with them.

They were talking still of Europe. Italy, Switzerland, England, Paris — the wonderworld to Victoria, who had never been out of New South Wales in her life, in spite of her name — which name her father had given her to annoy all his neighbours, because he said the State of Victoria was run like a paradise compared to New South Wales — although he too never went a yard out of his home state, if he could help it; they were talking still of Europe when they heard Jack’s voice calling from the opposite yard.

“Hello,” cried Victoria, running out. “Are you there, Jack?” I was listening for the motor-bike. I remember now, you went by tram.”

Sometimes she seemed a little afraid of him — physically afraid — though he was always perfectly good-humoured with her. And this evening she sounded like that — as if she feared his coming home, and wanted the Somers to shelter her.

“You’ve found a second home over there, apparently,” said Jack, advancing towards the fence. “Well, how’s things?”

It was dark, so they could not see his face. But he sounded different. There was something queer, unknown about him.

“I’ll come over for a game of chess to-night, old man, if you’ll say the word,” he said to Somers. “And the ladies can punish the piano again meanwhile, if they feel like it. I bought something to sweeten the melodies with, and give us a sort of breathing-space now and then: sort of little ear-rest, you know.”

“That means a pound of chocolates,” said Victoria, like a greedy child. “And Mrs. Somers will come and help me to eat them. Good!” And she ran in home. Somers thought of a picture advertisement in the Bulletin.

“Madge: I can’t think what you see in Jack. He is so unintellectual.”

“Gladys: Oh, but he always brings a pound of Billyer’s chocolates.”

Or else: “Sweets to the Sweet. Give her Billyer’s chocolates”; or else: “Billyer’s chocolates sweeten the home.”

The game of chess was a very quiet one. Jack was pale and subdued, silent, tired, thought Somers, after his long day and short night. Somers too played without any zest. And yet they were satisfied, just sitting there together, a curious peaceful ease in being together. Somers wondered at it, the rich, full

peace that there seemed to be between him and the other man. It was something he was not used to. As if one blood ran warm and rich between them. "Then shall thy peace be as a river."

"There was nothing wrong at the 'Trewhellas', was there, that made William James come so late?" asked Somers.

Jack looked up with a tinge of inquiry in his dark eyes at this question: as if he suspected something behind it. Somers flushed slightly.

"No, nothing wrong," said Jack.

"I beg your pardon for asking," said Somers hastily. "I heard a whistle when I'd just done setting the rat-traps, and I looked out, and heard you speak to him. That's how I knew who it was. I only wondered if anything was wrong."

"No, nothing wrong," repeated Jack laconically.

"That's all right," said Somers. "It's your move. Mind your queen."

"Mind my queen, eh? She takes some minding, that lady does. I feel I need a special eye at the end of my nose, to keep track of her. Come out of it, old lady. I'm not very bright at handling royalty, that's a fact."

Somers was now silent. He felt he had made a faux pas, and was rebuffed. They played for some time, Jack talking to himself mostly in that facetious strain which one just had to get used to in him, though Somers occasionally found it tiring.

Then after a time Jack put his hands into his lap, and looked up at Somers.

"You mustn't think I get the wind up, you know," he said, "if you ask me a question. You can ask me what you like, you know. And when I can tell you, I'll tell you. I know you'd never come shoving your nose in like a rat from under the skirting board when nobody's looking."

"Even if I SEEM to," said Somers, ironically.

"No, no, you don't seem to. And when I CAN tell you, I'll do so. *I* know I can trust you."

Somers looked up wondering, and met the meditative dark eyes of the other man resting on his face.

"There's some of us chaps," said Jack, "who've been through the war and had a lick at Paris and London, you know, who can tell a man by the smell of him, so to speak. If we can't see the COLOUR of his aura, we can jolly well size up the QUALITY of it. And that's what we go by. Call it instinct or what you like. If I like a man, slap out, at the first sight, I'd trust him into hell, I would."

"Fortunately you haven't anything VERY risky to trust him with," laughed Somers.

"I don't know so much about that," said Jack. "When a man feels he likes a chap, and trusts him, he's risking all he need, even by so doing. Because none of

us likes to be taken in, and to have our feelings thrown back in our faces, as you may say, do we?"

"We don't," said Somers grimly.

"No, we don't. And you know what it means to HAVE them thrown back in your face. And so do I. There's a lot of the people here that I wouldn't trust with a thank-you, I wouldn't. But then there's some that I would. And mind you, taking all for all, I'd rather trust an Aussie, I'd rather trust an Australian than an Englishman, I would, and a lot rather. Yet there's some of the rottenest people in Sydney that you'd find even if you sifted hell over. Rotten — absolute yellow rotten. And many of them in public positions, too. Simply white-anting society, that's what they're doing. Talk about public affairs in Sydney, talk about undercurrents of business in Sydney: the wickedest crew on God's earth, bar none. All the underhanded tricks of a Chink, a blooming yellow Chinaman, and all the barefaced fair talk of an Englishman. There you are. And yet, I'm telling you, I'd rather trust even a Sydney man, and he's a special sort of wombat, than an Englishman."

"So you've told me before: for my good, I suppose," laughed Somers, not without irony.

"No, now don't you go running away with any wrong ideas," said Jack, suddenly reaching out his hand and laying it on Somers' arm. "I'm not hinting at anything. If I was I'd ask you to kick me out of your house. I should deserve it. No, you're an Englishman. You're a European, perhaps I ought to say, for you've lived about all over that old continent, and you've studied it, and you've got tired of it. And you've come to Australia. Your instinct brought you here, however much you may rebel against rats and tin cans and a few other things like that. Your instinct brought you here — and brought you straight up against me. Now that I call fate."

He looked at Somers with dark, burning, questioning eyes.

"I suppose following one's deepest instinct IS one's fate," said Somers, rather flatly.

"There — you know what I mean, you see. Well then, instinct brings us together. I knew it the minute I set eyes on you when I saw you coming across from the Botanical Gardens, and you wanted a taxi. And then when I heard the address, 51 Murdoch Street, I said to myself, 'That chap is coming into my life.' And it is so. I'm a believer in fate, absolute."

"Yes," said Somers, non-committal.

"It's fate that you left Europe and came to Australia, bit by bit, and unwilling to come, as you say yourself. It's fate that brings you to Sydney, and makes me see you that dinner-hour coming from the Botanical Gardens. It's fate that brings

you to this house. And it's fate that sets you and me here at this minute playing chess."

"If you call it playing chess," laughed Somers.

Jack looked down at the board.

"I'm blest if I know whose move it is," he said. "But never mind. I say that fate meant you and Mrs. Somers to come here: her as much as you. I say fate meant me and you and Victoria and her to mean a lot to one another. And when I feel my fate, I absolutely give myself up to it. That's what I say. Do you think I'm right?"

His hand, which held Somers' arm lightly, now gripped the biceps of that arm hard, while he looked into the other man's face.

"I should say so," said Somers, rather uncomfortably.

Jack hardly heeded the words. He was watching the face.

"You're a stranger here. You're from the old country. You're different from us. But you're a man we want, and you're a man we've got to keep. I know it. What? What do you say? I can trust you, can't I?"

"What with?" asked Somers.

"What with?" Jack hesitated. "Why everything!" he blurted. "Everything! Body and soul and money and every blessed thing. I can trust you with EVERYTHING! Isn't that right?"

Somers looked with troubled eyes into the dark, dilated glowing eyes of the other man.

"But I don't know what it means," he stammered. "EVERYTHING! It means so much, that it means nothing."

Jack nodded his head slowly.

"Oh yes it does," he reiterated. "Oh yes it does."

"Besides," said Somers, "why should you trust me with ANYTHING, let alone everything. You've no occasion to trust me at all — except — as one neighbour trusts another, in common honour."

"Common honour!" Jack just caught up the words, not heeding the sense. "It's more than common honour. It's most uncommon honour. But look here," he seemed to rouse himself. "Supposing I came to you, to ask you things, and tell you things, you'd answer me man to man, wouldn't you? — with common honour? You'd treat everything I say with common honour, as between man and man?"

"Why, yes, I hope so."

"I know you would. But for the sake of saying it, say it. I can trust you, can't I? Tell me now, can I trust you?"

Somers watched him. Was it any good making reservations and

qualifications? The man was in earnest. And according to standards of commonplace honour, the so-called honour of man to man, Somers felt that he would trust Callcott, and that Callcott might trust him. So he said simply:

“Yes.”

A light leaped into Jack’s eyes.

“That means you trust me, of course?” he said.

“Yes,” replied Somers.

“Done!” said Jack, rising to his feet and upsetting the chessmen. Somers also pushed his chair, and rose to his feet, thinking they were going across to the next house. But Jack came to him and flung an arm round his shoulders and pressed him close, trembling slightly, and saying nothing. Then he let go, and caught Somers by the hand.

“This is fate,” he said, “and we’ll follow it up.” He seemed to cling to the other man’s hand. And on his face was a strange light of purpose and of passion, a look at once exalted and dangerous.

“I’ll soon bring the others to see it,” he said.

“But you know I don’t understand,” said Somers, withdrawing his hand and taking off his spectacles.

“I know,” said Jack. “But I’ll let you know everything in a day or two. Perhaps you wouldn’t mind if William James — if Jaz came here one evening — or you wouldn’t mind having a talk with him over in my shack.”

“I don’t mind talking to anybody,” said the bewildered Somers.

“Right you are.”

They still sat for some time by the fire, silent; Jack was pondering. Then he looked up at Somers.

“You and me,” he said in a quiet voice, “in a way we’re mates and in a way we’re not. In a way — it’s different.”

With which cryptic remark he left it. And in a few minutes the women came running in with the sweets, to see if the men didn’t want a macaroon.

On Sunday morning Jack asked Somers to walk with him across to the Trehellas. That is, they walked to one of the ferry stations, and took the ferry steamer to Mosman’s Bay. Jack was a late riser on Sunday morning. The Somers, who were ordinary half-past seven people, rarely saw any signs of life in Wyewurk before half-past ten on the Sabbath — then it was Jack in trousers and shirt, with his shirt-sleeves rolled up, having a look at his dahlias while Vicky prepared breakfast.

So the two men did not get a start till eleven o’clock. Jack rolled along easily beside the smaller, quieter Somers. They were an odd couple, ill-assorted. In a colonial way, Jack was handsome, well-built, with strong, heavy limbs. He filled

out his expensively tailored suit and looked a man who might be worth anything from five hundred to five thousand a year. The only lean, delicate part about him was his face. See him from behind, his broad shoulders and loose erect carriage and brown nape of the neck, and you expected a good square face to match. He turned, and his long lean rather pallid face really didn't seem to belong to his strongly animal body. For the face wasn't animal at all, except perhaps in a certain slow, dark, lingering look of the eyes, which reminded one of some animal or other, some patient, enduring animal with an indomitable but naturally passive courage.

Somers, in a light suit of thin cloth, made by an Italian tailor, and an Italian hat, just looked a foreign sort of little bloke — but a gentleman. The chief difference was that he looked sensitive all over, his body, even its clothing, and his feet, even his brown shoes, all equally sensitive with his face. Whereas Jack seemed strong and insensitive in the body, only his face vulnerable. His feet might have been made of leather all the way through, tramping with an insentient tread. Whereas Somers put down his feet delicately, as if they had a life of their own, mindful of each step of contact with the earth. Jack strode along: Somers seemed to hover along. There was decision in both of them, but oh, of such different quality. And each had a certain admiration of the other, and a very definite tolerance. Jack just barely tolerated the quiet finesse of Somers, and Somers tolerated with difficulty Jack's facetious familiarity and heartiness.

Callcott met quite a number of people he knew, and greeted them all heartily. "Hello Bill, old man, how's things?" "New boots pinchin' yet, Ant'ny? Hoppy sort of look about you this morning. Right 'o! So long, Ant'ny!" "Different girl again, boy! go on, Sydney's full of yer sisters. All right, goodbye, old chap." The same breezy intimacy with all of them, and the moment they had passed by, they didn't exist for him any more than the gull that had curved across in the air. They seemed to appear like phantoms, and disappear in the same instant, like phantoms. Like so many Flying Dutchmen the Australian's acquaintances seemed to steer slap through his consciousness, and were gone on the wind. What was the consecutive thread in the man's feelings? Not his feeling for any particular human beings, that was evident. His friends, even his loves, were just a series of disconnected, isolated moments in his life. Somers always came again upon this gap in the other man's continuity. He felt that if he knew Jack for twenty years, and then went away, Jack would say: "Friend o' mine, Englishman, rum sort of bloke, but not a bad sort. Dunno where he's hanging out just now. Somewhere on the surface of the old humming-top, I suppose."

The only consecutive thing was that facetious attitude, which was the attitude of taking things as they come, perfected. A sort of ironical stoicism. Yet the man

had a sort of passion, and a passionate identity. But not what Somers called human. And threaded on this ironical stoicism.

They found Trehwella dressed and expecting them. Trehwella was a coal and wood merchant, on the north side. He lived quite near the wharf, had his sheds at the side of the house, and in the front a bit of garden running down to the practically tideless bay of the harbour. Across the bit of blue water were many red houses, and new, wide streets of single cottages, seaside-like, disappearing rather forlorn over the brow of the low hill.

William James, or Jas, Jaz, as Jack called him, was as quiet as ever. The three men sat on a bench just above the brown rocks of the water's edge, in the lovely sunshine, and watched the big ferry steamer slip in and discharge its stream of summer-dressed passengers, and embark another stream: watched the shipping of the middle harbour away to the right, and the boats loitering on the little bay in front. A motor-boat was sweeping at a terrific speed, like some broom sweeping the water, past the little round fort away in the open harbour, and two tall white sailing boats, all wing and no body, were tacking across the pale blue mouth of the bay. The inland sea of the harbour was all bustling with Sunday morning animation: and yet there seemed space, and loneliness. The low, coffee-brown cliffs opposite, too low for cliffs, looked as silent and as aboriginal as if white men had never come.

The little girl Gladys came out shyly. Somers now noticed that she wore spectacles.

"Hello kiddie!" said Jack, "Come here and make a footstool of your uncle, and see what your Aunt Vicky's been thinking of. Come on then, amble up this road."

He took her on his knee, and fished out of his pocket a fine sort of hat-band that Victoria had contrived with ribbon and artificial flowers and wooden beads. Gladys sat for a moment shyly on her uncle's knee, and he held her there as if she were a big pillow he was scarcely conscious of holding. Her stepfather sat exactly as if the child did not exist, or were not present. It was neutrality brought to a remarkable pitch. Only Somers seemed actually aware that the child was a little human being — and to him she seemed so absent that he didn't know what to make of her.

Rose came out bringing beer and sausage rolls, and the girl vanished away again, seemed to evaporate. Somers felt uncomfortable, and wondered what he had been brought for.

"You know Cornwall, do you?" said William James, the Cornish singsong still evident in his Australian speech. He looked with his light-grey, inscrutable eyes at Somers.

“I lived for a time near Padstow,” said Somers.

“Padstow! Ay, I’ve been to Padstow,” said William James. And they talked for a while of the bleak, lonely northern coast of Cornwall, the black huge cliffs, with the gulls flying away below, and the sea boiling, and the wind blowing in huge volleys: and the black Cornish nights, with nothing but the violent weather outside.

“Oh, I remember it, I remember it,” said William James. “Though I was a half-starved youngster on a bit of a farm out there, you know, for everlasting chasing half a dozen heifers from the cliffs, where the beggars wanted to fall over and kill themselves, and hunting for a dozen sheep among the gorsebushes, and wading up to my knees in mud most part of the year, and then in summer, in the dry times, having to haul water for a mile over the rocks in a wagon, because the well had run dry. And at the end of it my father gave me one new suit in two years, and sixpence a week. Ay, that was a life for you. I suppose if I was there still he’d be giving me my keep and five shillin’ a week — if he could open his heart as wide as two half-crowns, which I’m doubting very much.”

“You have money out here, at least,” said Somers. “But there was a great fascination for me, in Cornwall.”

“Fascination! And where do you find the fascination? In a little Wesleyan chapel of a Sunday night, and a girl with her father waiting for her with a strap if she’s not in by nine o’clock? Fascination, did you say?”

“It had a great fascination for me — a magic — a magic in the atmosphere.”

“All the fairy tales they’ll tell you,” said William James, looking at the other man with a smile of slow ridicule. “Why ye didn’t go and believe them, did ye?”

“More or less. I could more easily have believed them there than anywhere else I’ve been.”

“Ay, no doubt. And that shows what sort of a place it be. Lot of damn silly nonsense.” He stirred on his seat impatiently.

“At any rate, you’re well out of it. You’re set up all right here,” said Somers, who was secretly amused. The other man did not answer for some time.

“Maybe I am,” he said at last, “I’m not pining to go back and work for my father, I tell you, on a couple of pasties and a lot of abuse. No, after that, I’d like you to tell me what’s wrong with Australia.”

“I’m sure I don’t know,” said Somers, “Probably nothing at all.”

Again William James was silent. He was a short, thick man, with a little felt hat that sat over his brow with a half humorous flap. He had his knees wide apart, and his hands clasped between them. And he looked for the most part down at the ground. When he did cock his eye at Somers, it was with a look of suspicion marked with humour and troubled with a certain desire. The man was

restless, desirous, craving something — heaven knows what.

“You thinking of settling out here then, are you?” he asked.

“No,” said Somers. “But I don’t say I won’t. It depends.”

William James fidgeted, tapping his feet rapidly on the ground, though his body was silent. He was not like Jack. He too, was sensitive all over, though his body looked so thick it was silently alive, and his feet were still uneasy. He was young too, with a youth that troubled him. And his nature was secretive, maybe treacherous. It was evident Jack only half liked him.

“You’ve got the money, you can live where you like and go where you like,” said William James, looking up at Somers. “Well, I might do the same. If I cared to do it, I could live quietly on what I’ve got, whether here or in England.” Somers recognized the Cornishman in this.

“You could very easily have as much as I’ve got,” he said laughing.

“The thing is, what’s the good of a life of idleness?” said William James.

“What’s the good of a life of work?” laughed Somers.

Shrewdly, with quick grey eye, Trewhella looked at the other man to see if he were laughing at him.

“Yet I expect you’ve got some purpose in coming to Australia,” said William James, a trifle challenging.

“Maybe I had — or have — maybe it was just whim.”

Again the other man looked shrewdly, to see if it were the truth.

“You aren’t investing money out here, are you?”

“No, I’ve none to invest.”

“Because if you was, I’d advise you not to.” And he spat into the distance, and kept his hands clasped tight.

All this time Jack sat silent and as if unconcerned, but listening attentively.

“Australians have always been croakers,” he said now.

“What do you think of this Irish business?” asked William James.

“I? I really don’t think much at all. I don’t feel Ireland is my job, personally. If I had to say, offhand, what I’d do myself, why, if I could I’d just leave the Irish to themselves, as they want, and let them wipe each other out or kiss and make friends as they please. They bore me rather.”

“And what about the Empire?”

“That again isn’t my job. I’m only one man, and I know it. But personally, I’d say to India and Australia and all of them the same — if you want to stay in the Empire, stay; if you want to go out, go.”

“And suppose they went out?”

“That’s their affair.”

“Supposing Australia said she was coming out of the Empire and governing

herself, and only keeping a sort of entente with Britain. What do you think she'd make of it?"

"By the looks of things, I think she'd make a howling mess of it. Yet it might do her good if she were thrown entirely on her own resources. You've got to have something to keep you steady. England has really kept the world steady so far — as steady as it's been. That's my opinion. Now she's not keeping it very steady, and the world's sick of being bossed, anyhow. Seems to me you may as well sink or swim on your own resources."

"Perhaps we're too likely to find ourselves sinking."

"Then you'll come to your senses, after you've sunk for the third time."

"What, about England? Cling to England again, you mean?"

"No, I don't. I mean you can't put the brotherhood of man on a wage basis."

"That's what a good many people say here," put in Jack.

"You don't trust socialism then?" said Jaz, in a quiet voice.

"What sort of socialism? Trades unionism? Soviet?"

"Yes, any."

"I really don't care about politics. Politics is no more than your country's housekeeping. If I had to swallow my whole life up in housekeeping, I wouldn't keep house at all; I'd sleep under a hedge. Same with a country and politics. I'd rather have no country than be gulfed in politics and social stuff. I'd rather have the moon for a motherland."

Jaz was silent for a time, contemplating his knuckles.

"And that," he said, "is how the big majority of Australians feel, and that's why they care nothing about Australia. It's cruel to the country."

"Anyhow, no sort of POLITICS will help the country," said Somers.

"If it won't, then nothing will," retorted Jaz.

"So you'd advise us all to be like seven-tenths of us here, not care a blooming hang about anything except your dinner and which horse gets in?" asked Jack, not without sarcasm.

Now Richard was silent, driven into a corner.

"Why," he said, "there's just this difference. The bulk of Australians don't care about Australia — that is, you say they don't. And why don't they? Because they care about nothing at all, neither in earth below or heaven above. They just blankly don't care about anything, and they live in defiance, a sort of slovenly defiance of care of any sort, human or inhuman, good or bad. If they've got one belief left, now the war's safely over, it's a dull, rock-bottom belief in obstinately not caring, not caring about anything. It seems to me they think it manly, the only manliness, not to care, not to think, not to attend to life at all, but just to tramp blankly on from moment to moment, and over the edge of death

without caring a straw. The final manliness.”

The other two men listened in silence, the distant colonial silence that hears the voice of the old country passionately speaking against them.

“But if they’re not to care about politics, what are they to care about?” asked Jaz, in his small, insinuating voice.

There was a moment’s pause. Then Jack added his question:

“Do you yourself really care about anything, Mr. Somers?”

Richard turned and looked him for a moment in the eyes. And then, knowing the two men were trying to corner him, he said coolly:

“Why, yes. I care supremely.”

“About what?” Jack’s question was soft as a drop of water falling into water, and Richard sat struggling with himself.

“That,” he answered, “you either know or don’t know. And if you don’t know, it would only be words my trying to tell.”

There was a silence of check-mate.

“I’m afraid, for myself, I don’t know,” said Jack.

But Somers did not answer, and the talk, rather lamely, was turned off to other things.

The two men went back to Murdoch Street rather silent, thinking their own thoughts. Jack only blurted once:

“What do you make of Jaz, then?”

“I like him. He lives by himself and keeps himself pretty dark — which is his nature.”

“He’s a cleverer man than you’d take him for — figures things out in a way that surprises me. And he’s better than a detective for getting to know things. He’s got one or two Cornish pals down town, you see — and they tip one another the wink. They’re like the Irish in many ways. And they’re not uncommonly unlike a Chink. I always feel as if Jaz had got a bit of Chinese blood in him. That’s what makes the women like him, I suppose.”

“But do the women like him?”

“Rose does. I believe he’d make any woman like him, if he laid himself out to do it. Got that quiet way with him, you know, and a sly sort of touch-the-harp-gently, that’s what they like on the quiet. But he’s the sort of chap I don’t exactly fancy mixing my broth with, and drinking out of the same can with.”

Somers laughed at the avowal of antipathy between the two men.

They were not home till two o’clock. Somers found Harriet looking rather plaintive.

“You’ve been a long time,” she said. “What did you do?”

“Just talked.”

“What about?”

“Politics.”

“And did you like them?”

“Yes, quite well.”

“And have you promised to see them again to-day?”

“Who?”

“Why, any of them — the Callcotts.”

“No.”

“Oh. They’re becoming rather an institution.”

“You like them too?”

“Yes, they’re all right. But I don’t want to spend my life with them. After all, that sort of people isn’t exactly my sort — and I thought you used to pretend it wasn’t yours.”

“It isn’t. But then no sort of people is my sort.”

“Yes, it is. Any sort of people, so long as they make a fuss of you.”

“Surely they make an even greater fuss of you.”

“Do they! It’s you they want, not me. And you go as usual, like a lamb to the slaughter.”

“Baa!” he said.

“Yes, baa! You should hear yourself bleat.”

“I’ll listen,” he said.

But Harriet was becoming discontented. They had been in their house only six weeks: and she had had enough of it. Yet it was paid for for three months: at four guineas a week. And they were pretty short of money, and would be for the rest of the year. He had already overdrawn.

Yet she began to suggest going away: away from Sydney. She felt humiliated in that beastly little Murdoch Street.

“What did I tell you?” he retorted. “The very look of it humiliated me. Yet you wanted it, and you said you liked it.”

“I did like it — for the fun of it. But now there’s all this intimacy and neighbouring. I just can’t stand it. I just can’t.”

“But you began it.”

“No, I didn’t; you began it. And your beastly sweetness and gentleness with such people. I wish you kept a bit of it for me.”

He went away in silence, knowing the uselessness of argument. And to tell the truth he was feeling also a revulsion from all this neighbouring, as Harriet called it, and all this talk. It was usually the same. He started by holding himself aloof then gradually he let himself get mixed in, and then he had revulsions. And to-day was one of his revulsions. Coming home from Mosman’s Bay, he had felt

himself dwindle to a cipher in Jack's consciousness. Then, last evening, there had been all this fervour and protestation. And this morning all the cross-examination by Trewhella. And he, Somers, had plainly said all he thought. And now, as he walked home with Jack, Jack had no more use for him than for the stump of cigar which he chewed between his lips merely because he forgot to spit it away. Which state of affairs did not go at all well with OUR friend's sense of self-importance.

Therefore, when he got home, his eyes opened once more to the delicacy of Harriet's real beauty, which he knew as none else knew it, after twelve years of marriage. And once more he realized her gay, undying courage, her wonderful fresh zest in front of life. And all these other little people seemed so common in comparison, so common. He stood still with astonishment, wondering how he could have come to betray the essential reality of his life and Harriet's to the common use of these other people with their watchful, vulgar wills. That scene of last evening: what right had a fellow like Callcott to be saying these things to him? What right had he to put his arm round his, Richard's shoulder, and give him a tight hug? Somers winced to think of it. And now Callcott had gone off with his Victoria in Sunday clothes to some other outing. Anything was as good as anything else: why not!

A gulf there was between them, really, between the Somers and the Callcotts. And yet the easy way Callcott flung a flimsy rope of intimacy across the gulf, and was embracing the pair of his neighbours in mid-air, as it were, without a grain of common foothold. And Somers let himself be embraced. So he sat pale and silent and mortified in the kitchen that evening thinking of it all, and wishing himself far away, in Europe.

"Oh, how I detest this treacly democratic Australia," he said. "It swamps one with a sort of common emotion like treacle, and before one knows where one is, one is caught like a fly on a flypaper, in one mess with all the other buzzers. How I hate it! I want to go away."

"It isn't Australia," said Harriet. "Australia's lonely. It's just the people. And it isn't even the people — if you would only keep your proper distance, and not make yourself cheap to them and get into messes."

"No, it's the country. It's in the air. I want to leave it."

But he was not very emphatic. Harriet wanted to go down to the South Coast, of which she had heard from Victoria.

"Think," she said, "it must be lovely there — with the mountain behind, and steep hills, and blackberries, and lovely little bays of sand."

"There'll be no blackberries. It's end of June — which is their mid-winter."

"But there'll be the other things. Let's do that, and never mind the beastly

money for this pokey Torestin.”

“They’ve asked us to go with them to Mullumbimby in a fortnight. Shall we wait till then and look?”

Harriet sat in silence for some moments.

“We might,” she said reluctantly. She didn’t want to wait. But what Victoria had told her of Mullumbimby, the township on the South Coast, so appealed to her that she decided to abide by her opportunity.

And then curiously enough, for the next week the neighbours hardly saw one another. It was as if the same wave of revulsion had passed over both sides of the fence. They had fleeting glimpses of Victoria as she went about the house. And when he could, Jack put in an hour at his garden in the evening, tidying it up finally for the winter. But the weather was bad, it rained a good deal; there were fogs in the morning, and foghorns on the harbour; and the Somers kept their doors continually blank and shut.

Somers went round to the shipping agents and found out about boats to San Francisco, and talked of sailing in July, and of stopping at Tahiti or at Fiji on the way, and of cabling for money for the fares. He figured it all out. And Harriet mildly agreed. Her revulsion from Australia had passed quicker than his, now that she saw herself escaping from town and from neighbours to the quiet of a house by the sea, alone with him. Still she let him talk. Verbal agreement and silent opposition is perhaps the best weapon on such occasions.

Harriet would look at him sometimes wistfully, as he sat with his brow clouded. She had a real instinctive mistrust of other people — all other people. In her heart of hearts she said she wanted to live alone with Somers, and know nobody, all the rest of her life. In Australia, where one can be lonely, and where the land almost calls to one to be lonely — and then drives one back again on one’s fellow-men in a kind of frenzy. Harriet would be quite happy, by the sea, with a house and a little garden and as much space to herself as possible, knowing nobody, but having Lovat always there. And he could write, and it would be perfect.

But he wouldn’t be happy — and he said so — and she knew it. She saw it like a doom on his brow.

“And why couldn’t we be happy in this wonderful new country, living to ourselves. We could have a cow, and chickens — and then the Pacific, and this marvellous new country. Surely that is enough for any man. Why must you have more?”

“Because I feel I **MUST** fight out something with mankind yet. I haven’t finished with my fellow-men. I’ve got a struggle with them yet.”

“But what struggle? What’s the good? What’s the point of your struggle? And

what's your struggle for?"

"I don't know. But it's inside me, and I haven't finished yet. To make some kind of an opening — some kind of a way for the afterwards."

"Ha, the afterwards will make its own way, it won't wait for you. It's a kind of nervous obstinacy and self-importance in you. You DON'T like people. You always turn away from them and hate them. Yet like a dog to his vomit you always turn back. And it will be the same old game here again as everywhere else. What are these people after all? Quite nice, but just common and — and not in your line at all. But there you are. You stick your head into a bush like an ostrich, and think you're doing wonders."

"I intend to move with men and get men to move with me before I die," he said. Then he added hastily: "Or at any rate I'll try a bit longer yet. When I make up my mind that it's really no good, I'll go with you and we'll live alone somewhere together, and forget the world. And in Australia too. Just like a business man retiring. I'll retire away from the world, and forget it. But not yet. Not till I feel I've finished. I've got to struggle with men and the world of men for a time yet. When it's over I'll do as you say."

"Ah, you and your men, men! What do these Callcotts and these little Trehwella people mean to you after all? Are they men? They are only something you delude yourself about. And then you'll come a cropper, and fall back on me. Just as it always is. You fall back on me, and I'm expected to like it. I'm good enough to fall back on, when you've made a fool of yourself with a lot of tuppenny little people, imagining you're doing something in the world of MEN. Much men there is about it. Common little street-people, that's all."

He was silent. He heard all she had to say: and he knew that as far as the past went, it was all quite true. He had started off on his fiery courses: always, as she said, to fall back rather the worse for the attempt on her. She had no use at all for fiery courses and efforts with the world of men. Let all that rubbish go.

"Well," he said. "It's my need to make these tries, yet. Wait till I've exhausted the need, and we'll have a little place of our own and forget the world, really. I know I can do it. I could almost do it now: and here in Australia. The country appeals to me that way: to lose oneself and have done with this side of life. But wait a bit longer."

"Ah, I suppose I shall have to," she said recklessly. "You'll have to go on making a fool of yourself till you're tired. Wives are SUPPOSED to have to take their husbands back a little damaged and repentant from their LOVE AFFAIRS with other women. And I'm hanged if it wouldn't be more fun than this business of seeing you come back once more fooled from your attempts with MEN — the world of men, as you call it. If they WERE real men I wouldn't mind. But look

at your Jack Callcott. Really, and you're supposed to have had some experience of life. 'Clip in, old man!'" She imitated Jack's voice and manner. "And you stand it all and think it's wonderful! Nay, men are too foolish for me to understand them; I give them up."

He laughed, realizing that most of what she said was true.

"You see," he said, "I have the roots of my life with you. But I want if possible to send out a new shoot in the life of mankind — the effort man makes forever, to grow into new forms."

She looked at him. And somehow she wanted to cry, because he was so silly in refusing to be finally disappointed in his efforts with mankind, and yet his silliness was pathetic, in a way beautiful. But then it WAS so silly — she wanted to shake him.

"Send out a new shoot then. Send it out. You do it in your writing already!" she cried. "But getting yourself mixed up with these impudent people won't send any shoots, don't you think it. They'll nip you in the bud again, as they always do."

He pondered this also, stubbornly, and knew it was true. But he had set his will on something, and wasn't going to give way.

"I want to do something with living people, somewhere, somehow, while I live on the earth. I write, but I write alone. And I live alone. Without any connection whatever with the rest of men."

"Don't swank, you don't live alone. You've got ME there safe enough, to support you. Don't swank to me about being alone, because it insults me, you see. I know how much alone you are, with me always there keeping you together."

And again he sulked and swallowed it, and obstinately held out.

"None the less," he retorted, "I do want to do something along with men. I AM alone and cut off. As a man among men, I just have no place. I have my life with you, I know: *et praeterea nihil*."

"*Et praeterea nihil!* And what more do you want? Besides, you liar, haven't you your writing? Isn't that all you want, isn't that DOING all there is to be done? Men! Much MEN there is about them! Bah, when it comes to that, I have to be even the only man as well as the only woman."

"That's the whole trouble," said he bitinglly.

"Bah, you creature, you ought to be grateful," cried Harriet.

William James arrived one morning when the Callcotts were both out, and brought a little basket of persimmons and passion fruits for Harriet. As it happened, Somers also was out.

"I remember you said you like these date-plums, Mrs. Somers. Over at our

place we don't care for them, so if you like to have them you're welcome. And these are about the last of the passion fruit, seemingly."

The persimmons were good big ones, of that lovely suave orange-red colour which is perhaps their chief attraction, and they were just beginning to go soft. Harriet of course was enchanted. William James came in and sat down for a few minutes, wondering what had become of Victoria. He looked round the room curiously. Harriet had, of course, arranged it to her own liking, taken away all the pictures and ornaments, hung a Tunis curtain behind the couch, stood two tall red lacquer candlesticks on the mantelpiece, and altogether given the room that air of pleasant distinction which a woman who knows how to do it finds so easy, especially if she has a few shawls and cushion-covers and bits of interesting brass or china. Harriet insisted on travelling with a few such things. She was prepared to camp in a furnished bungalow or cottage on any continent, but a few of her own things she must have about her. Also she wore a dress of Bavarian peasant stuff, very thin black woollen material, sprinkled all over with tiny pink roses with green leaves. And on her feet she had heelless sandals of plaited strips of leather, from Colombo. William James noticed every one of these things. They had a glamour like magic for him.

"This is quite a pleasant room you have here," he said in his Cornish voice, with the alert, subtle, faintly smiling look of wonder on his face.

"It isn't bad," said Harriet. "But a bit poky."

"Poky you call it? Do you remember the little stone holes they have for rooms in those old stone Cornish cottages?"

"Yes — but we had a lovely one. And the great thick granite walls and the low ceilings."

"Walls always letting the damp in, can't keep it out, because all the chinks and spaces are just stuffed with plain earth, and a bit of mortar smeared over the outside like butter scraped on bread. Don't I remember it! I should think I do."

"Cornwall had a great charm for me."

"Well, I don't know where you found it, I'm sure. But I suppose you've got a way of your own with a place, let it be Cornwall or where it may, to make it look well. It all depends where you're born and where you come from."

"Perhaps," said Harriet.

"I've never seen an Australian cottage looking like this, now. And yet it isn't the number of things you've put into it."

"The number I've taken out," laughed Harriet.

William James sat there with his quiet slumberous-seeming body, watching her: watching the quick radiance of her fair face, and the charm of her bearing. There was something quick and sure and, as it were, beyond the ordinary clay,

about her, that exercised a spell over him. She was his real Cornish idea of a lady: simple, living among people as if one of themselves, and yet not one of themselves: a sort of magic about her. He could almost see a glow in the air around her. And he could see that for her he was just a nice fellow who lived in another world and on another plane than herself, and that he could never come up or she come down. She was the queen that slumbers somewhere in every Cornish imagination, the queen ungrudged. And perhaps, in the true Celtic imagination slumbers the glamorous king as well. The Celt needs the mystic glow of real kingliness. Hence his loneliness in the democratic world of industry, and his social perversity.

“I don’t suppose Rose could ever learn to do this with a room, could she now?” he asked, making a slight gesture with his hand. He sat with his clear, queer, light grey eyes fixed on Harriet’s face.

“I think so,” cried Harriet; then she met the watchful eyes. “In her own way she could. Every woman has her own way, you know.”

“Yes, I do know,” he answered.

“And you see,” said Harriet, “we’re more or less lazy people who have no regular work in the world. If we had, perhaps we should live in a different way.”

William James shook his head.

“It’s what’s bred into you,” he said, “that comes out. Now if I was a really rich man, I think I could learn to carry it off with the best of them, out here. But when it comes to being the real thing, why, I know it would be beyond me, so there you are.”

“But can one be sure?” she cried.

“I think I can. I can see the difference between common and uncommon. I can do more than that. I can see the difference between gentlemen who haven’t got the gift, and those that have. Take Lord Washburn, for example. He’s a gentleman all right — he comes of an old family, they tell me. But I doubt very much if he’s any better than I am.”

“Why should he be?” cried Harriet.

“What I mean is,” said William James, “he hasn’t got the gift, you know.”

“The gift of what?” said Harriet, puzzled.

“How shall I put it? The gift that you’ve got, now: and that Mr. Somers has as well: and that people out here don’t have.”

“But that may only be manner,” said Harriet.

“No, it’s more than manner. It’s the gift of being superior, there now: better than most folks. You understand me, I don’t mean swank and money. That’ll never give it you. Neither is it THINKING yourself superior. The people that are superior don’t think it, and don’t even seem to feel it, in a way. And yet in a way

they know it. But there aren't many of them out here. And what there are go away. This place is meant for all one dead level sort of people."

He spoke with curious sarcasm.

"But," said Harriet, "you are Australian yourself now, aren't you? Or don't you feel it?"

"Oh yes, I suppose I feel it," he said shifting uneasily on his seat. "I AM Australian. And I'm Australian partly because I know that in Australia there WON'T be anybody any better than me. There now."

"But," laughed Harriet, "aren't you glad then?"

"Glad?" he said. "It's not a matter for gladness. It's a fact. But I'm not one of the fools who think there's nobody any better than me in the world. I know there are."

"How queer to hear you say so!"

"But this isn't the place for them. Here in Australia we don't want them. We want the new-fashioned sort of people who are all dead-level as good as one another. You're going to Mullumbimby this week-end with Jack and Victoria, aren't you?"

"Yes. And I thought if we liked it we might stay down there for a while — by the sea — away from the town."

"You please yourselves, of course. Perhaps better there than here. But — it's no business of mine, you know that" — he shrugged his shoulders. "But there's something comes over me when I see Mr. Somers thinking he can live out here, and work with the Australians. I think he's wrong — I really do. They'll drag him down to their level, and make what use they can of him — and — well, in my opinion you'd both be sorry for it."

"How strange that you should say so, you who are one of them."

"I am one of them, and I'm not. I'm not one of anybody. But I haven't got only just the two eyes in my head that can tell the kettle from the teapot. I've got another set of eyes inside me somewhere that can tell real differences, when there are any. And that's what these people don't seem to have at all. They've only got the outside eyes."

Harriet looked at him in wonder. And he looked at her — at her queer, rather large, but thin-skinned, soft hands.

"You need a thick skin to live out here," he said.

But still she sat with her hands folded, lost in meditation.

"But Lovat wants so much to do something in the world, with other men," she said at last. "It's not MY urging, I assure you."

"He's making a mistake. He's making a mistake to come out here, tell him from me. They'll take him at their own level, not at his."

“But perhaps he wants to be taken at their level,” said Harriet, rather bitterly, almost loving the short, thick man opposite for his quiet, Cornish voice and his uncanny grey eyes, and his warning.

“If he does he makes the mistake of his life, tell him from me.” And William James rose to his feet. “You’ll excuse me for stopping talking like this, over things that’s no business of mine,” he added.

“It’s awfully good of you,” said Harriet.

“Well, it’s not often I interfere with people’s doings. But there was just something about you and Mr. Somers — .”

“Awfully good of you.”

He had taken his little black felt hat. He had an almost Italian or Spanish look about him — from one of the big towns, Barcelona or even Palermo.

“I suppose I’ll have to be getting along,” he said.

She held out her hand to him to bid him goodbye. But he shook hands in a loose, slack way, and was gone, leaving Harriet uneasy as if she had received warning of a hidden danger.

She hastened to show Somers the persimmons when he came home, and to tell of her visitor.

“And he’s queer, Lovat, he’s awfully queer — nice too. He told me we were superior people, and that we made a mistake coming here, because they’d bring us down to their level.”

“Not if we don’t let them.”

“He says we can’t help it.”

“Why did he come to tell you that, I wonder.”

They were going down to Mullumbimby in two days’ time — and they had hardly seen anything of Jack and Victoria since the Sunday at Mosman’s Bay. But Victoria called across the fence, rather hesitatingly:

“You’re going with us on Saturday, aren’t you, Mrs. Somers?”

“Oh yes, we’re looking forward to it immensely — if it really suits you.”

“I’m so glad. I thought perhaps you didn’t want to go.”

That same evening Jack and Victoria came across for a few minutes.

“Look at the lovely cacchi,” said Harriet, giving the persimmons their Italian name. “William James brought them me this morning.”

“William James brought them!” cried Victoria and Jack in a breath. “Why, whatever have you done to him?”

“Nothing,” laughed Harriet. “I hope not, I’m sure.”

“You must have given him a glad eye,” said Jack. “Did he come in?”

“Yes, he came in and talked to me quite a long time. He said he would see you to-morrow in town.”

“Wonders never cease! I tell you, you’ve done it on him. What did he talk to you about, then?”

“Oh. Australia. He said he didn’t think we should really like it.”

“He did, did he? Wanted to warn you off, so to speak.”

“Perhaps,” laughed Harriet.

“The little mingo. He’s as deep as a five hundred feet boring, and I’ve never got down to sweet water in him yet.”

“Don’t you trust him?” said Harriet.

“Trust him? Oh yes, he’d never pick my pocket.”

“I didn’t mean that.”

“That’s the only way I have of trusting folks,” said Jack.

“Then you don’t trust them far,” mocked Harriet.

“Perhaps I don’t. And perhaps I’m wise of it.”

CHAPTER 5. COO-EE.

They went to Mullumbimby by the two o'clock train from Sydney on the Friday afternoon, Jack having managed to get a day off for the occasion. He was a sort of partner in the motor-works place where he was employed, so it was not so difficult. And work was slack.

Harriet and Victoria were both quite excited. The Somers had insisted on packing one basket of food for the house, and Victoria had brought some dainties as well. There were few people in the train, so they settled themselves right at the front, in one of those long open second-class coaches with many cane seats and a passage down the middle.

"This is really for the coal miners," said Victoria. "You'll see they'll get in when we get further down."

She was rather wistful, after the vague coolness that had subsisted between the two households. She was so happy that Somers and Harriet were coming with her and Jack. They made her feel — she could hardly describe it — but so safe, so happy and safe. Whereas often enough, in spite of the stalwart Jack, she felt like some piece of fluff blown about on the air, now that she was taken from her own home. With Somers and Harriet she felt like a child that is with its parents, so lovely and secure, without any need ever to look round. Jack was a man, and everything a man should be, in her eyes. But he was also like a piece of driftwood drifting on the strange unknown currents in an unexplored nowhere, without any place to arrive at. Whereas to Victoria, Harriet seemed to be rooted right in the centre of everything, at last she could come to perfect rest in her, like a bird in a tree that remains still firm when the floods are washing everything else about.

If only Somers would let her rest in Harriet and him. But he seemed to have a strange vindictiveness somewhere in his nature, that turned round on her and terrified her worse than before. If he would only be fond of her, that was what she wanted. If he would only be fond of her, and not ever really leave her. Not love. When she thought of lovers she thought of something quite different. Something rather vulgar, rather common, more or less naughty. Ah no, he wasn't like that. And yet — since all men are potential lovers to every woman — wouldn't it be terrible if he asked for love. Terrible — but wonderful. Not a bit like Jack — not a bit. Would Harriet mind? Victoria looked at Harriet with her quick, bright, shy brown eyes. Harriet looked so handsome and distant: she was

a little afraid of her. Not as she was afraid of Somers. Afraid as one woman is of another fierce woman. Harriet was fierce, Victoria decided. Somers was demonish, but could be gentle and kind.

It came on to rain, streaming down the carriage windows. Jack lit a cigarette, and offered one to Harriet. She, though she knew Somers disliked it intensely when she smoked, particularly in a public place like this long, open railway carriage, accepted, and sat by the closed window smoking.

The train ran for a long time through Sydney, or the endless outsides of Sydney. The town took almost as much leaving as London does. But it was different. Instead of solid rows of houses, solid streets like London, it was mostly innumerable detached bungalows and cottages, spreading for great distances, scattering over hills, low hills and shallow inclines. And then waste marshy places, and old iron, and abortive corrugated iron “works” — all like the Last Day of creation, instead of a new country. Away to the left they saw the shallow waters of the big opening where Botany Bay is: the sandy shores, the factory chimneys, the lonely places where it is still Bush. And the weary half established straggling of more suburb.

“Como”, said the station sign. And they ran on bridges over two arms of water from the sea, and they saw what looked like a long lake with wooded shores and bungalows: a bit like Lake Como, but oh, so unlike. That curious sombreness of Australia, the sense of oldness, with the forms all worn down low and blunt, squat. The squat-seeming earth. And then they ran at last into real country, rather rocky, dark old rocks, and sombre bush with its different pale-stemmed dull-leaved gumtrees standing graceful, and various healthy-looking undergrowth, and great spiky things like zuccas. As they turned south they saw tree-ferns standing on one knobbly leg among the gums, and among the rocks ordinary ferns and small bushes spreading in glades and up sharp hill-slopes. It was virgin bush, and as if unvisited, lost, sombre, with plenty of space, yet spreading grey for miles and miles, in a hollow towards the west. Far in the west, the sky having suddenly cleared, they saw the magical range of the Blue Mountains. And all this hoary space of bush between. The strange, as it were, INVISIBLE beauty of Australia, which is undeniably there, but which seems to lurk just beyond the range of our white vision. You feel you can’t SEE — as if your eyes hadn’t the vision in them to correspond with the outside landscape. For the landscape is so unimpressive, like a face with little or no features, a dark face. It is so aboriginal, out of our ken, and it hangs back so aloof. Somers always felt he looked at it through a cleft in the atmosphere; as one looks at one of the ugly-faced, distorted aborigines with his wonderful dark eyes that have such an incomprehensible ancient shine in them, across gulfs of unbridged centuries. And yet, when you

don't have the feeling of ugliness or monotony, in landscape or in nigger, you get a sense of subtle, remote, FORMLESS beauty more poignant than anything ever experienced before.

"Your wonderful Australia!" said Harriet to Jack. "I can't tell you how it moves me. It feels as if no one had ever loved it. Do you know what I mean? England and Germany and Italy and Egypt and India — they've all been loved so passionately. But Australia feels as if it had never been loved, and never come out into the open. As if man had never loved it, and made it a happy country, a bride country — or a mother country."

"I don't suppose they ever have," said Jack.

"But they will?" asked Harriet. "Surely they will. I feel that if I were Australian, I should love the very earth of it — the very sand and dryness of it — more than anything."

"Where should we poor Australian wives be?" put in Victoria, leaning forward her delicate, frail face — that reminded one of a flickering butterfly in its wavering.

"Yes," said Harriet meditatively, as if they had to be considered, but were not as important as the other question.

"I'm afraid most Australians come to hate the Australian earth a good bit before they're done with it," said Jack. "If you call the land a bride, she's the sort of bride not many of us are willing to tackle. She drinks your sweat and your blood, and then as often as not lets you down, does you in."

"Of course," said Harriet, "it will take time. And of course a LOT of love. A lot of fierce love, too."

"Let's hope she gets it," said Jack. "They treat the country more like a woman they pick up on the streets than a bride, to my thinking."

"I feel I could LOVE Australia," declared Harriet.

"Do you feel you could love an Australian?" asked Jack, very much to the point.

"Well," said Harriet, arching her eyes at him, "that's another matter. From what I see of them I rather doubt it," she laughed, teasing him.

"I should say you would. But it's no good loving Australia if you can't love the Australian."

"Yes, it is. If as you say Australia is like the poor prostitute, and the Australian just bullies her to get what he can out of her and then treats her like dirt."

"It's a good deal like that," said Jack.

"And then you expect me to approve of you."

"Oh, we're not all alike, you know."

"It always seems to me," said Somers, "that somebody will have to water

Australia with their blood before it's a real man's country. The soil, the very plants seem to be waiting for it."

"You've got a lurid imagination, my dear man," said Jack.

"Yes, he has," said Harriet. "He's always so extreme."

The train jogged on, stopping at every little station. They were near the coast, but for a long time the sea was not in sight. The land grew steeper — dark, straight hills like cliffs, masked in sombre trees. And then the first plume of colliery smoke among the trees on the hill-face. But they were little collieries, for the most part, where the men just walked into the face of the hill down a tunnel, and they hardly disfigured the land at all. Then the train came out on the sea — lovely bays with sand and grass and trees, sloping up towards the sudden hills that were like a wall. There were bungalows dotted in most of the bays. Then suddenly more collieries, and quite a large settlement of bungalows. From the train they looked down on many many pale-grey zinc roofs, sprinkled about like a great camp, close together, yet none touching, and getting thinner towards the sea. The chimneys were faintly smoking, there was a haze of smoke and a sense of home, home in the wilds. A little way off, among the trees, plumes of white steam betrayed more collieries.

A bunch of schoolboys clambered into the train with their satchels, at home as schoolboys are. And several black colliers, with tin luncheon boxes. Then the train ran for a mile and a half, to stop at another little settlement. Sometimes they stopped at beautiful bays in a hollow between hills, and no collieries, only a few bungalows. Harriet hoped Mullumbimby was like that. She rather dreaded the settlements with the many many iron roofs, and the wide, unmade roads of sandy earth running between, down to the sea, or skirting swamp-like little creeks.

The train jogged on again — they were there. The place was half and half. There were many tin roofs — but not SO many. There were the wide, unmade roads running so straight as it were to nowhere, with little bungalow homes half-lost at the side. But they were pleasant little bungalow homes. Then quite near, inland, rose a great black wall of mountain, or cliff, or tor, a vast dark tree-covered tor that reminded Harriet of Matlock, only much bigger. The town trailed down from the foot of this mountain towards the railway, a huddle of grey and red-painted iron roofs. Then over the railway, towards the sea, it began again in a scattered, spasmodic fashion, rather forlorn bungalows and new "stores" and fields with rail fences, and more bungalows above the fields, and more still running down the creek shallows towards the hollow sea, which lay beyond like a grey mound, the strangest sight Harriet had ever seen.

Next to the railway was a field, with men and youths playing football for their lives. Across the road from the football field was a barber's shop, where a man

on horseback was leaning chattering to the barber, a young intelligent gentleman in eye-glasses. And on the broad grass of the roadside grew the trees with the bright scarlet flowers perching among the grey twigs.

Going towards the sea they were going away from the town that slid down at the bush-covered foot of the dark tor. The sun was just sinking to this great hill face, amid a curdle of grey-white clouds. The faintest gold reflected in the more open eastern sky, in front. Strange and forlorn, the wide sandy-rutted road with the broad grass margin and just one or two bungalows. "Verdun" was the first, a wooden house painted dark red. But some had quite wide grass round them, inside their fences, like real lawns.

Victoria had to dart to the house-agent for the key. The other three turned to the left, up another wide road cut in the almost nothingness, past two straying bungalows perched on brick supports — then across a piece of grass-land as yet unoccupied, where small boys were kicking a football — then round the corner of another new road, where water lay in a great puddle so that they had to climb on to the grass beside the fence of a big red-painted bungalow. Across the road was a big bungalow built with imitation timbered walls and a red corrugated roof and red huge water-tanks. The sea roared loudly, but was not in sight. Next along the forlorn little road nestled a real bright red-tiled roof among a high bushy hedge, and with a white gate.

"I do hope it's that," said Harriet to herself. She was so yearning to find another home.

Jack stood waiting at the corner on the tall bit of grassy land above the muddy, cut-out road. There came Victoria running in her eager way across the open space up the slight incline. Evening was beginning to fall.

"Got 'em?" called Jack.

"Yes. Mrs. Wynne was just washing herself, so I had to wait a minute." Victoria came panting up.

"Is that it?" said Harriet timidly at last, pointing to the bright red roof.

"Yes, that's it," said Victoria, pleased and proprietary. A boy from the big red bungalow called to ask if he should bring milk across. The big red bungalow was a dairy. But Harriet followed eagerly on Jack's footsteps across the road. She peeped over the white gate as he unfastened it. A real lovely brick house, with a roof of bright red tiles coming down very low over dark wooden verandahs, and huge round rain-tanks, and a bit of grass and a big shed with double doors. Joy! The gate was open, and she rushed in, under the tall, over-leaning hedge that separated them from the neighbour, and that reached almost to touch the side of her house. A wooden side verandah with bedsteads — old rusty bedsteads patched with strip and rope — and then grass, a little front all of grass, with

loose hedges on either side — and the sea, the great Pacific right there and rolling in huge white thunderous rollers not forty yards away, under her grassy platform of a garden. She walked to the edge of the grass. Yes, just down the low cliff, really only a bank, went her own little path, as down a steep bank, and then was smooth yellow sand, and the long sea swishing up its incline, and rocks to the left, and incredible long rollers furling over and crushing down on the shore. At her feet! At her very feet, the huge rhythmic Pacific.

She turned to the house. There it crouched, with its long windows and its wide verandah and its various slopes of low, red-tiled roofs. Perfect! Perfect! The sun had gone down behind the great front of black mountain wall which she could still see over the hedge. The house inside was dark, with its deep verandahs like dark eyelids half closed. Somebody switched on a light. Long cottage windows, and a white ceiling with narrow dark beams. She rushed indoors. Once more in search of a home, to be alone with Lovat, where he would be happy. How the sea thundered!

Harriet liked the house immensely. It was beautifully built, solid, in the good English fashion. It had a great big room with dark jarrah timbering on the roof and the walls: it had a dark jarrah floor, and doors, and some solid, satisfactory jarrah furniture, a big, real table and a sideboard and strong square chairs with cane seats. The Lord had sent her here, that was certain.

And how delighted Victoria was with her raptures. Jack whipped his coat off and went to the shed for wood and coal, and soon had a lavish fire in the open hearth. A boy came with milk, and another with bread and fresh butter and eggs, ordered by Mrs. Wynne. The big black kettle was on the fire. And Harriet took Lovat's arm, she was so moved.

Through the open seaward door, as they sat at the table, the near sea was glimmering pale and greenish in the sunset, and breaking with a crash of foam right, as it seemed, under the house. If the house had not stood with its little grassy garden some thirty or forty feet above the ocean, sometimes the foam would have flown to the doorstep, or to the steps of the loggia. The great sea roaring at one's feet!

After the evening meal the women were busy making up beds and tidying round, while the men sat by the fire. Jack was quiet, he seemed to brood, and only smoke abstractedly, vaguely. He just sucked his pipe and stared in the fire, while the sea boomed outside, and the voices of the women were heard eager in the bedrooms. When one of the doors leading on to the verandahs was opened, the noise of the sea came in frightening, like guns.

The house had been let for seven months to a man and wife with eleven children. When Somers got up at sunrise, in the morning, he could well believe

it. But the sun rose golden from a low fume of haze in the north-eastern sea. The waves rolled in pale and bluey, glass-green, wonderfully heavy and liquid. They curved with a long arch, then fell in a great hollow thud, and a spurt of white foam and a long, soft, snow-pure rush of forward flat foam. Somers watched the crest of fine, bristling spume fly back from the head of the waves as they turned and broke. The sea was all yellow-green light.

And through the light came a low, black tramp steamer, lurching up and down on the waves, disappearing altogether in the lustrous water, save for her bit of yellow-banded funnel and her mast-tips: then emerging like some long, out-of-shape dolphin on a wave-top. She was like some lost mongrel running over a furrowed land. She bellowed and barked forlornly, and hung round on the up-and-down waves.

Somers saw what he wanted. At the south end of the shallow bay was a long, high jetty straddling on great tree-trunk poles out on to the sea, and carrying a long line of little red coal-trucks, the sort that can be tipped up. Beyond the straddling jetty was a spit of low, yellow-brown land, grassy, with a stiff little group of trees like ragged Noah's ark trees, and further in, a little farm-place with two fascinating big gum-trees that stuck out their clots of foliage in dark tufts at the end of slim, up-starting branches.

But the lines from the jetty ran inland for two hundred yards, to where a tiny colliery was pluming steam and smoke from beyond a marsh-like little creek. The steamer wanted to land. She saw the line of little trucks full and ready. She bellowed like a miserable cow, sloping up and down and turning round on the waters of the bay. Near the jetty the foam broke high on some sheltering rocks. The steamer seemed to watch yearningly, like a dog outside a shut door. A little figure walked along the jetty, slowly, unconcernedly. The steamer bellowed again. The figure reached the end of the jetty, and hung out a red flag. Then the steamer shouted no more, but slowly, fearfully turned and slunk up and down the waves back towards Sydney.

The jetty — the forlorn pale-brown grassy bank running out to sea, with the clump of sharp, hard-pointed dark conifers, trees of the southern hemisphere, stiff and mechanical; then the foreshore with yellow sand and rollers; then two bungalows, and a bit of waste ground full of tins; that was the southern aspect. Northwards, next door, was the big imitation black and white bungalow, with a tuft of wind-blown trees and half-dead hedge between it and the Somers' house. That was north. And the sun was already sloping upwards and northwards. It gave Somers an uneasy feeling, the northward travelling of the climbing sun: as if everything had gone wrong. Inland, lit up dark grey with its plummy trees in the morning light, was the great mountain or tor, with bare, greying rock showing

near the top, and above the ridge-top the pure blue sky, so bright and absolutely unsullied, it was always a wonder. There was an unspeakable beauty about the mornings, the great sun from the sea, such a big, untamed, proud sun, rising into a sky of such tender delicacy, blue, so blue, and yet so frail that even blue seems too coarse a colour to describe it, more virgin than humanity can conceive; the land inward lit up, the prettiness of many painted bungalows with tin roofs clustering up the low up-slopes of the grey-treed bush; and then rising like a wall, facing the light and still lightless, the tor face, with its high-up rim so grey, having tiny trees feathering against the most beautiful frail sky in the world. Morning!

But Somers turned to the house. It stood on one of the regulation lots, probably fifty feet by a hundred and fifty. The bit of level grass in front was only fifty feet wide, and perhaps about the same from the house to the brim of the sea-bank, which dropped bushily down some forty feet to the sand and the flat shore-rocks and the ocean. But this grassy garden was littered with bits of rag, and newspapers, sea-shells, tins and old sponges. And the lot next to it was a marvellous constellation of tin cans in every stage of rustiness, if you peeped between the bushes.

“You’ll take the ashes and the rubbish too?” said Somers to the sanitary-man who came to take the sanitary tin of the earth-closet every Monday morning.

“No,” responded that individual briefly: a true Australian Cockney answer, impossible to spell. A sort of neow sound.

“Does anybody take them?”

“Neow. We take no garbage.”

“Then what do I do with them?”

“Do what you like with ‘em.” And he marched off with the can. It was not rudeness. It was a kind of colonial humour.

After this Somers surveyed the cans and garbage of the next lot, under the bushes and everywhere, with colonial hopelessness. But he began at once to pick up rags and cans from his own grass.

The house was very pretty, and beautifully built. But it showed all signs of the eleven children. On the verandah at the side, on either side of the “visitors” door, was a bed: one a huge family iron bedstead with an indescribably rusty, saggy wire mattress, the other a single iron bedstead with the wire mattress all burst and so mended with a criss-cross of ropes. These beds were screened from the sea-wind by sacks, old pieces of awful carpeting, and pieces of linoleum tacked to the side of the verandah. The same happened on the third side of the house: two more rope-mended iron bedsteads, and a nailed-up lot of unspeakable rags to screen from the wind.

The house had three little bedrooms, one opening from each of the side verandahs, and one from the big central room. Each contained two saggy single beds. That was five people. Remained seven, with the father and mother. Three children must have gone into the huge bed by the side entrance door, and the other four must have been sprinkled over the other three outside, rope-mended beds.

The bungalow contained only the big room with five doors: one on each side the fire-place, opening into the inner bedroom and the kitchen respectively, and on each of the other three sides a door opening on to the verandah. From the kitchen opened a little pantry and a zinc-floored cubby-hole fitted with the inevitable Australian douche and a little sinkhole to carry off the water. This was the bathroom. There it was, all compact and nice, two outer bedrooms on the wings, and for the central block, the big room in front, the bedroom and kitchen at the back. The kitchen door opened on to the bit of grass at the back, near the shed.

It was a well-built little place, amazing in a world of wood and tin shacks. But Somers would not have liked to live in it with a thirteen-people family. There were eleven white breakfast cups, of which nine had smashed handles and broad tin substitutes quite cannily put on. There were two saucers only. And all the rest to match: seven large brown teapots, of which five had broken spouts: not one whole dish or basin of any sort, except a sauce boat. And rats! Torestin was a clean and ratless spot compared with Coo-ee. For the house was called Coo-ee, to fetch the rats in, Jack said.

The women flew at the house with hot water and soda. Jack and Somers spent the morning removing bedsteads into the shed, tearing down the horrid rag-and-dirt screens, pulling out the nails with which these screens had been held in place, and pulling out the hundreds of nails which had nailed down the dirt-grey, thin-carpet as if forever to the floor of the big room. Then they banged and battered this thin old patternless carpet, and washed it with soda and water. And then they banged and battered the two sofas, that were like sandbags, so full of sand and dust. And they took down all the ugly, dirt-filmed pictures of the Dana Gibson sort, and the "My refuge is in God" text.

"I should think so," said Jack. "Away from the muck they'd made down here."

Like demons the four of them flew at this Coo-ee house, and afternoon saw Jack and Somers polishing floors with a stuff called glowax, and Harriet and Victoria putting clean papers on all the shelves, and arranging the battered remnant of well-washed white crockery.

"The crockery is the worst item here," said Victoria. "You pay three-and-six and four shillings for one of these cups and saucers, and four-and-six for a

common brown quart jug, and twelve guineas for a white dinner service.”

Harriet looked at the horrid breakable stuff aghast.

“I feel like buying a tin mug at once,” she said.

But Victoria did not bother. She took it all as it came. The people with the eleven children had paid three and a half guineas a week for seven months for the house.

At three o'clock Victoria's brother, a shy youth of seventeen, arrived in a buggy and drove Jack and Victoria the four miles to the home of the latter. Somers and Harriet had tea alone.

“But I love and adore the place,” said Harriet. “Victoria says we can have it for thirty shillings a week, and if they'd let you off even half of the month for Torestin, we should be saving.”

The Callcotts arrived home in the early dark.

“Oh, but doesn't the house smell different,” cried Victoria.

“Beeswax and turps,” said Jack. “Not a bad smell.”

Again the evening passed quietly. Jack had not been his own boisterous self at all. He was silent, and you couldn't get at him. Victoria looked at him curiously, wondering, and tried to draw him out. He laughed and was pleasant enough, but relapsed into silence, as if he were sad, or gloomy.

In the morning sunlight Harriet and Somers were out first, after Somers had made the fire, having a frightened dip in the sandy foam. They kept far back from the great rollers, which, as the two sat in the dribbling back-wash, reared up so huge and white and fanged in a front attack, that Harriet always rose and ran, and it was long before she got really wet. And then when they did venture to sit in a foot of water, up came a sudden flush and flung them helpless rolling a dozen yards in, and banged them against the pebbles. It was distinctly surprising. Somers had never known that he weighed so little, that he was such a scrap of unimportance. And he still dared not quite imagine the whole of the blind, invisible force of that water. It was so different being in it, even on the edge of it, from looking at it from the outside.

As they came trembling and panting up the bank to the grass-plot, dripping and smelling so strong and sticky of the Pacific, they saw Jack standing smoking and watching.

“Are you going to try it?” said Somers.

He shook his head, and lit a cigarette.

“No. It's past my bathing season,” he said.

They ran to the little tub-house and washed the sand and salt and sea-stickiness off with fresh water.

Somers wondered whether Jack was going to say anything to him or not. He

was not sure. Perhaps Jack himself was not sure. And Somers had that shrinking feeling one has from going to see the doctor. In a quiet sort of way, the two men kept clear of one another. They loitered about in the sun and round the house during the morning, mending the broken deck-chairs and doing little jobs. Victoria and Harriet were cooking roast pork and apple sauce, and baking little cakes. It had already been arranged that the Somers should come and live in Coo-ee, and Victoria was quite happy and determined to leave a supply of nice eatables behind her.

In the afternoon they all went strolling down the sands, Somers and Victoria, Jack and Harriet. They picked up big, iridescent abalone shells, such as people had on their mantelpieces at home: and bits of purplish coral stuff. And they walked across two fields to have a look at an aeroplane which had come down with a broken propeller. Jack of course had to talk about it to the people there, while Somers hung back and tried to make himself invisible, as he always did when there were strange onlookers.

Then the four turned home. Jack and Victoria were leaving by the seven train next morning, Somers and Harriet were staying on a few days, before they returned to Sydney to pack up. Harriet was longing to have the house to themselves. So was Somers. He was also hoping that Jack wouldn't talk to him, wouldn't want anything of him. And at the same time he was waiting for some sort of approach.

The sea's edge was smoking with the fume of the waves like a mist, and the high shore ahead, with the few painted red-roofed bungalows, was all dim, like a Japanese print. Tier after tier of white-frost foam piled breaking towards the shore, in a haste. The tide was nearly high. Somers could hardly see beyond over the white wall-tops of the breaking waves, only on the clear horizon, far away, a steamer like a small black scratch, and a fantastic thread of smoke.

He lingered behind the rest, they were nearly home. They were at the wide sandy place where the creek left off. Its still brackish waters just sank into the sands, without ever running to meet the waves. And beyond the sands was a sort of marsh, bushes and tall stark dead gumtrees, and a few thin-tufted trees. Half wild ponies walked heavily from the bush to the sands, and across to the slope where the low cliff rose again. In the depths of the marsh-like level was the low chimney of the mine, and tips of roofs: and beyond, a long range of wire-like trees holding up tufts of foliage in handfuls, in front of the pale blue, diminishing range of the hills in the distance. It was a weird scene, full of definite detail, fascinating detail, yet all in the funeral-grey monotony of the bush.

Somers turned to the piled-up, white-fronted sea again. On the tip of a rock above him sat a little bird with hunched-up shoulders and a long beak: an absurd

silhouette. He went towards it, talking to it. It seemed to listen to him: really to listen. That is another of the charms of Australia: the birds are not really afraid, and one can really communicate with them. In West Australia Somers could sit in the bush and talk to the flocks of big, handsome, black-and-white birds that they call magpies, but which are a sort of butcher bird, apparently. And they would gurgle little answers in their throats, and cock their heads on one side. Handsome birds they were, some with mottled grey breasts like fish. And the boldest would even come and take pieces of bread from his hands. Yet they were quite wild. Only they seemed to have a strange power of understanding the human psyche.

Now this little kingfisher by the sea. It sat and looked at Somers, and cocked its head and listened. It LIKED to be talked to. When he came quite near, it sped with the straight low flight of kingfishers to another boulder, and waited for him. It was beautiful too: with a sheeny sea-green back and a pale breast touched with burnt yellow. A beautiful, dandy little fellow. And there he waited for Somers like a little penguin perching on a brown boulder. And Somers came softly near, talking quietly. Till he could almost touch the bird. Then away it sped a few yards, and waited. Sheeny greyish green, like the gum-leaves become vivid: and yellowish breast, like the suave gumtree trunks. And listening, and waiting, and wanting to be talked to. Wanting the contact.

The other three had disappeared from the sea-side. Somers walked slowly on. Then suddenly he saw Jack running across the sand in a bathing suit, and entering the shallow rim of a long, swift upwash. He went in gingerly — then threw himself into a little swell, and rolled in the water for a minute. Then he was rushing back, before the next big wave broke. He had gone again by the time Somers came to climb the cliff-bank to the house.

They had a cup of tea on the wooden verandah. The air had begun to waft icily from the inland, but in the sheltered place facing the sea it was still warm. This was only four o'clock — or to-day, five o'clock tea. Proper tea was at six or half-past, with meat and pies and fruit salad.

The women went indoors with the cups. Jack was smoking his pipe. There was something unnatural about his stillness.

“You had a dip after all,” said Somers.

“Yes. A dip in and out.”

Then silence again. Somers' thoughts wandered out to the gently darkening sea, and the bird, and the whole of vast Australia lying behind him flat and open to the sky.

“You like it down here?” said Jack.

“I do indeed.”

“Let’s go down to the rocks again, I like to be near the waves.”

Somers rose and followed him. The house was already lit up. The sea was bluey. They went down the steps cut in the earth of the bank top, and between the bushes to the sand. The tide was full, and swishing against a flat ledge of rocks. Jack went to the edge of this ledge, looking in at the surging water, white, hissing, heavy. Somers followed again. Jack turned his face to him.

“Funny thing it should go on doing this all the time, for no purpose,” said Jack, amid all the noise.

“Yes.”

Again they watched the heavy waves unfurl and fling the white challenge of foam on the shore.

“I say,” Jack turned his face. “I shan’t be making a mistake if I tell you a few things in confidence, shall I?”

“I hope not. But judge for yourself.”

“Well, it’s like this,” shouted Jack — they had to shout at one another in unnaturally lifted voices, because of the huge noise of the sea. “There’s a good many of us chaps as has been in France, you know — and been through it all — in the army — we jolly well know you can’t keep a country going on the vote-catching system — as you said the other day. We know it can’t be done.”

“It can’t,” said Somers, with a shout, “for ever.”

“If you’ve got to command, you don’t have to ask your men first if it’s right, before you give the command.”

“Of course not,” yelled Somers.

But Jack was musing for the moment.

“What?” he shouted, as he woke up.

“No,” yelled Somers.

A further muse, amid the roar of the waves.

“Do the men know better than the officers, or do the officers know better than the men?” he barked.

“Of course,” said Somers.

“These damned politicians — they invent a cry — and they wait to see if the public will take it up. And if it won’t, they drop it. And if it will, they make a mountain of it, if it’s only an old flower-pot.”

“They do,” yelled Somers.

They stood close side by side, like two mariners in a storm, amid the breathing spume of the foreshore, while darkness slowly sank. Right at the tip of the flat, low rocks they stood, like pilots.

“It’s no good,” barked Jack, with his hands in his pockets.

“Not a bit.”

“If you’re an officer, you study what is best, for the cause and for the men. You study your men. But you don’t ask THEM what to do. If you do you’re a wash-out.”

“Quite.”

“And that’s where it is in politics. You see the papers howling and blubbing for a statesman. Why, if they’d got the finest statesman the world ever saw, they’d chuck him on to the scrap heap the moment he really wanted his own way, doing what he saw was the best. That’s where they’ve got anybody who’s any good — on the scrap-heap.”

“Same the world over.”

“It’s got to alter somewhere.”

“It has.”

“When you’ve been through the army, you know that what you depend on is a GENERAL, and on DISCIPLINE, and on OBEDIENCE. And nothing else is the slightest bit of good.”

“But they say the civil world is NOT an army: it’s the will of the people,” cried Somers.

“Will of my grandmother’s old tom-cat. They’ve got no will, except to stop anybody else from having any.”

“I know.”

“Look at Australia. Absolutely fermenting rotten with politicians and the will of the people. Look at the country — going rottener every day, like an old pear.”

“All the democratic world the same.”

“Of course it’s the same. And you may well say Australian soil is waiting to be watered with blood. It’s waiting to be watered with our blood, once England’s got too soft to help herself, let alone us, and the Japs come down this way. They’d squash us like a soft pear.”

“I think it’s quite likely.”

“What?”

“Likely.”

“It’s pretty well a certainty. And would you blame them? If you was thirsty, wouldn’t you pick a ripe pear if it hung on nobody’s tree? Why, of course you would. And who’d blame you.”

“Blame myself if I didn’t,” said Somers.

“And then their coloured labour. I tell you, this country’s too far from Europe to risk it. They’ll swallow us. As sure as guns is guns, if we let in coloured labour, they’ll swallow us. They hate us. All the other colours hate the white. And they’re only waiting till we haven’t got the pull over them. They’re only waiting. And then what about poor little Australia?”

“Heaven knows.”

“There’ll be the Labour Party, the Socialists, uniting with the workers of the world. THEY’LL be the workers, if ever it comes to it. Those black and yellow people’ll make ‘em work — not half. It isn’t one side only that can keep slaves. Why, the fools, the coloured races don’t have any FEELING for liberty. They only think you’re a fool when you give it to them, and if they got a chance, they’d drive you out to work in gangs, and fairly laugh at you. All this world’s-worker business is simply playing their game.”

“Of course,” said Somers. “What is Indian Nationalism but a strong bid for power — for tyranny. The Brahmins want their old absolute caste-power — the most absolute tyranny — back again, and the Mohammedans want their military tyranny. That’s what they are lusting for — to wield the rod again. Slavery for millions. Japan the same. And China, in part, the same. The niggers the same. The real sense of liberty only goes with white blood. And the ideal democratic liberty is an exploded ideal. You’ve got to have wisdom and authority somewhere, and you can’t get it out of any further democracy.”

“There!” said Jack. “That’s what I mean. We’ll be wiped out, wiped out. And we know it. Look here, as man to man, you and me here: if you were an Australian, wouldn’t you do something if you could do something?”

“I would.”

“Whether you got shot or whether you didn’t! We went to France to get ourselves shot, for something that didn’t touch us very close either. Then why shouldn’t we run a bit of risk for what does touch us very close. Why, you know, with things as they are, *I* don’t want Victoria and me to have any children. I’d a jolly sight rather not — and I’ll watch it too.”

“Same with me,” yelled Somers.

Jack had come closer to him, and was now holding him by the arm.

“What’s a man’s life for, anyhow? Is it just to save up like rotten pears on a shelf, in the hopes that one day it’ll rot into a pink canary or something of that?”

“No,” said Somers.

“What we want in Australia,” said Jack, “isn’t a statesman, not yet. It’s a set of chaps with some guts in them, who’ll obey orders when they find a man who’ll give the orders.”

“Yes.”

“And we’ve got such men — we’ve got them. But we want to see our way clear. We don’t never feel quite SURE enough over here. That’s where it is. We sound as sure as a gas-explosion. But it’s all bang and no bump. We’ll never raise no lids. We shall only raise the roof — or our politicians will — with shouting. Because we’re never quite sure. We know it when we meet you

English people. You're a lot surer than we are. But you're mostly bigger fools as well. It takes a fool to be sure of himself, sometimes."

"Fact."

"And there's where it is. Most Englishmen are too big cocked-up fools for us. And there you are. Their sureness may help them along to the end of the road, but they haven't the wit to turn a corner: not a proper corner. And we can see it. They can only go back on themselves."

"Yes."

"You're the only man I've met who seems to me sure of himself and what he means. I may be mistaken, but that's how it seems to me. And William James knows it too. But it's my belief William James doesn't want you to come in, because it would spoil his little game."

"I don't understand."

"I know you don't. Now, look here. This is absolutely between ourselves, now, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"Certain?"

"Yes."

Jack was silent for a time. Then he looked round the almost dark shore. The stars were shining overhead.

"Give me your hand then," said Jack.

Somers gave him his hand, and Jack clasped it fast, drawing the smaller man to him and putting his arm round his shoulders and holding him near to him. It was a tense moment for Richard Lovat. He looked at the dark sea, and thought of his own everlasting gods, and felt the other man's body next to his.

"Well now," he said in Somers' ear, in a soothed tone. "There's quite a number of us in Sydney — and in the other towns as well — we're mostly diggers back from the war — we've joined up into a kind of club — and we're sworn in — and we're sworn to OBEY the leaders, no matter what the command, when the time is ready — and we're sworn to keep silent till then. We don't let out much, nothing of any consequence, to the general run of the members."

Richard listened with his soul. Jack's eager, conspirator voice seemed very close to his ear, and it had a kind of caress, a sort of embrace. Richard was absolutely motionless.

"But who are your leaders?" he asked, thinking of course that it was his own high destiny to be a leader.

"Why, the first club got fifty members to start with. Then we chose a leader and talked things over. And then we chose a secretary and a lieutenant. And

every member quietly brought in more chaps. And as soon as we felt we could afford it, we separated, making the next thirty or so into a second club, with the lieutenant for a leader. Then we chose a new lieutenant — and the new club chose a secretary and a lieutenant.”

Richard didn't follow all this lieutenant and club business very well. He was thinking of himself entering in with these men in a dangerous, desperate cause. It seemed unreal. Yet there he was, with Jack's arm round him. Jack would want him to be his “mate”. Could he? His cobber. Could he ever be mate to any man?

“You sort of have a lot of leaders. What if one of them let you down?” he asked.

“None of them have yet. But we've arranged for that.”

“How?”

“I'll tell you later. But you get a bit of the hang of the thing, do you?”

“I think so. But what do you call yourselves? How do you appear to the public?”

“We call ourselves the digger clubs, and we go in chiefly for athletics. And we do spend most of the time in athletics. But those that aren't diggers can join, if a pal brings them in and vouches for them.”

Richard was now feeling rather out of it. Returned soldiers, and clubs, and athletics — all unnatural things to him. Was he going to join in with this? How could he? He was so different from it all.

“And how do you work — I mean together?” he faltered.

“We have a special lodge of the leaders and lieutenants and secretaries from all the clubs, and again in every lodge they choose a master, that's the highest; and then a Jack, he's like a lieutenant; and a Teller, he's the sort of secretary and president. We have lodges in all the bigish places. And then all the masters of the lodges of the five states of Australia keep in touch, and they choose five masters who are called the Five, and these five agree among themselves which order they shall stand in: first, second, third, fourth, and fifth. When once they've chosen the first, then he has two votes towards the placing of the other four. And so they settle it. And then they grade the five Jacks and the five Tellers. I tell it you just in rough, you know.”

“Yes. And what are you?”

“I'm a master.”

Richard was still trying to see himself in connection with it all. He tried to piece together all that Jack had been letting off at him. Returned soldiers' clubs, chiefly athletics, with a more or less secret core to each club, and all the secret cores working together secretly in all the state under one chief head, and apparently with military penalties for any transgression. It was not a bad idea.

And the aim, apparently, a sort of revolution and a seizing of political power.

“How long have you been started?” he asked.

“About eighteen months — nearly two years altogether.”

Somers was silent, very much impressed, though his heart felt heavy. Why did his heart feel so heavy? Politics — conspiracy — political power: it was all so alien to him. Somehow, in his soul he always meant something quite different, when he thought of action along with other men. Yet Australia, the wonderful, lonely Australia, with her seven million people only — it might begin here. And the Australians, so queer, so absent, as it were, leaving themselves out all the time — they might be capable of a beautiful unselfishness and steadfastness of purpose. Only — his heart refused to respond.

“What is your aim, though? What do you want, finally?” he asked rather lamely.

Jack hesitated, and his grip on the other man’s arm tightened.

“Well,” he said. “It’s like this. We don’t talk a lot about what we intend: we fix nothing. But we start certain talks, and we listen, so we know more or less what most of the ordinary members feel like. Why, the plan is more or less this. The Labour people, the reds, are always talking about a revolution, and the Conservatives are always talking about a disaster. Well, we keep ourselves fit and ready for as soon as the revolution comes — or the disaster. Then we step in, you see, and we are the revolution. We’ve got most of the trained fighting men behind us, and we can MAKE the will of the people, don’t you see: if the members stand steady. We shall have ‘Australia’ for the word. We stand for Australia, not for any of your parties.”

Somers at once felt the idea was a good one. Australia is not too big — seven millions or so, and the biggest part of the seven concentrated in the five or six cities. Get hold of your cities and you’ve got hold of Australia. The only thing he mistrusted was the dryness in Jack’s voice: a sort of that’s-how-it’s-got-to-be dryness, sharp and authoritative.

“What d’yer think of it?” said Jack.

“Good idea,” said Somers.

“I know that — if we can bite on to it. Feel like joining in, d’yer think?”

Somers was silent. He was thinking of Jack even more than of the venture. Jack was trying to put something over him — in some way, to get a hold over him. He felt like an animal that is being lassoed. Yet here was his chance, if he wanted to be a leader of men. He had only to give himself, give himself up to it and to the men.

“Let me think about it a bit, will you?” he replied, “and I’ll tell you when I come up to Sydney.”

“Right O!” said Jack, a twinge of disappointment in his acquiescence. “Look before you leap, you know.”

“Yes — for both sides. You wouldn’t want me to jump in, and then squirm because I didn’t like it.”

“Right you are, old man. You take your own time — I know you won’t be wagging your jaw to anybody.”

“No. Not even to Harriet.”

“Oh, bless you, no. We’re not having the women in, if we can help it. Don’t believe in it, do you?”

“Not in real politics, I don’t.”

They stood a moment longer by the sea. Then Jack let go Somers’ arm.

“Well,” he said, “I’d rather die in a forlorn hope than drag my days out in a forlorn mope. Besides, damn it, I do want to have a shot at something, I do. These politicians absolutely get my wind up, running the country. If I can’t do better than that, then let me be shot, and welcome.”

“I agree,” said Somers.

Jack put his hand on his shoulder, and pressed it hard.

“I knew you would,” he said, in moved tones. “We want a man like you, you know — like a sort of queen bee to a hive.”

Somers laughed, rather startled by the metaphor. He had thought of himself as many things, but never as a queen bee to a hive of would-be revolutionaries. The two men went up to the house.

“Wherever have you been?” said Victoria.

“Talking politics and red-hot treason,” said Jack, rubbing his hands.

“Till you’re almost frozen, I’m sure,” said Victoria.

Harriet looked at the two men in curiosity and suspicion, but she said nothing. Only next morning when the Callcotts had gone she said to Lovat:

“What were you and Mr. Callcott talking about, really?”

“As he said, politics and hot treason. An idea that some of them have got for making a change in the constitution.”

“What sort of change?” asked Harriet.

“Why — don’t bother me yet. I don’t know myself.”

“Is it so important you mustn’t tell me?” she asked sarcastically.

“Or else so vague,” he answered.

But she saw by the shut look on his face that he was not going to tell her: that this was something he intended to keep apart from her: forever apart. A part of himself which he was not going to share with her. It seemed to her unnecessary, and a breach of faith on his part, wounding her. If their marriage was a real thing, then anything very serious was her matter as much as his, surely. Either

her marriage with him was not very important, or else this Jack Callcott stuff wasn't very important. Which probably it wasn't. Yet she hated the hoity-toity way she was shut out.

"Pah!" she said. "A bit of little boys' silly showing off."

But he had this other cold side to his nature, that could keep a secret cold and isolated till Doomsday. And for two or three years now, since the war, he had talked like this about doing some work with men alone, sharing some activity with men. Turning away from the personal life to the hateful male impersonal activity, and shutting her out from this.

She continued bright through the day. Then at evening he found her sitting on her bed with tears in her eyes and her hands in her lap. At once his heart became very troubled: because after all she was all he had in the world, and he couldn't bear her to be really disappointed or wounded. He wanted to ask her what was the matter, and to try to comfort her. But he knew it would be false. He knew that her greatest grief was when he turned away from their personal human life of intimacy to this impersonal business of male activity for which he was always craving. So he felt miserable, but went away without saying anything. Because he was determined, if possible, to go forward in this matter with Jack. He was also determined that it was not a woman's matter. As soon as he could he would tell her about it: as much as it was necessary for her to know. But, once he had slowly and carefully weighed a course of action, he would not hold it subject to Harriet's approval or disapproval. It would be out of her sphere, outside the personal sphere of their two lives, and he would keep it there. She emphatically opposed this principle of her externality. She agreed with the necessity for impersonal activity, but oh, she insisted on being identified with the activity, impersonal or not. And he insisted that it could not and should not be: that the pure male activity should be womanless, beyond woman. No man was beyond woman. But in his one quality of ultimate maker and breaker, he was womanless. Harriet denied this, bitterly. She wanted to share, to join in, not to be left out lonely. He looked at her in distress, and did not answer. It is a knot that can never be untied; it can only, like a navel string, be broken or cut.

For the moment, however, he said nothing. But Somers knew from his dreams what she was feeling: his dreams of a woman, a woman he loved, something like Harriet, something like his mother, and yet unlike either, a woman sullen and obstinate against him, repudiating him. Bitter the woman was, grieved beyond words, grieved till her face was swollen and puffy and almost mad or imbecile, because she had loved him so much, and now she must see him betray her love. That was how the dream woman put it: he had betrayed her great love, and she must go down desolate into an everlasting hell, denied, and denying him

absolutely in return, a sullen, awful soul. The face reminded him of Harriet, and of his mother, and of his sister, and of girls he had known when he was younger — strange glimpses of all of them, each glimpse excluding the last. And at the same time in the terrible face some of the look of that bloated face of a madwoman which hung over Jane Eyre in the night in Mr. Rochester's house.

The Somers of the dream was terribly upset. He cried tears from his very bowels, and laid his hand on the woman's arm saying:

"But I love you. Don't you BELIEVE in me? Don't you BELIEVE in me?" But the woman, she seemed almost old now — only shed a few bitter tears, bitter as vitriol, from her distorted face, and bitterly, hideously turned away, dragging her arm from the touch of his fingers; turned, as it seemed to the dream-Somers, away to the sullen and dreary, everlasting hell of repudiation.

He woke at this, and listened to the thunder of the sea with horror. With horror. Two women in his life he had loved down to the quick of life and death: his mother and Harriet. And the woman in the dream was so awfully his mother, risen from the dead, and at the same time Harriet, as it were, departing from this life, that he stared at the night-paleness between the window-curtains in horror.

"They neither of them believed in me," he said to himself. Still in the spell of the dream, he put it in the past tense, though Harriet lay sleeping in the next bed. He could not get over it.

Then he tried to come right awake. In his full consciousness, he was a great enemy of dreams. For his own private life, he found his dreams were like devils. When he was asleep and off his guard, then his own weaknesses, especially his old weaknesses that he had overcome in his full, day-waking self, rose up again maliciously to take some picturesque form and torment and overcome his sleeping self. He always considered dreams as a kind of revenge which old weaknesses took on the victorious healthy consciousness, like past diseases come back for a phantom triumph. So he said to himself: "The dream is one of these larvae of my past emotions. It means that the danger is passed, the evil is overcome, so it has to resort to dreams to terrify me. In dreams the diseases and evil weaknesses of the soul — and of our relations with other souls — take form to triumph falsely over the living, healthy, onward-struggling spirit. This dream means that the actual danger is gone." So he strengthened his spirit, and in the morning when he got up, and remembered, he was no longer afraid. A little uneasy still, maybe, especially as to what Harriet would do. But surely his mother was not hostile in death! And if she were a little bit hostile at this forsaking, it was not permanent, it was only the remains of a weakness, an unbelief which haunted the soul in life.

So he reasoned with himself. For he had an ingrained instinct or habit of

thought which made him feel that he could never take the move into activity unless Harriet and his dead mother believed in him. They both loved him: that he knew. They both believed in him terribly, in personal being. In the individual man he was, and the son of man, they believed with all the intensity of undivided love. But in the impersonal man, the man that would go beyond them, with his back to them, away from them into an activity that excluded them, in this man they did not find it so easy to believe.

Harriet, however, said nothing for two days. She was happy in her new house, delighted with the sea and the being alone, she loved her Coo-ee bungalow, and loved making it look nice. She loved having Lovat alone with her, and all her desires, as it were, in the hollow of her hand. She was bright and affectionate with him. But underneath lurked this chagrin of his wanting to go away from her, for his activity.

“You don’t take Callcott and his politics seriously, do you?” she said to him at evening.

“Yes,” he said, rather hesitatingly.

“But what does he want?”

“To have another sort of government for the Commonwealth — with a sort of Dictator: not the democratic vote-cadging sort.”

“But what does that matter to you?”

“It does matter. If you can start a new life-form.”

“You know quite well you say yourself life doesn’t START with a form. It starts with a new feeling, and ends with a form.”

“I know. But I think there is a new feeling.”

“In Callcott?” She had a very sceptical intonation.

“Yes.”

“I very much doubt it. He’s a returned war hero, and he wants a chance of keeping on being a hero — or something like that.”

“But even that is a new feeling,” he persisted.

“Yah!” she said, rather wearily sceptical. “I’d rather even believe in William James. There seems to me more real feeling even in him: deeper, at any rate. Your Jacks are shallow really.”

“Nay, he seemed a man to me.”

“I don’t know what you mean by your MEN. Really, I give it up, I don’t know what you do want. You change so. You’ve always said you despise politics, and yet here you are.” She tailed off as if it were hopeless.

“It’s not the politics. But it IS a new life-form, a new social form. We’re pot-bound inside democracy and the democratic feeling.”

“But you know what you’ve said yourself. You didn’t change the Roman

Empire with a revolution. Christianity grew up for centuries without having anything at all to do with politics — just a FEELING, and a belief.”

This was indeed what he had said himself, often enough: that a new religious inspiration, and a new religious idea must gradually spring up and ripen before there could be any constructive change. And yet he felt that preaching and teaching were both no good, at the world’s present juncture. There must be action, brave, faithful action: and in the action the new spirit would arise.

“You see,” he said, “Christianity is a religion which preaches the despising of the material world. And I don’t believe in that part of it, at least, any longer. I believe that the men with the real passion for life, for truth, for LIVING and not for HAVING, I feel they now must seize control of the material possessions, just to safeguard the world from all the masses who want to seize material possessions for themselves, blindly, and nothing else. The men with soul and with passionate truth in them must control the world’s material riches and supplies: absolutely put possessions out of the reach of the mass of mankind, and let life begin to live again, in place of this struggle for existence, or struggle for wealth.”

“Yah, I don’t believe it’s so all-important who controls the world’s material riches and supplies. That’ll always be the same.”

“It won’t.”

“It will. Conservatives or bolshevists or Labour Party — they’re all alike: they all want to grab and have things in their clutches, and they’re devilish with jealousy if they haven’t got them. That’s politics. You’ve said thousands of times that politics are a game for the base people with no human soul in them. Thousands of times you’ve said it. And yet now — .”

He was silent for a while.

“Now,” he said slowly. “Now I see that you don’t have only to give all your possessions to the poor. You’ve got to HAVE no poor that can be saved just by possessions. You’ve got to put the control of all supplies into the hands of sincere, sensible men who are still men enough to know that manhood isn’t the same thing as goods. We don’t want possessions. Nobody wants possessions — more than just the immediate things: as you say yourself, one trunk for you, one for me, and one for the household goods. That’s about all. We don’t want anything else. And the world is ours — Australia or India, Coo-ee or Ardnaree, or where you like. You have got to teach people that, by withholding possessions and stopping the mere frenzy for possession which runs the world to-day. You’ve got to do that FIRST, not last.”

“And you think Jack Callcott will do it?”

“I did think so, as he talked to me.”

“Well, then let him. Why do you want to interfere? In my opinion he’s chiefly jealous because other people run the show, and he doesn’t have a look-in. Having once been a Captain with some power, he wants the same again, and more. I’d rather trust William James to be disinterested.”

“Nay, Jack Callcott is generous by nature, and I believe he’d be disinterested.”

“In his way, he’s generous. But that isn’t the same as being disinterested, for all that. He wants to have his finger in the pie, that’s what he wants.”

“To pull out plums? That’s not true.”

“Perhaps not to pull out money plums. But to be bossy. To be a Captain once more, feeling his feet and being a boss over something.”

“Why shouldn’t he be?”

“Why not? I don’t care if he bosses all Australia and New Zealand and all the lot. But I don’t see why you should call it disinterested. Because it isn’t.”

He paused, struck.

“Am I disinterested?” he asked.

“Not” — she hesitated — “not when you want just POWER.”

“But I don’t want just power. I only see that somebody must have power, so those should have it who don’t want it selfishly, and who have some natural gift for it, and some reverence for the sacredness of it.”

“Ha! — power! power! What does it all mean, after all! And especially in people like Jack Callcott. Where does he see any sacredness. He’s a sentimentalist, and as you say yourself, nothing is sacred then.”

This discussion ended in a draw. Harriet had struck home once or twice, and she knew it. That appeased her for the moment. But he stuck to his essential position, though he was not so sure of the circumstantial standing.

Harriet loved Coo-ee, and was determined to be happy there. She had at last gradually realised that Lovat was no longer lover to her or anybody, or even anything: and amidst the chagrin was a real relief. Because he was her husband, that was undeniable. And if, as her husband, he had to go on to other things, outside of marriage: well, that was his affair. It only angered her when he thought these other things — revolutions or governments or whatnot — higher than their essential marriage. But then he would come to himself and acknowledge that his marriage WAS the centre of his life, the core, the root, however he liked to put it: and this other business was the inevitable excursion into his future, into the unknown, onwards, which man by his nature was condemned to make, even if he lost his life a dozen times in it. Well, so be it. Let him make the excursion: even without her. But she was not, if she could help it, going to have him setting off on a trip that led nowhere. No, if he was to excuse ahead, it must be ahead, and her instinct must be convinced as the needle of a

mariner's compass is convinced. And regarding this Australian business of Callcott's, she had her doubts.

However, she had for the moment a home, where she felt for the moment as rooted, as central as the tree of life itself. She wasn't a bit of flotsam, and she wasn't a dog chained to a dog-kennel. Coo-ee might be absurd — and she knew it was only a camp. But then where she camped with Lovat Somers was now the world's centre to her, and that was enough.

She loved to wake in the morning and open the bedroom door — they had the north bedroom, on the verandah, the room that had the sun all day long; then she liked to lie luxuriously in bed and watch the lovely, broken colours of the Australian dawn: always strange, mixed colours, never the primary reds and yellows. The sun rose on the north-east — she could hardly see it. But she watched the first yellow of morning, and then the strange, strong smoky red-purple of floating pieces of cloud: then the rose and mist blue of the horizon, and the sea all reddish, smoky flesh-colour, moving under a film of gold like a glaze; then the sea gradually going yellow, going primrose, with the foam breaking blue as forget-me-nots or frost, in front. And on the near swing of the bluey primrose, sticking up through the marvellous liquid pale yellow glaze, the black fins of sharks. The triangular, black fins of sharks, like small, hard sails of hell-boats, amid the swimming luminousness. Then she would run out on the verandah. Sharks! Four or five sharks, skulking in the morning glow, and so near, she could almost have thrown bread to them. Sharks, slinking along quite near the coast, as if they were walking on the land. She saw one caught in the heave of a breaker, and lifted. And then she saw him start, saw the quick flurry of his tail as he flung himself back. The land to him was horror — as to her the sea, beyond that wall of ice-blue foam. She made Lovat come to look. He watched them slowly, holding the brush in his hand. He had made the fire, and was sweeping the hearth. Coffee was ready by the time Harriet was dressed: and he was crouching making toast. They had breakfast together on the front verandah, facing the sea, eastwards. And the much-washed red-and-white tablecloth that had been in so many lands with them and that they used outdoors, looked almost too strongly coloured in the tender-seeming atmosphere. The coffee had a lot of chicory in it, but the butter and milk were good, and the brownish honey, that also, like the landscape, tasted queer, as if touched with unkindled smoke. It seemed to Somers as if the people of Australia OUGHT to be dusky. Think of Sicilian honey — like the sound of birds singing: and now this with a dusky undertone to it. But good too — so good!

CHAPTER 6. KANGAROO.

They went back to Sydney on the Thursday, for two days, to pack up and return to Coo-ee. All the time, they could hear the sea. It seemed strange that they felt the sea so far away, in Sydney. In Sydney itself, there is no sea. It might be Birmingham. Even in Mullumbimby, a queer raw little place, when Somers lifted his head and looked down Main Street and saw, a mile away, the high level of the solid sea, it was almost a shock to him. Half a mile inland, the influence of the sea has disappeared, and the land-sense is so heavy, buried, that it is hard to believe that the dull rumble in the air is the ocean. It sounds like a coal-mine or something.

“You’ll let Mr. Somers and me have a little chat to ourselves, Mrs. Somers, won’t you?” said Jack, appearing after tea.

“Willingly. I assure you *I* don’t want to be bothered with your important affairs,” said Harriet. None the less she went over rather resentfully to Victoria, turned out of her own house. It wasn’t that she wanted to listen. She would really have hated to attend to all their high-and-mighty revolution stuff. She didn’t believe in revolutions — they were vieux jeu, out of date.

“Well,” said Jack, settling down in a wooden arm-chair and starting his pipe. “You’ve thought it over, have you?”

“Over and over,” laughed Somers.

“I knew you would.”

He sucked his pipe and thought for a time.

“I’ve had a long talk with Kangaroo about you to-day,” he said.

“Who’s Kangaroo?”

“He’s the First,” replied Jack slowly. And again there was silence. Somers kept himself well in hand, and said nothing.

“A lawyer — well up — I knew him in the army, though. He was one of my lieutenants.”

Still Somers waited, without speaking.

“He’d like to see you. Should you care to have lunch with him and me in town to-morrow?”

“Have you told him you’ve talked to me?”

“Oh yes — told him before I did it. He knows your writings — read all you’ve written, apparently. He’d heard about you too from a chap on the Naldera. That’s the boat you came by, isn’t it?”

“Yes,” said Somers.

“Yes,” echoed Jack. “He was all over me when I mentioned your name. You’d like Kangaroo. He’s a great chap.”

“What’s his name?”

“Cooley — Ben — Benjamin Cooley.”

“They like him on the Bulletin, don’t they? Didn’t I see something about Ben Cooley and his straight talk?”

“Yes. Oh, he can talk straight enough — and crooked enough as well, if it comes to that. You’ll come to lunch then? We lunch in his chambers.”

Somers agreed. Jack was silent, as if he had not much more to say. After a while he added reflectively:

“Yes, I’m glad to have brought you and Kangaroo together.”

“Why do they call him Kangaroo?”

“Looks like one.”

Again there was a silence, each man thinking his own thoughts.

“You and Kangaroo will catch on like wax, as far as ideas go,” Jack prognosticated. “But he’s an unfeeling beggar, really. And that’s where you WON’T cotton on to him. That’s where *I* come in.”

He looked at Somers with a faint smile.

“Come in to what?” laughed Somers.

Jack took his pipe from his mouth with a little flourish.

“In a job like this,” he said, “a man wants a mate — yes, a mate — that he can say ANYTHING to, and be absolutely himself with. Must have it. And as far as I go — for me — you don’t mind if I say it, do you? — Kangaroo could never have a mate. He’s as odd as any phoenix bird I’ve ever heard tell of. You couldn’t mate him to anything in the heavens above or in the earth beneath or in the waters under the earth. No, there’s no female kangaroo of his species. Fine chap, for all that. But as lonely as a nail in a post.”

“Sounds something fatal and fixed,” laughed Somers.

“It does. And he IS fatal and fixed. Those eyeglasses of his, you know — they alone make a man into a sort of eye of God, rather glassy. But my idea is, in a job like this, every man should have a mate — like most of us had in the war. Mine was Victoria’s brother — and still is, in a way. But he got some sort of a sickness that seems to have taken all the fight out of him. Fooling about with the wrong sort of women. Can’t get his pecker up again now, the fool. Poor devil an’ all.”

Jack sighed and resumed his pipe.

“Men fight better when they’ve got a mate. They’ll stand anything when they’ve got a mate,” he went on again after a while. “But a mate’s not all that

easy to strike. We're a lot of decent chaps, stick at nothing once they wanted to put a thing through, in our lodge — and in my club. But there's not one of them I feel's quite up to me — if you know what I mean. Rattling good fellows — but nary one of 'em quite my cut."

"That's usually so," laughed Somers.

"It is," said Jack. Then he narrowed and diminished his voice. "Now I feel," he said cautiously and intensely, "that if you and me was mates, we could put any damn mortal thing through, if we had to knock the bottom out of the blanky show to do it."

Somers dropped his head. He liked the man. But what about the cause? What about the mistrust and reluctance he felt? And at the same time, the thrill of desire. What was offered? He wanted so much. To be mates with Jack in this cause. Life and death mates. And yet he felt he couldn't. Not quite. Something stopped him.

He looked up at Callcott. The other man's face was alert and waiting: curiously naked a face too. Somers wished it had had even a moustache, anything rather than this clean, all-clean bare flesh. If Jack had only had a beard too — like a man — and not one of these clean-shaven too-much-exposed faces. Alert, waiting face — almost lurking, waiting for an answer.

"Could we ever be QUITE mates?" Somers asked gently.

Jack's dark eyes watched the other man fixedly. Jack himself wasn't unlike a kangaroo, thought Somers: a long-faced, smooth-faced, strangely watchful kangaroo with powerful hindquarters.

"Perhaps not as me and Fred Wilmot was. In a way you're higher up than I am. But that's what I like, you know — a mate that's better than I am, a mate who I FEEL is better than I am. That's what I feel about you: and that's what makes me feel, if we was mates, I'd stick to you through hell fire and back, and we'd clear some land between us. I KNOW if you and me was mates, we could put any blooming thing through. There'd be nothing to stop us."

"Not even Kangaroo?"

"Oh, he'd be our way, and we'd be his. He's a sensible chap." Somers was tempted to give Jack his hand there and then, and pledge himself to a friendship, or a comradeship, that nothing should ever alter. He wanted to do it. Yet something withheld him as if an invisible hand were upon him, preventing him.

"I'm not sure that I'm a mating man, either," he said slowly.

"You?" Jack eyed him. "You are and you aren't. If you'd once come over — why man, do you think I wouldn't lay my life down for you?"

Somers went pale. He didn't want anybody laying down their lives for him. "Greater love than this — ." But he didn't want this great love. He didn't

BELIEVE in it: in that way of love.

“Let’s leave it, Jack,” he replied, laughing slowly and rising, giving his hand to the other man. “Don’t let us make any pledges yet. We’re friends, whatever else we are. As for being mates — wait till I feel sure. Wait till I’ve seen Kangaroo. Wait till I see my way clear. I feel I’m only six strides down the way yet, and you ask me to be at the end.”

“At the start you mean,” said Jack, gripping the other man’s hand, and rising too. “But take your time, old man.” He laid his hand on Somers’ shoulder. “If you’re slow and backward like a woman, it’s because it’s your nature. Not like me, I go at it in jumps like a kangaroo. I feel I could jump clean through the blooming tent-canvas sometimes.” As he spoke he was pale and tense with emotion, and his eyes were like black holes, almost wounds in the pallor of his face.

Somers was in a dilemma. Did he want to mix and make with this man? One part of him perhaps did. But not a very big part, since for his life he could not help resenting it when Jack put his hand on his shoulder, or called him “old man”. It wasn’t the commonness either. Jack’s “common” speech and manner was largely assumed — part of the colonial bluff. He could be accurate enough if he chose — as Somers knew already, and would soon know more emphatically. No, it was not the commonness, the vulgar touch in the approach. Jack was sensitive enough, really. And the quiet, well-bred appeal of upper-class young Englishmen, who have the same yearning for intimate comradeship, combined with a sensitive delicacy really finer than a woman’s, this made Somers shrink just the same. He half wanted to commit himself to this whole affection with a friend, a comrade, a mate. And then, in the last issue, he didn’t want it at all. The affection would be deep and genuine enough: that he knew. But — when it came to the point, he didn’t want any more affection. All his life he had cherished a beloved ideal of friendship — David and Jonathan. And now, when true and good friends offered, he found he simply could not commit himself, even to simple friendship. The whole trend of this affection, this mingling, this intimacy, this truly beautiful love, he found his soul just set against it. He couldn’t go along with it. He didn’t want a friend, he didn’t want loving affection, he didn’t want comradeship. No, his soul trembled when he tried to drive it along the way, trembled and stood still, like Balaam’s Ass. It did not want friendship or comradeship, great or small, deep or shallow.

It took Lovat Somers some time before he would really admit and accept this new fact. Not till he had striven hard with his soul did he come to see the angel in the way; not till his soul, like Balaam’s Ass, had spoken more than once. And then, when forced to admit, it was a revolution in his mind. He had all his life

had this craving for an absolute friend, a David to his Jonathan, Pylades to his Orestes: a blood-brother. All his life he had secretly grieved over his friendlessness. And now at last, when it really offered — and it had offered twice before, since he had left Europe — he didn't want it, and he realised that in his innermost soul he had never wanted it.

Yet he wanted SOME living fellowship with other men; as it was he was just isolated. Maybe a living fellowship! — but not affection, not love, not comradeship. Not mates and equality and mingling. Not blood-brotherhood. None of that.

What else? He didn't know. He only knew he was never destined to be mate or comrade or even friend with any man. Some other living relationship. But what? He did not know. Perhaps the thing that the dark races know: that one can still feel in India: the mystery of lordship. That which white men have struggled so long against, and which is the clue to the life of the Hindu. The mystery of lordship. The mystery of innate, natural, sacred priority. The other mystic relationship between men, which democracy and equality try to deny and obliterate. Not any arbitrary caste or birth aristocracy. But the mystic recognition of difference and innate priority, the joy of obedience and the sacred responsibility of authority.

Before Somers went down to George Street to find Jack and to be taken by him to luncheon with the Kangaroo, he had come to the decision, or to the knowledge that mating or comradeship were contrary to his destiny. He would never pledge himself to Jack, nor to this venture in which Jack was concerned.

They arrived at Mr. Cooley's chambers punctually. It was a handsome apartment with handsome jarrah furniture, dark and suave, and some very beautiful rugs. Mr. Cooley came at once: and he WAS a kangaroo. His face was long and lean and pendulous, with eyes set close together behind his pince-nez: and his body was stout but firm. He was a man of forty or so, hard to tell, swarthy, with short-cropped dark hair and a smallish head carried rather forward on his large but sensitive, almost shy body. He leaned forward in his walk, and seemed as if his hands didn't quite belong to him. But he shook hands with a firm grip. He was really tall, but his way of dropping his head, and his sloping shoulders, took away from his height. He seemed not much taller than Somers, towards whom he seemed to lean the sensitive tip of his long nose, hanging over him as he scrutinised him sharply through his eyeglasses, and approaching him with the front of his stomach.

"Very glad to see you," he said, in a voice half Australian, half official.

The luncheon was almost impressive: a round table with a huge bunch of violets in a queer old copper bowl, Queen Anne silver, a tablecloth with heavy

point edging, Venetian wine-glasses, red and white wine in Venetian wine-jugs, a Chinaman waiting at table, offering first a silver dish of hors d'oeuvres and a handsome crayfish with mayonnaise.

"Why," said Somers, equivocally, "I might be anywhere."

Kangaroo looked at him sharply. Somers noticed that when he sat down, his thighs in his dark grey, striped trousers were very thick, making his shoulders seem almost slender; but though his stomach was stout, it was firm.

"Then I hope you feel at home," said Kangaroo. "Because I am sure you are at home anywhere." And he helped himself to olives, putting one in his queer, pursed, thick-lipped mouth.

"For which reason I'm never at home, presumably."

"That may easily be the case. Will you take red or white wine?"

"White," said Somers, oblivious of the poised Chinaman.

"You have come to a homely country," said the Kangaroo, without the ghost of a smile.

"Certainly to a very hospitable one."

"We rarely lock our doors," said Kangaroo.

"Or anything else," said Jack. "Though of course we may slay you in the scullery if you say a word against us."

"I'm not going to be so indiscreet," said Somers.

"Leave the indiscretion to us. We believe in it. Indiscretion is the better part of valour. You agree, Kangaroo?" said Jack, smiling over his plate directly at his host.

"I don't think I'd care to see you turn discreet, boy," returned the other. "Though your quotation isn't new."

"Even a crystal-gazer can't gaze to the bottom of a deep well, eh? Never mind, I'm as shallow as a pie-dish, and proud of it. Red, please." This to the Chink.

"That's why it's so nice knowing you," said Kangaroo.

"And you, of course, are a glass finger-bowl with a violet floating on it, you're so transparent," said Jack.

"I think that describes me beautifully. Mr. Somers, help yourself to wine, that's the most comfortable. I hope you are going to write something for us. Australia is waiting for her Homer — or her Theocritus."

"Or even her Ally Sloper," said Jack, "if I may be permitted to be so old-fashioned."

"If I were but blind," said Somers, "I might have a shot at Australian Homeric."

"His eyes hurt him still, with looking at Sydney," said Jack.

There certainly is enough of it to look at," said Kangaroo.

“In acreage,” said Jack.

“Pity it spreads over so much ground,” said Somers.

“Oh, every man his little lot, and an extended tram-service.

“In Rome,” said Somers, “they piled up huge houses, vast, and stowed them away like grubs in a honeycomb.”

“Who did the stowing?” asked Jack sarcastically.

“We don’t like to have anybody overhead here,” said Kangaroo. “We don’t even care to go upstairs, because we are then one storey higher than our true, ground-floor selves.”

“Prop us up on a dozen stumps, and we’re cosy,” said Jack. “Just a little above the earth level, and no higher, you know. Australians in their heart of hearts hate anything but a bungalow. They feel it’s rock bottom, don’t you see. None of your stair-climbing shams and upstairs importance.”

“Good honest fellows,” said Kangaroo, and it was impossible to know if he were joking or not.

“Till it comes to business,” said Jack.

Kangaroo then started a discussion of the much-mooted and at the moment fashionable Theory of Relativity.

“Of course it’s popular,” said Jack. “It absolutely takes the wind out of anybody’s sails who wants to say ‘I’m IT.’ Even the Lord Almighty is only relatively so and as it were.”

“How nice for us all,” laughed Somers. “It needed a Jew to lead us this last step in liberty.”

“Now we’re all little ITS, chirping like so many molecules one with another,” said Jack, eyeing the roast duck with a shrewd gaze.

The luncheon passed frivolously. Somers was bored, but he had a shrewd suspicion that the other two men really enjoyed it. They sauntered into the study for coffee. It was a smallish room, with big, deep leather chairs of a delicate brown colour, and a thick, bluey oriental carpet. The walls even had an upper panelling of old embossed cordovan leather, a bluish colouring with gilt, old and tarnished away. It was evident that law pays, even in a new country.

Everybody waited for everybody to speak. Somers, of course, knew it was not his business to begin.

“The indiscreet Callcott told you about our Kangaroo clubs,” said the host, smiling faintly. Somers thought that surely he had Jewish blood in him. He stirred his little gold coffee-cup slowly.

“He gave me a very sketchy outline.”

“It interested you?”

“Exceedingly.”

“I read your series of articles on Democracy,” said Kangaroo. “In fact they helped me to this attempt now.”

“I thought not a soul read them,” said Somers, “in that absurd international paper published at the Hague, that they said was run absolutely by spies and shady people.”

“It may have been. But I was a subscriber, and I read your essays here in Sydney. There was another man, too, writing on a new aristocracy. But it seemed to me there was too much fraternising in his scheme, too much reverence for the upper classes and passionate pity for the working classes. He wanted them all to be kind to one another, aristocrats of the spirit.” Kangaroo smiled slowly. And when he smiled like that, there came an exceedingly sweet charm into his face, for a moment his face was like a flower. Yet he was quite ugly. And surely, thought Somers, it is Jewish blood. The very best that is in the Jewish blood: a faculty for pure disinterestedness, and warm, physically warm love, that seems to make the corpuscles of the blood glow. And after the smile his face went stupid and kangaroo-like, pendulous, with the eyes close together above the long, drooping nose. But the shape of the head was very beautiful, small, light, and fine. The man had surely Jewish blood. And he was almost purely KIND, essential kindness, embodied in an ancient, unscrupulous shrewdness. He was so shrewd, so clever. And with a rogue or a mean man, absolutely unscrupulous. But for any human being who showed himself sincere and vulnerable, his heart was pure in kindness. An extraordinary man. This pure kindness had something Jehovah-like in it. And in every difficulty and every stress, he would remember it, his kindly love for real, vulnerable human beings. It had given his soul an absolute direction, whatever he said about relativity. Yet once he felt any man or woman was cold, mean, barren of this warmth which was in him, then he became at once utterly unscrupulous in defeating the creature. He was not angry or indignant. He was more like a real Jehovah. He had only to turn on all the levers and forces of his clever, almost fiendishly subtle will, and he could triumph. And he knew it. Somers had once had a Jewish friend with this wonderful, Jehovah-like kindness, but also, without the shrewd fiendish subtlety of will. But it helped him to understand Cooley.

“Yes — I think the man sent me his book,” said Somers. “I forget his name. I only remember there was a feverish adulation of Lord Something-or-other, and a terrible cri du coeur about the mother of the people, the poor elderly woman in a battered black bonnet and a shawl, going out with sixpence ha’penny to buy a shillings-worth of necessaries for the home.”

“Just so,” said Kangaroo, smiling again. “No doubt her husband drank. If he did, who can wonder.”

“The very sight of her makes one want to shove her out of the house — or out of the world, for that matter,” said Somers.

“Nay,” said Jack. “She’s enjoying her misery, dear old soul. Don’t envy her bits of pleasures.

“Not envy,” laughed Somers. “But I begrudge them her.”

“What would you do with her?” asked Kangaroo.

“I wouldn’t do anything. She mostly creeps in the East End. where one needn’t bother about her. And she’s as much at home there as an opossum is in the bush. So don’t bother me about her.”

“Just so,” smiled Kangaroo. “I’d like to provide public kitchens where the children can get properly fed — and make the husband do a certain amount of state labour to pay for it. And for the rest, leave them to go their own way.”

“But their minds, their souls, their spirits?” said Somers.

“They must more or less look after them themselves. I want to keep ORDER. I want to remove physical misery as far as possible. That I am sure of. And that you can only do by exerting strong, just POWER from above. There I agree with you.”

“You don’t believe in education?”

“Not much. That is to say, in ninety per cent of the people it is useless. But I do want those ninety per cent none the less to have full, substantial lives: as even slaves had under certain masters and as our people hardly have at all. That again, I think, is one of your ideas.”

“It is,” said Somers. But his heart sank. “You want a kind of benevolent tyranny, then?”

“Not exactly. You see my tyrant would be so much circumscribed by the constitution I should establish. But in a sense, he would be a tyrant. Perhaps it would be nearer to say he would be a patriarch, or a pope: representing as near as possible the wise, subtle spirit of life. I should try to establish my state of Australia as a kind of Church, with the profound reverence for life, for life’s deepest urges, as the motive power. Dostoevsky suggests this: and I believe it can be done.”

“Perhaps it might be done here,” blurted Somers. “Every continent has its own way, and its own needs.”

“I agree,” said Kangaroo. “I have the greatest admiration for the Roman Catholic Church, as an institution. But the creed and the theology are not natural to me, quite. Not quite. I think we need something more flexible, and a power less formal and dogmatic; more generous, shall I say. A GENEROUS power, that sees all the issue here, not in the after-life, and that does not concern itself with sin and repentance and redemption. I should try to teach my people what it

is truly to be a MAN, and a woman. The salvation of souls seems too speculative a job. I think if a man is truly a man, true to his own being, his soul saves itself in that way. But no two people can save their souls alive, in the same way. As far as possible, we must leave it to them. *Fata volentem ducunt, nolentem trahunt.*”

“I believe that too.”

“Yet there must be law, and there must be authority. But law more human, and authority much wiser. If a man loves life, and feels the sacredness and the mystery of life, then he knows that life is full of strange and subtle and even conflicting imperatives. And a wise man learns to recognize the imperatives as they arise — or nearly so — and to obey. But most men bruise themselves to death trying to fight and overcome their own new, life-born needs, life’s ever-strange new imperatives. The secret of all life is in obedience: obedience to the urge that arises in the soul, the urge that is life itself, urging us on to new gestures, new embraces, new emotions, new combinations, new creations. It is a subtle and conflicting urge away from the thing we are. And there lies the pain. Because man builds himself in to his old house of life, builds his own blood into the roads he lays down, and to break from the old way, and to change his house of life, is almost like tearing him to pieces: a sacrilege. Life is cruel — and above all things man needs to be reassured and suggested into his new issues. And he needs to be relieved from this terrible responsibility of governing himself when he doesn’t know what he wants, and has no aim towards which to govern himself. Man again needs a father — not a friend or a brother sufferer, a suffering Saviour. Man needs a quiet, gentle father who uses his authority in the name of living life, and who is absolutely stern against anti-life. I offer no creed. I offer myself, my heart of wisdom, strange warm cavern where the voice of the oracle steams in from the unknown; I offer my consciousness, which hears the voice; and I offer my mind and my will, for the battle against every obstacle to respond to the voice of life, and to shelter mankind from the madness and the evil of anti-life.”

“You believe in evil?”

“Ah, yes. Evil is the great principle that opposes life in its new urges. The principle of permanency, everlastingness is, in my opinion, the root of evil. The Ten Commandments which Moses heard were the very voice of life. But the tablets of stone he engraved them on are millstones round our necks. Commandments should fade as flowers do. They are no more divine than flowers are. But our divine flowers — look at those hibiscus — they don’t want to immortalise themselves into stone. If they turned into stone on my table, my heart would almost stop beating, and lose its hope and its joy. But they won’t. They will quietly, gently wither. And I love them for it. And so should all

creeds, all gods, quietly and gently curl up and wither as their evening approaches. That is the only way of true holiness, in my opinion.”

The man had a beautiful voice, when he was really talking. It was like a flute, a wood-instrument. And his face, with that odd look of a sheep or a kangaroo, took on an extraordinary beauty of its own, a glow as if it were suffused with light. And the eyes shone with a queer, holy light, behind the eyeglasses. And yet it was still the kangaroo face.

Somers watched the face, and dropped his head. He sat feeling rebuked. He was so impatient and outrageous himself. And the steady loveliness of this man’s warm, wise heart was too much for him. He was abashed before it.

“Ah, yes,” Kangaroo re-echoed. “There is a principle of evil. The principle of resistance. Malignant resistance to the life principle. And it uses the very life-force itself against life, and sometimes seems as if it were absolutely winning. Not only Jesus rose from the dead. Judas rose as well, and propagated himself on the face of the earth. He has many children now. The life opposers. The life-resisters. The life-enemies. But we will see who wins. We will see. In the name of life, and the love of life, as man is almost invincible. I have found it so.”

“I believe it also,” said Somers.

They were silent, and Kangaroo sat there with the rapt look on his face: a pondering, eternal look, like the eternity of the lamb of God grown into a sheep. This rather wicked idea came into Somers’ mind: the lamb of God grown into a sheep. So the man sat there, with his wide-eyed, rapt face sunk forward to his breast, very beautiful, and as eternal as if it were a dream: so absolute.

A wonderful thing for a sculptor. For Kangaroo was really ugly: his pendulous Jewish face, his forward shoulders, his round stomach in its expensively tailored waistcoat and dark grey, striped trousers, his very big thighs. And yet even his body had become beautiful, to Somers — one might love it intensely, every one of its contours, its roundnesses and downward-drooping heaviness. Almost a grotesque, like a Chinese Buddha. And yet not a grotesque. Beautiful, beautiful as some half-tropical, bulging flower from a tree.

Then Kangaroo looked with a teasing little smile at Somers.

“But you have your OWN idea of power, haven’t you?” he said, getting up suddenly, with quick power in his bulk, and gripping the other man’s shoulder.

“I thought I had,” said Somers.

“Oh, you have, you have.” There was a calm, easy tone in the voice, slightly fat, very agreeable. Somers thrilled to it as he had never thrilled.

“Why, the man is like a god, I love him,” he said to his astonished self. And Kangaroo was hanging forward his face and smiling heavily and ambiguously to himself, knowing that Somers was with him.

“Tiger, tiger, burning bright In the forests of the night”

he quoted in a queer, sonorous voice, like a priest. “The lion of your might would be a tiger, wouldn’t it. The tiger and the unicorn were fighting for the crown. How about me for a unicorn? — if I tied a bayonet on my nose?” He rubbed his nose with a heavy playfulness.

“Is the tiger your principle of evil?”

“The tiger? Oh dear, no. The jackal, the hyaena, and dear, deadly humanity. No, no. The tiger stands on one side of the shield, and the unicorn on the other, and they don’t fight for the crown at all. They keep it up between them. The pillars of the world! The tiger and the kangaroo!” he boomed this out in a mock heroic voice, strutting with heavy playfulness. Then he laughed, looking winsomely at Somers. Heaven, what a beauty he had!

“Tiger, tiger, burning bright,” he resumed, sing-song, abstracted. “I knew you’d come. Ever since I read your first book of poems — how many years is it ago? — ten? — eleven? I knew you’d come.

‘Your hands are five-branded flames — Noli me tangere.’

Of course you had to come.”

“Well, here I am, anyhow,” said Somers.

“You are. You ARE!” shouted the other, and Somers was quite scared. Then Kangaroo laughed again. “Get up,” he said. “Stand up and let me look at you.”

The two men stood facing one another: Kangaroo large, with his full stomach and his face hulking down, and his queer, glaring eyes: Somers slight and aloof-looking. Cooley eyed him up and down.

“A little bit of a fellow — too delicate for rough me,” he said, then started quoting again:

‘Your hands are five-branded flames — Noli me tangere.’

I’ve got fat and bulky on all the poetry I never wrote. How do you do, Mr. Somers? How do you like Australia, and its national animal, the kangaroo?” Again he smiled with the sudden glow of warmth in his dark eyes, startling and wonderful.

“Australia is a weird country, and it’s national animal is beyond me,” Somers said, smiling rather palely.

“Oh no, it isn’t. You’ll be patting it on the back as soon as you’ve taken your hands out of your pockets.”

He stood silent a long while, with feet apart, looking abstractedly at Somers through his pince-nez.

“Ah, well,” he sighed at last. “We shall see. We shall see. But I’m very glad you came. You understand what I mean, I know, when I say we are birds of the same feather. Aren’t we?”

“In some ways I think we are.”

“Yes. In the feathery line. When shall I see you again?”

“We are going back to the South Coast on Saturday.”

“Then let me see you to-morrow. Let me call for you at your house — and bring you back into town for dinner in the evening. May I do that?”

“Thank you,” said Somers.

“What does ‘thank you’ mean? Danke! No, thank you.”

“Yes, thank you,” said Somers.

“Don’t thank ME, man,” suddenly shouted the other. “I’m the one to do the thanking.”

Somers felt simple startled amazement at these sudden shouts — loud shouts, that you might almost hear in the street.

At last Jack and Somers left. Jack had felt it his business to keep quiet: he knew his chief. But now he opened his mouth.

“What do you think of Kangaroo?” he asked.

“I’m beyond thinking,” said Somers.

“I know, that’s how he leaves you when he makes a set at you. But he’s a rattling fine sort, he is. He puts a heart into you when your chest’s as hollow as an old mustard tin. He’s a wonder, is Kangaroo: and he keeps on being a wonder.”

“Yes, he’s certainly a wonder.”

“My, the brain the man has! I say, though, talking about tigers and kangaroos reminded me of a thing I once saw. It was up in the North. I was going along when I heard snarls out of some long buffalo grass that made my hair stand on end. I had to see what it was, though, so into the grass goes I. And there I saw a full-grown male kangaroo backed up against a tree, with the flesh of one leg torn clean from the bone. He was gasping, but he was still fighting. And the other was a great big cat, we call ‘em tiger-cats, as big as a smallish leopard, a beauty — grey and black stripes, and straighter than a leopard. And before you could breathe, a streak of black and grey shot at the ‘roo’s throat, seemed to twist in mid air — and the ‘roo slipped down to the ground with his entrails ripped right out. I was so dumbfounded I took a step in the grass, and that great hulking cat stopped and lifted his face from his warm food that he’d started on without ever looking up. He stood over the ‘roo for ten seconds staring me in the eyes. Then the skin wrinkled back from his snout, and the fangs were so white and clean as death itself, and a low growl came out of his ugly throat. “Come on, you swine,” it said as plain as words. I didn’t, you bet. I backed out of that beastly grass.

“The next one I saw was a dead one. And beside him lay the boss’ best staghound, that had been trained to tackling wild boars since he was a pup: dead

as well. The cat had come fossicking round our camp on the Madden River.

“My gad, though, but the size of the brute, and muscle like you couldn’t find in any other beast. I looked at the claws on the pads. They’re as sharp as a lancet, and they’d tear the guts out of a man before he could squeak. It was good-bye ‘roo, that time.”

“They put that yarn in the Bulletin. And some chap wrote and said it was a stiff ‘un, and the wild cat must be descended from escaped tame cats, because this country has no pussy aboriginal of any sort. Couldn’t say myself, except I saw that tiger-cat, and it didn’t look much like the son of a homely tissey, either. Wonder what put the thing in my head. Perhaps Kangaroo’s fat belly.”

“He’s not so very fat,” said Somers.

“No, he’s not got what you’d call a corporation and a whole urban council in front of him. Neither is he flat just there, like you and me.”

Kangaroo arrived the next day at Torestin with a large bunch of violets in his hand: pale, expensive, late winter violets. He took off his hat to Harriet and bowed quite deep, without shaking hands. He had been a student at Munich.

“Oh, how do you do!” cried Harriet. “Please don’t look at the horrid room, we leave in the morning.”

Kangaroo looked vacantly around. He was not interested, so he saw nothing: he might as well have been blind.

“It’s a very nice room,” he said. “May I give you the violets? The poet said you liked having them about.”

She took them in her two hands, smelling their very faint fragrance.

“They’re not like English violets — or those big dark fellows in Italy,” he said. “But still we persuade ourselves that they ARE violets.”

“They’re lovely. I feel I could warm my hands over them,” she said.

“And now they’re quite happy violets,” he replied, smiling his rare, sweet smile at her. “Why are you taking the poet away from Sydney?”

“Lovat? He wants to go.”

“Lovat! What a good name to call him by!” He turned to Somers, looking at him closely. “May I call you Lovat?”

“Better that than ‘the poet’,” said Somers, lifting his nose slightly with aversion.

The other man laughed, but softly and happily.

“His muse he’s not in love with,” he murmured to himself.

“No, he prefers his own name,” said Somers.

“But supposing now,” said Kangaroo, as if alert and interested, “your name was Cooley: Benjamin Cooley — Ben, for short. You’d prefer even Kangaroo to that.”

“In Australia the kangaroo is the king of beasts,” said Somers.

“The kangaroo is the king of beasts, Inviting the other ones out to feasts,” sang the big man continuing: “Won’t you both come to dinner with the king of beasts? Won’t you come too, Mrs. Somers?”

“You know you only want Lovat, to talk your MAN’S stuff.”

“I’m not a man, I’m a kangaroo. Besides, yesterday I hadn’t seen you. If I had known, my dear Somers, that your wife, who is at this moment in her room hastily changing her dress, was such a beautiful person — I don’t say woman merely — I’d have invited you for her sake, and not for your own.”

“Then *I* wouldn’t have come,” said Somers.

“Hear them, what a haughty pair of individuals! I suppose you expect the king of beasts to go down on his knees to you, like the rest of democratic kings to their constituents. Won’t you get ready,” Mrs. Somers?”

“You are quite sure you want me to come?” said Harriet suspiciously.

“Why, if you won’t come, I shall ask Lovat — dear Lovat, by the happiest fluke in the world not Lovelace — to let me stay here to tea, dinner, or supper — that is, to the next meal, whatever name it may bear.”

At this Harriet disappeared to put on a proper dress.

“We will go as soon as you are ready,” called Kangaroo. “We can all squeeze into that automobile at your gate.”

When Harriet reappeared the men rose. Kangaroo looked at her with admiration.

“What a remarkably beautiful person you are,” he said. “But mind, I don’t say WOMAN. Dio liberi!” He scuttled hurriedly to the door.

They had a gay dinner. Kangaroo wasn’t really witty. But he had such an innocent charm, an extraordinary winsomeness, that it was much more delicious than wit. His presence was so warm. You felt you were cuddled cosily, like a child, on his breast, in the soft glow of his heart, and that your feet were nestling on his ample, beautiful “tummy”.

“I wonder you were never married,” said Harriet to him.

“I’ve been married several times,” he replied.

“Really!” she cried.

“First to Benny Cooley — then to immortal verse — after that to the law — once to a haughty lady — and now I’m wedded to my ideals. This time it is final. I don’t take another wife.”

“I don’t care about the rest. But were you ever married, really?”

“To a woman? A mere woman? Why yes indeed. A young Baroness too. And after seven months she told me she couldn’t stand me for another minute, and went off with Von Rumpeldorf.”

“Is it true?”

“Quite true.”

“And is there still a Mrs. Kangaroo?”

“Alas, no! Like the unicorn, the family knows no female.”

“But why couldn’t she stand you?” cried Harriet.

“Think of it now. Could ANY woman stand me?” he asked, with a slight shrug.

“I should have thought they’d have ADORED you,” she cried.

“Of course they do. They can’t stand me, though. And I thoroughly sympathize with them.”

Harriet looked at him thoughtfully.

“Yes,” she said slowly. “You’re too much like Abraham’s bosom. One would feel nowhere.”

Kangaroo threw down his napkin and pushed back his chair and roared with laughter — roared and roared with laughter. The Chinese manservant stood back perturbed. Harriet went very red — the dinner waited. Then suddenly he became quiet, looking comically at Harriet, and still sitting back from table. Then he opened his arms and held them outstretched, his head on one side.

“The way to nowhere,” he said, ironically.

She did not say any more, and he turned to the manservant.

“My glass is empty, John,” he said.

“Ah well,” he sighed, “if you please one woman you can’t please all women.”

“And you must please all women,” said Harriet, thoughtfully. “Yes, perhaps you must. Perhaps it is your mission.”

“Mission! Good God! Now I’m a fat missionary. Dear Mrs. Somers, eat my dinner, but don’t swallow ME in a mouthful. Eating your host for hors d’oeuvres. You’re a dangerous ogre, a Medusa with her hair under her hat. Let’s talk of Peach Melba. Where have you had the very best Peach Melba you ever tasted?”

After this he became quiet, and a little constrained, and when they had withdrawn for coffee, the talk went subduedly, with a little difficulty.

“I suppose your husband will have told you, Mrs. Somers, of our heaven-inspired scheme of saving Australia from the thieves, dingoes, rabbits, rats and starlings, humanly speaking.”

“No, he hasn’t told me. He’s only told me there was some political business going on.”

“He may as well put it that way as any other. And you advised him not to have anything to do with it?”

“No,” said Harriet, “I let him do as he likes.”

“Wonderful woman! Even the wind bloweth where it listeth.”

“So does he.”

“With your permission.”

“The wind has permission too,” said Harriet. “Everything goes by permission of something else, in this world.” But she went rather red.

“Bravo, a Daniel come to judgement!” Then his voice changed, became gentle and winning again. It was as if he had remembered to love her, in his way of love. “It’s not quite a political thing,” he said. “We want to take away the strain, the nervous tension out of life, and let folks be happy again unconsciously, instead of unhappy consciously. You wouldn’t say that was wrong, would you?”

“No,” she replied, rather unwilling.

“And if I have to be a fat old Kangaroo with — not an Abraham’s bosom, but a pouch to carry young Australia in — why — do you really resent it?”

Harriet laughed, glancing involuntarily at his lowest waistcoat button. It seemed such a true figure.

“Why should I resent it? It’s not my business.”

“Let it be your business just a little bit. I want your sympathy.”

“You mean you want Lovat?”

“Poor Lovat. Richard Lovat Somers! I do indeed want him. But just as much I want your sympathy.”

Harriet smiled enigmatically. She was being her most annoying. A look of almost vicious anger came over the man’s face as he leaned back in his chair, seeming to make his brows narrower, and a convulsion seemed to go through his belly. Then he recovered his calm, and seemed to forget. For a long time he lay silent, with a strange hypnotic stillness, as if he were thinking far away, quite far away. Both Harriet and Somers felt spellbound. Then from the distance came his small voice:

“Man that is born of woman is sick of himself. Man that is born of woman is tired of his day after day. And woman is like a mother with a tiresome child: what is she to do with him? What is she to do with him? — man, born of woman.

“But the men that are born like ants, out of the cold interval, and are womanless, they are not sick of themselves. They are full of cold energy, and they seethe with cold fire in the anthill, making new corridors, new chambers — they alone know what for. And they have cold, formic-acid females, as restless as themselves, and as active about the anthill, and as identical with the dried clay of the building. And the active, important, so-called females, and the active, cold-blooded, energetic males, they shift twig after twig, and lay crumb of earth upon crumb of earth, and the females deposit cold white eggs of young. This is

the world, and the people of the world. And with their cold, active bodies the ant-men and the ant-women swarm over the face of the earth.

“And where then are the sons of men? Where are the sons of men, and man that is born of woman? Man that is born of woman is a slave in the cold, barren corridors of the anthill. Or if he goes out, the open spaces are but spaces between anthill and anthill. And as he goes he hears voices claiming him, saying: “Hello, here comes a brother ant.” And they hail him as a brother ant. And from this there is no escape. None. Not even the lap of woman.

“But I am a son of man. I was once a man born of woman. And by the warm heart of the mother that bore me, even if fifty wives denied me, I would still go on fighting with a warm heart to break down the anthill. I can fight them with their own weapons: the hard mandibles and the acid sting of the cold ant. But that is not how I fight them. I fight them with the warm heart. Deep calls to deep, and fire calls out fire. And for warmth, for the fire of sympathy, to burn out the ant heap with the heat of fiery, living hearts: that is what I stand for.

“And if I can make no one single woman happy, I will make none unhappy either. But if I can let out the real fire of happiness from the heart and bowels of man that is born of woman and woman that is born of man.” Then suddenly he broke off: “And whether I can or not, I LOVE them,” he shouted, in a voice suddenly become loud and passionate. “I love them. I LOVE you, you woman born of man, I do, and I defy you to prevent me. Fiery you are, and fiery am I, and fire should be friends with fire. And when you make me angry, with your jealousy and mistrust like the ants, I remember, I remind myself: “But see the beauty of the fire in her! And think how the ants have tortured her and filled her with fear and with horror!” And then the rage goes down again, and I know I love you, and I know that fire loves fire, and that therefore you love me. And I chalk up another mark against the ants, who have tortured you with their cold energy and their conscious formic-acid that stings like fire. And I love you because you’ve suffered from them as I have. And I love you because you and your husband cherish the fire between you, sacred, apart from the ants. A bas les fourmis.

“I have been like a man buried up to his neck in an ant-heap: so buried in the daily world, and stung and stung and stung again, because I wouldn’t change and grow cold, till now their poison is innocuous, and the formic-acid of social man has no effect on me. And I’ve kept my warmth. And I will keep it, till I give it up to the unknown, out of my poor fat body. And it is my banner, and my wife and my children and my God — just a flicker that is in my heart like a fire, and that I live by. I CAN’T speculate about God. I can’t do it. It seems to me a cold, antish trick. But the fire that is in my heart is God, and I will not forswear it, no, not if

you offer me all the world. And fire is full of seeds — full of seeds — and let them scatter. I won't cherish it on a domestic hearth. I say I won't. So don't bring that up against me. I won't cherish it on the domestic hearth. I will use it against the ants, while they swarm over everything. And I'll call fire to my fire, and set the ant-heap at last in a blaze. Like kerosene poured in. It shall be so. It shall be so. Don't oppose me. Believe the flame in your heart, once and for all, and don't oppose me. Believe the flame of your own heart, and be with me. Remember I am with you against the ants. Remember that. And if I am Abraham's bosom — isn't it better than no bosom, in a world that simmers with busy ants? And would you leave every young, warm, naked thing on the ground for the ants to find. Would you?"

He looked at her searchingly. She was pale, and moved, but hostile. He swung round in his chair, swinging his heavy hips over and lying sideways.

"Shall I tell you a thing a man told me. He had it from the lady's own lips. It was when the Prince of Wales was in India just now. There had been a show — and then a dinner given by the governor of the town — some capital or other. The Prince sat next to the governor's lady, and he was glum, silent, tortured by them all a bit beyond bearance. And the governor's lady felt she ought to make conversation, ought to say something to the poor devil, just for the show's sake and the occasion. So she COULDN'T think what to tell him that would interest him. Then she had a brilliant idea. 'Do you know what happened to me last week?' she said. 'You've seen my adorable little Pekinese, Chu? She had puppies — four darling queer little things — tiny little creepy-crawlies. Of course we loved them. But in the night I thought I heard them crying — I wasn't sure. But at last I went down. And what do you think! There was a swarm of white ants, and they were just eating up the last bits of them. Wasn't it awful.' The Prince went white as death. And just then an ant happened to come on the tablecloth. He took his glass and banged it over it, and never spoke another word all evening. Now that story was told by the woman herself. And this was what she did to a poor nerve-racked lad she was supposed to honour. Now I ask you, where was the living heart in her? She was an ant, a white ant, too."

He rolled over in his chair, bitterly, with massive bitterness, turning his back on Harriet. She sat with a pale, blenched face, and tears in her eyes.

"How cruel!" she said. "But she must have been a fool."

"Vile! Vile! No fool! Quite brilliant ant-tactics. There was warmth in the lad's heart, and she was out to do HER bit of the quenching. Oh, she gave him her nip and sting. Ants, social ants. Social creatures! Cold — I'm as cold as they are when it comes to them. And as cunning, and QUITE as vicious. But that's not what I care for. I want to collect together all the fire in all the burning hearts in

Australia: that's what I want. Collect the heart-fire, and the fire will be our fire. That's what I do want; apart from all antics and ant-tricks. 'We have lighted such a fire this day, Master Latimer.' Yes, and we'll light another. You NEEDN'T be with me if you don't want to — if you're frightened of losing your monopoly over your precious husband. Take him home then — take him home."

And he rolled his back on her more than ever, finishing in a sudden gust of anger and weariness. He lay there rolled in his chair, a big, queer, heavy figure, with his face almost buried in the soft leather, and his big hips sticking out. Her face was quivering, wanting to cry. Then suddenly she broke into a laugh, saying rather shakily, venomously:

"Well, anyhow, you needn't turn the wrong end of you at me quite so undisguisedly."

"How do you know it IS the wrong end of me?" he said, sitting up suddenly and letting his head hang, scowling.

"Facon de parler," she said, laughing rather stiffly.

Somers was silent, and kept silent till the end. He was thankful that Kangaroo was fighting the battle this time.

Their host sent them home in his motor-car. Neither of them had anything to say. Then, as Harriet shut the door of Torestin, and they were quite alone, she said:

"Yes, he's right. I absolutely believe in him. I don't care WHAT he does with you."

"I do, though," said Somers.

The next day they went to Mullumbimby. And the day after that, each of them wrote a letter to Kangaroo.

"Dear Kaiser Kangaroo," began Harriet, "I must thank you very much for the dinner and the violets, which are still quite fresh and blue in Coo-ee. I think you were very horrid to me, but also very nice, so I hope you don't think the worst of me. I want to tell you that I DO sympathize, and that I am awfully glad if I can be of any use to you in any way. I have a holy terror of ants since I heard you, but I know what you mean by the fire. Lovat will hand over my portion when he comes to see you. But I shall make myself into a Fire Brigade, because I am sure you will be kindling fires all over everywhere, under the table and in the clothes-cupboard, and I, poor domestic wretch, shall have to be rushing to put them out. Being only a poor domestic female, I really don't feel safe with fires anywhere except in fire-places and in grates with hearths. But I do want you to know you have my sympathy — and my Lovat." She then signed herself Harriet Somers, and felt even more fluttered than when she had signed the marriage register.

She received for answer:

“Dear Mrs. Somers: I am much honoured and very grateful for the assurance of your sympathy. I have put a one-and-sixpenny government stamp under your signature, to make your letter a legal document, and have further forged the signatures of two witnesses to your deed of gift of Lovat, so I am afraid there is no court of law in New South Wales in which you could now substantiate a further claim over him. I am sorry to take this mean advantage over you, but we lawyers know no scruples.

“I should be more than delighted if I could have the honour of entertaining once more in Sydney — say next Thursday — a beautiful person and remarkable woman (one and the same individual) who tells me to my nose that I am a Jew and that my name, instead of Benjamin, should be Abraham. Do please come again and call me Abraham’s Bosom, but don’t fail to bring your husband, for the simple look of the thing.”

“The Kangaroo is a fighting beast, I believe,” said Somers, looking at Harriet and laughing. He was not sorry when for once some other person gave her a dig.

“I think he’s rather foolish,” she said briefly.

These days Somers, too, was filled with fury. As for loving mankind, or having a fire of love in his heart, it was all rot. He felt almost fiercely cold. He liked the sea, the pale sea of green glass that fell in such cold foam. Ice-fiery, fish-burning. He went out on to the low flat rocks at low tide, skirting the deep pock-holes that were full of brilliantly clear water and delicately-coloured shells and tiny, crimson anemones. Strangely sea-scooped sharp sea-bitter rock-floor, all wet and sea-savage. And standing at the edge looking at the waves, rather terrifying, rolling at him, where he stood low and exposed, far out from the sand-banks, and as he watched the gannets gleaming white, then falling with a splash like white sky-sparrows into the waves, he wished as he had never wished before that he could be cold, as sea-things are cold, and murderously fierce. To have oneself exultantly ice-cold, not one spark of this wretched warm flesh left, and to have all the terrific, ice energy of a fish. To surge with that cold exultance and passion of a sea thing! Now he understood the yearning in the seal-woman’s croon, as she went back to the sea, leaving her husband and her children of warm flesh. No more cloying warmth. No more of this horrible stuffy heat of human beings. To be an isolated swift fish in the big seas, that are bigger than the earth; fierce with cold, cold life, in the watery twilight before sympathy was created to clog us.

These were his feelings now. Mankind? Ha, he turned his face to the centre of the seas, away from any land. The noise of waters, and dumbness like a fish. The cold, lovely silence, before crying and calling were invented. His tongue felt heavy in his mouth, as if it had relapsed away from speech altogether.

He did not care a straw what Kangaroo said or felt, or what anybody said or felt, even himself. He had no feelings, and speech had gone out of him. He wanted to be cold, cold, and alone like a single fish, with no feeling in his heart at all except a certain icy exultance and wild, fish-like rapacity. "Homo sum!" All right. Who sets a limit to what a man is? Man is also a fierce and fish-cold devil, in his hour, filled with cold fury of desire to get away from the cloy of human life altogether, not into death, but into that icily self-sufficient vigour of a fish.

CHAPTER 7. THE BATTLE OF TONGUES.

As a rule the jetty on its poles straddling a little way into the sea was as deserted as if it were some relic left by an old invader. Then it had spurts of activity, when steamer after steamer came blorting and hanging miserably round, like cows to the cowshed on a winter afternoon. Then a little engine would chuff along the pier, shoving a string of tip-up trucks, and little men would saunter across the sky-line, and there would be a fine dimness of black dust round the low, red ship and the end of the jetty. Luckily it was far enough away, so that Harriet need not fear for her beautiful white washing. She washed her linen herself for the sheer joy of it, and loved nothing so much as thinking of it getting whiter and whiter, like the Spenserian maid, in the sun and sea, and visiting it on the grass every five minutes, and finding it every time really whiter, till Somers said it would reach a point of whiteness where the colours would break up, and she'd go out and find pieces of rainbow on the grass and bushes, instead of towels and shirts.

“Shouldn't I be startled!” she said, accepting it as quite a possible contingency, and adding thoughtfully: “No, not really.”

One of these afternoons when Somers was walking down on the sands, looking at the different shells, their sea-colours of pink and brown and rainbow and brilliant violet and shrimp-red, and when the boats were loading coal on the moderately quiet sea, he noticed the little engine standing steaming on the jetty, just overhead where he was going to pass under. Then his attention was drawn away to the men picking up the rounded, sea-smooth pebbles of coal in one little place where the beach was just a black slope of perfectly clean coal-pebbles: just like any other pebbles. There were usually some men, or women or children, picking here, putting the bigger pebbles of sea-coal into sacks. From the edge of the small waves Somers heard one man talking to another, and the English tones — unconsciously he expected a foreign language — and particularly the peculiar educated-artisan quality, almost a kind of uppishness that there is in the speech of Australian working men, struck him as incongruous with their picking up the coal-cobs from the shore. He watched them, in the chill of the shadow. Yes, they thought as much of themselves as anybody. But one was palpably a Welshman, and loved picking up something for nothing; and the other mixed his democratic uppishness with a queer lousy quality, like a bushranger. “They are ten times more foreign to me,” said Somers, “than Italian scoundrels, or even Indians.

They are so FOREIGN to me. And yet their manner of life, their ordinary way of living is almost exactly what I was used to as a boy. Why are they so foreign to me?"

They silently objected to his looking, so he went on. He had come to the huge, high timbers of the tall jetty. There stood the little engine still overhead: and in the gloom among the timbers underneath water was dripping down from her, which gave Somers a distaste for passing just then. He looked up. There was the engine-driver in his dirty shirt and dirty bare arms, talking to another man. The other man saluted — and to Somers' surprise it was William James. He stood quite still, and a surprised smile of recognition greeted the other man, who saluted.

"Why, what are you doing here?" called Somers.

William James came to the edge of the jetty, but could not hear, because of the noise of the sea. His face had that small, subtle smile that was characteristic of him, and which Somers was never quite sure of, whether it was really jeering or in a cunning way friendly.

"Won't you come up a minute?" roared William James.

So Somers scrambled round up the banks, on to the railway track.

"I couldn't come down for the moment," said William James. "I'll have to see the manager, then I'm off on this boat. We're ready to go. You heard her blowing."

"Where are you going? Back to Sydney."

"Yes. I come down occasionally on this coal-business, and if I like I go back on the collier. The sea is quiet, and I needn't wait for a train. Well, an' how're you gettin' on, like? Pleased with it down here all by yourselves?"

"Very."

"A bit lonely for you. I suppose you wouldn't like to know the manager here — Mr. Thomas? He's a decent chap — from South Wales originally."

"No. I like it best when I don't know anybody."

"That's a compliment for some of us. However — I know what you mean. I know what you mean. Jack tells me you saw Kangaroo. Made quite a fuss of you, I hear. I knew he would. Oh, Kangaroo knew all about you: all he wanted to know, anyhow. I say, if ye think of stoppin' down here, you might get in a ton of coal. It looks as if this strike might come off. That Arbitration Board's a fine failure, what?"

"As far as I can gather."

"Oh, bound to be. Bound to be. They talk about scraps of paper, why, every agreement that's ever come to in this country, you could wrap your next red herring in it, for all it's worth."

“I suppose it’s like Ireland, they don’t want to agree.”

“That’s about it. The Labour people want this revolution of theirs. What?” — and he looked at Somers with a long, smiling, sardonic leer, like a wink. “There’s a certain fact,” he continued, “as far as any electioneering success goes, they’re out of the running for a spell. What do you think of Trades Unions, one way and another?”

“I dislike them on the whole rather intensely. They’re just the nastiest profiteering side of the working man — they make a fool of him too, in my opinion.”

“Just my opinion. They make a fool of him. Wouldn’t it be nice to have them for bosses of the whole country? They very nearly are. But I doubt very much if they’ll ever cover the last lap — what?”

“Not if Kangaroo can help it,” said Somers.

“No!” William James flashed a quick look at him from his queer grey eyes. “What did you make of him then? Could you make him out?”

“Not quite. I never met anyone like him. The wonder to me is, he seems to have as much spare time for entertaining and amusing his guests, as if he had no work at all on hand.”

“Oh, that was just a special occasion. But he’s a funny sort of Saviour, isn’t he? Not much crown of thorns about him. Why, he’d look funny on a cross, what?”

“He’s no intention of being on one, I think,” said Somers stiffly.

“Oh, I don’t know. If the wrong party got hold of him. There’s many mites in a pound of cheese, they say.”

“Then I’ll toast my cheese.”

“Ha-ha! Oh yes, I like a bit of toasted cheese myself — or a Welsh rabbit, as well as any man.”

“But you don’t think they’d ever let him down, do you? — these Australians?”

“No-o,” said William James. “I doubt if they’d ever let him down. But if he happened to FALL down, you know, they’d soon forget him.”

“You don’t sound a very warm follower yourself.”

“Oh, warm isn’t my way, in anything. I like to see what I’m about. I can see that Kangaroo’s a wonder. Oh yes, he’s a world wonder. And I’d rather be in with him than anybody, if it was only for the sake of the spree, you know. Bound to be a spree some time — and before long, I should say, things going as they are. I wouldn’t like to be left out of the fun.”

“But you don’t feel any strong devotion to your leader?”

“Why, no; I won’t say it’s exactly strong devotion. But I think he’s a world wonder. He’s not quite the SHAPE of a man that I should throw away my eyes

for, that's all I mean." Again William James looked at Somers with that long, perhaps mocking little smile in his grey eyes.

"I thought even his shape beautiful, when he talked to me."

"Oh yes, it's wonderful what a spell he can cast over you. But I'm a stuggy fellow myself, maybe that's how it is I can't ever quite see him in the same light as the thin chaps do. But that's just the looks of the thing. I can see there isn't another man in the world like him, and I'd cross the seas to join in with him, if only for the fun of the thing!"

"But what about the end of the fun?" asked Somers.

"Oh, that I don't know. And nobody does, for that matter."

"But surely if one believes — ."

"One believes a lot, and one believes very little, seems to me. Taking all in all, seems to me we live from hand to mouth, as far as beliefs go."

"You never WOULD believe," said Somers, laughing.

"Not till I was made to," replied Jaz, twisting his face in his enigmatic smile.

Somers looked at the thick, stocky, silent figure in the well-made dark clothes that didn't in the least belong to him. There was something about him like a prisoner in prison uniform, in his town clothes — and something of that in his bearing. A stocky, silent, unconquerable prisoner. And in his imprisoned soul another kind of mystery, another sort of appeal.

The two men stood still in the cold wind that came up the sands to the south-west. To the left, as they faced the wind, went the black railway track on the pier, and the small engine stood dribbling. On the right the track ran curiously black past a little farm-place with a corrugated iron roof, and past a big field where the stubble of maize or beans stood ragged and sere, on into the little hollow of bush, where the mine was, beyond the stagnant creek. It was curious how intensely black, velvety and unnatural, the railway-track looked on this numb coast-front. The steamer hooted again.

"Cold it is up here," said Somers.

"It is cold. He's coming now, though," replied William James.

They stood together still another minute, looking down the pale sands at the foam and the dark-blue sea, the sere grass scattered with bungalows.

It was a strange, different bond of sympathy united them, from that that subsisted between Somers and Jack, or Somers and Kangaroo. Hardly sympathy at all, but an ancient sort of root-knowledge.

"Well, good-bye," said Somers, wanting to be gone before the manager came up with the papers. He shook hands with William James — but as usual, Jaz gave him a slack hand. Their eyes met — and the look, something like a taunt, in Trehwella's secretive grey eye, made Somers stiffen his back, and a kind of

haughtiness flew into his soul.

“Different men, different ways, Mr. Trehwella,” he said.

William James did not answer, but smiled rather stubbornly. It seemed to Somers the man would be smiling that stubborn, taunting smile till the crack of doom.

“I told Mrs. Somers what I think about it,” said Jaz, with a very Cornish accent. “I doubt if she’ll ever do much more believin’ than I shall.” And the taunt was forked this time.

“She says she believes entirely in Kangaroo.”

“Does she now? Who did she tell it to?”

“Me.”

Trehwella still stood with that faint grin on his face, short and stocky and erect like a little post left standing. Somers looked at him again, frowning, and turned abruptly down the bank. The smile left the face of the Cornishman, and he just looked obstinate, indifferent, and curiously alone, as if he stood there all alone in the world. He watched Somers emerge on the sands below, and go walking slowly among the sea-ragged flat shelves of the coast-bed rocks, his head dropping, looking in the pools, his hands in his pockets. And the obstinate light never changed in the eyes of the watcher, not even when he turned to the approaching manager.

Perhaps it was this meeting which made Somers want to see Kangaroo once more. Everything had suddenly become unreal to him. He went to Sydney and to Cooley’s rooms. But during the first half hour, the revulsion from the First persisted. Somers disliked his appearance, and the kangaroo look made him feel devilish. And then the queer, slow manner of approach. Kangaroo was not really ready for his visitor, and he seemed dense, heavy, absent, clownish. It was that kangarooish clownishness that made a vicious kind of hate spring into Somers’ face. He talked in a hard, cutting voice.

“Whom can you depend on, in this world?” he was saying. “Look at these Australians — they’re awfully nice, but they’ve got no inside to them. They’re hollow. How are you going to build on such hollow stalks? They may well call them cornstalks. They’re marvellous and manly and independent and all that, outside. But inside, they are not. When they’re QUITE alone, they don’t exist.”

“Yet many of them have been alone a long time, in the bush,” said Kangaroo, watching his visitor with slow, dumb, unchanging eyes.

“Alone, what sort of alone? Physically alone. And they’ve just gone hollow. They’re never alone in spirit: quite, quite alone in spirit. And the people who are are the only people you can depend on.”

“Where shall I find them?”

“Not here. It seems to me, least of all here. The Colonies make for OUTWARDNESS. Everything is outward — like hollow stalks of corn. The life makes this inevitable: all that struggle with bush and water and what-not, all the mad struggle with the material necessities and conveniences — the inside soul just withers and goes into the outside, and they’re all just lusty robust stalks of people.”

“The cornstalks bear the corn. I find them generous to recklessness — the greatest quality. The old world is cautious and forever bargaining about its soul. Here they don’t bother to bargain.”

They’ve no soul to bargain about. But they’re even more full of conceit. What do you expect to do with such people. Build a straw castle?”

“You see I believe in them — perhaps I know them a little better than you do.”

“Perhaps you do. It’ll be cornstalk castle, for all that. What DO you expect to build on?”

“They’re generous — generous to recklessness,” shouted Kangaroo. “And I love them. I love them. Don’t you come here carping to me about them. They are my children, I love them. If I’m not to believe in their generosity, am I to believe in your cautious, old-world carping, do you think, I WON’T!” he shouted fiercely. “I WON’T. Do you hear that!” And he sat hulking in his chair glowering like some queer dark god at bay. Somers paused, and his heart failed.

“Then make me believe in them and their generosity,” he said dryly. “They’re nice. But they haven’t got the last everlasting central bit of soul, solitary soul, that makes a man himself. The central bit of himself. They all merge to the outside, away from the centre. And what can you do, PERMANENTLY, with such people? You can have a fine cornstalk blaze. But as for anything permanent —

“I tell you I HATE permanency,” barked Kangaroo. “The phoenix rises out of the ashes.” He rolled over angrily in his chair.

“Let her! Like Rider Haggard’s ‘She’, I don’t feel like risking it a second time,” said Somers, like the venomous serpent he was.

“Generous, generous men!” Kangaroo muttered to himself. “At least you can get a blaze out of them. Not like European wet matches, that will never again strike alight — as you’ve said yourself.”

“But a blaze for what? What’s your blaze for?”

“I don’t care,” yelled Kangaroo, springing with sudden magnificent swiftness to his feet, and facing Somers, and seizing him by the shoulders and shaking him till his head nearly fell off, yelling all the time: “I don’t care, I tell you, I don’t care. Where there’s fire there’s change. And where the fire is love, there’s

creation. Seeds of fire. That's enough for me! Fire, and seeds of fire, and love. That's all I care about. Don't carp at me, I tell you. Don't carp at me with your old, European, damp spirit. If you can't take fire, WE CAN. That's all. Generous, passionate men — and you dare to carp at them. You. What have you to show?" And he went back to his chair like a great, sulky bear-god.

Somers sat rather stupefied than convinced. But he found himself again WANTING to be convinced, wanting to be carried away. The desire hankered in his heart. Kangaroo had become again beautiful: huge and beautiful like some god that sways and seems clumsy, then suddenly flashes with all the agility of thunder and lightning. Huge and beautiful as he sat hulked in his chair. Somers DID wish he would get up again, and carry him quite away.

But where to? Where to? Where is one carried to when one is carried away? He had a bitter mistrust of seventh heavens and all heavens in general. But then the experience. If Kangaroo had got up at that moment Somers would have given him heart and soul and body, for the asking, and damn all consequences. He longed to do it. He knew that by just going over and laying a hand on the great figure of the sullen god he could achieve it. Kangaroo would leap like a thundercloud and catch him up — catch him up and away into a transport. A transport that should last for life. He knew it.

But alas, it was just too late. In some strange way Somers felt he had come to the end of transports: they had no more mystery for him; at least this kind: or perhaps no more charm. Some bubble or other had burst in his heart. All his body and fibres wanted to go over and touch the other great being into a storm of response. But his soul wouldn't. The coloured bubble had burst.

Kangaroo sat up and adjusted his eyeglasses.

"Don't you run away with the idea, though," he said, "that I am just an emotional fool." His voice was almost menacing, and with a strange cold, intellectual quality that Somers had never heard before.

"I believe in the one fire of love. I believe it is the one inspiration of all creative activity. I trust myself entirely to the fire of love. This I do with my reason also. I don't discard my reason. I use it at the service of love, like a sharp weapon. I try to keep it very sharp — and very dangerous. Where I don't love, I use only my will and my wits. Where I love, I trust to love alone." The voice came cold and static.

Somers sat rather blank. The change frightened him almost as something obscene. This was the reverse to the passionate thunder-god.

"But is love the only inspiration of creative activity?" he asked, rather feebly.

"This is the first time I have heard it questioned. Do you know of any other?"

Somers thought he did, but he was not going to give himself away to that

sharp weapon of a voice, so he did not answer.

“IS there any other inspirational force than the force of love?” continued Kangaroo. “There is no other. Love makes the trees flower and shed their seed, love makes the animals mate and birds put on their best feather, and sing their best songs. And all that man has ever created on the face of the earth, or ever will create — if you will allow me the use of the word create, with regard to man’s highest productive activities.”

“It’s the word I always use myself,” said Somers.

“Naturally, since you know how to think inspiredly. Well then, all that man ever has created or ever will create, while he remains man, has been created in the inspiration and by the force of love. And not only man — all the living creatures are swayed to creation, to new creation, to the creation of song and beauty and lovely gesture, by love. I will go further. I believe the sun’s attraction for the earth is a form of love.”

“Then why doesn’t the earth fly into the sun?” said Somers.

“For the same reason. Love is mutual. Each attracts the other. But in natural love each tries at the same time to withhold the other, to keep the other true to its own beloved nature. To any true lover, it would be the greatest disaster if the beloved broke down from her own nature and self and began to identify herself with him, with his nature and self. I say, to any genuine lover this is the greatest disaster, and he tries by every means in his power to prevent this. The earth and sun, on their plane, have discovered a perfect equilibrium. But man has not yet begun. His lesson is so much harder. His consciousness is at once so complicated and so cruelly limited. This is the lesson before us. Man has loved the beloved for the sake of love, so far, but rarely, rarely has he CONSCIOUSLY known that he could only love her for her own separate, strange self: forever strange and a joyful mystery to him. Lovers henceforth have got to KNOW one another. A terrible mistake, and a self-delusion. True lovers only learn that as they know less, and less, and less of each other, the mystery of each grows more startling to the other. The tangible unknown: that is the magic, the mystery, and the grandeur of love, that it puts the tangible unknown in our arms, and against our breast: the beloved. We have made a fatal mistake. We have got to know so much ABOUT things, that we think we know the actuality, and contain it. The sun is as much outside us, and as eternally unknown, as ever it was. And the same with each man’s beloved: like the sun. What do the facts we know ABOUT a man amount to? Only two things we can know of him, and this by pure soul-intuition: we can know if he is true to the flame of life and love which is inside his heart, or if he is false to it. If he is true, he is friend. If he is wilfully false, and inimical to the fire of life and love in his own heart, then he is

my enemy as well as his own.”

Somers listened. He seemed to see it all and hear it all with marvellous clarity. And he believed that it was all true.

“Yes,” he said, “I believe that is all true.”

“What is it then that you disbelieve?”

“I don’t quite believe that love is the one and only exclusive force or mystery of living inspiration. I don’t quite believe that. There is something else.”

Kangaroo looked at him for once overbearingly and with a sort of contempt.

“Tell me what it is,” he replied briefly.

“I am not very clear myself. And, you see, what I want to say, you don’t want to hear.”

“Yes, I do,” snapped Kangaroo.

“With your ears and your critical mind only.”

“Say it anyhow, say it.”

Richard sat feeling very stupid. The communicative soul is like the ass, you can lead him to the water, but you can’t make him drink.

“Why,” he said, “it means an end of us and what we are, in the first place. And then a re-entry into us of the great God, who enters us from below, not from above.”

Kangaroo sat bunched up like some creature watching round-eyed out of a darker corner.

“How do you mean, enters us from below?” he barked.

“Not through the spirit. Enters us from the lower self, the dark self, the phallic self, if you like.”

“Enters us from the phallic self?” snapped Kangaroo sharply.

“Sacredly. The god you can never see or visualise, who stands dark on the threshold of the phallic me.”

“The phallic you, my dear young friend, what is that but love?”

Richard shook his head in silence.

“No,” he said, in a slow, remote voice. “I know your love, Kangaroo. Working everything from the spirit, from the head. You work the lower self as an instrument of the spirit. Now it is time for the spirit to leave us again; it is time for the Son of Man to depart, and leave us dark, in front of the unspoken God: who is just beyond the dark threshold of the lower self, my lower self. There is a great God on the threshold of my lower self, whom I fear while he is my glory. And the spirit goes out like a spent candle.”

Kangaroo watched with a heavy face like a mask.

“It is time for the spirit to leave us,” he murmured in a somnambulist voice. “Time for the spirit to leave us.”

Somers, who had dropped his face, hiding it as he spoke, watched the other man from under his brows. Kangaroo, who still sat impassive, like a frozen, antagonised Buddha, gave himself a jerk of recovery.

“Ah well!” he sighed, with a weary, impatient, condescending sigh. “I was never able to follow mysticism and metaphysics. One of my many limitations. I don’t know what you mean.”

“But what is your ‘love’ but a mystical thing?” asked Richard indignantly.

“My love? Why, that is something I FEEL, as plain as toothache.”

“Well, so do I feel the other: and love has become like cardboard to me,” said Richard, still indignant.

“Like cardboard? Well, I don’t quite see love like cardboard, dear boy. For you ARE a dear boy, in spite of yourself. Oh yes, you are. There’s some demon inside you makes you perverse, and won’t let you be the dear, beautiful thing you are. But I’m going to exorcise that demon.”

Somers gave a short laugh, the very voice of the demon speaking.

“Oh yes I am,” said Kangaroo, in a steely voice. “I’m going to exorcise that demon, and release your beautiful Andromeda soul.”

“Try,” ejaculated Richard dryly, turning aside his face in distaste.

Kangaroo leapt to his feet and stood towering over the little enemy as if he would stoop over him and smother him in violent warmth and drive out the demon in that way. But Richard sat cold and withheld, and Kangaroo had not the power to touch him.

“I’m going to try,” shouted the lawyer, in his slightly husky roar. “You’ve made it my prerogative by telling me to try. I’m going to love you, and you won’t get away from that. I’m the hound of heaven after you, my boy, and I’m fatal to the hell hound that’s leading you. Do you know I love you? — that I loved you long before I met you?”

Richard, curled narrow in his chair like a snake, glanced up at the big man projecting over him. A sort of magnetic effusion seemed to come out of Kangaroo’s body, and Richard’s hand was almost drawn in spite of himself to touch the other man’s body. He had deliberately to refrain from laying his hand on the near, generous stomach of the Kangaroo, because automatically his hand would have lifted and sought that rest. But he prevented himself, and the eyes of the two men met. Kangaroo searched Lovat’s eyes: but they seemed to be of cloudy blue like hell-smoke, impenetrable and devilish. Kangaroo watched a long time: but the other man was the unchangeable. Kangaroo turned aside suddenly.

“Ah well,” he said. “I can see there is a beast in the way. There is a beast in your eyes, Lovat, and if I can’t conquer him then — then, woe betide you, my

dear. But I love you, you see.”

“Sounds like a threat,” laughed Somers.

Kangaroo leaned and laid his hand gently on Lovat’s shoulder.

“Don’t say that,” his voice was small now, and very gentle. I loved you before I knew you. My soul cries for you. And you hurt me with the demon that is in you.”

Richard became very pale, and was silent for some moments. The hand sank heavier, nearer, on his shoulder.

“You see,” said Somers, trying hard to be fair, “what you call my demon is what I identify myself with. It’s my best me, and I stick to it. I think love, all this love of ours, is a devilish thing now: a slow poison. Really, I know the dark god at the lower threshold — even if I have to repeat it like a phrase. And in the sacred dark men meet and touch, and it is a great communion. But it isn’t this love. There’s no love in it. But something deeper. Love seems to me somehow trivial: and the spirit seems like something that belongs to paper. I can’t help it — I know another God.”

The pressure of the hand became inert.

“But aren’t you merely inventing other terms for the same thing that I mean, and that I call love?” said Kangaroo, in a strange, toneless voice, looking aside.

“Does it seem to you that I am?” asked Lovat, gently and dispassionately.

The strange, great passionate cloud of Kangaroo still hung there, hovering over the pale, sharp isolation of Somers, who lay looking up. And then it seemed as if the glow and vibration left Kangaroo’s body, the cloud became grey and heavy. He sighed, and removed his hand, and turned away.

“Ah well?” he said. “Ah well!”

Somers rose, trembling now, and feeling frail.

“I’ll go,” he said.

“Yes, do go,” said Kangaroo.

And without another word Somers went, leaving the other man sunk in a great heap in his chair, as if defeated. Somers did not even pity him. His heart felt queer and cave-like and devoid of emotion.

He was spending the night at the Callcotts. Harriet, too, was there. But he was in no hurry to get back there. It was a clear and very starry night. He took the tram-car away from the centre of the town, then walked. As was always the case with him, in this country, the land and the world disappeared as night fell, as if the day had been an illusion, and the sky came bending down. There was the Milky Way, in clouds of star-fume, bending down right in front of him, right down till it seemed as if he would walk on to it, if he kept going. The pale, fummy drift of the Milky Way drooped down and seemed so near, straight in front, that

it seemed the obvious road to take. And one would avoid the strange dark gaps, gulfs, in the way overhead. And one would look across to the floating isles of star-fume, to the south, across the gulfs where the sharp stars flashed like lighthouses, and one would be in a new way denizen of a new plane, walking by oneself. There would be a real new way to take. And the mechanical earth quite obliterated, sunk out.

Only he saw, on the sea's high black horizon, the various reddish sore-looking lights of a ship. There they were — the signs of the ways of men — hot-looking and weary. He turned quickly away from the marks of the far-off ship, to look again at the downward slope of the great hill of the Milky Way. He wanted so much to get out of this lit-up cloy of humanity, and the exhaust of love, and the fretfulness of desire. Why not swing away into cold separation? Why should desire always be fretting, fretting like a tugged chain? Why not break the bond and be single, take a fierce stoop and a swing back, as when a gannet plunges like a white, metallic arrow into the sea, raising a burst of spray, disappearing, completing the downward curve of the parabola in the invisible underwater where it seizes the object of desire, then away, away with success upwards, back flashing into the air and white space? Why not? Why want to urge, urge, urge oneself down the causeways of desirous love, hard pavements of love? Even like Kangaroo. Why shouldn't meeting be a stoop as a gannet stoops into the sea, or a hawk, or a kite, in a swift rapacious parabola downwards, to touch at the lowermost turn of the curve, then up again?

It is a world of slaves: all love-professing. Why unite with them? Why pander to them? Why go with them at all? Why not strike at communion out of the unseen, as the gannet strikes into the unseen underwater, or the kite from above at a mouse? One seizure, and away again, back away into isolation. A touch, and away. Always back, away into isolation. Why be cloyed and clogged down like billions of fish in water, or billions of mice on land? It is a world of slaves. Then why not gannets in the upper air, having two worlds? Why only one element? If I am to have a meeting it shall be down, down in the invisible, and the moment I re-emerge it shall be alone. In the visible world I am alone, an isolate instance. My meeting is in the underworld, the dark. Beneath every gannet that jumps from the water ten thousand fish are swimming still. But they are swimming in a shudder of silver fear. That is the magic of the ocean. Let them shudder the huge ocean aglimmer.

He arrived at Wyewurk at last, and found a little party. William James was there, and Victoria had made, by coincidence, a Welsh rarebit. The beer was on the table.

“Just in time,” said Jack. “As well you're not half an hour later, or there might

a' been no booze. How did you come — tram?"

"Yes — and walked part of the way."

"What kind of an evening did you have?" said Harriet.

He looked at her. A chill fell upon the little gathering, from his presence.

"We didn't agree," he replied.

"I knew you wouldn't — not for long, anyhow," she replied. "I don't see you agreeing and playing second fiddle for long."

"Do you see me as a fiddler at all?"

"I've seen you fiddling away hard enough many times," retorted Harriet. "Why, what else do you do, all your life, but fiddle some tune or other?"

He did not reply, and there was a pause. His face was pale and very definite, as if it were some curious seashell.

"What did you get the wind up about, between you?" said Jack soothingly, pouring Somers a glass of beer.

"No wind. We're only not the same pair of shoes."

"I could have told you that before you went," said Jaz with quiet elation in his tones.

Victoria looked at Somers with dark, bright eyes. She was quite fascinated by him, as an Australian bird by some adder.

"Isn't Mr. Somers queer?" she said. "He doesn't seem to mind a bit."

Somers looked at her quickly, a smile round his eyes, and a curious, smiling devil inside them, cold as ice.

"Oh yes, he minds. Don't take any notice of his pretence. He's only in a bad temper," cried Harriet. "I know him by now. He's been in a temper for days."

"Oh why?" cried Victoria. "I thought he was lovely this afternoon when he was here."

"Yes," said Harriet grimly. "Lovely! You should live with him."

But again Victoria looked at his clear, fixed face, with the false smile round the eyes, and her fascination did not diminish.

"What an excellent Welsh rarebit," he said. "If there were a little red pepper."

"Red pepper?" cried Victoria. "There is!" And she sprang up to get it for him. As she handed it to him he looked into her dilated, dark bright eyes, and thanked her courteously. When he was in this state his voice and tone in speaking were very melodious. Of course it set Harriet on edge. But Victoria stood fluttering with her hands over the table, bewildered.

"What are you feeling for?" asked Jack.

She only gave a little blind laugh, and remembered that she was going to sit down. So she sat down, and then wondered what it was she was going to do after that.

“So you don’t cotton on to Kangaroo either?” said Jack easily.

“I have the greatest admiration for him.”

“You’re not alone there. But you don’t fall over yourself, loving him.”

“I only trip, and recover my balance for the moment.”

Jaz gave a loud laugh, across his cheese.

“That’s good!” he said.

“You trip, and recover your balance,” said Jack. “You’re a wary one. The rest of us falls right in, flop, and are never heard of again. And how did you part then?”

“We parted in mutual esteem. I said I would go, and he asked me please to do so as quickly as possible.”

Jack made round eyes, and even Jaz left off eating.

Did you QUARREL?” cried Harriet.

“Oh yes, violently. But, of course, not vulgarly. We parted, as I said, in mutual esteem, bowing each other out.”

“You ARE awful. You only went on purpose to upset him. I knew that all along. Why must you be so spiteful?” said Harriet. “You’re never happy unless you’re upsetting somebody’s apple-cart.”

“Am I doomed to agree with everybody, then?”

“No. But you needn’t SET OUT to be disagreeable. And to Mr. Cooley especially, who likes you and is such a warm, big man. You ought to be flattered that he CARES what you think. No, you have to go and try and undermine him. Ah — why was I ever pestered with such a viperish husband as you!” said Harriet.

Victoria made alert, frightened eyes. But Somers sat on with the same little smile and courteous bearing.

“I am, of course, immensely flattered at his noticing me,” he replied. “Otherwise, naturally, I should have resented being told to leave. As it was I didn’t resent it a bit.”

“Didn’t you!” cried Harriet. “I know you and your pretences. That is what has put you in such a temper.”

“But you remember I’ve been in a temper for days,” he replied calmly and gravely. “Therefore there could be no putting.”

“Oh, it only made you worse. I’m tired of your temper, really.”

“But Mr. Somers isn’t in a temper at all!” cried Victoria. “He’s nicer than any of us, really. Jack would be as angry as anything if I said all those things to him. Shouldn’t you, Jack?” And she cuddled his arm.

“You’d be shut up in the coal-shed for the night before you got half way through with it, if ever you started trying it on,” he replied, with marital humour.

“No, I shouldn’t either: or it would be the last door you’d shut on ME, so there. But anyhow you’d be in a waxy old temper.”

And she smiled at Somers as she cuddled her husband’s arm.

“If my hostess says I’m nice,” said Somers, “I am not going to feel guilty whatever my WIFE may say.”

“Oh yes, you do feel guilty,” said Harriet.

“Your hostess doesn’t find any fault with you at all,” cried Victoria. She was looking very pretty, in a brown chiffon dress. “She thinks you’re the nicest of anybody here, there.”

“What?” cried Jack. “When I’m here as well?”

“Whether you’re here or not. You’re not very nice to me to-night, and William James never is. But Mr. Somers is AWFULLY nice.” She blushed suddenly quite vividly, looking under her long lashes at him. He smiled a little more intensely to himself.

“I tell you what, Mrs. Somers,” said Jack. “We’d better make a swap of it, till they alter their opinion. You and me had better strike up a match, and let them two elope with one another for a bit.”

“And what about William James?” cried Victoria, with hurried, vivid excitement.

“Oh nobody need trouble themselves about William James,” replied that individual. “It’s about time he was rolling home.”

“No,” said Harriet, in answer to Jack. “I’m striking off no more matches, thank you. The game’s not worth the candle.”

“Why, maybe you’ve only struck on the rough side, you know,” said Jack. “You might strike on the smooth next time.”

“No,” said Harriet. “I’m going to bed, and leave you all to your striking and your bad tempers. Good-night!”

She rose roughly. Victoria jumped up to accompany her to her room. The Somers had had a room each in Torestin, so Victoria had put them each separately into a nice little room in her house.

“Is it right,” said Jack, “that you got the wind up to-night?”

“No,” said Somers. “At least we only quite lovingly agreed to differ. Nothing else.”

“I thought it would be like that,” said Jack. “He thinks the world of you, I can see that.”

William James stood ready to leave. He looked at Somers cunningly, as if reading into him with his light-grey, sceptical eyes.

“Mr. Somers doesn’t care to commit himself so easily,” he said.

“No,” said Jack. “You blighters from the old country are so mighty careful of

risking yourselves. That's what I'm not. When I feel a thing I jump up and go for it, and damn the consequences. There's always plenty of time to think about a thing after you've done it. And then if you're fool enough to wish you hadn't done it, why, that shows you **SHOULDN'T** have. I don't go in for regrets, myself. I do what I want. And if I wanted to do a thing, then it's **ALL RIGHT** when it's done. All a man's got to do is to keep his mouth shut and his fist ready, and go down on his knees to **NOTHING**. Then he can damn well do as he pleases. And all he asks is that other folks shall do as they please, men or women. Damn all this careful stunt. I'll step along as far as the tram with you, Jaz, I feel like walking the Welsh rabbit down into his burrow. Vicky prefers Mr. Somers to me pro tem. — and I don't begrudge it her. Why should I?"

Victoria was putting away the dishes, and seemed not to hear. The two men went. Somers still sat in his chair. He was truly in a devil of a temper, with everybody and everything: a wicked, fiendish mood that made him **LOOK** quite handsome, as fate would have it. He had heard Jack's hint. He knew Victoria was attracted to him: that she imagined no nonsense about love, she was too remote from the old world, and too momentary for that. The moment — that was all her feelings were to her. And at this moment she was fascinated, and when she said, in her slightly contralto voice:

"You're not in a temper with **ME**, though, are you Mr. Somers?" she was so comely, like a maiden just ready for love, and like a comely, desirous virgin offering herself to the wayfarer, in the name of the god of bright desire, that Somers stretched out his hand and stroked her hot cheek very delicately with the tips of his fingers, replying:

"I could never be angry with you. You're much too winsome."

She looked at him with her dark eyes dilated into a glow, a glow of offering. He smiled faintly, rising to his feet, and desire in all his limbs like a power. The moment — and the power of the moment. Again he felt his limbs full of desire, like a power. And his days of anger seemed to culminate now in this moment, like bitter smouldering that at last leaps into flame. Not love — just weapon-like desire. He knew it. The god Bacchus. Iacchos! Iacchos! Bacchanals with weapon hands. She had the sacred glow in her eyes. Bacchus, the true Bacchus. Jack would not begrudge the god. And the fire was very clean and steely, after the smoke. And he felt the velvety fire from her face in his finger-tips.

And still his old stubborn self intervened. He decided almost involuntarily. Perhaps it was fear.

"Good-night," he said to her. "Jack will be back in a moment. You look bonnie to-night."

And he went to his room. When he had shut the door, he wondered if it was

merely a sort of cowardice. Honour? No need as far as Jack was concerned, apparently. And Harriet? She was too honest a female. She would know that the dishonour, as far as she felt it, lay in the desire, not in the act. For her, too, honour did not consist in a pledged word kept according to pledge, but in a genuine feeling faithfully followed. He had not to reckon with honour there.

What then? Why not follow the flame, the moment sacred to Bacchus? Why not, if it was the way of life? He did not know why not. Perhaps only old moral habit, or fear, as Jack said, of committing himself. Perhaps only that. It was Victoria's high moment; all her high moments would have this Bacchic, weapon-like momentaneity: since Victoria was Victoria. Why then deny it?

The pagan way, the many gods, the different service, the sacred moments of Bacchus. Other sacred moments: Zeus and Hera, for example, Ares and Aphrodite, all the great moments of the gods. Why not know them all, all the great moments of the gods, from the major moment with Hera to the swift short moments of Io or Leda or Ganymede? Should not a man know the whole range? And especially the bright, swift, weapon-like Bacchic occasion, should not any man seize it when it offered?

But his heart of hearts was stubbornly puritanical. And his innermost soul was dark and sullen, black with a sort of scorn. These moments bred in the head and born in the eye: he had enough of them. These flashes of desire for a visual object would no longer carry him into action. He had no use for them. There was a downslope into Orcus, and a vast, phallic, sacred darkness, where one was enveloped into the greater god as in an Egyptian darkness. He would meet there or nowhere. To the visual travesty he would lend himself no more.

Pondering and turning recklessly he heard Jack come back. Then he began to doze. He did not sleep well in Australia, it seemed as if the aboriginal daimon entered his body as he slept, to destroy its old constitution. Sleep was almost pain, and too full of dreams. This night he woke almost at once from a vivid little dream. The fact of the soonness troubled him too, for at home he never dreamed till morning.

But the dream had been just this. He was standing in the living room at Cooe, bending forward doing some little thing by the couch, perhaps folding the newspaper, making the room tidy at the last moment before going to bed, when suddenly a violent darkness came over him, he felt his arms pinned, and he heard a man's voice speaking mockingly behind him, with a laugh. It was as if he saw the man's face too — a stranger, a rough, strong sort of Australian. And he realised with horror: "Now they have put a sack over my head, and fastened my arms, and I am in the dark, and they are going to steal my little brown handbag from the bedroom, which contains all the money we have." The shock of intense

reality made him fight his way out of the depths of the first sleep, but it was some time before he could really lay hold of facts, like: "I am not at Coo-ee. I am not at Mullumbimby. I am in Sydney at Wyewurk, and the Callcotts are in the next room." So he came really awake. But if the thing had really happened, it could hardly have happened to him more than in this dream.

In the morning they were returning to the South Coast. But Jack said to Somers, a little sarcastically:

"You aren't altogether pleased with us, then?"

Somers hesitated before replying:

"I'm not altogether pleased with myself, am I?"

"You don't have to be so particular, in this life," said Jack.

"I may have to be."

"You can't have it all perfect beforehand, you know. You've got to sink a few times before you can swim."

"Sink in what?"

"Why, it seems to me you want to have a thing all ready in your hand, know all about it, before you'll try it. And there's some things you can't do that with. You've just got to flop into them, like when you chuck a dog into water."

Somers received this rebuke rather sourly. This was the first wintry day they had really had. There was a cold fog in Sydney in the morning, and rain in the fog. In the hills it would be snow — away in the Blue Mountains. But the fog lifted, and the rain held off, and there was a wash of yellowish sunshine.

Harriet of course had to talk to a fellow-passenger in the train, because Lovat was his glummiest. It was a red-moustached Welshman with a slightly injured look in his pale blue eyes, as if everything hadn't been as good to him as he thought it ought, considering his merit. He said his name was Evans, and he kept a store. He had been sixteen years in the country.

"And is it VERY hot in the summer?" said Harriet. "I suppose it is."

"Yes," he said, "it's very hot. I've known the days when I've had to lie down at two o'clock in the afternoon, and not been able to move. Overpowered, that's what it is, overpowered."

Harriet was suitably impressed, having tried heat in India.

"And do you think it takes one long to get used to this country?" she asked after a while.

"Well, I should say it takes about four or five years for your blood properly to thin down. You can't say you've begun, under two years."

"Four or five years!" re-echoed Harriet. But what she was really turning over in her mind was this phrase: "For your blood to thin down." To thin down! how queer! Lovat also heard the sentence, and realized that his blood took this

thinning very badly, and still about four years of simmering ahead, apparently, if he stayed in this country. And when the blood had finished its thinning, what then? He looked at Mr. Evans, with the sharp pale nose and the reddish hair and the injured look in his pale-blue eyes. Mr. Evans seemed to find it sweet still to talk to people from the “old country”. “You’re from the old country?” — the inevitable question. The thinning down had left him looking as if he felt he lacked something. Yet he wouldn’t go back to South Wales. Oh no, he wouldn’t go back.

“The blood is thinner out here than in the old country.” The Australians seemed to accept this as a scientific fact. Richard felt he didn’t want his blood thinned down to the Australian constituency. Yet no doubt in the night, in his sleep, the metabolic change was taking place fast and furious.

It was raining a little in the late afternoon when Somers and Harriet got back to Coo-ee. With infinite relief she stepped across her own threshold.

“Ah!” she said, taking a long breath. “Thank God to be back.” She looked round, and went to rearrange on the sofa the cushions that they had whacked so hard to get the dust out.

Somers went to the edge of the grass to be near the sea. It was raving in long, rasping lines of hissing breakers — not very high ones, but very long. The sky hung grey, with veils of dark rain out to sea, and in the south a blackness of much rain blowing nearer in the wind. At the end of the jetty, in the mist of the sea-wind’s spray, a long, heavy coal-steamer was slowly toiling to cast loose and get away. The waves were so long and the current so strong, they would hardly let her turn and get clear of the misty-black jetty.

Under the dark-grey sky the sea looked bright, but coldly bright, with its yellow-green waves and its ramparts of white foam. There were usually three white ramparts, one behind the other, of rasping surf: and sometimes four. Then the long swish and surge of the shoreward wash. The coast was quite deserted: the steep sand wet as the backwash slid away: the rocks wet with rain: the low, long black steamer still laboured in the fume of the wind, indistinctly.

Somers turned indoors, and suddenly began taking off his clothes. In a minute he was running naked in the rain which fell with lovely freshness on his skin. Ah, he felt so stuffy after that sort of emotional heat in town. Harriet in amazement saw him whitely disappearing over the edge of the low cliff-bank, and came to the edge to look.

He ran quickly over the sands, where the wind blew cold but velvety, and the raindrops fell loosely. He walked straight into the fore-wash, and fell into an advancing ripple. At least it looked a ripple, but was enough to roll him over so that he went under and got a little taste of the Pacific. Ah, the fresh cold wetness!

— the fresh cold wetness! The water rushed in the backwash and the sand melted under him, leaving him stranded like a fish. He turned again to the water. The walls of surf were some distance off, but near enough to look rather awful as they raced in high white walls shattering towards him. And above the ridge of the raving whiteness the dimness of the labouring steamer, as if it were perched on a bough.

Of course he did not go near the surf. No, the last green ripples of the broken swell were enough to catch him by the scruff of the neck and tumble him rudely up the beach, in a pell-mell. But even the blow did one good, as the sea struck one heavily on the back, if one were fleeing; full on the chest, if one were advancing.

It was raining quite heavily as he walked out, and the skies hung low over the sea, dark over the green and white vigour of the ocean. The shore was so foam-white it almost suggested sun. The rain felt almost warm.

Harriet came walking across the grass with a towel.

“What a good idea!” she said. “If I’d known I’d have come. I wish I had.”

But he ignored the towel, and went into the little wash-place and under the shower, to wash off the sticky, strong Pacific. Harriet came along with the towel, and he put his hand to her face and nodded to her. She knew what he meant, and went wondering, and when he had rubbed the wet off himself he came to her.

To the end she was more wondering than anything. But when it was the end, and the night was falling outside, she laughed and said to him:

“That was done in style. That was chic. Straight from the sea, like another creature.”

Style and chic seemed to him somewhat ill suited to the occasion, but he brought her a bowl of warm water and went and made the tea. The wind was getting noisier, and the sea was shut out but still calling outside the house. They had tea and toast and quince jam, and one of the seven brown teapots with a bit off the spout shone quite nicely and brightly at a corner of the little red-and-white check tea-cloth, which itself occupied a corner of the big, polished jarrah table. But, thank God, he felt cool and fresh and detached, not cosy and domestic. He was so thankful not to be feeling cosy and “homely”. The room felt as penetrable to the outside influence as if it were a seashell lying on the beach, cool with the freshness and insistence of the sea, not a snug, cosy box to be secured inside.

And Jack Callcott’s rebuke stuck in his throat. Perhaps after all he was just a Pommy, prescribing things with overmuch emphasis, and wanting to feel God-Almighty in the face of unborn events. A Pommy is a newcomer in Australia, from the Old Country.

Teacher: Why did you hit him, Georgie?

Georgie: Please miss, he called me a Pommy.

Aussie (with a discoloured eye): Well, you're one, ain'cher? Can I help it that ch'are one?

Pommy is supposed to be short for pomegranate. Pomegranate, pronounced invariably pommygranate, is a near enough rhyme to immigrant, in a naturally rhyming country. Furthermore, immigrants are known in their first months, before their blood "thins down," by their round and ruddy cheeks. So we are told. Hence again, pomegranate, and hence Pommy. Let etymologists be appeased: it is the authorised derivation.

Perhaps, said Somers to himself, I am just a Pommy and a fool. If my blood had thinned down, I shouldn't make all this fuss over sharing in with Kangaroo or being mates with Jack Callcott. If I am not a ruddy Pommy, I am a green one. Of course they take the thing as it comes to them, and they expect me to do the same. Yet there I am hopping and hissing like a fish in a frying-pan. Putting too much "soul" into it. Far too much. When your blood has thinned down, out here, there's nothing but the merest sediment of a soul left, and your wits and your feelings are clear of it. You take things as they come, as Jack says. Isn't that the sanest way to take them, instead of trying to drive them through the exact hole in the hedge that you've managed to poke your head through? Oh, you unlearn a lot as your blood thins down. But there's an awful lot to be unlearnt. And when you've unlearnt it, you never say so. In the first place, because it's dead against the sane old British tradition. And in the second place, because you don't really care about telling what you feel, once your blood has thinned down and is clear of soul.

"Thin, you Australian burgundy," said Somers to his own body, when he caught a glimpse of it unawares, reflected in the glass as he was going to bed. "You're thin enough as a bottle, but the wine needs a lot of maturing. I've made a fool of myself latterly."

Yet he said to himself: "Do I want my blood to thin down like theirs? — that peculiar emptiness that is in them, because of the thinning that's gone out of them? Do I want this curious transparent blood of the antipodes, with its momentaneous feelings, and its sort of ABSENTNESS? But of course till my blood has thinned down I shan't see with their eyes. And how in the name of heaven is this world-brotherhood mankind going to see with one eye, eye to eye, when the very blood is of different thickness on different continents, and with the difference in blood, the inevitable psychic difference? Different vision!"

CHAPTER 8. VOLCANIC EVIDENCE.

Richard Lovat Somers registered a new vow: not to take things with too overwhelming an amount of emotional seriousness, but to accept everything that came along with a certain sang froid, and not to sit frenziedly in judgment before he had heard the case. He had come to the end of his own tether, so why should he go off into tantrums if other folks strayed about with the broken bits of their tethers trailing from their ankles? Is it better to be savagely tugging at the end of your rope, or to wander at random tetherless? Matter of choice!

But the day of the absolute is over, and we're in for the strange gods once more. "But when you get to the end of your tether you've nothing to do but die" — so sings an out-of-date vulgar song. But is it so? Why not all? When you come to the end of your tether you break the rope. When you come to the end of the lane you straggle on into the bush and beat about till you find a new way through, and no matter if you raise vipers or goannas or wallabies, or even only a stink. And if you see a man beating about for a new track you don't immediately shout, "Perverted wretch!" or "Villain!" or "Vicious creature!" or even merely "The fool," or mildly: "Poor dear!" You have to let him try. Anything is better than stewing in your own juice, or grinding at the end of your tether, or tread-milling away at a career. Better a "wicked creature" any day, than a mechanical tread-miller of a careerist. Better anything on earth than the millions of human ants.

In this way Mr. Somers had to take himself to task, for his Pommy stupidity and his pommigrant superiority, and kick himself rather severely, looking at the ends of the tether he presumed he had just broken. Why should people who are tethered to a post be so God-Almighty puffed up about their posts? It seems queer. Yet there they are, going round and round at the ends of their tethers, and being immensely sniffy about the people who stray loose trailing the broken end of their old rope, and looking for a new way through the bush. Yet so men are. They will set up inquisitions and every manner of torture chamber to COMPEL people to refrain from breaking their tethers. But once man has broken any old particular hobble-line, not God Himself can safely knot it together again.

Somers now left off standing on his head in front of the word love, and looking at it calmly, decided he didn't care vastly either way. Harriet had on her dressing-table tray a painted wooden heart, painted red with dots round it, a Black Forest trifle which she had bought in Baden-Baden for a penny. On it was

the motto:

Dem Mutigen gehort die Welt.

That was the motto to have on one's red heart: not Love or Hope or any of those aspiring emotions: "The world belongs to the courageous." To be sure, it was a rather two-edged motto just now for Germany. And Somers was not quite sure that it was the "world" that he wanted.

Yes it was. Not the tuppenny social world of present mankind: but the genuine world, full of life and eternal creative surprises, including of course destructive surprises: since destruction is part of creation. Somers did want the world. He did want to take it away from all the teeming human ants, human slaves, and all the successful, empty careerists. He wanted little that the present society can give. But the lovely other world that is in spite of the social man of to-day: that he wanted, to clear it, to free it. — Freedom! Not for this subnormal slavish humanity of democratic antics. But for the world itself, and the Mutigen.

Mut! Muth! A good word. Better even than "courage". Virtue, *virtus*, manliness. Mut — manliness. Not braggaccio or insolence. *De l'audace, at de l'audace, at encore de l'audace!* Danton's word. But it was more than daring. It was Mut, profound manliness, that is not afraid of anything except of being cowardly or barren.

Dem Mutigen gehort die Welt. To the manly brave belongs the world.

Somers wrote to Kangaroo, and enclosed the red wooden heart, which had a little loop of ribbon so that it could be hung on the wall.

"Dear Kangaroo — I send you my red heart (never mind that it is wood, the wood once lived and was the tree of life) with its motto. I hope you will accept it, after all my annoying behaviour. It is not the love, but the Mut that I believe in, and join you in. Love may be an ingredient in Mut, so you have it all your own way. Anyhow, I send you my red motto-heart, and if you don't want it you can send it back — I will be your follower, in reverence for your virtue — *Virtus*. And you may command me."

The following day came the answer, in Kangaroo's difficult scrawl:

"Dear Lovat — Love is in your name, notwithstanding. I accept the red heart gladly, and when I win, I will wear it for my Order of Merit, pinned on my swelling chest.

"But you are the one person in the world I can never command. I knew it would be so. Yet I am unspeakably glad to have your approval, and perhaps your allegiance.

"Come and see me as soon as it is your wish to do so: I won't invite you, lest worse befall me. For you are either a terrible disappointment to me, or a great blessing in store. I wait for you."

Somers also wrote to Jack, to ask him to come down with Victoria for the week-end. But Jack replied that he couldn't get away this week-end, there was so much doing. Somers then invited him for the following one.

The newspapers were at this time full of the pending strike of coal-miners and shearers: that is, the Australian papers. The European papers were in a terrific stew about finance, and the German debt, and the more imposing Allied debt to America. Bolshevism, Communism, Labour, had all sunk into a sort of insignificance. The voice of mankind was against them for the time being, not now in hate and fear, as previously, but in a kind of bitter contempt: the kind of feeling one has when one has accepted a glib individual as a serious and remarkable man, only to find that he is a stupid vulgarian. Communism was a bubble that would never even float free and iridescent from the nasty pipe of the theorist.

What then? Nothing evident. There came dreary and fatuous letters from friends in England, refined young men of the upper middle-class writing with a guarded kind of friendliness, gentle and sweet, of course, but as dozy as ripe pears in their *laissez aller* heaviness. That was what it amounted to: they were overripe, they had been in the sun of prosperity too long, and all their tissues were soft and sweetish. How could they react with any sharpness to any appeal on earth? They wanted just to hang against the warmest wall they could find, as long as ever they could, till some last wind of death or disturbance shook them down into earth, mushy and overripe. A sardonic letter from a Jewish friend in London, amusing but a bit dreadful. Letters from women in London, friendly but irritable. "I have decided I am a comfort-loving conventional person, with just a dash of the other thing to keep me fidgety" — then accounts of buying old furniture, and gossip about everybody: "Verden Grenfel in a restaurant with TWO bottles of champagne, so he must be affluent just now." A girl taking her honeymoon trip to Naples by one of the Orient boats, third class: "There are 800 people on board, but room for another 400, so that on account of the missing 400 we have a six-berth cabin to ourselves. It is a bit noisy and not luxurious, but clean and comfortable, and you can imagine what it is to me, to be on the glorious sea, and to go ashore at wonderful Gibraltar, and to see the blue hills of Spain in the distance. Frederick is struggling with a mass of Italian irregular verbs at the moment." And in spite of all Somers' love of the Mediterranean, the thought of sitting on a third class deck with eight hundred emigrants, including babies, made him almost sick. "The glorious sea — wonderful Gibraltar." It takes quite a good eyesight even to SEE the sea from the deck of a liner, let alone out of the piled mass of humanity on the third-class deck. A letter from Germany, about a wedding and a pending journey into Austria and friends,

written with a touch of philosophy that comes to a man when he's fallen down and bumped himself, and strokes the bruise. A cheque for fifteen pounds seventeen shillings and fourpence, from a publisher: "Kindly acknowledge." A letter from a farming friend who had changed places: "A Major Ashworth has got the farm, and has spent about 600 pounds putting it in order. He has started as a poultry-farm, but has had bad luck in losing 400 chicks straight away, with the cold weather. I hope our spell of bad luck doesn't still hang over the place. I wish you would come back to England for the summer. Viv talks of getting a caravan, and then we might get two. Cold and wet weather for weeks. All work and no play, not good enough." A letter from Paris, artist friends: "I have sold one of the three pictures that are in the last Salon." A letter from Somers' sister: "Louis has been looking round everywhere to buy a little farm, but there doesn't seem to be a bit of land to be got anywhere. What do you think of our coming to Australia? I wish you would look for something for us, for we are terribly fed up with this place, nothing doing at all." A letter from Sicily: "I have had my father and stepmother over from New York. I had got them rooms here, but when I said so, the face of Anna, my stepmother, was a sight. She took me aside and told me that father was spoiling the trip entirely by his economies, and that she had set her heart on the Villa Igeia. Then Dad took me aside and said that he didn't wish to be reckless, but he didn't want to thwart Anna's wishes entirely, and was there nothing in the way of compromise? It ended by their staying two days here, and Anna said she thought it was very nice FOR ME. Then they went to the Palmes, which is entirely up to Anna's ideas of luxury, and she is delighted."

Somers had fourteen letters by this mail. He read them with a sort of loathing, one after the other, piling them up on his left hand for Harriet, and throwing the envelopes in the fire. By the time he had done he wished that every mail-boat would go down that was bringing any letter to him, that a flood would rise and cover Europe entirely, that he could have a little operation performed that would remove from him for ever his memory of Europe and everything in it — and so on. Then he went out and looked at the Pacific. He hadn't even the heart to bathe, and he felt so trite, with all those letters; he felt quite capable of saying "Good dog" to the sea: to quote one of the quips from the Bulletin. The sea that had been so full of potency, before the postman rode up on his pony and whistled with his policeman's whistle for Somers to come to the gate for that mass of letters. Never had Richard Lovat Somers felt so filled with spite against everybody he had ever known in the old life, as now.

"And there was I, knave, fool, and ninny, whining to go back to Europe, and abusing Australia for not being like it. That horrible, horrible staleness of Europe, and all their trite consciousness, and their dreariness. The dreariness?"

The sterility of their feelings? And here was I carping at Kangaroo and at Jack Callcott, who are golden wonders compared with anything I have known in the old world. Australia has got some real, positive indifference to “questions”, but Europe is one big wriggling question and nothing else. A tangle of quibbles. I’d rather be shot here next week, than quibble the rest of my life away in over-upholstered Europe.”

He left off kicking himself, and went down to the shore to get away from himself. After all, he knew the endless water would soon make him forget. It had a language which spoke utterly without concern of him, and this utter unconcern gradually soothed him of himself and his world. He began to forget.

There had been a squall in the night. At the tip of the rock-shelves above the waves men and youths, with bare, reddish legs, were fishing with lines for blackfish. They looked like animal creatures perching there, and like creatures they were passive or darting in their movements. A big albatross swung slowly down the surf: albatross or mollyhawk, with wide, waving wings.

The sea had thrown up, all along the surf-line, queer glittery creatures that looked like thin blown glass. They were bright transparent bladders of the most delicate ink-blue, with a long crest of deeper blue, and blind ends of translucent purple. And they had bunches of blue, blue strings, and one long blue string that trailed almost a yard across the sand, straight and blue and translucent. They must have been some sort of little octopus, with the bright glass bladder, big as smallish narrow pears, with a blue frill along the top to float them, and the strings to feel with — and perhaps the long string to anchor by. Who knows? Yet there they were, soft, brilliant, like pouches of frailest sea-glass. It reminded Somers of the glass they blow at Butano, at Venice. But there they never get the lovely soft texture and the colour.

The sky was tufted with cloud, and in the afternoon veils of rain swept here and there across the sea, in a changing wind. But then it cleared again, and Somers and Harriet walked along the sands, watching the blue sky mirror purple and the white clouds mirror warm on the wet sand. The sea talked and talked all the time, in its disintegrative, elemental language. And at last it talked its way into Somers’ soul, and he forgot the world again, the babel. The simplicity came back, and with it the inward peace. The world had left him again. He had been thinking, in his anger of the morning, that he would get Jack to teach him to shoot with a rifle and a revolver, so that he might take his part. He had never shot with a gun in his life, so he had thought it was high time to begin. But now he went back on his thoughts. What did he want with guns or revolvers? Nothing. He had nothing to do with them, as he had nothing to do with so much that is in the world of man. When he was truly himself he had a quiet stillness in

his soul, an inward trust. Faith, undefined and undefinable. Then he was at peace with himself. Not content, but peace like a river, something flowing and full. A stillness at the very core.

But faith in what? In himself, in mankind, in the destiny of mankind? No, no. In Providence, in Almighty God? No, not even that. He tried to think of the dark God he declared he served. But he didn't want to. He shrank away from the effort. The fair morning seaward world, full of bubbles of life.

So again came back to him the ever-recurring warning that SOME men must of their own choice and will listen only to the living life that is a rising tide in their own being, and listen, listen, listen for the injunctions, and give heed and know and speak and obey all they can. Some men must live by this unremitting inwardness, no matter what the rest of the world does. They must not let the rush of the world's "outwardness" sweep them away: or if they are swept away, they must struggle back. Somers realised that he had had a fright against being swept away, because he half wanted to be swept away: but that now, thank God, he was flowing back. Not like the poor, weird "ink-bubbles", left high and dry on the sands.

Now he could remember the frenzied outward rushing of the vast masses of people, away from themselves, without being driven mad by it. But it seemed strange to him that they should rush like this in their vast herds, outwards, outwards, always frenziedly outwards, like souls with hydrophobia rushing away from the pool of water. He himself, when he was caught up in the rush, felt tortured and maddened, it was an agony of irritation to him till he could feel himself drifting back again like a creature into the sea. The sea of his own inward soul, his own unconscious faith, over which his will had no exercise. Why did the mass of people not want this stillness and this peace with their own being? Why did they want cinemas and excitements? Excitements are as nauseous as sea-sickness. Why does the world want them?

It is their problem. They must go their way. But some men, some women must stay by their own inmost being, in peace, and without envy. And there in the stillness listen, listen, and try to know, and try to obey. From the innermost, not from the outside. It is so lovely, the peace. But poor dear Richard, he was only resting and basking in the old sunshine just now, after his fray. The fight would come again, and only in the fight would his soul burn its way once more to the knowledge, the intense knowledge of his "dark god". The other was so much sweeter and easier, while it lasted.

At tea-time it began to rain again. Somers sat on the verandah looking at the dark green sea, with its films of floating yellow light between the ruffled waves. Far back, in the east, was a cloud that was a rainbow. It was a piece of rainbow,

but not sharp, in a band; it was a tall fume far back among the clouds of the seawall.

“Who is there that you feel you are with, besides me — or who feel themselves with you?” Harriet was asking.

“No one,” he replied. And at the same moment he looked up and saw the rainbow fume beyond the sea. But it was on a dark back ground, like a coloured darkness. The rainbow was always a symbol to him — a good symbol: of this peace. A pledge of unbroken faith, between the universe and the innermost. And the very moment he said “No one,” he saw the rainbow for an answer.

Many times in his life he had seen a rainbow. The last had been on his arrival in Sydney. For some reason he felt absolutely wretched and dismal on that Saturday morning when the ship came into Sydney harbour. He had an unspeakable desire not to get out of the ship, not to go down on to the quay and into that town. The having to do it was a violation of himself. When he came on deck after breakfast and the ship had stopped, it was pouring with rain, the P. and O. wharf looked black and dismal, empty. It might almost have been an abandoned city. He walked round to the starboard side, to look towards the unimposing hillock of the city and the Circular Quay. Black, all black and unutterably dismal in the pouring rain, even the green grass of the Botanical Gardens, and the bits of battlement of the Conservatorium. Unspeakably forlorn. Yet over it all, spanning the harbour, the most magnificent great rainbow. His mood was so miserable he didn't want to see it. But it was unavoidable. A huge, brilliant, supernatural rainbow, spanning all Sydney.

He was thinking of this, and still watching the dark-green, yellow-reflecting sea, that was like a northern sea, a Whitby sea, and watching the far-off fume of a dark rainbow apparition, when Harriet heard somebody at the door. It was William James, who had an hour to wait for his train, and thought they wouldn't mind if he looked in. They were pleased, and Harriet brought him a cup and plate.

Thank goodness he, too, came in a certain stillness of spirit, saying very little, but being a quiet, grateful presence. When the tea was finished he and Somers sat back on the verandah out of the wind, and watched the yellow, cloudy evening sink. They hardly spoke, but lay lying back in the deckchairs.

“I was wondering,” said Somers, “whom Kangaroo depends on mostly for his following.”

William James looked back at him, with quiet, steady eyes.

“On the diggers — the returned soldiers chiefly: and the sailors.”

“Of what class?”

“Of any class. But there aren't many rich ones. Mostly like me and Jack, not

quite simple working men. A few doctors and architects and that sort.”

“And do you think it means much to them?”

Jaz shifted his thick body uneasily in his chair.

You never can tell,” he said.

“That’s true,” said Somers. “I don’t really know how much Jack Callcott cares. I really can’t make out.”

“He cares as much as about anything,” said Jaz. “Perhaps a bit more. It’s more exciting.”

“Do you think it IS the excitement they care about chiefly?”

“I should say so. You can die in Australia if you don’t get a bit of excitement.” There was silence for a minute or two.

“In my opinion,” said Somers, “it has to go deeper than excitement.” Again Jaz shifted uneasily in his chair.

“Oh, well — they don’t set much store on deepness over here. It’s easy come, easy go, as a rule. Yet they’re staunch chaps while the job lasts, you know. They are true to their mates, as a rule.”

“I believe they are. It’s the afterwards.”

“Oh, well — afterwards is afterwards, as Jack always says.” Again the two men were silent.

“If they cared deeply — ” Somers began slowly — but he did not continue, it seemed fatuous. Jaz did not answer for some time.

“You see, it hasn’t come to that with them,” he said. “It might, perhaps, once they’d actually done the thing. It might come home to them then; they might HAVE to care. It might be a force-put. THEN they’d need a man.”

“They’ve got Kangaroo,” said Somers.

“You think Kangaroo would get them over the fence?” said Jaz carefully, looking up at Somers.

“He seems as if he would. He’s a wonderful person. And there seems no alternative to him.”

“Oh yes, he’s a wonderful person. Perhaps a bit too much of a wonder. A hatchet doesn’t look anything like so spanking as a lawn-mower, does it now, but it’ll make a sight bigger clearing.”

“That’s true,” said Somers, laughing. “But Kangaroo isn’t a lawn-mower.”

“Oh, I don’t say so,” smiled Jaz fidgeting on his chair. “I should like to hear your rock-bottom opinion of him though.”

“I should like to hear yours,” said Somers, “You know him much better than I do. I haven’t got a rock-bottom opinion of him yet.”

“It’s not a matter of the time you’ve known him,” said Jaz. He was manifestly hedging, and trying to get at something. “You know I belong to his gang, don’t

you?”

“Yes,” said Somers, wondering at the word “gang”.

“And for that reason I oughtn’t to criticize him, ought I?”

Somers reflected for some moments.

“There’s no oughts, if you FEEL critical,” he answered.

“I think you feel critical of him yourself at times,” said Jaz, looking up with a slow, subtle smile of cunning: like a woman’s disconcerting intuitive knowledge. It laid Somers’ soul bare for the moment. He reflected. He had pledged no allegiance to Kangaroo.

“Yet,” he said aloud to Jaz, “if I HAD joined him I wouldn’t want to hinder him.”

“No, we don’t want to hinder him. But we need to know where we are. Supposing you were in my position — and you DIDN’T feel sure of things! A man has to look things in the face. You yourself, now — you’re holding back, aren’t you?”

“I suppose I am,” said Richard, “But then I hold back from everything.”

Jaz looked at him searchingly.

You don’t like to commit yourself?” he said, with a sly smile.

“Not altogether that. I’d commit myself, if I could. It’s just something inside me shakes its head and holds back.”

Jaz studied his knuckles for some time.

“Yes,” he said slowly. “Perhaps you can afford to stand out. You’ve got your life in other things. Some of us feel we haven’t got any life if we’re not — if we’re not mixed up in something.” He paused, and Richard waited. “But the point is this — ” Jaz looked up again with his light-grey, serpent’s eyes. “Do you yourself see Kangaroo pulling it off?” There was a subtle mockery in the question.

“What?”

“Why — you know. This revolution, and this new Australia. Do you see him figuring on the Australian postage stamps — and running the country like a new Jerusalem?”

“The eyes watched Richard fixedly.

“If he’s got a proper backing, why not?” Somers answered.

“I don’t say why not. I ask you, WILL HE? Won’t you say how you feel?”

Richard sat quite still, not even thinking, but suspending himself. And in the suspense his heart went sad, oh so empty, inside him. He looked at Jaz, and the two men read the meaning in each other’s eyes.

“You think he won’t?” said Jaz, triumphing.

“No, I think he won’t,” said Richard. “There now. I knew you felt like that.”

“And yet,” said Richard, “if men were men still — if they had any of that belief in love they pretend to have — if they were FIT to follow Kangaroo,” he added fiercely, feeling grief in his heart.

Jaz dropped his head and studied his knuckles, a queer, blank smile setting round his mouth.

“You have to take things as they are,” he said in a small voice.

Richard sat silent, his heart for the moment broken again.

“And,” added Jaz, looking up with a slow, subtle smile, “if men aren’t what Kangaroo wants them to be, why should they be? If they don’t want a new Jerusalem, why should they have it? It’s another catch. They like to hear Kangaroo’s sweet talk — and they’ll probably follow him if he’ll bring off a good big row, and they think he can make it all pretty afterwards.” Again he smiled, but bitterly, mockingly. “I don’t know why I say these things to you, I’m sure. But it’s as well for a man to get to the bottom of what he thinks, isn’t it? And I feel, you know, that you and me think alike, if we allow ourselves to think.”

Richard looked at him, but never answered. He felt somehow treacherous.

“Kangaroo’s clever,” resumed Jaz. “He’s a Jew, and he’s damn clever. Maybe he’s the cleverest. I’ll tell you why. You’re not offended now at what I say, are you?”

“What’s the good of being offended by anything, if it’s a genuine opinion?”

“Well now, that’s what I mean. And I say Kangaroo is cleverer than the Red people, because he can make it look as if it would be all rosy afterwards, you know, everything as good as apple pie. I tell you what. All these Reds and I.W.W.’s and all, why don’t they make their revolution? Because they’re frightened of it when they’ve made it. They’re not frightened of hanging all the capitalists and such. But they’re frightened to death of having to keep things going afterwards. They’re frightened to death.” Jaz smiled to himself with a chuckle. “Nothing frightens them so much as the thought of having to look after things when their revolution is made. It frightens them to death. And that’s why they won’t make their grand revolution. Never. Unless somebody shoves them into it. That’s why they’ve got this new cry: Make the revolution by degrees, through winning in politics. But that’s no revolution, you know. It’s the same old thing with a bit of difference, such a small bit of difference that you’d never notice it if you weren’t made to.”

“I think that’s true,” said Richard. “Nobody’s more frightened of a Red revolution than the Reds themselves. They just absolutely funk it.”

“There now — that’s the word — they funk it. Yet, you know, they’re all ready for it. And if you got them started, if you could, they’d make a clearance,

like they did in Russia. And we could do with that, don't you think?"

"I do," said Richard, sighing savagely.

"Well now, my idea's this. Couldn't we get Kangaroo — to join the Reds — the I.W.W.'s and all? Couldn't we get him to use all his men to back Red Labour in this country, and blow a cleavage through the old system. Because, you know he's got the trump cards in his hands. These Diggers' Clubs, they've got all the army men, dying for another scrap. And then a sort of secret organisation has ten times the hold over men than just a Labour Party, or a Trades Union. He's damned clever, he's got a wonderful scheme ready. But he'll spoil it, because he'll want it all to happen without hurting anybody. Won't he now?"

"Except a few."

"Oh yes — maybe four of his enemies. But he wants to blow the house up without breaking the windows. He thinks he can turn the country upside-down without spilling milk, let alone blood. Now the Reds, let them loose, would make a hole in things. Only they'll never move on their own responsibility. They haven't got the guts, the stomach, the backbone."

"You're so clever, Jaz. I wonder you're not a leader yourself."

"Me?" A slow ironical smile wreathed his face. "You're being sarcastic with me, Mr. Somers." "Not at all. I think you're amazing."

Jaz only smiled sceptically still.

"You take what I mean, though, do you?"

"I do."

"And what do you think of it?"

"Very clever."

"But isn't it feasible? You get Kangaroo, with his Diggers — the cleverest idea in the country, really — to quietly come in with the Reds, and explode a revolution over here. You could soon do it, in the cities: and the country couldn't help itself. You let the Reds appear in the front, and take all the shine. You keep a bit of a brake on them. You let them call a Soviet, or whatever they want, and get into a real mess over it. And then Kangaroo steps in with the balm of Gilead and the New Jerusalem. But let them play Old Tommy Jenkins first with Capital and State Industries and the free press and religious sects. And then Kangaroo steps in like a redeeming angel, and reminds us that it's God's Own Country, so we're God's Own People, and makes us feel good again. Like Solomon, when David has done the dirty work."

"The only point," said Somers smiling, "is that an Australian Lenin and an Australian Trotsky might pop up in the scrimmage, and then Kangaroo could take to the bush again."

Jaz shook his head.

“They wouldn’t,” he said. “There’s nobody with any grip. And you’d see, in this country, people would soon want to be good again, because it costs them least effort.”

“Perhaps Kangaroo is right, and they don’t want to be anything BUT good.”

Jaz shook his head.

“It’s not goodness they’re after just now,” he said. “They want to rip things up, or they want nothing. They aren’t ready to come under Kangaroo’s loving wing just yet. They’d as leave be under King George’s thumb, they can peep out easier. It seems to me, it’s SPITE that’s at the bottom, with most men. And they’ve got to let it out before anything’s any good.”

Somers began to feel tired now.

“But after all, Jaz,” he said, “what have I got to do with it?”

“You can put it to Kangaroo. You can make him see it. And you can keep him to it, if you promise him you’ll stick to him.”

“Me a power behind the throne?” protested the truly sceptical Richard.

“I take it you don’t want to sit on the throne yourself,” smiled Jaz. “And Kangaroo’s got more the figure. But what do you think of it?”

Somers was silent. He now was smiling subtly and ironically, and Jaz was watching him sharply, like a man who wants something. Jaz waited.

“I’m afraid, Jaz,” said Somers, “that, like Nietzsche, I no longer believe in great events. The war was a great event — and it made everything more pretty. I doubt if I care about the mass of mankind, Jaz. You make them more than ever distasteful to me.

“Oh, you know, you needn’t commit yourself. You’ve only to be friendly with Kangaroo, and work him into it. You know you said yourself you’d give anything to have a clearance made, in the world.”

“I know. Sometimes I feel I’d give anything, soul and body, for a smash up in this social-industrial world we’re in. And I would. And then when I realise people — just people — the same people after it as before — why, Jaz, then I don’t care any more, and feel it’s time to turn to the gods.”

“You feel there’s any gods to turn to, do you?” asked Jaz, with the sarcasm of disappointment.

“I feel it would probably be like Messina before and after the earthquake. Before the earthquake it was what is called a fine town, but commercial, low, and hateful. You felt you’d be glad if it was wiped out. After the earthquake it was horrible heaps of mortar and rubble, and now it’s rows and rows of wood and tin shanties, streets of them, and more commercial, lower than ever, and infinitely more ugly. That would probably be the world after your revolution. No, Jaz, I leave mankind to its own contrivances, and turn to the gods.”

“But you’ll say a word to Kangaroo?” said Jaz, persistent.

“Yes, if I feel like it,” said Richard.

Darkness had almost fallen, and Somers shivered as he rose to go indoors.

Next morning, when Somers had made the coffee, he and Harriet sat on the loggia at breakfast. It rained in the night, and the sea was whitish, sluggish, with soft, furry waves that had no plunge. The last thin flush of foam behaved queerly, running along with a straight, swift splash, just as when a steel rope rips out of water, as a tug hauls suddenly, jerking up a white splash that runs along its length.

“What had William James so much to say about?” asked Harriet, on the warpath.

“Why don’t you have the strength of mind not to ask?” he replied. “You know it’s better you left it alone: that I’m not supposed to blab.”

She gave him one fierce look, then went pale with anger. She was silent for some time. Then she burst out:

“Pah, as if I cared to know! What is all their revolution bosh to me! There have been revolutions enough, in my opinion, and each one more foolish than the last. And this will be the most foolish of the lot. And what have YOU got to do with revolutions, you petty and conceited creature? You and revolutions! You’re not big enough, not grateful enough to do anything real. I give you my energy and my life, and you want to put me aside as if I was a charwoman. Acknowledge ME first, before you can be any good.” With which she swallowed her coffee and rose from the table.

He finished too, and got up to carry in the cups and do the few chores that remained for his share. He always got up in the morning, made the fire, swept the room, and tidied roughly. Then he brought in coal and wood, made the breakfast, and did any little out-door job. After breakfast he helped to wash up, and settled the fire. Then he considered himself free to his own devices. Harriet could see to the rest.

His devices were not very many. He tried to write, that being his job. But usually, nowadays, when he tapped his unconscious, he found himself in a seethe of steady fury, general rage. He didn’t hate anybody in particular, nor even any class or body of men. He loathed politicians, and the well-bred darling young men of the well-to-do middle classes made his bile stir. But he didn’t fret himself about them specially. The off-hand self-assertive working people of Australia made him feel diabolic on their score sometimes. But as a rule the particulars were not in evidence, all the rocks were submerged, and his bile swirled diabolically for no particular reason at all. He just felt generally diabolical, and tried merely to keep enough good sense not to turn his temper in

any particular direction.

“You think that nothing but goodness and virtue and wonderfulness comes out of you,” was one of Harriet’s accusations against him. “You don’t know how small and mean and ugly you are to other people.”

“Which means I am small and ugly and mean in her eyes,” he thought to himself. “All because of this precious gratitude which I am supposed to feel towards her, I suppose. Damn her and her gratitude. When she thwarts me and puts me in a temper I DON’T feel anything but spite. Damn her impudent gratitude.”

But Harriet was not going to be ignored: no, she was not. She was not going to sink herself to the level of a convenience. She didn’t really want protestations of gratitude or love. They only puzzled her and confused her. But she wanted him INWARDLY to keep a connection with her. Silently, he must maintain the flow between him and her, and safeguard it carefully. It is a thing which a man cannot do with his head: it isn’t REMEMBERING. And it is a thing which a woman cannot explain or understand, because it is quite irrational. But it is one of the deepest realities in life. When a man and woman truly come together, when there is a marriage, then an unconscious, vital connection is established between them, like a throbbing blood-circuit. A man may forget a woman entirely with his head, and fling himself with energy and fervour into whatever job he is tackling, and all is well, all is good, if he does not break that inner vital connection which is the mystery of marriage. But let him once get out of unison, out of conjunction, let him inwardly break loose and come apart, let him fall into that worst of male vices, the vice of abstraction and mechanisation, and have a concert of working ALONE and of himself, then he commits the breach. He hurts the woman and he hurts himself, though neither may know why. The greatest hero that ever existed was heroic only whilst he kept the throbbing inner union with something, God, or Fatherland, or woman. The most immediate is woman, the wife. But the most grovelling wife-worshippers are the foulest of traitors and renegades to the inner unison. A man must strive onward, but from the root of marriage, marriage with God, with wife, with mankind. Like a tree that is rooted, always growing and flowering away from its root, so is a vitally active man. But let him take some false direction, and there is torture through the whole organism, roots and all. The woman suffers blindly from the man’s mistaken direction, and reacts blindly.

Now in this revolution stunt, and his insistence on “male” activity, Somers had upturned the root flow, and Harriet was a devil to him — quite rightly — for he knew that inside himself he was devilish. She tried to keep her kindness and happiness. But no, it was false when the inner connection was betrayed. So her

silent rage accumulated, and it was no good playing mental tricks of suppression with it. As for him, he was forced to recognize the devil in his own belly. He just felt devilish. While Harriet went about trying to be fair and happy, he realised that it was awful for him to be there, as black inside as an ink-bottle; however, he practised being nice. Theoretically he was grateful to her, and all that. But nothing conjured away that bellyful of black devilishness with which he was enceinte. He really felt like a woman who is with child by a corrosive fiend. In his lower man, just girning and demoniacal. No good pretending otherwise. No good playing tricks of being nice. Seven-thousand devils!

When he saw a motor-car parked in the waste lot next to Coo-ee, and saw two women in twelve-guinea black coats and skirts hobbling across the grass to the bungalow farther down, perhaps wanting to hire it: then the devil came and sat black and naked in his eyes. They hobbled along the uneven place so commonly, they looked so crassly common in spite of their tailors' bills, so LOW, in spite of their motor-car, that the devil in him fairly lashed its tail like a cat. And yet, he knew, they were probably just two nice, kindly women, as the world goes. And truly, even the devil in him did not want to do them any PERSONAL harm. If they had fallen, or got into difficulty, he would have gone out at once to help them all he could. And yet, at the sight of their backs in their tailored "costumes" hobbling past the bushes, the devil in him lashed its tail till he writhed.

So there you are. Or rather, there was Richard Lovat Somers. He tried to square accounts with himself. Surely, he said to himself, I am not just merely a sort of human bomb, all black inside, waiting to explode I don't know when or how or where. That's what I seem like to myself, nowadays. Yet surely it is not the only truth about me. When I feel at peace with myself, and, as it were, so quietly at the CENTRE of things — like last evening, for example — surely that is also me. Harriet seems fairly to detest me for having this nice feeling all to myself. Well, it wasn't my fault if I had it. I did have it. What does she want? She won't leave a fellow alone. I felt fairly beatific last evening — I felt I could swim Australia into a future, and that Jaz was wonderful, and I was a sort of central angel. So now I must admit I am flabbergasted at finding my devil coiled up exultant like a black cat in my belly this morning, purring all the more loudly because of my "goodness" of last evening, and lashing his tail so venomously at the sight of the two women in the black "costumes". Is this devil after all my god? Do I stand with the debbil-debbil worshippers, in spite of all my efforts and protestations?

This morning I do, and I admit it. I can't help it: it is so, then let it be so. I shall change again, I know. I shall feel white again, and like a pearl, suave and quiet within the oyster of time. I shall feel again that, given but the ANSWER,

the black poisonous bud will burst into a lovely new, unknown flower in me. The bud is deadly poison: the flower will be the flower of the tree of life. If Harriet let me alone, and people like Jaz really believed in me! Because they have a right to believe in me when I am at my best. Or perhaps he believes in me when I am my worst, and Kangaroo likes me when I am good. Yet I don't really like Kangaroo. The devil in me fairly hates him. Him and everybody. Well, all right then, if I AM finally a sort of human bomb, black inside, and primed; I hope the hour and the place will come for my going off: for my exploding with the maximum amount of havoc. SOME men have to be bombs, to explode and make breaches in the walls that shut life in. Blind, havoc-working bombs too. Then so be it.

That morning as luck would have it Somers read an article by A. Meston in an old Sydney Daily Telegraph, headed:

EARTHQUAKES.

IS AUSTRALIA SAFE?

SLEEPING VOLCANOES.

The fact that Australia so far has had no trouble with volcanoes or earthquakes, and appears to be the most immune country in the world, accounts for our entire indifference to the whole subject. But here are phases of this problem entitled to some serious consideration by those in whom the thinking and observant faculties are not altogether dormant, and who have not a calm, cool disregard of very ominous inexorable facts. Australia is a very peaceful reposeful area, with the serious volcanoes of New Zealand on one side, and the still more serious volcanoes of Java on the other. We live in a soft flowery meadow between two jungles, a lion in one and a tiger in the other, but as neither animal has chased or bitten us, up to the present time, we go calmly to sleep quite satisfied they are harmless.

Now the line of volcanic action on the east coast of Australia is very clearly defined, from the basalt of Illawarra, north to the basalt within three miles of Cape York. The chief areas over all that distance are the Big Scrub on the Richmond River, the Darling Downs, and the Atherton Tableland, behind Cairns.

These are the largest basalt areas in Australia, the Darling Downs and Atherton containing each about 2,000,000 acres of basalt, the one chiefly black, and the other all red. The other conspicuous areas are the red basalt Isis and Woongarra scrubs, and north of Atherton the next basalt area is on the McIvor and Morgan Rivers, 40 miles north of Cooktown. From there I saw no basalt on the coast of the Peninsula, until somewhat surprised to find great piles of black basaltic stone, like artificial quarry heaps, in the dense *Seaforthia* palm scrubs

ten miles west of Somerset.

VOLCANIC EVIDENCE.

Here, then, is a clearly defined but very intermittent line of volcanic action along our entire east coast for over two thousand miles. Yet to-day there is not only not one active volcano on the whole of that area, but not even one clearly authentic dead one. There is nothing to show whence came the basalt of the Darling Downs, the Big Scrub, or the Atherton Tableland, unless in the last case the two deep freshwater lakes, Barrine and Eacham, the Barrang and Zeetcham of the aboriginals, represent the craters of extinct volcanoes.

Whence, then, came the basalt spread along a narrow line of our east coast for two thousand miles, and all of it east of the Dividing Range? There is a lot of room for theories...

When the late Captain Audley Coote was laying the cable from New Caledonia to Sandy Cape, at the north end of Fraser Island, on the South Queensland coast, he passed a submerged mountain 6,000 feet in height, and found a tremendous chasm, so deep that they could find no bottom, and had to work the cable round the edge. When he reached the coast of Fraser Island he got the same soundings as Cook and Flinders and the Admiralty survey in the 'sixties, six to eight fathoms, but there came a break in the cable in after years, located in that six and eight fathom area, and they found the broken cable hanging over a submarine precipice of eight hundred feet.

That I read in Captain Coote's own manuscript journal, and it was confirmed by Captain John Mackay, the Brisbane harbourmaster, who assured me that an 800 feet chasm had suddenly formed there in the bottom of the ocean!

On the coast of Japan, the ocean bottoms sank in one place suddenly from four or five fathoms to 4,000 feet.

The old Fraser Island aboriginals told me that the deep blue lake, two miles from the White Cliffs, was once a level plateau, on which their fathers held fights and corroborees, and that it sank in one night. On the North Queensland coast, there is fairly shallow water from the seashore out to the edge of the Barrier, and then the ocean goes down to depths up to two and three thousand feet, so if the sea were removed you would look down from the outer Barrier into a tremendous valley with a wall of granite cliffs.

When the town of Port Royal in Jamaica was destroyed by an earthquake on June 7, 1692, the houses all disappeared into an ocean chasm 300 feet in depth; and in the terrible earthquake at Lisbon, 1755, destroying 2,000 houses and 5,000 people, the wharves and piers, and even the vessels lying beside them, disappeared into some tremendous gulf, leaving no trace whatever.

It is a singular fact that the heights of the loftiest mountains correspond with

the depths of the deepest seas, and that the 29,000 feet of Mount Everest is equal with what is known as the "Tuscarora Deep", fathomed by the U.S.A. vessel Tuscarora.

ISLANDS THAT VANISHED.

From the days of Seneca there are records of islands suddenly appearing before astonished mariners, and others disappearing suddenly before mariners equally astonished. In the dreadful volcanic explosion of Krakatoa in August, 1883, one mountain peak was blown to pieces, while others were thrown up from the ocean. The tidal wave created by Krakatoa destroyed 40,000 people, and the air wave from the concussion pulsated three times round the world. And Krakatoa and the Javanese volcanoes are only a short distance from the coast of Australia!

Doubtless many of the ships that have mysteriously disappeared, leaving no trace, have gone down in the vortex of a submarine earthquake, or a chasm created by a sudden shrinkage in the bottom of the ocean. From the facts above available it is reasonable to believe that the present continent of Australia is only a portion of the original, and that in some remote period it extended hundreds or thousands of miles to the eastward, probably including Lord Howe and Norfolk Islands and New Zealand, possibly New Caledonia. How came the ancient Cretaceous Ocean, which once covered all Central Australia, from the gulf to the Bight, to withdraw from the land, leaving nothing but marine fossils in the desert sandstone?

Was the Cretaceous Ocean shallow all round this continent, and did it suddenly subside to fill some tremendous chasm caused by a sudden submarine shrinkage of the earth's crust, followed by the inland sea which naturally rushed out into the vacancy?

What seems the only real danger to Australia lies not in the eruptions of some suddenly created new volcano, or any ordinary earthquake, but in just such shrinkages in the sea bottom as occurred on the coast of Japan, off Fraser Island, and many other localities, including Lisbon and Port Royal.

If such a subsidence were to come under Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide or Brisbane, it might be of such a magnitude that the whole city would disappear into the gulf.

We know nothing whatever of the awful forces at work beneath the crust of the earth, and nothing of the internal fires, or that awful subterranean abode where Shelley said "the old earthquake Demon nurses her young Ruin". The history of volcanoes and earthquakes is an appalling record of lost countless millions of lives and awful destruction.

One Peking earthquake destroyed 300,000 people, one in Naples 70,000,

another at Naples 40,000; and we are not far from July, 1902, when the volcano of Mount Pelee, in the island of Martinique, wiped out the town of St. Pierre and 30,000 inhabitants.

Still nearer is that 18th April, 1906, when the San Francisco earthquake killed over a thousand people, and did damage to the extent of sixty millions.

And so far in Australian history we have not had an earthquake that would capsize a tumbler of hot punch.

...

Why hot punch, thought Somers, why not hot bitters or ice-cream soda, which are much more Austral and to the point? But he had read this almost thrilling bit of journalism with satisfaction. If the mother earth herself is so unstable, and upsets the applecart without caring a straw, why, what can a man say to himself if he DOES happen to have a devil in his belly!

And he looked at the ocean uneasily moving, and wondered when next it would thrust an angry shoulder out of the watery bed-covering, to give things a little jog. Or when his own devil would get a leg up into affairs.

CHAPTER 9. HARRIET AND LOVAT AT SEA IN MARRIAGE.

When a sincere man marries a wife, he has one or two courses open to him, which he can pursue with that wife. He can propose to himself to be (a) the lord and master who is honoured and obeyed, (b) the perfect lover, (c) the true friend and companion. Of these (a) is now rather out of date. The lord and master has been proved, by most women quite satisfactorily, to be no more than a grown-up child, and his arrogance is to be tolerated just as a little boy's arrogance is tolerated, because it is rather amusing, and up to a certain point becoming. The case of (b), the perfect lover, is the crux of all ideal marriage to-day. But alas, not even the lord and master turns out such a fiasco as does the perfect lover, ninety-nine times out of a hundred. The perfect-lover marriage ends usually in a quite ghastly anti-climax, divorce and horrors and the basest vituperation. Alas for the fact, as compared with the ideal. A marriage of the perfect-lover type is bound either to end in catastrophe, or to slide away towards (a) or (c). It must either revert to a mild form of the lord-and-master marriage, and a wise woman, who knows the sickeningness of catastrophes and the ridiculous futility of second shots at the perfect-love paradise, often wisely pushes the marriage back gradually into one of the little bays or creeks of this Pacific ocean of marriage, lord-and-masterdom. Not that either party really believes in the lordship of man. But you've got to get into still water some time or other. The perfect-love business inevitably turns out to be a wildly stormy strait, like the Straits of Magellan, where two fierce and opposing currents meet and there is the devil of a business trying to keep the bark of marriage, with the flag of perfect-love at the mast, from dashing on a rock or foundering in the heavy seas. Two fierce and opposing currents meet in the narrows of perfect love. They may meet in blue and perfect weather, when the albatross hovers in the great sky like a permanent benediction, and the sea shimmers a second heaven. But you needn't wait long. The seas will soon begin to rise, the ship to roll. And the waters of perfect love — when once this love is consummated in marriage — become inevitably a perfect hell of storms and furies.

Then, as I say, the hymeneal bark either founders, or dashes on a rock, or more wisely gets out of the clash of meeting oceans and takes one tide or the other, where the flood has things all its own way. The woman being to-day the

captain of the marriage bark, either steers into the vast Pacific waters of lord-and-masterdom, though never, of course, hauling down the flag of perfect love; or else, much more frequently these latter days, she steers into the rather grey Atlantic of true friendship and companionship, still keeping the flag of perfect love bravely afloat.

And now the bark is fairly safe. In the great Pacific, the woman can take the ease and warm repose of her new dependence, but she is usually laughing up her sleeve. She lets the lord and master manage the ship, but woe betide him if he seeks to haul down the flag of perfect love. There is mutiny in a moment. And his chief officers and his crew, namely his children and his household servants, are up and ready to put him in irons at once, at a word from that wondrous goddess of the bark, the wife of his bosom. It is Aphrodite, mistress of the seas, in her grand capacity of motherhood and attendant wifehood. None the less, with a bit of managing the hymeneal bark sails on across the great waters into port. A lord and master is not much more than an upper servant while the flag of perfect love is flying and the sea-mother is on board. But a servant with the name of captain, and the pleasant job of sailing the ship and giving the necessary orders. He feels it is quite all right. He is supreme servant-in-command, while the mistress of mistresses smiles as she suckles his children. She is suckling him too.

Nevertheless, this is the course I would recommend young married women to DRIFT INTO, after the first two years of “perfect love”.

They won't often take my advice, I know that. Ha-ha! they will say. We see through your lord-and-master tricks. Course East-North-East, helmsman, into the safer and more populous waters of perfect companionship. If we can't have one thing perfect we'll have another. If it isn't exactly perfect love, it is perfect companionship, and the two are pretty nearly one and the same.

For woman, even more than man, when once she gets an idea into her head, or worse, when once she gets HERSELF into her head, will have nothing short of perfection. She simply will tolerate nothing short of perfection. East-north-east then, into the democratic Atlantic of PERFECT companionship.

Well, they are grey waters, and the perfect companionship usually resolves, subtly, and always under the perfect love flag, into a very nearly perfect limited liability company, the bark steering nicely according to profit and loss, and usually “getting on” fabulously. The Golden Vanity. If this perfect love flag is a vanity, the perfect-companionship management is certainly Golden. I would recommend perfect-companionship to all those married couples who truly and sincerely want TO GET ON.

Now the good bark Harriet and Lovat had risen from the waves, like Aphrodite's shell as well as Aphrodite, in the extremest waters of perfect love.

Love and love alone! Wide, wild, lonely waters, with the great albatross like a sign of the cross, sloping in the immense heavens. A sea to themselves, the waters of perfect love. And the good ship Harriet and Lovat, with white sails spread, sailing with never a master, like the boat of Dionysus, which steered of its own accord across the waters, in the right direction mark you, to the sound of the music of the dolphins, while the master of the ship put forth tendrils of vine and purple bunches of grapes, and the grapes of themselves dripped vinous down the throats of the true Dionysians. So sailed the fair ship Harriet and Lovat in the waters of perfect love.

I have not made up my mind whether she was a ship, or a bark, or a schooner, technically speaking. Let us imagine her as any one of them. Or perhaps she was a clipper, or a frigate, or a brig. All I insist is that she was not a steam-boat with a funnel, as most vessels are nowadays, sailing because they are stoked.

Fair weather and foul alternated. Sometimes the brig Harriet and Lovat skimmed along the path of the moon like a phantom: sometimes she lay becalmed, while sharks flicked her bottom: then she drove into the most awful hurricanes, and spun round in a typhoon: and yet behold her sailing out through the glowing arch of a rainbow into halcyon waters again. And so for years, till she began to look rather worn, but always attractive. Her paint had gone, so her timbers now were sea-silvery. Her sails were thin, but very white. The mainsail also was slit, and the stun-sails had been carried away in a blizzard. As for the flag of perfect love, the flag of the red-and-white rose upon the cross of thorns, all on a field of azure, it was woefully frayed and faded. The azure field was nearly tattered away, and the rose was fading into invisibility.

She had some awful weather, did the poor bark Harriet and Lovat. The seas opened great jaws to swallow her, the treacherous seas of perfect love, while cynical rocks gnashed their teeth at her, and unstable heavens opened chasms of wind on her, and fierce, full-blooded lusty bull-whales rushed at her and all but burst her timbers. Dazed and battered, she wandered hither and thither on the seas of perfect love, that she always had all to herself. Never another sail in sight, never another ship in hail. Only sometimes the smoke of a steamer skirting the horizon, making for one of the oceans.

And now the Harriet and Lovat began to feel the pull of the two opposing currents. It was as if she had a certain homesickness for one or other of the populous oceans: she was weary of the lone and wasteful waters of the sea of perfect love. Sometimes she drifted east-north-east towards the Atlantic of true companionship. And then Lovat, seeing the long swell of that grey sea, and the funnels of ships like a city suburb, put the helm hard aport, and turned the ship about, and beat against a horrible sea and wind till they got into the opposite

drift. Then things went a little easier, till Harriet saw before her the awful void opening of the other ocean, and the great, dark-blue, dominant swell of the waters, and the loneliness and the vastness and the feeling of being overwhelmed. She looked at the mast and saw the flag of perfect love falling limp, the faded rose of all roses dying at last.

And in a moment when he was asleep, her almost lord-and-master, she whipped the ship about and steered east-south-east into the heart of the sea of perfect love, hoping to get into the current east-north-east and so out into the open Atlantic. Then storms intolerable.

Then they took to cruising the far, lone, desert fringes of the sea of perfect love, utterly lonely and near the ice, the fringe of the seas of death. There they cruised, in the remote waters on the edge of extinction. And then they looked at one another.

“We will be perfect companions: you know how I love you,” said Harriet, of the good ship Harriet and Lovat.

“Never,” said Lovat, of the same ship. “I will be lord and master, but ah, such a wonderful lord and master that it will be your bliss to belong to me. Look, I have been sewing a new flag.”

She didn’t even look at the flag.

“You!” she exclaimed. “You a lord and master! Why, don’t you know that I love you as no man ever was loved? You a lord and master! Ph! you look it! Let me tell you I love you far, far more than ever you ought to be loved, and you should acknowledge it.”

“I would rather,” said he, “that you deferred your loving of me for a while, and considered the new proposition. We shall never sail any straight course at all, until you realise that I am lord and master, and you my blissful consort. Supposing, now, you had the real Hermes for a husband, Trismegistus. Would you not hold your tongue for fear you lost him, and change from being a lover, and be a worshipper? Well, I am not Hermes or Dionysus, but I am a little nearer to it than you allow. And I want you to yield to my mastery and my divination, and let me put my flag of a phoenix rising from a nest in flames in place of that old rose on a field azure. The gules are almost faded out,”

“It’s a LOVELY design!” she cried, looking at the new flag. “I might make a cushion-embroidery of it. But as a flag it’s absurd. Of course, you lonely phoenix, you are the bird and the ashes and the flames all by yourself! You would be. Nobody else enters in at all. I — I am just nowhere — I don’t exist.”

“Yes,” he said, “you are the nest.”

“I’ll watch it!” she cried. “Then you shall sleep on thorns, Mister.”

“But consider,” he said.

“That’s what I am doing,” she replied. “Mr. Dionysus and Mr. Hermes and Mr. Thinks-himself-grand. I’ve got one thing to tell you. Without ME you’d be nowhere, you’d be nothing, you’d not be THAT,” and she snapped her fingers under his nose, a movement he particularly disliked.

“I agree,” he replied, “that without the nest the phoenix would be — would be up a tree — would be in the air — would be nowhere, and couldn’t find a stable spot to resurrect in. The nest is as the body to the soul: the cup that holds the fire, and in which the ashes fall to take form again. The cup is the container and the sustainer.”

“Yes, I’ve done enough containing and sustaining of you, my gentleman, in the years I’ve known you. It’s almost time you left off wanting so much mothering. You can’t live a moment without me.”

“I admit that the phoenix without a nest is a bird absolutely without a perch, he must dissipate in the air. But — .”

“Then I’ll make a cushion-cover of your flag, and you can rest on that.”

“No, I’m going to haul down the flag of perfect love.”

“Oh, are you! And sail without a flag? Just like you, destroy, destroy, and nothing to put in its place.”

“Yes, I want to put in its place this crowned phoenix rising from the nest in flames. I want to set fire to our bark, Harriet and Lovat, and out of the ashes construct the frigate, Hermes, which name still contains the same reference, ‘her’ and ‘me’, but which has a higher total significance.”

She looked at him speechless for some time. Then she merely said:

“You’re mad,” and left him with his flag in his hands.

Nevertheless he was a determined little devil, as she knew to her cost, and once he’d got an idea into his head not heaven nor hell nor Harriet would ever batter it out. And now he’d got into his head this idea of being lord and master, and Harriet’s acknowledging him as such. Not just verbally. No. Not under the flag of perfect love. No. Obstinate and devilish as he was, he wanted to haul down the flag of perfect love, to set fire to the bark Harriet and Lovat, to seat himself in glory on the ashes, like a resurrected phoenix, with an imaginary crown on his head. And she was to be a comfortable nest for his impertinence.

In short, he was to be the lord and master, and she the humble slave. Thank you. Or at the very best, she was to be a sort of domestic Mrs. Gladstone, the Mrs. Gladstone of that old chestnut — who, when a female friend was lamenting over the terrible state of affairs, in Ireland or somewhere, and winding up her lament with: “Terrible, terrible. But there is One above” — replied: “Yes, he’s just changing his socks. He’ll be down in a minute.” Mr. Lovat was to be the One above, and she was to be happy downstairs thinking that this lord, this

master, this Hermes cum Dionysus wonder, was comfortably changing his socks. Thank you again. The man was mad.

Yet he stuck to his guns. She was to submit to the mystic man and male in him, with reverence, and even a little awe, like a woman before the altar of the great Hermes. She might remember that he WAS only human, that he had to change his socks if he got his feet wet, and that he would make a fool of himself nine times out of ten. But — and the but was emphatic as a thunderbolt — there was in him also the mystery and lordship of — of Hermes, if you like — but the mystery and the lordship of the forward-seeking male. That she must emphatically realise and bow down to. Yes, bow down to. You can't have two masters of one ship: neither can you have a ship without a master. The Harriet and Lovat had been an experiment of ten years' endurance. Now she was to be broken up, or burnt, so he said, and the non-existent Hermes was to take her place.

You can't have two masters to one ship. And if it IS a ship: that is, if it has a voyage to sail, a port to make, even a far direction to take, into the unknown, then a master it must have. Harriet said it wasn't a ship, it was a houseboat, and they could lie so perfectly here by the Pacific for the rest of time — or be towed away to some other lovely spot to house in. She could imagine no fairer existence. It was a houseboat.

But he with his no, no, he almost drove her mad. The bark of their marriage was a ship that must sail into uncharted seas, and he must be the master, and she must be the crew, sworn on. She was to believe in his adventure and deliver herself over to it; she was to believe in his mystic vision of a land beyond this charted world, where new life rose again.

And she just couldn't. His land beyond the land men knew, where men were more than they are now: she couldn't believe in it. "Then believe in ME," he said desperately. "I know you too well," she replied. And so, it was an impasse.

Him, a lord and master! Why, he was not really lord of his own bread and butter; next year they might both be starving. And he was not even master of himself, with his ungovernable furies and his uncritical intimacies with people: even people like Jack Callcott, whom Harriet quite liked, but whom she would never have taken seriously. Yet there was Lovat pouring himself out to him. Pah — believe! How could one believe in such a man! If he had been naturally a master of men, general of an army, or manager of some great steel works, with thousands of men under him — then, yes, she could have acknowledged the MASTER part of the bargain, if not the lord. Whereas, as it was, he was the most forlorn and isolated creature in the world, without even a dog to his command. He was so isolated he was hardly a man at all, among men. He had absolutely

nothing but her. Among men he was like some unbelievable creature — an emu, for example. Like an emu in the streets or in a railway carriage. He might well say phoenix.

All he could do was to try and come it over her with this revolution rubbish and a stunt of “male” activity. If it were even real!

He had nothing but her, absolutely. And that was why, presumably, he wanted to establish this ascendancy over her, assume this arrogance. And so that he could refute her, deny her, and imagine himself a unique male. He WANTED to be male and unique, like a freak of a phoenix. And then go prancing off into connections with men like Jack Callcott and Kangaroo, and saving the world. She could NOT stand these world-saviours. And she, she must be safely there, as a nest for him, when he came home with his feathers pecked. That was it. So that he could imagine himself absolutely and arrogantly It, he would turn her into a nest, and sit on her and overlook her, like the one and only phoenix in the desert of the world, gurgling hymns of salvation.

Poor Harriet! No wonder she resented it. Such a man, such a man to be tied to and tortured by!

And poor Richard! To be a man, and to have a man’s uneasy soul for his bed-fellow.

But he kicked against the pricks. He did not yet submit to the fact which he HALF knew: that before mankind would accept any man for a king, and before Harriet would ever accept him, Richard Lovat, as a lord and master, he, the selfsame Richard who was so strong on kingship, must open the doors of his soul and let in a dark Lord and Master for himself, the dark god he had sensed outside the door. Let him once truly submit to the dark majesty, break open his doors to this fearful god who is master, and enters us from below, the lower doors; let himself once admit a Master, the unspeakable god: and the rest would happen.

The fire began to burn the stick, The stick began to beat the dog. The dog began to bite the pig. The pig began to go over the bridge, And so the old woman got home that night...

CHAPTER 10. DIGGERS.

They had another ferocious battle, Somers and Harriet; they stood opposite to one another in such fury one against the other that they nearly annihilated one another. He couldn't stay near her, so started walking off into the country. It was winter, but sunny, and hot walking. He climbed steadily up and up the highroad between the dense, damp jungle that grew at the base and up the steep rise of the tor-face, which he wanted to get to the top of. Strange birds made weird, metallic noises. Tree-ferns rose on their notchy little trunks, and great mosses tangled in with more ordinary bushes. Overhead rose the gum-trees, sometimes with great stark, dead limbs thrown up, sometimes hands over like pine-trees.

He sweated up the steep road till at last he came to the top. There, on the farther side, the dip slope, the hills sank and ran in spurs, all fairly densely wooded, but not like the scarp slope up which he had toiled. The scarp slope was jungle, impenetrable, with tree-ferns and bunchy cabbage-palms and mosses like bushes, a thick matted undergrowth beneath the boles of the trees. But the dip slope was bush: gum trees rather scattered, and a low undergrowth like heath. The same lonely, unbreakable silence and loneliness that seemed to him the real bush. Curiously unapproachable to him. The mystery of the bush seems to recede from you as you advance, and then it is behind you if you look round. Lonely, and weird, and hoary.

He went on till he could look over the tor's edge at the land below. There was the scalloped sea-shore, for miles, and the strip of flat coast-land, sometimes a mile wide, sprinkled as far as the eye could reach with the pale-grey zinc roofs of the bungalows: all scattered like crystals in the loose cells of the dark tree-tissue of the shore. It was suggestive of Japanese landscape, dark trees and little, single, scattered toy houses. Then the bays of the shore, the coal-jetty, far off rocks down the coast, and long white lines of breakers.

But he was looking mostly straight below him, at the massed foliage of the cliff-slope. Down into the centre of the great, dull-green whorls of the tree-ferns, and on to the shaggy mops of the cabbage palms. In one place a long fall of creeper was yellowish with damp flowers. Gum-trees came up in tufts. The previous world! — the world of the coal age. The lonely, lonely world that had waited, it seemed, since the coal age. These ancient flat-topped tree-ferns, these trowsled palms like mops. What was the good of trying to be an alert conscious man here? You couldn't. Drift, drift into a sort of obscurity, backwards into a

nameless past, hoary as the country is hoary. Strange old feelings wake in the soul: old, non-human feelings. And an old, old indifference, like a torpor, invades the spirit. An old, saurian torpor. Who wins? There was the land sprinkled with dwellings as with granulated sugar. There was a black smoke of steamers on the high pale sea, and a whiteness of steam from a colliery among the dull trees. Was the land awake? Would the people waken this ancient land, or would the land put them to sleep, drift them back into the semi-consciousness of the world of the twilight?

Somers felt the torpor coming over him. He hung there on the parapet looking down, and he didn't care. How profoundly, darkly he didn't care. There are no problems for the soul in its darkened, wide-eyed torpor. Neither Harriet nor Kangaroo nor Jaz, nor even the world. Worlds come, and worlds go: even worlds. And when the old, old influence of the fern-world comes over a man, how can he care? He breathes the fern seed and drifts back, becomes darkly half vegetable, devoid of preoccupations. Even the never-slumbering urge of sex sinks down into something darker, more monotonous, incapable of caring: like sex in trees. The dark world before conscious responsibility was born.

A queer bird sat hunched on a bough a few yards away, just below; a bird like a bunch of old rag, with a small rag of a dark tail, and a fluffy pale top like an owl, and a sort of frill round his neck. He had a long, sharp, dangerous beak. But he too was sunk in unutterable apathy. A kukooburra! Some instinct made him know that Somers was watching, so he just shuffled round on the bough and sat with his back to the man, and became utterly oblivious. Somers watched and wondered. Then he whistled. No change. Then he clapped his hands. The bird looked over its shoulder in surprise. What! it seemed to say. Is there somebody alive? Is that a live somebody? It had quite a handsome face, with the exquisite long, dagger beak.

It slowly took Somers in. Then he clapped again. Making an effort the bird spread quite big wings and whirred in a queer, flickering flight to a bough a dozen yards farther off. And there it clotted again.

Ah well, thought Somers, life is so big, and has such huge ante-worlds of grey twilight. How can one care about anything in particular!

He went home again, and had forgotten the quarrel and forgotten marriage or revolutions or anything: drifted away into the grey pre-world where men didn't have emotions. Where men didn't have emotions and personal consciousness, but were shadowy like trees, and on the whole silent, with numb brains and slow limbs and a great indifference.

But Harriet was waiting for him rather wistful, and loving him rather quiveringly. And yet even in the quiver of her passion was some of this

indifference, this twilight indifference of the fern-world.

Jack and Victoria came for the week-end, and Somers and Callcott met in a much nearer sympathy than they had ever known before. Victoria was always thrilled and fascinated by both the Somers: they had an inexhaustible fascination for her, the tones of their voices, their manner, their way with each other. She could not understand the strange sureness they had in themselves, the sureness of what they were saying or going to say, the sureness of what they were feeling. For herself, her words fluttered out of her without her direct control, and her feelings fluttered in her the same. She was one perpetually agitated dovecot of words and emotions, always trying consciously to find HERSELF amid the whirl, and never quite succeeding. She thought someone might TELL her. Whereas the Somers had an unconscious sureness, something that seemed really royal to her. But she had in the last issue the twilight indifference of the fern-world. Only she still quivered for the light.

Poor Victoria! She clung to Jack's arm vibrating, always needing to vibrate outwards. And he seemed to become more Australian and apathetic every week. The great indifference, the darkness of the fern-world, upon his mind. Then spurts of energy, spurts of sudden violent desire, spurts of gambling excitement. But the mind in a kind of twilight sleep.

He made no more appeals. He was just static, and quite gentle. Even at table he was half oblivious of the presence of the other people. Then Victoria would poke him with her elbow, poke him hard, into consciousness, and bring back the lively Jack that the Somers had first known. Strange that the torpor had come on him so completely of late. Yet there was a queer light in his eyes, as if he might do something dangerous. And when he was once talking, he was perfectly logical and showed surprising calm common-sense. When he was discussing or criticising, he seemed so unusually sane as to be peculiar. Like a man in his sleep.

Just outside the station was the football field, and Mullumbimby was playing Wollondindy, Mullumbimby in royal blue, and Wollondindy in rather faded red. Along the roadside buggies and motor-cars were pulled up, the ponies were taken out of harness and left to feed on the roadside grass. Two riders sat on horseback to survey the scene. And under the flowering coral-trees, with their sharp red cockatoo flowers, stood men in their best clothes smoking pipes, or men in their best clothes squatting on the fence, and lasses mingling in or strolling past in white silk stockinette frocks, or pink crepe de chine, or muslin. Just like prostitutes, arm in arm, strolled the lasses, airing themselves and their pronounced hips. And the men apathetically took no notice, but watched the field.

This scene was too much for Jack Callcott. Somers or no Somers, he must be there. So there he stood, in his best clothes and a cream velour hat and a short pipe, staring with his long, naked, Australian face, impassive. On the field the blues and the reds darted madly about, like strange bird-creatures rather than men. They were mostly blond, with hefty legs, and with prominent round buttocks that worked madly inside the little white cotton shorts. And Jack, with his dark eyes, watched as if it was Doomsday. Occasionally the tail-end of a smile would cross his face, occasionally he would take his pipe-stem from his mouth and give a bright look into vacancy and say, "See that!" Heaven knows what it was that he saw. The game, the skill? Yes. But more, the motion, the wild combative motion. And most of all, fate. Fate had a fascination for him. It was the only real point of curiosity left in him: how would chance work things out. Chance! Now then, how would chance settle it? Even the football field, with its wildly scurrying blues and bits of red, was only a frenzied shuffling of fate, with men for the instruments. The living instruments of fate! And how would it work out, how would it work out? He could have stood there, static, with his little pipe, till Doomsday, waiting for fate to settle it. The wild scurrying motion, and the jumps in the air, of course made his heart beat faster. Towards the close one of the chaps got a kick on the jaw, and was knocked out. They couldn't finish the game. Hard lines.

Jack was a queer sight to Somers, when he was in this brightly vacant mood, not a man at all, but a chance thing, gazing spellbound on the evolutions of chance. And in this state, this very Australian state, you could hardly get a word out of him. Or, when he broke into a little volley of speech, you listened with wonder to the noise of it, as if a weird animal had suddenly given voice.

The indifference, the marvellous, bed-rock indifference. Not the static fatalism of the east. But an indifference based on real recklessness, an indifference with a deep flow of loose energy beneath it, ready to break out like a geyser. Ready to break into a kind of frenzy, a berserk frenzy, running amok in wild generosity, or still more wild smashing up. The wild joy in letting loose, in a smash-up. But will he ever let loose? Or will the static patience settle deeper, and the fern-twilight altogether envelop him. The slow transmutation! What does to-day matter, or this country? Time is so huge, and in Australia the next step back is to the fern age.

The township looked its queerest as dusk fell. Then the odd electric lights shone at rather wide intervals, the wide, unmade roads of rutted earth seemed to belong again to the wild, in the semi-dark, and the low bungalows with the doors open and the light showing seemed like shacks in the wilderness, a settlement in the fierce gloom of the wilderness. Then youths dashed fiercely on horseback

down the soft roads, standing in the stirrups and crouching over the neck of the thin, queer brown racehorses that sprinted along like ghosts. And the young baker, in emulation, dashed through the village on his creamy pony. A collier who had been staying somewhere cantered stiffly away into the dark on a pony like a rocking horse. Young maidens in cotton dresses stood at the little rail gates of their bungalow homes talking to young men in a buggy, or to a young man on foot, or to the last tradesman's cart, or to youths who were strolling past. It was evening, and the intense dusk of the far-off land, and white folks peering out of the dusk almost like aborigines. The far-off land, just as far-off when you are in it: nay, then furthest off.

The evening came very dark, with lightning playing pallid in the south-east, over the sea. There was nothing to be done with Jack but to play draughts with him. He wasn't in a real sporting mood, so he let himself be beaten even at draughts. When he was in a sporting mood he could cast a spell of confusion over Somers, and win every time, with a sort of gloating. But when he wasn't in a sporting mood he would shove up his men recklessly and lose them. He didn't care. He just leaned back and stretched himself in that intense physical way which Somers thought just a trifle less than human. The man was all body: a strong body full of energy like a machine that has got steam up, but is inactive. He had no mind, no spirit, no soul: just a tense, inactive body, and an eye rather glazed and a trifle bloodshot. The old psyche slowly disintegrating.

Meanwhile Victoria in a trill of nervous excitement and exaltation was talking Europe with Harriet. Victoria was just the opposite of Jack: she was all a quiver of excited consciousness, to know, to see, to realise. She would almost have done anything, to be able to LOOK at life, look at the inside of it, see it in its intimacy. She had had wild ideas of being a stewardess on a boat, a chambermaid in an hotel, a waitress in a good restaurant, a hospital nurse — anything, so that she could SEE intimacies, touch the private mysteries. To travel seemed to her the great desirable: to go to Europe and India, and SEE it all. She loved Australia, loved it far more quiveringly and excitedly than he. But it wasn't Australia that fascinated her: it was the secret intimacies of life, and what OTHER FOLKS FELT. That strange and aboriginal indifference that was bottommost in him seemed like a dynamo in her. She fluttered in the air like a loose live nerve, a nerve of the sympathetic system. She was all sympathetic drive: and he was nearly all check. He sat there apathetic, nothing but body and solid, steady, physical indifference. He did not oppose her at all, or go counter to her. He was just the heavy opposite pole of her energy. And of course she belonged to him as one pole belongs to the other pole in a circuit.

And he, he would stretch his body continuously, but he would not go to bed,

though Somers suggested it. No, there he sat. So Somers joined in the more exciting conversation of the women, and Jack sat solidly there. Whether he listened or whether he didn't, who knows? The aboriginal SYMPATHETIC apathy was upon him, he was like some creature that has lost its soul, and simply stares.

The morning was one of the loveliest Australian mornings, perfectly golden, all the air pure gold, the great gold effulgence to seaward, and the pure, cold pale-blue inland, over the dark range. The wind was blowing from inland, the sea was quiet as a purring cat with white paws, becoming darkish green-blue flecked with innumerable white flecks like rain-spots splashing the surface of a pool. The horizon was a clear and hard and dark sea against an almost white sky, but from far behind the horizon showed the mirage-magic tops of hazed, gold-white clouds, that seemed as if they indicated the far Pacific isles.

Though it was cold, Jack was sauntering about in his shirtsleeves with his waistcoat open and his hands in his pockets: rather to the vexation of Victoria. "Pull yourself together, Jack dear, do. Put your collar and tie on," she coaxed, fondling him.

"In a minute," he said.

The indifference — the fern-dark indifference of this remote golden Australia. Not to care — from the bottom of one's soul, not to care. Overpowered in the twilight of fern-odour. Just to keep enough grip to run the machinery of the day: and beyond that, to let yourself drift, not to think or strain or make any effort to consciousness whatsoever. That was Jack, sauntering down there in his shirtsleeves, with his waistcoat open showing his white shirt, his strong neck bare: sauntering with his hands in his pockets beside Somers, at the water's edge. Somers wore a dark flannel jacket, and his necktie hung dark and broke the intimacy of the white shirt-breast.

The two women stood on the cliff, the low, bushy cliff, looking down. Harriet was in a plain dress of dark-coloured purplish-and-brown hand-woven stuff of cotton and silk mixture, with old silver lace round the collar; Victoria in a pale-green knitted dress. So they stood in the morning light, watching the men on the fawn-coloured sand by the sea-fringe, waiting to wave when they looked up.

Jack looked up first. The two women coo-eeed and waved. He took his pipe from his mouth and held it high in his hand, in answer. A strange signal. The pale-green wisp of Victoria in the sky was part of his landscape. But the darker figure of Harriet had for some reason a menace to him, up there. He suddenly felt as if he were down below: he suddenly realised a need to bethink himself. He turned to Somers, looking down and saying in his peculiar Australian tone:

"Well, I suppose we'd better be going up."

The curious note of obedience in the manly twang!

Victoria made him put on coat and collar and tie for breakfast.

“Yes, dear, come on. I’ll tie your tie for you.”

“I suppose a man was born to give in,” said he, with laconic good humour and obstinacy. But he was a little uneasy. He realised the need to gather himself together.

“You get like the rest of them,” Victoria scolded him in a coaxing tone. “You used to be so smart. And you promised me you’d never go slack like they all are. Didn’t you, you bad boy?”

“I forget,” said he. But nevertheless the constraint of breakfast pulled him up. Because Harriet REALLY disapproved, and he didn’t know what was inside that rose-and-brown-purple cloud of her. The ancient judgment of the Old World. So he gathered himself somewhat together. But he was so far, fern-lost, from the old world.

“My God!” thought Somers. “These are the men Kangaroo wants to build up a new state with.”

After breakfast Somers got Jack to talk about Kangaroo and his plans. He heard again all about the Diggers’ Clubs: nearly all soldiers and sailors who had been in the war, but not restricted to these. They had started like any other social club: games, athletics, lectures, readings, discussions, debates. No gambling, no drink, no class or party distinction. The clubs were still chiefly athletics, but not SPORTING. They went in for boxing, wrestling, fencing, and knife-throwing, and revolver practice. But they had swimming and rowing squads, and rifle-ranges for rifle practice, and they had regular military training. The colonel who planned out the military training was a clever chap. The men were grouped in little squads of twenty, each with sergeant and corporal. Each of these twenty was trained to act like a scout, independently, though the squad worked in absolute unison among themselves, and were pledged to absolute obedience of higher commands. These commands, however, left most of the devising and method of execution of the job in hand to the squad itself. In New South Wales the Maggies, as these private squads were called, numbered already about fourteen hundred, all perfectly trained and equipped. They had a distinctive badge of their own: a white, broad-brimmed felt hat, like the ordinary khaki military hat, but white, and with a tuft of white feathers. “Because,” said Ennis, the colonel, “we’re the only ones that can afford to show the white feather.”

These Maggies, probably from Magpies, because Colonel Ennis used to wear white riding-breeches and black gaiters, and a black jacket and a white stock, with his white hat — were the core and heart of the Digger Movement. But Kangaroo had slaved at the other half of the business, the mental side. He DID

want his men to grip on to the problem of the future of Australia. He had insisted on attendance at debates and discussions: Australia and the World, Australia and the Future, White Australia, Australia and the Reds, Class Feeling in Australia, Politics and Australia, Australians and Work, What is Democracy? What is an Australian? What do our Politicians do for Australia? What our State Parliament does for us, What our Federal Parliament does for us, What side of the Australian does Parliament represent? Is Parliament necessary to Democracy? What is wrong with Soviet rule? Do we want a Statesman, or do we want a Leader? What kind of Leader do we want? What aim have we in view? Are we Australians? Are we Democratic? Do we believe in Ourselves?

So the debates had been going on, for a year and a half now. These debates were for club members only. And each club numbered only fifty members. Every member was asked to take part in the debates, and a memorandum was kept of each meeting. Then there were monthly united gatherings, of five or six or more clubs together. And occasionally a mass-meeting, at which Kangaroo spoke.

All this went on in the open, and roused some comment in the press: at first a great deal of praise, later some suspicion and considerable antagonism, both from Conservatives and Labour. Ben Cooley was supposed to be working himself in as a future Prime Minister, with a party behind him that would make him absolute, a Dictator. As soon as one paper came out with this alarm, an opponent sneered and pooh-poohed, and spoke of the Reds lounging about, a fearful menace, in Sydney, and recalled the Reigns of Terror in Paris and in Petrograd. Was another Reign of Terror preparing for Sydney? Was a bloodthirsty Robespierre or a ruthless Lenin awaiting his moment? Would responsible citizens be lynched in Martin Place, and dauntless citizenesses thrown into the harbour, when the fatal hour struck? Whereupon a loud burst from the press: were we to be alarmed by the knock-kneed, loutish socialist gang that hung round Canberra House? These gentry could hardly kill the vermin in their own clothing, not to speak of lynching in Martin Place. Whereas the Maggies were a set of efficient, well-armed, and no doubt unscrupulous tools of still more designing and unscrupulous masters. If we had to choose between Napoleon, in the shape of Ben Cooley, or Lenin, in the lack-of-shape of Willie Struthers, we should be hard put to it to know which was worse. Whereupon a fierce blast about our returned heroes and the white-livered skulkers who had got themselves soft jobs as coast-watchers, watching that the sharks didn't nibble the rocks, and now dared lift their dishonourable croaks against the revered name of Digger. And a ferocious rush-in from Labour, which didn't see much Napoleon in Ben Cooley, except his belly and the knack of filling his pockets. Napoleon,

though but a Dago and not a Jew, had filled one of the longest pockets Europe had ever emptied herself into, so where would poor little Australia be when the sham Kangaroo, with the help of the Magpies, which were indeed strictly Butcher Birds, started to coin her into shekels?

Then the boom died down, but the Digger Clubs had grown immensely on the strength of it. There were now more than a hundred clubs in New South Wales, and nearly as many in Victoria. The chief in Victoria was a smart chap, a mining expert. They called him the Emu, to match Kangaroo on the Australian coat of arms. He would be the Trotsky to the new Lenin, for he was a born handler of men. He had been a lieutenant-colonel in the war, a very smart soldier, and there had been a great cry to keep him on, for the Defence Force. But he had got the shove from Government, so he cleared out and went back to his mining.

But every club had its own committee, and this committee was composed of five or six of the best, surest members, sworn in to secrecy and to absolute obedience to any decision. Each club committee handled every question of development, and the master and the teller went to section-meetings. A section consisted of ten clubs. A decision at a section meeting was carried to the state meeting, where the chief of the state always had the ruling vote. Once a decision was passed, it became a law for all members, embodied in the person of the chief, and interpreted by him unquestioned save by his lieutenant, the chief of all the secretaries, or tellers.

The public members of the clubs were initiated into no secrets. The most important questions were discussed only among the chiefs. More general secrets were debated at the section meetings. That is, the great bulk of the members gave only their allegiance and their spirit of sympathy. The masters and chiefs carefully watched the response to all propositions at all open discussions. They carefully fostered the feeling they wished for, or which they were instructed to encourage. When the right feeling was arrived at, presumably, then the secret members started the discussion of propositions proposed from above. A secret member was allowed to make a proposition also, and the list was read over at the section meetings. But the Jack, the chief of the tellers, had right of absolute veto.

Somers could not get it very clear, from Jack Callcott's description. But it seemed to him as if all the principal ideas originated with the chief, went round the circuit of the clubs, disguised as general topics for debate, and returned as confirmed principles, via the section meetings and the state meetings. All the debates had been a slow, deliberate crystallising of a few dominant ideas in all the members. In the actual putting into practice of any principle, the chief was an autocrat, though he might, if he chose, send his propositions through the section meetings and the state meetings for criticism and amendment.

“What I feel,” said Somers to Jack, “is that the bulk of you just don’t care what the chief does, so long as he does something.”

“Oh, we don’t lose our sleep at nights. If he likes to be the boss, let him do the thinking. We know he’s our man, and so we’ll follow him. We can’t all be Peter and Paul and know all about it.”

“You just feel he’s your man?”

“Oh, we do.”

“But supposing you go in and win — and he is the boss of Australia. Shall you still leave things to him?”

Jack thought lazily for a time.

“I should think so,” he replied, with a queer, mistrustful tone.

And Somers felt again so distinctly they were doing it all just in order to have something to do, to put a spoke in the wheel of the present bosses, to make a change. Just temporary. There would be a change, and that was what they wanted. There was all the time the excitement. Damn the consequences.

“You don’t think it would be as well to HAVE a Soviet and Willie Struthers?”

“No, I don’t,” said Jack, in a thin, sharp voice. “I don’t want to be bullied by any damned Red International Labour. I don’t want to be kissing and hugging a lot of foreign labour tripe: niggers and what the hell. I’d rather have the British Empire ten thousand times over, and that bed’s a bit too wide, and too many in it for me. I don’t like sleeping with a lot of neighbours. But when it comes to going to bed with a crowd of niggers and dagoes, in an International Labour Combine, with a pair of red sheets so that the dirt won’t show, I’m absolutely sure I won’t have it. That’s why I like Kangaroo. We shall be just cosy and Australian with a boss like a father who gets up first in the morning, and locks up at night before you go to bed.”

“And who will stop in the Empire?”

“Oh, I suppose so. But he won’t be asking even the British to go to bed with him. He knows the difference between Australia and the rest of the Empire, The Empire’s like a lot of lock-up shops that you do your trade in. But I know Kangaroo well enough to know he’s not mixing his family in. He’ll keep Australia close and cosy. That’s what I want. And that’s what we all want, when we’re in our senses and aren’t bitten into spots by the Red International bug.”

Somers then mentioned Jaz’s proposition, of a red revolution first.

“I know,” said Jack. “It may be so. He’s one of your sly, crawling devils, Jaz is, and that seems to be the road nowadays. I wouldn’t mind egging the Reds in, and then slapping them clean out into nowhere. I wouldn’t mind at all. But I’m bound to follow Kangaroo’s orders, so I’m not bothering my chump over Jaz’s boodle.”

“You don’t care which way it happens?”

Jack looked at him sideways, like the funny bird.

“No,” he said, with an Australian drawl. “So long as it does happen. I don’t like things as they are, and I don’t feel safe about them. I don’t mean I want to feel safe as if nothing would ever happen. There’s some sorts of sport and risk that you enjoy, and there’s others you hate the thought of. Now I hate the thought of being bossed and messed about by the Old Country, or by Jew capitalists and bankers, or by a lot of labour bullies, or a Soviet. There’s no fun in that sort of sport, to me, unless you can jolly well wipe the bleeders out afterwards. And I don’t altogether want the mills of the British Empire to go grinding slowly on, and yourself compelled to do nothing but grind slowly with ‘em. It’s too much of a sameness altogether, and not as much sport as a tin Lizzie. We’re too much mixed up with other folk’s business, what’s absolutely no fun for us. No, what I want is a cosy, lively little Australia away from all this blooming world-boost. I’ve no use for a lot of people across a lot of miles of sea nudging me while I handle my knife and fork. Leave us Australians to ourselves, we shall manage.”

They were interrupted by Harriet calling for Somers to come and rescue the tea-towel from the horns of a cow who had calmly scrambled through the fence on to their grass. Somers was used to the cow: she had scrambled through the Coo-ee fence long before the Somers had ever walked through the gate, so she looked on them as mild intruders. He was quite friendly with her, she ate the pumpkin rind and apple parings from his hand. Now she looked at him half guiltily out of one eye, the kitchen towel hanging over the other eye. She took it quite calmly, but had a disreputable appearance.

“Come here,” said he. “Come here and have it taken off. Of course you had to poke your head into the bush if you thought there was a towel on it.”

She came mildly up and held her head while he disentangled the towel from her horns. Then she went calmly on, snuffing at the short, bitten grass for another mouthful, and twitching leaves off the stunted bushes.

So they were, the cows, so unafraid. In Cornwall, Harriet said, the cows had always sniffed in when she came near, and then breathed out heavily, nnh! nnh! as if they did not like the smell of human beings, breathing out against her, and backing. And that had scared her. But these cows didn’t do that. They seemed so calm. They fed over all the bush, the unoccupied grassy lots above the sea, among the unbuilt streets. And they pushed in among the trees and bushes where the creek came in. And then at dusk a boy would come on a cream-coloured pony riding round and driving them in, scaring a sort of crane or heron bird from the still waters of the marshy creek-edge. Then the cows walked or trotted

placidly home: so unconcerned. And the bird with the great, arched grey wings flapped in a low circle round, then settled again a yard or two from where she was before.

So unconcerned. Somers had noticed a pair of fishing birds by the creek, queer objects nearly as big as ducks, perched at the extremity of a dead gum-tree, above the water. They flew away at his coming, but while he stood looking, they circled with their longish necks stretched out and their wings sharply flicking in the high air, then one returned and sat again on the tree, and the other perched on another dead tree. The near one looked sideways at him.

“Yes, I’m here,” said he aloud.

Whereupon she did the inevitable, turned her back on him and he no longer existed for her. These ostriches needed no sand. She so far forgot him as to turn sideways to him again, so he had her in profile, clutched grey like an old knot at the tip of the stark, dead grey tree. And there she performed queer corkscrew exercises with her neck in the air. Whether it was she was getting down a last fishbone in her gizzard, or whether she was merely asserting herself in the upper air, he could not tell.

“What a fool you look,” he said aloud to her.

Then away the birds rose. And he saw a seedy, elderly man in black, in a long-skirted black coat like a cast-off Methodist parson, spying at him furtively from behind the bushes on the other side of the creek. This parson-looking weed carried a gun, and was shooting heaven knows what. He thought Richard Lovat a very suspicious bird, and Richard Lovat thought him the last word in human weeds. So our young man turned away to the sands, where the afternoon sea had gone a very dark blue. Another human weed with a very thin neck and a very red face sat on the sand ridge up which the foam-edge swished, his feet wide apart, facing the ocean, and tending a line which he had in some way managed to cast out into the low surf. An urchin, barefoot, was pottering round in silence, like a sandpiper. The elderly one made unintelligible noises as Somers approached. The latter realised it meant he was not to catch with his foot the line, which reached out behind the thin fisherman, covered with sand. So he stepped over it. The brown, barefoot urchin pattered round unheeding. He did not even look up when the elder made more unintelligible sounds to him.

My father is a fisherman, Oh a fisherman! Yes a fisherman! He catches all the fish-e-can.

Mondays, Wednesdays, and Saturdays were the library nights. When you had crossed the iron foot-bridge over the railway, you came to a big wooden building with a corrugated iron roof, standing forlorn at an unmade corner, like the fag-end of the village. But the village was an agglomeration of fag ends. This

building might have been a temporary chapel, as you came at it from the back. But in front it was labelled "Pictoria", so it was the cinema. But there was also a black board with gilt letters, like a chapel notice-board, which said "School of Arts Library". And the Pictoria had a sort of little wing, all wood, like a little school-room. And in one section of this wing was the School of Arts Library, which the Somers had joined. Four rows of novels: the top row a hundred or more thin books, all Nat Gould or Zane Grey. The young women came for Zane Grey. "Oh, 'The Maid of Mudgee' is a lovely thing, lovely" — a young woman was pronouncing from the top of the broken chair which served as stool to give access to this top row. "Y'aven' got a new Zaine Greye, have yer?" She spoke in these tones of unmitigated intimacy to the white-moustached librarian. One would have thought he was her dear old dad. Then came a young railway man who had heard there was a new Nat Gould.

"But," said Somers, as he and Harriet went off with a Mary E. Mann and a George A. Birmingham, "I don't wonder they can't read English books, or only want Nat Gould. All the scruples and the emotions and the regrets in English novels do seem waste of time out here."

"I suppose," said Harriet, "if you don't have any inside life of your own it must seem a waste of time. But look at it — look!"

The object she bade him look at was a bone of contention between them. She wanted to give five pounds to have four posts and an iron chain put round it, and perhaps a bit of grass sowed inside the enclosure. He declared that they'd probably charge ten pounds for the chain alone, since it was Australia. And let it alone. It was of a piece with the rest. But Harriet said she couldn't leave the place till she'd had something done to it. He said she was an interfering female.

The object was the memorial to the fallen soldiers. It was really a quite attractive little monument: a statue in pale, fawnish stone, of a Tommy standing at ease, with his gun down at his side, wearing his puttees and his turned-up felt hat. The statue itself was about life size, but standing just overhead on a tall pedestal it looked small and stiff and rather touching. The pedestal was in very nice proportion, and had at eye level white inlet slabs between little columns of grey granite, bearing the names of the fallen on one slab, in small black letters, and on the other slabs the names of all the men who served: "God Bless Them". The fallen had "Lest we forget", for a motto. Carved on the bottom step it said, "Unveiled by Grannie Rhys". A real township monument, bearing the names of everybody possible: the fallen, all those who donned khaki, the people who presented it, and Grannie Rhys. Wonderfully in keeping with the place and its people, naive but quite attractive, with the stiff, pallid, delicate fawn-coloured soldier standing forever stiff and pathetic.

But there it stood, a few yards from the corner of the corrugated Pictoria, at the corner of the fag-end road to the station, like an old milk-can someone had set down and forgotten: or a bran new milk-can. Old rags of paper littered the ground at the base, with an old tin or two. A little further back was a German machine gun, also looking as if it had been scrapped and forgotten. Standing there, with its big metal screen-flap, it looked exotic, a thing of some higher culture, demoniac and fallen.

Harriet was dying to rescue the forlorn monument that seemed as if it had been left there in the bustle of removal. She wanted to enclose it. But he said: "Leave it. Leave it. They don't like things enclosed."

She still had in her mind's eye an Australia with beautiful manorial farm-houses and dainty, perfect villages. She never acquiesced in the UNCREATEDNESS of the new country, the rawness, the slovenliness. It seemed to her comical, for instance, that no woman in Australia would carry a basket. Harriet went shopping as usual with her pretty straw basket in the village. But she felt that the women remarked on it. Only then did she notice that everybody carried a suitcase in this discreet country. The fat old woman who came to the door with a suitcase must, she thought, be a visitor coming to the wrong house. But no. "Did you want a cabbage?" In the suitcase two cabbages and half a pumpkin. A little girl goes to the dairy for six eggs and half a pound of butter with a small, elegant suitcase. Nay, a child of three toddled with a little six-inch suitcase, containing, as Harriet had occasion to see, two buns, because the suitcase flew open and the two buns rolled out. Australian suitcases were always flying open, and discharging groceries or a skinned rabbit or three bottles of beer. One had the impression that everybody was perpetually going away for the week-end: with a suitcase. Not so at all. Just a new-country bit of convention.

Ah, a new country! The cabbage, for example, cost tenpence in the normal course of things, and a cauliflower a shilling. And the tradesmen's carts flew round in the wilderness, delivering goods. There isn't much newness in MAN, whatever the country.

That old aeroplane that had lain broken-down in a field. It was nowadays always staggering in the low air just above the surf, past the front of Coo-ee, and lurching down on to the sands of the town "beach". There, in the cold wind, a forlorn group of men and boys round the aeroplane, the sea washing near, the marsh of the creek desolate behind. Then a "passenger mounted", and men shoving the great insect of a thing along the sand to get it started. It buzzed venomously into the air, looking very unsafe and wanting to fall in the sea.

"Yes, he's carrying passengers. Oh, quite a fair trade. Thirty-five shillings a

time. Yes, it seems a lot, but he has to make his money while he can. No, I've not been up myself, but my boy has. No, you see, there was four boys, and they had a sweepstake: eight-and-six apiece, and my boy won. He's just eleven. Yes, he liked it. But they was only up about four minutes: I timed them myself. Well, you know, it's hardly worth it. But he gets plenty to go. I heard he made over forty pounds on Whit Monday, here on this beach. It seems to me, though, he favours some more than others. There's some he flies round with for ten minutes, and that last chap now, I'm sure he wasn't up a second more than three minutes. No, not quite fair. Yes, he's a man from Bulli: was a flying-man all through the war. Now he's got this machine of his own, he's quite right to make something for himself if he can. No, I don't know that he has any licence or anything. But a chap like that, who went through the war — why, who's going to interfere with his doing the best for himself?"

CHAPTER 11. WILLIE STRUTHERS AND KANGAROO.

Jaz took Somers to the famous Canberra House, in Sydney, where the Socialists and Labour people had their premises: offices, meeting-rooms, club-rooms, quite an establishment. There was a lively feeling about the place, in spite of various down-at-heel malcontents who stood about in the passage and outside on the pavement. A business-like air.

The two men were conducted into an inner room where a man sat at a desk. He was very dark, red-faced, and thin, with deep lines in his face, a tight shut, receding mouth, and black, burning eyes. He reminded Somers of the portraits of Abraham Lincoln, the same sunken cheeks and deep, cadaverous lines and big black eyes. But this man, Willie Struthers, lacked that look of humour and almost of sweetness that one can find in Abraham Lincoln's portraits. Instead, he was suspicious, and seemed as if he were brooding an inner wrong.

He was a born Australian, had knocked about the continent, and spent many years on the goldfields. According to report, he was just comfortably well-off — not rich. He looked rather shabby, seedy; his clothes had that look as if he had just thrown them on his back, after picking them off the floor. Also one of his thin shoulders was noticeably higher than the other. But he was a distinct Australian type, thin, hollow-cheeked, with a brightish brittle, red skin on his face, and big, dark, incensed-looking eyes. He nodded to the two men as they entered, but did not speak nor rise from his desk.

“This is Mr. Somers,” said Jaz. “You’ve read his book on democracy.”

“Yes, I’ve read it,” said Struthers. “Take a seat.”

He spoke with a pronounced Australian accent — a bad cockney. He stared at Somers for a few seconds, then looked away.

He asked the usual questions, how Richard liked Australia, how long he had been there, how long he thought of staying. The two didn't get into any easy harmony.

Then he began to put a few shrewd questions concerning the Fascisti and Socialisti in Italy, the appropriation of the land by the peasants, and so on; then about Germany, the actual temper of the working people, the quality of their patriotism since the war, and so on.

“You understand,” said Somers, “I don't pretend to give anything but personal

impressions. I have no claim to knowledge, whatever.”

“That’s all right, Mr. Somers. I want your impressions. What they call knowledge is like any other currency, it’s liable to depreciate. Sound valuable knowledge to-day may not be worth the paper it’s printed on to-morrow — like the Austrian krone. We’re no slaves to facts. Give us your impressions.”

He spoke with a peculiar kind of bitterness, that showed passion too. They talked about Europe for some time. The man could listen: listen with his black eyes too. Watchful, always watchful, as if he expected some bird to fly suddenly out of the speaker’s face. He was well-informed, and seemed to weigh and judge everything he heard as he heard it.

“Why, when I left Europe it seemed to me socialism was losing ground everywhere — in Italy especially. In 1920 it was quite a living, exciting thing, in Italy. It made people insolent, usually, but it lifted them up as well. Then it sort of fizzled down, and last year there was only the smoke of it: and a nasty sort of disappointment and disillusion, a grating sort of irritation. Florence, Siena — hateful! The Fascisti risen up and taking on airs, all just out of a sort of spite. The Dante festival at Florence, and the King there, for example. Just set your teeth on edge, ugh! — with their “Savoia!” All false and out of spite.”

“And what do you attribute that to, Mr. Somers?”

“Why, I think the Socialists didn’t QUITE believe in their own socialism, so everybody felt let down. In Italy, particularly, it seemed to me they were on the brink of a revolution. And the King was ready to abdicate, and the Church was ready to make away with its possessions: I know that. Everything ready for a flight. And then the Socialists funked. They just funked. They daren’t make a revolution, because then they’d be responsible for the country. And they DAREN’T. And so the Fascisti, seeing the Socialists in a funk, got up and began to try to kick their behinds.”

Mr. Struthers nodded his head slowly.

“I suppose that is so,” he said. “I suppose that’s what it amounts to, they didn’t believe in what they were doing. But then they’re a childish, excitable people, with no stability.”

“But it seems to me socialism hasn’t got the spark in it to make a revolution. Not in any country. It hasn’t got the spunk, either. There’s no spunk in it.”

“What is there any spunk in?” asked the other man, a sort of bitter fire corroding in his eyes. “Where do you find any spunk?”

“Oh, nowhere,” said Richard.

There was a silence. Struthers looked out of the window as if he didn’t know what to say next, and he played irritably with a blotter on the desk, with his right hand. Richard also sat uncomfortably silent.

“Nowhere any spunk?” said Struthers, in his flat metallic voice.

“No,” said Richard.

And again the uncomfortable silence.

“There was plenty of spunk in the war,” said Struthers.

“Of a sort. And because they felt they HAD to, not from choice.”

“And mayn’t they feel they HAVE to again?” said Struthers, smiling rather grimly.

The two men eyed one another.

“What’ll make them?” asked Richard.

“Oh — circumstances.”

“Ah well — if circumstances.” Richard was almost rude. “I know if it was a question of WAR the majority of returned soldiers would join up in a month — in a week. You hear it over and over again from the Diggers here. The war was the only time they ever felt properly alive. But then they moved because they hated the Germans — self-righteously hated them. And they can’t quite bring it off, to hate the capitalist with a self-righteous hate. They don’t hate him. They know that if they themselves got a chance to make a pile of money and be capitalists, they’d JUMP at it. You can’t work up a hate except on fear. And they DON’T fear the capitalist, and you can’t make them. The most they’ll do is sneer about him.”

Struthers still fidgetted with the blotter, with his thin, very red, hairy hand, and abstractedly stared at the desk in front of him.

“And what does all that mean, in your estimation, Mr. Somers?” he asked dryly, looking nervously up.

“That you’ll never get them to act. You’ll never get Labour, or any of the Socialists, to make a revolution. They just won’t act. Only the Anarchists might — and they’re too few.”

“I’m afraid they are growing more.”

“Are they? Of that I know nothing. I should have thought they were growing fewer.”

Mr. Struthers did not seem to hear this. At least he did not answer. He sat with his head dropped, fingering the blotter, rather like a boy who is being told things he hates to hear, but which he doesn’t deny.

At last he looked up, and the fighting look was in the front of his eyes.

“It may be as you say, Mr. Somers,” he replied. “Men may not be ready yet for any great change. That does not make the change less inevitable. It’s coming, and it’s got to come. If it isn’t here to-day, it will be here next century, at least. Whatever you may say, the socialistic and communal ideal is a great ideal, which will be fulfilled when men are ready. We aren’t impatient. If revolution

seems a premature jump — and perhaps it does — then we can go on, step by step, towards where we intend to arrive at last. And that is, State Ownership, and International Labour Control. The General Confederation of Labour, as perhaps you know, does not aim at immediate revolutions. It wants to make the great revolution by degrees. Step by step, by winning political victories in each country, by having new laws passed by our insistence, we intend to advance more slowly, but more surely towards the goal we have in sight.

“Now, Mr. Somers, you are no believer in capitalism, and in this industrial system as we have it. If I judge you correctly from your writings, you are no lover of the great Washed Middle Classes. They are more than washed, they are washed out. And I think in your writings you say as much. You want a new spirit in society, a new bond between men. You want a new bond between men. Well, so do I, so do we. We realise that if we are going to go ahead we need first and foremost SOLIDARITY. Where we fail in our present position is in our lack of solidarity.

“And how are we to get it? You suggest us the answer in your writings. We must have a new bond between men, the bond of real brotherhood. And why don’t we find that bond sufficiently among us? Because we have been brought up from childhood to mistrust ourselves and to mistrust each other. We have been brought up in a kind of fetish worship. We are like tribes of savages with their witch-doctors. And who are our witch-doctors, our medicine-men? Why, they are professors of science and professors of medicine and professors of law and professors of religion, all of whom thump on their tom-tom drums and overawe us and take us in. And they take us in with the clever cry, “Listen to us, and you will get on, get on, get on, you will rise up into the middle classes and become one of the great washed.”

“The trick of this only educated men like yourself see through. The working man can’t see through it. HE can’t see that, for every one that GETS ON, you must have five hundred fresh slavers and toilers to produce the graft. Tempt all men to get on, and it’s like holding a carrot in front of five thousand asses all harnessed to your machine. One ass gets the carrot, and all the others have done your pulling for you.

“Now what we want is a new bond between fellow-men. We’ve got to knock down the middle-class fetish and the middle-class medicine-men. But you’ve got to build up as you knock down. You’ve got to build up the real fellow-feeling between fellow-men. You’ve got to teach us working men to trust one another, absolutely trust one another, and to take all our trust away from the Great Washed and their medicine men who bleed us like leeches. Let us mistrust them — but let us trust one another. First and foremost, let us trust one another, we

working men.

“Now Mr. Somers, you are a working man’s son. You know what I’m talking about. Isn’t it right, what I say? And isn’t it feasible?”

A strange glow had come into his large black eyes, something glistening and half-sweet, fixing itself on you. You felt drawn towards a strange sweetness — perhaps poisonous. Yet it touched Richard on one of his quivering strings — the latent power that is in man to-day, to love his near mate with a passionate, absolutely trusting love. Whitman says the love of comrades. We say, the mate love. “He is my mate.” A depth of unfathomed, unrealised love can go into that phrase! “My mate is waiting for me,” a man says, and turns away from wife, children, mother and all. The love of a man for his mate.

Now Richard knew what Struthers wanted. He wanted this love, this mate-trust called into consciousness and highest honour. He wanted to set it where Whitman tried to set his Love of Comrades. It was to be the new tie between men, in the new democracy. It was to be the new passional bond in the new society. The trusting love of a man for his mate.

Our society is based on the family, the love of a man for his wife and his children, or for his mother and brothers. The family is our social bedrock and limit. Whitman said the next, broader, more unselfish rock should be the Love of Comrades. The sacred relation of a man to his mate, his fellow man.

If our society is going to develop a new great phase, developing from where we stand now, it must accept this new relationship as the new sacred social bond, beyond the family. You can’t make bricks without straw. That is, you can’t hold together the friable mixture of modern mankind without a new cohesive principle, a new unifying passion. And this will be the new passion of a man’s absolute trust in his mate, his love for his mate.

Richard knew this. But he had learned something else as well. He had learned the great danger of the new passion, which as yet lay only half realised and half recognised, half effective.

Human love, human trust, are always perilous, because they break down. The greater the love, the greater the trust, and the greater the peril, the greater the disaster. Because to place absolute trust on another human being is in itself a disaster, both ways, since each human being is a ship that must sail its own course, even if it go in company with another ship. Two ships may sail together to the world’s end. But lock them together in mid-ocean and try to steer both with one rudder, and they will smash one another to bits. So it is when one individual seeks absolutely to love, or trust, another. Absolute lovers always smash one another, absolute trusters the same. Since man has been trying absolutely to love women, and women to love man, the human species has

almost wrecked itself. If now we start a still further campaign of men loving and absolutely trusting each other, comrades or mates, heaven knows the horror we are laying up.

And yet, love is the greatest thing between human beings, men and women, men and men, women and women, when it is love, when it happens. But when human love starts out to lock individuals together, it is just courting disaster.

Man-and-woman love is a disaster nowadays. What a holy horror man-and-man love would be: mates or comrades!

What is it then that is wrong? Why, human beings CAN'T absolutely love one another. Each man DOES kill the thing he loves, by sheer dint of loving it. Is love then just a horror in life?

Ah no. This individuality which each of us has got and which makes him a wayward, wilful, dangerous, untrustworthy quantity to every other individual, because every individuality is bound to react at some time against every other individuality, without exception — or else lose its own integrity; because of the inevitable necessity of each individual to react away from any other individual, at certain times, human love is truly a relative thing, not an absolute. It CANNOT be absolute.

Yet the human heart must have an absolute. It is one of the conditions of being human. The only thing is the God who is the source of all passion. Once go down before the God-passion and human passions take their right rhythm. But human love without the God-passion always kills the thing it loves. Man and woman virtually are killing each other with the love-will now. What would it be when mates, or comrades, broke down in their absolute love and trust? Because, without the polarized God-passion to hold them stable at the centre, break down they would. With no deep God who is source of all passion and life to hold them separate and yet sustained in accord, the loving comrades would smash one another, and smash all love, all feeling as well. It would be a rare gruesome sight.

Any more love is a hopeless thing, till we have found again, each of us for himself, the great dark God who alone will sustain us in loving one another. Till then, best not play with more fire.

Richard knew this, and it came to him again powerfully, under the dark eyes of Mr. Struthers.

“Yes,” he answered slowly. “I know what you mean, and you know I know. And it’s probably your only chance of carrying Socialism through. I don’t really know how much it is feasible. But — .”

“Wait a minute, Mr. Somers. You are the man I have been waiting for: all except the but. Listen to me a moment further. You know our situation here in

Australia. You know that Labour is stronger here, perhaps, more unopposed than in any country in the world. We might do anything. Then why do we do nothing? You know as well as I do. Because there is no real unifying principle among us. We're not together, we aren't one. And probably you never WILL be able to unite Australians on the wage question and the State Ownership question alone. They don't care enough. It doesn't really touch them emotionally. And they need to be touched emotionally, brought together that way. Once that was done, we'd be a grand, solid working-class people; grand, unselfish: a real PEOPLE. "When wilt thou save the People, Oh God of Israel, when?" It looks as if the God of Israel would never save them. We've got to save ourselves.

"Now you know quite well, Mr. Somers, we're an unstable, unreliable body to-day, the Labour Party here in Australia. And why? Because in the first place we haven't got any voice. We want a voice. Think of it, we've got no real Labour newspaper in Sydney — or in Australia. How CAN we be united? We've no voice to call us together. And why don't we have a paper of our own? Well, why? Nobody has the initiative. What would be the good, over here, of a grievance-airing rag like your London Daily Herald? It wouldn't be taken any more seriously than any other rag. It would have no real effect. Australians are a good bit subtler and more disillusioned than the English working classes. You can throw Australians chaff, and they'll laugh at it. They may even pretend to peck it up. But all the time they KNOW, and they're not taken in. The Bulletin would soon help them out, if they were. They've got a natural sarcastic turn, have the Australians. They'll do imbecile things: because one thing is pretty well as good as another, to them. They don't care.

"Then what's the good starting another Red rag, if the bull won't run at it? And this Australian bull may play about with a red rag, but it won't get his real dander up.

"No, you've got to give them something to appeal to the deeper man in them. That deeper man is waiting to be appealed to. And we're waiting for the right individual to come along to put the appeal to them.

"Now, Mr. Somers, here's your chance. I'm in a position to ask you, won't you help us to bring out a sincere, CONSTRUCTIVE Socialist paper, not a grievance airer, but a paper that calls to the constructive spirit in men? Deep calleth to deep. And the trouble with us here is, no one calls to our deeps, they lie there stagnant. I can't do it, I'm too grimy. It wants a deep, fresh nature, and I'm too stale.

"Now Mr. Somers, you're the son of a working man. You were born of the People. You haven't turned your back on them, have you, now that you're a well-known gentleman?"

“No, no,” said Richard, laughing at the irony.

“Then here is your work before you. Come and breathe the breath of life into us, through the printed word. Come and take charge of a true People’s paper for us. We needn’t make it a daily. Make it a twice-weekly. And let it appeal to the Australian, to his heart, for his heart is the right place to appeal to. Let it breathe the new air of trust and comradeship into us. We are ready for it: dying for it. Show us how to BELIEVE in one another, with all our hearts. Show us that the issue isn’t just the wage issue, or who holds the money. It’s brother-love at last, on which Christ’s Democracy is bound to rest. It’s the living People. It is man to man at last.”

The red face of Willie Struthers seemed to glow with fire, and his black eyes had a strange glisten as he watched Richard’s face. Richard’s pale, sombre face showed that he was moved. There was a strange excitement, a deep, exciting vibration in the air, as if something secret were taking place. Jaz in his corner sat silent as a mouse, his knees wide apart, his elbows on his knees, his head dropped. Richard’s eyes at length met the black, excited, glistening eyes of the other man, and he felt that something in the glisten was bearing him down, as a snake bears down a bird. Himself the bird.

But his heart was big within him, swollen in his breast. Because in truth he did love the working people, he did know them capable of a great, generous love for one another. And he did also believe, in a way, that they were capable of building up this great Church of Christ, the great beauty of a People, upon the generous passion of mate-love. All this theoretical socialism started by Jews like Marx, and appealing only to the will-to-power in the masses, making money the whole crux, this has cruelly injured the working people of Europe. For the working people of Europe were generous by nature, and money was not their prime passion. All this political socialism — all politics, in fact — has conspired to make money the only god. It has been a great treacherous conspiracy against the generous heart of the people. And that heart is betrayed: and knows it.

Then can’t the injury be remedied? Can’t the working men be called back, man to man, to a generous opening of the heart to one another, money forgotten? Can’t a new great inspiration of belief in the love of mates be breathed into the white Peoples of the world, and a new day be built on this belief?

It can be done. It could be done. Only, the terrible stress, the strain on the hearts of men, if as human beings the whole weight of the living world is to rest on them. Each man with the poles of the world resting on his heart. Men would go mad.

“You see,” stammered Richard, “it needs more than a belief of men in each other.”

“But what else is there to believe in? Quacks? Medicinemen? Scientists and politicians?”

“It DOES need some sort of religion.”

“Well then — well then — the religious question is ticklish, especially here in Australia. But all the churches are established on Christ. And Christ says Love one another.”

Richard laughed suddenly.

“That makes Christ into another political agent,” he said.

“Well then — I’m not deep enough for these matters. But surely you know how to square it with religion. Seems to me it IS religion — love one another.”

“Without a God.”

“Well — as I say — it’s Christ’s teaching, and that ought to be God enough.”

Richard was silent, his heart heavy. It all seemed so far from the dark God he wished to serve, the God from whom the dark, sensual passion of love emanates, not only the spiritual love of Christ. He wanted men once more to refer the sensual passion of love sacredly to the great dark God, the ithyphallic, of the first dark religions. And how could that be done, when each dry little individual ego was just mechanically set against any such dark flow, such ancient submission? As for instance Willie Struthers at this minute. Struthers didn’t mind Christ. Christ could easily be made to subserve his egoistic purpose. But the first, dark, ithyphallic God whom men had once known so tremendous — Struthers had no use for Him.

“I don’t think I can do it. I don’t think I’ve the right touch,” said Richard slowly.

“Nay, Mr. Somers, don’t you be a funkier, now. This is the work you were born for. Don’t leave us in the lurch.”

“I shouldn’t be doing what you want me to do.”

“Do what seems best to yourself. We’ll risk it. Make your own conditions. I know as far as money goes you won’t be hard. But take the job on, now. It’s been waiting for you, waiting for you to come out here. Don’t funk at the last minute.”

“I won’t promise at this minute,” said Richard, rising to escape. “I want to go now. I will tell you within a week. You might send me details of your scheme for the paper. Will you? And I’ll think about it hard.”

Mr. Struthers watched him as if he would read his soul. But Richard wasn’t going to have his soul read by force.

“Very well. I’ll see you have the whole scheme of the proposal to-morrow. I don’t think you’ll be able to run away from it.”

Richard was thankful to get out of Canberra Hall. It was like escaping from

one of the medical-examination rooms in the war. He and Jaz went in silence down the crowded, narrow pavement of George Street, towards the Circular Quay. Richard called at the General Post-office in Martin Place. As he came out again, and stood on the steps folding the stamps he had bought, seeing the sun down Pitt Street, the people hurrying, the flowers at the corner, the pink spread of Bulletins for sale at the corner of George Street, the hansom-cabs and taxis standing peacefully in the morning shadow of the post-office, suddenly the whole thing switched right away from him. He hailed a hansom.

“Jaz,” he said, “I want to drive round the Botanical Gardens and round the spit there — and I want to look at the peacocks and cockatoos.”

Jaz climbed in with him. “Right-O!” said the cabby, hearing the order, and they clock-clocked away up the hill to Macquarie Street.

“You know, Jaz,” said Richard, looking with joy at the blue harbour inlet, where the Australian “fleet” lay rusting to bits, with a few gay flags; “you know, Jaz, I shan’t do it. I shan’t do anything. I just don’t care about it.”

“You don’t?” said Jaz, with a sudden winsome smile.

“I try to kid myself that I care about mankind and its destiny. And I have fits of wistful love for the working men. But at the bottom I’m as hard as a mango nut. I don’t care about them all. I don’t really care about anything, no I don’t. I just don’t care, so what’s the good of fussing.”

“Why no,” said Jaz, again with a quick smile.

“I feel neither good nor bad. I feel like a fox that has gnawed his tail off and so escaped out of a trap. It seems like a trap to me, all this social business and this saving mankind. Why can’t mankind save itself? It can if it wants to. I’m a fool. I neither want love nor power. I like the world and I like to be alone in it, by myself. What do you want, Jaz?”

Richard was like a child escaped from school, escaped from his necessity to BE something and to DO something. They had jogged past the palm trees and the grass of the gardens, and the blue wrens had cocked their preposterous tails. They jogged to the end of the promontory, under wild trees, and Richard looked at the two lobes of the harbour, blue water on either side, and another part of the town beyond.

“Now take us back to the cockatoos,” he said to the cabby.

Richard loved the look of Australia, that marvellous soft flower-blue of the air, and the sombre grey of the earth, the foliage, the brown of the low rocks: like the dull pelts of kangaroos. It had a wonder and a far-awayness, even here in the heart of Sydney. All the shibboleths of mankind are so trumpery. Australia is outside everything.

“I couldn’t exactly say,” Jaz answered. “You’ve got a bit of an Australian look

this morning about you,” he added with a smile.

“I feel Australian. I feel a new creature. But what’s the outcome?”

“Oh, you’ll come back to caring, I should think: for the sake of having something to care about. That’s what most of them do. They want to turn bushrangers for six months, and then they get frightened of themselves, and come back and want to be good citizens.”

“Bushranger? But Australia’s like an open door with the blue beyond. You just walk out of the world and into Australia. And it’s just somewhere else. All those nations left behind in their schoolrooms, fussing. Let them fuss. This is Australia, where one can’t care.”

Jaz sat rather pale, and ten times more silent than ever.

“I expect you’ve got yourself to reckon with, no matter where you are. That’s why most Australians have to fuss about something — politics, or horse-racing, or football. Though a man can go empty in Australia, if he likes: as you’ve said yourself,” replied he.

“Then I’ll go empty,” said Richard. “What makes YOU fuss with Kangaroo and Struthers, Jaz?”

“Me?” The smile was slow and pale. “Go into the middle of Australia and see how empty it is. You can’t face emptiness long. You have to come back and do something to keep from being frightened at your own emptiness, and everything else’s emptiness. It may be empty. But it’s wicked, and it’ll kill you if it can. Something comes out of the emptiness, to kill you. You have to come back and do things with mankind, to forget.”

“It’s wonderful to be empty. It’s wonderful to feel this blue globe of emptiness of the Australian air. It shuts everything out,” protested Richard.

“You’ll be an Aussie yet,” smiled Jaz slowly.

“Shall I regret it?” asked Richard.

The eyes of the two men met. In the pale grey eyes of Jaz something lurking, like an old, experienced consciousness looking across at the childish consciousness of Somers, almost compassionately: and half in mockery.

“You’ll change back before you regret it,” he said.

“Are you wise, Jaz? And am I childish?” Richard’s look suddenly changed also to mockery. “If you’re wise, Jaz, why do you wander round like a lost soul? Because you do. And what takes you to Struthers, if you belong to Kangaroo?”

“I’m secretary for the coal-and timber-merchants’ union,” said Jaz quietly.

They got out of the cab to look at the aviaries. Wonderful, brilliant-coloured little birds, the love-birds self-consciously smirking. “Hello!” — pronounced pure Australian-cockney: “Helleow! Hello! Hello! Hello Cocky! What yer want?” This in a more-than-human voice from a fine sulphur-crested cockatoo.

“Hello Cocky!” His thick black tongue worked in his narrow mouth. So absolutely human the sound, and yet a bird’s. It was startling, and very funny. The two men talked to the cockatoos, fascinated and amused, for a quarter of an hour. The emu came prancing up, with his alert, large, sticking-out eyes and his whiskers. An alert gentleman, with the dark Australian eye. Very wide-awake, and yet far off in the past. And a remote, alert, sharp gentleness belonging to far past twilight ages, before enemies and iron weapons were perfected. A very remote, dirt-brown gentleman from the lost plains of time. The peacock rustling his blue fireworks seemed a sort of nouveau-riche in comparison.

Somers went in the evening of this memorable day to dine with Kangaroo. The other man was quiet, and seemed preoccupied.

“I went to Willie Struthers this morning,” Somers said.

Kangaroo looked at him sharply through his pince-nez. On the subtle face of Somers a small, wicked smile hovered like a half visible flame. But it was his alive, beautiful face. And his whole person seemed magnetic.

“Who took you there?” asked Kangaroo sharply.

“Jaz.”

“Jaz is a meddlesome-Patty. Well, and what then?”

“I think Willie is rather a terror. I wouldn’t like to have to spend my life with him. But he’s shrewd. Only I don’t like him physically — something thin and hairy and spiderish. I didn’t want to touch him. But he’s a force, he’s SOMETHING.”

Kangaroo looked puzzled, and his face took a heavy, stupid look.

“He wouldn’t want you to touch him,” he barked. “He didn’t offer to shake hands, did he?”

“No, thank goodness,” said Somers, thinking of the red, dry, thin-skinned hand.

There was a hostile silence from Kangaroo. He knew that this subtle, attractive Somers with the faint glow about him, like an aura, was venomous. And yet he was helplessly attracted to him.

“And what do you mean about his being something? Some more Trehwella?”

“Perhaps. I couldn’t help feeling that Struthers was shrewder than you are — in a way baser — but for that reason more likely to be effectual.”

Kangaroo watched Richard for a long time in silence.

“I know why Trehwella took you there,” he said sulkily.

“Why?”

“Oh, I know why. And what have you decided?”

“Nothing.”

There was a long and obstinate silence. The two men were at loggerheads, and

neither would make the first move.

“You seem very thick with Trewhella,” said Kangaroo at last.

“Not thick,” said Richard. “Celts — Cornish, Irish — they always interest me. What do you imagine is at the bottom of Jaz?”

“Treachery.”

“Oh, not only,” laughed Somers.

“Then why do you ask me, if you know better?”

“Because I don’t really get to the bottom of him.”

“There is no bottom to get to — he’s the instinctive traitor, as they all are.”

“Oh, surely not only that.”

“I see nothing else. They would like the white civilisation to be trampled underfoot piecemeal. And at the same time they live on us like parasites.” Kangaroo glowered fiercely.

“There’s something more,” replied Richard. “They don’t believe in our gods, in our ideals. They remember older gods, older ideals, different gods: before the Jews invented a mental Jehovah, and a spiritual Christ. They are nearer the magic of the animal world.”

“Magic of the animal world!” roared Kangaroo. “What does that nonsense mean? Are you traitor to your own human intelligence?”

“All too human,” smiled Richard.

Kangaroo sat up very straight, and looked at Somers. Somers still smiled faintly and luminously.

“Why are you so easily influenced?” said Kangaroo, with a certain cold reproof. “You are like a child. I know that is part of the charm of your nature, that you are naive like a child, but sometimes you are childish rather than childlike. A perverse child.”

“Let me be a perverse child then,” laughed Somers, with a flash of attractive laughter at Kangaroo. It frightened the big man, this perverse mood. If only he could have got the wicked light out of Lovat’s face, and brought back the fire of earnestness. And yet, as an individual, he was attracted to the little fellow now, like a moth to a candle: a great lumbering moth to a small, but dangerous flame of a candle.

“I’m sure it’s Struthers’ turn to set the world right, before it’s yours,” Somers said.

“Why are you sure?”

“I don’t know. I thought so when I saw him. You’re too human.”

Kangaroo was silent, and offended.

“I don’t think that is a final reason,” he replied.

“For me it is. No, I want one of the olives that the man took away. You give

one such good food, one forgets deep questions in your lovely salad. Why don't you do as Jaz says, and back up the Reds for the time being. Play your pawns and your bishops."

"You know that a bite from a hyaena means blood-poisoning," said Kangaroo.

"Don't be solemn. You mean Willie Struthers? Yes, I wouldn't want to be bitten. But if you are so sure of love as an all-ruling influence, and so sure of the fidelity of the Diggers, through love, I should agree with Jaz. Push Struthers where he wants to go. Let him proclaim the rule of the People: let him nationalise all industries and resources, and confiscate property above a certain amount: and bring the world about his ears. Then you step in like a saviour. It's much easier to point to a wrecked house, if you want to build something new, than to persuade people to pull the house down and build it up in a better style."

Kangaroo was deeply offended, mortified. Yet he listened.

"You are hopelessly facile, Lovat," he said gently. "In the first place, the greatest danger to the world to-day is anarchy, not bolshevism. It is anarchy and unrule that are coming on us — and that is what I, as an order-loving Jew and one of the half-chosen people, do not want. I want one central principle in the world: the principle of love, the maximum of individual liberty, the minimum of human distress. Lovat, you know I am sincere, don't you?"

There was a certain dignity and pathos in the question.

"I do," replied Somers sincerely. "But I am tired of one central principle in the world."

"Anything else means chaos."

"There has to be chaos occasionally. And then, Roo, if you DO want a benevolent fatherly autocracy, I'm sure you'd better step in after there's been a bit of chaos."

Kangaroo shook his head.

"Like a wayward child! Like a wayward child!" he murmured. "You are not such a fool, Lovat, that you can't see that once you break the last restraints on humanity to-day, it is the end. It is the end. Once burst the flood-gates, and you'll never get the water back into control. Never."

"Then let it distil up to heaven. I really don't care."

"But man, you are PERVERSE. What's the matter with you?" suddenly bellowed Kangaroo.

They had gone into the study for coffee. Kangaroo stood with his head dropped and his feet apart, his back to the fire. And suddenly he roared like a lion at Somers. Somers started, then laughed.

"Even perversity has its points," he said.

Kangaroo glowered like a massive cloud. Somers was standing staring at the

Durer etching of St. Jerome: he loved Durer. Suddenly, with a great massive movement, Kangaroo caught the other man to his breast.

“Don’t Lovat,” he said, in a much moved voice, pressing the slight body of the lesser man against his own big breast and body. “Don’t!” he said, with a convulsive tightening of the arm.

Somers, squeezed so that he could hardly breathe, kept his face from Kangaroo’s jacket and managed to ejaculate:

“All right. Let me go and I won’t.”

“Don’t thwart me,” pleaded Kangaroo. “Don’t — or I shall have to break all connection with you, and I love you so. I love you so. Don’t be perverse, and put yourself against me.”

He still kept Somers clasped against him, but not squeezed so hard. And Somers heard over his own head the voice speaking with a blind yearning. Not to himself. No. It was speaking over his head, to the void, to the infinite or something tiresome like that. Even the words: “I love you so. I love you so.” They made the marrow in Lovat’s bones melt, but they made his heart flicker even more devilishly.

“It is an impertinence, that he says he loves me,” he thought to himself. But he did not speak, out of regard for Kangaroo’s emotion, which was massive and genuine, even if Somers felt it missed his own particular self completely.

In those few moments when he was clasped to the warm, passionate body of Kangaroo, Somers’ mind flew with swift thought. “He doesn’t love ME,” he thought to himself. “He just turns a great general emotion on me, like a tap. I feel as cold as steel, in his clasp — and as separate. It is presumption, his loving me. If he was in any way really AWARE of me, he’d keep at the other end of the room, as if I was a dangerous little animal. He wouldn’t be hugging me if I were a scorpion. And I AM a scorpion. So why doesn’t he know it. Damn his love. He wants to FORCE me.”

After a few minutes Kangaroo dropped his arm and turned his back. He stood there, a great, hulked, black back. Somers thought to himself: “If I were a kestrel I’d stoop and strike him straight in the back of the neck, and he’d die. He ought to die.” Then he went and sat in his chair. Kangaroo left the room.

He did not come back for some time, and Lovat began to grow uncomfortable. But the devilishness in his heart continued, broken by moments of tenderness or pity or self-doubt. The gentleness was winning, when Kangaroo came in again. And one look at the big, gloomy figure set the devil alert like a flame again in the other man’s heart.

Kangaroo took his place before the fire again, but looked aside.

“Of course you understand,” he began in a muffled voice, “that it must be one

thing or the other. Either you are with me, and I FEEL you with me: or you cease to exist for me.”

Somers listened with wonder. He admired the man for his absoluteness, and his strange blind heroic obsession.

“I’m not really against you, am I?” said Somers. And his own heart answered, YES YOU ARE!

“You are not WITH me,” said Kangaroo, bitterly.

“No,” said Somers slowly.

“Then why have you deceived me, played with me,” suddenly roared Kangaroo. “I could have killed you.”

“Don’t do that,” laughed Somers, rather coldly.

But the other did not answer. He was like a black cloud.

“I want to hear,” said Kangaroo, “your case against me.”

“It’s not a case, Kangaroo,” said Richard, “it’s a sort of instinct.”

“Against what?”

“Why, against your ponderousness. And against your insistence. And against the whole sticky stream of love, and the hateful will-to-love. It’s the will-to-love that I hate, Kangaroo.”

“In me?”

“In us all. I just hate it. It’s a sort of syrup we HAVE to stew in, and it’s loathsome. Don’t love me. Don’t want to save mankind. You’re so awfully GENERAL, and your love is so awfully general: as if one were only a cherry in the syrup. Don’t love me. Don’t want me to love you. Let’s be hard, separate men. Let’s understand one another deeper than love.”

“Two human ants, in short,” said Kangaroo, and his face was yellow.

“No, no. Two men. Let us go to the understanding that is deeper than love.”

“Is any understanding deeper than love?” asked Kangaroo with a sneer.

“Why, yes, you know it is. At least between men.”

“I’m afraid I don’t know it. I know the understanding that is much LESS than love. If you want me to have a merely commonplace acquaintance with you, I refuse. That’s all.”

“We are neither of us capable of a quite commonplace acquaintance.”

“Oh yes, I am,” barked Kangaroo.

“I’m not. But you’re such a Kangaroo, wanting to carry mankind in your belly-pouch, cosy, with its head and long ears peeping out. You sort of figure yourself a Kangaroo of Judah, instead of a Lion of Judah: Jehovah with a great heavy tail and a belly-pouch. Let’s get off it, and be men, with the gods beyond us. I DON’T want to be godlike, Kangaroo. I like to know the gods beyond me. Let’s start as men, with the great gods beyond us.”

He looked up with a beautiful candour in his face, and a diabolic bit of mockery in his soul. For Kangaroo's face had gone like an angry wax mask, with mortification. An angry wax mask of mortification, haughty with a stiff, wooden haughtiness, and two little near-set holes for eyes, behind glass pince-nez. Richard had a moment of pure hate for him. in the silence. For Kangaroo refused to answer.

"What's the good, men trying to be gods?" said Richard. "You're a Jew, and you must be Jehovah or nothing. We're Christians, all little Christs walking without our crucifixes. Jaz is quite right to play us one against the other. Struthers is the anti-christ, preaching love alone. I'm tired, tired. I want to be a man, with the gods beyond me, greater than me. I want the great gods, and my own mere manliness."

"It's that treacherous Trehwella," Kangaroo murmured to himself. Then he seemed to be thinking hard.

And then at last he lifted his head and looked at Somers. And now Somers openly hated him. His face was arrogant, insolent, righteous.

"I am sorry I have made a mistake in you," he said. "But we had better settle the matter finally here. I think the best thing you can do is to leave Australia. I don't think you can do me any serious damage with your talk. I would ask you — before I warn you — not to try. That is all. I should prefer now to be alone."

He had become again hideous, with a long yellowish face and black eyes close together, and a cold, mindless, dangerous hulk to his shoulders. For a moment Somers was afraid of him, as of some great ugly idol that might strike. He felt the intense hatred of the man coming at him in cold waves. He stood up in a kind of horror, in front of the great, close-eyed horrible thing that was now Kangaroo. Yes, a thing, not a whole man. A great Thing, a horror.

"I am sorry if I have been foolish," he said, backing away from the Thing. And as he went out of the door he made a quick movement, and his heart melted in horror lest the Thing Kangaroo should suddenly lurch forward and clutch him. If that happened, Kangaroo would have blood on his hands. But Somers kept all his wits about him, and quickly, quietly got his hat and walked to the hall door. It seemed like a dream, as if it were miles to the outer door, as if his heart would burst before he got there, as if he would never be able to undo the fastening of the door.

But he kept all his wits about him, and as by inspiration managed the three separate locks of the strong door. Kangaroo had followed slowly, awfully, behind, like a madman. If he came near enough to touch!

Somers had the door opened, and looked round. The huge figure, the white face with the two eyes close together, like a spider, approaching with awful

stillness. If the stillness suddenly broke, and he struck out!

“Good-night!” said Somers, at the blind, horrible-looking face. And he moved quickly down the stairs, though still not apparently in flight, but going in that quick, controlled way that acts as a check on an onlooker.

He was thankful for the streets, for the people. But by bad luck, it was Saturday night, when Sydney is all shut up, and the big streets seem dark and dreary, though thronging with people. Dark streets, dark, streaming people. And fear. One could feel such fear, in Australia.

CHAPTER 12. THE NIGHTMARE.

He had known such different deep fears. In Sicily, a sudden fear, in the night of some single murderer, some single thing hovering as it were out of the violent past, with the intent of murder. Out of the old Greek past, that had been so vivid, sometimes an unappeased spirit of murderous-hate against the usurping moderns. A sudden presence of murder in the air, because of something which the modern psyche had excluded, some old and vital thing which Christianity has cut out. An old spirit, waiting for vengeance. But in England, during the later years of the war, a true and deadly fear of the criminal LIVING spirit which arose in all the stay-at-home bullies who governed the country during those years. From 1916 to 1919 a wave of criminal lust rose and possessed England, there was a reign of terror, under a set of indecent bullies like Bottomley of John Bull and other bottom-dog members of the House of Commons. Then Somers had known what it was to live in a perpetual state of semi-fear: the fear of the criminal public and the criminal government. The torture was steadily applied, during those years after Asquith fell, to break the independent soul in any man who would not hunt with the criminal mob. A man must identify himself with the criminal mob, sink his sense of truth, of justice, and of human honour, and bay like some horrible unclean hound, bay with a loud sound, from slavering, unclean jaws.

This Richard Lovat Somers had steadily refused to do. The deepest part of a man is his sense of essential truth, essential honour, essential justice. This deepest self makes him abide by his own feelings, come what may. It is not sentimentalism. It is just the male human creature, the thought-adventurer, driven to earth. Will he give in or won't he?

Many men, carried on a wave of patriotism and true belief in democracy, entered the war. Many men were driven in out of belief that it was necessary to save their property. Vast numbers of men were just bullied into the army. A few remained. Of these, many became conscientious objectors.

Somers tiresomely belonged to no group. He would not enter the army, because his profoundest instinct was against it. Yet he had no conscientious objection to war. It was the whole spirit of the war, the vast mob-spirit, which he could never acquiesce in. The terrible, terrible war, made so fearful because in every country practically every man lost his head, and lost his own centrality, his own manly isolation in his own integrity, which alone keeps life real. Practically

every man being caught away from himself, as in some horrible flood, and swept away with the ghastly masses of other men, utterly unable to speak, or feel for himself, or to stand on his own feet, delivered over and swirling in the current, suffocated for the time being. Some of them to die for ever. Most to come back home victorious in circumstance, but with their inner pride gone: inwardly lost. To come back home, many of them, to wives who had egged them on to this downfall in themselves: black bitterness. Others to return to a bewildered wife who had in vain tried to keep her man true to himself, tried and tried, only to see him at last swept away. And oh, when he was swept away, how she loved him. But when he came back, when he crawled out like a dog out of a dirty stream, a stream that had suddenly gone slack and turbid: when he came back covered with outward glory and inward shame, then there was the price to pay.

And there IS this bitter and sordid afterwar price to pay because men lost their heads, and worse, lost their inward, individual integrity. And when a man loses his inward, isolated, manly integrity, it is a bad day for that man's true wife. A true man should not lose his head. The greater the crisis, the more intense should be his isolated reckoning with his own soul. And THEN let him act, of his own whole self. Not fling himself away: or much worse, let himself be DRAGGED away, bit by bit.

Awful years — '16, '17, '18, '19 — the years when the damage was done. The years when the world lost its real manhood. Not for lack of courage to face death. Plenty of superb courage to face death. But no courage in any man to face his own isolated soul, and abide by its decision. Easier to sacrifice oneself. So much easier!

Richard Lovat was one of those utterly unsatisfactory creatures who just would not. He had no conscientious objections. He knew that men MUST fight, some time in some way or other. He was no Quaker, to believe in perpetual peace. He had been in Germany times enough to know HOW much he detested the German military creatures: mechanical bullies they were. They had once threatened to arrest him as a spy, and had insulted him more than once. Oh, he would never forgive THEM, in his inward soul. But then the industrialism and commercialism of England, with which patriotism and democracy became identified: did not these insult a man and hit him pleasantly across the mouth? How much humiliation had Richard suffered, trying to earn his living! How had they tried, with their beastly industrial self-righteousness, to humiliate him as a separate, single man? They wanted to bring him to heel even more than the German militarist did. And if a man is to be brought to any heel, better a spurred heel than the heel of a Jewish financier. So Richard decided later, when the years let him think things over, and see where he was.

Therefore when the war came, his instinct was against it. When the Asquith government so softly foundered, he began to suffer agonies. But when the Asquith government went right under, and in its place came that John Bull government of '16, '17, '18, then agonies gave way to tortures. He was summoned to join the army: and went. Spent a night in barracks with forty other men, and not one of these other men but felt like a criminal condemned, bitter in dejection and humiliation. Was medically examined in the morning by two doctors, both gentlemen, who knew the sacredness of another naked man: and was rejected.

So, that was over. He went back home. And he made up his mind what he would do. He would never voluntarily make a martyr of himself. His feeling was private to himself, he didn't want to force it on any other man. He would just act alone. For the moment, he was rejected as medically unfit. If he was called up again, he would go again. But he would never serve.

"Once," he said to Harriet, "that they have really conscripted me, I will never obey another order, if they kill me."

Poor Harriet felt scared, and didn't know what else to say.

"If ever," he said, looking up from his own knees in their old grey flannel trousers, as he sat by the fire, "if ever I see my legs in khaki, I shall die. But they shall never put my legs into khaki."

That first time, at the barracks in the country town in the west, they had treated him with that instinctive regard and gentleness which he usually got from men who were not German militarist bullies, or worse, British commercial bullies. For instance, in the morning in that prison barracks room, these unexamined recruits were ordered to make their beds and sweep the room. In obedience, so far, Richard Lovat took one of the heavy brooms. He was pale, silent, isolated: a queer figure, a young man with a beard. The other soldiers — or must-be soldiers — had looked at him as a queer fish, but that he was used to.

"Say, Dad," said a fattish young fellow older than himself, the only blatherer, a loose fellow who had come from Canada to join up and was already cursing: he was a good deal older than Somers.

"Say, Dad," said this fellow, as they sat in the train coming up, "all that'll come off to-morrow — Qck, Qck!" — and he made two noises, and gave two long swipes with his finger round his chin, to intimate that Richard's beard would be cut off to-morrow.

"We'll see," said Richard, smiling with pale lips.

He said in his heart, the day his beard was shaven he was beaten, lost. He identified it with his isolate manhood. He never forgot that journey up to Bodmin, with the other men who were called up. They were all bitterly,

desperately miserable, but still manly: mostly very quiet, yet neither sloppy nor frightened. Only the fat, loose fellow who had given up a damned good job in Canada to come and serve this bloody country, etc., etc., was a ranter and a bragger. Somers saw him afterwards naked: strange, fat, soft, like a woman. But in another carriage the men sang all the time, or howled like dogs in the night:

I'll be your sweetheart, if you will be mine, All my life I'll be you-o-o-ur Valentine. Bluebells I'll gather, take them and be true, When I'm a man, my plan will be to marry you.

Wailing down the lost corridors of hell, surely, those ghastly melancholy notes

—
All my li-i-i-ife — I'll be you-u-r Valentine.

Somers could never recall it without writhing. It is not death that matters, but the loss of the integral soul. And these men howled as if they were going to their doom, helplessly, ghastly. It was not the death in front. It was the surrender of all their old beliefs, and all their sacred liberty.

Those bluebells! They were worse than the earlier songs. In 1915, autumn, Hampstead Heath, leaves burning in heaps, in the blue air, London still almost pre-war London: but by the pond on the Spaniards Road, blue soldiers, wounded soldiers in their bright hospital blue and red, always there: and earth-coloured recruits with pale faces drilling near Parliament Hill. The pre-war world still lingering, and some vivid strangeness, glamour thrown in. At night all the great beams of the searchlights, in great straight bars, feeling across the London sky, feeling the clouds, feeling the body of the dark overhead. And then Zeppelin raids: the awful noise and the excitement. Somers was never afraid then. One evening he and Harriet walked from Platts Lane to the Spaniards Road, across the Heath: and there, in the sky, like some god vision, a Zeppelin, and the searchlights catching it, so that it gleamed like a manifestation in the heavens, then losing it, so that only the strange drumming came down out of the sky where the searchlights tangled their feelers. There it was again, high, high, high, tiny, pale, as one might imagine the Holy Ghost, far, far above. And the crashes of guns, and the awful hoarseness of shells bursting in the city. Then gradually, quiet. And from Parliament Hill, a great red glare below, near St. Paul's. Something ablaze in the city. Harriet was horribly afraid. Yet as she looked up at the far-off Zeppelin she said to Somers:

“Think, some of the boys I played with when I was a child are probably in it.”

And he looked up at the far, luminous thing, like a moon. Were there men in it? Just men, with two vulnerable legs and warm mouths. The imagination could not go so far.

Those days, that autumn...people carried about chrysanthemums, yellow and

brown chrysanthemums: and the smell of burning leaves: and the wounded, bright blue soldiers with their red cotton neckties, sitting together like macaws on the seats, pale and different from other people. And the star Jupiter very bright at nights over the cup hollow of the Vale, on Hampstead Heath. And the war news coming, the war horror drifting in, drifting in, prices rising, excitement growing, people going mad about the Zeppelin raids. And always the one song:

Keep the home fires burning, Though your hearts be yearning.

It was in 1915 the old world ended. In the winter 1915-1916 the spirit of the old London collapsed; the city, in some way, perished, perished from being a heart of the world, and became a vortex of broken passions, lusts, hopes, fears, and horrors. The integrity of London collapsed, and the genuine debasement began, the unspeakable baseness of the press and the public voice, the reign of that bloated ignominy, John Bull.

No man who has really consciously lived through this can believe again absolutely in democracy. No man who has heard reiterated in thousands of tones from all the common people during the crucial years of the war: "I believe in John Bull. Give me John Bull," can ever believe that in any crisis a people can govern itself, or is ever fit to govern itself. During the crucial years of the war, the people chose, and chose Bottomleyism. Bottom enough.

The well-bred, really cultured classes were on the whole passive resisters. They shirked their duty. It is the business of people who really know better to fight tooth and nail to keep up a standard, to hold control of authority. Laiser-aller is as guilty as the actual, stinking mongrelism it gives place to.

It was in mid-winter 1915 that Somers and Harriet went down to Cornwall. The spirit of the war — the spirit of collapse and of human ignominy, had not travelled so far yet. It came in advancing waves.

We hear so much of the bravery and horrors at the front. Brave the men were, all honour to them. It was at home the world was lost. We hear too little of the collapse of the proud human spirit at home, the triumph of sordid, rampant, raging meanness. "The bite of a jackal is blood-poisoning and mortification." And at home stayed all the jackals, middle-aged, male and female jackals. And they bit us all. And blood-poisoning and mortification set in.

We should never have let the jackals loose, and patted them on the head. They were feeding on our death all the while.

Away in the west Richard and Harriet lived alone in their cottage by the savage Atlantic. He hardly wrote at all, and never any propaganda. But he hated the war, and said so to the few Cornish people around. He laughed at the palpable lies of the press, bitterly. And because of his isolation and his absolute separateness, he was marked out as a spy.

“I am not a spy,” he said, “I leave it to dirtier people. I am myself, and I won’t have popular lies.”

So, there began the visits from the policeman. A large, blue, helmeted figure at the door.

“Excuse me, sir, I have just a few enquiries to make.”

The police-sergeant always a decent, kindly fellow, driven by the military.

Somers and Harriet lived now with that suspense about them in the very air they breathed. They were suspects.

“Then let them suspect,” said he. “I do nothing to them, so what can they do to me.

He still believed in the constitutional liberty of an Englishman.

“You know,” said Harriet, “you DO say things to these Cornish people.”

“I only say, when they tell me newspaper lies, that they ARE lies.”

But now the two began to be hated, hated far more than they knew.

“You want to be careful,” warned one of the Cornish friends. “I’ve heard that the coast-watchers have got orders to keep very strict watch on you.”

“Let them, they’ll see nothing.”

But it was not till afterwards that he learned that the watchers had lain behind the stone fence, to hear what he and Harriet talked about.

So, he was called up the first time and went. He was summoned to Penzance, and drove over with Harriet, expecting to return for the time at least. But he was ordered to proceed the same afternoon to Bodmin, along with sixteen or seventeen other fellows, farm hands and working men. He said good-bye to Harriet, who was to be driven back alone across the moors, to their lonely cottage on the other side.

“I shall be back to-morrow,” he said.

England was still England, and he was not finally afraid.

The train journey from Penzance to Bodmin with the other men: the fat, bragging other man: the tall man who felt as Somers did: the change at the roadside station, with the porters chaffing the men that the handcuffs were on them. Indeed, it was like being one of a gang of convicts. The great, prison-like barracks — the disgusting evening meal of which he could eat nothing — the little terrier-like sergeant of the regulars, who made them a little encouraging speech: not a bad chap. The lounging about that barracks yard, prisoners, till bed-time: the other men crowding to the canteen, himself mostly alone. The brief talks with men who were for a moment curious as to who and what he was. For a moment only. They were most of them miserable and bitter.

Gaol! It was like gaol. He thought of Oscar Wilde in prison. Night came, and the beds to be made.

“They’re good beds, clean beds, you’ll sleep quite comfortable in them,” said the elderly little sergeant with a white moustache. Nine o’clock lights out. Somers had brought no night clothes, nothing. He slept in his woollen pants, and was ashamed because they had patches on the knees, for he and Harriet were very poor these years. In the next bed was a youth, a queer fellow, in a sloppy suit of black broadcloth, and down-at-heel boots. He had a degenerate sort of handsomeness too. He had never spoken a word. His face was long and rather fine, but like an Apache, his straight black hair came in a lock over his forehead. And there was an Apache sort of sheepishness, stupidity, in everything he did. He was a long time getting undressed. Then there he stood, and his white cotton day-shirt was long below his knees, like a woman’s nightgown. A restless, bitter night, with one man cough, cough, coughing, a hysterical cough, and others talking, making noises in their sleep. Bugle at six, and a scramble to wash themselves at the zinc trough in the wash house. Somers could not crowd in, did not get in till towards the end. Then he had to borrow soap, and afterwards a piece of comb. The men were all quiet and entirely inoffensive, common, but gentle, by nature decent. A sickening breakfast, then wash-up and sweep the floors. Somers took one of the heavy brooms, as ordered, and began. He swept his own floors nearly every day. But this was heavier work. The sergeant stopped him. “Don’t you do that. You go and help to wipe the pots, if you like. Here, you boy, YOU — take that sweeping brush.”

And Somers relinquished his broom to a bigger man.

They were kindly, and, in the essential sense, gentlemen, the little terrier of a sergeant too. Englishmen, his own people.

When it came to Somer’s turn to be examined, and he took off his clothes and sat in his shirt in the cold lobby: the fat fellow pointed to his thin, delicate legs with a jeer. But Somers looked at him, and he was quiet again. The queer, soft, pale-bodied fellow, against Somers’ thin delicate whiteness. The little sergeant kept saying:

“Don’t you catch cold, you chaps.”

In the warm room behind a screen, Richard took off his shirt and was examined. The doctor asked him where he lived — where was his home — asked as a gentleman asks, treated him with that gentle consideration Somers usually met with, save from business people or official people.

“We shall reject you, leave you free,” said the doctor, after consulting with the more elderly, officious little man, “but we leave it to you to do what you can for your country.”

“Thank you,” said Richard, looking at him.

“Every man must do what he can,” put in the other doctor, who was elderly

and officious, but a gentleman. "The country needs the help of every man, and though we leave you free, we expect you to apply yourself to SOME service."

"Yes," said Somers, looking at him, and speaking in an absolutely neutral voice. Things said like that to him were never real to him: more like the noise of a cart passing, just a noise.

The two doctors looked from his face down his thin nakedness again.

"Put your shirt on," said the younger one.

And Somers could hear the mental comment, "Rum sort of a fellow," as he did so.

There was still a wait for the card. It was one of those cards: A — Called up for military service. B — Called up for service at the front, but not in the lines. C — Called up for non-military service. R — Rejected. A, B, and C were ruled out in red ink, leaving the Rejected. He still had to go to another office for his pay — two shillings and fourpence, or something like that. He signed for this and was free. Free — with two shillings and fourpence, and pass for a railway ticket — and God's air. The moment he stepped out with his card, he realised that it was Saturday morning, that the sun was shining, filling the big stone yard of the barracks, from which he could look to the station and the hill with its grass, beyond. That hill beyond — he had seemed to look at it through darkened glass, before. Till now, the morning had been a timeless greyness. Indeed, it had rained at seven o'clock, as they stood lounging miserably about in the barracks yard with its high wall, cold and bitter. And the tall man had talked to him bitterly.

But now the sun shone, the dark-green, Cornish hill, hard-looking, was just a near hill. He walked through the great gates. Ah God, he was out, he was free. The road with trees went downhill to the town. He hastened down, a free human being, on Saturday morning, the grey glaze gone from his eyes.

He telegraphed the ignominious word Rejected, and the time of his arrival, to Harriet. Then he went and had dinner. Some of the other men came in. They were reserved now — there was a distance between him and them — he was not of their social class.

"What are you?" they asked him.

"Rejected," he said.

And they looked at him grudgingly, thinking it was because he was not a working man he had got special favour. He knew what they thought, and he tried not to look so glad. But glad he was, and in some mysterious way, triumphant.

It was a wonderful journey on the Saturday afternoon home — sunny, busy, lovely. He changed at Truro and went into town. On the road he met some of the other fellows, who were called up, but not summoned for service immediately. They had some weeks, or months, of torment and suspense before them. They

looked at Somers, and grinned rather jeeringly at him. They envied him — no wonder. And already he was a stranger, in another walk of life.

Rejected as unfit. One of the unfit. What did he care? The Cornish are always horrified of any ailment or physical disablement. “What’s amiss then?” they would ask. They would SAY that you might as well be shot outright as labelled unfit. But most of them tried hard to find constitutional weaknesses in themselves, that would get them rejected also, notwithstanding. And at the same time they felt they must be horribly ashamed of their physical ignominy if they were LABELLED unfit.

Somers did not care. Let them label me unfit, he said to himself. I know my own body is fragile, in its way, but also it is very strong, and it’s the only body that would carry my particular self. Let the fools peer at it and put me down undeveloped chest and what they like, so long as they leave me to my own way.

Then the kindly doctor’s exhortation that he should find some way for himself for serving his country. He thought about that many times. But always, as he came near to the fact of committing himself, he knew that he simply could not commit himself to any service whatsoever. In no shape or form could he serve the war, either indirectly or directly. Yet it would have been so easy. He had quite enough influential friends in London to put him into some job, even some quite congenial, literary job, with a sufficient salary. They would be only too glad to do it, for there in his remoteness, writing occasionally an essay that only bothered them, he was a thorn in their flesh. And men and women with sons, brothers, husbands away fighting, it was small pleasure for them to read Mr. Somers and his denunciation. “This trench and machine warfare is a blasphemy against life itself, a blasphemy which we are all committing.” All very well, they said, but we are in for a war, and what are we to do? We hate it as much as he does. But we can’t all sit safely in Cornwall.

That was true too, and he knew it, and he felt the most a dreary misery, knowing how many brave, generous men were being put through this slaughter-machine of human devilishness. They were doing their best, and there was nothing else to do. But even that was no reason why he should go and do likewise.

If men had kept their souls firm and integral through the years, the war would never have come on. If, in the beginning, there had been enough strong, proud souls in England to concentrate the English feeling into stern, fierce, honourable fighting, the war would never have gone as it went. But England sloped and wobbled, and the tide of horror accumulated.

And now, if circumstances had roped nearly all men into the horror, and it was a case of adding horror to horror, or dying well, on the other hand, the

irremediable circumstance of his own separate soul made Richard Lovat's inevitable standing out. If there is outward, circumstantial unreason and fatality, there is inward unreason and inward fate. He would have to dare to follow his inward fate. He must remain alone, outside of everything, everything, conscious of what was going on, conscious of what he was doing and not doing. Conscious he must be, and consciously he must stick to it. To be forced into nothing.

For, above all things, man is a land animal and a thought-adventurer. Once the human consciousness really sinks and is swamped under the tide of events — as the best English consciousness was swamped, pacifist and patriotic alike — then the adventure is doomed. The English soul went under in the war, and, as a conscious, proud, adventurous, self-responsible soul, it was lost. We all lost the war: perhaps Germany least. Lost all the lot. The adventure is always lost when the human conscious soul gives way under the stress, fails to keep control, and is submerged. Then out swarm the rats and the Bottomleys and crew, and the ship of human adventure is a horrible piratic affair, a dirty sort of freebooting.

Richard Lovat had nothing to hang on to but his own soul. So he hung on to it, and tried to keep his wits. If no man was with him, he was hardly aware of it, he had to grip on so desperately, like a man on a plank in a shipwreck. The plank was his own individual self.

Followed that period of suspense which changed his life for ever. If the postman was coming plunging downhill through the bushes over the moor, the first thought was: What is he bringing now? The postman was over military age, and had a chuckle of pleasure in handing out those accursed On His Majesty's Service envelopes which meant that a man was summoned for torture. The postman was a great Wesleyan and a chapel preacher, and the thought of hell for other men was sweet in him: he had a religious zest added to his natural Cornish zest in other people's disasters.

Again, if there was the glint of a bicycle on the moor road, and if it turned down the bypath towards the cottage, then Somers strained his eyes to see if the rider were fat and blue, or tall and blue. Was it the police sergeant, or the police constable, coming for more identification proofs.

"We want your birth certificate," said the sergeant. "They've written from Bodmin asking you to produce your birth certificate."

"Then tell them to get it. No, I haven't got it. You've had my marriage certificate. You know who I am and where I was born and all the rest. Now let them get the birth certificate themselves."

Richard Lovat was at the end of all patience. They persisted he was a foreigner — poor Somers, just because he had a beard. One of the most intensely English little men England ever produced, with a passion for his country, even if

it were often a passion of hatred. But no, they persisted he was a foreigner. Pah!

He and Harriet did all their own work, their own shopping. One wintry afternoon they were coming home with a knapsack, along the field path above the sea, when two khaki individuals, officers of some sort, strode after them.

“Excuse me,” said one, in a damnatory officious voice. “What have you got in that sack?”

“A few groceries,” said Lovat.

“I would like to look.”

Somers put the sack down on the path. The tall and lofty officer stooped and groped nobly among a pound of rice and a piece of soap and a dozen candles.

“Ha!” he cried, exultant. “What’s this? A camera!”

Richard peeped in the bag at the groping red military hands. For a moment he almost believed that a camera had spirited itself in among his few goods, the implication of his guilt was so powerful. He saw a block in brown paper.

“A penn’orth of salt,” he said quietly, though pale to the lips with anger and insult.

But the gentlemanly officer — a Captain — tore open the paper. Yes, a common block of salt. He pushed the bag aside.

“We have to be careful,” said the other, lesser man.

“Of course,” said Richard, tying up his bag.

“Good afternoon!” said Harriet.

The fellows half saluted, and turned hastening away. Richard and Harriet had the advantage of sauntering behind them and looking at their noble backs. Oh, they were gentlemen, true English gentlemen: perhaps Cornish.

Harriet gave a pouf of laughter.

“The poor innocent salt!” she exclaimed.

And no doubt that also was chalked up against her.

It was Christmas time, and two friends came down to stay at the cottage with the Somers. Those were the days before America joined the Allies. The man friend arrived with a whole parcel of American dainties, buckwheat meal and sweet potatoes and maple sugar: the woman friend brought a good basket of fruit. They were to have a Christmas in the lonely cottage in spite of everything.

It was Christmas Eve, and a pouring black wet night outside. Nowhere can it be so black as on the edge of a Cornish moor, above the western sea, near the rocks where the ancient worshippers used to sacrifice. The darkness of menhirs. The American woman friend was crouching at the fire making fudge, the man was away in his room, when a thundering knock at the door. Ah Lord!

The burly police-sergeant, and his bicycle.

“Sorry to trouble you sir, but is an American, a Mr. Monsell, stopping here

with you? He is. Can I have a word with him?"

"Yes. Won't you come in?"

Into the cosy cottage room, with the American girl at the fire, her face flushed with the fudge-making, entered the big, burly police-sergeant, his black mackintosh-cape streaming wet.

"We give you a terrible lot of trouble, I'm sorry to say," said Harriet ironically. "What an awful night for you to have to come all these miles. I'm sure it isn't OUR doing."

"No, ma'm, I know that. It's the doing of people who like to meddle. These military orders, they take some keeping pace with."

"I'm sure they do."

Harriet was all sympathy. So he, too, was goaded by these military canaille.

Somers fetched the American friend, and he was asked to produce papers, and give information. He gave it, being an honourable citizen and a well-bred American, with complete sang froid. At that moment Somers would have given a lot to be American too, and not English. But wait — those were early days, when America was still being jeered at for standing out and filling her pockets. She was not yet the intensely loved Ally. The police-sergeant was pleasant as ever. He apologised again, and went out into the black and pouring night. So much for Christmas Eve.

"But that's not the end of the horrid affair," as the song says. When Monsell got back to London he was arrested, and conveyed to Scotland Yard: there examined, stripped naked, his clothes taken away. Then he was kept for a night in a cell — next evening liberated and advised to return to America.

Poor Monsell, and he was so very anti-German, so very pro-British. It was a blow for him. He did not leave off being anti-German, but he was much less pro-British. And after all, it was war-time, when these things must happen, we are told. Such a war-time that let loose the foulest feelings of a mob, particularly of 'gentlemen', to torture any single, independent man as a mob always tortures the isolated and independent.

In despair, Somers thought he would go to America. He had passports, he was Rejected. They had no use for him, and he had no use for them. So he posted his passports to the Foreign Office, for the military permit to depart.

It was January, and there was a thin film of half-melted snow, like silver, on the fields and the path. A white, static, arrested morning, away there in the west of Cornwall, with the moors looking primeval, and the huge granite boulders bulging out of the earth like presences. So easy to realise men worshipping stones. It is not the stone. It is the mystery of the powerful, pre-human earth, showing its might. And all, this morning, static, arrested in a cold, milky

whiteness, like death, the west lost in the sea.

A man culminates in intense moments. This was one of Somers' white, deathlike moments, as he walked home from the tiny post-office in the hamlet, on the wintry morning, after he had posted his passports asking for visas to go to New York. It was like walking in death: a strange, arrested land of death. Never had he known that feeling before: as if he were a ghost in the after-death, walking a strange, pale, static, cold world. It almost frightened him. "Have I done wrong?" he asked himself. "Am I wrong, to leave my country and go to America?"

It was then as if he HAD left his country: and that was like death, a still, static, corporate death. America was the death of his own country in him, he realised that.

But he need not have bothered. The Foreign Office kept his passports, and did not so much as answer him. He waited in vain.

Spring came — and one morning the news that Asquith was out of the government, that Lloyd George was in. And this was another of Somers' crises. He felt he must go away from the house, away from everywhere. And as he walked, clear as a voice out of the moors, came a voice saying: "It is the end of England. It is the end of the old England. It is finished. England will never be England any more."

Cornwall is a country that makes a man psychic. The longer he stayed, the more intensely it had that effect on Somers. It was as if he were developing second sight, and second hearing. He would go out into the blackness of night and listen to the blackness, and call, call softly, for the spirits, the presences he felt coming downhill from the moors in the night. "Tuatha De Danaan!" he would call softly. "Tuatha De Danaan! Be with me. Be with me." And it was as if he felt them come.

And so this morning the voice struck into his consciousness. "It is the end of England." So he walked along blindly, up the valley and on the moors. He loved the country intensely. It seemed to answer him. But his consciousness was all confused. In his mind, he did not at all see why it should be the end of England. Mr. Asquith was called Old Wait-and-See. And truly, English Liberalism had proved a slobbery affair, all sad sympathy with everybody, and no iron backbone, these years. Repulsively humble, too, on its own account. It was no time for Christian humility. And yet, it was true to its great creed.

Whereas Lloyd George! Somers knew nothing about Lloyd George. A little Welsh lawyer, not an Englishman at all. He had no real significance in Richard Lovat's soul. Only, Somers gradually came to believe that all Jews, and all Celts, even whilst they espoused the cause of England, subtly lived to bring about the

last humiliation of the great old England. They could never do so if England WOULD NOT BE humiliated. But with an England fairly offering herself to ignominy, where was the help? Let the Celts work out their subtlety. If England WANTED to be betrayed, in the deeper issues. Perhaps Jesus wanted to be betrayed. He did. He chose Judas.

Well, the story could have no other ending.

The war-wave had broken right over England, now: right over Cornwall. Probably throughout the ages Cornwall had not been finally swept, submerged by any English spirit. Now it happened — the accursed later war spirit. Now the tales began to go round full-tilt against Somers. A chimney of his house was tarred to keep out the damp: that was a signal to the Germans. He and his wife carried food to supply German submarines. They had secret stores of petrol in the cliff. They were watched and listened to, spied on, by men lying behind the low stone fences. It is a job the Cornish loved. They didn't even mind being caught at it: lying behind a fence with field-glasses, watching through a hole in the drystone wall a man with a lass, on the edge of the moors. Perhaps they were proud of it. If a man wanted to hear what was said about him — or anything — he lay behind a wall at the field-corners, where the youths talked before they parted and went indoors, late of a Saturday night. A whole intense life of spying going on all the time.

Harriet could not hang out a towel on a bush, or carry out the slops, in the empty landscape of moors and sea, without her every movement being followed by invisible eyes. And at evening, when the doors were shut, valiant men lay under the windows to listen to the conversation in the cosy little room. And bitter enough were the things they said: and damnatory, the two Somers. Richard did not hold himself in. And he talked too with the men on the farm: openly. For they had exactly the same anti-military feeling as himself, and they simply loathed the thought of being compelled to serve. Most men in the west, Somers thought, would have committed murder to escape, if murder would have helped them. It wouldn't. He loved the people at the farm, and the men kindled their rage together. And again Somers' farmer friend warned him, how he was being watched. But Somers WOULD not heed. "What can they do to me!" he said. "I am not a spy in any way whatsoever. There is nothing they can do to me. I make no public appearance at all. I am just by myself. What can they do to me? Let them go to hell."

He refused to be watchful, guarded, furtive, like the people around, saying double things as occasion arose, and hiding their secret thoughts and secret malignancy. He still believed in the freedom of the individual. — Yes, freedom of the individual!

He was aware of the mass of secret feeling against him. Yet the people he came into daily contact with liked him — almost loved him. So he kept on defying the rest, and went along blithe and open as ever, saying what he really felt, or holding his tongue. Enemies! How could he have any PERSONAL enemies? He had never done harm to any of these people, had never even felt any harm. He did not believe in personal enemies. It was just the military.

Enemies he had, however, people he didn't know and hadn't even spoken to. Enemies who hated him like poison. They hated him because he was free, because of his different, unafraid face. They hated him because he wasn't cowed, as they were all cowed. They hated him for his intimacy at the farm, in the hamlet. For each farm was bitter jealous of each other.

Yet he never believed he had any PERSONAL enemies. And he had all the west hating him like poison. He realized once, when two men came down the moorland by-road — officers in khaki — on a motor-bicycle, and went trying the door of the next cottage, which was shut up. Somers went to the door, in all simplicity.

“Did you want me?” he asked.

“No, we didn't want YOU,” replied one of the fellows, in a genteel voice and a tone like a slap in the face. Somers spoken to as if he were the lowest of the low. He shut his cottage door. Was it so? Had they wilfully spoken to him like that? He would not believe it.

But inwardly, he knew it was so. That was what they intended to convey to him: that he was the lowest of the low. He began even to feel guilty, under this mass of poisonous condemnation. And he realised that they had come, on their own, to get into the other cottage and see if there were some wireless installation or something else criminal. But it was fastened tight, and apparently they gave up their design of breaking in, for they turned the motor-cycle and went away.

Day followed day in this tension of suspense. Submarines were off the coast; Harriet saw a ship sunk, away to sea. Horrible excitement, and the postman asking sly questions to try to catch Somers out. Increased rigour of coast watching, and NO light must be shown. Yet along the high-road on the hillside above, plainer than any house-light, danced the lights of a cart, moving, or slowly sped the light of a bicycle, on the blackness. Then a Spanish coal-vessel, three thousand tons, ran on the rocks in a fog, straight under the cottage. She was completely wrecked. Somers watched the waves break over her. Her coal washed ashore, and the farmers carried it up the cliffs in sacks.

There was to be a calling-up now and a re-examination of every man — Somers felt the crisis approaching. The ordeal was to go through, once more. The first rejection meant nothing. There were certain reservations. He had

himself examined again by a doctor. The strain told. on his heart as well as his breathing. He sent in this note to the authorities. A reply: "You must present yourself for examination, as ordered."

He knew that if he was really ever summoned to any service, and finally violated, he would be broken, and die. But patience. In the meanwhile he went to see his people: the long journey up the west, changing at Plymouth and Bristol and Birmingham, up to Derby. Glamorous west of England: if a man were free. He sat through the whole day, very still, looking at the world. Very still, gone very far inside himself, travelling through this England in spring. He loved it so much. But it was in the grip of something monstrous, not English, and he was almost gripped too. As it was, by making himself far away inside himself, he contained himself, and was still.

He arrived late in Derby: Saturday night, and no train for the next ten miles. But luckily, there was a motor-bus going out to the outlying villages. Derby was very dark, like a savage town, a feeling of savagery. And at last the bus was ready: full of young miners, more or less intoxicated. The bus was crammed, a solid jam of men, sitting on each other's knees, standing blocked and wedged. There was no outside accommodation. And inside were jammed eighteen more men than was allowed. It was like being pressed into one block of corned beef.

The bus ran six miles without stopping, through an absolutely dark country, Zeppelin black, and having one feeble light of its own. The roads were unmended, and very bad. But the bus charged on, madly, at full speed, like a dim consciousness madly charging through the night. And the mass of colliers swayed with the bus, intoxicated into a living block, and with high, loud, wailing voices they sang:

There's a long, long trail a-winding
Into the land of my dreams — Where the
nightingales are singing and the —

This ghastly trailing song, like death itself. The colliers seemed to tear it out of their bowels, in a long, wild chant. They, too, all loathed the war: loathed it. And this awful song! They subsided, and somebody started "Tipperary".

It's a long, long way to Tipperary, It's a long way to go — .

But Tipperary was already felt as something of a Jonah: a bad-luck song, so it did not last long. The miserable songs — with their long, long ways that ended in sheer lugubriousness: real death-wails! These for battle songs. The wail of a dying humanity.

Somebody started:

Good-bye — eeee Don't cry — eee Wipe the tear, baby dear, from your eye
— eee — For it's hard to part I know. I'll — be — tickled-to-death to go, Good-
bye — eeee Don't cry — eee — .

But the others didn't know this ragtime, and they weren't yet in the mood. They drifted drunkenly back to the ineffable howl of

There's a long, long trail — .

A black, wild Saturday night. These were the collier youths Somers had been to school with — approximately. As they tore their bowels with their singing, they tore his. But as he sat squashed far back among all that coated flesh, in the dimmest glim of a light, that only made darkness more substantial, he felt like some strange isolated cell in some tensely packed organism that was hurtling through chaos into oblivion. The colliers. He was more at one with them. But they were blind, ventral. Once they broke loose heaven knows what it would be.

The Midlands — the theatre in Nottingham — the pretence of amusement, and the feeling of murder in the dark, dreadful city. In the daytime these songs — this horrible long trail, and “Good-byeeee” and “Way down in Tennessee.” They tried to keep up their spirits with this ragtime Tennessee. But there was murder in the air in the Midlands, among the colliers. In the theatre particularly, a shut-in, awful feeling of souls fit for murder.

London — mid-war London, nothing but war, war. Lovely sunny weather, and bombs at midday in the Strand. Summery weather. Berkshire — aeroplanes — springtime. He was as if blind; he must hurry the long journey back to Harriet and Cornwall.

Yes — he had his papers — he must present himself again at Bodmin barracks. He was just simply summoned as if he were already conscripted. But he knew he must be medically examined. He went — left home at seven in the morning to catch the train. Harriet watched him go across the field. She was left alone, in a strange country.

“I shall be back to-night,” he said.

It was a still morning, as if one were not in the world. On the hill down to the station he lingered. “Shall I not go! Shall I not go!” he said to himself. He wanted to break away. But what good? He would only be arrested and lost. Yet he had dawdled his time, he had to run hard to catch the train in the end.

This time things went much more quickly. He was only two hours in the barracks. He was examined. He could tell they knew about him and disliked him. He was put in class C3 — unfit for military service, but conscripted for light non-military duties. There were no rejections now. Still, it was good enough. There were thousands of C men, men who WANTED to have jobs as C men, so they were not very likely to fetch him up. He would only be a nuisance anyhow. That was clear all round.

Through the little window at the back of their ancient granite cottage, Harriet, peeping wistfully out to sea — poor Harriet, she was always frightened now —

saw Richard coming across the fields, home, walking fast, and with that intent look about him that she half feared. She ran out in a sort of fear, then waited. She would wait.

He saw her face very bright with fear and joy at seeing him back: very beautiful in his eyes. The only real thing, perhaps, left in his world.

“Here you are! So early!” she cried. “I didn’t expect you. The dinner isn’t ready yet. Well?”

“C3,” he replied. “It’s all right.”

“I KNEW it would be,” she cried, seizing his arm and hugging it to her. They went in to the cottage to finish cooking the evening meal. And immediately one of the farm girls came running up to see what it was.

“Oh, C3 — so you’re all right, Mr. Somers. Glad, I’m glad.”

Harriet never forgot the straight, intent bee-line for home which he was making when she peeped out of that little window unaware.

So, another respite. They were not going to touch him. They knew he would be a firebrand in their army, a dangerous man to put with any group of men. They would leave him alone. C3.

He had almost entirely left off writing now, and spent most of his days working on the farm. Again the neighbours were jealous.

“Buryan gets his labour cheap. He’d never have got his hay in but for Mr. Somers,” they said. And that was another reason for wishing to remove Richard Lovat. Work went like steam when he was on Trendrinnan farm, and he was too thick with the Buryans. Much too thick. And John Thomas Buryan rather bragged of Mr. Somers at market, and how he, Richard Lovat, wasn’t afraid of any of them, *etc.*, *etc.* — that he wasn’t going to serve anybody, *etc.* — and that nobody could make him — *etc.*, *etc.*

But Richard drifted away this summer, on to the land, into the weather, into Cornwall. He worked out of doors all the time — he ceased to care inwardly — he began to drift away from himself. He was very thick with John Thomas, and nearly always at the farm. Harriet was a great deal alone. And he seemed to be drifting away, drifting back to the common people, becoming a working man, of the lower classes. It had its charm for Harriet, this aspect of him — careless, rather reckless, in old clothes and an old battered hat. He kept his sharp wits, but his SPIRIT became careless, lost its concentration.

“I declare!” said John Thomas, as Somers appeared in the cornfield, “you look more like one of us every day.” And he looked with a bright Cornish eye at Somers’ careless, belted figure and old jacket. The speech struck Richard: it sounded half triumphant, half mocking. “He thinks I’m coming down in the world — it is half a rebuke,” thought Somers to himself. But he was half

pleased: and half he WAS rebuked.

Corn harvest lasted long, and was a happy time for them all. It went well, well. Also from London occasionally a young man came down and stayed at the inn in the church town, some young friend of Somers who hated the army and the Government and was generally discontented, and so fitfully came as an adherent to Richard Lovat. One of these was James Sharpe, a young Edinburgh man with a moderate income of his own, interested in music. Sharpe was hardly more than a lad — but he was the type of lowland Scotsman who is half an artist, not more, and so can never get on in the ordinary respectable life, rebels against it all the time, and yet can never get away from it or free himself from its dictates.

Sharpe had taken a house further along the coast, brought his piano down from London and sufficient furniture and a housekeeper, and insisted, like a morose bird, that he wanted to be alone. But he wasn't really morose, and he didn't want really to be alone. His old house, rather ramshackle, stood back a little way from the cliffs, where the moor came down savagely to the sea, past a deserted tin mine. It was lonely, wild, and in a savage way, poetic enough. Here Sharpe installed himself for the moment: to be alone with his music and his general discontent.

Of course he excited the wildest comments. He had window-curtains of different colours, so of course, HERE was plain signalling to the German submarines. Spies, the lot of them. When still another young man of the same set came and took a bungalow on the moors, West Cornwall decided that it was being delivered straight into German hands. Not that West Cornwall would really have minded that so terribly. No; it wasn't that it feared the Germans. It was that it hated the sight of these recalcitrant young men. And Somers the instigator, the arch-spy, the responsible little swine with his beard.

Somers, meanwhile, began to chuckle a bit to himself. After all he was getting the better of the military canaille. Canaille! Canaglia! Schweinerie! He loathed them in all the languages he could lay his tongue to.

So Somers and Harriet went to stay a week-end with Sharpe at Trevenna, as the house was called. Sharpe was a C2 man, on perpetual tenterhooks. He had decided that if ever HE were summoned to serve, he would just disappear. The Somers drove over, only three or four miles, on the Saturday afternoon, and the three wandered on the moor and down the cliff. No one was in sight. But how many pairs of eyes were watching, who knows? Sharpe lighting a cigarette for Harriet was an indication of untold immorality.

Evening came, the lamps were lit, and the incriminating curtains carefully drawn. The three sat before the fire in the long music room, and tried to be cosy

and jolly. But there was something wrong with the mood. After dinner it was even worse. Harriet curled herself up on the sofa with a cigarette. Sharpe spread himself in profound melancholy in his big chair, Somers sat back, nearer the window. They talked in occasional snatches, in mockery of the enemy that surrounded them. Then Somers sang to himself, in an irritating way, one German folksong after another, not in a songful, but in a defiant way.

“Annchen von Tharau” — ”Schatz, meun Schatz, reite nicht so weit von mir.” “Zu Strasburg auf der Schanz, da fiel mein Unglück ein.” This went on till Sharpe asked him to stop.

And in the silence, the tense and irritable silence that followed, came a loud bang. All got up in alarm, and followed Sharpe through the dining-room to the small entrance-room, where a dim light was burning. A lieutenant and three sordid men in the dark behind him, one with a lantern.

“Mr. Sharpe?” — the authoritative and absolutely-in-the-right voice of the puppy lieutenant.

Sharpe took his pipe from his mouth and said laconically, “Yes.”

“You’ve a light burning in your window facing the sea.”

“I think not. There is only one window, and that’s on the passage where I never go, upstairs.”

“A light was showing from that window ten minutes ago.”

“I don’t think it can have been.”

“It was.” And the stern, puppy lieutenant turned to his followers, who clustered there in the dark.

“Yes, there was a light there ten minutes since,” chimed the followers.

“I don’t see how it’s possible,” persisted Sharpe.

“Oh, well — there is sufficient evidence that it was. What other persons have you in the house — ? and this officer and gentleman stepped into the room, followed by his three Cornish weeds, one of whom had fallen into a ditch in his assiduous serving of his country, and was a sorry sight. Of course Harriet saw chiefly him, and had to laugh.

“There’s Mrs. Waugh, the housekeeper — but she’s in bed.”

The party now stood and eyed one another — the lieutenant with his three sorry braves on one hand, Sharpe, Somers, and Harriet in an old dress of soft silk on the other.

“Well, Mr. Sharpe, the light was seen.”

“I don’t see how it was possible. We’ve none of us been upstairs, and Mrs. Waugh has been in bed for half an hour.”

“Is there a curtain to the passage window?” put in Somers quietly. He had helped Sharpe in setting up house.

“I don’t believe there is,” said Sharpe. “I forgot all about it, as it wasn’t in a room, and I never go to that side of the house. Even Mrs. Waugh is supposed to go up the kitchen stairs, and so she doesn’t have to pass it.”

“She must have gone across with a candle as she went to bed,” said Somers.

But the lieutenant didn’t like being pushed into unimportance while these young men so quietly and naturally spoke together, excluding him as if he were an inferior: which they meant to do.

“You have an uncurtained window overlooking the sea, Mr. Sharpe?” he said, in his military counter-jumper voice.

“You’ll have to put a curtain to it to-morrow,” said Somers to Sharpe.

“What is your name?” chimed the lieutenant.

“Somers — I wasn’t speaking to you,” said Richard coldly. And then to Sharpe, with a note of contempt: “That’s what it is. Mrs. Waugh must have just passed with a candle.”

There was a silence. The wonderful watchers did not contradict.

“Yes, I suppose that’s it,” said Sharpe, fretfully.

“We’ll put a curtain up to-morrow,” said Somers.

The lieutenant would have liked to search the house. He would have liked to destroy its privacy. He glanced down to the music room. But Harriet, so obviously a lady, even if a hateful one; and Somers with his pale look of derision; and Sharpe so impassive with his pipe; and the weedy watchers in the background, knowing just how it all was, and ALMOST ready to take sides with the “gentleman” against the officer: they were too much for the lieutenant.

“Well, the light was there, Mr. Sharpe. Distinctly visible from the sea,” and he turned to his followers for confirmation.

“Oh, yes, a light plain enough,” said the one who had fallen into a ditch, and wanted a bit of his own back.

“A candle!” said Sharpe, with his queer, musical note of derision and fretfulness. “A candle just passing — .”

“You have an uncurtained window to the sea, and lights were showing. I shall have to report this to headquarters. Perhaps if you write and apologise to Major Caerlyon it may be passed over, if nothing of the like occurs again — .’

So they departed, and the three went back to their room, fuming with rage and mockery. They mocked the appearance and voice of the lieutenant, the appearance of the weeds, and Harriet rejoiced over the one who had fallen into a ditch. This regardless of the fact that they knew now that SOME of the watchers were lying listening in the gorse bushes under the windows, and had been lying there all the evening.

“Shall you write and apologise?” said Somers.

“Apologise! no!” replied Sharpe, with peevish contempt.

Harriet and Somers went back home on the Monday. On the Tuesday appeared Sharpe, the police had been and left him a summons to appear at the market town, charged under the Defence of the Realm Act.

“I suppose you’ll have to go,” said Somers.

“Oh, I shall go,” said he.

They waited for the day. In the afternoon Sharpe came with a white face and tears of rage and mortification in his eyes. The magistrate had told him he ought to be serving his country, and not causing mischief and skulking in an out-of-the-way corner. And he fined him twenty pounds.

“I shan’t pay it,” cried Sharpe.

“Your mother will,” said Somers.

And so it was. What was the good of putting oneself in their power in ANY way, if it could be avoided?

So the lower fields were cleared of corn, and they started on the two big fields above on the moors. Sharpe cycled over to say a farmer had asked HIM to go and help at Westyr; and for once he had gone; but he felt spiteful to Somers for letting him in for this.

But Somers was very fond of the family at Buryan farm, and he loved working with John Thomas and the girls. John Thomas was a year or two older than Somers, and at this time his dearest friend. And so he loved working all day among the corn beyond the high-road, with the savage moors all round, and the hill with its pre-Christian granite rocks rising like a great dark pyramid on the left, the sea in front. Sometimes a great airship hung over the sea, watching for submarines. The work stopped in the field, and the men watched. Then it went on again, and the wagon rocked slowly down the wild, granite road, rocked like a ship past Harriet’s sunken cottage. But Somers stayed above all day, loading or picking, or resting, talking in the intervals with John Thomas, who loved a half-philosophical, mystical talking about the sun, and the moon, the mysterious powers of the moon at night, and the mysterious change in man with the change of season, and the mysterious effects of sex on a man. So they talked, lying in the bracken or on the heather as they waited for a wain. Or one of the girls came with dinner in a huge basket, and they ate all together, so happy with the moors and sky and touch of autumn. Somers loved these people. He loved the sensitiveness of their intelligence. They were not educated. But they had an endless curiosity about the world, and an endless interest in what was RIGHT.

“Now do you think it’s right, Mr. Somers?” The times that Somers heard that question, from the girls, from Arthur, from John Thomas. They spoke in the quick Cornish way, with the West Cornish accent. Sometimes it was:

“Now do’ee think it right?”

And with their black eyes they watched the ethical issue in his face. Queer it was. Right and wrong was not fixed for them as for the English. There was still a mystery for them in what was right and what was wrong. Only one thing was wrong — any sort of PHYSICAL compulsion or hurt. That they were sure of. But as for the rest of behaviour — it was all a flux. They had none of the ethics of chivalry or of love.

Sometimes Harriet came also to tea: but not often. They loved her to come: and yet they were a little uneasy when she was there. Harriet was so definitely a lady. She liked them all. But it was a bit noli me tangere, with her. Somers was so VERY intimate with them. She couldn’t be. And the girls said: “Mrs. Somers don’t mix in wi the likes o’ we like Mr. Somers do.” Yet they were always very pleased when Harriet came.

Poor Harriet spent many lonely days in the cottage. Richard was not interested in her now. He was only interested in John Thomas and the farm people, and he was growing more like a labourer every day. And the farm people didn’t mind how long SHE was left alone, at night too, in that lonely little cottage, and with all the tension of fear upon her. Because she felt that it was SHE whom these authorities, these English, hated, even more than Somers. Because she made them feel she despised them. And as they were really rather despicable, they hated her at sight, her beauty, her reckless pride, her touch of derision. But Richard — even he neglected her and hated her. She was driven back on herself like a fury. And many a bitter fight they had, he and she.

The days grew shorter before the corn was all down from the moors. Sometimes Somers alone lay on the sheaves, waiting for the last wain to come to be loaded, while the others were down milking. And then the Cornish night would gradually come down upon the dark, shaggy moors, that were like the fur of some beast, and upon the pale-grey granite masses, so ancient and Druidical, suggesting blood-sacrifice. And as Somers sat there on the sheaves in the underdark, seeing the light swim above the sea, he felt he was over the border, in another world. Over the border, in that twilight, awesome world of the previous Celts. The spirit of the ancient, pre-Christian world, which lingers still in the truly Celtic places, he could feel it invade him in the savage dusk, making him savage too, and at the same time, strangely sensitive and subtle, understanding the mystery of blood-sacrifice: to sacrifice one’s victim, and let the blood run to the fire, there beyond the gorse upon the old grey granite: and at the same time to understand most sensitively the dark flicker of animal life about him, even in a bat, even in the writhing of a maggot in a dead rabbit. Writhe then, Life, he seemed to say to the things — and he no longer saw its sickeningness.

The old Celtic countries have never had our Latin-Teutonic consciousness, never will have. They have never been Christian, in the blue-eyed, or even in the truly Roman, Latin sense of the word. But they have been overlaid by our consciousness and our civilisation, smouldering underneath in a slow, eternal fire, that you can never put out till it burns itself out.

And this autumn Richard Lovat seemed to drift back. He had a passion, a profound nostalgia for the place. He could feel himself metamorphosing. He no longer wanted to struggle consciously along, a thought adventurer. He preferred to drift into a sort of blood-darkness, to take up in his veins again the savage vibrations that still lingered round the secret rocks, the place of the pre-Christian human sacrifice. Human sacrifice! he could feel his dark, blood-consciousness tingle to it again, the desire of it, the mystery of it. Old presences, old awful presences round the black moor-edge, in the thick dust, as the sky of light was pushed pulsing upwards, away. Then an owl would fly and hoot, and Richard lay with his soul departed back, back into the blood-sacrificial pre-world, and the sun-mystery, and the moon-power, and the mistletoe on the tree, away from his own white world, his own white, conscious day. Away from the burden of intensive mental consciousness. Back, back into semi-dark, the half-conscious, the clair-obscur, where consciousness pulsed as a passionate vibration, not as mind-knowledge.

Then would come John Thomas with the wain, and the two men would linger putting up the sheaves, linger, talking, till the dark, talking of the half-mystical things with which they both were filled. John Thomas, with his nervous ways and his quick brown eyes, was full of fear: fear of the unseen, fear of the unknown malevolencies, above all, fear of death. So they would talk of death, and the powers of death. And the farmer, in a non-mental way, understood, understood even more than Somers.

And then in the first dark they went down the hill with the wain, to part at the cottage door. And to Harriet, with her pure Teutonic consciousness, John Thomas' greeting would sound like a jeer, as he called to her. And Somers seemed to come home like an enemy, like an enemy, with that look on his face, and that pregnant malevolency of Cornwall investing him. It was a bitter time, to Harriet. Yet glamorous too.

Autumn drew on, corn-harvest was over, it was October. John Thomas drove every Thursday over the moors to market — a two hours' drive. To-day Somers would go with him — and Ann the sister also, to do some shopping. It was a lovely October morning. They passed the stony little huddle of the churchtown, and on up the hill, where the great granite boulders shoved out the land, and the barrenness was ancient and inviolable. They could see the gulls under the big

cliffs beyond — and there was a buzzard circling over the marshy place below churchtown. A Cornish, magic morning. John Thomas and Somers were walking up the hill, leaving the reins to Ann, seated high in the trap.

“One day, when the war ends, before long,” said Somers as they climbed behind the trap in the sun, past the still-flickering gorse-bushes, “we will go far across the sea — to Mexico, to Australia — and try living there. You must come too, and we will have a farm.”

“Me!” said John Thomas. “Why however should I come?”

“Why not?”

But the Cornishman smiled with that peculiar sceptical smile.

They reached town at length, over the moors and down the long hill. John Thomas was always late. Somers went about doing his shopping — and then met Ann at an eating house. John Thomas was to have been there too. But he failed them. Somers walked about the Cornish seaport — he knew it now — and by sight he too was known, and execrated. Yet the tradespeople were always so pleasant and courteous to him. And it was such a sunny day.

The town was buzzing with a story. Two German submarine officers had come into the town, dressed in clothes they had taken from an English ship they had sunk. They had stayed a night at the Mounts Bay Hotel. And two days later they had told the story to some fisherman whose fishing boat they stopped. They had shown the incredulous fisherman the hotel bill. Then they had sunk the fishing boat, sending the three fishermen ashore in the row-boat.

John Thomas, the chatterbox, should have been at the stables at five. He was an endless gossip, never by any chance punctual. Somers and Ann waited till six — all the farmers drove home, theirs was the last trap.

“Buryan’s trap — always the last,” said the ostler.

It became dark — the shops were all closing — it was night. And now the town, so busy at noon and all the afternoon, seemed cold, stony, deserted, with the wind blowing down its steep street. Nearly seven, and still no John Thomas. Ann was furious, but she knew him. Somers was more quiet: but he knew that this was a sort of deliberate insult on John Thomas’ part, and that he must never trust him again.

It was well after seven when the fellow came — smiling with subtle malevolence and excusing himself so easily.

“I shall never come with you again,” said Somers, quietly.

“I should think not, Mr. Somers,” cried Ann.

It was a two hours’ drive home — a long climb to the dark stretch of the moors — then across the moors in the cold of the night, to the steep, cliff-like descent on the north, where churchtown lay, and the sea beyond. As they drew

near to the north descent, the home face, and the darkness was below them, Somers suddenly said:

“I don’t think I shall ever drive this way again.”

“Don’t you? Why, what makes you say that?” cried the facile John Thomas.

Past nine o’clock as they came down the rocky road and saw the yellow curtain of the cottage glowing. Poor Harriet. Somers was stiff with cold as he rose to jump down.

“I’ll come down for my parcels later,” he said. Easier to take them out at the farm, and he must fetch the milk.

Harriet opened the door.

“At last you’ve come,” she said. “Something has happened, Lovat!” One of John Thomas’ sisters came out too — she had come up with Mrs. Somers out of sympathy.

“What?” he said. And up came all the fear.

It was evident Harriet had had a bad shock. She had walked in the afternoon across to Sharpe’s place, three miles away: and had got back just at nightfall, expecting Somers home by seven. She had left the doors unlocked, as they usually did. The moment she came in, in the dusk, she knew something had happened. She made a light, and looked round. Things were disturbed. She looked in her little treasure boxes — everything there, but moved. She looked in the drawers — everything turned upside down. The whole house ransacked, searched.

A terrible fear came over her. She knew she was antagonistic to the government people: in her soul she hated the fixed society with its barrenness and its barren laws. She had always been afraid — always shrunk from the sight of a policeman, as if she were guilty of heaven knows what. And now the horror had happened: all the black animosity of authority was encompassing her. The unknown of it: and the horror.

She fled down to the farm. Yes, three men had come, asking for Mr. and Mrs. Somers. They had told the one who came to the farm that Mr. Somers had driven to town, and Mrs. Somers they had seen going across the fields to churchtown. Then the men had gone up to the cottage again, and gone inside.

“And they’ve searched everything — everything,” said Harriet, shocked right through with awful fear.

“Well, there was nothing to find. They must have been disappointed,” said Richard.

But it was a shock to him also: great consternation at the farm.

“It must have been something connected with Sharpe — it must have been that,” said Somers, trying to reassure himself.

“Thank goodness the house was so clean and tidy,” said Harriet. But it was a last blow to her.

What had they taken? They had not touched Somers’ papers. But they had been through his pockets — they had taken the few loose letters from the pocket of his day-jacket — they had taken a book — and a sort of notebook with scraps of notes for essays in it — and his address book — yes, a few things like that.

“But it’ll be nothing. It’ll be something to do with Sharpe’s bother.”

But he felt sick and sullen, and wouldn’t get up early in the morning. Harriet was more prepared. She was down, dressed and tidy, making the breakfast. It was eight o’clock in the morning. Suddenly Somers heard her call:

“Lovat, they’re here. Get up.”

He heard the dread in her voice, and sprang into his clothes and came downstairs: a young officer, the burly police-sergeant, and two other loutish looking men. Somers came down without a collar.

“I have here a warrant to search your house,” said the young officer.

“But you searched it yesterday, didn’t you,” cried Harriet.

The young officer looked at her coldly, without replying. He read the search-warrant, and the two lout-detectives, in civilian clothes, began to nose round.

“And the police-sergeant will read this order to you.”

Somers, white, and very still, spoke no word, but waited. Then the police-sergeant, in rather stumbling fashion, began to read an order from the military authorities that Richard Lovat Somers and Harriet Emma Marianna Johanna Somers, of Trevetham Cottage, etc., should leave the county of Cornwall within the space of three days. And further, within the space of twenty-four hours of their arrival in any place they must report themselves at the police station of the said place, giving their address. And they were forbidden to enter any part of the area of Cornwall, etc., etc., etc.

Somers listened in silence.

“But why?” cried Harriet. “Why? What have we done?”

“I can’t say what you have done,” said the young officer in a cold tone, “but it must be something sufficiently serious. They don’t send out these orders for nothing.”

“But what is it then? What is it? *I* don’t know what we’ve done. Have we no right to know what you accuse us of?”

“No, you have no right to know anything further than what is said in the order.” And he folded up the said official foolscap, and handed it officially to Somers. Richard silently took it and read it again.

“But it’s monstrous! What have they against us? We live here simply — we do nothing at all that they can charge us with. What have we done?” cried

Harriet.

“I don’t know what you’ve done. But we can take no risks in these times — and evidently there is a risk in leaving you here.”

“But I should like to know WHAT?” cried Harriet.

“That I cannot tell you.”

“But you do KNOW?” woman-like, she persisted.

“No, I don’t even know,” he replied coldly.

Harriet broke into a few tears of fright, fear, and chagrin.

“Have we no rights at all?” she cried, furious.

“Be quiet,” said Richard to her.

“Yes. It is your duty to serve your country, if it is your country, by every means in your power. If you choose to put yourself under suspicion — .”

“Suspicion of what?”

“I tell you, I do not know, and could not tell you even if I did know.”

The foul, loutish detectives meanwhile were fumbling around, taking the books off the shelves and looking inside the clock. Somers watched them with a cold eye.

“Is this yours?” said one of the louts, producing a book with queer diagrams.

“Yes, it’s a botany notebook,” said Somers coldly.

The man secured it.

“He can learn the structure of moulds and parasites,” said Richard bitterly to Harriet.

“The house is all open, the men can search everything?” asked the officer coldly.

“You know it is,” said Somers. “You tried yesterday while we were out.” Then he asked: “Who is responsible for this? Whom can I write to?”

“You can write to Major Witham, Headquarters Southern Division, Salisbury, if it will do any good,” was the answer.

There was a pause. Somers wrote it down: not in his address book because that was gone.

“And one is treated like this, for nothing,” cried Harriet, again in tears. “For nothing, but just because I wasn’t born English. Yet one has married an Englishman, and they won’t let one live anywhere but in England.”

“It is more than that. It is more than the fact that you are not English born,” said the officer.

“Then what? What?” she cried.

He refused to answer this time. The police-sergeant looked on with troubled blue eyes.

“Nothing. It’s nothing but that, because it CAN’T be,” wept Harriet. “It can’t

be anything else, because we've never done anything else. Just because one wasn't born in England — as if one could help that. And to be persecuted like this, for nothing, for nothing else. And not even openly accused! Not even that." She wiped her tears, half enjoying it now. The police-sergeant looked into the road. One of the louts clumped downstairs and began to look once more among the books.

"That'll do here!" said the officer quietly, to the detective lout. But the detective lout wasn't going to be ordered, and persisted.

"This your sketch-book, Mr. Somers?" said the lout.

"No, those are Lady Hermione Rogers' sketches," said Somers, with derision. And the lout stuffed the book back.

"And why don't they let us go away?" cried Harriet. "Why don't they let us go to America? We don't WANT to be here if we are a nuisance. We want to go right away. Why won't they even let us do that!" She was all tear-marked now.

"They must have their reasons," said the young officer, who was getting more and more uncomfortable. He again tried to hurry up the detective lout. But they were enjoying nosing round among other people's privacies.

"And what'll happen to us if we don't go, if we just stay?" said Harriet, being altogether a female.

"You'd better not try," said the young man, grimly, so utterly confident in the absoluteness of the powers and the rightness he represented. And Somers would have liked to hit him across the mouth for that.

"Hold your tongue, Harriet," he said, turning on her fiercely. "You've said enough now. Be still, and let them do what they like, since they've the power to do it."

And Harriet was silent. And in the silence only the louts rummaging among the linen, and one looking into the bread-tin and into the tea caddy. Somers watched them with a cold eye, and that queer slight lifting of his nose, rather like a dog when it shows disgust. And the officer again tried to hurry the louts, in his low tone of command, which had so little effect.

"Where do you intend to go?" said the officer to Somers.

"Oh, just to London," said Somers, who did not feel communicative.

"I suppose they will send the things back that they take?" he said, indicating the louts.

"I should think so — anything that is not evidence."

The louts were drawing to an end: it was nearly over.

"Of course this has nothing to do with me: I have to obey orders, no matter what they are," said the young officer, half apologising.

Somers just looked at him, but did not answer. His face was pale and still and

distant, unconscious that the other people were real human beings. To him they were not: they were just THINGS, obeying orders. And his eyes showed that. The young officer wanted to get out.

At last it was over: the louts had collected a very few trifles. The officer saw them on to the road, bade them good-morning, and got out of the house as quick as he could.

“Good-morning, sir! Good-morning, mam!” said the police sergeant in tones of sympathy.

Yes, it was over. Harriet and Lovat looked at one another in silent consternation.

“Well, we must go,” she said.

“Oh, yes,” he replied.

And she studied the insolent notice to quit the area of Cornwall. In her heart of hearts she was not sorry to quit it. It had become too painful.

In a minute up came one of the farm girls to hear the news: then later Somers went down. Arthur, the boy, had heard the officer say to the police-sergeant as he went up the hill:

“Well, that’s a job I’d rather not have had to do.”

Harriet was alternately bitter and mocking: but badly shocked. Somers had had in his pocket the words of one of the Hebridean folk songs which Sharpe had brought down, and which they all thought so wonderful. On a bit of paper in his jacket-pocket, the words which have no meaning in any language apparently, but are just vocal, almost animal sounds: the Seal Woman’s Song — this they had taken.

Ver mi hiu — ravo na la vo — Ver mi hiu — ravo hovo i — Ver mi hiu — ravo na la vo — an catal — Traum — san jechar — .

What would the investigation make of this? What, oh, what? Harriet loved to think of it. Somers really expected to be examined under torture, to make him confess. The only obvious word — Traum — pure German.

The day was Friday: they must leave on Monday by the Great Western express. Started a bitter rush of packing. Somers, so sick of things, had a great fire of all his old manuscripts. They decided to leave the house as it was, the books on the shelves, to take only their personal belongings. For Somers was determined to come back. Until he had made up his mind to this, he felt paralysed. He loved the place so much. Ever since the conscription suspense began he had said to himself, when he walked up the wild, little road from his cottage to the moor: shall I see the foxgloves come out? If only I can stay till the foxgloves come. And he had seen the foxgloves come. Then it was the heather — would he see the heather? And then the primroses in the hollow down to the

sea: the tufts and tufts of primroses, where the fox stood and looked at him.

Lately, however, he had begun to feel secure, as if he had sunk some of himself into the earth there, and were rooted for ever. His soul seemed to have sunk into that Cornwall, that wild place under the moors. And now he must tear himself out. He was quite paralysed, could scarcely move. And at the farm they all looked at him with blank faces. He went back to the cottage to burn more manuscripts and pack up.

And then, like a revelation, he decided he would come back. He would use all his strength, put himself against all the authorities, and in a month or two he would come back. Before the snow-drops came in the farm garden.

“I shall be back in a month or two — three months,” he said to everybody, and they looked at him.

But John Thomas said to him:

“You remember you said you would never drive to town again. Eh?” And in the black, bright eyes Somers saw that it was so. Yet he persisted.

“It only meant not yet awhile.”

On the Monday morning he went down to say good-bye at the farm. It was a bitter moment, he was so much attached to them. And they to him. He could not bear to go. Only one was not there — the Uncle James. Many a time Somers wondered why Uncle James had gone down the fields, so as not to say good-bye.

John Thomas was driving them down in the trap — Arthur had taken the big luggage in the cart. The family at the farm did everything they could. Somers never forgot that while he and Harriet were slaving, on the Sunday, to get things packed, John Thomas came up with their dinners, from the farm Sunday dinner.

It was a lovely, lovely morning as they drove across the hill-slopes above the sea: Harriet and Somers and John Thomas. In spite of themselves they felt cheerful. It seemed like an adventure.

“I don’t know,” said John Thomas, “but I feel in myself as if it was all going to turn out for the best.” And he smiled in his bright, wondering way.

“So do I,” cried Harriet. “As if we were going to be more free.”

“As if we were setting out on a long adventure,” said Somers.

They drove through the town, where, of course, they were marked people. But it was curious how little they cared, how indifferent they felt to everybody.

At the station Somers bade good-bye to John Thomas, with whom he had been such friends.

“Well, I wonder when we shall see each other again,” said the young farmer.

“Soon. We will MAKE it soon,” said Somers. “We will MAKE it soon. And you can come to London to see us.”

“Well — if I can manage it — there’s nothing would please me better,”

replied the other. But even as he said it, Somers was thinking of the evening in town, when he and Ann had been kept waiting so long. And he knew he would not see John Thomas again soon.

During the long journey up to London Somers sat facing Harriet, quite still. The train was full: soldiers and sailors from Plymouth. One naval man talked to Harriet: bitter like all the rest. As soon as a man began to talk seriously, it was in bitterness. But many were beginning to make a mock of their own feelings even. Songs like “Good-byyyyy” had taken the place of “Bluebells,” and marked the change.

But Somers sat there feeling he had been killed: perfectly still, and pale, in a kind of after death, feeling he had been killed. He had always BELIEVED so in everything — society, love, friends. This was one of his serious deaths in belief. So he sat with his immobile face of a crucified Christ who makes no complaint, only broods silently and alone, remote. This face distressed Harriet horribly. It made her feel lost and shipwrecked, as if her heart was destined to break also. And she was in rather good spirits really. Her horror had been that she would be interned in one of the horrible camps, away from Somers. She had far less belief than he in the goodness of mankind. And she was rather relieved to get out of Cornwall. She had felt herself under a pressure there, long suffering. That very pressure he had loved so much. And so, while his still, fixed, crucified face distressed her horribly, at the same time it made her angry. What did he want to look like that for? Why didn't he show fight?

They came to London, and he tried taxi after taxi before he could get one to take them up to Hampstead. He had written to a staunch friend, and asked her to wire if she would receive them for a day or two. She wired that she would. So they went to her house. She was a little delicate lady who reminded Somers of his mother, though she was younger than his mother would have been. She and her husband had been friends of William Morris in those busy days of incipient Fabianism. Now her husband was sick, and she lived with him and a nurse and her grown-up daughter in a little old house in Hampstead.

Mrs. Redburn was frightened, receiving the tainted Somers. But she had pluck. Everybody in London was frightened at this time, everybody who was not a rabid and disgusting so-called patriot. It was a reign of terror. Mrs. Redburn was a staunch little soul, but she was bewildered: and she was frightened. They did such horrible things to you, the authorities. Poor tiny Hattie, with her cameo face, like a wise child, and her grey, bobbed hair. Such a frail little thing to have gone sailing these seas of ideas, and to suffer the awful breakdown of her husband. A tiny little woman with grey, bobbed hair, and wild, unyielding eyes. She had three great children. It all seemed a joke and a tragedy mixed, to her.

And now the war. She was just bewildered, and would not live long. Poor, frail, tiny Hattie, receiving the Somers into her still, tiny old house. Both Richard and Harriet loved her. He had pledged himself, in some queer way, to keep a place in his heart for her forever, even when she was dead. Which he did.

But he suffered from London. It was cold, heavy, foggy weather, and he pined for his cottage, the granite strewn, gorse-grown slope from the moors to the sea. He could not bear Hampstead Heath now. In his eyes he saw the farm below — grey, naked, stony, with the big, pale-roofed new barn — and the network of dark green fields with the pale-grey walls — and the gorse and the sea. Torture of nostalgia. He craved to be back, his soul was there. He wrote passionately to John Thomas.

Richard and Harriet went to a police-station for the first time in their lives. They went and reported themselves. The police at the station knew nothing about them and said they needn't have come. But next day a great policeman thumping at Hattie's door, and were some people called Somers staying there? It was explained to the policeman that they had already reported — but he knew nothing of it.

Somers wanted as quickly as possible to find rooms, to take the burden from Hattie. The American wife of an English friend, a poet serving in the army, offered her rooms in Mecklenburgh Square, and the third day after their arrival in London Somers and Harriet moved there: very grateful indeed to the American girl. They had no money. But the young woman tossed the rooms to them, and food and fuel, with a wild free hand. She was beautiful, reckless, one of the poetesses whose poetry Richard feared and wondered over.

Started a new life: anguish of nostalgia for Cornwall, from Somers. Wandering in the King's Cross Road or Theobald's Road, seeing his cottage and the road going up to the moors. He wrote twice to the headquarters at Salisbury insisting on being allowed to return. Came a reply, this could not be permitted. Then one day a man called and left a book and the little bundle of papers — a handful only — which the detectives had confiscated. A poor little show. Even the scrap of paper with *Ver mi hiu*. Again Somers wrote — but to no effect. Came a letter from John Thomas describing events in the west — the last Somers ever had from his friend.

Then Sharpe came up to London: it was too lonely down there. And they had some gay evenings. Many people came to see Somers. But Sharpe said to him:

“They're watching you still. There were two policemen near the door watching who came in.”

There was an atmosphere of terror all through London, as under the Tsar when no man dared open his mouth. Only this time it was the lowest orders of

mankind spying on the upper orders, to drag them down.

One evening there was a gorgeous commotion in Somers' rooms: four poets and three non-poets, all fighting out poetry: a splendid time. Somers ran down the stairs in the black dark — no lights in the hall — to open the door. He opened quickly — three policemen in the porch. They slipped out before they could be spoken to.

Harriet and Somers had reported at Bow Street — wonderful how little heed the police took of them. Somers could tell how the civil police loathed being under the military orders.

But watched and followed he knew he was. After two months the American friend needed her rooms. The Somers transferred to Kensington, to a flat belonging to Sharpe's mother. Again many friends came. One evening Sharpe was called out from the drawing-room: detectives in the hall enquiring about Somers, where he got his money from, etc., etc., such clowns, louts, mongrels of detectives. Even Sharpe laughed in their faces: such canaille. At the same time detectives enquiring for them at the old address: though they reported the change. Such a confusion in the official mind!

It was becoming impossible. Somers wrote bitterly to friends who had been all-influential till lately, but whom the canaille were now trying to taint also. And then he and Harriet moved to a little cottage he rented from his dear Hattie, in Oxfordshire. Once more they reported to the police in the market-town: once more the police sympathetic.

"I will report no more," said Somers.

But still he knew he was being watched all the time. Strange men questioning the cottage woman next door, as to all his doings. He began to FEEL a criminal. A sense of guilt, of self-horror began to grow up in him. He saw himself set apart from mankind, a Cain, or worse. Though of course he had committed no murder. But what might he not have done? A leper, a criminal! The foul, dense, carrion-eating mob were trying to set their teeth in him. Which meant mortification and death.

It was Christmas — winter — very cold. He and Harriet were very poor. Then he became ill. He lay in the tiny bedroom looking at the wintry sky and the deep, thatched roof of the cottage beyond. Sick. But then his soul revived. "No," he said to himself. "No. Whatever I do or have done, I am not wrong. Even if I commit what they call a crime, why should I accept THEIR condemnation or verdict? Whatever I do, I do of my own responsible self. I refuse their imputations. I despise them. They are canaille, carrion-eating, filthy-mouthed canaille, like dead-man-devouring jackals. I wish to God I could kill them. I wish I had power to blight them, to slay them with a blight, slay them in

thousands and thousands. I wish to God I could kill them off, the masses of canaille. Would they make me feel in the wrong? Would they? They shall not. Never. I will watch that they never set their unclean teeth in me, for a bite is blood-poisoning. But fear them! Feel in the wrong because of them? Never. Not if I were Cain several times over, and had killed several brothers and sisters as well. Not if I had committed all the crimes in their calendar. I will not be put in the wrong by them, God knows I will not. And I will report myself no more at their police-stations.”

So, whenever the feeling of terror came over him, the feeling of being marked-out, branded, a criminal marked out by society, marked out for annihilation, he pulled himself together, saying to himself:

“I am letting them make me feel in the wrong. I am degrading myself by feeling guilty, marked-out, and I have convulsions of fear. But I am NOT wrong. I have done no wrong, whatever I have done. That is, no wrong that society has to do with. Whatever wrongs I have done are my own, and private between myself and the other person. One may be wrong, yes, one is often wrong. But not for THEM to judge. For my own soul only to judge. Let me know them for human filth, all these pullers-down, and let me watch them, as I would watch a reeking hyaena, but never fear them. Let me watch them, to keep them at bay. But let me never admit for one single moment that THEY may be MY judges. That, never. I have judged them: they are canaille. I am a man, and I abide by my own soul. Never shall they have a chance of judging me.”

So he discovered the great secret: to stand alone as his own judge of himself, absolutely. He took his stand absolutely on his own judgment of himself. Then, the mongrel-mouthed world would say and do what it liked. This is the greatest secret of behaviour: to stand alone, and judge oneself from the deeps of one's own soul. And then, to know, to hear what the others say and think: to refer their judgment to the touchstone of one's own soul-judgment. To fear one's own inward soul, and never to fear the outside world, nay, not even one single person, nor even fifty million persons.

To learn to be afraid of nothing but one's own deepest soul: but to keep a sharp eye on the millions of the others. Somers would say to himself: “There are fifty million people in Great Britain, and they would nearly all be against me. Let them.”

So a period of quiet followed. Somers got no answers to his letters to John Thomas: it was like the evening when he had been kept waiting. The man was scared. It was an end.

And the authorities still would allow of no return to Cornwall. So let that be an end too. He wrote for his books and household linen to be sent up, the rest could

be sold.

Bitter, in Oxfordshire, to unpack the things he had loved so dearly in Cornwall. Life would never be quite the same again. Then let it be otherwise. He hardened his heart and his soul.

It was a lovely spring: and here, in the heart of England — Shakespeare's England — there was a sweetness and a humanness that he had never known before. The people were friendly and unsuspecting, though they knew all about the trouble. The police too were delicate and kindly. It was a human world once more, human and lovely: though the gangs of wood-men were cutting down the trees, baring the beautiful spring woods, making logs for trench-props.

And there was always the suspense of being once more called up for military service. "But surely," thought Somers, "if I am so vile they will be glad to leave me alone."

Spring passed on. Somers' sisters were alone, their husbands at the war. His younger sister took a cottage for him in their own bleak Derbyshire. And so he returned, after six years, to his own country. A bitter stranger too, he felt. It was northern, and the industrial spirit was permeated through everything: the alien spirit of coal and iron. People living for coal and iron, nothing else. What good was it all?

This time he would not go to the police-station to report. So one day a police-inspector called. But he was a kindly man, and a little bitter too. Strange that among the civil police, everyone that Somers met was kindly and understanding. But the so-called, brand-new military, they were insolent jackanapes, especially the stay-at-home military who had all the authority in England.

In September, on his birthday, came the third summons: On His Majesty's Service. His Majesty's Service, God help us! Somers was bidden present himself at Derby on a certain date, to join the colours. He replied: "If I am turned out of my home, and forbidden to enter the area of Cornwall: if I am forced to report myself to the police wherever I go, and am treated like a criminal, you surely cannot wish me to present myself to join the colours."

There was an interval: much correspondence with Bodmin, where they seemed to have forgotten him again. Then he received a notice that he was to present himself as ordered.

What else was there to do? But he was growing devilish inside himself. However, he went: and Harriet accompanied him to the town. The recruiting place was a sort of big Sunday School — you went down a little flight of steps from the road. In a smallish ante-room like a basement he sat on a form and waited while all his papers were filed. Beside him sat a big collier, about as old as himself. And the man's face was a study of anger and devilishness growing

under humiliation. After an hour's waiting Somers was called. He stripped as usual, but this time was told to put on his jacket over his complete nakedness.

And so — he was shown into a high, long schoolroom, with various sections down one side — bits of screens where various doctor-fellows were performing — and opposite, a long writing table where clerks and old military buffers in uniform sat in power: the clerks dutifully scribbling, glad to be in a safe job, no doubt, the old military buffers staring about. Near this Judgment-Day table a fire was burning, and there was a bench where two naked men sat ignominiously waiting, trying to cover their nakedness a little with their jackets, but too much upset to care really.

“Good God!” thought Somers. “Naked civilised men in their Sunday jackets and nothing else make the most heaven-forsaken sight I have ever seen.”

The big stark-naked collier was being measured: a big, gaunt, naked figure, with a gruesome sort of nudity. “Oh God, oh God,” thought Somers, “why do the animals none of them look like this? It doesn't look like life, like a living creature's figure. It is gruesome, with no life-meaning.”

In another section a youth of about twenty-five, stark naked too, was throwing out his chest while a chit of a doctor-fellow felt him between the legs. This naked young fellow evidently thought himself an athlete, and that he must make a good impression, so he threw his head up in a would-be noble attitude, and coughed bravely when the doctor-buffoon said cough! Like a piece of furniture waiting to be sat on, the athletic young man looked.

Across the room the military buffers looked on at the operette; occasionally a joke, incomprehensible, at the expense of the naked, was called across from the military papas to the fellows who may have been doctors. The place was full of an indescribable tone of jeering, gibing shamelessness. Somers stood in his street jacket and thin legs and beard — a sight enough for any gods — and waited his turn. Then he took off the jacket and was cleanly naked, and stood to be measured and weighed — being moved about like a block of meat, in the atmosphere of corrosive derision.

Then he was sent to the next section for eye-tests, and jokes were called across the room. Then after a time to the next section, where he was made to hop on one foot — then on the other foot — bend over — and so on: apparently to see if he had any physical deformity.

In due course to the next section where a fool of a little fellow, surely no doctor, eyed him up and down and said:

“Anything to complain of?”

“Yes,” said Somers. “I've had pneumonia three times and been threatened with consumption.”

“Oh. Go over there then.”

So in his stalky, ignominious nakedness he was sent over to another section, where an elderly fool turned his back on him for ten minutes, before looking round and saying:

“Yes. What have you to say?”

Somers repeated.

“When did you have pneumonia?”

Somers answered — he could hardly speak, he was in such a fury of rage and humiliation.

“What doctor said you were threatened with consumption? Give his name.” This in a tone of sneering scepticism.

The whole room was watching and listening. Somers knew his appearance had been anticipated, and they wanted to count him out. But he kept his head. The elderly fellow then proceeded to listen to his heart and lungs with a stethoscope, jabbing the end of the instrument against the flesh as if he wished to make a pattern on it. Somers kept a set face. He knew what he was out against, and he just hated and despised them all.

The fellow at length threw the stethoscope aside as if he were throwing Somers aside, and went to write. Somers stood still, with a set face, and waited.

Then he was sent to the next section, and the stethoscoping doctor strolled over to the great judgment table. In the final section was a young puppy, like a chemist’s assistant, who made most of the jokes. Jokes were all the time passing across the room — but Somers had the faculty of becoming quite deaf to anything that might disturb his equanimity.

The chemist-assistant puppy looked him up and down with a small grin as if to say, “Law-lummy, what a sight of a human scare-crow!” Somers looked him back again, under lowered lids, and the puppy left off joking for the moment. He told Somers to take up other attitudes. Then he came forward close to him, right till their bodies almost touched, the one in a navy blue serge, holding back a little as if from the contagion of the naked one. He put his hand between Somers’ legs, and pressed upwards, under the genitals. Somers felt his eyes going black.

“Cough,” said the puppy. He coughed.

“Again,” said the puppy. He made a noise in his throat, then turned aside in disgust.

“Turn round,” said the puppy. “Face the other way.”

Somers turned and faced the shameful monkey-faces at the long table. So, he had his back to the tall window: and the puppy stood plumb behind him.

“Put your feet apart.”

He put his feet apart.

“Bend forward — further — further — .”

Somers bent forward, lower, and realised that the puppy was standing aloof behind him to look into his anus. And that this was the source of the wonderful jesting that went on all the time.

“That will do. Get your jacket and go over there.” Somers put on his jacket and went and sat on the form that was placed endwise at the side of the fire, facing the side of the judgment table. The big, gaunt collier was still being fooled. He apparently was not very intelligent, and didn’t know what they meant when they told him to bend forward. Instead of bending with stiff knees — not knowing at all what they wanted — he crouched down, squatting on his heels as colliers do. And the doctor puppy, amid the hugest amusement, had to start him over again. So the game went on, and Somers watched them all.

The collier was terrible to him. He had a sort of Irish face with a short nose and a thin black head. This snub-nose face had gone quite blank with a ghastly voidness, void of intelligence, bewildered and blind. It was as if the big, ugly, powerful body could not OBEY words any more. Oh God, such an ugly body — not as if it belonged to a living creature.

Somers kept himself hard and in command, face set, eyes watchful. He felt his cup had been filled now. He watched these buffoons in this great room, as he sat there naked save for his jacket, and he felt that from his heart, from his spine went out vibrations that should annihilate them — blot them out, the canaille, stamp them into the mud they belonged to.

He was called at length to the table.

“What is your name?” asked one of the old parties. Somers looked at him.

“Somers,” he said, in a very low tone.

“Somers — Richard Lovat?” with an indescribable sneer.

Richard Lovat realised that they had got their knife into him. So! He had his knife in them, and it would strike deeper at last.

“You describe yourself as a writer.” He did not answer.

“A writer of what? — with a perfect sneer.

“Books — essays.”

The old buffer went on writing. Oh, yes, they intended to make him feel they had got their knife into him. They would have his beard off, too! But would they! He stood there with his ridiculous thin legs, in his ridiculous jacket, but he did not feel a fool. Oh, God, no. The white composure of his face, the slight lifting of his nose, like a dog’s disgust, the heavy, unshakable watchfulness of his eyes brought even the judgment-table to silence: even the puppy doctors. It was not till he was walking out of the room, with his jacket about his thin legs, and his beard in front of him, that they lifted their heads for a final jeer.

He dressed and waited for his card. It was Saturday morning, and he was almost the last man to be examined. He wondered what instructions they had had about him. Oh, foul dogs. But they were very close on him now, very close. They were grinning very close behind him, like hyaenas just going to bite. Yes, they were running him to earth. They had exposed all his nakedness to gibes. And they were pining, almost whimpering to give the last grab at him, and haul him to earth, a victim. Finished!

But not yet! Oh, no, not yet. Not yet, not now, nor ever. Not while life was life, should they lay hold of him. Never again. Never would he be touched again. And because they had handled his private parts, and looked into them, their eyes should burst and their hands should wither and their hearts should rot. So he cursed them in his blood, with an unremitting curse, as he waited.

They gave him his card: C2. Fit for non-military service. He knew what they would like to make him do. They would like to seize him and compel him to empty latrines in some camp. They had that in mind for him. But he had other things in mind.

He went out into accursed Derby, to Harriet. She was reassured again. But he was not. He hated the Midlands now, he hated the North. They were viler than the South, even than Cornwall. They had a universal desire to take life and down it: these horrible machine people, these iron and coal people. They wanted to set their foot absolutely on life, grind it down, and be master. Masters, as they were of their foul machines. Masters of life, as they were masters of steam-power and electric-power and above all, of money-power. Masters of money-power, with an obscene hatred of life, true spontaneous life.

Another flight. He was determined not to stop in the Derby Military Area. He would move one stage out of their grip, at least. So he and Harriet prepared to go back with their trunks to the Oxfordshire cottage, which they loved. He would not report, nor give any sign of himself. Fortunately in the village everybody was slack and friendly.

Derby had been a crisis. He would obey no more: not one more stride. If they summoned him he would disappear: or find some means of fighting them. But no more obedience: no more presenting himself when called up. By God, no! Never while he lived, again, would he be at the disposal of society.

So they moved south — to be one step removed. They had been living in this remote cottage in the Derbyshire hills: and they must leave at half-past seven in the morning, to complete their journey in a day. It was a black morning, with a slow dawn. Somers had the trunks ready. He stood looking at the dark gulf of the valley below. Meanwhile heavy clouds sank over the bare, Derbyshire hills, and the dawn was blotted out before it came. Then broke a terrific thunderstorm, and

hail lashed down with a noise like insanity. He stood at the big window over the valley, and watched. Come hail, come rain, he would go: forever.

This was his home district — but from the deepest soul he now hated it, mistrusted it even more than he hated it. As far as LIFE went, he mistrusted it utterly, with a black soul. Mistrusted it and hated it, with its smoke and its money-power, and its squirming millions who aren't human any more.

Ah, how lovely the South-west seemed, after it all. There was hardly any food, but neither he nor Harriet minded. They could pick up and be wonderfully happy again, gathering the little chestnuts in the woods, and the few last bilberries. Men were working harder than ever felling trees for trench-timber, denuding the land. But their brush fires were burning in the woods, and when they had gone, in the cold dusk, Somers went with a sack to pick up the unburnt faggots and the great chips of wood the axes had left golden against the felled logs. Flakes of sweet, pale gold oak. He gathered them in the dusk, in a sack, along with the other poor villagers. For he was poorer even than they. Still, it made him very happy to do these things — to see a big, glowing pile of wood-flakes in his shed — and to dig the garden, and set the rubbish burning in the late, wistful autumn — or to wander through the hazel copses, away to the real old English hamlets, that are still like Shakespeare — and like Hardy's Woodlanders.

Then, in November, the Armistice. It was almost too much to believe. The war was over! It WAS too much to believe. He and Harriet sat and sang German songs, in the cottage, that strange night of the Armistice, away there in the country: and she cried — and he wondered what now, now the walls would come no nearer. It had been like Edgar Allan Poe's story of the Pit and the Pendulum — where the walls come in, in, in, till the prisoner is almost squeezed. So the black walls of the war — and he had been trapped, and very nearly squeezed into the pit where the rats were. So nearly! So very nearly! And now the black walls had stopped, and he was NOT pushed into the pit, and the rats. And he knew it in his soul. What next then?

He insisted on going back to Derbyshire. Harriet, who hated him for the move, refused to go. So he went alone: back to his sisters, and to finish the year in the house which they had paid for him. Harriet refused to go. She stayed with Hattie in London.

At St. Pancras, as Somers left the taxi and went across the pavement to the station, he fell down: fell smack down on the pavement. He did not hurt himself. But he got up rather dazed, saying to himself, "Is that a bad omen? Ought I not to be going back?" But again he thought of Scipio Africanus, and went on.

The cold, black December days, alone in the cottage on the cold hills — Adam Bede country, Snowfields, Dinah Morris' home. Such heavy, cold, savage,

frustrated blackness. He had known it when he was a boy. Then Harriet came — and they spent Christmas with his sister. And when January came he fell ill with the influenza, and was ill for a long time. In March the snow was up to the window-sills of their house.

“Will the winter never end?” he asked his soul.

May brought the year’s house-rent of the Derbyshire cottage to an end: and back they went to Oxfordshire. But now the place seemed weary to him, tame, after the black iron of the North. The walls had gone — and now he felt nowhere.

So they applied for passports — Harriet to go to Germany, himself to Italy. A lovely summer went by, a lovely autumn came. But the meaning had gone out of everything for him. He had lost his meaning. England had lost its meaning for him. The free England had died, this England of the peace was like a corpse. It was the corpse of a country to him.

In October came the passports. He saw Harriet off to Germany — said good-bye at the Great Eastern Station, while she sat in the Harwich-Hook of Holland express. She had a look of almost vindictive triumph, and almost malignant love, as the train drew out. So he went back to his meaninglessness at the cottage.

Then, finding the meaninglessness too much, he gathered his few pounds together and in November left for Italy. Left England, England which he had loved so bitterly, bitterly — and now was leaving, alone, and with a feeling of expressionlessness in his soul. It was a cold day. There was snow on the Downs like a shroud. And as he looked back from the boat, when they had left Folkestone behind and only England was there, England looked like a grey, dreary-grey coffin sinking in the sea behind, with her dead grey cliffs and the white, worn-out cloth of snow above.

Memory of all this came on him so violently now in the Australian night, that he trembled helplessly under the shock of it. He ought to have gone up to Jack’s place for the night. But no, he could not speak to anybody. Of all the black throng in the dark Sydney streets, he was the most remote. He strayed round in a torture of fear, and then at last suddenly went to the Carlton Hotel, got a room, and went to bed, to be alone and think.

Detail for detail he thought out his experiences with the authorities, during the war, lying perfectly still and tense. Till now, he had always kept the memory at bay, afraid of it. Now it all came back, in a rush. It was like a volcanic eruption in his consciousness. For some weeks he had felt the great uneasiness in his unconscious. For some time he had known spasms of that same fear that he had known during the war: the fear of the base and malignant power of the mob-like authorities. Since he had been in Italy the fear had left him entirely. He had not

even remembered it, in India. Only in the quiet of Coo-ee, strangely enough, it had come back in spasms: the dread, almost the horror, of democratic society, the mob. Harriet had been feeling it too. Why? Why, in this free Australia? Why? Why should they both have been feeling this same terror and pressure that they had known during the war, why should it have come on again in Mullumbimby? Perhaps in Mullumbimby they were suspect again, two strangers, so much alone. Perhaps the secret service was making investigations about them. Ah, canaille!

Richard faced out all his memories like a nightmare in the night, and cut clear. He felt broken off from his fellow-men. He felt broken off from the England he had belonged to. The ties were gone. He was loose like a single timber of some wrecked ship, drifting over the face of the earth. Without a people, without a land. So be it. He was broken apart, apart he would remain.

CHAPTER 13. “REVENGE!” TIMOTHEUS CRIES.

AT last he had it all out with himself, right to the bitter end. And then he realised that all the time, since the year 1918, whether he was in Sicily or Switzerland or Venice or Germany or in the Austrian Tyrol, deep in his unconsciousness had lain this accumulation of black fury and fear, like frenzied lava quiescent in his soul. And now it had burst up: the fear, then the acute remembrance. So he faced it out, trembling with shock and bitterness, every detail. And then he tried to reckon it all up.

But first, why had it all come back on him? It had seemed so past, so gone. Why should it suddenly erupt like white hot lava, to set in hot black rock round the wound of his soul? Who knows? Perhaps there is a periodicity even in volcanic eruption. Or perhaps it was this contact with Kangaroo and Willie Struthers, contact with the accumulating forces of social violence. Or perhaps it was being again in a purely English-speaking country, and feeling again that queer revulsion from the English form of democracy. He realised that the oh-so-pleasant democracy of the English lower classes frightened him, always had frightened him. Yet everybody was so very pleasant and easy-going down in Mullumbimby. It REALLY seemed so free.

Free! Free! What did it mean? It was this very ultra-freedom that frightened him, like a still pause before a thunderstorm. “Let him that thinketh he stand take heed lest he fall.”

Or perhaps it was just the inversion of the season, the climate. His blood, his whole corporeal being, expected summer, and long days and short nights. And here he had wilfully come into the Southern hemisphere, with long starry nights of winter, and the late sun rising north-east behind the sea, and travelling northwards up the sky, as if running away, and setting in a cold glare north-west, behind the bluey-black range. It should have been bird-nesting time, and leaves and flowers and tall corn and full summer with cherry blossom fallen and cherries beginning to change colour. Whereas the grass was sere and brown, the earth had one winter-numb, the few deciduous trees were bare, and only the uncanny coral tree flared its flowers of red-hot iron.

Perhaps it was just this: the inversion of the seasons, the shock to his blood and his system. For, of course, the body has its own rhythm, with the sun and with the moon. The great nerve ganglia and the subtle glands have their regular times and motions, in correspondence with the outer universe. And these times

and motions had suddenly received a check from the outer universe: a distinct check. He had had an inkling of what it would be when from the ship in the Indian Ocean he had seen the great and beloved constellation Orion standing on its head as if pitching head foremost into the sea, and the bright dog Sirius coursing high above his heels in the outer air. Then he realized the inversion in the heavens.

And perhaps it was this inversion which had brought up all that corrosive and bitter fire from the bowels of his unconscious, up again into his full consciousness. If so, then let it be so.

One thing he realized, however: that if the fire had suddenly erupted in his own belly, it would erupt one day in the bellies of all men. Because there it had accumulated, like a great horrible lava pool, deep in the unconscious bowels of all men. All who were not dead. And even the dead were many of them raging in the invisible, with gnashing of teeth. But the living dead, these he could not reckon with: they with poisonous teeth like hyaenas.

Rage! Rage! Rage! The awful accumulations that lie quiescent and pregnant in the bowels of men. He thought of the big gaunt collier with the blunt, seal-like face shorn of its intelligence, squatting naked and ghastly on his heels. It passes, it passes for the time being. But in those moments there is an inward disruption, and the death-hot lava pours loose into the deepest reservoirs of the soul. One day to erupt: or else to go hard and rocky, dead.

Even the athletic young man who wanted to be approved of. Even he. He had not much true spunk. But what was he feeling now? Unless, of course, he had got into business and was successfully coining money. That seemed to be the only safety-valve: success in money-making. But how many men were successful, now?

Of course it was all necessary, the conscription, the medical examinations. Of course, of course. We all know it. But when it comes to the deepest things, men are as entirely irrational as women. You can reason with a sex-angry woman till you are black in the face. And if for a time you DO overcome her with reason, the sex-anger only arises more hideously and furiously, later. Perhaps in another guise.

There is no arguing with the instinctive passionate self. Not the least use in the world. Yes, you are quite right, quite right in all your contentions. BUT! And the BUT just explodes everything like a bomb.

The conscription, all the whole performance of the war was absolutely circumstantially necessary. It was necessary to investigate even the secret parts of a man. Agreed! Agreed! BUT — .

It was NECESSARY to put Richard Lovat and the ugly collier through that

business at Derby. Many men were put through things a thousand times worse. Agreed! Oh, entirely agreed! The war couldn't be lost, at that hour. Quite, quite, quite! Even Richard, even now, agreed fully to all these contentions. BUT — !

And there you are. BUT — . He was full of a lava fire of rage and hate, at the bottom of his soul. And he knew it was the same with most men. He felt desecrated. And he knew it was the same with most men. He felt sold. And he knew most men felt the same.

He cared for nothing now, but to let loose the hell-rage that was in him. Get rid of it by letting it out. For there was no digesting it. He had been trying that for three years, and roaming the face of the earth trying to soothe himself with the sops of travel and new experience and scenery. He knew now the worth of all sops. Once that disruption had taken place in a man's soul, and in a stress of humiliation, under the presence of COMPULSION, something has broken in his tissue and the liquid fire has run out loose into his blood, then no sops will be of any avail. The lava-fire at the bottom of a man's belly breeds more lava fire, and more, and more — till there is an eruption. As the lava fire accumulates, the man becomes more and more reckless. Till he reaches a pitch of dehumanised recklessness, and then the lid is blown off, as the top is blown off a hill to make a new volcano. Or else it all sets into rocky deadness.

Richard felt himself reaching the volcanic pitch. He had as good as reached it. And he realised that the Russians must have reached it during the war: that the Irish had got there: that the Indians in India were approaching the point: that the whole world was gradually working up to the pitch. The whole world. It was as inevitable as the coming of summer. It might be soon — it might be slow. But inevitable it was. Or else the alternative, the dead-rock barrenness.

But why? Why, oh why? Is human life just opposed to human reason? The Allies DID have to win the war. For it would certainly not have been any better letting Germany win. Unless a very great disaster might have shocked men to their deeper senses. But doubtful. Things HAD to go as they went.

So, it was just Thomas Hardy's Blind Fate? No, said Lovat to himself, no. *Fata volderem ducunt, nolentem trahunt*. The Fates lead on the willing man, the unwilling man they drag.

The Fates? What Fates? It takes a willing man to answer. Man is not a creature of circumstance, neither is he the result of cause-and-effect throughout the ages, neither is he a product of evolution, neither is he a living MIND, part of the Universal Mind. Neither is he a complicated make-up of forces and chemicals and organs. Neither is he a term of love. Neither is he the mere instrument of God's will. None of these things.

Man lives according to his own idea of himself. When circumstances begin

really to run counter to his idea of himself, he damns circumstances. When the running-counter persists, he damns the nature of things. And when it STILL persists, he becomes a fatalist. A fatalist or an opportunist — anything of that sort.

Whose fault is it? Fate's? Not at all. It is man's fault for persisting in some fixed idea of himself.

Yet, being an animal saddled with a mental consciousness, which means ideas, man MUST have some idea of himself. He just must, and those that deny it have got a more fixed idea than anybody.

Man must have some idea of himself. He must live HARD, HARD, up to this idea of himself.

But the idea is perishable. Say what you like, every idea is perishable: even the idea of God or Love or Humanity or Liberty — even the greatest idea has its day and perishes. Each formulated religion is in the end only a great idea. Once the idea becomes explicit, it is dead. Yet we must HAVE ideas.

When a man follows the true inspiration of a new, living idea, he then is the willing man whom the Fates lead onwards: like St. Paul or Pope Hildebrand or Martin Luther or Cromwell or Abraham Lincoln. But when the idea is really dead, and STILL man persists in following it, then he is the unwilling man whom the Fates destroy, like Kaiser Wilhelm or President Wilson, or, to-day, the world at large.

For the idea, or ideal of Love, Self-sacrifice, Humanity united in love, in brotherhood, in peace — all this is dead. There is no arguing about it. It is dead. The great ideal is dead.

How do we know? By putting off our conscious conceit and listening to our own soul.

So then, why will men not forgive the war, and their humiliations at the hands of these war-like authorities? Because men were COMPELLED into the service of a dead ideal. And perhaps nothing but this compulsion made them realise it WAS a dead ideal. But all those filthy little stay-at-home officers and coast-watchers and dirty-minded doctors who tortured men during the FIRST stages of the torture, did these men IN THEIR SOULS believe in what they were doing? They didn't. They HAD no souls. They had only their beastly little WILLS, which they used to bully all men with. With their wills they determined to fight for a dead ideal, and to bully every other man into compliance. The inspiring motive was the bullying. And every other man complied. Or else, by admitting a conscientious objection to war, he admitted the dead ideal, but took refuge in one of its side-tracks.

All men alike, and all women, admitted and still admit the face value of the

ideal of Love, Self-sacrifice, and Humanity united in love, brotherhood, and peace. So, they persist in the dead ideal. *Fata nolunt. Fata nolunt.* Then see how the fates betray them. In their service of the defunct ideal they find themselves utterly humiliated, SOLD. In England, Italy, Germany, India, Australia, that had been the one word men had used to describe their feeling. They had been sold. But not before they had sold themselves. Now then. The moment a man feels he has been sold, sold in the deepest things, something goes wrong with his whole mechanism. Something breaks, in his tissue, and the black poison is emitted into his blood. And then he follows a natural course, and becomes a creature of slow, or of quick, revenge. Revenge on all that the old ideal is and stands for. Revenge on the whole system. Just revenge. Even further revenge on himself.

Men revenged themselves on Athens, when they felt sold. When Rome, persisting in an old, defunct ideal, gradually made her subjects feel sold, they were revenged on her, no matter how. Constantinople and the Byzantine Empire the same. And now our turn. “Revenge,” Timotheus cries. And Timotheus is just everybody, except those that have got hold of the money or the power.

There is nothing for it but revenge. If you sow the dragon’s teeth, you mustn’t expect lilies of the valley to spring up in sweet meekness.

And Kangaroo? Kangaroo insisted on the old idea as hard as ever, though on the Power of Love rather than on the Submission and Sacrifice of Love. He wanted to take his revenge in an odour of sanctification and Lily of the Valley essence. But he was the mob, really. See his face in a rage. He was the mob: the VENGEFUL mob. Oh, God, the most terrifying of all things.

And Willie Struthers? The vengeful mob also. But if the old ideal had still a logical leaf to put forth, it was this last leaf of communism — before the lily-tree of humanity rooted in love died its final death. Perhaps better Struthers than Kangaroo.

“But what about myself?” said Richard Lovat to himself as he lay in the darkness of Sydney, his brain afire. For the horrible bitter fire seemed really to have got into his brain, burst up from his deepest bowels. “What about me? Am I too Timotheus crying REVENGE?”

Oh, revenge, yes, he wanted to be avenged. He wanted to be avenged. Especially when he felt tangled up in the horrible human affair, the ideal become like an octopus with a ghastly eye in the centre, and white arms enwreathing the world. Oh, then he wanted to be avenged.

But now, for the moment he felt he had cut himself clear. He was exhausted and almost wrecked — but he felt clear again. If no other ghastly arm of the octopus should flash out and encircle him.

For the moment he felt himself lying inert, but clear, the dragon dead. The

ever-renewed dragon of a great old ideal, with its foul poison-breath. It seemed, as if, for himself, he had killed it.

That was now all he wanted: to get clear. Not to save humanity or to help humanity or to have anything to do with humanity. No — no. Kangaroo had been his last embrace with humanity. Now, all he wanted was to cut himself clear. To be clear of humanity altogether, to be alone. To be clear of love, and pity, and hate. To be alone from it all. To cut himself finally clear from the last encircling arm of the octopus humanity. To turn to the old dark gods, who had waited so long in the outer dark.

Humanity could do as it liked: he did not care. So long as he could get his own soul clear. For he believed in the inward soul, in the profound unconscious of man. Not an ideal God. The ideal God is a proposition of the mental consciousness, all-too-limitedly human. “No,” he said to himself. “There IS God. But forever dark, forever unrealisable: forever and forever. The unutterable name, because it can never have a name. The great living darkness which we represent by the glyph, God.”

There is this ever-present, living darkness inexhaustible and unknowable. It IS. And it is all the God and the gods.

And every LIVING human soul is a well-head to this darkness of the living unutterable. Into every living soul wells up the darkness, the unutterable. And then there is travail of the visible with the invisible. Man is in travail with his own soul, while ever his soul lives. Into his unconscious surges a new flood of the God-darkness, the living unutterable. And this unutterable is like a germ, a foetus with which he must travail, bringing it at last into utterance, into action, into BEING.

But in most people the soul is withered at the source, like a woman whose ovaries withered before she became a woman, or a man whose sex-glands died at the moment when they should have come into life. Like unsexed people, the mass of mankind is soulless. Because to persist in resistance of the sensitive influx of the dark gradually withers the soul, makes it die, and leaves a human idealist and an automaton. Most people are dead, and scurrying and talking in the sleep of death. Life has its automatic side, sometimes in direct conflict with the spontaneous soul. Then there is a fight. And the spontaneous soul must extricate itself from the meshes of the ALMOST automatic white octopus of the human ideal, the octopus of humanity. It must struggle clear, knowing what it is doing: not waste itself in revenge. The revenge is inevitable enough, for each denial of the spontaneous dark soul creates the reflex of its own revenge. But the greatest revenge on the lie is to get clear of the lie.

The long travail. The long gestation of the soul within a man, and the final

parturition, the birth of a new way of knowing, a new God-influx. A new idea, true enough. But at the centre, the old anti-idea: the dark, the unutterable God. This time not a God scribbling on tablets of stone or bronze. No everlasting decalogues. No sermons on mounts, either. The dark God, the forever unrevealed. The God who is many gods to many men: all things to all men. The source of passions and strange motives. It is a frightening thought, but very liberating.

“Ah, my soul,” said Richard to himself, “you have to look more ways than one. First to the unutterable dark of God: first and foremost. Then to the utterable and sometimes very loud dark of that woman Harriet. I must admit that only the dark god in her fighting with my white idealism has got me so clear: and that only the dark god in her answering the dark god in me has got my soul heavy and fecund with a new sort of infant. But even now I can’t bring it forth. I can’t bring it forth. I need something else. Some other answer.”

Life makes no absolute statement: the true life makes no absolute statement. “Thou shalt have no other God before me.” The very commandment suggests that it is possible to have other gods, and to put them before Jehovah. “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.” But oh deepest of perplexing questions, HOW do I love myself? Am I to love my neighbour as if he WERE myself? But my very love makes me know that he ISN’T myself, and that therein lies his lovableness, unless I am a conceited prig. Am I to love my neighbour as much as myself? And how much do I love myself? It is a wildly problematic commandment. Supposing I love my neighbour more than myself. That again is a catastrophe.

Since every man must love himself in a different way — unless he is a materialist or a prig — he must love his neighbour in a different way. So Christ’s commandment is as large as life, and its meaning can never be fixed. I sometimes hate myself: and my neighbour as myself.

Life makes no absolute statement. It is all Call and Answer. As soon as the Call ceases, the Answer is invalid. And till the Answer comes, a Call is but a crying in the wilderness. And every Answer must wait until it hears the Call. Till the Call comes, the Answer is but an unborn foetus.

And so it is. Life is so wonderful and complex, and ALWAYS relative. A man’s soul is a perpetual call and answer. He can never be the call and the answer in one: between the dark God and the incarnate man: between the dark soul of woman, and the opposite dark soul of man: and finally, between the souls of man and man, strangers to one another, but answerers. So it is for ever, the eternal weaving of calls and answers, and the fabric of life woven and perishing again. But the calls never cease, and the answers never fail for long. And when

the fabric becomes grey and machine-made, some strange clarion-call makes men start to smash it up. So it is.

BLESSED ARE THE PURE IN HEART. That is absolute truth, a statement of living relativity, because the pure in heart are those who quiver to the dark God, to the call of woman, and to the call of men. The pure in heart are the listeners and the answerers. But Rameses II was no doubt as pure in heart as John the Evangelist. Indeed perhaps purer, since John was an INSISTER. To be pure in heart, man must listen to the dark gods as well as to the white gods, to the call to blood-sacrifice as well as to the eucharist.

BLESSED ARE THE POOR IN SPIRIT. It depends. If it means LISTENING. Not if it means taking up a permanent attitude.

BLESSED ARE THE PEACEMAKERS. It depends. If it means ANSWERING. Not if it means enforcing the peace, like policemen.

BLESSED ARE THE MEEK. It depends on the occasion.

BLESSED ARE THEY THAT MOURN. It depends altogether.

BLESSED ARE THEY THAT DO HUNGER AND THIRST AFTER RIGHTEOUSNESS. Ah, yes, but the righteousness of the profound listener, and of the answerer who will answer come what may. Not any other righteousness of the commandment sort.

BLESSED ARE YE WHEN MEN SHALL DESPISE YOU. Nay, nay, it is rather: UNBLESSED are the despisers — .

After all his terrific upheaval, Richard Lovat at last gave it up, and went to sleep. A man must even know how to give up his own earnestness, when its hour is over, and not to bother about anything any more, when he's bothered enough.

CHAPTER 14. BITS.

The following day Somers felt savage with himself again. "Fool that I am, fool!" he said, mentally kicking himself. And he looked at the big pink spread of his Sydney Bulletin viciously. The Bulletin was the only periodical in the world that really amused him. The horrible stuffiness of English newspapers he could not stand: they had the same effect on him as fish-balls in a restaurant, loathsome stuffy fare. English magazines were too piffling, too imbecile. But the "Bully", even if it was made up all of bits, and had neither head nor tail nor feet nor wings, was still a lively creature. He liked its straightforwardness and the kick in some of its tantrums. It beat no solemn drums. It had no deadly earnestness. It was just stoical, and spitefully humorous. Yes, at the moment he liked the Bulletin better than any paper he knew, though even the Bulletin tried a dowdy bit of swagger sometimes, especially on the pink page. But then the pink page was just "literary", and who cares?

Who cares, anyhow? Perhaps a bit sad, after all. But more fool you for being sad.

So he rushed to read the "bits". They would make Bishop Latimer forget himself and his martyrdom at the stake.

1805: The casual Digger of war-days has carried it into civvies. Sighted one of the original Tenth at the Outer Harbour (Adelaide) wharf last week fishing. His sinker was his 1914 Star.

Yes, couldn't Somers just see that forlorn Outer Harbour at Adelaide, and the digger, like some rag of sea-weed dripping over the edge of the wharf fishing, and using his medal for a weight?

Wilfrido: A recent advertisement for the Wellington (New Zealand) Art Gallery attracted 72 applicants. Among them were two solicitors (One an Oxford M.A.); five sheepfarmers, on whose lands the mortgagee had foreclosed; and a multitude of clerks. The post is not exactly a sinecure, either; it demands attendance on seven days a week at 150 pounds per annum.

Then a little cartoon of Ivan, the Russian workman, going for a tram-drive, and taking huge bundles of money with him, sackfuls of roubles, to pay the fare. The "Bully" was sardonic about Bolshevism.

Ned Kelly: Hearing the deuce of a racket in the abo (aborigines) camp near our place, we strolled over to see what was wrong, and saw a young Binghi giving his gin a father of a hiding for making eyes at another buck. Every

respectable Binghi has the right to wallop his missis, but this one laid it on so much that he knocked her senseless. This enraged her relatives, and they went for him en masse, while two or three gins applied restoratives to the battered wife. She soon came round, and, seeing how things were, grabbed a waddy and went to the assistance of her lord and master. In the end the twain routed the phalanxed relations. Same old woman, whatever her line.

Bits about bullock drivers and the biggest loads on record, about the biggest piece of land ploughed by a man in a day, recipes for mange in horses, twins, turnips, accidents to reverend clergymen, and so on.

Pick: In the arid parts out back the wild birds infallibly indicate to the wayfarer when the water in his bag must be vigorously conserved. If in the early morning they descend in flocks to the plain, and there collect the globules of dew among the dry stalks of grass, it means that every tank, gilgal and puddle-hole within a bird's drinking flight has gone dry.

Cellu Lloyd: Before you close down on mangey horses here's a cure I've never known to fail. To one bullock's gall add kerosene to make up a full pint. Heat sufficiently to enable it to mix well, not forgetting, of course, that half of it is kerosene. When well mixed add one teaspoonful of chrysophanic acid. Bottle and shake well. Before applying take a hard scrubbing brush and thoroughly scrub the part with carbolic soap and hot water, and when applying the mixture use the brush again. In one case I struck a pair of buggy ponies that had actually bitten pieces from each other, and rubbed down a hundred yards or so of fence in trying to allay the burning itch. Two months afterwards they were growing hair and gaining condition, and not a trace of mange remained. It is wonderful, however, how lightly some horse-owners treat the matter. When a horse works hard all day, and spends the night rubbing a fence flat in his itch frenzy, he at once loses condition and usefulness; but in most cases the owner builds the fence stronger instead of giving the unfortunate animal the necessary attention.

This recipe brought many biting comments in later issues.

Somers liked the concise, laconic style. It seemed to him manly and without trimmings. Put ship-shape in the office, no doubt. Sometimes the drawings were good, and sometimes they weren't.

Lady (who has just opened door to country girl carrying suitcase): "I am suited. A country girl has been engaged, and I'm getting her to-morrow."

Girl: "I'm her; and you're not. The 'ouse is too big."

There, thought Somers, you have the whole spirit of Australian labour.

K. Sped: A week or two back a Mildura (Victoria) motor-cyclist ran over a tiger-snake while travelling at 35 m.p.h. Ten minutes later the leg became itchy, and shortly afterwards, feeling giddy, he started back to the local hospital. He

made a wobbly passage and collapsed at the hospital gates. He was bad for a week, and was told that if the reptile had not struck him on the bone he would never have reached the ward. The snake must have doubled up when the wheel struck it, and by the merest fluke struck the rider's leg in mid-air.

Fraoch: I knew another case of a white girl marrying an aboriginal about an years ago on the Northern Rivers (New South Wales). She was rather pretty, a descendant of an English family. Binghi was a landed proprietor, having acquired a very decent estate on the death of a former spinster employer. (Binghi must have had "a way wid 'im"). He owned a large, well-furnished house, did himself well, and had a fair education, and was a good rough-rider. But every year the "call of the wild" came to him, and he would leave his wife and kids (they had three) and take himself to an old tumble-down hut in the bush, and there for a month or two live in solitude on his natural tucker. Under the will of the aforesaid spinster, upon Binghi's demise the estate was to revert to her relatives. With an optimism that was not without a pathos of its own, they used to trot out every outlaw in the district for their dusky friend to ride; but his neck was still intact when I left.

Sucre: Peering through her drawing-room window shortly before lunch, the benevolent old suburban lady saw a shivering man in a ruined overcoat. Not all the members of the capitalist classes are iron-souled creatures bent on grinding the faces of the afflicted, yet virtuous poor. Taking a ten shilling note from a heavily-beaded bag, she scribbled on a piece of paper the words: "Cheer Up", put both in an envelope, and told the maid to give it to the outcast from her. While the family was at dinner that evening a ring sounded at the front door. Argument followed in the hall between a hoarse male voice and that of the maid. "You can't come in. They're at dinner." "I'd RATHER come in miss. Always like for to fix these things up in person." "You can't come." Another moment and the needy wayfarer was in the diningroom. He carefully laid five filthy 1 pound notes on the table before his benefactress. "There you are, mum," he said, with a rough salute. "Cheer Up won all right. I'm mostly on the corner, race days, as your cook will tell you; an' I'd like to say that if any uv your FRIENDS —."

Bits, bits, bits. Yet Richard Lovat read on. It was not mere anecdotage. It was the sheer momentaneous life of the continent. There was no consecutive thread. Only the laconic courage of experience.

All the better. He could have kicked himself for wanting to help mankind, join in revolutions or reforms or any of that stuff. And he kicked himself still harder thinking of his frantic struggles with the "soul" and the "dark god" and the "listener" and the "answerer". Blarney — blarney — blarney! He was a preacher

and a blatherer, and he hated himself for it. Damn the “soul”, damn the “dark god”, damn the “listener” and the “answerer”, and above all, damn his own interfering, nosy self.

What right had he to go nosing round Kangaroo, and making up to Jaz or to Jack? Why couldn't he keep off it all? Let the whole show go its own gay course to hell, without Mr. Richard Lovat Somers trying to show it the way it should go.

A very strong wind had got up from the west. It blew down from the dark hills in a fury, and was cold as flat ice. It blew the sea back until the great water looked like dark, ruffled mole-fur. It blew it back till the waves got littler and littler, and could hardly uncurl the least swish of a rat-tail of foam.

On such a day his restlessness had driven them on a trip along the coast to Wolloona. They got to the lost little town just before mid-day, and looked at the shops. The sales were on, and prices were “smashed to bits”, “Prices Smashed to Bits”, in big labels. Harriet, of course, fascinated in the Main Street, that ran towards the sea, with the steep hills at the back. “Hitch your motor to a star — Star Motor Company.” “Your piano is the most important article of furniture in your drawing-room. You will not be proud of your drawing-room unless your piano has a HANDSOME APPEARANCE and a BEAUTIFUL TONE. Both these requisites — .”

It was a wonderful Main Street, and, thank heaven, out of the wind. There were several large but rather scaring brown hotels; with balconies all round: there was a yellow stucco church with a red-painted tin steeple, like a weird toy: there were high roofs and low roofs, all corrugated iron: and you came to an opening, and there, behold, were one or two forlorn bungalows inside their wooden palings, and then the void. The naked bush, sinking in a hollow to a sort of marsh, and then down the coast some sort of “works”, brick-works or something, smoking. All as if it had tumbled haphazard off the pantechicon of civilisation as it dragged round the edges of this wild land, and there lay, busy but not rooted in. As if none of the houses had any foundations.

Bright the sun, the air of marvellous clarity, tall stalks of cabbage palms rising in the hollow, and far off, tufted gum trees against a perfectly new sky, the tufts at the end of wire branches. And farther off, blue, blue hills. In the Main Street, large and expensive motor-cars and women in fuzzy fur coats; long, quiescent Australian men in tired-out-looking navy blue suits trotting on brown ponies, with a carpet-bag in one hand, doing the shopping; girls in very much-made hats, also flirtily shopping; three boys with big, magnificent bare legs, lying in a sunny corner in the dust; a lonely white pony hitched as if forever to a post at a street-corner.

“I like it,” said Harriet. “It doesn't feel FINISHED.”

“Not even begun,” he laughed.

But he liked it too: even the slummy-ness of some of the bungalows inside their wooden palings, drab-wood, decrepit houses, old tins, broken pots, a greeny-white pony reminding one of a mildewed old shoe, two half-naked babies sitting like bits of live refuse in the dirt, but with bonny, healthy bare legs: the awful place called “The Travellers’ Rest — Mrs. Cuddy’s Boarding Home” — a sort of blind, squalid, corner building made of wood and tin, with flat pieces of old lace curtain nailed inside the windows, and the green blinds hermetically drawn. What must it have been like inside? Then an open space, and coral-trees bristling with red crest-flowers on their bare, cold boughs: and the hollow space of the open country, and the marvellous blue hills of the distance.

The wind was cold enough to make you die. Harriet was disgusted at having been dragged away from home. They trailed to the sea to try and get out of it, for it blew from the land, and the sun was hot. On the bay one lone man flinging a line into the water, on the edge of the conch-shaped, sloping sands. Dark-blue water, ruffled like mole-fur, and flicked all over with froth as with bits of feather-fluff. And many white gannets turning in the air like a snowstorm and plunging down into the water like bombs. And fish leaped in the furry water, as if the wind had turned them upside-down. And the gannets dropping and exploding into the wave, and disappearing. On the sea’s horizon, so perfectly clear, a steamer like a beetle walking slowly along. Clear, with a non-earthly clarity.

Harriet and Somers sat and ate sandwiches with a little sand, she dazed but still expostulating. Then they went to walk on the sea’s edge, where the sands might be firm. But the beach sloped too much, and they were not firm. The lonely fisherman held up his thin silvery line for them to pass under.

“Don’t bother,” said Somers.

“Right O!” said he.

He had a sad, beery moustache, a very cold-looking face, and, of course, a little boy, his son, no doubt, for a satellite.

There were little, exquisite pink shells, like Venetian pink glass with white veins or black veins round their sharp little steeples. Harriet loved them, among her grumbles, and they began to gather them: “for trimmings”, said Harriet. So, in the flat-icy wind, that no life had ever softened and no god ever tempered, they crouched on the sea’s edge picking these marvellous little shells.

Suddenly, with a cry, to find the water rushing round their ankles and surging up their legs, they dragged their way wildly forward with the wave, and out and up the sand. Where immediately a stronger blast seized Lovat’s hat and sent it spinning to the sea again, and he after it like a bird. He caught it as the water

lifted it, and then the waste of waters enveloped him. Above his knees swirled the green flood, there was water all around him swaying, he looked down at it in amazement, reeling and clutching his hat.

Then once more he clambered out. Harriet had fallen on her knees on the sand in a paroxysm of laughter, and there she was doubled up like a sack, shrieking between her gasps:

“His hat! His hat! He wouldn’t let it go” — shrieks, and her head like a sand-bag flops to the sand — ”no — not if he had to swim” — shrieks — ”swim to Samoa.”

He was looking at his wet legs and chuckling with his inward laughter. Vivid, the blue sky: intensely clear, the dark sea, the yellow sands, the swoop of the bay, the low headlands: clear like a miracle. And the water bubbling in his shoes as he walked rolling up the sands.

At last she recovered enough to crawl after him. They sat in a sand-hollow under a big bush with odd red berries, and he wrung out his socks, and all he could of his underpants and trousers. Then he put on his socks and shoes again, and they set off for the station.

“The Pacific water,” he said, “is so very seaeey, it is almost warm.”

At which, looking at his wet legs and wet hat, she went off into shrieks again. But she made him be quick, because there was a train they could catch.

However in the Main Street they thought they would buy another pair of socks. So he bought them, and changed in the shop. And they missed the train, and Harriet expostulated louder.

They went home in a motor-bus and a cloud of dust, with the heaven bluer than blue above, the hills dark and fascinating, and the land so remote seeming. Everything so clear, so very distinct, and yet so marvellously aloof.

All the miles alongside the road tin bungalows in their paling fences: and a man on a pony, in a long black overcoat and a cold nose, driving three happy, fleecy cows, long men in jerseys and white kerchiefs round their necks, a la Buffalo Bill, riding nice slim horses; a woman riding astride top speed on the roadside grass. A motor-car at the palings of one of the bungalows. A few carts coming.

And the occupants of the bus bouncing and bobbing like a circus, because of the very bumpy road.

“Shakes your dinner down,” said the old woman with the terribly home-made hat — oh, such difficult, awful hats.

“It does, if you’ve had any,” laughed Harriet.

“Why, you’ve ‘ad your dinner, “aven’t you?”

As concerned as if Harriet was her own stomach, such a nice old woman. And

a lovely little boy with the bright, wide, gentle eyes of these Australians. So alert and alive and with that loveliness that almost hurts one. Absolute trust in the “niceness” of the world. A tall, stinky, ginger man with the same bright eyes and a turned-up nose and long stinky legs. An elderly man with bright, friendly, elderly eyes and careless hair and careless clothing. He was Joe, and the other was Alf. Real careless Australians, careless of their appearance, careless of their speech, of their money, of everything — except of their happy-go-lucky, democratic friendliness. Really nice, with bright, quick, willing eyes. Then a young man, perhaps a commercial traveller, with a suitcase. He was quite smartly dressed, and had fancy socks. He was one of those with the big, heavy legs, heavy thighs and calves that showed even in his trousers. And he was physically very self-conscious, very self-conscious of Lovat and Harriet. The driver’s face was long and deep red. He was absolutely laconic. And yet, absolutely willing, as if life held no other possibility than that of being an absolutely willing citizen. A fat man with a fat little girl waiting at one of the corners.

“Up she goes!” he said as he lifted her in.

A perpetual, unchanging willingness, and an absolute equality. The same good-humoured, right-you-are approach from everybody to everybody. “Right-you-are! Right-O!” Somers had been told so many hundreds of times, Right-he-was, Right-O!, that he almost had dropped into the way of it. It was like sleeping between blankets — so cosy. So cosy.

They were really awfully nice. There was a winsome charm about them. They none of them seemed mean, or tight, or petty.

The young man with the fine suit and the great legs put down his money, gently and shyly as a girl, beside the driver on the little window-ledge. Then he got out and strode off, shy and quick, with his suitcase.

“Hey!”

The young man turned at the driver’s summons, and came back.

“Did yer pay me?”

The question was put briskly, good-humouredly, with a touch even of tenderness. The young man pointed to the money. The driver glanced round and saw it.

“Oh! Right you are! Right-O!”

A faint little smile of almost tender understanding, and the young man turned again. And the driver bustled to carry out some goods. The way he stooped to pick up the heavy wooden box in his arms; so WILLING to stoop to burdens. So long, of course, as his Rights of Man were fully recognised. You mustn’t try any superior tricks with him.

Well, it was really awfully nice. It was touching. And it made life so easy, so easy.

Of course these were not government servants. Government servants have another sort of feeling. They feel their office, even in New South Wales — even a railway-clerk. Oh, yes.

So nice, so nice, so gentle. The strange, bright-eyed gentleness. Of course, really rub him the wrong way, and you've got a Tartar. But not before you've asked for one. Gentle as a Kangaroo, or a wallaby, with that wide-eyed, bright-eyed alert, RESPONSIBLE gentleness Somers had never known in Europe. It had a great beauty. And at the same time it made his spirits sink.

It made him feel so sad underneath, or uneasy, like an impending disaster. Such a charm. He was so tempted to commit himself to this strange continent and its strange people. It was so fascinating. It seemed so free, an absence of any form of stress whatsoever. No strain in any way, once you could accept it.

He was so tempted, save for a sense of impending disaster at the bottom of his soul. And there a voice kept saying: "No, no. No, no. It won't do. You've got to have a reversion. You can't carry this mode any further. You've got to have a recognition of the innate, sacred separateness."

So when they were walking home in a whirl of the coldest, most flat-edged wind they had ever known, he stopped in front of her to remark:

"Of course you can't go on with a soft, oh-so-friendly life like this here. You've got to have an awakening of the old recognition of the aristocratic principle, the INNATE difference between people."

"Aristocratic principle!" she shrieked on the wind. "You should have seen yourself, flying like a feather into the sea after your hat. Aristocratic PRINCIPLE!" She shrieked with laughter.

"There you are, you see," he said to himself. "I'm at it again". And he laughed too.

The wind blew them home. He made a big fire, and changed, and they drank coffee made with milk, and ate buns.

"Thank heaven for a home," he said, as they sat in the dark, big rooms at Cooe, and ate their buns, and looked out of the windows and saw here as well a whirl of gannets like a snowstorm, and a dark sea littered with white fluffs. The wind roared in the chimney, and for the first time the sea was inaudible.

"You see," she said, "how thankful you are for a home."

"Chilled to the bone!" he said. "I'm chilled to the bone with my day's pleasure-outing."

So they drew up the couch before the fire, and he piled rugs on her and jarrah chunks on the fire, and at last it was toastingly warm. He sat on a little barrel

which he had discovered in the shed, and in which he kept the coal for the fire. He had been at a loss for a lid to this barrel, till he had found a big tin-lid thrown out on the waste lot. And now the wee barrel with the slightly rusty tin lid was his perch when he wanted to get quite near the fire. Harriet hated it, and had moments when she even carried the lid to the cliff to throw it in the sea. But she brought it back, because she knew he would be so indignant. She reviled him, however.

“Shameful! Hideous! Old tin lids! How can you SIT on it? How you can bring yourself to sit on such a thing, and not feel humiliated. Is that your aristocratic principle?”

“I put a cushion on it,” he said.

As he squatted on his tub this evening in the fire-corner, she suddenly turned from her book and cried:

“There he is, on his throne! Sitting on his aristocratic principle!” And again she roared with laughter.

He, however, shook some coal out of the little tub on to the fire, replaced the tin lid and the cushion, and resumed his thoughts. The fire was very warm. She lay stretched in front of it on the sofa, covered with an eiderdown, and reading a Nat Gould novel, to get the real tang of Australia.

“Of course,” he said, “this land always gives me the feeling that it doesn’t WANT to be touched, it doesn’t WANT men to get hold of it.”

She looked up from her Nat Gould.

“Yes,” she admitted slowly. “And my ideal has always been a farm. But I know now. The farms don’t really belong to the land. They only scratch it and irritate it, and are never at one with it.”

Whereupon she returned to her Nat Gould, and there was silence save for the hollow of the wind. When she had finished her paper-backed book she said:

“It’s just like them — just like they THINK they are.”

“Yes,” he said vaguely.

“But, bah!” she added, “they make me sick. So absolutely dull — worse than an ‘At Home’ in the middle classes.”

And after a silence, another shriek of laughter suddenly.

“Like a flying-fish! Like a flying-fish dashing into the waves! Dashing into the waves after his hat — .”

He giggled on his tub.

“Fancy, that I’m here in Coo-ee after my day’s outing! I can’t believe it. I shall call you the flying-fish. It’s hard to believe that one was so many things in one day. Suddenly the water! Won’t you go now and do the tailor? Twenty to eight! The bold buccaneer!”

The tailor was a fish that had cost a shilling, and which he was to prepare for supper.

Globe: There can't be much telepathy about bullocks, anyhow. In Gippsland (Victoria) last season a score of them were put into a strange paddock, and the whole 20 were found drowned in a hole next morning. Tracks showed that they had gone each on his own along a path, overbalanced one after the other, and were unable to clamber up the rocky banks.

That, thought Richard at the close of the day, is a sufficient comment on herd-unity, equality, domestication, and civilisation. He felt he would have liked to climb down into that hole in which the bullocks were drowning and beat them all hard before they expired, for being such mechanical logs of life.

Telepathy! Think of the marvellous vivid communication of the huge sperm whales. Huge, grand, phallic beasts! Bullocks! Geldings! Men! R.L. wished he could take to the sea and be a whale, a great surge of living blood: away from these all-too-white people, who ought ALL to be called Cellu Lloyd, not only the horse-mange man.

Man is a thought-adventurer. Man is more, he is a life-adventurer. Which means he is a thought-adventurer, an emotion-adventurer, and a discoverer of himself and of the outer universe. A discoverer.

"I am a fool," said Richard Lovat, which was the most frequent discovery he made. It came, moreover, every time with a new shock of surprise and chagrin. Every time he climbed a new mountain range and looked over, he saw, not only a new world, but a big anticipatory fool on this side of it, namely, himself.

Now a novel is supposed to be a mere record of emotion-adventures, flounderings in feelings. We insist that a novel is, or should be, also a thought-adventure, if it is to be anything at all complete.

"I am a fool," thought Richard to himself, "to imagine that I can flounder in a sympathetic universe like a fly in the ointment." We think of ourselves, we think of the ointment, but we do not consider the fly. It fell into the ointment, crying: "Ah, here is a pure and balmy element in which all is unalloyed goodness. Here is attar of roses without a thorn." Hence the fly in the ointment: embalmed in balm. And our repugnance.

"I am a fool," said Richard to himself, "to be floundering round in this easy, cosy, all-so-friendly world. I feel like a fly in the ointment. For heaven's sake let me get out. I suffocate."

Where to? If you're going to get out you must have something to get out on to. Stifling in unctuous sympathy of a harmless humanity.

"Oh," cried the stifling R. "Where is my Rock of Ages?"

He knew well enough. It was where it always has been: in the middle of him.

“Let me get back to my own self,” he panted, “hard and central in the centre of myself. I am drowning in this merge of harmless, this sympathetic humanity. Oh, for heaven’s sake let me crawl out of the sympathetic smear, and get myself clean again.”

Back to his own centre — back — back. The inevitable recoil.

“Everything,” said R. to himself, in one of those endless conversations with himself which were his chief delight, “everything is relative.”

And flop he went into the pot of spikenard.

“Not quite,” he gasped, as he crawled out. “Let me drag my isolate and absolute individual self out of this mess.”

Which is the history of relativity in man. All is relative as we go flop into the ointment: or the treacle or the flame. But as we crawl out, or flutter out with a smell of burning, the ABSOLUTE holds us spellbound. Oh to be isolate and absolute, and breathe clear.

So that even relativity is only relative. Relative to the absolute.

I am sorry to have to stand, a sorry sight, preening my wings on the brink of the ointment-pot, thought Richard. But from this vantage ground let me preach to myself. He preached, and the record was taken down for this gramophone of a novel.

No, the self is absolute. It may be relative to everything else in the universe. But to itself it is an absolute.

Back to the central self, the isolate, absolute self.

“Now,” thought Richard to himself, waving his front paws with gratification: “I must sound the muezzin and summon all men back to their central, isolate selves.”

So he drew himself up, when — urch!! He was sluthering over the brim of the ointment pot into the balm of humanity once more.

“Oh, Lord, I nearly did it again,” he thought as he clambered out with a sick heart. “I shall do it once too often. The bulk of mankind haven’t got any central selves: haven’t got any. They’re all bits.”

Nothing but his fright would have struck this truth out of him. So he crouched still, like a fly very tired with crawling out of the ointment, to think about it.

“The bulk of people haven’t got any central selves. They’re all bits.”

He knew it was true, and he felt rather sick of the sweet odour of the balm of human beatitudes, in which he had been so nearly lost.

“It takes how many thousand facets to make the eye of a fly — or a spider?” he asked himself, being rather hazy scientifically. “Well, all these people are just facets: just bits, that fitted together make a whole. But you can fit the bits together time after time, yet it won’t bring the bug to life.”

The people of this terrestrial sphere are all bits. Isolate one of them, and he is still only a bit. Isolate your man in the street, and he is just a rudimentary fragment. Supposing you have the misfortune to have your little toe cut off. That little toe won't at once rear on its hind legs and begin to announce: "I'm an isolated individual with an immortal soul." It won't. But your man in the street will. And he is a liar. He's only a bit, and he's only got a minute share of the collective soul. Soul of his own he has none: and never will have. Just a share in the collective soul, no more. Never a thing by himself.

Damn the man in the street, said Richard to himself. Damn the collective soul, it's a dead rat in a hole. Let humanity scratch its own lice.

Now I'll sound my muezzin again. THE MAN BY HIMSELF. 'Allah bismallah! God is God and man is man and has a soul of his own. Each man to himself! Each man back to his own soul! Alone, alone, with his own soul alone. God is God and man is man and the man in the street is a louse.'

Whatever your relativity, that's the starting point and the finishing point: a man alone with his own soul: and the dark God beyond him.

A man by himself.

Begin then.

Let the men in the street — ugh, horrid millions, crawl the face of the earth like lice or ants or some other ignominy.

The man by himself.

That was one of the names of Erasmus of Rotterdam.

The man by himself.

That is the beginning and end, the alpha and the omega, the one absolute: the man alone by himself, alone with his own soul, alone with his eyes on the darkness which is the dark god of life. Alone like a pythoness on her tripod, like the oracle alone above the fissure into the unknown. The oracle, the fissure down into the unknown, the strange exhalations from the dark, the strange words that the oracle must utter. Strange, cruel, pregnant words: the new term of consciousness.

This is the innermost symbol of man: alone in the darkness of the cavern of himself, listening to soundlessness of inflowing fate. Inflowing fate, inflowing doom, what does it matter? The man by himself — that is the absolute — listening — that is the relativity — for the influx of his fate, or doom.

The man by himself. The listener.

But most men can't listen any more. The fissure is closed up. There is no soundless voice. They are deaf and dumb, ants, scurrying ants.

That is their doom. It is a new kind of absolute. Like ruffraff, which has fallen out of living relativity, on to the teeming absolute of the dust-heap, or the ant-

heap. Sometimes the dust-heap becomes huge, huge, huge, and covers nearly all the world. Then it turns into a volcano, and all starts again.

“It has nothing to do with me,” said Richard to himself. I hope, dear reader, you like plenty of CONVERSATION in a novel: it makes it so much lighter and brisker.

“It has nothing to do with me,” said Richard to himself. “They do as they like. But since, after all, I AM a kind-hearted dear creature, I will just climb the minaret of myself and sound my muezzin.”

So behold the poor dear on his pinnacle lifting his hands.

“God is God and man is man; and every man by himself. Every man by himself, alone with his own soul. Alone as if he were dead. Dead to himself. He is dead and alone. He is dead; alone. His soul is alone. Alone with God, with the dark God. God is God.”

But if he likes to shout muezzins, instead of hawking fried fish or newspapers or lottery tickets, let him.

Poor dear, it was rather an anomalous call: “Listen to me, and be alone.” Yet he felt called upon to call it.

To be alone, to be alone, and to rest on the unknown God alone.

The God must be unknown. Once you have defined him or described him, he is the most chummy of pals, as you’ll know if you listen to preachers. And once you’ve chummed up with your God, you’ll never be alone again, poor you. For that’s the end of you. You and your God chumming it through time and eternity.

Poor Richard saw himself in funny situations.

“My dear young lady, let me entreat you, be alone, only be alone.”

“Oh, Mr. Somers, I should love to, if you’d hold my hand.”

“There is a gulf,” growing sterner, “surrounds each solitary soul. A gulf surrounds you — a gulf surrounds me — .”

“I’M FALLING!” shrieks and flings her arms around his neck. Or Kangaroo.

“Why am I so beastly to Kangaroo?” said Richard to himself. “For beastly I am. I am a detestable little brat to them all round.”

A detestable little brat he felt.

But Kangaroo wanted to be a queen-bee of another hive, with all the other bees clustering on him like some huge mulberry. Sickening! Why couldn’t he be alone? At least for ONCE. For once withdraw entirely.

And a queen bee buzzing with beatitudes. Beatitudes, beatitudes. Bee attitudes or any other attitudes, it made Richard feel tired. More benevolence, more nauseating benevolence. “Charity suffereth long.”

Yet one cannot live a life of entire loneliness, like a monkey on a stick, up and down one’s own obstacle. There’s got to be meeting: even communion. Well,

then, let us have the other communion. “This is thy body which I take from thee and eat” as the priest, also the God, says in the ritual of blood sacrifice. The ritual of supreme responsibility, and offering. Sacrifice to the dark God, and to the men in whom the dark God is manifest. Sacrifice to the strong, not to the weak. In awe, not in dribbling love. The communion in power, the assumption into glory. La gloire.

CHAPTER 15. JACK SLAPS BACK.

Chapter follows chapter, and nothing doing. But man is a thought-adventurer, and his falls into the Charybdis of ointment, and his shipwrecks on the rock of ages, and his kisses across chasms, and his silhouette on a minaret: surely these are as thrilling as most things.

To be brief, there was a Harriet, a Kangaroo, a Jack and a Jaz and a Vicky, let alone a number of mere Australians. But you know as well as I do that Harriet is quite happy rubbing her hair with hair-wash and brushing it over her forehead in the sun and looking at the threads of gold and gun-metal, and the few threads, alas, of silver and tin, with admiration. And Kangaroo has just got a very serious brief, with thousands and thousands of pounds at stake in it. Of course he is fully occupied keeping them at stake, till some of them wander into his pocket. And Jack and Vicky have gone down to her father's for the week-end, and he's out fishing, and has already landed a rock-cod, a leather-jacket, a large schnapper, a rainbow-fish, seven black-fish, and a cuttlefish. So what's wrong with him? While she is trotting over on a pony to have a look at an old sweetheart who is much too young to be neglected. And Jaz is arguing with a man about the freight-rates. And all the scattered Australians are just having a bet on something or other. So what's wrong with Richard's climbing a mental minaret or two in the interim? Of course there isn't any interim. But you KNOW that Harriet is brushing her hair in the sun, and Kangaroo looking at huge sums of money on paper, and Jack fishing, and Vicky flirting and Jaz bargaining, so what more do you want to know? We can't be at a stretch of tension ALL the time, like the E string on a fiddle. If you don't like the novel, don't read it. If the pudding doesn't please you, leave it, leave it. *I don't mind your saucy plate. I know too well that you can bring an ass to water, etc.*

As for gods, thought Richard, there are gods of vengeance. "For I, the Lord thy God, am a jealous God." So true. A jealous God, and a vengeful — "Visiting the sins of the fathers upon the children, unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me." Of course. The fathers get off. You don't begin to pay the penalty till the second and third generation. That is something for US to put in our pipes and smoke. Because WE are the second generation, and it was our fathers who had a nice rosy time among the flesh-pots, cooking themselves the tit-bits of this newly-gutted globe of ours. They cooked the tit-bits, we are left with the carrion.

“The Lord thy God am a jealous God.”

So he is. The Lord thy God is the invisible stranger at the gate in the night, knocking. He is the mysterious life-suggestion, tapping for admission. And the wondrous Victorian Age managed to fasten the door so tight, and light up the compound so brilliantly with electric light, that really, there WAS no outside, it was all in. The unknown became a joke: is still a joke.

Yet there it is, outside the gate, getting angry. “Behold I stand at the gate and knock.” “Knock away,” said complacent, benevolent humanity, which had just discovered its own monkey origin to account for its own monkey tricks. “Knock away, nobody will hinder you from knocking.”

And Holman Hunt paints a pretty picture of a man with a Stars-and-Stripes lantern and a red beard, knocking. But whoever it is that’s knocking had been knocking for three generations now, and he’s got sick of it. He’ll be kicking the door in just now.

“For I the Lord thy God am a jealous God.”

It is not that He is jealous of Thor or Zeus or Bacchus or Venus. The great dark God outside the gate is all these gods. You open the gate, and sometimes in rushes Thor and gives you a bang on the head with a hammer; or Bacchus comes mysteriously through, and your mind goes dark and your knees and thighs begin to glow; or it is Venus, and you close your eyes and open your nostrils to a perfume, like a bull. All the gods. When they come through the gate they are personified. But outside the gate it is one dark God, the Unknown. And the Unknown is a terribly jealous God, and vengeful. A fearfully vengeful god: Moloch, Astarte, Ashtaroth, and Baal. That is why we dare not open now. It would be a hell-god, and we know it. We are the second generation. Our children are the third. And our children’s children are the fourth. Eheu! Eheu! Who knocks?

Jack trotted over to Coo-ee on the Sunday afternoon, when he was staying with his wife’s people. He knew Richard and Harriet would most probably be at home: they didn’t like going out on Sundays, when all the world and his wife in their exceedingly Sunday clothes, swarmed on the face of the earth.

Yes, they were at home: sitting on the verandah, a bit of rain spitting from the grey sky, and the sea gone colourless and small. Suddenly, there stood Jack. He had come round the corner on to the grass. Somers started as if an enemy were upon him. Jack looked very tall and wiry, in an old grey suit. He hesitated before coming forward, as if measuring the pair of unsuspecting turtle doves on the loggia, and on his face was a faint grin. His eyes were dark and grinning too, as he hung back there. Somers watched him quickly. Harriet looked over her shoulder.

“Oh, Mr. Callcott — why — how do you do?” And she got up, startled, and went across the loggia holding out her hand, to shake hands. So Jack had to come forward. Richard, very silent, shook hands also, and went indoors to fetch a chair and a cup and a plate, while Jack made his explanation to Harriet. He was quite friendly with her.

“Such a long time since we saw you,” she was saying. “Why didn’t Mrs. Callcott come, I should have liked so much to see her?”

“Ah — you see I came over on the pony. Doesn’t look very promising weather.” And he looked away across the sea, averting his face.

“No — and the TERRIBLE cold winds! I’m so glad if it will rain. I simply love the smell of rain in the air: especially here in Australia. It makes the air seem so much KINDER, not so dry and savage — .”

“Ah — yes — it does,” he said vaguely, still averting his face from her. He seemed strange to her. And his face looked different — as if he had been drinking, or as if he had indigestion.

The two men were aloof like two strange tom-cats.

“Were you disgusted with Lovat when he didn’t turn up the other Saturday?” said Harriet. “I do hope you weren’t sitting waiting for him.”

“Well — er — yes, we did wait up a while for him.”

“Oh, but what a shame! But you know by now he’s the most undependable creature on earth. I wish you’d be angry with him. It’s no good what *I* say.”

“No,” said he — the peculiar slow Cockney no — “I’m not angry with him.”

“But you should be,” cried Harriet. “It would be good for him.”

“Would it?” smiled Jack. His eyes were dark and inchoate, and there seemed a devil in his long, wiry body. He did not look at Somers.

“You know of course what happened?”

“Er — when?”

“When Lovat went to see Mr. Cooley.”

“Er — no.”

Again that peculiar Australian no, like a scorpion that stings with its tail.

“Didn’t Mr. Cooley tell you?” cried Harriet.

“No.” There was indescribable malice in the monosyllable.

“Didn’t he — !” cried Harriet, and she hesitated.

“You be quiet,” said Lovat crossly to her. “Of course YOU’D have to rush in.”

“You think angels would fear to tread in such a delicate mess?” said Harriet, with a flash of mocking wit that sent a faint smile up Jack’s face, like a red flame. His nose, his mouth were curiously reddened. He liked Harriet’s attacks. He looked at her with dark, attentive eyes. Then he turned vaguely to Somers.

“What was it?” he asked.

“Nothing at all new,” said Somers. “You know he and I start to quarrel the moment we set eyes on one another.”

“They might be man and wife,” mocked Harriet, and again Jack turned to her a look of black, smiling, malicious recognition.

“Another quarrel?” he said quietly.

But Somers was almost SURE he knew all about it, and had only come like a spy to take soundings.

“Another quarrel,” he replied, smiling, fencing. “And once more shown the door.”

“I should think,” said Harriet, “you’d soon know that door when you see it.”

“Oh, yes,” said Richard. He had not told her the worst of the encounter. He never told her the worst, nor her nor anybody.

Jack was looking from one to the other to see how much each knew.

“Was it a specially bad blow-up?” he said, in his quiet voice, that had a lurking tone of watchfulness in it.

“Oh, yes, final,” laughed Richard. “I am even going to leave Australia.”

“When?”

“I think in six weeks.”

There was silence for some moments.

“You’ve not booked your berths yet?” asked Jack.

“No. I must go up to Sydney.”

Again Jack waited before he spoke. Then he said:

“What’s made you settle on going?”

“I don’t know. I feel it’s my fate to go now.”

“Ha, your fate!” said Harriet. “It’s always your fate with you. If it was me it would be my foolish restlessness.”

Jack looked at her with another quick smile, and a curious glance of dark recognition in his eyes, almost like a caress. Strangely apart, too, as if he and she were in an inner dark circle, and Somers was away outside.

“Don’t you want to go, Mrs. Somers?” he asked.

“Of course I don’t. I love Australia,” she protested.

“Then don’t you go,” said Jack. “You stop behind.”

When he lowered his voice it took on a faint, indescribable huskiness. It made Harriet a little uneasy. She watched Lovat. She did not like Jack’s new turn of husky intimacy. She wanted Richard to rescue her.

“Ha!” she said. “He’d never be able to get through the world without me.”

“Does it matter?” said Jack, grinning faintly at her and keeping the husky note in his voice. “He knows his own mind — or his fate. You stop here. We’ll look

after you.”

But she watched Richard. He was hardly listening. He was thinking again that Jack was feeling malevolent towards him, wanting to destroy him, as in those early days when they used to play chess together.

“No,” said Harriet, watching Lovat’s face. “I suppose I shall have to trail myself along, poor woman, till I see the end of him.”

“He’ll lead you many a dance before that happens,” grinned Richard. He rather enjoyed Jack’s malevolence this time.

“Ha, you’ve led me all your dances that you know,” she retorted. “I know there’ll be nothing new, unfortunately.”

“Why don’t you stay in Australia?” Jack said to her, with the same quiet, husky note of intimacy, insistency, and the reddish light on his face.

She was somewhat startled and offended. Wasn’t the man sober, or what?

“Oh, he wouldn’t give me any money, and I haven’t a sou of my own,” she said lightly, laughing it off.

“You wouldn’t be short of money,” said Jack. “Plenty of money.”

“You see I couldn’t just live on charity, could I?” she replied, delicately.

“It wouldn’t be charity.”

“What then?”

There was a very awkward pause. Then a wicked redness came into Jack’s face, and a flicker into his voice.

“Appreciation. You’d be appreciated.” He seemed to speak with muted lips. There was a cold silence. Harriet was offended now.

“I’ll just clear the table,” she said, rising briskly.

Jack sat rather slack in his chair, his long, malevolent body half sunk, and his chin dropped.

“What boat do you think you’ll catch?” he asked.

“The Manganui. Why?”

But Jack did not speak. He sat there with his head sunk on his chin, his body half-turgid, as if he were really not quite sober.

“You won’t be honouring Australia long with your presence,” he said ironically.

“Nor dishonouring it,” said Richard. He was like a creature that is going to escape. Some of the fear he had felt for Kangaroo he now felt for Jack. Jack was really very malevolent. There was hell in his reddened face, and in his black, inchoate eyes, and in his long, pent-up body. But he kept an air of quiescence, of resignation, as if he were still really benevolent.

“Oh, I don’t say that,” he remarked in answer to Richard’s last, but in a tone which said so plainly what he felt: an insulting tone.

Said Richard to himself: "I wouldn't like to fall into your clutches, my friend, altogether: or to give your benevolence a chance to condemn me."

Aloud, he said to Jack:

"If I can't join in with what you're doing here, heart and soul, I'd better take myself off, hadn't I? You've all been good to me, and in a measure, trusted me. I shall always owe you a debt of gratitude, and keep your trust inviolable. You know that. But I am one of those who must stand and wait — though I don't pretend that by so doing I also serve."

"You take no risks," said Jack quietly.

Another home-thrust.

"Why — I would take risks — if only I felt it was any good."

"What does it matter about it's being any good? You can't tell what good a thing will be or won't be. All you can do is to take a bet on it."

"You see it isn't my nature to bet."

"Not a sporting nature, you mean?"

"No, not a sporting nature."

"Like a woman — you like to feel safe all round," said Jack, slowly raising his dark eyes to Somers in a faint smile of contempt and malevolence. And Richard had to acknowledge to himself that he WAS cutting a poor figure: nosing in, like a Mr. Nosy Parker, then drawing back quickly if he saw two sparks fly.

"Do you think I've let you down? I never pledged myself," he said coldly.

"Oh, no, you never pledged yourself" said Jack laconically.

"You see I don't BELIEVE in these things," said Somers, flushing.

"What's that you don't believe in?"

And Jack watched him with two black round eyes, with a spark dancing slowly in each, in a slow gaze putting forth all his power. But Somers now looked back into the two dark, malevolent pools.

"In revolutions — and public love and benevolence and feeling righteous," he said.

"What love, what benevolence and righteousness?" asked Jack, vaguely, still watching with those black, sardonic eyes. "I never said anything about them."

"You know you want to be the saviours of Australia," said Richard.

"I didn't know. But what's wrong with it?"

"I'm no good at saving."

"We don't pretend to be saviours. We want to do our best for Australia, it being our own country. And the Pommies come out from England to try to upset us. But they won't. They may as well stop in their dead-and-rotten old country."

"I'm sorry it looks to you like that," said Richard.

"Oh, don't apologise," said Jack, with a faint, but even more malevolent

smile. "It's pretty well always the same. You come out from the old countries very cocksure, with a lot of criticism to you. But when it comes to doing anything, you sort of fade out, you're nowhere. We're used to it, we don't mind."

There was a silence of hate.

"No, we don't mind," Jack continued. "It's quite right, you haven't let us down, because we haven't given you a chance. That's all. In so far as you've had any chance to, you've let us down, and we know it."

Richard was silent. Perhaps it was true. And he hated such a truth.

"All right," he said. "I've let you down. I suppose I shall have to admit it. I'm sorry — but I can't help myself."

Jack took not the slightest notice of this admission, sat as if he had not heard it.

"I'm sorry I've sort of fizzled out so quickly," said Richard. "But you wouldn't have me pretend, would you? I'd better be honest at the beginning."

Jack looked at him slowly, with slow, inchoate eyes, and a look of contempt on his face. The contempt on Jack's face, the contempt of the confident he-man for the shifty she-man, made Richard flush with anger, and drove him back on his deeper self once more.

"What do you call honest?" said Jack, sneering.

Richard became very silent, very still. He realised that Jack would like to give him a thrashing. The thought was horrible to Richard Lovat, who could never bear to be touched, physically. And the other man sitting there as if he were drunk was very repugnant to him. It was a bad moment.

"Why," he replied, in answer to the question, while Jack's eyes fixed him with a sort of jeering malevolence: "I can't honestly say I feel at one with you, you and Kangaroo, so I say so, and stand aside."

"You've found out all you wanted to know, I suppose?" said Jack.

"I didn't WANT to know anything. I didn't come asking or seeking. It was you who chose to tell me."

"You didn't try drawing us out, in your own way?"

"Why, no, I don't think so."

Again Jack looked at him with a faint contemptuous smile of derision.

"I should have said myself you did. And you got what you wanted, and now are clearing out with it. Exactly like a spy, in my opinion.

Richard opened wide eyes, and went pale.

"A spy!" he exclaimed. "But it's just absurd."

Jack did not vouchsafe any answer, but sat there as if he had come for some definite purpose, something menacing, and was going to have it out with the

other man.

“Kangaroo doesn’t think I came spying, does he?” asked Richard, aghast. “It’s too impossible.”

“I don’t know what he thinks,” said Jack. “But it isn’t ‘too impossible’ at all. It looks as if it had happened.”

Richard was now dumb. He realised the depths of the other man’s malevolence, and was aghast. Just aghast. Some fear too — and a certain horror, as if human beings had suddenly become horrible to him. Another gulf opened in front of him.

“Then what do you want of me now?” he asked, very coldly. “Some sort of security, I suppose,” said Jack, looking away at the sea.

Richard was silent with rage and cold disgust, and a sort of police-fear.

“Pray what sort of security?” he replied, coldly.

“That’s for you to say, maybe. But we want some sort of security that you’ll keep quiet, before — we let you leave Australia.”

Richard’s heart blazed in him with anger and disgust.

“You need not be afraid,” he said. “You’ve made it all too repulsive to me now, for me ever to want to open my mouth about it all. You can be quite assured: nothing will ever come out through me.”

Jack looked up with a faint, sneering smile.

“And you think we shall be satisfied with your bare word?” he said uglily.

But now Richard looked him square in the eyes.

“Either that or nothing,” he replied.

And unconscious of what he was doing, he sat looking direct down into the dark, shifting malice of Jack’s eyes. Till Jack turned aside. Richard was now so angry and insulted he felt only pure indignation.

“We’ll see,” said Jack.

Somers did not even heed him. He was too indignant to think of him any more. He only retreated into his own soul, and turned aside, invoking his own soul: “Oh, dark God, smite him over the mouth for insulting me. Be with me, gods of the other world, and strike down these liars.”

Harriet came out on to the verandah.

“What are you two men talking about?” she said. “I hear two very cross and snarling voices, though I can’t tell what they say.”

“I was just saying Mr. Somers can’t expect to have it all his own way,” said Jack in his low, intense, slightly husky voice, that was now jeering viciously.

“He’ll try his best to,” said Harriet. “But whatever have you both got so furious about. Just look at Lovat, green with fury. It’s really shameful. Men are like impish children — you daren’t leave them together for a minute.”

“It was about time you came to throw cold water over us,” smiled Jack sardonically. Ah, how sardonic he could be: deep, deep and devilish. He too must have a very big devil in his soul. But he never let it out. Or did he? Harriet looked at him, and shuddered slightly. He scared her, she had a revulsion from him. He was a bit repulsive to her. And she knew he had always been so.

“Ah, well!” said Jack. “Cheery-o! We aren’t such fools as we seem. The milk’s spilt, we won’t sulk over it.”

“No, don’t,” cried Harriet. “I hate sulky people.”

“So do I, Mrs. Somers, worse than water in my beer,” said Jack genially. “You and me, we’re not going to fall out, are we?”

“No,” said Harriet. “I don’t fall out with people — and I don’t let them fall out with me.

“Quite right. Don’t give ‘em a chance, eh? You’re right of it. You and me are pals, aren’t we?”

“Yes,” said Harriet easily, as if she were talking to some child she must soothe. “We’re pals. But why didn’t you bring your wife? I’m so fond of her.”

“Oh, Vicky’s all right. She’s A1 stuff. She thinks the world of you, you know. By golly, she does; she thinks the world of you.”

“Then why didn’t you bring her to see me?”

“Eh? Why didn’t I? Oh — let me see — why, she’d got her married sister and so forth come to see her, so she couldn’t leave them. But she sent her love, and all that sort of sweet nothing, you know. I told her I should never have the face to repeat it, you know. I was to give you HEAPS of love. “Heaps of love to Mrs. Somers!” Damn it, I said, how do I know she wants me dumping down heaps of love on her. But that was the message — heaps of love to Mrs. Somers, and don’t you forget it. I’m not likely to forget it, by gee! There aren’t two Mrs. Somers in the universe: I’m ready to bet all I’ve got on that. Ay, and a bit over. Now, look here, Mrs. Somers, between you and me and the bed-post — .”

“Do you mean Lovat is the bed-post?” put in Harriet. “He’s silent enough for one.”

Jack glanced at Somers, and also relapsed into silence.

CHAPTER 16. A ROW IN TOWN.

The thing that Kangaroo had to reckon with, and would not reckon with, was the mass-spirit. A collection of men does not necessarily mean a mob. A collection of men — an accidental gathering — may be just a gathering, drawn by a moment's curiosity, or it may be an audience drawn to hear something, or it may be a congregation, gathered together in some spirit of earnest desire: or it may be just a crowd, inspired by no one motive. The mass-spirit is complex. At its lowest it is a mob, and what is a mob?

To put it as briefly as possible, it is a collection of all the weak souls, sickeningly conscious of their weakness, into a heavy mob, that lusts to glut itself with blind destructive power. Not even vengeance. The spirit of vengeance belongs to a mass which is higher than a mob.

The study of collective psychology to-day is absurd in its inadequacy. Man is supposed to be an automaton working in certain automatic ways when you touch certain springs. These springs are all labelled, they form a keyboard to the human psyche, according to modern psychology. And the chief labels are herd instinct, collective interest, hunger, fear, collective prestige, and so on.

But the only way to make any study of collective psychology is to study the isolated individual. Upon your conception of the single individual, all your descriptions will be based, all your science established. For this reason, the human sciences, philosophy, ethics, psychology, politics, economics, can never be sciences at all. There can never be an exact science dealing with individual life. *L'anatomia presuppone il cadavere*: anatomy presupposes a corpse, says D'Annunzio. You can establish an exact science on a corpse, supposing you start with the corpse, and don't try to derive it from a living creature. But upon life itself, or any instance of life, you cannot establish a science.

Because even science must start from definition, or from precise description. And you can never define or precisely describe any living creature. Iron must remain iron, or cease to exist. But a rabbit might evolve into something which is still rabbit, and yet different from that which a rabbit now is. So how can you define or precisely describe a rabbit? There is always the unstable CREATIVE element present in life, and this science can never tackle. Science is cause-and-effect.

Before we can begin any of the so-called humane sciences we must take on trust a purely unscientific fact: namely, that every living creature has an

individual soul, however trivial or rudimentary, which connects it individually with the source of all life, as man, in the religious terminology, is connected with God, and inseparable from God. So is every creature, even an ant or a louse, individually in contact with the great life-urge which we call God. To call this connection the will-to-live is not quite sufficient. It is more than a will-to-persist. It is a will-to-live in the further sense, a will-to-change, a will-to-evolve, a will towards further creation of the self. The urge towards evolution if you like. But it is more than evolution. There is no simple cause-and-effect sequence. The change from caterpillar to butterfly is not cause and effect. It is a new gesture in creation. Science can wriggle as hard as it likes, but the change from caterpillar to butterfly is utterly unscientific, illogical, and UNNATURAL, if we take science's definition of nature. It is an answer to the strange creative urge, the God-whisper, which is the one and only everlasting motive for everything.

So then man. He is said to be a creature of cause-and-effect, or a creature of free-will. The two are the same. Free-will means acting according to reasoned choice, which is a purest instance of cause-and-effect. Logic is the quintessence of cause-and-effect. And idealism, the ruling of life by the instrumentality of the idea, is precisely the mechanical, even automatic cause-and-effect process. The idea, or ideal, becomes a fixed principle, and life, like any other force, is driven into mechanical repetition of given motions — millions of times over and over again — according to the fixed ideals. So, the Christian-democratic world prescribes certain motions, and men proceed to repeat these motions, till they conceive that there ARE no other motions but these. And that is pure automatism. When scientists describe savages, or ancient Egyptians, or Aztecs, they assume that these far-off peoples acted, but in a crude, clumsy way, from the same motives which move us. "Too much ego in his cosmos." Men have had strange, inconceivable motives and impulses, which were just as "right" as ours are. And our "right" motives will cease to activate, even as the lost motives of the Assyrians have ceased. Our "right" and our righteousness will go pop, and there will be another sort of right and righteousness.

The mob, then. Now, the vast bulk of mankind has always been, and always will be, helpless. By which we mean, helpless to interpret the new prompting of the God-urge. The highest function of MIND is its function of messenger. The curious throbs and pulses of the God-urge in man would go on forever ignored, if it were not for some few exquisitely sensitive and fearless souls who struggle with all their might to make that strange translation of the low, dark throbbing into open act or speech. Like a wireless message the new suggestion enters the soul, throb-throb, throb-throb-throb. And it beats and beats for years, before the mind, frightened of this new knocking in the dark, can be brought to listen and

attend.

For the mind is busy in a house of its own, which house it calls the universe. And how can there be anything outside the universe?

There is though. There is always something outside our universe. And it is always at the doors of the innermost, sentient soul. And there throb-throb, throb-throb-throb, throb-throb. It is like the almost inaudible beating of a wireless machine. Nine hundred and ninety-nine men out of a thousand hear nothing at all. Absolutely nothing. They racket away in their nice, complete, homely universe, running their trains and making their wars and saving the world for democracy. They hear not a thing. A tiny minority of sensitive souls feel the throb, and are frightened, and cry for more virtue, more goodness, more righteousness a la mode. But all the righteousness and goodness in all the world won't answer the throb, or interpret the faint but painful thresh of the message.

There is no Morse-code. There never will be. Every new code supersedes the current code. Nowadays, when we feel the throb, vaguely, we cry: "More love, more peace, more charity, more freedom, more self-sacrifice." Which makes matters all the worse, because the new throb interpreted mechanically according to the old code breeds madness and insanity. It may be that there is an insufficient activity of the thyroid glands, or the adrenalin cortex isn't making its secretions, or the pituitary or the pineal body is not working adequately. But this is result, not cause, of our neurasthenia and complexes. The neurasthenia comes from the inattention to the suggestion, or from a false interpretation. The best souls in the world make some of the worst interpretations — like President Wilson — and this is the bitterest tragedy of righteousness. The heroic effort to carry out the old righteousness becomes at last sheer wrongeousness. Men in the past have chosen to be martyred for an unborn truth. But life itself inflicts something worse than martyrdom on them if they will persist too long in the old truth.

Alas, there is no Morse-code for interpreting the new life-prompting, the new God-urge. And there never will be. It needs a new term of speech invented each time. A whole new concept of the universe gradually born, shedding the old concept.

Well now. There is the dark god knocking afresh at the door. The vast mass hear nothing, but say: "We know all about the universe. Our job is to make a real smart place of it." So they make more aeroplanes and old-age-pensions and are furious when Kaiser William interrupts them. The more sensitive hear something, feel a new urge and are uneasy. Then cry: "We are not pure in heart. We are too selfish. Let us educate the poor. Let us remove the slums. Let us save the children. Let us spend all we have on the noble work of education." So they

spend a bit more than before, but by no means all they have, with the result that now everybody reads the newspapers and discusses world-politics and feels himself most one-sidedly a bit of the great Godhead of the sacred People.

And still the knocking goes on, on, on, till some soul that dares as well as can, listens, and struggles to interpret. Every new word is anathema — bound to be. Jargon, rant, mystical tosh and so on. Evil, and anti-civilisation. Naturally. For the machine of the human psyche, once wound up to a certain ideal, doesn't want to stop.

And still, all the time, even in the vulgar uneducated — perhaps more in them than in the hearty money-makers of the lower middle-classes — throb-throb-throb goes the god-urge deep in their souls, driving them almost mad. They are quite stone-deaf to any new meaning. They would jeer an attempt at a new interpretation, jeer it to death. So there they are, between the rocky Scylla of the fixed, established ideal, and the whirling Charybdis of the conservative opposition to this ideal. Between these two perils they must pass. For behind them drives the unknown current of the God-urge, on, on through the straits.

They will never get through the straits. They do not know that there IS any getting through. Scylla must beat Charybdis, and Charybdis must beat Scylla. So the monster of humanity with a Scylla of an ideal of equality for the head, and a Charybdis of industrialism and possessive conservatism for the tail, howls with frenzy, and lashes the straits till every boat goes down, that tries to make a passage.

Well, Scylla must have it out with Charybdis, that's all, and we must wait outside the straits till the storm is over.

It won't be over yet, though.

Now this is the state of the mass. It is driven, goaded mad at length by the pricking of the God-urge which it will not, cannot attend to or interpret. It is so goaded that it is mad with its own wrongs. It is wronged, so wronged that it is mad.

And what is the wrong, pray? The mass doesn't know. There is no connection at all between the burning, throbbing unconscious soul and the clear-as-daylight conscious mind. The whole of Labour, to-day, sees the situation clear as daylight. So does the whole of Capital. And yet the whole of the daylight situation has really nothing to do with it. It is the God-urge which drives them mad, the unacknowledged, unadmitted, non-existent God-urge.

They may become a mob. A mob is like a mass of bullocks driven to frenzy by some bott fly, and charging frantically against the tents of some herdsman, imagining that all the evil comes out of these tents. There is a gulf between the quivering hurt in the unconscious soul, and the round, flat world of the visible

existence. A sense of weakness and injury, at last an intolerable sense of wrong, turning to a fiendish madness. A mad necessity to wreck something, cost what it may. For only the flat, round, visible world exists.

And yet it is the bott fly of the Holy Ghost, unlistened to, that is the real cause of everything.

But the mob has no direction even in its destructive lust. The vengeful masses HAVE direction. And it is no good trying to reason with them. The mass does not act by reason. A mass is not even formed by reason. The more intense or extended the COLLECTIVE consciousness, the more does the truly reasonable, individual consciousness sink into abeyance.

The herd instinct, for example, is of many sorts. It has two main divisions, the fear-instinct, and the aggressive instinct. But the vengeance instinct is not part of the herd instinct.

But consider the mode of communication of herd instinct. The communication between the individuals in a herd is not through the MIND. It is not through anything said or known. It is sub-mental. It is telepathic.

Why does a flock of birds rise suddenly from the tree-tops, all at once, in one spring, and swirl round in one cloud towards the water? There was no visible sign or communication given. It was a telepathic communication. They sat and waited, and waited, and let the individual mind merge into a kind of collective trance. Then click! — the unison was complete, the knowledge or suggestion was one suggestion all through, the action was one action.

This so-called telepathy is the clue to all herd instinct. It is not instinct. It is a vertebral-telegraphy, like radio-telegraphy. It is a complex interplay of vibrations from the big nerve centres of the vertebral system in all the individuals of the flock, till, click! — there is a unanimity. They have one mind. And this one-mindedness of the many-in-one will last while ever the peculiar pitch of vertebral nerve-vibrations continues unbroken through them all. As the vibration slacks off, the flock falls apart.

This vertebral telepathy is the true means of communication between animals. It is perhaps most highly developed where the brain, the mental consciousness, is smallest. Indeed the two forms of consciousness, mental and vertebral, are mutually exclusive. The highest form of vertebral telepathy seems to exist in the great sperm whales. Communication between these herds of roving monsters is of marvellous rapidity and perfection. They are lounging, feeding lazily, individually, in mid-ocean, with no cohesion. Suddenly, a quick thought-wave from the leader-bull, and as quick as answering thoughts the cows and young bulls are ranged, the herd is taking its direction with a precision little short of miraculous. Perhaps water acts as a most perfect transmitter of vertebral

telepathy.

This is the famous wisdom of the serpent, this vertebral consciousness and telepathy. This is what makes the magic of a leader like Napoleon — his powers of sending out intense vibrations, messages to his men, without the exact intermediation of mental correspondence. It is not brain-power. In fact, it is, in some ways, the very REVERSE of brain-power: it might be called the acme of stupidity. It is the stupendous wits of brainless intelligence. A marvellous reversion to the pre-mental form of consciousness.

This pre-mental form of consciousness seems most perfect in the great whales: more even in them than in the flocks of migrating birds. After the whales, the herds of wolves and deer and buffaloes. But it is most ABSOLUTE in the cold fishes and serpents, reptiles. The fishes have no other correspondence save this cold, vertebral vibration. And this is, as it were blind. The fish is absolutely stone-wall limited in its consciousness, to itself. It knows none other. Stony, abstract, cold, alone, the fish has still the power of radio-communication. It is a form of telepathy, like a radium-effluence, vibrating fear principally. Fear is the first of the actuating gods.

Then come the reptiles. They have sex, and dimly, darkly discern the bulk of the answerer. They are drawn to contact. It is the new motive. The fishes are never drawn to contact. Only food and fear. So in the reptiles the second telepathic vibration, the sympathetic, is set up. The primary consciousness is cold, the wisdom is isolated, cold, moon-like, knowing none other: the self alone in knowledge, utterly subtle. But then sex comes upon them, and the isolation is broken. Another flow sets up. They must seek the answerer. It is love.

So, telepathy, communication in the vertebrates. Ants and bees too have a one-conscious vibration. Even they have perfect ganglia-communication. But it is enough to consider the vertebrates.

In the sperm whale, intense is the passion of amorous love, intense is the cold exultance in power, isolate kingship. With the most intense enveloping vibration of possessive and protective love, the great bull encloses his herd into a oneness. And with the intensest vibration of power he keeps it subdued in awe in fear. These are the two great telepathic vibrations which rule all the vertebrates, man as well as beast. Man, whether in a savage tribe or in a complex modern society, is held in unison by these two great vibrations emitted unconsciously from the leader, the leaders, the governing classes, the authorities. First, the great influence of shadow of power, causing trust, fear and obedience: second, the great influence of protective love, causing productivity and the sense of safety. Those two powerful influences are emitted by men like Gladstone or Abraham Lincoln, against their knowledge, but none the less emitted. Only Gladstone and

Lincoln justify themselves in speech. And both insist on the single influence of love, and denounce the influence of fear.

A mob occurs when men turn upon ALL leadership. For true, living activity the mental and the vertebral consciousness should be in harmony. In Caesar and Napoleon the vertebral influence of power prevailed — and there was a break of balance, and a fall. In Lincoln and President Wilson the vertebral influence of love got out of balance, and there was a fall. There was no balance between the two modes of influence: the mind ran on, as it were, without a brake, towards absurdity. So it ran to absurdity in Napoleon.

Break the balance of the two great controlling influences, and you get, not a simple preponderance of the one influence, but a third state, the mob-state. This is the state when the society, tribe or herd degenerates into a mob. In man, the mind runs on with a sort of terrible automatism, which has no true connection with the VERTEBRAL consciousness. The vertebral inter-communication gradually gathers force, apart from all mental expression. Its vibration steadily increases till there comes a sudden click! And then you have the strange phenomenon of revolution, like the Russian and the French revolutions. It is a great disruptive outburst. It is a great eruption against the classes in authority. And it is, finally, a passionate, mindless vengeance taken by the collective, vertebral psyche upon the authority of orthodox MIND. In the Russian revolution it was the EDUCATED classes that were the enemy really: the deepest inspiration the hatred of the conscious classes. But revolution is not a mob-movement. Revolution has direction, and leadership, however temporary. There is point to its destructive frenzy.

In the end, it is a question with us to-day whether the masses will degenerate into mobs, or whether they will still keep a spark of direction. All great mass uprisings are really acts of vengeance against the dominant consciousness of the day. It is the dynamic, vertebral consciousness in man bursting up and smashing through the fixed, superimposed mental consciousness of mankind, which mental consciousness has degenerated and become automatic.

The masses are always, strictly, non-mental. Their consciousness is preponderantly vertebral. And from time to time, as some great life-idea cools down and sets upon them like a cold crust of lava, the vertebral powers will work below the crust, apart from the mental consciousness, till they have come to such a heat of unison and unanimity, such a pitch of vibration that men are reduced to a great, non-mental oneness as in the hot-blooded whales, and then, like whales which suddenly charge upon the ship which tortures them, so they burst upon the vessel of civilization. Or like whales that burst up through the ice that suffocates them, so they will burst up through the fixed consciousness, the

congealed idea which they can now only blindly react against. At the right moment, a certain cry, like a war-cry, a catchword, suddenly sounds, and the movement begins.

The purest lesson our era has taught is that man, at his highest, is an individual, single, isolate, alone, in direct soul-communication with the unknown God, which prompts within him.

This lesson, however, puts us in danger of conceit, especially spiritual conceit.

In his supreme being, man is alone, isolate, nakedly himself, in contact only with the unknown God.

This is our way of expressing Nirvana.

But just as a tree is only perfect in blossom because it has groping roots, so is man only perfected in his individual being by his groping, pulsing unison with mankind. The unknown God is within, at the quick. But this quick must send down roots into the great flesh of mankind.

In short, the 'spirit' has got a lesson to learn: the lesson of its own limitation. This is for the individual. And the infinite, which is Man writ large, or Humanity, has a still bitterer lesson to learn. It is the individual alone who can save humanity alive. But the greatest of great individuals must have deep, throbbing roots down in the dark red soil of the living flesh of humanity. Which is the bitter pill which Buddhists and all advocates of pure "Spirit" must swallow.

In short, man, even the greatest man, does not live only by his spirit and his pure contact with the Godhead — for example, Nirvana. Blessed are the pure in heart, Blessed are the poor in spirit. He is FORCED to live in vivid RAPPORT with the mass of men. If he denies this, he cuts his roots. He intermingles as the roots of a tree interpenetrate the fat, rock-ribbed earth.

How? In this same vertebral correspondence. The mystic may stare at his own navel and try to abstract himself for ever towards Nirvana: it is half at least illusion. There is all the time a powerful, unconscious interplay going on between the vertebral centres of consciousness in all men, a deep, mindless current flashing and quivering through the family, the community, the nation, the continent, and even the world. No man can REALLY isolate himself. And this vertebral interplay is the root of our living: must always be so.

And this vertebral interplay is subject to the laws of polarity, since it is an intercommunion of active, polarised conscience-force. There is a dual polarity, and a dual direction. There is the outward, or downward pulse, in the great motion of sympathy or love, the love that goes out to the weaker, to the poor, to the humble. The vast, prostrate mass now becomes the positive pole of attraction: woman, the working classes.

The whole of the great current of vertebral consciousness in mankind is supposed, now, to run in this direction. But the whole movement is but a polarised circuit. Insist on one direction overmuch, derange the circuit, and you have a terrible debacle. Which brings us to another aspect of relativity: relativity in dynamic living.

When the flow is sympathetic, or love, then the weak, the woman, the masses, assume the positivity. But the balance even is only kept by stern AUTHORITY, the unflinching obstinacy of the return-force, of power.

When the flow is power, might, majesty, glory, then it is a culminating flow towards one individual, through circles of aristocracy towards one grand centre. Emperor, Pope, Tyrant, King: whatever may be. It is the grand obeisance before a master.

In the balance of these two flows lies the secret of human stability. In the absolute triumph of either flow lies the immediate surety of collapse.

We have gone very far in the first direction. Democracy has ALMOST triumphed. The only real master left is the boss in industry. And he is to be dethroned. Labour is to wear the absolute crown of the everyday hat. Even the top hat is doomed. Labour shall be its own boss, and possess its own means and ends. The serpent shall swallow itself in a last gulp.

Mastership is based on possessions. To kill mastership you must have communal ownership. Then have it, for this superiority based on possession of money is worse than any of the pretensions of Labour or Bolshevism, strictly. Let the serpent swallow itself. Then we can have a new snake.

The moment Labour takes upon itself to be its own boss, the whole show is up, the end has begun. While ever the existing boss succeeds in hanging on to his money-capital, we get the present conditions of nullity and nagging. We're between the devil and a deep sea.

What Richard wanted was some sort of a new show: a new recognition of the life-mystery, a departure from the dreariness of money-making, money-having, and money-spending. It meant a new recognition of difference, of highness and of lowness, of one man meet for service and another man clean with glory, having majesty in himself, the innate majesty of the purest INDIVIDUAL, not the strongest instrument, like Napoleon. Not the tuppenny trick-majesty of Kaisers. But the true majesty of the single soul which has all its own weaknesses, but its strength in spite of them, its own lovableness, as well as its might and dread. The single soul that stands naked between the dark God and the dark-blooded masses of men. "Now, Kangaroo," said Richard, "is in a false position. He wants to save property for the property owners, and he wants to save Labour from itself and from the capitalist and the politician and all. In fact,

he wants to save everything as we have it, and it can't be done. You can't eat your cake and have it, and I prefer Willie Struthers. Bolshevism is at least not sentimental. It's a last step towards an end, a hopeless end. But better disaster than an equivocal nothingness, like the present. Kangaroo wants to be God Himself, and save everybody, which is just irritating, at last. Kangaroo as God Himself, with a kind of marsupial belly, is worse than Struthers' absolute of the People. Though it's a choice of evils, and I choose neither. I choose the Lord Almighty."

Having made up his mind so far, Richard came up to the big mass meeting of Labour in the great Canberra Hall, in Sydney. The Labour leaders had lost much ground. Labour was slipping into disorganization: the property-owning Conservatives and Liberals were just beginning to rejoice again. The reduction of the basic wage had been brought about, a further reduction was announced. At the same time the Government was aiming a strong blow at the Unions. It had pronounced the right of every man to work as he himself chose, and the right of employers to agree with non-union workers as to rate of wages. It had further announced its determination to protect the non-union worker, by holding the union responsible for any attacks on non-union men. The leaders of a union were to be arrested and held responsible for attacks on non-workers. In case of bloodshed and death, they were to be tried for manslaughter or for murder. The first to be arrested should be the chief of the union concerned. After him, his immediate subordinates.

Now the sword was drawn, and Labour was up in arms. Meetings were held every day. A special meeting was announced at Canberra Hall, admission by ticket. Somers had asked Jaz if he could get him a ticket, and Jaz had succeeded. There were two meetings: one, a small gathering for discussion, at half-past eight in the morning; the other, the mass meeting, at seven at night.

Richard got up in the dark, to catch the six o'clock train to Sydney. It was a dark, cloudy morning — night still — and a few frogs still were rattling away in a hollow towards the sea, like a weird little factory of machines whirring and trilling and screeching in the dark. At the station some miners were filling their tin bottles at the water-tap: pale and extinguished-looking men.

Dawn began to break over the sea, in a bluey-green rift between clouds. There seemed to be rain. The journey was endless.

In Sydney it was raining, but Richard did not notice. He hurried to the hall to the meeting. It lasted only half an hour, but it was straightforward and sensible. When Richard heard the men among themselves, he realised how LOGICAL their position was, in pure philosophy.

He came out with Jaz, whom he had not seen for a long time. Jaz looked rather

pale, and he was very silent, brooding.

“Your sympathy is with Labour, Jaz?”

“My sympathy is with various people, Mr. Somers,” replied Jaz, non-communicative.

It was no use talking to him: he was too much immersed.

The morning was very rainy, and Sydney, big city as it is, a real metropolis in Pitt Street and George Street, seemed again like a settlement in the wilderness, without any core. One of the great cities of the world. But without a core: unless, perhaps, Canberra Hall were its real centre. Everybody very friendly and nice. The friendliest country in the world: in some ways, the gentlest. But without a core. There was no heart in it all, it seemed hollow.

With mid-day came the sun and the clear sky: a wonderful clear sky and a hot, hot sun. Richard bought sandwiches and a piece of apple turnover, and went into the Palace Gardens to eat them, so that he need not sit in a restaurant. He loathed the promiscuity and publicity of even the good restaurants. The promiscuous feeding gave him a feeling of disgust. So he walked down the beautiful slope to the water again, and sat on a seat by himself, near a clump of strange palm-trees that made a weird noise in the breeze. The water was blue and dancing: and again he felt as if the harbour were wild, lost and undiscovered, as it was in Captain Cook’s time. The city wasn’t real.

In front in the small blue bay lay two little war-ships, pale grey, with the white flag having the Union Jack in one corner floating behind. And one boat had the Australian flag, with the five stars on a red field. They lay quite still, and seemed as lost as everything else, rusting into the water. Nothing seemed to keep its positive reality, this morning in the strong sun after the rain. The two ships were like bits of palpable memory, that persisted, but were only memory images.

Two tiny birds, one brown, one with a sky-blue patch on his head, like a dab of sky, fluttered and strutted, hoisting their long tails at an absurd angle. They were real: the absurd, sharp, unafraid creatures. They seemed to have no deep natural fear, as creatures in Europe have. Again and again Somers had felt this in Australia: the creatures had no sense of fear as in Europe. There was no animal fear in the air, as there is so deeply in India. Only sometimes a grey metaphysical dread.

“Perhaps,” thought he to himself, “this is really the country where men might live in a sort of harmless Eden, once they have settled the old Adam in themselves.”

He wandered the hot streets, walked round the circular quay and saw the women going to the ferries. So many women, ALMOST elegant. Yet their elegance provincial, without pride, awful. So many ALMOST beautiful women.

When they were in repose, quite beautiful, with pure, wistful faces, and some nobility of expression. Then, see them change countenance, and it seemed almost always a grimace of ugliness. Hear them speak, and it was startling, so ugly. Once in motion they were not beautiful. Still, when their features were immobile, they were lovely.

Richard had noticed this in many cases. And they were like the birds, quite without fear, impudent, perky, with a strange spasmodic self-satisfaction. Almost every one of the younger women walked as if she thought she was sexually trailing every man in the street after her. And that was absurd, too, because the men seemed more often than not to hurry away and leave a blank space between them and these women. But it made no matter: like mad-women the females, in their quasi-elegance, pranced with that prance of crazy triumph in their own sexual powers which left little Richard flabbergasted.

Hot, big, free-and-easy streets of Sydney: without any sense of an imposition of CONTROL. No control, everybody going his own ways with alert harmlessness. On the pavement the foot-passengers walked in two divided streams, keeping to the left, and by their unanimity made it impossible for you to wander and look at the shops, if the shops happened to be on your right. The stream of foot passengers flowed over you.

And so it was: far more regulated than London, yet all with a curious exhilaration of voluntariness that oppressed Richard like a madness. No control, and no opposition to control. Policemen were cyphers, not noticeable. Every man his own policeman. The terrible lift of the HARMLESS crowd. The strange relief from all superimposed control. One feels the police, for example, in London, and their civic majesty of authority. But in Sydney no majesty of authority at all. Absolute freedom from all that. Great freedom in the air. Yet, if you got into the wrong stream on the pavement you felt they'd tread you down, almost unseeing. You just MUSTN'T get in the wrong stream — Liberty!

Yes — the strange unanimity of HARMLESSNESS in the crowd had a half paralysing effect on Richard. “Can it be?” he said to himself, as he drifted in the strong sun-warmth of the world after rain, in the afternoon of this strange, antipodal city. “Can it be that there is any harm in these people at all?”

They were quick, and their manners were, in a free way, natural and kindly. They might say Right-O, Right you are! — they did say it, even in the most handsome and palatial banks and shipping offices. But they were patient and unaffected in their response. That Was the beauty of the men: their absolute lack of affectation, their naive simplicity, which was at the same time sensitive and gentle. The gentlest country in the world. Really, a high pitch of breeding. Good-breeding at a very high pitch — innate, and in its shirt sleeves.

A strange country. A wonderful country. Who knows what future it may have? Can a great continent breed a people of this magic harmlessness without becoming a sacrifice of some other, external power? The land that invites parasites now — where parasites breed like nightmares — what would happen if the power-lust came that way?

Richard bought himself a big, knobbly, green, soft-crusted apple, at a Chinese shop, and a pretty mother-of-pearl spoon to eat it with. The queer Chinese, with their gabbling-gobbling way of speaking — were they parasites too? A strange, strange world. He took himself off to the gardens to eat his custard apple — a pudding inside a knobbly green skin — and to relax into the magic ease of the afternoon. The warm sun, the big, blue harbour with its hidden bays, the palm trees, the ferry steamers sliding flatly, the perky birds, the inevitable shabby-looking, loafing sort of men strolling across the green slopes, past the red poinsettia bush, under the big flame-tree, under the blue, blue sky — Australian Sydney, with a magic like sleep; like sweet, soft sleep — a vast, endless, sun-hot, afternoon sleep with the world a mirage. He could taste it all in the soft, sweet, creamy custard apple. A wonderful sweet place to drift in. But surely a place that will some day wake terribly from this sleep.

Yet why should it? Why should it not drift marvellously for ever, with its sun and its marsupials?

The meeting in the evening, none the less, was a wild one. And Richard could not believe there was any REAL vindictiveness. He couldn't believe that anybody REALLY hated anybody. There was a touch of sardonic tolerance in it all. Oh, that sardonic tolerance! And at the same time that overwhelming obstinacy and power of endurance. The strange, Australian power of enduring — enduring suffering or opposition or difficulty — just blank enduring. In the long run, just endure.

Richard sat next to Jaz. Jaz was very still, very still indeed, seated with his hands in his lap.

“Will there be many diggers here?” Lovat asked.

“Oh, yes. There's quite a crowd over there, with Jack.”

And Richard looked quickly, and saw Jack. He knew Jack had seen him. But now he was looking the other way. And again, Richard felt afraid of something.

It was a packed hall, tense. There was plenty of noise and interruption, plenty of homethrusts at the speakers from the audience. But still, that sense of sardonic tolerance, endurance. “What's the odds, boys?”

Willie Struthers gave the main speech: on the solidarity of Labour. He sketched the industrial situation, and elaborated the charge that Labour was cutting its own throat by wrecking industry and commerce.

“But will anything get us away from this fact, mates,” he said: “that there’s never a shop shuts down because it can’t pay the weekly wage-bill. If a shop shuts down, it is because it can’t pay a high enough DIVIDEND, and there you’ve got it.

“Australian Labour has set out from the first on the principle that huge fortunes should not be made out of its efforts. We have had the obvious example of America before us, and we have been determined from the start that Australia should not fall into the hands of a small number of millionaires and a larger number of semi-millionaires. It has been our idea that a just proportion of all profits should circulate among the workers in the form of wages. Supposing the worker DOES get his pound a day. It is enormous, isn’t it! It is preposterous. Of course it is. But it isn’t preposterous for a small bunch of owners or shareholders to get their ten pounds a day, FOR DOING NOTHING. Sundays included. That isn’t preposterous, is it?

“They raise the plea that their fathers and their forefathers accumulated the capital by their labours. Well, haven’t OUR fathers and forefathers laboured? Haven’t they? And what have they accumulated? The right to labour on, and be paid for it what the others like to give ‘em.

“We don’t want to wreck industry. But, we say, wages shall go up so that profits shall go down. Why should there be any profits, after all? Forefathers! Why, we’ve all had forefathers, and I’m sure mine worked. Why should there be any profits AT ALL, I should like to know. And if profits there MUST be, well then, the profit grabber isn’t going to get ten times as much as the wage-earner, just because he had a few screwing forefathers. We, who work for what we get, are going to see that the man who doesn’t work shall not receive a large income for not working. If he’s GOT to have an income for doing nothing, let him have no more than what we call wages. The labourer is worthy of his hire, and the hire is worthy of his labourer. But I can NOT see that any man is worthy of an unearned income. Let there be no unearned incomes. So much for the basic wage. We know it is not the basic wage that wrecks industry. It’s big profits. When the profits are not forthcoming the directors would rather close down. A criminal proceeding. Because, after all, any big works is run, first, to supply the community with goods, and second, to give a certain proportion of the community a satisfactory occupation. Whatever net profits are made are made by cheating the worker and the consumer, filching a bit from every one of them, no matter how small a bit. And we will not see wages reduced one ha’penny, to help to fill the pockets of shareholders — .”

“What about your own shares in Nestles Milk, Willie?” asked a voice.

“I’ll throw them in the fire the minute they’re out of date,” said Willie,

promptly, “they’re pretty well wastepaper already.”

He went on to answer the charges of corruption and Tammany, with which the Labour Party in Australia had been accused. This led to the point of class hatred.

“It is we who are supposed to foster class hatred,” he said. “Now I put it to you. Does the so-called upper class hate us, or do we hate them more? If you’ll let me answer, I tell you it’s they who do the hating. We don’t wear the flesh off our bones hating them. They aren’t worth it. They’re far beneath hatred.

“We do want one class only — not your various shades of upper and lower. We want The People — and The People means the worker. I don’t mind what a man works at. He can be a doctor or a lawyer even, if men are such fools they must have doctors and lawyers. But look here, mates, what do we all work FOR? For a living? Then why won’t a working-man’s living wage do for a lawyer? Why not? Perhaps a lawyer makes an ideal of his job. Perhaps he is inspired in his efforts to right the wrongs of his client. Very well: virtue is its own reward. If he wants to be paid for it, it isn’t virtue any more. It’s dirty trading in justice, or whatever law means.

“Look at your upper classes, mates. Look at your lawyer charging you two guineas for half an hour’s work. Look at your doctor scrambling for his guinea a visit. Look at your experts with their five thousand a year. Call these UPPER classes? Upper in what? In the make-and-grab faculties, that’s all.

“To hell with their ‘upper’. If a working man thinks he’ll be in the running, and demand say half of what these gentry get, then he’s the assassin of his trade and country. It’s his business to grovel before these ‘upper’ gents, is it?

“No, mates, it’s his business to rise up and give ‘em a good kick in the seats of their pants, to remind them of their bedrock bottoms. You’d think, to hear all the fairy tales they let off, that their pants didn’t have such a region as seats. Like the blooming little angels, all fluttery tops and no bottoms. Don’t you be sucked in any more, mates. Look at ‘em, and you’ll see they’ve got good, heavy-weight sit-upons, and big, deep trouser-pockets next door. That’s them. Up-end ‘em for once, and look at ‘em upside down. Greedy fat-arses, mates, if you’ll pardon the vulgarity for once. Greedy fat-arses.

“And that’s what we’ve got to knuckle under to, is it? They’re the upper classes? Them and a few derelict lords and cuttle-fish capitalists. Upper classes? I’m damned if I see much upper about it, mates. Drop ‘em in the sea and they’ll float butt-end uppermost, you see if they don’t. For that’s where they keep their fat, like the camel his hump. Upper classes!

“But I wish them no special harm. A bit of a kick in the rear, to remind them that they’ve got a rear, a largely kickable rear. And then, let them pick themselves up and mingle with the rest. Give them a living wage, like any other

working man. But it's hell on earth to see them floating their fat bottoms through the upper regions, and just stooping low enough to lick the cream off things, as it were, and to squeal if a working man asks for more than a gill of the skilly.

“Work? What is one man's job more than another? Your Andrew Carnegies and your Rothschilds may be very smart at their jobs. All right — give 'em the maximum wage. Give 'em a pound a day. They won't starve on it. And what do they want with more? A job is nothing but a job, when all's said and done. And if Mr. Hebrew Rothschild is smart on the finance job, so am I a smart sheep-shearer, hold my own with any man. And what's the odds? Wherein is Mr. Hebrew, or Lord Benjamin Israelite any better man than I am? Why does he want so damned much for his dirty financing, and begrudges me my bit for shearing ten score o' sheep?

“No, mates, we're not sucked in. It may be Mr. Steel-trust Carnegie, it may even be Mr. Very-clever Marconi, it may be Marquis Tribes von Israel; and it certainly IS Willie Struthers. Now, mates, I, Willie Struthers, a big fortune I DO NOT WANT. But I'm damned if I am going to let a few other brainy vampires suck big fortunes out of me. Not I. I wouldn't be a man if I did. Upper Classes? They've got more greedy brains in the seats of their pants than in their top storeys.

“We're having no more of their classes and masses. We'll just put a hook in their trouser-bottoms and hook 'em gently to earth. That's all. And put 'em on a basic wage like all the rest: one job, one wage. Isn't that fair? No man can do more than his best. And why should one poor devil get ten bob for his level best, and another fat-arse get ten thousand for some blooming trick? No, no, if a man's a sincere citizen he does his BEST for the community he belongs to. And his simple wage is enough for him to live on.

“That's why we'll have a Soviet. Water finds its own level, and so shall money. It shall not be dammed up by a few sly fat-arses much longer. I don't pretend it will be paradise. But there'll be fewer lies about it, and less fat-arsed hypocrisy, and less dirty injustice than there is now. If a man works, he shall not have less than the basic wage, be he even a lying lawyer. There shall be no politicians, thank God. But more than the basic wage also he shall not have. Let us bring things down to a rock-bottom.

“Upper? Why all their uppishness amounts to is extra special greedy guts, ten-thousand-a-year minimum. Upper classes! Upper classes! Upper arsens.

“We'll have a Soviet, mates, and then we shall feel better about it. We'll be getting nasty tempered if we put it off much longer. Let's know our own mind. We'll unite with the World's Workers. Which doesn't mean we'll take the hearts out of our chests to give it Brother Brown to eat. No, Brother Brown and Brother

Yellow had, on the whole, best stop at home and sweep their own streets, rather than come and sweep ours. But that doesn't mean we can't come to more or less of an understanding with them. We don't want to get too much mixed up with them or anybody. But a proper understanding we can have. I don't say, Open the gates of Australia to all the waiting workers of India and China, let alone Japan. But, mates, you can be quite friendly with your neighbour over the fence without giving him the run of your house. And that is International Labour. You have a genuine understanding with your neighbours down the street. You know they won't shy stones through your windows or break into your house at night or kill your children in a dark corner. Why not? Because they're your neighbours and you all have a certain amount of trust in one another. And that is International Labour. That is the World's Workers.

"After all, mates, the biggest part of our waking lives belongs to our work. And certainly the biggest part of our importance is our importance as workers. Mates, we are, and we are bound to be, workers first and foremost. So were our fathers before us, so will our children be after us. Workers first. And as workers, mates. On this everything else depends. On our being workers depends our being husbands and fathers and playmates: nay, our being men. If we are not workers we are not even men, for we can't exist.

"Workers we are, mates, workers we must be, and workers we will be, and there's the end of it. We take our stand on it. Workers first, and whatever soul we have, it must go first into our work. Workers, mates, we are workers. A man is a man because he works. He must work and he does work. Call it a curse, call it a blessing, call it what you like. But the Garden of Eden is gone for ever, and while the ages roll, we must work.

"Let us take our stand on that fact, mates, and trim our lives accordingly. While time lasts, whatever ages come or go, we must work, day in, day out, year in, year out, so for ever. Then, mates, let us abide by it. Let us abide by it, and shape things to fit. No use shuffling, mates. Though you or I may make a little fortune, enough for the moment to keep us in idleness, yet, mates, as sure as ever the sun rises, as long as ever time lasts, the children of men must rise up to their daily toil.

"Is it a curse? — is it a blessing? I prefer to think it is a blessing, so long as, like everything else, it is in just proportion. My happiest days have been shearing sheep, or away in the gold mines — ."

"What, not talking on a platform?" asked a voice.

"No, not talking on a platform. Working along with my mates, in the bush, in the mines, wherever it was. That's where I put my manhood into my work. There I had my mates — my fellow-workers. I've had playmates as well. Wife,

children, friends — playmates all of them. My fellow-workers were my mates.

“So, since workers we are and shall be, till the end of time, let us shape the world accordingly. The world is shaped now for the idlers and the play-babies, and we work to keep THAT going. No, no, mates, it won’t do.

“Join hands with the workers of the world: just a fist-grip, as a token and a pledge. Take nobody to your bosom — a worker hasn’t got a bosom. He’s got a fist, to work with, to hit with, and lastly, to give the tight grip of fellowship to his fellow-workers and fellow-mates, no matter what colour or country he belongs to. The World’s Workers — and since they ARE the world, let them take their own, and not leave it all to a set of silly playboys and Hebrews who are not only silly but worse. The World’s Workers — we, who are the world’s millions, the world is our world. Let it be so, then. And let us so arrange it.

“What’s the scare about being mixed up with Brother Brown and Chinky and all the rest: the Indians in India, the niggers in the Transvaal, for instance? Aren’t we tight mixed up with them as it is? Aren’t we in one box with them, in this Empire business? Aren’t we all children of the same noble Empire, brown, black, white, green, or whatever colour we may be? We may not, of course, be reposing on the bosom of Brother Brown and Brother Black. But we are pretty well chained at his side in a sort of slavery, slaving to keep this marvellous Empire going, with its out-of-date Lords and its fat-arsed, hypocritical upper classes. I don’t know whether you prefer working in the same imperial slave-gang with Brother Brown of India, or whether you’d prefer to shake hands with him as a free worker, one of the world’s workers — but — .”

“ONE!” came a loud, distinct voice, as if from nowhere, Like a gun going off.

“But one or the other — .”

“TWO!” a solid block of men’s voices, like a bell.

“One or the other you’ll — .”

“THREE!” The voice, like a tolling bell, of men counting the speaker out. It was the diggers.

A thrill went through the audience. The diggers sat mostly together, in the middle of the hall, around Jack. Their faces were lit up with a new light. And like a bell they tolled the numbers against the speaker, counting him out, by their moral unison annihilating him.

Willie Struthers, his dark-yellow face gone demoniac, stood and faced them. His eyes too had suddenly leaped with a new look: big, dark, glancing eyes, like an aboriginal’s, glancing strangely. Was it fear, was it a glancing, gulf-like menace? He stood there, a shabby figure of a man, with undignified legs, facing the tolling enemy.

“FOUR!” came the sonorous, perfect rhythm. It was a strange sound, heavy,

hypnotic, trance-like. Willie Struthers stood as if he were fascinated, glaring spell-bound.

“FIVE!” The sound was unbearable, a madness, tolling out of a certain devilish cavern in the back of the men’s unconscious mind, in terrible malignancy. The Socialists began to leap to their feet in fury, turning towards the block of Diggers. But the lean, naked faces of the ex-soldiers gleamed with a smiling, demonish light, and from their narrow mouths simultaneously:

“SIX!”

Struthers, looking as if he were crouching to spring, glared back at them from the platform. They did not even look at him.

“SEVEN!” In two syllables, SEV-EN!

The sonorous gloating in the sound was unbearable. It was like hammer-strokes on the back of the brain. Everybody had started up save the Diggers. Even Somers was wildly on his feet, feeling as if he could fly, swoop like some enraged bird. But his feeling wavered. At one moment he gloated with the Diggers against the black and devilish figure of the isolated man on the platform, who half-crouched as if he were going to jump, his face black and satanic. And then, as the number came, unbearable in its ghastly striking:

“EIGHT!” like some hammer-stroke on the back of his brain it sent him clean mad, and he jumped up into the air like a lunatic, at the same moment as Struthers sprang with a clear leap, like a cat, towards the group of static, grinning ex-soldiers.

There was a crash, and the hall was like a bomb that has exploded. Somers tried to spring forward. In the blind moment he wanted to kill — to kill the soldiers. Jaz held him back, saying something. There was a most fearful roar, and a mad whirl of men, broken chairs, pieces of chairs brandished, men fighting madly with fists, claws, pieces of wood — any weapon they could lay hold of. The red flag suddenly flashing like blood, and bellowing rage at the sight of it. A Union Jack torn to fragments, stamped upon. A mob with many different centres, some fighting frenziedly round a red flag, some clutching fragments of the Union Jack, as if it were God incarnate. But the central heap a mass struggling with the Diggers, in real blood-murder passion, a tense mass with long, naked faces gashed with blood, and hair all wild, and eyes demented, and collars burst, and arms frantically waving over the dense bunch of horrific life, hands in the air with weapons, hands clawing to drag them down, wrists bleeding, hands bleeding, arms with the sleeves ripped back, white naked arms with brownish hands, and thud! as the white flesh was struck with a chair-leg.

The doors had been flung open — many men had gone out, but more rushed in. The police in blue uniforms and in blue clothes wielding their batons, the

whole place gone mad. Richard, small as he was, felt a great frenzy on him, a great longing to let go. But since he didn't REALLY know whom he wanted to let go at, he was not quite carried away. And Jaz, quiet, persistent, drew him gradually out into the street. Though not before he had lost his hat and had had his collar torn open, and had received a bang over the forehead that helped to bring him to his senses.

Smash went the lights of the hall — somebody smashing the electric lamps. The place was almost in darkness. It was unthinkable.

Jaz drew Somers into the street, which was already a wide mass of a crowd, and mounted police urging their way to the door, laying about them. The crowd too was waiting to catch fire. Almost beside himself Richard struggled out of the crowd, to get out of the crowd. Then there were shots in the night, and a great howl from the crowd. Among the police on horseback he saw a white hat — a white felt hat looped up at the side — and he seemed to hear the bellowing of a big, husky voice. Surely that was Kangaroo, that was Kangaroo shouting. Then there was a loud explosion and a crash — a bomb of some sort.

And Richard suddenly was faint — Jaz was leading him by the arm — leading him away — in the city night that roared from the direction of the hall, while men and women were running thither madly, and running as madly away, and motor cars came rushing: and even the fire-brigade with bright brass helmets — a great rush towards the centre of conflict — and a rush away, outwards. While hats — white hats — Somers, in his dazed condition saw three or four, and they occupied his consciousness as if they were thousands.

“We must go back,” he said, “We must go back to them!”

“What for?” said Jaz, “We're best away.”

And he led him sturdily down a side street, while Somers was conscious only of the scene he had left, and the sound of shots.

They went to one of the smaller, more remote Digger's Clubs. It consisted only of one large room, meeting room and gymnastics hall in turn, and a couple of small rooms, one belonging to the secretary and the head, and the other a sort of little kitchen with a sink and a stove. The one-armed caretaker was in attendance, but nobody else was there. Jaz and Somers went into the secretary's room, and Jaz made Richard lie down on the sofa.

“Stay here,” he said, “while I go and have a look round.”

Richard looked at him. He was feeling very sick: perhaps the bang over the head. Yet he wanted to go back into the town, into the melee. He felt he would even die if he did so. But then why not die? Why stay outside the row? He had always been outside the world's affairs.

“I'll come with you again,” he said.

“No, I don’t want you,” snapped Jaz. “I have a few of my own things to attend to.”

“Then I’ll go by myself,” said Richard.

“If I were you I wouldn’t,” said Jaz.

And Richard sat back feeling very sick, and confused. But such a pain in his stomach, as if something were torn there. And he could not keep still — he wanted to do something.

Jaz poured out a measure of whiskey for himself and one for Richard. Then he went out, saying:

“You’d best stay here till I come back, Mr. Somers. I shan’t be very long.”

Jaz too was very pale, and his manner was furtive, like one full of suppressed excitement.

Richard looked at him, and felt very alien, far from him and everybody. He rose to his feet to rush out again. But the torn feeling at the pit of his stomach was so strong he sat down and shoved his fists in his abdomen, and there remained. It was a kind of grief, a bitter, agonised grief for his fellow-men. He felt it was almost better to die, than to see his fellow-men go mad in this horror. He could hear Jaz talking for some time to the one-armed caretaker, a young soldier who was lame with a bad limp as well as maimed.

“I can’t do anything. I can’t be on either side. I’ve got to keep away from everything,” murmured Richard to himself. “If only one might die, and not have to wait and watch through all the human horror. They are my fellow-men, they are my fellow-men.”

So he lay down, and at length fell into a sort of semi-consciousness, still pressing his fists into his abdomen, and feeling as if he imagined a woman might feel after her first child, as if something had been ripped out of him. He was vaguely aware of the rage and chaos in the dark city round him, the terror of the clashing chaos. But what was the good even of being afraid? — even of grief? It was like a storm, in which he could do nothing but lie still and endure and wait. “They also serve who only stand and wait.” Perhaps it is the bitterest part, to keep still through it all, and watch and wait. In a numb half-sleep Richard lay and waited — waited for heaven knows what.

It seemed a long time. Then he heard voices. There was Jack and Jaz and one or two others — loud voices. Presently Jack and Jaz came in to him. Jack had a big cut on the chin, and was pale as death. There was blood on his coat, and he had a white pocket-handkerchief round his neck, having lost his collar. He looked with black eyes at Richard.

“What time is it?” asked Richard.

“Blowed if I know,” answered Jack, like a drunken man.

“Half past eleven,” said Jaz quietly.

Only an hour — or an hour and a half. Time must have stood still and waited.

“What has happened?” asked Richard.

“Nought!” blurted Jack, still like a drunken man. “Nought happened. Bloody blasted nothing.”

“Kangaroo is shot,” said Jaz.

“Dead?”

“No — o!” snarled Jack. “No, damn yer, not dead.”

Somers looked at Jaz.

“They’ve taken him home — shot in the belly,” said Jaz.

“In his bloomin’ Kangaroo guts,” said Jack. “Ain’t much left of the ant that shot ‘im, though — neither guts nor marrow.”

Richard stared at the two men.

“Are you hurt?” he said to Jack.

“Me? Oh, no, I just scratched myself shaving, darling. Making me toilet.”

There was silence for some time. Jaz’s plump, pale face was still impassive, inscrutable, and his clothing was in order. Jack poured himself a half-glass of neat whiskey, put in a little water, and drank it off.

“And Willie Struthers and everybody?” asked Richard.

“Gone ‘ome to his missis to have sausage for tea,” said Jack.

“Not hurt?”

“Blowed if I know,” replied Jack indifferently, “whether he’s hurt or not.”

“And is the town quiet?” Somers turned to Jaz. “Has everything blown over? What has happened?”

“What has happened exactly I couldn’t tell you. I suppose everything is quiet. The police have everything in hand.”

“Police!” snarled Jack. “Bloody Johnny Hops! They couldn’t hold a sucking pig in their hands, unless somebody hung on to its tail for them. It’s our boys who’ve got things in hand. And handed them over to the Hops.”

Somers knew that Johnny Hops was Australian for a policeman. Jack spoke in a suppressed frenzy.

“Was anybody killed?” Somers asked.

“I’m sure I hope so. If I haven’t done one or two of ‘em in I’m sorry. Damned sorry. Bloody sorry,” said Jack.

“I should be careful what I say,” said Jaz.

“I know you’d be careful, you Cornish whisper. Careful Jimmy’s your name and nation. But I HOPE I did one or two of ‘em in. And I DID do one or two of ‘em in. See the brains sputter out of that chap that shot ‘Roo?”

“And suppose they arrest you to-night and shove you in gaol for

manslaughter?” said Jaz.

“I wouldn’t advise anybody to lay as much as a leaf of maidenhair fern on me to-night, much less a finger.”

“They might to-morrow. You be still, and go home.”

Jack relapsed into a white silence. Jaz went into the common room again, where members dropped in from the town. Apparently everything had gone quiet. It was determined that everybody should go home as quietly and quickly as possible.

Richard found himself in the street with Jaz and Jack, both of whom were silent. They walked briskly through the streets. Groups of people were hurrying silently home. The town felt very dark, and as if something very terrible had happened. A few taxi-cabs were swiftly and furtively running. In George Street and Pitt Street patrols of mounted police were stationed, and the ordinary police were drawn up on guard outside the most important places. But the military had not been called out.

On the whole, the police took as little notice as possible of the foot-passengers who were hurrying away home, but occasionally they held up a taxi-cab. Jaz, Jack and Somers proceeded on foot, very quickly and in absolute silence. They were not much afraid of the city authorities: perhaps not so much as were the authorities themselves. But they all instinctively felt it best to keep quiet and unnoticed.

It was nearly one o’clock when they reached Wyewurk. Victoria had gone to bed. She called when she heard the men enter. Evidently she knew nothing of the row.

“Only me and Jaz and Mr. Somers,” called Jack. “Don’t you stir.”

“Of course I must,” she cried brightly.

“Don’t you move,” thundered Jack, and she relapsed into silence. She knew, when he had one of his hell-moods on him, it was best to leave him absolutely alone.

The men drank a little whiskey, then sat silent for some time. At last Jaz had the energy to say they must go to bed.

“Trot off Jazzy,” said Jack. “Go to bee-by, boys.”

“That’s what I’m doing,” said Jaz, as he retired. He was sleeping the night at Wyewurk, his own home being across the harbour.

Somers still sat inert, with his unfinished glass of whiskey, though Jaz said to him pertinently:

“Aren’t you retiring, Mr. Somers?”

“Yes,” he answered, but didn’t move.

The two were left in silence: only the little clock ticking away. Everything

quite still.

Suddenly Jack rose and looked at his face in the mirror.

“Nicked a bit out of my chin, seemingly. It was that little bomb that did that. Dirty little swine, to throw a bomb. But it hadn’t much kick in it.”

He turned round to Somers, and the strangest grin in the world was on his face, all the lines curved upwards.

“Tell you what, boy,” he said in a hoarse whisper. “I settled THREE of ‘em — three!” There was an indescribable gloating joy in his tones, like a man telling of the good time he has had with a strange mistress — ‘Gawr, but I was lucky. I got one of them iron bars from the windows, and I stirred the brains of a couple of them with it, and I broke the neck of a third. Why it was as good as a sword to defend yourself with, see — .”

He reached his face towards Somers with weird, gruesome exultation, and continued in a hoarse, secret voice:

“Cripes, there’s NOTHING bucks you up sometimes like killing a man — NOTHING. You feel a perfect ANGEL after it.”

Richard felt the same torn feeling in his abdomen, and his eyes watched the other man.

“When it comes over you, you know, there’s nothing else like it. *I* never knew, till the war. And I wouldn’t believe it then, not for many a while. But it’s THERE. Cripes, it’s there right enough. Having a woman’s something, isn’t it? But it’s a flea-bite, nothing, compared to killing your man when your blood comes up.”

And his eyes glowed with exultant satisfaction.

“And the best of it is,” he said, “you feel a perfect ANGEL after it. You don’t feel you’ve done any harm. Feel as gentle as a lamb all round. I can go to Victoria, now, and be as gentle — .” He jerked his head in the direction of Victoria’s room. “And you bet she’ll like me.”

His eyes glowed with a sort of exaltation.

“Killing’s natural to a man, you know,” he said. “It is just as natural as lying with a woman. Don’t you think?”

And still Richard did not answer.

The next morning he left early for Mullumbimby. The newspaper gave a large space to the disturbance, but used the wisest language. “Brawl between Communists and Nationalists at Canberra Hall. Unknown anarchist throws a bomb. Three persons killed and several injured. Ben Cooley, the well-known barrister, receives bullets in the abdomen, but is expected to recover. Police, aided by Diggers, soon restored order.”

This was the tone of all the newspapers.

Most blamed the Labour incendiaries, with pious horror — but all declared that the bomb was thrown by some unknown criminal who had intruded himself into the crowd unknown to all parties. There was a mention of shots fired: and a loud shout of accusation against the Mounted Police from the Labour papers, declaring that these had fired on the crowd. Equally loud denials. A rigorous inquiry was to be instituted, fourteen men were arrested. Jack was arrested as the leader of the men who had counted-out Willie Struthers, but he was released on bail. Kangaroo was said to be progressing, as far as could be ascertained, favourably.

And then the papers had a lovely lot of topics. They could discuss the character and persons of Struthers and Ben Cooley, all except the Radical paper, the Sun, praising Ben for his laudable attempts to obtain order by the help of his loyal Diggers. The Sun hinted at other things. Then the personal histories of all the men arrested. Jack, the well-known V.C., was cautiously praised.

What was curious was that nobody brought criminal charges against anybody. Jack's iron bar, for instance, nobody mentioned. It was called a stick. Who fired the revolvers, nobody chose to know. The bomb thrower was an unknown anarchist, probably a new immigrant from Europe. Each side vituperated and poured abuse on the other side. But nobody made any precise, criminal accusations. Most of the prisoners — including Jack — were bound over. Two of them got a year's imprisonment, and five got six months. And the affair began to fizzle down.

A great discussion started on the subject of counting out. Tales were told, how the sick men in a hospital, from their beds, counted out an unsympathetic medical officer till the man dared not show his face. It was said that the Aussies had once begun to count out the Prince of Wales. It was in Egypt. The Prince had ridden up to review them, and he seemed to them, as they stood there in the sun, to be supercilious, "superior". This is the greatest offence. So as he rode away like magic they started to count him out. "One! Two! Three!" No command would stop them. The Prince, though he did not know what it meant, instantly felt the thing like a blow, and rode back at once, holding up his hand, to ask what was wrong. And then he was so human and simple that they said they had made a mistake, and they cheered him passionately. But they had BEGUN to count him out. And once a man was counted out he was done: he was dead, he was counted out. So, newspaper talk.

And Somers, looking through the Bulletin, though he could hardly read it now, as if he could not SEE it, in its one level, as if he had gone deaf to its note — was struck by the end of a paragraph:

This tendency may be noted in the Christianised Melanesian native, in whom

an almost uncontrolled desire to kill sometimes arises without any provocation whatever. Fortunately for the would-be victim the native often has a premonition of the impending nerve-storm. It is not uncommon for a white man to be addressed thus by his model house-boy, walking behind him on a bush track: "More better, taubada (master), you walk behind me. Me want make you kill." In five minutes (If the master has been wise enough to get out of the way) a smiling boy will indicate that his little trouble has been weathered. In these cases Brother Brown is certainly a gentleman compared to the atavistic white.

CHAPTER 17. KANGAROO IS KILLED.

Dear Lovat, also Mrs. Lovat: I don't think it is very nice of you that you don't even call with a tract or a tube-rose, when you know I am so smitten. Yours, Kangaroo. P.S. — Bullets in my marsupial pouch.

Of course Richard went up at once: and Harriet sent a little box with all the different strange shells from the beach. They are curious and interesting for a sick man.

Somers found Kangaroo in bed, very yellow, and thin, almost lantern-jawed, with haunted, frightened eyes. The room had many flowers, and was perfumed with eau-de-cologne, but through the perfume came an unpleasant, discernable stench. The nurse had asked Richard, please to be very quiet.

Kangaroo put out a thin yellow hand. His black hair came wispily, pathetically over his forehead. But he said, with a faint, husky briskness:

“Hello! Come at last,” and he took Somers' hand in a damp clasp.

“I didn't know whether you could see visitors,” said Richard.

“I can't. Sit down. Behave yourself.”

Somers sat down, only anxious to behave himself.

“Harriet sent you such a silly present,” he said. “Just shells we have picked up from the shore. She thought you might like to play with them on the counterpane — .”

“Like that sloppy Coventry Patmore poem. Let me look.”

The sick man took the little Sorrento box with its inlaid design of sirens and peered in at the shells.

“I can smell the sea in them,” he said hoarsely.

And very slowly he began to look at the shells, one by one. There were black ones like buds of coal, and black ones with a white spiral thread, and funny knobbly black and white ones, and tiny purple ones, and a bright sea-orange, semi-transparent clam shell, and little pink ones with long, sharp points, and glass ones, and lovely pearly ones, and then those that Richard had put in, worn shells like sea-ivory, marvellous substance, with all the structure showing; spirals like fairy stair-cases, and long, pure phallic pieces that were the centres of big shells, from which the whorl was all washed away: also curious flat, oval discs, with a lovely whorl traced on them, and an eye in the centre. Richard liked these especially.

Kangaroo looked at them briefly, one by one, as if they were bits of

uninteresting printed paper.

“Here, take them away,” he said, pushing the box aside. And his face had a faint spot of pink in the cheeks.

“They may amuse you some time when you are alone,” said Richard, apologetically.

“They make me know I have never been born,” said Kangaroo, huskily.

Richard was startled, and he didn’t know what to answer. So he sat still, and Kangaroo lay still, staring blankly in front of him. Somers could not detach his mind from the slight, yet pervading sickening smell.

“My sewers leak,” said Kangaroo, bitterly, as if divining the other’s thought.

“But they will get better,” said Richard.

The sick man did not answer, and Somers just sat still.

“Have you forgiven me?” asked Kangaroo, looking at Somers.

“There was nothing to forgive,” said Richard, his face grave and still.

“I knew you hadn’t,” said Kangaroo. Richard knitted his brows. He looked at the long, yellow face. It was so strange and so frightening to him.

“You bark at me as if I were Little Red Riding-hood,” he said, smiling. Kangaroo turned dark, inscrutable eyes on him.

“Help me!” he said, almost in a whisper. “Help me.”

“Yes,” said Richard.

Kangaroo held out his hand: and Richard took it. But not without a slight sense of repugnance. Then he listened to the faint, far-off noises of the town, and looked at the beautiful flowers in the room: violets, orchids, tube-roses, delicate yellow and red roses, iceland poppies, orange like transmitted light, lilies. It was like a tomb, like a mortuary, all the flowers, and that other faint, sickening odour.

“I am not wrong, you know,” said Kangaroo.

“No one says you are,” laughed Richard gently.

“I am not wrong. Love is still the greatest.” His voice sank in its huskiness to a low resonance. Richard’s heart stood still. Kangaroo lay quite motionless, but with some of the changeless pride which had lent him beauty, at times, when he was himself. The Lamb of God grown into a sheep. Yes, the nobility.

“You heard Willie Struthers’ speech?” said Kangaroo, his face changing as he looked up at Somers.

“Yes.

“Well?”

“It seemed to me logical,” said Richard, not knowing how to answer.

“Logical!” Even Kangaroo flickered with surprise. “You and logic!”

“You see,” said Richard very gently, “the educated world has preached the

divinity of work at the lower classes. They broke them in, like draught-horses, put them all in the collar and set them all between the shafts. There they are, all broken in, WORKERS. They are conscious of nothing save that they are workers. They accept the fact that nothing is divine but work: work being service, and service being love. The highest is work. Very well then, accept the conclusion if you accept the premises. The working classes are the highest, it is for them to inherit the earth. You can't deny that, if you assert the sacredness of work."

He spoke quietly, gently. But he spoke because he felt it was kinder, even to the sick man, than to avoid discussion altogether.

"But I don't believe in the sacredness of work, Lovat," said Kangaroo.

"No, but they believe it themselves. And it follows from the sacredness of love."

"I want them to be men, men, men — not implements at a job." The voice was weak now, and took queer, high notes.

"Yes, I know. But men inspired by love. And love has only service as its means of expression."

"How do you know? You never love," said Kangaroo in a faint, sharp voice. "The joy of love is in being with the beloved — as near as you can get — 'And I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me.' — For life, for life's sake, Lovat, not for work. Lift them up, that they may live."

Richard was silent. He knew it was no good arguing.

"Do you think it can't be done?" asked Kangaroo, his voice growing fuller. "I hope I may live to show you. The working men have not realised yet what love is. The perfect love that men may have for one another, passing the love of women. Oh, Lovat, they still have that to experience. Don't harden your heart. Don't stiffen your neck before your old Jewish Kangaroo. You know it is true. Perfect love casteth out fear, Lovat. Teach a man how to love his mate, with a pure and fearless love. Oh, Lovat, think what can be done that way!"

Somers was very pale, his face set.

"Say you believe me. Say you believe me. And let us bring it to pass together. If I have you with me I know we can do it. If you had been with me this would never have happened to me."

His face changed again as if touched with acid at the thought. Somers sat still, remote. He was distressed, but it made him feel more remote.

"What class do you feel that you belong to, as far as you belong to any class?" asked Kangaroo, his eyes on Richard's face.

"I don't feel I belong to any class. But as far as I DO belong — it is to the working-classes. I know that. I can't change."

Kangaroo watched him eagerly.

“I wish I did,” he said, eagerly. Then, after a pause, he added: “They have never known the full beauty of love, the working classes. They have never admitted it. Work, bread has always stood first. But we can take away that obstacle. Teach them the beauty of love between men, Richard, teach them the highest — greater love than this hath no man — teach them how to love their own mate, and you will solve the problem of work for ever. Richard, this is true, you know it is true. How beautiful it would be! How beautiful it would be! It would complete the perfect circle — .”

His voice faded down into a whisper, so that Somers seemed to hear it from far off. And it seemed like some far off voice of annunciation. Yet Richard’s face was hard and clear and sea-bitter as one of the worn shells he had brought.

“The faithful, fearless love of man for man,” whispered Kangaroo, as he lay with his dark eyes on Richard’s face, and the wisp of hair on his forehead. Beautiful, he was beautiful again, like a transfiguration.

“We’ve got to save the People, we’ve got to do it. And when shall we begin, when shall we begin, you and I?” he repeated in a sudden full voice. “Only when we dare to lead them, Lovat,” he added in a murmur. “The love of man for wife and children, the love of man for man, so that each would lay down his life for the other, then the love of man for beauty, for truth, for the Right. Isn’t that so! Destroy no love. Only open the field for further love.”

He lay still for some moments after this speech, that ended in a whisper almost. Then he looked with a wonderful smile at Somers, without saying a word, only smiling from his eyes, strangely, wonderfully. But Richard was scared.

“Isn’t that all honest Injun, Lovat!” he whispered playfully.

“I believe it is,” said Richard, though with unchanging face. His eyes, however, were perplexed and tormented.

“Of course you do. Of course you do,” said Kangaroo softly. “But you are the most obstinate little devil and child that ever opposed a wise man like me. For example, don’t you love me in your heart of hearts, only you daren’t admit it! I know you do. I know you do. But admit it, man, admit it, and the world will be a bigger place to you. You are afraid of love.”

Richard was more and more tormented in himself.

“In a way, I love you, Kangaroo,” he said. “Our souls are alike somewhere. But it is true I don’t WANT to love you.”

And he looked in distress at the other man.

Kangaroo gave a real little laugh.

“Was ever woman so coy and hard to please!” he said, in a warm, soft voice.

“Why don’t you want to love me, you stiff-necked and uncircumcised Philistine! Don’t you want to love Harriet, for example?”

“No, I don’t want to love anybody. Truly. It simply makes me frantic and murderous to have to feel loving any more.”

“Then why did you come to me this morning?”

The question was pertinent. Richard was baffled.

“In a way,” he said vaguely, “because I love you. But love makes me feel I should die.”

“It is your wilful refusal of it,” said Kangaroo, a little wearily. “Put your hand on my throat, it aches a little.”

He took Richard’s hand and laid it over his warm, damp, sick throat, where the pulse beat so heavy and sick, and the Adam’s apple stood out hard.

“You must be still now,” said Lovat, gentle like a physician.

“Don’t let me die!” murmured Kangaroo, almost inaudible, looking into Richard’s muted face. The white, silent face did not change, only the blue-grey eyes were abstract with thought. He did not answer. And even Kangaroo dared not ask for an answer.

At last he let go Richard’s hand from his throat. Richard withdrew it, and wanted to wipe it on his handkerchief. But he refrained, knowing the sick man would notice. He pressed it very silently, quietly, under his thigh, to wipe it on his trousers.

“You are tired now,” he said softly.

“Yes.”

“I will tell the nurse to come?”

“Yes.”

“Good-bye — be better,” said Richard sadly, touching the man’s cheek with his finger-tips slightly. Kangaroo opened his eyes with a smile that was dark as death. “Come again,” he whispered, closing his eyes once more. Richard went blindly to the door. The nurse was there waiting.

Poor Richard, he went away almost blinded with stress and grief and bewilderment. Was it true what Kangaroo had said? Was it true? Did he, Richard, love Kangaroo? Did he love Kangaroo, and deny it? And was the denial just a piece of fear. Was it just fear that made him hold back from admitting his love for the other man?

Fear? Yes, it was fear. But then, did he not believe also in the God of fear? There was not only one God. There was not only the God of love. To insist that there is only one God, and that God the source of Love, is perhaps as fatal as the complete denial of God, and of all mystery. He believed in the God of fear, of darkness, of passion, and of silence, the God that made a man realise his own

sacred aloneness. If Kangaroo could have realised that too then Richard felt he would have loved him, in a dark, separate, other way of love. But never this all in all thing.

As for politics, there was so little to choose, and choice meant nothing. Kangaroo and Struthers were both right, both of them. Lords or doctors or Jewish financiers SHOULD not have more money than a simple working man, just because they were lords and doctors and financiers. If service was the all in all it was absolutely wrong. And Willie Struthers was right.

The same with Kangaroo. If love was the all in all then the great range of love was complete as he put it: a man's love for wife and children, his sheer, confessed love for his friend, his mate, and his love for beauty and truth. Whether love was all in all or not this was the great, wonderful range of love, and love was not complete short of the whole.

But — but something else was true at the same time. Man's isolation was always a supreme truth and fact, not to be forsworn. And the mystery of apartness. And the greater mystery of the dark God beyond a man, the God that gives a man passion, and the dark, unexplained blood-tenderness that is deeper than love, but so much more obscure, impersonal, and the brave, silent blood-pride, knowing his own separateness, and the sword-strength of his derivation from the dark God. This dark, passionate religiousness and inward sense of an inwelling magnificence, direct flow from the unknowable God, this filled Richard's heart first, and human love seemed such a fighting for candle-light, when the dark is so much better. To meet another dark worshipper, that would be the best of human meetings. But strain himself into a feeling of absolute human love, he just couldn't do it.

Man's ultimate love for man? Yes, yes, but only in the separate darkness of man's love for the present, unknowable God. Human love, as a god-act, very well. Human love as a ritual offering to the God who is out of the light, well and good. But human love as an all in all, ah, no, the strain and the unreality of it were too great.

He thought of Jack, and the strange, unforgettable uptilted grin on Jack's face as he spoke of the satisfaction of killing. This was true, too. As true as love and loving. Nay, Jack was a killer in the name of Love. That also has come to pass again.

"It is the collapse of the love-ideal," said Richard to himself. "I suppose it means chaos and anarchy. Then there will have to be chaos and anarchy: in the name of love and equality. The only thing one can stick to is one's own isolate being, and the God in whom it is rooted. And the only thing to look to is the God who fulfils one from the dark. And the only thing to wait for is for men to find

their aloneness and their God in the darkness. Then one can meet as worshippers, in a sacred contact in the dark.”

Which being so, he proceeded, as ever, to try to disentangle himself from the white octopus of love. Not that even now he dared quite deny love. Love is perhaps an eternal part of life. But it is only a part. And when it is treated as if it were a whole, it becomes a disease, a vast white strangling octopus. All things are relative, and have their sacredness in their true relation to all other things. And he felt the light of love dying out of his eyes, in his heart, in his soul, and a great, healing darkness taking its place, with a sweetness of everlasting aloneness, and a stirring of dark blood-tenderness, and a strange, soft iron of ruthlessness.

He fled away to be by himself as much as he could. His great relief was the shore. Sometimes the dull exploding of the waves was too much for him, like hammer-strokes on the head. He tried to flee inland. But the shore was his great solace, for all that. The huge white rollers of the Pacific breaking in a white, soft, snow-rushing wall, while the thin spume flew back to sea like a combed mane, combed back by the strong, cold land-wind.

The thud, the pulse of the waves: that was his nearest throb of emotion. The other emotions seemed to abandon him. So suddenly, and so completely, to abandon him. So it was when he got back from Sydney and, in the night of moonlight, went down the low cliff to the sand. Immediately the great rhythm and ringing of the breakers obliterated every other feeling in his breast, and his soul was a moonlit hollow with the waves striding home. Nothing else.

And in the morning the yellow sea faintly crinkled by the intruding wind from the land, and long, straight lines on the lacquered meadow, long, straight lines that reared at last in green glass, then broke in snow, and slushed softly up the sand. Sometimes the black skulking fin of a shark. The water was very clear, very green, like bright green glass. Another big fish with humpy sort of fins sticking up, and horror, in the green water a big red mouth wide open. One day the fins of dolphins near, it seemed almost over the sea edge. And then, suddenly, oh wonder, they were caught up in the green wall of the rising water, and there for a second they hung in the watery, bright green pane of the wave, five big dark dolphins, a little crowd, with their sharp fins, and blunt heads, a little sea-crowd in the thin, upreared sea. They flashed with a sharp black motion as the great wave curled to break. They flashed in-sea, flashed from the foamy horror of the land. And there they were, black little school, away in the lacquered water, panting, Richard imagined, with the excitement of the escape. Then one of the bold bucks came back to try again, and he jumped clean out of the water, above the wave, and kicked his heels as he dived in again.

The sea-birds were always wheeling: big, dark-backed birds like mollyhawks and albatrosses with a great spread of wings: and the white gleaming gannets, silvery as fish in the air. In they went, suddenly, like bombs into the wave, spitting back the water. Then they slipped out again, slipped out of the ocean with a sort of sly exultance.

And ships walked on the wall-crest of the sea, shedding black smoke. A vast, hard, high sea, with tiny clouds like mirage islets away far, far back, beyond the edge.

So Richard knew it, as he sat and worked on the verandah or sat at table in the room and watched through the open door. But it was usually in the afternoons he went down to it.

It was his afternoon occupation to go down to the sea's edge and wander slowly on the firm sand just at the foam-edge. Sometimes the great waves were turning like mill-wheels white all down the shore. Sometimes they were smaller, more confused, as the current shifted. Sometimes his eyes would be on the sand, watching the wrack, the big bladder-weed thrown up, the little sponges like short clubs rolling in the wind, and once, only, those fairy blue wind-bags like bags of rainbow with long blue strings.

He knew all the places where the different shells were found, the white shells and the black and the red, the big rainbow scoops and the innumerable little black snails that lived on the flat rocks in the little pools. Flat rocks ran out near the coal jetty, and between them little creeks of black, round, crunchy coal-pebbles: sea-coal. Sometimes there would be a couple of lazy, beach-combing men picking the biggest pebbles and putting them into sacks.

On the flat rocks were pools of clear water, that many a time he stepped into, because it was invisible. The coloured pebbles shone, the red anemones pursed themselves up. There were hideous stumpy little fish that darted swift as lightning — grey, with dark stripes. An urchin said they were called toads. “Yer can't eat 'em. Kill yer if y' do. Yer c'nt eat black fish. See me catch one o' these toads!” All this in a high shrill voice above the waves. Richard admired the elfish self-possession of the urchin, alone on the great shore all day, like a little wild creature himself. But so the boys were: such wonderful little self-possessed creatures. It was as if nobody was responsible for them, so they learned to be responsible for themselves, like young elf creatures, as soon as they were hatched. They liked Richard, and patronised him in a friendly, half-shy way. But it was they who were the responsible party, the grown-up they treated with a gentle, slightly off-handed indulgence. It always amused friend Richard to see these Australian children bearing the responsibility of their parents. “He's only a poor old Dad, you know. Young fellow like me's got to keep an eye on him, see

he's all right." That seemed to be the tone of the urchins of ten and eleven. They were charming: much nicer than the older youths, or the men.

The jetty straddled its huge grey timbers, like a great bridge, across the sands and the flat rocks. Under the bridge it was rather dark, between the great trunk-timbers. But here Richard found the best of the flat, oval disc-shells with the whorl and the blue eye. By the bank hung curtains of yellowish creeper, and a big, crimson-pink convolvulus flowered in odd tones. An aloe sent up its tall spike, and died at its base. A little bare grassy headland came out, and the flat rocks ran out dark to sea, where the white waves prowled on three sides.

Richard would drift out this way, right into the sea, on a sunny afternoon. On the flat rocks, all pocketed with limpid pools, the sea-birds would sit with their backs to him, oblivious. Only an uneasy black bird with a long neck, squatting among the gulls, would wriggle his neck as the man approached. The gulls ran a few steps, and forgot him. They were mostly real gulls, big and pure as grey pearl, suave and still, with a mat gleam, like eggs of the foam in the sun on the rocks. Slowly Richard strayed nearer. There were little browner birds huddled and further, one big, dark-backed bird. There they all remained, like opalescent whitish bubbles on the dark, flat, ragged wet-rock, in the sun, in the sea sleep. The black bird rose like a duck, flying with its neck outstretched, more timid than the rest. But it came back. Richard drew nearer and nearer, within six yards of the sea-things. Beyond, the everlasting low white wall of foam, rustling to the flat-rock. Only the sea.

The black creature rose again, showing the white at his side, and flying with a stretched-out neck, frightened-looking, like a duck. His mate rose too. And then all the gulls, flying low in a sort of protest over the foam-tips. Richard had it all to himself — the ever-unfurling water, the ragged, flat, square-holed rocks, the fawn sands inland, the soft sand-bank, the sere flat grass where ponies wandered, the low, red-painted bungalows squatting under coral trees, the ridge of tall wire-thin trees holding their plumes in tufts at the tips, the stalky cabbage-palms beyond in the hollow, clustering, low, whitish zinc roofs of bungalows, at the edge of the dark trees — then the trees in darkness swooping up to the wall of the tors, that ran a waving skyline sagging southwards. Scattered, low, frail-looking bungalows with whitish roofs, and scattered dark trees among. A plume of smoke beyond, out of the scarp front of trees. Near the sky, dark, old, aboriginal rocks. Then again all the yellowish fore-front of the sea, yellow bare grass, the homestead with leafless coral trees, the ponies above the sands, the pale fawn foreshore, the sea, the floor of wet rock.

He had it all to himself. And there, with his hands in his pockets, he drifted into indifference. The far-off, far-off, far-off indifference. The world revolved

and revolved and disappeared. Like a stone that has fallen into the sea, his old life, the old meaning, fell, and rippled, and there was vacancy, with the sea and the Australian shore in it. Far-off, far-off, as if he had landed on another planet, as a man might land after death. Leaving behind the body of care. Even the body of desire. Shed. All that had meant so much to him, shed. All the old world and self of care, the beautiful care as well as the weary care, shed like a dead body. The landscape? — he cared not a thing about the landscape. Love? — he was absolved from love, as if by a great pardon. Humanity? — there was none. Thought? — fallen like a stone into the sea. The great, the glamorous past? — worn thin, frail, like a frail, translucent film of shell thrown up on the shore.

To be alone, mindless and memoryless between the sea, under the sombre wall-front of Australia. To be alone with a long, wide shore and land, heartless, soulless. As alone and as absent and as present as an aboriginal dark on the sand in the sun. The strange falling-away of everything. The cabbage-palms in the sea-wind were sere like old mops. The jetty straddled motionless from the shore. A pony walked on the sand snuffing the sea-weed.

The past all gone so frail and thin. “What have I cared about, what have I cared for? There is nothing to care about.” Absolved from it all. The soft, blue, humanless sky of Australia, the pale, white unwritten atmosphere of Australia. Tabula rasa. The world a new leaf. And on the new leaf, nothing. The white clarity of the Australian, fragile atmosphere. Without a mark, without a record.

“Why have I cared? I don’t care. How strange it is here, to be soulless and alone.”

That was the perpetual refrain at the back of his mind. To be soulless and alone, by the Southern Ocean, in Australia.

“Why do I wrestle with my soul? I have no soul.”

Clear as the air about him this truth possessed him.

“Why do I talk of the soul? My soul is shed like a sheath. I am soulless and alone, soulless and alone. That which is soulless is perforce alone.”

The sun was curving to the crest of the dark ridge. As soon as the sun went behind the ridge, shadow fell on the shore, and a cold wind came, he would go home. But he wanted the sun not to sink — he wanted the sun to stand still, for fear it might turn back to the soulful world where love is and the burden of bothering.

He saw something clutch in a pool. Crouching, he saw a horror — a dark-grey, brown-striped octopus thing with two smallish, white beaks or eyes living in a cranny of a rock in a pool. It stirred the denser viscous pool of itself and unfurled a long dark arm through the water, an arm studded with bright, orange-red studs or suckers. Then it curled the arm in again, cuddling close. Perhaps a

sort of dark shore octopus, star-fish coloured amid its darkness. It was watching him as he crouched. He dropped a snail-shell near it. It huddled closer and one of the beak-like white things disappeared; or were they eyes? Heaven knows. It eased out again, and from its dense jelly mass another thick arm swayed out studded with the sea-orange studs. And he crouched and watched, while the white water hissed nearer to drive him away. Creatures of the sea! Creatures of the sea! The sea-water was round his boots, he rose with his hands in his pockets, to wander away.

The sun went behind the coal-dark hill, though the waves still glowed white-gold, and the sea was dark blue. But the shore had gone into shadow, and the cold wind came at once, like a creature that was lying in wait. The upper air seethed, seemed to hiss with light. But here was shadow, cold like the arm of the dark octopus. And the moon already in the sky.

Home again. But what was home? The fish has the vast ocean for home. And man has timelessness and nowhere. "I won't delude myself with the fallacy of home," he said to himself. "The four walls are a blanket I wrap around in, in timelessness and nowhere, to go to sleep."

Back to Harriet, to tea. Harriet? Another bird like himself. If only she wouldn't speak, talk, feel. The weary habit of talking and having feelings. When a man has no soul he has no feelings to talk about. He wants to be still. And "meaning" is the most meaningless of illusions. An outworn garment.

Harriet and he? It was time they both agreed that nothing has any meaning. Meaning is a dead letter when a man has no soul. And speech is like a volley of dead leaves and dust, stifling the air. Human beings should learn to make weird, wordless cries, like animals, and cast off the clutter of words.

Old dust and dirt of corpses: words and feelings. The decomposed body of the past whirling and choking us, language, love, and meaning. When a man loses his soul he knows what a small, weary bit of clockwork it was. Who dares to be soulless finds the new dimension of life.

Home, to tea. The clicking of the clock. Tic-tac! Tic-tac! The clock. Home to tea. Just for clockwork's sake.

No home, no tea. Insouciant soullessness. Eternal indifference. Perhaps it is only the great pause between carings. But it is only in this pause that one finds the meaninglessness of meanings — like old husks which speak dust. Only in this pause that one finds the meaninglessness of meanings, and the other dimension, the reality of timelessness and nowhere. Home to tea! Do you hear the clock tick? And yet there is timelessness and nowhere. And the clock means nothing with its ticking. And nothing is so meaningless as meanings.

Yet Richard meandered home to tea. For the sun had set, the sea of evening

light was going pale blue, fair as evening, faintly glazed with yellow: the eastern sky was a glow of rose and smoke blue, a band beyond the sea, while from the dark land-ridge under the western sky an electric fierceness still rushed up past a small but vehement evening star. Somewhere among it all the moon was lying.

He received another summons to go to Kangaroo. He didn't want to go. He didn't want any more emotional stress, of any sort. He was sick of having a soul that suffered or responded. He didn't want to respond any more, or to suffer any more. Saunter blindly and obstinately through the days.

But he set off. The wattle-blooms — the whitish, mealy ones — were aflower in the bush, and at the top of huge poles of stems, big, blackish-crimson buds and flowers, flowers of some sort, shot up out of a clump of spear-leaves. The bush was in flower. The sky above was a tender, virgin blue, the air was pale with clarity, the sun moved strong, yet with a soft and cat-like motion through the heavens. It was spring. But still the bush kept its sombreness along all the pellucid ether: the eternally unlighted bush.

What was the good of caring? What was the point of caring? As he looked at the silent, morning bush grey-still in the translucency of the day, a voice spoke quite aloud in him. What was the good of caring, of straining, of stressing? Not the slightest good. The vast lapse of time here — and white men thrown in like snow into dusky wine, to melt away and disappear, but to cool the fever of the dry continent. Afterwards — afterwards — in the far-off, far-off afterwards, a different sort of men might arise to a different sort of care. But as for now — like snow in aboriginal wine one could float and deliciously melt down, to nothingness, having no choice.

He knew that Kangaroo was worse. But he was startled to find him looking a dead man. A long, cadaverous-yellow face, exactly the face of a dead man, but with an animal's dark eyes. He did not move. But he watched Richard come forward from the door. He did not give him his hand.

“How are you?” said Richard gently.

“Dying.” The one word from the discoloured lips.

Somers was silent, because he knew it was only too true. Kangaroo's dark eyebrows above his motionless dark eyes were exactly like an animal that sulks itself to death. His brow was just sulking to death, like an animal.

Kangaroo glanced up at Somers with a rapid turn of the eyes. His body was perfectly motionless.

“Did you know I was dying?” he said.

“I was afraid.”

“Afraid! You weren't afraid. You were glad. They're all glad.” The voice was weak, hissing in its sound. He seemed to speak to himself.

“Nay, don’t say that.”

Kangaroo took no notice of the expostulation. He lay silent.

“They don’t want me,” he said.

“But why bother?”

“I’m dying! I’m dying! I’m dying!” suddenly shouted Kangaroo, with a breaking and bellowing voice that nearly startled Richard out of his skin. The nurse came running in, followed by Jack.

“Mr. Cooley! Whatever is it?” said the nurse.

He looked at her with long, slow, dark looks.

“Statement of fact,” he said, in his faint, husky voice.

“DON’T excite yourself,” pleaded the nurse. “You KNOW it hurts you. Don’t think about it, don’t. Hadn’t you perhaps best be left alone?”

“Yes, I’d better go,” said Richard, rising.

“I want to say good-bye to you,” said Kangaroo faintly, looking up at him with strange, beseeching eyes.

Richard, very pale at the gills, sat down again in the chair. Jack watched them both, scowling.

“Go out, nurse,” whispered Kangaroo, touching her hand with his fingers, in a loving kind of motion. “I’m all right.”

“Oh, Mr. Cooley, DON’T fret, DON’T,” she pleaded.

He watched her with dark, subtle, equivocal eyes, then glanced at the door. She went, obedient, and Jack followed her.

“Good-bye, Lovat!” said Kangaroo in a whisper, turning his face to Somers and reaching out his hand. Richard took the clammy, feeble hand. He did not speak. His lips were closed firmly, his face pale and proud looking. He looked back into Kangaroo’s eyes, unconscious of what he saw. He was only isolated again in endurance. Grief, torture, shame, seethed low down in him. But his breast and shoulders and face were hard as if turned to rock. He had no choice.

“You’ve killed me. You’ve killed me, Lovat!” whispered Kangaroo. “Say good-bye to me. Say you love me now you’ve done it, and I won’t hate you for it.” The voice was weak and tense.

“But *I* haven’t killed you, Kangaroo. I wouldn’t be here holding your hand if I had. I’m only so sorry some other villain did such a thing.” Richard spoke very gently, like a woman.

“Yes, you’ve killed me,” whispered Kangaroo hoarsely.

Richard’s face went colder, and he tried to disengage his hand. But the dying man clasped him with suddenly strong fingers.

“No, no,” he said fiercely. “Don’t leave me now. You must stay with me. I shan’t be long — and I need you to be there.”

There ensued a long silence. The corpse — for such it seemed — lay immobile and obstinate. Yet it did not relax into death. And Richard could not go, for it held him. He sat with his wrist clasped by the clammy thin fingers, and he could not go. Then again the dark, mysterious, animal eyes turned up to his face.

“Say you love me, Lovat,” came the hoarse, penetrating whisper, seeming even more audible than a loud sound.

And again Lovat’s face tightened with torture.

“I don’t understand what you mean,” he said with his lips.

“Say you love me.” The pleading, penetrating whisper seemed to sound inside Somers’ brain. He opened his mouth to say it. The sound ‘I — ’ came out. Then he turned his face aside and remained open-mouthed, blank.

Kangaroo’s fingers were clutching his wrist, the corpse-face was eagerly upturned to his. Somers was brought to by a sudden convulsive gripping of the fingers around his wrist. He looked down. And when he saw the eager, alert face, yellow, long, Jewish, and somehow ghoulish, he knew he could not say it. He didn’t love Kangaroo.

“No,” he said, “I can’t say it.”

The sharpened face, that seemed to be leaping up to him, or leaping up at him, like some snake striking, now seemed to sink back and go indistinct. Only the eyes smouldered low down out of the vague yellow mass of the face. The fingers slackened, and Richard managed to withdraw his wrist. There was an eternity of grey silence. And for a long time Kangaroo’s yellow face seemed sunk half visible under a shadow, as a dusky cuttle-fish under a pool, deep down. Then slowly, slowly it came to the surface again, and Richard braced his nerves.

“You are a little man, a little man, to have come and killed me,” came the terrible, pathetic whisper. But Richard was afraid of the face, so he turned aside. He thought in his mind: “I haven’t killed him at all.”

“What shall you do next?” came the whisper. And slowly, like a dying snake rearing itself, the face reared itself from the bed to look at Somers, who sat with his face averted.

“I am going away. I am leaving Australia.”

“When?”

“Next month.”

“Where are you going?”

“To San Francisco.”

“America! America!” came the hissing whisper. “They’ll kill you in America.” And the head sank back on the pillow.

There was a long silence.

“Going to America! Going to America! After he’s killed me here,” came the whispered moan.

“No, I haven’t killed you. I’m only awfully sorry — .”

“You have! You have!” shouted Kangaroo, in the loud, bellowing voice that frightened Richard nearly out of the window. “Don’t lie, you have — .”

The door opened swiftly and Jack, very stern-faced, entered. He looked at Somers in anger and contempt, then went to the bedside. The nurse hovered in the doorway with an anxious face.

“What is it, ‘Roo?” said Jack, in a voice of infinite tenderness, that made Somers shiver inside his skin. “What’s wrong, Chief, what’s wrong, dear old man?”

Kangaroo turned his face and looked at Somers vindictively.

“That man’s killed me,” he said in a distinct voice.

“No, I think you’re wrong there, old man,” said Jack. “Mr. Somers has never done anything like that. Let me give you a morphia injection, to ease you, won’t you?”

“Leave me alone.” Then, in a fretful vague voice: “I wanted him to love me.”

“I’m sure he loves you, ‘Roo — sure he does.”

“Ask him.”

Jack looked at Richard and made him a sharp, angry sign with his brows, as if bidding him comply.

“You love our one-and-only Kangaroo all right, don’t you, Mr. Somers?” he said in a manly, take-it-for-granted voice.

“I have an immense regard for him,” muttered Richard.

“Regard! I should think so. We’ve got more than regard. I love the man — love him — love him I do. Don’t I, ‘Roo?”

But Kangaroo had sunk down, and his face had gone small, he was oblivious again.

“I want nurse,” he whispered.

“Yes, all right,” said Jack, rising from bending over the sick man. Somers had already gone to the door. The nurse entered, and the two men found themselves in the dark passage.

“I shall have to be coming along, Mr. Somers, if you’ll wait a minute,” said Jack.

“I’ll wait outside,” said Somers. And he went out and down to the street, into the sun, where people were moving about. They were like pasteboard figures shifting on a flat light.

After a few minutes Jack joined him.

“Poor ‘Roo, it’s a question of days now,” said Jack.

“Yes.”

“Hard lines, you know, when a man’s in his prime and just ready to enter into his own. Bitter hard lines.”

“Yes.”

“That’s why I think you were a bit hard on him. I DO love him myself, so I can say so without exaggerating the fact. But if I hated the poor man like hell, and saw him lying there in that state — why, I’d swear on red-hot iron I loved him, I would. A man like that — a big, grand man, as great a hero as ever lived. If a man can’t speak two words of pity for a man in his state, why, I think there’s something wrong with that man. Sorry to have to say it. But if Old Harry himself had lain there like that and asked me to say I loved him I’d have done it. Heart-breaking, it was. But I suppose some folks is stingy about sixpence, and others is stingy about saying two words that would give another poor devil his peace of mind.”

Richard walked on in angry silence. He hated being condemned in this free-and-easy, rough-and-ready fashion.

“But I suppose chaps from the old country are more careful of what they say — might give themselves away or something of that. We’re different over here. Kick yourself over the cliff like an old can if a mate’s in trouble and needs a helping hand, or a bit of sympathy. That’s us. But I suppose being brought up in the old country, where everybody’s frightened that somebody else is going to take advantage of him, makes you more careful. So you’re leaving Australia, are you? Mrs. Somers want to go?”

“I think so.” Not very emphatically, perhaps.

“Wouldn’t want to if you didn’t, so to speak? Oh, Mrs. Somers is all right. She’s a fine woman, she is. I suppose I ought to say lady, but I prefer a woman, myself, to a lady, any day. And Mrs. Somers is a woman all over — she is that. I’m sorry for my own sake and Vicky’s sake that she’s going. I’m sorry for Australia’s sake. A woman like that ought to stop in a new country like this and breed sons for us. That’s what we want.”

“I suppose if she wanted to stop and breed sons she would,” said Richard coldly.

“They’d have to be your sons, that’s the trouble, old man. And how’s she going to manage that if you’re giving us the go-by?”

Richard spent the afternoon going round to the Customs House and to the American Consulate with his passport, and visiting the shipping office to get a plan of the boat. He went swiftly from place to place. There were no difficulties: only both the Customs House and the Consulate wanted photographs and Harriet’s own signature. She would have to come up personally.

He wanted to go now. He wanted to go quickly. But it was no good, he could not get off for another month, so he must preserve his soul in patience.

“No,” said Richard to himself, thinking of Kangaroo. “I don’t love him — I detest him. He can die. I’m glad he is dying. And I don’t like Jack either. Not a bit. In fact I like nobody. I love nobody and I like nobody, and there’s the end of it, as far as I’m concerned. And if I go round ‘loving’ anybody else, or even ‘liking’ them, I deserve a kick in the guts like Kangaroo.”

And yet, when he went over to the Zoo, on the other side of the harbour — and the warm sun shone on the rocks and the mimosa bloom, and he saw the animals, the tenderness came back. A girl he had met, a steamer-acquaintance, had given him a packet of little extra-strong peppermint sweets. The animals liked them. The grizzly bear caught them and ate them with excitement, panting after the hotness of the strong peppermint, and opening his mouth wide, wide, for more. And one golden brown old-man kangaroo, with his great earth-cleaving tail and his little hanging hands, hopped up to the fence and lifted his sensitive nose quivering, and gently nibbled the sweet between Richard’s fingers. So gently, so determinedly nibbled the sweet, but never hurting the fingers that held it. And looking up with the big, prominent Australian eyes, so aged in consciousness, with a fathomless, dark, fern-age gentleness and gloom. The female wouldn’t come near to eat. She only sat up and watched, and her little one hung its tiny fawn’s head and one long ear and one fore-leg out of her pouch, in the middle of her soft, big, grey body.

Such a married couple! Two kangaroos. And the blood in Richard’s veins all gone dark with a sort of sad tenderness. The gentle kangaroos, with their weight in heavy blood on the ground, in their great tail! It wasn’t love he felt for them, but a dark, animal tenderness, and another sort of consciousness, deeper than human.

It was a time of full moon. The moon rose about eight. She was so strong, so exciting, that Richard went out at nine o’clock down to the shore. The night was full of moonlight as a mother-of-pearl. He imagined it had a warmth in it towards the moon, a moon-heat. The light on the waves was like liquid radium swinging and slipping. Like radium, the mystic virtue of vivid decomposition, liquid-gushing lucidity.

The sea too was very full. It was nearly high tide, the waves were rolling very tall, with light like a menace on the nape of their necks as they bent, so brilliant. Then, when they fell, the foreflush in a great soft swing with incredible speed up the shore, on the darkness soft-lighted with moon, like a rush of white serpents, then slipping back with a hiss that fell into silence for a second, leaving the sand of granulated silver.

It was the huge rocking of this flat, hollow-foreflush moon — dim in its hollow, that was the night to Richard. “This is the night and the moon,” he said to himself. Incredibly swift and far the flat rush flew at him, with foam like the hissing, open mouths of snakes. In the nearness a wave broke white and high. Then, ugh! across the intervening gulf the great lurch and swish, as the snakes rushed forward, in a hollow frost hissing at his boots. Then failed to bite, fell back hissing softly, leaving the belly of the sands granulated silver.

A huge but a cold passion swinging back and forth. Great waves of radium swooping with a down-curve and rushing up the shore. Then calling themselves back again, retreating to the mass. Then rushing with venomous radium-burning speed into the body of the land. Then recoiling with a low swish, leaving the flushed sand naked.

That was the night. Rocking with cold, radium-burning passion, swinging and flinging itself with venomous desire. That was Richard, too, a bit of human wispieness in thin overcoat and thick boots. The shore was deserted all the way. Only, when he came past the creek on the sands, rough, wild ponies looking at him, dark figures in the moon light lifting their heads from the invisible grass of the sand, and waiting for him to come near. When he came and talked to them they were reassured, and put their noses down to the grass to eat a bit more in the moon-dusk, glad a man was there.

Richard rocking with the radium-urgent passion of the night: the huge, desirous swing, the call clamour, the low hiss of retreat. The call, call! And the answerer. Where was his answerer? There was no living answerer. No dark-bodied, warm-bodied answerer. He knew that when he had spoken a word to the night-half-hidden ponies with their fluffy legs. No animate answer this time. The radium-rocking, wave-knocking night his call and his answer both. This God without feet or knees or face. This sluicing, knocking, urging night, heaving like a woman with unspeakable desire, but no woman, no thighs or breast, no body. The moon, the concave mother-of-pearl of night, the great radium-swinging, and his little self. The call and the answer, without intermediary. Non-human gods, non-human human being.

CHAPTER 18. ADIEU AUSTRALIA.

Kangaroo died and had a great funeral, but Richard did not go up. He had fixed his berths on the Manganui, and would sail away in twenty days. To America — the United States, a country that did not attract him at all, but which seemed to lie next in his line of destiny.

Meanwhile he wandered round in the Australian spring. Already he loved it. He loved the country he had railed at so loudly a few months ago. While he “cared” he had to rail at it. But the care once broken inside him it had a deep mystery for him, and a dusky, far-off call that he knew would go on calling for long ages before it got any adequate response, in human beings. From far off, from down long fern-dark avenues there seemed to be the voice of Australia, calling low.

He loved to wander in the bush at evening, when night fell so delicately yet with such soft mystery. Then the sky behind the trees was all soft, rose pink, and the great gum-trees ran up their white limbs into the air like quicksilver, plumed at the tips with dark tufts. Like rivulets the white boughs ran up from the white trunk: or like great nerves, with nerve-like articulations, branching into the dusk. Then he would stand under a tall fern-tree, and look up through the whorl of lace above his head, listening to the birds calling in the evening stillness, the parrots making a chinking noise.

Sitting at the edge of the bush he looked at the settlement and the sea beyond. He had quite forgotten how he used to grumble at the haphazard throwing of bungalows here and there and anywhere: how he used to hate the tin roofs, and the untidiness, It recalled to him the young Australian captain: “Oh, how I liked the rain on the tin roofs of the huts at the war. It reminded me of Australia.”

“And now,” thought Richard to himself, “tin roofs and scattered shanties will remind me of Australia. They seem to me beautiful, though it’s a fact they have nothing to do with beauty.”

But, oh, the deep mystery of joy it was to him to sit at the edge of the bush as twilight fell, and look down at the township. The bungalows were built mostly on the sides of the slopes. They had no foundations, but stood on brickwork props, which brought them up to the level. There they stood on the hillsides, on their short legs, with darkness under their floors, the little bungalows, looking as if they weighed nothing. Looking flimsy, made of wood with corrugated zinc roofs. Some of them were painted dark red, roofs and all, some were painted

grey, some were wooden simply. Many had the white-grey zinc roofs, pale and delicate. At the back was always one big water-butt of corrugated iron, a big round tank painted dark-red, the corrugation ribs running round, and a jerky, red-painted pipe coming down from the eaves. Sometimes there were two of these tanks: and a thin, not very tidy woman in a big straw hat stooping to the tap at the bottom of the tank. The roof came down low, making a long shade over the wooden verandahs. Nearly always a little loggia at the back, from which the house-door opened. And this little verandah was the woman's kitchen; there she had a little table with her dirty dishes, which she was going to wash up. And a cat would be trotting around, as if it had not an enemy in the world, while from the verandah a parrot called.

The bungalows near the bush edge had odd bits of garden nipped out of the paddocks and carefully railed in: then another little enclosure for the calf. At the back the earth was scratched, there was a rubbish heap of ashes and tins slipping into the brambles, and very white fowls clustering for bedtime. In front of the house, in another bit of garden with wooden palings, two camellia trees full of flowers, one white and one red, like artificial things, but a bit seared by the wind. And at the gate the branching coral trees still flowering flame from their dark, strong-thrusting, up-curving buds.

So, with evening falling. There were green roads laid out in the wild, with but one lost bungalow to justify them. And a lost horse wildly galloping round the corner of this blind road, to quiet down and look around. A belated collier galloping stiffly on his pony, out of the township, and a woman in a white blouse and black skirt, with two little girls beside her, driving a ramshackle little buggy with a quick-legged little pony, homewards through the trees.

Lights were beginning to glint out: the township was deciding it was night. The bungalows scattered far and wide, on the lower levels. There was a network of wide roads, or beginnings of roads. The heart of the township was one tiny bit of street a hundred yards long: Main Street. You knew where it was, as you looked down on the reddish earth and grass and bush, by the rather big roof of pale zinc and a sandy-coloured round gable of the hotel — the biggest building in the place. For the rest, it looked, from above, like an inch of street with tin roofs on either side, fizzling out at once into a wide grass-road with a few bungalows and then the bush. But there was the dark railway, and the little station. And then again the big paddocks rising to the sea, with a ridge of coral-trees and a farm-place. Richard could see Coo-ee with its low, red roof, right on the sea. Behind it the rail-fences of the paddocks, and the open grass, and the streets cut out and going nowhere, with an odd bungalow here and there.

So it was all round — a far and wide scattering of pale-roofed bungalows at

random among grassy, cut-out streets, all along the levels above the sea, but keeping back from the sea, as if there were no sea. Ignoring the great Pacific. There were knolls and pieces of blue creek-hollow, blue of freshwater in lagoons on the yellow sands. Up the knolls perched more bungalows, on very long front legs and no back legs, caves of dark underneath. And on the sky-line, a ridge of wiry trees with dark plume-tufts at the ends of the wires, and these little loose crystals of different-coloured, sharp-angled bungalows cropping out beneath. All in a pale, clear air, clear and yet far off, as it were visionary.

So the land swooped in grassy swoops, past the railway, steep up to the bush: here and there thick-headed palm trees left behind by the flood of time and the flood of civilisation both: bungalows with flame-trees: bare bungalows like packing-cases: an occasional wind-fan for raising water: a round well-pool, perfectly round: then the bush, and a little colliery steaming among the trees. And so the great tree-covered swoop upwards of the tor, to the red fume of clouds, red like the flame-flowers, of sunset. In the darkness of trees the strange birds clinking and trilling: the tree-ferns with their knob-scaly trunks spreading their marvellous circle of lace overhead against the glow, the gum-trees like white, naked nerves running up their limbs, and the inevitable dead gum-trees poking stark grey limbs into the air. And the thick aboriginal dusk settling down.

Richard wandered through the village, homewards. Horses stood motionless in the middle of the road, like ghosts, listening. Or a cow stood as if asleep on the dark footpath. Then she too wandered off. At night-time always these creatures roaming the dark and semi-dark roads, eating the wayside grass. The motor-cars rushing up the coast road must watch for them. But the straying cattle were not troubled. They dragged slowly out of the way.

The night in the township was full of the sound of frogs, rattling, screeching, whirring, raving like a whole fairy factory going at full speed in the marshy creek-bottom. A great grey bird, a crane, came down on wide soft wings softly in the marshy place. A cream coloured-pony, with a snake-like head stretched out, came cropping up the road, cropping unmoved, though Richard's feet passed within a few yards of his nose. Richard thought of the snaky Praxiteles horses outside the Quirinal in Rome. Very, very nearly those old, snaky horses were born again here in Australia: or the same vision come back.

People mattered so little. People hardly matter at all. They were there, they were friendly. But they never entered inside one. It is said that man is the chief environment of man. That, for Richard, was not true in Australia. Man was there, but unnoticeable. You said a few words to a neighbour or an acquaintance, but it was merely for the sake of making a sound of some sort. Just a sound. There was nothing really to be said. The vast continent is really void of speech. Only man

makes noises to man, from habit. Richard found he never wanted to talk to anybody, never wanted to be with anybody. He had fallen apart out of the human association. And the rest of the people either were the same, or they herded together in a promiscuous fashion. But this speechless, aimless solitariness was in the air. It was natural to the country. The people left you alone. They didn't follow you with their curiosity and their inquisitiveness and their human fellowship. You passed, and they forgot you. You came again, and they hardly saw you. You spoke, and they were friendly. But they never asked any questions, and they never encroached. They didn't care. The profound Australian indifference, which still is not really apathy. The disintegration of the social mankind back to its elements. Rudimentary individuals with no desire of communication. Speeches, just noises. A herding together like dumb cattle, a promiscuity like slovenly animals. Yet the basic indifference under everything.

And with it all, toiling on with civilisation. But it felt like a clock that was running down. It had been wound up in Europe, and was running down, running right down, here in Australia. Men were mining, farming, making roads, shouting politics. But all with that basic indifference which dare not acknowledge HOW indifferent it is, lest it should drop everything and lapse into a blank. But a basic indifference, with a spurt of excitement over a horse-race, and an occasional joy in a row.

It seemed strange to Somers that Labour should be so insistent in Australia — or that Kangaroo should have been so burning. But then he realised that these men were all the time yoked to some work, they were all the time in the collar. And the work kept them going a good deal more than they kept the work going. Nothing but the absolute drive of the world's work kept them going. Without it they would have lapsed into the old bushranging recklessness, lapsed into the profound indifference which was basic in them.

But still, they were men, they were healthy, they were full of energy, even if they were indifferent to the aim in front. So they embraced one aim or another, out of need to be going somewhere, doing something more than just backing a horse. Something more than a mere day's work and a gamble. Some smack at the old-established institution of life, that came from Europe.

There it is, laid all over the world, the heavy established European way of life. Like their huge ponderous cathedrals and factories and cities, enormous encumbrances of stone and steel and brick, weighing on the surface of the earth. They say Australia is free, and it is. Even the flimsy, foundationless bungalows. Richard railed at the scrappy amorphousness, till two nights he dreamed he was in Paris, and a third night it was in some other city, of Italy or France. Here he was staying in a big palazzo of a house — and he struggled to get out, and found

himself in a high old provincial street with old gable houses and dark shadow and himself in the gulf between: and at the end of the street a huge, pale-grey bulk of a cathedral, an old Gothic cathedral, huge and massive and grey and beautiful.

But, suddenly, the mass of it made him sick, and the beauty was nauseous to him. So strong a feeling that he woke up. And since that day he had been thankful for the amorphous scrappy scattering of foundationless shacks and bungalows. Since then he had loved the Australian landscape, with the remote gum-trees running their white nerves into the air, the random streets of flimsy bungalows, all loose from one another, and temporary seeming, the bungalows perched precariously on the knolls, like Japanese paper-houses, below the ridge of wire-and-tuft trees.

He had now a horror of vast super-incumbent buildings. They were a nightmare. Even the cathedrals. Huge, huge bulks that are called beauty. Beauty seemed to him like some turgid tumour. Never again, he felt, did he want to look at London, the horrible WEIGHT of it: or at Rome with all the pressure on the hills. Horrible, inert, man-moulded weight. Heavy as death.

No, no, the flimsy hills of Australia were like a new world, and the frail INCONSPICUOUSNESS of the landscape, that was still so clear and clean, clean of all fogginess or confusion: but the frail, aloof, inconspicuous clarity of the landscape was like a sort of heaven — bungalows, shacks, corrugated iron and all. No wonder Australians love Australia. It is the land that as yet has made no great mistake, humanly. The horrible human mistakes of Europe. And, probably, the even worse human mistakes of America.

“Then why am I going?” he asked himself.

“Wait! Wait!” he answered himself. “You have got to go through the mistakes. You’ve got to go all round the world, and then halfway round again, till you get back. Go on, go on, the world is round, and it will bring you back. Draw your ring round the world, the ring of your consciousness. Draw it round until it is complete.”

So he prepared with a quiet heart to depart.

The only person that called at Coo-ee was Jaz.

“You’re leaving us, then?” he said.

“Yes.”

“Rather suddenly at the end.”

“Perhaps. But it’s as well I should go soon if I’m going.”

“You think so? Taken against the place, have you?”

“No — the contrary. If I stay much longer I shall stay altogether.”

“Come quite to like it!” Jaz smiled slowly.

“Yes. I love it, Jaz. I don’t love people. But this place — it goes into my marrow, and makes me feel drunk. I love Australia.”

“That’s why you leave it, eh?”

“Yes. I’m frightened. What I want to do is to go a bit further back into the bush — near some little township — have a horse and a cow of my own — and — damn everything.”

“I can quite understand the ‘damn everything’ part of it,” laughed Jaz. “You won’t do it, though.”

“I never was so tempted in my life. Talk about Eve tempting man to a fall: Australia tempts me. Retro me — .”

Jaz was silent for a few moments.

“You’d repent it, though,” he said quietly.

“I’ll probably repent whatever I do,” replied Somers, “so what’s the odds. I’ll probably repent bitterly going to America, going back to the world: when I want Australia. I want Australia as a man wants a woman. I fairly tremble with wanting it.”

“Australia?”

“Yes.”

Jaz looked at Somers with his curious, light-grey eyes.

“Then why not stop?” he said seductively.

“Not now. Not now. Some cussedness inside me. I don’t want to give in, you see. Not yet, I don’t want to give in to the place. It’s too strong. It would lure me quite away from myself. It would be too easy. It’s TOO tempting. It’s too big a stride, Jaz.”

Jaz laughed, looking back at Richard’s intense eyes.

“What a man you are, Mr. Somers!” he said. “Come and live in Sydney and you won’t find it such a big jump from anywhere else.”

“No, I wouldn’t want to live in Sydney. I’d want to go back in the bush near one of the little townships. It’s like wanting a woman, Jaz. I want it.”

“Then why not do it?”

“I won’t give in, not yet. It’s like giving in to a woman; I won’t give in yet. I’ll come back later.”

Jaz suddenly looked at Richard and smiled maliciously.

“You won’t give in, Mr. Somers, will you? You won’t give in to the women, and Australia’s like a woman to you. You wouldn’t give in to Kangaroo, and he’s dead now. You won’t give in to Labour, or Socialism. Well, now, what will you do? Will you give in to America, do you think?”

“Heaven preserve me — if I’m to speak beforehand.”

“Why, Mr. Somers!” laughed Jaz, “seems to me you just go round the world

looking for things you're not going to give in to. You're as bad as we folk."

"Maybe," said Richard. "But I'll give in to the Lord Almighty, which is more than you'll do —."

"Oh, well, now — we'd give in to Him if we saw Him," said Jaz, smiling with an odd winsomeness he sometimes had.

"All right. Well I prefer not to see, and yet to give in," said Richard.

Jaz glanced up at him suspiciously, from under his brows.

"And another thing," said Richard. "I won't give up the flag of our real civilised consciousness. I'll give up the ideals. But not the aware, self-responsible, deep consciousness that we've gained. I won't go back on that, Jaz, though Kangaroo did say I was the enemy of civilisation."

"You don't consider you are, then?" asked Jaz, pertinently.

"The enemy of civilisation? Well, I'm the enemy of this machine-civilisation and this ideal civilisation. But I'm not the enemy of the deep, self-responsible consciousness in man, which is what *I* mean by civilisation. In that sense of civilisation I'd fight forever for the flag, and try to carry it on into deeper, darker places. It's an adventure, Jaz, like any other. And when you realise what you're doing, it's perhaps the best adventure."

Harriet brought the tea-tray on to the verandah.

"It's quite nice that somebody has come to see us," she said to Jaz. "There seems such a gap, now Kangaroo is gone, and all he stood for."

"You feel a gap, do you?" asked Jaz.

"Awful. As if the earth had opened. As for Lovat, he's absolutely broken-hearted, and such a trial to live with."

Jaz looked quickly and inquiringly at Somers.

"Sort of metaphysical heart," Richard said, smiling wryly.

Jaz only looked puzzled.

"Metaphysical!" said Harriet. "You'd think to hear him he was nothing but a tea-pot brewing metaphysical tea. As a matter of fact Kangaroo went awfully deep with him, and now he's heart-broken, and that's why he's rushing to America. He's always breaking his heart over something — anything except me. To me he's a nether millstone."

"Is that so!" said Jaz.

"But one feels awful, you know, Kangaroo dying like that. Lovat likes to show off and be so beastly high and mighty about things. But I know how miserable he is."

They were silent for some time, and the talk drifted.

In the newspapers Somers read of a big cyclone off the coast of China, which had engulfed thousands of Chinese. This cyclone was now travelling south,

lashing its tail over the New Hebrides, and swooping its paws down the thousands of miles of east coast of Australia. The monster was expected to have spent itself by the time it reached Sydney. But it hadn't — not quite.

Down it came, in a great darkness. The sea began to have a strange yelling sound in its breakers, the black cloud came up like a wall from the sea, everywhere was dark. And the wind broke in volleys from the sea, and the rain poured as if the cyclone were a great bucket of water pouring itself endlessly down.

Richard and Harriet sat in the dark room at Coo-ee, with a big fire, and darkness raging in waters around. It was like the end of the world. The roaring snarl of the sea was of such volume, the volleying roar of the wind so great as to create almost a sense of silence in the room. The house was like a small cave under the water. Rain poured in waves over the dark room, and with a heaviness of spume. Though the roof came down so far and deep over the verandahs, yet the water swept in, and gurgled under the doors and in at the windows. Tiles were ripped off the verandah roof with a crash, and water splashed more heavily. For the first day there was nothing to do but to sit by the fire, and occasionally mop up the water at the seaward door. Through the long, low windows you saw only a yellow-livid fume, and over all the boom you heard the snarl of water.

They were quite cut off this day, alone, dark, in the devastation of water. The rain had an iciness, too, which seemed to make a shell round the house. The two beings, Harriet and Lovat, kept alone and silent in the shell of a house as in a submarine. They were black inside as out. Harriet particularly was full of a storm of black chagrin. She had expected so much of Australia. It had been as if all her life she had been waiting to come to Australia. To a new country, to a new, unspoiled country. Oh, she hated the old world so much. London, Paris, Berlin, Rome — they all seemed to her so old, so ponderous with ancient authority and ancient dirt. Ponderous, ancient authority especially, oh, how she hated it. Freed once, she wanted a new freedom, silvery and paradisaical in the atmosphere. A land with a new atmosphere, untainted by authority. Silvery, untouched freedom.

And in the first months she had found this in Australia, in the silent, silvery-blue days, and the unbreathed air, and strange, remote forms of tree and creature. She had felt herself free, free, free, for the first time in her life. In the silvery pure air of this undominated continent she could swim like a fish that is just born, alone in a crystal ocean. Woman that she was she exulted, she delighted. She had loved Coo-ee. And she just could not understand that Richard was so tense, so resistant.

Then gradually, through the silver glisten of the new freedom came a dull,

sinister vibration. Sometimes from the interior came a wind that seemed to her evil. Out of the silver paradisaical freedom untamed, evil winds could come, cold, like a stone hatchet murdering you. The freedom, like everything else, had two sides to it. Sometimes a heavy, reptile-hostility came off the sombre land, something gruesome and infinitely repulsive. It frightened her as a reptile would frighten her if it wound its cold folds around her. For the past month now Australia had been giving her these horrors. It was as if the silvery freedom suddenly turned, and showed the scaly back of a reptile, and the horrible jaws.

Out of all her bird-like elation at this new-found freedom, freedom for her, the female, suddenly, without warning, dark revulsions struck her. Struck her, it would seem, in her deepest female self, almost in her womb. These revulsions sent her into a frenzy. She had sudden, mad loathings of Australia. And these made her all the more frenzied because of her former great, radiant hopes and her silvery realisations. What, must it all be taken back from her, all this glisten of paradise, this glisten of paradise, this silvery freedom like protoplasm of life? Was it to be revoked?

There was Richard, that hell-bird, preaching, preaching at her: “Don’t trust it. You can’t have this absolved sort of freedom. It’s an illusion. You can’t have this freedom absolved from control. It can’t be done. There is no stability. There will come a reaction and a devastation. Inevitable. You must have deep control from within. You must have a deep, dark weight of authority in your own soul. You must be most carefully, sternly controlled from within. You must be under the hand of the Lord. You can’t escape the dark hand of the Lord, not even in free Australia. You’ll get the devils turning on you if you try too much freedom. It can’t be done. Too much freedom means you absolve yourself from the hand of the Lord, and once you’re really absolved you fall a prey to devils, devils. You’ll see. All you white females raging for further freedom. Wait, wait till you’ve got it and see how the devils will bite you with unclean, reptile sort of mouths. Wait, you who love Australia and its freedom. Only let me leave you to the freedom, till it bites you with a sort of sewer-mouth, like all these rats. Only let me abandon you to this freedom. Only let me — .”

So he had preached at her, like a dog barking, barking senselessly. And oh, how it had annoyed her.

Yet gradually, quite apart from him, it had begun to happen to her. These hateful revulsions, when Australia had turned as it were UNCLEAN to her, with an unclean sort of malevolence. And her revulsions had possessed her. Then the death of Kangaroo. And now this blackness, this slew of water, this noise of hellish elements.

To Richard it was like being caged in with a sick tiger, to be shut up with

Harriet in this watery cave of gloom. Like a sullen, sick tiger, she could hardly get her self to move, the weight of her revulsion was so deep upon her. She LOATHED Australia, with wet, dark repulsion. She was black, sick with chagrin. And she hated that barking white dog of a Richard, with his yap-yap-yapping about control and authority and the hand of the Lord. She had left Europe with her teeth set in hatred of Europe's ancient encumbrance of authority and of the withered, repulsive weight of the Hand of the Lord, that old Jew, upon it. Undying hostility to old Europe, undying hope of the new, free lands. Especially this far Australia.

And now — and now — was the freedom all going to turn into dirty water? All the uncontrolled gentleness and uncontaminated freedom of Australia, was it going to turn and bite her like the ghastly bite of some unclean-mouthed reptile, an iguana, a great newt? Had it already bitten her?

She was sick with revulsion, she wanted to get out, away to America which is not so sloppy and lovey, but hard and greedy and domineering, perhaps, but not mushey-lovey.

These three days of dark wetness, slew, and wind finished her. On the second morning there was an abatement, and Richard rushed to the post. The boys, barefoot, bare-legged in the icy water, were running to school under mackintosh capes. Down came the rain in a wind suddenly like a great hose-pipe, and Richard got home a running, streaming pillar of water. Home into the dark room and the sulky tiger of Harriet.

The storm went on, black, all day, all night, and the next day the same, inside the house as well as out. Harriet sulked the more, like a frenzied sick tigress. The afternoon of the third day another abatement into light rain, so Richard pulled on thick boots and went out to the shore. His grass was a thin surface stream, and down the low cliffs, one cascade stream. The sea was enormous: wave after wave in immediate succession, raving yellow and crashing dull into the land. The yeast-spume was piled in hills against the cliffs, among the big rocks, and in swung the raving yellow water, in great dull blows under the land, hoarsely surging out of the dim yellow blank of the sea. Harriet looked at it for a few moments, shuddering and peering down like a sick tigress in a flood. Then she turned tail and rushed indoors.

Richard tried to walk under the cliffs. But the whole shore was ruined, changed: a whole mass of new rocks, a chaos of heaped boulders, a gurgle of rushing, clayey water, and heaps of collapsed earth.

On the fourth day the wind had sunk, the rain was only thin, the dark sky was breaking. Gradually the storm of the sky went down. But not the sea. Its great yellow fore-fringe was a snarl of wave after wave, unceasing. And the shore was

a ruin. The beach seemed to have sunk or been swept away, the shore was a catastrophe of rocks and boulders. Richard scrambled along through the dank wetness to a bit of sand, where seaweed was piled like bushes, and he could more or less walk. But soon he came to a new obstacle. The creek, which formerly had sunk at the edge of the beach in a long pool, and left the sloping sand all free and beautiful, had now broken through, levelled the sand, and swept in a kind of snarling river to the snarling waves; across the cut-out sand. The freshwater met the waves with a snarl, and sometimes pushed on into the sea, sometimes was shoved back and heaped up with a rattle of angry protest. Waters against waters.

The beach never recovered, during the Somers' stay, the river never subsided into the sand, the sandy foreshore never came back. It was a rocky, boulder-heaped ruin with that stream for an impasse. Harriet would not go down to the sea any more. The waves still raved very high, they would not go back, and they lashed with a venomousness to the cliffs, to cut a man off. Richard would wander cold and alone on this inhospitable shore, looking for shells, out of the storm. And all the time the waves would lash up, and he would scramble out. It seemed to him female and vindictive. "Beastly water, beastly water, rolling up so high. Beastly water, beastly water, rolling up so high, breaking all the shells where they lie" — he crooned to himself, crooning a kind of war-croon, malevolent against the malevolence of this ocean.

Yet it was August, and spring was come, it was wattle-day in Sydney, the city full of yellow bloom of mimosa. Richard and Harriet went up to the United States Consul, to the shipping office: everything very easy. But he could not bear to be in Sydney any more. He could hear Kangaroo all the time.

It was August, and spring, and hot, hot sun in a blue sky. Only the sea would not, or could not return to its old beauties. Richard preferred to go inland. The wattle-trees and the camellia-trees were full in bloom in the bungalow gardens, birds flew quickly about in the sun, the morning was quick with spring, the afternoon already hot and drowsy with summer. Harriet, in her soul, had now left Australia for America, so she could look at this land with new, relieved eyes again. She never more passionately identified herself with it as at first.

Richard hired a little two-wheeled trap, called in Australia a sulky, with a little pony, to drive into the bush. Sometimes they had gone in a motor-car, but they both much preferred the little, comfortable sulky. There sat Harriet full and beaming, and the thin Richard beside her, like any Australian couple in a shabby sulky behind a shabby pony, trotting lazily under the gum-trees of the high-road and up the steep, steep, jungle-dense climb of the mountain to the pass.

Nothing is lovelier than to drive into the Australian bush in spring, on a clear

day: and most days are clear and hot. Up the steep climb the tree-ferns and the cabbage-palms stood dark and unlighted as ever, among the great gums. But once at the top, away from the high-road and the sea-face, trotting on the yellow-brown sandy trail through the sunny, thinly scattered trees of the untouched bush, it was heaven. They splashed through a clear, clear stream, and walked up a bank into the nowhere, the pony peacefully marching.

The bush was in bloom, the wattles were out. Wattle, or mimosa, is the national flower of Australia. There are said to be thirty-two species. Richard found only seven as they wandered along. The little, pale, sulphur wattle with a reddish stem sends its lovely sprays so aerial out of the sand of the trail, only a foot or two high, but such a delicate, spring-like thing. The thorny wattle with its fuzzy pale balls tangles on the banks. Then beautiful heath-plants with small bells, like white heather, stand in tall, straight tufts, and above them the gold sprays of the intensely gold bush mimosa, with here and there, on long, thin stalks like hairs almost, beautiful blue flowers, with gold grains, three-petalled, like reed-flowers, and blue, blue with a touch of Australian darkness. Then comes a hollow, desolate bare place with empty greyness and a few dead, charred gum-trees, where there has been a bush-fire. At the side of this bare place great flowers, twelve feet high, like sticky dark lilies in bulb-buds at the top of the shaft, dark, blood-red. Then over another stream, and scattered bush once more, and the last queer, gold red bushes of the bottle-brush tree, like soft-bristly golden bottle-brushes standing stiffly up, and the queer black-boys on one black leg with a tuft of dark-green spears, sending up the high stick of a seed-stalk, much taller than a man. And here and there the gold bushes of wattle with their narrow dark leaves.

Richard turned and they plunged into the wild grass and strange bushes, following the stream. By the stream the mimosa was all gold, great gold bushes full of spring fire rising over your head, and the scent of the Australian spring, and the most ethereal of all golden bloom, the plummy, many-balled wattle, and the utter loneliness, the manlessness, the untouched blue sky overhead, the gaunt, lightless gum-trees rearing a little way off, and sound of strange birds, vivid ones of strange, brilliant birds that flit round. Save for that, and for some weird frog-like sound, indescribable, the age-unbroken silence of the Australian bush.

But it is wonderful, out of the sombreness of gum-trees, that seem the same, hoary for ever, and that are said to begin to wither from the centre the moment they are mature — out of the hollow bush of gum-trees and silent heaths, all at once, in spring, the most delicate feathery yellow of plumes and plumes and plumes and trees and bushes of wattle, as if angels had flown right down out of

the softest gold regions of heaven to settle here, in the Australian bush. And the perfume in all the air that might be heaven, and the unutterable stillness, save for strange bright birds and flocks of parrots, and the motionlessness, save for a stream and butterflies and some small brown bees. Yet a stillness, and a manlessness, and an elation, the bush flowering at the gates of heaven.

Somers and Harriet left the pony and clambered along the stream, past trees of the grey, feathery-leaved wattle, most sumptuous of all in soft gold in the sky, and bushes of the grey-hard, queer-leaved wattle, on to the thick green of strange trees narrowing into the water. The water slithered rushing over steep rocks. The two scrambled down, and along after the water, to an abrupt edge. There the water fell in a great roar down a solid rock, and broke and rushed into a round, dark pool, dark, still, fathomless, low down in a gruesome dark cup in the bush, with rocks coming up to the trees. In this tarn the stream disappeared. There was no outlet. Rock and bush shut it in. The river just dived into the ground.

It was a dark, frightening place, famous for snakes. Richard hoped the snakes were still sleeping. But there was a horror of them in the air, rising from the tangled undergrowth, from under the fallen trees, the gum-trees that crashed down into the great ferns, eaten out by white ants.

In this place already the Christmas bells were blooming, like some great heath with hanging, bright red bells tipped with white. Other more single bell-flowers, a little bit like foxgloves, but stiff and sharp. All the flowers stiff, sharp, like crystals of colour come opaque out of the sombre, stiff, bristly bush plants.

Harriet had armfuls of bloom, gold plumage of many branches of different wattles, and the white heather, the scarlet bells, with the deep-blue reed-blobs. The sulky with all the bloom looked like a corner of paradise. And as they trotted home through the bush evening was coming, the gold sun slanting. But Richard kept jumping out from among the flowers, to plunge into the brake for a new flower. And the little pony looked round watching him impatiently and displeased. But it was a gentle, tolerant, Australian little beast, with untold patience. Only Harriet was frightened of the coming dusk.

So at length they were slipping down the steep slopes again, between the dense, creeper-tangled jungle and tree ferns, dark, chilly. They passed a family moving from nowhere to nowhere, two colts trotting beside the wagon. And they came out at last at the bottom, to the lost, flickering little township, at nightfall.

At home, with all the house full of blossom, but fluffy gold wattle-bloom, they sat at tea in the pleasant room, the bright fire burning, eating boiled eggs and toast. And they looked at one another — and Richard uttered the unspoken thought:

“Do you wish you were staying?”

“I — I,” stammered Harriet, “if I had THREE lives, I’d wish to stay. It’s the loveliest thing I’ve EVER known.”

“I know,” he answered, laughing. “If one could live a hundred years. But since one has only a short time — .”

They were both silent. The flowers there in the room were like angel-presences, something out of heaven. The bush! The wonderful Australia.

Yet the day came to go: to give up the keys, and leave the lonely, bare Coo-ee to the next comers. Even the sea had gone flowery again at last. And everybody was so simple, so kindly, at the departure. Harriet felt she would leave behind her forever something of herself, in that Coo-ee home. And he knew that one of his souls would stand forever out on those rocks beyond the jetty, towards Bulli, advanced into the sea, with the dark magic of the tor standing just inland.

The journey to Sydney was so spring-warm and beautiful, in the fresh morning. The bush now and then glowed gold, and there were almond and apricot trees near the little wooden bungalows, and by the railway unknown flowers, magenta and yellow and white, among the rocks. The frail, wonderful Australian spring, coming out of all the gummy hardness and sombreness of the bush.

Sydney, and the warm harbour. They crossed over once more in the blue afternoon. Kangaroo dead. Sydney lying on its many-lobed blue harbour, in the Australian spring. The many people, all seeming dissolved in the blue air. Revolution — nothingnesses. Nothing could ever matter.

On the last morning Victoria and Jaz’s wife came to see the Somers off. The ship sailed at ten. The sky was all sun, the boat reared her green paint and red funnel to the sun. Down below in the dark shadow of the wharf stood all those who were to be left behind, saying good-bye, standing down in the shadow under the ship and the wharf, their faces turned up to the passengers who hung over the rail. A whole crowd of people down on the wharf, with white uplifted faces, and one little group of quiet Chinese.

Everybody had bought streamers, rolls of coloured paper ribbon, and now the passengers leaning over the rail of the lower and middle decks tossed the unwinding rolls to their friends below. So this was the last tie, this ribbon of coloured paper. Somers had a yellow and a red one: Victoria held the end of the red streamer, Jaz’s wife the end of the yellow. Harriet had blue and green streamers. And from the side of the ship a whole glittering tangle of these colours connecting the departing with the remaining, a criss-cross of brilliant colour that seemed to glitter like a rainbow in the beams of the sun, as it rose higher, shining in between the ship and the wharf shed, touching the faces of the many people below.

The gangway was hoisted — the steamer gave long hoots. Only the criss-crossing web of brilliant streamers went from the hands of the departing to the hands of those who would be left behind. There was a sort of silence: the calling seemed to die out. And already before the cables were cast loose, the gulf seemed to come. Richard held fast to the two streamers, and looked down at the faces of the two women, who held the other ends of his paper threads. He felt a deep pang in his heart, leaving Australia, that strange country that a man might lose so hopelessly. He felt another heartstring going to break like the streamers, leaving Australia, leaving his own British connection. The darkness that comes over the heart at the moment of departure darkens the eyes too, and the last scene is remote, remote, detached inside a darkness.

So now, when the cables were cast loose, and the ship slowly left the side of the wharf and drew gradually towards the easier waters of the harbour, there was a little gulf of water between the ship and the wharf. The streamers lengthened out, they glittered and twinkled across the space almost like music, so many-coloured. And then the engines were going, and the crowd on the wooden quay began to follow slowly, slowly, holding the frail streamers carefully, like the ends of a cloud, following slowly down the quay as the ship melted from shadow to the sun beyond.

One by one the streamers broke and fluttered loose and fell bright and dead on the water. The slow crowd, slow as a funeral, was at the end, the far end of the quay, holding the last streamers. But the ship inexorably drifted out, and every coloured strip was broken: the crowd stood alone at the end of the wharf, the side of the vessel was fluttering with bright, broken ends.

So, it was time to take out handkerchiefs and wave across space. Few people wept. Somers waved and waved his orange silk kerchief in the blue air. Farewell! Farewell! Farewell Victoria and Jaz's wife, farewell Australia, farewell Britain and the great Empire. Farewell! Farewell! The last streamers blowing away, like broken attachments, broken heartstrings. The crowd on the wharf gone tiny in the sun, and melting away as the ship turned.

Richard watched the Observatory go by: then the Circular Quay, with all its ferry-wharves, and a Nippon steamer lying at her berth, and a well-known, big buff and black P. and O. boat at the P. and O. wharf, looking so like India. Then that was gone too, and the Governor's Palace, and the castellated Conservatorium of Music on its hill, where Richard had first seen Jack — the Palace Gardens, and the blue inlet where the Australian "Fleet" lay comfortably rusting. Then they drifted across harbour, nearer to the wild-seeming slope, like bush, where the Zoo is. And then they began to wait, to hang round.

There ahead was the open gate of the harbour, the low Heads with the South

Lighthouse, and the Pacific beyond, breaking white. On the left was Manly, where Harriet had lost her yellow scarf. And then the tram going to Narrabeen, where they had first seen Jaz. Behind was the great lobed harbour, so blue, and Sydney rather inconspicuous on the south hills, with its one or two sky-scrapers. And already, the blue water all round, and a thing of the past.

It was midday before they got out of the Heads, out of the harbour into the open sea. The sun was hot, the wind cold. There were not very many passengers in the first class: and nobody who looked possible to the Somers pair. Richard sat in the sun watching the dark coast of Australia, so sombre, receding. Harriet watched the two seamen casting rubbish overboard: such a funny assortment of rubbish. The iron sank in the deep, dark water, the wood and straw and cardboard drearily floated. The low Sydney Heads were not far off.

Lovat watched till he could see the dark of the mountain, far away, behind Coo-ee. He was almost sure of the shape. He thought of the empty house — the sunny grass in front — the sunny foreshore with its new rocks — the township behind, the dark tor, the bush, the Australian spring. The sea seemed dark and cold and inhospitable.

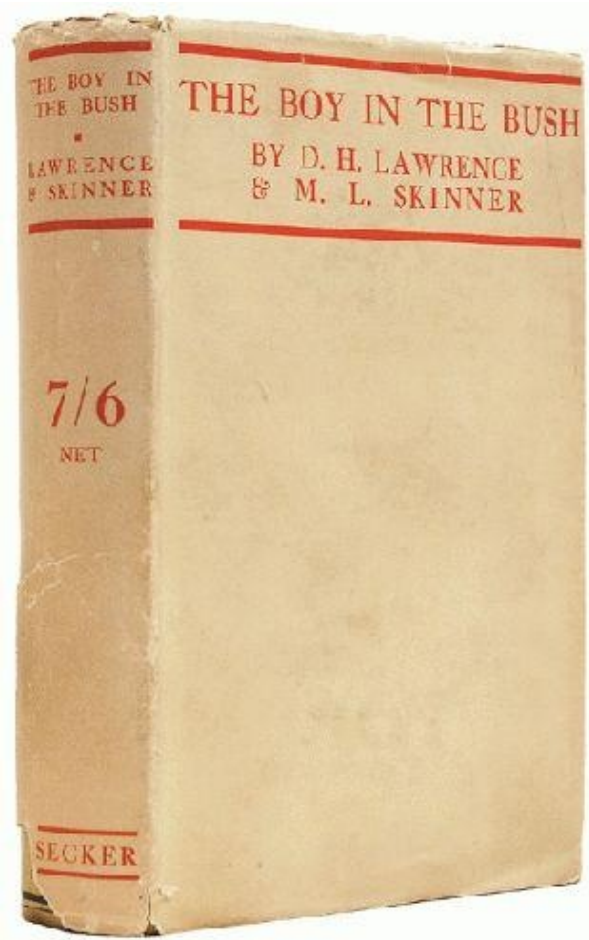
It was only four days to New Zealand, over a cold, dark, inhospitable sea.

THE END

THE BOY IN THE BUSH



This novel is set in Western Australia and was first published in 1924. It originates from a story in a manuscript given to Lawrence by his friend Mollie Skinner, entitled *The House of Ellis*. Lawrence and his wife Frieda stayed with Skinner in her guesthouse in Western Australia in 1922. The novel was later made into a miniseries in 1984, directed by Rob Stewart, starring Kenneth Branagh and Sigrid Thornton.



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Branagh in the TV adaptation

CHAPTER I

JACK ARRIVES IN AUSTRALIA

I

He stepped ashore, looking like a lamb. Far be it from me to say he was the lamb he looked. Else why should he have been sent out of England? But a good-looking boy he was, with dark blue eyes and the complexion of a girl and a bearing just a little too lamb-like to be convincing.

He stepped ashore in the newest of new colonies, glancing quickly around, but preserving his lamb-like quietness. Down came his elegant kit, and was dumped on the wharf: a kit that included a brand-new pigskin saddle and bridle, nailed up in a box straight from a smart shop in London. He kept his eye on that also, the tail of his well-bred eye.

Behind him was the wool ship that had brought him from England. This nondescript port was Fremantle, in West Australia; might have been anywhere or nowhere. In his pocket he had a letter of introduction to a well-known colonial lawyer, in which, as he was aware, was folded also a draft on a West Australian bank. In his purse he had a five-pound note. In his head were a few irritating memories. In his heart he felt a certain excited flutter at being in a real new land, where a man could be really free. Though what he meant by "free" he never stopped to define. He left everything suitably vague.

Meanwhile, he waited for events to develop, as if it were none of his business.

This was forty years ago, when it was still a long, long way to Australia, and the land was still full of the lure of promise. There were gold and pearl findings, bush and bush-ranging, the back of beyond and everything desirable. Much misery, too, ignored by all except the miserable.

And Jack was not quite eighteen, so he ignored a great deal. He didn't pay much attention even to his surroundings, yet from the end of the wharf he saw pure sky above, the pure, unknown, unsullied sea to westward; the ruffled,

tumbled sand glistened like fine silver, the air was the air of a new world, unbreathed by man.

The only prize Jack had ever won at school was for Scripture. The Bible language exerted a certain fascination over him, and in the background of his consciousness the Bible images always hovered. When he was moved, it was Scripture that came to his aid. So now he stood, silent with the shyness of youth, thinking over and over: "There shall be a new heaven and a new earth."

Not far off among the sand near the harbour mouth lay the township, a place of strong, ugly, oblong houses of white stone with unshuttered bottle-glass windows and a low whitewashed wall going round, like a sort of compound; then there was a huge stone prison with a high whitewashed wall. Nearer the harbour, a few new tall warehouse buildings, and sheds, long sheds, and a little wooden railway station. Further out again, windmills for milling flour, the mill-sails turning in the transparent breeze from the sea. Right in the middle of the township was a stolid new Victorian church with a turret: and this was the one thing he knew he disliked in the view.

On the wharf everything was busy. The old wool steamer lay important in dock, people were crowding on deck and crowding the wharf in a very informal manner, porters were running with baggage, a chain was clanking, and little groups of emigrants stood forlorn, looking for their wooden chests, swinging their odd bundles done up in coloured kerchiefs. The uttermost ends of the earth! All so lost, and yet so familiar. So familiar, and so lost. The people like provincial people at home. The railway running through the sand hills. And the feeling of remote unreality.

This was his mother's country. She had been born and raised here, and she had told him about it, many a time, like a fable. And this was what it was like! How could she feel she actually belonged to it? Nobody could belong to it.

Himself, he belonged to Bedford, England. And Bedford College. But his mind turned away from this in repugnance. Suddenly he turned desirously to the unreality of this remote place.

Jack was waiting for Mr. George, the lawyer to whom his letter of introduction was addressed. Mr. George had shaken hands with him on deck: a stout and breezy gentleman, who had been carried away again on the gusts of his own breeze, among the steamer crowd, and had forgotten his young charge. Jack patiently waited. Adult and responsible people with stout waistcoats had a habit, he knew, of being needed elsewhere.

Mr. George! And all his mother's humorous stories about him! This notable character of the Western lonely colony, this rumbustical old gentleman who had a "terrific memory," who was "full of quotations" and who "never forgot a face"

— Jack waited the more calmly, sure of being recognised again by him — was to be seen in the distance with his thumbs hooked in his waistcoat armholes, passively surveying the scene with a quiet, shrewd eye, before hailing another acquaintance and delivering another sally. He had a “tongue like a razor” and frightened the women to death. Seeing him there on the wharf, elderly, stout and decidedly old-fashioned, Jack had a little difficulty in reconciling him with the hearty colonial hero of his mother’s stories.

How he had missed a seat on the bench, for example. He was to become a judge. But while acting on probation, or whatever it is called, a man came up before him charged with wife-beating, and serious maltreatment of his better half. A verdict of “not guilty” was returned. “Two years hard labour,” said Mr. George, who didn’t like the looks of the fellow. There was a protest. “Verdict stands!” said Mr. George. “Two years hard labour. Give it him for not beating her and breaking her head. He should have done. He should have done. ‘Twas fairly proved!”

So Mr. George had remained a lawyer, instead of becoming a judge. A stout, shabby, provincial-looking old man with baggy trousers that seemed as if they were slipping down. Jack had still to get used to that sort of trousers. One of his mother’s heroes!

But the whole scene was still outside the boy’s vague, almost trancelike state. The commotion of unloading went on — people stood in groups, the lumpers were already at work with the winches, bringing bales and boxes from the hold. The Jewish gentleman standing just there had a red nose. He swung his cane uneasily. He must be well-off, to judge by his links and watch-chain. But then why did his trousers hang so low and baggy, and why was his waistcoat of yellow cloth — that cloth cost a guinea a yard, Jack knew it from his horsey acquaintances — so dirty and frayed?

Western Australia in the year 1882. Jack had read all about it in the official report on the steamer. The colony had three years before celebrated its fiftieth anniversary. Many people still remembered the fiasco of the first attempt at the Swan River Settlement. Captain Stirling brought the first boatload of prospective settlers. The Government promised not to defile the land with convicts. But the promise was broken. The convicts had come: and that stone prison-building must have been the convict station. He knew from his mother’s stories. But he also knew that the convicts were now gone again. The “Establishment” had been closed down already for ten years or more.

A land must have its ups and downs. And the first thing the old world had to ship to the new world was its sins, and the first shipments were of sinners. That was what his mother said. Jack felt a certain sympathy. He felt a sympathy with

the empty “Establishment” and the departed convicts. He himself was mysteriously a “sinner.” He felt he was born such: just as he was born with his deceptive handsome look of innocence. He was a sinner, a Cain. Not that he was aware of having committed anything that seemed to himself particularly sinful. No, he was not aware of having “sinned.” He was not aware that he ever would “sin.”

But that wasn't the point. Curiously enough, that wasn't the point. The men who commit sins and who know they commit sins usually get on quite well with the world. Jack knew he would never get on well with the world. He was a sinner. He knew that as far as the world went, he was a sinner, born condemned. Perhaps it had come to him from his mother's careless, rich, uncanny Australian blood. Perhaps it was a recoil from his father's military-gentleman nature. His father was an officer in Her Majesty's Army. An officer in Her Majesty's Army. For some reason, there was always a touch of the fantastic and ridiculous, to Jack, in being an officer in Her Majesty's Army. Quite a high and responsible officer, usually stationed in command in one or other of Her Britannic Majesty's Colonies.

Why did Jack find his father slightly fantastic? Why was that gentleman in uniform who appeared occasionally, very resplendent and somehow very “good,” why was he always unreal and fantastic to the little boy left at home in England? Why was he even more fantastic when he wore a black coat and genteel grey trousers? He was handsome and pleasant, and indisputably “good.” Then why, oh, why should he have appeared fantastic to his own little boy, who was so much like him in appearance?

“The spitten image!” one of his nurses had said. And Jack never forgave it. He thought it meant a spat-upon image, or an image in spit. This he resented and repudiated absolutely, though it remained vague.

“Oh, you little sinner!” said the same nurse, half caressingly. And this the boy had accepted as his natural appellation. He was a little sinner. As he grew older, he was a young sinner. Now, as he approached manhood, he was a sinner without modification.

Not, we repeat, that he was ever able to understand wherein his sinfulness lay. He knew his father was a “good man.” — “The colonel, your father, is such a good man, so you must be a good little boy and grow up like him.” — “There is no better example of an English gentleman than your father, the general. All you have to do is to grow up like him.”

Jack knew from the start that he wouldn't. And therein lay the sin, presumably. Or the root of the sin.

He did not dislike his father. The general was kind and simple and amiable. How could anyone dislike him? But to the boy he was always just a little fantastic, like the policeman in a Punch-and-Judy show.

Jack loved his mother with a love that could not but be intermittent, for sometimes she stayed in England and “lived” with him, and more often she left him and went off with his father to Jamaica or some such place — or to India or Khartoum, names that were in his blood — leaving the boy in the charge of a paternal Aunt. He didn’t think much of the Aunt.

But he liked the warm, flushed, rather muddled delight of his mother. She was a handsome, ripe Australian woman with warm colouring and soft flesh, absolutely kindly in a humorous, off-hand fashion, warm with a jolly sensuousness, and good in a wicked sort of way. She sat in the sun and laughed and refused to quarrel, refused also to weep. When she had to leave her little boy a spasm would contract her face and make her look ugly, so the child was glad if she went quickly. But she was in love with her husband, who was still more in love with her, so off she went laughing sensuously across seven seas, quarrelling with nobody, pitching her camp in true colonial fashion wherever she found herself, yet always with a touch of sensuous luxury, Persian rugs and silk cushions and dresses of rich material. She was the despair of the true English wives, for you couldn’t disapprove of her, she was the dearest thing imaginable, and yet she introduced a pleasant, semi-luxurious sense of — of what? Why, almost of sin. Not positive sin. She was really the dearest thing imaginable. But the feeling that there was no fence between sin and virtue. As if sin were, so to speak, the unreclaimed bush, and goodness were only the claims that the settlers had managed to fence in. And there was so much more bush than settlement. And the one was as good as the other, save that they served different ends. And that you always had the wild and endless bush all round your little claim, and coming and going was always through the wild and innocent, but non-moral bush. Which non-moral bush had a devil in it. Oh, yes! But a wild and comprehensible devil, like bush-rangers who did brutal and lawless things. Whereas the tame devil of the settlement, drunkenness and greediness and foolish pride, he was more scaring.

“My dear, there’s tame innocence and wild innocence, and tame devils and wild devils, and tame morality and wild morality. Let’s camp in the bush and be good.” That was her attitude, always. “Let’s camp in the bush and be good.” She was an Australian from a wild Australian homestead. And she was like a wild sweet animal. Always the sense of space and lack of restrictions, and it didn’t matter what you did, so long as you were good inside yourself.

Her husband was in love with her, completely. To him it mattered very much

what you did. So perhaps her easy indifference to English rail-fences satisfied in him the iconoclast that lies at the bottom of all men.

She was not well-bred. There was a certain “cottage” geniality about her. But also a sense of great, unfenced spaces, that put the ordinary ladylikeness rather at a loss. A real colonial, from the newest, wildest, remotest colony.

She loved her little boy. But also she loved her husband, and she loved the army life. She preferred, really, to be with her husband. And you can’t trail a child about. And she lived in all the world, and she couldn’t bear to be poked in a village in England. Not for long. And she was used to having men about her. Mostly men. Jolly men.

So her heart smarted for her little boy. But she had to leave him. And he loved her, but did not dream of depending on her. He knew it as a tiny child. He would never have to depend on anybody. His father would pay money for him. But his father was rather jealous of him. Jealous even of his beauty as a tiny child, in spite of the fact that the child was the “spitten” image of the father: dark blue eyes, curly hair, peach-bloom skin. Only the child had the easy way of accommodating himself to life and circumstances, like his mother, and a certain readiness to laugh, even when he was by himself. The easy laugh that made his nurse say “You little sinner!”

He knew he was a little sinner. It rather amused him.

Jack’s mind jolted awake as he made a grab at his hat, nearly knocking it off, realizing that he was being introduced to two men: or that two men were being introduced to him. They shook hands very casually, giggling at the same time to one another in a suppressed manner. Jack blushed furiously, embarrassed, not knowing what they were laughing at.

Just beside him, the Jewish gentleman was effusively greeting another Jewish gentleman. In fact, they were kissing: which made Jack curl with disgust. But he couldn’t move away, because there were bales behind him, people on two sides, and a big dog was dancing and barking in front of him, at something which it saw away below through a crack in the wharf timbers. The dog seemed to be a mixture of wolf and greyhound. Queer specimen! Later, he knew it was called a kangaroo dog.

“Mr. A. Bell and Mr. Swallow. Mr. Jack Grant from England.” This was Mr. George introducing him to the two men, and going on without any change, with a queer puffing of the lips: “Prh! Bah! Wolf and Hider! Wolf and Hider!”

This left Jack completely mystified. And why were Mr. Bell and Mr. Swallow laughing so convulsedly? Was it the dog?

“You remember his father, Bell, out here in ‘59. — Captain Grant. Married Surgeon-Captain Reid’s youngest daughter, from Woolamooloo Station.”

The gentleman said: “Pleased to make your acquaintance,” which was a phrase that embarrassed Jack because he didn’t know what to answer. Should one say, “Thank you!” — or “The pleasure is mine!” or “So am I to make yours!” He mumbled: “How do you do!”

However, it didn’t matter, for the two men kept the laugh between themselves, while Mr. George took on a colonial distraught look, then blew out his cheeks and ejaculated: “Mercy and truth have met together: righteousness and peace have kissed each other.” This was said in a matter-of-fact way. Jack knew it was a quotation from the Psalms, but not what it was aimed at. The two men were laughing more openly at the joke.

Was the joke against himself? Was it his own righteousness that was funny? He blushed furiously once more.

II

But Mr. George ignored the boy’s evident embarrassment, and strolled off with one of the gentlemen — whether Bell or Swallow, Jack did not know — towards the train.

The remaining gentleman — either Bell or Swallow — clapped the uncomfortable youth comfortably on the shoulder. “New chum, eh? — Not in the know? I’ll tell you.” — They set off after the other two.

“By gad, ‘s a funny thing! You’ve got to laugh if old George is about, though he never moves a muscle. Dry as a ship’s biscuit. D’y’see the Jews kissing? They’ve been at law for two years, those two blossoms. One’s name is Wolf and the other’s Hider, and Mr. George is Wolf’s attorney. Never able to do anything, because you couldn’t get Hider into the open. — See the joke? Hider! Sneak Hider! Hider under the rafters! Hider hidden! And the Wolf couldn’t unearth him. Though George showed up Wolf for what he is: a mean, grasping, contentious mongrel of a man. Now they meet to kiss. See them? The suit ended in a mush. But that dog there hunting a rat right under their feet — wasn’t that beautiful? Old George couldn’t miss it. — ‘Mercy and truth have met together,’ ha! hal However he finds his text for everything, beats me — ”

Jack laughed, and walked in a daze beside his new acquaintance. He felt he had fallen overhead into Australia, instead of arriving naturally.

The wood-eating little engine was gasping in front of a little train of open carriages. Jack remarked on her tender piled high with chunks of wood.

“Yes, we stoke ‘er with timber. We carry all we can. And if we’re going a

long way, to York, when she's burned up all she can carry she stops in the bush and we all get down, passengers and all, to chop a new supply. See the axe there? She carries half a dozen on a long trip."

The three men, all wearing old-fashioned whiskers, pulled out tobacco pouches the moment they were seated, and started their pipes. They were all stout, and their clothes were slack, and they behaved with such absolute unconcern that it made Jack self-conscious.

He sat rather stiffly, remembering the things his mother had told him. Her father, Surgeon-Captain Reid, had arrived at the Swan River on a man-of-war, on his very first voyage. He had landed with Captain Fremantle from H. M. S. "Challenger," when that officer took formal possession of the country in the name of His Majesty King George IV. He had seen the first transport, the "Parmelia," prevented by heavy gales from landing her goods and passengers on the mainland, disembark all on Garden Island, where the men of the "Challenger" were busy clearing ground and erecting temporary houses. That was in midwinter, June 1827: and Jack's grandfather! Now it was midwinter, June 1882: and mere Jack.

Midwinter! A pure blue sky and a warm, crystal air. The brush outside green, rather dull green, the sandy country dry. It was like English June, English midsummer. Why call it midwinter? Except for a certain dull look of the bushes.

They were passing the convict station. The "Establishment" had not lasted long; from about 1850 to 1870. Not like New South Wales, which had a purely convict origin. Western Australia was more respectable.

He remembered his mother always praised the convicts, said they had been a blessing to the colony. Western Australia had been too big and barren a mouthful for the first pioneers to chew, even though they were gentlemen of pluck and education and bit off their claims bravely. Came the rush that followed occupation, a rush of estimable and highly respectable British workmen. But even these were unprepared for the hardships that awaited them in Western Australia. The country was too much for them.

It needed the convicts to make a real impression: the convicts with their law, and discipline, and all their governmental outfit: and their forced labour. Soldiers, doctors, lawyers, spiritual pastors and earthly masters . . . and the convicts condemned to obey. This was the beginning of the colony.

Thought speaks! Mr. Swallow, identified as the gentleman with the long, lean ruddy face and large nose and vague brown eye, leaned forward and jerked his pipe stem towards the open window.

"See that beautiful road running through the sand, sir? That road extends to Perth and over the Causeway and away up country, branching in all directions,

like the arteries of the human body. Built by the sappers and miners with convict labour, sir. Yes with convict labour. Also the bridge over which we are crossing.”

Jack looked out at the road, but was much more enchanted by the full, soft river of heavenly blue water, on whose surface he looked eagerly for the black swans. He didn't see any.

“Oh yes! Oh yes! You'll find 'em wild in their native state a little way up,” said Mr. Swallow.

Beyond the river were sheets of sand again, white sand, stretching around on every side.

“It must have been here that the Carpenter wept — ” Jack said in his unexpected young voice that was still slightly hoarse, as he poked his face out of the window.

The three gentlemen were silent in passive consternation, till Mr. George swelled his cheeks and continued:

“Like anything to see such quantities of sand.” Then he snorted and blew his nose.

Mr. Bell at once recognized the Westralian joke, which had been handed on to Jack by his mother.

“Hit it, my son!” he cried, clapping his hands on his knees. “In the first five minutes. Useless! Useless! A gentleman of discernment, that's what you are. Just the sort we want in this colony — a gentleman of discernment. A gentleman without it planted us here, fifty years ago in the blank, blank sand. What's the consequence? Clogged, cloyed, cramped, sand — smothered, that's what we are.”

“Not a bit of it,” said Mr. Swallow.

“Sorrow, Sin, and Sand,” repeated Mr. Bell.

Jack was puzzled and amused by their free and easy, confidential way, which was still a little ceremonious. Slightly ceremonious, and in their shirt-sleeves, so to speak. The same with their curious, Cockney pronunciation, their accurate grammar and their slight pomposity. They never said “you,” merely “y” — “That's what y'are.” And their drawling, almost sneering manner was very odd, contrasting with the shirt-sleeves familiarity, the shabby clothes and the pleasant way they had of nodding at you when they talked to you.

“Yes, yes, Mr. Grant,” continued Mr. Bell, while Jack wished he wouldn't Mister him — “A gentleman without discernment induced certain politicians in the British Cabinet to invest in these vast areas. This same gentleman got himself created King of Groperland, and came out here with a small number of fool followers. These fool followers, for every three quid's worth of goods they

brought with them, were given forty acres of land apiece — ”

“Of sand,” said Mr. George.

“ — and a million acres of fine promises,” continued Mr. Bell unmoved. “Therefore the fool followers, mostly younger sons of good family, anxious to own property — ”

“In parties of five females to one male — Prrrh!” snorted Mr. George.

“ — came. They were informed that the soil was well adapted to the cultivation of tobacco! Of cotton! Of sugar! Of flax! And that cattle could be raised to supply His Majesty’s ships with salt beef — and horses could be reared to supply the army in India — ”

“With Kangaroos and Wallabies.”

“ — the cavalry, that is. So they came and were landed in the sand — ”

“And told to stick their head in it, so they shouldn’t see death staring at ‘em.”

“ — along with the goods they had brought.”

“A harp!” cried Mr. George. “My mother brought a harp and a Paisley shawl and got five hundred acres for ‘em — estimated value of harp being twenty guineas. She’d better have gone straight to heaven with it.”

“Yes, sir!” continued Mr. Bell, unheeding.

“No, sir!” broke in Mr. George. “Do you wish me unborn?”

Mr. Bell paused to smile, then continued:

“Mr. Grant, sir, these gentle ladies and gentlemen were dumped in the sand along with their goods. Well, there were a few cattle and sheep and horses. But what else? Harps. Paisley shawls. Ornamental glass cases of wax fruit, for the mantelpiece; family Bibles and a family coach, sir. For that family coach, sir, the bringer got a thousand acres of land. And it ended its days where they landed it, on the beach, for there wasn’t an inch of road to drive it over, nor anywhere to drive it to. They took off its wheels and there it lay. I myself have sat in it.”

“Ridden in his coach,” smiled Mr. George.

“My mother,” continued Mr. Bell, “was a clergyman’s daughter. I myself was born in a bush humpy, and my mother died shortly after — ”

“Of chagrin! Of chagrin!” muttered Mr. George.

“We will draw a veil over the sufferings of those years — ”

“Oh, but we made good! We made good!” put in Mr. Swallow comfortably. “What are you grouching about? We made good. There you sit, Bell, made of money, and grouching, anybody would think you wanted a loan of two bob.”

“By the waters of Babylon there we sat down — ” said Mr. George.

“Did we! No we didn’t. We rowed up the Swan River. That’s what my father did. A sturdy British yeoman, Mr. Grant.”

“Where did he get the boat from?” asked Mr. Bell.

“An old ship. I was a baby, sir, in a tartan frock. Remember it to this day, sitting in my mother’s lap. My father got that boat off a whaler. It had been stove in, and wasn’t fit for the sea. But he made it fit for the river, and they rowed up the Swan — my father and a couple of ‘indented’ servants, as we called them. We landed in the Upper Swan valley. I remember that camp fire, sir, as well as I remember anything.” “Better than most things,” put in Mr. George.

“We cleared off the scrub, we lifted the stones into heaps, we planted corn and wheat — ”

“The babe in the tartan frock steering the plough.”

“Yes, sir, later on. — Our flocks prospered, our land bore fruit, our family flourished — ”

“On milk and honey — ”

“Oh, cry off, Swallow!” ejaculated Mr. Bell. “Your father fought flood and drought for forty odd years. The floods of ‘62 broke his heart, and the floods in ‘72 ruined you. And this is ‘82, so don’t talk too loud.”

“Ruined! When was I ever ruined?” cried Mr. Swallow. “Sheep one-hundred-and-ten per cent — for some herds, as you know, gentlemen, throw twins and triplets. Cattle ninety per cent, horses fifty: and a ready market for ‘em all.”

“Pests,” Mr. Bell was saying, “one million per cent. Rust destroys fourteen thousand acres of wheat crop, just as the country is getting on its feet. Dingoes breed 135 per cent, and kill sheep to match. Cattle run wild and are no more seen. Horses cost the eyes out of your head before you can catch ‘em, break ‘em, train ‘em and ship ‘em to the Indian market.”

“Moth and rust! Moth and rust!” murmured Mr. George absently.

III

Jack, with the uncomfortable philosophy of youth, sat still and let the verbal waters rage. Until he was startled by a question from Mr. George.

“Well, sir, what were you sent out for?”

This was a colonial little joke at the “Establishment” identity’s expense. But unfortunately it hit Jack too. He had been sent out, really, because he was too tiresome to keep at home. Too fond of “low” company. Too often a frequenter of the stables. Too indifferent to the higher claims of society. They feared a waster in the bud. So they shipped the bud to the antipodes, to let it blossom there upside down.

But Jack was not going to give himself away.

“To go on the land, sir,” he replied. Which was true. But what had his father said in the letter? He flushed and looked angry, his dark blue eyes going very dark, “I was expelled from school,” he added calmly. “And I was sent down from the Agricultural College. That’s why I have come out a year before my time. But I was coming — to go on the land — anyway — ”

He ended in a stammer. He rather hated adults; he definitely hated them in tribunal.

Mr. George held up his hand deprecatingly.

“Say nothing! Say nothing! Your father made no mention of anything. Tell us when you know us, if y’like. But you aren’t called on to indict yourself. — That was a silly joke of mine. Forget it. — You came to go on the land, as your father informs me. — I knew your father, long before you were born. But I knew your mother better.”

“So did I,” said Mr. Swallow. “And grieved the day that ever a military gentleman carried her away from Western Australia. She was one of our home-grown flowers, was Katie Reid, and I never saw a Rose of England that could touch her.”

Jack now flushed deeper than ever.

“Though,” said Mr. George slyly, “if you’ve got a prank up y’r sleeve, that you can tell us about — come on with it, my son. We’ve none of us forgotten being shipped to England for a schooling.”

“Oh well!” said Jack. He always said “Oh well!” when he didn’t know what to say. “You mean at the Agricultural College? Oh well! — Well, I was the youngest there, stable-boy and harness-cleaner and all that. Oh well! You see there’d been a chivoo the night before. The lads had a grudge against the council; because they gave us bread and cheese, and no butter, for supper, and cocoa with no milk. And we weren’t just little nippers. We were — Oh well! Most of the chaps were men, really — eighteen — nineteen — twenty. As much as twenty-three. I was the youngest. I didn’t care. But the chaps were different. There were many who had failed at the big entrance exams for the Indian Civil, or the Naval or Military, and they were big, hungry chaps, you can bet — ”

“I should say so,” nodded Mr. George approvingly.

“Well, there was a chivoo. They held me on their shoulders and I smashed the Principal’s windows.”

You could see by Jack’s face how he had enjoyed breaking those windows.

“What with?” asked Mr. George.

“With a wooden gym club.”

“Wanton destruction of property. Prrrh!”

“The boss was frightened. But he raised Old Harry and said he’d go up to

town and report us to the council. So he ordered the trap right away, to catch the nine o'clock train. And I had to take the trap round to the front door — ”

Here Jack paused. He didn't want to go further.

“And so — ” said Mr. George.

“And so, when I stepped away from the horse's head, the Principal jerked the reins in the nasty way he had and the horse bolted.”

“Couldn't the fellow pull her up? Man in a position like that ought to know how to drive a horse.”

Jack watched their faces closely. On his own face was that subtle look of innocence, which veiled a look of life-and-death defiance.

“The reins weren't buckled into the bit, sir. No man could drive that horse,” he said quietly.

A look of amusement tinged with misgiving spread over Mr. George's face. But he was a true colonial. He had to hear the end of a story against powers-that-be.

“And how did it end?” he asked.

“I'm sorry,” said Jack. “He broke his leg in the accident.”

The three Australians burst into a laugh. Chiefly because when Jack said, “I'm sorry,” he really meant it. He was really sorry for the hurt man. But for the hurt Principal he wasn't sorry. As soon as the Principal was on the ground with a broken leg, Jack saw only the hurt man, and none of the office. And his heart was troubled for the hurt man.

But if the mischief was to do again, he would probably do it. He couldn't repent. And yet his feelings were genuinely touched. Which made him comical.

“You're a corker!” said Mr. George, shaking his head with new misgiving.

“So you were sent down,” said Mr. Bell. “And y'r father thought he'd better ship you straight out here, eh? Best thing for you, I'll be bound. I'll bet you never learned a ha'porth at that place.”

“Oh well! I think I learned a lot.”

“When to sow and when to reap and a latin motto attached!”

“No, sir, not that. I learned to vet.”

“Vet?”

“Well sir, you see, the head groom was a gentleman veterinary surgeon and he had a weakness, as he called it. So when he was strong he taught me to vet, and when he had his attacks, I'd go out with the cart and collect him at a pub and bring him home under the straw, in return for kindness shown.”

“A nice sort of school! Prrrh! Bah!” snorted Mr. George.

“Oh, that wasn't on the curriculum, sir. My mother says there'll be rascals in heaven, if you look for them.”

“And you keep on looking, eh? — Well — I wouldn’t, if I were you. Especially in this country, I wouldn’t. I wouldn’t go vetting any more for any drunken groom in the world, if I were you. Nor breaking windows, nor leaving reins unbuckled either. And I’ll tell you for why. It becomes a habit. You get a habit of going with rascals, and then you’re done. Because in this country you’ll find plenty of scamps, and plenty of wasters. And the sight of them is enough — nasty, low-down lot. — This is a great big country, where an honest man can go his own way into the back of beyond, if he likes. But the minute he begins to go crooked, or slack, the country breaks him. It breaks him, and he’s neither fit for God nor man any more. You beware of this country, my boy, and don’t try to play larks with it. It’s all right playing a prank on an old fool of a fossil out there in England. They need a few pranks played on them, they do. But out here no! Keep all your strength and all your wits to fight the bush. It’s a great big country, and it needs men, men, not wasters. It’s a great big country, and it wants men. You can go your way and do what you want: take up land, go on a sheep station, lumber, or try the goldfields. But whatever you do, live up to your fate like a man. And keep square with yourself. Never mind other people. But keep square with yourself.”

Jack, staring out of the window, saw miles of dull dark-green scrub spreading away on every side to a bright sky-line. He could hear his mother’s voice:

“Earn a good opinion of yourself and never mind the world’s opinion. You know when there’s the right glow inside you. That’s the spirit of God inside you.”

But this “right glow” business puzzled him a little. He was inclined to believe he felt it while he was smashing the Principal’s window-glass, and while he was “vetting” with the drunken groom. Yet the words fascinated him: “The right glow inside you — the spirit of God inside you.”

He sat motionless on his seat, while the Australians kept on talking about the colony. — “Have y’patience? Perseverance? Have ye that? — She wants y’ and y’ offspring. And the bones y’ll leave behind y’. All of y’ interests, y hopes, y’ life, and the same of y’ sons and sons’ sons. An’ she doesn’t care if y’ go nor stay, neither. Makes no difference to her. She’s waiting, drowsy. No hurry. Wants millions of yer. But she’s waited endless ages and can wait endless more. Only she must have men — understand? If they’re lazy derelicts and ne’er-do-wells, she’ll eat ‘em up. But she’s waiting for real men — British to the bone — ”

“The lad’s no more than a boy, yet, George. Dry up a bit with your men — British to the bone.”

“Don’t toll at me, Bell. — I’ve been here since ‘31, so let me speak. Came in

old sailing-ship, 'Rockingham' — wrecked on coast — left nothing but her name, township of Rockingham. Nice place to fish. — Was sent back to London to school, '41 — in another sailing-vessel and wasn't wrecked this time. 'Shepherd,' laden colonial produce. — The first steam vessel didn't come till '45 — the 'Driver.' Wonderful advancement. — Wonderful advancement in the colony too, when I came back. Came back a notary. — Couple of churches, Mill Street Jetty, Grammar School opened, Causeway built, lot of exploration done. Eyre had legged it from Adelaide — all in my time, all in my time — ”

IV

Jack felt it might go on forever. He was becoming stupefied. Mercifully, the train jerked to a standstill beside a wooden platform, that was separated from a sandy space by a picket fence. A porter put his hand to his mouth and yelled, "Perth," just for the look of the thing — because where else could it be? They all burst out of the train. The town stood up in the sand: wooden houses with wooden platforms blown over with sand.

And Mr. George was still at it. — "Yes, Bell, wait for the salty sand to mature. Wait for a few of us to die — and decay! Mature — manure, that's what's wanted. Dead men in the sand, dead men's bones in the gravel. That's what'll mature this country. The people you bury in it. Only good fertilizer. Dead men are like seed in the ground. When a few more like you and me, Bell, are worked in — ”

CHAPTER II

THE TWIN LAMBS

I

Jack was tired and a little land-sick, after the long voyage. He felt dazed and rather unhappy, and saw as through a glass, darkly. For he could not yet get used to the fixed land under his feet, after the long weeks on the steamer. And these people went on as if they were wound up, curiously oblivious of him and his feelings. A dream world, with a dark glass between his eyes and it. An uneasy dream.

He waited on the platform. Mr. George had again disappeared somewhere. The train was already backing away. It was evening, and the setting sun from the west, where the great empty sea spread unseen, cast a radiance in the etherealized air, melting the brick shops and the wooden houses and the sandy places in a sort of amethyst glow. And again Jack saw the magic clarity of this new world, as through a glass, darkly. He felt the cool snap of night in the air, coming strange and crude out of the jewel sky. And it seemed to him he was looking through the wrong end of a field-glass, at a far, far country.

Where was Mr. George? Had he gone off to read the letter again, or to inquire about the draft on the bank? Everyone had left the station, the wagonette cabs had driven away. What was to be done? Ought he to have mentioned an hotel? He'd better say something. He'd better say —

But here was Mr. George, with a serious face, coming straight up to say something.

“That vet,” he said, “did he think you had a natural gift for veterinary work?”

“He said so, sir. My mother's father was a naval surgeon — if that has anything to do with it.”

“Nothing at all. — I knew the old gentleman — and another silly old fossil he was, too. — But he's dead, so we'll make the best of him. — No, it was your character I wanted to get at. — Your father wants you to go on a farm or station

for twelve months, and sends a pound a week for your board. Suppose you know — ?”

“Yes — I hope it’s enough.”

“Oh, it’s enough, if you’re all right yourself — I was thinking of Ellis’ place. I’ve got the twins here now. They’re kinsmen of yours, the Ellises — and of mine, too. We’re all related, in clans and cliques and gangs, out here in this colony. Your mother belongs to the Ellis clan. — Well, now. Ellis’ place is a fine home farm, and not too far. Only he’s got a family of fine young lambs, my step-sister’s children into the bargain. And y’see, if y’re a wolf in sheep’s clothing — for you look mild enough — why, I oughtn’t be sending you among them. Young lasses and boys bred and reared out there in the bush, why — . Come now, son y’ father protected you by silence. — But you’re not in court, and you needn’t heed me. Tell me straight out what you were expelled from your Bedford school for.”

Jack was silent for a moment, rather pale about the nose.

“I was nabbed,” he said in a colourless voice, “at a fight with fists for a purse of sovereigns, laid either side. Plenty of others were there. But they got away, and the police nabbed me for the school colours on my cap. My father was just back from Ceylon, and he stood by me. But the Head said for the sake of example and for the name of the school I’d better be chucked out. They were talking about the school in the newspapers. The Head said he was sorry to expel me.”

Mr. George blew his nose into a large yellow red-spotted handkerchief, and looked for a few moments into the distance.

“Seems to me you let yourself be made a bit of a cat’s paw of,” he said dubiously.

“I suppose it’s because I don’t care,” said Jack.

“But you ought to care. — Why don’t y’?”

There was no answer.

“You’ll have to care some day or other,” the old man continued.

“Do you know, sir, which hotel I shall go to?” asked Jack.

“You’ll go to no hotel. You’ll come home with me. — But mind y’. I’ve got my two young nieces, Ellis’ twins, couple of girls, Ellis’ daughters, where I’m going to send you. They’re at my house. And there’s my other niece, Mary, who I’m very fond of. She’s not an Ellis, she’s a Rath, and an orphan, lives with her Aunt Matilda, my sister. They don’t live with me. None of ‘em live with me. I live alone, except for a good, plain cook, since my wife died. — But I tell you, they’re visiting me. And I shall look to you to behave yourself, now: both here and at Wandoo, which is Ellis’ station. I’ll take you there in the morning. — But

y’see now where I’m taking you: among a pack of innocent sheep that’s probably never seen a goat to say Boh! To — or Baa! if you like — makes no difference. We don’t raise goats in Western Australia, as I’m aware of. — But I’m telling you, if you’re a wolf in sheep’s clothing — . No, you needn’t say anything. You probably don’t know what you are, anyhow. So come on. I’ll tell somebody to bring your bags — looks a rare jorum to me — and we’ll walk.”

II

They walked off the timber platform into the sand, and Jack had his first experience of “sand-groping.” The sand was thick and fine and soft, so he was glad to reach the oyster-shell path running up Wellington Street, in front of the shops. They passed along the street of brick cottages and two-storied houses, to Barrack Street, where Jack looked with some surprise on the pretentious buildings that stood up in the dusk: the handsome square red brick tower of the Town Hall, and on the sandy hill to the left, the fine white edifice of the Roman Catholic Church, which building was already older than Jack himself. Beyond the Town Hall was the Church of England. “See it!” said Mr. George. “That’s where your father and mother were married. Slap-dash, military wedding, more muslin and red jackets than would stock a shop.”

Mr. George spoke to everybody he met, ladies and gentlemen alike. The ladies seemed a bit old-fashioned, the gentlemen all wore nether garments at least four sizes too large for them. Jack was much piqued by this pioneering habit. And they all seemed very friendly and easy-going, like men in a pub at home.

“What did the Bedford Headmaster say he was sorry to lose you for? Smart at your books, were you?”

“I was good at Scripture and Shakespeare, but not at the other things. — I expect he was sorry to lose me from the football eleven. I was the cock there.”

Mr. George blew his nose loudly, gasped, prrrhed, and said:

“You’d better say rooster, my son, here in Australia — especially in polite society. We’re a trifle more particular than they are in England, I suppose. — Well, and what else have you got to crow about?”

If Jack had been the sulky sort, he would now have begun to get sulky. As it was, he was tired of being continually pulled up. But he fell back on his own peculiar callous indifference.

“I was captain of the first football eleven,” he said in his indifferent voice, “and not bad in front of the sticks. And I took the long distance running cup a

year under age. I tell you because you ask me.”

Then Mr. George astonished Jack again by turning and planting himself in front of him like Balaam’s ass, in the middle of the path, standing with feet apart in his big elephant trousers, snorting behind a walrus moustache, glaring and extending a large and powerful hand. He shook hands vigorously, saying, “You’ll do, my son. You’ll do for me.”

Then he resumed his walk.

III

“Yes, sir, you’ll do for me,” resumed the old man. “For I can see you’re a gentleman.”

Jack was rather taken aback. He had come to Australia to be a man, a wild, bushy man among men. His father was a gentleman.

“I think I’d rather be a man than a gentleman,” he said.

Mr. George stood still, feet apart, as if he had been shot.

“What’s the difference?” he cried in a falsetto, sarcastic tone. “What’s the difference? Can’t be a man unless you are a gentleman. Take that from me. You might say I’m not a gentleman. Sense of the ridiculous runs away with me, for one thing. But, in order to be the best man I could, I’ve tried to be all the gentleman I could. No hanky-panky about it. — You’re a gentleman born. — I’m not, not altogether. Don’t you go trying to upset what you are. But whether you’re a bush-whacker or a lumper you can be a gentleman. A gentleman’s a man who never laughs to wound, who’s honest with himself and his own judge in the sight of the Almighty. — That’s the Government House down there among the trees, river just beyond. — That’s my house, there, see. I’m going to hand you over to the girls, once we get there. So I shan’t see you again, not to talk to. I want to tell you then, that I put my confidence in you, and you’re going to play up like a gentleman. And I want you to know, as between gentlemen, not merely between an old man and a boy: but as between gentlemen, if you ever need any help, or a word of advice come to me. Come to me, and I’ll do my best.”

He once more shook hands, this time in a conclusive manner.

Jack had looked to left and right as they walked, half listening to the endless old man. He saw sandy blocks of land beside the road, and scattered, ugly buildings, most of them new. He made out the turrets and gables of the Government House, in the dusk among trees, and he imagined the wide clear

river below those trees.

Turning down an unmade road, they approached a two-storied brick house with narrow verandahs, whose wooden supports rested nakedly on the sand below. There was no garden, fence, or anything: just an oyster-shell path across the sand, a pipe-clayed doorstep, a brass knocker, a narrow wooden verandah, a few flower-pots.

Mr. George opened the door and showed the boy into the narrow wooden hall. There was a delicious smell of cooking. Jack climbed the thin, flimsy stairs, and was shown into his bedroom. A four-poster bed with a crochet quilt and frilled pillows, a mahogany chest of drawers with swivel looking-glass, a washstand with china set complete. England all over again. — Even his bag was there, and his brushes were set out for him.

He had landed!

IV

As he made his toilet, he heard a certain fluttering outside his door. He waited for it to subside, and when all seemed still, opened to go downstairs. There stood two girls, giggling and blushing, waiting arm in arm to pounce on him.

“Oh, isn’t he beau!” exclaimed one of the girls, in a sort of aside. And the other broke into a high laugh.

Jack remained dumbfounded, reddening to the roots of his hair. But his dark-blue eyes lingered for a moment on the two girlish faces. They were evidently the twins. They had the same thin, soft, slightly-tanned, warm-looking faces, a little wild, and the same marked features. But the brows of one were level, and her fair hair, darkish fair, was all crisp, curly round her temples, and she looked up at you from under her level brows with queer yellow-grey eyes, shy, wild, and yet with a queer effrontery, like a wild-cat under a bush. The other had blue eyes and a bigger nose, and it was she who said, “Oh, isn’t he beau!”

The one with the yellow eyes stuck out her slim hand awkwardly, gazing at him and saying:

“I suppose you’re cousin Jack, Beau.”

He shook hands first with one, then with the other, and could not find a word to say. The one with the yellow eyes was evidently the leader of the two.

“Tea is ready,” she said, “if you’re coming down.”

She spoke this over her shoulder. There was the same colour in her tawny eyes as in her crisp tawny hair, but her brows were darker. She had a forehead, Jack

decided, like the plaster-cast of Minerva. And she had the queerest way of looking at you under her brows, and over her shoulder. Funny pair of lambs, these.

The two girls went downstairs arm in arm, at a run. This is quite a feat, but evidently they were used to it.

Jack looked on life, social life inside a house, as something to be borne in silence. These two girls were certainly a desperate addition. He heard them burst into the parlour, the other one repeating:

“He’s coming. Here comes Beau.”

“I thought his name was Jack. Bow is it!” exclaimed a voice.

He entered the parlour with his elbows at his sides, his starched collar feeling very stiff. He was aware of the usual hideous room, rather barer than at home: plush cushions on a horse-hair sofa, and a green carpet: a large stout woman with reddish hair in a silk frock and gold chains, and Mr. George introducing her as Mrs. Watson, otherwise Aunt Matilda. She put diamond-ringed hands on Jack’s shoulders and looked into his face, which he thought a repellent procedure.

“So like your father, dear boy; how’s your dear mother?”

And in spite of his inward fury of resistance, she kissed him. For she was but a woman of forty-two.

“Quite well, thank you,” said Jack: though considering he had been at sea for six weeks, he knew as little about his mother’s health as did Aunt Matilda herself.

“Did y’ blow y’ candle out?” asked Mr. George.

“No he didn’t,” answered the tawny girl. “I’ll go and do it.”

And she flashed away upstairs like a panther.

“I suppose the twins introduced themselves,” said Mr. George.

“No they didn’t,” said the other one.

“Only christened you Bow. — You’ll be somebody or other’s beau before very long, I’ll warrant. — This is Grace, Grace Ellis, you know, where you’re going to live. And her sister who’s gone upstairs to blow your candle out, is Monica. — Can’t be too careful of fire in these dry places. — Most folks say they can’t tell ‘em apart, but I call it nonsense.”

“Ancien, beau, bon, cher, adjectives which precede,” said the one called Monica, jerking herself into the room, after blowing out the candle.

“There’s your father,” said Mr. George. And Aunt Matilda fluttered into the hall, while the twins betrayed no interest at all. The tawny one stared at Jack and kept slinking about like a lean young panther to get a different view of him. For all the world as if she was going to pounce on him, like a cat on a bird. He,

permanently flushed, kept his self-possession in a boyish and rather handsome, if stiff, manner.

Mr. Ellis was stout, clean-shaven, red-faced, and shabby and baggy, and good-natured in appearance.

“This is the young gentleman — Mr. Grant — called in Westralia Bow, so named by Miss Monica Ellis.”

“By Miss Grace, if you please,” snapped Monica.

“Tea’s ready. Tea’s ready.”

They trooped into the dining room where a large table was spread. Aunt Matilda seated herself behind the tea-kettle, Mr. George sat at the other end, before the pile of plates and the carvers, and the others took their places where they would. Jack modestly sat on Aunt Matilda’s left hand, so the tawny Monica at once pounced on the chair opposite.

Entered the Good Plain Cook with a dish covered with a pewter cover, and followed by a small, dark, ugly, quiet girl carrying the vegetable dishes.

“That’s my niece Mary, Jack. Lives with Aunt Matilda here, who won’t spare her or I’d have her to live here with me. Now you know everybody. What’s for tea?”

He was dangerously clashing the knife on the steel. Then lifting the cover, he disclosed a young pig roasted in all its glory of gravy. Mary meanwhile had nodded her head at Jack and looked at him with her big, queer, very black eyes. You might have thought she had native blood. She sat down to serve the vegetables.

“Grace, there’s a fly in the milk,” said Aunt Matilda, who was already pouring large cups of tea. Grace seized the milk jug and jerked from the room.

“Do you take milk and sugar, as your dear father used to, John?” asked Aunt Matilda of the youth on her left.

“Call him Bow. Bow’s his name out here — John’s too stiff and Jack’s too common!” exclaimed Mr. George, elbows deep in carving.

“Bow’ll do for me,” put in Mrs. Ellis, who said little.

“Mary, is there any mustard?” said Aunt Matilda.

Jack rose vaguely to go and get it, but Aunt Matilda seized him by the arm and pushed him back.

“Sit still. She knows where it is.”

“Monica, come and carry the cups, there’s a good girl.”

“Now which end of the pig do you like, Jack?” asked Mr. George. “Matilda, will this do for you?” He held up a piece on the fork. Mary arrived with a ponderous gyrating cruet-stand, which she made place for in the middle of the table.

“What about bread?” said Aunt Matilda. “I’m sure John eats bread with his meat. Fetch some bread, Grace, for your cousin John.”

“Everybody did it,” thought Jack in despair, as he tried to eat amid the hustle. “No servants, nothing ever still. On the go all the time.”

“Girls going to the concert tonight?” asked Mr. George.

“If anybody will go with us,” replied Monica, with a tawny look at Jack.

“There’s Bow,” said Mr. George, “Bowll like to go.”

Under the shelion peering of Monica, Jack was incapable of answer.

“Let the poor boy rest,” said Aunt Matilda. “Just landed after a six thousand mile voyage, and you rush him out next minute to a concert. Let him stop at home quietly with me, and have a quiet chat about the dear ones he’s left behind. — Aren’t you going to the concert with the girls, Jacob?”

This was addressed to Mr. Ellis, who took a gulp of tea and shook his head mutely.

“I’d rather go to the concert, I think,” said Jack under the queer yellow glower of Monica’s eyes, and the full black moons of Mary’s.

“Good for you, my boy,” said Mr. George. “Bow by name and Bow by nature. And well set up, with three strings to his Bow already.”

Monica once more peered tawnily, and Mary glanced a black, furtive glance. Aunt Matilda looked down on him and Grace, at his side, peered up.

For the first time since childhood, Jack found himself in a really female setting. Instinctively he avoided women: but particularly he avoided girls. With girls and women he felt exposed to some sort of danger — as if something were going to seize him by the neck, from behind, when he wasn’t looking. He relied on men for safety. But curiously enough, these two elderly men gave him no shelter whatever. They seemed to throw him a victim to these frightful “lamps.” In England, there was an esprit de corps among men. Man for man was a tower of strength against the females. Here in this place men deserted one another as soon as the women put in an appearance. They left the field entirely to the females.

In the first half-hour Jack realised he was thrown a victim to these tawny and black young cats. And there was nothing to do but bear up.

“Have you got an evening suit?” asked Grace, who was always the one to ponder things out.

“Yes — a sort of a one,” said Jack.

“Oh, good! Oh, put it on! Do put it on.”

“Leave the lad alone,” said Mr. George. “Let him go as he is.”

“No,” said Aunt Matilda. “He has his father’s handsome presence. Let him make the best of himself. I think I’ll go to the concert after all.”

After dinner there was a bustle. Monica flew up to light his candle for him, and stood there peering behind the flame when he came upstairs.

“You haven’t much time,” she said, as if she were going to spear him.

“All right,” he answered, in his hoarse young voice. And he stood in torment till she left his room.

He was just tying his tie when there came a flutter and a tapping. Aunt Matilda’s voice saying: “Nearly time. Are you almost ready?”

“Half a minute!” he crowed hoarsely, like an unhappy young cock.

But the door stealthily opened, and Aunt Matilda peeped in.

“Oh, tying his tie!” she said, satisfactorily, when she perceived that he was dressed as far as discretion demanded. And she entered in full blow. Behind her hovered Grace — then Monica — and in the doorway Mary. It seemed to Jack that Aunt Matilda was the most objectionable of the lot, Monica the brazenest, Grace the most ill-mannered, and Mary the most repulsive, with her dark face. He struggled in discomfort with his tie.

“Let Mary do it,” said Aunt Matilda.

“No, no!” he barked. “I can do it.”

“Come on, Mary. Come and tie John’s tie.”

Mary came quietly forward.

“Let me do it for you, Bow,” she said in her quiet, insinuating voice, looking at him with her inky eyes and standing in front of him till his knees felt weak and his throat strangled. He was purple in the face, struggling with his tie in the presence of the lambs.

“He’ll never get it done,” said Monica, from behind the yellow glare.

“Let me do it,” said Mary, and lifting her hands decisively she took the two ends of the tie from him.

He held his breath and lifted his eyes to the ceiling and felt as if the front of his body were being roasted. Mary, the devil-puss, seemed endless ages fastening the tie. Then she twitched it at his throat and it was done, just as he was on the point of suffocation.

“Are those your best braces?” said Grace. “They’re awfully pretty with rose-buds.” And she fingered the band.

“I suppose you put on evening dress for the last dinner on board,” said Aunt Matilda. “Nothing makes me cry like Auld Lang Syne, that last night, before you land next day. But it’s fifteen years since I went over to England.”

“I don’t suppose we shall any of us ever go,” said Grace longingly.

“Unless you marry Bow,” said Monica abruptly.

“I can’t marry him unless he asks me,” said Grace.

“He’ll ask nobody for a good many years to come,” said Aunt Matilda with

satisfaction.

“Hasn’t he got lovely eyelashes?” said Grace impersonally.

“He’d almost do for a girl,” said Monica.

“Not if you look at his ears,” said Mary, with odd decision. He felt that Mary was bent on saving his manhood.

He breathed as if the air around him were red-hot. He would have to get out, or die. He plunged into his coat, pulling down his shirt-cuffs with a jerk.

“What funny green cuff-links,” said Grace. “Are they pot?”

“Malachite,” said Jack.

“What’s malachite?”

There was no answer. He put a white silk muffler round his neck to protect his collar.

“Oh, look at his initials in lavender silk!”

At last he was in his overcoat, and in the street with the bevy.

“Leave your overcoat open, so it shows your shirt-front as you walk,” said Grace, forcibly unbuttoning the said coat. “I think that looks so lovely. Doesn’t he look lovely, Monica? Everybody will be asking who he is.”

“Tell them he’s the son of General Grant,” said Aunt Matilda, with complete satisfaction, as she sailed at his side.

Life is principally a matter of endurance. This was the sum of Jack’s philosophy. He put it into practice this evening.

It was a benefit concert in the Town Hall, with the Episcopalian Choir singing, “Angels Ever Bright and Fair,” and a violinist from Germany playing violin solos, and a lady vocalist from Melbourne singing “home” solos, while local stars variously coruscated. Aunt Matilda filled up the end of the seat — like a massive book-end: and the others like slender volumes of romance were squeezed in between her and another stout book-end. Jack had the heaving warmth of Aunt Matilda on his right, the electric wriggle of Monica on his left, and he continued to breathe red-hot air.

The concert was a ludicrous continuation of shameful and ridiculous noise to him. Each item seemed inordinately long and he hoped for the next, which when it came, seemed worse than the last. The people who performed seemed to him in a ghastly humiliating position. One stout mother-of-thousands leaned forward and simply gurgled about riding over the brow of a hill and seeing a fair city beyond, and a young knight in silver armour riding toward her with shining face, to greet her on the spot as his lady fair and lady dear. Jack looked at her in pained amazement. And yet when the songstress from Melbourne, in a rich contralto, began to moan in a Scotch accent:

“And it’s o-o-oh! that I’m longing for my ain folk,

Though the-e-ey be but lowly, puir and plain folk —
I am far across the sea
But my heart will ever be-e-e-e-e
At home in dear old Scotland with my ain folk,”

Jack suddenly wanted to howl. He had never been to Scotland and his father, General Grant, with his mother, was at present in Malta. And he hadn't got any “ain folk,” and he didn't want any. Yet it was all he could do to keep the tears from showing in his eyes, as his heart fairly broke in him. And Aunt Matilda crowded him a little more suffocatingly on the right, and Monica, wriggled more hatefully than ever on the left, and that beastly Mary leaned forward to glance appreciatively at him, with her low-down black eyes. And he felt as if the front of his body was, scorched. And a smouldering desire for revenge awoke deep down in him.

People were always trying to “do things” to you. Why couldn't they leave you alone? Dirty cads to sing “My Ain Folk,” and then stare in your face to see how it got you.

But life was a matter of endurance, with possible revenge later on.

When at last he got home and could go to bed, he felt he had gained a brief respite. There was no lock to the door — so he put the arm-chair against it, for a barricade.

And he felt he had been once more sold. He had thought he was coming to a wild and woolly world. But all the way out he had been forced to play the gentlemanly son of his father. And here it was hell on earth, with these women let loose all over you, and these ghastly concerts, and these hideous meals, and these awful flimsy, choky houses. Far better the Agricultural College. Far better England.

He was sick with homesickness as he flung himself into bed. And it seemed to him he was always homesick for some place which he had never known and perhaps never would know. He was always homesick for somewhere else. He always hated where he was, silently but deeply.

Different people. The place would be all right, but for the people.

He hated women. He hated the kind of nausea he felt after they had crowded on him. The yellow cat-eyes of that deadly Monica! The inky eyes of that low-down Mary! The big nose of that Grace: she was the most tolerable. And the indecency of the red-haired Aunt Matilda, with her gold chains.

He flung his trousers in one direction, and the loathsome starched shirt in another, and his underwear in another. When he was quite clear of all his clothing he clenched his fists and reached them up, and stretched hard, hard as if to stretch himself clear of it all. Then he did a few thoughtless exercises, to

shake off the world. He wanted the muscles of his body to move, to shake off the contact of the world. As a dog coming out of the water shakes himself, so Jack stood there slowly, intensely going through his exercises, slowly sloughing the contact of the world from his young, resistant white body. And his hair fell loose into curl, and the alert defiance came into his eyes as he threw apart his arms and opened his young chest. Anything, anything to forget the world and to throw the contact of people off his limbs and his chest. Keen and savage as a Greek gymnast, he struck the air with his arms, with his legs.

Till at last he felt he had broken through the mesh. His blood was running free, he had shattered the film that other people put over him, as if snails had crawled over him. His skin was free and alive. He glowered at the door, and made the barricade more safe. Then he dived into his nightshirt, and felt the world was his own again. At least in his own immediate vicinity, Which was all he cared about for the moment.

CHAPTER III

DRIVING TO WANDOO

I

Jack started before dawn next morning, for Wandoo. Mr. George had business which took him south, so he decided to carry the boy along on the coach. Mr. Ellis also was returning home in the coach, but the twins, those lambs, were staying behind. In the chilly dark, Jack climbed the front of the buggy to sit on the seat beside the driver. He was huddled in his overcoat, the happiest boy alive. For now at last he was “getting away,” as he always wanted to “get away.” From what, he didn’t stop to consider, and still less did he realise towards what. Because however far you may get away from one thing; by so much do you draw near to another.

And this is the Fata Morgana of Liberty, or Freedom. She may lead you very definitely away from to-day’s prison. But she also very definitely leads you towards some other prison. Liberty is a changing of prisons, to people who seek only liberty.

Away went the buggy at a spanking trot, the driver pointing out the phosphoric glow of the river, as they descended to the Causeway. Stars still shone overhead, but the sky was beginning to open inland. The buggy ran softly over the damp sand, the two horses were full of life. There was an aroma of damp sand, and a fresh breeze from the river as they crossed.

Jack didn’t want to talk. But the driver couldn’t miss the opportunity.

“I drives this coach backards and forrards to Albany week in week out, years without end amen, and a good two hundred miles o’ land to cover, taking six days clear with two ‘osses, and them in relays fifteen or twenty miles, sometimes over, as on the outland reach past Wagin.”

“Ever get held up?”

“No sir, can’t say as I do. Who’d there be to hold me up in Western Australia? And if there was, the mounted police’d soon settle ‘em. There’s nobody to hold me up but my old woman, and she drives the coach for me up Middle Swan way.”

“Can she drive?”

“You back your life she can. Bred and born to it. Drive an’ swear at the ‘osses like a trooper, when she’s a mind. Swear! I’d never ha’ thought it of ‘er, when I rode behind ‘er as a groom.”

“How?”

“Oh, she took me in, she did, pretty. But after all, what’s a lady but a woman! Though far be it from me to say: ‘What’s a woman but a lady!’ If I’d gone down on my hands an’ knees to her, in them days, I should have expected her to kick me. And what does she do? Rode out of the park gates and stopped. So she did. Turns to me. ‘Grey,’ she says, ‘here’s money. You go to London and buy yourself clothes like what a grocer would buy. Avoid looking like a butler or a groom. And when you’ve got an outfit, dress and make yourself look like a grocer,’ she said, though I never had any connections with grocery in my life — ‘and go to the office in Victoria Street and take two passages to Australia.’ That was what she said. Just Australia. When the man in the office asked me, where to in Australia, I didn’t know what to say. ‘Oh, we’ll go in at the first gate,’ I said. And so it was Fremantle. ‘Yes,’ she said, ‘we’re going to elope.’ ‘Nice thing for me,’ thinks I. But I says, ‘All right, Miss.’ She was a pearl beyond price, was Miss Ethel. So she seemed to me then. Now she’s a termagant as ever was: in double ‘arness, collar-proud.”

The coachman flicked the horses. Jack looked at him in amazement. He was a man with a whitish-looking beard, in the dim light.

“And did she have any children?”

“She’s got five.”

“And does she regret it?”

“At times, I suppose. But as I say to her, if anybody was took in, it was me. I always thought her a perfect lady. So when she lets fly at me: ‘Call yourself a man?’ I just say to her: ‘Call yourself a lady?’ And she comes round all right.”

Jack’s consciousness began to go dim. He was aware of a strange dim booming almost like guns in the distance, and the driver’s voice saying, “Frogs, sir. Way back in the days before ever a British ship came here, they say the Dutchmen came, and was frightened off by the croaking of the bull frogs: Couldn’t make it out a-nohow!” — The horses’ hoofs were echoing on the boarded Causeway, and from the little islands alongside came the amazing croaking, barking, boeing and booming of the frogs.

II

When Jack looked round again it was day. And the driver's beard was black. He was a man with a thin red face and black beard and queer grey eyes that had a mocking sort of secret in them.

"I thought your beard was white," said Jack.

"Ay, with rime. With frost. Not with anything else."

"I didn't expect hoar-frost here."

"Well — it's not so very common. Not like the Old Country."

Jack realised they always spoke patronisingly of the Old Country, poor old place, as if it couldn't help being what it was.

The man's grey eyes with the amused secret glanced quickly at Jack.

"Not quite awake yet?" he said.

"Oh, yes," said Jack.

"Coming out to settle, I hope," said the driver. "We can do with a few spruce young lads. I've got five daughters to contend with. Why there's six A1 families in Perth, maybe you've heard, and six in the country, and possibly six round Fremantle, and nary one of 'em but's got seven daughters. Seven daughters — —"

Jack did not hear. He seemed to be saying, in reply to some question, "I'm Jack Hector Grant."

"Contrairy," the servants had called him, and "naughty little boy," his Aunts. Insubordinate, untrustworthy. Such things they said of him. His soul pricked from all the things, but he guessed they were not far wrong.

What did his mother think of him? And his father? He didn't know them very well. They only came home sometimes, and then they seemed to him reasonable and delightful people. The Wandering Grants, Lady Bewley had called them.

Was he a liar? When they called him a liar, was it true? It was. And yet he never really felt a liar. "Don't ask, and you'll get no lies told you." It was a phrase from his nurse, and he always wanted to use it to his hateful Aunts. "Say you're sorry! Say you're sorry!" Wasn't that forcing him to tell lies, when he wasn't sorry? His Aunts always seemed to him despicable liars. He himself was just an ordinary liar. He lied because he didn't want them to know what he'd done, even when he'd done right.

So they threatened him with that loathsome "policeman." Or they dropped him over the garden fence into the field beyond. There he sat in a sort of Crusoe solitary confinement. A vast row of back fences, and a vast, vast field. Himself squatting immovable, and an Aunt coming to demand sharply through the fence: "Say you're sorry. Say you want to be a good little boy. Say it, or you won't come in to dinner. You'll stay there all night."

He wasn't sorry, he didn't want to be a good little boy, therefore he wouldn't

“say it”; so he got a piece of bread and butter pushed through the fence. And then he faced the emptiness of the field and set off, to find himself somehow in the kitchen-garden of the manor-house. A servant had seen him, and brought him before her ladyship, who was herself walking in the garden.

“Who are you, little boy?”

“I’m Jack Hector Grant” — a pause. “Who are you?”

“I’m Lady Bewley.”

They eyed one another.

“And where were you wandering to, in my garden?”

“I wasn’t wand’rin’. I was walkin’.”

“Were you? Come, then, and walk with me, will you?”

She took his hand and led him along a path. He didn’t quite know if he was a prisoner. But her hand was gentle, and she seemed a quiet, sad lady. She stepped with him through wide-open window-doors. He looked uneasily round the drawing-room, then at the quiet lady.

“Where was you born?” he asked her.

“Why, you funny boy, I was born in this house.”

“My mother wasn’t. She was born in Australia. And my father was born in India. And I can’t remember where I was born.”

A servant had brought in the tea-tray. The child was sitting on a foot-stool. The lady seemed not to be listening. There was a dark cake.

“My mother said I wasn’t never to ask for cake, but if somebody was to offer me some, I needn’t say No fank you.”

“Yes, you shall have some cake,” said the lady. “So you are one of the Wandering Grants, and you don’t know where you were born?”

“But I think. I was born in my mother’s bed.”

“I suppose you were — And how old are you?”

“I’m four. How old are you?”

“A great deal older than that. — But tell me, what were you doing in my garden.”

“I don’t know. Well, I comed by mistake.”

“How was that?”

“‘Cause I wouldn’t say I was sorry I told a lie. Well, I wasn’t sorry. But I wasn’t wandrin’ in your garden. I was only walkin’. I was walkin’ out of the meadow where they put me — — ”

— — ”And I says, she may have been born in a ‘all, but she’ll die in a wooden shack.”

“Who? Who will?”

“I was tellin’ you about my old woman. — Look! There’s a joey runnin’ there

along the track.”

Jack looked, and saw a funny little animal half leaping, half running along.

“We call them baby ‘roos, joeys, you understand, and they make the cutest little pets you ever did imagine.”

They were still in sandy country, on a good road not far from the river, and Jack saw the little chap jump to cover. The tall gum trees with their brownish pale smooth stems and loose strips of bark stood tall and straight and still, scattered like a thin forest that spread unending, rising from a low, heath-like undergrowth. It seemed open, and yet weird, enclosing you in its vast emptiness. This bush, that he had heard so much of! The sun had climbed out of the mist, and was becoming gold and powerful in a limpid sky. The leaves of the gum trees hung like heavy narrow blades, inert and colourless, in a weight of silence. Save when they came to a more open place, and a flock of green parrots flew shrieking, “Twenty-eight! Twenty-eight!” At least that was what the driver said they cried. — The lower air was still somewhat chilly from the mist. A number of black-and-white handsome birds, that they call magpies, flew alongside in the bush, keeping pace for a time with the buggy. And once a wallaby ran alongside for a while on the path, a bigger ‘roo than the joey, and very funny, leaping persistently alongside with his little hands dangling.

It was a new country after all. It was different. A small exultance grew inside the youth. After all, he had got away, into a country that men had not yet clutched into their grip. Where you could do as you liked, without being stifled by people. He still had a secret intention of doing as he liked, though what it was he would do when he could do as he liked, he did not know. Nothing very definite. And yet something stirred in his bowels as he saw the endless bush, and the noisy green parrots and the queer, tame kangaroos: and no man.

“It’s dingy country down here,” the coachman was saying. “Not good for much. No good for nothing except cemetery, though Mr. George says he believes in it. And there’s nothing you can do with it, seeing as how many gents what come in the first place has gone away for ever, lock stock and barrel, leaving nothing but their ‘claims’ on the land itself, so nobody else can touch it.” Here he shook the reins on the horses’ backs. “But I hopes you settles, and makes good, and marries and has children, like me and my old woman, sir. She’ve put five daughters into the total, born in a shack, though their mother was born in Pontesbeach Hall — — ”

But Jack’s mind drifted away from the driver. He was in that third state, not uncommon to youth, which seems to intervene between reality and dream. The bush, the coach, the wallabies, the coachdriver were not very real to him. Neither was his own self and his own past very real to him. There seemed to him to be

another mute core to himself. Apart from the known Jack Grant, and apart from the world as he had known it. Even apart from this Australia which was so unknown to him.

As a matter of fact, he had not yet come-to in Australia. He had not yet extricated himself from England and the ship. Half of himself was left behind, and the other half was gone ahead. So there he sat, mute and stupid.

He only knew he wanted something, and he resented something. He resented having been so much found fault with. They had hated him because he preferred to make friends among “good-for-nothings.” But as he saw it, “good-for-nothings” were the only ones that had any daring. Not altogether tamed. He loathed the thought of harness. He hated tameness, hated it, hated it. The thought of it made his innocent face take on a really devilish look. And because of his hatred of harness, he hated answering the questions that people put to him. Neither did he ask many, for his own part. But now one popped out.

“There are policemen here, are there?”

“Yes, sir, a good force of mounted police, a smart body of men. And they’re needed. Western Australia is full of old prisoners, black fellers, and white ones too. The whites, born here, is called ‘gropers,’ if you take me, sir. Sand-gropers. And they all need protection one from the other. And there’s half-pay officers, civil and military, and clergy, scattered through the bush — — ”

“Need protecting from one another, and yet he says there’s nobody to hold up the coach,” thought Jack to himself, cynically.

The bush had alternated with patches of wild scrub. But now came clearings: a little wooden house, and an orchard of trees planted in rows, with a grazing field beyond. Then more flat meadows, and ploughed spaces, and a humpy or a shack here and there: children playing around, and hens: then a regular homestead, with a verandah on either side, and creepers climbing up, and fences about.

“The soil is red!” said Jack.

“Clay! That’s clay! No more sand, except in patches, all the way to Albany. This is Guildford where the roses grow.”

They clattered across a narrow wooden bridge with a white railing, and up to a wooden inn where the horses were to be changed. Jack got down in the road, and saw Mr. George and Mr. Ellis both sleepily emerge and pass without a word into the place marked BAR.

“I think I’ll walk on a bit,” said Jack, “if you’ll pick me up. But at that moment a fleecy white head peering out of the back of the coach cried:

“Oh, Mr. Gwey! Oh, Mr. Gwey! They’ve frowed away a perfectly good cat.”

The driver went over with Jack to where the chubby arm was pointing, and saw the body of a cat stretched by the trodden grass. It was quite dead. They

stood looking at it, Grey explaining that it was a good skin and it certainly was a pity to waste it, and he hoped someone would find it who would tan it before it went too far, for as for him, he could not take it along in the coach, the passengers might object before they reached Albany, though the weather was cooling up a bit.

Jack laughed and went back to the coach to throw off his overcoat. He loved the crazy inconsequence of everything. He stepped along the road feeling his legs thrilling with new life. The thrill and exultance of new life. And yet somewhere in his breast and throat tears were heaving. Why? Why? He didn't know. Only he wanted to cry till he died. And at the same time, he felt such a strength and a new power of life in his legs as he strode the Australian way, that he threw back his head in a sort of exultance.

Let the exultance conquer. Let the tears go to blazes. When the coach came alongside, there was the old danger-look in his eyes, a defiance, and something of the cat-look of a young lion. He did not mount, but walked on up the hill. They were climbing the steep Darling Ranges, and soon he had a wonderful view. There was the wonderful clean new country spread out below him, so big, so soft, so ancient in its virginity. And far beyond, the gleam of that strange empty sea. He saw the grey-green bush ribboned with blue rivers, winding to an unknown sea. And in his heart he was determining to get what he wanted. Even though he did not know what it was he wanted. In his heart he clinched his determination to get it. To get it out of this ancient country's virginity.

He waited at the top of the hill. The horses came clop-clopping up. Morning was warm and full of sun. They had rolled up the flaps of the wagonette, and there was the beaming face of Mr. George, and the purple face of Mr. Ellis, and the back of the head of the floss-haired child.

Jack looked back again, when he had climbed to his seat and the horses were breathing, to where the foot of the grey-bush hills rested in a valley ribboned with rivers and patched with cultivation, all frail and delicate in a dim ethereal light.

"A land of promise! A land of promise," said Mr. George. "When I was young I bid £1080 for 2,700 acres of it. But Hammersley bid twenty pounds more, and got it. — Take up land, Jack Grant, take up land. Buy, beg, borrow or steal land, but get it, sir, get it."

"He'll have to go farther back to find it," said Mr. Ellis, from his blue face. "He'll get none of what he sees there."

"Oh, if he means to stay, he can jump it. — The law is always bendin' and breakin', bendin' and breakin'."

"Well, if he's going to live with me, Mr. George, don't put him on to land-

snatching,” said Mr. Ellis. And the two men fell to a discussion of Land Acts, Grants, Holdings, Claims, and Jack soon ceased to listen. He thought the land looked lovely. But he had no desire to own any of it. He never felt the possibility of “owning” land. There the land was, for eternity. How could he own it? — Anyhow, it made no appeal to him along those lines.

But Mr. Ellis loved “timber” and broke the spell by pointing and saying:

“See them trees, Jack my boy? Jarrah! Hills run one into the other way to the Blackwood River. Hundreds of miles of beautiful jarrah timber. The trees like this barren ironstone formation. It’s well they do, for nothing else does.”

“There’s one o’ the mud-brick buildings the convicts lived in, while they were building the road,” said the driver, not to be done out of his say. “One of the convicts broke and got away. Mostly when they went off they was driven in by the bush. But this one never. They say he’s wanderin’ yet. I say, dead.”

Mr. George was explaining the landscape.

“Down there, Darlington. Governor Darling went down and never came back. Went home the quick way. — Boya, native word for rock. Mahogany Creek just above there. They’ll see us coming. Kids watch from the rise, run back and holloa. Pa catches rooster, black girl blows fire, Ma mixes paste, yardman peels spuds, — dinner when we get there.”

“And, sir, Sam has a good brew, none better. Also, sir, though it looks lonesome, he’s mostly got company.”

“How’s that?”

“Well, sir, everyone comes for miles round to hear his missus play the harmonium. Got it out from England, and if it doesn’t break your heart to hear it! The voice of the past! You’d love to hear it, Mr. Grant, being new from home.”

“I’m sure I should,” said Jack, thinking of the concert.

The dinner at Mahogany Creek was as Mr. George had said. Afterwards, on again through the bush.

Towards the end of the afternoon the coach pulled up at a little by-road, where stood a basket-work shay, and a tall young fellow in very old clothes lounging with loose legs.

“‘Ere y’are!” said Grey, and walking the horses to the side of the road, he scrambled down to pull water from a well. “Here we are!” said Mr. Ellis from the back of the coach, where the tall youth was just receiving the floss-haired baby between his big red hands. Fat Mr. Ellis got down. The youth began pulling out Jack’s bags and boxes, and Jack hurried round to help him.

“This is Tom,” said Mr. Ellis.

“Pleased to meet you,” said Tom, holding out a big hand and clasping Jack’s hand hard for a moment. Then they went on piling the luggage on the wicker

shay.

“That’s the lot!” called Mr. Ellis.

“Good-bye, Jack!” said Mr. George, leaning his grey head out of the coach. “Be good and you’ll be happy.”

Over which speech Jack puzzled mutely. But the floss-haired baby girl was embracing his trouser legs.

“I never knew you were an Ellis,” he said to her.

“Ay, she’s another of ‘em,” said Mr. Ellis.

The coach was going. Jack went over awkwardly and offered the driver a two-shilling piece.

“Put it back in y’r pocket, lad, y’ll want it more than I shall,” said Grey unceremoniously. “The best o’ luck to you, an’ I mean it.”

They all packed into the shay, Jack sitting with his back to the horses, the little girl tied in beside him, his smaller luggage bundled where it could be stowed; and in absolute silence they drove through the silence of the standing, motionless gum trees. Jack had never felt such silence. At last they pulled up. Tom jumped down and drew a slip-rail, and they passed a log fence, inside which there were many sheep, though it was still bush. Tom got in again and they drove through bush, with occasional sheep. Then Tom got down again — Jack could not see for what purpose. The youth fetched an axe out of the cart and started chopping. A tree was across the road: he was chopping at the broken part. There came a sweet scent.

“Raspberry jam!” said Mr. Ellis. “That’s acacia acuminata, a beautiful wood, good for fences, posts, pipes, walking-sticks. And they’re burning it off by the million acres.”

Tam pulled the trunk aside, and drove on again till he came to another gate. Then they saw ahead a great clearing in the bush, and in the midst of the clearing a “ginger-bread” house, made of wood slabs, with a shingle roof running low all round to the verandahs. A woman in dark homespun cloth with an apron and sunbonnet, and a young bearded man in moleskins and blue shirt, came out with a cheery shout.

“You get along inside and have some tea,” said the young bearded man. “I’ll change the horses.”

The woman lifted down the baby, after having untied her. There was a door in the front of the house, a window on each side. But they all went round under the eaves to the mud-brick kitchen behind, and had tea. The woman hardly spoke, but she smiled and passed the tea and nursed Ellie. When the young bearded man came in, he smiled and said:

“I’ve got the mail out of the shay, Mr. Ellis.”

“That’s all right,” said Mr. Ellis.

After which no one spoke again.

When they set off once more, there was a splendid pair of greys on either side the pole.

“Bill and Lil,” said Mr. Ellis. “My own breed. Angus lends us his for the twenty miles to the cross roads. We’ve just changed them and got our own. There’s another twenty miles yet.”

It now began to rain, and gradually grew dark and cold. The bush was dree, the dreest thing Jack had ever known. Rugs and mackintoshes were fetched out, the baby was fastened snug in a corner out of the wet, and the horses kept up a steady pace. And then, as Nature went to roost, Mr. Ellis woke up and pulled out his pipe, to begin a conversation.

“How’s Ma?”

“Great!”

“How’s Gran?”

“Same.”

“All well?”

“Yes.”

“He’s come twenty miles,” thought Jack, “and he only asks now!”

“See the doctor in town, Dad?” asked Tom.

“I did.”

“What’d he say?”

“Oh, heart’s wrong all right, just what Rackett said. But might live to be older than he is. So I might too, lad.”

“So you will an’ all, Dad.”

And then Mr. Ellis, as if desperate to change the conversation, pulling hard at his pipe:

“Jersey cow calved?”

“Yes.”

“Bull again?”

“No, heifer. Beauty.”

They both smiled silently. Then Tom’s tongue suddenly was loose.

“Little beauty, she is. And the Berkshire has farrowed nine little prize-winners. Cowslip came on with ‘er butter since she come on to the barley. I cot them twins Og an’ Magog peltin’ the dogs with eggs, an’ them so scarce, so I wopped ‘em both. That black spaniel bitch, I had to kill her for she worried one o’ the last batch o’ sucking pigs, though I don’t know how she come to do such a thing. I’ve finished fallowin’ in the bottom meadow, an’ I’m glad you’re back to tell us what to get on wif.”

“How’s clearing in th’ Long Mile Paddock?”

“Only bin down there once. Sam’s doin’ all right.”

“Hear anything of the Gum Tree Gully clearing gang?”

“Message from Spencer, an’ y’ t’go down some time — as soon’s y’ can.”

“Well, I want the land reclaimed this year, an’ I want it gone on with. Never know what’ll happen, Tom. I’d like for you to go down there, Tom. You c’n take th’ young feller behind here with you, soon’s the girls come home.”

“What’s he like?”

“Seems a likely enough young chap. Old George put in a good word for’m.”

“Bit of a toff.”

“Never you mind, s’ long’s his head’s not toffy.”

“Know anything?”

“Shouldn’t say so.”

“Some fool?”

“Don’t know. You find out for y’self.”

Silence.

Jack heard it all. But if he hadn’t heard it, he could easily have imagined it.

“Yes, you find out,” he thought to himself, going dazed with fatigue and indifference as he huddled under the blanket, hearing the horses’ hoofs clop-clop! and the rain splash on his shoulders. Sometimes the horses pulled slow and hard in the dark, sometimes they bowled along. He could see nothing. Sometimes there was a snort and jangle of harness, and the wheels resounding hollow. “Bridging something,” thought Jack. And he wondered how they found their way in the utter dark, for there were no lamps. The trees dripped heavily.

And then, at the end of all things, Tom jumped down and opened a gate. Hope! But on and on and on. Stop! — hope! — another gate. On and on. Same again. And so interminably.

Till at last some intuition seemed to communicate to Jack the presence of home. — The rain had stopped, the moon was out. Ghostly and weird the bush, with white trunks spreading like skeletons. There opened a clearing, and a dog barked. A horse neighed near at hand. There were no trees, a herd of animals was moving in the dusk. And then a dark house loomed ahead, unlighted. The shay drove on, and round to the back. A door opened, a woman’s figure stood in the candle-light and firelight.

“All right, Ma!” called Tom.

“All right, dear!” called Mr. Ellis.

“All right!” shrilled a little voice — —

Well, here they were, in the kitchen. Mrs. Ellis was a brown-haired woman with a tired look in her eyes. She looked a long time at Jack, holding his hand in

her one hand and feeling his wet coat with the other.

“You’re wet. But you can go to bed when you’ve had your supper. I hope you’ll be all right. Tom’ll look after you.”

She was hoping that he would only bring good with him. She was all mother: and mother of her own children first. She felt kindly towards him. But he was another woman’s son.

When they had eaten, Tom led the newcomer away out of the house, across a little yard, threw open a door in the dark, and lit a candle stuck in the neck of a bottle. Jack looked round at the mud floor, the windowless window, the unlined wooden walls, the calico ceiling, and he was glad. He was to share this cubby hole, as they called it, with the other Ellis boys. His truckle bed was fresh and clean. He was content. It wasn’t stuffy, it was rough and remote.

When he opened his portmanteau to get out his nightshirt he asked Tom where he was to put his clothes. For there was no cupboard or chest of drawers or anything.

“On your back or under your bed,” said Tom. “Or I might find y’ an old packing case, if y’re decent. — But say, ol’ bloke, lemme give y’a hint. Don’t y’ get sidey or nosey up here, puttin’ on jam an suchlike, f’r if y’do y’ll shame me in front of strangers, an’ I won’t stand it.”

“Jam, did you say?”

“Yes, jam, macaroni, cockadoodle. We’re plain people out here-aways, not mantel ornaments nor dickey-toffs, an’ we want no flash sparks round, see?”

“I’m no flash spark,” said Jack. “Not enough for ‘em at home. It’s too much fist and too little toff, that’s the matter with me.”

“C’n y’ use y’r fists?”

“Like to try me?”

Jack shaped up to him.

“Oh for the love o’ Mike,” laughed Tom, “stow the haw-haw gab! You’ll do me though, I think.”

“I’ll try to oblige,” said Jack, rolling into bed.

“Here!” said Tom sharply. “Out y’ get an’ say y’ prayers. What sortta example for them kids of ours, gettin’ into bed an’ forgettin’ y’r prayers?”

Jack eyed the youth.

“You say yours?” he asked.

“Should say I do. Gran is on ter me right cruel if I don’t see to it, whoever sleeps in this cubby. They has ter say their prayers, see?”

“All right!” said Jack laconically.

And he obediently got up, kneeled on the mud floor, and gabbled through his quota. Somewhere in his heart he was touched by the simple honesty of the boy.

And somewhere else he was writhing with slow, contemptuous repugnance at the vulgar tyranny.

But he called again to his aid that natural indifference of his, grounded on contempt. And also a natural boyish tolerance, because he saw that Tom had a naive, if rather vulgar, good-will.

He gabbled through his prayers wearily, but scrupulously to the last Amen. Then rolled again into bed to sleep till morning, and forget, forget, forget! He depended on his power of absolute forgetting.

CHAPTER IV

WANDOO

I

Two things struggled in Jack's mind when he awoke in the morning. The first was the brave idea that he had left everything behind; that he had done with his boyhood and was going to enter into his own. The second was a noise of somebody quoting Latin and clicking wooden dumb-bells.

Jack opened his eyes. There were four beds in the cubby hole. Between two beds stood a thin boy of about thirteen, swinging dumb-bells, and facing two small urchins who were faithfully imitating him, except that they did not repeat the Latin tags. They were all dressed in short breeches loosely held up by braces, and undervests.

Veni! up went their arms smartly, — vidi! down came the clubs to horizontal, — vici! the clubs were down by their sides.

Jack smiled to himself and dozed again. It was scarcely dawn. He was dimly aware of the rain pattering on the shingle roof.

"Ain't ye gettin' up this morning?"

It was Tom standing contemplating him. The children had run out barefoot and bare-armed in the rain.

"Is it morning?" asked Jack, stretching.

"Not half. We've fed th' osses. Come on."

"Where do I wash?"

"At the pump. Look slippy and get, your clothes on. Our men live over at Red's, we have to look sharp in the morning."

Jack looked slippy, and went out to wash in the tin dish by the pump. The rain was abating, but it seemed a damp performance.

By the time he was really awake, the day had come clear. It was a fine morning, the air fresh with the smell of flowering shrubs: silver wattle, spirea, daphne and syringa which Ellis grew in his garden. Already the sun was coming warm.

The house was a low stone building with a few trees round it. But all the life

went on here at the back, here where the pump was, and the various yards and wooden out-buildings. There was a vista of open clearing, and a few huge gum-trees. The sky was already blue, a certain mist lay below the great isolated trees.

In the yard a score of motherless lambs were penned, bleating, their silly faces looking up at Jack confidently, expecting the milk bottle. He walked with his hands in the pockets of his old English tweeds, feeling over-dressed and a bit out of place. Cows were tethered to posts or standing loose about the fenced yard, and the half-caste Tim, and Lennie, the dumb-bell boy, and a girl, were silently milking. The heavy, pure silence of the Australian morning.

Jack stood at a little distance. A cat whisked across the yard and ran up a queer-looking pine-tree, a dissipated old cow moved about at random. "Hey you!" shouted Tom impatiently, "Take houl't of that cart 'oss nosin' his way inter th' chaff-house, and bring him here. An' see to that grey's ropes: she's chewin' 'em free. Look slippy, make yourself useful."

There was a tone of amiability and intimacy mixed with this bossy shouting. Jack ran to the cart 'oss. He couldn't help liking Tom and the rest. They were so queer and naive, and they seemed oddly forlorn, like waifs lost in this new country. Jack had always had a leaning towards waifs and lost people. They were the only people whose bossing he didn't mind.

The children at their various tasks were singing in shrill, clear voices, with a sort of street-arab abandon. Lennie, the boy, would break the shrilling of the twin urchins with a sudden musical yell, from the side of the cow he was milking. And they seemed to sing anything, songs, poetry, nonsense, anything that came into their heads, like birds singing variously and at random.

"The blue, the fresh, the ever free

I am where I would ever be

With the blue above, and the blue below — "

Then a yell from Lennie by the cows:

"And wherever thus in childhood's our — "

The twins:

"I never was on the dull tame shore

But I loved the great sea more and more — "

Again a sudden and commanding yell from Lennie.

"I never loved a dear gazelle

To glad me with its soft black eye,

But, when it came to know me well

And love me — "

Here the twins, as if hypnotized, howled out —

" — it was sure to die."

They kept up this ragged yelling in the new, soft morning, like lost wild things. Jack laughed to himself. But they were quite serious. The elders were dumb-silent. Only the youngsters made all this noise. Was it a sort of protest against the great silence of the country? Was it their young, lost effort in the noiseless antipodes, whose noiselessness seems like a doom at last? They yelled away like wild little lost things, with an uncanny abandon. It pleased Jack.

II

They had all gone silent again, and collected under the peppermint tree at the back door, where Ma ladled out tea into mugs for everybody. Ma was Mrs. Ellis. She still had the tired, distant look in her eyes, and a tired bearing, and she seemed to take no notice of anybody, either when she was in the kitchen or when she came out with pie to the group squatting under the tree. When anyone said: "Some more tea, Ma!" she silently ladled out the brew. Jack was not a very intent observer. But he was struck by Mrs. Ellis' silence and her "drawn" look.

Tom came and hitched himself up against the trunk of the tree. Lennie was sitting opposite on a log, holding his tin mug and eyeing the stranger in silence. On another log sat the two urchins, sturdy, wild little brats, barefooted, bare-legged, bare-armed, as Jack had first seen them, their dress still consisting of a little pair of pants and a cotton undervest: and a pair of braces. The last seemed by far the most important garment. Lennie was clothed, or unclothed, the same, while Tom had added a pair of boots. The bare arms out of the cotton vests were brown and smooth, and they gave the boys and the youth a curiously naked look. A girl of about twelve, in a dark-blue spotted pinafore and a rag of red hair-ribbon, sat on a little stump near the twins. She was silent like her mother — but not yet "drawn."

"What d'ye think of Og an' Magog?" said Tom, pointing with his mug at the twins. "Called for giants 'cos they're so small."

Jack did not know what to think. He tried to smile benevolently.

"An' that's Katie," continued Tom, indicating the girl, who at once looked foolish. "She's younger'n Lennie, but she's pretty near his size. He's another little 'un. Little an' cheeky, that's what he is. Too much cheek for his age — which is, fourteen. You'll have to keep him in his place, I tell you straight."

"Ef ye ken!" murmured Len with a sour face.

Then, chirping up with a real street-arab pertness, he seemed to ignore Jack as he asked brightly of Tom:

“An’ who’s My Lord Duke of Early Risin’, if I might be told? — For before Gosh he sports a tidy raiment.”

“Now, Len, none o’ yer lingo!” warned Tom.

“Who is he, anyway, as you should go tellin’ him to keep me in my place?”

“No offence intended, I’m sure,” said Jack pleasantly.

“Taken though!” said Lennie, with such a black look that Jack’s colour rose in spite of himself.

“You keep a civil tongue in your head, or I’ll punch it for you,” he said. He and Lennie stared each other in the eye.

Lennie had a beautiful little face, with an odd pathos like some lovely girl, and grey eyes that could change to black. Jack felt a certain pang of love for him, and in the same instant remembered that she-lioness cub of a Monica. Perhaps she too had the same odd, lovely pathos, like a young animal that runs alert and alone in the wood. Why did these children seem so motherless and fatherless, so much on their own? — It was very much how Jack felt himself. Yet he was not pathetic.

Lennie suddenly smiled whimsically, and Jack knew he was let into the boy’s heart. Queer! Up till now they had all kept a door shut against him. Now Len had opened the door. Jack saw the winsomeness and pathos of the boy vividly, and loved him, too. But it was still remote. And still mixed up in it was the long stare of that Monica.

“That’s right, you tell ‘im,” said Tom. “What I say here — no back chat, an’ no tales told. That’s what’s the motto on this station.”

“Obey an’ please my Lord Tom Noddy, So God shall love and angels aid ye — — ” said Lennie, standing tip-toe on his log and balancing his bare feet, and repeating his rhyme with an abstract impudence, as if the fiends of air could hear him.

“Aw, shut up, you!” said Tom. “You’ve got ter get them ‘osses down to Red’s. Take Jack an’ show him.”

“I’ll show him,” said Len, munching a large piece of pie as he set off.

“Ken ye ride, Jack?”

Jack didn’t answer, because his riding didn’t amount to much.

III

Len unhitched four heavy horses, led them into the yard, and put the ropes into Jack’s hands. The child marched so confidently under the noses of the great

creatures, as they planted their shaggy feet. And he was such a midget, and with his brown bare arms and bare legs and feet, and his vivid face, he looked so “tender.” Jack’s heart moved with tenderness.

“Don’t you ever wear boots?” he asked.

“Not if I k’n help it. Them kids now, they won’t neither, ‘n I don’t blame ‘em. Last boots Ma sent for was found all over the manure heap, so the old man said he’d buy no more boots, an’ a good job too. The only thing as scares me is double-gees: spikes all roads and Satan’s face on three sides. Ever see double-gees?”

Len was leading three ponderous horses. He started peering on the road, the horses marching just behind his quick little figure. Then he found a burr with three queer sides and a sort of face on each side with sticking-out hair.

He was a funny kid, with his scraps of Latin and tags of poetry. Jack wondered that he wasn’t self-conscious and ashamed to quote poetry. But he wasn’t. He chirped them off, the bits of verse, as if they were a natural form of expression.

They had led the horses to another stable. Len again gave the ropes to Jack, disappeared, and returned leading a saddled stock-horse. Holding the reins of the saddle-horse, the boy scrambled up the neck of one of the big draft-horses like a monkey.

“Which are you goin’ to ride?” he asked Jack from the height. “I’m taking three an’ leading Lucy. You take the other three.”

So he received the three halter ropes.

“I think I’ll walk,” said Jack.

“Please y’self. You k’n open the gates easy walkin’; and comin’ back I’ll do it, ‘n you k’n ride Lucy an’ I’ll ride behind pinion so’s I can slip down easy.”

Yes, Lennie was a joy. On the return journey, when Jack was in the saddle riding Lucy, Len flew up behind him and stood on the horse’s crupper, his hands on Jack’s shoulders, crying: “Let ‘er go!” At the first gate, he slid down like a drop of water, then up again, this time sitting back to back with Jack, facing the horse’s tail, and whistling briskly. Suddenly he stopped whistling, and said:

“Y’ve seen everybody but Gran an’ Doc. Rackett, haven’ you? He teaches me — a rum sortta dock he is, too, never there when he’s wanted. But he’s a real doctor all right: signs death certificates an’ no questions asked. Y’ c’d do a murder, ‘n if you was on the right side of him, y’d never be hung. He’d say the corpse died of natural causes.”

“I didn’t know a corpse died,” said Jack laughing.

“Didn’t yer? Well yer know now! — Gran’s as good as a corpse, an’ she don’t want ter die. She put on Granfer’s grave: ‘Left desolate, but not without hope.’

So they all thought she'd get married again. But she never. — Did y' go to one of them English schools?"

"Yes."

"Ever wear a bell-topper?"

"Once or twice."

"Gosh! — May I never go to school, God help me. I should die of shame and disgrace. Arrayed like a little black pea in a pod, learnin' to be useless. Look at Rackett. School, an' Cambridge, an' comes inter money. Wastes it. Wastes his life. Now he's teachin' me, an' th' only useful thing he ever did."

After a pause, Jack ventured.

"Who is Dr. Rackett?"

"A waster. Down and out waster. He's got a sin. I don't know what it is, but it's wastin' his soul away."

IV

It was no use Jack's trying to thread it all together. It was a bewilderment, so he let it remain so. It seemed to him, that right at the very core of all of them was the same bewildered vagueness: Mr. Ellis, Mrs. Ellis, Tom, the men — they all had that empty bewildered vagueness at the middle of them. Perhaps Lennie was most on the spot. The others just could attend to their jobs, no more.

Jack still had no acquaintance with anyone but Tom and Len. He never got an answer from Og and Magog. They just grinned and wriggled. Then there was Katie. Then Harry, a fat, blue-eyed small boy. And then that floss-haired Ellie who had come from Perth. And smaller than her, the baby. All very confusing.

The second morning, when they were at the proper breakfast, Dad suddenly said:

"Ma! Dye know where the new narcissus bulbs are gone? I was waiting to plant 'em till I got back."

"I've not seen them since ye put them in the shed at the end of the verandah, dear."

"Well, they're gone."

Dead silence.

"Is 'em like onions?" asked Og, pricking up intelligently.

"Yes. They are! Have you seen them?" asked Dad sternly.

"I see Baby eatin' 'em, Dad," replied Og calmly.

"What, my bulbs, as I got out from England! Why, what the dickens, Ma,

d'you let that mischievous monkey loose for? My precious narcissus bulbs, the first I've ever had. An' besides — Ma! I'm not sure but what they're poison."

The parents looked at one another, then at the gay baby. There is a general consternation. Ma gets the long, evil blue bottle of castor oil and forcibly administers a spoonful to the screaming baby. Dad hurries away, unable to look on the torture of the baby — the last of his name. He goes to hunt for the bulbs in the verandah shed. Tom says, "By Gosh!" and sits stupefied. Katie jumps up and smacks Og for telling tales, and Magog flies at Katie for touching Og. Jack, as a visitor, unused to family life, is a little puzzled.

Lennie meanwhile calmly continues to eat his large mutton chop. The floss-haired Ellie toddles off talking to herself. She comes back just as intent, wriggles on her chair on her stomach, manages to mount, and puts her two fists on the table, clutching various nibbled, onion-like roots.

"Vem's vem, ain't they, Dad? She never ate 'em. She got 'em out vis mornin' and was suckin' 'em, so I took 'em from her an' hid 'em for you."

"Should Dad have said Narcissi or Narcissuses?" asked Len from over his coffee mug, in the hollow voice of one who speaks out of his cups.

Nobody answered. The baby was shining with castor oil. Jack sat in a kind of stupefaction. Everybody ate mutton chops in noisy silence, oppressively, and chewed huge doorsteps of bread.

Then there entered a melancholy, well-dressed young fellow who looked like a daguerreotype of a melancholy young gentleman. He sauntered in in silence, and pulling out his chair, sat down at table without a word. Katie ran to bring his breakfast, which was on a plate on the hearth, keeping warm. Then she sat down again. The meal was even more oppressive. Everybody was eating quickly, to get away.

And then Gran opened the door leading from the parlour, and stood there like the portrait of an old, old lady, stood there immovable, just looking on, like some ghost. Jack's blood ran cold. The boys, pushing back their empty plates, went quietly out to the verandah, to the air. Jack followed, clutching his cap, that he had held all the time on his knee.

Len was pulling off his shirt. The boys had to wear shirts at meal times.

This was the wild new country! Jack's sense of bewilderment deepened. Also he felt a sort of passionate love for the family — as a savage must feel for his tribe. He felt he would never leave the family. He must always be near them, always in close physical contact with them. And yet he was just a trifle horrified by it all.

CHAPTER V

THE LAMBS COME HOME

I

A month later Tom and Lennie went off with the greys, Bill and Lil, to fetch the girls. It had been wet, so Jack had spent most of his day in the sheds mending corn sacks. He was dressed now in thick cotton trousers, coloured shirt, and grey woollen socks, and copper-toed boots. When he went ploughing, by Tom's advice he wore "lasting" socks — none.

His tweed coat hung on a nail on the wall of the cubby, his good trousers and vest were under the mattress of his bed. The only useful garment he had brought had been the old riding breeches of the Agricultural College days.

On the back of his Tom-clipped hair was an ant-heap of an old felt hat, and so he sat, hour after hour, sewing the sacks with a big needle. He was certainly not unhappy. He had a sort of passion for the family. The family was almost his vice. He felt he must be there with the family, and then nothing else mattered. Dad and Ma were the silent, unobtrusive pillars of the house. Tom was the important young person. Lennie was the soul of the place. Og and Magog were the mischievous life. Then there was Harry, whom Jack didn't like, and the little girls, to be looked after. Dr. Rackett hovered round like an uneasy ghost, and Gran was there in her room. Now the girls were coming home.

Jack felt he had sunk into the family, merged his individuality, and he would never get out. His own father and mother, England, or the future, meant nothing to him. He loved this family. He loved Tom, and Lennie, and he wanted always to be with all of them. This was how it had taken him: as a real passion.

He loved, too, the ugly stone house, especially the south side, the shady side, which was the back where the peppermint tree stood. If you entered the front door — which nobody did — you were in a tiny passage from which opened the parlour on one side, and the dying room on the other. Tom called it the dying room because it had never been used for any other purpose by the family. Old Mr. Ellis had been carried down there to die. So had his brother Willie. As Tom explained: "The staircase is too narrow to handle a coffin."

Through the passage you dropped a step into the living room. On the right from this you stepped up a step into the kitchen, and on the left, up a step into Gran's room. Gran's room had once been the whole house: the rest had been added on. It is often so in Australia.

From the sitting room you went straight on to the back verandah, and there were the four trees, and a fenced-in garden, and the yards. The garden had gay flowers, because Mr. Ellis loved them, and a round, stone-walled well. Alongside was the yard, marked off by the four trees into a square: a mulberry one side the kitchen door, a pepper the other, a photosphorum with a seat under it a little way off, and across, a Norfolk pine and half a fir tree.

Tom would talk to Jack about the family: a terrible tangle, they both thought. Why, there was Gran, endless years old! Dad was fifty, and he and Uncle Easu (dead) were her twins and her only sons. However, she had seven daughters and, it seemed to Jack, hundreds of grandchildren, most of them grown up with more children of their own.

"I could never remember all their names," he declared.

"I don't try," said Tom. "Neither does Gran. And I don't believe she cares a tuppenny for 'em — for any of 'em, except Dad and us."

Gran was a delicate old lady with a lace cap, and white curly hair, and an ivory face. She made a great impression on Jack, as if she were the presiding deity of the family. Over her head as she sat by the sitting room fire an old clock tick-tocked. That impressed Jack, too. There was something weird in her age, her pallor, her white hair and white cap, her remoteness. She was very important in the house, but mostly invisible.

Lennie, Katie, Og and Magog, Harry, Ellie with the floss-hair and the baby: these counted as "the children." Tom, who had had another mother, not Ma, was different. And now the other twins, Monica and Grace, were coming. These were the lambs. Jack, as he sat mending the sacks, passionately in love with the family and happy doing any sort of work there, thought of himself as a wolf in sheep's clothing, and laughed.

He wondered why he didn't like Harry. Harry was six, rather fat and handsome, and strong as a baby bull. But he was always tormenting Baby. Or was it Baby tormenting Harry?

Harry had got a picture book, and was finding out letters. Baby crawled over and fell on the book. Harry snatched it away. Baby began to scream. Ma interfered.

"Let Baby have it, dear."

"She'll tear it, Ma."

"Let her, dear. I'll get you another."

“When?”

“Some day, Harry. When I go to Perth.”

“Ya. — Some day! Will ye get it Monday?”

“Oh, Harry, do be quiet, do — — ”

Then Baby and Harry tore the book between them in their shrieking struggles, while Harry battered the cover on the baby’s head. And a hot, dangerous, bullying look would come into his eyes, the look of a bully. Jack knew that look already. He would know it better before he had done with Australia.

And yet Baby adored Harry. He was her one god.

Jack always marvelled over that baby. To him it was a little monster. It had not lived twelve months, yet God alone knew the things it knew. The ecstasy with which it smacked its red lips and showed its toothless gums over sweet, sloppy food. The diabolic screams if it was thwarted. The way it spat out “lumps” from the porridge! How on earth, at that age, had it come to have such a mortal hatred for lumps in porridge? The way its nose had to be held when it was given castor oil! And again, though it protested so violently against lumps in porridge, how it loved such abominations as plaster, earth, or the scrapings of the pig’s bucket.

When you found it cramming dirt into its mouth, and scolded it, it would hold up its hands wistfully to have them cleaned. And it didn’t mind a bit, then, if you swabbed its mouth out with a lump of rag.

It was a girl. It loved having a new clean frock on. Would sit gurgling and patting its stomach, in a new smart frock, so pleased with itself. Astounding!

It loved bulls and stallions and great pigs, running between their legs. And yet it yelled in unholy terror if fowls or dogs came near. Went into convulsions over the friendly old dog, or a quiet hen pecking near its feet.

It was always trying to scuttle into the stable, where the horses stood. And it had an imbecile desire to put its hand in the fire. And it adored that blue-eyed bully of a Harry, and didn’t care a straw for the mother that slaved for it. Harry, who treated it with scorn and hate, pinching it, cuffing it, shoving it out of its favorite positions — off the grass patch, off the hearth-rug, off the sofa-end. But it knew exactly the moment to retaliate, to claw his cap from his head and clutch his fair curls, or to sweep his bread and jam on to the floor, into the dust, if possible

To Jack it was all just incredible.

II

But it was part of the family, and so he loved it.

He dearly loved the cheeky Len.

“What d’y’ want ter say ‘feece’ for? Why can’t yer say ‘fyce’ like any other bloke? — and why d’y’ wash y’fyce before y’wash y’hands?”

“I like the water clean for my face.”

“What about your dirty hands, smarmin’ them over it?”

“You use a flannel or a sponge.”

“If y’ve got one! Y’don’t find ‘em growin’ in th’ bush. Why can’t y’ learn offa me now, an’ be proper. Ye’ll be such an awful sukey when y’ goes out campin’, y’ll shame y’self. Y’should wash y’hands first. Frow away th’ water if y’not short, but y’ will be. Then when y’ve got y’hands all soapy, sop y’ fyce up an’ down, not round an’ round like a cat does. Then pop y’ nut under th’ pump an’ wring it dry. Don’t never waste y’ huckaback on it. Y’ll want that f’ somefin’ else.”

“What else shall I want my towel for?”

“Wroppin’ up things in, meat an’ damper, an’t’lay down for y’meal, against th’ ants, or to put over it against th’ insex.”

Then from Tom.

“Hey, nipper knowall, dry up! I’ve taught you the way you should behave, haven’t I? Well, I can teach Jack Grant, without any help from you. Skedaddle!”

“Hope y’ can! Sorry for y’, havin’ to try,” said Len as he skedaddled.

Tom was the head of the clan, and the others gave him leal obedience and a genuine, if impudent homage.

“What a funny kid!” said Jack. “He’s different from the rest of you, and his lingo’s rotten.”

“He’s not dif!” said Tom. “‘Xactly same. Same’s all of us — same’s all the nips round here. He went t’ same school as Monica and Grace an’ me, to Aunt’s school in th’ settlement, till Dr. Rackett came. If he’s any different, he got it from him: he’s English.”

Jack noticed they always spoke of Dr. Rackett as if he were a species of rattlesnake that they kept tame about the place.

“But Ma got Dad to get the Doc, ‘cos she can’t bear to part with Len even for a day — to give ‘m lessons at home. — I suppose he’s her eldest son. — Doc needn’t, he’s well-to-do. But he likes it, when he’s here. When he’s not, Lennie slopes off and reads what he pleases. But it makes no difference to Len, he’s real clever. And — ” Tom added grinning — ”he wouldn’t speak like you do neither, not for all the tin in a cow’s bucket.”

To Jack, fresh from an English Public school, Len was amazing. If he hurt himself sharply, he sat and cried for a minute or two. Tears came straight out, as

if smitten from a rock. If he read a piece of sorrowful poetry, he just sat and cried, wiping his eyes on his arm without heeding anybody. He was greedy, and when he wanted to, he ate enormously, in front of grown-up people. And yet you never minded. He talked poetry, or raggy bits of Latin, with great sententiousness and in the most awful accent, and without a qualm. Everything he did was right in his own eyes. Perfectly right in his own eyes.

His mother was fascinated by him.

Three things he did well: he rode, bare-back, standing up, lying down, anyhow. He rode like a circus rider. Also he boasted-heavens high. And thirdly, he could laugh. There was something so sudden, so blithe, so impish, so daring, and so wistful in his lit-up face when he laughed, that your heart melted in you like a drop of water.

Jack loved him passionately: as one of the family.

And yet even to Lennie, Tom was the hero. Tom, the slow Tom, the rather stupid Tom. To Lennie Tom's very stupidity was manly. Tom was so dependable, so manly, such a capable director. He never gave trouble to anyone, he was so complacent and self-reliant. Lennie was the love-child, the elf. But Tom was the good, ordinary Man, and therefore the hero.

Jack also loved Tom. But he did not accept his manliness so absolutely. And it hurt him a little, that the strange sensitive Len should put himself so absolutely in obedience and second place to the good plain fellow. But it was so. Tom was the chief. Even to Jack.

III

When Tom was away, Jack felt as if the pivot of all activity was missing. Mr. Ellis was not the real pivot. It was the plain, red-faced Tom.

Tom had talked a good deal, in snatches, to Jack. It was the family that bothered him, as usual. He always talked the family.

“My grandfather came out here in the early days. He was a merchant and lost all his money in some East India business. He married Gran in Melbourne, then they came out here. They had a bit of a struggle, but they made good. Then Grampa died without leaving a will: which complicated things for Gran. Dad and Easu was twins, but Dad was the oldest. But Dad had wandered: he was gone for years and no one knows what he did all the time.

“But Gran liked him best, and he was the eldest son, so she had this place all fixed up for him when he came back. She'd a deal of trouble getting the Reds

out. All the A'nts were on their side — on the Red's side. We always call Uncle Easu's family the Reds. And Aunt Emmie says she's sure Uncle Easu was born first, and not Dad. And that Gran took a fancy to Dad from the first, so she said he was the eldest. Anyhow it's neither here nor there. — I hope to goodness I never get twins. — It runs in the family, and of all the awful things! Though the Easu's have got no twins. Seven sons and no girls, and no twins. Uncle Easu's dead, so young Red runs their place.

“Uncle Easu was a nasty scrub, anyway. He married the servant girl, and a servant girl no better than she should be, they say.

“He didn't make no will, either. Making no wills runs in the family, as well as twins. Dad won't. His Dad wouldn't, and he won't neither.”

Which meant, Jack knew, that by the law of the colony the property would come to Tom.

“Oh. Gran's crafty all right! She never got herself talked about, turning the Reds out! She saved up a stocking — Gran always has a stocking. And she saved up an' bought 'em out. She persuaded them that the land beyond this was better'n this. She worked in with 'em while Dad was away, like the fingers on your hand: and bought that old barn of a place over yonder for 'em, and bounced 'em into it. Gran's crafty, when it's anyone she cares about. Now it's Len.

“Anyhow there it was when Dad came back, Wandoo all ready for him. He brought me wrapped in a blanket. Old Tim, our half-caste man, was his servant and there was my old nurse. That's all there is we know about me. I know no more, neither who I am nor where I sprung from. And Dad never lets on.

“He came back with a bit of money, and Gran made him marry Ma to mind me. She said I was such a squalling little grub, and she wanted me brought up decent. So Ma did it. But Gran never quite fancied me.

“It's a funny thing, seeing how I come, that I should be so steady and ordinary, and Len should be so clever and unsteady. You'd ha' thought I should be Len and him me.

“Who was my mother? That's what I want to know. Who was she? And Dad won't never say.

“Anyhow she wasn't black, so what does it matter, anyhow?”

“But it does matter!” — Tom brought his fist down with a smack in the palm of his other hand. “Nobody is ordinary to their mother, and I'm ordinary to everybody, and I wish I wasn't.”

Funny of Tom. Everybody depended on him so, he was the hero of the establishment, because he was so steady and ordinary and dependable. And now even he was wishing himself different. You never knew how folks would take themselves.

IV

As for the Reds, Jack had been over to their place once or twice. They were a rough crowd of men and youths, father and mother both dead. A bachelor establishment. When there was any extra work to be done, the Wandoos went over there to help. And the Reds came over to Wandoo the same. In fact they came more often to Wandoo than the Ellises went to them.

Jack felt the Reds didn't like him. So he didn't care for them. Red Ellis, the eldest son, was about thirty years old, a tall, sinewy, red-faced man with reddish hair and reddish beard and staring blue eyes. One morning when Tom and Mr. Ellis were out mustering and tallying, Jack was sent over to the Red house. This was during Jack's first fortnight at Wandoo.

Red the eldest met him in the yard.

"Where's y'oss?"

"I haven't one. Mr. Ellis said you'd lend me one."

"Can y' ride?"

"More or less."

"What dye want wearin' that Hyde Park costume out here for?"

"I've nothing else to ride in," said Jack, who was in his old riding breeches.

"Can't y' ride in trousers?"

"Can't keep 'em over my knees, yet."

"Better learn then, smart 'n' lively. Keep them down, 'n' y' socks up. Come on then, blast ye, an' I'll see about a horse."

They went to the stockyard, an immense place. But it was an empty desert now, save for a couple of black-boys holding a wild-looking bay. Red called out to them:

"Caught Stampede, have y'? Well, let 'im go again afore y' break y' necks. Y'r not to ride him, d'y hear? — What's in the stables, Ned?"

"Your mare, master. Waiting for you."

"What y' got besides, ye grinning jackasses? Find something for Mr. Grant here, an' look slippy."

"Oh, master, no horse in, no knowin' stranger come."

Red turned to Jack. Easu was a coarse, swivel-eyed, loose-jointed tall fellow.

"Y' hear that. Th' only thing left in this yard is Stampede. Ye k'n take him or leave him, if y'r frightened of him. I'm goin' tallyin' sheep, an' goin' now. If ye stop around idlin' all day, y' needn't tell Uncle 'twas my fault."

Jack hesitated. From a colonial point of view, he couldn't ride well, and he knew it. Yet he hated Easu's insulting way. Easu went grinning to the stable to fetch his mare, pleased with himself. He didn't want the young Jackeroo planted on him, to teach any blankey thing to.

Jack went slowly over to the quivering Stampede, and asked the blacks if they had ever ridden him. One answered:

"Me only fella ride 'im some time master not tomorrow. Me an' Ned catch him in mob longa time — Try break him — no good. He come back paddock one day. Ned wantta break him. No good. Master tell 'im let 'im go now."

Red Easu came walking out of the stable, chewing a stalk.

"Put the saddle on him," said Jack to the blacks: "I'll try."

The boys grinned and scuffled round. They rather liked the job. By being very quick and light, Jack got into the saddle, and gripped. The boys stood back, the horse stood up, and then whirled around on his hind legs, and round and down. Then up and away like a squib round the yard. The boys scattered, so did Easu, but Jack, because it was natural for his legs to grip and stick, stuck on. His bones rattled, his hat flew off, his heart beat high. But unless the horse came down backwards on top of him, he could stay on. And he was not really afraid. He thought: "If he doesn't go down backwards on top of me, I shall be all right." And to the boys he called: "Open the gate!" Meanwhile he tried to quiet the horse. "Steady now, steady!" he said, in a low, intimate voice. "Steady boy!" And all the time he held on with his thighs and knees, like iron.

He did not believe in the innate viciousness of the horse. He never believed in the innate viciousness of anything, except a man. And he did not want to fight the horse for simple mastery. He wanted just to hold it hard with his legs until it soothed down a little, and he and it could come to an understanding. But he must never relax the hold of his hard legs, or he was dead.

Stampede was not ready for the gate. He sprang fiercely at it as if it had been guarded by fire. Once in the open, he ran, and bucked, and bucked, and ran, and kicked, and bucked, and ran. Jack stuck on with the lower half of his body like a vise, feeling as if his head would be jerked off his shoulders. It was becoming hard work. But he knew, unless he stuck on, he was a dead man.

Then he was aware that Stampede was bolting, and Easu was coming along on a grey mare.

Now they reached the far gate, and a miracle happened. Stampede stood still while Red came up and opened the gate. Jack was conscious of a body of live muscle and palpitating fire between his legs, of a furious head tossing hair like hot wire, and bits of white foam. Also he was aware of the trembling in his own thighs, and the sensual exertion of gripping that hot wild body in the power of

his own legs. Gripping the hot horse in a grip of sensual mastery that made him tremble strangely with a curious quivering. Yet he dared not relax.

“Go!” said Red. And away they went. Stampede bolted like the wind, and Jack held on with his knees and by balance. He was thrilled, really: frightened externally, but internally keyed up. And never for a moment did he relax his mind’s attention, nor the attention of his own tossed body. The worst was the corkscrew bucks, when he nearly went over the brute’s head. And the moments of vindictive hate, when he would kill the beast and be killed a thousand times, rather than be beaten. Up he went, off the saddle, and down he came again, with a shattering jerk, down on the front of the saddle. The balance he kept was a mystery even to himself, his body was so flung about, by the volcano of furious life beneath him. He felt himself shaken to pieces, his bones rattled all out of socket. But they got there, out to the sheep paddock where a group of Reds and black-boys stood staring in silence.

Jack jumped off, though his knees were weak and his hands trembling. The horse stood dark with sweat. Quickly he unbuckled the saddle and bridle and pulled them off, and gave the horse a clap on its wet neck. Away it went, wild again, and free.

Jack glanced at the Reds, and then at Easu. Red Easu met his eyes, and the two stared at one another. It was the defiance of the hostile colonial, brutal and retrogressive, against the old mastery of the old country. Jack was barely conscious. Yet he was not afraid, inside himself, of the swivel-eyed brute of a fellow. He knew that Easu was not a better man than himself, though he was bigger, older, and on his own ground. But Jack had the pride of his own, old, well-bred country behind him, and he would never go back on his breeding. He was not going to yield in manliness before the colonial way of life: the brutishness, the commonness. Inwardly he would not give in to it. But the best of it, the colonial honesty and simplicity, that he loved.

There are two sides to colonials, as to everything. One side he loved. The other he refused and defied.

These decisions are not mental, but they are critical in the soul of a boy of eighteen. And the destiny of nations hangs on such silent, almost unconscious decisions.

Esau — they called him Easu, but the name was Esau — turned to a black, and bellowed:

“Give master your horse, and carry that bally saddle home.”

Then silently they all turned to the sheep-tallying.

V

Jack was still sewing sacks. It was afternoon. He listened for the sound of the shay, though he did not expect it until nightfall at least.

His ear, training to the Australian alertness, began to detect unusual sounds. Or perhaps it was not his ear. The old bushman seems to have developed a further faculty, a psychic faculty of “sensing” some unusual disturbance in the atmosphere, and reading it. Jack was a very new Australian. Yet he had become aware of this faculty in Tom, and he wanted it for himself. He wanted to be able to hear the inaudible, like a sort of clair-audience.

All he could hear was the audible: and all he could see was, the visible. The children were playing in the yard: he could see them in the dust. Mrs. Ellis was still at the wash-tub: he saw the steam. Katie was upstairs: he had seen her catching a hornet in the window. The men were out ploughing, the horses were away. The pigs were walking round grunting, the cows and poultry were all in the paddock. Gran never made a sound, unless she suddenly appeared on the scene like the Lord in Judgment. And Dr. Rackett was always quiet: often uncannily so.

It was still rainy season, but a warm, mellow, sleepy afternoon, with no real sound at all. He got up and stood on the threshold to stretch himself. And there, coming by the grain-shed, he saw a little cortege in which the first individual he distinguished was Red Easu.

“Go in,” shouted Red, “and tell A’nt as Herbert’s had an accident, and we’re bringin’ him in.”

Sure enough, they were carrying a man on a gate.

Mrs. Ellis clicked:

“Tt-tt-tt-tt! They run to us when they’re in trouble.” But she went at once to the linen closet, and on into the living room.

Gran was sitting in a corner by a little fire.

“Who’s hurt?” she inquired testily. “Not one of the family, I hope and pray.”

“Jack says it’s Red Herbert,” replied Mrs. Ellis.

“Put him in the cubby with the boys, then.”

But Mrs. Ellis thought of her beloved boys, and hesitated.

“Do you think it’s much, Jack?” she asked.

“They’re carrying him on a gate,” said Jack. “It looks bad.”

“Dear o’me!” snapped Gran, in her brittle fashion. “Why couldn’t you say so? — Well then — if you don’t want to put him in the cubby, there’s a bed in my room. Put him there. But I should have thought he could have had Tom’s bed,

and Tom could have slept here on the sofa.”

“Poor Tom,” thought Jack.

“Don’t” — Gran banged her stick on the floor — ”stand there like a pair of sawneys! Get to work! Get to work!”

Jack was staring at the ground and twirling his hat. Gran hobbled forward. He noticed to his surprise that she had a wooden leg. And she stamped it at him:

“Go and fetch that rascal of a doctor!” she cried, in a startling loud voice.

Jack went. Dr. Rackett was not in his room, for Jack halloed and knocked at every door. He peeped into the rooms, whose doors were slightly opened. This must be the girls’ room — two beds, neat white quilts, blue bow at the window. When would they be home? Here was the family bed, with two cots in the room as well. He came to a shut door. This must be it. He knocked and halloed again. No sound. Jack felt as if he were bound to come upon a Bluebeard’s chamber. He hated looking in these bedrooms.

He knocked again, and opened the door. A queer smell, like chemicals. A dark room, with the blind down: a few books, a feeling of dark dreariness. But no Doctor. “So that’s that!” thought Jack.

In spite of himself his boots clattered going down, and made him nervous. Why did the inside of the house, where he never went, seem so secret, and rather horrible? He peeped into the dismal little drawing room. Not there of course! Opposite was the dying room, the door wide open. Nobody ever was there.

Rackett was not in the house, that was certain. Jack slunk out, went to the paddock, caught Lucy the saddle-horse; saddled her and cantered aimlessly round, within hearing of the homestead. The afternoon was passing. Not a soul was in sight. The gum-trees hung their sharp leaves like obvious ghosts, with the hateful motionlessness of gum-trees. And though flowers were out, they were queer, scentless, unspeaking sort of flowers, even the red ones that were ragged like fire. Nothing spoke. The distances were clear and mellow and beautiful, but soulless, and nobody alive in the world. The silent, lonely gruesomeness of Australia gave Jack the blues.

It surely was milking time. Jack returned quietly to the yard. Still nobody alive in the world. As if everyone had died. Yes, there was the half-caste Tim in the distance, bringing up the slow, unwilling cows, slowly, like slow dreams.

And there was Dad coming out of the back door, in his shirt sleeves: bluer and puffier than ever, with his usual serene expression, and his look of boss, which came from his waistcoat and watchchain. Dad always wore his waistcoat and watchchain, and seemed almost over-dressed in it.

Came Og and Magog running with quick little steps, and Len slinking round the doorpost, and Harry marching alone, and Katie dragging her feet, and Baby

crawling. Jack was glad to see them. They had all been indoors to look at the accident. And it had been a dull, dead, empty afternoon, with all the life emptied out of it. Even now the family, the beloved family, seemed a trifle gruesome to Jack.

He helped to milk: a job he was not good at. Dad even took a stool and milked also. As usual Dad did nothing but supervise. It was a good thing to have a real large family that made supervising worth while. So Tom said, "It's a good thing to have nine children, you can clear some work with 'em, if you're their Dad." That's why Jack was by no means one too many. Dad supervised him too.

They got the milking done somehow. Jack changed his boots, washed himself, and put on his coat. He nearly trod on the baby as he walked across to the kitchen in the dying light. He lifted her and carried her in.

Usually "tea" — which meant mutton chops and eggs and steaks as well — was ready when they came in from milking. Today Mr. Ellis was putting eucalyptus sticks under the kettle, making the eternally familiar scent of the kitchen, and Mrs. Ellis was setting the table there. Usually, they lived in the living room from breakfast on. But today, tea was to be in the kitchen, with a silence and a cloud in the air like a funeral. But there was plenty of noise coming from Gran's room.

Jack had to have Baby beside him for the meal. And she put sticky hands in his hair and leaned over and chewed and sputtered crumbs, wet crumbs in his ear. Then she tried to wriggle down, but the evening was chill and her hands and feet were cold and Mrs. Ellis said to keep her up. Jack felt he couldn't stand it any longer, when suddenly she fell asleep, the most unexpected thing in the world, and Mrs. Ellis carried off her and Harry, to bed.

Ah, the family! The family! Jack still loved it. It seemed to fill the whole of life for him. He did not want to be alone, save at moments. And yet, on an afternoon like today, he somehow realised that even the family wouldn't last forever. What then? What then?

He couldn't bear the thought of getting married to one woman and coming home to a house with only himself and this one woman in it. Then the slow and lonely process of babies coming. The thought of such a future was dreadful to him. He didn't want it. He didn't want his own children. He wanted this family: always this family. And yet there was something gruesome to him about the empty bedrooms and the uncanny privacies even of this family. He didn't want to think of their privacies.

VI

Three of the Reds trooped out through the sitting room, lean, red-faced, hairy, heavy-footed, uncouth figures, for their tea. The Wandoo Ellises were aristocratic in comparison. They asked Jack to go and help hold Herbert down, because he was fractious. "He's that fractious!"

Jack didn't in the least want to have to handle any of the Reds, but he had to go. He found himself taking the two steps down into the dark living room, and the two steps up into Gran's room beyond.

Why need the family be so quiet in the kitchen, when there was such a hubbub in here? Alan Ellis was holding one leg of the injured party, and Ross Ellis the other, and they both addressed the recumbent figure as if it were an injured horse with a Whoa there! Steady on, now! Steady, boy, steady! Whilst Easu, bending terribly over the prostrate figure, clutched both its arms in a vice, and cursed Jack for not coming sooner to take one arm.

Herbert had hurt his head, and turned fractious. Jack took the one arm. Easu was on the other side of the bed, his reddish fair beard glowing. There was a queer power in Easu, which fascinated Jack a little. Beyond, Gran was sitting up in bed, among many white pillows, like Red Riding Hood's grandmother. A bright fire of wood logs was burning in the open hearth, and four or five tallow candles smoked duskily. But a screen was put between Gran's four-poster and Herbert's bed, a screen made of a wooden clothes-horse covered with sheets. Jack, however, from his position by Herbert's pillow, could see beyond the screen to Gran's section.

His attention was drawn by the patient. Herbert's movements were sudden and convulsive, and always in a sudden jerking towards the right side of the bed. Easu had given Jack the left arm to hold, and as soon as Herbert became violent, Jack couldn't hold him. The left arm, lean and hard as iron, broke free, and Easu jumped up and cursed Jack.

Here was a pretty scene! With Gran mumbling to herself on the other side the hideous sheeted screen!

There was nothing for it but to use cool intelligence — a thing the Reds did not possess. Jack had lost his hold again, and Easu like a reddish, glistening demon was gripping the sick man's two arms and arching over him. Jack called up his old veterinary experience and proceeded to detach himself.

He noticed first: that Herbert was far less fierce when they didn't resist him. Second, that he stopped groaning when his eyes fell away from the men around him. Third, that all the convulsive jerky movements, which had thrown him out

of the bed several times, were towards the right side of the bed.

Then why not bind him to the left?

The left arm had again escaped his grasp, and Easu's exasperated fury was only held in check by Gran's presence. Jack went out of the room and found Katie.

"Hunt me out an old sheet," he said.

"What for?" she asked, but went off to do his bidding. When she came back she said:

"Mother says they don't want to bandage Herbert, do they?"

"I'm going to try and bind him. I shan't hurt him," he replied.

"Oh Jack, don't let them send for me to sit with him — I hate sickness."

"You give us a hand then with this sheet."

Between them they prepared strong bands. Jack noosed one with sailor's knots round Katie's hands, and fastened it to the table leg.

"Pull!" he ordered. "Pull as hard as you can." And as she pulled, "Does it hurt, now?"

"Not a bit," she said.

Jack went back to the sick room. Herbert was quiet, the three brothers were sulky and silent. They wanted above all things to get out, to get away. You could see that. Easu glanced at Jack's hand. There was something tense and alert about Easu, like a great, wiry bird with enormous power in its lean, red neck and its lean limbs.

"I thought we'd best bind him so as not to hurt him," said Jack. "I know how to do it, I think."

The brothers said not a word, but let him go ahead. And Jack bound the left arm and the left leg, and put a band round the body of the patient. They looked on, rather distantly interested. Easu released the convulsive left arm of his brother. Jack took the sick man's hand soothingly, held it soothingly, then slipped his hand up the hairy fore-arm and got the band attached just above the elbow. Then he fastened the ends to the bed-head. He felt quite certain he was doing right. While he was busy Mrs. Ellis came in. She watched in silence, too. When it was done, Jack looked at her.

"I believe it'll do," she said with a nod of approval. And then, to the cowed, hulking brothers, "You might as well go and get your tea."

They bumped into one another trying to get through the door. Jack noticed they were in their stocking feet. They stooped outside the door to pick up their boots.

"Good idea!" he thought. And he took off his own boots. It made him feel more on the job.

Mrs. Ellis went round the white bed-sheet screen to sit with Gran. Jack went blowing out the reeking candles on the sick man's side of the same screen. Then he sat on a hard chair facing the staring, grimacing patient. He felt sorry for him, but repelled by him. Yet as Herbert tossed his wiry, hairy free arm and jerked his hairy, sharp-featured face, Jack wanted to help him.

He remembered the vet's advice: "Get the creatures' confidence, lad, and you can do anything with 'em. Horse or man, cat or canary, get the creature's confidence, and if anything can be done, you can do it."

Jack wanted now to proceed to get the creature's confidence. He knew it was a matter of will: of holding the other creature's will with his own will. But gently, and in a kindly spirit.

He held Herbert's hard fingers softly in his own hand, and said softly: "Keep quiet, old man, keep quiet. I'm here. I'll take care of you. You rest. You go to sleep. I won't leave you. I'll take care of you."

Herbert lay still as if listening. His muscles relaxed. He seemed dreadfully tired — Jack could feel it. He was dreadfully, dreadfully tired. Perhaps the womanless, brutal life of the Reds had made him so tired. He seemed to go to sleep. Then he jerked awake, and the convulsive struggling began again, with the frightful rolling of the eyes.

But the steady bonds that held him seemed to comfort him, and Jack quietly took the clutching fingers again. And the sick man's eyes, in their rolling, rested on the quiet, abstract face of the youth, with strange watching. Jack did not move. And again Herbert's tension seemed to relax. He seemed in an agony of desire to sleep, but the agony of desire was so great, that the very fear of it jerked the sick man into horrible wakefulness.

Jack was saying silently, with his will: "Don't worry! Don't worry, old man! Don't worry! You go to sleep. I'll look after you."

And as he sat in dead silence, saying these things, he felt as if the fluid of his life ran out of his fingers into the fingers of the hurt man. He was left weak and limp. And Herbert began to go to sleep, really to sleep.

Jack sat in a daze, with the virtue gone out of him. And Herbert's fingers were soft and childlike again in their relaxation.

The boy started a little, feeling someone pat him on the shoulder. It was Mrs. Ellis, patting him in commendation, because the patient was sunk deep in sleep. Then she went out.

Following her with his eyes, Jack saw another figure in the doorway. It was Red Easu, like a wolf out of the shadow, looking in. And Jack quietly let slip the heavy, sleeping fingers of the sick man. But he did not move his posture.

Then he was aware that Easu had gone again.

VII

It was late, and the noise of rain outside, and weird wind blowing. Mrs. Eilis had been in and whispered that Dr. Rackett was not home yet — that he had probably waited somewhere for the shay. And that she had told the Reds to keep away.

There was dead silence save for the weather outside, and a noise of the fire. The candles were all blown out.

He was startled by hearing Gran's voice:

"Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings — "

"She's reading," thought Jack, though there was no light to read by. And he wondered why the old lady wasn't asleep.

"I knew y'r mother's father, Jack Grant," came the thin, petulant voice. "He cut off my leg. Devil of a fella wouldn't let me die when I wanted to. Cut it off without a murmur, and no chloroform."

The thin voice was so devilishly awake, in the darkness of the night, like a voice out of the past piercing the inert present.

"What did he care! What did he care! Not a bit," Gran went on. "And y're another. You take after him. You're such another. You're a throw-back, to your mother's father. I was wondering what I was going to do with those great galoots in my room all night. I'm glad it's you."

Jack thought: "Lord, have I got to sit here all night!"

"You've got the night before you," said Gran's demonishly wakeful voice, uncanny in its thin alertness, in the deep night. "So come round here to the fireside an' make y'self comfortable."

Jack rose obediently and went round the screen. After all, an armchair would be welcome.

"Well, say something," said Gran.

The boy peered at her in the dusk, in a kind of fear.

"Then light me a candle, for the land's sake," she said pettishly.

He took a tin candle-stick with a tallow candle, blew the fire and made a yellow light. She looked like a carved ivory Chinese figure, almost grotesque, among her pillows.

"Yes, y'r like y'r grandfather: a stocky, stubborn man as didn't say much, but dare do anything. And never had a son. — Hard as nails the man was."

"More family!" thought Jack wearily, disapproving of Gran's language

thoroughly.

“Had two daughters though, and disowned the eldest. Your mother was the youngest. The eldest got herself into trouble and he turned her out. Regular obstinate fool, and no bowels of compassion. That’s how men are when y’ let ‘em. You’re the same.”

Jack was so sleepy, so sleepy, and the words of the old woman seemed like something pricking him.

“I’d have stood by her — but I was her age, and what could I do? I’d have married her father if I could, for he was a widower. But he married another woman for his second, and I went by ship to Melbourne, and then I took poor old Ellis.”

What on earth made her say these things, he didn’t know, for he was dead sleepy, and if he’d been wide awake he wouldn’t have wanted her to unload this sort of stuff on him. But she went on, like the old demon she was:

“Men are fools, and women make ‘em what they are. I followed your Aunt Lizzie up, years after. She married a man in the mounted police, and he sent the boy off. The boy was a bit weak-minded, and the man wouldn’t have him. So the lad disappeared into the bush. They say he was canny enough about business and farming, but a bit off about people. Anyway he was Mary’s half-brother: you met Mary in Perth. Her scamp of a father was father of that illegitimate boy. But she’s an orphan now, poor child: like that illegitimate half-brother of hers.”

Jack looked up pathetically. He didn’t want to hear. And Gran suddenly laughed at him, with the sudden daring, winsome laugh, like Lennie.

“Y’re a bundle of conventions, like y’r grandfather,” she said tenderly. “But y’ve got a kinder heart. I suppose that’s from y’r English father. Folks are tough in Australia: tough as whit-leather: Y’ll be tempted to sin, but y’wont be tempted to condemn. And never you mind. Trust yourself, Jack Grant. Earn a good opinion of yourself, and never mind other folks. You’ve only got to live once. You know when you’re spirit glows — trust that. That’s you! That’s the spirit of God in you. Trust in that, and you’ll never grow old. If you knuckle under, you’ll grow old.”

She paused for a time.

“Though I don’t know that I’ve much room to talk,” she ruminated on. “There was my son Esau, he never knuckled under, and though he’s dead, I’ve not much good to say of him. But then he never had a kind heart: never. Never a woman loved Esau, though some feared him. I was not among ‘em. Not I. I feared no man, not even your grandfather: except a little. But look at Dad here now. He’s got a kind heart: as kind a heart as ever beat. And he’s gone old. And he’s got heart disease. And he knuckled under. Ay, he knuckled under to me, he did, poor

lad. And he'll go off sudden, when his heart gives way. That's how it is with kind-hearted men. They knuckle under, and they die young. Like Dad here. He'll never make old bones. Poor lad!"

She mused again in silence.

"There's nothing to win in life, when all's said and done, but a good opinion of yourself. I've watched and I know. God is y'rself. Or put it the other way if you like: y'rself is God. So win a good opinion of yourself, and watch the glow inside you."

Queer, thought Jack, that this should be an old woman's philosophy. Yourself is God! Partly he believed it, partly he didn't. He didn't know what he believed. — Watch the glow inside you. That he understood.

He liked Gran. She was so alone in life, amid all her children. He himself was a lone wolf too: among the lambs of the family. And perhaps Red Easu was a lone wolf.

"But what was I telling you?" Gran resumed. "About your illegitimate cousin. I followed him up too. He went back beyond Atherton, and took up land. He's got a tidy place now, and he's never married. He's wrong in his head about people, but all right about the farm. I'm hoping that place'll come to Mary one day, for the child's got nothing. She's a good child — a good child. Her mother was a niece of mine."

She seemed to be going to sleep. But like Herbert, she roused again.

"Y'd better marry Mary. Make up your mind to it," she said.

And instantly he rebelled against the thought. Never.

"Perhaps I'd ought to have said: 'The best in yourself is God,'" she mused. "Perhaps that's more it. The best in yourself is God. But then who's going to say what is the best in yourself. A kind man knuckles under, and thinks it's the best in himself. And a hard man holds out, and thinks that's the best in himself. And it's not good for a kind man to knuckle under, and it's not good for a hard-hearted man to hold out. What's to be done, deary-me, what's to be done. And no matter what we say, people will be as they are. — You can but watch the glow."

She really did doze off. And Jack stole away to the other side of the screen to escape her, leaving the candle burning.

VIII

He sat down thankfully on the hard chair by Herbert's side, glad to get away from women. Glad to be with men, if it was only Herbert. Glad to doze and feel

alone: to feel alone.

He awoke with a jerk and a cramped neck, and there was Tom peeping in. Tom? They must be back. Jack's chair creaked as he made a movement to get up. But Tom only waved his hand and disappeared. Mean of Tom.

They must be back. The twins must be back. The family was replenished. He stared with sleepy eyes, and a heavy, sleepy, sleepy head.

And the next thing he heard was a soft, alert voice saying: "Hello, Bow!" Queer how it echoed in his dark consciousness as he slept, this soft "Hello, Bow!"

There they were, both laughing, fresh with the wind and rain. Grace standing just behind Monica, Monica's hair all tight crisp with rain, blond at the temples, darker on the head, and her fresh face laughing, and her yellow eyes looking with that long, meaningful look that had no meaning, peering into his sleepy eyes. He felt something stir inside him.

"Hello, Bow!" she said again, putting her fingers on his sleeve, "We've got back." And still in his sleep-stupor he stared without answering a word.

"You aren't awake!" she whispered, putting her cold hand suddenly on his face, and laughing as he started back. A new look came into his eyes as he stared startled at her, and she bent her head, turning aside.

"Poo! Smells of stinking candles in here!" whispered Grace.

Someone else was there. It was Red Easu in the doorway, saying in a hoarse voice:

"Want me to take a spell with Herbert?"

Monica glanced back at him with a strange look. He loomed weird and tall, with his rather long, red neck and glistening beard and quick blue eyes. A certain sense of power came with him.

"Hello, girls, got back!" he added to the twins, who watched him without speaking.

"Who's there?" said Gran's voice from the other side of the screen. "Is it the girls back? Has Mary come with you?"

As if in answer to the summons, Mary appeared in the doorway, wearing a white apron. She glanced first at Jack, with her black eyes, and then at Gran. Monica was watching her with a sideways lynx look, and Grace was looking at everybody with big blue eyes, while Easu looked down from his uncouth, ostrich height.

"Hello, Gran!" said Mary, going to the other side of the screen to kiss the old lady. The twins followed suit.

"Want me to take a spell in here?" said Easu, jerking his thumb at the sleeping Herbert. Easu wore black trousers hitched up high with braces over a dark-grey

flannel shirt, and leather leggings, but no boots. His shirt-sleeves were rolled up from his sinewy brown arms. His reddish fair hair was thick and rather long. He spoke in a deep gruff voice, that he made as quiet as possible, and he seemed to show a gruff sort of submissiveness to Jack, at the moment.

“No, Easu,” replied Gran, “I can’t do with you, Jack Grant will manage.”

The sick man was sleeping through it all like the dead.

“I can take a turn,” said Mary’s soft, low, insidious voice.

“No, not you either, Mary. You go to sleep after that drive. Go, all of you, go to bed. I can’t do with you all in here. Has Dr. Rackett come?”

“No,” said Easu.

“Then go away, all of you. I can’t do with you,” said Gran.

Mary came round the screen and shook hands with Jack, looking him full in the eyes with her black eyes, so that he was uncomfortable. She made him more uncomfortable than Monica did. Monica had slunk also round the screen, and was standing with one foot trailing, watching. She watched just as closely when Mary shook hands with the embarrassed Easu.

They all retreated silently to the door. Grace went first. And with her big, dark-blue eyes she glanced back inquisitively at Jack. Mary went next — she too turning in the door to give him a look and an intimate, furtive-seeming smile. Then came Monica, and like a wolf she lingered in the door looking back with a long, meaningful, meaningless sidelong look before she took her departure. Then on her heels went Easu, and he did not look back. He seemed to loom over the girls.

“Blow the light out,” said Gran.

He went round to blow out the candle. Gran lay there like an old angel. Queer old soul — framed by pillow frills.

“Yourself is God!”

Jack thought of that with a certain exultance.

He went over and made up the fire. Then he sat in the armchair. Herbert was moving. He went over to soothe him. The sick man moaned steadily for some time, for a long time, then went still again. Jack slept in the hard chair.

He woke up cramped and cold, and went round to the armchair by the fire. Gran was sleeping like an inert bit of ivory. He softly attended to the fire and sat down in the armchair.

He was riding a horse a long, long way, on a journey that would never end. He couldn’t stop the horse till it stopped of itself. And it would never stop. A voice said: What has he done? And a voice answered: Conquered the world. — But the horse did not stop. And he woke and saw shadows on the wall, and slept again. Things had all turned to dough — his hands were heavy with dough. He woke

and looked at his hands to see if it were so. How loudly and fiercely the clock ticked!

Not dough, but boxing gloves. He was fighting inside a ring, fighting with somebody who was and who wasn't Easu. He could beat Easu — he couldn't beat Easu. Easu had knocked him down; he was lying writhing with pain and couldn't rise, while they were counting him out. In three more seconds he would be counted out! Horror!

He woke, it was midnight and Herbert was writhing.

"Did I sleep a minute, Herbert?" he whispered.

"My head! My head! It jerks so!"

"Does it, old man? Never mind."

And the next thought was: "There must have been gunpowder in that piece of wood, in the fire."

IX

It was half-past one, and Mary unexpectedly appeared with tray and lighted candle, and cocoa-milk for Jack and arrowroot for Herbert. She fed Herbert with a spoon, and he swallowed, but made no sign that he understood.

"How did he get the accident?" Jack whispered.

"His horse threw him against a tree."

"Wish Rackett would come," whispered Jack.

Mary shook her head and they were silent.

"How old are you, Mary?" Jack asked.

"Nineteen."

"I'm eighteen at the end of this month."

"I know. — But I'm much older than you."

Jack looked at her queer dark muzzle. She seemed to have a queer, humble complacency of her own.

"She" — Jack nodded his head towards Gran — "says that knuckling under makes you old."

Mary laughed suddenly.

"Then I'm a thousand," she said.

"What do you knuckle under for?" he asked.

She looked up at him slowly, and again something quick and hot stirred in him, from her dark, queer, humble, yet assured face.

"It's my way," she said, with an odd smile.

“Funny way to have,” he replied, and suddenly he was embarrassed. And he thought of Monica’s dare-devil way.

He felt embarrassed.

“I must have my own way,” said Mary, with another odd, beseeching, and yet darkly confident smile.

“Yourself is God,” thought Jack. — But he said nothing, because he felt uncomfortable.

And Mary went away with the tray and the light, and he was glad when she was gone.

X

The worst part of the night. Nothing happened — and that was perhaps the worst part of it. Fortified by the powers of darkness, the slightest sounds took on momentous importance, but nothing happened. He expected something — but nothing came.

Gran asleep there, in all the fixed motionlessness of her years, a queer white clot. And young Herbert asleep or unconscious, sending wild vibrations from his brain.

The thought of Monica seemed to flutter subjectively in Jack’s soul, the thought of Mary objectively. That is, Monica was somehow inside him, in his blood, like a sister. And Mary was outside him, like a black-boy. Both of them engaging his soul. And yet he was alone, all alone in the universe. These two only beset him. Or did he beset them?

The opossums made a furious bombilation as they ran up and down, back and forth between the roof and ceiling, like an army moving. And suddenly, shatteringly a nut would come down on the old shingle roof from the Moreton Bay fig outside, with a crash like a gun, while the branches dangled and clanked against the timber walls. An immense, uncanny strider! And him alone in the lonely, uncanny, timeless core of the night.

Slowly the night went by. And weird things awoke in the boy’s soul, things he could never quite put to sleep again. He felt as if this night he had entered into a dense, impenetrable thicket. As if he would never get out. He knew he would never get out.

He awoke again with a start. Was it the first light? Herbert was stirring. Jack went quickly to him.

Herbert opened dazed eyes, and mutely looked at Jack. A look of intelligence

came, and as quickly passed. He groaned, and the torment came over him once more. Whatever was the matter with him? He writhed and struggled, groaning — then relapsed into a cold, inert silence. It was as if he were dying. As if he, or something in him, had decided to die.

Jack was terribly startled. In terror, he mixed a little brandy and milk, and tried to pour spoonfuls down the unresisting throat. He quickly fetched a hot stone from the fire, wrapped it in a piece of blanket, and put it in the bed.

Then he sat down and took the young man's hand softly in his own and whispered intensely: "Come back, Herbert! Come back! Come back!"

With all his will he summoned the inert spirit. He was terribly afraid the other would die. He sat and watched with a fixed, intent will. And Herbert relaxed again, the life came round his eyes again.

"Oh, God!" thought Jack. "I shall die. I shall die myself. What sort of a life have I got to live before I die? Oh, God, what sort of a life have I got between me and when I die?"

And it all seemed a mystery to him. The God he called on was a dark, almost fearful mystery. The life he had to live was a kind of doom. The choice he had was no choice. "Yourself is God." It wasn't true. There was a terrible God somewhere else. And nothing else than this.

Because, inside himself, he was alone, without father or mother or place or people. Just a separate living thing. And he could not choose his doom of living nor his dying. Somewhere outside himself was a terrible God who decreed.

He was afraid of the thicket of life, in which he found himself like a solitary, strange animal. He would have to find his way through: all the way to death. But what sort of way? What sort of life? What sort of life between him and death?

He didn't know. He only knew that something must be. That he was in a strange bush, and by himself. And that he must find his way through.

CHAPTER VI

IN THE YARD.

I

Ah, good to be out in the open air again! Beyond all telling good! Those indoor rooms were like coffins. To be dead, and to writhe unreleased in the coffin, that was what those indoor rooms were like.

“God, when I die, let me pass right away,” prayed Jack. “Lord, I promise to live my life right out, so that when I die I pass over and don’t lie wriggling in the coffin!”

Mary had come as soon as it was light, and found Herbert asleep and Jack staring at him in a stupor.

“You go to sleep now, Bow,” said Mary softly, laying her hand on his arm.

He looked at her in a kind of horror, as if she were part of the dark interior. He didn’t want to go to sleep. He wanted to wake. He stood in the yard and stared around stupefied at the early morning. Then he went and hauled Lennie and the twins out of their bunks. Tom was already up. Then he went, stripped to the waist, to the pump.

“Pump over my nut, Lennie,” he shouted, holding his head at the pump spout. Oh, ‘twas so good to shout at somebody. He must shout.

And Lennie pumped away like a little imp.

When Jack looked out of the towel at the day, he saw the sky fresh with yellow light, and some red still on the horizon above the grey gum-trees. It all seemed crisp and snappy. It was life.

“Ain’t yer goin’ ter do any of yer monkey trickin’ this morning?” shouted Lennie at him.

Jack shook his head, and rubbed his white young shoulders with the towel. Lennie, standing by the wash-tin in his little undervest and loose little breeches, was watching closely.

“Can you answer me a riddle, Lennie?” asked Jack.

“I’ll try,” said Len briskly, and Og and Magog jumped up in gay expectation.

“What is God, anyhow?” asked Jack.

“Y’d better let my father hear y’,” replied Lennie, with a dangerous nod of the

head.

“No, but I mean it. Suppose Herbert had died. I want to know what God is.”

Jack still had the inner darkness of that room in his eyes.

“I’ll tell y’,” said Len briskly. “God is a Higher Law than the Constitution.”

Jack thought about it. A higher law than the law of the land. Maybe! — The answer left him cold.

“And what is self?” he asked.

“Crikey! Stop up another night! It ‘ud make ye sawney. — But I’ll tell y’ what self is.

“Self is a wilderness of sweets. And selves
They eat, they drink, and in communion sweet
Quaff immortality and joy.”

Len was pleased with this. But Jack heard only words.

“Ask me one, Jack! Ask me one!” pleaded Og.

“All right. What’s success, Og?” asked Jack, smiling.

“Success! Success! Why, success — ”

“Success is t’grow a big bingy like a bloke from town, ‘n a watch-chain acrost it with a gold dial in y’ fob, and ter be allowed ter spout as much gab as y’ve got bref left over from y’ indigest,” cut in Lennie, with delight.

“That was my riddle,” yelled Og, rushing at him.

“Ask me one! Ask me one, Jack! Ask me one,” yelled Magog.

“What’s failure?” asked Jack, laughing.

“T’ be down on y’ uppers an’ hev no visible means of supportin’ y’r pants up whilst y’ slog t’ the’ nearest pub t’cadge a beer spot,” crowed Lennie in delight, while he fenced off Og.

Both twins made an assault and battery upon him.

“D’ye know y’r own answers?” yelled Len at Jack.

“No.”

The brazenness of the admission flabbergasted the twins. They stalked off. Len drew up a three-legged stool, and sat down to milk, explaining impatiently that success comes to those that work and don’t drink.

“But” — he reverted to his original thought — “ye’ve gotta work, not go wastin’ y’r time as you generally do of a morning — boundin’ about makin’ a kangaroo of y’self; tippin’ y’ elbows and holdin’ back y’ nut as if y’ had a woppin’ fine drink in both hands, and gone screwed with joy afore you drained it; lyin’ flat on y’ hands an’ toes, an’ heavin’ up an’ down, up an’ down, like a race-horse iguana frightened by a cat; an’ stalkin’ an’ stoopin’ as if y’wanted ter catch a bird round a corner; or roundin’ up on imaginary things, makin’ out t’hit ‘em slap-bang-whizz on the mitts they ain’t got; whippin’ round an’ bobbin’ like

a cornered billy-goat; skippin' up an' down like sis wif a rope, an' makin' a general high falutin' ass of y'self."

"I see you and the twins with clubs," said Jack.

"Oh, that! That's more for music an' one-two-three-four," said Len.

"You see I'm in training," said Jack.

"What for? Want ter teach the old sows to start dancin' on th' corn-bin floor?"

"No, I want to keep in training, for if I ever have a big fight."

"Who with?"

"Oh, I don't know. But I love a round with the fists. I'll teach you."

"All right. But why don't y' chuck farmin' an' go in f' prize fightin'?"

"I wish I could. But my father said no. An' perhaps he's right. But the best thing I know is to fight a fair round. I'll teach you, Len."

"Huh! What's the sense! If y' want exercise, y' c'n rub that horse down a bit cleaner than y' are doin'."

"Stop y' sauce, nipper, or I'll be after y' with a strap!" called Tom. "Come on, Jack. Tea! Timothy's bangin' the billy-can. And just you land that nipper a clout."

"Let him 'it me! Garn, let him!" cried Len, scooting up with his milk-stool and pail and looking like David skirmishing before Goliath. He wasn't laughing. There was a demonish little street-arab hostility in his face.

"Don't you like me, Len?" Jack asked, a bit soft this morning. Len's face at once suffused with a delightful roguishness.

"Aw, yes — if y' like! — -I'll be dressin' up in Katie's skirts n' spoonin' y' one of these bright nights."

He whipped away with his milk-pail, like a young lizard.

II

"Look at Bow, he looks like an owl," said Grace at breakfast.

"What d'y call 'im Bow for?" asked Len.

"Like a girl, with his eyes double size," said Monica.

"You'd better go to sleep, Jack," said Mrs. Ellis.

"Take a nap, lad," said Mr. Ellis. "There's nothin' for y' to do this morning."

Jack was going stupefied again, as the sun grew warm. He didn't hear half that was said. But the girls were very attentive to him. Mary was not there: she was sitting with Herbert. But Monica and Grace waited on him as if he had been their lord. It was a new experience for him: Monica jumping up and whipping away

his cup with her slim hand, to bring it back filled, and Grace insisting on opening a special jar of jam for him. Drowsy as he was, their attention made his blood stir. It was so new to him.

Mary came in from the sitting room: they were still in the kitchen.

“Herbert is awake,” she said. “He wants to be untied. Bow, do you think he ought to?”

Jack rose in silence and went through to Gran’s room. Herbert lay quite still, but he was himself. Only shattered and wordless. He looked at Jack and murmured:

“Can’t y’ untie me?”

Jack went at once to unfasten the linen bands. The twins, Monica and Grace, stood watching from the doorway. Mary was at his side to help.

“Don’t let ‘em come in,” said Herbert, looking into Jack’s face.

Jack nodded and went to the door.

“He wants to be left alone,” he said.

“Mustn’t we come, Bow?” said Monica, making queer yellow eyes at him.

“Best not,” he said. “Don’t let anybody come. He wants absolute quiet.”

“All right.” She looked at him with a heavy look of obedience, as if making an offering. They were not going to question his authority. She drew Grace away: both the girls humble. Jack slowly and unconsciously flushed. Then he went back to the bed.

“I want something,” murmured Herbert wanly. “Send that other away.”

“Go away, Mary. He wants a man to attend to him,” said Jack.

Mary looked a long, dark look at Jack. Then she, too, submitted.

“All right,” she said, turning darkly away.

And it came into his mind, with utter absurdity, that he ought to kiss her for this submission. And he hated the thought.

Herbert was a boy of nineteen, uncouth, and savagely shy. Jack had to do the menial offices for him.

The sick man went to sleep again almost immediately, and Jack returned to the kitchen. He heard voices from outside. Ma and Grace were washing up at the slab. Dad was sitting under the phosphorus tree, with Effie on one knee, cutting up tobacco in the palm of his hand. Tom was leaning against the tree, the children sat about. Lennie skipped up and offered a seat on a stump.

“Sit yourself down, Bow,” he said, using the nickname. “I’d be a knot instead of a bow if I had to nurse Red Herbert.”

Monica came slinking up from the shade, and stood with her skirt touching Jack’s arm. Mary was carrying away the dishes.

“I’ve been telling Tom,” said Mr. Ellis, “that he can take the clearing gang

over to his A'nt Greenlow's for the shearing, an' then get back an' clear for all he's worth, till Christmas. Y'might as well go along with him, Jack. We can get along all right here without y', now th' girls are back. Till Christmas, that is. We s'll want y' back for the harvest."

There was a dead silence. Jack didn't want to go.

"Then y' can go back to the clearing, and burn off. I need that land reclaimed, over against the little chaps grows up and wants to be farmers. Besides" — and he looked round at Ma — "we're a bit overstocked in' the house just now, an' we'll be glad of the cubby for Herbert, if he's on the mend."

Dad resumed cutting up his tobacco in the palm of his hand.

"Jack can't leave Herbert, Uncle," said Mary quietly, "he won't let anybody else do for him."

"Eh?" said Mr. Ellis, looking up.

"Herbert won't let me do for him," said Mary. "He'll only let Bow."

Mr. Ellis dropped his head in silence.

"In that case," he said slowly, "in that case, we must wait a bit. — Where's that darned Rackett put himself? This is his job."

There was still silence.

"Somebody had best go an' look for him," said Tom.

"Ay," said Mr. Ellis.

There was more silence. Monica, standing close to Jack, seemed to be fiercely sheltering him from this eviction. And Mary, at a distance, was like Moses' sister watching over events. It made Jack feel queer and thrilled, the girls all concentrating on him. It was as if it put power in his chest, and made a man of him.

Someone was riding up. It was Red Easu. He slung himself off his horse, and stalked slowly up.

"Herbert dead?" he asked humorously.

"Doing nicely," said Dad, very brief.

"I'll go an' have a look at 'm," said Easu, sitting on the step and pulling off his boots.

"Don't wake him if he's asleep. Don't frighten him, whatever you do," said Jack, anxious for his charge.

Easu looked at Jack with an insolent stare: a curious stare.

"Frighten him?" he said. "What with?"

"Jack's been up with him all night," put in Monica fiercely.

"He nearly died in the night," said Jack.

There was dead silence. Easu stared, poised like some menacing bird. Then he went indoors in his stocking feet.

“Did he nearly die, Jack?” asked Tom.

Jack nodded. His soul was feeling bleached.

“If Dr. Rackett isn’t coming — see if you can trail him up, Tom. And Len, can you go on Lucy and fetch Dr. Mallett?”

“Course I can,” said Len, jumping up.

“You go and get a nap in the cubby, son,” said Mr. Ellis. They were now all in motion. Jack followed vaguely into the kitchen. Lennie was the centre of excitement for the moment.

“Well, Ma, I has no socks fitta wear. If y’ll fix me some, I’ll go.” For he was determined to go to York in decent raiment, as he said.

“Find me a decent shirt, Ma; decent! None o’ your creases down th’ front for me. ‘N a starch collar, real starch.”

And so on. He was late. Lennie was always late.

“Ma, weer’s my tie — th’ blue one wif gold horseshoes? Grace — there’s an angel — me boots. Clean ‘em up a bit, go on — Monica! Oh, Monica! there y’arel Fix this collar on for me, proper, do! Y’re a bloke at it, so y’are, an’ I’m no good.-Gitt outta th’ way, you nips — how k’n I get dressed with you buzzin’ round me feet! — Ma! Ma! come an’ brush me ‘air with that dinkey nice-smellin’ stuff. — There, Ma, don’t your Lennie look a dream now?-Ooha, Ma, don’t kiss me, Ma, I ‘ate it.”

“Lennie love, don’t drop your aitches.”

“I never, Ma. I said I ‘ate it. Y’ kissed me, did y or didn’t y’? Well, I ‘ate it.”

He was gone on Lucy, like a little demon. Jack, sitting stupid on a chair, felt part of his soul go with him.

“Come on, Bow!” said Monica, taking him by the arm, “Come and go to sleep. Mary will wake you if Herbert wants you.”

And she led him off to the door of the cubby, while he submitted and Easu stood in his stocking feet on the verandah watching.

“He saved Herbert’s life,” said Monica, looking up at Easu with a kind of defiance, when she came back.

“Who asked him,” said Easu.

III

Tom and Jack were to leave the next day. The girls brought out a lot of stores from the cupboard, and blankets and billies and a lantern. They packed the sacks standing there.

“Get y’ swag f’y’ selves,” said Dad. “The men have everything for themselves. Take an axe an’ a gun apiece.”

“Gun! Gee! K’n I go, Dad?”

“Shut up, Len. Destroy all the dingoes y’ can. I’ll give y’ sixpence a head, an’ the Government gives another. Haven’t y’ a saddle, Jack Grant, somewhere in a box? Because I’d be short of one off the place, if you took one from here.”

“It must be somewhere,” said Jack.

“Get it unpacked. An’ you can have Lucy to put it across. It’s forty mile from here to virgin forest: real forest. If you get strayed, ever, all you have to do is to drop th’ reins on Lucy’s neck, ‘n she’ll bring y’ in.”

The saddle came out of the dusty box. All were there in a circle to look on. Jack expected deep admiration. But he was hurt to feel Monica laughing derisively. Everybody was laughing, but he minded Monica most. She could jeer cruelly.

“Jolly good saddle,” said Jack.

“Mighty little of it,” said Len.

“What’s wrong with it, Tom?” said Jack.

“Slithery. No knee-pads, saddle bags, strap holder, scooped seat, or any sorta comfort. It’s a whale, on the wrong side.”

Lennie closely examined the London ticket. The unpacking continued in silence, under Tom’s majestic eye. Whip, yellow horse-rug, bridle, leathers, a heavy bar bit with double rings and curb, saddle cloths, reins, extra special blue-and-gold girths wrapped in tissue paper, nickel cross rowell jockey spurs, and glittering steel stirrup-irons. Cord breeches, Assam silk coat, white water-proof linen stocks, leather gaiters, and a pair of leather gauntlets completed the amazing disclosure. It was all a mighty gift from one of the unforgiven Aunts.

Half way through the unpacking Tom gave a groan and walked away; but walked back. Og and Magog stole the saddle, slung it across a bar, and slid off and on rapturously. Monica was laughing at him disagreeably: strange and brutal, as if she hated him: rather like Easu. And Lennie was tittering with joy.

“Oh, Og! Here! Y’re missin’ it. Leave that hog’s back saddle, No. 1 Grade — picked material — hand forged — tree mounted, guaranteed — a topper off; see this princess palfrey bridle for you, rosettes ornamented, periwinkle an’ all. An’ oh, look you! a canary belly-band f’r Dada t’strap round th’ heifer’s neck when she gets first prize at the Royal York show. Look at that crush-bone cage to put round Stampede’s mouth when the niggers catches him again. Oh, Lor’ oh my — —”

“Shut up!” said Tom abruptly, catching the boy by the back of his pants and tossing him out of the barn. “Now roll up y’r bluey” — meaning the new rug,

which was yellow. “Fix them stirrup leathers, take the bridle off that bit an’ we’ll find you something decent to put the reins on. An’ kick th’ rest t’gether. What a gear. Glad it’s you, not me, as has got to ride that leather, me boy. But ride on’t y’ll have to, for there’s nought else. Now, Monica, close down that mirth of yours. You’re not asked for it.” “Let brotherly love continue,” said Monica spitefully. “Wonder if it will, even unto camp.”

She went, leaving Jack feeling suddenly tired.

CHAPTER VII

OUT BACK AND SOME LETTERS

I

Jack was absolutely happy, in camp with Tom. Perhaps the most completely happy time in his life. He had escaped the strange, new complications that life was weaving round him. Yet he had not left the beloved family. He was with Tom: who, after all, was the one that mattered most. Tom was the growing trunk of the tree.

All real living hurts as well as fulfils. Happiness comes when we have lived and have a respite for sheer forgetting. Happiness, in the vulgar sense, is just a holiday experience. The lifelong happiness lies in being used by life; hurt by life, driven and goaded by life, replenished and overjoyed with life, fighting for life's sake. That is real happiness. In the undergoing, a large part of it is pain. But the end is like Jack's camping expedition, a time of real happiness.

Perhaps death, after a life of real courage, is like a happy camping expedition in the unknown, before a new start.

It was spring in Western Australia, and a wonder of delicate blueness, of frail, unearthly beauty. The earth was full of weird flowers, star-shaped, needle-pointed, fringed, scarlet, white, blue, a whole world of strange flowers. Like being in a new Paradise from which man had not been cast out.

The trees in the dawn, so ghostly still. The scent of blossoming eucalyptus trees: the scent of burning eucalyptus leaves and sticks, in the camp fire. Trailing blossoms wet with dew; the scrub after the rain; the bitter-sweet fragrance of fresh-cut timber.

And the sounds! Magpies calling, parrots chattering, strange birds flitting in the renewed stillness. Then kangaroos calling to one another out of the frail, paradisaical distance. And the birr! of crickets in the heat of the day. And the sound of axes, the voices of men, the crash of falling timber. The strange slobbering talk of the blacks! The mysterious night coming round the camp fire.

Red gum everywhere! Fringed leaves dappling, the glowing new sun coming through, the large, feathery, honey-sweet blossoms flowering in clumps, the

hard, rough-marked, red-bronze trunks rising like pillars of burnt copper, or lying sadly felled, giving up the ghost. Everywhere scattered the red gum, making leaves and herbage underneath seem bestrewed with blood.

And it was spring: the short, swift, fierce, flower-strange spring of Western Australia, in the month of August.

Then evening came, and the small aromatic fire was burning amid the felled trees. Tom stood hands on hips, giving directions, while the blackened billy-can hung suspended from a cross-bar over the fire. The water bubbling, a handful of tea is thrown in. It sinks. It rises. "Bring it off!" yells Tom. Jack balances the cross-stick, holding the wobbling can, until it rests safely on the ground. Then snatching the handle, holds the can aloft. Tea is made.

The clearing gang had a hut with one side for the horses, the other for the men's sleeping place. Inside were stakes driven into the ground, bearing cross-bars with sacks fastened across, for beds. On the partition-poles hung the wardrobes, and in a couple of boxes lay the treasures, in the shape of watches, knives, razors, looking-glasses, etc., safe from the stray thief. But the men were always tormenting one another, hiding away a razor, or a strop, or a beloved watch.

Just in front of this shelter the camp oven had been built, for baking damper and roasting meat, and to one side was the well, a very important necessity, built by contract, timbered, and provided with winch, rope and bucket.

All around the bush was dense like a forest, much denser than usual. The slim-girthed trees grew in silent array, all alike and all asleep, with undergrowth of scrub and fern and flowers, banksia short and sturdy with its cone-shaped red-yellow flowers like fairy lamps, and here and there a perfect wattle, or mimosa tree, with its pale gold flowers like little balls of sun-dust, and here and there sandal-wood trees. Jack never forgot the beauty of the first bushes and trees of mimosa, in a damp place in the wild bush. Occasionally there was still an immense karri tree, or a jarrah slightly smaller, though this was not the region for these giants.

And far away, unending, upslope and downslope and rock-face one far unending dimness of these changeless trees, going on and on without variation, open enough to let one see ahead and all around, yet dense enough to form a monotony and a sense of helplessness in the mind, a sense of timelessness. Strongly the gang impressed on Jack that he must not go even for five minutes' walk out of sight of the clearing. The weird silent timelessness of the bush impressed him as nothing else ever did, in its motionless aloofness. "What would my father mean, out here?" he said to himself. And it seemed as if his father and his father's world and his father's gods withered and went to dust at the thought

of this bush. And when he saw one of the men on a red sorrel horse galloping like a phantom away through the dim, red-trunked, silent trees, followed by another man on a black horse: and when he heard their far, far-off yelping “Coo-ee!” or a shot as they fired at a dingo or a kangaroo, he felt as if the old world had given him up from the womb, and put him into a new weird grey-blue paradise, where man has to begin all over again. That was his feeling: that the human way of life was all to be begun over again.

The home that he and Tom made for themselves seemed to be a matter of forked sticks. If you wanted an upright of any sort, drive a forked stick into the ground, or dig it in, fork-end up. If you wanted a cross-bar, lay a stick or a pole across two forks. Down the sides of your house you wove brushwood. For the roof you plaited the long, stringy strips of gum-bark. With a couple of axes and a jack-knife they built a house fit for a savage king. Then they went out and made a kitchen, with pegs hammered into the bole of a tree, for the frying pans, the sawn surface of a large stump for a table, and logs to lie back against.

North of the clearing lay the nucleus of a settlement, with pub, saw-mill, store, one or two homes, and a farm or two outlying. And as they cleared the land, the teamsters carried the best of the timber on jinkers, or dragged it with chains hitched to bullock or horse teams, to the mill. But milling was expensive, and most of the wood was hand-split. Jack learned to cut palings and poles, and then to split slabs that would serve to build slab houses, or sheds. In the spare time they would have little hunts of wallabies or bandicoots or bungarras, or blood-rats; or they would snare opossums or stalk dingoes.

But because he was really away in the wild, Jack felt he must write letters home. So it is. The letters from home hardly interested him at all. The thin sheets with their interminable writing were almost repulsive to him. He would stow them in the barn and leave them for days without reading them: he was “busy.” And sometimes the mice nibbled them, and in that way read them for him. He was a little ashamed of this indifference. But he noticed other men were the same. When they got these endless thin sheets from home, covered with ink of words, they stowed them away in a kind of nausea, without reading more than a few lines. And the people at home had such a pitying admonishing tone: like the young naval lieutenant who made friends with the black aborigines by promptly shaving them. And then letters were not profitable. A stamp home cost sixpence, and a letter took about two months on the way. It was always four months before you got an answer. And after you’d written to your mother about something really important — like money — and waited impatiently several months for the answer, when it came it never mentioned the money, and made a mountain of a cold in your head which you couldn’t remember having had. What was the good

of people at home writing: "We are having true November weather, very cold, with fog and sleet," when you were grilling under a fierce sun and the rush of the intense antipodal summer. What was the good of it all? All dull as ditchwater, and no use to anybody. He had promised his mother he would write once a week. And his mother was his mother, he wanted to keep his promise. Which he did for a month. But in camp, he didn't even know what day it was, hardly what month: though the mail did come once a fortnight, via the saw-mill. — He took out his mother's letter.

"You said in your letter from Colombo that you were sneezing. Do take care in Australia in the rainy season. Ask not to be sent out in the rain. I recollect the climate, always sunny and bright between showers. That is what we miss so much now we are back in England, the sunny skies. Of course, I do not want you to be a mollycoddle, but I know the climate of Western Australia, it is very trying, particularly so in the rainy season. I do hope and pray you are on a good station with a good woman who will see you are not out getting drenched in those cold downpours — —"

Jack groaned aloud, astonished that his mother had got so far from her own early days. How in the name of heaven had he come to mention sneezing? Never again. He would not even say he was camping.

"Dear Mother:

"I am quite well and like farming out here all right. Old Mrs. Ellis knew your father. She says he cut off her leg. I hope Father has got rid of his Liver, you said he was taking variolettes for it. I hope they have done him good. Mr. Ellis says a cockles pill and a ten-mile walk will cure anything. He says it would cure a pig's liver. But when old Tim, the half-caste, tried to swallow the pill it came out of the gap where his front tooth used to be, so Mrs. Ellis gave him a teaspoonful of sulphur, which he said would make him blow up. But it didn't. I think I was more likely to blow up because she gave me a big teaspoon of parafin which they call kerosene out here. She is a fine doctor, far better than the medical man who lodges here, whose name is Rackett.

"I hope you are quite well. Give my love to all my aunts and sister and father. I hope they are all quite well — —"

Jack hurried this letter in confusion into its envelope, and spent sixpence on it, knowing perfectly well it was all nonsense.

II

There was a pause in the clearing work, after the early hot spell, and word from Lennie that there was to be a kangaroo hunt, and they were to come down. An Old Man kangaroo, a king of boomers, had been seen around, hoof-marks and paw-pad trails near the pool.

They met at dawn, by the well: Easu with two kangaroo hounds, like greyhounds on leash; Lennie peacocking on an enormous hairy-heeled roadster; a “superior” young Queenslander who had been sent west because his father found him unmanageable and who wasn’t a bad sort, though his nickname was Pink-eye Percy; Lennie’s “Cornseed” friend, Joe Low; Alec Rice, the young fellow who was courting Grace; Ross Ellis, and Herbert, who was well again, then Tom on a grey stallion, and Jack, in riding breeches and gaiters and clean shirt, astride the famous Lucy.

Easu was born in the saddle, he rode easy on his big roan. He waved his hat excitedly at the group, and led off into the scrub, through the slender, white-barked trees of the open bush. The others rode fast in ragged order, among the thin, open trees. Jack let Lucy pick her way, sometimes ahead, sometimes in sight of the others. They rode in silence.

Then they came out unexpectedly into low, grey-green scrub without trees, and crisp grey-white soil that crumbled under the hoofs of the horses. There they were, all out in the blue and gold light, with billows of blue-green scrub running away to right and left, towards a rise in front.

“Hold hard there!” sang out Easu, holding up the whip in his right hand. He held the reins loosely in his left, and with the reins, the leash on which the dogs were pulling. Dogs and horse he held in that left hand.

“I want y’ t’ divide. Tom, y’ lead on a zigzag course down north. Ross, you work south. — And this — this fox-hunting gentleman — — ” He paused, and Jack felt himself going scarlet.

“Says thank ye, an’ hopes he’s a gentleman, since y’ve mentioned it,” put in Lennie, in his mild, inconsequential way.

There was a laugh against Red: for there was no mistaking him for a gentleman, in any sense of the word. However, he was too much excited by the hunt to persevere.

The fellows were stowing away their pipes in their pockets, and buttoning their coats, ready for the dash. Easu, thrilled by his own unquestioned leadership, gave the orders. All listened closely.

“Call up! Call up! Follow my leader and find the trail. Biggest boomer ever ye — — ”

“Come!” cried Tom.

“And I’m here!” cried Lennie.

Away they went into the gully and through the scrub, riding light but swift, in different directions.

“Let go th’ mare’s head,” yelled Tom over his shoulder. “We’re coming to timber, an’ she’d best pilot herself.”

“Right!” cried Jack.

“Don’t ye kill Lucy,” shrieked Lennie. “Because me heart’s set on her. Keep y’ hands an’ y’ heels off y’ horse, an’ y’ head on y’ shoulders.”

The bolt of horsemen through the bush sent parrots screaming savagely over the feathery tree-tops. Jack let Lucy have her way. She was light and swift and sure-footed, old steeplechaser that she was. The slim straight trees slipped past, the motion of the horse surging her own way was exhilarating to a degree.

But Tom had heard something: not the parrots, not the soft thud of the following horses. He must have heard with his sixth sense: perhaps the warning call of the boomer. With face set and eyes burning he swung and urged his horse in a new direction. And like men coming in to supper from different directions, the handful of horsemen came swish-swish through the scrub, toward a centre.

Lucy pricked one ear. Perhaps she too had heard something. Then she gathers herself together and goes like the wind after the twinkling grey quarters of Tom’s stallion. Her excitement mounts to Jack’s head, and he rides like a catapult on the wind.

Again Tom was reining in, pulling his horse almost on to its haunches. And Jack must hold like a vice with his knees, for Lucy was pawing the air, frantic at being held up.

“Coo-ee!” came Tom’s clear tenor, ringing through the bush. “Coo-ee! Coo-ee! Coo-ee!” A marvellous sound, and Lucy pawing and dancing among the scrub.

“Coo-ee! Coo-ee! Coo-ee!”

It seemed to Jack, this sound in the bush was like God. Like the call of the heroic soul seeking its body. Like the call of the bodiless soul, sounding through the immense dead spaces of the dim, open bush, strange and heroic and inhuman. The deep long “coo,” mastering the silence, the high summons of the long, “eee.” The “coo” rising more imperious, and then the “eee!” thrilling and holding aloft. Then the swift lift and fall: “Coo-eee! Coo-eee! Coo-eee!” till the air rocks with the fierce pulse, as if a new heart were in motion, and the shriek and scream of the “eee!” rips in strange flashes into the far-off, far-off consciousness.

Much stranger than the weird yelp of the Red Indians’ war-cry was this rocking, ripping noise in the vast grey bush.

The others were coming in from right to left, like silent phantoms through the

sunny evanescence of the bush, riding hard. Tom is displaced by Red. A few quick words given and taken. Easu has unleashed the dogs, slashed the long lash with a resounding crack in the air. The long lean dogs stretch out — uncannily long, from tip to tip. Tom lets go and away. Jack lets go and away, and unconsciously his hand goes down for the bow of the slippery saddle.

Lucy had the situation well in hand, which was more than Jack had. Thud-thud. Thud-thud. Thud-thud! Up, fly! Crash! — Hello? — All right. A beauty! A dream of a jumper, this Lucy. But Jack wished his seat weren't so slippery.

They were turning into bigger timber: trees further apart, but much bigger, and with hanging limbs. "Look out! Look out f' y' head!" Jack kept all his eyes open, till he knew by second sight when to duck. He watched the twinkling hind quarters of Tom's grey, among the trees.

There was a short yapping of the dogs. Lucy was going like the wind, Jack was riding light, but she was beginning to breathe heavily. No longer so young as she was. How hot the sun was, in the almost shadeless bush. And what was leading, where was the 'roo? Jack strained his eyes almost out of his head, but could see nothing.

They were on the edge of the hills, and the country changed continually. No sooner were you used to scrub, than it was thin trees. No sooner did you know that Lucy could manipulate thin trees, than you were among big timber, with more space and dangerous boughs. Then it was salty paper-bark country — and back to forest again: close trees, fallen logs, blood-rat holes and sudden outcropping of dark-brown, ancient-looking rocks with little flat crags, to be avoided. But the other men were going full speed, and full speed you must follow, watching with all your eyes, and riding light, and swept along in the run.

Up! That was over an elephant log, and down went a man at Tom's heels. It was Grace's young man. No matter. Jack was going to look over his shoulder when Tom again shouted "Up!" and Jack and Lennie followed over the fallen timber.

Suddenly they were in a great black blanket of burnt country, clear of undergrowth or scrubs, with skeletons of black, charred trees standing gruesome. And there, right under their noses, leapt three kangaroos, swerving across. The baby one, Joey, was first, lithe, light, apparently not a bit afraid, but wildly excited; then the mother doe, all out, panting, anxious-eyed, stiffly jumping; and behind, a long way, with the dogs like needles coming after, ran the Old Man boomer; a great big chap making mighty springs and in varying directions. Yes, he was making a rear-guard action for the safety of his mate and spawn. Leaping with great leaps, as if to the end of the world, leaning forward, his little hands curled in, his immense massive tail straight out behind him like some immense

living rudder. And seeming perfectly calm, almost indifferent. With steady, easy, enormous springs he went this way, that way, detouring, but making for the same ridge his doe and Joey had passed.

The charred ground proved treacherous, holes, smouldering trunks of trees, smouldering hollows where trunks had been. Soon two horses were running loose, with men limping after them. But on went the rest. Thud and crackle went the hoofs of the galloping horses in the charcoal, as after the dogs, after the 'roos they followed, kicking up clouds of grey ash-mounds and red-burnt earth, jumping suddenly over the still-glowing logs.

The chase paused on the ridge, for the drop was sudden and steep, with rocks and boulders cropping out. Down slid the dogs in a cloud, yelping hard, making Easu at all costs turn to try the right, Tom to try the left.

They dropped awkwardly and joltingly down, between rocks, in loose charcoal powder and loose earth.

“Ain't that ole mare a marvel, Jack!” said Tom. “This nag is rode stiff, all-under my knees.”

Jack's face was full of wild joy. The stones rattled, the men stood back from the stirrups, the horses seemed to be diving. But Lucy was light and sure.

Down they jolted into the gully. Easu came up swearing — lost the quarry and dogs, Jack pulled Lucy over a boulder to get out of Easu's way: a thing he shouldn't have done. Crack! went his head against a branch, and Jack was bruising himself on the ground before he knew where he was.

But he was on his feet again, intently chasing Lucy.

“Here y'are!” It was Herbert who leaned down, picked up the reins of the scampering mare, and threw them to Jack. Jack's face was bleeding. Lennie came up and opened his mouth in dismay. But somebody coo-eed, and the chase was too good to lose. They are all gone.

Jack stiffly mounted, to find himself blinded by trickling blood. Lucy once more was stirring between his knees, stretching herself out, and he had to let her go, fumbling meanwhile for a handkerchief which he pushed under his hat-brim, and pulled down the old felt firmly. Wiping his eyes with his sleeve, he found the wound staunch by the impromptu dressing.

The scene had completely changed. Lucy was whisking him around the side of a huge dark boulder. They were in the dry bed of the gully, on stones.

Lucy stopped dead, practically on her haunches, but her impetus carried her over, and she was slithering down into a loose gravelly hole. Jack jumped off, to find himself face to face with the biggest boomer kangaroo he had ever imagined. It was the Old Man, sitting there at the bottom of the gravelhole, in the hollow of a barren she-oak, his absurd paws drooping dejectedly before him and

his silly dribbling under-jaw working miserably.

“He’s trying to get the wind up for another fly,” thought Jack, standing there as dazed as the ‘roo itself, and feeling himself very much in the same condition. Then he wondered where the doe and Joey were, and where all the other hunters. He hoped they wouldn’t come. Lucy stood by, as calm as a cucumber.

Jack took a step nearer the Old Man ‘roo, and instantly brought up his fists as the animal doubled its queer front paws and hit out wildly at him. He wanted to hit back.

“Mind the claws!” called somebody, with a quiet chuckle, from above.

Jack looked round, and there was Lennie and the heavy horse, the horse head-down, tail up, feet spread, like a salamander lizard on a wall, slithering down the grade into the hole, Lennie erect in the stirrups. Jack gave a loud laugh.

And the Old Man, either possessed of a sense of humour or terrified to death, seized the nearest thing at hand — which happened to be Jack; grabbed him, gripped him, hugged him in desperate fury, and tried to get up his huge, flail-like hind leg, to rip up the enemy with the toe claw. One stroke of that claw, and Jack was done.

In terror, anger, surprise, Jack jumped at the kangaroo’s throat, as far as the animal’s grip would let him. The ‘roo, trying all the time to use his hind legs, upset, so that the two went rolling on the gravel together. Jack was in horrid proximity to the weird grey fur, clutched by the weird-smelling, violent animal, in a sort of living earthquake, as the kangaroo writhed and bounced to use his great, oar-like hind legs, and Jack clung close and hit at the creature’s body, hit, hit, hit. It was like hitting living wire bands. Somebody was roaring, or else it was his own consciousness shouting: “Don’t let the hind claw get to work.” — How horrible a wild thing was, when you were mixed up with it! The terrible nausea of its powerful, furry, violent-blooded contact. Its unnatural, almost obscene power! Its different consciousness! Its overpowering smell!

The others were coming back up the stream-bed, jumping the rocks, towards this place where Jack had fallen and Lennie had come down after him. Easu was calling off the dogs, ferociously. Tom rushed in and got the ‘roo by the head.

Lennie was lying on the gravel laughing so hard he couldn’t stand on his legs.

III

Jack wrote a letter to his old friend, the vet with the “weakness,” in England.

“We are out at a place back of beyond, at a place called Gum Tree Valley, so I

take up my pen to write as I have time. — Tom Ellis is here bossing the clearing gang, and he has a lot of Aunts, whom he rightly calls ants. One of them has a place near here, and we go to dinner on Sundays, and to help when wanted. We stayed all last week and helped muster in the sheep for the shearing. We rode all round their paddock boundaries and rounded in the sheep that had strayed and got lost. They had run off from the main — about a score of flocks — and were feeding in little herds and groups miles apart. It's a grand sight to see them all running before you, their woolly backs bobbing up and down like brown water. I can tell you I know now the meaning of the Lost Sheep, and the sort of joy you have in cursing him when you find him.

“You told me to let you know if I heard any first hand news of gold finding. Well, I haven't heard much. But a man rode into Greenlow's — that's Tom's Aunt — place on Sunday, and he said to Tom: ‘Are those the Stirling Ranges?’ Tom said: ‘No, they're not. They're the Darling Ranges.’ He said: ‘Are you sure?’ — and got very excited. The black-fellows came and stood by and they were vastly amused, grinning and looking away. He got out a compass and said: ‘You are wrong, Mr. Ellis, they are the Stirling Ranges.’ Tom said: ‘Call ‘em what you choose, chum. We call ‘em Darling — and them others forty mile south west we call the Stirling.’ The man groaned. Minnie Greenlow called us to come in to tea, and he came along as well. His manners were awful. He fidgetted and pushed his hat back on his head and leant forward and spat in the fire at a long shot, and tipped his cup so that his tea swobbed in his saucer, then drank it out of the saucer. Then he pushed the cake back when handed to him, and leaned his head on his arms on the table and groaned. You'd have thought he was drunk, but he wasn't, because he said to Tom, ‘Are ye sure them's not the Stirling Ranges? I can't drink my tea for thinkin' about it.’ And Tom said: ‘Sure.’ and then he seemed more distracted than ever, and blew through his teeth and mopped his head, and was upset to a degree.

“When we had finished tea and we all went outside he said: ‘Well, I think I'll get back now. It's no use when the compass turns you down. I'll never find it.’ We didn't know what he was talking about, but when he'd got into his buggy and drove away the blacks told us: ‘Master lookin' for big lump yellow dirt — He think that very big fish, an' he bury him longa time. Comin' back no finda him.’ — While the boys were talking who should shout to have the slip rail let down but this same stranger and he drove right past us and away down the long paddock. When he got to the gate there he turned round and came back and drew up by us muttering, and said: ‘Where did you tell me the Stirling Ranges were?’ — Tom pointed it out, and he said, ‘So long!’ and drove off. We didn't see him again. We didn't want to. But Tom is almost sure he found a lump of gold some

time back and buried it for safety's sake and now can't find it.

"That's all the gold I've heard about out here.

"Now for news. One day I went out with tucker to old Jack Moss. He's keeping a bit of land warm for the Greenlows, shepherds sheep down there, about forty miles from everywhere. He talked and talked, and when he didn't talk he didn't listen to me. He looked away over the scrub and sucked his cutty. They say he's hoarded wealth but I didn't see any signs. He was in tatters and wore rags round his feet for boots, which were like a gorilla's. Another day we had a kangaroo hunt. We all chased an Old Man for miles and at last he turned and faced us. I was so close I had no time to think and was on him before I had time to pull up. I jumped to the ground and grappled, and we rolled over and over down the gully. They couldn't shoot him because of me, but they fought him off and killed him. And then we saw his mate standing near among the stones, on her hind legs, with her front paws hanging like a helpless woman. Then Tom, who was tying up my cuts, called out: 'Look at her pouch! It's plum full of little nippers!' and so it was. You never saw such a trick. So we let her go. But we got the Old Man.

"Another day we rode round the surveyed area here, which Mr. Ellis is taking up for the twins Og and Magog. I asked Tom a lot of questions about taking up land. I think I should like to try. Perhaps if I do you will come out. You would like the horses. There are quite a lot wild. We hunt them in and pick out the best and use them. That's how lots of people raise their horse-flesh. They are called brumbies. Excuse me for not ending properly, the mailman is coming along, he comes once a fortnight. We are lucky.

Jack."

IV

To his friend, the pugilist, he wrote:

"Dear Pug:

"You ask me what I think about sending Ned out here. Well, there's no opening that I can see for a gym. But work, that's another question, there's more than enough. I am at work at a place called Gum Tree Valley, clearing, but we came up to Tom's Aunt's place last week, to help, and we've been shearing. At least I haven't. I've been the chap who tars. You splash tar on like paint when the shearers make a misfire and gash the poor brutes and curse you. Lord, don't they curse, if the boss isn't round. He's got a grey beard and dribbles on it, and

the flies get caught in it and buzz as if it was a spider's web. He makes everyone work from morn till night like the Devil. Gosh, if it wasn't that it is only for a short spell, I'd get. Don't you worry, up-country folk know how to get your tucker's worth out of you all right. Today the Sabbath we had a rest. — I don't think! We washed our clothes. Talk about a goodly pile! Only a rumour. For the old man fetched along his vests and pants, and greasy overalls and aprons, his socks, his slimy hanks and night-shirt. Imagine our horror. He's Tom's Aunt's husband, and has no sons only herds of daughters, so we had to do it. We scrubbed 'em with horse-brushes on the stones. Jinks, but I rubbed some holes in 'em!

“But cheer up. I'm not grumbling. I like getting experience as it is called.

“I mean to take up land and have a place of my own some day, then you and Ned could visit me and we could have some fun with the gloves. Lennie says I'm like a kangaroo shaping and punching at nothing, so I got a cow's bladder and blew it up and tied it to a branch, and I batter on it. Must have something to hit. You know kangaroos shape up and make a punch. They are pretty doing that. We have a baby one, Joey, and it takes a cup in its little hands and drinks. Honest to God it's got hands, you never saw such a thing.

“Kindest regards to your old woman and Ned. Lord only knows how I've missed you, and pray that some day I will be fortunate enough to meet you again. Until then

“Farewell.

“A Merry Xmas and a Glad New Year, by the time you get this. Think of me in the broiling heat battling with sheep, their Boss, and the flies, and you'll think of me true.

“Ever your sincere friend
Jack.”

V

As the time for returning from camp drew near, Jack dwelt more and more on this question of the future — of taking up land. He wished so often that life could always be a matter of camping, land-clearing, kangaroo hunting, shearing, and generally messing about. But deep underneath himself he knew it couldn't: not for him at least. Plenty of fellows lived all their life messing from camp to camp and station to station. But himself — sooner or later he would have to bite on to something. He'd have to plunge in to that cold water of responsible living,

some time or other.

He asked Tom about it.

“You must make up y’ mind what you want to go in for, cattle, sheep, horses, wheat, or mixed farming like us,” said Tom. “Then you can go out to select. But it’s no good before you know what you want.”

Jack was surprised to find how little information he got from the men he mixed with. They knew their jobs: teamsters knew about teams, and jobs on the mill; the timber workers knew hauling and sawing; township people knew trading; the general hands knew about hunting and bush-craft and axe handling; and farmers knew what was under their nose, but nothing of the laws of the land, or how he himself was to get a start.

At last he found a small holder who went out as a hired man after he had put in the seed on his own land. And this, apparently, was how Jack would have to start. The man brought out various grubby Government papers, and handed them over.

Jack had a bad time with them: Government reports, blue books, narratives of operations. But he swotted grimly. And he made out so much:

1. Any reputable immigrant over 21 years could procure 50 acres of unimproved rural Crown land open for selection; if between the ages of 14 and 21, 25 acres.

2. Such land must be held by “occupation certificate,” deemed transferable only in case of death, *etc.*

3. The occupation certificate would be exchanged for a grant at the end of five years, or before that time, providing the land had been enclosed with a substantial fence and at least a quarter cultivated. But if at the end of the five years the above conditions, or any of them, had not been observed, the lots should revert to the Crown.

4. Country land was sub-divided into agricultural and pastoral, either purchasable at the sum of 10/- an acre, or leased: the former for eight years at the nominal sum of 1/- an acre, with the right of purchase, the latter for one year at annual rental of 2/- per hundred acres, with presumptive renewal; or five pounds per 1000 acres with rights.

Jack got all this into his mind, and at once loathed it. He loathed the thought of an “occupation certificate.” He loathed the thought of being responsible to the Government for a piece of land. He almost loathed the thought of being tied to land at all. He didn’t want to own things; especially land, that is like a grave to you as soon as you do own it. He didn’t want to own anything. He simply couldn’t bear the thought of being tied down. Even his own unpacked luggage he had detested.

But he started in with this taking-up land business, so he thought he'd try an easy way to get through with it.

"Dear Father,

"I could take up land on my own account now if you sent a few hundred pounds for that purpose per Mr. George. He would pay the deposit and arrange it for me. I have my eye on one or two improved farms falling idle shortly down this Gum Valley district, which is very flourishing. When they fall vacant on account of settlers dropping them, they can be picked up very cheap.

"I hope you are quite well, as I am at present

"Your affec. Son
Jack."

Jack spent his sixpence on this important document, and forgot all about it. And in the dead end of the hot summer, just in the nick of time, he got his answer:

Sea View Terrace,

Bournemouth.

2. 2. '83.

"Dear Jack:

"Thank you for your most comprehensive letter of 30/11/82. It is quite impossible for me to raise several hundreds of pounds, or for the matter of that, one hundred pounds, in this offhand manner. I don't want to be hard on you, but we want you to be independent as soon as possible. We have so many expenses, and I have no intention of sinking funds in the virgin Australian wild, at any rate until I see a way clear to getting some return for my money, in some form of safe interest accruing to you at my death. — You must not expect to run before you can walk. Stay where you are and learn what you can till your year is up, and then we will see about a jackeroo's job, at which your mother tells me you will earn £1. a week, instead of our having to pay it for you.

"We all send felicitations

Your affectionate father

G. B. Grant."

But this is running ahead. — It is not yet Christmas, 1882.

CHAPTER VIII

HOME FOR CHRISTMAS

I

It was a red hot Christmas that year — 'ot, 'ot, 'ot, all day long. Good Lord, how hot it was! — till blessed evening. Sundown brought blessings in its trail. After six o'clock you would sense the breeze coming from the sea. Whispering, sighing, hesitating. Then puff! there it was. Delicious, sweet, it seemed to save one's life.

It had been splendid out back, but it was nice to get home again and sit down to regular meals, have clean clothes and sheets to one's bed. To have your ironing and cooking done for you, and sit down to dinner at a big table with fresh, hailstorm-patterned tablecloth on it. There was a sense almost of glory in a big, white, glossy, hailstorm tablecloth. It lifted you up.

Mr. Ellis had taken Gran away for the time, so the place seemed freer, noisier. There was nothing to keep quiet for. It was holiday — pinkie, the natives called it; the fierce midsummer Christmas. Everybody was allowed to "spell" a great deal.

Tom and Jack were roasted like Red Indians, rather uncouth, and more manly. At first they seemed rather bumptious, thinking themselves very much men. Jack could now ride his slippery saddle in fine style, and handle a rope or an axe, and shoot straight. He knew jarrah, karri, eucalyptus, sandal, wattle, peppermint, banksia, she-oaks, pines, paper-back and gum trees; he had learned to tan a kangaroo hide, pegging it on to a tree; he had looked far into the wilderness, and seen the beyond, and been seized with a desire to explore it; he had made excursions over "likely places," with hammer and pick, looking for gold. He had hunted and brought home meat, had trapped and destroyed many native cats and dingoes. He had lain awake at night and listened to the more-porks, and in the early morning had heard with delight the warbling of the timeline and thickhead thrushes that abounded round the camp, mingled with the noises of magpies, tits, and wrens. He had watched the manoeuvres of willy-wagtails, and of a brilliant variety of birds: weavers, finches, parrots, honeyeaters, and pigeons. But the

banded wrens and blue-birds were his favourites in the bush world.

Well, on such a hero as this, the young home-hussies Monica and Grace had better not look too lightly. He was so grand they could hardly reach him with a long pole.

“An’ how many emus did y’ see?” asked Og. For lately at Wandoo they had had a plague of emus, which got into the paddocks and ate down the sheeps’ food-stuffs, and then got out again by running at the fences and bashing a way through.

Jack had never seen one.

“Never seen an emu!” — Even little Ellie shrilled in derisive amazement. “Monica, he’s never seen an emu!”

Already they had snipped the tip off the high feather he had in his cap.

But he was still a hero, and Lennie followed him round like a satellite, while the girls were obviously thrilled at having Tom and him back again. They would giggle and whisper behind Bow’s back, and wherever he was, they were always sauntering out to stand not far off from him. So that, of course, their thrill entered also into Jack’s veins, he felt a cocky young lord, a young life-master. This suited him very well.

But there was no love-making, of course. They all laughed and joked together over the milking and pail-carrying and feeding and butter-making and cheese-making and-everything, and life was a happy delirium.

They had waited for Tom to come home, to rob the bees. Tom hated the bees and they hated him, but he was staunch. Veils, bonnets, gloves, gaiters were produced, and off they all set, in great joy at their own appearance, with gong, fire, and endless laughter. Tom was to direct from a distance: he stood afar, “Smoking them off.” Grace and Monica worked merrily among the hives, manipulating the boxes which held the comb, lifting them on to the milk pans to save the honey, and handing the pans to the boys to carry in.

“Oooh!” yelled Tom suddenly, “Oooh!”

A cloud of angry bees was round his head. Down went his fire-protector — a tin full of smouldering chips — down went flappers and bellows as with a shriek he beat the air. The more he beat the darker the venomous cloud. Crippled with terror, he ran on shaking legs. The girls and youngsters were paralysed with joy. They swarmed after him shrieking with laughter. His head was completely hidden by bees; but his arms like windmills waved wildly to and fro. He dashed into the cubby, but the bees went with him. He appeared at the window for a moment, showing a demented face, then he jumped out, and the bees with him. Leaping the drain gap and yelling in terror, he made for the house. The bees swung with him and the children after. Jack and the girls stood speechless,

looking at one another. Monica had on man's trousers with an old uniform buttoned close to her neck, workmen's socks over her shoes and trouser-ends, and a Chinaman's hat with a veil over it, netted round her head like a meat-safe. Jack noticed that she was funny. Suddenly, somehow, she looked mysterious to him, and not just the ordinary image of a girl. Suddenly a new cavern seemed to open before his eyes: the mysterious, fascinating cavern of the female unknown. He was not definitely conscious of this. But seeing Monica there in the long white flannel trousers and the Chinaman's-hat meat-safe over her face, something else awoke in him, a new awareness of a new wonder. He had but lately stood on the inward ranges and looked inland into the blue, vast mystery of the Australian interior. And now with another opposite vision he saw an opposite mystery opposing him: the mystery of the female, the young female there in her grotesque garb.

A new awareness of Monica began to trouble him.

"Oooh! Oooh! Ma! Ma! Ma!" Out rushed Tom straight from the kitchen door, the bees still with him. Straight he dashed to the garden, and to the well in the middle. He loosed the windlass and stood on the coping screaming while the bucket clanged and clashed to the bottom. Then Tom seized the rope, and turning his legs round it, slid silently into the hidden, cool dark depths.

The children shrieked with bliss, Jack and the girls rocked with helpless laughter, convulsed by this last exit.

The bees were puzzled. They poised buzzbee fashion above the well-head, explored the mouth of the shaft, and rose again and hovered. Then they began to straggle away. They melted into the hot air.

And now the girls and Jack drew up from the well a raging and soaking Tom. Drew him up uncertainly, wobblingly, a terrible weight on the straining, creaking windlass. Ma and Ellie took him in hand and daubed him a sublime blue: like an ancient Briton, Grace said. Then they gave him bread and jam and a cup of tea.

Then occurred another honey-bee tragedy. Ellie, who had done nothing at all to the bees, suddenly shrieked loudly and ran pelting round, screaming: "I've got a bee in my head! I've got a bee in my head!" Monica caught and held her, while Jack took the bee, a big drone, out of the silky meshes of her honey hair. And as he lifted his eyes he met the yellow eyes of Monica. And the two exchanged a moment's look of intimacy and communication and secret shame, so that they both went away avoiding one another.

II

On New Year's Eve there was always a foregathering of the settlers at the Wandoo homestead. They must foregather somewhere, and Wandoo was the oldest and most flourishing place. It occupied the banks of the so-called Avon River, which was mostly just a great dry bed of stones. But it had plenty of fresh water in the soaks and wells, among the scorched rocks, and these wells were fed by underground springs, not brackish, as is so often the case. Wandoo was therefore a favoured place.

"What am I to wear?" said Jack, aghast, when he heard of the affair.

"Anything," said Tom.

"Nothing," said Len.

"Your new riding suit," said Monica, who had begun to assume airs of proprietorship over him. — "And you needn't say anything, young Len," she continued venomously. "Because you've got to wear that new holland suit Ma got you from England, and boots and socks as well."

"It's awful. Oo-er! It's awful!" groaned Lennie.

It was. A tight-fitting brown holland suit with pants halfway down the shin and many pearl-buttons across the stomach, the coat with a stiff stand-up collar and rigid seams. Harry had a similar rig, but the twins out-did Solomon in sailor suits with gold braid and floppy legs. At least they started in glory.

Tom, in his father's old tennis-flannels and a neat linen jacket, looked quite handsome. But when he saw Jack in his real pukka riding rig, he exclaimed,

"God Almighty, but you've got the goods!"

"A bit too dashing?" asked Jack anxiously.

"Not on your life! You'll do fine. Reds all go in for riding breeks and coats as near sporting dog's yank as they k'n get 'm. There's a couple o' white washing suits o' Dad's as he's grown out of, as I'll plank up in the loft to change into tonight. We can't come in this here cubby again. Once we leave it, it'll be jumped by all the women and children from round the country to put their things in."

"Won't they go into the house?"

"Hallelujah no! Only relations go upstairs. Quality into the dyin' room. Yahoos anywhere, and the ladies always bag our cubby!"

"Lor!"

But it had to be so. For the New Year's chivoo the settlers all saved up, and they all dressed up. By ten o'clock the place was like a fair ground. Horses of all sorts nosing their feed-bags; conveyances of all sorts unhitched; girls all muslin

and ribbon; boys with hats on at an angle, and boots on; men in clean shirts and brilliant ties, mothers in frill and furbelow, with stiffly-starched little children half hidden under sunbonnets; old dames and ancient patriarchs, young bearded farmers, and shaven civilians ridden over from York. Children rushing relentlessly in the heat, amid paper bags, orange peel, concertina-playing, baskets of victuals and fruit, canvas, rubbish and nuts all over the scorched grass. Christmas!

Tom had asked Jack to organise a cricket eleven to play against the Reds. The Reds were dangerous opponents, and the dandies of the day. In riding breeches made India fashion, with cotton gaiters, and rubber-soled shoes, white shirts, and broad-brimmed hats, they looked a handsome colonial set. And they had a complete eleven.

Tom was sitting on a bat bemoaning his fate. He had only five reliable men.

“Aw, shut up!” said Lennie. “Somebody’ll turn up. — Who’s comin’ in at the gate now? Ain’t it the parson from York, and five gents what can handle a bat. Hell! — ain’t my name cockadoodle!”

In top hats and, white linen suits these gentlemen had ridden their twenty-five miles for a game. What price the Reds now!

Tom’s side was in first, Easu and Ross Ellis bowling, Easu, big, loose, easy, looked strange and native, as if he belonged to the natural salt of the earth there. He seemed at home, like an emu or a yellow mimosa tree. He was a bowler of repute. But somehow Jack could not bear to see him palm the ball before he bowled: could not bear to watch it. Whereas fat Ross Ellis, the other bowler, spitting on his hand and rolling the ball in elation after getting the wicket of the best man from York, Jack didn’t mind him. — But unable to watch Easu, he walked away across the paddock, among the squatting mothers whose terror was the flying leather ball.

“Your turn at the wickets, Mr. Grant,” called the excited, red-faced parson, who, Lennie declared, “Couldn’t preach less or act more.”

“We’re eight men out for twenty-six rounds, so smack at ‘em. If ye can get the loose end on Ross, do it. I’ll be in t’other end next and stop ‘em off Easu. I come in right there as th’ useful block.”

Jack was excited. And when he was excited, phrases always came up in his mind. He had the sun in his eyes, but the bat felt good.

“If a gentleman sees bad, he ignores it. He — — ”

Here comes the ball from that devil Easu!

How’s that!

“Finds good and fans it to flame — fans it to — — ”

Joe Low, that stripling, had the other wicket.

Smack! Jack scored the first run off Easu, running for his life.

“You can be a gentleman even if you are a bush-whacker.”

Nine wickets had fallen to Easu for twenty-seven runs, and Easu was elated. Then the parson came forth and stood opposite Jack. He at once whacked Ross’ ball successfully, for three. Jack hitched his belt after the run, and hit out for another.

Smack! no need to run that time. It was a boundary. Lennie’s voice outside yelling admiration roused his soul, as did Easu’s yelling agrily to Ross: “You give that ball to Sam, this over. You blanky idjut!”

Ross picked up the returning leather, and sent down a sulky grubber which Jack naturally skied. Herbert, placed at a point in the shade, came out to catch it, and missed.

Somehow the parson had steadied Jack’s spirit. And when, in a crisis, Jack got his spirit steadied, it seemed to him he could get a semi-magical grip over a situation. Almost as if he could alter the swerve of the ball by his pure, clairvoyant will. So it seemed. And keyed up against the weird, handsome, native Easu, as if by a magic of will Jack held the wicket and got the runs. It was one of those subtle battles which are beyond our understanding. And Jack won.

But Easu got him out in the end: In the first innings, a terrific full pitch came down crash over his head on to the middle wicket, when he had made his first half century; that was Easu; and Easu stumped him out in the second innings, for twenty.

Nevertheless, the Reds were beaten by a margin of sixteen runs before the parson and the gentlemen in top hats set off for their long and dusty ride to York.

III

Jack hated the Reds with all the wholesale hatred of eighteen. There they were, all of them, swaggering round as if the place belonged to them, taking everything and giving nothing. Their peculiar air of assertion was particularly maddening, in contrast with the complete lack of assumption on the part of the other Australians. It was as if the Reds had made up their minds, all of them, to leave a bruise on everything they touched. They were all big men, and older than Jack. Easu must have been over thirty, and unmarried, with a bad reputation among the women of the colony. Yet, apparently, he could always find a girl. That slow, laconic assurance of his, his peculiar, meaning smile as he drifted up loose-jointed to a girl, seemed nearly always to get through. The women

watched him out of the corner of their eye. They didn't like him. But they felt his power. And that was perhaps even more effective.

For he had power. And this was what Jack felt lacking in himself. Jack had quick, intuitive understanding, and a quick facility. But he had not Easu's power. Sometimes Easu could look really handsome, strolling slowly across to some girl with a peculiar rolling gait that distinguished him, and smiling that little, meaningful, evil smile. Then he looked handsome, and as if he belonged to another race of men, men who were like small-headed demons out to destroy the world.

"I'm fighting him," thought Jack. "I wouldn't have a good opinion of myself if I didn't."

For he saw in Easu a malevolent principle, a kind of venom.

Ross Ellis, the youngest of the Reds, was old enough to be joining the mounted police force in a few days, and Mr. Ellis had sent up a strong chestnut mount for him, from the coast. Easu, tall, broad, sinewy, with sinewy powerful legs and small buttocks, was sitting close on the prancing chestnut, showing off, his malevolence seeming to smile under his blond beard, and his blue, rivet eyes taking in everything. All the time he went fooling the simple farmers who had come to the sports, raising a laugh where he could, and always a laugh of derision.

"Tom," said Jack at last, "couldn't you boss it a bit over those Reds? It's your place, it's your house, not theirs. Go on, put them down a bit, do."

"Aw," said Tom. "They're older'n me, and the place by rights belongs to them: leastways they think so. And they are crack sportsmen."

"Why, they're not! Look at Easu parading on that police horse your father sent up from the coast! And look at all the other cockeys getting ready to compete against him in the riding events. They haven't a chance, and he knows it."

"He won't risk taking that police horse over the jumps, don't you fret."

"No, but he has the pick of your stable, and he'll beat all the others while you stand idling by. Why should he be cock of the walk?"

"Why," cried Lennie breaking in, "I could beat anyfin' on Lucy. But Tom won't let me go in against the other chaps, will you, Tom?"

Tom smiled. He had a plain brick-red face, patient and unchanging, with white teeth, and brown, sensitive eyes. When he smiled he had a great charm. But he did not often smile, and his mouth was marred by the look so many men develop in Australia, facing the bush: that lipless look, which Jack, as he grew more used to it, came to call the suffering look. As if they had bitten and been bitten hard, perhaps too hard.

"Well, Nipper," he said after a moment's hesitation; "if you finds them

Waybacks has it between 'em, you stand out. But y'c'n have Lucy if you like, an' if y' beat the Reds — y'c'n beat 'em."

"That's what I mean all right!" cried Lennie, capering. "I savvy O. K. I'll give 'em googlies and sneaks an' legbreaks, y' see if I don't, an' even up for 'em."

IV

Monica came up and took Jack's arm with sudden impulsive affection, on this very public day. Drawing him away, she said:

"Come and sit down a bit under the Bay Fig, Jack. I want to rest. All these people tearing us in two from morning till night."

Jack found himself thrilling to the girl's touch, to his own surprise and disgust. He flushed slowly, and went on stiff legs, hoping nobody was looking at him. Nobody was looking specially, of course. But Monica kept hold of his arm, with her light, tense girlish hand, and he found it difficult to walk naturally. And again the queer electric thrills went through him, from that light blade of her hand.

She was very lovely to-day, with a sort of winsomeness, a sort of fierce appeal. As a matter of fact, she had been flirting dangerously with Red Easu, till she was a bit scared. And she had been laughing and fooling with Hal Stockley — otherwise Pink-eye Percy — whom all the girls were mad about, but who didn't affect her seriously. Easu affected her, though. And she didn't really like him. That was why she had come for Jack, whom she liked very much indeed. She felt so safe and happy with him. And she loved his delicate, English, virgin quality, his shyness and natural purity. He was purer than she was. So she wanted to make him in love with her. She was sure he was in love with her. But it was such a shy, unwilling love, she was half annoyed.

So she leaned forward to him, with her fierce young face and her queer, yellow, glowering eyes, not far from his, and she seemed to yearn to him with a yearning like a young leopard. Sometimes she touched his hand, and sometimes, laughing and showing her small, pointed teeth winsomely, she would look straight into his eyes, as if searching for something. And he flushed with a dazed sort of delight, unwilling to be overpowered by the new delight, yet dazed by it, even to the point of forgetting the other people and the party, and Easu on the chestnut horse.

But he made no move. When she touched his hand, though his eyes shone with a queer suffused light, he would not take her hand in his. He would not

touch her. He would not make any definite response. To all she said, he answered in simple monosyllables. And there he sat, suffused with delight, yet making no move whatsoever.

Till at last Monica, who was used to defending herself, was niffed. She thought him a muff. So she suddenly rose and left him. Went right away. And he was very much surprised and chagrined, feeling that somehow it wasn't possible, and feeling as if the sun had gone out of the sky.

V

The sun really was low in the heavens. The breeze came at last from the sea and freshened the air and lifted the sweet crushed scent of the trampled dry grass. It was time for the last events of the sports. Everybody was eager, revived by the approach of evening, and Jack felt the drunkenness of new delight upon him. He was still vague, however, and unwilling even to think of Monica, much less seek her out.

The black-boys' event, with unbroken buckjumpers, was finishing down by the river. Joe Low, with a serious face but sparkling eyes, went riding by on a brumby colt he had caught and broken himself. Jack sat alone under a tree, waiting for the flat race, in which he was entered, and feeling sure of himself.

Easu came dancing up on the raw chestnut that had been sent up from the coast along with the police horse. He wore spurs, and had a long parrot-feather in his hat.

"Here you young Pommy Grant," he said to Jack. "Ketch hold of me bit while I fix me girths a bit tighter, and then you c'n hold your breath while I show them Cornseeds what."

He had a peculiarly insolent manner towards Jack. The latter nevertheless held the frothy chestnut while Easu swung out of the saddle and hitched up the girth. As he bent there beside the horse, Jack noticed his broad shoulders and narrow waist and small hard, tense hips. Yes, he was a man. But ugh! what an objectionable one! Especially the slight hateful smile of derision on the red face and in the light-blue, small-pupilled eyes.

But he clipped into the saddle again, and once more it was impossible not to admire his seat, his close, fine, clean, small seat in the saddle. There was no spread about him there. And the power of the long, muscular thighs. Then once more he dismounted, leaving Jack to hold the bridle of the chestnut whilst he himself strolled away.

The other farmers were waiting on their horses, so serious and quiet: in their patience and unobtrusiveness, so gentlemanly, Jack thought. So unlike the assertive, jeering Easu.

Lennie came up and whipped the pin out of Jack's favour. It was a rosette of yellow ribbon, shiny as a buttercup, that Monica had made him.

"Here, what're you doing!" he cried.

"Aw, shut it. Keep still!" said Lennie.

And slipping round, he pushed the pin, point downward, into the back saddle-pad of the chestnut Jack was holding. That wasn't fair. But Jack let be.

The judge called his warning, the Cornseeds lined up, along with Joe Low and a young yellow-faced dairyman and a slender skin-hunter, and a woolly old stockman. Easu came and took his chafing horse, but did not mount.

"One!" Easu swung up, standing in his stirrups, scarce touching the saddle-seat.

"Two! Three!" and the sharp crack of a pistol.

Away went the scraggy brumby and Joe, and like a torrent, the dairyman and the skin-hunter and the stockman. But the chestnut had never heard a pistol shot before, and was jumping round wildly.

"Blood and pace, mark you;" said the judge, waving towards the chestnut. "Them cockeys does their best on what they got, but watch that chestnut under Red Ellis. It's a pleasure to see good horse-flesh like them Ellises brings up to these parts."

Easu, seeing the field running well and far ahead, wheeled his mount on to the track at that minute, and sat down.

The chestnut sat up, stopped, bucked, threw Easu, and then galloped madly away. It was all so sudden and somehow unnatural, that everybody was stunned. Easu rose and stared, with hell in his face, after the running chestnut. People began to laugh aloud.

"Oh, Gawd my fathers!" murmured Tom in Jack's ear. "Think of Easu getting a toss! Easu letting any horse get the soft side of him! Oh, my Gawd, if I'm not sorry for Easu when that crowd o' Reds sets on to him with their tongues to-morrow."

"I'm jolly glad," said Jack complacently.

"So am I," said Lennie. "An' I did it, an' I wish it had killed him. I put a pin under the saddle-crease, Tom. Don't look at me, y'needn't. I've had one up again 'im for a long time, for Jack's sake. D'y' know what he did? He put Jack on that Stampede stallion, when Jack hadn't been on our place a fortnight. So he did. An' if Jack had been killed, who'd ha' called him a murderer? Zah, one of the blacks, told me. And nobody durst tell you, cos they durstn't."

“On Stampede!” exclaimed Tom, going yellow, and hell coming into his brown eyes. “An’ a new chum my father trusted to him to show him round.”

“Oh well,” said Jack.

“The sod!” said Tom: and that was final.

Then after a moment:

“If the Reds is going over the jumps, you go and get Lucy, Len.”

“I likes your sperrit, Tom. I was goin’ to anyway, case they get that dark ‘oss.” Lennie threw off his coat, hat, and tie, then sat on the trodden brown grass to take off his boots and stockings. Thus stripped, he stood up and hitched his braces looser, remarking:

“Jack Grant said he’d bash Easu’s head for ‘im if he said anything to me after I beat ‘im over the jumps, so I was goin’ to risk it anyway.”

Jack had said no such thing, but was prepared to take the hint.

The chestnut had been caught and tied up. Down the field they could see Easu persuading Sept to ride a smart piebald filly that had been brought in. Sept was the thinnest of the Reds. The jumping events continued away on the left, the sun was almost setting.

“Hurry up there for the final!” called the judge.

Sept came up on the delicate piebald filly which they had brought over from their own place. She was dark chestnut, and with flames of pure white, she seemed dazzling.

“That’s the dark ‘oss I mentioned!” said Len. “Gosh, but me heart is beatin’! It’ll be a real match between me and him, for that there filly can jump like a ‘roo, I’ve watched ‘er.”

Joe Low rode up to the jumping yard, and lifted his brumby over. The filly danced down and followed. Lennie was in the saddle like a cat and Lucy went over the rail without effort.

When the rail was at five feet two, Joe Low’s brumby was done. Lucy clipped the rail and the filly cleared it. Sept brought his creature round to the judge, with raised eyebrows.

“No y’ don’t,” yelled Lennie, riding down the track hell for leather, and Lucy went over like a swallow: Sept laughed, and came down to the rail that was raised an inch. The filly sailed it, but hit the bar. Lucy baulked. Len swung her round and came again. A perfect over.

Next! The filly, snorting and frothing, tore down, jibbed, and was sworn at loudly by Easu standing near. Sept whipped and spurred her over.

But at that rail, raised to five feet nine, she would not be persuaded, though Lucy cleared it with a curious casual ease. The filly would not take it.

“Say, Mister!” called Lennie when he knew he was winner. “Raise that barrier

five inches and see us bound it.”

He made his detour, brought Lucy along on twinkling feet, and cleared it prettily.

The roar of delight from the crowd sent Easu mad. Jack kept an eye on him, in case he meant mischief. But Easu only went away to where the niggers were still trying out the buckjumpers. Taking hold of a huge rogue of a mare, he sprang on her back and came bucking all along the track, apparently to give a specimen of horsemanship. The crowd watched the queer massive pulsing up and down of the man and the powerful, bucking horse, all in a whirl of long hair, like some queer fountain of life. And there was Monica watching Easu’s cruel, changeless face, that seemed to have something fixed and eternal in it, amid all that heaving.

Jack felt he had a volcano inside him. He knew that Stampede had been caught again, and was being led about down there, securely roped, as part of the show. Down there among the outlaws.

Away ran Jack. Anything rather than be beaten by Easu. But as he ran, he kept inside him that queer little flame of white-hot calm which was his invincibility.

He patted Stampede’s arching neck, and told Sam to saddle him. Sam showed the whites of his eyes, but obeyed, and Stampede took it. Jack stood by, intense in his own cool calmness. He didn’t care what happened to him. If he was to be killed he would be killed. But at the same time, he was not reckless. He watched the horse with mystical closeness, and glanced over the saddle and bridle to see if they were all right.

Then, swift and light, he mounted and knew the joy of being a horseman, the thrill of being a real horseman. He had the gift, and he knew it. If not the gift of sheer power, like Easu, who seemed to overpower his horse as he rode it; Jack had the gift of adjustment. He adjusted himself to his horse. Intuitively, he yielded to Stampede, up to a certain point. Beyond that certain flexible point, there would be no yielding, none, and never.

Jack came bucking along in Easu’s wake, on a much wilder horse. But though Stampede was wild and wicked, he never exerted his last efforts. He bucked like the devil. But he never let himself altogether go. And Jack seemed to be listening with an inward ear to the animal, listening to its passion. After all it was a live creature, to be mastered, but not to be overborne. Intuitively, the boy gave way to it as much as possible. But he never for one moment doubted his own mastery over it. In his mastery there must be a living tolerance. This his instinct told him. And the stallion, bucking and sitting up, seemed somehow to accept it.

For after all, if the horse had gone really wicked, absolutely wicked, it would have been too much for Master Jack. What he depended on was the bit of response the animal was capable of. And this he knew.

He found he could sit the stallion with much greater ease than before. And that strange, powerful life beneath him and between his thighs, heaving and breaking like some enormous alive wave, exhilarated him with great exultance, the exultance in the power of life.

Monica's eyes turned from the red, fixed, overbearing face of Easu, to the queer, abstract, radiant male face of Jack, and a great pang went through her heart, and a cloud came over her brow. The boy balanced on the trembling, spurting stallion, looking down at it with dark-blue, wide, dark-looking eyes, and thinking of nothing, yet feeling so much; his face looking soft and warm with a certain masterfulness that was more animal than human, like a centaur, as if he were one blood with the horse, and had the centaur's superlative horse-sense, its non-human power, and wisdom of hot blood-knowledge. She watched the boy, and her brow darkened and her face was fretted as if she were denied something. She wanted to look again at Easu, with his fixed hard will that excited her. But she couldn't. The queer soft power of the boy was too much for her, she could not save herself.

So they rode, the two men, and all the people watched them, as the sun went down in the wild empty sea westward from hot Australia.

CHAPTER IX

NEW YEAR'S EVE

I

New Year's Eve was celebrated Scotch style, at Wandoo. It was already night, and Jack and Tom had been round seeing if the visitors had everything they wanted. Ma and a few select guests were still in the kitchen. The cold collation in the parlour still waited majestically. The twins and Harry were no longer visible: they had subsided on their stomachs by the wood-pile, in the hot evening, and found refuge in sleep; for all the world like sailors sunk dilapidated and demoralised after a high old spree. But Ellie and Baby were at their zenith. Having been kept out of the ruck most carefully upstairs, they were now produced at their best. Mr. Ellis was again away in Perth, seeing the doctor.

Tom and Jack went into the loft and changed into clean white duck. They came forth like new men, jerking their arms in the stiff starched sleeves. And they proceeded to light the many chinese lanterns hung in the barn, till the great place was mellow with soft light. Already in the forenoon they had scraped candle ends on the floor, and rubbed them in. Now they rubbed in the wax a little more, to get the proper slipperiness.

The light brought the people, like moths. Of course the Reds were there, brazen as brass. They too had changed into white suits, tight round the calf and hollow at the waist, and, for the moment, with high collars rising to their ears above the black cravats. Also they sported elastic-sided boots of patent leather, whereas most of the other fellows were in their heavy hob-nailed boots, nicely blacked, indeed, but destitute of grace. With their hair brushed down in a curl over their foreheads, and their beards brushed apart, their strong sinewy bodies filling out the white duck, they felt absolutely invincible, and almost they looked it. For Jack was growing blind to the rustic absurdities, blinded by the animal force of these Australians.

Jack sat down by Herbert, who was pleasant and mild after his illness, always a little shy with the English boy. But the other Reds had taken possession of the place. Their bounce and brass were astounding. Jack watched them in wonder at their aggressive self-assertion. They were real bounders, more crude and more

bouncy than ever the Old Country could produce. But that was Australian. The bulk of the people, perhaps, were dumb and unassuming. But there was always a proportion of real brassy bounders, ready to walk over you and jump in your stomach, if you'd let them.

Easu had constituted himself Master of the Ceremonies, and we know what an important post that is, in a country beanfeast. Wherever he was, he must be in the front, bossing and hectoring other people. He had appointed his brothers "stewards." The Reds were to run the show. There was to be but one will: the will of the big, loose-jointed, domineering Easu, with his reddish blonde beard brushed apart and his keen eyes spying everything with a slight jeer.

Most of the guests, of course, were as they had been all day, in their Sunday suits or new dungarees. Joe Low, trim in a clean cotton jacket, sat by the great open doors very, seriously blowing notes out of an old brass cornet, that had belonged to his father, a retired sergeant of the Foot. Near him, a half-caste Huck was sliding a bow up and down a yellow-looking fiddle, while other musicians stood with their instruments under their arms. Outside in the warm night bearded farmers smoked and talked. Mamas sat on the forms round the barn, and the girls, most of them fresh and gay in billowy cotton frocks, clustered around in excitement. It was the great day of all the year.

For the rest, most of the young men were leaning holding up the big timber supports of the barn, or framing the great opening of the sliding doors, which showed the enormous dark gap of the naked night.

Fire-eating Easu waved energetically to Joe, who blew a blast on the cornet. This done, the strong but "common" Australian voice of Easu, shouted effectively:

"Take partners. Get ready for the Grand March."

For of course he plumed himself on doing everything in "style," everything grand and correct, this Australian who so despised the effete Old Country. The rest of the Reds straightaway marched to the sheepish and awkward fellows who stood propped up against any available prop, seized them by the arm, and rushed them up to some equally sheepish maiden. And instead of resenting it, the poor clowns were glad at being forced into company. They grinned and blushed, and the girls giggled and bridled, as they coupled and arranged themselves, two by two, close behind one another.

A blast of music. Easu seized Monica, who was self-consciously waiting on the arm of another young fellow. He just flung his arm round her waist and heaved her to the head of the column. Then the procession set off, Easu in front with his arm round Monica's waist, he shining with his own brass and self-esteem, she looking falsely demure. After them came the other couples, self-

conscious but extremely pleased with themselves, slowly marching round the barn.

Jack, who had precipitated himself into the night rather than be hauled into action by one of the Red stewards, stood and looked on from afar, feeling out of it. He felt out in the cold. He hated Easu's common, gloating self-satisfaction, there at the head with Monica. Red cared nothing about Monica, really. Only she was the star of the evening, the chief girl, so he had got her. She was the chief girl for miles around. And that was enough for Easu. He was determined to leave his mark on her.

After the March, the girls went back to their Mamas, the youths to their shoulder-supports; and following a pause, Easu again came into the middle of the floor, and began bellowing instructions. He was so pleased with the sound of his own voice, when it was lifted in authority. Everybody listened with all their ears, afraid of disobeying Easu.

When the ovation was over, the boldest of the young men made a bee-line for the prettiest girls, and there was a hubbub. In a twinkling any girl whom Jack would have deigned to dance with, was monopolised, only the poorest remained. Meanwhile the stewards were busy sorting the couples into groups.

Jack could not dance. He had not intended to dance. But he didn't at all like being left out entirely, in oblivion as if he did not exist. Not at all. So he drifted towards the group of youths in the doorway. But he slid away again as Ross Ellis plunged in, seized whom he could by the arm, and led them off to the crude and unprepossessing maidens left still unchosen. He felt he would resent intensely being grabbed by the arm and hustled into a partner by one of the Reds.

What was to be done? He seemed to be marooned in his own isolation like some shipwrecked mariner: and he was becoming aware of the size of his own hands and feet. He looked for Tom. Tom was steering a stout but willing mother into the swim, and Lennie, like a faithful little tug, was following in his wake with a gentle but squint-eyed girl.

Jack became desperate. He looked round quickly. Mrs. Ellis was sitting alone on a packing case. At the same moment he saw Ross Ellis bearing down on him with sardonic satisfaction.

Action was quicker than thought. Jack stood bowing awkwardly before his hostess.

"Won't you do me the honour, Mrs. Ellis?"

"Oh, dear me! Oh dear, Jack Grant! But I believe I will. I never thought of such a thing. But why not? Yes, I will, it will give me great pleasure. We shall have to lead off, you know. And I was supposed to lead with Easu, seeing my husband isn't here. But never mind, well lead off, you and I, just as well."

She rose to her feet briskly, seeming young again. Lately Jack thought she seemed always to have some trouble on her mind. For the moment she shook it off.

As for him, he was panic-stricken. He wished he could ascend into heaven; or at least as high as the loft.

“You’ll help me through, marm, won’t you?” he said. “This dance is new to me.”

And he bowed to her, and she bowed to him, and it was horrible. The horrible things people did for enjoyment!

“This dance is new to him,” Mrs. Ellis passed over his shoulder to a pretty girl in pink. “Help him through, Alice.”

Feeling a fool, Jack turned and met a wide smile and a nod. He bowed confusedly.

“I’m your corner,” said the girl. “I’ll pass it on to Monica, she’ll be your vis-à-vis.”

“Pick up partners,” Easu was yelling with his domineering voice. “All in place, please! One more couple! One more couple!” He was at the other end of the barn, coming forward now, looking around like a general. He was coming for his Aunt.

“Ah!” he said when he saw Mrs. Ellis and Jack. “You’re dancing with Jack Grant, Aunt Jane? Thought he couldn’t dance.”

And he straightway turned his back on them, looking for Monica. Monica was standing with a young man from York.

“Monica, I want you,” said Easu. “You can find a girl there,” he said, nodding from the young fellow to a half-caste girl with fuzzy hair. The young fellow went white. But Monica, crossed over to Easu, for she was a wicked little thing, and this evening she was hating Jack Grant, the booby.

“One more couple not needed,” howled Easu. “Top centre. Where are you, Aunt Jane? Couple from here, lower centre, go to third set on left.”

Easu was standing near the top. He stepped backward, and down came his heel on Jack’s foot. Jack got away, but an angry light came into his eyes. His face, however, still kept that cherubic expression characteristic of it, and so ill-fitting his feelings. Easu was staring over the room, and never, even looked round.

“All in place? Music!” cried the M. C.

The music started with a crash and a bang, Mrs. Ellis had seized Jack’s arm and was leading him into the middle of the set.

“Catch hands, Monica,” she said.

He loved Monica’s thin, nervous, impulsive hands. His heart went hot as he

held them. But Monica wouldn't look at him. She looked demurely sideways. But he felt the electric thrill that came to him from her hands, and he didn't want to let go.

She loosed his grasp and pushed him from her.

"Get back to Ma," she whispered. "Corner with Alice."

"Oh, Lor!" thought Jack. For he was cornered and grabbed and twisted by the girl with the wide smile, before he was let go to fall into place beside Ma, panting with a sort of exasperation.

So it continued, grabbing and twisting and twirling, all perfectly ridiculous and undignified. Why, oh, why did human beings do it! Yet it was better than being left out. He was half-pleased with himself.

Something hard and vicious dug him in the ribs. It was the elbow of Easu, who passed skipping like a goat.

Was Easu making a dead set at him? The devil's own anger began to rise in the boy's heart, bringing up with it all the sullen dare-devil that was in him. When he was roused, he cared for nothing in earth or heaven. But his face remained cherubic.

"Follow!" said a gentle voice. Perhaps it was all a mistake. He found himself back by Mrs. Ellis, watching other folks prance. There he stood and mopped his brow, in the hot, hot night. He was wet with sweat all over. But before he could wipe his face the pink Alice had caught and twirled him, taking him unawares. He waited alert. Nothing happened. Actually peace for a few seconds.

The music stopped. Perhaps it was over. Oh, enjoyment! Why did people do such things to enjoy themselves? Only he would have liked to hold Monica's thin, keen hands again. The thin, keen, wild, wistful Monica. He would like to be near her.

Easu was bawling something. Figure Number Two. He could not listen to instructions in Easu's voice.

They were dancing again, and he knew no more than at first what he was doing. All a maze. A natural diffidence and a dislike of being touched by any casual stranger made dancing unpleasant to him. But he kept up. And suddenly he found himself with Monica folded in his arms, and she clinging to him with sudden fierce young abandon. His heart stood still, as he realised that not only did he want to hold her hands — he had thought it was just that; but he wanted to hold her altogether in his arms. Terrible and embarrassing thought! He wished himself on the moon, to escape his new emotions. At the same time there was the instantaneous pang of disappointment as she broke away from him. Why could she not have stayed! And why, oh, why were they both doing this beastly dancing!

He received a clean clear kick on the shin as he passed Easu. Dazed with a confusion of feelings, keenest among which perhaps was anger, he pulled up again beside Ma. And there was Monica suddenly in his arms again.

“You always go again,” he said in a vague murmur.

“What did you say?” she asked archly, as she floated from him, just at the moment when Easu jolted him roughly. Across the little distance she was watching the hot anger in the boy’s confused, dark-blue eyes.

Another pause. More beastly instructions. Different music. Different evolutions.

“Steady, now!” he said to himself, trying to make his way in the new figure. But what work it was! He tried to keep his brain steady. But Ma on his arm was heavy as lead.

And then, with great ease and perfect abandon, in spite of her years, Ma threw herself on his left bosom and reclined in peace there. He was overcome. She seemed absolutely to like resting on his bosom.

“Throw out your right hand, dear boy,” she whispered, and before he knew he had done it, Easu had seized his hand in a big, brutal, bullying grasp, and was grinding his knuckles. And then sixteen people began to spin.

The startled agony of it made a different man of him. For Ma was heavy as a log on his left side, clinging to him as if she liked to cling to his body. He never quite forgave her. And Easu had his unprotected right hand gripped in a vice and was torturing him on purpose with the weight and the grind. Jack’s hands were naturally small, and Easu’s were big. And to be gripped by that great malicious paw was horrible. Oh, the tension, the pain and rage of that giddy-go-rounding, first forward, then abruptly backwards. It broke some of his innocence forever.

But although paralytic with rage when released, Jack’s face still looked innocent and cherubic. He had that sort of face, and that diabolic sort of stoicism. Mrs. Ellis thought: “What a nice kind boy! but late waking up to the facts of life!” She thought he had not even noticed Easu’s behaviour. And again she thought to herself, her husband would be jealous if he saw her. Poor old Jacob! Aloud she said:

“The next is the last figure. You’re doing very well, Jack. You go off round the ring now, handing the ladies first your right and then your left hand.”

He felt no desire to hand anybody his hand. But in the middle of the ring he met Monica, and her slim grasp took his hurt right hand, and seemed to heal it for a moment.

Easu grabbed his arm, and he saw three others, suffering fools gladly, locked arm in arm, playing soldiers, as they called it. Oh, God! Easu, much taller than Jack, was twisting his arm abominably, almost pulling it out of the socket. And

Jack was saving up his anger.

It was over. "That was very kind of you, my dear boy," Mrs. Ellis was saying. "I haven't enjoyed a dance so much for years."

Enjoyed! That ghastly word! Why would people insist on enjoying themselves in these awful ways! Why "enjoy" oneself at all? He didn't see it. He decided he didn't care for enjoyment, it wasn't natural to him. Too humiliating, for one thing.

Twenty steps involved in the black skirts of Mrs. Ellis, and he was politely rid of her. She was very nice. And by some mystery she had really enjoyed herself in this awful melee. He gave it up. She was too distant in years and experience for him to try to understand her. Did these people never have living anger, like a bright black snake with unclosing eyes, at the bottom of their souls? Apparently not.

II

There was an interval in the dancing, and they were having games. Red was of course still bawling out instructions and directions, being the colonel of the feast. He was in his element, playing top sawyer.

The next game was to be "Modern Proposals." It sounded rotten to Jack. Each young man was to make an original proposal to an appointed girl. Great giggling and squirming even at the mention of it.

Easu still held the middle of the floor. Jack thought it was time to butt in. With his hands in his pockets he walked coolly into the middle of the room.

"You people don't know me, and I don't know you," he found himself announcing in his clear English voice. "Supposing I call this game."

Carried unanimously!

The young men lined up, and Easu, after standing loose on his legs for some time just behind Jack, went and sat down somewhat discomfited.

Jack pushed Tom on to his knees before the prettiest girl in the room — the prettiest strange girl, anyhow. Tom, furiously embarrassed on his knees, stammered:

"I say! There's a considerable pile o' socks wantin' darning in my ol' camp. I'd go so far as to face the parson, if you'd do 'em for me."

It was beautifully non-committal. For all the Bushies were at heart terrified lest they might by accident contract a Scotch marriage, and be held accountable for it.

Jack was amused by the odd, humorous expression of the young bush-farmers. Joe Low, scratching his head funnily, said: "I'll put the pot on, if you'll cook the stew." But the most approved proposal was that of a well-to-do young farmer who is now a J. P. and head of a prosperous family.

"Me ol' dad an' me ol' lady, they never had no daughters. They gettin' on well in years, and they kind o' fancy one. I've gotter get 'em one, quick an' lively. I've fifteen head o' cattle an' seventy-six sheep, eighteen pigs an' a fallowin' sow. I've got one hundred an' ninety-nine acres o' cleared land, and ten improved with fruit trees. I've got forty ducks an' hens an' a flock o' geese an' no one home to feed 'em. Meet me Sunday mornin' eight-forty sharp at the cross roads, an' I'll be there in me old sulky to drive y'out an' show y'."

And the girl in pink with the wide smile, answered seriously:

"I will if Mother'll let me, Mr. Burton."

The next girl had been looming up like a big coal-barge. She was a half-caste, of course named Lily, and she sat aggressively forwards, her long elbows and wrists much in evidence, and her pleasant swarthy face alight and eager with anticipation. Oh, these Missioner half-castes!

Jack ordered Easu forward.

But Easu was not to be baited. He strode over, put his hand on the fuzzy head, and said in his strong voice:

"Hump y'r bluey and come home."

The laugh was with him, he had won again.

III

They went down to the cold collation. There Jack found other arrivals. Mary had come in via York with Gran's spinster daughters. Also the Greenlow girls from away back, and they made a great fuss of him. The doctor too turned up. He had been missing all day, but now he strolled back and forth, chatting politely first to one and then another, but vague and washed-out to a degree.

Jack's anger coiled to rest at the supper, for Monica was very attentive to him. She sat next to him, found him the best pieces, and shared her glass with him, in her quick, dangerous, generous fashion, looking up at him with strange wide looks of offering, so that he felt very manly and very shy at the same time. But very glad to be near her. He felt that it was his spell that was upon her, after all, and though he didn't really like flirting with her there in the public supper room, he loved her hand finding his under the cover of her sash, and her fingers

twining into his as if she were entering into his body. Safely under the cover of her silk sash. He would have liked to hold her again, close, close; her agile, live body, quick as a cat's. She was mysterious to him as some cat-goddess, and she excited him in a queer electric fashion.

But soon she was gone again, elusive as a cat. And of course she was in great request. So Jack found himself talking to the little elderly Mary, with her dark animal's museau. Mary was like another kind of cat: not the panther sort, but the quiet, dark, knowing sort. She was comfortable to talk to, also soft and stimulating.

Jack and Mary sat on the edge of the barn, in the hot night, looking at the trees against the strange, ragged southern sky, hearing the frogs occasionally, and fighting the mosquitoes. Mrs. Ellis also sat on the ledge not far off. And presently Jack and Mary were joined by the doctor. Then came Grace and Alec Rice, sitting a little further down, and talking in low tones. The night seemed full of low, half-mysterious talking, in a starry darkness that seemed pregnant with the scent and presence of the black people. Jack often wondered why, in the night, the country still seemed to belong to the black people, with their strange, big, liquid eyes.

Where was Easu? Was he talking to Monica? Or to the black half-caste Lily? It might as well be the one as the other. The odd way he had placed his hand on Lily's black fuzzy head, as if he were master, and she a sort of concubine. She would give him all the submission he wanted.

But then, why Monica? Monica in her white, full-skirted frock with its moulded bodice, her slender, golden-white arms and throat! Why Monica in the same class with the half-caste Lily?

Anger against Easu was sharpening Jack's wits, and curiously detaching him from his surroundings. He listened to the Australian voices and the Australian accent around him. The careless, slovenly speech in the uncontrolled, slack, caressive voices. At first he had thought the accent awful. And it was awful. But gradually, as he got into the rhythm of the people, he began even to sympathise with "Kytie" instead of "Katie." There was an abandon in it all — an abandon of restrictions and confining control. Why have control? Why have authority? Why not let everybody do as they liked? Why not?

That was what Australia was for, a careless freedom. An easy, unrestricted freedom. At least out in the bush. Every man to do as he liked. Easu to run round with Monica, or with the black Lily, or to kick Jack's shins in the dance.

Yes, even this. But Jack had scored it up. He was going to have his own back on Easu. He thought of Easu with his hand on the black girl's fuzzy head. That would be just like Easu. And afterwards to want Monica. And Monica wouldn't

really mind about the black girl. Since Easu was Easu.

Sitting there on the barn ledge, Jack in a vague way understood it all. And in a vague way tolerated it all. But with a dim yet fecund germ of revenge in his heart. He was not morally shocked. But he was going to be revenged. He did not mind Easu's running with a black girl, and afterwards Monica. Morally he did not mind it. But physically — perhaps pride of race — he minded. Physically he could never go so far as to lay his hand on the darky's fuzzy head. His pride of blood was too intense.

He had no objection at all to Lily, until it came to actual physical contact. And then his blood recoiled with old haughtiness and pride of race. It was bad enough to have to come into contact with a woman of his own race: to have to give himself away even so far. The other was impossible.

And yet he wanted Monica. But he knew she was fooling round with Easu. So deep in his soul formed the motive of revenge.

There are times when a flood of realisation and purpose sweeps through a man. This was one of Jack's times. He was not definitely conscious of what he realised and of what he purposed. Yet, there it was, resolved in him.

He was trying not to hear Dr. Rackett's voice talking to Mary. Even Dr. Rackett was losing his Oxford drawl, and taking on some of the Australian ding-dong. But Rackett, like Jack, was absolutely fixed in his pride of race, no matter what extraneous vice he might have. Jack had a vague idea it was opium. Some chemical stuff.

“. . . free run of old George's books? I should say it was a doubtful privilege for a young lady. But you hardly seem to belong to West Australia. I think England is really your place. Do you actually want to belong, may I ask?"

"To Western Australia? To the country, yes, very much. I love the land, the country life, Dr. Rackett. I don't care for the social life of a town like Perth. But I should like to live all my life on a farm — in the bush."

"Would you now!" said Rackett. "I wonder where you get that idea from. You are the granddaughter of an earl."

"Oh, my grandfather is farther away from me than the moon. You would never know how far!" laughed Mary. "No, I am colonial born and bred. Though of course there is a fascination about the English. But I hardly knew Papa. He was a tenth child, so there wasn't much of the earldom left to him. And then he was a busy A.D.C. to the Governor-General. And he married quite late in life. And then Mother died when I was little, and I got passed on to Aunt Matilda. Mother was Australian born. I don't think there is much English in me."

Mary said it in a queer complacent way, as if there were some peculiar, subtle antagonism between England and the colonial, and she was ranged on the

colonial side. As if she were a subtle enemy of the father, the English father in her.

“Queer! Queer thing to me!” said Rackett, as if he half felt the antagonism. For he would never be colonial, not if he lived another hundred years in Australia. “I suppose,” he added, pointing his pipe stem upwards, “it comes from those unnatural stars up there. I always feel they are doing something to me.”

“I don’t think it’s the stars,” laughed Mary. “I am just Australian, in the biggest part of me, that’s all.”

Jack could feel in the statement some of the antagonism that burned in his own heart, against his own country, his own father, his own empty fate at home.

“If I’d been born in this country, I’d stick to it,” he broke in.

“But since you weren’t born in it, what will you do, Grant?” asked the doctor ironically.

“Stick to myself,” said Jack stubbornly, rather sulkily.

“You won’t stick to Old England then?” asked Rackett.

“Seems I’m a misfit in Old England,” said Jack. “And I’m not going to squeeze my feet into tight boots.”

Rackett laughed.

“Rather go barefoot like Lennie?” he laughed.

Jack relapsed into silence, and turned a deaf ear, looking into the alien night of the southern hemisphere. And having turned a deaf ear to Rackett and Mary, he heard, as if by divination, the low voice of Alec Rice proposing in real earnest to Grace: proposing in a low, urgent voice that sounded like a conspiracy.

He rose to go away. But Mary laid a detaining hand on his arm, as if she wished to include him in the conversation, and did not wish to be left alone with Dr. Rackett.

“Don’t you sympathise with me, Jack, for wishing I had been a boy, to make my own way in the world, and have my own friends, and size things up for myself?”

“Seems to me you do size things up for yourself,” said Jack rather crossly. “A great deal more than most men do.”

“Yes, but I can’t do things as I could if I were a man.”

“What can a man do, then, more than a woman — that’s worth doing?” asked Rackett.

“He can see the world, and love as he wishes to love, and work.”

“No man can love as he wishes to love,” said Rackett. “He’s nearly always stumped, in the love game.”

“But he can choose!” persisted Mary.

And Jack with his other ear was hearing Alec Rice’s low voice persisting.

“Go on, Grace, you’re not too young: You’re just right. You’re just the ticket now. Go on, let’s be engaged and tell your Dad and fix it up. We’re meant for one another, you know we are. Don’t you think we’re meant for one another?”

“I never thought about it that way, truly.”

“But don’t you think so now? Yes, you do.”

Silence — the sort that gives consent. And the silence of a young, spontaneous embrace.

Jack was on tenterhooks. He wanted to be gone. But Mary was persisting, in her obstinate voice — he wished she’d shut up too.

“I wanted to be a sailor at ten, and an explorer at twelve. At nineteen I wanted to become a painter of wonderful pictures.” Jack wished she wouldn’t say all this. “And then I had a streak of humility, and wanted to be a gardener. Yet — —” she laughed, “not a sort of gardener such as Aunt Matilda hires. I wanted to grow things and see them come up out of the earth. And see baby chicks hatched, and calves and lambs born.”

She had lifted her hand from Jack’s sleeve, to his relief. “And marry a farmer like Tom,” he said roughly. Mary received this with dead silence.

“And drudge your soul away like Mrs. Ellis,” said Rackett. “Worn out before your time, between babies and heavy housework. Groping on the earth all your life, grinding yourself into ugliness at work which some animal of a servant-lass would do with half the effort. Don’t you think of it, Miss Mary. Let the servant-lasses marry the farmers. You’ve got too much in you. Don’t go and have what you’ve got in you trampled out of you by marrying some cocky farmer. Tom’s as good as gold, but he wants a brawny lass of his own sort for a wife. You be careful, Miss Mary. Women can find themselves in ugly harness, out here in these god-forsaken colonies. Worse harness than any you’ve ever kicked against.”

Monica seemed to have scented the tense atmosphere under the barn, for she appeared like a young witch, in a whirlwind.

“Hullo, Mary! Hullo, Dr. Rackett! It’s just on midnight.” And she flitted over to Grace. “Just on midnight, Grace and Alec. Are you coming? You seem as if you were fixed here.”

“We’re not fixed on the spot, but we’re fixed up all right, otherwise,” said Alec, in a slight tone of resentment, as he rose from Grace’s side.

“Oh, have you and Grace fixed it up!” exclaimed Monica, with a false vagueness and innocence. “I’m awfully glad. I’m awfully glad, Grace.”

“I am,” said Grace, with a faint touch of resentment, and she rose and took Alec’s arm.

They were already like a married couple armed against that witch. Had she

been flirting with Alec, and then pushed him over on to Grace? Jack sensed it with the sixth sense which divines these matters.

Monica appeared at his side.

“It’s just twelve. Come and hold my hand in the ring. Mary can hold your other hand. Come on! Come on, Alec, as well. I don’t want any strangers next to me to-night.”

Jack smiled sardonically to himself as she impulsively caught hold of his hand. Monica was “a circumstance over which we have no control,” Lennie said. Jack felt that he had a certain control.

They all took hands as she directed, and moved into the barn to link up with the rest of the chain. There in the soft light of the big chamber, Easu suddenly appeared, without collar or cravat, his hair ruffled, his white suit considerably creased. But he lurched up in his usual aggressive way, with his assertive good humour, demanding to break in between Jack and Monica. Jack held on, and Monica said:

“You mustn’t break in, you know it makes enemies.”

“Does it!” grinned Easu. And with sardonic good humour he lurched away to an unjoined part of the ring. He carried about with him a sense of hostile power. But Jack was learning to keep within himself another sort of power, small and concentrated and fixed like a stone, the sort of power that ultimately would break through the bulk of Easu’s domineering.

The ring complete at last, they all began to sing: “Cheer, Boys, Cheer!” and “God Bless the Prince of Wales,” “John Brown’s Body,” and “Britons, Never, Never, Never.”

Then Easu bawled: “Midnight!” There was a moment’s frightened pause. Joe Low blasted on the cornet, his toe beating time madly all the while. Fiddles, whistles, concertinas, Jew’s harps raggedly began to try out the tune. The clasped hands began to rock, and taking Easu’s shouting lead, they all began to sing, in the ring:

“Should auld acquaintance be forgot,
An’ never brought to min’?
Should auld acquaintance be forgot,
And days of auld lang syne?
“For auld lang syne, my dear,
For auld lang syne,
We’ll tak’ a cup o’ kindness yet
For days of auld lang syne.”

They all sang heartily and with feeling. There was a queer Scottish tang in the colony, that made the Scottish emotion dominant. Jack disliked it. There was no

auld acquaintance, or auld lang syne, at least for him. And he didn't care for these particular cups of kindness, in one ring with Easu, black Lily, Dr. Rackett and Monica, and all. He didn't like the chain of emotion and supposed pathetic clanship. It was worse here even than on shipboard.

Why start the New Year like this? As a matter of fact he wanted to forget most of his own Auld Acquaintance, and start something a little different. And any rate, the emotion was spurious, the chain was artificial, the flow was false.

Monica seemed to take a wicked pleasure in it, and sang more emotionally than anybody, in a sweet but smallish voice. And poor little Mary, with her half-audible murmur, had her eyes full of tears and seemed so moved.

Auld lang syne!

Old Long Since.

Why not put it in plain English?

IV

The celebration did not end with Auld Lang Syne. By half-past two most of the ladies had retired, though some ardent dancers still footed the floor, and a chaperone or two, like crumpled rag-bags, slept on their boxes. A good number of young men and boys were asleep with Herbert on the sacks, handkerchiefs knotted round their throats in place of collars. The concertina, the cornet, the fiddles and the rest of the band had gone down to demolish the remains of the cold collation, whilst Tom, Ross, and Ned sat on the barn step singing as uproariously as they could, though a little hoarse, for the last dancers to dance to. Someone was whistling very sweetly.

Where was Easu? Jack wondered as he wandered aimlessly out into the night. Where was Easu? For Jack had it on his mind that he ought to fight him. Felt he would be a coward if he didn't tackle him this very night.

But it was three o'clock, the night was very still and rich, still warm, rather close, but not oppressive. The strange heaviness of the hot summer night, with the stars thick in clouds and clusters overhead, the moon being gone. Jack strayed aimlessly through the motionless, dark, warm air, till he came to the paddock gate, and there he leaned with his chin on his arms, half asleep. It seemed to be growing cooler, and a dampness was bringing out the scent of the scorched grass, the essence of the earth, like incense. There was a half-wild bush with a few pale pink roses near the gate. He could just get their fragrance. If it were as it should be, Monica would be here, in one of her wistful, her fiercely

wistful moments! When she looked at him with her yellow eyes and her fierce, naive look of yearning, he was ready to give all his blood to her. If things were as they should be, she would be clinging to him now like that, and nestling against his breast. If things were as they should be!

He didn't want to go to sleep. He wanted what he wanted. He wanted the night, the young, changeable, yearning Monica, and an answer to his own awake young blood. He insisted on it. He would not go to sleep, he would insist on an answer. And he wanted to fight Easu. He ought to fight Easu. His manhood depended on it.

He could hear the cattle stirring down the meadow. Soon it would begin to be day. What was it now? It was night, dark night towards morning, with a faint breathing of air from the sea. And where was he? He was in Australia, leaning on the paddock gate and seeing the stars and the dim shape of the gum-tree. There was a faint scent of eucalyptus in the night. His mother was far away. England was far away. He was alone there leaning on the paddock gate, in Australia.

After all, perhaps the very best thing was to be alone. Better even than having Monica or fighting Easu. Because where you are alone you are at one with your own God. The spirit in you is God in you. And when you are alone you are one with the spirit of God inside you. Other people are chiefly an interruption.

And moreover, he could never say he was lonely while he was at Wandoo, while there were Tom and Lennie, and Monica, and all the rest. He hoped he would have them all his life. He hoped he would never, in all his life, say good-bye to them.

No, he would take up land as near this homestead as possible and build a brick house on it. And he would have a number of fine horses, better than anyone else's, and some sheep that would pay, and a few cows. Always milk and butter with the wheat-meal damper.

What was that? Only a more-pork. He laid his head on his arms again, on the gate. He wanted a place of his own, now. He would have it now if he had any money. And marry Monica. Would he marry Monica? Would he marry anybody? He much preferred the whole family. But he wanted a place of his own. If he could hurry up his father. And old Mr. George. He might persuade Mr. George to be on his side. Why was there never any money? No money! A father ought to have some money for a son.

What was that? He saw a dim white figure stealing across the near distance. Pah! must have been a girl sitting out under the photosphorum tree. When he had thought he was quite alone.

The thought upset him. And he ought to find Easu. Obstinate he insisted to

himself that he ought to find Easu.

He drifted towards the shed near the cubby, where Mr. Ellis kept the tools. Somebody unknown and unauthorised had put a barrel of beer inside the shed. Men were there drinking, as he knew they would be.

“Have a pot, youngster?”

“Thanks.”

He sat down on a case beside the door, and drank the rather warm beer. His head began to drop. He knew he was almost asleep.

Easu loomed up from the dark, coatless, hatless, with his shirt front open, asking for a drink. He was thirsty. Easu was thirsty. How could you be angry with a thirsty man! And he wasn't so bad after all. No, Easu wasn't so bad after all! What did it matter! What did it all matter, anyhow?

Jack slipped to the ground and lay there fast asleep.

CHAPTER X

SHADOWS BEFORE

I

But in the morning memory was back, and the unquenched smouldering of passion. Easu had insulted him. Easu had insulted him, and that should never be forgiven. And he had this new, half painful, more than half painful desire to see Monica, to be near her, to touch her hand; a sort of necessity, upon him all the while which he was not used to. It made him restless, uneasy, and for the first time in his life, a little melancholy. He was used to feeling angry: a steady, almost blithe sort of anger. And beyond that he had always been able to summon up an indifference to things, cover them with oblivion: to retreat upon himself and insulate himself from contact.

Now he could no longer do this, and it fretted him, made him accessible to melancholy. The hot, hot January days, all dry flaming heat, and flies, and mosquitoes, passed over him leaving him strange even to himself. There was work, the drudging work of the farm, all the while. And one just sweated. He learned to submit to it, to the sweating all the time during the day, and the mosquitoes at night. It was like a narcotic. The old, English alertness grew darker and darker. He seemed to be moving, a dim consciousness and an unyielding will, in a dark cloud of heat, in a perspiring, dissolving body. He could feel his body, the English cool body of his being, slowly melting down and being invaded by a new tropical quality. Sometimes, he said to himself, he was sweating his soul away. That was how it felt: as if he were sweating his soul away. And he let his soul go, let it slowly melt away out of his wet, hot body.

Any man who has been in the tropics, unless he has kept all his mind and his consciousness focussed homewards, fixed towards the old people of home, will know how this feels. Now Jack did not turn homewards, back to England. He never wanted to go back. There was in him a slow, abiding anger against this same "home." Therefore he let himself go down the dark tide of the heat. He did not cling on to his old English soul, the soul of an English gentleman. He let that dissolve out of him, leaving what residuum of a man it might leave. But out of

very obstinacy he hung on to his own integrity: a small, dark, obscure integrity.

Usually he was too busy perspiring, panting, and working to think about anything. His mind also seemed dissolving away in perspiration and in the curious eucalyptus solvent of the Australian air. He was too busy and too much heat-oppressed even to think of Monica or of Easu, though Monica was a live wire in his body. Only on Sundays he seemed to come half out of his trance. And then everything went queer and strange, a little uncanny.

Dad was back again for the harvest, but his heart was no better, and a queer frightening cloud seemed over him. And Gran, they said, was failing. Somehow Gran was the presiding deity of the house. Her queer spirit controlled, even now. And she was failing. She adored Lennie, but he was afraid of her.

“Gran’s the limit,” he asserted. “She’s that wilful. Always the same with them women when they gets well on in years. I clear out from her if I can, she’s that obstropulous — tells y’t’wipe y’nose, pull up y’pants, brush y’tooth, not sniff: golly, I can’t stand it!”

Sunday was the day when you really came into contact with the family. The rule was, that each one took it in turns to get up and make breakfast, while everybody else stayed on in bed, for a much-needed rest. If it was your turn, you rolled out of bed at dawn when Timothy banged on the wall, you slipped on your shirt and pants and went to the “everlasting” fire. Raking the ashes together with a handful of sticks, you blew a blaze and once more smelt the burning eucalyptus leaves. You filled the black iron kettle at the pump, and set it over the flame. Then you washed yourself. After which you carved bread and butter: tiny bits for Gran, moderate pieces for upstairs, and doorsteps for the cubby. After which you made the tea, and holloa’d! while you poured it out. One of the girls, with a coat over her nighty and her hair in a chignon, would come barefoot to carry the trays, to Gran and to the upstairs. This was just the preliminary breakfast: the Sunday morning luxury. Just tea in bed.

Later the boys were shouting for clean shirts and towels, and the women were up. Proceeded the hair-cutting, nail-paring, button-sewing, and general murmur, all under the supervision of Ma. Then down to the sand-bagged pool for a dip. After which, clean and in clean raiment, you went to the parlour to hear Dad read the lessons.

The family Bible was carefully kept warm in the parlour, during the week, under a woollen crochet mat. A crochet mat above, and a crochet mat below. Nothing must ever stand on that book, nothing whatever. The children were quite superstitious about it.

Lennie, the Benjamin of his father Jacob, each Sunday went importantly into the drawing-room, in a semi-religious silence, and fetched the ponderous brass-

bound book. He put it on the table in front of Dad. Gran came in with her stick and her lace cap, and sat in the arm-chair near the window. Mrs. Ellis and the children folded their hands like saints. Mr. Ellis wiped his spectacles, cleared his throat, looked again at the little church calendar of the lessons, found the place, and proceeded in a droning voice. Nobody looked at him, except Mrs. Ellis. Everybody looked another way. Gran usually gazed sideways at the floor. Tick, tock! went the clock. It was a little eternity.

Jack knew the Bible pretty well, as a well-brought-up nephew of his Aunts. He had no objection to the Bible. On the contrary it supplied his imagination with a chief stock of images, his ear with the greatest solemn pleasure of words, and his soul with a queer heterogeneous ethic. He never really connected the Bible with Christianity proper, the Christianity of Aunts and clergymen. He had no use for Christianity proper: just dismissed it. But the Bible was perhaps the foundation of his consciousness. Do what seems good to you in the sight of the Lord. This was the moral he always drew from Bible lore. And since the Lord, for him, was always the Lord Almighty, Almighty God, Maker of Heaven and Earth, Jesus being only a side-issue; since the Lord was always Jehovah the great and dark, for him, one might do as David did, in the sight of the Lord, or as Jacob, or as Abraham or Moses or Joshua or Isaiah, in the sight of the Lord. The sight of the Lord was a vast strange scope of vision, in the semi-dark.

Gran always listened the same, leaning on her stick and looking sideways to the ground, as if she did not quite see the stout and purple-faced Jacob, her son, as the mouthpiece of the Word. As a matter of fact, the way he read Scripture irritated her. She wished Lennie could have read the lessons. But Dad was head of the house, and she was fond of him, poor old Jacob.

And Jack always furtively watched Gran. She frightened him, and he had a little horror of her: but she fascinated him too. She was like Monica, at the great distance of her years. Her lace cap was snowy white, with little lavender ribbons. Her face was pure ivory, with fine-shaped features, that subtly arched nose, like Monica's. Her silver hair came over her dead-looking ears. And her dry, shiny, blue-veined hand remained fixed over the pommel of her black stick. How awful, how unspeakably awful, Jack felt, to be so old! No longer human. And she seemed so little inside her clothes. And one never knew what she was thinking. But surely some strange, uncanny, dim non-human thoughts.

Sunday was full of strange, half-painful impressions of death and of life. After lessons the boys would escape to the yards, and the stables, and lounge about. Or they would try the horses, or take a gun into the uncleared bush. Then came the enormous Sunday dinner, when everyone ate himself stupid.

In the afternoon Tom and Jack wandered to the loft, to the old concertina. Up

there among the hay, they squeezed and pulled the old instrument, till at last, after much practice, they could draw forth tortured hymnal sounds from its protesting internals.

“Ha-a-appy Ho-ome! Ha-appy Ho-ome!
Oh Haa-py Ho-me! Oh Haa-py Ho-me!
In Paradise with thee!”

Over and over again the same tune, till Tom would drop off to sleep, and Jack would have a go at it. And this yearning sort of hymn always sent a chill to his bowels. They were like Gran, on the brink of the grave. In fact the word Paradise made him shudder worse than the word coffin. Yet he would grind away at the tune. Till he too fell asleep.

And then they would wake in the heat to the silence of the suspended, fiercely hot afternoon. Only to feel their own sweat trickling, and to hear the horses, the draft-horses which were in stable for the day, chop-chopping underneath. So, in spite of sweat and heat, another go at the fascinating concertina.

II

One Sunday Jack strolled in an hour early for tea. He had made a mistake, as one does sometimes when one sleeps in the afternoon. Gran was sitting by a little fire in the dark living room. She had to have a little fire to look at. It was like life to her. “Come here, Jack Grant,” she said in her thin, imperious voice. He went on reluctant feet, for he had a dread of her years and her strange femaleness. What did she want of him?

“Did y’hear Mr. George get my son to promise to make a will, when y’were in Perth?”

“No, marm,” said Jack promptly.

“Well, take it from me, if he promised, he hasn’t done it. He never signed a paper in his life, unless it was his marriage register. And but for my driving, he’d never have signed that. Sit down!”

Jack sat on the edge of a chair, his heart in his boots.

“I told you before I’d ha’ married your grandfather, if he hadn’t been married already. I wonder where you’d ha’ been then! Just as well I didn’t, for he wouldn’t look at me after he took my leg off. Just come here a minute.”

Jack got up and went to her side. She put her soft, dry, dead old hand on his face and stroked it, pressing on the cheekbones.

“Ay,” she said. “I suppose those are his bones again. And my bones are in

Monica. Don't stand up, lad, take your seat."

Jack sat down in extreme discomfort.

"Well," she resumed, "I was very well off with old Ellis, so I won't complain. But you've got your English father's eyes. You'd have been better with mine. Those bones, those beautiful bones, and my sort of eyes."

Gran's eyes were queer and remote now. But they had been perhaps like Monica's, only a darker grey, and with a darker, subtler cat look in them.

"I suppose it will be in the children's children," she resumed, her eyes going out like a candle. "For I married old Ellis, though to this day I never quite believe it. And one thing I do know. I won't die in the dying room of his house. I won't do it, not if it was the custom of a hundred families. Not if he was here himself to see me do it. I wouldn't. Though he was kindness itself. But not if he was here himself, and had the satisfaction of seeing me do it. A dreadful room! I'd be frightened to death to die in it. I like me sheets sun-kissed, heat or no heat, and no sun ever gets into that room. But it's better for a woman to marry, even if she marries the wrong man. I allus said so. An old maid, especially a decayed gentlewoman, is a blight on the face of the earth."

"Why?" said Jack suddenly. The old woman was too authoritative.

"That's why! What do you know about it," she said contemptuously.

"I knew a nice old lady in England, who'd never been married," he said, thinking of a really beautiful, gentle woman, who had kept all her perfume and her charm, in spite of her fifty-odd years of single blessedness. But then she had a naturally deep and religious nature, not like this pagan old cat of a Gran.

"Did you!" said Gran, eying him severely. "What do you know at your age? I've got three unmarried daughters, and I'm ashamed of them. If I'd married your grandfather I never should have had them. Self-centred, and old as old boots, they are. I'd rather they'd gone wrong and died in the bush, like your Aunt who had a child by Mary's father."

Jack made round, English eyes of amazement at this speech. He disapproved thoroughly.

"You've got too much of your English father in you," she said, "and not enough of your hard-hearted grandfather. Look at Lennie, what a beautiful boy he is."

There was a pause. Jack sat in a torment while she baited him. He was full of antagonism towards her and her years.

"But I tell you, you never realise you're old till you see your friends slipping away. One by one they go — over the border. That's what makes you feel old. I tell you. Nothing else. Annie Brockman died the other day. I was at school with her. She wasn't old, though you'd have thought so."

The way Gran said this was quite spiteful. And Jack thought to himself: “What nonsense, she was old if she was at school with Gran. If she was as old as Gran, she was awfully old.”

“No, she wasn’t old — school girls and fellows laughing in the ball room, or breathing fast after a hard ride. You didn’t know Sydney in those days. And men grown old behind their beards for want of understanding; because they’re too dense to understand what living means. Men are dense. Are ye listening?”

The question came with such queer aged force that Jack started almost out of his chair.

“Yes, marm,” he said.

“‘Yes marm!’ he says!” she repeated, with a queer little grin of amusement. “Listen to this grandfather’s chit saying ‘Yes marm!’ to me! Well, they’ll have their way. My friends are nearly all gone, so I suppose I shall soon be going. Not but what there’s plenty of amusement here.”

She looked round in an odd way, as if she saw ghosts. Jack would have given his skin to escape her.

“Listen,” she said with sudden secrecy. “I want ye to do something for me. You love Lennie, don’t ye?”

Jack nodded.

“So do I! I’m going to help him.” Her voice became sharp with secrecy. “I’ve put by a stocking for him,” she hissed. “At least it’s not a stocking, it’s a tin box, but it’s the same thing. It’s up there!” She pointed with her stick at the wide black chimney. “Dye understand?”

She eyed Jack with aged keenness, and he nodded, though his understanding was rather vague. Truth to tell, nothing she said seemed to him quite real. As if, poor Gran, her age put her outside of reason.

“That stocking is for Lennie. Tom’s mother was nobody knows who, though I’m not going to say Jacob never married her, if Jack says he did. But Tom’ll get everything. The same as Jacob did. That’s how it hits back at me. I wanted Jacob to have the place, and now it goes to Tom, and my little Lennie gets nothing. Alice has been a good woman, and a good wife to Jacob: better than he deserved. I’m going to stand by her. That stocking in there is for Lennie because he’s her eldest son. In a tin box. Y’understand?”

And she pointed again at the chimney.

Jack nodded, though he didn’t really take it in. He had a little horror of Gran at all times; but when she took on this witch-like portentousness, and whispered at him in a sharp, aged whisper, about money, hidden money, it all seemed so abnormal to him that he refused to take it for real. The queer, aged, female spirit that had schemed with money for the men-folk she chose, scheming to oust those

she had not elected, was so strange and half-ghoulish, that he merely shrank from taking it in. When she pointed with her white-headed stick at the wide black mouth of the chimney, he glanced and looked quickly away again. He did not want to think of a hoard of sovereigns in a stocking — or a tin box — secreted in there. He did not want to think of the subtle, scheming, vindictive old woman reaching up into the soot, to add more gold to the hoard. It was all unnatural to him and to his generation.

But Gran despised him and his generation. It was as unreal to her as hers to him.

“Old George couldn’t even persuade that Jacob of mine to sign a marriage settlement,” she continued. “And I wasn’t going to force him. Would you believe a man could be such an obstinate fool?”

“Yes, marm,” said Jack automatically.

And Gran stamped her stick at him in sudden vicious rage.

The stamping of the stick brought Grace, and he fled.

III

That evening they were all sitting in the garden. The drawing room was thrown open, as usual on Sunday, but nobody even went in except to strum the piano. Monica was strumming hymns now. Grace came along calling Mary. Mary was staying on at Wandoo.

“Mary, Gran wants you. She feels faint. Come and see to her, will you?”

Ellie came and slipped her fat little hand into Jack’s, hanging on to him. Katie and Lennie sat surreptitiously playing cats’-cradle, on the steps: forbidden act, on the Sabbath. The twin boys wriggled their backs against the gate-posts and their toes into the earth, asking each other riddles. Harry as usual aimed stones at birds. It was a close evening, the wind had not come. And they all were uneasy, with that uncanny uneasiness that attacks families, because Gran was not well.

Harry was singing profanely, profaning the Sabbath.

“A blue jay sat on a hickory limb,
He wink at me, I wink at him.
I up with a stone, an’ hit him on the shin.
Says he, Little Nigger, don’ do that agin!
Clar de kitchen, ol’ folk, young folk!
Clar de kitchen, ol’ folk, young folk!
An’ let us dance till dawn O.”

Harry shouted out these wicked words half loud to a tune of his own that was no tune.

Jack did not speak. The sense of evening, Sunday evening, far away from any church or bell, was strong upon him. The sun was slow in the sky, and the light intensely strong, all fine gold. He went out to look. The sunlight flooded the dry, dry earth till it glowed again, and the gum-trees that stood up hung tresses of liquid shadow from trunks of gold, and the buildings seemed to melt blue in the vision of light. Someone was riding in from westward, and a cloud of pure gold-dust rose fuming from the earth about the horse and the horseman, with a vast, overwhelming gold glow of the void heavens above. The whole west was so powerful with pure gold light, coming from immense space and the sea, that it seemed like a transfiguration, and another horseman rode fuming in a dust of light as if he were coming, small and Daniel-like, out of the vast furnace-mouth of creation. Jack looked west, into the welter of yellow light, in fear. He knew again, as he had known before, that his day was not the day of all the world, there was a huger sunset than the sunset of his race. There were vaster, more unspeakable gods than the gods of his fathers. The god in this yellow fire was huger than the white men could understand, and seemed to proclaim their doom.

Out of this immense power of the glory seemed to come a proclamation of doom. Lesser glories must crumble to powder in this greater glow, as the horsemen rode trotting in the glorified cloud of the earth, spuming a glory all round them. They seemed like messengers out of the great West, coming with a proclamation of doom, the small, trotting, aureoled figures kicking up dust like sun-dust, and gradually growing larger, hardening out of the sea of light. Like sun-arrivals.

Though after all it was only Alec Rice and Tom. But they were gilded men, dusty and sun-luminous, as they came into the yard, with their brown faces strangely vague in shadow, unreal.

The sun was setting, huge and liquid, and sliding down at immense speed behind the far-off molten, wavering, long ridge towards the coast. Fearsome the great liquid sun was, stooping fiercely down like an enemy stooping to hide his glory, leaving the sky hovering and pulsing above, with a sense of wings, and a sense of proclamation, and of doom. It seemed to say to Jack: I and my race are doomed. But even the doom is a splendour.

Shadow lay very thin on the earth, pale as day, though the sun was gone. Jack turned back to the house. The tiny twins were staggering home to find their supper, their hands in the pockets of their Sunday breeches. The pockets of everyday breeches were, for some mysterious reason, always sewn up, so Sunday alone knew this swagger. Harry was being called in to bed. And Len and

Katie, rarely far off at meal times, were converging towards supper too.

Monica was still drumming listlessly on the piano, and singing in a little voice. She had a very sweet voice, but she usually sang “small.” She was not singing a hymn, Jack became aware of this. She was singing, rather nervously, or irritably, and with her own queer yearning pathos:

“Oh Jane, Oh Jane, my pretty Jane, Oh Jane,
Ah never, never look so shy.
But meet me, meet me in the moonlight,
When the dew is on the rye.”

Someone had lighted the piano candles, and she sat there strumming and singing in a little voice, and looking queer and lonely. His heart went hot in his breast, and then started pounding. He crossed silently, and stood just behind her. For some moments she would not notice him, but went on singing the same. And he stood perfectly still close behind her. Then at last she glanced upward at him, and his heart stood still again with the same sense of doom the sun had given him. She still went on singing for a few moments. Then she stopped abruptly, and jerked her hand from the piano.

“Don’t you want to sing?” she asked sharply.

“Not particularly.”

“What do you want then?”

“Let us go out.”

She looked at him strangely, then rose in her abrupt fashion. She followed him across the yard in silence, while he felt the curious sense of doom settling down on him.

He sat down on the step of the back-door of the barn, outside, looking southward into the vast, rapidly darkening country, and glanced up at her. She, rather petulantly, sat down beside him. He felt for her cool slip of a hand, and she let it lie in his hot one. But she averted her face.

“Why don’t you like me?” she asked petulantly.

“But I love you,” he said thickly, with shame and the sense of doom piercing his heart.

She turned swiftly and stared him in the face with a brilliant, oddly triumphant look.

“Sure?” she said.

His heart seemed to go black with doom. But he turned away his face from her glowing eyes, and put his arm round her waist, and drew her to him. His whole body was trembling like a taut string, and she could feel the painful plunging of his heart as he pressed her fast against him, pressed the breath out of her.

“Monica!” he murmured blindly, in pain, like a man who is in the dark.

“What?” she said softly.

He hid his face against her shoulder, in the shame and anguish of desire. He would have given anything, if this need never have come upon him. But the strange fine quivering of his body thrilled her. She put her cheek down caressingly against his hair. She could be very tender, very, very tender and caressing. And he grew quieter.

He looked up at the night again, hot with pain and doom and necessity. It had grown quite dark, the stars were out.

“I suppose we shall have to be married,” he said in a dismal voice.

“Why?” she laughed. It seemed a very sudden and long stride to her. He had not even kissed her.

But he did not answer, did not even hear her question. She watched his fine young face in the dark, looking sullen and doomed at the stars.

“Kiss me!” she whispered, in the most secret whisper he had ever heard. “Kiss me!”

He turned, in the same battle of unwillingness. But as if magnetised he put forward his face and kissed her on the mouth: the first kiss of his life. And she seemed to hold him. And the fierce, fiery pain of pleasure which came with that kiss sent his soul rebelling in torment to hell. He had never wanted to be given up, to be broken by the black hands of this doom. But broken he was, and his soul seemed to be leaving him, in the pain and obsession of this desire, against which he struggled so fiercely.

She seemed to be pleased, to be laughing. And she was exquisitely sweet to him. How could he be otherwise than caught, and broken.

After an hour of this love-making she blackened him again, by saying they must go in to supper. But she meant it, so in he had to go.

Only when he was alone again in the cubby did he resume the fight to recover himself from her again. To be free as he had been before. Not to be under the torment of the spell of this desire. To preserve himself intact. To preserve himself from her.

He lay awake in his bed in the cubby and thanked God he was away from her. Thanked God he was alone, with a sufficient space of loneliness around him. Thanked God he was immune from her, that he could sleep in the sanctity of his own isolation. He didn't want even to think about her.

IV

Gran did not leave her room that week, and Tom talked of fetching the relations.

“What for?” asked Jack.

“They’d like to be present,” said Tom.

Jack felt incredulous.

Lennie came out of her room, sniffing and wiping his eyes with his knuckles.

“Poor ol’ girl!” he sniffed. “She do look frail. She’s almost like a little girl again.”

“You don’t think she’s dying, do you, Len?” asked Jack.

“I don’t think, I knows,” replied Len, with utmost scorn. “Sooner, or later she’s bound to go hence and be no more seen. But she’ll be missed, for many a day, she will.”

“But Tom,” said Jack. “Do you think Gran will like to have all the relations sniffing round her when she gets worse?”

“I should think so,” replied Tom. “Anyway, I should like to die respectable, whether you would or not.”

Jack gave it up. Some things were beyond him, and dying respectable was one of them.

“Like they do in books,” said Len, seeing that Jack disapproved, and trying to justify Tom’s position. “Even ol’ Nelson died proper. ‘Kiss me, ‘Ardy,’ he said, an’ ‘Ardy kissed him, grubby and filthy as he was. He could do no less, though it was beastly.”

Still the boys were not sent for the relations until the following Sunday, which was a rest day. Jack went to the Gum Valley Homestead, because he knew the way. He set off before dawn. The terrific heat of the New Year had already passed, and the dawn came fresh and lovely. He was happy on that ride, Gran or no Gran. And that’s what he thought would be the happiest: always to ride on at dawn, in a nearly virgin country. Always to be riding away.

The Greenlows seemed to expect him. They had been “warned.” After he had been refreshed with a good breakfast, they were ready to start, in the buggy. Jack rode in the buggy with them, his saddle under his seat and the neck-rope of the horse in his hand. The hack ran behind, and nearly jerked Jack’s arms out of their sockets, with its halts and its disinclination to trot. Almost it hauled him out of the buggy sometimes. He would much rather have ridden the animal, but he had been requested to take the buggy, to spare it.

Mr. and Mrs. Greenlow scarcely spoke on the journey; it would not have been “showing sorrow.” But Jack felt they were enjoying themselves immensely, driving in this morning air instead of being cooped up in the house, she cooking

and he with the Holy Book. The sun grew furiously hot. But Gum Valley Croft was seven miles nearer to Wandoo than the Ellis' Gum Tree Selection, so they drove into the yard, wet with perspiration, just before the mid-day meal was put on to the table. Mrs. Ellis, aproned and bare-armed, greeted them as they drove up, calling out that they should go right in, and Jack should take the horses out of the buggy.

Quite a number of strange hacks were tethered here and there in the yard, near odd, empty vehicles, sulkies dejectedly leaning forward on empty shafts, or buggies and wagonettes sturdily important on four wheels. Yet the place seemed strangely quiet.

Jack came back to the narrow verandah outside the parlour door, where Mrs. Ellis had her fuchsias, ferns, cyclamens and musk growing in pots. A table had been set there, and dinner was in progress, the girls coming round from the kitchen with the dishes. Grace saw Jack hesitate, so she nodded to him. He went to the kitchen and asked doubtfully:

“How is she?”

“Oh, bad! Poor old dear. They're all in there to say goodbye.”

Lennie, who was sitting on the floor under the kitchen window, put his head down on his arms and sobbed from a sort of nervousness, wailing:

“Oh, my poor ol' Gran! Oh, poor ol' dear!”

Jack, though upset, almost grinned. Poor Gran indeed, with that ghastly swarm of relations. He sat there on a chair, his nerves all on edge, noticing little things acutely, as he always did when he was strung up: the flies standing motionless on the chopping-block just outside the window, the smooth-tramped gravel walk, the curious surface of the mud floor in the kitchen, the smoky rafters overhead, the oven set in brick below the “everlasting” fire, the blackness of the pots and kettles above the horizontal bars . . .

“Do you mind sitting in the parlour, Jack, in case they want anything?” Mrs. Ellis asked him.

Jack minded, but he went and sat in the parlour, like a chief lackey, or a buffer between all the relations and the outer world.

The house had become more quiet. Monica had gone over to the Reds with clean overalls for the little boys, who had been bundled off there. Jack got this piece of news from Grace, who was constantly washing more dishes and serving more relations. A certain anger burned in him as he heard, but he took no notice. Mary was lying down upstairs: she had been up all night with Gran. Tom was attending to the horses. Katie and Mrs. Ellis had gone upstairs with Baby and Ellie, and Mr. Ellis was also upstairs. Lennie had slipped away again. So Jack had track of all the family. He was always like that, wanting to know where they

all were.

Mrs. Greenlow came in from Gran's inner room.

"Mary? Where's Mary?" she asked hurriedly.

Jack shook his head, and she passed on. She had left the door of Gran's room open, so Jack could see in. All the relations were there, horrible, the women weeping and perspiring, and wiping tears and perspiration away together, the men in their waistcoats and shirt-sleeves, perspiring and looking ugly. A Methodist parson son-in-law was saying prayers in an important monotone.

At last Mary came, looking anxious.

"Yes, Gran? Did you want me?" Jack heard her voice, and saw her by the bed.

"I felt so overcome with all these people," said Gran, in a curiously strong, yet frightened voice. "What do they all want?"

"They've come to see you. Come — " Mary hesitated " — to see if they can do anything for you."

"To frighten the bit of life out of me that I've got. But they're not going to. Get me some beef tea, Mary, and don't leave me alone with them."

Mary went out for the beef tea. Then Jack saw Gran's white hand feebly beckon.

"Ruth!" she said. "Ruth!"

The eldest daughter went over and took the hand, mopping her eyes. She was the parson's wife.

"Well, Ruth, how are you!" said Gran's high, quavering voice in a conversational tone.

"I'm well, Mother. It's how are you?" replied Ruth dismally.

But Gran was again totally oblivious of her. So at length Ruth dropped away embarrassed from the bedside, shaking her head.

Again Gran lifted her head on the pillow.

"Where's Jacob?"

"Upstairs, mother."

"The only one that has the decency to leave me alone." And she subsided again. Then after a while she asked, without lifting her head from the pillow, in a distant voice:

"And are the foolish virgins here?"

"Who, mother?"

"The foolish virgins. You know who I mean."

Gran lay with her eyes shut as she spoke.

There was an agitation among the family. It was the brothers-in-law who pushed the three Miss Ellises forward. They, the poor things, wept audibly.

Gran opened her eyes at the sound, and said, with a ghost of a smile on her

yellow, transparent old face:

“I hope virginity is its own reward.”

Then she remained unmoved until Mary came with the soup, which she took and slowly sipped, as Mary administered it in a spoon. It seemed to revive her.

“Where’s Lennie and his mother?” she asked, in a firmer tone.

These also were sent for. Mrs. Ellis sat by the bed and gently patted Gran’s arm; but Lennie, “skeered stiff,” shivered at the door. His mother held out her hand to him, and he came in, inch by inch, watching the fragile old Gran, who looked transparent and absolutely unreal, with a fascination of horror.

“Kiss me, Lennie,” said Gran grimly: exactly like Nelson.

Lennie shrank away. Then, yielding to his mother’s pressure he laid his dark, smooth head and his brown face on the pillow next to Gran’s face, but he did not kiss her.

“There’s my precious!” said Gran softly, with all the soft, cajoling gentleness that had made her so lovely, at moments, to her men.

“Alice, you’ve been good to my Jacob,” she said, as if remembering something. “There’s the stocking. It’s for you and Lennie.” She still managed to say the last words with a caress, though she was fading from consciousness again.

Lennie drew away and hid behind his mother. Gran lay still, exactly as if dead. But the laces of her eternal cap still stirred softly, to show she breathed. The silence was almost unbearable.

To break it, the Methodist son-in-law sank to his knees, the others followed his example, and he prayed in a low, solemn, extinguished voice. When he had said Amen the others whispered it and rose from their knees. And by one consent they glided from the room. They had had enough deathbed for the moment.

Mary closed the inner door when they had gone, and remained alone in the room with Gran.

V

The sons-in-law all melted through the parlour and out on to the verandah, where they helped themselves from the decanter on the table, filling up from the canvas water-bag that swung in the draught to keep cool. The daughters sat down by the table and wept, lugubriously and rather angrily. The sons-in-law drank and looked afflicted. Jack remained on duty in the parlour, though he

would dearly have liked to decamp.

But he was now interested in the relations. They began to weep less, and to talk in low, suppressed, vehement voices. He could only catch bits. — "It's a question if he ever married Tom's mother. I doubt if Tom's legitimate. I don't even doubt it, I'm sure. We've suffered from that before. Where's the stocking? Stocking! Stocking — saved up — bought Easu out. Mother should know better. If she's made a will — Jacob's first marriage — children to educate and provide for. Unmarried daughters — first claim — stocking — " And then quite plainly from Ruth: "It's hard on our husbands if they have to support mother's unmarried daughters." This said with dignity.

Jack glanced at the three Miss Ellises, to see if they minded, and inwardly he vowed that if he ever married Monica, for example, and Grace was an unmarried sister, he'd find some suitable way of supporting her, without making her feel ashamed. But the three Miss Ellises did not seem to mind. They were busy diving into secret pockets among their clothing, and fetching out secret little packages. Someone dropped the glass stopper out of a bottle of smelling salts, and spilled the contents on the floor. The pungent odour penetrated throughout the house. Jack never again smelt lavender salts without having a foreboding of death, and seeing mysterious little packets. The three Miss Ellises were surreptitiously laying out bits and tags of black braid, crape, beading, black cloth, black lace; all black, wickedly black, on the table edge. Smoothing them out. For as a matter of fact they kept a little shop. And everybody was looking with interest. Jack felt quite nauseated at the sight of these black blotches, the row of black patches.

Mary came out of Gran's room, going to the kitchen with the cup. She did not pass the verandah, so nobody noticed her. They were all intent on the muttering gloom of their investigation of those scraps of mourning patterns.

Jack felt the door of Gran's room slowly open. Mary had left it just ajar. He looked round and his hair rose on his head. There stood Gran, all white save for her eyes, like a yellow figure of aged female Time, standing with her hand on the door, looking across the parlour at the afternoon and the preoccupied party on the verandah. Her face was absolutely expressionless, timeless and awful. It frightened him very much. The inexorable female! He uttered an exclamation, and they all looked up, caught.

CHAPTER XI

BLOWS

I

Jack managed to escape. When the rooks were fluttered by the sight of that ghostly white starling, he just ran. He ran in disgust from the smell of lavender salts, the tags of mourning patterns, respectable dying, and these awful people. Surely there was something rotten at the bottom of people, he thought, to make them behave as they did. And again came over him the feeling he had often had, that he was a changeling, that he didn't belong to the so-called "normal" human race. Nor, by Jupiter, did he want to. The "normal" human race filled him with unspeakable repulsion. And he knew they would kill him if they found out what he was. Hence that unconscious dissembling of his innocent face.

He ran, glad to get into a sweat, glad to sweat it all out of himself. Glad to feel the sun hot on his damp hands, and then the afternoon breeze, just starting, cool on his wet skin. When he reached the sand-bagged pool, he took off his clothes and spread them in the sun, while he wallowed in the lukewarm water. Ay! if one could wash off one's associations! If one could but be alone in the world.

After bathing he sat in the sun awhile to dry, then dressed and walked off to look at the lower dam pump. Tom had said it needed attending to. And anyway it led him away from the house.

The pump was all right. There had been a March shower that had put water in the dam. So after looking round at the sheep, he turned away.

Which way? Not back home. Not yet.

The land breeze had lifted and the sea breeze had come, clearing the hot dry atmosphere as if by magic, and replacing the furnace breath by tender air. Which way?

At the back of his mind was the thought of Monica not home yet from the Reds' place, and evening coming on, another of the full golden evenings when the light seemed fierce with declaration of another eternity, a different eternity from ours.

Last Sunday, on such an evening, he had kissed her. And much as he wanted

to avoid her, the desire to kiss her again drove him as if the great yellowing light were a wind that blew him, as a butterfly is blown twinkling out to sea. He drifted towards the trail from the Reds' place. He walked slowly, listening to the queer evening noise of the magpies, and the more distant screeching of flying parrots. Someone had disturbed the parrots beyond the Black Barn gums. So as if by intuition he walked that way, slightly off the trail.

And suddenly he heard the sound his spirit expected to hear: Monica crying out in expostulation, anger, and fear. It was the fear in her voice that made his face set. His first instinct was not to intrude on their privacy. Then again came the queer, magpie noise of Monica, this time with an edge of real hatred to her fear. Jack pushed through the bushes. He could smell the warm horses already.

Yes, there was Lucy standing by a tree. And Monica, in a long skirt of pink-sprigged cotton, with a frill at the bottom, trying to get up into the side-saddle. While Easu, in his Sunday black reach-me-downs and white shirt and white rubber-soled cricketing boots, every time she set her foot in the stirrup, put his hand round her waist and spread his fingers on her body, and lifted her down again, lifted her on one hand in a childish and ridiculous fashion, and held her in a moment's embrace. She, in her long cotton riding-dress with the close-fitting bodice, did indeed look absurd, hung like a child on Easu's hand, as he lifted her down and held her struggling against him, then let her go once more, to mount her horse. Lucy was shifting uneasily, and Easu's big black horse, tethered to a tree, was jerking its head with a jingle of the bit. The girth hung loose. Easu had evidently dismounted to adjust it.

Monica was becoming really angry, really afraid, and really blind with dismay, feeling for the first time her absolute powerlessness. To be powerless drove her mad, and she would have killed Easu if she could, without a qualm. But her hate seemed to rouse the big Easu to a passion of desire for her. He put his two big hands round her slender body and compassed her entirely. She gave a loud, strange, uncanny scream. And Jack came out of the bushes, making the black horse plunge. Easu glanced round at the horse, and saw Jack. And at the same time our hero planted a straight, vicious blow on the bearded chin. Easu, unprepared, staggered up against Lucy, who began to jump, while Monica, tangled in her long skirt, fell to her knees on the ground.

Quite a picture! Jack said it himself. Even he saw himself standing there, like Jack the Giant-killer. And of course he saw Monica on her knees, with tumbled hair and scarlet cheeks, unspeakably furious at being caught, angrily hitching herself out of her long cotton riding-skirt and pressing her cheeks to make them less red. She was silent, with averted face, and she seemed small. He saw Easu in the Sunday white shirt and rather tight Sunday breeches, facing round in

unspeakable disgust and fury. He saw himself in a readymade cotton suit and cheap brown canvas shoes, bought at the local store, standing awaiting an onslaught.

The onslaught did not come. Instead, Easu said, in a tone of unutterable contempt:

“Why, what’s up with you, you little sod!”

Jack turned to Monica. She had got on to her feet, and was pushing her hair under her hat.

“Monica,” he said, “you’d better get home. Gran’s dying.” She looked at him, and a slow, wicked smile of amusement came over her face. Then she broke into a queer, hollow laugh, at the bottom of which was rage and frustration. Then her laugh rose higher.

“Ha! Ha! Ha!” she laughed. “Ah ha-ha-ha-ha-ha! ha-ha-ha! Ah! ! Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha! ha-ha-ha! Ah! ! ! ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha! Ah ! ha-ha! Ha! Ah! Gran’s dying! Ha-ha ha! Is she really? Oh, ha-ha-ha-ha-ha! No, I don’t mean it. But it seems so funny! Ah! ha-ha-ha-ha-ha! Ah! Ha-ha-ha!”

She smothered herself into a confused bubbling. The two men stood aghast, shuddering at the strange; hysterical woman’s laughter that went shrilling through the bush. They were horrified lest someone else should hear.

Monica, in her cotton frock and long sweeping skirt, stood pushing her handkerchief in her mouth, and trying in vain to stifle the hysterical laughter that still shook her slender body. Occasionally a strange peal, like mad bells, would break out. And then she ended with a passionate sobbing.

“I know! I know!” she sobbed, like a child. “Gran’s dying, and you won’t let me go home.”

“You can go home,” Jack said. “You can go home. But don’t go with your face all puffed up with crying.”

She gradually gained control of herself, and turned away to her horse. Jack went to help her mount. She got into the saddle, and he gave her the reins. She kept her face averted, and Lucy began to move away slowly, towards the home track.

Easu still stood there, planted with his feet apart, his head a little dropped, and a furious, contemptuous, revengeful hate of the other two in his light blue eyes. He had his head down, ready for an attack. Jack saw this, and waited.

“Going to take your punishment?” said Easu, in a nasty voice.

“Ready when you are,” said Jack.

Ugh! How he hated Easu’s ugly, jeering, evil eyes, how he would love to smash them out of his head. In the long run, hate was an even keener ecstasy than love, and the battle of hate, the fight with blood in the eyes, an orgasm of

deadly gratification keener than any passionate orgasm of love.

Easu slowly threw his hat on the ground. Jack did the same, and started to pull off his coat. Easu glanced round to see if Monica was going. She was. Her back was already turned, and Lucy was stepping gingerly through the bushes. He lifted his chin, unknotted his tie, and threw it in his hat. Then he unbuttoned his shirt-cuffs, and pulled off his shirt, and hitched his belt. He was now naked to the waist. He had a very white skin with reddish hair at the breast, and an angular kind of force. His reddish-haired brawny arms were burnt brown-red, as was his neck. For the rest his skin was pure white, with the dazzle of absolute health. Yet he was ugly rather than beautiful. The queer angularity of his brawn, the sense of hostile mechanical power. The sense of the mechanism of power in him made him like some devil fallen into a lower grade.

Jack's torso was rather absurdly marked by the sun-burnt scallops of his vest-lines, for he worked a good deal in a vest. Easu always wore a shirt and no vest. And Jack, in spite of the thinness of youth, seemed to have softer lines and a more human proportion, more grace. And there was a warmth in his white skin, making it much less conspicuous than the really dazzling brilliance of Easu. Easu was a good deal bigger, but Jack was more concentrated, and a born fighter. He fought with all his soul.

He shaped up to Easu, and Easu made ready, when they were interrupted by a cry from Monica, in a high, hysterical voice. They looked up. She had reined in her horse among the bushes, and was looking round at them with a queer sharp, terrified face, from the distance. Her shrill voice cried:

“Don't forget he saved Herbert's life.”

Both men faced round and looked at her as if she had committed an indecency. She quailed in her saddle. Easu, with a queer jerk of the head, motioned to her to go. She sank a little forward in her saddle, and hurriedly urged her horse through the bush, out of sight, without ever looking round, leaving the men, as she knew, to their heart's desire.

They waited for a while. Then they lifted their fists again, and drew near. Jack began the light, subtle, harmonious dancing which preceded his attack. He always attacked, no matter whom he fought. He could not fight unless he took the initiative. So now he danced warily, subtly before Easu, and Easu stood ready to side-step. Easu was bigger, harder, much more powerful than Jack, and built in hard mechanical lines: the kind that is difficult to knock out, if you have not much weight behind your blow.

“Are y' insured?” sneered Easu.

But Jack did not listen. He had always fought with people bigger and older than himself. But he had never before had this strange lust dancing in his blood,

the lust of rage dancing for its consummation in blows. He had known it before, as a sort of game. But now the lust bit into his very soul, and he was quivering with accumulated desire, the desire to hit Easu hard, hit him till he knocked him out. He wanted to hit him till he knocked him out.

And he knew himself deficient in brute power. So he must make up in quickness and skill and concentration. When he did strike it must be a fine keen blow that went deep. He had confidence in his power to do it. Only — and this was the disturbing element — he knew there was not much time. And he would rather be knocked out himself than have the fight spoiled in the middle.

He moved lightly and led Easu on, ducked, bobbed up again, and began to be consummately happy. Easu could not get at him.

“Come on!” said Easu thickly.

So suddenly he came on, and bang! Bang! went his knuckles against that insulting chin. And he felt joy spring in his bowels.

But he did not escape without punishment. Pat!-butt! Pat!-butt! went Easu’s swinging blows down over his back. But Jack got in two more: Bang! Bang! He knew by the exquisite pain of his knuckles that he had struck deep, pierced the marrow of the other with pain of defeat.

Pat-butt! Pat-butt! came the punishment.

But Jack was out again, dancing softly, electric joy in his bowels. Then suddenly he sprang back at Easu, his arms swinging in strange, vindictive sideways swoops. Ping! Pong! Ping! Pong! rapid as lightning. Easu fell back a little dazed before this sudden rain of white blows, but Jack followed, followed, followed, nimbly, warily, but with deadly, flickering intent.

Crash! Easu went down, but caught Jack a heavy smash in the face with his right as he fell. Jack reeled away.

And then, posed, waiting, watching, with blood running from bruised cuts on his swelling face, one eye rapidly closing, he stood well forward, fists in true boxing trim, and a deep gratification of joy in his dark belly.

Easu rose slowly, foaming at the mouth; then getting to his feet rushed head down, in a convulsion, at his adversary. Jack stepped aside, but not quite quick enough. He caught Easu a blow with his left under the ear, but not in time to stop the impact. Easu’s head butted right where he wanted it to — into his enemy’s stomach; though not full in the pit. Jack fell back winded, and Red also fell again, giving Jack time to throw back his head and whoop for a few mouthfuls of air. So that when Red rushed in again, he was able feebly to fence and stall him off, stepping aside and hitting again, but wofully clipping, smacking only . . .

“Foul! He’s winded! Foul!” yelled someone from the bushes. “Time!”

“Not for mine,” roared Easu.

He sprang and dashed at his gasping, gulping adversary, whirling his arms like iron piston-rods. Jack dodged the propelled whirl, but stumbled over one of the big feet stuck out to trip him. Easu hit as he fell, and swung a crashing left-right about the sinking, unprotected head. And when Jack was down, kicked the prostrate body in an orgasm of fury.

“Foul, you swine!” screamed Rackett, springing in like a tiger. Easu, absolutely blind with rage and hate, stared hellish and unseeing. Jack lay crumpled on the floor. Dr. Rackett stooped down to him, as Tom and Lennie and Alec Rice ran in. Easu went and dropped on a fallen log, sitting blowing to get his wind and his consciousness back. He was unconscious with fury, like some awful Thing, not like a man.

“My God, Easu!” screamed Rackett, who had lifted the dead head of Jack on to his knees. “If you’ve done for him I’ll have you indicted.”

And Easu, slowly, heavily coming back to consciousness, lifted his head, and the blue pupils of his red eyes went ugly with evil fear, his bruised face seemed to have dropped with fear. He waited, vacant, empty with fear.

At length Jack stirred. There was life in him. And at once the bully Easu began to talk wide.

“Bloody little sod came at me bashing me jaw, when I’d never touched him. Had to fight to defend myself. Bloody little sod!”

Jack opened his eyes and struggled to rise.

“Anybody counting?” he said stupidly. But he could not get up.

“It was a foul,” said Rackett.

“Foul be blithered!” shouted Easu. “It was a free fight and no blasted umpires asked for. If that bloody bastard wants some more, let him get up. I’m goin’ to teach him to come crowin’ from England, crowin’ over an Australian.”

But Jack was on his unsteady feet. He would fight now if he died for it.

“Teach me!” he said vaguely, and sprang like a cat out of a bag on the astonished and rather frightened Easu.

But something was very wrong. When his left fist rang home, it caused such an agony that a sheer scream of pain tore from him, clearing the mists from his brain in a strange white light. He was now fully conscious again, super-conscious. He knew he must hit with his right, and hit hard. He heard nothing, and saw nothing. But with a kind of trance vision he was super-awake.

Man is like this. He has various levels of consciousness. When he is broken, killed at one level of consciousness, his very death leaves him on a higher level. And this is the soul in its entirety, being conscious, super-conscious, far beyond mentality. It hardly needs eyes or ears. It is clairvoyant and clair-audient. And man’s divinity, and his ultimate power, is in this super-consciousness of the

whole soul. Not in brute force, not in skill or intelligence alone. But in the soul's extreme power of knowing and then willing. On this alone hangs the destiny of all mankind.

Jack, uncertain on his feet, incorporate, wounded to horrible pain in his left hand, was now in the second state of consciousness and power. Meanwhile the doctor was warning Easu to play fair. Jack heard absolutely without hearing. But Easu was bothered by it.

He was flustered by Jack's unexpected uprising. He was weary and wavering, the paroxysm of his ungovernable fury had left him, and he had a desire to escape. His rage was dull and sullen.

Jack was softly swaying. Easu shaped up and waited. And suddenly Jack sprang, with all the weight of his nine stone behind him, and all the mystery of his soul's deadly will, and planted a blow on Easu's astonished chin with his granite right fist. Before there was any recovery he got in a second blow, and it was a knockout. Easu crashed, and Jack crashed after him, and both lay still.

Dr. Rackett, watch in hand, counted. Easu stared at the darkening blue, and sat up. An oath came out of his disfigured mouth. Dr. Rackett put the watch in his pocket as Easu got to his feet. But Jack did not move. He lay in a dead faint.

Lennie, the emotional, began to cry when he saw Jack's bruised, greenish-looking face. Dr. Rackett was feeling the pulse and the heart.

"Take the horse, and fetch some whiskey and some water, Tom," he said.

Tom turned to Easu, who stood with his head down and his mouth all cut, watching, waiting to depart, undecided.

"I'll borrow your horse a minute, Easu," he said. And Easu did not answer. He was getting into his shirt again, and for the moment none of him was visible save the belt of white skin round the waist. Tom pulled up the girth of the black horse, and jumped into the saddle. Lennie slipped up behind him, his face still wet with tears. Easu's face emerged, disfigured, out of his white shirt, and watched them go. Rackett attended to Jack, who still gave no signs of life. Alec Rice stood beside the kneeling doctor, silent and impassive.

Easu slowly buttoned his shirt cuffs and shirt-collar, with numb fingers. The pain was just beginning to come out, and he made queer slight grimaces with his distorted face. Slowly he got, his black tie, and holding up his chin, fastened it round his throat, clumsily. He was not the same Easu that had set off so huge and assertive, with Monica.

Lennie came running with a tin of water. He had slipped off the horse at the lower dam, and found the tin which he kept secreted there. Dr. Rackett put a wet handkerchief on Jack's still, dead face. Under the livid skin the bruises and the blood showed terrifying, one eye already swollen up. The queer mask of a face

looked as if the soul, or the life, had retreated from it in weariness or disgust. It looked like somebody else's altogether.

"He ain't dead, is he?" whimpered Lennie, terrified most of all because Jack, with his swollen face and puffed eye, looked like somebody else.

"No! But I wish Tom would come with that whiskey."

As he spoke, they heard the crashing sound of the horse through the bushes, and Tom's red, anxious face appeared. He swung out of the saddle and dropped the reins on the ground.

Dr. Rackett pressed the bruised chin, pressed the mouth open, and poured a little liquor down Jack's throat. There was no response. He poured a little more whiskey. There came a slight choking sound, and then the one dark-blue eye opened vacant. It stared in vacancy for some moments, while everybody stood with held breath. Then the whiskey began to have effect. Life seemed to give a movement of itself, in the boy's body, and the wide-open eye took a conscious direction. It stared straight into the eyes of Easu, who stood there looking down, detached, in humiliation, derision, and uneasiness. It stared with a queer, natural recognition, and a faint jeering, uneasy grin was the reflex on Easu's disfigured mask.

"Guess he's had enough for once," said Easu, and turning, he picked up his horse's reins, dropped into the saddle, and rode straight away.

"Feel bad?" Dr. Rackett asked.

"Rotten!" said Jack.

And at last Lennie recognised the voice. He could not recognise the face, especially with that bunged-up eye peering gruesomely through a gradually diminished slit, Hun-like.

Dr. Rackett smiled slightly.

"Where's your pain?" he asked.

Jack thought about it. Then he looked into Rackett's eyes without answering.

"Think you can stand?" said Rackett.

"Try me."

They got him to his feet. Everything began to swim again. Rackett's arm came round him.

"Did he knock me out?" Jack asked. The question came from his half-consciousness: from a feeling that the battle with Easu was not yet finished.

"No, you knocked him out. Let's get your coat on."

But as he shoved his arm into his coat he knew he was fainting again, and he almost wept, feeling his consciousness and his control going. He thought it was just his stiff, swollen, unnatural face that caused it.

"Can y' walk?" asked Tom anxiously.

“Don’t walk on my face, do I?” came the words. But as they came, so did the reeling, nauseous oblivion. He fainted again, and was carried home like a sack over Tom’s back.

When he came to, he was on his bed, Lennie was feverishly pulling off his shoes, and Dr. Rackett was feeling him all over. Dr. Rackett smelt of drugs. But now Rackett’s face was earnest and attentive, he looked a nice man, only weak.

Jack thought at once of Gran.

“How’s Gran?” he asked.

“She’s picked up again. The relations put her in a wax, so she came to life again.”

“You’re the one now, you look an awful sight,” said Len.

“Did anybody see me?” asked Jack, dim and anxious.

“Only Grace so far.”

Rackett, who was busy bandaging, saw the fever of anxiety coming into the one live eye.

“Don’t talk,” he said. “Len, he mustn’t talk at all. He’s got to go to sleep.”

After they had got his nightshirt on, they gave him something to drink, and he went to sleep.

II

When he awoke, it was dark. His head felt enormous. It was getting bigger and bigger, till soon it would fill the room. Soon his head would be so big, it would fill all the room, and the room would be too small for it. Oh, horror! He was so frightened, he cried out.

“What’s amiss?” a quick voice was asking.

“Make a light! Make alight!” cried Jack.

Lennie quickly lit a candle, and to Jack’s agonized relief, there was the cubby, the bed, the walls, all of natural dimensions, and Tom and Lennie in their nightshirts standing by his bed.

“What’s a-matter, ol’ dear?” Lennie asked caressively.

“My head! I thought it was getting so big the room wouldn’t hold it.”

“Aw! go on now!” said Lennie. “Y’ face is a bit puffy, but y’ head’s same as ever it was.”

Jack couldn’t believe it. He was so sensually convinced that his head had grown enormous, enormous, enormous.

He stared at Lennie and Tom in dismay. Lennie stroked his hair softly.

“There’s y’ ol’ nut!” he said. “Tain’t no bigger ‘n it ever was. Just exactly same life-size.”

Gradually Jack let himself be convinced. And at last he let them blow the candle out. He went to sleep.

He woke again with a frenzy working in him. He had pain, too. But far worse than the pain was the tearing of the raging discomfort, the frenzy of dislocation. And in his stiff swollen head, there was something he remembered but could not drag into light. What was it? What was it? In the frenzy of struggle to know, he went vague.

Then it came to him, words as plain as knives.

“And when I die
In hell I shall lie
With fire and chains
And awful pains.”

The Aunts had repeated this to him, as a child, when he was naughty. And it had always struck a vague terror into his soul. He had forgotten it. Now it came again.

“In hell I shall lie
With fire and chains
And awful pains.”

He had a vivid realisation of this hell. That was where he lay at that very moment.

“You must be a good, loving little boy.”

He had never wanted to be a good, loving little boy. Something in his bowels revolted from being a good, loving little boy, revolted in nausea. “But if you’re not a good, loving little boy.

‘Then when you die
In hell you will lie’ — *etc.*

“Let me lie in hell, then,” the bad and unloving little boy had answered, to the shocked horror of the Aunts. And the answer had scared even himself.

And now the hell was on him. And still he was not a good, loving little boy.

He remembered his lessons: Love your enemies.

“Do I love Easu?” he asked himself. And he writhed over in bed in disgust. He loathed Easu. If he could crush him absolutely to powder, he would crush him to powder. Make him extinct.

“Lord, Lord!” he groaned. “I loathe Easu. I loathe him.”

What was amiss with him? Did he want to leave off loathing Easu? Was that the root of his sickness and fever?

But when he thought of Easu’s figure and face, he knew he didn’t want to

leave off loathing him. He did loathe him, whether he wanted to or not, and the fact to him was sacred. It went right through the core of him.

“Lord! Lord!” he groaned, writhing in fever. “Lord, help me to loathe him properly. Lord, I’ll kill him if you want me to; and if you don’t want me to, I won’t. I’ll kill him if you want me to. But if you don’t want me to, I won’t care any more.”

The pledge seemed to soothe him. At the back of Jack’s consciousness was always this mysterious Lord, to whom he cried in the night. And this Lord put commands upon him, but so darkly, Jack couldn’t easily find out what the commands were. The Aunts had always said, the command was to be a good, loving little boy. But when he tried being a good, loving little boy, his soul seemed to lose his Lord, and turn wicked. That was what made him fear hell. When he seemed to lose connection with his great, mysterious Lord, with whom he communed absolutely alone, he became aware of hell. And he couldn’t share with his Aunts that Jesus whom they always commended. At the Sacrament, something in his soul stood cold, and he knew this was no Sacrament to him.

He had his own Lord. And when he could get into communication or communion, with his own Lord, he always felt well and right again. Now, in his pain and battered fever, he was fighting for his Lord again.

“Lord, I don’t love Easu, and I’ll kill him if you want me to. But if you don’t want me to, I won’t, I won’t, I won’t bother any more.”

This pledge and this submission soothed him strangely. He felt he was coming back to his own Lord. It was a pledge, and he would keep it. He gave no pledge to love Easu. Only not to kill him, if the Lord didn’t want it; and to kill him, if the Lord did.

“Lord, I don’t love Monica. I don’t love her. But if she’d give up to me, I’d love her if you wanted me to.”

He thought about this. Somewhere, his soul burned against Monica. And somewhere, his soul burned for her.

But she must give up to him. She must give herself up. He demanded this submission, as if it were a submission to his mysterious Lord. She would never submit to the mysterious Lord direct. Like that old demon of a Gran, who knew the Lord, and played with Him, spited Him even. Monica would have first to submit to himself, Jack, in person, before she would really yield before the immense Lord. And yield before the immense Lord she must. Through him.

“Lord!” he said, invoking the supreme power, “I love Lennie and Tom, and I want always to love them, and I want you to back them.”

The prickles of pain entered his soul again.

“Lord, I don’t love my father, but I don’t want to hurt him. Only, I don’t love

him, Lord. And it's not my fault, though he's a good man, because I wasn't born with love for him in me."

This had been a thorn in his consciousness since he was a child. Best get it out now. Because the fear of not loving his father had almost made him hate him. If he ought to love him, and he couldn't love him, then there was nothing to do but hate him, because of the hopeless obligation. But if he needn't love him, then he needn't hate him, and they could both be in peace. He would leave it to his Lord.

"Perhaps I ought to love Mary," he continued. "But I don't really love her, because she doesn't realise about the Lord. She doesn't realise there is any Lord. She thinks there's only me, and herself. But there is the Lord. And Monica knows. But Monica, is spiteful against the Lord. Lord! Lord!"

He ended on the old human cry of invocation: a cry which is answered, when it comes from the extreme, passionate soul. The strange, dark comfort and power came back to him again, and he could go to sleep once more, with his Lord.

When he woke in the morning, the fever had left him. Lennie was there at dawn, to see if he wanted anything. The quick little Lennie, who always came straight from the Lord, unless his emotions of pity got the better of him. Then he lost his connections, and became maudlin.

Jack wanted the family not to know. But the twins saw his disfigured face, with horror. And Monica knew: it was she who had sent Dr. Rackett and Tom and Alec. And Grace knew. And soon Ma came, and said: "Dear o' me, Jack Grant, what d'y'mean by going and getting messed up like this!" And Dad came slow and heavy, and said nothing, but looked dark and angry. They all knew.

But Jack wanted to be left alone. He told Tom and Dr. Rackett, and Tom and Dr. Rackett ordered the family to leave him alone.

It was Grace who brought his meals. Poor old Grace, with her big eyes and rather big nose, she had a gentle heart, and more real sense than that Monica. Jack only got to know her while he was sick, and she really touched his heart. She was so kind, and thought so little of herself, and had such a sad wisdom at the bottom of her. Who would have thought it, of the pert, cheeky, nosy Grace?

Monica slipped in, and stood staring down at him with her queer, brooding eyes, that shone with widened pupils. Heaven knows what she was thinking about.

"I was awfully afraid he'd kill you," she said. "I was so frightened, that's what made me laugh."

"Why should I let him kill me?" said Jack.

"How could you help it! He's much stronger and crueller than you."

"He may be stronger, but I can match him in other ways."

She looked at him incredulously. She did not believe him. He could see she

did not believe in that other, inward power of his, upon which he himself depended. She thought him in every way weaker, frailer than Easu. Only, of course, nicer. This made Jack very angry.

“I think I punished him as much as he punished me,” he said.

“He’s not laid up in bed,” she replied.

Then, with her quivering, exquisite gentleness, she touched his bandaged hand.

“I’m awfully sorry he hurt you so,” she said. “I know you’ll hate me for it.”

“Why should I?” he replied coldly.

She took up his bandaged hand and kissed it quickly, then she looked him long and beseechingly in the eyes: or the one eye. Somehow she didn’t seem to see his caricature of a face.

“Don’t hate me for it,” she pleaded, still watching him with that strange, pleading, watchful look.

The flame leapt in his bowels, and came into his eyes. And another flame as she, catching the change in his eyes, softened her look and smiled subtly, suddenly taking his wrist in a passionate, secret grasp. He felt the hot blood suffusing him like new life.

“Good-bye!” she said, looking back at him as she disappeared.

And when she had gone, he remembered the watchfulness in her eyes, the cat-like watchfulness at the back of all her winsome tenderness. There it was, like the devil. And he turned his face to the wall, to his Lord, and two smarting tears came under his eyes as if they were acid.

The next day Mary came bringing his pap. She was not going to be kept away any longer. And she would come as a ministering angel.

He saw on her face that she was startled, shocked, and a little repelled by his appearance. She hardly knew him. But she overcame her repulsion at once, and became the more protective.

“Why, how awful it must be for you!” she said.

“Not so bad now,” he said, manfully swallowing his pap.

He could see she longed for him to have his own good-looking face again. She could not bear this strange horror. She refused to believe this was he.

“I shall never forgive that cruel Easu!” she said, and the colour came to her dark cheek. “I hope I never have to speak to him again.”

“Oh, I began it. It was my fault.”

“How could it be!” cried Mary. “That great hulking brute. How dare he lay a finger on you!”

Jack couldn’t smile, his face was of the fixed sort. But his one good eye had a gleam. “He dare, you see,” he answered.

But she turned away in smarting indignation.

“It makes one understand why such creatures had their hands cut off in the old days,” she said, with cold fierceness.

“How dare he disfigure your beautiful face! How dare he!”

And tears of anger came to her eyes.

A strangled grin caused considerable pain to Jack’s beautiful face.

“I suppose he didn’t rightly appreciate my sort of looks,” he said.

“The jealous brute,” said Mary. “But I hope he’ll pay for it. I hope he will. I do hope he hasn’t really disfigured you,” she ended on a note of agitation.

“No, no! Besides that doesn’t matter all the world.”

“It matters all the world,” she cried, with strange fierceness, “to me.”

CHAPTER XII

THE GREAT PASSING

I

Jack soon got better. Soon he was sitting in the old armchair by the parlour fire. There was a little fire, against the damp. This was Gran's place. But Gran did not leave her bed.

He had been in to see her, and she frightened him. The grey, dusky skin round the sunken mouth and sharpened nose, the eyes that were mostly shut, and never really open, the harsh breathing, the hands lying like old translucent stone on the bed-cover: it frightened him, and gave him a horror of dissolution and decay. He wanted terribly to be out again with the healthy Tom, among the horses. But not yet — he must wait yet awhile. So he took his turn sitting by Gran, to relieve Mary, who got little rest. And he became nervous, fanciful, frightened as he had never been before in his life. The family seemed to abandon him as they abandoned Gran. The cold isolation and horror of death.

The first rains had set in. All night the water had thundered down on the slab roof of the cubby, as if the bottom had fallen out of some well above. Outside was cloudy still, and a little chill. A wind was hush-sh-shing round the house. Mary was sitting with Gran, and he was in the parlour, listening to that clock — Tick-tock! Tick-tock! He sat in the armchair with a shawl over his shoulders, trying to read. Curiously enough, in Australia he could not read. The words somehow meant nothing to him.

It was Sunday afternoon, and the smell of roast beef, Yorkshire pudding, cabbage, apple pie and cinnamon custard still seemed to taint the house. Jack had come to loathe Sunday dinners. They seemed to him degrading. They hung so heavy afterwards. And now he was sick, it seemed to him particularly repulsive. The peculiar Sundayness of it. The one thing that took him in revulsion back to England: Sunday dinner. The England he didn't want to be taken back to. But it had been a quiet meal. Monica and Grace and the little boy twins had all been invited to York, by Alec Rice's parents, and they had gone away from the shadowed house, leaving a great emptiness. It seemed to Jack

they should all have stayed, so that their young life could have united against this slow dissolution.

Everything felt very strange. Tom and Lennie were out, Mrs. Ellis and the children were upstairs, Mr. Ellis had gone to look at some sheep that had got into trouble in the rain. There seemed a darkness, a chill, a deathliness in the air. It is like that in Australia: usually so sunny and absolutely forgetful. Then comes a dark day, and the place seems like an immemorial grave. More gruesome than ever England was, on her dark days. Mankind forever entombed in dissolution, in an endless grave.

“Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord; or who shall stand
in His holy place?

He that hath clean hands and a pure heart,
Who hath not yielded up himself unto vanity, nor sworn
deceitfully.”

Jack was thinking over the words Mr. Ellis had read in the morning, as near as he remembered them. He looked at his own hands: already they seemed pale and soft and very clean. What had the Lord intended hands for? So many things hands must do, and still they remain clean. Clean hands! His left was still discoloured and out of shape. Was it unclean?

No, it was not unclean. Not unclean like the great paw of Easu’s hiking Monica out of the saddle.

Clean hands and a pure heart! A pure heart! Jack thought of his own, with two heavy new desires in it: the sudden, shattering desire for Monica, that would rip through him sometimes like a flame. And the slow, smouldering desire to kill Easu. He had to be responsible for them both.

And he was not going to try to pluck them out. They both belonged to his heart, they were sacred even while they were shocking in his blood. Only, driven back on himself, he gave the old pledge: Lord, if you don’t want me to have Monica and kill Easu, I won’t. But if you want me to, I will. Somewhere he was inclined to cry out to be delivered from the cup. But that would be cowardice towards his own blood. It would be yielding himself up to vanity, if he pretended he hadn’t got the desires. And if he swore to eradicate them, it would be swearing deceitfully. Sometimes the hands must move in the darkest acts, if they are to remain really clean, not deathly like Gran’s now. And the heart must beat hard in the storm of darkest desires, if it is to keep pure, and not go pale-corrupt.

But always subject to the will of the Lord.

“Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord; or who shall stand
in His holy place.”

The Seraphim and the Cherubim knew strange, awful secrets of the Lord. That

was why they covered their faces with their wings, for the wings of glory also had a dark side.

The fire was burning low. Jack stooped to put on more wood. Then he blew the red coals to make the wood catch. A yellow flame came, and he was glad.

“Forsake me not, Oh God, in mine old age; when I am grey-headed; until I have sown my strength to this generation, and Thy power to all them that are yet to come.”

Jack was always afraid of those times when the mysterious sayings of the Bible invaded him. He seemed to have no power against them. And his soul was always a little afraid, as if the walls of life grew thin, and he could hear the great everlasting wind of the mysterious going of the Lord, on the other side.

“Forsake me not, Oh, God, in mine old age; when I am grey-headed.”

Jack wished Gran would say this, so that the Lord would stay with her, and she would not look so awful. How could Mary stand it, sitting with her day after day.

“Until I have shown my strength to this generation, and Thy power to all them that are yet to come.”

And again his stubborn strength of life arose. What was he for, but to show his strength to the generation, and a sign of the power of the Lord for all them that were yet to come.

The clock was ticking steadily in the room. But the yellow flames were bunching up in the grate. He wondered where Gran’s “stocking” really was? But the thought of stockings, of concealed money, of people hankering for money, always made him feel sick.

“There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon and another glory of the stars. . . . There is a natural body and a spiritual body. . . .”

“There is one glory of the sun — — ”

But men don’t all realise the same glory. In England the sun had seemed to him to move with a domestic familiarity. It wasn’t till he was out here that he had been struck to the soul with the immense assertive vigour and sacred handsomeness of the sun. He knew it now: the wild, immense, fierce, untamed sun, fiercer than a glowing-eyed lion with a vast mane of fire, crouching on the western horizon, staring at the earth as if to pounce on it, the mouse-like earth. He had seen this immense sun, fierce and powerful beyond all human considerations, glaring across the southern sea, as all men may see it if they go there.

“There is one glory of the sun — — ”

And it is a glory vast and fierce, of a Lord who is more than our small lives.

“And another glory of the moon — — ”

That too he knew. And he had not known, till the full moon had followed him through the empty bush, in Australia, in the night. The immense, liquid gleam of the far-south moon, following, following with a great, miraculous, liquid smile. That vast, white, liquid smile, so vindictive! And himself, hurrying back to camp on Lucy, had known a terrible fear. The fear that the broad, liquid fire of the cold moon would capture him, capture him and destroy him, like some white demon that slowly and coldly tastes and devours its prey. The moon had that power, he knew, to dissolve him, tissue, heart, body and soul, dissolve him away. The immense, gleaming, liquid, lusting white moon, following inexorably, and the bush like white charred moon-embers.

“There is another glory of the moon — — ”

And he was afraid of it. “The sun is thy right hand, and the moon is thy left hand.” The two gleaming, immense living orbs, moving like weapons in the two hands of the Lord.

“And there is another glory of the stars — — ”

The strange stars of the southern night, all in unfamiliar crowds and tufts and drooping clusters, with strange black wells in the sky. He never got used to the southern stars. Whenever he stood and looked up at them, he felt as if his soul were leaving him, as if he belonged to another species of life, not to man as he knew man. As if there were a metamorphosis, a terrible metamorphosis to take place.

“There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body.” This phrase had haunted his mind from the earliest days. And he had always had a sort of hatred of the thing his Aunts, and the parson, and the poets, called The Spirit, with a capital S. It had always, with him, been connected with his Sunday clothes, and best behaviour, and a certain exalted falseness. Part of his natural naughtiness had arisen from his vindictive dislike and contempt of The Spirit, and things of The Spirit.

Now it began to seem different to him. He knew, he always had known, that the Bible really meant something absolutely different from what the Aunts, and the parson, and even the poets meant by the Spirit, or the spiritual body.

Since he had seen the Great God in the roaring of the yellow sun, and the frightening vast smile in the gleaming full-moon following him, the new moon like a delicate weapon-thrust in the western sky, and the stars in disarray, like a scattered flock of sheep bunching and communing together in a strange bush, in the vast heavens, he had gradually come to know the difference between the natural body and the spiritual body. The natural body was like in England, where

the sun rises naturally to make day, and passes naturally at sunset, owing to the earth's revolving; where the moon "raises her lamp above," on a clear night, and the stars are "candles" in heaven. That is the natural body: all the cosmos just a natural fact. And a man loves a woman so that they can propagate their species. The natural body.

And the spiritual body is supposed to be something thin and immaterial, that can float through a brick wall and subsist on mere thought. Jack had always hated this thin, wafting object. He preferred his body solid. He loved the beautiful weight and transfigured solidity of living limbs. He had no use whatsoever for the gossamer stuff of the supposed "ethereal," or "pure," spirit: like evaporated alcohol. He had a natural dislike of Shelley, and vegetarians, and socialists, and all advocates of "spirit." He hated Blake's pictures, with people waving like the wrong kind of sea-weed, in the sky, instead of under water.

Hated it all. Till hating it had almost made him wicked.

Now he had a new understanding. He had always known that the Old Testament never meant any of this Shelley stuff, this Hindu Nirvana business. "There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body." And his natural body got up in the morning to eat food, and tend sheep, and earn money, and prepare for having a family; to see the sun usefully making day and setting, owing to the earth's revolution: the new moon so shapen because the earth's shadow fell on her; the stars being other worlds, other lumps in space, shining according to their various distances, coloured according to their chemical composition. Well and good.

That is man very cleverly finding out all about it, like a little boy pulling his toy to pieces.

But, willy-nilly, in this country he had another sun and another moon. He had seen the glory of the sun and the glory of the moon, and both these glories had had a powerful sensual effect on him. There had been a great passional reaction in himself, in his own body. And as the strange new passion of fear, and the sense of gloriousness burned through him, like a new intoxication, he knew that this was his real spiritual body. This glowing, intoxicated body, drunk with the sun and the moon, drunk from the cup in the hand of the Lord, this was his spiritual body.

And when the flame came up in him, tearing from his bowels, in the sudden new desire for Monica, this was his spiritual body, the body transfigured with fire. And that steady dark vibration which made him want to kill Easu — Easu seemed to him like the Antichrist — that was his own spiritual body. And when he had hit Easu with his broken left hand, and the white sheet of flame going through him had made him scream aloud, leaving him strange and distant, but

super-conscious and powerful, this too was his spiritual body. The sun in his right hand and the moon in his left hand. When he drank from the burning right hand of the Lord, and wanted Monica in the same fire, it was his body spiritual burning from the right hand of the Lord. And when he knew he must destroy Easu, in the sheet of white pain, it was his body spiritual transfigured from the left hand of the Lord. And when he ate and drank, and the food tasted good, it was the dark cup of life he was drinking, drinking the life of the dead ox from the meat. And this was the body spiritual communing with the sacrificed body of natural life: like a tiger glowing at evening and lapping blood. And when he rode after the sheep through the bush, and the horse between his knees went quick and delicate, it was the Lord tossing him in his spiritual body down the maze of living.

But when Easu ground down his horse and shoved it after the sheep, it was the natural body fiendishly subjugating the spiritual body. For the horse too is a spiritual body and a natural body, and may be ridden as the one or as the other. And when Easu wanted Monica, it was the natural body malignantly degrading the spiritual body. Monica also half wanted it.

For Easu knew the spiritual body. And like a fallen angel, he hated it, he wanted always to overthrow it more, in this day when it is so abjectly overthrown. Monica too knew the spiritual body: the body of straight fire. And she too seemed to have a grudge against it. It thwarted her “natural” will; which “natural” will is the barren devil of to-day.

Gran, that old witch, she also knew the spiritual body. But she loved spiting it. And she was dying like clay.

Mary, who was so spiritual and so self-sacrificing, she didn't know the body of straight fire at all. Her spirit was all natural. She was so “good,” and so heavily “natural,” she would put out any fire of the glory of the burning Lord. She was more “natural” even than Easu.

And Jack's father was the same. So good! So nice! So kind! So absolutely well-meaning! And he would bank out the fire of the burning Lord with shovelfuls of kindness.

They would, none of them, none of them, let the fire burn straight. None of them. There were no people at all who dared have the fire of the Lord, and drink from the cup of the fierce glory of the Lord, the sun in one hand and the moon in the other.

Only this strange, wild, ash-coloured country with its undiminished sun and its unblemished moon, would allow it. There was a great death between the two hands of the Lord; between the sun and the moon. But let there be a great death. Jack gave himself to it.

He was almost asleep, in the half-trance of inner consciousness, when Dad came in. Jack opened his eyes and made to rise, but Dad waved him to sit still, while he took the chair on the other side of the fire, and sat down inert. He seemed queer. Dad seemed queer. The same dusky look over his face as over Gran's. And a queer, pinched, far-away look. Jack wondered over it. And he could see Dad didn't want to be spoken to. The clock tick-tocked. Jack went into a kind of sleep.

He opened his eyes. Dad was very slowly, very slowly fingering the bowl of his pipe. How quiet it was!

Jack dozed again, and wakened to a queer noise. It was Dad's breathing: and perhaps the falling of his pipe. He had dropped his pipe. And his body had dropped over sideways, very heavy and uncomfortable, and he was breathing hoarsely, unnaturally in his sleep. Save for the breathing, it was dreadfully quiet. Jack picked up the pipe and sat down again. He felt tired: awfully tired, for no reason at all.

He woke with a start. The afternoon was passing, there was a shower, the room seemed dark. The firelight flickered on Mr. Ellis' watchguard. He wore his unbuttoned waistcoat as ever, with the gold watchchain showing. He was very stout, and very still. Terribly still and sagging sideways, the hoarse breathing had ceased. Jack would have liked to wake him from that queer position.

How quiet it was. Upstairs someone had dragged a chair, and that had made him realise! Far away, very far away, he could hear Harry and Ellie and Baby, playing. "There's a quiet of the sun, and another quiet of the moon, and another quiet of the stars; for one star differs from another in quiet. So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body."

Was that Scripture? or wasn't it? There is a quiet of the sun. This was the quiet of the sun. He was sitting in the cold, dead quiet of the sun. For one star differs from another in quiet. The sun had abstained from radiating, this was the quiet of the sun, and the strange, shadowy crowding of the stars' differing quietness seemed to infest the weak daylight.

It is sown a natural body! Oh, bother the words! He didn't want them. He wanted the sun to shine, and every thing to be normal. If he didn't feel so weak, and if it weren't raining, he'd go out to the stable to the horses. To the hot-blooded animals.

Mr. Ellis' head hung sagging on his chest. Jack wished he would wake up and change his position, it looked horrible.

The inner door suddenly opened, and Mary came swiftly out. She started, seeing Mr. Ellis asleep in the chair. Then she went to Jack's side and took his arm, and leaned whispering in his ear.

“Jack! She’s gone! I think she’s gone. I think she passed in her sleep. We shall have to wake uncle.”

Jack stood up trembling. There was a queer smell in the room. He walked across and touched the sleeping man on the sleeve.

“Dad!” he said. “Dad! Mr. Ellis.”

There was no response: They both waited. Then Jack shook the arm more vigorously. It felt very inert. Mary came across, and put her hand on her uncle’s sunken forehead, to lift his head. She gave a little scream.

“Something’s the matter with him,” she said, whimpering.

II

Thank goodness, Dr. Rackett was upstairs. They fetched him, and Timothy and Tom, and carried Mr. Ellis into the dying room.

“Better leave me alone with him now,” said Rackett.

After ten minutes he came out of the dying room and closed the door behind him. Tom was standing there. He looked at Rackett enquiringly. Rackett shook his head.

“Dad’s not dead?” said Tom.

Rackett nodded.

Tom’s face went to pieces for a moment. Then he composed it, and that Australian mouth of his, almost like a scar, shut close. He went into the dying room.

Someone had to fetch the Methodist son-in-law from York. Jack went in the sulky. Better die in the cart than stop in that house. And he could drive the sulky quietly.

The Methodist son-in-law, though he was stout and wore black, and Jack objected to him on principle, wasn’t really so bad, in his own home. His wife Ruth of course burst into tears and ran upstairs. Her husband kept his face straight, brought out the whiskey tantalus, and poured some for Jack and himself. This they both drank with befitting gravity.

“I must be in chapel in fifteen minutes; that will be five minutes late,” said the parson. “But they can’t complain, under the circumstances. Mrs. Blogg of course will stay at home. Er — is anyone making arrangements out at Wandoo?”

“What arrangements?”

“Oh, seeing to things . . . the personal property, too.”

“I was sent for you,” said Jack. “I suppose they thought you’d see to things.”

“Yes! Certainly! Certainly! I’ll be out with Mrs. Blogg directly after Meeting. Let me see.”

He went to a table and laboriously wrote two notes. Twisting them into cocked hats, he handed them one after the other to Jack, saying:

“This is to the Church of England parson. Leave it at his house. I’ve made it Toosday, Toosday at half-past ten. I suppose that’ll do. And this — this is to the joiner.”

He looked at Jack meaningly, and Jack looked vague.

“Joshua Jenkins, at the joiner’s shop. Third house from the end of the road. And you’ll find him in the loft over the stable, Sunday or not, if he isn’t in the house.”

It was sunset, and the single bells of the church and chapel were sounding their last ping! Ping! ping-ping! as Jack drove slowly down the straggling street of York. People were going to church, the women in their best shawls and bonnets, hurrying a little along the muddy road, where already the cows were lying down to sleep, and the loose horses straggled uncomfortably. Occasionally a muddy buggy rattled up to the brick Church of England, people passed shadow-shape into the wooden Presbyterian Church, or waited outside the slab Meeting House of the Methodists. The choir band was already scraping fiddles and tooting cornets in the church. Lamps were lighted within and one feeble lamp at the church gate. It was a cloudy evening. Odd horsemen went trotting through the mud, going out into the country again as night fell, rather forlorn.

Jack always felt queer, in York on Sundays. The attempt at Sunday seemed to him like children’s make-believe. The churches weren’t real churches, the parsons weren’t real parsons, the people weren’t real worshippers. It was a sort of earnest make-believe, where people felt important like actors. And the pub, with its extra number of lamps, seemed to feel extra wicked. And the men riding home, often tipsy, seemed vague as to what was real, this York acting Sunday, or their dark, rather dreary farms away out, or some other third unknown thing. Was anything quite real? That was what the shadows, the people, the buildings seemed all to be asking. It was like children’s games, real and not real, actual and yet unsubstantial, and the people seemed to feel as children feel, very earnest, very sure, very sure that they were very real, but having to struggle all the time to keep up the conviction. If they didn’t keep up the conviction, the dark, strange Australian night might clear them and their little town all away into some final cupboard, and leave the aboriginal bush again.

Joshua Jenkins the godless, was in the loft with a chisel, working by lantern light. He peered at the twisted note, and his face brightened.

“Two of ‘em!” he exclaimed, with a certain gusto. “Well, think o’ that, think

o' that! And I've not had a job o' this sort for over a month. Well, I never, t'be sure! 'T never rains but it comes down cats and dogs, seemingly. Toosday! Toosday! Toosday! Let's see — ” and he scratched his head behind the ear. “Pretty quick work that, pretty quick work. But can be done, oh, yes, can be done. I's'll have t' send somebody t' measure the Boss. How deep should you say he was in the barrel? Never mind though, I'll send Sam over with the measure, come morning. But I can start right away on the old lady. Let's see! Let's see! Let's see! She wouldn't be-e-e — she wouldn't be over five foot two or three now, would she?”

“I don't know,” said Jack hoarsely. “Do you mean for her coffin?” He was filled with horror.

“Well, I should say I do. I should say so. You don't see no sewing-machine here, do you, for sewing her shroud. I suppose I do mean her coffin, being joiner and carpenter, and J. P. and coroner as well when required.”

Jack fled, horrified. But as he lit his sulky candles, and set off at a slow trot out of the town, he laughed a bit to himself. He felt it was rather funny. Why shouldn't it be rather funny? He hoped it would be a bit funny when he was dead too, to relieve matters. He sat in the easy sulky driving slowly down the washed-out road, in the dark, alien night. The night was dark and strange. An animal ran along the road in front of him, just discernible, at the far edge of the dim yellow candle glow. It was a wild grey thing, running ahead into the dark. On into the dark.

Why should one care? Beyond a certain point, one didn't care about anything, life or death. One just felt it all. Up to a certain point, one had to go through the mill, caring and feeling bad. One had to cry out to the Lord, and fight the ugly brutes of life. And then for a time it was over, and one didn't care, good or bad, Lord or no Lord. One paid one's whack of caring and then one was let off for a time. When one was dead, one didn't care any more. And that was death. But life too had its own indifference, its own deep, strong indifference: as the ocean is calm way down, under the most violent storm.

When he got home, Tom came out to the sulky. Tom's face was set with that queer Australian look, as if he were caught in a trap, and it wasn't any use complaining about it. He unharnessed the horse in a rough, flinging fashion. Jack didn't know what to say to him, so he thought he'd better keep quiet.

Lennie came riding in on Lucy. He slid to the ground and dragged the mare's bridle roughly.

“Come on, yer blasted old idjut, can't ye!” he blubbed, dragging her to the stable door. “Blasted idjut, my Uncle Joe!” he continued, between the sniffs and gulps of his blubbing. “Questions! Questions! How c'n I answer questions when

I don't know myself!" A loud blub as he dragged the saddle down on top of himself, in his frenzy of untackling Lucy. "Rackett says to me, 'Len,' he says," — blub and a loud sniff — "'y' father's took bad and pore ol' Gran's gone,' he says" — blub! Blub! Blub — "'Be off an' fetch y' Uncle Joe an' tell him to come at onst' — an' he can go to hell." Lennie ended on a shout of defiance as he staggered into the stable with the saddle. And from the dark his voice came: "An' when I ask our Tom what's amiss wi' m' Dad," blub! blub! "blasted idjut looks at me like a blasted owl — like a blasted owl!" And Lennie sobbed before he sniffed and came out for the bridle.

"Don't y' cry, Lennie," said Jack, who was himself crying for all he was worth, under the cover of the dark.

"I'm not crying, y' bloomin' fool, you!" shouted Len. "I'm goin' in to see Ma, I am. Get some sense outta her."

He walked off towards the house, and then came back.

"Why don' you go in, Tom, an' see?" he cried. "What d'yer stan' there like that for, what do yer?"

There was a dead and horrible silence, outside the stable door in the dark. A silence that went to the core of the night, having no word to say.

The lights of a buggy were seen at the gate. The three waited. It was the unmarried Aunts. One of them ran and took Len in her arms.

"Oh, you poor little lamb!" she cried. "Oh, your poor Ma! Your Ma! Your poor Ma!"

"Ma's not bad! She's all right," yelped Len in a new fear. Then there was a pause, and he became super-conscious. Then he drew away from the Aunts.

"Is Dad dead?" he asked in a queer, quizzical little voice, looking from Tom to Jack, in the dim buggy light. Tom stood as if paralysed.

Lennie at last gave a queer, animal "Whooo," like a dog dazed with pain, and flung himself into Tom's arms. The only sounds in the night were Tom's short, dry sobs, as he held Lennie, and the whimpering of the Aunts.

"Come to your poor Mother, come to comfort her," said one of the Aunts gently.

"Tom! Tom!" cried Lennie. "I'm skeered! I'm skeered, Tom, o' them two corpses! I'm skeered of 'em, Tom." Tom, who was a little skeered too, gave a short, dry bark of a sob.

"They won't hurt you, precious!" said the Aunt. "They won't hurt you. Come to your poor Mother."

"No-o-o!" wailed Lennie in terror, and he flung away to Timothy's cabin, where he slept all night.

When the horses were fixed up, Tom and Jack went to the cubby. Tom flung

himself on the bed without undressing, and lay there in silence. Jack did the same. He didn't know what else to do. At last he managed to say:

"Don't take it too hard, Tom! Dad's lived his life, and he's got all you children. We have to live. We all have to live. An' then we've got to die."

There was unresponsive silence for a time.

"What's the blasted use of it all, anyhow?" said Tom.

"There's no such thing as use," said Jack. "Dad lived, and he had his life. He had his life. You'll have yours. And I shall have mine. It's just your life, and you live it."

"What's the good of it?" persisted Tom heavily.

"Neither good nor bad. You live your life because it's your own, and nobody can live it for you."

"What good is it to me?" said Tom dully, drearily. "I don't care if people live their lives or not."

Jack felt for the figure on the bed.

"Shake hands, though, Tom," he said. "You are alive, and so am I. Shake hands on it, then."

He found the hand and got a faint response, sulky, heavy. But for very shame Tom could not withhold all response.

Tim came in the morning with tea and bread and butter, saying Tom was wanted inside, and would Jack go with him to attend to the grave. Poor Tim was very much upset, and wept and wailed unrestrainedly. Which perhaps was good, because it spared the others the necessity to weep and wail.

They hitched up the old buggy, and set off with a pick and a couple of spades. Old black Timothy on the driving-box occasionally startled Jack by breaking forth into a new sudden wail, like a dog suddenly remembering again. It was fine day. The earth had already dried up, and a hot, dry, gritty wind was blowing from inland, from the east. They drove out of the paddocks and along an overgrown trail, then they crossed the river, heaving and floundering through the slough, for at this season it was no more. The excitement of the driving here made Timothy forget to wail.

Rounding a steep little bluff, they came to a lonely, forlorn little enclosed graveyard, which Jack had never seen. Tim wailed, then asked where the grave should be. The sun grew very hot. They nosed around the little, lonely, parched acre.

Jack could not dig, so he unharnessed the outfit and put a box of chaff before the horses. Tim flung his spade over against a little grey headstone, and climbed in with the pick. Even then they weren't quite sure how big to make the grave, so Jack lay on the ground while Tim picked out a line around him. They got a

straight line with a rope.

The soil was as hard as cement. Tim toiled and moiled, and forgot all wailing. But he made little impression on the cement-like earth.

“What we goin’ to do?” he asked, scratching his sweating head. “What ‘n hell’s name we goin’ t’ do, sir? Gotta bury ‘m Toosday, gotta.” And he looked at the blazing sun. “Gotta dig him hole sevenfut deep grave, gotta do ‘t.”

He set to again. Then two of the Reds came, sent to help. But the work was killing. The day became so hot, you forgot it, you passed into a kind of spell. But that work was heart-breaking.

Jack went off for dynamite, and Rackett came along, with Lennie, who would never miss a dynamiting show. Tim wrung his wet hair like a mop. The Reds, in their vests, were scarlet, and the vests were wet and grimy.

Much more fun with dynamite. Boom! Bang! Then somebody throwing out the dirt. Somebody going for a ladder. Boom! Bang! The explosions seemed enormous.

“Oh, for the love o’ Mike!” cried the excited Lennie. “Ye’ll blow me ol’ grandfather sky high, if y’ don’t mind. For the love of Mike, don’t let me see his bones.”

But the grandfather Ellis was safe in the next grave. Rackett laid another fuse. They all stood back. Bang! Boom! Pouf! went the dust.

III

Jack would have done anything to escape the funeral, but Timothy, for some reason, kept hold of him. He wanted him to help replace the turf: moral support rather than physical assistance.

The two of them hid behind the pinch. At last they saw the cortège approaching. Easu Ellis held the reins of the first team, and chewed the end of the whip. Beside him sat Joshua Jenkins, as a mute, fearful in black and like a scarecrow with loose danglings of crape. In the buggy behind them, on the floorboards, was Gran’s coffin, shaking wofully, covered with a black cloth. Joe Low drove the second buggy, which was the second hearse, and he looked strained and anxious as the heavy coffin bumped when the buggy dropped into holes on the track. Then came the family shay with the chief male mourners. Then a little crowd on foot.

The horses were behaving badly, not liking the road. It was hot, the vile east wind was blowing. Easu’s horse jibbed at the slough of the stream: would not

take it. He was afraid the horses would jump, and toss the coffin out of the buggy. He had to get bearers to carry Gran's poor remains across the mud and up the pinch to their last house. The bearers sunk almost to their knees in mud. The whole cortège was at a standstill.

Joe Low's horses, mortally frightened, were jumping round till they were almost facing the horses in the mourners' shay. Easu ran to their heads. More bearers, strong men, came forward to lift out Dad's heavy coffin. Everybody watched in terror as they staggered through the slough of the stream with that unnatural burden. Was it going to fall?

No, they were through. Men were putting branches and big stones for the foot-mourners to cross, everybody sweating and sweltering. The sporting parson, his white surplice waving in the hateful, gritty hot wind, came striding over, holding his book. Then Tom, with a wooden, stupid face. Then Lennie, cracking nuts between his teeth and spitting out the shells, in an agony of nervousness. Then the other mourners, some carrying a few late, weird bush-flowers, picking their way over like a train of gruesome fowls, staggering and clutching on the stones and boughs, landing safe on the other bank. Jack watched from a safe distance above.

There were two coffins, one on either side of the grave. Some of the uncles had top hats with dangling crape. Nearly everybody was black. Poor Len, what a black little crow he looked! The sporting parson read the service manfully. Then he announced hymn number 225.

Jack could feel the hollow place below, with the black mourners, simmer with panic, when the parson in cold blood asked them to sing a hymn. But he read the first verse solemnly, like an overture:

“Oh sweet and blessed country
The home of God's elect!
Oh sweet and blessed country
That eager hearts expect . . .”

There was a deadly pause. There was going to be no answer from the uncomfortable congregation, under that hot sun.

But Uncle Blogg was not to be daunted. He struck up in a rather fat, wheezy, Methodist voice, and Aunt Ruth piped feebly. The maiden Aunts, who had insisted on following their mother, though women were not expected to attend, listened to this for an awful minute or two, then they waveringly “tried” to join in. It was really only funny. And Tom in all his misery, suddenly started to laugh. Lennie looked up at him with wide eyes, but Tom's shoulders shook, shook harder, especially when Aunt Minnie “tried” to sing alto. That alto he could not bear.

The Reds were beginning to grin sheepishly and to turn their heads over their shoulders, as if the open country would not object to their grins. It was becoming a scandal.

Lennie saved the situation. His voice came clear and pure, like a chorister's, rising above the melancholy "trying" of the relations, a clear, pure singing, that seemed to dominate the whole wild bush.

"Oh sweet and blessed country
That eager hearts expect.
Jesu in mercy bring us
To that dear land of rest;
Who art with God the Father,
And Spirit ever blessed."

At the sound of Lennie's voice, Tom turned white as a sheet, and looked as if he were going to die too. But the boy's voice soared on, with that pure quality of innocence that was sheer agony to the elder brother.

IV

Jack, who was looking sick again, was sent away to the Greenlows' next day. And he was glad to go, thankful to be out of it. He loathed death, he loathed death, and Wandoo had suddenly become full of death.

The first cool days of the year, golden and blue, were at hand. The Greenlow girls made much of him. He rode with them after sheep, inspecting fences, examining far-off wells. They were not bad girls at all. They taught him to play solitaire at evening, to hold worsted, even to spin. Real companionable girls, thankful to have a young man in the house, spoiling him completely. Pa was home after the first day, and acted as a sort of hairy chimpanzee chaperone, but looking over his spectacles and hissing through his teeth was his severest form of reproof. He didn't set Jack to wash that Sunday, but even gave him tit-bits from the joint, so that our young hero almost knew what it was to have a prospective father-in-law.

Jack left Gum Tree Croft with regret. For he knew his life at Wandoo was over. Now Dad was dead, everything was going to break up. This was bitter to him, for it was the first place he had ever loved, ever wanted to stay in, for ever and ever. He loved the family. He couldn't bear to go away from them.

"Never mind!" he said to himself. "I shall always have them in some way or other, all my life."

Things seemed different when he got back. There wasn't much real difference, except a bit of raking and clearing up had been done for the funeral. But Wandoo itself seemed to have died. For the meantime, the homestead was as if dead.

Grace and Monica looked unnatural in black frocks. They felt unnatural.

Jack was told that Mr. George was having a conclave in the parlour, and that he was to go in.

Tom, Mrs. Ellis, and Mr. George and Dr. Rackett were there, seated round the table, on which were some papers. Jack shook hands, and sat uneasily in an empty chair on Dr. Rackett's side of the table. Mr. George was explaining things simply.

Mr. Ellis left no will. But the first marriage certificate had been found. Tom was to inherit Wandoo, but not till he came legally of age, in a year and a half's time. Meanwhile Mrs. Ellis could continue on the place, and carry on as best she might, on behalf of herself and all the children. For a year and a half.

She heard in silence. After a year and a half she would be homeless: or at least dependent on Tom, who was not her son. She sat silent in her black dress.

Tom cleared his throat and stared at the table. Then he looked up at Jack, and, scarlet in the face, said:

"I've been thinking, Ma, I don't want the place. You have it, for Len. I don't want it. You have it, for Len an' the kids. I'd rather go away. Best if that certificate hadn't never been found, if you're going to feel you're turned out."

He dropped his head in confusion. Mr. George held up his hand.

"No more of that heroic talk," he said. "When Jacob Ellis stored up that marriage certificate at the bottom of that box, he showed what he meant. And you may feel as you say to-day, but two years hence you might repent it."

Tom looked up angrily.

"I don't believe Tom would ever regret it," put in Mrs. Ellis. "But I couldn't think of it. Len wouldn't let me, even if I wanted to."

"Of course not," said Mr. George. "We've got to be sensible, and the law's the law. You can't alter it yet, my boy, even if you want to. You're not of age yet.

"So you listen to me. My plan is for you and Jack to go out into the colony and get some experience. Sow your wild oats if you've any to sow, or else pick up a bit of good oatseed. One or the other.

"My idea is for you and Jack to go up for a year to Lang's Well station, out Roeburne way. Lang'll give you your keep and a pound a week each, and your fare refunded if you stay a year.

"The 'Rob Roy' sails from Geraldton about a month from now; you can get passages on her. And I thought it would be just as well, Tom, if you and Jack rode up through that midland country. You've a hundred connections to see,

who'll change y'r horses for y'. And you'll see the country. And y'll be men of travel. We want men of experience, men of a wide outlook. Somebody's got to be the head-piece of this colony, when men like me and the rest of us are gone. It'll be a three hundred mile ride, but ye've nigh on a month to do it.

"Now, what do you say, my boy? Your mother will stop on here with the children. I'll see she gets a good man to run the place. And meanwhile she'll be able to fix something up for herself. Oh, we shall settle all right. I'll see your mother through all right. No fear of that. And no fear of any deterioration to the place. I'll watch that. You bet I Will."

Tom twisted his fingers, white at the gills, and mumbled his thanks vaguely.

"Jack," said Mr. George. "I know you're game. And you will look after Tom."

Dr. Rackett said he thought it a wise plan, and further, that if Mrs. Ellis would consent, he would like to bear the expenses of sending Lennie to school in England for the next three years.

Mrs. Ellis woke from her dream to say quickly:

"Although I thank you kindly, Dr. Rackett, I think you'll understand if I say No."

Her decision startled everybody.

"Prrh! Bah!" snorted Mr. George. "There's one thing. I doubt if we could make Lennie go. But, with your permission, Alice, we'll ask him. Jack, find Lennie for us."

"I'll not say a word," said Mrs. Ellis, nervously clutching the edge of the table. "I won't influence him. But if he goes it'll be the death of me. Poor old Lennie! Poor old Lennie!"

"Prrh! Bah! That's nonsense! Nonsense!" said Mr. George angrily. "Give the boy his chance, leave your fool emotions out, d'ye hear, Alice Ellis."

Mrs. Ellis sat like a martyr stubborn at the stake. Jack brought the mistrustful Len, who stood like a prisoner at the bar. Mr. George put the case as attractively as possible.

Len slowly shook his head, with a grimace of distaste. "No, I don't think!" he remarked. "Not fer mine, you bet! I stays alongside my pore ol' Ma, here in Western Austrylia."

Mr. George adjusted his eyeglasses severely.

"Your mother is neither poor nor old," he said coldly.

"I never!" broke out Lennie.

"And this country, thank God, is called Australia, not Austrylia. When you open your mouth you give proof enough of your need for education. I should like to hear different language in your mouth, my son, and see different ideas working in your head."

Lennie, rather pale and nervous, stared with wide eyes at him.

“You never — ” he said. “You never ketch me talkin’ like Jack Grant, not if y’ skin me alive.” And he shifted from one foot to the other.

“I wouldn’t take the trouble to skin you, alive or dead. Your skin wouldn’t be worth it. But come. You’re an intelligent boy. You need education. You need it. Your nature needs it, child. Your mother ought to see that. Your nature needs you to be educated, well-educated. You’ll be wasted afterwards — you will. And you’ll repent it. Mark me, you’ll repent it, when you’re older, and your spirit, which should be trained and equipped, is as clumsy and half-baked as any other cornseed’s. You’ll be a fretful, uneasy, wasted man, you will. Your mother ought to see that. You’ll be a half-baked, quarter-educated bush-whacker, instead of a well-equipped man.”

Len looked wonderingly at his mother. But she still sat like an obstinate martyr at the stake, and gave him no sign.

“Don’t he educate me?” asked Len, pointing to Rackett.

“As much as you’ll let him,” said Mr. George. “But — ”

Lennie’s face crumpled up with irritation.

“Oh, what for do you want me to be educated?” he cried testily. “I don’ want to be like Uncle Blogg. I don’ wantter be like Dr. Rackett even.” He wrinkled his nose in distaste. “N I don’ wantter be like Jack Grant neither. I don’ wantta. I don’ wantta, I tell y’ I don’ wantta.”

“Do you think they would want to be like you?” asked Mr. George.

Lennie looked from him to Rackett, and then to Jack.

“Jack’s not so very diff’reent,” he said slowly. And he shook his head. “But can’t y’ believe me,” he cried. “I don’ wantta go to England. I don’ wantta talk fine and be like them. Can’t ye see I don’t? I don’ wantta. What’s the good! What’s the mortal use of it, anyhow? Aren’t I right as I am?”

“What do you want to do?”

“I wants to work. I wants to milk an’ feed, and plough, and reap and lay out irrigation, like Dad. An’ I wants to look after Ma an’ the kids. An’ then I’ll get married and be on a place of me own with kids of me own, an’ die, like Dad, an’ be done for. That’s what I wants. It is.”

He looked desperately at his mother.

Mr. George slowly shook his head, staring at the keen, beautiful, but reluctant boy.

“I suppose that’s what we’ve come to,” said Rackett.

“Didn’t you learn me!” cried Lennie defiantly. And striking a little attitude, like a naive earnest actor, he repeated:

“Here rests, his head upon the lap of earth,

A youth of fortune and to fame unknown.
Fair science frowned not on his humble birth,
And melancholy marked him for her own.

“Large was his bounty, and his soul sincere,
Heaven did a recompense as largely send.

He gave to misery all he had, a tear,

He gained from heaven, ‘twas all he wished, a friend.’

“There,” he continued. “That’s me! An’ I’ve got a friend already.”

“You’re a little fool,” said Mr. George. “Much mark of melancholy there is on you! And do you think misery is going to thank you for your idiotic tear? As for your friend, he’s going away. And you’re a fool, putting up a headstone to yourself while you’re alive still. Damn you, you little fool, and be damned to you.”

Mr. George was really cross. He flounced his spectacles off his nose. Len was frightened. Then he said, rather waveringly, turning to his mother:

“We’re all right, Ma, ain’t we?”

Mrs. Ellis looked at him with her subtlest, tenderest smile. And in Lennie’s eyes burned a light of youthful indignation against these old men.

CHAPTER XIII

TOM AND JACK RIDE TOGETHER

These days Monica was fascinating to Jack's eyes. She wore a black dress, and her slimness, her impulsive girlishness under this cloud were wistful, exquisite. He would have liked to love her, soothingly, protectively, passionately. He would have liked to cherish her, with passion. Always he looked to her for a glance of intimacy, looked to see if she wouldn't accept his passion and his cherishing. He wanted to touch her, to kiss her, to feel the eternal lightning of her slim body through the cloud of that black dress. He wanted to declare to her that he loved her, as Alec Rice had declared to Grace; and he wanted to ask her to marry him. To ask her to marry him at once.

But mostly he wanted to touch her and hold her in his arms. He watched her all the time, hoping to get one of the old, long looks from her yellow eyes, from under her bended brows. Her long, deep, enigmatic looks, that used to worry him so. Now he longed for her to look at him like that.

Or better still if she would let him see her trouble and her grief, and love her so, with a passionate cherishing.

But she would do neither. She kept her grief and her provocation both out of sight, as if neither existed. Her little face remained mute and closed, like a shut-up bud. She only spoke to him with a vague distant voice, and she never really looked at him. Or if she did glance at him, it was in a kind of anger, and pain, as if she did not want to be interfered with; didn't want to be pulled down.

He was completely puzzled. Her present state was quite incomprehensible to him. She had nothing to reproach him with, surely. And if she had loved him, even a little, she could surely love him that little still. If she had so often taken his hand and clutched it, surely she could now let him take her hand, in real sympathy.

It was if she were angry with him because Dad had died. Jack hadn't wanted Dad to die. Indeed no. He was cut up by it as if he had been one of the family. And it was as bad a blow to his destiny as to hers. He was as sore and sorry as anybody. Yet she kept her face shut against him, and avoided him, as if he were to blame.

Completely puzzled, Jack went on with his preparations for departure. He had no choice. He was under orders from Mr. George, and with Mrs. Ellis' approval, to quit Wandoo, to ride with Tom up to Geraldton, and to spend at least a year on the sheep station up north. It had to be. It was the wheel of fate. So let it be.

And as the last day drew near, the strange volcano of anger which slumbered at the bottom of his soul — a queer, quiescent crater of anger which churned its deep hot lava invisible — threw up jets of silver rage, which hardened rapidly into a black, rocky indifference. And this was characteristic of him: an indifference which was really congealed anger, and which gave him a kind of innocent, remote, childlike quietness.

This was his nature. He was himself vaguely aware of the unplumbed crater of silent anger which lay at the bottom of his soul. It was not anger against any particular thing, or because of anything in particular. It was just generic, inherent in him. It was himself. It did not make him hate people, individually, unless they were hateful. It did not make him hard or cruel. Indeed he was too yielding rather than otherwise, too gentle and mindful of horses and cattle, for example, unmindful of himself. Tom often laughed at him for it. If Lucy had a will of her own, and a caprice she wanted to execute, he always let her go ahead, take her way, as far as was reasonable. If she exceeded her limits, his anger roused and there was no doing any more with him. But he very rarely, very rarely got really angry. Only then in the long, slow accumulation of hostility, as with Easu.

But anger! A deep, fathomless well-head of slowly-moving, invisible fire. Somewhere in his consciousness he was aware of it, and in this awareness it was as if he belonged to a race apart. He never felt identified with the great humanity. He belonged to a race apart, like the race of Cain. This he had always known.

Sometimes he met eyes that were eyes of his own outcast race. As a tiny boy it had been so. Fairs had always fascinated him, because at the fairs in England he met the eyes of gipsies who, in a glance, understood him. His own people could not understand. But in the black eyes of a gipsy woman he had seen the answer, even as a boy of ten. And he had thought: I ought to go away with her, run away with her.

It was the anger, the deep, burning life-anger which was the kinship. Not a deathly, pale, nervous anger. But an anger of the old blood. And it was this which had attracted him to grooms, horsey surroundings, and to pugilists. In them was some of this same deep, generous anger of the blood. And now in Australia too, he saw it like a secret away at the bottom of the black, full, strangely shining eyes of the aborigines. There it lay, the secret, like an eternal, brilliant snake. And it established at once a kind of free-masonry between him

and the blacks. They were curiously aware of him, when he came: aware of his coming, aware of his going. As if in him were the same great Serpent of their anger. And they were downcast now he was going away, as if their strength were being taken from them. Old Tim, who had taken a great fancy to Jack, relapsed into a sort of glumness as if he too, now, were preparing to die.

Since Jack had come back from the Greenlows' farm, Monica had withdrawn to a distance, a kind of luminous distance, and put a chasm between herself and Jack. She moved mute and remote on the shining side of the chasm. He stood on the dark side, looking across the blackness of the gulf at her as if she were some kind of star. Surely the gulf would close up. Surely they both would be on natural ground again.

But no! always that incomprehensible little face with fringed lashes, and mouth that opened with a little smile, a vulnerable little smile, as if asking them all to be kind to her, to be pitiful towards her, and not try to touch her.

"Well, good-bye, Monica, for the present," he said, as he sat in the saddle in the yard, and Tom started away riding towards the gate, leading the bulky-looking pack-horse.

"Good-bye. Come back!" said Monica, looking up with a queer, hard little question come into her eyes, but her face remote as ever.

Jack kicked his horse and started.

"I'll come back," he said over his shoulder. But he didn't look round at her. His heart had gone hard and hot in his breast. He was glad to be going.

Lennie had opened the gate. He stood there as Jack rode through.

"Why can't I never come?" he cried.

Jack laughed and rode on, after the faithful Tom. He was glad to go. He was glad to leave Wandoo. He was glad to say no more good-byes, and to feel no more pain. He was glad to be gone, since he was going, from the unlucky place. He was glad to be gone from its doom. There was a doom over it, a doom. And he was glad to be gone.

The morning was still orange and green. Winter had set in at last, the rains had begun to be heavy. They might have trouble with drenchings and boggings, but that, Tom said, was better than drought and sunstrokes. And anyhow the weather this morning was perfect.

The dark forest of karri that ran to the left of Wandoo away on the distant horizon, cut a dark pattern on the egg-green sky. Good-bye! Good-bye! to it. The sown fields they were riding through glittered with tender blades of wheat. Good-bye! Good-bye! Somebody would reap it. The bush was now full of sparks of the beautiful, uncanny flowers of Western Australia, and bright birds started and flew. Sombre the bush was in itself, but out of the heavy dullness came

sharp scarlet, flame-spark flowers, and flowers as lambent gold as sunset, and wan white flowers, and flowers of a strange, darkish rich blue, like the vault of heaven just after sundown. The scent of rain, of eucalyptus, and of the strange brown-green shrubs of the bush!

They rode in silence, Tom ahead with the pack-horse, and they did not draw near, but rode apart. They were travelling due west from York, along a bush track toward Paddy's Crossing. And as they went they drew nearer and nearer to the dark, low fringe of hills behind which, for the last twelve months, Jack had seen the sun setting with its great golden glow. Trees grew along the ridge of the hills, scroll-like and mysterious. They had always seemed to Jack like the bar of heaven.

By noon the riders reached the ridge, and the bar of heaven was the huge karri trees which went up aloft so magnificently. But the karri forest ended here with a jerk. Beyond, the earth ran away down long, long slopes, covered with scrub, down the greyness and undulation of Australia, towards the great dimness where was the coast. The sun was hot at noon. Jack was glad when Tom called a halt under the last trees, facing the great, soft, open swaying of the land seaward, and they began to make tea.

They had hardly sat down to drink their tea, when they heard a buggy approaching. It was the mysterious Dr. Rackett, driven by the grinning Sam. Rackett said nothing, just greeted the youths, pulled his tin mug and tucker from under the buggy seat, and joined in, chatting casually as if it had all been pre-arranged.

Tom was none too pleased, but he showed nothing. And when the tea was finished, he made good by handing over the beast of a pack-horse to Sam. Poor Sam sat in the back of the vehicle lugging the animal along, jerking its reluctant neck. Rackett drove in lonely state on the driving seat. Tom and Jack trotted quickly ahead, on the down-slope, and were soon out of sight. They were thankful to ride free.

Over the ridge they felt Wandoo was left behind, and they were in the open world again, away from care. Whenever man drives his tent-pegs deep, to stay, he drives them into underlying water of sorrow. Best ride tentless. So thought the boys.

They were going to a place called Paddy's Crossing, a settlement new to Jack, but well known to Tom as the place-where-men-went-when-they-wanted-a-private-jamboree. What a jamboree was, Jack, being a gentleman, that is not a lady, would learn in due course.

As the ground came to a rolling hollow, Tom set off at a good pace, and away they went, galloping beautifully along the soft earth trail, galloping, galloping,

putting the miles between them and Wandoo and women and care. They both rode in a kind of passion for riding, for hurling themselves ahead down the new road. To be men out alone in the world, away from the women and the dead stone of trouble.

They reached the river hours before Rackett's turn-out. Forging it they rode into the mushroom settlement, a string of slab cabins with shingle roofs and calico window-panes — or else shuttered-up windows. The stoves were outside the chimney-less cabins, under brush shelters. One such "kitchen," a fore-runner, had already a roof of flattened-out, rusty tin cans.

But it was a cosy, canny nook, homely, nestling down in the golden corner of the earth, the mimosa in bloom by the river. And it was beautifully ephemeral. As transient, as casual as the bushes themselves.

Jack for the moment had a dread of solid houses of brick and stone and permanence. There was always horror somewhere inside them.

He wanted the empty, timeless Australia, with nooks like this of flimsy wooden cabins by a river with a wattle bush.

There was one older, white-washed cabin with vine trellises.

"That's Paddy's," said Tom. "He grows grapes, and makes wine out of the little black ones. But the muscats is best. I'm not keen on wine, anyhow. Something a drop more warming."

Jack was amazed at the good Tom. He had never known him to drink.

"There's nobody about," said Jack, as they rode up the incline between the straggling cabins.

"All asleep," said Tom.

It was not so, however, because as they crested the slope and looked into the little hollow beyond, they saw a central wooden building, hall or mission or church, and people crowding like flies.

But Tom turned up to Paddy's white inn, up the side slope. He was remorseful about having galloped the horses at the beginning of such a long trip. The inn seemed deserted. Tom coo-eeed! but there was no answer.

"All shut up!" he said. "What's that paper on the door?" Jack got down and walked stiffly to the door, for the ride had been long and hard and downhill, and his knees were hurting. "'Gone to the wedin be ome soon P. O. T.'" he read.

"What is P. O. T.?" he asked.

"What I stand in need of," said the amazing Tom.

They were just turning their horses towards the stable when, with a racket and a canter, an urchin drove round from the yard in a pitch-black wicker chaise, a bone-white, careworn horse slopping between the shafts.

"You two blokes," yelled the urchin, "'d better get on th' trail for th' church,

else Father Prendy ‘ll be on y’ tail, I tell y’.”

“What’s up?” shouted Tom.

“I’m just off fer th’ bride. Ol’ Nick ‘ere ‘eld me up runnin’ away from me in the paddock.”

Tom grinned, the outfit swept past. Our heroes took their horses to the stable and settled them down conscientiously. Then they set off, glad to be on foot, down to the church.

The crowd was buzzing. It was half-past three. Father Prendy, the old mission priest, who looked like a dusty old piece of furniture from a loft, was peering up the road. The black wicker buggy still made no appearance with the bride.

“Two o’clock’s the legal limit for marriages,” said Father Prendy. “But praise God, we’ve half an hour yet.”

And he showed his huge watch, which said half-past one, since he had slipped away for a moment to put back the fingers.

The slab-building — hall, school, and church — was now a church, though the oleographs of the Queen and the Prince Consort in Robes still glowed on the walls, and a blackboard stood with its face to the wall, and one of those wire things with coloured beads poked out from behind, and the globe of the world could not be hidden entirely by the eucalyptus boughs.

But it was a church. A table with a white cloth and a crucifix was the altar. Crimson-flowering gum-blossom embowered the walls, the blackboard, the windows, but left the Queen and Prince Consort in full isolation. Forms were ranked on the mud floor, and these forms were densely packed with settlers dressed in all kinds of clothes. It was not only a church, it was a wedding. Just inside the door, like a figure at Madame Tussaud’s, sat an elderly creature in greenish evening suit with white waistcoat, and copper-toed boots, waiting apparently for the Last Trump. On the other side was a brown-whiskered man in frock-coat, a grey bell-topper in his hand, leaning balanced on a stick. He was shod in white socks and carpet slippers. Later on this gentleman explained to Jack: “I suffer from corns, and shouldn’t be happy in boots.”

There was a great murmuring and staring, and shuffling and shifting as Jack and Tom came up, as though one of them was the bride in disguise. The wooden church buzzed like a cocoanut shell. A red-faced man seized Tom’s arm as if Tom were a long-lost brother, and Jack was being introduced, shaking the damp, hot, trembling hand of the red-faced man, who was called Paddy.

“It’s fair come over me, so ut has! — praise be to the saints an’ may the devil run away with them two young termagants! Father Prendy makin’ them come to this pass all at onst! For mark my words, in his own mind he’s thinkin’ the wrong they’ve done, neither of them speakin’ to confess, till he was driven to

remark on the girl's unnatural figure. And not a soul in the world, mark you, has seen 'em speak a word to one another for the last year in or out. But she says it's he, an' Denny Mackinnon, he payin', I'll be bound, that black priest of a Father Prendy to come over me an' make me render up my poor innocent Pat to the hussy, in holy matrimony. May the saints fly away with 'em."

He wiped away his sweat, speechless. And Denny Mackinnon, the hussy's father — it could be no other than he — in moth-eaten scarlet coat and overall trousers, and top-boots slashed for his bunions, and forage-cap slashed for his increased head, stood bulging on the other side of the door, compressed in his youthful uniform, and scarlet in the face with, the compression. He was a stout man with a black beard and a fixed, fierce, solemn expression. Creator of this agitated occasion, he was almost bursting with wrathful agitation as that hussy of a daughter of his still failed to appear. By his side stood an ancient man, with a long grey beard, anciently clad.

Patrick, the bridegroom to be, lurked near his father. He was a thin, pale, freckled, small-faced youth with broad, brittle shoulders and brittle limbs, who would no doubt, in time, fill out into a burly fellow. As it was, he was agitated and unlovely in a new ready-made suit and a black bomb of a hard hat that wouldn't stay on, and new boots that stank to heaven of improperly dressed kangaroo hide: one of the filthiest of stinks.

Poor Paddy, the father of the bridegroom, was a tall, thin, well set-up man with trembling hands and a face like beet-root, garbed in a blue coat with brass buttons, mole trousers, leggings, and a sideways-leaning top hat. His tie was a flowing red with white spots. His eyes were light blue and wickedly twinkling behind their slight wateriness.

"What's that yer sayin' about me?" said Father Prendy, coming up rubbing his hands, bowing to the strangers, beaming with a cheerfulness that could outlast any delay under the sun.

"'Twas black I was callin' ye, Father Prendy," said Paddy. "For the fine pair of black eyes ye carry, why not? Isn't it a good drink ye'll be havin' on me afore the day is out, eh? Isn't it a pretty penny ye're costin' me, with your marrin' an' givin' in marriage? An' why isn't it Danny what pays the wedding breakfast, eh?"

"Hold your peace, Paddy, my dear. I see a wagon comin', don't I?"

Sure enough the black wicker buggy rattling down hill, the white horse seeming to swim, the urchin standing up, feet wide apart, elbows high up, bending forward and urging the bone-white steed with curses unnameable.

"What now! What now!" murmured the priest, feeling in his pocket for his stole. "What now!"

“Where’s Dad?” yelled the urchin, pulling the bone-white steed on its bony haunches, in front of the church.

Dad had gone round the corner. But he came bustling and puffing and bursting in his skin-tight scarlet coat, that almost cut his arms off, his own ancient father, with a long grey beard, pushing him irritably, propelling him towards the slippery boy. As if this family, generation by generation, got more and more behindhand in its engagements.

“Gawd’s sake!” blowed the scarlet Dad, as the old grey granddad shoved him.

“Hold ye breath, Dad, ‘n come ‘ome!” said the urchin, subsiding comfortably on to the seat, and speaking as if he enjoyed the utmost privacy. “Sis can’t get away. She’s had a baby. An’ Ma says I was to tell Mr. O’Burk as it’s a foine boy, an’ would Father Prendy step up, and Pat O’Burk can come ‘n see with his own eyes.”

CHAPTER XIV

JAMBOREE

“Let’s get along,” said Jack uncomfortably, in Tom’s ear. “Get! Not for mine! We’re in luck’s way, if ever we were.”

“There’s no fun under the circumstances.”

“Oh, Lord my, ain’t there! What’s wrong? They’re all packing into the buggy. Father Prendy’s putting his watch back a few more minutes. He’ll have ‘em married before you can betcher life. It’s a wedding, this is, boy!”

The people now came crowding, nudging, whispering, giggling, stumbling out of the church. The gentleman in the carpet slippers rakishly adjusted his grey bell-topper over his left brow, and came swaggering forward.

“Major Brownlee — Mr. Jack Grant,” Tom introduced them.

“Retired and happy in the country,” the Major explained, and he continued garrulously to explain his circumstances, his history and his family history. This continued all the way to the inn: a good half-hour, for the Major walked insecurely on his tender feet.

When they arrived at Paddy’s white, trellised house, all was in festivity. Paddy had thrown open the doors, disclosing the banquet spread in the bar parlour. Large joints of baked meat, ham, tongue, fowls, cakes and bottles and bunches of grapes and piles of apples: these Jack saw in splendid confusion.

“Come along in, come along in!” cried Paddy, as the Major and his young companions hesitated under the vine-trellis. “I guess ye’re the last. Come along in — all welcome! — an’ wet the baby’s eye. Sure, she’s a clever girl to get a baby an’ a man the same fine afternoon. A fine child, let me tell you. Father Prendy named him for me, Paddy O’Burk Tracy, on the spot, the minute the wedding was tied up. So yer can please yerselves whether it’s a christening ye’re coming to, or a wedding. I offer ye the choice. Come in.”

“P. O. T.” thought Jack. He still did not feel at ease. Perhaps Paddy noticed it. He came over and slapped him on the back.

“It’s yerself has brought good luck to the house, sir. Sit ye down an’ help y’self. Sit ye down an’ make y’self at home.”

Jack sat down along with the rest of the heterogeneous company. Paddy went

round pouring red wine into glasses.

“Gentlemen!” he announced from the head of the table. “We are all here, for the table’s full up. The first toast is: The stranger within our gates!”

Everybody drank but Jack. He was uncomfortably uncertain whether the baby was meant, or himself. At the last moment he hastily drank, to transfer the honour to the baby.

Then came “The Bride!” then “The Groom!” then “The Priest! Father Prendy, that black limb o’ salvation!” Dozens of toasts, it didn’t seem to matter to whom. And everybody drank and laughed, and made clumsy jokes. There were no women present, at least no women seated. Only the women who went round the table, waiting. One! Two! Three! Four! Five! Six! Seven! Westminster chimes from the Grandfather’s clock behind Jack. Seven o’clock! He had not even noticed them bring in the lights. Father Prendy was on his feet blessing the bride: “at the moment absent on the high mission of motherhood.” He then blessed the bridegroom, at the moment asleep with his head on the table.

The table had been cleared, save for bottles, fruit, and terrible cigars. The air was dense with smoke, bitter in the eyes, thick in the head. Everything seemed to be turning thick and swimmy, and the people seemed to move like living oysters in a natural, live liquor. A girl was sitting on Jack’s chair, putting her arm surreptitiously round his waist, sipping out of his glass. But he pushed her a little aside, because he wanted to watch four men who had started playing euchre.

“There’s a bright moon, gentlemen. Let’s go out and have a bit o’ sparrin’,” said Paddy swimmingly, from the head of the table.

That pleased Jack a lot. He was beginning to feel shut in.

He rose, and the girl — he had never really looked at her — followed him out. Why did she follow him? She ought to stay and clear away dishes.

The yard, it seemed to Jack, was clear as daylight: or clearer, with a big, flat white moon. Someone was sizing up to a little square man with long thick arms, and the little man was probing them off expertly. Hello! Here was a master, in his way.

The girl was leaning up against Jack, with her hand on his shoulder. This was a bore, but he supposed it was also a kind of tribute. He had still never looked at her.

“That’s Jake,” she said. “He’s champion of these parts. Oh my, if he sees me leanin’ on y’ arm like this, he’ll be after ye!”

“Well, don’t lean on me then,” said Jack complacently.

“Go on, he won’t see me. We’re in the dark right here.”

“I don’t care if he sees you,” said Jack.

“You do contradict yourself,” said the girl.

“Oh no, I don’t!” said Jack.

And he watched the long-armed man, and never once looked at the girl. So she leaned heavier on him. He disapproved, really, but felt rather manly under the burden.

The little, square, long-armed man was oldish, with a grey beard. Jack saw this as he danced round, like a queer old satyr, half gorilla, half satyr, roaring, booing, fencing with a big yahoo of a young bushman, holding him off with his unnatural long arms. Over went the big young fellow sprawling on the ground, causing such a splother that everyone shifted a bit out of his way. They all roared delightedly.

The long-armed man, looking round for his girl, saw her in the shadow, leaning heavily and laughingly on Jack’s young shoulder. Up he sprang, snarling like a gorilla, his long hairy arms in front of him. The girl retreated, and Jack, in a state of semi-intoxicated readiness, opened his arms and locked them round the little gorilla of a man. Locked together, they rolled and twirled round the yard under the moon, scattering the delighted onlookers like a wild cow. Jack was laughing to himself, because he had got the grip of the powerful long-armed old man. And there was no real anger in the tussle. The gorilla was an old sport.

Jack was sitting in a chair under the vine, with his head in his hands and his elbows on his knees, getting his wind. Paddy was fanning him with a bunch of gum-leaves, and congratulating him heartily.

“First chap as ever laid out Long-armed Jake.”

“What’d he jump on me for?” said Jack. “I said nothing to him.”

“What y’ sayin’?” ejaculated Paddy coaxingly. “Didn’t ye take his girl, now?”

“Take his girl? I? No! She leaned on me, I didn’t take her.”

“Arrah! Look at that now! The brazenness of it! Well, be it on ye! Take another drink. Will ye come an’ show the boys some o’ ye tricks, belike?”

Jack was in the yard again, shaking hands with Long-armed Jake.

“Good on y’! Good on y’!” cried old Jake. “Ye’re a cock-bird in fine feather! What’s a wench between two gentlemen! Shake, my lad, shake! I’m Long-armed Jake, I am, an’ I set a cock-bird before any whure of a hen.”

They rounded up, sparred, staved off, showed off like two amiable fighting-cocks, before the admiring cockeys. Then they had good-natured turns with the young farmers, and mild wrestling bouts with the old veterans. Having another drink, playing, gassing, swaggering . . .

Tom came bawling as if he were deaf:

“What about them ‘osses?”

“What about ‘em?” said Jack.

“See to ‘m!” said Tom. And he went back to where he came from.

“All right, Mister, we’ll see to ‘m!” yelled the admiring youngsters. “We’ll water ‘m an’ feed ‘m.”

“Water?” said Jack.

“Yes. — Show us how to double up, Mister, will y’?”

“A’ right!” said Jack, who was considerably tipsy. “When — when I’ve — fed — th ‘osses.”

He set off to the stables. The admiring youngsters ran yelling ahead. They brought out the horses and led them down to the trough. Jack followed, feeling the moon-lit earth sway a little.

He shoved his head in between the noses of the horses, into the cool trough of water. When he lifted and wrung out the shower from his hair, which curled when it was wet, he saw the girl standing near him.

“Y’ need a towel, Mister,” she said.

“I could do with one,” said he.

“Come an’ I’ll get ye one,” she said.

He followed meekly. She led him to an outside room, somewhere near the stable. He stood in the doorway.

“Here y’ are!” she said, from the darkness inside.

“Bring it me,” he said from the moon outside.

“Come in an’ I’ll dry your hair for yer.” Her voice sounded like the voice of a wild creature in a black cave. He ventured, unseeing, uncertain, into the den, half reluctant. But there was a certain coaxing imperiousness in her wild-animal voice, out of the black darkness.

He walked straight into her arms. He started and stiffened as if attacked. But her full, soft body was moulded against him. Still he drew fiercely back. Then feeling her yield to draw away and leave him, the old flame flew over him, and he drew her close again.

“Dearie!” she murmured. “Dearie!” and her hand went stroking the back of his wet head.

“Come!” she said. “And let me dry your hair.”

She led him and sat him on a pallet bed. Then she closed the door, through which the moonlight was streaming. The room had no window. It was pitch dark, and he was trapped. So he felt as he sat there on the hard pallet. But she came instantly and sat by him and began softly, caressingly to rub his hair with a towel. Softly, slowly, caressingly she rubbed his hair with a towel. And in spite of himself, his arms, alive with a power of their own, went out and clasped her, drew her to him.

“I’m supposed to be in love with a girl,” he said, really not speaking to her.

“Are you, dearie?” she said softly. And she left off rubbing his hair and softly

put her mouth to his.

Later — he had no idea what time of the night it was — he went round looking for Tom. The place was mostly dark. The inn was half dark . . . Nobody seemed alive. But there was music somewhere. There was music.

As he went looking for it, he came face to face with Dr. Rackett.

“Where’s Tom?” he asked.

“Best look in the barn.”

The dim-lighted barn was a cloud of half-illuminated dust, in which figures moved. But the music was still martial and British. Jack, always tipsy, for he had drunk a good deal and it took effect slowly, deeply, felt something in him stir to this music. They were dancing a jig or a horn-pipe. The air was all old and dusty in the barn. There were four crosses of wooden swords on the floor. Young Patrick, in his shirt and trousers, had already left off dancing for Ireland, but the Scotchman, in a red flannel shirt and a reddish kilt, was still lustily springing and knocking his heels in a haze of dust. The Welshman was a little poor fellow in old shirt and trousers. But the Englishman, in costermonger outfit, black bell-bottom trousers and lots of pearl buttons, was going well. He was thin and wiry and very neat about the feet. Then he left off dancing, and stood to watch the last two.

Everybody was drunk, everybody was arguing, according to his nationality, as to who danced best. The Englishman in the bell-bottom trousers knew he danced best, but spent his last efforts deciding between Sandy and Taffy. The music jiggled on. But whether it was British Grenadiers or Campbells Are Coming Jack didn’t know. Only he suddenly felt intensely patriotic.

“I am an Englishman,” he thought, with savage pride. “I am an Englishman. That is the best on earth. Australian is English, English, English, she’d collapse like a balloon but for the English in her. British means English first. I’m a Britisher, but I am an Englishman! God! I could crumple the universe in my fist, I could . . . I’m an Englishman, and I could crush everything in my hand. And the women are left behind. I’m an Englishman.”

Voices had begun to snarl and roar, fists were lifted.

“Mussen quarrel! — my weddin’! Mussen quarrel!” Pat was drunkenly saying, sitting on a box shaking his head.

Then suddenly he sprang to his feet, and quick and sharp as a stag, rushed to the wooden swords and stood with arms uplifted, smartly showing the steps. The fellow had spirit, a queer, staccato spirit.

Somebody laughed and cheered, and then they all began to laugh and cheer, and Pat pranced faster, in a cloud of dust, and the quarrel was forgotten.

Jack went to look for Tom. “I’m an Englishman,” he thought. “I’d better look

after him.”

He wasn't in the barn. Jack looked and looked.

He found Tom in the kitchen, sitting in a corner, a glass at his side, quite drunk.

“It's time to go to bed, Tom.”

“G'on, ol' duck. I'm waitin' for me girl.”

“You won't get any girl tonight. Let's go to bed.”

“Shan't I get — ? Yes shal! Yes shal!”

“Where shall I find a bed?”

“Plenty 'r flore space.”

And he staggered to his feet as a short, stout, red-faced, black-eyed, untidy girl slipped across the kitchen and out of the door, casting a black-eyed, meaningful look at the red-faced Tom, over her shoulder as she disappeared. Tom swayed to his feet and sloped after her with amazing quickness. Jack stood staring out of the open door, dazed. They both seemed to have melted.

Himself, he wanted to sleep — only to sleep. “Plenty of floor space,” Tom had said. He looked at the floor. Cockroaches running by the dozen, in all directions: those brown, barge-like cockroaches of the south, that trail their huge bellies, and sheer off in automatic straight lines and make a faint creaking noise, if you listen. Jack looked at the table: an old man already lay on it. He opened a cupboard: babies sleeping there.

He swayed, drunk with sleep and alcohol, out of the kitchen in some direction: pushed a swing door: the powerful smell of beer and sawdust made him know it was the bar. He could sleep on the seat. He could sleep in peace.

He lurched forward and touched cloth. Something snored, started, and reared up.

“What y' at?”

Jack stood back breathless — the figure subsided — he could beat a retreat.

Hopeless he looked in on the remains of the breakfast. Table and every bench occupied. He boldly opened another door. A small lamp burning, and what looked like dozens of dishevelled elderly women's awful figures, heaped crosswise on the hugest double bed he had ever seen.

He escaped into the open air. The moon was low. Someone was singing.

CHAPTER XV

UNCLE JOHN GRANT

It was day. The lie was hard. He didn't want to wake. He turned over and was sleep again, though the lie was very hard.

Someone pushing him. Tom, with a red, blank face was saying:

"Wake up! Let's go before Rackett starts."

And the rough hands pushing him crudely. He hated it.

He sat up. He had been lying on the bottom of the buggy, with a sack over him. No idea how he got there. It was full day.

"Old woman's got some tea made. If y' want t' change y' bags, hop over 'n take a dip in the pool. Down th' paddock there. Here's th' bag. I've left soap n' comb on th' splash board, an' I've seen to th' 'osses. I'm goin' f'r a drink while you get ready."

Tom had got a false dawn on him. He had wakened with that false energy which sometimes follows a "drunk," and which fades all too quickly. For he had hardly slept at all.

So when Jack was ready, Tom was not. His stupor was overcoming him. He was cross — and half way through his second pewter mug of beer.

"I'm not coming," said Tom.

"You are," said Jack. For the first time he felt that old call of the blood which made him master of Tom. Somewhere, in the night, the old spirit of a master had aroused in him.

Tom finished his mug of beer slowly, sullenly. He put down the empty pot.

"Get up!" said Jack. And Tom got slowly to his feet.

They set off, Jack leading the packhorse. But the beer and the "night before" had got Tom down. He rode like a sack in the saddle, sometimes semi-conscious, sometimes really asleep. Jack followed just behind, with the beast of a packhorse dragging his arm out. And Tom ahead, like a sot, with no life in him.

Jack himself felt hot inside, and dreary, and riding was a cruel effort, and the packhorse, dragging his arm from its socket, was hell. He wished he had enough saddle-tree to turn the rope round: but he was in his English saddle.

Nevertheless, he had decided something, in that jamboree. He belonged to the

blood of masters, not servants. He belonged to the class of those that are sought, not those that seek. He was no seeker. He was not desirous. He would never be desirous. Desire should not lead him humbly by the nose. Not desire for anything. He was of the few that are masters. He was to be desired. He was master. He was a real Englishman.

So he jogged along, in the hot, muggy day of early winter. Heavy clouds hung over the sky, lightning flashed beyond the purple hills. His body was a burden and a weariness to him, riding was a burden and a weariness, the packhorse was hell. And Tom, asleep on his nag, like a dead thing, was hateful to have ahead. The road seemed endless.

Yet he had in him his new, half savage pride to keep him up, and an isolate sort of resoluteness.

At mid-day they got down, drank water, camped, and slept without eating. Thank God the rain hadn't come. Jack slept like the dead till four o'clock.

He woke sharp, wondering where he was. The clouds looked threatening. He got up. Yes, the horses were there. He still felt bruised, and hot and dry inside, from the jamboree. Why in heaven did men want jamborees?

He made a fire, boiled the billy, prepared tea, and set out some food, though he didn't want any.

"Get up there!" he shouted to Tom, who lay like a beast. "Get up!" he shouted. But the beast slept.

"Get up, you beast!" he said, viciously kicking him. And he was horrified because Tom got up, without any show of retaliation at all, and obediently drank his tea.

They ate a little food, in silence. Saddled in silence, each finding the thought of speech repulsive. Watched one another to see if they were ready. Mounted, and rode in repulsive silence away. But Jack had left the packhorse to Tom this time. And it began to rain, softly, seepily.

And Tom was cheering up. The rain seemed to revive him wonderfully. He was one who was soon bowled over by a drink. Consequently he didn't absorb much, and he recovered sooner. Jack absorbed more, and it acted more slowly, deeply, and lastingly on him. On they went, in the rain. Tom began to show signs of new life. He swore at the packhorse. He kicked his nag to a little trot, and the packs flap-flapped like shut wings, on the rear pony. Presently he reined up, and sat quite still for a minute. Then he broke into a laugh, lifting his face to the rain.

"Seems to me we're off the road," he said. "We haven't passed a fence all day, have we?"

"No," said Jack. "But you were asleep all morning."

“We’re off the road. Listen!”

The rain was seeping down on the bush; in the grey evening, the warm horses smelt of their own steam. Jack could hear nothing except the wind and the increasing rain.

“This track must lead somewhere. Let’s get to shelter for the night,” said Jack.

“Agreed!” replied Tom magnanimously. “We’ll follow on, and see what we shall see.”

They walked slowly, pulling at the packhorse, which was dragging at the rope, tired with the burden that grew every minute heavier with the rain.

Tom reined in suddenly.

“There is somebody behind,” he said. “It’s not the wind.”

They sat there on their horses in the rain, and waited. Twilight was falling. Then Jack could distinguish the sound of a cart behind. It was Rackett in the old shay rolling along in the lonely dusk and rain, through the trees, approaching. Black Sam grinned mightily as he pulled up.

“Thought I’d follow, though you are on the wrong road,” said Rackett from beneath his black waterproof. “Sam showed me the turning two miles back. You missed it. Anyhow we’d better camp in on these people ahead here.”

“Is there a place ahead?” asked Jack.

“Yes,” replied Rackett. “Even a sort of relation of yours, that I promised Gran I would come and see. Hence my following on your heels.”

“Didn’t know I’d any relation hereabouts,” said Tom sulkily. He couldn’t bear Rackett’s interfering in the family in any way.

“You haven’t. I meant Jack. But we’ll get along, shall we?”

“We’re a big flood,” remarked Tom. “But if they’ll give us the barn, well manage. It’s getting wet to sleep out.”

They pressed ahead, the packhorse trotting, but lifting up his head like a venomous snake, in unwillingness. They had come into the open fields. At last in the falling dark they saw a house and buildings. A man hove in sight, but lurked away from them. Rackett hailed him. The man seemed to oppose their coming further. He was a hairy, queer figure, with his untrimmed beard.

“Master never takes no strangers,” he said.

Rackett slipped a shilling in his hand, and would he ask his master if they might camp in the barn, out of the rain.

“Y’ ain’t the police, now, by any manner of means?” asked the man.

“God love you, no,” said Rackett.

“We’re no police,” said Tom. “I’m Tom Ellis, from Wandoo, over York way.”

“Ellis! I heard th’ name. Well, master’s sick, an’ skeered to death o’ th’ police. They’re ready to drop in on the place, that they are, rot ‘em, the minute

he breathes his last. And he's skeered he's dyin' this time. Oh, he's skeered o' t. So I have me doubts of all strangers. I have me doubts, no matter what they be. Master he've sent a letter to his only relation upon earth, to his nephew, which thank the Lord he's writ for to come an' lay hold on the place, against he dies. If there's no one to lay hold, the police steps in, without a word. That's how they do it. They lets the places in grants like — lets a man have a grant — and when the poor man dies, his place is locked up by the Government. They takes it all."

"Gawd's sake!" murmured Tom aside. "The man's potty!"

"Bush mad," supplemented Rackett, who was sitting in the buggy with his chin in his hand, intently listening to the queer, furtive, garrulous individual.

"Say, friend," he added aloud. "Go and ask your master if we harmless strangers can camp in the barn out of the wet."

"What might your names be, Mister?" asked the man.

"Mine's Dr. Rackett. This is Tom Ellis. And this is Jack Grant. And no harm in any of us."

"D'y' say Jack Grant? Would that be Mr. John Grant?" asked the man, galvanised by sudden excitement.

"None other!" said Rackett.

"Then he's come!" cried the man.

"He certainly has," replied Rackett.

"Oh, Glory, Glory! Why didn't ye say so afore? Come in. Come in all of ye, come in! Come in, Mr. Grant! Come in!"

They got down, gave the reins to Sam, and were ready to follow the bearded man, looking one another in the face in amazement, and shaking their heads.

"Gawd Almighty, I'd rather keep out o' this!" murmured Tom, standing by his horse and keeping the rope of the packhorse.

"Case of mistaken identity," said Rackett coolly. "Hang on, boys. We'll get a night's shelter."

A woman came out of the dilapidated stone house, clutching her hands in distress and agitation.

"Missus! Missus! Here he is at last. God be praised!" cried the bearded man. She ran up in sudden effusion of welcome, but he ordered her into the house to brighten up the fire, while he waved the way to the stables, knowing that horse comes before man, in the bush.

When they had shaken down in the stable, they left Sam to sleep there, while the three went across to the house. Tom was most unwilling.

The man was at the door, to usher them in.

"I've broke the news to him, sir!" he said in a mysterious voice to Jack, as he showed them into the parlour.

“What’s your Master’s name?” asked Rackett.

“Don’t y’ know y’re at your destination?” whispered the man. “This is Mr. John Grant’s. This is the place ye’re looking for.”

A melancholy room! The calico ceiling drooped, the window and front door were hermetically sealed, an ornate glass lamp shone in murky, lonely splendour upon a wool mat on a ricketty round table. Six chairs stood against the papered walls. Nothing more.

Tom wanted to beat it back to the kitchen, through which they had passed to get to this sarcophagus, and where a fire was burning and a woman was busy. But the man was tapping at another door, and listening anxiously before entering.

He went into the dark room beyond, where a candle shone feebly, and they heard him say:

“Your nephew’s come, Mr. Grant, and brought a doctor and another gentleman, the Lord be praised.”

“The Lord don’t need to be praised on my behalf, Amos,” came a querulous voice. “And I ain’t got no nephew, if I did send him a letter. I’ve got nobody. And I want no doctor, because I died when I left my mother’s husband’s house.”

“They’re in the parlour.”

“Tell ‘em to walk up.”

The man appeared in the doorway. Rackett walked up, Jack followed, and Tom hung nervously and disgustedly in the rear.

“Here they are! Here’s the gentry,” said Amos.

In the candle-light they saw a thin man in red flannel night-cap with a blanket round his shoulders, sitting up in bed under an old green cart-umbrella. He was not old, but his face was thin and wasted, and his long colourless beard seemed papery. He had cunning, shifty eyes with red rims, and looked as mad as his setting.

Rackett had shoved Jack forward. The sick man stared at him and seemed suddenly pleased. He held out a thin hand. Rackett nudged Jack, and Jack had to shake. The hand seemed wet and icy, and Jack shuddered.

“How d’you do!” he mumbled. “I’m sorry, you know; I’m not your nephew.”

“I know ye’re not. But are y’ Jack Grant?”

“Yes,” said Jack.

The man under the umbrella seemed hideously pleased. Jack heard Tom’s ill-suppressed, awful chuckle from behind. The sick man peered irritably at the other two. Then he nodded slowly, under the green baldachino of the old cart-umbrella.

“Jack Grant! Jack Grant! Jack Grant!” he murmured, to himself. He was

surely mad, obviously mad.

“I’m right glad you’ve come, Cousin,” he said suddenly, looking again very pleased. “I’m surely glad you’ve come in time. I’ve a nice tidy place put together for you, Jack, a small proposition of three thousand acres, five hundred cleared and cropped, fifty fenced — dog-leg fences, broke MacCullen’s back putting ‘em up. But I’ll willingly put in five hundred more, for a gentleman like young master. Meaning old master will soon be underground. Well, who cares, now young master’s come to light, and the place doesn’t go out of the family! I am determined the place shall not go out of the family, Cousin Jack. Aren’t you pleased?”

“Very,” said Jack soothingly.

“Call me Cousin John. Or Uncle John if you like. I’m more like your uncle, I should think. Shake hands, and say, Right you are, Uncle John. Call me Uncle John.”

Jack shook hands once more, and dutifully, as to a crazy person, he said:

“Right you are, Uncle John.”

Tom, in the background, was going into convulsions. But Rackett remained quite serious.

Uncle John closed his eyes muttering, and fell back under the cart-umbrella.

“Mr. Grant,” said Dr. Rackett, “I think Jack would like to eat something after his ride.”

“All right, let him go to the kitchen with yon buck wallaby as can’t keep a straight face. Stop with me a minute yourself, Mister, if you will.”

The two boys bundled away into the kitchen. The woman had a meal ready, and they sat down at the table.

“I thank my stars,” said Tom impressively, “he’s not my Uncle John.”

“Shut up,” said Jack, because the woman was there.

They ate heartily, the effects of the jamboree having passed. After the meal they strolled to the door to look out, away from that lugubrious parlour and bedroom. They found a stiff wind blowing, the sky clear with running clouds and vivid stars in the spaces.

“Let’s get!” said Tom. It was his constant craving.

“We can’t leave Rackett.”

“We can. He pushed us in. Let’s get. Why can’t we?”

“Oh well, we can’t,” said Jack.

Rackett had entered the kitchen, and was eating his meal. He asked the woman for ink.

“There’s no ink,” she said.

“Must be somewhere,” said Amos, her husband. “Jack Grant’s letter was

written in ink.”

“I never got a letter,” said Jack, turning.

“Eh, hark ye! How like old master over again! Ye’ve come, haven’t ye?”

“By accident,” said Jack. “I’m not Mr. Grant’s nephew.”

“Hark ye! Hark ye! It runs in the family, father to son, uncle to nephew. All right! All right! Have it your own way,” cried Amos. He had been struggling with crazy contradictions too long.

Tom was in convulsions. Rackett put his hand on Jack’s shoulder. “It’s all right,” he said. “Don’t worry him. Leave it to me.” And to the woman he said, if there was no ink she was to kill a fowl and bring it to him, and he’d make ink with lamp-black and gall.

“You two boys had better be off to bed,” he said. “You have to be off in good time in the morning.”

“Oh, not going, not going so soon, surely! The young master’s not going so soon! Surely! Surely! Master’s so weak in the head and stomach, we can’t cope with him all by ourselves,” cried the old man and woman.

“Perhaps I’ll stay,” said Rackett. “And Jack will come back one day, don’t you worry. Now let me make that ink.”

The boys were shown into a large, low room — the fourth room of the house — that opened off the kitchen. It contained a big bed with clean sheets and white crochet quilt. Jack surmised it was the old couple’s bed, and wanted to go to the barn. But Tom said, since they offered it, there was nothing to do but to take it.

Tom was soon snoring. Jack lay in the great feather bed feeling that life was all going crazy. Tom was already snoring. He cared about nothing. Out of sight, out of mind. But Jack had a fit of remembering. His head was hot, and he could not sleep. The wind was blowing, it was raining again. He could not sleep, he had to remember.

It was always so with him. He could go on careless and unheeding, like Tom, for a while. Then came these fits of reckoning and remembering. Life seemed unhinged in Australia. In England there was a strong central pivot to all the living. But here the centre pin was gone, and the lives seemed to spin in a weird confusion.

He felt that for himself. His life was all unhinged. What was he driving at? What was he making for? Where was he going? What was his life, anyhow?

In England, you knew. You had your purpose. You had your profession and your family and your country. But out here you had no profession. You didn’t do anything for your country except boast of it to strangers, and leave it to get along as best it might. And as for your family, you cared for that, but in a queer, centreless fashion.

You didn't really care for anything. The old impetus of civilisation kept you still going, but you were just rolling to rest. As Mr. Ellis had rolled to rest, leaving everything stranded. There was no grip, no hold.

And yet, what Jack had rebelled against in England was the tight grip, the fixed hold over everything. He liked this looseness and carelessness of Australia. Till it seemed to him crazy. And then it scared him.

Tonight everything seemed to him crazy. He didn't pay any serious attention to Uncle John Grant: he was obviously out of his mind. But then everything seemed crazy. Mr. Ellis' death, and Gran's death, and Monica and Easu Ellis — it all seemed crazy as crazy. And the jamboree, and that girl who called him Dearie! And the journey, and this mad house in the rain. What did it all mean? What did it all stand for?

Everything seemed to be spinning to a darkness of death. Everybody seemed to be dancing a crazy dance of death. He could understand that the blacks painted themselves like white bone skeletons, and danced in the night, light skeletons dancing, in their corroborees. That was how it was. The night, dark and fleshly, and skeletons dancing a clicketty dry dance in it.

Tom, so awfully upset at his father's death! And now as careless as a lark, just spinning his way along the road, in a sort of weird dance, dancing humorously to the black verge of oblivion. That was how it was. To dance humorously to the black verge of oblivion. The children of death. With a sort of horror of death around them. Wandoo suddenly grim and grisly with the horror of death.

Death, the great end and goal. Death, the black, void, pulsating reality which would swallow them all up, like a black lover finally possessing them. The great black fleshliness of the end, the huge body of death reeling to swallow them all. And for this they danced, and for this they loved and reared families and made farms: to provide good meat and white, pure bones for the black, avid horror of death.

Something of the black, aboriginal horror came over him. He realised, to his amazement, the actuality of the great, grinning black demon of death. The vast, infinite demon that eats our flesh and cracks our bones in the last black potency of the end. And for this, for this demon one seeks for a woman, to lie with her and get children for the Moloch. Children for the Moloch! Lennie, Monica, the twins, Og and Magog! Children for the Moloch.

One God or the other must take them at the end. Either the dim white god of the heavenly infinite. Or else the great black Moloch of the living death. Devoured and digested in the living death.

Satan, Moloch, Death itself, all had been unreal to him before. But now, suddenly, he seemed to see the black Moloch grinning huge in the sky, while

human beings danced towards his grip, and he gripped and swallowed them into the black belly of death. That was their end.

Dance! Dance! Death has its deep delights! And ever-recurring. Be careless, ironical, stoical and reckless. And go your way to death with a will. With a dark handsomeness, and a dark lustre of fatality, and a splendour of recklessness. Oh, God, the Lords of Death! The big, darkly-smiling, heroic men who are Lords of Death! And they too go on splendidly towards death, the great goal of unutterable satisfaction, and consummated fear.

“I am going my way the same,” Jack thought to himself. “I am travelling in a reckless, slow dance, darker and darker, into the black, hot belly of death, where is my end. Oh, let me go gallantly, let me have the black joy of the road. Let me go with courage, and a bit of splendour and dark lustre, down to the great depths of death, that I am so frightened of, but which I long for in the last consummation. Let death take me in a last black embrace. Let me go on as the niggers go, with the last convulsion into the last black embrace. Since I am travelling the dark road, let me go in pride. Let me be a Lord of Death, since the reign of the white Lords of Life, like my father, has become sterile and a futility. Let me be a Lord of Death. Let me go that other great road, that the blacks go.”

The bed was soft and hot, and he stretched his arms fiercely. If he had Monica! Oh, if he had Monica! If that girl last night had been Monica!

That girl last night! He didn't even know her name. She had stroked his head — like — like — Mary! The association flashed into his mind. Yes, like Mary. And Mary would be humble and caressive and protective like that. So she would. And dark! It would be dark like that if one loved Mary. And brief! Brief! But sharp and good in the briefness. Mary! Mary!

He realised with amazement it was Mary he was now wanting. Not Monica. Or was it Monica? Her slim keen hand. Her slim body like a slim cat, so full of life. Oh, it was Monica! First and foremost, most intensely, it was Monica, because she was really his, and she was his destiny. He dared not think of her.

He rolled in the bed in misery. Tom slept unmoving. Oh, why couldn't he be like Tom, slow and untormented. Why couldn't he? Why was his body tortured? Why was he travelling this road? Why wasn't Monica there like a gipsy with him. Why wasn't Monica there?

Or Mary! Why wasn't Mary in the house? She would be so soft and understanding, so yielding. Like the girl of the long-armed man. The long-armed man didn't mind that he had taken his girl, for once.

Why was he himself rolling there in torment? Pug had advised him to “punch the ball,” when he was taken with ideas he wanted to get rid of. There was no

ball to punch. “Train the body hard, but train the mind hard too.” Yes, all very well. He could think, now for example, of fighting Easu, or of building up a place and raising fine horses. But the moment his mind relaxed for sleep, back came the other black flame. The women! The women! The women! Even the girl of last night.

What was a man born for? To find a mate, a woman, isn't it? Then why try to think of something else? To have a woman — to make a home for her — to have children. — And other women in the background, down the long, dusky, strange years towards death. So it seemed to him. And to fight the men that stand in one's way. To fight them. Always a new one cropping up, along the strange dusky road of the years, where you go with your head up, and your eyes open, and your spine sharp and electric, ready to fight your man and take your woman, on and on down the years, into the last black embrace of death. Death that stands grinning with arms open and black breast ready. Death, like the last woman you embrace. Death, like the last man you die fighting with. And he beats you. But somehow you are not beaten, if you are a Lord of Death.

Jack hoped he would die a violent death. He hoped he would live a defiant, unsubmitive life, and die a violent death. A bullet, or a knife piercing home. And the women he left behind — his women, enveloped in him as in a dark net. And the children he left, laughing already at death.

And himself! He hoped never to be downcast, never to be melancholy, never to yield. Never to yield. To be a Lord of Death, and go on to the black arms of death, still laughing. To laugh, and bide one's time, and leap at the right moment.

CHAPTER XVI

ON THE ROAD

I

“My dear nephew, I haven’t sent you a letter since the last one which I never wrote, yet you have come in answer to the one you never got. I wrote because I wanted you to come and receive the property, and I never posted it because I didn’t know your address, and you couldn’t come if I did, because you don’t exist. Yet here you are and I think you look very pleased to receive the property which you haven’t got yet. I was so afraid I should die sudden after this long lingering illness, but it’s you who has come suddenly and the illness hasn’t begun yet. So here am I speechless, but you are doing a lot of talking to your dear uncle who never had a nephew. What does it matter to me if you are Jack Grant because I am not, but took the name into the grant of land given me on the land grant system at a shilling an acre. So like a bad shilling the name turns up again on the register, so that the land goes back to the grant and the Grant to the land. But a better-looking nephew I never wish to see, being as much like me as an ape is like meat. So when I’m dead I won’t be alive to trouble you, and I’ll trouble no further about you since you might as well be dead for all I care.”

In this vein Tom ranted on the next morning, when they had set out in the glorious early dawn. Tom never wearied of the uncle under the umbrella. He told the tale to everybody who would listen, and wore out Jack’s ears with these long and facile pleasantries.

They were both glad to get away from the crazy, lugubrious place. Jack refused to give it a thought further, though he felt vaguely, at the back of his mind, that he knew something about it already. Something somebody had told him.

Rackett had stayed behind, so they made no very good pace, leading the pack-horse. But they pushed on, being already overdue at the homestead of one of Tom’s Aunts, who was expecting them.

Once on horseback and in the open morning, Jack wished for nothing more. Women, death, skeletons, the dance into the darkness, the future, the past, love,

home, and sorrow all disappeared in the bright well of the daylight, as if they'd dropped into a pool. He wanted nothing more than to ride, to jog along the track on the rather wet road, through bush and scrub still wet with rain, in a pure Westralian air that was like a clean beginning of everything, seeing the tiny bushman's flowers sparking and gilding eerily in the dunness of the world.

By mid-day they reached the highway to Geraldton, via Gingin, and camped at the Three-mile Government well in perfect good spirits. Everything was gone, everything was forgotten except the insouciance of the moment. They knew the uselessness of thinking and remembering and worrying. When worry starts biting like mosquitoes, then, if it bites hard enough, you've got to attend. But it's like illness, avoid it, beat it back if you can.

They found the high-road merely a bush-track after all. If it was near a settlement, or allotments or improved lands, it might run well for miles. But for the most part, it was exceedingly bad, full of holes of water, and beginning in places to be a bog.

Tom was now at his best, out in the bush again. All his bush lore came back to him, and he was like an animal in its native surroundings. His charm came back too, and his confidence. He went ahead looking keenly about, like a travelling animal, pointing out to Jack first this thing and then the other, initiating him into bush wisdom, teaching him the big cipher-book of the bush. And Jack learned gladly. It was so good, so good to be away from homesteads, and women, and money, watching the trees and the land and the marks of wild life. And Tom, a talker once he was wound up, told the histories of settlers, their failures and successes, and their peculiarities. It seemed to Jack there was a surplus of weird people out there. But then, Tom said, the weird ones usually came first, and they got weirder in the wild.

They passed an enormous hollow tree, from which issued an old man with a grey beard that came to his waist, dressed in rags. A grey-haired, very ragged woman also came out, carrying a baby. Other children crawled around. The travellers called Good-day! as they passed.

Tom said the woman's baby was the youngest of seventeen children. The eldest son was already grown up, a prosperous young man trading in sandalwood. But Dad and Mum liked the bush, and would accept nothing for their supposed welfare, either from their sons or anyone else.

In the middle of the afternoon they passed a sundowner trekking with a cartful of produce down to Middle Swan. At four o'clock they camped for half an hour, to drink a billy of tea. Before the water boiled they saw two tramps coming down the road. The slouchers came straight up and greeted the boys, eyeing them curiously up and down.

“Wot cheer, mate!” said one, a ruffianly mongrel.

“Good O! How’s the goin’ Gingin way?” asked Tom.

“Plenty grass an’ water this time o’ the year. But look out for the settlers this side. They ain’t over hopeful.” He turned to stare at Jack. Then he continued, to Tom: “How’s it y’ got y’ baby out?”

“New chum,” explained Tom. He spoke quietly, but his mouth had hardened. “You blokes want anything of us?”

“Yessir,” said the spokesman, coming in close. “We wants bacca.”

“Do you?” said Tom pleasantly, and he pulled out his pouch. “I’ve only got three plugs. That’s one apiece for me an’ the baby, an’ you can have the other to do as you likes with. But chum here doesn’t keer much for smokin’, so he might give you his.”

There was a tone of finality in Tom’s voice.

“You’ve surely got more blasted cheek than most kids,” said the fellow. “What’ve ye got planted away in y’ swags?” He glanced at his mate. “We don’t want to use no bally persuasion, does we, Bill?”

Bill was of villainous but not very imposing appearance. He had weak eyes, a dirty hairy face, and a purple mouth showing unbecomingly through his whiskers.

Tom calmly filled his pipe, and waving to the first tramp, gave him sufficient to fill his cutty. The fellow took it, ignoring his mate, and began to fill up eagerly. He sat down by the fire, and taking a hot ember, lit up, puffing avidly.

“The other can have my share, if he wants it,” said Jack.

“Thank you kindly,” said the other with a sneer. And as he stuffed it in his pipe: “It’ll do for a start.” But he was puffing almost before he could finish his words.

They smoked in silence round the fire for some time. Then Tom rose and went over to the pack, as if he were going to give in to the ruffians. One swaggy rose and followed him.

The other tramp, taking not the slightest notice of the boy sitting there, reached out his filthy hand and began to fill his pockets with everything that lay near the fire: the packet of tea, a spoon, a knife.

He had got as far as the spoon when the astonished Jack said: “Drop it!” as if he were speaking to a dog.

The man turned with a snarl, and made to cuff him. Jack seized his wrist and twisted it cruelly, making him drop the spoon and shout with pain. The other swaggy at once ran on Jack from the rear, and fell over him. Tom rushed on the second swaggy and fell too. Over they all went in a heap. Jack laughed aloud in the scrimmage, as he gripped the swaggy’s wrist with one hand and with the

other emptied out the contents of the pocket again. He brought out two knives, one of which didn't belong to him. Dropping the lot for safety, he got to his feet. Tom and the second swaggy were rolling and unlocking. That villain spied the open knife, seized it and sprang to his feet, snarling and brandishing.

“Come on, ye pair of — — ”

Jack gave another twist to the wrist of the prisoner, who howled, and then he kicked him three yards away. But his heart smote him, for the kick was so bony, the tramp was thin and frail. Then, full of the black joy of scattering such wastrels, he sprang unexpectedly on the other tramp. The swaggy gave a yell, and fled. For a minute or two the couple of ragged, wretched, despicable figures could be seen bolting like running vermin down the trail. Then they were out of sight.

Tom and Jack sat by the fire and roared with laughter, roared and roared till the bush was startled.

They were just packing up when someone else came down the road. It was a young woman in a very wide skirt on a very small pony, riding as if she were used to it. This was not the figure they expected to see.

“Why!” cried Tom, staring. “I do believe it's Ma's niece grown up.”

It was. She was quite pleasant, but her hands were stub-fingered and work-hardened, and her voice was common.

“Y' didn't come along yesterday, as Ma expected,” she explained, “so I just took Tubby to see if y' was coming today. How's the twins? How's Monica and Grace? I do wish they'd come.”

“They're all right,” said Tom.

“We heard about your Dad and your Gran. Fancy! But I wish Monica had come with you. She was such a little demon at school. I'm fair longing to see her.”

“She's not the only one of you that's a demon!” said Tom, in the correct tone of banter, putting over his horse and drawing to the girl's side, and becoming very manly for her benefit. “An' what's wrong with us, that you aren't glad to see us?”

“Oh, you're all right,” said the cousin. “But a girl of your own age is more fun, you know.”

“Well, I don't happen to be a girl of your own age,” said Tom. “Just by accident, I'm a man. But come on. There's some roughs about. We might just as well get out of their way.”

He trotted alongside the damsel, leaving Jack to bring the pack-horse. Jack didn't mind.

II

So they went on, receiving a rough and generous hospitality from one or another of Tom's or Jack's relations, of whom there were astonishingly many, along the grand bush track to Geraldton. If they weren't direct relations, they were relations by marriage, and it served just as well. There were the Brockmans, there were the Browns, and Gales, and Davises, Edgars and Conollys, Burgesses, Cooks, Logues, Cradles, Morrises, Fitzgeralds and Glasses. Families united by some fine-drawn connection or other; and very often much more divided than united, by some very plain-drawn feud. Their names like brooks trickled across the land, and you crossed and re-crossed. You would lose a name entirely: like the Brockman name. Then suddenly it reappeared as Brackman, and "Oh yes, we're cousins!"

"Who isn't cousin!" thought Jack.

Some of them had huge tracts of land fenced in. Some had little bits of poor farms. Sometimes there were deserted farms.

"And to think," said Tom, "that none of them is my own mother's relations. All Dad's, or else Ma's. Mostly Ma's."

It was queer the way he hankered after his own real mother. Jack, for his part, didn't care a straw who was his mother's relation and who wasn't. But you would have thought Tom lived under a Matriarchy, and derived everything from a lost mother.

It was not wet enough yet to be really boggy, though camping out was damp. However, they mostly got a roof. If it wasn't a relation's, it was a barn, or the "Bull and Horns" by Gingin. And to the boys, all that mattered was whether they were on the right road: often a very puzzling question; or if the heavy rain would hold off; if there was plenty of grub; if the horses seemed tired or not quite fit; if they were going to get through a boggy place all right; if the packs were fast; if they made good going. The inns were "low" in every sense of the word, including the low-pitched roof. And full of bugs, however new the country. With red-nosed, grassy-whiskered landlords who thumbed the glasses when there were any glasses to thumb. And there were always men at these inns, almost always the same kind of brutal, empty roughs.

"Look here," said Jack, "wherever we go there are these roughs, and more roughs, and more. Where the devil do they come from, and how do they make a living? Apart from farm labourers, I mean."

"A lot of them are shearers," said Tom, "drifting from job to job, according to climate. When shearing season's over here, they work on to the south-west,

where it's cooler. And then there are kangaroo and 'possum snarers. That young fellow we saw rooked of all his sugar last night was a skin hunter. They get half-a-crown apiece for good 'roo skins, and it's quite a trade. The others last night were mostly sandalwood getters. There's quite a lot of men make money collecting bark for export, and manna-gum. That rowdy lot playing fifty-three were a gang of well-sinkers. Then what with timber-workers, haulers, teamsters, junkers — oh, there's all sorts. But they're mostly one sort, swabs, rough and rowdy, an' can't keep their pants hitched up enough to be decent. You've seen 'em. They're mostly like the dirty old braces they wear. All the snap gone out of 'em, all the elastic perished. They just work and booze and loaf, and work and booze. I hope I'll never get so that I don't keep myself spruce. I hope I never will. But that's the worst o' the life out here. Nobody hardly keeps spruce."

Jack kept this well in mind. He too hated a man slouching along with a discoloured face, and trousers slopping down his insignificant legs. He loathed that look which tramps and ne'er-do-wells usually have, as if their legs weren't there, inside their beastly bags. Despicable about the rear and the legs. The best of the farmers, on the contrary, had strong, sinewy legs, full of life. Easu was like that, his powerful legs holding his horse. And Tom had good, live legs. But poor Dad had not been very alive, inside his pants.

"Whatever I do, I'll never go despicable and humiliated about the legs and seat," said Jack to himself, as he pressed the stirrups with his toes and felt the powerful elasticity of his thighs, holding the live body of the horse between his muscles in permanent grip. And it seemed as if the powerful animal life of the horse entered into him, through his legs and seat, and made him strong.

"What's a junker, Tom?"

"A low, four-wheeled log hauler, with a long pole."

"I thought it was a man. A swab is a man?"

"Yes. He's any old drunk."

"But a swaggy is a tramp?"

"It is. It is one who humps it. If he's got a pack, it's his swag. If he's only got a blanket and a billy, it's his bluey and his drum. And if he's got nothing, it's Waltzing Matilda."

"I suppose so," said Jack. "And his money is his sugar?"

"Right-O! son!"

"And Chink is Chinaman?"

"No, sir. That's Chow. Chink means prison. An' a lag is a ticketer: one who's out on lease. Now what more Child's Guide to Knowledge do you want?"

"I'm only getting it straight. Jam and dog both mean 'side'?"

"Verily. Only dog is sometimes same as bully tinned meat."

“And what’s stosh?”

“Landin’ him one.”

Jack rode on, thinking about it.

“What’s a remittance man, really, Tom?”

“A waster. A useless bird shipped out here to be kept south o’ the line, because he’s a disgrace to England. And his family soothes their conscience by sending him so much a month, which they call his remittance, ‘stead o’ letting him starve, or work. Like Rackett. Plenty o’ money sent out to him to stink on.”

“Why don’t you like Rackett?”

“I fairly despise him, an’ his money. He’s absolutely useless baggage, rotting life away. I can’t abear to see him about. Old George gave me the tip he was leaving our place, else I’d never have gone and left him loose there.”

“He is no harm.”

“How do you know? If he hasn’t got a disease of the body, he’s got a disease of the soul.”

“What disease?”

“Dunno.”

“Does he take drugs?”

“I reckon that’s about his figure. But he’s an eyesore to me, loafin’, loafin’. An’ he’s an eyesore to Ma, save for the bit he teaches Lennie. An’ when he starts talkin’ on the high fiddle, like he does to Mary the minute she comes down, makes you want to walk on his face.”

Poor Rackett! Jack marvelled that Tom had always been so civil.

The two jogged along very amicably together. Tom was hail-fellow-well-met with everybody. At the same time, he was in his own estimation a gentleman, and a person of consideration. It was “thus far” with him.

But whoever came along, they all drew up.

“Hello, mate! How’s goin’? . . . Well, so long!”

One youth was walking to Fremantle to take a job offered by his uncle, serving in a grocery shop. The lad was in tatters. His blanket was tied with twine, his battered billy hung on to it. But he was jubilant. And now he is one of Australia’s leading lights. Even it is said of him that he never forgot the kindness he received on the road.

But most of the trailers were sundowners, sloping along anyhow, subsisting anyhow, but ready with the ingenious explanation that they “chopped a bit,” or “fenced a bit,” or “trapped a bit.” Perhaps they never realised how much bigger was the bit they loafed.

They were not bad. The bad ones were the scoundrels down from the Never-Never, emerging in their rags and moral degradation after years on the sheep

runs or cattle stations, years of earnings spent in drink and squalid, beastly debauchery. Some were hoarding their cheques for coast-town consumption, like the first two rogues, and cadging and stealing their way.

But then there were families driving to the nearest settlement to do a bit of shopping, or visit their relations, or fetch the doctor to “fix up Teddy’s little leg.” Once there was a posse of mounted police, very important and gallant, with horses champing and chains clinking. They were out after a criminal supposed to have been landed on the coast by a dago boat “from the other side.” Then there was an occasional Minister of the Gospel, on a pony, dressed in black. Jack’s heart always sank when he saw that black. He decided that priests should be white, or in orange robes, like the Buddhist priests he had seen in Colombo, or in a good blue, like some nuns.

Gradually the road became a home: more a home than any homestead.

“Let’s get!” was Tom’s perpetual cry, when they were fixed up in the house of some relation, or in some inn. He only felt happy on the road. Sometimes they went utterly lonely for many miles. Sometimes they passed a deserted habitation. But there were always signs of life near a well. And often there were milestones.

“Fifty-seven miles to where?”

“I don’t know. We’re leagues from Gingin. Certainly fifty-seven miles to nowhere of any importance on the face of this earth.”

“Wonder what Gingin means?”

“Better not ask. You never know what these natives’ll be naming places after. Usually something vile. But gin means a woman, whatever Gingin is.”

Gradually they got further and further, geographically, mentally, and emotionally, from Wandoo and all permanent associations. Jack was glad. He loved the earth, the wild country, the bush, the scent. He wanted to go on forever. Beyond the settlements — beyond the ploughed land — beyond all fences. That was it — beyond all fences. Beyond all fences, where a man was alone with himself and the untouched earth.

Man escaping from Man! That’s how it is all the time. The passion men have to escape from mankind. What do they expect in the beyond? God?

They’ll never find the same God! Never again. They are trying to escape from the God men acknowledge, as well as from mankind, the acknowledger.

The land untouched by man. The call of the mysterious, vast, unoccupied land. The strange inaudible calling, like the far-off call of a kangaroo. The strange, still, pure air. The strange shadows. The strange scent of wild, brown, aboriginal honey.

Being early for the boat, the boys camped for twenty-four hours in a perfectly lonely place. And in the utterly lonely evening Jack began craving again: for

Monica, for a woman, for some object for his passion to settle on. And he knew again, as he had always known, that nowhere is free, so long as man is passionate, desirous, yearning. His only freedom is to find the object of his passion, and fulfil his desires and satisfy his yearning, as far as his life can succeed. Or else, which is more difficult, to harden himself away from all desire and craving, to harden himself into pride, and refer himself to that other god.

Yes, in the wild bush, God seemed another god. God seemed absolutely another god, vaster, more calm and more deeply, sensually potent. And this was a profound satisfaction. To find another, more terrible, but also more deeply-fulfilling god stirring subtly in the uncontaminated air about one. A dread god. But a great god, greater than any known. The sense of greatness, vastness, and newness, in the air. And the strange, dusky, gray eucalyptus-smelling sense of depth, strange depth in the air, as of a great deep well of potency, which life had not yet tapped. Something which lay in a man's blood as well — and in a woman's blood — in Monica's — in Mary's — in the Australian blood. A strange, dusky, gun-smelling depth of potency that had never been tapped by experience. As if life still held great wells of reserve vitality, strange unknown wells of secret life-source, dusky, of a strange, dim, aromatic sap which had never stirred in the veins of man, to consciousness and effect. And if he could take Monica and set the dusky, secret, unknown sap flowing in himself and her, to some unopened life consciousness — that was what he wanted. Dimly, uneasily, painfully he realised it.

And then the bush began to frighten him, as if it would kill him, as it had killed so much man-life before, killed it before the life in man had had time to come to realisation.

He was glad when the road came down to the sea. There, the great, pale-blue, strange, empty sea, on new shores with new strange sea-birds flying, and strange rocks sticking up, and strange blue distances up the bending coast. The sea that is always the same, always a relief, a vastness and a soothing. Coming out of the bush, and being a little afraid of the bush, he loved the sea with an English passion. It made him feel at home in the same known infinite of space.

Especially on a windy day, when the track would curve down to a greeny-grey opalescent sea that beat slowly on the red sands, like a dying grey bird with white wing-feathers. And the reddish cliffs with sage-green growth of herbs, stood almost like flesh.

Then the road went inland again, through a swamp, and to the bush. To emerge next morning in the sun, upon a massive deep indigo ocean, infinite, with pearl-clear horizon; and in the nearness, emerald-green and white flashing

unspeakably bright on a pinkish shore, perfectly world-new.

They were nearing the journey's end. Nearing the little port, and the ship, and the world of men.

CHAPTER XVII

AFTER TWO YEARS

I

A sky with clouds of white and grey, and patches of blue. A green sea flecked with white, and shadowed golden brown. On the horizon, the sense of a great open void, like an open valve, as if the bivalve oyster of the world, sea and sky, were open away westward, open into another infinity, and the people on land, inside the oyster of the world, could look far out to the opening.

They could see the bulk of near islands. Further off, a tiny white sail coming down fast on the fresh great sea-wind, emanating out of the north-west. She seemed to be coming from the beyond, slipping into the slightly-open, living oysters of our world.

The men on the wharf at Fremantle, watching her black hull emerge from the flecked sea, as she sailed magically nearer, knew she would be a cattle-boat coming in from the great Nor'-West. They watched her none the less.

As she hesitated, turning to the harbour, she was recognised as the old fore-and-aft schooner "Venus"; though if Venus ever smelled like that, we pity her lovers. Smell or not, she balanced nicely, and with a bit of manoeuvring ebbed her delicate way up the wharf.

There they are! There they are, Tom and Jack, though their own mothers wouldn't know them! Looking terribly like their fellow-passengers: stubby beards, long hair, greasy dirty dungarees, and a general air of disreputable outcasts. But, no doubt, with cheques of some sort in their pockets.

Two years, nearer three years have gone by, since they set out from Wandoo. It is more than three years since Jack landed fresh from England, in this very Fremantle. And he is so changed, he doesn't even trouble to remember.

They don't trouble to remember anything: not yet. Back in the Never-Never, one by one the ties break, the emotional connections snap, memory gives out, and you come undone. Then, when you have come undone from the great past, you drift in an unkempt nonchalance here and there, great distances across the great hinterland country, and there is nothing but the moment, the instantaneous

moment. If you are working your guts out, you are working your guts out. If you are rolling across for a drink, you are rolling across for a drink. If you are just getting into a fight with some lump of a brute, you are just getting into a fight with some lump of a brute. If you are going to sleep in some low hole, you are going to sleep in some low hole. And if you wake feeling dry and hot and hellish, why, you feel dry and hot and hellish till you leave off feeling dry and hot and hellish. There's no more to it. The same if you're sick. You're just sick, and stubborn as hell, till your stubbornness gets the better of your sickness.

There are words like home, Wandoo, England, mother, father, sister, but they don't carry very well. It's like a radio message that's so faint, so far off, it makes no impression on you; even if you can hear it in a shadowy way. Such a faint, unreal thing in the broadcast air.

You have moved outside the pale, the pale of civilisation, the pale of the general human consciousness. The human consciousness is a definitely limited thing, even on the face of the earth. You can move into regions outside of it. As in Australia. The broadcasting of the vast human consciousness can't get you. You are beyond. And since the call can't get you, the answer begins to die down inside yourself, you don't respond any more. You don't respond, and you don't correspond.

There is no past: or if there is, it is so remote and ineffectual it can't work on you at all. And there is no future. Why saddle yourself with such a spectre as the future? There is the moment. You sweat, you rest, the bugs bite you, you thirst, you drink, you think you're going to die, you don't care, and you know you won't die, because a certain stubbornness inside you keeps the upper hand.

So you go on. If you've got no work, you either get a horse or you tramp it off somewhere else. You keep your eyes open that you don't get lost, or stranded for water. When you're damned, infernally and absolutely sick of everything, you go to sleep. And then if the bugs bite you, you are beyond that too.

But at the bottom of yourself, somewhere, like a tiny seed, lies the knowledge that you're going back in a while. That all the unreal will become real again, and this real will become unreal. That all that stuff, home, mother, responsibility, family, duty, etc., it all will loom up again into actuality, and this, this heat, this parchedness, this dirt, this mutton, these dying sheep, these roving cattle that take the flies by the million, these burning tin gold-camps — all this will recede into the unreal, it will cease to be actual.

Some men decide never to go back, and they are the derelicts, the scarecrows and the warning. "Going back" was a problem in Jack's soul. He didn't really want to go back. All that which lay behind, society, homes, families, he felt a deep hostility towards. He didn't want to go back. He was like an enemy, lurking

outside the great camp of civilisation. And he didn't want to go into camp again.

Yet neither did he want to be a derelict. A mere derelict he would never be, though temporary derelicts both he and Tom were. But he saw enough of the real waster, the real out-and-out derelict, to know that this he would never be.

No, in the end he would go back to civilisation. But the thought of becoming a part of the civilised outfit was deeply repugnant to him. Some other queer hard resolve had formed in his soul. Something gradually went hard in the centre of him. He couldn't yield himself any more. The hard core remained impregnable.

They had dutifully spent their year on the sheep-run Mr. George had sent them to. But after that, it was shift for yourself. They had stuck at nothing. Only they had stuck together.

They had cashed their cheques in many a well-known wooden "hotel" of the far-away coast. Oh, those wooden hotels with their uneasy verandahs, flies, flies, flies, flies, their rum or whiskey, their dirty glasses, their flimsy partitions, their foul language, their bugs and dirt and desolation. The brutal foul-mouthed desolation of them, with the horses switching their tails at the hitching posts, the riders slowly soaking, staring at the blue heat and the silent world of dust, too far gone even to speak. Gone under the heat, the drought, the Never-Neversness of it, the unspeakable hot desolation. And evening coming, with men already drunk, already ripe for brawling, obscenity, and swindling gambling.

They had gone away chequeless, mourning their chequelessness, back on their horses to the cable station. Then following the droves miles and miles through the tropical, or semitropical bush, and over the open country, camping by water for a week at a time, and going on.

Then they had chucked cattle, wasted their cheques, footed it for weary, weary miles, like the swaggies they had so despised. Clothes in rags, boots in holes, another job; away in out-back camps with horsemen prospectors, with well-contractors; shepherding again, with utter wastrels of shepherds camping along with them, chucking the job, chucking the blasted rich aristocratic squatters, with all their millions of acres and sheep and fence and blasted outfit, all so dead bent on making money as quick as possible, all the machinery of civilisation, as far as possible, starting to grind and squeak there in the beyond. They had gone off with well-sinkers, and laboured like navvies. Chucked that, taken the road, spent the night at mission stations, watched the blacks being saved, and got to the mining camps.

Poor old Tom had got into deep waters. Even now he more than thought that he was legally married to a barmaid, far away back in the sublimest town you can imagine, back there in the blasting heat which so often burns a man's soul away even before it burns up his body. It had burned a hole in Tom's soul, in

that town away back in the blasting heat, a town consisting of a score or so of ready-made tin houses got up from the coast in pieces, and put together by anybody that liked to try. There they stood or staggered, the tin ovens that men and women lived in; houses leaning like drunken men against stark tree-trunks, others looking strange and forlorn with some of their parts missing, said parts being under the seas, or elsewhere mislaid. But the absence of one section of a wall did not spoil the house for habitation. It merely gave you a better view of the inside happenings. Many of the tin shacks were windowless, and even shutterless: square holes in the raw corrugated erection. One was entirely wallless, and this was the pub. It was just a tin roof reared on saplings against an old tree, with a sacking screen round the bar, through which sacking screen you saw the ghost of the landlady and her clients, if you approached from the back. The front view was open.

Here sat the motionless landlady, in her cooking hot shade, dispensing her indispensable grog, while her boss or husband rolled the barrels in. He had a team with which he hauled up the indispensable from the coast.

The nice-mannered Miss Snook took turn with her mama in this palace of Circe. She was extremely “nice” in her manners, for the “boss” owned the team, the pub, and the boarding-house at which you stayed so long as you could pay the outrageous prices. So Miss Snook, never familiarised into Lucy, for she wouldn’t allow it, oscillated between the closed oven of the boarding-house and the open oven of the pub.

Father — or the “boss” — had been a barber in Sydney. Now he cooked in the boarding-house, and drove the team. “Mother” had been the high-born daughter of a chemist; she had ruined all her prospects of continuing in the eastern “swim” by running away with the barber, now called “boss.” However, she took her decline in the social scale with dignity, and allowed no familiarities. Her previous station helped her to keep up her prices.

“We’re not, y’understand, Mr. Grant, a Provident concern, as some foot-sloggers seem to think us. We’re doing our best to provide for Lucy, against she wants to get married, or in case she doesn’t.”

She and Lucy did the washing and cleaning between them, but their efforts were nominal. Boss’ cooking left everything to be desired. The place was a perfect Paradise.

“We know a gentleman when we see one, Mr. Grant, and we’re not going to throw our only child away on a penniless waster.”

Jack wanted loudly to proclaim himself a penniless waster. But Tom and he had a pact, not to say anything about themselves, or where they came from. They were just “looking round.”

And in that heat, the plump, perspiring, cotton-clad Lucy thought that Tom seemed more amenable than Jack. Poor Tom seemed to fall for it, and Jack had to look on in silent disgust.

There was even a ghastly, gruesome wedding. Neither of the boys could bear to think of it. Even in the stupefaction of that heat, when the brain seems to melt, and the will degenerates, and nothing but the most rudimentary functions of the organism called man, continue to function, even then a sense of shame overpowered them. But Tom was in a trance, pig-headed as any of Circe's swine. He continued in the trance for about a week after his so-called marriage. Then he woke up from the welter of perspiration, rum, and Lucy in an amazed horror, and the boys escaped.

The nightmare of this town — it was called "Honeysuckle" — was able to penetrate Tom's most nonchalant mood, even when he was hundreds of trackless miles away. The young men covered their tracks carefully. The Snooks knew nothing but their names. But a name, alas, is a potent entity in the wilds.

They covered their tracks and disappeared again. But even so, an ancient letter from Wandoo followed them to a well-digging camp. It was from Monica to Tom, but it didn't seem to mean much to either boy.

For almost a year Tom and Jack had never written home. There didn't seem any reason. In his last letter Tom, suddenly having some sort of qualms, had sent his cheque to his maiden Aunts in York, because he knew, now Gran and Dad were gone, they'd be in shallow water. This off his conscience, he let Wandoo go out of his mind and spirit.

But now wandered in a letter from Aunt Lucy — dreaded name! It was a "thank you, my dear nephew," and went on to say that though she would be the last to repeat things she hoped trouble was not hanging over Mrs. Ellis' head.

Tom looked at Jack — —

"We'd best go back," said Jack, reading his eyes.

"Seems like it."

So — the time had come. The "freedom" was over. They were going back. — They caught the old ship "Venus," going south with cattle.

To come back in body is not always to come back in mind and spirit. When Jack saw the white buildings of Fremantle he knew his soul was far from Fremantle. But nothing to be done. The old ship bumped against the wharf, and was tied up. Nothing to do but to step ashore.

They loafed off that ship with a gang of similar unkempt, unshaved, greasy, scoundrelly returners.

"Come an' 'ave a spot!"

"What about it, Tom?"

“Y’know I haven’t a bean above the couple o’ dollars to take me to Perth.”

“Oh, dry it up,” cried the mate. “What y’come ashore for? You’re not goin’ without a spot. It’s on me. My shout.”

“Shout it back in Perth, then.”

“Wot’ll y’ave?”

And through the swing doors they went.

“Best an’ bitter’s mine.”

II

Jack had not let himself be cleaned out entirely, as Tom had. Tom seemed to want to be absolutely stumped. But Jack with deeper sense of the world’s nnmity, and his own need to hold his own against it, had posted a couple of cheques to Lennie to hold for him. Save for this he too was cleaned out.

The same little engine of the same little train of four years ago shrieked her whistle. The North-West crowd drifted noisily out of the Hotel and down the platform, packing into the third class compartment, in such positions as happily to negotiate the spittoons.

“Let’s go forward,” said Jack. “We might as well have cushions, if we’re not smoking.”

And he drew Tom forward along the train. They were going to get into another compartment, but seeing the looks of terror on the face of the woman and little girl already there, they refrained and went further.

Aggressively they entered another smoking compartment. A couple of fat tradesmen and a clergyman glowered at them. One of the tradesmen pulled out a handkerchief, shook it, and pretended to wipe his nose. There was perfume in the air.

“Oh my aunt!” said Tom, putting his hand on his stomach. “Turns me right over.”

“What?” asked Jack.

“All this smell o’ scent.”

Jack grinned to himself. But he was back in civilisation, and he involuntarily stiffened.

“Hello! There’s Sam Ellis!” Tom leaned out of the door. “Hello, Sam! How’s things, eh?”

The young fellow addressed looked at Tom, grinned sicklily, and turned away. He didn’t know Tom from Adam.

“Let’s have another drink!” said Tom, flabbergasted, getting out of the train.

Jack followed, and they started down the platform, when the train joggled, jerked, and began to pull away. Instantly they ran for it, caught the rail of the guard’s van, and swung themselves in. The interior was empty, so they sat down on the little boxes let in at the side. Then the two eyed each other self-consciously, uncomfortably. They felt uncomfortable and aware of themselves all at once.

“Of all the ol’ sweeps!” said Tom. “Tell you what, you look like a lumper, absolutely nothing but a lumper?”

“And what do you think you look like, you distorted scavenger!”

Tom grinned uncomfortably.

They got out of the station at Perth without having paid any railway fare.

The first place they went to was Mr. George’s office. Jack pushed Tom through the door, and stood himself in the doorway fingering his greasy felt hat. Tom dropped his, picked it up, hit it against his knee.

Mr. George, neat in pale-grey suit and white waistcoat, glared at them briefly.

“Now then, my men, what can I do f’ ye?”

“Why — — ” began Tom, grinning sheepishly.

“Trouble about a mining right? — mate stolen half y’ gold dust? — want stake a claim on somebody else’s reserve? — Come, out with it. What d’ you want me to do for ye, man?”

“Why — — ” Tom began, more foolishly grinning than ever. Mr. George looked shrewdly at him, then at Jack. Then he sat back smiling.

“Well, if you’re not a pair!” he said. “So it was mines for the last outfit? How’d it go?”

“About as slow as it could,” said Tom.

“So you’ve not come back millionaires?” said Mr. George, a little bit disappointed.

“Come to ask for a fiver,” said Tom.

“You outcast!” said Mr. George. “You had me, completely. But look here, lads, I’ll stand y’ a fiver apiece if y’ll stop around Perth like that all morning, an’ nobody spots ye.”

“Easy!” said Tom.

“A bigger pair o’ blackguards I’ve seldom set eyes on. — But you have dinner with me at the club tonight, I’ll hear all about y’ then. Six-thirty sharp. An’ then I’ll take ye to the Government House. Y’ can wear that evening suit in the closet at my house, Jack, that you’ve left there all this time. See you six-thirty then.”

III

Dismissed, they bundled into the street.

“Outcasts on the face value of us!” said Jack.

Tom stopped to roar with laughter, and bumped into a pedestrian.

“Hold hard! Keep a hand on the reins, can’t you?” exclaimed the individual, pushing Tom off.

Tom looked at him. It was Jimmie Short, another sort of cousin.

“Stow it, Jimmie. Don’t y’ know me?”

Jimmie took him firmly by the coat lapels and pulled him into the gutter.

“‘f course I know ye,” said Jimmie in a conciliatory tone, as to a drunk. “Meet me in half an hour at the Miners’ Refuge, eh? Three steps and a lurch and there y’ are! — Come, matey” — this to Jack — ”take, hold of y’ pal’s arm. See ye later.”

Tom was weak with laughter at Jimmie’s benevolent attitude. They were not recognised at all, as they lurched across the road.

They had a drink, and strolled down the long principal street of Perth, looking in at the windows of all the shops, and in spite of the fact that they had no money, buying each a silk handkerchief and a cake of scented soap. The excitement of this over, they rolled away to the riverside, to the ferry. Then again back into the town.

At the corner of the Freemason’s Hotel they saw Aunt Matilda and Mary; Aunt Matilda huge in a tight-fitting, ruched dress of dark purple stuff, and Mary in a black-and-white striped dress with a tight bodice and tight sleeves with a little puff at the top, and a long skirt very full behind. She wore also a little black hat with a wing. And Jack, with a wickedness brought with him out of the North-West, would have liked to rip these stereotyped clothes and corsets off her, and make her walk down Hay Street in puris naturalibus. She went so trim and exact behind the huge Mrs. Watson. It would have been good to unsheathe her.

“Hello!” cried Tom. “There’s Aunt Matilda. We’ve struck it rich.”

The two young blackguards followed slowly after the two women, close behind them. Mary carried a book, and was evidently making for the little bookshop that had a lending library of newish books.

“Well, Mary, while you go in there I’ll go and see if the chemist can’t give, me something for my breathing, for its awful!” said Mrs. Watson, standing and puffing before the bookshop.

“Shall I come for you or you for me?” asked Mary.

“I’ll sit and wait for you in Mr. Pusey’s,” panted Aunt Matilda, and she sailed

forward again, after having glanced suspiciously backward at the two ne'er-dowells who were hesitating a few yards away.

Mary, with her black hair in a huge bun, her hat with a wing held on by steel pins, was gazing contemplatively into the window of the bookshop, at the newest book. The Booklovers Latest! said a cardboard announcement.

"Can you help a poor chap, Miss?" said Tom, dropping his head and edging near.

Mary started, looked frightened, glanced at the first tramp and then at the second, in agitation, began to fumble for her purse, and dropped her book, spilling the loose leaves.

Jack at once began to gather up the scattered pages of the book: an Anthony Trollope novel. Mary, with black kid-gloved fingers, was fumbling in her purse for a penny. Tom peeped into the purse.

"Lend us the half-a-quid, Mary," he said.

She looked at his face, and a slow smile of amusement dawned in her eyes.

"I should never have known you!" she said.

Then as Jack rose, shoving the leaves together in the book, she looked into his blue eyes with her brown, queer shining eyes.

She held out her hand to him without saying a word, only looked into his eyes with a look of shining meaning. Which made him grin sardonically inside himself. He shook hands with her silently.

"You look something like you did after you'd been fighting with Easu Ellis," she said. "When are you going to Wandoo?"

"Tomorrow, I should think," said Tom. "Everybody O.K. down there?"

"Oh I think so!" said Mary nervously.

"What do you men want?" came a loud, panting voice. Aunt Matilda sailing up, purple in the face.

"Lend us half-a-quid, Mary," murmured Tom, and hastily she handed it over. Jack had already commenced to beat a retreat. Tom sloped away as the large lady loomed near.

"Beggars!" she panted. "Are they begging? — How much — how much did you give him? The disgraceful — —!"

"He made me give him half-a-sovereign, Aunt."

Mrs. Watson had to stagger into the shop for a chair.

The boys had a drink, and set off to the warehouse to look up Jack's box, in which were his white shirts and other forgotten garments.

Back in town, Jack felt a slow, sinister sense of oppression coming over him, a sort of fear, as if he were not really free, as if something bad were going to happen to him.

“How am I going to get dressed to dine with Old George tonight?” grumbled the still-careless Tom, who was again becoming tipsy. “Wherever am I goin’ to get a suit to sport?”

“Oh, some of yer relations ‘ll fix you up.”

Jack had an undefinable, uncomfortable feeling that he might suddenly come upon Monica, and she might see him in this state. He wouldn’t like the way she’d look at him. No, he wouldn’t be looked at like that, not for a hundred ponies.

They turned their backs on the beautiful River, with its Mount Eliza headland and wide sweeps and curves twinkling in the sun, and they walked up William Street looking for an adventure.

A man whom they knew from the north, in filthy denims, came out of a boot-shop and hailed them.

“Come an’ stop one on me, maties.”

“Righto! But where’s Lukey? He stood us one this morning. Seen him?”

“Yes, I seen him. — But ‘arf a mo’!”

Scottie turned into the pawnbroker’s, under the three balls, and the boys followed.

“If y’ sees what y’ didn’t oughta see, keep y’ mouth shut.”

“As a dead crab,” assented Jack.

“Now then, Uncle! What’ll y’ advance on that pair o’ bran new boots I’ve just bought?”

“Two bob.”

“Glory be. An’ I just give twenty for ‘em. Ne’ mind, gimme th’ ticket.”

This transaction concluded, Jack wondered what he could pawn. He pulled out a front tooth, beautifully set in a gold plate. It had been a parting finish to his colonial outfit, the original tooth having been lost in a football scrum.

“Father Abraham,” he said, holding up the tooth, “I’m a gentleman whether I look it or not. So is my friend this gentleman. He needs a dress suit for tonight, though you wouldn’t believe it. He needs a first-class well-fitting dress suit for this evening.”

“I have first-class latest fashion gents’ clothes upstairs. But a suit like that is worth five pound to me.”

“Let me try the jacket on.”

Abraham was doubtful. But at length Tom was hustled shamefacedly into a rather large tail-coat. It looked awful, but Jack said it would do. The man wouldn’t take a cent less than two quid deposit: and ten bob for the loan of the suit. The boys said they would call later.

“What’ll you give me on this tooth?” asked Jack. “There’s not a more

expensive tooth in Western Australia.”

“I’ll lend y’ five bob on that, pecos y’ amuth me.”

“And we’ll come in later for the dress suit. All right, Aaron. Hang on to that tooth, it’s irreplaceable. Treat it like a jewel. Give me the five bob and the ticket.”

In the Miners’ Refuge Jack flung himself down on a bench beside an individual who looked tidy but smelt strongly of rum, and asked:

“Say, mate, where can y’ get a wash an’ a brush-up for two? — local?”

The fellow got up and lurched surlily to the counter, refusing to answer.

Jack sat on, while Tom drank beer, and a heavy depression crept over his spirit. He had been hobnobbing with riff-raff so long, it had almost become second nature. But now a sense of disgust and impending disaster came over him. He would soon have to make an angry effort, and get out. He was becoming angry with Tom, for sitting there so sloppily soaking beer, when he knew his head was weak.

They began to eat sandwiches, hungrily standing at the bar. Another slipshod waster, eyeing the denim man as if he were a fish, sidled over to him and muttered.

“Sorry,” said Scottie with a mournful expression, pulling out the pawn-ticket, “I’ve just had to pawn me boots. Can’t be done.”

Jack grinned. The waster then came sloping over to him. “Y’ axed me mate a civil question just now, lad, an’ I’d ‘ave answered it for ‘im, but I just spotted a racin’ pal o’ mine an’ was onter him ter get a tip he’d promised — a dead cert f’ Belmont tomorrer. Y’ might ha’ seen him lettin’ me inter th’ know,” he breathed. “Hev’ a drink, lad!”

“Thanks!” said Jack. “This is my mate. — I’ll take the shout, an’ one back, an’ then we must be off. Going up country tomorrer morning.”

This seemed to push the man’s mind on quicker.

“Just from up North, aren’t ye? Easy place to knock up a cheque. How’d y’ like to double a fiver?”

“O.K.,” said Tom.

“Well here’s a dead cert. Take it from me, and don’t let it past yer. I got it from a racin’ pal wot’s in the know. Not straight for the punters, maybe — but straight as a die f’r me ‘n my pals. Double y’ money? Not ‘arf! Multiply it by ten. ‘S a dead cert.”

“Name?”

“Not so quick. Not in ‘ere. Come outside, ‘n I’ll whisper it to y’.”

Jack paid for the drinks, and winking warningly to Tom, followed the man outside.

“The name o’ the ‘oss,” the fellow said — ”But tell yer wot, I’ll put ye on the divvy with a book I know — or y’ c’n come wi’ me. He keeps a paper-shop in Hay Street.”

“We don’t know the name of the horse yet.”

“Comin’ from up North you don’t know the name o’ none of ‘em, do yer? He’s a rank outsider. Y’ oughter get twenties on ‘im.”

“We’ve only got a quid atween us,” said Tom.

“Well, that means a safe forty — after th’ race.”

“Bob on!” said Tom. “Where’s the bookshop?”

“How can we go in an’ back a hoss without knowin’ his name?” said Jack.

“Oh I’ll tip it y’ in ‘ere.”

They entered a small paper-shop, and the man said to the fellow behind the counter:

“These two gents ‘s pals o’ mine. — How much did y’ say y’d lay, mates?”

“Out with the name o’ th’ hoss first,” said Tom confidentially.

“This shop’s changed hands lately,” said the fat fellow behind the counter. “I don’t make books. Got no licence.”

Didn’t that look straight? But the boys were no greenhorns. They walked out of the shop again.

In the road the stranger said:

“The name o’ th’ ‘oss is Double Bee. If y’ll give me th’ money I’ll run upstairs ‘ere t’ old Josh — everyone knows him for a sound book.”

“The name o’ th’ hoss,” said Jack, “is Boots-two-Bob. An’ a more cramblin’ set o’ lies I never heard. Get outter this, or I’ll knock y’ head off.”

The fellow went off with a yellow look.

“Gosh!” said Tom. “We’re back home right enough, what?”

“Bon soir, as Frenchy used to say?”

Rolling a little drearily along, they saw Jimmie Short standing on the pavement watching them.

“Hello, mates!” he said. “Still going strong?”

“Fireproof!” said Tom.

“Remember barging into me this morning? And my best girl was just coming round the corner with her Ma! Had to mind my company, eh, boys. But come an’ have a drink now. — I seem to have seen you before to-day, haven’t I? Where was it?”

“Don’t try and think,” said Tom. “Y’ might do us out of a pony.”

“Righto! old golddust! Step over on to the Bar-parlour mat.”

“I’m stepping,” said Tom. “‘N I’m not drunk.”

“No, he’s not,” said Jack.

“You bet he’s not,” said Jimmie. He was eyeing them curiously as if his memory pricked him.

“My name,” said Tom, “is Ned Kelly. And if yours isn’t Jimmie Miller, what is it?”

“Why, it’s Short. — Well, I give it up. I can’t seem to lay my finger on you, Kelly.”

Tom roared with laughter.

“What time is it?” he asked.

“Ten past twelve.”

“We’ve won a pony off Old George!” said the delighted Tom. “I’m Tom Ellis and he’s Jack Grant. Now do you know us, Jimmie?”

Jack was glad to get washed and barbered and dressed. After all, he was sick of wasters and roughs. They were stupider than respectable people, and much more offensive physically and morally. To hell with them all. He wouldn’t care if some tyrant would up and extirpate the breed.

Anyhow he stepped clean out of their company.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE GOVERNOR'S DANCE

Three gentlemen in evening dress passing along by the low brick wall skirting the Government House. One of the gentlemen portly and correct, two of the gentlemen young, with burnt brown faces that showed a little less tan below the shaving line, and limbs too strong and too rough to fit the evening clothes. Jack's suit was on the small side, though he'd scarcely grown in height. But it showed a big piece of white shirt-cuff at the wrists, and seemed to reveal the muscles of his shoulders unduly. As for Tom's quite good and quite expensive suit from the pawn-shop, it was a little large for him. If he hadn't been so bursting with life it would have been sloppy. But the crude animal life came so forcibly through the black cloth, that you had to overlook the anomaly of the clothes. Both boys wore socks of fine scarlet wool, and the new handkerchiefs of magenta silk inside their waistcoats. The scarlet, magenta, and red-brown of their faces made a gallant pizzicato of colour against the black and white. Anyhow they fancied themselves, and walked conceitedly.

Jack's face was a little amusing. It had the kind of innocence and half-smile you can see on the face of a young fox, which will snap holes in your hand if you touch it. He was annoyed by his father's letter to him for his twenty-first birthday. The general had retired, and hadn't saved a sou. How could he, given his happy, thriftless lady. So it was a case of "My dear boy, I'm thankful you are at last twenty-one, because now you must look out for yourself. I have bled myself to send you this cheque for a hundred pounds, but I know you think I ought to send you something, so take it, but don't expect any more, for you won't get it if you do."

This was not really the text of the General's letter, but this was how Jack read it. As for his mother, she sent him six terrible neckties and awful silver-backed brushes which he hated the sight of, much love, a few tears, a bit of absurd fond counsel, and a general wind-up of tender doting.

He was annoyed, because he had expected some sort of real assistance in setting out like a gentleman on his life's career, now he had attained his majority. But the hundred quid was a substantial sop.

Mr. George had done them proud at the Weld Club, and got them invitations to the ball from the Private Secretary. Oh yes, he was proud of them, handsome upstanding young fellows. So they were proud of themselves. It was a fine, hot

evening, and nearly everybody was walking to the function, showing off their splendour. For few people possessed private carriages, and the town boasted very few cabs indeed.

Mr. George waited in the porch of the Government House for Aunt Matilda and Mary. They had not long to wait before they saw the ladies in their shawls, carrying each a little holland bag with scarlet initials, containing their dancing slippers, slowly and self-consciously mounting the steps.

The boys braced themselves to face the introduction to the Representation. They were uneasy. Also they wanted to grin. In Jack's mind a picture of Honeysuckle, that tin town in the heat, danced as on heat-waves, as he made his bows and his murmurs. He wanted to whisper to Tom: "Ain't we in Honeysuckle?" But it would have been too cruel.

Clutching their programmes as drowning men clutch straw, they passed on. The primary ordeal was over.

"Oh Lord, I'm sweating already," said Tom with a red-faced grin. "I'm off to get me bill-head crammed."

"Take me with you, for the Lord's sake," said Jack.

"Y're such an owl of a dancer. An' y' have to do it proper here. You go to Mr. George."

"Don't desert me, you swine."

"Go-on! Want me to take you back to Auntie? — Go-on! I'm goin' to dance an' sit out an' hold their little white hands."

Tom pulled a droll face, as he took his place in the line of glove-buttoning youths who made a queue on the Governor's left hand, where his daughter stood booking up duty dances. Jack, galvanised by the advent of the A.D.C., ducked through the crowd to Aunt Matilda's side.

He was always angry that he couldn't dance. The fact was, he would never learn. He could never bring himself to go hugging promiscuous girls round the waist and twiddling through dances with them. Underneath all his carelessness and his appearance of "mixing," there was a savage physical reserve which prevented his mixing at all. He could not bear the least physical intimacy. Something inside him recoiled and stood savagely at a distance, even from the prettiest girl, the moment she seemed to be "coming on." To take the dear young things in his arms was repugnant to him, it offended a certain aloof pride and a subtle arrogance in him. Even with Tom, intimate though they were, he always kept a certain unpassable space around him, a definite *noli me tangere* distance which gave the limit to all approach. It would have been difficult to define this reserve. Jack seemed absolutely the most open and accessible individual in the world, a perfect child. He seemed to lay himself far too open to anybody's

approach. But those who knew him better, like Mrs. Ellis or his mother, knew the cold inward reserve, the savage unwillingness to be touched, which was central in him, as in a wolf-cub. There was something reserved, fierce and untouched at the very centre of him. Something, at the centre of all his openness and his seeming softness, that was cold, overbearing, and a little angry. This was the old overweening English blood in him, which would never really yield to promiscuity, or to vulgar intimacy. He seemed to mix in with everybody at random. But as a matter of fact he had never finally mixed in with anybody, not even with his own father and mother, not even with Tom. And certainly not with any casual girl. Essentially, he kept himself a stranger to everybody.

Aunt Matilda was in green satin with a tiara of diamonds. "The devil you know is better than the devil you don't know," was Jack's inward comment as he approached her.

Aloud he said:

"Would it be right if I asked you to let me have the pleasure of taking you in to supper later, Marm?"

"Oh, you dear boy!" simpered Aunt Matilda. "So like y' dear father. But you see I'm engaged on these occasions. We have to go in in order of rank and precedence. But you can take Mary. She says she has hurt her foot and can't dance much."

Mary took his arm, and they went out on to the terrace. There was clear moonlight, and trees against a shadowy, grey-blue sky, and a dark perfume of tropical flowers. Jack felt the beauty of it and it moved him. He waited for his soul to melt. But his soul would never melt. It was hard and clear as the moon itself.

"It is much better here," he said, looking at the sky.

"Oh, it's beautiful!" said Mary. "I wanted so much to sit quietly and talk to you. It seems so long, and you looked so wild and different this morning. I've been so frightened, reading so much about the natives murdering people."

Mary was different too, but Jack didn't know wherein.

"I don't believe there's much more danger in one place than in another," he said, "so long as you keep yourself in hand. Shall we sit down and have a real wongie?"

They found a seat under the overspreading tree, and sat listening to the night-insects.

"You're not very glad to be back, are you?" asked Mary.

"Yes I am," he assented, without a great deal of vigour. "What has been happening to you all this time, Mary?"

"The little things that are nothing," she said. "The only thing" — she hesitated

— "is that they want me to marry. And I lie awake at night wondering about it."

"Marry who?" asked Jack, his mind running at once to Rackett.

They were sitting under a magnolia tree. Jack could make out the dark shape of a great flower against the moon, among black leaves. And the perfume was magnolia flowers.

"Do you want me to talk about it?" she said.

"I do."

Jack was glancing rather fiercely down the slope of the black-and-white garden, that sloped its lawns to the river. Mary sat very still beside him, in a cream lace dress.

"It's a Mr. Boyd Blessington. He is a widower with five children, but he is an interesting man. He's got a black beard."

"Goodness!" said Jack. "Have you accepted him?"

"No. Not yet."

"Why do you think of marrying him? Do you like him?"

"For some things. He is a good man, and he wants me in a good way. He has a beautiful library. And as he is a man of the world, there seems to be a big world round him. Yes, he is quite somebody. And Aunt Matilda says it is a wonderful opportunity for me. And I know it is."

Jack mused in silence.

"It may be," he said. "But I hardly fancy you kissing a widower of fifty, with a black beard and five children. Lord!"

"He's only thirty-seven. And he's a man."

Jack thought about Monica. He wanted Monica. But he also couldn't bear to let Mary go. This arrogance in him made him silent for some moments. Then he turned to Mary, his head erect, and looked down sternly on her small sinking figure in the pale lace dress.

"Do you want him?" he asked, in a subtle tone of authority and passion.

Mary was silent for some moments. "No-o!" she faltered. "Not — not — —"

Her hands lay inert in her lap. They were small, soft, dusky hands. The flame went over him, over his will. By some curious destiny, she really belonged to him. And Monica? He wanted Monica too. He wanted Monica first. But Mary also was his. Hard and savage he accepted this fact.

He took her two hands and lifted them to his lips, and kissed them with strange, blind passion. When the flame went over him, he was blind. Mary gave a little cry, but did not withdraw her hands.

"I thought you cared for Rackett," he said suddenly, looking at her closely. She shook her head, and he saw she was crying.

He put his arm round her and gathered her in her lace dress to his breast. She

was small, but strangely heavy. Not like that whip-wire of a Monica. But he loved her heaviness too. The heaviness of a dark magnetic stone. He wanted that too.

And in his mind he thought, "Why can't I have her too? She is naturally mine."

His soul was hard and unbending. "She is naturally mine!" he said to himself. And he kissed her softly, softly, kissed her face and her tears. And all the while Mary knew about Monica. And he, his soul fierce, would not yield in either direction. He wanted to marry her, and he wanted to marry Monica. Something was in Mary that would never be appeased unless he married her. And something in him would never be appeased unless he married Monica. His young, clear instinct saw both these facts. And the inward imperiousness of his nature rose to meet it. — "Why can't I have both these women?" he asked himself. And his soul, hard in its temper like a sword, answered him: "You can if you will."

Yet he was wary enough to know he must go cautiously. Meanwhile, determined that one day he would marry Monica, and Mary both, he held the girl soft and fast in his arms, kissing her, wanting her, but wanting her with the slow knowledge that he must wait and travel a long way before he could take her, yet take her he would. He wanted Monica first. But he also wanted Mary. The soft, slow weight of her as she lay silent and unmoving in his arms.

They could hear the music inside.

"I must go in for the next dance," she said in a muted tone. He kissed her mouth and released her. Then he escorted her back to the ballroom. She went across to Aunt Matilda, as the dance ended. And in her lace dress, the small, heavy, dusky Mary was like a lode-stone passing among flimsy people. She had a certain magnetic heaviness of her own, and a certain stubborn, almost ugly kind of beauty which in its heavy quietness, seemed like a darkish, perhaps bitter flower that rose from a very deep root. You were sensible of a deep root going down into the dark.

A tall, thin, rather hollow-chested man in a perfect evening suit and with orders on his breast, was speaking to her. He too had a faint air of proprietorship. He had a black beard and eyeglasses. But his face was sensitive, and delicate in its desire. It was evident he loved her with a real, though rather social, uneasy desirous love, as if he wanted all her answer. He was really a nice man, a bit frail and sad. Jack could see that. But he seemed to belong so entirely to the same world as the General, Jack's father. He belonged to the social world, and saw nothing really outside.

Mary too belonged almost entirely to the social world, her instinct was

strongly social. But there was a wild tang in her. And this Jack depended on. Somewhere deep in himself he hated his father's social world. He stood in the doorway and watched her dancing with Blessington. And he knew that as Mrs. Blessington, with a thoughtful husband and a good position in society, she would be well off. She would forfeit that bit of a wild tang.

If Jack let her. And he wasn't going to let her. He was hard and cool inside himself. He took his impetus from the wild sap that still flows in most men's veins, though they mostly choose to act from the tame sap. He hated his father's social sap. He wanted the wild nature in people, the unfathomed nature, to break into leaf again. The real rebel, not the mere reactionary.

He hated the element of convention and slight smugness which showed in Mary's movements as she danced with the tall, thin reed of a man. Anything can become a convention, even an unconventionality, even the frenzied jazzing of the modern ballroom. And then the same element of smugness, very repulsive, is evident, evident even in the most scandalous jazzers. This is curious, that as soon as any movement becomes accepted in the public consciousness, it becomes ugly and smug, unless it be saved by a touch of the wild individuality.

And Mary dancing with Mr. Blessington was almost smug. Only the downcast look on her face showed that she remembered Jack. Blessington himself danced like a man neatly and efficiently performing his duty.

The dance ended. Aunt Matilda was fluttering her fan at him like a ruffled cockatoo. There was a group: Mary, Blessington, Mr. George, Mr. James Watson, Aunt Matilda's brother-in-law, and Aunt Matilda. Mr. Blessington, with the quiet assurance of his class, managed to eclipse Mr. George and Jim Watson entirely, though Jim Watson was a rich man.

Jack went over and was introduced. Blessington and he bowed at one another. "Stay in your class, you monkey!" thought Jack with some of the sensual arrogance he had brought with him from the North-West.

Mr. Blessington introduced him to a thin, nervous girl, his daughter. She was evidently unhappy, and Jack was sorry for her. He took her out for refreshments, and was kind to her. She made dark-grey startled round eyes at him, and looked at him as if he were an incalculable animal that might bite. And he, in manner, if not in actuality, laughed and caressed the frail young thing to cajole some life into her.

Mary danced with Tom, and then with somebody else. Jack lounged about, watching with a set face that still looked innocent and amiable, keeping a corner of his eye on Mary, but chatting with various people. He wouldn't make a fool of himself, trying to dance.

When Mary was free again — complaining of her foot — he said to her:

“Come outside a bit.”

And obediently she came. They went and sat under the same magnolia tree.

“He’s not a bad fellow, your Blessington,” he said.

“He’s not my Blessington,” she replied, “Not yet anyhow. And he never would be really my Blessington.”

“You never know. I suppose he’s quite rich.”

“Don’t be horrid to me.”

“Why not? — I wish I was rich. I’d do as I liked. But you’ll never marry him.”

“Why shan’t I?”

“You just won’t.”

“I shall if Aunt Matilda makes me. I’m absolutely dependent on her — and do you think I don’t feel it? I want to be free. I should be much freer if I married Mr. Blessington. I’m tired of being as I am.”

“What would you really like to do?”

She was silent for a time. Then she answered:

“I should like to live on a farm.”

“Marry Tom,” he said maliciously.

“Why are you so horrid?” she said, in hurt surprise.

He was silent for a time.

“Anyhow you won’t marry Boyd Blessington.”

“Why are you so sure? Aunt Matilda is going to England in April. And I won’t travel with her. Travel with her would be unspeakable. I want to stay in Australia.”

“Marry Tom,” he said again, in malice.

“Why,” she asked in amazement, “do you say that to me?”

But he didn’t know himself.

“A farm — ” he was beginning, when a figure sailed up in the moonlight. It was Aunt Matilda. The two young people rose to their feet. Jack was silent and rather angry. He wanted to curl his nose and say: “It isn’t done, Marm!” But he said nothing. Aunt Matilda did the talking.

“I thought it was your voices,” she said coldly. “Why do you make yourself conspicuous, Mary? Mr. Blessington is looking for you in all the rooms.”

Mary was led away. Jack followed. Aunt Matilda had no sooner seen Mary led out by Mr. Blessington for the Lancers, than she came full sail upon Jack, as he stood lounging in the doorway.

“Come for a little walk on the terrace, dear boy,” she said.

“Can’t I have the pleasure of piloting you through this set of lancers, Marm?” he retorted.

She stood and smiled at him fixedly.

“I’ve heard of y’r dancing, dear boy,” she said, “and your father was a beautiful dancer. This Governor is very particular. He sent his A. D. C. to stop Jimmie Short reversing, right at the beginning of the evening.” — She eyed him with a shrewd eye.

“Surely worse form to hurt a gentleman’s feelings, than to reverse, Marm!” retorted Jack.

“It wasn’t bad form, it was bad temper. The Governor can’t reverse himself. Ha-ha-ha! Neither can I go through a set of Lancers with you. So come and take me out a minute.”

They went in silence down the terrace.

“Lovely evening! Not at all too hot,” he said.

She burst into a sputter of laughter.

“Lor! m’dear. You are amusin’!” she said. “But you won’t get out of it like that, young man. What have y’ t’say f’ y’self, running off with Mary like that twice!”

“You told me I could take her, Marm.”

“I didn’t ask you to keep her out and get her talked about, m’dear! I’m not a fool, my dear boy, and I’m not going to let her lose the chance of a life-time. You want her y’self for one night!” She slapped her fan crossly. “You leave well enough alone, we don’t want another scandal in the family. Mr. Blessington is a good man for Mary, a God-send. For she’s heavy, she’s heavy, she’s heavy for any man to take up with.” Aunt Matilda said this almost spitefully. “Mr. Blessington’s the very man for her, and a wonderful match. She’s got her family. She’s the granddaughter of Lord Haworth. And he has position. Besides they’re suited for one another. It’s the very finger of Heaven. Don’t you dare make another scandal in the family.”

She stopped under a lamp, and was leaning forward peering at him. Her large person exhaled a scent of artificial perfume. Jack hated perfume, especially in the open air. And her face, with its powder and wrinkles, in the mingled light of the lamp and the moon, made him think of a lizard.

“D’you want Mary yourself,” she snapped, like a great lizard. “It’s out of the question. You’ve got to make your way. She’d have to go on waiting for years. And you’d compromise her.”

“God forbid!” said Jack ironically.

“Then leave her alone,” she said. “If you compromise her, I’ll do no more for her, mind that.”

“Just exactly what do you mean, compromise her?” he asked.

“Get her talked about — as you’re trying to,” she snapped.

He thought it over. He must anyhow appear to yield to circumstances.

“All right,” he said. “I know what you mean.”

“See you do,” she retorted. “Now take me back to the ballroom.”

They returned, in a silence that was safe, if not golden. He was inwardly more set than ever. His appearance, however, was calm and innocent. She was much more ruffled. She wondered if she had said too much or too little, if he were merely stupid, or really dangerous.

He politely steered a way back to the reception room, placed her in a chair and turned to disappear. One thing he could not stand, and that was her proximity.

But as she sat down, she clutched his sleeve, cackling her unendurable laugh.

“Sit down, then,” she said. “We’re friends now, aren’t we?” And she tapped his tanned cheek, that still had a bit of the peach-look, with her feathery black fan.

“On the contrary, Marm,” he said, bowing but not taking a seat.

“Lor’, but you are an amusin’ boy, m’dear!” she said, and she let go his sleeve as she turned to survey the field.

In that instant he slipped away from her disagreeable presence.

He slipped behind a stout judge from Melbourne, then past a plumed woman, apparently of fashion, and was gone.

What he had to do was to reconnoitre his own position. He wanted Monica first. That was his fixed determination. But he was not going to let go of Mary either. Not in spite of battalions of Aunt Matildas, or correct social individuals. It was a battle.

But he had to gauge Mary’s disposition. He saw how much she was a social thing: how much, even, she was Lord Haworth’s granddaughter. And how little she was that other thing.

But it was a battle, a long, slow subtle battle. And he loved a fight, even a long, invisible one.

In the ballroom the A.D.C. pounced on him.

When he was free again, he looked round for Mary. It was the sixteenth dance, and she was being well nursed. When the dance was over, he went calmly and sat between her and Aunt Matilda on a red gilt sofa. Things were a little stiff. Even Mary was stiff.

He looked at her programme. The next dance was a polka, and she was not engaged.

“You are free for this dance?” he said.

“Yes, because of my foot,” she said firmly. He could see she too was on Aunt Matilda’s side, for the moment.

“I can dance a polka. Come and dance it with me,” he said.

“And my foot?”

He didn't answer, merely looked her in the face. And she rose.
They neither of them ever forgot that absurd, jogging little dance.

"I must speak to you, Mary," he said.

"What about?"

"Would you really like to live on a farm?"

"I think I should."

The conversation was rather jerky and breathless.

"In two years I can have a farm," he said.

She was silent for some time. Then she looked into his eyes, with her queer, black, humble-seeming eyes. She was thinking of all the grandeur of being Mrs. Boyd Blessington. It attracted her a great deal. At the same time, something in her soul fell prostrate, when Jack looked straight into her. Something fell prostrate, and she couldn't help it. His eyes had a queer power in them.

"In two years I can have a farm — a good one," he said.

She only gazed into his eyes with her queer, black, fascinated gaze.

The dance was over. Aunt Matilda was tapping Jack's wrist with her fan and saying:

"Yes, Mr. Blessington, do be so good as to take Mary down to supper."

Supper was over. It was the twentieth dance. Jack had been introduced to a sporting girl in her late twenties. She treated him like a child, and talked quite amusingly. Tom called her a "barrack hack."

Mr. Blessington went by with Mary on his arm.

"Mary," said Jack, "do you know Miss Brackley?"

Mary stopped and was smilingly introduced. Miss Brackley at once pounced amusingly upon Mr. Blessington.

"I want to speak to you," Jack said once more to Mary. "Behind the curtain of the third window."

He glanced at the red, ponderous plush curtain he meant. Mary looked frightened into his eyes, then glanced too, Mr. Blessington, extricating himself, walked on with Mary.

Jack looked round for Tom. That young man was having a drink, at the supper extra. Jack left the Barrack Hack for a moment.

"Tom," he said. "Will you stand by me in anything I say or do?"

"I will," said the glistening, scarlet-faced Tom, who was away on the gay high seas of exaltation.

"Get up a rubber of whist for Aunt Matilda. I know she'd like one. Will you?"

"Before you c'n say Wiggins," replied Tom, laughing as he always did when he was tipsy.

"And I say, Tom, you care for Mary, don't you? Would you provide a home

for her if she was wanting one?"

"I'd marry Mary if she'd 'ave me 'n I hadn't got a wife."

"Shut up!"

Tom broke into a laugh.

"Don't go back on me, Tom."

"Never, s'elp me bob."

"Get a move on then, and arrange that whist."

He sent him off with the Barrack Hack. And then he watched Mary. She still was walking with Mr. Blessington. They were not dancing. She knew Jack was watching her, and she was nervous. He watched her more closely.

And at the third window she fluttered, staggered a little, let go Mr. Blessington's arm, and turned round to gather up her skirt behind. She pretended she had torn a hem. She pretended she couldn't move without a pin. She asked to be steered into the alcove. She sent Mr. Blessington away into the ladies' dressing-room, for a pin.

And when he came back with it, she was gone.

Jack, outside in the night, was questioning her.

"Has Mr. Blessington proposed to you yet?"

"No."

"Don't let him. Would you really be happy on a farm, — even if it was rather hard work?"

He had to look down on her very steadfastly as he asked this. And she was slow in answering, and the tears came into her eyes before she murmured:

"Yes."

He was touched, and the same dominating dark desire came over him again. He held her fast in his arms, fast and silent. The desire was dark and powerful and permanent in him.

"Can you wait for me, even two years?" he asked.

"Yes," she murmured faintly.

His will was steady and black. He knew he could wait.

"In two years I shall have a farm for you to live on," he said. And he kissed her again, with the same dark, permanent passion.

Then he sent her off again.

He went and found Mr. George, in the card room. There was old Aunt Matilda, playing for her life, her diamonds twinkling but her fan laid aside.

"We're going to Wandoo to-morrow morning, Sir," said Jack.

"That's right, lad," said Mr. George.

"I say, Sir, won't you do Tom a kindness?" said Jack, "You're coming down yourself one day-this week, aren't you?"

“Yes, I shall be down on Wednesday or Thursday.”

“Bring Mary down with you. Make her Aunt Matilda let her come. Tom’s awfully gone on her, and when he sees her with Boyd Blessington he straightway goes for a drink. I don’t think she’s suited for Mr. Blessington, do you, Sir? He’s nearly old enough to be her father. And Tom’s the best fellow in the world, and Mary’s the one he cares for. If nothing puts him out and sends him wrong, there’s not a better fellow in the world.”

Mr. George blew nose, prrhed! and bahed! and was in a funk. He feared Aunt Matilda. He was very fond of Mary, might even have married her himself, but for the ridicule. He liked Tom Ellis. He didn’t care for men like Blessington. And he was an emotional old Australian.

“That needs thinking about! That needs thought!” he said. Not the next day, but the day following that, the boys drove away from Perth in a new sulky, with a horse bought from Jimmie Short. And Mr. George had promised to come on the coach the day after, with Mary.

CHAPTER XIX

THE WELCOME AT WANDOO

“Things change,” said Jack, as he and Tom drove along in the sulky, “and they never go back to what they were before.”

“Seems like they don’t,” said Tom uneasily.

“And men change,” continued Jack. “I have changed, and I shall never go back to what I was before.”

“Oh dry up,” said the nervous Tom. “You’re just the blanky same.”

Both boys felt a load on their spirits, now they were actually on the road home. They hated the load too.

“We’re going to make some change at Wandoo,” said Tom. “I wish I could leave Ma on the place. But Mr. George says she absolutely refuses to stay, and he says I’ve not got to try an’ force her. He sortta winked at me, and told me I should want to be settlin’ down myself. I wondered what ‘n hell he meant. Y’aven’t let on nothing about that Honeysuckle trip, have y’? I don’t mean to insult you by askin’, but it seemed kinder funny like.”

“No,” said Jack. “I’ve not breathed Honeysuckle to a soul, and never will. You get it off your mind — it’s nothing.”

“Well, then, I dunno what he meant. I told him I hadn’t made a bean anyhow. An’ I asked him what ‘n hell Ma was goin’ ter live on. He seemed a bit down in the mouth about ‘er himself, old George did. Fair gave me the bally hump. Wisht I was still up north, strike me lucky I do.

“We’ve been gone over two years, yet I feel I’ve never been away, an’ yet I feel the biggest stranger in the world, comin’ back to what’s supposed to be me own house. I hate havin’ ter come, because o’ the bloomin’ circumstances. Why ‘n hell couldn’t Ma have had the place for while she lived, an’ me be comin’ back to her and the kids? Then I shouldn’t feel sortta sick about it. But as it is — it fair gets me beat. Lennie’ll resent me, an’ Katie an’ Monica’ll hate havin’ ter get inter a smaller house, an’ the twins an’ Harry an’ the little ones don’ matter so much, but I do worry over pore ol’ Ma.”

There he was with a blank face, driving the pony homewards. He hadn’t worried over pore ol’ Ma till this very minute, on the principle “out of sight, out

of mind." Now he was all strung up.

"Y' know, Jack," he said, "I kinder don' want Wandoo. I kinder don' want to be like Dad, settlin' down with a heap o' responsibilities an' kids an' all that. I kinder don' want it."

"What do you want?" said Jack.

"I'd rather knock about with you for me mate, Jack, I'd a sight rather do that."

"You can't knock about forever," said Jack.

"I don' know whether you can or you can't. I only know I never knew my own mother. I only know she never lived at Wandoo. She never raised me there. I bet she lugged me through the bush. An' when all comes to all, I'd rather do the same. I don' want Dad's property. I don' want that Ellis property. Seems ter me bad luck. What d' yer think?"

"I should think it depends on you," said Jack.

"I should think it does. Anyhow shall you stop with me, an' go shares in the blinkin' thing?"

"I don't know," said Jack.

He was thinking that soon he would see Monica. He was wondering how she would be. He was wondering if she was ready for him, or if she would have a thousand obstacles around her. He was wondering if she would want him to plead and play the humble and say he wasn't good enough for her. Because he wouldn't do it. Not if he never saw her again. All that flummery of love he would not subscribe to. He would not say he adored her, because he didn't adore her. He was not the adoring sort. He would not make up to her, and play the humble to her, because it insulted his pride. He didn't feel like that, and he never would feel like that, not towards any woman on earth. Even Mary, once he had declared himself, would fetch up her social tricks and try to bring him to his knees. And he was not going down on his knees, not for half a second, not to any woman on earth, nor to any man either. Enough of this kneeling flummery.

He stood fast and erect on his two feet, that had travelled many wild miles. And fast and erect he would continue to stand. Almost he wished he could be clad in iron armour, inaccessible. Because the thought of women bringing him down and making him humble himself, before they would give themselves to him, this turned his soul black.

Monica! He didn't love her. He didn't feel the slightest bit of sentimental weakening towards her. Rather when he thought of her his muscles went stiffer and his soul haughtier. It was not he who must bow the head. It was she.

Because he wanted her. With a deep, arrowy desire, and a long, lasting dark desire, he wanted her. He wanted to take her apart from all the world, and put her under his own roof.

But he didn't want to plead with her, or weep before her, or adore her, or humbly kiss her feet. The very thought of it made his blood curdle and go black. Something had happened to him in the Never-Never. Before he went over the border he might have been tricked into a surrender to this soft and hideous thing they called love. But now, he would have love in his own way, haughtily, passionately, and darkly, with dark, arrowy desire, and a strange, arrowy-submissive woman: either this, or he would not have love at all.

He thought of Monica and sometimes the thought of her sent him black with anger. And sometimes, as he thought of her wild, delicate, reckless, lonely little profile, a hot tenderness swept over him, and he felt he would envelop her with a fierce and sheltering tenderness, like a scarlet mantle.

So long as she would not fight against him, and strike back at him. Jeer at him, play with Easu in order to insult him. Not that, my God, not that.

As for Mary, a certain hate of her burned in him. The queer heavy stupid conceit with which she had gone off to dance with Boyd Blessington, because he was an important social figure. Mary, wanting to live on a farm, but at the same time absolutely falling before the social glamour of a Blessington, and becoming conceited on the strength of it. Inside herself, Mary thought she was very important, thought that all sorts of eternal destinies depended on her choice and her actions. Even Jack was nothing more than an instrument of her divine importance.

He had sensed this clearly enough. And it was this that made Aunt Matilda a bit spiteful against her, when she said that Mary was "heavy" and wouldn't easily get a man.

But there was also the queer black look in Mary's eyes, that was outside her conceit and her social importance. The queer, almost animal dark glisten, that was full of fear and wonder, and vulnerability. Like the look in the eyes of a caught wild animal. Or the look in the shining black eyes of one of the aborigines, especially the black woman looking askance in a sort of terror at a white man, as if a white man was a sort of devil that might possess her.

Where had Mary got that queer aboriginal look, she the granddaughter of an English earl?

"Y're real lively to-day, aintcher, Jack? Got a hundred quid for your birthday, and my, some talk!"

"Comes to that," said Jack, rousing himself with difficulty. "We've come fifteen or twenty miles without you opening your mouth either."

Tom laughed shortly and relapsed into silence.

"Well," he said, "let's wake up now, there's the outlying paddock." He pointed with his whip. — "And there's the house through the dip in the valley!"

Then suddenly in a queer tone: "Say, matey, don't it look lovely from here, with all that afternoon sun falling over it like snow . . . You think I've never seen snow: but I have, in my dream."

Jack's heart contracted as he jumped down to open the first gate. For him too, the strange fulness of the yellow afternoon light was always unearthly, at Wandoo. But the day was still early, just after dinner-time, for they had stayed the night half way.

"Looks in good trim, eh?" said Jack.

"So it does! A1!" replied Tom. "Mr. George says Ma done wonders. Made it pay hand over fist. Y'remember that fellow, Pink-eye Percy, what come from Queensland, and had studied agriculture an' was supposed to be a bad egg an' all that? At that 'roo hunt, you remember? Well, he bought land next to Wandoo, off-side from the Reds. An' Ma sortta broke wi' the Reds over something, an' went in wi' him, an' t' seems they was able to do wonders. Anyway Old George says Ma's been able to buy a little place near her own old home in Beverley, to go to. — But seems to me — "

"What?"

"Funny how little anyone tells you, Jack."

"How?"

"I felt I couldn't get to th' bottom of what old George was tellin' me. I took no notice then. But it seems funny now. An' I say — "

"What?"

"You'd 'a thought Monica or Katie might ha' driven to the Cross Roads for us, like we used to in Dad's days."

"Yes, I thought one of them would have been there."

The boys drove on, in tense silence, through the various gates. They could see the house ahead.

"There's Timothy," said Tom.

The old black was holding open the yard gate. He seemed to have almost forgotten Jack, but the emotion in his black, glistening eyes was strange, as he stared with strange adoration at the young master. He caught Tom's hand in his two wrinkled dark hands, as if clinging to life itself.

The twins ran out, waved, and ran back. Katie appeared, looking bigger, heavier, more awkward than ever. Tom patted Timothy's hands again, then went across and kissed Katie, who blushed with shyness.

"Where's Ma, Katie?"

"In the parlour."

Tom broke away, leaving Katie blushing in front of Jack. Jack was thinking how queer and empty the house seemed. And he felt an outsider again. He stayed

outside, sat down on the bench.

A boy much bigger than Harry, but with the same blue eyes and curly hair, appeared chewing a haystalk, and squatted on a stone near by. Then Og and Magog, a bit taller, but no thinner, came and edged on to the seat. Then Ellie, a long-legged little girl, came running to his knees. And then what had been Baby, but was now a fat, toddling little girl, came racing out, fearless and inconsequential as the twins had been.

“Where’s Len?” said Jack.

“He’s in the paddock seein’ to th’ sheep,” said Harry.

There was a queer tense silence. The children seemed to cling round Jack for male protection.

“We’re goin’ to’ live nearer in to th’ township now,” said Harry, “in a little wee sortta house.”

He stared with bold blue eyes, unwinking and yet not easy, straight into Jack’s eyes.

“Well Harry,” said Jack, “You’ve grown quite a man.”

“I hev so!” said Harry: “Quite the tyke! I ken kill birds for Ma to put in th’ pot. I ken skin a kangaroo. I ken — ”

But Jack didn’t hear what else, because Tom was calling him from the doorway. He went slowly across.

“Say, mate,” said Tom in a low tone. “Stand by me. Things is not all right.” Aloud he said: “Ma wants t’ see ye, Jack.”

Jack followed through the back premises, down the three steps into the parlour. It all seemed forlorn.

Ma sat with her face buried in her hands. Jack knitted his brows. Tom put his hand on her shoulder.

“What is it, Ma? What is it? I wouldn’t be anything but good to yer, Ma, ye know that. Here’s Jack Grant.”

“Ye were always a good boy, Tom. I’m real glad t’ see ye back. And Jack,” said Ma through her hands.

Tom looked at Jack in dismay. Then he stooped and kissed her hair.

“You look to me,” he said. “We’ll fix everything all right, for Lennie ‘n everybody.”

But Ma still kept her face between her hands.

“There’s nothing t’ worry about, Ma, sure there isn’t,” persisted the distracted Tom. “I want y’ t’ have everything you want, I do, you an’ Lennie an’ the kids.”

Mrs. Ellis took her hands from her face. She looked pale and worn. She would not turn to the boys, but kept her face averted.

“I know you’re as good a boy as ever lived,” she faltered. Then she glanced

quickly at Tom and Jack, the tears began to run down her face, and she threw her apron over her head.

“God’s love!” gasped the bursting Tom, sinking on a chair.

They all waited in silence. Mrs. Ellis suddenly wiped her face on her apron and turned with a wan smile to the boys.

“I’ve saved enough to buy a little place near Beverley, which is where I belong,” she said. “So me and the children are all right. And I’ve got my eye, at least Lennie’s got his on a good selection east of here, between this and my little house, for Lennie. But we want cash for that, I’m afraid. Only it’s not that. That’s not it.”

“Lennie’s young yet to take up land, Ma!” Tom plunged in. “Why won’t he stop here and go shares with me?”

“He wants to get married,” said the mother wanly. “Get married! Len! Why he’s only seventeen!”

At this very natural exclamation, Ma threw her apron over her head, and began to cry once more.

“He’s been so good,” she sobbed. “He’s been so good! And his Ruth is old enough and sensible enough for two. Better anything — ” with more sobbing — ”than another scandal in the family.”

Tom rubbed his head. Gosh! It was no joke being the head of a family!

“Well, Ma, if you wish it, what’s the odds? But I’m afraid it’ll have to wait a bit. Jack’ll tell you I haven’t any cash. Not a stiver, Ma! Blown out! It takes it outter yer up North. We never struck it rich.”

Mrs. Ellis, under her apron, wept softly.

“Poor little Lennie! Poor little Lennie! He’s been so good, Tom, working day and night. And never spending a shilling. All his learning gone for nought, Tom, and him a little slave, at his years, old and wise enough to be his father, Tom. And he wants to get married. If we could start him out fair! The new place has only four rooms and an out-kitchen, and there’s not enough to keep him, much less a lady wife. She’s a lady earning her bread teaching. He could go to Grace’s. Alec Rice would have him. But — ”

She had taken her apron off her face, and was staring averted at the door leading into Gran’s old room.

The two boys listened mystified and a little annoyed. Why all this about Lennie? Jack was wondering where Monica was. Why didn’t she come? Why wasn’t she mentioned? And why was Ma so absolutely downcast, on the afternoon of Tom’s home-coming? It wasn’t fair on Tom.

“Where is Monica?” asked Jack shyly at last.

But Mrs. Ellis only shook her head faintly and was mute, staring across at

Gran's door.

"Lennie married!" Tom was brooding. "Y'll have to put it out of y'r mind for a bit, Ma. Why, it wouldn't hardly be decent."

"Let him marry if he's set on it — an' the girl's a good girl," said Mrs. Ellis, her eyes swamping with tears again, and her voice breaking as she rocked herself again.

"Yes, if we could afford it," Tom hastily put in. And he raised his stunned eyes to Jack. Jack shrugged, and looked in the empty fireplace, and thought of the little fires Gran used to have.

Money! Money! Money! The moment you entered within four walls it was the word money, and your mouth full of ashes.

And then again something hardened in his soul. All his life he had been slipping away from the bugbear of money. It was no good. You had to turn round and get a grip on the miserable stuff. There was nothing else for it. Though money nauseated him, he now accepted the fact that he must have control over money, and not try just to slip by.

He began to repent of having judged Gran. That little old witch of a Gran, he had hated the way she had seemed to hoard money and gloat in the secret possession of it. But perhaps she knew, somebody must control it, somebody must keep a hand over it. Like a deadly weapon. Money! Property! Gran fighting for them, to bequeath them to the man she loved.

Perhaps she too had really hated money. She wouldn't make a will. Neither would Dad. Their secret repugnance for money and possessions. But you had to have property, else you were down and out. The men you loved had to have property, or they were down and out. Like Lennie!

Poor old plucky Gran, fighting for her man. It was all a terrible muddle anyhow. But he began to understand her motive.

Yes, if Len had got a girl into trouble and wanted to marry her, the best he could do would be to have money and buy himself a little place. Otherwise, heaven knows what would happen to him. With their profound indifference to the old values, these Australians seemed either to exaggerate the brutal importance of money, or they wanted to waste money altogether, and themselves along with it. This was what Gran feared: that her best male heirs would go and waste themselves, as Jacob had begun to waste himself. The generous ones would just waste themselves, because of their profound mistrust of the old values.

Better rescue Lennie for the little while it was still possible to rescue him. Jack's mind turned to his own money. And then, looking at that inner door, he seemed to see Gran's vehement figure, pointing almost viciously with her black

stick. She had tried so hard to drive the wedge of her meaning into Jack's consciousness. And she had failed. He had refused to take her meaning.

But now with a sigh that was almost a groan, he took up the money burden. The "stocking" she had talked about, and which he had left in the realms of unreality, was an actuality. That witch Gran, with her uncanny, hateful second sight, had put by a stocking for Lennie, and entrusted the secret of it to Jack. And he had refused the secret. He hated those affairs.

Now he must assume the mysterious responsibility for this money. He got up and went to the chimney, and peered into the black opening. Then he began to feel carefully along the side of the chimney-stack inside, where there was a ledge. His hand went deep in soot and charcoal and grey ash.

He took off his coat and rolled up his sleeve.

"Gone off y'r bloomin' nut; Jack?" asked Tom, mystified.

"Gran told me she had put a stocking for Len in here," said Jack.

"Stocking be blowed!" said Tom testily. "We've heard that barm-stick yarn before. Leave it alone, boy."

He was looking at Jack's bare, brown, sinewy arm. It reminded him of the great North-West, and the heat, and the work, and the absolute carelessness. This money and stocking business was like a mill-stone round his neck. He felt he was gradually being drowned in soot, as Jack continued to fumble up inside the chimney, and the soot poured down over the naked arm.

"Oh, God's love, leave it alone, Jack!" he cried.

"Let him try," said Mrs. Ellis quietly. "If Gran told him. I wonder he didn't speak before."

"I never really thought about it," said Jack.

"Don't think about it now!" shouted Tom.

Jack could feel nothing in the chimney. He looked contemplatively at the fireplace. Something drew him to the place near Gran's arm-chair . . . He began feeling, while the other two watched him in a state of nervous tension. Tom hated it. "She pointed here with her stick," said Jack.

There was a piece of tin fastened over the side of the fireplace, and black-leaded.

"Mind if we try behind this?" he asked.

"Leave it alone!" cried Tom.

But Jack pulled it out, and the ash and dirt and soot poured down over the hearth. Behind the sheet of thin iron was the naked stone of the chimney-piece. Various stones were loose: that was why Gran had had the tin sheet put over.

He got out of the cavity behind the stones, where the loose mortar had all crumbled, a little square dusty box that had apparently been an old tea-caddy. It

was very heavy for its size, and very dirty. He put it on the table in front of Mrs. Ellis. Tom got up excitedly to look in. He opened the lid. It was full to the brim of coins, gold coins and silver coins and dust and dirt, and a sort of spider filament. He shook his head over it.

“Isn’t that old Gran to a T!” he exclaimed, and poured out the dust and the money on the table.

Ma began eagerly to pick out the gold from the silver, saying:

“I remember when she made Dad put that iron plate up. She said insects came out and worried her.”

Ma only picked out the gold pieces, the sovereigns and half-sovereigns. She left Tom to sort the silver crowns and half-crowns into little piles. Jack watched in silence. There was a smell of soot and old fire-dust, and everybody’s hands were black.

Mrs. Ellis was putting the sovereigns in piles of ten. She had a queer sort of satisfaction, but her gloom did not really lift. Jack stayed to know how much it was. Mentally he counted the piles of gold she made: the pale washy gold of Australia, most of it. She counted and counted again.

“Two hundred and fourteen pounds!” she said in a low voice.

“And ten in silver,” said Tom.

“Two hundred and twenty-four pounds,” she said.

“It’s not the world,” said Tom, “but it’s worth having. It’s a start, Ma. And you can’t say that isn’t Lennie’s.”

Jack went out and left them. He listened in all the rooms downstairs. What he wanted to know about was Monica. He hated this family and family money business, it smelled to him of death. Where was Monica? Probably, to add to the disappointment, she was away, staying with Grace.

The house sounded silent. Upstairs all was silent. It felt as if nobody was there.

He went out and across the yard to the stable. Lucy whinnied. Jack felt she knew him. The nice, natural old thing: Tom would have to christen her afresh. At least this Lucy wouldn’t leave a stocking behind her when she was dead. She was much too clean. Ah, so much nicer than that other Lucy with her unpleasant perspiration, away in Honeysuckle.

Jack stood a long while with the sensitive old horse. Then he went round the out-buildings, looking for Lennie. He drifted back to the house, where Harry was chopping something with a small hatchet.

“Where’s Monica, Harry?” he asked.

“She’s not home,” said Harry.

“Where’s she gone?”

“Dunno.”

And the resolute boy went on with his chopping.

Tom came out, calling. “I’m going over to have a word wi’ th’ Reds, Jack. Comin’ with me?”

Tom didn’t care for going anywhere alone, just now. Jack joined him.

“Where’s Monica, Tom?” he asked.

“Ay, where is she?” said Tom, looking round as if he expected her to appear from the thin air.

“She’s not at home, anyhow,” said Jack.

“She’s gone off to Grace’s, or to see somebody, I expect,” said Tom, as they walked across the yard. “And Len is out in the paddocks still. He don’t seem in no hurry to come an’ meet us, neither. The little cuss! Fancy that nipper wantin’ to be spliced. Gosh, I’ll bet he’s old for his age, the little old wallaby! An’ that bloomin’ teacher woman, Ruth, why she’s older’n me. She oughtta be ashamed of herself, kidnappin’ that nipper.”

The two went side by side across the pasture, almost as if they were free again. They came to a stile.

“Gosh!” said Tom. “They’ve blocked up this gate, ‘n put a stile over, see! Think o’ that!”

They climbed the stile and continued their way.

“God’s love, boy, didn’t we land in it over our heads! Ever see Ma like that? I never! Good for you, Jack, lad, findin’ that tea-caddy. That’s how the Ellises are — ain’t it the devil! ‘Spect I take after my own mother, f’r I’m not in the tea-caddyin’ line. Ma’s cheered up a bit. She’ll be able to start Lennie in a bit of a way, now, ‘n the twins can wait for a bit, thank goodness! My, but ain’t families lively! Here I come back to be boss of this bloomin’ place, an’ I feel as if I was goin’ to be shot. Say, boy, dye think I’m really spliced to that water-snake in Honeysuckle? Because I s’ll have to have somebody on this outfit. Alone I will not face it. Say, matey, promise me you won’t leave me till I’m fixed up a bit. Give me your word you’ll stand by me here for a time, anyhow.”

“I’ll stay for a time,” said Jack.

“Righto! an’ then if I’m not copped by the Honeysuckle bird — ‘appen Mary might have me, what d’you think? I shall have to have somebody. I simply couldn’t stand this place, all by my lonesome. What d’you think about Mary? D’you think she’d like it, here?”

“Ask her,” said Jack grimly.

CHAPTER XX

THE LAST OF EASU

I

They knew that Easu was married, but they were hardly prepared for the dirty baby crawling on the verandah floor. Easu had seen them come through the gate, and was striding across to meet them, after bawling something in his bullying way to someone inside the house: presumably his wife.

Outwardly, he was not much altered. Yet there was an undefinable change for the worse. He was one of those men whom marriage seems to humiliate, and to make ugly. As if he despised himself for being married.

Easu ignored the baby as if it were not there, striding past into the house, leading the newcomers into the parlour. It was darkened in there, to keep out the flies; but he pulled up the blind: "t'see their blanky fisogs." And he called out to the missus to bring glasses.

The parlour was like most parlours. Enlarged photographs of Mr. and Mrs. Ellis, the Red parents, in large pine frames, on the wall. A handsome china clock under a glass case on the mantelpiece, with flanking vases to match, on fawn-and-red woollen crochet mats. An oval, rather curvy table in the middle of the room, with the family Bible, and the meat under a fly-proof wire cover. The parlour was the coolest place for the meat.

Easu shifted the red obnoxiousity, wire cover and all, to the top of a cupboard where some cups and saucers were displayed, and drew forth a demijohn of spirit from the back of the horsehair sofa, in front of the window.

Mrs. Easu came in with the glasses. She was a thin, pale-faced young woman with big dark eyes and her hair in huge curling pins, and a hostile bearing. She took no notice of the visitors: only let her big what-do-you-want eye pass over them with distaste beneath her bald forehead. It was her fixed belief that whoever came to the house came to get something, if they could. And they were not going to get it out of her. She made an alliance with Easu so far. But her rather protruding teeth and her vindictive mouth showed that Easu would get as many bites as kisses.

She set the glasses from her hands on to the table, and looked down at Easu under her pale lashes.

“What else d’ye want?” she asked rudely. “Nothing. If I want anything I’ll holloa.”

They seemed to be on terms of mutual rudeness. She had been quite an heiress: brought Easu a thousand pounds. But the way she said it — a tharsand parnds! — as if it was something absolutely you couldn’t get beyond, made even Easu writhe. She was common, to put it commonly. She spoke in a common way, she thought in a common way, and she acted in a common way. But she had energy, and even a vulgar suffisance. She thought herself as good as anybody, and a bit better, on the strength of the tharsand parnds!

“S not eddication as matters, it’s munney!” she said blatantly to Lennie. “At your age y’ought t’ave somethink in th’ bank.”

He of course hated the sight of her after that. She had looked at him with a certain superciliousness and contempt in her conceited brown eyes, because he had no money and was supposed to be clever. He never forgave her.

But what did she care! She jerked up her sharp-toothed mouth, and sailed away. She wasn’t going to be put down by any penniless snobs. The Ellises! Who were the Ellises? Yes, indeed! They thought themselves so superior. Could they draw a tharsand parnd? Pah!

She felt a particularly spiteful, almost vindictive, scorn of Jack. He was somebody, was he? Ha! What was he worth? That was the point. How much munney did he reckon he’d got? “If yer want me ter think anythink of yer, yer mun show me yer bank-book,” she said.

Easu listened and grinned, and said nothing to all this. But she had a fiery temper of her own, and they went for one another like two devils. She wasn’t going to be daunted, she wasn’t. She had her virtues too. She had no method, but she was clean. The place was forever in a muddle, but she was always cleaning it, almost vindictively, as if the shine on the door-knob reflected some of the tharsand parnd. Even the baby was turned out and viciously cleaned once a day. But in the intervals it groped where it would. As for herself, she was a sight this morning, with her hair in huge iron waving-pins, and her forehead and her teeth both sticking out. She looked a sight to shudder at. But wait. Wait till she was dressed up and turning out in the buggy, in a coat and skirt of thick brown cord silk with orange and black braiding, and a hugely feathered hat, with huge floating ostrich feathers, an orange one and a brown one. And her teeth sticking out and a huge brooch of a lump of gold set with pearls and diamonds, and a great gold chain. And the baby, in a silk cape with pink ribbons, and a frilled silk bonnet of alternate pink and white ruches, mercilessly held against her chains

and brooches! Wait!

Therefore when Jack glanced at her from a strange distance, she tossed her bald forehead with the curling-irons, and thought to herself: “You can look, Master Jack Nobody. And you can look again, next Sunday, when I’ve got my proper things on. Then you’ll see who’s got the munney!”

She seemed to think that her Sunday gorgeousness absolutely obliterated the grimness of her week of curling pins. “Six days shall thou labour in thy curling-irons.” She lived in them. They kept her hair out of the way and saved her having to do it up all the time.

And it may be that Easu never really looked at her in her teeth and pins. That was not the real Sarah Ann. The real Sarah Ann swayed with ostrich feathers; brown silk, brown and orange feathers, reddish hair, brown eyes, pale skin, and a stiff, militant, vulgar bearing that wasn’t going to let anybody put it over her. “They can’t put me down, whoever they are!” she asserted. “I consider myself equal to the best, and perhaps a little better.”

This Easu heard and saw with curious gratification. This was his Sarah Ann.

None the less, he was no fool. He saw the baffled, surprised look Jack turned upon this grisly young woman in curlers and teeth, as if he could not quite enter her in the class of human beings. And Easu was enough of an Ellis to know what that look meant. It was a silent “Good God!” And no man, when his wife enters the room, cares to hear another man’s horrified ejaculation: “Good God!” at the sight of her.

Easu wanted his wife to be common. Nevertheless, with the anomalousness of human beings, it humiliated him and put acid in his blood.

“Have a jorum!” said Easu to Tom.

“I s’d think you’re not goin’ to set down drinkin’ at this time of day,” she said, in her loud, common, interfering voice.

“What’s the time of the day to you?” asked Easu acidly, as he filled Tom’s glass.

“We can’t stop. Ma’ll be expecting us back,” said Tom.

Easu silently filled Jack’s glass, and the wife went out, banging the door. Immediately she fell upon the baby and began to vituperate the little animal for its dirt. The men couldn’t hear themselves speak.

But Easu lifted up his chin and poured the liquor down his throat. He had shaved his beard, and had only three days of yellowish stubble. He smacked his lips as he set down his glass, and looked at the two boys with a sarcastic, gloating look.

“Find a few changes, eh?” he observed.

“Just a few.”

“How’s the place look?”

“All right.”

“Make a pile up North?”

“No.”

Easu grinned slowly.

“Thought you didn’t need to, eh?” he asked maliciously.

“Didn’t worry myself,” said Tom.

“Jack Grant come in for a fortune?” Easu asked, looking at Jack.

“No,” said Jack coldly. There was something about Easu’s vulgar, taunting eyes, which he couldn’t stand.

“Oh, you ‘aven’t!” The pleased sneer was unbearable.

“How’s Ma?” asked Easu.

“All right,” said Tom, surprised.

“Don’t see much of her now,” said Easu.

“No, I saw the gate was blocked up,” said Tom. “Looks like she blocked the wrong gate up.”

“How?”

“How? Well don’t you think she’d better have blocked up the gate over to Pink-eye Percy’s place?” — Easu was smiling with thin, gloating lips.

“Why?”

“Why? Don’t y’ know?”

“What?”

“Don’t ye know about Monica?”

Jack’s blood stood still for a moment, and death entered his soul again, to stay.

“No. What?”

“Didn’t Old George say nothing to y’ in Perth?”

“No!” said Tom, becoming sullen and dangerous.

“Well, that’s funny now! And Aunt Alice said nothing?”

“No! What about?”

Easu was smiling gloatingly, in silence, as if he had something very good.

“Well that’s funny now! Think of your getting right here, and not having heard a thing! I shouldn’t have thought it possible.”

Tom was going white under his tan.

“What’s amiss, Red?” he said curtly.

“To think as you haven’t heard! Why it was the talk of the place. Ross heard all about it in Perth. Didn’t you come across him there? He’s been in the Force quite a while now.”

“No! What was it he heard about?”

“Why, about Monica.”

“What about her?”

“D’y’ mean to say you don’t know?”

“I tell you I don’t know.”

“Well!” and Easu smiled with curious, poisonous satisfaction. “I don’t know as I want to be the one to tell you.”

There was a moment’s dead silence. The sun was setting.

“What have you got to say?” asked Tom, his face set and blank, and his mouth taking on the lipless, Australian look.

“Funny thing nobody has told you. Why it happened six or seven months since.”

This was received in dead silence.

“She went off with Percy when the baby was a month old.”

Again there was nothing but dead silence.

“Mean she married Pink-eye Percy?” asked Tom, in a muffled tone.

“I dunno about marryin’ him. They say he’s got a wife or two already: legal and otherwise. All I know is they cleared out a month after the baby was born, and went down south.”

Still dead silence from the other two. The room was full of golden light. Jack was looking at the fly-dirts and the lampblack on the ceiling. He was sitting in a horsehair arm-chair, and the broken springs were uncomfortable, and the horsehair scratched his wrist. Otherwise he felt vacant, and in a deathly way, remote.

“You’re minding what you’re saying?” came Tom’s empty voice.

“Minding what I’m saying!” echoed Easu rejoicingly. “I didn’t want to tell you. It was you who asked me.”

“Was the baby Percy’s baby?” asked Jack.

“I should say so,” Easu replied, stumbling. “I never asked her, myself. They were all thick with Percy at that time, and I was married with a family of my own. Why I’ve not been over to Wandoo for — for — for close on two years, I should think.”

“That’s what was wrong with Ma!” Tom was saying, in a dull voice, to himself.

“I wonder Old George or Mary didn’t prepare ye,” said Easu. “They both came down before the baby came. But seemingly Old George couldn’t do nothing. Percy confessing he was married, and trying to say he wasn’t to blame. However, he’s run off with Monica all right. Ma had a letter from her from Albany, to say there was no need to worry, Percy was playin’ the gentleman.”

“She never cared for him,” Jack cried.

“I dunno about that. Seems she’s been mad about him all the time. Maybe she

waited for you to come back. I dunno! I tell you, I've never been over to Wandoo for nigh on two years."

Jack could not bear any more. The golden light had gone out of the room, the sun was under the ridge — that ridge — —

"Let's get, Tom!" said Jack rising to his feet.

They stumbled out of the house, and went home in silence, through the dusk. Again the world had caved in, and they were walking through the ruins.

Ma was upstairs when they got home, but Katie had got the tea on the table, and Lennie was in. He was a tall, thin, silent, sensitive youth.

"Hullo, you two wanderin' Jews!" he said.

"Hello, Len!"

"Come an' 'ave y' teas."

Lennie was like the head of the house. They ate their meal in silence.

II

Tom and Jack and Lennie still slept in the cubby, but Og and Magog had moved indoors. The three of them lay in the dark, without sleeping.

"Say, young Len," said Tom at length, "what was you after, letting Monica get mixed up with that Pink-eye Percy?"

"Me? What was I after? How could I be after 'er every minute. She snapped my 'ead off if I looked at 'er. What for did you an' Jack stop away all that time, an' never write a word to nobody? Blame me, all right! But you go 'avin' 'igh jinks in the Never-Never, and nobody says a word to you. You never did nothing wrong, did you? An' you kep' an eye on the fam'ly, didn't you? An' it's only me to blame. 'F course! 'Twould be! But what about yourselves?"

This outburst was received in silence. Then a queer, sullen snake reared its head haughtily in Jack's soul.

"I shouldn't have thought she'd have cared for Percy," said he.

"No more would nobody," replied Len. "You never know what women's up to. Give me a steady woman, Lord, I pray. Because for the last year Monica wasn't right in 'er mind, that's what I say. It wasn't Percy's fault. It was she made 'im. She made 'im as soft as grease about 'er. Percy's not bad, he's not. But women can make him as soft as grease. An' I knows what that means myself. Either there shouldn't be no men an' women, or they should be kept apart till they're pitched into the same pen, to breed."

Tom, with Honeysuckle Lucy on his conscience, said never a word.

“Is it true that Percy’s got a wife already out east?” asked Jack.

“He say he has. But he wrote to find out if she was dead. At first he said he wasn’t to blame. Then he said he was, but he couldn’t marry her. An’ Monica like a wild cat at us all. She would let nobody write an’ tell you. She went over to Reds, but Easu had just got married, an’ Sarah Ann threatened to lay her out. Then she turned on Percy. I tell you, she skeered me. The phosphorus came out of her eyes like a wildcat’s. She’s bewitched or something. Or else possessed of a devil. That’s what I think she is. Though I needn’t talk, for maybe I am myself. Oh, mates, leave me alone, I’m sick of it all. Lemme go to sleep.”

“What did she go over to Easu’s for?”

“God knows. She’d been nosing round with Easu, till Ma got mad and put a stop to it. But that’s a good while since. A good while afore Easu married the lovely Sarah Ann, with her rows o’ cartridges on her forehead. Oh Cripes, marriage! Leave m’alone, I tell you.”

“Funny she should go to Easu’s, if she was struck on Percy,” said Jack.

“Don’t make me think of it, sonny!” came Len’s voice. “She went round like a cat who’s goin’ t’ have kittens, an’ nobody knew what was amiss with her. Oh Jehosaphat! Talk about bein’ born in sin. I should think we are. But say, Jack! Do you suppose the Lord gets awful upset, whether Monica has a baby or not? I don’t believe He does. An’ I don’t believe Jesus either turns a hair. I don’t believe He turns half a hair. Yet we get into all this stew. Tell you what, makes a chap sick of bein’ a humin bein’. Wish I grew feathers, an’ was an emu.”

“Don’t you bother,” said Jack.

“Not me,” said Len. “I don’t bother! Anyhow I know all about the parsley bed, ‘n I don’t care, I’d rather know an’ have done with it. ‘S got to come some time. I’m a collarhorse, I am, like ol’ Rackett said. All right, let me be one. Let me be one, an’ pull me guts out. Might just as well do that, as be a sick outlaw like Rackett, or a softy like Percy. Leave m’alone! I’ve got the collar on, an’ the load behind, an’ I’ll pull it out if I pulls me guts out. That’s the past, present an’ future of Lennie.”

“Where is Rackett?”

“Hanged if I know. Don’t matter where he is. He wanted to educate me an’ make a gentleman of me. Else I’d be nothing but a cart-’oss, he said. Well, I am nothing but a cart-’oss. But if I enjoys pullin’ me guts out, let me. I enjoys it all right.”

Tom lay in silence in the dark, and felt scared. He hated having to face things. He hated taking a long view. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof, was his profound conviction. He hated even to look round the next corner.

“Say, Jack,” came Lennie’s voice again. “You always turns up like a silver

lining. I got your cheques all right. Fifty-seven pound. That's only a pair o' socks, that is, compared to Gran's store. I had to have a laugh over that stockin', you're the angel that stood in Jacob's doorway an' looked like a man, you are. I'd love it if you'd come an' live with me an' Ruthie."

But Jack was thinking his own thoughts. It had come over him that it was Easu who had betrayed Monica. The picture of her wandering across like a cat that is going to have kittens, to the Red's place, and facing that fearful, common Sarah Ann, and Easu grinning and looking on, made his spirit turn to steel. Pink-eye Percy was not the father of that baby. Percy was as soft as wax. Monica would never have fallen for him. She had simply made use of him. The baby was Easu's.

"Was the baby a girl or a boy?" he asked.

"A girl."

"Did it look like Percy?"

"Not it. It didn't have any of Percy's goo-goo brown eyes or anything. Ma said it was the spitten image of Harry when he was born."

III

Jack decided what he would do. In the morning he would take the new horse and set off south, to Albany. He would see Monica and ask her. Anyhow he would see her.

He was up at dawn, saddling his horse. He told Tom of his plan, and Tom merely, remarked:

"It's up to you, mate."

Tom was relapsing at once into the stiff-faced, rather taciturn Australian he had been before. The settled life on the farm at once pulled him to earth, the various calamities had brought him down with a bump.

So Jack rode off almost unnoticed, with a blanket strapped behind his saddle, and a flat water-bottle, a pistol in his belt, and a hatchet and a little bag of food tied to the front saddle-strings. Something made him turn his horse past the place where he had fought Easu, and along the bush trail to the Reds' place.

The sun had come up hot out of a pink, dusty dawn. In an hour it would be blazing like a fiend out of the bare blue heavens. Meanwhile it was still cool, there was still a faint coolness on the parched dry earth, whose very grass was turning into yellowish dust. Jack jogged along slowly, at a slow morning jog-trot. He was glad to be in the saddle again.

As he came down the track, he saw the blue smoke rising out of the chimneys of Easu's house, and a dark movement away in one of the home paddocks. He got down for the gates, then rode on, over to the paddock fence, and sat there on his horse, watching Easu and Herbert and three blacks, sorting out some steers from a bunch of about thirty cattle. They were running the steers through a gate to a smaller enclosure.

There was a good deal of yelling and shouting and running and confusion, as the bunch of young cattle, a mixed little mob of all colours, blacks and black-and-white and red and red-and-white, tossed and swayed, the young cows breaking away and running nimbly on light feet, excited by the deep, powerful lowing of the stock bull, which had wandered up to the outer corner of the fence under a group of ragged gum-trees, and there stood bellowing at the excitement that was going on in the next paddock.

Jack kept an eye on the bull, as he sat on his uneasy horse outside the shut gate, watching. Near by, two more horses stood saddled and waiting. One of them was Easu's big black mare with the two white forefeet. The other was a thin roan, probably Herbert's horse.

Herbert was quite a man, now: tall and thin and broad, with a rather small red face and dull fairish hair that stood up straight from his brow. He was the only one of the brothers left with Easu. He was patient and didn't pay any attention to that scorpion of a Sarah Ann. Sam and Ross had cleared out at the first sight of her.

It was Herbert who did most of the running. Easu, who stood with his feet apart, did most of the bossing — he was never happy unless he was bossing, and finding fault with somebody — and the blacks did most of the halloaing. Easu didn't move much. He seemed to have gone heavier, and where he stood, with his feet apart and his bare arm waving, he seemed stuck, as if he were inert. This was unlike him. He was always stiffish, but he used to be quick. Now he seemed slow and wooden in his movements, his body had gone inert, the life had gone out of it, and he could only shout and jeer. He used to have a certain flame of life, that made him handsome, even if you hated him. A certain conceit and daring, inside all his bullying. Now the flame had gone, the conceit and daring had sunk, he was only ugly and defeated, common, and a little humiliated. He was getting fat, and it didn't suit him at all.

He had glanced round, when Jack rode up, and it was evident that he hated the intrusion. Herbert had waved his arm. Herbert still felt a certain gratitude — and the blacks had all stopped for a moment to stare. But Easu shouted them on.

At last the sorting out was done, and the bars put up. The bull went bellowing along the far fence. Herbert came striding to the gate, his smallish red face

shining, and Jack got down to greet him. The two shook hands, and Herbert said:
“Glad to see you back.”

He was the first to say he was glad to see Jack back. Even Len had not said it. The two men stood exchanging awkward sentences beside the horse.

Easu too came through the gate. He looked grudgingly at Jack and at Jack's horse. Jack thought how ugly he was, now his face had gone fatter and his mouth with its thin, jeering line looked mean. The alert bird-look had gone, he was heavy, and consumed with grudging. His very healthiness looked heavy, a bit dead. His light blue eyes stared and pretended to smile, but the smile was a grudging sneer.

“Where ‘d you get y’ ‘oss?”

“From Jimmie Short, in Perth.”

“Bit long in the barrel. Making a trip, are y’?”

And Easu looked with his pale-blue eyes straight and sneering into Jack's eyes, and smiled with his grudging, mean mouth. Jack noticed that Easu had begun to belly, inside his slack black trousers. He was no longer the spruce, straight fellow. Easu saw the glance, and was again humiliated. He himself hated his growing belly. He looked a second time, into Jack's eyes, furtively, before he said:

“Find out if it was right what I was tellin’ y’?”

Jack was ready for the insult, and did not answer. He turned to Herbert asking about Joe Low, who had been a pal of Herbert's. Joe Low also was married, and had gone down Busselton way. Jack asked for his directions, saying perhaps he might be able to call on him.

“What, are y’ goin’ south?” put in Easu.

Jack looked at him. It was impossible not to see the slack look of defeat in Easu's face. Something had defeated him, leaving him all sneering and acid and heavy. Again Jack did not answer.

“What did you say?” Easu persisted, advancing a little insolently.

“What about?”

“I asked if y’ was goin’ south.”

“That's my business, where I'm going.”

“Of course it is,” said Easu with a sneer and a grin. “You don't think anyone wants to get ahead of you, do you?” He stood with a faint, sneering smile on his face, malevolent with impotence. “You'll do Percy a lot o' hurt, I'll bet. I wouldn't like to be Percy, when you turn up.” And he looked with a grin at Herbert. Herbert grinned faintly in echo.

“I should think, whatever Percy is, he wouldn't want to be you,” said Jack, going white at the gills with anger, but speaking with calm superiority, because

he knew that enraged Easu most.

“What’s that?” cried Easu, the grin flying out of his face at once, and leaving it stiff and dangerous.

“I should think Percy wouldn’t want to be you, let him be what he may in himself,” said Jack, in the cold, clear, English voice which he knew infuriated Easu unbearably.

Easu searched Jack’s face intently with his pale-blue eyes.

“How’s that?” he asked curtly.

Jack stared at the red, heavy face with the smallish eyes, and thought to himself: “You pig! You intolerable white fat pig!” But aloud he said nothing.

Easu smiled a defeated grin, and strode away heavily to his horse. He unhitched, swung heavily into the saddle, and moved away, then at a little distance reined in to hear what Jack and Herbert were talking about. He couldn’t go.

Herbert was giving Jack directions, how to find Joe Low down Busselton way. Then he sent various items of news to his old pal. But he asked Jack no questions, and was careful to avoid any kind of enquiry concerning Jack’s business.

Easu sat on his black horse a little way off, listening. He had a rope and an axe tied to his saddle. Presumably he was going into the bush. Herbert was asking questions about the North-West, about the cattle stations and the new mines. He talked as if he would like to talk all day. And Jack answered freely, laughing easily and making a joke of everything. They spoke of Perth, and Jack told how Tom and he had been at the Governor’s ball a few nights ago, and what a change it was from the North-West, and how Tom enjoyed himself. Herbert listened, impressed.

“Gosh! That’s something to rag old Tom about!” he said.

“When you’ve done gassing there!” called Easu.

Jack turned and looked at him.

“You don’t have to wait,” he said easily, as if to a servant.

There was really something about Easu now that suggested a servant. He went suddenly yellow with anger.

“What’s that?” he said, moving his horse a few paces forward.

And Jack, also white at the gills, but affecting the same ease, repeated distinctly and easily, as if to a man-servant:

“We’re talking, you don’t have to wait.”

There was no answer to this insult. Easu remained stock motionless on his horse for a few moments. Was he going to have to swallow it?

Jack turned laughing to Herbert, saying:

“I’ve got several things to tell you about old Tom.”

But he glanced up quickly. Easu was kicking his horse, and it was dancing before it would take a direction. Herbert gave a loud, inarticulate cry. Jack turned quickly to his own horse, to put his foot in the stirrup. Just as quickly he refrained, swung round, drew his pistol, and cocked it. Easu, once more a horseman, was kicking his restive horse forward, holding the small axe in his right hand, the reins in his left. His face was livid, and looked like the face of one returning from the dead. He came bearing down on Jack and Herbert, like Death returning from the dead, the axe held back at arm’s length, ready for the swing, half urging, half holding his horse, so that it danced strangely nearer. Jack stood with the pistol ready, his back to his own horse, that was tossing its head nervously.

“Look out!” cried Herbert, suddenly jumping at the bit of Jack’s horse, in terror, and making it start back, with a thudding of hoofs.

But Jack did not move. He stood with his pistol ready, his eyes on Easu. Easu’s horse was snaffling and jerking, twisting, trying to get round, and Easu was forcing it slowly forward. He had on his death-face. He held the axe at arm’s length, backward, and with his pale-blue, fixed death-eyes he watched Jack, who stood there on the ground. So he advanced, waiting for the moment to swing the axe, fixing part of his will on the curvetting horse, which he forced on.

Jack, in a sort of trance, fixed Easu’s death-face in the middle of the forehead. But he was watching with every pore of his body.

Suddenly he saw him begin to heave in the stirrups, and on that instant he fired at the mystic place in Easu’s forehead, under his old hat, at the same time springing back. And in that self-same instant he saw two things: part of Easu’s forehead seemed to shift mystically open, and the axe, followed by Easu’s whole body, crashed at him as he sprang back. He went down in the universal crash, and for a moment his consciousness was dark and eternal. Then he wriggled to his feet, and ran, as Herbert was running, to the black horse, which was dancing in an agony of terror, Easu’s right foot having caught in the stirrup, the body rolling horribly on the ground.

He caught the horse, which was shying off from Herbert, and raised his right hand to take the bridle. To his further horror and astonishment, he saw his hand all blood, and his fore-finger gone. But he clutched the bridle of the horse with his maimed hand, then changed to his left hand, and stood looking in chagrin and horror at the bloody stump of his finger, which was just beginning, in a distant sort of way, to hurt.

“My God, he’s dead!” came the high, hysterical yell from Herbert, on the other side of the horse, and Jack let go the bridle again, to look.

It was too obvious. The big, ugly, inert bulk of Easu lay crumpled on the ground, part of the forehead shot away. Jack looked twice, then looked away again. A black had caught his horse, and tied it to the fence. Another black was running up. A dog came panting excitedly up, sniffing and licking the blood. Herbert, beside himself, stood helpless, repeating: "He's dead! He's dead! My God, he's dead! He is."

Then he gave a yell, and swooped at the dog, as it began to lick the blood.

Jack, after once more looking round, walked away. He saw his pistol lying on the ground, so he picked it up and put it in his belt, although it was bloody, and had a cut where the axe had struck it. Then he walked across to his horse, and unhitched the bridle from the fence. But before he mounted, he took his handkerchief and tied it round his bleeding hand, which was beginning to hurt with a big aching hurt. He knew it, and yet he hardly heeded it. It was hardly noticeable.

He got into the saddle, and rode calmly away, going on his journey southward just the same. The world about him seemed faint and unimportant. Inside himself was the reality and the assurance. Easu was dead. It was a good thing.

He had one definite feeling. He felt as if there had been something damming life up, as a great clot of weeds will dam a stream and make the water spread marshily and dead over the surrounding land. He felt he had lifted this clod out of the stream, and the water was flowing on clear again.

He felt he had done a good thing. Somewhere inside himself he felt he had done a supremely good thing. Life could flow on to something beyond. Why question further?

He rode on, down the track. The sun was very hot, and his body was re-echoing with the pain from his hand. But he went on calmly, monotonously, his horse travelling in a sort of sleep, easy in its single-step. He didn't think where he was going, or why; he was just going.

CHAPTER XXI

LOST

At evening he was still riding. But his horse lagged, and would not be spurred forward. Darkness came with swift persistence. He was looking anxiously for water, a burning thirst had made him empty his bottle.

As if directed by God, he felt the horse rousing up and pressing eagerly forward. In a few minutes it stopped. Darkness had fallen. He found the horse nosing a timber-lined Government well.

He got down and awkwardly drew water, for the well was low. He drank and the horse drank. Then with some difficulty he unsaddled, tied the reins round a sapling and removed the bit. The horse snorted, nosed round, and began to crop in the dark. Jack sat on the ground and looked up at the stars. Then he drank more water, and ate a piece of bread and dry cheese.

Then he began to go to sleep. He saw Easu coming at him with the axe. Ugh, how good it was Easu was dead. Dead, to go in the earth to manure the soil. Hadn't Old George said it? The land wanted dead men dug into it, to manure it. Men like Easu, dead and turned to manure. And men like old Dad Ellis. Poor old Dad.

Jack thought of Monica, Monica with her little flower-face. All messed up by that nasty dog of an Easu. He should be twice dead. Jack felt she was a little repulsive too. To let herself be pawed over and made sticky by that heavy dog of an Easu! Jack felt he could never follow where Easu had been messing. Monica was no good now. She had taken on some of Easu's repulsiveness.

Aunt Matilda had said, "Another scandal in the family!" Well, the death of Easu should make a good scandal.

How lonely it was in the bush! How big and weapon-like the stars were. One great star very flashing.

"I have dipped my hand in blood!" he thought to himself. And looking at his own bloody, hurting hand, in the starlight, he didn't realise whether it was Easu's blood or his own.

"I have dipped my hand in blood! So be it. Let it be my testament."

And he lifted up his hand to the great flashing star, his wounded hand, saying

aloud:

“Here! Here is my hand in blood! Take it then. There is blood between us forever.”

The blood was between him and his mysterious Lord, forever. Like a sort of pledge, or baptism, or a sacrifice: a bond between them. He was speaking to his mysterious Lord.

“There is blood between us forever,” he said to the star.

But the sound of his own hoarse, rather deep voice, reminded him of his surroundings. He looked round. He heard his horse, and called to it. It nickered in the loneliness, still cropping. He started up to see if it was all right, to stroke it and speak to it. The bush was very lonely.

“Hello, you!” he said to it. “In the midst of life we are in death. There’s death in the spaces between the stars. But somehow it seems all right. I like it. I like to be lord of Death. Who do they call the lords of Death? I am a lord of Death.”

He patted the horse’s neck as he talked.

“I can’t bear to think of Monica messy with Easu,” he said. “But I suppose it’s my destiny. I suppose it means I am a lord of death. I hope if I have any children they’ll have that look in their eyes, like soldiers from the dark kingdom. I don’t want children that aren’t warriors. I don’t want little love children for my children. When I beget children I want to sow dragon’s teeth, and warriors will spring up. Easu hadn’t one grain nor spark of a warrior in him. He was absolutely a groping civilian, a bully. That’s why he wanted to spoil Monica. She is the wife for a fighting man. So he wanted to spoil her. . . . Funny, my father isn’t a fighting man at all. He’s an absolute civilian. So he became a general. And I’m not a civilian. I know the spaces of death between the stars, like spaces in an Egyptian temple. And at the end of life I see the big black door of death, and the infinite black labyrinth beyond. I like to think of going in, and being at home and one of the masters in the black halls of death, when I am dead. I hope I die fighting, and go into the black halls of death as a master: not as a scavenger servant, like Easu, or a sort of butler, like my father. I don’t want to be a servant in the black house of death. I want to be a master.”

He sat down again, with his back to the tree, looking at the sharp stars, and the fume of stars, and the great black gulfs between the stars. His hand and arm were aching and paining a great deal. But he watched the gulfs between the stars.

“I suppose my Lord meant me to be like this,” he said. “Think if I had to be tied up and a gentleman, like that Blessington. Or a lawyer like Old George. Or a politician dropping his aitches, like that Mr. Watson. Or empty and important like that A.D.C. Or anything that’s successful and goes to church and sings hymns and has supper after church on the best linen table cloth! What Lord is it

that likes these people? What God can it be that likes success and Sunday dinners? Oh God! It must be a big, fat, rusty sort of God.

“My God is dark and you can’t see him. You can’t even see his eyes, they are so dark. But he sits and bides his time and smiles, in the spaces between the stars. And he doesn’t know himself what he thinks. But there’s deep, powerful feelings inside him, and he’s only waiting his time to upset this pigsty full of white fat pigs. I like my Lord. I like his dark face, that I can’t see, and his dark eyes, that are so dark you can’t see them, and his dark hair that is blacker than the night on his forehead, and the dark feelings he has, which nobody will ever be able to explain. I like my Lord, my own Lord, who is not Lord of pigs.”

He slept fitfully, feverishly, with dreams, and rose at daylight to drink water, and dip his head in water. His horse came, he tended it and with great difficulty got the saddle on. Then he left it standing, and when he came again, it wasn’t where he had left it.

He called, and it whinnied, so he went into the scrub for it. But it wasn’t where the sound of whinnying came from. He went a few more steps forward, and called. The scrub wasn’t so very thick either, yet you couldn’t see that horse. He was sure it was only a couple of yards away. So he went forward, coaxing, calling. But nothing . . . Queer!

He looked round. The track wasn’t there. The well wasn’t there. Only the silent, vindictive, scattered bush.

He couldn’t be lost. That was impossible. The homestead wasn’t more than twenty miles away — and the settlement.

Yet, as he tramped on, through the brown, heath-like undergrowth, past the ghost-like trunks of the scattered gum-trees, over the fallen, burnt-out trunks of charred trees, past the bushes of young gum-trees, he gradually realised he was lost. And yet it was impossible. He would come upon a cabin, or pick up the track of a woodcutter, or a ‘roo hunter. He was so near to everywhere.

There is something mysterious about the Australian bush. It is so absolutely still. And yet, in the near distance, it seems alive. It seems alive, and as if it hovered round you to maze you and circumvent you. There is a strange feeling, as if invisible, hostile things were hovering round you and heading you off.

Jack stood still and coo-eed! long and loud. He fancied he heard an answer, and he hurried forward. He felt lightheaded. He wished he had eaten something. He remembered he had no water. And he was walking very fast, the sweat pouring down him. Silly this. He made himself go slower. Then he stood still and looked around. Then he coo-eed! again, and was afraid of the ringing sound of his own cry.

The changeless bush, with scattered, slender tree-trunks everywhere. You

could see between them into the distance, to more open bush: a few brown rocks: two great dead trees as white as bone: burnt trees with their core charred out: and living trees hanging their motionless clusters of brown, dagger-like leaves. And the permanent soft blue of the sky overhead.

Nothing was hidden. It was all open and fair. And yet it was haunted with a malevolent mystery. You felt yourself so small, so tiny, so absolutely insignificant, in the still, eternal glade. And this again is the malevolence of the bush, that it reduces you to your own absolute insignificance, go where you will.

Jack collected his wits and began to make a plan.

“First look at the sky, and get your bearing.” Then he would go somewhere straight west from the Reds. The sun had been in his eyes as he rode last evening.

Or had he better go east, and get back? There were scores of empty miles, uninhabited, west. It was settled, he would go east. Perhaps someone would find his horse, and come to look for him.

He walked with the sun straight bang in his eyes. It was very hot, and he was tired. He was thirsty, his arm hurt and throbbed. Why did he imagine he was hungry? He was only thirsty. And so hot! He took off his coat and threw it away. After a while his waistcoat followed. He felt a little lighter. But he was an intolerable burden to himself.

He sat down under a bush and went fast asleep. How long he slept he did not know. But he woke with a jerk, to find himself lying on the ground in his shirt and trousers, the sun still hot in the heavens, and the mysterious bush all around. The sun had come round and was burning his legs. What was the matter? Fear, that was the first thing. The great, resounding fear. Then, a second, he was terribly thirsty. For a third, his arm was aching horribly. He took off his shirt and made a sling of it, to carry his arm in.

For a fourth thing, he realised he had killed Easu, and something was gnawing at his soul.

He heard himself sob, and this surprised him very much. It even brought him to his senses.

“Well!” he thought. “I have killed Easu.” It seemed years and years ago. “And the bush has got me, Australia has got me, and now it will take my life from me. Now I am going to die. Well, then, so be it. I will go out and haunt the bush, like all the other lost dead. I shall wander in the bush throughout eternity, with my bloody hand. Well, then, so be it. I shall be a lord of death hovering in the bush, and let the people who come beware.”

But suddenly he started to his feet in terror and horror. The face of death had really got him this time. It was as if a second waking had come upon him, and

his life, which had been sinking, suddenly flared up in a frenzy of struggle and fear. He coo-eeed! again and again, and once more plunged forward in mad pursuit of an echo.

He might certainly run into a 'roo hunter's camp, any minute. The place was alive with them, great big boomers! Their silly faces! Their silly complacency, almost asking to be shot. There were a lot of wallabies out here too. You might make a fortune hunting skins.

Christ! how one could want water.

But no matter. On and on! His soul dropped to its own sullen level. If he was to die, die he would. But he would hold out through it all.

On and on in a persistent dogged stupor. Why give in?

Then suddenly he dropped on a log, in weariness. Suddenly he had thought of Monica. Why had she betrayed him? Why had they all betrayed him, betrayed him and the thing he wanted from life. He leaned his head down on his arms and wept hoarsely and dryly, and went silent again even as he sat, realising the futility of weeping. His heart, the heart he wept from, went utterly dark. He had no more heart of torn sympathy. That was gone. Only a black, deep male volition. And this was all there was left of him. He would carry the same into death. Young or old, death sooner or later, he would carry just this one thing into the further darkness, his deep, black, undying male volition.

He must have slept. He was in great misery, his mouth like an open sepulchre, his consciousness dull. He was hardly aware that it was late afternoon, hot and motionless. The outside things were all so far away. And the blackness of death and misery was thick, but transparent, over his eyes.

He went on, still obstinately insisting that ahead there was something, perhaps even water, though hope was dead in him. It was not hope, it was heavy volition that insisted on water.

The sling dragged on his neck, he threw it away, and walked with his hand against his breast. And his braces dragged on him. He didn't want any burden at all, none at all. He stopped, took off his braces and threw them away, then his sweat-soaked undervest. He didn't want these things. He didn't want them. He walked on a bit.

He hesitated, then came for a moment to his senses. He was going to throw away his trousers too. But it came to him: "Don't be a fool, and throw away your clothes, man. You know men do it who are lost in the bush, and then they are found naked, dead."

He looked vaguely round for the vest and braces he had just thrown away. But it was half an hour since he had flung them down. His consciousness tricked him, obliterating the interval. He could not believe his eye. They had ghostlily

disappeared.

So he rolled his trousers on his naked hips, and pressed his hurt hand on his naked breast, and set off again in a sort of fear. His hat had gone long ago. And all the time he had this strange desire to throw all his clothes away, even his boots, and be absolutely naked, as when he was born. And all the time something obstinate in him combated the desire. He wanted to throw everything away, and go absolutely naked over the border. And at the same time, something in him deeper than himself obstinately withstood the desire. He wanted to go over the border. And something deeper even than his consciousness, refused.

So he went on, scarcely conscious at all. He himself was in the middle of a vacuum, and pressing round were visions and agonies. The vacuum was perhaps the greatest agony, like a death-tension. But the other agonies were pressing on its border: his dry, cardboard mouth, his aching body. And the visions pressed on the border too. A great lake of ghostly white water, such as lies in the valleys where the dead are. But he walked to it, and it wasn't there. The moon was shining whitely.

And on the edge of the aching void of him, a wheel was spinning in his brain like a prayer-wheel.

“Petition me no petitions, Sir, to-day;
Let other hours be set apart for business.
Today it is our pleasure to be drunk
And this our queen . . .”

Water! Water! Water! Was water only a visionary thing of memory, something only achingly, wearily, thought and thought and thought, and never substantiated?

“A Briton even in love should be
A subject not a slave . . .”

The wheel of words went round, the wheel of his brain, on the edge of the vacuum. What did that mean? What was a Briton?

“A Briton even in love should be
A subject not a slave.”

The words went round and round and were absolutely meaningless to him. And then out of the dark another wheel was pressing and turning.

“How fast has brother followed brother
From sunshine to the sunless land.”

Away on the hard dark periphery of his consciousness, the wheel of these words was turning and grinding.

His mind was turning helplessly, but his feet walked on. He realised in a weird, mournful way that he was shut groping in a dark unfathomable cave, and

that the walls of the cave were his own aching body. And he was going on and on in the cave, looking for the fountain, the water. But his body was the aching, ghastly, jutting walls of the cave. And it made this weary grind of words on the outside. And he had need to struggle on and on.

In little flickers he tried to associate his dark cave-consciousness with his grinding body. Was it night, was it day?

But before he had decided that it was night, the two things had gone apart again, and he was groping and listening to the grind.

“But hushed be every thought that springs

From out the bitterness of things.

Those obstinate questionings

Of sense and outward things

Falling from us, vanishing.”

He was so weary of the outward grind of words. He was stumbling as he walked. And waiting for the walls of the cave to crash in and bury him altogether. And the spring of water did not exist.

“Blank misgivings of a creator moving about in a world not realised.”

This phrase almost united his two consciousnesses. He was going to crash into this creator who moved about unrealised. Other people had gone, and other things. Monica, Easu, Tom, Mary, Mother, Father, Lennie. They were all like papery, fallen leaves blowing about outside in some street. Inside here there were no people at all, none at all. Only the Creator moving around unrealised. His Lord.

He stumbled and fell, and in the white flash of falling knew he hurt himself again, and that he was falling forever.

CHAPTER XXII

THE FIND

I

The subconscious self woke first, roaring in distant wave-beats, unintelligible, unmeaning, persistent, and growing in volume. It had something to do with birth. And not having died. "I have not let my soul run like water out of my mouth."

And as the roaring and beating of the waves increased in volume, tiny little words emerged like flying-fish out of the black ocean of consciousness. "Ye must be born again," in little silvery, twinkling spurts like flying-fish which twinkle silver and spark into the utterly dark sea again. They were gone and forgotten before they were realised. They had merged deep in the sea again. And the roar of dark consciousness was the roar of death. The kingdom of death. And the lords of death.

"Ye must be born again." But the twinkling words had disappeared into the lordly powerful darkness of death. And the baptism is the blackness of death between the eyes, that never lifts, forever, neither in life nor death. You may be born again. But when you emerge, this time you emerge with the darkness of death between your eyes, as a lord of death.

The waves of dark consciousness surged in a huge billow, and broke. The boy's eyes were wide open, and his voice was saying:

"Is that you, Tom!"

The sound of his voice paperily rustling these words was so surprising to him that he instantly went dark again. He heard no answer.

But those surging dark waves pressed him again and again, and again his eyes were open. They recognised nothing. Something was being done to him on the outside of him. His own throat was moving. And life started again with a sharp pain.

"What was it?"

The question sparked suddenly out of him. Someone was putting a metal rim to his lips, there was liquid in his mouth. He put it out. He didn't want to come back. His soul sank again like a dark stone.

And at the very bottom it took a command from the Lord of Death, and rose slowly again.

Someone was tilting his head, and pouring a little water again. He swallowed with a crackling noise and a crackling pain. One had to come back. He recognised the command from his own Lord. His Lord was the Lord of Death. And he, Jack, was dark-anointed and sent back. Returned with the dark unction between his brows. So be it.

He saw green leaves hanging from a blue sky. It was still far off. And the dark was still better. But the dark green leaves were also like a triumphal banner. He tries to smile, but his face is stiff. The faintest irony of a smile sets in its stiffness. He is forced to swallow again, and know the pain and tearing. Ah! He suddenly realised the water was good. He had not realised it the other times. He gulped suddenly, everything forgotten. And his mind gave a sudden lurch towards consciousness.

“Is that you, Tom?”

“Yes. Feel better?”

He saw the red mistiness of Tom’s face near. Tom was faithful. And this time his soul swayed, as if it too had drunk of the water of faithfulness.

He drank the water from the metal cup, because he knew it came from Tom’s faithfulness.

Gradually Jack revived. But his burning bloodshot eyes were dilated with fever, and he could not keep hold of his consciousness. He realised that Tom was there, and Mary, and somebody he didn’t for a long time recognise as Lennie; and that there was a fire, and a smell of meat, and night was again falling. Yes, he was sure night was falling. Or was it his own consciousness going dark? He didn’t know. Perhaps it was the everlasting dark.

“What time is it?” he asked.

“Sundown,” said Tom. “Why?”

But he was gone again. It was no good trying to keep a hold on one’s consciousness. The ache, the nausea, the throbbing pain, the swollen mouth, the strange feeling of cracks in his flesh, made him let go.

Tom was there and Mary. He would leave himself to Tom’s faithfulness and Mary’s tenderness, and Lennie’s watchful intuition. The mystery of death was in that bit of deathless faithfulness which was in Tom. And Mary’s tenderness, and Lennie’s intuitive care, both had a touch of the mystery and stillness of the death that surrounds us darkly all the time.

II

They got Jack home, but he was very ill. His life would seem to come back. Then it would sink away again like a stone, and they would think he was going. The strange oscillation. Several times, Mary watched him almost die. Then from the very brink of death, he would come back again, with a strange, haunted look in his bloodshot eyes.

“What is it, Jack?” she would ask him. But the eyes only looked at her.

And Lennie, standing there silently watching, said:

“He’s had about enough of life, that’s what it is.”

Mary, blanched with fear, went to find Tom.

“Tom,” she said, “he’s sinking again. Lennie says it’s because he doesn’t want to live.”

Tom silently threw down his tool, and walked with her into the house. It was obvious he was sinking again.

“Jack!” said Tom in a queer voice, bending over him. “Mate! Mate!” He seemed to be calling him into camp.

Jack’s expressionless, fever-dilated, bloodshot eyes opened again. The whites were almost scarlet.

“Y’ aren’t desertin’ us, are y’?” said Tom, in a gloomy, reproachful tone. “Are y’ desertin’ us, mate?”

It was the Australian, lost but unbroken on the edge of the wilderness, looking with grim mouth into the void, and calling to his mate not to leave him. Man for man, they were up against the great dilemma of white men, on the edge of the white man’s world, looking into the vaster, alien world of the undawned era, and unable to enter, unable to leave their own.

Jack looked at Tom and smiled faintly. In some subtle way, both men knew the mysterious responsibilities of living. Tom was almost fatalistic-reckless. Yet it was a recklessness which knew that the only thing to do was to go ahead, meet death that way. He could see nothing but meeting death ahead. But since he was a man, he would go ahead to meet it, he would not sit and wait.

Jack smiled faintly, and the courage came back to him. He began to rally.

The next morning, he turned to Mary and said:

“I still want Monica.”

Mary dropped her head and did not answer. She recognised it as one of the signs that he was going to live. And she recognised the unbending obstinacy in his voice.

“I shall come for you too in time,” he said to her, looking at her with his

terrible scarlet eyes.

She did not answer, but her hand trembled as she went for his medicine. There was something prophetic and terrible in his sallow face and burning, bloodshot eyes.

“Be still,” she murmured to him. “Only be still.”

“I shan’t ever really drop you,” he said to her. “But I want Monica. first. That’s my way.”

He seemed curiously victorious, making these assertions.

CHAPTER XXIII

GOLD

I

The boy Jack never rose from that fever. It was a man who got up again. A man with all the boyishness cut away from him, all the childishness gone, and a certain unbending recklessness in its place.

He was thin, and pale, and the cherubic look had left his face forever. His cheeks were longer, leaner, and when he got back his brown-faced strength again, he was handsome. But it was not the handsomeness, any more, that would make women like Aunt Matilda exclaim involuntarily: "Dear boy!" They would look at him twice, but with misgiving, and a slight recoil.

It was his eyes that had changed most. From being the warm, emotional dark-blue eyes of a boy, they had become impenetrable, and had a certain fixity. There was a touch of death in them, a little of the fixity and changelessness of death. And with this, a peculiar power. As if he had lost his softness in the otherworld of death, and brought back instead some of the relentless power that belongs there. And the inevitable touch of mockery.

As soon as he began to walk about, he was aware of the change. He walked differently, he put his feet down differently, he carried himself differently. The old drifting, diffident, careless bearing had left him. He felt his uprightness hard, bony. Sometimes he was aware of the skeleton of himself. He was a hard skeleton, built upon the solid bony column of the back-bone, and pitched for balance on the great bones of the hips. But the plumb-weight was in the cage of his chest. A skeleton!

But not the dead skeleton. The living bone, the living man of bone, unyielding and imperishable. The bone of his forehead like iron against the world, and the blade of his breast like an iron wedge held forward. He was thin, and built of bone.

And inside this living, rigid man of bone, the dark heart heavy with its wisdom and passions and emotions and its correspondences. It was living, softly and intensely living. But heavy and dark, plumb to the earth's center.

During his convalescence, he got used to this man of bone which he had become, and accepted his own inevitable. His bones, his skeleton was isolatedly itself. It had no contact. Except that it was forged in the kingdom of death, to be durable and effectual. Some strange Lord had forged his bones in the dark smithy where the dead and the unborn came and went.

And this was his only permanent contact: the contact with the Lord who had forged his bones, and put a dark heart in the midst.

But the other contacts, they were alive and quivering in his flesh. His passive but enduring affection for Tom and Lennie, and the strange quiescent hold he held over Mary. Beyond these, the determined molten stirring of his desire for Monica.

And the other desires. The desire in his heart for masterhood. Not mastery. He didn't want to master anything. But to be the dark lord of his own folk: that was a desire in his heart. And the concurrent knowledge that, to achieve this, he must be master too of gold. Not gold for the having's sake. Not for the spending's sake. Nor for the sake of the power to hire services, which is the power of money. But the mastery of gold, so that gold should no longer be like a yellow star to which men hitched the wagon of their destinies. To be Master of Gold, in the name of the dark Lord who had forged his bones neither of gold nor silver nor iron, but of the white glisten of knife. Masterhood, as a man forged by the Lord of Hosts, in the innermost fires of life and death. Because, just as a red fire burning on the hearth is a fusion of death into what was once live leaves, so the creation of man in the dark is a fusion of life into death, with the life dominant.

The two are never separate, life and death. And in the vast dark kingdom of afterwards, the Lord of Death is Lord of Life, and the God of life and creation is Lord of Death.

But Jack knew his Lord as the Lord of Death. The rich, dark mystery of death, which lies ahead, and the dark sumptuousness of the halls of death. Unless Life moves on to the beauty of the darkness of death, there is no life, there is only automatism. Unless we see the dark splendour of death ahead, and travel to be lords of darkness at last, peers in the realms of death, our life is nothing but a petulant, pitiful backing, like a frightened horse, back, back to the stable, the manger, the cradle. But onward ahead is the great porch of the entry into death, with its columns of bone-ivory. And beyond the porch is the heart of darkness, where the lords of death arrive home out of the vulgarity of life, into their own dark and silent domains, lordly, ruling the incipience of life.

II

At the trial Jack said, in absolute truth, he shot Easu in self-defence. He had not the faintest thought of shooting him when he rode up to the paddock: nor of shooting anybody. He had called in passing, just to say good-day. And then he had fired at Easu because he knew the axe would come down in his skull if he didn't.

Herbert gave the same deposition. The shot was entirely in self-defence.

So Jack was free again. There had been no further mention of Monica, after Jack had said he was riding south to see her, because he had always cared for her. No one hinted that Easu was the father of her child, though Mrs. Ellis knew and Old George knew.

Afterwards Jack wondered why he had called at the Reds' place that morning. Why had he taken the trail past where he and Easu had fought? He had intended to see Easu, that was why. But for what unconscious purpose, who shall say? The death was laid at the door of the old feud between Jack and Red. Only Old George knew the whole, and he, subtle and unafraid, pushed justice as it should go, according to his own sense of justice, like a real Australian.

Meanwhile he had been corresponding with Monica and Percy. They were in Albany, and on the point of sailing to Melbourne, where Percy would enter some business or other, and the two would live as man and wife. Monica was expecting another child. At this news, Mr. George wanted to let them go, and be damned to them. But he talked to Mary, and Mary said Jack would want Monica, no matter what happened.

"When he wants a thing really, he can't change," said Mary gloomily. "He is like that."

"An obstinate young fool that's never had enough lickings," said Old George. "Devil's blood of his mother's devil of an obstinate father. But very well then, let him have her, with a couple of babies for a dowry. Make himself the laughing stock of the colony."

So he wrote to Monica: "If you care about seeing Jack Grant again, you'd better stop in this colony. He sticks to it he wants to see you, being more of a fool than a knave, unlike many people in Western Australia."

She being obstinate like the rest, stayed on in Albany, though Percy, angry and upset, sailed on to Melbourne. He said she could join him if she liked. He stayed till her baby was born, then went because he didn't want to face Jack.

Jack arrived by sea. He was still not strong enough to travel by land. He got a vessel going to Adelaide, that touched at Albany.

Monica, thinner than ever, with a little baby in her arms, and her flower-face like a chilled flower, was on the dock to meet him. He saw her at once, and his heart gave a queer lurch.

As he came forward to meet her, their eyes met. Her yellow eyes looked straight into his, with the same queer, panther-like scrutiny, and the eternal question. She was a question, and she had got to be answered. It made her fearless, almost shameless, whatever she did.

But with Percy, the fear had nipped her, the fear that she should go forever unanswered, as if life had rejected her.

This nipped look and her strange yellow flare of question as she peered at him under her brows, like a panther, made Jack's cheeks slowly darken, and the life-blood flow into him stronger, heavier. He knew his passion for her was the same. Thank God he met her at last.

"You're awfully thin," she said.

"So are you," he answered.

And she laughed her quick, queer, breathless little laugh, showing her pointed teeth. She had seen the death-look in his eyes and it was her answer, a bitter answer enough. She stopped to put straight the tiny bonnet over her little baby's face, with a delicate, remote movement. He watched her in silence.

"Where do you want to go?" she asked him, without looking at him.

"With you," he said.

Then she looked at him again, with the dry-eyed question. But she saw the unapproachable death-look there in his eyes, at the back of their dark-blue, dilated emotion and passion. And her heart gave up. She looked down the pier, as if to walk away. He carried his own bag. They set off side by side.

She lived in a tiny slab cottage in a side lane. But she called first at a neighbour's house, for her other child. It was a tiny, toddling thing with a defiant stare in its pale-blue eyes. Monica held her baby on one arm, and led this tottering child by the other. Jack walked at her side in silence.

The cottage had just two rooms, poorly furnished. But it was clean, and had bright cotton curtains and a sofa-bed, and a pale-blue convolvulus vine mingling with a passion vine over the window.

She laid the baby down in its cradle, and began to take off the bonnet of the little girl. She had called it Jane.

Jack watched the little Jane as if fascinated. The infant had curly reddish hair, of a lovely fine texture and a beautiful tint, something like raw silk with threads of red. Her eyes were round and bright blue, and rather defiant, and she had the delicate complexion of her kind. She fingered her mother's brooch, like a little monkey touching a bit of glittering gold, as Monica stooped to her.

“Daddy gone!” she said in her chirping, bird-like, quite emotionless tone.

“Yes, Daddy gone!” replied Monica, as emotionlessly.

The child then glanced with unmoved curiosity at Jack. She kept on looking and looking at him, sideways. And he watched her just as sharply, her sharp, pale-blue eyes.

“Him more Daddy?” she asked.

“I don’t know,” replied Monica, who was suckling her baby.

“Yes,” said Jack in a rather hard tone, smiling with a touch of mockery. “I’m your new father.”

The child smiled back at him a faint, mocking little grin, and put her finger in her mouth.

The day passed slowly in the strange place, Monica busy all the time with the children and the house. Poor Monica, she was already a drudge. She was still careless and hasty in her methods, but clean, and uncomplaining. She kept herself to herself, and did what she had to do. And Jack watched, mostly silent.

At last the lamp was lighted, the children were both in bed. Monica cooked a little supper over the fire.

Before he came to the table, Jack asked:

“Is Jane Easu’s child?”

“I thought you knew,” she said.

“No one has told me. Is she?”

Monica turned and faced him, with the yellow flare in her eyes, as she looked into his eyes, challenging.

“Yes,” she said.

But his eyes did not change. The remoteness at the back of them did not come any nearer.

“Shall you hate her?” she asked, rather breathlessly.

“I don’t know,” he said slowly.

“Don’t!” she pleaded, in the same breathlessness. “Because I rather hate her.”

“She’s too little to hate,” said Jack.

“I know,” said Monica rather doubtfully.

She put the food on the table. But she herself ate nothing.

“Aren’t you well? You don’t eat,” he asked.

“I can’t eat just now,” she said.

“If you have a child to suckle, you should,” he replied.

But she only became more silent, and her hands hung dead in her lap. Then the baby began to cry, a thin, poor, frail noise, and she went to soothe it.

When she came back, Jack had left the table and was sitting in Percy’s wooden arm-chair.

“Percy’s child doesn’t seem to have much life in it,” he said.

“Not very much,” she replied. And her hands trembled as she cleared away the dishes.

When she had finished, she moved about, afraid to sit down. He called her to him.

“Monica!” he said with a little jerk of his head, meaning she should come to him.

She came rather slowly, her queer, pure-seeming face looking like a hurt. She stood with her thin hands hanging in front of her apron.

“Monica!” he said, rising and taking her hands. “I should still want you if you had a hundred children. So we won’t say any more about that. And you won’t oppose me when there’s anything I want to do, will you?”

She shook her head.

“No, I won’t oppose you,” she said, in a dead little voice.

“Let me come to you, then,” he said. “I should have to come to you if you went to Melbourne or all round the world. And I should be glad to come,” he added whimsically, with the warmth of his old smile coming into his eyes. “I suppose I should be glad to come, if it was in hell.”

“But it isn’t hell, is it?” she asked, wistfully and a little defiantly.

“Not a bit,” he said. “You’ve got too much pluck in you to spoil. You’re as good to me as you were the first time I knew you. Only Easu might have spoiled you.”

“And you killed him,” she said quickly, half in reproach.

“Would you rather he’d killed me?” he asked.

She looked a long time into his eyes, with that watchful, searching look that used to hurt him. Now it hurt him no more.

She shook her head, saying:

“I’m glad you killed him. I couldn’t bear to think of him living on, and sneering — sneering! — I was always in love with you, really.”

“Ah, Monica!” he exclaimed softly, teasingly, with a little smile. And she flushed, and flashed with anger.

“If you never knew, it was your own fault!” she jerked out.

“Really,” he said, quoting and echoing the word as she had said it, and smiling with a touch of raillery at her, before he added:

“You always loved me really, but you loved the others as well, unreally.”

“Yes,” she said, baffled, defiant.

“All right, that day is over. You’ve had your unreal loves. Now come and have your real one.”

In the next room Easu’s child was sleeping in its odd little way, a sleep that

was neither innocent nor not innocent, queer and naïvely “knowing,” even in its sleep. Jack watched it as he took off his things: this little inheritance he had from Easu. An odd little thing. With an odd, loveless little spirit of its own, cut off and not daunted. He wouldn’t love it, because it wasn’t lovable. But its odd little dauntlessness and defiance amused him, he would see it had fair play.

And he took Monica in his arms, glad to get into grips with his own fate again. And it was good. It was better, perhaps, than his passionate desirings of earlier days had imagined. Because he didn’t lose and scatter himself. He gathered, like a reaper at harvest gathering.

And Monica, who woke for her baby, looked at him as he slept soundly and she sat in bed suckling her child. She saw in him the eternal stranger. There he was, the eternal stranger, lying in her bed sleeping at her side. She rocked her baby slightly as she sat up in the night, still rocking in the last throes of rebellion. The eternal stranger, whom she feared, because she could never finally possess him, and never finally know him! He would never belong to her. This had made her rebel so terribly against the thought of him. Because she would have to belong to him. Now he had arrived again before her like a doom, a doom she still fought against, but could no longer withstand. Because the emptiness of the other men, Easu, Percy, all the men she knew, was worse than the doom of this man who would never give her his ultimate intimacy, but who would be able to hold her till the end of time. There was something enduring and changeless in him. But she would never hold him entirely. Never! She would have to resign herself to this.

Well, so be it. At least it relieved her of the burden of responsibility for life. It took away from her her own strange and fascinating female power, which she couldn’t bear to part with. But at the same time she felt saved, because her own power frightened her, having brought her to a brink of nothingness that was like madness. The nothingness that fronted her with Percy was worse than submitting to this man beside her. After all, this man was magical.

She put her child in its cradle, and returning waked the man. He put out his hand quickly for her, as if she were a new, blind discovery. She quivered and thrilled, and left it to him. It was his mystery, since he would have it so.

III

They were married in Albany, and stayed there another month waiting for a ship. Then they sailed away, all the family, away to the North-West. They did

not go to Perth: they did not go to Wandoo. Only Jack saw Mr. George in Fremantle, and waved to him Good-bye as the ship proceeded North.

Then came two months of wandering, a pretty business with a baby and a toddling infant. The second month, Percy's baby suddenly died in the heat, and Monica hardly mourned for it. As Jack looked at its pinched little dead face, he said: You are better dead. And that was true.

The little Jane, however, showed no signs of dying. The knocking about seemed to suit her. Monica remained very thin. It was a sort of hell-life to her, this struggling from place to place in the heat and dust, no water to wash in, sleeping anywhere like a lost dog, eating the food that came. Because she loved to be clean and good-looking and in graceful surroundings. What fiend of hell had ordained that she must be a sort of tramp-woman in the back of beyond?

She did not know, so it was no good asking. Jack seemed to know what he wanted. And she was his woman, fated to him. There was no more to it. Through the purgatory of discomfort she had to go. And he was good to her, thoughtful for her, in material things. But at the centre of his soul he was not thoughtful for her. He just possessed her, mysteriously owned her, and went ahead with his own obsessions.

Sometimes she tried to rebel. Sometimes she wanted to refuse to go any further, to refuse to be a party to his will. But then he suddenly looked so angry, and so remote, looked at her with such far-off, cold, haughty eyes, that she was frightened. She was afraid he would abandon her, or ship her back to Perth, and put her out of his life forever.

Above all things, she didn't want to be shipped back to Perth. Here in the wild she could have taken up with another man. She knew that. But she knew that if she did, Jack would just put her out of his life altogether. There would be no return. His passion for her would just take the form of excluding her forever from his being. Because passion can so reverse itself, and from being a great desire that draws the beloved towards itself, it can become an eternal revulsion, excluding the once-beloved forever from any contact at all.

Monica knew this. And whenever she tried to oppose him, and the deathly anger rose in him, she was pierced with a fear so acute she had to hold on to some support, to prevent herself sinking to the ground. It was a strange fear, as if she were going to be cast out of the land of the living, among the unliving that slink like pariahs outside.

Afterwards she was puzzled. Why had he got this power over her? Why couldn't she be a free woman, to go where she chose, and be a complete thing in herself?

She caught at the idea. But it was no good. When he went away prospecting

for a week or more at a time, she would struggle to regain her woman's freedom. And it would seem to her as if she had got it: she was free of him again. She was a free being, by herself.

But then, when he came back, tired, sunburnt, ragged, and still unsuccessful: and when he looked at her with desire in his eyes, the living desire for her; she was so glad, suddenly, as if she had forgotten, or as if she had never known what his desire of her meant to her. She was so glad, she was weak with gladness instead of fear. And if, in perverseness, she still tried to oppose him, in the light of her supposedly regained freedom; and she saw the strange glow of desire for her go out of his eyes, and the strange loveliness, to her, of his wanting to have her near, in the room, giving him his meal or sitting near him outside in the shade of the evening; then, when his face changed, and took on the curious look of aloofness, as if he glistened with anger looking down on her from a long way off; then she felt all her own world turn to smoke, and her own will mysteriously evaporated, leaving her only wanting to be wanted again, back in his world. Her freedom was worth less than nothing.

Still often, when he was gone, leaving her alone in the little cabin, she was glad. She was free to spread her own woman's aura round her, she was free to delight in her own woman's idleness and whimsicality, free to amuse herself half teasing, half loving that little odd female of a Jane. And sometimes she would go to the cabins of other women, and gossip. And sometimes she would flirt with a young miner or prospector who seemed handsome. And she would get back her young, gay liveliness and freedom.

But when the man she flirted with wanted to kiss her, or put his arm round her waist, she found it made her go cold and savagely hostile. It was not as in the old days, when it gave her a thrill to be seized and kissed, whether by Easu, by Percy or Jack, or whatever man it was she was flirting with. Then, there had been a spark between her and many a man. But now, alas, the spark wouldn't fly. The man might be ever so good-looking and likeable, yet when he touched her, instead of the spark flying from her to him, immediately all the spark went dead in her. And this left her so angry, she could kill herself, or so wretched, she couldn't even cry.

That little goggle-eyed imp of a Jane, in spite of her one solitary year of age, seemed somehow to divine what was happening inside her mother's breast, and she seemed to chuckle wickedly. Monica always felt that the brat knew, and that she took Jack's side.

Jane always wanted Jack to come back. When he was away, she would toddle about on her own little affairs, curiously complacent and impervious to outer influences. But if she heard a horse coming up to the hut, she was at the door in a

flash. And Monica saw with a pang, how steadily intent the brat was on the man's return. Somehow, from Jane, Monica knew that Jack would go with other women. Because of the spark that flashed to him from that brat of a baby of Easu's.

And at evening, Jane hated going to bed if Jack hadn't come home. She would be a real little hell-monkey. It was as if she felt the house wasn't safe, wasn't real, till he had come in.

Which annoyed Monica exceedingly. Why wasn't' the mother enough for the child?

But she wasn't. And when Jane was in bed, Monica would take up the uneasiness of the manless house. She would sit like a cat shut up in a strange room, unable to settle, unable really to rest, and hating the night for having come and surprised her in her empty loneliness. Her loneliness might be really enjoyable during the day. But after nightfall it was empty, sterile, a mere oppression to her. She wished he would come home, if only so that she could hate him.

And she felt a flash of joy when she heard his footstep on the stones outside, even if the flash served only to kindle a great resentment against him. And he would come in, with his burnt, half-seeing face, unsuccessful, worn, silent, yet not uncheerful. And he spoke his few rather low words, from his chest, asking her something. And she knew he had come back to her. But where from, and what from, she would never know entirely.

She had always known where Percy had been, and what he had been doing. She felt she would always have known, with Easu. But with Jack she never knew. And sometimes this infuriated her. But it was no good. He would tell her anything she asked. And then she felt there was something she couldn't ask about.

The months went by. He staked his claim, and worked like a navvy. He was a navvy, nothing but a navvy. And she was a navvy's wife, in a hut of one room, in a desert of heat and sand and grey-coloured bush, sleeping on a piece of canvas stretched on a low trestle, eating on a tin plate, eating sand by the mouthful when the wind blew. Percy's baby was dead and buried in the sand: another sop to the avid country. And she herself was with child again, and thin as a rat. But it was his child this time, so she had a certain savage satisfaction in it.

He went on working at his claim. It was now more than a year he had spent at this game of looking for gold, and he had hardly found a cent's worth. They were very poor, in debt to the keeper of the store. But everybody had a queer respect for Jack. They dared not be very familiar with him, but they didn't resent

him. He had a good aura. The other men might jeer sometimes at his frank but unapproachable aloofness, his subtle delicacy, and his simple sort of pride. Yet when he was spoken to, his answer was so much in the spirit of the question, so frank, that you couldn't resent him. In ordinary things he was gay and completely one of themselves. The self that was beyond them he never let intrude. Hence their curious respect for him.

Because there was something unordinary in him. The biggest part of himself he kept entirely to himself, and a curious sombre steadfastness inside him made shifty men uneasy with him. He could never completely mix in, in the vulgar way, with men. He would take a drink with the rest, and laugh and talk half an hour away. Even get a bit tipsy and talk rather brilliantly. But always, always at the back of his eyes was this sombre aloofness, that could never come forward and meet and mingle, but held back, apart, waiting.

They called him, after his father, the General. But never was a General with so small an army at his command. He was playing a lone hand. The mate he was working with suddenly chucked up the job, and travelled away, and the General went on alone. He moved about the camp at his ease. When he sat in the bar drinking his beer with the other men, he was really alone, and they knew it. But he had a good aura, so they felt a certain real respect for his loneliness. And when he was there, they talked and behaved as if in the aura of a certain blood-purity, although he was in rags, for Monica hated sewing and couldn't bear, simply couldn't bear, to mend his old shirts and trousers. And there was no money to buy new.

He held on. He did not get depressed or melancholy. When he got absolutely stumped, he went away and did hired work for a spell. Then he came back to the goldfield. He was now nothing but a miner. The miner's instinct had developed in him. He had to wait for his instinct to perfect itself. He knew that. He knew he was not a man to be favoured by blind luck. Whatever he won, he must win by mystic conquest.

If he wanted gold he must master it in the veins of the earth. He knew this. And for this reason he gave way neither to melancholy nor to impatience. "If I can't win," he said to himself, "it's because I'm not master of the thing I'm up against."

"If I can't win, I'll die fighting," he said to himself. "But in the end I will win."

There was nothing to do but to fight, and fight on. This was his creed. And a fighter has no use for melancholy and impatience.

He saw the fight his boyhood had been, against his Aunts, and school and college. He didn't want to be made quite tame, and they had wanted to tame him,

like all the rest. His father was a good man and a good soldier: but a tame one. He himself was not a soldier, nor even a good man. But also he was not tame. Not a tame dog, like all the rest.

For this reason he had come to Australia, away from the welter of vicious tameness. For tame dogs are far more vicious than wild ones. Only they can be brought to heel.

In Australia, a new sort of fight. A fight with tame dogs that were playing wild. Easu was a tame dog, playing the wolf in a mongrel, back-biting way. Tame dogs escaped and became licentious. That was Australia. He knew that.

But they were not all quite tame. Tom, the safe Tom, had salt of wild savour still in his blood. And Lennie had his wild streak. So had Monica. So, somewhere had the *à terre* Mary. Some odd freakish wildness of the splendid, powerful, wild old English blood.

Jack had escaped the tamers: they couldn't touch him now. He had escaped the insidious tameness, the slight degeneracy, of Wandoo. He had learned the tricks of the escaped tame dogs who played at licentiousness. And he had mastered Monica, who had wanted to be a domestic bitch playing wild. He had captured her wildness, to mate his own wildness.

It was no good playing wild. If he had any real wildness in him, it was dark, and wary, and collected, self-responsible, and of unbreakable steadfastness: like the wildness of a wolf or a fox, that knows it will die if it is caught.

If you had a tang of the old wildness in you, you ran with the most intense wariness, knowing that the good tame dogs are really turning into licentious, vicious tame dogs. The vicious tame dogs, pretending to be wild, hate the real clean wildness of an unbroken thing much more than do the respectable tame people.

No, if you refuse to be tamed, you have to be most wary, most subtle, on your guard all the time. You can't afford to be licentious. If you are, you will die in the trap. For the world is a great trap set wide for the unwary.

Jack had learned all these things. He refused to be tamed. He knew that the dark kingdom of death ahead had no room for tame dogs. They merely were put into the earth as carrion. Only the wild, untamed souls walked on after death over the border into the porch of death, to be lords of death and masters of the next living. This he knew. The tame dogs were put into the earth as carrion, like Easu and Percy's poor little baby, and Jacob Ellis. He often wondered if that courageous old witch-cat of a Gran had slipped into the halls of death, to be one of the ladies of the dark. The lords of death, and the ladies of the dark. He would take his own Monica over the border when she died. She would sit unbroken, a quiet, fearless bride in the dark chambers of the dead, the dead who order the

goings of the next living.

That was the goal of the afterwards, that he had at the back of his eyes. But meanwhile here on earth he had to win. He had to make room again on earth for those who are not unbroken, those who are not tamed to carrion. Some place for those who know the dark mystery of being royal in death (so that they can enact the shadow of their own royalty on earth). Some place for the souls that are in themselves dark and have some of the sumptuousness of proud death, no matter what their fathers were. Jack's father was tame, as kings and dukes to-day are almost mongrelly tame. But Jack was not tame. And Easu's weird baby was not tame. She had some of the eternal fearlessness of the aristocrat whose bones are pure. But a weird sort of aristocrat.

Jack wanted to make a place on earth for a few aristocrats-to-the-bone. He wanted to conquer the world.

And first he must conquer gold. As things are, only the tame go out and conquer gold, and make a lucrative tameness: The untamed forfeit their gold.

"I must conquer gold!" said Jack to himself. "I must open the veins of the earth and bleed the power of gold into my own veins, for the fulfilling of the aristocrats-of-the-bone. I must bring the great stream of gold flowing in another direction, away from the veins of the tame ones, into the veins of the lords of death. I must start the river of the wealth of the world rolling in a new course, down the sombre, quiet, proud valleys of the lords of death and the ladies of the dark, the aristocrats of the afterwards."

So he talked to himself, as he wandered alone in his search, or sat on the bench with a pot of beer, or stepped into Monica's hot little hut. And when he failed he knew it was because he had not fought intensely enough, and subtly enough.

The bad food, the climate, the hard life gave him a sort of fever and an eczema. But it was no matter. That was only the pulp of him paying the penalty. The powerful skeleton he was was powerful as ever. The pulp of him, his belly, his heart, his muscle seemed not to be able to affect his strength, or at least his power, for more than a short time. Sometimes he broke down. Then he would think what he could do with himself, do for himself, for his flesh and blood. And what he could do, he would do. And when he could do no more, he would go and lie down in the mine, or hide in some shade, lying on the earth, alone, away from anything human. Till the earth itself gave him back his power. Till the powerful living skeleton of him resumed its sway and serenity and fierce power.

He knew he was winning, winning slowly, even in his fight with the earth, his fight for gold. It was on the cards he might die before his victory. Then it would be death, he would have to accept it. He would have to go into death, and leave

Monica and Jane and the coming baby to fate.

Meanwhile he would fight, and fight on. The baby was near, there was no money. He had to stay and watch Monica. She, poor thing, went to bed with twins, two boys. There was nothing hardly left of her. He had to give up everything, even his thoughts, and bend his whole life to her, to help her through, and save her and the two quite healthy baby boys. For a month he was doctor and nurse and housewife and husband, and he gave himself absolutely to the work, without a moment's failing. Poor Monica, when she couldn't bear herself, he held her hips together with his arm, and she clung to his neck for life.

This time he almost gave up. He almost decided to go and hire himself out to steady work, to keep her and the babies in peace and safety. To be a hired workman for the rest of his days.

And as he sat with his eyes dark and unchanging, ready to accept this fate, since this his fate must be, came a letter from Mr. George with an enclosure from England, and a cheque for fifty pounds, a legacy from one of the Aunts, who had so benevolently died at the right moment. He decided his dark Lord did not intend him to go and hire himself out for life, as a hired labourer. He decided Monica and the babies did not want the peace and safety of a hired labourer's cottage. Perhaps better die and be buried in the sand, and leave their skeletons like white messengers in the ground of this Australia.

So he went back to his working. And three days later struck gold, so that there was gold on his pick-point. He was alone, and he refused at first to get excited. But his trained instinct knew that it was a rich lode. He worked along the vein, and felt the rich weight of the yellow-streaked stuff he fetched out. The light-coloured softish stuff. He sat looking at it in his hand, and the glint of it in the dark earth-rock of the mine, in the light of the lamp. And his bowels leaped in him, knowing that the white gods of tameness would wilt and perish as the pale gold flowed out of their veins.

There would be a place on earth for the lords of death. His own Lord had at last spoken.

Jack sent quickly for Lennie to come and work with him. For Lennie, with a wife and a child, was struggling very hard.

Len and Tom both came. Jack had not expected Tom. But Tom lifted his brown eyes to Jack and said:

"I sortta felt I couldn't stand even Len being mates with you, an' me not there. I was your first mate, Jack. I've never been myself since I parted with you."

"All right," laughed Jack. "You're my first mate."

"That's what I am, General," said Tom.

Jack had showed Monica some of the ore, and told her the mine seemed to be

turning out fairly. She was getting back her own strength, that those two monstrous young twins had almost robbed from her entirely. Jack was very careful of her. He wanted above all things that she should become really strong again.

And she, with her rare vitality, soon began to bloom once more. And as her strength came back she was very much taken up with her babies. These were the first she had enjoyed. The other two she had never really enjoyed. But with these she was as fussy as a young cat with her kittens. She almost forgot Jack entirely. Left him to be busy with Tom and Lennie and his mine. Even the gold failed to excite her.

And she had rather a triumph. She was able to be queenly again with Tom and Lennie. As a girl, she had always been a bit queenly with the rest of them at Wandoo. And she couldn't bear to be humiliated in their eyes.

Now she needn't. She had the General for her husband, she had his twins. And he had gold in his mine. Hadn't she a perfect right to be queenly with Tom and Lennie? She even got into the habit, right at the beginning, of speaking of Jack as "the General" to them.

"Where's the General? Didn't he come down with you?" she would snap at them, in her old sparky fashion.

"He's reviewing his troops," Lennie sarcastically answered.

Whereupon Jack appeared in the door, still in rags. And it was Lennie who mended his shirt for him, when it was torn on the shoulder and showed the smooth man underneath. Monica still couldn't bring herself to these fiddling bothering jobs.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE OFFER TO MARY

I

They worked for months at the mine, and still it turned out richly. Though they kept as quiet as possible, the fame spread. They had a bonanza. They were all three going to be rich, and Jack was going to be very rich. In the light of his luck, he was “the General” to everybody.

And in the midst of this flow of fortune, came another, rather comical windfall. Again the news was forwarded by Mr. George, along with a word of congratulation from that gentleman. The forwarded letter read:

“Dear Sir,

This come hopping to find you well as it leaves me at prisent thanks be to almighty God. You dear uncle Passed Away peaceful on Saterdag nite And though it be not my place to tell you of it i am Grateful to have the oppertunity to offer my umble Respects before the lord and Perlice I take up my pen with pleashr to inform you that He passed without Pain and even Drafts as he aloud the umberrela to be put down and the Book read.

The 24 salm and i kep the ink and paper by to rite of his sudden dismiss but he lingered long years after the bote wint so was onable to Inform you before he desist the doctor rote a butiful certicket of death saying he did of sensible decay but I don no how he brote himself to rite it as the pore master was wite as driven snow and no blemish. And being his most umble and Dutiful servants we could not ave brout ourself to hever ave rote as he was sensible Pecos god knows the pore sole was not. be that as it may we burried him proud under the prisent arrangements of town councel the clerk who was prisent xpects the docters will he mad up the nite you was hear in the cimetary and pending your Return Holds It In Bond as Being rite for us we are Yor Respectable servants to Oblige Hand Commend

Emma and Amos Lewis.”

Jack and Tom roared with laughter over this epistle, that brought back so vividly the famous trip up North.

“Gloryanna, General, you’ve got your property at Coney Hatch all right,” said Tom.

There was a letter from Mr. George saying that the defunct John Grant was the son of Jack’s mother’s eldest sister, that he had been liable all his life to bouts of temporary insanity, but that in a period of sanity he had signed the will drawn up by Doctor Rackett, when the two boys called at the place several years before, and that the will had been approved. So that Jack, as legal heir and nearest male relative, could now come down and take possession of the farm.

“I don’t want that dismal place,” said Jack. “Let it go to the Crown. I’ve no need of it now.”

“Don’t be a silly cuckoo!” said Tom. “You saw it of a wet night with Ally Sloper in bed under a green cart umbrella. Go an’ look at it of a fine day. An’ then if you don’t want it, sell it or lease it, but don’t let the Crown rake it in.”

So in about a fortnight’s time Jack rather reluctantly left the mine, with its growing heaps of refuse, and departed from the mining settlement which had become a sort of voluntary prison for him, and went west to Perth. He was already a rich man and notorious in the colony. He rode with two pistols in his belt, and that unchanging aloof look on his face. But he carried himself with pride, rode a good horse, wore well-made riding breeches and a fine bandanna handkerchief loose round his neck, and looked, with a silver studded band round his broad felt hat, a mixture of gold miner, a gentleman settler, and a bandit chief. Perhaps he felt a mixture of them all.

Mr. George received him with a great welcome. And Jack was pleased to see the old man. But he refused absolutely to go to the club or to the Government House, or to meet any of the responsible people of the town.

“I don’t want to see them, Mr. George. I don’t want to see them.”

And poor Old George, his nose a bit out of joint, had to submit to leaving Jack alone.

Jack had his old room in Mr. George’s house. The Good Plain Cook was still going. And Aunt Matilda, rather older, stouter, with more lines in her face, came to tea with Mary and Miss Blessington. Mary had not married Mr. Blessington. But she had remained friends with the odd daughter, who was now a self-contained young woman, shy, thin, well-bred, and delicate. Mr. Blessington had not married again. In Aunt Matilda’s opinion, he was still waiting for Mary. And Mary had refused Tom’s rather doubtful offer. Tom was still nervous about Honeysuckle. So there they all were.

When Jack shook hands with Mary, he had a slight shock. He had forgotten her. She had gone out of his consciousness. But when she looked up at him with her dark, clear, waiting eyes, as if she had been watching and waiting for him

afar off, his heart gave a queer dizzy lurch. He had forgotten her. They say the heart has a short memory. But now, as a dark hotness gathered in his heart, he realised that his blood had not forgotten her. He had only forgotten her with his head. His blood, with its strange submissiveness and its strange unawareness of time, had kept her just the same.

The blood has an eternal memory. It neither forgets nor moves on ahead. But it is quiescent and submits to the mind's oversight.

He had a certain blood-connection with Mary. He had utterly forgotten it, in the stress and rage of other things. And now, the moment she lifted her eyes to him, and he saw her dusky, quiet, heavy permanent face, the dull heat started in his breast again, and he remembered how he had told her he would come for her again.

Since his twins were born and he had been so busy with the mine, and he had Monica, he had not given any thought to women. But the moment he saw Mary and met her eyes, the dark thought struck home in him again: I want Mary for my other woman. He didn't want to displace Monica. Monica was Monica. But he wanted this other woman too.

Aunt Matilda dear-boyed him more than ever. But now he was not a dear boy, he didn't feel a dear boy, and she was put out.

"Dear boy! and how does Monica stand that drying climate?"

"She is quite well again, Marm."

"Poor child! Poor child! I hope you will bring her into a suitable home here in Perth, and have the children suitably brought up. It is so fortunate for you your mine is so successful. Now you can build a home here by the river, among us all, and be charming company for us, like your dear father."

Mary was watching him with black eyes, and Miss Blessington with her wide, quick, round, dark-grey eyes. There was a frail beauty about that odd young woman; frail, highly-bred, sensitive, with an uncanny intelligence.

"No, Marm," said Jack cheerfully. "I shall not come and live in Perth."

"Dear boy, of course you will! You won't forsake us and take your money and your family and your attractive self far away to England? No, don't do that. It is just what your dear father did. Robbed us of one of our sweetest girls, and never came back."

"No, I shan't go to England either," smiled Jack.

"Then what will you do?"

"Stay at the mine for the time being."

"Oh, but the mine won't last forever. And dear boy, don't waste your talents and your charm mining, when it is no longer necessary! Oh, do come down to Perth, and bring your family. Mary is pining to see your twins: and dear Monica.

Of course we all are.” Jack smiled to himself. He would no longer give in a hair’s breadth to any of these dreary world-people.

“A la bonne heure!” he said, using one of his mother’s well-worn tags. But then his mother could rattle bad colloquial French, and he couldn’t.

Mary asked him many questions about the mine and Monica, and Hilda Blessington listened with lowered head, only occasionally fixing him with queer searching eyes, like some odd creature not quite human. Jack was something of a hero. And he was pleased. He wanted to be a hero.

But he was no hero any more for Aunt Matilda. Now that the cherub look had gone forever, and the shy, blushing, blurring boy had turned into a hard-boned, healthy young man, with a half haughty aloofness and a little reckless smile that made you feel uncomfortable, she was driven to venting some venom on him.

“That is the worst of the colonies,” she said from her bluish powdered face. “Our most charming, cultured young men go out to the back of beyond, and they come home quite — quite — ”

“Quite what, Marm?”

“Why I was going to say uncouth, but that’s perhaps a little strong.”

“I should say not at all,” he answered. He disliked the old lady, and enjoyed baiting her. Great stout old hen, she had played cock-o’-the-walk long enough.

“How many children have you got out there?” she suddenly asked, rudely.

“We have only the twins of my own,” he answered. “But of course there is Jane.”

“Jane! Jane! Which is Jane?”

“Jane is Easu’s child. Monica’s first.”

Everybody started. It was as if a bomb had been dropped in the room. Miss Blessington coloured to the roots of her fleecy brown hair. Mary studied her fingers, and Aunt Matilda sat in a Queen Victoria statue pose, outraged.

“What is she like?” asked Mary softly, looking up.

“Who, Jane? She’s a funny little urchin. I’m fond of her. I believe she’d always stand by me.”

Mary looked at him. It was a curious thing to say.

“Is that how you think of people — whether they would always stand by you or not?” she asked softly.

“I suppose it is,” he laughed. “Courage is the first quality in life, don’t you think? And fidelity the next.”

“Fidelity?” asked Mary.

“Oh, I don’t mean automatic fidelity. I mean faithful to the living spark,” he replied a little hastily.

“Don’t you try to be too much of a spark, young man,” snapped Aunt Matilda,

arousing from her statuesque offence in order to let nothing pass by her.

“I promise you I won’t try,” he laughed.

Mary glanced at him quickly — then down at her fingers.

“I think fidelity is a great problem,” she said softly.

“Pray, why?” bounced Aunt Matilda. “You give your word, and you stick to it.”

“Oh, it’s not just simple word-faithfulness, Mrs. Watson,” said Jack. He had Mary in mind.

“Well, I suppose I have still to live and learn,” said Aunt Matilda.

“What’s that you have still to live and learn, Matilda?” said Mr. George, coming in again with papers.

“This young man is teaching me lessons about life. Courage is the first quality in life, if you please.”

“Well, why not?” said Old George amiably. “I like spunk myself.”

“Courage to do the right thing!” said Aunt Matilda.

“And who’s going to decide which is the right thing?” asked the old man, teasing her.

“There’s no question of it,” said Aunt Matilda.

“Well,” said the old lawyer, rubbing his head, “there often is, my dear woman, a very big question!”

“And fidelity is the second virtue,” said Mary, looking up at him with trustful eyes, enquiringly.

“A man’s no good unless he can keep faith,” said the old man.

“But what is it one must remain faithful to?” came the quiet cool voice of Hilda Blessington.

“Do you know what old Gran Ellis said?” asked Jack. “She said a man’s own true self is God in him. She was a queer old bird.”

“His true self,” said Aunt Matilda. “His true self! And I should say old Mrs. Ellis was a doubtful guide to young people, judging from her own family.”

“She made a great impression on me, Marm,” said Jack politely.

Mr. George had brought the papers referring to the new property. Jack read various documents, rather absently. Then the title deeds. Then he studied a fascinating little green-and-red map, “delineating and setting forth,” with “easements and encumbrances,” whatever they were. There was a bank-book showing a balance of four hundred pounds nineteen shillings and sixpence, in the West Australian Bank. Jack told about his visit to Grant Farm, and the man under the umbrella. They all laughed.

“The poor fellow had a bad start,” said Mr. George. “But he was a good farmer and a good business man, in his right times. Oh, he knew who he was

leaving the place to, when Rackett drew up that will.”

“Gran Ellis told me about him,” said Jack. “She told me about all the old people. She told me about my mother’s old sister. And she told me about the father of this crazy man as well, but — ”

Mr. George was looking at him coldly and fiercely.

“The poor fellow’s father,” said the old man, “was an Englishman who thought himself a swell, but wasn’t too much of a high-born gentleman to abandon a decent girl and go round to the east side and marry another woman, and flaunt round in society with women he hadn’t married.”

Jack remembered. It was Mary’s father: seventh son of old Lord Haworth. What a mix-up! How bitter Old George sounded!

“It seems to have been a mighty mix-up out here, fifty years ago, sir,” he said mildly.

“It was a mix-up then — and is a mix-up now.”

“I suppose,” said Jack, “if the villain of a gentleman had never abandoned my Aunt — I can’t think of her as an Aunt — he’d never have gone to Sydney, and his children that he had there would never have been born.”

“I suppose not,” said Mr. George drily. But he started a little and involuntarily looked at Mary.

“Do you think it would have been better if they had never been born?” Jack asked pertinently.

“I don’t set up to judge,” said the old man.

“Does Mrs. Watson?”

“I certainly think it would be better,” said Mrs. Watson, “if that poor half-idiot cousin of yours had never been born.”

“I’ve got Gran Ellis on my mind,” said Jack. “She was funny, what she condemned and what she didn’t. I used to think she was an old terror. But I can understand her better now. She was a wise woman, seems to me.”

“Indeed!” said Aunt Matilda. “I never put her and wisdom together.”

“Yes, she was wise. I can see now. She knew that sins are as vital a part of life as virtues, and she stuck up for the sins that are necessary to life.”

“What’s the matter with you, Jack Grant, that you go and start moralising?” said Old George.

“Why sir, it must be that my own sinful state is dawning on my mind,” said Jack, “and I’m wondering whether to take Mrs. Watson’s advice and repent and weep, etc., etc. Or whether to follow old Gran Ellis’ lead, and put a sinful feather in my cap.”

“Well,” said Old George, smiling, “I don’t know. You talk about courage and fidelity. Sin usually means doing something rather cowardly, and breaking your

faith in some direction.”

“Oh I don’t know, sir. Tom and Lennie are faithful to me. But that doesn’t mean they are not free. They are free to do just what they like, so long as they are faithful to the spark that is between us. As I am faithful to them. It seems to me, Sir, one is true to one’s word in business, in affairs. But in life one can only be true to the spark.”

“I’m afraid there’s something amiss with you, son, that’s set you off arguing and splitting hairs.”

“There is. Something is always amiss with most of us. Old Gran Ellis was a lesson to me, if I’d known. Something is always wrong with the lot of us. And I believe in thinking before I act.”

“Let us hope so,” said Mr. George. “But it sounds funny sort of thinking you do.”

“But,” said Hilda Blessington, with wide, haunted eyes, “what is the spark that one must be faithful to? How are we to be sure of it?”

“You just feel it. And then you act upon it. That’s courage. And then you always live up to the responsibility of your act. That’s faithfulness. You have to keep faith in all kinds of ways. I have to keep faith with Monica and the babies, and young Jane, and Lennie and Tom and dead Gran Ellis: and — and more — yes, more.”

He looked with clear hard eyes at Mary, and at the young girl. They were both watching him, puzzled and perturbed. The two old people in the background were silent but hostile.

“Do you know what I am faithful to?” he said, still to the two young women, but letting the elders hear. “I am faithful to my own inside, when something stirs in me. Gran Ellis said that was God in me. I know there’s a God outside of me. But he tells me to go my own way, and never be frightened of people and the world, only be frightened of Him. And if I felt I really wanted two wives, for example, I would have them and keep them both. If I really wanted them, it would mean it was the God outside of me bidding me, and it would be up to me to obey, world or no world.”

“You describe exactly the devil driving you,” said Aunt Matilda.

“Doesn’t he!” laughed Mr. George, who was oddly impressed. “I hope there isn’t a streak of madness in the family.”

“No, there’s not. The world is all so tame, it’s a bit imbecile, in my opinion. Really a dangerous idiot. If I do want two wives — or even three — I do. Why should I mind what the idiot says.”

“Sounds like you’d gone cracked, out there in that mining settlement,” said Mr. George.

“If I said I wanted two fortunes instead of one, you wouldn’t think it cracked,” said Jack, with a malicious smile.

“No, only greedy,” said Old George.

“Not if I could use them. And the same if I have real use for two wives — or even three — ” said Jack, grinning, but with a queer bright intention, at Hilda Blessington. “Well, three wives would be three fortunes for my blood and spirit.”

“You are not allowed to say such things, even as a joke,” said Aunt Matilda, with ponderous disapproval. “It is no joke to me.”

“Surely I say them in dead earnest,” persisted Jack mischievously. He was aware of Mary and Hilda Blessington listening, and he wanted to throw a sort of lasso over them.

“You’ll merely find yourself in gaol for bigamy,” said Mr. George.

“Oh,” said Jack, “I wouldn’t risk that. It would really be a Scotch marriage. Monica is my legal wife. But what I pledged myself to, I’d stick to, as I stick to Monica, I’d stick to the others the same.”

“I won’t hear any more of this nonsense,” said Aunt Matilda, rising.

“Nonsense it is,” said Old George testily.

Jack laughed. Their being bothered amused him. He was a little surprised at himself breaking out in this way. But the sight of Mary, and the sense of a new, different responsibility, had struck it out of him. His nature was ethical, inclined to be emotionally mystical. Now, however, the sense of foolish complacency and empty assurance in Aunt Matilda, and in all the dead-certain people of this world struck out of him a hard, sharp, non-emotional opposition. He felt hard and mischievous, confronting them. Who were they, to judge and go on judging? Who was Aunt Matilda, to judge the dead fantastic soul of the fierce Gran? The Ellises, the Ellises, they all had some of Gran’s fierce pagan uneasiness about them, they were all a bit uncanny. That was why he loved them so.

And Mary! Mary had another slow, heavy, mute mystery that waited and waited forever, like a lode-stone. And should he therefore abandon her, abandon her to society and a sort of sterility? Not he. She was his. His, and no other man’s. She knew it herself. He knew it. Then he would fight them all. Even the good Old George. For the mystery that was his and Mary’s.

Let it be an end of popular goodness. Let there be another deeper, fiercer, untamed sort of goodness, like in the days of Abraham and Samson and Saul. If Jack was to be good he would be good with these great old men, the heroic fathers, not with the saints. The Christian goodness had gone bad, decayed almost into poison. It needed again the old heroic goodness of untamed men, with the wild great God who was forever too unknown to be a paragon.

Old George was a little afraid of Jack, uneasy about him. He thought him not normal. The boy had to be put in a category by himself, like a madman in a solitary cell. And at the same time, the old man was delighted. He was delighted with the young man's physical presence. Bewildered by the careless, irrational things Jack would say, the old bachelor took off his spectacles and rubbed his tired eyes again and again, as if he were going blind, and as if he were losing his old dominant will.

He had been a dominant character in the colony so long. And now this young fellow was laughing at him and stealing away his power of resistance.

"Don't make eyes at me, sir," said Jack, laughing. "I know better than you what life means."

"You do, do you? Oh you do?" said the old man. And he laughed too. Somehow it made him feel warm and easy. "A fine crazy affair it would be if it were left to you." And he laughed loud at the absurdity.

II

Jack persuaded Mary to go with Mr. George and himself to look at Grant Farm. Mary and the old lawyer went in a buggy, Jack rode his own horse. And it seemed to him to be good to be out again in the bush and forest country. It was rainy season, and the smell of the earth was delicious in his nostrils.

He decided soon to leave the mine. It was running thin. He could leave it in charge of Tom. And then he must make some plans for himself. Perhaps he would come and live on the Grant Farm. It was not too far from Perth, or from Wandoo, it was in the hills, the climate was balmy and almost English, after the goldfields, and there were trees. He really rejoiced again, riding through strong, living trees.

Sometimes he would ride up beside Mary. She sat very still at Mr. George's side, talking to him in her quick, secret-seeming way. Mary always looked as if the things she was saying were secrets.

And her upper lip with its down of fine dark hair, would lift and show her white teeth as she smiled with her mouth. She only smiled with her mouth: her eyes remained dark and glistening and unchanged. But she talked a great deal to Mr. George, almost like lovers, they were so confidential and so much in tune with one another. It was as if Mary was happy with an old man's love, that was fatherly, warm, and sensuous, and wise and talkative, without being at all dangerous.

When Jack rode up, she seemed to snap the thread of her communication with Mr. George, her ready volubility failed, and she was a little nervous. Her eyes, her dark eyes, were afraid of the young man. Yet they would give him odd, bright, corner-wise looks, almost inviting. So different from the full, confident way she looked at Mr. George. So different from Monica's queer yellow glare. Mary seemed almost to peep at him, while her dark face, like an animal's muzzle with its slightly heavy mouth, remained quite expressionless.

It amused him. He remembered how he had kissed her, and he wondered if she remembered. It was impossible, of course, to ask her. And when she talked, it was always so seriously. That again amused Jack. She was so voluble, especially with Mr. George, on all kinds of deep and difficult subjects. She was quite excited, just now about authoritarianism. She was being drawn by the Roman Catholic Church.

"Oh," she was saying, "I am an authoritarian. Don't you think that the whole natural scheme is a scheme of authority, one rank having authority over another?"

Mr. George couldn't quite see it. Yet it tickled his paternal male conceit of authority, so he didn't contradict her. And Jack smiled to himself. "She runs too much to talk," he thought. "She runs too much in her head." She seemed, indeed, to have forgotten quite how he kissed her. It seemed that "questions of the day" quite absorbed her.

They came through the trees in the soft afternoon sunshine. Jack remembered the place well. He remembered the jamboree, and that girl who had called him Dearie! His first woman! And insignificant enough; but not bad. He thought kindly of her. She was a warm-hearted soul. But she didn't belong to his life at all. He remembered too how he had kicked Tom. The faithful Tom! Mary would never marry Tom, that was a certainty. And it was equally certain, Tom would never break his heart.

Jack was thinking to himself that he would build a new house on this place, and ask Mary to live in the old house. That was a brilliant idea.

But as he drove up, he thought: "The first money you spend on this place, my boy, will be on a brand new five-barred white gate."

Emma and Amos came out full of joy. They too were a faithful old pair. Jack handed Mary down. She wore a dark-blue dress and white silk gloves. It was so like her, to put on white silk gloves. But he liked the touch of them, as he handed her down. Her small, short, rather passive hands.

He and she walked round the place, and she was very much interested. A new place, a new farm, a new undertaking always excited her, as if it was she who was making the new move.

“Don’t you think that will be a good place for the new house,” he was saying to her. “Down there, near that jolly bunch of old trees. And the garden south of the trees. If you dig in that flat you’ll find water, sure to.”

She inspected the place most carefully, and uttered her mature judgments.

“You’ll have to help think it out,” he said. “Monica’s as different as an opossum. Would you like to build yourself a house here, and tend to things? I’ll build you one if you like. Or give you the old one.”

She looked at him with glowing eyes.

“Wouldn’t that be splendid!” she said. “Oh, wouldn’t that be splendid! If I had a house and a piece of land of my own! Oh yes!”

“Well I can easily give it you,” he said. “Just whatever you like.”

“Isn’t that lovely!” she exclaimed.

But he could tell she was thinking merely of the house and the bit of land, and herself a sort of Auntie to his and Monica’s children. She was fairly jumping into old-maidom, both feet first. Which was not what he intended. He didn’t want her as an Auntie for his children.

They went back to the house, and inspected there. She liked it. It was a stone one-storey house with a great kitchen and three other rooms, all rather low and homely. The dead cousin had wanted his house to be exactly like the houses of other respectable farmers. And he had not been prevented.

The place was a bit tumble-down, but clean. Emma was baking scones, and the sweet smell of scorched flour filled the house. Mary lit the lamp in the little parlour, and set it on the highly-polished but rather rickety rosewood table, next the photograph album. The family Bible had been removed to the bedroom. But the old man had a photograph album, like any other respectable householder.

Mary drew up one of the green-rep chairs, and opened the book. Jack, looking over her shoulder, started a little as he saw the first photograph: an elderly lady in lace cap and voluminous silken skirts was seated reading a book, while negligently leaning with one hand on her chair was a gentleman, with long white trousers and old-fashioned coat and side-whiskers, obviously having his photograph taken.

This was the identical photograph which held place of honour in Jack’s mother’s album; being the photograph of her father and mother.

“See!” said Jack. “That’s my grandfather and grandmother. And he must have been the man who took Gran Ellis’ leg off. Goodness!”

Mary gazed at them closely.

“He looks a domineering man!” she said. “I hope you’re not like him.”

Jack didn’t feel at all like him. Mary turned over, and they beheld two young ladies of the Victorian period. Somebody had marked a cross, in ink, over the

head of one of the young ladies. They must be his own Aunts, both of them many years older than his own mother, who was a late arrival.

“Do you think that was his mother?” said Mary, looking up at Jack, who stood at her side. “She was beautiful.”

Jack studied the photograph of the young woman. She looked like nobody’s mother on earth, with her hair curiously rolled and curled, and a great dress flouncing round her. And her beauty was so photographic and abstract, he merely gazed seeking for it.

But Mary, looking up at him, saw his silent face in the glow of the lamp, his rather grim mouth closed ironically under his moustache, his open nostrils, and the long, steady, self-contained look of his eyes under his lashes. He was not thinking of her at all, at the moment. But his calm, rather distant, unconsciously imperious face was something quite new and startling, and rather frightening to her. She became intensely aware of his thighs standing close against her, and her heart went faint. She was afraid of him.

In agitation, she was going to turn the leaf. But he put his work-hardened hand on the page, and turned back to the first photograph.

“Look!” he said. “He — — ” pointing to his grandfather, “disowned her — — ” turning to the Aunt marked with across, “ — — and she died an outcast, in misery, and her son burrowed here, half crazy. Yet their two faces are rather alike. Gran Ellis told me about them.” Mary studied them.

“They are both a bit like yours,” she said, “their faces.”

“Mine!” he exclaimed. “Oh no! I look like my father’s family.”

He could see no resemblance at all to himself in the handsome, hard-mouthed, large man, with the clean face and the fringe of fair whiskers, and the black cravat, and the overbearing look.

“Your eyes are set in the same way,” she said. “And your brows are the same. But your mouth is not so tight.”

“I don’t like what I heard of him, anyhow,” said Jack. “A puritanical surgeon! Turn over.”

She turned over and gave a low cry. There was a photograph of a young elegant with drooping black moustachios, and mutton-chop side whiskers, and large, languid, black eyes, leaning languidly and swinging a cane. Over the top was written, in a weird handwriting: The Honourable George Rath, blasted father of

Skull and crossbones

This skull and crossbones was repeated on the other margins of the photograph.

“Oh!” said Mary, covering her face with her hands.

Jack's face was a study. Mary had evidently recognised the photograph of her father as a young man. Yet Jack could not help smiling at the skull and crossbones, in connection with the Bulwer Lytton young elegant, and the man under the green umbrella.

"My God!" he thought to himself. "All that happens in a generation! From that sniffy young dude to that fellow here who made this farm, and Mary with her face in her hands!"

He could not help smiling to himself.

"Had you seen that photograph before?" he asked her.

She, unable to answer, kept her face in her hands.

"Don't worry," he said. "We're all more or less that way. We're none of us perfect."

Still she did not answer. Then he went on, almost without thinking, as he studied the rather fetching young gentleman with the long black hair and bold black eyes, and the impudent, handsome, languid lips:

"You're a bit like him, too. You're a bit like him in the look of your eyes. I bet he wasn't tall either. I bet he was rather small."

Mary took her hands from her face and looked up fierce and angry.

"You have no feeling," she said.

"I have," he replied, smiling slightly. "But life seems to me too rummy to get piqued about it. Think of him leaving a son like the fellow I saw under the umbrella! Think of it! Such a dandy! And that his son! And then having you for a daughter when he was getting quite on in years. Do you remember him?"

"How can you talk to me like that?" she said.

"But why? It's life. It's how it was. Do you remember your father?"

"Of course I do."

"Did he dye his whiskers?"

"I won't answer you."

"Well, don't then. But this man under the umbrella here — you should have seen him — was your half-brother and my cousin. It makes us almost related."

Mary left the room. In a few minutes Mr. George came in.

"What's wrong with Mary?" he asked, suspiciously, angrily.

Jack shrugged his shoulders, and pointed to the photograph. The old man bent over and stared at it: and laughed. Then he took the photograph out of the book, and put it in his pocket.

"Well, I'm damned!" he said. "Signs himself skull and crossbones! Think of that now!"

"Was the Honourable George a smallish-built man?" asked Jack.

"Eh!" The old man started. Then startled, he began to remember back. "Ay!"

he said. "He was. He was smallish-built, and the biggest little dude you ever set eyes on. Something about his backside always reminded me of a woman. But all the women were wild about him. Ay, even when he was over fifty, Mary's mother was wild in love with him. And he married her because she was going to be a big heiress. But she died a bit too soon, an' he got nothing, nor Mary neither, because she was his daughter." The old man made an ironic grimace. "He only died a few years back, in Sydney," he added. "But I say, that poor lass is fair cut up about it. We'd always kept it from her. I feel bad about her."

"She may as well get used to it," said Jack, disliking the old man's protective sentimentalism.

"Eh! Get used to it! Why? How can she get used to it?"

"She's got to live her own life some time."

"How d'y' mean, live her own life? She's never going to live that sort of a life, as long as I can see to it!" He was quite huffed.

"Are you going to leave her to be an old maid?" said Jack.

"Eh? Old maid? No! She'll marry when she wants to."

"You bet," said Jack with a slow smile.

"She's a child yet," said Mr. George.

"An elderly child — poor Mary!"

"Poor Mary! Poor Mary! Why poor Mary? Why so?"

"Just poor Mary," said Jack, slowly smiling.

"I don't see it. Why is she poor? You're growing into a real young devil, you are." And the old man glanced into the young man's eyes in mistrust, and fear, and also in admiration.

They went into the kitchen, the late tea was ready. It was evident that Mary was waiting for them to come in. She had recovered her composure, but was more serious than usual. Jack laughed at her, and teased her.

"Ah, Mary," he said, "do you still believe in the Age of Innocence?"

"I still believe in good feeling," she retorted.

"So do I. And when good feeling's comical, I believe in laughing at it," he replied.

"There's something wrong with you," she replied.

"Quoth Aunt Matilda," he echoed.

"Aunt Matilda is very often right," she said.

"Never, in my opinion. Aunt Matilda is a wrong number. She's one of life's false statements."

"Hark at him!" laughed Old George.

As soon as the meal was over, he rose, saying he would see to his horse. Mary looked up at him as he put his hat on his head and took the lantern. She didn't

want him to go.

“How long will you be?” she asked.

“Why, not long,” he answered, with a slight smile. Nevertheless he was glad to be out and with his horse. Somehow those others made a false atmosphere, Mary and Old George. They made Jack’s soul feel sarcastic. He lingered about the stable in the dim light of the lantern, preparing himself a bed. There were only two bedrooms in the house. The old couple would sleep on the kitchen floor, or on the sofa. He preferred to sleep in the stable. He had grown so that he did not like to sleep inside their fixed, shut-in houses. He did not mind a mere hut, like his at the camp. But a shut-in house with fixed furniture made him feel sick. He was sick of the whole pretence of it.

And he knew he would never come to live on this farm. He didn’t want to. He didn’t like the atmosphere of the place. He felt stifled. He wanted to go North, or West, or North-West once more.

Suddenly he heard footsteps: Mary picking her way across.

“Is your horse all right?” she asked. “I was afraid something was wrong with him. And he is so beautiful. Or is it a mare?”

“No,” he said “it is a horse. I don’t care for a mare, for riding.”

“Why?”

“She has so many whims of her own, and wants so much attention paid to her. And then ten to one you can’t trust her. I prefer a horse to ride.”

She saw the rugs spread on the straw.

“Who is going to sleep here?” she asked.

“I”

“Why — but — — ”

He cut short her expostulations.

“Oh, but do let me bring you sheets. Do let me make you a proper bed!” she cried.

But he only laughed at her.

“What’s a proper bed?” he said. “Is this an improper one, then?”

“It’s not a comfortable one,” she said with dignity.

“It is for me. I wasn’t going to ask you to sleep on it too, was I, now?”

She went out and stood looking at the Southern Cross.

“Weren’t you coming indoors again?” she asked.

“Don’t you think it’s nicer out here? Feels a bit tight in there. I say, Mary, I don’t think I shall ever come and live on this place.”

“Why not?” “I don’t like it.”

“Why not?”

“It feels a bit heavy — and a bit tight to me.”

“What shall you do then?”

“Oh, I don’t know. I’ll decide when I’m back at the camp. But I say, wouldn’t you like this place? I’ll give it you if you would. You’re next of kin really. If you’ll have it, I’ll give it you.”

Mary was silent for some time.

“And what do you think you’ll do if you don’t live here?” she asked. “Will you stay always on the goldfields?”

“Oh dear no! I shall probably go up to the Never-Never, and raise cattle. Where there aren’t so many people, and photo albums, and good old Georges and Aunt Matildas and all that.”

“You’ll be yourself, wherever you are.”

“Thank God for that, but it’s not quite true. I find I’m less myself down here, with all you people.”

Again she was silent for a time.

“Why?” she asked.

“Oh, that’s how it makes me feel, that’s all.”

“Are you more yourself on the goldfields?” she asked rather contemptuously.

“Oh yes.”

“When you are getting money, you mean?”

“No. But I’ve got so that Aunt Matilda-ism and Old-Georgism don’t agree with me. They make me feel sarcastic, they make me feel out of sorts all over.”

“And I suppose you mean Mary-ism too,” she said.

“Yes, a certain sort of Mary-ism does it to me as well. But there’s a Mary without the ism that I said I’d come back for. — Would you like this place?”

“Why?”

“To cultivate your Mary-ism. Or would you like to come to the North-West?”

“But why do you trouble about me?”

“I’ve come back for you. I said I’d come back for you. I am here.”

There was a moment of tense silence.

“You have married Monica, now,” said Mary in a low voice.

“Of course I have. But the leopard doesn’t change his spots when he goes into a cave with a she-leopard. I said I’d come back for you as well, and I’ve come.”

A dead silence.

“But what about Monica?” Mary asked, with a little curl of irony.

“Monica?” he said. “Yes, she’s my wife, I tell you. But she’s not my only wife. Why should she be? She will lose nothing.”

“Did she say so? Did you tell her?” Mary asked insidiously.

Slowly an anger suffused thick in his chest, and then seemed to break in a kind of explosion. And the curious tension of his desire for Mary snapped with the

explosion of his anger.

“No,” he said. “I didn’t tell her. I had to ask you first. Monica is thick with her babies now. She won’t care where I am. That’s how women are. They are more creatures than men are. They’re not separated out of the earth: They’re like black ore. The metal’s in them, but it’s still part of the earth. They’re all part of the matrix, women are, with their children clinging to them.”

“And men are pure gold?” said Mary sarcastically.

“Yes, in streaks. Men are the pure metal, in streaks. Women never are. For my part, I don’t want them to be. They are the mother-rock. They are the matrix. Leave them at that. That’s why I want more than one wife.”

“But why?” she asked.

He realised that, in his clumsy fashion, he had taken the wrong tack. The one thing he should never have done, he had begun to do: explain and argue. Truly, Mary put up a permanent mental resistance. But he should have attacked elsewhere. He should have made love to her. Yet, since she had so much mental resistance, he had to make his position clear. — Now he realised he was angry and tangled.

“Shall we go in?” he said abruptly.

And she returned with him in silence back to the house. Mr. George was in the parlour, looking over some papers. Jack and Mary went in to him.

“I have been thinking, Sir,” said Jack, “that I shall never come and live on this place. I want to go up to the North-West and raise cattle. That’ll suit me better than wheat and dairy. So I offer this place to Mary. She can do as she likes with it. Really, I feel the property is naturally hers.”

Now Old George had secretly cherished this thought for many years, and it had riled him a little when Jack calmly stepped into the inheritance.

“Oh, you can’t be giving away a property like this,” he said.

“Why not? I have all the money I want. I give the place to Mary. I’d much rather give it to her than sell it. But if she won’t have it, I’ll ask you to sell it for me.”

“Why! Why!” said Old George fussily, stirring quite delighted in his chair, and looking from one to the other of the young people, unable to understand their faces. Mary looked sulky and unhappy, Jack looked sarcastic.

“I won’t take it, anyhow,” exclaimed Mary.

“Eh? Why not? If the young millionaire wants to throw it away — — ” said the old man ironically.

“I won’t! I won’t take it!” she repeated abruptly.

“Why — what’s amiss?”

“Nothing! I won’t take it.”

“Got a proud stomach from your aristocratic ancestors, have you?” said Old George. “Well, you needn’t have; the place is your father’s son’s place, you needn’t be altogether so squeamish.”

“I wouldn’t take it if I was starving,” she asserted.

“You’re in no danger of starving, so don’t talk,” said the old man, testily. “It’s a nice little place. I should enjoy coming out here and spending a few months of the year myself. Should like nothing better.”

“But I won’t take it,” said Mary.

Jack went grinning off to his stable. He was angry, but it was the kind of anger that made him feel sarcastic.

Damn her! She was in love with him. She had a passion for him. What did she want? Did she want him to make love to her, and run away with her, and abandon Monica and Jane and the twin babies? — No doubt she would listen to such a proposition hard enough. But he was never going to make it her. He had married Monica, and he would stick to her. She was his first and chief wife, and whatever happened, she should remain it. He detested and despised divorce; a shifty business. But it was nonsense to pretend that Monica was the beginning and end of his marriage with woman. Woman was the matrix, the red earth, and he wanted his roots in this earth. More than one root, to keep him steady and complete. Mary instinctively belonged to him. Then why not belong to him completely? Why not? And why not make a marriage with her too? The legal marriage with Monica, his own marriage with Mary. It was a natural thing. The old heroes, the old fathers of red earth, like Abraham in the Bible, like David even, they took the wives they needed for their own completeness, without this nasty chop-and-change business of divorce. Then why should he not do the same?

He would have all the world against him. But what would it matter, if he were away in the Never-Never, where the world just faded out? Monica could have the chief house. But Mary should have another house, with garden and animals if she wanted them. And she should have her own children: his children. Why should she be only Auntie to Monica’s children? Mary, with her black, glistening eyes and her short, dark, secret body, she was asking for children. She was asking him for his children, really. He knew it, and secretly she knew it; and Aunt Matilda, and even Old George knew it, somewhere in themselves. And Old George was funny. He wouldn’t really have minded an affair between Jack and Mary, provided it had been kept dark. He would even have helped them to it, so long as they would let nothing be known.

But Jack was too wilful and headstrong, and too proud, for an intrigue. An intrigue meant a certain cringing before society, and this he would never do. If

he took Mary, it was because he felt she instinctively belonged to him. Because, in spite of the show she kept up, her womb was asking for him. And he wanted her for himself. He wanted to have her and to answer her. And he would be judged by nobody.

He rose quickly, returning to the house. Mary and the old man were in the kitchen, getting their candles to go to bed.

“Mary,” said Jack, “come out and listen to the night-bird.”

She started slightly, glanced at him, then at Mr. George.

“Go with him a minute, if you want to,” said the old man.

Rather unwillingly she went out of the door with Jack. They crossed the yard in silence, towards the stable. She hesitated outside, in the thin moonlight.

“Come to the stable with me,” he said, his heart beating thick, and his voice strange and low.

“Oh Jack!” she cried, with a funny little lament; “you’re married to Monica! I can’t! You’re Monica’s.”

“Am I?” he said. “Monica’s mine, if you like, but why am I all hers? She’s certainly not all mine. She belongs chiefly to her babies just now. Why shouldn’t she? She’s their red earth. But I’m not going to shut my eyes. Neither am I going to play the mild Saint Joseph. I don’t feel that way. At the present moment I’m not Monica’s, any more than she is mine. So what’s the good of your telling me? I shall love her again, when she is free. Everything in season, even wives. Now I love you again, after having never thought of it for a long while. But it was always slumbering inside me, just as Monica is asleep inside me this minute. The sun goes, and the moon comes. A man isn’t made up of only one thread. What’s the good of keeping your virginity! It’s really mine. Come with me to the stable, and then afterwards come and live in the North-West, in one of my houses, and have your children there, and animals or whatever you want.”

“Oh God!” cried Mary. “You must really be mad. You don’t love me, you can’t, you must love Monica. Oh God, why do you torture me!”

“I don’t torture you. Come to the stable with me. I love you too.”

“But you love Monica.”

“I shall love Monica again; another time. Now I love you. I don’t change. But sometimes it’s one, then the other. Why not?”

“It can’t be! It can’t be!” cried Mary.

“Why not? Come into the stable with me, with me and the horses.”

“Oh don’t torture me! I hate my animal nature. You want to make a slave of me,” she cried blindly.

This struck him silent. Hate her animal nature? What did she mean? Did she mean the passion she had for him? And make a slave of her? How?

“How make a slave of you?” he asked. “What are you now? You are a sad thing as you are. I don’t want to leave you as you are. You are a slave now, to Aunt Matilda and all the conventions. Come with me into the stable.”

“Oh, you are cruel to me! You are wicked! I can’t. You know I can’t.”

“Why can’t you? You can. I am not wicked. To me it doesn’t matter what the world is. You really want me, and nothing but me. It’s only the outside of you that’s afraid. There is nothing to be afraid of, now we have enough money. You will come with me to the North-West, and be my other wife, and have my children, and I shall depend on you as a man has to depend on a woman.”

“How selfish you are! You are as selfish as my father, who betrayed your mother’s sister and left this skull-and-crossbones son,” she cried. “No, it’s dreadful, it’s horrible. In this horrible place, too, proposing such a thing to me. It shows you have no feelings.”

“I don’t care about feelings. They’re what people have because they feel they ought to have them. But I know my own real feelings. I don’t care about your feelings.”

“I know you don’t,” she said. “Good-night!” She turned abruptly and hurried away in the moonlight, escaping to the house.

Jack watched the empty night for some minutes. Then he turned away into the stable.

“That’s that!” he said, seeing his little plans come to nought.

He went into the stable and sat down on his bed, near the horses. How good it was to be with the horses! How good animals were, with no “feelings” and no ideas. They just straight felt what they’ felt, without lies and complications.

Well, so be it! He was surprised. He had not expected Mary to funk the issue, since the issue was clear. What else was the right thing to do? Why, nothing else!

It seemed to him so obvious. Mary obviously wanted him, even more, perhaps, than he wanted her. Because she was only a part thing, by herself. All women were only parts of some whole, when they were by themselves: let them be as clever as they might. They were creatures of earth, and fragments, all of them. All women were only fragments; fragments of matrix at that.

No, he was not wrong, he was right. If the others didn’t agree, they didn’t, that was all. He still was right. He still hated the nauseous one-couple-in-one-cottage domesticity. He hated domesticity altogether. He loathed the thought of being shut up with one woman and a bunch of kids in a house. Several women, several houses, several bunches of kids: it would then be like a perpetual travelling, a camp, not a home. He hated homes. He wanted a camp.

He wanted to pitch his camp in the wilderness: with the faithful Tom, and

Lennie, and his own wives. Wives, not wife. And the horses, and the come-and-go, and the element of wildness. Not to be tamed. His men, men by themselves. And his women never to be tamed. And the wilderness still there. He wanted to go like Abraham under the wild sky, speaking to a fierce wild Lord, and having angels stand in his doorway.

Why not? Even if the whole world said No! Even then, why not?

As for being ridiculous, what was more ridiculous than men wheeling perambulators and living among a mass of furniture in a tight house?

Anyhow it was no good talking to Mary at the moment. She wasn't a piece of the matrix of red earth. She was a piece of the upholstered world. Damn the upholstered world! He would go back to the goldfields, to Tom and Lennie and Monica, back to camp. Back to camp, away from the upholstery.

No, he wasn't a man who had finished when he had got one wife.

And that damned Mary, by the mystery of fate, was linked to him.

And damn her, she preferred to break that link, and turn into an upholstered old maid. Of all the hells!

Then let her marry Blessington and a houseful of furniture. Or else marry Old George, and gas to him while he could hear. She loved gassing. Talk, talk, talk, Jack hated a talking woman. But Mary would rather sit gassing with Old George than be with him, Jack. Of all the surprising hells!

At least Tom wasn't like that. And Monica wasn't. But Monica was wrapped up in her babies, she seemed to swim in a sea of babies, and Jack had to let her be. And she too had a hankering after furniture. He knew she'd be after it, if he didn't prevent her. Well, it was no good preventing people, even from stuffed plush furniture and knick-knacks. But he'd keep the brake on. He would do that.

CHAPTER XXV

TROT, TROT BACK AGAIN

But as he rode back to Perth, with Mary rather stiff and silent, and Mr. George absorbed in his own thoughts; and as they greeted people on the road, and passed by settlements; and as they saw far off the pale-blue sea with a speck of a steamer smoking, and the dim fume of Perth down at sea-level, he thought to himself: "I had better be careful. I had better be wary. The world is cold and cautious, it has cold blood, like ants and centipedes. They, all the men in the world, they hardly want one wife, let alone two. And they would take any excuse to destroy me. They would like to destroy me, because I am not cold and like an ant, as they are. Mary would like me to be killed. Look at her face. She would feel a real deep satisfaction if my horse threw me against those stones and smashed my skull in. She would feel vindicated. And Old George would think it served me right. And practically everybody would be glad. Not Tom and Len. But practically everybody else. Even Monica, though she is my wife. Even she feels a judgment ought to descend upon me. Because I'm not what she wants me to be. Because I'm not as she thinks I ought to be. And because she can't get beyond me. Because something inside her knows she can't get past me. Therefore, in one corner of her she hates me, like a scorpion lurking. If I'm unaware, and put my hand unthinking in that corner, she'll sting me and hope to kill me. How curious it is! And since I have found the gold it is more emphatic than before. As if they grudged me something. As if they grudged me my very being. Because I'm not one of them, and just like they are, they would like me destroyed. It has always been so ever since I was born. My Aunts, my own father. And my mother didn't want me destroyed as they secretly did, but even my mother would not have tried to prevent them from destroying me. Even when they like me, as Old George does, they grudge their own liking, they take it back whenever they can. He defended me over Easu because he thought I was defending Monica, and going the good way of the world. Now he scents that I am going my own way, he feels as if I were a sort of snake that should be put out of existence. That's how Mary feels too: and Mary loves me, if loving counts for anything. Tom and Len don't wish me destroyed. But if they saw the world destroying me they'd acquiesce. Their fondness for me is only passive, not active. I believe, if I ransacked earth and heaven, there's nobody would fight for me as I am, not a soul, except that little Jane of Easu's. The others would fight

like cats and dogs for me as they want me to be. But for me as I am, they think I ought to be destroyed.

“And I, I am a fool, talking to them, giving myself away to them, as to Mary. Why, Mary ought to go down on her knees before the honour, if I want to take her. Instead of which she puffs herself up, and spits venom in my face like a cobra.

“Very well, very well. Soon I can go out of her sight again, for I loathe the sight of her. I can ride down Hay Street without yielding a hair’s breadth to any man or woman on earth. And I can ride out of Perth without leaving a vestige of myself behind, for them to work mischief on.

“God, but it’s a queer thing, to know that they all want to destroy me as I am, even out here in this far-off colony. I thought it was only my Aunts, and my father because of his social position. But it is everybody. Even, passively, my mother, and Tom and Len. Because inside my soul I don’t conform: can’t conform. They would all like to kill the nonconforming me. Which is me myself.

“And at the same time they all love me exceedingly the moment they think I am in line with them. The moment they think I am in line with them, they’re awfully fond of me. Monica, Mary, Old George, even Aunt Matilda, they’re almost all of them in love with me then, and they’d give me anything. If I asked Mary to sin with me as something I shouldn’t do, but I went down on my knees and asked for it, unable to help myself, she’d give in to me like anything. And Monica, if I was willing to be forgiven, would forgive me with unction.

“But since I refuse the sin business, and I never go down on my knees; and since I say that my way is better than theirs, and that I should have my two wives, and both of them know that it is an honour for them to be taken by me, an honour for them to be put into my house and acknowledged there, they would like to kill me. It is I who must grovel, I who must submit to judgment. If I would but submit to their judgment, I could do all the wicked things I like, and they would only love me better. But since I will never submit to them, they would like to destroy me off the face of the earth, like a rattlesnake.

“They shall not do it. But I must be wary. I must not put out my hand to ask them for anything, or they will strike my hand like vipers out of a hole. I must take great care to ask them for nothing, and to take nothing from them. Absolutely I must have nothing from them, not so much as to let them carry the cup of tea for me, unpaid. I must be very careful. I should not have let that brown snake of a Mary see I wanted her. As for Monica, I married her, so that makes them all allow me certain rights, as far as she is concerned. But she has her rights too, and the moment she thinks I trespass on them, she will unsheath her fangs.

“As for me, I refuse their social rights, they can keep them. If they will give me no rights, to the man I am, to me as I am, they shall give me nothing.

“God, what am I going to do? I feel like a man whom the snake-worshipping savages have thrown into one of their snake-pits. All snakes, and if I touch a single one of them, it will bite me. Man or woman, wife or friend, every one of them is ready for me since I am rich. Daniel in the den of lions was a comfortable man in comparison. These are all silent, damp, creeping snakes, like that yellow-faced Mary there, and that little whip-snake of a Monica, whom I have loved. ‘Now they bite me where I most have sinned,’ says old Don Rodrigo, when the snakes of the Inferno bite him. So they shall not bite me. God in heaven, no, so they, shall not bite me. Snakes they are, and the world is a snake-pit into which one is thrown. But still they shall not bite me. As sure as God is God, they shall not bite me. I will crush their heads rather.

“Why did I want that Mary? How unspeakably repulsive she is to me now! Why did I ever want Monica so badly? God, I shall never want her again. They shall not bite me as they bit Don Rodrigo, or Don Juan. My name is John, but I am no Don. God forbid that I should take a title from them.

“And the soft, good Tom and Lennie, they shall live their lives, but not with my life.

“Am I not a fool! Am I not a pure crystal of a fool! I thought they would love me for what I am, for the man I am, and they only love me for the me as they want me to be. They only love me because they get themselves glorified out of me.

“I thought at least they would give me a certain reverence, because I am myself and because I am different, in the name of the Lord. But they have all got their fangs full and surcharged with insult, to vent it on me the moment I stretch out my hand.

“I thought they would know the Lord was with me, and a certain new thing with me on the face of the earth. But if they know the Lord is with me, it is only so that they can intensify and concentrate their poison, to drive Him out again. And if they guess a new thing in me, on the face of the earth, it only makes them churn their bile and secrete their malice into a poison that would corrode the face of the Lord.

“Lord! Lord! That I should ever have wanted them, or even wanted to touch them! That ever I should have wanted to come near them, or to let them come near me. Lord, as the only boon, the only blessedness, leave me intact, leave me utterly isolate and out of the reach of all men.

“That I should have wanted! That I should have wanted Monica so badly! Well, I got her, and she saves her fangs in silent readiness for me, for the me as I

am, not the me that is hers. That I should have wanted this Mary, whom I now despise. That I should have thought of a new little world of my own!

“What a fool! To think of Abraham, and the great men in the early days. To think that I could take up land in the North, a big wild stretch of land, and build my house and raise my cattle and live as Abraham lived, at the beginning of time, but myself at another, late beginning. With my wives and the children of my wives, and Tom and Lennie with their families, my right hand and my left hand, and absolutely fearless. And the men I would have work for me, because they were fearless and hated the world. Each one having his share of the cattle, and the horses, at the end of the year. Men ready to fight for me and with me, no matter against what. A little world of my own, in the North-West. And my children growing up like a new race on the face of the earth, with a new creed of courage and sensual pride, and the black wonder of the halls of death ahead, and the call to be lords of death, on earth. With my Lord, as dark as death and splendid with lustrous doom, a sort of spontaneous royalty, for the God of my little world. The spontaneous royalty of the dark Overlord, giving me earth-royalty, like Abraham or Saul, that can't be quenched and that moves on to perfection in death. One's last and perfect lordliness in the halls of death, when slaves have sunk as carrion, and only the serene in pride are left to judge the unborn.

“A little world of my own! As if I could make it with the people that are on earth to-day! No, no, I can do nothing but stand alone. And then, when I die, I shall not drop like carrion on the earth's earth. I shall be a lord of death, and sway the destinies of the life to come.”

CHAPTER XXVI

THE RIDER ON THE RED HORSE

Jack was glad to get away from Perth, to ride out and leave no vestige of his soul behind, for them to work mischief on. He saddled his horse before dawn, and still before sun was up, he was trotting along beside the river. He loved the world, the early morning, the sense of newness. It was natural to him to like the world, the trees, the sky, the animals, and even, in a casual way, people. It was his nature to like the casual people he came across. And, casually, they all liked him. It was only when he approached nearer, into intimacy, that he had a revulsion.

In the casual way of life he was good-humored, and could get on with almost everybody. He took them all at their best, and they responded. For on the whole, people are glad to be taken at their best, on trust.

But when he went further, the thing broke down. Casually, he could get on with anybody. Intimately, he could get on with nobody. In intimate life, he was quiet and unyielding, often oppressive. In the casual way, he was most yielding and agreeable. Therefore it was his friends who suffered most from him.

He knew this. He knew that Monica and Lennie suffered from his aloofness and a certain arrogance, in intimate life. So friendly with everybody, he was. And at the centre, not really friendly even with his wife and his dearest friends. Withheld, unyielding, exacting even in his silence, he kept them in a sort of suspense.

As he rode his bright bay stallion on the soft road, he became aware of this. Perhaps his horse was the only creature with which he had the right relation. He did not love it, but he harmonised with it. As if, between them, they made a sort of centaur. It was not love. It was a sort of understanding in power and mastery and crude life. A harmony even more than an understanding. As if he himself were the breast and arms and head of the ruddy, powerful horse, and it, the flanks and hoofs. Like a centaur. It had a real joy in riding away with him to the bush again. He knew by the uneven, springy dancing. And he had perhaps a greater joy. The animal knew it in the curious pressure of his knees, and the soft rhythm of the bit. Between them, they moved in a sort of triumph.

The red stallion was always glad when Jack rode alone. It did not like company, particularly human company. When Jack rode alone, his horse had a

curious bubbling, exultant movement. When he rode in company, it went in a more suppressed way. And when he stopped to talk to people, in his affable, rather loving manner, the horse became irritable, chafing to go on. He had long ago realised that the bay could not bear it when he reined in and stayed chatting. His voice, in its amiable flow, seemed to irritate the animal. And it did not like Lennie. Lucy, the old mare, loved Lennie. Most horses liked him. But Jack's stallion got a bit wicked, irritable with him.

And when Jack had made a fool of himself, as with Mary, and felt tangled, he always craved to get on his horse Adam, to be put right. He would feel the warm flow of life from the horse mount up him and wash away in its flood the human entanglements in his nerves. And sometimes he would feel guilty towards his horse Adam, as if he had betrayed the natural passion of the horse, giving way to the human travesty.

Now, in the morning before sunrise, with the red horse bubbling with exultance between his knees, his soul turned with a sudden jerk of realisation away from his fellow-men. He really didn't want his fellow-men. He didn't want that amiable casual association with them, which took up so large a part of his life. It was a habit and a bluff on his part. Also it was part of his nature. A certain real amiability in him, and a natural kindly disposition towards his fellow-men combated inside him with a repudiation of the whole trend of modern human life, the emotional, spiritual, ethical, and intellectual trend. Deep inside himself, he fought like a wild-cat against the whole thing. And yet, because of a naturally amiably disposed, even benevolent nature in himself, he took any casual individual into his warmth, and was bosom-friends for the moment. Until, inevitably, after a short time the individual betrayed himself a unit of the universal human trend, and then Jack recoiled in anger and revulsion again.

This was a sort of dilemma. Monica, and Tom, and Lennie, who knew him intimately, knew the absoluteness of his repudiation of mankind and mankind's direction in general. They knew it to their cost, having suffered from it. Therefore the anomaly of his casual intimacies and his casual bosom-friendships was considerably puzzling and annoying to them. He seemed to them false to himself, false to the other thing he was trying to put across. Above all, it seemed false to them, his real, old friends, towards whom he was so silently exacting and overbearing.

This morning, after his fiasco with Mary, he vaguely realised himself. He vaguely realised that he had to make a change. The casual intimacies were really a self-betrayal. But they made his life easy. It was the easiest way for him to encounter people. To suppress for the time being his deepest self, his thoughts, his feelings, his vital repudiation of the way of human life now, and to play at

being really pleasant and ordinary. He liked to think that most people, casually and superficially, were nice. He hated having to withdraw.

But now, after the fiasco with Mary, he realised again his necessity to withdraw. To pass people by. They were all going in the opposite direction to his own. Then he was wrong to rein up and pretend a bosom-friendship for half an hour. As he did so, he was only being borne down stream, in the old, deadly direction, against himself.

Even his horse knew it: even old Adam. He pressed the animal's sides with his legs, and made a silent pact with him: not to make this compromise of amiability and casual friendship, not forever to be reining up and allowing himself to be carried backwards in the weary flood of the old human direction. To forfeit the casual amiabilities, and go his way in silence. To have the courage to turn his face right away from mankind. His soul and his spirit had already turned away. Now he must turn away his face, and see them all no more.

"I never want to see their faces any more," he said aloud to himself. And his horse between his thighs danced and began to canter, as the sun came sparkling up over the horizon. Jack looked into the sun, and knew that he must turn his own face aside forever from the people of his world, not look at them or communicate with them again, not any more. Cover his own face with shadow, and let the world pass on its way, unseen and unseeing.

And he must know as he knew his horse, not face to face, never any more face to face, but communicating as he did with his stallion Adam, from a pressure of the thighs and knees. The arrows of the Archer, who is also a centaur.

Vision is no good. It is no good seeing any more. And words are no good. It is useless to talk. We must communicate with the arrows of sightless, wordless knowledge, as Jack communicated with his horse, by a pressure of the thighs and knees.

The sun had risen gold above the far-off ridge of the bush. Jack drew up at an inn by the side of the road, to eat breakfast. He left his horse at the hitching-post near the door, and went into the bar parlour. There was a smell of mutton chops frying, and he was hungry.

As he sat eating, he heard his horse neighing fiercely. He pricked his ears. Again Adam's powerful neigh, and far off a high answering call of a mare. He went out quickly to the door of the inn. Adam stood by the post, his feet apart, his ears erect, his head high up, looking with flashing eyes back down the road. How beautiful he was! in the newly-risen sun shining bright almost as fire, every fibre of him on the alert, tall and overweening. And down the road, a grey horse, cloud colour, running eagerly forwards, its rider, a young lady, flushing scarlet and trying to hold up her mare. It was no good. The mare's shrill, wild neigh

came answering the stallion's, and the lady rider was powerless to hold her creature back. Strong, like bells in his deep chest, came the stallion's call once more. And lifting her head as she ran on swift, light feet, the mare sang back.

The girl was Hilda Blessington. Jack took his horse and quickly ran him, rearing and flaming, round to the stable. There he shut him up, though his feet were thudding madly on the wooden floor, and his powerful neighing shook the place with a sound like fire.

The grey mare came running straight to the stable, carrying its helpless, scarlet-flushing rider. Jack lifted the girl down, and held the mare. There was a terrific thudding from the stable.

"I'll put her in the paddock, shall I?" said Jack.

"I think you'd better," she said.

He looked uneasily at the stable, whence came a sound of something going smash. The shut-up stallion sounded like an enclosed thunderstorm.

"Shall I put them both in the paddock?" said Jack. "It seems the simplest thing to do."

"Yes," she murmured in confusion. "Perhaps you'd better."

She was rather frightened. The duet of neighing was terrific, like the bells of some wild cathedral going at full clash. The landlord of the inn came running up. Jack was just slipping the mare's saddle off.

"Steady! Steady!" he said. Then to the landlord: "Take her to the paddock and turn her loose. I'm going to turn the horse loose with her."

The landlord dragged the frantic grey animal away, while she screamed and reared and pranced.

Jack ran to the stable door, calling to his horse. He opened carefully. The first thing he saw was the blazing eyes of the stallion. The horse had broken the halter, and had his nose and his wild eyes at the door, prepared to charge. Jack called to him again, and managed to get in front of him and close the door behind him. The animal was listening to two things at once, thinking two things at once. He was quivering in every fibre, in a state almost of madness. Yet he stood quite still while Jack slipped off the loosened saddle.

Then again he began to jump. Already he had smashed in one side of the stall, and had a bleeding fetlock. Jack got hold of the broken halter, and opened the door. The horse, like a great ruddy thunderbolt, sprang out of the stable, jerking Jack with him. The man, with a flying jump, got on the bright, brilliant bare back of the stallion, and clung there as the creature, swerving on powerful haunches past the terrified Hilda, ran with a terrific, splendid neighing towards the paddock, moving rhythmic and handsome.

There was the grey mare at the gate, inside, neighing back, and the landlord

keeping guard. The men had to be very quick, the one to open the gate, the other to slip down.

Jack left the broken halter-rope dangling from his horse's head — it was broken quite short — and went back into the yard.

“What a commotion!” he said laughingly, to the flushed, deeply embarrassed girl. “But you won't mind if your grey mare gets a foal to my horse?”

“Oh no,” she said. “I shall like it.”

“Why not?” said he. “They'll be all right. There's the landlord and another fellow there with them. Will you come in? Have you had breakfast? Come and eat something.”

She went with him into the bar parlour, where he sat down again to eat his half-cold mutton chops. She was silent and embarrassed, but not afraid. The colour still was high in her young, delicate cheeks, but her odd, bright, round, dark-grey eyes were fearless above her fear. She had really a great dread of everything, especially of the social world in which she had been brought up. But her dread had made her fearless. There was something slightly uncanny about her, her quick, rabbit-like alertness and her quick, open defiance, like some unyielding animal. She was more like a hare than a rabbit: like a she-hare that will fight all the cats that are after her young. And she had a great capacity for remaining silent and remote, like a quaint rabbit unmoving in a corner.

“Were you riding this way by accident?” he asked her.

“No,” she said quickly. “I hoped I might see you. Mary said you were leaving early in the morning.”

“Why did you want to see me?” he asked, amused.

“I don't know. But I did.”

“Well, it was a bit of a hubbub,” he laughed.

She glanced at him sharply, warily, on the defensive, and then laughed as well, with a funny little chuckle.

“Why did you leave so suddenly?” she asked.

“No, it wasn't sudden. I'd had enough.”

“Enough of what?”

“Everything.”

“Even of Mary?”

“Chiefly of Mary.”

She eyed him again sharply, wonderingly, searchingly, then again gave her odd little chuckle of a laugh.

“Why 'chiefly of Mary'?” she asked. “I think she's so nice. She'd make me such a good step-mother.”

“Do you want one?” he asked.

“Yes, I do rather. Then my father would want to get rid of me. I should be in the way.”

“And do you want to be got rid of?”

“Yes, I do rather.”

“What for?”

“I want to go right away.”

“Back to England?”

“No. Not that. Never there again. Right away from Perth. Into the unoccupied country. Into the North-West.”

“What for?”

“To get away.”

“What from?”

“Everything. Just everything.”

“But what would you find when you’d got away?”

“I don’t know. I want to try. I want to try.”

She had such an odd, definite decisiveness and self-confidence, he was very much amused. She seemed the queerest, oddest, most isolated bird he had ever come across. Exceedingly well-bred, with all the charm of pure breeding. By nature, timorous like a hare. But now, in her queer state of rebellion, like a hare that is perfectly fearless, and will go its own way in determined singleness.

“You must come and see Monica and me when we move to the North-West. Would you like to?”

“Very much. When will that be?”

“Soon. Before the year is out. Shall I tell Monica you’re coming? She’d be glad of another woman.”

“Are you sure you want me?”

“Quite.”

“Are you sure everybody will want me? I shan’t be in the way? Tell me quite frankly.”

“I’m sure everybody will want you. And you can’t be in the way, you are much too wary.”

“I only seem it.”

“Do come, though.”

“I should love to.”

“Well, do. When could you come?”

“Any time. Tomorrow if you wish. I am quite independent. I have a certain amount of money, from my mother. Not much, but enough for all I want. And I am of age. I am quite free. — And I think if I went, father would marry Mary. I wish he would.”

“Why?”

“Then I should be free.”

“But free what for?”

“Anything. Free to breathe. Free to live. Free not to marry. I know they want to get me married. They’ve got their minds fixed on it. And I’m afraid they’ll force me to do it, and I don’t want it.”

“Marry who?”

“Oh, nobody in particular. Just somebody, don’t you know.”

“And don’t you want to marry?” asked Jack, amused.

“No. No, I don’t. Not any of the people I meet. No! Not that sort of man. No. Never!”

He burst into a laugh, and she, glancing in surprise at his amusement, suddenly chuckled.

“Don’t you like men?” he asked, still laughing.

“No. I don’t. I dislike them very much.”

Her quick, cool, alert manner of statement amused him more than anything.

“Not any men at all?”

“No. Not yet. And I dislike the idea of marriage. I just hate it. I don’t think I’d mind men so much, if it weren’t for marriage in the background. I can’t do with marriage.”

“Might you like men without marriage?” he asked, laughing.

“I don’t know,” she said, with her odd precision. “So far it’s all just impossible. I can’t stand it. All that sort of thing is impossible to me. No, I don’t care for men at all.”

“What sort of thing is just impossible?” he asked.

“Men! Particularly a man. Impossible!”

Jack roared with laughter at her. She seemed rather to like being laughed at. And her odd, cool, precise intensity tickled him to death.

“You want to be virgin in the virgin bush?” he asked.

She glanced at him quickly.

“Something like that,” she said, with her little chuckle. “I think later on, not now, not now — ” she shook her head — “I might like to be a man’s second or third wife: if the other two were living. I would never be the first. Never. You remember you talked about it.”

She looked at him with her round, bright, odd eyes, like an elf or some creature of the border-land, and as he roared with laughter, she smiled quickly and with an odd, mischievous response.

“What you said the other night, when Aunt Matilda was so angry, made me think of it. — She hates you,” she added.

“Who, Aunt Matilda? Good job.”

“Yes, very good job! Don’t you think she’s terrible?”

“I do,” said Jack.

“I’m glad you do. I can’t stand her. I like Mr. George. But I don’t care for it when he seems to like me.”

Jack roared with laughter again, and again, from some odd corner of herself, she smiled.

“Why do you laugh?” she said. But the infection of laughter made her give a little chuckle.

“It’s all such a real joke,” he said.

“It is,” she answered. “Rather a bad joke.”

Slowly he formed a dim idea of her precise life, with a rather tyrannous father who was fond of her in the wrong way, and brothers who had bullied her and jeered at her for her odd ways and appearance, and her slight deafness. The governess who had mis-educated her, the loneliness of the life in London, the aristocratic but rather vindictive society in England, which had persecuted her in a small way, because she was one of the odd border-line people who don’t and can’t, really belong. She kept an odd, bright, amusing spark of revenge twinkling in her all the time. She felt that with Jack she could kindle her spark of revenge into a natural sun. And without any compunction, she came to tell him.

He was tremendously amused. She was a new thing to him. She was one who knew the world, and society, better than he did, and her hatred of it was purer, more twinkling, more relentless in a quiet way. Her way was absolutely relentless, and absolutely quiet. She had gone further along that line than himself. And her fearlessness was of a queer, uncanny quality, hardly human. She was a real border-line being.

“All right,” he said, making a pact with her. “By Christmas we’ll ask you to come and see us in the North-West.”

“By Christmas! It’s a settled thing?” she said, holding up her forefinger with an odd, warning, alert gesture.

“It’s a settled thing,” he replied.

“Splendid!” she answered. “I believe you’ll keep your word.”

“You’ll see I shall.”

She rose. The horses, quieted down, were caught and saddled and brought round. She glanced from her blue-grey mare to his red stallion, and gave her odd, squirrel-like chuckle.

“What a contretemps,” she said. “It’s like the sun mating with the moon.” She gave him a quick, bright, odd glance: some of the coolness of a fairy.

“Is it!” he exclaimed, as he lifted her into the saddle. She was slim and light,

with an odd, remote reserve.

He mounted his horse.

“We go different ways for the moment,” she said.

“Till Christmas,” he answered. “Then the moon will come to the sun, eh? Bring the mare with you. She’ll probably be in foal.”

“I certainly will. Goodbye, till Christmas. Don’t forget. I shall expect you to keep your word.”

“I will keep my word,” he said. “Goodbye till Christmas.”

He rode away, laughing and chuckling to himself. If Mary had been a fiasco, this was a real joke. A real, unexpected joke.

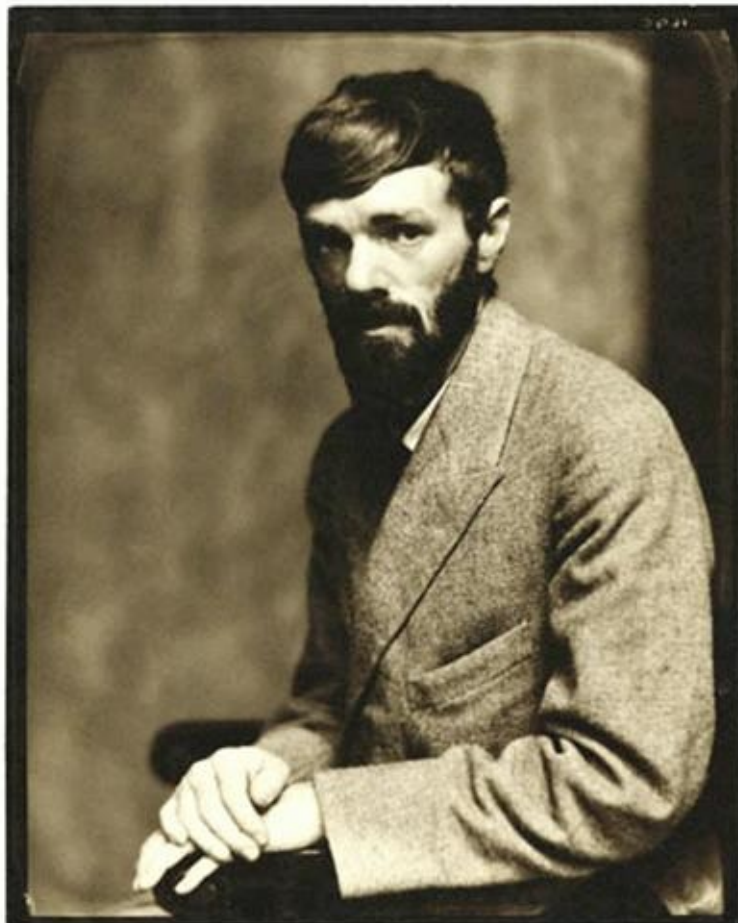
His horse travelled with quick, strong, rhythmic movement, inland, away from the sea. At the last ridge he turned and saw the pale-blue ocean full of light. Then he rode over the crest and down the silent grey bush, in which he had once been lost.

THE END

THE PLUMED SERPENT



First published in 1926, Lawrence began writing *The Plumed Serpent* while living in Taos, New Mexico, two years previously. The original working title was *Quetzalcoatl*, a reference to the cult of the plumed serpent in Mexico. The novel has a contemporary setting during the period of the Mexican Revolution. It opens with a group of tourists visiting a bullfight in Mexico City. One of them, Kate Leslie, departs in disgust and encounters Don Cipriano, a Mexican general. Later she meets his friend, an intellectual landowner Don Ramon, and travels to Sayula, a small town set on a lake. Ramon and Cipriano are leading a revival of a pre-Christian religion and Kate becomes drawn into their cult.



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CHAPTER I

Beginnings of a Bull-fight

It was the Sunday after Easter, and the last bull-fight of the season in Mexico City. Four special bulls had been brought over from Spain for the occasion, since Spanish bulls are more fiery than Mexican. Perhaps it is the altitude, perhaps just the spirit of the western Continent which is to blame for the lack of 'pep', as Owen put it, in the native animal.

Although Owen, who was a great socialist, disapproved of bull-fights, 'We have never seen one. We shall have to go,' he said.

'Oh yes, I think we must see it,' said Kate.

'And it's our last chance,' said Owen.

Away he rushed to the place where they sold tickets, to book seats, and Kate went with him. As she came into the street, her heart sank. It was as if some little person inside her were sulking and resisting. Neither she nor Owen spoke much Spanish, there was a fluster at the ticket place, and an unpleasant individual came forward to talk American for them.

It was obvious they ought to buy tickets for the 'Shade.' But they wanted to economize, and Owen said he preferred to sit among the crowd, therefore, against the resistance of the ticket man and the onlookers, they bought reserved seats in the 'Sun.'

The show was on Sunday afternoon. All the tram-cars and the frightful little Ford omnibuses called camions were labelled Torero, and were surging away towards Chapultepec. Kate felt that sudden dark feeling, that she didn't want to go.

'I'm not very keen on going,' she said to Owen.

'Oh, but why not? I don't believe in them on principle, but we've never seen one, so we shall have to go.'

Owen was an American, Kate was Irish. 'Never having seen one' meant 'having to go.' But it was American logic rather than Irish, and Kate only let herself be overcome.

Villiers of course was keen. But then he too was American, and he too had never seen one, and being younger, more than anybody he had to go.

They got into a Ford taxi and went. The busted car careered away down the wide dismal street of asphalt and stone and Sunday dreariness. Stone buildings

in Mexico have a peculiar hard, dry dreariness.

The taxi drew up in a side street under the big iron scaffolding of the stadium. In the gutters, rather lousy men were selling pulque and sweets, cakes, fruit, and greasy food. Crazy motorcars rushed up and hobbled away. Little soldiers in washed-out cotton uniforms, pinky drab, hung around an entrance. Above all loomed the network iron frame of the huge, ugly stadium.

Kate felt she was going to prison. But Owen excitedly surged to the entrance that corresponded to his ticket. In the depths of him, he too didn't want to go. But he was a born American, and if anything was on show, he had to see it. That was 'Life.'

The man who took the tickets at the entrance, suddenly, as they were passing in, stood in front of Owen, put both his hands on Owen's chest, and pawed down the front of Owen's body. Owen started, bridled, transfixed for a moment. The fellow stood aside. Kate remained petrified.

Then Owen jerked into a smiling composure as the man waved them on. 'Feeling for fire-arms!' he said, rolling his eyes with pleased excitement at Kate.

But she had not got over the shock of horror, fearing the fellow might paw her.

They emerged out of a tunnel in the hollow of the concrete-and-iron amphitheatre. A real gutter-lout came to look at their counterslips, to see which seats they had booked. He jerked his head downwards, and slouched off. Now Kate knew she was in a trap — a big concrete beetle trap.

They dropped down the concrete steps till they were only three tiers from the bottom. That was their row. They were to sit on the concrete, with a loop of thick iron between each numbered seat. This was a reserved place in the 'Sun.'

Kate sat gingerly between her two iron loops, and looked vaguely around.

'I think it's thrilling!' she said.

Like most modern people, she had a will-to-happiness.

'Isn't it thrilling?' cried Owen, whose will-to-happiness was almost a mania. 'Don't you think so, Bud?'

'Why, yes, I think it may be,' said Villiers, non-committal.

But then Villiers was young, he was only over twenty, while Owen was over forty. The younger generation calculates its 'happiness' in a more business-like fashion. Villiers was out after a thrill, but he wasn't going to say he'd got one till he'd got it. Kate and Owen — Kate was also nearly forty — must enthuse a thrill, out of a sort of politeness to the great Show-man, Providence.

'Look here!' said Owen. 'Supposing we try to protect our extremity on this concrete — ' and thoughtfully he folded his rain-coat and laid it along the concrete ledge so that both he and Kate could sit on it.

They sat and gazed around. They were early. Patches of people mottled the concrete slope opposite, like eruptions. The ring just below was vacant, neatly sanded; and above the ring, on the encircling concrete, great advertisements for hats, with a picture of a city-man's straw hat, and advertisements for spectacles, with pairs of spectacles supinely folded, glared and shouted.

'Where is the "Shade" then?' said Owen, twisting his neck.

At the top of the amphitheatre, near the sky, were concrete boxes. This was the 'Shade', where anybody who was anything sat.

'Oh but,' said Kate, 'I don't want to be perched right up there, so far away.'

'Why no!' said Owen. 'We're much better where we are, in our "Sun", which isn't going to shine a great deal after all.'

The sky was cloudy, preparing for the rainy season.

It was nearly three o'clock in the afternoon, and the crowd was filling in, but still only occupied patches of the bare concrete. The lower tiers were reserved, so the bulk of the people sat in the mid-way levels, and gentry like our trio were more or less isolated.

But the audience was already a mob, mostly of fattish town men in black tight suits and little straw hats, and a mixing-in of the dark-faced labourers in big hats. The men in black suits were probably employees and clerks and factory hands. Some had brought their women, in sky-blue chiffon with brown chiffon hats and faces powdered to look like white marshmallows. Some were families with two or three children.

The fun began. The game was to snatch the hard straw hat off some fellow's head, and send it skimming away down the slope of humanity, where some smart boulder down below would catch it and send it skimming across in another direction. There were shouts of jeering pleasure from the mass, which rose almost to a yell as seven straw hats were skimming, meteor-like, at one moment across the slope of people.

'Look at that!' said Owen. 'Isn't that fun!'

'No,' said Kate, her little alter ego speaking out for once, in spite of her will-to-happiness. 'No, I don't like it. I really hate common people.'

As a socialist, Owen disapproved, and as a happy man, he was disconcerted. Because his own real self, as far as he had any left, hated common rowdiness just as much as Kate did.

'It's awfully smart though!' he said, trying to laugh in sympathy with the mob. 'There now, see that!'

'Yes, it's quite smart, but I'm glad it's not my hat,' said Villiers.

'Oh, it's all in the game,' said Owen largely.

But he was uneasy. He was wearing a big straw hat of native make,

conspicuous in the comparative isolation of the lower tiers. After a lot of fidgeting, he took off this hat and put it on his knees. But unfortunately he had a very definitely bald spot on a sunburnt head.

Behind, above, sat a dense patch of people in the unreserved section. Already they were throwing things. Bum! came an orange, aimed at Owen's bald spot, and hitting him on the shoulder. He glared round rather ineffectually through his big shell spectacles.

'I'd keep my hat on if I were you,' said the cold voice of Villiers.

'Yes, I think perhaps it's wiser,' said Owen, with assumed nonchalance, putting on his hat again.

Whereupon a banana skin rattled on Villiers' tidy and ladylike little panama. He glared round coldly, like a bird that would stab with its beak if it got the chance, but which would fly away at the first real menace.

'How I detest them!' said Kate.

A diversion was created by the entrance, opposite, of the military bands, with their silver and brass instruments under their arms. There were three sets. The chief band climbed and sat on the right, in the big bare tract of concrete reserved for the Authorities. These musicians wore dark grey uniforms trimmed with rose colour, and made Kate feel almost reassured, as if it were Italy and not Mexico City. A silver band in pale buff uniforms sat opposite our party, high up across the hollow distance, and still a third 'música' threaded away to the left, on the remote scattered hillside of the amphitheatre. The newspapers had said that the President would attend. But the Presidents are scarce at bull-fights in Mexico, nowadays.

There sat the bands, in as much pomp as they could muster, but they did not begin to play. Great crowds now patched the slopes, but there were still bare tracts, especially in the Authorities' section. Only a little distance above Kate's row was a mass of people, as it were impending; a very uncomfortable sensation.

It was three o'clock, and the crowds had a new diversion. The bands, due to strike up at three, still sat there in lordly fashion, sounding not a note.

'La música! La música!' shouted the mob, with the voice of mob authority. They were the People, and the revolutions had been their revolutions, and they had won them all. The bands were their bands, present for their amusement.

But the bands were military bands, and it was the army which had won all the revolutions. So the revolutions were their revolutions, and they were present for their own glory alone.

Música pagada toca mal tono.

Spasmodically, the insolent yelling of the mob rose and subsided. La música! La música! The shout became brutal and violent. Kate always remembered it. La

música! The band peacocked its nonchalance. The shouting was a great yell: the degenerate mob of Mexico City!

At length, at its own leisure, the bands in grey with dark rose facings struck up: crisp, martial, smart.

‘That’s fine!’ said Owen. ‘But that’s really good! And it’s the first time I’ve heard a good band in Mexico, a band with any backbone.’

The music was smart, but it was brief. The band seemed scarcely to have started, when the piece was over. The musicians took their instruments from their mouths with a gesture of dismissal. They played just to say they’d played, making it as short as possible.

Música pagada toca mal tono.

There was a ragged interval, then the silver band piped up. And at last it was half-past three, or more.

Whereupon, at some given signal, the masses in the middle, unreserved seats suddenly burst and rushed down on to the lowest, reserved seats. It was a crash like a burst reservoir, and the populace in black Sunday suits poured down round and about our astonished, frightened trio. And in two minutes it was over. Without any pushing or shoving. Everybody careful, as far as possible, not to touch anybody else. You don’t elbow your neighbour if he’s got a pistol on his hip and a knife at his belly. So all the seats in the lower tiers filled in one rush, like the flowing of water.

Kate now sat among the crowd. But her seat, fortunately, was above one of the track-ways that went round the arena, so at least she would not have anybody sitting between her knees.

Men went uneasily back and forth along this gangway past the feet, wanting to get in next their friends, but never venturing to ask. Three seats away, on the same row, sat a Polish bolshevist fellow who had met Owen. He leaned over and asked the Mexican next to Owen if he might change seats with him. ‘No,’ said the Mexican. ‘I’ll sit in my own seat.’

‘Muy bien, Señor, muy bien!’ said the Pole.

The show did not begin, and men like lost mongrels still prowled back and forth on the track that was next step down from Kate’s feet. They began to take advantage of the ledge on which rested the feet of our party, to squat there.

Down sat a heavy fellow, plumb between Owen’s knees.

‘I hope they won’t sit on my feet,’ said Kate anxiously.

‘We won’t let them,’ said Villiers, with bird-like decision. ‘Why don’t you shove him off, Owen? Shove him off?’

And Villiers glared at the Mexican fellow ensconced between Owen’s legs. Owen flushed, and laughed uncomfortably. He was not good at shoving people

off. The Mexican began to look round at the three angry white people.

And in another moment, another fat Mexican in a black suit and a little black hat was lowering himself into Villiers' foot-space. But Villiers was too quick for him. He quickly brought his feet together under the man's sinking posterior, so the individual subsided uncomfortably on to a pair of boots, and at the same time felt a hand shoving him quietly but determinedly on the shoulder.

'No!' Villiers was saying in good American. 'This place is for my feet! Get off! You get off!'

And he continued, quietly but very emphatically, to push the Mexican's shoulder, to remove him.

The Mexican half raised himself, and looked round murderously at Villiers. Physical violence was being offered, and the only retort was death. But the young American's face was so cold and abstract, only the eyes showing a primitive, bird-like fire, that the Mexican was nonplussed. And Kate's eyes were blazing with Irish contempt.

The fellow struggled with his Mexican city-bred inferiority complex. He muttered an explanation in Spanish that he was only sitting there for a moment, till he could join his friends — waving a hand towards a lower tier. Villiers did not understand a word, but he reiterated:

'I don't care what it is. This place is for my feet, and you don't sit there.'

Oh, home of liberty! Oh, land of the free! Which of these two men was to win in the struggle for conflicting liberty? Was the fat fellow free to sit between Villiers' feet, or was Villiers free to keep his foot-space?

There are all sorts of inferiority complex, and the city Mexican has a very strong sort, that makes him all the more aggressive, once it is roused. Therefore the intruder lowered his posterior with a heavy, sudden bounce on Villiers' feet, and Villiers, out of very distaste, had had to extricate his feet from such a compression. The young man's face went white at the nostrils, and his eyes took on that bright abstract look of pure democratic anger. He pushed the fat shoulders more decisively, repeating:

'Go away! Go away! You're not to sit there.'

The Mexican, on his own ground, and heavy on his own base, let himself be shoved, oblivious.

'Insolence!' said Kate loudly. 'Insolence!'

She glared at the fat back in the shoddily-fitting black coat, which looked as if a woman dressmaker had made it, with loathing. How could any man's coat-collar look so homemade, so en famille!

Villiers remained with a fixed, abstract look on his thin face, rather like a death's head. All his American will was summoned up, the bald eagle of the

north bristling in every feather. The fellow should not sit there. — But how to remove him?

The young man sat tense with will to annihilate his beetle-like intruder, and Kate used all her Irish malice to help him.

‘Don’t you wonder who was his tailor?’ she asked, with a flicker in her voice.

Villiers looked at the femalish black coat of the Mexican, and made an arch grimace at Kate.

‘I should say he hadn’t one. Perhaps did it himself.’

‘Very likely!’ Kate laughed venomously.

It was too much. The man got up and betook himself, rather diminished, to another spot.

‘Triumph!’ said Kate. ‘Can’t you do the same, Owen?’

Owen laughed uncomfortably, glancing down at the man between his knees as he might glance at a dog with rabies, when it had its back to him.

‘Apparently not yet, unfortunately,’ he said, with some constraint, turning his nose away again from the Mexican, who was using him as a sort of chair-back.

There was an exclamation. Two horsemen in gay uniforms and bearing long staffs had suddenly ridden into the ring. They went round the arena, then took up their posts, sentry-wise, on either side the tunnel entrance through which they had come in.

In marched a little column of four toreadors wearing tight uniforms plastered with silver embroidery. They divided, and marched smartly in opposite directions, two and two, around the ring, till they came to the place facing the section of the Authorities, where they made their salute.

So this was a bull-fight! Kate already felt a chill of disgust.

In the seats of the Authorities were very few people, and certainly no sparkling ladies in high tortoise-shell combs and lace mantillas. A few common-looking people, bourgeois with not much taste, and a couple of officers in uniform. The President had not come.

There was no glamour, no charm. A few commonplace people in an expanse of concrete were the elect, and below, four grotesque and effeminate-looking fellows in tight, ornate clothes were the heroes. With their rather fat posteriors and their squiffs of pigtails and their clean-shaven faces, they looked like eunuchs, or women in tight pants, these precious toreadors.

The last of Kate’s illusions concerning bull-fights came down with a flop. These were the darlings of the mob! These were the gallant toreadors! Gallant? Just about as gallant as assistants in a butcher’s shop. Lady-killers? Ugh!

There was an Ah! of satisfaction from the mob. Into the ring suddenly rushed a smallish, dun-coloured bull with long flourishing horns. He ran out, blindly, as

if from the dark, probably thinking that now he was free. Then he stopped short, seeing he was not free, but surrounded in an unknown way. He was utterly at a loss.

A toreador came forward and switched out a pink cloak like a fan not far from the bull's nose. The bull gave a playful little prance, neat and pretty, and charged mildly on the cloak. The toreador switched the cloak over the animal's head, and the neat little bull trotted on round the ring, looking for a way to get out.

Seeing the wooden barrier around the arena, finding he was able to look over it, he thought he might as well take the leap. So over he went into the corridor or passage-way which circled the ring, and in which stood the servants of the arena.

Just as nimbly, these servants vaulted over the barrier into the arena, that was now bull-less.

The bull in the gangway trotted inquiringly round till he came to an opening on to the arena again. So back he trotted into the ring.

And back into the gangway vaulted the servants, where they stood again to look on.

The bull trotted waveringly and somewhat irritated. The toreadors waved their cloaks at him, and he swerved on. Till his vague course took him to where one of the horsemen with lances sat motionless on his horse.

Instantly, in a pang of alarm, Kate noticed that the horse was thickly blindfolded with a black cloth. Yes, and so was the horse on which sat the other picador.

The bull trotted suspiciously up to the motionless horse bearing the rider with the long pole; a lean old horse that would never move till Doomsday, unless someone shoved it.

O shades of Don Quixote! Oh four Spanish horsemen of the Apocalypse! This was surely one of them.

The picador pulled his feeble horse round slowly, to face the bull, and slowly he leaned forward and shoved his lance-point into the bull's shoulder. The bull, as if the horse were a great wasp that had stung him deep, suddenly lowered his head in a jerk of surprise and lifted his horns straight up into the horse's abdomen. And without more ado, over went horse and rider, like a tottering monument upset.

The rider scrambled from under the horse and went running away with his lance. The old horse, in complete dazed amazement, struggled to rise, as if overcome with dumb incomprehension. And the bull, with a red place on his shoulder welling a trickle of dark blood, stood looking around in equally hopeless amazement.

But the wound was hurting. He saw the queer sight of the horse half reared

from the ground, trying to get to its feet. And he smelled blood and bowels.

So rather vaguely, as if not quite knowing what he ought to do, the bull once more lowered his head and pushed his sharp, flourishing horns in the horse's belly, working them up and down inside there with a sort of vague satisfaction.

Kate had never been taken so completely by surprise in all her life. She had still cherished some idea of a gallant show. And before she knew where she was, she was watching a bull whose shoulders trickled blood goring his horns up and down inside the belly of a prostrate and feebly plunging old horse.

The shock almost overpowered her. She had come for a gallant show. This she had paid to see. Human cowardice and beastliness, a smell of blood, a nauseous whiff of bursten bowels! She turned her face away.

When she looked again, it was to see the horse feebly and dazedly walking out of the ring, with a great ball of its own entrails hanging out of its abdomen and swinging reddish against its own legs as it automatically moved.

And once more, the shock of amazement almost made her lose consciousness. She heard the confused small applause of amusement from the mob. And that Pole, to whom Owen had introduced her, leaned over and said to her, in horrible English:

'Now, Miss Leslie, you are seeing Life! Now you will have something to write about, in your letters to England.'

She looked at his unwholesome face in complete repulsion, and wished Owen would not introduce her to such sordid individuals.

She looked at Owen. His nose had a sharp look, like a little boy who may make himself sick, but who is watching at the shambles with all his eyes, knowing it is forbidden.

Villiers, the younger generation, looked intense and abstract, getting the sensation. He would not even feel sick. He was just getting the thrill of it, without emotion, coldly and scientifically, but very intent.

And Kate felt a real pang of hatred against this Americanism which is coldly and unscrupulously sensational.

'Why doesn't the horse move? Why doesn't it run away from the bull?' she asked in repelled amazement, of Owen.

Owen cleared his throat.

'Didn't you see? It was blindfolded,' he said.

'But can't it smell the bull?' she asked.

'Apparently not. — They bring the old wrecks here to finish them off. — I know it's awful, but it's part of the game.'

How Kate hated phrases like 'part of the game.' What do they mean, anyhow! She felt utterly humiliated, crushed by a sense of human indecency, cowardice of

two-legged humanity. In this 'brave' show she felt nothing but reeking cowardice. Her breeding and her natural pride were outraged.

The ring servants had cleaned away the mess and spread new sand. The toreadors were playing with the bull, unfurling their foolish cloaks at arm's length. And the animal, with the red sore running on his shoulder, foolishly capered and ran from one rag to the other, here and there.

For the first time, a bull seemed to her a fool. She had always been afraid of bulls, fear tempered with reverence of the great Mithraic beast. And now she saw how stupid he was, in spite of his long horns and his massive maleness. Blindly and stupidly he ran at the rag, each time, and the toreadors skipped like fat-hipped girls showing off. Probably it needed skill and courage, but it looked silly.

Blindly and foolishly the bull ran ducking its horns each time at the rag, just because the rag fluttered.

'Run at the men, idiot!' said Kate aloud, in her overwrought impatience. 'Run at the men, not at the cloaks.'

'They never do, isn't it curious!' replied Villiers, with cool scientific interest. 'They say no toreador will face a cow, because a cow always goes for him instead of the cloak. If a bull did that there'd be no bull-fights. Imagine it!'

She was bored now. The nimbleness and the skipping tricks of the toreadors bored her. Even when one of the banderilleros reared himself on tiptoe, his plump posterior much in evidence, and from his erectness pushed two razor-sharp darts with frills at the top into the bull's shoulder, neatly and smartly, Kate felt no admiration. One of the darts fell out, anyway, and the bull ran on with the other swinging and wagging in another bleeding place.

The bull now wanted to get away, really. He leaped the fence again, quickly, into the attendants' gangway. The attendants vaulted over into the arena. The bull trotted in the corridor, then nicely leaped back. The attendants vaulted once more into the corridor. The bull trotted round the arena, ignoring the toreadors, and leaped once more into the gangway. Over vaulted the attendants.

Kate was beginning to be amused, now that the mongrel men were skipping for safety.

The bull was in the ring again, running from cloak to cloak, foolishly. A banderillero was getting ready with two more darts. But at first another picador put nobly forward on his blindfolded old horse. The bull ignored this little lot too, and trotted away again, as if all the time looking for something, excitedly looking for something. He stood still and excitedly pawed the ground, as if he wanted something. A toreador advanced and swung a cloak. Up pranced the bull, tail in air, and with a prancing bound charged — upon the rag, of course. The

toreador skipped round with a ladylike skip, then tripped to another point. Very pretty!

The bull, in the course of his trotting and prancing and pawing, had once more come near the bold picador. The bold picador shoved forward his ancient steed, leaned forwards, and pushed the point of his lance in the bull's shoulder. The bull looked up, irritated and arrested. What the devil!

He saw the horse and rider. The horse stood with that feeble monumentality of a milk horse, patient as if between the shafts, waiting while his master delivered the milk. How strange it must have been to him when the bull, giving a little bound like a dog, ducked its head and dived its horns upwards into his belly, rolling him over with his rider as one might push over a hat-stand.

The bull looked with irritable wonder at the incomprehensible medley of horse and rider kicking on the ground a few yards away from him. He drew near to investigate. The rider scrambled out and bolted. And the toreadors, running up with their cloaks, drew off the bull. He went caracoling round, charging at more silk-lined rags.

Meanwhile an attendant had got the horse on its feet again, and was leading it tottering into the gangway and round to the exit, under the Authorities. The horse crawled slowly. The bull, running from pink cloak to red cloak, rag to rag, and never catching anything, was getting excited, impatient of the rag game. He jumped once more into the gangway and started running, alas, on towards where the wounded horse was still limping its way to the exit.

Kate knew what was coming. Before she could look away, the bull had charged on the limping horse from behind, the attendants had fled, the horse was up-ended absurdly, one of the bull's horns between his hind legs and deep in his inside. Down went the horse, collapsing in front, but his rear was still heaved up, with the bull's horn working vigorously up and down inside him, while he lay on his neck all twisted. And a huge heap of bowels coming out. And a nauseous stench. And the cries of pleased amusement among the crowd.

This pretty event took place on Kate's side of the ring, and not far from where she sat, below her. Most of the people were on their feet craning to look down over the edge to watch the conclusion of this delightful spectacle.

Kate knew if she saw any more she would go into hysterics. She was getting beside herself.

She looked swiftly at Owen, who looked like a guilty boy spellbound.

'I'm going!' she said, rising.

'Going!' he cried, in wonder and dismay, his flushed face and his bald flushed forehead a picture, looking up at her.

But she had already turned, and was hurrying away towards the mouth of the

exit-tunnel.

Owen came running after her, flustered, and drawn in all directions.

‘Really going!’ he said in chagrin, as she came to the high, vaulted exit-tunnel.

‘I must. I’ve got to get out,’ she cried. ‘Don’t you come.’

‘Really!’ he echoed, torn all ways.

The scene was creating a very hostile attitude in the audience. To leave the bull-fight is a national insult.

‘Don’t come! Really! I shall take a tram-car,’ she said hurriedly.

‘Really! Do you think you’ll be all right?’

‘Perfectly. You stay. Good-bye! I can’t smell any more of this stink.’

He turned like Orpheus looking back into hell, and wavering made towards his seat again.

It was not so easy, because many people were now on their feet and crowding to the exit vault. The rain which had sputtered a few drops suddenly fell in a downward splash. People were crowding to shelter; but Owen, unheeding, fought his way back to his seat, and sat in his rain-coat with the rain pouring on his bald head. He was as nearly in hysterics as Kate. But he was convinced that this was life. He was seeing LIFE, and what can an American do more!

‘They might just as well sit and enjoy somebody else’s diarrhoea’ was the thought that passed through Kate’s distracted but still Irish mind.

There she was in the great concrete archway under the stadium, with the lousy press of the audience crowding in after her. Facing outwards, she saw the straight downpour of the rain, and a little beyond, the great wooden gates that opened to the free street. Oh to be out, to be out of this, to be free!

But it was pouring tropical rain. The little shoddy soldiers were pressing back under the brick gateway, for shelter. And the gates were almost shut. Perhaps they would not let her out. Oh horror!

She stood hovering in front of the straight downpour. She would have dashed out, but for the restraining thought of what she would look like when her thin gauze dress was plastered to her body by drenching rain. On the brink she hovered.

Behind her, from the inner end of the stadium tunnel, the people were surging in in waves. She stood horrified and alone, looking always out to freedom. The crowd was in a state of excitement, cut off in its sport, on tenterhooks lest it should miss anything. Thank goodness the bulk stayed near the inner end of the vault. She hovered near the outer end, ready to bolt at any moment.

The rain crashed steadily down.

She waited on the outer verge, as far from the people as possible. Her face had that drawn, blank look of a woman near hysterics. She could not get out of her

eyes the last picture of the horse lying twisted on its neck with its hindquarters hitched up and the horn of the bull goring slowly and rhythmically in its vitals. The horse so utterly passive and grotesque. And all its bowels slipping on to the ground.

But a new terror was the throng inside the tunnel entrance. The big arched place was filling up, but still the crowd did not come very near her. They pressed towards the inner exit.

They were mostly loutish men in city clothes, the mongrel men of a mongrel city. Two men stood making water against the wall, in the interval of their excitement. One father had kindly brought his little boys to the show, and stood in fat, sloppy, paternal benevolence above them. They were pale mites, the elder about ten years old, highly dressed up in Sunday clothes. And badly they needed protecting from that paternal benevolence, for they were oppressed, peaked, and a bit wan from the horrors. To those children at least bull-fights did not come natural, but would be an acquired taste. There were other children, however, and fat mammas in black satin that was greasy and grey at the edges with an overflow of face-powder. These fat mammas had a pleased, excited look in their eyes, almost sexual, and very distasteful in contrast to their soft passive bodies.

Kate shivered a little in her thin frock, for the ponderous rain had a touch of ice. She stared through the curtain of water at the big rickety gates of the enclosure surrounding the amphitheatre, at the midget soldiers cowering in their shoddy, pink-white cotton uniforms, and at the glimpse of the squalid street outside, now running with dirty brown streams. The vendors had all taken refuge, in dirty-white clusters, in the pulque shops, one of which was sinisterly named: A Ver que Sale.

She was afraid more of the repulsiveness than of anything. She had been in many cities of the world, but Mexico had an underlying ugliness, a sort of squalid evil, which made Naples seem debonair in comparison. She was afraid, she dreaded the thought that anything might really touch her in this town, and give her the contagion of its crawling sort of evil. But she knew that the one thing she must do was to keep her head.

A little officer in uniform, wearing a big, pale-blue cape, made his way through the crowd. He was short, dark, and had a little black beard like an imperial. He came through the people from the inner entrance, and cleared his way with a quiet, silent unobtrusiveness, yet with the peculiar heavy Indian momentum. Even touching the crowd delicately with his gloved hand, and murmuring almost inaudibly the Con permiso! formula, he seemed to be keeping himself miles away from contact. He was brave too: because there was just the chance some lout might shoot him because of his uniform. The people knew him

too. Kate could tell that by the flicker of a jeering, self-conscious smile that passed across many faces, and the exclamation: 'General Viedma! Don Cipriano!'

He came towards Kate, saluting and bowing with a brittle shyness.

'I am General Viedma. Did you wish to leave? Let me get you an automobile,' he said, in very English English, that sounded strange from his dark face, and a little stiff on his soft tongue.

His eyes were dark, quick, with the glassy darkness that she found so wearying. But they were tilted up with a curious slant, under arched black brows. It gave him an odd look of detachment, as if he looked at life with raised brows. His manner was superficially assured, underneath perhaps half-savage, shy and farouche, and deprecating.

'Thank you so much,' she said.

He called to a soldier in the gateway.

'I will send you in the automobile of my friend,' he said. 'It will be better than a taxi. You don't like the bull-fight?'

'No! Horrible!' said Kate. 'But do get me a yellow taxi. That is quite safe.'

'Well, the man has gone for the automobile. You are English, yes?'

'Irish,' said Kate.

'Ah Irish!' he replied, with the flicker of a smile.

'You speak English awfully well,' she said.

'Yes! I was educated there. I was in England seven years.'

'Were you! My name is Mrs Leslie.'

'Ah Leslie! I knew James Leslie in Oxford. He was killed in the war.'

'Yes. That was my husband's brother.'

'Oh really!'

'How small the world is!' said Kate.

'Yes indeed!' said the General.

There was a pause.

'And the gentlemen who are with you, they are — ?'

'American,' said Kate.

'Ah Americans! Ah yes!'

'The older one is my cousin — Owen Rhys.'

'Owen Rhys! Ah yes! I think I saw in the newspaper you were here in town — visiting Mexico.'

He spoke in a peculiar quiet voice, rather suppressed, and his quick eyes glanced at her, and at his surroundings, like those of a man perpetually suspecting an ambush. But his face had a certain silent hostility, under his kindness. He was saving his nation's reputation.

‘They did put in a not very complimentary note,’ said Kate. ‘I think they don’t like it that we stay in the Hotel San Remo. It is too poor and foreign. But we are none of us rich, and we like it better than those other places.’

‘The Hotel San Remo? Where is that?’

‘In the Avenida del Peru. Won’t you come and see us there, and meet my cousin and Mr Thompson?’

‘Thank you! Thank you! I hardly ever go out. But I will call if I may, and then perhaps you will all come to see me at the house of my friend, Señor Ramón Carrasco.’

‘We should like to,’ said Kate.

‘Very well. And shall I call, then?’

She told him a time, and added:

‘You mustn’t be surprised at the hotel. It is small, and nearly all Italians. But we tried some of the big ones, and there is such a feeling of lowness about them, awful! I can’t stand the feeling of prostitution. And then the cheap insolence of the servants. No, my little San Remo may be rough, but it’s kindly and human, and it’s not rotten. It is like Italy as I always knew it, decent, and with a bit of human generosity. I do think Mexico City is evil, underneath.’

‘Well,’ he said, ‘the hotels are bad. It is unfortunate, but the foreigners seem to make the Mexicans worse than they are naturally. And Mexico, or something in it, certainly makes the foreigners worse than they are at home.’

He spoke with a certain bitterness.

‘Perhaps we should all stay away,’ she said.

‘Perhaps!’ he said, lifting his shoulders a little. ‘But I don’t think so.’

He relapsed into a slightly blank silence. Peculiar how his feelings flushed over him, anger, diffidence, wistfulness, assurance, and an anger again, all in little flushes, and somewhat naïve.

‘It doesn’t rain so much,’ said Kate. ‘When will the car come?’

‘It is here now. It has been waiting some time,’ he replied.

‘Then I’ll go,’ she said.

‘Well,’ he replied, looking at the sky. ‘It is still raining, and your dress is very thin. You must take my cloak.’

‘Oh!’ she said, shrinking, ‘it is only two yards.’

‘It is still raining fairly fast. Better either wait, or let me lend you my cloak.’

He swung out of his cloak with a quick little movement, and held it up to her. Almost without realizing, she turned her shoulders to him and he put the cape on her. She caught it round her, and ran out to the gate, as if escaping. He followed, with a light yet military stride. The soldiers saluted rather slovenly, and he responded briefly.

A not very new Fiat stood at the gate, with a chauffeur in a short red-and-black check coat. The chauffeur opened the door. Kate slipped off the cloak as she got in, and handed it back. He stood with it over his arm.

‘Good-bye!’ she said. ‘Thank you ever so much. And we shall see you on Tuesday. Do put your cape on.’

‘On Tuesday, yes. Hotel San Remo. Calle de Peru,’ he added to the chauffeur. Then turning again to Kate: ‘The hotel, no?’

‘Yes,’ she said, and instantly changed. ‘No, take me to Sanborn’s, where I can sit in a corner and drink tea to comfort me.’

‘To comfort you after the bull-fight?’ he said, with another quick smile. ‘To Sanborn’s, Gonzalez.’

He saluted and bowed and closed the door. The car started.

Kate sat back, breathing relief. Relief to get away from that beastly place. Relief even to get away from that nice man. He was awfully nice. But he made her feel she wanted to get away from him too. There was that heavy, black Mexican fatality about him, that put a burden on her. His quietness, and his peculiar assurance, almost aggressive; and at the same time, a nervousness, an uncertainty. His heavy sort of gloom, and yet his quick, naïve, childish smile. Those black eyes, like black jewels, that you couldn’t look into, and which were so watchful; yet which, perhaps, were waiting for some sign of recognition and of warmth! Perhaps!

She felt again, as she felt before, that Mexico lay in her destiny almost as a doom. Something so heavy, so oppressive, like the folds of some huge serpent that seemed as if it could hardly raise itself.

She was glad to get to her corner in the tea-house, to feel herself in the cosmopolitan world once more, to drink her tea and eat strawberry shortcake and try to forget.

CHAPTER II

Tea-party in Tlacolula

Owen came back to the hotel at about half-past six, tired, excited, a little guilty, and a good deal distressed at having let Kate go alone. And now the whole thing was over, rather dreary in spirit.

‘Oh, how did you get on?’ he cried, the moment he saw her, afraid almost like a boy of his own sin of omission.

‘I got on perfectly. Went to Sanborn’s for tea, and had strawberry shortcake — so good!’

‘Oh, good for you!’ he laughed in relief. ‘Then you weren’t too much overcome! I’m so glad. I had such awful qualms after I’d let you go. Imagined all the things that are supposed to happen in Mexico — chauffeur driving away with you into some horrible remote region, and robbing you and all that — but then I knew really you’d be all right. Oh, the time I had — the rain! — and the people throwing things at my bald patch — and those horses — wasn’t that horrible? — I wonder I’m still alive.’ And he laughed with tired excitement, putting his hand over his stomach and rolling his eyes.

‘Aren’t you drenched?’ she said.

‘Drenched!’ he replied. ‘Or at least I was. I’ve dried off quite a lot. My rain-coat is no good — I don’t know why I don’t buy another. Oh, but what a time! The rain streaming on my bald head, and the crowd behind throwing oranges at it. Then simply gored in my inside about letting you go alone. Yet it was the only bullfight I shall ever see. I came then before it was over. Bud wouldn’t come. I suppose he’s still there.’

‘Was it as awful as the beginning?’ she asked.

‘No! No! It wasn’t. The first was worst — that horse-shambles. Oh, they killed two more horses. And five bulls! Yes, a regular butchery. But some of it was very neat work; those toreadors did some very pretty feats. One stood on his cloak while a bull charged him.’

‘I think,’ interrupted Kate, ‘if I knew that some of those toreadors were going to be tossed by the bull, I’d go to see another bullfight. Ugh, how I detest them! The longer I live the more loathsome the human species becomes to me. How much nicer the bulls are!’

‘Oh, quite!’ said Owen vaguely. ‘Exactly. But still there was some very skilful

work, very pretty. Really very plucky.'

'Yah!' snarled Kate. 'Plucky! They with all their knives and their spears and cloaks and darts — and they know just how a bull will behave. It's just a performance of human beings torturing animals, with those common fellows showing off, how smart they are at hurting a bull. Dirty little boys maiming flies — that's what they are. Only grown-up, they are bastards, not boys. Oh, I wish I could be a bull, just for five minutes. Bastard, that's what I call it!'

'Well!' laughed Owen uneasily, 'it is rather.'

'Call that manliness!' cried Kate. 'Then thank God a million times that I'm a woman, and know poltroonery and dirty-mindedness when I see it.'

Again Owen laughed uncomfortably.

'Go upstairs and change,' she said. 'You'll die.'

'I think I'd better. I feel I might die any minute, as a matter of fact. Well, till dinner then. I'll tap at your door in half an hour.'

Kate sat trying to sew, but her hand trembled. She could not get the bull-ring out of her mind, and something felt damaged in her inside.

She straightened herself, and sighed. She was really very angry, too, with Owen. He was naturally so sensitive, and so kind. But he had the insidious modern disease of tolerance. He must tolerate everything, even a thing that revolted him. He would call it Life! He would feel he had lived this afternoon. Greedy even for the most sordid sensations.

Whereas she felt as if she had eaten something which was giving her ptomaine poisoning. If that was life!

Ah men, men! They all had this soft rottenness of the soul, a strange perversity which made even the squalid, repulsive things seem part of life to them. Life! And what is life? A louse lying on its back and kicking? Ugh!

At about seven o'clock Villiers came tapping. He looked wan, peaked, but like a bird that had successfully pecked a bellyful of garbage.

'Oh it was GREAT!' he said, lounging on one hip. 'GREAT! They killed seven BULLS.'

'No calves, unfortunately,' said Kate, suddenly furious again.

He paused to consider the point, then laughed. Her anger was another slight sensational amusement to him.

'No, no calves,' he said. 'The calves have come home to be fattened. But several more horses after you'd gone.'

'I don't want to hear,' she said coldly.

He laughed, feeling rather heroic. After all, one must be able to look on blood and bursten bowels calmly: even with a certain thrill. The young hero! But there were dark rings round his eyes, like a debauch.

‘Oh but!’ he began, making a rather coy face. ‘Don’t you want to hear what I did after! I went to the hotel of the chief toreador, and saw him lying on his bed all dressed up, smoking a fat cigar. Rather like a male Venus who is never undressed. So funny!’

‘Who took you there?’ she said.

‘That Pole, you remember? — and a Spaniard who talked English. The toreador was great, lying on his bed in all his get-up, except his shoes, and quite a crowd of men going over it all again — wawawawawa! — you never heard such a row!’

‘Aren’t you wet?’ said Kate.

‘No, not at all. I’m perfectly dry. You see I had my coat. Only my head, of course. My poor hair was all streaked down my face like streaks of dye.’ He wiped his thin hair across his head with rather self-conscious humour. ‘Hasn’t Owen come in?’ he asked.

‘Yes, he’s changing.’

‘Well I’ll go up. I suppose it’s nearly supper time. Oh yes, it’s after!’ At which discovery he brightened as if he’d received a gift.

‘Oh by the way, how did you get on? Rather mean of us to let you go all alone like that,’ he said, as he hung poised in the open doorway.

‘Not at all,’ she said. ‘You wanted to stay. And I can look after myself, at my time of life.’

‘We-ell!’ he said, with an American drawl. ‘Maybe you can!’ Then he gave a little laugh. ‘But you should have seen all those men rehearsing in that bedroom, throwing their arms about, and the toreador lying on the bed like Venus with a fat cigar, listening to her lovers.’

‘I’m glad I didn’t,’ said Kate.

Villiers disappeared with a wicked little laugh. And as she sat her hands trembled with outrage and passion. A-moral! How could one be a-moral, or non-moral, when one’s soul was revolted! How could one be like these Americans, picking over the garbage of sensations, and gobbling it up like carrion birds! At the moment, both Owen and Villiers seemed to her like carrion birds, repulsive.

She felt, moreover, that they both hated her first because she was a woman. It was all right so long as she fell in with them in every way. But the moment she stood out against them in the least, they hated her mechanically for the very fact that she was a woman. They hated her womanness.

And in this Mexico, with its great under-drift of squalor and heavy reptile-like evil, it was hard for her to bear up.

She was really fond of Owen. But how could she respect him? So empty, and

waiting for circumstance to fill him up. Swept with an American despair of having lived in vain, or of not having really lived. Having missed something. Which fearful misgiving would make him rush like mechanical steel filings to a magnet, towards any crowd in the street. And then all his poetry and philosophy gone with the cigarette-end he threw away, he would stand craning his neck in one more frantic effort to see — just to see. Whatever it was, he must see it. Or he might miss something. And then, after he'd seen an old ragged woman run over by a motor-car and bleeding on the floor, he'd come back to Kate pale at the gills, sick, bewildered, daunted, and yet, yes, glad he'd seen it. It was Life!

'Well,' said Kate, 'I always thank God I'm not Argus. Two eyes are often two too many for me, in all the horrors. I don't feed myself on street-accidents.'

At dinner they tried to talk of pleasanter things than bullfights. Villiers was neat and tidy and very nicely mannered, but she knew he was keeping a little mocking laugh up his sleeve, because she could not stomach the afternoon's garbage. He himself had black rings under his eyes, but that was because he had 'lived.'

The climax came with the dessert. In walked the Pole and that Spaniard who spoke American. The Pole was unhealthy and unclean-looking. She heard him saying to Owen, who of course had risen with automatic cordiality:

'We thought we'd come here to dinner. Well, how are you?'

Kate's skin was already goose-flesh. But the next instant she heard that dingy voice, that spoke so many languages dingily, assailing her with familiarity:

'Ah, Miss Leslie, you missed the best part of it. You missed all the fun! Oh, I say —'

Rage flew into her heart and fire into her eyes. She got up suddenly from her chair, and faced the fellow behind her.

'Thank you!' she said. 'I don't want to hear. I don't want you to speak to me. I don't want to know you.'

She looked at him once, then turned her back, sat down again, and took a pitahaya from the fruit plate.

The fellow went green, and stood a moment speechless.

'Oh, all right!' he said mechanically, turning away to the Spaniard who spoke American.

'Well — see you later!' said Owen rather hurriedly, and he went back to his seat at Kate's table.

The two strange fellows sat at another table. Kate ate her cactus fruit in silence, and waited for her coffee. By this time she was not so angry, she was quite calm. And even Villiers hid his joy in a new sensation under a manner of complete quiet composure.

When coffee came she looked at the two men at the other table, and at the two men at her own table.

‘I’ve had enough of canaille, of any sort,’ she said.

‘Oh, I understand, perfectly,’ said Owen.

After dinner, she went to her room, and through the night she could not sleep, but lay listening to the noises of Mexico City, then to the silence and the strange, grisly fear that so often creeps out on to the darkness of a Mexican night. Away inside her, she loathed Mexico City. She even feared it. In the daytime it had a certain spell — but at night, the underneath grisliness and evil came forth.

In the morning Owen also announced that he had not slept at all.

‘Oh, I never slept so well since I was in Mexico,’ said Villiers, with a triumphant look of a bird that has just pecked a good morsel from the garbage-heap.

‘Look at the frail aesthetic youth!’ said Owen, in a hollow voice.

‘His frailty and his aestheticism are both bad signs, to me,’ said Kate ominously.

‘And the youth. Surely that’s another!’ said Owen, with a dead laugh.

But Villiers only gave a little snort of cold, pleased amusement.

Someone was calling Miss Leslie on the telephone, said the Mexican chambermaid. It was the only person Kate knew in the capital — or in the Distrito Federal — a Mrs Norris, widow of an English ambassador of thirty years ago. She had a big, ponderous old house out in the village of Tlacolula.

‘Yes! Yes! This is Mrs Norris. How are you? That’s right, that’s right. Now, Mrs Leslie, won’t you come out to tea this afternoon and see the garden? I wish you would. Two friends are coming in to see me, two Mexicans: Don Ramón Carrasco and General Viedma. They are both charming men, and Don Ramón is a great scholar. I assure you, they are both entirely the exception among Mexicans. Oh, but entirely the exception! So now, my dear Mrs Leslie, won’t you come with your cousin? I wish you would.’

Kate remembered the little General; he was a good deal smaller than herself. She remembered his erect, alert little figure, something birdlike, and the face with eyes slanting under arched eyebrows, and the little black tuft of an imperial on the chin: a face with a peculiar Chinese suggestion, without being Chinese in the least, really. An odd, detached, yet cocky little man, a true little Indian, speaking Oxford English in a rapid, low, musical voice, with extraordinarily gentle intonation. Yet those black, inhuman eyes!

Till this minute she had not really been able to recall him to herself, to get any sharp impression. Now she had it. He was an Indian pure and simple. And in Mexico, she knew, there were more generals than soldiers. There had been three

generals in the Pullman coming down from El Paso, two, more or less educated, in the 'drawing-room', and the third, a real peasant Indian, travelling with a frizzy half-white woman who looked as if she had fallen into a flour-sack, her face was so deep in powder, and her frizzy hair and her brown silk dress so doused with the white dust of it. Neither this 'General' nor this woman had ever been in a Pullman before. But the General was sharper than the woman. He was a tall wiry fellow with a reddened pock-marked face and sharp little black eyes. He followed Owen to the smoking-room, and watched with sharp eyes, to see how everything was done. And soon he knew. And he would wipe his wash-bowl dry as neatly as anybody. There was something of a real man about him. But the poor, half-white woman, when she wanted the ladies' toilet, got lost in the passage and wailed aloud: I don't know where to go! No sé adonde! No sé adonde! — until the General sent the Pullman boy to direct her.

But it had annoyed Kate to see this General and this woman eating chicken and asparagus and jelly in the Pullman, paying fifteen pesos for a rather poor dinner, when for a peso-and-a-half apiece they could have eaten a better meal, and real Mexican, at the meal-stop station. And all the poor, barefoot people clamouring on the platform, while the 'General', who was a man of their own sort, nobly swallowed his asparagus on the other side of the window-pane.

But this is how they save the people, in Mexico and elsewhere. Some tough individual scrambles up out of the squalor and proceeds to save himself. Who pays for the asparagus and jelly and face-powder, nobody asks, because everybody knows.

And so much for Mexican generals: as a rule, a class to be strictly avoided.

Kate was aware of all this. She wasn't much interested in any sort of Mexican in office. There is so much in the world that one wants to avoid, as one wants to avoid the lice that creep on the unwashed crowd.

Being rather late, Owen and Kate bumped out to Tlacolula in a Ford taxi. It was a long way, a long way through the peculiar squalid endings of the town, then along the straight road between trees, into the valley. The sun of April was brilliant, there were piles of cloud about the sky, where the volcanoes would be. The valley stretched away to its sombre, atmospheric hills, in a flat dry bed, parched except where there was some crop being irrigated. The soil seemed strange, dry, blackish, artificially wetted, and old. The trees rose high, and hung bare boughs, or withered shade. The buildings were either new and alien, like the Country Club, or cracked and dilapidated, with all the plaster falling off. The falling of thick plaster from cracked buildings — one could almost hear it!

Yellow tram-cars rushed at express speed away down the fenced-in car-lines, rushing round towards Xochimilco or Tlalpam. The asphalt road ran outside

these lines, and on the asphalt rushed incredibly dilapidated Ford omnibuses, crowded with blank dark natives in dirty cotton clothes and big straw hats. At the far edge of the road, on the dust-tracks under the trees, little donkeys under huge loads loitered towards the city, driven by men with blackened faces and bare, blackened legs. Three-fold went the traffic; the roar of the tram-trains, the clatter of the automobiles, the straggle of asses and of outside-seeming individuals.

Occasional flowers would splash out in colour from a ruin of falling plaster. Occasional women with strong, dark-brown arms would be washing rags in a drain. An occasional horseman would ride across to the herd of motionless black-and-white cattle on the field. Occasional maize-fields were already coming green. And the pillars that mark the water conduits passed one by one.

They went through the tree-filled plaza of Tlacolula, where natives were squatting on the ground, selling fruits or sweets, then down a road between high walls. They pulled up at last at big gate-doors, beyond which was a heavy pink-and-yellow house, and beyond the house, high, dark cypress trees.

In the road two motor-cars were already standing. That meant other visitors. Owen knocked on the studded fortress doors: there was an imbecile barking of dogs. At last a little footman with a little black moustache opened silently.

The square, inner patio, dark, with sun lying on the heavy arches of one side, had pots of red and white flowers, but was ponderous, as if dead for centuries. A certain dead, heavy strength and beauty seemed there, unable to pass away, unable to liberate itself and decompose. There was a stone basin of clear but motionless water, and the heavy reddish-and-yellow arches went round the courtyard with warrior-like fatality, their bases in dark shadow. Dead, massive house of the Conquistadores, with a glimpse of tall-grown garden beyond, and further Aztec cypresses rising to strange dark heights. And dead silence, like the black, porous, absorptive lava rock. Save when the tram-cars battered past outside the solid wall.

Kate went up the jet-like stone staircase, through the leather doors. Mrs Norris came forward on the terrace of the upper patio to receive her guests.

‘I’m so glad, my dear, that you came. I should have rung you up before, but I’ve had such trouble with my heart. And the doctor wanting to send me down to a lower altitude! I said to him, I’ve no patience! If you’re going to cure me, cure me at an altitude of seven thousand feet or else admit your incompetence at once. Ridiculous, this rushing up and down from one altitude to another. I’ve lived at this height all these years. I simply refuse to be bundled down to Cuernavaca or some other place where I don’t want to go. Well, my dear, and how are you?’

Mrs Norris was an elderly woman, rather like a conquistador herself in her black silk dress and her little black shoulder-shawl of fine cashmere, with a short silk fringe, and her ornaments of black enamel. Her face had gone slightly grey, her nose was sharp and dusky, and her voice hammered almost like metal, a slow, distinct, peculiar hard music of its own. She was an archaeologist, and she had studied the Aztec remains so long, that now some of the black-grey look of the lava rock, and some of the experience of the Aztec idols, with sharp nose and slightly prominent eyes and an expression of tomb-like mockery, had passed into her face. A lonely daughter of culture, with a strong mind and a dense will, she had browsed all her life on the hard stones of archaeological remains, and at the same time she had retained a strong sense of humanity, and a slightly fantastic humorous vision of her fellow men.

From the first instant, Kate respected her for her isolation and her dauntlessness. The world is made up of a mass of people and a few individuals. Mrs Norris was one of the few individuals. True, she played her social game all the time. But she was an odd number; and all alone, she could give the even numbers a bad time.

‘But come in. Do come in!’ she said, after keeping her two guests out on the terrace that was lined with black idols and dusty native baskets and shields and arrows and tapa, like a museum.

In the dark sitting-room that opened on to the terrace were visitors: an old man in a black morning coat and white hair and beard, and a woman in black crêpe-de-chine, with the inevitable hat of her sort upon her grey hair: a stiff satin turned up on three sides and with black ospreys underneath. She had the baby face and the faded blue eyes and the middle-west accent inevitable.

‘Judge and Mrs Burlap.’

The third visitor was a youngish man, very correct and not quite sure. He was Major Law, American military attaché at the moment.

The three people eyed the newcomers with cautious suspicion. They might be shady. There are indeed so many shady people in Mexico that it is taken for granted, if you arrive unannounced and unexpected in the capital, that you are probably under an assumed name, and have some dirty game up your sleeve.

‘Been long in Mexico?’ snapped the Judge; the police enquiry had begun.

‘No!’ said Owen, resonantly, his gorge rising. ‘About two weeks.’

‘You are an American?’

‘I,’ said Owen, ‘am American. Mrs Leslie is English — or rather Irish.’

‘Been in the club yet?’

‘No,’ said Owen, ‘I haven’t. American clubs aren’t much in my line. Though Garfield Spence gave me a letter of introduction.’

‘Who? Garfield Spence?’ The judge started as if he had been stung. ‘Why the fellow’s nothing better than a bolshevist. Why he went to Russia!’

‘I should rather like to go to Russia myself,’ said Owen. ‘It is probably the most interesting country in the world to-day.’

‘But weren’t you telling me,’ put in Mrs Norris, in her clear, metal-musical voice, ‘that you loved China so much, Mr Rhys?’

‘I did like China very much,’ said Owen.

‘And I’m sure you made some wonderful collections. Tell me now, what was your particular fancy?’

‘Perhaps, after all,’ said Owen, ‘it was jade.’

‘Ah jade! Yes! Jade! Jade is beautiful! Those wonderful little fairy-lands they carve in jade!’

‘And the stone itself! It was the delicate stone that fascinated me,’ said Owen. ‘The wonderful quality of it!’

‘Ah wonderful, wonderful! Tell me now, dear Mrs Leslie, what you have been doing since I saw you?’

‘We went to a bullfight, and hated it,’ said Kate. ‘At least I did. We sat in the Sun, near the ring, and it was all horrible.’

‘Horrible, I am sure. I never went to a bullfight in Mexico. Only in Spain, where there is wonderful colour. Did you ever try a bullfight, Major?’

‘Yes, I have been several times.’

‘You have! Then you know all about it. And how are you liking Mexico, Mrs Leslie?’

‘Not much,’ said Kate. ‘It strikes me as evil.’

‘It does! It does!’ said Mrs Norris. ‘Ah, if you had known it before! Mexico before the revolution! It was different then. What is the latest news, Major?’

‘About the same,’ said the Major. ‘There is a rumour that the new President will be turned down by the army, a few days before he comes into office. But you never know.’

‘I think it would be a great shame not to let him have a try,’ put in Owen hotly. ‘He seems a sincere man, and just because he is honestly a Labour man, they want to shut him out.’

‘Ah, my dear Mr Rhys, they all talk so nobly beforehand. If only their deeds followed their words, Mexico would be heaven on earth.’

‘Instead of hell on earth,’ snapped the Judge.

A young man and his wife, also Americans, were introduced as Mr and Mrs Henry. The young man was fresh and lively.

‘We were talking about the new President,’ said Mrs. Norris.

‘Well, why not!’ said Mr Henry breezily. ‘I’m just back from Orizaba. And do

you know what they've got pasted up on the walls? — Hosanna! Hosanna! Hosanna! Viva el Jesús Cristo de Mexico, Socrates Tomás Montes!

'Why, did you ever hear of such a thing!' said Mrs. Norris.

'Hosanna! Hosanna! Hosanna! To the new Labour President. I think it's rich,' said Henry.

The Judge stamped his stick on the ground in a speechless access of irritability.

'They pasted on my luggage,' said the Major, 'when I came through Vera Cruz: La degenerada media clasa, Será regenerada, por mi, Montes. The degenerate middle class shall be regenerated by me, Montes.'

'Poor Montes!' said Kate. 'He seems to have got his work cut out.'

'He has indeed!' said Mrs Norris. 'Poor man, I wish he might come in peacefully and put a strong hand on the country. But there's not much hope, I'm afraid.'

There was a silence, during which Kate felt that bitter hopelessness that comes over people who know Mexico well. A bitter barren hopelessness.

'How can a man who comes in on a Labour vote, even a doctored one, put a strong hand on a country!' snapped the Judge. 'Why he came in on the very cry of Down with the strong hand!' And again the old man stamped his stick in an access of extreme irritability.

This was another characteristic of the old residents of the city: A state of intense, though often suppressed irritation, an irritation amounting almost to rabies.

'Oh, but mayn't it be possible that he will change his views a little on coming into power?' said Mrs Norris. 'So many Presidents have done so.'

'I should say very probable, if ever he gets into power,' said young Henry. 'He'll have all his work cut out saving Socrates Tomás, he won't have much time left for saving Mexico.'

'He's a dangerous fellow, and will turn out a scoundrel,' said the Judge.

'Myself,' said Owen, 'as far as I have followed him, I believe he is sincere, and I admire him.'

'I thought it was so nice,' said Kate, 'that they received him in New York with loud music by the Street Sweepers' Band. The Street Sweepers' Band they sent to receive him from the ship!'

'You see,' said the Major, 'no doubt the Labour people themselves wished to send that particular band.'

'But to be President Elect, and to be received by the Street Sweepers' Band!' said Kate. 'No, I can't believe it!'

'Oh, it actually was so,' said the Major. 'But that is Labour hailing Labour,

surely.'

'The latest rumour,' said Henry, 'is that the army will go over en bloc to General Angulo about the twenty-third, a week before the inauguration.'

'But how is it possible?' said Kate, 'when Montes is so popular?'

'Montes popular!' they all cried at once. 'Why!' snapped the Judge, 'he's the most unpopular man in Mexico.'

'Not with the Labour Party!' said Owen, almost at bay.

'The Labour Party!' the Judge fairly spat like a cat. 'There is no such thing. What is the Labour Party in Mexico? A bunch of isolated factory hands here and there, mostly in the State of Vera Cruz. The Labour Party! They've done what they could already. We know them.'

'That's true,' said Henry. 'The Labourites have tried every little game possible. When I was in Orizaba they marched to the Hotel Francia to shoot all the gringos and the Gachupines. The hotel manager had pluck enough to harangue them, and they went off to the next hotel. When the man came out there to talk to them, they shot him before he got a word out. It's funny, really! If you have to go to the Town Hall, and you're dressed in decent clothes, they let you sit on a hard bench for hours. But if a street-sweeper comes in, or a fellow in dirty cotton drawers, it is Buenos dias! Señor! Pase Usted! Quiere Usted algo? — while you sit there waiting their pleasure. Oh, it's quite funny.'

The Judge trembled with irritation like an access of gout. The party sat in gloomy silence, that sense of doom and despair overcoming them as it seems to overcome all people who talk seriously about Mexico. Even Owen was silent. He too had come through Vera Cruz, and had had his fright; the porters had charged him twenty pesos to carry his trunk from the ship to the train. Twenty pesos is ten dollars, for ten minutes' work. And when Owen had seen the man in front of him arrested and actually sent to jail, a Mexican jail at that, for refusing to pay the charge, 'the legal charge', he himself had stumped up without a word.

'I walked into the National Museum the other day,' said the Major quietly. 'Just into that room on the patio where the stones are. It was rather a cold morning, with a Norte blowing. I'd been there about ten minutes when somebody suddenly poked me on the shoulder. I turned round, and it was a lout in tight boots. You spik English? I said yes! Then he motioned me to take my hat off: I'd got to take my hat off. What for? said I, and I turned away and went on looking at their idols and things: ugliest set of stuff in the world, I believe. Then up came the fellow with the attendant — the attendant of course wearing his cap. They began gabbling that this was the National Museum, and I must take off my hat to their national monuments. Imagine it: those dirty stones! I laughed at them and jammed my hat on tighter and walked out. They are really only monkeys

when it comes to nationalism.'

'Exactly!' cried Henry. 'When they forget all about the Patria and Mexico and all that stuff, they're as nice a people as you'd find. But as soon as they get national, they're just monkeys. A man up from Mixcoatl told me a nice story. Mixcoatl is a capital way in the South, and they've got a sort of Labour bureau there. Well, the Indians come in from the hills, as wild as rabbits. And they get them into that bureau, and the Laboristas, the agitator fellows, say to them: Now, Señores, have you anything to report from your native village? Haven't you anything for which you would like redress? Then of course the Indians start complaining about one another, and the Secretary says: Wait a minute, gentlemen! Let me ring up the Governor and report this. So he goes to the telephone and starts ringing: ringing: Ah! Is that the Palace? Is the Governor in? Tell him Señor Fulano wants to speak to him! The Indians sit gaping with open mouths. To them it's a miracle. Ah! Is that you, Governor! Good morning! How are you? Can I have your attention for a moment? Many thanks! Well I've got some gentlemen here down from Apaxtle, in the hills: José Garcia, Jesús Querido, *etc.* — and they wish to report so-and-so. Yes! Yes! That's it! Yes! What? You will see that justice is done and the thing is made right? Ah señor, many thanks! In the name of these gentlemen from the hills, from the village of Apaxtle, many thanks.'

'There sit the Indians staring as if heaven had opened and the Virgin of Guadalupe was standing tiptoe on their chins. And what do you expect? The telephone is a dummy. It isn't connected with anywhere. Isn't that rich? But it's Mexico.'

The moment's fatal pause followed this funny story.

'Oh but!' said Kate, 'it's wicked! It is wicked. I'm sure the Indians would be all right, if they were left alone.'

'Well,' said Mrs Norris, 'Mexico isn't like any other place in the world.'

But she spoke with fear and despair in her voice.

'They seem to want to betray everything,' said Kate. 'They seem to love criminals and ghastly things. They seem to want the ugly things. They seem to want the ugly things to come up to the top. All the foulness that lies at the bottom, they want to stir up to the top. They seem to enjoy it. To enjoy making everything fouler. Isn't it curious!'

'It is curious,' said Mrs Norris.

'But that's what it is,' said the Judge. 'They want to turn the country into one big crime. They don't like anything else. They don't like honesty and decency and cleanliness. They want to foster lies and crime. What they call liberty here is just freedom to commit crime. That's what Labour means, that's what they all

mean. Free crime, nothing else.'

'I wonder all the foreigners don't go away,' said Kate.

'They have their occupations here,' snapped the Judge.

'And the good people are all going away. They have nearly all gone, those that have anything left to go to,' said Mrs Norris. 'Some of us, who have our property here, and who have made our lives here, and who know the country, we stay out of a kind of tenacity. But we know it's hopeless. The more it changes, the worse it is. — Ah, here is Don Ramón and Don Cipriano. So pleased to see you. Let me introduce you.'

Don Ramón Carrasco was a tall, big, handsome man who gave the effect of bigness. He was middle aged, with a large black moustache and large, rather haughty eyes under straight brows. The General was in civilian clothes, looking very small beside the other man, and very smartly built, almost cocky.

'Come,' said Mrs Norris. 'Let us go across and have tea.'

The Major excused himself, and took his departure.

Mrs Norris gathered her little shawl round her shoulders and led through a sombre antechamber to a little terrace, where creepers and flowers bloomed thick on the low walls. There was a bell-flower, red and velvety, like blood that is drying: and clusters of white roses: and tufts of bougainvillea, papery magenta colour.

'How lovely it is here!' said Kate. 'Having the great dark trees beyond.'

But she stood in a kind of dread.

'Yes it is beautiful,' said Mrs Norris, with the gratification of a possessor. 'I have such a time trying to keep these apart.' And going across in her little black shawl, she pushed the bougainvillea away from the rust-scarlet bell-flowers, stroking the little white roses to make them intervene.

'I think the two reds together interesting,' said Owen.

'Do you really!' said Mrs Norris, automatically, paying no heed to such a remark.

The sky was blue overhead, but on the lower horizon was a thick, pearl haze. The clouds had gone.

'One never sees Popocatepetl nor Ixtaccihuatl,' said Kate, disappointed.

'No, not at this season. But look, through the trees there, you see Ajusco!'

Kate looked at the sombre-seeming mountain, between the huge dark trees.

On the low stone parapet were Aztec things, obsidian knives, grimacing squatting idols in black lava, and a queer thickish stone stick, or bâton. Owen was balancing the latter: it felt murderous even to touch.

Kate turned to the General, who was near her, his face expressionless, yet alert.

‘Aztec things oppress me,’ she said.

‘They are oppressive,’ he answered, in his beautiful cultured English, that was nevertheless a tiny bit like a parrot talking.

‘There is no hope in them,’ she said.

‘Perhaps the Aztecs never asked for hope,’ he said, somewhat automatically.

‘Surely it is hope that keeps one going?’ she said.

‘You, maybe. But not the Aztec, nor the Indian to-day.’

He spoke like a man who has something in reserve, who is only half attending to what he hears, and even to his own answer.

‘What do they have, if they don’t have hope?’ she said.

‘They have some other strength, perhaps,’ he said evasively.

‘I would like to give them hope,’ she said. ‘If they had hope, they wouldn’t be so sad, and they would be cleaner, and not have vermin.’

‘That of course would be good,’ he said, with a little smile. ‘But I think they are not so very sad. They laugh a good deal and are gay.’

‘No,’ she said. ‘They oppress me, like a weight on my heart. They make me irritable, and I want to go away.’

‘From Mexico?’

‘Yes. I feel I want to go away from it and never, never see it again. It is so oppressive and gruesome.’

‘Try it a little longer,’ he said. ‘Perhaps you will feel differently. But perhaps not,’ he ended vaguely, driftingly.

She could feel in him a sort of yearning towards her. As if a sort of appeal came to her from him, from his physical heart in his breast. As if the very heart gave out dark rays of seeking and yearning. She glimpsed this now for the first time, quite apart from the talking, and it made her shy.

‘And does everything in Mexico oppress you?’ he added, almost shyly, but with a touch of mockery, looking at her with a troubled naïve face that had its age heavy and resistant beneath the surface.

‘Almost everything!’ she said. ‘It always makes my heart sink. Like the eyes of the men in the big hats — I call them the peons. Their eyes have no middle to them. Those big handsome men, under their big hats, they aren’t really there. They have no centre, no real I. Their middle is a raging black hole, like the middle of a maelstrom.’

She looked with her troubled grey eyes into the black, slanting, watchful, calculating eyes of the small man opposite her. He had a pained expression, puzzled, like a child. And at the same time something obstinate and mature, a demonish maturity, opposing her in an animal way.

‘You mean we aren’t real people, we have nothing of our own, except killing

and death,' he said, quite matter of fact.

'I don't know,' she said, startled by his interpretation. 'I only say how it makes me feel.'

'You are very clever, Mrs Leslie,' came Don Ramón's quiet, but heavy teasing voice behind her. 'It is quite true. Whenever a Mexican cries Viva! he ends up with Muera! When he says Viva! he really means Death for Somebody or Other! I think of all the Mexican revolutions, and I see a skeleton walking ahead of a great number of people, waving a black banner with Viva la Muerte! written in large white letters. Long live Death! Not Viva Cristo Rey! but Viva Muerte Rey! Vamos! Viva!'

Kate looked round. Don Ramón was flashing his knowing brown Spanish eyes, and a little sardonic smile lurked under his moustache. Instantly Kate and he, Europeans in essence, understood one another. He was waving his arm to the last Viva!

'But,' said Kate, 'I don't want to say Viva la Muerte!'

'But when you are real Mexican — ' he said, teasing.

'I never could be,' she said hotly, and he laughed.

'I'm afraid Viva la Muerte! hits the nail on the head,' said Mrs Norris, rather stonily. 'But won't you come to tea! Do!'

She led the way in her black little shawl and neat grey hair, going ahead like a Conquistador herself, and turning to look with her Aztec eyes through her pince-nez, to see if the others were coming.

'We are following,' said Don Ramón in Spanish, teasing her. Stately in his black suit, he walked behind her on the narrow terrace, and Kate followed, with the small, strutting Don Cipriano, also in a black suit, lingering oddly near her.

'Do I call you General or Don Cipriano?' she asked, turning to him.

An amused little smile quickly lit his face, though his eyes did not smile. They looked at her with a black, sharp look.

'As you wish,' he said. 'You know General is a term of disgrace in Mexico. Shall we say Don Cipriano?'

'Yes, I like that much the best,' she said.

And he seemed pleased.

It was a round tea-table, with shiny silver tea-service, and silver kettle with a little flame, and pink and white oleanders. The little neat young footman carried the tea-cups, in white cotton gloves. Mrs Norris poured tea and cut cakes with a heavy hand.

Don Ramón sat on her right hand, the Judge on her left. Kate was between the Judge and Mr Henry. Everybody except Don Ramón and the Judge was a little nervous. Mrs Norris always put her visitors uncomfortably at their ease, as if

they were captives and she the chieftainess who had captured them. She rather enjoyed it, heavily, archaeologically queening at the head of the table. But it was evident that Don Ramón, by far the most impressive person present, liked her. Cipriano, on the other hand, remained mute and disciplined, perfectly familiar with the tea-table routine, superficially quite at ease, but underneath remote and unconnected. He glanced from time to time at Kate.

She was a beautiful woman, in her own unconventional way, and with a certain richness. She was going to be forty next week. Used to all kinds of society, she watched people as one reads the pages of a novel, with a certain disinterested amusement. She was never in any society: too Irish, too wise.

‘But of course nobody lives without hope,’ Mrs Norris was saying banteringly to Don Ramón. ‘If it’s only the hope of a real, to buy a litre of pulque.’

‘Ah, Mrs Norris!’ he replied in his quiet, yet curiously deep voice, like a violoncello: ‘If pulque is the highest happiness!’

‘Then we are fortunate, because a tostón will buy paradise,’ she said.

‘It is a bon mot, Señora mía,’ said Don Ramón, laughing and drinking his tea.

‘Now won’t you try these little native cakes with sesame seeds on them!’ said Mrs Norris to the table at large. ‘My cook makes them, and her national feeling is flattered when anybody likes them. Mrs Leslie, do take one.’

‘I will,’ said Kate. ‘Does one say Open Sesame!’

‘If one wishes,’ said Mrs Norris.

‘Won’t you have one?’ said Kate, handing the plate to Judge Burlap.

‘Don’t want any,’ he snapped, turning his face away as if he had been offered a plate of Mexicans, and leaving Kate with the dish suspended.

Mrs Norris quickly but definitely took the plate, saying:

‘Judge Burlap is afraid of Sesame Seed, he prefers the cave shut.’ And she handed the dish quietly to Cipriano, who was watching the old man’s bad manners with black, snake-like eyes.

‘Did you see that article by Willis Rice Hope, in the Excelsior?’ suddenly snarled the Judge, to his hostess.

‘I did. I thought it very sensible.’

‘The only sensible thing that’s been said about these Agrarian Laws. Sensible! I should think so. Why Rice Hope came to me, and I put him up to a few things. But his article says everything, doesn’t miss an item of importance.’

‘Quite!’ said Mrs Norris, with rather stony attention. ‘If only saying would alter things, Judge Burlap.’

‘Saying the wrong thing has done all the mischief!’ snapped the Judge. ‘Fellows like Garfield Spence coming down here and talking a lot of criminal talk. Why the town’s full of Socialists and Sinvergüenzas from New York.’

Mrs Norris adjusted her pince-nez.

‘Fortunately,’ she said, ‘they don’t come out to Tlacolula, so we needn’t think about them. Mrs Henry, let me give you some more tea.’

‘Do you read Spanish?’ the Judge spat out, at Owen. Owen, in his big shell spectacles, was evidently a red rag to his irritable fellow-countryman.

‘No!’ said Owen, round as a cannon-shot.

Mrs Norris once more adjusted her eye-glasses.

‘It’s such a relief to hear someone who is altogether innocent of Spanish, and altogether unashamed,’ she said. ‘My father had us all speaking four languages by the time we were twelve, and we have none of us ever quite recovered. My stockings were all dyed blue for me before I put my hair up. By the way! How have you been for walking, Judge? You heard of the time I had with my ankle?’

‘Of course we heard!’ cried Mrs Burlap, seeing dry land at last. ‘I’ve been trying so hard to get out to see you, to ask about it. We were so grieved about it.’

‘What happened?’ said Kate.

‘Why I foolishly slipped on a piece of orange peel in town — just at the corner of San Juan de Latrán and Madero. And I fell right down. And of course, the first thing I did when I got up was to push the piece of orange peel into the gutter. And would you believe it, that lot of Mex — ’ she caught herself up — ‘that lot of fellows standing there at the corner laughed heartily at me, when they saw me doing it. They thought it an excellent joke.’

‘Of course they would,’ said the Judge. ‘They were waiting for the next person to come along and fall.’

‘Did nobody help you?’ asked Kate.

‘Oh no! If anyone has an accident in this country, you must never, never help. If you touch them even, you may be arrested for causing the accident.’

‘That’s the law!’ said the Judge. ‘If you touch them before the police arrive, you are arrested for complicity. Let them lie and bleed, is the motto.’

‘Is that true?’ said Kate to Don Ramón.

‘Fairly true,’ he replied. ‘Yes, it is true you must not touch the one who is hurt.’

‘How disgusting!’ said Kate.

‘Disgusting!’ cried the Judge. ‘A great deal is disgusting in this country, as you’ll learn if you stay here long. I nearly lost my life on a banana skin; lay in a darkened room for days, between life and death, and lame for life from it.’

‘How awful!’ said Kate. ‘What did you do when you fell?’

‘What did I do? Just smashed my hip.’

It had truly been a terrible accident, and the man had suffered bitterly.

‘You can hardly blame Mexico for a banana skin,’ said Owen, elated. ‘I fell

on one in Lexington Avenue; but fortunately I only bruised myself on a soft spot.'

'That wasn't your head, was it?' said Mrs Henry.

'No,' laughed Owen. 'The other extreme.'

'We've got to add banana skins to the list of public menaces,' said young Henry. 'I'm an American, and I may any day turn bolshevist, to save my pesos, so I can repeat what I heard a man saying yesterday. He said there are only two great diseases in the world to-day — Bolshevism and Americanism; and Americanism is the worse of the two, because Bolshevism only smashes your house or your business or your skull, but Americanism smashes your soul.'

'Who was he?' snarled the Judge.

'I forget,' said Henry, wickedly.

'One wonders,' said Mrs Norris slowly, 'what he meant by Americanism.'

'He didn't define it,' said Henry. 'Cult of the dollar, I suppose.'

'Well,' said Mrs Norris. 'The cult of the dollar, in my experience, is far more intense in the countries that haven't got the dollar, than in the United States.'

Kate felt that the table was like a steel disc to which they were all, as victims, magnetized and bound.

'Where is your garden, Mrs Norris?' she asked.

They trooped out, gasping with relief, to the terrace. The Judge hobbled behind, and Kate had to linger sympathetically to keep him company.

They were on the little terrace.

'Isn't this strange stuff!' said Kate, picking up one of the Aztec stone knives on the parapet. 'Is it a sort of jade?'

'Jade!' snarled the Judge. 'Jade's green, not black. That's obsidian.'

'Jade can be black,' said Kate. 'I've got a lovely little black tortoise of jade from China.'

'You can't have. Jade's bright green.'

'But there's white jade too. I know there is.'

The Judge was silent from exasperation for a few moments, then he snapped:

'Jade's bright green.'

Owen, who had the ears of a lynx, had heard.

'What's that?' he said.

'Surely there's more than green jade!' said Kate.

'What!' cried Owen. 'More! Why there's every imaginable tint — white, rose, lavender —'

'And black?' said Kate.

'Black? Oh yes, quite common. Why you should see my collection. The most beautiful range of colour! Only green jade! Ha-ha-ha!' — and he laughed a

rather stage laugh.

They had come to the stairs, which were old stone, waxed and polished in some way till they were a glittering black.

‘I’ll catch hold of your arm down here,’ said the Judge to young Henry. ‘This staircase is a death-trap.’

Mrs Norris heard without comment. She only tilted her pince-nez on her sharp nose.

In the archway downstairs, Don Ramón and the General took their leave. The rest trailed on into the garden.

Evening was falling. The garden was drawn up tall, under the huge dark trees on the one side, and the tall, reddish-and-yellow house on the other. It was like being at the bottom of some dusky, flowering garden down in Hades. Hibiscus hung scarlet from the bushes, putting out yellow bristling tongues. Some roses were scattering scentless petals on the twilight, and lonely-looking carnations hung on weak stalks. From a huge dense bush the mysterious white bells of the datura were suspended, large and silent, like the very ghosts of sound. And the datura scent was moving thick and noiseless from the tree, into the little alleys.

Mrs Burlap had hitched herself on to Kate, and from her silly, social baby-face was emitting searching questions.

‘What hotel are you staying at?’

Kate told her.

‘I don’t know it. Where is it?’

‘In the Avenida del Peru. You wouldn’t know it, it is a little Italian hotel.’

‘Are you staying long?’

‘We aren’t certain.’

‘Is Mr Rhys on a newspaper?’

‘No, he’s a poet.’

‘Does he make a living by poetry?’

‘No, he doesn’t try to.’

It was the sort of secret service investigation one is submitted to, in the capital of shady people, particularly shady foreigners.

Mrs Norris was lingering by a flowering arch of little white flowers.

Already a firefly was sparking. It was already night.

‘Well, good-bye, Mrs Norris! Won’t you come and lunch with us? I don’t mean come out to our house. Only let me know, and lunch with me anywhere you like, in town.’

‘Thank you, my dear! Thank you so much! Well! I’ll see!’

Mrs Norris was almost regal, stonily, Aztec-regal.

At last they had all made their adieus, and the great doors were shut behind

them.

‘How did you come out?’ Mrs Burlap asked, impertinent.

‘In an old Ford taxi — but where is it?’ said Kate, peering into the dark. It should have been under the fresno trees opposite, but it wasn’t.

‘What a curious thing!’ said Owen, and he disappeared into the night.

‘Which way do you go?’ said Mrs Burlap.

‘To the Zócalo,’ said Kate.

‘We have to take a tram, the opposite way,’ said the baby-faced, withered woman from the Middle-West.

The Judge was hobbling along the pavement like a cat on hot bricks, to the corner. Across the road stood a group of natives in big hats and white calico clothes, all a little the worse for the pulque they had drunk. Nearer, on this side of the road, stood another little gang, of workmen in town clothes.

‘There you have them,’ said the Judge, flourishing his stick with utter vindictiveness. ‘There’s the two lots of ‘em.’

‘What two lots?’ said Kate, surprised.

‘Those peon fellows and those obreros, all drunk, the lot of them. The lot of them!’ And in a spasm of pure, frustrated hate, he turned his back on her.

At the same time they saw the lights of a tram-car rushing dragon-like up the dark road, between the high wall and the huge trees.

‘Here’s our car!’ said the Judge, beginning to scramble excitedly with his stick.

‘You go the other way,’ flung the baby-faced, faded woman in the three-cornered satin hat, also beginning to fluster as if she were going to swim off the pavement.

The couple clambered avidly into the brightly-lighted car, first class; hobbling up. The natives crowded into the second class.

Away whizzed the tren. The Burlap couple had not even said good night. They were terrified lest they might have to know somebody whom they might not want to know; whom it might not pay to know.

‘You common-place little woman!’ said Kate aloud, looking after the retreating tram-car. ‘You awful ill-bred little pair.’

She was a bit afraid of the natives, not quite sober, who were waiting for the car in the opposite direction. But stronger than her fear was a certain sympathy with these dark-faced silent men in their big straw hats and naïve little cotton blouses. Anyhow they had blood in their veins: they were columns of dark blood.

Whereas the other bloodless, acidulous couple from the Middle-West, with their nasty whiteness . . .!

She thought of the little tale the natives tell. When the Lord was making the first men, He made them of clay and put them into the oven to bake. They came out black. They're baked too much! said the Lord. So He made another batch, and put them in. They came out white. They're baked too little! He said. So He had a third try. These came out a good warm brown. They're just right! said the Lord.

The couple from the Middle-West, that withered baby-face and that limping Judge, they weren't baked. They were hardly baked at all.

Kate looked at the dark faces under the arc-lamp. They frightened her. They were a sort of menace to her. But she felt they were at least baked hot and to a certain satisfactory colour.

The taxi came lurching up, with Owen poking his head out and opening the door.

'I found the man in a pulquería,' he said. 'But I don't think he's quite drunk. Will you risk driving back with him?'

'The pulquería was called La Flor de un Día — the Flower of a Day,' said Owen, with an apprehensive laugh.

Kate hesitated, looking at her man.

'We may as well,' she said.

Away gallivanted the Ford, full speed to Hell.

'Do tell him not so fast,' said Kate.

'I don't know how,' said Owen.

He shouted in good English:

'Hey! chauffeur! Not so fast! Don't drive so fast.'

'No presto. Troppo presto. Va troppo presto!' said Kate.

The man looked at them with black, dilated eyes of fathomless incomprehension. Then he put his foot on the accelerator.

'He's only going faster!' laughed Owen nervously.

'Ah! Let him alone!' said Kate, with utter weariness.

The fellow drove like a devil incarnate, as if he had the devil in his body. But also, he drove with the devil's own nonchalant skill. There was nothing to do but let him rip.

'Wasn't that a ghastly tea-party!' said Owen.

'Ghastly!' said Kate.

CHAPTER III

Fortieth Birthday

Kate woke up one morning, aged forty. She did not hide the fact from herself, but she kept it dark from the others.

It was a blow, really. To be forty! One had to cross a dividing line. On this side there was youth and spontaneity and 'happiness.' On the other side something different: reserve, responsibility, a certain standing back from 'fun.'

She was a widow, and a lonely woman now. Having married young, her two children were grown up. The boy was twenty-one, and her daughter nineteen. They stayed chiefly with their father, from whom she had been divorced ten years before, in order to marry James Joachim Leslie. Now Leslie was dead, and all that half of life was over.

She climbed up to the flat roofs of the hotel. It was a brilliant morning, and for once, under the blue sky of the distance, Popocatepetl stood aloof, a heavy giant presence under heaven, with a cape of snow. And rolling a long dark roll of smoke like a serpent.

Ixtaccihuatl, the White Woman, glittered and seemed near, but the other mountain, Popocatepetl, stood farther back, and in shadow, a pure cone of atmospheric shadow, with glinting flashes of snow. There they were, the two monsters, watching gigantically and terribly over their lofty, bloody cradle of men, the Valley of Mexico. Alien, ponderous, the white-hung mountains seemed to emit a deep purring sound, too deep for the ear to hear, and yet audible on the blood, a sound of dread. There was no soaring or uplift or exaltation, as there is in the snowy mountains of Europe. Rather a ponderous, white-shouldered weight, pressing terribly on the earth, and murmuring like two watchful lions.

Superficially, Mexico might be all right: with its suburbs of villas, its central fine streets, its thousands of motor-cars, its tennis, and its bridge-parties. The sun shone brilliantly every day, and big bright flowers stood out from the trees. It was a holiday.

Until you were alone with it. And then the undertone was like the low, angry, snarling purring of some jaguar spotted with night. There was a ponderous, down-pressing weight upon the spirit: the great folds of the dragon of the Aztecs, the dragon of the Toltecs winding around one and weighing down the soul. And on the bright sunshine was a dark steam of an angry, impotent blood, and the

flowers seemed to have their roots in spilt blood. The spirit of place was cruel, down-dragging, destructive.

Kate could so well understand the Mexican who had said to her: *El grito mexicano es siempre el grito del odio* — The Mexican shout is always a shout of hate. The famous revolutions, as Don Ramón said, began with *Viva!* but ended always with *Muera!* Death to this, death to the other; it was all death! death! death! as insistent as the Aztec sacrifices. Something for ever gruesome and macabre.

Why had she come to this high plateau of death? As a woman, she suffered even more than men suffer: and in the end, practically all men go under. Once, Mexico had had an elaborate ritual of death. Now it has death, ragged, squalid, vulgar, without even the passion of its own mystery.

She sat on a parapet of the old roof. The street beyond was like a black abyss, but around her was the rough glare of uneven flat roofs, with loose telephone wires trailing across, and the sudden, deep, dark wells of the patios, showing flowers blooming in shade.

Just behind was a huge old church, its barrel roof humping up like some crouching animal, and its domes, like bubbles inflated, glittering with yellow tiles, and blue and white tiles, against the intense blue heaven. Quiet native women in long skirts were moving on the roofs, hanging out washing or spreading it on the stones. Chickens perched here and there. An occasional bird soared huge overhead, trailing a shadow. And not far away stood the brownish tower-stumps of the Cathedral, the profound old bell trembling huge and deep, so soft as to be almost inaudible, upon the air.

It ought to have been all gay, allegro, allegretto, in that sparkle of bright air and old roof surfaces. But no! There was the dark undertone, the black, serpent-like fatality all the time.

It was no good Kate's wondering why she had come. Over in England, in Ireland, in Europe, she had heard the *consummatum est* of her own spirit. It was finished, in a kind of death agony. But still this heavy continent of dark-souled death was more than she could bear.

She was forty: the first half of her life was over. The bright page with its flowers and its love and its stations of the Cross ended with a grave. Now she must turn over, and the page was black, black and empty.

The first half of her life had been written on the bright, smooth vellum of hope, with initial letters all gorgeous upon a field of gold. But the glamour had gone from station to station of the Cross, and the last illumination was the tomb.

Now the bright page was turned, and the dark page lay before her. How could one write on a page so profoundly black?

She went down, having promised to go and see the frescoes in the university and schools. Owen and Villiers and a young Mexican were waiting for her. They set off through the busy streets of the town, where automobiles and the little omnibuses called camiones run wild, and where the natives in white cotton clothes and sandals and big hats linger like heavy ghosts in the street, among the bourgeoisie, the young ladies in pale pink crêpe de chine and high heels, the men in little shoes and American straw hats. A continual bustle in the glitter of sunshine.

Crossing the great shadeless plaza in front of the Cathedral, where the tram-cars gather as in a corral, and slide away down their various streets, Kate lingered again to look at the things spread for sale on the pavement: the little toys, the painted gourd-shells, brilliant in a kind of lacquer, the novedades from Germany, the fruits, the flowers. And the natives squatting with their wares, large-limbed, silent, handsome men looking up with their black, centreless eyes, speaking so softly, and lifting with small sensitive brown hands the little toys they had so carefully made and painted. A strange gentle appeal and wistfulness, strange male voices, so deep, yet so quiet and gentle. Or the women, the small quick women in their blue rebozos, looking up quickly with dark eyes, and speaking in their quick, coaxing voices. The man just setting out his oranges, wiping them with a cloth so carefully, almost tenderly, and piling them in bright tiny pyramids, all neat and exquisite. A certain sensitive tenderness of the heavy blood, a certain chirping charm of the bird-like women, so still and tender with a bud-like femininity. And at the same time, the dirty clothes, and the unwashed skin, the lice, and the peculiar hollow glint of the black eyes, at once so fearsome and so appealing.

Kate knew the Italian fruit vendors, vigorously polishing their oranges on their coat-sleeves. Such a contrast, the big, handsome Indian, sitting so soft and as it were lonely by the kerb, softly, lingeringly polishing his yellow oranges to a clean gleam, and lingeringly, delicately arranging the little piles, the pyramids for two or three cents each.

Queer work, for a big, handsome, male-looking man. But they seem to prefer these childish jobs.

The University was a Spanish building that had been done up spick and span, and given over to the young artists to decorate. Since the revolutions, nowhere had authority and tradition been so finally overthrown as in the Mexican fields of science and art. Science and art are the sport of the young. Go ahead, my boys!

The boys had gone ahead. But even then, the one artist of distinction was no longer a boy, and he had served a long apprenticeship in Europe.

Kate had seen the reproductions of some of Ribera's frescoes. Now she went round the patios of the University, looking at the originals. They were interesting: the man knew his craft.

But the impulse was the impulse of the artist's hate. In the many frescoes of the Indians there was sympathy with the Indian, but always from the ideal, social point of view. Never the spontaneous answer of the blood. These flat Indians were symbols in the great script of modern socialism, they were figures of the pathos of the victims of modern industry and capitalism. That was all they were used for: symbols in the weary script of socialism and anarchy.

Kate thought of the man polishing his oranges half-an-hour before: his peculiar beauty, a certain richness of physical being, a ponderous power of blood within him, and a helplessness, a profound unbelief that was fatal and demonish. And all the liberty, all the progress, all the socialism in the world would not help him. Nay, it would only help further to destroy him.

On the corridors of the University, young misses in bobbed hair and boys' jumpers were going around, their chins pushed forward with the characteristic, deliberate youth-and-eagerness of our day. Very much aware of their own youth and eagerness. And very American. Young professors were passing in soft amiability, young and apparently harmless.

The artists were at work on the frescoes, and Kate and Owen were introduced to them. But they were men — or boys — whose very pigments seemed to exist only to *épater le bourgeois*. And Kate was weary of *épatisme*, just as much as of the bourgeoisie. She wasn't interested in *épatant le bourgeois*. The *épateurs* were as boring as the bourgeois, two halves of one dreariness.

The little party passed on to the old Jesuit convent, now used as a secondary school. Here were more frescoes.

But they were by another man. And they were caricatures so crude and so ugly that Kate was merely repelled. They were meant to be shocking, but perhaps the very deliberateness prevents them from being so shocking as they might be. But they were ugly and vulgar. Strident caricatures of the Capitalist and the Church, and of the Rich Woman, and of Mammon painted life-size and as violently as possible, round the patios of the grey old building, where the young people are educated. To anyone with the spark of human balance, the things are a misdemeanour.

'Oh, but how wonderful!' cried Owen.

His susceptibilities were shocked, therefore, as at the bullfight, he was rather pleased. He thought it was novel and stimulating to decorate your public buildings in this way.

The young Mexican who was accompanying the party was a professor in the

University too: a rather short, soft young fellow of twenty-seven or eight, who wrote the inevitable poetry of sentiment, had been in the Government, even as a member of the House of Deputies, and was longing to go to New York. There was something fresh and soft, petulant about him. Kate liked him. He could laugh with real hot young amusement, and he was no fool.

Until it came to these maniacal ideas of socialism, politics, and La Patria. Then he was as mechanical as a mousetrap. Very tedious.

‘Oh no!’ said Kate in front of the caricatures. ‘They are too ugly. They defeat their own ends.’

‘But they are meant to be ugly,’ said young Garcia. ‘They must be ugly, no? Because capitalism is ugly, and Mammon is ugly, and the priest holding his hand to get the money from the poor Indians is ugly. No?’ He laughed rather unpleasantly.

‘But,’ said Kate, ‘these caricatures are too intentional. They are like vulgar abuse, not art at all.’

‘Isn’t that true?’ said Garcia, pointing to a hideous picture of a fat female in a tight short dress, with hips and breasts as protuberances, walking over the faces of the poor.

‘That is how they are, no?’

‘Who is like that?’ said Kate. ‘It bores me. One must keep a certain balance.’

‘Not in Mexico!’ said the young Mexican brightly, his plump cheeks flushing. ‘In Mexico you can’t keep a balance, because things are so bad. In other countries, yes, perhaps you can remain balanced, because things are not so bad as they are here. But here they are so very bad, you can’t be human. You have to be Mexican. You have to be more Mexican than human, no? You can’t do no other. You have to hate the capitalist, you have to, in Mexico, or nobody can live. We can’t live. Nobody can live. If you are Mexican you can’t be human, it is impossible. You have to be a socialist Mexican, or you have to be a capitalist Mexican, and you hate. What else is there to be done? We hate the capitalist because he ruins the country and the people. We must hate him.’

‘But after all,’ said Kate, ‘what about the twelve million poor — mostly Indians — whom Montes talks about? You can’t make them all rich, whatever you do. And they don’t understand the very words, capital and socialism. They are Mexico, really, and nobody ever looks at them, except to make a casus belli of them. Humanly, they never exist for you.’

‘Humanly they can’t exist, they are too ignorant!’ cried Garcia. ‘But when we can kill all the capitalists, then — ’

‘You’ll find somebody killing you,’ said Kate. ‘No, I don’t like it. You aren’t Mexico. You aren’t even Mexican, really. You are just half Spaniards full of

European ideas, and you care for asserting your own ideas and nothing else. You have no real bowels of compassion. You are no good.'

The young man listened with round eyes, going rather yellow in the face. At the end he lifted his shoulders and spread his hands in a pseudo-Mediterranean gesture.

'Well! It may be!' he said, with a certain jeering flippancy. 'Perhaps you know everything. Maybe! Foreigners, they usually know everything about Mexico.' And he ended on a little cackling laugh.

'I know what I feel,' said Kate. 'And now I want a taxi, and I want to go home. I don't want to see any more stupid, ugly pictures.'

Off she drove back to the hotel, once more in a towering rage. She was amazed at herself. Usually she was so good-tempered and easy. But something about this country irritated her and put her into such a violent anger, she felt she would die. Burning, furious rage.

And perhaps, she thought to herself, the white and half-white Mexicans suffered some peculiar reaction in their blood which made them that they too were almost always in a state of suppressed irritation and anger, for which they must find a vent. They must spend their lives in a complicated game of frustration, frustration of life in its ebbing and flowing.

Perhaps something came out of the earth, the dragon of the earth, some effluence, some vibration which militated against the very composition of the blood and nerves in human beings. Perhaps it came from the volcanoes. Or perhaps even from the silent, serpent-like dark resistance of those masses of ponderous natives whose blood was principally the old, heavy, resistant Indian blood.

Who knows? But something there was, and something very potent. Kate lay on her bed and brooded on her own organic rage. There was nothing to be done!

But young Garcia was really nice. He called in the afternoon and sent up his card. Kate, feeling sore, received him unwillingly.

'I came,' he said, with a little stiff dignity, like an ambassador on a mission, 'to tell you that I, too, don't like those caricatures. I, too, don't like them. I don't like the young people, boys and girls, no? — to be seeing them all the time. I, too, don't like. But I think, also, that here in Mexico we can't help it. People are very bad, very greedy, no? — they only want to get money here, and they don't care. So we must hate them. Yes, we must. But I, too, I don't like it.'

He held his hat in his two hands, and twisted his shoulders in a conflict of feelings.

Kate suddenly laughed, and he laughed too, with a certain pain and confusion in his laughter.

‘That’s awfully nice of you to come and say so,’ she said, warming to him.

‘No, not nice,’ he said, frowning. ‘But I don’t know what to do. Perhaps you think I am — different — I am not the thing that I am. And I don’t want it.’

He flushed and was uncomfortable. There was a curious naïve sincerity about him, since he was being sincere. If he had chosen to play a game of sophistication, he could have played it better. But with Kate he wanted to be sincere.

‘I know, really,’ laughed Kate, ‘you feel a good deal like I do about it. I know you only pretend to be fierce and hard.’

‘No!’ he said, suddenly making solemn, flashing eyes. ‘I do also feel fierce. I do hate these men who take, only take everything from Mexico — money, and all — everything!’ He spread his hands with finality. ‘I hate them because I must, no? But also, I am sorry — I am sorry I have to hate so much. Yes, I think I am sorry. I think so.’

He knitted his brows rather tense. And over his plump, young, fresh face was a frown of resentment and hatred, quite sincere too.

Kate could see he wasn’t really sorry. Only the two moods, of natural, soft, sensuous flow, and of heavy resentment and hate, alternated inside him like shadow and shine on a cloudy day, in swift, unavoidable succession. What was nice about him was his simplicity, in spite of the complication of his feelings, and the fact that his resentments were not personal, but beyond persons, even beyond himself.

She went out with him to tea, and while she was out, Don Ramón called and left cards with the corners turned down, and an invitation to dinner for her and Owen. There seemed an almost old-fashioned correctness in those cards.

Looking over the newspaper, she came on an odd little item. She could read Spanish without much difficulty. The trouble lay in talking it, when Italian got in her way and caused a continual stumble. She looked on the English page of the *Excelsior* or the *Universal* for the news — if there was any. Then she looked through the Spanish pages for bits of interest.

This little item was among the Spanish information, and was headed: *The Gods of Antiquity Return to Mexico.*

‘There was a ferment in the village of Sayula, Jalisco, on the Lake of Sayula, owing to an incident of more or less comic nature, yesterday morning towards mid-day. The women who inhabit the shores of the lake are to be seen each day soon after sunrise descending to the water’s edge with large bundles. They kneel on the rocks and stones, and in little groups, like water-fowl, they wash their dirty linen in the soft water of the lake, pausing at times as an old

canoe sails by with large single sail. The scene is little changed since the days of Montezuma, when the natives of the lake worshipped the spirit of the waters, and threw in little images and idols of baked clay, which the lake sometimes returns to the descendants of the dead idolaters, to keep them in mind of practices not yet altogether forgotten.

‘As the hot sun rises in the sky, the women spread their washing on the sand and pebbles of the shore, and retire to the shade of the willow trees that grow so gracefully and retain their verdant hue through the dryest season of the year. While thus reposing after their labours, these humble and superstitious women were astonished to see a man of great stature rise naked from the lake and wade towards the shore. His face, they said, was dark and bearded, but his body shone like gold.

‘As if unaware of any watchful eyes, he advanced calmly and majestically towards the shore. There he stood a moment, and selecting with his eye a pair of the loose cotton pants worn by the peasants in the fields, that was spread whitening in the sun, he stooped and proceeded to cover his nakedness with the said garment.

‘The woman who thus saw her husband’s apparel robbed beneath her eye, rose, calling to the man and summoning the other women. Whereupon the stranger turned his dark face upon them, and said in a quiet voice: “Why are you crying? Be quiet! It will be given back to you. Your gods are ready to return to you. Quetzalcoatl and Tlaloc, the old gods, are minded to come back to you. Be quiet, don’t let them find you crying and complaining. I have come from out of the lake to tell you the gods are coming back to Mexico, they are ready to return to their own home.”

‘Little comforted by this speech, the woman who had lost her washing was overcome and said no more. The stranger then appropriated a cotton blouse, which he donned, and disappeared.

‘After a while, the simple women gathered courage to return to their humble dwellings. The story thus reached the ears of the police, who at once set out to search for the thief.

‘The story, however, is not yet concluded. The husband of the poor woman of the lake-shore, returning from his labours in the field, approached the gates of the village towards sunset, thinking, no doubt, of nothing but repose and the evening meal. A man in a black serape stepped towards him, from the shadows of a broken wall, and asked: Are you afraid to come with me? The labourer, a man of spirit, promptly replied: No, señor! He therefore followed the unknown man through the broken wall and through the bushes of a deserted garden. In a dark room, or cellar, a small light was burning, revealing a great basin of gold,

into which four little men, smaller than children, were pouring sweet-scented water. The astounded peasant was now told to wash and put on clean clothes, to be ready for the return of the gods. He was seated in the golden basin and washed with sweet-smelling soap, while the dwarfs poured water over him. This, they said, is the bath of Quetzalcoatl. The bath of fire is yet to come. They gave him clean clothing of pure white cotton, and a new hat with star embroidery, and sandals with straps of white leather. But beside this, a new blanket, white with bars of blue and black, and flowers like stars at the centre, and two pieces of silver money. Go, he was told. And when they ask you, where did you get your blanket? answer that Quetzalcoatl is young again. The poor fellow went home in sore fear, lest the police should arrest him for possessing stolen goods.

‘The village is full of excitement, and Don Ramón Carrasco, our eminent historian and archaeologist, whose hacienda lies in the vicinity, has announced his intention of proceeding as soon as possible to the spot to examine the origin of this new legend. Meanwhile, the police are watching attentively the development of affairs, without taking any steps for the moment. Indeed, these little fantasies create a pleasant diversion in the regular order of banditry, murder, and outrage, which it is usually our duty to report.’

Kate wondered what was at the back of this: if anything more than a story. Yet, strangely, a different light than the common light seemed to gleam out of the words of even this newspaper paragraph.

She wanted to go to Sayula. She wanted to see the big lake where the gods had once lived, and whence they were due to emerge. Amid all the bitterness that Mexico produced in her spirit, there was still a strange beam of wonder and mystery, almost like hope. A strange darkly-iridescent beam of wonder, of magic.

The name Quetzalcoatl, too, fascinated her. She had read bits about the god. Quetzal is the name of a bird that lives high up in the mists of tropical mountains, and has very beautiful tail-feathers, precious to the Aztecs. Coatl is a serpent. Quetzalcoatl is the Plumed Serpent, so hideous in the fanged, feathered, writhing stone of the National Museum.

But Quetzalcoatl was, she vaguely remembered, a sort of fair-faced bearded god; the wind, the breath of life, the eyes that see and are unseen, like the stars by day. The eyes that watch behind the wind, as the stars beyond the blue of day. And Quetzalcoatl must depart from Mexico to merge again into the deep bath of life. He was old. He had gone eastwards, perhaps into the sea, perhaps he had sailed into heaven, like a meteor returning, from the top of the Volcano of Orizaba: gone back as a peacock streaming into the night, or as a bird of

Paradise, its tail gleaming like the wake of a meteor. Quetzalcoatl! Who knows what he meant to the dead Aztecs, and to the older Indians, who knew him before the Aztecs raised their deity to heights of horror and vindictiveness?

All a confusion of contradictory gleams of meaning, Quetzalcoatl. But why not? Her Irish spirit was weary to death of definite meanings, and a God of one fixed purport. Gods should be iridescent, like the rainbow in the storm. Man creates a God in his own image, and the gods grow old along with the men that made them. But storms sway in heaven, and the god-stuff sways high and angry over our heads. Gods die with men who have conceived them. But the god-stuff roars eternally, like the sea, with too vast a sound to be heard. Like the sea in storm, that beats against the rocks of living, stiffened men, slowly to destroy them. Or like the sea of the glimmering, ethereal plasm of the world, that bathes the feet and the knees of men as earth-sap bathes the roots of trees. Ye must be born again. Even the gods must be born again. We must be born again.

In her vague, woman's way, Kate knew this. She had lived her life. She had had her lovers, her two husbands. She had her children.

Joachim Leslie, her dead husband, she had loved as much as a woman can love a man: that is, to the bounds of human love. Then she had realized that human love has its limits, that there is a beyond. And Joachim dead, willy nilly her spirit had passed the bounds. She was no longer in love with love. She no longer yearned for the love of a man, or the love even of her children. Joachim had gone into eternity in death, and she had crossed with him into a certain eternity in life. There, the yearning for companionship and sympathy and human love had left her. Something infinitely intangible but infinitely blessed took its place: a peace that passes understanding.

At the same time, a wild and angry battle raged between her and the thing that Owen called life: such as the bullfight, the tea-party, the enjoyments; like the arts in their modern aspect of hate effusion. The powerful, degenerate thing called life, wrapping one or other of its tentacles round her.

And then, when she could escape into her true loneliness, the influx of peace and soft, flower-like potency which was beyond understanding. It disappeared even if you thought about it, so delicate, so fine. And yet, the only reality.

Ye must be born again. Out of the fight with the octopus of life, the dragon of degenerate or of incomplete existence, one must win this soft bloom of being, that is damaged by a touch.

No, she no longer wanted love, excitement, and something to fill her life. She was forty, and in the rare, lingering dawn of maturity, the flower of her soul was opening. Above all things, she must preserve herself from worldly contacts. Only she wanted the silence of other unfolded souls around her, like a perfume.

The presence of that which is forever unsaid.

And in the horror and climax of death-rattles, which is Mexico, she thought she could see it in the black eyes of the Indians. She felt that Don Ramón and Don Cipriano both had heard the soundless call, across all the hideous choking.

Perhaps this had brought her to Mexico: away from England and her mother, away from her children, away from everybody. To be alone with the unfolding flower of her own soul, in the delicate, chiming silence that is at the midst of things.

The thing called 'Life' is just a mistake we have made in our own minds. Why persist in the mistake any further?

Owen was the mistake itself: so was Villiers: so was that Mexico City.

She wanted to get out, to disentangle herself again.

They had promised to go out to dinner to the house of Don Ramón. His wife was away in the United States with her two boys, one of whom had been ill, not seriously, at his school in California. But Don Ramón's aunt would be hostess.

The house was out at Tlalpam. It was May, the weather was hot, the rains were not yet started. The shower at the bullfight had been a sort of accident.

'I wonder,' said Owen, 'whether I ought to put on a dinner-coat. Really, I feel humiliated to the earth every time I put on evening dress.'

'Then don't do it!' said Kate, who was impatient of Owen's kicking at these very little social pricks, and swallowing the whole porcupine.

She herself came down in a simple gown with a black velvet top and a loose skirt of delicate brocaded chiffon, of a glimmering green and yellow and black. She also wore a long string of jade and crystal.

It was a gift she had, of looking like an Ossianic goddess, a certain feminine strength and softness glowing in the very material of her dress. But she was never 'smart.'

'Why you're dressed up to the eyes!' cried Owen in chagrin, pulling at his soft collar. 'Bare shoulders notwithstanding!'

They went out to the distant suburb in the tram-car, swift in the night, with big clear stars overhead, dropping and hanging with a certain gleam of menace. In Tlalpam there was a heavy scent of nightflowers, a feeling of ponderous darkness, with a few sparks of intermittent fireflies. And always the heavy calling of nightflower scents. To Kate, there seemed a faint whiff of blood in all tropical-scented flowers: of blood or sweat.

It was a hot night. They banged on the iron doors of the entrance, dogs barked, and a mozo opened to them, warily, closing fast again the moment they had entered the dark garden of trees.

Don Ramón was in white, a white dinner-jacket: Don Cipriano the same. But

there were other guests, young Garcia, another pale young man called Mirabal, and an elderly man in a black cravat, named Toussaint. The only other woman was Doña Isabel, aunt to Don Ramón. She wore a black dress with a high collar of black lace, and some strings of pearls, and seemed shy, frightened, absent as a nun before all these men. But to Kate she was very kind, caressive, speaking English in a plaintive faded voice. This dinner was a sort of ordeal and ritual combined, to the cloistered, elderly soul.

But it was soon evident that she was trembling with fearful joy. She adored Ramón with an uncritical, nun-like adoration. It was obvious she hardly heard the things that were said. Words skimmed the surface of her consciousness without ever penetrating. Underneath, she was trembling in nun-like awareness of so many men, and in almost sacred excitement at facing Don Ramón as hostess.

The house was a fairly large villa, quietly and simply furnished, with natural taste.

‘Do you always live here?’ said Kate to Don Ramón. ‘Never at your hacienda?’

‘How do you know I have a hacienda?’ he asked.

‘I saw it in a newspaper — near Sayula.’

‘Ah!’ he said, laughing at her with his eyes. ‘You saw about the returning of the Gods of Antiquity.’

‘Yes,’ she said. ‘Don’t you think it is interesting?’

‘I think so,’ he said.

‘I love the word Quetzalcoatl.’

‘The word!’ he repeated.

His eyes laughed at her teasingly all the time.

‘What do you think, Mrs Leslie,’ cried the pale-faced young Mirabal, in curiously resonant English, with a French accent. ‘Don’t you think it would be wonderful if the gods came back to Mexico? our own gods?’ He sat in intense expectation, his blue eyes fixed on Kate’s face, his soup-spoon suspended.

Kate’s face was baffled with incomprehension.

‘Not those Aztec horrors!’ she said.

‘The Aztec horrors! The Aztec horrors! Well, perhaps they were not so horrible after all. But if they were, it was because the Aztecs were all tied up. They were in a cul de sac, so they saw nothing but death. Don’t you think so?’

‘I don’t know enough!’ said Kate.

‘Nobody knows any more. But if you like the word Quetzalcoatl, don’t you think it would be wonderful if he came back again? Ah, the names of the gods! Don’t you think the names are like seeds, so full of magic, of the unexplored

magic? Huitzilopochtli! — how wonderful! And Tlaloc! Ah! I love them! I say them over and over, like they say Mani padma Om! in Tibet. I believe in the fertility of sound. Itzpapalotl — the Obsidian Butterfly! Itzpapalotl! But say it, and you will see it does good to your soul. Itzpapalotl! Tezcatlipocá! They were old when the Spaniards came, they needed the bath of life again. But now, rebathed in youth, how wonderful they must be! Think of Jehovah! Jehovah! Think of Jesus Christ! How thin and poor they sound! Or Jesús Cristo! They are dead names, all the life withered out of them. Ah, it is time now for Jesus to go back to the place of the death of the gods, and take the long bath of being made young again. He is an old-old young god, don't you think?' He looked long at Kate, then dived for his soup.

Kate widened her eyes in amazement at this torrent from the young Mirabal. Then she laughed.

'I think it's a bit overwhelming!' she said, non-committal.

'Ah! Yes! Exactly! Exactly! But how good to be overwhelmed! How splendid if something will overwhelm me! Ah, I am so glad!'

The last word came with a clapping French resonance, and the young man dived for his soup again. He was lean and pale, but burning with an intense, crazy energy.

'You see,' said young Garcia, raising his full, bright dark eyes to Kate, half aggressive and half bashful: 'we must do something for Mexico. If we don't, it will go under, no? You say you don't like socialism. I don't think I do either. But if there is nothing else but socialism, we will have socialism. If there is nothing better. But perhaps there is.'

'Why should Mexico go under?' said Kate. 'There are lots of children everywhere.'

'Yes. But the last census of Porfirio Diaz gave seventeen million people in Mexico, and the census of last year gave only thirteen millions. Maybe the count was not quite right. But you count four million people fewer, in twenty years, then in sixty years there will be no Mexicans: only foreigners, who don't die.'

'Oh, but figures always lie!' said Kate. 'Statistics are always misleading.'

'Maybe two and two don't make four,' said Garcia. 'I don't know if they do. But I know, if you take two away from two, it leaves none.'

'Do you think Mexico might die out?' she said to Don Ramón.

'Why!' he replied. 'It might. Die out and become Americanized.'

'I quite see the danger of Americanization,' said Owen. 'That would be ghastly. Almost better die out.'

Owen was so American, he invariably said these things.

'But!' said Kate. 'The Mexicans look so strong!'

‘They are strong to carry heavy loads,’ said Don Ramón. ‘But they die easily. They eat all the wrong things, they drink the wrong things, and they don’t mind dying. They have many children, and they like their children very much. But when the child dies, the parents say: Ah, he will be an angelito! So they cheer up and feel as if they had been given a present. Sometimes I think they enjoy it when their children die. Sometimes I think they would like to transfer Mexico en bloc into Paradise, or whatever lies behind the walls of death. It would be better there!’

There was a silence.

‘But how sad you are!’ said Kate, afraid.

Doña Isabel was giving hurried orders to the manservant.

‘Whoever knows Mexico below the surface, is sad!’ said Julio Toussaint, rather sententiously, over his black cravat.

‘Well,’ said Owen, ‘it seems to me, on the contrary, a gay country. A country of gay, irresponsible children. Or rather, they would be gay, if they were properly treated. If they had comfortable homes, and a sense of real freedom. If they felt that they could control their lives and their own country. But being in the grip of outsiders, as they have been for hundreds of years, life of course seems hardly worth while to them. Naturally, they don’t care if they live or die. They don’t feel free.’

‘Free for what?’ asked Toussaint.

‘To make Mexico their own. Not to be so poor and at the mercy of outsiders.’

‘They are at the mercy of something worse than outsiders,’ said Toussaint. ‘Let me tell you. They are at the mercy of their own natures. It is this way. Fifty per cent of the people in Mexico are pure Indian: more or less. Of the rest, a small proportion are foreigners or Spaniard. You have then the mass which is on top, of mixed blood, Indian and Spaniard mixed, chiefly. These are the Mexicans, those with the mixed blood. Now, you take us at this table. Don Cipriano is pure Indian. Don Ramón is almost pure Spaniard, but most probably he has the blood of Tlaxcalan Indians in his veins as well. Señor Mirabal is mixed French and Spanish. Señor Garcia most probably has a mixture of Indian blood with Spanish. I myself have French, Spanish, Austrian, and Indian blood. Very well! Now you mix blood of the same race, and it may be all right. Europeans are all Aryan stock, the race is the same. But when you mix European and American Indian, you mix different blood races, and you produce the half-breed. Now, the half-breed is a calamity. For why? He is neither one thing nor another, he is divided against himself. His blood of one race tells him one thing, his blood of another race tells him another. He is an unfortunate, a calamity to himself. And it is hopeless.’

‘And this is Mexico. The Mexicans of mixed blood are hopeless. Well then! There are only two things to be done. All the foreigners and the Mexicans clear out and leave the country to the Indians, the pure-blooded Indians. But already you have a difficulty. How can you distinguish the pure-blooded Indian, after so many generations? Or else the half-breed or mixed-blood Mexicans who are all the time on top shall continue to destroy the country till the Americans from the United States flood in. We are as California and New Mexico now are, swamped under the dead white sea.

‘But let me tell you something further. I hope we are not Puritans. I hope I may say that it depends on the moment of coition. At the moment of coition, either the spirit of the father fuses with the spirit of the mother, to create a new being with a soul, or else nothing fuses but the germ of procreation.

‘Now consider. How have these Mexicans of mixed blood been begotten, for centuries? In what spirit? What was the moment of coition like? Answer me that, and you have told me the reason for this Mexico which makes us despair and which will go on making everybody despair, till it destroys itself. In what spirit have the Spanish and other foreign fathers gotten children of the Indian women? What sort of spirit was it? What sort of coition? And then, what sort of race do you expect?’

‘But what sort of a spirit is there between white men and white women!’ said Kate.

‘At least,’ replied the didactic Toussaint, ‘the blood is homogeneous, so that consciousness automatically unrolls in continuity.’

‘I hate its unrolling in automatic continuity,’ said Kate.

‘Perhaps! But it makes life possible. Without developing continuity in consciousness, you have chaos. And this comes of mixed blood.’

‘And then,’ said Kate, ‘surely the Indian men are fond of their women! The men seem manly, and the women seem very lovable and womanly.’

‘It is possible that the Indian children are pure-blooded, and there is the continuity of blood. But the Indian consciousness is swamped under the stagnant water of the white man’s Dead Sea consciousness. Take a man like Benito Juarez, a pure Indian. He floods his old consciousness with the new white ideas, and there springs up a whole forest of verbiage, new laws, new constitutions and all the rest. But it is a sudden weed. It grows like a weed on the surface, saps the strength of the Indian soil underneath, and helps the process of ruin. No, madam! There is no hope for Mexico short of a miracle.’

‘Ah!’ cried Mirabal, flourishing his wine-glass. ‘Isn’t that wonderful, when only the miracle will save us! When we must produce the miracle? We! We! We must make the miracle!’ He hit his own breast emphatically. ‘Ah, I think that is

marvellous!' And he returned to his turkey in black sauce.

'Look at the Mexicans!' Toussaint flared on. 'They don't care about anything. They eat food so hot with chili, it burns holes in their insides. And it has no nourishment. They live in houses that a dog would be ashamed of, and they lie and shiver with cold. But they don't do anything. They could make, easily, easily, a bed of maize leaves or similar leaves. But they don't do it. They don't do anything. They roll up in a thin serape and lie on a thin mat on the bare ground, whether it is wet or dry. And Mexican nights are cold. But they lie down like dogs, anyhow, as if they lay down to die. I say dogs! But you will see the dogs looking for a dry sheltered place. The Mexicans, no! Anywhere, nothing, nothing! And it is terrible. It is terrible! As if they wanted to punish themselves for being alive!'

'But then, why do they have so many children?' said Kate.

'Why do they? The same, because they don't care. They don't care. They don't care about money, they don't care about making anything, they don't care about nothing, nothing, nothing. Only they get an excitement out of women, as they do out of chili. They like to feel the red pepper burning holes in their insides, and they like to feel the other thing, the sex, burning holes in them too. But after the moment, they don't care. They don't care a bit.

'And that is bad. I tell you, excuse me, but all, everything, depends on the moment of coition. At that moment many things can come to a crisis: all a man's hope, his honour, his faith, his trust, his belief in life and creation and God, all these things can come to a crisis in the moment of coition. And these things will be handed on in continuity to the child. Believe me, I am a crank on this idea, but it is true. It is certainly absolutely true.'

'I believe it is true,' said Kate, rather coldly.

'Ah! you do! Well then! Look at Mexico! The only conscious people are half-breeds, people of mixed blood, begotten in greed and selfish brutality.'

'Some people believe in the mixed blood,' said Kate.

'Ah! They do, do they? Who?'

'Some of your serious-minded men. They say the half-breed is better than the Indian.'

'Better! Well! The Indian has his hopelessness. The moment of coition is his moment of supreme hopelessness, when he throws himself down the pit of despair.'

The Austrian, European blood, which fans into fire of conscious understanding, died down again, leaving what was Mexican in Julio Toussaint sunk in irredeemable gloom.

'It is true,' said Mirabal, out of the gloom. 'The Mexicans who have any

feeling always prostitute themselves, one way or another, and so they can never do anything. And the Indians can never do anything either, because they haven't got hope in anything. But it is always darkest before the dawn. We must make the miracle come. The miracle is superior even to the moment of coition.'

It seemed, however, as if he said it by an effort of will.

The dinner was ending in silence. During the whirl of talk, or of passionate declaration, the servants had carried round the food and wine. Doña Isabel, completely oblivious of the things that were being said, watched and directed the servants with nervous anxiety and excitement, her hands with their old jewellery trembling with agitation. Don Ramón had kept his eye on his guests' material comfort, at the same time listening, as it were, from the back of his head. His big brown eyes were inscrutable, his face impassive. But when he had anything to say, it was always with a light laugh and a teasing accent. And yet his eyes brooded and smouldered with an incomprehensible, unyielding fire.

Kate felt she was in the presence of men. Here were men face to face not with death and self-sacrifice, but with the life-issue. She felt, for the first time in her life, a pang almost like fear, of men who were passing beyond what she knew, beyond her depth.

Cipriano, his rather short but intensely black, curved eyelashes lowering over his dark eyes, watched his plate, only sometimes looking up with a black, brilliant glance, either at whomsoever was speaking, or at Don Ramón, or at Kate. His face was changeless and intensely serious, serious almost with a touch of childishness. But the curious blackness of his eyelashes lifted so strangely, with such intense unconscious maleness from his eyes, the movement of his hand was so odd, quick, light as he ate, so easily a movement of shooting, or of flashing a knife into the body of some adversary, and his dark-coloured lips were so helplessly savage, as he ate or briefly spoke, that her heart stood still. There was something undeveloped and intense in him, the intensity and the crudity of the semi-savage. She could well understand the potency of the snake upon the Aztec and Maya imagination. Something smooth, undeveloped, yet vital in this man suggested the heavy-ebbing blood of reptiles in his veins. That was what it was, the heavy-ebbing blood of powerful reptiles, the dragon of Mexico.

So that unconsciously she shrank when his black, big, glittering eyes turned on her for a moment. They were not, like Don Ramón's, dark eyes. They were black, as black as jewels into which one could not look without a sensation of fear. And her fascination was tinged with fear. She felt somewhat as the bird feels when the snake is watching it.

She wondered almost that Don Ramón was not afraid. Because she had noticed that usually, when an Indian looked to a white man, both men stood back

from actual contact, from actual meeting of each other's eyes. They left a wide space of neutral territory between them. But Cipriano looked at Ramón with a curious intimacy, glittering, steady, warrior-like, and at the same time betraying an almost menacing trust in the other man.

Kate realized that Ramón had a good deal to stand up to. But he kept a little, foiling laugh on his face, and lowered his beautiful head with the black hair touched with grey, as if he would put a veil before his countenance.

'Do you think one can make this miracle come?' she asked of him.

'The miracle is always there,' he said, 'for the man who can pass his hand through to it, to take it.'

They finished dinner, and went to sit out on the veranda, looking into the garden where the light from the house fell uncannily on the blossoming trees and the dark tufts of Yucca and the strange great writhing trunks of the Laurel de India.

Cipriano had sat down next to her, smoking a cigarette.

'It is a strange darkness, the Mexican darkness!' she said.

'Do you like it?' he asked.

'I don't know yet,' she said. 'Do you?'

'Yes. Very much. I think I like best the time when the day is falling and the night coming on like something else. Then, one feels more free, don't you think? Like the flowers that send out their scent at night, but in the daytime they look at the sun and don't have any smell.'

'Perhaps the night here scares me,' she laughed.

'Yes. But why not? The smell of the flowers at night may make one feel afraid, but it is a good fear. One likes it, don't you think?'

'I am afraid of fear,' she said.

He laughed shortly.

'You speak such English English,' she said. 'Nearly all the Mexicans who speak English speak American English. Even Don Ramón does, rather.'

'Yes. Don Ramón graduated in Columbia University. But I was sent to England, to school in London, and then to Oxford.'

'Who sent you?'

'My god-father. He was an Englishman: Bishop Severn, Bishop of Oaxaca. You have heard of him?'

'No,' said Kate.

'He was a very well-known man. He died only about ten years ago. He was very rich, too, before the revolution. He had a big hacienda in Oaxaca, with a very fine library. But they took it away from him in the revolution, and they sold the things, or broke them. They didn't know the value of them, of course.'

‘And did he adopt you?’

‘Yes! In a way. My father was one of the overseers on the hacienda. When I was a little boy I came running to my father, when the Bishop was there, with something in my hands — so!’ — and he made a cup of his hand. ‘I don’t remember. This is what they tell me. I was a small child — three or four years of age — somewhere there. What I had in my hands’ was a yellow scorpion, one of the small ones, very poisonous, no?’

And he lifted the cup of his small, slender, dark hands, as if to show Kate the creature.

‘Well, the Bishop was talking to my father, and he saw what I had got before my father did. So he told me at once, to put the scorpion in his hat — the Bishop’s hat, no? Of course I did what he told me, and I put the scorpion in his hat, and it did not bite me. If it had stung me I should have died, of course. But I didn’t know, so I suppose the alacran was not interested. The Bishop was a very good man, very kind. He liked my father, so he became my god-father. Then he always took an interest in me, and he sent me to school, and then to England. He hoped I should be a priest. He always said that the one hope for Mexico was if she had really fine native priests.’ He ended rather wistfully.

‘And didn’t you want to become a priest?’ said Kate.

‘No!’ he said sadly. ‘No!’

‘Not at all?’ she asked.

‘No! When I was in England it was different from Mexico. Even God was different, and the Blessed Mary. They were changed so much, I felt I didn’t know them any more. Then I came to understand better, and when I understood I didn’t believe any more. I used to think it was the images of Jesus, and the Virgin, and the Saints, that were doing everything in the world. And the world seemed to me so strange, no? I couldn’t see that it was bad, because it was all so very strange and mysterious, when I was a child, in Mexico. Only in England I learned about the laws of life, and some science. And then when I knew why the sun rose and set, and how the world really was, I felt quite different.’

‘Was your god-father disappointed?’

‘A little, perhaps. But he asked me if I would rather be a soldier, so I said I would. Then when the revolution came, and I was twenty-two years old, I had to come back to Mexico.’

‘Did you like your god-father?’

‘Yes, very much. But the revolution carried everything away. I felt I must do what my god-father wished. But I could see that Mexico was not the Mexico he believed in. It was different. He was too English, and too good to understand. In the revolutions I tried to help the man I believed was the best man. So you see, I

have always been half a priest and half a soldier.'

'You never married?'

'No. I couldn't marry, because I always felt my god-father was there, and I felt I had promised him to be a priest — all those things, you know. When he died he told me to follow my own conscience, and to remember that Mexico and all the Indians were in the hands of God, and he made me promise never to take sides against God. He was an old man when he died, seventy-five.'

Kate could see the spell of the old Bishop's strong, rather grandiose personality upon the impressionable Indian. She could see the curious recoil into chastity, perhaps characteristic of the savage. And at the same time she felt the intense masculine yearning, coupled with a certain male ferocity, in the man's breast.

'Your husband was James Joachim Leslie, the famous Irish leader?' he asked her: and added: 'You had no children?'

'No. I wanted Joachim's children so much, but I didn't have any. But I have a boy and a girl from my first marriage. My first husband was a lawyer, and I was divorced from him for Joachim.'

'Did you like him — that first one?'

'Yes. I liked him. But I never felt anything very deep for him. I married him when I was young, and he was a good deal older than I. I was fond of him, in a way. But I — had never realized that one could be more than fond of a man, till I knew Joachim. I thought that was all one could ever expect to feel — that you just liked a man, and that he was in love with you. It took me years to understand that a woman can't love a man — at least a woman like I am can't — if he is only the sort of good, decent citizen. With Joachim I came to realize that a woman like me can only love a man who is fighting to change the world, to make it freer, more alive. Men like my first husband, who are good and trustworthy and who work to keep the world going on well in the same state they found it in, they let you down horribly, somewhere. You feel so terribly sold. Everything is just a sell: it becomes so small. A woman who isn't quite ordinary herself can only love a man who is fighting for something beyond the ordinary life.'

'And your husband fought for Ireland.'

'Yes — for Ireland, and for something he never quite realized. He ruined his health. And when he was dying, he said to me: Kate, perhaps I've let you down. Perhaps I haven't really helped Ireland. But I couldn't help myself. I feel as if I'd brought you to the doors of life, and was leaving you there. Kate, don't be disappointed in life because of me. I didn't really get anywhere. I haven't really got anywhere. I feel as if I'd made a mistake. But perhaps when I'm dead I shall

be able to do more for you than I have done while I was alive. Say you'll never feel disappointed!'

There was a pause. The memory of the dead man was coming over her again, and all her grief.

'And I don't feel disappointed,' she went on, her voice beginning to shake. 'But I loved him. And it was bitter, that he had to die, feeling he hadn't — hadn't.'

She put her hands before her face, and the bitter tears came through her fingers.

Cipriano sat motionless as a statue. But from his breast came that dark surging passion of tenderness the Indians are capable of. Perhaps it would pass, leaving him indifferent and fatalistic again. But at any rate for the moment he sat in a dark, fiery cloud of passionate male tenderness. He looked at her soft, wet white hands over her face, and at the one big emerald on her finger, in a sort of wonder. The wonder, the mystery, the magic that used to flood over him as a boy and a youth, when he kneeled before the babyish figure of the Santa Maria de la Soledad, flooded him again. He was in the presence of the goddess, white-handed, mysterious, gleaming with a moon-like power and the intense potency of grief.

Then Kate hastily took her hands from her face and with head ducked looked for her handkerchief. Of course she hadn't got one. Cipriano lent her his, nicely folded. She took it without a word, and rubbed her face and blew her nose.

'I want to go and look at the flowers,' she said in a strangled voice.

And she dashed into the garden with his handkerchief in her hand. He stood up and drew aside his chair, to let her pass, then stood a moment looking at the garden, before he sat down again and lighted a cigarette.

CHAPTER IV

To Stay or Not to Stay

Owen had to return to the United States, and he asked Kate whether she wanted to stay on in Mexico.

This put her into a quandary. It was not an easy country for a woman to be alone in. And she had been beating her wings in an effort to get away. She felt like a bird round whose body a snake has coiled itself. Mexico was the snake.

The curious influence of the country, pulling one down, pulling one down. She had heard an old American, who had been forty years in the Republic, saying to Owen: 'No man who hasn't a strong moral backbone should try to settle in Mexico. If he does, he'll go to pieces, morally and physically, as I've seen hundreds of young Americans do.'

To pull one down. It was what the country wanted to do all the time, with a slow, reptilian insistence, to pull one down. To prevent the spirit from soaring. To take away the free, soaring sense of liberty.

'There is no such thing as liberty,' she heard the quiet, deep, dangerous voice of Don Ramón repeating. 'There is no such thing as liberty. The greatest liberators are usually slaves of an idea. The freest people are slaves to convention and public opinion, and more still, slaves to the industrial machine. There is no such thing as liberty. You only change one sort of domination for another. All we can do is to choose our master.'

'But surely that is liberty — for the mass of people.'

'They don't choose. They are tricked into a new form of servility, no more. They go from bad to worse.'

'You yourself — aren't you free?' she asked.

'I?' he laughed. 'I spent a long time trying to pretend. I thought I could have my own way. Till I realized that having my own way meant only running about smelling all the things in the street, like a dog that will pick up something. Of myself, I have no way. No man has any way in himself. Every man who goes along a way is led by one of three things: by an appetite — and I class ambition among appetites; or by an idea; or by an inspiration.'

'I used to think my husband was inspired about Ireland,' said Kate doubtfully.

'And now?'

'Yes! Perhaps he put his wine in old, rotten bottles that wouldn't hold it. No!

— Liberty is a rotten old wine-skin. It won't hold one's wine of inspiration or passion any more,' she said.

'And Mexico!' he said. 'Mexico is another Ireland. Ah no, no man can be his own master. If I must serve, I will not serve an idea, which cracks and leaks like an old wine-skin. I will serve the God that gives me my manhood. There is no liberty for a man, apart from the God of his manhood. Free Mexico is a bully, and the old, colonial, ecclesiastical Mexico was another sort of bully. When man has nothing but his will to assert — even his good-will — it is always bullying. Bolshevism is one sort of bullying, capitalism another: and liberty is a change of chains.'

'Then what's to be done?' said Kate. 'Just nothing?'

And with her own will, she wanted nothing to be done. Let the skies fall!

'One is driven, at last, back to the far distance, to look for God,' said Ramón uneasily.

'I rather hate this search-for-God business, and religiosity,' said Kate.

'I know!' he said, with a laugh. 'I've suffered from would-be-cocksure religion myself.'

'And you can't really "find God"!' she said. 'It's a sort of sentimentalism, and creeping back into old, hollow shells.'

'No!' he said slowly. 'I can't find God, in the old sense. I know it's a sentimentalism if I pretend to. But I am nauseated with humanity and the human will: even with my own will. I have realized that my will, no matter how intelligent I am, is only another nuisance on the face of the earth, once I start exerting it. And other people's wills are even worse.'

'Oh! isn't human life horrible!' she cried. 'Every human being exerting his will all the time — over other people, and over himself, and nearly always self-righteous!'

Ramón made a grimace of repulsion.

'To me,' he said, 'that is just the weariness of life! For a time, it can be amusing: exerting your own will, and resisting all the other people's wills, that they try to put over you. But at a certain point a nausea sets in at the very middle of me: my soul is nauseated. My soul is nauseated, and there is nothing but death ahead, unless I find something else.'

Kate listened in silence. She knew the road he had gone, but she herself had not yet come to the end of it. As yet she was still strong in the pride of her own — her very own will.

'Oh, people are repulsive!' she cried.

'My own will becomes even more repulsive at last,' he said. 'My own will, merely as my own will, is even more distasteful to me than other people's wills.'

From being the god in my own machine, I must either abdicate, or die of disgust — self-disgust, at that.’

‘How amusing!’ she cried.

‘It is rather funny,’ he said sardonically.

‘And then?’ she asked, looking at him with a certain malevolent challenge.

He looked back at her slowly, with an ironical light in his eyes.

‘Then!’ he repeated. ‘Then! — I ask, what else is there in the world, besides human will, human appetite? because ideas and ideals are only instruments of human will and appetite.’

‘Not entirely,’ said Kate. ‘They may be disinterested.’

‘May they? If the appetite isn’t interested, the will is.’

‘Why not?’ she mocked. ‘We can’t be mere detached blocks.’

‘It nauseates me — I look for something else.’

‘And what do you find?’

‘My own manhood!’

‘What does that mean?’ she cried, jeering.

‘If you looked, and found your own womanhood, you would know.’

‘But I have my own womanhood!’ she cried.

‘And then — when you find your own manhood — your womanhood,’ he went on, smiling faintly at her — ‘then you know it is not your own, to do as you like with. You don’t have it of your own will. It comes from — from the middle — from the God. Beyond me, at the middle, is the God. And the God gives me my manhood, then leaves me to it. I have nothing but my manhood. The God gives it me, and leaves me to do further.’

Kate would not hear any more. She broke off into banalities.

The immediate question, for her, was whether she would stay in Mexico or not. She was not really concerned with Don Ramón’s soul — or even her own. She was concerned with her immediate future. Should she stay in Mexico? Mexico meant the dark-faced men in cotton clothes, big hats: the peasants, peons, pelados, Indians, call them what you will. The mere natives.

Those pale-faced Mexicans of the Capital, politicians, artists, professionals, and business people, they did not interest her. Neither did the hacendados and the ranch-owners, in their tight trousers and weak, soft sensuality, pale victims of their own emotional undiscipline. Mexico still meant the mass of silent peons, to her. And she thought of them again, these silent, stiff-backed men, driving their strings of asses along the country roads, in the dust of Mexico’s infinite dryness, past broken walls, broken houses, broken haciendas, along the endless desolation left by the revolutions; past the vast stretches of maguey, the huge cactus, or aloe, with its gigantic rosette of upstarting, pointed leaves, that in its

iron rows covers miles and miles of ground in the Valley of Mexico, cultivated for the making of that bad-smelling drink, pulque. The Mediterranean has the dark grape, old Europe has malted beer, and China has opium from the white poppy. But out of the Mexican soil a bunch of black-tarnished swords bursts up, and a great unfolded bud of the once-flowering monster begins to thrust at the sky. They cut the great phallic bud and crush out the sperm-like juice for the pulque. Agua miel! Pulque!

But better pulque than the fiery white brandy distilled from the maguey: mescal, tequila: or in the low lands, the hateful sugar-cane brandy, aguardiente.

And the Mexican burns out his stomach with those beastly fire-waters and cauterizes the hurt with red-hot chili. Swallowing one hell-fire to put out another.

Tall fields of wheat and maize. Taller, more brilliant fields of bright-green sugar-cane. And threading in white cotton clothes, with dark, half-visible face, the eternal peon of Mexico, his great white calico drawers flopping round his ankles as he walks, or rolled up over his dark, handsome legs.

The wild, sombre, erect men of the north! The too-often degenerate men of Mexico Valley, their heads through the middle of their ponchos! The big men in Tlascala, selling ice-cream or huge half-sweetened buns and fancy bread! The quick little Indians, quick as spiders, down in Oaxaca! The queer-looking half-Chinese natives towards Vera Cruz! The dark faces and the big black eyes on the coast of Sinaloa! The handsome men of Jalisco, with a scarlet blanket folded on one shoulder!

They were of many tribes and many languages, and far more alien to one another than Frenchmen, English, and Germans are. Mexico! It is not really even the beginnings of a nation: hence the rabid assertion of nationalism in the few. And it is not a race.

Yet it is a people. There is some Indian quality which pervades the whole. Whether it is men in blue overalls and a slouch, in Mexico City, or men with handsome legs in skintight trousers, or the floppy, white, cotton-clad labourers in the fields, there is something mysteriously in common. The erect, prancing walk, stepping out from the base of the spine with lifted knees and short steps. The jaunty balancing of the huge hats. The thrown-back shoulders with a folded serape like a royal mantle. And most of them handsome, with dark, warm-bronze skin so smooth and living, their proudly-held heads, whose black hair gleams like wild, rich feathers. Their big, bright black eyes that look at you wonderingly, and have no centre to them. Their sudden, charming smile, when you smile first. But the eyes unchanged.

Yes, and she had to remember, too, a fair proportion of smaller, sometimes

insignificant-looking men, some of them scaly with dirt, who looked at you with a cold, mud-like antagonism as they stepped cattishly past. Poisonous, thin, stiff little men, cold and unliving like scorpions, and as dangerous.

And then the truly terrible faces of some creatures in the city, slightly swollen with the poison of tequila, and with black, dimmed, swivel eyes swinging in pure evil. Never had she seen such faces of pure brutish evil, cold and insect-like, as in Mexico City.

The country gave her a strange feeling of hopelessness and of dauntlessness. Unbroken, eternally resistant, it was a people that lived without hope, and without care. Gay even, and laughing with indifferent carelessness.

They were something like her own Irish, but gone to a much greater length. And also, they did what the self-conscious and pretentious Irish rarely do, they touched her bowels with a strange fire of compassion.

At the same time, she feared them. They would pull her down, pull her down, to the dark depths of nothingness.

It was the same with the women. In their full long skirts and bare feet, and with the big dark-blue scarf or shawl called a rebozo over their womanly small heads and tight round their shoulders, they were images of wild submissiveness, the primitive womanliness of the world, that is so touching and so alien. Many women kneeling in a dim church, all hooded in their dark-blue rebozos, the pallor of their skirts on the floor, their heads and shoulders wrapped dark and tight, as they swayed with devotion of fear and ecstasy! A churchful of dark-wrapped women sunk there in wild, humble supplication of dread and of bliss filled Kate with tenderness and revulsion. They crouched like people not quite created.

Their soft, untidy black hair, which they scratched for lice; the round-eyed baby joggling like a pumpkin in the shawl slung over the woman's shoulder, the never-washed feet and ankles, again somewhat reptilian under the long, flounced, soiled cotton skirt; and then, once more, the dark eyes of half-created women, soft, appealing, yet with a queer void insolence! Something lurking, where the womanly centre should have been; lurking snake-like. Fear! The fear of not being able to find full creation. And the inevitable mistrust and lurking insolence, insolent against a higher creation, the same thing that is in the striking of a snake.

Kate, as a woman, feared the women more than the men. The women were little and insidious, the men were bigger and more reckless. But in the eyes of each, the uncreated centre, where the evil and the insolence lurked.

And sometimes she wondered whether America really was the great death-continent, the great No! to the European and Asiatic, and even African Yes! Was

it really the great melting-pot, where men from the creative continents were smelted back again, not to a new creation, but down into the homogeneity of death? Was it the great continent of the undoing, and all its peoples the agents of the mystic destruction! Plucking, plucking at the created soul in a man, till at last it plucked out the growing germ, and left him a creature of mechanism and automatic reaction, with only one inspiration, the desire to pluck the quick out of every living spontaneous creature.

Was that the clue to America? she sometimes wondered. Was it the great death-continent, the continent that destroyed again what the other continents had built up? The continent whose spirit of place fought purely to pick the eyes out of the face of God? Was that America?

And all the people who went there, Europeans, Negroes, Japanese, Chinese, all the colours and the races, were they the spent people, in whom the God impulse had collapsed, so they crossed to the great continent of the negation, where the human will declares itself 'free', to pull down the soul of the world? Was it so? And did this account for the great drift to the New World, the drift of spent souls passing over to the side of Godless democracy, energetic negation? The negation which is the life-breath of materialism. And would the great negative pull of the Americans at last break the heart of the world?

This thought would come to her, time and again.

She herself, what had she come to America for?

Because the flow of her life had broken, and she knew she could not re-start it in Europe.

These handsome natives! Was it because they were death-worshippers, Moloch-worshippers, that they were so uncowed and handsome? Their pure acknowledgment of death and their undaunted admission of nothingness kept so erect and careless.

White men had had a soul, and lost it. The pivot of fire had been quenched in them, and their lives had started to spin in the reversed direction, widdershins. That reversed look which is in the eyes of so many white people, the look of nullity, and life wheeling in the reversed direction. Widdershins.

But the dark-faced natives, with their strange soft flame of life wheeling upon a dark void: were they centreless and widdershins too, as so many white men now are?

The strange, soft flame of courage in the black Mexican eyes. But still it was not knit to a centre, that centre which is the soul of a man in a man.

And all the efforts of white men to bring the soul of the dark men of Mexico into final clinched being has resulted in nothing but the collapse of the white man. Against the soft, dark flow of the Indian the white man at last collapses;

with his God and his energy he collapses. In attempting to convert the dark man to the white man's way of life, the white man has fallen helplessly down the hole he wanted to fill up. Seeking to save another man's soul, the white man lost his own, and collapsed upon himself.

Mexico! The great, precipitous, dry, savage country, with a handsome church in every landscape, rising as it were out of nothing. A revolution-broken landscape, with lingering, tall, handsome churches whose domes are like inflations that are going to burst, and whose pinnacles and towers are like the trembling pagodas of an unreal race. Gorgeous churches waiting, above the huts and straw hovels of the natives, like ghosts to be dismissed.

And noble ruined haciendas, with ruined avenues approaching their broken splendour.

And the cities of Mexico, great and small, that the Spaniards conjured up out of nothing. Stones live and die with the spirit of the builders. And the spirit of Spaniards in Mexico dies, and the very stones in the building die. The natives drift into the centre of the plazas again, and in unspeakable empty weariness the Spanish buildings stand around, in a sort of dry exhaustion.

The conquered race! Cortés came with his iron heel and his iron will, a conqueror. But a conquered race, unless grafted with a new inspiration, slowly sucks the blood of the conquerors, in the silence of a strange night and the heaviness of a hopeless will. So that now, the race of the conquerors in Mexico is soft and boneless, children crying in helpless hopelessness.

Was it the dark negation of the continent?

Kate could not look at the stones of the National Museum in Mexico without depression and dread. Snakes coiled like excrement, snakes fanged and feathered beyond all dreams of dread. And that was all.

The ponderous pyramids of San Juan Teotihuacan, the House of Quetzalcoatl wreathed with the snake of all snakes, his huge fangs white and pure to-day as in the lost centuries when his makers were alive. He has not died. He is not so dead as the Spanish churches, this all-enwreathing dragon of the horror of Mexico.

Cholula, with its church where the altar was! And the same ponderousness, the same unspeakable sense of weight and downward pressure of the blunt pyramid. Down-sinking pressure and depression. And the great market-place with its lingering dread and fascination.

Mitla under its hills, in the parched valley where a wind blows the dust and the dead souls of the vanished race in terrible gusts. The carved courts of Mitla, with a hard, sharp-angled, intricate fascination, but the fascination of fear and repulsion. Hard, four-square, sharp-edged, cutting, zig-zagging Mitla, like continual blows of a stone axe. Without gentleness or grace or charm. Oh

America, with your unspeakable hard lack of charm, what then is your final meaning? Is it forever the knife of sacrifice, as you put out your tongue at the world?

Charmless America! With your hard, vindictive beauty, are you waiting forever to smite death? Is the world your everlasting victim?

So long as it will let itself be victimized.

But yet! But yet! The gentle voices of the natives. The voice of the boys, like birds twittering among the trees of the plaza of Tehuacan! The soft touch, the gentleness. Was it the dark-fingered quietness of death, and the music of the presence of death in their voices?

She thought again of what Don Ramón had said to her.

‘They pull you down! Mexico pulls you down, the people pull you down like a great weight! But it may be they pull you down as the earth’s pull of gravitation does, that you can balance on your feet. Maybe they draw you down as the earth draws down the roots of a tree, so that it may be clinched deep in soil. Men are still part of the Tree of Life, and the roots go down to the centre of the earth. Loose leaves, and aeroplanes, blow away on the wind, in what they call freedom. But the Tree of Life has fixed, deep, gripping roots.

‘It may be you need to be drawn down, down, till you send roots into the deep places again. Then you can send up the sap and the leaves back to the sky, later.

‘And to me, the men in Mexico are like trees, forests that the white men felled in their coming. But the roots of the trees are deep and alive and forever sending up new shoots.

‘And each new shoot that comes up overthrows a Spanish church or an American factory. And soon the dark forest will rise again, and shake the Spanish buildings from the face of America.

‘All that matters to me are the roots that reach down beyond all destruction. The roots and the life are there. What else it needs is the word, for the forest to begin to rise again. And some man among men must speak the word.’

The strange doom-like sound of the man’s words! But in spite of the sense of doom on her heart, she would not go away yet. She would stay longer in Mexico.

CHAPTER V

The Lake

Owen left, Villiers stayed on a few days to escort Kate to the lake. If she liked it there, and could find a house, she could stay by herself. She knew sufficient people in Mexico and in Guadalajara to prevent her from being lonely. But she still shrank from travelling alone in this country.

She wanted to leave the city. The new President had come in quietly enough, but there was an ugly feeling of uppishness in the lower classes, the bottom dog clambering mangily to the top. Kate was no snob. Man or woman, she cared nothing about the social class. But meanness, sordidness she hated. She hated bottom dogs. They all were mangy, they all were full of envy and malice, many had the rabies. Ah no, let us defend ourselves from the bottom dog, with its mean growl and its yellow teeth.

She had tea with Cipriano before leaving.

‘How do you get along with the Government?’ she asked.

‘I stand for the law and the constitution,’ he said. ‘They know I don’t want anything to do with cuartelazos or revolutions. Don Ramón is my chief.’

‘In what way?’

‘Later, you will see.’

He had a secret, important to himself, on which he was sitting tight. But he looked at her with shining eyes, as much as to say that soon she would share the secret, and then he would be much happier.

He watched her curiously, from under his wary black lashes. She was one of the rather plump Irishwomen, with soft brown hair and hazel eyes, and a beautiful, rather distant repose. Her great charm was her soft repose, and her gentle, unconscious inaccessibility. She was taller and bigger than Cipriano: he was almost boyishly small. But he was all energy, and his eyebrows tilted black and with a barbarian conceit, above his full, almost insolent black eyes.

He watched her continually, with a kind of fascination: the same spell that the absurd little figures of the doll Madonna had cast over him as a boy. She was the mystery, and he the adorer, under the semi-ecstatic spell of the mystery. But once he rose from his knees, he rose in the same strutting conceit of himself as before he knelt: with all his adoration in his pocket again. But he had a good deal of magnetic power. His education had not diminished it. His education lay like a

film of white oil on the black lake of his barbarian consciousness. For this reason, the things he said were hardly interesting at all. Only what he was. He made the air around him seem darker, but richer and fuller. Sometimes his presence was extraordinarily grateful, like a healing of the blood. And sometimes he was an intolerable weight on her. She gasped to get away from him.

‘You think a great deal of Don Ramón?’ she said to him.

‘Yes,’ he said, his black eyes watching her. ‘He is a very fine man.’

How trivial the words sounded! That was another boring thing about him: his English seemed so trivial. He wasn’t really expressing himself. He was only flipping at the white oil that lay on his surface.

‘You like him better than the Bishop, your god-father?’

He lifted his shoulders in a twisted, embarrassed shrug.

‘The same!’ he said. ‘I like him the same.’

Then he looked away into the distance, with a certain hauteur and insolence.

‘Very different, no?’ he said. ‘But in some ways, the same. He knows better what is Mexico. He knows better what I am. Bishop Severn did not know the real Mexico: how could he, he was a sincere Catholic! But Don Ramón knows the real Mexico, no?’

‘And what is the real Mexico?’ she asked.

‘Well — you must ask Don Ramón. I can’t explain.’

She asked Cipriano about going to the lake.

‘Yes!’ he said. ‘You can go! You will like it. Go first to Orilla, no? — you take a ticket on the railway to Ixtlahuacan. And in Orilla is an hotel with a German manager. Then from Orilla you can go in a motor-boat, in a few hours, to Sayula. And there you will find a house to live in.’

He wanted her to do this, she could tell.

‘How far is Don Ramón’s hacienda from Sayula?’ she asked.

‘Near! About an hour in a boat. He is there now. And at the beginning of the month I am going with my division to Guadalajara: now there is a new Governor. So I shall be quite near too.’

‘That will be nice,’ she said.

‘You think so?’ he asked quickly.

‘Yes,’ she said, on her guard, looking at him slowly. ‘I should be sorry to lose touch with Don Ramón and you.’

He had a little tension on his brow, haughty, unwilling, conceited, and at the same time, yearning and desirous.

‘You like Don Ramón very much?’ he said. ‘You want to know him more?’

There was a peculiar anxiety in his voice.

‘Yes,’ she said. ‘One knows so few people in the world nowadays, that one can respect — and fear a little. I am a little afraid of Don Ramón: and I have the greatest respect for him — ’ She ended on a hot note of sincerity.

‘It is good!’ he said. ‘It is very good. You may respect him more than any other man in the world.’

‘Perhaps that is true,’ she said, turning her eyes slowly to his.

‘Yes! Yes!’ he cried impatiently. ‘It is true. You will find out later. And Ramón likes you. He told me to ask you to come to the lake. When you come to Sayula, when you are coming, write to him, and no doubt he can tell you about a house, and all those things.’

‘Shall I?’ she said, hesitant.

‘Yes. Yes! of course, we say what we mean.’

Curious little man, with his odd, inflammable hauteur and conceit, something burning inside him, that gave him no peace. He had an almost childish faith in the other man. And yet she was not sure that he did not, in some corner of his soul, resent Ramón somewhat.

Kate set off by the night train for the west, with Villiers. The one Pullman coach was full: people going to Guadalajara and Colima and the coast. There were three military officers, rather shy in their new uniforms, and rather swaggering at the same time, making eyes at the empty air, as if they felt they were conspicuous, and sitting quickly in their seats, as if to obliterate themselves. There were two country farmers or ranchers, in tight trousers and cartwheel hats stitched with silver. One was a tall man with a big moustache, the other was a smaller, grey man. But they both had the handsome, alive legs of the Mexicans, and the rather quenched faces. There was a widow buried in crape, accompanied by a criada, a maid. The rest were townsmen, Mexicans on business, at once shy and fussy, unobtrusive and self-important.

The Pullman was clean and neat, with its hot green-plush seats. But, full of people, it seemed empty compared with a Pullman in the United States. Everybody was very quiet, very soft and guarded. The farmers folded their beautiful serapes and laid them carefully on the seats, sitting as if their section were a lonely little place. The officers folded their cloaks and arranged dozens of little parcels, little cardboard hatboxes and heterogeneous bundles, under the seats and on the seats. The business men had the oddest luggage, canvas holdalls embroidered in wool, with long, touching mottoes.

And in all the crowd a sense of guardedness and softness and self-effacement: a curious soft sensibilité, touched with fear. It was already a somewhat conspicuous thing to travel in the Pullman; you had to be on your guard.

The evening for once was grey: the rainy season really approaching. A sudden

wind whirled dust and a few spots of rain. The train drew out of the formless, dry, dust-smitten areas fringing the city, and wound mildly on for a few minutes, only to stop in the main street of Tacubaya, the suburb-village. In the grey approach of evening the train halted heavily in the street, and Kate looked out at the men who stood in groups, with their hats tilted against the wind and their blankets folded over their shoulders and up to their eyes, against the dust, motionless, standing like sombre ghosts, only a glint of eyes showing between the dark serape and the big hat-brim; while donkey-drivers in a dust-cloud ran frantically, with uplifted arms like demons, uttering short, sharp cries to prevent their donkeys from poking in between the coaches of the train. Silent dogs trotted in-and-out under the train, women, their faces wrapped in their blue rebozos, came to offer tortillas folded in a cloth to keep them warm, or pulque in an earthenware mug, or pieces of chicken smothered in red, thick, oily sauce; or oranges or bananas or pitahayas, anything. And when few people bought, because of the dust, the women put their wares under their arm, under the blue rebozo, and covered their faces and motionless watched the train.

It was about six o'clock. The earth was utterly dry and stale. Somebody was kindling charcoal in front of a house. Men were hurrying down the wind, balancing their great hats curiously. Horsemen on quick, fine little horses, guns slung behind, trotted up to the train, lingered, then trotted quickly away again into nowhere.

Still the train stood in the street. Kate and Villiers got down. They watched the sparks blowing from the charcoal which a little girl was kindling in the street, to cook tortillas.

The train had a second-class coach and a first-class. The second class was jam-full of peasants, Indians, piled in like chickens with their bundles and baskets and bottles, endless things. One woman had a fine peacock under her arm. She put it down and in vain tried to suppress it beneath her voluminous skirts. It refused to be suppressed. She took it up and balanced it on her knee and looked round again over the medley of jars, baskets, pumpkins, melons, guns, bundles, and human beings.

In the front was a steel car with a guard of little scrubby soldiers in their dirty cotton uniforms. Some soldiers were mounted on top of the train with their guns: the look-out.

And the whole train, seething with life, was curiously still, subdued. Perhaps it is the perpetual sense of danger which makes the people so hushed, without clamour or stridency. And with an odd, hushed politeness among them. A sort of demon-world.

At last the train moved on. If it had waited forever, no one would have been

deeply surprised. For what might not be ahead? Rebels, bandits, bridges blown up — anything.

However, quietly, stealthily, the train moved out and along the great weary valley. The circling mountains, so relentless, were invisible save near at hand. In a few broken adobe huts a bit of fire sparked red. The adobe was grey-black, of the lava dust, depressing. Into the distance the fields spread dry, with here and there patches of green irrigation. There was a broken hacienda with columns that supported nothing. Darkness was coming, dust still blew in the shadow; the valley seemed encompassed in a dry, stale, weary gloom.

Then there came a heavy shower. The train was passing a pulque hacienda. The rows of the giant maguey stretched bristling their iron-black barbs in the gloom.

All at once, the lights came on, the Pullman attendant came swiftly lowering the blinds, so that the brilliance of the windows should attract no bullets from the dark outside.

There was a poor little meal at exorbitant prices, and when this was cleared away, the attendant came with a clash to make the beds, pulling down the upper berths. It was only eight o'clock, and the passengers looked up in resentment. But no good. The pug-faced Mexican in charge, and his smallpox-pitted assistant, insolently came in between the seats, inserted the key overhead, and brought down the berth with a crash. And the Mexican passengers humbly crawled away to the smoking-room or the toilet, like whipped dogs.

At half-past eight everybody was silently and with intense discretion going to bed. None of the collar-stud-snapping bustle and 'homely' familiarity of the United States. Like subdued animals they all crept in behind their green serge curtains.

Kate hated a Pullman, the discreet indiscretion, the horrible nearness of other people, like so many larvae in so many sections, behind the green serge curtains. Above all, the horrible intimacy of the noise of going to bed. She hated to undress, struggling in the oven of her berth, with her elbow butting into the stomach of the attendant who was buttoning up the green curtain outside.

And yet, once she was in bed and could put out her light and raise the window-blind, she had to admit it was better than a wagon-lit in Europe: and perhaps the best that can be done for people who must travel through the night in trains.

There was a rather cold wind, after the rain, up there on that high plateau. The moon had risen, the sky was clear. Rocks, and tall organ cactus, and more miles of maguey. Then the train stopped at a dark little station on the rim of the slope, where men swathed in dark serapes held dusky, ruddy lanterns that lit up no

faces at all, only dark gaps. Why did the train stay so long? Was something wrong?

At last they were going again. Under the moon she saw beyond her a long downslope of rocks and cactus, and in the distance below, the lights of a town. She lay in her berth watching the train wind slowly down the wild, rugged slope. Then she dozed.

To wake at a station that looked like a quiet inferno, with dark faces coming near the windows, glittering eyes in the half-light, women in their rebozos running along the train balancing dishes of meat, tamales, tortillas on one hand, black-faced men with fruit and sweets, and all calling in a subdued, intense, hushed hubbub. Strange and glaring, she saw eyes at the dark screen of the Pullman, sudden hands thrusting up something to sell. In fear, Kate dropped her window. The wire screen was not enough.

The platform below the Pullman was all dark. But at the back of the train she could see the glare of the first-class windows, on the dark station. And a man selling sweet-meats — Cajetas! Cajetas! La de Celaya!

She was safe inside the Pullman, with nothing to do but to listen to an occasional cough behind the green curtains, and to feel the faint bristling apprehension of all the Mexicans in their dark berths. The dark Pullman was full of a subdued apprehension, fear lest there might be some attack on the train.

She went to sleep and woke at a bright station: probably Queretaro. The green trees looked theatrical in the electric light. Opales! she heard the men calling softly. If Owen had been there he would have got up in his pyjamas to buy opals. The call would have been too strong.

She slept fitfully, in the shaken saloon, vaguely aware of stations and the deep night of the open country. Then she started from a complete sleep. The train was dead still, no sound. Then a tremendous jerking as the Pullman was shunted. It must be Irapuato, where they branched to the west.

She would arrive at Ixtlahuacan soon after six in the morning. The man woke her at daybreak, before the sun had risen. Dry country with mesquite bushes, in the dawn: then green wheat alternating with ripe wheat. And men already in the pale, ripened wheat reaping with sickles, cutting short little handfuls from the short straw. A bright sky, with a bluish shadow on earth. Parched slopes with ragged maize stubble. Then a forlorn hacienda and a man on horseback, in a blanket, driving a silent flock of cows, sheep, bulls, goats, lambs, rippling a bit ghostly in the dawn, from under a tottering archway. A long canal beside the railway, a long canal paved with bright green leaves from which poked the mauve heads of the lirio, the water hyacinth. The sun was lifting up, red. In a moment it was the full, dazzling gold of a Mexican morning.

Kate was dressed and ready, sitting facing Villiers, when they came to Ixtlahuacan. The man carried out her bags. The train drifted in to a desert of a station. They got down. It was a new day.

In the powerful light of morning, under a turquoise-blue sky, she gazed at the helpless-looking station, railway lines, some standing trucks, and a remote lifelessness. A boy seized their bags and ran across the lines to the station yard, which was paved with cobblestones, but overgrown with weeds. At one side stood an old tram-car with two mules, like a relic. One or two men, swathed up to the eyes in scarlet blankets, were crossing on silent white legs.

‘Adonde?’ said the boy.

But Kate went to see her big luggage taken out. It was all there.

‘Orilla Hotel,’ said Kate.

The boy said they must go in the tram-car, so in the tram-car they went. The driver whipped his mules, they rolled in the still, heavy morning light away down an uneven cobbled road with holes in it, between walls with falling mortar and low, black adobe houses, in the peculiar vacuous depression of a helpless little Mexican town, towards the plaza. The strange emptiness, everything empty of life!

Occasional men on horseback clattered suddenly by, occasional big men in scarlet serapes went noiselessly on their own way, under the big hats. A boy on a high mule was delivering milk from red globe-shaped jars slung on either side his mount. The street was stony, uneven, vacuous, sterile. The stones seemed dead, the town seemed made of dead stone. The human life came with a slow, sterile unwillingness, in spite of the low-hung power of the sun.

At length they were in the plaza, where brilliant trees flowered in a blaze of pure scarlet, and some in pure lavender, around the basins of milk-looking water. Milky-dim the water bubbled up in the basins, and women, bleary with sleep, uncombed, came from under the dilapidated arches of the portales, and across the broken pavement, to fill their water-jars.

The tram stopped and they got down. The boy got down with the bags, and told them they must go to the river to take a boat.

They followed obediently down the smashed pavements, where every moment you might twist your ankle or break your leg. Everywhere the same weary indifference and brokenness, a sense of dirt and of helplessness, squalor of far-gone indifference, under the perfect morning sky, in the pure sunshine and the pure Mexican air. The sense of life ebbing away, leaving dry ruin.

They came to the edge of the town, to a dusty, humped bridge, a broken wall, a pale-brown stream flowing full. Below the bridge a cluster of men.

Each one wanted her to hire his boat. She demanded a motor-boat: the boat

from the hotel. They said there wasn't one. She didn't believe it. Then a dark-faced fellow with his black hair down his forehead, and a certain intensity in his eyes, said: Yes, yes; the hotel had a boat, but it was broken. She must take a row-boat. In an hour and a half he would row her there.

'How long?' said Kate.

'An hour and a half.'

'And I am so hungry!' cried Kate. 'How much do you charge?'

'Two pesos.' He held up two fingers.

Kate said yes, and he ran down to his boat. Then she noticed he was a cripple with inturned feet. But how quick and strong!

She climbed with Villiers down the broken bank to the river, and in a moment they were in the boat. Pale green willow-trees fringed from the earthen banks to the fuller-flowing, pale-brown water. The river was not very wide, between deep banks. They slipped under the bridge, and past a funny high barge with rows of seats. The boatman said it went up the river to Jocotlan: and he waved his hand to show the direction. They were slipping down-stream, between lonely banks of willow-trees.

The crippled boatman was pulling hard, with great strength and energy. When she spoke to him in her bad Spanish and he found it hard to understand, he knitted his brow a little, anxiously. And when she laughed he smiled at her with such a beautiful gentleness, sensitive, wistful, quick. She felt he was naturally honest and truthful, and generous. There was a beauty in these men, a wistful beauty and a great physical strength. Why had she felt so bitterly about the country?

Morning was still young on the pale buff river, between the silent earthen banks. There was a blue dimness in the lower air, and black water-fowl ran swiftly, unconcernedly back and forth from the river's edge, on the dry, baked banks that were treeless now, and wider. They had entered a wide river, from the narrow one. The blueness and moistness of the dissolved night seemed to linger under the scattered pepper-trees of the far shore.

The boatman rowed short and hard upon the flimsy, soft, sperm-like water, only pausing at moments swiftly to smear the sweat from his face with an old rag he kept on the bench beside him. The sweat ran from his bronze-brown skin like water, and the black hair on his high-domed, Indian head smoked with wetness.

'There is no hurry,' said Kate, smiling to him.

'What does the Señorita say?'

'There is no hurry,' she repeated.

He paused, smiling, breathing deeply, and explained that now he was rowing

against stream. This wider river flowed out of the lake, full and heavy. See! even as he rested a moment, the boat began to turn and drift! He quickly took his oars.

The boat moved slowly, in the hush of departed night, upon the soft, full-flowing buff water, that carried little tufts of floating water-hyacinth. Some willow-trees stood near the edge, and some pepper-trees of most delicate green foliage. Beyond the trees and the level of the shores, big hills rose up to high, blunt points, baked incredibly dry, like biscuit. The blue sky settled against them nakedly; they were leafless and lifeless save for the iron-green shafts of the organ cactus, that glistened blackly, yet atmospherically, in the ochreous aridity. This was Mexico again, stark-dry and luminous with powerful light, cruel and unreal.

On a flat near the river a peon, perched on the rump of his ass, was slowly driving five luxurious cows towards the water to drink. The big black-and-white animals stepped in a dream-pace past the pepper-trees to the bank, like moving pieces of light-and-shade: the dun cows trailed after, in the incredible silence and brilliance of the morning.

Earth, air, water were all silent with new light, the last blue of night dissolving like a breath. No sound, even no life. The great light was stronger than life itself. Only, up in the blue, some turkey-buzzards were wheeling with dirty-edged wings, as everywhere in Mexico.

‘Don’t hurry!’ Kate said again to the boatman, who was again mopping his face, while his black hair ran sweat. ‘We can go slowly.’

The man smiled deprecatingly.

‘If the Señorita will sit in the back,’ he said.

Kate did not understand his request at first. He had rowed in towards a bend in the right bank, to be out of the current. On the left bank Kate had noticed some men bathing: men whose wet skins flashed with the beautiful brown-rose colour and glitter of the naked natives, and one stout man with the curious creamy-biscuit skin of the city Mexicans. Low against the water across-stream she watched the glitter of naked men, half-immersed in the river.

She rose to step back into the stern of the boat, where Villiers was. As she did so, she saw a dark head and the flashing ruddy shoulders of a man swimming towards the boat. She wavered — and as she was sitting down, the man stood up in the water and was wading near, the water washing at the loose little cloth he had round his loins. He was smooth and wet and of a lovely colour, with the rich smooth-muscléd physique of the Indians. He was coming towards the boat, pushing back his hair from his forehead.

The boatman watched him, transfixed, without surprise, a little subtle half-smile, perhaps of mockery, round his nose. As if he had expected it!

‘Where are you going?’ asked the man in the water, the brown river running softly at his strong thighs.

The boatman waited a moment for his patrons to answer, then, seeing they were silent, replied in a low, unwilling tone:

‘Orilla.’

The man in the water took hold of the stern of the boat, as the boatman softly touched the water with the oars to keep her straight, and he threw back his longish black hair with a certain effrontery.

‘Do you know whom the lake belongs to?’ he asked, with the same effrontery.

‘What do you say?’ asked Kate, haughtily.

‘If you know whom the lake belongs to?’ the young man in the water repeated.

‘To whom?’ said Kate, flustered.

‘To the old gods of Mexico,’ the stranger said. ‘You have to make a tribute to Quetzalcoatl if you go on the lake.’

The strange calm effrontery of it! But truly Mexican.

‘How?’ said Kate.

‘You can give me something,’ he said.

‘But why should I give something to you, if it is a tribute to Quetzalcoatl?’ she stammered.

‘I am Quetzalcoatl’s man, I,’ he replied, with calm effrontery.

‘And if I don’t give you anything?’ she said.

He lifted his shoulders and spread his free hand, staggering a little, losing his footing in the water as he did so.

‘If you wish to make an enemy of the lake — ’ he said, coolly, as he recovered his balance.

And then for the first time he looked straight at her. And as he did so, the demonish effrontery died down again, and the peculiar American tension slackened and left him.

He gave a slight wave of dismissal with his free hand, and pushed the boat gently forward.

‘But it doesn’t matter,’ he said, with a slight insolent jerk of his head sideways, and a faint, insolent smile. ‘We will wait till the Morning Star rises.’

The boatman softly but powerfully pulled the oars. The man in the water stood with the sun on his powerful chest, looking after the boat in half-seeing abstraction. His eyes had taken again the peculiar gleaming far-awayness, suspended between the realities, which, Kate suddenly realized, was the central look in the native eyes. The boatman, rowing away, was glancing back at the man who stood in the water, and his face, too, had the abstracted, transfigured

look of a man perfectly suspended between the world's two strenuous wings of energy. A look of extraordinary, arresting beauty, the silent, vulnerable centre of all life's quivering, like the nucleus gleaming in tranquil suspense, within a cell.

'What does he mean,' said Kate, 'by "We will wait till the Morning Star rises"?''

The man smiled slowly.

'It is a name,' he said.

And he seemed to know no more. But the symbolism had evidently the power to soothe and sustain him.

'Why did he come and speak to us?' asked Kate.

'He is one of those of the god Quetzalcoatl, Señorita.'

'And you? are you one too?'

'Who knows!' said the man, putting his head on one side. Then he added: 'I think so. We are many.'

He watched Kate's face with that gleaming, intense semi-abstraction, a gleam that hung unwavering in his black eyes, and which suddenly reminded Kate of the morning star, or the evening star, hanging perfect between night and the sun.

'You have the morning star in your eyes,' she said to the man.

He flashed her a smile of extraordinary beauty.

'The Señorita understands,' he said.

His face changed again to a dark-brown mask, like semi-transparent stone, and he rowed with all his might. Ahead, the river was widening, the banks were growing lower, down to the water's level, like shoals planted with willow-trees and with reeds. Above the willow-trees a square white sail was standing, as if erected on the land.

'Is the lake so near?' said Kate.

The man hastily mopped his running wet face.

'Yes, Señorita! The sailing-boats are waiting for the wind, to come into the river. We will pass by the canal.'

He indicated with a backward movement of the head a narrow, twisting passage of water between deep reeds. It made Kate think of the little river Anapo: the same mystery unbroken. The boatman, with creases half of sadness and half of exaltation in his bronze, still face, was pulling with all his might. Water-fowl went swimming into the reeds, or rose on wing and wheeled into the blue air. Some willow-trees hung a dripping, vivid green, in the stark dry country. The stream was narrow and winding. With a nonchalant motion, first of the right then of the left hand, Villiers was guiding the boatman, to keep him from running aground in the winding, narrow water-way.

And this put Villiers at his ease, to have something practical and slightly

mechanical to do and to assert. He was striking the American note once more, of mechanical dominance.

All the other business had left him incomprehending, and when he asked Kate, she had pretended not to hear him. She sensed a certain delicate, tender mystery in the river, in the naked man in the water, in the boatman, and she could not bear to have it subjected to the tough American flippancy. She was weary to death of American automatism and American flippant toughness. It gave her a feeling of nausea.

‘Quite a well-built fellow, that one who laid hold of the boat. What did he want, anyway?’ Villiers insisted.

‘Nothing!’ said Kate.

They were slipping out past the clay-coloured, loose stony edges of the land, through a surge of ripples, into the wide white light of the lake. A breeze was coming from the east, out of the upright morning, and the surface of the shallow, flimsy, dun-coloured water was in motion. Shoal-water rustled near at hand. Out to the open, large, square white sails were stepping gingerly forward, and beyond the buff-coloured, pale desert of water rose far-away blue, sharp hills of the other side, many miles away, pure pale blue with distance, yet sharp-edged and clear in form.

‘Now,’ said the boatman, smiling to Kate, ‘it is easier. Now we are out of the current.’

He pulled rhythmically through the frail-rippling, sperm-like water, with a sense of peace. And for the first time Kate felt she had met the mystery of the natives, the strange and mysterious gentleness between a scylla and a charybdis of violence; the small poised, perfect body of the bird that waves wings of thunder and wings of fire and night in its flight. But central between the flash of day and the black of night, between the flash of lightning and the break of thunder, the still, soft body of the bird poised and soaring, forever. The mystery of the evening-star brilliant in silence and distance between the downward-surgling plunge of the sun and the vast, hollow seething of inpouring night. The magnificence of the watchful morning-star, that watches between the night and the day, the gleaming clue to the two opposites.

This kind of frail, pure sympathy, she felt at the moment between herself and the boatman, between herself and the man who had spoken from the water. And she was not going to have it broken by Villiers’ American jokes.

There was a sound of breaking water. The boatman drew away, and pointed across to where a canoa, a native sailing-boat, was lying at an angle. She had run aground in a wind, and now must wait till another wind would carry her off the submerged bank again. Another boat was coming down the breeze, steering

cautiously among the shoals, for the river outlet. She was piled high with petates, the native leaf mats, above her hollowed black sides. And bare-legged men with loose white drawers rolled up, and brown chests showing, were running with poles as the shallows heaved up again, pushing her off, and balancing their huge hats with small, bird-like shakes of the head.

Beyond the boats, seawards, were rocks outcropping and strange birds like pelicans standing in silhouette, motionless.

They had been crossing a bay of the lake-shore, and were nearing the hotel. It stood on a parched dry bank above the pale-brown water, a long, low building amid a tender green of bananas and pepper-trees. Everywhere the shores rose up pale and cruelly dry, dry to cruelty, and on the little hills the dark statues of the organ cactus poised in nothingness.

There was a broken-down landing-place, and a boat-house in the distance, and someone in white flannel trousers was standing on the broken masonry. Upon the filmy water ducks and black water-fowl bobbed like corks. The bottom was stony. The boatman suddenly backed the boat, and pulled round. He pushed up his sleeve and hung over the bows, reaching into the water. With a quick motion he grabbed something, and scrambled into the boat again. He was holding in the pale-skinned hollow of his palm a little earthenware pot, crusted by the lake deposit.

‘What is it?’ she said.

‘Ollita of the gods,’ he said. ‘Of the old dead gods. Take it, Señorita.’

‘You must let me pay for it,’ she said.

‘No, Señorita. It is yours,’ said the man, with that sensitive, masculine sincerity which comes sometimes so quickly from a native.

It was a little, rough round pot with protuberances.

‘Look!’ said the man, reaching again for the little pot. He turned it upside-down, and she saw cut-in eyes and the sticking-out ears of an animal’s head.

‘A cat!’ she exclaimed. ‘It is a cat.’

‘Or a coyote!’

‘A coyote!’

‘Let’s look!’ said Villiers. ‘Why, how awfully interesting! Do you think it’s old?’

‘It is old?’ Kate asked.

‘The time of the old gods,’ said the boatman. Then with a sudden smile: ‘The dead gods don’t eat much rice, they only want little casseroles while they are bone under the water.’ And he looked her in the eyes.

‘While they are bone?’ she repeated. And she realized he meant the skeletons of gods that cannot die.

They were at the landing-stage; or rather, at the heap of collapsed masonry which had once been a landing-stage. The boatman got out and held the boat steady while Kate and Villiers landed. Then he scrambled up with the bags.

The man in white trousers, and a mozo appeared. It was the hotel manager. Kate paid the boatman.

‘Adiós, Señorita!’ he said with a smile. ‘May you go with Quetzalcoatl.’

‘Yes!’ she cried. ‘Good-bye!’

They went up the slope between the tattered bananas, whose ragged leaves were making a hushed, distant patter in the breeze. The green fruit curved out its bristly-soft bunch, the purple flower-bud depending stiffly.

The German manager came to talk to them: a young man of about forty, with his blue eyes going opaque and stony behind his spectacles, though the centres were keen. Evidently a German who had been many years out in Mexico — out in the lonely places. The rather stiff look, the slight look of fear in the soul — not physical fear — and the look of defeat, characteristic of the European who has long been subjected to the unbroken spirit of place! But the defeat was in the soul, not the will.

He showed Kate to her room in the unfinished quarter, and ordered her breakfast. The hotel consisted of an old low ranch-house with a veranda — and this was the dining-room, lounge, kitchen, and office. Then there was a two-storey new wing, with a smart bathroom between each two bedrooms, and almost up-to-date fittings: very incongruous.

But the new wing was unfinished — had been unfinished for a dozen years and more, the work abandoned when Porfirio Diaz fled. Now it would probably never be finished.

And this is Mexico. Whatever pretentiousness and modern improvements it may have, outside the capital, they are either smashed or raw and unfinished, with rusty bones of iron girders sticking out.

Kate washed her hands and went down to breakfast. Before the long veranda of the old ranch-house the green pepper-trees dropped like green light, and small cardinal birds with scarlet bodies and blazing impertinent heads like poppy-buds flashed among the pinkish pepper-heads, closing their brown wings upon the audacity of their glowing redness. A train of geese passed in the glaring sun, automatic, towards the eternal tremble of pale, earth-coloured water beyond the stones.

It was a place with a strange atmosphere: stony, hard, broken, with round cruel hills and the many-fluted bunches of the organ-cactus behind the old house, and an ancient road trailing past, deep in ancient dust. A touch of mystery and cruelty, the stoniness of fear, a lingering, cruel sacredness.

Kate loitered hungrily, and was glad when the Mexican in shirt-sleeves and patched trousers, another lingering remnant of Don Porfirio's day, brought her her eggs and coffee.

He was muted as everything about the place seemed muted, even the very stones and the water. Only those poppies on wing, the cardinal birds, gave a sense of liveliness: and they were uncanny.

So swiftly one's moods changed! In the boat she had glimpsed the superb rich stillness of the morning-star, the poignant intermediate flashing its quiet between the energies of the cosmos. She had seen it in the black eyes of the natives, in the sunrise of the man's rich, still body, Indian-warm.

And now again already the silence was of vacuity, arrest, and cruelty: the uncanny empty unbearableness of many Mexican mornings. Already she was uneasy, suffering from the malaise which tortures one inwardly in that country of cactuses.

She went up to her room, pausing at the corridor window to look out at the savage little hills that stood at the back of the hotel in desiccated heaps, with the dark-green bulks of organ-cactus sticking up mechanically and sinister, sombre in all the glare. Grey ground-squirrels like rats slithered ceaselessly around. Sinister, strangely dark and sinister, in the great glare of the sun!

She went to her room to be alone. Below her window, in the bricks and fallen rubble of unfinished masonry, a huge white turkey-cock, dim-white, strutted with his brown hens. And sometimes he stretched out his pink wattles and gave vent to fierce, powerful turkey-yelps, like some strong dog yelping; or else he ruffled all his feathers like a great, soiled white peony, and chuffed, hissing here and there, raging the metal of his plumage.

Below him, the eternal tremble of pale-earth, unreal waters, far beyond which rose the stiff resistance of mountains losing their pristine blue. Distinct, frail distances far off on the dry air, dim-seeing, yet sharp and edged with menace.

Kate took her bath in the filmy water that was hardly like water at all. Then she went and sat on the collapsed masonry, in the shade of the boat-house below. Small white ducks bobbed about on the shallow water below her, or dived, raising clouds of submarine dust. A canoe came paddling in; a lean fellow with sinewy brown legs. He answered Kate's nod with the aloof promptness of an Indian, made fast his canoe inside the boat-house, and was gone, stepping silent and barefoot over the bright green water-stones, and leaving a shadow, cold as flint, on the air behind him.

No sound on the morning save a faint touching of water, and the occasional powerful yelping of the turkey-cock. Silence, an aboriginal, empty silence, as of life withheld. The vacuity of a Mexican morning. Resounding sometimes to the

turkey-cock.

And the great, lymphatic expanse of water, like a sea, trembling, trembling, trembling to a far distance, to the mountains of substantial nothingness.

Near at hand, a ragged shifting of banana-trees, bare hills with immobile cactus, and to the left, an hacienda with peon's square mud boxes of houses. An occasional ranchero in skintight trousers and big hat rode trotting through the dust on a small horse, or peons on the rump of their asses, in floppy white cotton, going like ghosts.

Always something ghostly. The morning passing all of a piece, empty, vacuous. All sound withheld, all life withheld, everything holding back. The land so dry as to have a quality of invisibility, the water earth-filmy, hardly water at all. The lymphatic milk of fishes, somebody said.

CHAPTER VI

The Move Down the Lake

In Porfirio Diaz' day, the lake-side began to be the Riviera of Mexico, and Orilla was to be the Nice, or at least the Mentone of the country. But revolutions started erupting again, and in 1911 Don Porfirio fled to Paris with, it is said, thirty million gold pesos in his pocket: a peso being half a dollar, nearly half-a-crown. But we need not believe all that is said, especially by a man's enemies.

During the subsequent revolutions, Orilla, which had begun to be a winter paradise for the Americans, lapsed back into barbarism and broken brickwork. In 1921 a feeble new start had been made.

The place belonged to a German-Mexican family, who also owned the adjacent hacienda. They acquired the property from the American Hotel Company, who had undertaken to develop the lake-shore, and who had gone bankrupt during the various revolutions.

The German-Mexican owners were not popular with the natives. An angel from heaven would not have been popular, these years, if he had been known as the owner of property. However, in 1921 the hotel was very modestly opened again, with an American manager.

Towards the end of the year, José, son of the German-Mexican owner, came to stay with his wife and children in the hotel, in the new wing. José was a bit of a fool, as most foreigners are, after the first generation in Mexico. Having business to settle, he went into Guadalajara to the bank and returned with a thousand gold pesos in a bag, keeping the matter, as he thought, a dead secret.

Everyone had just gone to bed, on a brilliant moonlight night in winter, when two men appeared in the yard calling for José: they had to speak to him. José, suspecting nothing, left his wife and two children, and went down. In a moment he called for the American manager. The manager, thinking it was some bargaining to be done, also came down. As he came out of the door, two men seized him by the arms, and said: 'Don't make a noise!'

'What's amiss?' said Bell, who had built up Orilla, and had been twenty years on the lake.

Then he noticed that two other men had hold of José. 'Come,' they said.

There were five Mexicans — Indians, or half-Indians — and the two captives.

They went, the captives in slippers and shirtsleeves, to the little office away at the end of the other part of the hotel, which had been the old ranch-house.

‘What do you want?’ asked Bell.

‘Give us the money,’ said the bandits.

‘Oh, all right,’ said the American. There were a few pesos only in the safe. He opened, showed them, and they took the money.

‘Now give us the rest,’ they said.

‘There is no more,’ said the manager, in all sincerity; for José had not confessed to the thousand pesos.

The five peons then began to search the poor little office. They found a pile of red blankets — which they appropriated — and a few bottles of red wine — which they drank.

‘Now,’ they said, ‘give us the money.’

‘I can’t give you what there isn’t to give,’ said the manager.

‘Good!’ they said, and pulled out the hideous machetes, the heavy knives of the Mexicans.

José, intimidated, produced the suit-case with the thousand pesos. The money was wrapped up in the corner of a blanket.

‘Now, come with us,’ said the bandits.

‘Where to?’ asked the manager, beginning at last to be scared.

‘Only out on to the hill, where we will leave you, so that you cannot telephone to Ixtlahuacan before we have time to get away,’ said the Indians.

Outside, in the bright moon, the air was chill. The American shivered, in his trousers and shirt and a pair of bedroom slippers.

‘Let me take a coat,’ he said.

‘Take a blanket,’ said the tall Indian.

He took a blanket, and with two men holding his arms, he followed José, who was likewise held captive, out of the little gate, across the dust of the road, and up the steep little round hill on which the organ cactus thrust up their sinister clumps, like bunches of cruel fingers, in the moonlight. The hill was stony and steep, the going slow. José, a fat young man of twenty-eight, protested in the feeble manner of the well-to-do Mexicans.

At last they came to the top of the hill. Three men took José apart, leaving Bell alone near a cactus clump. The moon shone in a perfect Mexican heaven. Below, the big lake glimmered faintly, stretching its length towards the west. The air was so clear, the mountains across, thirty miles away, stood sharp and still in the moonlight. And not a sound nor a motion anywhere! At the foot of the hill was the hacienda, with the peons asleep in their huts. But what help was there in them?

José and the three men had gone behind a cactus-tree that stuck up straight like a great black bundle of poles, poised on one central foot, and cast a sharp, iron shadow. The American could hear the voices, talking low and rapidly, but could not distinguish the words. His two guards drew away from him a little, to hear what the others were saying, behind the cactus.

And the American, who knew the ground he stood on and the sky that hung over him, felt again the black vibration of death in the air, the black thrill of the death-lust. Unmistakable he felt it seething in the air, as any man may feel it, in Mexico. And the strange aboriginal fiendishness, awake now in the five bandits, communicated itself to his blood.

Loosening his blanket, he listened tensely in the moonlight. And came the thud! thud! thud! of a machete striking with lust in a human body, then the strange voice of José: 'Perdóneme! — Forgive me!' the murdered man cried as he fell.

The American waited for no more. Dropping his blanket, he jumped for the cactus cover, and stooping, took the down-slope like a rabbit. The pistol-shots rang out after him, but the Mexicans don't as a rule take good aim. His bedroom slippers flew off, and barefoot, the man, thin and light, sped down over the stones and the cactus, down to the hotel.

When he got down, he found everyone in the hotel awake and shouting.

'They are killing José!' he said, and he rushed to the telephone, expecting every moment the five bandits would be on him.

The telephone was in the old ranch-building, in the dining-room. There was no answer — no answer — no answer. In her little bedroom over the kitchen, the cook-woman, the traitress, was yelling. Across in the new wing, a little distance away, José's Mexican wife was screaming. One of the servant boys appeared.

'Try and get the police in Ixtlahuacan,' said the American, and he ran to the new wing, to get his gun and to barricade the doors. His daughter, a motherless girl, was crying with Jose's wife.

There was no answer on the telephone. At dawn, the cook, who said the bandits would not hurt a woman, went across to the hacienda to fetch the peons. And when the sun rose, a man was sent for the police.

They found the body of José, pierced with fourteen holes. The American was carried to Ixtlahuacan, and kept in bed, having cactus spines dug out of his feet by two native women.

The bandits fled across the marshes. Months later, they were identified by the stolen blankets, away in Michoacan; and, pursued, one of them betrayed the others.

After this, the hotel was closed again, and had been reopened only three

months when Kate arrived.

But Villiers came with another story. Last year the peons had murdered the manager of one of the estates across the lake. They had stripped him and left him naked on his back, with his sexual organs cut off and put into his mouth, his nose slit and pinned back, the two halves, to his cheeks, with long cactus spines.

‘Tell me no more!’ said Kate.

She felt there was doom written on the very sky, doom and horror.

She wrote to Don Ramón in Sayula, saying she wanted to go back to Europe. True, she herself had seen no horrors, apart from the bull-fight. And she had had some exquisite moments, as coming to this hotel in the boat. The natives had a certain mystery and beauty, to her. But she could not bear the unease, and the latest sense of horror.

True, the peons were poor. They used to work for twenty cents, American, a day; and now the standard price was fifty cents, or one peso. But then in the old days they received their wage all the year round. Now, only at harvest time or sowing time. No work, no pay. And in the long dry season, it was mostly no work.

‘Still,’ said the German manager of the hotel, a man who had run a rubber plantation in Tabasco, a sugar plantation in the state of Vera Cruz, and an hacienda growing wheat, maize, oranges, in Jalisco: ‘still, it isn’t a question of money with the peons. It doesn’t start with the peons. It starts in Mexico City, with a lot of malcontents who want to put their spoke in the wheel, and who lay hold of pious catchwords, to catch the poor. There’s no more in it than that. Then the agitators go round and infect the peons. It is nothing but a sort of infectious disease, like syphilis, all this revolution and socialism.’

‘But why does no one oppose it,’ said Kate. ‘Why don’t the hacendados put up a fight, instead of caving in and running away?’

‘The Mexican hacendado!’ The man’s German eyes gave out a spark. ‘The Mexican gentleman is such a brave man, that while the soldier is violating his wife on the bed, he is hiding under the bed and holding his breath so they shan’t find him. He’s as brave as that.’

Kate looked away uncomfortably.

‘They all want the United States to intervene. They hate the Americans; but they want the United States to intervene, to save them their money and their property. That’s how brave they are! They hate the Americans personally, but they love them because they can look after money and property. So they want the United States to annex Mexico, the beloved patria; leaving the marvellous green and white and red flag, and the eagle with the snake in its claws, for the sake of appearances and honour! They’re simply bottled full of honour; of that

sort.'

Always the same violence of bitterness, Kate thought to-herself. And she was so weary of it. How, how weary she was of politics, of the very words 'Labour' and 'Socialism!' and all that sort! It suffocated her.

'Have you heard of the men of Quetzalcoatl?' asked Kate.

'Quetzalcoatl!' exclaimed the manager, giving a little click of the final 'l', in a peculiar native fashion. 'That's another try-on of the Bolshevists. They thought socialism needed a god, so they're going to fish him out of this lake. He'll do for another pious catchword in another revolution.'

The man went away, unable to stand any more.

'Oh dear!' thought Kate. 'It really is hard to bear.'

But she wanted to hear more of Quetzalcoatl.

'Did you know,' she said to the man later, showing him the little pot, 'that they find those things in the lake?'

'They're common enough!' he said. 'They used to throw them in, in the idolatrous days. May still do so, for what I know. Then get them out again to sell to tourists.'

'They call them ollitas of Quetzalcoatl.'

'That's a new invention.'

'Why, do you think?'

'They're trying to start a new thing, that's all. They've got this society on the lake here, of the Men of Quetzalcoatl, and they go round singing songs. It's another dodge for national-socialism, that's all.'

'What do they do, the Men of Quetzalcoatl?'

'I can't see they do anything, except talk and get excited over their own importance.'

'But what's the idea?'

'I couldn't say. Don't suppose they have any. But if they have, they won't let on to you. You're a gringo — or a gringita, at the best. And this is for pure Mexicans. For los señores, the workmen, and los caballeros, the peons. Every peon is a caballero nowadays, and every workman is a señor. So I suppose they're going to get themselves a special god, to put the final feather in their caps.'

'Where did it start, the Quetzalcoatl thing?'

'Down in Sayula. They say Don Ramón Carrasco is at the back of it. Maybe he wants to be the next President — or maybe he's aiming higher, and wants to be the first Mexican Pharaoh.'

Ah, how tired it made Kate feel; the hopelessness, the ugliness, the cynicism, the emptiness. She felt she could cry aloud, for the unknown gods to put the

magic back into her life, and to save her from the dry-rot of the world's sterility.

She thought again of going back to Europe. But what was the good? She knew it! It was all politics or jazzing or slushy mysticism or sordid spiritualism. And the magic had gone. The younger generation, so smart and interesting, but so without any mystery, any background. The younger the generation, the flatter and more jazzy, more and more devoid of wonder.

No, she could not go back to Europe.

And no! She refused to take the hotel manager's estimate of Quetzalcoatl. How should a hotel manager judge? — even if he was not really an hotel manager, but a ranch-overseer. She had seen Ramón Carrasco, and Cipriano. And they were men. They wanted something beyond. She would believe in them. Anything, anything rather than this sterility of nothingness which was the world, and into which her life was drifting.

She would send Villiers away, too. He was nice, she liked him. But he, too, was widdershins, unwinding the sensations of disintegration and anti-life. No, she must send him away. She must, she must free herself from these mechanical connections.

Every one of them, like Villiers, was like a cogwheel in contact with which all one's workings were reversed. Everything he said, everything he did, reversed her real life-flow, made her go against the sun.

And she did not want to go against the sun. After all, in spite of the horrors latent in Mexico, when you got these dark-faced people away from wrong contacts like agitators and socialism, they made one feel that life was vast, if fearsome, and death was fathomless.

Horrors might burst out of them. But something must burst out, sometimes, if men are not machines.

No! no! no! no! no! she cried to her own soul. Let me still believe in some human contact. Let it not be all cut off for me!

But she made up her mind to be alone, and to cut herself off from all the mechanical widdershin contacts. Villiers must go back to his United States. She would be alone in her own milieu. Not to be touched by any, any of the mechanical cogwheel people. To be left alone, not to be touched. To hide, and be hidden, and never really be spoken to.

Yet, at the same time, with her blood flowing softly sunwise, to let the sunwise sympathy of unknown people steal in to her. To shut doors of iron against the mechanical world. But to let the sunwise world steal across to her, and add its motion to her, the motion of the stress of life, with the big sun and the stars like a tree holding out its leaves.

She wanted an old Spanish house, with its inner patio of flowers and water.

Turned inwards, to the few flowers walled in by shadow. To turn one's back on the cogwheel world. Not to look out any more on to that horrible machine of the world. To look at one's own quiet little fountain and one's own little orange-trees, with only heaven above.

So, having soothed her heart, she wrote Don Ramón again, that she was coming to Sayula to look for a house. She sent Villiers away. And the next day she set off with a manservant, in the old motor-boat of the hotel, down to the village of Sayula.

It was thirty-five miles to travel, down the long lake. But the moment she set off, she felt at peace. A tall, dark-faced fellow sat in the stern of the boat, steering and attending to the motor. She sat on cushions in the middle. And the young manservant perched in the prow.

They started before sunrise, when the lake was bathed in motionless light. Odd tufts of water-hyacinth were travelling on the soft spermy water, holding up a green leaf like a little sail of a boat, and nodding a delicate, mauve-blue flower.

Give me the mystery and let the world live again for me! Kate cried to her own soul. And deliver me from man's automatism.

The sun rose, and a whiteness of light played on the tops of the mountains. The boat hugged the north shore, turning the promontory on which the villas had started so jauntily, twenty years ago, but now were lapsing back to wilderness. All was still and motionless in the light. Sometimes on the little bare patches high up on the dry hills were white specks; birds? No, men in their white cotton, peons hoeing. They were so tiny and so distinct, they looked like white birds settled.

Round the bend were the hot springs, the church, the inaccessible village of the pure Indians, who spoke no Spanish. There were some green trees, under the precipitous, dry mountain-side.

So on and on, the motor-boat chugging incessantly, the man in the bows coiled up like a serpent, watching; the fish-milk water gleaming and throwing off a dense light, so that the mountains away across were fused out. And Kate, under the awning, went into a kind of sleep.

They were passing the island, with its ruins of fortress and prison. It was all rock and dryness, with great broken walls and the shell of a church among its hurtful stones and its dry grey herbage. For a long time the Indians had defended it against the Spaniards. Then the Spaniards used the island as a fortress against the Indians. Later, as a penal settlement. And now the place was a ruin, repellent, full of scorpions, and otherwise empty of life. Only one or two fishermen lived in the tiny cove facing the mainland, and a flock of goats, specks of life creeping among the rocks. And an unhappy fellow put there by the Government to

register the weather.

No, Kate did not want to land. The place looked too sinister. She took food from the basket, and ate a little lunch, and dozed.

In this country she was afraid. But it was her soul more than her body that knew fear. She had realized, for the first time, with finality and fatality, what was the illusion she laboured under. She had thought that each individual had a complete self, a complete soul, an accomplished I. And now she realized as plainly as if she had turned into a new being, that this was not so. Men and women had incomplete selves, made up of bits assembled together loosely and somewhat haphazard. Man was not created ready-made. Men to-day were half-made, and women were half-made. Creatures that existed and functioned with certain regularity, but which ran off into a hopeless jumble of inconsequence.

Half-made, like insects that can run fast and be so busy and suddenly grow wings, but which are only winged grubs after all. A world full of half-made creatures on two legs, eating food and degrading the one mystery left to them, sex. Spinning a great lot of words, burying themselves inside the cocoons of words and ideas that they spin round themselves, and inside the cocoons, mostly perishing inert and overwhelmed.

Half-made creatures, rarely more than half-responsible and half-accountable, acting in terrible swarms, like locusts.

Awful thought! And with a collective insect-like will, to avoid the responsibility of achieving any more perfected being or identity. The queer, rabid hate of being urged on into purer self. The morbid fanaticism of the non-integrate.

In the great seething light of the lake, with the terrible blue-ribbed mountains of Mexico beyond, she seemed swallowed by some grisly skeleton, in the cage of his death-anatomy. She was afraid, mystically, of the man crouching there in the bows with his smooth thighs and supple loins like a snake, and his black eyes watching. A half-being, with a will to disintegration and death. And the tall man behind her at the tiller, he had the curious smoke-grey phosphorus eyes under black lashes sometimes met among the Indians. Handsome, he was, and quiet and seemingly self-contained. But with that peculiar devilish half-smile lurking under his face, the half-jeering look of a part-thing, which knows its power to destroy the purer thing.

And yet, Kate told herself, both these men were manly fellows. They would not molest her, unless she communicated the thought to them, and by a certain cowardliness, prompted them. Their souls were nascent, there was no fixed evil in them, they could sway both ways.

So in her soul she cried aloud to the greater mystery, the higher power that

hovered in the interstices of the hot air, rich and potent. It was as if she could lift her hands and clutch the silent, stormless potency that roved everywhere, waiting. 'Come then!' she said, drawing a long slow breath, and addressing the silent life-breath which hung unrevealed in the atmosphere, waiting.

And as the boat ran on, and her fingers rustled in the warm water of the lake, she felt the fulness descend into her once more, the peace, and the power. The fulfilment filling her soul like the fulness of ripe grapes. And she thought to herself: 'Ah, how wrong I have been, not to turn sooner to the other presence, not to take the life-breath sooner! How wrong to be afraid of these two men.'

She did what she had been half-afraid to do before; she offered them the oranges and sandwiches still in the basket. And each of the men looked at her, the smoke-grey eyes looked her in the eyes, and the black eyes looked her in the eyes. And the man with the smoke-grey eyes, who was cunninger than the other man, but also prouder, said to her with his eyes: We are living! I know your sex, and you know mine. The mystery we are glad not to meddle with. You leave me my natural honour, and I thank you for the grace.

In his look, so quick and proud, and in his quiet *Muchas gracias!* she heard the touch of male recognition, a man glad to retain his honour, and to feel the communion of grace. Perhaps it was the Spanish word *Gracias!* But in her soul she was thinking of the communion of grace.

With the black-eyed man it was the same. He was humbler. But as he peeled his orange and dropped the yellow peel on the water, she could see the stillness, the humility, and the pathos of grace in him; something very beautiful and truly male, and very hard to find in a civilized white man. It was not of the spirit. It was of the dark, strong, unbroken blood, the flowering of the soul.

Then she thought to herself: After all, it is good to be here. It is very good to be in this boat on this lake with these two silent, semi-barbarous men. They can receive the gift of grace, and we can share it like a communion, they and I. I am very glad to be here. It is so much better than love: the love I knew with Joachim. This is the fulness of the vine.

'Sayula!' said the man in the bows, pointing ahead.

She saw, away off, a place where there were green trees, where the shore was flat, and a biggish building stood out.

'What is the building?' she asked.

'The railway station.'

She was suitably impressed, for it was a new-looking, imposing structure.

A little steamer was smoking, lying off from a wooden jetty in the loneliness, and black, laden boats were poling out to her, and merging back to shore. The vessel gave a hoot, and slowly yet busily set off on the bosom of the water,

heading in a slanting line across the lake, to which the tiny high white twin-towers of Tuliapán showed above the water-line, tiny and far-off, on the other side.

They had passed the jetty, and rounding the shoal where the willows grew, she could see Sayula; white fluted twin-towers of the church, obelisk shaped above the pepper-trees; beyond, a mound of a hill standing alone, dotted with dry bushes, distinct and Japanese-looking; beyond this, the corrugated, blue-ribbed, flat-flanked mountains of Mexico.

It looked peaceful, delicate, almost Japanese. As she drew nearer she saw the beach with the washing spread on the sand; the fleecy green willow-trees and pepper-trees, and the villas in foliage and flowers, hanging magenta curtains of bougainvillea, red dots of hibiscus, pink abundance of tall oleander trees; occasional palm-trees sticking out.

The boat was steering round a stone jetty, on which, in black letters, was painted an advertisement for motor-car tyres. There were a few seats, some deep fleecy trees growing out of the sand, a booth for selling drinks, a little promenade, and white boats on a sandy beach. A few women sitting under parasols, a few bathers in the water, and trees in front of the few villas deep in green or blazing scarlet blossoms.

‘This is very good,’ thought Kate. ‘It is not too savage, and not over-civilized. It isn’t broken, but it is rather out of repair. It is in contact with the world, but the world has got a very weak grip on it.’

She went to the hotel, as Don Ramón had advised her.

‘Do you come from Orilla? You are Mrs Leslie? Don Ramón Carrasco sent us a letter about you.’

There was a house. Kate paid her boatmen and shook hands with them. She was sorry to be cut off from them again. And they looked at her with a touch of regret as they left. She said to herself:

‘There is something rich and alive in these people. They want to be able to breathe the Great Breath. They are like children, helpless. And then they’re like demons. But somewhere, I believe, they want the breath of life and the communion of the brave, more than anything.’

She was surprised at herself, suddenly using this language. But her weariness and her sense of devastation had been so complete, that the Other Breath in the air, and the bluish dark power in the earth had become, almost suddenly, more real to her than so-called reality. Concrete, jarring, exasperating reality had melted away, and a soft world of potency stood in its place, the velvety dark flux from the earth, the delicate yet supreme life-breath in the inner air. Behind the fierce sun the dark eyes of a deeper sun were watching, and between the bluish

ribs of the mountains a powerful heart was secretly beating, the heart of the earth.

Her house was what she wanted; a low, L-shaped, tiled building with rough red floors and deep veranda, and the other two sides of the patio completed by the thick, dark little mango-forest outside the low wall. The square of the patio, within the precincts of the house and the mango-trees, was gay with oleanders and hibiscus, and there was a basin of water in the seedy grass. The flower-pots along the veranda were full of flowering geranium and foreign flowers. At the far end of the patio the chickens were scratching under the silent motionlessness of ragged banana-trees.

There she had it; her stone, cool, dark house, every room opening on to the veranda; her deep, shady veranda, or piazza, or corridor, looking out to the brilliant sun, the sparkling flowers and the seed-grass, the still water and the yellowing banana-trees, the dark splendour of the shadow-dense mango-trees.

With the house went a Mexican Juana with two thick-haired daughters and one son. This family lived in a den at the back of the projecting bay of the dining-room. There, half screened, was the well and the toilet, and a little kitchen and a sleeping-room where the family slept on mats on the floor. There the paltry chickens paddled, and the banana-trees made a chitter as the wind came.

Kate had four bedrooms to choose from. She chose the one whose low, barred window opened on the rough, grass and cobble-stone street, closed her doors and windows, and went to sleep, saying to herself as she lay down: Now I am alone. And now I have only one thing to do: not to get caught up into the world's cogwheels any more, and not to lose my hold on the hidden greater thing.

She was tired with a strange weariness, feeling she could make no further effort. She woke up at tea-time, but there was no tea. Juana hastened off to the hotel to buy a bit.

Juana was a woman of about forty, rather short, with full dark face, centreless dark eyes, untidy hair, and a limping way of walking. She spoke rapidly, a rather plum-in-the-mouth Spanish, adding 'n' to all her words. Something of a sloven, down to her speech.

'No, Niña, no hay masn' — masn instead of mas. And calling Kate, in the old Mexican style, Niña, which means child. It is the honourable title for a mistress.

Juana was going to be a bit of a trial. She was a widow of doubtful antecedents, a creature with passion, but not much control, strong with a certain indifference and looseness. The hotel owner assured Kate that she was honest, but that if Kate would rather find another criada, all well and good.

There was a bit of a battle to be fought between the two women. Juana was

obstinate and reckless; she had not been treated very well by the world. And there was a touch of bottom-dog insolence about her.

But also, sudden touches of passionate warmth and the peculiar selfless generosity of the natives. She would be honest out of rough defiance and indifference, so long as she was not in a state of antagonism.

As yet, however, she was cautiously watching her ground, with that black-eyed touch of malice and wariness to be expected. And Kate felt that the cry: Niña — child! by which she was addressed, held in it a slight note of malevolent mockery.

But there was nothing to do but to go ahead and trust the dark-faced, centreless woman.

The second day, Kate had the energy to cast out one suite of bent-wood and cane furniture from her salon, remove pictures and little stands.

If there is one social instinct more dreary than all the other social instincts in the world, it is the Mexican. In the centre of Kate's red-tiled salon were two crescents: a black bent-wood cane settee flanked on each side by two black bent-wood cane chairs, exactly facing a brown bent-wood cane settee flanked on each side by two brown bent-wood cane chairs. It was as if the two settees and the eight chairs were occupied by the ghosts of all the Mexican banalities ever uttered, sitting facing one another with their knees towards one another, and their feet on the terrible piece of green-with-red-roses carpet, in the weary centre of the salon. The very sight of it was frightening.

Kate shattered this face-to-face symmetry, and had the two girls, Maria and Concha, assisted by the ironic Juana, carrying off the brown bent-wood chairs and the bamboo stands into one of the spare bedrooms. Juana looked on cynically, and assisted officiously. But when Kate had her trunk, and fished out a couple of light rugs and a couple of fine shawls and a few things to make the place human, the criada began to exclaim: 'Qué bonita! Qué bonita, Niña! Mire que bonita!'

CHAPTER VII

The Plaza

Sayula was a little lake resort; not for the idle rich, for Mexico has few left; but for tradespeople from Guadalajara, and week-enders. Even of these, there were few.

Nevertheless, there were two hotels, left over, really, from the safe quiet days of Don Porfirio, as were most of the villas. The outlying villas were shut up, some of them abandoned. Those in the village lived in a perpetual quake of fear. There were many terrors, but the two regnant were bandits and bolshevists.

Bandits are merely men who, in the outlying villages, having very often no money, no work, and no prospects, take to robbery and murder for a time — occasionally for a lifetime — as a profession. They live in their wild villages until troops are sent after them, when they retire into the savage mountains, or the marshes.

Bolshevists, somehow, seem to be born on the railway. Wherever the iron rails run, and passengers are hauled back and forth in railway coaches, there the spirit of rootlessness, of transitoriness, of first and second class in separate compartments, of envy and malice, and of iron and demonish panting engines, seems to bring forth the logical children of materialism, the bolshevists.

Sayula had her little branch of railway, her one train a day. The railway did not pay, and fought with extinction. But it was enough.

Sayula also had that real insanity of America, the automobile. As men used to want a horse and a sword, now they want a car. As women used to pine for a home and a box at the theatre, now it is a 'machine.' And the poor follow the middle class. There was a perpetual rush of 'machines', motor-cars and motor-buses — called *camiónes* — along the one forlorn road coming to Sayula from Guadalajara. One hope, one faith, one destiny; to ride in a *camión*, to own a car.

There was a little bandit scare when Kate arrived in the village, but she did not pay much heed. At evening she went into the plaza, to be with the people. The plaza was a square with big trees and a disused bandstand in the centre, a little promenade all round, and then the cobbled streets where the donkeys and the *camiónes* passed. There was a further little section of real market-place, on the north side.

The band played no more in Sayula, and the *elegancia* strolled no more on the

inner pavement around the plaza, under the trees. But the pavement was still good, and the benches were still more-or-less sound. Oh Don Porfirio's day! And now it was the peons and Indians, in their blankets and white clothes, who filled the benches and monopolized the square. True, the law persisted that the peons must wear trousers in the plaza, and not the loose great floppy drawers of the fields. But then the peons also wanted to wear trousers, instead of the drawers that were the garb of their humble labour.

The plaza now belonged to the peons. They sat thick on the benches, or slowly strolled round in their sandals and blankets. Across the cobbled road on the north side, the little booths selling soup and hot food were crowded with men after six o'clock; it was cheaper to eat out, at the end of a day's work. The women at home could eat tortillas, never mind the caldo, the soup or the meat mess. At the booths which sold tequila, men, women, and boys sat on the benches with their elbows on the board. There was a mild gambling game, where the man in the centre turned the cards, and the plaza rang to his voice: Cinco de Spadas! Rey de Copas! A large, stout, imperturbable woman, with a cigarette on her lip and danger in her lowering black eye, sat on into the night, selling tequila. The sweetmeat man stood by his board and sold sweets at one centavo each. And down on the pavement, small tin torch-lamps flared upon tiny heaps of mangoes or nauseous tropical red plums, two or three centavos the little heap, while the vendor, a woman in the full wave of her skirt, or a man with curious patient humility, squatted waiting for a purchaser, with that strange fatal indifference and that gentle sort of patience so puzzling to a stranger. To have thirty cents' worth of little red plums to sell; to pile them on the pavement in tiny pyramids, five in a pyramid; and to wait all day and on into the night, squatting on the pavement and looking up from the feet to the far-off face of the passer-by and potential purchaser, this, apparently, is an occupation and a living. At night by the flare of the tin torch, blowing its flame on the wind.

Usually there would be a couple of smallish young men with guitars of different sizes, standing close up facing one another like two fighting cocks that are uttering a long, endless swan-song, singing in tense subdued voices the eternal ballads, not very musical, mournful, endless, intense, audible only within close range; keeping on and on till their throats were scraped. And a few tall, dark men in red blankets standing around, listening casually, and rarely, very rarely making a contribution of one centavo.

In among the food-booths would be another trio, this time two guitars and a fiddle, and two of the musicians blind; the blind ones singing at a high pitch, full speed, yet not very audible. The very singing seemed secretive, the singers pressing close in, face to face, as if to keep the wild, melancholy ballad re-

echoing in their private breasts, their back to the world.

And the whole village was in the plaza, it was like a camp, with the low, rapid sound of voices. Rarely, very rarely, a voice rose above the deep murmur of the men, the musical ripple of the women, the twitter of children. Rarely any quick movement; the slow promenade of men in sandals, the sandals, called huaraches, making a slight cockroach shuffle on the pavement. Sometimes, darting among the trees, barelegged boys went sky-larking in and out of the shadow, in and out of the quiet people. They were the irrepressible boot-blacks, who swarm like tiresome flies in a barefooted country.

At the south end of the plaza, just across from the trees and cornerwise to the hotel, was a struggling attempt at an outdoor café, with little tables and chairs on the pavement. Here, on weekdays, the few who dared flaunt their prestige would sit and drink a beer or a glass of tequila. They were mostly strangers. And the peons, sitting immobile on the seats in the background, looked on with basilisk eyes from under the great hats.

But on Saturdays and Sundays there was something of a show. Then the camiónes and motor-cars came in lurching and hissing. And, like strange birds alighting, you had slim and charming girls in organdie frocks and face-powder and bobbed hair, fluttering into the plaza. There they strolled, arm in arm, brilliant in red organdie and blue chiffon and white muslin and pink and mauve and tangerine frail stuffs, their black hair bobbed out, their dark slim arms interlaced, their dark faces curiously macabre in the heavy make-up; approximating to white, but the white of a clown or a corpse.

In a world of big, handsome peon men, these flappers flapped with butterfly brightness and an incongruous shrillness, manless. The supply of fifis, the male young elegants who are supposed to equate the flappers, was small. But still, fifis there were, in white flannel trousers and white shoes, dark jackets, correct straw hats, and canes. Fifis far more ladylike than the reckless flappers; and far more nervous, wincing. But fifis none the less, gallant, smoking a cigarette with an elegant flourish, talking elegant Castilian, as near as possible, and looking as if they were going to be sacrificed to some Mexican god within a twelvemonth; when they were properly plumped and perfumed. The sacrificial calves being fattened.

On Saturday, the fifis and the flappers and the motor-car people from town — only a forlorn few, after all — tried to be butterfly gay, in sinister Mexico. They hired the musicians with guitars and fiddle, and the jazz music began to quaver, a little too tenderly, without enough kick.

And on the pavement under the trees of the alameda — under the trees of the plaza, just near the little tables and chairs of the café, the young couples began to

gyrate à la mode. The red and the pink and the yellow and the blue organdie frocks were turning sharply with all the white flannel trousers available, and some of the white flannel trousers had smart shoes, white with black strappings or with tan brogue bands. And some of the organdie frocks had green legs and green feet, some had legs à la nature, and white feet. And the slim, dark arms went around the dark blue fifi shoulders — or dark blue with a white thread. And the immeasurably soft faces of the males would smile with a self-conscious fatherliness at the whitened, pretty, reckless little faces of the females; soft, fatherly, sensuous smiles, suggestive of a victim's luxuriousness.

But they were dancing on the pavement of the plaza, and on this pavement the peons were slowly strolling, or standing in groups watching with black, inscrutable eyes the uncanny butterfly twitching of the dancers. Who knows what they thought? — whether they felt any admiration and envy at all, or only just a silent, cold, dark-faced opposition? Opposition there was.

The young peons in their little white blouses, and the scarlet serape folded jauntily on one shoulder, strolled slowly on under their big heavy, poised hats, with a will to ignore the dancers. Slowly, with a heavy, calm balance, they moved irresistibly through the dance, as if the dance did not exist. And the fifis in white trousers, with organdie in their arms, steered as best they might, to avoid the heavy, relentless passage of the young peons, who went on talking to one another, smiling and flashing powerful white teeth, in a black, heavy sang-froid that settled like a blight even on the music. The dancers and the passing peons never touched, never jostled. In Mexico you do not run into people accidentally. But the dance broke against the invisible opposition.

The Indians on the seats, they too watched the dancers for a while. Then they turned against them the heavy negation of indifference, like a stone on the spirit. The mysterious faculty of the Indians, as they sit there, so quiet and dense, for killing off any ebullient life, for quenching any light and colourful effervescence.

There was indeed a little native dance-hall. But it was shut apart within four walls. And the whole rhythm and meaning was different, heavy, with a touch of violence. And even there, the dancers were artisans and mechanics or railway-porters, the half-urban people. No peons at all — or practically none.

So, before very long, the organdie butterflies and the flannel-trouser fifis gave in, succumbed, crushed once more beneath the stone-heavy passivity of resistance in the demonish peons.

The curious, radical opposition of the Indians to the thing we call the spirit. It is spirit which makes the flapper flap her organdie wings like a butterfly. It is spirit which creases the white flannel trousers of the fifi and makes him cut his

rather pathetic dash. They try to talk the elegancies and flippancies of the modern spirit.

But down on it all, like a weight of obsidian, comes the passive negation of the Indian. He understands soul, which is of the blood. But spirit, which is superior, and is the quality of our civilization, this, in the mass, he darkly and barbarically repudiates. Not until he becomes an artisan or connected with machinery does the modern spirit get him.

And perhaps it is this ponderous repudiation of the modern spirit which makes Mexico what it is.

But perhaps the automobile will make roads even through the inaccessible soul of the Indian.

Kate was rather sad, seeing the dance swamped. She had been sitting at a little table, with Juana for dueña, sipping a glass of absinthe.

The motor-cars returning to town left early, in a little group. If bandits were out, they had best keep together. Even the fifis had a pistol on their hips.

But it was Saturday, so some of the young 'elegance' was staying on, till the next day; to bathe and flutter in the sun.

It was Saturday, so the plaza was very full, and along the cobbled streets stretching from the square many torches fluttered and wavered upon the ground, illuminating a dark salesman and an array of straw hats, or a heap of straw mats called petates, or pyramids of oranges from across the lake.

It was Saturday, and Sunday morning was market. So, as it were suddenly, the life in the plaza was dense and heavy with potency. The Indians had come in from all the villages, and from far across the lake. And with them they brought the curious heavy potency of life which seems to hum deeper and deeper when they collect together.

In the afternoon, with the wind from the south, the big canoas, sailing-boats with black hulls and one huge sail, had come drifting across the waters, bringing the market-produce and the natives to their gathering ground. All the white specks of villages on the far shore, and on the far-off slopes, had sent their wild quota to the throng.

It was Saturday, and the Indian instinct for living on into the night, once they are gathered together, was now aroused. The people did not go home. Though market would begin at dawn, men had no thought of sleep.

At about nine o'clock, after the fifi dance was shattered, Kate heard a new sound, the sound of a drum, or tom-tom, and saw a drift of the peons away to the dark side of the plaza, where the side market would open to-morrow. Already places had been taken, and little stalls set up, and huge egg-shaped baskets big enough to hold two men were lolling against the wall.

There was a rippling and a pulse-like thudding of the drum, strangely arresting on the night air, then the long note of a flute playing a sort of wild, unemotional melody, with the drum for a syncopated rhythm. Kate, who had listened to the drums and the wild singing of the Red Indians in Arizona and New Mexico, instantly felt that timeless, primeval passion of the prehistoric races, with their intense and complicated religious significance, spreading on the air.

She looked inquiringly at Juana, and Juana's black eyes glanced back at her furtively.

'What is it?' said Kate.

'Musicians, singers,' said Juana evasively.

'But it's different,' said Kate.

'Yes, it is new.'

'New?'

'Yes, it has only been coming for a short time.'

'Where does it come from?'

'Who knows!' said Juana, with an evasive shrug of her shoulders.

'I want to hear,' said Kate.

'It's purely men,' said Juana.

'Still, one can stand a little way off.'

Kate moved towards the dense, silent throng of men in big hats. They all had their backs to her.

She stood on the step of one of the houses, and saw a little clearing at the centre of the dense throng of men, under the stone wall over which bougainvillea and plumbago flowers were hanging, lit up by the small, brilliantly flaring torches of sweet-smelling wood, which a boy held in his two hands.

The drum was in the centre of the clearing, the drummer standing facing the crowd. He was naked from the waist up, wore snow-white cotton drawers, very full, held round the waist by a red sash, and bound at the ankles with red cords. Round his uncovered head was a red cord, with three straight scarlet feathers rising from the back of his head, and on his forehead a turquoise ornament, a circle of blue with a round blue stone in the centre. The flute-player was also naked to the waist, but over his shoulder was folded a fine white serape with blue-and-dark edges, and fringe. Among the crowd, men with naked shoulders were giving little leaflets to the onlookers. And all the time, high and pure, the queer clay flute was repeating a savage, rather difficult melody, and the drum was giving the blood-rhythm.

More and more men were drifting in from the plaza. Kate stepped from her perch and went rather shyly forward. She wanted one of the papers. The man gave her one without looking at her. And she went into the light to read. It was a

sort of ballad, but without rhyme, in Spanish. At the top of the leaflet was a rough print of an eagle within the ring of a serpent that had its tail in its mouth; a curious deviation from the Mexican emblem, which is an eagle standing on a nopal, a cactus with great flat leaves, and holding in its beak and claws a writhing snake.

This eagle stood slim upon the serpent, within the circle of the snake, that had black markings round its back, like short black rays pointing inwards. At a little distance, the emblem suggested an eye.

In the place of the west
In peace, beyond the lashing of the sun's bright tail,
In the stillness where waters are born
Slept I, Quetzalcoatl.
In the cave which is called Dark Eye,
Behind the sun, looking through him as a window
Is the place. There the waters rise,
There the winds are born.
On the waters of the after-life
I rose again, to see a star falling, and feel a breath on my face.
The breath said: Go! And lo!
I am coming.
The star that was falling was fading, was dying.
I heard the star singing like a dying bird;
My name is Jesus, I am Mary's Son.
I am coming home.
My mother the Moon is dark.
Oh brother, Quetzalcoatl
Hold back the dragon of the sun,
Bind him with shadow while I pass
Homewards. Let me come home.
I bound the bright fangs of the Sun
And held him while Jesus passed
Into the lidless shade,
Into the eye of the Father,
Into the womb of refreshment.
And the breath blew upon me again.
So I took the sandals of the Saviour
And started down the long slope
Past the mount of the sun.

Till I saw beneath me
White breast-tips of my Mexico
My bride.
Jesus the Crucified
Sleeps in the healing waters
The long sleep.
Sleep, sleep, my brother, sleep.
My bride between the seas
Is combing her dark hair,
Saying to herself: Quetzalcoatl.

There was a dense throng of men gathered now, and from the centre the ruddy glow of ocote torches rose warm and strong, and the sweet scent of the cedar-like resin was on the air. Kate could see nothing for the mass of men in big hats.

The flute had stopped its piping, and the drum was beating a slow, regular thud, acting straight on the blood. The incomprehensible hollow barking of the drum was like a spell on the mind, making the heart burst each stroke, and darkening the will.

The men in the crowd began to subside, sitting and squatting on the ground, with their hats between their knees. And now it was a little sea of dark, proud heads leaning a little forward above the soft, strong male shoulders.

Near the wall was a clear circle, with the drum in the centre. The drummer with the naked torso stood tilting his drum towards him, his shoulders gleaming smooth and ruddy in the flare of light. Beside him stood another man holding a banner that hung from a light rod. On the blue field of the banneret was the yellow sun with a black centre, and between the four greater yellow rays, four black rays emerging, so that the sun looked like a wheel spinning with a dazzling motion.

The crowd having all sat down, the six men with naked torsos, who had been giving out the leaflets and ordering the crowd, now came back and sat down in a ring, of which the drummer, with the drum tilted between his knees as he squatted on the ground, was the key. On his right hand sat the banner-bearer, on his left the flautist. They were nine men in the ring, the boy, who sat apart watching the two ocote torches, which he had laid upon a stone supported on a long cane tripod, being the tenth.

The night seemed to have gone still. The curious seed-rattling hum of voices that filled the plaza was hushed. Under the trees, on the pavements, people were still passing unconcerned, but they looked curiously lonely, isolated figures drifting in the twilight of the electric lamps, and going about some exceptional

business. They seemed outside the nucleus of life.

Away on the north side, the booths were still flaring, people were buying and selling. But this quarter, too, looked lonely, and outside the actual reality, almost like memory.

When the men sat down, the women began to drift up shyly, and seat themselves on the ground at the outer rim, their full cotton skirts flowering out around them, and their dark rebozos drawn tight over their small, round, shy heads, as they squatted on the ground. Some, too shy to come right up, lingered on the nearest benches of the plaza. And some had gone away. Indeed, a good many men and women had disappeared as soon as the drum was heard.

So that the plaza was curiously void. There was the dense clot of people round the drum, and then the outer world, seeming empty and hostile. Only in the dark little street that gave on to the darkness of the lake, people were standing like ghosts, half lit-up, the men with their serapes over their faces, watching erect and silent and concealed, from the shadow.

But Kate, standing back in the doorway, with Juana sitting on the doorstep at her feet, was fascinated by the silent, half-naked ring of men in the torchlight. Their heads were black, their bodies soft and ruddy with the peculiar Indian beauty that has at the same time something terrible in it. The soft, full, handsome torsos of silent men with heads softly bent a little forward; the soft, easy shoulders, that are yet so broad, and which balance upon so powerful a backbone; shoulders drooping a little, with the relaxation of slumbering, quiescent power; the beautiful ruddy skin, gleaming with a dark fineness; the strong breasts, so male and so deep, yet without the muscular hardening that belongs to white men; and the dark, closed faces, closed upon a darkened consciousness, the black moustaches and delicate beards framing the closed silence of the mouth; all this was strangely impressive, moving strange, frightening emotions in the soul. Those men who sat there in their dark, physical tenderness, so still and soft, they looked at the same time frightening. Something dark, heavy, and reptilian in their silence and their softness. Their very naked torsos were clothed with a subtle shadow, a certain secret obscurity. White men sitting there would have been strong-muscled and frank, with an openness in their very physique, a certain ostensible presence. But not so these men. Their very nakedness only revealed the soft, heavy depths of their natural secrecy, their eternal invisibility. They did not belong to the realm of that which comes forth.

Everybody was quite still; the expectant hush deepened to a kind of dead, night silence. The naked-shouldered men sat motionless, sunk into themselves, and listening with the dark ears of the blood. The red sash went tight round their

waists, the wide white trousers, starched rather stiff, were bound round the ankles with red cords, and the dark feet in the glare of the torch looked almost black, in huaraches that had red thongs. What did they want then, in life, these men who sat so softly and without any assertion, yet whose weight was so ponderous, arresting?

Kate was at once attracted and repelled. She was attracted, almost fascinated by the strange nuclear power of the men in the circle. It was like a darkly glowing, vivid nucleus of new life. Repellent the strange heaviness, the sinking of the spirit into the earth, like dark water. Repellent the silent, dense opposition to the pale-faced spiritual direction.

Yet here, and here alone, it seemed to her, life burned with a deep, new fire. The rest of life, as she knew it, seemed wan, bleached and sterile. The pallid wanness and weariness of her world! And here, the dark ruddy figures in the glare of a torch, like the centre of the everlasting fire, surely this was a new kindling of mankind!

She knew it was so. Yet she preferred to be on the fringe, sufficiently out of contact. She could not bear to come into actual contact.

The man with the banner of the sun lifted his face as if he were going to speak. And yet he did not speak. He was old; in his sparse beard were grey hairs, grey hairs over his thick, dark mouth. And his face had the peculiar thickness, with a few deep-scored lines, of the old among these people. Yet his hair rose vigorous and manly from his forehead, his body was smooth and strong. Only, perhaps, a little smoother, heavier, softer than the shoulders of the younger men.

His black eyes gazed sightless for some time. Perhaps he was really blind; perhaps it was a heavy abstraction, a sort of heavy memory working in him, which made his face seem sightless.

Then he began, in a slow, clear, far-off voice, that seemed strangely to echo the vanished barking of the drum:

‘Listen to me, men! Listen to me, women of these men! A long time ago, the lake started calling for men, in the quiet of the night. And there were no men. The little charales were swimming round the shore, looking for something, and the bágari and the other big fish would jump out of the water, to look around. But there were no men.

‘So one of the gods with hidden faces walked out of the water, and climbed the hill’ — he pointed with his hand in the night towards the invisible round hill at the back of the village — ‘and looked about. He looked up at the sun, and through the sun he saw the dark sun, the same that made the sun and the world, and will swallow it again like a draught of water.

‘He said: Is it time? And from behind the bright sun the four dark arms of the

greater sun shot out, and in the shadow men arose. They could see the four dark arms of the sun in the sky. And they started walking.

‘The man on the top of the hill, who was a god, looked at the mountains and the flat places, and saw men very thirsty, their tongues hanging out. So he said to them: Come! Come here! Here is my sweet water!

‘They came like dogs running with their tongues out, and kneeled on the shore of the lake. And the man on the top of the hill heard them panting with having drunk much water. He said to them: Have you drunk too much into yourselves? Are your bones not dry enough?

‘The men made houses on the shore, and the man on the hill, who was a god, taught them to sow maize and beans, and build boats. But he said to them: No boat will save you, when the dark sun ceases to hold out his dark arms abroad in the sky.

‘The man on the hill said: I am Quetzalcoatl, who breathed moisture on your dry mouths. I filled your breasts with breath from beyond the sun. I am the wind that whirls from the heart of the earth, the little winds that whirl like snakes round your feet and your legs and your thighs, lifting up the head of the snake of your body, in whom is your power. When the snake of your body lifts its head, beware! It is I, Quetzalcoatl, rearing up in you, rearing up and reaching beyond the bright day, to the sun of darkness beyond, where is your home at last. Save for the dark sun at the back of the day-sun, save for the four dark arms in the heavens, you were bone, and the stars were bone, and the moon an empty sea-shell on a dry beach, and the yellow sun were an empty cup, like the dry thin bone of a dead coyote’s head. So beware!

‘Without me you are nothing. Just as I, without the sun that is back of the sun, am nothing.

‘When the yellow sun is high in the sky, then say: Quetzalcoatl will lift his hand and screen me from this, else I shall burn out, and the land will wither.

‘For, say I, in the palm of my hand is the water of life, and on the back of my hand is the shadow of death. And when men forget me, I lift the back of my hand, farewell! Farewell, and the shadow of death.

‘But men forgot me. Their bones were moist, their hearts weak. When the snake of their body lifted its head, they said: This is the tame snake that does as we wish. And when they could not bear the fire of the sun, they said: The sun is angry. He wants to drink us up. Let us give him blood of victims.

‘And so it was, the dark branches of shade were gone from heaven, and Quetzalcoatl mourned and grew old, holding his hand before his face, to hide his face from men.

‘He mourned and said: Let me go home. I am old, I am almost bone. Bone

triumphs in me, my heart is a dry gourd. I am weary in Mexico.

‘So he cried to the Master-Sun, the dark one, of the unuttered name: I am withering white like a perishing gourd-vine. I am turning to bone. I am denied of these Mexicans. I am waste and weary and old. Take me away.

‘Then the dark sun reached an arm, and lifted Quetzalcoatl into the sky. And the dark sun beckoned with a finger, and brought white men out of the east. And they came with a dead god on the Cross, saying: Lo! This is the Son of God! He is dead, he is bone! Lo, your god is bled and dead, he is bone. Kneel and sorrow for him, and weep. For your tears he will give you comfort again, from the dead, and a place among the scentless rose-trees of the after-life, when you are dead.

‘Lo! His mother weeps, and the waters of the world are in her hands. She will give you drink, and heal you, and lead you to the land of God. In the land of God you shall weep no more. Beyond the gates of death, when you have passed from the house of bone into the garden of white roses.

‘So the weeping Mother brought her Son who was dead on the Cross to Mexico, to live in the temples. And the people looked up no more, saying: The Mother weeps. The Son of her womb is bone. Let us hope for the place of the west, where the dead have peace among the scentless rose-trees, in the Paradise of God.

‘For the priests would say: It is beautiful beyond the grave.

‘And then the priests grew old, and the tears of the Mother were exhausted, and the Son on the Cross cried out to the dark sun far beyond the sun: What is this that is done to me? Am I dead for ever, and only dead? Am I always and only dead, but bone on a Cross of bone?

‘So this cry was heard in the world, and beyond the stars of the night, and beyond the sun of the day.

‘Jesus said again: Is it time? My Mother is old like a sinking moon, the old bone of her can weep no more. Are we perished beyond redeem?

‘Then the greatest of the great suns spoke aloud from the back of the sun: I will take my Son to my bosom, I will take His Mother on my lap. Like a woman I will put them in my womb, like a mother I will lay them to sleep, in mercy I will dip them in the bath of forgetting and peace and renewal.

‘That is all. So hear now, you men, and you women of these men.

‘Jesus is going home, to the Father, and Mary is going back, to sleep in the belly of the Father. And they both will recover from death, during the long long sleep.

‘But the Father will not leave us alone. We are not abandoned.

‘The Father has looked around, and has seen the Morning Star, fearless between the rush of the oncoming yellow sun, and the backward reel of the

night. So the Great One, whose name has never been spoken, says: Who art thou, bright watchman? And the dawn-star answering: It is I, the Morning Star, who in Mexico was Quetzalcoatl. It is I, who look at the yellow sun from behind, have my eye on the unseen side of the moon. It is I, the star, midway between the darkness and the rolling of the sun. I, called Quetzalcoatl, waiting in the strength of my days.

‘The Father answered: It is well. It is well. And again: It is time.

‘Thus the big word was spoken behind the back of the world. The Nameless said: It is time.

‘Once more the word has been spoken: It is time.

‘Listen, men, and the women of men: It is time. Know now it is time. Those that left us are coming back. Those that came are leaving again. Say welcome, and then farewell!

‘Welcome! Farewell!’

The old man ended with a strong, suppressed cry, as if really calling to the gods:

‘Bienvenido! Bienvenido! Adiós! Adiós!’

Even Juana, seated at Kate’s feet, cried out without knowing what she did:

‘Bienvenido! Bienvenido! Adiós! Adiós! Adiós-n!’

On the last adiós! she trailed out to a natural human ‘n.’

The drum began to beat with an insistent, intensive rhythm, and the flute, or whistle, lifted its odd, far-off calling voice. It was playing again and again the peculiar melody Kate had heard at first.

Then one of the men in the circle lifted his voice, and began to sing the hymn. He sang in the fashion of the old Red Indians, with intensity and restraint, singing inwardly, singing to his own soul, not outward to the world, nor yet even upward to God, as the Christians sing. But with a sort of suppressed, tranced intensity, singing to the inner mystery, singing not into space, but into the other dimension of man’s existence, where he finds himself in the infinite room that lies inside the axis of our wheeling space. Space, like the world, cannot but move. And like the world, there is an axis. And the axis of our worldly space, when you enter, is a vastness where even the trees come and go, and the soul is at home in its own dream, noble and unquestioned.

The strange, inward pulse of the drum, and the singer singing inwardly, swirled the soul back into the very centre of time, which is older than age. He began on a high, remote note, and holding the voice at a distance, ran on in subtle, running rhythms, apparently unmeasured, yet pulsed underneath by the drum, and giving throbbing, three-fold lilts and lurches. For a long time, no melody at all was recognizable: it was just a lurching, running, far-off crying,

something like the distant faint howling of a coyote. It was really the music of the old American Indian.

There was no recognizable rhythm, no recognizable emotion, it was hardly music. Rather a far-off, perfect crying in the night. But it went straight through to the soul, the most ancient and everlasting soul of all men, where alone can the human family assemble in immediate contact.

Kate knew it at once, like a sort of fate. It was no good resisting. There was neither urge nor effort, nor any speciality. The sound sounded in the innermost far-off place of the human core, the ever-present, where there is neither hope nor emotion, but passion sits with folded wings on the nest, and faith is a tree of shadow.

Like fate, like doom. Faith is the Tree of Life itself, inevitable, and the apples are upon us, like the apples of the eye, the apples of the chin, the apple of the heart, the apples of the breast, the apple of the belly, with its deep core, the apples of the loins, the apples of the knees, the little, side-by-side apples of the toes. What do change and evolution matter? We are the Tree with the fruit forever upon it. And we are faith forever. Verbum sat.

The one singer had finished, and only the drum kept on, touching the sensitive membrane of the night subtly and knowingly. Then a voice in the circle rose again on the song, and like birds flying from a tree, one after the other, the individual voices arose, till there was a strong, intense, curiously weighty soaring and sweeping of male voices, like a dark flock of birds flying and dipping in unison. And all the dark birds seemed to have launched out of the heart, in the inner forest of the masculine chest.

And one by one, voices in the crowd broke free, like birds launching and coming in from a distance, caught by the spell. The words did not matter. Any verse, any words, no words, the song remained the same: a strong, deep wind rushing from the caverns of the breast, from the everlasting soul! Kate herself was too shy and wincing to sing: too blenched with disillusion. But she heard the answer away back in her soul, like a far-off mocking-bird at night. And Juana was singing in spite of herself, in a crooning feminine voice, making up the words unconsciously.

The half-naked men began to reach for their serapes: white serapes, with borders of blue and earth-brown bars, and dark fringe. A man rose from the crowd and went towards the lake. He came back with ocote and with faggots that a boat had brought over. And he started a little fire. After a while, another man went for fuel, and started another fire in the centre of the circle, in front of the drum. Then one of the women went off soft and barefoot, in her full cotton skirt. And she made a little bonfire among the women.

The air was bronze with the glow of flame, and sweet with smoke like incense. The song rose and fell, then died away. Rose, and died. The drum ebbed on, faintly touching the dark membrane of the night. Then ebbed away. In the absolute silence could be heard the soundless stillness of the dark lake.

Then the drum started again, with a new, strong pulse. One of the seated men, in his white poncho with the dark blackish-and-blue border, got up, taking off his sandals as he did so, and began softly to dance the dance step. Mindless, dancing heavily and with a curious bird-like sensitiveness of the feet, he began to tread the earth with his bare soles, as if treading himself deep into the earth. Alone, with a curious pendulum rhythm, leaning a little forward from a powerful backbone, he trod to the drum beat, his white knees lifting and lifting alternately against the dark fringe of his blanket, with a queer dark splash. And another man put his huaraches into the centre of the ring, near the fire, and stood up to dance. The man at the drum lifted up his voice in a wild, blind song. The men were taking off their ponchos. And soon, with the firelight on their breasts and on their darkly abstracted faces, they were all afoot, with bare torsos and bare feet, dancing the savage bird-tread.

‘Who sleeps shall wake! Who sleeps shall wake! Who treads down the path of the snake in the dust shall arrive at the place; in the path of the dust shall arrive at the place and be dressed in the skin of the snake: shall be dressed in the skin of the snake of the earth, that is father of stone; that is father of stone and the timber of earth; of the silver and gold, of the iron, the timber of earth from the bone of the father of earth, of the snake of the world, of the heart of the world, that beats as a snake beats the dust in its motion on earth, from the heart of the world.

‘Who slee-eeeps sha-all wake! Who slee-eeeps sha-all wake! Who sleeps sha-ll wake in the way of the snake of the dust of the earth, of the stone of the earth, of the bone of the earth.’

The song seemed to take new wild flights, after it had sunk and rustled to a last ebb. It was like waves that rise out of the invisible, and rear up into form and a flying, disappearing whiteness and a rustle of extinction. And the dancers, after dancing in a circle in a slow, deep absorption, each man changeless in his own place, treading the same dust with the soft churning of bare feet, slowly, slowly began to revolve, till the circle was slowly revolving round the fire, with always the same soft, down-sinking, churning tread. And the drum kept the changeless living beat, like a heart, and the song rose and soared and fell, ebbed and ebbed to a sort of extinction, then heaved up again.

Till the young peons could stand it no more. They put off their sandals and their hats and their blankets, and shyly, with inexpert feet that yet knew the old

echo of the tread, they stood behind the wheeling dancers, and danced without changing place. Till soon the revolving circle had a fixed yet throbbing circle of men outside.

Then suddenly one of the naked-shouldered dancers from the inner circle stepped back into the outer circle and with a slow leaning, slowly started the outer circle revolving in the reverse direction from the inner. So now there were two wheels of the dance, one within the other, and revolving in different directions.

They kept on and on, with the drum and the song, revolving like wheels of shadow-shapes around the fire. Till the fire died low, and the drum suddenly stopped, and the men suddenly dispersed, returning to their seats again.

There was silence, then the low hum of voices and the sound of laughter. Kate had thought, so often, that the laughter of the peons broke from them in a sound almost like pain. But now the laughs came like little invisible flames, suddenly from the embers of the talk.

Everybody was waiting, waiting. Yet nobody moved at once, when the thud of the drum struck again like a summons. They sat still talking, listening with a second consciousness. Then a man arose and threw off his blanket, and threw wood on the central fire. Then he walked through the seated men to where the women clustered in the fullness of their skirts. There he waited, smiling with a look of abstraction. Till a girl rose and came with utmost shyness towards him, holding her rebozo tight over her lowered head with her right hand, and taking the hand of the man in her left. It was she who lifted the motionless hand of the man in her own, shyly, with a sudden shy snatching. He laughed, and led her through the now risen men, towards the inner fire. She went with dropped head, hiding her face in confusion. But side by side and loosely holding hands, they began to tread the soft, heavy dance-step, forming the first small segment of the inner, stationary circle.

And now all the men were standing facing outwards, waiting to be chosen. And the women quickly, their shawled heads hidden, were slipping in and picking up the loose right hand of the man of their choice. The inner men with the naked shoulders were soon chosen. The inner circle, of men and women in pairs, hand in hand, was closing.

‘Come, Niña, come!’ said Juana, looking up at Kate with black, gleaming eyes.

‘I am afraid!’ said Kate. And she spoke the truth.

One of the bare-breasted men had come across the street, out of the crowd, and was standing waiting, near the doorway in which Kate stood, silently, with averted face.

‘Look! Niña! This master is waiting for you. Then come! Oh, Niña, come!’

The voice of the criada had sunk to the low, crooning, almost magical appeal of the women of the people, and her black eyes glistened strangely, watching Kate’s face. Kate, almost mesmerized, took slow, reluctant steps forward, towards the man who was standing with averted face.

‘Do you mind?’ she said in English, in great confusion. And she touched his fingers with her own.

His hand, warm and dark and savagely suave, loosely, almost with indifference, and yet with the soft barbaric nearness, held her fingers, and he led her to the circle. She dropped her head, and longed to be able to veil her face. In her white dress and green straw hat, she felt a virgin again, a young virgin. This was the quality these men had been able to give back to her.

Shyly, awkwardly, she tried to tread the dance-step. But in her shoes she felt inflexible, insulated, and the rhythm was not in her. She moved in confusion.

But the man beside her held her hand in the same light, soft grasp, and the slow, pulsing pendulum of his body swayed untrammelled. He took no notice of her. And yet he held her fingers in his soft, light touch.

Juana had discarded her boots and stockings, and with her dark, creased face like a mask of obsidian, her eyes gleaming with the timeless female flame, dark and unquenchable, she was treading the step of the dance.

‘As the bird of the sun treads the earth at the dawn of the day like a brown hen under his feet, like a hen and the branches of her belly droop with the apples of birth, with the eggs of gold, with the eggs that hide the globe of the sun in the waters of heaven, in the purse of the shell of earth that is white from the fire of the blood, tread the earth, and the earth will conceive like the hen ‘neath the feet of the bird of the sun; ‘neath the feet of the heart, ‘neath the heart’s twin feet. Tread the earth, tread the earth that squats as a pullet with wings closed in — ’

The circle began to shift, and Kate was slowly moving round between two silent and absorbed men, whose arms touched her arms. And the one held her fingers softly, loosely, but with transcendent nearness. And the wild song rose again like a bird that has alighted for a second, and the drum changed rhythm incomprehensibly.

The outer wheel was all men. She seemed to feel the strange dark glow of them upon her back. Men, dark, collective men, non-individual. And herself woman, wheeling upon the great wheel of womanhood.

Men and women alike danced with faces lowered and expressionless, abstract, gone in the deep absorption of men into the greater manhood, women into the great womanhood. It was sex, but the greater, not the lesser sex. The waters over the earth wheeling upon the waters under the earth, like an eagle silently

wheeling above its own shadow.

She felt her sex and her womanhood caught up and identified in the slowly revolving ocean of nascent life, the dark sky of the men lowering and wheeling above. She was not herself, she was gone, and her own desires were gone in the ocean of the great desire. As the man whose fingers touched hers was gone in the ocean that is male, stooping over the face of the waters.

The slow, vast, soft-touching revolution of the ocean above upon ocean below, with no vestige of rustling or foam. Only the pure sliding conjunction. Herself gone into her greater self, her womanhood consummated in the greater womanhood. And where her fingers touched the fingers of the man, the quiet spark, like the dawn-star, shining between her and the greater manhood of men.

How strange, to be merged in desire beyond desire, to be gone in the body beyond the individualism of the body, with the spark of contact lingering like a morning star between her and the man, her woman's greater self, and the greater self of man. Even of the two men next to her. What a beautiful slow wheel of dance, two great streams streaming in contact, in opposite directions.

She did not know the face of the man whose fingers she held. Her personal eyes had gone blind, his face was the face of dark heaven, only the touch of his fingers a star that was both hers and his.

Her feet were feeling the way into the dance-step. She was beginning to learn softly to loosen her weight, to loosen the uplift of all her life, and let it pour slowly, darkly, with an ebbing gush, rhythmical in soft, rhythmic gushes from her feet into the dark body of the earth. Erect, strong like a staff of life, yet to loosen all the sap of her strength and let it flow down into the roots of the earth.

She had lost count of time. But the dance of itself seemed to be wheeling to a close, though the rhythm remained exactly the same to the end.

The voice finished singing, only the drum kept on. Suddenly the drum gave a rapid little shudder, and there was silence. And immediately the hands were loosened, the dance broke up into fragments. The man gave her a quick, far-off smile and was gone. She would never know him by sight. But by presence she might know him.

The women slipped apart, clutching their rebozos tight round their shoulders. The men hid themselves in their blankets. And Kate turned to the darkness of the lake.

'Already you are going, Niña?' came Juana's voice of mild, aloof disappointment.

'I must go now,' said Kate hurriedly.

And she hastened towards the dark of the lake, Juana running behind her with shoes and stockings in her hand.

Kate wanted to hurry home with her new secret, the strange secret of her greater womanhood, that she could not get used to. She would have to sink into this mystery.

She hastened along the uneven path of the edge of the lake shore, that lay dark in shadow, though the stars gave enough light to show the dark bulks and masts of the sailing-canoes against the downy obscurity of the water. Night, timeless, hourless night! She would not look at her watch. She would lay her watch face down, to hide its phosphorus figures. She would not be timed.

And as she sank into sleep, she could hear the drum again, like a pulse inside a stone beating.

CHAPTER VIII

Night in the House

Over the gateway of Kate's house was a big tree called a cuenta tree, because it dropped its fruits, that were little, round, hard balls like little dark marbles, perfect in shape, for the natives to gather up and string for beads, cuentas, or, more particularly, for the Pater Noster beads of the rosary. At night, the little road outside was quite dark, and the dropping of the cuentas startled the silence.

The nights, which at first had seemed perfectly friendly, began to be full of terrors. Fear had risen again. A band of robbers had gathered in one of the outlying villages on the lake, a village where the men had bad characters, as being ready to turn bandit at any moment. And this gang, invisible in the daytime, consisting during the day of lake fishermen and labourers on the land, at night would set off on horseback to sack any lonely, or insufficiently-protected house.

Then the fact that a gang of bandits was out always set the isolated thieves and scoundrels in action. Whatever happened, it would be attributed to the bandits. And so, many an unsuspected, seemingly honest man, with the old lust in his soul, would steal out by night with his machete and perhaps a pistol, to put his fingers in the pie of the darkness.

And again Kate felt the terror clot and thicken in the black silence of the Mexican night, till the sound of a cuenta falling was terrible. She would lie and listen to the thickening darkness. A little way off would sound the long, shrill whistle of the police watch. And in a while, the police patrol, on horseback, would go clattering lightly by. But the police in most countries are never present save where there is no trouble.

The rainy season was coming, and the night-wind rose from the lake, making strange noises in the trees, and shaking the many loose doors of the house. The servants were away in their distant recess. And in Mexico, at night, each little distance isolates itself absolutely, like a man in a black cloak turning his back.

In the morning, Juana would appear from the plaza, her eyes blob-like and inky, and the old, weary, monkey look of subjection to fear settled on her bronze face. A race old in subjection to fear, and unable to shake it off. She would immediately begin to pour forth to Kate, in a babbling, half-intelligent stream, some story of a house broken into and a woman stabbed. And she would say, the

owner of the hotel had sent word that it was not safe for Kate to sleep alone in the house. She must go to the hotel to sleep.

The whole village was in that state of curious, reptile apprehension which comes over dark people. A panic fear, a sense of devilment and horror thick in the night air. When blue morning came they would cheer up. But at night, like clotting blood the air would begin to thicken again.

The fear, of course, was communicated from one person to another. Kate was sure that if Juana and her family had not been huddled in reptile terror away at the far end of the house, she herself would have been unafraid. As it was, Juana was like a terror-struck lizard.

There was no man about the place. Juana had two sons, Jesús, who was about twenty, and Ezequiel, about seventeen. But Jesús — she pronounced it Hezoosn — ran the little gasoline motor for the electric light, and he and Ezequiel slept together on the floor of the little engine-house. So that Juana huddled with her two girls, Concha and Maria, in the den at the end of Kate's house, and seemed to sweat a rank odour of fear.

The village was submerged. Usually the plaza kept alive till ten o'clock, with the charcoal fires burning and the ice-cream man going round with his bucket on his head, endlessly crying: Nieve! Nieve! and the people gossiping on the streets or listening to the young men with guitars.

Now, by nine o'clock, the place was deserted, curiously stony and vacuous. And the Jefe sent out the order that anybody in the streets after ten o'clock would be arrested.

Kate hurried to her house and locked herself in. It is not easy to withstand the panic fear of a black-eyed, semi-barbaric people. The thing communicates itself like some drug on the air, wringing the heart and paralysing the soul with a sense of evil; black, horrible evil.

She would lie in her bed in the absolute dark: the electric light was cut off completely, everywhere, at ten o'clock, and primitive darkness reigned. And she could feel the demonish breath of evil moving on the air in waves.

She thought of the grisly stories of the country, which she had heard. And she thought again of the people, outwardly so quiet, so nice, with a gentle smile. But even Humboldt had said of the Mexicans, that few people had such a gentle smile, and at the same time, such fierce eyes. It was not that their eyes were exactly fierce. But their blackness was inchoate, with a dagger of white light in it. And in the inchoate blackness the blood-lust might arise, out of the sediment of the uncreated past.

Uncreated, half-created, such a people was at the mercy of old black influences that lay in a sediment at the bottom of them. While they were quiet,

they were gentle and kindly, with a sort of limpid naïveté. But when anything shook them at the depths, the black clouds would arise, and they were gone again in the old grisly passions of death, blood-lust, incarnate hate. A people incomplete, and at the mercy of old, upstarting lusts.

Somewhere at the bottom of their souls, she felt, was a fathomless resentment, like a raw wound. The heavy, bloody-eyed resentment of men who have never been able to win a soul for themselves, never been able to win themselves a nucleus, an individual integrity out of the chaos of passions and potencies and death. They are caught in the toils of old lusts and old activities as in the folds of a black serpent that strangles the heart. The heavy, evil-smelling weight of an unconquered past.

And under this weight they live and die, not really sorry to die. Clogged and tangled in the elements, never able to extricate themselves. Blackened under a too-strong sun, surcharged with the heavy sundering electricity of the Mexican air, and tormented by the bubbling of volcanoes away below the feet. The tremendous potent elements of the American continent, that give men powerful bodies, but which weigh the soul down and prevent its rising into birth. Or, if a man arrives with a soul, the maleficent elements gradually break it, gradually, till he decomposes into ideas and mechanistic activities, in a body full of mechanical energy, but with his blood-soul dead and putrescent.

So, these men, unable to overcome the elements, men held down by the serpent tangle of sun and electricity and volcanic emission, they are subject to an ever-recurring, fathomless lust of resentment, a demonish hatred of life itself. Then, the in-striking thud of a heavy knife, stabbing into a living body, this is the best. No lust of women can equal that lust. The clutching throb of gratification as the knife strikes in and the blood spurts out!

It is the inevitable supreme gratification of a people entangled in the past, and unable to extricate itself. A people that has never been redeemed, that has not known a Saviour.

For Jesus is no Saviour to the Mexicans. He is a dead god in their tomb. As a miner who is entombed underground by the collapsing of the earth in the gangways, so do whole nations become entombed under the slow subsidence of their past. Unless there comes some Saviour, some Redeemer to drive a new way out, to the sun.

But the white men brought no salvation to Mexico. On the contrary, they find themselves at last shut in the tomb along with their dead god and the conquered race.

Which is the status quo.

Kate lay and thought hard, in the black night. At the same time, she was

listening intently, with a clutch of horror. She could not control her heart. It seemed wrenched out of place, and really hurt her. She was, as she had never been before, absolute physically afraid, blood afraid. Her blood was wrenched in a paralysis of fear.

In England, in Ireland, during the war and the revolution she had known spiritual fear. The ghastly fear of the rabble; and during the war, nations were nearly all rabble. The terror of the rabble that, mongrel-like, wanted to break the free spirit in individual men and women. It was the cold, collective lust of millions of people, to break the spirit in the outstanding individuals. They wanted to break this spirit, so that they could start the great downhill rush back to old underworld levels, old gold-worship and murder lust. The rabble.

In those days Kate had known the agony of cold social fear, as if a democracy were a huge, huge cold centipede which, if you resisted it, would dig every claw into you. And the flesh would mortify around every claw.

That had been her worst agony of fear. And she had survived.

Now she knew the real heart-wrench of blood fear. Her heart seemed pulled out of place, in a stretched pain.

She dozed, and wakened suddenly, at a small noise. She sat up in bed. Her doors on to the veranda had shutters. The doors themselves were fastened, but the shutters were open for air, leaving the upper space, like the window of the door, open. And against the dark grey of the night she saw what looked like a black cat crouching on the bottom of the panel-space.

‘What is that?’ she said automatically.

Instantly, the thing moved, slid away, and she knew it was the arm of a man that had been reaching inside to pull the bolt of the door. She lay for a second paralysed, prepared to scream. There was no movement. So she leaned and lit a candle.

The curious panic fear was an agony to her. It paralysed her and wrenched her heart out of place. She lay prostrate in the anguish of night-terror. The candle blazed duskily. There was a far-off mutter of thunder. And the night was horrible, horrible. Mexico was ghastly to her beyond description.

She could not relax, she could not get her heart into place. ‘Now,’ she thought to herself, ‘I am at the mercy of this thing, and I have lost myself.’ And it was a terrible feeling, to be lost, scattered, as it were, from herself in a horror of fear.

‘What can I do?’ she thought, summoning her spirit. ‘How can I help myself?’ She knew she was all alone.

For a long time she could do nothing. Then a certain relief came to her as she thought: ‘I am believing in evil. I mustn’t believe in evil. Panic and murder never start unless the leading people let slip the control. I don’t really believe in

evil. I don't believe the old Pan can wrench us back into the old, evil forms of consciousness, unless we wish it. I do believe there is a greater power, which will give us the greater strength, while we keep the faith in it, and the spark of contact. Even the man who wanted to break in here, I don't think he really had the power. He was just trying to be mean and wicked, but something in him would have to submit to a greater faith and a greater power.'

So she reassured herself, till she had the courage to get up and fasten her door-shutters at the top. After which she went from room to room, to see that all was made fast. And she was thankful to realize that she was afraid of scorpions on the floor, as well as of the panic horror.

Now she had seen that the five doors and the six windows of her wing of communicating rooms were fast. She was sealed inside the darkness, with her candle. To get to the other part of the house, the dining-room and kitchen, she had to go outside on the veranda.

She grew quieter, shut up with the dusky glow of her candle. And her heart, still wrenched with the pain of fear, was thinking: 'Joachim said that evil was the lapsing back to old life-modes that have been surpassed in us. This brings murder and lust. But the drums of Saturday night are the old rhythm, and that dancing round the drum is the old savage form of expression. Consciously reverting to the savage. So perhaps it is evil.'

But then again her instinct to believe came up.

'No! It's not a helpless, panic reversal. It is conscious, carefully chosen. We must go back to pick up old threads. We must take up the old, broken impulse that will connect us with the mystery of the cosmos again, now we are at the end of our own tether. We must do it. Don Ramón is right. He must be a great man, really. I thought there were no really great men any more: only great financiers and great artists and so on, but no great men. He must be a great man.'

She was again infinitely reassured by this thought.

But again, just as she had blown out the candle, vivid flares of white light spurted through all the window-cracks, and thunder broke in great round balls, smashing down. The bolts of thunder seemed to fall on her heart. She lay absolutely crushed, in a kind of quiescent hysterics, tortured. And the hysterics held her listening and tense and abject, until dawn. And then she was a wreck.

In the morning came Juana, also looking like a dead insect, with the conventional phrase: 'How have you passed the night, Niña?'

'Badly!' said Kate. Then she told the story of the black cat, or the man's arm.

'Mire!' said Juana, in a hushed voice. 'The poor innocent will be murdered in her bed. No, Niña, you must go and sleep in the hotel. No, no, Niña, you can't leave your window shutter open. No, no, impossible. See now, will you go to the

hotel to sleep? The other señora does it.'

'I don't want to,' said Kate.

'You don't want to, Niña? Ah! Entonces! Entonces, Niña, I will tell Ezequiel to sleep here outside your door, with his pistol. He has a pistol, and he will sleep outside your door, and you can leave your shutter open, for air in the hot night. Ah, Niña, we poor women, we need a man and a pistol. We ought not to be left alone all the night. We are afraid, the children are afraid. And imagine it, that there was a robber trying to open the bolt of your door! Imagine it to yourself! No, Niña, we will tell Ezequiel at mid-day.'

Ezequiel came striding proudly in, at mid-day. He was a wild, shy youth, very erect and proud, and half savage. His voice was breaking, and had a queer resonance.

He stood shyly while the announcement was being made to him. Then he looked at Kate with flashing black eyes, very much the man to the rescue.

'Yes! yes!' he said. 'I will sleep here on the corridor. Don't have any fear. I shall have my pistol.'

He marched off, and returned with the pistol, an old long-barrelled affair.

'It has five shots,' he said, showing the weapon. 'If you open the door in the night, you must say a word to me first. Because if I see anything move, I shall fire five shots. Pst! Pst!'

She saw by the flash of his eyes what satisfaction it would give him to fire five shots at something moving in the night. The thought of shots being fired at him gave him not the least concern.

'And Niña,' said Juana, 'if you come home late, after the light is out, you must call Ezequiel! Because if not, Brumm! Brumm! — and who knows who will be killed!'

Ezequiel slept on a straw mat on the brick veranda outside Kate's door, rolled up in his blanket, and with the pistol at his side. So she could leave her shutter open for air. And the first night she was kept awake once more by his fierce snoring. Never had she heard such a tremendous resonant sound! What a chest that boy must have! It was sound from some strange, savage other world. The noise kept her awake, but there was something in it which she liked. Some sort of wild strength.

CHAPTER IX

Casa de las Cuentas

Kate was soon fond of the limping, untidy Juana, and of the girls. Concha was fourteen, a thick, heavy, barbaric girl with a mass of black waving hair which she was always scratching. Maria was eleven, a shy, thin bird-like thing with big eyes that seemed almost to absorb the light round her.

It was a reckless family. Juana admitted a different father for Jesús, but to judge from the rest, one would have suspected a different father for each of them. There was a basic, sardonic carelessness in the face of life, in all the family. They lived from day to day, a stubborn, heavy, obstinate life of indifference, careless about the past, careless about the present, careless about the future. They had even no interest in money. Whatever they got they spent in a minute, and forgot it again.

Without aim or purpose, they lived absolutely à terre, down on the dark, volcanic earth. They were not animals, because men and women and their children cannot be animals. It is not granted us. Go, for once gone, thou never canst return! says the great Urge, which drives us creatively on. When man tries brutally to return to the older, previous levels of evolution, he does so in the spirit of cruelty and misery.

So in the black eyes of the family, a certain vicious fear and wonder and misery. The misery of human beings who squat helpless outside their own unbuilt selves, unable to win their souls out of the chaos, and indifferent to all other victories.

White people are becoming soulless too. But they have conquered the lower worlds of metal and energy, so they whizz around in machines, circling the void of their own emptiness.

To Kate, there was a great pathos in her family. Also a certain repulsiveness.

Juana and her children, once they accepted their Niña as their own, were honest with intensity. Point of honour, they were honest to the least little plum in the fruit bowl. And almost intensely eager to serve.

Themselves indifferent to their surroundings, they would live in squalor. The earth was the great garbage-bowl. Everything discarded was flung on the earth and they did not care. Almost they liked to live in a milieu of fleas and old rags, bits of paper, banana skins and mango stones. Here's a piece torn off my dress!

Earth, take it. Here's the combings of my hair! Earth, take them!

But Kate could not bear it. She cared. And immediately, the family were quite glad, thrilled that she cared. They swept the patio with the twig broom till they swept the very surface of the earth away. Fun! The Niña had feelings about it.

She was a source of wonder and amusement to them. But she was never a class superior. She was a half-incomprehensible, half-amusing wonder-being.

The Niña wanted the aguador to bring two botes of hot water, quick, from the hot springs, to wash herself all over every morning. Fun! Go, Maria, tell the aguador to run with the Niña's water.

Then they almost resented it that she shut herself off to have her bath. She was a sort of goddess to them, to provide them with fun and wonder; but she ought always to be accessible. And a god who is forever accessible to human beings has an unenviable time of it, Kate soon discovered.

No, it was no sinecure, being a Niña. At dawn began the scrape-scape of the twig broom outside. Kate stayed on in bed, doors fastened but shutters open. Flutter outside! Somebody wanted to sell two eggs. Where is the Niña? She is sleeping! The visitor does not go. Continual flutter outside.

The aguador! Ah, the water for the Niña's bath! She is sleeping, she is sleeping.' No!' called Kate, slipping into a dressing-gown and unbolting the door. In come the children with the bath-tub, in comes the aguador with the two square kerosene cans full of hot water. Twelve centavos! Twelve centavos for the aguador! No hay! We haven't got twelve centavos. Later! Later! Away trots the aguador, pole over his shoulder. Kate shuts her doors and shutters and starts her bath.

'Niña? Niña?'

'What do you want?'

'Eggs boiled or fried or rancheros? Which do you want?'

'Boiled.'

'Coffee or chocolate?'

'Coffee.'

'Or do you want tea?'

'No, coffee.'

Bath proceeds.

'Nina?'

'Yes.'

'There is no coffee. We are going to buy some.'

'I'll take tea.'

'No, Niña! I am going. Wait for me.'

'Go then.'

Kate comes out to breakfast on the veranda. The table is set, heaped with fruit and white bread and sweet buns.

‘Good morning, Niña. How have you passed the night? Well! Ah, praised be God! Maria, the coffee. I’m going to put the eggs in the water. Oh, Niña, that they may not be boiled hard! — Look, what feet of the Madonna! Look! Bonitos!’

And Juana stooped down, fascinated to touch with her black finger Kate’s white soft feet, that were thrust in light sandals, just a thong across the foot.

The day had begun. Juana looked upon herself as dedicated entirely to Kate. As soon as possible she shooed her girls away, to school. Sometimes they went: mostly they didn’t. The Niña said they must go to school. Listen! Listen now! Says the Niña that you must go to school! Away! Walk!

Juana would limp back and forth down the long veranda from kitchen to the breakfast table, carrying away the dishes one by one. Then, with a great splash, she was washing up.

Morning! Brilliant sun pouring into the patio, on the hibiscus flowers and the fluttering yellow and green rags of the banana-trees. Birds swiftly coming and going, with tropical suddenness. In the dense shadow of the mango-grove, white-clad Indians going like ghosts. The sense of fierce sun and, almost more impressive, of dark, intense shadow. A twitter of life, yet a certain heavy weight of silence. A dazzling flicker and brilliance of light, yet the feeling of weight.

Kate would sit alone, rocking on her veranda, pretending to sew. Silently appears an old man with one egg held up mysteriously, like some symbol. Would the patrona buy it for five centavos? La Juana only gives four centavos. All right. Where is Juana?

Juana appears from the plaza with more purchases. The egg! The four centavos! The account of the spendings. Entonces! Entonces! Luego! Luego! Ah, Niña, no tengo memoria! Juana could not read nor write. She scuffled off to the market with her pesos, bought endless little things at one or two centavos each, every morning. And every morning there was a reckoning up. Ah! Ah! Where are we? I have no memory. Well then — ah — yes — I bought ocote for three centavos! How much? How much, Niña? How much is it now?

It was a game which thrilled Juana to the marrow, reckoning up the centavos to get it just right. If she was a centavo short in the change, she was paralysed. Time after time she would reappear. There is a centavo short, Niña! Ah, how stupid I am! But I will give you one of mine!

‘Don’t bother,’ said Kate. ‘Don’t think of it any more.’

‘But yes. But yes!’ and away she limped in distraction.

Till an hour later, loud cry from the far end of the house. Juana waving a scrap

of greenery.

‘Mire! Niña! Compré perejil a un centavo — I bought parsley for one cent. Is it right?’

‘It is right,’ said Kate.

And life could proceed once more.

There were two kitchens, the one next the dining-room, belonging to Kate, and the narrow little shed under the banana-trees, belonging to the servants. From her veranda Kate looked away down to Juana’s kitchen shed. It had a black window-hole.

Clap! Clap! Clap! Clap! Why, I thought Concha was at school! said Kate to herself.

No! — there, in the darkness of the window-hole, was Concha’s swarthy face and mane, peering out like some animal from a cave, as she made the tortillas. Tortillas are flat pancakes of maize dough, baked dry on a flat earthenware plate over the fire. And the making consists of clapping a bit of new dough from the palm of one hand to the other, till the tortilla is of the requisite thinness, roundness, and so-called lightness.

Clap! Clap! Clap! Clap! Clap! Clap! Clap! It was as inevitable as the tick of some spider, the sound of Concha making tortillas in the heat of the morning, peering out of her dark window-hole. And some time after mid-day, the smoke would be coming out of the window-hole; Concha was throwing the raw tortillas on the big earthen plate over the slow wood fire.

Then Ezequiel might or might not stride in, very much the man, serape poised over one shoulder and big straw hat jauntily curled, to eat the mid-day tortillas. If he had work in the fields at any distance, he would not appear till nightfall. If he appeared, he sat on the doorstep and the women served him his tortillas and fetched him his drink of water as if he was a king, boy though he might be. And his rough, breaking voice was heard in quiet command.

Command was the word. Though he was quiet and gentle, and very conscientious, there was calm, kingly command in his voice when he spoke to his mother or sisters. The old male prerogative. Somehow, it made Kate want to ridicule him.

Came her own meal: one of her trials. Hot, rather greasy soup. Inevitable hot, greasy, rather peppery rice. Inevitable meat in hot, thick, rather greasy sauce. Boiled calabacitas or egg-plant, salad, perhaps some dulce made with milk — and the big basket of fruit. Overhead, the blazing tropical sun of late May.

Afternoon, and greater heat. Juana set off with the girls and the dishes. They would do the washing up in the lake. Squatting on the stones, they would dabble the plates one by one, the spoons and the forks one by one in the filmy water of

the lake, then put them in the sun to dry. After which Juana might wash a couple of towels in the lake and the girls might bathe. Sauntering the day away — sauntering the day away.

Jesús, the eldest son, a queer, heavy, greasy fellow, usually appeared in the afternoon, to water the garden. But he ate his meals at the hotel, and really lived there, had his home there. Not that he had any home, any more than a zopilote had a home. But he ran the planta, and did odd jobs about the hotel, and worked every day in the year till half-past ten at night, earning twenty-two pesos, eleven dollars, a month. He wore a black shirt, and his thick, massive black hair dropped over his low brow. Very near to an animal. And though, to order, he wore a black Fascisti shirt, he had the queer, animal jeering of the socialists, an instinct for pulling things down.

His mother and he had a funny little intimacy of quiet and indifferent mutual taunting of one another. He would give her some money if she were in a strait. And there was a thin little thread of blood-bondage between them. Apart from that, complete indifference.

Ezequiel was a finer type. He was slender and so erect that he almost curved backwards. He was very shy, farouche. Proud also, and more responsible to his family. He would not go to work in an hotel. No. He was a worker in the fields, and he was proud of it. A man's work. No equivocal sort of half-service for him.

Though he was just a hired labourer, yet working on the land he never felt he was working for a master. It was the land he worked for. Somewhere inside himself he felt that the land was his, and he belonged in a measure to it. Perhaps a lingering feeling of tribal, communal land-ownership and service.

When there was work, he was due to earn a peso a day. There was often no work: and often only seventy-five centavos a day for wage. When the land was dry, he would try to get work on the road, though this he did not like. But he earned his peso a day.

Often, there was no work. Often, for days, sometimes for weeks, he would have to hang about, nothing to do, nothing to do. Only, when the Socialist Government had begun giving the peasants bits of land, dividing up the big haciendas, Ezequiel had been allotted a little piece outside the village. He would go and gather the stones together there, and prepare to build a little hut. And he would break the earth with a hoe, his only implement, as far as possible. But he had no blood connection with this square allotment of unnatural earth, and he could not get himself into relations with it. He was fitful and diffident about it. There was no incentive, no urge.

On workdays he would come striding in about six o'clock, shyly greeting Kate as he passed. He was a gentleman in his barbarism. Then, away in the far recess,

he would rapidly fold tortilla after tortilla, sitting on the floor with his back to the wall, rapidly eating the leathery things that taste of mortar, because the maize is first boiled with lime to loosen the husk, and accepting another little pile, served on a leaf, from the cook, Concha. Juana, cook for the Niña, would no longer condescend to cook for her own family. And sometimes there was a mess of meat and chile for Ezequiel to scoop up out of the earthenware casserole, with his tortillas. And sometimes there was not. But always, he ate with a certain blind, rapid indifference, that also seems to be Mexican. They seem to eat even with a certain hostile reluctance, and have a strange indifference to what or when they eat.

His supper finished, as a rule he was off again like a shot, to the plaza, to be among men. And the women would sit desultorily about, on the ground. Sometimes Kate would come in at nine o'clock to an empty place — Ezequiel in the plaza, Juana and Maria disappeared somewhere or other, and Concha lying asleep like a heap of rags on the gravel of the patio. When Kate called her, she would raise her head, stupefied and hopeless; then get up like a dog and crawl away to the gate. The strange stupor of boredom and hopelessness that was always sinking upon them would make Kate's heart stand still with dread.

The peculiar indifference to everything, even to one another. Juana washed a cotton shirt and a pair of cotton trousers for each of her sons, once a week, and there her maternal efforts ended. She saw hardly anything of them, and was often completely unaware of what Ezequiel was doing, where he was working, or at what. He had just gone off to work, no more.

Yet again, sometimes she had hot, fierce pangs of maternal protectiveness, when the boy was unjustly treated, as he often was. And if she thought he were ill, a black sort of fatalistic fear came over her. But Kate had to rouse her into getting some simple medicine.

Like animals, yet not at all like animals. For animals are complete in their isolation and their insouciance. With them it is not indifference. It is completeness in themselves. But with the family there was always a kind of bleeding of incompleteness, a terrible stupor of boredom settling down.

The two girls could not be apart: they must always be running after one another. Yet Concha continually teased the big-eyed, naïve simpleton of a Maria. And Maria was always in tears. Or the two were suddenly throwing stones at one another. But with no real aim to hit. And Juana was abusing them with sudden vehemence, that flickered in a minute to complete indifference again.

Queer, the savage ferocity with which the girls would suddenly be throwing stones at one another. But queerer still, they always aimed just to miss, Kate noticed the same in the savage attacks the boys made on one another, on the

beach; hurling large stones with intense, terrible ferocity. But almost always, aiming with a curious cast in the eyes, just to miss.

But sometimes not. Sometimes hitting with a sharp cut. And then the wounded one would drop right down, with a howl, as if dead. And the other boys would edge away, in a silent kind of dread. And the wounded boy would be prostrate, not really much hurt, but as if he was killed.

Then, maybe, suddenly he would be up, with a convulsion of murder in his face, pursuing his adversary with a stone. And the adversary would abjectly flee.

Always the same thing among the young: a ceaseless, endless taunting and tormenting. The same as among the Red Indians. But the Pueblo Indians rarely lapsing from speech into violence. The Mexican boys almost always. And almost always, one boy in murderous rage, pursuing his taunter till he had hurt him: then an abject collapse of the one hurt. Then, usually, a revival of the one hurt, the murderous frenzy transferred to him, and the first attacker fleeing abjectly, in terror. One or the other always abject.

They were a strange puzzle to Kate. She felt something must be done. She herself was inspired to help. So she had the two girls for an hour a day, teaching them to read, to sew, to draw. Maria wanted to learn to read: that she did want. For the rest, they began well. But soon, the regularity and the slight insistence of Kate on their attention made them take again that peculiar invisible jeering tone, something peculiar to the American Continent. A quiet, invisible, malevolent mockery, a desire to wound. They would press upon her, trespassing upon her privacy, and with a queer effrontery, doing all they could to walk over her. With their ugly little wills, trying to pull her will down.

‘No, don’t lean on me, Concha. Stand on your own feet.’

The slight grin of malevolence on Concha’s face, as she stood on her own feet. Then:

‘Do you have lice in your hair, Niña?’

The question asked with a peculiar, subtle, Indian insolence.

‘No,’ said Kate, suddenly angry. ‘And now go! Go! Go away from me! Don’t come near me.’

They slunk out, abject. So much for educating them.

Kate had visitors from Guadalajara — great excitement. But while the visitors were drinking tea with Kate on the veranda, at the other side of the patio, full in view, Juana, Concha, Maria and Felipa, a cousin of about sixteen, squatted on the gravel with their splendid black hair down their backs, displaying themselves as they hunted in each other’s hair for lice. They wanted to be full in view. And they were it. They wanted the basic fact of lice to be thrust under the noses of those white people.

Kate strode down the veranda.

‘If you must pick lice,’ she said in a shaking voice to Juana, shaking with anger, ‘pick them there, in your own place, where you can’t be seen.’

One instant, Juana’s black inchoate eyes gleamed with a malevolent ridicule, meeting Kate’s. The next instant, humble and abject, the four with their black hair down their backs slunk into the recess out of sight.

But it pleased Juana that she had been able to make Kate’s eyes blaze with anger. It pleased her. She felt a certain low power in herself. True, she was a little afraid of that anger. But that was what she wanted. She would have no use for a Niña of whom she was not a bit afraid. And she wanted to be able to provoke that anger, of which she felt a certain abject twinge of fear.

Ah the dark races! Kate’s own Irish were near enough for her to have glimpsed some of the mystery. The dark races belong to a bygone cycle of humanity. They are left behind in a gulf out of which they have never been able to climb. And on to the particular white man’s levels they never will be able to climb. They can only follow as servants.

While the white man keeps the impetus of his own proud, onward march, the dark races will yield and serve, perforce. But let the white man once have a misgiving about his own leadership, and the dark races will at once attack him, to pull him down into the old gulfs. To engulf him again.

Which is what is happening. For the white man, let him bluster as he may, is hollow with misgiving about his own supremacy.

Full speed ahead, then, for the débâcle.

But once Kate had been roused to a passion of revulsion from these lice-picking, down-dragging people, they changed again, and served her with a certain true wistfulness that could not but touch her. Juana cared really about nothing. But just that last thread of relationship that connected her with Kate and the upper world of daylight and fresh air, she didn’t want to break. No, no, she didn’t want finally to drive her Niña away. No, no, the only one thing she did want, ultimately, was to serve her Niña.

But at the same time, she cherished a deep malevolent grudge against rich people, white people, superior people. Perhaps the white man has finally betrayed his own leadership. Who knows! But it is a thing of the brave, on-marching soul, and perhaps this has been betrayed already by the white man. So that the dark are rising upon him.

Juana would come to Kate, telling her stories from the past. And the sinister mocking film would be on her black eyes, and her lined copper face would take on its reptile mask as she would continue: ‘Usted sabe, Niña, los gringos, los gringuitos llevan todo — you know, Niña, the gringos and the gringuitos take

away everything . . .’

The gringos are the Americans. But Kate herself was included by Juana in the gringuitos: the white foreigners. The woman was making another sliding, insolent attack.

‘It is possible,’ said Kate coldly. ‘But tell me what I take away from Mexico.’

‘No, Niña, no!’ The subtle smile of satisfaction lurked under the bronze tarnish of Juana’s face. She had been able to get at the other woman, touch the raw. ‘I don’t speak of you, Niña!’ But there was too much protest in it.

Almost, they wanted to drive her away: to insult her and drag her down and make her want to go away. They couldn’t help it. Like the Irish, they could cut off their nose to spite their face.

The backward races!

At the same time there was a true pathos about them. Ezequiel had worked for a man for two months, building a house, when he was a boy of fourteen, in order to get a serape. At the end of the two months, the man had put him off, and he had not got the serape: had never got it. A bitter disappointment.

But, then, Kate was not responsible for that. And Juana seemed almost to make her so.

A people without the energy of getting on, how could they fail to be hopelessly exploited. They had been hopelessly and cruelly exploited, for centuries. And their backbones were locked in malevolent resistance.

‘But,’ as Kate said to herself, ‘I don’t want to exploit them. Not a bit. On the contrary, I am willing to give more than I get. But that nasty insinuating insultingness is not fair in the game. I never insult them. I am so careful not to hurt them. And then they deliberately make these centipede attacks on me, and are pleased when I am hurt.’

But she knew her own Irish at the game. So she was able to put Juana and the girls away from her, and isolate herself from them. Once they were put away, their malevolence subsided and they remembered what Kate wanted. While she stayed amiable, they forgot. They forgot to sweep the patio, they forgot to keep themselves clean. Only when they were shoved back, into isolation, did they remember again.

The boy, Ezequiel, seemed to her to have more honour than the women. He never made these insidious attacks.

And when her house was clean and quiet and the air seemed cleaned again, the soul renewed, her old fondness for the family came back. Their curious flitting, coming and going, like birds: the busy clap — clap — clapping of tortillas, the excited scrunching of tomatoes and chile on the metate, as Juana prepared sauce. The noise of the bucket in the well. Jesús, come to water the garden.

The game, the game of it all! Everything they did must be fun, or they could not do it. They could not abstract themselves to a routine. Never. Everything must be fun, must be variable, must be a bit of an adventure. It was confusion, but after all, a living confusion, not a dead, dreary thing. Kate remembered her English servants in the English kitchens: so mechanical and somehow inhuman. Well, this was the other extreme.

Here there was no discipline nor method at all. Although Juana and her brats really wanted to do the things Kate wished they must do them their own way. Sometimes Kate felt distracted: after all, the mechanical lines are so much easier to follow. But as far as possible, she let the family be. She had to get used, for example, to the vagaries of her dining-table: a little round table that always stood on the veranda. At breakfast time it would be discreetly set under the plantas by the salon; for dinner, at one o'clock, it would have travelled way down the veranda; for tea it might be under a little tree on the grass. And then Juana would decide that the Niña must take supper, two eggs, rancheros, in the dining-room itself, isolated at the corner of the long dining-table meant for fourteen people.

The same with the dishes. Why they should, after washing up in the big bowls in the kitchen for several days, suddenly struggle way down to the lake with the unwashed pots in a basket on Concha's shoulder, Kate never knew. Except for the fun of the thing.

Children! But, then, not at all children. None of the wondering insouciance of childhood. Something dark and cognisant in their souls all the time: some heavy weight of resistance. They worked in fits and starts, and could be very industrious; then came days when they lay about on the ground like pigs. At times they were merry, seated round on the ground in groups, like Arabian nights, and laughing away. Then suddenly resisting even merriment in themselves, relapsing into the numb gloom. When they were busily working, suddenly, for no reason, throwing away the tool, as if resenting having given themselves. Careless in their morals, always changing their loves, the men at least resisted all the time any real giving of themselves. They didn't want the thing they were pursuing. It was the women who drew them on. And a young man and a girl going down the road from the lake in the dark, teasing and poking each other in excitement, would startle Kate because of their unusualness — the men and women never walked their sex abroad, as white people do. And the sudden, sexual laugh of the man, so strange a sound of pain and desire, obstinate reluctance, and helpless passion, a noise as if something tearing in his breast, was a sound to remember.

Kate felt her household a burden. In a sense, they were like parasites, they

wanted to live on her life, and pull her down, pull her down. Again, they were so generous with her, so good and gentle, she felt they were wonderful. And then once more she came up against that unconscious, heavy, reptilian indifference in them, indifference and resistance.

Her servants were the clue to all the native life, for her. The men always together, erect, handsome, balancing their great hats on the top of their heads and sitting, standing, crouching with a snake-like impassivity. The women together separately, soft, and as if hidden, wrapped tight in their dark rebozos. Men and women seemed always to be turning their back on one another, as if they didn't want to see one another. No flirting, no courting. Only an occasional quick, dark look, the signal of a weapon-like desire, given and taken.

The women seemed, on the whole, softly callous and determined to go their own way: to change men if they wished. And the men seemed not to care very profoundly. But it was the women who wanted the men.

The native women, with their long black hair streaming down their full, ruddy backs, would bathe at one end of the beach, usually wearing their chemise, or a little skirt. The men took absolutely no notice. They didn't even look the other way. It was the women bathing, that was all. As if it were, like the charales swimming, just a natural part of the lake life. The men just left that part of the lake to the women. And the women sat in the shallows of the lake, isolated in themselves like moor-fowl, pouring water over their heads and over their ruddy arms from a gourd scoop.

The quiet, unobtrusive, but by no means down-trodden women of the peon class. They went their own way, enveloped in their rebozos as in their own darkness. They hurried nimbly along, their full cotton skirts swinging, chirping and quick like birds. Or they sat in the lake with long hair streaming, pouring water over themselves: again like birds. Or they passed with a curious slow inevitability up the lake-shore, with a heavy red jar of water perched on one shoulder, one arm over the head, holding the rim of the jar. They had to carry all water from the lake to their houses. There was no town supply. Or, especially on Sunday afternoons, they sat in their doorways de-lousing one another. The most resplendent belles, with magnificent black wavy hair, were most thoroughly de-loused. It was as if it were a meritorious public act.

The men were the obvious figures. They assert themselves on the air. They are the dominant. Usually they are in loose groups, talking quietly, or silent: always standing or sitting apart, rarely touching one another. Often a single man would stand alone at a street corner in his serape, motionless for hours, like some powerful spectre. Or a man would lie on the beach as if he had been cast up dead from the waters. Impassive, motionless, they would sit side by side on the

benches of the plaza, not exchanging a word. Each one isolated in his own fate, his eyes black and quick like a snake's, and as blank.

It seemed to Kate that the highest thing this country might produce would be some powerful relationship of man to man. Marriage itself would always be a casual thing. Though the men seemed very gentle and protective to the little children. Then they forgot them.

But sex itself was a powerful, potent thing, not to be played with or paraded. The one mystery. And a mystery greater than the individual. The individual hardly counted.

It was strange to Kate to see the Indian huts on the shore, little holes built of straw or corn-stalks, with half-naked children squatting on the naked earth floor, and a lousy woman-squalor around, a litter of rags and bones, and a sharp smell of human excrement. The people have no noses. And standing silent and erect not far from the hole of the doorway, the man, handsome and impassive. How could it be, that such a fine-looking human male should be so absolutely indifferent, content with such paltry squalor?

But there he was, unconscious. He seemed to have life and passion in him. And she knew he was strong. No men in the world can carry heavier loads on their backs, for longer distances, than these Indians. She had seen an Indian trotting down a street with a piano on his back: holding it, also, by a band round his forehead. From his forehead, and on his spine he carried it, trotting along. The women carry with a band round the breast.

So there is strength. And apparently, there is passionate life. But no energy. Nowhere in Mexico is there any sign of energy. This is, as it were, switched off.

Even the new artisan class, though it imitates the artisan class of the United States, has no real energy. There are workmen's clubs. The workmen dress up and parade a best girl on their arm. But somehow it seems what it is, only a weak imitation.

Kate's family was increased, without her expecting it. One day there arrived from Ocotlan a beautiful ox-eyed girl of about fifteen, wrapped in her black cotton rebozo, and somewhat towny in her Madonna-meekness: Maria del Carmen. With her, Julio, a straight and fierce young man of twenty-two. They had just been married, and had come to Sayula for a visit. Julio was Juana's cousin.

Might they sleep in the patio with herself and the girls, was Juana's request. They would stay only two days.

Kate was amazed. Maria del Carmen must have had some Spanish blood, her beauty was touched with Spain. She seemed even refined and superior. Yet she was to sleep out on the ground like a dog, with her young husband. And he, so

erect and proud-looking, possessed nothing in the world but an old serape.

‘There are three spare bedrooms,’ said Kate. ‘They may sleep in one of those.’

The beds were single beds. Would they need more blankets? she asked Juana.

No! They would manage with the one serape of Julio’s.

The new family had arrived. Julio was a bricklayer. That is to say, he worked building the adobe walls of the little houses. He belonged to Sayula, and had come back for a visit.

The visit continued. Julio would come striding in at midday and at evening; he was looking for work. Maria del Carmen, in her one black dress, would squat on the floor and pat tortillas. She was allowed to cook them in Juana’s kitchen hole. And she talked and laughed with the girls. At night, when Julio was home, he would lie on the ground with his back to the wall, impassive, while Maria del Carmen fondled his thick black hair.

They were in love. But even now, he was not yielding to his love.

She wanted to go back to Ocotlan, where she was at home, and more a señorita than here in Sayula. But he refused. There was no money: the young ménage lived on about five American cents a day.

Kate was sewing. Maria del Carmen, who didn’t even know how to put a chemise together, watched with great eyes. Kate taught her, and bought a length of cotton material. Maria del Carmen was sewing herself a dress!

Julio had got work at a peso a day. The visit continued. Kate thought Julio wasn’t very nice with Maria del Carmen: his quiet voice was so overbearing in command when he spoke to her. And Maria del Carmen, who was a bit towny, did not take it well. She brooded a little.

The visit stretched into weeks. And now Juana was getting a bit tired of her relative.

But Julio had got a bit of money. He had rented a little one-room adobe house, at one peso fifty per week. Maria del Carmen was going to move into her own home.

Kate saw the new outfit got together. It consisted of one straw mat, three cooking-plates of earthenware, five bits of native crockery, two wooden spoons, one knife and Julio’s old blanket. That was all. But Maria del Carmen was moving in.

Kate presented her with a large old eiderdown, whose silk was rather worn, a couple of bowls, and a few more bits of crockery. Maria del Carmen was set up. Good! Good! Oh good! Kate heard her voice down the patio. I have got a coverlet! I have got a coverlet!

In the rainy season, the nights can be very cold, owing to evaporation. Then the natives lie through the small hours like lizards, numb and prostrate with cold.

They are lying on the damp earth on a thin straw mat, with a corner of an old blanket to cover them. And the same terrible inertia makes them endure it, without trying to make any change. They could carry in corn husks or dry banana leaves for a bed. They could even cover themselves with banana leaves.

But no! On a thin mat on damp cold earth they lie and tremble with cold, night after night, night after night, night after night.

But Maria del Carmen was a bit towny. Oh good! Oh good! I've got a coverlet!

CHAPTER X

Don Ramón and Doña Carlota

Kate had been in Sayula ten days before she had any sign from Don Ramón. She had been out in a boat on the lake, and had seen his house, round the bend of the western point. It was a reddish-and-yellow two-storey house with a little stone basin for the boats, and a mango grove between it and the lake. Among the trees, away from the lake, were the black adobe huts, two rows, of the peons.

The hacienda had once been a large one. But it had been irrigated from the hills, and the revolutions had broken all the aqueducts. Only a small supply of water was available. Then Don Ramón had had enemies in the Government. So that a good deal of his land was taken away to be divided among the peons. Now, he had only some three hundred acres. The two hundred acres along the lake-shore were mostly lost to him. He worked a few acres of fruit land round the house, and in a tiny valley just in the hills he raised sugar-cane. On the patches of the mountain slope little patches of maize were to be seen.

But Doña Carlota had money. She was from Torreon and drew still a good income from the mines.

A mozo came with a note from Don Ramón: might he bring his wife to call on Kate?

Doña Carlota was a thin, gentle, wide-eyed woman, with a slightly startled expression, and soft, brownish hair. She was pure European in extraction, of a Spanish father and French mother: very different from the usual stout, over-powdered, ox-like Mexican matron. Her face was pale, faded, and without any make-up at all. Her thin, eager figure had something English about it, but her strange, wide brown eyes were not English. She spoke only Spanish — or French. But her Spanish was so slow and distinct and slightly plaintive, that Kate understood her at once.

The two women understood one another quickly, but were a little nervous of one another. Doña Carlota was delicate and sensitive like a Chihuahua dog, and with the same slightly prominent eyes. Kate felt she had rarely met a woman with such a dog-like finesse of gentleness. And the two women talked. Ramón, large and muted, kept himself in reserve. It was as if the two women rushed together to unite against his silence and his powerful, different significance.

Kate knew at once that Doña Carlota loved him, but with a love that was now

nearly all will. She had worshipped him, and she had had to leave off worshipping him. She had had to question him. And she would never now cease from questioning.

So he sat apart, a little constrained, his handsome head hanging a little, and his dark, sensitive hands dangling between his thighs.

‘I had such a wonderful time!’ Kate said suddenly to him. ‘I danced a dance round the drum with the Men of Quetzalcoatl.’

‘I heard,’ he said, with a rather stiff smile.

Doña Carlota understood English, though she would not speak it.

‘You danced with the men of Quetzalcoatl!’ she said in Spanish, in a pained voice. ‘But, Señora, why did you do such a thing? Oh why?’

‘I was fascinated,’ said Kate.

‘No, you must not be fascinated. No! No! It is not good. I tell you. I am so sorry my husband interests himself in this thing. I am so sorry.’

Juana was bringing a bottle of vermouth: all that Kate had to offer her visitors, in the morning.

‘You went to see your boys in the United States?’ said Kate to Doña Carlota. ‘How were they?’

‘Oh, better, thank you. They are well; that is, the younger is very delicate.’

‘You didn’t bring him home?’

‘No! No! I think they are better at school. Here — here — there are so many things to trouble them. No! But they will come home next month, for the vacation.’

‘How nice!’ said Kate. ‘Then I shall see them. They will be here, won’t they? — on the lake?’

‘Well! — I am not sure. Perhaps for a little while. You see I am so busy in Mexico with my Cuna.’

‘What is a Cuna?’ said Kate; she only knew it was the Spanish for cradle.

It turned out to be a foundlings’ home, run by a few obscure Carmelite sisters. And Doña Carlota was the director. Kate gathered that Don Ramón’s wife was an intense, almost exalted Catholic. She exalted herself in the Church, and in her work for the Cuna.

‘There are so many children born in Mexico,’ said Doña Carlota, ‘and so many die. If only we could save them, and equip them for life. We do a little, all we can.’

It seemed the waste, unwanted babies could be delivered in at the door of the Cuna, like parcels. The mother had only to knock, and hand in the little living bundle.

‘It saves so many mothers from neglecting their babies, and letting them die,’

said Doña Carlota. 'Then we do what we can. If the mother doesn't leave a name, I name the child. Very often I do. The mothers just hand over a little naked thing, sometimes without a name or a rag to cover it. And we never ask.'

The children were not all kept in the Home. Only a small number. Of the others, some decent Indian woman was paid a small sum to take the child into her home. Every month she must come with the little one to the Cuna, to receive her wage. The Indians are so very rarely unkind to children. Careless, yes. But rarely, rarely unkind.

In former days, Doña Carlota said, nearly every well-born lady in Mexico would receive one or more of these foundlings into her home, and have it brought up with the family. It was the loose, patriarchal generosity innate in the bosoms of the Spanish-Mexicans. But now, few children were adopted. Instead, they were taught as far as possible to be carpenters or gardeners, or house-servants, or, among the girls, dressmakers, even school-teachers.

Kate listened with uneasy interest. She felt there was so much real human feeling in this Mexican charity: she was almost rebuked. Perhaps what Doña Carlota was doing was the best that could be done, in this half-wild, helpless country. At the same time, it was such a forlorn hope, it made one's heart sink.

And Doña Carlota, confident as she was in her good works, still had just a bit the look of a victim; a gentle, sensitive, slightly startled victim. As if some secret enemy drained her blood.

Don Ramón sat there impassive, listening without heeding; solid and unmoving against the charitable quiver of his wife's emotion. He let her do as she would. But against her work and against her flow he was in silent, heavy, unchanging opposition. She knew this, and trembled in her nervous eagerness, as she talked to Kate about the Cuna, and won Kate's sympathy. Till it seemed to her that there was something cruel in Don Ramón's passive, masked poise. An impassive male cruelty, changeless as a stone idol.

'Now won't you come and spend the day with me while I am here with Don Ramón?' said Doña Carlota. 'The house is very poor and rough. It is no longer what it used to be. But it is your house if you will come.'

Kate accepted, and said she would prefer to walk out. It was only four miles, and surely she would be safe, with Juana.

'I will send a man to come with you,' said Don Ramón. 'It might not be quite safe.'

'Where is General Viedma?' asked Kate.

'We shall try to get him out when you come,' replied Doña Carlota. 'I am so very fond of Don Cipriano, I have known him for many years, and he is the godfather of my younger son. But now he is in command of the Guadalajara

division, he is not very often able to come out.'

'I wonder why he is a General?' said Kate. 'He seems to me too human.'

'Oh, but he is very human too. But he is a general; yes, yes, he wants to be in command of the soldiers. And I tell you, he is very strong. He has great power with his regiments. They believe in him, oh, they believe in him. He has that power, you know, that some of the higher types of Indians have, to make many others want to follow them and fight for them. You know? Don Cipriano is like that. You can never change him. But I think a woman might be wonderful for him. He has lived so without any woman in his life. He won't care about them.'

'What does he care about?' asked Kate.

'Ah!' Doña Carlota started as if stung. Then she glanced quickly, involuntarily at her husband, as she added: 'I don't know. Really, I don't know.'

'The Men of Quetzalcoatl,' said Don Ramón heavily, with a little smile.

But Doña Carlota seemed to be able to take all the ease and the banter out of him. He seemed stiff and a bit stupid.

'Ah, there! There! There you have it! The Men of Quetzalcoatl — that is a nice thing for him to care about! A nice thing, I say,' fluttered Doña Carlota, in her gentle, fragile, scolding way. And it was evident to Kate that she adored both the men, and trembled in opposition to their wrongness, and would never give in to them.

To Ramón it was a terrible burden, his wife's quivering, absolute, blind opposition, taken in conjunction with her helpless adoration.

A man-servant appeared at nine o'clock one morning, to accompany Kate to the hacienda, which was called Jamiltepec. He had a basket, and had been shopping in the market. An elderly man, with grey in his moustache, he had bright young eyes and seemed full of energy. His bare feet in the huaraches were almost black with exposure, but his clothes were brilliantly white.

Kate was glad to be walking. The one depressing thing about life in the villages was that one could not walk out into the country. There was always the liability to be held up or attacked. And she had walked already, as far as possible, in every direction, in the neighbourhood of the village, accompanied usually by Ezequiel. Now she was beginning to feel a prisoner.

She was glad, then, to be setting off. The morning was clear and hot, the pale brown lake quite still, like a phantom. People were moving on the beach, in the distance tiny, like dots of white: white dots of men following the faint dust of donkeys. She wondered often why humanity was like specks in the Mexican landscape; just specks of life.

They passed from the lake shore to the rough, dusty road going west, between the steep slope of the hills and the bit of flat by the lake. For almost a mile there

were villas, most of them shut up fast, some of them smashed, with broken walls and smashed windows. Only flowers bloomed in masses above the rubble.

In the empty places were flimsy straw huts of the natives, haphazard, as if blown there. By the road under the hill were black-grey adobe huts, like boxes, and fowls running about, and brown pigs or grey pigs spotted with black careered and grunted, and half-naked children, dark orange-brown, trotted or lay flat on their faces in the road, their little naked posteriors hunched up, fast asleep. Already asleep again.

The houses were many of them being re-thatched, or the tiled roofs were being patched by men who assumed a great air of importance at having undertaken such a task. They were pretending to hurry, too, because the real rains might begin any day. And in the little stony levels by the lake, the land was being scratch-ploughed by a pair of oxen and a lump of pointed wood.

But this part of the road Kate knew. She knew the fine villa on the knoll, with its tufts of palms, and the laid-out avenues that were laid out, indeed, as the dead are, to crumble back again. She was glad to be past the villas, where the road came down to the lake again, under big shady trees that had twisted, wriggly beans. On the left was the water, the colour of turtledoves, lapping the pale fawn stones. At a water-hole of a stream in the beach, a cluster of women were busily washing clothes. In the shallows of the lake itself two women sat bathing, their black hair hanging dense and wet. A little farther along a man was wading slowly, stopping to throw his round net skilfully upon the water, then slowly stooping and gathering it in, picking out the tiny, glittery fish called charales. Strangely silent and remote everything, in the gleaming morning, as if it were some distant period of time.

A little breeze was coming from the lake, but the deep dust underfoot was hot. On the right the hill rose precipitous, baked and yellowish, giving back the sun and the intense dryness, and exhaling the faint, desiccated, peculiar smell of Mexico, that smells as if the earth had sweated itself dry.

All the time strings of donkeys trotted laden through the dust, their drivers stalking erect and rapid behind, watching with eyes like black holes, but always answering Kate's salute with a respectful *Adiós!* And Juana echoed her laconic *Adiós!* She was limping, and she thought it horrible of Kate to walk four miles, when they might have struggled out in an old hired motor-car, or gone in a boat, or even ridden donkey-back.

But to go on foot! Kate could hear all her criada's feelings in the drawled, sardonic *Adiós!* But the man behind strode bravely and called cheerfully. His pistol was prominent in his belt.

A bluff of yellow rock came jutting at the road. The road wound round it, and

into a piece of flat open country. There were fields of dry stone, and hedges of dusty thorn and cactus. To the left the bright green of the willows by the lake-shore. To the right the hills swerved inland, to meet the sheer, fluted sides of dry mountains. Away ahead, the hills curved back at the shore, and a queer little crack or niche showed. This crack in the hills led from Don Ramón's shore-property to the little valley where he grew the sugar-cane. And where the hills approached the lake again there was a dark clustering of mango-trees, and the red upper storey of the hacienda house.

'There it is!' cried the man behind. 'Jamiltepec, Señorita. 'La hacienda de Don Ramón!'

And his eyes shone as he said the name. He was a proud peon, and he really seemed happy.

'Look! How far!' cried Juana.

'Another time,' said Kate, 'I shall come alone, or with Ezequiel.'

'No, Niña! Don't say so. Only my foot hurts this morning.'

'Yes. Better not to bring you.'

'No, Niña! I like to come, very much!'

The tall windmill fan for drawing up water from the lake was spinning gaily. A little valley came down from the niche in the hills, and at the bottom a little water running. Towards the lake, where this valley flattened out, was a grove of banana-plants, screened a little from the lake breeze by a vivid row of willow-trees. And on the top of the slope, where the road ran into the shade of mango-trees, were the two rows of adobe huts, like a village, set a little back from the road.

Women were coming up between the trees, on the patch from the lake, with jars of water on their shoulders; children were playing around the doors, squatting with little naked posteriors in deep dust; and here and there a goat was tethered. Men in soiled white clothes were lounging, with folded arms and one leg crossed in front of the other, against the corner of a house, or crouching under the walls. Not by any means *dolce far niente*. They seemed to be waiting, eternally waiting for something.

'That way, Señorita!' called the man with the basket, running to her side and indicating the smoother road sloping down between some big trees, towards the white gate of the hacienda. 'We are here!'

Always he spoke with pleased delight, as if the place were a wonder-place to him.

The big doors of the *zaguán*, the entrance, stood open, and in the shade of the entrance-way a couple of little soldiers were seated. Across the cleared, straw-littered space in front of the gates two peons were trotting, each with a big bunch

of bananas on his head. The soldiers said something, and the two peons halted in their trotting, and slowly turned under their yellow-green load, to look back at Kate and Juana and the man Martin, approaching down the road. Then they turned again and trotted into the courtyard, barefoot.

The soldiers stood up. Martin, trotting at Kate's side again, ushered her into the arched entrance, where the ox-wagons rumbling through had worn deep ruts. Juana came behind, making a humble noise.

Kate found herself in a big, barren yard, that seemed empty. There were high walls on the three sides, with sheds and stables. The fourth side, facing, was the house, with heavily-barred windows looking on to the courtyard, but with no door. Instead, there was another zaguán, or passage with closed doors piercing the house.

Martin trotted ahead to knock on the closed doors. Kate stood looking round at the big yard. In a shed in one corner, four half-naked men were packing bunches of bananas. A man in the shade was sawing poles, and two men in the sun were unloading tiles from a donkey. In a corner was a bullock-wagon, and a pair of big black-and-white oxen standing with heads pressed down, waiting.

The big doors opened, and Kate entered the second zaguán. It was a wide entrance way, with stairs going up on one side, and Kate lingered to look through the open iron gates in front of her, down a formal garden hemmed in with huge mango-trees, to the lake, with its little artificial harbour where two boats were moored. The lake seemed to give off a great light, between the dark walls of mango.

At the back of the new-comers the servant woman closed the big doors on to the yard, then waved Kate to the stairs.

'Pass this way, Señorita.'

A bell tinkled above. Kate climbed the stone stairs. And there above her was Doña Carlota, in white muslin and with white shoes and stockings, her face looking curiously yellow and faded by contrast. Her soft brown hair was low over her ears, and she held out her thin brownish arms with queer effusiveness.

'So you have come! And you have walked, walked all the way? Oh, imagine walking in so much sun and dust! Come, come in and rest.'

She took Kate's hands and led her across the open terrace at the top of the stairs.

'It is beautiful here,' said Kate.

She stood on the terrace, looking out past the mango-trees at the lake. A distant sailing-canoe was going down the breeze, on the pallid, unreal water. Away across rose the bluish, grooved mountains, with the white speck of a village: far away in the morning it seemed, in another world, in another life, in

another mode of time.

‘What is that village?’ Kate asked.

‘That one? That one there? It is San Ildefonso,’ said Doña Carlota, in her fluttering eagerness.

‘But it is beautiful here!’ Kate repeated.

‘Hermoso — sí! Sí, bonito!’ quavered the other woman uneasily, always answering in Spanish.

The house, reddish and yellow in colour, had two short wings towards the lake. The terrace, with green plants on the terrace wall, went round the three sides, the roof above supported by big square pillars that rose from the ground. Down below, the pillars made a sort of cloisters around the three sides, and in the little stone court was a pool of water. Beyond, the rather neglected formal garden with strong sun and deep mango-shade.

‘Come, you will need to rest!’ said Doña Carlota.

‘I would like to change my shoes,’ said Kate.

She was shown into a high, simple, rather bare bedroom with red-tiled floor. There she changed into the shoes and stockings Juana had carried, and rested a little.

As she lay resting, she heard the dulled thud-thud of the tom-tom drum, but, save the crowing of a cock in the distance, no other sound on the bright, yet curiously hollow Mexican morning. And the drum, thudding with its dulled, black insistence, made her uneasy. It sounded like something coming over the horizon.

She rose, and went into the long, high salon where Doña Carlota was sitting talking to a man in black. The salon, with its three window-doors open on to the terrace, its worn, red floor tiled with old square bricks, its high walls colour-washed a faint green, and the many-beamed ceiling whitewashed; and with its bareness of furniture; seemed like part of the out-of-doors, like some garden-arbour put for shade. The sense, which houses have in hot climates, of being just three walls wherein one lingers for a moment, then goes away again.

As Kate entered the room, the man in black rose and shook hands with Doña Carlota, bowing very low and deferential. Then with a deferential sideways sort of bow to Kate, he vanished out of doors.

‘Come!’ said Doña Carlota to Kate. ‘Are you sure now you are rested?’ And she pulled forward one of the cane rocking-chairs that had poised itself in the room, en route to nowhere.

‘Perfectly!’ said Kate. ‘How still it seems here! Except for the drum. Perhaps it is the drum that makes it seem so still. Though I always think the lake makes a sort of silence.’

‘Ah, the drum!’ cried Doña Carlota, lifting her hand with a gesture of nervous, spent exasperation. ‘I cannot hear it. No, I cannot, I cannot bear to hear it.’

And she rocked herself in a sudden access of agitation.

‘It does hit one rather below the belt,’ said Kate. ‘What is it?’

‘Ah, do not ask me! It is my husband.’

She made a gesture of despair, and rocked herself almost into unconsciousness.

‘Is Don Ramón drumming?’

‘Drumming?’ Doña Carlota seemed to start. ‘No! Oh no! He is not drumming, himself. He brought down two Indians from the north to do that.’

‘Did he!’ said Kate, non-committal.

But Doña Carlota was rocking in a sort of semi-consciousness. Then she seemed to pull herself together.

‘I must talk to somebody, I must!’ she said, suddenly straightening herself in her chair, her face creamy and creased, her soft brown hair sagging over her ears, her brown eyes oddly desperate. ‘May I talk to you?’

‘Do!’ said Kate, rather uneasy.

‘You know what Ramón is doing?’ she said, looking at Kate almost furtively, suspiciously.

‘Does he want to bring back the old gods?’ said Kate vaguely.

‘Ah!’ cried Doña Carlota, again with that desperate, flying jerk of her hand. ‘As if it were possible! As if it were possible! The old gods! Imagine it, Señora! The old gods! Why, what are they? Nothing but dead illusions. And ugly, repulsive illusions! Ah! I always thought my husband such a clever man, so superior to me! Ah, it is terrible to have to change one’s idea! This is such nonsense. How dare he! How dare he take such nonsense seriously! How does he dare!’

‘Does he believe in it himself?’ asked Kate.

‘Himself? But, Señora — ’ and Doña Carlota gave a pitiful, pitying smile of contempt. ‘How could he! As if it were possible. After all, he is an educated man! How could he believe in such nonsense!’

‘Then why does he do it?’

‘Why? Why?’ There was a tone of unspeakable weariness in Doña Carlota’s voice. ‘I wish I knew. I think he has gone insane, as Mexicans do. Insane like Francisco Villa, the bandit.’

Kate thought of the pug-faced notorious Pancho Villa in wonder, unable to connect him with Don Ramón.

‘All the Mexicans, as soon as they rise above themselves, go that way,’ said Doña Carlota. ‘Their pride gets the better of them. And then they understand

nothing, nothing but their own foolish will, their will to be very, very important. It is just the male vanity. Don't you think, Señora, that the beginning and the end of a man is his vanity? Don't you think it was just against this danger that Christ came, to teach men a proper humility? To teach them the sin of pride. But that is why they hate Christ so much, and His teaching. First and last, they want their own vanity.'

Kate had often thought so herself. Her own final conclusion about men was that they were the vanity of vanities, nothing but vanity. They must be flattered and made to feel great: Nothing else.

'And now, my husband wants to go to the other extreme of Jesus. He wants to exalt pride and vanity higher than God. Ah, it is terrible, terrible! And foolish like a little boy! Ah, what is a man but a little boy who needs a nurse and a mother! Ah, Señora, I can't bear it.'

Doña Carlota covered her face with her hand, as if swooning.

'But there is something wonderful, too, about Don Ramón,' said Kate coaxingly: though at the moment she hated him.

'Wonderful! Ah yes, he has gifts. He has great gifts! But what are gifts to a man who perverts them!'

'Tell me what you think he really wants,' said Kate.

'Power! Just power! Just foolish, wicked power. As if there had not been enough horrible, wicked power let loose in this country. But he — he — wants to be beyond them all. He — he — he wants to be worshipped. To be worshipped! To be worshipped! A God! He, whom I've held, I've held in my arms! He is a child, as all men are children. And now he wants — to be worshipped — !' She went off into a shrill, wild laughter, covering her face with her hands, and laughing shrilly, her laughter punctuated by hollow, ghastly sobs.

Kate sat in absolute dismay, waiting for the other woman to recover herself. She felt cold against these hysterics, and exerted all her heavy female will to stop them.

'After all,' she said, when Doña Carlota became quiet, her face in her hands, 'it isn't your fault. We can't be responsible, even for our husbands. I know that, since my husband died, and I couldn't prevent him dying. And then — then I learned that no matter how you love another person, you can't really do anything, you are helpless when it comes to the last things. You have to leave them to themselves, when they want to die: or when they want to do things that seem foolish, so, so foolish, to a woman.'

Doña Carlota looked up at the other woman.

'You loved your husband very much — and he died?' she said softly.

'I did love him. And I shall never, never love another man. I couldn't. I've lost

the power.'

'And why did he die?'

'Ah, even that was really his own fault. He broke his own soul and spirit, in those Irish politics. I knew it was wrong. What does Ireland matter, what does nationalism and all that rubbish matter, really! And revolutions! They are so, so stupid and vieux jeu. Ah! It would have been so much better if Joachim had been content to live his life in peace, with me. It could be so jolly, so lovely. And I tried and tried and tried with him. But it was no good. He wanted to kill himself with that beastly Irish business, and I tried in vain to prevent him.'

Doña Carlota stared slowly at Kate.

'As a woman must try to prevent a man, when he is going wrong,' she said. 'As I try to prevent Ramón. As he will get himself killed, as surely as they all do, down to Francisco Villa. And when they are dead, what good is it all?'

'When they are dead,' said Kate, 'then you know it's no good.'

'You do! Oh, Señora, if you think you can help me with Ramón, do help me, do! For it means the death either of me or him. And I shall die, though he is wrong. Unless he gets killed.'

'Tell me what he wants to do,' said Kate. 'What does he think he wants to do, anyhow? — Like my husband thought he wanted to make a free Ireland and a great Irish people. But I knew all the time, the Irish aren't a great people any more, and you can't make them free. They are only good at destroying — just mere stupid destroying. How can you make a people free, if they aren't free? If something inside them compels them to go on destroying!'

'I know! I know! And that is Ramón. He wants to destroy even Jesus and the Blessed Virgin, for this people. Imagine it! To destroy Jesus and the Blessed Virgin! the last thing they've got!'

'But what does he say himself, that he wants to do?'

'He says he wants to make a new connection between the people and God. He says himself, God is always God. But man loses his connection with God. And then he can never recover it again, unless some new Saviour comes to give him his new connection. And every new connection is different from the last, though God is always God. And now, Ramón says, the people have lost God. And the Saviour cannot lead them to Him any more. There must be a new Saviour with a new vision. But ah, Señora, that is not true for me. God is love, and if Ramón would only submit to love, he would know that he had found God. But he is perverse. Ah, if we could be together, quietly loving, and enjoying the beautiful world, and waiting in the love of God! Ah, Señora, why, why, why can't he see it? Oh, why can't he see it! Instead of doing all these — '

The tears came to Doña Carlota's eyes, and spilled over her cheeks. Kate also

was in tears, mopping her face.

‘It’s no good!’ she said, sobbing. ‘I know it’s no good, no matter what we do. They don’t want to be happy and peaceful. They want this strife and these other false, horrible connections. It’s no good whatever we do! That’s what’s so bitter, so bitter!’

The two women sat in their bent-wood rocking-chairs and just sobbed. And as they sobbed, they heard a step coming along the terrace, the faint swish of the sandals of the people.

It was Don Ramón, drawn unconsciously by the emotional disturbance of the two women.

Doña Carlota hastily dabbed her eyes, and her sniffing nose, Kate blew her nose like a trumpet, and Don Ramón stood in the doorway.

He was dressed in white, dazzling, in the costume of the peons, the white blouse jacket and the white, wide pantaloon trousers. But the white was linen, slightly starched, and brilliant, almost unnatural in its whiteness. From under his blouse, in front, hung the ends of a narrow woollen sash, white, with blue and black bars, and a fringe of scarlet. And on his naked feet were the plaited huaraches, of blue and black strips of leather, with thick, red-dyed soles. His loose trousers were bound round the ankles with blue, red, and black woollen braids.

Kate glanced at him as he stood in the sun, so dazzlingly white, that his black hair and dark face looked like a hole in the atmosphere. He came forward, the ends of his sash swinging against his thighs, his sandals slightly swishing.

‘I am pleased to see you,’ he said, shaking hands with Kate. ‘How did you come?’

He dropped into a chair, and sat quite still. The two women hung their heads, hiding their faces. The presence of the man seemed to put their emotion out of joint. He ignored all the signs of their discomfort, overlooking it with a powerful will. There was a certain strength in his presence. They all cheered up a bit.

‘You didn’t know my husband had become one of the people — a real peon — a Señor Peon, like Count Tolstoy became a Señor Moujik?’ said Doña Carlota, with an attempt at raillery.

‘Anyway it suits him,’ said Kate.

‘There!’ said Don Ramón. ‘Give the devil his dues.’

But there was something unyielding, unbending about him. He laughed and spoke to the women only from a surface self. Underneath, powerful and inscrutable, he made no connection with them.

So it was at lunch. There was a flitting conversation, with intervals of silence. It was evident that Ramón was thinking in another world, in the silence. And the

ponderous stillness of his will, working in another sphere, made the women feel overshadowed.

‘The Señora is like me, Ramón,’ said Doña Carlota. ‘She cannot bear the sound of that drum. Must it play any more this afternoon?’

There was a moment’s pause, before he answered:

‘After four o’clock only.’

‘Must we have that noise to-day?’ Carlota persisted.

‘Why not to-day like other days!’ he said. But a certain darkness was on his brow, and it was evident he wanted to leave the presence of the two women.

‘Because the Señora is here: and I am here: and we neither of us like it. And to-morrow the Señora will not be here, and I shall be gone back to Mexico. So why not spare us to-day! Surely you can show us this consideration.’

Ramón looked at her, and then at Kate. There was anger in his eyes. And Kate could almost feel, in his powerful chest, the big heart swelling with a suffocation of anger. Both women kept mum. But it pleased them, anyhow, that they could make him angry.

‘Why not row with Mrs Leslie on the lake!’ he said, with quiet control.

But under his dark brows was a level, indignant anger.

‘We may not want to,’ said Carlota.

Then he did what Kate had not known anyone to do before. He withdrew his consciousness away from them as they all three sat at table, leaving the two women, as it were, seated outside a closed door, with nothing more happening. Kate felt for the time startled and forlorn, then a slow anger burned in her warm ivory cheek.

‘Oh, yes,’ she said. ‘I can start home before then.’

‘No! No!’ said Doña Carlota, with a Spanish wail. ‘Don’t leave me. Stay with me till evening, and help me to amuse Don Cipriano. He is coming to supper.’

CHAPTER XI

Lords of the Day and Night

When lunch was over, Ramón went to his room, to sleep for an hour. It was a hot, still afternoon. Clouds were standing erect and splendid, at the west end of the lake, like messengers. Ramón went into his room and closed the window-doors and the shutters, till it was quite dark, save for yellow pencils of light that stood like substance on the darkness, from the cracks of the shutters.

He took off his clothes, and in the darkness thrust his clenched fists upwards above his head, in a terrible tension of stretched, upright prayer. In his eyes was only darkness, and slowly the darkness revolved in his brain, too, till he was mindless. Only a powerful will stretched itself and quivered from his spine in an immense tension of prayer. Stretched the invisible bow of the body in the darkness with inhuman tension, erect, till the arrows of the soul, mindless, shot to the mark, and the prayer reached its goal.

Then, suddenly, the clenched and quivering arms dropped, the body relaxed into softness. The man had reached his strength again. He had broken the cords of the world, and was free in the other strength.

Softly, delicately, taking great care not to think, not to remember, not to disturb the poisonous snakes of mental consciousness, he picked up a thin, fine blanket, wrapped it round him, and lay down on the pile of mats on the floor. In an instant he was asleep.

He slept in complete oblivion for about an hour. Then suddenly he opened his eyes wide. He saw the velvety darkness, and the pencils of light gone frail. The sun had moved. Listening, there seemed not a sound in the world: there was no world.

Then he began to hear. He heard the faint rumble of an ox-wagon: then leaves in a wind: then a faint tapping noise: then the creak of some bird calling.

He rose and quickly dressed in the dark, and threw open the doors. It was mid-afternoon, with a hot wind blowing, and clouds reared up dark and bronze in the west, the sun hidden. But the rain would not fall yet. He took a big straw hat and balanced it on his head. It had a round crest of black and white and blue feathers, like an eye, or a sun, in front. He heard the low sound of women talking. Ah, the strange woman! He had forgotten her. And Carlota! Carlota was here! He thought of her for a moment, and of her curious opposition. Then, before he

could be angry, he lifted his breast again in the black, mindless prayer, his eyes went dark, and the sense of opposition left him.

He went quickly, drifting along the terrace to the stone stairs that led down to the inner entrance-way. Going through to the courtyard, he saw two men packing bales of bananas upon donkeys, under a shed. The soldiers were sleeping in the zaguán. Through the open doors, up the avenue of trees, he could see an ox-wagon slowly retreating. Within the courtyard there was the sharp ringing of metal hammered on an anvil. It came from a corner where was a smithy, where a man and a boy were working. In another shed a carpenter was planing wood.

Don Ramón stood a moment to look around. This was his own world. His own spirit was spread over it like a soft, nourishing shadow, and the silence of his own power gave it peace.

The men working were almost instantly aware of his presence. One after the other the dark, hot faces glanced up at him, and glanced away again. They were men, and his presence was wonderful to them; but they were afraid to approach him, even by staring at him. They worked the quicker for having seen him, as if it gave them new life.

He went across to the smithy, where the boy was blowing the old-fashioned bellows, and the man was hammering a piece of metal, with quick, light blows. The man worked on without lifting his head, as the patrón drew near.

‘It is the bird?’ said Ramón, standing watching the piece of metal, now cold upon the anvil.

‘Yes, Patrón! It is the bird. Is it right?’ And the man looked up with black, bright, waiting eyes.

The smith lifted with the tongs the black, flat, tongue-shaped piece of metal, and Ramón looked at it a long time.

‘I put the wings on after,’ said the smith.

Ramón traced with his dark, sensitive hand an imaginary line, outside the edge of the iron. Three times he did it. And the movement fascinated the smith.

‘A little more slender — so!’ said Ramón.

‘Yes, Patrón! Yes! Yes! I understand,’ said the man eagerly.

‘And the rest?’

‘Here it is!’ The man pointed to two hoops of iron, one smaller than the other, and to some flat discs of iron, triangular in shape.

‘Lay them on the ground.’

The man put the hoops on the ground, one within the other. Then, taking the triangular discs, he placed them with quick, sensitive hands, so that their bases were upon the outer circle, and their apices touched the inner. There were seven.

And thus they made a seven-pointed sun of the space inside.

‘Now the bird,’ said Ramón.

The man quickly took the long piece of iron: it was the rudimentary form of a bird, with two feet, but, as yet without wings. He placed it in the centre of the inner circle, so that the feet touched the circle and the crest of the head touched opposite.

‘So! It fits,’ said the man.

Ramón stood looking at the big iron symbol on the ground. He heard the doors of the inner entrance: Kate and Carlota walking across the courtyard.

‘I take it away?’ asked the workman quickly.

‘Never mind,’ Ramón answered quietly.

Kate stood and stared at the great wreath of iron on the ground.

‘What is it?’ she asked brightly.

‘The bird within the sun.’

‘Is that a bird?’

‘When it has wings.’

‘Ah, yes! When it has wings. And what is it for?’

‘For a symbol to the people.’

‘It is pretty.’

‘Yes.’

‘Ramón!’ said Doña Carlota, ‘will you give me the key for the boat? Martin will row us out.’

He produced the key from under his sash.

‘Where did you get that beautiful sash?’ asked Kate.

It was the white sash with blue and brown-black bars, and with a heavy red fringe.

‘This?’ he said. ‘We wove it here.’

‘And did you make the sandals too?’

‘Yes! They were made by Manuel. Later I will show you.’

‘Oh, I should like to see! — They are beautiful, don’t you think, Doña Carlota?’

‘Yes! Yes! It is true. But whether beautiful things are wise things, I don’t know. So much I don’t know, Señora. Ay, so much! — And you, do you know what is wise?’

‘I?’ said Kate. ‘I don’t care very much.’

‘Ah! You don’t care! — You think Ramón is wise, to wear the peasants’ clothes, and the huaraches?’ For once Doña Carlota was speaking in slow English.

‘Oh, yes!’ cried Kate. ‘He looks so handsome! — Men’s clothes are so

hideous, and Don Ramón looks so handsome in those!’ With the big hat poised on his head, he had a certain air of nobility and authority.

‘Ah!’ cried Doña Carlota, looking at the other woman with intelligent, half-scared eyes, and swinging the key of the boat. ‘Shall we go to the lake?’

The two women departed. Ramón, laughing to himself, went out of the gate and across the outer yard, to where a big, barn-like building stood near the trees. He entered the barn, and gave a low whistle. It was answered from the loft above, and a trap-door opened. Don Ramón went up the steps, and found himself in a sort of studio and carpenter’s shop. A fattish young man with curly hair, wearing an artist’s blouse, and with mallet and chisels in his hand, greeted him.

‘How is it going?’ asked Ramón.

‘Yes — well —’

The artist was working on a head, in wood. It was larger than life, conventionalized. Yet under the conventional lines the likeness to Ramón revealed itself.

‘Sit for me for half an hour,’ said the sculptor.

Ramón sat in silence, while the other man bent over his model, working in silent concentration. And all the time, Ramón sat erect, almost motionless, with a great stillness of repose and concentration, thinking about nothing, but throwing out the dark aura of power, in the spell of which the artist worked.

‘That is enough,’ he said at last, quietly rising.

‘But give me the pose before you go,’ said the artist.

Ramón slowly took off his blouse-skirt, and stood with naked torso, the sash with its blue and black bars tight round his naked waist. For some moments he stood gathering himself together. Then suddenly, in a concentration of intense, proud prayer, he flung his right arm up above his head, and stood transfixed, his left arm hanging softly by his side, the fingers touching his thigh. And on his face that fixed, intense look of pride which was at once a prayer.

The artist gazed with wonder, and with an appreciation touched with fear. The other man, large and intense, with big dark eyes staring with intense pride, yet prayerful, beyond the natural horizons, sent a thrill of dread and of joy through the artist. He bowed his head as he looked.

Don Ramón turned to him.

‘Now you!’ he said.

The artist was afraid. He seemed to quail. But he met Ramón’s eyes. And instantly, that stillness of concentration came over him, like a trance. And then suddenly, out of the trance, he shot his arm aloft, and his fat, pale face took on an expression of peace, a noble, motionless transfiguration, the blue-grey eyes calm, proud, reaching into the beyond, with prayer. And though he stood in his

blouse, with a rather pudgy figure and curly hair, he had the perfect stillness of nobility.

‘It is good!’ said Ramón, bowing his head.

The artist suddenly changed; Ramón held out his two hands; the artist took them in his two hands. Then he lifted Ramón’s right hand and placed the back of it on his brow.

‘Adiós!’ said Ramón, taking his blouse again.

‘Adiós, Señor!’ said the artist.

And with a proud, white look of joy in his face, he turned again to his work.

Ramón visited the adobe house, its yard fenced with cane and overshadowed by a great mango-tree, where Manuel and his wife and children, and two assistants, were spinning and weaving. Two little girls were assiduously carding white wool and brown wool under a cluster of banana-trees: the wife and a young maiden were spinning fine, fine thread. On the line hung dyed wool, red, and blue, and green. And under the shed stood Manuel and a youth, weaving at two heavy hand-loom.

‘How is it going?’ called Don Ramón.

‘Muy bien! Muy bien!’ answered Manuel, with that curious look of transfiguration glistening in his black eyes and in the smile of his face. ‘It is going well, very well, Señor!’

Ramón paused to look at the fine white serape on the loom. It had a zig-zag border of natural black wool and blue, in little diamonds, and the ends a complication of blackish and blue diamond-pattern. The man was just beginning to do the centre — called the boca, the mouth: and he looked anxiously at the design that was tacked to the loom. But it was simple: the same as the iron symbol the smith was making: a snake with his tail in his mouth, the black triangles on his back being the outside of the circle: and in the middle, a blue eagle standing erect, with slim wings touching the belly of the snake with their tips, and slim feet upon the snake, within the hoop.

Ramón went back to the house, to the upper terrace, and round to the short wing where his room was. He put a folded serape over his shoulder, and went along the terrace. At the end of this wing, projecting to the lake, was a square terrace with a low, thick wall and a tiled roof, and a coral-scarlet bignonia dangling from the massive pillars. The terrace, or loggia, was strewn with the native palm-leaf mats, petates, and there was a drum in one corner, with the drum-stick upon it. At the far inner corner went down an enclosed stone staircase, with an iron door at the bottom.

Ramón stood a while looking out at the lake. The clouds were dissolving again, the sheet of water gave off a whitish light. In the distance he could see the

dancing speck of a boat, probably Martin with the two women.

He took off his hat and his blouse, and stood motionless, naked to the waist. Then he lifted the drum-stick, and after waiting a moment or two, to become still in soul, he sounded the rhythmic summons, rather slow, yet with a curious urge in its strong-weak, one-two rhythm. He had got the old barbaric power into the drum.

For some time he stood alone, the drum, or tom-tom, lifted by its thong against his legs, his right hand drumming, his face expressionless. A man entered, bareheaded, running from the inner terrace. He was in the white cotton clothes, snow white, but with a dark serape folded on his shoulder, and he held a key in his hand. He saluted Ramón by putting the back of his right hand in front of his eyes for a moment, then he went down the stone stairway and opened the iron door.

Immediately men were coming up, all dressed alike, in the white cotton clothes and the huaraches, each with a folded serape over his shoulder. But their sashes were all blue, and their sandals blue and white. The sculptor came too, and Mirabal was there, also dressed in the cotton clothes.

There were seven men, besides Ramón. At the top of the stairs, one after another, they saluted. Then they took their serapes, dark brown, with blue eyes filled with white, along the edges, and threw them down along the wall, their hats beside them. Then they took off their blouses, and flung them on their hats.

Ramón left the drum, and sat down on his own serape, that was white with the blue and black bars, and the scarlet fringe. The drummer sat down and took the drum. The circle of men sat cross-legged, naked to the waist, silent. Some were of a dark, ruddy coffee-brown, two were white, Ramón was of a soft creamy brown. They sat in silence for a time, only the monotonous, hypnotic sound of the drum pulsing, touching the inner air. Then the drummer began to sing, in the curious, small, inner voice, that hardly emerges from the circle, singing in the ancient falsetto of the Indians:

‘Who sleeps — shall wake! Who sleeps — shall wake! Who treads down the path of the snake shall arrive at the place; in the path of the dust shall arrive at the place and be dressed in the skin of the snake — ’

One by one the voices of the men joined in, till they were all singing in the strange, blind infallible rhythm of the ancient barbaric world. And all in the small, inward voices, as if they were singing from the oldest, darkest recess of the soul, not outwards, but inwards, the soul singing back to herself.

They sang for a time in the peculiar unison like a flock of birds that fly in one consciousness. And when the drum shuddered for an end, they all let their voices fade out, with the same broad, clapping sound in the throat.

There was silence. The men turned, speaking to one another, laughing in a quiet way. But their daytime voices, and their daytime eyes had gone.

Then Ramón's voice was heard, and the men were suddenly silent, listening with bent heads. Ramón sat with his face lifted, looking far away, in the pride of prayer.

'There is no Before and After, there is only Now,' he said, speaking in a proud, but inward voice.

'The great Snake coils and uncoils the plasm of his folds, and stars appear, and worlds fade out. It is no more than the changing and easing of the plasm.

'I always am, says his sleep.

'As a man in a deep sleep knows not, but is, so is the Snake of the coiled cosmos, wearing its plasm.

'As a man in a deep sleep has no to-morrow, no yesterday, nor to-day, but only is, so is the limpid, far-reaching Snake of the eternal Cosmos, Now, and forever Now.

'Now, and only Now, and forever Now.

'But dreams arise and fade in the sleep of the Snake.

'And worlds arise as dreams, and are gone as dreams.

'And man is a dream in the sleep of the Snake.

'And only the sleep that is dreamless breathes I Am!

'In the dreamless Now, I Am.

'Dreams arise as they must arise, and man is a dream arisen.

'But the dreamless plasm of the Snake is the plasm of a man, of his body, his soul, and his spirit at one.

'And the perfect sleep of the Snake I Am is the plasm of a man, who is whole.

'When the plasm of the body, and the plasm of the soul, and the plasm of the spirit are at one, in the Snake I Am.

'I am Now.

'Was-not is a dream, and shall-be is a dream, like two separate, heavy feet.

'But Now, I Am.

'The trees put forth their leaves in their sleep, and flowering emerge out of dreams, into pure I Am.

'The birds forget the stress of their dreams, and sing aloud in the Now, I Am! I Am!

'For dreams have wings and feet, and journeys to take, and efforts to make.

'But the glimmering Snake of the Now is wingless and footless, and undivided, and perfectly coiled.

'It is thus the cat lies down, in the coil of Now, and the cow curves round her nose to her belly, lying down.

‘In the feet of a dream the hare runs uphill. But when he pauses, the dream has passed, he has entered the timeless Now, and his eyes are the wide I Am.

‘Only man dreams, dreams, and dreams, and changes from dream to dream, like a man who tosses on his bed.

‘With his eyes and his mouth he dreams, with his hands and his feet, with phallos and heart and belly, with body and spirit and soul, in a tempest of dreams.

‘And rushes from dream to dream, in the hope of the perfect dream.

‘But I, I say to you, there is no dream that is perfect, for every dream has an ache and an urge, an urge and an ache.

‘And nothing is perfect, save the dream pass out into the sleep, I Am.

‘When the dream of the eyes is darkened, and encompassed with Now.

‘And the dream of the mouth resounds in the last I Am.

‘And the dream of the hands is a sleep like a bird on the sea, that sleeps and is lifted and shifted, and knows not.

‘And the dreams of the feet and the toes touch the core of the world, where the Serpent sleeps.

‘And the dream of the phallos reaches the great I Know Not.

‘And the dream of the body is the stillness of a flower in the dark.

‘And the dream of the soul is gone in the perfume of Now.

‘And the dream of the spirit lapses, and lays down its head, and is still with the Morning Star.

‘For each dream starts out of Now, and is accomplished in Now.

‘In the core of the flower, the glimmering, wakeless Snake.

‘And what falls away is a dream, and what accrues is a dream. There is always and only Now, Now and I Am.’

There was silence in the circle of men. Outside, the sound of the bullock-wagon could be heard, and from the lake, the faint knocking of oars. But the seven men sat with their heads bent, in the semi-trance, listening inwardly.

Then the drum began softly to beat, as if of itself. And a man began to sing, in a small voice:

The Lord of the Morning Star
Stood between the day and the night:
As a bird that lifts its wings, and stands
With the bright wing on the right
And the wing of the dark on the left,
The Dawn Star stood into sight.
Lo! I am always here!

Far in the hollow of space
I brush the wing of the day
And put light on your face.
The other wing brushes the dark.
But I, I am always in place.
Yea, I am always here. I am Lord
In every way. And the lords among men
See me through the flashing of wings.
They see me and lose me again.
But lo! I am always here
Within ken.
The multitudes see me not.
They see only the waving of wings,
The coming and going of things.
The cold and the hot.
But ye that perceive me between
The tremors of night and the day,
I make you the Lords of the
Way Unseen.
The path between gulfs of the dark and the steeps of the light;
The path like a snake that is gone, like the length of a fuse to ignite
The substance of shadow, that bursts and explodes into sight.
I am here undeparting. I sit tight
Between wings of the endless flight,
At the depths of the peace and the fight.
Deep in the moistures of peace,
And far down the muzzle of the fight
You shall find me, who am neither increase
Nor destruction, different quite.
I am far beyond
The horizons of love and strife.
Like a star, like a pond
That washes the lords of life.

‘Listen!’ said Ramón, in the stillness. ‘We will be masters among men, and lords among men. But lords of men and masters of men we will not be. Listen! We are lords of the night. Lords of the day and night. Sons of the Morning Star, sons of the Evening Star. Men of the Morning and the Evening Star.

‘We are not lords of men: how can men make us lords? Nor are we masters of

men, for men are not worth it.

‘But I am the Morning and the Evening Star, and lord of the day and the night. By the power that is put in my left hand, and the power that I grasp in my right, I am lord of the two ways.

‘And my flower on earth is the jasmine flower, and in heaven the flower Hesperus.

‘I will not command you, nor serve you, for the snake goes crooked to his own house.

‘Yet I will be with you, so you depart not from yourselves.

‘There is no giving, and no taking. When the fingers that give touch the fingers that receive, the Morning Star shines at once, from the contact, and the jasmine gleams between the hands. And thus there is neither giving nor taking, nor hand that proffers nor hand that receives, but the star between them is all, and the dark hand and the light hand are invisible on each side. The jasmine takes the giving and the receiving in her cup, and the scent of the oneness is fragrant on the air.

‘Think neither to give nor to receive, only let the jasmine flower.

‘Let nothing spill from you in excess, let nothing be reived from you.

‘And reive nothing away. Not even the scent from the rose, nor the juice from the pomegranate, nor the warmth from the fire.

‘But say to the rose: Lo! I take you away from your tree, and your breath is in my nostrils, and my breath is warm in your depths. Let it be a sacrament between us.

‘And beware when you break the pomegranate; it is sunset you take in your hands. Say: I am coming, come thou. Let the Evening Star stand between us.

‘And when the fire burns up and the wind is cold and you spread your hands to the blaze, listen to the flame saying: Ah! Is it thou? Comest thou to me? Lo, I was going the longest journey, down the path of the greatest snake. But since thou comest to me, I come to thee. And where thou fallest into my hands, fall I into thine, and jasmine flowers on the burning bush between us. Our meeting is the burning bush, whence the jasmine flowers.

‘Reive nothing away, and let nothing be reived from you. For reiver and bereaved alike break the root of the jasmine flower, and spit upon the Evening Star.

‘Take nothing, to say: I have it! For you can possess nothing, not even peace.

‘Nought is possessible, neither gold, nor land, nor love, nor life, nor peace, nor even sorrow nor death, nor yet salvation.

‘Say of nothing: It is mine.

‘Say only: It is with me.

‘For the gold that is with thee lingers as a departing moon, looking across space thy way, saying: Lo! We are beholden of each other. Lo! for this little while, to each other thou and I are beholden.

‘And thy land says to thee: Ah, my child of a far-off father! Come, lift me, lift me a little while, that poppies and wheat may blow on the level wind that moves between my breast and thine! Then sink with me, and we will make one mound.

‘And listen to thy love saying: Beloved! I am mown by thy sword like mown grass, and darkness is upon me, and the tremble of the Evening Star. And to me thou art darkness and nowhere. Oh thou, when thou risest up and goest thy way, speak to me, only say: The star rose between us.

‘And say to thy life: Am I thine? Art thou mine? Am I the blue curve of day around thine uncurved night? Are my eyes twilight of neither of us, where the star hangs? Is my upper lip the sunset and my lower lip the dawn, does the star tremble inside my mouth?

‘And say to thy peace: Ah! risen, deathless star! Already the waters of dawn sweep over thee, and wash me away on the flood!

‘And say to thy sorrow: Axe, thou art cutting me down!

‘Yet did a spark fly from out of thy edge and my wound!

‘Cut then, while I cover my face, father of the Star.

‘And say to thy strength: Lo, the night is foaming up my feet and my loins, day is foaming down from my eyes and my mouth to the sea of my breast. Lo, they meet! My belly is a flood of power, that races in down the sluice of bone at my back, and a star hangs low on the flood, over a troubled dawn.

‘And say to thy death: Be it so! I, and my soul, we come to thee, Evening Star. Flesh, go thou into the night. Spirit, farewell, ‘tis thy day. Leave me now. I go in last nakedness now to the nakedest Star.’

CHAPTER XII

The First Waters

The men had risen and covered themselves, and put on their hats, and covered their eyes for a second, in salute before Ramón, as they departed down the stone stair. And the iron door at the bottom had clanged, the doorkeeper had returned with the key, laid it on the drum, and softly, delicately departed.

Still Ramón sat on his serape, leaning his naked shoulders on the wall, and closing his eyes. He was tired, and in that state of extreme separateness which makes it very hard to come back to the world. On the outside of his ears he could hear the noises of the hacienda, even the tinkle of tea-spoons, and the low voice of women, and later, the low, labouring sound of a motor-car struggling over the uneven road, then swirling triumphantly into the courtyard.

It was hard to come back to these things. The noise of them sounded on the outside of his ears, but inside them was the slow, vast, inaudible roar of the cosmos, like in a sea-shell. It was hard to have to bear the contact of commonplace daily things, when his soul and body were naked to the cosmos.

He wished they would leave him the veils of his isolation awhile. But they would not: especially Carlota. She wanted him to be present to her: in familiar contact.

She was calling: 'Ramón! Ramón! Have you finished? Cipriano is here.' And even so, in her voice was fear, and an overriding temerity.

He pushed back his hair and rose, and very quickly went out, as he was, with naked torso. He didn't want to dress himself into everyday familiarity, since his soul was unfamiliar.

They had a tea-table out on the terrace, and Cipriano, in uniform, was there. He got up quickly, and came down the terrace with outstretched arms, his black eyes gleaming with an intensity almost like pain, upon the face of the other man. And Ramón looked back at him with wide, seeing, yet unchanging eyes.

The two men embraced, breast to breast, and for a moment Cipriano laid his little blackish hands on the naked shoulders of the bigger man, and for a moment was perfectly still on his breast. Then very softly, he stood back and looked at him, saying not a word.

Ramón abstractedly laid his hand on Cipriano's shoulder, looking down at him with a little smile.

‘Qué tal?’ he said, from the edge of his lips. ‘How goes it?’

‘‘Bien! Muy bien!’ said Cipriano, still gazing into the other man’s face with black, wondering, childlike, searching eyes, as if he, Cipriano, were searching for himself, in Ramón’s face. Ramón looked back into Cipriano’s black, Indian eyes with a faint, kind smile of recognition, and Cipriano hung his head as if to hide his face, the black hair, which he wore rather long and brushed sideways, dropping over his forehead.

The women watched in absolute silence. Then, as the two men began slowly to come along the terrace to the tea-table, Carlota began to pour tea. But her hand trembled so much, the teapot wobbled as she held it, and she had to put it down and clasp her hands in the lap of her white muslin dress.

‘You rowed on the lake?’ said Ramón abstractedly, coming up.

‘It was lovely!’ said Kate. ‘But hot when the sun came.’

Ramón smiled a little, then pushed his hand through his hair. Then, leaning one hand on the parapet of the terrace wall, he turned to look at the lake, and a sigh lifted his shoulders unconsciously.

He stood thus, naked to the waist, his black hair ruffled and splendid, his back to the women, looking out at the lake. Cipriano stood lingering beside him.

Kate saw the sigh lift the soft, quiescent, cream-brown shoulders. The soft, cream-brown skin of his back, of a smooth pure sensuality, made her shudder. The broad, square, rather high shoulders, with neck and head rising steep, proudly. The full-fleshed, deep-chested, rich body of the man made her feel dizzy. In spite of herself, she could not help imagining a knife stuck between those pure, male shoulders. If only to break the arrogance of their remoteness.

That was it. His nakedness was so aloof, far-off and intangible, in another day. So that to think of it was almost a violation, even to look at it with prying eyes. Kate’s heart suddenly shrank in her breast. This was how Salome had looked at John. And this was the beauty of John, that he had had; like a pomegranate on a dark tree in the distance, naked, but not undressed! Forever still and clothe-less, and with another light about it, of a richer day than our paltry, prying, sneak-thieving day.

The moment Kate had imagined a knife between his shoulders her heart shrank with grief and shame, and a great stillness came over her. Better to take the hush into one’s heart, and the sharp, prying beams out of one’s eyes. Better to lapse away from one’s own prying, assertive self, into the soft, untrespassing self, to whom nakedness is neither shame nor excitement, but clothed like a flower in its own deep, soft consciousness, beyond cheap awareness.

The evening breeze was blowing very faintly. Sailing-boats were advancing through the pearly atmosphere, far off, the sun above had a golden quality. The

opposite shore, twenty miles away, was distinct, and yet there seemed an opalescent, spume-like haze in the air, the same quality as in the filmy water. Kate could see the white specks of the far-off church towers of Tuliapan.

Below, in the garden below the house, was a thick grove of mango-trees. Among the dark and reddish leaves of the mangos, scarlet little birds were bustling, like suddenly-opening poppy-buds, and pairs of yellow birds, yellow underneath as yellow butterflies, so perfectly clear, went skimming past. When they settled for a moment and closed their wings, they disappeared, for they were grey on top. And when the cardinal birds settled, they too disappeared, for the outside of their wings was brown, like a sheath.

‘Birds in this country have all their colour below,’ said Kate.

Ramón turned to her suddenly.

‘They say the word Mexico means below this!’ he said, smiling, and sinking into a rocking-chair.

Doña Carlota had made a great effort over herself, and with eyes fixed on the tea-cups, she poured out the tea. She handed him his cup without looking at him. She did not trust herself to look at him. It made her tremble with a strange, hysterical anger: she, who had been married to him for years, and knew him, ah, knew him: and yet, and yet, had not got him at all. None of him.

‘Give me a piece of sugar, Carlota,’ he said, in his quiet voice.

But at the sound of it, his wife stopped as if some hand had suddenly grasped her.

‘Sugar! Sugar!’ she repeated abstractedly to herself.

Ramón sat forward in his rocking-chair, holding his cup in his hand, his breasts rising in relief. And on his thighs the thin linen seemed to reveal him almost more than his own dark nakedness revealed him. She understood why the cotton pantaloons were forbidden on the plaza. The living flesh seemed to emanate through them.

He was handsome, almost horribly handsome, with his black head poised as it were without weight, above his darkened, smooth neck. A pure sensuality, with a powerful purity of its own, hostile to her sort of purity. With the blue sash round his waist, pressing a fold in the flesh, and the thin linen seeming to gleam with the life of his hips and his thighs, he emanated a fascination almost like a narcotic, asserting his pure, fine sensuality against her. The strange, soft, still sureness of him, as if he sat secure within his own dark aura. And as if this dark aura of his militated against her presence, and against the presence of his wife. He emitted an effluence so powerful, that it seemed to hamper her consciousness, to bind down her limbs.

And he was utterly still and quiescent, without desire, soft and unroused,

within his own ambiente. Cipriano going the same, the pair of them so quiet and dark and heavy, like a great weight bearing the women down.

Kate knew now how Salome felt. She knew now how John the Baptist had been, with his terrible, aloof beauty, inaccessible, yet so potent.

‘Ah!’ she said to herself. ‘Let me close my eyes to him, and open only my soul. Let me close my prying, seeing eyes, and sit in dark stillness along with these two men. They have got more than I, they have a richness that I haven’t got. They have got rid of that itching of the eye, and the desire that works through the eye. The itching, prurient, knowing, imagining eye, I am cursed with it, I am hampered up in it. It is my curse of curses, the curse of Eve. The curse of Eve is upon me, my eyes are like hooks, my knowledge is like a fish-hook through my gills, pulling me in spasmodic desire. Oh, who will free me from the grappling of my eyes, from the impurity of sharp sight! Daughter of Eve, of greedy vision, why don’t these men save me from the sharpness of my own eyes!’

She rose and went to the edge of the terrace. Yellow as daffodils underneath, two birds emerged out of their own invisibility. In the little shingle bay, with a small breakwater, where the boat was pulled up and chained, two men were standing in the water, throwing out a big, fine round net, catching the little silvery fish called charales, which flicked out of the brownish water sometimes like splinters of glass.

‘Ramón!’ Kate heard Doña Carlota’s voice. ‘Won’t you put something on?’

The wife had been able to bear it no more.

‘Yes! Thank you for the tea,’ said Ramón, rising.

Kate watched him go down the terrace, in his own peculiar silence, his sandals making a faint swish on the tiles.

‘Oh, Señora Caterina!’ came the voice of Carlota. ‘Come and drink your tea. Come!’

Kate returned to the table, saying:

‘It seems so wonderfully peaceful here.’

‘Peaceful!’ echoed Carlota. ‘Ah, I do not find it peaceful. There is a horrible stillness, which makes me afraid.’

‘Do you come out very often?’ said Kate to Cipriano.

‘Yes. Fairly often. Once a week. Or twice,’ he replied, looking at her with a secret consciousness which she could not understand lurking in his black eyes.

These men wanted to take her will away from her, as if they wanted to deny her the light of day.

‘I must be going home now,’ she said. ‘The sun will be setting.’

‘Ya va?’ said Cipriano, in his soft, velvety Indian voice, with a note of distant

surprise and reproach. 'Will you go already?'

'Oh, no, Señora!' cried Carlota. 'Stay until to-morrow. Oh, yes, stay until to-morrow, with me.'

'They will expect us home,' she said, wavering.

'Ah, no! I can send a boy to say you will come to-morrow. Yes? You will stay? Ah, good, good!'

And she laid her hand caressively on Kate's arm, then rose to hurry away to the servants.

Cipriano had taken out his cigarette-case. He offered it to Kate.

'Shall I take one?' she said. 'It is my vice.'

'Do take one,' he said. 'It isn't good to be perfect.'

'It isn't, is it?' she laughed, puffing her cigarette.

'Now would you call it peace?' he asked with incomprehensible irony.

'Why?' she cried.

'Why do white people always want peace?' he asked.

'Surely peace is natural! Don't all people want it? Don't you?'

'Peace is only the rest after war,' he said. 'So it is not more natural than fighting: perhaps not so natural.'

'No, but there is another peace: the peace that passes all understanding. Don't you know that?'

'I don't think I do,' he said.

'What a pity!' she cried.

'Ah!' he said. 'You want to teach me! But to me it is different. Each man has two spirits in him. The one is like the early morning in the time of rain, very quiet, and sweet, moist, no? — with the mocking-bird singing, and birds flying about, very fresh. And the other is like the dry season, the steady, strong hot light of the day, which seems as if it will never change.'

'But you like the first better,' she cried.

'I don't know!' he replied. 'The other lasts longer.'

'I am sure you like the fresh morning better,' she said.

'I don't know! I don't know!' He smiled a crumpled sort of smile, and she could tell he really did not know. 'In the first time, you can feel the flowers on their stem, the stem very strong and full of sap, no? — and the flower opening on top like a face that has the perfume of desire. And a woman might be like that. — But this passes, and the sun begins to shine very strong, very hot, no? Then everything inside a man changes, goes dark, no? And the flowers crumple up, and the breast of a man becomes like a steel mirror. And he is all darkness inside, coiling and uncoiling like a snake. All the flowers withered up on shrunk stems, no? And then women don't exist for a man. They disappear like the

flowers.'

'And then what does he want?' said Kate.

'I don't know. Perhaps he wants to be a very big man, and master all the people.'

'Then why doesn't he?' said Kate.

He lifted his shoulders.

'And you,' he said to her. 'You seem to me like that morning I told you about.'

'I am just forty years old,' she laughed shakily.

Again he lifted his shoulders.

'It doesn't matter,' he said. 'It is the same. Your body seems to me like the stem of the flower I told you about, and in your face it will always be morning, of the time of the rains.'

'Why do you say that to me?' she said, as an involuntary strange shudder shook her.

'Why not say it!' he replied. 'You are like the cool morning, very fresh. In Mexico, we are the end of the hot dry day.'

He watched her, with a strange lingering desire in his black eyes, and what seemed to her a curious, lurking sort of insolence. She dropped her head to hide from him, and rocked in her chair.

'I would like to marry you,' he said; 'if ever you will marry. I would like to marry you.'

'I don't think I shall ever marry again,' she flashed, her bosom heaving like suffocation, and a dark flush suffusing over her face, against her will.

'Who knows!' said he.

Ramón was coming down the terrace, his fine white serape folded over his naked shoulder, with its blue-and-dark pattern at the borders, and its long scarlet fringe dangling and swaying as he walked. He leaned against one of the pillars of the terrace, and looked down at Kate and Cipriano. Cipriano glanced up with that peculiar glance of primitive intimacy.

'I told the Señora Caterina,' he said, 'if ever she wanted to marry a man, she should marry me.'

'It is plain talk,' said Ramón, glancing at Cipriano with the same intimacy, and smiling.

Then he looked at Kate, with a slow smile in his brown eyes, and a shadow of curious knowledge on his face. He folded his arms over his breast, as the natives do when it is cold and they are protecting themselves; and the cream-brown flesh, like opium, lifted the bosses of his breasts, full and smooth.

'Don Cipriano says that white people always want peace,' she said, looking up

at Ramón with haunted eyes. 'Don't you consider yourselves white people?' she asked, with a slight, deliberate impertinence.

'No whiter than we are,' smiled Ramón. 'Not lily-white, at least.'

'And don't you want peace?' she asked.

'I? I shouldn't think of it. The meek have inherited the earth, according to prophecy. But who am I, that I should envy them their peace! No, Señora. Do I look like a gospel of peace? — or a gospel of war either? Life doesn't split down that division, for me.'

'I don't know what you want,' said she, looking up at him with haunted eyes.

'We only half know ourselves,' he replied, smiling with changeful eyes. 'Perhaps not so much as half.'

There was a certain vulnerable kindness about him, which made her wonder, startled, if she had ever realized what real fatherliness meant. The mystery, the nobility, the inaccessibility, and the vulnerable compassion of man in his separate fatherhood.

'You don't like brown-skinned people?' he asked her gently.

'I think it is beautiful to look at,' she said. 'But' — with a faint shudder — 'I am glad I am white.'

'You feel there could be no contact?' he said, simply.

'Yes!' she said. 'I mean that.'

'It is as you feel,' he said.

And as he said it, she knew he was more beautiful to her than any blond white man, and that, in a remote, far-off way, the contact with him was more precious than any contact she had known.

But then, though he cast over her a certain shadow, he would never encroach on her, he would never seek any close contact. It was the incompleteness in Cipriano that sought her out, and seemed to trespass on her.

Hearing Ramón's voice, Carlota appeared uneasily in a doorway. Hearing him speak English, she disappeared again, on a gust of anger. But after a little while, she came once more, with a little vase containing the creamy-coloured, thick flowers that are coloured like freesias, and that smell very sweet.

'Oh, how nice!' said Kate. 'They are temple flowers! In Ceylon the natives tiptoe into the little temples and lay one flower on the table at the foot of the big Buddha statues. And the tables of offering are all covered with these flowers, all put so neatly. The natives have that delicate oriental way of putting things down.'

'Ah!' said Carlota, setting the vase on the table. 'I did not bring them for any gods, especially strange ones. I brought them for you, Señora. They smell so sweet.'

‘Don’t they!’ said Kate.

The two men went away, Ramón laughing.

‘Ah, Señora!’ said Carlota, sitting down tense at the table. ‘Could you follow Ramón? Could you give up the Blessed Virgin? — I could sooner die!’

‘Ha!’ said Kate, with a little weariness. ‘Surely we don’t want any more gods.’

‘More gods, Señora!’ said Doña Carlota, shocked. ‘But how is it possible! — Don Ramón is in mortal sin.’

Kate was silent.

‘And he wants to lead more and more people into the same,’ continued Carlota. ‘It is the sin of pride. Men wise in their own conceit! — The cardinal sin of men. Ah, I have told him. — And I am so glad, Señora, that you feel as I feel. I am so afraid of American women, women like that. They wish to have men’s minds, so they accept all the follies and wickedness of men. — You are Catholic, Señora?’

‘I was educated in a convent,’ said Kate.

‘Ah, of course! Of course! — Ah, Señora, as if a woman who had ever known the Blessed Virgin could ever part from her again. Ah, Señora, what woman would have the heart to put Christ back on the Cross, to crucify him twice! But men, men! This Quetzalcoatl business! What buffoonery, Señora; if it were not horrible sin! And two clever, well-educated men! Wise in their own conceit!’

‘Men usually are,’ said Kate.

It was sunset, with a big level cloud like fur overhead, only the sides of the horizon fairly clear. The sun was not visible. It had gone down in a thick, rose-red fume behind the wavy ridge of the mountains. Now the hills stood up bluish, all the air was a salmon-red flush, the fawn water had pinkish ripples. Boys and men, bathing a little way along the shore, were the colour of deep flame.

Kate and Carlota had climbed up to the azotea, the flat roof, from the stone stairway at the end of the terrace. They could see the world: the hacienda with its courtyard like a fortress, the road between deep trees, the black mud huts near the broken highroad, and little naked fires already twinkling outside the doors. All the air was pinkish, melting to a lavender blue, and the willows on the shore, in the pink light, were apple-green and glowing. The hills behind rose abruptly, like mounds, dry and pinky. Away in the distance, down the lake, the two white obelisk towers of Sayula glinted among the trees, and villas peeped out. Boats were creeping into the shadow, from the outer brightness of the lake.

And in one of these boats was Juana, being rowed, disconsolate, home.

CHAPTER XIII

The First Rain

Ramón and Cipriano were out by the lake. Cipriano also had changed into the white clothes and sandals, and he looked better than when in uniform.

‘I had a talk with Montes when he came to Guadalajara,’ Cipriano said to Ramón. Montes was the President of the Republic.

‘And what did he say?’

‘He is careful. But he doesn’t like his colleagues. I think he feels lonely. I think he would like to know you better.’

‘Why?’

‘Perhaps that you could give him your moral support. Perhaps that you might be Secretary, and President when Montes’ term is up.’

‘I like Montes,’ said Ramón. ‘He is sincere and passionate. Did you like him?’

‘Yes!’ said Cipriano. ‘More or less. He is suspicious, and jealous for fear anyone else might want to share in his power. He has the cravings of a dictator. He wanted to find out if I would stick to him.’

‘You let him know you would?’

‘I told him that all I cared for was for you and for Mexico.’

‘What did he say?’

‘Well, he is no fool. He said: “Don Ramón sees the world with different eyes from mine. Who knows which of us is right? I want to save my country from poverty and unenlightenment, he wants to save its soul. I say, a hungry and ignorant man has no place for a soul. An empty belly grinds upon itself, so does an empty mind, and the soul doesn’t exist. Don Ramón says, if a man has no soul, it doesn’t matter whether he is hungry or ignorant. Well, he can go his way, and I mine. We shall never hinder one another, I believe. I give you my word I won’t have him interfered with. He sweeps the patio and I sweep the street.”’

‘Sensible!’ said Ramón. ‘And honest in his convictions.’

‘Why should you not be Secretary in a few months’ time? And follow to the Presidency?’ said Cipriano.

‘You know I don’t want that. I must stand in another world, and act in another world. — Politics must go their own way, and society must do as it will. Leave me alone, Cipriano. I know you want me to be another Porfirio Diaz, or something like that. But for me that would be failure pure and simple.’

Cipriano was watching Ramón with black, guarded eyes, in which was an element of love, and of fear, and of trust, but also incomprehension, and the suspicion that goes with incomprehension.

‘I don’t understand, myself, what you want,’ he muttered.

‘Yes, yes, you do. Politics and all this social religion that Montes has got is like washing the outside of the egg, to make it look clean. But I, myself, I want to get inside the egg, right to the middle, to start it growing into a new bird. Ay! Cipriano! Mexico is like an old, old egg that the bird of Time laid long ago; and she has been sitting on it for centuries, till it looks foul in the nest of the world. But still, Cipriano, it is a good egg. It is not addled. Only the spark of fire has never gone into the middle of it, to start it. — Montes wants to clean the nest and wash the egg. But meanwhile, the egg will go cold and die. The more you save these people from poverty and ignorance, the quicker they will die: like a dirty egg that you take from under the hen-eagle, to wash it. While you wash the egg, it chills and dies. Poor old Montes, all his ideas are American and European. And the old Dove of Europe will never hatch the egg of dark-skinned America. The United States can’t die, because it isn’t alive. It is a nestful of china eggs, made of pot. So they can be kept clean. — But here, Cipriano, here, let us hatch the chick before we start cleaning up the nest.’

Cipriano hung his head. He was always testing Ramón, to see if he could change him. When he found he couldn’t, then he submitted, and new little fires of joy sprang up in him. But meanwhile, he had to try, and try again.

‘It is no good, trying to mix the two things. At this stage of affairs, at least, they won’t mix. We have to shut our eyes and sink down, sink away from the surface, away, like shadows, down to the bottom. Like the pearl divers. But you keep bobbing up like a cork.’

Cipriano smiled subtly. He knew well enough.

‘We’ve got to open the oyster of the cosmos, and get our manhood out of it. Till we’ve got the pearl, we are only gnats on the surface of the ocean,’ said Ramón.

‘My manhood is like a devil inside me,’ said Cipriano.

‘It’s very true,’ said Ramón. ‘That’s because the old oyster has him shut up, like a black pearl. You must let him walk out.’

‘Ramón,’ said Cipriano, ‘wouldn’t it be good to be a serpent, and be big enough to wrap one’s folds round the globe of the world, and crush it like that egg?’

Ramón looked at him and laughed.

‘I believe we could do that,’ said Cipriano, a slow smile curling round his mouth. ‘And wouldn’t it be good?’

Ramón shook his head, laughing.

‘There would be one good moment, at least,’ he said.

‘Who asks for more!’ said Cipriano.

A spark flashed out of Ramón’s eyes too. Then he checked himself, and gathered himself together.

‘What would be the good!’ he said heavily. ‘If the egg was crushed, and we remained, what could we do but go howling down the empty passages of darkness? What’s the good, Cipriano?’

Ramón got up and walked away. The sun had set, the night was falling. And in his soul the great, writhing anger was alive again. Carlota provoked it into life: the two women seemed to breathe life into the black monster of his inward rage, till it began to lash again. And Cipriano stirred it up till it howled with desire.

‘My manhood is like a demon howling inside me,’ said Ramón to himself, in Cipriano’s words.

And he admitted the justice of the howling, his manhood being pent up, humiliated, goaded with insult inside him. And rage came over him, against Carlota, against Cipriano, against his own people, against all mankind, till he was filled with rage like the devil.

His people would betray him, he knew that. Cipriano would betray him. Given one little vulnerable chink, they would pierce him. They would leap at the place out of nowhere, like a tarantula, and bite in the poison.

While ever there was one little vulnerable chink. And what man can be invulnerable?

He went upstairs by the outer stairway, through the iron door at the side of the house, under the heavy trees, up to his room, and sat on his bed. The night was hot, heavy, and ominously still.

‘The waters are coming,’ he heard a servant say. He shut the doors of his room till it was black dark inside. Then he threw aside his clothing, saying: I put off the world with my clothes. And standing nude and invisible in the centre of his room he thrust his clenched fist upwards, with all his might, feeling he would break the walls of his chest. And his left hand hung loose, the fingers softly curving downwards.

And tense like the gush of a soundless fountain, he thrust up and reached down in the invisible dark, convulsed with passion. Till the black waves began to wash over his consciousness, over his mind, waves of darkness broke over his memory over his being, like an incoming tide, till at last it was full tide and he trembled, and fell to rest. Invisible in the darkness, he stood soft and relaxed, staring with wide eyes at the dark, and feeling the dark fecundity of the inner tide washing over his heart, over his belly, his mind dissolved away in the

greater, dark mind, which is undisturbed by thoughts.

He covered his face with his hands, and stood still, in pure unconsciousness, neither hearing nor feeling nor knowing, like a dark sea-weed deep in the sea. With no Time and no World, in the deeps that are timeless and worldless.

Then when his heart and his belly were restored, his mind began to flicker again softly, like a soft flame flowing without departing.

So he wiped his face with his hands, and put his serape over his head, and, silent inside an aura of pain, he went out and took the drum, carrying it downstairs.

Martin, the man who loved him, was hovering in the zaguán.

‘Ya, Patrón?’ he said.

‘Ya!’ said Ramón.

The man ran indoors, where a lamp was burning in the big, dark kitchen, and ran out again with an armful of the woven straw mats.

‘Where, Patrón?’ he said.

Ramón hesitated in the centre of the courtyard, and looked at the sky.

‘Viene el agua?’ he said.

‘Creo que sí, Patrón.’

They went to the shed where the bananas had been packed and carried away on donkeys. There the man threw down the petates. Ramón arranged them. Guisleno ran with canes. He was going to make lights, the simplest possible. Three pieces of thick cane, tied at the neck with a cord, stood up three-legged, waist high. In the three-pronged fork at the top he laid a piece of flat, slightly hollow lava stone. Then he came running from the house with a bit of burning ocote wood. Three or four bits of ocote, each bit no bigger than a long finger, flickered and rose in quick flames from the stone, and the courtyard danced with shadow.

Ramón took off his serape, folded it, and sat upon it. Guisleno lit another tripod-torch. Ramón sat with his back to the wall, the firelight dancing on his dark brows, that were sunk in a sort of frown. His breast shone like gold in the flame. He took the drum and sounded the summons, slow, monotonous, rather sad. In a moment two or three men came running. The drummer came, Ramón stood up and handed him the drum. He ran with it to the great outer doorway, and out into the dark lane, and there sounded the summons, quick, sharp.

Ramón put on his serape, whose scarlet fringe touched his knees, and stood motionless, with ruffled hair. Round his shoulders went the woven snake, and his head was through the middle of the blue, woven bird.

Cipriano came from the house. He was wearing a serape all scarlet and dark brown, a great scarlet sun at the centre, deep scarlet zigzags at the borders, and

dark brown fringe at his knees. He came and stood at Ramón's side, glancing up into Ramón's face. But the other man's brows were low, his eyes were fixed in the darkness of the sheds away across the courtyard. He was looking into the heart of the world; because the faces of men, and the hearts of men are helpless quicksands. Only in the heart of the cosmos man can look for strength. And if he can keep his soul in touch with the heart of the world, then from the heart of the world new blood will beat in strength and stillness into him, fulfilling his manhood.

Cipriano turned his black eyes to the courtyard. His soldiers had drawn near, in a little group. Three or four men were standing in dark serapes, round the fire. Cipriano stood brilliant like a cardinal bird, next to Ramón. Even his sandals were bright, sealing-wax red, and his loose linen trousers were bound at the ankles with red and black bands. His face looked very dark and ruddy in the firelight, his little black tuft of a beard hung odd and devilish, his eyes were glittering sardonically. But he caught Ramón's hand in his small hand, and stood holding it.

The peons were coming through the entrance-way, balancing their big hats. Women were hurrying barefoot, swishing their full skirts, carrying babies inside the dark wrap of their rebozos, children running after. They all clustered towards the flame-light, like wild animals gazing in at the circle of men in dark serapes, Ramón, magnificent in his white and blue and shadow, poising his beautiful head, Cipriano at his side like a glittering cardinal bird.

Carlota and Kate emerged from the inner doorway of the house. But there Carlota remained, wrapped in a black silk shawl, seated on a wooden bench where the soldiers usually sat, looking across at the ruddy flare of light, the circle of dark men, the tall beauty of her husband, the poppy-petal glitter of red, of Cipriano, the group of little, dust-coloured soldiers, and the solid throng of peons and women and children, standing gazing like animals. While through the gate men still came hurrying, and from outside, the drum sounded, and a high voice sang again and again:

Someone will enter between the gates,
Now, at this moment, Ay!
See the light on the man that waits.
Shall you? Shall I?
Someone will come to the place of fire,
Now, at this moment, Ay!
And hark to the words of their heart's desire.
Shall you? Shall I?

Someone will knock when the door is shut,
Ay! in a moment, Ay!
Hear a voice saying: I know you not!
Shall you? Shall I?

There was a queer, wild yell each time on the Ay! and like a bugle refrain:
Shall you? Shall I? It made Carlota shiver.

Kate, wrapping her yellow shawl round her, walked slowly towards the group.

The drum outside gave a rapid shudder, and was finished. The drummer came in, the great doors were shut and barred, the drummer took his place in the ring of standing men. A dead silence supervened.

Ramón continued to gaze from under lowered brows, into space. Then in a quiet, inward voice, he said:

‘As I take off this cover, I put away the day that is gone from upon me.’

He took off his serape, and stood with it over his arm. All the men in the circle did the same, till they stood with naked breasts and shoulders, Cipriano very dark and strong-looking, in his smallness, beside Ramón.

‘I put away the day that is gone,’ Ramón continued, in the same still, inward voice, ‘and stand with my heart uncovered in the night of the gods.’

Then he looked down at the ground.

‘Serpent of the earth,’ he said; ‘snake that lies in the fire at the heart of the world, come! Come! Snake of the fire of the heart of the world, coil like gold round my ankles, and rise like life around my knee, and lay your head against my thigh. Come, put your head in my hand, cradle your head in my fingers, snake of the deeps. Kiss my feet and my ankles with your mouth of gold, kiss my knees and my inner thigh, snake branded with flame and shadow, come! and rest your head in my finger-basket! So!’

The voice was soft and hypnotic. It died upon a stillness. And it seemed as if really a mysterious presence had entered unseen from the underworld. It seemed to the peons as if really they saw a snake of brilliant gold and living blackness softly coiled around Ramón’s ankle and knee, and resting its head in his fingers, licking his palm with forked tongue.

He looked out at the big, dilated, glittering eyes of his people, and his own eyes were wide and uncanny.

‘I tell you,’ he said, ‘and I tell you truly. At the heart of this earth sleeps a great serpent, in the midst of fire. Those that go down in mines feel the heat and the sweat of him, they feel him move. It is the living fire of the earth, for the earth is alive. The snake of the world is huge, and the rocks are his scales, trees grow between them. I tell you the earth you dig is alive as a snake that sleeps. So

vast a serpent you walk on, this lake lies between his folds as a drop of rain in the folds of a sleeping rattlesnake. Yet he none the less lives. The earth is alive.

‘And if he died, we should all perish. Only his living keeps the soil sweet, that grows you maize. From the roots of his scales we dig silver and gold, and the trees have root in him, as the hair of my face has root in my lips.

‘The earth is alive. But he is very big and we are very small, smaller than dust. But he is very big in his life, and sometimes he is angry. These people, smaller than dust, he says, they stamp on me and say I am dead. Even to their asses they speak, and shout Harreh! Burro! But to me they speak no word. Therefore I will turn against them, like a woman who lies angry with her man in bed, and eats away his spirit with her anger, turning her back to him.

‘That is what the earth says to us. He sends sorrow into our feet, and depression into our loins.

‘Because as an angry woman in the house can make a man heavy, taking his life from him, so the earth can make us heavy, make our souls cold, and our life dreary in our feet.

‘Speak then to the snake of the heart of the world, put oil on your fingers and lower your fingers for him to taste the oil of the earth, and let him send life into your feet and ankles and knees, like sap in the young maize pressing against the joint and making the milk of the maize bud among its hair.

‘From the heart of the earth man feels his manhood rise up in him, like the maize that is proud, turning its green leaves outwards. Be proud like the maize, and let your roots go deep, deep, for the rains are here, and it is time for us to be growing in Mexico.’

Ramón ceased speaking, the drum softly pulsed. All the men of the ring were looking down at the earth and softly letting their left hands hang.

Carlota, who had not been able to hear, drifted up to Kate’s side, spellbound by her husband. Kate unconsciously glanced down at the earth, and secretly let her fingers hang softly against her dress. But then she was afraid of what might happen to her, and she caught her hand up into her shawl.

Suddenly the drum began to give a very strong note, followed by a weak: a strange, exciting thud.

Everybody looked up. Ramón had flung his right arm tense into the air, and was looking up at the black dark sky. The men of the ring did the same, and the naked arms were thrust aloft like so many rockets.

‘Up! up! up!’ said a wild voice.

‘Up! up!’ cried the men of the ring, in a wild chorus.

And involuntarily the men in the crowd twitched, then shot their arms upwards, turning their faces to the dark heavens. Even some of the women

boldly thrust up their naked arms, and relief entered their hearts as they did so.

But Kate would not lift her arm.

There was dead silence, even the drum was silent. Then the voice of Ramón was heard, speaking upwards to the black sky:

‘Your big wings are dark, Bird, you are flying low to-night. You are flying low over Mexico, we shall soon feel the fan of your wings on our face.

‘Ay, Bird! You fly about where you will. You fly past the stars, and you perch on the sun. You fly out of sight, and are gone beyond the white river of the sky. But you come back like the ducks of the north, looking for water and winter.

‘You sit in the middle of the sun, and preen your feathers. You crouch in the rivers of stars, and make the star-dust rise around you. You fly away into the deepest hollow place of the sky, whence there seems no return.

‘You come back to us, and hover overhead, and we feel your wings fanning our faces — ’

Even as he spoke the wind rose, in sudden gusts, and a door could be heard slamming in the house, with a shivering of glass, and the trees gave off a tearing sound.

‘Come then, Bird of the great sky!’ Ramón called wildly. ‘Come! Oh Bird, settle a moment on my wrist, over my head, and give me power of the sky, and wisdom. Oh Bird! Bird of all the wide heavens, even if you drum your feathers in thunder, and drop the white snake of fire from your beak back to the earth again, where he can run in, deep down the rocks again, home: even if you come as the Thunderer, come! Settle on my wrist a moment, with the clutch of the power of thunder, and arch your wings over my head, like a shadow of clouds; and bend your breast to my brow, and bless me with the sun. Bird, roaming Bird of the Beyond, with thunder in your pinions and the snake of lightning in your beak, with the blue heaven in the socket of your wings and cloud in the arch of your neck, with sun in the burnt feathers of your breast and power in your feet, with terrible wisdom in your flight, swoop to me a moment, swoop!’

Sudden gusts of wind tore at the little fires of flame, till they could be heard to rustle, and the lake began to speak in a vast hollow noise, beyond the tearing of trees. Distant lightning was beating far off, over the black hills.

Ramón dropped his arm, which had been bent over his head. The drum began to beat. Then he said:

‘Sit down a moment, before the Bird shakes water out of his wings. It will come soon. Sit down.’

There was a stir. Men put their serapes over their faces, women clutched their rebozos tighter, and all sat down on the ground. Only Kate and Carlota remained standing, on the outer edge. Gusts of wind tore at the flames, the men put their

hats on the ground in front of them.

‘The earth is alive, and the sky is alive,’ said Ramón in his natural voice, ‘and between them, we live. Earth has kissed my knees, and put strength in my belly. Sky has perched on my wrist, and sent power into my breast.

‘But as in the morning the Morning-star stands between earth and sky, a star can rise in us, and stand between the heart and the loins.

‘That is the manhood of man, and for woman, her womanhood.

‘You are not yet men. And women, you are not yet women.

‘You run about and toss about and die, and still you have not found the star of your manhood rise within you, the stars of your womanhood shine out serene between your breasts, women.

‘I tell you, for him that wishes it, the star of his manhood shall rise within him, and he shall be proud, and perfect even as the Morning-star is perfect.

‘And the star of a woman’s womanhood can rise at last, from between the heavy rim of the earth and the lost grey void of the sky.

‘But how? How shall we do it? How shall it be?

‘How shall we men become Men of the Morning Star? And the women the Dawn-Star Women?

‘Lower your fingers to the caress of the Snake of the earth.

‘Lift your wrist for a perch to the far-lying Bird.

‘Have the courage of both, the courage of lightning and the earthquake.

‘And wisdom of both, the wisdom of the snake and the eagle.

‘And the peace of both, the peace of the serpent and the sun.

‘And the power of both, the power of the innermost earth and the outermost heaven.

‘But on your brow, Men! the undimmed Morning Star, that neither day nor night, nor earth nor sky can swallow and put out.

‘And between your breasts, Women! the Dawn-Star, that cannot be dimmed.

‘And your home at last is the Morning Star. Neither heaven nor earth shall swallow you up at the last, but you shall pass the place beyond both, into the bright star that is lonely yet feels itself never alone.

‘The Morning Star is sending you a messenger, a god who died in Mexico. But he slept his sleep, and the invisible Ones washed his body with water of resurrection. So he has risen, and pushed the stone from the mouth of the tomb, and has stretched himself. And now he is striding across the horizons even quicker than the great stone from the tomb is tumbling back to the earth, to crush those that rolled it up.

‘The Son of the Star is coming back to the Sons of Men, with big, bright strides.

‘Prepare to receive him. And wash yourselves, and put oil on your hands and your feet, on your mouth and eyes and ears and nostrils, on your breast and navel and on the secret places of your body, that nothing of the dead days, no dust of skeletons and evil things may pass into you and make you unclean.

‘Do not look with the eyes of yesterday, nor like yesterday listen, nor breathe, nor smell, nor taste, nor swallow food and drink. Do not kiss with the mouths of yesterday, nor touch with the hands, nor walk with yesterday’s feet. And let your navel know nothing of yesterday, and go into your women with a new body, enter the new body in her.

‘For yesterday’s body is dead, and carrion, the Xopilote is hovering above it.

‘Put yesterday’s body from off you, and have a new body. Even as your God who is coming. Quetzalcoatl is coming with a new body, like a star, from the shadows of death.

‘Yes, even as you sit upon the earth this moment, with the round of your body touching the round of the earth, say: Earth! Earth! you are alive as the globes of my body are alive. Breathe the kiss of the inner earth upon me, even as I sit upon you.

‘And so, it is said. The earth is stirring beneath you, the sky is rushing its wings above. Go home to your homes, in front of the waters that will fall and cut you off forever from your yesterdays.

‘Go home, and hope to be Men of the Morning Star, Women of the Star of Dawn.

‘You are not yet men and women — ’

He rose up and waved to the people to be gone. And in a moment they were on their feet, scurrying and hastening with the quiet Mexican hurry, that seems to run low down upon the surface of the earth.

The black wind was all loose in the sky, tearing with the thin shriek of torn fabrics, in the mango-trees. Men held their big hats on their heads and ran with bent knees, their serapes blowing. Women clutched their rebozos tighter and ran barefoot to the zaguán.

The big doors were open, a soldier stood with a gun across his back, holding a hurricane lamp. And the people fled like ghosts through the doors, and away up the black lane like bits of paper veering away into nothingness, blown out of their line of flight. In a moment, they had all silently gone.

Martin barred the great doors. The soldier put down his lamp on the wooden bench, and he and his comrades sat huddled in their dark shawls, in a little bunch like toadstools in the dark cavern of the zaguán. Already one had curled himself up on the wooden bench, wrapped like a snail in his blanket, head disappeared.

‘The water is coming!’ cried the servants excitedly, as Kate went upstairs with

Doña Carlota.

The lake was quite black, like a great pit. The wind suddenly blew with violence, with a strange ripping sound in the mango-trees, as if some membrane in the air were being ripped. The white-flowered oleanders in the garden below leaned over quite flat, their white flowers ghostly, going right down to the earth, in the pale beam of the lamp — like a street lamp — that shone on the wall at the front entrance. A young palm-tree bent and spread its leaves on the ground. Some invisible juggernaut car rolling in the dark over the outside world.

Away across the lake, south-west, lightning blazed and ran down the sky like some portentous writing. And soft, velvety thunder broke inwardly, strangely.

‘It frightens me!’ cried Doña Carlota, putting her hand over her eyes and hastening into a far corner of the bare salon.

Cipriano and Kate stood on the terrace, watching the coloured flowers in the pots shake and fly to bits, disappearing up into the void of darkness. Kate clutched her shawl. But the wind suddenly got under Cipriano’s blanket, and lifted it straight up into the air, then dropped it in a scarlet flare over his head. Kate watched his deep, strong Indian chest lift as his arms quickly fought to free his head. How dark he was, and how primitively physical, beautiful, and deep-breasted, with soft, full flesh! But all, as it were, for himself. Nothing that came forth from him to meet with one outside. All oblivious of the outside, all for himself.

‘Ah! the water!’ he cried, holding down his serape.

The first great drops were flying darkly at the flowers, like arrows. Kate stood back into the doorway of the salon. A pure blaze of lightning slipped three-fold above the black hills, seemed to stand a moment, then slip back into the dark.

Down came the rain with a smash, as if some great vessel had broken. With it, came a waft of icy air. And all the time, first in one part of the sky, then in another, in quick succession the blue lightning, very blue, broke out of heaven and lit up the air for a blue, breathless moment, looming trees and ghost of a garden, then was gone, while thunder dropped and exploded continually.

Kate watched the dropping masses of water in wonder. Already, in the blue moments of lightning, she saw the garden below a pond, the walks were rushing rivers. It was cold. She turned indoors.

A servant was going round the rooms with a lantern, to look if scorpions were coming out. He found one scuttling across the floor of Kate’s room, and one fallen from the ceiling beams on to Carlota’s bed.

They sat in the salon in rocking-chairs, Carlota and Kate, and rocked, smelling the good wetness, breathing the good, chilled air. Kate had already forgotten what really chill air was like. She wrapped her shawl tighter round her.

‘Ah, yes, you feel cold! You must take care in the nights now. Sometimes in the rainy season the nights are very cold. You must be ready with an extra blanket. And the servants, poor things, they just lie and shudder, and they get up in the morning like corpses. — But the sun soon warms them again, and they seem to think they must bear what comes. So they complain sometimes, but still they don’t provide.’

The wind had gone, suddenly. Kate was uneasy, uneasy, with the smell of water, almost of ice, in her nostrils, and her blood still hot and dark. She got up and went again to the terrace. Cipriano was still standing there, motionless and inscrutable, like a monument, in his red and dark serape.

The rain was abating. Down below in the garden two barefooted women-servants were running through the water, in the faint light of the zaguán lamp, running across the garden and putting ollas and square gasoline cans under the arching spouts of water that seethed down from the roof, then darting away while they filled, then struggling in with the frothy vessel. It would save making trips to the lake, for water.

‘What do you think of us?’ Cipriano said to her.

‘It is strange to me,’ she replied, wondering and a little awed by the night.

‘Good, no?’ he said, in an exultant tone.

‘A little scaring,’ she replied, with a slight laugh.

‘When you are used to it,’ he said, ‘it seems natural, no? It seems natural so — as it is. And when you go to a country like England, where all is so safe and ready-made, then you miss it. You keep saying to yourself: “What am I missing? What is it that is not here?”’

He seemed to be gloating in his native darkness. It was curious, that though he spoke such good English, it seemed always foreign to her, more foreign than Doña Carlota’s Spanish.

‘I can’t understand that people want to have everything, all life, no? — so safe and ready-made as in England and America. It is good to be awake. On the qui vive, no?’

‘Perhaps,’ she said.

‘So I like it,’ he said, ‘when Ramón tells the people the earth is alive, and the sky has a big bird in it, that you don’t see. I think it is true. Certainly! And it is good to know it, because then one is on the qui vive, no?’

‘But it’s tiring to be always on the qui vive,’ she said.

‘Why? Why tiring? No, I think, on the contrary, it is refreshing. — Ah, you should marry, and live in Mexico. At last, I am sure, you would like it. You would keep waking up more and more to it.’

‘Or else going more and more deadened,’ she said. ‘That is how most

foreigners go, it seems to me.'

'Why deadened?' he said to her. 'I don't understand. Why deadened? Here you have a country where night is night, and rain comes down and you know it. And you have a people with whom you must be on the *qui vive* all the time, all the time. And that is very good, no? You don't go sleepy. Like a pear! Don't you say a pear goes sleepy, no? — *cuando se echa a perder?*'

'Yes!' she said.

'And here you have also Ramón. How does Ramón seem to you?'

'I don't know. I don't want to say anything. But I do think he is almost too much: too far. — And I don't think he is Mexican.'

'Why not? Why not Mexican? He is Mexican.'

'Not as you are.'

'How not as I am? He is Mexican.'

'He seems to me to belong to the old, old Europe,' she said.

'And he seems to me to belong to the old, old Mexico — and also to the new,' he added quickly.

'But you don't believe in him.'

'How?'

'You — yourself. You don't believe in him. You think it is like everything else, a sort of game. Everything is a sort of game, a put-up job, to you Mexicans. You don't really believe, in anything.'

'How not believe? I not believe in Ramón? — Well, perhaps not, in that way of kneeling before him and spreading out my arms and shedding tears on his feet. But I — I believe in him, too. Not in your way, but in mine. I tell you why. Because he has the power to compel me. If he hadn't the power to compel me, how should I believe?'

'It is a queer sort of belief that is compelled,' she said.

'How else should one believe, except by being compelled? I like Ramón for that, that he can compel me. When I grew up, and my godfather could not compel me to believe, I was very unhappy. It made me very unhappy. — But Ramón compels me, and that is very good. It makes me very happy, when I know I can't escape. It would make you happy too.'

'To know I could not escape from Don Ramón?' she said ironically.

'Yes, that also. And to know you could not escape from Mexico. And even from such a man as me.'

She paused in the dark before she answered, sardonically:

'I don't think it would make me happy to feel I couldn't escape from Mexico. No, I feel, unless I was sure I could get out any day, I couldn't bear to be here.'

In her mind she thought: And perhaps Ramón is the only one I couldn't quite

escape from, because he really touches me somewhere inside. But from you, you little Cipriano, I should have no need even to escape, because I could not be caught by you.

‘Ah!’ he said quickly. ‘You think so. But then you don’t know. You can only think with American thoughts, it is natural. From your education, you have only American thoughts, U.S.A. thoughts, to think with. Nearly all women are like that: even Mexican women of the Spanish-Mexican class. They are all thinking nothing but U.S.A. thoughts, because those are the ones that go with the way they dress their hair. And so it is with you. You think like a modern woman, because you belong to the Anglo-Saxon or Teutonic world, and dress your hair in a certain way, and have money, and are altogether free. — But you only think like this because you have had these thoughts put in your head, just as in Mexico you spend centavos and pesos, because that is the Mexican money you have put in your pocket. It’s what they give you at the bank. — So when you say you are free, you are not free. You are compelled all the time to be thinking U.S.A. thoughts — compelled, I must say. You have not as much choice as a slave. As the peons must eat tortillas, tortillas, tortillas, because there is nothing else, you must think these U.S.A. thoughts, about being a woman and being free. Every day you must eat those tortillas, tortillas. — Till you don’t know how you would like something else.’

‘What else should I like?’ she said, with a grimace at the darkness.

‘Other thoughts, other feelings. — You are afraid of such a man as me, because you think I should not treat you à l’américaine. You are quite right. I should not treat you as an American woman must be treated. Why should I? I don’t wish to. It doesn’t seem good to me.’

‘You would treat a woman like a real old Mexican, would you? Keep her ignorant, and shut her up?’ said Kate sarcastically.

‘I could not keep her ignorant if she did not start ignorant. But what more I had to teach her wouldn’t be in the American style of teaching.’

‘What then?’

‘Quién sabe! Ça reste à voir.’

‘Et continuera à y rester,’ said Kate, laughing.

CHAPTER XIV

Home to Sayula

The morning came perfectly blue, with a freshness in the air and a blue luminousness over the trees and the distant mountains, and birds so bright, absolutely like new-opened buds sparking in the air.

Cipriano was returning to Guadalajara in the automobile, and Carlota was going with him. Kate would be rowed home on the lake.

To Ramón, Carlota was still, at times, a torture. She seemed to have the power still to lacerate him, inside his bowels. Not in his mind or spirit, but in his old emotional, passionate self: right in the middle of his belly, to tear him and make him feel he bled inwardly.

Because he had loved her, he had cared for her: for the affectionate, passionate, whimsical, sometimes elfish creature she had been. He had made much of her, and spoiled her, for many years.

But all the while, gradually, his nature was changing inside him. Not that he ceased to care for her, or wanted other women. That she could have understood. But inside him was a slow, blind imperative, urging him to cast his emotional and spiritual and mental self into the slow furnace, and smelt them into a new, whole being.

But he had Carlota to reckon with. She loved him, and that, to her, was the outstanding factor. She loved him, emotionally. And spiritually, she loved mankind. And mentally, she was sure she was quite right.

Yet, as time went on, he had to change. He had to cast that emotional self, which she loved, into the furnace, to be smelted down to another self.

And she felt she was robbed, cheated. Why couldn't he go on being gentle, good, and loving, and trying to make the whole world more gentle, good, and loving?

He couldn't, because it was borne in upon him that the world had gone as far as it could go in the good, gentle, and loving direction, and anything farther in that line meant perversity. So the time had come for the slow, great change to something else — what, he didn't know.

The emotion of love, and the greater emotion of liberty for mankind seemed to go hard and congeal upon him, like the shell on a chrysalis. It was the old caterpillar stage of Christianity evolving into something else.

But Carlota felt this was all she had, this emotion of love, for her husband, her children, for her people, for the animals and birds and trees of the world. It was her all, her Christ, and her Blessed Virgin. How could she let it go?

So she continued to love him, and to love the world, steadily, pathetically, obstinately, and devilishly. She prayed for him, and she engaged in works of charity.

But her love had turned from being the spontaneous flow, subject to the unforeseen comings and goings of the Holy Ghost, and had turned into will. She loved now with her will: as the white world now tends to do. She became filled with charity: that cruel kindness.'

Her winsomeness and her elfishness departed from her, she began to wither, she grew tense. And she blamed him, and prayed for him. Even as the spontaneous mystery died in her, the will hardened, till she was nothing but a will: a lost will.

She soon succeeded in drawing the life of her young boys all to herself, with her pathos and her subtle will. Ramón was too proud and angry to fight for them. They were her children. Let her have them.

They were the children of his old body. His new body had no children: would probably never have any.

'But remember,' he said to her, with southern logic, 'you do not love, save with your will. I don't like the love you have for your god: it is an assertion of your own will. I don't like the love you have for me: it is the same. I don't like the love you have for your children. If ever I see in them a spark of desire to be saved from it, I shall do my best to save them. Meanwhile have your love, have your will. But you know I dislike it. I dislike your insistence. I dislike your monopoly of one feeling, I dislike your charity works. I disapprove of the whole trend of your life. You are weakening and vitiating the boys. You do not love them, you are only putting your love will over them. One day they will turn and hate you for it. Remember I have said this to you.'

Doña Carlota had trembled in every fibre of her body, under the shock of this. But she went away to the chapel of the Annunciation Convent, and prayed. And, praying for his soul, she seemed to gain a victory over him, in the odour of sanctity. She came home in frail, pure triumph, like a flower that blooms on a grave: his grave.

And Ramón henceforth watched her in her beautiful, rather fluttering, rather irritating gentleness, as he watched his closest enemy.

Life had done its work on one more human being, quenched the spontaneous life and left only the will. Killed the god in the woman, or the goddess, and left only charity, with a will.

‘Carlota,’ he had said to her, ‘how happy you would be if you could wear deep, deep mourning for me. — I shall not give you this happiness.’

She gave him a strange look from her hazel-brown eyes.

‘Even that is in the hands of God,’ she had replied, as she hurried away from him.

And now, on this morning after the first rains, she came to the door of his room as he was sitting writing. As yesterday, he was naked to the waist, the blue-marked sash tied round his middle confined the white linen, loose trousers — like big, wide pyjama trousers crossed in front and tied round his waist.

‘May I come in?’ she said nervously.

‘Do!’ he replied, putting down his pen and rising.

There was only one chair — he was offering it her, but she sat down on the unmade bed, as if asserting her natural right. And in the same way she glanced at his naked breast — as if asserting her natural right.

‘I am going with Cipriano after breakfast,’ she said.

‘Yes, so you said.’

‘The boys will be home in three weeks.’

‘Yes.’

‘Don’t you want to see them?’

‘If they want to see me.’

‘I am sure they do.’

‘Then bring them here.’

‘Do you think it is pleasant for me?’ she said, clasping her hands.

‘You do not make it pleasant for me, Carlota.’

‘How can I? You know I think you are wrong. When I listened to you last night — there is something so beautiful in it all — and yet so monstrous. So monstrous! — Oh! I think to myself: What is this man doing? This man of all men, who might be such a blessing to his country and mankind — ’

‘Well,’ said Ramón. ‘And what is he instead?’

‘You know! You know! I can’t bear it. — It isn’t for you to save Mexico, Ramón. Christ has already saved it.’

‘It seems to me not so.’

‘He has! He has! And He made you the wonderful being that you are, so that you should work out the salvation, in the name of Christ and of love. Instead of which — ’

‘Instead of which, Carlota, I try something else. — But believe me, if the real Christ has not been able to save Mexico — and He hasn’t — then I am sure the white Anti-Christ of charity, and socialism, and politics, and reform, will only succeed in finally destroying her. That, and that alone, makes me take my stand.

— You, Carlota, with your charity works and your pity: and men like Benito Juarez, with their Reform and their Liberty: and the rest of the benevolent people, politicians and socialists and so forth, surcharged with pity for living men, in their mouths, but really with hate — the hate of the materialist have-nots for the materialist haves: they are the Anti-Christ. The old world, that's just the world. But the new world, that wants to save the People, this is the Anti-Christ. This is Christ with real poison in the communion cup. — And for this reason I step out of my ordinary privacy and individuality. I don't want everybody poisoned. About the great mass I don't care. But I don't want everybody poisoned.'

'How can you be so sure that you yourself are not a poisoner of the people? — I think you are.'

'Think it then. I think of you, Carlota, merely that you have not been able to come to your complete, final womanhood: which is a different thing from the old womanhoods.'

'Womanhood is always the same.'

'Ah, no, it isn't! Neither is manhood.'

'But what do you think you can do? What do you think this Quetzalcoatl nonsense amounts to?'

'Quetzalcoatl is just a living word, for these people, no more. All I want them to do is to find the beginnings of the way to their own manhood, their own womanhood. Men are not yet men in full, and women are not yet women. They are all half and half, incoherent, part horrible, part pathetic, part good creatures. Half arrived. — I mean you as well, Carlota. I mean all the world. — But these people don't assert any righteousness of their own, these Mexican people of ours. That makes me think that grace is still with them. And so, having got hold of some kind of clue to my own whole manhood, it is part of me now to try with them.'

'You will fail.'

'I shan't. Whatever happens to me, there will be a new vibration, a new call in the air, and a new answer inside some men.'

'They will betray you. — Do you know what even your friend Toussaint said of you? — Ramón Carrasco's future is just the past of mankind.'

'A great deal of it is the past. Naturally Toussaint sees that part.'

'But the boys don't believe in you. Instinctively, they disbelieve. Cyprian said to me, when I went to see him: "Is father doing any more of that silly talk about old gods coming back, mother? I wish he wouldn't. It would be pretty nasty for us if he got himself into the newspapers with it."'“

Ramón laughed.

‘Little boys,’ he said, ‘are like little gramophones. They only talk according to the record that’s put into them.’

‘You don’t believe out of the mouths of babes and sucklings,’ said Carlota bitterly.

‘Why, Carlota, the babes and sucklings don’t get much chance. Their mothers and their teachers turn them into little gramophones from the first, so what can they do, but say and feel according to the record the mother and teacher puts into them? Perhaps in the time of Christ babes and sucklings were not so perfectly exploited by their elders.’

Suddenly, however, the smile went off his face. He rose up, and pointed to the door.

‘Go away,’ he said in a low tone. ‘Go away! I have smelt the smell of your spirit long enough.’

She sat on the bed, spell-bound, gazing at him with frightened, yet obstinate, insolent eyes, wincing from his outstretched arm as if he had threatened to strike her.

Then again the fire went out of his eyes, and his arm sank. The still, far-away look came on his face.

‘What have I to do with it!’ he murmured softly.

And taking up his blouse and his hat, he went silently out on to the terrace, departing from her in body and in soul. She heard the soft swish of his sandals. She heard the faint resonance of the iron door to the terrace, to which he alone had access. And she sat like a heap of ash on his bed, ashes to ashes, burnt out, with only the coals of her will still smouldering.

Her eyes were very bright, as she went to join Kate and Cipriano.

After breakfast, Kate was rowed home down the lake. She felt a curious depression at leaving the hacienda: as if, for her, life now was there, and not anywhere else.

Her own house seemed empty, banal, vulgar. For the first time in her life, she felt the banality and emptiness even of her own milieu. Though the Casa de las Cuentas was not purely her own milieu.

‘Ah, Niña, how good! How good that you have come! Ay, in the night, how much water! Much! Much! But you were safe in the hacienda, Niña. Ah, how nice, that hacienda of Jamiltepec. Such a good man, Don Ramón — isn’t he, Niña? He cares a great deal for his people. And the Señora, ah, how sympathetic she is!’

Kate smiled and was pleasant. But she felt more like going into her room and saying: For God’s sake, leave me alone, with your cheap rattle.

She suffered again from the servants. Again that quiet, subterranean insolence

against life, which seems to belong to modern life. The unbearable note of flippant jeering, which is underneath almost all modern utterance. It was underneath Juana's constant cry. — Niña! Niña!

At meal-times Juana would seat herself on the ground at a little distance from Kate, and talk, talk in her rapid mouthfuls of conglomerate words with trailing, wistful endings: and all the time watch her mistress with those black, unseeing eyes on which the spark of light would stir with the peculiar slow, malevolent jeering of the Indian.

Kate was not rich — she had only her moderate income.

'Ah, the rich people — !' Juana would say.

'I am not rich,' said Kate.

'You are not rich, Niña?' came the singing, caressive bird-like voice: 'Then, you are poor?' — this was indescribable irony.

'No, I am not poor either. I am not rich, and I am not poor,' said Kate.

'You are not rich, and you are not poor, Niña!' repeated Juana, in her bird-like voice, that covered the real bird's endless, vindictive jeering.

For the words meant nothing to her. To her, who had nothing, could never have anything, Kate was one of that weird class, the rich. And, Kate felt, in Mexico it was a crime to be rich, or to be classed with the rich. Not even a crime, really, so much as a freak. The rich class was a freak class, like dogs with two heads or calves with five legs. To be looked upon, not with envy, but with the slow, undying antagonism and curiosity which 'normals' have towards 'freaks.' The slow, powerful, corrosive Indian mockery, issuing from the lava-rock Indian nature, against anything which strives to be above the grey, lava-rock level.

'Is it true, Niña, that your country is through there?' Juana asked, jabbing her finger downward, towards the bowels of the earth.

'Not quite!' said Kate. 'My country is more there — ' and she slanted her finger at the earth's surface.

'Ah — that way!' said Juana. And she looked at Kate with a subtle leer, as if to say: what could you expect from people who came out of the earth sideways, like sprouts of camote!

'And is it true that over there, there are people with only one eye — here!' Juana punched herself in the middle of her forehead.

'No. That isn't true. That is just a story.'

'Ah!' said Juana. 'Isn't it true! Do you know? Have you been to the country where they are, these people?'

'Yes,' said Kate. 'I have been to all the countries, and there are no such people.'

‘Verdad! Verdad!’ breathed Juana awestruck. ‘You have been to all the countries, and there are no such people! — But in your country, they are all gringos? Nothing but gringos?’

She meant, no real people and salt of the earth like her own Mexican self.

‘They are all people like me,’ said Kate coldly.

‘Like you, Niña? And they all talk like you?’

‘Yes! Like me.’

‘And there are many?’

‘Many! Many!’

‘Look now!’ breathed Juana, almost awestruck to think that there could be whole worlds of these freak, mockable people.

And Concha, that young, belching savage, would stare through her window-grating at the strange menagerie of the Niña and the Niña’s white visitors. Concha, slapping tortillas, was real.

Kate walked down towards the kitchen. Concha was slapping the masa, the maize dough which she bought in the plaza at eight centavos a kilo.

‘Niña!’ she called in her raucous voice. ‘Do you eat tortillas?’

‘Sometimes,’ said Kate.

‘Eh?’ shouted the young savage.

‘Sometimes.’

‘Here! Eat one now!’ And Concha thrust a brown paw with a pinkish palm, and a dingy-looking tortilla, at Kate.

‘Not now,’ said Kate.

She disliked the heavy plasters that tasted of lime.

‘Don’t you want it? Don’t you eat it?’ said Concha, with an impudent, strident laugh. And she flung the rejected tortilla on the little pile.

She was one of those who won’t eat bread: say they don’t like it, that it is not food.

Kate would sit and rock on her terrace, while the sun poured in the green square of the garden, the palm-tree spread its great fans translucent at the light, the hibiscus dangled great double-red flowers, rosy red, from its very dark tree, and the dark green oranges looked as if they were sweating as they grew.

Came lunch time, madly hot: and greasy hot soup, greasy rice, splintery little fried fishes, bits of boiled meat and boiled egg-plant vegetables, a big basket piled with mangoes, papayas, zapotes — all the tropical fruits one did not want, in hot weather.

And the barefoot little Maria, in a limp, torn, faded red frock, to wait at table. She was the loving one. She would stand by Juana as Juana bubbled with talk, like dark bubbles in her mouth, and she would stealthily touch Kate’s white arm;

stealthily touch her again. Not being rebuked, she would stealthily lay her thin little black arm on Kate's shoulder, with the softest, lightest touch imaginable, and her strange, wide black eyes would gleam with ghostly black beatitude, very curious, and her childish, pock-marked, slightly imbecile face would take on a black, arch, beatitudinous look. Then Kate would quickly remove the thin, dark, pock-marked arm, the child would withdraw half a yard, the beatitudinous look foiled, but her very black eyes still shining exposed and absorbedly, in a rapt, reptilian sort of ecstasy.

Till Concha came to hit her with her elbow, making some brutal, savage remark which Kate could not understand. So the glozing black eyes of the child would twitch, and Maria would break into meaningless tears, Concha into a loud, brutal, mocking laugh, like some violent bird. And Juana interrupted her black and gluey flow of words to glance at her daughters and throw out some ineffectual remark.

The victim, the inevitable victim, and the inevitable victimizer.

The terrible, terrible hot emptiness of the Mexican mornings, the weight of black ennui that hung in the air! It made Kate feel as if the bottom had fallen out of her soul. She went out to the lake, to escape that house, that family.

Since the rains, the trees in the broken gardens of the lake front had flamed into scarlet, and poured themselves out into lavender flowers. Rose red, scarlet and lavender, quick, tropical flowers. Wonderful splashes of colour. But that was all: splashes! They made a splash, like fireworks.

And Kate thought of the blackthorn puffing white, in the early year, in Ireland, and hawthorn with coral grains, in a damp still morning in the lanes, and foxgloves by the bare rock, and tufts of ling and heather, and a ravel of harebells. And a terrible, terrible longing for home came over her. To escape from these tropical brilliancies and meaninglessnesses.

In Mexico, the wind was a hard draught, the rain was a sluice of water, to be avoided, and the sun hit down on one with hostility, terrific and stunning. Stiff, dry, unreal land, with sunshine beating on it like metal. Or blackness and lightning and crashing violence of rain.

No lovely fusion, no communion. No beautiful mingling of sun and mist, no softness in the air, never. Either hard heat or hard chill. Hard, straight lines and zigzags, wounding the breast. No soft, sweet smell of earth. The smell of Mexico, however subtle, suggested violence and things in chemical conflict.

And Kate felt herself filled with an anger of resentment. She would sit under a willow-tree by the lake, reading a Pío Baroja novel that was angry and full of No! No! No! — *ich bin der Geist der stets verneint!* But she herself was so much angrier and fuller of repudiation than Pío Baroja. Spain cannot stand for No! as

Mexico can.

The tree hung fleecy above her. She sat on the warm sand in the shadow, careful not to let even her ankles lie in the biting shine of the sun. There was a faint, old smell of urine. The lake was so still and filmy as to be almost invisible. In the near distance, some dark women were kneeling on the edge of the lake, dressed only in their long wet chemises in which they had bathed. Some were washing garments, some were pouring water over themselves, scooping it up in gourd scoops and pouring it over their black heads and ruddy-dark shoulders, in the intense pressure of the sunshine. On her left were two big trees, and a cane fence, and little straw huts of Indians. There the beach itself ended, and the little Indian plots of land went down to the lake-front.

Glancing around in the great light, she seemed to be sitting isolated in a dark core of shadow, while the world moved in inconsequential specks through the hollow glare. She noticed a dark urchin, nearly naked, marching with naked, manly solemnity down to the water's edge. He would be about four years old, but more manly than an adult man. With sex comes a certain vulnerability which these round-faced, black-headed, stiff-backed infant men have not got. Kate knew the urchin. She knew his tattered rag of a red shirt, and the weird rags that were his little man's white trousers. She knew his black round head, his stiff, sturdy march of a walk, his round eyes, and his swift, scuttling run, like a bolting animal.

'What's the brat got?' she said to herself, gazing at the moving little figure within the great light.

Dangling from his tiny outstretched arm, held by the webbed toe, head down and feebly flapping its out-sinking wings, was a bird, a waterfowl. It was a black mud-chick with a white bar across the under-wing, one of the many dark fowl that bobbed in little flocks along the edge of the sun-stunned lake.

The urchin marched stiffly down to the water's edge, holding the upside-down bird, that seemed big as an eagle in the tiny fist. Another brat came scuttling after. The two infant men paddled a yard into the warm, lapping water, under the great light, and gravely stooping, like old men, set the fowl on the water. It floated, but could hardly paddle. The lift of the ripples moved it. The urchins dragged it in, like a rag, by a string tied to its leg.

So quiet, so still, so dark, like tiny, chubby little infant men, the two solemn figures with the rag of a bird!

Kate turned uneasily to her book, her nerves on edge. She heard the splash of a stone. The bird was on the water, but apparently the string that held it by the leg was tied to a stone. It lay wavering, a couple of yards out. And the two little

he-men, with sober steadfastness and a quiet, dark lust, were picking up stones, and throwing them with the fierce Indian aim at the feebly fluttering bird: right down upon it. Like a little warrior stood the mite in the red rag, his arm upraised, to throw the stone with all his might down on the tethered bird.

In a whiff, Kate was darting down the beach.

‘Ugly boys! Ugly children! Go! Go away, ugly children, ugly boys!’ she said on one breath, with quiet intensity.

The round-headed dot gave her one black glance from his manly eyes, then the two of them scuttled up the beach into invisibility.

Kate went into the water, and lifted the wet, warm bird. The bit of coarse fibre-string hung from its limp, greenish, waterfowl’s ankle. It feebly tried to bite her.

She rapidly stepped out of the water and stood in the sun to unfasten the string. The bird was about as big as a pigeon. It lay in her hand with the absolute motionlessness of a caught wild thing.

Kate stooped and pulled off her shoes and stockings. She looked round. No sign of life from the reed huts dark in the shadow of the trees. She lifted her skirts and staggered out barefoot in the hot shallows of the water, almost falling on the cruel stones under the water. The lake-side was very shallow. She staggered on and on, in agony, holding up her skirts in one hand, holding the warm, wet, motionless bird in the other. Till at last she was up to her knees. Then she launched the greeny-black bird, and gave it a little push to the uprearing expanse of filmy water, that was almost dim, invisible with the glare of light.

It lay wet and draggled on the pale, moving sperm of the water, like a buoyant rag.

‘Swim then! Swim!’ she said, trying to urge it away into the lake.

Either it couldn’t or wouldn’t. Anyhow it didn’t.

But it was out of reach of those urchins. Kate struggled back from those stones, to her tree, to her shade, to her book, away from the rage of the sun. Silent with slow anger, she kept glancing up at the floating bird, and sideways at the reed huts of the Indians in the black shadow.

Yes, the bird was dipping its beak in the water, and shaking its head. It was coming to itself. But it did not paddle. It let itself be lifted, lifted on the ripples, and the ripples would drift it ashore.

‘Fool of a thing!’ said Kate nervously, using all her consciousness to make it paddle away into the lake.

Two companions, two black dots with white specks of faces, were coming out of the pale glare of the lake. Two mud-chicks swam busily forward. The first

swam up and poked its beak at the inert bird, as if to say Hello! What's up? Then immediately it turned away and paddled in complete oblivion to the shore, its companion following.

Kate watched the rag of feathered misery anxiously. Would it not rouse itself? wouldn't it follow?

No! There it lay, slowly, inertly drifting on the ripples, only sometimes shaking its head.

The other two alert birds waded confidently, busily among the stones.

Kate read a bit more.

When she looked again, she could not see her bird. But the other two were walking among the stones, jauntily.

She read a bit more.

The next thing was a rather loutish youth of eighteen or so, in overall trousers, running with big strides towards the water, and the stiff little man-brat scuttling after with determined bare feet. Her heart stood still.

The two busy mud-chicks rose in flight and went low over the water into the glare of light. Gone!

But the lout in the big hat and overall trousers and those stiff Indian shoulders she sometimes hated so much was peering among the stones. She, however, was sure her bird had gone.

No! Actually no! The stiff-shoulder lout stooped and picked up the damp thing. It had let itself drift back.

He turned, dangling it like a rag from the end of one wing, and handed it to the man-brat. Then he stalked self-satisfied up the shore.

Ugh! and that moment how Kate hated these people: their terrible lowness, à terre, à terre. Their stiff broad American shoulders, and high chests, and above all, their walk, their prancing, insentient walk. As if some motor-engine drove them at the bottom of their back.

Stooping rather forward and looking at the ground so that he could turn his eyes sideways to her, without showing her his face, the lout returned to the shadow of the huts. And after him, diminutive, the dot of a man marched stiffly, hurriedly, dangling the wretched bird, that stirred very feebly, downwards from the tip of one wing. And from time to time turning his round, black-eyed face in Kate's direction, vindictively, apprehensively, lest she should swoop down on him again. Black, apprehensive male defiance of the great, white weird female.

Kate glared back from under her tree.

'If looks would kill you, brat, I'd kill you,' she said. And the urchin turned his face like clockwork at her from time to time, as he strutted palpitating towards the gap in the cane hedge, into which the youth had disappeared.

Kate debated whether to rescue the foolish bird again. But what was the good!

This country would have its victim. America would have its victim. As long as time lasts, it will be the continent divided between Victims and Victimizers. What is the good of trying to interfere!

She rose up in detestation of the flabby bird, and of the sulky-faced brat turning his full moon on her in apprehension.

Lumps of women were by the water's edge. Westwards, down the glare, rose the broken-looking villas and the white twin towers of the church, holding up its two fingers in mockery above the scarlet flame-trees and the dark mangoes. She saw the rather lousy shore, and smelt the smell of Mexico come out in the hot sun after the rains: excrement, human and animal dried in the sun on a dry, dry earth; and dry leaves; and mango leaves; and pure air with a little refuse-smoke in it.

'But the day will come when I shall go away,' she said to herself.

And sitting rocking once more on her veranda, hearing the clap-clap of tortillas from the far end of the patio, the odd, metallic noises of birds, and feeling the clouds already assembling in the west, with a weight of unborn thunder upon them, she felt she could bear it no more: the vacuity, and the pressure: the horrible uncreate elementality, so uncouth, even sun and rain uncouth, uncouth.

And she wondered over the black vision in the eyes of that urchin. The curious void.

He could not see that the bird was a real living creature with a life of its own. This, his race had never seen. With black eyes they stared out on an elemental world, where the elements were monstrous and cruel, as the sun was monstrous, and the cold, crushing black water of the rain was monstrous, and the dry, dry, cruel earth.

And among the monstrosity of the elements flickered and towered other presences: terrible uncouth things called gringos, white people, and dressed up monsters of rich people, with powers like gods, but uncouth, demonish gods. And uncouth things like birds that could fly and snakes that could crawl and fish that could swim and bite. An uncouth, monstrous universe of monsters big and little, in which man held his own by sheer resistance and guardedness, never, never going forth from his own darkness.

And sometimes, it was good to have revenge on the monsters that fluttered and strode. The monsters big and the monsters little. Even the monster of that bird, which had its own monstrous bird-nature. On this the mite could wreck the long human vengeance, and for once be master.

Blind to the creature as a soft, struggling thing finding its own fluttering way

through life. Seeing only another monster of the outer void.

Walking forever through a menace of monsters, blind to the sympathy in things, holding one's own, and not giving in, nor going forth. Hence the lifted chests and the prancing walk. Hence the stiff, insentient spines, the rich physique, and the heavy, dreary natures, heavy like the dark-grey mud-bricks, with a terrible obstinate ponderosity and a dry sort of gloom.

CHAPTER XV

The Written Hymns of Quetzalcoatl

The electric light in Sayula was as inconstant as everything else. It would come on at half-past six in the evening, and it might bravely burn till ten at night, when the village went dark with a click. But usually it did no such thing. Often it refused to sputter into being till seven, or half-past, or even eight o'clock. But its worst trick was that of popping out just in the middle of supper, or just when you were writing a letter. All of a sudden, the black Mexican night came down on you with a thud. And then everybody running blindly for matches and candles, with a calling of frightened voices. Why were they always frightened? Then the electric light, like a wounded thing, would try to revive, and a red glow would burn in the bulbs, sinister. All held their breath — was it coming or not? Sometimes it expired for good, sometimes it got its breath back and shone, rather dully, but better than nothing.

Once the rainy season had set in, it was hopeless. Night after night it collapsed. And Kate would sit with her weary, fluttering candle, while blue lightning revealed the dark shapes of things in the patio. And half-seen people went swiftly down to Juana's end of the patio, secretly.

On such a night Kate sat on her veranda facing the deepness of the black night. A candle shone in her desert salon. Now and again she saw the oleanders and the papaya in the patio garden, by the blue gleam of lightning that fell with a noiseless splash into the pitch darkness. There was a distant noise of thunder, several storms prowling round like hungry jaguars, above the lake.

And several times the gate clicked, and crunching steps came along the gravel, someone passed on the gravel walk, saluting her, going down to Juana's quarters, where the dull light of a floating oil-wick shone through the grated window-hole. Then there was a low, monotonous sound of a voice, reciting or reading. And as the wind blew and the lightning alighted again like a blue bird among the plants, there would come the sharp noise of the round cuentas falling from the cuenta-tree.

Kate was uneasy and a bit forlorn. She felt something was happening down in the servants' corner, something secret in the dark. And she was stranded in her isolation on her terrace.

But, after all, it was her house, and she had a right to know what her own

people were up to. She rose from her rocking-chair and walked down the veranda and round the dining-room bay. The dining-room, which had its own two doors on the patio, was already locked up.

In the far corner beyond the well she saw a group sitting on the ground, outside the doorway of Juana's kitchen-hole. Out of this little kitchen-shed shone the light of the floating-wick lamp, and a voice was slowly intoning, all the faces were looking into the dim light, the women dark-hooded in rebozos, the men with their hats on, their serapes over their shoulders.

When they heard Kate's footsteps, the faces looked her way, and a voice murmured in warning. Juana struggled to her feet.

'It is the Niña!' she said. 'Come, then, Niña, you poor innocent all alone in the evening.'

The men in the group rose to their feet — she recognized the young Ezequiel, taking his hat off to her. And there was Maria del Carmen, the bride. And inside the little shed, with the wick lamp on the floor, was Julio, the bridegroom of a few weeks ago. Concha and little Maria were there, and a couple of strangers.

'I could hear the voice — ' said Kate. 'I didn't know it was you, Julio. How do you do? — And I wondered so much what it was.'

There was a moment's dead silence. Then Juana plunged in.

'Yes, Niña! Come! It's very nice that you come. Concha, the chair for the Niña!'

Concha got up rather unwillingly, and fetched the little low chair which formed Juana's sole article of furniture, save the one bed.

'I don't disturb you?' said Kate.

'No, Niña, you are a friend of Don Ramón, verdad?'

'Yes,' said Kate.

'And we — we are reading the Hymns.'

'Yes?' said Kate.

'The Hymns of Quetzalcoatl,' said Ezequiel, in his barking young voice, with sudden bravado.

'Do go on! May I listen!'

'You hear! The Niña wants to listen. Read, Julio, read! Read then.'

They all sat down once more on the ground, and Julio sat down by the lamp, but he hung his head, hiding his face in the shadow of his big hat.

'Entonces! — Read then,' said Juana.

'He is afraid,' murmured Maria del Carmen, laying her hand on the young man's knee. 'However, read, Julio! Because the Niña wants to hear.'

And after a moment's struggle, Julio said in a muffled voice:

'Do I begin from the beginning.'

‘Yes, from the beginning! Read!’ said Juana.

The young man took a sheet of paper, like an advertisement leaflet, from under his blanket. At the top it had the Quetzalcoatl symbol, called the Eye, the ring with the bird-shape standing in the middle.

He began to read in a rather muffled voice:

‘I am Quetzalcoatl with the dark face, who lived in Mexico in other days.

‘Till there came a stranger from over the seas, and his face was white, and he spoke with strange words. He showed his hands and his feet, that in both there were holes. And he said: “My name is Jesus, and they called me Christ. Men crucified me on a Cross till I died. But I rose up out of the place where they put me, and I went up to heaven to my Father. Now my Father has told me to come to Mexico.”

‘Quetzalcoatl said: You alone?

‘Jesus said: My mother is here. She shed many tears for me, seeing me crucify. So she will hold the Sons of Mexico on her lap, and soothe them when they suffer, and when the women of Mexico weep, she will take them on her bosom and comfort them. And when she cries to the Father for her people, He will make everything well.

‘Quetzalcoatl said: That is well. And Brother with the name Jesus, what will you do in Mexico?

‘Jesus said: I will bring peace into Mexico. And on the naked I will put clothes, and food between the lips of the hungry, and gifts in all men’s hands, and peace and love in their hearts.

‘Quetzalcoatl said: It is very good. I am old. I could not do so much. I must go now. Farewell, people of Mexico. Farewell, strange brother called Jesus. Farewell, woman called Mary. It is time for me to go.

‘So Quetzalcoatl looked at his people; and he embraced Jesus, the Son of Heaven; and he embraced Maria, the Blessed Virgin, the Holy Mother of Jesus, and he turned away. Slowly he went. But in his ears was the sound of the tearing down of his temples in Mexico. Nevertheless he went on slowly, being old, and weary with much living. He climbed the steep of the mountain, and over the white snow of the volcano. As he went, behind him rose a cry of people dying, and a flame of places burning. He said to himself: Surely those are Mexicans crying! Yet I must not hear, for Jesus has come to the land, and he will wipe the tears from all eyes, and his Mother will make them all glad.

‘He also said: Surely that is Mexico burning. But I must not look, for all men will be brothers, now Jesus has come to the land, and the women will sit by the blue skirts of Mary, smiling with peace and with love.

‘So the old god reached the top of the mountain, and looked up into the blue

of heaven. And through a door in the blue wall he saw a great darkness, and stars and a moon shining. And beyond the darkness he saw one great star, like a bright gateway.

‘Then fire rose from the volcano around the old Quetzalcoatl, in wings and glittering feathers. And with the wings of fire and the glitter of sparks Quetzalcoatl flew up, up, like a wafting fire, like a glittering bird, up, into the space, and away to the white steps of heaven, that lead to the blue walls, where is the door to the dark. So he entered in and was gone.

‘Night fell, and Quetzalcoatl was gone, and men in the world saw only a star travelling back into heaven, departing under the low branches of darkness.

‘Then men in Mexico said: Quetzalcoatl has gone. Even his star has departed. We must listen to this Jesus, who speaks in a foreign tongue.

‘So they learned a new speech from the priests that came from upon the great waters to the east. And they became Christians.’

Julio, who had become absorbed, ended abruptly, as the tale of the leaflet was ended.

‘It is beautiful,’ said Kate.

‘And it is true!’ cried the sceptical Juana.

‘It seems to me true,’ said Kate.

‘Señora!’ yelled Concha. ‘Is it true that heaven is up there, and you come down steps like clouds to the edge of the sky, like the steps from the mole into the lake? Is it true that El Señor comes and stands on the steps and looks down at us like we look down into the lake to see the charales?’

Concha shoved up her fierce swarthy face, and shook her masses of hair, glaring at Kate, waiting for an answer.

‘I don’t know everything,’ laughed Kate. ‘But it seems to me true.’

‘She believes it,’ said Concha, turning her face to her mother.

‘And is it true,’ asked Juana, ‘that El Señor, El Cristo del Mundo, is a gringo, and that He comes from your country, with His Holy Mother?’

‘Not from my country, but from a country near.’

‘Listen!’ exclaimed Juana, awestruck. ‘El Señor is a gringuito, and His Holy Mother is a gringuita. Yes, one really knows. Look! Look at the feet of the Niña! Pure feet the Santísima! Look!’ Kate was barefoot, wearing sandals with a simple strap across the foot. Juana touched one of the Niña’s white feet, fascinated. ‘Feet of the Santísima. And She, the Holy Mary, is a gringuita. She came over the sea, like you, Niña?’

‘Yes, she came over the sea!’

‘Ah! You know it?’

‘Yes. We know that.’

‘Think of it! The Santísima is a gringuita, and She came over the Sea like the Niña, from the countries of the Niña!’ Juana spoke in a wicked wonder, horrified, delighted, mocking.

‘And the Lord is a Gringuito — pure Gringuito?’ barked Concha.

‘And Niña — it was the gringos who killed El Señor? It wasn’t the Mexicans? It was those other gringos who put Him on the Cross?’

‘Yes!’ said Kate. ‘It wasn’t the Mexicans.’

‘The gringos?’

‘Yes, the gringos.’

‘And He Himself was a Gringo?’

‘Yes!’ said Kate, not knowing what else to say.

‘Look!’ said Juana, in her hushed, awed, malevolent voice. ‘He was a Gringo, and the gringos put him on the Cross.’

‘But a long time ago,’ said Kate hastily.

‘A long time ago, says the Niña,’ echoed Juana, in her awed voice.

There was a moment of silence. The dark faces of the girls and men seated on the ground were turned up to Kate, watching her fixedly, in the half light, counting every word. In the outer air, thunder muttered in different places.

‘And now, Niña,’ came the cool, clear voice of Maria del Carmen, ‘El Señor is going back again to His Father, and our Quetzalcoatl is coming back to us?’

‘And the Santísima is leaving us?’ put in the hurried voice of Juana. ‘Think of it! The Santísima is leaving us, and this Quetzalcoatl is coming! He has no mother, he!’

‘Perhaps he has a wife,’ said Kate.

‘Quién sabe!’ murmured Juana.

‘They say,’ said the bold Concha, ‘that in Paradise he has grown young.’

‘Who?’ asked Juana.

‘I don’t know how they call him,’ muttered Concha, ashamed to say the word.

‘Quetzalcoatl!’ said Ezequiel, in his barking strong young voice. ‘Yes, he is young. He is a god in the flower of life, and finely built.’

‘They say so! They say so!’ murmured Juana. ‘Think of it!’

‘Here it says so!’ cried Ezequiel. ‘Here it is written. In the second Hymn.’

‘Read it then, Julio.’

And Julio, now nothing loth, took out a second paper.

‘I, Quetzalcoatl, of Mexico, I travelled the longest journey.

‘Beyond the blue outer wall of heaven, beyond the bright place of the Sun, across the plains of darkness where the stars spread out like trees, like trees and bushes, far away to the heart of all the worlds, low down like the Morning Star.

‘And at the heart of all the worlds those were waiting whose faces I could not

see. And in voices like bees they murmured among themselves: This is Quetzalcoatl whose hair is white with fanning the fires of life. He comes alone, and slowly.

‘Then with hands I could not see, they took my hands, and in their arms that I could not see, at last I died.

‘But when I was dead, and bone, they cast not my bones away, they did not give me up to the four winds, nor to the six. No, not even to the wind that blows down to the middle of earth, nor to him that blows upward like a finger pointing, did they give me.

‘He is dead, they said, but unrelinquished.

‘So they took the oil of the darkness, and laid it on my brow and my eyes, they put it in my ears and nostrils and my mouth, they put it on the two-fold silence of my breasts, and on my sunken navel, and on my secret places, before and behind: and in the palms of my hands, and on the mounds of my knees, and under the tread of my feet.

‘Lastly, they anointed all my head with the oil that comes out of the darkness. They they said: He is sealed up. Lay him away.

‘So they laid me in the fountain that bubbles darkly at the heart of the worlds, far, far behind the sun, and there lay I, Quetzalcoatl, in warm oblivion.

‘I slept the great sleep, and dreamed not.

‘Till a voice was calling: Quetzalcoatl!

‘I said: Who is that?

‘No one answered, but the voice said: Quetzalcoatl!

‘I said: Where art thou?

‘So! he said. I am neither here nor there. I am thymself. Get up.

‘Now all was very heavy upon me, like a tomb-stone of darkness.

‘I said: Am I not old? How shall I roll this stone away?

‘How art thou old, when I am new man? I will roll away the stone. Sit up!

‘I sat up, and the stone went rolling, crashing down the gulfs of space.

‘I said to myself: I am new man. I am younger than the young and older than the old. Lo! I am unfolded on the stem of time like a flower, I am at the midst of the flower of my manhood. Neither do I ache with desire, to tear, to burst the bud; neither do I yearn away like a seed that floats into heaven. The cup of my flowering is unfolded, in its middle the stars float balanced with array. My stem is in the air, my roots are in all the dark, the sun is no more than a cupful within me.

‘Lo! I am neither young nor old, I am the flower unfolded, I am new.

‘So I rose and stretched my limbs and looked around. The sun was below me

in a daze of heat, like a hot humming-bird hovering at mid-day over the worlds.
And his beak was long and very sharp, he was like a dragon.

‘And a faint star was hesitating wearily, waiting to pass.

‘I called aloud, saying: “Who is that?”

My name is Jesus, I am Mary’s son.

I am coming home.

My mother the Moon is dark.

Brother, Quetzalcoatl,

Hold back the wild hot sun.

Bind him with shadow while I pass.

Let me come home.

‘I caught the sun and held him, and in my shade the faint star slipped past, going slowly into the dark reaches beyond the burning of the sun. Then on the slope of silence he sat down and took off his sandals, and I put them on.

“How do they wear the wings of love, Jesus, the Mexican people?”

“The souls of the Mexican people are heavy for the wings of love, they have swallowed the stone of despair.”

“Where is your Lady Mother in the mantle of blue, she with comfort in her lap?”

“Her mantle faded in the dust of the world, she was weary without sleep, for the voices of people cried night and day, and the knives of the Mexican people were sharper than the pinions of love, and their stubbornness was stronger than hope. Lo! the fountain of tears dries up in the eyes of the old, and the lap of the aged is comfortless, they look for rest. Quetzalcoatl, Sir, my mother went even before me, to her still white bed in the moon.”

“She is gone, and thou art gone, Jesus, the Crucified. Then what of Mexico?”

“The images stand in their churches, Oh Quetzalcoatl, they don’t know that I and my Mother have departed. They are angry souls, Brother, my Lord! They vent their anger. They broke my Churches, they stole my strength, they withered the lips of the Virgin. They drove us away, and we crept away like a tottering old man and a woman, tearless and bent double with age. So we fled while they were not looking. And we seek but rest, to forget forever the children of men who have swallowed the stone of despair.”

‘Then said I: It is good, pass on. I, Quetzalcoatl, will go down. Sleep thou the sleep without dreams. Farewell at the cross-roads, Brother Jesus.

‘He said: Oh, Quetzalcoatl! They have forgotten thee. The feathered snake! The serpent — silent bird! They are asking for none of thee.

‘I said: Go thy way, for the dust of earth is in thy eyes and on thy lips. For me the serpent of middle-earth sleeps in my loins and my belly, the bird of the outer air perches on my brow and sweeps her bill across my breast. But I, I am lord of two ways. I am master of up and down. I am as a man who is a new man, with new limbs and life, and the light of the Morning Star in his eyes. Lo! I am I! The lord of both ways. Thou wert lord of the one way. Now it leads thee to the sleep. Farewell!

‘So Jesus went on towards the sleep. And Mary the Mother of Sorrows lay down on the bed of the white moon, weary beyond any more tears.

‘And I, I am on the threshold. I am stepping across the border. I am Quetzalcoatl, lord of both ways, star between day and the dark.’

There was silence as the young man finished reading.

CHAPTER XVI

Cipriano and Kate

On Saturday afternoons the big black canoes with their large square sails came slowly approaching out of the thin haze across the lake, from the west, from Tlapaltepec, with big straw hats and with blankets and earthenware stuff, from Ixtlahuacan and Jaramay and Las Zemas with mats and timber and charcoal and oranges, from Tuliapan and Cuxcueco and San Cristobal with boatloads of dark-green, globular watermelons, and piles of red tomatoes, mangoes, vegetables, oranges: and boatloads of bricks and tiles, burnt red, but rather friable; then more charcoal, more wood, from the stark dry mountains over the lake.

Kate nearly always went out about five o'clock, on Saturdays, to see the boats, flat-bottomed, drift up to the shallow shores, and begin to unload in the glow of the evening. It pleased her to see the men running along the planks with the dark-green melons, and piling them in a mound on the rough sand, melons dark-green like creatures with pale bellies. To see the tomatoes all poured out into a shallow place in the lake, bobbing about while the women washed them, a bobbing scarlet upon the water.

The long, heavy bricks were piled in heaps along the scrap of demolished breakwater, and little gangs of asses came trotting down the rough beach, to be laden, pressing their little feet in the gravelly sand, and flopping their ears.

The cargadores were busy at the charcoal boats, carrying out the rough sacks.

'Do you want charcoal, Niña?' shouted a grimy cargador, who had carried the trunks from the station on his back.

'At how much?'

'Twenty-five reales the two sacks.'

'I pay twenty reales.'

'At twenty reales then, Señorita. But you give me two reales for the transport?'

'The owner pays the transport,' said Kate. 'But I will give you twenty centavos.'

Away went the man, trotting barelegged, barefoot, over the stony ground, with two large sacks of charcoal on his shoulders. The men carry huge weights, without seeming ever to think they are heavy. Almost as if they liked to feel a huge weight crushing on their iron spines, and to be able to resist it.

Baskets of spring guavas, baskets of sweet lemons called limas, basket of tiny green and yellow lemons, big as walnuts; orange-red and greenish mangoes, oranges, carrots, cactus fruits in great abundance, a few knobbly potatoes, flat, pearl-white onions, little calabazitas and speckled green calabazitas like frogs, camotes cooked and raw — she loved to watch the baskets trotting up the beach past the church.

Then, rather late as a rule, big red pots, bulging red ollas for water-jars, earthenware casseroles and earthenware jugs with cream and black scratched pattern in glaze, bowls, big flat earthenware discs for cooking tortillas — much earthenware.

On the west shore, men were running up the beach wearing twelve enormous hats at once, like a trotting pagoda. Men trotting with finely woven huaraches and rough strip sandals. And men with a few dark serapes, with gaudy rose-pink patterns, in a pile on their shoulders.

It was fascinating. But at the same time, there was a heavy, almost sullen feeling on the air. These people came to market to a sort of battle. They came, not for the joy of selling, but for the sullen contest with those who wanted what they had got. The strange, black resentment always present.

By the time the church bells clanged for sunset, the market had already begun. On all the pavements round the plaza squatted the Indians with their wares, pyramids of green watermelons, arrays of rough earthenware, hats in piles, pairs of sandals side by side, a great array of fruit, a spread of collar-studs and knick-knacks, called *novedades*, little trays with sweets. And people arriving all the time out of the wild country, with laden asses.

Yet never a shout, hardly a voice to be heard. None of the animation and the frank wild clamour of a Mediterranean market. Always the heavy friction of the will; always, always, grinding upon the spirit, like the grey black grind of lava-rock.

When dark fell, the vendors lighted their tin torch-lamps, and the flames wavered and streamed as the dark-faced men squatted on the ground in their white clothes and big hats, waiting to sell. They never asked you to buy. They never showed their wares. They didn't even look at you. It was as if their static resentment and indifference would hardly let them sell at all.

Kate sometimes felt the market cheerful and easy. But more often she felt an unutterable weight slowly, invisibly sinking on her spirits. And she wanted to run. She wanted, above all, the comfort of Don Ramón and the Hymns of Quetzalcoatl. This seemed to her the only escape from a world gone ghastly.

There was talk of revolution again, so the market was uneasy and grinding the black grit into the spirit. Foreign-looking soldiers were about, with looped hats,

and knives and pistols, and savage northern faces: tall, rather thin figures. They would loiter about in pairs, talking in a strange northern speech, and seeming more alien even than Kate herself.

The food-stalls were brilliantly lighted. Rows of men sat at the plank boards, drinking soup and eating hot food with their fingers. The milkman rode in on horseback, his two big cans of milk slung before him, and he made his way slowly through the people to the food-stalls. There, still sitting unmoved on horseback, he delivered bowls of milk from the can in front of him, and then, on horseback like a monument, took his supper, his bowl of soup, and his plate of tamales, or of minced, fiery meat spread on tortillas. The peons drifted slowly round. Guitars were sounding, half-secretly. A motor-car worked its way in from the city, choked with people, girls, young men, city papas, children, in a pile.

The rich press of life, above the flare of torches upon the ground! The throng of white-clad, big-hatted men circulating slowly, the women with dark rebozos slipping silently. Dark trees overhead. The doorway of the hotel bright with electricity. Girls in organdie frocks, white, cherry-red, blue, from the city. Groups of singers singing inwardly. And all the noise subdued, suppressed.

The sense of strange, heavy suppression, the dead black power of negation in the souls of the peons. It was almost pitiful to see the pretty, pretty slim girls from Guadalajara going round and round, their naked arms linked together, so light in their gauzy, scarlet, white, blue, orange dresses, looking for someone to look at them, to take note of them. And the peon men only emitting from their souls the black vapour of negation, that perhaps was hate. They seemed, the natives, to have the power of blighting the air with their black, rock-bottom resistance.

Kate almost wept over the slim, eager girls, pretty as rather papery flowers, eager for attention, but thrust away, victimized.

Suddenly there was a shot. The market-place was on its feet in a moment, scattering, pouring away into the streets and the shops. Another shot! Kate, from where she stood, saw across the rapidly-emptying plaza a man sitting back on one of the benches, firing a pistol into the air. He was a lout from the city, and he was half drunk. The people knew what it was. Yet any moment he might lower the pistol and start firing at random. Everybody hurried silently, melting away, leaving the plaza void.

Two more shots, pap-pap! still into the air. And at the same moment a little officer in uniform darted out of the dark street where the military station was, and where now the big hats were piled on the ground; he rushed straight to the drunkard, who was spreading his legs and waving the pistol: and before you could breathe, slap! and again slap! He had slapped the pistol-firer first on one

side of the face, then on the other, with slaps that resounded almost like shots. And in the same breath he seized the arm that held the pistol and wrested the weapon away.

Two of the strange soldiers instantly rushed up and seized the man by the arms. The officer spoke two words, they saluted and marched off their prisoner.

Instantly the crowd was ebbing back into the plaza, unconcerned. Kate sat on a bench with her heart beating. She saw the prisoner pass under a lamp, streaks of blood on his cheek. And Juana, who had fled, now came scuttling back and took Kate's hand, saying:

'Look! Niña! It is the General!'

She rose startled to her feet. The officer was saluting her.

'Don Cipriano!' she said.

'The same!' he replied. 'Did that drunken fellow frighten you?'

'Not much! Only startled me. I didn't feel any evil intention behind it.'

'No, only drunk.'

'But I shall go home now.'

'Shall I walk with you?'

'Would you care to?'

He took his place at her side, and they turned down by the church, to the lake shore. There was a moon above the mountain and the air was coming fresh, not too strong, from the west. From the Pacific. Little lights were burning ruddy by the boats at the water's edge, some outside, and some inside, under the roof-tilt of the boat's little inward shed. Women were preparing a mouthful of food.

'But the night is beautiful,' said Kate, breathing deep.

'With the moon clipped away just a little,' he said.

Juana was following close on her heels: and behind, two soldiers in slouched hats.

'Do the soldiers escort you?' she said.

'I suppose so,' said he.

'But the moon,' she said, 'isn't lovely and friendly as it is in England or Italy.'

'It is the same planet,' he replied.

'But the moonshine in America isn't the same. It doesn't make one feel glad as it does in Europe. One feels it would like to hurt one.'

He was silent for some moments. Then he said:

'Perhaps there is in you something European, which hurts our Mexican Moon.'

'But I come in good faith.'

'European good faith. Perhaps it is not the same as Mexican.'

Kate was silent, almost stunned.

‘Fancy your Mexican moon objecting to me!’ she laughed ironically.

‘Fancy your objecting to our Mexican moon!’ said he.

‘I wasn’t,’ said she.

They came to the corner of Kate’s road. At the corner was a group of trees, and under the trees, behind the hedge, several reed huts. Kate often laughed at the donkey looking over the dry-stone low wall, and at the black sheep with curved horns, tied to a bitten tree, and at the lad, naked but for a bit of a shirt, fleeing into the corner under the thorn screen.

Kate and Cipriano sat on the veranda of the House of the Cuentas. She offered him vermouth, but he refused.

They were still. There came the faint pip!-pip! from the little electric plant just up the road, which Jesús tended. Then a cock from beyond the bananas crowed powerfully and hoarsely.

‘But how absurd!’ said Kate. ‘Cocks don’t crow at this hour.’

‘Only in Mexico,’ laughed Cipriano.

‘Yes! Only here!’

‘He thinks your moon is the sun, no?’ he said, teasing her.

The cock crowed powerfully, again and again.

‘This is very nice, your house, your patio,’ said Cipriano.

But Kate was silent.

‘Or don’t you like it?’ he said.

‘You see,’ she answered, ‘I have nothing to do! The servants won’t let me do anything. If I sweep my room, they stand and say Qué Niña! Qué Niña! As if I was standing on my head for their benefit. I sew, though I’ve no interest in sewing. — What is it, for a life?’

‘And you read!’ he said, glancing at the magazines and books.

‘Ah, it is all such stupid, lifeless stuff, in the books and papers,’ she said.

There was a silence. After which he said:

‘But what would you like to do? As you say, you take no interest in sewing. You know the Navajo women, when they weave a blanket, leave a little place for their soul to come out, at the end: not to weave their soul into it. — I always think England has woven her soul into her fabrics, into all the things she has made. And she never left a place for it to come out. So now all her soul is in her goods, and nowhere else.’

‘But Mexico has no soul,’ said Kate. ‘She’s swallowed the stone of despair, as the hymn says.’

‘Ah! You think so? I think not. The soul is also a thing you make, like a pattern in a blanket. It is very nice while all the wools are rolling their different threads and different colours, and the pattern is being made. But once it is

finished — then finished it has no interest any more. Mexico hasn't started to weave the pattern of her soul. Or she is only just starting: with Ramón. Don't you believe in Ramón?'

Kate hesitated before she answered.

'Ramón, yes! I do! But whether it's any good trying here in Mexico, as he is trying — ' she said slowly.

'He is in Mexico. He tries here. Why should not you?'

'I?'

'Yes! You! Ramón doesn't believe in womanless gods, he says. Why should you not be the woman in the Quetzalcoatl pantheon? If you will, the goddess!'

'I, a goddess in the Mexican pantheon?' cried Kate, with a burst of startled laughter.

'Why not?' said he.

'But I am not Mexican,' said she.

'You may easily be a goddess,' said he, 'in the same pantheon with Don Ramón and me.'

A strange, inscrutable flame of desire seemed to be burning on Cipriano's face, as his eyes watched her glittering. Kate could not help feeling that it was a sort of intense, blind ambition, of which she was partly an object: a passionate object also: which kindled the Indian to the hottest pitch of his being.

'But I don't feel like a goddess in a Mexican pantheon,' she said. 'Mexico is a bit horrible to me. Don Ramón is wonderful: but I'm so afraid they will destroy him.'

'Come, and help to prevent it.'

'How?'

'You marry me. You complain you have nothing to do. Then marry me. Marry me, and help Ramón and me. We need a woman, Ramón says, to be with us. And you are the woman. There is a great deal to do.'

'But can't I help without marrying anybody?' said Kate.

'How can you?' he said simply.

And she knew it was true.

'But you see,' she said, 'I have no impulse to marry you, so how can I?'

'Why?' he said.

'You see, Mexico is really a bit horrible to me. And the black eyes of the people really make my heart contract, and my flesh shrink. There's a bit of horror in it. And I don't want horror in my soul.'

He was silent and unfathomable. She did not know in the least what he was thinking, only a black cloud seemed over him.

'Why not?' he said at last. 'Horror is real. Why not a bit of horror, as you say,

among all the rest?’

He gazed at her with complete, glittering earnestness, something heavy upon her.

‘But — ’ she stammered in amazement.

‘You feel a bit of horror for me too. — But why not? Perhaps I feel a bit of horror for you too, for your light-coloured eyes and your strong white hands. But that is good.’

Kate looked at him in amazement. And all she wanted was to flee, to flee away beyond the bounds of this gruesome continent.

‘Get used to it,’ he said. ‘Get used to it that there must be a bit of fear, and a bit of horror in your life. And marry me, and you will find many things that are not horror. The bit of horror is like the sesame seed in the nougat, it gives the sharp wild flavour. It is good to have it there.’

He sat watching her with black, glittering eyes, and talking with strange, uncanny reason. His desire seemed curiously impersonal, physical, and yet not personal at all. She felt as if, for him, she had some other name, she moved within another species. As if her name were, for example, Itzpapalotl, and she had been born in unknown places, and was a woman unknown to herself.

Yet surely, surely he was only putting his will over her?

She was breathless with amazement, because he had made her see the physical possibility of marrying him: a thing she had never even glimpsed before. But surely, surely it would not be herself who could marry him. It would be some curious female within her, whom she did not know and did not own.

He was emanating a dark, exultant sort of passion.

‘I can’t believe,’ she said, ‘that I could do it.’

‘Do it,’ he said. ‘And then you will know.’

She shuddered slightly, and went indoors for a wrap. She came out again in a silk Spanish shawl, brown, but deeply embroidered in silver-coloured silk. She tangled her fingers nervously in the long brown fringe.

Really, he seemed sinister to her, almost repellent. Yet she hated to think that she merely was afraid: that she had not the courage. She sat with her head bent, the light falling on her soft hair and on the heavy, silvery-coloured embroidery of her shawl, which she wrapped round her tight, as the Indian women do their rebozos. And his black eyes watched her, and watched the rich shawl, with a peculiar intense glitter. The shawl, too, fascinated him.

‘Well!’ he said suddenly. ‘When shall it be?’

‘What?’ she said, glancing up into his black eyes with real fear.

‘The marriage.’

She looked at him, almost hypnotized with amazement that he should have

gone so far. And even now, she had not the power to make him retreat.

‘I don’t know,’ she said.

‘Will you say in August? On the first of August?’

‘I won’t say any time,’ she said.

Suddenly the black gloom and anger of the Indians came over him. Then again he shook it off, with a certain callous indifference.

‘Will you come to Jamiltepec to-morrow to see Ramón?’ he asked. ‘He wants to speak with you.’

Kate also wanted to see Ramón: she always did.

‘Shall I?’ she said.

‘Yes! Come with me in the morning in the automobile. Yes?’

‘I would like to see Don Ramón again,’ she said.

‘You are not afraid of him, eh? Not the bit of horror, eh?’ he said, smiling peculiarly.

‘No. But Don Ramón isn’t really Mexican,’ she said.

‘Not really Mexican?’

‘No! — He feels European.’

‘Really! To me he is — Mexico.’

She paused and gathered herself together.

‘I will row in a boat to Jamiltepec to-morrow, or I will take Alonso’s motor-boat. I will come about ten o’clock.’

‘Very good!’ said Cipriano, rising to leave.

When he had gone, she heard the sound of the drum from the plaza. It would be another meeting of the men of Quetzalcoatl. But she had not the desire nor the courage to set out afresh that day.

Instead, she went to bed, and lay breathing the inner darkness. Through the window-cracks she saw the whiteness of the moon, and through the walls she heard the small pulse of the drum. And it all oppressed her and made her afraid. She lay forming plans to escape. She must escape. She would hurriedly pack her trunks and disappear: perhaps take the train to Manzanillo, on the coast, and thence sail up to California, to Los Angeles or to San Francisco. Suddenly escape, and flee away to a white man’s country, where she could once more breathe freely. How good it would be! — Yes, this was what she would do.

The night grew late, the drum ceased, she heard Ezequiel come home and lie down on the mattress outside her door. The only sound was the hoarse crowing of cocks in the moonlit night. And in her room, like someone striking a match, came the greenish light of a firefly, intermittent, now here, now there.

Thoroughly uneasy and cowed, she went to sleep. But then she slept deeply.

And curiously enough, she awoke in the morning with a new feeling of

strength. It was six o'clock, the sun was making yellow pencils through her shutter-cracks. She threw open her window to the street, and looked through the iron grating at the little lane with deep shadow under the garden wall, and above the wall, banana leaves fraying translucent green, and shaggy mops of palm-trees perching high, towards the twin white tower-tips of the church, crowned by the Greek cross with four equal arms.

In the lane it was already motion: big cows marching slowly to the lake, under the bluish shadow of the wall, and a small calf, big-eyed and adventurous, trotting aside to gaze through her gate at the green watered grass and the flowers. The silent peon, following, lifted his two arms with a sudden swoop upwards, noiselessly, and the calf careered on. Only the sound of the feet of calves.

Then two boys vainly trying to urge a young bull-calf to the lake. It kept on jerking up its sharp rump, and giving dry little kicks, from which the boys ran away. They pushed its shoulder, and it butted them with its blunt young head. They were in the state of semi-frenzied bewilderment which the Indians fall into when they are opposed and frustrated. And they took the usual recourse of running to a little distance, picking up heavy stones, and hurling them viciously at the animal.

'No!' cried Kate from her window. 'Don't throw stones. Drive it sensibly!'

They started as if the skies had opened, dropped their stones, and crept very much diminished after the see-sawing bull-calf.

An ancient crone appeared at the window with a plate of chopped-up young cactus leaves, for three centavos. Kate didn't like cactus vegetable, but she bought it. An old man was thrusting a young cockerel through the window-bars.

'Go,' said Kate, 'into the patio.'

And she shut her window on the street, for the invasion had begun.

But it had only changed doors.

'Niña! Niña!' came Juana's voice. 'Says the old man that you buy this chicken?'

'At how much?' shouted Kate, slipping on a dressing gown.

'At ten reales.'

'Oh, no!' said Kate, flinging open her patio doors, and appearing in her fresh wrap of pale pink cotton crepe, embroidered with heavy white flowers. 'Not more than a peso!'

'A peso and ten centavos!' pleaded the old man, balancing the staring-eyed red cock between his hands. 'He is nice and fat, Señorita. See!'

And he held out the cock for Kate to take it and balance it between her hands, to try its weight. She motioned to him to hand it to Juana. The red cock fluttered, and suddenly crowed in the transfer. Juana balanced him, and made a grimace.

‘No, only a peso!’ said Kate.

The man gave a sudden gesture of assent, received the peso, and disappeared like a shadow. Concha lurched up and took the cock, and instantly she bawled in derision:

‘Está muy flaco! He is very thin.’

‘Put him in the pen,’ said Kate. ‘We’ll let him grow.’

The patio was liquid with sunshine and shadows. Ezequiel had rolled up his mattress and gone. Great rose-coloured hibiscus dangled from the tips of their boughs, there was a faint scent from the half-wild, creamy roses. The great mango-trees were most sumptuous in the morning, like cliffs, with their hard green fruits dropping like the organs of some animal from the new bronze leaves, so curiously heavy with life.

‘Está muy flaco!’ the young Concha was bawling still in derision as she bore off the young cock to the pen under the banana-trees. ‘He’s very scraggy.’

Everybody watched intent while the red cock was put in among the few scraggy fowls. The grey cock, elder, retreated to the far end of the pen, and eyed the newcomer with an eye of thunder. The red cock, muy flaco, stood diminished in a dry corner. Then suddenly he stretched himself and crowed shrilly, his red gills lifted like an aggressive beard. And the grey cock stirred around, preparing the thunders of his vengeance. The hens took not the slightest notice.

Kate laughed, and went back to her room to dress, in the powerful newness of the morning. Outside her window the women were passing quietly, the red water-jar on one shoulder, going to the lake for water. They always put one arm over their head, and held the jar on the other shoulder. It had a contorted look, different from the proud way the women carried water in Sicily.

‘Niña! Niña!’ Juana was crying outside.

‘Wait a minute,’ said Kate.

It was another of the hymn-sheets, with a Hymn of Quetzalcoatl.

‘See, Niña, the new hymn from last evening.’

Kate took the leaflet and sat upon her bed to read it.

QUETZALCOATL LOOKS DOWN ON MEXICO

Jesus had gone far up the dark slope, when he looked back.
Quetzalcoatl, my brother! he called. Send me my images,
And the images of my mother, and the images of my saints.
Send me them by the swift way, the way of the sparks,
That I may hold them like memories in my arms when I go to sleep.
And Quetzalcoatl called back: I will do it.

Then he laughed, seeing the sun dart fiercely at him.
He put up his hand, and held back the sun with his shadow.
So he passed the yellow one, who lashed like a dragon in vain.
And having passed the yellow one, he saw the earth beneath.
And he saw Mexico lying like a dark woman with white breast-tips.
Wondering he stepped nearer, and looked at her,
At her trains, at her railways and her automobiles,
At her cities of stone and her huts of straw,
And he said: Surely this looks very curious!

He sat within the hollow of a cloud, and saw the men that worked in the fields, with foreign overseers.

He saw the men that were blind, reeling with aguardiente.
He saw the women that were not clean.

He saw the hearts of them all, that were black, and heavy, with a stone of anger at the bottom.

Surely, he said, this is a curious people I have found!
So leaning forward on his cloud, he said to himself:
I will call to them.

Hold! Hold! Mexicanos! Glance away a moment towards me.

Just turn your eyes this way, Mexicanos!

They turned not at all, they glanced not one his way.

Holalá! Mexicanos! Holalá!

They have gone stone deaf! he said.

So he blew down on them, to blow his breath in their faces.

But in the weight of their stupefaction, none of them knew.

Holalá! What a pretty people!

All gone stupefied!

A falling star was running like a white dog over a plain.

He whistled to it loudly, twice, till it fell to his hand.

In his hand it lay and went dark.

It was the Stone of Change.

This is the stone of change! he said.

So he tossed it awhile in his hand, and played with it.

Then suddenly he spied the old lake, and he threw it in.

It fell in.

And two men looked up.

Holalá! he said. Mexicanos!

Are there two of you awake?

So he laughed, and one heard him laughing.

Why are you laughing? asked the first man of Quetzalcoatl.

I hear the voice of my First Man ask me why I am laughing? Holalá,
Mexicanos! It is funny!

To see them so glum and so lumpish!

Hey! First Man of my name! Hark here!

Here is my sign.

Get a place ready for me.

Send Jesus his images back, Mary and the saints and all.

Wash yourself, and rub oil in your skin.

On the seventh day, let every man wash himself, and put oil on his skin; let every woman.

Let him have no animal walk on his body, nor through the shadow of his hair. Say the same to the women.

Tell them they all are fools, that I'm laughing at them.

The first thing I did when I saw them, was to laugh at the sight of such fools.

Such lumps, such frogs with stones in their bellies.

Tell them they are like frogs with stones in their bellies, can't hop!

Tell them they must get the stones out of their bellies,

Get rid of their heaviness,

Their lumpishness,

Or I'll smother them all.

I'll shake the earth, and swallow them up, with their cities.

I'll send fire and ashes upon them, and smother them all.

I'll turn their blood like sour milk rotten with thunder,

They will bleed rotten blood, in pestilence.

Even their bones shall crumble.

Tell them so, First Man of my Name.

For the sun and the moon are alive, and watching with gleaming eyes.

And the earth is alive, and ready to shake off his fleas.

And the stars are ready with stones to throw in the faces of men.

And the air that blows good breath in the nostrils of people and beasts

Is ready to blow bad breath upon them, to perish them all.

The stars and the earth and the sun and the moon and the winds

Are about to dance the war dance round you, men!

When I say the word, they will start.

For sun and stars and earth and the very rains are weary

Of tossing and rolling the substance of life to your lips.

They are saying to one another: Let us make an end

Of those ill-smelling tribes of men, these frogs that can't jump,
These cocks that can't crow
These pigs that can't grunt
This flesh that smells
These words that are all flat
These money vermin.
These white men, and red men, and yellow men, and brown men, and black
men
That are neither white, nor red, nor yellow, nor brown, nor black
But everyone of them dirtyish.
Let us have a spring cleaning in the world.
For men upon the body of the earth are like lice,
Devouring the earth into sores.
This is what stars and sun and earth and moon and winds and rain
Are discussing with one another; they are making ready to start.
So tell the men I am coming to,
To make themselves clean, inside and out.
To roll the grave-stone off their souls, from the cave of their bellies,
To prepare to be men.
Or else prepare for the other things.

Kate read this long leaflet again and again, and a swift darkness like a whirlwind seemed to envelop the morning. She drank her coffee on the veranda, and the heavy papayas in their grouping seemed to be oozing like great drops from the invisible spouting of the fountain of non-human life. She seemed to see the great sprouting and urging of the cosmos, moving into weird life. And men only like green-fly clustering on the tender tips, an aberration there. So monstrous the rolling and unfolding of the life of the cosmos, as if even iron could grow like lichen deep in the earth, and cease growing, and prepare to perish. Iron and stone render up their life, when the hour comes. And men are less than the green-fly sucking the stems of the bush, so long as they live by business and bread alone. Parasites on the face of the earth.

She strayed to the shore. The lake was blue in the morning light, the opposite mountains pale and dry and ribbed like mountains in the desert. Only at their feet, next the lake, the dark strip of trees and white specks of villages.

Near her against the light five cows stood with their noses to the water, drinking. Women were kneeling on the stones, filling red jars. On forked sticks stuck up on the foreshore, frail fishing-nets were hung out, drying, and on the nets a small bird sat facing the sun; he was red as a drop of new blood, from the

arteries of the air.

From the straw huts under the trees, her urchin of the mud-chick was scuttling towards her, clutching something in his fist. He opened his hand to her, and on the palm lay three of the tiny cooking-pots, the ollitas which the natives had thrown into the water long ago, to the gods.

‘Muy chiquitas!’ he said, in his brisk way, a little, fighting tradesman; ‘do you buy them?’

‘I have no money. To-morrow!’ said Kate.

‘To-morrow!’ he said, like a pistol shot.

‘To-morrow.’

He had forgiven her, but she had not forgiven him.

Somebody in the fresh Sunday morning was singing rather beautifully, letting the sound, as it were, produce itself.

A boy was prowling with a sling, prowling like a cat, to get the little birds. The red bird like a drop of new blood twittered upon the almost invisible fish-nets, then in a flash was gone. The boy prowled under the delicate green of the willow-trees, stumbling over the great roots in the sand.

Along the edge of the water flew four dark birds, their necks pushed out, skimming silent near the silent surface of the lake, in a jagged level rush.

Kate knew these mornings by the lake. They hypnotized her almost like death. Scarlet birds like drops of blood, in very green willow-trees. The aguador trotting to her house with a pole over his shoulder, and two heavy square gasoline cans, one at each end of the pole, filled with hot water. He had been to the hot spring for her daily supply. Now barefoot, with one bare leg, the young man trotted softly beneath the load, his dark, handsome face sunk beneath the shadows of the big hat, as he trotted in a silence, mindlessness that was like death.

Dark heads out on the water in little groups, like black water-fowl bobbing. Were they birds? Were they heads? Was this human life, or something intermediate, that lifted its orange, wet, glistening shoulders a little out of the lake, beneath the dark head?

She knew so well what the day would be. Slowly the sun thickening and intensifying in the air overhead. And slowly the electricity clotting invisibly as afternoon approached. The beach in the blind heat, strewn with refuse, smelling of refuse and the urine of creatures.

Everything going vague in the immense sunshine, as the air invisibly thickened, and Kate could feel the electricity pressing like hot iron on the back of her head. It stupefied her like morphine. Meanwhile the clouds rose like white trees from behind the mountains, as the afternoon swooned in silence, rose and

spread black branches, quickly, in the sky, from which the lightning stabbed like birds.

And in the midst of the siesta stupor, the sudden round bolts of thunder, and the crash and the chill of rain.

Tea-time, and evening coming. The last sailing-boats making to depart, waiting for the wind. The wind was from the west, the boats going east and south had gone, their sails were lapsing far away on the lake. But the boats towards the west were waiting, waiting, while the water rattled under their black flat keels.

The big boat from Tlapaltepec, bringing many people from the west, waited on into the night. She was anchored a few yards out, and in the early night her passengers came down the dark beach, weary of the day, to go on board. They clustered in a group at the edge of the flapping water.

The big, wide, flat-bottomed canoe, with her wooden awning and her one straight mast, lay black, a few yards out, in the dark night. A lamp was burning under the wooden roof; one looked in, from the shore. And this was home for the passengers.

A short man with trousers rolled up came to carry the people on board. The men stood with their backs to him, legs apart. He suddenly dived at them, ducked his head between the fork of their legs and rose, with a man on his shoulders. So he waded out through the water to the black boat, and heaved his living load on board.

For a woman, he crouched down before her, and she sat on one of his shoulders. He clasped her legs with his right arm, she clasped his dark head. So he carried her to the ship, as if she were nothing.

Soon the boat was full of people. They sat on the mats on the floor, with their backs to the sides of the vessel, baskets hanging from the pent roof, swaying as the vessel swayed. Men spread their serapes and curled up to sleep. The light of the lantern lit them up, as they sat and lay and slept, or talked in murmurs.

A little woman came up out of the darkness; then suddenly ran back again. She had forgotten something. But the vessel would not sail without her, for the wind would not change yet.

The tall mast stood high, the great sail lay in folds along the roof, ready. Under the roof, the lantern swayed, the people slept and stretched. Probably they would not sail till midnight. Then down the lake to Tlapaltepec, with its reeds at the end of the lake, and its dead, dead plaza, its dead dry houses of black adobe, its ruined streets, its strange, buried silence, like Pompeii.

Kate knew it. So strange and deathlike, it frightened her, and mystified her.

But to-day! To-day she would not loiter by the shore all morning. She must go

to Jamiltepec in a motor-boat, to see Ramón. To talk to him even about marrying Cipriano.

Ah, how could she marry Cipriano, and give her body to this death? Take the weight of this darkness on her breast, the heaviness of this strange gloom? Die before dying, and pass away whilst still beneath the sun?

Ah no! Better to escape to the white men's lands.

But she went to arrange with Alonso for the motor-boat.

CHAPTER XVII

Fourth Hymn and the Bishop

The President of the Republic, as a new broom, had been sweeping perhaps a little too clean for the common liking, so there was a 'rebellion.' It was not a very large one. But it meant, of course, banditry, robbery, and cowed villages.

Ramón was determined to keep free from the taint of politics. But already the Church, and with the Church the Knights of Cortés and a certain 'black' faction, was preparing against him. The priests began to denounce him from the pulpits — but not very loudly — as an ambitious Anti-Christ. With Cipriano beside him, however, and with Cipriano the army of the west, he had not much to fear.

But it was possible Cipriano would have to march away in defence of the Government.

'Above all things,' said Ramón, 'I don't want to acquire a political smell. I don't want to be pushed in the direction of any party. Unless I can stand uncontaminated, I had better abandon everything. But the Church will push me over to the socialists — and the socialists will betray me on the first opportunity. It is not myself. It is the new spirit. The surest way to kill it — and it can be killed, like any other living thing — is to get it connected with any political party.'

'Why don't you see the Bishop?' said Cipriano. 'I will see him too. Am I to be chief of the division in the west for nothing?'

'Yes,' said Ramón slowly, 'I will see Jimenez. I have thought of it. Yes, I intend to use every means in my power. — Montes will stand for us, because he hates the Church and hates any hint of dictation from outside. He sees the possibility of a "national" church. Though myself, I don't care about national churches. Only one has to speak the language of one's own people. You know the priests are forbidding the people to read the Hymns?'

'What does that matter?' said Cipriano. 'These people are nothing if not perverse, nowadays. They will read them all the more.'

'Maybe! — I shall take no notice. I'll let my new legend, as they call it, grow while the earth is moist. But we have to keep our eye very close on all the little bunches of "interests".'

'Ramón!' said Cipriano. 'If you can turn Mexico entirely into a Quetzalcoat country, what then?'

‘I shall be First Man of Quetzalcoatl — I know no more.’

‘You won’t trouble about the rest of the world?’

Ramón smiled. Already he saw in Cipriano’s eye the gleam of a Holy War.

‘I would like,’ he said, smiling, ‘to be one of the Initiates of the Earth. One of the Initiators. Every country its own Saviour, Cipriano: or every people its own Saviour. And the First Men of every people, forming a Natural Aristocracy of the World. One must have aristocrats, that we know. But natural ones, not artificial. And in some way the world must be organically united: the world of man. But in the concrete, not in the abstract. Leagues and Covenants and International Programmes. Ah! Cipriano! it’s like an international pestilence. The leaves of one great tree can’t hang on the boughs of another great tree. The races of the earth are like trees; in the end they neither mix nor mingle. They stand out of each other’s way, like trees. Or else they crowd on one another, and their roots grapple, and it is the fight to the death. — Only from the flowers there is commingling. And the flowers of every race are the natural aristocrats of that race. And the spirit of the world can fly from flower to flower, like a hummingbird, and slowly fertilize the great trees in their blossoms. Only the Natural Aristocrats can rise above their nation; and even then they do not rise beyond their race. Only the Natural Aristocrats of the World can be international, or cosmopolitan, or cosmic. It has always been so. The peoples are no more capable of it than the leaves of the mango-tree are capable of attaching themselves to the pine. — So if I want Mexicans to learn the name of Quetzalcoatl, it is because I want them to speak with the tongues of their own blood. I wish the Teutonic world would once more think in terms of Thor and Wotan, and the tree Igdrasil. And I wish the Druidic world would see, honestly, that in the mistletoe is their mystery, and that they themselves are the Tuatha De Danaan, alive, but submerged. And a new Hermes should come back to the Mediterranean, and a new Ashtaroth to Tunis; and Mithras again to Persia, and Brahma unbroken to India, and the oldest of dragons to China. Then I, Cipriano, I, First Man of Quetzalcoatl, with you, First Man of Huitzilopochtli, and perhaps your wife, First Woman of Itzpapalotl, could we not meet, with sure souls, the other great aristocrats of the world, the First Man of Wotan and the First Woman of Freya, First Lord of Hermes, and the Lady of Astarte, the Best-Born of Brahma, and the Son of the Greatest Dragon? I tell you, Cipriano, then the earth might rejoice, when the First Lords of the West met the First Lords of South and East, in the Valley of the Soul. Ah, the earth has Valleys of the Soul, that are not cities of commerce and industry. And the mystery is one mystery, but men must see it differently. The hibiscus and the thistle and the gentian all flower on the Tree of Life, but in the world they are far apart; and must be. And I am hibiscus and you

are a yucca flower, and your Caterina is a wild daffodil, and my Carlota is a white pansy. Only four of us, yet we make a curious bunch. So it is. The men and women of the earth are not manufactured goods, to be interchangeable. But the Tree of Life is one tree, as we know when our souls open in the last blossoming. We can't change ourselves, and we don't want to. But when our souls open out in the final blossoming, then as blossoms we share one mystery with all blossoms, beyond the knowledge of any leaves and stems and roots: something transcendent.

'But it doesn't matter. At the present time I have to fight my way in Mexico, and you have to fight yours. So let us go and do it.'

He went away to his workshops and his men who were labouring under his directions, while Cipriano sat down to his correspondence and his military planning.

They were both interrupted by the thudding of a motor-boat entering the little bay. It was Kate, escorted by the black-scarved Juana.

Ramón, in his white clothes, with the blue-and-black figured sash and the big hat with the turquoise-inlaid Eye of Quetzalcoatl, went down to meet her. She was in white, too, with a green hat and the shawl of pale yellow silk.

'I was so glad to come again,' she said, holding out her hand to him. 'Jamiltepec has become a sort of Mecca to me, my inside yearns for it.'

'Then why don't you come oftener? I wish you would come.'

'I am afraid of intruding.'

'No! You could help if you would.'

'Oh!' she said. 'I am so frightened, and so sceptical of big undertakings. I think it is because, at the very bottom of me, I dislike the masses of people — anywhere. I'm afraid I rather despise people; I don't want them to touch me, and I don't want to touch them. — So how could I pretend to join any — any — any sort of Salvation Army? — which is a horrid way of putting it.'

Don Ramón laughed.

'I do myself,' he said. 'I detest and despise masses of people. But these are my own people.'

'I, ever since I was a child, since I can remember. — They say of me, when I was a little girl of four, and my parents were having a big dinner-party, they had the nurse bring me in to say good night to all the people they had there dressed up and eating and drinking. And I suppose they all said nice things to me, as they do. I only answered: You are all monkeys! It was a great success! — But I felt it even as a child, and I feel it now. People are all monkeys to me, performing in different ways.'

'Even the people nearest you?'

Kate hesitated. Then she confessed, rather unwillingly:

‘Yes! I’m afraid so. Both my husbands — even Joachim — they seemed, somehow, so obstinate in their little stupidities — rather like monkeys. I felt a terrible revulsion from Joachim when he was dead. I thought: What peaked monkey is that, that I have been losing my blood about. — Do you think it’s rather awful?’

‘I do! But then I think we all feel like that, at moments. Or we would if we dared. It’s only one of our moments.’

‘Sometimes,’ said she, ‘I think that is my permanent feeling towards people. I like the world, the sky and the earth and the greater mystery beyond. But people — yes, they are all monkeys to me.’

He could see that, at the bottom of her soul, it was true.

‘Puros monos!’ he said to himself in Spanish. ‘Y lo que hacen, puras monerías.’

‘Pure monkeys! And the things they do, sheer monkeydom!’ Then he added: ‘Yet you have children!’

‘Yes! Yes!’ she said, struggling with herself. ‘My first husband’s children.’

‘And they? — monos y no más?’

‘No!’ she said, frowning and looking angry with herself. ‘Only partly.’

‘It is bad,’ he said, shaking his head. ‘But then!’ he added. — ‘What are my own children to me, but little monkeys? And their mother — and their mother — Ah, no! Señora Caterina! It is no good. One must be able to disentangle oneself from persons, from people. If I go to a rose-bush, to be intimate with it, it is a nasty thing that hurts me. One must disentangle oneself from persons and personalities, and see people as one sees the trees in the landscape. People in some way dominate you. In some way, humanity dominates your consciousness. So you must hate people and humanity, and you want to escape. But there is only one way of escape: to turn beyond them, to the greater life.’

‘But I do!’ cried Kate. ‘I do nothing else. When I was with Joachim absolutely alone in a cottage, doing all the work myself, and knowing nobody at all, just living, and feeling the greater thing all the time; then I was free, I was happy.’

‘But he?’ said Ramón. ‘Was he free and happy?’

‘He was really. But that’s where the monkeyishness comes in. He wouldn’t let himself be content. He insisted on having people and a cause, just to torture himself with.’

‘Then why didn’t you live in your cottage quite alone, and without him?’ he said. ‘Why do you travel and see people?’

She was silent, very angry. She knew she could not live quite alone. The vacancy crushed her. She needed a man there, to stop the gap, and to keep her

balanced. But even when she had him, in her heart of hearts she despised him, as she despised the dog and the cat. Between herself and humanity there was the bond of subtle, helpless antagonism.

She was naturally quite free-handed and she left people their liberty. Servants would get attached to her, and casual people all liked and admired her. She had a strong life-flow of her own, and a certain assertive *joie de vivre*.

But underneath it all was the unconquerable dislike, almost disgust of people. More than hate, it was disgust. Whoever it was, wherever it was, however it was, after a little while this disgust overcame her. Her mother, her father, her sisters, her first husband, even her children whom she loved, and Joachim, for whom she had felt such passionate love, even these, being near her, filled her with a certain disgust and repulsion after a little while, and she longed to fling them down the great and final *oubliette*.

But there is no great and final *oubliette*: or at least, it is never final, until one has flung oneself down.

So it was with Kate. Till she flung herself down the last dark *oubliette* of death, she would never escape from her deep, her bottomless disgust with human beings. Brief contacts were all right, thrilling even. But close contacts, or long contacts, were short and long revulsions of violent disgust.

She and Ramón had sat down on a bench under the white-flowering oleander of the garden downstairs. His face was impassive and still. In the stillness, with a certain pain and nausea, he realized the state she was in, and realized that his own state, as regards personal people, was the same. Mere personal contact, mere human contact filled him, too, with disgust. Carlota disgusted him. Kate herself disgusted him. Sometimes, Cipriano disgusted him.

But this was because, or when, he met them on a merely human, personal plane. To do so was disaster: it filled him with disgust of them and loathing of himself.

He had to meet them on another plane, where the contact was different; intangible, remote, and without intimacy. His soul was concerned elsewhere. So that the quick of him need not be bound to anybody. The quick of a man must turn to God alone: in some way or other.

With Cipriano he was most sure. Cipriano and he, even when they embraced each other with passion, when they met after an absence, embraced in the recognition of each other's eternal and abiding loneliness; like the Morning Star.

But women would not have this. They wanted intimacy — and intimacy means disgust. Carlota wanted to be eternally and closely identified with Ramón, consequently she hated him and hated everything which she thought drew him away from this eternal close identification with herself. It was just a horror and

he knew it.

Men and women should know that they cannot, absolutely, meet on earth. In the closest kiss, the dearest touch, there is the small gulf which is none the less complete because it is so narrow, so nearly non-existent. They must bow and submit in reverence, to the gulf. Even though I eat the body and drink the blood of Christ, Christ is Christ and I am I, and the gulf is impassable. Though a woman be dearer to a man than his own life, yet he is he and she is she, and the gulf can never close up. Any attempt to close it is a violation, and the crime against the Holy Ghost.

That which we get from the beyond, we get it alone. The final me I am, comes from the farthest off, from the Morning Star. The rest is assembled. All that of me which is assembled from the mighty cosmos can meet and touch all that is assembled in the beloved. But this is never the quick. Never can be.

If we would meet in the quick, we must give up the assembled self, the daily I, and, putting off ourselves one after the other, meet unconscious in the Morning Star. Body, soul, and spirit can be transfigured into the Morning Star. But without transfiguration we shall never get there. We shall gnash at the leash.

Ramón knew what it was to gnash at his leashes. He had gnashed himself almost to pieces, before he had found the way to pass out in himself, in the quick of himself, to the Quick of all being and existence, which he called the Morning Star, since men must give all things names. To pass in the quick of himself, with transfiguration, to the Morning Star, and there, there alone meet his fellow man.

He knew what it was to fail even now, and to keep on failing. With Carlota he failed absolutely. She claimed him and he restrained himself in resistance. Even his very naked breast, when Carlota was there, was self-conscious and assertively naked. But then that was because she claimed it as her property.

When men meet at the quick of all things, they are neither naked nor clothed; in the transfiguration they are just complete, they are not seen in part. The final perfect strength has also the power of innocence.

Sitting on the seat beside Kate, Ramón was sad with the sense of heaviness and inadequacy. His third Hymn was angry and bitter. Carlota almost embittered his soul. In Mexico, turbulent fellows had caught at his idea and burlesqued it. They had invaded one of the churches of the city, thrown out the sacred images, and hung in their place the grotesque papier-mâché Judas figures, which the Mexicans explode at Easter time. This of course made a scandal. And Cipriano, whenever he was away on his own for some time, slipped back into the inevitable Mexican General, fascinated by the opportunity for furthering his own personal ambition and imposing his own personal will. Then came Kate, with this centre of sheer repudiation deep in the middle of her, the will to explode the

world.

He felt his spirits sinking again, his limbs going like lead. There is only one thing that a man really wants to do, all his life; and that is, to find his way to his God, his Morning Star, and be alone there. Then afterwards, in the Morning Star, salute his fellow man, and enjoy the woman who has come the long way with him.

But to find the way, far, far along, to the bright Quick of all things, this is difficult, and requires all a man's strength and courage, for himself. If he breaks a trail alone, it is terrible. But if every hand pulls at him, to stay him in the human places; if the hands of love drag at his entrails and the hands of hate seize him by the hair, it becomes almost impossible.

This was how Ramón felt at the moment: — I am attempting the impossible. I had better either go and take my pleasure of life while it lasts, hopeless of the pleasure which is beyond all pleasures. Or else I had better go into the desert and take my way all alone, to the Star where at last I have my wholeness, holiness. The way of the anchorites and the men who went into the wilderness to pray. For surely my soul is craving for her consummation, and I am weary of the thing men call life. Living, I want to depart to where I am.

Yet, he said to himself, the woman that was with me in the Morning Star, how glad I should be of her! And the man that was with me there, what a delight his presence would be! Surely the Morning Star is a meeting-ground for us, for the joy!

Sitting side by side on the bench, Ramón and Kate forgot one another, she thinking back on the past, with the long disgust of it all, he thinking on into his future, and trying to revive his heavy spirits.

In the silence, Cipriano came out on to the balcony above, looking around. He almost started as he saw the two figures seated on the bench below, under the white oleander tree, miles apart, worlds apart, in their silence.

Ramón heard the step, and glanced up.

'We are coming up!' he called, rising and looking round at Kate. 'Shall we go upstairs? Will you drink something cool, tepache, or squeezed oranges? There is no ice.'

'I would like orange juice and water,' she said.

He called to his servant and gave the order.

Cipriano was in the white pantaloons and blouse, like Ramón. But his sash was scarlet, with black curves, something like the markings on a snake.

'I heard you come. I thought perhaps you had gone away again,' he said, looking at her with a certain black reproachfulness: an odd, hesitating wistfulness of the barbarian, who feels himself at a loss. Then also a certain

resentment.

‘Not yet,’ she said.

Ramón laughed, and flung himself into a chair.

‘The Señora Caterina thinks we are all monkeys, but perhaps this particular monkey-show is the most amusing after all,’ he said. ‘So she will see a little more of it.’

Cipriano, a real Indian, was offended in his pride, and the little black imperial on his chin seemed to become portentous.

‘That’s rather an unfair way of putting it!’ laughed Kate.

The black eyes of Cipriano glanced at her in hostility. He thought she was laughing at him. And so, at the depths of her female soul, she was. She was jeering at him inwardly. Which no man can stand, least of all a dark-skinned man.

‘No!’ she said. ‘There’s something else beside that.’

‘Ah!’ said Ramón. ‘Take care! A little mercy is a dangerous thing.’

‘No! Not mercy!’ she said, flushing. ‘Why are you being horrid to me?’

‘Monkeys always end by being horrid to the spectators,’ said Ramón.

She looked up at him, and caught the flash of anger in his eyes.

‘I came,’ she said, ‘to hear about the Mexican pantheon. I was even given to understand I might be admitted.’

‘Ah, that is good!’ laughed Ramón. ‘A rare specimen of the female monkey has been added to the Ramón menagerie! I am sure you would be a good draw. There have been some pretty goddesses, I assure you, in the Aztec pantheon.’

‘How horrid!’ she said.

‘Come! Come!’ he cried. ‘Let us keep to the bedrock of things, Señora mía. We are all monkeys. Monos somos. — Ihr seid alle Affen! Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings was it spoken, as Carlota said. You see that little male monkey, Cipriano. He had the monkey’s idea of marrying you. Say the word. Marriage is a monkey’s game. Say the word. He will let you go when you’ve had enough; and he’s had enough. He is a general and a very great jefe. He can make you monkey-queen of monkey-Mexico, if it please you. And what should monkeys do, but amuse themselves! Vamos! Embobémonos! Shall I be priest? Vamos! Vamos!’

He rose with sudden volcanic violence, and rushed away.

Cipriano looked at Kate in wonder. She had gone pale.

‘What have you been saying to him?’ he asked.

‘Nothing!’ she said, rising. ‘I’d better go now.’

Juana was collected; and Alonso and Kate set off back down the lake. She sat with a certain obstinate offendedness under the awning of the boat. The sun was

terrifically hot, and the water blinded her. She put on black spectacles, in which she looked a monster.

‘Mucho calor, Niña! Mucho calor!’ Juana was repeating behind her. The criada had evidently imbibed tepache.

On the pale-brown water little tufts of water-hyacinth were vaguely sailing, holding up the hand of a leaf for a sail. Everywhere the lake was dotted with these sailing tufts. The heavy rains had washed in flood down the Lerma river into the lake, washing the acres of lirio loose from the marshy end of the waters, thirty miles away, and slowly setting them travelling over all the expanse of the inland sea, till the shores began to be piled, and the far-off Santiago river, which flowed out of the lake, was choked.

That day Ramón wrote his Fourth Hymn.

WHAT QUETZALCOATL SAW IN MEXICO

Who are these strange faces in Mexico?
Palefaces, yellowfaces, blackfaces? These are no Mexicans!
Where do they come from, and why?
Lord of the Two Ways, these are the foreigners.
They come out of nowhere.
Sometimes they come to tell us things,
Mostly they are the greedy ones.
What then do they want?
They want gold, they want silver from the mountains,
And oil, much oil from the coast.
They take sugar from the tall tubes of the cane,
Wheat from the high lands, and maize;
Coffee from the bushes in the hot lands, even the juicy rubber.
They put up tall chimneys that smoke,
And in the biggest houses they keep their machines, that talk
And work iron elbows up and down,
And hold myriad threads from their claws!
Wonderful are the machines of the greedy ones!
And you, Mexicans and peons, what do you do?
We work with their machines, we work in their fields,
They give us pesos made of Mexican silver.
They are the clever ones.
Do you love them then?
We love them not, and never.

Their faces are ugly, yet they make wonderful things.

And their wills are like their machines of iron.

What can we do?

I see dark things rushing across the country.

Yea, Lord! Even trains and camiones and automobiles.

Trains and camiones, automobiles and aeroplanes.

How nice! says the peon, to go rushing in a train!

How nice, to get in the camion, and for twenty centavos, to be gone!

How nice, in the great cities, where all things rush, and huge lights flare bright, to wander and do nothing!

How nice to sit in the cine, where the picture of all the world dances before the eyes!

How nice if we could take all these things away from the foreigners, and possess them!

Take back our lands and silver and oil, take the trains and the factories and the automobiles

And play with them all the time!

How nice!

Oh, fools! Mexicans and peons!

Who are you, to be masters of machines which you cannot make?

Which you can only break!

Those that can make are masters of these machines.

Not you, poor boobs.

How have these palefaces, yellowfaces crossed the waters of the world?

Oh, fools! Mexicans and peons, with muddy hearts!

Did they do it by squatting on their hams?

You do nothing but squat on your hams, and stare with vacant eyes, and drink fire-waters, and quarrel and stab.

And then run like surly dogs at the bidding of paleface masters.

Oh, dogs and fools, Mexicans and peons!

Watery-hearted, with wishy-washy knees.

Sulky in spirit, and inert.

What are you good for, but to be slaves, and rot away?

You are not worth a god!

Lo! the universe tangles its great dragons,

The dragons in the cosmos are stirring with anger again.

The dragon of the disappointed dead, that sleeps in the snow-white north

Is lashing his tail in his sleep; the winds howl, the cold rocks round.

The spirits of the cold dead whistle in the ears of the world.

Prepare for doom.

For I tell you, there are no dead dead, not even your dead.

There are dead that sleep in the waves of the Morning Star, with freshening limbs.

There are dead that weep in bitter rains.

There are dead that cluster in the frozen north, shuddering and chattering among the ice

And howling with hate.

There are dead that creep through the burning bowels of the earth, stirring the fires to acid of bitterness.

There are dead that sit under the trees, watching with ash-grey eyes for their victims.

There are dead that attack the sun like swarms of black flies, to suck his life.

There are dead that stand upon you, when you go in to your women,

And they dart to her womb, they fight for the chance to be born, they struggle at the gate you have opened,

They gnash when it closes, and hate the one that got in to be born again, Child of the living dead, the dead that live and are not refreshed.

I tell you, sorrow upon you; you shall all die.

And being dead, you shall not be refreshed.

There are no dead dead.

Being dead, you shall rove like dogs with broken haunches

Seeking the offal and garbage of life, in the invisible lanes of the air.

The dead that have mastered fire live on, salamanders, in fire.

The dead of the water-lords rock and glimmer in the seas.

The dead of the steel machines go up in motion, away!

The dead of electric masters are electricity itself.

But the dead of those who have mastered nothing, nothing at all,

Crawl like masterless dogs in the back streets of the air,

Creeping for the garbage of life, and biting with venomous mouths.

Those that have mastered the forces of the world, die into the forces, they have homes in death.

But you! what have you mastered, among the dragon hosts of the cosmos?

There are dragons of sun and ice, dragons of the moon and the earth, dragons of salty waters, dragons of thunder;

There is the spangled dragon of the stars at large.

And far at the centre, with one unblinking eye, the dragon of the Morning Star.

Conquer! says the Morning Star. Pass the dragons, and pass on to me.
For I am sweet, I am the last and the best, the pool of new life.
But lo! you inert ones, I will set the dragons upon you.
They shall crunch your bones.
And even then they shall spit you out, as broken-haunched dogs,
You shall have nowhere to die into.
Lo! in the back streets of the air, dead ones are crawling like curs!
Lo! I release the dragons! The great white one of the north,
Him of the disappointed dead, he is lashing and turning round.
He is breathing cold corruption upon you, you shall bleed in your chests.
I am going to speak to the dragon of the inner fires,
He who housels the dead of the guns,
To withdraw his warmth from your feet, so your feet turn cold with death.
I am about to tell the dragon of the waters to turn round on you
And spew out corrosion into your streams, on your rains.
And I wait for the final day, when the dragon of thunder, waking under the
spider-web nets
Which you've thrown upon him, shall suddenly shake with rage,
And dart his electric needles into your bones, and curdle your blood like
milk with electric venom.
Wait! Only wait! Little by little it all shall come upon you.

Ramón put on his black city clothes, and a black hat, and went himself with this hymn to the printer in the city. The sign of Quetzalcoatl he had printed in black and red, and the sign of the dragon, at the end, in green and black and red. And the sheet was folded.

Six soldiers of Cipriano's command took the bundles of hymns by train; one to the capital, one to Puebla and Jalapa, one to Tampico and Monterrey, one to Tlaxcala and Chihuahua, one to Sinaloa and Sonora, and one to the mines in Pachuca, Guanajuato, and the central region. Each soldier took only a hundred sheets. But in every town there was a recognized Reader of the Hymns; or two, or three, or four, or even ten Readers in one city. And readers who went round to the villages.

Because there was a strange, submerged desire in the people for things beyond the world. They were weary of events, and weary of news and the newspapers, weary even of the things that are taught in education. Weary is the spirit of man with man's importunity. Of all things human, and humanly invented, we have had enough, they seemed to say. And though they took not much active notice of the Hymns, they craved for them, as men crave for alcohol, as a relief from the

weariness and ennui of mankind's man-made world.

Everywhere, in all the towns and villages, at night-time the little flames would be seen flickering, a cluster of people was seen, sometimes standing, sometimes sitting upon the ground, listening to the slow voice of some Reader.

More rarely, in some small, out-of-the-way plaza, would sound the sinister thud of the tom-tom, beating out of the hollow of the ages. And there would be two men with white serapes with the blue edges. Then the singing of the Songs of Quetzalcoatl, and perhaps the slow round dance, with the ancient rhythm of the feet on the earth, belonging to aboriginal America.

For the old dances of the Aztecs and the Zapotees, of all the submerged Indian races, are based upon the old, sinking bird-step of the Red Indians of the north. It is in the blood of the people; they cannot quite forget it. It comes back to them, with a sense of fear, and joy, and relief.

Of themselves, they dared not revive the old motion, nor stir the blood in the old way. The spell of the past is too terrible. But in the Songs and the Hymns of Quetzalcoatl there spoke a new voice, the voice of a master and authority. And though they were slow to trust, the slowest and the most untrusting, they seized upon the new-old thrill, with a certain fear, and joy, and relief.

The Men of Quetzalcoatl avoided the great market-places and centres of activity. They took their stand in the little side places. On the rim of a fountain a man in a dark blanket with blue borders, or with the sign of Quetzalcoatl in his hat, would sit down and begin to read aloud. It was enough. The people lingered to listen. He would read to the end, then say: 'I have finished this reading of the Fourth Hymn of Quetzalcoatl. Now I will begin again.'

In this way, by a sort of far-away note in the voice, and by the slow monotony of repetition, the thing would drift darkly into the consciousness of the listeners.

Already in the beginning there had been the scandal of the Judases. Holy Week, in Mexico City, is, to all appearance, the great week of Judas. Everywhere you see men carrying home in triumph the great, gaudily-varnished dolls of papier-mâché. They are all men-dolls, more or less life-like grotesque. Most frequently it is a fat Mexican-Spanish hacendado, landowner and big farmer, who is represented with his tight trousers, sticking-out belly, and huge upturned moustaches. The old-fashioned patrón. Some of the figures are like Punch, some are like harlequin. But they all have rosy faces and the white man's get-up. You never see the dark-faced image of a native-blooded Mexican; always a stiff, haughty grotesque of a white man.

And all these are Judases. Judas is the fun of the fair, the victim, the big man of Holy Week, just as the Skeleton, and the skeleton on horseback, is the idol of the first week in November, the days of the dead and of all the saints.

On Easter Saturday the Judases are hung from the balconies, the string is lighted, and at length, bang! Shrieks of joy, Judas has exploded into nothingness, from a big cracker in the middle of him! — All the town is popping with Judases.

There was the scandal of the Holy Images thrown out of one of the churches in Mexico City, and these Judases put in their place. The Church began to move.

But then the Church in Mexico has to move gingerly; it is not popular, and its claws are cut. The priest may not ring the church bells for more than three minutes. Neither priests nor monks may wear any habit in the street, beyond the hideous black vest and white collar of the Protestant clergy. So that the priest shows himself as little as possible in the street, and practically never in the chief streets and the chief plazas.

Nevertheless, he still has influence. Processions in the streets are forbidden, but not sermons from the pulpit, nor advice from the confessional. Montes, the President, had no love for the Church, and was meditating the expulsion of all foreign priests. The Archbishop himself was an Italian. But he was also a fighter.

He gave orders to all the priests, to forbid the people from listening to anything concerned with Quetzalcoatl, to destroy any hymn-sheet that might fall into their hands, and to prevent as far as possible the Hymns from being read, and the Songs from being sung, in the parishes.

But Montes had given orders to the police and the military to afford such protection to the Men of Quetzalcoatl as was accorded to any other law-abiding citizen.

Mexico is not Mexico for nothing, however, and already blood had been shed on both sides. This Ramón particularly wanted to avoid, as he felt that violent death was not so easily wiped out of the air and out of the souls of men, as spilt blood was washed off the pavements.

Therefore, when he was in the City, he asked the Bishop of the West if he would consent to an interview with himself and Don Cipriano, and would he name the place. The Bishop — who was an old friend and adviser of Carlota, and who knew Ramón well enough — replied that he would be pleased to see Don Ramón and the Señor General the next day, if they would be so good as to come to his house.

The Bishop no longer occupied the great episcopal palace. This was turned into the post-office building. But he had a large house not far from the Cathedral, which had been presented by the faithful.

Ramón and Cipriano found the thin old man in a dusty, uninteresting library, waiting. He wore a simple black cassock, not too clean, with purple buttons. He received Ramón, who was in a black town suit, and Cipriano, who was in

uniform, with an affable manner and suspicious looks. But he played at being the lively, genial old bird.

‘Ah, Don Ramón, it is long since I saw you! How goes it, eh? Well, well? That is good! That is very good!’ And he patted Ramón on the sleeve like a fussy old uncle. ‘Ah, my General, much honour, much honour! Welcome to this poor house of yours. It is the house of your Honour! To serve you! Gentlemen! Won’t you take a seat?’

They all sat down, in the dusty, dreary room, in the old leather chairs. The Bishop nervously looked at his thin old hands, at the fine, but rather dull amethyst ring he wore.

‘Good! Señores!’ he said, glancing up with his little black eyes. ‘At your service! Entirely at the service of your Honours.’

‘Doña Carlota is in the city, Father. You have seen her?’ said Ramón.

‘Yes, son of mine,’ said the Bishop.

‘Then you know the latest news about me. She told you everything.’

‘Somewhat! Somewhat! She spoke somewhat of you, the poor little thing. Thanks to God she has her sons with her. They are safely back in their native country, in good health.’

‘Did you see them?’

‘Yes! yes! Two of my dearest children! Very sympathetic, very intelligent, like their father; and, like him, promising to be of very handsome presence. Yes! yes! Smoke if you will, my General. Don’t hesitate.’

Cipriano lit a cigarette. From old associations, he was nervous, albeit amused.

‘You know all about what I want to do, Father?’ said Ramón.

‘I don’t know all, son of mine, but I know enough. I wouldn’t want to hear more. Eh!’ he sighed. ‘It is very sad.’

‘Not so very sad, Father, if we don’t make it sad. Why make a sad thing out of it, Father? We are in Mexico for the most part Indians. They cannot understand the high Christianity, Father, and the Church knows it. Christianity is a religion of the spirit, and must needs be understood if it is to have any effect. The Indians cannot understand it, any more than the rabbits of the hills.’

‘Very good! Very good! Son of mine! But we can convey it to them. The rabbits of the hills are in the hands of God.’

‘No, Father, it is impossible. And without a religion that will connect them with the universe, they will all perish. Only religion will serve; not socialism, nor education, nor anything.’

‘Thou speakest well,’ said the Bishop.

‘The rabbits of the hills may be in the hands of God, Father. But they are at the mercy of men. The same with Mexico. The people sink heavier and heavier

into inertia, and the Church cannot help them, because the Church does not possess the key-word to the Mexican soul.'

'Doesn't the Mexican soul know the Voice of God?' said the Bishop.

'Your own children may know your voice, Father. But if you go out to speak to the birds on the lake, or the deer among the mountains, will they know your voice? Will they wait and listen?'

'Who knows? It is said they waited to listen to the Holy Francisco of Assisi.'

'Now, Father, we must speak to the Mexicans in their own language, and give them the clue-word to their own souls. I shall say Quetzalcoatl. If I am wrong, let me perish. But I am not wrong.'

The Bishop fidgeted rather restlessly. He didn't want to hear all this. And he did not want to answer. He was impotent anyhow.

'Your Church is the Catholic Church, Father?'

'Surely!' said the Bishop.

'And Catholic Church means the Church of All, the Universal Church?'

'Surely, son of mine.'

'Then why not let it be really catholic? Why call it catholic, when it is not only just one among many Churches, but is even hostile to all the rest of the churches? Father, why not let the Catholic Church become really the Universal Church?'

'It is the Universal Church of Christ, my son.'

'Why not let it be the Universal Church of Mohammed as well; since ultimately, God is One God, but the peoples speak varying languages, and each needs its own prophet to speak with its own tongue. The Universal Church of Christ, and Mohammed, and Buddha, and Quetzalcoatl, and all the others — that would be a Catholic Church, Father.'

'You speak of things beyond me,' said the Bishop, turning his ring.

'Not beyond any man,' said Don Ramón. 'A Catholic Church is a church of all the religions, a home on earth for all the prophets and the Christs, a big tree under which every man who acknowledges the greater life of the soul can sit and be refreshed. Isn't that the Catholic Church, Father?'

'Alas, my son, I know the Apostolic Church of Christ in Rome, of which I am a humble servant. I do not understand these clever things you are saying to me.'

'I am asking you for peace, Father. I am not one who hates the Church of Christ, the Roman Catholic Church. But in Mexico I think it has no place. When my heart is not bitter, I am grateful forever to Christ, the Son of God. The affair of the Judases grieves me more than it does you, and the affairs of bloodshed are far bitterer to me.'

'I am no innovator, my son, to provoke bloodshed.'

‘Listen! I am going to remove the holy images from the church at Sayula, with reverence, and with reverence burn them upon the lake. Then I shall put the image of Quetzalcoatl in the church at Sayula.’

The Bishop looked up furtively. For some moments he said nothing. But his silence was furtive, cornered.

‘Would you dare do that, Don Ramón?’ he said.

‘Yes! And I shall not be prevented. General Viedma is with me.’

The Bishop glanced sideways at Cipriano.

‘Certainly,’ said Cipriano.

‘Nevertheless it is illegal,’ said the Bishop, with acid bitterness.

‘What is illegal in Mexico?’ said Ramón. ‘What is weak is illegal. I will not be weak, My Lord.’

‘Lucky you!’ said the Bishop, lifting his shoulders.

There was a break of silence.

‘No!’ said Ramón. ‘I come to ask you for peace. Tell the Archbishop what I say. Let him tell the Cardinals and the Pope that the time has come for a Catholic Church of the Earth, the Catholic Church of All the Sons of Men. The Saviours are more than one, and let us pray they will still be increased. But God is one God, and the Saviours are the Sons of the One God. Let the Tree of the Church spread its branches over all the earth, and shelter the prophets in its shade, as they sit and speak their knowledge of the beyond.’

‘Are you one of these prophets, Don Ramón?’

‘I surely am, Father. And I would speak about Quetzalcoatl in Mexico, and build his Church here.’

‘Nay! You would invade the Churches of Christ and the Blessed Virgin, I heard you say.’

‘You know my intentions. But I do not want to quarrel with the Church of Rome, nor have bloodshed and enmity, Father. Can you not understand me? Should there not be peace between the men who strive down their different ways to the God-Mystery?’

‘Once more desecrate the altars! Bring in strange idols. Burn the images of Our Lord and Our Lady, and ask for peace?’ said the poor Bishop, who helplessly longed to be left alone.

‘All that, Father,’ said Ramón.

‘Son, what can I answer? You are a good man smitten with the madness of pride. Don Cipriano is one more Mexican general. I am the poor old Bishop of this diocese, faithful servant of the Holy Church, humble child of the Holy Father in Rome. What can I do? What can I answer? Take me out to the cemetery and shoot me at once, General!’

‘I don’t want to,’ said Cipriano.

‘It will end like that,’ said the Bishop.

‘But why?’ cried Don Ramón. ‘Is there no sense in what I say? Cannot you understand?’

‘My son, my understanding goes no farther than my faith, my duty, will allow. I am not a clever man, I live by faith and my duty to my sacred office. Understand that I do not understand.’

‘Good-day, Father!’ said Ramón, suddenly rising.

‘Go with God, my son,’ said the Bishop, rising and lifting his fingers.

‘Adiós, Señor!’ said Cipriano, clicking his spurs, and putting his hand on his sword as he turned to the door.

‘Adiós, Señor General,’ said the Bishop, darting after them his eyes of old malice, which they could feel in their backs.

‘He will say nothing,’ said Cipriano, as he and Ramón went down the steps. ‘The old Jesuit, he only wants to keep his job and his power, and prevent the heart’s beating. I know them. All they treasure, even more than their money, is their centipede power over the frightened people; especially over the women.’

‘I didn’t know you hated them,’ laughed Ramón.

‘Waste no more breath on them, my dear one,’ said Cipriano. ‘Go forward, you can walk over broken snakes such as those.’

As they went on foot past the post-office square, where the modern scribes at little tables under the arches sat tapping out letters on their typewriters for the poor and illiterate, who waited with their few centavos to have their messages turned into florid Castilian, Ramón and Cipriano met with an almost startled respect.

‘Why talk to the Bishop? — he doesn’t exist any more. I hear his Knights of Cortés had a big dinner the other evening, and it is said — I don’t believe it — that they drank oaths in blood to have my life and yours. But I think the oaths of the Catholic Dames would frighten me more. Why, if a man stops to unfasten his trousers to make water, the Knights of Cortés run for their lives, thinking the pistol is pointed at them. Don’t think about them, man! Don’t try to conciliate them. They will only puff up and become insolent, thinking you are afraid of them. Six soldiers will trample down all that dirt,’ said the General.

It was the city, and the spirit of the city.

Cipriano had a suite in the big Palace on the Plaza de Armas.

‘If I marry,’ he said, as they passed into the stone patio, where soldiers stood at attention, ‘I shall take a house in the colony, to be more private.’

Cipriano in town was amusing. He seemed to exude pride and arrogant authority as he walked about. But his black eyes, glancing above his fine nose

and that little goat beard, were not to be laughed at. They seemed to get everything, in the stab of a glance. A demoniacal little fellow.

CHAPTER XVIII

Auto da Fe

Ramón saw Carlota and his boys in the city, but it was a rather fruitless meeting. The elder boy was just uncomfortable in the presence of his father, but the younger Cyprian, who was delicate and very intelligent, had a rather lofty air of displeasure with his parent.

‘Do you know what they sing, papa?’ he said.

‘Not all the things they sing,’ said Ramón.

‘They sing — ’ the boy hesitated. Then, in his clear young voice, he piped up, to the tune of La Cucaracha:

‘Don Ramón don’t drink, don’t smoke.
Doña Carlota wished he would.
He’s going to wear the sky-blue cloak
That he’s stolen from the Mother of God.’

‘No, I’m not,’ said Ramón, smiling. ‘Mine’s got a snake and a bird in the middle, and black zigzags and a red fringe. You’d better come and see it.’

‘No, papa! I don’t want to.’

‘Why not?’

‘I don’t want to be mixed up in this affair. It makes us all look ridiculous.’

‘But how do you think you look, anyhow, in your striped little sailor suit and your little saintly look? We’d better dress you as the Infant Jesus.’

‘No, papa! You are in bad taste. One doesn’t say those things.’

‘Now you’ll have to confess to a fib. You say one doesn’t say those things, when I, who am your father, said them only a moment ago, and you heard me.’

‘I mean good people don’t. Decent people.’

‘Now you’ll have to confess again, for calling your father indecent. — Terrible child!’

The child flushed, and tears rose to his eyes. There was silence for a while.

‘So you don’t want to come to Jamiltepec?’ said Ramón, to his boys.

‘Yes!’ said the elder boy, slowly. ‘I want to come and bathe in the lake, and have a boat. But — they say it is impossible.’

‘Why?’

‘They say you make yourself a peon, in your clothes.’ — The boy was shy.

‘They’re very nice clothes, you know. Nicer than those little breeches of yours.’

‘They say, also, that you pretend to be the Aztec god Quetzalcoatl.’

‘Not at all. I only pretend that the Aztec god Quetzalcoatl is coming back to the Mexicans.’

‘But, papa, it is not true.’

‘How do you know?’

‘Because it is impossible.’

‘Why?’

‘There never was any Quetzalcoatl, except idols.’

‘Is there any Jesus, except images?’

‘Yes, papa.’

‘Where?’

‘In heaven.’

‘Then in heaven there is also Quetzalcoatl. And what is in heaven is capable of coming back to earth. Don’t you believe me?’

‘I can’t.’

‘Then go on unbelieving,’ said the father, laughing at them and rising to leave them.

‘It is very bad that they sing songs about you, and put mama in; like about Pancho Villa,’ said the younger boy. ‘It hurts me very much.’

‘Rub it with Vapour-rub, my pet,’ said Ramón. ‘Rub it with Vapour-rub, where it hurts you.’

‘What a real bad man you are, papa!’

‘What a real good child are you, my son! Isn’t that so?’

‘I don’t know, papa. I only know you are bad.’

‘Oh! Oh! Is that all they teach thee at thy American school?’

‘Next term,’ said Ciprianito, ‘I want to change my name. I don’t want to be called Carrasco any more. When thou art in the newspapers, they will laugh at us.’

‘Oh! Oh! I am laughing at thee now, little frog! What name wilt thou choose, then? Espina, perhaps. Thou knowest Carrasco is a wild bush, on the moors in Spain, where we come from. Wilt thou be the little thorn on the bush? Call thyself Espina, thou art a sprig of the old tree. Entonces, adiós! Señor Espina Espinita!’

‘Adiós!’ said the boy abruptly, flushing with rage.

Ramón took a motorcar to Sayula, for there was a made road. But already the rains were washing it away. The car lurched and bumped in the great gaps. In

one place a *camión* lay on its back, where it had overturned.

On the flat desert there were already small smears of water, and the pink cosmos flowers, and the yellow, were just sprouting their tufts of buds. The hills in the distance were going opaque, as leaves came out on the invisible trees and bushes. The earth was coming to life.

Ramón called in Sayula at Kate's house. She was out, but the wild Concha came scouring across the beach, to fetch her. — 'There is Don Ramón! There is Don Ramón!'

Kate hurried home, with sand in her shoes.

She thought Ramón looked tired, and, in his black suit, sinister.

'I didn't expect you,' she said.

'I am on my way back from town.'

He sat very still, with that angry look on his creamy dark face, and he kept pushing back his black moustache from his closed, angry lips.

'Did you see anybody in town?' she asked.

'I saw Don Cipriano — and Doña Carlota, and my boys!'

'Oh, how nice for you! Are they quite well?'

'In excellent health, I believe.'

She laughed suddenly.

'You are still cross,' she said. 'Is it about the monkeys still?'

'Señora,' he said, leaning forward, so that his black hair dropped a little on his brow, 'in monkeydom I don't know who is prince. But in the kingdom of fools, I believe it is I.'

'Why?' she said.

And as he did not answer, she added:

'It must be a comfort to be a prince, even of fools.'

He looked daggers at her, then burst into a laugh.

'Oh, Señora mía! What ails us men, when we are always wanting to be good?'

'Are you repenting of it?' she laughed.

'Yes!' he said. 'I am a prince of fools! Why have I started this Quetzalcoatl business? Why? Pray tell me why.'

'I suppose you wanted to.'

He pondered for a time, pushing up his moustache.

'Perhaps it is better to be a monkey than a fool. I object to being called a monkey, nevertheless. Carlota is a monkey, no more; and my two boys are prize young monkeys in sailor suits. And I am a fool. Yet what is the difference between a fool and a monkey?'

'Quién sabe?' said Kate.

'One wants to be good, and the other is sure he is good. So I make a fool of

myself. They are sure they are always good, so that makes monkeys of them. Oh, if only the world would blow up like a bomb!

‘It won’t!’ said Kate.

‘True enough. — Ah, well!’

He drew himself erect, pulling himself together.

‘Do you think, Señora Caterina, you might marry our mutual General?’ Ramón had put himself aside again.

‘I — I don’t know!’ stammered Kate. ‘I hardly think so.’

‘He is not sympathetic to you at all?’

‘Yes, he is. He is alive, and there is even a certain fascination about him. — But one shouldn’t try marrying a man of another race, do you think, even if he were more sympathetic?’

‘Ah!’ sighed Ramón. ‘It’s no good generalizing. It’s no good marrying anybody, unless there will be a real fusion somewhere.’

‘And I feel there wouldn’t,’ said Kate. ‘I feel he just wants something of me; and perhaps I just want something of him. But he would never meet me. He would never come forward himself, to meet me. He would come to take something from me and I should have to let him. And I don’t want merely that. I want a man who will come half-way, just half-way, to meet me.’

Don Ramón pondered, and shook his head.

‘You are right,’ he said. ‘Yet, in these matters, one never knows what is half-way, nor where it is. A woman who just wants to be taken, and then to cling on, is a parasite. And a man who wants just to take, without giving, is a creature of prey.’

‘And I’m afraid Don Cipriano might be that,’ said Kate.

‘Possibly,’ said Ramón. ‘He is not so with me. But perhaps he would be, if we did not meet — perhaps it is our half-way — in some physical belief that is at the very middle of us, and which we recognize in one another. Don’t you think there might be that between you and him?’

‘I doubt if he’d feel it necessary, with a woman. A woman wouldn’t be important enough.’

Ramón was silent.

‘Perhaps!’ he said. ‘With a woman, a man always wants to let himself go. And it is precisely with a woman that he should never let himself go. It is precisely with a woman that he should never let himself go, but stick to his innermost belief, and meet her just there. Because when the innermost belief coincides in them both, if it’s physical, there, and then, and nowhere else, they can meet. And it’s no good unless there is a meeting. It’s no good a man ravishing a woman, and it’s absolutely no good a woman ravishing a man. It’s a sin, that is. There is

such a thing as sin, and that's the centre of it. Men and women keep on ravishing one another. Absurd as it may sound, it is not I who would ravish Carlota. It is she who would ravish me. Strange and absurd and a little shameful, it is true. — Letting oneself go, is either ravishing or being ravished. Oh, if we could only abide by our own souls, and meet in the abiding place. — Señora, I have not a very great respect for myself. Woman and I have failed with one another, and it is a bad failure to have in the middle of oneself.'

Kate looked at him in wonder, with a little fear. Why was he confessing to her? Was he going to love her? She almost suspended her breathing. He looked at her with a sort of sorrow on his brow, and in his dark eyes, anger, vexation, wisdom, and a dull pain.

'I am sorry,' he went on, 'that Carlota and I are as we are with one another. Who am I, even to talk about Quetzalcoatl, when my heart is hollow with anger against the woman I have married and the children she bore me? — We never met in our souls, she and I. At first I loved her, and she wanted me to ravish her. Then after a while a man becomes uneasy. He can't keep on wanting to ravish a woman, the same woman. He has revulsions. Then she loved me, and she wanted to ravish me. And I liked it for a time. But she had revulsions too. The eldest boy is really my boy, when I ravished her. And the youngest is her boy, when she ravished me. See how miserable it is! And now we can never meet; she turns to her crucified Jesus, and I to my uncrucified and uncrucifiable Quetzalcoatl, who at least cannot be ravished.'

'And I'm sure you won't make him a ravisher,' she said.

'Who knows? If I err, it will be on that side. But you know, Señora, Quetzalcoatl is to me only the symbol of the best a man may be, in the next days. The universe is a nest of dragons, with a perfectly unfathomable life-mystery at the centre of it. If I call the mystery the Morning Star, surely it doesn't matter! A man's blood can't beat in the abstract. And man is a creature who wins his own creation inch by inch from the nest of the cosmic dragons. Or else he loses it little by little, and goes to pieces. Now we are all losing it, in the ravishing and ravished disintegration. We must pull ourselves together, hard, both men and women, or we are all lost. — We must pull ourselves together, hard.'

'But are you a man who needs a woman in his life?' she said.

'I am a man who yearns for the sensual fulfilment of my soul, Señora,' he said. 'I am a man who has no belief in abnegation of the blood desires. I am a man who is always on the verge of taking wives and concubines to live with me, so deep is my desire for that fulfilment. Except that now I know that is useless — not momentarily useless, but in the long run — my ravishing a woman with hot desire. No matter how much she is in love with me and desires me to ravish

her. It is no good, and the very inside of me knows it is no good. Wine, woman, and song — all that — all that game is up. Our insides won't really have it any more. Yet it is hard to pull ourselves together.'

'So that you really want a woman to be with you?' said Kate.

'Ah, Señora! If I could trust myself; and trust her! I am no longer a young man, who can afford to make mistakes. I am forty-two years old, and I am making my last — and perhaps in truth, my first great effort as a man. I hope I may perish before I make a big mistake.'

'Why should you make a mistake? You needn't?'

'I? It is very easy for me to make a mistake. Very easy, on the one hand, for me to become arrogant and a ravisher. And very easy, on the other hand, for me to deny myself, and make a sort of sacrifice of my life. Which is being ravished. Easy to let myself, in a certain sense, be ravished. I did it to a small degree even yesterday, with the Bishop of Guadalajara. And it is bad. If I had to end my life in a mistake, Señora, I had rather end it in being a ravisher, than in being ravished. As a hot ravisher, I can still slash and cut at the disease of the other thing, the horrible pandering and the desire men have to be ravished, the hateful, ignoble desire they have.'

'But why don't you do as you say, stick by the innermost soul that is in you, and meet a woman there, meet her, as you say, where your two souls coincide in their deepest desire? Not always that horrible unbalance that you call ravishing.'

'Why don't I? But which woman can I meet in the body, without that slow degradation of ravishing, or being ravished, setting in? If I marry a Spanish woman or a dark Mexican, she will give herself up to me to be ravished. If I marry a woman of the Anglo-Saxon or any blonde northern stock, she will want to ravish me, with the will of all the ancient white demons. Those that want to be ravished are parasites on the soul, and one has revulsions. Those that want to ravish a man are vampires. And between the two, there is nothing.'

'Surely there are some really good women?'

'Well, show me them. They are all potential Carlotas or — or — yes, Caterinas. I am sure you ravished your Joachim till he died. No doubt he wanted it; even more than you wanted it. It is not just sex. It lies in the will. Victims and victimizers. The upper classes, craving to be victims to the lower classes; or else craving to make victims of the lower classes. The politicians, craving to make one people victims to another. The Church, with its evil will for turning the people into humble, writhing things that shall crave to be victimized, to be ravished — I tell you, the earth is a place of shame.'

'But if you want to be different,' said Kate, 'surely a few other people do — really.'

‘It may be,’ he said, becoming calm. ‘It may be. I wish I kept myself together better. I must keep myself together, keep myself within the middle place, where I am still. My Morning Star. Now I am ashamed of having talked like this to you, Señora Caterina.’

‘Why?’ she cried. And for the first time, the flush of hurt and humiliation came into her face.

He saw it at once, and put his hand on hers for a moment.

‘No,’ he said. ‘I am not ashamed. I am relieved.’

She flushed deeply at his touch, and was silent. He rose hastily, to leave, craving to be alone again with his own soul.

‘On Sunday,’ he said, ‘will you come into the plaza, in the morning, when the drum sounds? Will you come?’

‘What for?’ she said.

‘Well! Come, and you will see.’

He was gone in a flash.

There were many soldiers in the village. When she went to the post-office, she saw the men in their cotton uniforms lying about in the entrance to the military station. There must have been fifty or more, little men, not the tall soldiers in slouched hats. These were little, quick, compact men, like Cipriano, and they talked in a strange Indian language, very subdued. They were very rarely seen in the streets. They kept out of sight.

But at night everyone was requested to be indoors by ten o’clock, and through the darkness Kate heard the patrols of horse-soldiers riding round.

There was an air of excitement and mystery in the place. The parish priest, a rather overbearing, fat man of fifty or so, had preached a famous Saturday evening sermon against Ramón and Quetzalcoatl, forbidding the heathen name to be mentioned, threatening with all the penalties any parishioner who read the Hymns, or even listened.

So, of course, he was attacked when he left the church, and had to be rescued by soldiers who were in the doorway. They marched him safely home. But his criada, the old woman who served him, was told by more women than one that the next time the padre opened his mouth against Quetzalcoatl, he would have a few inches of machete in his fat guts.

So his reverence stayed at home, and a curate officiated.

Practically all the people who came over the lake in boats on Saturdays went to mass in Sayula church. The great doors stood open all the day. Men as they passed to and fro to the lake, took off their big hats, with a curious cringing gesture, as they went by the gateway of the church. All day long, scattered people were kneeling in the aisles or among the benches, the men kneeling erect,

their big hats down by their knees, their curious tall-shaped Indian heads with the thick black hair also erect; only the kneeling legs, close together, humble. The women hooded themselves in their dark rebozos and spread their elbows as they kneeled at a bench, in a slack sort of voluptuousness.

On Saturday night, a great ruddy flickering of many candle-points, away down the dark cavern of the church; and a clustering of dark men's heads, a shuffling of women, a come and go of men arriving from the lake, of men departing to the market. A hush, not exactly of worship, but of a certain voluptuous admiration of the loftiness and glitter, a sensual, almost victimized self-abandon to the god of death, the Crucified streaked with blood, or to the pretty white woman in a blue mantle, with her little doll's face under her crown, Mary, the doll of dolls, Niña of Niñas.

It was not worship. It was a sort of numbness and letting the soul sink uncontrolled. And it was a luxury, after all the week of unwashed dullness in their squalid villages of straw huts. But it irritated Kate.

The men got up and tiptoed away in their sandals, crossing themselves front and back, on the navel and on the back of the head, with holy water. And their black eyes shone with a loose, sensuous look. Instead of having gathered themselves together and become graver, stronger, more collected and deep in their own integrity, they emerged only the more loose and sloppy and uncontrolled.

Oh, if there is one thing men need to learn, but the Mexican Indians especially, it is to collect each man his own soul together deep inside him, and to abide by it. The Church, instead of helping men to this, pushes them more and more into a soft, emotional helplessness, with the unpleasant sensuous gratification of feeling themselves victims, victimized, victimized, but at the same time with the lurking sardonic consciousness that in the end a victim is stronger than the victimizer. In the end, the victims pull down their victimizer, like a pack of hyenas on an unwary lion. They know it. Cursed are the falsely meek, for they are inheriting the earth.

On Sunday morning there was early mass at sunrise, another mass at seven o'clock, another at nine, another at eleven. Then there was a little band of violins and 'cellos, playing old-fashioned dance music; there was, especially early in the morning, a solid mass of peons and women, kneeling on the floor; and a flapping of dusky candles, a smell of the exhaust air of candles, a heavy, rolling fume of incense, and the heavy choir of men's voices, solid, powerful, impressive, from the gallery.

And the people went away in sensuous looseness, which soon turned, in the market, to hate, the old, unfathomable hate which lies at the bottom of the Indian

heart, and which always rises black and turbid when they have swayed awhile in sensuous gratification.

The church inside was a dead interior, like all Mexican churches, even the gorgeous Puebla cathedral. The interior of almost any Mexican church gives the impression of cynical barrenness, cynical meaninglessness, an empty, cynical, mocking shell. The Italian churches are built much in the same style, and yet in them lingers a shadow and stillness of old, mysterious holiness. The hush.

But not in Mexico. The churches outside are impressive. Inside, and it is curious to define it, they are blatant; void of sound and yet with no hush, simple, and yet completely vulgar, barren, sterile. More barren than a bank or a schoolroom or an empty concert-hall, less mysterious than any of these. You get a sense of plaster, of mortar, of whitewash, of smeared blue-wash or grey-wash; and of gilt laid on and ready to peel off. Even in the most gorgeous churches, the gilt is hatefully gilt, never golden. Nothing is soft nor mellow.

So the interior of Sayula church; and Kate had often been in. The white exterior was charming, and so valuable in the landscape, with the twin white pagoda-towers peering out of the green willow-trees. But inside, it seemed nothing but whitewash, stencilled over with grey scroll-work decorations. The windows were high, and many, letting in the light as into a schoolroom. Jesus, streaked with blood, was in one of the transepts, and the Virgin, a doll in faded satin, stood startled inside a glass case. There were rag flowers and paper flowers, coarse lace and silver that looked like tin.

Nevertheless, it was quite clean, and very much frequented.

The Month of Mary had gone by, the blue and white paper ribbons were all taken down, the palm-trees in pots were all removed from the aisle, the little girls in white dresses and little crowns of flowers no longer came with posies in their hand, at evening. Curious, the old gentle ceremonials of Europe, how trashy they seem in Mexico, just a cheap sort of charade.

The day of Corpus Christi came, with high mass and the church full to the doors with kneeling peons, from dawn till noon. Then a feeble little procession of children within the church, because the law forbids religious processions outside. But all, somehow, for nothing. Just so that the people could call it a fiesta, and so have an excuse to be more slack, more sloshy and uncontrolled than ever. The one Mexican desire; to let themselves go in sloppy inertia.

And this was the all-in-all of the religion. Instead of doing as it should, collecting the soul into its own strength and integrity, the religious day left it all the more decomposed and degenerate.

However, the weeks passed, the crowd in the church seemed the same as ever. But the crowd in the church one hour was the crowd of Quetzalcoatl the next

hour. Just a sensation.

Till the more socialistic Readers mingled a little anti-clerical bitterness in their reading. And all the peons began to say: was El Señor a gringo, and the Santísima, was she nothing but a gringuita?

This provoked retaliation on the part of the priests, first mere admonitions, then at last the loud denunciations and threat of that sermon. Which meant war.

Everybody waited for Saturday. Saturday came, and the church remained shut. Saturday night, the church was dark and closed. Sunday, the church was silent and the doors blank fastened.

Something like consternation spread through the market host. They had nowhere to go! — But among the consternation was a piqued curiosity. Perhaps something exciting was going to happen.

Things had happened before. In the revolutions, many of the churches in Mexico have been used for stables and for barracks. And churches are turned into schools, and concert halls, and cinematograph theatres. The convents and the monasteries are most of them barracks for the rag-tag-and-bobtail soldiers. The world changes, is bound to change.

The second Saturday of the closed church was, as it happened, a big market. Much fruit and stuff had come up the lake, from the south from far distances, even from Colima. There were men with lacquer wooden bowls, and women with glazed pottery. And as usual, men crouching in guard over twenty centavos worth of nauseous tropical plums, or chiles, or mangoes, in tiny pyramids along the roadway.

A crowded market, with the much and the little of the Indians. And the church doors shut and locked, the church bells silent, even the clock stopped. True, the clock was always stopping. But not with such a final arrest.

No mass, no confession, no little orgy of incense and slack emotion! The low rumble of murmuring tones, the quick, apprehensive glances around. Vendors by the causeway squatted tight, as if to make themselves dense and small, squatting down on their haunches with their knees up to their shoulders, like the Aztec idols. And soldiers in twos and threes sprinkled everywhere. And Señoras and Señoritas, in their black gauze scarves or mantillas, tripping to the church for mass and shrilling round the gateway of the church, all a bubble and a froth of chatter; though they had known quite well the church was shut.

But it was Sunday morning, and something was due to happen.

At about half-past ten, a boat appeared, and men in snow-white clothes got out, one carrying a drum. They marched quickly through the people, under the old trees on the sand, across to the church. They passed through the broken iron gates into the stone courtyard in front of the church.

At the church doors, which were still shut, they took off their blouses, and stood in a ring, with dark naked shoulders and the blue-and-black sashes of Quetzalcoatl round their waists.

The drum began to beat, with a powerful, pounding note, as the men stood bare-headed and bare-breasted in a circle outside the church doors; a strange ring of lustrous, bluey-black heads and dark shoulders, above the snowy-white pantaloons. Monotonously the drum beat, on and on. Then the little clay flute with the husky sound wheezed a clear melody.

The whole market pressed densely towards the gateways of the church. But there, soldiers stood guard. And on the inside of the stone yard in front of the church, soldiers quietly guarded the low walls, letting nobody mount. So that outside, under the old willow-and pepper-trees, in the hot morning sun, the dense crowd stood gazing at the church doors. They were mostly men in big hats; but some townsmen were there, and some women, and Kate with a parasol lined with dark blue. A close, silent, tense throng under the spangled shade, pressing round the trunks of the palm-trees, climbing on the roots of the pepper-trees. And behind were the camiones and the motorcars drawn up.

The drum shuddered and went still, and the earthen flute was silent. The lake could be heard lapping, and a clink of glasses and a sound of chauffeurs' voices at the little cantina-booth. For the rest, the silent breathing of the crowd. — Soldiers were quickly distributing a few leaflets among the crowd. A strong, far-carrying male voice began to sing to the softened thud of the drum.

JESUS' FAREWELL

Farewell, Farewell, Despedida!
The last of my days is gone.
To-morrow Jesus and Holy Mary
Will be gone.
It is a long, long way
From Mexico to the Pool of Heaven.
Look back the last time, Mary Mother,
Let us call the eleven.
James, and John, and Mark,
Felipe and San Cristobal,
All my saints, and Anna, Teresa,
Guadalupe whose face is oval.
Come then, now, it is finished for all of us.
Let us all be gone.
Follow me now up the ladders of sparks.

Every one.
Joaquin, Francis, and Anthony
And many-named Maria,
Purísima, Refugio, and Soledad
Follow here.
Ho! all my saints and my Virgins
Troop out of your shrines,
After your master, the Crucified;
Bring all your signs.
Run up the flames, and with feet on the sparks
Troop into the sky.
Once more following the Master,
Back again now, on high.
Farewell, let all be forgotten
In Mexico.
To the pool of peace and forgetting in heaven
We go.

While this was singing, another boat had arrived, and soldiers made way through the crowd for Ramón, in his white serape with the blue edges and scarlet fringe, and a young priest of the church in a black cassock, and six men in dark serapes with the blue borders of Quetzalcoatl. This strange procession marched through the crowd and through the gateways of the yard.

As they approached, the ring of men round the drum opened, and spread into a crescent. Ramón stood tall behind the drum, the six men in dark serapes divided and went to the wings of the crescent, the young, slim priest in a black cassock stood alone, in front of the crescent, facing the crowd.

He lifted his hand; Ramón took off his hat; all the men in the crowd took off their hats.

The priest turned, met Ramón at the centre of the crescent, and, across the drum, handed him the key of the church. Then the priest waited.

Ramón unlocked the church doors and flung them open. The men in front of the crowd kneeled down suddenly, seeing the church dark like a cavern, but a trembling blaze of many candles, away, seemingly far down the mysterious darkness, shuddering with dark, rippling flame, like the Presence of the burning bush.

The crowd swayed and rustled, and subsided, kneeling. Only here and there a labourer, a chauffeur or a railway man stood erect.

The priest raised his hand a little higher, returning towards the people.

‘My children,’ he said; and as he spoke the lake seemed to rustle; ‘God the Almighty has called home His Son, and the Holy Mother of the Son. Their days are over in Mexico. They go back to the Father.

Jesus, the Son of God, bids you farewell.
Mary, the Mother of God, bids you farewell.
For the last time they bless you, as they leave you.
Answer Adiós!
Say Adiós! my children.’

The men in the circle said a deep Adiós! And from the soldiers, and from the kneeling crowd, a ragged, muttered, strange repeating of Adiós! again and again, like a sort of storm.

Suddenly, in a blast, down the darkness of the church into which the kneeling people were staring, the burning bush of candles was gone, there was only darkness. Across the sunshine, lit here and there by a frail light of a taper, was a cave of darkness.

Men in the crowd exclaimed and groaned.

Then the drum softly touched, and two men in the crescent began to sing, in magnificent, terrible voices, the Farewell Hymn again. They were men whom Ramón, or his followers, had found in low drinking-dens in Mexico City, men with trained and amazing voices, the powerful Mexican tenor that seemed to tear the earth open. Men whom the ‘times’ have reduced to singing in low city dives. And now they sang with all the terrible desperation that was in them, the hopeless, demonish recklessness.

When they finished, the priest again lifted his hand, and gave the benediction; adding in a quiet voice:

‘And now, with all the saints, let Me go, saith Jesus. For I go back to my Father which is in heaven, and I lead my Mother in my right hand, home to peace.’

He turned and went into the church. Ramón followed. Then slowly, all the men of the crescent. Overhead the church bell rang a little while, on the deathly silence. It ceased.

And in a moment, from the depths of the church sounded a drum, with a remote, fearsome thud, and a slow monotony.

The priest, in his white vestments with rich lace, appeared in the doorway of the church, bearing a tall crucifix. He hesitated, then came into the sun. The kneeling people clasped their hands.

Candles in the dark church were clustering towards the door, lonely flames.

Don Ramón came out of the dark, naked to the waist, his serape over one shoulder, bearing the front pole of the great bier whereon lies, within a glass case, the lifelike, terrible dead Christ of Holy Week. A tall, dark man, naked to the waist, held the other end of the pole on his shoulder. The crowd moaned and crossed themselves. The lifelike Dead Christ seemed really dead, as he passed the gate. As He entered the crowd, kneeling men and women lifted sightless faces and flung their arms wide apart, and so remained, arms rigid and outflung, in an unspeakable ecstasy of fear, supplication, acknowledgement of death.

After the bier of the Dead Christ, a slow procession of men naked to the waist, carrying litter after litter. First the terrible scourged Christ, with naked body striped like a tiger with blood. Then the image of the Saviour of the Sacred Heart, the well-known figure from the side altar, with long hair and outstretched hands. Then the image of Jesus of Nazareth, with a crown of thorns.

Then the Virgin with the blue mantle and lace, and the golden crown. The women began to moan as she emerged rather trashily into the blazing sunlight. Behind her, in the church, the candles were one by one going out.

Then came brown Saint Anthony of Padua, with a child in his arms. Then Saint Francis, looking strangely at a cross in his hand. Then Saint Anna. And last, Saint Joaquin. And as he emerged, the last candles in the dark church went out, there were only open doors upon a darkness.

The images on the shoulders of the brown-skinned men rode rather childishly out through the blazing sun, into the shadow of trees. The drum followed last, slowly thudding. On the glass case of the big Dead Christ the sun flashed with startling flashes, as the powerful men carrying it turned towards the water. The crowd murmured and swayed on its knees. Women cried: Purísima! Purísima! Don't leave us! and some men ejaculated in strangled anguish, over and over again: Señor! Señor! Señor!

But the strange procession made its way slowly under the trees, to the coarse sands, and descended again into the great light towards the lake. There was a little breeze under a blaze of sun. Folded serapes on naked, soft shoulders swung unevenly, the images rocked and tottered a little. But onwards to the edge of the water went the tall crucifix, then the flashing glass box. And after, came Jesus in a red silk robe, fluttering, then a wooden Jesus all paint and streaks, then Jesus in white with a purple mantle that blew like a kerchief, Mary in lace that fluttered upon stiff white and blue satin. But the Saints were only painted; painted wood.

The slim, lace-smocked priest staggered down the sand under the heavy crucifix, which had a white Christ Crucified stretched aloft, facing the lake. By the little wall was a large black canoa, sailing boat, with a broad plank gangway up to her stern. Two bare-legged, white-clad men walked by the slim priest,

whose white sleeves blew like flags as he slowly climbed the gangway to the ship. Men helped him on board, and he walked away to the prow, where at length he stood the big crucifix, with the Christ still facing outwards.

The ship was open, without deck or hatches, but with fixed tables for the images. Slowly Ramón ascended and descended into the boat, the great glass case was laid down on its rest, the two men could wipe their wet brows and their hot, black hair. Ramón put on his blanket and his hat, against the sun. The boat heaved very slightly. The wind was from the west. The lake was pale and unreal, sun-blinded.

One after another the images rose over the stern of the boat, against the sky, then descended into the vessel, to be set down on their rests, where they rose above the black sides of the canoa, in view of the throng on the shore.

It was a strange and tawdry collection of images. And yet, each image had a certain pathos of its own, and a certain touch of horror, as they were grouped together for their last ride, upon the trestle-supports, within the vessels. By each image stood the bearers, in hats and serapes, keeping a steady hand on the poles.

There was a little line of soldiers on the shore, and three motor-boats with soldiers waited by the big canoa. The shore was covered with a mass of people. Many row-boats came rowing inquisitively round, like fishes. But none came too near.

Bare-legged sailors began to pole the ship from the shore. They leaned heavily on the poles, and walked along the rims of the vessel. Slowly she began to move upon the waters, in the shallows. Slowly she was leaving the shore, and the throng.

Two other sailors swiftly began to hoist the huge, square white sail. Quickly, yet heavily it rose in the air, and took the wind. It had the great sign of Quetzalcoatl, the circling blue snake and the blue eagle upon a yellow field, at the centre, like a great eye.

The wind came from the west, but the boat was steering south-east, for the little Island of the Scorpions, which rose like a small dim hummock from the haze of the lake. So the sail reached out, and the great eye seemed to be glancing back, at the village with the green willows and the empty white church, the throng on the shore.

Motor-boats circled the huge, slow canoe, small boats like insects followed and ranged round at a distance, never coming too close. The running water clucked and spoke, the men by the images steadied the poles with one hand, their hats with the other, the great eye on the sail ever looked back at the land, the sweep of the white canvas sweeping low above the glass case of death, the Christ caked with gore, the images in their fluttering mantles.

On the shore, the people wandered away, or sat on the sands waiting and watching in a sort of dumb patience that was half indifference. The canoe grew smaller, more inconspicuous, lapsing into the light, the little boats circled around it like mere dots. The lake tired the eyes with its light.

Away under the trees, in a half silence, a half vacancy, a woman bought a dark water-melon, smashed it open on a stone, and gave the big pinky fragments to her children. In silence, men sprinkled salt on the thick slice of cucumber sold by the woman under the tree. In silence they wandered into the church, past the soldiers on guard at the door.

The church was absolutely dark, save for the light that entered the doorway, and absolutely bare; walls, floor, altar, transepts, all stark bare and empty. The people wandered away again, in silence.

It was noon, and a hot day. The canoa slowly ranged to the small hummock of the island amid the waters, where lived one family of Indians — fishers, with a few goats and one dry little place where they grew a few beans and heads of maize. For the rest, the island was all dry rock and thorny bushes, and scorpions.

The vessel was poled round to the one rocky bay. Slowly she drew near the island. The motor-boats and the little boats hurried ahead. Already brown, naked men were bathing among the rocks.

The great sail sank, the canoa edged up to the rocky shore, men sprang from her into the water, the images were lowered and slowly carried on to the rocks. There they waited for the bearers.

Slowly the procession went again up the bank of the dishevelled island, past the couple of huts, where a red cock was crowing among the litter, and over to rocks, beyond the bushes, on the far side.

The side facing Sayula was all rock, naked and painful to tread on. In a rocky hollow at the water's edge, tall stones had been put up on end, with iron bars across the top, like a grill. Underneath, a pile of faggots ready; and at the side, a pile of faggots.

The images, the glass box of the great Dead Christ, were laid on the iron bars of the grill, in a pathetic cluster all together. The crucifix was leaned against them. It was noon, the heat and the light were fierce and erect. But already down the lake clouds were pushing up fantastically.

Beyond the water, beyond the glare, the village looked like a mirage, with its trees and villages and white church towers.

Men who had come in boats crowded on the rocks of the little amphitheatre. In silence, Ramón kindled shreds of cane and ocote, with a burning-glass. Little hasty flames like young snakes arose in the solid sunlight, with vapour of smoke. He set fire to the carefully-arranged pyramid of faggots beneath the grill-table of

the images.

There was a crackling, and a puffing of whitish smoke, the sweet scent of ocote, and orange-red tongues of half-substantial flame were leaping up in the hot white air. Hot breaths blew suddenly, sudden flames gushed up, and the ocote, full of sweet resin, began to roar. The glass of the great box emitted strange, painful yelps as it splintered and fell tinkling. Between the iron bars, brownish flames pushed up among the images, which at once went black. The little vestments of silk and satin withered in a moment to blackness, the caked wounds of paint bubbled black.

The young priest took off his linen vestment, his stole, and his chasuble, and with flushed face flung them in the flame. Then he stripped off his black cassock, and emerged in the white cotton of the men of Quetzalcoatl, his white drawers rolled up to the knee. He threw his cassock in the fire. Someone handed him a big hat, and a white serape with blue ends.

There was a smell of burning paint, and wool, and ocote. The fire rushed in a dusky mass upon the blackened, flickering images, till nothing was to be seen but a confused bush of smoke and brown-red flames, puthering, reeking, roaring. The flaming crucifix slipped aside, and fell. A man seized it and pushed it into the fire, under the images. Men in a sort of ecstasy threw on more of the heavy, resinous wood, that almost exploded into flame. Rocks cracked and exploded like guns. Everybody drew back from that roaring tree of flame, which rose ever higher and higher, its dark smoke and its sparks unfolding into heaven.

One of the supporting stones burst with a bang, bars of iron and blazing stumps of images tumbled in a confused roar. The glass case had disappeared, but ribbons of iron waved, then curled over red, into the torrent of the sudden fire. Strange rods of iron appeared out of nowhere, protruding from solid red coals.

And soon, all that was left was a fierce glow of red coals of wood, with a medley of half-fused iron.

Ramón stood aside and watched in silence, his dark brow quite expressionless.

Then, when only the last bluish flames flickered out of a tumble of red fire, from the eminence above rockets began to shoot into the air with a swish, exploding high in the sightless hot blue, with a glimmer of bluish showers, and of gold.

The people from the shore had seen the tree of smoke with its trunk of flame. Now they heard the heavy firing of the rockets, they looked again, exclaiming, half in dismay, half in the joyful lust of destruction:

‘Señor! Señor! La Purísima! La Santísima!’

The flame and the smoke and the rockets melted as if by miracle, into

nothingness, leaving the hot air unblemished. The coals of fire were shovelled and dropped down a steep hole.

As the canoa sailed back, the side of the lake, through filmy air, looked brownish and changeless. A cloud was rising in the south-west, from behind the dry, silent mountains, like a vast white tail, like the vast white fleecy tail of some squirrel, that had just dived out of sight behind the mountains. This wild white tail fleeced up and up, to the zenith, straight at the sun. And as the canoa spread her sail to tack back, already a delicate film of shadow was over the chalk-white lake.

Only on the low end of the isle of Scorpions, hot air still quivered.

Ramón returned in one of the motor-boats. Slowly the sky was clouding for the thunder and the rain. The canoa, unable to make her way across, was sailing for Tuliapan. The little boats hurried in silence.

They landed before the wind rose. Ramón went and locked the doors of the church.

The crowd scattered in the wind, rebozos waving wildly, leaves torn, dust racing. Sayula was empty of God, and, at heart, they were glad.

CHAPTER XIX

The Attack on Jamiltepec

Suddenly, nearly all the soldiers disappeared from the village, there was a 'rebellion' in Colima. A train had been held up, people killed. And somebody, Generals Fulano and Tulano, had 'pronounced' against the government.

Stir in the air, everybody enjoying those periodical shivers of fear! But for these shivers, everything much the same as usual. The church remained shut up, and dumb. The clock didn't go. Time suddenly fell off, the days walked naked and timeless, in the old, uncounted manner of the past. The strange, old, uncounted, unregistered, unreckoning days of the ancient heathen world.

Kate felt a bit like a mermaid trying to swim in a wrong element. She was swept away in some silent tide, to the old, antediluvian silence, where things moved without contact. She moved and existed without contact. Even the striking of the hours had ceased. As a drowning person sees nothing but the waters, so Kate saw nothing but the face of the timeless waters.

So, of course, she clutched at her straw. She couldn't bear it. She ordered an old, rickety Ford car, to take her bumping out to Jamiltepec, over the ruinous roads in the afternoon.

The country had gone strange and void, as it does when these 'rebellions' start. As if the life-spirit were sucked away, and only some empty, anti-life void remained in the wicked hollow countryside. Though it was not far to Jamiltepec, once outside the village, the chauffeur and his little attendant lad began to get frightened, and to go frog-like with fear.

There is something truly mysterious about the Mexican quality of fear. As if man and woman collapsed and lay wriggling on the ground like broken reptiles, unable to rise. Kate used all her will, against this cringing nonsense.

They arrived without ado at Jamiltepec. The place seemed quiet, but normal. An oxen wagon stood empty in the courtyard. There were no soldiers on guard. They had all been withdrawn, against the rebellion. But several peons were moving round, in a desultory fashion. The day was a fiesta, when not much work was doing. In the houses of the peons, the women were patting tortillas, and preparing hot chile sauce, grinding away on the metates. A fiesta! Only the windmill that pumped up water from the lake was spinning quickly, with a little noise.

Kate drove into the yard in silence, and two mozos with guns and belts of cartridges came to talk in low tones to the chauffeur.

‘Is Doña Carlota here?’ asked Kate.

‘No, Señora. The patrona is not here.’

‘Don Ramón?’

‘Sí, Señora! Está.’

Even as she hesitated, rather nervous, Ramón came out of the inner doorway of the courtyard, in his dazzling white clothes.

‘I came to see you,’ said Kate. ‘I don’t know if you’d rather I hadn’t. But I can go back in the motor-car.’

‘No,’ he said. ‘I am glad. I was feeling deserted, I don’t know why. Let us go upstairs.’

‘Patrón!’ said the chauffeur, in a low voice. ‘Must I stay?’

Ramón said a few words to him. The chauffeur was uneasy, and didn’t want to stay. He said he had to be back in Sayula at such and such a time. Excuses, anyhow. But it was evident he wanted to get away.

‘Then best let him go,’ said Ramón to Kate. ‘You do not mind going home in the boat?’

‘I don’t want to give you trouble.’

‘It is least trouble to let this fellow go, and you can leave by boat just whenever you wish to. So we shall all be more free.’

Kate paid the chauffeur, and the Ford started rattling. After rattling a while, it moved in a curve round the courtyard, and lurched through the zaguán, disappearing as fast as possible.

Ramón spoke to his two mozos with the guns. They went to the outer doorway, obediently.

‘Why do you have to have armed men?’ she said.

‘Oh, they’re afraid of bandits,’ he said. ‘Whenever there’s a rebellion anywhere, everybody is afraid of bandits. So of course that calls bandits into life.’

‘But where do they come from?’ said Kate, as they passed into the inner doorways.

‘From the villages,’ he said, closing the heavy door of that entrance behind him, and putting the heavy iron bars across, from wall to wall.

The inner archway was now a little prison, for the strong iron gates at the lake end of the passage were shut fast. She looked through, at the little round pond. It had some blue water-lilies on it. Beyond, the pallid lake seemed almost like a ghost, in the glare of the sun.

A servant was sent to the kitchen quarters, Ramón and Kate climbed the stone

stairs to the upper terrace. How lonely, stonily lonesome and forlorn the hacienda could feel! The very stone walls could give off emptiness, loneliness, negation.

‘But which villages do the bandits come from?’ she insisted.

‘Any of them. Mostly, they say, from San Pablo or from Ahuajijic.’

‘Quite near!’ she cried.

‘Or from Sayula,’ he added. ‘Any of the ordinary men in big hats you see around the plaza may possibly be bandits, when banditry pays, as a profession, and isn’t punished with any particular severity.’

‘It is hard to believe!’ she said.

‘It is so obvious!’ he said, dropping into one of the rocking-chairs opposite her, and smiling across the onyx table.

‘I suppose it is!’ she said.

He clapped his hands, and his mozo Martin came up. Ramón ordered something, in a low, subdued tone. The man replied in an even lower, more subdued tone. Then the master and man nodded at one another, and the man departed, his huaraches swishing a little on the terrace.

Ramón had fallen into the low, crushed sort of voice so common in the country, as if everyone were afraid to speak aloud, so they murmured guardedly. This was unusual, and Kate noticed it in him with displeasure. She sat looking past the thick mango-trees, whose fruit was changing colour like something gradually growing hot, to the ruffled, pale-brown lake. The mountains of the opposite shore were very dark. Above them lay a heavy, but distant black cloud, out of which lightning flapped suddenly and uneasily.

‘Where is Don Cipriano?’ she asked.

‘Don Cipriano is very much General Viedma at the moment,’ he replied. ‘Chasing rebels in the State of Colima.’

‘Will they be very hard to chase?’

‘Probably not. Anyhow Cipriano will enjoy chasing them. He is Zapoteco, and most of his men are Zapotecans, from the hills. They love chasing men who aren’t.’

‘I wondered why he wasn’t there on Sunday when you carried away the images,’ she said. ‘I think it was an awfully brave thing to do.’

‘Do you?’ he laughed. ‘It wasn’t. It’s never half so brave to carry something off, and destroy it, as to set a new pulse beating.’

‘But you have to destroy those old things, first.’

‘Those frowsty images — why, yes. But it’s no good until you’ve got something else moving, from the inside.’

‘And have you?’

‘I think I have. Don’t you?’

‘Yes,’ she said, a little doubtful.

‘I think I have,’ he said. ‘I feel there’s a new thing moving inside me.’ He was laughing at her, for her hesitation. ‘Why don’t you come and join us?’ he added.

‘How?’ she said. ‘By being married off to Don Cipriano?’

‘Not necessarily. Not necessarily. Not necessarily by being married to anybody.’

‘What are you going to do next?’ she said.

‘I? I am going to re-open the church, for Quetzalcoatl to come in. But I don’t like lonely gods. There should be several of them, I think, for them to be happy together.’

‘Does one need gods?’ she said.

‘Why yes. One needs manifestations, it seems to me.’

Kate sat in unwilling silence.

‘One needs goddesses too. That is also a dilemma,’ he added, with a laugh.

‘How I would hate,’ said Kate, ‘to have to be a goddess for people.’

‘For the monkeys?’ he said, smiling.

‘Yes! Of course.’

At that moment, he sat erect, listening. There had been a shot, which Kate had heard, but which she had hardly noticed; to her ears, it might have been a motor-car back-firing, or even a motor-boat.

Suddenly, a sharp little volley of shots.

Ramón rose swiftly, swift as a great cat, and slammed to the iron door at the top of the stairway, shooting the bars.

‘Won’t you go into that room?’ he said to her, pointing to a dark doorway. ‘You will be all right there. Just stay a few minutes till I come back.’

As he spoke, there came a shriek from the courtyard at the back, and a man’s death-voice yelled Patrón!

Ramón’s eyes dilated with terrible anger, the anger of death. His face went pale and strange, as he looked at her without seeing her, the black flame filling his eyes. He had drawn a long-barrelled steel revolver from his hip.

Still without seeing her, he strode rapidly, soft and catlike, along the terrace, and leaped up the end staircase on to the roof. The soft, eternal passion of anger in his limbs.

Kate stood in the doorway of the room, transfixed. The light of day seemed to have darkened before her face.

‘Holá! You there!’ she heard his voice from the roof, in such anger it was almost a laugh, from far away.

For answer, a confused noise from the courtyard, and several shots. The slow,

steady answer of shots!

She started as a rushing hiss broke on the air. In terror she waited. Then she saw it was a rocket bursting with a sound like a gun, high over the lake, and emitting a shower of red balls of light. A signal from Ramón!

Unable to go into the dark room, Kate waited as if smitten to death. Then something stirred deep in her, she flew along the terrace and up the steps to the roof. She realized that she didn't mind dying so long as she died with that man. Not alone.

The roof was glaring with sunshine. It was flat, but its different levels were uneven. She ran straight out into the light, towards the parapet wall, and had nearly come in sight of the gateway of the courtyard below, when something gave a slight smack, and bits of plaster flew in her face and her hair. She turned and fled back like a bee to the stairway.

The stairs came up in a corner, where there was a little sort of stone turret, square, with stone seats. She sank on one of these seats, looking down in terror at the turn of the stairs. It was a narrow little stone stairway, between the solid stone walls.

She was almost paralysed with shock and with fear. Yet something within her was calm. Leaning and looking out across calm sunshine of the level roof, she could not believe in death.

She saw the white figure and the dark head of Ramón within one of the small square turrets across the roof. The little tower was open, and hardly higher than his head. He was standing in a corner, looking sideways down a loop-hole, perfectly motionless. Snap! went his revolver, deliberately. There was a muffled cry below, and a sudden volley of shots.

Ramón stood away from the loop-hole and took off his white blouse, so that it should not betray him. Above his sash was a belt of cartridges. In the shadow of the turret, his body looked curiously dark, rising from the white of his trousers. Again he took his stand quietly at the side of the long, narrow, slanting aperture. He lifted his revolver carefully, and the shots, one, two, three, slow and deliberate, startled her nerves. And again there was a volley of shots from below, and bits of stone and plaster smoking against the sky. Then again, silence, long silence. Kate pressed her hands against her body, as she sat.

The clouds had shifted, the sun shone yellowish. In the heavier light, the mountains beyond the parapet showed a fleece of young green, smoky and beautiful.

All was silent. Ramón in the shadow did not move, pressing himself against the wall, and looking down. He commanded, she knew, the big inner doors.

Suddenly, however, he shifted. With his revolver in his hand he stooped and

ran, like some terrible cat, the sun gleaming on his naked back as he crouched under the shelter of the thick parapet wall, running along the roof to the corresponding front turret.

This turret was roofless, and it was nearer to Kate, as she sat spellbound, in a sort of eternity, on the stone seat at the head of the stairs, watching Ramón. He pressed himself against the wall, and lifted his revolver to the slit. And again, one, two, three, four, five, the shots exploded deliberately. Some voice below yelled Ay-ee! Ay-ee! Ay-ee! in yelps of animal pain. A voice was heard shouting command. Ramón kneeled on one knee, re-loading his revolver. Then he struck a match, and again Kate almost started out of her skin, as a rocket rushed ferociously up into the sky, exploded like a gun, and let fall the balls of red flame that lingered as if loth to die away, in the high, remote air.

She sighed, wondering what it all was. It was death, she knew. But so strange, so vacant. Just these noises of shots! And she could see nothing outside. She wanted to see what was in the courtyard.

Ramón was at his post, pressing himself close to the wall, looking down, with bent head, motionless. There were shots, and a spatter of lead from below. But he did not move. She could not see his face, only part of his back; the proud, heavy, creamy-brown shoulders, the black head bent a little forward, in concentration, the cartridge-belt dropping above his loins, over the white, floppy linen of the trousers. Still and soft in watchful concentration, almost like silence itself. Then with soft, diabolic swiftness in his movements, he changed his position, and took aim.

He was utterly unaware of her; even of her existence. Which was as it should be, no doubt. She sat motionless, waiting. Waiting, waiting, waiting, in that yellowish sunlight of eternity, with a certain changeless suspense of stillness inside her. Someone would come from the village. There would be an end. There would be an end.

At the same time, she started every time he fired, and looked at him. And she heard his voice saying: 'One needs manifestations, it seems to me.' Ah, how she hated the noise of shots.

Suddenly she gave a piercing shriek, and in one leap was out of her retreat. She had seen a black head turning the stairs.

Before she knew it, Ramón jumped past her like a great cat, and two men clashed in mid-air, as the unseen fellow leaped up from the stairs. Two men in a crash went down on the floor, a revolver went off, terrible limbs were writhing.

Ramón's revolver was on the floor. But again there was a shot from the tangled men, and a redness of blood suddenly appearing out of nowhere, on the white cotton clothing, as the two men twisted and fought on the floor.

They were both big men. Struggling on the ground, they looked huge. Ramón had the bandit's revolver-hand by the wrist. The bandit, with a ghastly black face with rolling eyes and sparse moustache, had got Ramón's naked arm in his white teeth, and was hanging on, showing his red gums, while with his free hand he was feeling for his knife.

Kate could not believe that the black, ghastly face with the sightless eyes and biting mouth was conscious. Ramón had him clasped round the body. The bandit's revolver fell, and the fellow's loose black hand scrabbled on the concrete, feeling for it. Blood was flowing over his teeth. Yet some blind super-consciousness seemed to possess him, as if he were a devil, not a man.

His hand nearly touched Ramón's revolver. In horror Kate ran and snatched the weapon from the warm concrete, running away as the bandit gave a heave, a great sudden heave of his body, under the body of Ramón. Kate raised the revolver. She hated that horrible devil under Ramón as she had never hated in her life. Yet she dared not fire.

Ramón shouted something, glancing at her. She could not understand. But she ran round, to be able to shoot the man under Ramón. Even as she ran, the bandit twisted with a great lunge of his body, heaved Ramón up, and with his short free hand got Ramón's own knife from the belt at the groin, and stabbed.

Kate gave a cry! Oh, how she wanted to shoot! She saw the knife strike sideways, slanting in a short jab into Ramón's back. At the same moment there was a stumble on the stairs, and another black-headed man was leaping on to the roof from the turret.

She stiffened her wrist and fired without looking, in a sudden second of pure control. The black head came crashing at her. She recoiled in horror, lifted the revolver and fired again, and missed. But even as it passed her, she saw red blood among the black hairs of that head. It crashed down, the buttocks of the body heaving up, the whole thing twitching and jerking along, the face seeming to grin in a mortal grin.

Glancing from horror to horror, she saw Ramón, his face still as death, blood running down his arm and his back, holding down the head of the bandit by the hair and stabbing him with short stabs in the throat, one, two, while blood shot out like a red projectile; there was a strange sound like a soda-syphon, a ghastly bubbling, one final terrible convulsion from the loins of the stricken man, throwing Ramón off, and Ramón lay twisted, still clutching the man's hair in one hand, the bloody knife in the other, and gazing into the livid, distorted face, in which ferocity seemed to have gone frozen, with a steady, intent, inhuman gaze.

Then, without letting go his victim's hair, he looked up, cautiously. To see

Kate's man, with black hair wet with blood, and blood running down into his glazed, awful eyes, slowly rising to his knees. It was the strangest face in the world; the high, domed head with blood-soddened hair, blood running in several streams down the narrow, corrugated brow and along the black eyebrows above the glazed, black, numb eyes, in which the last glazing was of ferocity, stranger even than wonder, the glazed and absolute ferocity which the man's last consciousness showed.

It was a long, thin, handsome face, save for those eyes of glazed ferocity, and for the longish white teeth under the sparse moustache.

The man was reduced to his last, blank term of being; a glazed and ghastly ferocity.

Ramón dropped the hair of his victim, whose head dropped sideways with a gaping red throat, and rose to a crouching position. The second bandit was on his knees, but his hand already clasped his knife. Ramón crouched. They were both perfectly still. But Ramón had got his balance, crouching between his feet.

The bandit's black, glazed eyes of blank ferocity took a glint of cunning. He was stretching. He was going to leap to his feet for his stroke.

And even as he leaped, Ramón shot the knife, that was all bright red as a cardinal bird. It flew red like a bird, and the drops of Ramón's handful of blood flew with it, splashing even Kate, who kept her revolver ready, watching near the stairway.

The bandit dropped on his knees again, and remained for a moment kneeling as if in prayer, the red pommel of the knife sticking out of his abdomen, from his white trousers. Then he slowly bowed over, doubled up, and went on his face again, once more with his buttocks in the air.

Ramón still crouched at attention, almost supernatural, his dark eyes glittering with watchfulness, in pure, savage attentiveness. Then he rose, very smooth and quiet, crossed the blood-stained concrete to the fallen man, picked up the clean, fallen knife that belonged to the fellow, lifted the red-dripping chin, and with one stroke drove the knife into the man's throat. The man subsided with the blow, not even twitching.

Then again, Ramón turned to look at the first man. He gazed a moment attentively. But that horrible black face was dead.

And then Ramón glanced at Kate, as she stood near the stairs with the revolver. His brow was like a boy's, very pure and primitive, and the eyes underneath had a certain primitive gleaming look of virginity. As men must have been, in the first awful days, with that strange beauty that goes with pristine rudimentariness.

For the most part, he did not recognize her. But there was one remote glint of

recognition.

‘Are they both dead?’ she asked, awestruck.

‘Creo que sí!’ he replied in Spanish.

He turned to look once more, and to pick up the pistol that lay on the concrete. As he did so, he noticed that his right hand was bright red, with the blood that flowed still down his arm. He wiped it on the jacket of the dead man. But his trousers on his loins were also sodden with blood, they stuck red to his hips. He did not notice.

He was like a pristine being, remote in consciousness, and with far, remote sex.

Curious rattling, bubbling noises still came from the second man, just physical sounds. The first man lay sprawling in a ghastly fashion, his evil face fixed above a pool of blackening blood.

‘Watch the stairs!’ said Ramón in Spanish to her, glancing at her with farouche eyes, from some far remote jungle. Yet still the glint of recognition sparked furtively out of the darkness.

He crept to the turret, and stealthily looked out. Then he crept back, with the same stealth, and dragged the nearest dead man to the parapet, raising the body till the head looked over. There was no sound. Then he raised himself, and peeped over. No sign, no sound.

He looked at the dead body as he let it drop. Then he went to Kate, to look down the stairs.

‘You grazed that man with your first shot, you only stunned him, I believe,’ he said.

‘Are there any more?’ she asked, shuddering.

‘I think they are all gone.’

He was pale, almost white, with that same pristine clear brow, like a boy’s, a sort of twilight changelessness.

‘Are you much hurt?’ she said.

‘I? No!’ and he put his fingers round to his back, to feel the slowly welling wound, with his bloody fingers.

The afternoon was passing towards yellow, heavy evening.

He went again to look at the terrible face of the first dead man.

‘Did you know him?’ she said.

He shook his head.

‘Not that I am aware,’ he said. Then: ‘Good that he is dead. Good that he is dead. — Good that we killed them both.’

He looked at her with that glint of savage recognition from afar.

‘Ugh! No! It’s terrible!’ she said, shuddering.

‘Good for me that you were there! Good that we killed them between us! Good they are dead.’

The heavy, luxurious yellow light from below the clouds gilded the mountains of evening. There was the sound of a motor-car honking its horn.

Ramón went in silence to the parapet, the blood wetting his pantaloons lower and lower, since they stuck to him when he bent down. Rich yellow light flooded the blood-stained roof. There was a terrible smell of blood.

‘There is a car coming,’ he said.

She followed, frightened, across the roof.

She saw the hills and lower slopes inland swimming in gold light like lacquer. The black huts of the peons, the lurid leaves of bananas showed up uncannily, the trees green-gold stood up, with boughs of shadow. And away up the road was a puther of dust, then the flash of glass as the automobile turned.

‘Stay here,’ said Ramón, ‘while I go down.’

‘Why didn’t your peons come and help you?’ she said.

‘They never do!’ he replied. ‘Unless they are armed on purpose.’

He went, picking up his blouse and putting it on. And immediately the blood came through.

He went down. She listened to his steps. Below, the courtyard was all shadow, and empty, save for two dead white-clothed bodies of men, one near the zaguán, one against a pillar of the shed.

The motor-car came sounding its horn wildly all the way between the trees. It lurched into the zaguán. It was full of soldiers, soldiers standing on the running-boards, hanging on.

‘Don Ramón! Don Ramón!’ shouted the officer, leaping out of the car. ‘Don Ramón!’ He was thundering at the doors of the inner zaguán.

Why did not Ramón open? Where was he?

She leaned over the parapet and screamed like a wild bird.

‘Viene! Viene Don Ramón! Él viene!’

The soldiers all looked up at her. She drew back in terror. Then, in a panic, she turned downstairs, to the terrace. There was blood on the stone stairs, at the bottom, a great pool. And on the terrace near the rocking-chairs, two dead men in a great pool of blood.

One was Ramón! For a moment she went unconscious. Then slowly she crept forward. Ramón had fallen, reeking with blood from his wound, his arms round the body of the other man, who was bleeding too. The second man opened his eyes, wildly, and in a rattling voice, blind and dying, said:

‘Patrón!’

It was Martin, Ramón’s own mozo. He was stiffening and dying in Ramón’s

arms. And Ramón, lifting him, had made his own wound gush with blood, and had fainted. He lay like dead. But Kate could see the faintest pulse in his neck.

She ran blindly down the stairs, and fought to get the great iron bars from across the door, screaming all the time:

‘Come! Somebody! Come to Don Ramón! He will die.’

A terrified boy and a woman appeared from the kitchen quarters. The door was opened, just as six horse-soldiers galloped into the courtyard. The officer leaped from his horse and ran like a hare, his revolver drawn, his spurs flashing, straight through the doors and up the stairs, like a madman. When Kate got up the stairs again, the officer was standing with drawn revolver, gazing down at Ramón.

‘He is dead?’ he said, stupefied, looking at Kate.

‘No!’ she said. ‘It is only loss of blood.’

The officers lifted Ramón and laid him on the terrace. Then quickly they got off his blouse. The wound was bleeding thickly in the back.

‘We’ve got to stop this wound,’ said the lieutenant. ‘Where is Pablo?’

Instantly there was a cry for Pablo.

Kate ran into a bedroom for water, and she switched an old linen sheet from the bed. Pablo was a young doctor among the soldiers. Kate gave him the bowl of water and the towel, and was tearing the sheet into bands. Ramón lay naked on the floor, all streaked with blood. And the light was going.

‘Bring light!’ said the young doctor.

With swift hands he washed the wound, peering with his nose almost touching it.

‘It is not much!’ he said.

Kate had prepared bandages and a pad. She crouched to hand them to the young man. The woman-servant set a lamp with a white shade on the floor by the doctor. He lifted it, peering again at the wound.

‘No!’ he said. ‘It is not much.’

Then glancing up at the soldiers who stood motionless, peering down, the light on their dark faces.

‘Tu!’ he said, making a gesture.

Quickly the lieutenant took the lamp, holding it over the inert body, and the doctor, with Kate to help, proceeded to staunch and bind the wound. And Kate, as she touched the soft, inert flesh of Ramón, was thinking to herself: This too is he, this silent body! And that face that stabbed the throat of the bandit was he! And that twilit brow, and those remote eyes, like a death-virgin, was he. Even a savage out of the twilight! And the man that knows me, where is he? One among these many men, no more! Oh God! give the man his soul back, into this bloody

body. Let the soul come back, or the universe will be cold for me and for many men.

The doctor finished his temporary bandage, looked at the wound in the arm, swiftly wiped the blood off the loins and buttocks and legs, and said:

‘We must put him in bed. Lift his head.’

Quickly Kate lifted the heavy, inert head. The eyes were half open. The doctor pressed the closed lips, under the sparse black moustache. But the teeth were firmly shut.

The doctor shook his head.

‘Bring a mattress,’ he said.

The wind was suddenly roaring, the lamp was leaping with a long, smoky needle of flame, inside its chimney. Leaves and dust flew rattling on the terrace, there was a splash of lightning. Ramón’s body lay there uncovered and motionless, the bandage was already soaked with blood, under the darkening, leaping light of the lamp.

And again Kate saw, vividly, how the body is the flame of the soul, leaping and sinking upon the invisible wick of the soul. And now the soul, like a wick, seemed spent, the body was a sinking, fading flame.

‘Kindle his soul again, oh God!’ she cried to herself.

All she could see of the naked body was the terrible absence of the living soul of it. All she wanted was for the soul to come back, the eyes to open.

They got him upon the bed and covered him, closing the doors against the wind and the rain. The doctor chafed his brow and hands with cognac. And at length the eyes opened; the soul was there, but standing far back.

For some moments Ramón lay with open eyes, without seeing or moving. Then he stirred a little.

‘What’s the matter?’ he said.

‘Keep still, Don Ramón,’ said the doctor, who with his slim dark hands was even more delicate than a woman. ‘You have lost much blood. Keep still.’

‘Where is Martin?’

‘He is outside.’

‘How is he?’

‘He is dead.’

The dark eyes under the black lashes were perfectly steady and changeless. Then came the voice:

‘Pity we did not kill them all. Pity we did not kill them all. We have got to kill them all. — Where is the Señora Inglesa?’

‘Here she is.’

His black eyes looked up at Kate. Then more of his consciousness came back.

‘Thank you for my life,’ he said, closing his eyes. Then: ‘Put the lamp aside.’

Soldiers were tapping at the glass pane, for the lieutenant. A black little fellow entered, wiping the rain from his black face and pushing his thick black hair back.

‘There are two more dead on the azotea,’ he announced to his officer.

The lieutenant rose, and followed him out. Kate too went on to the terrace. In the early darkness the rain was threshing down. A lantern was coming down from the roof: it came along the terrace to the stairs, and after it two soldiers in the pouring rain, carrying a dead body, then behind, two more, with the other body. The huaraches of the soldiers clicked and shuffled on the wet terrace. The dismal cortège went downstairs.

Kate stood on the terrace facing the darkness, while the rain threshed down. She felt uneasy here, in this house of men and of soldiers. She found her way down to the kitchen, where the boy was fanning a charcoal fire, and the woman was crushing tomatoes on the metate, for a sauce.

‘Ay, Señora!’ cried the woman. ‘Five men dead, and the Patrón wounded to death! Ay! Ay!’

‘Seven men dead!’ said the boy. ‘Two on the azotea!’

‘Seven men! Seven men!’

Kate sat on her chair, stunned, unable to hear anything but the threshing rain, unable to feel anything more. Two or three peons came in, and two more women, the men wrapped to their noses in their blankets. The women brought masa, and began a great clapping of tortillas. The people conversed in low, rapid tones, in the dialect, and Kate could not listen.

At length the rain began to abate. She knew it would leave off suddenly. There was a great sound of water running, gushing, splashing, pouring into the cistern. And she thought to herself: The rain will wash the blood off the roof and down the spouts into the cistern. There will be blood in the water.

She looked at her own blood-smeared white frock. She felt chilly. She rose to go upstairs again, into the dark, empty, masterless house.

‘Ah, Señora! You are going upstairs? Go, Daniel, carry the lantern for the Señora!’

The boy lit a candle in a lantern, and Kate returned to the upper terrace. The light shone out of the room where Ramón was. She went into the salon and got her hat and her brown shawl. The lieutenant heard her, and came to her quickly, very kindly and respectful.

‘Won’t you come in, Señora?’ he said, holding the door to the room where Ramón lay; the guest-room.

Kate went in. Ramón lay on his side, his black, rather thin moustache pushed

against the pillow. He was himself.

‘It is very unpleasant for you here, Señora Caterina,’ he said. ‘Would you like to go to your house? The lieutenant will send you in the motor-car.’

‘Is there nothing I can do here?’ she said.

‘Ah no! Don’t stay here! It is too unpleasant for you. — I shall soon get up, and I shall come to thank you for my life.’

He looked at her, into her eyes. And she saw that his soul had come back to him, and with his soul he saw her and acknowledged her; though always from the peculiar remoteness that was inevitable in him.

She went downstairs with the young lieutenant.

‘Ah, what a horrible affair! They were not bandits, Señora!’ said the young man, with passion. ‘They didn’t come to rob. They came to murder Don Ramón, you know, Señora! simply to murder Don Ramón. And but for your being here, they would have done it! — Ah, think of it, Señora! Don Ramón is the most precious man in Mexico. It is possible that in the world there is not a man like him. And personally, he hasn’t got enemies. As a man among men, he hasn’t got enemies. No, Señora. Not one! But do you know who it will be? the priests, and the Knights of Cortés.’

‘Are you sure?’ said Kate.

‘Sure, Señora!’ cried the lieutenant indignantly. ‘Look! There are seven men dead. Two were the mozos with guns, watching in the zaguán. One was Don Ramón’s own mozo Martin! — ah, what a faithful man, what a brave one! Never will Don Ramón pardon his death. Then moreover, the two men killed on the azotea, and two men in the courtyard, shot by Don Ramón. Besides these, a man whom Martin wounded, who fell and broke his leg, so we have got him. Come and see them, Señora.’

They were down in the wet courtyard. Little fires had been lighted under the sheds, and the little, black, devil-may-care soldiers were crouching round them, with a bunch of peons in blankets standing round. Across the courtyard, horses stamped and jingled their harness. A boy came running with tortillas in a cloth. The dark-faced little soldiers crouched like animals, sprinkled salt on the tortillas, and devoured them with small, white, strong teeth.

Kate saw the great oxen tied in their sheds, lying down, the wagons standing inert. And a little crowd of asses was munching alfalfa in a corner.

The officer marched beside Kate, his spurs sparkling in the firelight. He went to the muddy car, that stood in the middle of the yard, then to his horse. From a saddle-pocket he took an electric torch, and led Kate across to the end shed.

There he suddenly flashed his light upon seven dead bodies, laid side by side. The two from the roof were wet. Ramón’s dead man lay with his dark, strong

breast bare, and his blackish, thick, devilish face sideways; a big fellow. Kate's man lay rigid. Martin had been stabbed in the collar bone; he looked as if he were staring at the roof of the shed. The others were two more peons, and two fellows in black boots and grey trousers and blue overall jackets. They were all inert and straight and dead, and somehow, a little ridiculous. Perhaps it is clothing that makes dead people gruesome and absurd. But also, the grotesque fact that the bodies are vacant, is always present.

'Look!' said the lieutenant, touching a body with his toe. 'This is a chauffeur from Sayula; this is a boatman from Sayula. These two are peons from San Pablo. This man' — the lieutenant kicked the dead body — 'we don't know.' It was Ramón's dead man. 'But this man' — he kicked her dead man, with the tall domed head — 'is from Ahuajjic, and he was married to the woman that now lives with a peon here. — You see, Señora! A chauffeur and a boatman from Sayula — they are Knights-of-Cortés men; and those two peons from San Pablo are priests' men. — These are not bandits. It was an attempt at assassination. But of course they would have robbed everything, everything, if they had killed Don Ramón.'

Kate was staring at the dead men. Three of them were handsome; one, the boatman, with a thin line of black beard framing his shapely face, was beautiful. But dead, with the mockery of death in his face. All of them men who had been in the flush of life. Yet dead, they did not even matter. They were gruesome, but it did not matter that they were dead men. They were vacant. Perhaps even in life there had been a certain vacancy, nothingness, in their handsome physique.

For a pure moment, she wished for men who were not handsome as these dark natives were. Even their beauty was suddenly repulsive to her; the dark beauty of half-created, half-evolved things, left in the old, reptile-like smoothness. It made her shudder.

The soul! If only the soul in man, in woman, would speak to her, not always this strange, perverse materialism, or a distorted animalism. If only people were souls, and their bodies were gestures from the soul! If one could but forget both bodies and facts, and be present with strong, living souls!

She went across the courtyard, that was littered with horse-droppings, to the car. The lieutenant was choosing the soldiers who should stay behind. The horse-soldiers would stay. A peon on a delicate speckled horse, a flea-bitten roan, came trotting past the soldiers in the zaguán. He had been to Sayula for doctor's stuff, and to give messages to the Jefe.

At last the car, with little soldiers clinging on to it all round, moved slowly out of the courtyard. The lieutenant sat beside Kate. He stopped the car again at the big white barn under the trees, to talk to two soldiers picketed there.

Then they moved slowly on, under the wet trees, in the mud that crackled beneath the wheels, up the avenue to the highroad, where were the little black huts of the peons. Little fires were flapping in front of one or two huts, women were baking tortillas on the flat earthenware plates, upon the small wood fires. A woman was going to her hut with a blazing brand, like a torch, to kindle her fire. A few peons in dirty-white clothes squatted silent against the walls of their houses, utterly silent. As the motor-car turned its great glaring headlights upon the highroad, little sandy pigs with short, curly hair started up squealing, and faces and figures stood out blindly, as in a searchlight.

There was a hut with a wide opening in the black wall, and a grey old man was standing inside. The car stopped for the lieutenant to call to the peons under the wall. They came to the car with their black eyes glaring and glittering apprehensively. They seemed very much abashed, and humble, answering the lieutenant.

Meanwhile Kate watched a boy buy a drink for one centavo and a piece of rope for three centavos, from the grey old man at the dark hole, which was a shop.

The car went on, the great lights glaring unnaturally upon the hedges of cactus and mesquite and palo blanco trees, and upon the great pools of water in the road. It was a slow progress.

CHAPTER XX

Marriage by Quetzalcoatl

Kate hid in her own house, numbed. She could not bear to talk to people. She could not bear even Juana's bubbling discourse. The common threads that bound her to humanity seemed to have snapped. The little human things didn't interest her any more. Her eyes seemed to have gone dark, and blind to individuals. They were all just individuals, like leaves in the dark, making a noise. And she was alone under the trees.

The egg-woman wanted six centavos for an egg.

'And I said to her — I said to her — we buy them at five centavos!' Juana went on.

'Yes!' said Kate. She didn't care whether they were bought at five or fifty, or not bought at all.

She didn't care, she didn't care, she didn't care. She didn't even care about life any more. There was no escaping her own complete indifference. She felt indifferent to everything in the whole world, almost she felt indifferent to death.

'Niña! Niña! Here is the man with the sandals! Look! Look how nicely he has made them for you, Niña! Look what Mexican huaraches the Niña is going to wear!'

She tried them on. The man charged her too much. She looked at him with her remote, indifferent eyes. But she knew, in the world one must live, so she paid him less than he asked, though more than he really would have accepted.

She sat down again in her rocking-chair in the shade of the room. Only to be alone! Only that no one should speak to her. Only that no one should come near her! Because in reality her soul and spirit were gone, departed into the middle of some desert, and the effort of reaching across to people to effect an apparent meeting, or contact, was almost more than she could bear.

Never had she been so alone, and so inert, and so utterly without desire; plunged in a wan indifference, like death. Never had she passed her days so blindly, so unknowingly, in stretches of nothingness.

Sometimes, to get away from her household, she sat under a tree by the lake. And there, without knowing it, she let the sun scorch her foot and burn her face inflamed. Juana made a great outcry over her. The foot blistered and swelled, her face was red and painful. But it all seemed to happen merely to her shell. And

she was wearily, wanly indifferent.

Only at the very centre of her sometimes a little flame rose, and she knew that what she wanted was for her soul to live. The life of days and facts and happenings was dead on her, and she was like a corpse. But away inside her a little light was burning, the light of her innermost soul. Sometimes it sank and seemed extinct. Then it was there again.

Ramón had lighted it. And once it was lighted the world went hollow and dead, all the world-activities were empty weariness to her. Her soul! Her frail, innermost soul! She wanted to live its life, not her own life.

The time would come again when she would see Ramón and Cipriano, and the soul that was guttering would kindle again in her, and feel strong. Meanwhile she only felt weak, weak, weak, weak as the dying. She felt that afternoon of bloodshed had blown all their souls into the twilight of death, for the time. But they would come back. They would come back. Nothing to do but to submit, and wait. Wait, with a soul almost dead, and hands and heart of uttermost inert heaviness, indifference.

Ramón had lost much blood. And she, too, in other ways, had been drained of the blood of the body. She felt bloodless and powerless.

But wait, wait, wait, the new blood would come.

One day Cipriano came. She was rocking in her salon, in a cotton housedress, and her face red and rather swollen. She saw him, in uniform, pass by the window. He stood in the doorway on the terrace, a dark, grave, small, handsome man.

‘Do come in,’ she said with effort.

Her eyelids felt burnt. He looked at her with his full black eyes, that always had in them so many things she did not understand. She felt she could not look back at him.

‘Have you chased all your rebels?’ she said.

‘For the present,’ he replied.

He seemed to be watching, watching for something.

‘And you didn’t get hurt?’

‘No, I didn’t get hurt.’

She looked away out of the door, having nothing to say in the world.

‘I went to Jamiltepec yesterday evening,’ he said.

‘How is Don Ramón?’

‘Yes, he is better.’

‘Quite better?’

‘No. Not quite better. But he walks a little.’

‘Wonderful how people heal.’

‘Yes. We die very easily. But we also come quickly back to life.’

‘And you? Did you fight the rebels, or didn’t they want to fight?’

‘Yes, they wanted to. We fought once or twice; not very much.’

‘Men killed?’

‘Yes! Some! Not many, no? Perhaps a hundred. We can never tell, no? Maybe two hundred.’

He waved his hand vaguely.

‘But you had the worst rebellion at Jamiltepec, no?’ he said suddenly, with heavy Indian gravity, gloom suddenly settling down.

‘It didn’t last long, but it was rather awful while it did.’

‘Rather awful, no? — If I had known! I said to Ramón, won’t you keep the soldiers? — the guard, no? He said they were not necessary. But here — you never know, no?’

‘Niña!’ cried Juana, from the terrace. ‘Niña! Don Antonio says he is coming to see you.’

‘Tell him to come to-morrow.’

‘Already he is on the way!’ cried Juana, in helplessness. Don Antonio was Kate’s fat landlord; and, of course, Juana’s permanent master, more important in her eyes, then, even than Kate.

‘Here he is!’ she cried, and fled.

Kate leaned forward in her chair, to see the stout figure of her landlord on the walk outside the window, taking off his cloth cap and bowing low to her. A cloth cap! — She knew he was a great Fascista, the reactionary Knights of Cortés held him in great esteem.

Kate bowed coldly.

He bowed low again, with the cloth cap.

Kate said not a word.

He stood on one foot, then on the other, and then marched forward up the gravel walk, towards the kitchen quarters, as if he had not seen either Kate or General Viedma. In a few moments he marched back, as if he could not see either Kate or the General, through the open door.

Cipriano looked at the passing stout figure of Don Antonio in a cloth cap as if it were the wind blowing.

‘It is my landlord!’ said Kate. ‘I expect he wants to know if I am taking on the house for another three months.’

‘Ramón wanted me to come and see you — to see how you are, no? — and to ask you to come to Jamiltepec. Will you come with me now? The car is here.’

‘Must I?’ said Kate, uneasily.

‘No. Not unless you wish. Ramón said, not unless you wished. He said,

perhaps it would be painful to you, no? — to go to Jamiltepec again — so soon after — ’

How curious Cipriano was! He stated things as if they were mere bare facts with no emotional content at all. As for its being painful to Kate to go to Jamiltepec, that meant nothing to him.

‘Lucky thing you were there that day, no?’ he said. ‘They might have killed him. Very likely they would! Very likely! Awful, no?’

‘They might have killed me too,’ she said.

‘Yes! Yes! They might!’ he acquiesced.

Curious he was! With a sort of glaze of the ordinary world on top, and underneath a black volcano with hell knows what depths of lava. And talking half-abstractedly from his glazed, top self, the words came out small and quick, and he was always hesitating, and saying: No? It wasn’t himself at all talking.

‘What would you have done if they had killed Ramón?’ she said, tentatively.

‘I?’ — He looked up at her in a black flare of apprehension. The volcano was rousing. ‘If they had killed him? — ’ His eyes took on that fixed glare of ferocity, staring her down.

‘Would you have cared very much?’ she said.

‘I? Would I?’ he repeated, and the black suspicious look came into his Indian eyes.

‘Would it have meant very much to you?’

He still watched her with a glare of ferocity and suspicion.

‘To me!’ he said, and he pressed his hand against the buttons of his tunic. ‘To me Ramón is more than life. More than life.’ His eyes seemed to glare and go sightless, as he said it, the ferocity melting in a strange blind, confiding glare, that seemed sightless, either looking inward, or out at the whole vast void of the cosmos, where no vision is left.

‘More than anything?’ she said.

‘Yes!’ he replied abstractedly, with a blind nod of the head.

Then abruptly he looked at her and said:

‘You saved his life.’

By this he meant that therefore — But she could not understand the therefore.

She went to change, and they set off to Jamiltepec. Cipriano made her a little uneasy, sitting beside him. He made her physically aware of him, of his small but strong and assertive body, with its black currents and storms of desire. The range of him was very limited, really. The great part of his nature was just inert and heavy, unresponsive, limited as a snake or a lizard is limited. But within his own heavy, dark range he had a curious power. Almost she could see the black fume of power which he emitted, the dark, heavy vibration of his blood, which

cast a spell over her.

As they sat side by side in the motor-car, silent, swaying to the broken road, she could feel the curious tingling heat of his blood, and the heavy power of the will that lay unemerged in his blood. She could see again the skies go dark, and the phallic mystery rearing itself like a whirling dark cloud, to the zenith, till it pierced the sombre, twilit zenith; the old, supreme phallic mystery. And herself in the everlasting twilight, a sky above where the sun ran smokily, an earth below where the trees and creatures rose up in blackness, and man strode along naked, dark, half-visible, and suddenly whirled in supreme power, towering like a dark whirlwind column, whirling to pierce the very zenith.

The mystery of the primeval world! She could feel it now in all its shadowy, furious magnificence. She knew now what was the black, glinting look in Cipriano's eyes. She could understand marrying him, now. In the shadowy world where men were visionless, and winds of fury rose up from the earth, Cipriano was still a power. Once you entered his mystery the scale of all things changed, and he became a living male power, undefined, and unconfined. The smallness, the limitations ceased to exist. In his black, glinting eyes the power was limitless, and it was as if, from him, from his body of blood could rise up that pillar of cloud which swayed and swung, like a rearing serpent or a rising tree, till it swept the zenith, and all the earth below was dark and prone, and consummated. Those small hands, that little natural tuft of black goats' beard hanging light from his chin, the tilt of his brows and the slight slant of his eyes, the domed Indian head with its thick black hair, they were like symbols to her, of another mystery, the mystery of the twilit, primitive world, where shapes that are small suddenly loom up huge, gigantic on the shadow, and a face like Cipriano's is the face at once of a god and a devil, the undying Pan face. The bygone mystery, that has indeed gone by, but has not passed away. Never shall pass away.

As he sat in silence, casting the old, twilit Pan-power over her, she felt herself submitting, succumbing. He was once more the old dominant male, shadowy, intangible, looming suddenly tall, and covering the sky, making a darkness that was himself and nothing but himself, the Pan male. And she was swooned prone beneath, perfect in her proneness.

It was the ancient phallic mystery, the ancient god-devil of the male Pan. Cipriano unyielding forever, in the ancient twilight, keeping the ancient twilight around him. She understood now his power with his soldiers. He had the old gift of demon-power.

He would never woo; she saw this. When the power of his blood rose in him, the dark aura streamed from him like a cloud pregnant with power, like thunder,

and rose like a whirlwind that rises suddenly in the twilight and raises a great pliant column, swaying and leaning with power, clear between heaven and earth.

Ah! and what a mystery of prone submission, on her part, this huge erection would imply! Submission absolute, like the earth under the sky. Beneath an over-arching absolute.

Ah! what a marriage! How terrible! and how complete! With the finality of death, and yet more than death. The arms of the twilight Pan. And the awful, half-intelligible voice from the cloud.

She could conceive now her marriage with Cipriano; the supreme passivity, like the earth below the twilight, consummate in living lifelessness, the sheer solid mystery of passivity. Ah, what an abandon, what an abandon, what an abandon! — of so many things she wanted to abandon.

Cipriano put his hand, with its strange soft warmth and weight, upon her knee, and her soul melted like fused metal.

‘En poco tiempo, verdad?’ he said to her, looking into her eyes with the old, black, glinting look, of power about to consummate itself.

‘In a little while, no?’

She looked back at him, wordless. Language had abandoned her, and she leaned silent and helpless in the vast, unspoken twilight of the Pan world. Her self had abandoned her, and all her day was gone. Only she said to herself:

‘My demon lover!’

Her world could end in many ways, and this was one of them. Back to the twilight of the ancient Pan world, where the soul of woman was dumb, to be forever unspoken.

The car had stopped, they had come to Jamiltepec. He looked at her again, as reluctantly he opened the door. And as he stepped out, she realized again his uniform, his small figure in uniform. She had lost it entirely. She had only known his face, the face of the supreme god-demon; with the arching brows and slightly slanting eyes, and the loose, light tuft of a goat-beard. The Master. The everlasting Pan.

He was looking back at her again, using all his power to prevent her seeing in him the little General in uniform, in the worldly vision. And she avoided his eyes, and saw nothing.

They found Ramón sitting in his white clothes in a long chair on the terrace. He was creamy-brown in his pallor.

He saw at once the change in Kate. She had the face of one waking from the dead, curiously dipped in death, with a tenderness far more new and vulnerable than a child’s. He glanced at Cipriano. Cipriano’s face seemed darker than usual, with that secret hauteur and aloofness of the savage. He knew it well.

‘Are you better?’ Kate asked.

‘Very nearly!’ he said, looking up at her gently. ‘And you?’

‘Yes, I am all right.’

‘You are?’

‘Yes, I think so. — I have felt myself all lost, since that day. Spiritually, I mean. Otherwise I am all right. Are you healing well?’

‘Oh, yes! I always heal quickly.’

‘Knives and bullets are horrible things.’

‘Yes — in the wrong place.’

Kate felt rather as if she were coming to, from a swoon, as Ramón spoke to her and looked at her. His eyes, his voice seemed kind. Kind? The word suddenly was strange to her, she had to try to get its meaning.

There was no kindness in Cipriano. The god-demon Pan preceded kindness. She wondered if she wanted kindness. She did not know. Everything felt numb.

‘I was wondering whether to go to England,’ she said.

‘Again?’ said Ramón, with a slight smile. ‘Away from the bullets and the knives, is that it?’

‘Yes! — to get away.’ And she sighed deeply.

‘No!’ said Ramón. ‘Don’t go away. You will find nothing in England.’

‘But can I go on here?’

‘Can you help it?’

‘I wish I knew what to do.’

‘How can one know? Something happens inside you, and all your decisions are smoke. — Let happen what will happen.’

‘I can’t quite drift as if I had no soul of my own, can I?’

‘Sometimes it is best.’

There was a pause. Cipriano stayed outside the conversation altogether, in a dusky world of his own, apart and secretly hostile.

‘I have been thinking so much about you,’ she said to Ramón, ‘and wondering whether it is worth while.’

‘What?’

‘What you are doing; trying to change the religion of these people. If they have any religion to change. I don’t think they are a religious people. They are only superstitious. I have no use for men and women who go crawling down a church aisle on their knees, or holding up their arms for hours. There’s something stupid and wrong about it. They never worship a God. Only some little evil power. I have been wondering so much if it is worth while giving yourself to them, and exposing yourself to them. It would be horrible if you were really killed. I have seen you look dead.’

‘Now you see me look alive again,’ he smiled.

But a heavy silence followed.

‘I believe Don Cipriano knows them better than you do. I believe he knows best, if it is any good,’ she said.

‘And what does he say?’ asked Ramón.

‘I say I am Ramón’s man,’ replied Cipriano stubbornly.

Kate looked at him, and mistrusted him. In the long run he was nobody’s man. He was that old, masterless Pan-male, that could not even conceive of service; particularly the service of mankind. He saw only glory; the black mystery of glory consummated. And himself like a wind of glory.

‘I feel they’ll let you down,’ said Kate to Ramón.

‘Maybe! But I shan’t let myself down. I do what I believe in. Possibly I am only the first step round the corner of change. But: ce n’est que le premier pas qui coute — Why will you not go round the corner with us? At least it is better than sitting still.’

Kate did not answer his question. She sat looking at the mango-trees and the lake, and the thought of that afternoon came over her again.

‘How did those two men get in; those two bandits on the roof?’ she asked wonderingly.

‘It was a woman this time; a girl whom Carlota brought here from the Cuna in Mexico City, to be a sewing girl and to teach the peon’s wives to sew and do little things. She had a little room at the end of the terrace there — ’ Ramón pointed to the terrace projecting towards the lake, opposite the one where his own room was, and the covered balcony. ‘She got entangled with one of the peons; a sort of second overseer, called Guillermo. Guillermo had got a wife and four children, but he came to me to say could he change and take Maruca — the sewing girl. I said no, he could stay with his family. And I sent Maruca back to Mexico. But she had had a smattering of education, and thought she was equal to anything. She got messages through to Guillermo, and he ran away and joined her in Mexico, leaving wife and four children here. The wife then went to live with another peon — the blacksmith — whose wife had died and who was supposed to be a good match; a decent fellow.

‘One day appeared Guillermo, and said: could he come back? I said not with Maruca. He said he didn’t want Maruca, he wanted to come back. His wife was willing to go back to him again with the children. The blacksmith was willing to let her go. I said very well; but he had forfeited his job as sub-overseer, and must be a peon again.

‘And he seemed all right — satisfied. But then Maruca came and stayed in Sayula, pretending to make her living as a dressmaker. She was in with the

priest; and she got Guillermo again.

‘It seems the Knights of Cortés had promised a big reward for the man who would bring in my scalp; secretly, of course. The girl got Guillermo: Guillermo got those two peons, one from San Pablo and one from Ahuajjic; somebody else arranged for the rest.

‘The bedroom the girl used to have is that one, on the terrace not far from where the stairs go up to the roof. The bedroom has a lattice window, high up, looking out on the trees. There’s a big laurel de India growing outside. It appears the girl climbed on a table and knocked the iron lattice of the window loose, while she was living here, and that Guillermo, by taking a jump from the bough — a very risky thing, but then he was one of that sort — could land on the window-sill and pull himself into the room.

‘Apparently he and the other two men were going to get the scalp and pillage the house before the others could enter. So the first one, the man I killed, climbed the tree, and with a long pole shoved in the lattice of the window, and so got into the room, and up the terrace stairs.

‘Martin, my man, who was waiting on the other stairs, ready if they tried to blow out the iron door, heard the smash of the window and rushed round just as the second bandit — the one you shot — was crouching on the window-sill to jump down into the room. The window is quite small, and high up.

‘Before Martin could do anything the man had jumped down on top of him and stabbed him twice with his machete. Then he took Martin’s knife and came up the stairs, when you shot him in the head.

‘Martin was on the floor when he saw the hands of a third man gripping through the window. Then the face of Guillermo. Martin got up and gave the hands a slash with the heavy machete, and Guillermo fell smash back down on to the rocks under the wall.

‘When I came down, I found Martin lying outside the door of that room. He told me — They came through there, Patrón. Guillermo was one of them.

‘Guillermo broke his thigh on the rocks, and the soldiers found him. He confessed everything, and said he was sorry, and begged my pardon. He’s in the prison hospital now.’

‘And Maruca?’ said Kate.

‘They’ve got her too.’

‘There will always be a traitor,’ said Kate gloomily.

‘Let us hope there will also be a Catarina,’ said Ramón.

‘But will you go on with it — your Quetzalcoatl?’

‘How can I leave off? It’s my métier now. Why don’t you join us? Why don’t you help me?’

‘How?’

‘You will see. Soon you will hear the drums again. Soon the first day of Quetzalcoatl will come. You will see. Then Cipriano will appear — in the red serape — and Huitzilopochtli will share the Mexican Olympus with Quetzalcoatl. Then I want a goddess.’

‘But will Don Cipriano be the god Huitzilopochtli?’ she asked, taken aback.

‘First Man of Huitzilopochtli, as I am First Man of Quetzalcoatl.’

‘Will you?’ said Kate to Cipriano. ‘That horrible Huitzilopochtli?’

‘Yes, Señora!’ said Cipriano, with a subtle smile of hauteur, the secret savage coming into his own.

‘Not the old Huitzilopochtli — but the new,’ said Ramón. ‘And then there must come a goddess; wife or virgin, there must come a goddess. Why not you, as the First Woman of — say Itzpapalotl, just for the sound of the name?’

‘I?’ said Kate. ‘Never! I should die of shame.’

‘Shame?’ laughed Ramón. ‘Ah, Señora Caterina, why shame? This is a thing that must be done. There must be manifestations. We must change back to the vision of the living cosmos; we must. The oldest Pan is in us, and he will not be denied. In cold blood and in hot blood both, we must make the change. That is how man is made. I accept the must from the oldest Pan in my soul, and from the newest me. Once a man gathers his whole soul together and arrives at a conclusion, the time of alternatives has gone. I must. No more than that. I am the First Man of Quetzalcoatl. I am Quetzalcoatl himself, if you like. A manifestation, as well as a man. I accept myself entire, and proceed to make destiny. Why, what else can I do?’

Kate was silent. His loss of blood seemed to have washed him curiously fresh again, and he was carried again out of the range of human emotion. A strange sort of categorical imperative! She saw now his power over Cipriano. It lay in this imperative which he acknowledged in his own soul, and which really was like a messenger from the beyond.

She looked on like a child looking through a railing; rather wistful, and rather frightened.

Ah, the soul! The soul was always flashing and darkening into new shapes, each one strange to the other. She had thought Ramón and she had looked into each other’s souls. And now, he was this pale, distant man, with a curious gleam, like a messenger from the beyond, in his soul. And he was remote, remote from any woman.

Whereas Cipriano had suddenly opened a new world to her, a world of twilight, with the dark, half-visible face of the god-demon Pan, who can never perish, but ever returns upon mankind from the shadows. The world of shadows

and dark prostration, with the phallic wind rushing through the dark.

Cipriano had to go to the town at the end of the lake, near the State of Colima; to Jaramay. He was going in a motor-boat with a couple of soldiers. Would Kate go with him? He waited, in heavy silence, for her answer.

She said she would. She was desperate. She did not want to be sent back to her own empty, dead house.

It was one of those little periods when the rain seems strangled, the air thick with thunder, silent, ponderous thunder latent in the air from day to day, among the thick, heavy sunshine. Kate, in these days in Mexico, felt that between the volcanic violence under the earth, and the electric violence of the air above, men walked dark and incalculable, like demons from another planet.

The wind on the lake seemed fresh, from the west, but it was a running mass of electricity, that burned her face and her eyes and the roots of her hair. When she had wakened in the night and pushed the sheets, heavy sparks fell from her fingertips. She felt she could not live.

The lake was like some frail milk of thunder; the dark soldiers curled under the awning of the boat, motionless. They seemed dark as lava and sulphur, and full of a dormant, diabolic electricity. Like salamanders. The boatman in the stern, steering, was handsome, almost like the man she had killed. But this one had pale greyish eyes, phosphorescent with flecks of silver.

Cipriano sat in silence in front of her. He had removed his tunic, and his neck rose almost black from his white shirt. She could see how different his blood was from hers, dark, blackish, like the blood of lizards among hot black rocks. She could feel its changeless surge, holding up his light, bluey-black head as on a fountain. And she would feel her own pride dissolving, going.

She felt he wanted his blood-stream to envelop hers. As if it could possibly be. He was so still, so unnoticing, and the darkness of the nape of his neck was so like invisibility. Yet he was always waiting, waiting, waiting, invisibly and ponderously waiting.

She lay under the awning in the heat and light without looking out. The wind made the canvas crackle.

Whether the time was long or short, she knew not. But they were coming to the silent lake-end, where the beach curved round in front of them. It seemed sheer lonely sunlight.

But beyond the shingle there were willow-trees, and a low ranch-house. Three anchored canoas rode with their black, stiff lines. There were flat lands, with maize half grown and blowing its green flags sideways. But all was as if invisible, in the intense hot light.

The warm, thin water ran shallower and shallower, to the reach of shingle

beyond. Black water-fowl bobbed like corks. The motor stopped. The boat ebbed on. Under the thin water were round stones, with thin green hair of weed. They would not reach the shore — not by twenty yards.

The soldiers took off their huaraches, rolled their cotton trousers up their black legs, and got into the water. The tall boatman did the same, pulling forward the boat. She would go no farther. He anchored her with a big stone. Then with his uncanny pale eyes, under the black lashes, he asked Kate in a low tone if he could carry her ashore, offering her his shoulder.

‘No, no!’ she said. ‘I’ll paddle.’

And hastily she took off her shoes and stockings and stepped into the shallow water, holding up her thin skirt of striped silk. The man laughed; so did the soldiers.

The water was almost hot. She went blindly forward, her head dropped. Cipriano watched her with the silent, heavy, changeless patience of his race, then when she reached the shingle he came ashore on the boatman’s shoulders.

They crossed the hot shingle to the willow-trees by the maize-fields, and sat upon boulders. The lake stretched pale and unreal, far, far away into the invisible, with dimmed mountains rising on either side, bare and abstract. The canoas were black and stiff, their masts motionless. The white motor-boat rode near. Black birds were bobbing like corks, at this place of the water’s end and the world’s end.

A lonely woman went up the shingle with a water-jar on her shoulder. Hearing a sound, Kate looked, and saw a group of fishermen holding a conclave in a dug-out hollow by a tree. They saluted, looking at her with black, black eyes. They saluted humbly, and yet in their black eyes was that ancient remote hardness and hauteur.

Cipriano had sent the soldiers for horses. It was too hot to walk.

They sat silent in the invisibility of this end of the lake, the great light taking sight away.

‘Why am I not the living Huitzilopochtli?’ said Cipriano quietly, looking full at her with his black eyes.

‘Do you feel you are?’ she said, startled.

‘Yes,’ he replied, in the same low, secret voice. ‘It is what I feel.’

The black eyes looked at her with a rather awful challenge. And the small, dark voice seemed to take all her will away. They sat in silence, and she felt she was fainting, losing her consciousness for ever.

The soldiers came, with a black Arab horse for him; a delicate thing; and for her a donkey, on which she could sit sideways. He lifted her into the saddle, where she sat only half-conscious. A soldier led the donkey, and they set off,

past the long, frail, hanging fishing-nets, that made long filmy festoons, into the lane.

Then out into the sun and the grey-black dust, towards the grey-black, low huts of Jaramay, that lined the wide, desert road.

Jaramay was hot as a lava oven. Black low hut-houses with tiled roofs lined the broken, long, dilapidated street. Broken houses. Blazing sun. A brick pavement all smashed and sun-worn. A dog leading a blind man along the little black walls, on the broken pavement. A few goats. And unspeakable lifelessness, emptiness.

They came to the broken plaza, with sun-decayed church and ragged palm trees. Emptiness, sun, sun-decay, sun-dilapidation. One man on a dainty Arab horse trotting lightly over the stones, gun behind, big hat making a dark face. For the rest, the waste space of the centre of life. Curious how dainty the horse looked, and the horseman sitting erect, amid the sun-roasted ruin.

They came to a big building. A few soldiers were drawn up at the entrance. They saluted Cipriano as if they were transfixed, rolling their dark eyes.

Cipriano was down from his horse in a moment. Emitting the dark rays of dangerous power, he found the Jefe all obsequious; a fat man in dirty white clothes. They put their wills entirely in his power.

He asked for a room where his esposa could rest. Kate was pale and all her will had left her. He was carrying her on his will.

He accepted a large room with a brick-tiled floor and a large, new brass bed with a coloured cotton cover thrown over it, and with two chairs. The strange, dry, stark emptiness, that looked almost cold in the heat.

‘The sun makes you pale. Lie down and rest. I will close the windows,’ he said.

He closed the shutters till only a darkness remained.

Then in the darkness, suddenly, softly he touched her, stroking her hip.

‘I said you were my wife,’ he said, in his small, soft Indian voice. ‘It is true, isn’t it?’

She trembled, and her limbs seemed to fuse like metal melting down. She fused into a molten unconsciousness, her will, her very self gone, leaving her lying in molten life, like a lake of still fire, unconscious of everything save the eternity of the fire in which she was gone. Gone in the fadeless fire, which has no death. Only the fire can leave us, and we can die.

And Cipriano the master of fire. The Living Huitzilopochtli, he had called himself. The living firemaster. The god in the flame; the salamander.

One cannot have one’s own way, and the way of the gods. It has to be one or the other.

When she went out into the next room, he was sitting alone, waiting for her. He rose quickly, looking at her with black, flashing eyes from which dark flashes of light seemed to play upon her. And he took her hand, to touch her again.

‘Will you come to eat at the little restaurant?’ he said.

In the uncanny flashing of his eyes she saw a gladness that frightened her a little. His touch on her hand was uncannily soft and inward. His words said nothing; would never say anything. But she turned aside her face, a little afraid of that flashing, primitive gladness, which was so impersonal and beyond her.

Wrapping a big yellow-silk shawl around her, Spanish fashion, against the heat, and taking her white sunshade lined with green, she stepped out with him past the bowing Jefe and the lieutenant, and the saluting soldiers. She shook hands with the Jefe and the lieutenant. They were men of flesh and blood, they understood her presence, and bowed low, looking up at her with flashing eyes. And she knew what it was to be a goddess in the old style, saluted by the real fire in men’s eyes, not by their lips.

In her big, soft velour hat of jade green, her breast wrapped round with the yellow brocade shawl, she stepped across the sun-eaten plaza, a sort of desert made by man, softly, softly beside her Cipriano, soft as a cat, hiding her face under her green hat and her sunshade, keeping her body secret and elusive. And the soldiers and the officers and clerks of the Jefatura, watching her with fixed black eyes, saw, not the physical woman herself, but the inaccessible, voluptuous mystery of man’s physical consummation.

They ate in the dusky little cavern of a fonda kept by a queer old woman with Spanish blood in her veins. Cipriano was very sharp and imperious in his orders, the old woman scuffled and ran in a sort of terror. But she was thrilled to her soul.

Kate was bewildered by the new mystery of her own elusiveness. She was elusive even to herself. Cipriano hardly talked to her at all; which was quite right. She did not want to be talked to, and words addressed straight at her, without the curious soft veiling which these people knew how to put into their voices, speaking only to the unconcerned, third person in her, came at her like blows. Ah, the ugly blows of direct, brutal speech! She had suffered so much from them. Now she wanted this veiled elusiveness in herself, she wanted to be addressed in the third person.

After the lunch they went to look at the serapes which were being spun for Ramón. Their two soldiers escorted them a few yards up a broken, sun-wasted wide street of little, low black houses, then knocked at big doors.

Kate entered the grateful shade of the zaguán. In the dark shade of the inner

court, or patio, where sun blazed on bananas beyond, was a whole weaver's establishment. A fat, one-eyed man sent a little boy to fetch chairs. But Kate wandered, fascinated.

In the zaguán was a great heap of silky white wool, very fine, and in the dark corridor of the patio all the people at work. Two boys with flat square boards bristling with many little wire bristles were carding the white wool into thin films, which they took off the boards in fine rolls like mist, and laid beside the two girls at the end of the shed.

These girls stood by their wheels, spinning, standing beside the running wheel, which they set going with one hand, while with the other hand they kept a long, miraculous thread of white wool-yarn dancing at the very tip of the rapidly-spinning spool-needle, the filmy rolls of the carded wool just touching the point of the spool, and at once running out into a long, pure thread of white, which wound itself on to the spool, and another piece of carded wool was attached. One of the girls, a beautiful oval-faced one, who smiled shyly at Kate, was very clever. It was almost miraculous the way she touched the spool and drew out the thread of wool almost as fine as sewing cotton.

At the other end of the corridor, under the black shed, were two looms, and two men weaving. They treddled at the wooden tread-looms, first with one foot and then the other, absorbed and silent, in the shadow of the black mud walls. One man was weaving a brilliant scarlet serape, very fine, and of the beautiful cochineal red. It was difficult work. From the pure scarlet centre zigzags of black and white were running in a sort of whorl, away to the edge, that was pure black. Wonderful to see the man, with small bobbins of fine red and white yarn, and black, weaving a bit of the ground, weaving the zigzag of black up to it, and, up to that, the zigzag of white, with deft, dark fingers, quickly adjusting his setting needle, quick as lightning threading his pattern, then bringing down the beam heavily to press it tight. The serape was woven on a black warp, long fine threads of black, like a harp. But beautiful beyond words the perfect, delicate scarlet weaving in.

‘For whom is that?’ said Kate to Cipriano. ‘For you?’

‘Yes,’ he said. ‘For me!’

The other weaver was weaving a plain white serape with blue and natural-black ends, throwing the spool of yarn from side to side, between the white harp-strings, pressing down each thread of his woof heavily, with the wooden bar, then treddling to change the long, fine threads of the warp.

In the shadow of the mud shed, the pure colours of the lustrous wool looked mystical, the cardinal scarlet, the pure, silky white, the lovely blue, and the black, gleaming in the shadow of the blackish walls.

The fat man with the one eye brought serapes, and two boys opened them one by one. There was a new one, white, with close flowers of blue on black stalks, and with green leaves, forming the borders, and at the boca, the mouth, where the head went through, a whole lot of little, rainbow-coloured flowers, in a coiling blue circle.

‘I love that!’ said Kate. ‘What is that for?’

‘It is one of Ramón’s; they are Quetzalcoatl’s colours, the blue and white and natural black. But this one is for the day of the opening of the flowers, when he brings in the goddess who will come,’ said Cipriano.

Kate was silent with fear.

There were two scarlet serapes with a diamond at the centre, all black, and a border-pattern of black diamonds.

‘Are these yours?’

‘Well, they are for the messengers of Huitzilopochtli. Those are my colours: scarlet and black. But I myself have white as well, just as Ramón has a fringe of my scarlet.’

‘Doesn’t it make you afraid?’ she said to him, looking at him rather blanched.

‘How make me afraid?’

‘To do this. To be the living Huitzilopochtli,’ she said.

‘I am the living Huitzilopochtli,’ he said. ‘When Ramón dares to be the living Quetzalcoatl, I dare to be the living Huitzilopochtli. I am he. — Am I not?’

Kate looked at him, at his dark face with the little hanging tuft of beard, the arched brows, the slightly slanting black eyes. In the round, fierce gaze of his eyes there was a certain silence, like tenderness, for her. But beyond that, an inhuman assurance, which looked far, far beyond her, in the darkness.

And she hid her face from him, murmuring:

‘I know you are.’

‘And on the day of flowers,’ he said, ‘you, too, shall come, in a green dress they shall weave you, with blue flowers at the seam, and on your head the new moon of flowers.’

She hid her face, afraid.

‘Come and look at the wools,’ he said, leading her across the patio to the shade where, on a line, the yarn hung in dripping tresses of colour, scarlet and blue and yellow and green and brown.

‘See!’ he said. ‘You shall have a dress of green, that leaves the arms bare, and a white under-dress with blue flowers.’

The green was a strong apple-green colour.

Two women under the shed were crouching over big earthenware vessels, which sat over a fire which burned slowly in a hole dug in the ground. They

were watching the steaming water. One took dried, yellow-brown flowers, and flung them in her water as if she were a witch brewing decoctions. She watched as the flowers rose, watched as they turned softly in the boiling water. Then she threw in a little white powder.

‘And on the day of flowers you, too, will come. Ah! If Ramón is the centre of a new world, a world of new flowers shall spring up round him, and push the old world back. I call you the First Flower.’

They left the courtyard. The soldiers had brought the black Arab stallion for Cipriano, and for her the donkey, on which she could perch sideways, like a peasant woman. So they went through the hot, deserted silence of the mud-brick town, down the lane of deep, dark-grey dust, under vivid green trees that were bursting into flower, again to the silent shore of the lake-end, where the delicate fishing-nets were hung in long lines and blowing in the wind, loop after loop striding above the shingle and blowing delicately in the wind, as away on the low places the green maize was blowing, and the fleecy willows shook like soft green feathers hanging down.

The lake stretched pale and unreal into nowhere; the motor-boat rode near in, the black canoas stood motionless a little farther out. Two women, tiny as birds, were kneeling on the water’s edge, washing.

Kate jumped from her donkey on to the shingle.

‘Why not ride through the water to the boat?’ said Cipriano.

She looked at the boat, and thought of the donkey stumbling and splashing.

‘No,’ she said. ‘I will wade again.’

He rode his black Arab to the water. It sniffed, and entered with delicate feet into the warm shallows. Then, a little way in, it stood and suddenly started pawing the water, as a horse paws the ground, in the oddest manner possible, very rapidly striking the water with its fore-foot, so that little waves splashed up over its black legs and belly.

But this splashed Cipriano too. He lifted the reins and touched the creature with his spurs. It jumped, and went half-stumbling, half-dancing through the water, prettily, with a splashing noise. Cipriano quieted it, and it waded gingerly on through the shallows of the vast lake, bending its black head down to look, to look in a sort of fascination at the stony bottom, swaying its black tail as it moved its glossy, raven haunches gingerly.

Then again it stood still, and suddenly, with a rapid beating of its fore-paw, sent the water hollowly splashing up, till its black belly glistened wet like a black serpent, and its legs were shiny wet pillars. And again Cipriano lifted its head and touched it with the spurs, so the delicate creature danced in a churn of water.

‘Oh, it looks so pretty! It looks so pretty when it paws the water!’ cried Kate from the shore. ‘Why does it do it?’

Cipriano turned in the saddle and looked back at her with the sudden, gay Indian laugh.

‘It likes to be wet — who knows?’ he said.

A soldier hurried wading through the water and took the horse’s bridle. Cipriano dismounted neatly from the stirrup, with a little backward leap into the boat, a real savage horseman. The barefoot soldier leaped into the saddle, and turned the horse to shore. But the black horse, male and wilful, insisted on stopping to paw the waters and splash himself, with a naïve, wilful sort of delight.

‘Look! Look!’ cried Kate. ‘It’s so pretty.’

But the soldier was perching in the saddle, drawing up his legs like a monkey, and shouting at the horse. It would wet its fine harness.

He rode the Arab slanting through the water, to where an old woman, sitting in her own silence and almost invisible before, was squatted in the water with brown bare shoulders emerging, ladling water from a half gourd-shell over her matted grey head. The horse splashed and danced, the old woman rose with her rag of chemise clinging to her, scolding in a quiet voice and bending forward with her calabash cup; the soldier laughed, the black horse joyfully and excitedly pawed the water and made it splash high up, the soldier shouted again. — But the soldier knew he could make Cipriano responsible for the splashings.

Kate waded slowly to the boat, and stepped in. The water was warm, but the wind was blowing with strong, electric heaviness. Kate quickly dried her feet and legs on her handkerchief, and pulled on her biscuit-coloured silk stockings and brown shoes.

She sat looking back, at the lake-end, the desert of shingle, the blowing, gauzy nets, and, beyond them, the black land with green maize standing, a further fleecy green of trees, and the broken lane leading deep into the rows of old trees, where the soldiers from Jaramay were now riding away on the black horse and the donkey. On the right there was a ranch, too; a long, low black building and a cluster of black huts with tiled roofs, empty gardens with reed fences, clumps of banana and willow-trees. All in the changeless, heavy light of the afternoon, the long lake reaching into invisibility, between its unreal mountains.

‘It is beautiful here!’ said Kate. ‘One could almost live here.’

‘Ramón says he will make the lake the centre of a new world,’ said Cipriano. ‘We will be the gods of the lake.’

‘I’m afraid I am just a woman,’ said Kate.

His black eyes came round at her swiftly.

‘What does it mean, just a woman?’ he said, quickly, sternly.

She hung her head. What did it mean? What indeed did it mean? Just a woman! She let her soul sink again into the lovely elusiveness where everything is possible, even that oneself is elusive among the gods.

The motor-boat, with waves slapping behind, was running quickly along the brownish pale water. The soldiers, who were in the front, for balance, crouched on the floor with the glazed, stupefied mask-faces of the people when they are sleepy. And soon they were a heap in the bottom of the boat, two little heaps lying in contact.

Cipriano sat behind her, his tunic removed, spreading his white-sleeved arms on the back of his seat. The cartridge-belt was heavy on his hips. His face was completely expressionless, staring ahead. The wind blew his black hair on his forehead, and blew his little beard. He met her eyes with a far-off, remote smile, far, far down his black eyes. But it was a wonderful recognition of her.

The boatman in the stern sat tall and straight, watching with pale eyes of shallow, superficial consciousness. The great hat made his face dark, the chin-ribbon fell black against his cheek. Feeling her look at him, he glanced at her as if she were not there.

Turning, she pushed her cushion on to the floor and slid down. Cipriano got up, in the running, heaving boat, and pulled her another seat-cushion. She lay, covering her face with her shawl, while the motor chugged rapidly, the awning rattled with sudden wind, the hurrying waves rose behind, giving the boat a slap and throwing her forward, sending spray sometimes, in the heat and silence of the lake.

Kate lost her consciousness, under her yellow shawl, in the silence of men.

She woke to the sudden stopping of the engine, and sat up. They were near shore; the white towers of San Pablo among near trees. The boatman, wide-eyed, was bending over the engine, abandoning the tiller. The waves pushed the boat slowly round.

‘What is it?’ said Cipriano.

‘More gasoline, Excellency!’ said the boatman.

The soldiers woke and sat up.

The breeze had died.

‘The water is coming,’ said Cipriano.

‘The rain?’ said Kate.

‘Yes — ’ and he pointed with his fine black finger, which was pale on the inside, to where black clouds were rushing up behind the mountains, and in another place farther off, great heavy banks were rising with strange suddenness. The air seemed to be knitting together overhead. Lightning flashed in various

places, muffled thunder spoke far away.

Still the boat drifted. There was a smell of gasoline. The man potted with the engine. The motor started again, only to stop again in a moment.

The man rolled up his trousers, and, to Kate's amazement, stepped into the lake, though they were a mile from the shore. The water was not up to his knees. They were on a bank. He slowly pushed the boat before him, wading in the silence.

'How deep is the lake farther in?' asked Kate.

'There, Señorita, where the birds with the white breasts are swimming, it is eight and a half metres,' he said, pointing as he waded.

'We must make haste,' said Cipriano.

'Yes, Excellency!'

The man stepped in again, with his long, handsome brown legs. The motor spluttered. They were under way, running fast. A new chill wind was springing up.

But they rounded a bend, and saw ahead the flat promontory with the dark mango-trees, and the pale yellow upper story of the hacienda house of Jamiltepec rising above the trees. Palm-trees stood motionless, the bougainvillea hung in heavy sheets of magenta colour. Kate could see huts of peons among the trees, and women washing, kneeling on stones at the lake side where the stream ran in, and a big plantation of bananas just above.

A cool wind was spinning round in the heavens. Black clouds were filling up. Ramón came walking slowly down to the little harbour as they landed.

'The water is coming,' he said in Spanish.

'We are in time,' said Cipriano.

Ramón looked them both in the face, and knew. Kate, in her new elusiveness, laughed softly.

'There is another flower opened in the garden of Quetzalcoatl,' said Cipriano in Spanish.

'Under the red cannas of Huitzilopochtli,' said Ramón.

'Yes, there, Señor,' said Cipriano. 'Pero una florecita tan zarca! Y abrió en mi sombra, amigo.'

'Seis hombre de la alta fortuna.'

'Verdad!'

It was about five in the afternoon. The wind hissed in the leaves, and suddenly the rain was streaming down in a white smoke of power. The ground was a solid white smoke of water, the lake was gone.

'You will have to stay here to-night,' said Cipriano to Kate in Spanish, in the soft, lapping Indian voice.

‘But the rain will leave off,’ she said.

‘You will have to stay here,’ he repeated, in the same Spanish phrase, in a curious voice like a breath of wind.

Kate looked at Ramón, blushing. He looked back at her, she thought, very remote, as if looking at her from far, far away.

‘The bride of Huitzilopochtli,’ he said, with a faint smile.

‘Thou, Quetzalcoatl, thou wilt have to marry us,’ said Cipriano.

‘Do you wish it?’ said Ramón.

‘Yes!’ she said. ‘I want you to marry us, only you.’

‘When the sun goes down,’ said Ramón.

And he went away to his room. Cipriano showed Kate to her room, then left her and went to Ramón.

The cool water continued to come down, rushing with a smoke of speed down from heaven.

As the twilight came through the unceasing rain, a woman-servant brought Kate a sleeveless dress or chemise of white linen, scalloped at the bottom and embroidered with stiff blue flowers upside-down on the black stalks, with two stiff green leaves. In the centre of the flowers was the tiny Bird of Quetzalcoatl.

‘The Patrón asks that you put this on!’ said the woman, bringing also a lamp and a little note.

The note was from Ramón, saying in Spanish: ‘Take the dress of the bride of Huitzilopochtli, and put it on, and take off everything but this. Leave no thread nor thing that can touch you from the past. The past is finished. It is the new twilight.’

Kate did not quite know how to put on the slip, for it had no sleeves nor arm-holes, but was just a straight slip with a running string. Then she remembered the old Indian way, and tied the string over her left shoulder; rather, slipped the tied string over her left shoulder, leaving her arms and part of her right breast bare, the slip gathered full over her breasts. And she sighed. For it was but a shirt with flowers upturned at the bottom.

Ramón, barefoot, in his white clothes, came for her and took her in silence downstairs into the garden. The zaguán was dark, the rain fell steadily in the twilight, but was abating. All was dark twilight.

Ramón took off his blouse and threw it on the stairs. Then with naked breast he led her into the garden, into the massive rain. Cipriano came forward, barefoot, with naked breast, bareheaded, in the floppy white pantaloons.

They stood barefoot on the earth, that still threw back a white smoke of waters. The rain drenched them in a moment.

‘Barefoot on the living earth, with faces to the living rain,’ said Ramón in

Spanish, quietly; ‘at twilight, between the night and the day; man, and woman, in presence of the unfading star, meet to be perfect in one another. Lift your face, Caterina, and say: This man is my rain from heaven.’

Kate lifted her face and shut her eyes in the downpour.

‘This man is my rain from heaven,’ she said.

‘This woman is the earth to me — say that, Cipriano,’ said Ramón, kneeling on one knee and laying his hand flat on the earth.

Cipriano kneeled and laid his hand on the earth.

‘This woman is the earth to me,’ he said.

‘I, woman, kiss the feet and the heels of this man, for I will be strength to him, throughout the long twilight of the Morning Star.’

Kate kneeled and kissed the feet and heels of Cipriano, and said her say.

‘I, man, kiss the brow and the breast of this woman, for I will be her peace and her increase, through the long twilight of the Morning Star.’

Cipriano kissed her, and said his say.

Then Ramón put Cipriano’s hand over the rain-wet eyes of Kate, and Kate’s hand over the rain-wet eyes of Cipriano.

‘I, a woman, beneath the darkness of this covering hand, pray to this man to meet me in the heart of the night, and never deny me,’ said Kate. ‘But let it be an abiding place between us, for ever.’

‘I, a man, beneath the darkness of this covering hand, pray to this woman to receive me in the heart of the night, in the abiding place that is between us for ever.’

‘Man shall betray a woman, and woman shall betray a man,’ said Ramón, ‘and it shall be forgiven them, each of them. But if they have met as earth and rain, between day and night, in the hour of the Star; if the man has met the woman with his body and the star of his hope, and the woman has met the man with her body and the star of her yearning, so that a meeting has come to pass, and an abiding place for the two where they are as one star, then shall neither of them betray the abiding place where the meeting lives like an unsetting star. For if either betray the abiding place of the two, it shall not be forgiven, neither by day nor by night nor in the twilight of the star.’

The rain was leaving off, the night was dark.

‘Go and bathe in the warm water, which is peace between us all. And put oil on your bodies, which is the stillness of the Morning Star. Anoint even the soles of your feet, and the roots of your hair.’

Kate went up to her room and found a big earthenware bath with steaming water, and big towels. Also, in a beautiful little bowl, oil, and a soft bit of white wool.

She bathed her rain-wet body in the warm water, dried and anointed herself with the clear oil, that was clear as water. It was soft, and had a faint perfume, and was grateful to the skin. She rubbed all her body, even among her hair and under her feet, till she glowed softly.

Then she put on another of the slips with the inverted blue flowers that had been laid on the bed for her, and over that a dress of green, hand-woven wool, made of two pieces joined openly together down the sides, showing a bit of the white, full under-dress, and fastened on the left shoulder. There was a stiff flower, blue, on a black stem, with two black leaves, embroidered at the bottom, at each side. And her white slip showed a bit at the breast, and hung below the green skirt, showing the blue flowers.

It was strange and primitive, but beautiful. She pushed her feet into the plaited green huaraches. But she wanted a belt. She tied a piece of ribbon round her waist.

A mozo tapped to say supper was ready.

Laughing rather shyly, she went along to the salon.

Ramón and Cipriano were both waiting, in silence, in their white clothes. Cipriano had his red serape loosely thrown over his shoulders.

‘So!’ said Cipriano, coming forward. ‘The bride of Huitzilopochtli, like a green morning. But Huitzilopochtli will put on your sash, and you will put on his shoes, so that he shall never leave you, and you shall be always in his spell.’

Cipriano tied round her waist a narrow woollen sash of white wool, with white, terraced towers upon a red and black ground. And she stooped and put on his small, dark feet the huaraches of woven red strips of leather, with a black cross on the toes.

‘One more little gift,’ said Ramón.

He made Kate put over Cipriano’s head a blue cord bearing a little symbol of Quetzalcoatl, the snake in silver and the bird in blue turquoise. Cipriano put over her head the same symbol, but in gold, with a bird in black dull jet, and hanging on a red cord.

‘There!’ said Ramón. ‘That is the symbol of Quetzalcoatl, the Morning Star. Remember the marriage is the meeting-ground, and the meeting-ground is the star. If there be no star, no meeting-ground, no true coming together of man with the woman, into a wholeness, there is no marriage. And if there is no marriage, there is nothing but an agitation. If there is no honourable meeting of man with woman and woman with man, there is no good thing come to pass. But if the meeting come to pass, then whosoever betrays the abiding place, which is the meeting-ground, which is that which lives like a star between day and night, between the dark of woman and the dawn of man, between man’s night and

woman's morning, shall never be forgiven, neither here nor in the hereafter. For man is frail and woman is frail, and none can draw the line down which another shall walk. But the star that is between two people and is their meeting-ground shall not be betrayed.

‘And the star that is between three people, and is their meeting-ground, shall not be betrayed.

‘And the star that is between all men and all women, and between all the children of men, shall not be betrayed.

‘Whosoever betrays another man, betrays a man like himself, a fragment. For if there is no star between a man and a man, or even a man and a wife, there is nothing. But whosoever betrays the star that is between him and another man, betrays all, and all is lost to the traitor.

‘Where there is no star and no abiding place, nothing is, so nothing can be lost.’

CHAPTER XXI

The Opening of the Church

Kate went back to her house in Sayula, and Cipriano went back to his command in the city.

‘Will you not come with me?’ he said. ‘Shall we not make a civil marriage, and live in the same house together?’

‘No,’ she said. ‘I am married to you by Quetzalcoatl, no other. I will be your wife in the world of Quetzalcoatl, no other. And if the star has risen between us, we will watch it.’

Conflicting feelings played in his dark eyes. He could not bear even to be the least bit thwarted. Then the strong, rather distant look came back.

‘It is very good,’ he said. ‘It is the best.’

And he went away without looking back.

Kate returned to her house, to her servants and her rocking-chair. Inside herself she kept very still and almost thoughtless, taking no count of time. What was going to unfold must unfold of itself.

She no longer feared the nights, when she was shut alone in her darkness. But she feared the days a little. She shrank so mortally from contact.

She opened her bedroom window one morning, and looked down to the lake. The sun had come, and queer blotchy shadows were on the hills beyond the water. Way down at the water’s edge a woman was pouring water from a calabash bowl over a statuesque pig, dipping rapidly and assiduously. The little group was seen in silhouette against the pale, dun lake.

But impossible to stand at her open window looking on the little lane. An old man suddenly appeared from nowhere, offering her a leaf full of tiny fish, charales, like splinters of glass, for ten centavos, and a girl was unfolding three eggs from the ragged corner of her rebozo, thrusting them imploringly forward to Kate. An old woman was shambling up with a sad story, Kate knew. She fled from her window and the importunity.

At the same instant the sound that always made her heart stand still woke on the invisible air. It was the sound of drums, of tom-toms rapidly beaten. The same sound she had heard in the distance, in the tropical dusk of Ceylon, from the temple at sunset. The sound she had heard from the edge of the forests in the north, when the Red Indians were dancing by the fire. The sound that wakes

dark, ancient echoes in the heart of every man, the thud of the primeval world.

Two drums were violently throbbing against one another. Then gradually they were slowing down, in a peculiar uneven rhythm, till at last there was only left one slow, continual, monotonous note, like a great drop of darkness falling heavily, continually, dripping in the bright morning.

The re-evoked past is frightening, and if it be re-evoked to overwhelm the present, it is fiendish. Kate felt a real terror of the sound of a tom-tom. It seemed to beat straight on her solar plexus, to make her sick.

She went to her window. Across the lane rose a tall garden-wall of adobe brick, and above that, the sun on the tops of the orange-trees, deep gold. Beyond the orange garden rose three tall, handsome, shaggy palm-trees, side by side on slim stems. And from the very top of the two outer palms rose the twin tips of the church towers. She had noticed it so often; the two ironwork Greek crosses seeming to stand on the mops of the palms.

Now in an instant she saw the glitter of the symbol of Quetzalcoatl in the places where the cross had been; two circular suns, with the dark bird at the centre. The gold of the suns — or the serpents — flashed new in the light of the sun, the bird lifted its wings dark in outline within the circle.

Then again the two drums were speeding up, beating against one another with the peculiar uneven savage rhythm, which at first seems no rhythm, and then seems to contain a summons almost sinister in its power, acting on the helpless blood direct. Kate felt her hands flutter on her wrists, in fear. Almost, too, she could hear the heart of Cipriano beating; her husband in Quetzalcoatl.

‘Listen, Niña! Listen, Niña!’ came Juana’s frightened voice from the veranda.

Kate went to the veranda. Ezequiel had rolled up his mattress and was hitching up his pants. It was Sunday morning, when he sometimes lay on after sunrise. His thick black hair stood up, his dark face was blank with sleep, but in his quiet aloofness and his slightly bowed head Kate could see the secret satisfaction he took in the barbarous sound of the drums.

‘It comes from the Church!’ said Juana.

Kate caught the other woman’s black, reptilian eyes unexpectedly. Usually, she forgot that Juana was dark, and different. For days she would not realize it. Till suddenly she met that black, void look with the glint in it, and she started inwardly, involuntarily asking herself: ‘Does she hate me?’

Or was it only the unspeakable difference in blood?

Now, in the dark glitter which Juana showed her for one moment, Kate read fear, and triumph, and a slow, savage nonchalant defiance. Something very inhuman.

‘What does it mean?’ Kate said to her.

‘It means, Niña, that they won’t ring the bells any more. They have taken the bells away, and they beat the drums in the church. Listen! Listen!’

The drums were shuddering rapidly again.

Kate and Juana went across to the open window.

‘Look! Niña! The Eye of the Other One! No more crosses on the church. It is the Eye of the Other One. Look! How it shines! How nice!’

‘It means,’ said Ezequiel’s breaking young voice, which was just turning deep, ‘that it is the church of Quetzalcoatl. Now it is the temple of Quetzalcoatl; our own God.’

He was evidently a staunch Man of Quetzalcoatl.

‘Think of it!’ murmured Juana, in an awed voice. She seemed like a heap of darkness low at Kate’s side.

Then again she glanced up, and the eyes of the two women met for a moment.

‘See the Niña’s eyes of the sun!’ cried Juana, laying her hand on Kate’s arm. Kate’s eyes were a sort of hazel, changing, grey-gold, flickering at the moment with wonder, and a touch of fear and dismay. Juana sounded triumphant.

A man in a white serape, with the blue and black borders, suddenly appeared at the window, lifting his hat, on which was the sign of Quetzalcoatl, and pushing a little card through the window.

The card said: Come to the church when you hear the one big drum; about seven o’clock. — It was signed with the sign of Quetzalcoatl.

‘Very well!’ said Kate. ‘I will come.’

It was a quarter to seven already. Outside the room was the noise of Juana sweeping the veranda. Kate put on a white dress and a yellow hat, and a long string of pale-coloured topaz that glimmered with yellow and mauve.

The earth was all damp with rain, the leaves were all fresh and tropical thick, yet many old leaves were on the ground, beaten down.

‘Niña! You are going out already! Wait! Wait! The coffee. Concha! quick!’

There was a running of bare feet, the children bringing cup and plate and sweet buns and sugar, the mother hastily limping with the coffee. Ezequiel came striding along the walk, lifting his hat. He went down to the servants’ quarters.

‘Ezequiel says — !’ Juana came crying. When suddenly a soft, slack thud seemed to make a hole in the air, leaving a gap behind it. Thud! — Thud! — Thud! — rather slowly. It was the big drum, irresistible.

Kate rose at once from her coffee.

‘I am going to the church,’ she said.

‘Yes, Niña — Ezequiel says — I am coming, Niña — ’

And Juana scuttled away, to get her black rebozo.

The man in the white serape with the blue and black ends was waiting by the

gate. He lifted his hat, and walked behind Kate and Juana.

‘He is following us!’ whispered Juana.

Kate drew her yellow shawl around her shoulders.

It was Sunday morning, sailing-boats lined the water’s edge, with their black hulls. But the beach was empty. As the great drum let fall its slow, bellowing note, the last people were running towards the church.

In front of the church was a great throng of natives, the men with their dark serapes, or their red blankets over their shoulders; the nights of rain were cold; and their hats in their hands. The high, dark Indian heads! — Women in blue rebozos were pressing along. The big drum slowly, slackly exploded its note from the church-tower. Kate had her heart in her mouth.

In the middle of the crowd, a double row of men in the scarlet serapes of Huitzilopochtli with the black diamond on the shoulders, stood with rifles, holding open a lane through the crowd.

‘Pass!’ said her guard to her. And Kate entered the lane of scarlet and black serapes, going slow and dazed between watchful black eyes of the men. Her guard followed her. But Juana had been turned back.

Kate looked at her feet, and stumbled. Then she looked up.

In the gateway of the yard before the church stood a brilliant figure in a serape whose zig-zag whorls of scarlet, white, and black ran curving, dazzling, to the black shoulders; above which was the face of Cipriano, calm, superb, with the little black beard and the arching brows. He lifted his hand to her in salute.

Behind him, stretching from the gateway to the closed door of the church, was a double row of the guard of Quetzalcoatl, in their blankets with the blue and black borders.

‘What shall I do?’ said Kate.

‘Stand here with me a moment,’ said Cipriano, in the gateway.

It was no easy thing to do, to face all those dark faces and black, glittering eyes. After all, she was a gringuita, and she felt it. A sacrifice? Was she a sacrifice? She hung her head, under her yellow hat, and watched the string of topaz twinkling and shaking its delicate, bog-watery colours against her white dress. Joachim had given it her. He had had it made up for her, the string, in Cornwall. So far away! In another world, in another life, in another era! Now she was condemned to go through these strange ordeals, like a victim.

The big drum overhead ceased, and suddenly the little drums broke like a shower of hail on the air, and as suddenly ceased.

In low, deep, inward voices, the guard of Quetzalcoatl began to speak, in heavy unison:

‘Oyé! Oyé! Oyé! Oyé!’

The small, inset door within the heavy doors of the church opened and Don Ramón stepped through. In his white clothes, wearing the Quetzalcoatl serape, he stood at the head of his two rows of guards, until there was a silence. Then he raised his naked right arm.

‘What is God, we shall never know!’ he said, in a strong voice, to all the people.

The Guard of Quetzalcoatl turned to the people, thrusting up their right arm.

‘What is God, you shall never know!’ they repeated.

Then again, in the crowd, the words were re-echoed by the Guard of Huitzilopochtli.

After which there fell a dead silence, in which Kate was aware of a forest of black eyes glistening with white fire.

‘But the Sons of God come and go.
They come from beyond the Morning Star;
And thither they return, from the land of men.’

It was again the solemn, powerful voice of Ramón. Kate looked at his face; it was creamy-brown in its pallor, but changeless in expression, and seemed to be sending a change over the crowd, removing them from their vulgar complacency.

The Guard of Quetzalcoatl turned again to the crowd, and repeated Ramón’s words to the crowd.

‘Mary and Jesus have left you, and gone to the place of renewal.
And Quetzalcoatl has come. He is here.
He is your lord.’

With his words, Ramón was able to put the power of his heavy, strong will over the people. The crowd began to fuse under his influence. As he gazed back at all the black eyes, his eyes seemed to have no expression, save that they seemed to be seeing the heart of all darkness in front of him, where his unknowable God-mystery lived and moved.

‘Those that follow me, must cross the mountains of the sky,
And pass the houses of the stars by night.
They shall find me only in the Morning Star.

But those that will not follow, must not peep. Peeping, they will lose their sight, and lingering, they will fall very lame.’

He stood a moment in silence, gazing with dark brows at the crowd. Then he dropped his arm, and turned. The big doors of the church opened, revealing a dim interior. Ramón entered the church alone. Inside the church, the drum began to beat. The guard of Quetzalcoatl slowly filed into the dim interior, the scarlet guard of Huitzilopochtli filed into the yard of the church, taking the place of the guard of Quetzalcoatl. Cipriano remained in the gateway of the churchyard. His voice rang out clear and military.

‘Hear me, people. You may enter the house of Quetzalcoatl. Men must go to the right and left, and remove their shoes, and stand erect. To the new God no man shall kneel.

‘Women must go down the centre, and cover their faces. And they may sit upon the floor.

‘But men must stand erect.

‘Pass now, those who dare.’

Kate went with Cipriano into the church.

It was all different, the floor was black and polished, the walls were in stripes of colour, the place seemed dark. Two files of the white-clad men of Quetzalcoatl stood in a long avenue down the centre of the church.

‘This way,’ said one of the men of Quetzalcoatl, in a low voice, drawing her into the centre between the motionless files of men.

She went alone and afraid over the polished black floor, covering her face with her yellow shawl. The pillars of the nave were dark green, like trees rising to a deep, blue roof. The walls were vertically striped in bars of black and white, vermilion and yellow and green, with the windows between rich with deep blue and crimson and black glass, having specks of light. A strange maze, the windows.

The daylight came only from small windows, high up under the deep blue roof, where the stripes of the walls had run into a maze of green, like banana leaves. Below, the church was all dark, and rich with hard colour.

Kate went forward to the front, near the altar steps. High at the back of the chancel, above where the altar had been, burned a small but intense bluey-white light, and just below and in front of the light stood a huge dark figure, a strange looming block, apparently carved in wood. It was a naked man, carved archaic and rather flat, holding his right arm over his head, and on the right arm balanced a carved wooden eagle with outspread wings whose upper surface gleamed with gold, near the light, whose under surface was black shadow. Round the heavy left leg of the man-image was carved a serpent, also glimmering gold, and its golden head rested in the hand of the figure, near the

thigh. The face of the figure was dark.

This great dark statue loomed stiff like a pillar, rather frightening in the white-lit blue chancel.

At the foot of the statue was a stone altar with a small fire of ocote-wood burning. And on a low throne by the altar sat Ramón.

People were beginning to file into the church. Kate heard the strange sound of the naked feet of the men on the black, polished floor, the white figures stole forward towards the altar steps, the dark faces gazing round in wonder, men crossing themselves involuntarily. Throngs of men slowly flooded in, and woman came half running, to crouch on the floor and cover their faces. Kate crouched down too.

A file of the men of Quetzalcoatl came and stood along the foot of the altar steps, like a fence with a gap in the middle, facing the people. Beyond the gap was the flickering altar, and Ramón.

Ramón rose to his feet. The men of Quetzalcoatl turned to face him, and shot up their naked right arms, in the gesture of the statue, Ramón lifted his arm, so that his blanket fell in towards his shoulder, revealing the naked side and the blue sash.

‘All men salute Quetzalcoatl!’ said a clear voice in command.

The scarlet men of Huitzilopochtli were threading among the men of the congregation, pulling the kneeling ones to their feet, causing all to thrust up their right arm, palm flat to heaven, face uplifted, body erect and tense. It was the statue receiving the eagle.

So that around the low dark shrubs of the crouching women stood a forest of erect, upthrusting men, powerful and tense with inexplicable passion. It was a forest of dark wrists and hands up-pressing, with the striped wall vibrating above, and higher, the maze of green going to the little, iron-barred windows that stood open, letting in the light and air of the roof.

‘I am the living Quetzalcoatl,’ came the solemn, impassive voice of Ramón.

‘I am the Son of the Morning Star, and child of the deeps.
No man knows my Father, and I know Him not.
My Father is deep within the deeps, whence He sent me forth.
He sends the eagle of silence down on wide wings
To lean over my head and my neck and my breast
And fill them strong with strength of wings.
He sends the serpent of power up my feet and my loins
So that strength wells up in me like water in hot springs.
But midmost shines as the Morning Star midmost shines

Between night and day, my Soul-star in one,
Which is my Father whom I know not.
I tell you, the day should not turn into glory,
And the night should not turn deep,
Save for the morning and evening stars, upon which they turn.
Night turns upon me, and Day, who am the star between.
Between your breast and belly is a star.

If it be not there

You are empty gourd-shells filled with dust and wind.

When you walk, the star walks with you, between your breast and your belly.

When you sleep, it softly shines.

When you speak true and true, it is bright on your lips and your teeth.

When you lift your hands in courage and bravery, its glow is clear in your palms.

When you turn to your wives as brave men turn to their women

The Morning Star and the Evening Star shine together.

For man is the Morning Star.

And woman is the Star of Evening.

I tell you, you are not men alone.

The star of the beyond is within you.

But have you seen a dead man, how his star has gone out of him?

So the star will go out of you, even as a woman will leave a man if his warmth never warms her.

Should you say: I have no star; I am no star.

So it will leave you, and you will hang like a gourd on the vine of life

With nothing but rind:

Waiting for the rats of the dark to come and gnaw your inside.

Do you hear the rats of the darkness gnawing at your inside?

Till you are as empty as rat-gnawed pomegranates hanging hollow on the Tree of Life?

If the star shone, they dare not, they could not.

If you were men with the Morning Star.

If the star shone within you

No rat of the dark dared gnaw you.

But I am Quetzalcoatl, of the Morning Star.

I am the living Quetzalcoatl.

And you are men who should be men of the Morning Star.

See you be not rat-gnawed gourds.

I am Quetzalcoatl of the eagle and the snake.
The earth and air.
Of the Morning Star.
I am Lord of the Two Ways — ’

The drum began to beat, the men of Quetzalcoatl suddenly took off their serapes, and Ramón did the same. They were now men naked to the waist. The eight men from the altar-steps filed up to the altar where the fire burned, and one by one kindled tall green candles, which burned with a clear light. They ranged themselves on either side the chancel, holding the lights high, so that the wooden face of the image glowed as if alive, and the eyes of silver and jet flashed most curiously.

‘A man shall take the wine of his spirit and the blood of his heart, the oil of his belly and the seed of his loins, and offer them first to the Morning Star,’ said Ramón, in a loud voice, turning to the people.

Four men came to him. One put a blue crown with the bird on his brow, one put a red belt round his breast, another put a yellow belt around his middle, and the last fastened a white belt round his loins. Then the first one pressed a small glass bowl to Ramón’s brow, and in the bowl was white liquid like bright water. The next touched a bowl to the breast, and the red shook in the bowl. At the navel the man touched a bowl with yellow fluid, and at the loins a bowl with something dark. They held them all to the light.

Then one by one they poured them into a silver mixing-bowl that Ramón held between his hands.

‘For save the Unknown God pours His Spirit over my head and fire into my heart, and sends his power like a fountain of oil into my belly, and His lightning like a hot spring into my loins, I am not. I am nothing. I am a dead gourd.

‘And save I take the wine of my spirit and the red of my heart, the strength of my belly and the power of my loins, and mingle them all together, and kindle them to the Morning Star, I betray my body, I betray my soul, I betray my spirit and my God who is Unknown.

‘Fourfold is man. But the star is one star. And one man is but one star.’

He took the silver mixing-bowl and slowly circled it between his hands, in the act of mixing.

Then he turned his back to the people, and lifted the bowl high up, between his hands, as if offering it to the image.

Then suddenly he threw the contents of the bowl into the altar fire.

There was a soft puff of explosion, a blue flame leaped high into the air, followed by a yellow flame, and then a rose-red smoke. In three successive

instants the faces of the men inside the chancel were lit bluish, then gold, then dusky red. And in the same moment Ramón had turned to the people and shot up his hand.

‘Salute Quetzalcoat!’ cried a voice, and men began to thrust up their arms, when another voice came moaning strangely.

‘No! Ah no! Ah no!’ — the voice rose in a hysterical cry.

It came from among the crouching women, who glanced round in fear, to see a woman in black, kneeling on the floor, her black scarf falling back from her lifted face, thrusting up her white hands to the Madonna, in the old gesture.

‘No! No! It is not permitted!’ shrieked the voice. ‘Lord! Lord! Lord Jesus! Holy Virgin! Prevent him! Prevent him!’

The voice sank again to a moan, the white hands clutched the breast, and the woman in black began to work her way forward on her knees, through the throng of women who pressed aside to make her way, towards the altar steps. She came with her head lowered, working her way on her knees, and moaning low prayers of supplication.

Kate felt her blood run cold. Crouching near the altar steps, she looked round. And she knew, by the shape of the head bent in the black scarf, it was Carlota, creeping along on her knees to the altar steps.

The whole church was frozen in horror. ‘Saviour! Saviour! Jesus! Oh Holy Virgin!’ Carlota was moaning to herself as she crawled along.

It seemed hours before she reached the altar steps. Ramón still stood below the great Quetzalcoatl image with arm up-flung.

Carlota crouched black at the altar steps and flung up the white hands and her white face in the frenzy of the old way.

‘Lord! Lord!’ she cried, in a strange ecstatic voice that froze Kate’s bowels with horror: ‘Jesus! Jesus! Jesus! Jesus! Jesus! Jesus!’

Carlota strangled in her ecstasy. And all the while, Ramón, the living Quetzalcoatl, stood before the flickering altar with naked arm upraised, looking with dark, inalterable eyes down upon the woman.

Throes and convulsions tortured the body of Carlota. She gazed sightlessly upwards. Then came her voice, in the mysterious rhapsody of prayer:

‘Lord! Lord! Forgive!’

‘God of love, forgive! He knows not what he does.’

‘Lord! Lord Jesus! Make an end. Make an end, Lord of the world, Christ of the cross, make an end. Have mercy on him, Father. Have pity on him!’

‘Oh, take his life from him now, now, that his soul may not die.’

Her voice had gathered strength till it rang out metallic and terrible.

‘Almighty God, take his life from him, and save his soul.’

And in the silence after that cry her hands seemed to flicker in the air like flames of death.

‘The Omnipotent,’ came the voice of Ramón, speaking quietly, as if to her, ‘is with me, and I serve Omnipotence!’

She remained with her white clasped hands upraised, her white arms and her white face showing mystical, like onyx, from her thin black dress. She was absolutely rigid. And Ramón, with his arm too upraised, looked down on her abstractedly, his black brows a little contracted.

A strong convulsion seized her body. She became tense again, making inarticulate noises. Then another convulsion seized her. Once more she recovered herself, and thrust up her clenched hands in frenzy. A third convulsion seized her as if from below, and she fell with a strangling moan in a heap on the altar steps.

Kate had risen suddenly and ran to her, to lift her up. She found her stiff, with a little froth on her discoloured lips, and fixed, glazed eyes.

Kate looked up in consternation at Ramón. He had dropped his arm, and stood with his hands against his thighs, like a statue. But he remained with his wide, absorbed dark eyes watching without any change. He met Kate’s glance of dismay, and his eyes quickly glanced, like lightning, for Cipriano. Then he looked back at Carlota, across a changeless distance. Not a muscle of his face moved. And Kate could see that his heart had died in its connection with Carlota, his heart was quite, quite dead in him; out of the deathly vacancy he watched his wife. Only his brows frowned a little, from his smooth, male forehead. His old connections were broken. She could hear him say: There is no star between me and Carlota. — And how terribly true it was!

Cipriano came quickly, switched off his brilliant serape, wrapped it round the poor, stiff figure, and picking up the burden lightly, walked with it through the lane of women to the door, and out into the brilliant sun; Kate following. And as she followed, she heard the slow, deep voice of Ramón:

‘I am the Living Quetzalcoatl.
Naked I come from out of the deep
From the place which I call my Father,
Naked have I travelled the long way round
From heaven, past the sleeping sons of God.
Out of the depths of the sky, I came like an eagle.
Out of the bowels of the earth like a snake.
All things that lift in the lift of living between earth and sky, know me.
But I am the inward star invisible.

And the star is the lamp in the hand of the Unknown Mover.

Beyond me is a Lord who is terrible, and wonderful, and dark to me forever.

Yet I have lain in his loins, ere he begot me in Mother space.

Now I am alone on earth, and this is mine.

The roots are mine, down the dark, moist path of the snake.

And the branches are mine, in the paths of the sky and the bird,

But the spark of me that is me is more than mine own.

And the feet of men, and the hands of the women know me.

And knees and thighs and loins, and the bowels of strength and seed are lit with me.

The snake of my left-hand out of the darkness is kissing your feet with his mouth of caressive fire,

And putting his strength in your heels and ankles, his flame in your knees and your legs and your loins, his circle of rest in your belly.

For I am Quetzalcoatl, the feathered snake,

And I am not with you till my serpent has coiled his circle of rest in your belly.

And I, Quetzalcoatl, the eagle of the air, am brushing your faces with vision.

I am fanning your breasts with my breath.

And building my nest of peace in your bones.

I am Quetzalcoatl, of the Two Ways.'

Kate lingered to hear the end of this hymn. Cipriano also had lingered in the porch, with the strange figure in the brilliant serape in his arms. His eyes met Kate's. In his black glance was a sort of homage, to the mystery of the Two Ways; a sort of secret. And Kate was uneasy.

They crossed quickly under the trees to the hotel, which was very near, and Carlota was laid in bed. A soldier had gone already to find a doctor; they sent also for a priest.

Kate sat by the bed. Carlota lay on the bed, making small, horrible moaning noises. The drums outside on the church-roof started to roll, in a savage, complicated rhythm. Kate went to the window and looked out. People were streaming dazzled from the church.

And then, from the church roof, came the powerful singing of men's voices, fanning like a dark eagle in the bright air; a deep, relentless chanting, with an undertone of passionate assurance. She went to the window to look. She could see the men on the church roof, the people swarming down below. And the roll

of that relentless chanting, with its undertone of exultance in power and life, rolled through the air like an invisible dark presence.

Cipriano came in again, glancing at Carlota and at Kate.

‘They are singing the song of Welcome to Quetzalcoatl,’ said he.

‘Is that it?’ said Kate. ‘What are the words?’

‘I will find you a song-sheet,’ he said.

He stood beside her, putting the spell of his presence over her. And she still struggled a little, as if she were drowning. When she wasn’t drowning, she wanted to drown. But when it actually came, she fought for her old footing.

There was a crying noise from Carlota. Kate hurried to the bed.

‘Where am I?’ said the white-faced, awful, deathly-looking woman.

‘You are resting in bed,’ said Kate. ‘Don’t trouble.’

‘Where was I?’ came Carlota’s voice.

‘Perhaps the sun gave you a touch of sunstroke,’ said Kate.

Carlota closed her eyes.

Then suddenly outside the noise of drums rolled again, a powerful sound. And outside in the sunshine life seemed to be rolling in powerful waves.

Carlota started, and opened her eyes.

‘What is that noise?’

‘It is a fiesta,’ said Kate.

‘Ramón, he’s murdered me, and lost his own soul,’ said Carlota. ‘He has murdered me, and lost his own soul. He is a murderer, and one of the damned. The man I married! The man I married! A murderer among the damned!’

It was evident she no longer heard the sounds outside.

Cipriano could not bear the sound of her voice. He came quickly to the side of the bed.

‘Doña Carlota!’ he said, looking down at her dulled hazel eyes, that were fixed and unseeing: ‘Do not die with wrong words on your lips. If you are murdered, you have murdered yourself. You were never married to Ramón. You were married to your own way.’

He spoke fiercely, avengingly.

‘Ah!’ said the dying woman. ‘Ah! I never married Ramón. No! I never married him! How could I? He was not what I would have him be. How could I marry him? Ah! I thought I married him. Ah! I am so glad I didn’t — so glad.’

‘You are glad! You are glad!’ said Cipriano in anger, angry with the very ghost of the woman, talking to the ghost. ‘You are glad because you never poured the wine of your body into the mixing-bowl! Yet in your day you have drunk the wine of his body and been soothed with his oil. You are glad you kept yours back? You are glad you kept back the wine of your body and the secret oil

of your soul? That you gave only the water of your charity? I tell you the water of charity, the hissing water of the spirit, is bitter at last in the mouth and in the breast and in the belly; it puts out the fire. You would have put out the fire, Doña Carlota. — But you cannot. You shall not. You have been charitable and compassionless to the man you called your own. So you have put out your own fire.’

‘Who is talking?’ said the ghost of Carlota.

‘I, Cipriano Viedma, am talking.’

‘The oil and the wine! The oil and the wine and the bread! They are the sacrament! They are the body and the blessing of God! Where is the priest? I want the sacrament. Where is the priest? I want to confess, and take the sacrament, and have the peace of God,’ said the ghost of Carlota.

‘The priest is coming. — But you can take no sacrament, unless you give it. The oil and the wine and the bread! They are not for the priest to give. They are to be poured into the mixing-bowl, which Ramón calls the cup of the star. If you pour neither oil nor wine into the mixing-bowl, from the mixing-bowl you cannot drink. So you have no sacrament.’

‘The sacrament! The bread!’ said the ghost of Carlota.

‘There is no bread. There is no body without blood and oil, as Shylock found out.’

‘A murderer, lost among the damned!’ murmured Carlota. ‘The father of my children! The husband of my body! Ah no! It is better for me to call to the Holy Virgin, and die.’

‘Call then, and die!’ said Cipriano.

‘My children!’ murmured Carlota.

‘It is well you must leave them. With your beggar’s bowl of charity you have stolen their oil and their wine as well. It is good for you to steal from them no more, you stale virgin, you spinster, you born widow, you weeping mother, you impeccable wife, you just woman. You stole the very sunshine out of the sky and the sap out of the earth. Because back again, what did you pour? Only the water of dead dilution into the mixing-bowl of life, you thief. Oh die! — die! — die! Die and be a thousand times dead! Do nothing but utterly die!’

Doña Carlota had relapsed into unconsciousness; even her ghost refused to hear. Cipriano flung his sinisterly-flaming serape over his shoulders and his face, over his nose, till only his black, glittering eyes were visible as he blew out of the room.

Kate sat by the window, and laughed a little. The primeval woman inside her laughed to herself, for she had known all the time about the two thieves on the Cross with Jesus; the bullying, marauding thief of the male in his own rights, and

the much more subtle, cold, sly, charitable thief of the woman in her own rights, forever chanting her beggar's whine about the love of God and the God of pity.

But Kate, too, was a modern woman and a woman in her own right. So she sat on with Carlota. And when the doctor came, she accepted the obsequiousness of the man as part of her rights. And when the priest came, she accepted the obsequiousness from him, just the same, as part of her woman's rights. These two ministers of love, what were they for, but to be obsequious to her? As for herself, she could hardly be called a thief, and a sneak-thief of the world's virility, when these men came forcing their obsequiousness upon her, whining to her to take it and relieve them of the responsibility of their own manhood. No, if women are thieves, it is only because men want to be thieved from. If women steal the world's virility it is only because men want to have it thieved, since for men to be responsible for their own manhood seems to be the last thing men want.

So Kate sat on in the room of the dying Carlota, smiling a little cynically. Outside she heard the roll of the tom-toms and the deep chanting of the men of Quetzalcoatl. Beyond, under the trees, in the smoothed, cleared space before the church, she saw the half-naked men dancing in a circle, to the drum; the round dance. Then later, dancing a religious dance of the return of Quetzalcoatl. It was the old, barefooted, absorbed dancing of the Indians, the dance of downward-sinking absorption. It was the dance of these people, too, just the same: the dance of the Aztecs and Zapotecs and the Huicholes, just the same in essence, indigenous to America; the curious, silent, absorbed dance of the softly-beating feet and ankles, the body coming down softly, but with deep weight, upon powerful knees and ankles, to the tread of the earth, as when a male bird treads the hen. And women softly stepping in unison.

And Kate, listening to the drums, and the full-throated singing, and watching the rich, soft bodies in the dance, thought to herself a little sceptically: Yes! For these it is easier. But all the white men, of the dominant race, what are they doing at this moment?

In the afternoon there was a great dance of the Welcome of Quetzalcoatl. Kate could only see a little of it, in front of the church.

The drums beat vigorously all the time, the dance wound strangely to the water's edge. Kate heard afterwards that the procession of women with baskets on their heads, filled with bread and fruits all wrapped in leaves, went down to the shore and loaded the boats. Then dancers and all got into the boats and canoas, and rowed to the island.

They made a feast on the island, and learned the dance of the Welcome of Quetzalcoatl, which they would dance every year on that day. And they learned

the Song of the Welcome of Quetzalcoatl; which later on Cipriano brought to Kate, as she sat in that dim room with the unconscious woman, who made small, terrible, mechanical noises.

The doctor came hastening, and the priest came after a while. Neither could do anything. They came in the afternoon again, and Kate walked out and wandered on the half-deserted beach, looking at the flock of boats drawing near the island, and feeling that life was a more terrible issue even than death. One could die and have done. But living was never done, it could never be finished, and the responsibility could never be shifted.

She went back again to the sick-room, and with the aid of a woman she undressed poor Carlota and put a nightdress on her. Another doctor came from the city. But the sick woman was dying. And Kate was alone with her again.

The men, where were they?

The business of living? Were they really gone about the great business of living, abandoning her here to this business of dying?

It was nightfall before she heard the drums returning. And again that deep, full, almost martial singing of men, savage and remote, to the sound of the drum. Perhaps after all, life would conquer again, and men would be men, so that women could be women. Till men are men indeed, women have no hope to be women. She knew that fatally enough.

Cipriano came to her, smelling of sun and sweat, his face darkly glowing, his eyes flashing. He glanced at the bed, at the unconscious woman, at the medicine bottles.

‘What do they say?’ he asked.

‘The doctors think she may come round.’

‘She will die,’ he said.

Then he went with her to the window.

‘See!’ he said. ‘This is what they are singing.’

It was the Song-sheet of the Welcome to Quetzalcoatl.

WELCOME TO QUETZALCOATL

We are not wasted. We are not left out.

Quetzalcoatl has come!

There is nothing more to ask for.

Quetzalcoatl has come!

He threw the Fish in the boat.

The cock rose, and crew over the waters.

The naked one climbed in.

Quetzalcoatl has come!
Quetzalcoatl loves the shade of trees.
Give him trees! Call back the trees!
We are like trees, tall and rustling.
Quetzalcoatl is among the trees.
Do not tell me my face is shining.
Quetzalcoatl has come!
Over my head his noiseless eagle
Fans a flame.
Tie my spotted shoes for dancing,
The snake has kissed my heel.
Like a volcano my hips are moving
With fire, and my throat is full.
Blue daylight sinks in my hair.
The star comes out between the two
Wonders, shines out of everywhere,
Saying without speech: Look you!
Ah, Quetzalcoatl!
Put sleep as black as beauty in the secret of my belly.
Put star-oil over me.
Call me a man.

Even as she read, she could hear the people outside singing it, as the reed-flutes unthreaded the melody time after time. This strange dumb people of Mexico was opening its voice at last. It was as if a stone had been rolled off them all, and she heard their voice for the first time, deep, wild, with a certain exultance and menace.

‘The naked one climbed in.
Quetzalcoatl has come!’

She could hear the curious defiance and exultance in the men’s voices. Then a woman’s voice, clear almost as a star itself, went up the road at the verse:

‘Blue daylight sinks in my hair.
The star comes out between the two
Wonders . . .’

Strange! The people had opened hearts at last. They had rolled the stone of

their heaviness away, a new world had begun. Kate was frightened. It was dusk. She laid her hand on Cipriano's knee, lost. And he leaned and put his dark hand against her cheek, breathing silently.

'To-day,' he said softly, 'we have done well.'

She felt for his hand. All was so dark. But oh, so deep, so deep and beyond her, the vast, soft, living heat! So beyond her!

'Put sleep as black as beauty in the secret of my belly.
Put star-oil over me.'

She could almost feel her soul appealing to Cipriano for this sacrament.

They sat side by side in darkness, as the night fell, and he held his hand loosely on hers. Outside, the people were still singing. Some were dancing round the drum. On the church-towers, where the bells had been, there were fires flickering, and white forms of men, the noise of a heavy drum, then again, the chant. In the yard before the church doors a fire was blazing, and men of Huitzilopochtli stood watching two of their men, naked save for a breech-cloth and the scarlet feathers on their head, dancing the old spear-dance, whooping challenge in the firelight.

Ramón came in, in his white clothes. He pulled off his big hat, and stood looking down at Carlota. She no longer made noises, and her eyes were turned up horribly, showing the whites. Ramón closed his eyes a moment, and turned away, saying nothing. He came to the window, where Cipriano still sat in his impenetrable but living silence, that satisfied where all speech had failed, holding Kate's hand loosely. Nor did he let go her hand.

Ramón looked out, at the fires in the church towers, the fire before the church doors, the little fires on the beach by the lake; and the figures of men in white, the figures of women in dark rebozos, with full white skirts, the two naked dancers, the standing crowd, the occasional scarlet serapes of Huitzilopochtli, the white and blue of Quetzalcoatl, the creeping away of a motor-car, the running of boys, the men clustering round the drum, to sing.

'It is life,' he said, 'which is the mystery. Death is hardly mysterious in comparison.'

There was a knocking. The doctor had come again, and a sister to nurse the dying woman. Softly the sister paced round the room and bent over her charge.

Cipriano and Kate went away in a boat over the dark lake, away from all the fires and the noise into the deep darkness of the lake beyond, to Jamiltepec. Kate felt she wanted to be covered with deep and living darkness, the deeps where Cipriano could lay her.

Put sleep as black as beauty in the secret of my belly.
Put star-oil over me.

And Cipriano, as he sat in the boat with her, felt the inward sun rise darkly in him, diffusing through him; and felt the mysterious flower of her woman's femaleness slowly opening to him, as a sea-anemone opens deep under the sea, with infinite soft fleshliness. The hardness of self-will was gone, and the soft anemone of her deeps blossomed for him of itself, far down under the tides.

Ramón remained behind in the hotel, in the impenetrable sanctuary of his own stillness. Carlota remained unconscious. There was a consultation of doctors; to no effect. She died at dawn, before her boys could arrive from Mexico; as a canoa was putting off from the shore with a little breeze, and the passengers were singing the Song of Welcome to Quetzalcoatl, unexpectedly, upon the pale water.

CHAPTER XXII

The Living Huitzilopochtli

They buried Doña Carlota in Sayula, and Kate, though a woman, went also to the funeral. Don Ramón followed the coffin, in his white clothes and big hat with the Quetzalcoatl sign. His boys went with him; and there were many strangers, men, in black.

The boys looked odd young shoots, in their black suits with short breeches and bare knees. They were both round-faced and creamy brown in complexion, both had a touch of fairness. The elder, Pedro, was more like Don Ramón; but his hair was softer, more fluffy than his father's, with a hint of brown. He was sulky and awkward, and kept his head ducked. The younger boy, Cyprian, had the fluffy, upstanding brown hair and the startled, hazel eyes of his mother.

They had come in a motor-car with their aunt, from Guadalajara, and were returning straight to town. In her will, the mother had named guardians in place of the father, stating that the father would consent. And her considerable fortune she had left in trust for the boys. But the father was one of the trustees.

Ramón sat in his room in the hotel, overlooking the lake, and his two boys sat on the cane settee opposite him.

'What do you want to do, my sons?' said Ramón. 'To go back with your Aunt Margarita, and return to school in the United States?'

The boys remained a while in sulky silence.

'Yes!' said Cyprian at last, his brown hair seeming to fluff up with indignation. 'That is what our mother wished us to do. So, of course, we shall do it.'

'Very well!' said Ramón quietly. 'But remember I am your father, and my door, and my arms, and my heart will always be open to you, when you come.'

The elder boy shuffled with his feet, and muttered, without looking up:

'We cannot come, papa!'

'Why not, child?'

The boy looked up at him with brown eyes as challenging as his own.

'You, papa, you call yourself The Living Quetzalcoatl?'

'Yes.'

'But, papa, our father is called Ramón Carrasco.'

'It is also true,' said Ramón, smiling.

‘We,’ said Pedro, rather heavily, ‘are not the children of the Living Quetzalcoatl, papa. We are Carrasco y de Lara.’

‘Good names both,’ said Ramón.

‘Never,’ said the young Cyprian, his eyes flashing, ‘never can we love you, papa. You are our enemy. You killed our mother.’

‘No, no!’ said Ramón. ‘That you must not say. Your mother sought her own death.’

‘Mama loved you much, much, much!’ cried Cyprian, the tears rising to his eyes. ‘Always she loved you and prayed for you — ’ He began to cry.

‘And I, my son?’ said Ramón.

‘You hated her and killed her! Oh, mama! Mama! Oh, mama! I want my mother!’ he wept.

‘Come to me, little one!’ said Ramón softly, holding out his hands.

‘No!’ cried Cyprian, stamping his foot and flashing his eyes through his tears. ‘No! No!’

The elder boy hung his head and was crying too. Ramón had the little, perplexed frown of pain on his brow. He looked from side to side, as if for some issue. Then he gathered himself together.

‘Listen, my sons,’ he said. ‘You also will be men; it will not be long. While you are little boys, you are neither men nor women. But soon, the change will come, and you will have to be men. And then you will know that a man must be a man. When his soul tells him to do a thing, he must do it. When you are men, you must listen carefully to your own souls, and be sure to be true. Be true to your own souls; there is nothing else for a man to do.’

‘Je m’en fiche de ton âme, mon père!’ said Cyprian, with one of his flashes into French. It was a language he often spoke with his mother.

‘That you may, my boy,’ said Ramón. ‘But I may not.’

‘Papa!’ put in the elder boy. ‘Is your soul different from mama’s soul?’

‘Who knows?’ said Ramón. ‘I understand it differently.’

‘Because mama always prayed for your soul.’

‘And I, in my way, pray for hers, child. If her soul comes back to me, I will take it into my heart.’

‘Mama’s soul,’ said Cyprian, ‘will go straight into Paradise.’

‘Who knows, child! Perhaps the Paradise for the souls of the dead is the hearts of the living.’

‘I don’t understand what you say.’

‘It is possible,’ said Ramón, ‘that even now the only Paradise for the soul of your mother is in my heart.’

The two boys stared at him with open eyes.

‘Never will I believe that,’ said Cyprian.

‘Or it may be in thy heart,’ said Ramón. ‘Hast thou a place in thy heart for the soul of thy mother?’

The young Cyprian stared with bewildered hazel eyes.

‘The soul of my mother goes direct to Paradise, because she is a saint,’ he asserted flatly.

‘Which Paradise, my son?’

‘The only one. Where God is.’

‘And where is that?’

There was a pause.

‘In the sky,’ said Cyprian, stubbornly.

‘It is very far and very empty. But I believe, my son, that the hearts of living men are the very middle of the sky. And there God is; and Paradise; inside the hearts of living men and women. And there the souls of the dead come to rest, there, at the very centre, where the blood turns and returns; that is where the dead sleep best.’

There was a very blank pause.

‘And wilt thou go on saying thou art the Living Quetzalcoatl?’ said Cyprian.

‘Surely! And when you are a little older, perhaps you will come to me and say it too.’

‘Never! Thou hast killed our mother, and we shall hate thee. When we are men we ought to kill thee.’

‘Nay, that is bombast, child! Why wilt thou listen only to servants and priests and people of that sort? Are they not thy inferiors, since thou art my son, and thy mother’s son? Why dost thou take the talk of servants and inferiors into thy mouth? Hast thou no room for the speech of brave men? Thou wilt not kill me, neither will thy brother. For I would not allow you, even if you wished it. And you do not wish it. Talk no more of this empty lackey-talk to me, Cyprian, for I will not hear it. Art thou already a little lackey, or a priest? Come, thou art vulgar. Thou art a little vulgarian. We had better speak English; or thy French. Castilian is too good a language to turn into this currish talk.’

Ramón rose and went to the window to look out at the lake. The drums on the church were sounding for midday, when every man should glance at the sun, and stand silent with a little prayer.

‘The sun has climbed the hill, the day is on the downward slope.

Between the morning and the afternoon, stand I here with my soul, and lift it up.

My soul is heavy with sunshine, and steeped with strength.

The sunbeams have filled me like a honeycomb,
It is the moment of fulness,
And the top of the morning.'

Ramón turned and repeated the Mid-day verse to his boys. They listened in confused silence.

'Come!' he said. 'Why are you confused? If I talked to you about your new boots, or ten pesos, you would not be confused. But if I speak of the sun and your own souls filled from the sun like honeycombs, you sulk. You had better go back to your school in America, to learn to be business men. You had better say to everybody: Oh, no! we have no father! Our mother died, but we never had a father. We are children of an immaculate conception, so we should make excellent business men.'

'I shall be a priest,' said Cyprian.

'And I a doctor,' said Pedro.

'Very good! Very good! Shall-be is far from am, and tomorrow is another day. Come to me when your heart tells you to come. You are my little boys, whatever you say, and I shall stroke your hair and laugh at you. Come! Come here!'

He looked at them, and they dared not refuse to obey, his power was so much greater than theirs.

He took his eldest son in his arms and stroked his head.

'There!' he said. 'Thou art my eldest son, and I am thy father, who calls himself The Living Quetzalcoatl. When they say: "Is it thy father who calls himself The Living Quetzalcoatl?" — say to them: "Yes, he is my father." And when they ask you what you think of such a father, say: "I am young, and I do not understand him yet. But I do not judge my father without understanding him." Wilt thou say that, my boy, Pedro, my son?' And Ramón stroked the boy's hair with the gentleness and tenderness which filled the child with a sort of awe.

'Yes, papa! I will say that,' said the boy, relieved.

'It is well,' said Ramón, laying his hand on the child's head for a moment, like a blessing.

Then he turned to the younger son.

'Come then,' he said, 'and let me stroke thy upstanding hair.'

'If I love thee, I cannot love mama!' said Cyprian.

'Nay, is thy heart so narrow? Love not at all, if it makes thee petty.'

'But I do not want to come to thee, papa.'

'Then stay away, my son, and come when thou dost want it.'

'I do not think thou lovest me, papa.'

'Nay, when thou art an obstinate monkey, I love thee not. But when thy real

manhood comes upon thee, and thou art brave and daring, rather than rash and impudent, then thou wilt be lovable. How can I love thee if thou art not lovable?’

‘Mama always loved me.’

‘She called thee her own. I do not call thee mine own. Thou art thyself. When thou art lovable, I can love thee. When thou art rash and impudent, nay, I cannot. The mill will not spin when the wind does not blow.’

The boys went away. Ramón watched them as they stood in their black clothes and bare knees upon the jetty, and his heart yearned over them.

‘Ah, the poor little devils!’ he said to himself. And then:

‘But I can do no more than keep my soul like a castle for them, to be a stronghold to them when they need it — if ever they do.’

These days Kate often sat by the lake shore, in the early light of the morning. Between the rains, the day came very clear, she could see every wrinkle in the great hills opposite, and the fold, or pass, through which a river came, away at Tuliapan, was so vivid to her she felt she had walked it. The red birds looked as if rains had freshened even their poppy-buds, and in the morning frogs were whirring.

But the world was somehow different; all different. No jingle of bells from the church, no striking of the clock. The clock was taken away.

And instead, the drums. At dawn, the heavy drum rolling its sound on the air. Then the sound of the Dawn-Verse chanted from the tower, in a strong man’s voice:

‘The dark is dividing, the sun is coming past the wall.

Day is at hand.

Lift your hand, say Farewell! say Welcome!

Then be silent.

Let the darkness leave you, let the light come into you,

Man in the twilight.’

The voice and the great drum ceased. And in the dawn the men who had risen stood silent, with arm uplifted, in the moment of change, the women covered their faces and bent their heads. All was changeless still for the moment of change.

Then the light drum rattled swiftly, as the first sparkle of the bright sun flashed in sheer light from the crest of the great hills. The day had begun. People of the world moved on their way.

At about nine o’clock the light drum rattled quickly, and the voice in the tower cried:

‘Half-way! Half-way up the slope of the morning!’

There was the heavy drum at noon, the light drum again at about three o’clock, with the cry:

‘Half-way! Half-way down the slope of afternoon.’

And at sunset again, the great drum rolling, and the voice crying:

‘Leave off! Leave off! Leave off!

Lift your hand, say Farewell! say Welcome!

Man in the twilight.

The sun is in the outer porch, cry to him: Thanks! Oh, Thanks!

Then be silent.

You belong to the night.’

And again in the sunset everywhere men stood with lifted faces and hands, and women covered their faces and stood with bowed heads; all was changeless still for the moment of change.

Then the lighter drums suddenly beat, and people moved on into the night.

The world was different, different. The drums seemed to leave the air soft and vulnerable, as if it were alive. Above all, no clang of metal on metal, during the moments of change.

‘Metal for resistance.

Drums for the beating heart.

The heart ceases not.’

This was one of Ramón’s little verses.

Strange, the change that was taking place in the world. Always the air had a softer, more velvety silence, it seemed alive. And there were no hours. Dawn and noon and sunset, mid-morning, or the up-slope middle, and mid-afternoon, or the down-slope middle, this was the day, with the watches of the night. They began to call the four watches of the day the watch of the rabbit, the watch of the hawk, the watch of the turkey-buzzard and the watch of the deer. And the four quarters of the night were the watch of the frog, the watch of the fire-fly, the watch of the fish, the watch of the squirrel.

‘I shall come for you,’ wrote Cipriano to her, ‘when the deer is thrusting his last foot towards the forest.’

That meant, she knew, in the last quarter of the hours of the deer; something after five o’clock.

It was as if, from Ramón and Cipriano, from Jamiltepec and the lake region, a

new world was unfolding, unrolling, as softly and subtly as twilight falling and removing the clutter of day. It was a soft, twilit newness slowly spreading and penetrating the world, even into the cities. Now, even in the cities the blue serapes of Quetzalcoatl were seen, and the drums were heard at the Hours, casting a strange mesh of twilight over the clash of bells and the clash of traffic. Even in the capital the big drum rolled again, and men, even men in city clothes, would stand still with uplifted faces and arm upstretched, listening for the noon-verse, which they knew in their hearts, and trying not to hear the clash of metal.

‘Metal for resistance.
Drums for the beating heart.’

But it was a world of metal, and a world of resistance. Cipriano, strangely powerful with the soldiers, in spite of the hatred he aroused in other officials, was for meeting metal with metal. For getting Montes to declare: The Religion of Quetzalcoatl is the religion of Mexico, official and declared. — Then backing up the declaration with the army.

But no! no! said Ramón. Let it spread of itself. And wait awhile, till you can be declared the living Huitzilopochtli, and your men can have the red and black blanket, with the snake-curve. Then perhaps we can have the open wedding with Caterina, and she will be a mother among the gods.

All the time, Ramón tried as far as possible to avoid arousing resistance and hate. He wrote open letters to the clergy, saying:

‘Who am I, that I should be enemy of the One Church? I am catholic of catholics. I would have One Church of all the world, with Rome for the Central City, if Rome wish.

‘But different peoples must have different Saviours, as they have different speech and different colour. The final mystery is one mystery. But the manifestations are many.

‘God must come to Mexico in a blanket and in huaraches, else He is no God of the Mexicans, they cannot know Him. Naked, all men are but men. But the touch, the look, the word that goes from one naked man to another is the mystery of living. We live by manifestations.

‘And men are fragile, and fragments, and strangely grouped in their fragmentariness. The invisible God has done it to us, darkened some faces and whitened others, and grouped us in groups, even as the zopilote is a bird, and the parrot of the hot lands is a bird, and the little oriole is a bird. But the angel of the zopilotes must be a zopilote, and the angel of the parrots a parrot. And to one, the dead carcase will ever smell good; to the other, the fruit.

‘Priests who will come to me do not forsake either faith or God. They change their manner of speech and vestments, as the peon calls with one cry to the oxen, and with another cry to the mules. Each responds to its own call in its own way —’

To the socialists and agitators he wrote:

‘What do you want? Would you make all men as you are? And when every peon in Mexico wears an American suit of clothes and shiny black shoes, and looks for life in the newspaper and for his manhood to the government, will you be satisfied? Did the government, then, give you your manhood, that you expect it to give it to these others?’

‘It is time to forget. It is time to put away the grudge and the pity. No man was ever the better for being pitied, and every man is the worse for a grudge.’

‘We can do nothing with life, except live it.’

‘Let us seek life where it is to be found. And, having found it, life will solve the problems. But every time we deny the living life, in order to solve a problem, we cause ten problems to spring up where was one before. Solving the problems of the people, we lose the people in a poisonous forest of problems.’

‘Life makes, and moulds, and changes the problem. The problem will always be there, and will always be different. So nothing can be solved, even by life and living, for life dissolves and resolves, solving it leaves alone.’

‘Therefore we turn to life; and from the clock to the sun and from metal to membrane.’

‘This way we hope the problem will dissolve, since it can never be solved. When men seek life first, they will not seek land nor gold. The land will lie on the lap of the gods, where men lie. And if the old communal system comes back, and the village and the land are one, it will be very good. For truly, no man can possess lands.’

‘But when we are deep in a bog, it is no use attempting to gallop. We can only wade out with toil. And in our haste to have a child, it is no good tearing the babe from the womb.’

‘Seek life, and life will bring the change.’

‘Seek life itself, even pause at dawn and at sunset, and life will come back into us and prompt us through the transitions.’

‘Lay forcible hands on nothing, only be ready to resist, if forcible hands should be laid on you. For the new shoots of life are tender, and better ten deaths than that they should be torn or trampled down by the bullies of the world. When it comes to fighting for the tender shoots of life, fight as the jaguar fights for her young, as the she-bear for her cubs.’

‘That which is life is vulnerable, only metal is invulnerable. Fight for the

vulnerable unfolding of life. But for that, fight never to yield.'

Cipriano, too, was always speaking to his soldiers, always with the same cry:

'We are men! We are fighters!

'But what can we do?

'Shall we march to simple death?

'No! No! We must march to life.

'The gringos are here. We have let them come. We must let them stay, for we cannot drive them out. With guns and swords and bayonets we can never drive them out, for they have a thousand where we have one. And if they come in peace, let them stay in peace.

'But we have not lost Mexico yet. We have not lost each other.

'We are the blood of America. We are the blood of Montezuma.

'What is my hand for? Is it to turn the handle of a machine alone?

'My hand is to salute the God of Mexicans, beyond the sky.

'My hand is to touch the hand of a brave man.

'My hand is to hold a gun.

'My hand is to make the corn grow out of the ground.

'What are my knees for?

'My knees are to hold me proud and erect.

'My knees are for marching on my way.

'My knees are the knees of a man.

'Our god is Quetzalcoatl of the blue sky, and Huitzilopochtli red at the gates, watching.

'Our gods hate a kneeling man. They shout Ho! Erect!

'Then what can we do?

'Wait!

'I am a man, naked inside my clothes as you are.

'Am I a big man? Am I a tall and powerful man, from Tlascala, for example.

'I am not. I am little. I am from the south. I am small —

'Yet am I not your general?

'Why?

'Why am I a general, and you only soldiers?

'I will tell you.

'I found the other strength.

'There are two strengths; the strength which is the strength of oxen and mules and iron, of machines and guns, and of men who cannot get the second strength.

'Then there is the second strength. It is the strength you want. And you can get it, whether you are small or big. It is the strength that comes from behind the sun. And you can get it; you can get it here!' — he struck his breast — 'and

here!' — he struck his belly — 'and here!' — he struck his loins. 'The strength that comes from back of the sun.'

When Cipriano was roused, his eyes flashed, and it was as if dark feathers, like pinions, were starting out of him, out of his shoulders and back, as if these dark pinions clashed and flashed like a roused eagle. His men seemed to see him, as by second sight, with the demonish clashing and dashing of wings, like an old god. And they murmured, their eyes flashing:

'It is Cipriano! It is he! We are Ciprianistos, we are his children.'

'We are men! We are men!' cried Cipriano.

'But listen. There are two kinds of men. There are men with the second strength, and men without it.

'When the first gringos came, we lost our second strength. And the padres taught us: Submit! Submit!

'The gringos had got the second strength!

'How?

'Like cunning ones, they stole it on the sly. They kept very still, like a tarantula in his hole. Then when neither sun nor moon nor stars knew he was there, Biff! — the tarantula sprang across, and bit, and left the poison and sucked the secret.

'So they got the secrets of the air and the water, and they got the secrets out of the earth. So the metals were theirs, and they made guns and machines and ships, and they made trains and telegrams and radio.

'Why? Why did they make all these things? How could they do it?

'Because, by cunning, they had got the secret of the second strength, which comes from behind the sun.

'And we had to be slaves, because we had only got the first strength, we had lost the second strength.

'Now we are getting it back. We have found our way again to the secret sun behind the sun. There sat Quetzalcoatl, and at last Don Ramón found him. There sits the red Huitzilopochtli, and I have found him. For I have found the second strength.

'When he comes, all you who strive shall find the second strength.

'And when you have it, where will you feel it?

'Not here!' — and he struck his forehead. 'Not where the cunning gringos have it, in the head, and in their books. Not we. We are men, we are not spiders.

'We shall have it here!' — he struck his breast — 'and here!' — he struck his belly — 'and here!' — he struck his loins.

'Are we men? Can we not get the second strength? Can we not? Have we lost it forever?

‘I say no! Quetzalcoatl is among us. I have found the red Huitzilopochtli. The second strength!

‘When you walk or sit, when you work or lie down, when you eat or sleep, think of the second strength, that you must have it.

‘Be very quiet. It is shy as a bird in a dark tree.

‘Be very clean, clean in your bodies and your clothes. It is like a star, that will not shine in dirt.

‘Be very brave, and do not drink till you are drunk, nor soil yourself with bad women, nor steal. Because a drunken man has lost his second strength, and a man loses his strength in bad women, and a thief is a coward, and the red Huitzilopochtli hates a coward.

‘Try! Try for the second strength. When we have it, the others will lose it.’

Cipriano struggled hard with his army. The curse of any army is the having nothing to do. Cipriano made all his men cook and wash for themselves, clean and paint the barracks, make a great garden to grow vegetables, and plant trees wherever there was water. And he himself took a passionate interest in what they did. A dirty tunic, a sore foot, a badly-made huarache did not escape him. But even when they cooked their meals he went among them.

‘Give me something to eat,’ he would say. ‘Give me an enchilada!’

Then he praised the cooking, or said it was bad.

Like all savages, they liked doing small things. And, like most Mexicans, once they were a little sure of what they were doing, they loved doing it well.

Cipriano was determined to get some discipline into them. Discipline is what Mexico needs, and what the whole world needs. But it is the discipline from the inside that matters. The machine discipline, from the outside, breaks down.

He had the wild Indians from the north beat their drums in the barrack-yard, and start the old dances again. The dance, the dance which has meaning, is a deep discipline in itself. The old Indians of the north still have the secret of animistic dancing. They dance to gain power; power over the living forces or potencies of the earth. And these dances need intense dark concentration, and immense endurance.

Cipriano encouraged the dances more than anything. He learned them himself, with curious passion. The shield and spear dance, the knife dance, the dance of ambush, and the surprise dance, he learned them in the savage villages of the north, and he danced them in the barrack-yard, by the bonfire, at night, when the great doors were shut.

Then, naked save for a black breech-cloth, his body smeared with oil and red earth-powder, he would face some heavy naked Indian and with shield and spear dance the dance of the two warriors, champions in the midst of the dense ring of

soldiers. And the silent, rhythmic concentration of this duel in subtlety and rapidity kept the feet softly beating with the drum, the naked body suave and subtle, circling with suave, primitive stealth, then crouching and leaping like a panther, with the spear poised, to a clash of shields, parting again with the crowing yell of defiance and exultance.

In this dance, no one was more suave and sudden than Cipriano. He could swerve along the ground with bent, naked back, as invisible as a lynx, circling round his opponent, his feet beating and his suave body subtly tilting to the drum. Then in a flash he was in the air, his spear pointing down at the collarbone of his enemy and gliding over his shoulder, as the opponent swerved under, and the war-yell resounded. The soldiers in the deep circle watched, fascinated, uttering the old low cries.

And as the dance went on, Cipriano felt his strength increase and surge inside him. When all his limbs were glistening with sweat, and his spirit was at last satisfied, he was at once tired and surcharged with extraordinary power. Then he would throw his scarlet and dark serape around him, and motion other men to fight, giving his spear and shield to another officer or soldier, going himself to sit down on the ground and watch, by the firelight. And then he felt his limbs and his whole body immense with power, he felt the black mystery of power go out of him over all his soldiers. And he sat there imperturbable, in silence, holding all those black-eyed men in the splendour of his own, silent self. His own dark consciousness seemed to radiate through their flesh and their bones; they were conscious, not through themselves but through him. And as a man's instinct is to shield his own head, so that instinct was to shield Cipriano, for he was the most precious part of themselves to them. It was in him they were supreme. They got their splendour from his power and their greatest consciousness was his consciousness diffusing them.

'I am not of myself,' he would say to them. 'I am of the red Huitzilopochtli and the power from behind the sun. And you are not of yourselves. Of yourselves you are nothing. You are of me, my men.'

He encouraged them to dance naked, with the breech-cloth, to rub themselves with the red earth-powder, over the oil.

'This is the oil of the stars. Rub it well into your limbs and you will be strong as the starry sky. This is the red blood of volcanoes. Rub yourselves with it, you will have the power of the fire of the volcanoes, from the centre of the earth.'

He encouraged them to dance the silent, concentrated dances to the drum, to dance for hours, gathering power and strength.

'If you know how to tread the dance, you can tread deeper and deeper, till you touch the middle of the earth with your foot. And when you touch the middle of

the earth, you will have such power in your belly and your breast, no man will be able to overcome you. Get the second strength. Get it, get it out of the earth, get it from behind the sun. Get the second strength.'

He made long, rapid marches across the wild Mexican country, and through the mountains, moving light and swift. He liked to have his men camping in the open, with no tents: but the watch set, and the stars overhead. He pursued the bandits with swift movements. He stripped his captives, and tied them up. But if it seemed a brave man, he would swear him in. If it seemed to him a knave, a treacherous cur, he stabbed him to the heart, saying:

'I am the red Huitzilopochtli, of the knife.'

Already he had got his own small, picked body of men out of the ignominious drab uniform, dressed in white with the scarlet sash and the scarlet ankle cords, and carrying the good, red and black serape. And his men must be clean. On the march they would stop by some river, with the order for every man to strip and wash, and wash his clothing. Then the men, dark and ruddy, moved about naked, while the white clothing of strong white cotton dried on the earth. They moved on again, glittering with the peculiar whiteness of cotton clothes in Mexico, gun at their backs, serape and small pack on their backs, wearing the heavy straw hats with the scarlet crowns on their heads.

'They must move!' he said to his officers. 'They must learn again to move swiftly and untiringly, with the old power. They must not lie about. In the sleep hours, let them sleep. In the waking, let them work, or march, or drill, or dance.'

He divided his regiment up into little companies of a hundred each, with a centurion and a sergeant in command. Each company of a hundred must learn to act in perfect unison, freely and flexibly. 'Perfect your hundred,' Cipriano insisted, 'and I will perfect your thousands and your tens of thousands.'

'Listen!' he said. 'For us, no trench and cannon warfare. My men are no cannon-fodder, nor trench-dung. Where cannon are, we move away. Our hundreds break up, and we attack where the cannon are not. That we are swift, that we are silent, that we have no burdens, and that the second strength is in us: that is all. We intend to put up no battle-front, but to attack at our own moment, and at a thousand points.'

And always he reiterated:

'If you can get the power from the heart of the earth, and the power from behind the sun; if you can summon the power of the red Huitzilopochtli into you, nobody can conquer you. Get the second strength.'

Ramón was pressing Cipriano now openly to assume the living Huitzilopochtli.

'Come!' he said. 'It is time you let General Viedma be swallowed up in the

red Huitzilopochtli. Don't you think?'

'If I know what it means,' said Cipriano.

They were sitting on the mats in Ramón's room, in the heat before the rain came, towards the end of the rainy season.

'Stand up!' said Ramón.

Cipriano stood up at once, with that soft, startling alertness in his movement.

Ramón came quickly to him, placed one of his hands over Cipriano's eyes, closing them. Ramón stood behind Cipriano, who remained motionless in the warm dark, his consciousness reeling in strange concentric waves, towards a centre where it suddenly plunges into the bottomless deeps, like sleep.

'Cipriano?' — the voice sounded so far off.

'Yes.'

'Is it dark?'

'It is dark.'

'Is it alive? Is the darkness alive?'

'Surely it is alive.'

'Who lives?'

'I.'

'Where?'

'I know not. In the living darkness.'

Ramón then bound Cipriano's eyes and head with a strip of black fur. Then again, with a warm, soft pressure, he pressed one naked hand over Cipriano's naked breast, and one between his shoulders. Cipriano stood in profound darkness, erect and silent.

'Cipriano?'

'Yes.'

'Is it dark in your heart?'

'It is coming dark.'

Ramón felt the thud of the man's heart slowly slackening. In Cipriano, another circle of darkness had started slowly to revolve, from his heart. It swung in widening rounds, like a greater sleep.

'Is it dark?'

'It is dark.'

'Who lives?'

'I.'

Ramón bound Cipriano's arms at his sides, with a belt of fur round the breast. Then he put his one hand over the navel, his other hand in the small of the other man's back, pressing with slow, warm, powerful pressure.

'Cipriano?'

‘Yes.’

The voice and the answer going farther and farther away.

‘Is it dark?’

‘No, my Lord.’

Ramón knelt and pressed his arms close round Cipriano’s waist, pressing his black head against his side. And Cipriano began to feel as if his mind, his head were melting away in the darkness; like a pearl in black wine, the other circle of sleep began to swing, vast. And he was a man without a head, moving like a dark wind over the face of the dark waters.

‘Is it perfect?’

‘It is perfect.’

‘Who lives?’

‘Who — !’

Cipriano no longer knew.

Ramón bound him fast round the middle, then, pressing his head against the hip, folded the arms round Cipriano’s loins, closing with his hands the secret places.

‘Cipriano?’

‘Yes.’

‘Is it all dark?’

But Cipriano could not answer. The last circle was sweeping round, and the breath upon the waters was sinking into the waters, there was no more utterance. Ramón knelt with pressed head and arms and hands, for some moments still. Then he bound the loins, binding the wrists to the hips.

Cipriano stood rigid and motionless. Ramón clasped the two knees with his hands, till they were warm, and he felt them dark and asleep like two living stones, or two eggs. Then swiftly he bound them together, and grasped the ankles, as one might grasp the base of a young tree, as it emerges from the earth. Crouching on the earth, he gripped them in an intense grip, resting his head on the feet. The moments passed, and both men were unconscious.

Then Ramón bound the ankles, lifted Cipriano suddenly, with a sleep-moving softness, laid him on the skin of a big mountain-lion, which was spread upon the blankets, threw over him the red and black serape of Huitzilopochtli, and lay down at his feet, holding Cipriano’s feet to his own abdomen.

And both men passed into perfect unconsciousness, Cipriano within the womb of undisturbed creation, Ramón in the death sleep.

How long they were both dark, they never knew. It was twilight. Ramón was suddenly aroused by the jerking of Cipriano’s feet. He sat up, and took the blanket off Cipriano’s face.

‘Is it night?’ said Cipriano.

‘Almost night,’ said Ramón.

Silence followed, while Ramón unfastened the bonds, beginning at the feet. Before he unbound the eyes, he closed the window, so the room was almost dark. Then he unfastened the last binding, and Cipriano sat up, looking, then suddenly covering his eyes.

‘Make it quite dark!’ he said.

Ramón closed the shutters, and the room was complete night. Then he returned and sat on the mat by Cipriano. Cipriano was asleep again. After a while, Ramón left him.

He did not see him again till dawn. Then Ramón found him going down to the lake, to swim. The two men swam together, while the sun rose. With the rain, the lake was colder. They went to the house to rub oil in their limbs.

Cipriano looked at Ramón with black eyes which seemed to be looking at all space.

‘I went far,’ he said.

‘To where there is no beyond?’ said Ramón.

‘Yes, there.’

And in a moment or two, Cipriano was wrapped in his blanket again, and asleep.

He did not wake till the afternoon. Then he ate, and took a boat, and rowed down the lake to Kate. He found her at home. She was surprised to see him, in his white clothes and with his serape of Huitzilopochtli.

‘I am going to be the living Huitzilopochtli,’ he said.

‘Are you? When? Does it feel queer?’ — Kate was afraid of his eyes; they seemed inhuman.

‘On Thursday. The day of Huitzilopochtli is to be Thursday. Won’t you sit beside me, and be wife of me when I am a god?’

‘But do you feel you are a god?’ she asked, querulous.

He turned his eyes on her strangely.

‘I have been,’ he said. ‘And I have come back. But I belong there, where I went.’

‘Where?’

‘Where there is no beyond, and the darkness sinks into the water, and waking and sleeping are one thing.’

‘No,’ said Kate, afraid. ‘I never understood mystical things. They make me uneasy.’

‘Is it mystical when I come in to you?’

‘No,’ said Kate. ‘Surely, that is physical.’

‘So is the other, only further. Won’t you be the bride of Huitzilopochtli?’ he asked again.

‘Not so soon,’ said Kate.

‘Not so soon!’ he re-echoed.

There was a pause.

‘Will you come back with me to Jamiltepec now?’ he asked.

‘Not now,’ she said.

‘Why not now?’

‘Oh, I don’t know. — You treat me as if I had no life of my own,’ she said. ‘But I have.’

‘A life of your own? Who gave it you? Where did you get it?’

‘I don’t know. But I have got it. And I must live it. I can’t be just swallowed up.’

‘Why, Malintzi?’ he said, giving her a name. ‘Why can’t you?’

‘Be just swallowed up?’ she said. ‘Well, I just can’t.’

‘I am the living Huitzilopochtli,’ he said. ‘And I am swallowed up. I thought, so could you be, Malintzi.’

‘No! Not quite!’ she said.

‘Not quite! Not quite! Not now! Not just now! How often you say Not, to-day! — I must go back to Ramón.’

‘Yes. Go back to him. You only care about him, and your living Quetzalcoatl and your living Huitzilopochtli. — I am only a woman.’

‘No, Malintzi, you are more. You are more than Kate, you are Malintzi.’

‘I am not! I am only Kate, and I am only a woman. I mistrust all that other stuff.’

‘I am more than just a man, Malintzi. — Don’t you see that?’

‘No!’ said Kate. ‘I don’t see it. Why should you be more than just a man?’

‘Because I am the living Huitzilopochtli. Didn’t I tell you? You’ve got dust in your mouth to-day, Malintzi.’

He went away, leaving her rocking in anger on her terrace, in love again with her old self, and hostile to the new thing. She was thinking of London and Paris and New York, and all the people there.

‘Oh!’ she cried to herself, stifling. ‘For heaven’s sake let me get out of this, and back to simple human people. I loathe the very sound of Quetzalcoatl and Huitzilopochtli. I would die rather than be mixed up in it any more. Horrible, really, both Ramón and Cipriano. And they want to put it over me, with their high-flown bunk, and their Malintzi. Malintzi! I am Kate Forrester, really. I am neither Kate Leslie nor Kate Tylor. I am sick of these men putting names over me. I was born Kate Forrester, and I shall die Kate Forrester. I want to go home.’

Loathsome, really, to be called Malintzi. — I've had it put over me.'

CHAPTER XXIII

Huitzilopochtli's Night

They had the Huitzilopochtli ceremony at night, in the wide yard in front of the church. The guard of Huitzilopochtli, in serapes of black, red, and yellow stripes, striped like tigers or wasps, stood holding torches of blazing ocote. A tall bonfire was built, but unkindled, in the centre of the yard.

In the towers where the bells had been, fires were blazing and the heavy drum of Huitzilopochtli went rolling its deep, sinister notes. It had been sounding all the while since the sun went down.

The crowd gathered under the trees, outside the gates in front of the church. The church doors were closed.

There was a bang of four firework cannons exploding simultaneously, then four rockets shot up into the sky, leaning in the four directions, and exploding in showers of red, green, white, and yellow.

The church doors opened, and Cipriano appeared, in his brilliant serape of Huitzilopochtli, and with three green parrot feathers erect on his brow. He was carrying a torch. He stooped and lit the big bonfire, then plucked out four blazing brands and tossed them to four of his men, who stood waiting, naked save for their black breech-cloths. The men caught the brands as they flew, and ran in the four directions, to kindle the four bonfires that waited, one in each corner of the yard.

The guard had taken off their blankets and blouses, and were naked to the red sash. The lighter drum began to beat for the dance, and the dance began, the half-naked men throwing their blazing torches whirling in the air, catching them as they came down, dancing all the while. Cipriano, in the centre, threw up brand after brand from the fire.

Now that he was stripped of his blanket, his body was seen painted in horizontal bars of red and black, while from his mouth went a thin green line, and from his eyes a band of yellow.

The five fires, built hollow of little towers of ocote faggots, sent pure flame in a rush up to the dark sky, illuminating the dancing men, who sang in deep voices as they danced.

The fires rushed rapidly upwards in flame. The drum beat without ceasing. And the men of Huitzilopochtli danced on, like demons. Meanwhile the crowd

sat in the old Indian silence, their black eyes glittering in the firelight. And gradually the fires began to die down, the white facade of the church, that had danced also to the yellow flames, began to go bluish above, merging into the night, rose-coloured below, behind the dark shapes that danced to the sinking fires.

Suddenly the dance ceased, the men threw their serapes around them, and sat down. Little ocote fires upon the cane tripods flickered here and there, in a silence that lasted for some minutes. Then the drum sounded, and a man began to sing, in a clear, defiant voice, the First Song of Huitzilopochtli:

‘I am Huitzilopochtli,
The Red Huitzilopochtli,
The blood-red.
I am Huitzilopochtli,
Yellow of the sun,
Sun in the blood.
I am Huitzilopochtli,
White of the bone,
Bone in the blood.
I am Huitzilopochtli,
With a blade of grass between my teeth.
I am Huitzilopochtli, sitting in the dark.
With my redness staining the body of the dark.
I watch by the fire.
I wait behind men.
In the stillness of my night
The cactus sharpens his thorn.
The grass feels with his roots for the other sun.
Deeper than the roots of the mango tree
Down in the centre of the earth
Is the yellow, serpent-yellow shining of my sun.
Oh, beware of him!
Oh, beware of me!
Who runs athwart my serpent-flame
Gets bitten and must die.
I am the sleeping and waking
Of the anger of the manhood of men.
I am the leaping and quaking
Of fire bent back again.’

The song came to an end. There was a pause. Then all the men of Huitzilopochtli took it up again, changing the 'I' into 'He.'

'He is Huitzilopochtli,
The Red Huitzilopochtli,
The blood-red.
He is Huitzilopochtli,
Yellow of the sun,
Sun in the blood.
He is Huitzilopochtli,
White of the bone,
Bone in the blood.
He is Huitzilopochtli,
With a blade of green grass between his teeth.
He is Huitzilopochtli, sitting in the dark,
With his redness staining the body of the night.
He is watching by the fire.
Waiting behind men.
In the stillness of his night
Cactuses sharpen their thorns.
Grass feels downwards with his roots.
Deeper than the roots of the mango tree
Down in the centre of the earth
Shines the yellow, serpent-yellow shining of the sun.
Oh, men, take care, take care!
Take care of him and it.
Nor run aslant his rays.
Who is bitten, dies.
He is Huitzilopochtli, sleeping or waking
Serpent in the bellies of men.
Huitzilopochtli, leaping and quaking
Fire of the passion of men.'

The big fires had all died down. Only the little flames on the tripods lit up the scene with a ruddy glow. The guard withdrew to the outer wall of the yard, holding bayonets erect. The big drum was going alone, slowly.

The yard was now a clear space, with the glowing red heaps of the bonfires, and the ocote flames flapping. And now was seen a platform erected against the

white wall of the church.

In the silence the big doors of the church opened, and Cipriano came out, in his bright serape, holding in his hand a bunch of black leaves, or feathers, and with a tuft of scarlet feathers, black-tipped, rising from the back of his head. He mounted the platform and stood facing the crowd, the light of a torch on his face and on the brilliant feathers that rose like flames from the back of his head.

After him came a strange procession: a peon in floppy white clothes, led prisoner between two of the guards of Huitzilopochtli: who wore their serapes with red and black and yellow and white and green stripes: then another peon prisoner: then another: in all, five, the fifth one tall, limping, and with a red cross painted on the breast of his white jacket. Last of all came a woman-prisoner, likewise between two guards, her hair flowing loose, over a red tunic.

They mounted the platform. The peons, prisoners, were placed in a row, their guards behind them. The limping peon was apart, with his two guards behind him: the woman again was apart, her two guards behind her.

The big drum ceased, and a bugle rang out, a long, loud triumphant note, repeated three times. Then the kettle-drums, or the small tom-toms like kettle-drums, rattled fierce as hail.

Cipriano lifted his hand, and there was silence.

Out of the silence he began to speak, in his short, martial sentences:

‘Man that is man is more than a man.
No man is man till he is more than a man.
Till the power is in him
Which is not his own.
The power is in me from behind the sun,
And from middle earth.
I am Huitzilopochtli.
I am dark as the sunless under-earth,
And yellow as the fire that consumes,
And white as bone,
And red as blood.
But I touched the hand of Quetzalcoatl.
And between our fingers rose a blade of green grass.
I touched the hand of Quetzalcoatl.
Lo! I am lord of the watches of the night
And the dream of the night rises from me like a red feather.
I am the watcher, and master of the dream.
In the dream of the night I see the grey dogs prowling.

Prowling to devour the dream.
In the night the soul of a coward creeps out of him
Like a grey dog whose mouth is foul with rabies,
Creeping among the sleeping and the dreaming, who are lapped in my dark,
And in whom the dream sits up like a rabbit, lifting long ears tipped with
night,
On the dream-slopes browsing like a deer in the dusk.
In the night I see the grey dogs creeping, out of the sleeping men
Who are cowards, who are liars, who are traitors, who have no dreams
That prick their ears like a rabbit, or browse in the dark like deer,
But whose dreams are dogs, grey dogs with yellow mouths.
From the liars, from the thieves, from the false and treacherous and mean
I see the grey dogs creeping out, where my deer are browsing in the dark.
Then I take my knife, and throw it upon the grey dog.
And lo! it sticks between the ribs of a man!
The house of the grey dog!
Beware! Beware!
Of the men and the women who walk among you.
You know not how many are houses of grey dogs.
Men that seem harmless, women with fair words,
Maybe they kennel the grey dog.'

The drums began to beat and the singer began to sing, clear and pure:

THE SONG OF THE GREY DOG

'When you sleep and know it not
The grey dog creeps among you.
In your sleep, you twist, your soul hurts you.
The grey dog is chewing your entrails.
Then call on Huitzilopochtli:
The grey dog caught me at the cross-roads
As I went down the road of sleep
And crossed the road of the uneasy.
The grey dog leapt at my entrails.
Huitzilopochtli, call him off.
Lo! the Great One answers. Track him down!
Kill him in his unclean house.
Down the road of the uneasy

You track the grey dog home
To his house in the heart of a traitor,
A thief, a murderer of dreams.
And you kill him there with one stroke,
Crying: Huitzilopochtli, is this well done?
That your sleep be not as a cemetery
Where dogs creep unclean.'

The song ceased, and there was silence. Then Cipriano beckoned to the men to bring forward the peon with the black cross painted on his front and back. He limped forward.

Cipriano: 'What man is that, limping?'

Guards: 'It is Guillermo, overseer of Don Ramón, who betrayed Don Ramón, his master.'

Cipriano: 'Why does he limp?'

Guards: 'He fell from the window on to the rocks.'

Cipriano: 'What made him wish to betray his master?'

Guards: 'His heart is a grey dog, and a woman, a grey bitch, enticed him forth.'

Cipriano: 'What woman enticed the grey dog forth?'

The guards came forward with the woman.

Guards: 'This woman, Maraca, my Lord, with the grey bitch heart.'

Cipriano: 'Is it she, indeed?'

Guards: 'It is she.'

Cipriano: 'The grey dog, and the grey bitch, we kill, for their mouths are yellow with poison, Is it well, men of Huitzilopochtli?'

Guards: 'It is very well, my Lord.'

The guards stripped the peon Guillermo of his white clothes, leaving him naked, in a grey loin-cloth, with a grey-white cross painted on his naked breast. The woman, too, had a grey-white cross painted on her body. She stood in a short petticoat of grey wool.

Cipriano: 'The grey dog and the grey bitch shall run no more about the world. We will bury their bodies in quick-lime, till their souls are eaten, and their bodies, and nothing is left. For lime is the thirsty bone that swallows even a soul and is not slaked. — Bind them with the grey cords, put ash on their heads.'

The guards quickly obeyed. The prisoners, ash-grey, gazed with black, glittering eyes, making not a sound. A guard stood behind each of them. Cipriano gave a sign, and quick as lightning the guards had got the throats of the two victims in a grey cloth, and with a sharp jerk had broken their necks, lifting

them backwards in one movement. The grey cloths they tied hard and tight round the throats, laying the twitching bodies on the floor.

Cipriano turned to the crowd:

‘The Lords of Life are the Masters of Death.
Blue is the breath of Quetzalcoatl.
Red is Huitzilopochtli’s blood.
But the grey dog belongs to the ash of the world.
The Lords of Life are the Masters of Death.
Dead are the grey dogs.
Living are the Lords of Life.
Blue is the deep sky and the deep water.
Red is the blood and the fire.
Yellow is the flame.
The bone is white and alive.
The hair of night is dark over our faces.
But the grey dogs are among the ashes.
The Lords of Life are the Masters of Death.’

Then he turned once more, to the other, imprisoned peons.

Cipriano: ‘Who are these four?’

Guards: ‘Four who came to kill Don Ramón.’

Cipriano: ‘Four men, against one man?’

Guards: ‘They were more than four, my Lord.’

Cipriano: ‘When many men come against one, what is the name of the many?’

Guards: ‘Cowards, my Lord.’

Cipriano: ‘Cowards it is. They are less than men. Men that are less than men are not good enough for the light of the sun. If men that are men will live, men that are less than men must be put away, lest they multiply too much. Men that are more than men have the judgment of men that are less than men. Shall they die?’

Guards: ‘They shall surely die, my Lord.’

Cipriano: ‘Yet my hand has touched the hand of Quetzalcoatl, and among the black leaves one sprung green, with the colour of Malintzi.’

An attendant came and lifted Cipriano’s serape over his head, leaving his body bare to the waist. The guards likewise took off their serapes.

Cipriano lifted up his fist, in which he held a little tuft of black feathers, or leaves.

Then he said slowly:

Huitzilopochtli gives the black blade of death.
Take it bravely.
Take death bravely.
Go bravely across the border, admitting your mistake.
Determine to go on and on, till you enter the Morning Star.
Quetzalcoatl will show you the way.
Malintzi of the green dress will open the door.
In the fountain you will lie down.
If you reach the fountain, and lie down
And the fountain covers your face, forever,
You will have departed forever from your mistake.
And the man that is more than a man in you
Will wake at last from the clean forgetting
And stand up, and look about him,
Ready again for the business of being a man.
But Huitzilopochtli touched the hand of Quetzalcoatl
And one green leaf sprang among the black.
The green leaf of Malintzi
Who pardons once, and no more.

Cipriano turned to the four peons. He held out his fist with the four black twigs, to the first. This first one, a little man, peered at the leaves curiously.

‘There is no green one,’ he said sceptically.

‘Good!’ said Cipriano. ‘Then receive a black.’

And he handed him a black leaf.

‘I knew it,’ said the man, and he threw the leaf away with contempt and defiance.

The second man drew a black leaf. He stood gazing at it, as if fascinated, turning it round.

The third man drew a leaf whose lower half was green.

‘See!’ said Cipriano. ‘The green leaf of Malintzi!’

And he handed the last black leaf to the last man.

‘Have I got to die?’ said the last man.

‘Yes.’

‘I don’t want to die, Patrón.’

‘You played with death, and it has sprung upon you.’

The eyes of the three men were blindfolded with black cloths, their blouses and pantaloons were taken away. Cipriano took a bright, thin dagger.

‘The Lords of Life are Masters of Death,’ he said in a loud, clear voice.

And swift as lightning he stabbed the blindfolded men to the heart, with three swift, heavy stabs. Then he lifted the red dagger and threw it down.

‘The Lords of Life are Masters of Death,’ he repeated.

The guards lifted the bleeding bodies one by one, and carried them into the church. There remained only the one prisoner, with the green leaf.

‘Put the green leaf of Malintzi between his brows; for Malintzi pardons once, and no more,’ said Cipriano.

‘Yes, my Lord!’ replied the guard.

And they led the man away into the church.

Cipriano followed, the last of his guard after him.

In a few minutes the drums began to beat and men came slowly streaming into the church. Women were not admitted. All the interior was hung with red and black banners. At the side of the chancel was a new idol: a heavy, seated figure of Huitzilopochtli, done in black lava stone. And round him burned twelve red candles. The idol held the bunch of black strips, or leaves, in his hand. And at his feet lay the five dead bodies.

The fire on the altar was flickering high, to the dark statue of Quetzalcoatl. On his little throne Ramón sat, wearing his blue and white colours of Quetzalcoatl. There was another corresponding throne next him, but it was empty. Six of the guard of Quetzalcoatl stood by Ramón: but Huitzilopochtli’s side of the chancel was empty save for the dead.

The hard drums of Huitzilopochtli were beating incessantly outside, with a noise like madness. Inside was the soft roll of the drum of Quetzalcoatl. And the men from the crowd outside thronged slowly in, between the guard of Quetzalcoatl.

A flute sounded the summons to close the doors. The drums of Quetzalcoatl ceased, and from the towers was heard again the wild bugle of Huitzilopochtli.

Then down the centre of the church, in silence, barefoot, came the procession of Huitzilopochtli, naked save for the black loin-cloths and the paint, and the scarlet feathers of the head-dresses. Cipriano had his face painted with a white jaw, a thin band of green stretched from his mouth, a band of black across his nose, yellow from his eyes, and scarlet on his brow. One green feather rose from his forehead, and behind his head a beautiful head-dress of scarlet feathers. A band of red was painted round his breast, yellow round his middle. The rest was ash-grey.

After him came his guard, their faces red, black, and white, their bodies painted as Cipriano’s, and a scarlet feather rising from the back of their head. The hard, dry drum of Huitzilopochtli beat monotonously.

As the Living Huitzilopochtli came near the altar steps, the Living Quetzalcoatl rose and came to meet him. The two saluted, each covering his eyes with his left hand for a moment, then touching fingers with the right hand.

Cipriano stood before the statue of Huitzilopochtli, dipped his hand in a stone bowl, and giving the loud cry or whoop of Huitzilopochtli, lifted up his red hand. His guard uttered the loud cry, and quickly filed past, each man dipping his hand and raising his wet, red fist. The hard drums of Huitzilopochtli rattled like madness in the church, then fell suddenly silent.

Ramón: 'Why is your hand red, Huitzilopochtli, my brother?'

Cipriano: 'It is the blood of the treacherous, Oh Quetzalcoatl.'

Ramón: 'What have they betrayed?'

Cipriano: 'The yellow sun and the heart of darkness; the hearts of men, and the buds of women. While they lived, the Morning Star could not be seen.'

Ramón: 'And are they verily dead?'

Cipriano: 'Verily dead, my Lord.'

Ramón: 'Their blood is shed?'

Cipriano: 'Yes, my Lord, save that the grey dogs shed no blood. Two died the bloodless death of the grey dogs, three died in blood.'

Ramón: 'Give me the blood of the three, my brother Huitzilopochtli, to sprinkle the fire.'

Cipriano brought the stone bowl, and the little bunch of black leaves from Huitzilopochtli's idol. Ramón slowly, gently, sprinkled a little blood on the fire, with the black leaves.

Ramón: 'Darkness, drink the blood of expiation. Sun, swallow up the blood of expiation. Rise, Morning Star, between the divided sea.'

He gave back the bowl and the leaves to Huitzilopochtli, who placed them by the black idol.

Ramón: 'Thou who didst take the lives of the three, Huitzilopochtli, my brother, what wilt thou do with the souls?'

Cipriano: 'Even give them to thee, my Lord, Quetzalcoatl, my Lord of the Morning Star.'

Ramón: 'Yea, give them to me and I will wrap them in my breath and send them the longest journey, to the sleep and the far awakening.'

Cipriano: 'My Lord is lord of two ways.'

The naked, painted guard of Huitzilopochtli came and carried the dead bodies of the three stabbed men, carried them on red biers, and laid them at the foot of the Quetzalcoatl statue.

Ramón: 'So, there is a long way to go, past the sun to the gate of the Morning Star. And if the sun is angry he strikes swifter than a jaguar, and the whirr of the

winds is like an angry eagle, and the upper waters strike in wrath like silver-coloured snakes. Ah, three souls, make peace now with the sun and winds and waters, and go in courage, with the breath of Quetzalcoatl around you like a cloak. Fear not and shrink not and fail not; but come to the end of the longest journey, and let the fountain cover your face. So shall all at length be made new.'

When he had spoken to the dead, Ramón took incense and threw it on the fire, so clouds of blue smoke arose. Then with a censer he swung the blue smoke over the dead. Then he unfolded three blue cloths and covered the dead. Then the guards of Quetzalcoatl lifted the biers, and the flute of Quetzalcoatl sounded.

'Salute the Morning Star!' cried Ramón, turning to the light beyond the statue of Quetzalcoatl, and throwing up his right arm in the Quetzalcoatl prayer. Every man turned to the light and threw up his arm in the passion. And the silence of the Morning Star filled the church.

The drum of Quetzalcoatl sounded: the guards slowly moved away with the three blue-wrapped dead.

Then came the voice of the Living Huitzilopochtli:

'Upon the dead grey dogs the face of Quetzalcoatl cannot look. Upon the corpses of grey dogs rises no Morning Star. But the fire of corpses shall consume them.'

There was a sharp rattle of the dry drums of Huitzilopochtli. Ramón remained with his back to the church, his arm upraised to the Morning Star. And the guard of Huitzilopochtli lifted the strangled bodies, laid them on biers, covered them with grey cloths, and bore them away.

The bugle of Huitzilopochtli sounded.

Cipriano: 'The dead are on their way. Quetzalcoatl helps them on the longest journey. — But the grey dogs sleep within the quick-lime, in the slow corpse-fire. — It is finished.'

Ramón dropped his arm and turned to the church. All men dropped their hands. The soft drums of Quetzalcoatl sounded, mingling with the hard drums of Huitzilopochtli. Then both guards began to sing together:

HUITZILOPOCHTLI'S WATCH

'Red Huitzilopochtli
Keeps day and night apart.
Huitzilopochtli the golden
Guards life from death, and death from life.
No grey-dogs, cowards, pass him.

No spotted traitors crawl by,
False fair ones cannot slip through
Past him, from the one to the other.
Brave men have peace at nightfall,
True men look up at the dawn,
Men in their manhood walk out
Into blue day, past Huitzilopochtli.
Red Huitzilopochtli
Is the purifier.
Black Huitzilopochtli
Is doom.
Huitzilopochtli golden
Is the liberating fire.
White Huitzilopochtli
Is washed bone.
Green Huitzilopochtli
Is Malintzi's blade of grass.'

At the beginning of each stanza, the Guard of Huitzilopochtli struck their left palm with their scarlet right fist, and the drums gave a great crash, a terrific splash of noise. When the song ended, the drums gradually died down, like subsiding thunder, leaving the hearts of men re-echoing.

Ramón: 'Why is your hand so red, Huitzilopochtli?'

Cipriano: 'With the blood of slain men, Brother.'

Ramón: 'Must it always be red?'

Cipriano: 'Till green-robed Malintzi brings her water-bowl.'

The bugle and the flute both sounded. The guard of Huitzilopochtli put out the red candles, one by one, the guard of Quetzalcoatl extinguished the blue candles. The church was dark, save for the small but fierce blue-white light beyond the Quetzalcoatl statue, and the red smouldering on the altar.

Ramón began slowly to speak:

'The dead are on their journey, the way is dark.
There is only the Morning Star.
Beyond the white of whiteness,
Beyond the blackness of black,
Beyond spoken day,
Beyond the unspoken passion of night,
The light which is fed from two vessels

From the black oil and the white
Shines at the gate.
A gate to the innermost place
Where the Breath and the Fountains commingle,
Where the dead are living, and the living are dead.
The deeps that life cannot fathom,
The Source and the End, of which we know
Only that it is, and its life is our life and our death.
All men cover their eyes
Before the unseen.
All men be lost in silence,
Within the noiseless.'

The church was utterly still, all men standing with a hand pressed over their eyes.

Till there was one note of a silver gong, and the green candles of Malintzi were being lighted in the altar place. — Ramón's voice was heard again:

'Like the green candles of Malintzi
Like a tree in new leaf.
The rain of blood is fallen, is gone into the earth.
The dead have gone the long journey
Beyond the star.
Huitzilopochtli has thrown his black mantle
To those who would sleep.
When the blue wind of Quetzalcoatl
Waves softly,
When the water of Malintzi falls
Making a greenness:
Count the red grains of the Huitzilopochtli
Fire in your hearts, O men.
And blow the ash away.
For the living live,
And the dead die.
But the fingers of all touch the fingers of all
In the Morning Star.'

CHAPTER XXIV

Malintzi

When the women were shut out of the church, Kate went home gloomy and uneasy. The executions shocked and depressed her. She knew that Ramón and Cipriano did deliberately what they did: they believed in their deeds, they acted with all their conscience. And as men, probably they were right.

But they seemed nothing but men. When Cipriano said: Man that is man is more than a man, he seemed to be driving the male significance to its utmost, and beyond, with a sort of demonism. It seemed to her all terrible will, the exertion of pure, awful will.

And deep in her soul came a revulsion against this manifestation of pure will. It was fascinating also. There was something dark and lustrous and fascinating to her in Cipriano, and in Ramón. The black, relentless power, even passion of the will in men! The strange, sombre, lustrous beauty of it! She knew herself under the spell.

At the same time, as is so often the case with any spell, it did not bind her completely. She was spellbound, but not utterly acquiescent. In one corner of her soul was revulsion and a touch of nausea.

Ramón and Cipriano no doubt were right for themselves, for their people and country. But for herself, ultimately, ultimately she belonged elsewhere. Not to this terrible, natural will which seemed to beat its wings in the very air of the American continent. Always will, will, will, without remorse or relenting. This was America to her: all the Americas. Sheer will!

The Will of God! She began to understand that once fearsome phrase. At the centre of all things, a dark, momentous Will sending out its terrific rays and vibrations, like some vast octopus. And at the other end of the vibration, men, created men, erect in the dark potency, answering Will with will, like gods or demons.

It was wonderful too. But where was woman, in this terrible interchange of will? Truly only a subservient, instrumental thing: the soft stone on which the man sharpened the knife of his relentless volition: the soft lodestone to magnetize his blade of steel and keep all its molecules alive in the electric flow.

Ah, yes, it was wonderful. It was, as Ramón said, a manifestation, a manifestation of the Godhead. But to the Godhead as a sheer and awful Will she

could not respond.

Joachim, letting himself be bled to death for people who would profit nothing by his sacrifice, he was the other extreme. The black and magnificent pride of will which comes out of the volcanic earth of Mexico had been unknown to him. He was one of the white, self-sacrificing gods. Hence her bitterness. And hence, naturally, the spell of beauty and lustrous satisfaction which Cipriano could cast over her. She was in love with him, when he was with her; in his arms, she was quite gone in his spell. She was the deep, slumbrous lodestone which set all his bones glittering with the energy of relentless pride. And she herself derived a great gratification in the embrace, a sense of passive, downward-sinking power, profound.

Yet she could not be purely this, this thing of sheer reciprocity. Surely, though her woman's nature was reciprocal to his male, surely it was more than that! Surely he and she were not two potent and reciprocal currents between which the Morning Star flashed like a spark out of nowhere. Surely this was not it? Surely she had one tiny Morning Star inside her, which was herself, her own very soul and star-self!

But he would never admit this. The tiny star of her very self he would never see. To him she was but the answer to his call, the sheath for his blade, the cloud to his lightning, the earth to his rain, the fuel to his fire.

Alone, she was nothing. Only as the pure female corresponding to his pure male, did she signify.

As an isolated individual, she had little or no significance. As a woman on her own, she was repulsive, and even evil, to him. She was not real till she was reciprocal.

To a great extent this was true, and she knew it. To a great extent, the same was true of him, and without her to give him the power, he too would not achieve his own manhood and meaning. With her or without her, he would be beyond ordinary men, because the power was in him. But failing her, he would never make his ultimate achievement, he would never be whole. He would be chiefly an instrument.

He knew this too: though perhaps not well enough. He would strive to keep her, to have her, for his own fulfilment. He would not let her go.

But that little star of her own single self, would he ever recognize that? Nay, did he even recognize any single star of his own being? Did he not conceive of himself as a power and a potency on the face of the earth, an embodied will, like a rushing dark wind? And hence, inevitably, she was but the stone of rest to his potency, his bed of sleep, the cave and lair of his male will.

What else? To him there was nothing else. The star! Don Ramón's Morning

Star was something that sprang between him and her and hung shining, the strange third thing that was both of them and neither of them, between his night and her day.

Was it true? Was she nothing, nothing, by herself? And he, alone, failing his last manhood, without her was he nothing, or next to nothing? As a fig tree which grows up, but never comes to flower.

Was this thing true, the same of both of them? — that alone, they were next to nothing? Each of them, separate, next to nothing. Apart in a sort of grey, mechanical twilight, without a star?

And together, in strange reciprocity, flashing darkly till the Morning Star rose between them?

He would say to her, as Ramón had said of Carlota: ‘Soul! No, you have no soul of your own. You have at best only half a soul. It takes a man and a woman together to make a soul. The soul is the Morning Star, emerging from the two. One alone cannot have a soul.’

This Ramón said. And she knew it conveyed what Cipriano really felt. Cipriano could not see Kate as a being by herself. And if he lived a thousand more years, he would never see her as such. He would see her only as reciprocal to himself. As the balance of him, and the correspondence on the other side of heaven.

‘Let the Morning Star rise between us,’ he would say. ‘Alone you are nothing, and I am manqué. But together we are the wings of the Morning.’

Was it true? Was this the final answer to man’s assertion of individuality?

Was it true? And was it her sacred duty to sit beside him in the green dress of Malintzi, in the church, the goddess admitting her halfness? Her halfness! Was there no star of the single soul? Was that all an illusion?

Was the individual an illusion? Man, any man, every man, by himself just a fragment, knowing no Morning Star? And every woman the same; by herself, starless and fragmentary. Even in the relation to the innermost God, still fragmentary and unblest.

Was it true, that the gate was the Morning Star, the only entrance to the Innermost? And the Morning Star rises between the two, and between the many, but never from one alone.

And was a man but a dark and arrowy will, and woman the bow from which the arrow is shot? The bow without the arrow was as nothing, and the arrow without the bow only a short-range dart, ineffectual?

Poor Kate, it was hard to have to reflect this. It meant a submission she had never made. It meant the death of her individual self. It meant abandoning so much, even her own very foundations. For she had believed truly that every man

and every woman alike was founded on the individual.

Now, must she admit that the individual was an illusion and a falsification? There was no such animal. Except in the mechanical world. In the world of machines, the individual machine is effectual. The individual, like the perfect being, does not and cannot exist, in the vivid world. We are all fragments. And at the best, halves. The only whole thing is the Morning Star. Which can only rise between two: or between many.

And men can meet only in the light of the Morning Star.

She thought again of Cipriano and the executions, and she covered her hands over her face. Was this the knife to which she must be sheath? Was it such a star of power and relentlessness that must rise between her and him? Him naked and painted, with his soldiers, dancing and sweating and shouting among them. Herself unseen and nowhere!

As she sat rocking in her terrible loneliness and misgiving, she heard the drums on the towers, and the sound of rockets. She went to the gate. Over the church, in the night sky, hung a spangling cloud of red and blue fire, the colours of Huitzilopochtli and Quetzalcoatl. The night of Huitzilopochtli would be over. The sky was dark again, and there were all the stars, beyond, far, far beyond where the spangling had been.

She went indoors again, to retire. The servants had all run out to see the rockets. Ezequiel would be in with the men in church.

She heard footsteps on the gravel walk, and suddenly Cipriano stood in the doorway, in his white clothes. He took off his hat, quickly. His black eyes were sparkling, almost blazing to her, with a flashing of light such as she had never seen. There were still smears of paint on his face. In the blazing of his eyes he seemed to be smiling to her, but in a dazzling, childish way.

‘Malintzi,’ he said to her in Spanish. ‘Oh, come! Come and put on the green dress. I cannot be the Living Huitzilopochtli without a bride. I cannot be it, Malintzi!’

He stood before her, flickering and flashing and strangely young, vulnerable, as young and boyish as flame. She saw that when the fire came free in him, he would be like this always, flickering, flashing with a flame of virgin youth. Now, not will at all. Sensitive as a boy. And calling her only with his boyish flame. The living, flickering, fiery Wish. This was first. The Will she had seen was subsidiary and instrumental, the Wish in armour.

She had been so used to fighting for her own soul with individualistic men, that for a moment she felt old, and uncertain. The strange, flashing vulnerability in him, the nakedness of the living Wish, disconcerted her. She was used to men who had themselves well in hand, and were seeking their own ends as

individuals.

‘Where do you want me to come?’ she said.

‘To the church,’ he said. ‘It is mine to-night. I am Huitzilopochtli: but I cannot be it alone,’ he added with quick, wistful, watchful smile, as if all his flesh were flickering with delicate fire.

Kate wrapped herself in a dark tartan shawl and went with him. He stepped quickly, in the short, Indian way. The night was very dark. Down on the beach some fireworks were flaming, and the people were all watching.

They entered the yard of the church from the back, by the priest’s little gate. Soldiers were already rolled up in their blankets, sleeping under the wall. Cipriano opened the little vestry door. Kate passed into the darkness. He followed, lighting a candle.

‘My soldiers know I am watching to-night in the church,’ he said. ‘They will keep guard.’

The body of the church was quite dark, but the bluish white light burned above the statue of Quetzalcoatl, giving not much light.

Cipriano lifted his candle to the black statue of Huitzilopochtli. Then he turned to Kate, his black eyes flashing.

‘I am Huitzilopochtli, Malintzi,’ he said in his low, Indian Spanish. ‘But I cannot be it without you. Stay with me, Malintzi. Say you are the bride of the Living Huitzilopochtli.’

‘Yes!’ she replied, ‘I say it.’

Convulsive flames of joy and triumph seemed to go over his face. He lit two candles in front of Huitzilopochtli.

‘Come!’ he said. ‘Put on the green dress.’

He took her to the vestry, where were many folded serapes, and the silver bowl and other implements of the church, and left her while she put on the dress of Malintzi she had worn when Ramón married them.

When she stepped out she found Cipriano naked and in his paint, before the statue of Huitzilopochtli, on a rug of jaguar skins.

‘I am the living Huitzilopochtli,’ he murmured to her in a sort of ecstasy.

‘You are Malintzi,’ he said. ‘The bride of Huitzilopochtli.’

The convulsion of exultance went over his face. He took her hand in his left hand, and they stood facing the bluish light.

‘Cover your face!’ he said to her.

They covered their faces in the salute.

‘Now salute Quetzalcoatl.’ And he flung up his arm. She held out her left hand, in the woman’s salute.

Then they turned to the statue of Huitzilopochtli.

‘Salute Huitzilopochtli!’ he said, bringing his right fist down with a smash in the palm of his left hand. But this was the male salute. He taught her to press her hands together in front of her breast, then shoot them out towards the idol.

Then he put a little lamp of earthenware between the feet of Huitzilopochtli. From the right knee of the idol he took a little black vessel of oil, making her take a little white vessel from the god’s left knee.

‘Now,’ he said, ‘together we fill the lamp.’

And together they poured the oil from their little pitchers, into the saucer-shaped lamp.

‘Now together we light it,’ he said.

He took one of the two candles burning before the black idol, she took the other, and with the flames dripping and leaping together, they kindled the floating wick of the lamp. It burned in a round blue bud, then rose higher.

‘Blow out your candle,’ he said. ‘It is our Morning Star.’

They blew out the two candles. It was almost dark now, with the slow light, like a snow-drop, of their united lives floating between the feet of Huitzilopochtli, and the everlasting-light burning small and bluish beyond the statue of Quetzalcoatl.

At the foot of the altar, beside the chair of Huitzilopochtli, a third chair was placed.

‘Sit in your throne of Malintzi,’ he said to her.

They sat side by side, his hand holding her hand, in complete silence, looking down the dark church. He had placed tufts of greenish flowers, like thin, greenish lilac, above her chair, and their perfume was like a dream, strong, overpoweringly sweet on the darkness.

Strange how naïve he was! He was not like Ramón, rather ponderous and deliberate in his ceremonials. Cipriano in his own little deeds to-night with her, was naïve like a child. She could hardly look at that bud of light which he said meant their united lives, without a catch at her heart. It burned so soft and round, and he had such an implicit, childish satisfaction in its symbol. It all gave him a certain wild, childish joy. The strange convulsions like flames of joy and gratification went over his face!

‘Ah, God!’ she thought. ‘There are more ways than one of becoming like a little child.’

The flaminess and the magnificence of the beginning: this was what Cipriano wanted to bring to his marriage. The reeling, powerful perfume of those invisible green flowers, that the peons call buena de noche: good by night.

Strange — that which he brought to marriage was something flamey and

unabashed, forever virginal. Not, as she had always known in men, yearning and seeking his own ends. Naïvely bringing his flame to her flame.

As she sat in that darkened church in the intense perfume of flowers, in the seat of Malintzi, watching the bud of her life united with his, between the feet of the idol, and feeling his dark hand softly holding her own, with the soft, deep Indian heat, she felt her own childhood coming back on her. The years seemed to be reeling away in great circles, falling away from her.

Leaving her sitting there like a girl in her first adolescence. The Living Huitzilopochtli! Ah, easily he was the living Huitzilopochtli. More than anything. More than Cipriano, more than a male man, he was the living Huitzilopochtli. And she was the goddess bride, Malintzi of the green dress.

Ah, yes, it was childish. But it was actually so. She was perhaps fourteen years old, and he was fifteen. And he was the young Huitzilopochtli, and she was the bride Malintzi, the bride-girl. She had seen it. When the flame came up in him and licked him all over, he was young and vulnerable as a boy of fifteen, and he would always be so, even when he was seventy.

And this was her bridegroom. Here at last he was not a will. When he came clothed in his own free flame, it was not will that clothed him. Let him be a general, an executioner, what he liked, in the world. The flame of their united lives was a naked bud of flame. Their marriage was a young, vulnerable flame.

So he sat in silence on his throne, holding her hand in silence till the years reeled away from her in fleeing circles, and she sat, as every real woman can sit, no matter at what age, a girl again, and for him, a virgin. He held her hand in silence, till she was Malintzi, and virgin for him, and when they looked at one another, and their eyes met, the two flames rippled in oneness. She closed her eyes, and was dark.

Then later, when she opened her eyes and saw the bud of flame just above her, and the black idol invisibly crouching, she heard his strange voice, the voice of a boy hissing in naïve ecstasy, in Spanish:

‘Miel! Miel de Malintzi! — Honey of Malintzi!’

And she pressed him to her breast, convulsively. His innermost flame was always virginal, it was always the first time. And it made her again always a virgin girl. She could feel their two flames flowing together.

How else, she said to herself, is one to begin again, save by re-finding one’s virginity? And when one finds one’s virginity, one realizes one is among the gods. He is of the gods, and so am I. Why should I judge him?

So, when she thought of him and his soldiers, tales of swift cruelty she had heard of him: when she remembered his stabbing the three helpless peons, she thought: Why should I judge him? He is of the gods. And when he comes to me

he lays his pure, quick flame to mine, and every time I am a young girl again, and every time he takes the flower of my virginity, and I his. It leaves me insouciant like a young girl. What do I care if he kills people? His flame is young and clean. He is Huitzilopochtli, and I am Malintzi. What do I care, what Cipriano Viedma does or doesn't do? Or even what Kate Leslie does or doesn't do!

CHAPTER XXV

Teresa

Ramón somewhat surprised Kate by marrying again, a couple of months or so after the death of Doña Carlota. The new bride was a young woman of about twenty-eight, called Teresa. There was a very quiet civil wedding, and Ramón brought his new wife to Jamiltepec.

He had known her since she was a child, for she was the daughter of the famous hacienda of Las Yemas, some twelve miles inland from Jamiltepec. Don Tomás, her father, had been a staunch friend of the Carrascos.

But Don Tomás had died a year ago, leaving the large, flourishing tequila hacienda to his three children, to be administered by Teresa. Teresa was the youngest. Her two brothers had reverted to the usual wasteful, spendthrift, brutal Mexican way. Therefore Don Tomás, in order to save the hacienda from their destructive hands, had especially appointed Teresa administrador, and had got the brothers' consent to this. After all, they were shiftless ne'er-do-wells, and had never shown the slightest desire to help in the rather burdensome business of managing a large tequila hacienda, during their father's lifetime. Teresa had been the one. And during her father's illness the whole charge had devolved on her, while her brothers wasted themselves and their substance in the squashy prostitution-living of Mexicans of their class, away in the cities.

No sooner was the father dead, however, and Teresa in charge, than home came the two brothers, big with their intention to be hacendados. By simple brute force they ousted their sister, gave orders over her head, jeered at her, and in crushing her united for once with each other. They were putting her back into her place as a woman — that is to say, back into a secluded sort of prostitution, to which, in their eyes, women belonged.

But they were bullies, and, as bullies, cowards. And like so many Mexicans of that class, soft and suicidal towards themselves. They made friends with judges and generals. They rode about in resplendent charro dress, and had motor-loads of rather doubtful visitors.

Against their soft, sensuous brutality Teresa could do nothing, and she knew it. They were all soft and sensual, or sensuous, handsome in their way, open-handed, careless, but bullies, with no fear at the middle of them.

'Make yourself desirable, and get a husband for yourself,' they said to her.

In their eyes, her greatest crime was that she did not make herself desirable to men of their sort. That she had never had a man, that she was not married, made her almost repulsive to them. What was woman for, but for loose, soft, prostitutional sex?

‘Do you want to wear the trousers?’ they jeered at her. ‘No, Señorita! Not while there are two men on the place, you are not going to wear the trousers. No, Señorita! The trousers, the men wear them. The women keep under their petticoats that which they are women for.’

Teresa was used to these insults. But they made her soul burn.

‘You, do you want to be an American woman?’ they said to her. ‘Go off to America, then, and bob your hair and wear breeches. Buy a ranch there, and get a husband to take your orders. Go!’

She went to her lawyers, but they held up their hands. And she went to Ramón, whom she had known since she was a child.

It would have meant a hopeless and ruinous law-suit, to get the brothers ejected from the hacienda. It would have meant the rapid ruin of the estate. Ramón instead asked Teresa to marry him, and he carefully arranged her dowry, so that she should always have her own provision.

‘It is a country where men despise sex, and live for it,’ said Ramón. ‘Which is just suicide.’

Ramón came with his wife, to see Kate. Teresa was rather small, pale, with a lot of loose black hair and big, wide black eyes. Yet in her quiet bearing and her well-closed mouth there was an air of independence and authority. She had suffered great humiliation at the hands of her brothers, there was still a certain wanness round her eyes, the remains of tears of anger and helpless indignation, and the bitterness of insulted sex. But now she loved Ramón with a wild, virgin loyalty. That, too, was evident. He had saved her sex from the insult, restored it to her in its pride and its beauty. And in return, she felt an almost fierce reverence for him.

But with Kate she was shy and rather distant: a little afraid of the travelled, experienced, rather assertive white-skinned woman, the woman of the other race. She sat in Kate’s salon in her simple white dress with a black gauze rebozo, her brown hands motionless in her lap, her dark neck erect, her dark, slender, well-shaped cheek averted. She seemed, Kate thought, rather like a little sempstress.

But Kate was reckoning without that strange quiescent power of authority which Teresa also possessed, in her slight, dark body. And without the black, flashing glances which rested on her from time to time, from Teresa’s eyes, full of searching fierceness and fiery misgiving. A fiery soul, in such a demure, slight, dark body. Sometimes a muted word came from her mouth, and a

constrained smile moved her lips. But her burning eyes never changed. She did not even look at Ramón.

‘How much do you charge per word, Chica?’ he asked her, with a sort of soft fondness.

Then her dark eyes flashed at him, and her mouth gave a little smile. It was evident she was hopelessly in love with him, in a sort of trance or muse of love. And she maintained such a cold sort of blankness towards Kate.

‘She despises me,’ thought Kate, ‘because I can’t be in love as she is.’

And for one second Kate envied Teresa. The next second, she despised her. ‘The harem type — ’

Well, it was Ramón’s nature to be a sort of Sultan. He looked very handsome in his white clothes, very serene and pasha-like in his assurance, yet at the same time, soft, pleasant, something boyish also in his physical well-being. In his soft yet rather pasha-like way, he was mixing a cocktail of gin and vermouth and lime. Teresa watched him from the corner of her eye. And at the same time, she watched Kate, the potential enemy, the woman who talked with men on their own plane.

Kate rose to get spoons. At the same moment, he stepped back from the low table where he was squeezing a lime, so that he came into slight collision with her. And Kate noticed again how quick and subtle was his physical evasion of her, the soft, almost liquid, hot quickness of sliding out of contact with her. His natural voluptuousness avoided her as a flame leans away from a draught.

She flushed slightly. And Teresa saw the quick flush under the fair, warm-white skin, the leap of yellow light, almost like anger, into Kate’s grey-hazel eyes. The moment of evasion of two different blood-streams.

And Teresa rose and went to Ramón’s side, bending over and looking in the tumblers, asking, with that curious affected childishness of dark women:

‘What do you put in?’

‘Look!’ said Ramón. And with the same curious male childishness of dark men, he was explaining the cocktail to her, giving her a little gin in a spoon, to taste.

‘It is an impure tequila,’ she said naïvely.

‘At eight pesos a bottle?’ he laughed.

‘So much! It is much!’

She looked into his eyes for a second, and saw all his face go darker, warmer, as if his flesh were fusing soft towards her. Her small head poised the prouder. She had got him back.

‘Harem tricks!’ said Kate to herself. And she was somewhat impatient, seeing the big, portentous Ramón enveloped in the toils of this little dark thing. She

resented being made so conscious of his physical presence, his full, male body inside his thin white clothes, the strong, yet soft shoulders, the full, rich male thighs. It was as if she herself, also, being in the presence of this Sultan, should succumb as part of the harem.

What a curious will the little dark woman had! What a subtle female power inside her rather skinny body! She had the power to make him into a big, golden full glory of a man. Whilst she herself became almost inconspicuous, save for her big black eyes lit with a tigerish power.

Kate watched in wonder. She herself had known men who made her feel a queen, who made her feel as if the sky rested on her bosom and her head was among the stars. She knew what it was to rise grander and grander, till she filled the universe with her womanhood.

Now she saw the opposite taking place. This little bit of a black-eyed woman had an almost uncanny power to make Ramón great and gorgeous in the flesh, whilst she herself became inconspicuous, almost invisible, save for her great black eyes. Like a sultan, he was, like a full golden fruit in the sun, with a strange and magnificent presence, glamour. And then, by some mysterious power in her dark little body, the skinny Teresa held him most completely.

And this was what Ramón wanted. And it made Kate angry, angry. The big, fluid male, gleaming, was somewhat repulsive to her. And the tense little female with her pale-dark face, wan under her great, intense, black eyes, having all her female being tense in an effort to exalt this big glistening man, this enraged Kate. She could not bear the glistening smile in Ramón's dark eyes, a sort of pasha satisfaction. And she could not bear the erect, tense little figure of the dark woman, using her power in this way.

This hidden, secretive power of the dark female! Kate called it harem, and self-prostitution. But was it? Yes, surely it was the slave approach. Surely she wanted nothing but sex from him, like a prostitute! The ancient mystery of the female power, which consists in glorifying the blood-male.

Was it right? Kate asked herself. Wasn't it degrading for a woman? And didn't it make the man either soft and sensuous, or else hatefully autocratic?

Yet Kate herself had convinced herself of one thing, finally: that the clue to all living and to all moving-on into new living lay in the vivid blood-relation between man and woman. A man and a woman in this togetherness were the clue to all present living and future possibility. Out of this clue of togetherness between a man and a woman, the whole of the new life arose. It was the quick of the whole.

And the togetherness needed a balance. Surely it needed a balance! And did not this Teresa throw herself entirely into the male balance, so that all the weight

was on the man's side?

Ramón had not wanted Kate. Ramón had got what he wanted — this black little creature, who was so servile to him and so haughty in her own power. Ramón had never wanted Kate: except as a friend, a clever friend. As a woman, no! — He wanted this little viper of a Teresa.

Cipriano wanted Kate. The little general, the strutting little soldier, he wanted Kate: just for moments. He did not really want to marry her. He wanted the moments, no more. She was to give him his moments, and then he was off again, to his army, to his men. It was what he wanted.

It was what she wanted too. Her life was her own! It was not her *métier* to be fanning the blood in a man, to make him almighty and blood-glamorous. Her life was her own!

She rose and went to her bedroom to look for a book she had promised Ramón. She could not bear the sight of him in love with Teresa any longer. The heavy, mindless smile on his face, the curious glisten of his eyes, and the strange, heavy, lordly aplomb of his body affected her like a madness. She wanted to run.

This was what they were, these people! Savages, with the impossible fluid flesh of savages, and that savage way of dissolving into an awful black mass of desire. Emerging with the male conceit and haughtiness swelling his blood and making him feel endless. While his eyes glistened with a haughty blackness.

The trouble was, that the power of the world, which she had known until now only in the eyes of blue-eyed men, who made queens of their women — even if they hated them for it in the end — was now fading in the blue eyes, and dawning in the black. In Ramón's eyes at this moment was a steady, alien gleam of pride, and daring, and power, which she knew was masterly. The same was in Cipriano's quick looks. The power of the world was dying in the blond men, their bravery and their supremacy was leaving them, going into the eyes of the dark men, who were rousing at last.

Joachim, the eager, clever, fierce, sensitive genius, who could look into her soul, and laugh into her soul, with his blue eyes: he had died under her eyes. And her children were not even his children.

If she could have fanned his blood as Teresa now fanned the blood of Ramón, he would never have died.

But it was impossible. Every dog has his day. — And every race.

Teresa came tapping timidly.

'May I come?'

'Do!' said Kate, rising from her knees and leaving little piles of books all round the book-trunk.

It was a fairly large room, with doors opening on to the patio and the sun-hard garden, smooth mango-trees rising like elephant's trunks out of the ground, green grass after the rains, chickens beneath the ragged banana leaves. A red bird splashed in the basin of water, opening and shutting brown wings above his pure scarlet, vivid.

But Teresa looked at the room, not out of doors. She smelt the smell of cigarettes and saw the many cigarette stumps in the agate tray by the bed. She saw the littered books, the scattered jewellery, the brilliant New-Mexican rugs on the floor, the Persian curtain hung behind the bed, the handsome, coloured bedcover, the dresses of dark silk and bright velvet flung over a trunk, the folded shawls with their long fringe, the scattered shoes, white, grey, pale-brown, dark-brown, black, on the floor, the tall Chinese candlesticks. The room of a woman who lived her own life, for her own self.

Teresa was repelled, uneasy, and fascinated.

'How nice this is!' she said, touching the glowing bedcover.

'A friend made it for me, in England.'

Teresa looked with wonder at everything, especially at the tangle of jewellery on the dressing-table.

'Don't you like those red stones!' said Kate, kneeling again to put the books back, and looking at the brown neck bent absorbedly over the jewels. Thin shoulders, with a soft, dark skin, in a bit of a white dress! And loosely folded masses of black hair held by tortoise-shell pins. — An insignificant little thing, humble, Kate thought to herself.

But she knew really that Teresa was neither insignificant nor humble. Under that soft brown skin, and in that stooping female spine was a strange old power to call up the blood in a man, and glorify it, and, in some way, keep it for herself.

On the sewing-table was a length of fine Indian muslin which Kate had bought in India, and did not know what to do with. It was a sort of yellow-peach colour, beautiful, but it did not suit Kate. Teresa was fingering the gold-thread selvedge.

'It is not organdie?' she said.

'No, muslin. Hand-made muslin from India. — Why don't you take it? It doesn't suit me. It would be perfect for you.'

She rose and held the fabric against Teresa's dark neck, pointing to the mirror. Teresa saw the warm-yellow muslin upon herself, and her eyes flashed.

'No!' she said. 'I couldn't take it.'

'Why not? It doesn't suit me. I've had it lying about for a year now, and was wondering whether to cut it up for curtains. Do have it.'

Kate could be imperious, almost cruel in her giving.

'I can't take it from you!'

‘Of course you can!’

Ramón appeared in the doorway, glancing round the room, and at the two women.

‘Look!’ said Teresa, rather confused. ‘The Señora wants to give me this Indian muslin.’ — She turned to him shyly, with the fabric held to her throat.

‘You look very well in it,’ he said, his eyes resting on her.

‘The Señora ought not to give it to me.’

‘The Señora would not give it you unless she wished to.’

‘Then!’ said Teresa to Kate. ‘Many thanks! But many thanks!’

‘It is nothing,’ said Kate.

‘But Ramón says it suits me.’

‘Yes, doesn’t it suit her!’ cried Kate to him. ‘It was made in India for someone as dark as she is. It does suit her.’

‘Very pretty!’ said Ramón.

He had glanced round the room, at the different attractive things from different parts of the world, and at the cigarette ends in the agate bowl: the rather weary luxury and disorder, and the touch of barrenness, of a woman living her own life.

She did not know what he was thinking. But to herself she thought: This is the man I defended on that roof. This is the man who lay with a hole in his back, naked and unconscious under the lamp. He didn’t look like a Sultan then.

Teresa must have divined something of her thought, for she said, looking at Ramón:

‘Señora! But for you Ramón would have been killed. Always I think of it.’

‘Don’t think of it,’ said Kate. ‘Something else would have happened. Anyhow it wasn’t I, it was destiny.’

‘Ah, but you were the destiny!’ said Teresa.

‘Now there is a hostess, won’t you come and stay some time at Jamiltepec?’ said Ramón.

‘Oh, do! Do come!’ cried Teresa.

‘But do you really want me?’ said Kate, incredulous.

‘Yes! Yes!’ cried Teresa.

‘She needs a woman-friend,’ said Ramón gently.

‘Yes, I do!’ she cried. ‘I have never had a true, true woman-friend: only when I was at school, and we were girls.’

Kate doubted very much her own capacity for being a true, true woman-friend to Teresa. She wondered what the two of them saw in her. As what did they see her?

‘Yes, I should like to come for a few days,’ she replied.

‘Oh, yes!’ cried Teresa. ‘When will you come?’

The day was agreed.

‘And we will write the Song of Malintzi,’ said Ramón.

‘Don’t do that!’ cried Kate quickly.

He looked at her, in his slow, wondering way. He could make her feel, at moments, as if she were a sort of child and as if he were a ghost.

Kate went to Jamiltepec, and before the two women knew it, almost, they were making dresses for Teresa, cutting up the pineapple-coloured muslin. Poor Teresa, for a bride she had a scanty wardrobe: nothing but her rather pathetic black dresses that somehow made her look poor, and a few old white dresses. She had lived for her father — who had a good library of Mexicana and was all his life writing a history of the State of Jalisco — and for the hacienda. And it was her proud boast that Las Yemas was the only hacienda, within a hundred miles range, which had not been smashed at all during the revolutions that followed the flight of Porfirio Diaz.

Teresa had a good deal of the nun in her. But that was because she was deeply passionate, and deep passion tends to hide within itself, rather than expose itself to vulgar contact.

So Kate pinned the muslin over the brown shoulders, wondering again at the strange, uncanny softness of the dark skin, the heaviness of the black hair. Teresa’s family, the Romeros, had been in Mexico since the early days of the Conquest.

Teresa wanted long sleeves.

‘My arms are so thin!’ she murmured, hiding her slender brown arms with a sort of shame. ‘They are not beautiful like yours.’

Kate was a strong, full-developed woman of forty, with round, strong white arms.

‘No!’ she said to Teresa. ‘Your arms are not thin: they are exactly right for your figure, and pretty and young and brown.’

‘But make the sleeves long, to the wrist,’ pleaded Teresa.

And Kate did so, realizing it became the other woman’s nature better.

‘The men here don’t like little thin women,’ said Teresa, wistfully.

‘One doesn’t care what the men like,’ said Kate. ‘Do you think Don Ramón wishes you were a plump partridge?’

Teresa looked at her with a smile in her dark, big bright eyes, that were so quick, and in many ways so unseeing.

‘Who knows!’ she said. And in her quick, mischievous smile it was evident she would like also, sometimes, to be a plump partridge.

Kate now saw more of the hacienda life than she had done before. When

Ramón was at home, he consulted his overseer, or administrator, every morning. But already Teresa was taking this work off his hands. She would see to the estate.

Ramón was a good deal absent, either in Mexico City or in Guadalajara, or even away in Sonora. He was already famous and notorious throughout the country, his name was a name to conjure with. But underneath the rather ready hero-worship of the Mexicans, Kate somehow felt their latent grudging. Perhaps they took more satisfaction in ultimately destroying their heroes, than in temporarily raising them high. The real perfect moment was when the hero was downed.

And to Kate, sceptic as she was, it seemed much more likely that they were sharpening the machete to stick in Ramón's heart, when he got a bit too big for them, than anything else. Though, to be sure, there was Cipriano to reckon with. And Cipriano was a little devil whom they quite rightly feared. And Cipriano, for once, was faithful. He was, to himself, Huitzilopochtli, and to this he would maintain a demonish faith. He was Huitzilopochtli, Ramón was Quetzalcoatl. To Cipriano this was a plain and living fact. And he kept his army keen as a knife. Even the President would not care to run counter to Cipriano. And the President was a brave man too.

'One day,' he said, 'we will put Quetzalcoatl in Puebla Cathedral, and Huitzilopochtli in Mexico Cathedral and Malintzi in Guadalupe. The day will come, Ramón.'

'We will see that it comes,' Ramón replied.

But Ramón and Montes suffered alike from the deep, devilish animosity the country sent out in silence against them. It was the same, whoever was in power, the Mexicans seemed to steam with invisible, grudging hate, the hate of demons foiled in their own souls, whose only motive is to foil everything, everybody, in the everlasting hell of cramped frustration.

This was the dragon of Mexico, that Ramón had to fight. Montes, the President, had it to fight the same. And it shattered his health. Cipriano also had it up against him. But he succeeded best. With his drums, with his dances round the fire, with his soldiers kept keen as knives he drew real support from his men. He grew stronger and more brilliant.

Ramón also, at home in his own district, felt the power flow into him from his people. He was their chief, and by his effort and his power he had almost overcome their ancient, fathomless resistance. Almost he had awed them back into the soft mystery of living, awed them until the tension of their resistant, malevolent wills relaxed. At home, he would feel his strength upon him.

But away from home, and particularly in the city of Mexico, he felt himself

bled, bled, bled by the subtle, hidden malevolence of the Mexicans, and the ugly negation of the greedy, mechanical foreigners, birds of prey forever alighting in the cosmopolitan capital.

While Ramón was away, Kate stayed with Teresa. The two women had this in common, that they felt it was better to stand faithfully behind a really brave man, than to push forward into the ranks of cheap and obtrusive women. And this united them. A certain deep, ultimate faithfulness in each woman, to her own man who needed her fidelity, kept Kate and Teresa kindred to one another.

The rainy season had almost passed, though throughout September and even in October occasional heavy downpours fell. But the wonderful Mexican autumn, like a strange, inverted spring, was upon the land. The waste places bloomed with pink and white cosmos, the strange wild trees flowered in a ghostly way, forests of small sunflowers shone in the sun, the sky was a pure, pure blue, the floods of sunshine lay tempered on the land, that in part was flooded with water, from the heavy rains.

The lake was very full, strange and uneasy, and it had washed up a bank of the wicked water-hyacinths along all its shores. The wild-fowl were coming from the north, clouds of wild ducks like dust in the high air, sprinkling the water like weeds. Many, many wild fowl, grebe, cranes, and white gulls of the inland seas, so that the northern mystery seemed to have blown so far south. There was a smell of water in the land, and a sense of soothing. For Kate firmly believed that part of the horror of the Mexican people came from the unsoothed dryness of the land and the untempered crudity of the flat-edged sunshine. If only there could be a softening of water in the air, and a haze above trees, the unspoken and unspeakable malevolence would die out of the human hearts.

Kate rode out often with Teresa to see the fields. The sugarcane in the inner valley was vivid green, and rising tall, tall. The peons were beginning to cut it with their sword-like machetes, filling the bullock-wagons, to haul the cane to the factory in Sayula. On the dry hill-slopes the spikey tequila plant — a sort of maguey — flourished in its iron wickedness. Low wild cactuses put forth rose-like blossoms, wonderful and beautiful for such sinister plants. The beans were gathered from the bean-fields, some gourds and squashes still sprawled their uncanny weight across the land. Red chiles hung on withering plants, red tomatoes sank to the earth. Some maize still reared its flags, there was still young corn to eat on the cob. The banana crop was small, the children came in with the little wild yellow tejocote apples, for making preserves. Teresa was making preserves, even with the late figs and peaches. On the trees, the ponderous mango-trees, some fruit was again orange-yellow and ripe, but the most still hung in strings, heavy and greenish and dropping like the testes of

bulls.

It was autumn in Mexico, with wild duck on the waters, and hunters with guns, and small wild doves in the trees. Autumn in Mexico, and the coming of the dry season, with the sky going higher and higher, pure pale blue, the sunset arriving with a strange flare of crystal yellow light. With the coffee berries turning red on the struggling bushes under the trees, and bougainvillea in the strong light glowing with a glow of magenta colour so deep you could plunge your arms deep in it. With a few humming-birds in the sunshine, and the fish in the waters gone wild, and the flies, that steamed black in the first rains, now passing away again.

Teresa attended to everything, and Kate helped. Whether it was a sick peon in one of the little houses, or the hosts of bees from the hives under the mangoes, or the yellow, yellow beeswax to be made into little bowlfuls, or the preserves, or the garden, or the calves, or the bit of butter and the little fresh cheeses made of strands of curd, or the turkeys to be overlooked: she saw to it along with Teresa. And she wondered at the steady, urgent, efficient will which had to be exerted all the time. Everything was kept going by a heavy exertion of will. If once the will of the master broke, everything would break, and ruin would overtake the place almost at once. No real relaxation, ever. Always the sombre, insistent will.

Ramón arrived home one evening in November, from a long journey to Sonora. He had come overland from Tepic, and twice had been stopped by floods. The rains, so late, were very unusual. He was tired and remote-seeming. Kate's heart stood still a moment as she thought: He goes so remote, as if he might go away altogether into death.

It was cloudy again, with lightning beating about on the horizons. But all was very still. She said good-night early, and wandered down her own side of the terrace, to the look-out at the end, which looked on to the lake. Everything was dark, save for the intermittent pallor of lightning.

And she was startled to see, in a gleam of lightning, Teresa sitting with her back to the wall of the open terrace, Ramón lying with his head in her lap, while she slowly pushed her fingers through his thick black hair. They were as silent as the night.

Kate gave a startled murmur and said:

'I'm so sorry! I didn't know you were here.'

'I wanted to be under the sky!' said Ramón, heaving himself to rise.

'Oh, don't move!' said Kate. 'It was stupid of me to come here. You are tired.'

'Yes,' he said, sinking again. 'I am tired. These people make me feel I have a hole in the middle of me. So I have come back to Teresa.'

‘Yes!’ said Kate. ‘One isn’t the Living Quetzalcoatl for nothing. Of course they eat holes in you. — Really, is it worth it? — To give yourself to be eaten away by them.’

‘It must be so,’ he said. ‘The change has to be made. And some man has to make it. I sometimes wish it wasn’t I.’

‘So do I wish it. So does Teresa. One wonders if it isn’t better to be just a man,’ said Kate.

But Teresa said nothing.

‘One does what one must. And after all, one is always just a man,’ he said. ‘And if one has wounds — *à la guerre comme à la guerre!*’

His voice came out of the darkness like a ghost.

‘Ah!’ sighed Kate. ‘It makes one wonder what a man is, that he must needs expose himself to the horrors of all the other people.’

There was silence for a moment.

‘Man is a column of blood, with a voice in it,’ he said. ‘And when the voice is still, and he is only a column of blood, he is better.’

She went away to her room sadly, hearing the sound of infinite exhaustion in his voice. As if he had a hole, a wound in the middle of him. She could almost feel it, in her own bowels.

And if, with his efforts, he killed himself? — Then, she said, Cipriano would come apart, and it would be all finished.

Ah, why should a man have to make these efforts on behalf of a beastly, malevolent people who weren’t worth it! Better let the world come to an end, if that was what it wanted.

She thought of Teresa soothing him, soothing him and saying nothing. And him like a great helpless, wounded thing! It was rather horrible, really. Herself, she would have to expostulate, she would have to try to prevent him. Why should men damage themselves with this useless struggling and fighting, and then come home to their women to be restored!

To Kate, the fight simply wasn’t worth one wound. Let the beastly world of man come to an end, if that was its destiny, as soon as possible. Without lifting a finger to prevent it. — Live one’s own precious life, that was given but once, and let the rest go its own hellish way.

She would have had to try to prevent Ramón from giving himself to destruction this way. She was willing for him to be ten Living Quetzalcoatl. But not to expose himself to the devilish malevolence of people.

Yet he would do it. Even as Joachim had done. And Teresa, with her silence and her infinitely soft administering, she would heal him far better than Kate, with her expostulation and her opposition.

‘Ah!’ said Kate to herself. ‘I’m glad Cipriano is a soldier, and doesn’t get wounds in his soul.’

At the same time, she knew that without Ramón, Cipriano was just an instrument, and not ultimately interesting to her.

In the morning, Teresa appeared alone to breakfast. She seemed very calm, hiding her emotions in her odd, brown, proud little way.

‘How is Ramón?’ said Kate.

‘He is sleeping,’ said Teresa.

‘Good! He seemed to me almost done up, last night.’

‘Yes.’ — The black eyes looked at Kate, wide with unshed tears and courage, and a beautiful deep, remote light.

‘I don’t believe in a man’s sacrificing himself in this way,’ said Kate. ‘And I don’t.’

Teresa still looked her full in the eyes.

‘Ah!’ she said. ‘He doesn’t sacrifice himself. He feels he must do as he does. And if he must, I must help him.’

‘But then you are sacrificing yourself to him, and I don’t believe in that either,’ said Kate.

‘Oh, no!’ replied Teresa quickly, and a little flush burned in her cheek, and her dark eyes flashed. ‘I am not sacrificing myself to Ramón. If I can give him — sleep — when he needs it — that is not sacrifice. It is — ’ She did not finish, but her eyes flashed, and the flush burned darker.

‘It is love, I know,’ said Kate. ‘But it exhausts you too.’

‘It is not simply love,’ flashed Teresa proudly. ‘I might have loved more than one man: many men are lovable. But Ramón! — My soul is with Ramón.’ — The tears rose to her eyes. ‘I do not want to talk about it,’ she said, rising. ‘But you must not touch me there, and judge me.’

She hurried out of the room, leaving Kate somewhat dismayed. Kate sighed, thinking of going home.

But in an hour Teresa appeared again, putting her cool, soft, snake-like little hand on Kate’s arm.

‘I am sorry if I was rude,’ she said.

‘No,’ said Kate. ‘Apparently it is I who am wrong.’

‘Yes, I think you are,’ said Teresa. ‘You think there is only love. Love is only such a little bit.’

‘And what is the rest?’

‘How can I tell you if you do not know? — But do you think Ramón is no more to me than a lover?’

‘A husband!’ said Kate.

‘Ah!’ Teresa put her head aside with an odd impatience. ‘Those little words! Those little words! Nor either a husband. — He is my life.’

‘Surely it is better for one to live one’s own life!’

‘No! It is like seed. It is no good till it is given. I know. I kept my own life for a long time. As you keep it longer, it dies. And I tried to give it to God. But I couldn’t, quite. Then they told me, if I married Ramón and had any part in the Quetzalcoatl heresy, my soul would be damned. — But something made me know it was not true. I even knew he needed my soul. — Ah, Señora — ’ a subtle smile came on Teresa’s pale face — ‘I have lost my soul to Ramón. — What more can I say!’

‘And what about his soul?’

‘It comes home to me — here!’ She put her hand over her womb.

Kate was silent for a time.

‘And if he betrays you?’ she said.

‘Ah, Señora!’ said Teresa. ‘Ramón is not just a lover. He is a brave man, and he doesn’t betray his own blood. And it is his soul that comes home to me. — And I would struggle to my last breath to give him sleep, when he came home to me with his soul, and needed it,’ she flashed. Then she added, murmuring to herself: ‘No, thank God! I have not got a life of my own! I have been able to give it to a man who is more than a man, as they say in their Quetzalcoatl language. And now it needn’t die inside me, like a bird in a cage. — Oh, yes, Señora! If he goes to Sinaloa and the west coast, my soul goes with him and takes part in it all. It does not let him go alone. And he does not forget that he has my soul with him. I know it. — No, Señora! You must not criticise me or pity me.’

‘Still!’ said Kate. ‘It still seems to me it would be better for each one to keep her own soul, and be responsible for it.’

‘If it were possible!’ said Teresa. ‘But you can no more keep your own soul inside you for yourself, without its dying, than you can keep the seed of your womb. Until a man gives you his seed, the seed of your womb is nothing. And the man’s seed is nothing to him. — And until you give your soul to a man, and he takes it, your soul is nothing to you. — And when a man has taken your whole soul. — Ah, do not talk to me about betraying. A man only betrays because he has been given a part, and not the whole. And a woman only betrays because only the part has been taken from her, and not the whole. That is all about betrayal. I know. — But when the whole is given, and taken, betrayal can’t exist. What I am to Ramón, I am. And what he is to me, he is. I do not care what he does. If he is away from me, he does as he wishes. So long as he will always keep safe what I am to him.’

Kate did not like having to learn lessons from this little waif of a Teresa. Kate was a woman of the world, handsome and experienced. She was accustomed to homage. Other women usually had a slight fear of her, for she was powerful and ruthless in her own way.

Teresa also feared her a little, as a woman of the world. But as an intrinsic woman, not at all. Trenched inside her own fierce and proud little soul, Teresa looked on Kate as on one of those women of the outside world, who make a very splendid show, but who are not so sure of the real secret of womanhood, and the innermost power. All Kate's handsome, ruthless female power was second-rate to Teresa, compared with her own quiet, deep passion of connection with Ramón.

Yes, Kate was accustomed to looking on other women as inferiors. But the tables were suddenly turned. Even as, in her soul, she knew Ramón to be a greater man than Cipriano, suddenly she had to question herself, whether Teresa was not a greater woman than she.

Teresa! A greater woman than Kate? What a blow! Surely it was impossible!

Yet there it was. Ramón had wanted to marry Teresa, not Kate. And the flame of his marriage with Teresa she saw both in his eyes and in Teresa's. A flame that was not in Kate's eyes.

Kate's marriage with Cipriano was curious and momentary. When Cipriano was away, Kate was her old individual self. Only when Cipriano was present, and then only sometimes, did the connection overwhelm her.

When Teresa turned and looked at her with this certain flame, touched with indignation, Kate quailed. Perhaps for the first time in her life she quailed and felt abashed: repentant.

Kate even knew that Teresa felt a little repugnance for her: for the foreign white woman who talked as cleverly as a man and who never gave her soul: who did not believe in giving her soul. All these well-dressed, beautiful women from America or England, Europe, they all kept their souls for themselves, in a sort of purse, as it were.

Teresa was determined that Kate should leave off treating her, very, very indefinitely, as an inferior. It was how all the foreign women treated the Mexican women. Because the foreign women were their own mistresses! They even tried to be condescending to Ramón.

But Ramón! He could look at them and make them feel small, feel really nothing, in spite of all their money and their experience and their air of belonging to the ruling races. The ruling races! Wait! Ramón was a challenge to all that. Let those rule who can.

'You did not sleep?' Teresa said to Kate.

‘Not very well,’ said Kate.

‘No, you look as if you had not slept very well. — Under your eyes.’

Kate smoothed the skin under her eyes, querulously.

‘One gets that look in Mexico,’ she said. ‘It’s not an easy country to keep your youth in. — You are looking well.’

‘Yes, I am very well.’

Teresa had a new, soft bloom on her dark skin, something frail and tender, which she did not want to have to defend against another woman.

‘I think I will go home now Ramón has come,’ said Kate.

‘Oh, why? Do you wish to?’

‘I think I’d better.’

‘Then I will go with you to Sayula. In the boat, no?’

Kate put her few things together. She had slept badly. The night had been black, black, with something of horror in it. As when the bandits had attacked Ramón. She could see the scar in his back, in the night. And the drumming crash of falling water, menacing and horrible, seemed to keep up for hours.

In her soul, Kate felt Teresa’s contempt for her way of wifehood.

‘I have been married too,’ Kate had said. ‘To a very exceptional man, whom I loved.’

‘Ah, yes!’ said Teresa. ‘And he died.’

‘He wanted to die.’

‘Ah, yes! He wanted to die.’

‘I did my level best to prevent him from wearing himself out.’

‘Ah, yes, to prevent him.’

‘What else could I have done?’ flashed Kate in anger.

‘If you could have given him your life, he would not even have wanted to die.’

‘I did give him my life. I loved him — oh, you will never know. — But he didn’t want my soul. He believed I should keep a soul of my own.’

‘Ah, yes, men are like that, when they are merely men. When a man is warm and brave — then he wants the woman to give him her soul, and he keeps it in his womb, so he is more than a mere man, a single man. I know it. I know where my soul is. It is in Ramón’s womb, the womb of a man, just as his seed is in my womb, the womb of a woman. He is a man, and a column of blood. I am a woman, and a valley of blood. I shall not contradict him. How can I? My soul is inside him, and I am far from contradicting him when he is trying with all his might to do something that he knows about. He won’t die, and they won’t kill him. No! The stream flows into him from the heart of the world: and from me. — I tell you, because you saved his life, and therefore we belong to the same thing, you and I and he — and Cipriano. But you should not misjudge me. That

other way of women, where a woman keeps her own soul — ah, what is it but weariness!’

‘And the men?’

‘Ah! if there are men whose souls are warm and brave, how they comfort one’s womb, Caterina!’

Kate hung her head, stubborn and angry at being put down from her eminence. — The slave morale! she said to herself. The miserable old trick of a woman living just for the sake of a man. Only living to send her soul with him, inside his precious body. And to carry his precious seed in her womb! Herself, apart from this, nothing.

Kate wanted to make her indignation thorough, but she did not quite succeed. Somewhere, secretly and angrily, she envied Teresa her dark eyes with the flame in them and their savage assurance. She envied her her serpent-delicate fingers. And above all, she envied her, with repining, the comfort of a living man permanent in her womb. And the secret, savage indomitable pride in her own womanhood, that rose from this.

In the warm morning after the rain, the frogs were whirring frantically. Across the lake, the mountains were blue black, and little pieces of white, fluffy vapour wandered low across the trees. Clouds were along the mountain-tops, making a level sky-line of whitish softness the whole length of the range. On the lonely, fawn-coloured water, one sail was blowing.

‘It is like Europe — like the Tyrol to-day,’ said Kate wistfully.

‘Do you love Europe very much?’ asked Teresa.

‘Yes, I think I love it.’

‘And must you go back to it?’

‘I think so. Soon! To my mother and my children.’

‘Do they want you very much?’

‘Yes!’ said Kate, rather hesitant. Then she added: ‘Not very much, really. But I want them.’

‘What for? — I mean,’ Teresa added, ‘do you long for them?’

‘Sometimes,’ said Kate, the tears coming to her eyes.

The boat rowed on in silence.

‘And Cipriano?’ Teresa asked timidly.

‘Ah!’ said Kate shortly. ‘He is such a stranger to me.’

Teresa was silent for some moments.

‘I think a man is always a stranger to a woman,’ said Teresa. ‘Why should it not be so?’

‘But you,’ said Kate, ‘haven’t any children.’

‘Ramón has. — And he says: “I cast my bread upon the waters. It is my

children too. And if they return to me after many days, I shall be glad.” — Is it not the same for you?’

‘Not quite!’ said Kate. ‘I am a woman, I am not a man.’

‘I, if I have children,’ said Teresa, ‘I shall try to cast my bread upon the waters, so my children come to me that way. I hope I shall. I hope I shall not try to fish them out of life for myself, with a net. I have a very great fear of love. It is so personal. Let each bird fly with its own wings, and each fish swim its own course. — Morning brings more than love. And I want to be true to the morning.’

CHAPTER XXVI

Kate is a Wife

Kate was glad to get back to her own house, and to be more or less alone. She felt a great change was being worked in her, and if it worked too violently, she would die. It was the end of something, and the beginning of something, far, far inside her: in her soul and womb. The men, Ramón and Cipriano, caused the change, and Mexico. Because the time had come. — Nevertheless if what was happening happened too rapidly, or violently, she felt she would die. So, from time to time she had to withdraw from contact, to be alone.

She would sit alone for hours on the shore, under a green willow-tree that hung its curtains of pale-green fronds, on the beach. The lake was much fuller and higher up the shore, softer, more mysterious. There was a smell of the piles of water-hyacinth decaying at the water's edges. Distance seemed farther away. The near conical hills were dotted with green bushes, like a Japanese drawing. Bullock-wagons with solid wheels came rolling to the village, high with sugar cane, drawn by eight oxen with ponderous heads and slowly swinging horns, while a peon walked in front, with the guiding-stick on the cross-beam of the yoke. So slow, so massive, yet with such slight control!

She had a strange feeling, in Mexico, of the old prehistoric humanity, the dark-eyed humanity of the days, perhaps, before the glacial period. When the world was colder, and the seas emptier, and all the land-formation was different. When the waters of the world were piled in stupendous glaciers on the high places, and high, high upon the poles. When great plains stretched away to the oceans, like Atlantis, and the lost continents of Polynesia, so that seas were only great lakes, and the soft, dark-eyed people of that world could walk around the globe. Then there was a mysterious, hot-blooded, soft-footed humanity with a strange civilization of its own.

Till the glaciers melted, and drove the peoples to the high places, like the lofty plateaux of Mexico, separated them into cut-off nations.

Sometimes, in America, the shadow of that old pre-Flood world was so strong, that the day of historic humanity would melt out of Kate's consciousness, and she would begin to approximate to the old mode of consciousness, the old, dark will, the unconcern for death, the subtle, dark consciousness, non-cerebral, but vertebrate. When the mind and the power of man was in his blood and his

backbone, and there was the strange, dark inter-communication between man and man and man and beast, from the powerful spine.

The Mexicans were still this. That which is aboriginal in America still belongs to the way of the world before the Flood, before the mental-spiritual world came into being. In America, therefore, the mental-spiritual life of white people suddenly flourishes like a great weed let loose in virgin soil. Probably it will as quickly wither. A great death come. And after that, the living results will be a new germ, a new conception of human life, that will arise from the fusion of the old blood-and-vertebrate consciousness with the white man's present mental-spiritual consciousness. The sinking of both beings, into a new being.

Kate was more Irish than anything, and the almost deathly mysticism of the aboriginal Celtic or Iberian people lay at the bottom of her soul. It was a residue of memory, something that lives on from the pre-Flood world, and cannot be killed. Something older, and more everlastingly potent, than our would-be fair-and-square world.

She knew more or less what Ramón was trying to effect: this fusion! She knew what it was that made Cipriano more significant to her than all her past, her husbands and her children. It was the leap of the old, antediluvian blood-male into unison with her. And for this, without her knowing, her innermost blood had been thudding all the time.

Ireland would not and could not forget that other old, dark, sumptuous living. The Tuatha De Danaan might be under the western sea. But they are under the living blood, too, never quite to be silenced. Now they have to come forth again, to a new connection. And the scientific, fair-and-square Europe has to mate once more with the old giants.

But the change, Kate felt, must not come on her too soon and too suddenly, or it would rupture her and she would die. The old way has its horror. The heavy-footed, à terre spirit of aboriginal Mexico could be so horrible to her, as to make her wicked. The slow, indomitable kind of existing and persisting, without hope or élan, which is in the aboriginal American, sometimes made her feel she would go mad. The sullen will persisting over the slow, dark centuries, counting the individual existence a trifle! A tenacity of demons, less than human. And a sudden ferocity, a sudden lust of death rousing incalculable and terrible.

People who never really changed. Men who were not faithful to life, to the living actuality. Faithful to some dark necessity out of the past. The actual present suddenly collapsing in the souls of the men and the women, and the old, black, volcanic lava bursting up in violence, followed by a lava-rock indifference.

The hope! The hope! Would it ever be possible to revive the hope in these

black souls, and achieve the marriage which is the only step to the new world of man?

But meanwhile, a strange, almost torn nausea would come over Kate, and she felt she must go away, to spare herself. The strange, reptilian insistence of her very servants. Blood is one blood. We are all of one blood-stream. Something aboriginal and tribal, and almost worse than death to the white individual. Out of the dark eyes and the powerful spines of these people, all the time the unknown assertion: The blood is one blood. It was a strange, overbearing insistence, a claim of blood-unison.

Kate was of a proud old family. She had been brought up with the English-Germanic idea of the intrinsic superiority of the hereditary aristocrat. Her blood was different from the common blood, another, finer fluid.

But in Mexico, none of this. Her criada Juana, the aguador who carried the water, the boatman who rowed her on the lake, all looked at her with one look in their eyes. The blood is one blood. In the blood, you and I are undifferentiated. She saw it in their eyes, she heard it in their words, it tinged their deference and their mockery. And sometimes it made her feel physically sick: this overbearing blood-familiarity.

And sometimes, when she tried to hold herself up, in the proud old assertion: My blood is my own. *Noli me tangere*, she would see the terrible ancient hatred in their eyes, the hatred which leads them to atrocities and fearful maimings.

They would defer to her spirit, her knowledge, her understanding. They would give her deference, and a sort of grudging reverence for this. She belonged to the ruling races, the clever ones. But back again they demanded her acquiescence to the primeval assertion: The blood is one blood. We are one blood. It was the assertion that swept away all individualism, and left her immersed, drowned in the grand sea of the living blood, in immediate contact with all these men and all these women.

To this she must submit. Or they would persist in the slow revenge.

And she could not submit, off-hand. It had to be a slow, organic process. Anything sudden or violent would destroy her.

Now she understood Ramón's assertion: Man is a column of blood: Woman is a valley of blood. It was the primeval oneness of mankind, the opposite of the oneness of the spirit.

But Kate had always looked upon her blood as absolutely her own, her individual own. Her spirit she shared, in the spirit she communed. But her blood stayed by her in individuality.

Now she was confronted by the other great assertion: The blood is one blood. — It meant a strange, marginless death of her individual self.

Now she understood why Ramón and Cipriano wore the white clothes and the sandals, and were naked, or half-naked, as living gods. It was the acquiescence in the primitive assertion. It was the renewal of the old, terrible bond of the blood-unison of man, which made blood-sacrifice so potent a factor of life. The blood of the individual is given back to the great blood-being, the god, the nation, the tribe.

Now she understood the strange unison she could always feel between Ramón and his men, and Cipriano and his men. It was the soft, quaking, deep communion of blood-oneness. Sometimes it made her feel sick. Sometimes it made her revolt. But it was the power she could not get beyond.

Because, admitting his blood-unison, Ramón at the same time claimed a supremacy, even a godliness. He was a man, as the lowest of his peons was a man. At the same time, rising from the same pool of blood, from the same roots of manhood as they, and being, as they were, a man of the pulsing blood, he was still something more. Not in the blood nor in the spirit lay his individuality and his supremacy, his godhead. But in a star within him, an inexplicable star which rose out of the dark sea and shone between the flood and the great sky. The mysterious star which unites the vast universal blood with the universal breath of the spirit, and shines between them both.

Not the rider on the white horse: nor the rider on the red. That which is beyond the riders and the horses, the inexplicable mystery of the stars whence no horseman comes and to which no horseman can arrive. The star which is a man's innermost clue, which rules the power of the blood on the one hand, and the power of the spirit on the other.

For this, the only thing which is supreme above all power in a man, and at the same time, is power; which far transcends knowledge; the strange star between the sky and the waters of the first cosmos: this is man's divinity.

And some men are not divine at all. They have only faculties. They are slaves, or they should be slaves.

But many a man has his own spark of divinity, and has it quenched, blown out by the winds of force or ground out of him by machines.

And when the spirit and the blood in man begin to go asunder, bringing the great death, most stars die out.

Only the man of a great star, a great divinity, can bring the opposites together again, in a new unison.

And this was Ramón, and this was his great effort: to bring the great opposites into contact and into unison again. And this is the god-power in man. By this power you shall know the god in man. By none other.

Ramón was a man as the least of his peons was a man, with the beating heart

and the secret loins and the lips closed on the same secret of manhood. And he was human as Kate was human, with the same yearning of the spirit, for pure knowledge and communion, the soul in the greatness of its comprehending.

But only he had that starry power for bringing together the two great human impulses to a point of fusion, for being the bird between the vast wings of the dual-created power to which man has access and in which man has his being. The Morning Star, between the breath of dawn and the deeps of the dark.

Men had tried to murder him with knives. Carlota would have murdered him with her spirit. Each half separately wanted to commit the murder of him.

But he kept himself beyond. He was the living Quetzalcoatl, and the tiny sparkle of a star was rising in his own men, in his own woman.

The star between the two wings of power: that alone was divinity in a man, and final manhood.

Kate had a message from Cipriano to say he was coming out to stay in the Villa Aragon. The Villa Aragon was the chief house on the lake, in small but rather beautiful grounds with tufts of palm-trees and heavy hedges of jasmine, a garden kept always green by constant watering. The house was built rather like a little castle, absurd, yet its deep, spacious verandas opening on to the slopes and knolls of the tree-clustered garden, above the lake, were pleasant.

Cipriano arrived very pleased, his black eyes shining with the boyish look. He wanted Kate to marry him, go through the Mexican civil marriage, and install herself in the Villa Aragon. She hesitated. She knew she must go back to Europe, to England and Ireland, very soon. The necessity was imperative. The sense of menace that Mexico put over her, and the feeling of inner nausea, was becoming too much to bear. She felt she could not stand it, unless she went away to relax for a time.

This she told to Cipriano. And his face fell.

‘It doesn’t matter to me very much whether I marry or not, before I go,’ she said. ‘But I must go soon — soon.’

‘How soon?’

‘By January.’

His face lightened again.

‘Then marry me before you go,’ he said. ‘Next week.’

She agreed, with curious indifference, and he, his eyes flashing again like a boy’s, moved quickly, to make the necessary legal preparations.

She did not care whether she married or not. In one essential sense, she had married Cipriano already. He was first and foremost a soldier, swift to come to her, and swift to go. She would always be a good deal alone.

And him alone, just as a man and a soldier, she could marry easily enough. It

was this terrible Mexico that frightened her with a sense of doom.

The Quetzalcoatl movement had spread in the country, but sinisterly. The Archbishop had declared against it, Ramón and Cipriano and their adherents were excommunicated. An attempt had been made to assassinate Montes.

The adherents of Quetzalcoatl in the capital had made the Church of San Juan Bautisto, which was called the Church of the Black Saviour, their Metropolitan House of Quetzalcoatl. The Archbishop, a choleric man, had summoned his fervent followers to march in procession to this Church of San Juan, now called the House of Quetzalcoatl, and seize it, and restore it to the Catholic Church. The government, knowing it would have to fight sooner or later, arrested the Archbishop and broke up the procession after some bloodshed.

Then a kind of war began. The Knights of Cortés brought out their famous hidden stores of arms, not very impressive, after all, and a clerical mob, headed by a fanatical priest, surged into the Zócalo. Montes had the guns turned on them. But it looked like the beginnings of a religious war. In the streets the white and blue serapes of Quetzalcoatl and the scarlet and black serapes of Huitzilopochtli were seen in bands, marching to the sound of tom-toms, and holding up the curious round banners, made of feather-work, of Quetzalcoatl, and the tall scarlet signs of Huitzilopochtli, long poles with the soft club of scarlet feathers at the top, tufted with a black point. — In the churches, the priests were still inflaming the orthodox to a holy war. In the streets, priests who had gone over to Quetzalcoatl were haranguing the crowd.

It was a wild moment. In Zacatecas General Narciso Beltran had declared against Montes and for the Church. But Cipriano with his Huitzilopochtli soldiers had attacked with such swiftness and ferocity, Beltran was taken and shot, his army disappeared.

Then Montes declared the old Church illegal in Mexico, and caused a law to be passed, making the religion of Quetzalcoatl the national religion of the Republic. All churches were closed. All priests were compelled to take an oath of allegiance to the Republic, or condemned to exile. The armies of Huitzilopochtli and the white and blue serapes of Quetzalcoatl appeared in all the towns and villages of the Republic. Ramón laboured ceaselessly. Cipriano appeared in unexpected flashes, in unexpected places. He managed to rouse the most discontented States, Vera Cruz, Tamaulipas, Yucatan, to a sort of religious frenzy. Strange baptisms took place in the sea, and a scarlet and black tower of Huitzilopochtli rose along the shores.

The whole country was thrilling with a new thing, with a release of new energy. But there was a sense of violence and crudity in it all, a touch of horror.

The Archbishop was deported, no more priests were seen in the streets. Only

the white and blue and earth-coloured serapes of Quetzalcoatl, and the scarlet and black of Huitzilopochtli, were seen among the crowds. There was a great sense of release, almost of exuberance.

This is why Cipriano came to Kate with those black, flashing, boyish eyes. He was in a strange state of triumph. Kate was frightened, and she felt curiously hollow. Even the queer, new, flashing triumph and the sense of a new thing on the face of the earth could not quite save her. She belonged too much to the old world of Europe, she could not, could not make herself over so quickly. But she felt that if she could go back to Ireland, and let her life and her body pause for a time, then she could come back and take her share.

For it was not her spirit alone which was changing, it was her body, and the constitution of her very blood. She could feel it, the terrible katabolism and metabolism in her blood, changing her even as a creature, changing her to another creature.

And if it went too fast, she would die.

So, she was legally married to Cipriano, and she went to live with him in the Villa Aragon, for a month. After a month, she would sail away, alone, to Ireland. He agreed too.

It was strange, to be married to him. He made her go all vague and quiet, as if she sank away heavy and still, away from the surface of life, and lay deep in the under-life.

The strange, heavy, positive passivity. For the first time in her life she felt absolutely at rest. And talk, and thought, had become trivial, superficial to her: as the ripples on the surface of the lake are as nothing, to the creatures that live away below in the unwavering deeps.

In her soul, she was still and proud. If only the body had not suffered the unbearable nausea of change. She had sunk to a final rest, within a great, opened-out cosmos. The universe had opened out to her new and vast, and she had sunk to the deep bed of pure rest. She had become almost like Teresa in sureness.

Yet the process of change within her blood was terrible to her.

Cipriano was happy, in his curious Indian way. His eyes kept that flashing, black, dilated look of a boy looking newly on a strange, almost uncanny wonder of life. He did not look very definitely at Kate, or even take much definite notice of her. He did not like talking to her, in any serious way. When she wanted to talk seriously, he flashed a cautious, dark look at her, and went away.

He was aware of things that she herself was hardly conscious of. Chiefly, of the curious irritant quality of talk. And this he avoided. Curious as it may seem, he made her aware of her own desire for frictional, irritant sensation. She

realized how all her old love had been frictional, charged with the fire of irritation and the spasms of frictional voluptuousness.

Cipriano, curiously, by refusing to share any of this with her, made it become external to her. Her strange seething feminine will and desire subsided in her and swept away, leaving her soft and powerfully potent, like the hot springs of water that gushed up, so noiseless, so soft, yet so powerful, with a sort of secret potency.

She realized, almost with wonder, the death in her of the Aphrodite of the foam: the seething, frictional, ecstatic Aphrodite. By a swift dark instinct, Cipriano drew away from this in her. When, in their love, it came back on her, the seething electric female ecstasy, which knows such spasms of delirium, he recoiled from her. It was what she used to call her 'satisfaction.' She had loved Joachim for this, that again, and again, and again he could give her this orgiastic 'satisfaction', in spasms that made her cry aloud.

But Cipriano would not. By a dark and powerful instinct he drew away from her as soon as this desire rose again in her, for the white ecstasy of frictional satisfaction, the throes of Aphrodite of the foam. She could see that to him, it was repulsive. He just removed himself, dark and unchangeable, away from her.

And she, as she lay, would realize the worthlessness of this foam-effervescence, its strange externality to her. It seemed to come upon her from without, not from within. And succeeding the first moment of disappointment, when this sort of 'satisfaction' was denied her, came the knowledge that she did not really want it, that it was really nauseous to her.

And he, in his dark, hot silence would bring her back to the new, soft, heavy, hot flow, when she was like a fountain gushing noiseless and with urgent softness from the volcanic deeps. Then she was open to him soft and hot, yet gushing with a noiseless soft power. And there was no such thing as conscious 'satisfaction.' What happened was dark and untellable. So different from the beak-like friction of Aphrodite of the foam, the friction which flares out in circles of phosphorescent ecstasy, to the last wild spasm which utters the involuntary cry, like a death-cry, the final love-cry. This she had known, and known to the end, with Joachim. And now this too was removed from her. What she had with Cipriano was curiously beyond her knowing: so deep and hot and flowing, as it were subterranean. She had to yield before it. She could not grip it into one final spasm of white ecstasy which was like sheer knowing.

And as it was in the love-act, so it was with him. She could not know him. When she tried to know him, something went slack in her, and she had to leave off. She had to let be. She had to leave him, dark and hot and potent, along with the things that are, but are not known. The presence. And the stranger. This he

was always to her.

There was hardly anything to say to him. And there was no personal intimacy. He kept his privacy round him like a cloak, and left her immune within her own privacy. He was a stranger to her, she to him. He accepted the fact absolutely, as if nothing else were possible. She, sometimes, felt it strange. She had so craved for intimacy, insisted on intimacy.

Now she found herself accepting him finally and forever as the stranger in whose presence she lived. It was his impersonal presence which enveloped her. She lived in his aura, and he, she knew, lived in hers, with nothing said, and no personal or spiritual intimacy whatever. A mindless communion of the blood.

Therefore, when he had to go away, it did not matter so very much. His presence was something he left with her, and he took her presence along with him. And somehow, there was no need for emotions.

He had to leave early one morning for Mexico City. The dawn came perfect and clear. The sun was not yet on the lake, but it caught the mountains beyond Tuliapan, and they shone magically distinct, as if some magic light were focussed on them. The green furrows of the mountain-sides were as if in her own hand. Two white gulls, flying, suddenly got the light, and glittered. But the full, soft, noiseless dun lake was pallid, unlit.

She thought of the sea. The Pacific was not very far away. The sea seemed to have retreated entirely out of her consciousness. Yet she knew she needed its breath again.

Cipriano was going down to bathe. She saw him walk out on the masonry of the square basin which was their own tiny harbour. He threw off his wrap and stood dark in silhouette against the pale, unlit water. How dark he was! Dark as a Malay. Curious that his body was as dark, almost, as his face. And with that strange archaic fulness of physique, with the full chest and the full, yet beautiful buttocks of men on old Greek coins.

He dropped off the edge of masonry and waded out in the dim, soft, uncanny water. And at that moment the light tipped over the edge of the mountain and spilled gold upon the surface of the lake. And instantly he was red as fire. The sunshine was not red, the sun was too high for that. It was golden with morning. But as it flushed along the surface of the lake it caught the body of Cipriano and he was red as fire, as a piece of pure fire.

The Sons of the Morning! The column of blood! A Red Indian. She looked at him in wonder, as he moved pure red and luminous further into the lake, unconscious. As if on fire!

The Sons of the Morning! She let her effort at knowing slip away from her once more, and remained without effort, within the communion.

It was his race, too. She had noticed before how the natives shone pure red when morning or evening light caught them, rather level. As fires they stood in the water. The Red Indian.

He went away, with his man, on horseback. And she watched him ride over the brow of the road, sitting dark and still on his silky, roan horse. He loved a red horse. And there was a curious motionlessness about him as he rode horseback, an old, male pride, and at the same time the half-ghostly, dark invisibility of the Indian, sitting close upon the horse as if he and it belonged to one birth.

He was gone, and for a while she felt the old nostalgia for his presence. Not for him, exactly. Not even to see him or touch him or speak to him. Only to feel him about.

Then quickly she recovered. She adjusted herself to the presence he left behind with her. As soon as he had really gone, and the act of going was over, his presence came back to her.

She walked a little while by the shore, beyond the breakwater wall. She loved to be alone: a great deal alone, with a garden and the lake and the morning.

'I am like Teresa, really,' she said to herself.

Suddenly before her she saw a long, dark soft rope, lying over a pale boulder. But her soul was softly alert, at once. It was a snake, with a subtle pattern along its soft dark back, lying there over a big stone, with its head sunk down to earth.

It felt her presence, too, for suddenly, with incredible soft quickness, it contracted itself down the boulder, and she saw it entering a little gap in the bottom of the wall.

The hole was not very big. And as it entered it quickly looked back, poising its little, dark, wicked, pointed head, and flickering a dark tongue. Then it passed on, slowly easing its dark length into the hole.

When it had all gone in, Kate could see the last fold still, and the flat little head resting on the fold, like the devil with his chin on his arms, looking out of a loop-hole. So the wicked sparks of the eyes looked out at her, from within the recess. Watching out of its own invisibility.

So she wondered over it, as it lay in its hidden places. At all the unseen things in the hidden places of the earth. And she wondered if it was disappointed at not being able to rise higher in creation: to be able to run on four feet, and not keep its belly on the ground.

Perhaps not! Perhaps it had its own peace. She felt a certain reconciliation between herself and it.

CHAPTER XXVII

Here!

She and Teresa visited one another along the lake. There was a kinship and a gentleness between them, especially now Kate was going away for a while.

There was a certain autumnal purity and lull on the lake. The moisture still lingered, the bushes on the wild hills were green in puffs. Sunlight lay in a rich gleam on the mountains, and shadows were deep and velvety. The green almost covered the rocks and the pinkish land. Bright green the sugar cane, red the ploughed earth, dark the trees with white specks of villages here and there. And over the wild places, a sprinkle of bushes, then stark grey rock still coming out.

The sky was very high and pure. In the morning came the sound of drums, and on the motionless, crystal air the cry for the pauses of the day. And always the day seemed to be pausing and unfolding again to the greater mystery. The universe seemed to have opened vast and soft and delicate with life.

There was something curiously soothing even in the full, pale, dove-brown water of the lake. A boat was coming over, with its sail hollowed out like a shell, pearly white, and its sharp black canoe-beak slipping past the water. It looked like the boat of Dionysos coming with a message, and the vine sprouting.

Kate could hardly remember now the dry rigid pallor of the heat, when the whole earth seemed to crepitate viciously with dry malevolence: like memory gone dry and sterile, hellish.

Ramón and Teresa came along the lake, and rowed into the basin. It was a morning when the shadows on the mountains were almost cornflower blue.

‘Yet you must go away?’ Ramón said to her.

‘For a little while. You don’t think I am Lot’s wife, do you?’

‘No!’ laughed Ramón. ‘I think you’re Cipriano’s.’

‘I am really. But I want to go back for a little while.’

‘Ah yes! Better go and then come again. Tell them in your Ireland to do as we have done here.’

‘But how?’

‘Let them find themselves again, and their own universe, and their own gods. Let them substantiate their own mysteries. The Irish have been so wordy about their far-off heroes and green days of the heroic gods. Now tell them to substantiate them, as we have tried to substantiate Quetzalcoatl and Huitzilopochtli.’

‘I will tell them,’ she said. ‘If there is anybody to listen.’

‘Yes!’ he said.

He watched the white sail blowing nearer.

‘But why do you go away?’ he asked her, after a silence.

‘You don’t care, do you?’ she said.

There was a dead pause.

‘Yes, I care,’ he said.

‘But why?’

Again it was some time before he answered.

‘You are one of us, we need you,’ he said.

‘Even when I don’t do anything? — and when I get a bit bored with living Quetzalcoatl — and the rest, and wish for a simple Don Ramón?’ she replied.

He laughed suddenly.

‘What is a simple Don Ramón?’ he said. ‘A simple Don Ramón has a living Quetzalcoatl inside him. But you help all the same.’

‘You go ahead so grandly, one would not think you needed help: especially from a mere woman who — who after all is only the wife of your friend.’

They were sitting on a bench under a red-flowering poinsettia whose huge scarlet petal-leaves spread out like sharp plumes.

‘The wife of my friend!’ he said. ‘What could you be better?’

‘Of course,’ she said, more than equivocal.

He was leaning his arms on his knees, and looking out to the lake, abstract, and remote. There was a certain worn look on his face, and the vulnerability which always caught at Kate’s heart. She realized again the isolation and the deadly strain his effort towards a new way of life put upon him. Yet he had to do it.

This again gave her a feeling of helplessness, a woman’s utter helplessness with a man who goes out to the beyond. She had to stifle her resentment, and her dislike of his ‘abstract’ efforts.

‘Do you feel awfully sure of yourself?’ she said.

‘Sure of myself?’ he re-echoed. ‘No! Any day I may die and disappear from the face of the earth. I not only know it, I feel it. So why should I be sure of myself?’

‘Why should you die?’ she said.

‘Why should anybody ever die? — even Carlota!’

‘Ah! — her hour had come!’

‘Can you set one’s hour as one sets an alarm clock?’

Kate paused.

‘And if you’re not sure of yourself, what are you sure of?’ she challenged.

He looked at her with dark eyes which she could not understand.

‘I am sure — sure — ’ he voice tailed off into vagueness, his face seemed to go grey and peaked, as a dead man’s, only his eyes watched her blackly, like a ghost’s. Again she was confronted with the suffering ghost of the man. And she was a woman, powerless before this suffering ghost which was still in the flesh.

‘You don’t think you are wrong, do you?’ she asked, in cold distress.

‘No! I am not wrong. Only maybe I can’t hold out,’ he said.

‘And then what?’ she said, coldly.

‘I shall go my way, alone.’ There seemed to be nothing left of him but the black, ghostly eyes that gazed on her. He began to speak Spanish.

‘It hurts me in my soul, as if I were dying,’ he said.

‘But why?’ she cried. ‘You are not ill?’

‘I feel as if my soul were coming undone.’

‘Then don’t let it,’ she cried, in fear and repulsion.

But he only gazed with those fixed, blank eyes. A sudden deep stillness came over her; a sense of power in herself.

‘You should forget for a time,’ she said gently, compassionately laying her hand on his. What was the good of trying to understand him or wrestle with him? She was a woman. He was a man, and — and — and therefore not quite real. Not true to life.

He roused himself suddenly from her touch, as if he had come awake, and he looked at her with keen, proud eyes. Her motherly touch had roused him like a sting.

‘Yes!’ he said. ‘It is true!’

‘Of course it is!’ she replied. ‘If you want to be so — so abstract and Quetzalcoatlían, then bury your head sometimes, like an ostrich in the sand, and forget.’

‘So!’ he said, smiling. ‘You are angry again!’

‘It’s not so simple,’ she said. ‘There is a conflict in me. And you won’t let me go away for a time.’

‘We can’t even prevent you,’ he said.

‘Yes, but you are against my going — you don’t let me go in peace.’

‘Why must you go?’ he said.

‘I must,’ she said. ‘I must go back to my children, and my mother.’

‘It is a necessity in you?’ he said.

‘Yes!’

The moment she had admitted the necessity, she realized it was a certain duplicity in herself. It was as if she had two selves: one, a new one, which belonged to Cipriano and to Ramón, and which was her sensitive, desirous self:

the other hard and finished, accomplished, belonging to her mother, her children, England, her whole past. This old accomplished self was curiously invulnerable and insentient, curiously hard and 'free.' In it, she was an individual and her own mistress. The other self was vulnerable, and organically connected with Cipriano, even with Ramón and Teresa, and so was not 'free' at all.

She was aware of a duality in herself, and she suffered from it. She could not definitely commit herself, either to the old way of life, or to the new. She reacted from both. The old was a prison, and she loathed it. But in the new way she was not her own mistress at all, and her egoistic will recoiled.

'That's just it!' she said. 'It is a necessity in me, and you want to prevent me.'

'No! No!' said Ramón. 'I hope not.'

'Yes! You put a weight on me, and paralyse me, to prevent me from going,' she said.

'We must not do that,' he said. 'We must leave you, and not come near you for a time, if you feel it is so.'

'Why? Why can't you be friendly? Why can't you be with me in my going? Why can't you want me to go, since I must go?'

He looked at her with dispassionate eyes.

'I can't do that,' he said. 'I don't believe in your going. It is a turning back: there is something renegade in it. — But we are all complicated. And if you feel you must go back for a time, go! It isn't terribly important. You have chosen, really. I am not afraid for you.'

It was a great relief to her to hear this: because she was terribly afraid for herself. She could never be sure, never be whole in her connection with Cipriano and Ramón. Yet she said, mocking slightly:

'Why should you be afraid for me?'

'Aren't you sometimes afraid for yourself?' he asked.

'Never!' she said. 'I'm absolutely sure about myself.'

They had been sitting in the garden of the Villa Aragon, under the poinsettia tree with the huge scarlet petal-leaves, like soft red quill feathers. The morning was becoming hot. The lake had gone still, with the fallen wind. Everything was still. Save the long scarlet of the poinsettia.

Christmas was coming! The poinsettia reminded Kate of it.

Christmas! Holly-berries! England! Presents! Food! — If she hurried, she could be in England for Christmas. It felt so safe, so familiar, so normal, the thought of Christmas at home, in England, with her mother. And all the exciting things she could tell to the people at home! And all the exciting gossip she could hear! In the distance, it looked very attractive. — She still had a qualm as to what the actual return would be like.

‘One can have too much of a good thing,’ she said to Ramón.

‘What good thing in particular?’ he asked her.

‘Oh — Quetzalcoatl and all that!’ she said. ‘One can have too much of it.’

‘It may be,’ he said, rising and going quietly away; so quietly, he was gone before she knew. And when she realized he had gone like that, she flushed with anger. But she sat on under the poinsettia tree, in the hot, still November sun, looking with anger at the hedge of jasmine, with its pure white flowers, and its sere, withered flowers, and its pinkish buds among the dark leaves. Where had she heard something about jasmine? ‘And the jasmine flowers between us!’

Oh! how tired she was of all that!

Teresa came down the garden slope.

‘You are still sitting here?’ she exclaimed.

‘Where else should I be?’ Kate answered.

‘I don’t know. — Ramón has gone to Sayula, to see the Jefe. He wouldn’t wait for us, to come with us in the boat.’

‘I suppose he was in a hurry,’ said Kate.

‘How fine these Noche Buenas are!’ said Teresa, looking at the brilliant spread of the red poinsettias.

‘They are your Christmas flower, aren’t they?’ said Kate.

‘Yes — the flowers of the Noche Buena — ’

‘How awful, Christmas with hibiscus and poinsettia! It makes me long to see mistletoe among the oranges, in a fruiterer’s shop in Hampstead.’

‘Why that?’ laughed Teresa.

‘Oh!’ Kate sighed petulantly. ‘To get back to simple life. To see the buses rolling on the mud in Piccadilly, on Christmas Eve, and the wet pavements crowded with people under the brilliant shops.’

‘Is that life, to you?’ asked Teresa.

‘Yes! Without all this abstraction, and will. Life is good enough for me if I am allowed to live and be myself.’

‘It is time Cipriano should come home,’ said Teresa.

But this made Kate rise from her seat, with sudden impatience. She would not have this thing put over her! She would break free, and show them!

She went with Teresa to the village. The air seemed mysteriously alive, with a new Breath. But Kate felt out of it. The two women sat under a tree on the beach at Sayula, talking a little, and watching the full expanse of the dove-pale lake.

A black boat with a red-painted roof and a tall mast was moored to the low breakwater-wall, which rose about a yard high, from the shallow water. On the wall stood loose little groups of white-clad men, looking into the black belly of the ship. And perched immobile in silhouette against the lake, was a black-and-

white cow, and a huge monolithic black-and-white bull. The whole silhouette frieze motionless, against the far water that was coloured brown like turtle doves.

It was near, yet seemed strange and remote. Two peons fixed a plank gangway up to the side of the boat. Then they began to shove the cow towards it. She pawed the new broad planks tentatively, then, with that slow Mexican indifference, she lumbered unwillingly on to the gangway. They edged her slowly to the end, where she looked down into the boat. And at last, she dropped neatly into the hold.

Now the group of men broke into motion, for the huge and spangled bull. A tall old Mexican, in fawn, skin-tight trousers and little leather jacket, and a huge felt hat heavily embroidered with silver, gently took the ring in the bull's nose, gently lifted the wedge of the bull's head, so the great soft throat was uplifted. A peon behind put his head down, and with all his might began shoving the mighty, living flanks of the bull. The slim-legged, high-hatted old Mexican pulled evenly at the nose-ring. And with a calm and weighty poise, the bull stepped along the crest of the wall, delicately and impassively, to the plank gangway. There he stopped.

The peons began to re-group. The one behind, with his red sash tied so determinedly over his white hips, ceased to shove, the slim-legged Mexican let go the ring.

Then two peons passed a rope loosely round the haunches of the bull. The high-hatted farmer stepped on to the planks, and took the nose-ring again, very gently. He pulled softly. The bull lifted its head, but held back. It struck the planks with an unwilling foot. Then it stood, spangled with black on its whiteness, like a piece of the sky, immobile.

The farmer pulled once more at the ring. Two men were pulling the rope, pressing in the flanks of the immovable, passive, spangled monster. Two peons, at the back, with their heads down and their red-sashed, flexible loins thrust out behind, shoved with all their strength in the soft flanks of the mighty creature.

And all was utterly noiseless and changeless; against the fullness of the pale lake, this silent, monumental group of life.

Then the bull stepped slowly, imperturbably, yet against its will, on to the loose planks, and was edged slowly along, to the brink of the boat. There he waited.

He stood huge and silvery, dappled like the sky, with black snake markings down his haunches, looming massive above the red roof of the canoa. How would he ever duck to that roof, and drop under, into the darkness of the ship?

He lowered his head, and looked into the hold. The men behind shoved his

living flanks. He took no heed, but lowered his head and looked again. The men pushed with all their might, in the dense Mexican silence.

Slowly, carefully, the bull crouched himself, made himself small, and with a quick, massive little movement dropped his forefeet down into the body of the boat, leaving his huge hind-quarters heaved up behind. There was a shuffle and a little stagger down below, then the soft thud as his hind-feet leaped down. He had gone.

The planks were taken away. A peon ran to unfasten the mooring rope from the stones of the shore. There was a strange thudding of soft feet within the belly of the boat. Men in the water were pushing the ship's black stern, to push her off. But she was heavy. Slowly, casually they pulled the stones from under her flat bottom, and flung them aside. Slowly she edged, swayed, moved a little, and was afloat.

The men climbed in. The two peons on the ship's rims were poling her out, pressing their poles and walking heavily till they reached the stern, then lifting their poles and running to the high prow. She slid slowly out, on to the lake.

Then quickly they hoisted the wide white sail. The sail thrust up her horn and curved in a whorl to the wind. The ship was going across the waters, with her massive, sky-spangled cargo of life invisible.

All so still and soft and remote.

'And will Ramón want you to sit beside him in the church as the bride of Quetzalcoatl — with some strange name?' Kate asked of Teresa.

'I don't know,' said Teresa. 'Later, he says, when the time comes for them to have a goddess.'

'And will you mind?'

'For myself, I am afraid of it. But I understand that Ramón wants it. He says it is accepting the greater responsibility of one's existence. And I think that is true. If there is God in me, and God as woman, then I must accept this part of myself also, and put on the green dress, and be for the time the God-woman, since it is true of me also. I think it is true. Ramón says we must make it manifest. When I think of my brothers, I know we must. So I shall think of the God that beats invisible, like the heart of all the world. So when I have to wear the green dress, and sit before all the people in the church, I shall look away to the heart of all the world, and try to be my sacred self, because it is necessary, and the right thing to do. It is right. I would not do it if I thought it was not right.'

'But I thought the green dress was for the Bride of Huitzilopochtli!' said Kate.

'Ah yes!' Teresa caught herself up. 'Mine is the black dress with the white edges, and the red clouds.'

'Would you rather have the green?' Kate asked. 'Have it if you would. I am

going away.'

Teresa glanced up at her quickly.

'The green is for the wife of Huitzilopochtli,' she said, as if numbed.

'I can't see that it matters,' said Kate.

Teresa looked at her with quick, dark eyes.

'Different men must have different wives,' she said. 'Cipriano would never want a wife like me.'

'And different women must have different husbands,' said Kate. 'Ramón would always be too abstract and overbearing for me.'

Teresa flushed slowly, looking down at the ground.

'Ramón needs far too much submission from a woman, to please me,' Kate added. 'He takes too much upon himself.'

Teresa looked up quickly, and raised her head proudly, showing her brownish throat like a rearing, crested snake.

'How do you know that Ramón needs submission from a woman?' she said. 'How do you know? He has not asked any submission from you. — And you are wrong. He does not ask submission from me. He wants me to give myself gently to him. And then he gives himself back to me far more gently than I give myself to him. Because a man like that is more gentle than a woman. He is not like Cipriano. Cipriano is a soldier. But Ramón is gentle. You are mistaken in what you say.'

Kate laughed a little.

'And you are a soldier among women, fighting all the time,' Teresa continued. 'I am not such. But some women must be soldiers in their spirit, and they need soldier husbands. That is why you are Malintzi, and your dress is green. You would always fight. You would fight with yourself, if you were alone in the world.'

It was very still by the lake. They were waiting for Ramón.

A man was stripping palm-stalks, squatting in silence under a tree, in his white clothes, his black head bent forward. Then he went to wet his long strips in the lake, returning with them dangling.

Then he sat down again, and deftly, silently, with the dark, childlike absorption of the people, took up his work. He was mending a chair bottom. When Kate watched him, he glanced up with a flash of black eyes, saluting her. And she felt a strange power surge in her limbs, from the flash of living recognition and deference in his eyes. As if his deference were a sort of flame of life, rich in him when he saw her.

A roan horse speckled with white was racing prancing along the shore, neighing frantically. His mane flowed in the wind, his feet struck the pebbles as

he ran, and again he opened his long nose and neighed anxiously. Away up the shore he ran. What had he lost?

A peon had driven a high-wheeled wagon, drawn by four mules, deep into the lake, till the water was above the high axles of the wheels, almost touching the bed of the cart. It looked like a dark square boat drawn by four soft, dark seahorses which slowly waved their long dark ears like leaves, while the peon, in white with his big hat proudly balanced, stood erect. The mules deep in the water stepped gently, curving to the shore.

It was winter, but like spring by the lake. White and yellow calves, new and silky, were skipping, butting up their rear ends, lifting their tails, trotting side by side down to the water, to sniff at it suspiciously.

In the shadow of a great tree a mother-ass was tethered, and her foal lay in the shadow, a little thing black as ink, curled up, with fluffy head erect and great black ears spreading up, like some jet-black hare full of witchcraft.

‘How many days?’ called Kate to the peon, who had come out of the straw hut.

He gave her the flash of his dark eyes, in a sort of joy of deference. And she felt her breast surge with living pride.

‘Last night, Patrona!’ he smiled in answer.

‘So new! So new! He doesn’t get up, can’t he?’

The peon went round, put his arm under the foal and lifted it to its feet. There it straddled on high, in amaze, upon its black legs like bent hair-pins.

‘How nice it is!’ cried Kate in delight, and the peon laughed at her with a soft, grateful flame, touched with reverence.

The ink-black ass-foal did not understand standing up. It rocked on its four loose legs, and wondered. Then it hobbled a few steps, to smell at some green, growing maize. It smelled and smelled and smelled, as if all the dark aeons were stirring awake in its nostrils.

Then it turned, and looked with its bushy-velvet face straight at Kate, and put out a pink tongue at her. She laughed aloud. It stood wondering, dazed. Then it put out its tongue again. She laughed at it. It gave an awkward little skip, which surprised its own self very much. Then it ventured forward again, and all unexpectedly even to itself, exploded into another little skip.

‘Already it dances!’ cried Kate. ‘And it came into the world only last night.’

‘Yes, already it dances!’ reiterated the peon.

After bethinking itself for a time, the ass-foal walked uncertainly towards the mother. She was a well-liking grey-and-brown she-ass, rather glossy and self-assured. The ass-foal straight found the udder, and was drinking.

Glancing up, Kate met again the peon’s eyes, with their black, full flame of

life heavy with knowledge and with a curious reassurance. The black foal, the mother, the drinking, the new life, the mystery of the shadowy battlefield of creation; and the adoration of the full-breasted, glorious woman beyond him: all this seemed in the primitive black eyes of the man.

‘Adiós!’ said Kate to him, lingeringly.

‘Adiós, Patrona!’ he replied, suddenly lifting his hand high, in the Quetzalcoatl salute.

She walked across the beach to the jetty, feeling the life surging vivid and resistant within her. ‘It is sex,’ she said to herself. ‘How wonderful sex can be, when men keep it powerful and sacred, and it fills the world! Like sunshine through and through one! — But I’m not going to submit, even there. Why should one give in, to anything!’

Ramón was coming down towards the boat, the blue symbol of Quetzalcoatl in his hat. And at that moment the drums began to sound for mid-day, and there came the mid-day call, clear and distinct, from the tower. All the men on the shore stood erect, and shot up their right hands to the sky. The women spread both palms to the light. Everything was motionless, save the moving animals.

Then Ramón went on to the boat, the men saluting him with the Quetzalcoatl salute as he came near.

‘It is wonderful, really,’ said Kate, as they rowed over the water, ‘how — how splendid one can feel in this country! As if one were still genuinely of the nobility.’

‘Aren’t you?’ he said.

‘Yes, I am. But everywhere else it is denied. Only here one feels the full force of one’s nobility. The natives still worship it.’

‘At moments,’ said Ramón. ‘Later, they will murder you and violate you, for having worshipped you.’

‘Is it inevitable?’ she said flippantly.

‘I think so,’ he replied. ‘If you lived here alone in Sayula, and queened it for a time, you would get yourself murdered — or worse — by the people who had worshipped you.’

‘I don’t think so,’ she said.

‘I know,’ he replied.

‘Why?’ she said, obstinate.

‘Unless one gets one’s nobility from the gods and turns to the middle of the sky for one’s power, one will be murdered at last.’

‘I do get my nobility that way,’ she said.

But she did not quite believe it. And she made up her mind still more definitely, to go away.

She wrote to Mexico City, and engaged a berth from Vera Cruz to Southampton: she would sail on the last day of November. Cipriano came home on the seventeenth, and she told him what she had done. He looked at her with his head a little on one side, with a queer boyish judiciousness, but she could not tell at all what he felt.

‘You are going already?’ he said in Spanish.

And then she knew, at last, that he was offended. When he was offended he never spoke English at all, but spoke Spanish just as if he were addressing another Mexican.

‘Yes,’ she said. ‘On the thirtieth.’

‘And when do you come back?’ he asked.

‘Quién sabe! — Who knows!’ she retorted.

He let his black eyes rest on her face for some minutes, watching her, unchanging and incomprehensible. He was thinking, superficially, that if he liked, he could use the law and have her prevented from leaving the country — or even from leaving Sayula — since she was legally married to him. There was the old fixity of Indian anger, glinting fixed and relentless in the depths of his eyes. And then the almost invisible change in his face, as the hidden emotion sank down and the stoic indifference, the emotionlessness of centuries, and the stoic kind of tolerance came over him. She could almost feel the waves of successive shadow and coldness go through his blood, his mind hardly aware at all. And again a fear of losing his contact melted her heart.

It was somehow, to her, beautiful, to feel shadows, and cold gleams, and a hardness like stone, then the strange heavy inertia of the tropical mid-day, the stupor of the sun, moving upon him while he stood motionless, watching her. In the end it was that weird, sultry, tropical stupor of the hot hours, a heat-swoon of sheer indifference.

‘Como quieres tu!’ he said. ‘As you wish.’

And she knew he had already released her, in the dark, sultry stupor of his blood. He would make no further effort after her. This also was the doom of his race.

He took a boat and went down to Jamiltepec, to Ramón: as she knew he would.

She was alone, as usual. It occurred to her, that she herself willed this aloneness. She could not relax and be with these people. She could not relax and be with anybody. She always had to recoil upon her own individuality, as a cat does.

Sex, sexual correspondence, did it matter so very much to her? It might have mattered more, if she had not had it. But she had had it — and very finally and

consummately, with Cipriano. So she knew all about it. It was as if she had conquered another territory, another field of life. The conqueress! And now she would retire to the lair of her own individuality, with the prey.

Suddenly, she saw herself as men often saw her: the great cat, with its spasms of voluptuousness and its lifelong lustful enjoyment of its own isolated, isolated individuality. Voluptuously to enjoy a contact. Then with a lustful feline gratification, to break the contact, and roam alone in a sense of power. Each time, to seize a sort of power, purring upon her own isolated individuality.

She knew so many women like that. They played with love and intimacy as a cat with a mouse. In the end, they quickly ate up the love mouse, then trotted off with a full belly and a voluptuous sense of power.

Only sometimes the love-mouse refused to be digested, and there was lifelong dyspepsia. Or, like Cipriano, turned into a sort of serpent, that reared and looked at her with glittering eyes, then slid away into the void, leaving her blank, the sense of power gone out of her.

Another thing, she had observed, with a touch of horror. One after the other, her women 'friends', the powerful love-women, at the age of forty, forty-five, fifty, they lost all their charm and allure, and turned into real grimalkins, greyish, avid, and horrifying, prowling around looking for prey that became scarcer and scarcer. As human beings they went to pieces. And they remained these grey-ribbed grimalkins, dressed in elegant clothes, the grimalkin howl even passing into their smart chatter.

Kate was a wise woman, wise enough to take a lesson.

It is all very well for a woman to cultivate her ego, her individuality. It is all very well for her to despise love, or to love love as a cat loves a mouse, that it plays with as long as possible, before devouring it to vivify her own individuality and voluptuously fill the belly of her own ego.

'Woman has suffered far more from the suppression of her ego than from sex suppression,' says a woman writer, and it may well be true. But look, only look at the modern women of fifty and fifty-five, those who have cultivated their ego to the top of their bent! Usually, they are grimalkins to fill one with pity or with repulsion.

Kate knew all this. And as she sat alone in her villa, she remembered it again. She had had her fling, even here in Mexico. And these men would let her go again. She was no prisoner. She could carry off any spoil she had captured.

And then what! To sit in a London drawing-room, and add another to all the grimalkins? To let the peculiar grimalkin-grimace come on her face, the most weird grimalkin-twang come into her voice? Horror! Of all the horrors, perhaps the grimalkin women, her contemporaries, were the most repellent to her. Even

the horrid old tom-cat men of the civilized roof gutters, did not fill her with such sickly dread.

‘No!’ she said to herself. ‘My ego and my individuality are not worth that ghastly price. I’d better abandon some of my ego, and sink some of my individuality, rather than go like that.’

After all, when Cipriano touched her caressively, all her body flowered. That was the greater sex, that could fill all the world with lustre, and which she dared not think about, its power was so much greater than her own will. But on the other hand when she spread the wings of her own ego, and sent forth her own spirit, the world could look very wonderful to her, when she was alone. But after a while, the wonder faded, and a sort of jealous emptiness set in.

‘I must have both,’ she said to herself. ‘I must not recoil against Cipriano and Ramón, they make my blood blossom in my body. I say they are limited. But then one must be limited. If ones tries to be unlimited, one becomes horrible. Without Cipriano to touch me and limit me and submerge my will, I shall become a horrible, elderly female. I ought to want to be limited. I ought to be glad if a man will limit me with a strong will and a warm touch. Because what I call my greatness, and the vastness of the Lord behind me, lets me fall through a hollow floor of nothingness, once there is no man’s hand there, to hold me warm and limited. Ah yes! Rather than become elderly and a bit grisly, I will make my submission; as far as I need, and no further.’

She called a man-servant, and set off down the lake in a row-boat. It was a very lovely November morning, the world had not yet gone dry again. In the sharp folds of the steep mountain slopes to the north-east, the shadows were pure cornflower blue. Below was the lingering delicacy of green, already drying. The lake was full still, but subsided, and the water-hyacinths had drifted away. Birds flew low in the stillness. It was very full and still, in the strong, hot light. Some maize-fields showed sere stubble, but the palo-blanco flowers were out, and the mesquite bushes were frail green, and there were wafts of perfume from the little yellow flower-balls, like cassia.

‘Why should I go away!’ said Kate. ‘Why should I see the buses on the mud of Piccadilly, on Christmas Eve, and the crowds of people on the wet pavements, under the big shops like great caves of light? I may as well stay here, where my soul is less dreary. I shall have to tell Ramón I am sorry for the things I said. I won’t carp at them. After all, there is another kind of vastness here, with the sound of drums, and the cry of Quetzalcoatl.’

Already she could see the yellow and reddish, tower-like upper story of Jamiltepec, and the rich, deep fall of magenta bougainvillea, from the high wall, with the pale spraying of plumbago flowers, and many loose creamy-coloured

roses.

‘Están tocando!’ said her boatman quietly, looking up at her with dark, pregnant eyes.

He had heard already the sound of the light drum at Jamiltepec. The boat rowed softly: and there came a sound of a man’s voice singing in the morning.

Her boatman lifted an oar, as a signal to the house. And as the boat rounded the curve into the basin, a man-servant in white clothes came running down to the little jetty. In the changeless sunshine was a scent, perhaps of datura and of roses, and an eternal Mexican silence, which the noise of the drum, and the voice of singing, did not disturb.

‘Is Don Cipriano here?’ asked Kate.

‘Está!’ murmured the man, with a slight motion towards Ramón’s balcony, whence the singing came. ‘Shall I say you have come?’

He did not lift his voice above the murmur.

‘No!’ said Kate. ‘I shall sit here in the garden a while, before I come up.’

‘Then I will leave open the door,’ said the man, ‘and you can come up when you will.’

Kate sat on a seat under a big tree. A creeping plant, with great snake-like cords, and big sulphur-and-brown trumpet flowers, hung above. She listened to the singing. It was Ramón teaching one of the singers.

Ramón had not a very good voice. He sang quietly, as if to the inner air, with very beautiful, simple expression. But Kate could not catch the words.

‘Ya?’ said Ramón, when he had finished.

‘Ya, Patrón!’ said the man, the singer.

And he began, in his strong, pure voice that caught at the very bowels, to sing another of the Hymns.

‘My way is not thy way, and thine is not mine.

But come, before we part

Let us separately go to the Morning Star,

And meet there.

I do not point you to my road, nor yet

Call: “Oh come!”

But the Star is the same for both of us,

Winsome.

The good ghost of me goes down the distance

To the Holy Ghost.

Oh you, in the tent of the cloven flame

Meet me, you I like most.

Each man his own way forever, but towards
The hoverer between;
Who opens his flame like a tent-flap,
As we slip in unseen.
A man cannot tread like a woman,
Nor a woman step out like a man.
The ghost of each through the leaves of shadow
Moves as it can.
But the Morning Star and the Evening Star
Pitch tents of flame
Where we foregather like gypsies, none knowing
How the other came.
I ask for nothing except to slip
In the tent of the Holy Ghost
And be there in the house of the cloven flame,
Guest of the Host.
Be with me there, my woman,
Be bodily there.
Then let the flame wrap round us
Like a snare.
Be there along with me, O men!
Reach across the hearth,
And laugh with me while the woman rests
For all we are worth.'

The man had sung this hymn over several times, halting and forgetting, his pure, burning voice faltering out; then the low, rather husky voice of Ramón, with a subtler intensity, coming in, as if heard from the centre of a shell; then again the sudden ripping sound of the true singer's tenor, going like a flame through the blood.

Her mozo, a man-servant, had followed her into the garden, and sat at a distance on his heels, under a tree, with his back to the trunk, like a crouching shadow clothed in white. His toes spread dark and hard, in his open huaraches, and the black braid of his hat-string hung against his dark cheek. For the rest he was pure white, the white cotton tight on his thighs.

When the singing had finished above, and the drum was silent, and even the voices speaking in low tones were silent, her mozo looked up at Kate, with his black hat-string dangling at his chin, his black eyes shining, and a timid sort of smile on his face.

‘Está muy bien, Patrona?’ he said shyly. ‘It is good, isn’t it, Mistress?’

‘It is very good,’ she replied, with the infallible echo. But there were conflicting feelings in her breast, and the man knew it.

He looked so young, when he smiled that gay, shy, excited little smile. Something of the eternal child in him. But a child that could harden in an instant into a savage man, revengeful and brutal. And a man always fully sex-alive, for the moment innocent in the fulness of sex, not in the absence. And Kate thought to herself, as she had thought before, that there were more ways than one of ‘becoming again as a little child.’

But the man had a sharp, watchful look in the corner of his eye: to see if she were feeling some covert hostility. He wanted her to acquiesce in the hymn, in the drum, in the whole mood. Like a child he wanted her to acquiesce. But if she were going to be hostile, he would be quick to be first in the hostility. Her hostile judgment would make a pure enemy of him.

Ah, all men were alike!

At that moment the man stood up, with soft suddenness, and she heard Cipriano’s voice from the balcony above:

‘What is it, Lupe?’

‘Está la Patrona,’ answered the servant.

Kate rose to her feet and looked up. She saw the head and the naked shoulders of Cipriano above the parapet of the balcony.

‘I will come up,’ she said.

And slowly she went through the great iron gates into the passage-way. Lupe, following, bolted the doors behind her.

On the terrace above she found Ramón and Cipriano both with their upper bodies naked, waiting for her in silence. She was embarrassed.

‘I waited to hear the new hymn,’ she said.

‘And how does it seem to you?’ said Ramón, in Spanish.

‘I like it,’ she said.

‘Let us sit down,’ said Ramón, still in Spanish. He and she sat in the cane rocking-chairs: Cipriano stood by the wall of the terrace.

She had come to make a sort of submission: to say she didn’t want to go away. But finding them both in the thick of their Quetzalcoatl mood, with their manly breasts uncovered, she was not very eager to begin. They made her feel like an intruder. She did not pause to realize that she was one.

‘We don’t meet in your Morning Star, apparently, do we?’ she said, mocking, but with a slight quaver.

A deeper silence seemed suddenly to hold the two men.

‘And I suppose a woman is really de trop, even there, when two men are together.’

But she faltered a bit in the saying. Cipriano, she knew, was baffled and stung when she taunted him.

Ramón answered her, with the gentleness that could come straight out of his heart: but still in Spanish:

‘Why, Cousin, what is it?’

Her lip quivered, as she suddenly said:

‘I don’t really want to go away from you.’

Ramón looked swiftly at Cipriano, then said:

‘I know you don’t.’

But the gentle protective tone of his voice only made Kate rebel again. She brimmed over with sudden tears, crying:

‘You don’t really want me.’

‘Yes, I want you! — Verdad! Verdad!’ exclaimed Cipriano, in his low, secret, almost muttering voice.

And even amid her tears, Kate was thinking to herself: What a fraud I am! I know all the time it is I who don’t altogether want them. I want myself to myself. But I can fool them so that they shan’t find out.

For she heard the hot, phallic passion in Cipriano’s voice.

Then came the voice of Ramón, like a chill:

‘It is you who don’t want,’ he said, in English this time. ‘You needn’t commit yourself to us. Listen to your own best desire.’

‘And if it tells me to go away?’ she flashed, defiant through the end of her tears.

‘Then go! Oh certainly go!’

Suddenly her tears came afresh.

‘I knew you didn’t really want me,’ she wept.

Then Cipriano’s voice said, with a hot, furtive softness of persuasion:

‘You are not his! He would not tell you!’

‘That is very true,’ said Ramón. ‘Don’t listen to me!’

He spoke in Spanish. And Kate glanced up sharply through her tears, to see him going quietly, but swiftly, away.

She wiped her face, suddenly calm. Then she looked with wet eyes at Cipriano. He was standing erect and alert, like a little fighting male, and his eyes glowed black and uncannily as he met her wet, limpid glance.

Yes, she was a bit afraid of him too, with his inhuman black eyes.

‘You don’t want me to go, do you?’ she pleaded.

A slow, almost foolish smile came over his face, and his body was slightly

convulsed. Then came his soft-tongued Indian speech, as if all his mouth were soft, saying in Spanish, but with the 'r' sound almost lost:

'Yo! Yo!' — his eyebrows lifted with queer mock surprise, and a little convulsion went through his body again. 'Te quiero mucho! Mucho te quiero! Mucho! Mucho! I like you very much! Very much!'

It sounded so soft, so soft-tongued, of the soft, wet, hot blood, that she shivered a little.

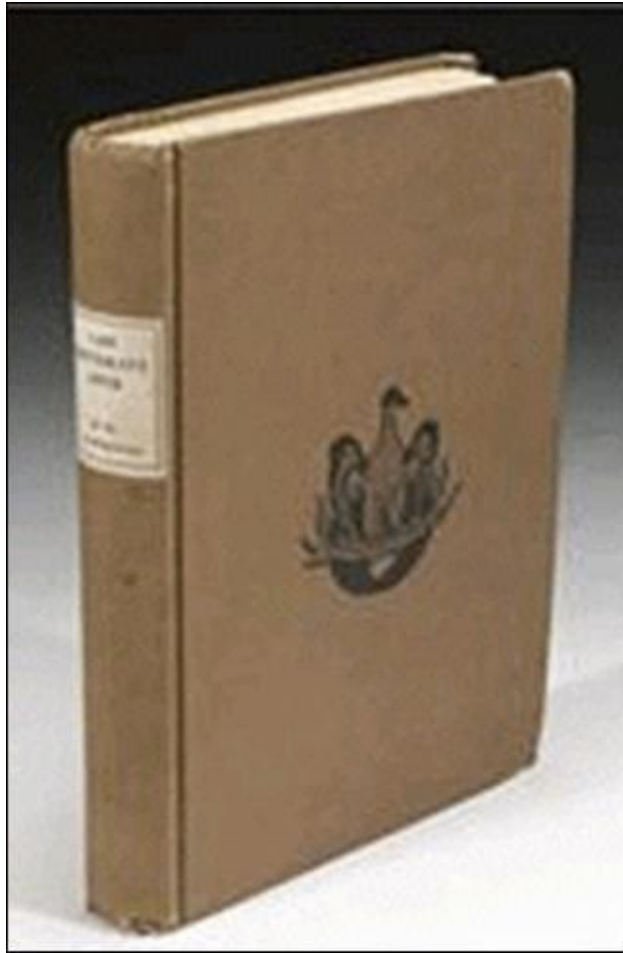
'You won't let me go!' she said to him.

THE END

LADY CHATTERLEY'S LOVER



Lady Chatterley's Lover is Lawrence's last novel, first published in 1928. The first edition was printed in Florence, Italy, as it could not be published openly in the United Kingdom until 1960. It soon became notorious for its story of the physical relationship between a working-class man and an aristocratic woman, with explicit sexual descriptions and what was deemed frequent uses of vulgar language. The story is believed to have originated from events in Lawrence's own unhappy domestic life, and he took inspiration for the settings of the book from Eastwood, Nottinghamshire, where he grew up. According to some critics, the fling of Lady Ottoline Morrell with "Tiger", a young stonemason who came to carve plinths for her garden statues, also influenced the story. Lawrence considered calling the novel *Tenderness* and made significant alterations to the text and story in the process of its composition.



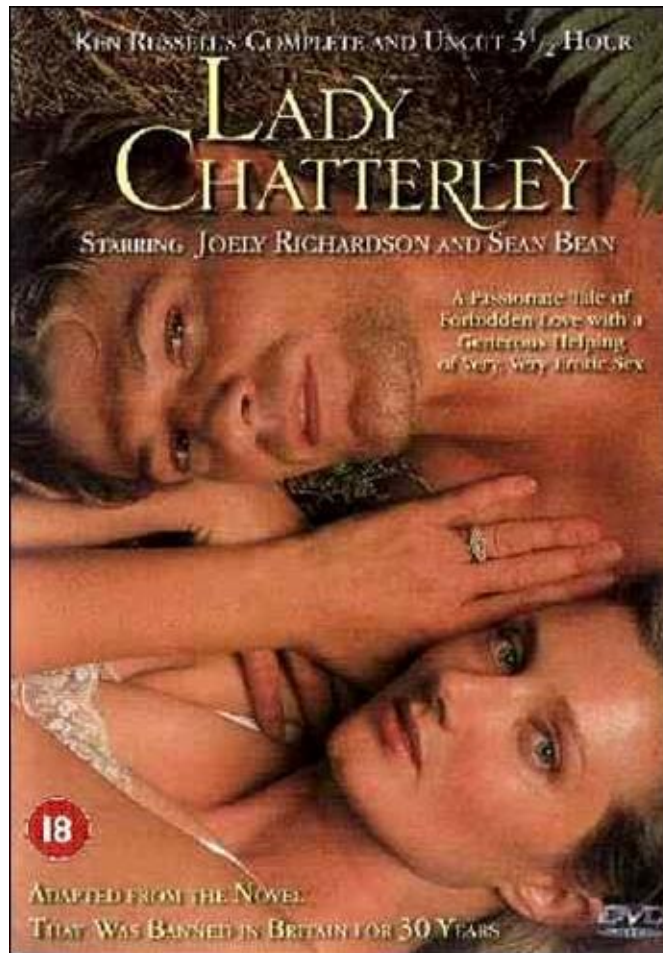
The first edition

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The 1955 French movie adaptation



Ken Russell's 1993 TV series

CHAPTER 1

Ours is essentially a tragic age, so we refuse to take it tragically. The cataclysm has happened, we are among the ruins, we start to build up new little habitats, to have new little hopes. It is rather hard work: there is now no smooth road into the future: but we go round, or scramble over the obstacles. We've got to live, no matter how many skies have fallen.

This was more or less Constance Chatterley's position. The war had brought the roof down over her head. And she had realized that one must live and learn.

She married Clifford Chatterley in 1917, when he was home for a month on leave. They had a month's honeymoon. Then he went back to Flanders: to be shipped over to England again six months later, more or less in bits. Constance, his wife, was then twenty-three years old, and he was twenty-nine.

His hold on life was marvellous. He didn't die, and the bits seemed to grow together again. For two years he remained in the doctor's hands. Then he was pronounced a cure, and could return to life again, with the lower half of his body, from the hips down, paralysed for ever.

This was in 1920. They returned, Clifford and Constance, to his home, Wragby Hall, the family 'seat'. His father had died, Clifford was now a baronet, Sir Clifford, and Constance was Lady Chatterley. They came to start housekeeping and married life in the rather forlorn home of the Chatterleys on a rather inadequate income. Clifford had a sister, but she had departed. Otherwise there were no near relatives. The elder brother was dead in the war. Crippled for ever, knowing he could never have any children, Clifford came home to the smoky Midlands to keep the Chatterley name alive while he could.

He was not really downcast. He could wheel himself about in a wheeled chair, and he had a bath-chair with a small motor attachment, so he could drive himself slowly round the garden and into the line melancholy park, of which he was really so proud, though he pretended to be flippant about it.

Having suffered so much, the capacity for suffering had to some extent left him. He remained strange and bright and cheerful, almost, one might say, chirpy, with his ruddy, healthy-looking face, and his pale-blue, challenging bright eyes. His shoulders were broad and strong, his hands were very strong. He was expensively dressed, and wore handsome neckties from Bond Street. Yet still in his face one saw the watchful look, the slight vacancy of a cripple.

He had so very nearly lost his life, that what remained was wonderfully

precious to him. It was obvious in the anxious brightness of his eyes, how proud he was, after the great shock, of being alive. But he had been so much hurt that something inside him had perished, some of his feelings had gone. There was a blank of insentience.

Constance, his wife, was a ruddy, country-looking girl with soft brown hair and sturdy body, and slow movements, full of unusual energy. She had big, wondering eyes, and a soft mild voice, and seemed just to have come from her native village. It was not so at all. Her father was the once well-known R. A., old Sir Malcolm Reid. Her mother had been one of the cultivated Fabians in the palmy, rather pre-Raphaelite days. Between artists and cultured socialists, Constance and her sister Hilda had had what might be called an aesthetically unconventional upbringing. They had been taken to Paris and Florence and Rome to breathe in art, and they had been taken also in the other direction, to the Hague and Berlin, to great Socialist conventions, where the speakers spoke in every civilized tongue, and no one was abashed.

The two girls, therefore, were from an early age not the least daunted by either art or ideal politics. It was their natural atmosphere. They were at once cosmopolitan and provincial, with the cosmopolitan provincialism of art that goes with pure social ideals.

They had been sent to Dresden at the age of fifteen, for music among other things. And they had had a good time there. They lived freely among the students, they argued with the men over philosophical, sociological and artistic matters, they were just as good as the men themselves: only better, since they were women. And they tramped off to the forests with sturdy youths bearing guitars, twang-twang! They sang the Wandervogel songs, and they were free. Free! That was the great word. Out in the open world, out in the forests of the morning, with lusty and splendid-throated young fellows, free to do as they liked, and — above all — to say what they liked. It was the talk that mattered supremely: the impassioned interchange of talk. Love was only a minor accompaniment.

Both Hilda and Constance had had their tentative love-affairs by the time they were eighteen. The young men with whom they talked so passionately and sang so lustily and camped under the trees in such freedom wanted, of course, the love connexion. The girls were doubtful, but then the thing was so much talked about, it was supposed to be so important. And the men were so humble and craving. Why couldn't a girl be queenly, and give the gift of herself?

So they had given the gift of themselves, each to the youth with whom she had the most subtle and intimate arguments. The arguments, the discussions were the great thing: the love-making and connexion were only a sort of primitive

reversion and a bit of an anti-climax. One was less in love with the boy afterwards, and a little inclined to hate him, as if he had trespassed on one's privacy and inner freedom. For, of course, being a girl, one's whole dignity and meaning in life consisted in the achievement of an absolute, a perfect, a pure and noble freedom. What else did a girl's life mean? To shake off the old and sordid connexions and subjections.

And however one might sentimentalize it, this sex business was one of the most ancient, sordid connexions and subjections. Poets who glorified it were mostly men. Women had always known there was something better, something higher. And now they knew it more definitely than ever. The beautiful pure freedom of a woman was infinitely more wonderful than any sexual love. The only unfortunate thing was that men lagged so far behind women in the matter. They insisted on the sex thing like dogs.

And a woman had to yield. A man was like a child with his appetites. A woman had to yield him what he wanted, or like a child he would probably turn nasty and flounce away and spoil what was a very pleasant connexion. But a woman could yield to a man without yielding her inner, free self. That the poets and talkers about sex did not seem to have taken sufficiently into account. A woman could take a man without really giving herself away. Certainly she could take him without giving herself into his power. Rather she could use this sex thing to have power over him. For she only had to hold herself back in sexual intercourse, and let him finish and expend himself without herself coming to the crisis: and then she could prolong the connexion and achieve her orgasm and her crisis while he was merely her tool.

Both sisters had had their love experience by the time the war came, and they were hurried home. Neither was ever in love with a young man unless he and she were verbally very near: that is unless they were profoundly interested, talking to one another. The amazing, the profound, the unbelievable thrill there was in passionately talking to some really clever young man by the hour, resuming day after day for months...this they had never realized till it happened! The paradisaical promise: Thou shalt have men to talk to! — had never been uttered. It was fulfilled before they knew what a promise it was.

And if after the roused intimacy of these vivid and soul-enlightened discussions the sex thing became more or less inevitable, then let it. It marked the end of a chapter. It had a thrill of its own too: a queer vibrating thrill inside the body, a final spasm of self-assertion, like the last word, exciting, and very like the row of asterisks that can be put to show the end of a paragraph, and a break in the theme.

When the girls came home for the summer holidays of 1913, when Hilda was

twenty and Connie eighteen, their father could see plainly that they had had the love experience.

L'amour avait passe par la, as somebody puts it. But he was a man of experience himself, and let life take its course. As for the mother, a nervous invalid in the last few months of her life, she wanted her girls to be 'free', and to 'fulfil themselves'. She herself had never been able to be altogether herself: it had been denied her. Heaven knows why, for she was a woman who had her own income and her own way. She blamed her husband. But as a matter of fact, it was some old impression of authority on her own mind or soul that she could not get rid of. It had nothing to do with Sir Malcolm, who left his nervously hostile, high-spirited wife to rule her own roost, while he went his own way.

So the girls were 'free', and went back to Dresden, and their music, and the university and the young men. They loved their respective young men, and their respective young men loved them with all the passion of mental attraction. All the wonderful things the young men thought and expressed and wrote, they thought and expressed and wrote for the young women. Connie's young man was musical, Hilda's was technical. But they simply lived for their young women. In their minds and their mental excitements, that is. Somewhere else they were a little rebuffed, though they did not know it.

It was obvious in them too that love had gone through them: that is, the physical experience. It is curious what a subtle but unmistakable transmutation it makes, both in the body of men and women: the woman more blooming, more subtly rounded, her young angularities softened, and her expression either anxious or triumphant: the man much quieter, more inward, the very shapes of his shoulders and his buttocks less assertive, more hesitant.

In the actual sex-thrill within the body, the sisters nearly succumbed to the strange male power. But quickly they recovered themselves, took the sex-thrill as a sensation, and remained free. Whereas the men, in gratitude to the woman for the sex experience, let their souls go out to her. And afterwards looked rather as if they had lost a shilling and found sixpence. Connie's man could be a bit sulky, and Hilda's a bit jeering. But that is how men are! Ungrateful and never satisfied. When you don't have them they hate you because you won't; and when you do have them they hate you again, for some other reason. Or for no reason at all, except that they are discontented children, and can't be satisfied whatever they get, let a woman do what she may.

However, came the war, Hilda and Connie were rushed home again after having been home already in May, to their mother's funeral. Before Christmas of 1914 both their German young men were dead: whereupon the sisters wept, and loved the young men passionately, but underneath forgot them. They didn't exist

any more.

Both sisters lived in their father's, really their mother's, Kensington house, and mixed with the young Cambridge group, the group that stood for 'freedom' and flannel trousers, and flannel shirts open at the neck, and a well-bred sort of emotional anarchy, and a whispering, murmuring sort of voice, and an ultra-sensitive sort of manner. Hilda, however, suddenly married a man ten years older than herself, an elder member of the same Cambridge group, a man with a fair amount of money, and a comfortable family job in the government: he also wrote philosophical essays. She lived with him in a smallish house in Westminster, and moved in that good sort of society of people in the government who are not tip-toppers, but who are, or would be, the real intelligent power in the nation: people who know what they're talking about, or talk as if they did.

Connie did a mild form of war-work, and consorted with the flannel-trousers Cambridge intransigents, who gently mocked at everything, so far. Her 'friend' was a Clifford Chatterley, a young man of twenty-two, who had hurried home from Bonn, where he was studying the technicalities of coal-mining. He had previously spent two years at Cambridge. Now he had become a first lieutenant in a smart regiment, so he could mock at everything more becomingly in uniform.

Clifford Chatterley was more upper-class than Connie. Connie was well-to-do intelligentsia, but he was aristocracy. Not the big sort, but still it. His father was a baronet, and his mother had been a viscount's daughter.

But Clifford, while he was better bred than Connie, and more 'society', was in his own way more provincial and more timid. He was at his ease in the narrow 'great world', that is, landed aristocracy society, but he was shy and nervous of all that other big world which consists of the vast hordes of the middle and lower classes, and foreigners. If the truth must be told, he was just a little bit frightened of middle-and lower-class humanity, and of foreigners not of his own class. He was, in some paralysing way, conscious of his own defencelessness, though he had all the defence of privilege. Which is curious, but a phenomenon of our day.

Therefore the peculiar soft assurance of a girl like Constance Reid fascinated him. She was so much more mistress of herself in that outer world of chaos than he was master of himself.

Nevertheless he too was a rebel: rebelling even against his class. Or perhaps rebel is too strong a word; far too strong. He was only caught in the general, popular recoil of the young against convention and against any sort of real authority. Fathers were ridiculous: his own obstinate one supremely so. And governments were ridiculous: our own wait-and-see sort especially so. And armies were ridiculous, and old buffers of generals altogether, the red-faced

Kitchener supremely. Even the war was ridiculous, though it did kill rather a lot of people.

In fact everything was a little ridiculous, or very ridiculous: certainly everything connected with authority, whether it were in the army or the government or the universities, was ridiculous to a degree. And as far as the governing class made any pretensions to govern, they were ridiculous too. Sir Geoffrey, Clifford's father, was intensely ridiculous, chopping down his trees, and weeding men out of his colliery to shove them into the war; and himself being so safe and patriotic; but, also, spending more money on his country than he'd got.

When Miss Chatterley — Emma — came down to London from the Midlands to do some nursing work, she was very witty in a quiet way about Sir Geoffrey and his determined patriotism. Herbert, the elder brother and heir, laughed outright, though it was his trees that were felling for trench props. But Clifford only smiled a little uneasily. Everything was ridiculous, quite true. But when it came too close and oneself became ridiculous too...? At least people of a different class, like Connie, were earnest about something. They believed in something.

They were rather earnest about the Tommies, and the threat of conscription, and the shortage of sugar and toffee for the children. In all these things, of course, the authorities were ridiculously at fault. But Clifford could not take it to heart. To him the authorities were ridiculous *ab ovo*, not because of toffee or Tommies.

And the authorities felt ridiculous, and behaved in a rather ridiculous fashion, and it was all a mad hatter's tea-party for a while. Till things developed over there, and Lloyd George came to save the situation over here. And this surpassed even ridicule, the flippant young laughed no more.

In 1916 Herbert Chatterley was killed, so Clifford became heir. He was terrified even of this. His importance as son of Sir Geoffrey, and child of Wragby, was so ingrained in him, he could never escape it. And yet he knew that this too, in the eyes of the vast seething world, was ridiculous. Now he was heir and responsible for Wragby. Was that not terrible? and also splendid and at the same time, perhaps, purely absurd?

Sir Geoffrey would have none of the absurdity. He was pale and tense, withdrawn into himself, and obstinately determined to save his country and his own position, let it be Lloyd George or who it might. So cut off he was, so divorced from the England that was really England, so utterly incapable, that he even thought well of Horatio Bottomley. Sir Geoffrey stood for England and Lloyd George as his forebears had stood for England and St George: and he

never knew there was a difference. So Sir Geoffrey felled timber and stood for Lloyd George and England, England and Lloyd George.

And he wanted Clifford to marry and produce an heir. Clifford felt his father was a hopeless anachronism. But wherein was he himself any further ahead, except in a wincing sense of the ridiculousness of everything, and the paramount ridiculousness of his own position? For willy-nilly he took his baronetcy and Wragby with the last seriousness.

The gay excitement had gone out of the war...dead. Too much death and horror. A man needed support and comfort. A man needed to have an anchor in the safe world. A man needed a wife.

The Chatterleys, two brothers and a sister, had lived curiously isolated, shut in with one another at Wragby, in spite of all their connexions. A sense of isolation intensified the family tie, a sense of the weakness of their position, a sense of defencelessness, in spite of, or because of, the title and the land. They were cut off from those industrial Midlands in which they passed their lives. And they were cut off from their own class by the brooding, obstinate, shut-up nature of Sir Geoffrey, their father, whom they ridiculed, but whom they were so sensitive about.

The three had said they would all live together always. But now Herbert was dead, and Sir Geoffrey wanted Clifford to marry. Sir Geoffrey barely mentioned it: he spoke very little. But his silent, brooding insistence that it should be so was hard for Clifford to bear up against.

But Emma said No! She was ten years older than Clifford, and she felt his marrying would be a desertion and a betrayal of what the young ones of the family had stood for.

Clifford married Connie, nevertheless, and had his month's honeymoon with her. It was the terrible year 1917, and they were intimate as two people who stand together on a sinking ship. He had been virgin when he married: and the sex part did not mean much to him. They were so close, he and she, apart from that. And Connie exulted a little in this intimacy which was beyond sex, and beyond a man's 'satisfaction'. Clifford anyhow was not just keen on his 'satisfaction', as so many men seemed to be. No, the intimacy was deeper, more personal than that. And sex was merely an accident, or an adjunct, one of the curious obsolete, organic processes which persisted in its own clumsiness, but was not really necessary. Though Connie did want children: if only to fortify her against her sister-in-law Emma.

But early in 1918 Clifford was shipped home smashed, and there was no child. And Sir Geoffrey died of chagrin.

CHAPTER 2

Connie and Clifford came home to Wragby in the autumn of 1920. Miss Chatterley, still disgusted at her brother's defection, had departed and was living in a little flat in London.

Wragby was a long low old house in brown stone, begun about the middle of the eighteenth century, and added on to, till it was a warren of a place without much distinction. It stood on an eminence in a rather line old park of oak trees, but alas, one could see in the near distance the chimney of Tevershall pit, with its clouds of steam and smoke, and on the damp, hazy distance of the hill the raw straggle of Tevershall village, a village which began almost at the park gates, and trailed in utter hopeless ugliness for a long and gruesome mile: houses, rows of wretched, small, begrimed, brick houses, with black slate roofs for lids, sharp angles and wilful, blank dreariness.

Connie was accustomed to Kensington or the Scotch hills or the Sussex downs: that was her England. With the stoicism of the young she took in the utter, soulless ugliness of the coal-and-iron Midlands at a glance, and left it at what it was: unbelievable and not to be thought about. From the rather dismal rooms at Wragby she heard the rattle-rattle of the screens at the pit, the puff of the winding-engine, the clink-clink of shunting trucks, and the hoarse little whistle of the colliery locomotives. Tevershall pit-bank was burning, had been burning for years, and it would cost thousands to put it out. So it had to burn. And when the wind was that way, which was often, the house was full of the stench of this sulphurous combustion of the earth's excrement. But even on windless days the air always smelt of something under-earth: sulphur, iron, coal, or acid. And even on the Christmas roses the smuts settled persistently, incredible, like black manna from the skies of doom.

Well, there it was: fated like the rest of things! It was rather awful, but why kick? You couldn't kick it away. It just went on. Life, like all the rest! On the low dark ceiling of cloud at night red blotches burned and quavered, dappling and swelling and contracting, like burns that give pain. It was the furnaces. At first they fascinated Connie with a sort of horror; she felt she was living underground. Then she got used to them. And in the morning it rained.

Clifford professed to like Wragby better than London. This country had a grim will of its own, and the people had guts. Connie wondered what else they had: certainly neither eyes nor minds. The people were as haggard, shapeless, and

dreary as the countryside, and as unfriendly. Only there was something in their deep-mouthed slurring of the dialect, and the thresh-thresh of their hob-nailed pit-boots as they trailed home in gangs on the asphalt from work, that was terrible and a bit mysterious.

There had been no welcome home for the young squire, no festivities, no deputation, not even a single flower. Only a dank ride in a motor-car up a dark, damp drive, burrowing through gloomy trees, out to the slope of the park where grey damp sheep were feeding, to the knoll where the house spread its dark brown facade, and the housekeeper and her husband were hovering, like unsure tenants on the face of the earth, ready to stammer a welcome.

There was no communication between Wragby Hall and Tevershall village, none. No caps were touched, no curtseys bobbed. The colliers merely stared; the tradesmen lifted their caps to Connie as to an acquaintance, and nodded awkwardly to Clifford; that was all. Gulf impassable, and a quiet sort of resentment on either side. At first Connie suffered from the steady drizzle of resentment that came from the village. Then she hardened herself to it, and it became a sort of tonic, something to live up to. It was not that she and Clifford were unpopular, they merely belonged to another species altogether from the colliers. Gulf impassable, breach indescribable, such as is perhaps nonexistent south of the Trent. But in the Midlands and the industrial North gulf impassable, across which no communication could take place. You stick to your side, I'll stick to mine! A strange denial of the common pulse of humanity.

Yet the village sympathized with Clifford and Connie in the abstract. In the flesh it was — You leave me alone! — on either side.

The rector was a nice man of about sixty, full of his duty, and reduced, personally, almost to a nonentity by the silent — You leave me alone! — of the village. The miners' wives were nearly all Methodists. The miners were nothing. But even so much official uniform as the clergyman wore was enough to obscure entirely the fact that he was a man like any other man. No, he was Mester Ashby, a sort of automatic preaching and praying concern.

This stubborn, instinctive — We think ourselves as good as you, if you are Lady Chatterley! — puzzled and baffled Connie at first extremely. The curious, suspicious, false amiability with which the miners' wives met her overtures; the curiously offensive tinge of — Oh dear me! I am somebody now, with Lady Chatterley talking to me! But she needn't think I'm not as good as her for all that! — which she always heard twanging in the women's half-fawning voices, was impossible. There was no getting past it. It was hopelessly and offensively nonconformist.

Clifford left them alone, and she learnt to do the same: she just went by

without looking at them, and they stared as if she were a walking wax figure. When he had to deal with them, Clifford was rather haughty and contemptuous; one could no longer afford to be friendly. In fact he was altogether rather supercilious and contemptuous of anyone not in his own class. He stood his ground, without any attempt at conciliation. And he was neither liked nor disliked by the people: he was just part of things, like the pit-bank and Wragby itself.

But Clifford was really extremely shy and self-conscious now he was lamed. He hated seeing anyone except just the personal servants. For he had to sit in a wheeled chair or a sort of bath-chair. Nevertheless he was just as carefully dressed as ever, by his expensive tailors, and he wore the careful Bond Street neckties just as before, and from the top he looked just as smart and impressive as ever. He had never been one of the modern ladylike young men: rather bucolic even, with his ruddy face and broad shoulders. But his very quiet, hesitating voice, and his eyes, at the same time bold and frightened, assured and uncertain, revealed his nature. His manner was often offensively supercilious, and then again modest and self-effacing, almost tremulous.

Connie and he were attached to one another, in the aloof modern way. He was much too hurt in himself, the great shock of his maiming, to be easy and flippant. He was a hurt thing. And as such Connie stuck to him passionately.

But she could not help feeling how little connexion he really had with people. The miners were, in a sense, his own men; but he saw them as objects rather than men, parts of the pit rather than parts of life, crude raw phenomena rather than human beings along with him. He was in some way afraid of them, he could not bear to have them look at him now he was lame. And their queer, crude life seemed as unnatural as that of hedgehogs.

He was remotely interested; but like a man looking down a microscope, or up a telescope. He was not in touch. He was not in actual touch with anybody, save, traditionally, with Wragby, and, through the close bond of family defence, with Emma. Beyond this nothing really touched him. Connie felt that she herself didn't really, not really touch him; perhaps there was nothing to get at ultimately; just a negation of human contact.

Yet he was absolutely dependent on her, he needed her every moment. Big and strong as he was, he was helpless. He could wheel himself about in a wheeled chair, and he had a sort of bath-chair with a motor attachment, in which he could puff slowly round the park. But alone he was like a lost thing. He needed Connie to be there, to assure him he existed at all.

Still he was ambitious. He had taken to writing stories; curious, very personal stories about people he had known. Clever, rather spiteful, and yet, in some

mysterious way, meaningless. The observation was extraordinary and peculiar. But there was no touch, no actual contact. It was as if the whole thing took place in a vacuum. And since the field of life is largely an artificially-lighted stage today, the stories were curiously true to modern life, to the modern psychology, that is.

Clifford was almost morbidly sensitive about these stories. He wanted everyone to think them good, of the best, ne plus ultra. They appeared in the most modern magazines, and were praised and blamed as usual. But to Clifford the blame was torture, like knives goading him. It was as if the whole of his being were in his stories.

Connie helped him as much as she could. At first she was thrilled. He talked everything over with her monotonously, insistently, persistently, and she had to respond with all her might. It was as if her whole soul and body and sex had to rouse up and pass into theme stories of his. This thrilled her and absorbed her.

Of physical life they lived very little. She had to superintend the house. But the housekeeper had served Sir Geoffrey for many years, and the dried-up, elderly, superlatively correct female you could hardly call her a parlour-maid, or even a woman...who waited at table, had been in the house for forty years. Even the very housemaids were no longer young. It was awful! What could you do with such a place, but leave it alone! All these endless rooms that nobody used, all the Midlands routine, the mechanical cleanliness and the mechanical order! Clifford had insisted on a new cook, an experienced woman who had served him in his rooms in London. For the rest the place seemed run by mechanical anarchy. Everything went on in pretty good order, strict cleanliness, and strict punctuality; even pretty strict honesty. And yet, to Connie, it was a methodical anarchy. No warmth of feeling united it organically. The house seemed as dreary as a disused street.

What could she do but leave it alone? So she left it alone. Miss Chatterley came sometimes, with her aristocratic thin face, and triumphed, finding nothing altered. She would never forgive Connie for ousting her from her union in consciousness with her brother. It was she, Emma, who should be bringing forth the stories, these books, with him; the Chatterley stories, something new in the world, that they, the Chatterleys, had put there. There was no other standard. There was no organic connexion with the thought and expression that had gone before. Only something new in the world: the Chatterley books, entirely personal.

Connie's father, when he paid a flying visit to Wragby, and in private to his daughter: As for Clifford's writing, it's smart, but there's nothing in it. It won't last! Connie looked at the burly Scottish knight who had done himself well all

his life, and her eyes, her big, still-wondering blue eyes became vague. Nothing in it! What did he mean by nothing in it? If the critics praised it, and Clifford's name was almost famous, and it even brought in money...what did her father mean by saying there was nothing in Clifford's writing? What else could there be?

For Connie had adopted the standard of the young: what there was in the moment was everything. And moments followed one another without necessarily belonging to one another.

It was in her second winter at Wragby her father said to her: 'I hope, Connie, you won't let circumstances force you into being a demi-vierge.'

'A demi-vierge!' replied Connie vaguely. 'Why? Why not?'

'Unless you like it, of course!' said her father hastily. To Clifford he said the same, when the two men were alone: 'I'm afraid it doesn't quite suit Connie to be a demi-vierge.'

'A half-virgin!' replied Clifford, translating the phrase to be sure of it.

He thought for a moment, then flushed very red. He was angry and offended.

'In what way doesn't it suit her?' he asked stiffly.

'She's getting thin...angular. It's not her style. She's not the pilchard sort of little slip of a girl, she's a bonny Scotch trout.'

'Without the spots, of course!' said Clifford.

He wanted to say something later to Connie about the demi-vierge business...the half-virgin state of her affairs. But he could not bring himself to do it. He was at once too intimate with her and not intimate enough. He was so very much at one with her, in his mind and hers, but bodily they were nonexistent to one another, and neither could bear to drag in the corpus delicti. They were so intimate, and utterly out of touch.

Connie guessed, however, that her father had said something, and that something was in Clifford's mind. She knew that he didn't mind whether she were demi-vierge or demi-monde, so long as he didn't absolutely know, and wasn't made to see. What the eye doesn't see and the mind doesn't know, doesn't exist.

Connie and Clifford had now been nearly two years at Wragby, living their vague life of absorption in Clifford and his work. Their interests had never ceased to flow together over his work. They talked and wrestled in the throes of composition, and felt as if something were happening, really happening, really in the void.

And thus far it was a life: in the void. For the rest it was nonexistence. Wragby was there, the servants...but spectral, not really existing. Connie went for walks in the park, and in the woods that joined the park, and enjoyed the solitude and

the mystery, kicking the brown leaves of autumn, and picking the primroses of spring. But it was all a dream; or rather it was like the simulacrum of reality. The oak-leaves were to her like oak-leaves seen ruffling in a mirror, she herself was a figure somebody had read about, picking primroses that were only shadows or memories, or words. No substance to her or anything...no touch, no contact! Only this life with Clifford, this endless spinning of webs of yarn, of the minutiae of consciousness, these stories Sir Malcolm said there was nothing in, and they wouldn't last. Why should there be anything in them, why should they last? Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof. Sufficient unto the moment is the appearance of reality.

Clifford had quite a number of friends, acquaintances really, and he invited them to Wragby. He invited all sorts of people, critics and writers, people who would help to praise his books. And they were flattered at being asked to Wragby, and they praised. Connie understood it all perfectly. But why not? This was one of the fleeting patterns in the mirror. What was wrong with it?

She was hostess to these people...mostly men. She was hostess also to Clifford's occasional aristocratic relations. Being a soft, ruddy, country-looking girl, inclined to freckles, with big blue eyes, and curling, brown hair, and a soft voice, and rather strong, female loins she was considered a little old-fashioned and 'womanly'. She was not a 'little pilchard sort of fish', like a boy, with a boy's flat breast and little buttocks. She was too feminine to be quite smart.

So the men, especially those no longer young, were very nice to her indeed. But, knowing what torture poor Clifford would feel at the slightest sign of flirting on her part, she gave them no encouragement at all. She was quiet and vague, she had no contact with them and intended to have none. Clifford was extraordinarily proud of himself.

His relatives treated her quite kindly. She knew that the kindness indicated a lack of fear, and that these people had no respect for you unless you could frighten them a little. But again she had no contact. She let them be kindly and disdainful, she let them feel they had no need to draw their steel in readiness. She had no real connexion with them.

Time went on. Whatever happened, nothing happened, because she was so beautifully out of contact. She and Clifford lived in their ideas and his books. She entertained...there were always people in the house. Time went on as the clock does, half past eight instead of half past seven.

CHAPTER 3

Connie was aware, however, of a growing restlessness. Out of her disconnexion, a restlessness was taking possession of her like madness. It twitched her limbs when she didn't want to twitch them, it jerked her spine when she didn't want to jerk upright but preferred to rest comfortably. It thrilled inside her body, in her womb, somewhere, till she felt she must jump into water and swim to get away from it; a mad restlessness. It made her heart beat violently for no reason. And she was getting thinner.

It was just restlessness. She would rush off across the park, abandon Clifford, and lie prone in the bracken. To get away from the house...she must get away from the house and everybody. The work was her one refuge, her sanctuary.

But it was not really a refuge, a sanctuary, because she had no connexion with it. It was only a place where she could get away from the rest. She never really touched the spirit of the wood itself...if it had any such nonsensical thing.

Vaguely she knew herself that she was going to pieces in some way. Vaguely she knew she was out of connexion: she had lost touch with the substantial and vital world. Only Clifford and his books, which did not exist...which had nothing in them! Void to void. Vaguely she knew. But it was like beating her head against a stone.

Her father warned her again: 'Why don't you get yourself a beau, Connie? Do you all the good in the world.'

That winter Michaelis came for a few days. He was a young Irishman who had already made a large fortune by his plays in America. He had been taken up quite enthusiastically for a time by smart society in London, for he wrote smart society plays. Then gradually smart society realized that it had been made ridiculous at the hands of a down-at-heel Dublin street-rat, and revulsion came. Michaelis was the last word in what was caddish and boulderish. He was discovered to be anti-English, and to the class that made this discovery this was worse than the dirtiest crime. He was cut dead, and his corpse thrown into the refuse can.

Nevertheless Michaelis had his apartment in Mayfair, and walked down Bond Street the image of a gentleman, for you cannot get even the best tailors to cut their low-down customers, when the customers pay.

Clifford was inviting the young man of thirty at an inauspicious moment in that young man's career. Yet Clifford did not hesitate. Michaelis had the ear of a

few million people, probably; and, being a hopeless outsider, he would no doubt be grateful to be asked down to Wragby at this juncture, when the rest of the smart world was cutting him. Being grateful, he would no doubt do Clifford 'good' over there in America. Kudos! A man gets a lot of kudos, whatever that may be, by being talked about in the right way, especially 'over there'. Clifford was a coming man; and it was remarkable what a sound publicity instinct he had. In the end Michaelis did him most nobly in a play, and Clifford was a sort of popular hero. Till the reaction, when he found he had been made ridiculous.

Connie wondered a little over Clifford's blind, imperious instinct to become known: known, that is, to the vast amorphous world he did not himself know, and of which he was uneasily afraid; known as a writer, as a first-class modern writer. Connie was aware from successful, old, hearty, bluffing Sir Malcolm, that artists did advertise themselves, and exert themselves to put their goods over. But her father used channels ready-made, used by all the other R. A.s who sold their pictures. Whereas Clifford discovered new channels of publicity, all kinds. He had all kinds of people at Wragby, without exactly lowering himself. But, determined to build himself a monument of a reputation quickly, he used any handy rubble in the making.

Michaelis arrived duly, in a very neat car, with a chauffeur and a manservant. He was absolutely Bond Street! But at sight of him something in Clifford's county soul recoiled. He wasn't exactly... not exactly...in fact, he wasn't at all, well, what his appearance intended to imply. To Clifford this was final and enough. Yet he was very polite to the man; to the amazing success in him. The bitch-goddess, as she is called, of Success, roamed, snarling and protective, round the half-humble, half-defiant Michaelis' heels, and intimidated Clifford completely: for he wanted to prostitute himself to the bitch-goddess, Success also, if only she would have him.

Michaelis obviously wasn't an Englishman, in spite of all the tailors, hatters, barbers, booters of the very best quarter of London. No, no, he obviously wasn't an Englishman: the wrong sort of flattish, pale face and bearing; and the wrong sort of grievance. He had a grudge and a grievance: that was obvious to any true-born English gentleman, who would scorn to let such a thing appear blatant in his own demeanour. Poor Michaelis had been much kicked, so that he had a slightly tail-between-the-legs look even now. He had pushed his way by sheer instinct and sheerer effrontery on to the stage and to the front of it, with his plays. He had caught the public. And he had thought the kicking days were over. Alas, they weren't... They never would be. For he, in a sense, asked to be kicked. He pined to be where he didn't belong...among the English upper classes. And how they enjoyed the various kicks they got at him! And how he hated them!

Nevertheless he travelled with his manservant and his very neat car, this Dublin mongrel.

There was something about him that Connie liked. He didn't put on airs to himself, he had no illusions about himself. He talked to Clifford sensibly, briefly, practically, about all the things Clifford wanted to know. He didn't expand or let himself go. He knew he had been asked down to Wragby to be made use of, and like an old, shrewd, almost indifferent business man, or big-business man, he let himself be asked questions, and he answered with as little waste of feeling as possible.

'Money!' he said. 'Money is a sort of instinct. It's a sort of property of nature in a man to make money. It's nothing you do. It's no trick you play. It's a sort of permanent accident of your own nature; once you start, you make money, and you go on; up to a point, I suppose.'

'But you've got to begin,' said Clifford.

'Oh, quite! You've got to get in. You can do nothing if you are kept outside. You've got to beat your way in. Once you've done that, you can't help it.'

'But could you have made money except by plays?' asked Clifford.

'Oh, probably not! I may be a good writer or I may be a bad one, but a writer and a writer of plays is what I am, and I've got to be. There's no question of that.'

'And you think it's a writer of popular plays that you've got to be?' asked Connie.

'There, exactly!' he said, turning to her in a sudden flash. 'There's nothing in it! There's nothing in popularity. There's nothing in the public, if it comes to that. There's nothing really in my plays to make them popular. It's not that. They just are like the weather...the sort that will have to be...for the time being.'

He turned his slow, rather full eyes, that had been drowned in such fathomless disillusion, on Connie, and she trembled a little. He seemed so old...endlessly old, built up of layers of disillusion, going down in him generation after generation, like geological strata; and at the same time he was forlorn like a child. An outcast, in a certain sense; but with the desperate bravery of his rat-like existence.

'At least it's wonderful what you've done at your time of life,' said Clifford contemplatively.

'I'm thirty...yes, I'm thirty!' said Michaelis, sharply and suddenly, with a curious laugh; hollow, triumphant, and bitter.

'And are you alone?' asked Connie.

'How do you mean? Do I live alone? I've got my servant. He's a Greek, so he says, and quite incompetent. But I keep him. And I'm going to marry. Oh, yes, I

must marry.'

'It sounds like going to have your tonsils cut,' laughed Connie. 'Will it be an effort?'

He looked at her admiringly. 'Well, Lady Chatterley, somehow it will! I find... excuse me... I find I can't marry an Englishwoman, not even an Irishwoman...'

'Try an American,' said Clifford.

'Oh, American!' He laughed a hollow laugh. 'No, I've asked my man if he will find me a Turk or something...something nearer to the Oriental.'

Connie really wondered at this queer, melancholy specimen of extraordinary success; it was said he had an income of fifty thousand dollars from America alone. Sometimes he was handsome: sometimes as he looked sideways, downwards, and the light fell on him, he had the silent, enduring beauty of a carved ivory Negro mask, with his rather full eyes, and the strong queerly-arched brows, the immobile, compressed mouth; that momentary but revealed immobility, an immobility, a timelessness which the Buddha aims at, and which Negroes express sometimes without ever aiming at it; something old, old, and acquiescent in the race! Aeons of acquiescence in race destiny, instead of our individual resistance. And then a swimming through, like rats in a dark river. Connie felt a sudden, strange leap of sympathy for him, a leap mingled with compassion, and tinged with repulsion, amounting almost to love. The outsider! The outsider! And they called him a bounder! How much more bounderish and assertive Clifford looked! How much stupider!

Michaelis knew at once he had made an impression on her. He turned his full, hazel, slightly prominent eyes on her in a look of pure detachment. He was estimating her, and the extent of the impression he had made. With the English nothing could save him from being the eternal outsider, not even love. Yet women sometimes fell for him...Englishwomen too.

He knew just where he was with Clifford. They were two alien dogs which would have liked to snarl at one another, but which smiled instead, perforce. But with the woman he was not quite so sure.

Breakfast was served in the bedrooms; Clifford never appeared before lunch, and the dining-room was a little dreary. After coffee Michaelis, restless and ill-sitting soul, wondered what he should do. It was a fine November day ... fine for Wragby. He looked over the melancholy park. My God! What a place!

He sent a servant to ask, could he be of any service to Lady Chatterley: he thought of driving into Sheffield. The answer came, would he care to go up to Lady Chatterley's sitting-room.

Connie had a sitting-room on the third floor, the top floor of the central portion of the house. Clifford's rooms were on the ground floor, of course.

Michaelis was flattered by being asked up to Lady Chatterley's own parlour. He followed blindly after the servant...he never noticed things, or had contact with his surroundings. In her room he did glance vaguely round at the fine German reproductions of Renoir and Cezanne.

'It's very pleasant up here,' he said, with his queer smile, as if it hurt him to smile, showing his teeth. 'You are wise to get up to the top.'

'Yes, I think so,' she said.

Her room was the only gay, modern one in the house, the only spot in Wragby where her personality was at all revealed. Clifford had never seen it, and she asked very few people up.

Now she and Michaelis sit on opposite sides of the fire and talked. She asked him about himself, his mother and father, his brothers...other people were always something of a wonder to her, and when her sympathy was awakened she was quite devoid of class feeling. Michaelis talked frankly about himself, quite frankly, without affectation, simply revealing his bitter, indifferent, stray-dog's soul, then showing a gleam of revengeful pride in his success.

'But why are you such a lonely bird?' Connie asked him; and again he looked at her, with his full, searching, hazel look.

'Some birds are that way,' he replied. Then, with a touch of familiar irony: 'but, look here, what about yourself? Aren't you by way of being a lonely bird yourself?' Connie, a little startled, thought about it for a few moments, and then she said: 'Only in a way! Not altogether, like you!'

'Am I altogether a lonely bird?' he asked, with his queer grin of a smile, as if he had toothache; it was so wry, and his eyes were so perfectly unchangingly melancholy, or stoical, or disillusioned or afraid.

'Why?' she said, a little breathless, as she looked at him. 'You are, aren't you?'

She felt a terrible appeal coming to her from him, that made her almost lose her balance.

'Oh, you're quite right!' he said, turning his head away, and looking sideways, downwards, with that strange immobility of an old race that is hardly here in our present day. It was that that really made Connie lose her power to see him detached from herself.

He looked up at her with the full glance that saw everything, registered everything. At the same time, the infant crying in the night was crying out of his breast to her, in a way that affected her very womb.

'It's awfully nice of you to think of me,' he said laconically.

'Why shouldn't I think of you?' she exclaimed, with hardly breath to utter it.

He gave the wry, quick hiss of a laugh.

‘Oh, in that way!...May I hold your hand for a minute?’ he asked suddenly, fixing his eyes on her with almost hypnotic power, and sending out an appeal that affected her direct in the womb.

She stared at him, dazed and transfixed, and he went over and kneeled beside her, and took her two feet close in his two hands, and buried his face in her lap, remaining motionless. She was perfectly dim and dazed, looking down in a sort of amazement at the rather tender nape of his neck, feeling his face pressing her thighs. In all her burning dismay, she could not help putting her hand, with tenderness and compassion, on the defenceless nape of his neck, and he trembled, with a deep shudder.

Then he looked up at her with that awful appeal in his full, glowing eyes. She was utterly incapable of resisting it. From her breast flowed the answering, immense yearning over him; she must give him anything, anything.

He was a curious and very gentle lover, very gentle with the woman, trembling uncontrollably, and yet at the same time detached, aware, aware of every sound outside.

To her it meant nothing except that she gave herself to him. And at length he ceased to quiver any more, and lay quite still, quite still. Then, with dim, compassionate fingers, she stroked his head, that lay on her breast.

When he rose, he kissed both her hands, then both her feet, in their suede slippers, and in silence went away to the end of the room, where he stood with his back to her. There was silence for some minutes. Then he turned and came to her again as she sat in her old place by the fire.

‘And now, I suppose you’ll hate me!’ he said in a quiet, inevitable way. She looked up at him quickly.

‘Why should I?’ she asked.

‘They mostly do,’ he said; then he caught himself up. ‘I mean...a woman is supposed to.’

‘This is the last moment when I ought to hate you,’ she said resentfully.

‘I know! I know! It should be so! You’re frightfully good to me...’ he cried miserably.

She wondered why he should be miserable. ‘Won’t you sit down again?’ she said. He glanced at the door.

‘Sir Clifford!’ he said, ‘won’t he...won’t he be...?’ She paused a moment to consider. ‘Perhaps!’ she said. And she looked up at him. ‘I don’t want Clifford to know not even to suspect. It would hurt him so much. But I don’t think it’s wrong, do you?’

‘Wrong! Good God, no! You’re only too infinitely good to me...I can hardly bear it.’

He turned aside, and she saw that in another moment he would be sobbing.

‘But we needn’t let Clifford know, need we?’ she pleaded. ‘It would hurt him so. And if he never knows, never suspects, it hurts nobody.’

‘Me!’ he said, almost fiercely; ‘he’ll know nothing from me! You see if he does. Me give myself away! Ha! Ha!’ he laughed hollowly, cynically, at such an idea. She watched him in wonder. He said to her: ‘May I kiss your hand and go? I’ll run into Sheffield I think, and lunch there, if I may, and be back to tea. May I do anything for you? May I be sure you don’t hate me? — and that you won’t?’ — he ended with a desperate note of cynicism.

‘No, I don’t hate you,’ she said. ‘I think you’re nice.’

‘Ah!’ he said to her fiercely, ‘I’d rather you said that to me than said you love me! It means such a lot more...Till afternoon then. I’ve plenty to think about till then.’ He kissed her hands humbly and was gone.

‘I don’t think I can stand that young man,’ said Clifford at lunch.

‘Why?’ asked Connie.

‘He’s such a bounder underneath his veneer...just waiting to bounce us.’

‘I think people have been so unkind to him,’ said Connie.

‘Do you wonder? And do you think he employs his shining hours doing deeds of kindness?’

‘I think he has a certain sort of generosity.’

‘Towards whom?’

‘I don’t quite know.’

‘Naturally you don’t. I’m afraid you mistake unscrupulousness for generosity.’

Connie paused. Did she? It was just possible. Yet the unscrupulousness of Michaelis had a certain fascination for her. He went whole lengths where Clifford only crept a few timid paces. In his way he had conquered the world, which was what Clifford wanted to do. Ways and means...? Were those of Michaelis more despicable than those of Clifford? Was the way the poor outsider had shoved and bounced himself forward in person, and by the back doors, any worse than Clifford’s way of advertising himself into prominence? The bitch-goddess, Success, was trailed by thousands of gasping dogs with lolling tongues. The one that got her first was the real dog among dogs, if you go by success! So Michaelis could keep his tail up.

The queer thing was, he didn’t. He came back towards tea-time with a large handful of violets and lilies, and the same hang-dog expression. Connie wondered sometimes if it were a sort of mask to disarm opposition, because it was almost too fixed. Was he really such a sad dog?

His sad-dog sort of extinguished self persisted all the evening, though through

it Clifford felt the inner effrontery. Connie didn't feel it, perhaps because it was not directed against women; only against men, and their presumptions and assumptions. That indestructible, inward effrontery in the meagre fellow was what made men so down on Michaelis. His very presence was an affront to a man of society, cloak it as he might in an assumed good manner.

Connie was in love with him, but she managed to sit with her embroidery and let the men talk, and not give herself away. As for Michaelis, he was perfect; exactly the same melancholic, attentive, aloof young fellow of the previous evening, millions of degrees remote from his hosts, but laconically playing up to them to the required amount, and never coming forth to them for a moment. Connie felt he must have forgotten the morning. He had not forgotten. But he knew where he was...in the same old place outside, where the born outsiders are. He didn't take the love-making altogether personally. He knew it would not change him from an ownerless dog, whom everybody begrudges its golden collar, into a comfortable society dog.

The final fact being that at the very bottom of his soul he was an outsider, and anti-social, and he accepted the fact inwardly, no matter how Bond-Streety he was on the outside. His isolation was a necessity to him; just as the appearance of conformity and mixing-in with the smart people was also a necessity.

But occasional love, as a comfort and soothing, was also a good thing, and he was not ungrateful. On the contrary, he was burningly, poignantly grateful for a piece of natural, spontaneous kindness: almost to tears. Beneath his pale, immobile, disillusioned face, his child's soul was sobbing with gratitude to the woman, and burning to come to her again; just as his outcast soul was knowing he would keep really clear of her.

He found an opportunity to say to her, as they were lighting the candles in the hall:

'May I come?'

'I'll come to you,' she said.

'Oh, good!'

He waited for her a long time...but she came.

He was the trembling excited sort of lover, whose crisis soon came, and was finished. There was something curiously childlike and defenceless about his naked body: as children are naked. His defences were all in his wits and cunning, his very instincts of cunning, and when these were in abeyance he seemed doubly naked and like a child, of unfinished, tender flesh, and somehow struggling helplessly.

He roused in the woman a wild sort of compassion and yearning, and a wild, craving physical desire. The physical desire he did not satisfy in her; he was

always come and finished so quickly, then shrinking down on her breast, and recovering somewhat his effrontery while she lay dazed, disappointed, lost.

But then she soon learnt to hold him, to keep him there inside her when his crisis was over. And there he was generous and curiously potent; he stayed firm inside her, giving to her, while she was active...wildly, passionately active, coming to her own crisis. And as he felt the frenzy of her achieving her own orgasmic satisfaction from his hard, erect passivity, he had a curious sense of pride and satisfaction.

‘Ah, how good!’ she whispered tremulously, and she became quite still, clinging to him. And he lay there in his own isolation, but somehow proud.

He stayed that time only the three days, and to Clifford was exactly the same as on the first evening; to Connie also. There was no breaking down his external man.

He wrote to Connie with the same plaintive melancholy note as ever, sometimes witty, and touched with a queer, sexless affection. A kind of hopeless affection he seemed to feel for her, and the essential remoteness remained the same. He was hopeless at the very core of him, and he wanted to be hopeless. He rather hated hope. ‘Une immense esprance a travers la terre’, he read somewhere, and his comment was:’ — and it’s darned-well drowned everything worth having.’

Connie never really understood him, but, in her way, she loved him. And all the time she felt the reflection of his hopelessness in her. She couldn’t quite, quite love in hopelessness. And he, being hopeless, couldn’t ever quite love at all.

So they went on for quite a time, writing, and meeting occasionally in London. She still wanted the physical, sexual thrill she could get with him by her own activity, his little orgasm being over. And he still wanted to give it her. Which was enough to keep them connected.

And enough to give her a subtle sort of self-assurance, something blind and a little arrogant. It was an almost mechanical confidence in her own powers, and went with a great cheerfulness.

She was terrifically cheerful at Wragby. And she used all her aroused cheerfulness and satisfaction to stimulate Clifford, so that he wrote his best at this time, and was almost happy in his strange blind way. He really reaped the fruits of the sensual satisfaction she got out of Michaelis’ male passivity erect inside her. But of course he never knew it, and if he had, he wouldn’t have said thank you!

Yet when those days of her grand joyful cheerfulness and stimulus were gone, quite gone, and she was depressed and irritable, how Clifford longed for them

again! Perhaps if he'd known he might even have wished to get her and Michaelis together again.

CHAPTER 4

Connie always had a foreboding of the hopelessness of her affair with Mick, as people called him. Yet other men seemed to mean nothing to her. She was attached to Clifford. He wanted a good deal of her life and she gave it to him. But she wanted a good deal from the life of a man, and this Clifford did not give her; could not. There were occasional spasms of Michaelis. But, as she knew by foreboding, that would come to an end. Mick couldn't keep anything up. It was part of his very being that he must break off any connexion, and be loose, isolated, absolutely lone dog again. It was his major necessity, even though he always said: She turned me down!

The world is supposed to be full of possibilities, but they narrow down to pretty few in most personal experience. There's lots of good fish in the sea...maybe...but the vast masses seem to be mackerel or herring, and if you're not mackerel or herring yourself you are likely to find very few good fish in the sea.

Clifford was making strides into fame, and even money. People came to see him. Connie nearly always had somebody at Wragby. But if they weren't mackerel they were herring, with an occasional cat-fish, or conger-eel.

There were a few regular men, constants; men who had been at Cambridge with Clifford. There was Tommy Dukes, who had remained in the army, and was a Brigadier-General. 'The army leaves me time to think, and saves me from having to face the battle of life,' he said.

There was Charles May, an Irishman, who wrote scientifically about stars. There was Hammond, another writer. All were about the same age as Clifford; the young intellectuals of the day. They all believed in the life of the mind. What you did apart from that was your private affair, and didn't much matter. No one thinks of inquiring of another person at what hour he retires to the privy. It isn't interesting to anyone but the person concerned.

And so with most of the matters of ordinary life...how you make your money, or whether you love your wife, or if you have 'affairs'. All these matters concern only the person concerned, and, like going to the privy, have no interest for anyone else.

'The whole point about the sexual problem,' said Hammond, who was a tall thin fellow with a wife and two children, but much more closely connected with a typewriter, 'is that there is no point to it. Strictly there is no problem. We don't

want to follow a man into the w.c., so why should we want to follow him into bed with a woman? And therein lies the problem. If we took no more notice of the one thing than the other, there'd be no problem. It's all utterly senseless and pointless; a matter of misplaced curiosity.'

'Quite, Hammond, quite! But if someone starts making love to Julia, you begin to simmer; and if he goes on, you are soon at boiling point.'...Julia was Hammond's wife.

'Why, exactly! So I should be if he began to urinate in a corner of my drawing-room. There's a place for all these things.'

'You mean you wouldn't mind if he made love to Julia in some discreet alcove?'

Charlie May was slightly satirical, for he had flirted a very little with Julia, and Hammond had cut up very roughly.

'Of course I should mind. Sex is a private thing between me and Julia; and of course I should mind anyone else trying to mix in.'

'As a matter of fact,' said the lean and freckled Tommy Dukes, who looked much more Irish than May, who was pale and rather fat: 'As a matter of fact, Hammond, you have a strong property instinct, and a strong will to self-assertion, and you want success. Since I've been in the army definitely, I've got out of the way of the world, and now I see how inordinately strong the craving for self-assertion and success is in men. It is enormously overdeveloped. All our individuality has run that way. And of course men like you think you'll get through better with a woman's backing. That's why you're so jealous. That's what sex is to you...a vital little dynamo between you and Julia, to bring success. If you began to be unsuccessful you'd begin to flirt, like Charlie, who isn't successful. Married people like you and Julia have labels on you, like travellers' trunks. Julia is labelled Mrs Arnold B. Hammond — just like a trunk on the railway that belongs to somebody. And you are labelled Arnold B. Hammond, c/o Mrs Arnold B. Hammond. Oh, you're quite right, you're quite right! The life of the mind needs a comfortable house and decent cooking. You're quite right. It even needs posterity. But it all hinges on the instinct for success. That is the pivot on which all things turn.'

Hammond looked rather piqued. He was rather proud of the integrity of his mind, and of his not being a time-server. None the less, he did want success.

'It's quite true, you can't live without cash,' said May. 'You've got to have a certain amount of it to be able to live and get along...even to be free to think you must have a certain amount of money, or your stomach stops you. But it seems to me you might leave the labels off sex. We're free to talk to anybody; so why shouldn't we be free to make love to any woman who inclines us that way?'

‘There speaks the lascivious Celt,’ said Clifford.

‘Lascivious! well, why not — ? I can’t see I do a woman any more harm by sleeping with her than by dancing with her...or even talking to her about the weather. It’s just an interchange of sensations instead of ideas, so why not?’

‘Be as promiscuous as the rabbits!’ said Hammond.

‘Why not? What’s wrong with rabbits? Are they any worse than a neurotic, revolutionary humanity, full of nervous hate?’

‘But we’re not rabbits, even so,’ said Hammond.

‘Precisely! I have my mind: I have certain calculations to make in certain astronomical matters that concern me almost more than life or death. Sometimes indigestion interferes with me. Hunger would interfere with me disastrously. In the same way starved sex interferes with me. What then?’

‘I should have thought sexual indigestion from surfeit would have interfered with you more seriously,’ said Hammond satirically.

‘Not it! I don’t over-eat myself and I don’t over-fuck myself. One has a choice about eating too much. But you would absolutely starve me.’

‘Not at all! You can marry.’

‘How do you know I can? It may not suit the process of my mind. Marriage might...and would...stultify my mental processes. I’m not properly pivoted that way...and so must I be chained in a kennel like a monk? All rot and funk, my boy. I must live and do my calculations. I need women sometimes. I refuse to make a mountain of it, and I refuse anybody’s moral condemnation or prohibition. I’d be ashamed to see a woman walking around with my name-label on her, address and railway station, like a wardrobe trunk.’

These two men had not forgiven each other about the Julia flirtation.

‘It’s an amusing idea, Charlie,’ said Dukes, ‘that sex is just another form of talk, where you act the words instead of saying them. I suppose it’s quite true. I suppose we might exchange as many sensations and emotions with women as we do ideas about the weather, and so on. Sex might be a sort of normal physical conversation between a man and a woman. You don’t talk to a woman unless you have ideas in common: that is you don’t talk with any interest. And in the same way, unless you had some emotion or sympathy in common with a woman you wouldn’t sleep with her. But if you had...’

‘If you have the proper sort of emotion or sympathy with a woman, you ought to sleep with her,’ said May. ‘It’s the only decent thing, to go to bed with her. Just as, when you are interested talking to someone, the only decent thing is to have the talk out. You don’t prudishly put your tongue between your teeth and bite it. You just say out your say. And the same the other way.’

‘No,’ said Hammond. ‘It’s wrong. You, for example, May, you squander half

your force with women. You'll never really do what you should do, with a fine mind such as yours. Too much of it goes the other way.'

'Maybe it does...and too little of you goes that way, Hammond, my boy, married or not. You can keep the purity and integrity of your mind, but it's going damned dry. Your pure mind is going as dry as fiddlesticks, from what I see of it. You're simply talking it down.'

Tommy Dukes burst into a laugh.

'Go it, you two minds!' he said. 'Look at me...I don't do any high and pure mental work, nothing but jot down a few ideas. And yet I neither marry nor run after women. I think Charlie's quite right; if he wants to run after the women, he's quite free not to run too often. But I wouldn't prohibit him from running. As for Hammond, he's got a property instinct, so naturally the straight road and the narrow gate are right for him. You'll see he'll be an English Man of Letters before he's done. A.B.C. from top to toe. Then there's me. I'm nothing. Just a squib. And what about you, Clifford? Do you think sex is a dynamo to help a man on to success in the world?'

Clifford rarely talked much at these times. He never held forth; his ideas were really not vital enough for it, he was too confused and emotional. Now he blushed and looked uncomfortable.

'Well!' he said, 'being myself hors de combat, I don't see I've anything to say on the matter.'

'Not at all,' said Dukes; 'the top of you's by no means hors de combat. You've got the life of the mind sound and intact. So let us hear your ideas.'

'Well,' stammered Clifford, 'even then I don't suppose I have much idea...I suppose marry-and-have-done-with-it would pretty well stand for what I think. Though of course between a man and woman who care for one another, it is a great thing.'

'What sort of great thing?' said Tommy.

'Oh...it perfects the intimacy,' said Clifford, uneasy as a woman in such talk.

'Well, Charlie and I believe that sex is a sort of communication like speech. Let any woman start a sex conversation with me, and it's natural for me to go to bed with her to finish it, all in due season. Unfortunately no woman makes any particular start with me, so I go to bed by myself; and am none the worse for it...I hope so, anyway, for how should I know? Anyhow I've no starry calculations to be interfered with, and no immortal works to write. I'm merely a fellow skulking in the army...'

Silence fell. The four men smoked. And Connie sat there and put another stitch in her sewing...Yes, she sat there! She had to sit mum. She had to be quiet as a mouse, not to interfere with the immensely important speculations of these

highly-mental gentlemen. But she had to be there. They didn't get on so well without her; their ideas didn't flow so freely. Clifford was much more hedgy and nervous, he got cold feet much quicker in Connie's absence, and the talk didn't run. Tommy Dukes came off best; he was a little inspired by her presence. Hammond she didn't really like; he seemed so selfish in a mental way. And Charles May, though she liked something about him, seemed a little distasteful and messy, in spite of his stars.

How many evenings had Connie sat and listened to the manifestations of these four men! these, and one or two others. That they never seemed to get anywhere didn't trouble her deeply. She liked to hear what they had to say, especially when Tommy was there. It was fun. Instead of men kissing you, and touching you with their bodies, they revealed their minds to you. It was great fun! But what cold minds!

And also it was a little irritating. She had more respect for Michaelis, on whose name they all poured such withering contempt, as a little mongrel arriviste, and uneducated bounder of the worst sort. Mongrel and bounder or not, he jumped to his own conclusions. He didn't merely walk round them with millions of words, in the parade of the life of the mind.

Connie quite liked the life of the mind, and got a great thrill out of it. But she did think it overdid itself a little. She loved being there, amidst the tobacco smoke of those famous evenings of the cronies, as she called them privately to herself. She was infinitely amused, and proud too, that even their talking they could not do, without her silent presence. She had an immense respect for thought...and these men, at least, tried to think honestly. But somehow there was a cat, and it wouldn't jump. They all alike talked at something, though what it was, for the life of her she couldn't say. It was something that Mick didn't clear, either.

But then Mick wasn't trying to do anything, but just get through his life, and put as much across other people as they tried to put across him. He was really anti-social, which was what Clifford and his cronies had against him. Clifford and his cronies were not anti-social; they were more or less bent on saving mankind, or on instructing it, to say the least.

There was a gorgeous talk on Sunday evening, when the conversation drifted again to love.

'Blest be the tie that binds Our hearts in kindred something-or-other' —

said Tommy Dukes. 'I'd like to know what the tie is...The tie that binds us just now is mental friction on one another. And, apart from that, there's damned little tie between us. We bust apart, and say spiteful things about one another, like all the other damned intellectuals in the world. Damned everybodies, as far as that

goes, for they all do it. Else we bust apart, and cover up the spiteful things we feel against one another by saying false sugaries. It's a curious thing that the mental life seems to flourish with its roots in spite, ineffable and fathomless spite. Always has been so! Look at Socrates, in Plato, and his bunch round him! The sheer spite of it all, just sheer joy in pulling somebody else to bits...Protagoras, or whoever it was! And Alcibiades, and all the other little disciple dogs joining in the fray! I must say it makes one prefer Buddha, quietly sitting under a bo-tree, or Jesus, telling his disciples little Sunday stories, peacefully, and without any mental fireworks. No, there's something wrong with the mental life, radically. It's rooted in spite and envy, envy and spite. Ye shall know the tree by its fruit.'

'I don't think we're altogether so spiteful,' protested Clifford.

'My dear Clifford, think of the way we talk each other over, all of us. I'm rather worse than anybody else, myself. Because I infinitely prefer the spontaneous spite to the concocted sugaries; now they are poison; when I begin saying what a fine fellow Clifford is, etc., etc., then poor Clifford is to be pitied. For God's sake, all of you, say spiteful things about me, then I shall know I mean something to you. Don't say sugaries, or I'm done.'

'Oh, but I do think we honestly like one another,' said Hammond.

'I tell you we must...we say such spiteful things to one another, about one another, behind our backs! I'm the worst.'

'And I do think you confuse the mental life with the critical activity. I agree with you, Socrates gave the critical activity a grand start, but he did more than that,' said Charlie May, rather magisterially. The cronies had such a curious pomposity under their assumed modesty. It was all so ex cathedra, and it all pretended to be so humble.

Dukes refused to be drawn about Socrates.

'That's quite true, criticism and knowledge are not the same thing,' said Hammond.

'They aren't, of course,' chimed in Berry, a brown, shy young man, who had called to see Dukes, and was staying the night.

They all looked at him as if the ass had spoken.

'I wasn't talking about knowledge...I was talking about the mental life,' laughed Dukes. 'Real knowledge comes out of the whole corpus of the consciousness; out of your belly and your penis as much as out of your brain and mind. The mind can only analyse and rationalize. Set the mind and the reason to cock it over the rest, and all they can do is to criticize, and make a deadness. I say all they can do. It is vastly important. My God, the world needs criticizing today...criticizing to death. Therefore let's live the mental life, and glory in our

spite, and strip the rotten old show. But, mind you, it's like this: while you live your life, you are in some way an Organic whole with all life. But once you start the mental life you pluck the apple. You've severed the connexion between the apple and the tree: the organic connexion. And if you've got nothing in your life but the mental life, then you yourself are a plucked apple...you've fallen off the tree. And then it is a logical necessity to be spiteful, just as it's a natural necessity for a plucked apple to go bad.'

Clifford made big eyes: it was all stuff to him. Connie secretly laughed to herself.

'Well then we're all plucked apples,' said Hammond, rather acidly and petulantly.

'So let's make cider of ourselves,' said Charlie.

'But what do you think of Bolshevism?' put in the brown Berry, as if everything had led up to it.

'Bravo!' roared Charlie. 'What do you think of Bolshevism?'

'Come on! Let's make hay of Bolshevism!' said Dukes.

'I'm afraid Bolshevism is a large question,' said Hammond, shaking his head seriously.

'Bolshevism, it seems to me,' said Charlie, 'is just a superlative hatred of the thing they call the bourgeois; and what the bourgeois is, isn't quite defined. It is Capitalism, among other things. Feelings and emotions are also so decidedly bourgeois that you have to invent a man without them.'

'Then the individual, especially the personal man, is bourgeois: so he must be suppressed. You must submerge yourselves in the greater thing, the Soviet-social thing. Even an organism is bourgeois: so the ideal must be mechanical. The only thing that is a unit, non-organic, composed of many different, yet equally essential parts, is the machine. Each man a machine-part, and the driving power of the machine, hate...hate of the bourgeois. That, to me, is Bolshevism.'

'Absolutely!' said Tommy. 'But also, it seems to me a perfect description of the whole of the industrial ideal. It's the factory-owner's ideal in a nut-shell; except that he would deny that the driving power was hate. Hate it is, all the same; hate of life itself. Just look at these Midlands, if it isn't plainly written up...but it's all part of the life of the mind, it's a logical development.'

'I deny that Bolshevism is logical, it rejects the major part of the premisses,' said Hammond.

'My dear man, it allows the material premiss; so does the pure mind...exclusively.'

'At least Bolshevism has got down to rock bottom,' said Charlie.

'Rock bottom! The bottom that has no bottom! The Bolsheviks will have the

finest army in the world in a very short time, with the finest mechanical equipment.

‘But this thing can’t go on...this hate business. There must be a reaction...’ said Hammond.

‘Well, we’ve been waiting for years...we wait longer. Hate’s a growing thing like anything else. It’s the inevitable outcome of forcing ideas on to life, of forcing one’s deepest instincts; our deepest feelings we force according to certain ideas. We drive ourselves with a formula, like a machine. The logical mind pretends to rule the roost, and the roost turns into pure hate. We’re all Bolsheviks, only we are hypocrites. The Russians are Bolsheviks without hypocrisy.’

‘But there are many other ways,’ said Hammond, ‘than the Soviet way. The Bolsheviks aren’t really intelligent.’

‘Of course not. But sometimes it’s intelligent to be half-witted: if you want to make your end. Personally, I consider Bolshevism half-witted; but so do I consider our social life in the west half-witted. So I even consider our far-famed mental life half-witted. We’re all as cold as cretins, we’re all as passionless as idiots. We’re all of us Bolsheviks, only we give it another name. We think we’re gods...men like gods! It’s just the same as Bolshevism. One has to be human, and have a heart and a penis if one is going to escape being either a god or a Bolshevik...for they are the same thing: they’re both too good to be true.’

Out of the disapproving silence came Berry’s anxious question:

‘You do believe in love then, Tommy, don’t you?’

‘You lovely lad!’ said Tommy. ‘No, my cherub, nine times out of ten, no! Love’s another of those half-witted performances today. Fellows with swaying waists fucking little jazz girls with small boy buttocks, like two collar studs! Do you mean that sort of love? Or the joint-property, make-a-success-of-it, My-husband-my-wife sort of love? No, my fine fellow, I don’t believe in it at all!’

‘But you do believe in something?’

‘Me? Oh, intellectually I believe in having a good heart, a chirpy penis, a lively intelligence, and the courage to say “shit!” in front of a lady.’

‘Well, you’ve got them all,’ said Berry.

Tommy Dukes roared with laughter. ‘You angel boy! If only I had! If only I had! No; my heart’s as numb as a potato, my penis droops and never lifts its head up, I dare rather cut him clean off than say “shit!” in front of my mother or my aunt...they are real ladies, mind you; and I’m not really intelligent, I’m only a “mental-lifer”. It would be wonderful to be intelligent: then one would be alive in all the parts mentioned and unmentionable. The penis rouses his head and says: How do you do? — to any really intelligent person. Renoir said he painted

his pictures with his penis...he did too, lovely pictures! I wish I did something with mine. God! when one can only talk! Another torture added to Hades! And Socrates started it.'

'There are nice women in the world,' said Connie, lifting her head up and speaking at last.

The men resented it...she should have pretended to hear nothing. They hated her admitting she had attended so closely to such talk.

'My God!'

If they be not nice to me

What care I how nice they be?

'No, it's hopeless! I just simply can't vibrate in unison with a woman. There's no woman I can really want when I'm faced with her, and I'm not going to start forcing myself to it...My God, no! I'll remain as I am, and lead the mental life. It's the only honest thing I can do. I can be quite happy talking to women; but it's all pure, hopelessly pure. Hopelessly pure! What do you say, Hildebrand, my chicken?'

'It's much less complicated if one stays pure,' said Berry.

'Yes, life is all too simple!'

CHAPTER 5

On a frosty morning with a little February sun, Clifford and Connie went for a walk across the park to the wood. That is, Clifford chuffed in his motor-chair, and Connie walked beside him.

The hard air was still sulphurous, but they were both used to it. Round the near horizon went the haze, opalescent with frost and smoke, and on the top lay the small blue sky; so that it was like being inside an enclosure, always inside. Life always a dream or a frenzy, inside an enclosure.

The sheep coughed in the rough, sere grass of the park, where frost lay bluish in the sockets of the tufts. Across the park ran a path to the wood-gate, a fine ribbon of pink. Clifford had had it newly gravelled with sifted gravel from the pit-bank. When the rock and refuse of the underworld had burned and given off its sulphur, it turned bright pink, shrimp-coloured on dry days, darker, crab-coloured on wet. Now it was pale shrimp-colour, with a bluish-white hoar of frost. It always pleased Connie, this underfoot of sifted, bright pink. It's an ill wind that brings nobody good.

Clifford steered cautiously down the slope of the knoll from the hall, and Connie kept her hand on the chair. In front lay the wood, the hazel thicket nearest, the purplish density of oaks beyond. From the wood's edge rabbits bobbed and nibbled. Rooks suddenly rose in a black train, and went trailing off over the little sky.

Connie opened the wood-gate, and Clifford puffed slowly through into the broad riding that ran up an incline between the clean-whipped thickets of the hazel. The wood was a remnant of the great forest where Robin Hood hunted, and this riding was an old, old thoroughfare coming across country. But now, of course, it was only a riding through the private wood. The road from Mansfield swerved round to the north.

In the wood everything was motionless, the old leaves on the ground keeping the frost on their underside. A jay called harshly, many little birds fluttered. But there was no game; no pheasants. They had been killed off during the war, and the wood had been left unprotected, till now Clifford had got his gamekeeper again.

Clifford loved the wood; he loved the old oak-trees. He felt they were his own through generations. He wanted to protect them. He wanted this place inviolate, shut off from the world.

The chair chuffed slowly up the incline, rocking and jolting on the frozen clods. And suddenly, on the left, came a clearing where there was nothing but a ravel of dead bracken, a thin and spindly sapling leaning here and there, big sawn stumps, showing their tops and their grasping roots, lifeless. And patches of blackness where the woodmen had burned the brushwood and rubbish.

This was one of the places that Sir Geoffrey had cut during the war for trench timber. The whole knoll, which rose softly on the right of the riding, was denuded and strangely forlorn. On the crown of the knoll where the oaks had stood, now was bareness; and from there you could look out over the trees to the colliery railway, and the new works at Stacks Gate. Connie had stood and looked, it was a breach in the pure seclusion of the wood. It let in the world. But she didn't tell Clifford.

This denuded place always made Clifford curiously angry. He had been through the war, had seen what it meant. But he didn't get really angry till he saw this bare hill. He was having it replanted. But it made him hate Sir Geoffrey.

Clifford sat with a fixed face as the chair slowly mounted. When they came to the top of the rise he stopped; he would not risk the long and very jolty down-slope. He sat looking at the greenish sweep of the riding downwards, a clear way through the bracken and oaks. It swerved at the bottom of the hill and disappeared; but it had such a lovely easy curve, of knights riding and ladies on palfreys.

'I consider this is really the heart of England,' said Clifford to Connie, as he sat there in the dim February sunshine.

'Do you?' she said, seating herself in her blue knitted dress, on a stump by the path.

'I do! this is the old England, the heart of it; and I intend to keep it intact.'

'Oh yes!' said Connie. But, as she said it she heard the eleven-o'clock hooters at Stacks Gate colliery. Clifford was too used to the sound to notice.

'I want this wood perfect...untouched. I want nobody to trespass in it,' said Clifford.

There was a certain pathos. The wood still had some of the mystery of wild, old England; but Sir Geoffrey's cuttings during the war had given it a blow. How still the trees were, with their crinkly, innumerable twigs against the sky, and their grey, obstinate trunks rising from the brown bracken! How safely the birds flitted among them! And once there had been deer, and archers, and monks padding along on asses. The place remembered, still remembered.

Clifford sat in the pale sun, with the light on his smooth, rather blond hair, his reddish full face inscrutable.

'I mind more, not having a son, when I come here, than any other time,' he

said.

‘But the wood is older than your family,’ said Connie gently.

‘Quite!’ said Clifford. ‘But we’ve preserved it. Except for us it would go...it would be gone already, like the rest of the forest. One must preserve some of the old England!’

‘Must one?’ said Connie. ‘If it has to be preserved, and preserved against the new England? It’s sad, I know.’

‘If some of the old England isn’t preserved, there’ll be no England at all,’ said Clifford. ‘And we who have this kind of property, and the feeling for it, must preserve it.’

There was a sad pause. ‘Yes, for a little while,’ said Connie.

‘For a little while! It’s all we can do. We can only do our bit. I feel every man of my family has done his bit here, since we’ve had the place. One may go against convention, but one must keep up tradition.’ Again there was a pause.

‘What tradition?’ asked Connie.

‘The tradition of England! of this!’

‘Yes,’ she said slowly.

‘That’s why having a son helps; one is only a link in a chain,’ he said.

Connie was not keen on chains, but she said nothing. She was thinking of the curious impersonality of his desire for a son.

‘I’m sorry we can’t have a son,’ she said.

He looked at her steadily, with his full, pale-blue eyes.

‘It would almost be a good thing if you had a child by another man, he said. ‘If we brought it up at Wragby, it would belong to us and to the place. I don’t believe very intensely in fatherhood. If we had the child to rear, it would be our own, and it would carry on. Don’t you think it’s worth considering?’

Connie looked up at him at last. The child, her child, was just an ‘it’ to him. It...it...it!

‘But what about the other man?’ she asked.

‘Does it matter very much? Do these things really affect us very deeply?...You had that lover in Germany...what is it now? Nothing almost. It seems to me that it isn’t these little acts and little connexions we make in our lives that matter so very much. They pass away, and where are they? Where...Where are the snows of yesteryear?...It’s what endures through one’s life that matters; my own life matters to me, in its long continuance and development. But what do the occasional connexions matter? And the occasional sexual connexions especially! If people don’t exaggerate them ridiculously, they pass like the mating of birds. And so they should. What does it matter? It’s the life-long companionship that matters. It’s the living together from day to day, not the sleeping together once

or twice. You and I are married, no matter what happens to us. We have the habit of each other. And habit, to my thinking, is more vital than any occasional excitement. The long, slow, enduring thing...that's what we live by...not the occasional spasm of any sort. Little by little, living together, two people fall into a sort of unison, they vibrate so intricately to one another. That's the real secret of marriage, not sex; at least not the simple function of sex. You and I are interwoven in a marriage. If we stick to that we ought to be able to arrange this sex thing, as we arrange going to the dentist; since fate has given us a checkmate physically there.'

Connie sat and listened in a sort of wonder, and a sort of fear. She did not know if he was right or not. There was Michaelis, whom she loved; so she said to herself. But her love was somehow only an excursion from her marriage with Clifford; the long, slow habit of intimacy, formed through years of suffering and patience. Perhaps the human soul needs excursions, and must not be denied them. But the point of an excursion is that you come home again.

'And wouldn't you mind what man's child I had?' she asked.

'Why, Connie, I should trust your natural instinct of decency and selection. You just wouldn't let the wrong sort of fellow touch you.'

She thought of Michaelis! He was absolutely Clifford's idea of the wrong sort of fellow.

'But men and women may have different feelings about the wrong sort of fellow,' she said.

'No,' he replied. 'You care for me. I don't believe you would ever care for a man who was purely antipathetic to me. Your rhythm wouldn't let you.'

She was silent. Logic might be unanswerable because it was so absolutely wrong.

'And should you expect me to tell you?' she asked, glancing up at him almost furtively.

'Not at all, I'd better not know...But you do agree with me, don't you, that the casual sex thing is nothing, compared to the long life lived together? Don't you think one can just subordinate the sex thing to the necessities of a long life? Just use it, since that's what we're driven to? After all, do these temporary excitements matter? Isn't the whole problem of life the slow building up of an integral personality, through the years? living an integrated life? There's no point in a disintegrated life. If lack of sex is going to disintegrate you, then go out and have a love-affair. If lack of a child is going to disintegrate you, then have a child if you possibly can. But only do these things so that you have an integrated life, that makes a long harmonious thing. And you and I can do that together...don't you think?...if we adapt ourselves to the necessities, and at the

same time weave the adaptation together into a piece with our steadily-lived life. Don't you agree?'

Connie was a little overwhelmed by his words. She knew he was right theoretically. But when she actually touched her steadily-lived life with him she...hesitated. Was it actually her destiny to go on weaving herself into his life all the rest of her life? Nothing else?

Was it just that? She was to be content to weave a steady life with him, all one fabric, but perhaps brocaded with the occasional flower of an adventure. But how could she know what she would feel next year? How could one ever know? How could one say Yes? for years and years? The little yes, gone on a breath! Why should one be pinned down by that butterfly word? Of course it had to flutter away and be gone, to be followed by other yes's and no's! Like the straying of butterflies.

'I think you're right, Clifford. And as far as I can see I agree with you. Only life may turn quite a new face on it all.'

'But until life turns a new face on it all, you do agree?'

'Oh yes! I think I do, really.'

She was watching a brown spaniel that had run out of a side-path, and was looking towards them with lifted nose, making a soft, fluffy bark. A man with a gun strode swiftly, softly out after the dog, facing their way as if about to attack them; then stopped instead, saluted, and was turning downhill. It was only the new gamekeeper, but he had frightened Connie, he seemed to emerge with such a swift menace. That was how she had seen him, like the sudden rush of a threat out of nowhere.

He was a man in dark green velveteens and gaiters...the old style, with a red face and red moustache and distant eyes. He was going quickly downhill.

'Mellors!' called Clifford.

The man faced lightly round, and saluted with a quick little gesture, a soldier!

'Will you turn the chair round and get it started? That makes it easier,' said Clifford.

The man at once slung his gun over his shoulder, and came forward with the same curious swift, yet soft movements, as if keeping invisible. He was moderately tall and lean, and was silent. He did not look at Connie at all, only at the chair.

'Connie, this is the new gamekeeper, Mellors. You haven't spoken to her ladyship yet, Mellors?'

'No, Sir!' came the ready, neutral words.

The man lifted his hat as he stood, showing his thick, almost fair hair. He stared straight into Connie's eyes, with a perfect, fearless, impersonal look, as if

he wanted to see what she was like. He made her feel shy. She bent her head to him shyly, and he changed his hat to his left hand and made her a slight bow, like a gentleman; but he said nothing at all. He remained for a moment still, with his hat in his hand.

‘But you’ve been here some time, haven’t you?’ Connie said to him.

‘Eight months, Madam...your Ladyship!’ he corrected himself calmly.

‘And do you like it?’

She looked him in the eyes. His eyes narrowed a little, with irony, perhaps with impudence.

‘Why, yes, thank you, your Ladyship! I was reared here...’

He gave another slight bow, turned, put his hat on, and strode to take hold of the chair. His voice on the last words had fallen into the heavy broad drag of the dialect...perhaps also in mockery, because there had been no trace of dialect before. He might almost be a gentleman. Anyhow, he was a curious, quick, separate fellow, alone, but sure of himself.

Clifford started the little engine, the man carefully turned the chair, and set it nose-forwards to the incline that curved gently to the dark hazel thicket.

‘Is that all then, Sir Clifford?’ asked the man.

‘No, you’d better come along in case she sticks. The engine isn’t really strong enough for the uphill work.’ The man glanced round for his dog...a thoughtful glance. The spaniel looked at him and faintly moved its tail. A little smile, mocking or teasing her, yet gentle, came into his eyes for a moment, then faded away, and his face was expressionless. They went fairly quickly down the slope, the man with his hand on the rail of the chair, steadying it. He looked like a free soldier rather than a servant. And something about him reminded Connie of Tommy Dukes.

When they came to the hazel grove, Connie suddenly ran forward, and opened the gate into the park. As she stood holding it, the two men looked at her in passing, Clifford critically, the other man with a curious, cool wonder; impersonally wanting to see what she looked like. And she saw in his blue, impersonal eyes a look of suffering and detachment, yet a certain warmth. But why was he so aloof, apart?

Clifford stopped the chair, once through the gate, and the man came quickly, courteously, to close it.

‘Why did you run to open?’ asked Clifford in his quiet, calm voice, that showed he was displeased. ‘Mellors would have done it.’

‘I thought you would go straight ahead,’ said Connie.

‘And leave you to run after us?’ said Clifford.

‘Oh, well, I like to run sometimes!’

Mellors took the chair again, looking perfectly unheeding, yet Connie felt he noted everything. As he pushed the chair up the steepish rise of the knoll in the park, he breathed rather quickly, through parted lips. He was rather frail really. Curiously full of vitality, but a little frail and quenched. Her woman's instinct sensed it.

Connie fell back, let the chair go on. The day had greyed over; the small blue sky that had poised low on its circular rims of haze was closed in again, the lid was down, there was a raw coldness. It was going to snow. All grey, all grey! the world looked worn out.

The chair waited at the top of the pink path. Clifford looked round for Connie.

'Not tired, are you?' he said.

'Oh, no!' she said.

But she was. A strange, weary yearning, a dissatisfaction had started in her. Clifford did not notice: those were not things he was aware of. But the stranger knew. To Connie, everything in her world and life seemed worn out, and her dissatisfaction was older than the hills.

They came to the house, and around to the back, where there were no steps. Clifford managed to swing himself over on to the low, wheeled house-chair; he was very strong and agile with his arms. Then Connie lifted the burden of his dead legs after him.

The keeper, waiting at attention to be dismissed, watched everything narrowly, missing nothing. He went pale, with a sort of fear, when he saw Connie lifting the inert legs of the man in her arms, into the other chair, Clifford pivoting round as she did so. He was frightened.

'Thanks, then, for the help, Mellors,' said Clifford casually, as he began to wheel down the passage to the servants' quarters.

'Nothing else, Sir?' came the neutral voice, like one in a dream.

'Nothing, good morning!'

'Good morning, Sir.'

'Good morning! it was kind of you to push the chair up that hill...I hope it wasn't heavy for you,' said Connie, looking back at the keeper outside the door.

His eyes came to hers in an instant, as if wakened up. He was aware of her.

'Oh no, not heavy!' he said quickly. Then his voice dropped again into the broad sound of the vernacular: 'Good mornin' to your Ladyship!'

'Who is your gamekeeper?' Connie asked at lunch.

'Mellors! You saw him,' said Clifford.

'Yes, but where did he come from?'

'Nowhere! He was a Tevershall boy...son of a collier, I believe.'

'And was he a collier himself?'

‘Blacksmith on the pit-bank, I believe: overhead smith. But he was keeper here for two years before the war...before he joined up. My father always had a good opinion of him, so when he came back, and went to the pit for a blacksmith’s job, I just took him back here as keeper. I was really very glad to get him...its almost impossible to find a good man round here for a gamekeeper...and it needs a man who knows the people.’

‘And isn’t he married?’

‘He was. But his wife went off with...with various men...but finally with a collier at Stacks Gate, and I believe she’s living there still.’

‘So this man is alone?’

‘More or less! He has a mother in the village...and a child, I believe.’

Clifford looked at Connie, with his pale, slightly prominent blue eyes, in which a certain vagueness was coming. He seemed alert in the foreground, but the background was like the Midlands atmosphere, haze, smoky mist. And the haze seemed to be creeping forward. So when he stared at Connie in his peculiar way, giving her his peculiar, precise information, she felt all the background of his mind filling up with mist, with nothingness. And it frightened her. It made him seem impersonal, almost to idiocy.

And dimly she realized one of the great laws of the human soul: that when the emotional soul receives a wounding shock, which does not kill the body, the soul seems to recover as the body recovers. But this is only appearance. It is really only the mechanism of the re-assumed habit. Slowly, slowly the wound to the soul begins to make itself felt, like a bruise, which only slowly deepens its terrible ache, till it fills all the psyche. And when we think we have recovered and forgotten, it is then that the terrible after-effects have to be encountered at their worst.

So it was with Clifford. Once he was ‘well’, once he was back at Wragby, and writing his stories, and feeling sure of life, in spite of all, he seemed to forget, and to have recovered all his equanimity. But now, as the years went by, slowly, slowly, Connie felt the bruise of fear and horror coming up, and spreading in him. For a time it had been so deep as to be numb, as it were non-existent. Now slowly it began to assert itself in a spread of fear, almost paralysis. Mentally he still was alert. But the paralysis, the bruise of the too-great shock, was gradually spreading in his affective self.

And as it spread in him, Connie felt it spread in her. An inward dread, an emptiness, an indifference to everything gradually spread in her soul. When Clifford was roused, he could still talk brilliantly and, as it were, command the future: as when, in the wood, he talked about her having a child, and giving an heir to Wragby. But the day after, all the brilliant words seemed like dead leaves,

crumpling up and turning to powder, meaning really nothing, blown away on any gust of wind. They were not the leafy words of an effective life, young with energy and belonging to the tree. They were the hosts of fallen leaves of a life that is ineffectual.

So it seemed to her everywhere. The colliers at Tevershall were talking again of a strike, and it seemed to Connie there again it was not a manifestation of energy, it was the bruise of the war that had been in abeyance, slowly rising to the surface and creating the great ache of unrest, and stupor of discontent. The bruise was deep, deep, deep...the bruise of the false inhuman war. It would take many years for the living blood of the generations to dissolve the vast black clot of bruised blood, deep inside their souls and bodies. And it would need a new hope.

Poor Connie! As the years drew on it was the fear of nothingness in her life that affected her. Clifford's mental life and hers gradually began to feel like nothingness. Their marriage, their integrated life based on a habit of intimacy, that he talked about: there were days when it all became utterly blank and nothing. It was words, just so many words. The only reality was nothingness, and over it a hypocrisy of words.

There was Clifford's success: the bitch-goddess! It was true he was almost famous, and his books brought him in a thousand pounds. His photograph appeared everywhere. There was a bust of him in one of the galleries, and a portrait of him in two galleries. He seemed the most modern of modern voices. With his uncanny lame instinct for publicity, he had become in four or five years one of the best known of the young 'intellectuals'. Where the intellect came in, Connie did not quite see. Clifford was really clever at that slightly humorous analysis of people and motives which leaves everything in bits at the end. But it was rather like puppies tearing the sofa cushions to bits; except that it was not young and playful, but curiously old, and rather obstinately conceited. It was weird and it was nothing. This was the feeling that echoed and re-echoed at the bottom of Connie's soul: it was all flag, a wonderful display of nothingness; At the same time a display. A display! a display! a display!

Michaelis had seized upon Clifford as the central figure for a play; already he had sketched in the plot, and written the first act. For Michaelis was even better than Clifford at making a display of nothingness. It was the last bit of passion left in these men: the passion for making a display. Sexually they were passionless, even dead. And now it was not money that Michaelis was after. Clifford had never been primarily out for money, though he made it where he could, for money is the seal and stamp of success. And success was what they wanted. They wanted, both of them, to make a real display...a man's own very

display of himself that should capture for a time the vast populace.

It was strange...the prostitution to the bitch-goddess. To Connie, since she was really outside of it, and since she had grown numb to the thrill of it, it was again nothingness. Even the prostitution to the bitch-goddess was nothingness, though the men prostituted themselves innumerable times. Nothingness even that.

Michaelis wrote to Clifford about the play. Of course she knew about it long ago. And Clifford was again thrilled. He was going to be displayed again this time, somebody was going to display him, and to advantage. He invited Michaelis down to Wragby with Act I.

Michaelis came: in summer, in a pale-coloured suit and white suede gloves, with mauve orchids for Connie, very lovely, and Act I was a great success. Even Connie was thrilled...thrilled to what bit of marrow she had left. And Michaelis, thrilled by his power to thrill, was really wonderful...and quite beautiful, in Connie's eyes. She saw in him that ancient motionlessness of a race that can't be disillusioned any more, an extreme, perhaps, of impurity that is pure. On the far side of his supreme prostitution to the bitch-goddess he seemed pure, pure as an African ivory mask that dreams impurity into purity, in its ivory curves and planes.

His moment of sheer thrill with the two Chatterleys, when he simply carried Connie and Clifford away, was one of the supreme moments of Michaelis' life. He had succeeded: he had carried them away. Even Clifford was temporarily in love with him...if that is the way one can put it.

So next morning Mick was more uneasy than ever; restless, devoured, with his hands restless in his trousers pockets. Connie had not visited him in the night...and he had not known where to find her. Coquetry!...at his moment of triumph.

He went up to her sitting-room in the morning. She knew he would come. And his restlessness was evident. He asked her about his play...did she think it good? He had to hear it praised: that affected him with the last thin thrill of passion beyond any sexual orgasm. And she praised it rapturously. Yet all the while, at the bottom of her soul, she knew it was nothing.

'Look here!' he said suddenly at last. 'Why don't you and I make a clean thing of it? Why don't we marry?'

'But I am married,' she said, amazed, and yet feeling nothing.

'Oh that!...he'll divorce you all right...Why don't you and I marry? I want to marry. I know it would be the best thing for me...marry and lead a regular life. I lead the deuce of a life, simply tearing myself to pieces. Look here, you and I, we're made for one another...hand and glove. Why don't we marry? Do you see any reason why we shouldn't?'

Connie looked at him amazed: and yet she felt nothing. These men, they were all alike, they left everything out. They just went off from the top of their heads as if they were squibs, and expected you to be carried heavenwards along with their own thin sticks.

‘But I am married already,’ she said. ‘I can’t leave Clifford, you know.’

‘Why not? but why not?’ he cried. ‘He’ll hardly know you’ve gone, after six months. He doesn’t know that anybody exists, except himself. Why the man has no use for you at all, as far as I can see; he’s entirely wrapped up in himself.’

Connie felt there was truth in this. But she also felt that Mick was hardly making a display of selflessness.

‘Aren’t all men wrapped up in themselves?’ she asked.

‘Oh, more or less, I allow. A man’s got to be, to get through. But that’s not the point. The point is, what sort of a time can a man give a woman? Can he give her a damn good time, or can’t he? If he can’t he’s no right to the woman...’ He paused and gazed at her with his full, hazel eyes, almost hypnotic. ‘Now I consider,’ he added, ‘I can give a woman the darndest good time she can ask for. I think I can guarantee myself.’

‘And what sort of a good time?’ asked Connie, gazing on him still with a sort of amazement, that looked like thrill; and underneath feeling nothing at all.

‘Every sort of a good time, damn it, every sort! Dress, jewels up to a point, any nightclub you like, know anybody you want to know, live the pace...travel and be somebody wherever you go...Darn it, every sort of good time.’

He spoke it almost in a brilliancy of triumph, and Connie looked at him as if dazzled, and really feeling nothing at all. Hardly even the surface of her mind was tickled at the glowing prospects he offered her. Hardly even her most outside self responded, that at any other time would have been thrilled. She just got no feeling from it, she couldn’t ‘go off’. She just sat and stared and looked dazzled, and felt nothing, only somewhere she smelt the extraordinarily unpleasant smell of the bitch-goddess.

Mick sat on tenterhooks, leaning forward in his chair, glaring at her almost hysterically: and whether he was more anxious out of vanity for her to say Yes! or whether he was more panic-stricken for fear she should say Yes! — who can tell?

‘I should have to think about it,’ she said. ‘I couldn’t say now. It may seem to you Clifford doesn’t count, but he does. When you think how disabled he is...’

‘Oh damn it all! If a fellow’s going to trade on his disabilities, I might begin to say how lonely I am, and always have been, and all the rest of the my-eye-Betty-Martin sob-stuff! Damn it all, if a fellow’s got nothing but disabilities to recommend him...’

He turned aside, working his hands furiously in his trousers pockets. That evening he said to her:

‘You’re coming round to my room tonight, aren’t you? I don’t darn know where your room is.’

‘All right!’ she said.

He was a more excited lover that night, with his strange, small boy’s frail nakedness. Connie found it impossible to come to her crisis before he had really finished his. And he roused a certain craving passion in her, with his little boy’s nakedness and softness; she had to go on after he had finished, in the wild tumult and heaving of her loins, while he heroically kept himself up, and present in her, with all his will and self-offering, till she brought about her own crisis, with weird little cries.

When at last he drew away from her, he said, in a bitter, almost sneering little voice:

‘You couldn’t go off at the same time as a man, could you? You’d have to bring yourself off! You’d have to run the show!’

This little speech, at the moment, was one of the shocks of her life. Because that passive sort of giving himself was so obviously his only real mode of intercourse.

‘What do you mean?’ she said.

‘You know what I mean. You keep on for hours after I’ve gone off...and I have to hang on with my teeth till you bring yourself off by your own exertions.’

She was stunned by this unexpected piece of brutality, at the moment when she was glowing with a sort of pleasure beyond words, and a sort of love for him. Because, after all, like so many modern men, he was finished almost before he had begun. And that forced the woman to be active.

‘But you want me to go on, to get my own satisfaction?’ she said.

He laughed grimly: ‘I want it!’ he said. ‘That’s good! I want to hang on with my teeth clenched, while you go for me!’

‘But don’t you?’ she insisted.

He avoided the question. ‘All the darned women are like that,’ he said. ‘Either they don’t go off at all, as if they were dead in there...or else they wait till a chap’s really done, and then they start in to bring themselves off, and a chap’s got to hang on. I never had a woman yet who went off just at the same moment as I did.’

Connie only half heard this piece of novel, masculine information. She was only stunned by his feeling against her...his incomprehensible brutality. She felt so innocent.

‘But you want me to have my satisfaction too, don’t you?’ she repeated.

‘Oh, all right! I’m quite willing. But I’m darned if hanging on waiting for a woman to go off is much of a game for a man...’

This speech was one of the crucial blows of Connie’s life. It killed something in her. She had not been so very keen on Michaelis; till he started it, she did not want him. It was as if she never positively wanted him. But once he had started her, it seemed only natural for her to come to her own crisis with him. Almost she had loved him for it...almost that night she loved him, and wanted to marry him.

Perhaps instinctively he knew it, and that was why he had to bring down the whole show with a smash; the house of cards. Her whole sexual feeling for him, or for any man, collapsed that night. Her life fell apart from his as completely as if he had never existed.

And she went through the days drearily. There was nothing now but this empty treadmill of what Clifford called the integrated life, the long living together of two people, who are in the habit of being in the same house with one another.

Nothingness! To accept the great nothingness of life seemed to be the one end of living. All the many busy and important little things that make up the grand sum-total of nothingness!

CHAPTER 6

‘Why don’t men and women really like one another nowadays?’ Connie asked Tommy Dukes, who was more or less her oracle.

‘Oh, but they do! I don’t think since the human species was invented, there has ever been a time when men and women have liked one another as much as they do today. Genuine liking! Take myself. I really like women better than men; they are braver, one can be more frank with them.’

Connie pondered this.

‘Ah, yes, but you never have anything to do with them!’ she said.

‘I? What am I doing but talking perfectly sincerely to a woman at this moment?’

‘Yes, talking...’

‘And what more could I do if you were a man, than talk perfectly sincerely to you?’

‘Nothing perhaps. But a woman...’

‘A woman wants you to like her and talk to her, and at the same time love her and desire her; and it seems to me the two things are mutually exclusive.’

‘But they shouldn’t be!’

‘No doubt water ought not to be so wet as it is; it overdoes it in wetness. But there it is! I like women and talk to them, and therefore I don’t love them and desire them. The two things don’t happen at the same time in me.’

‘I think they ought to.’

‘All right. The fact that things ought to be something else than what they are, is not my department.’

Connie considered this. ‘It isn’t true,’ she said. ‘Men can love women and talk to them. I don’t see how they can love them without talking, and being friendly and intimate. How can they?’

‘Well,’ he said, ‘I don’t know. What’s the use of my generalizing? I only know my own case. I like women, but I don’t desire them. I like talking to them; but talking to them, though it makes me intimate in one direction, sets me poles apart from them as far as kissing is concerned. So there you are! But don’t take me as a general example, probably I’m just a special case: one of the men who like women, but don’t love women, and even hate them if they force me into a pretence of love, or an entangled appearance.’

‘But doesn’t it make you sad?’

‘Why should it? Not a bit! I look at Charlie May, and the rest of the men who have affairs...No, I don’t envy them a bit! If fate sent me a woman I wanted, well and good. Since I don’t know any woman I want, and never see one...why, I presume I’m cold, and really like some women very much.’

‘Do you like me?’

‘Very much! And you see there’s no question of kissing between us, is there?’

‘None at all!’ said Connie. ‘But oughtn’t there to be?’

‘Why, in God’s name? I like Clifford, but what would you say if I went and kissed him?’

‘But isn’t there a difference?’

‘Where does it lie, as far as we’re concerned? We’re all intelligent human beings, and the male and female business is in abeyance. Just in abeyance. How would you like me to start acting up like a continental male at this moment, and parading the sex thing?’

‘I should hate it.’

‘Well then! I tell you, if I’m really a male thing at all, I never run across the female of my species. And I don’t miss her, I just like women. Who’s going to force me into loving or pretending to love them, working up the sex game?’

‘No, I’m not. But isn’t something wrong?’

‘You may feel it, I don’t.’

‘Yes, I feel something is wrong between men and women. A woman has no glamour for a man any more.’

‘Has a man for a woman?’

She pondered the other side of the question.

‘Not much,’ she said truthfully.

‘Then let’s leave it all alone, and just be decent and simple, like proper human beings with one another. Be damned to the artificial sex-compulsion! I refuse it!’

Connie knew he was right, really. Yet it left her feeling so forlorn, so forlorn and stray. Like a chip on a dreary pond, she felt. What was the point, of her or anything?

It was her youth which rebelled. These men seemed so old and cold. Everything seemed old and cold. And Michaelis let one down so; he was no good. The men didn’t want one; they just didn’t really want a woman, even Michaelis didn’t.

And the bounders who pretended they did, and started working the sex game, they were worse than ever.

It was just dismal, and one had to put up with it. It was quite true, men had no real glamour for a woman: if you could fool yourself into thinking they had, even as she had fooled herself over Michaelis, that was the best you could do.

Meanwhile you just lived on and there was nothing to it. She understood perfectly well why people had cocktail parties, and jazzed, and Charlestoned till they were ready to drop. You had to take it out some way or other, your youth, or it ate you up. But what a ghastly thing, this youth! You felt as old as Methuselah, and yet the thing fizzed somehow, and didn't let you be comfortable. A mean sort of life! And no prospect! She almost wished she had gone off with Mick, and made her life one long cocktail party, and jazz evening. Anyhow that was better than just mooning yourself into the grave.

On one of her bad days she went out alone to walk in the wood, ponderously, heeding nothing, not even noticing where she was. The report of a gun not far off startled and angered her.

Then, as she went, she heard voices, and recoiled. People! She didn't want people. But her quick ear caught another sound, and she roused; it was a child sobbing. At once she attended; someone was ill-treating a child. She strode swinging down the wet drive, her sullen resentment uppermost. She felt just prepared to make a scene.

Turning the corner, she saw two figures in the drive beyond her: the keeper, and a little girl in a purple coat and moleskin cap, crying.

'Ah, shut it up, tha false little bitch!' came the man's angry voice, and the child sobbed louder.

Constance strode nearer, with blazing eyes. The man turned and looked at her, saluting coolly, but he was pale with anger.

'What's the matter? Why is she crying?' demanded Constance, peremptory but a little breathless.

A faint smile like a sneer came on the man's face. 'Nay, yo mun ax 'er,' he replied callously, in broad vernacular.

Connie felt as if he had hit her in the face, and she changed colour. Then she gathered her defiance, and looked at him, her dark blue eyes blazing rather vaguely.

'I asked you,' she panted.

He gave a queer little bow, lifting his hat. 'You did, your Ladyship,' he said; then, with a return to the vernacular: 'but I canna tell yer.' And he became a soldier, inscrutable, only pale with annoyance.

Connie turned to the child, a ruddy, black-haired thing of nine or ten. 'What is it, dear? Tell me why you're crying!' she said, with the conventionalized sweetness suitable. More violent sobs, self-conscious. Still more sweetness on Connie's part.

'There, there, don't you cry! Tell me what they've done to you!'...an intense tenderness of tone. At the same time she felt in the pocket of her knitted jacket,

and luckily found a sixpence.

‘Don’t you cry then!’ she said, bending in front of the child. ‘See what I’ve got for you!’

Sobs, snuffles, a fist taken from a blubbered face, and a black shrewd eye cast for a second on the sixpence. Then more sobs, but subduing. ‘There, tell me what’s the matter, tell me!’ said Connie, putting the coin into the child’s chubby hand, which closed over it.

‘It’s the...it’s the...pussy!’

Shudders of subsiding sobs.

‘What pussy, dear?’

After a silence the shy fist, clenching on sixpence, pointed into the bramble brake.

‘There!’

Connie looked, and there, sure enough, was a big black cat, stretched out grimly, with a bit of blood on it.

‘Oh!’ she said in repulsion.

‘A poacher, your Ladyship,’ said the man satirically.

She glanced at him angrily. ‘No wonder the child cried,’ she said, ‘if you shot it when she was there. No wonder she cried!’

He looked into Connie’s eyes, laconic, contemptuous, not hiding his feelings. And again Connie flushed; she felt she had been making a scene, the man did not respect her.

‘What is your name?’ she said playfully to the child. ‘Won’t you tell me your name?’

Sniffs; then very affectedly in a piping voice: ‘Connie Mellors!’

‘Connie Mellors! Well, that’s a nice name! And did you come out with your Daddy, and he shot a pussy? But it was a bad pussy!’

The child looked at her, with bold, dark eyes of scrutiny, sizing her up, and her condolence.

‘I wanted to stop with my Gran,’ said the little girl.

‘Did you? But where is your Gran?’

The child lifted an arm, pointing down the drive. ‘At th’ cottidge.’

‘At the cottage! And would you like to go back to her?’

Sudden, shuddering quivers of reminiscent sobs. ‘Yes!’

‘Come then, shall I take you? Shall I take you to your Gran? Then your Daddy can do what he has to do.’ She turned to the man. ‘It is your little girl, isn’t it?’

He saluted, and made a slight movement of the head in affirmation.

‘I suppose I can take her to the cottage?’ asked Connie.

‘If your Ladyship wishes.’

Again he looked into her eyes, with that calm, searching detached glance. A man very much alone, and on his own.

‘Would you like to come with me to the cottage, to your Gran, dear?’

The child peeped up again. ‘Yes!’ she simpered.

Connie disliked her; the spoilt, false little female. Nevertheless she wiped her face and took her hand. The keeper saluted in silence.

‘Good morning!’ said Connie.

It was nearly a mile to the cottage, and Connie senior was well bored by Connie junior by the time the game-keeper’s picturesque little home was in sight. The child was already as full to the brim with tricks as a little monkey, and so self-assured.

At the cottage the door stood open, and there was a rattling heard inside. Connie lingered, the child slipped her hand, and ran indoors.

‘Gran! Gran!’

‘Why, are yer back a’ready!’

The grandmother had been blackleading the stove, it was Saturday morning. She came to the door in her sacking apron, a blacklead-brush in her hand, and a black smudge on her nose. She was a little, rather dry woman.

‘Why, whatever?’ she said, hastily wiping her arm across her face as she saw Connie standing outside.

‘Good morning!’ said Connie. ‘She was crying, so I just brought her home.’

The grandmother looked around swiftly at the child:

‘Why, wheer was yer Dad?’

The little girl clung to her grandmother’s skirts and simpered.

‘He was there,’ said Connie, ‘but he’d shot a poaching cat, and the child was upset.’

‘Oh, you’d no right t’ave bothered, Lady Chatterley, I’m sure! I’m sure it was very good of you, but you shouldn’t ‘ave bothered. Why, did ever you see!’ — and the old woman turned to the child: ‘Fancy Lady Chatterley takin’ all that trouble over yer! Why, she shouldn’t ‘ave bothered!’

‘It was no bother, just a walk,’ said Connie smiling.

‘Why, I’m sure ‘twas very kind of you, I must say! So she was crying! I knew there’d be something afore they got far. She’s frightened of ‘im, that’s wheer it is. Seems ‘e’s almost a stranger to ‘er, fair a stranger, and I don’t think they’re two as’d hit it off very easy. He’s got funny ways.’

Connie didn’t know what to say.

‘Look, Gran!’ simpered the child.

The old woman looked down at the sixpence in the little girl’s hand.

‘An’ sixpence an’ all! Oh, your Ladyship, you shouldn’t, you shouldn’t. Why,

isn't Lady Chatterley good to yer! My word, you're a lucky girl this morning!'

She pronounced the name, as all the people did: Chat'ley. — Isn't Lady Chat'ley good to you!' — Connie couldn't help looking at the old woman's nose, and the latter again vaguely wiped her face with the back of her wrist, but missed the smudge.

Connie was moving away 'Well, thank you ever so much, Lady Chat'ley, I'm sure. Say thank you to Lady Chat'ley!' — this last to the child.

'Thank you,' piped the child.

'There's a dear!' laughed Connie, and she moved away, saying 'Good morning', heartily relieved to get away from the contact.

Curious, she thought, that that thin, proud man should have that little, sharp woman for a mother!

And the old woman, as soon as Connie had gone, rushed to the bit of mirror in the scullery, and looked at her face. Seeing it, she stamped her foot with impatience. 'Of course she had to catch me in my coarse apron, and a dirty face! Nice idea she'd get of me!'

Connie went slowly home to Wragby. 'Home!'...it was a warm word to use for that great, weary warren. But then it was a word that had had its day. It was somehow cancelled. All the great words, it seemed to Connie, were cancelled for her generation: love, joy, happiness, home, mother, father, husband, all these great, dynamic words were half dead now, and dying from day to day. Home was a place you lived in, love was a thing you didn't fool yourself about, joy was a word you applied to a good Charleston, happiness was a term of hypocrisy used to bluff other people, a father was an individual who enjoyed his own existence, a husband was a man you lived with and kept going in spirits. As for sex, the last of the great words, it was just a cocktail term for an excitement that bucked you up for a while, then left you more raggy than ever. Frayed! It was as if the very material you were made of was cheap stuff, and was fraying out to nothing.

All that really remained was a stubborn stoicism: and in that there was a certain pleasure. In the very experience of the nothingness of life, phase after phase, tape after tape, there was a certain grisly satisfaction. So that's that! Always this was the last utterance: home, love, marriage, Michaelis: So that's that! And when one died, the last words to life would be: So that's that!

Money? Perhaps one couldn't say the same there. Money one always wanted. Money, Success, the bitch-goddess, as Tommy Dukes persisted in calling it, after Henry James, that was a permanent necessity. You couldn't spend your last sou, and say finally: So that's that! No, if you lived even another ten minutes, you wanted a few more sous for something or other. Just to keep the business

mechanically going, you needed money. You had to have it. Money you have to have. You needn't really have anything else. So that's that!

Since, of course, it's not your own fault you are alive. Once you are alive, money is a necessity, and the only absolute necessity. All the rest you can get along without, at a pinch. But not money. Emphatically, that's that!

She thought of Michaelis, and the money she might have had with him; and even that she didn't want. She preferred the lesser amount which she helped Clifford to make by his writing. That she actually helped to make. — 'Clifford and I together, we make twelve hundred a year out of writing'; so she put it to herself. Make money! Make it! Out of nowhere. Wring it out of the thin air! The last feat to be humanly proud of! The rest all-my-eye-Betty-Martin.

So she plodded home to Clifford, to join forces with him again, to make another story out of nothingness: and a story meant money. Clifford seemed to care very much whether his stories were considered first-class literature or not. Strictly, she didn't care. Nothing in it! said her father. Twelve hundred pounds last year! was the retort simple and final.

If you were young, you just set your teeth, and bit on and held on, till the money began to flow from the invisible; it was a question of power. It was a question of will; a subtle, subtle, powerful emanation of will out of yourself brought back to you the mysterious nothingness of money a word on a bit of paper. It was a sort of magic, certainly it was triumph. The bitch-goddess! Well, if one had to prostitute oneself, let it be to a bitch-goddess! One could always despise her even while one prostituted oneself to her, which was good.

Clifford, of course, had still many childish taboos and fetishes. He wanted to be thought 'really good', which was all cock-a-hoopy nonsense. What was really good was what actually caught on. It was no good being really good and getting left with it. It seemed as if most of the 'really good' men just missed the bus. After all you only lived one life, and if you missed the bus, you were just left on the pavement, along with the rest of the failures.

Connie was contemplating a winter in London with Clifford, next winter. He and she had caught the bus all right, so they might as well ride on top for a bit, and show it.

The worst of it was, Clifford tended to become vague, absent, and to fall into fits of vacant depression. It was the wound to his psyche coming out. But it made Connie want to scream. Oh God, if the mechanism of the consciousness itself was going to go wrong, then what was one to do? Hang it all, one did one's bit! Was one to be let down absolutely?

Sometimes she wept bitterly, but even as she wept she was saying to herself: Silly fool, wetting hankies! As if that would get you anywhere!

Since Michaelis, she had made up her mind she wanted nothing. That seemed the simplest solution of the otherwise insoluble. She wanted nothing more than what she'd got; only she wanted to get ahead with what she'd got: Clifford, the stories, Wragby, the Lady-Chatterley business, money and fame, such as it was...she wanted to go ahead with it all. Love, sex, all that sort of stuff, just water-ices! Lick it up and forget it. If you don't hang on to it in your mind, it's nothing. Sex especially...nothing! Make up your mind to it, and you've solved the problem. Sex and a cocktail: they both lasted about as long, had the same effect, and amounted to about the same thing.

But a child, a baby! That was still one of the sensations. She would venture very gingerly on that experiment. There was the man to consider, and it was curious, there wasn't a man in the world whose children you wanted. Mick's children! Repulsive thought! As lief have a child to a rabbit! Tommy Dukes? he was very nice, but somehow you couldn't associate him with a baby, another generation. He ended in himself. And out of all the rest of Clifford's pretty wide acquaintance, there was not a man who did not rouse her contempt, when she thought of having a child by him. There were several who would have been quite possible as lover, even Mick. But to let them breed a child on you! Ugh! Humiliation and abomination.

So that was that!

Nevertheless, Connie had the child at the back of her mind. Wait! wait! She would sift the generations of men through her sieve, and see if she couldn't find one who would do. — 'Go ye into the streets and by ways of Jerusalem, and see if you can find a man.' It had been impossible to find a man in the Jerusalem of the prophet, though there were thousands of male humans. But a man! c'est une autre chose!

She had an idea that he would have to be a foreigner: not an Englishman, still less an Irishman. A real foreigner.

But wait! wait! Next winter she would get Clifford to London; the following winter she would get him abroad to the South of France, Italy. Wait! She was in no hurry about the child. That was her own private affair, and the one point on which, in her own queer, female way, she was serious to the bottom of her soul. She was not going to risk any chance comer, not she! One might take a lover almost at any moment, but a man who should beget a child on one...wait! wait! it's a very different matter. — 'Go ye into the streets and byways of Jerusalem...' It was not a question of love; it was a question of a man. Why, one might even rather hate him, personally. Yet if he was the man, what would one's personal hate matter? This business concerned another part of oneself.

It had rained as usual, and the paths were too sodden for Clifford's chair, but

Connie would go out. She went out alone every day now, mostly in the wood, where she was really alone. She saw nobody there.

This day, however, Clifford wanted to send a message to the keeper, and as the boy was laid up with influenza, somebody always seemed to have influenza at Wragby, Connie said she would call at the cottage.

The air was soft and dead, as if all the world were slowly dying. Grey and clammy and silent, even from the shuffling of the collieries, for the pits were working short time, and today they were stopped altogether. The end of all things!

In the wood all was utterly inert and motionless, only great drops fell from the bare boughs, with a hollow little crash. For the rest, among the old trees was depth within depth of grey, hopeless inertia, silence, nothingness.

Connie walked dimly on. From the old wood came an ancient melancholy, somehow soothing to her, better than the harsh insentience of the outer world. She liked the inwardness of the remnant of forest, the unspeaking reticence of the old trees. They seemed a very power of silence, and yet a vital presence. They, too, were waiting: obstinately, stoically waiting, and giving off a potency of silence. Perhaps they were only waiting for the end; to be cut down, cleared away, the end of the forest, for them the end of all things. But perhaps their strong and aristocratic silence, the silence of strong trees, meant something else.

As she came out of the wood on the north side, the keeper's cottage, a rather dark, brown stone cottage, with gables and a handsome chimney, looked uninhabited, it was so silent and alone. But a thread of smoke rose from the chimney, and the little railed-in garden in the front of the house was dug and kept very tidy. The door was shut.

Now she was here she felt a little shy of the man, with his curious far-seeing eyes. She did not like bringing him orders, and felt like going away again. She knocked softly, no one came. She knocked again, but still not loudly. There was no answer. She peeped through the window, and saw the dark little room, with its almost sinister privacy, not wanting to be invaded.

She stood and listened, and it seemed to her she heard sounds from the back of the cottage. Having failed to make herself heard, her mettle was roused, she would not be defeated.

So she went round the side of the house. At the back of the cottage the land rose steeply, so the back yard was sunken, and enclosed by a low stone wall. She turned the corner of the house and stopped. In the little yard two paces beyond her, the man was washing himself, utterly unaware. He was naked to the hips, his velveteen breeches slipping down over his slender loins. And his white slim back was curved over a big bowl of soapy water, in which he ducked his head,

shaking his head with a queer, quick little motion, lifting his slender white arms, and pressing the soapy water from his ears, quick, subtle as a weasel playing with water, and utterly alone. Connie backed away round the corner of the house, and hurried away to the wood. In spite of herself, she had had a shock. After all, merely a man washing himself, commonplace enough, Heaven knows!

Yet in some curious way it was a visionary experience: it had hit her in the middle of the body. She saw the clumsy breeches slipping down over the pure, delicate, white loins, the bones showing a little, and the sense of aloneness, of a creature purely alone, overwhelmed her. Perfect, white, solitary nudity of a creature that lives alone, and inwardly alone. And beyond that, a certain beauty of a pure creature. Not the stuff of beauty, not even the body of beauty, but a lambency, the warm, white flame of a single life, revealing itself in contours that one might touch: a body!

Connie had received the shock of vision in her womb, and she knew it; it lay inside her. But with her mind she was inclined to ridicule. A man washing himself in a back yard! No doubt with evil-smelling yellow soap! She was rather annoyed; why should she be made to stumble on these vulgar privacies?

So she walked away from herself, but after a while she sat down on a stump. She was too confused to think. But in the coil of her confusion, she was determined to deliver her message to the fellow. She would not be balked. She must give him time to dress himself, but not time to go out. He was probably preparing to go out somewhere.

So she sauntered slowly back, listening. As she came near, the cottage looked just the same. A dog barked, and she knocked at the door, her heart beating in spite of herself.

She heard the man coming lightly downstairs. He opened the door quickly, and startled her. He looked uneasy himself, but instantly a laugh came on his face.

‘Lady Chatterley!’ he said. ‘Will you come in?’

His manner was so perfectly easy and good, she stepped over the threshold into the rather dreary little room.

‘I only called with a message from Sir Clifford,’ she said in her soft, rather breathless voice.

The man was looking at her with those blue, all-seeing eyes of his, which made her turn her face aside a little. He thought her comely, almost beautiful, in her shyness, and he took command of the situation himself at once.

‘Would you care to sit down?’ he asked, presuming she would not. The door stood open.

‘No thanks! Sir Clifford wondered if you would and she delivered her

message, looking unconsciously into his eyes again. And now his eyes looked warm and kind, particularly to a woman, wonderfully warm, and kind, and at ease.

‘Very good, your Ladyship. I will see to it at once.’

Taking an order, his whole self had changed, glazed over with a sort of hardness and distance. Connie hesitated, she ought to go. But she looked round the clean, tidy, rather dreary little sitting-room with something like dismay.

‘Do you live here quite alone?’ she asked.

‘Quite alone, your Ladyship.’

‘But your mother...?’

‘She lives in her own cottage in the village.’

‘With the child?’ asked Connie.

‘With the child!’

And his plain, rather worn face took on an indefinable look of derision. It was a face that changed all the time, baking.

‘No,’ he said, seeing Connie stand at a loss, ‘my mother comes and cleans up for me on Saturdays; I do the rest myself.’

Again Connie looked at him. His eyes were smiling again, a little mockingly, but warm and blue, and somehow kind. She wondered at him. He was in trousers and flannel shirt and a grey tie, his hair soft and damp, his face rather pale and worn-looking. When the eyes ceased to laugh they looked as if they had suffered a great deal, still without losing their warmth. But a pallor of isolation came over him, she was not really there for him.

She wanted to say so many things, and she said nothing. Only she looked up at him again, and remarked:

‘I hope I didn’t disturb you?’

The faint smile of mockery narrowed his eyes.

‘Only combing my hair, if you don’t mind. I’m sorry I hadn’t a coat on, but then I had no idea who was knocking. Nobody knocks here, and the unexpected sounds ominous.’

He went in front of her down the garden path to hold the gate. In his shirt, without the clumsy velveteen coat, she saw again how slender he was, thin, stooping a little. Yet, as she passed him, there was something young and bright in his fair hair, and his quick eyes. He would be a man about thirty-seven or eight.

She plodded on into the wood, knowing he was looking after her; he upset her so much, in spite of herself.

And he, as he went indoors, was thinking: ‘She’s nice, she’s real! She’s nicer than she knows.’

She wondered very much about him; he seemed so unlike a game-keeper, so unlike a working-man anyhow; although he had something in common with the local people. But also something very uncommon.

‘The game-keeper, Mellors, is a curious kind of person,’ she said to Clifford; ‘he might almost be a gentleman.’

‘Might he?’ said Clifford. ‘I hadn’t noticed.’

‘But isn’t there something special about him?’ Connie insisted.

‘I think he’s quite a nice fellow, but I know very little about him. He only came out of the army last year, less than a year ago. From India, I rather think. He may have picked up certain tricks out there, perhaps he was an officer’s servant, and improved on his position. Some of the men were like that. But it does them no good, they have to fall back into their old places when they get home again.’

Connie gazed at Clifford contemplatively. She saw in him the peculiar tight rebuff against anyone of the lower classes who might be really climbing up, which she knew was characteristic of his breed.

‘But don’t you think there is something special about him?’ she asked.

‘Frankly, no! Nothing I had noticed.’

He looked at her curiously, uneasily, half-suspiciously. And she felt he wasn’t telling her the real truth; he wasn’t telling himself the real truth, that was it. He disliked any suggestion of a really exceptional human being. People must be more or less at his level, or below it.

Connie felt again the tightness, niggardliness of the men of her generation. They were so tight, so scared of life!

CHAPTER 7

When Connie went up to her bedroom she did what she had not done for a long time: took off all her clothes, and looked at herself naked in the huge mirror. She did not know what she was looking for, or at, very definitely, yet she moved the lamp till it shone full on her.

And she thought, as she had thought so often, what a frail, easily hurt, rather pathetic thing a human body is, naked; somehow a little unfinished, incomplete!

She had been supposed to have rather a good figure, but now she was out of fashion: a little too female, not enough like an adolescent boy. She was not very tall, a bit Scottish and short; but she had a certain fluent, down-slipping grace that might have been beauty. Her skin was faintly tawny, her limbs had a certain stillness, her body should have had a full, down-slipping richness; but it lacked something.

Instead of ripening its firm, down-running curves, her body was flattening and going a little harsh. It was as if it had not had enough sun and warmth; it was a little greyish and sapless.

Disappointed of its real womanhood, it had not succeeded in becoming boyish, and unsubstantial, and transparent; instead it had gone opaque.

Her breasts were rather small, and dropping pear-shaped. But they were unripe, a little bitter, without meaning hanging there. And her belly had lost the fresh, round gleam it had had when she was young, in the days of her German boy, who really loved her physically. Then it was young and expectant, with a real look of its own. Now it was going slack, and a little flat, thinner, but with a slack thinness. Her thighs, too, they used to look so quick and glimpsy in their female roundness, somehow they too were going flat, slack, meaningless.

Her body was going meaningless, going dull and opaque, so much insignificant substance. It made her feel immensely depressed and hopeless. What hope was there? She was old, old at twenty-seven, with no gleam and sparkle in the flesh. Old through neglect and denial, yes, denial. Fashionable women kept their bodies bright like delicate porcelain, by external attention. There was nothing inside the porcelain; but she was not even as bright as that. The mental life! Suddenly she hated it with a rushing fury, the swindle!

She looked in the other mirror's reflection at her back, her waist, her loins. She was getting thinner, but to her it was not becoming. The crumple of her waist at the back, as she bent back to look, was a little weary; and it used to be

so gay-looking. And the longish slope of her haunches and her buttocks had lost its gleam and its sense of richness. Gone! Only the German boy had loved it, and he was ten years dead, very nearly. How time went by! Ten years dead, and she was only twenty-seven. The healthy boy with his fresh, clumsy sensuality that she had then been so scornful of! Where would she find it now? It was gone out of men. They had their pathetic, two-seconds spasms like Michaelis; but no healthy human sensuality, that warms the blood and freshens the whole being.

Still she thought the most beautiful part of her was the long-sloping fall of the haunches from the socket of the back, and the slumberous, round stillness of the buttocks. Like hillocks of sand, the Arabs say, soft and downward-slipping with a long slope. Here the life still lingered hoping. But here too she was thinner, and going unripe, astringent.

But the front of her body made her miserable. It was already beginning to slacken, with a slack sort of thinness, almost withered, going old before it had ever really lived. She thought of the child she might somehow bear. Was she fit, anyhow?

She slipped into her nightdress, and went to bed, where she sobbed bitterly. And in her bitterness burned a cold indignation against Clifford, and his writings and his talk: against all the men of his sort who defrauded a woman even of her own body.

Unjust! Unjust! The sense of deep physical injustice burned to her very soul.

But in the morning, all the same, she was up at seven, and going downstairs to Clifford. She had to help him in all the intimate things, for he had no man, and refused a woman-servant. The housekeeper's husband, who had known him as a boy, helped him, and did any heavy lifting; but Connie did the personal things, and she did them willingly. It was a demand on her, but she had wanted to do what she could.

So she hardly ever went away from Wragby, and never for more than a day or two; when Mrs Betts, the housekeeper, attended to Clifford. He, as was inevitable in the course of time, took all the service for granted. It was natural he should.

And yet, deep inside herself, a sense of injustice, of being defrauded, had begun to burn in Connie. The physical sense of injustice is a dangerous feeling, once it is awakened. It must have outlet, or it eats away the one in whom it is aroused. Poor Clifford, he was not to blame. His was the greater misfortune. It was all part of the general catastrophe.

And yet was he not in a way to blame? This lack of warmth, this lack of the simple, warm, physical contact, was he not to blame for that? He was never really warm, nor even kind, only thoughtful, considerate, in a well-bred, cold

sort of way! But never warm as a man can be warm to a woman, as even Connie's father could be warm to her, with the warmth of a man who did himself well, and intended to, but who still could comfort a woman with a bit of his masculine glow.

But Clifford was not like that. His whole race was not like that. They were all inwardly hard and separate, and warmth to them was just bad taste. You had to get on without it, and hold your own; which was all very well if you were of the same class and race. Then you could keep yourself cold and be very estimable, and hold your own, and enjoy the satisfaction of holding it. But if you were of another class and another race it wouldn't do; there was no fun merely holding your own, and feeling you belonged to the ruling class. What was the point, when even the smartest aristocrats had really nothing positive of their own to hold, and their rule was really a farce, not rule at all? What was the point? It was all cold nonsense.

A sense of rebellion smouldered in Connie. What was the good of it all? What was the good of her sacrifice, her devoting her life to Clifford? What was she serving, after all? A cold spirit of vanity, that had no warm human contacts, and that was as corrupt as any low-born Jew, in craving for prostitution to the bitch-goddess, Success. Even Clifford's cool and contactless assurance that he belonged to the ruling class didn't prevent his tongue lolling out of his mouth, as he panted after the bitch-goddess. After all, Michaelis was really more dignified in the matter, and far, far more successful. Really, if you looked closely at Clifford, he was a buffoon, and a buffoon is more humiliating than a bounder.

As between the two men, Michaelis really had far more use for her than Clifford had. He had even more need of her. Any good nurse can attend to crippled legs! And as for the heroic effort, Michaelis was a heroic rat, and Clifford was very much of a poodle showing off.

There were people staying in the house, among them Clifford's Aunt Eva, Lady Bennerley. She was a thin woman of sixty, with a red nose, a widow, and still something of a grande dame. She belonged to one of the best families, and had the character to carry it off. Connie liked her, she was so perfectly simple and frank, as far as she intended to be frank, and superficially kind. Inside herself she was a past-mistress in holding her own, and holding other people a little lower. She was not at all a snob: far too sure of herself. She was perfect at the social sport of coolly holding her own, and making other people defer to her.

She was kind to Connie, and tried to worm into her woman's soul with the sharp gimlet of her well-born observations.

'You're quite wonderful, in my opinion,' she said to Connie. 'You've done wonders for Clifford. I never saw any budding genius myself, and there he is, all

the rage.' Aunt Eva was quite complacently proud of Clifford's success. Another feather in the family cap! She didn't care a straw about his books, but why should she?

'Oh, I don't think it's my doing,' said Connie.

'It must be! Can't be anybody else's. And it seems to me you don't get enough out of it.'

'How?'

'Look at the way you are shut up here. I said to Clifford: If that child rebels one day you'll have yourself to thank!'

'But Clifford never denies me anything,' said Connie.

'Look here, my dear child' — and Lady Bennerley laid her thin hand on Connie's arm. 'A woman has to live her life, or live to repent not having lived it. Believe me!' And she took another sip of brandy, which maybe was her form of repentance.

'But I do live my life, don't I?'

'Not in my idea! Clifford should bring you to London, and let you go about. His sort of friends are all right for him, but what are they for you? If I were you I should think it wasn't good enough. You'll let your youth slip by, and you'll spend your old age, and your middle age too, repenting it.'

Her ladyship lapsed into contemplative silence, soothed by the brandy.

But Connie was not keen on going to London, and being steered into the smart world by Lady Bennerley. She didn't feel really smart, it wasn't interesting. And she did feel the peculiar, withering coldness under it all; like the soil of Labrador, which his gay little flowers on its surface, and a foot down is frozen.

Tommy Dukes was at Wragby, and another man, Harry Winterslow, and Jack Strangeways with his wife Olive. The talk was much more desultory than when only the cronies were there, and everybody was a bit bored, for the weather was bad, and there was only billiards, and the pianola to dance to.

Olive was reading a book about the future, when babies would be bred in bottles, and women would be 'immunized'.

'Jolly good thing too!' she said. 'Then a woman can live her own life.' Strangeways wanted children, and she didn't.

'How'd you like to be immunized?' Winterslow asked her, with an ugly smile.

'I hope I am; naturally,' she said. 'Anyhow the future's going to have more sense, and a woman needn't be dragged down by her functions.'

'Perhaps she'll float off into space altogether,' said Dukes.

'I do think sufficient civilization ought to eliminate a lot of the physical disabilities,' said Clifford. 'All the love-business for example, it might just as well go. I suppose it would if we could breed babies in bottles.'

‘No!’ cried Olive. ‘That might leave all the more room for fun.’

‘I suppose,’ said Lady Bennerley, contemplatively, ‘if the love-business went, something else would take its place. Morphine, perhaps. A little morphine in all the air. It would be wonderfully refreshing for everybody.’

‘The government releasing ether into the air on Saturdays, for a cheerful weekend!’ said Jack. ‘Sounds all right, but where should we be by Wednesday?’

‘So long as you can forget your body you are happy,’ said Lady Bennerley. ‘And the moment you begin to be aware of your body, you are wretched. So, if civilization is any good, it has to help us to forget our bodies, and then time passes happily without our knowing it.’

‘Help us to get rid of our bodies altogether,’ said Winterslow. ‘It’s quite time man began to improve on his own nature, especially the physical side of it.’

‘Imagine if we floated like tobacco smoke,’ said Connie.

‘It won’t happen,’ said Dukes. ‘Our old show will come flop; our civilization is going to fall. It’s going down the bottomless pit, down the chasm. And believe me, the only bridge across the chasm will be the phallus!’

‘Oh do! Dobe impossible, General!’ cried Olive.

‘I believe our civilization is going to collapse,’ said Aunt Eva.

‘And what will come after it?’ asked Clifford.

‘I haven’t the faintest idea, but something, I suppose,’ said the elderly lady.

‘Connie says people like wisps of smoke, and Olive says immunized women, and babies in bottles, and Dukes says the phallus is the bridge to what comes next. I wonder what it will really be?’ said Clifford.

‘Oh, don’t bother! let’s get on with today,’ said Olive. ‘Only hurry up with the breeding bottle, and let us poor women off.’

‘There might even be real men, in the next phase,’ said Tommy. ‘Real, intelligent, wholesome men, and wholesome nice women! Wouldn’t that be a change, an enormous change from us? we’re not men, and the women aren’t women. We’re only cerebrating make-shifts, mechanical and intellectual experiments. There may even come a civilization of genuine men and women, instead of our little lot of clever-jacks, all at the intelligence-age of seven. It would be even more amazing than men of smoke or babies in bottles.’

‘Oh, when people begin to talk about real women, I give up,’ said Olive.

‘Certainly nothing but the spirit in us is worth having,’ said Winterslow.

‘Spirits!’ said Jack, drinking his whisky and soda.

‘Think so? Give me the resurrection of the body!’ said Dukes.

‘But it’ll come, in time, when we’ve shoved the cerebral stone away a bit, the money and the rest. Then we’ll get a democracy of touch, instead of a

democracy of pocket.'

Something echoed inside Connie: 'Give me the democracy of touch, the resurrection of the body!' She didn't at all know what it meant, but it comforted her, as meaningless things may do.

Anyhow everything was terribly silly, and she was exasperatedly bored by it all, by Clifford, by Aunt Eva, by Olive and Jack, and Winterslow, and even by Dukes. Talk, talk, talk! What hell it was, the continual rattle of it!

Then, when all the people went, it was no better. She continued plodding on, but exasperation and irritation had got hold of her lower body, she couldn't escape. The days seemed to grind by, with curious painfulness, yet nothing happened. Only she was getting thinner; even the housekeeper noticed it, and asked her about herself. Even Tommy Dukes insisted she was not well, though she said she was all right. Only she began to be afraid of the ghastly white tombstones, that peculiar loathsome whiteness of Carrara marble, detestable as false teeth, which stuck up on the hillside, under Tevershall church, and which she saw with such grim painfulness from the park. The bristling of the hideous false teeth of tombstones on the hill affected her with a grisly kind of horror. She felt the time not far off when she would be buried there, added to the ghastly host under the tombstones and the monuments, in these filthy Midlands.

She needed help, and she knew it: so she wrote a little cri du coeur to her sister, Hilda. 'I'm not well lately, and I don't know what's the matter with me.'

Down posted Hilda from Scotland, where she had taken up her abode. She came in March, alone, driving herself in a nimble two-seater. Up the drive she came, tooting up the incline, then sweeping round the oval of grass, where the two great wild beech-trees stood, on the flat in front of the house.

Connie had run out to the steps. Hilda pulled up her car, got out, and kissed her sister.

'But Connie!' she cried. 'Whatever is the matter?'

'Nothing!' said Connie, rather shamefacedly; but she knew how she had suffered in contrast to Hilda. Both sisters had the same rather golden, glowing skin, and soft brown hair, and naturally strong, warm physique. But now Connie was thin and earthy-looking, with a scraggy, yellowish neck, that stuck out of her jumper.

'But you're ill, child!' said Hilda, in the soft, rather breathless voice that both sisters had alike. Hilda was nearly, but not quite, two years older than Connie.

'No, not ill. Perhaps I'm bored,' said Connie a little pathetically.

The light of battle glowed in Hilda's face; she was a woman, soft and still as she seemed, of the old amazon sort, not made to fit with men.

'This wretched place!' she said softly, looking at poor, old, lumbering Wragby

with real hate. She looked soft and warm herself, as a ripe pear, and she was an amazon of the real old breed.

She went quietly in to Clifford. He thought how handsome she looked, but also he shrank from her. His wife's family did not have his sort of manners, or his sort of etiquette. He considered them rather outsiders, but once they got inside they made him jump through the hoop.

He sat square and well-groomed in his chair, his hair sleek and blond, and his face fresh, his blue eyes pale, and a little prominent, his expression inscrutable, but well-bred. Hilda thought it sulky and stupid, and he waited. He had an air of aplomb, but Hilda didn't care what he had an air of; she was up in arms, and if he'd been Pope or Emperor it would have been just the same.

'Connie's looking awfully unwell,' she said in her soft voice, fixing him with her beautiful, glowering grey eyes. She looked so maidenly, so did Connie; but he well knew the tone of Scottish obstinacy underneath.

'She's a little thinner,' he said.

'Haven't you done anything about it?'

'Do you think it necessary?' he asked, with his suavest English stiffness, for the two things often go together.

Hilda only glowered at him without replying; repartee was not her forte, nor Connie's; so she glowered, and he was much more uncomfortable than if she had said things.

'I'll take her to a doctor,' said Hilda at length. 'Can you suggest a good one round here?'

'I'm afraid I can't.'

'Then I'll take her to London, where we have a doctor we trust.'

Though boiling with rage, Clifford said nothing.

'I suppose I may as well stay the night,' said Hilda, pulling off her gloves, 'and I'll drive her to town tomorrow.'

Clifford was yellow at the gills with anger, and at evening the whites of his eyes were a little yellow too. He ran to liver. But Hilda was consistently modest and maidenly.

'You must have a nurse or somebody, to look after you personally. You should really have a manservant,' said Hilda as they sat, with apparent calmness, at coffee after dinner. She spoke in her soft, seemingly gentle way, but Clifford felt she was hitting him on the head with a bludgeon.

'You think so?' he said coldly.

'I'm sure! It's necessary. Either that, or Father and I must take Connie away for some months. This can't go on.'

'What can't go on?'

‘Haven’t you looked at the child!’ asked Hilda, gazing at him full stare. He looked rather like a huge, boiled crayfish at the moment; or so she thought.

‘Connie and I will discuss it,’ he said.

‘I’ve already discussed it with her,’ said Hilda.

Clifford had been long enough in the hands of nurses; he hated them, because they left him no real privacy. And a manservant!...he couldn’t stand a man hanging round him. Almost better any woman. But why not Connie?

The two sisters drove off in the morning, Connie looking rather like an Easter lamb, rather small beside Hilda, who held the wheel. Sir Malcolm was away, but the Kensington house was open.

The doctor examined Connie carefully, and asked her all about her life. ‘I see your photograph, and Sir Clifford’s, in the illustrated papers sometimes. Almost notoriety, aren’t you? That’s how the quiet little girls grow up, though you’re only a quiet little girl even now, in spite of the illustrated papers. No, no! There’s nothing organically wrong, but it won’t do! It won’t do! Tell Sir Clifford he’s got to bring you to town, or take you abroad, and amuse you. You’ve got to be amused, got to! Your vitality is much too low; no reserves, no reserves. The nerves of the heart a bit queer already: oh, yes! Nothing but nerves; I’d put you right in a month at Cannes or Biarritz. But it mustn’t go on, mustn’t, I tell you, or I won’t be answerable for consequences. You’re spending your life without renewing it. You’ve got to be amused, properly, healthily amused. You’re spending your vitality without making any. Can’t go on, you know. Depression! Avoid depression!’

Hilda set her jaw, and that meant something.

Michaelis heard they were in town, and came running with roses. ‘Why, whatever’s wrong?’ he cried. ‘You’re a shadow of yourself. Why, I never saw such a change! Why ever didn’t you let me know? Come to Nice with me! Come down to Sicily! Go on, come to Sicily with me. It’s lovely there just now. You want sun! You want life! Why, you’re wasting away! Come away with me! Come to Africa! Oh, hang Sir Clifford! Chuck him, and come along with me. I’ll marry you the minute he divorces you. Come along and try a life! God’s love! That place Wragby would kill anybody. Beastly place! Foul place! Kill anybody! Come away with me into the sun! It’s the sun you want, of course, and a bit of normal life.’

But Connie’s heart simply stood still at the thought of abandoning Clifford there and then. She couldn’t do it. No...no! She just couldn’t. She had to go back to Wragby.

Michaelis was disgusted. Hilda didn’t like Michaelis, but she almost preferred him to Clifford. Back went the sisters to the Midlands.

Hilda talked to Clifford, who still had yellow eyeballs when they got back. He, too, in his way, was overwrought; but he had to listen to all Hilda said, to all the doctor had said, not what Michaelis had said, of course, and he sat mum through the ultimatum.

‘Here is the address of a good manservant, who was with an invalid patient of the doctor’s till he died last month. He is really a good man, and fairly sure to come.’

‘But I’m not an invalid, and I will not have a manservant,’ said Clifford, poor devil.

‘And here are the addresses of two women; I saw one of them, she would do very well; a woman of about fifty, quiet, strong, kind, and in her way cultured...’

Clifford only sulked, and would not answer.

‘Very well, Clifford. If we don’t settle something by tomorrow, I shall telegraph to Father, and we shall take Connie away.’

‘Will Connie go?’ asked Clifford.

‘She doesn’t want to, but she knows she must. Mother died of cancer, brought on by fretting. We’re not running any risks.’

So next day Clifford suggested Mrs Bolton, Tevershall parish nurse. Apparently Mrs Betts had thought of her. Mrs Bolton was just retiring from her parish duties to take up private nursing jobs. Clifford had a queer dread of delivering himself into the hands of a stranger, but this Mrs Bolton had once nursed him through scarlet fever, and he knew her.

The two sisters at once called on Mrs Bolton, in a newish house in a row, quite select for Tevershall. They found a rather good-looking woman of forty-odd, in a nurse’s uniform, with a white collar and apron, just making herself tea in a small crowded sitting-room.

Mrs Bolton was most attentive and polite, seemed quite nice, spoke with a bit of a broad slur, but in heavily correct English, and from having bossed the sick colliers for a good many years, had a very good opinion of herself, and a fair amount of assurance. In short, in her tiny way, one of the governing class in the village, very much respected.

‘Yes, Lady Chatterley’s not looking at all well! Why, she used to be that bonny, didn’t she now? But she’s been failing all winter! Oh, it’s hard, it is. Poor Sir Clifford! Eh, that war, it’s a lot to answer for.’

And Mrs Bolton would come to Wragby at once, if Dr Shardlow would let her off. She had another fortnight’s parish nursing to do, by rights, but they might get a substitute, you know.

Hilda posted off to Dr Shardlow, and on the following Sunday Mrs Bolton drove up in Leiver’s cab to Wragby with two trunks. Hilda had talks with her;

Mrs Bolton was ready at any moment to talk. And she seemed so young! The way the passion would flush in her rather pale cheek. She was forty-seven.

Her husband, Ted Bolton, had been killed in the pit, twenty-two years ago, twenty-two years last Christmas, just at Christmas time, leaving her with two children, one a baby in arms. Oh, the baby was married now, Edith, to a young man in Boots Cash Chemists in Sheffield. The other one was a schoolteacher in Chesterfield; she came home weekends, when she wasn't asked out somewhere. Young folks enjoyed themselves nowadays, not like when she, Ivy Bolton, was young.

Ted Bolton was twenty-eight when he was killed in an explosion down th' pit. The butty in front shouted to them all to lie down quick, there were four of them. And they all lay down in time, only Ted, and it killed him. Then at the inquiry, on the masters' side they said Ted had been frightened, and trying to run away, and not obeying orders, so it was like his fault really. So the compensation was only three hundred pounds, and they made out as if it was more of a gift than legal compensation, because it was really the man's own fault. And they wouldn't let her have the money down; she wanted to have a little shop. But they said she'd no doubt squander it, perhaps in drink! So she had to draw it thirty shillings a week. Yes, she had to go every Monday morning down to the offices, and stand there a couple of hours waiting her turn; yes, for almost four years she went every Monday. And what could she do with two little children on her hands? But Ted's mother was very good to her. When the baby could toddle she'd keep both the children for the day, while she, Ivy Bolton, went to Sheffield, and attended classes in ambulance, and then the fourth year she even took a nursing course and got qualified. She was determined to be independent and keep her children. So she was assistant at Uthwaite hospital, just a little place, for a while. But when the Company, the Tevershall Colliery Company, really Sir Geoffrey, saw that she could get on by herself, they were very good to her, gave her the parish nursing, and stood by her, she would say that for them. And she'd done it ever since, till now it was getting a bit much for her; she needed something a bit lighter, there was such a lot of traipsing around if you were a district nurse.

'Yes, the Company's been very good to me, I always say it. But I should never forget what they said about Ted, for he was as steady and fearless a chap as ever set foot on the cage, and it was as good as branding him a coward. But there, he was dead, and could say nothing to none of 'em.'

It was a queer mixture of feelings the woman showed as she talked. She liked the colliers, whom she had nursed for so long; but she felt very superior to them. She felt almost upper class; and at the same time a resentment against the ruling

class smouldered in her. The masters! In a dispute between masters and men, she was always for the men. But when there was no question of contest, she was pining to be superior, to be one of the upper class. The upper classes fascinated her, appealing to her peculiar English passion for superiority. She was thrilled to come to Wragby; thrilled to talk to Lady Chatterley, my word, different from the common colliers' wives! She said so in so many words. Yet one could see a grudge against the Chatterleys peep out in her; the grudge against the masters.

'Why, yes, of course, it would wear Lady Chatterley out! It's a mercy she had a sister to come and help her. Men don't think, high and low-alike, they take what a woman does for them for granted. Oh, I've told the colliers off about it many a time. But it's very hard for Sir Clifford, you know, crippled like that. They were always a haughty family, standoffish in a way, as they've a right to be. But then to be brought down like that! And it's very hard on Lady Chatterley, perhaps harder on her. What she misses! I only had Ted three years, but my word, while I had him I had a husband I could never forget. He was one in a thousand, and jolly as the day. Who'd ever have thought he'd get killed? I don't believe it to this day somehow, I've never believed it, though I washed him with my own hands. But he was never dead for me, he never was. I never took it in.'

This was a new voice in Wragby, very new for Connie to hear; it roused a new ear in her.

For the first week or so, Mrs Bolton, however, was very quiet at Wragby, her assured, bossy manner left her, and she was nervous. With Clifford she was shy, almost frightened, and silent. He liked that, and soon recovered his self-possession, letting her do things for him without even noticing her.

'She's a useful nonentity!' he said. Connie opened her eyes in wonder, but she did not contradict him. So different are impressions on two different people!

And he soon became rather superb, somewhat lordly with the nurse. She had rather expected it, and he played up without knowing. So susceptible we are to what is expected of us! The colliers had been so like children, talking to her, and telling her what hurt them, while she bandaged them, or nursed them. They had always made her feel so grand, almost super-human in her administrations. Now Clifford made her feel small, and like a servant, and she accepted it without a word, adjusting herself to the upper classes.

She came very mute, with her long, handsome face, and downcast eyes, to administer to him. And she said very humbly: 'Shall I do this now, Sir Clifford? Shall I do that?'

'No, leave it for a time. I'll have it done later.'

'Very well, Sir Clifford.'

‘Come in again in half an hour.’

‘Very well, Sir Clifford.’

‘And just take those old papers out, will you?’

‘Very well, Sir Clifford.’

She went softly, and in half an hour she came softly again. She was bullied, but she didn’t mind. She was experiencing the upper classes. She neither resented nor disliked Clifford; he was just part of a phenomenon, the phenomenon of the high-class folks, so far unknown to her, but now to be known. She felt more at home with Lady Chatterley, and after all it’s the mistress of the house matters most.

Mrs Bolton helped Clifford to bed at night, and slept across the passage from his room, and came if he rang for her in the night. She also helped him in the morning, and soon valeted him completely, even shaving him, in her soft, tentative woman’s way. She was very good and competent, and she soon knew how to have him in her power. He wasn’t so very different from the colliers after all, when you lathered his chin, and softly rubbed the bristles. The standoffishness and the lack of frankness didn’t bother her; she was having a new experience.

Clifford, however, inside himself, never quite forgave Connie for giving up her personal care of him to a strange hired woman. It killed, he said to himself, the real flower of the intimacy between him and her. But Connie didn’t mind that. The fine flower of their intimacy was to her rather like an orchid, a bulb stuck parasitic on her tree of life, and producing, to her eyes, a rather shabby flower.

Now she had more time to herself she could softly play the piano, up in her room, and sing: ‘Touch not the nettle, for the bonds of love are ill to loose.’ She had not realized till lately how ill to loose they were, these bonds of love. But thank Heaven she had loosened them! She was so glad to be alone, not always to have to talk to him. When he was alone he tapped-tapped-tapped on a typewriter, to infinity. But when he was not ‘working’, and she was there, he talked, always talked; infinite small analysis of people and motives, and results, characters and personalities, till now she had had enough. For years she had loved it, until she had enough, and then suddenly it was too much. She was thankful to be alone.

It was as if thousands and thousands of little roots and threads of consciousness in him and her had grown together into a tangled mass, till they could crowd no more, and the plant was dying. Now quietly, subtly, she was unravelling the tangle of his consciousness and hers, breaking the threads gently, one by one, with patience and impatience to get clear. But the bonds of such love are more ill to loose even than most bonds; though Mrs Bolton’s coming had

been a great help.

But he still wanted the old intimate evenings of talk with Connie: talk or reading aloud. But now she could arrange that Mrs Bolton should come at ten to disturb them. At ten o'clock Connie could go upstairs and be alone. Clifford was in good hands with Mrs Bolton.

Mrs Bolton ate with Mrs Betts in the housekeeper's room, since they were all agreeable. And it was curious how much closer the servants' quarters seemed to have come; right up to the doors of Clifford's study, when before they were so remote. For Mrs Betts would sometimes sit in Mrs Bolton's room, and Connie heard their lowered voices, and felt somehow the strong, other vibration of the working people almost invading the sitting-room, when she and Clifford were alone. So changed was Wragby merely by Mrs Bolton's coming.

And Connie felt herself released, in another world, she felt she breathed differently. But still she was afraid of how many of her roots, perhaps mortal ones, were tangled with Clifford's. Yet still, she breathed freer, a new phase was going to begin in her life.

CHAPTER 8

Mrs Bolton also kept a cherishing eye on Connie, feeling she must extend to her her female and professional protection. She was always urging her ladyship to walk out, to drive to Uthwaite, to be in the air. For Connie had got into the habit of sitting still by the fire, pretending to read; or to sew feebly, and hardly going out at all.

It was a blowy day soon after Hilda had gone, that Mrs Bolton said: 'Now why don't you go for a walk through the wood, and look at the daffs behind the keeper's cottage? They're the prettiest sight you'd see in a day's march. And you could put some in your room; wild daffs are always so cheerful-looking, aren't they?'

Connie took it in good part, even daffs for daffodils. Wild daffodils! After all, one could not stew in one's own juice. The spring came back... 'Seasons return, but not to me returns Day, or the sweet approach of Ev'n or Morn.'

And the keeper, his thin, white body, like a lonely pistil of an invisible flower! She had forgotten him in her unspeakable depression. But now something roused... 'Pale beyond porch and portal'...the thing to do was to pass the porches and the portals.

She was stronger, she could walk better, and in the wood the wind would not be so tiring as it was across the bark, flatten against her. She wanted to forget, to forget the world, and all the dreadful, carrion-bodied people. 'Ye must be born again! I believe in the resurrection of the body! Except a grain of wheat fall into the earth and die, it shall by no means bring forth. When the crocus cometh forth I too will emerge and see the sun!' In the wind of March endless phrases swept through her consciousness.

Little gusts of sunshine blew, strangely bright, and lit up the celandines at the wood's edge, under the hazel-rods, they spangled out bright and yellow. And the wood was still, stiller, but yet gusty with crossing sun. The first windflowers were out, and all the wood seemed pale with the pallor of endless little anemones, sprinkling the shaken floor. 'The world has grown pale with thy breath.' But it was the breath of Persephone, this time; she was out of hell on a cold morning. Cold breaths of wind came, and overhead there was an anger of entangled wind caught among the twigs. It, too, was caught and trying to tear itself free, the wind, like Absalom. How cold the anemones looked, bobbing their naked white shoulders over crinoline skirts of green. But they stood it. A

few first bleached little primroses too, by the path, and yellow buds unfolding themselves.

The roaring and swaying was overhead, only cold currents came down below. Connie was strangely excited in the wood, and the colour flew in her cheeks, and burned blue in her eyes. She walked ploddingly, picking a few primroses and the first violets, that smelled sweet and cold, sweet and cold. And she drifted on without knowing where she was.

Till she came to the clearing, at the end of the wood, and saw the green-stained stone cottage, looking almost rosy, like the flesh underneath a mushroom, its stone warmed in a burst of sun. And there was a sparkle of yellow jasmine by the door; the closed door. But no sound; no smoke from the chimney; no dog barking.

She went quietly round to the back, where the bank rose up; she had an excuse, to see the daffodils.

And they were there, the short-stemmed flowers, rustling and fluttering and shivering, so bright and alive, but with nowhere to hide their faces, as they turned them away from the wind.

They shook their bright, sunny little rags in bouts of distress. But perhaps they liked it really; perhaps they really liked the tossing.

Constance sat down with her back to a young pine-tree, that swayed against her with curious life, elastic, and powerful, rising up. The erect, alive thing, with its top in the sun! And she watched the daffodils turn golden, in a burst of sun that was warm on her hands and lap. Even she caught the faint, tarry scent of the flowers. And then, being so still and alone, she seemed to bet into the current of her own proper destiny. She had been fastened by a rope, and jaggling and snarring like a boat at its moorings; now she was loose and adrift.

The sunshine gave way to chill; the daffodils were in shadow, dipping silently. So they would dip through the day and the long cold night. So strong in their frailty!

She rose, a little stiff, took a few daffodils, and went down. She hated breaking the flowers, but she wanted just one or two to go with her. She would have to go back to Wragby and its walls, and now she hated it, especially its thick walls. Walls! Always walls! Yet one needed them in this wind.

When she got home Clifford asked her:

‘Where did you go?’

‘Right across the wood! Look, aren’t the little daffodils adorable? To think they should come out of the earth!’

‘Just as much out of air and sunshine,’ he said.

‘But modelled in the earth,’ she retorted, with a prompt contradiction, that

surprised her a little.

The next afternoon she went to the wood again. She followed the broad riding that swerved round and up through the larches to a spring called John's Well. It was cold on this hillside, and not a flower in the darkness of larches. But the icy little spring softly pressed upwards from its tiny well-bed of pure, reddish-white pebbles. How icy and clear it was! Brilliant! The new keeper had no doubt put in fresh pebbles. She heard the faint tinkle of water, as the tiny overflow trickled over and downhill. Even above the hissing boom of the larchwood, that spread its bristling, leafless, wolfish darkness on the down-slope, she heard the tinkle as of tiny water-bells.

This place was a little sinister, cold, damp. Yet the well must have been a drinking-place for hundreds of years. Now no more. Its tiny cleared space was lush and cold and dismal.

She rose and went slowly towards home. As she went she heard a faint tapping away on the right, and stood still to listen. Was it hammering, or a woodpecker? It was surely hammering.

She walked on, listening. And then she noticed a narrow track between young fir-trees, a track that seemed to lead nowhere. But she felt it had been used. She turned down it adventurously, between the thick young firs, which gave way soon to the old oak wood. She followed the track, and the hammering grew nearer, in the silence of the windy wood, for trees make a silence even in their noise of wind.

She saw a secret little clearing, and a secret little hut made of rustic poles. And she had never been here before! She realized it was the quiet place where the growing pheasants were reared; the keeper in his shirt-sleeves was kneeling, hammering. The dog trotted forward with a short, sharp bark, and the keeper lifted his face suddenly and saw her. He had a startled look in his eyes.

He straightened himself and saluted, watching her in silence, as she came forward with weakening limbs. He resented the intrusion; he cherished his solitude as his only and last freedom in life.

'I wondered what the hammering was,' she said, feeling weak and breathless, and a little afraid of him, as he looked so straight at her.

'Ah'm gettin' th' coops ready for th' young bods,' he said, in broad vernacular.

She did not know what to say, and she felt weak. 'I should like to sit down a bit,' she said.

'Come and sit 'ere i' th' 'ut,' he said, going in front of her to the hut, pushing aside some timber and stuff, and drawing out a rustic chair, made of hazel sticks.

'Am Ah t' light yer a little fire?' he asked, with the curious naivete of the

dialect.

‘Oh, don’t bother,’ she replied.

But he looked at her hands; they were rather blue. So he quickly took some larch twigs to the little brick fire-place in the corner, and in a moment the yellow flame was running up the chimney. He made a place by the brick hearth.

‘Sit ‘ere then a bit, and warm yer,’ he said.

She obeyed him. He had that curious kind of protective authority she obeyed at once. So she sat and warmed her hands at the blaze, and dropped logs on the fire, whilst outside he was hammering again. She did not really want to sit, poked in a corner by the fire; she would rather have watched from the door, but she was being looked after, so she had to submit.

The hut was quite cosy, panelled with unvarnished deal, having a little rustic table and stool beside her chair, and a carpenter’s bench, then a big box, tools, new boards, nails; and many things hung from pegs: axe, hatchet, traps, things in sacks, his coat. It had no window, the light came in through the open door. It was a jumble, but also it was a sort of little sanctuary.

She listened to the tapping of the man’s hammer; it was not so happy. He was oppressed. Here was a trespass on his privacy, and a dangerous one! A woman! He had reached the point where all he wanted on earth was to be alone. And yet he was powerless to preserve his privacy; he was a hired man, and these people were his masters.

Especially he did not want to come into contact with a woman again. He feared it; for he had a big wound from old contacts. He felt if he could not be alone, and if he could not be left alone, he would die. His recoil away from the outer world was complete; his last refuge was this wood; to hide himself there!

Connie grew warm by the fire, which she had made too big: then she grew hot. She went and sat on the stool in the doorway, watching the man at work. He seemed not to notice her, but he knew. Yet he worked on, as if absorbedly, and his brown dog sat on her tail near him, and surveyed the untrustworthy world.

Slender, quiet and quick, the man finished the coop he was making, turned it over, tried the sliding door, then set it aside. Then he rose, went for an old coop, and took it to the chopping log where he was working. Crouching, he tried the bars; some broke in his hands; he began to draw the nails. Then he turned the coop over and deliberated, and he gave absolutely no sign of awareness of the woman’s presence.

So Connie watched him fixedly. And the same solitary aloneness she had seen in him naked, she now saw in him clothed: solitary, and intent, like an animal that works alone, but also brooding, like a soul that recoils away, away from all human contact. Silently, patiently, he was recoiling away from her even now. It

was the stillness, and the timeless sort of patience, in a man impatient and passionate, that touched Connie's womb. She saw it in his bent head, the quick quiet hands, the crouching of his slender, sensitive loins; something patient and withdrawn. She felt his experience had been deeper and wider than her own; much deeper and wider, and perhaps more deadly. And this relieved her of herself; she felt almost irresponsible.

So she sat in the doorway of the hut in a dream, utterly unaware of time and of particular circumstances. She was so drifted away that he glanced up at her quickly, and saw the utterly still, waiting look on her face. To him it was a look of waiting. And a little thin tongue of fire suddenly flickered in his loins, at the root of his back, and he groaned in spirit. He dreaded with a repulsion almost of death, any further close human contact. He wished above all things she would go away, and leave him to his own privacy. He dreaded her will, her female will, and her modern female insistency. And above all he dreaded her cool, upper-class impudence of having her own way. For after all he was only a hired man. He hated her presence there.

Connie came to herself with sudden uneasiness. She rose. The afternoon was turning to evening, yet she could not go away. She went over to the man, who stood up at attention, his worn face stiff and blank, his eyes watching her.

'It is so nice here, so restful,' she said. 'I have never been here before.'

'No?'

'I think I shall come and sit here sometimes.'

'Yes?'

'Do you lock the hut when you're not here?'

'Yes, your Ladyship.'

'Do you think I could have a key too, so that I could sit here sometimes? Are there two keys?'

'Not as Ah know on, ther' isna.'

He had lapsed into the vernacular. Connie hesitated; he was putting up an opposition. Was it his hut, after all?

'Couldn't we get another key?' she asked in her soft voice, that underneath had the ring of a woman determined to get her way.

'Another!' he said, glancing at her with a flash of anger, touched with derision.

'Yes, a duplicate,' she said, flushing.

'Appen Sir Clifford 'ud know,' he said, putting her off.

'Yes!' she said, 'he might have another. Otherwise we could have one made from the one you have. It would only take a day or so, I suppose. You could spare your key for so long.'

‘Ah canna tell yer, m’Lady! Ah know nob’dy as ma’es keys round ‘ere.’

Connie suddenly flushed with anger.

‘Very well!’ she said. ‘I’ll see to it.’

‘All right, your Ladyship.’

Their eyes met. His had a cold, ugly look of dislike and contempt, and indifference to what would happen. Hers were hot with rebuff.

But her heart sank, she saw how utterly he disliked her, when she went against him. And she saw him in a sort of desperation.

‘Good afternoon!’

‘Afternoon, my Lady!’ He saluted and turned abruptly away. She had wakened the sleeping dogs of old voracious anger in him, anger against the self-willed female. And he was powerless, powerless. He knew it!

And she was angry against the self-willed male. A servant too! She walked sullenly home.

She found Mrs Bolton under the great beech-tree on the knoll, looking for her.

‘I just wondered if you’d be coming, my Lady,’ the woman said brightly.

‘Am I late?’ asked Connie.

‘Oh only Sir Clifford was waiting for his tea.’

‘Why didn’t you make it then?’

‘Oh, I don’t think it’s hardly my place. I don’t think Sir Clifford would like it at all, my Lady.’

‘I don’t see why not,’ said Connie.

She went indoors to Clifford’s study, where the old brass kettle was simmering on the tray.

‘Am I late, Clifford?’ she said, putting down the few flowers and taking up the tea-caddy, as she stood before the tray in her hat and scarf. ‘I’m sorry! Why didn’t you let Mrs Bolton make the tea?’

‘I didn’t think of it,’ he said ironically. ‘I don’t quite see her presiding at the tea-table.’

‘Oh, there’s nothing sacrosanct about a silver tea-pot,’ said Connie.

He glanced up at her curiously.

‘What did you do all afternoon?’ he said.

‘Walked and sat in a sheltered place. Do you know there are still berries on the big holly-tree?’

She took off her scarf, but not her hat, and sat down to make tea. The toast would certainly be leathery. She put the tea-cosy over the tea-pot, and rose to get a little glass for her violets. The poor flowers hung over, limp on their stalks.

‘They’ll revive again!’ she said, putting them before him in their glass for him to smell.

‘Sweeter than the lids of Juno’s eyes,’ he quoted.

‘I don’t see a bit of connexion with the actual violets,’ she said. ‘The Elizabethans are rather upholstered.’

She poured him his tea.

‘Do you think there is a second key to that little hut not far from John’s Well, where the pheasants are reared?’ she said.

‘There may be. Why?’

‘I happened to find it today — and I’d never seen it before. I think it’s a darling place. I could sit there sometimes, couldn’t I?’

‘Was Mellors there?’

‘Yes! That’s how I found it: his hammering. He didn’t seem to like my intruding at all. In fact he was almost rude when I asked about a second key.’

‘What did he say?’

‘Oh, nothing: just his manner; and he said he knew nothing about keys.’

‘There may be one in Father’s study. Betts knows them all, they’re all there. I’ll get him to look.’

‘Oh do!’ she said.

‘So Mellors was almost rude?’

‘Oh, nothing, really! But I don’t think he wanted me to have the freedom of the castle, quite.’

‘I don’t suppose he did.’

‘Still, I don’t see why he should mind. It’s not his home, after all! It’s not his private abode. I don’t see why I shouldn’t sit there if I want to.’

‘Quite!’ said Clifford. ‘He thinks too much of himself, that man.’

‘Do you think he does?’

‘Oh, decidedly! He thinks he’s something exceptional. You know he had a wife he didn’t get on with, so he joined up in 1915 and was sent to India, I believe. Anyhow he was blacksmith to the cavalry in Egypt for a time; always was connected with horses, a clever fellow that way. Then some Indian colonel took a fancy to him, and he was made a lieutenant. Yes, they gave him a commission. I believe he went back to India with his colonel, and up to the north-west frontier. He was ill; he was a pension. He didn’t come out of the army till last year, I believe, and then, naturally, it isn’t easy for a man like that to get back to his own level. He’s bound to flounder. But he does his duty all right, as far as I’m concerned. Only I’m not having any of the Lieutenant Mellors touch.’

‘How could they make him an officer when he speaks broad Derbyshire?’

‘He doesn’t...except by fits and starts. He can speak perfectly well, for him. I suppose he has an idea if he’s come down to the ranks again, he’d better speak

as the ranks speak.'

'Why didn't you tell me about him before?'

'Oh, I've no patience with these romances. They're the ruin of all order. It's a thousand pities they ever happened.'

Connie was inclined to agree. What was the good of discontented people who fitted in nowhere?

In the spell of fine weather Clifford, too, decided to go to the wood. The wind was cold, but not so tiresome, and the sunshine was like life itself, warm and full.

'It's amazing,' said Connie, 'how different one feels when there's a really fresh fine day. Usually one feels the very air is half dead. People are killing the very air.'

'Do you think people are doing it?' he asked.

'I do. The steam of so much boredom, and discontent and anger out of all the people, just kills the vitality in the air. I'm sure of it.'

'Perhaps some condition of the atmosphere lowers the vitality of the people?' he said.

'No, it's man that poisons the universe,' she asserted.

'Fouls his own nest,' remarked Clifford.

The chair puffed on. In the hazel copse catkins were hanging pale gold, and in sunny places the wood-anemones were wide open, as if exclaiming with the joy of life, just as good as in past days, when people could exclaim along with them. They had a faint scent of apple-blossom. Connie gathered a few for Clifford.

He took them and looked at them curiously.

'Thou still unravished bride of quietness,' he quoted. 'It seems to fit flowers so much better than Greek vases.'

'Ravished is such a horrid word!' she said. 'It's only people who ravish things.'

'Oh, I don't know...snails and things,' he said.

'Even snails only eat them, and bees don't ravish.'

She was angry with him, turning everything into words. Violets were Juno's eyelids, and windflowers were on ravished brides. How she hated words, always coming between her and life: they did the ravishing, if anything did: ready-made words and phrases, sucking all the life-sap out of living things.

The walk with Clifford was not quite a success. Between him and Connie there was a tension that each pretended not to notice, but there it was. Suddenly, with all the force of her female instinct, she was shoving him off. She wanted to be clear of him, and especially of his consciousness, his words, his obsession with himself, his endless treadmill obsession with himself, and his own words.

The weather came rainy again. But after a day or two she went out in the rain, and she went to the wood. And once there, she went towards the hut. It was raining, but not so cold, and the wood felt so silent and remote, inaccessible in the dusk of rain.

She came to the clearing. No one there! The hut was locked. But she sat on the log doorstep, under the rustic porch, and snuggled into her own warmth. So she sat, looking at the rain, listening to the many noiseless noises of it, and to the strange soughings of wind in upper branches, when there seemed to be no wind. Old oak-trees stood around, grey, powerful trunks, rain-blackened, round and vital, throwing off reckless limbs. The ground was fairly free of undergrowth, the anemones sprinkled, there was a bush or two, elder, or guelder-rose, and a purplish tangle of bramble: the old russet of bracken almost vanished under green anemone ruffs. Perhaps this was one of the unravished places. Unravished! The whole world was ravished.

Some things can't be ravished. You can't ravish a tin of sardines. And so many women are like that; and men. But the earth...!

The rain was abating. It was hardly making darkness among the oaks any more. Connie wanted to go; yet she sat on. But she was getting cold; yet the overwhelming inertia of her inner resentment kept her there as if paralysed.

Ravished! How ravished one could be without ever being touched. Ravished by dead words become obscene, and dead ideas become obsessions.

A wet brown dog came running and did not bark, lifting a wet feather of a tail. The man followed in a wet black oilskin jacket, like a chauffeur, and face flushed a little. She felt him recoil in his quick walk, when he saw her. She stood up in the handbreadth of dryness under the rustic porch. He saluted without speaking, coming slowly near. She began to withdraw.

'I'm just going,' she said.

'Was yer waitin' to get in?' he asked, looking at the hut, not at her.

'No, I only sat a few minutes in the shelter,' she said, with quiet dignity.

He looked at her. She looked cold.

'Sir Clifford 'adn't got no other key then?' he asked.

'No, but it doesn't matter. I can sit perfectly dry under this porch. Good afternoon!' She hated the excess of vernacular in his speech.

He watched her closely, as she was moving away. Then he hitched up his jacket, and put his hand in his breeches pocket, taking out the key of the hut.

'Appen yer'd better 'ave this key, an' Ah min fend for t' bods some other road.'

She looked at him.

'What do you mean?' she asked.

‘I mean as ‘appen Ah can find anuther pleece as’ll du for rearin’ th’ pheasants. If yer want ter be ‘ere, yo’ll non want me messin’ abaht a’ th’ time.’

She looked at him, getting his meaning through the fog of the dialect.

‘Why don’t you speak ordinary English?’ she said coldly.

‘Me! Ah thowt it wor ordinary.’

She was silent for a few moments in anger.

‘So if yer want t’ key, yer’d better tacit. Or ‘appen Ah’d better gi’e ‘t yer termorrer, an’ clear all t’ stuff aht fust. Would that du for yer?’

She became more angry.

‘I didn’t want your key,’ she said. ‘I don’t want you to clear anything out at all. I don’t in the least want to turn you out of your hut, thank you! I only wanted to be able to sit here sometimes, like today. But I can sit perfectly well under the porch, so please say no more about it.’

He looked at her again, with his wicked blue eyes.

‘Why,’ he began, in the broad slow dialect. ‘Your Ladyship’s as welcome as Christmas ter th’ hut an’ th’ key an’ iverythink as is. On’y this time O’ th’ year ther’s bods ter set, an’ Ah’ve got ter be potterin’ abaht a good bit, seein’ after ‘em, an’ a’. Winter time Ah ned ‘ardly come nigh th’ pleece. But what wi’ spring, an’ Sir Clifford wantin’ ter start th’ pheasants...An’ your Ladyship’d non want me tinkerin’ around an’ about when she was ‘ere, all the time.’

She listened with a dim kind of amazement.

‘Why should I mind your being here?’ she asked.

He looked at her curiously.

‘T’nuisance on me!’ he said briefly, but significantly. She flushed. ‘Very well!’ she said finally. ‘I won’t trouble you. But I don’t think I should have minded at all sitting and seeing you look after the birds. I should have liked it. But since you think it interferes with you, I won’t disturb you, don’t be afraid. You are Sir Clifford’s keeper, not mine.’

The phrase sounded queer, she didn’t know why. But she let it pass.

‘Nay, your Ladyship. It’s your Ladyship’s own ‘ut. It’s as your Ladyship likes an’ pleases, every time. Yer can turn me off at a wik’s notice. It wor only...’

‘Only what?’ she asked, baffled.

He pushed back his hat in an odd comic way.

‘On’y as ‘appen yo’d like the place ter yersen, when yer did come, an’ not me messin’ abaht.’

‘But why?’ she said, angry. ‘Aren’t you a civilized human being? Do you think I ought to be afraid of you? Why should I take any notice of you and your being here or not? Why is it important?’

He looked at her, all his face glimmering with wicked laughter.

‘It’s not, your Ladyship. Not in the very least,’ he said.

‘Well, why then?’ she asked.

‘Shall I get your Ladyship another key then?’

‘No thank you! I don’t want it.’

‘Ah’ll get it anyhow. We’d best ‘ave two keys ter th’ place.’

‘And I consider you are insolent,’ said Connie, with her colour up, panting a little.

‘Nay, nay!’ he said quickly. ‘Dunna yer say that! Nay, nay! I niver meant nuthink. Ah on’y thought as if yo’ come ‘ere, Ah s’d ave ter clear out, an’ it’d mean a lot of work, settin’ up somewheres else. But if your Ladyship isn’t going ter take no notice O’ me, then...it’s Sir Clifford’s ‘ut, an’ everythink is as your Ladyship likes, everythink is as your Ladyship likes an’ pleases, barrin’ yer take no notice O’ me, doin’ th’ bits of jobs as Ah’ve got ter do.’

Connie went away completely bewildered. She was not sure whether she had been insulted and mortally offended, or not. Perhaps the man really only meant what he said; that he thought she would expect him to keep away. As if she would dream of it! And as if he could possibly be so important, he and his stupid presence.

She went home in confusion, not knowing what she thought or felt.

CHAPTER 9

Connie was surprised at her own feeling of aversion from Clifford. What is more, she felt she had always really disliked him. Not hate: there was no passion in it. But a profound physical dislike. Almost, it seemed to her, she had married him because she disliked him, in a secret, physical sort of way. But of course, she had married him really because in a mental way he attracted her and excited her. He had seemed, in some way, her master, beyond her.

Now the mental excitement had worn itself out and collapsed, and she was aware only of the physical aversion. It rose up in her from her depths: and she realized how it had been eating her life away.

She felt weak and utterly forlorn. She wished some help would come from outside. But in the whole world there was no help. Society was terrible because it was insane. Civilized society is insane. Money and so-called love are its two great manias; money a long way first. The individual asserts himself in his disconnected insanity in these two modes: money and love. Look at Michaelis! His life and activity were just insanity. His love was a sort of insanity.

And Clifford the same. All that talk! All that writing! All that wild struggling to push himself forwards! It was just insanity. And it was getting worse, really maniacal.

Connie felt washed-out with fear. But at least, Clifford was shifting his grip from her on to Mrs Bolton. He did not know it. Like many insane people, his insanity might be measured by the things he was not aware of the great desert tracts in his consciousness.

Mrs Bolton was admirable in many ways. But she had that queer sort of bossiness, endless assertion of her own will, which is one of the signs of insanity in modern woman. She thought she was utterly subservient and living for others. Clifford fascinated her because he always, or so often, frustrated her will, as if by a finer instinct. He had a finer, subtler will of self-assertion than herself. This was his charm for her.

Perhaps that had been his charm, too, for Connie.

‘It’s a lovely day, today!’ Mrs Bolton would say in her caressive, persuasive voice. ‘I should think you’d enjoy a little run in your chair today, the sun’s just lovely.’

‘Yes? Will you give me that book — there, that yellow one. And I think I’ll have those hyacinths taken out.’

‘Why they’re so beautiful!’ She pronounced it with the ‘y’ sound: be-yutiful! ‘And the scent is simply gorgeous.’

‘The scent is what I object to,’ he said. ‘It’s a little funereal.’

‘Do you think so!’ she exclaimed in surprise, just a little offended, but impressed. And she carried the hyacinths out of the room, impressed by his higher fastidiousness.

‘Shall I shave you this morning, or would you rather do it yourself?’ Always the same soft, caressive, subservient, yet managing voice.

‘I don’t know. Do you mind waiting a while. I’ll ring when I’m ready.’

‘Very good, Sir Clifford!’ she replied, so soft and submissive, withdrawing quietly. But every rebuff stored up new energy of will in her.

When he rang, after a time, she would appear at once. And then he would say:

‘I think I’d rather you shaved me this morning.’

Her heart gave a little thrill, and she replied with extra softness:

‘Very good, Sir Clifford!’

She was very deft, with a soft, lingering touch, a little slow. At first he had resented the infinitely soft touch of her fingers on his face. But now he liked it, with a growing voluptuousness. He let her shave him nearly every day: her face near his, her eyes so very concentrated, watching that she did it right. And gradually her fingertips knew his cheeks and lips, his jaw and chin and throat perfectly. He was well-fed and well-liking, his face and throat were handsome enough and he was a gentleman.

She was handsome too, pale, her face rather long and absolutely still, her eyes bright, but revealing nothing. Gradually, with infinite softness, almost with love, she was getting him by the throat, and he was yielding to her.

She now did almost everything for him, and he felt more at home with her, less ashamed of accepting her menial offices, than with Connie. She liked handling him. She loved having his body in her charge, absolutely, to the last menial offices. She said to Connie one day: ‘All men are babies, when you come to the bottom of them. Why, I’ve handled some of the toughest customers as ever went down Tevershall pit. But let anything ail them so that you have to do for them, and they’re babies, just big babies. Oh, there’s not much difference in men!’

At first Mrs Bolton had thought there really was something different in a gentleman, a real gentleman, like Sir Clifford. So Clifford had got a good start of her. But gradually, as she came to the bottom of him, to use her own term, she found he was like the rest, a baby grown to man’s proportions: but a baby with a queer temper and a fine manner and power in its control, and all sorts of odd knowledge that she had never dreamed of, with which he could still bully her.

Connie was sometimes tempted to say to him:

‘For God’s sake, don’t sink so horribly into the hands of that woman!’ But she found she didn’t care for him enough to say it, in the long run.

It was still their habit to spend the evening together, till ten o’clock. Then they would talk, or read together, or go over his manuscript. But the thrill had gone out of it. She was bored by his manuscripts. But she still dutifully typed them out for him. But in time Mrs Bolton would do even that.

For Connie had suggested to Mrs Bolton that she should learn to use a typewriter. And Mrs Bolton, always ready, had begun at once, and practised assiduously. So now Clifford would sometimes dictate a letter to her, and she would take it down rather slowly, but correctly. And he was very patient, spelling for her the difficult words, or the occasional phrases in French. She was so thrilled, it was almost a pleasure to instruct her.

Now Connie would sometimes plead a headache as an excuse for going up to her room after dinner.

‘Perhaps Mrs Bolton will play piquet with you,’ she said to Clifford.

‘Oh, I shall be perfectly all right. You go to your own room and rest, darling.’

But no sooner had she gone, than he rang for Mrs Bolton, and asked her to take a hand at piquet or bezique, or even chess. He had taught her all these games. And Connie found it curiously objectionable to see Mrs Bolton, flushed and tremulous like a little girl, touching her queen or her knight with uncertain fingers, then drawing away again. And Clifford, faintly smiling with a half-teasing superiority, saying to her:

‘You must say j’adoube!’

She looked up at him with bright, startled eyes, then murmured shyly, obediently:

‘J’adoube!’

Yes, he was educating her. And he enjoyed it, it gave him a sense of power. And she was thrilled. She was coming bit by bit into possession of all that the gentry knew, all that made them upper class: apart from the money. That thrilled her. And at the same time, she was making him want to have her there with him. It was a subtle deep flattery to him, her genuine thrill.

To Connie, Clifford seemed to be coming out in his true colours: a little vulgar, a little common, and uninspired; rather fat. Ivy Bolton’s tricks and humble bossiness were also only too transparent. But Connie did wonder at the genuine thrill which the woman got out of Clifford. To say she was in love with him would be putting it wrongly. She was thrilled by her contact with a man of the upper class, this titled gentleman, this author who could write books and poems, and whose photograph appeared in the illustrated newspapers. She was

thrilled to a weird passion. And his 'educating' her roused in her a passion of excitement and response much deeper than any love affair could have done. In truth, the very fact that there could be no love affair left her free to thrill to her very marrow with this other passion, the peculiar passion of knowing, knowing as he knew.

There was no mistake that the woman was in some way in love with him: whatever force we give to the word love. She looked so handsome and so young, and her grey eyes were sometimes marvellous. At the same time, there was a lurking soft satisfaction about her, even of triumph, and private satisfaction. Ugh, that private satisfaction. How Connie loathed it!

But no wonder Clifford was caught by the woman! She absolutely adored him, in her persistent fashion, and put herself absolutely at his service, for him to use as he liked. No wonder he was flattered!

Connie heard long conversations going on between the two. Or rather, it was mostly Mrs Bolton talking. She had unloosed to him the stream of gossip about Tevershall village. It was more than gossip. It was Mrs Gaskell and George Eliot and Miss Mitford all rolled in one, with a great deal more, that these women left out.' Once started, Mrs Bolton was better than any book, about the lives of the people. She knew them all so intimately, and had such a peculiar, flamey zest in all their affairs, it was wonderful, if just a trifle humiliating to listen to her. At first she had not ventured to 'talk Tevershall', as she called it, to Clifford. But once started, it went on. Clifford was listening for 'material', and he found it in plenty. Connie realized that his so-called genius was just this: a perspicuous talent for personal gossip, clever and apparently detached. Mrs Bolton, of course, was very warm when she 'talked Tevershall'. Carried away, in fact. And it was marvellous, the things that happened and that she knew about. She would have run to dozens of volumes.

Connie was fascinated, listening to her. But afterwards always a little ashamed. She ought not to listen with this queer rabid curiosity. After all, one may hear the most private affairs of other people, but only in a spirit of respect for the struggling, battered thing which any human soul is, and in a spirit of fine, discriminative sympathy. For even satire is a form of sympathy. It is the way our sympathy flows and recoils that really determines our lives. And here lies the vast importance of the novel, properly handled. It can inform and lead into new places the flow of our sympathetic consciousness, and it can lead our sympathy away in recoil from things gone dead. Therefore, the novel, properly handled, can reveal the most secret places of life: for it is in the passional secret places of life, above all, that the tide of sensitive awareness needs to ebb and flow, cleansing and freshening.

But the novel, like gossip, can also excite spurious sympathies and recoils, mechanical and deadening to the psyche. The novel can glorify the most corrupt feelings, so long as they are conventionally 'pure'. Then the novel, like gossip, becomes at last vicious, and, like gossip, all the more vicious because it is always ostensibly on the side of the angels. Mrs Bolton's gossip was always on the side of the angels. 'And he was such a bad fellow, and she was such a nice woman.' Whereas, as Connie could see even from Mrs Bolton's gossip, the woman had been merely a mealy-mouthed sort, and the man angrily honest. But angry honesty made a 'bad man' of him, and mealy-mouthedness made a 'nice woman' of her, in the vicious, conventional channelling of sympathy by Mrs Bolton.

For this reason, the gossip was humiliating. And for the same reason, most novels, especially popular ones, are humiliating too. The public responds now only to an appeal to its vices.

Nevertheless, one got a new vision of Tevershall village from Mrs Bolton's talk. A terrible, seething welter of ugly life it seemed: not at all the flat drabness it looked from outside. Clifford of course knew by sight most of the people mentioned, Connie knew only one or two. But it sounded really more like a Central African jungle than an English village.

'I suppose you heard as Miss Allsopp was married last week! Would you ever! Miss Allsopp, old James' daughter, the boot-and-shoe Allsopp. You know they built a house up at Pye Croft. The old man died last year from a fall; eighty-three, he was, an' nimble as a lad. An' then he slipped on Bestwood Hill, on a slide as the lads 'ad made last winter, an' broke his thigh, and that finished him, poor old man, it did seem a shame. Well, he left all his money to Tattie: didn't leave the boys a penny. An' Tattie, I know, is five years — yes, she's fifty-three last autumn. And you know they were such Chapel people, my word! She taught Sunday school for thirty years, till her father died. And then she started carrying on with a fellow from Kinbrook, I don't know if you know him, an oldish fellow with a red nose, rather dandified, Willcock, as works in Harrison's woodyard. Well he's sixty-five, if he's a day, yet you'd have thought they were a pair of young turtle-doves, to see them, arm in arm, and kissing at the gate: yes, an' she sitting on his knee right in the bay window on Pye Croft Road, for anybody to see. And he's got sons over forty: only lost his wife two years ago. If old James Allsopp hasn't risen from his grave, it's because there is no rising: for he kept her that strict! Now they're married and gone to live down at Kinbrook, and they say she goes round in a dressing-gown from morning to night, a veritable sight. I'm sure it's awful, the way the old ones go on! Why they're a lot worse than the young, and a sight more disgusting. I lay it down to the pictures, myself. But you

can't keep them away. I was always saying: go to a good instructive film, but do for goodness sake keep away from these melodramas and love films. Anyhow keep the children away! But there you are, grown-ups are worse than the children: and the old ones beat the band.

'Talk about morality! Nobody cares a thing. Folks does as they like, and much better off they are for it, I must say. But they're having to draw their horns in nowadays, now th' pits are working so bad, and they haven't got the money. And the grumbling they do, it's awful, especially the women. The men are so good and patient! What can they do, poor chaps! But the women, oh, they do carry on! They go and show off, giving contributions for a wedding present for Princess Mary, and then when they see all the grand things that's been given, they simply rave: who's she, any better than anybody else! Why doesn't Swan & Edgar give me one fur coat, instead of giving her six. I wish I'd kept my ten shillings! What's she going to give me, I should like to know? Here I can't get a new spring coat, my dad's working that bad, and she gets van-loads. It's time as poor folks had some money to spend, rich ones 'as 'ad it long enough. I want a new spring coat, I do, an' wheer am I going to get it? I say to them, be thankful you're well fed and well clothed, without all the new finery you want! And they fly back at me: "Why isn't Princess Mary thankful to go about in her old rags, then, an' have nothing! Folks like her get van-loads, an' I can't have a new spring coat. It's a damned shame. Princess! Bloomin' rot about Princess! It's munney as matters, an' cos she's got lots, they give her more! Nobody's givin' me any, an' I've as much right as anybody else. Don't talk to me about education. It's munney as matters. I want a new spring coat, I do, an' I shan't get it, cos there's no munney..."

'That's all they care about, clothes. They think nothing of giving seven or eight guineas for a winter coat — colliers' daughters, mind you — and two guineas for a child's summer hat. And then they go to the Primitive Chapel in their two-guinea hat, girls as would have been proud of a three-and-sixpenny one in my day. I heard that at the Primitive Methodist anniversary this year, when they have a built-up platform for the Sunday School children, like a grandstand going almost up to th' ceiling, I heard Miss Thompson, who has the first class of girls in the Sunday School, say there'd be over a thousand pounds in new Sunday clothes sitting on that platform! And times are what they are! But you can't stop them. They're mad for clothes. And boys the same. The lads spend every penny on themselves, clothes, smoking, drinking in the Miners' Welfare, jaunting off to Sheffield two or three times a week. Why, it's another world. And they fear nothing, and they respect nothing, the young don't. The older men are that patient and good, really, they let the women take everything. And this is

what it leads to. The women are positive demons. But the lads aren't like their dads. They're sacrificing nothing, they aren't: they're all for self. If you tell them they ought to be putting a bit by, for a home, they say: That'll keep, that will, I'm goin' t' enjoy myself while I can. Owt else'll keep! Oh, they're rough an' selfish, if you like. Everything falls on the older men, an' it's a bad outlook all round.'

Clifford began to get a new idea of his own village. The place had always frightened him, but he had thought it more or less stable. Now — ?

'Is there much Socialism, Bolshevism, among the people?' he asked.

'Oh!' said Mrs Bolton, 'you hear a few loud-mouthed ones. But they're mostly women who've got into debt. The men take no notice. I don't believe you'll ever turn our Tevershall men into reds. They're too decent for that. But the young ones blether sometimes. Not that they care for it really. They only want a bit of money in their pocket, to spend at the Welfare, or go gadding to Sheffield. That's all they care. When they've got no money, they'll listen to the reds spouting. But nobody believes in it, really.'

'So you think there's no danger?'

'Oh no! Not if trade was good, there wouldn't be. But if things were bad for a long spell, the young ones might go funny. I tell you, they're a selfish, spoilt lot. But I don't see how they'd ever do anything. They aren't ever serious about anything, except showing off on motor-bikes and dancing at the Palais-de-danse in Sheffield. You can't make them serious. The serious ones dress up in evening clothes and go off to the Pally to show off before a lot of girls and dance these new Charlestons and what not. I'm sure sometimes the bus'll be full of young fellows in evening suits, collier lads, off to the Pally: let alone those that have gone with their girls in motors or on motor-bikes. They don't give a serious thought to a thing — save Doncaster races, and the Derby: for they all of them bet on every race. And football! But even football's not what it was, not by a long chalk. It's too much like hard work, they say. No, they'd rather be off on motor-bikes to Sheffield or Nottingham, Saturday afternoons.'

'But what do they do when they get there?'

'Oh, hang around — and have tea in some fine tea-place like the Mikado — and go to the Pally or the pictures or the Empire, with some girl. The girls are as free as the lads. They do just what they like.'

'And what do they do when they haven't the money for these things?'

'They seem to get it, somehow. And they begin talking nasty then. But I don't see how you're going to get bolshevism, when all the lads want is just money to enjoy themselves, and the girls the same, with fine clothes: and they don't care about another thing. They haven't the brains to be socialists. They haven't

enough seriousness to take anything really serious, and they never will have.'

Connie thought, how extremely like all the rest of the classes the lower classes sounded. Just the same thing over again, Tevershall or Mayfair or Kensington. There was only one class nowadays: moneyboys. The moneyboy and the moneygirl, the only difference was how much you'd got, and how much you wanted.

Under Mrs Bolton's influence, Clifford began to take a new interest in the mines. He began to feel he belonged. A new sort of self-assertion came into him. After all, he was the real boss in Tevershall, he was really the pits. It was a new sense of power, something he had till now shrunk from with dread.

Tevershall pits were running thin. There were only two collieries: Tevershall itself, and New London. Tevershall had once been a famous mine, and had made famous money. But its best days were over. New London was never very rich, and in ordinary times just got along decently. But now times were bad, and it was pits like New London that got left.

'There's a lot of Tevershall men left and gone to Stacks Gate and Whiteover,' said Mrs Bolton. 'You've not seen the new works at Stacks Gate, opened after the war, have you, Sir Clifford? Oh, you must go one day, they're something quite new: great big chemical works at the pit-head, doesn't look a bit like a colliery. They say they get more money out of the chemical by-products than out of the coal — I forget what it is. And the grand new houses for the men, fair mansions! of course it's brought a lot of riff-raff from all over the country. But a lot of Tevershall men got on there, and doin' well, a lot better than our own men. They say Tevershall's done, finished: only a question of a few more years, and it'll have to shut down. And New London'll go first. My word, won't it be funny when there's no Tevershall pit working. It's bad enough during a strike, but my word, if it closes for good, it'll be like the end of the world. Even when I was a girl it was the best pit in the country, and a man counted himself lucky if he could on here. Oh, there's been some money made in Tevershall. And now the men say it's a sinking ship, and it's time they all got out. Doesn't it sound awful! But of course there's a lot as'll never go till they have to. They don't like these new fangled mines, such a depth, and all machinery to work them. Some of them simply dreads those iron men, as they call them, those machines for hewing the coal, where men always did it before. And they say it's wasteful as well. But what goes in waste is saved in wages, and a lot more. It seems soon there'll be no use for men on the face of the earth, it'll be all machines. But they say that's what folks said when they had to give up the old stocking frames. I can remember one or two. But my word, the more machines, the more people, that's what it looks like! They say you can't get the same chemicals out of Tevershall

coal as you can out of Stacks Gate, and that's funny, they're not three miles apart. But they say so. But everybody says it's a shame something can't be started, to keep the men going a bit better, and employ the girls. All the girls traipsing off to Sheffield every day! My word, it would be something to talk about if Tevershall Collieries took a new lease of life, after everybody saying they're finished, and a sinking ship, and the men ought to leave them like rats leave a sinking ship. But folks talk so much, of course there was a boom during the war. When Sir Geoffrey made a trust of himself and got the money safe for ever, somehow. So they say! But they say even the masters and the owners don't get much out of it now. You can hardly believe it, can you! Why I always thought the pits would go on for ever and ever. Who'd have thought, when I was a girl! But New England's shut down, so is Colwick Wood: yes, it's fair haunting to go through that cobby and see Colwick Wood standing there deserted among the trees, and bushes growing up all over the pit-head, and the lines red rusty. It's like death itself, a dead colliery. Why, whatever should we do if Tevershall shut down — ? It doesn't bear thinking of. Always that throng it's been, except at strikes, and even then the fan-wheels didn't stand, except when they fetched the ponies up. I'm sure it's a funny world, you don't know where you are from year to year, you really don't.'

It was Mrs Bolton's talk that really put a new fight into Clifford. His income, as she pointed out to him, was secure, from his father's trust, even though it was not large. The pits did not really concern him. It was the other world he wanted to capture, the world of literature and fame; the popular world, not the working world.

Now he realized the distinction between popular success and working success: the populace of pleasure and the populace of work. He, as a private individual, had been catering with his stories for the populace of pleasure. And he had caught on. But beneath the populace of pleasure lay the populace of work, grim, grimy, and rather terrible. They too had to have their providers. And it was a much grimmer business, providing for the populace of work, than for the populace of pleasure. While he was doing his stories, and 'getting on' in the world, Tevershall was going to the wall.

He realized now that the bitch-goddess of Success had two main appetites: one for flattery, adulation, stroking and tickling such as writers and artists gave her; but the other a grimmer appetite for meat and bones. And the meat and bones for the bitch-goddess were provided by the men who made money in industry.

Yes, there were two great groups of dogs wrangling for the bitch-goddess: the group of the flatterers, those who offered her amusement, stories, films, plays: and the other, much less showy, much more savage breed, those who gave her

meat, the real substance of money. The well-groomed showy dogs of amusement wrangled and snarled among themselves for the favours of the bitch-goddess. But it was nothing to the silent fight-to-the-death that went on among the indispensables, the bone-bringers.

But under Mrs Bolton's influence, Clifford was tempted to enter this other fight, to capture the bitch-goddess by brute means of industrial production. Somehow, he got his pecker up.

In one way, Mrs Bolton made a man of him, as Connie never did. Connie kept him apart, and made him sensitive and conscious of himself and his own states. Mrs Bolton made him aware only of outside things. Inwardly he began to go soft as pulp. But outwardly he began to be effective.

He even roused himself to go to the mines once more: and when he was there, he went down in a tub, and in a tub he was hauled out into the workings. Things he had learned before the war, and seemed utterly to have forgotten, now came back to him. He sat there, crippled, in a tub, with the underground manager showing him the seam with a powerful torch. And he said little. But his mind began to work.

He began to read again his technical works on the coal-mining industry, he studied the government reports, and he read with care the latest things on mining and the chemistry of coal and of shale which were written in German. Of course the most valuable discoveries were kept secret as far as possible. But once you started a sort of research in the field of coal-mining, a study of methods and means, a study of by-products and the chemical possibilities of coal, it was astounding the ingenuity and the almost uncanny cleverness of the modern technical mind, as if really the devil himself had lent fiend's wits to the technical scientists of industry. It was far more interesting than art, than literature, poor emotional half-witted stuff, was this technical science of industry. In this field, men were like gods, or demons, inspired to discoveries, and fighting to carry them out. In this activity, men were beyond any mental age calculable. But Clifford knew that when it did come to the emotional and human life, these self-made men were of a mental age of about thirteen, feeble boys. The discrepancy was enormous and appalling.

But let that be. Let man slide down to general idiocy in the emotional and 'human' mind, Clifford did not care. Let all that go hang. He was interested in the technicalities of modern coal-mining, and in pulling Tevershall out of the hole.

He went down to the pit day after day, he studied, he put the general manager, and the overhead manager, and the underground manager, and the engineers through a mill they had never dreamed of. Power! He felt a new sense of power

flowing through him: power over all these men, over the hundreds and hundreds of colliers. He was finding out: and he was getting things into his grip.

And he seemed verily to be re-born. Now life came into him! He had been gradually dying, with Connie, in the isolated private life of the artist and the conscious being. Now let all that go. Let it sleep. He simply felt life rush into him out of the coal, out of the pit. The very stale air of the colliery was better than oxygen to him. It gave him a sense of power, power. He was doing something: and he was going to do something. He was going to win, to win: not as he had won with his stories, mere publicity, amid a whole sapping of energy and malice. But a man's victory.

At first he thought the solution lay in electricity: convert the coal into electric power. Then a new idea came. The Germans invented a new locomotive engine with a self feeder, that did not need a fireman. And it was to be fed with a new fuel, that burnt in small quantities at a great heat, under peculiar conditions.

The idea of a new concentrated fuel that burnt with a hard slowness at a fierce heat was what first attracted Clifford. There must be some sort of external stimulus of the burning of such fuel, not merely air supply. He began to experiment, and got a clever young fellow, who had proved brilliant in chemistry, to help him.

And he felt triumphant. He had at last got out of himself. He had fulfilled his life-long secret yearning to get out of himself. Art had not done it for him. Art had only made it worse. But now, now he had done it.

He was not aware how much Mrs Bolton was behind him. He did not know how much he depended on her. But for all that, it was evident that when he was with her his voice dropped to an easy rhythm of intimacy, almost a trifle vulgar.

With Connie, he was a little stiff. He felt he owed her everything, and he showed her the utmost respect and consideration, so long as she gave him mere outward respect. But it was obvious he had a secret dread of her. The new Achilles in him had a heel, and in this heel the woman, the woman like Connie, his wife, could lame him fatally. He went in a certain half-subservient dread of her, and was extremely nice to her. But his voice was a little tense when he spoke to her, and he began to be silent whenever she was present.

Only when he was alone with Mrs Bolton did he really feel a lord and a master, and his voice ran on with her almost as easily and garrulously as her own could run. And he let her shave him or sponge all his body as if he were a child, really as if he were a child.

CHAPTER 10

Connie was a good deal alone now, fewer people came to Wragby. Clifford no longer wanted them. He had turned against even the cronies. He was queer. He preferred the radio, which he had installed at some expense, with a good deal of success at last. He could sometimes get Madrid or Frankfurt, even there in the uneasy Midlands.

And he would sit alone for hours listening to the loudspeaker bellowing forth. It amazed and stunned Connie. But there he would sit, with a blank entranced expression on his face, like a person losing his mind, and listen, or seem to listen, to the unspeakable thing.

Was he really listening? Or was it a sort of soporific he took, whilst something else worked on underneath in him? Connie did now know. She fled up to her room, or out of doors to the wood. A kind of terror filled her sometimes, a terror of the incipient insanity of the whole civilized species.

But now that Clifford was drifting off to this other weirdness of industrial activity, becoming almost a creature, with a hard, efficient shell of an exterior and a pulpy interior, one of the amazing crabs and lobsters of the modern, industrial and financial world, invertebrates of the crustacean order, with shells of steel, like machines, and inner bodies of soft pulp, Connie herself was really completely stranded.

She was not even free, for Clifford must have her there. He seemed to have a nervous terror that she should leave him. The curious pulpy part of him, the emotional and humanly-individual part, depended on her with terror, like a child, almost like an idiot. She must be there, there at Wragby, a Lady Chatterley, his wife. Otherwise he would be lost like an idiot on a moor.

This amazing dependence Connie realized with a sort of horror. She heard him with his pit managers, with the members of his Board, with young scientists, and she was amazed at his shrewd insight into things, his power, his uncanny material power over what is called practical men. He had become a practical man himself and an amazingly astute and powerful one, a master. Connie attributed it to Mrs Bolton's influence upon him, just at the crisis in his life.

But this astute and practical man was almost an idiot when left alone to his own emotional life. He worshipped Connie. She was his wife, a higher being, and he worshipped her with a queer, craven idolatry, like a savage, a worship based on enormous fear, and even hate of the power of the idol, the dread idol.

All he wanted was for Connie to swear, to swear not to leave him, not to give him away.

‘Clifford,’ she said to him — but this was after she had the key to the hut — ‘Would you really like me to have a child one day?’

He looked at her with a furtive apprehension in his rather prominent pale eyes.

‘I shouldn’t mind, if it made no difference between us,’ he said.

‘No difference to what?’ she asked.

‘To you and me; to our love for one another. If it’s going to affect that, then I’m all against it. Why, I might even one day have a child of my own!’

She looked at him in amazement.

‘I mean, it might come back to me one of these days.’

She still stared in amazement, and he was uncomfortable.

‘So you would not like it if I had a child?’ she said.

‘I tell you,’ he replied quickly, like a cornered dog, ‘I am quite willing, provided it doesn’t touch your love for me. If it would touch that, I am dead against it.’

Connie could only be silent in cold fear and contempt. Such talk was really the gabbling of an idiot. He no longer knew what he was talking about.

‘Oh, it wouldn’t make any difference to my feeling for you,’ she said, with a certain sarcasm.

‘There!’ he said. ‘That is the point! In that case I don’t mind in the least. I mean it would be awfully nice to have a child running about the house, and feel one was building up a future for it. I should have something to strive for then, and I should know it was your child, shouldn’t I, dear? And it would seem just the same as my own. Because it is you who count in these matters. You know that, don’t you, dear? I don’t enter, I am a cypher. You are the great I-am! as far as life goes. You know that, don’t you? I mean, as far as I am concerned. I mean, but for you I am absolutely nothing. I live for your sake and your future. I am nothing to myself’

Connie heard it all with deepening dismay and repulsion. It was one of the ghastly half-truths that poison human existence. What man in his senses would say such things to a woman! But men aren’t in their senses. What man with a spark of honour would put this ghastly burden of life-responsibility upon a woman, and leave her there, in the void?

Moreover, in half an hour’s time, Connie heard Clifford talking to Mrs Bolton, in a hot, impulsive voice, revealing himself in a sort of passionless passion to the woman, as if she were half mistress, half foster-mother to him. And Mrs Bolton was carefully dressing him in evening clothes, for there were important business guests in the house.

Connie really sometimes felt she would die at this time. She felt she was being crushed to death by weird lies, and by the amazing cruelty of idiocy. Clifford's strange business efficiency in a way over-awed her, and his declaration of private worship put her into a panic. There was nothing between them. She never even touched him nowadays, and he never touched her. He never even took her hand and held it kindly. No, and because they were so utterly out of touch, he tortured her with his declaration of idolatry. It was the cruelty of utter impotence. And she felt her reason would give way, or she would die.

She fled as much as possible to the wood. One afternoon, as she sat brooding, watching the water bubbling coldly in John's Well, the keeper had strode up to her.

'I got you a key made, my Lady!' he said, saluting, and he offered her the key.

'Thank you so much!' she said, startled.

'The hut's not very tidy, if you don't mind,' he said. 'I cleared it what I could.'

'But I didn't want you to trouble!' she said.

'Oh, it wasn't any trouble. I am setting the hens in about a week. But they won't be scared of you. I s'll have to see to them morning and night, but I shan't bother you any more than I can help.'

'But you wouldn't bother me,' she pleaded. 'I'd rather not go to the hut at all, if I am going to be in the way.'

He looked at her with his keen blue eyes. He seemed kindly, but distant. But at least he was sane, and wholesome, if even he looked thin and ill. A cough troubled him.

'You have a cough,' she said.

'Nothing — a cold! The last pneumonia left me with a cough, but it's nothing.'

He kept distant from her, and would not come any nearer.

She went fairly often to the hut, in the morning or in the afternoon, but he was never there. No doubt he avoided her on purpose. He wanted to keep his own privacy.

He had made the hut tidy, put the little table and chair near the fireplace, left a little pile of kindling and small logs, and put the tools and traps away as far as possible, effacing himself. Outside, by the clearing, he had built a low little roof of boughs and straw, a shelter for the birds, and under it stood the live coops. And, one day when she came, she found two brown hens sitting alert and fierce in the coops, sitting on pheasants' eggs, and fluffed out so proud and deep in all the heat of the pondering female blood. This almost broke Connie's heart. She, herself was so forlorn and unused, not a female at all, just a mere thing of

terrors.

Then all the live coops were occupied by hens, three brown and a grey and a black. All alike, they clustered themselves down on the eggs in the soft nestling ponderosity of the female urge, the female nature, fluffing out their feathers. And with brilliant eyes they watched Connie, as she crouched before them, and they gave short sharp clucks of anger and alarm, but chiefly of female anger at being approached.

Connie found corn in the corn-bin in the hut. She offered it to the hens in her hand. They would not eat it. Only one hen pecked at her hand with a fierce little jab, so Connie was frightened. But she was pining to give them something, the brooding mothers who neither fed themselves nor drank. She brought water in a little tin, and was delighted when one of the hens drank.

Now she came every day to the hens, they were the only things in the world that warmed her heart. Clifford's protestations made her go cold from head to foot. Mrs Bolton's voice made her go cold, and the sound of the business men who came. An occasional letter from Michaelis affected her with the same sense of chill. She felt she would surely die if it lasted much longer.

Yet it was spring, and the bluebells were coming in the wood, and the leaf-buds on the hazels were opening like the spatter of green rain. How terrible it was that it should be spring, and everything cold-hearted, cold-hearted. Only the hens, fluffed so wonderfully on the eggs, were warm with their hot, brooding female bodies! Connie felt herself living on the brink of fainting all the time.

Then, one day, a lovely sunny day with great tufts of primroses under the hazels, and many violets dotting the paths, she came in the afternoon to the coops and there was one tiny, tiny perky chicken tinily prancing round in front of a coop, and the mother hen clucking in terror. The slim little chick was greyish brown with dark markings, and it was the most alive little spark of a creature in seven kingdoms at that moment. Connie crouched to watch in a sort of ecstasy. Life, life! pure, sparky, fearless new life! New life! So tiny and so utterly without fear! Even when it scampered a little, scrambling into the coop again, and disappeared under the hen's feathers in answer to the mother hen's wild alarm-cries, it was not really frightened, it took it as a game, the game of living. For in a moment a tiny sharp head was poking through the gold-brown feathers of the hen, and eyeing the Cosmos.

Connie was fascinated. And at the same time, never had she felt so acutely the agony of her own female forlornness. It was becoming unbearable.

She had only one desire now, to go to the clearing in the wood. The rest was a kind of painful dream. But sometimes she was kept all day at Wragby, by her duties as hostess. And then she felt as if she too were going blank, just blank and

insane.

One evening, guests or no guests, she escaped after tea. It was late, and she fled across the park like one who fears to be called back. The sun was setting rosy as she entered the wood, but she pressed on among the flowers. The light would last long overhead.

She arrived at the clearing flushed and semi-conscious. The keeper was there, in his shirt-sleeves, just closing up the coops for the night, so the little occupants would be safe. But still one little trio was pattering about on tiny feet, alert drab mites, under the straw shelter, refusing to be called in by the anxious mother.

‘I had to come and see the chickens!’ she said, panting, glancing shyly at the keeper, almost unaware of him. ‘Are there any more?’

‘Thurty-six so far!’ he said. ‘Not bad!’

He too took a curious pleasure in watching the young things come out.

Connie crouched in front of the last coop. The three chicks had run in. But still their cheeky heads came poking sharply through the yellow feathers, then withdrawing, then only one beady little head eyeing forth from the vast mother-body.

‘I’d love to touch them,’ she said, putting her fingers gingerly through the bars of the coop. But the mother-hen pecked at her hand fiercely, and Connie drew back startled and frightened.

‘How she pecks at me! She hates me!’ she said in a wondering voice. ‘But I wouldn’t hurt them!’

The man standing above her laughed, and crouched down beside her, knees apart, and put his hand with quiet confidence slowly into the coop. The old hen pecked at him, but not so savagely. And slowly, softly, with sure gentle fingers, he felt among the old bird’s feathers and drew out a faintly-peeping chick in his closed hand.

‘There!’ he said, holding out his hand to her. She took the little drab thing between her hands, and there it stood, on its impossible little stalks of legs, its atom of balancing life trembling through its almost weightless feet into Connie’s hands. But it lifted its handsome, clean-shaped little head boldly, and looked sharply round, and gave a little ‘peep’. ‘So adorable! So cheeky!’ she said softly.

The keeper, squatting beside her, was also watching with an amused face the bold little bird in her hands. Suddenly he saw a tear fall on to her wrist.

And he stood up, and stood away, moving to the other coop. For suddenly he was aware of the old flame shooting and leaping up in his loins, that he had hoped was quiescent for ever. He fought against it, turning his back to her. But it leapt, and leapt downwards, circling in his knees.

He turned again to look at her. She was kneeling and holding her two hands

slowly forward, blindly, so that the chicken should run in to the mother-hen again. And there was something so mute and forlorn in her, compassion flamed in his bowels for her.

Without knowing, he came quickly towards her and crouched beside her again, taking the chick from her hands, because she was afraid of the hen, and putting it back in the coop. At the back of his loins the fire suddenly darted stronger.

He glanced apprehensively at her. Her face was averted, and she was crying blindly, in all the anguish of her generation's forlornness. His heart melted suddenly, like a drop of fire, and he put out his hand and laid his fingers on her knee.

'You shouldn't cry,' he said softly.

But then she put her hands over her face and felt that really her heart was broken and nothing mattered any more.

He laid his hand on her shoulder, and softly, gently, it began to travel down the curve of her back, blindly, with a blind stroking motion, to the curve of her crouching loins. And there his hand softly, softly, stroked the curve of her flank, in the blind instinctive caress.

She had found her scrap of handkerchief and was blindly trying to dry her face.

'Shall you come to the hut?' he said, in a quiet, neutral voice.

And closing his hand softly on her upper arm, he drew her up and led her slowly to the hut, not letting go of her till she was inside. Then he cleared aside the chair and table, and took a brown, soldier's blanket from the tool chest, spreading it slowly. She glanced at his face, as she stood motionless.

His face was pale and without expression, like that of a man submitting to fate.

'You lie there,' he said softly, and he shut the door, so that it was dark, quite dark.

With a queer obedience, she lay down on the blanket. Then she felt the soft, groping, helplessly desirous hand touching her body, feeling for her face. The hand stroked her face softly, softly, with infinite soothing and assurance, and at last there was the soft touch of a kiss on her cheek.

She lay quite still, in a sort of sleep, in a sort of dream. Then she quivered as she felt his hand groping softly, yet with queer thwarted clumsiness, among her clothing. Yet the hand knew, too, how to unclthe her where it wanted. He drew down the thin silk sheath, slowly, carefully, right down and over her feet. Then with a quiver of exquisite pleasure he touched the warm soft body, and touched her navel for a moment in a kiss. And he had to come in to her at once, to enter

the peace on earth of her soft, quiescent body. It was the moment of pure peace for him, the entry into the body of the woman.

She lay still, in a kind of sleep, always in a kind of sleep. The activity, the orgasm was his, all his; she could strive for herself no more. Even the tightness of his arms round her, even the intense movement of his body, and the springing of his seed in her, was a kind of sleep, from which she did not begin to rouse till he had finished and lay softly panting against her breast.

Then she wondered, just dimly wondered, why? Why was this necessary? Why had it lifted a great cloud from her and given her peace? Was it real? Was it real?

Her tormented modern-woman's brain still had no rest. Was it real? And she knew, if she gave herself to the man, it was real. But if she kept herself for herself it was nothing. She was old; millions of years old, she felt. And at last, she could bear the burden of herself no more. She was to be had for the taking. To be had for the taking.

The man lay in a mysterious stillness. What was he feeling? What was he thinking? She did not know. He was a strange man to her, she did not know him. She must only wait, for she did not dare to break his mysterious stillness. He lay there with his arms round her, his body on hers, his wet body touching hers, so close. And completely unknown. Yet not unpeaceful. His very stillness was peaceful.

She knew that, when at last he roused and drew away from her. It was like an abandonment. He drew her dress in the darkness down over her knees and stood a few moments, apparently adjusting his own clothing. Then he quietly opened the door and went out.

She saw a very brilliant little moon shining above the afterglow over the oaks. Quickly she got up and arranged herself she was tidy. Then she went to the door of the hut.

All the lower wood was in shadow, almost darkness. Yet the sky overhead was crystal. But it shed hardly any light. He came through the lower shadow towards her, his face lifted like a pale blotch.

'Shall we go then?' he said.

'Where?'

'I'll go with you to the gate.'

He arranged things his own way. He locked the door of the hut and came after her.

'You aren't sorry, are you?' he asked, as he went at her side.

'No! No! Are you?' she said.

'For that! No!' he said. Then after a while he added: 'But there's the rest of

things.'

'What rest of things?' she said.

'Sir Clifford. Other folks. All the complications.'

'Why complications?' she said, disappointed.

'It's always so. For you as well as for me. There's always complications.' He walked on steadily in the dark.

'And are you sorry?' she said.

'In a way!' he replied, looking up at the sky. 'I thought I'd done with it all. Now I've begun again.'

'Begun what?'

'Life.'

'Life!' she re-echoed, with a queer thrill.

'It's life,' he said. 'There's no keeping clear. And if you do keep clear you might almost as well die. So if I've got to be broken open again, I have.'

She did not quite see it that way, but still 'It's just love,' she said cheerfully.

'Whatever that may be,' he replied.

They went on through the darkening wood in silence, till they were almost at the gate.

'But you don't hate me, do you?' she said wistfully.

'Nay, nay,' he replied. And suddenly he held her fast against his breast again, with the old connecting passion. 'Nay, for me it was good, it was good. Was it for you?'

'Yes, for me too,' she answered, a little untruthfully, for she had not been conscious of much.

He kissed her softly, softly, with the kisses of warmth.

'If only there weren't so many other people in the world,' he said lugubriously.

She laughed. They were at the gate to the park. He opened it for her.

'I won't come any further,' he said.

'No!' And she held out her hand, as if to shake hands. But he took it in both his.

'Shall I come again?' she asked wistfully.

'Yes! Yes!'

She left him and went across the park.

He stood back and watched her going into the dark, against the pallor of the horizon. Almost with bitterness he watched her go. She had connected him up again, when he had wanted to be alone. She had cost him that bitter privacy of a man who at last wants only to be alone.

He turned into the dark of the wood. All was still, the moon had set. But he

was aware of the noises of the night, the engines at Stacks Gate, the traffic on the main road. Slowly he climbed the denuded knoll. And from the top he could see the country, bright rows of lights at Stacks Gate, smaller lights at Tevershall pit, the yellow lights of Tevershall and lights everywhere, here and there, on the dark country, with the distant blush of furnaces, faint and rosy, since the night was clear, the rosiness of the outpouring of white-hot metal. Sharp, wicked electric lights at Stacks Gate! An undefinable quick of evil in them! And all the unease, the ever-shifting dread of the industrial night in the Midlands. He could hear the winding-engines at Stacks Gate turning down the seven-o'clock miners. The pit worked three shifts.

He went down again into the darkness and seclusion of the wood. But he knew that the seclusion of the wood was illusory. The industrial noises broke the solitude, the sharp lights, though unseen, mocked it. A man could no longer be private and withdrawn. The world allows no hermits. And now he had taken the woman, and brought on himself a new cycle of pain and doom. For he knew by experience what it meant.

It was not woman's fault, nor even love's fault, nor the fault of sex. The fault lay there, out there, in those evil electric lights and diabolical rattlings of engines. There, in the world of the mechanical greedy, greedy mechanism and mechanized greed, sparkling with lights and gushing hot metal and roaring with traffic, there lay the vast evil thing, ready to destroy whatever did not conform. Soon it would destroy the wood, and the bluebells would spring no more. All vulnerable things must perish under the rolling and running of iron.

He thought with infinite tenderness of the woman. Poor forlorn thing, she was nicer than she knew, and oh! so much too nice for the tough lot she was in contact with. Poor thing, she too had some of the vulnerability of the wild hyacinths, she wasn't all tough rubber-goods and platinum, like the modern girl. And they would do her in! As sure as life, they would do her in, as they do in all naturally tender life. Tender! Somewhere she was tender, tender with a tenderness of the growing hyacinths, something that has gone out of the celluloid women of today. But he would protect her with his heart for a little while. For a little while, before the insentient iron world and the Mammon of mechanized greed did them both in, her as well as him.

He went home with his gun and his dog, to the dark cottage, lit the lamp, started the fire, and ate his supper of bread and cheese, young onions and beer. He was alone, in a silence he loved. His room was clean and tidy, but rather stark. Yet the fire was bright, the hearth white, the petroleum lamp hung bright over the table, with its white oil-cloth. He tried to read a book about India, but tonight he could not read. He sat by the fire in his shirt-sleeves, not smoking, but

with a mug of beer in reach. And he thought about Connie.

To tell the truth, he was sorry for what had happened, perhaps most for her sake. He had a sense of foreboding. No sense of wrong or sin; he was troubled by no conscience in that respect. He knew that conscience was chiefly fear of society, or fear of oneself. He was not afraid of himself. But he was quite consciously afraid of society, which he knew by instinct to be a malevolent, partly-insane beast.

The woman! If she could be there with him, and there were nobody else in the world! The desire rose again, his penis began to stir like a live bird. At the same time an oppression, a dread of exposing himself and her to that outside Thing that sparkled viciously in the electric lights, weighed down his shoulders. She, poor young thing, was just a young female creature to him; but a young female creature whom he had gone into and whom he desired again.

Stretching with the curious yawn of desire, for he had been alone and apart from man or woman for four years, he rose and took his coat again, and his gun, lowered the lamp and went out into the starry night, with the dog. Driven by desire and by dread of the malevolent Thing outside, he made his round in the wood, slowly, softly. He loved the darkness and folded himself into it. It fitted the turgidity of his desire which, in spite of all, was like a riches; the stirring restlessness of his penis, the stirring fire in his loins! Oh, if only there were other men to be with, to fight that sparkling electric Thing outside there, to preserve the tenderness of life, the tenderness of women, and the natural riches of desire. If only there were men to fight side by side with! But the men were all outside there, glorying in the Thing, triumphing or being trodden down in the rush of mechanized greed or of greedy mechanism.

Constance, for her part, had hurried across the park, home, almost without thinking. As yet she had no afterthought. She would be in time for dinner.

She was annoyed to find the doors fastened, however, so that she had to ring. Mrs Bolton opened.

‘Why there you are, your Ladyship! I was beginning to wonder if you’d gone lost!’ she said a little roguishly. ‘Sir Clifford hasn’t asked for you, though; he’s got Mr Linley in with him, talking over something. It looks as if he’d stay to dinner, doesn’t it, my Lady?’

‘It does rather,’ said Connie.

‘Shall I put dinner back a quarter of an hour? That would give you time to dress in comfort.’

‘Perhaps you’d better.’

Mr Linley was the general manager of the collieries, an elderly man from the north, with not quite enough punch to suit Clifford; not up to post-war

conditions, nor post-war colliers either, with their 'ca' canny' creed. But Connie liked Mr Linley, though she was glad to be spared the toadying of his wife.

Linley stayed to dinner, and Connie was the hostess men liked so much, so modest, yet so attentive and aware, with big, wide blue eyes and a soft repose that sufficiently hid what she was really thinking. Connie had played this woman so much, it was almost second nature to her; but still, decidedly second. Yet it was curious how everything disappeared from her consciousness while she played it.

She waited patiently till she could go upstairs and think her own thoughts. She was always waiting, it seemed to be her forte.

Once in her room, however, she felt still vague and confused. She didn't know what to think. What sort of a man was he, really? Did he really like her? Not much, she felt. Yet he was kind. There was something, a sort of warm naive kindness, curious and sudden, that almost opened her womb to him. But she felt he might be kind like that to any woman. Though even so, it was curiously soothing, comforting. And he was a passionate man, wholesome and passionate. But perhaps he wasn't quite individual enough; he might be the same with any woman as he had been with her. It really wasn't personal. She was only really a female to him.

But perhaps that was better. And after all, he was kind to the female in her, which no man had ever been. Men were very kind to the person she was, but rather cruel to the female, despising her or ignoring her altogether. Men were awfully kind to Constance Reid or to Lady Chatterley; but not to her womb they weren't kind. And he took no notice of Constance or of Lady Chatterley; he just softly stroked her loins or her breasts.

She went to the wood next day. It was a grey, still afternoon, with the dark-green dogs-mercury spreading under the hazel copse, and all the trees making a silent effort to open their buds. Today she could almost feel it in her own body, the huge heave of the sap in the massive trees, upwards, up, up to the bud-tips, there to push into little flamey oak-leaves, bronze as blood. It was like a ride running turgid upward, and spreading on the sky.

She came to the clearing, but he was not there. She had only half expected him. The pheasant chicks were running lightly abroad, light as insects, from the coops where the fellow hens clucked anxiously. Connie sat and watched them, and waited. She only waited. Even the chicks she hardly saw. She waited.

The time passed with dream-like slowness, and he did not come. She had only half expected him. He never came in the afternoon. She must go home to tea. But she had to force herself to leave.

As she went home, a fine drizzle of rain fell.

‘Is it raining again?’ said Clifford, seeing her shake her hat.

‘Just drizzle.’

She poured tea in silence, absorbed in a sort of obstinacy. She did want to see the keeper today, to see if it were really real. If it were really real.

‘Shall I read a little to you afterwards?’ said Clifford.

She looked at him. Had he sensed something?

‘The spring makes me feel queer — I thought I might rest a little,’ she said.

‘Just as you like. Not feeling really unwell, are you?’

‘No! Only rather tired — with the spring. Will you have Mrs Bolton to play something with you?’

‘No! I think I’ll listen in.’

She heard the curious satisfaction in his voice. She went upstairs to her bedroom. There she heard the loudspeaker begin to bellow, in an idiotically velveteen-genteel sort of voice, something about a series of street-cries, the very cream of genteel affectation imitating old criers. She pulled on her old violet coloured mackintosh, and slipped out of the house at the side door.

The drizzle of rain was like a veil over the world, mysterious, hushed, not cold. She got very warm as she hurried across the park. She had to open her light waterproof.

The wood was silent, still and secret in the evening drizzle of rain, full of the mystery of eggs and half-open buds, half unsheathed flowers. In the dimness of it all trees glistened naked and dark as if they had unclothed themselves, and the green things on earth seemed to hum with greenness.

There was still no one at the clearing. The chicks had nearly all gone under the mother-hens, only one or two last adventurous ones still dived about in the dryness under the straw roof shelter. And they were doubtful of themselves.

So! He still had not been. He was staying away on purpose. Or perhaps something was wrong. Perhaps she should go to the cottage and see.

But she was born to wait. She opened the hut with her key. It was all tidy, the corn put in the bin, the blankets folded on the shelf, the straw neat in a corner; a new bundle of straw. The hurricane lamp hung on a nail. The table and chair had been put back where she had lain.

She sat down on a stool in the doorway. How still everything was! The fine rain blew very softly, filmily, but the wind made no noise. Nothing made any sound. The trees stood like powerful beings, dim, twilight, silent and alive. How alive everything was!

Night was drawing near again; she would have to go. He was avoiding her.

But suddenly he came striding into the clearing, in his black oilskin jacket like a chauffeur, shining with wet. He glanced quickly at the hut, half-saluted, then

veered aside and went on to the coops. There he crouched in silence, looking carefully at everything, then carefully shutting the hens and chicks up safe against the night.

At last he came slowly towards her. She still sat on her stool. He stood before her under the porch.

‘You come then,’ he said, using the intonation of the dialect.

‘Yes,’ she said, looking up at him. ‘You’re late!’

‘Ay!’ he replied, looking away into the wood.

She rose slowly, drawing aside her stool.

‘Did you want to come in?’ she asked.

He looked down at her shrewdly.

‘Won’t folks be thinkin’ somethink, you comin’ here every night?’ he said.

‘Why?’ She looked up at him, at a loss. ‘I said I’d come. Nobody knows.’

‘They soon will, though,’ he replied. ‘An’ what then?’

She was at a loss for an answer.

‘Why should they know?’ she said.

‘Folks always does,’ he said fatally.

Her lip quivered a little.

‘Well I can’t help it,’ she faltered.

‘Nay,’ he said. ‘You can help it by not comin’ — if yer want to,’ he added, in a lower tone.

‘But I don’t want to,’ she murmured.

He looked away into the wood, and was silent.

‘But what when folks finds out?’ he asked at last. ‘Think about it! Think how lowered you’ll feel, one of your husband’s servants.’

She looked up at his averted face.

‘Is it,’ she stammered, ‘is it that you don’t want me?’

‘Think!’ he said. ‘Think what if folks find out Sir Clifford an’ a’ — an’ everybody talkin’ — ’

‘Well, I can go away.’

‘Where to?’

‘Anywhere! I’ve got money of my own. My mother left me twenty thousand pounds in trust, and I know Clifford can’t touch it. I can go away.’

‘But ‘appen you don’t want to go away.’

‘Yes, yes! I don’t care what happens to me.’

‘Ay, you think that! But you’ll care! You’ll have to care, everybody has. You’ve got to remember your Ladyship is carrying on with a game-keeper. It’s not as if I was a gentleman. Yes, you’d care. You’d care.’

‘I shouldn’t. What do I care about my ladyship! I hate it really. I feel people

are jeering every time they say it. And they are, they are! Even you jeer when you say it.'

'Me!'

For the first time he looked straight at her, and into her eyes. 'I don't jeer at you,' he said.

As he looked into her eyes she saw his own eyes go dark, quite dark, the pupils dilating.

'Don't you care about a' the risk?' he asked in a husky voice. 'You should care. Don't care when it's too late!'

There was a curious warning pleading in his voice.

'But I've nothing to lose,' she said fretfully. 'If you knew what it is, you'd think I'd be glad to lose it. But are you afraid for yourself?'

'Ay!' he said briefly. 'I am. I'm afraid. I'm afraid. I'm afraid o' things.'

'What things?' she asked.

He gave a curious backward jerk of his head, indicating the outer world.

'Things! Everybody! The lot of 'em.'

Then he bent down and suddenly kissed her unhappy face.

'Nay, I don't care,' he said. 'Let's have it, an' damn the rest. But if you was to feel sorry you'd ever done it — !'

'Don't put me off,' she pleaded.

He put his fingers to her cheek and kissed her again suddenly.

'Let me come in then,' he said softly. 'An' take off your mackintosh.'

He hung up his gun, slipped out of his wet leather jacket, and reached for the blankets.

'I brought another blanket,' he said, 'so we can put one over us if you like.'

'I can't stay long,' she said. 'Dinner is half-past seven.'

He looked at her swiftly, then at his watch.

'All right,' he said.

He shut the door, and lit a tiny light in the hanging hurricane lamp. 'One time we'll have a long time,' he said.

He put the blankets down carefully, one folded for her head. Then he sat down a moment on the stool, and drew her to him, holding her close with one arm, feeling for her body with his free hand. She heard the catch of his intaken breath as he found her. Under her frail petticoat she was naked.

'Eh! what it is to touch thee!' he said, as his finger caressed the delicate, warm, secret skin of her waist and hips. He put his face down and rubbed his cheek against her belly and against her thighs again and again. And again she wondered a little over the sort of rapture it was to him. She did not understand the beauty he found in her, through touch upon her living secret body, almost the

ecstasy of beauty. For passion alone is awake to it. And when passion is dead, or absent, then the magnificent throb of beauty is incomprehensible and even a little despicable; warm, live beauty of contact, so much deeper than the beauty of vision. She felt the glide of his cheek on her thighs and belly and buttocks, and the close brushing of his moustache and his soft thick hair, and her knees began to quiver. Far down in her she felt a new stirring, a new nakedness emerging. And she was half afraid. Half she wished he would not caress her so. He was encompassing her somehow. Yet she was waiting, waiting.

And when he came into her, with an intensification of relief and consummation that was pure peace to him, still she was waiting. She felt herself a little left out. And she knew, partly it was her own fault. She willed herself into this separateness. Now perhaps she was condemned to it. She lay still, feeling his motion within her, his deep-sunk intentness, the sudden quiver of him at the springing of his seed, then the slow-subsiding thrust. That thrust of the buttocks, surely it was a little ridiculous. If you were a woman, and a part in all the business, surely that thrusting of the man's buttocks was supremely ridiculous. Surely the man was intensely ridiculous in this posture and this act!

But she lay still, without recoil. Even when he had finished, she did not rouse herself to get a grip on her own satisfaction, as she had done with Michaelis; she lay still, and the tears slowly filled and ran from her eyes.

He lay still, too. But he held her close and tried to cover her poor naked legs with his legs, to keep them warm. He lay on her with a close, undoubting warmth.

'Are yer cold?' he asked, in a soft, small voice, as if she were close, so close. Whereas she was left out, distant.

'No! But I must go,' she said gently.

He sighed, held her closer, then relaxed to rest again.

He had not guessed her tears. He thought she was there with him.

'I must go,' she repeated.

He lifted himself kneeled beside her a moment, kissed the inner side of her thighs, then drew down her skirts, buttoning his own clothes unthinking, not even turning aside, in the faint, faint light from the lantern.

'Tha mun come ter th' cottage one time,' he said, looking down at her with a warm, sure, easy face.

But she lay there inert, and was gazing up at him thinking: Stranger! Stranger! She even resented him a little.

He put on his coat and looked for his hat, which had fallen, then he slung on his gun.

'Come then!' he said, looking down at her with those warm, peaceful sort of

eyes.

She rose slowly. She didn't want to go. She also rather resented staying. He helped her with her thin waterproof and saw she was tidy.

Then he opened the door. The outside was quite dark. The faithful dog under the porch stood up with pleasure seeing him. The drizzle of rain drifted greyly past upon the darkness. It was quite dark.

'Ah mun ta'e th' lantern,' he said. 'The'll be nob'dy.'

He walked just before her in the narrow path, swinging the hurricane lamp low, revealing the wet grass, the black shiny tree-roots like snakes, wan flowers. For the rest, all was grey rain-mist and complete darkness.

'Tha mun come to the cottage one time,' he said, 'shall ta? We might as well be hung for a sheep as for a lamb.'

It puzzled her, his queer, persistent wanting her, when there was nothing between them, when he never really spoke to her, and in spite of herself she resented the dialect. His 'tha mun come' seemed not addressed to her, but some common woman. She recognized the foxglove leaves of the riding and knew, more or less, where they were.

'It's quarter past seven,' he said, 'you'll do it.' He had changed his voice, seemed to feel her distance. As they turned the last bend in the riding towards the hazel wall and the gate, he blew out the light. 'We'll see from here,' he said, taking her gently by the arm.

But it was difficult, the earth under their feet was a mystery, but he felt his way by tread: he was used to it. At the gate he gave her his electric torch. 'It's a bit lighter in the park,' he said; 'but take it for fear you get off th' path.'

It was true, there seemed a ghost-glimmer of greyness in the open space of the park. He suddenly drew her to him and whipped his hand under her dress again, feeling her warm body with his wet, chill hand.

'I could die for the touch of a woman like thee,' he said in his throat. 'If tha' would stop another minute.'

She felt the sudden force of his wanting her again.

'No, I must run,' she said, a little wildly.

'Ay,' he replied, suddenly changed, letting her go.

She turned away, and on the instant she turned back to him saying: 'Kiss me.'

He bent over her indistinguishable and kissed her on the left eye. She held her mouth and he softly kissed it, but at once drew away. He hated mouth kisses.

'I'll come tomorrow,' she said, drawing away; 'if I can,' she added.

'Ay! not so late,' he replied out of the darkness. Already she could not see him at all.

'Goodnight,' she said.

‘Goodnight, your Ladyship,’ his voice.

She stopped and looked back into the wet dark. She could just see the bulk of him. ‘Why did you say that?’ she said.

‘Nay,’ he replied. ‘Goodnight then, run!’

She plunged on in the dark-grey tangible night. She found the side-door open, and slipped into her room unseen. As she closed the door the gong sounded, but she would take her bath all the same — she must take her bath. ‘But I won’t be late any more,’ she said to herself; ‘it’s too annoying.’

The next day she did not go to the wood. She went instead with Clifford to Uthwaite. He could occasionally go out now in the car, and had got a strong young man as chauffeur, who could help him out of the car if need be. He particularly wanted to see his godfather, Leslie Winter, who lived at Shipley Hall, not far from Uthwaite. Winter was an elderly gentleman now, wealthy, one of the wealthy coal-owners who had had their hey-day in King Edward’s time. King Edward had stayed more than once at Shipley, for the shooting. It was a handsome old stucco hall, very elegantly appointed, for Winter was a bachelor and prided himself on his style; but the place was beset by collieries. Leslie Winter was attached to Clifford, but personally did not entertain a great respect for him, because of the photographs in illustrated papers and the literature. The old man was a buck of the King Edward school, who thought life was life and the scribbling fellows were something else. Towards Connie the Squire was always rather gallant; he thought her an attractive demure maiden and rather wasted on Clifford, and it was a thousand pities she stood no chance of bringing forth an heir to Wragby. He himself had no heir.

Connie wondered what he would say if he knew that Clifford’s game-keeper had been having intercourse with her, and saying to her ‘tha mun come to th’ cottage one time.’ He would detest and despise her, for he had come almost to hate the shoving forward of the working classes. A man of her own class he would not mind, for Connie was gifted from nature with this appearance of demure, submissive maidenliness, and perhaps it was part of her nature. Winter called her ‘dear child’ and gave her a rather lovely miniature of an eighteenth-century lady, rather against her will.

But Connie was preoccupied with her affair with the keeper. After all, Mr Winter, who was really a gentleman and a man of the world, treated her as a person and a discriminating individual; he did not lump her together with all the rest of his female womanhood in his ‘thee’ and ‘tha’.

She did not go to the wood that day nor the next, nor the day following. She did not go so long as she felt, or imagined she felt, the man waiting for her, wanting her. But the fourth day she was terribly unsettled and uneasy. She still

refused to go to the wood and open her thighs once more to the man. She thought of all the things she might do — drive to Sheffield, pay visits, and the thought of all these things was repellent. At last she decided to take a walk, not towards the wood, but in the opposite direction; she would go to Marehay, through the little iron gate in the other side of the park fence. It was a quiet grey day of spring, almost warm. She walked on unheeding, absorbed in thoughts she was not even conscious of. She was not really aware of anything outside her, till she was startled by the loud barking of the dog at Marehay Farm. Marehay Farm! Its pastures ran up to Wragby park fence, so they were neighbours, but it was some time since Connie had called.

‘Bell!’ she said to the big white bull-terrier. ‘Bell! have you forgotten me? Don’t you know me?’ She was afraid of dogs, and Bell stood back and bellowed, and she wanted to pass through the farmyard on to the warren path.

Mrs Flint appeared. She was a woman of Constance’s own age, had been a schoolteacher, but Connie suspected her of being rather a false little thing.

‘Why, it’s Lady Chatterley! Why!’ And Mrs Flint’s eyes glowed again, and she flushed like a young girl. ‘Bell, Bell. Why! barking at Lady Chatterley! Bell! Be quiet!’ She darted forward and slashed at the dog with a white cloth she held in her hand, then came forward to Connie.

‘She used to know me,’ said Connie, shaking hands. The Flints were Chatterley tenants.

‘Of course she knows your Ladyship! She’s just showing off,’ said Mrs Flint, glowing and looking up with a sort of flushed confusion, ‘but it’s so long since she’s seen you. I do hope you are better.’

‘Yes thanks, I’m all right.’

‘We’ve hardly seen you all winter. Will you come in and look at the baby?’

‘Well!’ Connie hesitated. ‘Just for a minute.’

Mrs Flint flew wildly in to tidy up, and Connie came slowly after her, hesitating in the rather dark kitchen where the kettle was boiling by the fire. Back came Mrs Flint.

‘I do hope you’ll excuse me,’ she said. ‘Will you come in here?’

They went into the living-room, where a baby was sitting on the rag hearth rug, and the table was roughly set for tea. A young servant-girl backed down the passage, shy and awkward.

The baby was a perky little thing of about a year, with red hair like its father, and cheeky pale-blue eyes. It was a girl, and not to be daunted. It sat among cushions and was surrounded with rag dolls and other toys in modern excess.

‘Why, what a dear she is!’ said Connie, ‘and how she’s grown! A big girl! A big girl!’

She had given it a shawl when it was born, and celluloid ducks for Christmas.

‘There, Josephine! Who’s that come to see you? Who’s this, Josephine? Lady Chatterley — you know Lady Chatterley, don’t you?’

The queer pert little mite gazed cheekily at Connie. Ladyships were still all the same to her.

‘Come! Will you come to me?’ said Connie to the baby.

The baby didn’t care one way or another, so Connie picked her up and held her in her lap. How warm and lovely it was to hold a child in one’s lap, and the soft little arms, the unconscious cheeky little legs.

‘I was just having a rough cup of tea all by myself. Luke’s gone to market, so I can have it when I like. Would you care for a cup, Lady Chatterley? I don’t suppose it’s what you’re used to, but if you would...’

Connie would, though she didn’t want to be reminded of what she was used to. There was a great relaying of the table, and the best cups brought and the best tea-pot.

‘If only you wouldn’t take any trouble,’ said Connie.

But if Mrs Flint took no trouble, where was the fun! So Connie played with the child and was amused by its little female dauntlessness, and got a deep voluptuous pleasure out of its soft young warmth. Young life! And so fearless! So fearless, because so defenceless. All the other people, so narrow with fear!

She had a cup of tea, which was rather strong, and very good bread and butter, and bottled damsons. Mrs Flint flushed and glowed and bridled with excitement, as if Connie were some gallant knight. And they had a real female chat, and both of them enjoyed it.

‘It’s a poor little tea, though,’ said Mrs Flint.

‘It’s much nicer than at home,’ said Connie truthfully.

‘Oh-h!’ said Mrs Flint, not believing, of course.

But at last Connie rose.

‘I must go,’ she said. ‘My husband has no idea where I am. He’ll be wondering all kinds of things.’

‘He’ll never think you’re here,’ laughed Mrs Flint excitedly. ‘He’ll be sending the crier round.’

‘Goodbye, Josephine,’ said Connie, kissing the baby and ruffling its red, wispy hair.

Mrs Flint insisted on opening the locked and barred front door. Connie emerged in the farm’s little front garden, shut in by a privet hedge. There were two rows of auriculas by the path, very velvety and rich.

‘Lovely auriculas,’ said Connie.

‘Recklesses, as Luke calls them,’ laughed Mrs Flint. ‘Have some.’

And eagerly she picked the velvet and primrose flowers.

‘Enough! Enough!’ said Connie.

They came to the little garden gate.

‘Which way were you going?’ asked Mrs Flint.

‘By the Warren.’

‘Let me see! Oh yes, the cows are in the gin close. But they’re not up yet. But the gate’s locked, you’ll have to climb.’

‘I can climb,’ said Connie.

‘Perhaps I can just go down the close with you.’

They went down the poor, rabbit-bitten pasture. Birds were whistling in wild evening triumph in the wood. A man was calling up the last cows, which trailed slowly over the path-worn pasture.

‘They’re late, milking, tonight,’ said Mrs Flint severely. ‘They know Luke won’t be back till after dark.’

They came to the fence, beyond which the young fir-wood bristled dense. There was a little gate, but it was locked. In the grass on the inside stood a bottle, empty.

‘There’s the keeper’s empty bottle for his milk,’ explained Mrs Flint. ‘We bring it as far as here for him, and then he fetches it himself’

‘When?’ said Connie.

‘Oh, any time he’s around. Often in the morning. Well, goodbye Lady Chatterley! And do come again. It was so lovely having you.’

Connie climbed the fence into the narrow path between the dense, bristling young firs. Mrs Flint went running back across the pasture, in a sun-bonnet, because she was really a schoolteacher. Constance didn’t like this dense new part of the wood; it seemed gruesome and choking. She hurried on with her head down, thinking of the Flints’ baby. It was a dear little thing, but it would be a bit bow-legged like its father. It showed already, but perhaps it would grow out of it. How warm and fulfilling somehow to have a baby, and how Mrs Flint had showed it off! She had something anyhow that Connie hadn’t got, and apparently couldn’t have. Yes, Mrs Flint had flaunted her motherhood. And Connie had been just a bit, just a little bit jealous. She couldn’t help it.

She started out of her muse, and gave a little cry of fear. A man was there.

It was the keeper. He stood in the path like Balaam’s ass, barring her way.

‘How’s this?’ he said in surprise.

‘How did you come?’ she panted.

‘How did you? Have you been to the hut?’

‘No! No! I went to Marehay.’

He looked at her curiously, searchingly, and she hung her head a little guiltily.

‘And were you going to the hut now?’ he asked rather sternly. ‘No! I mustn’t. I stayed at Marehay. No one knows where I am. I’m late. I’ve got to run.’

‘Giving me the slip, like?’ he said, with a faint ironic smile. ‘No! No. Not that. Only — ’

‘Why, what else?’ he said. And he stepped up to her and put his arms around her. She felt the front of his body terribly near to her, and alive.

‘Oh, not now, not now,’ she cried, trying to push him away.

‘Why not? It’s only six o’clock. You’ve got half an hour. Nay! Nay! I want you.’

He held her fast and she felt his urgency. Her old instinct was to fight for her freedom. But something else in her was strange and inert and heavy. His body was urgent against her, and she hadn’t the heart any more to fight.

He looked around.

‘Come — come here! Through here,’ he said, looking penetratingly into the dense fir-trees, that were young and not more than half-grown.

He looked back at her. She saw his eyes, tense and brilliant, fierce, not loving. But her will had left her. A strange weight was on her limbs. She was giving way. She was giving up.

He led her through the wall of prickly trees, that were difficult to come through, to a place where was a little space and a pile of dead boughs. He threw one or two dry ones down, put his coat and waistcoat over them, and she had to lie down there under the boughs of the tree, like an animal, while he waited, standing there in his shirt and breeches, watching her with haunted eyes. But still he was provident — he made her lie properly, properly. Yet he broke the band of her underclothes, for she did not help him, only lay inert.

He too had bared the front part of his body and she felt his naked flesh against her as he came into her. For a moment he was still inside her, turgid there and quivering. Then as he began to move, in the sudden helpless orgasm, there awoke in her new strange thrills rippling inside her. Rippling, rippling, rippling, like a flapping overlapping of soft flames, soft as feathers, running to points of brilliance, exquisite, exquisite and melting her all molten inside. It was like bells rippling up and up to a culmination. She lay unconscious of the wild little cries she uttered at the last. But it was over too soon, too soon, and she could no longer force her own conclusion with her own activity. This was different, different. She could do nothing. She could no longer harden and grip for her own satisfaction upon him. She could only wait, wait and moan in spirit as she felt him withdrawing, withdrawing and contracting, coming to the terrible moment when he would slip out of her and be gone. Whilst all her womb was open and soft, and softly clamouring, like a sea-anemone under the tide, clamouring for

him to come in again and make a fulfilment for her. She clung to him unconscious in passion, and he never quite slipped from her, and she felt the soft bud of him within her stirring, and strange rhythms flushing up into her with a strange rhythmic growing motion, swelling and swelling till it filled all her cleaving consciousness, and then began again the unspeakable motion that was not really motion, but pure deepening whirlpools of sensation swirling deeper and deeper through all her tissue and consciousness, till she was one perfect concentric fluid of feeling, and she lay there crying in unconscious inarticulate cries. The voice out of the uttermost night, the life! The man heard it beneath him with a kind of awe, as his life sprang out into her. And as it subsided, he subsided too and lay utterly still, unknowing, while her grip on him slowly relaxed, and she lay inert. And they lay and knew nothing, not even of each other, both lost. Till at last he began to rouse and become aware of his defenceless nakedness, and she was aware that his body was loosening its clasp on her. He was coming apart; but in her breast she felt she could not bear him to leave her uncovered. He must cover her now for ever.

But he drew away at last, and kissed her and covered her over, and began to cover himself. She lay looking up to the boughs of the tree, unable as yet to move. He stood and fastened up his breeches, looking round. All was dense and silent, save for the awed dog that lay with its paws against its nose. He sat down again on the brushwood and took Connie's hand in silence.

She turned and looked at him. 'We came off together that time,' he said.

She did not answer.

'It's good when it's like that. Most folks live their lives through and they never know it,' he said, speaking rather dreamily.

She looked into his brooding face.

'Do they?' she said. 'Are you glad?'

He looked back into her eyes. 'Glad,' he said, 'Ay, but never mind.' He did not want her to talk. And he bent over her and kissed her, and she felt, so he must kiss her for ever.

At last she sat up.

'Don't people often come off together?' she asked with naive curiosity.

'A good many of them never. You can see by the raw look of them.' He spoke unwittingly, regretting he had begun.

'Have you come off like that with other women?'

He looked at her amused.

'I don't know,' he said, 'I don't know.'

And she knew he would never tell her anything he didn't want to tell her. She watched his face, and the passion for him moved in her bowels. She resisted it as

far as she could, for it was the loss of herself to herself.

He put on his waistcoat and his coat, and pushed a way through to the path again.

The last level rays of the sun touched the wood. 'I won't come with you,' he said; 'better not.'

She looked at him wistfully before she turned. His dog was waiting so anxiously for him to go, and he seemed to have nothing whatever to say. Nothing left.

Connie went slowly home, realizing the depth of the other thing in her. Another self was alive in her, burning molten and soft in her womb and bowels, and with this self she adored him. She adored him till her knees were weak as she walked. In her womb and bowels she was flowing and alive now and vulnerable, and helpless in adoration of him as the most naive woman. It feels like a child, she said to herself it feels like a child in me. And so it did, as if her womb, that had always been shut, had opened and filled with new life, almost a burden, yet lovely.

'If I had a child!' she thought to herself; 'if I had him inside me as a child!' — and her limbs turned molten at the thought, and she realized the immense difference between having a child to oneself and having a child to a man whom one's bowels yearned towards. The former seemed in a sense ordinary: but to have a child to a man whom one adored in one's bowels and one's womb, it made her feel she was very different from her old self and as if she was sinking deep, deep to the centre of all womanhood and the sleep of creation.

It was not the passion that was new to her, it was the yearning adoration. She knew she had always feared it, for it left her helpless; she feared it still, lest if she adored him too much, then she would lose herself become effaced, and she did not want to be effaced, a slave, like a savage woman. She must not become a slave. She feared her adoration, yet she would not at once fight against it. She knew she could fight it. She had a devil of self-will in her breast that could have fought the full soft heaving adoration of her womb and crushed it. She could even now do it, or she thought so, and she could then take up her passion with her own will.

Ah yes, to be passionate like a Bacchante, like a Bacchanal fleeing through the woods, to call on Iacchos, the bright phallos that had no independent personality behind it, but was pure god-servant to the woman! The man, the individual, let him not dare intrude. He was but a temple-servant, the bearer and keeper of the bright phallos, her own.

So, in the flux of new awakening, the old hard passion flamed in her for a time, and the man dwindled to a contemptible object, the mere phallos-bearer, to

be torn to pieces when his service was performed. She felt the force of the Bacchae in her limbs and her body, the woman gleaming and rapid, beating down the male; but while she felt this, her heart was heavy. She did not want it, it was known and barren, birthless; the adoration was her treasure.

It was so fathomless, so soft, so deep and so unknown. No, no, she would give up her hard bright female power; she was weary of it, stiffened with it; she would sink in the new bath of life, in the depths of her womb and her bowels that sang the voiceless song of adoration. It was early yet to begin to fear the man.

‘I walked over by Marehay, and I had tea with Mrs Flint,’ she said to Clifford. ‘I wanted to see the baby. It’s so adorable, with hair like red cobwebs. Such a dear! Mr Flint had gone to market, so she and I and the baby had tea together. Did you wonder where I was?’

‘Well, I wondered, but I guessed you had dropped in somewhere to tea,’ said Clifford jealously. With a sort of second sight he sensed something new in her, something to him quite incomprehensible, but he ascribed it to the baby. He thought that all that ailed Connie was that she did not have a baby, automatically bring one forth, so to speak.

‘I saw you go across the park to the iron gate, my Lady,’ said Mrs Bolton; ‘so I thought perhaps you’d called at the Rectory.’

‘I nearly did, then I turned towards Marehay instead.’

The eyes of the two women met: Mrs Bolton’s grey and bright and searching; Connie’s blue and veiled and strangely beautiful. Mrs Bolton was almost sure she had a lover, yet how could it be, and who could it be? Where was there a man?

‘Oh, it’s so good for you, if you go out and see a bit of company sometimes,’ said Mrs Bolton. ‘I was saying to Sir Clifford, it would do her ladyship a world of good if she’d go out among people more.’

‘Yes, I’m glad I went, and such a quaint dear cheeky baby, Clifford,’ said Connie. ‘It’s got hair just like spider-webs, and bright orange, and the oddest, cheekiest, pale-blue china eyes. Of course it’s a girl, or it wouldn’t be so bold, bolder than any little Sir Francis Drake.’

‘You’re right, my Lady — a regular little Flint. They were always a forward sandy-headed family,’ said Mrs Bolton.

‘Wouldn’t you like to see it, Clifford? I’ve asked them to tea for you to see it.’

‘Who?’ he asked, looking at Connie in great uneasiness.

‘Mrs Flint and the baby, next Monday.’

‘You can have them to tea up in your room,’ he said.

‘Why, don’t you want to see the baby?’ she cried.

‘Oh, I’ll see it, but I don’t want to sit through a tea-time with them.’

‘Oh,’ cried Connie, looking at him with wide veiled eyes.

She did not really see him, he was somebody else.

‘You can have a nice cosy tea up in your room, my Lady, and Mrs Flint will be more comfortable than if Sir Clifford was there,’ said Mrs Bolton.

She was sure Connie had a lover, and something in her soul exulted. But who was he? Who was he? Perhaps Mrs Flint would provide a clue.

Connie would not take her bath this evening. The sense of his flesh touching her, his very stickiness upon her, was dear to her, and in a sense holy.

Clifford was very uneasy. He would not let her go after dinner, and she had wanted so much to be alone. She looked at him, but was curiously submissive.

‘Shall we play a game, or shall I read to you, or what shall it be?’ he asked uneasily.

‘You read to me,’ said Connie.

‘What shall I read — verse or prose? Or drama?’

‘Read Racine,’ she said.

It had been one of his stunts in the past, to read Racine in the real French grand manner, but he was rusty now, and a little self-conscious; he really preferred the loudspeaker. But Connie was sewing, sewing a little frock of primrose silk, cut out of one of her dresses, for Mrs Flint’s baby. Between coming home and dinner she had cut it out, and she sat in the soft quiescent rapture of herself sewing, while the noise of the reading went on.

Inside herself she could feel the humming of passion, like the after-humming of deep bells.

Clifford said something to her about the Racine. She caught the sense after the words had gone.

‘Yes! Yes!’ she said, looking up at him. ‘It is splendid.’

Again he was frightened at the deep blue blaze of her eyes, and of her soft stillness, sitting there. She had never been so utterly soft and still. She fascinated him helplessly, as if some perfume about her intoxicated him. So he went on helplessly with his reading, and the throaty sound of the French was like the wind in the chimneys to her. Of the Racine she heard not one syllable.

She was gone in her own soft rapture, like a forest sighing with the dim, glad moan of spring, moving into bud. She could feel in the same world with her the man, the nameless man, moving on beautiful feet, beautiful in the phallic mystery. And in herself in all her veins, she felt him and his child. His child was in all her veins, like a twilight.

‘For hands she hath none, nor eyes, nor feet, nor golden Treasure of hair...’

She was like a forest, like the dark interlacing of the oakwood, humming inaudibly with myriad unfolding buds. Meanwhile the birds of desire were

asleep in the vast interlaced intricacy of her body.

But Clifford's voice went on, clapping and gurgling with unusual sounds. How extraordinary it was! How extraordinary he was, bent there over the book, queer and rapacious and civilized, with broad shoulders and no real legs! What a strange creature, with the sharp, cold inflexible will of some bird, and no warmth, no warmth at all! One of those creatures of the afterwards, that have no soul, but an extra-alert will, cold will. She shuddered a little, afraid of him. But then, the soft warm flame of life was stronger than he, and the real things were hidden from him.

The reading finished. She was startled. She looked up, and was more startled still to see Clifford watching her with pale, uncanny eyes, like hate.

'Thank you so much! You do read Racine beautifully!' she said softly.

'Almost as beautifully as you listen to him,' he said cruelly. 'What are you making?' he asked.

'I'm making a child's dress, for Mrs Flint's baby.'

He turned away. A child! A child! That was all her obsession.

'After all,' he said in a declamatory voice, 'one gets all one wants out of Racine. Emotions that are ordered and given shape are more important than disorderly emotions.'

She watched him with wide, vague, veiled eyes. 'Yes, I'm sure they are,' she said.

'The modern world has only vulgarized emotion by letting it loose. What we need is classic control.'

'Yes,' she said slowly, thinking of him listening with vacant face to the emotional idiocy of the radio. 'People pretend to have emotions, and they really feel nothing. I suppose that is being romantic.'

'Exactly!' he said.

As a matter of fact, he was tired. This evening had tired him. He would rather have been with his technical books, or his pit-manager, or listening-in to the radio.

Mrs Bolton came in with two glasses of malted milk: for Clifford, to make him sleep, and for Connie, to fatten her again. It was a regular night-cap she had introduced.

Connie was glad to go, when she had drunk her glass, and thankful she needn't help Clifford to bed. She took his glass and put it on the tray, then took the tray, to leave it outside.

'Goodnight Clifford! Do sleep well! The Racine gets into one like a dream. Goodnight!'

She had drifted to the door. She was going without kissing him goodnight. He

watched her with sharp, cold eyes. So! She did not even kiss him goodnight, after he had spent an evening reading to her. Such depths of callousness in her! Even if the kiss was but a formality, it was on such formalities that life depends. She was a Bolshevik, really. Her instincts were Bolshevistic! He gazed coldly and angrily at the door whence she had gone. Anger!

And again the dread of the night came on him. He was a network of nerves, and when he was not braced up to work, and so full of energy: or when he was not listening-in, and so utterly neuter: then he was haunted by anxiety and a sense of dangerous impending void. He was afraid. And Connie could keep the fear off him, if she would. But it was obvious she wouldn't, she wouldn't. She was callous, cold and callous to all that he did for her. He gave up his life for her, and she was callous to him. She only wanted her own way. 'The lady loves her will.'

Now it was a baby she was obsessed by. Just so that it should be her own, all her own, and not his!

Clifford was so healthy, considering. He looked so well and ruddy in the face, his shoulders were broad and strong, his chest deep, he had put on flesh. And yet, at the same time, he was afraid of death. A terrible hollow seemed to menace him somewhere, somehow, a void, and into this void his energy would collapse. Energyless, he felt at times he was dead, really dead.

So his rather prominent pale eyes had a queer look, furtive, and yet a little cruel, so cold: and at the same time, almost impudent. It was a very odd look, this look of impudence: as if he were triumphing over life in spite of life. 'Who knoweth the mysteries of the will — for it can triumph even against the angels —'

But his dread was the nights when he could not sleep. Then it was awful indeed, when annihilation pressed in on him on every side. Then it was ghastly, to exist without having any life: lifeless, in the night, to exist.

But now he could ring for Mrs Bolton. And she would always come. That was a great comfort. She would come in her dressing gown, with her hair in a plait down her back, curiously girlish and dim, though the brown plait was streaked with grey. And she would make him coffee or camomile tea, and she would play chess or piquet with him. She had a woman's queer faculty of playing even chess well enough, when she was three parts asleep, well enough to make her worth beating. So, in the silent intimacy of the night, they sat, or she sat and he lay on the bed, with the reading-lamp shedding its solitary light on them, she almost gone in sleep, he almost gone in a sort of fear, and they played, played together — then they had a cup of coffee and a biscuit together, hardly speaking, in the silence of night, but being a reassurance to one another.

And this night she was wondering who Lady Chatterley's lover was. And she was thinking of her own Ted, so long dead, yet for her never quite dead. And when she thought of him, the old, old grudge against the world rose up, but especially against the masters, that they had killed him. They had not really killed him. Yet, to her, emotionally, they had. And somewhere deep in herself because of it, she was a nihilist, and really anarchic.

In her half-sleep, thoughts of her Ted and thoughts of Lady Chatterley's unknown lover commingled, and then she felt she shared with the other woman a great grudge against Sir Clifford and all he stood for. At the same time she was playing piquet with him, and they were gambling sixpences. And it was a source of satisfaction to be playing piquet with a baronet, and even losing sixpences to him.

When they played cards, they always gambled. It made him forget himself. And he usually won. Tonight too he was winning. So he would not go to sleep till the first dawn appeared. Luckily it began to appear at half past four or thereabouts.

Connie was in bed, and fast asleep all this time. But the keeper, too, could not rest. He had closed the coops and made his round of the wood, then gone home and eaten supper. But he did not go to bed. Instead he sat by the fire and thought.

He thought of his boyhood in Tevershall, and of his five or six years of married life. He thought of his wife, and always bitterly. She had seemed so brutal. But he had not seen her now since 1915, in the spring when he joined up. Yet there she was, not three miles away, and more brutal than ever. He hoped never to see her again while he lived.

He thought of his life abroad, as a soldier. India, Egypt, then India again: the blind, thoughtless life with the horses: the colonel who had loved him and whom he had loved: the several years that he had been an officer, a lieutenant with a very fair chance of being a captain. Then the death of the colonel from pneumonia, and his own narrow escape from death: his damaged health: his deep restlessness: his leaving the army and coming back to England to be a working man again.

He was temporizing with life. He had thought he would be safe, at least for a time, in this wood. There was no shooting as yet: he had to rear the pheasants. He would have no guns to serve. He would be alone, and apart from life, which was all he wanted. He had to have some sort of a background. And this was his native place. There was even his mother, though she had never meant very much to him. And he could go on in life, existing from day to day, without connexion and without hope. For he did not know what to do with himself.

He did not know what to do with himself. Since he had been an officer for

some years, and had mixed among the other officers and civil servants, with their wives and families, he had lost all ambition to 'get on'. There was a toughness, a curious rubbernecked toughness and unlivingness about the middle and upper classes, as he had known them, which just left him feeling cold and different from them.

So, he had come back to his own class. To find there, what he had forgotten during his absence of years, a pettiness and a vulgarity of manner extremely distasteful. He admitted now at last, how important manner was. He admitted, also, how important it was even to pretend not to care about the halfpence and the small things of life. But among the common people there was no pretence. A penny more or less on the bacon was worse than a change in the Gospel. He could not stand it.

And again, there was the wage-squabble. Having lived among the owning classes, he knew the utter futility of expecting any solution of the wage-squabble. There was no solution, short of death. The only thing was not to care, not to care about the wages.

Yet, if you were poor and wretched you had to care. Anyhow, it was becoming the only thing they did care about. The care about money was like a great cancer, eating away the individuals of all classes. He refused to care about money.

And what then? What did life offer apart from the care of money? Nothing.

Yet he could live alone, in the wan satisfaction of being alone, and raise pheasants to be shot ultimately by fat men after breakfast. It was futility, futility to the nth power.

But why care, why bother? And he had not cared nor bothered till now, when this woman had come into his life. He was nearly ten years older than she. And he was a thousand years older in experience, starting from the bottom. The connexion between them was growing closer. He could see the day when it would clinch up and they would have to make a life together. 'For the bonds of love are ill to loose!'

And what then? What then? Must he start again, with nothing to start on? Must he entangle this woman? Must he have the horrible broil with her lame husband? And also some sort of horrible broil with his own brutal wife, who hated him? Misery! Lots of misery! And he was no longer young and merely buoyant. Neither was he the insouciant sort. Every bitterness and every ugliness would hurt him: and the woman!

But even if they got clear of Sir Clifford and of his own wife, even if they got clear, what were they going to do? What was he, himself going to do? What was he going to do with his life? For he must do something. He couldn't be a mere

hanger-on, on her money and his own very small pension.

It was the insoluble. He could only think of going to America, to try a new air. He disbelieved in the dollar utterly. But perhaps, perhaps there was something else.

He could not rest nor even go to bed. After sitting in a stupor of bitter thoughts until midnight, he got suddenly from his chair and reached for his coat and gun.

‘Come on, lass,’ he said to the dog. ‘We’re best outside.’

It was a starry night, but moonless. He went on a slow, scrupulous, soft-stepping and stealthy round. The only thing he had to contend with was the colliers setting snares for rabbits, particularly the Stacks Gate colliers, on the Marehay side. But it was breeding season, and even colliers respected it a little. Nevertheless the stealthy beating of the round in search of poachers soothed his nerves and took his mind off his thoughts.

But when he had done his slow, cautious beating of his bounds — it was nearly a five-mile walk — he was tired. He went to the top of the knoll and looked out. There was no sound save the noise, the faint shuffling noise from Stacks Gate colliery, that never ceased working: and there were hardly any lights, save the brilliant electric rows at the works. The world lay darkly and family sleeping. It was half past two. But even in its sleep it was an uneasy, cruel world, stirring with the noise of a train or some great lorry on the road, and flashing with some rosy lightning flash from the furnaces. It was a world of iron and coal, the cruelty of iron and the smoke of coal, and the endless, endless greed that drove it all. Only greed, greed stirring in its sleep.

It was cold, and he was coughing. A fine cold draught blew over the knoll. He thought of the woman. Now he would have given all he had or ever might have to hold her warm in his arms, both of them wrapped in one blanket, and sleep. All hopes of eternity and all gain from the past he would have given to have her there, to be wrapped warm with him in one blanket, and sleep, only sleep. It seemed the sleep with the woman in his arms was the only necessity.

He went to the hut, and wrapped himself in the blanket and lay on the floor to sleep. But he could not, he was cold. And besides, he felt cruelly his own unfinished nature. He felt his own unfinished condition of aloneness cruelly. He wanted her, to touch her, to hold her fast against him in one moment of completeness and sleep.

He got up again and went out, towards the park gates this time: then slowly along the path towards the house. It was nearly four o’clock, still clear and cold, but no sign of dawn. He was used to the dark, he could see well.

Slowly, slowly the great house drew him, as a magnet. He wanted to be near

her. It was not desire, not that. It was the cruel sense of unfinished aloneness, that needed a silent woman folded in his arms. Perhaps he could find her. Perhaps he could even call her out to him: or find some way in to her. For the need was imperious.

He slowly, silently climbed the incline to the hall. Then he came round the great trees at the top of the knoll, on to the drive, which made a grand sweep round a lozenge of grass in front of the entrance. He could already see the two magnificent beeches which stood in this big level lozenge in front of the house, detaching themselves darkly in the dark air.

There was the house, low and long and obscure, with one light burning downstairs, in Sir Clifford's room. But which room she was in, the woman who held the other end of the frail thread which drew him so mercilessly, that he did not know.

He went a little nearer, gun in hand, and stood motionless on the drive, watching the house. Perhaps even now he could find her, come at her in some way. The house was not impregnable: he was as clever as burglars are. Why not come to her?

He stood motionless, waiting, while the dawn faintly and imperceptibly paled behind him. He saw the light in the house go out. But he did not see Mrs Bolton come to the window and draw back the old curtain of dark-blue silk, and stand herself in the dark room, looking out on the half-dark of the approaching day, looking for the longed-for dawn, waiting, waiting for Clifford to be really reassured that it was daybreak. For when he was sure of daybreak, he would sleep almost at once.

She stood blind with sleep at the window, waiting. And as she stood, she started, and almost cried out. For there was a man out there on the drive, a black figure in the twilight. She woke up greyly, and watched, but without making a sound to disturb Sir Clifford.

The daylight began to rustle into the world, and the dark figure seemed to go smaller and more defined. She made out the gun and gaiters and baggy jacket — it would be Oliver Mellors, the keeper. 'Yes, for there was the dog nosing around like a shadow, and waiting for him'!

And what did the man want? Did he want to rouse the house? What was he standing there for, transfixed, looking up at the house like a love-sick male dog outside the house where the bitch is?

Goodness! The knowledge went through Mrs Bolton like a shot. He was Lady Chatterley's lover! He! He!

To think of it! Why, she, Ivy Bolton, had once been a tiny bit in love with him herself. When he was a lad of sixteen and she a woman of twenty-six. It was

when she was studying, and he had helped her a lot with the anatomy and things she had had to learn. He'd been a clever boy, had a scholarship for Sheffield Grammar School, and learned French and things: and then after all had become an overhead blacksmith shoeing horses, because he was fond of horses, he said: but really because he was frightened to go out and face the world, only he'd never admit it.

But he'd been a nice lad, a nice lad, had helped her a lot, so clever at making things clear to you. He was quite as clever as Sir Clifford: and always one for the women. More with women than men, they said.

Till he'd gone and married that Bertha Coutts, as if to spite himself. Some people do marry to spite themselves, because they're disappointed of something. And no wonder it had been a failure. — For years he was gone, all the time of the war: and a lieutenant and all: quite the gentleman, really quite the gentleman! — Then to come back to Tevershall and go as a game-keeper! Really, some people can't take their chances when they've got them! And talking broad Derbyshire again like the worst, when she, Ivy Bolton, knew he spoke like any gentleman, really.

Well, well! So her ladyship had fallen for him! Well her ladyship wasn't the first: there was something about him. But fancy! A Tevershall lad born and bred, and she her ladyship in Wragby Hall! My word, that was a slap back at the high-and-mighty Chatterleys!

But he, the keeper, as the day grew, had realized: it's no good! It's no good trying to get rid of your own aloneness. You've got to stick to it all your life. Only at times, at times, the gap will be filled in. At times! But you have to wait for the times. Accept your own aloneness and stick to it, all your life. And then accept the times when the gap is filled in, when they come. But they've got to come. You can't force them.

With a sudden snap the bleeding desire that had drawn him after her broke. He had broken it, because it must be so. There must be a coming together on both sides. And if she wasn't coming to him, he wouldn't track her down. He mustn't. He must go away, till she came.

He turned slowly, ponderingly, accepting again the isolation. He knew it was better so. She must come to him: it was no use his trailing after her. No use!

Mrs Bolton saw him disappear, saw his dog run after him.

'Well, well!' she said. 'He's the one man I never thought of; and the one man I might have thought of. He was nice to me when he was a lad, after I lost Ted. Well, well! Whatever would he say if he knew!'

And she glanced triumphantly at the already sleeping Clifford, as she stepped softly from the room.

CHAPTER 11

Connie was sorting out one of the Wragby lumber rooms. There were several: the house was a warren, and the family never sold anything. Sir Geoffery's father had liked pictures and Sir Geoffery's mother had liked cinquecento furniture. Sir Geoffery himself had liked old carved oak chests, vestry chests. So it went on through the generations. Clifford collected very modern pictures, at very moderate prices.

So in the lumber room there were bad Sir Edwin Landseers and pathetic William Henry Hunt birds' nests: and other Academy stuff, enough to frighten the daughter of an R.A. She determined to look through it one day, and clear it all. And the grotesque furniture interested her.

Wrapped up carefully to preserve it from damage and dry-rot was the old family cradle, of rosewood. She had to unwrap it, to look at it. It had a certain charm: she looked at it a long time.

'It's thousand pities it won't be called for,' sighed Mrs Bolton, who was helping. 'Though cradles like that are out of date nowadays.'

'It might be called for. I might have a child,' said Connie casually, as if saying she might have a new hat.

'You mean if anything happened to Sir Clifford!' stammered Mrs Bolton.

'No! I mean as things are. It's only muscular paralysis with Sir Clifford — it doesn't affect him,' said Connie, lying as naturally as breathing.

Clifford had put the idea into her head. He had said: 'Of course I may have a child yet. I'm not really mutilated at all. The potency may easily come back, even if the muscles of the hips and legs are paralysed. And then the seed may be transferred.'

He really felt, when he had his periods of energy and worked so hard at the question of the mines, as if his sexual potency were returning. Connie had looked at him in terror. But she was quite quick-witted enough to use his suggestion for her own preservation. For she would have a child if she could: but not his.

Mrs Bolton was for a moment breathless, flabbergasted. Then she didn't believe it: she saw in it a ruse. Yet doctors could do such things nowadays. They might sort of graft seed.

'Well, my Lady, I only hope and pray you may. It would be lovely for you: and for everybody. My word, a child in Wragby, what a difference it would

make!’

‘Wouldn’t it!’ said Connie.

And she chose three R. A. pictures of sixty years ago, to send to the Duchess of Shortlands for that lady’s next charitable bazaar. She was called ‘the bazaar duchess’, and she always asked all the county to send things for her to sell. She would be delighted with three framed R. A.s. She might even call, on the strength of them. How furious Clifford was when she called!

But oh my dear! Mrs Bolton was thinking to herself. Is it Oliver Mellors’ child you’re preparing us for? Oh my dear, that would be a Tevershall baby in the Wragby cradle, my word! Wouldn’t shame it, neither!

Among other monstrosities in this lumber room was a largish blackjapanned box, excellently and ingeniously made some sixty or seventy years ago, and fitted with every imaginable object. On top was a concentrated toilet set: brushes, bottles, mirrors, combs, boxes, even three beautiful little razors in safety sheaths, shaving-bowl and all. Underneath came a sort of escritoire outfit: blotters, pens, ink-bottles, paper, envelopes, memorandum books: and then a perfect sewing-outfit, with three different sized scissors, thimbles, needles, silks and cottons, darning egg, all of the very best quality and perfectly finished. Then there was a little medicine store, with bottles labelled Laudanum, Tincture of Myrrh, Ess. Cloves and so on: but empty. Everything was perfectly new, and the whole thing, when shut up, was as big as a small, but fat weekend bag. And inside, it fitted together like a puzzle. The bottles could not possibly have spilled: there wasn’t room.

The thing was wonderfully made and contrived, excellent craftsmanship of the Victorian order. But somehow it was monstrous. Some Chatterley must even have felt it, for the thing had never been used. It had a peculiar soullessness.

Yet Mrs Bolton was thrilled.

‘Look what beautiful brushes, so expensive, even the shaving brushes, three perfect ones! No! and those scissors! They’re the best that money could buy. Oh, I call it lovely!’

‘Do you?’ said Connie. ‘Then you have it.’

‘Oh no, my Lady!’

‘Of course! It will only lie here till Doomsday. If you won’t have it, I’ll send it to the Duchess as well as the pictures, and she doesn’t deserve so much. Do have it!’

‘Oh, your Ladyship! Why, I shall never be able to thank you.’

‘You needn’t try,’ laughed Connie.

And Mrs Bolton sailed down with the huge and very black box in her arms, flushing bright pink in her excitement.

Mr Betts drove her in the trap to her house in the village, with the box. And she had to have a few friends in, to show it: the school-mistress, the chemist's wife, Mrs Weedon the undercashier's wife. They thought it marvellous. And then started the whisper of Lady Chatterley's child.

'Wonders'll never cease!' said Mrs Weedon.

But Mrs Bolton was convinced, if it did come, it would be Sir Clifford's child. So there!

Not long after, the rector said gently to Clifford:

'And may we really hope for an heir to Wragby? Ah, that would be the hand of God in mercy, indeed!'

'Well! We may hope,' said Clifford, with a faint irony, and at the same time, a certain conviction. He had begun to believe it really possible it might even be his child.

Then one afternoon came Leslie Winter, Squire Winter, as everybody called him: lean, immaculate, and seventy: and every inch a gentleman, as Mrs Bolton said to Mrs Betts. Every millimetre indeed! And with his old-fashioned, rather haw-haw! manner of speaking, he seemed more out of date than bag wigs. Time, in her flight, drops these fine old feathers.

They discussed the collieries. Clifford's idea was, that his coal, even the poor sort, could be made into hard concentrated fuel that would burn at great heat if fed with certain damp, acidulated air at a fairly strong pressure. It had long been observed that in a particularly strong, wet wind the pit-bank burned very vivid, gave off hardly any fumes, and left a fine powder of ash, instead of the slow pink gravel.

'But where will you find the proper engines for burning your fuel?' asked Winter.

'I'll make them myself. And I'll use my fuel myself. And I'll sell electric power. I'm certain I could do it.'

'If you can do it, then splendid, splendid, my dear boy. Haw! Splendid! If I can be of any help, I shall be delighted. I'm afraid I am a little out of date, and my collieries are like me. But who knows, when I'm gone, there may be men like you. Splendid! It will employ all the men again, and you won't have to sell your coal, or fail to sell it. A splendid idea, and I hope it will be a success. If I had sons of my own, no doubt they would have up-to-date ideas for Shipley: no doubt! By the way, dear boy, is there any foundation to the rumour that we may entertain hopes of an heir to Wragby?'

'Is there a rumour?' asked Clifford.

'Well, my dear boy, Marshall from Fillingwood asked me, that's all I can say about a rumour. Of course I wouldn't repeat it for the world, if there were no

foundation.'

'Well, Sir,' said Clifford uneasily, but with strange bright eyes. 'There is a hope. There is a hope.'

Winter came across the room and wrung Clifford's hand.

'My dear boy, my dear lad, can you believe what it means to me, to hear that! And to hear you are working in the hopes of a son: and that you may again employ every man at Tevershall. Ah, my boy! to keep up the level of the race, and to have work waiting for any man who cares to work! —'

The old man was really moved.

Next day Connie was arranging tall yellow tulips in a glass vase.

'Connie,' said Clifford, 'did you know there was a rumour that you are going to supply Wragby with a son and heir?'

Connie felt dim with terror, yet she stood quite still, touching the flowers.

'No!' she said. 'Is it a joke? Or malice?'

He paused before he answered:

'Neither, I hope. I hope it may be a prophecy.'

Connie went on with her flowers.

'I had a letter from Father this morning,' She said. 'He wants to know if I am aware he has accepted Sir Alexander Cooper's Invitation for me for July and August, to the Villa Esmeralda in Venice.'

'July and August?' said Clifford.

'Oh, I wouldn't stay all that time. Are you sure you wouldn't come?'

'I won't travel abroad,' said Clifford promptly. She took her flowers to the window.

'Do you mind if I go?' she said. 'You know it was promised, for this summer.'

'For how long would you go?'

'Perhaps three weeks.'

There was silence for a time.

'Well,' said Clifford slowly, and a little gloomily. 'I suppose I could stand it for three weeks: if I were absolutely sure you'd want to come back.'

'I should want to come back,' she said, with a quiet simplicity, heavy with conviction. She was thinking of the other man.

Clifford felt her conviction, and somehow he believed her, he believed it was for him. He felt immensely relieved, joyful at once.

'In that case,' he said,

'I think it would be all right, don't you?'

'I think so,' she said.

'You'd enjoy the change?' She looked up at him with strange blue eyes.

'I should like to see Venice again,' she said, 'and to bathe from one of the

shingle islands across the lagoon. But you know I loathe the Lido! And I don't fancy I shall like Sir Alexander Cooper and Lady Cooper. But if Hilda is there, and we have a gondola of our own: yes, it will be rather lovely. I do wish you'd come.'

She said it sincerely. She would so love to make him happy, in these ways.

'Ah, but think of me, though, at the Gare du Nord: at Calais quay!'

'But why not? I see other men carried in litter-chairs, who have been wounded in the war. Besides, we'd motor all the way.'

'We should need to take two men.'

'Oh no! We'd manage with Field. There would always be another man there.'

But Clifford shook his head.

'Not this year, dear! Not this year! Next year probably I'll try.'

She went away gloomily. Next year! What would next year bring? She herself did not really want to go to Venice: not now, now there was the other man. But she was going as a sort of discipline: and also because, if she had a child, Clifford could think she had a lover in Venice.

It was already May, and in June they were supposed to start. Always these arrangements! Always one's life arranged for one! Wheels that worked one and drove one, and over which one had no real control!

It was May, but cold and wet again. A cold wet May, good for corn and hay! Much the corn and hay matter nowadays! Connie had to go into Uthwaite, which was their little town, where the Chatterleys were still the Chatterleys. She went alone, Field driving her.

In spite of May and a new greenness, the country was dismal. It was rather chilly, and there was smoke on the rain, and a certain sense of exhaust vapour in the air. One just had to live from one's resistance. No wonder these people were ugly and tough.

The car ploughed uphill through the long squalid straggle of Tevershall, the blackened brick dwellings, the black slate roofs glistening their sharp edges, the mud black with coal-dust, the pavements wet and black. It was as if dismalness had soaked through and through everything. The utter negation of natural beauty, the utter negation of the gladness of life, the utter absence of the instinct for shapely beauty which every bird and beast has, the utter death of the human intuitive faculty was appalling. The stacks of soap in the grocers' shops, the rhubarb and lemons in the greengrocers! the awful hats in the milliners! all went by ugly, ugly, ugly, followed by the plaster-and-gilt horror of the cinema with its wet picture announcements, 'A Woman's Love!', and the new big Primitive chapel, primitive enough in its stark brick and big panes of greenish and raspberry glass in the windows. The Wesleyan chapel, higher up, was of

blackened brick and stood behind iron railings and blackened shrubs. The Congregational chapel, which thought itself superior, was built of rusticated sandstone and had a steeple, but not a very high one. Just beyond were the new school buildings, expensive pink brick, and gravelled playground inside iron railings, all very imposing, and fixing the suggestion of a chapel and a prison. Standard Five girls were having a singing lesson, just finishing the la-me-doh-la exercises and beginning a 'sweet children's song'. Anything more unlike song, spontaneous song, would be impossible to imagine: a strange bawling yell that followed the outlines of a tune. It was not like savages: savages have subtle rhythms. It was not like animals: animals mean something when they yell. It was like nothing on earth, and it was called singing. Connie sat and listened with her heart in her boots, as Field was filling petrol. What could possibly become of such a people, a people in whom the living intuitive faculty was dead as nails, and only queer mechanical yells and uncanny will-power remained?

A coal-cart was coming downhill, clanking in the rain. Field started upwards, past the big but weary-looking drapers and clothing shops, the post-office, into the little market-place of forlorn space, where Sam Black was peering out of the door of the Sun, that called itself an inn, not a pub, and where the commercial travellers stayed, and was bowing to Lady Chatterley's car.

The church was away to the left among black trees. The car slid on downhill, past the Miners' Arms. It had already passed the Wellington, the Nelson, the Three Tuns, and the Sun, now it passed the Miners' Arms, then the Mechanics' Hall, then the new and almost gaudy Miners' Welfare and so, past a few new 'villas', out into the blackened road between dark hedges and dark green fields, towards Stacks Gate.

Tevershall! That was Tevershall! Merrie England! Shakespeare's England! No, but the England of today, as Connie had realized since she had come to live in it. It was producing a new race of mankind, over-conscious in the money and social and political side, on the spontaneous, intuitive side dead, but dead. Half-corpses, all of them: but with a terrible insistent consciousness in the other half. There was something uncanny and underground about it all. It was an underworld. And quite incalculable. How shall we understand the reactions in half-corpses? When Connie saw the great lorries full of steel-workers from Sheffield, weird, distorted smallish beings like men, off for an excursion to Matlock, her bowels fainted and she thought: Ah God, what has man done to man? What have the leaders of men been doing to their fellow men? They have reduced them to less than humanness; and now there can be no fellowship any more! It is just a nightmare.

She felt again in a wave of terror the grey, gritty hopelessness of it all. With

such creatures for the industrial masses, and the upper classes as she knew them, there was no hope, no hope any more. Yet she was wanting a baby, and an heir to Wragby! An heir to Wragby! She shuddered with dread.

Yet Mellors had come out of all this! — Yes, but he was as apart from it all as she was. Even in him there was no fellowship left. It was dead. The fellowship was dead. There was only apartness and hopelessness, as far as all this was concerned. And this was England, the vast bulk of England: as Connie knew, since she had motored from the centre of it.

The car was rising towards Stacks Gate. The rain was holding off, and in the air came a queer pellucid gleam of May. The country rolled away in long undulations, south towards the Peak, east towards Mansfield and Nottingham. Connie was travelling South.

As she rose on to the high country, she could see on her left, on a height above the rolling land, the shadowy, powerful bulk of Warsop Castle, dark grey, with below it the reddish plastering of miners' dwellings, newish, and below those the plumes of dark smoke and white steam from the great colliery which put so many thousand pounds per annum into the pockets of the Duke and the other shareholders. The powerful old castle was a ruin, yet it hung its bulk on the low sky-line, over the black plumes and the white that waved on the damp air below.

A turn, and they ran on the high level to Stacks Gate. Stacks Gate, as seen from the highroad, was just a huge and gorgeous new hotel, the Coningsby Arms, standing red and white and gilt in barbarous isolation off the road. But if you looked, you saw on the left rows of handsome 'modern' dwellings, set down like a game of dominoes, with spaces and gardens, a queer game of dominoes that some weird 'masters' were playing on the surprised earth. And beyond these blocks of dwellings, at the back, rose all the astonishing and frightening overhead erections of a really modern mine, chemical works and long galleries, enormous, and of shapes not before known to man. The head-stock and pit-bank of the mine itself were insignificant among the huge new installations. And in front of this, the game of dominoes stood forever in a sort of surprise, waiting to be played.

This was Stacks Gate, new on the face of the earth, since the war. But as a matter of fact, though even Connie did not know it, downhill half a mile below the 'hotel' was old Stacks Gate, with a little old colliery and blackish old brick dwellings, and a chapel or two and a shop or two and a little pub or two.

But that didn't count any more. The vast plumes of smoke and vapour rose from the new works up above, and this was now Stacks Gate: no chapels, no pubs, even no shops. Only the great works', which are the modern Olympia with temples to all the gods; then the model dwellings: then the hotel. The hotel in

actuality was nothing but a miners' pub though it looked first-classy.

Even since Connie's arrival at Wragby this new place had arisen on the face of the earth, and the model dwellings had filled with riff-raff drifting in from anywhere, to poach Clifford's rabbits among other occupations.

The car ran on along the uplands, seeing the rolling county spread out. The county! It had once been a proud and lordly county. In front, looming again and hanging on the brow of the sky-line, was the huge and splendid bulk of Chadwick Hall, more window than wall, one of the most famous Elizabethan houses. Noble it stood alone above a great park, but out of date, passed over. It was still kept up, but as a show place. 'Look how our ancestors lorded it!'

That was the past. The present lay below. God alone knows where the future lies. The car was already turning, between little old blackened miners' cottages, to descend to Uthwaite. And Uthwaite, on a damp day, was sending up a whole array of smoke plumes and steam, to whatever gods there be. Uthwaite down in the valley, with all the steel threads of the railways to Sheffield drawn through it, and the coal-mines and the steel-works sending up smoke and glare from long tubes, and the pathetic little corkscrew spire of the church, that is going to tumble down, still pricking the fumes, always affected Connie strangely. It was an old market-town, centre of the dales. One of the chief inns was the Chatterley Arms. There, in Uthwaite, Wragby was known as Wragby, as if it were a whole place, not just a house, as it was to outsiders: Wragby Hall, near Tevershall: Wragby, a 'seat'.

The miners' cottages, blackened, stood flush on the pavement, with that intimacy and smallness of colliers' dwellings over a hundred years old. They lined all the way. The road had become a street, and as you sank, you forgot instantly the open, rolling country where the castles and big houses still dominated, but like ghosts. Now you were just above the tangle of naked railway-lines, and foundries and other 'works' rose about you, so big you were only aware of walls. And iron clanked with a huge reverberating clank, and huge lorries shook the earth, and whistles screamed.

Yet again, once you had got right down and into the twisted and crooked heart of the town, behind the church, you were in the world of two centuries ago, in the crooked streets where the Chatterley Arms stood, and the old pharmacy, streets which used to lead Out to the wild open world of the castles and stately couchant houses.

But at the corner a policeman held up his hand as three lorries loaded with iron rolled past, shaking the poor old church. And not till the lorries were past could he salute her ladyship.

So it was. Upon the old crooked burgess streets hordes of oldish blackened

miners' dwellings crowded, lining the roads out. And immediately after these came the newer, pinker rows of rather larger houses, plastering the valley: the homes of more modern workmen. And beyond that again, in the wide rolling regions of the castles, smoke waved against steam, and patch after patch of raw reddish brick showed the newer mining settlements, sometimes in the hollows, sometimes gruesomely ugly along the sky-line of the slopes. And between, in between, were the tattered remnants of the old coaching and cottage England, even the England of Robin Hood, where the miners prowled with the dismalness of suppressed sporting instincts, when they were not at work.

England, my England! But which is my England? The stately homes of England make good photographs, and create the illusion of a connexion with the Elizabethans. The handsome old halls are there, from the days of Good Queen Anne and Tom Jones. But smuts fall and blacken on the drab stucco, that has long ceased to be golden. And one by one, like the stately homes, they were abandoned. Now they are being pulled down. As for the cottages of England — there they are — great plasterings of brick dwellings on the hopeless countryside.

'Now they are pulling down the stately homes, the Georgian halls are going. Fritchley, a perfect old Georgian mansion, was even now, as Connie passed in the car, being demolished. It was in perfect repair: till the war the Weatherleys had lived in style there. But now it was too big, too expensive, and the country had become too uncongenial. The gentry were departing to pleasanter places, where they could spend their money without having to see how it was made.'

This is history. One England blots out another. The mines had made the halls wealthy. Now they were blotting them out, as they had already blotted out the cottages. The industrial England blots out the agricultural England. One meaning blots out another. The new England blots out the old England. And the continuity is not Organic, but mechanical.

Connie, belonging to the leisured classes, had clung to the remnants of the old England. It had taken her years to realize that it was really blotted out by this terrifying new and gruesome England, and that the blotting out would go on till it was complete. Fritchley was gone, Eastwood was gone, Shipley was going: Squire Winter's beloved Shipley.

Connie called for a moment at Shipley. The park gates, at the back, opened just near the level crossing of the colliery railway; the Shipley colliery itself stood just beyond the trees. The gates stood open, because through the park was a right-of-way that the colliers used. They hung around the park.

The car passed the ornamental ponds, in which the colliers threw their newspapers, and took the private drive to the house. It stood above, aside, a very

pleasant stucco building from the middle of the eighteenth century. It had a beautiful alley of yew trees, that had approached an older house, and the hall stood serenely spread out, winking its Georgian panes as if cheerfully. Behind, there were really beautiful gardens.

Connie liked the interior much better than Wragby. It was much lighter, more alive, shapen and elegant. The rooms were panelled with creamy painted panelling, the ceilings were touched with gilt, and everything was kept in exquisite order, all the appointments were perfect, regardless of expense. Even the corridors managed to be ample and lovely, softly curved and full of life.

But Leslie Winter was alone. He had adored his house. But his park was bordered by three of his own collieries. He had been a generous man in his ideas. He had almost welcomed the colliers in his park. Had the miners not made him rich! So, when he saw the gangs of unshapely men lounging by his ornamental waters — not in the private part of the park, no, he drew the line there — he would say: ‘the miners are perhaps not so ornamental as deer, but they are far more profitable.’

But that was in the golden — monetarily — latter half of Queen Victoria’s reign. Miners were then ‘good working men’.

Winter had made this speech, half apologetic, to his guest, the then Prince of Wales. And the Prince had replied, in his rather guttural English:

‘You are quite right. If there were coal under Sandringham, I would open a mine on the lawns, and think it first-rate landscape gardening. Oh, I am quite willing to exchange roe-deer for colliers, at the price. Your men are good men too, I hear.’

But then, the Prince had perhaps an exaggerated idea of the beauty of money, and the blessings of industrialism.

However, the Prince had been a King, and the King had died, and now there was another King, whose chief function seemed to be to open soup-kitchens.

And the good working men were somehow hemming Shipley in. New mining villages crowded on the park, and the squire felt somehow that the population was alien. He used to feel, in a good-natured but quite grand way, lord of his own domain and of his own colliers. Now, by a subtle pervasion of the new spirit, he had somehow been pushed out. It was he who did not belong any more. There was no mistaking it. The mines, the industry, had a will of its own, and this will was against the gentleman-owner. All the colliers took part in the will, and it was hard to live up against it. It either shoved you out of the place, or out of life altogether.

Squire Winter, a soldier, had stood it out. But he no longer cared to walk in the park after dinner. He almost hid, indoors. Once he had walked, bare-headed,

and in his patent-leather shoes and purple silk socks, with Connie down to the gate, talking to her in his well-bred rather haw-haw fashion. But when it came to passing the little gangs of colliers who stood and stared without either salute or anything else, Connie felt how the lean, well-bred old man winced, winced as an elegant antelope stag in a cage winces from the vulgar stare. The colliers were not personally hostile: not at all. But their spirit was cold, and shoving him out. And, deep down, there was a profound grudge. They 'worked for him'. And in their ugliness, they resented his elegant, well-groomed, well-bred existence. 'Who's he!' It was the difference they resented.

And somewhere, in his secret English heart, being a good deal of a soldier, he believed they were right to resent the difference. He felt himself a little in the wrong, for having all the advantages. Nevertheless he represented a system, and he would not be shoved out.

Except by death. Which came on him soon after Connie's call, suddenly. And he remembered Clifford handsomely in his will.

The heirs at once gave out the order for the demolishing of Shipley. It cost too much to keep up. No one would live there. So it was broken up. The avenue of yews was cut down. The park was denuded of its timber, and divided into lots. It was near enough to Uthwaite. In the strange, bald desert of this still-one-more no-man's-land, new little streets of semi-detacheds were run up, very desirable! The Shipley Hall Estate!

Within a year of Connie's last call, it had happened. There stood Shipley Hall Estate, an array of red-brick semi-detached 'villas' in new streets. No one would have dreamed that the stucco hall had stood there twelve months before.

But this is a later stage of King Edward's landscape gardening, the sort that has an ornamental coal-mine on the lawn.

One England blots out another. The England of the Squire Winters and the Wragby Halls was gone, dead. The blotting out was only not yet complete.

What would come after? Connie could not imagine. She could only see the new brick streets spreading into the fields, the new erections rising at the collieries, the new girls in their silk stockings, the new collier lads lounging into the Pally or the Welfare. The younger generation were utterly unconscious of the old England. There was a gap in the continuity of consciousness, almost American: but industrial really. What next?

Connie always felt there was no next. She wanted to hide her head in the sand: or, at least, in the bosom of a living man.

The world was so complicated and weird and gruesome! The common people were so many, and really so terrible. So she thought as she was going home, and saw the colliers trailing from the pits, grey-black, distorted, one shoulder higher

than the other, slurring their heavy ironshod boots. Underground grey faces, whites of eyes rolling, necks cringing from the pit roof, shoulders out of shape. Men! Men! Alas, in some ways patient and good men. In other ways, non-existent. Something that men should have was bred and killed out of them. Yet they were men. They begot children. One might bear a child to them. Terrible, terrible thought! They were good and kindly. But they were only half, Only the grey half of a human being. As yet, they were 'good'. But even that was the goodness of their halfness. Supposing the dead in them ever rose up! But no, it was too terrible to think of. Connie was absolutely afraid of the industrial masses. They seemed so weird to her. A life with utterly no beauty in it, no intuition, always 'in the pit'.

Children from such men! Oh God, oh God!

Yet Mellors had come from such a father. Not quite. Forty years had made a difference, an appalling difference in manhood. The iron and the coal had eaten deep into the bodies and souls of the men.

Incarnate ugliness, and yet alive! What would become of them all? Perhaps with the passing of the coal they would disappear again, off the face of the earth. They had appeared out of nowhere in their thousands, when the coal had called for them. Perhaps they were only weird fauna of the coal-seams. Creatures of another reality, they were elementals, serving the elements of coal, as the metal-workers were elementals, serving the element of iron. Men not men, but animas of coal and iron and clay. Fauna of the elements, carbon, iron, silicon: elementals. They had perhaps some of the weird, inhuman beauty of minerals, the lustre of coal, the weight and blueness and resistance of iron, the transparency of glass. Elemental creatures, weird and distorted, of the mineral world! They belonged to the coal, the iron, the clay, as fish belong to the sea and worms to dead wood. The anima of mineral disintegration!

Connie was glad to be home, to bury her head in the sand. She was glad even to babble to Clifford. For her fear of the mining and iron Midlands affected her with a queer feeling that went all over her, like influenza.

'Of course I had to have tea in Miss Bentley's shop,' she said.

'Really! Winter would have given you tea.'

'Oh yes, but I daren't disappoint Miss Bentley.' Miss Bentley was a shallow old maid with a rather large nose and romantic disposition who served tea with a careful intensity worthy of a sacrament.

'Did she ask after me?' said Clifford.

'Of course! — may I ask your Ladyship how Sir Clifford is! — I believe she ranks you even higher than Nurse Cavell!'

'And I suppose you said I was blooming.'

‘Yes! And she looked as rapt as if I had said the heavens had opened to you. I said if she ever came to Tevershall she was to come to see you.’

‘Me! Whatever for! See me!’

‘Why yes, Clifford. You can’t be so adored without making some slight return. Saint George of Cappadocia was nothing to you, in her eyes.’

‘And do you think she’ll come?’

‘Oh, she blushed! and looked quite beautiful for a moment, poor thing! Why don’t men marry the women who would really adore them?’

‘The women start adoring too late. But did she say she’d come?’

‘Oh!’ Connie imitated the breathless Miss Bentley, ‘your Ladyship, if ever I should dare to presume!’

‘Dare to presume! how absurd! But I hope to God she won’t turn up. And how was her tea?’

‘Oh, Lipton’s and very strong. But Clifford, do you realize you are the roman de la rose of Miss Bentley and lots like her?’

‘I’m not flattered, even then.’

‘They treasure up every one of your pictures in the illustrated papers, and probably pray for you every night. It’s rather wonderful.’

She went upstairs to change.

That evening he said to her:

‘You do think, don’t you, that there is something eternal in marriage?’

She looked at him.

‘But Clifford, you make eternity sound like a lid or a long, long chain that trailed after one, no matter how far one went.’

He looked at her, annoyed.

‘What I mean,’ he said, ‘is that if you go to Venice, you won’t go in the hopes of some love affair that you can take au grand serieux, will you?’

‘A love affair in Venice au grand srieux? No. I assure you! No, I’d never take a love affair in Venice more than au tres petit serieux.’

She spoke with a queer kind of contempt. He knitted his brows, looking at her.

Coming downstairs in the morning, she found the keeper’s dog Flossie sitting in the corridor outside Clifford’s room, and whimpering very faintly.

‘Why, Flossie!’ she said softly. ‘What are you doing here?’

And she quietly opened Clifford’s door. Clifford was sitting up in bed, with the bed-table and typewriter pushed aside, and the keeper was standing at attention at the foot of the bed. Flossie ran in. With a faint gesture of head and eyes, Mellors ordered her to the door again, and she slunk out.

‘Oh, good morning, Clifford!’ Connie said. ‘I didn’t know you were busy.’ Then she looked at the keeper, saying good morning to him. He murmured his

reply, looking at her as if vaguely. But she felt a whiff of passion touch her, from his mere presence.

‘Did I interrupt you, Clifford? I’m sorry.’

‘No, it’s nothing of any importance.’

She slipped out of the room again, and up to the blue boudoir on the first floor. She sat in the window, and saw him go down the drive, with his curious, silent motion, effaced. He had a natural sort of quiet distinction, an aloof pride, and also a certain look of frailty. A hireling! One of Clifford’s hirelings! ‘The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars, but in ourselves, that we are underlings.’

Was he an underling? Was he? What did he think of her?

It was a sunny day, and Connie was working in the garden, and Mrs Bolton was helping her. For some reason, the two women had drawn together, in one of the unaccountable flows and ebbs of sympathy that exist between people. They were pegging down carnations, and putting in small plants for the summer. It was work they both liked. Connie especially felt a delight in putting the soft roots of young plants into a soft black puddle, and cradling them down. On this spring morning she felt a quiver in her womb too, as if the sunshine had touched it and made it happy.

‘It is many years since you lost your husband?’ she said to Mrs Bolton as she took up another little plant and laid it in its hole.

‘Twenty-three!’ said Mrs Bolton, as she carefully separated the young columbines into single plants. ‘Twenty-three years since they brought him home.’

Connie’s heart gave a lurch, at the terrible finality of it. ‘Brought him home!’

‘Why did he get killed, do you think?’ she asked. ‘He was happy with you?’

It was a woman’s question to a woman. Mrs Bolton put aside a strand of hair from her face, with the back of her hand.

‘I don’t know, my Lady! He sort of wouldn’t give in to things: he wouldn’t really go with the rest. And then he hated ducking his head for anything on earth. A sort of obstinacy, that gets itself killed. You see he didn’t really care. I lay it down to the pit. He ought never to have been down pit. But his dad made him go down, as a lad; and then, when you’re over twenty, it’s not very easy to come out.’

‘Did he say he hated it?’

‘Oh no! Never! He never said he hated anything. He just made a funny face. He was one of those who wouldn’t take care: like some of the first lads as went off so blithe to the war and got killed right away. He wasn’t really wezzle-brained. But he wouldn’t care. I used to say to him: “You care for nought nor nobody!” But he did! The way he sat when my first baby was born, motionless,

and the sort of fatal eyes he looked at me with, when it was over! I had a bad time, but I had to comfort him. "It's all right, lad, it's all right!" I said to him. And he gave me a look, and that funny sort of smile. He never said anything. But I don't believe he had any right pleasure with me at nights after; he'd never really let himself go. I used to say to him: Oh, let thysen go, lad! — I'd talk broad to him sometimes. And he said nothing. But he wouldn't let himself go, or he couldn't. He didn't want me to have any more children. I always blamed his mother, for letting him in th' room. He'd no right t'ave been there. Men makes so much more of things than they should, once they start brooding.'

'Did he mind so much?' said Connie in wonder.

'Yes, he sort of couldn't take it for natural, all that pain. And it spoilt his pleasure in his bit of married love. I said to him: If I don't care, why should you? It's my look-out! — But all he'd ever say was: It's not right!'

'Perhaps he was too sensitive,' said Connie.

'That's it! When you come to know men, that's how they are: too sensitive in the wrong place. And I believe, unbeknown to himself he hated the pit, just hated it. He looked so quiet when he was dead, as if he'd got free. He was such a nice-looking lad. It just broke my heart to see him, so still and pure looking, as if he'd wanted to die. Oh, it broke my heart, that did. But it was the pit.'

She wept a few bitter tears, and Connie wept more. It was a warm spring day, with a perfume of earth and of yellow flowers, many things rising to bud, and the garden still with the very sap of sunshine.

'It must have been terrible for you!' said Connie.

'Oh, my Lady! I never realized at first. I could only say: Oh my lad, what did you want to leave me for! — That was all my cry. But somehow I felt he'd come back.'

'But he didn't want to leave you,' said Connie.

'Oh no, my Lady! That was only my silly cry. And I kept expecting him back. Especially at nights. I kept waking up thinking: Why he's not in bed with me! — It was as if my feelings wouldn't believe he'd gone. I just felt he'd have to come back and lie against me, so I could feel him with me. That was all I wanted, to feel him there with me, warm. And it took me a thousand shocks before I knew he wouldn't come back, it took me years.'

'The touch of him,' said Connie.

'That's it, my Lady, the touch of him! I've never got over it to this day, and never shall. And if there's a heaven above, he'll be there, and will lie up against me so I can sleep.'

Connie glanced at the handsome, brooding face in fear. Another passionate one out of Tevershall! The touch of him! For the bonds of love are ill to loose!

‘It’s terrible, once you’ve got a man into your blood!’ she said. ‘Oh, my Lady! And that’s what makes you feel so bitter. You feel folks wanted him killed. You feel the pit fair wanted to kill him. Oh, I felt, if it hadn’t been for the pit, an’ them as runs the pit, there’d have been no leaving me. But they all want to separate a woman and a man, if they’re together.’

‘If they’re physically together,’ said Connie.

‘That’s right, my Lady! There’s a lot of hard-hearted folks in the world. And every morning when he got up and went to th’ pit, I felt it was wrong, wrong. But what else could he do? What can a man do?’

A queer hate flared in the woman.

‘But can a touch last so long?’ Connie asked suddenly. ‘That you could feel him so long?’

‘Oh my Lady, what else is there to last? Children grows away from you. But the man, well! But even that they’d like to kill in you, the very thought of the touch of him. Even your own children! Ah well! We might have drifted apart, who knows. But the feeling’s something different. It’s ‘appen better never to care. But there, when I look at women who’s never really been warmed through by a man, well, they seem to me poor doolowls after all, no matter how they may dress up and gad. No, I’ll abide by my own. I’ve not much respect for people.’

CHAPTER 12

Connie went to the wood directly after lunch. It was really a lovely day, the first dandelions making suns, the first daisies so white. The hazel thicket was a lace-work, of half-open leaves, and the last dusty perpendicular of the catkins. Yellow celandines now were in crowds, flat open, pressed back in urgency, and the yellow glitter of themselves. It was the yellow, the powerful yellow of early summer. And primroses were broad, and full of pale abandon, thick-clustered primroses no longer shy. The lush, dark green of hyacinths was a sea, with buds rising like pale corn, while in the riding the forget-me-nots were fluffing up, and columbines were unfolding their ink-purple ruches, and there were bits of blue bird's eggshell under a bush. Everywhere the bud-knots and the leap of life!

The keeper was not at the hut. Everything was serene, brown chickens running lustily. Connie walked on towards the cottage, because she wanted to find him.

The cottage stood in the sun, off the wood's edge. In the little garden the double daffodils rose in tufts, near the wide-open door, and red double daisies made a border to the path. There was the bark of a dog, and Flossie came running.

The wide-open door! so he was at home. And the sunlight falling on the red-brick floor! As she went up the path, she saw him through the window, sitting at the table in his shirt-sleeves, eating. The dog wuffed softly, slowly wagging her tail.

He rose, and came to the door, wiping his mouth with a red handkerchief still chewing.

'May I come in?' she said.

'Come in!'

The sun shone into the bare room, which still smelled of a mutton chop, done in a dutch oven before the fire, because the dutch oven still stood on the fender, with the black potato-saucepan on a piece of paper, beside it on the white hearth. The fire was red, rather low, the bar dropped, the kettle singing.

On the table was his plate, with potatoes and the remains of the chop; also bread in a basket, salt, and a blue mug with beer. The table-cloth was white oil-cloth, he stood in the shade.

'You are very late,' she said. 'Do go on eating!'

She sat down on a wooden chair, in the sunlight by the door.

'I had to go to Uthwaite,' he said, sitting down at the table but not eating.

‘Do eat,’ she said. But he did not touch the food.

‘Shall y’ave something?’ he asked her. ‘Shall y’ave a cup of tea? t’ kettle’s on t’ boil’ — he half rose again from his chair.

‘If you’ll let me make it myself,’ she said, rising. He seemed sad, and she felt she was bothering him.

‘Well, tea-pot’s in there’ — he pointed to a little, drab corner cupboard; ‘an’ cups. An’ tea’s on t’ mantel ower yer ‘ead,’

She got the black tea-pot, and the tin of tea from the mantel-shelf. She rinsed the tea-pot with hot water, and stood a moment wondering where to empty it.

‘Throw it out,’ he said, aware of her. ‘It’s clean.’

She went to the door and threw the drop of water down the path. How lovely it was here, so still, so really woodland. The oaks were putting out ochre yellow leaves: in the garden the red daisies were like red plush buttons. She glanced at the big, hollow sandstone slab of the threshold, now crossed by so few feet.

‘But it’s lovely here,’ she said. ‘Such a beautiful stillness, everything alive and still.’

He was eating again, rather slowly and unwillingly, and she could feel he was discouraged. She made the tea in silence, and set the tea-pot on the hob, as she knew the people did. He pushed his plate aside and went to the back place; she heard a latch click, then he came back with cheese on a plate, and butter.

She set the two cups on the table; there were only two. ‘Will you have a cup of tea?’ she said.

‘If you like. Sugar’s in th’ cupboard, an’ there’s a little cream jug. Milk’s in a jug in th’ pantry.’

‘Shall I take your plate away?’ she asked him. He looked up at her with a faint ironical smile.

‘Why...if you like,’ he said, slowly eating bread and cheese. She went to the back, into the pent-house scullery, where the pump was. On the left was a door, no doubt the pantry door. She unlatched it, and almost smiled at the place he called a pantry; a long narrow white-washed slip of a cupboard. But it managed to contain a little barrel of beer, as well as a few dishes and bits of food. She took a little milk from the yellow jug.

‘How do you get your milk?’ she asked him, when she came back to the table.

‘Flints! They leave me a bottle at the warren end. You know, where I met you!’

But he was discouraged. She poured out the tea, poisoning the cream-jug.

‘No milk,’ he said; then he seemed to hear a noise, and looked keenly through the doorway.

‘‘Appen we’d better shut,’ he said.

‘It seems a pity,’ she replied. ‘Nobody will come, will they?’

‘Not unless it’s one time in a thousand, but you never know.’

‘And even then it’s no matter,’ she said. ‘It’s only a cup of tea.’

‘Where are the spoons?’

He reached over, and pulled open the table drawer. Connie sat at the table in the sunshine of the doorway.

‘Flossie!’ he said to the dog, who was lying on a little mat at the stair foot. ‘Go an’ hark, hark!’

He lifted his finger, and his ‘hark!’ was very vivid. The dog trotted out to reconnoitre.

‘Are you sad today?’ she asked him.

He turned his blue eyes quickly, and gazed direct on her.

‘Sad! no, bored! I had to go getting summonses for two poachers I caught, and, oh well, I don’t like people.’

He spoke cold, good English, and there was anger in his voice. ‘Do you hate being a game-keeper?’ she asked.

‘Being a game-keeper, no! So long as I’m left alone. But when I have to go messing around at the police-station, and various other places, and waiting for a lot of fools to attend to me...oh well, I get mad...’ and he smiled, with a certain faint humour.

‘Couldn’t you be really independent?’ she asked.

‘Me? I suppose I could, if you mean manage to exist on my pension. I could! But I’ve got to work, or I should die. That is, I’ve got to have something that keeps me occupied. And I’m not in a good enough temper to work for myself. It’s got to be a sort of job for somebody else, or I should throw it up in a month, out of bad temper. So altogether I’m very well off here, especially lately...’

He laughed at her again, with mocking humour.

‘But why are you in a bad temper?’ she asked. ‘Do you mean you are always in a bad temper?’

‘Pretty well,’ he said, laughing. ‘I don’t quite digest my bile.’

‘But what bile?’ she said.

‘Bile!’ he said. ‘Don’t you know what that is?’ She was silent, and disappointed. He was taking no notice of her.

‘I’m going away for a while next month,’ she said.

‘You are! Where to?’

‘Venice! With Sir Clifford? For how long?’

‘For a month or so,’ she replied. ‘Clifford won’t go.’

‘He’ll stay here?’ he asked.

‘Yes! He hates to travel as he is.’

‘Ay, poor devil!’ he said, with sympathy. There was a pause.

‘You won’t forget me when I’m gone, will you?’ she asked. Again he lifted his eyes and looked full at her.

‘Forget?’ he said. ‘You know nobody forgets. It’s not a question of memory;’

She wanted to say: ‘When then?’ but she didn’t. Instead, she said in a mute kind of voice: ‘I told Clifford I might have a child.’

Now he really looked at her, intense and searching.

‘You did?’ he said at last. ‘And what did he say?’

‘Oh, he wouldn’t mind. He’d be glad, really, so long as it seemed to be his.’ She dared not look up at him.

He was silent a long time, then he gazed again on her face.

‘No mention of me, of course?’ he said.

‘No. No mention of you,’ she said.

‘No, he’d hardly swallow me as a substitute breeder. Then where are you supposed to be getting the child?’

‘I might have a love-affair in Venice,’ she said.

‘You might,’ he replied slowly. ‘So that’s why you’re going?’

‘Not to have the love-affair,’ she said, looking up at him, pleading.

‘Just the appearance of one,’ he said.

There was silence. He sat staring out the window, with a faint grin, half mockery, half bitterness, on his face. She hated his grin.

‘You’ve not taken any precautions against having a child then?’ he asked her suddenly. ‘Because I haven’t.’

‘No,’ she said faintly. ‘I should hate that.’

He looked at her, then again with the peculiar subtle grin out of the window. There was a tense silence.

At last he turned his head and said satirically:

‘That was why you wanted me, then, to get a child?’

She hung her head.

‘No. Not really,’ she said.

‘What then, really?’ he asked rather bitingly.

She looked up at him reproachfully, saying: ‘I don’t know.’

He broke into a laugh.

‘Then I’m damned if I do,’ he said.

There was a long pause of silence, a cold silence.

‘Well,’ he said at last. ‘It’s as your Ladyship likes. If you get the baby, Sir Clifford’s welcome to it. I shan’t have lost anything. On the contrary, I’ve had a very nice experience, very nice indeed!’ — and he stretched in a half-suppressed sort of yawn. ‘If you’ve made use of me,’ he said, ‘it’s not the first time I’ve

been made use of; and I don't suppose it's ever been as pleasant as this time; though of course one can't feel tremendously dignified about it.' — He stretched again, curiously, his muscles quivering, and his jaw oddly set.

'But I didn't make use of you,' she said, pleading.

'At your Ladyship's service,' he replied.

'No,' she said. 'I liked your body.'

'Did you?' he replied, and he laughed. 'Well, then, we're quits, because I liked yours.'

He looked at her with queer darkened eyes.

'Would you like to go upstairs now?' he asked her, in a strangled sort of voice.

'No, not here. Not now!' she said heavily, though if he had used any power over her, she would have gone, for she had no strength against him.

He turned his face away again, and seemed to forget her.

'I want to touch you like you touch me,' she said. 'I've never really touched your body.'

He looked at her, and smiled again.

'Now?' he said.

'No! No! Not here! At the hut. Would you mind?'

'How do I touch you?' he asked.

'When you feel me.'

He looked at her, and met her heavy, anxious eyes.

'And do you like it when I feel you?' he asked, laughing at her still.

'Yes, do you?' she said.

'Oh, me!' Then he changed his tone. 'Yes,' he said. 'You know without asking.' Which was true.

She rose and picked up her hat. 'I must go,' she said.

'Will you go?' he replied politely.

She wanted him to touch her, to say something to her, but he said nothing, only waited politely.

'Thank you for the tea,' she said.

'I haven't thanked your Ladyship for doing me the honours of my tea-pot,' he said.

She went down the path, and he stood in the doorway, faintly grinning. Flossie came running with her tail lifted. And Connie had to plod dumbly across into the wood, knowing he was standing there watching her, with that incomprehensible grin on his face.

She walked home very much downcast and annoyed. She didn't at all like his saying he had been made use of because, in a sense, it was true. But he oughtn't

to have said it. Therefore, again, she was divided between two feelings: resentment against him, and a desire to make it up with him.

She passed a very uneasy and irritated tea-time, and at once went up to her room. But when she was there it was no good; she could neither sit nor stand. She would have to do something about it. She would have to go back to the hut; if he was not there, well and good.

She slipped out of the side door, and took her way direct and a little sullen. When she came to the clearing she was terribly uneasy. But there he was again, in his shirt-sleeves, stooping, letting the hens out of the coops, among the chicks that were now growing a little gawky, but were much more trim than hen-chickens.

She went straight across to him. 'You see I've come!' she said.

'Ay, I see it!' he said, straightening his back, and looking at her with a faint amusement.

'Do you let the hens out now?' she asked.

'Yes, they've sat themselves to skin and bone,' he said. 'An' now they're not all that anxious to come out an' feed. There's no self in a sitting hen; she's all in the eggs or the chicks.'

The poor mother-hens; such blind devotion! even to eggs not their own! Connie looked at them in compassion. A helpless silence fell between the man and the woman.

'Shall us go i' th' 'ut?' he asked.

'Do you want me?' she asked, in a sort of mistrust.

'Ay, if you want to come.'

She was silent.

'Come then!' he said.

And she went with him to the hut. It was quite dark when he had shut the door, so he made a small light in the lantern, as before.

'Have you left your underthings off?' he asked her.

'Yes!'

'Ay, well, then I'll take my things off too.'

He spread the blankets, putting one at the side for a coverlet. She took off her hat, and shook her hair. He sat down, taking off his shoes and gaiters, and undoing his cord breeches.

'Lie down then!' he said, when he stood in his shirt. She obeyed in silence, and he lay beside her, and pulled the blanket over them both.

'There!' he said.

And he lifted her dress right back, till he came even to her breasts. He kissed them softly, taking the nipples in his lips in tiny caresses.

‘Eh, but tha’rt nice, tha’rt nice!’ he said, suddenly rubbing his face with a snuggling movement against her warm belly.

And she put her arms round him under his shirt, but she was afraid, afraid of his thin, smooth, naked body, that seemed so powerful, afraid of the violent muscles. She shrank, afraid.

And when he said, with a sort of little sigh: ‘Eh, tha’rt nice!’ something in her quivered, and something in her spirit stiffened in resistance: stiffened from the terribly physical intimacy, and from the peculiar haste of his possession. And this time the sharp ecstasy of her own passion did not overcome her; she lay with her ends inert on his striving body, and do what she might, her spirit seemed to look on from the top of her head, and the butting of his haunches seemed ridiculous to her, and the sort of anxiety of his penis to come to its little evacuating crisis seemed farcical. Yes, this was love, this ridiculous bouncing of the buttocks, and the wilting of the poor, insignificant, moist little penis. This was the divine love! After all, the moderns were right when they felt contempt for the performance; for it was a performance. It was quite true, as some poets said, that the God who created man must have had a sinister sense of humour, creating him a reasonable being, yet forcing him to take this ridiculous posture, and driving him with blind craving for this ridiculous performance. Even a Maupassant found it a humiliating anti-climax. Men despised the intercourse act, and yet did it.

Cold and derisive her queer female mind stood apart, and though she lay perfectly still, her impulse was to heave her loins, and throw the man out, escape his ugly grip, and the butting over-riding of his absurd haunches. His body was a foolish, impudent, imperfect thing, a little disgusting in its unfinished clumsiness. For surely a complete evolution would eliminate this performance, this ‘function’.

And yet when he had finished, soon over, and lay very very still, receding into silence, and a strange motionless distance, far, farther than the horizon of her awareness, her heart began to weep. She could feel him ebbing away, ebbing away, leaving her there like a stone on a shore. He was withdrawing, his spirit was leaving her. He knew.

And in real grief, tormented by her own double consciousness and reaction, she began to weep. He took no notice, or did not even know. The storm of weeping swelled and shook her, and shook him.

‘Ay!’ he said. ‘It was no good that time. You wasn’t there.’ — So he knew! Her sobs became violent.

‘But what’s amiss?’ he said. ‘It’s once in a while that way.’

‘I...I can’t love you,’ she sobbed, suddenly feeling her heart breaking.

‘Canna ter? Well, dunna fret! There’s no law says as tha’s got to. Ta’e it for what it is.’

He still lay with his hand on her breast. But she had drawn both her hands from him.

His words were small comfort. She sobbed aloud.

‘Nay, nay!’ he said. ‘Ta’e the thick wi’ th’ thin. This wor a bit o’ thin for once.’

She wept bitterly, sobbing. ‘But I want to love you, and I can’t. It only seems horrid.’

He laughed a little, half bitter, half amused.

‘It isna horrid,’ he said, ‘even if tha thinks it is. An’ tha canna ma’e it horrid. Dunna fret thysen about lovin’ me. Tha’lt niver force thysen to ‘t. There’s sure to be a bad nut in a basketful. Tha mun ta’e th’ rough wi’ th’ smooth.’

He took his hand away from her breast, not touching her. And now she was untouched she took an almost perverse satisfaction in it. She hated the dialect: the thee and the tha and the thysen. He could get up if he liked, and stand there, above her, buttoning down those absurd corduroy breeches, straight in front of her. After all, Michaelis had had the decency to turn away. This man was so assured in himself he didn’t know what a clown other people found him, a half-bred fellow.

Yet, as he was drawing away, to rise silently and leave her, she clung to him in terror.

‘Don’t! Don’t go! Don’t leave me! Don’t be cross with me! Hold me! Hold me fast!’ she whispered in blind frenzy, not even knowing what she said, and clinging to him with uncanny force. It was from herself she wanted to be saved, from her own inward anger and resistance. Yet how powerful was that inward resistance that possessed her!

He took her in his arms again and drew her to him, and suddenly she became small in his arms, small and nestling. It was gone, the resistance was gone, and she began to melt in a marvellous peace. And as she melted small and wonderful in his arms, she became infinitely desirable to him, all his blood-vessels seemed to scald with intense yet tender desire, for her, for her softness, for the penetrating beauty of her in his arms, passing into his blood. And softly, with that marvellous swoon-like caress of his hand in pure soft desire, softly he stroked the silky slope of her loins, down, down between her soft warm buttocks, coming nearer and nearer to the very quick of her. And she felt him like a flame of desire, yet tender, and she felt herself melting in the flame. She let herself go. She felt his penis risen against her with silent amazing force and assertion and she let herself go to him. She yielded with a quiver that was like death, she went

all open to him. And oh, if he were not tender to her now, how cruel, for she was all open to him and helpless!

She quivered again at the potent inexorable entry inside her, so strange and terrible. It might come with the thrust of a sword in her softly-opened body, and that would be death. She clung in a sudden anguish of terror. But it came with a strange slow thrust of peace, the dark thrust of peace and a ponderous, primordial tenderness, such as made the world in the beginning. And her terror subsided in her breast, her breast dared to be gone in peace, she held nothing. She dared to let go everything, all herself and be gone in the flood.

And it seemed she was like the sea, nothing but dark waves rising and heaving, heaving with a great swell, so that slowly her whole darkness was in motion, and she was Ocean rolling its dark, dumb mass. Oh, and far down inside her the deeps parted and rolled asunder, in long, fair-travelling billows, and ever, at the quick of her, the depths parted and rolled asunder, from the centre of soft plunging, as the plunger went deeper and deeper, touching lower, and she was deeper and deeper and deeper disclosed, the heavier the billows of her rolled away to some shore, uncovering her, and closer and closer plunged the palpable unknown, and further and further rolled the waves of herself away from herself leaving her, till suddenly, in a soft, shuddering convulsion, the quick of all her plasm was touched, she knew herself touched, the consummation was upon her, and she was gone. She was gone, she was not, and she was born: a woman.

Ah, too lovely, too lovely! In the ebbing she realized all the loveliness. Now all her body clung with tender love to the unknown man, and blindly to the wilting penis, as it so tenderly, frailly, unknowingly withdrew, after the fierce thrust of its potency. As it drew out and left her body, the secret, sensitive thing, she gave an unconscious cry of pure loss, and she tried to put it back. It had been so perfect! And she loved it so!

And only now she became aware of the small, bud-like reticence and tenderness of the penis, and a little cry of wonder and poignancy escaped her again, her woman's heart crying out over the tender frailty of that which had been the power.

'It was so lovely!' she moaned. 'It was so lovely!' But he said nothing, only softly kissed her, lying still above her. And she moaned with a sort of bliss, as a sacrifice, and a newborn thing.

And now in her heart the queer wonder of him was awakened.

A man! The strange potency of manhood upon her! Her hands strayed over him, still a little afraid. Afraid of that strange, hostile, slightly repulsive thing that he had been to her, a man. And now she touched him, and it was the sons of god with the daughters of men. How beautiful he felt, how pure in tissue! How

lovely, how lovely, strong, and yet pure and delicate, such stillness of the sensitive body! Such utter stillness of potency and delicate flesh. How beautiful! How beautiful! Her hands came timorously down his back, to the soft, smallish globes of the buttocks. Beauty! What beauty! a sudden little flame of new awareness went through her. How was it possible, this beauty here, where she had previously only been repelled? The unspeakable beauty to the touch of the warm, living buttocks! The life within life, the sheer warm, potent loveliness. And the strange weight of the balls between his legs! What a mystery! What a strange heavy weight of mystery, that could lie soft and heavy in one's hand! The roots, root of all that is lovely, the primeval root of all full beauty.

She clung to him, with a hiss of wonder that was almost awe, terror. He held her close, but he said nothing. He would never say anything. She crept nearer to him, nearer, only to be near to the sensual wonder of him. And out of his utter, incomprehensible stillness, she felt again the slow momentous, surging rise of the phallus again, the other power. And her heart melted out with a kind of awe.

And this time his being within her was all soft and iridescent, purely soft and iridescent, such as no consciousness could seize. Her whole self quivered unconscious and alive, like plasm. She could not know what it was. She could not remember what it had been. Only that it had been more lovely than anything ever could be. Only that. And afterwards she was utterly still, utterly unknowing, she was not aware for how long. And he was still with her, in an unfathomable silence along with her. And of this, they would never speak.

When awareness of the outside began to come back, she clung to his breast, murmuring 'My love! My love!' And he held her silently. And she curled on his breast, perfect.

But his silence was fathomless. His hands held her like flowers, so still and strange.

'Where are you?' she whispered to him. 'Where are you? Speak to me! Say something to me!'

He kissed her softly, murmuring: 'Ay, my lass!'

But she did not know what he meant, she did not know where he was. In his silence he seemed lost to her.

'You love me, don't you?' she murmured.

'Ay, tha knows!' he said.

'But tell me!' she pleaded.

'Ay! Ay! 'asn't ter felt it?' he said dimly, but softly and surely. And she clung close to him, closer. He was so much more peaceful in love than she was, and she wanted him to reassure her.

'You do love me!' she whispered, assertive. And his hands stroked her softly,

as if she were a flower, without the quiver of desire, but with delicate nearness. And still there haunted her a restless necessity to get a grip on love.

‘Say you’ll always love me!’ she pleaded.

‘Ay!’ he said, abstractedly. And she felt her questions driving him away from her.

‘Mustn’t we get up?’ he said at last.

‘No!’ she said.

But she could feel his consciousness straying, listening to the noises outside.

‘It’ll be nearly dark,’ he said. And she heard the pressure of circumstances in his voice. She kissed him, with a woman’s grief at yielding up her hour.

He rose, and turned up the lantern, then began to pull on his clothes, quickly disappearing inside them. Then he stood there, above her, fastening his breeches and looking down at her with dark, wide-eyes, his face a little flushed and his hair ruffled, curiously warm and still and beautiful in the dim light of the lantern, so beautiful, she would never tell him how beautiful. It made her want to cling fast to him, to hold him, for there was a warm, half-sleepy remoteness in his beauty that made her want to cry out and clutch him, to have him. She would never have him. So she lay on the blanket with curved, soft naked haunches, and he had no idea what she was thinking, but to him too she was beautiful, the soft, marvellous thing he could go into, beyond everything.

‘I love thee that I can go into thee,’ he said.

‘Do you like me?’ she said, her heart beating.

‘It heals it all up, that I can go into thee. I love thee that tha opened to me. I love thee that I came into thee like that.’

He bent down and kissed her soft flank, rubbed his cheek against it, then covered it up.

‘And will you never leave me?’ she said.

‘Dunna ask them things,’ he said.

‘But you do believe I love you?’ she said.

‘Tha loved me just now, wider than iver tha thout tha would. But who knows what’ll ‘appen, once tha starts thinkin’ about it!’

‘No, don’t say those things! — And you don’t really think that I wanted to make use of you, do you?’

‘How?’

‘To have a child — ?’

‘Now anybody can ‘ave any childt i’ th’ world,’ he said, as he sat down fastening on his leggings.

‘Ah no!’ she cried. ‘You don’t mean it?’

‘Eh well!’ he said, looking at her under his brows. ‘This wor t’ best.’

She lay still. He softly opened the door. The sky was dark blue, with crystalline, turquoise rim. He went out, to shut up the hens, speaking softly to his dog. And she lay and wondered at the wonder of life, and of being.

When he came back she was still lying there, glowing like a gipsy. He sat on the stool by her.

‘Tha mun come one naight ter th’ cottage, afore tha goos; sholl ter?’ he asked, lifting his eyebrows as he looked at her, his hands dangling between his knees.

‘Sholl ter?’ she echoed, teasing.

He smiled. ‘Ay, sholl ter?’ he repeated.

‘Ay!’ she said, imitating the dialect sound.

‘Yi!’ he said.

‘Yi!’ she repeated.

‘An’ slaip wi’ me,’ he said. ‘It needs that. When sholt come?’

‘When sholl I?’ she said.

‘Nay,’ he said, ‘tha canna do’t. When sholt come then?’

‘Appen Sunday,’ she said.

‘Appen a’ Sunday! Ay!’

He laughed at her quickly.

‘Nay, tha canna,’ he protested.

‘Why canna I?’ she said.

CHAPTER 13

On Sunday Clifford wanted to go into the wood. It was a lovely morning, the pear-blossom and plum had suddenly appeared in the world in a wonder of white here and there.

It was cruel for Clifford, while the world bloomed, to have to be helped from chair to bath-chair. But he had forgotten, and even seemed to have a certain conceit of himself in his lameness. Connie still suffered, having to lift his inert legs into place. Mrs Bolton did it now, or Field.

She waited for him at the top of the drive, at the edge of the screen of beeches. His chair came puffing along with a sort of valetudinarian slow importance. As he joined his wife he said:

‘Sir Clifford on his roaming steed!’

‘Snorting, at least!’ she laughed.

He stopped and looked round at the facade of the long, low old brown house.

‘Wragby doesn’t wink an eyelid!’ he said. ‘But then why should it! I ride upon the achievements of the mind of man, and that beats a horse.’

‘I suppose it does. And the souls in Plato riding up to heaven in a two-horse chariot would go in a Ford car now,’ she said.

‘Or a Rolls-Royce: Plato was an aristocrat!’

‘Quite! No more black horse to thrash and maltreat. Plato never thought we’d go one better than his black steed and his white steed, and have no steeds at all, only an engine!’

‘Only an engine and gas!’ said Clifford. ‘I hope I can have some repairs done to the old place next year. I think I shall have about a thousand to spare for that: but work costs so much!’ he added.

‘Oh, good!’ said Connie. ‘If only there aren’t more strikes!’

‘What would be the use of their striking again! Merely ruin the industry, what’s left of it: and surely the owls are beginning to see it!’

‘Perhaps they don’t mind ruining the industry,’ said Connie.

‘Ah, don’t talk like a woman! The industry fills their bellies, even if it can’t keep their pockets quite so flush,’ he said, using turns of speech that oddly had a twang of Mrs Bolton.

‘But didn’t you say the other day that you were a conservative-anarchist,’ she asked innocently.

‘And did you understand what I meant?’ he retorted. ‘All I meant is, people

can be what they like and feel what they like and do what they like, strictly privately, so long as they keep the form of life intact, and the apparatus.'

Connie walked on in silence a few paces. Then she said, obstinately:

'It sounds like saying an egg may go as addled as it likes, so long as it keeps its shell on whole. But addled eggs do break of themselves.'

'I don't think people are eggs,' he said. 'Not even angels' eggs, my dear little evangelist.'

He was in rather high feather this bright morning. The larks were trilling away over the park, the distant pit in the hollow was fuming silent steam. It was almost like old days, before the war. Connie didn't really want to argue. But then she did not really want to go to the wood with Clifford either. So she walked beside his chair in a certain obstinacy of spirit.

'No,' he said. 'There will be no more strikes, if the thing is properly managed.'

'Why not?'

'Because strikes will be made as good as impossible.'

'But will the men let you?' she asked.

'We shan't ask them. We shall do it while they aren't looking: for their own good, to save the industry.'

'For your own good too,' she said.

'Naturally! For the good of everybody. But for their good even more than mine. I can live without the pits. They can't. They'll starve if there are no pits. I've got other provision.'

They looked up the shallow valley at the mine, and beyond it, at the black-lidded houses of Tevershall crawling like some serpent up the hill. From the old brown church the bells were ringing: Sunday, Sunday, Sunday!

'But will the men let you dictate terms?' she said.

'My dear, they will have to: if one does it gently.'

'But mightn't there be a mutual understanding?'

'Absolutely: when they realize that the industry comes before the individual.'

'But must you own the industry?' she said.

'I don't. But to the extent I do own it, yes, most decidedly. The ownership of property has now become a religious question: as it has been since Jesus and St Francis. The point is not: take all thou hast and give to the poor, but use all thou hast to encourage the industry and give work to the poor. It's the only way to feed all the mouths and clothe all the bodies. Giving away all we have to the poor spells starvation for the poor just as much as for us. And universal starvation is no high aim. Even general poverty is no lovely thing. Poverty is ugly.'

‘But the disparity?’

‘That is fate. Why is the star Jupiter bigger than the star Neptune? You can’t start altering the make-up of things!’

‘But when this envy and jealousy and discontent has once started — ’ she began.

‘Do your best to stop it. Somebody’s got to be boss of the show.’

‘But who is boss of the show?’ she asked.

‘The men who own and run the industries.’

There was a long silence.

‘It seems to me they’re a bad boss,’ she said.

‘Then you suggest what they should do.’

‘They don’t take their boss-ship seriously enough,’ she said.

‘They take it far more seriously than you take your ladyship,’ he said.

‘That’s thrust upon me. I don’t really want it,’ she blurted out. He stopped the chair and looked at her.

‘Who’s shirking their responsibility now!’ he said. ‘Who is trying to get away now from the responsibility of their own boss-ship, as you call it?’

‘But I don’t want any boss-ship,’ she protested.

‘Ah! But that is funk. You’ve got it: fated to it. And you should live up to it. Who has given the colliers all they have that’s worth having: all their political liberty, and their education, such as it is, their sanitation, their health-conditions, their books, their music, everything. Who has given it them? Have colliers given it to colliers? No! All the Wragbys and Shipleys in England have given their part, and must go on giving. There’s your responsibility.’

Connie listened, and flushed very red.

‘I’d like to give something,’ she said. ‘But I’m not allowed. Everything is to be sold and paid for now; and all the things you mention now, Wragby and Shipley sells them to the people, at a good profit. Everything is sold. You don’t give one heart-beat of real sympathy. And besides, who has taken away from the people their natural life and manhood, and given them this industrial horror? Who has done that?’

‘And what must I do?’ he asked, green. ‘Ask them to come and pillage me?’

‘Why is Tevershall so ugly, so hideous? Why are their lives so hopeless?’

‘They built their own Tevershall, that’s part of their display of freedom. They built themselves their pretty Tevershall, and they live their own pretty lives. I can’t live their lives for them. Every beetle must live its own life.’

‘But you make them work for you. They live the life of your coal-mine.’

‘Not at all. Every beetle finds its own food. Not one man is forced to work for me.’

‘Their lives are industrialized and hopeless, and so are ours,’ she cried.

‘I don’t think they are. That’s just a romantic figure of speech, a relic of the swooning and die-away romanticism. You don’t look at all a hopeless figure standing there, Connie my dear.’

Which was true. For her dark-blue eyes were flashing, her colour was hot in her cheeks, she looked full of a rebellious passion far from the dejection of hopelessness. She noticed, in the tussocky places of the grass, cottony young cowslips standing up still bleared in their down. And she wondered with rage, why it was she felt Clifford was so wrong, yet she couldn’t say it to him, she could not say exactly where he was wrong.

‘No wonder the men hate you,’ she said.

‘They don’t!’ he replied. ‘And don’t fall into errors: in your sense of the word, they are not men. They are animals you don’t understand, and never could. Don’t thrust your illusions on other people. The masses were always the same, and will always be the same. Nero’s slaves were extremely little different from our colliers or the Ford motor-car workmen. I mean Nero’s mine slaves and his field slaves. It is the masses: they are the unchangeable. An individual may emerge from the masses. But the emergence doesn’t alter the mass. The masses are unalterable. It is one of the most momentous facts of social science. panem et circenses! Only today education is one of the bad substitutes for a circus. What is wrong today is that we’ve made a profound hash of the circuses part of the programme, and poisoned our masses with a little education.’

When Clifford became really roused in his feelings about the common people, Connie was frightened. There was something devastatingly true in what he said. But it was a truth that killed.

Seeing her pale and silent, Clifford started the chair again, and no more was said till he halted again at the wood gate, which she opened.

‘And what we need to take up now,’ he said, ‘is whips, not swords. The masses have been ruled since time began, and till time ends, ruled they will have to be. It is sheer hypocrisy and farce to say they can rule themselves.’

‘But can you rule them?’ she asked.

‘I? Oh yes! Neither my mind nor my will is crippled, and I don’t rule with my legs. I can do my share of ruling: absolutely, my share; and give me a son, and he will be able to rule his portion after me.’

‘But he wouldn’t be your own son, of your own ruling class; or perhaps not,’ she stammered.

‘I don’t care who his father may be, so long as he is a healthy man not below normal intelligence. Give me the child of any healthy, normally intelligent man, and I will make a perfectly competent Chatterley of him. It is not who begets us,

that matters, but where fate places us. Place any child among the ruling classes, and he will grow up, to his own extent, a ruler. Put kings' and dukes' children among the masses, and they'll be little plebeians, mass products. It is the overwhelming pressure of environment.'

'Then the common people aren't a race, and the aristocrats aren't blood,' she said.

'No, my child! All that is romantic illusion. Aristocracy is a function, a part of fate. And the masses are a functioning of another part of fate. The individual hardly matters. It is a question of which function you are brought up to and adapted to. It is not the individuals that make an aristocracy: it is the functioning of the aristocratic whole. And it is the functioning of the whole mass that makes the common man what he is.'

'Then there is no common humanity between us all!'

'Just as you like. We all need to fill our bellies. But when it comes to expressive or executive functioning, I believe there is a gulf and an absolute one, between the ruling and the serving classes. The two functions are opposed. And the function determines the individual.'

Connie looked at him with dazed eyes.

'Won't you come on?' she said.

And he started his chair. He had said his say. Now he lapsed into his peculiar and rather vacant apathy, that Connie found so trying. In the wood, anyhow, she was determined not to argue.

In front of them ran the open cleft of the riding, between the hazel walls and the gay grey trees. The chair puffed slowly on, slowly surging into the forget-me-nots that rose up in the drive like milk froth, beyond the hazel shadows. Clifford steered the middle course, where feet passing had kept a channel through the flowers. But Connie, walking behind, had watched the wheels jolt over the woodruff and the bugle, and squash the little yellow cups of the creeping-jenny. Now they made a wake through the forget-me-nots.

All the flowers were there, the first bluebells in blue pools, like standing water.

'You are quite right about its being beautiful,' said Clifford. 'It is so amazingly. What is quite so lovely as an English spring!'

Connie thought it sounded as if even the spring bloomed by act of Parliament. An English spring! Why not an Irish one? or Jewish? The chair moved slowly ahead, past tufts of sturdy bluebells that stood up like wheat and over grey burdock leaves. When they came to the open place where the trees had been felled, the light flooded in rather stark. And the bluebells made sheets of bright blue colour, here and there, sheering off into lilac and purple. And between, the

bracken was lifting its brown curled heads, like legions of young snakes with a new secret to whisper to Eve. Clifford kept the chair going till he came to the brow of the hill; Connie followed slowly behind. The oak-buds were opening soft and brown. Everything came tenderly out of the old hardness. Even the snaggy craggy oak-trees put out the softest young leaves, spreading thin, brown little wings like young bat-wings in the light. Why had men never any newness in them, any freshness to come forth with! Stale men!

Clifford stopped the chair at the top of the rise and looked down. The bluebells washed blue like flood-water over the broad riding, and lit up the downhill with a warm blueness.

‘It’s a very fine colour in itself,’ said Clifford, ‘but useless for making a painting.’

‘Quite!’ said Connie, completely uninterested.

‘Shall I venture as far as the spring?’ said Clifford.

‘Will the chair get up again?’ she said.

‘We’ll try; nothing venture, nothing win!’

And the chair began to advance slowly, joltingly down the beautiful broad riding washed over with blue encroaching hyacinths. O last of all ships, through the hyacinthian shallows! O pinnacle on the last wild waters, sailing in the last voyage of our civilization! Whither, O weird wheeled ship, your slow course steering. Quiet and complacent, Clifford sat at the wheel of adventure: in his old black hat and tweed jacket, motionless and cautious. O Captain, my Captain, our splendid trip is done! Not yet though! Downhill, in the wake, came Constance in her grey dress, watching the chair jolt downwards.

They passed the narrow track to the hut. Thank heaven it was not wide enough for the chair: hardly wide enough for one person. The chair reached the bottom of the slope, and swerved round, to disappear. And Connie heard a low whistle behind her. She glanced sharply round: the keeper was striding downhill towards her, his dog keeping behind him.

‘Is Sir Clifford going to the cottage?’ he asked, looking into her eyes.

‘No, only to the well.’

‘Ah! Good! Then I can keep out of sight. But I shall see you tonight. I shall wait for you at the park-gate about ten.’

He looked again direct into her eyes.

‘Yes,’ she faltered.

They heard the Papp! Papp! of Clifford’s horn, tooting for Connie. She ‘Coo-ee!’ in reply. The keeper’s face flickered with a little grimace, and with his hand he softly brushed her breast upwards, from underneath. She looked at him, frightened, and started running down the hill, calling Coo-ee! again to Clifford.

The man above watched her, then turned, grinning faintly, back into his path.

She found Clifford slowly mounting to the spring, which was halfway up the slope of the dark larch-wood. He was there by the time she caught him up.

‘She did that all right,’ he said, referring to the chair.

Connie looked at the great grey leaves of burdock that grew out ghostly from the edge of the larch-wood. The people call it Robin Hood’s Rhubarb. How silent and gloomy it seemed by the well! Yet the water bubbled so bright, wonderful! And there were bits of eye-bright and strong blue bugle...And there, under the bank, the yellow earth was moving. A mole! It emerged, rowing its pink hands, and waving its blind gimlet of a face, with the tiny pink nose-tip uplifted.

‘It seems to see with the end of its nose,’ said Connie.

‘Better than with its eyes!’ he said. ‘Will you drink?’

‘Will you?’

She took an enamel mug from a twig on a tree, and stooped to fill it for him. He drank in sips. Then she stooped again, and drank a little herself.

‘So icy!’ she said gasping.

‘Good, isn’t it! Did you wish?’

‘Did you?’

‘Yes, I wished. But I won’t tell.’

She was aware of the rapping of a woodpecker, then of the wind, soft and eerie through the larches. She looked up. White clouds were crossing the blue.

‘Clouds!’ she said.

‘White lambs only,’ he replied.

A shadow crossed the little clearing. The mole had swum out on to the soft yellow earth.

‘Unpleasant little beast, we ought to kill him,’ said Clifford.

‘Look! he’s like a parson in a pulpit,’ she said.

She gathered some sprigs of woodruff and brought them to him.

‘New-mown hay!’ he said. ‘Doesn’t it smell like the romantic ladies of the last century, who had their heads screwed on the right way after all!’

She was looking at the white clouds.

‘I wonder if it will rain,’ she said.

‘Rain! Why! Do you want it to?’

They started on the return journey, Clifford jolting cautiously downhill. They came to the dark bottom of the hollow, turned to the right, and after a hundred yards swerved up the foot of the long slope, where bluebells stood in the light.

‘Now, old girl!’ said Clifford, putting the chair to it.

It was a steep and jolty climb. The chair pugged slowly, in a struggling

unwilling fashion. Still, she nosed her way up unevenly, till she came to where the hyacinths were all around her, then she balked, struggled, jerked a little way out of the flowers, then stopped

‘We’d better sound the horn and see if the keeper will come,’ said Connie. ‘He could push her a bit. For that matter, I will push. It helps.’

‘We’ll let her breathe,’ said Clifford. ‘Do you mind putting a scotch under the wheel?’

Connie found a stone, and they waited. After a while Clifford started his motor again, then set the chair in motion. It struggled and faltered like a sick thing, with curious noises.

‘Let me push!’ said Connie, coming up behind.

‘No! Don’t push!’ he said angrily. ‘What’s the good of the damned thing, if it has to be pushed! Put the stone under!’

There was another pause, then another start; but more ineffectual than before.

‘You must let me push,’ said she. ‘Or sound the horn for the keeper.’

‘Wait!’

She waited; and he had another try, doing more harm than good.

‘Sound the horn then, if you won’t let me push,’ she said.

‘Hell! Be quiet a moment!’

She was quiet a moment: he made shattering efforts with the little motor.

‘You’ll only break the thing down altogether, Clifford,’ she remonstrated; ‘besides wasting your nervous energy.’

‘If I could only get out and look at the damned thing!’ he said, exasperated. And he sounded the horn stridently. ‘Perhaps Mellors can see what’s wrong.’

They waited, among the mashed flowers under a sky softly curdling with cloud. In the silence a wood-pigeon began to coo roo-hoo hoo! roo-hoo hoo! Clifford shut her up with a blast on the horn.

The keeper appeared directly, striding inquiringly round the corner. He saluted.

‘Do you know anything about motors?’ asked Clifford sharply.

‘I am afraid I don’t. Has she gone wrong?’

‘Apparently!’ snapped Clifford.

The man crouched solicitously by the wheel, and peered at the little engine.

‘I’m afraid I know nothing at all about these mechanical things, Sir Clifford,’ he said calmly. ‘If she has enough petrol and oil — ’

‘Just look carefully and see if you can see anything broken,’ snapped Clifford.

The man laid his gun against a tree, took off his coat, and threw it beside it. The brown dog sat guard. Then he sat down on his heels and peered under the chair, poking with his finger at the greasy little engine, and resenting the grease-

marks on his clean Sunday shirt.

‘Doesn’t seem anything broken,’ he said. And he stood up, pushing back his hat from his forehead, rubbing his brow and apparently studying.

‘Have you looked at the rods underneath?’ asked Clifford. ‘See if they are all right!’

The man lay flat on his stomach on the floor, his neck pressed back, wriggling under the engine and poking with his finger. Connie thought what a pathetic sort of thing a man was, feeble and small-looking, when he was lying on his belly on the big earth.

‘Seems all right as far as I can see,’ came his muffled voice.

‘I don’t suppose you can do anything,’ said Clifford.

‘Seems as if I can’t!’ And he scrambled up and sat on his heels, collier fashion. ‘There’s certainly nothing obviously broken.’

Clifford started his engine, then put her in gear. She would not move.

‘Run her a bit hard, like,’ suggested the keeper.

Clifford resented the interference: but he made his engine buzz like a blue-bottle. Then she coughed and snarled and seemed to go better.

‘Sounds as if she’d come clear,’ said Mellors.

But Clifford had already jerked her into gear. She gave a sick lurch and ebbed weakly forwards.

‘If I give her a push, she’ll do it,’ said the keeper, going behind.

‘Keep off!’ snapped Clifford. ‘She’ll do it by herself.’

‘But Clifford!’ put in Connie from the bank, ‘you know it’s too much for her. Why are you so obstinate!’

Clifford was pale with anger. He jabbed at his levers. The chair gave a sort of scurry, reeled on a few more yards, and came to her end amid a particularly promising patch of bluebells.

‘She’s done!’ said the keeper. ‘Not power enough.’

‘She’s been up here before,’ said Clifford coldly.

‘She won’t do it this time,’ said the keeper.

Clifford did not reply. He began doing things with his engine, running her fast and slow as if to get some sort of tune out of her. The wood re-echoed with weird noises. Then he put her in gear with a jerk, having jerked off his brake.

‘You’ll rip her inside out,’ murmured the keeper.

The chair charged in a sick lurch sideways at the ditch.

‘Clifford!’ cried Connie, rushing forward.

But the keeper had got the chair by the rail. Clifford, however, putting on all his pressure, managed to steer into the riding, and with a strange noise the chair was fighting the hill. Mellors pushed steadily behind, and up she went, as if to

retrieve herself.

‘You see, she’s doing it!’ said Clifford, victorious, glancing over his shoulder. There he saw the keeper’s face.

‘Are you pushing her?’

‘She won’t do it without.’

‘Leave her alone. I asked you not.’

‘She won’t do it.’

‘Let her try!’ snarled Clifford, with all his emphasis.

The keeper stood back: then turned to fetch his coat and gun. The chair seemed to strangle immediately. She stood inert. Clifford, seated a prisoner, was white with vexation. He jerked at the levers with his hand, his feet were no good. He got queer noises out of her. In savage impatience he moved little handles and got more noises out of her. But she would not budge. No, she would not budge. He stopped the engine and sat rigid with anger.

Constance sat on the bank and looked at the wretched and trampled bluebells. ‘Nothing quite so lovely as an English spring.’ ‘I can do my share of ruling.’ ‘What we need to take up now is whips, not swords.’ ‘The ruling classes!’

The keeper strode up with his coat and gun, Flossie cautiously at his heels. Clifford asked the man to do something or other to the engine. Connie, who understood nothing at all of the technicalities of motors, and who had had experience of breakdowns, sat patiently on the bank as if she were a cipher. The keeper lay on his stomach again. The ruling classes and the serving classes!

He got to his feet and said patiently:

‘Try her again, then.’

He spoke in a quiet voice, almost as if to a child.

Clifford tried her, and Mellors stepped quickly behind and began to push. She was going, the engine doing about half the work, the man the rest.

Clifford glanced round, yellow with anger.

‘Will you get off there!’

The keeper dropped his hold at once, and Clifford added: ‘How shall I know what she is doing!’

The man put his gun down and began to pull on his coat. He’d done.

The chair began slowly to run backwards.

‘Clifford, your brake!’ cried Connie.

She, Mellors, and Clifford moved at once, Connie and the keeper jostling lightly. The chair stood. There was a moment of dead silence.

‘It’s obvious I’m at everybody’s mercy!’ said Clifford. He was yellow with anger.

No one answered. Mellors was slinging his gun over his shoulder, his face

queer and expressionless, save for an abstracted look of patience. The dog Flossie, standing on guard almost between her master's legs, moved uneasily, eyeing the chair with great suspicion and dislike, and very much perplexed between the three human beings. The tableau vivant remained set among the squashed bluebells, nobody proffering a word.

'I expect she'll have to be pushed,' said Clifford at last, with an affectation of sang froid.

No answer. Mellors' abstracted face looked as if he had heard nothing. Connie glanced anxiously at him. Clifford too glanced round.

'Do you mind pushing her home, Mellors!' he said in a cool superior tone. 'I hope I have said nothing to offend you,' he added, in a tone of dislike.

'Nothing at all, Sir Clifford! Do you want me to push that chair?'

'If you please.'

The man stepped up to it: but this time it was without effect. The brake was jammed. They poked and pulled, and the keeper took off his gun and his coat once more. And now Clifford said never a word. At last the keeper heaved the back of the chair off the ground and, with an instantaneous push of his foot, tried to loosen the wheels. He failed, the chair sank. Clifford was clutching the sides. The man gasped with the weight.

'Don't do it!' cried Connie to him.

'If you'll pull the wheel that way, so!' he said to her, showing her how.

'No! You mustn't lift it! You'll strain yourself,' she said, flushed now with anger.

But he looked into her eyes and nodded. And she had to go and take hold of the wheel, ready. He heaved and she tugged, and the chair reeled.

'For God's sake!' cried Clifford in terror.

But it was all right, and the brake was off. The keeper put a stone under the wheel, and went to sit on the bank, his heart beat and his face white with the effort, semi-conscious.

Connie looked at him, and almost cried with anger. There was a pause and a dead silence. She saw his hands trembling on his thighs.

'Have you hurt yourself?' she asked, going to him.

'No. No!' He turned away almost angrily.

There was dead silence. The back of Clifford's fair head did not move. Even the dog stood motionless. The sky had clouded over.

At last he sighed, and blew his nose on his red handkerchief.

'That pneumonia took a lot out of me,' he said.

No one answered. Connie calculated the amount of strength it must have taken to heave up that chair and the bulky Clifford: too much, far too much! If it

hadn't killed him!

He rose, and again picked up his coat, slinging it through the handle of the chair.

'Are you ready, then, Sir Clifford?'

'When you are!'

He stooped and took out the scotch, then put his weight against the chair. He was paler than Connie had ever seen him: and more absent. Clifford was a heavy man: and the hill was steep. Connie stepped to the keeper's side.

'I'm going to push too!' she said.

And she began to shove with a woman's turbulent energy of anger. The chair went faster. Clifford looked round.

'Is that necessary?' he said.

'Very! Do you want to kill the man! If you'd let the motor work while it would — '

But she did not finish. She was already panting. She slackened off a little, for it was surprisingly hard work.

'Ay! slower!' said the man at her side, with a faint smile of his eyes.

'Are you sure you've not hurt yourself?' she said fiercely.

He shook his head. She looked at his smallish, short, alive hand, browned by the weather. It was the hand that caressed her. She had never even looked at it before. It seemed so still, like him, with a curious inward stillness that made her want to clutch it, as if she could not reach it. All her soul suddenly swept towards him: he was so silent, and out of reach! And he felt his limbs revive. Shoving with his left hand, he laid his right on her round white wrist, softly enfolding her wrist, with a caress. And the flame of strength went down his back and his loins, reviving him. And she bent suddenly and kissed his hand. Meanwhile the back of Clifford's head was held sleek and motionless, just in front of them.

At the top of the hill they rested, and Connie was glad to let go. She had had fugitive dreams of friendship between these two men: one her husband, the other the father of her child. Now she saw the screaming absurdity of her dreams. The two males were as hostile as fire and water. They mutually exterminated one another. And she realized for the first time what a queer subtle thing hate is. For the first time, she had consciously and definitely hated Clifford, with vivid hate: as if he ought to be obliterated from the face of the earth. And it was strange, how free and full of life it made her feel, to hate him and to admit it fully to herself. — 'Now I've hated him, I shall never be able to go on living with him,' came the thought into her mind.

On the level the keeper could push the chair alone. Clifford made a little

conversation with her, to show his complete composure: about Aunt Eva, who was at Dieppe, and about Sir Malcolm, who had written to ask would Connie drive with him in his small car, to Venice, or would she and Hilda go by train.

‘I’d much rather go by train,’ said Connie. ‘I don’t like long motor drives, especially when there’s dust. But I shall see what Hilda wants.’

‘She will want to drive her own car, and take you with her,’ he said.

‘Probably! — I must help up here. You’ve no idea how heavy this chair is.’

She went to the back of the chair, and plodded side by side with the keeper, shoving up the pink path. She did not care who saw.

‘Why not let me wait, and fetch Field? He is strong enough for the job,’ said Clifford.

‘It’s so near,’ she panted.

But both she and Mellors wiped the sweat from their faces when they came to the top. It was curious, but this bit of work together had brought them much closer than they had been before.

‘Thanks so much, Mellors,’ said Clifford, when they were at the house door. ‘I must get a different sort of motor, that’s all. Won’t you go to the kitchen and have a meal? It must be about time.’

‘Thank you, Sir Clifford. I was going to my mother for dinner today, Sunday.’

‘As you like.’

Mellors slung into his coat, looked at Connie, saluted, and was gone. Connie, furious, went upstairs.

At lunch she could not contain her feeling.

‘Why are you so abominably inconsiderate, Clifford?’ she said to him.

‘Of whom?’

‘Of the keeper! If that is what you call ruling classes, I’m sorry for you.’

‘Why?’

‘A man who’s been ill, and isn’t strong! My word, if I were the serving classes, I’d let you wait for service. I’d let you whistle.’

‘I quite believe it.’

‘If he’d been sitting in a chair with paralysed legs, and behaved as you behaved, what would you have done for him?’

‘My dear evangelist, this confusing of persons and personalities is in bad taste.’

‘And your nasty, sterile want of common sympathy is in the worst taste imaginable. noblesse oblige! You and your ruling class!’

‘And to what should it oblige me? To have a lot of unnecessary emotions about my game-keeper? I refuse. I leave it all to my evangelist.’

‘As if he weren’t a man as much as you are, my word!’

‘My game-keeper to boot, and I pay him two pounds a week and give him a house.’

‘Pay him! What do you think you pay for, with two pounds a week and a house?’

‘His services.’

‘Bah! I would tell you to keep your two pounds a week and your house.’

‘Probably he would like to: but can’t afford the luxury!’

‘You, and rule!’ she said. ‘You don’t rule, don’t flatter yourself. You have only got more than your share of the money, and make people work for you for two pounds a week, or threaten them with starvation. Rule! What do you give forth of rule? Why, you re dried up! You only bully with your money, like any Jew or any Schieber!’

‘You are very elegant in your speech, Lady Chatterley!’

‘I assure you, you were very elegant altogether out there in the wood. I was utterly ashamed of you. Why, my father is ten times the human being you are: you gentleman!’

He reached and rang the bell for Mrs Bolton. But he was yellow at the gills.

She went up to her room, furious, saying to herself: ‘Him and buying people! Well, he doesn’t buy me, and therefore there’s no need for me to stay with him. Dead fish of a gentleman, with his celluloid soul! And how they take one in, with their manners and their mock wistfulness and gentleness. They’ve got about as much feeling as celluloid has.’

She made her plans for the night, and determined to get Clifford off her mind. She didn’t want to hate him. She didn’t want to be mixed up very intimately with him in any sort of feeling. She wanted him not to know anything at all about herself: and especially, not to know anything about her feeling for the keeper. This squabble of her attitude to the servants was an old one. He found her too familiar, she found him stupidly insentient, tough and indiarubbery where other people were concerned.

She went downstairs calmly, with her old demure bearing, at dinner-time. He was still yellow at the gills: in for one of his liver bouts, when he was really very queer. — He was reading a French book.

‘Have you ever read Proust?’ he asked her.

‘I’ve tried, but he bores me.’

‘He’s really very extraordinary.’

‘Possibly! But he bores me: all that sophistication! He doesn’t have feelings, he only has streams of words about feelings. I’m tired of self-important mentalities.’

‘Would you prefer self-important animalities?’

‘Perhaps! But one might possibly get something that wasn’t self-important.’

‘Well, I like Proust’s subtlety and his well-bred anarchy.’

‘It makes you very dead, really.’

‘There speaks my evangelical little wife.’

They were at it again, at it again! But she couldn’t help fighting him. He seemed to sit there like a skeleton, sending out a skeleton’s cold grizzly will against her. Almost she could feel the skeleton clutching her and pressing her to its cage of ribs. He too was really up in arms: and she was a little afraid of him.

She went upstairs as soon as possible, and went to bed quite early. But at half past nine she got up, and went outside to listen. There was no sound. She slipped on a dressing-gown and went downstairs. Clifford and Mrs Bolton were playing cards, gambling. They would probably go on until midnight.

Connie returned to her room, threw her pyjamas on the tossed bed, put on a thin tennis-dress and over that a woollen day-dress, put on rubber tennis-shoes, and then a light coat. And she was ready. If she met anybody, she was just going out for a few minutes. And in the morning, when she came in again, she would just have been for a little walk in the dew, as she fairly often did before breakfast. For the rest, the only danger was that someone should go into her room during the night. But that was most unlikely: not one chance in a hundred.

Betts had not locked up. He fastened up the house at ten o’clock, and unfastened it again at seven in the morning. She slipped out silently and unseen. There was a half-moon shining, enough to make a little light in the world, not enough to show her up in her dark-grey coat. She walked quickly across the park, not really in the thrill of the assignation, but with a certain anger and rebellion burning in her heart. It was not the right sort of heart to take to a love-meeting. But *a la guerre comme a la guerre!*

CHAPTER 14

When she got near the park-gate, she heard the click of the latch. He was there, then, in the darkness of the wood, and had seen her!

‘You are good and early,’ he said out of the dark. ‘Was everything all right?’

‘Perfectly easy.’

He shut the gate quietly after her, and made a spot of light on the dark ground, showing the pallid flowers still standing there open in the night. They went on apart, in silence.

‘Are you sure you didn’t hurt yourself this morning with that chair?’ she asked.

‘No, no!’

‘When you had that pneumonia, what did it do to you?’

‘Oh nothing! it left my heart not so strong and the lungs not so elastic. But it always does that.’

‘And you ought not to make violent physical efforts?’

‘Not often.’

She plodded on in an angry silence.

‘Did you hate Clifford?’ she said at last.

‘Hate him, no! I’ve met too many like him to upset myself hating him. I know beforehand I don’t care for his sort, and I let it go at that.’

‘What is his sort?’

‘Nay, you know better than I do. The sort of youngish gentleman a bit like a lady, and no balls.’

‘What balls?’

‘Balls! A man’s balls!’

She pondered this.

‘But is it a question of that?’ she said, a little annoyed.

‘You say a man’s got no brain, when he’s a fool: and no heart, when he’s mean; and no stomach when he’s a funkier. And when he’s got none of that spunky wild bit of a man in him, you say he’s got no balls. When he’s a sort of tame.’

She pondered this.

‘And is Clifford tame?’ she asked.

‘Tame, and nasty with it: like most such fellows, when you come up against ‘em.’

‘And do you think you’re not tame?’

‘Maybe not quite!’

At length she saw in the distance a yellow light.

She stood still.

‘There is a light!’ she said.

‘I always leave a light in the house,’ he said.

She went on again at his side, but not touching him, wondering why she was going with him at all.

He unlocked, and they went in, he bolting the door behind them. As if it were a prison, she thought! The kettle was singing by the red fire, there were cups on the table.

She sat in the wooden arm-chair by the fire. It was warm after the chill outside.

‘I’ll take off my shoes, they are wet,’ she said.

She sat with her stockinged feet on the bright steel fender. He went to the pantry, bringing food: bread and butter and pressed tongue. She was warm: she took off her coat. He hung it on the door.

‘Shall you have cocoa or tea or coffee to drink?’ he asked.

‘I don’t think I want anything,’ she said, looking at the table. ‘But you eat.’

‘Nay, I don’t care about it. I’ll just feed the dog.’

He tramped with a quiet inevitability over the brick floor, putting food for the dog in a brown bowl. The spaniel looked up at him anxiously.

‘Ay, this is thy supper, tha nedna look as if tha wouldna get it!’ he said.

He set the bowl on the stairfoot mat, and sat himself on a chair by the wall, to take off his leggings and boots. The dog instead of eating, came to him again, and sat looking up at him, troubled.

He slowly unbuckled his leggings. The dog edged a little nearer.

‘What’s amiss wi’ thee then? Art upset because there’s somebody else here? Tha’rt a female, tha art! Go an’ eat thy supper.’

He put his hand on her head, and the bitch leaned her head sideways against him. He slowly, softly pulled the long silky ear.

‘There!’ he said. ‘There! Go an’ eat thy supper! Go!’

He tilted his chair towards the pot on the mat, and the dog meekly went, and fell to eating.

‘Do you like dogs?’ Connie asked him.

‘No, not really. They’re too tame and clinging.’

He had taken off his leggings and was unlacing his heavy boots. Connie had turned from the fire. How bare the little room was! Yet over his head on the wall hung a hideous enlarged photograph of a young married couple, apparently him

and a bold-faced young woman, no doubt his wife.

‘Is that you?’ Connie asked him.

He twisted and looked at the enlargement above his head.

‘Ay! Taken just afore we was married, when I was twenty-one.’ He looked at it impassively.

‘Do you like it?’ Connie asked him.

‘Like it? No! I never liked the thing. But she fixed it all up to have it done, like.’

He returned to pulling off his boots.

‘If you don’t like it, why do you keep it hanging there? Perhaps your wife would like to have it,’ she said.

He looked up at her with a sudden grin.

‘She carted off iverything as was worth taking from th’ ‘ouse,’ he said. ‘But she left that!’

‘Then why do you keep it? for sentimental reasons?’

‘Nay, I niver look at it. I hardly knowed it wor theer. It’s bin theer sin’ we come to this place.’

‘Why don’t you burn it?’ she said.

He twisted round again and looked at the enlarged photograph. It was framed in a brown-and-gilt frame, hideous. It showed a clean-shaven, alert, very young-looking man in a rather high collar, and a somewhat plump, bold young woman with hair fluffed out and crimped, and wearing a dark satin blouse.

‘It wouldn’t be a bad idea, would it?’ he said.

He had pulled off his boots, and put on a pair of slippers. He stood up on the chair, and lifted down the photograph. It left a big pale place on the greenish wall-paper.

‘No use dusting it now,’ he said, setting the thing against the wall.

He went to the scullery, and returned with hammer and pincers. Sitting where he had sat before, he started to tear off the back-paper from the big frame, and to pull out the sprigs that held the backboard in position, working with the immediate quiet absorption that was characteristic of him.

He soon had the nails out: then he pulled out the backboards, then the enlargement itself, in its solid white mount. He looked at the photograph with amusement.

‘Shows me for what I was, a young curate, and her for what she was, a bully,’ he said. ‘The prig and the bully!’

‘Let me look!’ said Connie.

He did look indeed very clean-shaven and very clean altogether, one of the clean young men of twenty years ago. But even in the photograph his eyes were

alert and dauntless. And the woman was not altogether a bully, though her jowl was heavy. There was a touch of appeal in her.

‘One never should keep these things,’ said Connie.

‘That, one shouldn’t! One should never have them made!’

He broke the cardboard photograph and mount over his knee, and when it was small enough, put it on the fire.

‘It’ll spoil the fire though,’ he said.

The glass and the backboard he carefully took upstairs.

The frame he knocked asunder with a few blows of the hammer, making the stucco fly. Then he took the pieces into the scullery.

‘We’ll burn that tomorrow,’ he said. ‘There’s too much plaster-moulding on it.’

Having cleared away, he sat down.

‘Did you love your wife?’ she asked him.

‘Love?’ he said. ‘Did you love Sir Clifford?’

But she was not going to be put off.

‘But you cared for her?’ she insisted.

‘Cared?’ He grinned.

‘Perhaps you care for her now,’ she said.

‘Me!’ His eyes widened. ‘Ah no, I can’t think of her,’ he said quietly.

‘Why?’

But he shook his head.

‘Then why don’t you get a divorce? She’ll come back to you one day,’ said Connie.

He looked up at her sharply.

‘She wouldn’t come within a mile of me. She hates me a lot worse than I hate her.’

‘You’ll see she’ll come back to you.’

‘That she never will. That’s done! It would make me sick to see her.’

‘You will see her. And you’re not even legally separated, are you?’

‘No.’

‘Ah well, then she’ll come back, and you’ll have to take her in.’

He gazed at Connie fixedly. Then he gave the queer toss of his head.

‘You might be right. I was a fool ever to come back here. But I felt stranded and had to go somewhere. A man’s a poor bit of a wastrel blown about. But you’re right. I’ll get a divorce and get clear. I hate those things like death, officials and courts and judges. But I’ve got to get through with it. I’ll get a divorce.’

And she saw his jaw set. Inwardly she exulted.

‘I think I will have a cup of tea now,’ she said.

He rose to make it. But his face was set.

As they sat at table she asked him:

‘Why did you marry her? She was commoner than yourself. Mrs Bolton told me about her. She could never understand why you married her.’

He looked at her fixedly.

‘I’ll tell you,’ he said. ‘The first girl I had, I began with when I was sixteen. She was a school-master’s daughter over at Ollerton, pretty, beautiful really. I was supposed to be a clever sort of young fellow from Sheffield Grammar School, with a bit of French and German, very much up aloft. She was the romantic sort that hated commonness. She egged me on to poetry and reading: in a way, she made a man of me. I read and I thought like a house on fire, for her. And I was a clerk in Butterley offices, thin, white-faced fellow fuming with all the things I read. And about everything I talked to her: but everything. We talked ourselves into Persepolis and Timbuctoo. We were the most literary-cultured couple in ten counties. I held forth with rapture to her, positively with rapture. I simply went up in smoke. And she adored me. The serpent in the grass was sex. She somehow didn’t have any; at least, not where it’s supposed to be. I got thinner and crazier. Then I said we’d got to be lovers. I talked her into it, as usual. So she let me. I was excited, and she never wanted it. She just didn’t want it. She adored me, she loved me to talk to her and kiss her: in that way she had a passion for me. But the other, she just didn’t want. And there are lots of women like her. And it was just the other that I did want. So there we split. I was cruel, and left her. Then I took on with another girl, a teacher, who had made a scandal by carrying on with a married man and driving him nearly out of his mind. She was a soft, white-skinned, soft sort of a woman, older than me, and played the fiddle. And she was a demon. She loved everything about love, except the sex. Clinging, caressing, creeping into you in every way: but if you forced her to the sex itself, she just ground her teeth and sent out hate. I forced her to it, and she could simply numb me with hate because of it. So I was balked again. I loathed all that. I wanted a woman who wanted me, and wanted it.’

‘Then came Bertha Coutts. They’d lived next door to us when I was a little lad, so I knew ‘em all right. And they were common. Well, Bertha went away to some place or other in Birmingham; she said, as a lady’s companion; everybody else said, as a waitress or something in a hotel. Anyhow just when I was more than fed up with that other girl, when I was twenty-one, back comes Bertha, with airs and graces and smart clothes and a sort of bloom on her: a sort of sensual bloom that you’d see sometimes on a woman, or on a trolley. Well, I was in a state of murder. I chucked up my job at Butterley because I thought I was a

weed, clerking there: and I got on as overhead blacksmith at Tevershall: shoeing horses mostly. It had been my dad's job, and I'd always been with him. It was a job I liked: handling horses: and it came natural to me. So I stopped talking "fine", as they call it, talking proper English, and went back to talking broad. I still read books, at home: but I blacksmithed and had a pony-trap of my own, and was My Lord Duckfoot. My dad left me three hundred pounds when he died. So I took on with Bertha, and I was glad she was common. I wanted her to be common. I wanted to be common myself. Well, I married her, and she wasn't bad. Those other "pure" women had nearly taken all the balls out of me, but she was all right that way. She wanted me, and made no bones about it. And I was as pleased as punch. That was what I wanted: a woman who wanted me to fuck her. So I fucked her like a good un. And I think she despised me a bit, for being so pleased about it, and bringin' her her breakfast in bed sometimes. She sort of let things go, didn't get me a proper dinner when I came home from work, and if I said anything, flew out at me. And I flew back, hammer and tongs. She flung a cup at me and I took her by the scruff of the neck and squeezed the life out of her. That sort of thing! But she treated me with insolence. And she got so's she'd never have me when I wanted her: never. Always put me off, brutal as you like. And then when she'd put me right off, and I didn't want her, she'd come all lovey-dovey, and get me. And I always went. But when I had her, she'd never come off when I did. Never! She'd just wait. If I kept back for half an hour, she'd keep back longer. And when I'd come and really finished, then she'd start on her own account, and I had to stop inside her till she brought herself off, wriggling and shouting, she'd clutch clutch with herself down there, an' then she'd come off, fair in ecstasy. And then she'd say: That was lovely! Gradually I got sick of it: and she got worse. She sort of got harder and harder to bring off, and she'd sort of tear at me down there, as if it was a beak tearing at me. By God, you think a woman's soft down there, like a fig. But I tell you the old rampers have beaks between their legs, and they tear at you with it till you're sick. Self! Self! Self! all self! tearing and shouting! They talk about men's selfishness, but I doubt if it can ever touch a woman's blind beakishness, once she's gone that way. Like an old trull! And she couldn't help it. I told her about it, I told her how I hated it. And she'd even try. She'd try to lie still and let me work the business. She'd try. But it was no good. She got no feeling off it, from my working. She had to work the thing herself, grind her own coffee. And it came back on her like a raving necessity, she had to let herself go, and tear, tear, tear, as if she had no sensation in her except in the top of her beak, the very outside top tip, that rubbed and tore. That's how old whores used to be, so men used to say. It was a low kind of self-will in her, a raving sort of self-will: like in

a woman who drinks. Well in the end I couldn't stand it. We slept apart. She herself had started it, in her bouts when she wanted to be clear of me, when she said I bossed her. She had started having a room for herself. But the time came when I wouldn't have her coming to my room. I wouldn't.

'I hated it. And she hated me. My God, how she hated me before that child was born! I often think she conceived it out of hate. Anyhow, after the child was born I left her alone. And then came the war, and I joined up. And I didn't come back till I knew she was with that fellow at Stacks Gate.'

He broke off, pale in the face.

'And what is the man at Stacks Gate like?' asked Connie.

'A big baby sort of fellow, very low-mouthed. She bullies him, and they both drink.'

'My word, if she came back!'

'My God, yes! I should just go, disappear again.'

There was a silence. The pasteboard in the fire had turned to grey ash.

'So when you did get a woman who wanted you,' said Connie, 'you got a bit too much of a good thing.'

'Ay! Seems so! Yet even then I'd rather have her than the never-never ones: the white love of my youth, and that other poison-smelling lily, and the rest.'

'What about the rest?' said Connie.

'The rest? There is no rest. Only to my experience the mass of women are like this: most of them want a man, but don't want the sex, but they put up with it, as part of the bargain. The more old-fashioned sort just lie there like nothing and let you go ahead. They don't mind afterwards: then they like you. But the actual thing itself is nothing to them, a bit distasteful. Add most men like it that way. I hate it. But the sly sort of women who are like that pretend they're not. They pretend they're passionate and have thrills. But it's all cockaloopy. They make it up. Then there's the ones that love everything, every kind of feeling and cuddling and going off, every kind except the natural one. They always make you go off when you're not in the only place you should be, when you go off. — Then there's the hard sort, that are the devil to bring off at all, and bring themselves off, like my wife. They want to be the active party. — Then there's the sort that's just dead inside: but dead: and they know it. Then there's the sort that puts you out before you really "come", and go on writhing their loins till they bring themselves off against your thighs. But they're mostly the Lesbian sort. It's astonishing how Lesbian women are, consciously or unconsciously. Seems to me they're nearly all Lesbian.'

'And do you mind?' asked Connie.

'I could kill them. When I'm with a woman who's really Lesbian, I fairly

howl in my soul, wanting to kill her.'

'And what do you do?'

'Just go away as fast as I can.'

'But do you think Lesbian women any worse than homosexual men?'

'I do! Because I've suffered more from them. In the abstract, I've no idea. When I get with a Lesbian woman, whether she knows she's one or not, I see red. No, no! But I wanted to have nothing to do with any woman any more. I wanted to keep to myself: keep my privacy and my decency.'

He looked pale, and his brows were sombre.

'And were you sorry when I came along?' she asked.

'I was sorry and I was glad.'

'And what are you now?'

'I'm sorry, from the outside: all the complications and the ugliness and recrimination that's bound to come, sooner or later. That's when my blood sinks, and I'm low. But when my blood comes up, I'm glad. I'm even triumphant. I was really getting bitter. I thought there was no real sex left: never a woman who'd really "come" naturally with a man: except black women, and somehow, well, we're white men: and they're a bit like mud.'

'And now, are you glad of me?' she asked.

'Yes! When I can forget the rest. When I can't forget the rest, I want to get under the table and die.'

'Why under the table?'

'Why?' he laughed. 'Hide, I suppose. Baby!'

'You do seem to have had awful experiences of women,' she said.

'You see, I couldn't fool myself. That's where most men manage. They take an attitude, and accept a lie. I could never fool myself. I knew what I wanted with a woman, and I could never say I'd got it when I hadn't.'

'But have you got it now?'

'Looks as if I might have.'

'Then why are you so pale and gloomy?'

'Bellyful of remembering: and perhaps afraid of myself.'

She sat in silence. It was growing late.

'And do you think it's important, a man and a woman?' she asked him.

'For me it is. For me it's the core of my life: if I have a right relation with a woman.'

'And if you didn't get it?'

'Then I'd have to do without.'

Again she pondered, before she asked:

'And do you think you've always been right with women?'

‘God, no! I let my wife get to what she was: my fault a good deal. I spoilt her. And I’m very mistrustful. You’ll have to expect it. It takes a lot to make me trust anybody, inwardly. So perhaps I’m a fraud too. I mistrust. And tenderness is not to be mistaken.’

She looked at him.

‘You don’t mistrust with your body, when your blood comes up,’ she said. ‘You don’t mistrust then, do you?’

‘No, alas! That’s how I’ve got into all the trouble. And that’s why my mind mistrusts so thoroughly.’

‘Let your mind mistrust. What does it matter!’

The dog sighed with discomfort on the mat. The ash-clogged fire sank.

‘We are a couple of battered warriors,’ said Connie.

‘Are you battered too?’ he laughed. ‘And here we are returning to the fray!’

‘Yes! I feel really frightened.’

‘Ay!’

He got up, and put her shoes to dry, and wiped his own and set them near the fire. In the morning he would grease them. He poked the ash of pasteboard as much as possible out of the fire. ‘Even burnt, it’s filthy,’ he said. Then he brought sticks and put them on the hob for the morning. Then he went out awhile with the dog.

When he came back, Connie said:

‘I want to go out too, for a minute.’

She went alone into the darkness. There were stars overhead. She could smell flowers on the night air. And she could feel her wet shoes getting wetter again. But she felt like going away, right away from him and everybody.

It was chilly. She shuddered, and returned to the house. He was sitting in front of the low fire.

‘Ugh! Cold!’ she shuddered.

He put the sticks on the fire, and fetched more, till they had a good crackling chimneyful of blaze. The rippling running yellow flame made them both happy, warmed their faces and their souls.

‘Never mind!’ she said, taking his hand as he sat silent and remote. ‘One does one’s best.’

‘Ay!’ He sighed, with a twist of a smile.

She slipped over to him, and into his arms, as he sat there before the fire.

‘Forget then!’ she whispered. ‘Forget!’

He held her close, in the running warmth of the fire. The flame itself was like a forgetting. And her soft, warm, ripe weight! Slowly his blood turned, and began to ebb back into strength and reckless vigour again.

‘And perhaps the women really wanted to be there and love you properly, only perhaps they couldn’t. Perhaps it wasn’t all their fault,’ she said.

‘I know it. Do you think I don’t know what a broken-backed snake that’s been trodden on I was myself!’

She clung to him suddenly. She had not wanted to start all this again. Yet some perversity had made her.

‘But you’re not now,’ she said. ‘You’re not that now: a broken-backed snake that’s been trodden on.’

‘I don’t know what I am. There’s black days ahead.’

‘No!’ she protested, clinging to him. ‘Why? Why?’

‘There’s black days coming for us all and for everybody,’ he repeated with a prophetic gloom.

‘No! You’re not to say it!’

He was silent. But she could feel the black void of despair inside him. That was the death of all desire, the death of all love: this despair that was like the dark cave inside the men, in which their spirit was lost.

‘And you talk so coldly about sex,’ she said. ‘You talk as if you had only wanted your own pleasure and satisfaction.’

She was protesting nervously against him.

‘Nay!’ he said. ‘I wanted to have my pleasure and satisfaction of a woman, and I never got it: because I could never get my pleasure and satisfaction of her unless she got hers of me at the same time. And it never happened. It takes two.’

‘But you never believed in your women. You don’t even believe really in me,’ she said.

‘I don’t know what believing in a woman means.’

‘That’s it, you see!’

She still was curled on his lap. But his spirit was grey and absent, he was not there for her. And everything she said drove him further.

‘But what do you believe in?’ she insisted.

‘I don’t know.’

‘Nothing, like all the men I’ve ever known,’ she said.

They were both silent. Then he roused himself and said:

‘Yes, I do believe in something. I believe in being warm-hearted. I believe especially in being warm-hearted in love, in fucking with a warm heart. I believe if men could fuck with warm hearts, and the women take it warm-heartedly, everything would come all right. It’s all this cold-hearted fucking that is death and idiocy.’

‘But you don’t fuck me cold-heartedly,’ she protested.

‘I don’t want to fuck you at all. My heart’s as cold as cold potatoes just now.’

‘Oh!’ she said, kissing him mockingly. ‘Let’s have them sautes.’

He laughed, and sat erect.

‘It’s a fact!’ he said. ‘Anything for a bit of warm-heartedness. But the women don’t like it. Even you don’t really like it. You like good, sharp, piercing cold-hearted fucking, and then pretending it’s all sugar. Where’s your tenderness for me? You’re as suspicious of me as a cat is of a dog. I tell you it takes two even to be tender and warm-hearted. You love fucking all right: but you want it to be called something grand and mysterious, just to flatter your own self-importance. Your own self-importance is more to you, fifty times more, than any man, or being together with a man.’

‘But that’s what I’d say of you. Your own self-importance is everything to you.’

‘Ay! Very well then!’ he said, moving as if he wanted to rise. ‘Let’s keep apart then. I’d rather die than do any more cold-hearted fucking.’

She slid away from him, and he stood up.

‘And do you think I want it?’ she said.

‘I hope you don’t,’ he replied. ‘But anyhow, you go to bed an’ I’ll sleep down here.’

She looked at him. He was pale, his brows were sullen, he was as distant in recoil as the cold pole. Men were all alike.

‘I can’t go home till morning,’ she said.

‘No! Go to bed. It’s a quarter to one.’

‘I certainly won’t,’ she said.

He went across and picked up his boots.

‘Then I’ll go out!’ he said.

He began to put on his boots. She stared at him.

‘Wait!’ she faltered. ‘Wait! What’s come between us?’

He was bent over, lacing his boot, and did not reply. The moments passed. A dimness came over her, like a swoon. All her consciousness died, and she stood there wide-eyed, looking at him from the unknown, knowing nothing any more.

He looked up, because of the silence, and saw her wide-eyed and lost. And as if a wind tossed him he got up and hobbled over to her, one shoe off and one shoe on, and took her in his arms, pressing her against his body, which somehow felt hurt right through. And there he held her, and there she remained.

Till his hands reached blindly down and felt for her, and felt under the clothing to where she was smooth and warm.

‘Ma lass!’ he murmured. ‘Ma little lass! Dunna let’s fight! Dunna let’s niver fight! I love thee an’ th’ touch on thee. Dunna argue wi’ me! Dunna! Dunna! Dunna! Let’s be together.’

She lifted her face and looked at him.

‘Don’t be upset,’ she said steadily. ‘It’s no good being upset. Do you really want to be together with me?’

She looked with wide, steady eyes into his face. He stopped, and went suddenly still, turning his face aside. All his body went perfectly still, but did not withdraw.

Then he lifted his head and looked into her eyes, with his odd, faintly mocking grin, saying: ‘Ay-ay! Let’s be together on oath.’

‘But really?’ she said, her eyes filling with tears.

‘Ay really! Heart an’ belly an’ cock.’

He still smiled faintly down at her, with the flicker of irony in his eyes, and a touch of bitterness.

She was silently weeping, and he lay with her and went into her there on the hearthrug, and so they gained a measure of equanimity. And then they went quickly to bed, for it was growing chill, and they had tired each other out. And she nestled up to him, feeling small and enfolded, and they both went to sleep at once, fast in one sleep. And so they lay and never moved, till the sun rose over the wood and day was beginning.

Then he woke up and looked at the light. The curtains were drawn. He listened to the loud wild calling of blackbirds and thrushes in the wood. It would be a brilliant morning, about half past five, his hour for rising. He had slept so fast! It was such a new day! The woman was still curled asleep and tender. His hand moved on her, and she opened her blue wondering eyes, smiling unconsciously into his face.

‘Are you awake?’ she said to him.

He was looking into her eyes. He smiled, and kissed her. And suddenly she roused and sat up.

‘Fancy that I am here!’ she said.

She looked round the whitewashed little bedroom with its sloping ceiling and gable window where the white curtains were closed. The room was bare save for a little yellow-painted chest of drawers, and a chair: and the smallish white bed in which she lay with him.

‘Fancy that we are here!’ she said, looking down at him. He was lying watching her, stroking her breasts with his fingers, under the thin nightdress. When he was warm and smoothed out, he looked young and handsome. His eyes could look so warm. And she was fresh and young like a flower.

‘I want to take this off!’ she said, gathering the thin batiste nightdress and pulling it over her head. She sat there with bare shoulders and longish breasts faintly golden. He loved to make her breasts swing softly, like bells.

‘You must take off your pyjamas too,’ she said.

‘Eh, nay!’

‘Yes! Yes!’ she commanded.

And he took off his old cotton pyjama-jacket, and pushed down the trousers. Save for his hands and wrists and face and neck he was white as milk, with fine slender muscular flesh. To Connie he was suddenly piercingly beautiful again, as when she had seen him that afternoon washing himself.

Gold of sunshine touched the closed white curtain. She felt it wanted to come in.

‘Oh, do let’s draw the curtains! The birds are singing so! Do let the sun in,’ she said.

He slipped out of bed with his back to her, naked and white and thin, and went to the window, stooping a little, drawing the curtains and looking out for a moment. The back was white and fine, the small buttocks beautiful with an exquisite, delicate manliness, the back of the neck ruddy and delicate and yet strong.

There was an inward, not an outward strength in the delicate fine body.

‘But you are beautiful!’ she said. ‘So pure and fine! Come!’ She held her arms out.

He was ashamed to turn to her, because of his aroused nakedness.

He caught his shirt off the floor, and held it to him, coming to her.

‘No!’ she said still holding out her beautiful slim arms from her dropping breasts. ‘Let me see you!’

He dropped the shirt and stood still looking towards her. The sun through the low window sent in a beam that lit up his thighs and slim belly and the erect phallos rising darkish and hot-looking from the little cloud of vivid gold-red hair. She was startled and afraid.

‘How strange!’ she said slowly. ‘How strange he stands there! So big! and so dark and cock-sure! Is he like that?’

The man looked down the front of his slender white body, and laughed. Between the slim breasts the hair was dark, almost black. But at the root of the belly, where the phallos rose thick and arching, it was gold-red, vivid in a little cloud.

‘So proud!’ she murmured, uneasy. ‘And so lordly! Now I know why men are so overbearing! But he’s lovely, really. Like another being! A bit terrifying! But lovely really! And he comes to me! — ’ She caught her lower lip between her teeth, in fear and excitement.

The man looked down in silence at the tense phallos, that did not change. — ‘Ay!’ he said at last, in a little voice. ‘Ay ma lad! tha’re theer right enough. Yi,

tha mun rear thy head! Theer on thy own, eh? an' ta'es no count O' nob'dy! Tha ma'es nowt O' me, John Thomas. Art boss? of me? Eh well, tha're more cocky than me, an' tha says less. John Thomas! Dost want her? Dost want my lady Jane? Tha's dipped me in again, tha hast. Ay, an' tha comes up smilin'. — Ax 'er then! Ax lady Jane! Say: Lift up your heads, O ye gates, that the king of glory may come in. Ay, th' cheek on thee! Cunt, that's what tha're after. Tell lady Jane tha wants cunt. John Thomas, an' th' cunt O' lady Jane! — '

'Oh, don't tease him,' said Connie, crawling on her knees on the bed towards him and putting her arms round his white slender loins, and drawing him to her so that her hanging, swinging breasts touched the tip of the stirring, erect phallos, and caught the drop of moisture. She held the man fast.

'Lie down!' he said. 'Lie down! Let me come!' He was in a hurry now.

And afterwards, when they had been quite still, the woman had to uncover the man again, to look at the mystery of the phallos.

'And now he's tiny, and soft like a little bud of life!' she said, taking the soft small penis in her hand. 'Isn't he somehow lovely! so on his own, so strange! And so innocent! And he comes so far into me! You must never insult him, you know. He's mine too. He's not only yours. He's mine! And so lovely and innocent!' And she held the penis soft in her hand.

He laughed.

'Blest be the tie that binds our hearts in kindred love,' he said.

'Of course!' she said. 'Even when he's soft and little I feel my heart simply tied to him. And how lovely your hair is here! quite, quite different!'

'That's John Thomas's hair, not mine!' he said.

'John Thomas! John Thomas!' and she quickly kissed the soft penis, that was beginning to stir again.

'Ay!' said the man, stretching his body almost painfully. 'He's got his root in my soul, has that gentleman! An' sometimes I don' know what ter do wi' him. Ay, he's got a will of his own, an' it's hard to suit him. Yet I wouldn't have him killed.'

'No wonder men have always been afraid of him!' she said. 'He's rather terrible.'

The quiver was going through the man's body, as the stream of consciousness again changed its direction, turning downwards. And he was helpless, as the penis in slow soft undulations filled and surged and rose up, and grew hard, standing there hard and overweening, in its curious towering fashion. The woman too trembled a little as she watched.

'There! Take him then! He's thine,' said the man.

And she quivered, and her own mind melted out. Sharp soft waves of

unspeakable pleasure washed over her as he entered her, and started the curious molten thrilling that spread and spread till she was carried away with the last, blind flush of extremity.

He heard the distant hooters of Stacks Gate for seven o'clock. It was Monday morning. He shivered a little, and with his face between her breasts pressed her soft breasts up over his ears, to deafen him.

She had not even heard the hooters. She lay perfectly still, her soul washed transparent.

'You must get up, mustn't you?' he muttered.

'What time?' came her colourless voice.

'Seven-o'clock blowers a bit sin'.'

'I suppose I must.'

She was resenting as she always did, the compulsion from outside.

He sat up and looked blankly out of the window.

'You do love me, don't you?' she asked calmly.

He looked down at her.

'Tha knows what tha knows. What dost ax for!' he said, a little fretfully.

'I want you to keep me, not to let me go,' she said.

His eyes seemed full of a warm, soft darkness that could not think.

'When? Now?'

'Now in your heart. Then I want to come and live with you, always, soon.'

He sat naked on the bed, with his head dropped, unable to think.

'Don't you want it?' she asked.

'Ay!' he said.

Then with the same eyes darkened with another flame of consciousness, almost like sleep, he looked at her.

'Dunna ax me nowt now,' he said. 'Let me be. I like thee. I luv thee when tha lies theer. A woman's a lovely thing when 'er's deep ter fuck, and cunt's good. Ah luv thee, thy legs, an' th' shape on thee, an' th' womanness on thee. Ah luv th' womanness on thee. Ah luv thee wi' my balls an' wi' my heart. But dunna ax me nowt. Dunna ma'e me say nowt. Let me stop as I am while I can. Tha can ax me iverything after. Now let me be, let me be!'

And softly, he laid his hand over her mound of Venus, on the soft brown maiden-hair, and himself sat still and naked on the bed, his face motionless in physical abstraction, almost like the face of Buddha. Motionless, and in the invisible flame of another consciousness, he sat with his hand on her, and waited for the turn.

After a while, he reached for his shirt and put it on, dressed himself swiftly in silence, looked at her once as she still lay naked and faintly golden like a Gloire

de Dijon rose on the bed, and was gone. She heard him downstairs opening the door.

And still she lay musing, musing. It was very hard to go: to go out of his arms. He called from the foot of the stairs: 'Half past seven!' She sighed, and got out of bed. The bare little room! Nothing in it at all but the small chest of drawers and the smallish bed. But the board floor was scrubbed clean. And in the corner by the window gable was a shelf with some books, and some from a circulating library. She looked. There were books about Bolshevist Russia, books of travel, a volume about the atom and the electron, another about the composition of the earth's core, and the causes of earthquakes: then a few novels: then three books on India. So! He was a reader after all.

The sun fell on her naked limbs through the gable window. Outside she saw the dog Flossie roaming round. The hazel-brake was misted with green, and dark-green dogs-mercury under. It was a clear clean morning with birds flying and triumphantly singing. If only she could stay! If only there weren't the other ghastly world of smoke and iron! If only he would make her a world.

She came downstairs, down the steep, narrow wooden stairs. Still she would be content with this little house, if only it were in a world of its own.

He was washed and fresh, and the fire was burning. 'Will you eat anything?' he said.

'No! Only lend me a comb.'

She followed him into the scullery, and combed her hair before the handbreadth of mirror by the back door. Then she was ready to go.

She stood in the little front garden, looking at the dewy flowers, the grey bed of pinks in bud already.

'I would like to have all the rest of the world disappear,' she said, 'and live with you here.'

'It won't disappear,' he said.

They went almost in silence through the lovely dewy wood. But they were together in a world of their own.

It was bitter to her to go on to Wragby.

'I want soon to come and live with you altogether,' she said as she left him.

He smiled, unanswering.

She got home quietly and unremarked, and went up to her room.

CHAPTER 15

There was a letter from Hilda on the breakfast-tray. 'Father is going to London this week, and I shall call for you on Thursday week, June 17th. You must be ready so that we can go at once. I don't want to waste time at Wragby, it's an awful place. I shall probably stay the night at Retford with the Colemans, so I should be with you for lunch, Thursday. Then we could start at teatime, and sleep perhaps in Grantham. It is no use our spending an evening with Clifford. If he hates your going, it would be no pleasure to him.'

So! She was being pushed round on the chess-board again.

Clifford hated her going, but it was only because he didn't feel safe in her absence. Her presence, for some reason, made him feel safe, and free to do the things he was occupied with. He was a great deal at the pits, and wrestling in spirit with the almost hopeless problems of getting out his coal in the most economical fashion and then selling it when he'd got it out. He knew he ought to find some way of using it, or converting it, so that he needn't sell it, or needn't have the chagrin of failing to sell it. But if he made electric power, could he sell that or use it? And to convert into oil was as yet too costly and too elaborate. To keep industry alive there must be more industry, like a madness.

It was a madness, and it required a madman to succeed in it. Well, he was a little mad. Connie thought so. His very intensity and acumen in the affairs of the pits seemed like a manifestation of madness to her, his very inspirations were the inspirations of insanity.

He talked to her of all his serious schemes, and she listened in a kind of wonder, and let him talk. Then the flow ceased, and he turned on the loudspeaker, and became a blank, while apparently his schemes coiled on inside him like a kind of dream.

And every night now he played pontoon, that game of the Tommies, with Mrs Bolton, gambling with sixpences. And again, in the gambling he was gone in a kind of unconsciousness, or blank intoxication, or intoxication of blankness, whatever it was. Connie could not bear to see him. But when she had gone to bed, he and Mrs Bolton would gamble on till two and three in the morning, safely, and with strange lust. Mrs Bolton was caught in the lust as much as Clifford: the more so, as she nearly always lost.

She told Connie one day: 'I lost twenty-three shillings to Sir Clifford last night.'

‘And did he take the money from you?’ asked Connie aghast.

‘Why of course, my Lady! Debt of honour!’

Connie expostulated roundly, and was angry with both of them. The upshot was, Sir Clifford raised Mrs Bolton’s wages a hundred a year, and she could gamble on that. Meanwhile, it seemed to Connie, Clifford was really going deader.

She told him at length she was leaving on the seventeenth.

‘Seventeenth!’ he said. ‘And when will you be back?’

‘By the twentieth of July at the latest.’

‘Yes! the twentieth of July.’

Strangely and blankly he looked at her, with the vagueness of a child, but with the queer blank cunning of an old man.

‘You won’t let me down, now, will you?’ he said.

‘How?’

‘While you’re away, I mean, you’re sure to come back?’

‘I’m as sure as I can be of anything, that I shall come back.’

‘Yes! Well! Twentieth of July!’

He looked at her so strangely.

Yet he really wanted her to go. That was so curious. He wanted her to go, positively, to have her little adventures and perhaps come home pregnant, and all that. At the same time, he was afraid of her going.

She was quivering, watching her real opportunity for leaving him altogether, waiting till the time, herself, himself, should be ripe.

She sat and talked to the keeper of her going abroad.

‘And then when I come back,’ she said, ‘I can tell Clifford I must leave him. And you and I can go away. They never need even know it is you. We can go to another country, shall we? To Africa or Australia. Shall we?’

She was quite thrilled by her plan.

‘You’ve never been to the Colonies, have you?’ he asked her.

‘No! Have you?’

‘I’ve been in India, and South Africa, and Egypt.’

‘Why shouldn’t we go to South Africa?’

‘We might!’ he said slowly.

‘Or don’t you want to?’ she asked.

‘I don’t care. I don’t much care what I do.’

‘Doesn’t it make you happy? Why not? We shan’t be poor. I have about six hundred a year, I wrote and asked. It’s not much, but it’s enough, isn’t it?’

‘It’s riches to me.’

‘Oh, how lovely it will be!’

‘But I ought to get divorced, and so ought you, unless we’re going to have complications.’

There was plenty to think about.

Another day she asked him about himself. They were in the hut, and there was a thunderstorm.

‘And weren’t you happy, when you were a lieutenant and an officer and a gentleman?’

‘Happy? All right. I liked my Colonel.’

‘Did you love him?’

‘Yes! I loved him.’

‘And did he love you?’

‘Yes! In a way, he loved me.’

‘Tell me about him.’

‘What is there to tell? He had risen from the ranks. He loved the army. And he had never married. He was twenty years older than me. He was a very intelligent man: and alone in the army, as such a man is: a passionate man in his way: and a very clever officer. I lived under his spell while I was with him. I sort of let him run my life. And I never regret it.’

‘And did you mind very much when he died?’

‘I was as near death myself. But when I came to, I knew another part of me was finished. But then I had always known it would finish in death. All things do, as far as that goes.’

She sat and ruminated. The thunder crashed outside. It was like being in a little ark in the Flood.

‘You seem to have such a lot behind you,’ she said.

‘Do I? It seems to me I’ve died once or twice already. Yet here I am, pegging on, and in for more trouble.’

She was thinking hard, yet listening to the storm.

‘And weren’t you happy as an officer and a gentleman, when your Colonel was dead?’

‘No! They were a mingy lot.’ He laughed suddenly. ‘The Colonel used to say: Lad, the English middle classes have to chew every mouthful thirty times because their guts are so narrow, a bit as big as a pea would give them a stoppage. They’re the mingiest set of ladylike snipe ever invented: full of conceit of themselves, frightened even if their boot-laces aren’t correct, rotten as high game, and always in the right. That’s what finishes me up. Kow-tow, kow-tow, arse-licking till their tongues are tough: yet they’re always in the right. Prigs on top of everything. Prigs! A generation of ladylike prigs with half a ball each — ’

Connie laughed. The rain was rushing down.

‘He hated them!’

‘No,’ said he. ‘He didn’t bother. He just disliked them. There’s a difference. Because, as he said, the Tommies are getting just as priggish and half-balled and narrow-gutted. It’s the fate of mankind, to go that way.’

‘The common people too, the working people?’

‘All the lot. Their spunk is gone dead. Motor-cars and cinemas and aeroplanes suck that last bit out of them. I tell you, every generation breeds a more rabbitry generation, with india rubber tubing for guts and tin legs and tin faces. Tin people! It’s all a steady sort of bolshevism just killing off the human thing, and worshipping the mechanical thing. Money, money, money! All the modern lot get their real kick out of killing the old human feeling out of man, making mincemeat of the old Adam and the old Eve. They’re all alike. The world is all alike: kill off the human reality, a quid for every foreskin, two quid for each pair of balls. What is cunt but machine-fucking! — It’s all alike. Pay ‘em money to cut off the world’s cock. Pay money, money, money to them that will take spunk out of mankind, and leave ‘em all little twiddling machines.’

He sat there in the hut, his face pulled to mocking irony. Yet even then, he had one ear set backwards, listening to the storm over the wood. It made him feel so alone.

‘But won’t it ever come to an end?’ she said.

‘Ay, it will. It’ll achieve its own salvation. When the last real man is killed, and they’re all tame: white, black, yellow, all colours of tame ones: then they’ll all be insane. Because the root of sanity is in the balls. Then they’ll all be insane, and they’ll make their grand auto da fe. You know auto da fe means act of faith? Ay, well, they’ll make their own grand little act of faith. They’ll offer one another up.’

‘You mean kill one another?’

‘I do, duckie! If we go on at our present rate then in a hundred years’ time there won’t be ten thousand people in this island: there may not be ten. They’ll have lovingly wiped each other out.’ The thunder was rolling further away.

‘How nice!’ she said.

‘Quite nice! To contemplate the extermination of the human species and the long pause that follows before some other species crops up, it calms you more than anything else. And if we go on in this way, with everybody, intellectuals, artists, government, industrialists and workers all frantically killing off the last human feeling, the last bit of their intuition, the last healthy instinct; if it goes on in algebraical progression, as it is going on: then ta-tah! to the human species! Goodbye! darling! the serpent swallows itself and leaves a void, considerably messed up, but not hopeless. Very nice! When savage wild dogs bark in Wragby,

and savage wild pit-ponies stamp on Tevershall pit-bank! te deum laudamus!’

Connie laughed, but not very happily.

‘Then you ought to be pleased that they are all bolshevists,’ she said. ‘You ought to be pleased that they hurry on towards the end.’

‘So I am. I don’t stop ‘em. Because I couldn’t if I would.’

‘Then why are you so bitter?’

‘I’m not! If my cock gives its last crow, I don’t mind.’

‘But if you have a child?’ she said.

He dropped his head.

‘Why,’ he said at last. ‘It seems to me a wrong and bitter thing to do, to bring a child into this world.’

‘No! Don’t say it! Don’t say it!’ she pleaded. ‘I think I’m going to have one. Say you’ll be pleased.’ She laid her hand on his.

‘I’m pleased for you to be pleased,’ he said. ‘But for me it seems a ghastly treachery to the unborn creature.’

‘Ah no!’ she said, shocked. ‘Then you can’t ever really want me! You can’t want me, if you feel that!’

Again he was silent, his face sullen. Outside there was only the threshing of the rain.

‘It’s not quite true!’ she whispered. ‘It’s not quite true! There’s another truth.’ She felt he was bitter now partly because she was leaving him, deliberately going away to Venice. And this half pleased her.

She pulled open his clothing and uncovered his belly, and kissed his navel. Then she laid her cheek on his belly and pressed her arm round his warm, silent loins. They were alone in the flood.

‘Tell me you want a child, in hope!’ she murmured, pressing her face against his belly. ‘Tell me you do!’

‘Why!’ he said at last: and she felt the curious quiver of changing consciousness and relaxation going through his body. ‘Why I’ve thought sometimes if one but tried, here among th’ colliers even! They’re workin’ bad now, an’ not earnin’ much. If a man could say to ‘em: Dunna think o’ nowt but th’ money. When it comes ter wants, we want but little. Let’s not live for money —’

She softly rubbed her cheek on his belly, and gathered his balls in her hand. The penis stirred softly, with strange life, but did not rise up. The rain beat bruisingly outside.

‘Let’s live for summat else. Let’s not live ter make money, neither for us-selves nor for anybody else. Now we’re forced to. We’re forced to make a bit for us-selves, an’ a fair lot for th’ bosses. Let’s stop it! Bit by bit, let’s stop it. We

needn't rant an' rave. Bit by bit, let's drop the whole industrial life an' go back. The least little bit o' money'll do. For everybody, me an' you, bosses an' masters, even th' king. The least little bit o' money'll really do. Just make up your mind to it, an' you've got out o' th' mess.' He paused, then went on:

'An' I'd tell 'em: Look! Look at Joe! He moves lovely! Look how he moves, alive and aware. He's beautiful! An' look at Jonah! He's clumsy, he's ugly, because he's niver willin' to rouse himself I'd tell 'em: Look! look at yourselves! one shoulder higher than t'other, legs twisted, feet all lumps! What have yer done ter yerselves, wi' the blasted work? Spoilt yerselves. No need to work that much. Take yer clothes off an' look at yourselves. Yer ought ter be alive an' beautiful, an' yer ugly an' half dead. So I'd tell 'em. An' I'd get my men to wear different clothes: appen close red trousers, bright red, an' little short white jackets. Why, if men had red, fine legs, that alone would change them in a month. They'd begin to be men again, to be men! An' the women could dress as they liked. Because if once the men walked with legs close bright scarlet, and buttocks nice and showing scarlet under a little white jacket: then the women 'ud begin to be women. It's because th' men aren't men, that th' women have to be. — An' in time pull down Tevershall and build a few beautiful buildings, that would hold us all. An' clean the country up again. An' not have many children, because the world is overcrowded.

'But I wouldn't preach to the men: only strip 'em an' say: Look at yourselves! That's workin' for money! — Hark at yourselves! That's working for money. You've been working for money! Look at Tevershall! It's horrible. That's because it was built while you was working for money. Look at your girls! They don't care about you, you don't care about them. It's because you've spent your time working an' caring for money. You can't talk nor move nor live, you can't properly be with a woman. You're not alive. Look at yourselves!'

There fell a complete silence. Connie was half listening, and threading in the hair at the root of his belly a few forget-me-nots that she had gathered on the way to the hut. Outside, the world had gone still, and a little icy.

'You've got four kinds of hair,' she said to him. 'On your chest it's nearly black, and your hair isn't dark on your head: but your moustache is hard and dark red, and your hair here, your love-hair, is like a little brush of bright red-gold mistletoe. It's the loveliest of all!'

He looked down and saw the milky bits of forget-me-nots in the hair on his groin.

'Ay! That's where to put forget-me-nots, in the man-hair, or the maiden-hair. But don't you care about the future?'

She looked up at him.

‘Oh, I do, terribly!’ she said.

‘Because when I feel the human world is doomed, has doomed itself by its own mingy beastliness, then I feel the Colonies aren’t far enough. The moon wouldn’t be far enough, because even there you could look back and see the earth, dirty, beastly, unsavoury among all the stars: made foul by men. Then I feel I’ve swallowed gall, and it’s eating my inside out, and nowhere’s far enough away to get away. But when I get a turn, I forget it all again. Though it’s a shame, what’s been done to people these last hundred years: men turned into nothing but labour-insects, and all their manhood taken away, and all their real life. I’d wipe the machines off the face of the earth again, and end the industrial epoch absolutely, like a black mistake. But since I can’t, an’ nobody can, I’d better hold my peace, an’ try an’ live my own life: if I’ve got one to live, which I rather doubt.’

The thunder had ceased outside, but the rain which had abated, suddenly came striking down, with a last blench of lightning and mutter of departing storm. Connie was uneasy. He had talked so long now, and he was really talking to himself not to her. Despair seemed to come down on him completely, and she was feeling happy, she hated despair. She knew her leaving him, which he had only just realized inside himself had plunged him back into this mood. And she triumphed a little.

She opened the door and looked at the straight heavy rain, like a steel curtain, and had a sudden desire to rush out into it, to rush away. She got up, and began swiftly pulling off her stockings, then her dress and underclothing, and he held his breath. Her pointed keen animal breasts tipped and stirred as she moved. She was ivory-coloured in the greenish light. She slipped on her rubber shoes again and ran out with a wild little laugh, holding up her breasts to the heavy rain and spreading her arms, and running blurred in the rain with the eurhythmic dance movements she had learned so long ago in Dresden. It was a strange pallid figure lifting and falling, bending so the rain beat and glistened on the full haunches, swaying up again and coming belly-forward through the rain, then stooping again so that only the full loins and buttocks were offered in a kind of homage towards him, repeating a wild obeisance.

He laughed wryly, and threw off his clothes. It was too much. He jumped out, naked and white, with a little shiver, into the hard slanting rain. Flossie sprang before him with a frantic little bark. Connie, her hair all wet and sticking to her head, turned her hot face and saw him. Her blue eyes blazed with excitement as she turned and ran fast, with a strange charging movement, out of the clearing and down the path, the wet boughs whipping her. She ran, and he saw nothing but the round wet head, the wet back leaning forward in flight, the rounded

buttocks twinkling: a wonderful cowering female nakedness in flight.

She was nearly at the wide riding when he came up and flung his naked arm round her soft, naked-wet middle. She gave a shriek and straightened herself and the heap of her soft, chill flesh came up against his body. He pressed it all up against him, madly, the heap of soft, chilled female flesh that became quickly warm as flame, in contact. The rain streamed on them till they smoked. He gathered her lovely, heavy posteriors one in each hand and pressed them in towards him in a frenzy, quivering motionless in the rain. Then suddenly he tipped her up and fell with her on the path, in the roaring silence of the rain, and short and sharp, he took her, short and sharp and finished, like an animal.

He got up in an instant, wiping the rain from his eyes.

‘Come in,’ he said, and they started running back to the hut. He ran straight and swift: he didn’t like the rain. But she came slower, gathering forget-me-nots and campion and bluebells, running a few steps and watching him fleeing away from her.

When she came with her flowers, panting to the hut, he had already started a fire, and the twigs were crackling. Her sharp breasts rose and fell, her hair was plastered down with rain, her face was flushed ruddy and her body glistened and trickled. Wide-eyed and breathless, with a small wet head and full, trickling, naive haunches, she looked another creature.

He took the old sheet and rubbed her down, she standing like a child. Then he rubbed himself having shut the door of the hut. The fire was blazing up. She ducked her head in the other end of the sheet, and rubbed her wet hair.

‘We’re drying ourselves together on the same towel, we shall quarrel!’ he said.

She looked up for a moment, her hair all odds and ends.

‘No!’ she said, her eyes wide. ‘It’s not a towel, it’s a sheet.’ And she went on busily rubbing her head, while he busily rubbed his.

Still panting with their exertions, each wrapped in an army blanket, but the front of the body open to the fire, they sat on a log side by side before the blaze, to get quiet. Connie hated the feel of the blanket against her skin. But now the sheet was all wet.

She dropped her blanket and kneeled on the clay hearth, holding her head to the fire, and shaking her hair to dry it. He watched the beautiful curving drop of her haunches. That fascinated him today. How it sloped with a rich down-slope to the heavy roundness of her buttocks! And in between, folded in the secret warmth, the secret entrances!

He stroked her tail with his hand, long and subtly taking in the curves and the globe-fullness.

‘Tha’s got such a nice tail on thee,’ he said, in the throaty caressive dialect. ‘Tha’s got the nicest arse of anybody. It’s the nicest, nicest woman’s arse as is! An’ ivery bit of it is woman, woman sure as nuts. Tha’rt not one o’ them button-arsed lasses as should be lads, are ter! Tha’s got a real soft sloping bottom on thee, as a man loves in ‘is guts. It’s a bottom as could hold the world up, it is!’

All the while he spoke he exquisitely stroked the rounded tail, till it seemed as if a slippery sort of fire came from it into his hands. And his finger-tips touched the two secret openings to her body, time after time, with a soft little brush of fire.

‘An’ if tha shits an’ if tha pisses, I’m glad. I don’t want a woman as couldna shit nor piss.’

Connie could not help a sudden snort of astonished laughter, but he went on unmoved.

‘Tha’rt real, tha art! Tha’art real, even a bit of a bitch. Here tha shits an’ here tha pisses: an’ I lay my hand on ‘em both an’ like thee for it. I like thee for it. Tha’s got a proper, woman’s arse, proud of itself. It’s none ashamed of itself this isna.’

He laid his hand close and firm over her secret places, in a kind of close greeting.

‘I like it,’ he said. ‘I like it! An’ if I only lived ten minutes, an’ stroked thy arse an’ got to know it, I should reckon I’d lived one life, see ter! Industrial system or not! Here’s one o’ my lifetimes.’

She turned round and climbed into his lap, clinging to him. ‘Kiss me!’ she whispered.

And she knew the thought of their separation was latent in both their minds, and at last she was sad.

She sat on his thighs, her head against his breast, and her ivory-gleaming legs loosely apart, the fire glowing unequally upon them. Sitting with his head dropped, he looked at the folds of her body in the fire-glow, and at the fleece of soft brown hair that hung down to a point between her open thighs. He reached to the table behind, and took up her bunch of flowers, still so wet that drops of rain fell on to her.

‘Flowers stops out of doors all weathers,’ he said. ‘They have no houses.’

‘Not even a hut!’ she murmured.

With quiet fingers he threaded a few forget-me-not flowers in the fine brown fleece of the mound of Venus.

‘There!’ he said. ‘There’s forget-me-nots in the right place!’

She looked down at the milky odd little flowers among the brown maiden-hair at the lower tip of her body.

‘Doesn’t it look pretty!’ she said.

‘Pretty as life,’ he replied.

And he stuck a pink campion-bud among the hair.

‘There! That’s me where you won’t forget me! That’s Moses in the bull-rushes.’

‘You don’t mind, do you, that I’m going away?’ she asked wistfully, looking up into his face.

But his face was inscrutable, under the heavy brows. He kept it quite blank.

‘You do as you wish,’ he said.

And he spoke in good English.

‘But I won’t go if you don’t wish it,’ she said, clinging to him.

There was silence. He leaned and put another piece of wood on the fire. The flame glowed on his silent, abstracted face. She waited, but he said nothing.

‘Only I thought it would be a good way to begin a break with Clifford. I do want a child. And it would give me a chance to, to —,’ she resumed.

‘To let them think a few lies,’ he said.

‘Yes, that among other things. Do you want them to think the truth?’

‘I don’t care what they think.’

‘I do! I don’t want them handling me with their unpleasant cold minds, not while I’m still at Wragby. They can think what they like when I’m finally gone.’

He was silent.

‘But Sir Clifford expects you to come back to him?’

‘Oh, I must come back,’ she said: and there was silence.

‘And would you have a child in Wragby?’ he asked.

She closed her arm round his neck.

‘If you wouldn’t take me away, I should have to,’ she said.

‘Take you where to?’

‘Anywhere! away! But right away from Wragby.’

‘When?’

‘Why, when I come back.’

‘But what’s the good of coming back, doing the thing twice, if you’re once gone?’ he said.

‘Oh, I must come back. I’ve promised! I’ve promised so faithfully. Besides, I come back to you, really.’

‘To your husband’s game-keeper?’

‘I don’t see that that matters,’ she said.

‘No?’ He mused a while. ‘And when would you think of going away again, then; finally? When exactly?’

‘Oh, I don’t know. I’d come back from Venice. And then we’d prepare

everything.'

'How prepare?'

'Oh, I'd tell Clifford. I'd have to tell him.'

'Would you!'

He remained silent. She put her arms round his neck.

'Don't make it difficult for me,' she pleaded.

'Make what difficult?'

'For me to go to Venice and arrange things.'

A little smile, half a grin, flickered on his face.

'I don't make it difficult,' he said. 'I only want to find out just what you are after. But you don't really know yourself. You want to take time: get away and look at it. I don't blame you. I think you're wise. You may prefer to stay mistress of Wragby. I don't blame you. I've no Wragbys to offer. In fact, you know what you'll get out of me. No, no, I think you're right! I really do! And I'm not keen on coming to live on you, being kept by you. There's that too.'

She felt somehow as if he were giving her tit for tat.

'But you want me, don't you?' she asked.

'Do you want me?'

'You know I do. That's evident.'

'Quite! And when do you want me?'

'You know we can arrange it all when I come back. Now I'm out of breath with you. I must get calm and clear.'

'Quite! Get calm and clear!'

She was a little offended.

'But you trust me, don't you?' she said.

'Oh, absolutely!'

She heard the mockery in his tone.

'Tell me then,' she said flatly; 'do you think it would be better if I don't go to Venice?'

'I'm sure it's better if you do go to Venice,' he replied in the cool, slightly mocking voice.

'You know it's next Thursday?' she said.

'Yes!'

She now began to muse. At last she said:

'And we shall know better where we are when I come back, shan't we?'

'Oh surely!'

The curious gulf of silence between them!

'I've been to the lawyer about my divorce,' he said, a little constrainedly.

She gave a slight shudder.

‘Have you!’ she said. ‘And what did he say?’

‘He said I ought to have done it before; that may be a difficulty. But since I was in the army, he thinks it will go through all right. If only it doesn’t bring her down on my head!’

‘Will she have to know?’

‘Yes! she is served with a notice: so is the man she lives with, the co-respondent.’

‘Isn’t it hateful, all the performances! I suppose I’d have to go through it with Clifford.’

There was a silence.

‘And of course,’ he said, ‘I have to live an exemplary life for the next six or eight months. So if you go to Venice, there’s temptation removed for a week or two, at least.’

‘Am I temptation!’ she said, stroking his face. ‘I’m so glad I’m temptation to you! Don’t let’s think about it! You frighten me when you start thinking: you roll me out flat. Don’t let’s think about it. We can think so much when we are apart. That’s the whole point! I’ve been thinking, I must come to you for another night before I go. I must come once more to the cottage. Shall I come on Thursday night?’

‘Isn’t that when your sister will be there?’

‘Yes! But she said we would start at teatime. So we could start at teatime. But she could sleep somewhere else and I could sleep with you.’

‘But then she’d have to know.’

‘Oh, I shall tell her. I’ve more or less told her already. I must talk it all over with Hilda. She’s a great help, so sensible.’

He was thinking of her plan.

‘So you’d start off from Wragby at teatime, as if you were going to London? Which way were you going?’

‘By Nottingham and Grantham.’

‘And then your sister would drop you somewhere and you’d walk or drive back here? Sounds very risky, to me.’

‘Does it? Well, then, Hilda could bring me back. She could sleep at Mansfield, and bring me back here in the evening, and fetch me again in the morning. It’s quite easy.’

‘And the people who see you?’

‘I’ll wear goggles and a veil.’

He pondered for some time.

‘Well,’ he said. ‘You please yourself as usual.’

‘But wouldn’t it please you?’

‘Oh yes! It’d please me all right,’ he said a little grimly. ‘I might as well smite while the iron’s hot.’

‘Do you know what I thought?’ she said suddenly. ‘It suddenly came to me. You are the “Knight of the Burning Pestle”!’

‘Ay! And you? Are you the Lady of the Red-Hot Mortar?’

‘Yes!’ she said. ‘Yes! You’re Sir Pestle and I’m Lady Mortar.’

‘All right, then I’m knighted. John Thomas is Sir John, to your Lady Jane.’

‘Yes! John Thomas is knighted! I’m my-lady-maiden-hair, and you must have flowers too. Yes!’

She threaded two pink campions in the bush of red-gold hair above his penis.

‘There!’ she said. ‘Charming! Charming! Sir John!’

And she pushed a bit of forget-me-not in the dark hair of his breast.

‘And you won’t forget me there, will you?’ She kissed him on the breast, and made two bits of forget-me-not lodge one over each nipple, kissing him again.

‘Make a calendar of me!’ he said. He laughed, and the flowers shook from his breast.

‘Wait a bit!’ he said.

He rose, and opened the door of the hut. Flossie, lying in the porch, got up and looked at him.

‘Ay, it’s me!’ he said.

The rain had ceased. There was a wet, heavy, perfumed stillness. Evening was approaching.

He went out and down the little path in the opposite direction from the riding. Connie watched his thin, white figure, and it looked to her like a ghost, an apparition moving away from her.

When she could see it no more, her heart sank. She stood in the door of the hut, with a blanket round her, looking into the drenched, motionless silence.

But he was coming back, trotting strangely, and carrying flowers. She was a little afraid of him, as if he were not quite human. And when he came near, his eyes looked into hers, but she could not understand the meaning.

He had brought columbines and campions, and new-mown hay, and oak-tufts and honeysuckle in small bud. He fastened fluffy young oak-sprays round her breasts, sticking in tufts of bluebells and campion: and in her navel he poised a pink campion flower, and in her maiden-hair were forget-me-nots and woodruff.

‘That’s you in all your glory!’ he said. ‘Lady Jane, at her wedding with John Thomas.’

And he stuck flowers in the hair of his own body, and wound a bit of creeping-jenny round his penis, and stuck a single bell of a hyacinth in his navel. She watched him with amusement, his odd intentness. And she pushed a

campion flower in his moustache, where it stuck, dangling under his nose.

‘This is John Thomas marryin’ Lady Jane,’ he said. ‘An’ we mun let Constance an’ Oliver go their ways. Maybe — ’

He spread out his hand with a gesture, and then he sneezed, sneezing away the flowers from his nose and his navel. He sneezed again.

‘Maybe what?’ she said, waiting for him to go on.

He looked at her a little bewildered.

‘Eh?’ he said.

‘Maybe what? Go on with what you were going to say,’ she insisted.

‘Ay, what was I going to say?’

He had forgotten. And it was one of the disappointments of her life, that he never finished.

A yellow ray of sun shone over the trees.

‘Sun!’ he said. ‘And time you went. Time, my Lady, time! What’s that as flies without wings, your Ladyship? Time! Time!’

He reached for his shirt.

‘Say goodnight! to John Thomas,’ he said, looking down at his penis. ‘He’s safe in the arms of creeping Jenny! Not much burning pestle about him just now.’

And he put his flannel shirt over his head.

‘A man’s most dangerous moment,’ he said, when his head had emerged, ‘is when he’s getting into his shirt. Then he puts his head in a bag. That’s why I prefer those American shirts, that you put on like a jacket.’ She still stood watching him. He stepped into his short drawers, and buttoned them round the waist.

‘Look at Jane!’ he said. ‘In all her blossoms! Who’ll put blossoms on you next year, Jinny? Me, or somebody else? “Goodbye, my bluebell, farewell to you!” I hate that song, it’s early war days.’ He then sat down, and was pulling on his stockings. She still stood unmoving. He laid his hand on the slope of her buttocks. ‘Pretty little Lady Jane!’ he said. ‘Perhaps in Venice you’ll find a man who’ll put jasmine in your maiden-hair, and a pomegranate flower in your navel. Poor little lady Jane!’

‘Don’t say those things!’ she said. ‘You only say them to hurt me.’

He dropped his head. Then he said, in dialect:

‘Ay, maybe I do, maybe I do! Well then, I’ll say nowt, an’ ha’ done wi’t. But tha mun dress thysen, all’ go back to thy stately homes of England, how beautiful they stand. Time’s up! Time’s up for Sir John, an’ for little Lady Jane! Put thy shimmy on, Lady Chatterley! Tha might be anybody, standin’ there be-out even a shimmy, an’ a few rags o’ flowers. There then, there then, I’ll undress

thee, tha bob-tailed young throstle.’ And he took the leaves from her hair, kissing her damp hair, and the flowers from her breasts, and kissed her breasts, and kissed her navel, and kissed her maiden-hair, where he left the flowers threaded. ‘They mun stop while they will,’ he said. ‘So! There tha’rt bare again, nowt but a bare-arsed lass an’ a bit of a Lady Jane! Now put thy shimmy on, for tha mun go, or else Lady Chatterley’s goin’ to be late for dinner, an’ where ‘ave yer been to my pretty maid!’

She never knew how to answer him when he was in this condition of the vernacular. So she dressed herself and prepared to go a little ignominiously home to Wragby. Or so she felt it: a little ignominiously home.

He would accompany her to the broad riding. His young pheasants were all right under the shelter.

When he and she came out on to the riding, there was Mrs Bolton faltering palely towards them.

‘Oh, my Lady, we wondered if anything had happened!’

‘No! Nothing has happened.’

Mrs Bolton looked into the man’s face, that was smooth and new-looking with love. She met his half-laughing, half-mocking eyes. He always laughed at mischance. But he looked at her kindly.

‘Evening, Mrs Bolton! Your Ladyship will be all right now, so I can leave you. Goodnight to your Ladyship! Goodnight, Mrs Bolton!’

He saluted and turned away.

CHAPTER 16

Connie arrived home to an ordeal of cross-questioning. Clifford had been out at tea-time, had come in just before the storm, and where was her ladyship? Nobody knew, only Mrs Bolton suggested she had gone for a walk into the wood. Into the wood, in such a storm! Clifford for once let himself get into a state of nervous frenzy. He started at every flash of lightning, and blanched at every roll of thunder. He looked at the icy thunder-rain as if it dare the end of the world. He got more and more worked up.

Mrs Bolton tried to soothe him.

‘She’ll be sheltering in the hut, till it’s over. Don’t worry, her Ladyship is all right.’

‘I don’t like her being in the wood in a storm like this! I don’t like her being in the wood at all! She’s been gone now more than two hours. When did she go out?’

‘A little while before you came in.’

‘I didn’t see her in the park. God knows where she is and what has happened to her.’

‘Oh, nothing’s happened to her. You’ll see, she’ll be home directly after the rain stops. It’s just the rain that’s keeping her.’

But her ladyship did not come home directly the rain stopped. In fact time went by, the sun came out for his last yellow glimpse, and there still was no sign of her. The sun was set, it was growing dark, and the first dinner-gong had rung.

‘It’s no good!’ said Clifford in a frenzy. ‘I’m going to send out Field and Betts to find her.’

‘Oh don’t do that!’ cried Mrs Bolton. ‘They’ll think there’s a suicide or something. Oh don’t start a lot of talk going. Let me slip over to the hut and see if she’s not there. I’ll find her all right.’

So, after some persuasion, Clifford allowed her to go.

And so Connie had come upon her in the drive, alone and palely loitering.

‘You mustn’t mind me coming to look for you, my Lady! But Sir Clifford worked himself up into such a state. He made sure you were struck by lightning, or killed by a falling tree. And he was determined to send Field and Betts to the wood to find the body. So I thought I’d better come, rather than set all the servants agog.’

She spoke nervously. She could still see on Connie’s face the smoothness and

the half-dream of passion, and she could feel the irritation against herself.

‘Quite!’ said Connie. And she could say no more.

The two women plodded on through the wet world, in silence, while great drops splashed like explosions in the wood. When they came to the park, Connie strode ahead, and Mrs Bolton panted a little. She was getting plumper.

‘How foolish of Clifford to make a fuss!’ said Connie at length, angrily, really speaking to herself.

‘Oh, you know what men are! They like working themselves up. But he’ll be all right as soon as he sees your Ladyship.’

Connie was very angry that Mrs Bolton knew her secret: for certainly she knew it.

Suddenly Constance stood still on the path.

‘It’s monstrous that I should have to be followed!’ she said, her eyes flashing.

‘Oh! your Ladyship, don’t say that! He’d certainly have sent the two men, and they’d have come straight to the hut. I didn’t know where it was, really.’

Connie flushed darker with rage, at the suggestion. Yet, while her passion was on her, she could not lie. She could not even pretend there was nothing between herself and the keeper. She looked at the other woman, who stood so sly, with her head dropped: yet somehow, in her femaleness, an ally.

‘Oh well!’ she said. ‘If it is so it is so. I don’t mind!’

‘Why, you’re all right, my Lady! You’ve only been sheltering in the hut. It’s absolutely nothing.’

They went on to the house. Connie marched in to Clifford’s room, furious with him, furious with his pale, over-wrought face and prominent eyes.

‘I must say, I don’t think you need send the servants after me,’ she burst out.

‘My God!’ he exploded. ‘Where have you been, woman, You’ve been gone hours, hours, and in a storm like this! What the hell do you go to that bloody wood for? What have you been up to? It’s hours even since the rain stopped, hours! Do you know what time it is? You’re enough to drive anybody mad. Where have you been? What in the name of hell have you been doing?’

‘And what if I don’t choose to tell you?’ She pulled her hat from her head and shook her hair.

He looked at her with his eyes bulging, and yellow coming into the whites. It was very bad for him to get into these rages: Mrs Bolton had a weary time with him, for days after. Connie felt a sudden qualm.

But really!’ she said, milder. ‘Anyone would think I’d been I don’t know where! I just sat in the hut during all the storm, and made myself a little fire, and was happy.’

She spoke now easily. After all, why work him up any more!

He looked at her suspiciously.

And look at your hair!' he said; 'look at yourself!'

'Yes!' she replied calmly. 'I ran out in the rain with no clothes on.'

He stared at her speechless.

'You must be mad!' he said.

'Why? To like a shower bath from the rain?'

'And how did you dry yourself?'

'On an old towel and at the fire.'

He still stared at her in a dumbfounded way.

'And supposing anybody came,' he said.

'Who would come?'

'Who? Why, anybody! And Mellors. Does he come? He must come in the evenings.'

'Yes, he came later, when it had cleared up, to feed the pheasants with corn.'

She spoke with amazing nonchalance. Mrs Bolton, who was listening in the next room, heard in sheer admiration. To think a woman could carry it off so naturally!

'And suppose he'd come while you were running about in the rain with nothing on, like a maniac?'

'I suppose he'd have had the fright of his life, and cleared out as fast as he could.'

Clifford still stared at her transfixed. What he thought in his under-consciousness he would never know. And he was too much taken aback to form one clear thought in his upper consciousness. He just simply accepted what she said, in a sort of blank. And he admired her. He could not help admiring her. She looked so flushed and handsome and smooth: love smooth.

'At least,' he said, subsiding, 'you'll be lucky if you've got off without a severe cold.'

'Oh, I haven't got a cold,' she replied. She was thinking to herself of the other man's words: That's got the nicest woman's arse of anybody! She wished, she dearly wished she could tell Clifford that this had been said to her, during the famous thunderstorm. However! She bore herself rather like an offended queen, and went upstairs to change.

That evening, Clifford wanted to be nice to her. He was reading one of the latest scientific-religious books: he had a streak of a spurious sort of religion in him, and was egocentrically concerned with the future of his own ego. It was like his habit to make conversation to Connie about some book, since the conversation between them had to be made, almost chemically. They had almost chemically concocted it in their heads.

‘What do you think of this, by the way?’ he said, reaching for his book. ‘You’d have no need to cool your ardent body by running out in the rain, if only we have a few more aeons of evolution behind us. Ah, here it is! — ”The universe shows us two aspects: on one side it is physically wasting, on the other it is spiritually ascending.”‘

Connie listened, expecting more. But Clifford was waiting. She looked at him in surprise.

‘And if it spiritually ascends,’ she said, ‘what does it leave down below, in the place where its tail used to be?’

‘Ah!’ he said. ‘Take the man for what he means. ascending is the opposite of his wasting, I presume.’

‘Spiritually blown out, so to speak!’

‘No, but seriously, without joking: do you think there is anything in it?’

She looked at him again.

‘Physically wasting?’ she said. ‘I see you getting fatter, and I’m not wasting myself. Do you think the sun is smaller than he used to be? He’s not to me. And I suppose the apple Adam offered Eve wasn’t really much bigger, if any, than one of our orange pippins. Do you think it was?’

‘Well, hear how he goes on: “It is thus slowly passing, with a slowness inconceivable in our measures of time, to new creative conditions, amid which the physical world, as we at present know it, will be represented by a ripple barely to be distinguished from nonentity.”‘

She listened with a glister of amusement. All sorts of improper things suggested themselves. But she only said:

‘What silly hocus-pocus! As if his little conceited consciousness could know what was happening as slowly as all that! It only means he’s a physical failure on the earth, so he wants to make the whole universe a physical failure. Priggish little impertinence!’

‘Oh, but listen! Don’t interrupt the great man’s solemn words! — ”The present type of order in the world has risen from an unimaginable part, and will find its grave in an unimaginable future. There remains the inexhaustive realm of abstract forms, and creativity with its shifting character ever determined afresh by its own creatures, and God, upon whose wisdom all forms of order depend.” — There, that’s how he winds up!’

Connie sat listening contemptuously.

‘He’s spiritually blown out,’ she said. ‘What a lot of stuff! Unimaginables, and types of order in graves, and realms of abstract forms, and creativity with a shifty character, and God mixed up with forms of order! Why, it’s idiotic!’

‘I must say, it is a little vaguely conglomerate, a mixture of gases, so to

speak,' said Clifford. 'Still, I think there is something in the idea that the universe is physically wasting and spiritually ascending.'

'Do you? Then let it ascend, so long as it leaves me safely and solidly physically here below.'

'Do you like your physique?' he asked.

'I love it!' And through her mind went the words: It's the nicest, nicest woman's arse as is!

'But that is really rather extraordinary, because there's no denying it's an encumbrance. But then I suppose a woman doesn't take a supreme pleasure in the life of the mind.'

'Supreme pleasure?' she said, looking up at him. 'Is that sort of idiocy the supreme pleasure of the life of the mind? No thank you! Give me the body. I believe the life of the body is a greater reality than the life of the mind: when the body is really wakened to life. But so many people, like your famous wind-machine, have only got minds tacked on to their physical corpses.'

He looked at her in wonder.

'The life of the body,' he said, 'is just the life of the animals.'

'And that's better than the life of professional corpses. But it's not true! the human body is only just coming to real life. With the Greeks it gave a lovely flicker, then Plato and Aristotle killed it, and Jesus finished it off. But now the body is coming really to life, it is really rising from the tomb. And It will be a lovely, lovely life in the lovely universe, the life of the human body.'

'My dear, you speak as if you were ushering it all in! True, you are going away on a holiday: but don't please be quite so indecently elated about it. Believe me, whatever God there is is slowly eliminating the guts and alimentary system from the human being, to evolve a higher, more spiritual being.'

'Why should I believe you, Clifford, when I feel that whatever God there is has at last wakened up in my guts, as you call them, and is rippling so happily there, like dawn. Why should I believe you, when I feel so very much the contrary?'

'Oh, exactly! And what has caused this extraordinary change in you? running out stark naked in the rain, and playing Bacchante? desire for sensation, or the anticipation of going to Venice?'

'Both! Do you think it is horrid of me to be so thrilled at going off?' she said.

'Rather horrid to show it so plainly.'

'Then I'll hide it.'

'Oh, don't trouble! You almost communicate a thrill to me. I almost feel that it is I who am going off.'

'Well, why don't you come?'

‘We’ve gone over all that. And as a matter of fact, I suppose your greatest thrill comes from being able to say a temporary farewell to all this. Nothing so thrilling, for the moment, as Good-bye-to-all! — But every parting means a meeting elsewhere. And every meeting is a new bondage.’

‘I’m not going to enter any new bondages.’

‘Don’t boast, while the gods are listening,’ he said.

She pulled up short.

‘No! I won’t boast!’ she said.

But she was thrilled, none the less, to be going off: to feel bonds snap. She couldn’t help it.

Clifford, who couldn’t sleep, gambled all night with Mrs Bolton, till she was too sleepy almost to live.

And the day came round for Hilda to arrive. Connie had arranged with Mellors that if everything promised well for their night together, she would hang a green shawl out of the window. If there were frustration, a red one.

Mrs Bolton helped Connie to pack.

‘It will be so good for your Ladyship to have a change.’

‘I think it will. You don’t mind having Sir Clifford on your hands alone for a time, do you?’

‘Oh no! I can manage him quite all right. I mean, I can do all he needs me to do. Don’t you think he’s better than he used to be?’

‘Oh much! You do wonders with him.’

‘Do I though! But men are all alike: just babies, and you have to flatter them and wheedle them and let them think they’re having their own way. Don’t you find it so, my Lady?’

‘I’m afraid I haven’t much experience.’

Connie paused in her occupation.

‘Even your husband, did you have to manage him, and wheedle him like a baby?’ she asked, looking at the other woman.

Mrs Bolton paused too.

‘Well!’ she said. ‘I had to do a good bit of coaxing, with him too. But he always knew what I was after, I must say that. But he generally gave in to me.’

‘He was never the lord and master thing?’

‘No! At least there’d be a look in his eyes sometimes, and then I knew I’d got to give in. But usually he gave in to me. No, he was never lord and master. But neither was I. I knew when I could go no further with him, and then I gave in: though it cost me a good bit, sometimes.’

‘And what if you had held out against him?’

‘Oh, I don’t know, I never did. Even when he was in the wrong, if he was

fixed, I gave in. You see, I never wanted to break what was between us. And if you really set your will against a man, that finishes it. If you care for a man, you have to give in to him once he's really determined; whether you're in the right or not, you have to give in. Else you break something. But I must say, Ted 'ud give in to me sometimes, when I was set on a thing, and in the wrong. So I suppose it cuts both ways.'

'And that's how you are with all your patients?' asked Connie.

'Oh, That's different. I don't care at all, in the same way. I know what's good for them, or I try to, and then I just contrive to manage them for their own good. It's not like anybody as you're really fond of. It's quite different. Once you've been really fond of a man, you can be affectionate to almost any man, if he needs you at all. But it's not the same thing. You don't really care. I doubt, once you've really cared, if you can ever really care again.'

These words frightened Connie.

'Do you think one can only care once?' she asked.

'Or never. Most women never care, never begin to. They don't know what it means. Nor men either. But when I see a woman as cares, my heart stands still for her.'

'And do you think men easily take offence?'

'Yes! If you wound them on their pride. But aren't women the same? Only our two prides are a bit different.'

Connie pondered this. She began again to have some misgiving about her gag away. After all, was she not giving her man the go-by, if only for a short time? And he knew it. That's why he was so queer and sarcastic.

Still! the human existence is a good deal controlled by the machine of external circumstance. She was in the power of this machine. She couldn't extricate herself all in five minutes. She didn't even want to.

Hilda arrived in good time on Thursday morning, in a nimble two-seater car, with her suit-case strapped firmly behind. She looked as demure and maidenly as ever, but she had the same will of her own. She had the very hell of a will of her own, as her husband had found out. But the husband was now divorcing her.

Yes, she even made it easy for him to do that, though she had no lover. For the time being, she was 'off' men. She was very well content to be quite her own mistress: and mistress of her two children, whom she was going to bring up 'properly', whatever that may mean.

Connie was only allowed a suit-case, also. But she had sent on a trunk to her father, who was going by train. No use taking a car to Venice. And Italy much too hot to motor in, in July. He was going comfortably by train. He had just come down from Scotland.

So, like a demure arcadian field-marshal, Hilda arranged the material part of the journey. She and Connie sat in the upstairs room, chatting.

‘But Hilda!’ said Connie, a little frightened. ‘I want to stay near here tonight. Not here: near here!’

Hilda fixed her sister with grey, inscrutable eyes. She seemed so calm: and she was so often furious.

‘Where, near here?’ she asked softly.

‘Well, you know I love somebody, don’t you?’

‘I gathered there was something.’

‘Well he lives near here, and I want to spend this last night with him. I must! I’ve promised.’

Connie became insistent.

Hilda bent her Minerva-like head in silence. Then she looked up.

‘Do you want to tell me who he is?’ she said.

‘He’s our game-keeper,’ faltered Connie, and she flushed vividly, like a shamed child.

‘Connie!’ said Hilda, lifting her nose slightly with disgust: a motion she had from her mother.

‘I know: but he’s lovely really. He really understands tenderness,’ said Connie, trying to apologize for him.

Hilda, like a ruddy, rich-coloured Athena, bowed her head and pondered. She was really violently angry. But she dared not show it, because Connie, taking after her father, would straight away become obstreperous and unmanageable.

It was true, Hilda did not like Clifford: his cool assurance that he was somebody! She thought he made use of Connie shamefully and impudently. She had hoped her sister would leave him. But, being solid Scotch middle class, she loathed any ‘lowering’ of oneself or the family. She looked up at last.

‘You’ll regret it,’ she said,

‘I shan’t,’ cried Connie, flushed red. ‘He’s quite the exception. I really love him. He’s lovely as a lover.’

Hilda still pondered.

‘You’ll get over him quite soon,’ she said, ‘and live to be ashamed of yourself because of him.’

‘I shan’t! I hope I’m going to have a child of his.’

‘Connie!’ said Hilda, hard as a hammer-stroke, and pale with anger.

‘I shall if I possibly can. I should be fearfully proud if I had a child by him.’

It was no use talking to her. Hilda pondered.

‘And doesn’t Clifford suspect?’ she said.

‘Oh no! Why should he?’

‘I’ve no doubt you’ve given him plenty of occasion for suspicion,’ said Hilda.

‘Not at all.’

‘And tonight’s business seems quite gratuitous folly. Where does the man live?’

‘In the cottage at the other end of the wood.’

‘Is he a bachelor?’

‘No! His wife left him.’

‘How old?’

‘I don’t know. Older than me.’

Hilda became more angry at every reply, angry as her mother used to be, in a kind of paroxysm. But still she hid it.

‘I would give up tonight’s escapade if I were you,’ she advised calmly.

‘I can’t! I must stay with him tonight, or I can’t go to Venice at all. I just can’t.’

Hilda heard her father over again, and she gave way, out of mere diplomacy. And she consented to drive to Mansfield, both of them, to dinner, to bring Connie back to the lane-end after dark, and to fetch her from the lane-end the next morning, herself sleeping in Mansfield, only half an hour away, good going.

But she was furious. She stored it up against her sister, this balk in her plans.

Connie flung an emerald-green shawl over her window-sill.

On the strength of her anger, Hilda warmed toward Clifford.

After all, he had a mind. And if he had no sex, functionally, all the better: so much the less to quarrel about! Hilda wanted no more of that sex business, where men became nasty, selfish little horrors. Connie really had less to put up with than many women if she did but know it.

And Clifford decided that Hilda, after all, was a decidedly intelligent woman, and would make a man a first-rate helpmate, if he were going in for politics for example. Yes, she had none of Connie’s silliness, Connie was more a child: you had to make excuses for her, because she was not altogether dependable.

There was an early cup of tea in the hall, where doors were open to let in the sun. Everybody seemed to be panting a little.

‘Good-bye, Connie girl! Come back to me safely.’

‘Good-bye, Clifford! Yes, I shan’t be long.’ Connie was almost tender.

‘Good-bye, Hilda! You will keep an eye on her, won’t you?’

‘I’ll even keep two!’ said Hilda. ‘She shan’t go very far astray.’

‘It’s a promise!’

‘Good-bye, Mrs Bolton! I know you’ll look after Sir Clifford nobly.’

‘I’ll do what I can, your Ladyship.’

‘And write to me if there is any news, and tell me about Sir Clifford, how he

is.'

'Very good, your Ladyship, I will. And have a good time, and come back and cheer us up.'

Everybody waved. The car went off. Connie looked back and saw Clifford, sitting at the top of the steps in his house-chair. After all, he was her husband: Wragby was her home: circumstance had done it.

Mrs Chambers held the gate and wished her ladyship a happy holiday. The car slipped out of the dark spinney that masked the park, on to the highroad where the colliers were trailing home. Hilda turned to the Crosshill Road, that was not a main road, but ran to Mansfield. Connie put on goggles. They ran beside the railway, which was in a cutting below them. Then they crossed the cutting on a bridge.

'That's the lane to the cottage!' said Connie.

Hilda glanced at it impatiently.

'It's a frightful pity we can't go straight off!' she said. 'We could have been in Pall Mall by nine o'clock.'

'I'm sorry for your sake,' said Connie, from behind her goggles.

They were soon at Mansfield, that once-romantic, now utterly disheartening colliery town. Hilda stopped at the hotel named in the motor-car book, and took a room. The whole thing was utterly uninteresting, and she was almost too angry to talk. However, Connie had to tell her something of the man's history.

'He! He! What name do you call him by? You only say he,' said Hilda.

'I've never called him by any name: nor he me: which is curious, when you come to think of it. Unless we say Lady Jane and John Thomas. But his name is Oliver Mellors.'

'And how would you like to be Mrs Oliver Mellors, instead of Lady Chatterley?'

'I'd love it.'

There was nothing to be done with Connie. And anyhow, if the man had been a lieutenant in the army in India for four or five years, he must be more or less presentable. Apparently he had character. Hilda began to relent a little.

'But you'll be through with him in awhile,' she said, 'and then you'll be ashamed of having been connected with him. One can't mix up with the working people.'

'But you are such a socialist! you're always on the side of the working classes.'

'I may be on their side in a political crisis, but being on their side makes me know how impossible it is to mix one's life with theirs. Not out of snobbery, but just because the whole rhythm is different.'

Hilda had lived among the real political intellectuals, so she was disastrously unanswerable.

The nondescript evening in the hotel dragged out, and at last they had a nondescript dinner. Then Connie slipped a few things into a little silk bag, and combed her hair once more.

‘After all, Hilda,’ she said, ‘love can be wonderful: when you feel you live, and are in the very middle of creation.’ It was almost like bragging on her part.

‘I suppose every mosquito feels the same,’ said Hilda. ‘Do you think it does? How nice for it!’

The evening was wonderfully clear and long-lingering, even in the small town. It would be half-light all night. With a face like a mask, from resentment, Hilda started her car again, and the two sped back on their traces, taking the other road, through Bolsover.

Connie wore her goggles and disguising cap, and she sat in silence. Because of Hilda’s opposition, she was fiercely on the side of the man, she would stand by him through thick and thin.

They had their head-lights on, by the time they passed Crosshill, and the small lit-up train that chuffed past in the cutting made it seem like real night. Hilda had calculated the turn into the lane at the bridge-end. She slowed up rather suddenly and swerved off the road, the lights glaring white into the grassy, overgrown lane. Connie looked out. She saw a shadowy figure, and she opened the door.

‘Here we are!’ she said softly.

But Hilda had switched off the lights, and was absorbed backing, making the turn.

‘Nothing on the bridge?’ she asked shortly.

‘You’re all right,’ said the man’s voice.

She backed on to the bridge, reversed, let the car run forwards a few yards along the road, then backed into the lane, under a wych-elm tree, crushing the grass and bracken. Then all the lights went out. Connie stepped down. The man stood under the trees.

‘Did you wait long?’ Connie asked.

‘Not so very,’ he replied.

They both waited for Hilda to get out. But Hilda shut the door of the car and sat tight.

‘This is my sister Hilda. Won’t you come and speak to her? Hilda! This is Mr Mellors.’

The keeper lifted his hat, but went no nearer.

‘Do walk down to the cottage with us, Hilda,’ Connie pleaded. ‘It’s not far.’

‘What about the car?’

‘People do leave them on the lanes. You have the key.’

Hilda was silent, deliberating. Then she looked backwards down the lane.

‘Can I back round the bush?’ she said.

‘Oh yes!’ said the keeper.

She backed slowly round the curve, out of sight of the road, locked the car, and got down. It was night, but luminous dark. The hedges rose high and wild, by the unused lane, and very dark seeming. There was a fresh sweet scent on the air. The keeper went ahead, then came Connie, then Hilda, and in silence. He lit up the difficult places with a flash-light torch, and they went on again, while an owl softly hooted over the oaks, and Flossie padded silently around. Nobody could speak. There was nothing to say.

At length Connie saw the yellow light of the house, and her heart beat fast. She was a little frightened. They trailed on, still in Indian file.

He unlocked the door and preceded them into the warm but bare little room. The fire burned low and red in the grate. The table was set with two plates and two glasses on a proper white table-cloth for once. Hilda shook her hair and looked round the bare, cheerless room. Then she summoned her courage and looked at the man.

He was moderately tall, and thin, and she thought him good-looking. He kept a quiet distance of his own, and seemed absolutely unwilling to speak.

‘Do sit down, Hilda,’ said Connie.

‘Do!’ he said. ‘Can I make you tea or anything, or will you drink a glass of beer? It’s moderately cool.’

‘Beer!’ said Connie.

‘Beer for me, please!’ said Hilda, with a mock sort of shyness. He looked at her and blinked.

He took a blue jug and tramped to the scullery. When he came back with the beer, his face had changed again.

Connie sat down by the door, and Hilda sat in his seat, with the back to the wall, against the window corner.

‘That is his chair,’ said Connie softly.’ And Hilda rose as if it had burnt her.

‘Sit yer still, sit yer still! Ta’e ony cheer as yo’n a mind to, none of us is th’ big bear,’ he said, with complete equanimity.

And he brought Hilda a glass, and poured her beer first from the blue jug.

‘As for cigarettes,’ he said, ‘I’ve got none, but ‘appen you’ve got your own. I dunna smoke, mysen. Shall y’ eat summat?’ He turned direct to Connie. ‘Shall t’eat a smite o’ summat, if I bring it thee? Tha can usually do wi’ a bite.’ He spoke the vernacular with a curious calm assurance, as if he were the landlord of

the Inn.

‘What is there?’ asked Connie, flushing.

‘Boiled ham, cheese, pickled wa’nuts, if yer like. — Nowt much.’

‘Yes,’ said Connie. ‘Won’t you, Hilda?’

Hilda looked up at him.

‘Why do you speak Yorkshire?’ she said softly.

‘That! That’s non Yorkshire, that’s Derby.’

He looked back at her with that faint, distant grin.

‘Derby, then! Why do you speak Derby? You spoke natural English at first.’

‘Did Ah though? An’ canna Ah change if Ah’m a mind to ‘t? Nay, nay, let me talk Derby if it suits me. If yo’n nowt against it.’

‘It sounds a little affected,’ said Hilda.

‘Ay, ‘appen so! An’ up i’ Tevershall yo’d sound affected.’ He looked again at her, with a queer calculating distance, along his cheek-bone: as if to say: Yi, an’ who are you?

He tramped away to the pantry for the food.

The sisters sat in silence. He brought another plate, and knife and fork. Then he said:

‘An’ if it’s the same to you, I s’ll ta’e my coat off like I allers do.’

And he took off his coat, and hung it on the peg, then sat down to table in his shirt-sleeves: a shirt of thin, cream-coloured flannel.

‘‘Elp yerselves!’ he said. ‘‘Elp yerselves! Dunna wait f’r axin’!’ He cut the bread, then sat motionless. Hilda felt, as Connie once used to, his power of silence and distance. She saw his smallish, sensitive, loose hand on the table. He was no simple working man, not he: he was acting! acting!

‘Still!’ she said, as she took a little cheese. ‘It would be more natural if you spoke to us in normal English, not in vernacular.’

He looked at her, feeling her devil of a will.

‘Would it?’ he said in the normal English. ‘Would it? Would anything that was said between you and me be quite natural, unless you said you wished me to hell before your sister ever saw me again: and unless I said something almost as unpleasant back again? Would anything else be natural?’

‘Oh yes!’ said Hilda. ‘Just good manners would be quite natural.’

‘Second nature, so to speak!’ he said: then he began to laugh. ‘Nay,’ he said. ‘I’m weary o’ manners. Let me be!’

Hilda was frankly baffled and furiously annoyed. After all, he might show that he realized he was being honoured. Instead of which, with his play-acting and lordly airs, he seemed to think it was he who was conferring the honour. Just impudence! Poor misguided Connie, in the man’s clutches!

The three ate in silence. Hilda looked to see what his table-manners were like. She could not help realizing that he was instinctively much more delicate and well-bred than herself. She had a certain Scottish clumsiness. And moreover, he had all the quiet self-contained assurance of the English, no loose edges. It would be very difficult to get the better of him.

But neither would he get the better of her.

‘And do you really think,’ she said, a little more humanly, ‘it’s worth the risk.’

‘Is what worth what risk?’

‘This escapade with my sister.’

He flickered his irritating grin.

‘Yo’ maun ax ‘er!’ Then he looked at Connie.

‘Tha comes o’ thine own accord, lass, doesn’t ter? It’s non me as forces thee?’

Connie looked at Hilda.

‘I wish you wouldn’t cavil, Hilda.’

‘Naturally I don’t want to. But someone has to think about things. You’ve got to have some sort of continuity in your life. You can’t just go making a mess.’

There was a moment’s pause.

‘Eh, continuity!’ he said. ‘An’ what by that? What continuity ave yer got i’ your life? I thought you was gettin’ divorced. What continuity’s that? Continuity o’ yer own stubbornness. I can see that much. An’ what good’s it goin’ to do yer? You’ll be sick o’ yer continuity afore yer a fat sight older. A stubborn woman an er own self-will: ay, they make a fast continuity, they do. Thank heaven, it isn’t me as ‘as got th’ ‘andlin’ of yer!’

‘What right have you to speak like that to me?’ said Hilda.

‘Right! What right ha’ yo’ ter start harnessin’ other folks i’ your continuity? Leave folks to their own continuities.’

‘My dear man, do you think I am concerned with you?’ said Hilda softly.

‘Ay,’ he said. ‘Yo’ are. For it’s a force-put. Yo’ more or less my sister-in-law.’

‘Still far from it, I assure you.’

‘Not a’ that far, I assure you. I’ve got my own sort o’ continuity, back your life! Good as yours, any day. An’ if your sister there comes ter me for a bit o’ cunt an’ tenderness, she knows what she’s after. She’s been in my bed afore: which you ‘aven’t, thank the Lord, with your continuity.’ There was a dead pause, before he added: ‘— Eh, I don’t wear me breeches arse-forrards. An’ if I get a windfall, I thank my stars. A man gets a lot of enjoyment out o’ that lass theer, which is more than anybody gets out o’ th’ likes o’ you. Which is a pity, for you might appen a’ bin a good apple, ‘stead of a handsome crab. Women like you needs proper graftin’.’

He was looking at her with an odd, flickering smile, faintly sensual and appreciative.

‘And men like you,’ she said, ‘ought to be segregated: justifying their own vulgarity and selfish lust.’

‘Ay, ma’am! It’s a mercy there’s a few men left like me. But you deserve what you get: to be left severely alone.’

Hilda had risen and gone to the door. He rose and took his coat from the peg.

‘I can find my way quite well alone,’ she said.

‘I doubt you can’t,’ he replied easily.

They tramped in ridiculous file down the lane again, in silence. An owl still hooted. He knew he ought to shoot it.

The car stood untouched, a little dewy. Hilda got in and started the engine. The other two waited.

‘All I mean,’ she said from her entrenchment, ‘is that I doubt if you’ll find it’s been worth it, either of you!’

‘One man’s meat is another man’s poison,’ he said, out of the darkness. ‘But it’s meat an’ drink to me.’

The lights flared out.

‘Don’t make me wait in the morning,’

‘No, I won’t. Goodnight!’

The car rose slowly on to the highroad, then slid swiftly away, leaving the night silent.

Connie timidly took his arm, and they went down the lane. He did not speak. At length she drew him to a standstill.

‘Kiss me!’ she murmured.

‘Nay, wait a bit! Let me simmer down,’ he said.

That amused her. She still kept hold of his arm, and they went quickly down the lane, in silence. She was so glad to be with him, just now. She shivered, knowing that Hilda might have snatched her away. He was inscrutably silent.

When they were in the cottage again, she almost jumped with pleasure, that she should be free of her sister.

‘But you were horrid to Hilda,’ she said to him.

‘She should ha’ been slapped in time.’

‘But why? and she’s so nice.’

He didn’t answer, went round doing the evening chores, with a quiet, inevitable sort of motion. He was outwardly angry, but not with her. So Connie felt. And his anger gave him a peculiar handsomeness, an inwardness and glisten that thrilled her and made her limbs go molten.

Still he took no notice of her.

Till he sat down and began to unlace his boots. Then he looked up at her from under his brows, on which the anger still sat firm.

‘Shan’t you go up?’ he said. ‘There’s a candle!’

He jerked his head swiftly to indicate the candle burning on the table. She took it obediently, and he watched the full curve of her hips as she went up the first stairs.

It was a night of sensual passion, in which she was a little startled and almost unwilling: yet pierced again with piercing thrills of sensuality, different, sharper, more terrible than the thrills of tenderness, but, at the moment, more desirable. Though a little frightened, she let him have his way, and the reckless, shameless sensuality shook her to her foundations, stripped her to the very last, and made a different woman of her. It was not really love. It was not voluptuousness. It was sensuality sharp and searing as fire, burning the soul to tinder.

Burning out the shames, the deepest, oldest shames, in the most secret places. It cost her an effort to let him have his way and his will of her. She had to be a passive, consenting thing, like a slave, a physical slave. Yet the passion licked round her, consuming, and when the sensual flame of it pressed through her bowels and breast, she really thought she was dying: yet a poignant, marvellous death.

She had often wondered what Abelard meant, when he said that in their year of love he and Heloise had passed through all the stages and refinements of passion. The same thing, a thousand years ago: ten thousand years ago! The same on the Greek vases, everywhere! The refinements of passion, the extravagances of sensuality! And necessary, forever necessary, to burn out false shames and smelt out the heaviest ore of the body into purity. With the fire of sheer sensuality.

In the short summer night she learnt so much. She would have thought a woman would have died of shame. Instead of which, the shame died. Shame, which is fear: the deep organic shame, the old, old physical fear which crouches in the bodily roots of us, and can only be chased away by the sensual fire, at last it was roused up and routed by the phallic hunt of the man, and she came to the very heart of the jungle of herself. She felt, now, she had come to the real bed-rock of her nature, and was essentially shameless. She was her sensual self, naked and unashamed. She felt a triumph, almost a vainglory. So! That was how it was! That was life! That was how oneself really was! There was nothing left to disguise or be ashamed of. She shared her ultimate nakedness with a man, another being.

And what a reckless devil the man was! really like a devil! One had to be strong to bear him. But it took some getting at, the core of the physical jungle,

the last and deepest recess of organic shame. The phallos alone could explore it. And how he had pressed in on her!

And how, in fear, she had hated it. But how she had really wanted it! She knew now. At the bottom of her soul, fundamentally, she had needed this phallic hunting out, she had secretly wanted it, and she had believed that she would never get it. Now suddenly there it was, and a man was sharing her last and final nakedness, she was shameless.

What liars poets and everybody were! They made one think one wanted sentiment. When what one supremely wanted was this piercing, consuming, rather awful sensuality. To find a man who dared do it, without shame or sin or final misgiving! If he had been ashamed afterwards, and made one feel ashamed, how awful! What a pity most men are so doggy, a bit shameful, like Clifford! Like Michaelis even! Both sensually a bit doggy and humiliating. The supreme pleasure of the mind! And what is that to a woman? What is it, really, to the man either! He becomes merely messy and doggy, even in his mind. It needs sheer sensuality even to purify and quicken the mind. Sheer fiery sensuality, not messiness.

Ah, God, how rare a thing a man is! They are all dogs that trot and sniff and copulate. To have found a man who was not afraid and not ashamed! She looked at him now, sleeping so like a wild animal asleep, gone, gone in the remoteness of it. She nestled down, not to be away from him.

Till his rousing waked her completely. He was sitting up in bed, looking down at her. She saw her own nakedness in his eyes, immediate knowledge of her. And the fluid, male knowledge of herself seemed to flow to her from his eyes and wrap her voluptuously. Oh, how voluptuous and lovely it was to have limbs and body half-asleep, heavy and suffused with passion.

‘Is it time to wake up?’ she said.

‘Half past six.’

She had to be at the lane-end at eight. Always, always, always this compulsion on one!

‘I might make the breakfast and bring it up here; should I?’ he said.

‘Oh yes!’

Flossie whimpered gently below. He got up and threw off his pyjamas, and rubbed himself with a towel. When the human being is full of courage and full of life, how beautiful it is! So she thought, as she watched him in silence.

‘Draw the curtain, will you?’

The sun was shining already on the tender green leaves of morning, and the wood stood bluey-fresh, in the nearness. She sat up in bed, looking dreamily out through the dormer window, her naked arms pushing her naked breasts together.

He was dressing himself. She was half-dreaming of life, a life together with him: just a life.

He was going, fleeing from her dangerous, crouching nakedness.

‘Have I lost my nightie altogether?’ she said.

He pushed his hand down in the bed, and pulled out the bit of flimsy silk.

‘I knowed I felt silk at my ankles,’ he said.

But the nightdress was slit almost in two.

‘Never mind!’ she said. ‘It belongs here, really. I’ll leave it.’

‘Ay, leave it, I can put it between my legs at night, for company. There’s no name nor mark on it, is there?’

She slipped on the torn thing, and sat dreamily looking out of the window. The window was open, the air of morning drifted in, and the sound of birds. Birds flew continuously past. Then she saw Flossie roaming out. It was morning.

Downstairs she heard him making the fire, pumping water, going out at the back door. By and by came the smell of bacon, and at length he came upstairs with a huge black tray that would only just go through the door. He set the tray on the bed, and poured out the tea. Connie squatted in her torn nightdress, and fell on her food hungrily. He sat on the one chair, with his plate on his knees.

‘How good it is!’ she said. ‘How nice to have breakfast together.’

He ate in silence, his mind on the time that was quickly passing. That made her remember.

‘Oh, how I wish I could stay here with you, and Wragby were a million miles away! It’s Wragby I’m going away from really. You know that, don’t you?’

‘Ay!’

‘And you promise we will live together and have a life together, you and me! You promise me, don’t you?’

‘Ay! When we can.’

‘Yes! And we will! we will, won’t we?’ she leaned over, making the tea spill, catching his wrist.

‘Ay!’ he said, tidying up the tea.

‘We can’t possibly not live together now, can we?’ she said appealingly.

He looked up at her with his flickering grin.

‘No!’ he said. ‘Only you’ve got to start in twenty-five minutes.’

‘Have I?’ she cried. Suddenly he held up a warning finger, and rose to his feet.

Flossie had given a short bark, then three loud sharp yaps of warning.

Silent, he put his plate on the tray and went downstairs. Constance heard him go down the garden path. A bicycle bell tinkled outside there.

‘Morning, Mr Mellors! Registered letter!’

‘Oh ay! Got a pencil?’

'Here y'are!'

There was a pause.

'Canada!' said the stranger's voice.

'Ay! That's a mate o' mine out there in British Columbia. Dunno what he's got to register.'

'Appen sent y'a fortune, like.'

'More like wants summat.'

Pause.

'Well! Lovely day again!'

'Ay!'

'Morning!'

'Morning!'

After a time he came upstairs again, looking a little angry.

'Postman,' he said.

'Very early!' she replied.

'Rural round; he's mostly here by seven, when he does come.

'Did your mate send you a fortune?'

'No! Only some photographs and papers about a place out there in British Columbia.'

'Would you go there?'

'I thought perhaps we might.'

'Oh yes! I believe it's lovely!'

But he was put out by the postman's coming.

'Them damn bikes, they're on you afore you know where you are. I hope he twigged nothing.'

'After all, what could he twig!'

'You must get up now, and get ready. I'm just goin' ter look round outside.'

She saw him go reconnoitring into the lane, with dog and gun. She went downstairs and washed, and was ready by the time he came back, with the few things in the little silk bag.

He locked up, and they set off, but through the wood, not down the lane. He was being wary.

'Don't you think one lives for times like last night?' she said to him.

'Ay! But there's the rest o'times to think on,' he replied, rather short.

They plodded on down the overgrown path, he in front, in silence.

'And we will live together and make a life together, won't we?' she pleaded.

'Ay!' he replied, striding on without looking round. 'When t' time comes! Just now you're off to Venice or somewhere.'

She followed him dumbly, with sinking heart. Oh, now she was wae to go!

At last he stopped.

‘I’ll just strike across here,’ he said, pointing to the right.

But she flung her arms round his neck, and clung to him.

‘But you’ll keep the tenderness for me, won’t you?’ she whispered. ‘I loved last night. But you’ll keep the tenderness for me, won’t you?’

He kissed her and held her close for a moment. Then he sighed, and kissed her again.

‘I must go an’ look if th’ car’s there.’

He strode over the low brambles and bracken, leaving a trail through the fern. For a minute or two he was gone. Then he came striding back.

‘Car’s not there yet,’ he said. ‘But there’s the baker’s cart on t’ road.’

He seemed anxious and troubled.

‘Hark!’

They heard a car softly hoot as it came nearer. It slowed up on the bridge.

She plunged with utter mournfulness in his track through the fern, and came to a huge holly hedge. He was just behind her.

‘Here! Go through there!’ he said, pointing to a gap. ‘I shan’t come out.’

She looked at him in despair. But he kissed her and made her go. She crept in sheer misery through the holly and through the wooden fence, stumbled down the little ditch and up into the lane, where Hilda was just getting out of the car in vexation.

‘Why you’re there!’ said Hilda. ‘Where’s he?’

‘He’s not coming.’

Connie’s face was running with tears as she got into the car with her little bag. Hilda snatched up the motoring helmet with the disfiguring goggles.

‘Put it on!’ she said. And Connie pulled on the disguise, then the long motoring coat, and she sat down, a goggling inhuman, unrecognizable creature. Hilda started the car with a businesslike motion. They heaved out of the lane, and were away down the road. Connie had looked round, but there was no sight of him. Away! Away! She sat in bitter tears. The parting had come so suddenly, so unexpectedly. It was like death.

‘Thank goodness you’ll be away from him for some time!’ said Hilda, turning to avoid Crosshill village.

CHAPTER 17

‘You see, Hilda,’ said Connie after lunch, when they were nearing London, ‘you have never known either real tenderness or real sensuality: and if you do know them, with the same person, it makes a great difference.’

‘For mercy’s sake don’t brag about your experiences!’ said Hilda. ‘I’ve never met the man yet who was capable of intimacy with a woman, giving himself up to her. That was what I wanted. I’m not keen on their self-satisfied tenderness, and their sensuality. I’m not content to be any man’s little petsy-wetsy, nor his chair a plaisir either. I wanted a complete intimacy, and I didn’t get it. That’s enough for me.’

Connie pondered this. Complete intimacy! She supposed that meant revealing everything concerning yourself to the other person, and his revealing everything concerning himself. But that was a bore. And all that weary self-consciousness between a man and a woman! a disease!

‘I think you’re too conscious of yourself all the time, with everybody,’ she said to her sister.

‘I hope at least I haven’t a slave nature,’ said Hilda.

‘But perhaps you have! Perhaps you are a slave to your own idea of yourself.’

Hilda drove in silence for some time after this piece of unheard of insolence from that chit Connie.

‘At least I’m not a slave to somebody else’s idea of me: and the somebody else a servant of my husband’s,’ she retorted at last, in crude anger.

‘You see, it’s not so,’ said Connie calmly.

She had always let herself be dominated by her elder sister. Now, though somewhere inside herself she was weeping, she was free of the dominion of other women. Ah! that in itself was a relief, like being given another life: to be free of the strange dominion and obsession of other women. How awful they were, women!

She was glad to be with her father, whose favourite she had always been. She and Hilda stayed in a little hotel off Pall Mall, and Sir Malcolm was in his club. But he took his daughters out in the evening, and they liked going with him.

He was still handsome and robust, though just a little afraid of the new world that had sprung up around him. He had got a second wife in Scotland, younger than himself and richer. But he had as many holidays away from her as possible: just as with his first wife.

Connie sat next to him at the opera. He was moderately stout, and had stout thighs, but they were still strong and well-knit, the thighs of a healthy man who had taken his pleasure in life. His good-humoured selfishness, his dogged sort of independence, his unrepenting sensuality, it seemed to Connie she could see them all in his well-knit straight thighs. Just a man! And now becoming an old man, which is sad. Because in his strong, thick male legs there was none of the alert sensitiveness and power of tenderness which is the very essence of youth, that which never dies, once it is there.

Connie woke up to the existence of legs. They became more important to her than faces, which are no longer very real. How few people had live, alert legs! She looked at the men in the stalls. Great puddingy thighs in black pudding-cloth, or lean wooden sticks in black funeral stuff, or well-shaped young legs without any meaning whatever, either sensuality or tenderness or sensitiveness, just mere leggy ordinariness that pranced around. Not even any sensuality like her father's. They were all daunted, daunted out of existence.

But the women were not daunted. The awful mill-posts of most females! really shocking, really enough to justify murder! Or the poor thin pegs! or the trim neat things in silk stockings, without the slightest look of life! Awful, the millions of meaningless legs prancing meaninglessly around!

But she was not happy in London. The people seemed so spectral and blank. They had no alive happiness, no matter how brisk and good-looking they were. It was all barren. And Connie had a woman's blind craving for happiness, to be assured of happiness.

In Paris at any rate she felt a bit of sensuality still. But what a weary, tired, worn-out sensuality. Worn-out for lack of tenderness. Oh! Paris was sad. One of the saddest towns: weary of its now-mechanical sensuality, weary of the tension of money, money, money, weary even of resentment and conceit, just weary to death, and still not sufficiently Americanized or Londonized to hide the weariness under a mechanical jig-jig-jig! Ah, these manly he-men, these flaneurs, the oglers, these eaters of good dinners! How weary they were! weary, worn-out for lack of a little tenderness, given and taken. The efficient, sometimes charming women knew a thing or two about the sensual realities: they had that pull over their jigging English sisters. But they knew even less of tenderness. Dry, with the endless dry tension of will, they too were wearing out. The human world was just getting worn out. Perhaps it would turn fiercely destructive. A sort of anarchy! Clifford and his conservative anarchy! Perhaps it wouldn't be conservative much longer. Perhaps it would develop into a very radical anarchy.

Connie found herself shrinking and afraid of the world. Sometimes she was

happy for a little while in the Boulevards or in the Bois or the Luxembourg Gardens. But already Paris was full of Americans and English, strange Americans in the oddest uniforms, and the usual dreary English that are so hopeless abroad.

She was glad to drive on. It was suddenly hot weather, so Hilda was going through Switzerland and over the Brenner, then through the Dolomites down to Venice. Hilda loved all the managing and the driving and being mistress of the show. Connie was quite content to keep quiet.

And the trip was really quite nice. Only Connie kept saying to herself: Why don't I really care! Why am I never really thrilled? How awful, that I don't really care about the landscape any more! But I don't. It's rather awful. I'm like Saint Bernard, who could sail down the lake of Lucerne without ever noticing that there were even mountain and green water. I just don't care for landscape any more. Why should one stare at it? Why should one? I refuse to.

No, she found nothing vital in France or Switzerland or the Tyrol or Italy. She just was carted through it all. And it was all less real than Wragby. Less real than the awful Wragby! She felt she didn't care if she never saw France or Switzerland or Italy again. They'd keep. Wragby was more real.

As for people! people were all alike, with very little difference. They all wanted to get money out of you: or, if they were travellers, they wanted to get enjoyment, perforce, like squeezing blood out of a stone. Poor mountains! poor landscape! it all had to be squeezed and squeezed and squeezed again, to provide a thrill, to provide enjoyment. What did people mean, with their simply determined enjoying of themselves?

No! said Connie to herself I'd rather be at Wragby, where I can go about and be still, and not stare at anything or do any performing of any sort. This tourist performance of enjoying oneself is too hopelessly humiliating: it's such a failure.

She wanted to go back to Wragby, even to Clifford, even to poor crippled Clifford. He wasn't such a fool as this swarming holidaying lot, anyhow.

But in her inner consciousness she was keeping touch with the other man. She mustn't let her connexion with him go: oh, she mustn't let it go, or she was lost, lost utterly in this world of riff-raffy expensive people and joy-hogs. Oh, the joy-hogs! Oh 'enjoying oneself'! Another modern form of sickness.

They left the car in Mestre, in a garage, and took the regular steamer over to Venice. It was a lovely summer afternoon, the shallow lagoon rippled, the full sunshine made Venice, turning its back to them across the water, look dim.

At the station quay they changed to a gondola, giving the man the address. He was a regular gondolier in a white-and-blue blouse, not very good-looking, not at all impressive.

‘Yes! The Villa Esmeralda! Yes! I know it! I have been the gondolier for a gentleman there. But a fair distance out!’

He seemed a rather childish, impetuous fellow. He rowed with a certain exaggerated impetuosity, through the dark side-canal with the horrible, slimy green walls, the canals that go through the poorer quarters, where the washing hangs high up on ropes, and there is a slight, or strong, odour of sewage.

But at last he came to one of the open canals with pavement on either side, and looping bridges, that run straight, at right-angles to the Grand Canal. The two women sat under the little awning, the man was perched above, behind them.

‘Are the signorine staying long at the Villa Esmeralda?’ he asked, rowing easy, and wiping his perspiring face with a white-and-blue handkerchief.

‘Some twenty days: we are both married ladies,’ said Hilda, in her curious hushed voice, that made her Italian sound so foreign.

‘Ah! Twenty days!’ said the man. There was a pause. After which he asked: ‘Do the signore want a gondolier for the twenty days or so that they will stay at the Villa Esmeralda? Or by the day, or by the week?’

Connie and Hilda considered. In Venice, it is always preferable to have one’s own gondola, as it is preferable to have one’s own car on land.

‘What is there at the Villa? what boats?’

‘There is a motor-launch, also a gondola. But — ’ The but meant: they won’t be your property.

‘How much do you charge?’

It was about thirty shillings a day, or ten pounds a week.

‘Is that the regular price?’ asked Hilda.

‘Less, Signora, less. The regular price — ’

The sisters considered.

‘Well,’ said Hilda, ‘come tomorrow morning, and we will arrange it. What is your name?’

His name was Giovanni, and he wanted to know at what time he should come, and then for whom should he say he was waiting. Hilda had no card. Connie gave him one of hers. He glanced at it swiftly, with his hot, southern blue eyes, then glanced again.

‘Ah!’ he said, lighting up. ‘Milady! Milady, isn’t it?’

‘Milady Costanza!’ said Connie.

He nodded, repeating: ‘Milady Costanza!’ and putting the card carefully away in his blouse.

The Villa Esmeralda was quite a long way out, on the edge of the lagoon looking towards Chioggia. It was not a very old house, and pleasant, with the

terraces looking seawards, and below, quite a big garden with dark trees, walled in from the lagoon.

Their host was a heavy, rather coarse Scotchman who had made a good fortune in Italy before the war, and had been knighted for his ultrapatriotism during the war. His wife was a thin, pale, sharp kind of person with no fortune of her own, and the misfortune of having to regulate her husband's rather sordid amorous exploits. He was terribly tiresome with the servants. But having had a slight stroke during the winter, he was now more manageable.

The house was pretty full. Besides Sir Malcolm and his two daughters, there were seven more people, a Scotch couple, again with two daughters; a young Italian Contessa, a widow; a young Georgian prince, and a youngish English clergyman who had had pneumonia and was being chaplain to Sir Alexander for his health's sake. The prince was penniless, good-looking, would make an excellent chauffeur, with the necessary impudence, and basta! The Contessa was a quiet little puss with a game on somewhere. The clergyman was a raw simple fellow from a Bucks vicarage: luckily he had left his wife and two children at home. And the Guthries, the family of four, were good solid Edinburgh middle class, enjoying everything in a solid fashion, and daring everything while risking nothing.

Connie and Hilda ruled out the prince at once. The Guthries were more or less their own sort, substantial, but boring: and the girls wanted husbands. The chaplain was not a bad fellow, but too deferential. Sir Alexander, after his slight stroke, had a terrible heaviness his joviality, but he was still thrilled at the presence of so many handsome young women. Lady Cooper was a quiet, catty person who had a thin time of it, poor thing, and who watched every other woman with a cold watchfulness that had become her second nature, and who said cold, nasty little things which showed what an utterly low opinion she had of all human nature. She was also quite venomously overbearing with the servants, Connie found: but in a quiet way. And she skilfully behaved so that Sir Alexander should think that he was lord and monarch of the whole caboosh, with his stout, would-be-genial paunch, and his utterly boring jokes, his humourosity, as Hilda called it.

Sir Malcolm was painting. Yes, he still would do a Venetian lagoonscape, now and then, in contrast to his Scottish landscapes. So in the morning he was rowed off with a huge canvas, to his 'site'. A little later, Lady Cooper would be rowed off into the heart of the city, with sketching-block and colours. She was an inveterate watercolour painter, and the house was full of rose-coloured palaces, dark canals, swaying bridges, medieval facades, and so on. A little later the Guthries, the prince, the countess, Sir Alexander, and sometimes Mr Lind,

the chaplain, would go off to the Lido, where they would bathe; coming home to a late lunch at half past one.

The house-party, as a house-party, was distinctly boring. But this did not trouble the sisters. They were out all the time. Their father took them to the exhibition, miles and miles of weary paintings. He took them to all the cronies of his in the Villa Lucchese, he sat with them on warm evenings in the piazza, having got a table at Florian's: he took them to the theatre, to the Goldoni plays. There were illuminated water-fetes, there were dances. This was a holiday-place of all holiday-places. The Lido, with its acres of sun-pinked or pyjamaed bodies, was like a strand with an endless heap of seals come up for mating. Too many people in the piazza, too many limbs and trunks of humanity on the Lido, too many gondolas, too many motor-launches, too many steamers, too many pigeons, too many ices, too many cocktails, too many menservants wanting tips, too many languages rattling, too much, too much sun, too much smell of Venice, too many cargoes of strawberries, too many silk shawls, too many huge, raw-beef slices of watermelon on stalls: too much enjoyment, altogether far too much enjoyment!

Connie and Hilda went around in their sunny frocks. There were dozens of people they knew, dozens of people knew them. Michaelis turned up like a bad penny. 'Hullo! Where you staying? Come and have an ice-cream or something! Come with me somewhere in my gondola.' Even Michaelis almost sun-burned: though sun-cooked is more appropriate to the look of the mass of human flesh.

It was pleasant in a way. It was almost enjoyment. But anyhow, with all the cocktails, all the lying in warmish water and sunbathing on hot sand in hot sun, jazzing with your stomach up against some fellow in the warm nights, cooling off with ices, it was a complete narcotic. And that was what they all wanted, a drug: the slow water, a drug; the sun, a drug; jazz, a drug; cigarettes, cocktails, ices, vermouth. To be drugged! Enjoyment! Enjoyment!

Hilda half liked being drugged. She liked looking at all the women, speculating about them. The women were absorbingly interested in the women. How does she look! what man has she captured? what fun is she getting out of it? — The men were like great dogs in white flannel trousers, waiting to be patted, waiting to wallow, waiting to plaster some woman's stomach against their own, in jazz.

Hilda liked jazz, because she could plaster her stomach against the stomach of some so-called man, and let him control her movement from the visceral centre, here and there across the floor, and then she could break loose and ignore 'the creature'. He had been merely made use of. Poor Connie was rather unhappy. She wouldn't jazz, because she simply couldn't plaster her stomach against some

'creature's' stomach. She hated the conglomerate mass of nearly nude flesh on the Lido: there was hardly enough water to wet them all. She disliked Sir Alexander and Lady Cooper. She did not want Michaelis or anybody else trailing her.

The happiest times were when she got Hilda to go with her away across the lagoon, far across to some lonely shingle-bank, where they could bathe quite alone, the gondola remaining on the inner side of the reef.

Then Giovanni got another gondolier to help him, because it was a long way and he sweated terrifically in the sun. Giovanni was very nice: affectionate, as the Italians are, and quite passionless. The Italians are not passionate: passion has deep reserves. They are easily moved, and often affectionate, but they rarely have any abiding passion of any sort.

So Giovanni was already devoted to his ladies, as he had been devoted to cargoes of ladies in the past. He was perfectly ready to prostitute himself to them, if they wanted him: he secretly hoped they would want him. They would give him a handsome present, and it would come in very handy, as he was just going to be married. He told them about his marriage, and they were suitably interested.

He thought this trip to some lonely bank across the lagoon probably meant business: business being l'amore, love. So he got a mate to help him, for it was a long way; and after all, they were two ladies. Two ladies, two mackerels! Good arithmetic! Beautiful ladies, too! He was justly proud of them. And though it was the Signora who paid him and gave him orders, he rather hoped it would be the young milady who would select him for l'amore. She would give more money too.

The mate he brought was called Daniele. He was not a regular gondolier, so he had none of the cadger and prostitute about him. He was a sandola man, a sandola being a big boat that brings in fruit and produce from the islands.

Daniele was beautiful, tall and well-shapen, with a light round head of little, close, pale-blond curls, and a good-looking man's face, a little like a lion, and long-distance blue eyes. He was not effusive, loquacious, and bibulous like Giovanni. He was silent and he rowed with a strength and ease as if he were alone on the water. The ladies were ladies, remote from him. He did not even look at them. He looked ahead.

He was a real man, a little angry when Giovanni drank too much wine and rowed awkwardly, with effusive shoves of the great oar. He was a man as Mellors was a man, unprostituted. Connie pitied the wife of the easily-overflowing Giovanni. But Daniele's wife would be one of those sweet Venetian women of the people whom one still sees, modest and flower-like in the back of

that labyrinth of a town.

Ah, how sad that man first prostitutes woman, then woman prostitutes man. Giovanni was pining to prostitute himself, dribbling like a dog, wanting to give himself to a woman. And for money!

Connie looked at Venice far off, low and rose-coloured upon the water. Built of money, blossomed of money, and dead with money. The money-deadness! Money, money, money, prostitution and deadness.

Yet Daniele was still a man capable of a man's free allegiance. He did not wear the gondolier's blouse: only the knitted blue jersey. He was a little wild, uncouth and proud. So he was hireling to the rather doggy Giovanni who was hireling again to two women. So it is! When Jesus refused the devil's money, he left the devil like a Jewish banker, master of the whole situation.

Connie would come home from the blazing light of the lagoon in a kind of stupor, to find letters from home. Clifford wrote regularly. He wrote very good letters: they might all have been printed in a book. And for this reason Connie found them not very interesting.

She lived in the stupor of the light of the lagoon, the lapping saltiness of the water, the space, the emptiness, the nothingness: but health, health, complete stupor of health. It was gratifying, and she was lulled away in it, not caring for anything. Besides, she was pregnant. She knew now. So the stupor of sunlight and lagoon salt and sea-bathing and lying on shingle and finding shells and drifting away, away in a gondola, was completed by the pregnancy inside her, another fullness of health, satisfying and stupefying.

She had been at Venice a fortnight, and she was to stay another ten days or a fortnight. The sunshine blazed over any count of time, and the fullness of physical health made forgetfulness complete. She was in a sort of stupor of well-being.

From which a letter of Clifford roused her.

We too have had our mild local excitement. It appears the truant wife of Mellors, the keeper, turned up at the cottage and found herself unwelcome. He packed her off, and locked the door. Report has it, however, that when he returned from the wood he found the no longer fair lady firmly established in his bed, in *puris naturalibus*; or one should say, in *impuris naturalibus*. She had broken a window and got in that way. Unable to evict the somewhat man-handled Venus from his couch, he beat a retreat and retired, it is said, to his mother's house in Tevershall. Meanwhile the Venus of Stacks Gate is established in the cottage, which she claims is her home, and Apollo, apparently, is domiciled in Tevershall.

I repeat this from hearsay, as Mellors has not come to me personally. I had

this particular bit of local garbage from our garbage bird, our ibis, our scavenging turkey-buzzard, Mrs Bolton. I would not have repeated it had she not exclaimed: her Ladyship will go no more to the wood if that woman's going to be about!

I like your picture of Sir Malcolm striding into the sea with white hair blowing and pink flesh glowing. I envy you that sun. Here it rains. But I don't envy Sir Malcolm his inveterate mortal carnality. However, it suits his age. Apparently one grows more carnal and more mortal as one grows older. Only youth has a taste of immortality —

This news affected Connie in her state of semi-stupefied well-being with vexation amounting to exasperation. Now she had got to be bothered by that beast of a woman! Now she must start and fret! She had no letter from Mellors. They had agreed not to write at all, but now she wanted to hear from him personally. After all, he was the father of the child that was coming. Let him write!

But how hateful! Now everything was messed up. How foul those low people were! How nice it was here, in the sunshine and the indolence, compared to that dismal mess of that English Midlands! After all, a clear sky was almost the most important thing in life.

She did not mention the fact of her pregnancy, even to Hilda. She wrote to Mrs Bolton for exact information.

Duncan Forbes, an artist friend of theirs, had arrived at the Villa Esmeralda, coming north from Rome. Now he made a third in the gondola, and he bathed with them across the lagoon, and was their escort: a quiet, almost taciturn young man, very advanced in his art.

She had a letter from Mrs Bolton:

You will be pleased, I am sure, my Lady, when you see Sir Clifford. He's looking quite blooming and working very hard, and very hopeful. Of course he is looking forward to seeing you among us again. It is a dull house without my Lady, and we shall all welcome her presence among us once more.

About Mr Mellors, I don't know how much Sir Clifford told you. It seems his wife came back all of a sudden one afternoon, and he found her sitting on the doorstep when he came in from the wood. She said she was come back to him and wanted to live with him again, as she was his legal wife, and he wasn't going to divorce her. But he wouldn't have anything to do with her, and wouldn't let her in the house, and did not go in himself; he went back into the wood without ever opening the door.

But when he came back after dark, he found the house broken into, so he went upstairs to see what she'd done, and he found her in bed without a rag on her. He

offered her money, but she said she was his wife and he must take her back. I don't know what sort of a scene they had. His mother told me about it, she's terribly upset. Well, he told her he'd die rather than ever live with her again, so he took his things and went straight to his mother's on Tevershall hill. He stopped the night and went to the wood next day through the park, never going near the cottage. It seems he never saw his wife that day. But the day after she was at her brother Dan's at Beggarlee, swearing and carrying on, saying she was his legal wife, and that he'd been having women at the cottage, because she'd found a scent-bottle in his drawer, and gold-tipped cigarette-ends on the ash-heap, and I don't know what all. Then it seems the postman Fred Kirk says he heard somebody talking in Mr Mellors' bedroom early one morning, and a motor-car had been in the lane.

Mr Mellors stayed on with his mother, and went to the wood through the park, and it seems she stayed on at the cottage. Well, there was no end of talk. So at last Mr Mellors and Tom Phillips went to the cottage and fetched away most of the furniture and bedding, and unscrewed the handle of the pump, so she was forced to go. But instead of going back to Stacks Gate she went and lodged with that Mrs Swain at Beggarlee, because her brother Dan's wife wouldn't have her. And she kept going to old Mrs Mellors' house, to catch him, and she began swearing he'd got in bed with her in the cottage and she went to a lawyer to make him pay her an allowance. She's grown heavy, and more common than ever, and as strong as a bull. And she goes about saying the most awful things about him, how he has women at the cottage, and how he behaved to her when they were married, the low, beastly things he did to her, and I don't know what all. I'm sure it's awful, the mischief a woman can do, once she starts talking. And no matter how low she may be, there'll be some as will believe her, and some of the dirt will stick. I'm sure the way she makes out that Mr Mellors was one of those low, beastly men with women, is simply shocking. And people are only too ready to believe things against anybody, especially things like that. She declared she'll never leave him alone while he lives. Though what I say is, if he was so beastly to her, why is she so anxious to go back to him? But of course she's coming near her change of life, for she's years older than he is. And these common, violent women always go partly insane when the change of life comes upon them —

This was a nasty blow to Connie. Here she was, sure as life, coming in for her share of the lowness and dirt. She felt angry with him for not having got clear of a Bertha Coutts: nay, for ever having married her. Perhaps he had a certain hankering after lowness. Connie remembered the last night she had spent with him, and shivered. He had known all that sensuality, even with a Bertha Coutts!

It was really rather disgusting. It would be well to be rid of him, clear of him altogether. He was perhaps really common, really low.

She had a revulsion against the whole affair, and almost envied the Guthrie girls their gawky inexperience and crude maidenliness. And she now dreaded the thought that anybody would know about herself and the keeper. How unspeakably humiliating! She was weary, afraid, and felt a craving for utter respectability, even for the vulgar and deadening respectability of the Guthrie girls. If Clifford knew about her affair, how unspeakably humiliating! She was afraid, terrified of society and its unclean bite. She almost wished she could get rid of the child again, and be quite clear. In short, she fell into a state of funk.

As for the scent-bottle, that was her own folly. She had not been able to refrain from perfuming his one or two handkerchiefs and his shirts in the drawer, just out of childishness, and she had left a little bottle of Coty's Wood-violet perfume, half empty, among his things. She wanted him to remember her in the perfume. As for the cigarette-ends, they were Hilda's.

She could not help confiding a little in Duncan Forbes. She didn't say she had been the keeper's lover, she only said she liked him, and told Forbes the history of the man.

'Oh,' said Forbes, 'you'll see, they'll never rest till they've pulled the man down and done him in. If he has refused to creep up into the middle classes, when he had a chance; and if he's a man who stands up for his own sex, then they'll do him in. It's the one thing they won't let you be, straight and open in your sex. You can be as dirty as you like. In fact the more dirt you do on sex the better they like it. But if you believe in your own sex, and won't have it done dirt to: they'll down you. It's the one insane taboo left: sex as a natural and vital thing. They won't have it, and they'll kill you before they'll let you have it. You'll see, they'll hound that man down. And what's he done, after all? If he's made love to his wife all ends on, hasn't he a right to? She ought to be proud of it. But you see, even a low bitch like that turns on him, and uses the hyena instinct of the mob against sex, to pull him down. You have a snivel and feel sinful or awful about your sex, before you're allowed to have any. Oh, they'll hound the poor devil down.'

Connie had a revulsion in the opposite direction now. What had he done, after all? what had he done to herself, Connie, but give her an exquisite pleasure and a sense of freedom and life? He had released her warm, natural sexual flow. And for that they would hound him down.

No no, it should not be. She saw the image of him, naked white with tanned face and hands, looking down and addressing his erect penis as if it were another being, the odd grin flickering on his face. And she heard his voice again: Tha's

got the nicest woman's arse of anybody! And she felt his hand warmly and softly closing over her tail again, over her secret places, like a benediction. And the warmth ran through her womb, and the little flames flickered in her knees, and she said: Oh, no! I mustn't go back on it! I must not go back on him. I must stick to him and to what I had of him, through everything. I had no warm, flamy life till he gave it me. And I won't go back on it.

She did a rash thing. She sent a letter to Ivy Bolton, enclosing a note to the keeper, and asking Mrs Bolton to give it him. And she wrote to him:

I am very much distressed to hear of all the trouble your wife is making for you, but don't mind it, it is only a sort of hysteria. It will all blow over as suddenly as it came. But I'm awfully sorry about it, and I do hope you are not minding very much. After all, it isn't worth it. She is only a hysterical woman who wants to hurt you. I shall be home in ten days' time, and I do hope everything will be all right.

A few days later came a letter from Clifford. He was evidently upset.

I am delighted to hear you are prepared to leave Venice on the sixteenth. But if you are enjoying it, don't hurry home. We miss you, Wragby misses you. But it is essential that you should get your full amount of sunshine, sunshine and pyjamas, as the advertisements of the Lido say. So please do stay on a little longer, if it is cheering you up and preparing you for our sufficiently awful winter. Even today, it rains.

I am assiduously, admirably looked after by Mrs Bolton. She is a queer specimen. The more I live, the more I realize what strange creatures human beings are. Some of them might just as well have a hundred legs, like a centipede, or six, like a lobster. The human consistency and dignity one has been led to expect from one's fellow-men seem actually nonexistent. One doubts if they exist to any startling degree even in oneself.

The scandal of the keeper continues and gets bigger like a snowball. Mrs Bolton keeps me informed. She reminds me of a fish which, though dumb, seems to be breathing silent gossip through its gills, while ever it lives. All goes through the sieve of her gills, and nothing surprises her. It is as if the events of other people's lives were the necessary oxygen of her own.

She is preoccupied with the Mellors scandal, and if I will let her begin, she takes me down to the depths. Her great indignation, which even then is like the indignation of an actress playing a role, is against the wife of Mellors, whom she persists in calling Bertha Courts. I have been to the depths of the muddy lies of the Bertha Couttses of this world, and when, released from the current of gossip, I slowly rise to the surface again, I look at the daylight its wonder that it ever should be.

It seems to me absolutely true, that our world, which appears to us the surface of all things, is really the bottom of a deep ocean: all our trees are submarine growths, and we are weird, scaly-clad submarine fauna, feeding ourselves on offal like shrimps. Only occasionally the soul rises gasping through the fathomless fathoms under which we live, far up to the surface of the ether, where there is true air. I am convinced that the air we normally breathe is a kind of water, and men and women are a species of fish.

But sometimes the soul does come up, shoots like a kittiwake into the light, with ecstasy, after having preyed on the submarine depths. It is our mortal destiny, I suppose, to prey upon the ghastly subaqueous life of our fellow-men, in the submarine jungle of mankind. But our immortal destiny is to escape, once we have swallowed our swimmy catch, up again into the bright ether, bursting out from the surface of Old Ocean into real light. Then one realizes one's eternal nature.

When I hear Mrs Bolton talk, I feel myself plunging down, down, to the depths where the fish of human secrets wriggle and swim. Carnal appetite makes one seize a beakful of prey: then up, up again, out of the dense into the ethereal, from the wet into the dry. To you I can tell the whole process. But with Mrs Bolton I only feel the downward plunge, down, horribly, among the sea-weeds and the pallid monsters of the very bottom.

I am afraid we are going to lose our game-keeper. The scandal of the truant wife, instead of dying down, has reverberated to greater and greater dimensions. He is accused of all unspeakable things and curiously enough, the woman has managed to get the bulk of the colliers' wives behind her, gruesome fish, and the village is putrescent with talk.

I hear this Bertha Coutts besieges Mellors in his mother's house, having ransacked the cottage and the hut. She seized one day upon her own daughter, as that chip of the female block was returning from school; but the little one, instead of kissing the loving mother's hand, bit it firmly, and so received from the other hand a smack in the face which sent her reeling into the gutter: whence she was rescued by an indignant and harassed grandmother.

The woman has blown off an amazing quantity of poison-gas. She has aired in detail all those incidents of her conjugal life which are usually buried down in the deepest grave of matrimonial silence, between married couples. Having chosen to exhume them, after ten years of burial, she has a weird array. I hear these details from Linley and the doctor: the latter being amused. Of course there is really nothing in it. Humanity has always had a strange avidity for unusual sexual postures, and if a man likes to use his wife, as Benvenuto Cellini says, 'in the Italian way', well that is a matter of taste. But I had hardly expected our

game-keeper to be up to so many tricks. No doubt Bertha Coutts herself first put him up to them. In any case, it is a matter of their own personal squalor, and nothing to do with anybody else.

However, everybody listens: as I do myself. A dozen years ago, common decency would have hushed the thing. But common decency no longer exists, and the colliers' wives are all up in arms and unabashed in voice. One would think every child in Tevershall, for the last fifty years, had been an immaculate conception, and every one of our nonconformist females was a shining Joan of Arc. That our estimable game-keeper should have about him a touch of Rabelais seems to make him more monstrous and shocking than a murderer like Crippen. Yet these people in Tevershall are a loose lot, if one is to believe all accounts.

The trouble is, however, the execrable Bertha Coutts has not confined herself to her own experiences and sufferings. She has discovered, at the top of her voice, that her husband has been 'keeping' women down at the cottage, and has made a few random shots at naming the women. This has brought a few decent names trailing through the mud, and the thing has gone quite considerably too far. An injunction has been taken out against the woman.

I have had to interview Mellors about the business, as it was impossible to keep the woman away from the wood. He goes about as usual, with his Miller-of-the-Dee air, I care for nobody, no not I, if nobody care for me! Nevertheless, I shrewdly suspect he feels like a dog with a tin can tied to its tail: though he makes a very good show of pretending the tin can isn't there. But I heard that in the village the women call away their children if he is passing, as if he were the Marquis de Sade in person. He goes on with a certain impudence, but I am afraid the tin can is firmly tied to his tail, and that inwardly he repeats, like Don Rodrigo in the Spanish ballad: 'Ah, now it bites me where I most have sinned!'

I asked him if he thought he would be able to attend to his duty in the wood, and he said he did not think he had neglected it. I told him it was a nuisance to have the woman trespassing: to which he replied that he had no power to arrest her. Then I hinted at the scandal and its unpleasant course. 'Ay,' he said. 'folks should do their own fuckin', then they wouldn't want to listen to a lot of clafart about another man's.'

He said it with some bitterness, and no doubt it contains the real germ of truth. The mode of putting it, however, is neither delicate nor respectful. I hinted as much, and then I heard the tin can rattle again. 'It's not for a man the shape you're in, Sir Clifford, to twit me for havin' a cod atween my legs.'

These things, said indiscriminately to all and sundry, of course do not help him at all, and the rector, and Finley, and Burroughs all think it would be as well if the man left the place.

I asked him if it was true that he entertained ladies down at the cottage, and all he said was: 'Why, what's that to you, Sir Clifford?' I told him I intended to have decency observed on my estate, to which he replied: 'Then you mun button the mouths o' a' th' women.' — When I pressed him about his manner of life at the cottage, he said: 'Surely you might ma'e a scandal out o' me an' my bitch Flossie. You've missed summat there.' As a matter of fact, for an example of impertinence he'd be hard to beat.

I asked him if it would be easy for him to find another job. He said: 'If you're hintin' that you'd like to shunt me out of this job, it'd be easy as wink.' So he made no trouble at all about leaving at the end of next week, and apparently is willing to initiate a young fellow, Joe Chambers, into as many mysteries of the craft as possible. I told him I would give him a month's wages extra, when he left. He said he'd rather I kept my money, as I'd no occasion to ease my conscience. I asked him what he meant, and he said: 'You don't owe me nothing extra, Sir Clifford, so don't pay me nothing extra. If you think you see my shirt hanging out, just tell me.'

Well, there is the end of it for the time being. The woman has gone away: we don't know where to: but she is liable to arrest if she shows her face in Tevershall. And I heard she is mortally afraid of gaol, because she merits it so well. Mellors will depart on Saturday week, and the place will soon become normal again.

Meanwhile, my dear Connie, if you would enjoy to stay in Venice or in Switzerland till the beginning of August, I should be glad to think you were out of all this buzz of nastiness, which will have died quite away by the end of the month.

So you see, we are deep-sea monsters, and when the lobster walks on mud, he stirs it up for everybody. We must perforce take it philosophically.

The irritation, and the lack of any sympathy in any direction, of Clifford's letter, had a bad effect on Connie. But she understood it better when she received the following from Mellors:

The cat is out of the bag, along with various other pussies. You have heard that my wife Bertha came back to my unloving arms, and took up her abode in the cottage: where, to speak disrespectfully, she smelled a rat, in the shape of a little bottle of Coty. Other evidence she did not find, at least for some days, when she began to howl about the burnt photograph. She noticed the glass and the back-board in the square bedroom. Unfortunately, on the back-board somebody had scribbled little sketches, and the initials, several times repeated: C. S. R. This, however, afforded no clue until she broke into the hut, and found one of your books, an autobiography of the actress Judith, with your name,

Constance Stewart Reid, on the front page. After this, for some days she went round loudly saying that my paramour was no less a person than Lady Chatterley herself. The news came at last to the rector, Mr Burroughs, and to Sir Clifford. They then proceeded to take legal steps against my liege lady, who for her part disappeared, having always had a mortal fear of the police.

Sir Clifford asked to see me, so I went to him. He talked around things and seemed annoyed with me. Then he asked if I knew that even her ladyship's name had been mentioned. I said I never listened to scandal, and was surprised to hear this bit from Sir Clifford himself. He said, of course it was a great insult, and I told him there was Queen Mary on a calendar in the scullery, no doubt because Her Majesty formed part of my harem. But he didn't appreciate the sarcasm. He as good as told me I was a disreputable character also walked about with my breeches' buttons undone, and I as good as told him he'd nothing to unbutton anyhow, so he gave me the sack, and I leave on Saturday week, and the place thereof shall know me no more.

I shall go to London, and my old landlady, Mrs Inger, 17 Coburg Square, will either give me a room or will find one for me.

Be sure your sins will find you out, especially if you're married and her name's Bertha —

There was not a word about herself, or to her. Connie resented this. He might have said some few words of consolation or reassurance. But she knew he was leaving her free, free to go back to Wragby and to Clifford. She resented that too. He need not be so falsely chivalrous. She wished he had said to Clifford: 'Yes, she is my lover and my mistress and I am proud of it!' But his courage wouldn't carry him so far.

So her name was coupled with his in Tevershall! It was a mess. But that would soon die down.

She was angry, with the complicated and confused anger that made her inert. She did not know what to do nor what to say, so she said and did nothing. She went on at Venice just the same, rowing out in the gondola with Duncan Forbes, bathing, letting the days slip by. Duncan, who had been rather depressingly in love with her ten years ago, was in love with her again. But she said to him: 'I only want one thing of men, and that is, that they should leave me alone.'

So Duncan left her alone: really quite pleased to be able to. All the same, he offered her a soft stream of a queer, inverted sort of love. He wanted to be with her.

'Have you ever thought,' he said to her one day, 'how very little people are connected with one another. Look at Daniele! He is handsome as a son of the sun. But see how alone he looks in his handsomeness. Yet I bet he has a wife

and family, and couldn't possibly go away from them.'

'Ask him,' said Connie.

Duncan did so. Daniele said he was married, and had two children, both male, aged seven and nine. But he betrayed no emotion over the fact.

'Perhaps only people who are capable of real togetherness have that look of being alone in the universe,' said Connie. 'The others have a certain stickiness, they stick to the mass, like Giovanni.' 'And,' she thought to herself, 'like you, Duncan.'

CHAPTER 18

She had to make up her mind what to do. She would leave Venice on the Saturday that he was leaving Wragby: in six days' time. This would bring her to London on the Monday following, and she would then see him. She wrote to him to the London address, asking him to send her a letter to Hartland's hotel, and to call for her on the Monday evening at seven.

Inside herself she was curiously and complicatedly angry, and all her responses were numb. She refused to confide even in Hilda, and Hilda, offended by her steady silence, had become rather intimate with a Dutch woman. Connie hated these rather stifling intimacies between women, intimacy into which Hilda always entered ponderously.

Sir Malcolm decided to travel with Connie, and Duncan could come on with Hilda. The old artist always did himself well: he took berths on the Orient Express, in spite of Connie's dislike of trains de luxe, the atmosphere of vulgar depravity there is aboard them nowadays. However, it would make the journey to Paris shorter.

Sir Malcolm was always uneasy going back to his wife. It was habit carried over from the first wife. But there would be a house-party for the grouse, and he wanted to be well ahead. Connie, sunburnt and handsome, sat in silence, forgetting all about the landscape.

'A little dull for you, going back to Wragby,' said her father, noticing her glumness.

'I'm not sure I shall go back to Wragby,' she said, with startling abruptness, looking into his eyes with her big blue eyes. His big blue eyes took on the frightened look of a man whose social conscience is not quite clear.

'You mean you'll stay on in Paris a while?'

'No! I mean never go back to Wragby.'

He was bothered by his own little problems, and sincerely hoped he was getting none of hers to shoulder.

'How's that, all at once?' he asked.

'I'm going to have a child.'

It was the first time she had uttered the words to any living soul, and it seemed to mark a cleavage in her life.

'How do you know?' said her father.

She smiled.

‘How should I know?’

‘But not Clifford’s child, of course?’

‘No! Another man’s.’

She rather enjoyed tormenting him.

‘Do I know the man?’ asked Sir Malcolm.

‘No! You’ve never seen him.’

There was a long pause.

‘And what are your plans?’

‘I don’t know. That’s the point.’

‘No patching it up with Clifford?’

‘I suppose Clifford would take it,’ said Connie. ‘He told me, after last time you talked to him, he wouldn’t mind if I had a child, so long as I went about it discreetly.’

‘Only sensible thing he could say, under the circumstances. Then I suppose it’ll be all right.’

‘In what way?’ said Connie, looking into her father’s eyes. They were big blue eyes rather like her own, but with a certain uneasiness in them, a look sometimes of an uneasy little boy, sometimes a look of sullen selfishness, usually good-humoured and wary.

‘You can present Clifford with an heir to all the Chatterleys, and put another baronet in Wragby.’

Sir Malcolm’s face smiled with a half-sensual smile.

‘But I don’t think I want to,’ she said.

‘Why not? Feeling entangled with the other man? Well! If you want the truth from me, my child, it’s this. The world goes on. Wragby stands and will go on standing. The world is more or less a fixed thing and, externally, we have to adapt ourselves to it. Privately, in my private opinion, we can please ourselves. Emotions change. You may like one man this year and another next. But Wragby still stands. Stick by Wragby as far as Wragby sticks by you. Then please yourself. But you’ll get very little out of making a break. You can make a break if you wish. You have an independent income, the only thing that never lets you down. But you won’t get much out of it. Put a little baronet in Wragby. It’s an amusing thing to do.’

And Sir Malcolm sat back and smiled again. Connie did not answer.

‘I hope you had a real man at last,’ he said to her after a while, sensually alert.

‘I did. That’s the trouble. There aren’t many of them about,’ she said.

‘No, by God!’ he mused. ‘There aren’t! Well, my dear, to look at you, he was a lucky man. Surely he wouldn’t make trouble for you?’

‘Oh no! He leaves me my own mistress entirely.’

‘Quite! Quite! A genuine man would.’

Sir Malcolm was pleased. Connie was his favourite daughter, he had always liked the female in her. Not so much of her mother in her as in Hilda. And he had always disliked Clifford. So he was pleased, and very tender with his daughter, as if the unborn child were his child.

He drove with her to Hartland’s hotel, and saw her installed: then went round to his club. She had refused his company for the evening.

She found a letter from Mellors.

I won’t come round to your hotel, but I’ll wait for you outside the Golden Cock in Adam Street at seven.

There he stood, tall and slender, and so different, in a formal suit of thin dark cloth. He had a natural distinction, but he had not the cut-to-pattern look of her class. Yet, she saw at once, he could go anywhere. He had a native breeding which was really much nicer than the cut-to-pattern class thing.

‘Ah, there you are! How well you look!’

‘Yes! But not you.’

She looked in his face anxiously. It was thin, and the cheekbones showed. But his eyes smiled at her, and she felt at home with him. There it was: suddenly, the tension of keeping up her appearances fell from her. Something flowed out of him physically, that made her feel inwardly at ease and happy, at home. With a woman’s now alert instinct for happiness, she registered it at once. ‘I’m happy when he’s there!’ Not all the sunshine of Venice had given her this inward expansion and warmth.

‘Was it horrid for you?’ she asked as she sat opposite him at table. He was too thin; she saw it now. His hand lay as she knew it, with the curious loose forgottenness of a sleeping animal. She wanted so much to take it and kiss it. But she did not quite dare.

‘People are always horrid,’ he said.

‘And did you mind very much?’

‘I minded, as I always shall mind. And I knew I was a fool to mind.’

‘Did you feel like a dog with a tin can tied to its tail? Clifford said you felt like that.’

He looked at her. It was cruel of her at that moment: for his pride had suffered bitterly.

‘I suppose I did,’ he said.

She never knew the fierce bitterness with which he resented insult.

There was a long pause.

‘And did you miss me?’ she asked.

‘I was glad you were out of it.’

Again there was a pause.

‘But did people believe about you and me?’ she asked.

‘No! I don’t think so for a moment.’

‘Did Clifford?’

‘I should say not. He put it off without thinking about it. But naturally it made him want to see the last of me.’

‘I’m going to have a child.’

The expression died utterly out of his face, out of his whole body. He looked at her with darkened eyes, whose look she could not understand at all: like some dark-flamed spirit looking at her.

‘Say you’re glad!’ she pleaded, groping for his hand. And she saw a certain exultance spring up in him. But it was netted down by things she could not understand.

‘It’s the future,’ he said.

‘But aren’t you glad?’ she persisted.

‘I have such a terrible mistrust of the future.’

‘But you needn’t be troubled by any responsibility. Clifford would have it as his own, he’d be glad.’

She saw him go pale, and recoil under this. He did not answer.

‘Shall I go back to Clifford and put a little baronet into Wragby?’ she asked.

He looked at her, pale and very remote. The ugly little grin flickered on his face.

‘You wouldn’t have to tell him who the father was?’

‘Oh!’ she said; ‘he’d take it even then, if I wanted him to.’

He thought for a time.

‘Ay!’ he said at last, to himself. ‘I suppose he would.’

There was silence. A big gulf was between them.

‘But you don’t want me to go back to Clifford, do you?’ she asked him.

‘What do you want yourself?’ he replied.

‘I want to live with you,’ she said simply.

In spite of himself, little flames ran over his belly as he heard her say it, and he dropped his head. Then he looked up at her again, with those haunted eyes.

‘If it’s worth it to you,’ he said. ‘I’ve got nothing.’

‘You’ve got more than most men. Come, you know it,’ she said.

‘In one way, I know it.’ He was silent for a time, thinking. Then he resumed: ‘They used to say I had too much of the woman in me. But it’s not that. I’m not a woman not because I don’t want to shoot birds, neither because I don’t want to make money, or get on. I could have got on in the army, easily, but I didn’t like the army. Though I could manage the men all right: they liked me and they had a

bit of a holy fear of me when I got mad. No, it was stupid, dead-handed higher authority that made the army dead: absolutely fool-dead. I like men, and men like me. But I can't stand the twaddling bossy impudence of the people who run this world. That's why I can't get on. I hate the impudence of money, and I hate the impudence of class. So in the world as it is, what have I to offer a woman?'

'But why offer anything? It's not a bargain. It's just that we love one another,' she said.

'Nay, nay! It's more than that. Living is moving and moving on. My life won't go down the proper gutters, it just won't. So I'm a bit of a waste ticket by myself. And I've no business to take a woman into my life, unless my life does something and gets somewhere, inwardly at least, to keep us both fresh. A man must offer a woman some meaning in his life, if it's going to be an isolated life, and if she's a genuine woman. I can't be just your male concubine.'

'Why not?' she said.

'Why, because I can't. And you would soon hate it.'

'As if you couldn't trust me,' she said.

The grin flickered on his face.

'The money is yours, the position is yours, the decisions will lie with you. I'm not just my Lady's fucker, after all.'

'What else are you?'

'You may well ask. It no doubt is invisible. Yet I'm something to myself at least. I can see the point of my own existence, though I can quite understand nobody else's seeing it.'

'And will your existence have less point, if you live with me?'

He paused a long time before replying:

'It might.'

She too stayed to think about it.

'And what is the point of your existence?'

'I tell you, it's invisible. I don't believe in the world, not in money, nor in advancement, nor in the future of our civilization. If there's got to be a future for humanity, there'll have to be a very big change from what now is.'

'And what will the real future have to be like?'

'God knows! I can feel something inside me, all mixed up with a lot of rage. But what it really amounts to, I don't know.'

'Shall I tell you?' she said, looking into his face. 'Shall I tell you what you have that other men don't have, and that will make the future? Shall I tell you?'

'Tell me then,' he replied.

'It's the courage of your own tenderness, that's what it is: like when you put your hand on my tail and say I've got a pretty tail.'

The grin came flickering on his face.

‘That!’ he said.

Then he sat thinking.

‘Ay!’ he said. ‘You’re right. It’s that really. It’s that all the way through. I knew it with the men. I had to be in touch with them, physically, and not go back on it. I had to be bodily aware of them and a bit tender to them, even if I put em through hell. It’s a question of awareness, as Buddha said. But even he fought shy of the bodily awareness, and that natural physical tenderness, which is the best, even between men; in a proper manly way. Makes ‘em really manly, not so monkeyish. Ay! it’s tenderness, really; it’s cunt-awareness. Sex is really only touch, the closest of all touch. And it’s touch we’re afraid of. We’re only half-conscious, and half alive. We’ve got to come alive and aware. Especially the English have got to get into touch with one another, a bit delicate and a bit tender. It’s our crying need.’

She looked at him.

‘Then why are you afraid of me?’ she said.

He looked at her a long time before he answered.

‘It’s the money, really, and the position. It’s the world in you.’

‘But isn’t there tenderness in me?’ she said wistfully.

He looked down at her, with darkened, abstract eyes.

‘Ay! It comes an’ goes, like in me.’

‘But can’t you trust it between you and me?’ she asked, gazing anxiously at him.

She saw his face all softening down, losing its armour. ‘Maybe!’ he said. They were both silent.

‘I want you to hold me in your arms,’ she said. ‘I want you to tell me you are glad we are having a child.’

She looked so lovely and warm and wistful, his bowels stirred towards her.

‘I suppose we can go to my room,’ he said. ‘Though it’s scandalous again.’

But she saw the forgetfulness of the world coming over him again, his face taking the soft, pure look of tender passion.

They walked by the remoter streets to Coburg Square, where he had a room at the top of the house, an attic room where he cooked for himself on a gas ring. It was small, but decent and tidy.

She took off her things, and made him do the same. She was lovely in the soft first flush of her pregnancy.

‘I ought to leave you alone,’ he said.

‘No!’ she said. ‘Love me! Love me, and say you’ll keep me. Say you’ll keep me! Say you’ll never let me go, to the world nor to anybody.’

She crept close against him, clinging fast to his thin, strong naked body, the only home she had ever known.

‘Then I’ll keep thee,’ he said. ‘If tha wants it, then I’ll keep thee.’

He held her round and fast.

‘And say you’re glad about the child,’ she repeated.

‘Kiss it! Kiss my womb and say you’re glad it’s there.’

But that was more difficult for him.

‘I’ve a dread of puttin’ children i’ th’ world,’ he said. ‘I’ve such a dread o’ th’ future for ‘em.’

‘But you’ve put it into me. Be tender to it, and that will be its future already. Kiss it!’

He quivered, because it was true. ‘Be tender to it, and that will be its future.’ — At that moment he felt a sheer love for the woman. He kissed her belly and her mound of Venus, to kiss close to the womb and the foetus within the womb.

‘Oh, you love me! You love me!’ she said, in a little cry like one of her blind, inarticulate love cries. And he went in to her softly, feeling the stream of tenderness flowing in release from his bowels to hers, the bowels of compassion kindled between them.

And he realized as he went into her that this was the thing he had to do, to come into tender touch, without losing his pride or his dignity or his integrity as a man. After all, if she had money and means, and he had none, he should be too proud and honourable to hold back his tenderness from her on that account. ‘I stand for the touch of bodily awareness between human beings,’ he said to himself, ‘and the touch of tenderness. And she is my mate. And it is a battle against the money, and the machine, and the insentient ideal monkeyishness of the world. And she will stand behind me there. Thank God I’ve got a woman! Thank God I’ve got a woman who is with me, and tender and aware of me. Thank God she’s not a bully, nor a fool. Thank God she’s a tender, aware woman.’ And as his seed sprang in her, his soul sprang towards her too, in the creative act that is far more than procreative.

She was quite determined now that there should be no parting between him and her. But the ways and means were still to settle.

‘Did you hate Bertha Coutts?’ she asked him.

‘Don’t talk to me about her.’

‘Yes! You must let me. Because once you liked her. And once you were as intimate with her as you are with me. So you have to tell me. Isn’t it rather terrible, when you’ve been intimate with her, to hate her so? Why is it?’

‘I don’t know. She sort of kept her will ready against me, always, always: her ghastly female will: her freedom! A woman’s ghastly freedom that ends in the

most beastly bullying! Oh, she always kept her freedom against me, like vitriol in my face.'

'But she's not free of you even now. Does she still love you?'

'No, no! If she's not free of me, it's because she's got that mad rage, she must try to bully me.'

'But she must have loved you.'

'No! Well, in specks she did. She was drawn to me. And I think even that she hated. She loved me in moments. But she always took it back, and started bullying. Her deepest desire was to bully me, and there was no altering her. Her will was wrong, from the first.'

'But perhaps she felt you didn't really love her, and she wanted to make you.'

'My God, it was bloody making.'

'But you didn't really love her, did you? You did her that wrong.'

'How could I? I began to. I began to love her. But somehow, she always ripped me up. No, don't let's talk of it. It was a doom, that was. And she was a doomed woman. This last time, I'd have shot her like I shoot a stoat, if I'd but been allowed: a raving, doomed thing in the shape of a woman! If only I could have shot her, and ended the whole misery! It ought to be allowed. When a woman gets absolutely possessed by her own will, her own will set against everything, then it's fearful, and she should be shot at last.'

'And shouldn't men be shot at last, if they get possessed by their own will?'

'Ay! — the same! But I must get free of her, or she'll be at me again. I wanted to tell you. I must get a divorce if I possibly can. So we must be careful. We mustn't really be seen together, you and I. I never, never could stand it if she came down on me and you.'

Connie pondered this.

'Then we can't be together?' she said.

'Not for six months or so. But I think my divorce will go through in September; then till March.'

'But the baby will probably be born at the end of February,' she said.

He was silent.

'I could wish the Cliffords and Berthas all dead,' he said.

'It's not being very tender to them,' she said.

'Tender to them? Yea, even then the tenderest thing you could do for them, perhaps, would be to give them death. They can't live! They only frustrate life. Their souls are awful inside them. Death ought to be sweet to them. And I ought to be allowed to shoot them.'

'But you wouldn't do it,' she said.

'I would though! and with less qualms than I shoot a weasel. It anyhow has a

prettiness and a loneliness. But they are legion. Oh, I'd shoot them.'

'Then perhaps it is just as well you daren't.'

'Well.'

Connie had now plenty to think of. It was evident he wanted absolutely to be free of Bertha Coutts. And she felt he was right. The last attack had been too grim. This meant her living alone, till spring. Perhaps she could get divorced from Clifford. But how? If Mellors were named, then there was an end to his divorce. How loathsome! Couldn't one go right away, to the far ends of the earth, and be free from it all?

One could not. The far ends of the world are not five minutes from Charing Cross, nowadays. While the wireless is active, there are no far ends of the earth. Kings of Dahomey and Lamas of Tibet listen in to London and New York.

Patience! Patience! The world is a vast and ghastly intricacy of mechanism, and one has to be very wary, not to get mangled by it.

Connie confided in her father.

'You see, Father, he was Clifford's game-keeper: but he was an officer in the army in India. Only he is like Colonel C. E. Florence, who preferred to become a private soldier again.'

Sir Malcolm, however, had no sympathy with the unsatisfactory mysticism of the famous C. E. Florence. He saw too much advertisement behind all the humility. It looked just like the sort of conceit the knight most loathed, the conceit of self-abasement.

'Where did your game-keeper spring from?' asked Sir Malcolm irritably.

'He was a collier's son in Tevershall. But he's absolutely presentable.'

The knighted artist became more angry.

'Looks to me like a gold-digger,' he said. 'And you're a pretty easy gold-mine, apparently.'

'No, Father, it's not like that. You'd know if you saw him. He's a man. Clifford always detested him for not being humble.'

'Apparently he had a good instinct, for once.'

What Sir Malcolm could not bear was the scandal of his daughter's having an intrigue with a game-keeper. He did not mind the intrigue: he minded the scandal.

'I care nothing about the fellow. He's evidently been able to get round you all right. But, by God, think of all the talk. Think of your step-mother how she'll take it!'

'I know,' said Connie. 'Talk is beastly: especially if you live in society. And he wants so much to get his own divorce. I thought we might perhaps say it was another man's child, and not mention Mellors' name at all.'

‘Another man’s! What other man’s?’

‘Perhaps Duncan Forbes. He has been our friend all his life.’

‘And he’s a fairly well-known artist. And he’s fond of me.’

‘Well I’m damned! Poor Duncan! And what’s he going to get out of it?’

‘I don’t know. But he might rather like it, even.’

‘He might, might he? Well, he’s a funny man if he does. Why, you’ve never even had an affair with him, have you?’

‘No! But he doesn’t really want it. He only loves me to be near him, but not to touch him.’

‘My God, what a generation!’

‘He would like me most of all to be a model for him to paint from. Only I never wanted to.’

‘God help him! But he looks down-trodden enough for anything.’

‘Still, you wouldn’t mind so much the talk about him?’

‘My God, Connie, all the bloody contriving!’

‘I know! It’s sickening! But what can I do?’

‘Contriving, conniving; conniving, contriving! Makes a man think he’s lived too long.’

‘Come, Father, if you haven’t done a good deal of contriving and conniving in your time, you may talk.’

‘But it was different, I assure you.’

‘It’s always different.’

Hilda arrived, also furious when she heard of the new developments. And she also simply could not stand the thought of a public scandal about her sister and a game-keeper. Too, too humiliating!

‘Why should we not just disappear, separately, to British Columbia, and have no scandal?’ said Connie.

But that was no good. The scandal would come out just the same. And if Connie was going with the man, she’d better be able to marry him. This was Hilda’s opinion. Sir Malcolm wasn’t sure. The affair might still blow over.

‘But will you see him, Father?’

Poor Sir Malcolm! he was by no means keen on it. And poor Mellors, he was still less keen. Yet the meeting took place: a lunch in a private room at the club, the two men alone, looking one another up and down.

Sir Malcolm drank a fair amount of whisky, Mellors also drank. And they talked all the while about India, on which the young man was well informed.

This lasted during the meal. Only when coffee was served, and the waiter had gone, Sir Malcolm lit a cigar and said, heartily:

‘Well, young man, and what about my daughter?’

The grin flickered on Mellors' face.

'Well, Sir, and what about her?'

'You've got a baby in her all right.'

'I have that honour!' grinned Mellors.

'Honour, by God!' Sir Malcolm gave a little squirting laugh, and became Scotch and lewd. 'Honour! How was the going, eh? Good, my boy, what?'

'Good!'

'I'll bet it was! Ha-ha! My daughter, chip of the old block, what! I never went back on a good bit of fucking, myself. Though her mother, oh, holy saints!' He rolled his eyes to heaven. 'But you warmed her up, oh, you warmed her up, I can see that. Ha-ha! My blood in her! You set fire to her haystack all right. Ha-ha-ha! I was jolly glad of it, I can tell you. She needed it. Oh, she's a nice girl, she's a nice girl, and I knew she'd be good going, if only some damned man would set her stack on fire! Ha-ha-ha! A game-keeper, eh, my boy! Bloody good poacher, if you ask me. Ha-ha! But now, look here, speaking seriously, what are we going to do about it? Speaking seriously, you know!'

Speaking seriously, they didn't get very far. Mellors, though a little tipsy, was much the soberer of the two. He kept the conversation as intelligent as possible: which isn't saying much.

'So you're a game-keeper! Oh, you're quite right! That sort of game is worth a man's while, eh, what? The test of a woman is when you pinch her bottom. You can tell just by the feel of her bottom if she's going to come up all right. Ha-ha! I envy you, my boy. How old are you?'

'Thirty-nine.'

The knight lifted his eyebrows.

'As much as that! Well, you've another good twenty years, by the look of you. Oh, game-keeper or not, you're a good cock. I can see that with one eye shut. Not like that blasted Clifford! A lily-livered hound with never a fuck in him, never had. I like you, my boy, I'll bet you've a good cod on you; oh, you're a bantam, I can see that. You're a fighter. Game-keeper! Ha-ha, by crikey, I wouldn't trust my game to you! But look here, seriously, what are we going to do about it? The world's full of blasted old women.'

Seriously, they didn't do anything about it, except establish the old free-masonry of male sensuality between them.

'And look here, my boy, if ever I can do anything for you, you can rely on me. Game-keeper! Christ, but it's rich! I like it! Oh, I like it! Shows the girl's got spunk. What? After all, you know, she has her own income, moderate, moderate, but above starvation. And I'll leave her what I've got. By God, I will. She deserves it for showing spunk, in a world of old women. I've been struggling to

get myself clear of the skirts of old women for seventy years, and haven't managed it yet. But you're the man, I can see that.'

'I'm glad you think so. They usually tell me, in a sideways fashion, that I'm the monkey.'

'Oh, they would! My dear fellow, what could you be but a monkey, to all the old women?'

They parted most genially, and Mellors laughed inwardly all the time for the rest of the day.

The following day he had lunch with Connie and Hilda, at some discreet place.

'It's a very great pity it's such an ugly situation all round,' said Hilda.

'I had a lot o' fun out of it,' said he.

'I think you might have avoided putting children into the world until you were both free to marry and have children.'

'The Lord blew a bit too soon on the spark,' said he.

'I think the Lord had nothing to do with it. Of course, Connie has enough money to keep you both, but the situation is unbearable.'

'But then you don't have to bear more than a small corner of it, do you?' said he.

'If you'd been in her own class.'

'Or if I'd been in a cage at the Zoo.'

There was silence.

'I think,' said Hilda, 'it will be best if she names quite another man as co-respondent and you stay out of it altogether.'

'But I thought I'd put my foot right in.'

'I mean in the divorce proceedings.'

He gazed at her in wonder. Connie had not dared mention the Duncan scheme to him.

'I don't follow,' he said.

'We have a friend who would probably agree to be named as co-respondent, so that your name need not appear,' said Hilda.

'You mean a man?'

'Of course!'

'But she's got no other?'

He looked in wonder at Connie.

'No, no!' she said hastily. 'Only that old friendship, quite simple, no love.'

'Then why should the fellow take the blame? If he's had nothing out of you?'

'Some men are chivalrous and don't only count what they get out of a woman,' said Hilda.

‘One for me, eh? But who’s the johnny?’

‘A friend whom we’ve known since we were children in Scotland, an artist.’

‘Duncan Forbes!’ he said at once, for Connie had talked to him.

‘And how would you shift the blame on to him?’

‘They could stay together in some hotel, or she could even stay in his apartment.’

‘Seems to me like a lot of fuss for nothing,’ he said.

‘What else do you suggest?’ said Hilda. ‘If your name appears, you will get no divorce from your wife, who is apparently quite an impossible person to be mixed up with.’

‘All that!’ he said grimly.

There was a long silence.

‘We could go right away,’ he said.

‘There is no right away for Connie,’ said Hilda. ‘Clifford is too well known.’

Again the silence of pure frustration.

‘The world is what it is. If you want to live together without being persecuted, you will have to marry. To marry, you both have to be divorced. So how are you both going about it?’

He was silent for a long time.

‘How are you going about it for us?’ he said.

‘We will see if Duncan will consent to figure as co-respondent: then we must get Clifford to divorce Connie: and you must go on with your divorce, and you must both keep apart till you are free.’

‘Sounds like a lunatic asylum.’

‘Possibly! And the world would look on you as lunatics: or worse.’

‘What is worse?’

‘Criminals, I suppose.’

‘Hope I can plunge in the dagger a few more times yet,’ he said, grinning. Then he was silent, and angry.

‘Well!’ he said at last. ‘I agree to anything. The world is a raving idiot, and no man can kill it: though I’ll do my best. But you’re right. We must rescue ourselves as best we can.’

He looked in humiliation, anger, weariness and misery at Connie.

‘Ma lass!’ he said. ‘The world’s goin’ to put salt on thy tail.’

‘Not if we don’t let it,’ she said.

She minded this conniving against the world less than he did.

Duncan, when approached, also insisted on seeing the delinquent game-keeper, so there was a dinner, this time in his flat: the four of them. Duncan was a rather short, broad, dark-skinned, taciturn Hamlet of a fellow with straight

black hair and a weird Celtic conceit of himself. His art was all tubes and valves and spirals and strange colours, ultra-modern, yet with a certain power, even a certain purity of form and tone: only Mellors thought it cruel and repellent. He did not venture to say so, for Duncan was almost insane on the point of his art: it was a personal cult, a personal religion with him.

They were looking at the pictures in the studio, and Duncan kept his smallish brown eyes on the other man. He wanted to hear what the game-keeper would say. He knew already Connie's and Hilda's opinions.

'It is like a pure bit of murder,' said Mellors at last; a speech Duncan by no means expected from a game-keeper.

'And who is murdered?' asked Hilda, rather coldly and sneeringly.

'Me! It murders all the bowels of compassion in a man.'

A wave of pure hate came out of the artist. He heard the note of dislike in the other man's voice, and the note of contempt. And he himself loathed the mention of bowels of compassion. Sickly sentiment!

Mellors stood rather tall and thin, worn-looking, gazing with flickering detachment that was something like the dancing of a moth on the wing, at the pictures.

'Perhaps stupidity is murdered; sentimental stupidity,' sneered the artist.

'Do you think so? I think all these tubes and corrugated vibrations are stupid enough for anything, and pretty sentimental. They show a lot of self-pity and an awful lot of nervous self-opinion, seems to me.'

In another wave of hate the artist's face looked yellow. But with a sort of silent hauteur he turned the pictures to the wall.

'I think we may go to the dining-room,' he said. And they trailed off, dismally.

After coffee, Duncan said:

'I don't at all mind posing as the father of Connie's child. But only on the condition that she'll come and pose as a model for me. I've wanted her for years, and she's always refused.' He uttered it with the dark finality of an inquisitor announcing an auto da fe.

'Ah!' said Mellors. 'You only do it on condition, then?'

'Quite! I only do it on that condition.' The artist tried to put the utmost contempt of the other person into his speech. He put a little too much.

'Better have me as a model at the same time,' said Mellors. 'Better do us in a group, Vulcan and Venus under the net of art. I used to be a blacksmith, before I was a game-keeper.'

'Thank you,' said the artist. 'I don't think Vulcan has a figure that interests me.'

‘Not even if it was tubified and titivated up?’

There was no answer. The artist was too haughty for further words.

It was a dismal party, in which the artist henceforth steadily ignored the presence of the other man, and talked only briefly, as if the words were wrung out of the depths of his gloomy portentousness, to the women.

‘You didn’t like him, but he’s better than that, really. He’s really kind,’ Connie explained as they left.

‘He’s a little black pup with a corrugated distemper,’ said Mellors.

‘No, he wasn’t nice today.’

‘And will you go and be a model to him?’

‘Oh, I don’t really mind any more. He won’t touch me. And I don’t mind anything, if it paves the way to a life together for you and me.’

‘But he’ll only shit on you on canvas.’

‘I don’t care. He’ll only be painting his own feelings for me, and I don’t mind if he does that. I wouldn’t have him touch me, not for anything. But if he thinks he can do anything with his owlish arty staring, let him stare. He can make as many empty tubes and corrugations out of me as he likes. It’s his funeral. He hated you for what you said: that his tubified art is sentimental and self-important. But of course it’s true.’

CHAPTER 19

Dear Clifford, I am afraid what you foresaw has happened. I am really in love with another man, and do hope you will divorce me. I am staying at present with Duncan in his flat. I told you he was at Venice with us. I'm awfully unhappy for your sake: but do try to take it quietly. You don't really need me any more, and I can't bear to come back to Wragby. I'm awfully sorry. But do try to forgive me, and divorce me and find someone better. I'm not really the right person for you, I am too impatient and selfish, I suppose. But I can't ever come back to live with you again. And I feel so frightfully sorry about it all, for your sake. But if you don't let yourself get worked up, you'll see you won't mind so frightfully. You didn't really care about me personally. So do forgive me and get rid of me.

Clifford was not inwardly surprised to get this letter. Inwardly, he had known for a long time she was leaving him. But he had absolutely refused any outward admission of it. Therefore, outwardly, it came as the most terrible blow and shock to him. He had kept the surface of his confidence in her quite serene.

And that is how we are. By strength of will we cut off our inner intuitive knowledge from admitted consciousness. This causes a state of dread, or apprehension, which makes the blow ten times worse when it does fall.

Clifford was like a hysterical child. He gave Mrs Bolton a terrible shock, sitting up in bed ghastly and blank.

'Why, Sir Clifford, whatever's the matter?'

No answer! She was terrified lest he had had a stroke. She hurried and felt his face, took his pulse.

'Is there a pain? Do try and tell me where it hurts you. Do tell me!'

No answer!

'Oh dear, oh dear! Then I'll telephone to Sheffield for Dr Carrington, and Dr Lecky may as well run round straight away.'

She was moving to the door, when he said in a hollow tone:

'No!'

She stopped and gazed at him. His face was yellow, blank, and like the face of an idiot.

'Do you mean you'd rather I didn't fetch the doctor?'

'Yes! I don't want him,' came the sepulchral voice.

'Oh, but Sir Clifford, you're ill, and I daren't take the responsibility. I must send for the doctor, or I shall be blamed.'

A pause: then the hollow voice said:

‘I’m not ill. My wife isn’t coming back.’ It was as if an image spoke.

‘Not coming back? you mean her ladyship?’ Mrs Bolton moved a little nearer to the bed. ‘Oh, don’t you believe it. You can trust her ladyship to come back.’

The image in the bed did not change, but it pushed a letter over the counterpane.

‘Read it!’ said the sepulchral voice.

‘Why, if it’s a letter from her ladyship, I’m sure her ladyship wouldn’t want me to read her letter to you, Sir Clifford. You can tell me what she says, if you wish.’

‘Read it!’ repeated the voice.

‘Why, if I must, I do it to obey you, Sir Clifford,’ she said. And she read the letter.

‘Well, I am, surprised at her ladyship,’ she said. ‘She promised so faithfully she’d come back!’

The face in the bed seemed to deepen its expression of wild, but motionless distraction. Mrs Bolton looked at it and was worried. She knew what she was up against: male hysteria. She had not nursed soldiers without learning something about that very unpleasant disease.

She was a little impatient of Sir Clifford. Any man in his senses must have known his wife was in love with somebody else, and was going to leave him. Even, she was sure, Sir Clifford was inwardly absolutely aware of it, only he wouldn’t admit it to himself. If he would have admitted it, and prepared himself for it: or if he would have admitted it, and actively struggled with his wife against it: that would have been acting like a man. But no! he knew it, and all the time tried to kid himself it wasn’t so. He felt the devil twisting his tail, and pretended it was the angels smiling on him. This state of falsity had now brought on that crisis of falsity and dislocation, hysteria, which is a form of insanity. ‘It comes’, she thought to herself, hating him a little, ‘because he always thinks of himself. He’s so wrapped up in his own immortal self, that when he does get a shock he’s like a mummy tangled in its own bandages. Look at him!’

But hysteria is dangerous: and she was a nurse, it was her duty to pull him out. Any attempt to rouse his manhood and his pride would only make him worse: for his manhood was dead, temporarily if not finally. He would only squirm softer and softer, like a worm, and become more dislocated.

The only thing was to release his self-pity. Like the lady in Tennyson, he must weep or he must die.

So Mrs Bolton began to weep first. She covered her face with her hand and burst into little wild sobs. ‘I would never have believed it of her ladyship, I

wouldn't!' she wept, suddenly summoning up all her old grief and sense of woe, and weeping the tears of her own bitter chagrin. Once she started, her weeping was genuine enough, for she had had something to weep for.

Clifford thought of the way he had been betrayed by the woman Connie, and in a contagion of grief, tears filled his eyes and began to run down his cheeks. He was weeping for himself. Mrs Bolton, as soon as she saw the tears running over his blank face, hastily wiped her own wet cheeks on her little handkerchief, and leaned towards him.

'Now, don't you fret, Sir Clifford!' she said, in a luxury of emotion. 'Now, don't you fret, don't, you'll only do yourself an injury!'

His body shivered suddenly in an indrawn breath of silent sobbing, and the tears ran quicker down his face. She laid her hand on his arm, and her own tears fell again. Again the shiver went through him, like a convulsion, and she laid her arm round his shoulder. 'There, there! There, there! Don't you fret, then, don't you! Don't you fret!' she moaned to him, while her own tears fell. And she drew him to her, and held her arms round his great shoulders, while he laid his face on her bosom and sobbed, shaking and hulking his huge shoulders, whilst she softly stroked his dusky-blond hair and said: 'There! There! There! There then! There then! Never you mind! Never you mind, then!'

And he put his arms round her and clung to her like a child, wetting the bib of her starched white apron, and the bosom of her pale-blue cotton dress, with his tears. He had let himself go altogether, at last.

So at length she kissed him, and rocked him on her bosom, and in her heart she said to herself: 'Oh, Sir Clifford! Oh, high and mighty Chatterleys! Is this what you've come down to!' And finally he even went to sleep, like a child. And she felt worn out, and went to her own room, where she laughed and cried at once, with a hysteria of her own. It was so ridiculous! It was so awful! Such a come-down! So shameful! And it was so upsetting as well.

After this, Clifford became like a child with Mrs Bolton. He would hold her hand, and rest his head on her breast, and when she once lightly kissed him, he said! 'Yes! Do kiss me! Do kiss me!' And when she sponged his great blond body, he would say the same! 'Do kiss me!' and she would lightly kiss his body, anywhere, half in mockery.

And he lay with a queer, blank face like a child, with a bit of the wonderment of a child. And he would gaze on her with wide, childish eyes, in a relaxation of madonna-worship. It was sheer relaxation on his part, letting go all his manhood, and sinking back to a childish position that was really perverse. And then he would put his hand into her bosom and feel her breasts, and kiss them in exultation, the exultation of perversity, of being a child when he was a man.

Mrs Bolton was both thrilled and ashamed, she both loved and hated it. Yet she never rebuffed nor rebuked him. And they drew into a closer physical intimacy, an intimacy of perversity, when he was a child stricken with an apparent candour and an apparent wonderment, that looked almost like a religious exaltation: the perverse and literal rendering of: 'except ye become again as a little child'. While she was the Magna Mater, full of power and potency, having the great blond child-man under her will and her stroke entirely.

The curious thing was that when this child-man, which Clifford was now and which he had been becoming for years, emerged into the world, it was much sharper and keener than the real man he used to be. This perverted child-man was now a real business-man; when it was a question of affairs, he was an absolute he-man, sharp as a needle, and impervious as a bit of steel. When he was out among men, seeking his own ends, and 'making good' his colliery workings, he had an almost uncanny shrewdness, hardness, and a straight sharp punch. It was as if his very passivity and prostitution to the Magna Mater gave him insight into material business affairs, and lent him a certain remarkable inhuman force. The wallowing in private emotion, the utter abasement of his manly self, seemed to lend him a second nature, cold, almost visionary, business-clever. In business he was quite inhuman.

And in this Mrs Bolton triumphed. 'How he's getting on!' she would say to herself in pride. 'And that's my doing! My word, he'd never have got on like this with Lady Chatterley. She was not the one to put a man forward. She wanted too much for herself.'

At the same time, in some corner of her weird female soul, how she despised him and hated him! He was to her the fallen beast, the squirming monster. And while she aided and abetted him all she could, away in the remotest corner of her ancient healthy womanhood she despised him with a savage contempt that knew no bounds. The merest tramp was better than he.

His behaviour with regard to Connie was curious. He insisted on seeing her again. He insisted, moreover, on her coming to Wragby. On this point he was finally and absolutely fixed. Connie had promised to come back to Wragby, faithfully.

'But is it any use?' said Mrs Bolton. 'Can't you let her go, and be rid of her?'

'No! She said she was coming back, and she's got to come.'

Mrs Bolton opposed him no more. She knew what she was dealing with.

I needn't tell you what effect your letter has had on me [he wrote to Connie to London]. Perhaps you can imagine it if you try, though no doubt you won't trouble to use your imagination on my behalf.

I can only say one thing in answer: I must see you personally, here at Wragby,

before I can do anything. You promised faithfully to come back to Wragby, and I hold you to the promise. I don't believe anything nor understand anything until I see you personally, here under normal circumstances. I needn't tell you that nobody here suspects anything, so your return would be quite normal. Then if you feel, after we have talked things over, that you still remain in the same mind, no doubt we can come to terms.

Connie showed this letter to Mellors.

'He wants to begin his revenge on you,' he said, handing the letter back.

Connie was silent. She was somewhat surprised to find that she was afraid of Clifford. She was afraid to go near him. She was afraid of him as if he were evil and dangerous.

'What shall I do?' she said.

'Nothing, if you don't want to do anything.'

She replied, trying to put Clifford off. He answered:

If you don't come back to Wragby now, I shall consider that you are coming back one day, and act accordingly. I shall just go on the same, and wait for you here, if I wait for fifty years.

She was frightened. This was bullying of an insidious sort. She had no doubt he meant what he said. He would not divorce her, and the child would be his, unless she could find some means of establishing its illegitimacy.

After a time of worry and harassment, she decided to go to Wragby. Hilda would go with her. She wrote this to Clifford. He replied:

I shall not welcome your sister, but I shall not deny her the door. I have no doubt she has connived at your desertion of your duties and responsibilities, so do not expect me to show pleasure in seeing her.

They went to Wragby. Clifford was away when they arrived. Mrs Bolton received them.

'Oh, your Ladyship, it isn't the happy home-coming we hoped for, is it!' she said.

'Isn't it?' said Connie.

So this woman knew! How much did the rest of the servants know or suspect?

She entered the house, which now she hated with every fibre in her body. The great, rambling mass of a place seemed evil to her, just a menace over her. She was no longer its mistress, she was its victim.

'I can't stay long here,' she whispered to Hilda, terrified.

And she suffered going into her own bedroom, re-entering into possession as if nothing had happened. She hated every minute inside the Wragby walls.

They did not meet Clifford till they went down to dinner. He was dressed, and with a black tie: rather reserved, and very much the superior gentleman. He

behaved perfectly politely during the meal and kept a polite sort of conversation going: but it seemed all touched with insanity.

‘How much do the servants know?’ asked Connie, when the woman was out of the room.

‘Of your intentions? Nothing whatsoever.’

‘Mrs Bolton knows.’

He changed colour.

‘Mrs Bolton is not exactly one of the servants,’ he said.

‘Oh, I don’t mind.’

There was tension till after coffee, when Hilda said she would go up to her room.

Clifford and Connie sat in silence when she had gone. Neither would begin to speak. Connie was so glad that he wasn’t taking the pathetic line, she kept him up to as much haughtiness as possible. She just sat silent and looked down at her hands.

‘I suppose you don’t at all mind having gone back on your word?’ he said at last.

‘I can’t help it,’ she murmured.

‘But if you can’t, who can?’

‘I suppose nobody.’

He looked at her with curious cold rage. He was used to her. She was as it were embedded in his will. How dared she now go back on him, and destroy the fabric of his daily existence? How dared she try to cause this derangement of his personality?

‘And for what do you want to go back on everything?’ he insisted.

‘Love!’ she said. It was best to be hackneyed.

‘Love of Duncan Forbes? But you didn’t think that worth having, when you met me. Do you mean to say you now love him better than anything else in life?’

‘One changes,’ she said.

‘Possibly! Possibly you may have whims. But you still have to convince me of the importance of the change. I merely don’t believe in your love of Duncan Forbes.’

‘But why should you believe in it? You have only to divorce me, not to believe in my feelings.’

‘And why should I divorce you?’

‘Because I don’t want to live here any more. And you really don’t want me.’

‘Pardon me! I don’t change. For my part, since you are my wife, I should prefer that you should stay under my roof in dignity and quiet. Leaving aside personal feelings, and I assure you, on my part it is leaving aside a great deal, it

is bitter as death to me to have this order of life broken up, here in Wragby, and the decent round of daily life smashed, just for some whim of yours.'

After a time of silence she said:

'I can't help it. I've got to go. I expect I shall have a child.'

He too was silent for a time.

'And is it for the child's sake you must go?' he asked at length.

She nodded.

'And why? Is Duncan Forbes so keen on his spawn?'

'Surely keener than you would be,' she said.

'But really? I want my wife, and I see no reason for letting her go. If she likes to bear a child under my roof, she is welcome, and the child is welcome: provided that the decency and order of life is preserved. Do you mean to tell me that Duncan Forbes has a greater hold over you? I don't believe it.'

There was a pause.

'But don't you see,' said Connie. 'I must go away from you, and I must live with the man I love.'

'No, I don't see it! I don't give tuppence for your love, nor for the man you love. I don't believe in that sort of cant.'

'But you see, I do.'

'Do you? My dear Madam, you are too intelligent, I assure you, to believe in your own love for Duncan Forbes. Believe me, even now you really care more for me. So why should I give in to such nonsense!'

She felt he was right there. And she felt she could keep silent no longer.

'Because it isn't Duncan that I do love,' she said, looking up at him.

'We only said it was Duncan, to spare your feelings.'

'To spare my feelings?'

'Yes! Because who I really love, and it'll make you hate me, is Mr Mellors, who was our game-keeper here.'

If he could have sprung out of his chair, he would have done so. His face went yellow, and his eyes bulged with disaster as he glared at her.

Then he dropped back in the chair, gasping and looking up at the ceiling.

At length he sat up.

'Do you mean to say you're telling me the truth?' he asked, looking gruesome.

'Yes! You know I am.'

'And when did you begin with him?'

'In the spring.'

He was silent like some beast in a trap.

'And it was you, then, in the bedroom at the cottage?'

So he had really inwardly known all the time.

‘Yes!’

He still leaned forward in his chair, gazing at her like a cornered beast.

‘My God, you ought to be wiped off the face of the earth!’

‘Why?’ she ejaculated faintly.

But he seemed not to hear.

‘That scum! That bumptious lout! That miserable cad! And carrying on with him all the time, while you were here and he was one of my servants! My God, my God, is there any end to the beastly lowness of women!’

He was beside himself with rage, as she knew he would be.

‘And you mean to say you want to have a child to a cad like that?’

‘Yes! I’m going to.’

‘You’re going to! You mean you’re sure! How long have you been sure?’

‘Since June.’

He was speechless, and the queer blank look of a child came over him again.

‘You’d wonder,’ he said at last, ‘that such beings were ever allowed to be born.’

‘What beings?’ she asked.

He looked at her weirdly, without an answer. It was obvious, he couldn’t even accept the fact of the existence of Mellors, in any connexion with his own life. It was sheer, unspeakable, impotent hate.

‘And do you mean to say you’d marry him? — and bear his foul name?’ he asked at length.

‘Yes, that’s what I want.’

He was again as if dumbfounded.

‘Yes!’ he said at last. ‘That proves that what I’ve always thought about you is correct: you’re not normal, you’re not in your right senses. You’re one of those half-insane, perverted women who must run after depravity, the *nostalgie de la boue*.’

Suddenly he had become almost wistfully moral, seeing himself the incarnation of good, and people like Mellors and Connie the incarnation of mud, of evil. He seemed to be growing vague, inside a nimbus.

‘So don’t you think you’d better divorce me and have done with it?’ she said.

‘No! You can go where you like, but I shan’t divorce you,’ he said idiotically.

‘Why not?’

He was silent, in the silence of imbecile obstinacy.

‘Would you even let the child be legally yours, and your heir?’ she said.

‘I care nothing about the child.’

‘But if it’s a boy it will be legally your son, and it will inherit your title, and have Wragby.’

‘I care nothing about that,’ he said.

‘But you must! I shall prevent the child from being legally yours, if I can. I’d so much rather it were illegitimate, and mine: if it can’t be Mellors’.’

‘Do as you like about that.’

He was immovable.

‘And won’t you divorce me?’ she said. ‘You can use Duncan as a pretext! There’d be no need to bring in the real name. Duncan doesn’t mind.’

‘I shall never divorce you,’ he said, as if a nail had been driven in.

‘But why? Because I want you to?’

‘Because I follow my own inclination, and I’m not inclined to.’

It was useless. She went upstairs and told Hilda the upshot.

‘Better get away tomorrow,’ said Hilda, ‘and let him come to his senses.’

So Connie spent half the night packing her really private and personal effects. In the morning she had her trunks sent to the station, without telling Clifford. She decided to see him only to say good-bye, before lunch.

But she spoke to Mrs Bolton.

‘I must say good-bye to you, Mrs Bolton, you know why. But I can trust you not to talk.’

‘Oh, you can trust me, your Ladyship, though it’s a sad blow for us here, indeed. But I hope you’ll be happy with the other gentleman.’

‘The other gentleman! It’s Mr Mellors, and I care for him. Sir Clifford knows. But don’t say anything to anybody. And if one day you think Sir Clifford may be willing to divorce me, let me know, will you? I should like to be properly married to the man I care for.’

‘I’m sure you would, my Lady. Oh, you can trust me. I’ll be faithful to Sir Clifford, and I’ll be faithful to you, for I can see you’re both right in your own ways.’

‘Thank you! And look! I want to give you this — may I?’ So Connie left Wragby once more, and went on with Hilda to Scotland. Mellors went into the country and got work on a farm. The idea was, he should get his divorce, if possible, whether Connie got hers or not. And for six months he should work at farming, so that eventually he and Connie could have some small farm of their own, into which he could put his energy. For he would have to have some work, even hard work, to do, and he would have to make his own living, even if her capital started him.

So they would have to wait till spring was in, till the baby was born, till the early summer came round again.

The Grange Farm

Old Heanor

29 September

I got on here with a bit of contriving, because I knew Richards, the company engineer, in the army. It is a farm belonging to Butler and Smitham Colliery Company, they use it for raising hay and oats for the pit-ponies; not a private concern. But they've got cows and pigs and all the rest of it, and I get thirty shillings a week as labourer. Rowley, the farmer, puts me on to as many jobs as he can, so that I can learn as much as possible between now and next Easter. I've not heard a thing about Bertha. I've no idea why she didn't show up at the divorce, nor where she is nor what she's up to. But if I keep quiet till March I suppose I shall be free. And don't you bother about Sir Clifford. He'll want to get rid of you one of these days. If he leaves you alone, it's a lot.

I've got lodging in a bit of an old cottage in Engine Row very decent. The man is engine-driver at High Park, tall, with a beard, and very chapel. The woman is a birdy bit of a thing who loves anything superior. King's English and allow-me! all the time. But they lost their only son in the war, and it's sort of knocked a hole in them. There's a long gawky lass of a daughter training for a school-teacher, and I help her with her lessons sometimes, so we're quite the family. But they're very decent people, and only too kind to me. I expect I'm more coddled than you are.

I like farming all right. It's not inspiring, but then I don't ask to be inspired. I'm used to horses, and cows, though they are very female, have a soothing effect on me. When I sit with my head in her side, milking, I feel very solaced. They have six rather fine Herefords. Oat-harvest is just over and I enjoyed it, in spite of sore hands and a lot of rain. I don't take much notice of people, but get on with them all right. Most things one just ignores.

The pits are working badly; this is a colliery district like Tevershall. only prettier. I sometimes sit in the Wellington and talk to the men. They grumble a lot, but they're not going to alter anything. As everybody says, the Notts-Derby miners have got their hearts in the right place. But the rest of their anatomy must be in the wrong place, in a world that has no use for them. I like them, but they don't cheer me much: not enough of the old fighting-cock in them. They talk a lot about nationalization, nationalization of royalties, nationalization of the whole industry. But you can't nationalize coal and leave all the other industries as they are. They talk about putting coal to new uses, like Sir Clifford is trying to do. It may work here and there, but not as a general thing, I doubt. Whatever you make you've got to sell it. The men are very apathetic. They feel the whole damned thing is doomed, and I believe it is. And they are doomed along with it.

Some of the young ones spout about a Soviet, but there's not much conviction in them. There's no sort of conviction about anything, except that it's all a muddle and a hole. Even under a Soviet you've still got to sell coal: and that's the difficulty.

We've got this great industrial population, and they've got to be fed, so the damn show has to be kept going somehow. The women talk a lot more than the men, nowadays, and they are a sight more cock-sure. The men are limp, they feel a doom somewhere, and they go about as if there was nothing to be done. Anyhow, nobody knows what should be done in spite of all the talk, the young ones get mad because they've no money to spend. Their whole life depends on spending money, and now they've got none to spend. That's our civilization and our education: bring up the masses to depend entirely on spending money, and then the money gives out. The pits are working two days, two and a half days a week, and there's no sign of betterment even for the winter. It means a man bringing up a family on twenty-five and thirty shillings. The women are the maddest of all. But then they're the maddest for spending, nowadays.

If you could only tell them that living and spending isn't the same thing! But it's no good. If only they were educated to live instead of earn and spend, they could manage very happily on twenty-five shillings. If the men wore scarlet trousers as I said, they wouldn't think so much of money: if they could dance and hop and skip, and sing and swagger and be handsome, they could do with very little cash. And amuse the women themselves, and be amused by the women. They ought to learn to be naked and handsome, and to sing in a mass and dance the old group dances, and carve the stools they sit on, and embroider their own emblems. Then they wouldn't need money. And that's the only way to solve the industrial problem: train the people to be able to live and live in handsomeness, without needing to spend. But you can't do it. They're all one-track minds nowadays. Whereas the mass of people oughtn't even to try to think, because they can't. They should be alive and frisky, and acknowledge the great god Pan. He's the only god for the masses, forever. The few can go in for higher cults if they like. But let the mass be forever pagan.

But the colliers aren't pagan, far from it. They're a sad lot, a deadened lot of men: dead to their women, dead to life. The young ones scoot about on motor-bikes with girls, and jazz when they get a chance, But they're very dead. And it needs money. Money poisons you when you've got it, and starves you when you haven't.

I'm sure you're sick of all this. But I don't want to harp on myself, and I've nothing happening to me. I don't like to think too much about you, in my head, that only makes a mess of us both. But, of course, what I live for now is for you

and me to live together. I'm frightened, really. I feel the devil in the air, and he'll try to get us. Or not the devil, Mammon: which I think, after all, is only the mass-will of people, wanting money and hating life. Anyhow, I feel great grasping white hands in the air, wanting to get hold of the throat of anybody who tries to live, to live beyond money, and squeeze the life out. There's a bad time coming. There's a bad time coming, boys, there's a bad time coming! If things go on as they are, there's nothing lies in the future but death and destruction, for these industrial masses. I feel my inside turn to water sometimes, and there you are, going to have a child by me. But never mind. All the bad times that ever have been, haven't been able to blow the crocus out: not even the love of women. So they won't be able to blow out my wanting you, nor the little glow there is between you and me. We'll be together next year. And though I'm frightened, I believe in your being with me. A man has to fend and fettle for the best, and then trust in something beyond himself. You can't insure against the future, except by really believing in the best bit of you, and in the power beyond it. So I believe in the little flame between us. For me now, it's the only thing in the world. I've got no friends, not inward friends. Only you. And now the little flame is all I care about in my life. There's the baby, but that is a side issue. It's my Pentecost, the forked flame between me and you. The old Pentecost isn't quite right. Me and God is a bit uppish, somehow. But the little forked flame between me and you: there you are! That's what I abide by, and will abide by, Cliffords and Berthas, colliery companies and governments and the money-mass of people all notwithstanding.

That's why I don't like to start thinking about you actually. It only tortures me, and does you no good. I don't want you to be away from me. But if I start fretting it wastes something. Patience, always patience. This is my fortieth winter. And I can't help all the winters that have been. But this winter I'll stick to my little Pentecost flame, and have some peace. And I won't let the breath of people blow it out. I believe in a higher mystery, that doesn't let even the crocus be blown out. And if you're in Scotland and I'm in the Midlands, and I can't put my arms round you, and wrap my legs round you, yet I've got something of you. My soul softly flaps in the little Pentecost flame with you, like the peace of fucking. We fucked a flame into being. Even the flowers are fucked into being between the sun and the earth. But it's a delicate thing, and takes patience and the long pause.

So I love chastity now, because it is the peace that comes of fucking. I love being chaste now. I love it as snowdrops love the snow. I love this chastity, which is the pause of peace of our fucking, between us now like a snowdrop of forked white fire. And when the real spring comes, when the drawing together

comes, then we can fuck the little flame brilliant and yellow, brilliant. But not now, not yet! Now is the time to be chaste, it is so good to be chaste, like a river of cool water in my soul. I love the chastity now that it flows between us. It is like fresh water and rain. How can men want wearisomely to philander. What a misery to be like Don Juan, and impotent ever to fuck oneself into peace, and the little flame alight, impotent and unable to be chaste in the cool between-whiles, as by a river.

Well, so many words, because I can't touch you. If I could sleep with my arms round you, the ink could stay in the bottle. We could be chaste together just as we can fuck together. But we have to be separate for a while, and I suppose it is really the wiser way. If only one were sure.

Never mind, never mind, we won't get worked up. We really trust in the little flame, and in the unnamed god that shields it from being blown out. There's so much of you here with me, really, that it's a pity you aren't all here.

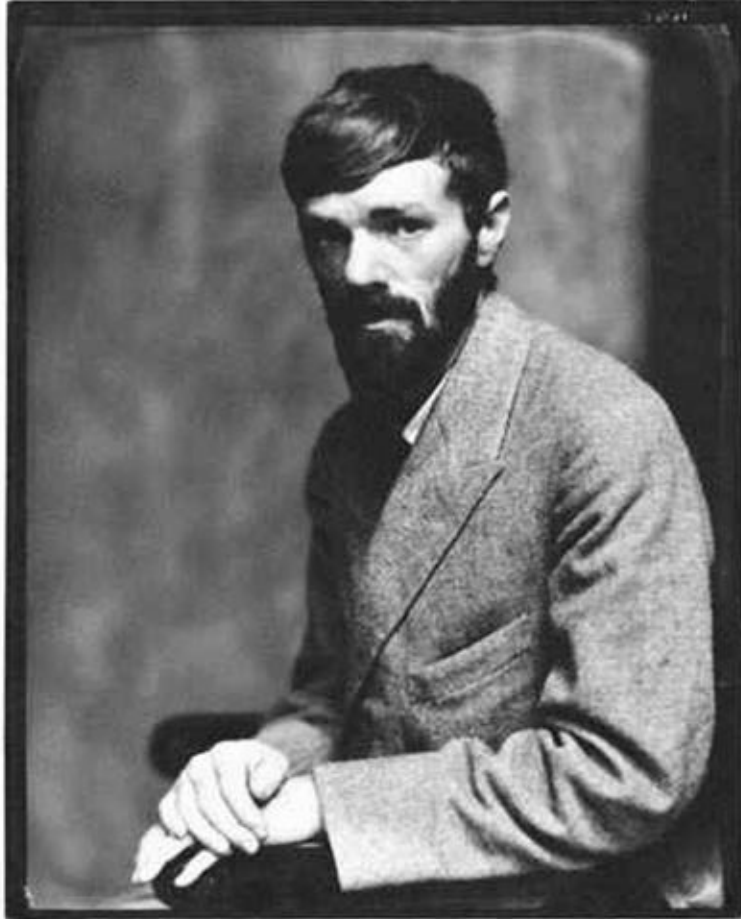
Never mind about Sir Clifford. If you don't hear anything from him, never mind. He can't really do anything to you. Wait, he will want to get rid of you at last, to cast you out. And if he doesn't, we'll manage to keep clear of him. But he will. In the end he will want to spew you out as the abominable thing.

Now I can't even leave off writing to you.

But a great deal of us is together, and we can but abide by it, and steer our courses to meet soon. John Thomas says good-night to Lady Jane, a little droopingly, but with a hopeful heart.

THE END

The Novellas



THE LADYBIRD



How many swords had Lady Beveridge in her pierced heart! Yet there always seemed room for another. Since she had determined that her heart of pity and kindness should never die. If it had not been for this determination she herself might have died of sheer agony, in the years 1916 and 1917, when her boys were killed, and her brother, and death seemed to be mowing with wide swaths through her family. But let us forget.

Lady Beveridge loved humanity, and come what might, she would continue to love it. Nay, in the human sense, she would love her enemies. Not the criminals among the enemy, the men who committed atrocities. But the men who were enemies through no choice of their own. She would be swept into no general hate.

Somebody had called her the soul of England. It was not ill said, though she was half Irish. But of an old, aristocratic, loyal family famous for its brilliant men. And she, Lady Beveridge, had for years as much influence on the tone of English politics as any individual alive. The close friend of the real leaders in the House of Lords and in the Cabinet, she was content that the men should act, so long as they breathed from her as from the rose of life the pure fragrance of truth and genuine love. She had no misgiving regarding her own spirit.

She, she would never lower her delicate silken flag. For instance, throughout all the agony of the war she never forgot the enemy prisoners; she was determined to do her best for them. During the first years she still had influence. But during the last years of the war power slipped out of the hands of her and her sort, and she found she could do nothing any more: almost nothing. Then it seemed as if the many swords had gone home into the heart of this little, unyielding Mater Dolorosa. The new generation jeered at her. She was a shabby, old-fashioned little aristocrat, and her drawing-room was out of date.

But we anticipate. The years 1916 and 1917 were the years when the old spirit died for ever in England. But Lady Beveridge struggled on. She was being beaten.

It was in the winter of 1917 — or in the late autumn. She had been for a fortnight sick, stricken, paralysed by the fearful death of her youngest boy. She felt she *must* give in, and just die. And then she remembered how many others were lying in agony.

So she rose, trembling, frail, to pay a visit to the hospital where lay the enemy

sick and wounded, near London. Countess Beveridge was still a privileged woman. Society was beginning to jeer at this little, worn bird of an out-of-date righteousness and aesthetic. But they dared not think ill of her.

She ordered the car and went alone. The Earl, her husband, had taken his gloom to Scotland. So, on a sunny, wan November morning Lady Beveridge descended at the hospital, Hurst Place. The guard knew her, and saluted as she passed. Ah, she was used to such deep respect! It was strange that she felt it so bitterly, when the respect became shallower. But she did. It was the beginning of the end to her.

The matron went with her into the ward. Alas, the beds were all full, and men were even lying on pallets on the floor. There was a desperate, crowded dreariness and helplessness in the place: as if nobody wanted to make a sound or utter a word. Many of the men were haggard and unshaven, one was delirious, and talking fitfully in the Saxon dialect. It went to Lady Beveridge's heart. She had been educated in Dresden, and had had many dear friendships in the city. Her children also had been educated there. She heard the Saxon dialect with pain.

She was a little, frail, bird-like woman, elegant, but with that touch of the blue-stocking of the nineties which was unmistakable. She fluttered delicately from bed to bed, speaking in perfect German, but with a thin, English intonation: and always asking if there was anything she could do. The men were mostly officers and gentlemen. They made little requests which she wrote down in a book. Her long, pale, rather worn face, and her nervous little gestures somehow inspired confidence.

One man lay quite still, with his eyes shut. He had a black beard. His face was rather small and sallow. He might be dead. Lady Beveridge looked at him earnestly, and fear came into her face.

'Why, Count Dionys!' she said, fluttered. 'Are you asleep?'

It was Count Johann Dionys Psanek, a Bohemian. She had known him when he was a boy, and only in the spring of 1914 he and his wife had stayed with Lady Beveridge in her country house in Leicestershire.

His black eyes opened: large, black, unseeing eyes, with curved black lashes. He was a small man, small as a boy, and his face too was rather small. But all the lines were fine, as if they had been fired with a keen male energy. Now the yellowish swarthy paste of his flesh seemed dead, and the fine black brows seemed drawn on the face of one dead. The eyes, however, were alive: but only just alive, unseeing and unknowing.

'You know me, Count Dionys? You know me, don't you?' said Lady Beveridge, bending forward over the bed.

There was no reply for some time. Then the black eyes gathered a look of recognition, and there came the ghost of a polite smile.

‘Lady Beveridge.’ The lips formed the words. There was practically no sound.

‘I am so glad you can recognize me. And I am so sorry you are hurt. I am so sorry.’

The black eyes watched her from that terrible remoteness of death, without changing.

‘There is nothing I can do for you? Nothing at all?’ she said, always speaking German.

And after a time, and from a distance, came the answer from his eyes, a look of weariness, of refusal, and a wish to be left alone; he was unable to strain himself into consciousness. His eyelids dropped.

‘I am so sorry,’ she said. ‘If ever there is anything I can do — ’

The eyes opened again, looking at her. He seemed at last to hear, and it was as if his eyes made the last weary gesture of a polite bow. Then slowly his eyelids closed again.

Poor Lady Beveridge felt another sword-thrust of sorrow in her heart, as she stood looking down at the motionless face, and at the black fine beard. The black hairs came out of his skin thin and fine, not very close together. A queer, dark, aboriginal little face he had, with a fine little nose: not an Aryan, surely. And he was going to die.

He had a bullet through the upper part of his chest, and another bullet had broken one of his ribs. He had been in hospital five days.

Lady Beveridge asked the matron to ring her up if anything happened. Then she drove away, saddened. Instead of going to Beveridge House, she went to her daughter’s flat near the park — near Hyde Park. Lady Daphne was poor. She had married a commoner, son of one of the most famous politicians in England, but a man with no money. And Earl Beveridge had wasted most of the large fortune that had come to him, so that the daughter had very little, comparatively.

Lady Beveridge suffered, going in the narrow doorway into the rather ugly flat. Lady Daphne was sitting by the electric fire in the small yellow drawing-room, talking to a visitor. She rose at once, seeing her little mother.

‘Why, mother, ought you to be out? I’m sure not.’

‘Yes, Daphne darling. Of course I ought to be out.’

‘How are you?’ The daughter’s voice was slow and sonorous, protective, sad. Lady Daphne was tall, only twenty-five years old. She had been one of the beauties, when the war broke out, and her father had hoped she would make a splendid match. Truly, she had married fame: but without money. Now, sorrow, pain, thwarted passion had done her great damage. Her husband was missing in

the East. Her baby had been born dead. Her two darling brothers were dead. And she was ill, always ill.

A tall, beautifully-built girl, she had the fine stature of her father. Her shoulders were still straight. But how thin her white throat! She wore a simple black frock stitched with coloured wool round the top, and held in a loose coloured girdle: otherwise no ornaments. And her face was lovely, fair, with a soft exotic white complexion and delicate pink cheeks. Her hair was soft and heavy, of a lovely pallid gold colour, ash-blond. Her hair, her complexion were so perfectly cared for as to be almost artificial, like a hothouse flower.

But alas, her beauty was a failure. She was threatened with phthisis, and was far too thin. Her eyes were the saddest part of her. They had slightly reddened rims, nerve-worn, with heavy, veined lids that seemed as if they did not want to keep up. The eyes themselves were large and of a beautiful green-blue colour. But they were full, languid, almost glaucous.

Standing as she was, a tall, finely-built girl, looking down with affectionate care on her mother, she filled the heart with ashes. The little pathetic mother, so wonderful in her way, was not really to be pitied for all her sorrow. Her life was in her sorrows, and her efforts on behalf of the sorrows of others. But Daphne was not born for grief and philanthropy. With her splendid frame, and her lovely, long, strong legs, she was Artemis or Atalanta rather than Daphne. There was a certain width of brow and even of chin that spoke a strong, reckless nature, and the curious, distraught slant of her eyes told of a wild energy dammed up inside her.

That was what ailed her: her own wild energy. She had it from her father, and from her father's desperate race. The earldom had begun with a riotous, daredevil border soldier, and this was the blood that flowed on. And alas, what was to be done with it?

Daphne had married an adorable husband: truly an adorable husband. Whereas she needed a daredevil. But in her *mind* she hated all daredevils: she had been brought up by her mother to admire only the good.

So, her reckless, anti-philanthropic passion could find no outlet — and *should* find no outlet, she thought. So her own blood turned against her, beat on her own nerves, and destroyed her. It was nothing but frustration and anger which made her ill, and made the doctors fear consumption. There it was, drawn on her rather wide mouth: frustration, anger, bitterness. There it was the same in the roll of her green-blue eyes, a slanting, averted look: the same anger furtively turning back on itself. This anger reddened her eyes and shattered her nerves. And yet her whole will was fixed in her adoption of her mother's creed, and in condemnation of her handsome, proud, brutal father, who had made so much misery in the

family. Yes, her will was fixed in the determination that life should be gentle and good and benevolent. Whereas her blood was reckless, the blood of daredevils. Her will was the stronger of the two. But her blood had its revenge on her. So it is with strong natures today: shattered from the inside.

‘You have no news, darling?’ asked the mother.

‘No. My father-in-law had information that British prisoners had been brought into Hasrun, and that details would be forwarded by the Turks. And there was a rumour from some Arab prisoners that Basil was one of the British brought in wounded.’

‘When did you hear this?’

‘Primrose came in this morning.’

‘Then we can hope, dear.’

‘Yes.’

Never was anything more dull and bitter than Daphne’s affirmative of hope. Hope had become almost a curse to her. She wished there need be no such thing. Ha, the torment of hoping, and the *insult* to one’s soul. Like the importunate widow dunning for her deserts. Why could it not all be just clean disaster, and have done with it? This dilly-dallying with despair was worse than despair. She had hoped so much: ah, for her darling brothers she had hoped with such anguish. And the two she loved best were dead. So were most others she had hoped for, dead. Only this uncertainty about her husband still rankling.

‘You feel better, dear?’ said the little, unquenched mother.

‘Rather better,’ came the resentful answer.

‘And your night?’

‘No better.’

There was a pause.

‘You are coming to lunch with me, Daphne darling?’

‘No, mother dear. I promised to lunch at the Howards with Primrose. But I needn’t go for a quarter of an hour. Do sit down.’

Both women seated themselves near the electric fire. There was that bitter pause, neither knowing what to say. Then Daphne roused herself to look at her mother.

‘Are you sure you were fit to go out?’ she said. ‘What took you out so suddenly?’

‘I went to Hurst Place, dear. I had the men on my mind, after the way the newspapers had been talking.’

‘Why ever do you read the newspapers!’ blurted Daphne, with a certain burning, acid anger. ‘Well,’ she said, more composed. ‘And do you feel better now you’ve been?’

‘So many people suffer besides ourselves, darling.’

‘I know they do. Makes it all the worse. It wouldn’t matter if it were only just us. At least, it would matter, but one could bear it more easily. To be just one of a crowd all in the same state.’

‘And some even worse, dear.’

‘Oh, quite! And the worse it is for all, the worse it is for one.’

‘Is that so, darling? Try not to see too darkly. I feel if I can give just a little bit of myself to help the others — you know — it alleviates me. I feel that what I can give to the men lying there, Daphne, I give to my own boys. I can only help them now through helping others. But I can still do that, Daphne, my girl.’

And the mother put her little white hand into the long, white cold hand of her daughter. Tears came to Daphne’s eyes, and a fearful stony grimace to her mouth.

‘It’s so wonderful of you that you can feel like that,’ she said.

‘But you feel the same, my love. I know you do.’

‘No, I don’t. Everyone I see suffering these same awful things, it makes me wish more for the end of the world. And I quite see that the world won’t end — ’

‘But it will get better, dear. This time it’s like a great sickness — like a terrible pneumonia tearing the breast of the world.’

‘Do you believe it will get better? I don’t.’

‘It will get better. Of course it will get better. It is perverse to think otherwise, Daphne. Remember what *has* been before, even in Europe. Ah, Daphne, we must take a bigger view.’

‘Yes, I suppose we must.’

The daughter spoke rapidly, from the lips, in a resonant, monotonous tone. The mother spoke from the heart.

‘And Daphne, I found an old friend among the men at Hurst Place.’

‘Who?’

‘Little Count Dionys. You remember him?’

‘Quite. What’s wrong?’

‘Wounded rather badly — through the chest. So ill.’

‘Did you speak to him?’

‘Yes. I recognized him in spite of his beard.’

‘Beard!’

‘Yes — a black beard. I suppose he could not be shaven. It seems strange that he is still alive, poor man.’

‘Why strange? He isn’t old. How old is he?’

‘Between thirty and forty. But so ill, so wounded, Daphne. And so small. So small, so sallow — *smorto*, you know the Italian word. The way dark people

look. There is something so distressing in it.'

'Does he look *very* small now — uncanny?' asked the daughter.

'No, not uncanny. Something of the terrible far-awayness of a child that is very ill and can't tell you what hurts it. Poor Count Dionys, Daphne. I didn't know, dear, that his eyes were so black, and his lashes so curved and long. I had never thought of him as beautiful.'

'Nor I. Only a little comical. Such a dapper little man.'

'Yes. And yet now, Daphne, there is something remote and in a sad way heroic in his dark face. Something primitive.'

'What did he say to you?'

'He couldn't speak to me. Only with his lips, just my name.'

'So bad as that?'

'Oh yes. They are afraid he will die.'

'Poor Count Dionys. I liked him. He was a bit like a monkey, but he had his points. He gave me a thimble on my seventeenth birthday. Such an amusing thimble.'

'I remember, dear.'

'Unpleasant wife, though. Wonder if he minds dying far away from her. Wonder if she knows.'

'I think not. They didn't even know his name properly. Only that he was a colonel of such and such a regiment.'

'Fourth Cavalry,' said Daphne. 'Poor Count Dionys. Such a lovely name, I always thought: Count Johann Dionys Psanek. Extraordinary dandy he was. And an amazingly good dancer, small, yet electric. Wonder if he minds dying.'

'He was so full of life, in his own little animal way. They say small people are always conceited. But he doesn't look conceited now, dear. Something ages old in his face — and, yes, a certain beauty, Daphne.'

'You mean long lashes.'

'No. So still, so solitary — and ages old, in his race. I suppose he must belong to one of those curious little aboriginal races of Central Europe. I felt quite new beside him.'

'How nice of you,' said Daphne.

Nevertheless, next day Daphne telephoned to Hurst Place to ask for news of him. He was about the same. She telephoned every day. Then she was told he was a little stronger. The day she received the message that her husband was wounded and a prisoner in Turkey, and that his wounds were healing, she forgot to telephone for news of the little enemy Count. And the following day she telephoned that she was coming to the hospital to see him.

He was awake, more restless, more in physical excitement. They could see the

nausea of pain round his nose. His face seemed to Daphne curiously hidden behind the black beard, which nevertheless was thin, each hair coming thin and fine, singly, from the sallow, slightly translucent skin. In the same way his moustache made a thin black line round his mouth. His eyes were wide open, very black, and of no legible expression. He watched the two women coming down the crowded, dreary room, as if he did not see them. His eyes seemed too wide.

It was a cold day, and Daphne was huddled in a black sealskin coat with a skunk collar pulled up to her ears, and a dull gold cap with wings pulled down on her brow. Lady Beveridge wore her sable coat, and had that odd, untidy elegance which was natural to her, rather like a ruffled chicken.

Daphne was upset by the hospital. She looked from right to left in spite of herself, and everything gave her a dull feeling of horror: the terror of these sick, wounded enemy men. She loomed tall and obtrusive in her furs by the bed, her little mother at her side.

‘I hope you don’t mind my coming!’ she said in German to the sick man. Her tongue felt rusty, speaking the language.

‘Who is it then?’ he asked.

‘It is my daughter, Lady Daphne. You remembered *me*, Lady Beveridge! This is my daughter, whom you knew in Saxony. She was so sorry to hear you were wounded.’

The black eyes rested on the little lady. Then they returned to the looming figure of Daphne. And a certain fear grew on the low, sick brow. It was evident the presence loomed and frightened him. He turned his face aside. Daphne noticed how his fine black hair grew uncut over his small, animal ears.

‘You don’t remember me, Count Dionys?’ she said dully.

‘Yes,’ he said. But he kept his face averted.

She stood there feeling confused and miserable, as if she had made a *faux pas* in coming.

‘Would you rather be left alone?’ she said. ‘I’m sorry.’

Her voice was monotonous. She felt suddenly stifled in her closed furs, and threw her coat open, showing her thin white throat and plain black slip dress on her flat breast. He turned again unwillingly to look at her. He looked at her as if she were some strange creature standing near him.

‘Good-bye,’ she said. ‘Do get better.’

She was looking at him with a queer, slanting, downward look of her heavy eyes as she turned away. She was still a little red round the eyes, with nervous exhaustion.

‘You are so tall,’ he said, still frightened.

‘I was always tall,’ she replied, turning half to him again.

‘And I, small,’ he said.

‘I am so glad you are getting better,’ she said.

‘I am not glad,’ he said.

‘Why? I’m sure you are. Just as we are glad because we want you to get better.’

‘Thank you,’ he said. ‘I have wished to die.’

‘Don’t do that, Count Dionys. Do get better,’ she said, in the rather deep, laconic manner of her girlhood. He looked at her with a farther look of recognition. But his short, rather pointed nose was lifted with the disgust and weariness of pain, his brows were tense. He watched her with that curious flame of suffering which is forced to give a little outside attention, but which speaks only to itself.

‘Why did they not let me die?’ he said. ‘I wanted death now.’

‘No,’ she said. ‘You mustn’t. You must live. If we *can* live we must.’

‘I wanted death,’ he said.

‘Ah, well,’ she said, ‘even death we can’t have when we want it, or when we think we want it.’

‘That is true,’ he said, watching her with the same wide black eyes. ‘Please to sit down. You are too tall as you stand.’

It was evident he was a little frightened still by her looming, overhanging figure.

‘I am sorry I am too tall,’ she said, taking a chair which a man-nurse had brought her. Lady Beveridge had gone away to speak with the men. Daphne sat down, not knowing what to say further. The pitch-black look in the Count’s wide eyes puzzled her.

‘Why do you come here? Why does your lady mother come?’ he said.

‘To see if we can do anything,’ she answered.

‘When I am well, I will thank your ladyship.’

‘All right,’ she replied. ‘When you are well I will let my lord the Count thank me. Please do get well.’

‘We are enemies,’ he said.

‘Who? You and I and my mother?’

‘Are we not? The most difficult thing is to be sure of anything. If they had let me die!’

‘That is at least ungrateful, Count Dionys.’

‘*Lady Daphne!* Yes. *Lady Daphne!* Beautiful, the name is. You are always called Lady Daphne? I remember you were so bright a maiden.’

‘More or less,’ she said, answering his question.

‘Ach! We should all have new names now. I thought of a name for myself, but I have forgotten it. No longer Johann Dionys. That is shot away. I am Karl or Wilhelm or Ernst or Georg. Those are names I hate. Do you hate them?’

‘I don’t like them — but I don’t hate them. And you mustn’t leave off being Count Johann Dionys. If you do I shall have to leave off being Daphne. I like your name so much.’

‘Lady Daphne! Lady Daphne!’ he repeated. ‘Yes, it rings well, it sounds beautiful to me. I think I talk foolishly. I hear myself talking foolishly to you.’ He looked at her anxiously.

‘Not at all,’ she said.

‘Ach! I have a head on my shoulders that is like a child’s windmill, and I can’t prevent its making foolish words. Please to go away, not to hear me. I can hear myself.’

‘Can’t I do anything for you?’ she asked.

‘No, no! No, no! If I could be buried deep, very deep down, where everything is forgotten! But they draw me up, back to the surface. I would not mind if they buried me alive, if it were very deep, and dark, and the earth heavy above.’

‘Don’t say that,’ she replied, rising.

‘No, I am saying it when I don’t wish to say it. Why am I here? Why am I here? Why have I survived into this? Why can I not stop talking?’

He turned his face aside. The black, fine, elfish hair was so long, and pushed up in tufts from the smooth brown nape of his neck. Daphne looked at him in sorrow. He could not turn his body. He could only move his head. And he lay with his face hard averted, the fine hair of his beard coming up strange from under his chin and from his throat, up to the socket of his ear. He lay quite still in this position. And she turned away, looking for her mother. She had suddenly realized that the bonds, the connexions between him and his life in the world had broken, and he lay there, a bit of loose, palpitating humanity, shot away from the body of humanity.

It was ten days before she went to the hospital again. She had wanted never to go again, to forget him, as one tries to forget incurable things. But she could not forget him. He came again and again into her mind. She had to go back. She had heard that he was recovering very slowly.

He looked really better. His eyes were not so wide open, they had lost that black, inky exposure which had given him such an unnatural look, unpleasant. He watched her guardedly. She had taken off her furs, and wore only her dress and a dark, soft feather toque.

‘How are you?’ she said, keeping her face averted, unwilling to meet his eyes.

‘Thank you, I am better. The nights are not so long.’

She shuddered, knowing what long nights meant. He saw the worn look in her face too, the reddened rims of her eyes.

‘Are you not well? Have you some trouble?’ he asked her.

‘No, no,’ she answered.

She had brought a handful of pinky, daisy-shaped flowers.

‘Do you care for flowers?’ she asked.

He looked at them. Then he slowly shook his head.

‘No,’ he said. ‘If I am on horseback, riding through the marshes or through the hills, I like to see them below me. But not here. Not now. Please do not bring flowers into this grave. Even in gardens, I do not like them. When they are upholstery to human life.’

‘I will take them away again,’ she said.

‘Please do. Please give them to the nurse.’

Daphne paused.

‘Perhaps,’ she said, ‘you wish I would not come to disturb you.’

He looked into her face.

‘No,’ he said. ‘You are like a flower behind a rock, near an icy water. No, you do not live too much. I am afraid I cannot talk sensibly. I wish to hold my mouth shut. If I open it, I talk this absurdity. It escapes from my mouth.’

‘It is not so very absurd,’ she said.

But he was silent — looking away from her.

‘I want you to tell me if there is really nothing I can do for you,’ she said.

‘Nothing,’ he answered.

‘If I can write any letter for you.’

‘None,’ he answered.

‘But your wife and your two children. Do they know where you are?’

‘I should think not.’

‘And where are they?’

‘I do not know. Probably they are in Hungary.’

‘Not at your home?’

‘My castle was burnt down in a riot. My wife went to Hungary with the children. She has her relatives there. She went away from me. I wished it too. Alas for her, I wished to be dead. Pardon me the personal tone.’

Daphne looked down at him — the queer, obstinate little fellow.

‘But you have somebody you wish to tell — somebody you want to hear from?’

‘Nobody. Nobody. I wish the bullet had gone through my heart. I wish to be dead. It is only I have a devil in my body that will not die.’

She looked at him as he lay with closed, averted face.

‘Surely it is not a devil which keeps you alive,’ she said. ‘It is something good.’

‘No, a devil,’ he said.

She sat looking at him with a long, slow, wondering look.

‘Must one hate a devil that makes one live?’ she asked.

He turned his eyes to her with a touch of a satiric smile.

‘If one lives, no,’ he said.

She looked away from him the moment he looked at her. For her life she could not have met his dark eyes direct.

She left him, and he lay still. He neither read nor talked throughout the long winter nights and the short winter days. He only lay for hours with black, open eyes, seeing everything around with a touch of disgust, and heeding nothing.

Daphne went to see him now and then. She never forgot him for long. He seemed to come into her mind suddenly, as if by sorcery.

One day he said to her:

‘I see you are married. May I ask you who is your husband?’

She told him. She had had a letter also from Basil. The Count smiled slowly.

‘You can look forward,’ he said, ‘to a happy reunion and new, lovely children, Lady Daphne. Is it not so?’

‘Yes, of course,’ she said.

‘But you are ill,’ he said to her.

‘Yes — rather ill.’

‘Of what?’

‘Oh!’ she answered fretfully, turning her face aside. ‘They talk about lungs.’ She hated speaking of it. ‘Why, how do you know I am ill?’ she added quickly.

Again he smiled slowly.

‘I see it in your face, and hear it in your voice. One would say the Evil One had cast a spell on you.’

‘Oh no,’ she said hastily. ‘But do I look ill?’

‘Yes. You look as if something had struck you across the face, and you could not forget it.’

‘Nothing has,’ she said. ‘Unless it’s the war.’

‘The war!’ he repeated.

‘Oh, well, don’t let us talk of it,’ she said.

Another time he said to her:

‘The year has turned — the sun must shine at last, even in England. I am afraid of getting well too soon. I am a prisoner, am I not? But I wish the sun would shine. I wish the sun would shine on my face.’

‘You won’t always be a prisoner. The war will end. And the sun *does* shine

even in the winter in England,' she said.

'I wish it would shine on my face,' he said.

So that when in February there came a blue, bright morning, the morning that suggests yellow crocuses and the smell of a mezereon tree and the smell of damp, warm earth, Daphne hastily got a taxi and drove out to the hospital.

'You have come to put me in the sun,' he said the moment he saw her.

'Yes, that's what I came for,' she said.

She spoke to the matron, and had his bed carried out where there was a big window that came low. There he was put full in the sun. Turning, he could see the blue sky and the twinkling tops of purplish, bare trees.

'The world! The world!' he murmured.

He lay with his eyes shut, and the sun on his swarthy, transparent, immobile face. The breath came and went through his nostrils invisibly. Daphne wondered how he could lie so still, how he could look so immobile. It was true as her mother had said: he looked as if he had been cast in the mould when the metal was white hot, all his lines were so clean. So small, he was, and in his way perfect.

Suddenly his dark eyes opened and caught her looking.

'The sun makes even anger open like a flower,' he said.

'Whose anger?' she said.

'I don't know. But I can make flowers, looking through my eyelashes. Do you know how?'

'You mean rainbows?'

'Yes, flowers.'

And she saw him, with a curious smile on his lips, looking through his almost closed eyelids at the sun.

'The sun is neither English nor German nor Bohemian,' he said. 'I am a subject of the sun. I belong to the fire-worshippers.'

'Do you?' she replied.

'Yes, truly, by tradition.' He looked at her smiling. 'You stand there like a flower that will melt,' he added.

She smiled slowly at him with a slow, cautious look of her eyes, as if she feared something.

'I am much more solid than you imagine,' she said.

Still he watched her.

'One day,' he said, 'before I go, let me wrap your hair round my hands, will you?' He lifted his thin, short, dark hands. 'Let me wrap your hair round my hands, like a bandage. They hurt me. I don't know what it is. I think it is all the gun explosions. But if you let me wrap your hair round my hands. You know, it

is the hermetic gold — but so much of water in it, of the moon. That will soothe my hands. One day, will you?’

‘Let us wait till the day comes,’ she said.

‘Yes,’ he answered, and was still again.

‘It troubles me,’ he said after a while, ‘that I complain like a child, and ask for things. I feel I have lost my manhood for the time being. The continual explosions of guns and shells! It seems to have driven my soul out of me like a bird frightened away at last. But it will come back, you know. And I am so grateful to you; you are good to me when I am soulless, and you don’t take advantage of me. Your soul is quiet and heroic.’

‘Don’t,’ she said. ‘Don’t talk!’

The expression of shame and anguish and disgust crossed his face.

‘It is because I can’t help it,’ he said. ‘I have lost my soul, and I can’t stop talking to you. I can’t stop. But I don’t talk to anyone else. I try not to talk, but I can’t prevent it. Do you draw the words out of me?’

Her wide, green-blue eyes seemed like the heart of some curious, full-open flower, some Christmas rose with its petals of snow and flush. Her hair glinted heavy, like water-gold. She stood there passive and indomitable with the wide-eyed persistence of her wintry, blond nature.

Another day when she came to see him, he watched her for a time, then he said:

‘Do they all tell you you are lovely, you are beautiful?’

‘Not quite all,’ she replied.

‘But your husband?’

‘He has said so.’

‘Is he gentle? Is he tender? Is he a dear lover?’

She turned her face aside, displeased.

‘Yes,’ she replied curtly.

He did not answer. And when she looked again he was lying with his eyes shut, a faint smile seeming to curl round his short, transparent nose. She could faintly see the flesh through his beard, as water through reeds. His black hair was brushed smooth as glass, his black eyebrows glinted like a curve of black glass on the swarthy opalescence of his brow.

Suddenly he spoke, without opening his eyes.

‘You have been very kind to me,’ he said.

‘Have I? Nothing to speak of.’

He opened his eyes and looked at her.

‘Everything finds its mate,’ he said. ‘The ermine and the pole-cat and the buzzard. One thinks so often that only the dove and the nightingale and the stag

with his antlers have gentle mates. But the pole-cat and the ice-bears of the north have their mates. And a white she-bear lies with her cubs under a rock as a snake lies hidden, and the male bear slowly swims back from the sea, like a clot of snow or a shadow of a white cloud passing on the speckled sea. I have seen her too, and I did not shoot her, nor him when he landed with fish in his mouth, wading wet and slow and yellow-white over the black stones.'

'You have been in the North Sea?'

'Yes. And with the Eskimo in Siberia, and across the Tundras. And a white sea-hawk makes a nest on a high stone, and sometimes looks out with her white head over the edge of the rocks. It is not only a world of men, Lady Daphne.'

'Not by any means,' said she.

'Else it were a sorry place.'

'It is bad enough,' said she.

'Foxes have their holes. They have even their mates, Lady Daphne, that they bark to and are answered. And an adder finds his female. Psanek means an outlaw; did you know?'

'I did not.'

'Outlaws, and brigands, have often the finest woman-mates.'

'They do,' she said.

'I will be Psanek, Lady Daphne. I will not be Johann Dionys any more, I will be Psanek. The law has shot me through.'

'You might be Psanek and Johann and Dionys as well,' she said.

'With the sun on my face? Maybe,' he said, looking to the sun.

There were some lovely days in the spring of 1918. In March the Count was able to get up. They dressed him in a simple, dark-blue uniform. He was not very thin, only swarthy-transparent, now his beard was shaven and his hair was cut. His smallness made him noticeable, but he was masculine, perfect in his small stature. All the smiling dapperness that had made him seem like a monkey to Daphne when she was a girl had gone now. His eyes were dark and haughty; he seemed to keep inside his own reserves, speaking to nobody if he could help it, neither to the nurses nor the visitors nor to his fellow-prisoners, fellow-officers. He seemed to put a shadow between himself and them, and from across this shadow he looked with his dark, beautifully-fringed eyes, as a proud little beast from the shadow of its lair. Only to Daphne he laughed and chatted.

She sat with him one day in March on the terrace of the hospital, on a morning when white clouds went endlessly and magnificently about a blue sky, and the sunshine felt warm after the blots of shadow.

'When you had a birthday, and you were seventeen, didn't I give you a thimble?' he asked her.

‘Yes. I have it still.’

‘With a gold snake at the bottom, and a Mary-beetle of green stone at the top, to push the needle with.’

‘Yes.’

‘Do you ever use it?’

‘No. I sew rarely.’

‘Would it displease you to sew something for me?’

‘You won’t admire my stitches. What would you wish me to sew?’

‘Sew me a shirt that I can wear. I have never before worn shirts from a shop, with a maker’s name inside. It is very distasteful to me.’

She looked at him — his haughty little brows.

‘Shall I ask my maid to do it?’ she said.

‘Oh, please, no! Oh, please, no, do not trouble. No, please, I would not want it unless you sewed it yourself, with the Psanek thimble.’

She paused before she answered. Then came her slow:

‘Why?’

He turned and looked at her with dark, searching eyes.

‘I have no reason,’ he said, rather haughtily.

She left the matter there. For two weeks she did not go to see him. Then suddenly one day she took the bus down Oxford Street and bought some fine white flannel. She decided he must wear flannel.

That afternoon she drove out to Hurst Place. She found him sitting on the terrace, looking across the garden at the red suburb of London smoking family in the near distance, interrupted by patches of uncovered ground and a flat, tin-roofed laundry.

‘Will you give me measurements for your shirt?’ she said.

‘The number of the neck-band of this English shirt is fifteen. If you ask the matron she will give you the measurement. It is a little too large, too long in the sleeves, you see,’ and he shook his shirt cuff over his wrist. ‘Also too long altogether.’

‘Mine will probably be unwearable when I’ve made them,’ said she.

‘Oh no. Let your maid direct you. But please do not let her sew them.’

‘Will you tell me why you want me to do it?’

‘Because I am a prisoner, in other people’s clothes, and I have nothing of my own. All the things I touch are distasteful to me. If your maid sews for me, it will still be the same. Only you might give me what I want, something that buttons round my throat and on my wrists.’

‘And in Germany — or in Austria?’

‘My mother sewed for me. And after her, my mother’s sister, who was the

head of my house.'

'Not your wife?'

'Naturally not. She would have been insulted. She was never more than a guest in my house. In my family there are old traditions — but with me they have come to an end. I had best try to revive them.'

'Beginning with traditions of shirts?'

'Yes. In our family the shirt should be made and washed by a woman of our own blood: but when we marry, by the wife. So when I married I had sixty shirts, and many other things — sewn by my mother and my aunt, all with my initial, and the ladybird, which is our crest.'

'And where did they put the initial?'

'Here!' He put his finger on the back of his neck, on the swarthy, transparent skin. 'I fancy I can feel the embroidered ladybird still. On our linen we had no crown: only the ladybird.'

She was silent, thinking.

'You will forgive what I ask you?' he said, 'since I am a prisoner and can do no other, and since fate has made you so that you understand the world as I understand it. It is not really indelicate, what I ask you. There will be a ladybird on your finger when you sew, and those who wear the ladybird understand.'

'I suppose,' she mused, 'it is as bad to have your bee in your shirt as in your bonnet.'

He looked at her with round eyes.

'Don't you know what it is to have a bee in your bonnet?' she said.

'No.'

'To have a bee buzzing among your hair! To be out of your wits,' she smiled at him.

'So!' he said. 'Ah, the Psaneks have had a ladybird in their bonnets for many hundred years.'

'Quite, quite mad,' she said.

'It may be,' he answered. 'But with my wife I was quite sane for ten years. Now give me the madness of the ladybird. The world I was sane about has gone raving. The ladybird I was mad with is wise still.'

'At least, when I sew the shirts, if I sew them,' she said, 'I shall have the ladybird at my finger's end.'

'You want to laugh at me.'

'But surely you know you are funny, with your family insect.'

'My family insect? Now you want to be rude to me.'

'How many spots must it have?'

'Seven.'

‘Three on each wing. And what do I do with the odd one?’

‘You put that one between its teeth, like the cake for Cerebus.’

‘I’ll remember that.’

When she brought the first shirt, she gave it to the matron. Then she found Count Dionys sitting on the terrace. It was a beautiful spring day. Near at hand were tall elm trees and some rooks cawing.

‘What a lovely day!’ she said. ‘Are you liking the world any better?’

‘The world?’ he said, looking up at her with the same old discontent and disgust on his fine, transparent nose.

‘Yes,’ she replied, a shadow coming over her face.

‘Is this the world — all those little red-brick boxes in rows, where couples of little people live, who decree my destiny?’

‘You don’t like England?’

‘Ah, England! Little houses like little boxes, each with its domestic Englishman and his domestic wife, each ruling the world because all are alike, so alike.’

‘But England isn’t all houses.’

‘Fields then! Little fields with innumerable hedges. Like a net with an irregular mesh, pinned down over this island and everything under the net. Ah, Lady Daphne, forgive me. I am ungrateful. I am so full of bile, of spleen, you say. My only wisdom is to keep my mouth shut.’

‘Why do you hate everything?’ she said, her own face going bitter.

‘Not everything. If I were free! If I were outside the law. Ah, Lady Daphne, how does one get outside the law?’

‘By going inside oneself,’ she said. ‘Not outside.’

His face took on a greater expression of disgust.

‘No, no. I am a man, I am a man, even if I am little. I am not a spirit, that coils itself inside a shell. In my soul is anger, anger, anger. Give me room for my anger. Give me room for that.’

His black eyes looked keenly into hers. She rolled her eyes as if in a half-trance. And in a monotonous, tranced voice she said:

‘Much better get over your anger. And *why* are you angry?’

‘There is no *why*. If it were love, you would not ask me, *why do you love?* But it is anger, anger, anger. What else can I call it? And there is no *why*.’

Again he looked at her with his dark, sharp, questioning, tormented eyes.

‘Can’t you get rid of it?’ she said, looking aside.

‘If a shell exploded and blew me into a thousand fragments,’ he said, ‘it would not destroy the anger that is in me. I know that. No, it will never dissipate. And to die is no release. The anger goes on gnashing and whimpering in death. Lady

Daphne, Lady Daphne, we have used up all the love, and this is what is left.'

'Perhaps *you* have used up all your love,' she replied. 'You are not everybody.'

'I know it. I speak for me and you.'

'Not for me,' she said rapidly.

He did not answer, and they remained silent.

At length she turned her eyes slowly to him.

'Why do you say you speak for me?' she said, in an accusing tone.

'Pardon me. I was hasty.'

But a faint touch of superciliousness in his tone showed he meant what he had said. She mused, her brow cold and stony.

'And why do you tell *me* about your anger?' she said. 'Will that make it better?'

'Even the adder finds his mate. And she has as much poison in her mouth as he.'

She gave a little sudden squirt of laughter.

'Awfully poetic thing to say about me,' she said.

He smiled, but with the same corrosive quality.

'Ah,' he said, 'you are not a dove. You are a wild-cat with open eyes, half dreaming on a bough, in a lonely place, as I have seen her. And I ask myself — What are her memories, then?'

'I wish I were a wild-cat,' she said suddenly.

He eyed her shrewdly, and did not answer.

'You want more war?' she said to him bitterly.

'More trenches? More Big Berthas, more shells and poison-gas, more machine-drilled science-manoeuvred so-called armies? Never. Never. I would rather work in a factory that makes boots and shoes. And I would rather deliberately starve to death than work in a factory that makes boots and shoes.'

'Then what do you want?'

'I want my anger to have room to grow.'

'How?'

'I do not know. That is why I sit here, day after day. I wait.'

'For your anger to have room to grow?'

'For that.'

'Good-bye, Count Dionys.'

'Good-bye, Lady Daphne.'

She had determined never to go and see him again. She had no sign from him. Since she had begun the second shirt, she went on with it. And then she hurried to finish it, because she was starting a round of visits that would end in the

summer sojourn in Scotland. She intended to post the shirt. But after all, she took it herself.

She found Count Dionys had been removed from Hurst Place to Voynich Hall, where other enemy officers were interned. The being thwarted made her more determined. She took the train next day to go to Voynich Hall.

When he came into the ante-room where he was to receive her, she felt at once the old influence of his silence and his subtle power. His face had still that swarthy-transparent look of one who is unhappy, but his bearing was proud and reserved. He kissed her hand politely, leaving her to speak.

‘How are you?’ she said. ‘I didn’t know you were here. I am going away for the summer.’

‘I wish you a pleasant time,’ he said. They were speaking English.

‘I brought the other shirt,’ she said. ‘It is finished at last.’

‘That is a greater honour than I dared expect,’ he said.

‘I’m afraid it may be more honourable than useful. The other didn’t fit, did it?’

‘Almost,’ he said. ‘It fitted the spirit, if not the flesh,’ he smiled.

‘I’d rather it had been the reverse, for once,’ she said. ‘Sorry.’

‘I would not have it one stitch different.’

‘Can we sit in the garden?’

‘I think we may.’

They sat on a bench. Other prisoners were playing croquet not far off. But these two were left comparatively alone.

‘Do you like it better here?’ she said.

‘I have nothing to complain of,’ he said.

‘And the anger?’

‘It is doing well, I thank you,’ he smiled.

‘You mean getting better?’

‘Making strong roots,’ he said, laughing.

‘Ah, so long as it only makes roots!’ she said.

‘And your ladyship, how is she?’

‘My ladyship is rather better,’ she replied.

‘Much better, indeed,’ he said, looking into her face.

‘Do you mean I *look* much better?’ she asked quickly.

‘Very much. It is your beauty you think of. Well, your beauty is almost itself again.’

‘Thanks.’

‘You brood on your beauty as I on my anger. Ah, your ladyship, be wise, and make friends with your anger. That is the way to let your beauty blossom.’

‘I was not unfriendly with you, was I?’ she said.

‘With me?’ His face flickered with a laugh. ‘Am I your anger? Your vicar in wrath? So then, be friends with the angry me, your ladyship. I ask nothing better.’

‘What is the use,’ she said, ‘being friends with the *angry* you? I would much rather be friends with the happy you.’

‘That little animal is extinct,’ he laughed. ‘And I am glad of it.’

‘But what remains? Only the angry you? Then it is no use my trying to be friends.’

‘You remember, dear Lady Daphne, that the adder does not suck his poison all alone, and the pole-cat knows where to find his she-pole-cat. You remember that each one has his own dear mate,’ he laughed. ‘Dear, deadly mate.’

‘And what if I do remember those bits of natural history, Count Dionys?’

‘The she-adder is dainty, delicate, and carries her poison lightly. The wild-cat has wonderful green eyes that she closes with memory like a screen. The ice-bear hides like a snake with her cubs, and her snarl is the strangest thing in the world.’

‘Have you ever heard me snarl?’ she asked suddenly.

He only laughed, and looked away.

They were silent. And immediately the strange thrill of secrecy was between them. Something had gone beyond sadness into another, secret, thrilling communion which she would never admit.

‘What do you do all day here?’ she asked.

‘Play chess, play this foolish croquet, play billiards, and read, and wait, and remember.’

‘What do you wait for?’

‘I don’t know.’

‘And what do you remember?’

‘Ah, that. Shall I tell you what amuses me? Shall I tell you a secret?’

‘Please don’t, if it’s anything that matters.’

‘It matters to nobody but me. Will you hear it?’

‘If it does not implicate me in any way.’

‘It does not. Well, I am a member of a certain old secret society — no, don’t look at me, nothing frightening — only a society like the free-masons.’

‘And?’

‘And — well, as you know, one is initiated into certain so-called secrets and rites. My family has always been initiated. So I am an initiate too. Does it interest you?’

‘Why, of course.’

‘Well. I was always rather thrilled by these secrets. Or some of them. Some

seemed to me far-fetched. The ones that thrilled me even never had any relation to actual life. When you knew me in Dresden and Prague, you would not have thought me a man invested with awful secret knowledge, now would you?’

‘Never.’

‘No. It was just a little exciting side-show. And I was a grimacing little society man. But now they become true. It becomes true.’

‘The secret knowledge?’

‘Yes.’

‘What, for instance?’

‘Take actual fire. It will bore you. Do you want to hear?’

‘Go on.’

‘This is what I was taught. The true fire is invisible. Flame, and the red fire we see burning, has its back to us. It is running away from us. Does that mean anything to you?’

‘Yes.’

‘Well then, the yellowness of sunshine — light itself — that is only the glancing aside of the real original fire. You know that is true. There would be no light if there was no refraction, no bits of dust and stuff to turn the dark fire into visibility. You know that’s a fact. And that being so, even the sun is dark. It is only his jacket of dust that makes him visible. You know that too. And the true sunbeams coming towards us flow darkly, a moving darkness of the genuine fire. The sun is dark, the sunshine flowing to us is dark. And light is only the inside-turning away of the sun’s directness that was coming to us. Does that interest you at all?’

‘Yes,’ she said dubiously.

‘Well, we’ve got the world inside out. The true living world of fire is dark, throbbing, darker than blood. Our luminous world that we go by is only the reverse of this.’

‘Yes, I like that,’ she said.

‘Well! Now listen. The same with love. This white love that we have is the same. It is only the reverse, the whited sepulchre of the true love. True love is dark, a throbbing together in darkness, like the wild-cat in the night, when the green screen opens and her eyes are on the darkness.’

‘No, I don’t see that,’ she said in a slow, clanging voice.

‘You, and your beauty — that is only the inside-out of you. The real you is the wild-cat invisible in the night, with red fire perhaps coming out of its wide, dark eyes. Your beauty is your whited sepulchre.’

‘You mean cosmetics,’ she said. ‘I’ve got none on today — not even powder.’

He laughed.

‘Very good,’ he said. ‘Consider me. I used to think myself small but handsome, and the ladies used to admire me moderately, never very much. A trim little fellow, you know. Well, that was just the inside-out of me. I am a black tom-cat howling in the night, and it is then that fire comes out of me. This me you look at is my whited sepulchre. What do you say?’

She was looking into his eyes. She could see the darkness swaying in the depths. She perceived the invisible, cat-like fire stirring deep inside them, felt it coming towards her. She turned her face aside. Then he laughed, showing his strong white teeth, that seemed a little too large, rather dreadful.

She rose to go.

‘Well,’ she said. ‘I shall have the summer in which to think about the world inside-out. Do write if there is anything to say. Write to Thoresway. Good-bye!’

‘Ah, your eyes!’ he said. ‘They are like jewels of stone.’

Being away from the Count, she put him out of her mind. Only she was sorry for him a prisoner in that sickening Voynich Hall. But she did not write. Nor did he.

As a matter of fact, her mind was now much more occupied with her husband. All arrangements were being made to effect his exchange. From month to month she looked for his return. And so she thought of him.

Whatever happened to her, she thought about it, thought and thought a great deal. The consciousness of her mind was like tablets of stone weighing her down. And whoever would make a new entry into her must break these tablets of stone piece by piece. So it was that in her own way she thought often enough of the Count’s world inside-out. A curious latency stirred in her consciousness that was not yet an idea.

He said her eyes were like jewels of stone. What a horrid thing to say! What did he want her eyes to be like? He wanted them to dilate and become all black pupil, like a cat’s at night. She shrank convulsively from the thought, and tightened her breast.

He said her beauty was her whited sepulchre. Even that, she knew what he meant. The invisibility of her he wanted to love. But ah, her pearl-like beauty was so dear to her, and it was so famous in the world.

He said her white love was like moonshine, harmful, the reverse of love. He meant Basil, of course. Basil always said she was the moon. But then Basil loved her for that. The ecstasy of it! She shivered, thinking of her husband. But it had also made her nerve-worn, her husband’s love. Ah, nerve-worn.

What then would the Count’s love be like? Something so secret and different. She would not be lovely and a queen to him. He hated her loveliness. The wild-cat has its mate. The little wild-cat that he was. Ah!

She caught her breath, determined not to think. When she thought of Count Dionys she felt the world slipping away from her. She would sit in front of a mirror, looking at her wonderful cared-for face that had appeared in so many society magazines. She loved it so, it made her feel so vain. And she looked at her blue-green eyes — the eyes of the wild-cat on a bough. Yes, the lovely blue-green iris drawn tight like a screen. Supposing it should relax. Supposing it should unfold, and open out the dark depths, the dark, dilated pupil! Supposing it should?

Never! She always caught herself back. She felt she might be killed before she could give way to that relaxation that the Count wanted of her. She could not. She just could not. At the very thought of it some hypersensitive nerve started with a great twinge in her breast; she drew back, forced to keep her guard. Ah no, Monsieur le Comte, you shall never take her ladyship off her guard.

She disliked the thought of the Count. An impudent little fellow. An impertinent little fellow! A little madman, really. A little outsider. No, no. She would think of her husband: an adorable, tall, well-bred Englishman, so easy and simple, and with the amused look in his blue eyes. She thought of the cultured, casual trail of his voice. It set her nerves on fire. She thought of his strong, easy body — beautiful, white-fleshed, with the fine springing of warm-brown hair like tiny flames. He was the Dionysos, full of sap, milk and honey, and northern golden wine: he, her husband. Not that little unreal Count. Ah, she dreamed of her husband, of the love-days, and the honeymoon, the lovely, simple intimacy. Ah, the marvellous revelation of that intimacy, when he left himself to her so generously. Ah, she was his wife for this reason, that he had given himself to her so greatly, so generously. Like an ear of corn he was there for her gathering — her husband, her own, lovely, English husband. Ah, when would he come again, when would he come again!

She had letters from him — and how he loved her. Far away, his life was all hers. All hers, flowing to her as the beam flows from a white star right down to us, to our heart. Her lover, her husband.

He was now expecting to come home soon. It had all been arranged. ‘I hope you won’t be disappointed in me when I do get back,’ he wrote. ‘I am afraid I am no longer the plump and well-looking young man I was. I’ve got a big scar at the side of my mouth, and I’m as thin as a starved rabbit, and my hair’s going grey. Doesn’t sound attractive, does it? And it isn’t attractive. But once I can get out of this infernal place, and once I can be with you again, I shall come in for my second blooming. The very thought of being quietly in the same house with you, quiet and in peace, makes me realize that if I’ve been through hell, I have known heaven on earth and can hope to know it again. I am a miserable brute to

look at now. But I have faith in you. You will forgive my appearance, and that alone will make me feel handsome.'

She read this letter many times. She was not afraid of his scar or his looks. She would love him all the more.

Since she had started making shirts — those two for the Count had been an enormous labour, even though her maid had come to her assistance forty times: but since she had started making shirts, she thought she might continue. She had some good suitable silk: her husband liked silk underwear.

But she still used the Count's thimble. It was gold outside and silver inside, and was too heavy. A snake was coiled round the base, and at the top, for pressing the needle, was inset a semi-translucent apple-green stone, perhaps jade, carved like a scarab, with little dots. It was too heavy. But then she sewed so slowly. And she liked to feel her hand heavy, weighted. And as she sewed she thought about her husband, and she felt herself in love with him. She thought of him, how beautiful he was, and how she would love him now he was thin: she would love him all the more. She would love to trace his bones, as if to trace his living skeleton. The thought made her rest her hands in her lap and drift into a muse. Then she felt the weight of the thimble on her finger, and took it off, and sat looking at the green stone. The ladybird. The ladybird. And if only her husband would come soon, soon. It was wanting him that made her so ill. Nothing but that. She had wanted him so badly. She wanted now. Ah, if she could go to him now, and find him, wherever he was, and see him and touch him and take all his love.

As she mused, she put the thimble down in front of her, took up a little silver pencil from her work-basket, and on a bit of blue paper that had been the band of a small skein of silk she wrote the lines of the silly little song

*'Wenn ich ein Vöglein wär'
Und auch zwei Flüglein hätt'
Flög' ich zu dir — '*

That was all she could get on her bit of pale-blue paper.

*'If I were a little bird
And had two little wings
I'd fly to thee —'*

Silly enough, in all conscience. But she did not translate it, so it did not seem quite so silly.

At that moment her maid announced Lady Bingham — her husband's sister. Daphne crumpled up the bit of paper in a flurry, and in another minute Primrose, his sister, came in. The newcomer was not a bit like a primrose, being long-faced and clever, smart, but not a bit elegant, in her new clothes.

'Daphne dear, what a domestic scene! I suppose it's rehearsal. Well, you may as well rehearse, he's with Admiral Burns on the *Ariadne*. Father just heard from the Admiralty: quite fit. He'll be here in a day or two. Splendid, isn't it? And the war is going to end. At least it seems like it. You'll be safe of your man now, dear. Thank heaven when it's all over. What are you sewing?'

'A shirt,' said Daphne.

'A shirt! Why, how clever of you. I should never know which end to begin. Who showed you?'

'Millicent.'

'And how did *she* know? She's no business to know how to sew shirts: nor cushions nor sheets either. Do let me look. Why, how perfectly marvellous you are! — every bit by hand too. Basil isn't worth it, dear, really he isn't. Let him order his shirts in Oxford Street. Your business is to be beautiful, not to sew shirts. What a dear little pin-poppet, or rather needle-woman! I say, a satire on us, that is. But what a darling, with mother-of-pearl wings to her skirts! And darling little gold-eyed needles inside her. You screw her head off, and you find she's full of pins and needles. Woman for you! Mother says won't you come to lunch tomorrow. And won't you come to Brassey's to tea with me at this minute. Do, there's a dear. I've got a taxi.'

Daphne bundled her sewing loosely together.

When she tried to do a bit more, two days later, she could not find her thimble. She asked her maid, whom she could absolutely trust. The girl had not seen it. She searched everywhere. She asked her nurse — who was now her housekeeper — and footman. No, nobody had seen it. Daphne even asked her sister-in-law.

'Thimble, darling? No, I don't remember a thimble. I remember a dear little needle-lady, whom I thought such a precious satire on us women. I didn't notice a thimble.'

Poor Daphne wandered about in a muse. She did not want to believe it lost. It had been like a talisman to her. She tried to forget it. Her husband was coming, quite soon, quite soon. But she could not raise herself to joy. She had lost her thimble. It was as if Count Dionys accused her in her sleep of something, she did not quite know what.

And though she did not really want to go to Voynich Hall, yet like a fatality she went, like one doomed. It was already late autumn, and some lovely days. This was the last of the lovely days. She was told that Count Dionys was in the

small park, finding chestnuts. She went to look for him. Yes, there he was in his blue uniform stooping over the brilliant yellow leaves of the sweet chestnut tree, that lay around him like a fallen nimbus of glowing yellow, under his feet, as he kicked and rustled, looking for the chestnut burrs. And with his short, brown hands he was pulling out the small chestnuts and putting them in his pockets. But as she approached he peeled a nut to eat it. His teeth were white and powerful.

‘You remind me of a squirrel laying in a winter store,’ said she.

‘Ah, Lady Daphne — I was thinking and did not hear you.’

‘I thought you were gathering chestnuts — even eating them.’

‘Also!’ he laughed. He had a dark, sudden charm when he laughed, showing his rather large white teeth. She was not quite sure whether she found him a little repulsive.

‘Were you *really* thinking?’ she said, in her slow, resonant way.

‘Very truly.’

‘And weren’t you enjoying the chestnut a bit?’

‘Very much. Like sweet milk. Excellent, excellent.’ He had the fragments of the nut between his teeth, and bit them finely. ‘Will you take one too.’ He held out the little, pointed brown nuts on the palm of his hand.

She looked at them doubtfully.

‘Are they as tough as they always were?’ she said.

‘No, they are fresh and good. Wait, I will peel one for you.’

They strayed about through the thin clump of trees.

‘You have had a pleasant summer; you are strong?’

‘Almost *quite* strong,’ said she. ‘Lovely summer, thanks. I suppose it’s no good asking you if you have been happy?’

‘Happy?’ He looked at her direct. His eyes were black, and seemed to examine her. She always felt he had a little contempt of her. ‘Oh yes,’ he said, smiling. ‘I have been very happy.’

‘So glad.’

They drifted a little farther, and he picked up an apple-green chestnut burr out of the yellow-brown leaves, handling it with sensitive fingers that still suggested paws to her.

‘How did you succeed in being happy?’ she said.

‘How shall I tell you? I felt that the same power which put up the mountains could pull them down again — no matter how long it took.’

‘And was that all?’

‘Was it not enough?’

‘I should say decidedly too little.’

He laughed broadly, showing the strong, negroid teeth.

‘You do not know all it means,’ he said.

‘The thought that the mountains were going to be pulled down?’ she said. ‘It will be so long after my day.’

‘Ah, you are bored,’ he said. ‘But I — I found the God who pulls things down: especially the things that men have put up. Do they not say that life is a search after God, Lady Daphne? I have found my God.’

‘The god of destruction,’ she said, blanching.

‘Yes — not the devil of destruction, but the god of destruction. The blessed god of destruction. It is strange’ — he stood before her, looking up at her — ‘but I have found my God. The god of anger, who throws down the steeples and the factory chimneys. Ah, Lady Daphne, he is a man’s God, he is a man’s God. I have found my God, Lady Daphne.’

‘Apparently. And how are you going to serve him?’

A naïve glow transfigured his face.

‘Oh, I will help. With my heart I will help while I can do nothing with my hands. I say to my heart: Beat, hammer, beat with little strokes. Beat, hammer of God, beat them down. Beat it all down.’

Her brows knitted, her face took on a look of discontent.

‘Beat what down?’ she asked harshly.

‘The world, the world of man. Not the trees — these chestnuts, for example’ — he looked up at them, at the tufts and loose pinions of yellow — ‘not these — nor the chattering sorcerers, the squirrels — nor the hawk that comes. Not those.’

‘You mean beat England?’ she said.

‘Ah, no. Ah, no. Not England any more than Germany — perhaps not as much. Not Europe any more than Asia.’

‘Just the end of the world?’

‘No, no. No, no. What grudge have I against a world where little chestnuts are so sweet as these! Do you like yours? Will you take another?’

‘No, thanks.’

‘What grudge have I against a world where even the hedges are full of berries, bunches of black berries that hang down, and red berries that thrust up. Never would I hate the world. But the world of man. Lady Daphne’ — his voice sank to a whisper — ‘*I hate it. Zzz!*’ he hissed. ‘Strike, little heart! Strike, strike, hit, smite! Oh, Lady Daphne!’ — his eyes dilated with a ring of fire.

‘What?’ she said, scared.

‘I believe in the power of my red, dark heart. God has put the hammer in my breast — the little eternal hammer. Hit — hit — hit! It hits on the world of man.’

It hits, it hits! And it hears the thin sound of cracking. The thin sound of cracking. Hark!’

He stood still and made her listen. It was late afternoon. The strange laugh of his face made the air seem dark to her. And she could easily have believed that she heard a faint, fine shivering, cracking, through the air, a delicate crackling noise.

‘You hear it? Yes? Oh, may I live long! May I live long, so that my hammer may strike and strike, and the cracks go deeper, deeper! Ah, the world of man! Ah, the joy, the passion in every heart-beat! Strike home, strike true, strike sure. Strike to destroy it. Strike! Strike! To destroy the world of man. Ah, God. Ah, God, prisoner of peace. Do I not know you, Lady Daphne? Do I not? Do I not?’

She was silent for some moments, looking away at the twinkling lights of a station beyond.

‘Not the white plucked lily of your body. I have gathered no flower for my ostentatious life. But in the cold dark, your lily root, Lady Daphne. Ah, yes, you will know it all your life, that I know where your root lies buried, with its sad, sad quick of life. What does it matter!’

They had walked slowly towards the house. She was silent. Then at last she said, in a peculiar voice:

‘And you would never want to kiss me?’

‘Ah, no!’ he answered sharply.

She held out her hand.

‘Good-bye, Count Dionys,’ she drawled, fashionably. He bowed over her hand, but did not kiss it.

‘Good-bye, Lady Daphne.’

She went away, with her brow set hard. And henceforth she thought only of her husband, of Basil. She made the Count die out of her. Basil was coming, he was near. He was coming back from the East, from war and death. Ah, he had been through awful fire of experience. He would be something new, something she did not know. He was something new, a stronger lover who had been through terrible fire, and had come out strange and new, like a god. Ah, new and terrible his love would be, pure and intensified by the awful fire of suffering. A new lover — a new bridegroom — a new, supernatural wedding-night. She shivered in anticipation, waiting for her husband. She hardly noticed the wild excitement of the Armistice. She was waiting for something more wonderful to her.

And yet the moment she heard his voice on the telephone, her heart contracted with fear. It was his well-known voice, deliberate, diffident, almost drawling, with the same subtle suggestion of deference, and the rather exaggerated

Cambridge intonation, up and down. But there was a difference, a new icy note that went through her veins like death.

‘Is that you, Daphne? I shall be with you in half an hour. Is that all right for you? Yes, I’ve just landed, and shall come straight to you. Yes, a taxi. Shall I be too sudden for you, darling? No? Good, oh good! Half an hour, then! I say, Daphne? There won’t be anyone else there, will there? Quite alone! Good! I can ring up Dad afterwards. Yes, splendid, splendid. Sure you’re all right, my darling? I’m at death’s door till I see you. Yes. Good-bye — half an hour. Good-bye.’

When Daphne had hung up the receiver she sat down almost in a faint. What was it that so frightened her? His terrible, terrible altered voice, like cold, blue steel. She had no time to think. She rang for her maid.

‘Oh, my lady, it isn’t bad news?’ cried Millicent, when she caught sight of her mistress white as death.

‘No, good news. Major Apsley will be here in half an hour. Help me to dress. Ring to Murry’s first to send in some roses, red ones, and some lilac-coloured iris — two dozen of each, at once.’

Daphne went to her room. She didn’t know what to wear, she didn’t know how she wanted her hair dressed. She spoke hastily to her maid. She chose a violet-coloured dress. She did not know what she was doing. In the middle of dressing the flowers came, and she left off to put them in the bowls. So that when she heard his voice in the hall, she was still standing in front of the mirror reddening her lips and wiping it away again.

‘Major Apsley, my lady!’ murmured the maid, in excitement.

‘Yes, I can hear. Go and tell him I shall be one minute.’

Daphne’s voice had become slow and sonorous, like bronze, as it always did when she was upset. Her face looked almost haggard, and in vain she dabbed with the rouge.

‘How does he look?’ she asked curtly, when her maid came back.

‘A long scar here,’ said the maid, and she drew her finger from the left-hand corner of her mouth into her cheek, slanting downwards.

‘Make him look very different?’ asked Daphne.

‘Not so *very* different, my lady,’ said Millicent gently. ‘His eyes are the same, I think.’ The girl also was distressed.

‘All right,’ said Daphne. She looked at herself a long, last look as she turned away from the mirror. The sight of her own face made her feel almost sick. She had seen so much of herself. And yet even now she was fascinated by the heavy droop of her lilac-veined lids over her slow, strange, large, green-blue eyes. They *were* mysterious-looking. And she gave herself a long, sideways glance,

curious and Chinese. How was it possible there was a touch of the Chinese in her face? — she so purely an English blonde, an Aphrodite of the foam, as Basil had called her in poetry. Ah well! She left off her thoughts and went through the hall to the drawing-room.

He was standing nervously in the middle of the room in his uniform. She hardly glanced at his face — and saw only the scar.

‘Hullo, Daphne,’ he said, in a voice full of the expected emotion. He stepped forward and took her in his arms, and kissed her forehead.

‘So glad! So glad it’s happened at last,’ she said, hiding her tears.

‘So glad what has happened, darling?’ he asked, in his deliberate manner.

‘That you’re back.’ Her voice had the bronze resonance, she spoke rather fast.

‘Yes, I’m back, Daphne darling — as much of me as there is to bring back.’

‘Why?’ she said. ‘You’ve come back whole, surely?’ She was frightened.

‘Yes, apparently I have. Apparently. But don’t let’s talk of that. Let’s talk of you, darling. How are you? Let me look at you. You are thinner, you are older. But you are more wonderful than ever. Far more wonderful.’

‘How?’ said she.

‘I can’t exactly say how. You were only a girl. Now you are a woman. I suppose it’s all that’s happened. But you are wonderful as a woman, Daphne darling — more wonderful than all that’s happened. I couldn’t have believed you’d be so wonderful. I’d forgotten — or else I’d never known. I say, I’m a lucky chap really. Here I am, alive and well, and I’ve got you for a wife. It’s brought you out like a flower. I say, darling, there is more now than Venus of the foam — grander. How beautiful you are! But you look like the beauty of all life — as if you were moon-mother of the world — Aphrodite. God is good to me after all, darling. I ought never to utter a single complaint. How lovely you are — how lovely you are, my darling! I’d forgotten you — and I thought I knew you so well. Is it true that you belong to me? Are you really mine?’

They were seated on the yellow sofa. He was holding her hand, and his eyes were going up and down, from her face to her throat and her breast. The sound of his words, and the strong, cold desire in his voice excited her, pleased her, and made her heart freeze. She turned and looked into his light blue eyes. They had no longer the amused light, nor the young look. They burned with a hard, focused light, whitish.

‘It’s all right. You are mine, aren’t you, Daphne darling?’ came his cultured, musical voice, that had always the well-bred twang of diffidence.

She looked back into his eyes.

‘Yes, I am yours,’ she said, from the lips.

‘Darling! Darling!’ he murmured, kissing her hand.

Her heart beat suddenly so terribly, as if her breast would be ruptured, and she rose in one movement and went across the room. She leaned her hand on the mantelpiece and looked down at the electric fire. She could hear the faint, faint noise of it. There was silence for a few moments.

Then she turned and looked at him. He was watching her intently. His face was gaunt, and there was a curious deathly sub-pallor, though his cheeks were not white. The scar ran livid from the side of his mouth. It was not so very big. But it seemed like a scar in him himself, in his brain, as it were. In his eyes was that hard, white, focused light that fascinated her and was terrible to her. He was different. He was like death; like risen death. She felt she dared not touch him. White death was still upon him. She could tell that he shrank with a kind of agony from contact. 'Touch me not, I am not yet ascended unto the Father.' Yet for contact he had come. Something, someone seemed to be looking over his shoulder. His own young ghost looking over his shoulder. Oh, God! She closed her eyes, seeming to swoon. He remained leaning forward on the sofa, watching her.

'Aren't you well, darling?' he asked. There was a strange, incomprehensible coldness in his very fire. He did not move to come near her.

'Yes, I'm well. It is only that after all it is so sudden. Let me get used to you,' she said, turning aside her face from him. She felt utterly like a victim of his white, awful face.

'I suppose I must be a bit of a shock to you,' he said. 'I hope you won't leave off loving me. It won't be that, will it?'

The strange coldness in his voice! And yet the white, uncanny fire.

'No, I shan't leave off loving you,' she admitted, in a low tone, as if almost ashamed. She *dared* not have said otherwise. And the saying it made it true.

'Ah, if you're sure of that,' he said. 'I'm a pretty unlovely sight to behold, I know, with this wound-scar. But if you can forgive it me, darling. Do you think you can?' There was something like compulsion in his tone.

She looked at him, and shivered slightly.

'I love you — more than before,' she said hurriedly.

'Even the scar?' came his terrible voice, inquiring.

She glanced again, with that slow, Chinese side-look, and felt she would die.

'Yes,' she said, looking away at nothingness. It was an awful moment to her. A little, slightly imbecile smile widened on his face.

He suddenly knelt at her feet, and kissed the toe of her slipper, and kissed the instep, and kissed the ankle in the thin black stocking.

'I knew,' he said in a muffled voice. 'I knew you would make good. I knew if I had to kneel, it was before you. I knew you were divine, you were the one —

Cybele — Isis. I knew I was your slave. I knew. It has all been just a long initiation. I had to learn how to worship you.’

He kissed her feet again and again, without the slightest self-consciousness, or the slightest misgiving. Then he went back to the sofa, and sat there looking at her, saying:

‘It isn’t love, it is worship. Love between me and you will be a sacrament, Daphne. That’s what I had to learn. You are beyond me. A mystery to me. My God, how great it all is. How marvellous!’

She stood with her hand on the mantelpiece, looking down and not answering. She was frightened — almost horrified: but she was thrilled deep down to her soul. She really felt she could glow white and fill the universe like the moon, like Astarte, like Isis, like Venus. The grandeur of her own pale power. The man religiously worshipped her, not merely amorously. She was ready for him — for the sacrament of his supreme worship.

He sat on the sofa with his hands spread on the yellow brocade and pushing downwards behind him, down between the deep upholstery of the back and the seat. He had long, white hands with pale freckles. And his fingers touched something. With his long white fingers he groped and brought it out. It was the lost thimble. And inside it was the bit of screwed-up blue paper.

‘I say, is that *your* thimble?’ he asked.

She started, and went hurriedly forward for it.

‘Where was it?’ she said, agitated.

But he did not give it to her. He turned it round and pulled out the bit of blue paper. He saw the faint pencil marks on the screwed-up ball, and unrolled the band of paper, and slowly deciphered the verse.

‘*Wenn ich ein Vöglein wär*
Und auch zwei Flüglein hätt
Flög’ ich zu dir —’

‘How awfully touching that is,’ he said. ‘A *Vöglein* with two little *Flüglein*! But what a precious darling child you are! Whom did you want to fly to, if you were a *Vöglein*?’ He looked up at her with a curious smile.

‘I can’t remember,’ she said, turning aside her head.

‘I hope it was to me,’ he said. ‘Anyhow, I shall consider it was, and shall love you all the more for it. What a darling child! A *Vöglein* if you please, with two little wings! Why, how beautifully absurd of you, darling!’

He folded the scrap of paper carefully, and put it in his pocket-book, keeping the thimble all the time between his knees.

‘Tell me when you lost it, Daphne,’ he said, examining the bauble.

‘About a month ago — or two months.’

‘About a month ago — or two months. And what were you sewing? Do you mind if I ask? I like to think of you then. I was still in that beastly El Hasrun. What were you sewing, darling, two months ago, when you lost your thimble?’

‘A shirt.’

‘I say, a shirt! Whose shirt?’

‘Yours.’

‘There. Now we’ve run it to earth. Were you really sewing a shirt for me! Is it finished? Can I put it on at this minute?’

‘That one isn’t finished, but the first one is.’

‘I say, darling, let me go and put it on. To think I should have it next my skin! I shall feel you all round me, all over me. I say how marvellous that will be! Won’t you come?’

‘Won’t you give me the thimble?’ she said.

‘Yes, of course. What a noble thimble too! Who gave it you?’

‘Count Dionys Psanek.’

‘Who was he?’

‘A Bohemian Count, in Dresden. He once stayed with us in Thoresway — with a tall wife. Didn’t you meet them?’

‘I don’t think I did. I don’t think I did. I don’t remember. What was he like?’

‘A little man with black hair and a rather low, dark forehead — rather dressy.’

‘No, I don’t remember him at all. So he gave it you. Well, I wonder where he is now? Probably rotted, poor devil.’

‘No, he’s interned in Voynich Hall. Mother and I have been to see him several times. He was awfully badly wounded.’

‘Poor little beggar! In Voynich Hall! I’ll look at him before he goes. Odd thing, to give you a thimble. Odd gift! You were a girl then, though. Do you think he had it made, or do you think he found it in a shop?’

‘I think it belonged to the family. The ladybird at the top is part of their crest — and the snake as well, I think.’

‘A ladybird! Funny thing for a crest. Americans would call it a bug. I must look at him before he goes. And you were sewing a shirt for me! And then you posted me this little letter into the sofa. Well, I’m awfully glad I received it, and that it didn’t go astray in the post, like so many things. “*Wenn ich ein Vöglein wär*” — you perfect child! But that is the beauty of a woman like you: you are so superb and beyond worship, and then such an exquisite naïve child. Who could help worshipping you and loving you: immortal and mortal together. What, you want the thimble? Here! Wonderful, wonderful, white fingers. Ah, darling, you

are more goddess than child, you long, limber Isis with sacred hands. White, white, and immortal! Don't tell me your hands could die, darling: your wonderful Proserpine fingers. They are immortal as February and snowdrops. If you lift your hands the spring comes. I *can't* help kneeling before you, darling. I am no more than a sacrifice to you, an offering. I *wish* I could die in giving myself to you, give you all my blood on your altar, for ever.'

She looked at him with a long, slow look, as he turned his face to her. His face was white with ecstasy. And she was not afraid. Somewhere, saturnine, she knew it was absurd. But she chose not to know. A certain swoon-sleep was on her. With her slow, green-blue eyes she looked down on his ecstasized face, almost benign. But in her right hand unconsciously she held the thimble fast, she only gave him her left hand. He took her hand and rose to his feet in that curious priestly ecstasy which made him more than a man or a soldier, far, far more than a lover to her.

Nevertheless, his home-coming made her begin to be ill again. Afterwards, after his love, she had to bear herself in torment. To her shame and her heaviness, she knew she was not strong enough, or pure enough, to bear this awful outpouring adoration-lust. It was not her fault she felt weak and fretful afterwards, as if she wanted to cry and be fretful and petulant, wanted someone to save her. She could not turn to Basil, her husband. After his ecstasy of adoration-lust for her, she recoiled from him. Alas, she was not the goddess, the superb person he named her. She was flawed with the fatal humility of her age. She could not harden her heart and burn her soul pure of this humility, this misgiving. She could not finally believe in her own woman-godhead — only in her own female mortality.

That fierce power of being alone, even with your lover, the fierce power of the woman *in excelsis* — alas, she could not keep it. She could rise to the height for the time, the incandescent, transcendent, moon-fierce womanhood. But alas, she could not stay intensified and resplendent in her white, womanly powers, her female mystery. She relaxed, she lost her glory, and became fretful. Fretful and ill and never to be soothed. And then naturally her man became ashy and somewhat acrid, while she ached with nerves, and could not eat.

Of course she began to dream about Count Dionys: to yearn wistfully for him. And it was absolutely a fatal thought to her that he was going away. When she thought that — that he was leaving England soon — going away into the dark for ever — then the last spark seemed to die in her. She felt her soul perish, whilst she herself was worn and soulless like a prostitute. A prostitute goddess. And her husband, the gaunt, white, intensified priest of her, who never ceased from being before her like a lust.

‘Tomorrow,’ she said to him, gathering her last courage and looking at him with a side look, ‘I want to go to Voynich Hall.’

‘What, to see Count Psanek? Oh, good! Yes, very good! I’ll come along as well. I should like very much to see him. I suppose he’ll be getting sent back before long.’

It was a fortnight before Christmas, very dark weather. Her husband was in khaki. She wore her black furs and a black lace veil over her face, so that she seemed mysterious. But she lifted the veil and looped it behind, so that it made a frame for her face. She looked very lovely like that — her face pure like the most white hellebore flower, touched with winter pink, amid the blackness of her drapery and furs. Only she was rather too much like the picture of a modern beauty: too much the actual thing. She had half an idea that Dionys would hate her for her effective loveliness. He would see it and hate it. The thought was like a bitter balm to her. For herself, she loved her loveliness almost with obsession.

The Count came cautiously forward, glancing from the lovely figure of Lady Daphne to the gaunt well-bred Major at her side. Daphne was so beautiful in her dark furs, the black lace of her veil thrown back over her close-fitting, dull-gold-threaded hat, and her face fair like a winter flower in a cranny of darkness. But on her face, that was smiling with a slow self-satisfaction of beauty and of knowledge that she was dangling the two men, and setting all the imprisoned officers wildly on the alert, the Count could read that acidity of dissatisfaction and of inefficiency. And he looked away to the livid scar on the Major’s cheek.

‘Count Dionys, I wanted to bring my husband to see you. May I introduce him to you? Major Apsley — Count Dionys Psanek.’

The two men shook hands rather stiffly.

‘I can sympathize with you being fastened up in this place,’ said Basil in his slow, easy fashion. ‘I hated it, I assure you, out there in the East.’

‘But your conditions were much worse than mine,’ smiled the Count.

‘Well, perhaps they were. But prison is prison, even if it were heaven itself.’

‘Lady Apsley has been the one angel of my heaven,’ smiled the Count.

‘I’m afraid I was as inefficient as most angels,’ said she.

The small smile never left the Count’s dark face. It was true as she said, he was low-browed, the black hair growing low on his brow, and his eyebrows making a thick bow above his dark eyes, which had again long black lashes. So that the upper part of his face seemed very dusky-black. His nose was small and somewhat translucent. There was a touch of mockery about him, which was intensified even by his small, energetic stature. He was still carefully dressed in the dark-blue uniform, whose shabbiness could not hinder the dark flame of life which seemed to glow through the cloth from his body. He was not thin — but

still had a curious swarthy translucency of skin in his low-browed face.

‘What would you have been more?’ he laughed, making equivocal dark eyes at her.

‘Oh, of course, a delivering angel — a cinema heroine,’ she replied, closing her eyes and turning her face aside.

All the while the white-faced, tall Major watched the little man with a fixed, half-smiling scrutiny. The Count seemed to notice. He turned to the Englishman.

‘I am glad that I can congratulate you, Major Apsley, on your safe and happy return to your home.’

‘Thanks. I hope I may be able to congratulate you in the same way before long.’

‘Oh yes,’ said the Count. ‘Before long I shall be shipped back.’

‘Have you any news of your family?’ interrupted Daphne.

‘No news,’ he replied briefly, with sudden gravity.

‘It seems you’ll find a fairish mess out in Austria,’ said Basil.

‘Yes, probably. It is what we had to expect,’ replied the Count.

‘Well, I don’t know. Sometimes things do turn out for the best. I feel that’s as good as true in my case,’ said the Major.

‘Things have turned out for the best?’ said the Count, with an intonation of polite inquiry.

‘Yes. Just for me personally, I mean — to put it quite selfishly. After all, what we’ve learned is that a man can only speak for himself. And I feel it’s been dreadful, but it’s not been lost. It was like an ordeal one had to go through,’ said Basil.

‘You mean the war?’

‘The war and everything that went with it.’

‘And when you’ve been through the ordeal?’ politely inquired the Count.

‘Why, you arrive at a higher state of consciousness, and therefore of life. And so, of course, at a higher plane of love. A surprisingly higher plane of love, that you had never suspected the existence of before.’

The Count looked from Basil to Daphne, who was posing her head a little self-consciously.

‘Then indeed the war has been a valuable thing,’ he said.

‘Exactly!’ cried Basil. ‘I am another man.’

‘And Lady Apsley?’ queried the Count.

‘Oh’ — her husband faced round to her — ‘she is *absolutely* another woman — and *much* more wonderful, more marvellous.’

The Count smiled and bowed slightly.

‘When we knew her ten years ago, we should have said then that it was

impossible,' said he, 'for her to be more wonderful.'

'Oh, quite!' returned the husband. 'It always seems impossible. And the impossible is always happening. As a matter of fact, I think the war has opened another circle of life to us — a wider ring.'

'It may be so,' said the Count.

'You don't feel it so yourself?' The Major looked with his keen, white attention into the dark, low-browed face of the other man. The Count looked smiling at Daphne.

'I am only a prisoner still, Major, therefore I feel my ring quite small.'

'Yes, of course you do. Of course. Well, I do hope you won't be a prisoner much longer. You must be dying to get back into your own country.'

'Yes, I shall be glad to be free. Also,' he smiled. 'I shall miss my prison and my visits from the angels.'

Even Daphne could not be sure he was mocking her. It was evident the visit was unpleasant to him. She could see he did not like Basil. Nay, more, she could feel that the presence of her tall, gaunt, idealistic husband was hateful to the little swarthy man. But he passed it all off in smiles and polite speeches.

On the other hand, Basil was as if fascinated by the Count. He watched him absorbedly all the time, quite forgetting Daphne. She knew this. She knew that she was quite gone out of her husband's consciousness, like a lamp that has been carried away into another room. There he stood completely in the dark, as far as she was concerned, and all his attention focused on the other man. On his pale, gaunt face was a fixed smile of amused attention.

'But don't you get awfully bored,' he said, 'between the visits?'

The Count looked up with an affection of frankness.

'No, I do not,' he said. 'I can brood, you see, on the things that come to pass.'

'I think that's where the harm comes in,' replied the Major. 'One sits and broods, and is cut off from everything, and one loses one's contact with reality. That's the effect it had on me, being a prisoner.'

'Contact with reality — what is that?'

'Well — contact with anybody, really — or anything.'

'Why must one have contact?'

'Well, because one must,' said Basil.

The Count smiled slowly.

'But I can sit and watch fate flowing, like black water, deep down in my own soul,' he said. 'I feel that there, in the dark of my own soul, things are happening.'

'That may be. But whatever happens, it is only one thing, really. It is a contact between your own soul and the soul of one other being, or of many other beings.'

Nothing else can happen to man. That's how I figured it out for myself. I may be wrong. But that's how I figured it out when I was wounded and a prisoner.'

The Count's face had gone dark and serious.

'But is this contact an aim in itself?' he asked.

'Well' — said the Major — he had taken his degree in philosophy — 'it seems to me it is. It results inevitably in some form of activity. But the cause and the origin and the life-impetus of all action, activity, whether constructive or destructive, seems to me to be in the dynamic contact between human beings. You bring to pass a certain dynamic contact between men, and you get war. Another sort of dynamic contact, and you get them all building a cathedral, as they did in the Middle Ages.'

'But was not the war, or the cathedral, the real aim, and the emotional contact just the means?' said the Count.

'I don't think so,' said the Major, his curious white passion beginning to glow through his face. The three were seated in a little card-room, left alone by courtesy by the other men. Daphne was still draped in her dark, too-becoming drapery. But alas, she sat now ignored by both men. She might just as well have been an ugly little nobody, for all the notice that was taken of her. She sat in the window-seat of the dreary small room with a look of discontent on her exotic, rare face, that was like a delicate white and pink hothouse flower. From time to time she glanced with long, slow looks from man to man: from her husband, whose pallid, intense, white glowing face was pressed forward across the table to the Count, who sat back in his chair, as if in opposition, and whose dark face seemed clubbed together in a dark, unwilling stare. Her husband was *quite* unaware of anything but his own white identity. But the Count still had a grain of secondary consciousness which hovered round and remained aware of the woman in the window-seat. The whole of his face, and his forward-looking attention was concentrated on Basil. But somewhere at the back of him he kept track of Daphne. She sat uneasy, in discontent, as women always do sit when men are locked together in a combustion of words. At the same time, she followed the argument. It was curious that, while her sympathy at this moment was with the Count, it was her husband whose words she believed to be true. The contact, the emotional contact was the real thing, the so-called 'aim' was only a by-product. Even wars and cathedrals, in her mind, were only by-products. The real thing was what the warriors and cathedral-builders had had in common, as a great uniting feeling: the thing they felt for one another, and for their women in particular, of course.

'There are a great many kinds of contact, nevertheless,' said Dionys.

'Well, do you know,' said the Major, 'it seems to me there is really only one

supreme contact, the contact of love. Mind you, the love may take on an infinite variety of forms. And in my opinion, no form of love is wrong, so long as it is love, and you yourself *honour* what you are doing. Love has an extraordinary variety of forms! And that is all that there is in life, it seems to me. But I grant you, if you deny the *variety* of love you deny love altogether. If you try to specialize love into one set of accepted feelings, you wound the very soul of love. Love *must* be multiform, else it is just tyranny, just death.'

'But why call it all *love*?' said the Count.

'Because it seems to me it *is* love: the great power that draws human beings together, no matter what the result of the contact may be. Of course there is hate, but hate is only the recoil of love.'

'Do you think the old Egypt was established on love?' asked Dionys.

'Why, of course! And perhaps the most multiform, the most comprehensive love that the world has seen. All that we suffer from now is that our way of love is narrow, exclusive, and therefore not love at all; more like death and tyranny.'

The Count slowly shook his head, smiling slowly and as if sadly.

'No,' he said. 'No. It is no good. You must use another word than love.'

'I don't agree at all,' said Basil.

'What word then?' blurted Daphne.

The Count looked at her.

'Obedience, submission, faith, belief, responsibility, power,' he said slowly, picking out the words slowly, as if searching for what he wanted, and never quite finding it. He looked with his quiet dark eyes into her eyes. It was curious, she disliked his words intensely, but she liked him. On the other hand, she believed absolutely what her husband said, yet her physical sympathy was against him.

'Do you agree, Daphne?' asked Basil.

'Not a bit,' she replied, with a heavy look at her husband.

'Nor I,' said Basil. 'It seems to me, if you love, there is no obedience nor submission, except to the soul of love. If you mean obedience, submission, and all the rest, to the soul of love itself, I quite agree. But if you mean obedience, submission of one person to another, and one man having power over others — I don't agree, and never shall. It seems to me just there where we have gone wrong. Kaiser Wilhelm II wanted power —'

'No, no,' said the Count. 'He was a mountebank. He had no conception of the sacredness of power.'

'He proved himself very dangerous.'

'Oh yes. But peace can be even more dangerous still.'

'Tell me, then. Do you believe that you, as an aristocrat, should have feudal power over a few hundreds of other men, who happen to be born serfs, or not

aristocrats?’

‘Not as a hereditary aristocrat, but as a *man* who is by nature an aristocrat,’ said the Count, ‘it is my sacred duty to hold the lives of other men in my hands, and to shape the issue. But I can never fulfil my destiny till men will willingly put their lives in my hands.’

‘You don’t expect them to, do you?’ smiled Basil.

‘At this moment, no.’

‘Or at any moment!’ The Major was sarcastic.

‘At a certain moment the men who are really living will come beseeching to put their lives into the hands of the greater men among them, beseeching the greater men to take the sacred responsibility of power.’

‘Do you think so? Perhaps you mean men will at last begin to choose leaders whom they will *love*,’ said Basil. ‘I wish they would.’

‘No, I mean that they will at last yield themselves before men who are greater than they: become vassals by choice.’

‘Vassals!’ exclaimed Basil, smiling. ‘You are still in the feudal ages, Count.’

‘Vassals. Not to any hereditary aristocrat — Hohenzollern or Hapsburg or Psanek,’ smiled the Count. ‘But to the man whose soul is born single, able to be alone, to choose and to command. At last the masses will come to such men and say: “You are greater than we. Be our lords. Take our life and our death in your hands, and dispose of us according to your will. Because we see a light in your face, and burning on your mouth.”’

The Major smiled for many moments, really piqued and amused, watching the Count, who did not turn a hair.

‘I say, you must be awfully naïve, Count, if you believe the modern masses are ever going to behave like that. I assure you, they never will.’

‘If they did,’ said the Count, ‘would you call it a new reign of love, or something else?’

‘Well, of course, it would contain an element of love. There would have to be an element of love in their feeling for their leaders.’

‘Do you think so? I thought that love assumed an equality in difference. I thought that love gave to every man the right to judge the acts of other men — “This was not an act of love, therefore it was wrong.” Does not democracy, and love, give to every man this right?’

‘Certainly,’ said Basil.

‘Ah, but my chosen aristocrat would say to those who chose him: “If you choose me, you give up forever your right to judge me. If you have truly chosen to follow me, you have thereby rejected all your right to criticize me. You can no longer either approve or disapprove of me. You have performed the sacred act of

choice. Henceforth you can only obey.”“

‘They wouldn’t be able to help criticizing, for all that,’ said Daphne, blurting in her say.

He looked at her slowly, and for the first time in her life she was doubtful of what she was saying.

‘The day of Judas,’ he said, ‘ends with the day of love.’

Basil woke up from a sort of trance.

‘I think, of course, Count,’ he said, ‘that it’s an awfully amusing idea. A retrogression slap back to the Dark Ages.’

‘Not so,’ said the Count. ‘Men — the mass of men — were never before free to perform the sacred act of choice. Today — soon — they may be free.’

‘Oh, I don’t know. Many tribes chose their kings and chiefs.’

‘Men have never before been quite free to choose: and to know what they are doing.’

‘You mean they’ve only made themselves free in order voluntarily to saddle themselves with new lords and masters?’

‘I do mean that.’

‘In short, life is just a vicious circle?’

‘Not at all. An ever-widening circle, as you say. Always more wonderful.’

‘Well, it’s all frightfully interesting and amusing — don’t you think so, Daphne? By the way, Count, where would women be? Would they be allowed to criticize their husbands?’

‘Only before marriage,’ smiled the Count. ‘Not after.’

‘Splendid!’ said Basil. ‘I’m all for that bit of your scheme, Count. I hope you’re listening, Daphne.’

‘Oh yes. But then I’ve only married *you*, I’ve got my right to criticize all the other men,’ she said in a dull, angry voice.

‘Exactly. Clever of you! So the Count won’t get off! Well now, what do you think of the Count’s aristocratic scheme for the future, Daphne? Do you approve?’

‘Not at all. But then little men have always wanted power,’ she said cruelly.

‘Oh, big men as well, for that matter,’ said Basil, conciliatory.

‘I have been told before,’ smiled the Count, ‘little men are always bossy. I am afraid I have offended Lady Daphne?’

‘No,’ she said. ‘Not really. I’m amused, really. But I always dislike any suggestion of bullying.’

‘Indeed, so do I,’ said he.

‘The Count didn’t mean bullying, Daphne,’ said Basil. ‘Come, there is really an allowable distinction between responsible power and bullying.’

‘When men put their heads together about it,’ said she.

She was haughty and angry, as if she were afraid of losing something. The Count smiled mischievously at her.

‘You are offended, Lady Daphne? But why? You are safe from any spark of my dangerous and extensive authority.’

Basil burst into a roar of laughter.

‘It is rather funny, you to be talking of power and of not being criticized,’ he said. ‘But I should like to hear more: I would like to hear more.’

As they drove home, he said to his wife:

‘You know I like that little man. He’s a quaint little bantam. And he sets one thinking.’

Lady Daphne froze to four degrees below zero, under the north wind of this statement, and not another word was to be thawed out of her.

Curiously enough, it was now Basil who was attracted by the Count, and Daphne who was repelled. Not that she was so bound up in her husband. Not at all. She was feeling rather sore against men altogether. But as so often happens, in this life based on the wicked triangle, Basil could only follow his enthusiasm for the Count in his wife’s presence. When the two men were alone together, they were awkward, resistant, they could hardly get out a dozen words to one another. When Daphne was there, however, to complete the circuit of the opposing currents, things went like a house on fire.

This, however, was not much consolation to Lady Daphne. Merely to sit as a passive medium between two men who are squibbing philosophical nonsense to one another: no, it was not good enough! She almost hated the Count: low-browed little fellow, belonging to the race of prehistoric slaves. But her grudge against her white-faced, spiritually intense husband was sharp as vinegar. Let down: she was let down between the pair of them.

What next? Well, what followed was entirely Basil’s fault. The winter was passing: it was obvious the war was really over, that Germany was finished. The Hohenzollern had fizzled out like a very poor squib, the Hapsburg was popping feebly in obscurity, the Romanov was smudged out without a sputter. So much for imperial royalty. Henceforth democratic peace.

The Count, of course, would be shipped back now like returned goods that had no market any more. There was a world peace ahead. A week or two, and Voynich Hall would be empty.

Basil, however, could not let matters follow their simple course. He was awfully intrigued by the Count. He wanted to entertain him as a guest before he went. And Major Apsley could get anything in reason, at this moment. So he obtained permission for the poor little Count to stay a fortnight at Thoresway,

before being shipped back to Austria. Earl Beveridge, whose soul was black as ink since the war, would never have allowed the little alien enemy to enter his house, had it not been for the hatred which had been aroused in him, during the last two years, by the degrading spectacle of the so-called patriots who had been howling their mongrel indecency in the public face. These mongrels had held the Press and the British public in abeyance for almost two years. Their one aim was to degrade and humiliate anything that was proud or dignified remaining in England. It was almost the worst nightmare of all, this coming to the top of a lot of public filth which was determined to suffocate the souls of all dignified men.

Hence, the Earl, who never intended to be swamped by unclean scum, whatever else happened to him, stamped his heels in the ground and stood on his own feet. When Basil said to him, would he allow the Count to have a fortnight's decent peace in Thoresway before all was finished, Lord Beveridge gave a slow consent, scandal or no scandal. Indeed, it was really to defy scandal that he took such a step. For the thought of his dead boys was bitter to him: and the thought of England fallen under the paws of smelly mongrels was bitterer still.

Lord Beveridge was at Thoresway to receive the Count, who arrived escorted by Basil. The English Earl was a big, handsome man, rather heavy, with a dark, sombre face that would have been haughty if haughtiness had not been made so ridiculous. He was a passionate man, with a passionate man's sensitiveness, generosity, and instinctive overbearing. But *his* dark passionate nature, and his violent sensitiveness had been subjected now to fifty-five years' subtle repression, condemnation, repudiation, till he had almost come to believe in his own wrongness. His little, frail wife, all love for humanity, she was the genuine article. Himself, he was labelled selfish, sensual, cruel, etc., etc. So by now he always seemed to be standing aside, in the shadow, letting himself be obliterated by the pallid rabble of the democratic hurry. That was the impression he gave of a man standing back, half-ashamed, half-haughty, semi-hidden in the dark background.

He was a little on the defensive as Basil came in with the Count.

'Ah — how do you do, Count Psanek?' he said, striding largely forward and holding out his hand. Because he was the father of Daphne the Count felt a certain tenderness for the taciturn Englishman.

'You do me too much honour, my lord, receiving me in your house,' said the small Count proudly.

The Earl looked at him slowly, without speaking: seemed to look down on him, in every sense of the words.

'We are still men, Count. We are not beasts altogether.'

‘You wish to say that my countrymen are so very nearly beasts, Lord Beveridge?’ smiled the Count, curling his fine nose.

Again the Earl was slow in replying.

‘You have a low opinion of my manners, Count Psanek.’

‘But perhaps a just appreciation of your meaning, Lord Beveridge,’ smiled the Count, with the same reckless little look of contempt on his nose.

Lord Beveridge flushed dark, with all his native anger offended.

‘I am glad Count Psanek makes my own meaning clear to me,’ he said.

‘I beg your pardon a thousand times, my lord, if I give offence in doing so,’ replied the Count.

The Earl went black, and felt a fool. He turned his back on the Count. And then he turned round again, offering his cigar-case.

‘Will you smoke?’ he said. There was kindness in his tone.

‘Thank you,’ said the Count, taking a cigar.

‘I dare say,’ said Lord Beveridge, ‘that all men are beasts in some way. I am afraid I have fallen into the common habit of speaking by rote, and not what I really mean. Won’t you take a seat?’

‘It is only as a prisoner that I have learned that I am *not* truly a beast. No, I am myself. I am not a beast,’ said the Count, seating himself.

The Earl eyed him curiously.

‘Well,’ he said, smiling, ‘I suppose it is best to come to a decision about it.’

‘It is necessary, if one is to be safe from vulgarity.’

The Earl felt a twinge of accusation. With his agate-brown, hard-looking eyes he watched the black-browed little Count.

‘You are probably right,’ he said.

But he turned his face aside.

They were five people at dinner — Lady Beveridge was there as hostess.

‘Ah, Count Dionys,’ she said with a sigh, ‘do you really feel that the war is over?’

‘Oh yes,’ he replied quickly. ‘This war is over. The armies will go home. *Their* cannon will not sound any more. Never again like this.’

‘Ah, I hope so,’ she sighed.

‘I am sure,’ he said.

‘You think there’ll be no more war?’ said Daphne.

For some reason she had made herself very fine, in her newest dress of silver and black and pink-chenille, with bare shoulders, and her hair fashionably done. The Count in his shabby uniform turned to her. She was nervous, hurried. Her slim white arm was near him, with the bit of silver at the shoulder. Her skin was white like a hothouse flower. Her lips moved hurriedly.

‘Such a war as this there will never be again,’ he said.

‘What makes you so sure?’ she replied, glancing into his eyes.

‘The machine of war has got out of our control. We shall never start it again, till it has fallen to pieces. We shall be afraid.’

‘Will everybody be afraid?’ said she, looking down and pressing back her chin.

‘I think so.’

‘We will hope so,’ said Lady Beveridge.

‘Do you mind if I ask you, Count,’ said Basil, ‘what you feel about the way the war has ended? The way it has ended for *you*, I mean.’

‘You mean that Germany and Austria have lost the war? It was bound to be. We have all lost the war. All Europe.’

‘I agree there,’ said Lord Beveridge.

‘We’ve all lost the war?’ said Daphne, turning to look at him.

There was pain on his dark, low-browed face. He suffered having the sensitive woman beside him. Her skin had a hothouse delicacy that made his head go round. Her shoulders were broad, rather thin, but the skin was white and so sensitive, so hothouse delicate. It affected him like the perfume of some white, exotic flower. And she seemed to be sending her heart towards him. It was as if she wanted to press her breast to his. From the breast she loved him, and sent out love to him. And it made him unhappy; he wanted to be quiet, and to keep his honour before these hosts.

He looked into her eyes, his own eyes dark with knowledge and pain. She, in her silence and her brief words seemed to be holding them all under her spell. She seemed to have cast a certain muteness on the table, in the midst of which she remained silently master, leaning forward to her plate, and silently mastering them all.

‘Don’t I think we’ve all lost the war?’ he replied, in answer to her question. ‘It was a war of suicide. Nobody could win it. It was suicide for all of us.’

‘Oh, I don’t know,’ she replied. ‘What about America and Japan?’

‘They don’t count. They only helped *us* to commit suicide. They did not enter vitally.’

There was such a look of pain on his face, and such a sound of pain in his voice, that the other three closed their ears, shut off from attending. Only Daphne was making him speak. It was she who was drawing the soul out of him, trying to read the future in him as the augurs read the future in the quivering entrails of the sacrificed beast. She looked direct into his face, searching his soul.

‘You think Europe has committed suicide?’ she said.

‘Morally.’

‘Only morally?’ came her slow, bronze-like words, so fatal.

‘That is enough,’ he smiled.

‘Quite,’ she said, with a slow droop of her eyelids. Then she turned away her face. But he felt the heart strangling inside his breast. What was she doing now? What was she thinking? She filled him with uncertainty and with uncanny fear.

‘At least,’ said Basil, ‘those infernal guns are quiet.’

‘For ever,’ said Dionys.

‘I wish I could believe you, Count,’ said the Major.

The talk became more general — or more personal. Lady Beveridge asked Dionys about his wife and family. He knew nothing save that they had gone to Hungary in 1916, when his own house was burnt down. His wife might even have gone to Bulgaria with Prince Bogorik. He did not know.

‘But your children, Count!’ cried Lady Beveridge.

‘I do not know. Probably in Hungary, with their grandmother. I will go when I get back.’

‘But have you never *written*? — never inquired?’

‘I could not write. I shall know soon enough — everything.’

‘You have no son?’

‘No. Two girls.’

‘Poor things!’

‘Yes.’

‘I say, isn’t it an odd thing to have a ladybird on your crest?’ asked Basil, to cheer up the conversation.

‘Why queer? Charlemagne had bees. And it is a *Marienkäfer* — a Mary-beetle. The beetle of Our Lady. I think it is quite a heraldic insect, Major,’ smiled the Count.

‘You’re proud of it?’ said Daphne, suddenly turning to look at him again, with her slow, pregnant look.

‘I am, you know. It has such a long genealogy — our spotted beetle. Much longer than the Psaneks. I think, you know, it is a descendant of the Egyptian scarabeus, which is a very mysterious emblem. So I connect myself with the Pharaohs: just through my ladybird.’

‘You feel your ladybird has crept through so many ages,’ she said.

‘Imagine it!’ he laughed.

‘The scarab *is* a piquant insect,’ said Basil.

‘Do you know Fabre?’ put in Lord Beveridge. ‘He suggests that the beetle rolling a little ball of dung before him, in a dry old field, must have suggested to the Egyptians the First Principle that set the globe rolling. And so the scarab became the symbol of the creative principle — or something like that.’

‘That the earth is a tiny ball of dry dung is good,’ said Basil.

‘Between the claws of a ladybird,’ added Daphne.

‘That is what it is, to go back to one’s origin,’ said Lady Beveridge.

‘Perhaps they meant that it was the principle of decomposition which first set the ball rolling,’ said the Count.

‘The ball would have to be *there* first,’ said Basil.

‘Certainly. But it hadn’t started to roll. Then the principle of decomposition started it.’ The Count smiled as if it were a joke.

‘I am no Egyptologist,’ said Lady Beveridge, ‘so I can’t judge.’

The Earl and Countess Beveridge left next day. Count Dionys was left with the two young people in the house. It was a beautiful Elizabethan mansion, not very large, but with those magical rooms that are all a twinkle of small-paned windows, looking out from the dark panelled interior. The interior was cosy, panelled to the ceiling, and the ceiling moulded and touched with gold. And then the great square bow of the window with its little panes intervening like magic between oneself and the world outside, the crest in stained glass crowning its colour, the broad window-seat cushioned in faded green. Dionys wandered round the house like a little ghost, through the succession of small and large twinkling sitting-rooms and lounge rooms in front, down the long, wide corridor with the wide stairhead at each end, and up the narrow stairs to the bedrooms above, and on to the roof.

It was early spring, and he loved to sit on the leaded, pale-grey roof that had its queer seats and slopes, a little pale world in itself. Then to look down over the garden and the sloping lawn to the ponds massed round with trees, and away to the elms and furrows and hedges of the shires. On the left of the house was the farmstead, with ricks and great-roofed barns and dark-red cattle. Away to the right, beyond the park, was a village among trees, and the spark of a grey church spire.

He liked to be alone, feeling his soul heavy with its own fate. He would sit for hours watching the elm trees standing in rows like giants, like warriors across the country. The Earl had told him that the Romans had brought these elms to Britain. And he seemed to see the spirit of the Romans in them still. Sitting there alone in the spring sunshine, in the solitude of the roof, he saw the glamour of this England of hedgerows and elm trees, and the labourers with slow horses slowly drilling the sod, crossing the brown furrow: and the roofs of the village, with the church steeple rising beside a big black yew tree: and the chequer of fields away to the distance.

And the charm of the old manor around him, the garden with its grey stone walls and yew hedges — broad, broad yew hedges and a peacock pausing to

glitter and scream in the busy silence of an English spring, when celandines open their yellow under the hedges, and violets are in the secret, and by the broad paths of the garden polyanthus and crocuses vary the velvet and flame, and bits of yellow wallflower shake raggedly, with a wonderful triumphance, out of the cracks of the wall. There was a fold somewhere near, and he could hear the treble bleat of the growing lambs, and the deeper, contented baa-ing of the ewes.

This was Daphne's home, where she had been born. She loved it with an ache of affection. But now it was hard to forget her dead brothers. She wandered about in the sun, with two old dogs padding after her. She talked with everybody — gardener, groom, stableman, with the farm-hands. That filled a large part of her life — straying round talking with the work-people. They were, of course, respectful to her — but not at all afraid of her. They knew she was poor, that she could not afford a car, nor anything. So they talked to her very freely: perhaps a little too freely. Yet she let it be. It was her one passion at Thoresway to hear the dependants talk and talk — about everything. The curious feeling of intimacy across a breach fascinated her. Their lives fascinated her: what they thought, what they *felt*. These, what they felt. That fascinated her. There was a gamekeeper she could have loved — an impudent, ruddy-faced, laughing, ingratiating fellow; she could have loved him, if he had not been isolated beyond the breach of his birth, her culture, her consciousness. Her *consciousness* seemed to make a great gulf between her and the lower classes, the unconscious classes. She accepted it as her doom. She could never meet in real contact anyone but a super-conscious, finished being like herself: or like her husband. Her father had some of the unconscious blood-warmth of the lower classes. But he was like a man who is damned. And the Count, of course. The Count had something that was hot and invisible, a dark flame of life that might warm the cold white fire of her own blood. But —

They avoided each other. All three, they avoided one another. Basil, too, went off alone. Or he immersed himself in poetry. Sometimes he and the Count played billiards. Sometimes all three walked in the park. Often Basil and Daphne walked to the village, to post. But truly, they avoided one another, all three. The days slipped by.

At evening they sat together in the small west room that had books and a piano and comfortable shabby furniture of faded rose-coloured tapestry: a shabby room. Sometimes Basil read aloud: sometimes the Count played the piano. And they talked. And Daphne stitch by stitch went on with a big embroidered bedspread, which she might finish if she lived long enough. But they always went to bed early. They were nearly always avoiding one another.

Dionys had a bedroom in the east bay — a long way from the rooms of the

others. He had a habit, when he was quite alone, of singing, or rather crooning, to himself the old songs of his childhood. It was only when he felt he was quite alone: when other people seemed to fade out of him, and all the world seemed to dissolve into darkness, and there was nothing but himself, his own soul, alive in the middle of his own small night, isolate for ever. Then, half unconscious, he would croon in a small, high-pitched, squeezed voice, a sort of high dream-voice, the songs of his childhood dialect. It was a curious noise: the sound of a man who is alone in his own blood: almost the sound of a man who is going to be executed.

Daphne heard the sound one night when she was going downstairs again with the corridor lantern to find a book. She was a bad sleeper, and her nights were a torture to her. She, too, like a neurotic, was nailed inside her own fretful self-consciousness. But she had a very keen ear. So she started as she heard the small, bat-like sound of the Count's singing to himself. She stood in the midst of the wide corridor, that was wide as a room, carpeted with a faded lavender-coloured carpet, with a piece of massive dark furniture at intervals by the wall, and an oak arm-chair and sometimes a faded, reddish Oriental rug. The big horn lantern which stood at nights at the end of the corridor she held in her hand. The intense 'peeping' sound of the Count, like a witchcraft, made her forget everything. She could not understand a word, of course. She could not understand the noise even. After listening for a long time, she went on downstairs. When she came back again he was still, and the light was gone from under his door.

After this, it became almost an obsession to her to listen for him. She waited with fretful impatience for ten o'clock, when she could retire. She waited more fretfully still for the maid to leave her, and for her husband to come and say good-night. Basil had the room across the corridor. And then in resentful impatience she waited for the sounds of the house to become still. Then she opened her door to listen.

And far away, as if from far, far away in the unseen, like a ventriloquist sound or a bat's uncanny peeping, came the frail, almost inaudible sound of the Count's singing to himself before he went to bed. It was inaudible to anyone but herself. But she, by concentration, seemed to hear supernaturally. She had a low arm-chair by the door, and there, wrapped in a huge old black silk shawl, she sat and listened. At first she could not hear. That is, she could hear the sound. But it was only a sound. And then, gradually, gradually she began to follow the thread of it. It was like a thread which she followed out of the world: out of the world. And as she went, slowly, by degrees, far, far away, down the thin thread of his singing, she knew peace — she knew forgetfulness. She could pass beyond the

world, away beyond where her soul balanced like a bird on wings, and was perfected.

So it was, in her upper spirit. But underneath was a wild, wild yearning, actually to go, actually to be given. Actually to go, actually to die the death, actually to cross the border and be gone, to be gone. To be gone from this herself, from this Daphne, to be gone from father and mother, brothers and husband, and home and land and world: to be gone. To be gone to the call from the beyond: the call. It was the Count calling. He was calling her. She was sure he was calling her. Out of herself, out of her world, he was calling her.

Two nights she sat just inside her room, by the open door, and listened. Then when he finished she went to sleep, a queer, light, bewitched sleep. In the day she was bewitched. She felt strange and light, as if pressure had been removed from around her. Some pressure had been clamped round her all her life. She had never realized it till now; now it was removed, and her feet felt so light, and her breathing delicate and exquisite. There had always been a pressure against her breathing. Now she breathed delicate and exquisite, so that it was a delight to breathe. Life came in exquisite breaths, quickly, as if it delighted to come to her.

The third night he was silent — though she waited and waited till the small hours of the morning. He was silent, he did not sing. And then she knew the terror and blackness of the feeling that he might never sing any more. She waited like one doomed, throughout the day. And when the night came she trembled. It was her greatest nervous terror, lest her spell should be broken, and she should be thrown back to what she was before.

Night came, and the kind of swoon upon her. Yes, and the call from the night. The call! She rose helplessly and hurried down the corridor. The light was under his door. She sat down in the big oak arm-chair that stood near his door, and huddled herself tight in her black shawl. The corridor was dim with the big, star-studded, yellow lantern-light. Away down she could see the lamp-light in her doorway; she had left her door ajar.

But she saw nothing. Only she wrapped herself close in the black shawl, and listened to the sound from the room. It called. Oh, it called her! Why could she not go? Why could she not cross through the closed door.

Then the noise ceased. And then the light went out, under the door of his room. Must she go back? Must she go back? Oh, impossible. As impossible as that the moon should go back on her tracks, once she has risen. Daphne sat on, wrapped in her black shawl. If it must be so, she would sit on through eternity. Return she never could.

And then began the most terrible song of all. It began with a rather dreary, slow, horrible sound, like death. And then suddenly came a real call — fluty, and

a kind of whistling and a strange whirr at the changes, most imperative, and utterly inhuman. Daphne rose to her feet. And at the same moment up rose the whistling throb of a summons out of the death moan.

Daphne tapped low and rapidly at the door. 'Count! Count!' she whispered. The sound inside ceased. The door suddenly opened. The pale, obscure figure of Dionys.

'Lady Daphne!' he said in astonishment, automatically standing aside.

'You called,' she murmured rapidly, and she passed intent into his room.

'No, I did not call,' he said gently, his hand on the door still.

'Shut the door,' she said abruptly.

He did as he was bid. The room was in complete darkness. There was no moon outside. She could not see him.

'Where can I sit down?' she said abruptly.

'I will take you to the couch,' he said, putting out his hand and touching her in the dark. She shuddered.

She found the couch and sat down. It was quite dark.

'What are you singing?' she said rapidly.

'I am so sorry. I did not think anyone could hear.'

'What was it you were singing?'

'A song of my country.'

'Had it any words?'

'Yes, it is a woman who was a swan, and who loved a hunter by the marsh. So she became a woman and married him and had three children. Then in the night one night the king of the swans called to her to come back, or else he would die. So slowly she turned into a swan again, and slowly she opened her wide, wide wings, and left her husband and her children.'

There was silence in the dark room. The Count had been really startled, startled out of his mood of the song into the day-mood of human convention. He was distressed and embarrassed by Daphne's presence in his dark room. She, however, sat on and did not make a sound. He, too, sat down in a chair by the window. It was everywhere dark. A wind was blowing in gusts outside. He could see nothing inside his room: only the faint, faint strip of light under the door. But he could feel her presence in the darkness. It was uncanny, to feel her near in the dark, and not to see any sign of her, nor to hear any sound.

She had been wounded in her bewitched state by the contact with the everyday human being in him. But now she began to relapse into her spell, as she sat there in the dark. And he, too, in the silence, felt the world sinking away from him once more, leaving him once more alone on a darkened earth, with nothing between him and the infinite dark space. Except now her presence. Darkness

answering to darkness, and deep answering to deep. An answer, near to him, and invisible.

But he did not know what to do. He sat still and silent as she was still and silent. The darkness inside the room seemed alive like blood. He had no power to move. The distance between them seemed absolute.

Then suddenly, without knowing, he went across in the dark, feeling for the end of the couch. And he sat beside her on the couch. But he did not touch her. Neither did she move. The darkness flowed about them thick like blood, and time seemed dissolved in it. They sat with the small, invisible distance between them, motionless, speechless, thoughtless.

Then suddenly he felt her finger-tips touch his arm, and a flame went over him that left him no more a man. He was something seated in flame, in flame unconscious, seated erect, like an Egyptian King-god in the statues. Her finger-tips slid down him, and she herself slid down in a strange, silent rush, and he felt her face against his closed feet and ankles, her hands pressing his ankles. He felt her brow and hair against his ankles, her face against his feet, and there she clung in the dark, as if in space below him. He still sat erect and motionless. Then he bent forward and put his hand on her hair.

‘Do you come to me?’ he murmured. ‘Do you come to me?’

The flame that enveloped him seemed to sway him silently.

‘Do you really come to me?’ he repeated. ‘But we have nowhere to go.’

He felt his bare feet wet with her tears. Two things were struggling in him, the sense of eternal solitude, like space, and the rush of dark flame that would throw him out of his solitude towards her.

He was thinking too. He was thinking of the future. He had no future in the world: of that he was conscious. He had no future in this life. Even if he lived on, it would only be a kind of enduring. But he felt that in the after-life the inheritance was his. He felt the after-life belonged to him.

Future in the world he could not give her. Life in the world he had not to offer her. Better go on alone. Surely better go on alone.

But then the tears on his feet: and her face that would face him as he left her! No, no. The next life was his. He was master of the after-life. Why fear for this life? Why not take the soul she offered him? Now and for ever, for the life that would come when they both were dead. Take her into the underworld. Take her into the dark Hades with him, like Francesca and Paolo. And in hell hold her fast, queen of the underworld, himself master of the underworld. Master of the life to come. Father of the soul that would come after.

‘Listen,’ he said to her softly. ‘Now you are mine. In the dark you are mine. And when you die you are mine. But in the day you are not mine, because I have

no power in the day. In the night, in the dark, and in death, you are mine. And that is for ever. No matter if I must leave you. I shall come again from time to time. In the dark you are mine. But in the day I cannot claim you. I have no power in the day, and no place. So remember. When the darkness comes, I shall always be in the darkness of you. And as long as I live, from time to time I shall come to find you, when I am able to, when I am not a prisoner. But I shall have to go away soon. So don't forget — you are the night wife of the ladybird, while you live and even when you die.'

Later, when he took her back to her room, he saw the door still ajar.

'You shouldn't leave a light in your room,' he murmured.

In the morning there was a curious remote look about him. He was quieter than ever, and seemed very far away. Daphne slept late. She had a strange feeling as if she had slipped off all her cares. She did not care, she did not grieve, she did not fret any more. All that had left her. She felt she could sleep, sleep, sleep — for ever. Her face, too, was very still, with a delicate look of virginity that she had never had before. She had always been Aphrodite, the self-conscious one. And her eyes, the green-blue, had been like slow, living jewels, resistant. Now they had unfolded from the hard flower-bud, and had the wonder, and the stillness of a quiet night.

Basil noticed it at once.

'You're different, Daphne,' he said. 'What are you thinking about?'

'I wasn't thinking,' she said, looking at him with candour.

'What were you doing then?'

'What does one do when one doesn't think? Don't make me puzzle it out, Basil.'

'Not a bit of it, if you don't want to.'

But he was puzzled by her. The sting of his ecstatic love for her seemed to have left him. Yet he did not know what else to do but to make love to her. She went very pale. She submitted to him, bowing her head because she was his wife. But she looked at him with fear, with sorrow, with real suffering. He could feel the heaving of her breast, and knew she was weeping. But there were no tears on her face, she was only death pale. Her eyes were shut.

'Are you in pain?' he asked her.

'No! no!' She opened her eyes, afraid lest she had disturbed him. She did not want to disturb him.

He was puzzled. His own ecstatic, deadly love for her had received a check. He was out of the reckoning.

He watched her when she was with the Count. Then she seemed so meek — so maidenly — so different from what he had known of her. She was so still, like

a virgin girl. And it was this quiet, intact quality of Virginitv in her which puzzled him most, puzzled his emotions and his ideas. He became suddenly ashamed to make love to her. And because he was ashamed, he said to her as he stood in her room that night:

‘Daphne, are you in love with the Count?’

He was standing by the dressing-table, uneasy. She was seated in a low chair by the tiny dying wood fire. She looked up at him with wide, slow eyes. Without a word, with wide, soft, dilated eyes she watched him. What was it that made him feel all confused? He turned his face aside, away from her wide, soft eyes.

‘Pardon me, dear. I didn’t intend to ask such a question. Don’t take any notice of it,’ he said. And he strode away and picked up a book. She lowered her head and gazed abstractedly into the fire, without a sound. Then he looked at her again, at her bright hair that the maid had plaited for the night. Her plait hung down over her soft pinkish wrap. His heart softened to her as he saw her sitting there. She seemed like his sister. The excitement of desire had left him, and now he seemed to see clear and feel true for the first time in his life. She was like a dear, dear sister to him. He felt that she was his blood-sister, nearer to him than he had imagined any woman could be. So near — so dear — and all the sex and the desire gone. He didn’t want it — he hadn’t wanted it. This new pure feeling was so much more wonderful.

He went to her side.

‘Forgive me, darling,’ he said, ‘for having questioned you.’

She looked up at him with the wide eyes, without a word. His face was good and beautiful. Tears came to her eyes.

‘You have the right to question me,’ she said sadly.

‘No,’ he said. ‘No, darling. I have no right to question you. Daphne! Daphne, darling! It shall be as *you* wish, between us. Shall it? Shall it be as you wish?’

‘You are the husband, Basil,’ she said sadly.

‘Yes, darling. But’ — he went on his knees beside her — ‘perhaps, darling, something has changed in us. I feel as if I ought never to touch you again — as if I never *wanted* to touch you — in that way. I feel it was wrong, darling. Tell me what you think.’

‘Basil, don’t be angry with me.’

‘It isn’t anger; it’s pure love, darling — it is.’

‘Let us not come any nearer to one another than this, Basil — physically — shall we?’ she said. ‘And don’t be angry with me, will you?’

‘Why,’ he said. ‘I think myself the sexual part has been a mistake. I had rather love you — as I love now. I *know* that this is true love. The other was always a bit whipped up. I *know* I love you now, darling: now I’m free from that other.’

But what if it comes upon me, that other, Daphne?’

‘I am always your wife,’ she said quietly. ‘I am always your wife. I want always to obey you, Basil: what you wish.’

‘Give me your hand, dear.’

She gave him her hand. But the look in her eyes at the same time warned him and frightened him. He kissed her hand and left her.

It was to the Count she belonged. This had decided itself in her down to the depths of her soul. If she could not marry him and be his wife in the world, it had nevertheless happened to her for ever. She could no more question it. Question had gone out of her.

Strange how different she had become — a strange new quiescence. The last days were slipping past. He would be going away — Dionys: he with the still remote face, the man she belonged to in the dark and in the light, for ever. He would be going away. He said it must be so. And she acquiesced. The grief was deep, deep inside her. He must go away. Their lives could not be one life, in this world’s day. Even in her anguish she knew it was so. She knew he was right. He was for her infallible. He spoke the deepest soul in her.

She never *saw* him as a lover. When she saw him, he was the little officer, a prisoner, quiet, claiming nothing in all the world. And when she went to him as his lover, his wife, it was always dark. She only knew his voice and his contact in darkness. ‘My wife in darkness,’ he said to her. And in this too she believed him. She would not have contradicted him, no, not for anything on earth: lest contradicting him she should lose the dark treasures of stillness and bliss which she kept in her breast even when her heart was wrung with the agony of knowing he must go.

No, she had found this wonderful thing after she had heard him singing: she had suddenly collapsed away from her old self into this darkness, this peace, this quiescence that was like a full dark river flowing eternally in her soul. She had gone to sleep from the *nuit blanche* of her days. And Basil, wonderful, had changed almost at once. She feared him, lest he might change back again. She would always have him to fear. But deep inside her she only feared for this love of hers for the Count: this dark, everlasting love that was like a full river flowing for ever inside her. Ah, let that not be broken.

She was so still inside her. She could sit so still, and feel the day slowly, richly changing to night. And she wanted nothing, she was short of nothing. If only Dionys need not go away! If only he need not go away!

But he said to her, the last morning:

‘Don’t forget me. Always remember me. I leave my soul in your hands and your womb. Nothing can ever separate us, unless we betray one another. If you

have to give yourself to your husband, do so, and obey him. If you are true to me, innerly, innerly true, he will not hurt us. He is generous, be generous to him. And never fail to believe in me. Because even on the other side of death I shall be watching for you. I shall be king in Hades when I am dead. And you will be at my side. You will never leave me any more, in the after-death. So don't be afraid in life. Don't be afraid. If you have to cry tears, cry them. But in your heart of hearts know that I shall come again, and that I have taken you for ever. And so, in your heart of hearts be still, be still, since you are the wife of the ladybird.' He laughed as he left her, with his own beautiful, fearless laugh. But they were strange eyes that looked after him.

He went in the car with Basil back to Voynich Hall.

'I believe Daphne will miss you,' said Basil.

The Count did not reply for some moments.

'Well, if she does,' he said, 'there will be no bitterness in it.'

'Are you sure?' smiled Basil.

'Why — if we are sure of anything,' smiled the Count.

'She's changed, isn't she?'

'Is she?'

'Yes, she's quite changed since you came, Count.'

'She does not seem to me so very different from the girl of seventeen whom I knew.'

'No — perhaps not. I didn't know her then. But she's very different from the wife I have known.'

'A regrettable difference?'

'Well — no, not as far as she goes. She is much quieter inside herself. You know, Count, something of me died in the war. I feel it will take me an eternity to sit and think about it all.'

'I hope you may think it out to your satisfaction, Major.'

'Yes, I hope so too. But that is how it has left me — feeling as if I needed eternity now to brood about it all, you know. Without the need to act — or even to love, really. I suppose love is action.'

'Intense action,' said the Count.

'Quite so. I know really how I feel. I only ask of life to spare me from further effort of action of any sort — even love. And then to fulfil myself, brooding through eternity. Of course, I don't mind *work*, mechanical action. That in itself is a form of inaction.'

'A man can only be happy following his own inmost need,' said the Count.

'Exactly!' said Basil. 'I will lay down the law for nobody, not even for myself. And live my day —'

‘Then you will be happy in your own way. I find it so difficult to keep from laying the law down for myself,’ said the Count. ‘Only the thought of death and the after life saves me from doing it any more.’

‘As the thought of eternity helps me,’ said Basil. ‘I suppose it amounts to the same thing.’

THE END

THE FOX



The two girls were usually known by their surnames, Banford and March. They had taken the farm together, intending to work it all by themselves: that is, they were going to rear chickens, make a living by poultry, and add to this by keeping a cow, and raising one or two young beasts. Unfortunately, things did not turn out well.

Banford was a small, thin, delicate thing with spectacles. She, however, was the principal investor, for March had little or no money. Banford's father, who was a tradesman in Islington, gave his daughter the start, for her health's sake, and because he loved her, and because it did not look as if she would marry. March was more robust. She had learned carpentry and joinery at the evening classes in Islington. She would be the man about the place. They had, moreover, Banford's old grandfather living with them at the start. He had been a farmer. But unfortunately the old man died after he had been at Bailey Farm for a year. Then the two girls were left alone.

They were neither of them young: that is, they were near thirty. But they certainly were not old. They set out quite gallantly with their enterprise. They had numbers of chickens, black Leghorns and white Leghorns, Plymouths and Wyandottes; also some ducks; also two heifers in the fields. One heifer, unfortunately, refused absolutely to stay in the Bailey Farm closes. No matter how March made up the fences, the heifer was out, wild in the woods, or trespassing on the neighbouring pasture, and March and Banford were away, flying after her, with more haste than success. So this heifer they sold in despair. Then, just before the other beast was expecting her first calf, the old man died, and the girls, afraid of the coming event, sold her in a panic, and limited their attentions to fowls and ducks.

In spite of a little chagrin, it was a relief to have no more cattle on hand. Life was not made merely to be slaved away. Both girls agreed in this. The fowls were quite enough trouble. March had set up her carpenter's bench at the end of the open shed. Here she worked, making coops and doors and other appurtenances. The fowls were housed in the bigger building, which had served as barn and cow-shed in old days. They had a beautiful home, and should have been perfectly content. Indeed, they looked well enough. But the girls were

disgusted at their tendency to strange illnesses, at their exacting way of life, and at their refusal, obstinate refusal to lay eggs.

March did most of the outdoor work. When she was out and about, in her puttees and breeches, her belted coat and her loose cap, she looked almost like some graceful, loose-balanced young man, for her shoulders were straight, and her movements easy and confident, even tinged with a little indifference or irony. But her face was not a man's face, ever. The wisps of her crisp dark hair blew about her as she stooped, her eyes were big and wide and dark, when she looked up again, strange, startled, shy and sardonic at once. Her mouth, too, was almost pinched as if in pain and irony. There was something odd and unexplained about her. She would stand balanced on one hip, looking at the fowls pattering about in the obnoxious fine mud of the sloping yard, and calling to her favourite white hen, which came in answer to her name. But there was an almost satirical flicker in March's big, dark eyes as she looked at her three-toed flock pottering about under her gaze, and the same slight dangerous satire in her voice as she spoke to the favoured Patty, who pecked at March's boot by way of friendly demonstration.

Fowls did not flourish at Bailey Farm, in spite of all that March did for them. When she provided hot food for them in the morning, according to rule, she noticed that it made them heavy and dozy for hours. She expected to see them lean against the pillars of the shed in their languid processes of digestion. And she knew quite well that they ought to be busily scratching and foraging about, if they were to come to any good. So she decided to give them their hot food at night, and let them sleep on it. Which she did. But it made no difference.

War conditions, again, were very unfavourable to poultry-keeping. Food was scarce and bad. And when the Daylight Saving Bill was passed, the fowls obstinately refused to go to bed as usual, about nine o'clock in the summer-time. That was late enough, indeed, for there was no peace till they were shut up and asleep. Now they cheerfully walked around, without so much as glancing at the barn, until ten o'clock or later. Both Banford and March disbelieved in living for work alone. They wanted to read or take a cycle-ride in the evening, or perhaps March wished to paint curvilinear swans on porcelain, with green background, or else make a marvellous fire-screen by processes of elaborate cabinet work. For she was a creature of odd whims and unsatisfied tendencies. But from all these things she was prevented by the stupid fowls.

One evil there was greater than any other. Bailey Farm was a little homestead, with ancient wooden barn and low-gabled farm-house, lying just one field removed from the edge of the wood. Since the war the fox was a demon. He carried off the hens under the very noses of March and Banford. Banford would

start and stare through her big spectacles with all her eyes, as another squawk and flutter took place at her heels. Too late! Another white Leghorn gone. It was disheartening.

They did what they could to remedy it. When it became permitted to shoot foxes, they stood sentinel with their guns, the two of them, at the favoured hours. But it was no good. The fox was too quick for them. So another year passed, and another, and they were living on their losses, as Banford said. They let their farm-house one summer, and retired to live in a railway-carriage that was deposited as a sort of out-house in a corner of the field. This amused them, and helped their finances. None the less, things looked dark.

Although they were usually the best of friends, because Banford, though nervous and delicate, was a warm, generous soul, and March, though so odd and absent in herself, had a strange magnanimity, yet, in the long solitude, they were apt to become a little irritable with one another, tired of one another. March had four-fifths of the work to do, and though she did not mind, there seemed no relief, and it made her eyes flash curiously sometimes. Then Banford, feeling more nerve-worn than ever, would become despondent, and March would speak sharply to her. They seemed to be losing ground, somehow, losing hope as the months went by. There alone in the fields by the wood, with the wide country stretching hollow and dim to the round hills of the White Horse, in the far distance, they seemed to have to live too much off themselves. There was nothing to keep them up — and no hope.

The fox really exasperated them both. As soon as they had let the fowls out, in the early summer mornings, they had to take their guns and keep guard: and then again as soon as evening began to mellow, they must go once more. And he was so sly. He slid along in the deep grass; he was difficult as a serpent to see. And he seemed to circumvent the girls deliberately. Once or twice March had caught sight of the white tip of his brush, or the ruddy shadow of him in the deep grass, and she had let fire at him. But he made no account of this.

One evening March was standing with her back to the sunset, her gun under her arm, her hair pushed under her cap. She was half watching, half musing. It was her constant state. Her eyes were keen and observant, but her inner mind took no notice of what she saw. She was always lapsing into this odd, rapt state, her mouth rather screwed up. It was a question whether she was there, actually conscious present, or not.

The trees on the wood-edge were a darkish, brownish green in the full light — for it was the end of August. Beyond, the naked, copper-like shafts and limbs of the pine trees shone in the air. Nearer the rough grass, with its long, brownish stalks all a gleam, was full of light. The fowls were round about — the ducks

were still swimming on the pond under the pine trees. March looked at it all, saw it all, and did not see it. She heard Banford speaking to the fowls in the distance — and she did not hear. What was she thinking about? Heaven knows. Her consciousness was, as it were, held back.

She lowered her eyes, and suddenly saw the fox. He was looking up at her. Her chin was pressed down, and his eyes were looking up. They met her eyes. And he knew her. She was spellbound — she knew he knew her. So he looked into her eyes, and her soul failed her. He knew her, he was not daunted.

She struggled, confusedly she came to herself, and saw him making off, with slow leaps over some fallen boughs, slow, impudent jumps. Then he glanced over his shoulder, and ran smoothly away. She saw his brush held smooth like a feather, she saw his white buttocks twinkle. And he was gone, softly, soft as the wind.

She put her gun to her shoulder, but even then pursed her mouth, knowing it was nonsense to pretend to fire. So she began to walk slowly after him, in the direction he had gone, slowly, pertinaciously. She expected to find him. In her heart she was determined to find him. What she would do when she saw him again she did not consider. But she was determined to find him. So she walked abstractedly about on the edge of the wood, with wide, vivid dark eyes, and a faint flush in her cheeks. She did not think. In strange mindlessness she walked hither and thither.

At last she became aware that Banford was calling her. She made an effort of attention, turned, and gave some sort of screaming call in answer. Then again she was striding off towards the homestead. The red sun was setting, the fowls were retiring towards their roost. She watched them, white creatures, black creatures, gathering to the barn. She watched them spellbound, without seeing them. But her automatic intelligence told her when it was time to shut the door.

She went indoors to supper, which Banford had set on the table. Banford chatted easily. March seemed to listen, in her distant, manly way. She answered a brief word now and then. But all the time she was as if spellbound. And as soon as supper was over, she rose again to go out, without saying why.

She took her gun again and went to look for the fox. For he had lifted his eyes upon her, and his knowing look seemed to have entered her brain. She did not so much think of him: she was possessed by him. She saw his dark, shrewd, unabashed eye looking into her, knowing her. She felt him invisibly master her spirit. She knew the way he lowered his chin as he looked up, she knew his muzzle, the golden brown, and the greyish white. And again she saw him glance over his shoulder at her, half inviting, half contemptuous and cunning. So she went, with her great startled eyes glowing, her gun under her arm, along the

wood edge. Meanwhile the night fell, and a great moon rose above the pine trees. And again Banford was calling.

So she went indoors. She was silent and busy. She examined her gun, and cleaned it, musing abstractedly by the lamplight. Then she went out again, under the great moon, to see if everything was right. When she saw the dark crests of the pine trees against the blood-red sky, again her heart beat to the fox, the fox. She wanted to follow him, with her gun.

It was some days before she mentioned the affair to Banford. Then suddenly one evening she said:

‘The fox was right at my feet on Saturday night.’

‘Where?’ said Banford, her eyes opening behind her spectacles.

‘When I stood just above the pond.’

‘Did you fire?’ cried Banford.

‘No, I didn’t.’

‘Why not?’

‘Why, I was too much surprised, I suppose.’

It was the same old, slow, laconic way of speech March always had. Banford stared at her friend for a few moments.

‘You saw him?’ she cried.

‘Oh yes! He was looking up at me, cool as anything.’

‘I tell you,’ cried Banford — ‘the cheek! They’re not afraid of us, Nellie.’

‘Oh, no,’ said March.

‘Pity you didn’t get a shot at him,’ said Banford.

‘Isn’t it a pity! I’ve been looking for him ever since. But I don’t suppose he’ll come so near again.’

‘I don’t suppose he will,’ said Banford.

And she proceeded to forget about it, except that she was more indignant than ever at the impudence of the beggar. March also was not conscious that she thought of the fox. But whenever she fell into her half-musing, when she was half rapt and half intelligently aware of what passed under her vision, then it was the fox which somehow dominated her unconsciousness, possessed the blank half of her musing. And so it was for weeks, and months. No matter whether she had been climbing the trees for the apples, or beating down the last of the damsons, or whether she had been digging out the ditch from the duck-pond, or clearing out the barn, when she had finished, or when she straightened herself, and pushed the wisps of her hair away again from her forehead, and pursed up her mouth again in an odd, screwed fashion, much too old for her years, there was sure to come over her mind the old spell of the fox, as it came when he was looking at her. It was as if she could smell him at these times. And it always

recurred, at unexpected moments, just as she was going to sleep at night, or just as she was pouring the water into the tea-pot to make tea — it was the fox, it came over her like a spell.

So the months passed. She still looked for him unconsciously when she went towards the wood. He had become a settled effect in her spirit, a state permanently established, not continuous, but always recurring. She did not know what she felt or thought: only the state came over her, as when he looked at her.

The months passed, the dark evenings came, heavy, dark November, when March went about in high boots, ankle deep in mud, when the night began to fall at four o'clock, and the day never properly dawned. Both girls dreaded these times. They dreaded the almost continuous darkness that enveloped them on their desolate little farm near the wood. Banford was physically afraid. She was afraid of tramps, afraid lest someone should come prowling around. March was not so much afraid as uncomfortable, and disturbed. She felt discomfort and gloom in all her physique.

Usually the two girls had tea in the sitting-room. March lighted a fire at dusk, and put on the wood she had chopped and sawed during the day. Then the long evening was in front, dark, sodden, black outside, lonely and rather oppressive inside, a little dismal. March was content not to talk, but Banford could not keep still. Merely listening to the wind in the pines outside or the drip of water, was too much for her.

One evening the girls had washed up the tea-cups in the kitchen, and March had put on her house-shoes, and taken up a roll of crochet-work, which she worked at slowly from time to time. So she lapsed into silence. Banford stared at the red fire, which, being of wood, needed constant attention. She was afraid to begin to read too early, because her eyes would not bear any strain. So she sat staring at the fire, listening to the distant sounds, sound of cattle lowing, of a dull, heavy moist wind, of the rattle of the evening train on the little railway not far off. She was almost fascinated by the red glow of the fire.

Suddenly both girls started, and lifted their heads. They heard a footstep — distinctly a footstep. Banford recoiled in fear. March stood listening. Then rapidly she approached the door that led into the kitchen. At the same time they heard the footsteps approach the back door. They waited a second. The back door opened softly. Banford gave a loud cry. A man's voice said softly:

'Hello!'

March recoiled, and took a gun from a corner.

'What do you want?' she cried, in a sharp voice.

Again the soft, softly-vibrating man's voice said:

'Hello! What's wrong!'

‘I shall shoot!’ cried March. ‘What do you want?’

‘Why, what’s wrong? What’s wrong?’ came the soft, wondering, rather scared voice: and a young soldier, with his heavy kit on his back, advanced into the dim light.

‘Why,’ he said, ‘who lives here then?’

‘We live here,’ said March. ‘What do you want?’

‘Oh!’ came the long, melodious, wonder-note from the young soldier. ‘Doesn’t William Grenfel live here then?’

‘No — you know he doesn’t.’

‘Do I? Do I? I don’t, you see. He did *live* here, because he was my grandfather, and I lived here myself five years ago. What’s become of him then?’

The young man — or youth, for he would not be more than twenty — now advanced and stood in the inner doorway. March, already under the influence of his strange, soft, modulated voice, stared at him spellbound. He had a ruddy, roundish face, with fairish hair, rather long, flattened to his forehead with sweat. His eyes were blue, and very bright and sharp. On his cheeks, on the fresh ruddy skin were fine, fair hairs, like a down, but sharper. It gave him a slightly glistening look. Having his heavy sack on his shoulders, he stooped, thrusting his head forward. His hat was loose in one hand. He stared brightly, very keenly from girl to girl, particularly at March, who stood pale, with great dilated eyes, in her belted coat and puttees, her hair knotted in a big crisp knot behind. She still had the gun in her hand. Behind her, Banford, clinging to the sofa-arm, was shrinking away, with half-averted head.

‘I thought my grandfather still lived here? I wonder if he’s dead.’

‘We’ve been here for three years,’ said Banford, who was beginning to recover her wits, seeing something boyish in the round head with its rather long, sweaty hair.

‘Three years! You don’t say so! And you don’t know who was here before you?’

‘I know it was an old man, who lived by himself.’

‘Ay! Yes, that’s him! And what became of him then?’

‘He died. I know he died.’

‘Ay! He’s dead then!’

The youth stared at them without changing colour or expression. If he had any expression, besides a slight baffled look of wonder, it was one of sharp curiosity concerning the two girls; sharp, impersonal curiosity, the curiosity of that round young head.

But to March he was the fox. Whether it was the thrusting forward of his head,

or the glisten of fine whitish hairs on the ruddy cheek-bones, or the bright, keen eyes, that can never be said: but the boy was to her the fox, and she could not see him otherwise.

‘How is it you didn’t know if your grandfather was alive or dead?’ asked Banford, recovering her natural sharpness.

‘Ay, that’s it,’ replied the softly-breathing youth. ‘You see, I joined up in Canada, and I hadn’t heard for three or four years. I ran away to Canada.’

‘And now have you just come from France?’

‘Well — from Salonika really.’

There was a pause, nobody knowing quite what to say.

‘So you’ve nowhere to go now?’ said Banford rather lamely.

‘Oh, I know some people in the village. Anyhow, I can go to the “Swan”.’

‘You came on the train, I suppose. Would you like to sit down a bit?’

‘Well — I don’t mind.’

He gave an odd little groan as he swung off his kit. Banford looked at March.

‘Put the gun down,’ she said. ‘We’ll make a cup of tea.’

‘Ay,’ said the youth. ‘We’ve seen enough of rifles.’

He sat down rather tired on the sofa, leaning forward.

March recovered her presence of mind, and went into the kitchen. There she heard the soft young voice musing:

‘Well, to think I should come back and find it like this!’ He did not seem sad, not at all — only rather interestedly surprised.

‘And what a difference in the place, eh?’ he continued, looking round the room.

‘You see a difference, do you?’ said Banford.

‘Yes — don’t I!’

His eyes were unnaturally clear and bright, though it was the brightness of abundant health.

March was busy in the kitchen preparing another meal. It was about seven o’clock. All the time, while she was active, she was attending to the youth in the sitting-room, not so much listening to what he said as feeling the soft run of his voice. She primmed up her mouth tighter and tighter, puckering it as if it were sewed, in her effort to keep her will uppermost. Yet her large eyes dilated and glowed in spite of her; she lost herself. Rapidly and carelessly she prepared the meal, cutting large chunks of bread and margarine — for there was no butter. She racked her brain to think of something else to put on the tray — she had only bread, margarine, and jam, and the larder was bare. Unable to conjure anything up, she went into the sitting-room with her tray.

She did not want to be noticed. Above all, she did not want him to look at her.

But when she came in, and was busy setting the table just behind him, he pulled himself up from his sprawling, and turned and looked over his shoulder. She became pale and wan.

The youth watched her as she bent over the table, looked at her slim, well-shapen legs, at the belted coat dropping around her thighs, at the knot of dark hair, and his curiosity, vivid and widely alert, was again arrested by her.

The lamp was shaded with a dark-green shade, so that the light was thrown downwards and the upper half of the room was dim. His face moved bright under the light, but March loomed shadowy in the distance.

She turned round, but kept her eyes sideways, dropping and lifting her dark lashes. Her mouth unpuckered as she said to Banford:

‘Will you pour out?’

Then she went into the kitchen again.

‘Have your tea where you are, will you?’ said Banford to the youth — ‘unless you’d rather come to the table.’

‘Well,’ said he, ‘I’m nice and comfortable here, aren’t I? I will have it here, if you don’t mind.’

‘There’s nothing but bread and jam,’ she said. And she put his plate on a stool by him. She was very happy now, waiting on him. For she loved company. And now she was no more afraid of him than if he were her own younger brother. He was such a boy.

‘Nellie,’ she called. ‘I’ve poured you a cup out.’

March appeared in the doorway, took her cup, and sat down in a corner, as far from the light as possible. She was very sensitive in her knees. Having no skirts to cover them, and being forced to sit with them boldly exposed, she suffered. She shrank and shrank, trying not to be seen. And the youth sprawling low on the couch, glanced up at her, with long, steady, penetrating looks, till she was almost ready to disappear. Yet she held her cup balanced, she drank her tea, screwed up her mouth and held her head averted. Her desire to be invisible was so strong that it quite baffled the youth. He felt he could not see her distinctly. She seemed like a shadow within the shadow. And ever his eyes came back to her, searching, unremitting, with unconscious fixed attention.

Meanwhile he was talking softly and smoothly to Banford, who loved nothing so much as gossip, and who was full of perky interest, like a bird. Also he ate largely and quickly and voraciously, so that March had to cut more chunks of bread and margarine, for the roughness of which Banford apologized.

‘Oh, well,’ said March, suddenly speaking, ‘if there’s no butter to put on it, it’s no good trying to make dainty pieces.’

Again the youth watched her, and he laughed, with a sudden, quick laugh,

showing his teeth and wrinkling his nose.

‘It isn’t, is it,’ he answered in his soft, near voice.

It appeared he was Cornish by birth and upbringing. When he was twelve years old he had come to Bailey Farm with his grandfather, with whom he had never agreed very well. So he had run away to Canada, and worked far away in the West. Now he was here — and that was the end of it.

He was very curious about the girls, to find out exactly what they were doing. His questions were those of a farm youth; acute, practical, a little mocking. He was very much amused by their attitude to their losses: for they were amusing on the score of heifers and fowls.

‘Oh, well,’ broke in March, ‘we don’t believe in living for nothing but work.’

‘Don’t you?’ he answered. And again the quick young laugh came over his face. He kept his eyes steadily on the obscure woman in the corner.

‘But what will you do when you’ve used up all your capital?’ he said.

‘Oh, I don’t know,’ answered March laconically. ‘Hire ourselves out for land-workers, I suppose.’

‘Yes, but there won’t be any demand for women land-workers now the war’s over,’ said the youth.

‘Oh, we’ll see. We shall hold on a bit longer yet,’ said March, with a plangent, half-sad, half-ironical indifference.

‘There wants a man about the place,’ said the youth softly.

Banford burst out laughing.

‘Take care what you say,’ she interrupted. ‘We consider ourselves quite efficient.’

‘Oh,’ came March’s slow plangent voice, ‘it isn’t a case of efficiency, I’m afraid. If you’re going to do farming you must be at it from morning till night, and you might as well be a beast yourself.’

‘Yes, that’s it,’ said the youth. ‘You aren’t willing to put yourselves into it.’

‘We aren’t,’ said March, ‘and we know it.’

‘We want some of our time for ourselves,’ said Banford.

The youth threw himself back on the sofa, his face tight with laughter, and laughed silently but thoroughly. The calm scorn of the girls tickled him tremendously.

‘Yes,’ he said, ‘but why did you begin then?’

‘Oh,’ said March, ‘we had a better opinion of the nature of fowls then than we have now.’

‘Of Nature altogether, I’m afraid,’ said Banford. ‘Don’t talk to me about Nature.’

Again the face of the youth tightened with delighted laughter.

‘You haven’t a very high opinion of fowls and cattle, have you?’ he said.

‘Oh no — quite a low one,’ said March.

He laughed out.

‘Neither fowls nor heifers,’ said Banford, ‘nor goats nor the weather.’

The youth broke into a sharp yap of laughter, delighted. The girls began to laugh too, March turning aside her face and wrinkling her mouth in amusement.

‘Oh, well,’ said Banford, ‘we don’t mind, do we, Nellie?’

‘No,’ said March, ‘we don’t mind.’

The youth was very pleased. He had eaten and drunk his fill. Banford began to question him. His name was Henry Grenfel — no, he was not called Harry, always Henry. He continued to answer with courteous simplicity, grave and charming. March, who was not included, cast long, slow glances at him from her recess, as he sat there on the sofa, his hands clasping his knees, his face under the lamp bright and alert, turned to Banford. She became almost peaceful at last. He was identified with the fox — and he was here in full presence. She need not go after him any more. There in the shadow of her corner she gave herself up to a warm, relaxed peace, almost like sleep, accepting the spell that was on her. But she wished to remain hidden. She was only fully at peace whilst he forgot her, talking to Banford. Hidden in the shadow of the corner, she need not any more be divided in herself, trying to keep up two planes of consciousness. She could at last lapse into the odour of the fox.

For the youth, sitting before the fire in his uniform, sent a faint but distinct odour into the room, indefinable, but something like a wild creature. March no longer tried to reserve herself from it. She was still and soft in her corner like a passive creature in its cave.

At last the talk dwindled. The youth relaxed his clasp of his knees, pulled himself together a little, and looked round. Again he became aware of the silent, half-invisible woman in the corner.

‘Well,’ he said unwillingly, ‘I suppose I’d better be going, or they’ll be in bed at the “Swan “.’

‘I’m afraid they’re in bed, anyhow,’ said Banford. ‘They’ve all got this influenza.’

‘Have they!’ he exclaimed. And he pondered. ‘Well,’ he continued, ‘I shall find a place somewhere.’

‘I’d say you could stay here, only — ’ Banford began.

He turned and watched her, holding his head forward.

‘What?’ he asked.

‘Oh, well,’ she said, ‘propriety, I suppose.’ She was rather confused.

‘It wouldn’t be improper, would it?’ he said, gently surprised.

‘Not as far as we’re concerned,’ said Banford.

‘And not as far as *I’m* concerned,’ he said, with grave *naïveté*. ‘After all, it’s my own home, in a way.’

Banford smiled at this.

‘It’s what the village will have to say,’ she said.

There was a moment’s blank pause.

‘What do you say, Nellie?’ asked Banford.

‘I don’t mind,’ said March, in her distinct tone. ‘The village doesn’t matter to me, anyhow.’

‘No,’ said the youth, quick and soft. ‘Why should it? I mean, what should they say?’

‘Oh, well,’ came March’s plangent, laconic voice, ‘they’ll easily find something to say. But it makes no difference what they say. We can look after ourselves.’

‘Of course you can,’ said the youth.

‘Well then, stop if you like,’ said Banford. ‘The spare room is quite ready.’

His face shone with pleasure.

‘If you’re quite sure it isn’t troubling you too much,’ he said, with that soft courtesy which distinguished him.

‘Oh, it’s no trouble,’ they both said.

He looked, smiling with delight, from one to another.

‘It’s awfully nice not to have to turn out again, isn’t it?’ he said gratefully.

‘I suppose it is,’ said Banford.

March disappeared to attend the room. Banford was as pleased and thoughtful as if she had her own young brother home from France. It gave her just the same kind of gratification to attend on him, to get out the bath for him, and everything. Her natural warmth and kindness had now an outlet. And the youth luxuriated in her sisterly attention. But it puzzled him slightly to know that March was silently working for him too. She was so curiously silent and obliterated. It seemed to him he had not really seen her. He felt he should not know her if he met her in the road.

That night March dreamed vividly. She dreamed she heard a singing outside which she could not understand, a singing that roamed round the house, in the fields, and in the darkness. It moved her so that she felt she must weep. She went out, and suddenly she knew it was the fox singing. He was very yellow and bright, like corn. She went nearer to him, but he ran away and ceased singing. He seemed near, and she wanted to touch him. She stretched out her hand, but suddenly he bit her wrist, and at the same instant, as she drew back, the fox, turning round to bound away, whisked his brush across her face, and it seemed

his brush was on fire, for it seared and burned her mouth with a great pain. She awoke with the pain of it, and lay trembling as if she were really seared.

In the morning, however, she only remembered it as a distant memory. She arose and was busy preparing the house and attending to the fowls. Banford flew into the village on her bicycle to try and buy food. She was a hospitable soul. But alas, in the year 1918 there was not much food to buy. The youth came downstairs in his shirtsleeves. He was young and fresh, but he walked with his head thrust forward, so that his shoulders seemed raised and rounded, as if he had a slight curvature of the spine. It must have been only a manner of bearing himself, for he was young and vigorous. He washed himself and went outside, whilst the women were preparing breakfast.

He saw everything, and examined everything. His curiosity was quick and insatiable. He compared the state of things with that which he remembered before, and cast over in his mind the effect of the changes. He watched the fowls and the ducks, to see their condition; he noticed the flight of wood-pigeons overhead: they were very numerous; he saw the few apples high up, which March had not been able to reach; he remarked that they had borrowed a draw-pump, presumably to empty the big soft-water cistern which was on the north side of the house.

‘It’s a funny, dilapidated old place,’ he said to the girls, as he sat at breakfast.

His eyes were wise and childish, with thinking about things. He did not say much, but ate largely. March kept her face averted. She, too, in the early morning could not be aware of him, though something about the glint of his khaki reminded her of the brilliance of her dream-fox.

During the day the girls went about their business. In the morning he attended to the guns, shot a rabbit and a wild duck that was flying high towards the wood. That was a great addition to the empty larder. The girls felt that already he had earned his keep. He said nothing about leaving, however. In the afternoon he went to the village. He came back at tea-time. He had the same alert, forward-reaching look on his roundish face. He hung his hat on a peg with a little swinging gesture. He was thinking about something.

‘Well,’ he said to the girls, as he sat at table. ‘What am I going to do?’

‘How do you mean — what are you going to do?’ said Banford.

‘Where am I going to find a place in the village to stay?’ he said.

‘I don’t know,’ said Banford. ‘Where do you think of staying?’

‘Well’ — he hesitated — ‘at the “Swan” they’ve got this flu, and at the “Plough and Harrow” they’ve got the soldiers who are collecting the hay for the army: besides, in the private houses, there’s ten men and a corporal altogether billeted in the village, they tell me. I’m not sure where I could get a bed.’

He left the matter to them. He was rather calm about it. March sat with her elbows on the table, her two hands supporting her chin, looking at him unconsciously. Suddenly he lifted his clouded blue eyes, and unthinking looked straight into March's eyes. He was startled as well as she. He, too, recoiled a little. March felt the same sly, taunting, knowing spark leap out of his eyes, as he turned his head aside, and fall into her soul, as it had fallen from the dark eyes of the fox. She pursed her mouth as if in pain, as if asleep too.

'Well, I don't know,' Banford was saying. She seemed reluctant, as if she were afraid of being imposed upon. She looked at March. But, with her weak, troubled sight, she only saw the usual semi-abstraction on her friend's face. 'Why don't you speak, Nellie?' she said.

But March was wide-eyed and silent, and the youth, as if fascinated, was watching her without moving his eyes.

'Go on — answer something,' said Banford. And March turned her head slightly aside, as if coming to consciousness, or trying to come to consciousness.

'What do you expect me to say?' she asked automatically.

'Say what you think,' said Banford.

'It's all the same to me,' said March.

And again there was silence. A pointed light seemed to be on the boy's eyes, penetrating like a needle.

'So it is to me,' said Banford. 'You can stop on here if you like.'

A smile like a cunning little flame came over his face, suddenly and involuntarily. He dropped his head quickly to hide it, and remained with his head dropped, his face hidden.

'You can stop on here if you like. You can please yourself, Henry,' Banford concluded.

Still he did not reply, but remained with his head dropped. Then he lifted his face. It was bright with a curious light, as if exultant, and his eyes were strangely clear as he watched March. She turned her face aside, her mouth suffering as if wounded, and her consciousness dim.

Banford became a little puzzled. She watched the steady, pellucid gaze of the youth's eyes as he looked at March, with the invisible smile gleaming on his face. She did not know how he was smiling, for no feature moved. It seemed only in the gleam, almost the glitter of the fine hairs on his cheeks. Then he looked with quite a changed look at Banford.

'I'm sure,' he said in his soft, courteous voice, 'you're awfully good. You're too good. You don't want to be bothered with me, I'm sure.'

'Cut a bit of bread, Nellie,' said Banford uneasily, adding: 'It's no bother, if you like to stay. It's like having my own brother here for a few days. He's a boy

like you are.'

'That's awfully kind of you,' the lad repeated. 'I should like to stay ever so much, if you're sure I'm not a trouble to you.'

'No, of course you're no trouble. I tell you, it's a pleasure to have somebody in the house beside ourselves,' said warmhearted Banford.

'But Miss March?' he said in his soft voice, looking at her.

'Oh, it's quite all right as far as I'm concerned,' said March vaguely.

His face beamed, and he almost rubbed his hands with pleasure.

'Well then,' he said, 'I should love it, if you'd let me pay my board and help with the work.'

'You've no need to talk about board,' said Banford.

One or two days went by, and the youth stayed on at the farm. Banford was quite charmed by him. He was so soft and courteous in speech, not wanting to say much himself, preferring to hear what she had to say, and to laugh in his quick, half-mocking way. He helped readily with the work — but not too much. He loved to be out alone with the gun in his hands, to watch, to see. For his sharp-eyed, impersonal curiosity was insatiable, and he was most free when he was quite alone, half-hidden, watching.

Particularly he watched March. She was a strange character to him. Her figure, like a graceful young man's, piqued him. Her dark eyes made something rise in his soul, with a curious elate excitement, when he looked into them, an excitement he was afraid to let be seen, it was so keen and secret. And then her odd, shrewd speech made him laugh outright. He felt he must go further, he was inevitably impelled. But he put away the thought of her and went off towards the wood's edge with the gun.

The dusk was falling as he came home, and with the dusk, a fine, late November rain. He saw the fire-light leaping in the window of the sitting-room, a leaping light in the little cluster of the dark buildings. And he thought to himself it would be a good thing to have this place for his own. And then the thought entered him shrewdly: Why not marry March? He stood still in the middle of the field for some moments, the dead rabbit hanging still in his hand, arrested by this thought. His mind waited in amazement — it seemed to calculate — and then he smiled curiously to himself in acquiescence. Why not? Why not indeed? It was a good idea. What if it was rather ridiculous? What did it matter? What if she was older than he? It didn't matter. When he thought of her dark, startled, vulnerable eyes he smiled subtly to himself. He was older than she, really. He was master of her.

He scarcely admitted his intention even to himself. He kept it as a secret even from himself. It was all too uncertain as yet. He would have to see how things

went. Yes, he would have to see how things went. If he wasn't careful, she would just simply mock at the idea. He knew, sly and subtle as he was, that if he went to her plainly and said: 'Miss March, I love you and want you to marry me,' her inevitable answer would be: 'Get out. I don't want any of that tomfoolery.' This was her attitude to men and their 'tomfoolery'. If he was not careful, she would turn round on him with her savage, sardonic ridicule, and dismiss him from the farm and from her own mind for ever. He would have to go gently. He would have to catch her as you catch a deer or a woodcock when you go out shooting. It's no good walking out into the forest and saying to the deer: 'Please fall to my gun.' No, it is a slow, subtle battle. When you really go out to get a deer, you gather yourself together, you coil yourself inside yourself, and you advance secretly, before dawn, into the mountains. It is not so much what you do, when you go out hunting, as how you feel. You have to be subtle and cunning and absolutely fatally ready. It becomes like a fate. Your own fate overtakes and determines the fate of the deer you are hunting. First of all, even before you come in sight of your quarry, there is a strange battle, like mesmerism. Your own soul, as a hunter, has gone out to fasten on the soul of the deer, even before you see any deer. And the soul of the deer fights to escape. Even before the deer has any wind of you, it is so. It is a subtle, profound battle of wills which takes place in the invisible. And it is a battle never finished till your bullet goes home. When you are *really* worked up to the true pitch, and you come at last into range, you don't then aim as you do when you are firing at a bottle. It is your own *will* which carries the bullet into the heart of your quarry. The bullet's flight home is a sheer projection of your own fate into the fate of the deer. It happens like a supreme wish, a supreme act of volition, not as a dodge of cleverness.

He was a huntsman in spirit, not a farmer, and not a soldier stuck in a regiment. And it was as a young hunter that he wanted to bring down March as his quarry, to make her his wife. So he gathered himself subtly together, seemed to withdraw into a kind of invisibility. He was not quite sure how he would go on. And March was suspicious as a hare. So he remained in appearance just the nice, odd stranger-youth, staying for a fortnight on the place.

He had been sawing logs for the fire in the afternoon. Darkness came very early. It was still a cold, raw mist. It was getting almost too dark to see. A pile of short sawed logs lay beside the trestle. March came to carry them indoors, or into the shed, as he was busy sawing the last log. He was working in his shirtsleeves, and did not notice her approach; she came unwillingly, as if shy. He saw her stooping to the bright-ended logs, and he stopped sawing. A fire like lightning flew down his legs in the nerves.

‘March?’ he said in his quiet, young voice.
She looked up from the logs she was piling.

‘Yes!’ she said.

He looked down on her in the dusk. He could see her not too distinctly.

‘I wanted to ask you something,’ he said.

‘Did you? What was it?’ she said. Already the fright was in her voice. But she was too much mistress of herself.

‘Why’ — his voice seemed to draw out soft and subtle, it penetrated her nerves — ‘why, what do you think it is?’

She stood up, placed her hands on her hips, and stood looking at him transfixed, without answering. Again he burned with a sudden power.

‘Well,’ he said, and his voice was so soft it seemed rather like a subtle touch, like the merest touch of a cat’s paw, a feeling rather than a sound.’ Well — I wanted to ask you to marry me.’

March felt rather than heard him. She was trying in vain to turn aside her face. A great relaxation seemed to have come over her. She stood silent, her head slightly on one side. He seemed to be bending towards her, invisibly smiling. It seemed to her fine sparks came out of him.

Then very suddenly she said:

‘Don’t try any of your tomfoolery on me.’

A quiver went over his nerves. He had missed. He waited a moment to collect himself again. Then he said, putting all the strange softness into his voice, as if he were imperceptibly stroking her:

‘Why, it’s not tomfoolery. It’s not tomfoolery. I mean it. I mean it. What makes you disbelieve me?’

He sounded hurt. And his voice had such a curious power over her; making her feel loose and relaxed. She struggled somewhere for her own power. She felt for a moment that she was lost — lost — lost. The word seemed to rock in her as if she were dying. Suddenly again she spoke.

‘You don’t know what you are talking about,’ she said, in a brief and transient stroke of scorn. ‘What nonsense! I’m old enough to be your mother.’

‘Yes, I do know what I’m talking about. Yes, I do,’ he persisted softly, as if he were producing his voice in her blood. ‘I know quite well what I’m talking about. You’re not old enough to be my mother. That isn’t true. And what does it matter even if it was. You can marry me whatever age we are. What is age to me? And what is age to you! Age is nothing.’

A swoon went over her as he concluded. He spoke rapidly — in the rapid Cornish fashion — and his voice seemed to sound in her somewhere where she was helpless against it. ‘Age is nothing!’ The soft, heavy insistence of it made

her sway dimly out there in the darkness. She could not answer.

A great exultance leaped like fire over his limbs. He felt he had won.

‘I want to marry you, you see. Why shouldn’t I?’ he proceeded, soft and rapid. He waited for her to answer. In the dusk he saw her almost phosphorescent. Her eyelids were dropped, her face half-averted and unconscious. She seemed to be in his power. But he waited, watchful. He dared not yet touch her.

‘Say then,’ he said, ‘say then you’ll marry me. Say — say!’ He was softly insistent.

‘What?’ she asked, faint, from a distance, like one in pain. His voice was now unthinkable near and soft. He drew very near to her.

‘Say yes.’

‘Oh, I can’t,’ she wailed helplessly, half-articulate, as if semiconscious, and as if in pain, like one who dies. ‘How can I?’

‘You can,’ he said softly, laying his hand gently on her shoulder as she stood with her head averted and dropped, dazed. ‘You can. Yes, you can. What makes you say you can’t? You can. You can.’ And with awful softness he bent forward and just touched her neck with his mouth and his chin.

‘Don’t!’ she cried, with a faint mad cry like hysteria, starting away and facing round on him. ‘What do you mean?’ But she had no breath to speak with. It was as if she was killed.

‘I mean what I say,’ he persisted softly and cruelly. ‘I want you to marry me. I want you to marry me. You know that, now, don’t you? You know that, now? Don’t you? Don’t you?’

‘What?’ she said.

‘Know,’ he replied.

‘Yes,’ she said. ‘I know you say so.’

‘And you know I mean it, don’t you?’

‘I know you say so.’

‘You believe me?’ he said.

She was silent for some time. Then she pursed her lips.

‘I don’t know what I believe,’ she said.

‘Are you out there?’ came Banford’s voice, calling from the house.

‘Yes, we’re bringing in the logs,’ he answered.

‘I thought you’d gone lost,’ said Banford disconsolately. ‘Hurry up, do, and come and let’s have tea. The kettle’s boiling.’

He stooped at once to take an armful of little logs and carry them into the kitchen, where they were piled in a corner. March also helped, filling her arms and carrying the logs on her breast as if they were some heavy child. The night had fallen cold.

When the logs were all in, the two cleaned their boots noisily on the scraper outside, then rubbed them on the mat. March shut the door and took off her old felt hat — her farm-girl hat. Her thick, crisp, black hair was loose, her face was pale and strained. She pushed back her hair vaguely and washed her hands. Banford came hurrying into the dimly-lighted kitchen, to take from the oven the scones she was keeping hot.

‘Whatever have you been doing all this time?’ she asked fretfully. ‘I thought you were never coming in. And it’s ages since you stopped sawing. What were you doing out there?’

‘Well,’ said Henry, ‘we had to stop that hole in the barn to keep the rats out.’

‘Why, I could see you standing there in the shed. I could see your shirtsleeves,’ challenged Banford.

‘Yes, I was just putting the saw away.’

They went in to tea. March was quite mute. Her face was pale and strained and vague. The youth, who always had the same ruddy, self-contained look on his face, as though he were keeping himself to himself, had come to tea in his shirtsleeves as if he were at home. He bent over his plate as he ate his food.

‘Aren’t you cold?’ said Banford spitefully. ‘In your shirtsleeves.’

He looked up at her, with his chin near his plate, and his eyes very clear, pellucid, and unwavering as he watched her.

‘No, I’m not cold,’ he said with his usual soft courtesy. ‘It’s much warmer in here than it is outside, you see.’

‘I hope it is,’ said Banford, feeling nettled by him. He had a strange, suave assurance and a wide-eyed bright look that got on her nerves this evening.

‘But perhaps,’ he said softly and courteously, ‘you don’t like me coming to tea without my coat. I forgot that.’

‘Oh, I don’t mind,’ said Banford: although she *did*.

‘I’ll go and get it, shall I?’ he said.

March’s dark eyes turned slowly down to him.

‘No, don’t you bother,’ she said in her queer, twanging tone. ‘If you feel all right as you are, stop as you are.’ She spoke with a crude authority.

‘Yes,’ said he, ‘I *feel* all right, if I’m not rude.’

‘It’s usually considered rude,’ said Banford. ‘But we don’t mind.’

‘Go along, “considered rude”,’ ejaculated March. ‘Who considers it rude?’

‘Why, you do, Nellie, in anybody else,’ said Banford, bristling a little behind her spectacles, and feeling her food stick in her throat.

But March had again gone vague and unheeding, chewing her food as if she did not know she was eating at all. And the youth looked from one to another, with bright, watching eyes.

Banford was offended. For all his suave courtesy and soft voice, the youth seemed to her impudent. She did not like to look at him. She did not like to meet his clear, watchful eyes, she did not like to see the strange glow in his face, his cheeks with their delicate fine hair, and his ruddy skin that was quite dull and yet which seemed to burn with a curious heat of life. It made her feel a little ill to look at him: the quality of his physical presence was too penetrating, too hot.

After tea the evening was very quiet. The youth rarely went into the village. As a rule, he read: he was a great reader, in his own hours. That is, when he did begin, he read absorbedly. But he was not very eager to begin. Often he walked about the fields and along the hedges alone in the dark at night, prowling with a queer instinct for the night, and listening to the wild sounds.

Tonight, however, he took a Captain Mayne Reid book from Banford's shelf and sat down with knees wide apart and immersed himself in his story. His brownish fair hair was long, and lay on his head like a thick cap, combed sideways. He was still in his shirtsleeves, and bending forward under the lamplight, with his knees stuck wide apart and the book in his hand and his whole figure absorbed in the rather strenuous business of reading, he gave Banford's sitting-room the look of a lumber-camp. She resented this. For on her sitting-room floor she had a red Turkey rug and dark stain round, the fire-place had fashionable green tiles, the piano stood open with the latest dance music: she played quite well: and on the walls were March's hand-painted swans and water-lilies. Moreover, with the logs nicely, tremulously burning in the grate, the thick curtains drawn, the doors all shut, and the pine trees hissing and shuddering in the wind outside, it was cosy, it was refined and nice. She resented the big, raw, long-legged youth sticking his khaki knees out and sitting there with his soldier's shirt-cuffs buttoned on his thick red wrists. From time to time he turned a page, and from time to time he gave a sharp look at the fire, settling the logs. Then he immersed himself again in the intense and isolated business of reading.

March, on the far side of the table, was spasmodically crocheting. Her mouth was pursed in an odd way, as when she had dreamed the fox's brush burned it, her beautiful, crisp black hair strayed in wisps. But her whole figure was absorbed in its bearing, as if she herself was miles away. In a sort of semi-dream she seemed to be hearing the fox singing round the house in the wind, singing wildly and sweetly and like a madness. With red but well-shaped hands she slowly crocheted the white cotton, very slowly, awkwardly.

Banford was also trying to read, sitting in her low chair. But between those two she felt fidgety. She kept moving and looking round and listening to the wind, and glancing secretly from one to the other of her companions. March, seated on a straight chair, with her knees in their close breeches crossed, and

slowly, laboriously crocheting, was also a trial.

‘Oh dear!’ said Banford, ‘My eyes are bad tonight.’ And she pressed her fingers on her eyes.

The youth looked up at her with his clear, bright look, but did not speak.

‘Are they, Jill?’ said March absently.

Then the youth began to read again, and Banford perforce returned to her book. But she could not keep still. After a while she looked up at March, and a queer, almost malignant little smile was on her thin face.

‘A penny for them, Nell,’ she said suddenly.

March looked round with big, startled black eyes, and went pale as if with terror. She had been listening to the fox singing so tenderly, so tenderly, as he wandered round the house.

‘What?’ she said vaguely.

‘A penny for them,’ said Banford sarcastically. ‘Or twopence, if they’re as deep as all that.’

The youth was watching with bright, clear eyes from beneath the lamp.

‘Why,’ came March’s vague voice, ‘what do you want to waste your money for?’

‘I thought it would be well spent,’ said Banford.

‘I wasn’t thinking of anything except the way the wind was blowing,’ said March.

‘Oh dear,’ replied Banford, ‘I could have had as original thought as that myself. I’m afraid I *have* wasted my money this time.’

‘Well, you needn’t pay,’ said March.

The youth suddenly laughed. Both women looked at him: March rather surprised-looking, as if she had hardly known he was there.

‘Why, do you ever pay up on these occasions?’ he asked.

‘Oh yes,’ said Banford. ‘We always do. I’ve sometimes had to pass a shilling a week to Nellie, in the winter-time. It costs much less in summer.’

‘What, paying for each other’s thoughts?’ he laughed.

‘Yes, when we’ve absolutely come to the end of everything else.’

He laughed quickly, wrinkling his nose sharply like a puppy and laughing with quick pleasure, his eyes shining.

‘It’s the first time I ever heard of that,’ he said.

‘I guess you’d hear of it often enough if you stayed a winter on Bailey Farm,’ said Banford lamentably.

‘Do you get so tired, then?’ he asked.

‘So bored,’ said Banford.

‘Oh!’ he said gravely. ‘But why should you be bored?’

‘Who wouldn’t be bored?’ said Banford.

‘I’m sorry to hear that,’ he said gravely.

‘You must be, if you were hoping to have a lively time here,’ said Banford.

He looked at her long and gravely.

‘Well,’ he said, with his odd, young seriousness, ‘it’s quite lively enough for me.’

‘I’m glad to hear it,’ said Banford.

And she returned to her book. In her thin, frail hair were already many threads of grey, though she was not yet thirty. The boy did not look down, but turned his eyes to March, who was sitting with pursed mouth laboriously crocheting, her eyes wide and absent. She had a warm, pale, fine skin and a delicate nose. Her pursed mouth looked shrewish. But the shrewish look was contradicted by the curious lifted arch of her dark brows, and the wideness of her eyes; a look of startled wonder and vagueness. She was listening again for the fox, who seemed to have wandered farther off into the night.

From under the edge of the lamplight the boy sat with his face looking up, watching her silently, his eyes round and very clear and intent. Banford, biting her fingers irritably, was glancing at him under her hair. He sat there perfectly still, his ruddy face tilted up from the low level under the light, on the edge of the dimness, and watching with perfect abstract intentness. March suddenly lifted her great, dark eyes from her crocheting and saw him. She started, giving a little exclamation.

‘There he is!’ she cried involuntarily, as if terribly startled.

Banford looked round in amazement, sitting up straight.

‘Whatever has got you, Nellie?’ she cried.

But March, her face flushed a delicate rose colour, was looking away to the door.

‘Nothing! Nothing!’ she said crossly. ‘Can’t one speak?’

‘Yes, if you speak sensibly,’ said Banford. ‘What ever did you mean?’

‘I don’t know what I meant,’ cried March testily

Oh, Nellie, I hope you aren’t going jumpy and nervy. I feel I can’t stand another *thing*! Whoever did you mean? Did you mean Henry?’ cried poor, frightened Banford.

‘Yes. I suppose so,’ said March laconically. She would never confess to the fox.

‘Oh dear, my nerves are all gone for tonight,’ wailed Banford.

At nine o’clock March brought in a tray with bread and cheese and tea — Henry had confessed that he liked a cup of tea. Banford drank a glass of milk and ate a little bread. And soon she said:

‘I’m going to bed, Nellie, I’m all nerves tonight. Are you coming?’

‘Yes, I’m coming the minute I’ve taken the tray away,’ said March.

‘Don’t be long then,’ said Banford fretfully. ‘Good-night, Henry. You’ll see the fire is safe, if you come up last, won’t you?’

‘Yes, Miss Banford, I’ll see it’s safe,’ he replied in his reassuring way.

March was lighting the candle to go to the kitchen. Banford took her candle and went upstairs. When March came back to the fire, she said to him:

‘I suppose we can trust you to put out the fire and everything?’ She stood there with her hand on her hip, and one knee loose, her head averted shyly, as if she could not look at him. He had his face lifted, watching her.

‘Come and sit down a minute,’ he said softly.

‘No, I’ll be going. Jill will be waiting, and she’ll get upset, if I don’t come.’

‘What made you jump like that this evening?’ he asked.

‘When did I jump?’ she retorted, looking at him.

‘Why, just now you did,’ he said. ‘When you cried out.’

‘Oh!’ she said. ‘Then! — Why, I thought you were the fox!’ And her face screwed into a queer smile, half-ironic.

‘The fox! Why the fox?’ he asked softly.

‘Why, one evening last summer when I was out with the gun I saw the fox in the grass nearly at my feet, looking straight up at me. I don’t know — I suppose he made an impression on me.’ She turned aside her head again and let one foot stray loose, self-consciously.

‘And did you shoot him?’ asked the boy.

‘No, he gave me such a start, staring straight at me as he did, and then stopping to look back at me over his shoulder with a laugh on his face.’

‘A laugh on his face!’ repeated Henry, also laughing. ‘He frightened you, did he?’

‘No, he didn’t frighten me. He made an impression on me, that’s all.’

‘And you thought I was the fox, did you?’ he laughed, with the same queer, quick little laugh, like a puppy wrinkling his nose.

‘Yes, I did, for the moment,’ she said. ‘Perhaps he’d been in my mind without my knowing.’

‘Perhaps you think I’ve come to steal your chickens or something,’ he said, with the same young laugh.

But she only looked at him with a wide, dark, vacant eye.

‘It’s the first time,’ he said, ‘that I’ve ever been taken for a fox. Won’t you sit down for a minute?’ His voice was very soft and cajoling.

‘No,’ she said. ‘Jill will be waiting.’ But still she did not go, but stood with one foot loose and her face turned aside, just outside the circle of light.

‘But won’t you answer my question?’ he said, lowering his voice still more.

‘I don’t know what question you mean.’

‘Yes, you do. Of course you do. I mean the question of you marrying me.’

‘No, I shan’t answer that question,’ she said flatly.

‘Won’t you?’ The queer, young laugh came on his nose again. ‘Is it because I’m like the fox? Is that why?’ And still he laughed.

She turned and looked at him with a long, slow look.

‘I wouldn’t let that put you against me,’ he said. ‘Let me turn the lamp low, and come and sit down a minute.’

He put his red hand under the glow of the lamp and suddenly made the light very dim. March stood there in the dimness quite shadowy, but unmoving. He rose silently to his feet, on his long legs. And now his voice was extraordinarily soft and suggestive, hardly audible.

‘You’ll stay a moment,’ he said. ‘Just a moment.’ And he put his hand on her shoulder. She turned her face from him. ‘I’m sure you don’t really think I’m like the fox,’ he said, with the same softness and with a suggestion of laughter in his tone, a subtle mockery. ‘Do you now?’ And he drew her gently towards him and kissed her neck, softly. She winced and trembled and hung away. But his strong, young arm held her, and he kissed her softly again, still on the neck, for her face was averted.

‘Won’t you answer my question? Won’t you now?’ came his soft, lingering voice. He was trying to draw her near to kiss her face. And he kissed her cheek softly, near the ear.

At that moment Banford’s voice was heard calling fretfully, crossly from upstairs.

‘There’s Jill!’ cried March, starting and drawing erect.

And as she did so, quick as lightning he kissed her on the mouth, with a quick, brushing kiss. It seemed to burn through her every fibre. She gave a queer little cry.

‘You will, won’t you? You will?’ he insisted softly.

‘Nellie! *Nellie!* What ever are you so long for?’ came Banford’s faint cry from the outer darkness.

But he held her fast, and was murmuring with that intolerable softness and insistency:

‘You will, won’t you? Say yes! Say yes!’

March, who felt as if the fire had gone through her and scathed her, and as if she could do no more, murmured:

‘Yes! Yes! Anything you like! Anything you like! Only let me go! Only let me go! Jill’s calling.’

‘You know you’ve promised,’ he said insidiously.

‘Yes! Yes! I do!’ Her voice suddenly rose into a shrill cry. ‘All right, Jill, I’m coming.’

Startled, he let her go, and she went straight upstairs.

In the morning at breakfast, after he had looked round the place and attended to the stock and thought to himself that one could live easily enough here, he said to Banford:

‘Do you know what, Miss Banford?’

‘Well, what?’ said the good-natured, nervy Banford.

He looked at March, who was spreading jam on her bread.

‘Shall I tell?’ he said to her.

She looked up at him, and a deep pink colour flushed over her face.

‘Yes, if you mean Jill,’ she said. ‘I hope you won’t go talking all over the village, that’s all.’ And she swallowed her dry bread with difficulty.

‘Whatever’s coming?’ said Banford, looking up with wide, tired, slightly reddened eyes. She was a thin, frail little thing, and her hair, which was delicate and thin, was bobbed, so it hung softly by her worn face in its faded brown and grey.

‘Why, what do you think?’ he said, smiling like one who has a secret.

‘How do I know!’ said Banford.

‘Can’t you guess?’ he said, making bright eyes and smiling, pleased with himself.

‘I’m sure I can’t. What’s more, I’m not going to try.’

‘Nellie and I are going to be married.’

Banford put down her knife out of her thin, delicate fingers, as if she would never take it up to eat any more. She stared with blank, reddened eyes.

‘You what?’ she exclaimed.

‘We’re going to get married. Aren’t we, Nellie?’ and he turned to March.

‘You say so, anyway,’ said March laconically. But again she flushed with an agonized flush. She, too, could swallow no more.

Banford looked at her like a bird that has been shot: a poor, little sick bird. She gazed at her with all her wounded soul in her face, at the deep-flushed March.

‘Never!’ she exclaimed, helpless.

‘It’s quite right,’ said the bright and gloating youth.

Banford turned aside her face, as if the sight of the food on the table made her sick. She sat like this for some moments, as if she were sick. Then, with one hand on the edge of the table, she rose to her feet.

‘I’ll *never* believe it, Nellie,’ she cried. ‘It’s absolutely impossible!’

Her plaintive, fretful voice had a thread of hot anger and despair.

‘Why? Why shouldn’t you believe it?’ asked the youth, with all his soft, velvety impertinence in his voice.

Banford looked at him from her wide, vague eyes, as if he were some creature in a museum.

‘Oh,’ she said languidly, ‘because she can never be such a fool. She can’t lose her self-respect to such an extent.’ Her voice was cold and plaintive, drifting.

‘In what way will she lose her self-respect?’ asked the boy.

Banford looked at him with vague fixity from behind her spectacles.

‘If she hasn’t lost it already,’ she said.

He became very red, vermilion, under the slow, vague stare from behind the spectacles.

‘I don’t see it at all,’ he said.

‘Probably you don’t. I shouldn’t expect you would,’ said Banford, with that straying, mild tone of remoteness which made her words even more insulting.

He sat stiff in his chair, staring with hot, blue eyes from his scarlet face. An ugly look had come on his brow.

‘My word, she doesn’t know what she’s letting herself in for,’ said Banford, in her plaintive, drifting, insulting voice.

‘What has it got to do with you, anyway?’ said the youth, in a temper.

‘More than it has to do with you, probably,’ she replied, plaintive and venomous.

‘Oh, has it! I don’t see that at all,’ he jerked out.

‘No, you wouldn’t,’ she answered, drifting.

‘Anyhow,’ said March, pushing back her hair and rising uncouthly. ‘It’s no good arguing about it.’ And she seized the bread and the tea-pot and strode away to the kitchen.

Banford let her fingers stray across her brow and along her hair, like one bemused. Then she turned and went away upstairs.

Henry sat stiff and sulky in his chair, with his face and his eyes on fire. March came and went, clearing the table. But Henry sat on, stiff with temper. He took no notice of her. She had regained her composure and her soft, even, creamy complexion. But her mouth was pursed up. She glanced at him each time as she came to take things from the table, glanced from her large, curious eyes, more in curiosity than anything. Such a long, red-faced, sulky boy! That was all he was. He seemed as remote from her as if his red face were a red chimney-pot on a cottage across the fields, and she looked at him just as objectively, as remotely.

At length he got up and stalked out into the fields with the gun. He came in only at dinner-time, with the devil still in his face, but his manners quite polite. Nobody said anything particular; they sat each one at the sharp corner of a

triangle, in obstinate remoteness. In the afternoon he went out again at once with the gun. He came in at nightfall with a rabbit and a pigeon. He stayed in all the evening, but hardly opened his mouth. He was in the devil of a temper, feeling he had been insulted.

Banford's eyes were red, she had evidently been crying. But her manner was more remote and supercilious than ever; the way she turned her head if he spoke at all, as if he were some tramp or inferior intruder of that sort, made his blue eyes go almost black with rage. His face looked sulkier. But he never forgot his polite intonation, if he opened his mouth to speak. March seemed to flourish in this atmosphere. She seemed to sit between the two antagonists with a little wicked smile on her face, enjoying herself. There was even a sort of complacency in the way she laboriously crocheted this evening.

When he was in bed, the youth could hear the two women talking and arguing in their room. He sat up in bed and strained his ears to hear what they said. But he could hear nothing, it was too far off. Yet he could hear the soft, plaintive drip of Banford's voice, and March's deeper note.

The night was quiet, frosty. Big stars were snapping outside, beyond the ridgetops of the pine trees. He listened and listened. In the distance he heard a fox yelping; and the dogs from the farms barking in answer. But it was not that he wanted to hear. It was what the two women were saying.

He got stealthily out of bed and stood by his door. He could hear no more than before. Very, very carefully he began to lift the door latch. After quite a time he had his door open. Then he stepped stealthily out into the passage. The old oak planks were cold under his feet, and they creaked preposterously. He crept very, very gently up the one step, and along by the wall, till he stood outside their door. And there he held his breath and listened. Banford's voice:

'No, I simply couldn't stand it. I should be dead in a month. Which is just what he would be aiming at, of course. That would just be his game, to see me in the churchyard. No, Nellie, if you were to do such a thing as to marry him, you could never stop here. I couldn't, I couldn't live in the same house with him. Oh! — oh! I feel quite sick with the smell of his clothes. And his red face simply turns me over. I can't eat my food when he's at the table. What a fool I was ever to let him stop. One ought *never* to try to do a kind action. It always flies back in your face like a boomerang.'

'Well, he's only got two more days,' said March.

'Yes, thank heaven. And when he's gone he'll never come in this house again. I feel so bad while he's here. And I know, I know he's only counting what he can get out of you. I *know* that's all it is. He's just a good-for-nothing, who doesn't want to work, and who thinks he'll live on us. But he won't live on me.

If you're such a fool, then it's your own lookout. Mrs Burgess knew him all the time he was here. And the old man could never get him to do any steady work. He was off with the gun on every occasion, just as he is now. Nothing but the gun! Oh, I do hate it. You don't know what you're doing, Nellie, you don't. If you marry him he'll just make a fool of you. He'll go off and leave you stranded. I know he will, if he can't get Bailey Farm out of us — and he's not going to, while I live. While I live he's never going to set foot here. I know what it would be. He'd soon think he was master of both of us, as he thinks he's master of you already.'

'But he isn't,' said Nellie.

'He thinks he is, anyway. And that's what he wants: to come and be master here. Yes, imagine it! That's what we've got the place together for, is it, to be bossed and bullied by a hateful, red-faced boy, a beastly labourer. Oh, we *did* make a mistake when we let him stop. We ought never to have lowered ourselves. And I've had such a fight with all the people here, not to be pulled down to their level. No, he's not coming here. And then you see — if he can't have the place, he'll run off to Canada or somewhere again, as if he'd never known you. And here you'll be, absolutely ruined and made a fool of. I know I shall never have any peace of mind again.'

'We'll tell him he can't come here. We'll tell him that,' said March.

'Oh, don't you bother; I'm going to tell him that, and other things as well, before he goes. He's not going to have all his own way while I've got the strength left to speak. Oh, Nellie, he'll despise you, he'll despise you, like the awful little beast he is, if you give way to him. I'd no more trust him than I'd trust a cat not to steal. He's deep, he's deep, and he's bossy, and he's selfish through and through, as cold as ice. All he wants is to make use of you. And when you're no more use to him, then I pity you.'

'I don't think he's as bad as all that,' said March.

'No, because he's been playing up to you. But you'll find out, if you see much of him. Oh, Nellie, I can't bear to think of it.'

'Well, it won't hurt you, Jill, darling.'

'Won't it! Won't it! I shall never know a moment's peace again while I live, nor a moment's happiness. No, Nellie — ' and Banford began to weep bitterly.

The boy outside could hear the stifled sound of the woman's sobbing, and could hear March's soft, deep, tender voice comforting, with wonderful gentleness and tenderness, the weeping woman.

His eyes were so round and wide that he seemed to see the whole night, and his ears were almost jumping off his head. He was frozen stiff. He crept back to bed, but felt as if the top of his head were coming off. He could not sleep. He

could not keep still. He rose, quietly dressed himself, and crept out on to the landing once more. The women were silent. He went softly downstairs and out to the kitchen.

Then he put on his boots and his overcoat and took the gun. He did not think to go away from the farm. No, he only took the gun. As softly as possible he unfastened the door and went out into the frosty December night. The air was still, the stars bright, the pine trees seemed to bristle audibly in the sky. He went stealthily away down a fence-side, looking for something to shoot. At the same time he remembered that he ought not to shoot and frighten the women.

So he prowled round the edge of the gorse cover, and through the grove of tall old hollies, to the woodside. There he skirted the fence, peering through the darkness with dilated eyes that seemed to be able to grow black and full of sight in the dark, like a cat's. An owl was slowly and mournfully whooping round a great oak tree. He stepped stealthily with his gun, listening, listening, watching.

As he stood under the oaks of the wood-edge he heard the dogs from the neighbouring cottage up the hill yelling suddenly and startlingly, and the wakened dogs from the farms around barking answer. And suddenly it seemed to him England was little and tight, he felt the landscape was constricted even in the dark, and that there were too many dogs in the night, making a noise like a fence of sound, like the network of English hedges netting the view. He felt the fox didn't have a chance. For it must be the fox that had started all this hullabaloo.

Why not watch for him, anyhow! He would, no doubt, be coming sniffing round. The lad walked downhill to where the farmstead with its few pine trees crouched blackly. In the angle of the long shed, in the black dark, he crouched down. He knew the fox would be coming. It seemed to him it would be the last of the foxes in this loudly-barking, thick-voiced England, tight with innumerable little houses.

He sat a long time with his eyes fixed unchanging upon the open gateway, where a little light seemed to fall from the stars or from the horizon, who knows. He was sitting on a log in a dark corner with the gun across his knees. The pine trees snapped. Once a chicken fell off its perch in the barn with a loud caw and cackle and commotion that startled him, and he stood up, watching with all his eyes, thinking it might be a rat. But he *felt* it was nothing. So he sat down again with the gun on his knees and his hands tucked in to keep them warm, and his eyes fixed unblinking on the pale reach of the open gateway. He felt he could smell the hot, sickly, rich smell of live chickens on the cold air.

And then — a shadow. A sliding shadow in the gateway. He gathered all his vision into a concentrated spark, and saw the shadow of the fox, the fox creeping

on his belly through the gate. There he went, on his belly like a snake. The boy smiled to himself and brought the gun to his shoulder. He knew quite well what would happen. He knew the fox would go to where the fowl door was boarded up and sniff there. He knew he would lie there for a minute, sniffing the fowls within. And then he would start again prowling under the edge of the old barn, waiting to get in.

The fowl door was at the top of a slight incline. Soft, soft as a shadow the fox slid up this incline, and crouched with his nose to the boards. And at the same moment there was the awful crash of a gun reverberating between the old buildings, as if all the night had gone smash. But the boy watched keenly. He saw even the white belly of the fox as the beast beat his paws in death. So he went forward.

There was a commotion everywhere. The fowls were scuffling and cawking, the ducks were quark-quarking, the pony had stamped wildly to his feet. But the fox was on his side, struggling in his last tremors. The boy bent over him and smelt his foxy smell.

There was a sound of a window opening upstairs, then March's voice calling:

'Who is it?'

'It's me,' said Henry; 'I've shot the fox.'

'Oh, goodness! You nearly frightened us to death.'

'Did I? I'm awfully sorry.'

'Whatever made you get up?'

'I heard him about.'

'And have you shot him?'

'Yes, he's here,' and the boy stood in the yard holding up the warm, dead brute. 'You can't see, can you? Wait a minute.' And he took his flash-light from his pocket and flashed it on to the dead animal. He was holding it by the brush. March saw, in the middle of the darkness, just the reddish fleece and the white belly and the white underneath of the pointed chin, and the queer, dangling paws. She did not know what to say.

'He's a beauty,' he said. 'He will make you a lovely fur.'

'You don't catch me wearing a fox fur,' she replied.

'Oh!' he said. And he switched off the light.

'Well, I should think you'll come in and go to bed again now,' she said.

'Probably I shall. What time is it?'

'What time is it, Jill?' called March's voice. It was a quarter to one.

That night March had another dream. She dreamed that Banford was dead, and that she, March, was sobbing her heart out. Then she had to put Banford into her coffin. And the coffin was the rough wood-box in which the bits of chopped

wood were kept in the kitchen, by the fire. This was the coffin, and there was no other, and March was in agony and dazed bewilderment, looking for something to line the box with, something to make it soft with, something to cover up the poor, dead darling. Because she couldn't lay her in there just in her white, thin nightdress, in the horrible wood-box. So she hunted and hunted, and picked up thing after thing, and threw it aside in the agony of dream-frustration. And in her dream-despair all she could find that would do was a fox-skin. She knew that it wasn't right, that this was not what she should have. But it was all she could find. And so she folded the brush of the fox, and laid her darling Jill's head on this, and she brought round the skin of the fox and laid it on the top of the body, so that it seemed to make a whole ruddy, fiery coverlet, and she cried and cried, and woke to find the tears streaming down her face.

The first thing that both she and Banford did in the morning was to go out to see the fox. Henry had hung it up by the heels in the shed, with its poor brush falling backwards. It was a lovely dog-fox in its prime, with a handsome, thick, winter coat: a lovely golden-red colour, with grey as it passed to the belly, and belly all white, and a great full brush with a delicate black and grey and pure white tip.

'Poor brute!' said Banford. 'If it wasn't such a thieving wretch, you'd feel sorry for it.'

March said nothing, but stood with her foot trailing aside, one hip out; her face was pale and her eyes big and black, watching the dead animal that was suspended upside down. White and soft as snow his belly: white and soft as snow. She passed her hand softly down it. And his wonderful black-glinted brush was full and frictional, wonderful. She passed her hand down this also, and quivered. Time after time she took the full fur of that thick tail between her fingers, and passed her hand slowly downwards. Wonderful, sharp, thick, splendour of a tail. And he was dead! She pursed her lips, and her eyes went black and vacant. Then she took the head in her hand.

Henry was sauntering up, so Banford walked rather pointedly away. March stood there bemused, with the head of the fox in her hand. She was wondering, wondering, wondering over his long, fine muzzle. For some reason it reminded her of a spoon or a spatula. She felt she could not understand it. The beast was a strange beast to her, incomprehensible, out of her range. Wonderful silver whiskers he had, like ice-threads. And pricked ears with hair inside. But that long, long, slender spoon of a nose! — and the marvellous white teeth beneath! It was to thrust forward and bite with, deep, deep, deep into the living prey, to bite and bite the blood.

'He's a beauty, isn't he?' said Henry, standing by.

‘Oh yes, he’s a fine big fox. I wonder how many chickens he’s responsible for,’ she replied.

‘A good many. Do you think he’s the same one you saw in the summer?’

‘I should think very likely he is,’ she replied.

He watched her, but he could make nothing of her. Partly she was so shy and virgin, and partly she was so grim, matter-of-fact, shrewish. What she said seemed to him so different from the look of her big, queer, dark eyes.

‘Are you going to skin him?’ she asked.

‘Yes, when I’ve had breakfast, and got a board to peg him on.’

‘My word, what a strong smell he’s got! Poo! It’ll take some washing off one’s hands. I don’t know why I was so silly as to handle him.’ And she looked at her right hand, that had passed down his belly and along his tail, and had even got a tiny streak of blood from one dark place in his fur.

‘Have you seen the chickens when they smell him, how frightened they are?’ he said.

‘Yes, aren’t they!’

‘You must mind you don’t get some of his fleas.’

‘Oh, fleas!’ she replied, nonchalant.

Later in the day she saw the fox’s skin nailed flat on a board, as if crucified. It gave her an uneasy feeling.

The boy was angry. He went about with his mouth shut, as if he had swallowed part of his chin. But in behaviour he was polite and affable. He did not say anything about his intention. And he left March alone.

That evening they sat in the dining-room. Banford wouldn’t have him in her sitting-room any more. There was a very big log on the fire. And everybody was busy. Banford had letters to write. March was sewing a dress, and he was mending some little contrivance.

Banford stopped her letter-writing from time to time to look round and rest her eyes. The boy had his head down, his face hidden over his job.

‘Let’s see,’ said Banford. ‘What train do you go by, Henry?’

He looked up straight at her.

‘The morning train. In the morning,’ he said.

‘What, the eight-ten or the eleven-twenty?’

‘The eleven-twenty, I suppose,’ he said.

‘That is the day after tomorrow?’ said Banford.

‘Yes, the day after tomorrow.’

‘Mm!’ murmured Banford, and she returned to her writing. But as she was licking her envelope, she asked:

‘And what plans have you made for the future, if I may ask?’

‘Plans?’ he said, his face very bright and angry.

‘I mean about you and Nellie, if you are going on with this business. When do you expect the wedding to come off?’ She spoke in a jeering tone.

‘Oh, the wedding!’ he replied. ‘I don’t know.’

‘Don’t you know anything?’ said Banford. ‘Are you going to clear out on Friday and leave things no more settled than they are?’

‘Well, why shouldn’t I? We can always write letters.’

‘Yes, of course you can. But I wanted to know because of this place. If Nellie is going to get married all of a sudden, I shall have to be looking round for a new partner.’

‘Couldn’t she stay on here if she were married?’ he said. He knew quite well what was coming.

‘Oh,’ said Banford, ‘this is no place for a married couple. There’s not enough work to keep a man going, for one thing. And there’s no money to be made. It’s quite useless your thinking of staying on here if you marry. Absolutely!’

‘Yes, but I wasn’t thinking of staying on here,’ he said.

‘Well, that’s what I want to know. And what about Nellie, then? How long is *she* going to be here with me, in that case?’

The two antagonists looked at one another.

‘That I can’t say,’ he answered.

‘Oh, go along,’ she cried petulantly. ‘You must have some idea what you are going to do, if you ask a woman to marry you. Unless it’s all a hoax.’

‘Why should it be a hoax? I am going back to Canada.’

‘And taking her with you?’

‘Yes, certainly.’

‘You hear that, Nellie?’ said Banford.

March, who had had her head bent over her sewing, now looked up with a sharp, pink blush on her face, and a queer, sardonic laugh in her eyes and on her twisted mouth.

‘That’s the first time I’ve heard that I was going to Canada,’ she said.

‘Well, you have to hear it for the first time, haven’t you?’ said the boy.

‘Yes, I suppose I have,’ she said nonchalantly. And she went back to her sewing.

‘You’re quite ready, are you, to go to Canada? Are you, Nellie?’ asked Banford.

March looked up again. She let her shoulders go slack, and let her hand that held the needle lie loose in her lap.

‘It depends on *how* I’m going,’ she said. ‘I don’t think I want to go jammed up in the steerage, as a soldier’s wife. I’m afraid I’m not used to that way.’

The boy watched her with bright eyes.

‘Would you rather stay over here while I go first?’ he asked.

‘I would, if that’s the only alternative,’ she replied.

‘That’s much the wisest. Don’t make it any fixed engagement,’ said Banford. ‘Leave yourself free to go or not after he’s got back and found you a place, Nellie. Anything else is madness, madness.’

‘Don’t you think,’ said the youth, ‘we ought to get married before I go — and then go together, or separate, according to how it happens?’

‘I think it’s a terrible idea,’ cried Banford.

But the boy was watching March.

‘What do you think?’ he asked her.

She let her eyes stray vaguely into space.

‘Well, I don’t know,’ she said. ‘I shall have to think about it.’

‘Why?’ he asked pertinently.

‘Why?’ She repeated his question in a mocking way and looked at him laughing, though her face was pink again. ‘I should think there’s plenty of reasons why.’

He watched her in silence. She seemed to have escaped him. She had got into league with Banford against him. There was again the queer, sardonic look about her; she would mock stoically at everything he said or which life offered.

‘Of course,’ he said, ‘I don’t want to press you to do anything you don’t wish to do.’

‘I should think not, indeed,’ cried Banford indignantly.

At bed-time Banford said plaintively to March:

‘You take my hot bottle up for me, Nellie, will you?’

‘Yes, I’ll do it,’ said March, with the kind of willing unwillingness she so often showed towards her beloved but uncertain Jill.

The two women went upstairs. After a time March called from the top of the stairs: ‘Good-night, Henry. I shan’t be coming down. You’ll see to the lamp and the fire, won’t you?’

The next day Henry went about with the cloud on his brow and his young cub’s face shut up tight. He was cogitating all the time. He had wanted March to marry him and go back to Canada with him. And he had been sure she would do it. Why he wanted her he didn’t know. But he did want her. He had set his mind on her. And he was convulsed with a youth’s fury at being thwarted. To be thwarted, to be thwarted! It made him so furious inside that he did not know what to do with himself. But he kept himself in hand. Because even now things might turn out differently. She might come over to him. Of course she might. It was her business to do so.

Things drew to a tension again towards evening. He and Banford had avoided each other all day. In fact, Banford went in to the little town by the 11.20 train. It was market day. She arrived back on the 4.25. Just as the night was falling Henry saw her little figure in a dark-blue coat and a dark-blue tam-o'-shanter hat crossing the first meadow from the station. He stood under one of the wild pear trees, with the old dead leaves round his feet. And he watched the little blue figure advancing persistently over the rough winter-ragged meadow. She had her arms full of parcels, and advanced slowly, frail thing she was, but with that devilish little certainty which he so detested in her. He stood invisible under the pear tree, watching her every step.

And if looks could have affected her, she would have felt a log of iron on each of her ankles as she made her way forward. 'You're a nasty little thing, you are,' he was saying softly, across the distance. 'You're a nasty little thing. I hope you'll be paid back for all the harm you've done me for nothing. I hope you will — you nasty little thing. I hope you'll have to pay for it. You will, if wishes are anything. You nasty little creature that you are.'

She was toiling slowly up the slope. But if she had been slipping back at every step towards the Bottomless Pit, he would not have gone to help her with her parcels. Aha, there went March, striding with her long, land stride in her breeches and her short tunic! Striding downhill at a great pace, and even running a few steps now and then, in her great solicitude and desire to come to the rescue of the little Banford. The boy watched her with rage in his heart. See her leap a ditch, and run, run as if a house was on fire, just to get to that creeping, dark little object down there! So, the Banford just stood still and waited. And March strode up and took *all* the parcels except a bunch of yellow chrysanthemums. These the Banford still carried — yellow chrysanthemums!

'Yes, you look well, don't you?' he said softly into the dusk air. 'You look well, pottering up there with a bunch of flowers, you do. I'd make you eat them for your tea if you hug them so tight. And I'd give them you for breakfast again, I would. I'd give you flowers. Nothing but flowers.'

He watched the progress of the two women. He could hear their voices: March always outspoken and rather scolding in her tenderness, Banford murmuring rather vaguely. They were evidently good friends. He could not hear what they said till they came to the fence of the home meadow, which they must climb. Then he saw March manfully climbing over the bars with all her packages in her arms, and on the still air he heard Banford's fretful:

'Why don't you let me help you with the parcels?' She had a queer, plaintive hitch in her voice. Then came March's robust and reckless:

'Oh, I can manage. Don't you bother about me. You've all you can do to get

yourself over.'

'Yes, that's all very well,' said Banford fretfully. 'You say, *Don't you bother about me*, and then all the while you feel injured because nobody thinks of you.'

'When do I feel injured?' said March.

'Always. You always feel injured. Now you're feeling injured because I won't have that boy to come and live on the farm.'

'I'm not feeling injured at all,' said March. 'I know you are. When he's gone you'll sulk over it. I know you will.'

'Shall I?' said March. 'We'll see.'

'Yes, we *shall* see, unfortunately. I can't think how you can make yourself so cheap. I can't *imagine* how you can lower yourself like it.'

'I haven't lowered myself,' said March.

'I don't know what you call it, then. Letting a boy like that come so cheeky and impudent and make a mug of you. I don't know what you think of yourself. How much respect do you think he's going to have for you afterwards? My word, I wouldn't be in your shoes, if you married him.'

'Of course you wouldn't. My boots are a good bit too big for you, and not half dainty enough,' said March, with rather a misfire sarcasm.

'I thought you had too much pride, really I did. A woman's got to hold herself high, especially with a youth like that. Why, he's impudent. Even the way he forced himself on us at the start.'

'We asked him to stay,' said March.

'Not till he'd almost forced us to. And then he's so cocky and self-assured. My word, he puts my back up. I simply can't imagine how you can let him treat you so cheaply.'

'I don't let him treat me cheaply,' said March. 'Don't you worry yourself, nobody's going to treat me cheaply. And even you aren't, either.' She had a tender defiance and a certain fire in her voice.

'Yes, it's sure to come back to me,' said Banford bitterly. 'That's always the end of it. I believe you only do it to spite me.'

They went now in silence up the steep, grassy slope and over the brow, through the gorse bushes. On the other side of the hedge the boy followed in the dusk, at some little distance. Now and then, through the huge ancient hedge of hawthorn, risen into trees, he saw the two dark figures creeping up the hill. As he came to the top of the slope he saw the homestead dark in the twilight, with a huge old pear tree leaning from the near gable, and a little yellow light twinkling in the small side windows of the kitchen. He heard the clink of the latch and saw the kitchen door open into light as the two women went indoors. So they were at home.

And so! — this was what they thought of him. It was rather in his nature to be a listener, so he was not at all surprised whatever he heard. The things people said about him always missed him personally. He was only rather surprised at the women's way with one another. And he disliked the Banford with an acid dislike. And he felt drawn to the March again. He felt again irresistibly drawn to her. He felt there was a secret bond, a secret thread between him and her, something very exclusive, which shut out everybody else and made him and her possess each other in secret.

He hoped again that she would have him. He hoped with his blood suddenly firing up that she would agree to marry him quite quickly: at Christmas, very likely. Christmas was not far off. He wanted, whatever else happened, to snatch her into a hasty marriage and a consummation with him. Then for the future, they could arrange later. But he hoped it would happen as he wanted it. He hoped that tonight she would stay a little while with him, after Banford had gone upstairs. He hoped he could touch her soft, creamy cheek, her strange, frightened face. He hoped he could look into her dilated, frightened dark eyes, quite near. He hoped he might even put his hand on her bosom and feel her soft breasts under her tunic. His heart beat deep and powerful as he thought of that. He wanted very much to do so. He wanted to make sure of her soft woman's breasts under her tunic. She always kept the brown linen coat buttoned so close up to her throat. It seemed to him like some perilous secret, that her soft woman's breasts must be buttoned up in that uniform. It seemed to him, moreover, that they were so much softer, tenderer, more lovely and lovable, shut up in that tunic, than were the Banford's breasts, under her soft blouses and chiffon dresses. The Banford would have little iron breasts, he said to himself. For all her frailty and fretfulness and delicacy, she would have tiny iron breasts. But March, under her crude, fast, workman's tunic, would have soft, white breasts, white and unseen. So he told himself, and his blood burned.

When he went in to tea, he had a surprise. He appeared at the inner door, his face very ruddy and vivid and his blue eyes shining, dropping his head forward as he came in, in his usual way, and hesitating in the doorway to watch the inside of the room, keenly and cautiously, before he entered. He was wearing a long-sleeved waistcoat. His face seemed extraordinarily like a piece of the out-of-doors come indoors: as holly-berries do. In his second of pause in the doorway he took in the two women sitting at table, at opposite ends, saw them sharply. And to his amazement March was dressed in a dress of dull, green silk crape. His mouth came open in surprise. If she had suddenly grown a moustache he could not have been more surprised.

'Why,' he said, 'do you wear a dress, then?'

She looked up, flushing a deep rose colour, and twisting her mouth with a smile, said:

‘Of course I do. What else do you expect me to wear but a dress?’

‘A land girl’s uniform, of course,’ said he.

‘Oh,’ she cried, nonchalant, ‘that’s only for this dirty, mucky work about here.’

‘Isn’t it your proper dress, then?’ he said.

‘No, not indoors it isn’t,’ she said. But she was blushing all the time as she poured out his tea. He sat down in his chair at table, unable to take his eyes off her. Her dress was a perfectly simple slip of bluey-green crape, with a line of gold stitching round the top and round the sleeves, which came to the elbow. It was cut just plain and round at the top, and showed her white, soft throat. Her arms he knew, strong and firm muscled, for he had often seen her with her sleeves rolled up. But he looked her up and down, up and down,

Banford, at the other end of the table, said not a word, but pigged with the sardine on her plate. He had forgotten her existence. He just simply stared at March while he ate his bread and margarine in huge mouthfuls, forgetting even his tea.

‘Well, I never knew anything make such a difference!’ he murmured, across his mouthfuls.

‘Oh, goodness!’ cried March, blushing still more. ‘I might be a pink monkey!’

And she rose quickly to her feet and took the tea-pot to the fire, to the kettle. And as she crouched on the hearth with her green slip about her, the boy stared more wide-eyed than ever. Through the crape her woman’s form seemed soft and womanly. And when she stood up and walked he saw her legs move soft within her modernly short skirt. She had on black silk stockings, and small patent shoes with little gold buckles.

No, she was another being. She was something quite different. Seeing her always in the hard-cloth breeches, wide on the hips, buttoned on the knee, strong as armour, and in the brown puttees and thick boots, it had never occurred to him that she had a woman’s legs and feet. Now it came upon him. She had a woman’s soft, skirted legs, and she was accessible. He blushed to the roots of his hair, shoved his nose in his tea-cup and drank his tea with a little noise that made Banford simply squirm: and strangely, suddenly he felt a man, no longer a youth. He felt a man, with all a man’s grave weight of responsibility. A curious quietness and gravity came over his soul. He felt a man, quiet, with a little of the heaviness of male destiny upon him.

She was soft and accessible in her dress. The thought went home in him like an everlasting responsibility.

‘Oh, for goodness’ sake, say something, somebody,’ cried Banford fretfully. ‘It might be a funeral.’ The boy looked at her, and she could not bear his face.

‘A funeral!’ said March, with a twisted smile. ‘Why, that breaks my dream.’ Suddenly she had thought of Banford in the wood-box for a coffin.

‘What, have you been dreaming of a wedding?’ said Banford sarcastically.

‘Must have been,’ said March.

‘Whose wedding?’ asked the boy.

‘I can’t remember,’ said March.

She was shy and rather awkward that evening, in spite of the fact that, wearing a dress, her bearing was much more subdued than in her uniform. She felt unpeeled and rather exposed. She felt almost improper.

They talked desultorily about Henry’s departure next morning, and made the trivial arrangement. But of the matter on their minds, none of them spoke. They were rather quiet and friendly this evening; Banford had practically nothing to say. But inside herself she seemed still, perhaps kindly.

At nine o’clock March brought in the tray with the everlasting tea and a little cold meat which Banford had managed to procure. It was the last supper, so Banford did not want to be disagreeable. She felt a bit sorry for the boy, and felt she must be as nice as she could.

He wanted her to go to bed. She was usually the first. But she sat on in her chair under the lamp, glancing at her book now and then, and staring into the fire. A deep silence had come into the room. It was broken by March asking, in a rather small tone:

‘What time is it, Jill?’

‘Five past ten,’ said Banford, looking at her wrist.

And then not a sound. The boy had looked up from the book he was holding between his knees. His rather wide, cat-shaped face had its obstinate look, his eyes were watchful.

‘What about bed?’ said March at last.

‘I’m ready when you are,’ said Banford.

‘Oh, very well,’ said March. ‘I’ll fill your bottle.’

She was as good as her word. When the hot-water bottle was ready, she lit a candle and went upstairs with it. Banford remained in her chair, listening acutely. March came downstairs again.

‘There you are, then,’ she said. ‘Are you going up?’

‘Yes, in a minute,’ said Banford. But the minute passed, and she sat on in her chair under the lamp.

Henry, whose eyes were shining like a cat’s as he watched from under his brows, and whose face seemed wider, more chubbed and cat-like with

unalterable obstinacy, now rose to his feet to try his throw.

‘I think I’ll go and look if I can see the she-fox,’ he said. ‘She may be creeping round. Won’t you come as well for a minute, Nellie, and see if we see anything?’

‘Me!’ cried March, looking up with her startled, wondering face.

‘Yes. Come on,’ he said. It was wonderful how soft and warm and coaxing his voice could be, how near. The very sound of it made Banford’s blood boil. ‘Come on for a minute,’ he said, looking down into her uplifted, unsure face.

And she rose to her feet as if drawn up by his young, ruddy face that was looking down on her.

‘I should think you’re never going out at this time of night, Nellie!’ cried Banford.

‘Yes, just for a minute,’ said the boy, looking round on her, and speaking with an odd, sharp yelp in his voice.

March looked from one to the other, as if confused, vague. Banford rose to her feet for battle.

‘Why, it’s ridiculous. It’s bitter cold. You’ll catch your death in that thin frock. And in those slippers. You’re not going to do any such thing.’

There was a moment’s pause. Banford turtled up like a little fighting cock, facing March and the boy.

‘Oh, I don’t think you need worry yourself,’ he replied. ‘A moment under the stars won’t do anybody any damage. I’ll get the rug off the sofa in the dining-room. You’re coming, Nellie.’

His voice had so much anger and contempt and fury in it as he spoke to Banford: and so much tenderness and proud authority as he spoke to March, that the latter answered:

‘Yes, I’m coming.’

And she turned with him to the door.

Banford, standing there in the middle of the room, suddenly burst into a long wail and a spasm of sobs. She covered her face with her poor, thin hands, and her thin shoulders shook in an agony of weeping. March looked back from the door.

‘Jill!’ she cried in a frantic tone, like someone just coming awake. And she seemed to start towards her darling.

But the boy had March’s arm in his grip, and she could not move. She did not know why she could not move. It was as in a dream when the heart strains and the body cannot stir.

‘Never mind,’ said the boy softly. ‘Let her cry. Let her cry. She will have to cry sooner or later. And the tears will relieve her feelings. They will do her

good.'

So he drew March slowly through the doorway. But her last look was back to the poor little figure which stood in the middle of the room with covered face and thin shoulders shaken with bitter weeping.

In the dining-room he picked up the rug and said:

'Wrap yourself up in this.'

She obeyed — and they reached the kitchen door, he holding her soft and firm by the arm, though she did not know it. When she saw the night outside she started back.

'I must go back to Jill,' she said. 'I *must!* Oh yes, I must.'

Her tone sounded final. The boy let go of her and she turned indoors. But he seized her again and arrested her.

'Wait a minute,' he said. 'Wait a minute. Even if you go, you're not going yet.'

'Leave go! Leave go!' she cried. 'My place is at Jill's side. Poor little thing, she's sobbing her heart out.'

'Yes,' said the boy bitterly. 'And your heart too, and mine as well.'

'Your heart?' said March. He still gripped her and detained her.

'Isn't it as good as her heart?' he said. 'Or do you think it's not?'

'Your heart?' she said again, incredulous.

'Yes, mine! Mine! Do you think I haven't *got* a heart?' And with his hot grasp he took her hand and pressed it under his left breast. 'There's my heart,' he said, 'if you don't believe in it.'

It was wonder which made her attend. And then she felt the deep, heavy, powerful stroke of his heart, terrible, like something from beyond. It was like something from beyond, something awful from outside, signalling to her. And the signal paralysed her. It beat upon her very soul, and made her helpless. She forgot Jill. She could not think of Jill any more. She could not think of her. That terrible signalling from outside!

The boy put his arm round her waist.

'Come with me,' he said gently. 'Come and let us say what we've got to say.'

And he drew her outside, closed the door. And she went with him darkly down the garden path. That he should have a beating heart! And that he should have his arm round her, outside the blanket! She was too confused to think who he was or what he was.

He took her to a dark corner of the shed, where there was a tool-box with a lid, long and low.

'We'll sit here a minute,' he said.

And obediently she sat down by his side.

‘Give me your hand,’ he said.

She gave him both her hands, and he held them between his own. He was young, and it made him tremble.

‘You’ll marry me. You’ll marry me before I go back, won’t you?’ he pleaded.

‘Why, aren’t we both a pair of fools?’ she said.

He had put her in the corner, so that she should not look out and see the lighted window of the house across the dark garden. He tried to keep her all there inside the shed with him.

‘In what way a pair of fools?’ he said. ‘If you go back to Canada with me, I’ve got a job and a good wage waiting for me, and it’s a nice place, near the mountains. Why shouldn’t you marry me? Why shouldn’t we marry? I should like to have you there with me. I should like to feel I’d got somebody there, at the back of me, all my life.’

‘You’d easily find somebody else who’d suit you better,’ she said.

‘Yes, I might easily find another girl. I know I could. But not one I really wanted. I’ve never met one I really wanted for good. You see, I’m thinking of all my life. If I marry, I want to feel it’s for all my life. Other girls: well, they’re just girls, nice enough to go a walk with now and then. Nice enough for a bit of play. But when I think of my life, then I should be very sorry to have to marry one of them, I should indeed.’

‘You mean they wouldn’t make you a good wife.’

‘Yes, I mean that. But I don’t mean they wouldn’t do their duty by me. I mean — I don’t know what I mean. Only when I think of my life, and of you, then the two things go together.’

‘And what if they didn’t?’ she said, with her odd, sardonic touch.

‘Well, I think they would.’

They sat for some time silent. He held her hands in his, but he did not make love to her. Since he had realized that she was a woman, and vulnerable, accessible, a certain heaviness had possessed his soul. He did not want to make love to her. He shrank from any such performance, almost with fear. She was a woman, and vulnerable, accessible to him finally, and he held back from that which was ahead, almost with dread. It was a kind of darkness he knew he would enter finally, but of which he did not want as yet even to think. She was the woman, and he was responsible for the strange vulnerability he had suddenly realized in her.

‘No,’ she said at last, ‘I’m a fool. I know I’m a fool.’

‘What for?’ he asked.

‘To go on with this business.’

‘Do you mean me?’ he asked.

‘No, I mean myself. I’m making a fool of myself, and a big one.’

‘Why, because you don’t want to marry me, really?’

‘Oh, I don’t know whether I’m against it, as a matter of fact. That’s just it. I don’t know.’

He looked at her in the darkness, puzzled. He did not in the least know what she meant.

‘And don’t you know whether you like to sit here with me this minute or not?’ he asked.

‘No, I don’t really. I don’t know whether I wish I was somewhere else, or whether I like being here. I don’t know, really.’

‘Do you wish you were with Miss Banford? Do you wish you’d gone to bed with her?’ he asked, as a challenge.

She waited a long time before she answered:

‘No,’ she said at last. ‘I don’t wish that.’

‘And do you think you would spend all your life with her — when your hair goes white, and you are old?’ he said.

‘No,’ she said, without much hesitation. ‘I don’t see Jill and me two old women together.’

‘And don’t you think, when I’m an old man and you’re an old woman, we might be together still, as we are now?’ he said.

‘Well, not as we are now,’ she replied. ‘But I could imagine — no, I can’t. I can’t imagine you an old man. Besides, it’s dreadful!’

‘What, to be an old man?’

‘Yes, of course.’

‘Not when the time comes,’ he said. ‘But it hasn’t come. Only it will. And when it does, I should like to think you’d be there as well.’

‘Sort of old age pensions,’ she said dryly.

Her kind of witless humour always startled him. He never knew what she meant. Probably she didn’t quite know herself.

‘No,’ he said, hurt.

‘I don’t know why you harp on old age,’ she said. ‘I’m not ninety.’

‘Did anybody ever say you were?’ he asked, offended.

They were silent for some time, pulling different ways in the silence.

‘I don’t want you to make fun of me,’ he said.

‘Don’t you?’ she replied, enigmatic.

‘No, because just this minute I’m serious. And when I’m serious, I believe in not making fun of it.’

‘You mean nobody else must make fun of you,’ she replied.

‘Yes, I mean that. And I mean I don’t believe in making fun of it myself.’

When it comes over me so that I'm serious, then — there it is, I don't want it to be laughed at.'

She was silent for some time. Then she said, in a vague, almost pained voice:

'No, I'm not laughing at you.'

A hot wave rose in his heart.

'You believe me, do you?' he asked.

'Yes, I believe you,' she replied, with a twang of her old, tired nonchalance, as if she gave in because she was tired. But he didn't care. His heart was hot and clamorous.

'So you agree to marry me before I go? — perhaps at Christmas?'

'Yes, I agree.'

'There!' he exclaimed. 'That's settled it.'

And he sat silent, unconscious, with all the blood burning in all his veins, like fire in all the branches and twigs of him. He only pressed her two hands to his chest, without knowing. When the curious passion began to die down, he seemed to come awake to the world.

'We'll go in, shall we?' he said: as if he realized it was cold.

She rose without answering.

'Kiss me before we go, now you've said it,' he said.

And he kissed her gently on the mouth, with a young, frightened kiss. It made her feel so young, too, and frightened, and wondering: and tired, tired, as if she were going to sleep.

They went indoors. And in the sitting-room, there, crouched by the fire like a queer little witch, was Banford. She looked round with reddened eyes as they entered, but did not rise. He thought she looked frightening, unnatural, crouching there and looking round at them. Evil he thought her look was, and he crossed his fingers.

Banford saw the ruddy, elate face on the youth: he seemed strangely tall and bright and looming. And March had a delicate look on her face; she wanted to hide her face, to screen it, to let it not be seen.

'You've come at last,' said Banford uglily.

'Yes, we've come,' said he.

'You've been long enough for anything,' she said.

'Yes, we have. We've settled it. We shall marry as soon as possible,' he replied.

'Oh, you've settled it, have you! Well, I hope you won't live to repent it,' said Banford.

'I hope so too,' he replied.

'Are you going to bed *now*, Nellie?' said Banford.

‘Yes, I’m going now.’

‘Then for goodness’ sake come along.’

March looked at the boy. He was glancing with his very bright eyes at her and at Banford. March looked at him wistfully. She wished she could stay with him. She wished she had married him already, and it was all over. For oh, she felt suddenly so safe with him. She felt so strangely safe and peaceful in his presence. If only she could sleep in his shelter, and not with Jill. She felt afraid of Jill. In her dim, tender state, it was agony to have to go with Jill and sleep with her. She wanted the boy to save her. She looked again at him.

And he, watching with bright eyes, divined something of what she felt. It puzzled and distressed him that she must go with Jill.

‘I shan’t forget what you’ve promised,’ he said, looking clear into her eyes, right into her eyes, so that he seemed to occupy all herself with his queer, bright look.

She smiled to him faintly, gently. She felt safe again — safe with him.

But in spite of all the boy’s precautions, he had a setback. The morning he was leaving the farm he got March to accompany him to the market-town, about six miles away, where they went to the registrar and had their names stuck up as two people who were going to marry. He was to come at Christmas, and the wedding was to take place then. He hoped in the spring to be able to take March back to Canada with him, now the war was really over. Though he was so young, he had saved some money.

‘You never have to be without *some* money at the back of you, if you can help it,’ he said.

So she saw him off in the train that was going West: his camp was on Salisbury Plain. And with big, dark eyes she watched him go, and it seemed as if everything real in life was retreating as the train retreated with his queer, chubby, ruddy face, that seemed so broad across the cheeks, and which never seemed to change its expression, save when a cloud of sulky anger hung on the brow, or the bright eyes fixed themselves in their stare. This was what happened now. He leaned there out of the carriage window as the train drew off, saying good-bye and staring back at her, but his face quite unchanged. There was no emotion on his face. Only his eyes tightened and became fixed and intent in their watching like a cat’s when suddenly she sees something and stares. So the boy’s eyes stared fixedly as the train drew away, and she was left feeling intensely forlorn. Failing his physical presence, she seemed to have nothing of him. And she had nothing of anything. Only his face was fixed in her mind: the full, ruddy, unchanging cheeks, and the straight snout of a nose and the two eyes staring above. All she could remember was how he suddenly wrinkled his nose when he

laughed, as a puppy does when he is playfully growling. But him, himself, and what he was — she knew nothing, she had nothing of him when he left her.

On the ninth day after he had left her he received this letter.

Dear Henry,

I have been over it all again in my mind, this business of me and you, and it seems to me impossible. When you aren't there I see what a fool I am. When you are there you seem to blind me to things as they actually are. You make me see things all unreal, and I don't know what. Then when I am alone again with Jill I seem to come to my own senses and realise what a fool I am making of myself, and how I am treating you unfairly. Because it must be unfair to you for me to go on with this affair when I can't feel in my heart that I really love you. I know people talk a lot of stuff and nonsense about love, and I don't want to do that. I want to keep to plain facts and act in a sensible way. And that seems to me what I'm not doing. I don't see on what grounds I am going to marry you. I know I am not head over heels in love with you, as I have fancied myself to be with fellows when I was a young fool of a girl. You are an absolute stranger to me, and it seems to me you will always be one. So on what grounds am I going to marry you? When I think of Jill, she is ten times more real to me. I know her and I'm awfully fond of her, and I hate myself for a beast if I ever hurt her little finger. We have a life together. And even if it can't last for ever, it is a life while it does last. And it might last as long as either of us lives. Who knows how long we've got to live? She is a delicate little thing, perhaps nobody but me knows how delicate. And as for me, I feel I might fall down the well any day. What I don't seem to see at all is you. When I think of what I've been and what I've done with you, I'm afraid I am a few screws loose. I should be sorry to think that softening of the brain is setting in so soon, but that is what it seems like. You are such an absolute stranger, and so different from what I'm used to, and we don't seem to have a thing in common. As for love, the very word seems impossible. I know what love means even in Jill's case, and I know that in this affair with you it's an absolute impossibility. And then going to Canada. I'm sure I must have been clean off my chump when I promised such a thing. It makes me feel fairly frightened of myself. I feel I might do something really silly that I wasn't responsible for — and end my days in a lunatic asylum. You may think that's all I'm fit for after the way I've gone on, but it isn't a very nice thought for me. Thank goodness Jill is here, and her being here makes me feel sane again, else I don't know what I might do; I might have an accident with the gun one evening. I love Jill, and she makes me feel safe and sane, with her loving anger against me for being such a fool. Well, what I want to say is, won't you let us cry the

whole thing off? I can't marry you, and really, I won't do such a thing if it seems to me wrong. It is all a great mistake. I've made a complete fool of myself, and all I can do is to apologise to you and ask you please to forget it, and please to take no further notice of me. Your fox-skin is nearly ready, and seems all right, I will post it to you if you will let me know if this address is still right, and if you will accept my apology for the awful and lunatic way I have behaved with you, and then let the matter rest.

Jill sends her kindest regards. Her mother and father are staying with us over Christmas,

Yours very sincerely,
ELLEN MARCH.

The boy read this letter in camp as he was cleaning his kit. He set his teeth, and for a moment went almost pale, yellow round the eyes with fury. He said nothing and saw nothing and felt nothing but a livid rage that was quite unreasoning. Balked! Balked again! Balked! He wanted the woman, he had fixed like doom upon having her. He felt that was his doom, his destiny, and his reward, to have this woman. She was his heaven and hell on earth, and he would have none elsewhere. Sightless with rage and thwarted madness he got through the morning. Save that in his mind he was lurking and scheming towards an issue, he would have committed some insane act. Deep in himself he felt like roaring and howling and gnashing his teeth and breaking things. But he was too intelligent. He knew society was on top of him, and he must scheme. So with his teeth bitten together, and his nose curiously slightly lifted, like some creature that is vicious, and his eyes fixed and staring, he went through the morning's affairs drunk with anger and suppression. In his mind was one thing — Banford. He took no heed of all March's outpouring: none. One thorn rankled, stuck in his mind. Banford. In his mind, in his soul, in his whole being, one thorn rankling to insanity. And he would have to get it out. He would have to get the thorn of Banford out of his life, if he died for it.

With this one fixed idea in his mind, he went to ask for twenty-four hours' leave of absence. He knew it was not due to him. His consciousness was supernaturally keen. He knew where he must go — he must go to the captain. But how could he get at the captain? In that great camp of wooden huts and tents he had no idea where his captain was.

But he went to the officers' canteen. There was his captain standing talking with three other officers. Henry stood in the doorway at attention.

'May I speak to Captain Berryman?' The captain was Cornish like himself.

'What do you want?' called the captain.

‘May I speak to you, Captain?’

‘What do you want?’ replied the captain, not stirring from among his group of fellow officers.

Henry watched his superior for a minute without speaking.

‘You won’t refuse me, sir, will you?’ he asked gravely.

‘It depends what it is.’

‘Can I have twenty-four hours’ leave?’

‘No, you’ve no business to ask.’

‘I know I haven’t. But I must ask you.’

‘You’ve had your answer.’

‘Don’t send me away, Captain.’

There was something strange about the boy as he stood there so everlasting in the doorway. The Cornish captain felt the strangeness at once, and eyed him shrewdly.

‘Why, what’s afoot?’ he said, curious.

‘I’m in trouble about something. I must go to Blewbury,’ said the boy.

‘Blewbury, eh? After the girls?’

‘Yes, it is a woman, Captain.’ And the boy, as he stood there with his head reaching forward a little, went suddenly terribly pale, or yellow, and his lips seemed to give off pain. The captain saw and paled a little also. He turned aside.

‘Go on, then,’ he said. ‘But for God’s sake don’t cause any trouble of any sort.’

‘I won’t, Captain, thank you.’

He was gone. The captain, upset, took a gin and bitters. Henry managed to hire a bicycle. It was twelve o’clock when he left the camp. He had sixty miles of wet and muddy crossroads to ride. But he was in the saddle and down the road without a thought of food.

At the farm, March was busy with a work she had had some time in hand. A bunch of Scotch fir trees stood at the end of the open shed, on a little bank where ran the fence between two of the gorse-shaggy meadows. The farthest of these trees was dead — it had died in the summer, and stood with all its needles brown and sere in the air. It was not a very big tree. And it was absolutely dead. So March determined to have it, although they were not allowed to cut any of the timber. But it would make such splendid firing, in these days of scarce fuel.

She had been giving a few stealthy chops at the trunk for a week or more, every now and then hacking away for five minutes, low down, near the ground, so no one should notice. She had not tried the saw, it was such hard work, alone. Now the tree stood with a great yawning gap in his base, perched, as it were, on one sinew, and ready to fall. But he did not fall.

It was late in the damp December afternoon, with cold mists creeping out of the woods and up the hollows, and darkness waiting to sink in from above. There was a bit of yellowness where the sun was fading away beyond the low woods of the distance. March took her axe and went to the tree. The small thud-thud of her blows resounded rather ineffectual about the wintry homestead. Banford came out wearing her thick coat, but with no hat on her head, so that her thin, bobbed hair blew on the uneasy wind that sounded in the pines and in the wood.

‘What I’m afraid of,’ said Banford, ‘is that it will fall on the shed and we sh’ll have another job repairing that.’

‘Oh, I don’t think so,’ said March, straightening herself and wiping her arm over her hot brow. She was flushed red, her eyes were very wide open and queer, her upper lip lifted away from her two white, front teeth with a curious, almost rabbit look.

A little stout man in a black overcoat and a bowler hat came pottering across the yard. He had a pink face and a white beard and smallish, pale-blue eyes. He was not very old, but nervy, and he walked with little short steps.

‘What do you think, father?’ said Banford. ‘Don’t you think it might hit the shed in falling?’

‘Shed, no!’ said the old man. ‘Can’t hit the shed. Might as well say the fence.’

‘The fence doesn’t matter,’ said March, in her high voice.

‘Wrong as usual, am I!’ said Banford, wiping her straying hair from her eyes.

The tree stood as it were on one spelch of itself, leaning, and creaking in the wind. It grew on the bank of a little dry ditch between the two meadows. On the top of the bank straggled one fence, running to the bushes up-hill. Several trees clustered there in the corner of the field near the shed and near the gate which led into the yard. Towards this gate, horizontal across the weary meadows, came the grassy, rutted approach from the high road. There trailed another rickety fence, long split poles joining the short, thick, wide-apart uprights. The three people stood at the back of the tree, in the corner of the shed meadow, just above the yard gate. The house, with its two gables and its porch, stood tidy in a little grassed garden across the yard. A little, stout, rosy-faced woman in a little red woollen shoulder shawl had come and taken her stand in the porch.

‘Isn’t it down yet?’ she cried, in a high little voice.

‘Just thinking about it,’ called her husband. His tone towards the two girls was always rather mocking and satirical. March did not want to go on with her hitting while he was there. As for him, he wouldn’t lift a stick from the ground if he could help it, complaining, like his daughter, of rheumatics in his shoulder. So the three stood there a moment silent in the cold afternoon, in the bottom corner near the yard.

They heard the far-off taps of a gate, and craned to look. Away across, on the green horizontal approach, a figure was just swinging on to a bicycle again, and lurching up and down over the grass, approaching.

‘Why, it’s one of our boys — it’s Jack,’ said the old man.

‘Can’t be,’ said Banford.

March craned her head to look. She alone recognized the khaki figure. She flushed, but said nothing.

‘No, it isn’t Jack, I don’t think,’ said the old man, staring with little round blue eyes under his white lashes.

In another moment the bicycle lurched into sight, and the rider dropped off at the gate. It was Henry, his face wet and red and spotted with mud. He was altogether a muddy sight.

‘Oh!’ cried Banford, as if afraid. ‘Why, it’s Henry!’

‘What?’ muttered the old man. He had a thick, rapid, muttering way of speaking, and was slightly deaf. ‘What? What? Who is it? Who is it, do you say? That young fellow? That young fellow of Nellie’s? Oh! Oh!’ And the satiric smile came on his pink face and white eyelashes.

Henry, pushing the wet hair off his steaming brow, had caught sight of them and heard what the old man said. His hot, young face seemed to flame in the cold light.

‘Oh, are you all there!’ he said, giving his sudden, puppy’s little laugh. He was so hot and dazed with cycling he hardly knew where he was. He leaned the bicycle against the fence and climbed over into the corner on to the bank, without going into the yard.

‘Well, I must say, we weren’t expecting *you*,’ said Banford laconically.

‘No, I suppose not,’ said he, looking at March.

She stood aside, slack, with one knee drooped and the axe resting its head loosely on the ground. Her eyes were wide and vacant, and her upper lip lifted from her teeth in that helpless, fascinated rabbit look. The moment she saw his glowing, red face it was all over with her. She was as helpless as if she had been bound. The moment she saw the way his head seemed to reach forward.

‘Well, who is it? Who is it, anyway?’ asked the smiling, satiric old man in his muttering voice.

‘Why, Mr Grenfel, whom you’ve heard us tell about, father,’ said Banford coldly.

‘Heard you tell about, I should think so. Heard of nothing else practically,’ muttered the elderly man, with his queer little jeering smile on his face. ‘How do you do,’ he added, suddenly reaching out his hand to Henry.

The boy shook hands just as startled. Then the two men fell apart.

‘Cycled over from Salisbury Plain, have you?’ asked the old man.

‘Yes.’

‘Hm! Longish ride. How long d’it take you, eh? Some time, eh? Several hours, I suppose.’

‘About four.’

‘Eh? Four! Yes, I should have thought so. When are you going back, then?’

‘I’ve got till tomorrow evening.’

‘Till tomorrow evening, eh? Yes. Hm! Girls weren’t expecting you, were they?’

And the old man turned his pale-blue, round little eyes under their white lashes mockingly towards the girls. Henry also looked round. He had become a little awkward. He looked at March, who was still staring away into the distance as if to see where the cattle were. Her hand was on the pommel of the axe, whose head rested loosely on the ground.

‘What were you doing there?’ he asked in his soft, courteous voice. ‘Cutting a tree down?’

March seemed not to hear, as if in a trance.

‘Yes,’ said Banford. ‘We’ve been at it for over a week.’

‘Oh! And have you done it all by yourselves then?’

‘Nellie’s done it all, I’ve done nothing,’ said Banford.

‘Really! You must have worked quite hard,’ he said, addressing himself in a curious gentle tone direct to March. She did not answer, but remained half averted staring away towards the woods above as if in a trance.

‘Nellie!’ cried Banford sharply. ‘Can’t you answer?’

‘What — me?’ cried March, starting round and looking from one to the other. ‘Did anyone speak to me?’

‘Dreaming!’ muttered the old man, turning aside to smile. ‘Must be in love, eh, dreaming in the daytime!’

‘Did you say anything to me?’ said March, looking at the boy as from a strange distance, her eyes wide and doubtful, her face delicately flushed.

‘I said you must have worked hard at the tree,’ he replied courteously.

‘Oh, that! Bit by bit. I thought it would have come down by now.’

‘I’m thankful it hasn’t come down in the night, to frighten us to death,’ said Banford.

‘Let me just finish it for you, shall I?’ said the boy.

March slanted the axe-shaft in his direction.

‘Would you like to?’ she said.

‘Yes, if you wish it,’ he said.

‘Oh, I’m thankful when the thing’s down, that’s all,’ she replied, nonchalant.

‘Which way is it going to fall?’ said Banford. ‘Will it hit the shed?’

‘No, it won’t hit the shed,’ he said. ‘I should think it will fall there — quite clear. Though it might give a twist and catch the fence.’

‘Catch the fence!’ cried the old man. ‘What, catch the fence! When it’s leaning at that angle? Why, it’s farther off than the shed. It won’t catch the fence.’

‘No,’ said Henry, ‘I don’t suppose it will. It has plenty of room to fall quite clear, and I suppose it will fall clear.’

‘Won’t tumble backwards on top of *us*, will it?’ asked the old man, sarcastic.

‘No, it won’t do that,’ said Henry, taking off his short overcoat and his tunic. ‘Ducks! Ducks! Go back!’

A line of four brown-speckled ducks led by a brown-and-green drake were stemming away downhill from the upper meadow, coming like boats running on a ruffled sea, cockling their way top speed downwards towards the fence and towards the little group of people, and cackling as excitedly as if they brought news of the Spanish Armada.

‘Silly things! Silly things!’ cried Banford, going forward to turn them off. But they came eagerly towards her, opening their yellow-green beaks and quacking as if they were so excited to say something.

‘There’s no food. There’s nothing here. You must wait a bit,’ said Banford to them. ‘Go away. Go away. Go round to the yard.’

They didn’t go, so she climbed the fence to swerve them round under the gate and into the yard. So off they waggled in an excited string once more, wagging their rumps like the stems of little gondolas, ducking under the bar of the gate. Banford stood on the top of the bank, just over the fence, looking down on the other three.

Henry looked up at her, and met her queer, round-pupilled, weak eyes staring behind her spectacles. He was perfectly still. He looked away, up at the weak, leaning tree. And as he looked into the sky, like a huntsman who is watching a flying bird, he thought to himself: ‘If the tree falls in just such a way, and spins just so much as it falls, then the branch there will strike her exactly as she stands on top of that bank.’

He looked at her again. She was wiping the hair from her brow again, with that perpetual gesture. In his heart he had decided her death. A terrible still force seemed in him, and a power that was just his. If he turned even a hair’s breadth in the wrong direction, he would lose the power.

‘Mind yourself, Miss Banford,’ he said. And his heart held perfectly still, in the terrible pure will that she should not move.

‘Who, me, mind myself?’ she cried, her father’s jeering tone in her voice.

‘Why, do you think you might hit me with the axe?’

‘No, it’s just possible the tree might, though,’ he answered soberly. But the tone of his voice seemed to her to imply that he was only being falsely solicitous, and trying to make her move because it was his will to move her.

‘Absolutely impossible,’ she said.

He heard her. But he held himself icy still, lest he should lose his power.

‘No, it’s just possible. You’d better come down this way.’

‘Oh, all right. Let us see some crack Canadian tree-felling,’ she retorted.

‘Ready, then,’ he said, taking the axe, looking round to see he was clear.

There was a moment of pure, motionless suspense, when the world seemed to stand still. Then suddenly his form seemed to flash up enormously tall and fearful, he gave two swift, flashing blows, in immediate succession, the tree was severed, turning slowly, spinning strangely in the air and coming down like a sudden darkness on the earth. No one saw what was happening except himself. No one heard the strange little cry which the Banford gave as the dark end of the bough swooped down, down on her. No one saw her crouch a little and receive the blow on the back of the neck. No one saw her flung outwards and laid, a little twitching heap, at the foot of the fence. No one except the boy. And he watched with intense bright eyes, as he would watch a wild goose he had shot. Was it winged or dead? Dead!

Immediately he gave a loud cry. Immediately March gave a wild shriek that went far, far down the afternoon. And the father started a strange bellowing sound.

The boy leapt the fence and ran to the fringe. The back of the neck and head was a mass of blood, of horror. He turned it over. The body was quivering with little convulsions. But she was dead really. He knew it, that it was so. He knew it in his soul and his blood. The inner necessity of his life was fulfilling itself, it was he who was to live. The thorn was drawn out of his bowels. So he put her down gently. She was dead.

He stood up. March was standing there petrified and absolutely motionless. Her face was dead white, her eyes big black pools. The old man was scrambling horribly over the fence.

‘I’m afraid it’s killed her,’ said the boy.

The old man was making curious, blubbering noises as he huddled over the fence. ‘What!’ cried March, starting electric.

‘Yes, I’m afraid,’ repeated the boy.

March was coming forward. The boy was over the fence before she reached it.

‘What do you say, killed her?’ she asked in a sharp voice.

‘I’m afraid so,’ he answered softly.

She went still whiter, fearful. The two stood facing one another. Her black eyes gazed on him with the last look of resistance. And then in a last agonized failure she began to grizzle, to cry in a shivery little fashion of a child that doesn't want to cry, but which is beaten from within, and gives that little first shudder of sobbing which is not yet weeping, dry and fearful.

He had won. She stood there absolutely helpless, shuddering her dry sobs and her mouth trembling rapidly. And then, as in a child, with a little crash came the tears and the blind agony of sightless weeping. She sank down on the grass, and sat there with her hands on her breast and her face lifted in sightless, convulsed weeping. He stood above her, looking down on her, mute, pale, and everlasting seeming. He never moved, but looked down on her. And among all the torture of the scene, the torture of his own heart and bowels, he was glad, he had won.

After a long time he stooped to her and took her hands.

'Don't cry,' he said softly. 'Don't cry.'

She looked up at him with tears running from her eyes, a senseless look of helplessness and submission. So she gazed on him as if sightless, yet looking up to him. She would never leave him again. He had won her. And he knew it and was glad, because he wanted her for his life. His life must have her. And now he had won her. It was what his life must have.

But if he had won her, he had not yet got her. They were married at Christmas as he had planned, and he got again ten days' leave. They went to Cornwall, to his own village, on the sea. He realized that it was awful for her to be at the farm any more.

But though she belonged to him, though she lived in his shadow, as if she could not be away from him, she was not happy. She did not want to leave him: and yet she did not feel free with him. Everything round her seemed to watch her, seemed to press on her. He had won her, he had her with him, she was his wife. And she — she belonged to him, she knew it. But she was not glad. And he was still foiled. He realized that though he was married to her and possessed her in every possible way, apparently, and though she *wanted* him to possess her, she wanted it, she wanted nothing else, now, still he did not quite succeed.

Something was missing. Instead of her soul swaying with new life, it seemed to droop, to bleed, as if it were wounded. She would sit for a long time with her hand in his, looking away at the sea. And in her dark, vacant eyes was a sort of wound, and her face looked a little peaked. If he spoke to her, she would turn to him with a faint new smile, the strange, quivering little smile of a woman who has died in the old way of love, and can't quite rise to the new way. She still felt she ought to *do* something, to strain herself in some direction. And there was nothing to do, and no direction in which to strain herself. And she could not

quite accept the submergence which his new love put upon her. If she was in love, she ought to *exert* herself, in some way, loving. She felt the weary need of our day to *exert* herself in love. But she knew that in fact she must no more exert herself in love. He would not have the love which exerted itself towards him. It made his brow go black. No, he wouldn't let her exert her love towards him. No, she had to be passive, to acquiesce, and to be submerged under the surface of love. She had to be like the seaweeds she saw as she peered down from the boat, swaying forever delicately under water, with all their delicate fibrils put tenderly out upon the flood, sensitive, utterly sensitive and receptive within the shadowy sea, and never, never rising and looking forth above water while they lived. Never. Never looking forth from the water until they died, only then washing, corpses, upon the surface. But while they lived, always submerged, always beneath the wave. Beneath the wave they might have powerful roots, stronger than iron; they might be tenacious and dangerous in their soft waving within the flood. Beneath the water they might be stronger, more indestructible than resistant oak trees are on land. But it was always under-water, always under-water. And she, being a woman, must be like that.

And she had been so used to the very opposite. She had had to take all the thought for love and for life, and all the responsibility. Day after day she had been responsible for the coming day, for the coming year: for her dear Jill's health and happiness and well-being. Verily, in her own small way, she had felt herself responsible for the well-being of the world. And this had been her great stimulant, this grand feeling that, in her own small sphere, she was responsible for the well-being of the world.

And she had failed. She knew that, even in her small way, she had failed. She had failed to satisfy her own feeling of responsibility. It was so difficult. It seemed so grand and easy at first. And the more you tried, the more difficult it became. It had seemed so easy to make one beloved creature happy. And the more you tried, the worse the failure. It was terrible. She had been all her life reaching, reaching, and what she reached for seemed so near, until she had stretched to her utmost limit. And then it was always beyond her.

Always beyond her, vaguely, unrealizably beyond her, and she was left with nothingness at last. The life she reached for, the happiness she reached for, the well-being she reached for all slipped back, became unreal, the farther she stretched her hand. She wanted some goal, some finality — and there was none. Always this ghastly reaching, reaching, striving for something that might be just beyond. Even to make Jill happy. She was glad Jill was dead. For she had realized that she could never make her happy. Jill would always be fretting herself thinner and thinner, weaker and weaker. Her pains grew worse instead of

less. It would be so for ever. She was glad she was dead.

And if Jill had married a man it would have been just the same. The woman striving, striving to make the man happy, striving within her own limits for the well-being of her world. And always achieving failure. Little, foolish successes in money or in ambition. But at the very point where she most wanted success, in the anguished effort to make some one beloved human being happy and perfect, there the failure was almost catastrophic. You wanted to make your beloved happy, and his happiness seemed always achievable. If only you did just this, that, and the other. And you did this, that, and the other, in all good faith, and every time the failure became a little more ghastly. You could love yourself to ribbons and strive and strain yourself to the bone, and things would go from bad to worse, bad to worse, as far as happiness went. The awful mistake of happiness.

Poor March, in her good-will and her responsibility, she had strained herself till it seemed to her that the whole of life and everything was only a horrible abyss of nothingness. The more you reached after the fatal flower of happiness, which trembles so blue and lovely in a crevice just beyond your grasp, the more fearfully you became aware of the ghastly and awful gulf of the precipice below you, into which you will inevitably plunge, as into the bottomless pit, if you reach any farther. You pluck flower after flower — it is never *the* flower. The flower itself — its calyx is a horrible gulf, it is the bottomless pit.

That is the whole history of the search for happiness, whether it be your own or somebody else's that you want to win. It ends, and it always ends, in the ghastly sense of the bottomless nothingness into which you will inevitably fall if you strain any farther.

And women? — what goal can any woman conceive, except happiness? Just happiness for herself and the whole world. That, and nothing else. And so, she assumes the responsibility and sets off towards her goal. She can see it there, at the foot of the rainbow. Or she can see it a little way beyond, in the blue distance. Not far, not far.

But the end of the rainbow is a bottomless gulf down which you can fall forever without arriving, and the blue distance is a void pit which can swallow you and all your efforts into its emptiness, and still be no emptier. You and all your efforts. So, the illusion of attainable happiness!

Poor March, she had set off so wonderfully towards the blue goal. And the farther and farther she had gone, the more fearful had become the realization of emptiness. An agony, an insanity at last.

She was glad it was over. She was glad to sit on the shore and look westwards over the sea, and know the great strain had ended. She would never strain for

love and happiness any more. And Jill was safely dead. Poor Jill, poor Jill. It must be sweet to be dead.

For her own part, death was not her destiny. She would have to leave her destiny to the boy. But then, the boy. He wanted more than that. He wanted her to give herself without defences, to sink and become submerged in him. And she — she wanted to sit still, like a woman on the last milestone, and watch. She wanted to see, to know, to understand. She wanted to be alone: with him at her side.

And he! He did not want her to watch any more, to see any more, to understand any more. He wanted to veil her woman's spirit, as Orientals veil the woman's face. He wanted her to commit herself to him, and to put her independent spirit to sleep. He wanted to take away from her all her effort, all that seemed her very *raison d'être*. He wanted to make her submit, yield, blindly pass away out of all her strenuous consciousness. He wanted to take away her consciousness, and make her just his woman. Just his woman.

And she was so tired, so tired, like a child that wants to go to sleep, but which fights against sleep as if sleep were death. She seemed to stretch her eyes wider in the obstinate effort and tension of keeping awake. She *would* keep awake. She *would* know. She *would* consider and judge and decide. She would have the reins of her own life between her own hands. She *would* be an independent woman to the last. But she was so tired, so tired of everything. And sleep seemed near. And there was such rest in the boy.

Yet there, sitting in a niche of the high, wild, cliffs of West Cornwall, looking over the westward sea, she stretched her eyes wider and wider. Away to the West, Canada, America. She *would* know and she *would* see what was ahead. And the boy, sitting beside her, staring down at the gulls, had a cloud between his brows and the strain of discontent in his eyes. He wanted her asleep, at peace in him. He wanted her at peace asleep in him. And *there* she was, dying with the strain of her own wakefulness. Yet she would not sleep: no, never. Sometimes he thought bitterly that he ought to have left her. He ought never to have killed Banford. He should have left Banford and March to kill one another.

But that was only impatience: and he knew it. He was waiting, waiting to go West. He was aching almost in torment to leave England, to go West, to take March away. To leave this shore! He believed that as they crossed the seas, as they left this England which he so hated, because in some way it seemed to have stung him with poison, she would go to sleep. She would close her eyes at last and give in to him.

And then he would have her, and he would have his own life at last. He chafed, feeling he hadn't got his own life. He would never have it till she yielded

and slept in him. Then he would have all his own life as a young man and a male, and she would have all her own life as a woman and a female. There would be no more of this awful straining. She would not be a man any more, an independent woman with a man's responsibility. Nay, even the responsibility for her own soul she would have to commit to him. He knew it was so, and obstinately held out against her, waiting for the surrender.

'You'll feel better when once we get over the seas to Canada over there,' he said to her as they sat among the rocks on the cliff.

She looked away to the sea's horizon, as if it were not real. Then she looked round at him, with the strained, strange look of a child that is struggling against sleep.

'Shall I?' she said.

'Yes,' he answered quietly.

And her eyelids dropped with the slow motion, sleep weighing them unconscious. But she pulled them open again to say:

'Yes, I may. I can't tell. I can't tell what it will be like over there.'

'If only we could go soon!' he said, with pain in his voice.

THE END

THE CAPTAIN'S DOLL



I

‘Hannele!’

‘*Ja — a.*’

‘*Wo bist du?*’

‘*Hier.*’

‘*Wo dann?*’

Hannele did not lift her head from her work. She sat in a low chair under a reading-lamp, a basket of coloured silk pieces beside her, and in her hands a doll, or mannikin, which she was dressing. She was doing something to the knee of the mannikin, so that the poor little gentleman flourished head downwards with arms wildly tossed out. And it was not at all seemly, because the doll was a Scotch soldier in tight-fitting tartan trews.

There was a tap at the door, and the same voice, a woman’s, calling:

‘Hannele?’

‘*Ja — a!*’

‘Are you here? Are you alone?’ asked the voice in German.

‘Yes — come in.’

Hannele did not sound very encouraging. She turned round her doll as the door opened, and straightened his coat. A dark-eyed young woman peeped in through the door, with a roguish coyness. She was dressed fashionably for the street, in a thick cape-wrap, and a little black hat pulled down to her ears.

‘Quite, quite alone!’ said the newcomer, in a tone of wonder. ‘Where is he, then?’

‘That I don’t know,’ said Hannele.

‘And you sit here alone and wait for him? But no! That I call courage! Aren’t you afraid?’ Mitchka strolled across to her friend.

‘Why shall I be afraid?’ said Hannele curtly.

‘But no! And what are you doing? Another puppet! He is a good one, though! Ha — ha — ha! *Him!* It is him! No — no — that is too beautiful! No — that is too beautiful, Hannele. It is him — exactly him. Only the trousers.’

‘He wears those trousers too,’ said Hannele, standing her doll on her knee. It

was a perfect portrait of an officer of a Scottish regiment, slender, delicately made, with a slight, elegant stoop of the shoulders and close-fitting tartan trousers. The face was beautifully modelled, and a wonderful portrait, dark-skinned, with a little, close-cut, dark moustache, and wide-open dark eyes, and that air of aloofness and perfect diffidence which marks an officer and a gentleman.

Mitchka bent forward, studying the doll. She was a handsome woman with a warm, dark golden skin and clear black eyebrows over her russet-brown eyes.

‘No,’ she whispered to herself, as if awe-struck. ‘That is him. That is him. Only not the trousers. Beautiful, though, the trousers. Has he really such beautiful fine legs?’

Hannele did not answer.

‘Exactly him. Just as finished as he is. Just as complete. He is just like that: finished off. Has he seen it?’

‘No,’ said Hannele.

‘What will he say, then?’ She started. Her quick ear had caught a sound on the stone stairs. A look of fear came to her face. She flew to the door and out of the room, closing the door to behind her.

‘Who is it?’ her voice was heard calling anxiously down the stairs.

The answer came in German. Mitchka immediately opened the door again and came back to join Hannele.

‘Only Martin,’ she said.

She stood waiting. A man appeared in the doorway — erect, military.

‘Ah! Countess Hannele,’ he said in his quick, precise way, as he stood on the threshold in the distance. ‘May one come in?’

‘Yes, come in,’ said Hannele.

The man entered with a quick, military step, bowed, and kissed the hand of the woman who was sewing the doll. Then, much more intimately, he touched Mitchka’s hands with his lips.

Mitchka meanwhile was glancing round the room. It was a very large attic, with the ceiling sloping and then bending in two handsome movements towards the walls. The light from the dark-shaded reading-lamp fell softly on the huge whitewashed vaulting of the ceiling, on the various objects round the walls, and made a brilliant pool of colour where Hannele sat in her soft, red dress, with her basket of silks.

She was a fair woman with dark-blond hair and a beautiful fine skin. Her face seemed luminous, a certain quick gleam of life about it as she looked up at the man. He was handsome, clean-shaven, with very blue eyes strained a little too wide. One could see the war in his face.

Mitchka was wandering round the room, looking at everything, and saying: 'Beautiful! But beautiful! Such good taste! A man, and such good taste! No, they don't need a woman. No, look here, Martin, the Captain Hepburn has arranged all this room himself. Here you have the man. Do you see? So simple, yet so elegant. He needs a woman.'

The room was really beautiful, spacious, pale, soft-lighted. It was heated by a large stove of dark-blue tiles, and had very little furniture save large peasant cupboards or presses of painted wood, and a huge writing-table, on which were writing materials and some scientific apparatus and a cactus plant with fine scarlet blossoms. But it was a man's room. Tobacco and pipes were on a little tray, on the pegs in the distance hung military overcoats and belts, and two guns on a bracket. Then there were two telescopes, one mounted on a stand near a window. Various astronomical apparatus lay upon the table.

'And he reads the stars. Only think — he is an astronomer and reads the stars. Queer, queer people, the English!'

'He is Scottish,' said Hannele.

'Yes, Scottish,' said Mitchka. 'But, you know, I am afraid when I am with him. He is at a closed end. I don't know where I can get to with him. Are you afraid of him too, Hannele? Ach, like a closed road!'

'Why should I be?'

'Ah, you! Perhaps you don't know when you should be afraid. But if he were to come and find us here? No, no — let us go. Let us go, Martin. Come, let us go. I don't want the Captain Hepburn to come and find me in his room. Oh no!' Mitchka was busily pushing Martin to the door, and he was laughing with the queer, mad laugh in his strained eyes. 'Oh no! I don't like. I don't like it,' said Mitchka, trying her English now. She spoke a few sentences prettily. 'Oh no, Sir Captain, I don't want that you come. I don't like it, to be here when you come. Oh no. Not at all. I go. I go, Hannele. I go, my Hannele. And you will really stay here and wait for him? But when will he come? You don't know? Oh dear, I don't like it, I don't like it. I do not wait in the man's room. No, no — Never — *jamais — jamais, voyez-vous*. Ach, you poor Hannele! And he has got wife and children in England? Nevair! No, nevair shall I wait for him.'

She had bustlingly pushed Martin through the door and settled her wrap and taken a mincing, elegant pose, ready for the street, and waved her hand and made wide, scared eyes at Hannele, and was gone. The Countess Hannele picked up the doll again and began to sew its shoe. What living she now had she earned making these puppets.

But she was restless. She pressed her arms into her lap, as if holding them bent had wearied her. Then she looked at the little clock on his writing-table. It was

long after dinner-time — why hadn't he come? She sighed rather exasperated. She was tired of her doll.

Putting aside her basket of silks, she went to one of the windows. Outside the stars seemed white, and very near. Below was the dark agglomeration of the roofs of houses, a fume of light came up from beneath the darkness of roofs, and a faint breakage of noise from the town far below. The room seemed high, remote, in the sky.

She went to the table and looked at his letter-clip with letters in it, and at his sealing-wax and his stamp-box, touching things and moving them a little, just for the sake of the contrast, not really noticing what she touched. Then she took a pencil, and in stiff Gothic characters began to write her name — Johanna zu Rassentlow — time after time her own name — and then once, bitterly, curiously, with a curious sharpening of her nose: Alexander Hepburn.

But she threw the pencil down, having no more interest in her writing. She wandered to where the large telescope stood near a farther window, and stood for some minutes with her fingers on the barrel, where it was a little brighter from his touching it. Then she drifted restlessly back to her chair. She had picked up her puppet when she heard him on the stairs. She lifted her face and watched as he entered.

'Hello, you there!' he said quietly, as he closed the door behind him. She glanced at him swiftly, but did not move or answer.

He took off his overcoat with quick, quiet movements, and went to hang it up on the pegs. She heard his step, and looked again. He was like the doll, a tall, slender, well-bred man in uniform. When he turned, his dark eyes seemed very wide open. His black hair was growing grey at the temples — the first touch.

She was sewing her doll. Without saying anything, he wheeled round the chair from the writing-table, so that he sat with his knees almost touching her. Then he crossed one leg over the other. He wore fine tartan socks. His ankles seemed slender and elegant, his brown shoes fitted as if they were part of him. For some moments he watched her as she sat sewing. The light fell on her soft, delicate hair, that was full of strands of gold and of tarnished gold and shadow. She did not look up.

In silence he held out his small, naked-looking brown hand for the doll. On his forearm were black hairs.

She glanced up at him. Curious how fresh and luminous her face looked in contrast to his.

'Do you want to see it?' she asked, in natural English.

'Yes,' he said.

She broke off her thread of cotton and handed him the puppet. He sat with one

leg thrown over the other, holding the doll in one hand and smiling inscrutably with his dark eyes. His hair, parted perfectly on one side, was jet black and glossy.

‘You’ve got me,’ he said at last, in his amused, melodious voice.

‘What?’ she said.

‘You’ve got me,’ he repeated.

‘I don’t care,’ she said.

‘What — You don’t care?’ His face broke into a smile. He had an odd way of answering, as if he were only half attending, as if he were thinking of something else.

‘You are very late, aren’t you?’ she ventured.

‘Yes. I am rather late.’

‘Why are you?’

‘Well, as a matter of fact, I was talking with the Colonel.’

‘About me?’

‘Yes. It was about you.’

She went pale as she sat looking up into his face. But it was impossible to tell whether there was distress on his dark brow or not.

‘Anything nasty?’ she said.

‘Well, yes. It was rather nasty. Not about you, I mean. But rather awkward for me.’

She watched him. But still he said no more.

‘What was it?’ she said.

‘Oh, well — only what I expected. They seem to know rather too much about you — about you and me, I mean. Not that anybody cares one bit, you know, unofficially. The trouble is, they are apparently going to have to take official notice.’

‘Why?’

‘Oh, well — it appears my wife has been writing letters to the Major-General. He is one of her family acquaintances — known her all his life. And I suppose she’s been hearing rumours. In fact, I know she has. She said so in her letter to me.’

‘And what do you say to her then?’

‘Oh, I tell her I’m all right — not to worry.’

‘You don’t expect *that* to stop her worrying, do you?’ she asked.

‘Oh, I don’t know. Why should she worry?’ he said.

‘I think she might have some reason,’ said Hannele. ‘You’ve not seen her for a year. And if she adores you — ’

‘Oh, I don’t think she adores me. I think she quite likes me.’

‘Do you think you matter as little as that to her?’

‘I don’t see why not. Of course she likes to feel *safe* about me.’

‘But now she doesn’t feel safe?’

‘No — exactly. Exactly. That’s the point. That’s where it is. The Colonel advises me to go home on leave.’

He sat gazing with curious, bright, dark, unseeing eyes at the doll which he held by one arm. It was an extraordinary likeness of himself, true even to the smooth parting of his hair and his peculiar way of fixing his dark eyes.

‘For how long?’ she asked.

‘I don’t know. For a month,’ he replied, first vaguely, then definitely.

‘For a month!’ She watched him, and seemed to see him fade from her eyes.

‘And will you go?’ she asked.

‘I don’t know. I don’t know.’ His head remained bent, he seemed to muse rather vaguely. ‘I don’t know,’ he repeated. ‘I can’t make up my mind what I shall do.’

‘Would you like to go?’ she asked.

He lifted his brows and looked at her. Her heart always melted in her when he looked straight at her with his black eyes and that curious, bright, unseeing look that was more like second sight than direct human vision. She never knew what he saw when he looked at her.

‘No,’ he said simply. ‘I don’t *want* to go. I don’t think I’ve any desire at all to go to England.’

‘Why not?’ she asked.

‘I can’t say.’ Then again he looked at her, and a curious white light seemed to shine on his eyes, as he smiled slowly with his mouth, and said: ‘I suppose you ought to know, if anybody does.’

A glad, half-frightened look came on her face.

‘You mean you don’t want to leave me?’ she asked, breathless.

‘Yes. I suppose that’s what I mean.’

‘But you aren’t sure?’

‘Yes, I am, I’m quite sure,’ he said, and the curious smile lingered on his face, and the strange light shone in his eyes.

‘That you don’t want to leave me?’ she stammered, looking aside.

‘Yes, I’m quite sure I don’t want to leave you,’ he repeated. He had a curious, very melodious Scottish voice. But it was the incomprehensible smile on his face that convinced and frightened her. It was almost a gargoyle smile, a strange, lurking, changeless-seeming grin.

She was frightened, and turned aside her face. When she looked at him again, his face was like a mask, with strange, deep-graven lines and a glossy dark skin

and a fixed look — as if carved half grotesquely in some glossy stone. His black hair on his smooth, beautifully-shaped head seemed changeless.

‘Are you rather tired?’ she asked him.

‘Yes, I think I am.’ He looked at her with black, unseeing eyes and a mask-like face. Then he glanced as if he heard something. Then he rose with his hand on his belt, saying: ‘I’ll take off my belt and change my coat, if you don’t mind.’

He walked across the room, unfastening his broad, brown belt. He was in well-fitting, well-cut khaki. He hung up his belt and came back to her wearing an old, light tunic, which he left unbuttoned. He carried his slippers in one hand. When he sat down to unfasten his shoes, she noticed again how black and hairy his forearm was, how naked his brown hand seemed. His hair was black and smooth and perfect on his head, like some close helmet, as he stooped down.

He put on his slippers, carried his shoes aside, and resumed his chair, stretching luxuriously.

‘There,’ he said. ‘I feel better now.’ And he looked at her. ‘Well,’ he said, ‘and how are you?’

‘Me?’ she said. ‘Do I matter?’ She was rather bitter.

‘Do you matter?’ he repeated, without noticing her bitterness. ‘Why, what a question! Of course you are of the very highest importance. What? Aren’t you?’ And smiling his curious smile — it made her for a moment think of the fixed sadness of monkeys, of those Chinese carved soapstone apes. He put his hand under her chin, and gently drew his finger along her cheek. She flushed deeply,

‘But I’m not as important as you, am I?’ she asked defiantly.

‘As important as me! Why, bless you, I’m not important a bit. I’m not important a bit!’ — the odd straying sound of his words mystified her. What did he really mean?

‘And I’m even less important than that,’ she said bitterly.

‘Oh no, you’re not. Oh no, you’re not. You’re very important. You’re very important indeed, I assure you.’

‘And your wife?’ — the question came rebelliously. ‘Your wife? Isn’t she important?’

‘My wife? My wife?’ He seemed to let the word stray out of him as if he did not quite know what it meant. ‘Why, yes, I suppose she is important in her own sphere.’

‘What sphere?’ blurted Hannele, with a laugh.

‘Why, her own sphere, of course. Her own house, her own home, and her two children: that’s her sphere.’

‘And you? — where do you come in?’

‘At present I don’t come in,’ he said.

‘But isn’t that just the trouble,’ said Hannele. ‘If you have a wife and a home, it’s your business to belong to it, isn’t it?’

‘Yes, I suppose it is, if I want to,’ he replied.

‘And you *do* want to?’ she challenged.

‘No, I don’t,’ he replied.

‘Well, then?’ she said.

‘Yes, quite,’ he answered. ‘I admit it’s a dilemma.’

‘But what will you *do*?’ she insisted.

‘Why, I don’t know. I don’t know yet. I haven’t made up my mind what I’m going to do.’

‘Then you’d better begin to make it up,’ she said.

‘Yes, I know that. I know that.’

He rose and began to walk uneasily up and down the room. But the same vacant darkness was on his brow. He had his hands in his pockets. Hannele sat feeling helpless. She couldn’t help being in love with the man: with his hands, with his strange, fascinating physique, with his incalculable presence. She loved the way he put his feet down, she loved the way he moved his legs as he walked, she loved the mould of his loins, she loved the way he dropped his head a little, and the strange, dark vacancy of his brow, his not-thinking. But now the restlessness only made her unhappy. Nothing would come of it. Yet she had driven him to it.

He took his hands out of his pockets and returned to her like a piece of iron returning to a magnet. He sat down again in front of her and put his hands out to her, looking into her face.

‘Give me your hands,’ he said softly, with that strange, mindless, soft, suggestive tone which left her powerless to disobey. ‘Give me your hands, and let me feel that we are together. Words mean so little. They mean nothing. And all that one thinks and plans doesn’t amount to anything. Let me feel that we are together, and I don’t care about all the rest.’

He spoke in his slow, melodious way, and closed her hands in his. She struggled still for voice.

‘But you’ll *have* to care about it. You’ll *have* to make up your mind. You’ll just *have* to,’ she insisted.

‘Yes, I suppose I shall. I suppose I shall. But now that we are together, I won’t bother. Now that we are together, let us forget it.’

‘But when we *can*’t forget it any more?’

‘Well — then I don’t know. But — tonight — it seems to me — we might just as well forget it.’

The soft, melodious, straying sound of his voice made her feel helpless. She

felt that he never answered her. Words of reply seemed to stray out of him, in the need to say *something*. But he himself never spoke. There he was, a continual blank silence in front of her.

She had a battle with herself. When he put his hand again on her cheek, softly, with the most extraordinary soft half-touch, as a kitten's paw sometimes touches one, like a fluff of living air, then, if it had not been for the magic of that almost indiscernible caress of his hand, she would have stiffened herself and drawn away and told him she could have nothing to do with him, while he was so half-hearted and unsatisfactory. She wanted to tell him these things. But when she began he answered invariably in the same soft, straying voice, that seemed to spin gossamer threads all over her, so that she could neither think nor act nor even feel distinctly. Her soul groaned rebelliously in her. And yet, when he put his hand softly under her chin, and lifted her face and smiled down on her with that gargoyle smile of his — she let him kiss her.

'What are you thinking about tonight?' he said. 'What are you thinking about?'

'What did your Colonel say to you, exactly?' she replied, trying to harden her eyes.

'Oh, that!' he answered. 'Never mind that. That is of no significance whatever.'

'But what *is* of any significance?' she insisted. She almost hated him.

'What is of any significance? Well, nothing to me, outside of this room at this minute. Nothing in time or space matters to me.'

'Yes, *this minute!*' she repeated bitterly. 'But then there's the future. *I've* got to live in the future.'

'The future! The future! The future is used up every day. The future to me is like a big tangle of black thread. Every morning you begin to untangle one loose end — and that's your day. And every evening you break off and throw away what you've untangled, and the heap is so much less: just one thread less, one day less. That's all the future matters to me.'

'Then nothing matters to you. And I don't matter to you. As you say, only an end of waste thread,' she resisted him.

'No, there you're wrong. You aren't the future to me.'

'What am I then? — the past?'

'No, not any of those things. You're nothing. As far as all that goes, you're nothing.'

'Thank you,' she said sarcastically, 'if I'm nothing.'

But the very irrelevancy of the man overcame her. He kissed her with half-discernible, dim kisses, and touched her throat. And the meaninglessness of him

fascinated her and left her powerless. She could ascribe no meaning to him, none whatever. And yet his mouth, so strange in kissing, and his hairy forearms, and his slender, beautiful breast with black hair — it was all like a mystery to her, as if one of the men from Mars were loving her. And she was heavy and spellbound, and she loved the spell that bound her. But also she didn't love it.

II

Countess zu Rassentlow had a studio in one of the main streets. She was really a refugee. And nowadays you can be a grand-duke and a pauper, if you are a refugee. But Hannele was not a pauper, because she and her friend Mitchka had the studio where they made these dolls, and beautiful cushions of embroidered coloured wools, and such-like objects of feminine art. The dolls were quite famous, so the two women did not starve.

Hannele did not work much in the studio. She preferred to be alone in her own room, which was another fine attic, not quite so large as the captain's, under the same roof. But often she went to the studio in the afternoon, and if purchasers came, then they were offered a cup of tea.

The Alexander doll was never intended for sale. What made Hannele take it to the studio one afternoon, we do not know. But she did so, and stood it on a little bureau. It was a wonderful little portrait of an officer and gentleman, the physique modelled so that it made you hold your breath.

'And *that* — that is genius!' cried Mitchka. 'That is a *chef d'oeuvre!* That is thy masterpiece, Hannele. That is really marvellous. And beautiful! A beautiful man, what! But no, that is *too* real. I don't understand how you *dare*. I always thought you were *good*, Hannele, so much better-natured than I am. But now you frighten me. I am afraid you are wicked, do you know. It frightens me to think that you are wicked. *Aber nein!* But you won't leave him there?'

'Why not?' said Hannele, satiric.

Mitchka made big dark eyes of wonder, reproach, and fear.

'But you *must* not,' she said.

'Why not?'

'No, that you *may* not do. You love the man.'

'What then?'

'You can't leave his puppet standing there.'

'Why can't I?'

'But you are really wicked. *Du bist wirklich böse*. Only think! — and he is an English officer.'

'He isn't sacrosanct even then.'

‘They will expel you from the town. They will deport you.’

‘Let them, then.’

‘But no! What will you do? That would be horrible if we had to go to Berlin or to Munich and begin again. Here everything has happened so well.’

‘I don’t care,’ said Hannele.

Mitchka looked at her friend and said no more. But she was angry. After some time she turned and uttered her ultimatum.

‘When you are not there,’ she said, ‘I shall put the puppet away in a drawer. I shall show it to nobody, nobody. And I must tell you, it makes me afraid to see it there. It makes me afraid. And you have no right to get me into trouble, do you see. It is not I who look at the English officers. I don’t like them, they are too cold and finished off for me. I shall never bring trouble on *myself* because of the English officers.’

‘Don’t be afraid,’ said Hannele. ‘They won’t trouble *you*. They know everything we do, well enough. They have their spies everywhere. Nothing will happen to you.’

‘But if they make you go away — and I am planted here with the studio — ’

It was no good, however; Hannele was obstinate.

So, one sunny afternoon there was a ring at the door: a little lady in white, with a wrinkled face that still had its prettiness.

‘Good afternoon!’ — in rather lardy-dardy, middle-class English. ‘I wonder if I may see your things in your studio.’

‘Oh yes!’ said Mitchka. ‘Please come in.’

Entered the little lady in her finery and her crumpled prettiness. She would not be very old: perhaps younger than fifty. And it was odd that her face had gone so crumpled, because her figure was very trim, her eyes were bright, and she had pretty teeth when she laughed. She was very fine in her clothes: a dress of thick knitted white silk, a large ermine scarf with the tails only at the ends, and a black hat over which dripped a trail of green feathers of the osprey sort. She wore rather a lot of jewellery, and two bangles tinkled over her white kid gloves as she put up her fingers to touch her hair, whilst she stood complacently and looked round.

‘You’ve got a *charming* studio — *charming* — perfectly delightful! I couldn’t imagine anything more delightful.’

Mitchka gave a slight ironic bow, and said in her odd, plangent English:

‘Oh yes. We like it very much also.’

Hannele, who had dodged behind a screen, now came quickly forth.

‘Oh, how do you do!’ smiled the elderly lady. ‘I heard there were two of you. Now which is which, if I may be so bold? This’ — and she gave a winsome

smile and pointed a white kid finger at Mitchka — 'is the — ?'

'Annamaria von Prielau-Carolath,' said Mitchka, slightly bowing.

'Oh!' — and the white kid finger jerked away. 'Then this — '

'Johanna zu Rassentlow,' said Hannele, smiling.

'Ah, yes! Countess von Rassentlow! And this is Baroness von — von — but I shall never remember even if you tell me, for I'm awful at names. Anyhow, I shall call one *Countess* and the other *Baroness*. That will do, won't it, for poor me! Now I should like awfully to see your things, if I may. I want to buy a little present to take back to England with me. I suppose I shan't have to pay the world in duty on things like these, shall I?'

'Oh no,' said Mitchka. 'No duty. Toys, you know, they — there is — ' Her English stammered to an end, so she turned to Hannele.

'They don't charge duty on toys, and the embroideries they don't notice,' said Hannele.

'Oh, well. Then I'm all right,' said the visitor. 'I hope I can buy something really nice! I see a perfectly lovely jumper over there, perfectly delightful. But a little too gay for me, I'm afraid. I'm not quite so young as I was, alas.' She smiled her winsome little smile, showing her pretty teeth and the old pearls in her ears shook.

'I've heard so much about your dolls. I hear they're perfectly exquisite, quite works of art. May I see some, please?'

'Oh yes,' came Mitchka's invariable answer, this exclamation being the foundation-stone of all her English.

There were never more than three or four dolls in stock. This time there were only two. The famous captain was hidden in his drawer.

'Perfectly beautiful! Perfectly wonderful!' murmured the little lady, in an artistic murmur. 'I think they're perfectly delightful. It's wonderful of you, Countess, to make them. It is you who make them, is it not? Or do you both do them together?'

Hannele explained, and the inspection and the rhapsody went on together. But it was evident that the little lady was a cautious buyer. She went over the things very carefully, and thought more than twice. The dolls attracted her — but she thought them expensive, and hung fire.

'I do wish,' she said wistfully, 'there had been a larger selection of the dolls. I feel, you know, there might have been one which I *just loved*. Of course these are *darlings* — darlings they are: and worth every *penny*, considering the work there is in them. And the art, of course. But I have a feeling, don't you know how it is, that if there had been just one or two more, I should have found one which I *absolutely* couldn't live without. Don't you know how it is? One is so

foolish, of course. What does Goethe say — "*Dort wo du nicht bist. . .*"? My German isn't even a beginning, so you must excuse it. But it means you always feel you would be happy somewhere else, and not just where you are. Isn't that it? Ah, well, it's so very often true — so very often. But not always, thank goodness.' She smiled an odd little smile to herself, pursed her lips, and resumed: 'Well now, that's how I feel about the dolls. If only there had been one or two more. Isn't there a single one?'

She looked winsomely at Hannele.

'Yes,' said Hannele, 'there is one. But it is ordered. It isn't for sale.'

'Oh, do you think I might see it? I'm sure it's lovely. Oh, I'm dying to see it. You know what woman's curiosity is, don't you?' — she laughed her tinkling little laugh. 'Well, I'm afraid I'm all woman, unfortunately. One is so much harder if one has a touch of the man in one, don't you think, and more able to bear things. But I'm afraid I'm all woman.' She sighed and became silent.

Hannele went quietly to the drawer and took out the captain. She handed him to the little woman. The latter looked frightened. Her eyes became round and childish, her face went yellowish. Her jewels tinkled nervously as she stammered:

'Now *that* — isn't that — ' and she laughed a little, hysterical laugh.

She turned round, as if to escape.

'Do you mind if I sit down,' she said. 'I think the standing — ' and she subsided into a chair. She kept her face averted. But she held the puppet fast, her small, white fingers with their heavy jewelled rings clasped round his waist.

'You know,' rushed in Mitchka, who was terrified. 'You know, that is a life picture of one of the Englishmen, of a gentleman, you know. A life picture, you know.'

'A portrait,' said Hannele brightly.

'Yes,' murmured the visitor vaguely. 'I'm sure it is. I'm sure it is a very clever portrait indeed.'

She fumbled with a chain, and put up a small gold lorgnette before her eyes, as if to screen herself. And from behind the screen of her lorgnette she peered at the image in her hand.

'But,' she said, 'none of the English officers, or rather Scottish, wear the close-fitting tartan trews any more — except for fancy dress.'

Her voice was vague and distant.

'No, they don't now,' said Hannele. 'But that is the correct dress. I think they are so handsome, don't you?'

'Well. I don't know. It depends' — and the little woman laughed shakily.

'Oh yes,' said Hannele. 'It needs well-shapen legs.'

‘Such as the original of your doll must have had — quite,’ said the lady.

‘Oh yes,’ said Hannele. ‘I think his legs are very handsome.’

‘Quite!’ said the lady. ‘Judging from his portrait, as you call it. May I ask the name of the gentleman — if it is not too indiscreet?’

‘Captain Hepburn,’ said Hannele.

‘Yes, of course it is. I knew him at once. I’ve known him for many years.’

‘Oh, please,’ broke in Mitchka. ‘Oh, please, do not tell him you have seen it! Oh, please! Please do not tell anyone!’

The visitor looked up with a grey little smile.

‘But why not?’ she said. ‘Anyhow, I can’t tell him at once, because I hear he is away at present. You don’t happen to know when he will be back?’

‘I believe tomorrow,’ said Hannele.

‘Tomorrow!’

‘And please!’ pleaded Mitchka, who looked lovely in her pleading distress, ‘please not to tell anybody that you have seen it.’

‘Must I promise?’ smiled the little lady wanly. ‘Very well, then, I won’t tell him I’ve seen it. And now I think I must be going. Yes, I’ll just take the cushion-cover, thank you. Tell me again how much it is, please.’

That evening Hannele was restless. He had been away on some duty for three days. He was returning that night — should have been back in time for dinner. But he had not arrived, and his room was locked and dark. Hannele had heard the servant light the stove some hours ago. Now the room was locked and blank as it had been for three days.

Hannele was most uneasy because she seemed to have forgotten him in the three days whilst he had been away. He seemed to have quite disappeared out of her. She could hardly even remember him. He had become so insignificant to her she was dazed.

Now she wanted to see him again, to know if it was really so. She felt that he was coming. She felt that he was already putting out some influence towards her. But what? And was he real? Why had she made his doll? Why had his doll been so important, if he was nothing? Why had she shown it to that funny little woman this afternoon? Why was she herself such a fool, getting herself into tangles in this place where it was so unpleasant to be entangled? Why was she entangled, after all? It was all so unreal. And particularly *he* was unreal: as unreal as a person in a dream, whom one has never heard of in actual life. In actual life, her own German friends were real. Martin was real: German men were real to her. But this other, he was simply not there. He didn’t really exist. He was a nullus, in reality. A nullus — and she had somehow got herself complicated with him.

Was it possible? Was it possible she had been so closely entangled with an absolute nothing? Now he was absent she couldn't even *imagine* him. He had gone out of her imagination, and even when she looked at his doll she saw nothing but a barren puppet. And yet for this dead puppet she had been compromising herself, now, when it was so risky for her to be compromised.

Her own German friends — her own German men — they were men, they were real beings. But this English officer, he was neither fish, flesh, fowl, nor good red herring, as they say. He was just a hypothetical presence. She felt that if he never came back, she would be just as if she had read a rather peculiar but false story, a *tour de force* which works up one's imagination all falsely.

Nevertheless, she was uneasy. She had a lurking suspicion that there might be something else. So she kept uneasily wandering out to the landing, and listening to hear if he might be coming.

Yes — there was a sound. Yes, there was his slow step on the stairs, and the slow, straying purr of his voice. And instantly she heard his voice she was afraid again. She knew there *was* something there. And instantly she felt the reality of his presence, she felt the unreality of her own German men friends. The moment she heard the peculiar, slow melody of his foreign voice everything seemed to go changed in her, and Martin and Otto and Albrecht, her German friends, seemed to go pale and dim as if one could almost see through them, like unsubstantial things.

This was what she had to reckon with, this recoil from one to the other. When he was present, he seemed so terribly real. When he was absent he was completely vague, and her own men of her own race seemed so absolutely the only reality.

But he was talking. Who was he talking to? She heard the steps echo up the hollows of the stone staircase slowly, as if wearily, and voices slowly, confusedly mingle. The slow, soft trail of his voice — and then the peculiar, quick tones — yes, of a woman. And not one of the maids, because they were speaking English. She listened hard. The quick, and yet slightly hushed, slightly sad-sounding voice of a woman who talks a good deal, as if talking to herself. Hannele's quick ears caught the sound of what she was saying: 'Yes, I thought the Baroness a perfectly beautiful creature, perfectly lovely. But so extraordinarily like a Spaniard. Do you remember, Alec, at Malaga? I always thought they fascinated you then, with their mantillas. Perfectly lovely she would look in a mantilla. Only perhaps she is too open-hearted, too impulsive, poor thing. She lacks the Spanish reserve. Poor thing, I feel sorry for her. For them both, indeed. It must be very hard to have to do these things for a living, after you've been accustomed to be made much of for your own sake, and for

your aristocratic title. It's very hard for them, poor things. Baroness, Countess, it sounds just a little ridiculous, when you're buying woollen embroideries from them. But I suppose, poor things, they can't help it. Better drop the titles altogether, I think —'

'Well, they do, if people will let them. Only English and American people find it so much easier to say Baroness or Countess than Fräulein von Prielau-Carolath, or whatever it is.'

'They could say simply Fräulein, as we do to our governesses — or as we used to, when we *had* German governesses,' came the voice of *her*.

'Yes, we *could*,' said his voice.

'After all, what is the good, what is the good of titles if you have to sell dolls and woollen embroideries — not so very beautiful, either.'

'Oh, quite! Oh, quite! I think titles are perhaps a mistake, anyhow. But they've always had them,' came his slow, musical voice, with its sing-song note of hopeless indifference. He sounded rather like a man talking out of his sleep.

Hannele caught sight of the tail of blue-green crane feathers veering round a turn in the stairs away below, and she beat a hasty retreat.

III

There was a little platform out on the roof, where he used sometimes to stand his telescope and observe the stars or the moon: the moon when possible. It was not a very safe platform, just a little ledge of the roof, outside the window at the end of the top corridor: or rather, the top landing, for it was only the space between the attics. Hannele had the one attic room at the back, he had the room we have seen, and a little bedroom which was really only a lumber room. Before he came, Hannele had been alone under the roof. His rooms were then lumber room and laundry room, where the clothes were dried. But he had wanted to be high up, because of his stars, and this was the place that pleased him.

Hannele heard him quite late in the night, wandering about. She heard him also on the ledge outside. She could not sleep. He disturbed her. The moon was risen, large and bright in the sky. She heard the bells from the cathedral slowly strike two: two great drops of sound in the livid night. And again, from outside on the roof, she heard him clear his throat. Then a cat howled.

She rose, wrapped herself in a dark wrap, and went down the landing to the window at the end. The sky outside was full of moonlight. He was squatted like a great cat peering up his telescope, sitting on a stool, his knees wide apart. Quite motionless he sat in that attitude, like some leaden figure on the roof. The moonlight glistened with a gleam of plumbago on the great slope of black tiles.

She stood still in the window, watching. And he remained fixed and motionless at the end of the telescope.

She tapped softly on the window-pane. He looked round, like some tom-cat staring round with wide night eyes. Then he reached down his hand and pulled the window open.

‘Hello,’ he said quietly. ‘You not asleep?’

‘Aren’t *you* tired?’ she replied, rather resentful.

‘No, I was as wide awake as I could be. *Isn’t* the moon fine tonight! What? Perfectly amazing. Wouldn’t you like to come up and have a look at her?’

‘No, thank you,’ she said hastily, terrified at the thought.

He resumed his posture, peering up the telescope.

‘Perfectly amazing,’ he said, murmuring. She waited for some time, bewitched likewise by the great October moon and the sky full of resplendent white-green light. It seemed like another sort of day-time. And there he straddled on the roof like some cat! It was exactly like day in some other planet.

At length he turned round to her. His face glistened faintly, and his eyes were dilated like a cat’s at night.

‘You know I had a visitor?’ he said.

‘Yes.’

‘My wife.’

‘Your *wife!*’ — she looked up really astonished. She had thought it might be an acquaintance — perhaps his aunt — or even an elder sister. ‘But she’s years older than you,’ she added.

‘Eight years,’ he said. ‘I’m forty-one.’

There was a silence.

‘Yes,’ he mused. ‘She arrived suddenly, by surprise, yesterday, and found me away. She’s staying in the hotel, in the Vier Jahreszeiten.’

There was a pause.

‘Aren’t you going to stay with her?’ asked Hannele.

‘Yes, I shall probably join her tomorrow.’

There was a still longer pause.

‘Why not tonight?’ asked Hannele.

‘Oh, well — I put it off for tonight. It meant all the bother of my wife changing her room at the hotel — and it was late — and I was all mucky after travelling.’

‘But you’ll go tomorrow?’

‘Yes, I shall go tomorrow. For a week or so. After that I’m not sure what will happen.’

There was quite a long pause. He remained seated on his stool on the roof,

looking with dilated, blank, black eyes at nothingness. She stood below in the open window space, pondering.

‘Do you want to go to her at the hotel?’ asked Hannele.

‘Well, I don’t, particularly. But I don’t mind, really. We’re very good friends. Why, we’ve been friends for eighteen years — we’ve been married seventeen. Oh, she’s a nice little woman. I don’t want to hurt her feelings. I wish her no harm, you know. On the contrary, I wish her all the good in the world.’

He had no idea of the blank amazement in which Hannele listened to these stray remarks.

‘But — ’ she stammered. ‘But doesn’t she expect you to make *love* to her?’

‘Oh yes, she expects that. You bet she does: woman-like.’

‘And you?’ — the question had a dangerous ring.

‘Why, I don’t mind, really, you know, if it’s only for a short time. I’m used to her. I’ve always been fond of her, you know — and so if it gives her any pleasure — why, I like her to get what pleasure out of life she can.’

‘But you — you *yourself*! Don’t *you* feel anything?’ Hannele’s amazement was reaching the point of incredulity. She began to feel that he was making it up. It was all so different from her own point of view. To sit there so quiet and to make such statements in all good faith: no, it was impossible.

‘I don’t consider I count,’ he said naïvely.

Hannele looked aside. If that wasn’t lying, it was imbecility, or worse. She had for the moment nothing to say. She felt he was a sort of psychic phenomenon like a grasshopper or a tadpole or an ammonite. Not to be regarded from a human point of view. No, he just wasn’t normal. And she had been fascinated by him! It was only sheer, amazed curiosity that carried her on to her next question.

‘But do you *never* count, then?’ she asked, and there was a touch of derision, of laughter in her tone. He took no offence.

‘Well — very rarely,’ he said. ‘I count very rarely. That’s how life appears to me. One matters so *very* little.’

She felt quite dizzy with astonishment. And he called himself a man!

‘But if you matter so very little, what do you do anything at all for?’ she asked.

‘Oh, one has to. And then, why not? Why not do things, even if oneself hardly matters. Look at the moon. It doesn’t matter in the least to the moon whether I exist or whether I don’t. So why should it matter to me?’

After a blank pause of incredulity she said:

‘I could die with laughter. It seems to me all so ridiculous — no, I can’t believe it.’

‘Perhaps it is a point of view,’ he said.

There was a long and pregnant silence: we should not like to say pregnant with what.

‘And so I don’t mean anything to you at all?’ she said.

‘I didn’t say that,’ he replied.

‘Nothing means anything to you,’ she challenged.

‘I don’t say that.’

‘Whether it’s your wife — or me — or the moon — *toute la même chose.*’

‘No — no — that’s hardly the way to look at it.’

She gazed at him in such utter amazement that she felt something would really explode in her if she heard another word. Was this a man? — or what was it? It was too much for her, that was all.

‘Well, good-bye,’ she said. ‘I hope you will have a nice time at the Vier Jahreszeiten.’

So she left him still sitting on the roof.

‘I suppose,’ she said to herself, ‘that is love *à l’anglaise*. But it’s more than I can swallow.’

IV

‘Won’t you come and have tea with me — do! Come right along now. Don’t you find it bitterly cold? Yes — well now — come in with me and we’ll have a cup of nice, hot tea in our little sitting-room. The weather changes so suddenly, and really one needs a little reinforcement. But perhaps you don’t take tea?’

‘Oh yes. I got so used to it in England,’ said Hannele.

‘Did you now! Well now, were you long in England?’

‘Oh yes — ’

The two women had met in the Domplatz. Mrs Hepburn was looking extraordinarily like one of Hannele’s dolls, in a funny little cape of odd striped skins, and a little dark-green skirt, and a rather fuzzy sort of hat. Hannele looked almost huge beside her.

‘But now you will come in and have tea, won’t you? Oh, please do. Never mind whether it’s *de rigueur* or not. I *always* please myself *what* I do. I’m afraid my husband gets some shocks sometimes — but that we can’t help. I won’t have anybody laying down the law to me.’ She laughed her winsome little laugh.’ So now come along in, and we’ll see if there aren’t hot scones as well. I love a hot scone for tea in cold weather. And I hope you do. That is, if there are any. We don’t know yet.’ She tinkled her little laugh. ‘My husband may or may not be in. But that makes no difference to you and me, does it? There, it’s just striking half

past four. In England, we always have tea at half past. My husband *adores* his tea. I don't suppose our man is five minutes off the half past, ringing the gong for tea, not once in twelve months. My husband doesn't mind at all if dinner is a little late. But he gets — quite — well, quite “ratty” if tea is late.’ She tinkled a laugh. ‘Though I shouldn't say that. He is the soul of kindness and patience. I don't think I've ever known him do an unkind thing — or hardly say an unkind word. But I doubt if he will be in today.’

He *was* in, however, standing with his feet apart and his hands in his trouser pockets in the little sitting-room upstairs in the hotel. He raised his eyebrows the smallest degree, seeing Hannele enter.

‘Ah, Countess Hannele — my wife has brought you along! Very nice, very nice! Let me take your wrap. Oh yes, certainly . . .’

‘Have you rung for tea, dear?’ asked Mrs Hepburn.

‘Er — yes. I said as soon as you came in they were to bring it.’

‘Yes — well. Won't you ring again, dear, and say for *three*.’

‘Yes — certainly. Certainly.’

He rang, and stood about with his hands in his pockets waiting for tea.

‘Well now,’ said Mrs Hepburn, as she lifted the tea-pot, and her bangles tinkled, and her huge rings of brilliants twinkled, and her big ear-rings of clustered seed-pearls bobbed against her rather withered cheek, ‘isn't it charming of Countess zu — Countess zu —’

‘Rassentlow,’ said he. ‘I believe most people say Countess Hannele. I know we always do among ourselves. We say Countess Hannele's shop.’

‘Countess Hannele's shop! Now, isn't that perfectly delightful: such a romance in the very sound of it. You take cream?’

‘Thank you,’ said Hannele.

The tea passed in a cloud of chatter, while Mrs Hepburn manipulated the tea-pot, and lit the spirit-flame, and blew it out, and peeped into the steam of the tea-pot, and couldn't see whether there was any more tea or not — and — ‘At home I *know* — I was going to say to a teaspoonful — how much tea there is in the pot. But this tea-pot — I don't know what it's made of — it isn't silver, I know that — it is so heavy in itself that it's deceived me several times already. And my husband is a greedy man, a greedy man — he likes at least three cups — and four if he can get them, or five! Yes, dear, I've plenty of tea today. You shall have even five, if you don't mind the last two weak. Do let me fill your cup, Countess Hannele. I think it's a *charming* name.’

‘There's a play called *Hannele*, isn't there?’ said he.

When he had had his five cups, and his wife had got her cigarette perched in the end of a long, long, slim, white holder, and was puffing like a little

Chinawoman from the distance, there was a little lull.

‘Alec, dear,’ said Mrs Hepburn. ‘You won’t forget to leave that message for me at Mrs Rackham’s. I’m so afraid it will be forgotten.’

‘No, dear, I won’t forget. Er — would you like me to go round now?’

Hannele noticed how often he said ‘er’ when he was beginning to speak to his wife. But they *were* such good friends, the two of them.

‘Why, if you *would*, dear, I should feel perfectly comfortable. But I don’t want you to hurry one bit.’

‘Oh, I may as well go now.’

And he went. Mrs Hepburn detained her guest.

‘He *is* so charming to me,’ said the little woman. ‘He’s really wonderful. And he always has been the same — invariably. So that if he *did* make a little slip — well, you know, I don’t have to take it so seriously.’

‘No,’ said Hannele, feeling as if her ears were stretching with astonishment.

‘It’s the war. It’s just the war. It’s had a terribly deteriorating effect on the men.’

‘In what way?’ said Hannele.

‘Why, morally. Really, there’s hardly one man left the same as he was before the war. Terribly degenerated.’

‘Is that so?’ said Hannele.

‘It is indeed. Why, isn’t it the same with the German men and officers?’

‘Yes, I think so,’ said Hannele.

‘And I’m sure so, from what I hear. But of course it is the women who are to blame in the first place. We poor women! We are a guilty race, I am afraid. But I never throw stones. I know what it is myself to have temptations. I have to flirt a little — and when I was younger — well, the men didn’t escape me, I assure you. And I was so often scorched. But never *quite* singed. My husband never minded. He knew I was *really* safe. Oh yes, I have always been faithful to him. But still — I have been very near the flame.’ And she laughed her winsome little laugh.

Hannele put her fingers to her ears to make sure they were not falling off.

‘Of course during the war it was terrible. I know that in a certain hospital it was quite impossible for a girl to stay on if she kept straight. The matrons and sisters just turned her out. They wouldn’t have her unless she was one of themselves. And you know what that means. Quite like the convent in Balzac’s story — you know which I mean, I’m sure.’ And the laugh tinkled gaily.

‘But then, what can you expect, when there aren’t enough men to go round! Why, I had a friend in Ireland. She and her husband had been an ideal couple, an *ideal* couple. Real playmates. And you can’t say more than that, can you? Well,

then, he became a major during the war. And she was so looking forward, poor thing, to the perfectly lovely times they would have together when he came home. She is like me, and is lucky enough to have a little income of her own — not a great fortune — but — well — Well now, what was I going to say? Oh yes, she was looking forward to the perfectly lovely times they would have when he came home: building on her dreams, poor thing, as we unfortunate women always do. I suppose we shall never be cured of it.’ A little tinkling laugh. ‘Well now, not a bit of it. Not a bit of it.’ Mrs Hepburn lifted her heavily-jewelled little hand in a motion of protest. It was curious, her hands were pretty and white, and her neck and breast, now she wore a little tea-gown, were also smooth and white and pretty, under the medley of twinkling little chains and coloured jewels. Why should her face have played her this nasty trick of going all crumpled! However, it was so.

‘Not one bit of it,’ reiterated the little lady. ‘He came home quite changed. She said she could hardly recognize him for the same man. Let me tell you one little incident. Just a trifle, but significant. He was coming home — this was some time after he was free from the army — he was coming home from London, and he told her to meet him at the boat: gave her the time and everything. Well, she went to the boat, poor thing, and he didn’t come. She waited, and no word of explanation or anything. So she couldn’t make up her mind whether to go next day and meet the boat again. However, she decided she wouldn’t. So of course, on that boat he arrived. When he got home, he said to her: “Why didn’t you meet the boat?” “Well,” she said, “I went yesterday, and you didn’t come.” “Then why didn’t you meet it again today?” Imagine it, the sauce! And they had been real playmates. Heart-breaking isn’t it? “Well,” she said in self-defence, “why didn’t you come yesterday?” “Oh,” he said, “I met a woman in town whom I liked, and she asked me to spend the night with her, so I did.” Now what do you think of that? Can you conceive of such a thing?’

‘Oh no,’ said Hannele. ‘I call that unnecessary brutality.’

‘Exactly! So terrible to say such a thing to her! The brutality of it! Well, that’s how the world is today. I’m thankful my husband isn’t that sort. I don’t say he’s perfect. But whatever else he did, he’d never be unkind, and he *couldn’t* be brutal. He just couldn’t. He’d never tell me a lie — I know *that*. But callous brutality, no, thank goodness, he hasn’t a spark of it in him. I’m the wicked one, if either of us is wicked.’ The little laugh tinkled. ‘Oh, but he’s been perfect to me, perfect. Hardly a cross word. Why, on our wedding night, he kneeled down in front of me and promised, with God’s help, to make my life happy. And I must say, as far as possible, he’s kept his word. It has been his one aim in life, to make my life happy.’

The little lady looked away with a bright, musing look towards the window. She was being a heroine in a romance. Hannele could see her being a heroine, playing the chief part in her own life romance. It is such a feminine occupation, that no woman takes offence when she is made audience.

‘I’m afraid I’ve more of the woman than the mother in my composition,’ resumed the little heroine. ‘I adore my two children. The boy is at Winchester, and my little girl is in a convent in Brittany. Oh, they are perfect darlings, both of them. But the man is first in my mind, I’m afraid. I fear I’m rather old-fashioned. But never mind. I can see the attractions in other men — can’t I indeed! There was a perfectly exquisite creature — he was a very clever engineer — but much, much more than *that*. But never mind.’ The little heroine sniffed as if there were perfume in the air, folded her jewelled hands, and resumed: ‘However — I know what it is myself to flutter round the flame. You know I’m Irish myself, and we Irish can’t help it. Oh, I wouldn’t be English for anything. Just that little touch of imagination, you know . . .’ The little laugh tinkled. ‘And that’s what makes me able to sympathize with my husband even when, perhaps, I shouldn’t. Why, when he was at home with me, he never gave a thought, not a thought to another woman. I must say, he used to make *me* feel a little guilty sometimes. But there! I don’t think he ever thought of another woman as being flesh and blood, after he knew me. I could tell. Pleasant, courteous, charming — but other women were not flesh and blood to him, they were just people, callers — that kind of thing. It used to amaze me, when some perfectly lovely creature came, whom I should have been head over heels in love with in a minute — and he, he was charming, delightful; he could see her points, but she was no more to him than, let me say, a pot of carnations or a beautiful old piece of *punto di Milano*. Not flesh and blood. Well, perhaps one can feel too safe. Perhaps one needs a tiny pinch of salt of jealousy. I believe one does. And I have not had one jealous moment for seventeen years. So that, *really*, when I heard a whisper of something going on here, I felt almost pleased. I felt exonerated for my own little peccadilloes, for one thing. And I felt he was perhaps a little more human. Because, after all, it is nothing but human to fall in love, if you are alone for a long time and in the company of a beautiful woman — and if you’re an attractive man yourself.’

Hannele sat with her eyes propped open and her ears buttoned back with amazement, expecting the next revelations.

‘Why, of course,’ she said, knowing she was expected to say something.

‘Yes, of course,’ said Mrs Hepburn, eyeing her sharply. ‘So I thought I’d better come and see how far things had gone. I had nothing but a hint to go on. I knew no name — nothing. I had just a hint that she was German, and a refugee

aristocrat — and that he used to call at the studio.’ The little lady eyed Hannele sharply, and gave a breathless little laugh, clasping her hands nervously. Hannele sat absolutely blank: really dazed.

‘Of course,’ resumed Mrs Hepburn, ‘that was enough. That was quite a sufficient clue. I’m afraid my intentions when I called at the studio were not as pure as they might have been. I’m afraid I wanted to see something more than the dolls. But when you showed me *his* doll, then I knew. Of course there wasn’t a shadow of doubt after that. And I saw at once that she loved him, poor thing. She was so agitated. And no idea who I was. And you were so unkind to show me the doll. Of course, you had no idea who you were showing it to. But for her, poor thing, it was such a trial. I could see how she suffered. And I must say she’s very lovely — she’s very, very lovely, with her golden skin and her reddish amber eyes and her beautiful, beautiful carriage. And such a naïve, impulsive nature. Give everything away in a minute. And then her deep voice — “*Oh yes — Oh, please!*” — such a child. And such an aristocrat, that lovely turn of her head, and her simple, elegant dress. Oh, she’s very charming. And she’s just the type I always knew would attract him, if he hadn’t got me. I’ve thought about it many a time — many a time. When a woman is older than a man, she does think these things — especially if he has his attractive points too. And when I’ve dreamed of the woman he would love if he hadn’t got me, it has always been a Spanish type. And the Baroness is extraordinarily Spanish in her appearance. She must have had some noble Spanish ancestor. Don’t you think so?’

‘Oh yes,’ said Hannele.’ There were such a lot of Spaniards in Austria, too, with the various emperors.’

‘With Charles V, exactly. Exactly. That’s how it must have been. And so she has all the Spanish beauty, and all the German feeling. Of course, for myself, I miss the *reserve*, the haughtiness. But she’s very, very lovely, and I’m sure I could never *hate* her. I couldn’t even if I tried. And I’m not going to try. But I think she’s much too dangerous for my husband to see much of her. Don’t you agree, now?’

‘Oh, but really,’ stammered Hannele. ‘There’s nothing in it, really.’

‘Well,’ said the little lady, cocking her head shrewdly aside, ‘I shouldn’t like there to be any *more* in it.’

And there was a moment’s dead pause. Each woman was reflecting. Hannele wondered if the little lady was just fooling her.

‘Anyhow,’ continued Mrs Hepburn, ‘the spark is there, and I don’t intend the fire to spread. I am going to be very, very careful, myself, not to fan the flames. The last thing I should think of would be to make my husband scenes. I believe it would be fatal.’

‘Yes,’ said Hannele, during the pause.

‘I am going very carefully. You think there isn’t much in it — between him and the Baroness?’

‘No — no — I’m sure there isn’t,’ cried Hannele, with a full voice of conviction. She was almost indignant at being slighted so completely herself, in the little lady’s suspicions.

‘Hm! — mm!’ hummed the little woman, sapiently nodding her head slowly up and down. ‘I’m not so sure! I’m not so sure that it hasn’t gone pretty far.’

‘Oh *no!*’ cried Hannele, in real irritation of protest.

‘Well,’ said the other. ‘In any case, I don’t intend it to go any farther.’

There was dead silence for some time.

‘There’s more in it than you say. There’s more in it than you say,’ ruminated the little woman. ‘I know *him*, for one thing. I know he’s got a cloud on his brow. And I know it hasn’t left his brow for a single minute. And when I told him I had been to the studio, and showed him the cushion-cover, I knew he felt guilty. I am not so easily deceived. We Irish all have a touch of second sight, I believe. Of course I haven’t challenged him. I haven’t even mentioned the doll. By the way, *who* ordered the doll? Do you mind telling me?’

‘No, it wasn’t ordered,’ confessed Hannele.

‘Ah — I thought not — I thought not!’ said Mrs Hepburn, lifting her finger. ‘At least, I knew no outsider had ordered it. Of course I knew.’ And she smiled to herself.

‘So,’ she continued, ‘I had too much sense to say anything about it. I don’t believe in stripping wounds bare. I believe in gently covering them and letting them heal. But I *did* say I thought her a lovely creature.’ The little lady looked brightly at Hannele.

‘Yes,’ said Hannele.

‘And he was very vague in his manner, “Yes, not bad,” he said. I thought to myself: Aha, my boy, you don’t deceive me with your *not bad*. She’s very much more than not bad. I said so, too. I wanted, of course, to let him know I had a suspicion.’

‘And do you think he knew?’

‘Of course he did. Of course he did. “She’s much too dangerous,” I said, “to be in a town where there are so many strange men: married and unmarried.” And then he turned round to me and gave himself away, oh, so plainly. “Why?” he said. But such a haughty, distant tone. I said to myself: “It’s time, my dear boy, you were removed out of the danger zone.” But I answered him: Surely somebody is bound to fall in love with her. Not at all, he said, she keeps to her own countrymen. You don’t tell *me*, I answered him, with her pretty broken

English! It is a wonder the two of them are allowed to stay in the town. And then again he rounded on me. Good gracious! he said. Would you have them turned out just because they're beautiful to look at, when they have nowhere else to go, and they make their bit of a livelihood here? I assure you, he hasn't rounded on me in that overbearing way, not once before, in all our married life. So I just said quietly: I should like to protect *our own men*. And he didn't say anything more. But he looked at me under his brows and went out of the room.'

There was a silence. Hannele waited with her hands in her lap, and Mrs Hepburn mused, with her hands in *her* lap. Her face looked yellow, and *very* wrinkled.

'Well now,' she said, breaking again suddenly into life. 'What are we to do? I mean what is to be done? You are the Baroness's nearest friend. And I wish her *no* harm, none whatever.'

'What can we do?' said Hannele, in the pause.

'I have been urging my husband for some time to get his discharge from the army,' said the little woman. 'I knew he could have it in three months' time. But like so many more men, he has no income of his own, and he doesn't want to feel dependent. Perfect nonsense! So he says he wants to stay on in the army. I have never known him before go against my real wishes.'

'But it *is* better for a man to be independent,' said Hannele.

'I know it is. But it is also better for him to be *at home*. And I could get him a post in one of the observatories. He could do something in meteorological work.'

Hannele refused to answer any more.

'Of course,' said Mrs Hepburn, 'if he *does* stay on here, it would be much better if the Baroness left the town.'

'I'm sure she will never leave of her own choice,' said Hannele.

'I'm sure she won't either. But she might be made to see that it would be very much *wiser* of her to move of her own free will.'

'Why?' said Hannele.

'Why, because she might any time be removed by the British authorities.'

'Why should she?' said Hannele.

'I think the women who are a menace to our men should be removed.'

'But she is *not* a menace to your men.'

'Well, I have my own opinion on that point.'

Which was a decided deadlock.

'I'm sure I've kept you an awful long time with my chatter,' said Mrs Hepburn. 'But I did want to make everything as simple as possible. As I said before, I can't feel any ill-will against her. Yet I can't let things just go on. Heaven alone knows when they may end. Of course if I can persuade my

husband to resign his commission and come back to England — anyhow, we will see. I'm sure I am the last person in the world to bear malice.'

The tone in which she said it conveyed a dire threat.

Hannele rose from her chair.

'Oh, and one other thing,' said her hostess, taking out a tiny lace handkerchief and touching her nose delicately with it. 'Do you think' — dab, dab — 'that I might have that *doll* — you know — ?'

'That — ?'

'Yes, of my husband' — the little lady rubbed her nose with her kerchief.

'The price is three guineas,' said Hannele.

'Oh indeed!' — the tone was very cold. 'I thought it was not for sale.'

Hannele put on her wrap.

'You'll send it round — will you? — if you will be so kind.'

'I must ask my friend first.'

'Yes, of course. But I'm sure she will be so kind as to send it me. It is a little — er — indelicate, don't you think!'

'No,' said Hannele. 'No more than a painted portrait.'

'Don't you?' said her hostess coldly. 'Well, even a painted portrait I think I should like in my own possession. This *doll* — '

Hannele waited, but there was no conclusion.

'Anyhow,' she said, 'the price is three guineas: or the equivalent in marks.'

'Very well,' said the little lady, 'you shall have your three guineas when I get the doll.'

V

Hannele went her way pondering. A man never is quite such an abject specimen as his wife makes him look, talking about 'my husband'. Therefore, if any woman wishes to rescue her husband from the clutches of another female, let her only invite this female to tea and talk quite sincerely about 'my husband, you know'. Every man has made a ghastly fool of himself with a woman at some time or other. No woman ever forgets. And most women will give the show away, with real pathos, to another woman. For instance, the picture of Alec at his wife's feet on his wedding night, vowing to devote himself to her life-long happiness — this picture strayed across Hannele's mind time after time, whenever she thought of her dear captain. With disastrous consequences to the captain. Of course if he had been at her own feet, then Hannele would have thought it almost natural: almost a necessary part of the show of love. But at the feet of that other little woman! And what was that other little woman wearing?

Her wedding night! Hannele hoped before heaven it wasn't some awful little nightie of frail flowered silk. Imagine it, that little lady! Perhaps in a chic little boudoir cap of *punto di Milano*, and this slip of frail flowered silk: and the man, perhaps, in his braces! Oh, merciful heaven, save us from other people's indiscretions. No, let us be sure it was in proper evening dress — twenty years ago — very low cut, with a full skirt gathered behind and trailing a little, and a little leather erection in her high-dressed hair, and all those jewels: pearls of course: and he in a dinner-jacket and a white waistcoat: probably in an hotel bedroom in Lugano or Biarritz. And she? Was she standing with one small hand on his shoulder? — or was she seated on the couch in the bedroom? Oh, dreadful thought! And yet it was almost inevitable, that scene. Hannele had never been married, but she had come quite near enough to the realization of the event to know that such a scene *was* practically inevitable. An indispensable part of any honeymoon. Him on his knees, with his heels up!

And how black and tidy his hair must have been then! and no grey at the temples at all. Such a good-looking bridegroom. Perhaps with a white rose in his button-hole still. And she could see him kneeling there, in his new black trousers and a wing collar. And she could see his head bowed. And she could hear his plangent, musical voice saying: 'With God's help, I will make your life happy. I will live for that and for nothing else.' And then the little lady must have had tears in her eyes, and she must have said, rather superbly: 'Thank you, dear, I'm perfectly sure of it.'

Ach! Ach! Husbands should be left to their own wives: and wives should be left to their own husbands. And *no* stranger should ever be made a party to these terrible bits of connubial staging. Nay, thought Hannele, that scene was really true. It actually took place. And with the man of that scene I have been in love! With the devoted husband of that little lady. Oh God, oh God, how was it possible! Him on his knees, on his knees, with his heels up!

Am I a perfect fool? she thought to herself. Am I really just an idiot, gaping with love for him? How *could* I? How could I? The very way he says: 'Yes, dear!' to her! The way he does what she tells him! The way he fidgets about the room with his hands in his pockets! The way he goes off when she sends him away because she wants to talk to me. And he knows she wants to talk to me. And he knows what she *might* have to say to me. Yet he goes off on his errand without a question, like a servant. 'I will do whatever you wish, darling.' He must have said those words time after time to the little lady. And fulfilled them, also. Performed all his pledges and his promises.

Ach! Ach! Hannele wrung her hands to think of *herself* being mixed up with him. And he had seemed to her so manly. He seemed to have so much silent

male passion in him. And yet — the little lady! ‘My husband has *always* been *perfectly sweet* to me.’ Think of it! On his knees too. And his ‘Yes, dear! Certainly. Certainly.’ Not that he was afraid of the little lady. He was just committed to her, as he might have been committed to gaol, or committed to paradise.

Had she been dreaming, to be in love with him? Oh, she wished so much she had never been. She *wished* she had never given herself away. To him! — given herself away to him! — and so abjectly. Hung upon his words and his motions, and looked up to him as if he were Caesar. So he had seemed to her: like a mute Caesar. Like Germanicus. Like — she did not know what.

How had it all happened? What had taken her in? Was it just his good looks? No, not really. Because they were the kind of staring good looks she didn’t really care for. He must have had charm. He must have charm. Yes, he *had* charm. When it worked.

His charm had not worked on her now for some time — never since that evening after his wife’s arrival. Since then he had seemed to her — rather awful. Rather awful — stupid — an ass — a limited, rather vulgar person. That was what he seemed to her when his charm wouldn’t work. A limited, rather inferior person. And in a world of *Schiebers* and profiteers and vulgar, pretentious persons, this was the worst thing possible. A limited, inferior, slightly pretentious individual! The husband of the little lady! And oh heaven, she was so deeply implicated with him! He had not, however, spoken with her in private since his wife’s arrival. Probably he would never speak with her in private again. She hoped to heaven, never again. The awful thing was the past, that which had been between him and her. She shuddered when she thought of it. The husband of the little lady!

But surely there was something to account for it! Charm, just charm. He had a charm. And then, oh, heaven, when the charm left off working! It had left off so completely at this moment, in Hannele’s case, that her very mouth tasted salt. What *did* it all amount to?

What was his charm, after all? How could it have affected her? She began to think of him again, at his best: his presence, when they were alone high up in that big, lonely attic near the stars. His room! — the big whitewashed walls, the first scent of tobacco, the silence, the sense of the stars being near, the telescopes, the cactus with fine scarlet flowers: and above all, the strange, remote, insidious silence of his presence, that was so congenial to her also. The curious way he had of turning his head to listen — to listen to what? — as if he heard something in the stars. The strange look, like destiny, in his wide-open, almost staring black eyes. The beautiful lines of his brow, that seemed always to

have a certain cloud on it. The slow elegance of his straight, beautiful legs as he walked, and the exquisiteness of his dark, slender chest! Ah, she could feel the charm mounting over her again. She could feel the snake biting her heart. She could feel the arrows of desire rankling.

But then — and she turned from her thoughts back to this last little tea-party in the Vier Jahreszeiten. She thought of his voice: ‘Yes, dear. Certainly. Certainly I will.’ And she thought of the stupid, inferior look on his face. And the something of a servant-like way in which he went out to do his wife’s bidding.

And then the charm was gone again, as the glow of sunset goes off a burning city and leaves it a sordid industrial hole. So much for charm!

So much for charm. She had better have stuck to her own sort of men. Martin, for instance, who was a gentleman and a daring soldier, and a queer soul and pleasant to talk to. Only he hadn’t any *magic*. Magic? The very word made her writhe. Magic? Swindle. Swindle, that was all it amounted to. Magic!

And yet — let us not be too hasty. If the magic had *really* been there, on those evenings in that great lofty attic. Had it? Yes. Yes, she was bound to admit it. There had been magic. If there had been magic in his presence and in his contact, the husband of the little lady — But the distaste was in her mouth again.

So she started afresh, trying to keep a tight hold on the tail of that all-too-*evanescent* magic of his. Dear, it slipped so quickly into disillusion. Nevertheless. If it had existed it did exist. And if it did exist, it was worth having. You could call it an illusion if you liked. But an illusion which is a real experience is worth having. Perhaps this disillusion was a greater illusion than the illusion itself. Perhaps all this disillusion of the little lady and the husband of the little lady was falsier than the illusion and magic of those few evenings. Perhaps the long disillusion of life was falsier than the brief moments of real illusion. After all — the delicate darkness of his breast, the mystery that seemed to come with him as he trod slowly across the floor of his room, after changing his tunic — Nay, nay, if she could keep the illusion of his charm, she would give all disillusion to the devils. Nay, only let her be under the spell of his charm. Only let the spell be upon her. It was all she yearned for. And the thing she had to fight was the vulgarity of disillusion. The vulgarity of the little lady, the vulgarity of the husband of the little lady, the vulgarity of his insincerity, his ‘Yes, dear. Certainly! Certainly!’ — this was what she had to fight. He was vulgar and horrible, then. But also, the queer figure that sat alone on the roof watching the stars! The wonderful red flower of the cactus. The mystery that advanced with him as he came across the room after changing his tunic. The glamour and sadness of him, his silence, as he stooped unfastening his boots.

And the strange gargoyle smile, fixed, when he caressed her with his hand under the chin! Life is all a choice. And if she chose the glamour, the magic, the charm, the illusion, the spell! Better death than that other, the husband of the little lady. When all was said and done, was he as much the husband of the little lady as he was that queer, delicate-breasted Caesar of her own knowledge? Which was he?

No, she was *not* going to send her the doll. The little lady should never have the doll.

What a doll she would make herself! Heavens, what a wizened jewel!

VI

Captain Hepburn still called occasionally at the house for his post. The maid always put his letters in a certain place in the hall, so that he should not have to climb the stairs.

Among his letters — that is to say, along with another letter, for his correspondence was very meagre — he one day found an envelope with a crest. Inside this envelope two letters.

Dear Captain Hepburn,

I had the enclosed letter from Mrs Hepburn. I don't intend her to have the doll which is your portrait, so I shall not answer this note. Also I don't see why she should try to turn us out of the town. She talked to me after tea that day, and it seems she believes that Mitchka is your lover. I didn't say anything at all — except that it wasn't true. But she needn't be afraid of me. I don't want you to trouble yourself. But you may as well know how things are.

JOHANNA Z. R.

The other letter was on his wife's well-known heavy paper, and in her well-known large, 'aristocratic' hand.

My dear Countess,

I wonder if there has been some mistake, or some misunderstanding. Four days ago you said you would send round that doll we spoke of, but I have seen no sign of it yet. I thought of calling at the studio, but did not wish to disturb the Baroness. I should be very much obliged if you could send the doll at once, as I do not feel easy while it is out of my possession. You may rely on having a cheque by return.

Our old family friend, Major-General Barlow, called on me yesterday, and we

had a most interesting conversation on our Tommies, and the protection of their morals here. It seems we have full power to send away any person or persons deemed undesirable, with twenty-four hours' notice to leave. But of course all this is done as quietly and with the intention of causing as little scandal as possible.

Please let me have the doll by tomorrow, and perhaps some hint as to your future intentions.

With very best wishes from one who only seeks to be your friend. Yours very sincerely,

EVANGELINE HEPBURN.

VII

And then a dreadful thing happened: really a very dreadful thing. Hannele read of it in the evening newspaper of the town — the *Abendblatt*. Mitchka came rushing up with the paper at ten o'clock at night, just when Hannele was going to bed.

Mrs Hepburn had fallen out of her bedroom window, from the third floor of the hotel, down on to the pavement below, and was killed. She was dressing for dinner. And apparently she had in the morning washed a certain little camisole, and put it on the window-sill to dry. She must have stood on a chair, reaching for it when she fell out of the window. Her husband, who was in the dressing-room, heard a queer little noise, a sort of choking cry, and came into her room to see what it was. And she wasn't there. The window was open, and the chair by the window. He looked round, and thought she had left the room for a moment, so returned to his shaving. He was half-shaved when one of the maids rushed in. When he looked out of the window down into the street he fainted, and would have fallen too if the maid had not pulled him in in time.

The very next day the captain came back to his attic. Hannele did not know, until quite late at night when he tapped on her door. She knew his soft tap immediately.

'Won't you come over for a chat?' he said.

She paused for some moments before she answered. And then perhaps surprise made her agree: surprise and curiosity.

'Yes, in a minute,' she said, closing her door in his face.

She found him sitting quite still, not even smoking, in his quiet attic. He did not rise, but just glanced round with a faint smile. And she thought his face seemed different, more flexible. But in the half-light she could not tell. She sat at some little distance from him.

‘I suppose you’ve heard,’ he said.

‘Yes.’

After a long pause, he resumed:

‘Yes. It seems an impossible thing to have happened. Yet it *has* happened.’

Hannele’s ears were sharp. But strain them as she might, she could not catch the meaning of his voice.

‘A terrible thing. A *very* terrible thing,’ she said.

‘Yes.’

‘Do you think she fell quite accidentally?’ she said.

‘Must have done. The maid was in just a minute before, and she seemed as happy as possible. I suppose reaching over that broad window-ledge, her brain must suddenly have turned. I can’t imagine why she didn’t call me. She could never bear even to look out of a high window. Turned her ill instantly if she saw a space below her. She used to say she couldn’t really look at the moon, it made her feel as if she would fall down a dreadful height. She never dared to more than glance at it. She always had the feeling, I suppose, of the awful space beneath her, if she were on the moon.’

Hannele was not listening to his words, but to his voice. There was something a little automatic in what he said. But then that is always so when people have had a shock.

‘It must have been terrible for you too,’ she said.

‘Ah, yes. At the time it was awful. Awful. I felt the smash right inside me, you know.’

‘Awful!’ she repeated.

‘But now,’ he said, ‘I feel very strangely happy about it. I feel happy about it. I feel happy for her sake, if you can understand that. I feel she has got out of some great tension. I feel she’s free now for the first time in her life. She was a gentle soul, and an original soul, but she was like a fairy who is condemned to live in houses and sit on furniture and all that, don’t you know. It was never her nature.’

‘No?’ said Hannele, herself sitting in blank amazement.

‘I always felt she was born in the wrong period — or on the wrong planet. Like some sort of delicate creature you take out of a tropical forest the moment it is born, and from the first moment teach it to perform tricks. You know what I mean. All her life she performed the tricks of life, clever little monkey she was at it too. Beat me into fits. But her own poor little soul, a sort of fairy soul, those queer Irish creatures, was cooped up inside her all her life, tombed in. There it was, tombed in, while she went through all the tricks of life that you have to go through if you are born today.’

‘But,’ stammered Hannele, ‘what would she have done if she *had* been free?’

‘Why, don’t you see, there *is* nothing for her to do in the world today. Take her language, for instance. She never ought to have been speaking English. I don’t know what language she ought to have spoken. Because if you take the Irish language, they only learn it back from English. They think in English, and just put Irish words on top. But English was never her language. It bubbled off her lips, so to speak. And she had no other language. Like a starling that you’ve made talk from the very beginning, and so it can only shout these talking noises, don’t you know. It can’t whistle its own whistling to save its life. Couldn’t do it. It’s lost it. All its own natural mode of expressing itself has collapsed, and it can only be artificial.’

There was a long pause.

‘Would she have been wonderful, then, if she had been able to talk in some unknown language?’ said Hannele jealously.

‘I don’t say she would have been wonderful. As a matter of fact, we think a talking starling is much more wonderful than an ordinary starling. I don’t myself, but most people do. And she would have been a sort of starling. And she would have had her own language and her own ways. As it was, poor thing, she was always arranging herself and fluttering and chattering inside a cage. And she never knew she was in the cage, any more than we know we are inside our own skins.’

‘But,’ said Hannele, with a touch of mockery, ‘how do you know you haven’t made it all up — just to console yourself?’

‘Oh, I’ve thought it long ago,’ he said.

‘Still,’ she blurted, ‘you may have invented it all — as a sort of consolation for — for — for your life.’

‘Yes, I may,’ he said. ‘But I don’t think so. It was her eyes. Did you ever notice her eyes? I often used to catch her eyes. And she’d be talking away, all the language bubbling off her lips. And her eyes were so clear and bright and different. Like a child’s that is listening to something, and is going to be frightened. She was always listening — and waiting — for something else. I tell you what, she was exactly like that fairy in the Scotch song, who is in love with a mortal, and sits by the high road in terror waiting for him to come, and hearing the plovers and the curlews. Only nowadays motor-lorries go along the moor roads and the poor thing is struck unconscious, and carried into our world in a state of unconsciousness, and when she comes round, she tries to talk our language and behave as we behave, and she can’t remember anything else, so she goes on and on, till she falls with a crash, back to her own world.’

Hannele was silent, and so was he.

‘You loved her then?’ she said at length.

‘Yes. But in this way. When I was a boy I caught a bird, a black-cap, and I put it in a cage. And I loved that bird. I don’t know why, but I loved it. I simply loved that bird. All the gorse, and the heather, and the rock, and the hot smell of yellow gorse blossom, and the sky that seemed to have no end to it, when I was a boy, everything that I almost was *mad* with, as boys are, seemed to me to be in that little, fluttering black-cap. And it would peck its seed as if it didn’t quite know what else to do; and look round about, and begin to sing. But in quite a few days it turned its head aside and died. Yes, it died. I never had the feeling again that I got from that black-cap when I was a boy — not until I saw her. And then I felt it all again. I felt it all again. And it was the same feeling. I knew, quite soon I knew, that she would die. She would peck her seed and look round in the cage just the same. But she would die in the end. Only it would last much longer. But she would die in the cage, like the black-cap.’

‘But she loved the cage. She loved her clothes and her jewels. She must have loved her house and her furniture and all that with a perfect frenzy.’

‘She did. She did. But like a child with playthings. Only they were big, marvellous playthings to her. Oh yes, she was never away from them. She never forgot her things — her trinkets and her furs and her furniture. She never got away from them for a minute. And everything in her mind was mixed up with them.’

‘Dreadful!’ said Hannele.

‘Yes, it was dreadful,’ he answered.

‘Dreadful,’ repeated Hannele.

‘Yes, quite. Quite! And it got worse. And her way of talking got worse. As if it bubbled off her lips. But her eyes never lost their brightness, they never lost that faery look. Only I used to see fear in them. Fear of everything — even all the things she surrounded herself with. Just like my black-cap used to look out of his cage — so bright and sharp, and yet as if he didn’t know that it was just the cage that was between him and the outside. He thought it was inside himself, the barrier. He thought it was part of his own nature to be shut in. And she thought it was part of her own nature. And so they both died.’

‘What I can’t see,’ said Hannele, ‘is what she would have done outside her cage. What other life could she have, except her *bibelots* and her furniture, and her talk?’

‘Why, none. There *is* no life outside for human beings.’

‘Then there’s nothing,’ said Hannele.

‘That’s true. In a great measure, there’s nothing.’

‘Thank you,’ said Hannele.

There was a long pause.

‘And perhaps I was to blame. Perhaps I ought to have made some sort of a move. But I didn’t know what to do. For my life, I didn’t know what to do, except try to make her happy. She had enough money — and I didn’t think it mattered if she shared it with me. I always had a garden — and the astronomy. It’s been an immense relief to me watching the moon. It’s been wonderful. Instead of looking inside the cage, as I did at my bird, or at her — I look right out — into freedom — into freedom.’

‘The moon, you mean?’ said Hannele.

‘Yes, the moon.’

‘And that’s your freedom?’

‘That’s where I’ve found the greatest sense of freedom,’ he said.

‘Well, I’m not going to be jealous of the moon,’ said Hannele at length.
‘Why should you? It’s not a thing to be jealous of.’
In a little while, she bade him good-night and left him.

VIII

The chief thing that the captain knew, at this juncture, was that a hatchet had gone through the ligatures and veins that connected him with the people of his affection, and that he was left with the bleeding ends of all his vital human relationships. Why it should be so he did not know. But then one never can know the whys and the wherefores of one’s passional changes.

He only knew that it was so. The emotional flow between him and all the people he knew and cared for was broken, and for the time being he was conscious only of the cleavage. The cleavage that had occurred between him and his fellow-men, the cleft that was now between him and them. It was not the fault of anybody or anything. He could neither reproach himself nor them. What had happened had been preparing for a long time. Now suddenly the cleavage. There had been a long, slow weaning away: and now this sudden silent rupture.

What it amounted to principally was that he did not want even to see Hannele. He did not want to think of her even. But neither did he want to see anybody else, or to think of anybody else. He shrank with a feeling almost of disgust from his friends and acquaintances, and their expressions of sympathy. It affected him with instantaneous disgust when anybody wanted to share emotions with him. He did not want to share emotions or feelings of any sort. He wanted to be by himself, essentially, even if he was moving about among other people.

So he went to England to settle his own affairs, and out of duty to see his children. He wished his children all the well in the world — everything except any emotional connexion with himself. He decided to take his girl away from the convent at once, and to put her into a jolly English school. His boy was all right where he was.

The captain had now an income sufficient to give him his independence, but not sufficient to keep up his wife’s house. So he prepared to sell the house and most of the things in it. He decided also to leave the army as soon as he could be free. And he thought he would wander about for a time, till he came upon something he wanted.

So the winter passed, without his going back to Germany. He was free of the army. He drifted along, settling his affairs. They were of no very great importance. And all the time he never wrote once to Hannele. He could not get over his disgust that people insisted on his sharing their emotions. He could not

bear their emotions, neither their activities. Other people might have all the emotions and feelings and earnestness and busy activities they liked. Quite nice even that they had such a multifarious commotion for themselves. But the moment they approached him to spread their feelings over him or to entangle him in their activities a helpless disgust came up in him, and until he could get away he felt sick, even physically.

This was no state of mind for a lover. He could not even think of Hannele. Anybody else he felt he need not think about. He was deeply, profoundly thankful that his wife was dead. It was an end of pity now; because, poor thing, she had escaped and gone her own way into the void, like a flown bird.

IX

Nevertheless, a man hasn't finished his life at forty. He may, however, have finished one great phase of his life.

And Alexander Hepburn was not the man to live alone. All our troubles, says somebody wise, come upon us because we cannot be alone. And that is all very well. We must all be *able* to be alone, otherwise we are just victims. But when we *are* able to be alone, then we realize that the only thing to do is to start a new relationship with another — or even the same — human being. That people should all be stuck up apart, like so many telegraph-poles, is nonsense.

So with our dear captain. He had his convulsion into a sort of telegraph-pole isolation: which was absolutely necessary for him. But then he began to bud with a new yearning for — for what? For love?

It was a question he kept nicely putting to himself. And really, the nice young girls of eighteen or twenty attracted him very much: so fresh, so impulsive, and looking up to him as if he were something wonderful. If only he could have married two or three of them, instead of just one!

Love! When a man has no particular ambition, his mind turns back perpetually, as a needle towards the pole. That tiresome word Love. It means so many things. It meant the feeling he had had for his wife. He had loved her. But he shuddered at the thought of having to go through such love again. It meant also the feeling he had for the awfully nice young things he met here and there: fresh, impulsive girls ready to give all their hearts away. Oh yes, he could fall in love with half a dozen of them. But he knew he'd better not.

At last he wrote to Hannele: and got no answer. So he wrote to Mitchka and still got no answer. So he wrote for information — and there was none forthcoming, except that the two women had gone to Munich.

For the time being he left it at that. To him, Hannele did not exactly represent

rosy love. Rather a hard destiny. He did not adore her. He did not feel one bit of adoration for her. As a matter of fact, not all the beauties and virtues of woman put together with all the gold in the Indies would have tempted him into the business of adoration any more. He had gone on his knees once, vowing with faltering tones to try and make the adored one happy. And now — never again. Never.

The temptation this time was to be adored. One of those fresh young things would have adored him as if he were a god. And there was something *very* alluring about the thought. Very — very alluring. To be god-almighty in your own house, with a lovely young thing adoring you, and you giving off beams of bright effulgence like a Gloria! Who wouldn't be tempted: at the age of forty? And this was why he dallied.

But in the end he suddenly took the train to Munich. And when he got there he found the town beastly uncomfortable, the Bavarians rude and disagreeable, and no sign of the missing females, not even in the Café Stéphanie. He wandered round and round.

And then one day, oh heaven, he saw his doll in a shop window: a little art shop. He stood and stared quite spellbound.

'Well, if that isn't the devil,' he said. 'Seeing yourself in a shop window!'

He was so disgusted that he would not go into the shop.

Then, every day for a week did he walk down that little street and look at himself in the shop window. Yes, there he stood, with one hand in his pocket. And the figure had one hand in its pocket. There he stood, with his cap pulled rather low over his brow. And the figure had its cap pulled low over its brow. But, thank goodness, his own cap now was a civilian tweed. But there he stood, his head rather forward, gazing with fixed dark eyes. And himself in little, that wretched figure, stood there with its head rather forward, staring with fixed dark eyes. It was such a real little *man* that it fairly staggered him. The oftener he saw it, the more it staggered him. And the more he hated it. Yet it fascinated him, and he came again to look.

And it was always there. A lonely little individual lounging there with one hand in its pocket, and nothing to do, among the bric-à-brac and the *bibelots*. Poor devil, stuck so incongruously in the world. And yet losing none of his masculinity.

A male little devil, for all his forlornness. But such an air of isolation, or not-belonging. Yet taut and male, in his tartan trews. And what a situation to be in! — lounging with his back against a little Japanese lacquer cabinet, with a few old pots on his right hand and a tiresome brass ink-tray on his left, while pieces of not-very-nice filet lace hung their length up and down the background. Poor

little devil: it was like a deliberate satire.

And then one day it was gone. There was the cabinet and the filet lace and the tiresome ink-stand tray: and the little gentleman wasn't there. The captain at once walked into the shop.

'Have you sold that doll? — that unknown soldier?' he added, without knowing quite what he was saying.

The doll was sold.

'Do you know who bought it?'

The girl looked at him very coldly, and did not know.

'I once knew the lady who made it. In fact, the doll was *me*,' he said.

The girl now looked at him with sudden interest.

'Don't you think it was like me?' he said.

'Perhaps' — she began to smile.

'It was me. And the lady who made it was a friend of mine. Do you know her name?'

'Yes.'

'Gräfin zu Rassentlow,' he cried, his eyes shining.

'Oh yes. But her dolls are famous.'

'Do you know where she is? Is she in Munich?'

'That I don't know.'

'Could you find out?'

'I don't know. I can ask.'

'Or the Baroness von Prielau-Carolath.'

'The Baroness is dead.'

'Dead!'

'She was shot in a riot in Salzburg. They say a lover — '

'How do you know?'

'From the newspapers.'

'Dead! Is it possible. Poor Hannele.'

There was a pause.

'Well,' he said, 'if you would inquire about the address — I'll call again.'

Then he turned back from the door.

'By the way, do you mind telling me how much you sold the doll for?'

The girl hesitated. She was by no means anxious to give away any of her trade details. But at length she answered reluctantly:

'Five hundred marks.'

'So cheap,' he said. 'Good-day. Then I will call again.'

Then again he got a trace. It was in the Chit-Chat column of the *Münchener Neue Zeitung*: under Studio-Comments. ‘Theodor Worpswede’s latest picture is a still-life, containing an entertaining group of a doll, two sunflowers in a glass jar, and a poached egg on toast. The contrast between the three substances is highly diverting and instructive, and this is perhaps one of the most interesting of Worpswede’s works. The doll, by the way, is one of the creations of our fertile Countess Hannele. It is the figure of an English, or rather Scottish, officer in the famous tartan trousers which, clinging closely to the legs of the lively Gaul, so shocked the eminent Julius Caesar and his cohorts. We, of course, are no longer shocked, but full of admiration for the creative genius of our dear Countess. The doll itself is a masterpiece, and has begotten another masterpiece in Theodor Worpswede’s Still-life. We have heard, by the way, a rumour of Countess zu Rassentlow’s engagement. Apparently the Herr Regierungsrat von Poldi, of that most beautiful of summer resorts, Kaprun, in the Tyrol, is the fortunate man — ’

XI

The captain bought the Still-life. This new version of himself along with the poached egg and the sunflowers was rather frightening. So he packed up for Austria, for Kaprun, with his picture, and had a fight to get the beastly thing out of Germany, and another fight to get it into Austria. Fatigued and furious he arrived in Salzburg, seeing no beauty in anything. Next day he was in Kaprun.

It was an elegant and fashionable watering-place before the war: a lovely little lake in the midst of the Alps, an old Tyrolese town on the water-side, green slopes sheering up opposite, and away beyond a glacier. It was still crowded and still elegant. But alas, with a broken, bankrupt, desperate elegance, and almost empty shops.

The captain felt rather dazed. He found himself in an hotel full of Jews of the wrong, rich sort, and wondered what next. The place was beautiful, but the life wasn’t.

XII

The Herr Regierungsrat was not at first sight prepossessing. He was approaching fifty, and had gone stout and rather loose, as so many men of his class and race do. Then he wore one of those dreadful full-bottom coats, a kind of poor relation to our full-skirted frock-coat: it would best be described as a family coat. It flapped about him as he walked, and he looked at first glance

lower middle class.

But he wasn't. Of course, being in office in the collapsed Austria, he was a republican. But by nature he was a monarchist, nay, an imperialist, as every true Austrian is. And he was a true Austrian. And as such he was much finer and subtler than he looked. As one got used to him, his rather fat face, with its fine nose and slightly bitter, pursed mouth, came to have a resemblance to the busts of some of the late Roman emperors. And as one was with him, one came gradually to realize that out of all his baggy bourgeois appearance came something of a *grand geste*. He could not help it. There was something sweeping and careless about his soul: big, rather assertive, and ill-bred-seeming; but, in fact, not ill-bred at all, only a little bitter and a good deal indifferent to his surroundings. He looked at first sight so common and *parvenu*. And then one had to realize that he was a member of a big, old empire, fallen into a sort of epicureanism, and a little bitter. There was no littleness, no meanness, and no real coarseness. But he was a great talker, and relentless towards his audience.

Hannele was attracted to him by his talk. He began as soon as dinner appeared: and he went on, carrying the decanter and the wine-glass with him out on to the balcony of the villa, over the lake, on and on until midnight. The summer night was still and warm: the lake lay deep and full, and the old town twinkled away across. There was the faintest tang of snow in the air, from the great glacier-peaks that were hidden in the night opposite. Sometimes a boat with a lantern twanged a guitar. The clematis flowers were quite black, like leaves, dangling from the terrace.

It was so beautiful, there in the very heart of the Tyrol. The hotels glittered with lights: electric light was still cheap. There seemed a fullness and a loveliness in the night. And yet for some reason it was all terrible and devastating: the life-spirit seemed to be squirming, bleeding all the time.

And on and on talked the Herr Regierungsrat, with all the witty volubility of the more versatile Austrian. He was really very witty, very human, and with a touch of salty cynicism that reminded one of a real old Roman of the Empire. That subtle stoicism, that unsentimental epicureanism, that kind of reckless hopelessness, of course, fascinated the women. And particularly Hannele. He talked on and on — about his work before the war, when he held an important post and was one of the governing class — then about the war — then about the hopelessness of the present: and in it all there seemed a bigness, a carelessness based on indifference and hopelessness that laughed at its very self. The real old Austria had always fascinated Hannele. As represented in the witty, bitter-indifferent Herr Regierungsrat it carried her away.

And he, of course, turned instinctively to her, talking in his rapid, ceaseless

fashion, with a laugh and a pause to drink and a new start taken. She liked the sound of his Austrian speech: its racy carelessness, its salty indifference to standards of correctness. Oh yes, here was the *grand geste* still lingering.

He turned his large breast towards her, and made a quick gesture with his fat, well-shapen hand, blurted out another subtle, rough-seeming romance, pursed his mouth, and emptied his glass once more. Then he looked at his half-forgotten cigar and started again.

There was something almost boyish and impulsive about him: the way he turned to her, and the odd way he seemed to open his big breast to her. And again he seemed almost eternal, sitting there in his chair with knees planted apart. It was as if he would never rise again, but would remain sitting for ever, and talking. He seemed as if he had no legs, save to sit with. As if to stand on his feet and walk would not be natural to him.

Yet he rose at last, and kissed her hand with the grand gesture that France or Germany have never acquired: carelessness, profound indifference to other people's standards, and then such a sudden stillness, as he bent and kissed her hand. Of course she felt a queen in exile.

And perhaps it is more dangerous to feel yourself a queen in exile than a queen *in situ*. She fell in love with him, with this large, stout, loose widower of fifty, with two children. He had no money except some Austrian money that was worth nothing outside Austria. He could not even go to Germany. There he was, fixed in this hollow in the middle of the Tyrol.

But he had an ambition still, old Roman of the decadence that he was. He had year by year and without making any fuss collected the material for a very minute and thorough history of his own district: the Chiemgau and the Pinzgau. Hannele found that his fund of information on this subject was inexhaustible, and his intelligence was so delicate, so human, and his scope seemed so wide, that she felt a touch of reverence for him. He wanted to write this history. And she wanted to help him.

For, of course, as things were he would never write it. He was Regierungsrat: that is, he was the petty local governor of his town and immediate district. The Amthaus was a great old building, and there young ladies in high heels flirted among masses of papers with bare-kneed young gentlemen in Tyrolese costume, and occasionally they parted to take a pleasant, interesting attitude and write a word or two, after which they fluttered together for a little more interesting diversion. It was extraordinary how many finely built, handsome young people of an age fitted for nothing but love-affairs ran the governmental business of this department. And the Herr Regierungsrat sailed in and out of the big, old room, his wide coat flying like wings and making the papers flutter, his rather wine-

reddened, old-Roman face smiling with its bitter look. And of course it was a witticism he uttered first, even if Hungary was invading the frontier or cholera was in Vienna.

When he was on his legs, he walked nimbly, briskly, and his coat-bottoms always flew. So he waded through the town, greeting somebody at every few strides and grinning, and yet with a certain haughty reserve. Oh yes, there was a certain salty *hauteur* about him which made the people trust him. And he spoke the vernacular so racily.

Hannele felt she would like to marry him. She would like to be near him. She would like him to write his history. She would like him to make her feel a queen in exile. No one had ever *quite* kissed her hand as he kissed it: with that sudden stillness and strange, chivalric abandon of himself. How he would abandon himself to her! — terribly — wonderfully — perhaps a little horribly. His wife, whom he had married late, had died after seven years of marriage. Hannele could understand that too. One or the other must die.

She became engaged. But something made her hesitate before marriage. Being in Austria was like being on a wrecked ship that *must* sink after a certain short length of time. And marrying the Herr Regierungsrat was like marrying the doomed captain of the doomed ship. The sense of fatality was part of the attraction.

And yet she hesitated. The summer weeks passed. The strangers flooded in and crowded the town, and ate up the food like locusts. People no longer counted the paper money, they weighed it by the kilogram. Peasants stored it in a corner of the meal-bin, and mice came and chewed holes in it. Nobody knew where the next lot of food was going to come from: yet it always came. And the lake teemed with bathers. When the captain arrived he looked with amazement on the crowds of strapping, powerful fellows who bathed all day long, magnificent blond flesh of men and women. No wonder the old Romans stood in astonishment before the huge blond limbs of the savage Germana.

Well, the life was like a madness. The hotels charged fifteen hundred kronen a day: the women, old and young, paraded in the peasant costume, in flowery cotton dresses with gaudy, expensive silk aprons: the men wore the Tyrolese costume, bare knees and little short jackets. And for the men, the correct thing was to have the leathern hose and the blue linen jacket as old as possible. If you had a hole in your leathern seat, so much the better.

Everything so physical. Such magnificent naked limbs and naked bodies, and in the streets, in the hotels, everywhere, bare, white arms of women and bare, brown, powerful knees and thighs of men. The sense of flesh everywhere, and the endless ache of flesh. Even in the peasants who rowed across the lake,

standing and rowing with a slow, heavy, gondolier motion at the one curved oar, there was the same endless ache of physical yearning.

XIII

It was August when Alexander met Hannele. She was walking under a chintz parasol, wearing a dress of blue cotton with little red roses, and a red silk apron. She had no hat, her arms were bare and soft, and she had white stockings under her short dress. The Herr Regierungsrat was at her side, large, nimble, and laughing with a new witticism.

Alexander, in a light summer suit and Panama hat, was just coming out of the bank, shoving twenty thousand kronen into his pocket. He saw her coming across from the Amtsgericht, with the Herr Regierungsrat at her side, across the space of sunshine. She was laughing, and did not notice him.

She did not notice till he had taken off his hat and was saluting her. Then what she saw was the black, smooth, shining head, and she went pale. His black, smooth, close head — and all the blue Austrian day seemed to shrivel before her eyes.

‘How do you do, Countess! I hoped I should meet you.’

She heard his slow, sad-clanging, straying voice again, and she pressed her hand with the umbrella stick against her breast. She had forgotten it — forgotten his peculiar, slow voice. And now it seemed like a noise that sounds in the silence of night. Ah, how difficult it was, that suddenly the world could split under her eyes, and show this darkness inside. She wished he had not come.

She presented him to the Herr Regierungsrat, who was stiff and cold. She asked where the captain was staying. And then, not knowing what else to say, she said:

‘Won’t you come to tea?’

She was staying in a villa across the lake. Yes, he would come to tea.

He went. He hired a boat and a man to row him across. It was not far. There stood the villa, with its brown balconies one above the other, the bright red geraniums and white geraniums twinkling all round, the trees of purple clematis tumbling at one corner. All the green window doors were open: but nobody about. In the little garden by the water’s edge the rose trees were tall and lank, drawn up by the dark green trees of the background. A white table with chairs and garden seats stood under — the shadow of a big willow tree, and a hammock with cushions swung just behind. But no one in sight. There was a little landing bridge on to the garden: and a fairly large boathouse at the garden end.

The captain was not sure that the boathouse belonged to the villa. Voices were

shouting and laughing from the water's surface, bathers swimming. A tall, naked youth with a little red cap on his head and a tiny red loin-cloth round his slender young hips was standing on the steps of the boathouse calling to the three women who were swimming near. The dark-haired woman with the white cap swam up to the steps and caught the boy by the ankle. He cried and laughed and remonstrated, and poked her in the breast with his foot.

'*Nein, nein, Hardu!*' she cried as he tickled her with his toe. '*Hardu! Hardu! Hör' auf!* — Leave off!' — and she fell with a crash back into the water. The youth laughed a loud, deep laugh of a lad whose voice is newly broken.

'*Was macht er dann?*' cried a voice from the waters. 'What is he doing?' It was a dark-skinned girl swimming swiftly, her big dark eyes watching amused from the water surface.

'*Jetzt Hardu hör' auf. Nein. Jetzt ruhig!* Now leave off! Now be quiet.' And the dark-skinned woman was climbing out in the sunshine onto the pale, raw-wood steps of the boathouse, the water glistening on her dark-blue, stockinette, soft-moulded back and loins: while the boy, with his foot stretched out, was trying to push her back into the water. She clambered out, however, and sat on the steps in the sun, panting slightly. She was dark and attractive-looking, with a mature beautiful figure, and handsome, strong woman's legs.

In the garden appeared a black-and-white maid-servant with a tray.

'*Kaffee, gnädige Frau!*'

The voice came so distinct over the water.

'*Hannele! Hannele! Kaffee!*' called the woman on the steps of the bathing-house.

'*Tante Hannele! Kaffee!*' called the dark-eyed girl, turning round in the water, then swimming for home.

'*Kaffee! Kaffee!*' roared the youth, in anticipation.

'*Ja — a! Ich kom — mm,*' sang Hannele's voice from the water.

The dark-eyed girl, her hair tied up in a silk bandana, had reached the steps and was climbing out, a slim young fish in her close dark suit. The three stood clustered on the steps, the elder woman with one arm over the naked shoulders of the youth, the other arm over the shoulders of the girl. And all in chorus sang:

'*Hannele! Hannele! Hannele! Wir warten auf dich.*'

The boatman had left off rowing, and the boat was drifting slowly in. The family became quiet, because of the intrusion. The attractive-looking woman turned and picked up her blue bath-robe, of a mid-blue colour that became her. She swung it round her as if it were an opera cloak. The youth stared at the boat.

The captain was watching Hannele. With a white kerchief tied round her silky, brownish hair, she was swimming home. He saw her white shoulders and her

white, wavering legs below in the clear water. Round the boat fishes were suddenly jumping.

The three on the steps beyond stood silent, watching the intruding boat with resentment. The boatman twisted his head round and watched them. The captain, who was facing them, watched Hannele. She swam slowly and easily up, caught the rail of the steps, and stooping forward, climbed slowly out of the water. Her legs were large and flashing white and looked rich, the rich, white thighs with the blue veins behind, and the full, rich softness of her sloping loins.

'*Ach! Schön! 'S war schön! Das Wasser ist gut,*' her voice was heard, half singing as she took her breath. 'It was lovely.'

'*Heiss,*' said the woman above. '*Zu warm.* Too warm.'

The youth made way for Hannele, who drew herself erect at the top of the steps, looking round, panting a little and putting up her hands to the knot of her kerchief on her head. Her legs were magnificent and white.

'*Kuck de Leut, die da bleiben,*' said the woman in the blue wrap, in a low voice. 'Look at the people stopping there.'

'*Ja!*' said Hannele negligently. Then she looked. She started as if in fear, looked round, as if to run away, looked back again, and met the eyes of the captain, who took off his hat.

She cried in a loud, frightened voice:

'Oh, but — I thought it was *tomorrow!*'

'No — today,' came the quiet voice of the captain over the water.

'*Today!* Are you sure?' she cried, calling to the boat.

'Quite sure. But we'll make it tomorrow if you like,' he said.

'*Today! Today!*' she repeated in bewilderment. 'No! Wait a minute.' And she ran into the boathouse.

'*Was ist es?*' asked the dark woman, following her. 'What is it?'

'A friend — a visitor — Captain Hepburn,' came Hannele's voice.

The boatman now rowed slowly to the landing-stage. The dark woman, huddled in her blue wrap as in an opera-cloak, walked proudly and unconcernedly across the background of the garden and up the steps to the first balcony. Hannele, her feet slip-slopping in loose slippers, clutching an old yellow wrap round her, came to the landing-stage and shook hands.

'I am so sorry. It is so stupid of me. I was sure it was tomorrow,' she said.

'No, it was today. But I wish for your sake it had been tomorrow,' he replied.

'No. No. It doesn't matter. You won't mind waiting a minute, will you? You mustn't be angry with me for being so stupid.'

So she went away, the heelless slippers flipping up to her naked heels. Then the big-eyed, dusky girl stole into the house: and then the naked youth, who went

with *sang-froid*. He would make a fine, handsome man: and he knew it.

XIV

Hepburn and Hannele were to make a small excursion to the glacier which stood there always in sight, coldly grinning in the sky. The weather had been very hot, but this morning there were loose clouds in the sky. The captain rowed over the lake soon after dawn. Hannele stepped into the little craft, and they pulled back to the town. There was a wind ruffling the water, so that the boat leaped and chuckled. The glacier, in a recess among the folded mountains, looked cold and angry. But morning was very sweet in the sky, and blowing very sweet with a faint scent of the second hay from the low lands at the head of the lake. Beyond stood naked grey rock like a wall of mountains, pure rock, with faint, thin slashes of snow. Yesterday it had rained on the lake. The sun was going to appear from behind the Breitsteinhorn, the sky with its clouds floating in blue light and yellow radiance was lovely and cheering again. But dark clouds seemed to spout up from the Pinzgau valley. And once across the lake, all was shadow, when the water no longer gave back the sky-morning.

The day was a feast day, a holiday. Already so early three young men from the mountains were bathing near the steps of the Badeanstalt. Handsome, physical fellows, with good limbs rolling and swaying in the early morning water. They seemed to enjoy it too. But to Hepburn it was always as if a dark wing were stretched in the sky, over these mountains, like a doom. And these three young, lusty, naked men swimming and rolling in the shadow.

Hepburn's was the first boat stirring. He made fast in the hotel boathouse, and he and Hannele went into the little town. It was deep in shadow, though the light of the sky, curdled with cloud, was bright overhead. But dark and chill and heavy lay the shadow in the black-and-white town, like a sediment.

The shops were all shut, but peasants from the hills were already strolling about in their holiday dress: the men in their short leather trousers, like football drawers, and bare brown knees and great boots: their little grey jackets faced with green, and their green hats with the proud chamois-brush behind. They seemed to stray about like lost souls, and the proud chamois-brush behind their hats, this proud, cocky, perking-up tail, like a mountain-buck with his tail up, was belied by the lost-soul look of the men, as they loitered about with their hands shoved in the front pockets of their trousers. Some women also were creeping about: peasant women, in the funny little black hats that had thick gold under the brim and long black streamers of ribbon, broad, black, water-wave ribbon starting from a bow under the brim behind and streaming right to the

bottom of the skirt. These women, in their thick, dark dresses with tight bodices and massive, heavy, full skirts, and bright or dark aprons, strode about with the heavy stride of the mountain women, the heavy, quick, forward-leaning motion. They were waiting for the town-day to begin.

Hepburn had a knapsack on his back, with food for the day. But bread was wanting. They found the door of the bakery open, and got a loaf: a long, hot loaf of pure white bread, beautifully sweet bread. It cost seventy kronen. To Hepburn it was always a mystery where this exquisite bread came from, in a lost land.

In the little square where the clock stood were bunches of people, and a big motor-omnibus, and a motor-car that would hold about eight people. Hepburn had paid his seven hundred kronen for the two tickets. Hannele tied up her head in a thin scarf and put on her thick coat. She and Hepburn sat in front by the peaked driver. And at seven o'clock away went the car, swooping out of the town, past the handsome old Tyrolese Schloss, or manor, black-and-white, with its little black spires pricking up, past the station, and under the trees by the lakeside. The road was not good, but they ran at a great speed, out past the end of the lake, where the reeds grew, out into the open valley mouth, where the mountains opened in two clefts. It was cold in the car. Hepburn buttoned himself up to the throat and pulled his hat down on his ears. Hannele's scarf fluttered. She sat without saying anything, erect, her face fine and keen, watching ahead. From the deep Pinzgau Valley came the river roaring and raging, a glacier river of pale, seething ice-water. Over went the car, over the log bridge, darting towards the great slopes opposite. And then a sudden immense turn, a swerve under the height of the mountain-side, and again a darting lurch forward, under the pear trees of the high-road, past the big old ruined castle that so magnificently watched the valley mouth, and the foaming river; on, rushing under the huge roofs of the balconied peasant houses of a village, then swinging again to take another valley mouth, there where a little village clustered all black and white on a knoll, with a white church that had a black steeple, and a white castle with black spires, and clustering, ample black-and-white houses of the Tyrol. There is a grandeur even in the peasant houses, with their great wide passage halls where the swallows build, and where one could build a whole English cottage.

So the motor-car darted up this new, narrow, wilder, more sinister valley. A herd of almost wild young horses, handsome reddish things, burst around the car, and one great mare with full flanks went crashing up the road ahead, her heels flashing to the car, while her foal whinnyed and screamed from behind. But no, she could not turn from the road. On and on she crashed, forging ahead, the car behind her. And then at last she did swerve aside, among the thin alder

trees by the wild riverbed.

'If it isn't a cow, it's a horse,' said the driver, who was thin and weaselly and silent, with his ear-flaps over his ears.

But the great mare had shaken herself in a wild swerve, and screaming and whinneying was plunging back to her foal. Hannele had been frightened.

The car rushed on, through water-meadows, along a naked, white bit of mountain road. Ahead was a darkness of mountain front and pine trees. To the right was the stony, furious, lion-like river, tawny-coloured here, and the slope up beyond. But the road for the moment was swinging fairly level through the stunned water-meadows of the savage valley. There were gates to open, and Hepburn jumped down to open them, as if he were the footboy. The heavy Jews of the wrong sort, seated behind, of course did not stir.

At a house on a knoll the driver sounded his horn, and out rushed children crying Papa! Papa! — then a woman with a basket. A few brief words from the weaselly man, who smiled with warm, manly blue eyes at his children, then the car leaped forward. The whole bearing of the man was so different when he was looking at his own family. He could not even say thank you when Hepburn opened the gates. He hated and even despised his human cargo of middle-class people. Deep, deep is class hatred, and it begins to swallow all human feeling in its abyss. So, stiff, silent, thin, capable, and neuter towards his fares, sat the little driver with the flaps over his ears, and his thin nose cold.

The car swept round, suddenly, into the trees: and into the ravine. The river shouted at the bottom of a gulf. Bristling pine trees stood around. The air was black and cold and forever sunless. The motor-car rushed on, in this blackness under the rock-walls and the fir trees.

Then it suddenly stopped. There was a huge motor-omnibus ahead, drab and enormous-looking. Tourists and trippers of last night coming back from the glacier. It stood like a great rock. And the smaller motor-car edged past, tilting into the rock gutter under the face of stone.

So, after a while of this valley of the shadow of death, lurching in steep loops upwards, the motor-car scrambling wonderfully, struggling past trees and rock upwards, at last they came to the end. It was a huge inn or tourist hotel of brown wood: and here the road ended in a little wide bay surrounded and overhung by trees. Beyond was a garage and a bridge over a roaring river: and always the overhung darkness of trees and the intolerable steep slopes immediately above.

Hannele left her big coat. The sky looked blue above the gloom. They set out across the hollow-sounding bridge, over the everlasting mad rush of ice-water, to the immediate upslope of the path, under dark trees. But a little old man in a sort of sentry-box wanted fifty or sixty kronen: apparently for the upkeep of the road,

a sort of toll.

The other tourists were coming — some stopping to have a drink first. The second omnibus had not yet arrived. Hannele and Hepburn were the first two, treading slowly up that dark path, under the trees. The grasses hanging on the rock face were still dewy. There were a few wild raspberries, and a tiny tuft of bilberries with black berries here and there, and a few tufts of unripe cranberries. The many hundreds of tourists who passed up and down did not leave much to pick. Some mountain harebells, like bells of blue water, hung coldly glistening in their darkness. Sometimes the hairy mountain-bell, pale-blue and bristling, stood alone, curving his head right down, stiff and taut. There was an occasional big, moist, lolling daisy.

So the two climbed slowly up the steep ledge of a road. This valley was just a mountain cleft, cleft sheer in the hard, living rock, with black trees like hair flourishing in this secret, naked place of the earth. At the bottom of the open wedge for ever roared the rampant, insatiable water. The sky from above was like a sharp wedge forcing its way into the earth's cleavage, and that eternal ferocious water was like the steel edge of the wedge, the terrible tip biting in into the rocks' intensity. Who could have thought that the soft sky of light, and the soft foam of water could thrust and penetrate into the dark, strong earth? But so it was. Hannele and Hepburn, toiling up the steep little ledge of a road that hung half-way down the gulf, looked back, time after time, back down upon the brown timbers and shingle roofs of the hotel, that now, away below, looked damp and wedged in like boulders. Then back at the next tourists struggling up. Then down at the water, that rushed like a beast of prey. And then, as they rose higher, they looked up also at the livid great sides of rock, livid, bare rock that sloped from the sky-ridge in a hideous sheer swerve downwards.

In his heart of hearts Hepburn hated it. He hated it, he loathed it, it seemed almost obscene, this livid, naked slide of rock, unthinkably huge and massive, sliding down to this gulf where bushes grew like hair in the darkness and water roared. Above, there were thin slashes of snow.

So the two climbed slowly on, up the eternal side of that valley, sweating with the exertion. Sometimes the sun, now risen high, shone full on their side of the gully. Tourists were trickling downhill too: two maidens with bare arms and bare heads and huge boots: men tourists with great knapsacks and edelweiss in their hats: giving *Bergheil* for a greeting. But the captain said Good-day. He refused this *Bergheil* business. People swarming touristy on these horrible mountains made him feel almost sick.

He and Hannele also were not in good company together. There was a sort of silent hostility between them. She hated the effort of climbing; but the high air,

the cold in the air, the savage cat-howling sound of the water, those awful flanks of livid rock, all this thrilled and excited her to another sort of savageness. And he, dark, rather slender and feline, with something of the physical suavity of a delicate-footed race, he hated beating his way up the rock, he hated the sound of the water, it frightened him, and the high air hit him in the chest, like a viper.

‘Wonderful! Wonderful!’ she cried, taking great breaths in her splendid chest.

‘Yes. And horrible. Detestable,’ he said.

She turned with a flash, and the high strident sound of the mountain in her voice.

‘If you don’t like it,’ she said, rather jeering, ‘why ever did you come?’

‘I had to try,’ he said.

‘And if you don’t like it,’ she said, ‘why should you try to spoil it for me?’

‘I hate it,’ he answered.

They were climbing more into the height, more into the light, into the open, in the full sun. The valley cleft was sinking below them. Opposite was only the sheer, livid slide of the naked rock, tipping from the pure sky. At a certain angle they could see away beyond the lake lying far off and small, the wall of those other rocks like a curtain of stone, dim and diminished to the horizon. And the sky with curdling clouds and blue sunshine intermittent.

‘Wonderful, wonderful, to be high up,’ she said, breathing great breaths.

‘Yes,’ he said. ‘It *is* wonderful. But very detestable. I want to live near the sea-level. I am no mountain-topper.’

‘Evidently not,’ she said.

‘*Bergheil!*’ cried a youth with bare arms and bare chest, bare head, terrific fanged boots, a knapsack and an alpenstock, and all the bronzed wind and sun of the mountain snow in his skin and his faintly bleached hair. With his great heavy knapsack, his rumpled thick stockings, his ghastly fanged boots, Hepburn found him repulsive.

‘*Guten Tag*’ he answered coldly.

‘*Grüss Gott,*’ said Hannele.

And the young Tannhäuser, the young Siegfried, this young Balder beautiful strode climbing down the rocks, marching and swinging with his alpenstock. And immediately after the youth came a maiden, with hair on the wind and her shirt-breast open, striding in corduroy breeches, rumpled worsted stockings, thick boots, a knapsack and an alpenstock. She passed without greeting. And our pair stopped in angry silence and watched her dropping down the mountain-side.

Ah, well, everything comes to an end, even the longest up-climb. So, after much sweat and effort and crossness, Hepburn and Hannele emerged on to the rounded bluff where the road wound out of that hideous great valley cleft into upper regions. So they emerged more on the level, out of the trees as out of something horrible, on to a naked, great bank of rock and grass.

‘Thank the Lord!’ said Hannele.

So they trudged on round the bluff, and then in front of them saw what is always, always wonderful, one of those shallow, upper valleys, naked, where the first waters are rocked. A flat, shallow, utterly desolate valley, wide as a wide bowl under the sky, with rock slopes and grey stone-slides and precipices all round, and the zig-zag of snow-stripes and ice-roots descending, and then rivers, streams and rivers rushing from many points downwards, down out of the ice-roots and the snow-dagger-points, waters rushing in newly-liberated frenzy downwards, down in waterfalls and cascades and threads, down into the wide, shallow bed of the valley, strewn with rocks and stones innumerable, and not a tree, not a visible bush.

Only, of course, two hotels or restaurant places. But these no more than low, sprawling, peasant-looking places lost among the stones, with stones on their roofs so that they seemed just a part of the valley bed. There was the valley, dotted with rock and rolled-down stone, and these two house-places, and woven with innumerable new waters, and one hoarse stone-tracked river in the desert, and the thin road-track winding along the desolate flat, past first one house, then the other, over one stream, then another, on to the far rock-face above which the glacier seemed to loll like some awful great tongue put out.

‘Ah, it is wonderful!’ he said, as if to himself.

And she looked quickly at his face, saw the queer, blank, sphinx-look with which he gazed out beyond himself. His eyes were black and set, and he seemed so motionless, as if he were eternal facing these upper facts.

She thrilled with triumph. She felt he was overcome.

‘It is wonderful,’ she said.

‘Wonderful. And forever wonderful,’ he said.

‘Ah, in *winter* — ’ she cried.

His face changed, and he looked at her.

‘In winter you couldn’t get up here,’ he said.

They went on. Up the slopes cattle were feeding: came that isolated tong-tong-tong of cow-bells, dropping like the slow clink of ice on the arrested air. The sound always woke in him a primeval, almost hopeless melancholy. Always made him feel *navré*. He looked round. There was no tree, no bush, only great grey rocks and pale boulders scattered in place of trees and bushes. But yes,

clinging on one side like a dark, close beard were the alpenrose shrubs.

‘In May,’ he said, ‘that side there must be all pink with alpenroses.’

‘I *must* come. I *must* come!’ she cried.

There were tourists dotted along the road: and two tiny low carts drawn by silky, long-eared mules. These carts went right down to meet the motor-cars, and to bring up provisions for the Glacier Hotel: for there was still another big hotel ahead. Hepburn was happy in that upper valley, that first rocking cradle of early water. He liked to see the great fangs and slashes of ice and snow thrust down into the rock, as if the ice had bitten into the flesh of the earth. And from the fang-tips the hoarse water crying its birth-cry, rushing down.

By the turfy road and under the rocks were many flowers: wonderful harebells, big and cold and dark, almost black, and seeming like purple-dark ice: then little tufts of tiny pale-blue bells, as if some fairy frog had been blowing spume-bubbles out of the ice: then the bishops-crosier of the stiff, bigger, hairy mountain-bell: then many stars of pale-lavender gentian, touched with earth colour: and then monkshood, yellow, primrose yellow monkshood and sudden places full of dark monkshood. That dark-blue, black-blue, terrible colour of the strange rich monkshood made Hepburn look and look and look again. How did the ice come by that lustrous blue-purple intense darkness? — and by that royal poison? — that laughing-snake gorgeousness of much monkshood.

XVI

By one of the loud streams, under a rock in the sun, with scented minty or thyme flowers near, they sat down to eat some lunch. It was about eleven o’clock. A thin bee went in and out the scented flowers and the eyebright. The water poured with all the lust and greed of unloosed water over the stones. He took a cupful for Hannele, bright and icy, and she mixed it with the red Hungarian wine.

Down the road strayed the tourists like pilgrims, and at the closed end of the valley they could be seen, quite tiny, climbing the cut-out road that went up like a stairway. Just by their movements you perceived them. But on the valley-bed they went like rolling stones, little as stones. A very elegant mule came stepping by, following a middle-aged woman in tweeds and a tall, high-browed man in knickerbockers. The mule was drawing a very amusing little cart, a chair, rather like a round office-chair upholstered in red velvet, and mounted on two wheels. The red velvet had gone gold and orange and like fruit-juice, being old: really a lovely colour. And the muleteer, a little shabby creature, waddled beside excitedly.

'Ach' cried Hannele, 'that looks almost like before the war: almost as peaceful.'

'Except that the chair is too shabby, and that they all feel exceptional,' he remarked.

There in that upper valley there was no sense of peace. The rush of the waters seemed like weapons, and the tourists all seemed in a sort of frenzy, in a frenzy to be happy, or to be thrilled. It was a feeling that desolated the heart.

The two sat in the changing sunshine under their rock, with the mountain flowers scenting the snow-bitter air, and they ate their eggs and sausage and cheese, and drank the bright-red Hungarian wine. It seemed lovely: almost like before the war: almost the same feeling of eternal holiday, as if the world was made for man's everlasting holiday. But not quite. Never again quite the same. The world is not made for man's everlasting holiday.

As Alexander was putting the bread back into his shoulder-sack, he exclaimed:

'Oh, look here!'

She looked, and saw him drawing out a flat package wrapped in paper: evidently a picture.

'A picture!' she cried.

He unwrapped the thing and handed it to her. It was Theodor Worpswede's *Stilleben*: not very large, painted on a board.

Hannele looked at it and went pale.

'It's *good*,' she cried, in an equivocal tone.

'Quite good,' he said.

'Especially the poached egg,' she said.

'Yes, the poached egg is almost living.'

'But where did you find it?'

'Oh, I found it in the artist's studio.' And he told her how he had traced her.

'How extraordinary!' she cried. 'But why did you buy it?'

'I don't quite know.'

'Did you *like* it?'

'No, not quite that.'

'You could *never* hang it up.'

'No, never,' he said.

'But do you think it is good as a work of art?'

'I think it is quite clever as a painting. I don't like the spirit of it, of course. I'm too catholic for that.'

'No. No,' she faltered. 'It's rather horrid really. That's why I wonder why you bought it.'

‘Perhaps to prevent anyone else’s buying it,’ he said.

‘Do you mind very much, then?’ she asked.

‘No, I don’t mind very much. I didn’t quite like it that you sold the doll,’ he said.

‘I needed the money,’ she said quietly.

‘Oh, quite.’

There was a pause for some moments.

‘I felt you’d sold *me*,’ she said, quiet and savage.

‘When?’

‘When your wife appeared. And when you *disappeared*.’

Again there was a pause: his pause this time.

‘I did write to you,’ he said.

‘When?’

‘Oh — March, I believe.’

‘Oh yes. I had that letter.’ Her voice was just as quiet, and even savager.

So there was a pause that belonged to both of them. Then she rose.

‘I want to be going,’ she said. ‘We shall never get to the glacier at this rate.’

He packed up the picture, slung on his knapsack, and they set off. She stooped now and then to pick the starry, earth-lavender gentians from the roadside. As they passed the second of the valley hotels, they saw the man and wife sitting at a little table outside eating bread and cheese, while the mule-chair with its red velvet waited aside on the grass. They passed a whole grove of black-purple nightshade on the left, and some long, low cattle-huts which, with the stones on their roofs, looked as if they had grown up as stones grow in such places through the grass. In the wild, desert place some black pigs were snouting.

So they wound into the head of the valley, and saw the steep face ahead, and high up, like vapour or foam dripping from the fangs of a beast, waterfalls vapouring down from the deep fangs of ice. And there was one end of the glacier, like a great bluey-white fur just slipping over the slope of the rock.

As the valley closed in again the flowers were very lovely, especially the big, dark, icy bells, like harebells, that would sway so easily, but which hung dark and with that terrible motionlessness of upper mountain flowers. And the road turned to get on to the long slant in the cliff face, where it climbed like a stair. Slowly, slowly the two climbed up. Now again they saw the valley below, behind. The mule-chair was coming, hastening, the lady seated tight facing backwards, as the chair faced, and wrapped in rugs. The tall, fair, middle-aged husband in knickerbockers strode just behind, bare-headed.

Alexander and Hannele climbed slowly, slowly up the slant, under the dripping rock-face where the white and veined flowers of the grass of Parnassus

still rose straight and chilly in the shadow, like water which had taken on itself white flower-flesh. Above they saw the slipping edge of the glacier, like a terrible great paw, bluey. And from the skyline dark grey clouds were fuming up, fuming up as if breathed black and icily out from some ice-cauldron.

‘It is going to rain,’ said Alexander.

‘Not much,’ said Hannele shortly.

‘I hope not,’ said he.

And still she would not hurry up that steep slant, but insisted on standing to look. So the dark, ice-black clouds fumed solid, and the rain began to fly on a cold wind. The mule-chair hastened past, the lady sitting comfortably with her back to the mule, a little pheasant-trimming in her tweed hat, while her Tannhäuser husband reached for his dark, cape-frilled mantle.

Alexander had his dust-coat, but Hannele had nothing but a light knitted jersey-coat, such as women wear indoors. Over the hollow crest above came the cold, steel rain. They pushed on up the slope. From behind came another mule, and a little old man hurrying, and a little cart like a hand-barrow, on which were hampers with cabbage and carrots and peas and joints of meat, for the hotel above.

‘*Wird es viel sein?*’ asked Alexander of the little gnome. ‘Will it be much?’

‘*Was meint der Herr?*’ replied the other. ‘What does the gentleman say?’

‘*Der Regen, wir des lang dauern?* Will the rain last long?’

‘*Nein. Nein. Dies ist kein langer Regen.*’

So, with his mule, which had to stand exactly at that spot to make droppings, the little man resumed his way, and Hannele and Alexander were the last on the slope. The air smelt steel-cold of rain, and of hot droppings. Alexander watched the rain beat on the shoulders and on the blue skirt of Hannele.

‘It is a pity you left your big coat down below,’ he said.

‘What good is it saying so now!’ she replied, pale at the nose with anger.

‘Quite,’ he said, as his eyes glowed and his brow blackened. ‘What good suggesting anything at any time, apparently?’

She turned round on him in the rain, as they stood perched nearly at the summit of that slanting cliff-climb, with a glacier-paw hung almost invisible above, and waters gloating aloud in the gulf below. She faced him, and he faced her.

‘What have you ever suggested to me?’ she said, her face naked as the rain itself with an ice-bitter fury. ‘What have you ever suggested to me?’

‘When have you ever been open to suggestion?’ he said, his face dark and his eyes curiously glowing.

‘I? I? Ha! Haven’t I waited for you to suggest something? And all you can do

is to come here with a picture to reproach me for having sold your doll. Ha! I'm glad I sold it. A foolish barren effigy it was too, a foolish staring thing. What should I do but sell it. Why should I keep it, do you imagine?'

'Why do you come here with me today, then?'

'Why do I come here with you today?' she replied. 'I come to see the mountains, which are wonderful, and give me strength. And I come to see the glacier. Do you think I come here to see *you*? Why should I? You are always in some hotel or other away below.'

'You came to see the glacier and the mountains *with* me,' he replied.

'Did I? Then I made a mistake. You can do nothing but find fault even with God's mountains.'

A dark flame suddenly went over his face.

'Yes,' he said, 'I hate them, I hate them. I hate their snow and their affectations.'

'*Affectation!*' she laughed. 'Oh! Even the mountains are affected for you, are they?'

'Yes,' he said. 'Their loftiness and their uplift. I hate their uplift. I hate people prancing on mountain-tops and feeling exalted. I'd like to make them all stop up there, on their mountain-tops, and chew ice to fill their stomachs. I wouldn't let them down again, I wouldn't. I hate it all, I tell you; I hate it.'

She looked in wonder on his dark, glowing, ineffectual face. It seemed to her like a dark flame burning in the daylight and in the ice-rains: very ineffectual and unnecessary.

'You must be a little mad,' she said superbly, 'to talk like that about the mountains. They are so much bigger than you.'

'No,' he said. 'No! They are not.'

'What!' she laughed aloud. 'The mountains are not bigger than you? But you are extraordinary.'

'They are not bigger than me,' he cried. 'Any more than you are bigger than me if you stand on a ladder. They are not bigger than me. They are less than me.'

'Oh! Oh!' she cried in wonder and ridicule. 'The mountains are less than you.'

'Yes,' he cried, 'they are less.'

He seemed suddenly to go silent and remote as she watched him. The speech had gone out of his face again, he seemed to be standing a long way off from her, beyond some border-line. And in the midst of her indignant amazement she watched him with wonder and a touch of fascination. To what country did he belong then? — to what dark, different atmosphere?

'You must suffer from megalomania,' she said. And she said what she felt.

But he only looked at her out of dark, dangerous, haughty eyes.

They went on their way in the rain in silence. He was filled with a passionate silence and imperiousness, a curious, dark, masterful force that supplanted thought in him. And she, who always pondered, went pondering: 'Is he mad? What does he mean? Is he a madman? He wants to bully me. He wants to bully me into something. What does he want to bully me into? Does he want me to love him?'

At this final question she rested. She decided that what he wanted was that she should love him. And this thought flattered her vanity and her pride and appeased her wrath against him. She felt quite mollified towards him.

But what a way he went about it! He wanted her to love him. Of this she was sure. He had always wanted her to love him, even from the first. Only he had not made up his *mind* about it. He had not made up his mind. After his wife had died he had gone away to make up his mind. Now he had made it up. He wanted her to love him. And he was offended, mortally offended because she had sold his doll.

So, this was the conclusion to which Hannele came. And it pleased her, and it flattered her. And it made her feel quite warm towards him, as they walked in the rain. The rain, by the way, was abating. The spume over the hollow crest to which they were approaching was thinning considerably. They could again see the glacier paw hanging out a little beyond. The rain was going to pass. And they were not far now from the hotel, and the third level of Lammerboden.

He wanted her to love him. She felt again quite glowing and triumphant inside herself, and did not care a bit about the rain on her shoulders. He wanted her to love him. Yes, that was how she had to put it. He didn't want to *love* her. No. He wanted *her* to love *him*.

But then, of course, woman-like, she took his love for granted. So many men had been so very ready to love her. And this one — to her amazement, to her indignation, and rather to her secret satisfaction — just blackly insisted that *she* must love *him*. Very well — she would give him a run for his money. That was it: he blackly insisted that *she* must love *him*. What he felt was not to be considered. *She* must love *him*. And be bullied into it. That was what it amounted to. In his silent, black, overbearing soul, he wanted to compel her, he wanted to have power over her. He wanted to make her love him so that he had power over her. He wanted to bully her, physically, sexually, and from the inside.

And she! Well, she was just as confident that she was not going to be bullied. She would love him: probably she would: most probably she did already. But she was not going to be bullied by him in any way whatsoever. No, he must go down on his knees to her if he wanted her love. And then she would love him.

Because she *did* love him. But a dark-eyed little master and bully she would never have.

And this was her triumphant conclusion. Meanwhile the rain had almost ceased, they had almost reached the rim of the upper level, towards which they were climbing, and he was walking in that silent diffidence which made her watch him because she was not sure what he was feeling, what he was thinking, or even what he was. He was a puzzle to her: eternally incomprehensible in his feelings and even his sayings. There seemed to her no logic and no reason in what he felt and said. She could never tell what his next mood would come out of. And this made her uneasy, made her watch him. And at the same time it piqued her attention. He had some of the fascination of the incomprehensible. And his curious inscrutable face — it wasn't really only a meaningless mask, because she had seen it half an hour ago melt with a quite incomprehensible and rather, to her mind, foolish passion. Strange, black, inconsequential passion. Asserting with that curious dark ferocity that he was bigger than the mountains. Madness! Madness! Megalomania.

But because he gave himself away, she forgave him and even liked him. And the strange passion of his, that gave out incomprehensible flashes, *was* rather fascinating to her. She felt just a tiny bit sorry for him. But she wasn't going to be bullied by him. She wasn't going to give in to him and his black passion. No, never. It must be love on equal terms or nothing. For love on equal terms she was quite ready. She only waited for him to offer it.

XVII

In the hotel was a buzz of tourists. Alexander and Hannele sat in the restaurant drinking hot coffee and milk, and watching the maidens in cotton frocks and aprons and bare arms, and the fair youths with maidenly necks and huge voracious boots, and the many Jews of the wrong sort and the wrong shape. These Jews were all being very Austrian, in Tyrol costume that didn't sit on them, assuming the whole gesture and intonation of aristocratic Austria, so that you might think they *were* Austrian aristocrats, if you weren't properly listening, or if you didn't look twice. Certainly they were lords of the Alps, or at least lords of the Alpine hotels this summer, let prejudice be what it might. Jews of the wrong sort. And yet even they imparted a wholesome breath of sanity, disillusion, unsentimentality to the excited '*Bergheil*' atmosphere. Their dark-eyed, sardonic presence seemed to say to the maidenly-necked mountain youths: 'Don't sprout wings of the spirit too much, my dears.'

The rain had ceased. There was a wisp of sunshine from a grey sky. Alexander

left the knapsack, and the two went out into the air. Before them lay the last level of the up-climb, the Lammerboden. It was a rather gruesome hollow between the peaks, a last shallow valley about a mile long. At the end the enormous static stream of the glacier poured in from the blunt mountain-top of ice. The ice was dull, sullen-coloured, melted on the surface by the very hot summer: and so it seemed a huge, arrested, sodden flood, ending in a wave-wall of stone-speckled ice upon the valley bed of rocky débris. A gruesome descent of stone and blocks of rock, the little valley bed, with a river raving through. On the left rose the grey rock, but the glacier was there, sending down great paws of ice. It was like some great, deep-furred ice-bear lying spread upon the top heights, and reaching down terrible paws of ice into the valley: like some immense sky-bear fishing in the earth's solid hollows from above. Hepburn it just filled with terror. Hannele too it scared, but it gave her a sense of ecstasy. Some of the immense, furrowed paws of ice held down between the rock were vivid blue in colour, but of a frightening, poisonous blue, like crystal copper sulphate. Most of the ice was a sullen, semi-translucent greeny grey.

The two set off to walk through the massy, desolate stone-bed, under rocks and over waters, to the main glacier. The flowers were even more beautiful on this last reach. Particularly the dark harebells were large and almost black and ice-metallic: one could imagine they gave a dull ice-chink. And the grass of Parnassus stood erect, white-veined big cups held terribly naked and open to their ice air.

From behind the great blunt summit of ice that blocked the distance at the end of the valley, a pale-grey, woolly mist or cloud was fusing up, exhaling huge, like some grey-dead aura into the sky, and covering the top of the glacier. All the way along the valley people were threading, strangely insignificant, among the grey dishevel of stone and rock, like insects. Hannele and Alexander went ahead quickly, along the tiring track.

'Are you glad now that you came?' she said, looking at him triumphant.

'Very glad I came,' he said. His eyes were dilated with excitement that was ordeal or mystic battle rather than the *Bergheil* ecstasy. The curious vibration of his excitement made the scene strange, rather horrible to her. She too shuddered. But it still seemed to her to hold the key to all glamour and ecstasy, the great silent, living glacier. It seemed to her like a grand beast.

As they came near they saw the wall of ice: the glacier end, thick crusted and speckled with stone and dirt debris. From underneath, secret in stones, water rushed out. When they came quite near, they saw the great monster was sweating all over, trickles and rivulets of sweat running down his sides of pure, slush-translucent ice. There it was, the glacier, ending abruptly in the wall of ice under

which they stood. Near to, the ice was pure, but water-logged, all the surface rather rotten from the hot summer. It was sullenly translucent, and of a watery, darkish bluey-green colour. But near the earth it became again bright coloured, gleams of green like jade, gleams of blue like thin, pale sapphire, in little caverns above the wet stones where the walls trickled for ever.

Alexander wanted to climb on to the glacier. It was his one desire — to stand upon it. So under the pellucid wet wall they toiled among rock upwards, to where the guide-track mounted the ice. Several other people were before them — mere day tourists — and all uncertain about venturing any farther. For the ice-slope rose steep and slithery, pure, sun-locked, sweating ice. Still, it was like a curved back. One could scramble on to it, and on up to the first level, like the flat on top of some huge paw.

There stood the little cluster of people, facing the uphill of sullen, pure, sodden-looking ice. They were all afraid: naturally. But being human, they all wanted to go beyond their fear. It was strange that the ice looked so pure, like flesh. Not bright, because the surface was soft like a soft, deep epidermis. But pure ice away down to immense depths.

Alexander, after some hesitation, began gingerly to try the ice. He was frightened of it. And he had no stick, and only smooth-soled boots. But he had a great desire to stand on the glacier. So, gingerly and shakily, he began to struggle a few steps up the pure slope. The ice was soft on the surface, he could kick his heel in it and get a little sideways grip. So, staggering and going sideways he got up a few yards, and was on the naked ice-slope.

Immediately the youths and the fat man below began to tackle it too: also two maidens. For some time, however, Alexander gingerly and scramblingly led the way. The slope of ice was steeper, and rounded, so that it was difficult to stand up in any way. Sometimes he slipped, and was clinging with burnt finger-ends to the soft ice mass. Then he tried throwing his coat down, and getting a foot-hold on that. Then he went quite quickly by bending down and getting a little grip with his fingers, and going ridiculously as on four legs.

Hannele watched from below, and saw the ridiculous exhibition, and was frightened and amused, but more frightened. And she kept calling, to the great joy of the Austrians down below:

‘Come back. Do come back.’

But when he got on to his feet again he only waved his hand at her, half crossly, as she stood away down there in her blue frock. The other fellows with sticks and nail-boots had now taken heart and were scrambling like crabs past our hero, doing better than he.

He had come to a rift in the ice. He sat near the edge and looked down. Clean,

pure ice, fused with pale colour, and fused into intense copper-sulphate blue away down in the crack. It was not like crystal, but fused as one fuses a borax bead under a blow-flame. And keenly, wickedly blue in the depths of the crack.

He looked upwards. He had not half mounted the slope. So on he went, upon the huge body of the soft-fleshed ice, slanting his way sometimes on all fours, sometimes using his coat, usually hitting-in with the side of his heel. Hannele down below was crying him to come back. But two other youths were now almost level with him.

So he struggled on till he was more or less over the brim. There he stood and looked at the ice. It came down from above in a great hollow world of ice. A world, a terrible place of hills and valleys and slopes, all motionless, all of ice. Away above the grey mist-cloud was looming bigger. And near at hand were long, huge cracks, side by side, like gills in the ice. It would seem as if the ice breathed through these great ridged gills. One could look down into the series of gulfs, fearful depths, and the colour burning that acid, intense blue, intenser as the crack went deeper. And the crests of the open gills ridged and grouped pale blue above the crevices. It seemed as if the ice breathed there.

The wonder, the terror, and the bitterness of it. Never a warm leaf to unfold, never a gesture of life to give off. A world sufficient unto itself in lifelessness, all this ice.

He turned to go down, though the youths were passing beyond him. And seeing the naked translucent ice heaving downwards in a vicious curve, always the same dark translucency underfoot, he was afraid. If he slipped, he would certainly slither the whole way down, and break some of his bones. Even when he sat down he had to cling with his finger-nails in the ice, because if he had started to slide he would have slid the whole way down on his trouser-seat, precipitously, and have landed heaven knows how.

Hannele was watching from below. And he was frightened, perched, seated on the shoulder of ice and not knowing how to get off. Above he saw the great blue gills of ice ridging the air. Down below were two blue cracks — then the last wet level claws of ice upon the stones. And there stood Hannele and the three or four people who had got so far.

However, he found that by striking in his heels sideways with sufficient sharpness he could keep his footing, no matter how steep the slope. So he started to jerk his way zig-zag downwards.

As he descended, arrived a guide with a black beard and all the paraphernalia of ropes and pole and bristling boots. He and his gentlemen began to strike their way up the ice. With those bristling nails like teeth in one's boots, it was quite easy: and a pole to press on to.

Hannele, who had got sick of waiting, and who was also frightened, had gone scuttling on the return journey. He hurried after her, thankful to be off the ice, but excited and gratified. Looking round, he saw the guide and the men on the ice watching the ice-world and the weather. Then they too turned to come down. The day wasn't safe.

XVIII

Pondering, rather thrilled, they threaded their way through the desert of rock and rushing water back to the hotel. The sun was shining warmly for a moment, and he felt happy, though his finger-ends were bleeding a little from the ice.

'But one day,' said Hannele, 'I should love to go with a guide right up, high, right into the glacier.'

'No,' said he. 'I've been far enough. I prefer the world where cabbages will grow on the soil. Nothing grows on glaciers.'

'They say there are glacier fleas, which only live on glaciers,' she said.

'Well, to me the ice didn't look good to eat, even for a flea.'

'You never know,' she laughed. 'But you're glad you've been, aren't you?'

'Very glad. Now I need never go again.'

'But you *did* think it wonderful?'

'Marvellous. And awful, to my mind.'

XIX

They ate venison and spinach in the hotel, then set off down again. Both felt happier. She gathered some flowers and put them in her handkerchief so they should not die. And again they sat by the stream, to drink a little wine.

But the fume of cloud was blowing up again, thick from behind the glacier. Hannele was uneasy. She wanted to get down. So they went fairly quickly. Many other tourists were hurrying downwards also. The rain began — a sharp handful of drops flung from beyond the glacier. So Hannele and he did not stay to rest, but dropped easily down the steep, dark valley towards the motor-car terminus.

There they had tea, rather tired, but comfortably so. The big hotel restaurant was hideous, and seemed sordid. So in the gloom of a grey, early twilight they went out again and sat on a seat, watching the tourists and the trippers and the motor-car men. There were three Jews from Vienna: and the girl had a huge white woolly dog, as big as a calf, and white and woolly and silky and amiable as a toy. The men, of course, came patting it and admiring it, just as men always do, in life and in novels. And the girl, holding the leash, posed and leaned

backwards in the attitude of heroines on novel-covers. She said the white cool monster was a Siberian steppe-dog. Alexander wondered what the steppes made of such a wuffer. And the three Jews pretended they were elegant Austrians out of popular romances.

‘Do you think,’ said Alexander, ‘you will marry the Herr Regierungsrat?’

She looked round, making wide eyes.

‘It looks like it, doesn’t it!’ she said.

‘Quite,’ he said.

Hannele watched the woolly white dog. So of course it came wagging its ever-amiable hindquarters towards her. She looked at it still, but did not touch it.

‘What makes you ask such a question?’ she said.

‘I can’t say. But even so, you haven’t really answered. Do you really fully intend to marry the Herr Regierungsrat? Is that your final intention at this moment?’

She looked at him again.

‘But before I answer,’ she said, ‘oughtn’t I to know why you ask?’

‘Probably you know already,’ he said.

‘I assure you I don’t.’

He was silent for some moments. The huge, woolly dog stood in front of him and breathed enticingly, with its tongue out. He only looked at it blankly.

‘Well,’ he said, ‘if you were not going to marry the Herr Regierungsrat, I should suggest that you marry me.’

She stared away at the auto-garage, a very faint look of amusement, or pleasure, or ridicule on her face: or all three. And a certain shyness.

‘But why?’ she said.

‘Why what?’ he returned.

‘Why should you suggest that I should marry you?’

‘Why?’ he replied, in his lingering tones. ‘Why? Well, for what purpose does a man usually ask a woman to marry him?’

‘For what *purpose!*’ she repeated, rather haughtily.

‘For what reason, then!’ he corrected.

She was silent for some moments. Her face was closed and a little numb-looking, her hands lay very still in her lap. She looked away from him, across the road.

‘There is usually only one reason,’ she replied, in a rather small voice.

‘Yes?’ he replied curiously. ‘What would you say that was?’

She hesitated. Then she said, rather stiffly:

‘Because he really loved her, I suppose. That seems to me the only excuse for a man asking a woman to marry him.’

Followed a dead silence, which she did not intend to break. He knew he would have to answer, and for some reason he didn't want to say what was obviously the thing to say.

'Leaving aside the question of whether you love me or I love you — ' he began.

'I certainly *won't* leave it aside,' she said.

'And I certainly won't consider it,' he said, just as obstinately.

She turned now and looked full at him, with amazement, ridicule, and anger in her face.

'I really think you must be mad,' she said.

'I doubt if you do think that,' he replied. 'It is only a method of retaliation, that is. I think you understand my point very clearly.'

'Your point!' she cried. 'Your point! Oh, so you have a point in all this palavering?'

'Quite!' said he.

She was silent with indignation for some time. Then she said angrily:

'I assure you I do *not* see your point. I don't see any point at all. I see only impertinence.'

'Very good,' he replied. 'The point is whether we marry on a basis of love.'

'Indeed! Marry! We, marry! I don't think that is by any means the point.'

He took his knapsack from under the seat between his feet. And from the knapsack he took the famous picture.

'When,' he said, 'we were supposed to be in love with one another, you made that doll of me, didn't you?' And he sat looking at the odious picture.

'I never for one moment deluded myself that you *really* loved me,' she said bitterly.

'Take the other point, whether *you* loved *me* or not,' said he.

'How could I love you when I couldn't believe in your love for me?' she cried.

He put the picture down between his knees again.

'All this about love,' he said, 'is very confusing and very complicated.'

'Very! In *your* case. Love to me is simple enough,' she said.

'Is it? Is it? And was it simple love which made you make that doll of me?'

'Why shouldn't I make a doll of you? Does it do you any harm? And *weren't* you a doll, good heavens! You *were* nothing but a doll. So what hurt does it do you?'

'Yes, it does. It does me the greatest possible damage,' he replied.

She turned on him with wide-open eyes of amazement and rage.

'Why? Pray why? Can you tell me why?'

‘Not quite, I can’t,’ he replied, taking up the picture and holding it in front of him. She turned her face from it as a cat turns its nose away from a lighted cigarette.’ But when I look at it — when I look at this — then I *know* that there is no love between you and me.’

‘Then why are you talking at me in this shameful way?’ she flashed at him, tears of anger and mortification rising to her eyes. ‘You want your little revenge on me, I suppose, because I made that doll of you.’

‘That may be so, in a small measure,’ he said.

‘That is *all*. That is all and everything,’ she cried. ‘And that is all you came back to me for — for this petty revenge. Well, you’ve had it now. But please don’t speak to me any more. I shall see if I can go home in the big omnibus.’

She rose and walked away. He saw her hunting for the motor-bus conductor. He saw her penetrate into the yard of the garage. And he saw her emerge again, after a time, and take the path to the river. He sat on in front of the hotel. There was nothing else to do.

The tourists who had arrived in the big bus now began to collect. And soon the huge, drab vehicle itself rolled up and stood big as a house before the hotel door. The passengers began to scramble into their seats. The two men of the white dog were going: but the woman of the white dog, and the dog, were staying behind. Hepburn wondered if Hannele had managed to get herself transferred. He doubted it, because he knew the omnibus was crowded.

Moreover, he had her ticket.

The passengers were packed in. The conductor was collecting the tickets. And at last the great bus rolled away. The bay of the road-end seemed very empty. Even the woman with the white dog had gone. Soon the other car, the *Luxus*, so-called, must appear. Hepburn sat and waited. The evening was falling chilly, the trees looked gruesome.

At last Hannele sauntered up again, unwillingly.

‘I think,’ she said, ‘you have my ticket.’

‘Yes, I have,’ he replied.

‘Will you give it me, please?’

He gave it to her. She lingered a moment. Then she walked away.

There was the sound of a motor-car. With a triumphant purr the *Luxus* came steering out of the garage yard and drew up at the hotel door. Hannele came hastening also. She went straight to one of the hinder doors — she and Hepburn had their seats in front, beside the driver. She had her foot on the step of the back seat. And then she was afraid. The little sharp-faced driver — there was no conductor — came round looking at the car. He looked at her with his sharp, metallic eye of a mechanic.

‘Are all the people going back who came?’ she asked, shrinking.

‘*Jawohl.*’

‘It is full — this car?’

‘*Jawohl.*’

‘There’s no other place?’

‘*Nein.*’

Hannele shrank away. The driver was absolutely laconic.

Six of the passengers were here: four were already seated. Hepburn sat still by the hotel door, Hannele lingered in the road by the car, and the little driver, with a huge woollen muffler round his throat, was running round and in and out looking for the two missing passengers. Of course there were two missing passengers. No, he could not find them. And off he trotted again, silently, like a weasel after two rabbits. And at last, when everybody was getting cross, he unearthed them and brought them scuttling to the car.

Now Hannele took her seat, and Hepburn beside her. The driver snapped up the tickets and climbed in past them. With a vindictive screech the car glided away down the ravine. Another beastly trip was over, another infernal joyful holiday done with.

‘I think,’ said Hepburn, ‘I may as well finish what I had to say.’

‘What?’ cried Hannele, fluttering in the wind of the rushing car.

‘I may as well finish what I had to say,’ shouted he, his breath blown away.

‘Finish then,’ she screamed, the ends of her scarf flickering behind her.

‘When my wife died,’ he said loudly, ‘I knew I couldn’t love any more.’

‘Oh — h!’ she screamed ironically.

‘In fact,’ he shouted, ‘I realized that, as far as I was concerned, love was a mistake.’

‘*What* was a mistake?’ she screamed.

‘Love,’ he bawled.

‘Love!’ she screamed. ‘A mistake?’ Her tone was derisive.

‘For me personally,’ he said, shouting.

‘Oh, only for you personally,’ she cried, with a pouf of laughter.

The car gave a great swerve, and she fell on the driver. Then she righted herself. It gave another swerve, and she fell on Alexander. She righted herself angrily. And now they ran straight on: and it seemed a little quieter.

‘I realized,’ he said, ‘that I had always made a mistake, undertaking to love.’

‘It must have been an undertaking for you,’ she cried.

‘Yes, I’m afraid it was. I never really wanted it. But I thought I did. And that’s where I made my mistake.’

‘Whom have you ever loved? — even as an undertaking?’ she asked.

‘To begin with, my mother: and that was a mistake. Then my sister: and that was a mistake. Then a girl I had known all my life: and that was a mistake. Then my wife: and that was my most terrible mistake. And then I began the mistake of loving you.’

‘Undertaking to love me, you mean,’ she said. ‘But then you never did properly undertake it. You never really *undertook* to love me.’

‘Not quite, did I?’ said he.

And she sat feeling angry that he had never made the undertaking.

‘No,’ he continued. ‘Not quite. That is why I came back to you. I don’t want to love you. I don’t want marriage on a basis of love.’

‘On a basis of what, then?’

‘I think you know without my putting it into words,’ he said.

‘Indeed, I assure you I don’t. You are much too mysterious,’ she replied.

Talking in a swiftly-running motor-car is a nerve-racking business. They both had a pause, to rest, and to wait for a quieter stretch of road.

‘It isn’t very easy to put it into words,’ he said. ‘But I tried marriage once on a basis of love, and I must say it was a ghastly affair in the long run. And I believe it would be so, for me, *whatever* woman I had.’

‘There must be something wrong with you, then,’ said she.

‘As far as love goes. And yet I want marriage. I want marriage. I want a woman to honour and obey me.’

‘If you are quite reasonable and very sparing with your commands,’ said Hannele. ‘And very careful how you give your orders.’

‘In fact, I want a sort of patient Griselda. I want to be honoured and obeyed. I don’t want love.’

‘How Griselda managed to honour that fool of a husband of hers, even if she obeyed him, is more than I can say,’ said Hannele. ‘I’d like to know what she *really* thought of him. Just what any woman thinks of a bullying fool of a husband.’

‘Well,’ said he, ‘that’s no good to me.’

They were silent now until the car stopped at the station. There they descended and walked on under the trees by the lake.

‘Sit on a seat,’ he said, ‘and let us finish.’

Hannele, who was really anxious to hear what he should say, and who, woman-like, was fascinated by a man when he began to give away his own inmost thoughts — no matter how much she might jeer afterwards — sat down by his side. It was a grey evening, just falling dark. Lights twinkled across the lake, the hotel over there threaded its strings of light. Some little boats came rowing quietly to shore. It was a grey, heavy evening, with that special sense of

dreariness with which a public holiday usually winds up.

‘Honour and obedience: and the proper physical feelings,’ he said. ‘To me that is marriage. Nothing else.’

‘But what are the proper physical feelings but love?’ asked Hannele.

‘No,’ he said. ‘A woman wants you to adore her, and be in love with her — and I shan’t. I will not do it again, if I live a monk for the rest of my days. I will neither adore you nor be in love with you.’

‘You won’t get a chance, thank you. And what do you call the proper physical feelings, if you are not in love? I think you want something vile.’

‘If a woman honours me — absolutely from the bottom of her nature honours me — and obeys me because of that, I take it, my desire for her goes very much deeper than if I was in love with her, or if I adored her.’

‘It’s the same thing. If you love, then everything is there — all the lot: your honour and obedience and everything. And if love isn’t there, nothing is there,’ she said.

‘That isn’t true,’ he replied. ‘A woman may love you, she may adore you, but she’ll never honour you nor obey you. The most loving and adoring woman today could any minute start and make a doll of her husband — as you made of me.’

‘Oh, that eternal doll. What makes it stick so in your mind?’

‘I don’t know. But there it is. It wasn’t malicious. It was flattering, if you like. But it just sticks in me like a thorn: like a thorn. And there it is, in the world, in Germany somewhere. And you can say what you like, but *any* woman, today, no matter *how* much she loves her man — she could start any minute and make a doll of him. And the doll would be her hero: and her hero would be no more than her doll. My wife might have done it. She did do it, in her mind. She had her doll of me right enough. Why, I heard her talk about me to other women. And her doll was a great deal sillier than the one you made. But it’s all the same. If a woman loves you, she’ll make a doll out of you. She’ll never be satisfied till she’s made your doll. And when she’s got your doll, that’s all she wants. And that’s what love means. And so, I won’t be loved. And I won’t love. I won’t have anybody loving me. It is an insult. I feel I’ve been insulted for forty years: by love, and the women who’ve loved me. I won’t be loved. And I won’t love. I’ll be honoured and I’ll be obeyed: or nothing.’

‘Then it’ll most probably be nothing,’ said Hannele sarcastically. ‘For I assure you I’ve nothing but love to offer.’

‘Then keep your love,’ said he.

She laughed shortly.

‘And you?’ she cried. ‘You! Even suppose you *were* honoured and obeyed. I

suppose all you've got to do is to sit there like a sultan and sup it up.'

'Oh no. I have many things to do. And woman or no woman, I'm going to start to do them.'

'What, pray?'

'Why, nothing very exciting. I'm going to East Africa to join a man who's breaking his neck to get his three thousand acres of land under control. And when I've done a few more experiments and observations, and got all the necessary facts, I'm going to do a book on the moon. Woman or no woman, I'm going to do that.'

'And the woman? — supposing you get the poor thing.'

'Why, she'll come along with me, and we'll set ourselves up out there.'

'And she'll do all the honouring and obeying and housekeeping incidentally, while you ride about in the day and stare at the moon in the night.'

He did not answer. He was staring away across the lake.

'What will you do for the woman, poor thing, while she's racking herself to pieces honouring you and obeying you and doing frightful housekeeping in Africa: because I know it can be *awful*: awful.'

'Well,' he said slowly, 'she'll be my wife, and I shall treat her as such. If the marriage service says love and cherish — well, in that sense I shall do so.'

'Oh!' cried Hannele. 'What, *love* her? Actually love the poor thing?'

'Not in that sense of the word, no. I shan't adore her or be in love with her. But she'll be my wife, and I shall love and cherish her as such.'

'Just because she's your wife. Not because she's herself. Ghastly fate for any miserable woman,' said Hannele.

'I don't think so. I think it's her highest fate.'

'To be your wife?'

'To be a wife — and to be loved and shielded as a wife — not as a flirting woman.'

'To be loved and cherished just because you're his wife! No, thank you. All I can admire is the conceit and impudence of it.'

'Very well, then — there it is,' he said, rising.

She rose too, and they went on towards where the boat was tied.

As they were rowing in silence over the lake, he said:

'I shall leave tomorrow.'

She made no answer. She sat and watched the lights of the villa draw near. And then she said:

'I'll come to Africa with you. But I won't promise to honour and obey you.'

'I don't want you otherwise,' he said, very quietly.

The boat was drifting to the little landing-stage. Hannele's friends were

halloing to her from the balcony.

‘Hallo!’ she cried. ‘*Ja. Da bin ich. Ja, ‘s war wunderschön.*’

Then to him she said:

‘You’ll come in?’

‘No,’ he said, ‘I’ll row straight back.’

From the villa they were running down the steps to meet Hannele.

‘But won’t you have me even if I love you?’ she asked him.

‘You must promise the other,’ he said. ‘It comes in the marriage service.’

‘*Hat ‘s geregnet? Wiewar das Wetter? Warst du auf dem Gletscher?*’ cried the voices from the garden.

‘*Nein — kein Regen. Wunderschön! Ja, er war ganz auf dem Gletscher,*’ cried Hannele in reply. And to him, *sotto voce*:

‘Don’t be a solemn ass. Do come in.’

‘No,’ he said, ‘I don’t want to come in.’

‘Do you want to go away tomorrow? Go if you *do*. But, anyway, I won’t say it *before* the marriage service. I needn’t, need I?’

She stepped from the boat on to the plank.

‘Oh,’ she said, turning round, ‘give me that picture, please, will you? I want to burn it.’

He handed it to her.

‘And come tomorrow, will you?’ she said.

‘Yes, in the morning.’

He pulled back quickly into the darkness.

THE END

ST. MAWR



Lou Witt had had her own way so long, that by the age of twenty-five she didn't know where she was. Having one's own way landed one completely at sea.

To be sure for a while she had failed in her grand love affair with Rico. And then she had had something really to despair about. But even that had worked out as she wanted. Rico had come back to her, and was dutifully married to her. And now, when she was twenty-five and he was three months older, they were a charming married couple. He flirted with other women still, to be sure. He wouldn't be the 'handsome Rico if he didn't. But she had 'got' him. Oh yes! You had only to see the uneasy backward glance at her, from his big blue eyes: just like a horse that is edging away from its master: to know how completely he was mastered.

She, with her odd little museau, not exactly pretty, but very attractive; and her quaint air of playing at being well bred, in a sort of charade game; and her queer familiarity with foreign cities and foreign languages; and the lurking sense of being an outsider everywhere, like a sort of gipsy, who is at home anywhere and nowhere: all this made up her charm and her failure. She didn't quite belong.

Of course she was American: Louisiana family, moved down to Texas. And she was moderately rich, with no close relation except her mother. But she had been sent to school in France when she was twelve, and since she had finished school, she had drifted from Paris to Palermo, Biarritz to Vienna and back via Munich to London, then down again to Rome. Only fleeting trips to her America.

So what sort of American was she, after all?

And what sort of European was she either? She didn't 'belong' anywhere. Perhaps most of all in Rome, among the artists and the Embassy people.

It was in Rome she had met Rico. He was an Australian, son of a government official in Melbourne, who had been made a baronet. So one day Rico would be Sir Henry, as he was the only son. Meanwhile he floated round Europe on a very small allowance — his father wasn't rich in capital — and was being an artist.

They met in Rome when they were twenty-two, and had a love affair in Capri. Rico was handsome, elegant, but mostly he had spots of paint on his trousers and he ruined a necktie pulling it off. He behaved in a most floridly elegant fashion, fascinating to the Italians. But at the same time he was canny and shrewd and sensible as any young poser could be and, on principle, good-hearted, anxious.

He was anxious for his future, and anxious for his place in the world, he was poor, and suddenly wasteful in spite of all his tension of economy, and suddenly spiteful in spite of all his ingratiating efforts, and suddenly ungrateful in spite of all his burden of gratitude, and suddenly rude in spite of all his good manners, and suddenly detestable in spite of all his suave, courtier-like amiability.

He was fascinated by Lou's quaint aplomb, her experiences, her 'knowledge', her *gamine* knowingness, her aloneness, her pretty clothes that were sometimes an utter failure, and her southern 'drawl' that was sometimes so irritating. That singsong which was so American. Yet she used no Americanisms at all, except when she lapsed into her odd spasms of acid irony, when she was very American indeed!

And she was fascinated by Rico. They played to each other like two butterflies at one flower. They pretended to be very poor in Rome — he was poor: and very rich in Naples. Everybody stared their eyes out at them. And they had that love affair in Capri.

But they reacted badly on each other's nerves. She became ill. Her mother appeared. He couldn't stand Mrs. Witt, and Mrs. Witt couldn't stand him. There was a terrible fortnight. Then Lou was popped into a convent nursing-home in Umbria, and Rico dashed off to Paris. Nothing would stop him. He must go back to Australia.

He went to Melbourne, and while there his father died, leaving him a baronet's title and an income still very moderate. Lou visited America once more, as the strangest of strange lands to her. She came away disheartened, panting for Europe, and, of course, doomed to meet Rico again.

They couldn't get away from one another, even though in the course of their rather restrained correspondence he informed her that he was 'probably' marrying a very dear girl, friend of his childhood, only daughter of one of the oldest families in Victoria. Not saying much.

He didn't commit the probability, but reappeared in Paris, wanting to paint his head off, terribly inspired by Cézanne and by old Renoir. He dined at the Rotonde with Lou and Mrs. Witt, who, with her queer democratic New Orleans sort of conceit, looked round the drinking-hall with savage contempt, and at Rico as part of the show. "Certainly," she said, "when these people here have got any money, they fall in love on a full stomach. And when they've got no money, they fall in love with a full pocket. I never was in a more disgusting place. They take their love like some people take after-dinner pills."

She would watch with her arching, full, strong grey eyes, sitting there erect and silent in her well-bought American clothes. And then she would deliver some such charge of grape-shot. Rico always writhed.

Mrs. Witt hated Paris: "this sordid, unlucky city," she called it. "Something unlucky is bound to happen to me in this sinister, unclean town," she said. "I feel contagion in the air of this place. For heaven's sake, Louise, let us go to Morocco or somewhere."

"No, mother dear, I can't now. Rico has proposed to me, and I have accepted him. Let us think about a wedding, shall we?"

"There!" said Mrs. Witt. "I said it was an unlucky city!"

And the peculiar look of extreme New Orleans annoyance came round her sharp nose. But Lou and Rico were both twenty-four years old, and beyond management. And, anyhow, Lou would be Lady Carrington. But Mrs. Witt was exasperated beyond exasperation. She would almost rather have preferred Lou to elope with one of the great, evil porters at Les Halles. Mrs. Witt was at the age when the malevolent male in man, the old Adam, begins to loom above all the social tailoring. And yet — and yet — it was better to have Lady Carrington for a daughter, seeing Lou was that sort.

There was a marriage, after which Mrs. Witt departed to America, Lou and Rico leased a little old house in Westminster, and began to settle into a certain layer of English society. Rico was becoming an almost fashionable portrait-painter. At least, he was almost fashionable, whether his portraits were or not. And Lou, too, was almost fashionable: almost a hit. There was some flaw somewhere. In spite of their appearances, both Rico and she would never quite go down in any society. They were the drifting artist sort. Yet neither of them was content to be of the drifting artist sort. They wanted to fit in, to make good.

Hence the little house in Westminster, the portraits, the dinners, the friends, and the visits. Mrs. Witt came and sardonically established herself in a suite in a quiet but good-class hotel not far off. Being on the spot. And her terrible grey eyes with the touch of a leer looked on at the hollow mockery of things. As if she knew of anything better!

Lou and Rico had a curious exhausting effect on one another: neither knew why. They were fond of one another. Some inscrutable bond held them together. But it was a strange vibration of the nerves, rather than of the blood. A nervous attachment, rather than a sexual love. A curious tension of will, rather than a spontaneous passion. Each was curiously under the domination of the other. They were a pair — they had to be together. Yet quite soon they shrank from one another. This attachment of the will and the nerves was destructive. As soon as one felt strong, the other felt ill. As soon as the ill one recovered strength, down went the one who had been well.

And soon, tacitly, the marriage became more like a friendship, platonic. It was a marriage, but without sex. Sex was shattering and exhausting, they shrank

from it, and became like brother and sister. But still they were husband and wife. And the lack of physical relation was a secret source of uneasiness and chagrin to both of them. They would neither of them accept it. Rico looked with contemplative, anxious eyes at other women.

Mrs. Witt kept track of everything, watching, as it were, from outside the fence, like a potent well-dressed demon, full of uncanny energy and a shattering sort of sense. She said little: but her small, occasionally biting remarks revealed her attitude of contempt for the *ménage*.

Rico entertained clever and well-known people. Mrs. Witt would appear, in her New York gowns and few good jewels. She was handsome, with her vigorous grey hair. But her heavy-lidded grey eyes were the despair of any hostess. They looked too many shattering things. And it was but too obvious that these clever, well-known English people got on her nerves terribly, with their finickiness and their fine-drawn discriminations. She wanted to put her foot through all these fine-drawn distinctions. She thought continually of the house of her girlhood, the plantation, the negroes, the planters: the sardonic grimness that underlay all the big, shiftless life. And she wanted to cleave with some of this grimness of the big, dangerous America, into the safe, finicky drawing-rooms of London. So naturally she was not popular.

But being a woman of energy, she had to do *something*. During the latter part of the war she had worked in the American Red Cross in France, nursing. She loved men — real men. But, on close contact, it was difficult to define what she meant by ‘real’ men. She never met any.

Out of the *débauche* of the war she had emerged with an odd piece of débris, in the shape of Geronimo Trujillo. He was an American, son of a Mexican father and a Navajo Indian mother, from Arizona. When you knew him well, you recognised the real half-breed, though at a glance he might pass as a sunburnt citizen of any nation, particularly of France. He looked like a certain sort of Frenchman, with his curiously-set dark eyes, his straight black hair, his thin black moustache, his rather long cheeks, and his almost slouching, diffident, sardonic bearing. Only when you knew him, and looked right into his eyes, you saw that unforgettable glint of the Indian.

He had been badly shell-shocked, and was for a time a wreck. Mrs. Witt, having nursed him into convalescence, asked him where he was going next. He didn't know. His father and mother were dead, and he had nothing to take him back to Phoenix, Arizona. Having had an education in one of the Indian high schools, the unhappy fellow had now no place in life at all. Another of the many misfits.

There was something of the Paris *Apache* in his appearance but he was all the

time withheld, and nervously shut inside himself. Mrs. Witt was intrigued by him.

“Very well, Phoenix,” she said, refusing to adopt his Spanish name, “I’ll see what I can do.”

What she did was to get him a place on a sort of manor farm, with some acquaintances of hers. He was very good with horses, and had a curious success with turkeys and geese and fowls.

Some time after Lou’s marriage, Mrs. Witt reappeared in London, from the country, with Phoenix in tow, and a couple of horses. She had decided that she would ride in the Park in the morning, and see the world that way. Phoenix was to be her groom.

So, to the great misgiving of Rico, behold Mrs. Witt in splendidly tailored habit and perfect boots, a smart black hat on her smart grey hair, riding a grey gelding as smart as she was, and looking down her conceited, inquisitive, scornful, aristocratic-democratic Louisiana nose at the people in Piccadilly, as she crossed to the Row, followed by the taciturn shadow of Phoenix, who sat on a chestnut with three white feet as if he had grown there.

Mrs. Witt, like many other people, always expected to find the real *beau monde* and the real *grand monde* somewhere or other. She didn’t quite give in to what she saw in the Bois de Boulogne, or in Monte Carlo, or on the Pincio: all a bit shoddy, and not very *beau* and not at all *grand*. There she was, with her grey eagle eye, her splendid complexion and her weapon-like health of a woman of fifty, dropping her eyelids a little, very slightly nervous, but completely prepared to despise the *monde* she was entering in Rotten Row.

In she sailed, and up and down that regatta-canal of horsemen and horsewomen under the trees of the Park. And yes, there were lovely girls with fair hair down their backs, on happy ponies. And awfully well-groomed papas, arid tight mamas who looked as if they were going to pour tea between the ears of their horses, and converse with banal skill, one eye on the teapot, one on the visitor with whom she was talking, and all the rest of her hostess’s argus eyes upon everybody in sight. That alert argus capability of the English matron was startling and a bit horrifying. Mrs. Witt would at once think of the old negro mammies, away in Louisiana. And her eyes became dagger-like as she watched the clipped, shorn, mincing young Englishmen. She refused to look at the prosperous Jews.

It was still the days before motor-cars were allowed in the Park, but Rico and Lou, sliding round Hyde Park Corner and up Park Lane in their car, would watch the steely horsewoman and the saturnine groom with a sort of dismay. Mrs. Witt seemed to be pointing a pistol at the bosom of every other horseman or

horsewoman and announcing: “*Your virility or your life! Your femininity or your life!*” She didn’t know herself what she really wanted them to be: but it was something as democratic as Abraham Lincoln and as aristocratic as a Russian czar, as highbrow as Arthur Balfour, and as taciturn and unideal as Phoenix. Everything at once.

There was nothing for it: Lou had to buy herself a horse and ride at her mother’s side, for very decency’s sake. Mrs. Witt was so like a smooth, levelled, gunmetal pistol, Lou had to be a sort of sheath. And she really looked pretty, with her clusters of dark, curly, New Orleans hair, like grapes, and her quaint brown eyes that didn’t quite match, and that looked a bit sleepy and vague, and at the same time quick as a squirrel’s. She was slight and elegant, and a tiny bit rakish, and somebody suggested she might be on the movies.

Nevertheless, they were in the society columns next morning — *two new and striking figures in the Row this morning were Lady Henry Carrington and her mother, Mrs. Witt, etc.* And Mrs. Witt liked it, let her say what she might. So did Lou. Lou liked it immensely. She simply luxuriated in the sun of publicity.

“Rico dear, you must get a horse.”

The tone was soft and southern and drawling, but the overtone had a decisive finality. In vain Rico squirmed — he had a way of writhing and squirming which perhaps he had caught at Oxford. In vain he protested that he couldn’t ride, and that he didn’t care for riding. He got quite angry, and his handsome arched nose tilted and his upper lip lifted from his teeth, like a dog that is going to bite. Yet daren’t quite bite.

And that was Rico. He daren’t quite bite. Not that he was really afraid of the others. He was afraid of himself, once he let himself go. He might rip up in an eruption of life-long anger all this pretty-pretty picture of a charming young wife and a delightful little home and a fascinating success as a painter of fashionable, and at the same time ‘great’ portraits: with colour, wonderful colour, and at the same time, form, marvellous form. He had composed this little tableau vivant with great effort. He didn’t want to erupt like some suddenly wicked horse — Rico was really more like a horse than a dog, a horse that might go nasty any moment. For the time, he was good, very good, dangerously good.

“Why, Rico dear, I thought you used to ride so much, in Australia, when you were young? Didn’t you tell me all about it, hm?” — and as she ended on that slow, singing *hm?*, which acted on him like an irritant and a drug, he knew he was beaten.

Lou kept the sorrel mare in a mews just behind the house in Westminster, and she was always slipping round to the stables. She had a funny little nostalgia for the place: something that really surprised her. She had never had the faintest

notion that she cared for horses and stables and grooms. But she did. She was fascinated. Perhaps it was her childhood's Texas associations come back. Whatever it was, her life with Rico in the elegant little house, and all her social engagements seemed like a dream, the substantial reality of which was those mews in Westminster, her sorrel mare, the owner of the mews, Mr. Saintsbury, and the grooms he employed. Mr. Saintsbury was a horsey, elderly man like an old maid, and he loved the sound of titles.

"Lady Carrington! — well I never! You've come to us for a bit of company again, I see. I don't know whatever we shall do if you go away, we shall be that lonely!" and he flashed his old-maid's smile at her. "No matter how grey the morning, your ladyship would make a beam of sunshine. Poppy is all right, I think..."

Poppy was the sorrel mare with the no white feet and the startled eye, and she was all right. And Mr. Saintsbury was smiling with his old-maid's mouth, and showing all his teeth.

"Come across with me, Lady Carrington, and look at a new horse just up from the country. I think he's worth a look, and I believe you have a moment to spare, your Ladyship."

Her Ladyship had too many moments to spare. She followed the sprightly, elderly, clean-shaven man across the yard to a loose-box, and waited while he opened the door.

In the inner dark she saw a handsome bay horse with his clean ears pricked like daggers from his naked head as he swung handsomely round to stare at the open doorway. He had big, black, brilliant eyes, with a sharp questioning glint, and that air of tense, alert quietness which betrays an animal that can be dangerous.

"Is he quiet?" Lou asked.

"Why — yes — my Lady! He's quiet, with those that know how to handle him. *Cup! my boy! Cup, my beauty! Cup then! St. Mawr!*"

Loquacious even with the animals, he went softly forward and laid his hand on the horse's shoulder, soft and quiet as a fly settling. Lou saw the brilliant skin of the horse crinkle a little in apprehensive anticipation, like the shadow of the descending hand on a bright red-gold liquid. But then the animal relaxed again.

"Quiet with those that know how to handle him, and a bit of a ruffian with those that don't. Isn't that the ticket, eh, St. Mawr?"

"What is his name?" Lou asked.

The man repeated it, with a slight Welsh twist — "He's from the Welsh borders, belonging to a Welsh gentleman, Mr. Griffith Edwards. But they're wanting to sell him."

“How old is he?” asked Lou.

“About seven years — seven years and five months,” said Mr. Saintsbury, dropping his voice as if it were a secret. “Could one ride him in the Park?”

“Well — yes! I should say a gentleman who knew how to handle him could ride him very well and make a very handsome figure in the Park.”

Lou at once decided that this handsome figure should be Rico’s. For she was already half in love with St. Mawr. He was of such a lovely red-gold colour, and a dark, invisible fire seemed to come out of him. But in his big black eyes there was a lurking afterthought. Something told her that the horse was not quite happy: that somewhere deep in his animal consciousness lived a dangerous, half-revealed resentment, a diffused sense of hostility. She realised that he was sensitive, in spite of his flaming, healthy strength, and nervous with a touchy uneasiness that might make him vindictive.

“Has he got any tricks?” she asked.

“Not that I know of, my Lady: not tricks exactly. But he’s one of these temperamental creatures, as they say. Though I say, every horse is temperamental, when you come down to it. But this one, it is as if he was a trifle raw somewhere. Touch this raw spot, and there’s no answering for him.”

“Where is he raw?” asked Lou, somewhat mystified. She thought he might really have some physical sore.

“Why, that’s hard to say, my Lady. If he was a human being, you’d say something had gone wrong in his life. But with a horse it’s not that, exactly. A highbred animal like St. Mawr needs understanding, and I don’t know as anybody has quite got the hang of him. I confess I haven’t myself. But I do realise that he is a special animal and needs a special sort of touch, and I’m willing he should have it, did I but know exactly what it is.”

She looked at the glowing bay horse that stood there with his ears back, his face averted, but attending as if he were some lightning-conductor. He was a stallion. When she realised this, she became more afraid of him.

“Why does Mr. Griffith Edwards want to sell him?” she asked.

“Well — my Lady — they raised him for stud purposes — but he didn’t answer. There are horses like that: don’t seem to fancy the mares for some reason. Well, anyway, they couldn’t keep him for the stud. And as you see, he’s a powerful, beautiful hackney, clean as a whistle, and eaten up with his own power. But there’s no putting him between the shafts. He won’t stand it. He’s a fine saddle-horse, beautiful action, and lovely to ride. But he’s got to be handled, and there you are.”

Lou felt there was something behind the man’s reticence.

“Has he ever made a break?” she asked, apprehensive.

“Made a break?” replied the man. “Well, if I must admit it, he’s had two accidents. Mr. Griffith Edwards’s son rode him a bit wild, away there in the Forest of Dean, and the young fellow had his skull smashed in against a low oak bough. Last autumn, that was. And some time back, he crushed a groom against the side of the stall — injured him fatally. But they were both accidents, my Lady. Things will happen.”

The man spoke in a melancholy, fatalistic way. The horse, with his ears laid back, seemed to be listening tensely, his face averted. He looked like something finely bred and passionate that has been judged and condemned.

“May I say *how do you do?*” she said to the horse, drawing a little nearer in her white, summery dress and lifting her hand that glittered with emeralds and diamonds.

He drifted away from her, as if some wind blew him. Then he ducked his head and looked sideway at her from his black, full eye.

“I think I’m all right,” she said, edging nearer, while he watched her.

She laid her hand on his side and gently stroked him. Then she stroked his shoulder, and then the hard, tense arch of his neck. And she was startled to feel the vivid heat of his life come through to her, through the lacquer of red-gold gloss. So slippery with vivid, hot life!

She paused, as if thinking, while her hand rested on the horse’s sun-arched neck. Dimly, in her weary young woman’s soul, an ancient understanding seemed to flood in. She wanted to buy St. Mawr.

“I think,” she said to Saintsbury, “if I can, I will buy him.” The man looked at her long and shrewdly.

“Well, my Lady,” he said at last, “there shall be nothing kept from you. But what would your Ladyship do with him, if I may make so bold?”

“I don’t know,” she replied vaguely. “I might take him to America.”

The man paused once more, then said:

“They say it’s been the making of some horses, to take them over the water, to Australia or such places. It might repay you — you never know.”

She wanted to buy St. Mawr. She wanted him to belong to her. For some reason the sight of him, his power, his alive, alert intensity, his unyieldingness, made her want to cry.

She never did cry: except sometimes with vexation, or to get her own way. As far as weeping went, her heart felt as dry as a Christmas walnut. What was the good of tears, anyhow? You had to keep on holding on in this life, never give way, and never give in. Tears only left one weakened and ragged.

But now, as if that mysterious fire of the horse’s body had split some rock in her, she went home and hid herself in her room, and just cried. The wild,

brilliant, alert head of St. Mawr seemed to look at her out of another world. It was as if she had had a vision, as if the walls of her Awn world had suddenly melted away, leaving her in a great darkness, in the midst of which the large, brilliant eyes of that horse looked at her with demonish question, while his naked ears stood up like daggers from the naked lines of his inhuman head, and his great body glowed red with power.

What was it? Almost like a god looking at her terribly out of the everlasting dark, she had felt the eyes of that horse; great, glowing, fearsome eyes, arched with a question and containing a white blade of light like a threat. What was his nonhuman question, and his uncanny threat? She didn't know. He was some splendid demon, and she must worship him.

She hid herself away from Rico. She could not bear the triviality and superficiality of her human relationships. Looming like some god out of the darkness was the head of that horse, with the wide, terrible, questioning eyes. And she felt that it forbade her to be her ordinary, commonplace self. It forbade her to be just Rico's wife, young Lady Carrington, and all that.

It haunted her, the horse. It had looked at her as she had never been looked at before: terrible, gleaming, questioning eyes arching out of darkness, and backed by all the fire of that great ruddy body. What did it mean, and what ban did it put upon her? She felt it put a ban on her heart: wielded some uncanny authority over her, that she dared not, could not understand.

No matter where she was, what she was doing, at the back of her consciousness loomed a great, over-aweing figure out of a dark background: St. Mawr, looking at her without really seeing her, yet gleaming a question at her, from his wide, terrible eyes, and gleaming a sort of menace, doom. Master of doom, he seemed to be!

"You are thinking about something, Lou dear!" Rico said to her that evening.

He was so quick and sensitive to detect her moods — so exciting in this respect. And his big, slightly prominent blue eyes, with the whites a little bloodshot, glanced at her quickly, with searching and anxiety, and a touch of fear, as if his conscience were always uneasy. He, too, was rather like a horse — but forever quivering with a sort of cold, dangerous mistrust, which he covered with anxious love.

At the middle of his eyes was a central powerlessness that left him anxious. It used to touch her to pity, that central look of powerlessness in him. But now, since she had seen the full, dark, passionate blaze of power and of different life in the eyes of the thwarted horse, the anxious powerlessness of the man drove her mad. Rico was so handsome, and he was so self-controlled, he had a gallant sort of kindness and a real worldly shrewdness. One had to admire him: at least

she had to.

But after all, and after all, it was a bluff, an attitude. He kept it all working in himself deliberately. It was an attitude.

She read psychologists who said that everything was an attitude. Even the best of everything. But now she realised that, with men and women, everything is an attitude only when something else is lacking. Something is lacking and they are thrown back on their own devices. That black fiery flow in the eyes of the horse was not 'attitude'. It was something much more terrifying, and real, the only thing that was real. Gushing from the darkness in menace and question, and blazing out in the splendid body of the horse.

"Was I thinking about something?" she replied in her slow, amused, casual fashion. As if everything was so casual and easy to her. And so it was, from the hard, polished side of herself. But that wasn't the whole story.

"I think you were, Loulina. May we offer the penny?"

"Don't trouble," she said. "I was thinking, if I was thinking of anything, about a bay horse called St. Mawr." — Her secret *almost* crept into her eyes.

"The name is awfully attractive," he said with a laugh. "Not so attractive as the creature himself. I'm going to buy him."

"Not really!" he said. "But why?"

"He is so attractive. I'm going to buy him for you."

"For *me*? *Darling*? How you do take me for granted. He may not be in the least attractive to me. As you know, I have hardly any feeling for horses at all. — Besides, how much does he cost?"

"That I don't know, Rico dear. But I'm sure you'll love him, for my sake." — She felt, now, she was merely playing for her own ends.

"Lou dearest, *don't* spend a fortune on a horse for me, which I *don't* want. Honestly, I prefer a car."

"Won't you ride with me in the Park, Rico?"

"Honestly, dear Lou, I don't want to."

"Why not, dear boy? You look so beautiful. I wish you would. — And, anyhow, come with me to look at St. Mawr."

Rico was divided. He had a certain uneasy feeling about horses. At the same time, he would like to cut a handsome figure in the Park.

They went across to the mews. A little Welsh groom was watering the brilliant horse.

"Yes, dear, he certainly is beautiful: such a marvellous colour! Almost orange! But rather large, I should say, to ride in the Park."

"No, for you he's perfect. You are so tall."

"He'd be marvellous in a Composition. That colour!" And all Rico could do

was to gaze with the artist's eye at the horse, with a glance at the groom.

"Don't you think the man is rather fascinating too?" he said, nursing his chin artistically and penetratingly. The groom, Lewis, was a little, quick, rather bow-legged, loosely-built fellow of indeterminate age, with a mop of black hair and a little black beard. He was grooming the brilliant St. Mawr out in the open. The horse was really glorious: like a marigold, with a pure golden sheen, a shimmer of green-gold lacquer upon a burning red-orange. There on the shoulder you saw the yellow lacquer glisten. Lewis, a little scrub of a fellow, worked absorbedly, unheedingly at the horse, with an absorption that was almost ritualistic. He seemed the attendant shadow of the ruddy animal.

"He goes with the horse," said Lou. "If we buy St. Mawr we get the man thrown in."

"They'd be so amusing to paint; such an extraordinary contrast! But darling, I *hope* you won't insist on buying the horse. It's so frightfully expensive."

"Mother will help me. — You'd look so well on him, Rico."

"If ever I dared take the liberty of getting on his back — —!"

"Why not?" She went quickly across the cobbled yard. "Good morning, Lewis. How is St. Mawr?"

Lewis straightened himself and looked at her from under the falling mop of his black hair.

"All right," he said.

He peered straight at her from under his overhanging black hair. He had pale grey eyes, that looked phosphorescent, and suggested the eyes of a wild cat peering intent from under the darkness of some bush where it lies unseen. Lou, with her brown, unmatched, oddly perplexed eyes, felt herself found out. — "He's a common little fellow," she thought to herself. "But he knows a woman and a horse at sight." — Aloud she said, in her Southern drawl:

"How do you think he'd be with Sir Henry?"

Lewis turned his remote, coldly watchful eyes on the young baronet. Rico was tall and handsome and balanced on his hips. His face was long and well-defined, and with the hair taken straight back from the brow. It seemed as well-made as his clothing, and as perpetually presentable. You could not imagine his face dirty, or scrubby and unshaven, or bearded, or even moustached. It was perfectly prepared for social purposes. If his head had been cut off, like John the Baptist's, it would have been a thing complete in itself, would not have missed the body in the least. The body was perfectly tailored. The head was one of the famous 'talking heads' of modern youth, with eyebrows a trifle Mephistophelian, large blue eyes a trifle hold, and curved mouth thrilling to death to kiss.

Lewis, the groom, staring from between his bush of hair and his beard,

watched like an animal from the underbrush. And Rico was still sufficiently a colonial to be uneasily aware of the underbrush, uneasy under the watchfulness of the pale grey eyes, and uneasy in that man-to-man exposure which is characteristic of the democratic colonies and of America. He knew he must ultimately be judged on his merits as a man, alone without a background: an ungarnished colonial.

This lack of background, this defenceless man-to-man business which left him at the mercy of every servant, was bad for his nerves. For he was also an artist. He bore up against it in a kind of desperation, and was easily moved to rancorous resentment. At the same time he was free of the Englishman's water-tight *suffisance*. He really was aware that he would have to hold his own all alone, thrown alone on his own defences in the universe. The extreme democracy of the Colonies had taught him this.

And this, the little aboriginal Lewis recognised in him. He recognised also Rico's curious hollow misgiving, fear of some deficiency in himself, beneath all his handsome, young-hero appearance.

"He'd be all right with anybody as would meet him halfway," said Lewis, in the quick Welsh manner of speech, impersonal.

"You hear, Rico!" said Lou in her singsong, turning to her husband.

"Perfectly, darling!"

"Would you be willing to meet St. Mawr halfway, hm?"

"All the way, darling! Mahomet would go all the way to that mountain. Who would dare do otherwise?"

He spoke with a laughing, yet piqued sarcasm.

"Why, I think St. Mawr would understand perfectly," she said in the soft voice of a woman haunted by love. And she went and laid her hand on the slippery, life-smooth shoulder of the horse. He, with his strange equine head lowered, its exquisite fine lines reaching a little snake-like forward, and his ears a little back, was watching her sideways from the corner of his eye. He was in a state of absolute mistrust, like a cat crouching to spring.

"St. Mawr!" she said. "St. Mawr! What is the matter? Surely you and I are all right!"

And she spoke softly, dreamily stroked the animal's neck. She could feel a response gradually coming from him. But he would not lift up his head. And when Rico suddenly moved nearer, he sprang with a sudden jerk backwards, as if lightning exploded in his four hoofs.

The groom spoke a few low words in Welsh. Lou, frightened, stood with lifted hands arrested. She had been going to stroke him.

"Why did he do that?" she said.

“They gave him a beating once or twice,” said the groom in a neutral voice, “and he doesn’t forget.”

She could hear a neutral sort of judgment in Lewis’s voice. And she thought of the ‘raw spot’.

Not any raw spot at all. A battle between two worlds. She realised that St. Mawr drew his hot breaths in another world from Rico’s, from our world. Perhaps the old Greek horses had lived in St. Mawr’s world. And the old Greek heroes, even Hippolytus, had known it.

With their strangely naked equine heads, and something of a snake in their way of looking round, and lifting their sensitive, dangerous muzzles, they moved in a prehistoric twilight where all things loomed phantasmagoric, all on one plane, sudden presences suddenly jutting out of the matrix. It was another world, an older, heavily potent world. And in this world the horse was swift and fierce and supreme, undominated and unsurpassed. — “Meet him halfway,” Lewis said. But halfway across from our human world to that terrific equine twilight was not a small step. It was a step, she knew, that Rico could never take. She knew it. But she was prepared to sacrifice Rico.

St. Mawr was bought, and Lewis was hired along with him. At first, Lewis rode him behind Lou, in the Row, to get him going. He behaved perfectly.

Phoenix, the half Indian, was very jealous when he saw the black-bearded Welsh groom on St. Mawr.

“What horse you got there?” he asked, looking at the other man with the curious unseeing stare in his hard, Navajo eyes, in which the Indian glint moved like a spark upon a dark chaos. In Phoenix’s high-boned face there was all the race misery of the dispossessed Indian, with an added blankness left by shell-shock. But at the same time, there was that unyielding, save to death, which is characteristic of his tribe; his mother’s tribe. Difficult to say what subtle thread bound him to the Navajo, and made his destiny a Red Man’s destiny still.

They were a curious pair of grooms, following the correct, and yet extraordinary, pair of American mistresses. Mrs. Witt and Phoenix both rode with long stirrups and straight leg, sitting close to the saddle, without posting. Phoenix looked as if he and the horse were all one piece, he never seemed to rise in the saddle at all, neither trotting nor galloping, but sat like a man riding bareback. And all the time he stared around at the riders in the Row, at the people grouped outside the rail, chatting, at the children walking with their nurses, as if he were looking at a mirage, in whose actuality he never believed for a moment. London was all a sort of dark mirage to him. His wide, nervous-looking brown eyes with a smallish brown pupil, that showed the white all round, seemed to be focused on the far distance, as if he could not see things too

near. He was watching the pale deserts of Arizona shimmer with moving light, the long mirage of a shallow lake ripple, the great pallid concave of earth and sky expanding with interchanged light. And a horse-shape loom large and portentous in the mirage, like some prehistoric beast.

That was real to him: the phantasm of Arizona. But this London was something his eye passed over as a false mirage. He looked too smart in his well-tailored groom's clothes, so smart, he might have been one of the satirised new rich. Perhaps it was a sort of half-breed physical assertion that came through his clothing, the savage's physical assertion of himself. Anyhow, he looked 'common', rather horsey and loud.

Except his face. In the golden suavity of his high-boned Indian face, that was hairless, with hardly any eyebrows, there was a blank, lost look that was almost touching. The same startled blank look was in his eyes. But in the smallish dark pupils the dagger-point of light still gleamed unbroken.

He was a good groom, watchful, quick, and on the spot in an instant if anything went wrong. He had a curious quiet power over the horses, unemotional, unsympathetic, but silently potent. In the same way, watching the traffic of Piccadilly with his blank, glinting eye, he would calculate everything instinctively, as if it were an enemy, and pilot Mrs. Witt by the strength of his silent will. He threw around her the tense watchfulness of her own America, and made her feel at home.

"Phoenix," she said, turning abruptly in her saddle as they walked the horses past the sheltering policeman at Hyde Park Corner, "I can't tell you how glad I am to have something a hundred per cent American at the back of me when I go through these gates."

She looked at him from dangerous grey eyes as if she meant it indeed, in vindictive earnest. A ghost of a smile went up to his high cheek-bones, but he did not answer.

"Why, mother?" said Lou, singsong. "It feels to me so friendly — !"

"Yes, Louise, it does. So friendly! That's why I mistrust it so entirely — "

And she set off at a canter up the Row, under the green trees, her face like the face of Medusa at fifty, a weapon in itself. She stared at everything and everybody, with that stare of cold dynamite waiting to explode them all. Lou posted trotting at her side, graceful and elegant, and faintly amused. Behind came Phoenix, like a shadow, with his yellowish, high-boned face still looking sick. And at his side, on the big brilliant bay horse, the smallish, black-bearded Welshman.

Between Phoenix and Lewis there was a latent, but unspoken and wary sympathy. Phoenix was terribly impressed by St. Mawr, he could not leave off

staring at him. And Lewis rode the brilliant, handsome-moving stallion so very quietly, like an insinuation.

Of the two men, Lewis looked the darker, with his black beard coming up to his thick black eyebrows. He was swarthy, with a rather short nose, and the uncanny pale-grey eyes that watched everything and cared about nothing. He cared about nothing in the world, except, at the present, St. Mawr. People did not matter to him. He rode his horse and watched the world from the vantage ground of St. Mawr, with a final indifference.

“You have been with that horse long?” asked Phoenix. “Since he was born.”

Phoenix watched the action of St. Mawr as they went. The bay moved proud and springy, but with perfect good sense, among the stream of riders. It was a beautiful June morning, the leaves overhead were thick and green; there came the first whiff of lime tree scent. To Phoenix, however, the city was a sort of nightmare mirage, and to Lewis, it was a sort of prison. The presence of people he felt as a prison around him.

Mrs. Witt and Lou were turning at the end of the Row, bowing to some acquaintances. The grooms pulled aside Mrs. Witt looked at Lewis with a cold eye.

“It seems an extraordinary thing to me, Louise,” she said, “to see a groom with a beard.”

“It isn’t usual, mother,” said Lou. “Do you mind?”

“Not at all. At least, I think I don’t. I get very tired of modern, bare-faced young men, very! The clean, pure boy, don’t you know! Doesn’t it make you tired? — No, I think a groom with a beard is quite attractive.”

She gazed into the crowd defiantly, perching her finely-shod toe with war-like firmness on the stirrup-iron. Then suddenly she reined in, and turned her horse towards the grooms.

“Lewis!” she said, “I want to ask you a question. Supposing, now, that Lady Carrington wanted you to shave off that beard, what should you say?”

Lewis instinctively put up his hand to the said beard. “They’ve wanted me to shave it off, Mam,” he said. “But I’ve never done it.”

“But why? Tell me why?”

“It’s part of me, Mam.”

Mrs. Witt pulled on again.

“Isn’t that extraordinary, Louise?” she said. “Don’t you like the way he says Mam? It sounds so impossible to me. Could any woman think of herself as Mam? Never! — Since Queen Victoria. But, do you know it hadn’t occurred to me that a man’s beard was really part of him. It always seemed to me that men wore their beards, like they wear their neckties, for show. I shall always

remember Lewis for saying his beard was part of him. Isn't it curious, the way he rides? He seems to sink himself in the horse. When I speak to him, I'm not sure whether I'm speaking to a man or to a horse."

A few days later, Rico himself appeared on St. Mawr for the morning ride. He rode self-consciously, as he did everything, and he was just a little nervous. But his mother-in-law was benevolent. She made him ride between her and Lou, like three ships slowly sailing abreast.

And that very day, who should come driving in an open carriage through the Park but the Queen Mother! Dear old Queen Alexandra, there was a flutter everywhere. And she bowed expressly to Rico, mistaking him, no doubt, for somebody else.

"Do you know," said Rico as they sat at lunch, he and Lou and Mrs. Witt, in Mrs. Witt's sitting-room in the dark, quiet hotel in Mayfair, "I really like riding St. Mawr so much. He really is a noble animal. — If ever I am made a lord — which heaven forbid! — I shall be Lord St. Mawr."

"You mean," said Mrs. Witt, "his real lordship would be the horse?"

"Very possible, I admit," said Rico, with a curl of his long upper lip.

"Don't you think, mother," said Lou, "there is something quite noble about St. Mawr? He strikes me as the first noble thing I have ever seen."

"Certainly I've not seen any *man* that could compare with him. Because these English noblemen — well! I'd rather look at a negro Pullman-boy, if I was looking for what *I* call nobility."

Poor Rico was getting crosser and crosser. There was a devil in Mrs. Witt. She had a hard, bright devil inside her that she seemed to be able to let loose at will.

She let it loose the next day, when Rico and Lou joined her in the Row. She was silent but deadly with the horses, balking them in every way. She suddenly crowded over against the rail in front of St. Mawr, so that the stallion had to rear to pull himself up. Then, having a clear track, she suddenly set off at a gallop, like an explosion, and the stallion, all on edge, set off after her.

It seemed as if the whole Park, that morning, were in a state of nervous tension. Perhaps there was thunder in the air. But St. Mawr kept on dancing and pulling at the bit and wheeling sideways up against the railing, to the terror of the children and the onlookers, who squealed and jumped back suddenly, sending the nerves of the stallion into a rush like rockets. He reared and fought as Rico pulled him round.

Then he went on: dancing, pulling, springily progressing sideways, possessed with all the demons of perversity. Poor Rico's face grew longer and angrier. A fury rose in him, which he could hardly control. He hated his horse, and viciously tried to force him to a quiet, straight trot. Up went St. Mawr on his

hind legs, to the terror of the Row. He got the bit in his teeth and began to fight.

But Phoenix, cleverly, was in front of him.

“You get off, Rico!” called Mrs. Witt’s voice, with all the calm of her wicked exultance.

And almost before he knew what he was doing, Rico had sprung lightly to the ground, and was hanging on to the bridle of the rearing stallion.

Phoenix also lightly jumped down, and ran to St. Mawr, handing his bridle to Rico. Then began a dancing and a splashing, a rearing and a plunging. St. Mawr was being wicked. But Phoenix, the indifference of conflict in his face, sat tight and immovable, without any emotion, only the heaviness of his impersonal will settling down like a weight, all the time, on the horse. There was, perhaps, a curious barbaric exultance in bare, dark will devoid of emotion or personal feeling.

So they had a little display in the Row for almost five minutes, the brilliant horse rearing and fighting. Rico, with a stiff, long face, scrambled on to Phoenix’s horse and withdrew to a safe distance. Policemen came, and an officious mounted policeman rode up to save the situation. But it was obvious that Phoenix, detached and apparently unconcerned, but barbarically potent in his will, would bring the horse to order.

Which he did, and rode the creature home. Rico was requested not to ride St. Mawr in the Row any more, as the stallion was dangerous to public safety. The authorities knew all about him.

Where ended the first fiasco of St. Mawr.

“We didn’t get on very well with his lordship this morning,” said Mrs. Witt triumphantly.

“No, he didn’t like his company *at all!*” Rico snarled back. He wanted Lou to sell the horse again.

“I doubt if anyone would buy him, dear,” she said. “He’s a known character.”

“Then make a gift of him — to your mother,” said Rico with venom.

“Why to mother?” asked Lou innocently.

“She might be able to cope with him — or he with her!” The last phrase was deadly. Having delivered it, Rico departed.

Lou remained at a loss. She felt almost always a little bit dazed, as if she could not see clear nor feel clear. A curious deadness upon her, like the first touch of death. And through this cloud of numbness, or deadness, came all her muted experiences.

Why was it? She did not know. But she felt that in some way it came from a battle of wills. Her mother, Rico, herself, it was always an unspoken, unconscious battle of wills, which was gradually numbing and paralysing her.

She knew Rico meant nothing but kindness by her. She knew her mother only wanted to watch over her. Yet always there was this tension of will, that was no numbing. As if at the depths of him, Rico were always angry, though he seemed so 'happy' on top. And Mrs. Witt was organically angry. So they were like a couple of bombs, timed to explode some day, but ticking on like two ordinary timepieces, in the meanwhile.

She had come definitely to realise this: that Rico's anger was wound up tight at the bottom of him, like a steel spring that kept his works going, while he himself was 'charming', like a bomb-clock with Sevres paintings or Dresden figures on the outside. But his very charm was a sort of anger, and his love was a destruction in itself. He just couldn't help it.

And she? Perhaps she was a good deal the same herself. Wound up tight inside, and enjoying herself being 'lovely'. But wound up tight on some tension that, she realised now with wonder, was really a sort of anger. This, the mainspring that drove her on the round of 'joys'.

She used really to enjoy the tension, and the *élan* it gave her. While she knew nothing about it. So long as she felt it really was life and happiness, this *élan*, this tension and excitement of 'enjoying oneself'.

Now suddenly she doubted the whole show. She attributed to it the curious numbness that was overcoming her, as if she couldn't feel any more.

She wanted to come unwound. She wanted to escape this battle of wills.

Only St. Mawr gave her some hint of the possibility. He was so powerful, and so dangerous. But in his dark eye, that looked, with its cloudy brown pupil, a cloud within a dark fire, like a world beyond our world, there was a dark vitality glowing, and within the fire another sort of wisdom. She felt sure of it: even when he put his ears back, and bared his teeth, and his great eyes came bolting out of his naked horse's head, and she saw demons upon demons in the chaos of his horrid eyes.

Why did he seem to her like some living background, into which she wanted to retreat? When he reared his head and neighed from his deep chest, like deep wind-bells resounding, she seemed to hear the echoes of another darker, more spacious, more dangerous, more splendid world than ours, that was beyond her. And there she wanted to go.

She kept it utterly a secret to herself. Because Rico would just have lifted his long upper lip, in his bare face, in a condescending sort of 'understanding'. And her mother would, as usual, have suspected her of side-stepping. People, all the people she knew, seemed so entirely contained within their cardboard let's-be-happy world. Their wills were fixed like machines on happiness, or fun, or the-best-ever. This ghastly cheery-o! touch, that made all her blood go numb.

Since she had really seen St. Mawr looming fiery and terrible in an outer darkness, she could not believe the world she lived in. She could not believe it was actually happening, when she was dancing in the afternoon at Claridge's, or in the evening at the Carlton, slid about with some suave young man who wasn't like a man at all to her. Or down in Sussex for the week-end with the Enderleys: the talk, the eating and drinking, the flirtation, the endless dancing: it all seemed far more bodiless and, in a strange way, wraith-like, than any fairy story. She seemed to be eating Barmecide food, that had been conjured up out of thin air, by the power of words. She seemed to be talking to handsome, young, bare-faced unrealities, not men at all: as she slid about with them, in the perpetual dance, they too seemed to have been conjured up out of air, merely for this soaring, slithering dance business. And she could not believe that, when the lights went out, they wouldn't melt back into thin air again and complete nonentity. The strange nonentity of it all! Everything just conjured up, and nothing real. *'Isn't this the best ever!'* they would beamingly assert, like wraiths of enjoyment, without any genuine substance. And she would beam back: *'Lots of fun!'*

She was thankful the season was over, and everybody was leaving London. She and Rico were due to go to Scotland, but not till August. In the meantime they would go to her mother.

Mrs. Witt had taken a cottage in Shropshire, on the Welsh border, and had moved down there with Phoenix and her horses. The open, heather-and-bilberry-covered hills were splendid for riding.

Rico consented to spend the month in Shropshire, because for near neighbours Mrs. Witt had the Manbys, at Corrabach Hall. The Manbys were rich Australians returned to the old country and set up as squires, all in full blow. Rico had known them in Victoria: they were of good family: and the girls made a great fuss of him.

So down went Lou and Rico, Lewis, Poppy and St. Mawr, to Shrewsbury, then out into the country. Mrs. Witt's 'cottage' was a tall red-brick Georgian house looking straight on to the churchyard, and the dark, looming big church.

"I never knew what a comfort it would be," said Mrs. Witt, "to have grave-stones under my drawing-room windows, and funerals for lunch."

She really did take a strange pleasure in sitting in her panelled room, that was painted grey, and watching the Dean or one of the curates officiating at the graveside, among a group of black country mourners with black-bordered handkerchiefs luxuriantly in use.

"Mother!" said Lou. "I think it's gruesome!"

She had a room at the back, looking over the walled garden and the stables.

Nevertheless, there was the *boom! boom!* of the passing-bell, and the chiming and pealing on Sundays. The shadow of the church, indeed! A very audible shadow, making itself heard insistently.

The Dean was a big, burly, fat man with a pleasant manner. He was a gentleman, and a man of learning in his own line. But he let Mrs. Witt know that he looked down on her just a trifle — as a parvenu American, a Yankee — though she never was a Yankee: and at the same time he had a sincere respect for her, as a rich woman. Yes, a sincere respect for her, as a rich woman.

Lou knew that every Englishman, especially of the upper classes, has a wholesome respect for riches. But then, who hasn't?

The Dean was more *impressed* by Mrs. Witt than by little Lou. But to Lady Carrington he was charming: she was *almost* 'one of us', you know. And he was very gracious to Rico: 'your father's splendid colonial service.'

Mrs. Witt had now a new pantomime to amuse her: the Georgian house, her own pew in church — it went with the old house: a village of thatched cottages — some of them with corrugated iron over the thatch: the cottage people, farm labourers and their families, with a few, very few, outsiders: the wicked little group of cottagers down at Mile End, famous for ill-living. The Mile-Enders were all Allison and Jephsons, and in-bred, the Dean said: result of working through the centuries at the Quarry, and living isolated there at Mile End.

Isolated! Imagine it! A mile and a half from the railway station, ten miles from Shrewsbury. Mrs. Witt thought of Texas, and said:

"Yes, they are very isolated, away down there!"

And the Dean never for a moment suspected sarcasm.

But there she had the whole thing staged complete for her: English village life. Even miners breaking in to shatter the rather stuffy, unwholesome harmony. — All the men touched their caps to her, all the women did a bit of reverence, the children stood aside for her, if she appeared in the street.

They were all poor again: the labourers could no longer afford even a glass of beer in the evenings, since the Glorious War.

"Now I think that is terrible," said Mrs. Witt. "Not to be able to get away from those stuffy, squalid, picturesque cottages for an hour in the evening, to drink a glass of beer."

"It's a pity, I do agree with you, Mrs. Witt. But Mr. Watson has organised a men's reading-room, where the men can smoke and play dominoes, and read if they wish."

"But that," said Mrs. Witt, "is not the same as that cosy parlour in the 'Moon and Stars'."

"I quite agree," said the Dean. "It isn't"

Mrs. Witt marched to the landlord of the 'Moon and Stars' and asked for a glass of cider.

"I want," she said, in her American accent, "these poor labourers to have their glass of beer in the evenings."

"They want it themselves," said Harvey.

"Then they must have it — "

The upshot was, she decided to supply one large barrel of beer per week and the landlord was to sell it to the labourers at a penny a glass.

"My own country has gone dry," she asserted. "But not because we can't *afford* it."

By the time Lou and Rico appeared, she was deep in. She actually interfered very little: the barrel of beer was her one public act. But she *did* know everybody by sight, already, and she *did* know everybody's circumstances. And she had attended one prayer-meeting, one mothers' meeting, one sewing-bee, one 'social', one Sunday School meeting, one Band of Hope meeting, and one Sunday School treat. She ignored the poky little Wesleyan and Baptist chapels, and was true-blue Episcopalian.

"How strange these picturesque old villages are, Louise!" she said, with a duskiness around her sharp, well-bred nose. "How *easy* it all seems, all on a definite pattern. And how false! And underneath, *how corrupt!*"

She gave that queer, triumphant leer from her grey eyes, and queer demonish wrinkles seemed to twitter on her face.

Lou shrank away. She was beginning to be afraid of her mother's insatiable curiosity, that always looked for the snake under the flowers. Or rather, for the maggots.

Always this same morbid interest in other, people and their doings, their privacies, their dirty linen. Always this air of alertness for personal happenings, personalities, personalities, personalities. Always this subtle criticism and appraisal of other people, this analysis of other people's motives. If anatomy presupposes a corpse, then psychology presupposes a world of corpses. Personalities, which means personal criticism and analysis, presuppose a whole world laboratory of human psyches waiting to be vivisected. If you cut a thing up, of course it will smell. Hence, nothing raises such an infernal stink, at last, as human psychology.

Mrs. Witt was a pure psychologist, a fiendish psychologist. And Rico, in his way, was a psychologist too. But he had a formula. "Let's know the worst, dear! But let's look on the bright side, and believe the best."

"Isn't the Dean a priceless old darling!" said Rico at breakfast.

And it had begun. Work had started in the psychic vivisection laboratory.

“Isn’t he wonderful!” said Lou vaguely.

“So delightfully worldly! — *Some of us are not born to make money, dear boy. Luckily for us, we can marry it.*” — Rico made a priceless face.

“Is Mrs. Vyner so rich?” asked Lou.

“She is quite a wealthy woman — in coal,” replied Mrs. Witt. “But the Dean is surely worth his weight even in gold. And he’s a massive figure. I can imagine there would be great satisfaction in having him for a husband.”

“Why, mother?” asked Lou.

“Oh, such a presence! One of these old Englishmen that nobody can put in their pocket. You can’t imagine his wife asking him to thread her needle. Something after all so robust! So different from *young* Englishmen, who all seem to me like ladies, perfect ladies.”

“*Somebody* has to keep up the tradition of the perfect lady,” said Rico.

“I know it,” said Mrs. Witt. “And if the women won’t do it, the young gentlemen take on the burden. They bear it very well.”

It was in full swing, the cut and thrust. And poor Lou, who had reached the point of stupefaction in the game, felt she did not know what to do with herself.

Rico and Mrs. Witt were deadly enemies, yet neither could keep clear of the other. It might have been they who were married to one another, their duel and their duet were so relentless.

But Rico immediately started the social round: first the Manbys: then motor twenty miles to luncheon at Lady Tewkesbury’s: then young Mr. Burns came flying down in his aeroplane from Chester: then they must motor to the sea to Sir Edward Edwards’s place, where there was a moonlight bathing party. Everything intensely thrilling, and so innerly wearisome, Lou felt.

But back of it all was St. Mawr, looming like a bonfire in the dark. He really was a tiresome horse to own. He worried the mares, if they were in the same paddock with him, always driving them round. And with any other horse he just fought with definite intent to kill. So he had to stay alone.

“That St. Mawr, he’s a bad horse,” said Phoenix.

“Maybe!” said Lewis.

“You don’t like quiet horses?” said Phoenix.

“Most horses *is* quiet,” said Lewis. “St. Mawr, he’s different.”

“Why don’t he never get any foals?”

“Doesn’t want to, I should think. Same as me.”

“What good is a horse like that? Better shoot him, before he kill somebody.”

“What good’ll they get, shooting St. Mawr?” said Lewis. “If he kills somebody!” said Phoenix.

But there was no answer.

The two grooms both lived over the stables, and Lou, from her window, saw a good deal of them. They were two quiet men, yet she was very much aware of their presence, aware of Phoenix's rather high square shoulders and his fine, straight, vigorous black hair that tended to stand up assertively on his head, as he went quietly drifting about his various jobs. He was not lazy, but he did everything with a sort of diffidence, as if from a distance, and handled his horses carefully, cautiously, and cleverly, but without sympathy. He seemed to be holding something back all the time, unconsciously, as if in his very being there was some secret. But it was a secret of *will*. His quiet, reluctant movement as if he never really wanted to do anything; his long, flat-stepping stride; the permanent challenge in his high cheek-bones, the Indian glint in his eyes, and his peculiar stare, watchful and yet unseeing, made him unpopular with the women servants.

Nevertheless, women had a certain fascination for him: he would stare at the pretty young maids with an intent blank stare when they were not looking. Yet he was rather overbearing, domineering with them, and they resented him. It was evident to Lou that he looked upon himself as belonging to the master, not to the servant class. When he flirted with the maids, as he very often did, for he had a certain crude ostentatiousness, he seemed to let them feel that he despised them as inferiors, servants, while he admired their pretty charms, as fresh, country maids.

"I'm fair nervous of that Phoenix," said Fanny, the fair-haired girl. "He makes you feel what he'd do to you if he could."

"He'd better not try with me," said Mabel. "I'd scratch his cheeky eyes out. Cheek! — for it's nothing else! He's nobody — common as they're made!"

"He makes you feel you was there for him to trample on," said Fanny.

"Mercy, you are soft! If anybody's that it's him. Oh, my, Fanny, you've no right to let a fellow make you feel like *that*! Make *them* feel that *they're* dirt, for you to trample on: which they are!"

Fanny, however, being a shy little blonde thing, wasn't good at assuming the trampling role. She was definitely nervous of Phoenix. And he enjoyed it. An invisible smile seemed to creep up his cheek-bones, and the glint moved in his eyes as he teased her. He tormented her by his very presence, as he knew.

He would come silently up when she was busy, and stand behind her perfectly still, so that she was unaware of his presence. Then, silently, he would *make* her aware. Till she glanced nervously round, and with a scream saw him.

One day Lou watched the little play. Fanny had been picking over a bowl of blackcurrants, sitting on the bench under the maple tree in a corner of the yard. She didn't look round till she had picked up her bowl to go to the kitchen. Then

there was a scream and a crash.

When Lou came out, Phoenix was crouching down silently gathering up the currants, which the little maid, scarlet and trembling, was collecting into another bowl. Phoenix seemed to be smiling down his back.

“Phoenix!” said Lou. “I wish you wouldn’t startle Fanny!” He looked up and she saw the glint of ridicule in his eyes.

“Who, me?” he said.

“Yes, you. You go up behind Fanny to startle her. You’re not to do it.”

He slowly stood erect and lapsed into his peculiar invisible silence. Only for a second his eyes glanced at Lou’s, and then she saw the cold anger, the gleam of malevolence and contempt. He could not bear being commanded, or reprimanded, by a woman.

Yet it was even worse with a man.

“What’s that, Lou?” said Rico, appearing all handsome and in the picture, in white flannels with an apricot silk shirt.

“I’m telling Phoenix he’s not to torment Fanny!”

“Oh!” — and Rico’s voice immediately became his father’s, the important government official’s. “Certainly *not!* Most certainly *not!*” He looked at the scattered currants and the broken bowl. Fanny melted into tears. “This, I suppose, is some of the results! Now look here, Phoenix, you’re to leave the maids strictly alone. I shall ask them to report to me whenever, or if ever, you interfere with them. But I hope you *won’t* interfere with them — in any way. You understand?”

As Rico became more and more Sir Harry and the government official, Lou’s bones melted more and more into discomfort. Phoenix stood in his peculiar silence, the invisible smile on his cheek-bones.

“You understand what I’m saying to you?” Rico demanded, in intensified acid tones.

But Phoenix only stood there, as it were behind a cover of his own will, and looked back at Rico with a faint smile on his face and the glint moving in his eyes.

“Do you intend to answer?” Rico’s upper lip lifted nastily. “Mrs. Witt is my boss,” came from Phoenix.

The scarlet flew up Rico’s throat and flushed his face, his eyes went glaucous. Then quickly his face turned yellow.

Lou looked at the two men: her husband, whose rages, over-controlled, were organically terrible: the half-breed, whose dark-coloured lips were widened in a faint smile of derision, but in whose eyes caution and hate were playing against one another. She realised that Phoenix would accept her reprimand, or her

mother's, because he could despise the two of them as mere women. But Rico's business aroused murder pure and simple.

She took her husband's arm.

"Come, dear!" she said in her half-plaintive way. "I'm sure Phoenix understands. We all understand. Go to the kitchen, Fanny, never mind the currants. There are plenty more in the garden."

Rico was always thankful to be drawn quickly, submissively away from his own rage. He was afraid of it. He was afraid lest he should fly at the groom in some horrible fashion. The very thought horrified him. But in actuality he came very near to it.

He walked stiffly, feeling paralysed by his own fury. And those words, *Mrs. Witt is my boss*, were like hot acid in his brain. An insult!

"By the way, Belle-Mère!" he said when they joined Mrs. Witt — she hated being called Belle-Mère, and once said: "If I'm the bell-mare, are you one of the colts?" — She also hated his voice of smothered fury — "I had to speak to Phoenix about persecuting the maids. He took the liberty of informing me that you were his boss, so perhaps you had better speak to him."

"I certainly will. I believe they're my maids, and nobody else's, so it's my duty to look after them. Who was he persecuting?"

"I'm the responsible one, mother," said Lou.

Rico disappeared in a moment. He must get out: get away from the house. How? Something was wrong with the car. Yet he must get away, away. He would go over to Corrabach. He would ride St. Mawr. He had been talking about the horse, and Flora Manby was dying to see him. She had said: "Oh, I can't wait to see that marvellous horse of yours."

He would ride him over. It was only seven miles. He found Lou's maid Elena, and sent her to tell Lewis. Meanwhile, to soothe himself, he dressed himself most carefully in white riding-breeches and a shirt of purple silk crepe, with a flowing black tie spotted red like a ladybird, and black riding-boots. Then he took a *chic* little white hat with a black band.

St. Mawr was saddled and waiting, and Lewis had saddled a second horse.

"Thanks, Lewis, I'm going alone!" said Rico.

This was the first time he had ridden St. Mawr in the country, and he was nervous. But he was also in the hell of a smothered fury. All his careful dressing had not really soothed him. So his fury consumed his nervousness.

He mounted with a swing, blind and rough. St. Mawr reared.

"Stop that!" snarled Rico, and put him to the gate.

Once out in the village street, the horse went dancing sideways. He insisted on dancing at the sidewalk, to the exaggerated terror of the children. Rico,

exasperated, pulled him across. But no, he wouldn't go down the centre of the village street. He began dancing and edging on to the other sidewalk, so the foot-passengers fled into the shops in terror.

The devil was in him. He would turn down every turning where he was not meant to go. He reared with panic at a furniture van. He *insisted* on going down the wrong side of the road. Rico was riding him with a martingale, and he could see the rolling, bloodshot eye.

"Damn you, *go!*" said Rico, giving him a dig with the spurs. And away they went, down the high-road, in a thunderbolt. It was a hot day, with thunder threatening, so Rico was soon in a flame of heat. He held on tight, with fixed eyes, trying all the time to rein in the horse. What he really was afraid of was that the brute would shy suddenly as he galloped. Watching for this, he didn't care when they sailed past the turning to Corrabach.

St. Mawr flew on, in a sort of *élan*. Marvellous the power and life in the creature. There was really a great joy in the motion. If only he wouldn't take the corners at a gallop, nearly swerving Rico off! Luckily the road was clear. To ride, to ride at this terrific gallop, on into eternity!

After several miles, the horse slowed down, and Rico managed to pull him into a lane that might lead to Corrabach. When all was said and done, it was a wonderful ride. St. Mawr could go like the wind, but with that luxurious heavy ripple of life which is like nothing else on earth. It seemed to carry one at once into another world, away from the life of the nerves.

So Rico arrived, after all, something of a conqueror at Corrabach. To be sure, he was perspiring, and so was his horse. But he was a hero from another, heroic world.

"Oh, such a hot ride!" he said, as he walked on to the lawn at Corrabach Hall. "Between the sun and the horse, really! — between two fires!"

"Don't you trouble, you're looking dandy, a bit hot and flushed like," said Flora Manby. "Let's go and see your horse."

And his exclamation was: "Oh, he's *lovely!* He's fine! I'd love to try him once —"

Rico decided to accept the invitation to stay overnight at Corrabach. Usually he was very careful, and refused to stay, unless Lou was with him. But they telephoned to the post office at Chomesbury, would Mr. Jones please send a message to Lady Carrington that Sir Henry was staying the night at Corrabach Hall, but would be home next day. Mr. Jones received the request with unctiousness, and said he would go over himself to give the message to Lady Carrington.

Lady Carrington was in the walled garden. The peculiarity of Mrs. Witt's house was that, for grounds proper, it had the churchyard.

“I never thought, Louise, that one day I should have an old English churchyard for my lawns and shrubbery and park, and funeral mourners for my herds of deer. It’s curious. For the first time in my life a funeral has become a real thing to me. I feel I could write a book on them.”

But Louise only felt intimidated.

At the back of the house was a flagged courtyard, with stables and a maple tree in a corner, and big doors opening on to the village street. But at the side was a walled garden, with fruit trees and currant bushes and a great bed of rhubarb, and some tufts of flowers, peonies, pink roses, sweet williams. Phoenix, who had a certain taste for gardening, would be out there thinning the carrots or tying up the lettuce. He was not lazy. Only he would not take work seriously, as a job. He would be quite amused tying up lettuces, and would tie up head after head, quite prettily. Then, becoming bored, he would abandon his task, light a cigarette, and go and stand on the threshold of the big doors, in full view of the street, watching, and yet completely indifferent.

After Rico’s departure on St. Mawr, Lou went into the garden. And there she saw Phoenix working in the onion-bed. He was bending over, in his own silence, busy with nimble, amused fingers among the grassy young onions. She thought he had not seen her, so she went down another path to where a swing bed hung under the apple tree. There she sat with a book and a bundle of magazines. But she did not read.

She was musing vaguely. Vaguely, she was glad that Rico was away for a while. Vaguely, she felt a sense of bitterness, of complete futility: the complete futility of her living. This left her drifting in a sea of utter chagrin. And Rico seemed to her the symbol of the futility. Vaguely, she was aware that something else existed, but she didn’t know where it was or what it was.

In the distance she could see Phoenix’s dark, rather tall-built head, with its black, fine, intensely-living hair tending to stand on end, like a brush with long, very fine black bristles. His hair, she thought, betrayed him as an animal of a different species. He was growing a little bored by weeding onions: that also she could tell. Soon he would want some other amusement.

Presently Lewis appeared. He was small, energetic, a little bit bow-legged, and he walked with a slight strut. He wore khaki riding-breeches, leather gaiters, and a blue shirt. And, like Phoenix, he rarely had any cap or hat on his head. His thick black hair was parted at the side and brushed over heavily sideways, dropping on his forehead at the right. It was very long, a real mop, under which his eyebrows were dark and steady.

“Seen Lady Carrington?” he asked of Phoenix.

“Yes, she’s sitting on that swing over there — she’s been there quite a while.”

The wretch — he had seen her from the very first!

Lewis came striding over, looking towards her with his pale-grey eyes, from under his mop of hair.

“Mr. Jones from the post office wants to see you, my Lady, with a message from Sir Henry.”

Instantly alarm took possession of Lou’s soul.

“Oh! — Does he want to see me personally? — What message? Is anything wrong?” — And her voice trailed out over the last word, with a sort of anxious nonchalance.

“I don’t think it’s anything amiss,” said Lewis reassuringly.

“Oh! You don’t,” the relief came into her voice. Then she looked at Lewis with a slight, winning smile in her unmatched eyes. “I’m so afraid of St. Mawr, you know.” Her voice was soft and cajoling. Phoenix was listening in the distance.

“St. Mawr’s all right, if you don’t do nothing to him,” Lewis replied.

“I’m sure he is! — But how is one to know when one is doing something to him? — Tell Mr. Jones to come here, please,” she concluded, on a changed tone.

Mr. Jones, a man of forty-five, thick-set, with a fresh complexion and rather foolish brown eyes, and a big brown moustache, came prancing down the path, smiling rather fatuously, and doffing his straw hat with a gorgeous bow the moment he saw Lou sitting in her slim white frock on the coloured swing bed under the trees with their hard green apples.

“Good-morning, Mr. Jones!”

“Good-morning, Lady Carrington. — If I may say so, what a picture you make — a beautiful picture — ”

He beamed under his big brown moustache like the greatest lady-killer.

“Do I! — Did Sir Henry say he was all right?”

“He didn’t say exactly, but I should expect he is all right — ” and Mr. Jones delivered his message, in the mayonnaise of his own unction.

“Thank you so much, Mr. Jones. It’s awfully good of you to come and tell me. Now I shan’t worry about Sir Henry *at all*.”

“It’s a great pleasure to come and deliver a satisfactory message to Lady Carrington. But it won’t be kind to Sir Henry if you don’t worry about him *at all* in his absence. We all enjoy being worried about by those we love — so long as there is nothing to worry about, of course!”

“Quite!” said Lou. “Now won’t you take a glass of port and a biscuit, or a whisky and soda? And thank you ever so much.”

“Thank you, my Lady. I might drink a whisky and soda, since you are so good.”

And he beamed fatuously.

“Let Mr. Jones mix himself a whisky and soda, Lewis,” said Lou.

“Heavens!” she thought, as the postmaster retreated a little uncomfortably down the garden path, his bald spot passing in and out of the sun, under the trees: “How ridiculous everything is, how ridiculous, ridiculous!” Yet she didn’t really dislike Mr. Jones and his interlude.

Phoenix was melting away out of the garden. He had to follow the fun.

“Phoenix!” Lou called. “Bring me a glass of water, will you? Or send somebody with it.”

He stood in the path looking round at her.

“All right!” he said

And he turned away again.

She did not like being alone in the garden. She liked to have the men working somewhere near. Curious how pleasant it was to sit there in the garden when Phoenix was about, or Lewis. It made her feel she could never be lonely or jumpy. But when Rico was there, she was all aching nerve.

Phoenix came back with a glass of water, lemon juice, sugar, and a small bottle of brandy. He knew Lou liked a spoonful of brandy in her iced lemonade.

“How thoughtful of you, Phoenix!” she said. “Did Mr. Jones get his whisky?”

“He was just getting it.”

“That’s right. — By the way, Phoenix, I wish you wouldn’t get mad if Sir Henry speaks to you. He is *really* so kind.”

She looked up at the man. He stood there watching her in silence, the invisible smile on his face, and the inscrutable Indian glint moving in his eyes. What was he thinking? There was something passive and almost submissive about him, but underneath this, an unyielding resistance and cruelty: yes, even cruelty. She felt that, on top, he was submissive and attentive, bringing her her lemonade as she liked it, without being told: thinking for her quite subtly. But underneath there was an unchanging hatred. He submitted circumstantially, he worked for a wage. And even circumstantially, he *liked* his mistress — *la patrona* — and her daughter. But much deeper than any circumstance or any circumstantial liking, was the categorical hatred upon which he was founded, and with which he was powerless. His liking for Lou and for Mrs. Witt, his serving them and working for a wage, was all side-tracking his own nature, which was grounded on hatred of their very existence. But what was he to do? He had to live. Therefore he had to serve, to work for a wage, and even to be faithful.

And yet *their* existence made his own existence negative. If he was to exist, positively, they would have to cease to exist. At the same time, a fatal sort of tolerance made him serve these women, and go on serving.

“Sir Henry is so kind to everybody,” Lou insisted.

The half-breed met her eyes, and smiled uncomfortably. “Yes, he’s a kind man,” he replied, as if sincerely. “Then why do you mind if he speaks to you?”

“I don’t mind,” said Phoenix glibly.

“But you do. Or else you wouldn’t make him so angry.”

“Was he angry? I don’t know,” said Phoenix.

“He was very angry. And you *do* know.”

“No, I don’t know if he’s angry. I don’t know,” the fellow persisted. And there was a glib sort of satisfaction in his tone.

“That’s awfully unkind of you, Phoenix,” she said, growing offended in her turn.

“No, I don’t know if he’s angry. I don’t want to make him angry. I don’t know — ”

He had taken on a tone of naïve ignorance, which at once gratified her pride as a woman, and deceived her.

“Well, you believe me when I tell you you *did* make him angry, don’t you?”

“Yes, I believe when you tell me.”

“And you promise me, won’t you, not to do it again? It’s so bad for him — so bad for his nerves, and for his eyes. It makes them inflamed, and injures his eyesight. And you know, as an artist, it’s terrible if anything happens to his eyesight — ”

Phoenix was watching her closely, to take it in. He still was not good at understanding continuous, logical statement. Logical connection in speech seemed to stupefy him, make him stupid. He understood in disconnected assertions of fact. But he had gathered what she said. “He gets mad at you. When he gets mad, it hurts his eyes. His eyes hurt him. He can’t see, because his eyes hurt him. He wants to paint a picture, he can’t. He can’t paint a picture, he can’t see clear — ”

Yes, he had understood. She saw he had understood. The bright glint of satisfaction moved in his eyes.

“So now promise me, won’t you, you won’t make him mad again: you won’t make him angry?”

“No, I won’t make him angry. I don’t do anything to make him angry,” Phoenix answered, rather glibly.

“And you do understand, don’t you? You do know how kind he is: how he’d do a good, turn to anybody?”

“Yes, he’s a kind man,” said Phoenix.

“I’m so glad you realise. There, that’s luncheon! How nice It is to sit here in the garden, when everybody is nice to you! No, I can carry the tray, don’t you

bother.”

But he took the tray from her hand and followed her to the house. And as he walked behind her, he watched the slim white nape of her neck, beneath the clustering of her bobbed hair, something as a stoat watches a rabbit he is following.

In the afternoon Lou retreated once more to her place in the garden. There she lay, sitting with a bunch of pillows behind her, neither reading nor working, just musing. She had learned the new joy: to do absolutely nothing, but to lie and let the sunshine filter through the leaves, to see the bunch of red-hot-poker flowers pierce scarlet into the afternoon, beside the comparative neutrality of some foxgloves. The mere colour of hard red, like the big Oriental poppies that had fallen, and these poker flowers, lingered in her consciousness like a communication.

Into this peaceful indolence, when even the big, dark-grey tower of the church beyond the wall and the yew trees was keeping its bells in silence, advanced Mrs. Witt, in a broad Panama hat and a white dress.

“Don’t you want to ride, or do something, Louise?” she asked ominously.

“Don’t you want to be peaceful, mother?” retorted Louise.

“Yes — an *active* peace. — I can’t *believe* that my daughter can be content to lie on a hammock and do nothing, not even read or improve her mind, the greater part of the day.”

“Well, your daughter is content to do that. It’s her greatest pleasure.”

“I know it. I can see it. And it surprises me very much. When I was your age, I was never still. I had so much *go* — ”

“Those maids, thank God,
Are ‘neath the sod,
And all the generation.”

“No, but, mother, I only take life differently. Perhaps you used up that sort of *go*. I’m the harem type, mother: only I never want the men inside the lattice.”

“Are you really my daughter? — Well! A woman never knows what will happen to her. I’m an *American* woman, and I suppose I’ve got to remain one, no matter where I am. — What did you want, Lewis?”

The groom had approached down the path.

“If I am to saddle Poppy?” said Lewis.

“No, apparently not!” replied Mrs. Witt. “Your mistress prefers the hammock to the saddle.”

“Thank you, Lewis. What mother says is true this afternoon, at least.” And she gave him a peculiar little cross-eyed smile.

“Who,” said Mrs. Witt to the man, “has been cutting at your hair?”

There was a moment of silent resentment.

“I did it myself, Mam! Sir Henry said it was too long.”

“He certainly spoke the truth. But I believe there’s a barber in the village on Saturdays — or you could ride over to Shrewsbury. Just turn round, and let me look at the back. Is it the money?”

“No, Mam. I don’t like these fellows touching my head.” He spoke coldly, with a certain hostile reserve that at once piqued Mrs. Witt.

“Don’t you really!” she said. “But it’s quite *impossible* for you to go about as you are. It gives you a half-witted appearance. Go now into the yard and get a chair and a dust-sheet. I’ll cut your hair.”

The man hesitated, hostile.

“Don’t be afraid, I know how it’s done. I’ve cut the hair of many a poor wounded boy in hospital: and shaved them too. *You’ve got such a touch, nurse!* Poor fellow, he was dying, though none of us knew it. — Those are the compliments I value, Louise. — Get that chair now, and a dust-sheet, I’ll borrow your hair-scissors from Elena, Louise.”

Mrs. Witt, happily on the war-path, was herself again. She didn’t care for work, actual work. But she loved trimming. She loved arranging unnatural and pretty salads, devising new and piquant-looking ice-creams, having a turkey stuffed exactly as she knew a stuffed turkey in Louisiana, with chestnuts and butter and stuff, or showing a servant how to turn waffles on a waffle-iron, or to bake a ham with brown sugar and cloves and a moistening of rum. She liked pruning rose trees, or beginning to cut a yew hedge into shape. She liked ordering her own and Louise’s shoes, with an exactitude and a knowledge of shoe-making that sent the salesmen crazy. She was a demon in shoes. Reappearing from America, she would pounce on her daughter. “Louise, throw those shoes away. Give them to one of the maids.” — “But, mother, they are some of the best French shoes. I like them.” — “Throw them away. A shoe has only two excuses for existing: perfect comfort or perfect appearance. Those have neither. I have brought you some shoes.” — Yes, she had brought ten pairs of shoes from New York. She knew her daughter’s foot as she knew her own.

So now she was in her element, looming behind Lewis as he sat in the middle of the yard swathed in a dust-sheet. She had on an overall and a pair of wash-leather gloves, and she poised a pair of long scissors like one of the Fates. In her big hat she looked curiously young, but with the youth of a bygone generation. Her heavy-lidded, laconic grey eyes were alert, studying the groom’s black mop of hair. Her eyebrows made thin, uptilting black arches on her brow. Her fresh skin was slightly powdered, and she was really handsome in a bold, bygone, eighteenth-century style. Some of the curious, adventurous stoicism of the

eighteenth century: and then a Certain blatant American efficiency.

Lou, who had strayed into the yard to see, looked so much younger and so many thousand of years older than her mother, as she stood in her wisp-like diffidence, the clusters of grape-like bobbed hair hanging beside her face, with its fresh colouring and its ancient weariness, her slightly squinting eyes, that were so disillusioned they were becoming faunlike.

“Not too short, mother, not too short!” she remonstrated, as Mrs. Witt, with a terrific flourish of efficiency, darted at the man’s black hair, and the thick flakes fell like black snow.

“Now, Louise, I’m right in this job, please don’t interfere. Two things I hate to see: a man with his wool in his neck and ears: and a bare-faced young man who looks as if he’d bought his face as well as his hair from a men’s beauty-specialist.”

And efficiently she bent down, clip — clip — clipping! while Lewis sat utterly immobile, with sunken head, in a sort of despair.

Phoenix stood against the stable door, with his restless, eternal cigarette. And in the kitchen doorway the maids appeared and fled, appeared and fled in delight. The old gardener, a fixture who went with the house, creaked in and stood with his legs apart, silent in intense condemnation.

“First time I ever see such a thing!” he muttered to himself, as he creaked on into the garden. He was a bad-tempered old soul, who thoroughly disapproved of the household, and would have given notice, but that he knew which side his bread was buttered: and there was butter unstinted on his bread in Mrs. Witt’s kitchen.

Mrs. Witt stood back to survey her handiwork, holding those terrifying shears with their beak erect. Lewis lifted his head and looked stealthily round, like a creature in a trap. “Keep still!” she said. “I haven’t finished.”

And she went for his front hair, with vigour, lifting up long layers and snipping off the ends artistically: till at last he sat with a black aureole upon the floor, and his ears standing out with curious new alertness from the sides of his clean-clipped head.

“Stand up,” she said, “and let me look.”

He stood up, looking absurdly young, with the hair all cut away from his neck and ears, left thick only on top. She surveyed her work with satisfaction.

“You look so much younger,” she said, “you would be surprised. Sit down again.”

She clipped the back of his neck with the shears, and then, with a very slight hesitation, she said:

“Now about the beard!”

But the man rose suddenly from the chair, pulling the dust-cloth from his neck with desperation.

“No, I’ll do that myself,” he said, looking her in the eyes with a cold light in his pale-grey, uncanny eyes.

She hesitated in a kind of wonder at his queer male rebellion.

“Now, listen, I shall do it much better than you — and besides,” she added hurriedly, snatching at the dust-cloth he was flinging on the chair — “I haven’t quite finished round the ears.”

“I think I shall do,” he said, again looking her in the eyes, with a cold, white gleam of finality. “Thank you for what you’ve done.”

And he walked away to the stable.

“You’d better sweep up here,” Mrs. Witt called.

“Yes, Mam,” he replied, looking round at her again with an odd resentment, but continuing to walk away.

“However!” said Mrs. Witt, “I suppose he’ll do.”

And she divested herself of gloves and overall and walked indoors to wash and to change. Lou went indoors too.

“It is extraordinary what hair that man has!” said Mrs. Witt. “Did I tell you when I was in Paris, I saw a woman’s face in the hotel that I thought I knew? I couldn’t place her, till she was coming towards me. ‘Aren’t you Rachel Fannière?’ she said. ‘Aren’t you Janette Leroy?’ We hadn’t seen each other since we were girls of twelve and thirteen, at school in New Orleans. ‘Oh!’ she said to me. ‘Is every illusion doomed to perish? You had such wonderful golden curls! All my life I’ve said, Oh, if only I had such lovely hair as Rachel Fannière! I’ve seen those beautiful golden curls of yours all my life. And now I meet you, you’re grey!’ Wasn’t that terrible, Louise? Well, that man’s hair made me think of it — so thick and curious. It’s strange what a difference there is in hair; I suppose it’s because he’s just an animal — no mind! There’s nothing I admire in a man like a good *mind*. Your father was a very clever man, and all the men I’ve admired have been clever. But isn’t it curious now, I’ve never cared much to touch their hair. How strange life is! If it gives one thing, it takes away another. — And even those poor boys in hospital: I have shaved them, or cut their hair, like a mother, never thinking anything of it. Lovely, intelligent, clean boys, most of them were. Yet it never did anything to me. I never knew before that something could happen to one from a person’s *hair*! Like to Janette Leroy from my curls when I was a child. And now I’m grey, as she says. — I wonder how old a man Lewis is, Louise! Didn’t he look absurdly young with his ears pricking up?”

“I think Rico said he was forty or forty-one.”

“And never been married?”

“No — not as far as I know.”

“Isn’t that curious now! — just an animal! No mind! A man with no mind! I’ve always thought that the *most* despicable thing. Yet such wonderful hair to touch. Your Henry has quite a good mind, yet I would simply shrink from touching his hair. I suppose one likes stroking a cat’s fur, just the same. Just the animal in man. Curious that I never seem to have met it, Louise. Now I come to think of it, he has the eyes of a human cat: a human tom-cat. Would you call him stupid? Yes, he’s very stupid.”

“No, mother, he’s not stupid. He only doesn’t care about most things.”

“Like an animal! But what a strange look he has in his eyes! A strange sort of intelligence! and a confidence in himself. Isn’t that curious, Louise, in a man with as little mind as he has? Do you know, I should say he could see through a woman pretty well.”

“Why, mother!” said Lou impatiently. “I think one gets so tired of your men with mind, as you call it. There are so many of that sort of clever men. And there are lots of men who aren’t very clever, but are rather nice: and lots are stupid. It seems to me there’s something else besides mind and cleverness, or niceness or cleanness. Perhaps it is the animal. Just think of St. Mawr! I’ve thought so much about him. We call him an animal, but we never know what it means. He seems a far greater mystery to me than a clever man. He’s a horse. Why can’t one say in the same way of a man: ‘He’s a man?’ There seems no mystery in being a man. But there’s a terrible mystery in St. Mawr.”

Mrs. Witt watched her daughter quizzically.

“Louise,” she said, “you won’t tell me that the mere animal is all that counts in a man. I will never believe it. Man is wonderful because he is able to think.”

“But is he?” cried Lou, with sudden exasperation. “Their thinking seems to me all so childish: like stringing the same beads over and over again. Ah, men! They and their thinking are all so *paltry*. How can you be impressed?”

Mrs. Witt raised her eyebrows sardonically.

“Perhaps I’m not — any more,” she said with a grim smile.

“But,” she added, “I still can’t see that I am to be impressed by the mere animal in man. The animals are the same as we are. It seems to me they have the same feelings and wants as we do in a commonplace way. The only difference is that they have no minds: no human minds, at least. And no matter what you say, Louise, lack of minds makes the commonplace.”

Lou knitted her brows nervously.

“I suppose it does, mother. — But men’s minds are so commonplace: look at Dean Vyner and his mind! Or look at Arthur Balfour, as a shining example. Isn’t

that commonplace, that cleverness? I would hate St. Mawr to be spoiled by such a mind.”

“Yes, Louise, so would I. Because the men you mention are really old women, knitting the same pattern over and over again. Nevertheless, I shall never alter my belief that real mind is all that matters in a man, and it’s that *that* we women love.”

“Yes, mother! — But what *is* real mind? The old woman who knits the most complicated pattern? Oh, I can hear all their needles clicking, the clever men! As a matter of fact, mother, I believe Lewis has far more real mind than Dean Vyner or any of the clever ones. He has a good intuitive mind, he knows things without thinking them.”

“That may be, Louise! But he is a servant. He is *under*. A real man should never be under. And then you could never be intimate with a man like Lewis.”/

“I don’t want intimacy, mother. I’m too tired of it all. I love St. Mawr because he isn’t intimate. He stands where one can’t get at him. And he burns with life. And where does his life come from, to him? That’s the mystery. That great burning life in him, which never is dead. Most men have a deadness in them, that frightens me so, because of my own deadness. Why can’t men get their life straight, like St. Mawr, and then think? Why can’t they think quick, mother: quick as a woman: only farther than we do? Why isn’t men’s thinking quick like fire, mother? Why is it so slow, so dead, so deadly dull?”

“I can’t tell you, Louise. My own opinion of the men of to-day has grown very small. But I can live in spite of it.”

“No, mother. We seemed to be living off old fuel, like the camel when he lives off his hump. Life doesn’t rush into us, as it does even into St. Mawr, and he’s a dependent animal. I can’t live, mother. I just can’t.”

“I don’t see why not! *I’m* full of life.”

“I know you are, mother. But I’m not, and I’m your daughter. — And don’t misunderstand me, mother! I don’t want to be an animal like a horse or a cat or a lioness, though they all fascinate me, the way they get their life *straight*, not from a lot of old tanks, as we do. I don’t admire the caveman, and that sort of thing. But think, mother, if we could get our lives straight from the source, as the animals do, and still be ourselves. You don’t like men yourself. But you’ve no idea how men just tire me out: even the very thought of them. You say they are too animal. But they’re not, mother. It’s the animal in them has gone perverse, or cringing, or humble, or domesticated, like dogs. I don’t know one single man who is a proud living animal. I know they’ve left off really thinking. But then men always do leave off really thinking when the last bit of wild animal dies in them.”

“Because we have minds — ”

“We have no minds once we are tame, mother. Men are all women, knitting and crocheting words together.”

“I can’t altogether agree, you know, Louise.”

“I know you don’t. — You like clever men. But clever men are mostly such *unpleasant* animals. As animals, so very unpleasant. And in men like Rico, the animal has gone queer and wrong. And in those nice clean boys you liked so much in the war, there is no wild animal left in them. They’re all tame dogs, even when they’re brave and well-bred. They’re all tame dogs, mother, with human masters. There’s no mystery in them.”

“What do you want, Louise? You do want the cave man, who’ll knock you on the head with a club.”

“Don’t be silly, mother. That’s much more your subconscious line, you admirer of Mind — I don’t consider the cave man is a real human animal at all. He’s a brute, a degenerate. A pure animal man would be as lovely as a deer or a leopard, burning like a flame fed straight from underneath. And he’d be part of the unseen, like a mouse is, even. And he’d never cease to wonder, he’d breathe silence and unseen wonder, as the partridges do, running in the stubble. He’d be all the animals in turn, instead of one, fixed, automatic thing, which he is now, grinding on the nerves. — Ah, no, mother, I want the wonder back again, or I shall die. I don’t want to be like you, just criticising and annihilating these dreary people, and enjoying it.”

“My dear daughter, whatever else the human animal might be, he’d be a dangerous commodity.”

“I wish he would, mother. I’m dying of these empty danger-less men, who are only sentimental and spiteful.”

“Nonsense, you’re not dying.”

“I am, mother. And I should be dead if there weren’t St. Mawr and Phoenix and Lewis in the world.”

“St. Mawr and Phoenix and Lewis! I thought you said they were servants.”

“That’s the worst of it. If only they were masters! If only there were some men with as much natural life as they have, and their brave, quick minds that commanded instead of serving!”

“There are no such men,” said Mrs. Witt, with a certain grim satisfaction.

“I know it. But I’m young, and I’ve got to live. And the thing that is offered me as life just starves me, starves me to death, mother. What am I to do? You enjoy shattering people like Dean Vyner. But I am young, I can’t live that way!”

“That may be.”

It had long ago struck Lou how much more her mother realised and

understood than ever Rico did. Rico was afraid, always afraid of realising. Rico, with his good manners and his habitual kindness, and that peculiar imprisoned sneer of his.

He arrived home next morning on St. Mawr, rather flushed and gaudy, and over-kind, with an empressé anxiety about Lou's welfare which spoke too many volumes. Especially as he was accompanied by Flora Manby, and by Flora's sister Elsie, and Elsie's husband, Frederick Edwards. They all came on horseback.

"Such awful ages since I saw you!" said Flora to Lou. "Sorry if we burst in on you. We're only just saying 'How do you do!' and going on to the inn. They've got rooms all ready for us there. We thought we'd stay just one night over here, and ride to-morrow to the Devil's Chair. Won't you come? Lots of fun! Isn't Mrs. Witt at home?"

Mrs. Witt was out for the moment. When she returned she had on her curious stiff face, yet she greeted the newcomers with a certain cordiality: she felt it would be diplomatic, no doubt.

"There *are* two rooms here," she said, "and if you care to poke into them, why, we shall be *delighted* to have you. But I'll show them to you first, because they are poor, inconvenient rooms, with no running water and *miles* from the baths."

Flora and Elsie declared that they were "perfectly darling sweet rooms — not overcrowded."

"Well," said Mrs. Witt, "the conveniences certainly don't fill up much space. But if you like to take them for what they are —"

"Why, we feel absolutely overwhelmed, don't we, Elsie? — But we've no clothes —!"

Suddenly the silence had turned into a house-party. The Manby girls appeared to lunch in fine muslin dresses, bought in Paris, fresh as daisies. Women's clothing takes up so little space, especially in summer! Fred Edwards was one of those blond Englishmen with a little brush moustache and those strong blue eyes which were always attempting the sentimental, but which Lou, in her prejudice, considered cruel: upon what grounds she never analysed. However, he took a gallant tone with her at once, and she had to seem to simper. Rico, watching her, was so relieved when he saw the simper coming.

It had begun again, the whole clockwork of 'lots of fun'!

"Isn't Fred flirting perfectly outrageously with Lady Carrington! — She looks so *sweet!*" cried Flora, over her coffee-cup. "Don't you mind, Harry!"

They called Rico 'Harry'! His boy-name.

"Only a very little," said Harry. "*L'uomo è cacciatore.*"

“Oh, now, what does that mean?” cried Flora, who always thrilled to Rico’s bits of affectation.

“It means,” said Mrs. Witt, leaning forward and speaking in her most suave voice, “that man is a hunter.”

Even Flora shrank under the smooth acid of the irony. “Oh, well now!” she cried. “If he is, then what is woman?”

“The hunted,” said Mrs. Witt, in a still smoother acid. “At least,” said Rico, “she is always *game!*”

“Ah, is she though!” came Fred’s manly, well-bred tones. “I’m not so sure.”

Mrs. Witt looked from one man to the other, as if she were dropping them down the bottomless pit.

Lou escaped to look at St. Mawr. He was still moist where the saddle had been. And he seemed a little bit extinguished, as if virtue had gone out of him.

But when he lifted his lovely naked head, like a bunch of flames, to see who it was had entered, she saw he was still himself. Forever sensitive and alert, his head lifted like the summit of a fountain. And within him the clean bones striking to the earth, his hoofs intervening between him and the ground like lesser jewels.

He knew her and did not resent her. But he took no notice of her. He would never ‘respond’. At first she had resented It. Now she was glad. He would never be intimate, thank heaven.

She hid herself away till tea-time, but she could not hide from the sound of voices. Dinner was early, at seven. Dean Vyner came — Mrs. Vyner was an invalid — and also an artist who had a studio in the village and did etchings. He was a man of about thirty-eight, and poor, just beginning to accept himself as a failure, as far as making money goes. But he worked at his etchings and studied esoteric matters like astrology and alchemy. Rico patronised him, and was a little afraid of him. Lou could not quite make him out. After knocking about Paris and London and Munich, he was trying to become staid, and to persuade himself that English village life, with squire and dean in the background, humble artist in the middle, and labourer in the common foreground, was a genuine life. His self-persuasion was only moderately successful. This was betrayed by the curious arrest in his body: he seemed to have to force himself into movements: and by the curious duplicity in his yellow-grey, twinkling eyes, that twinkled and expanded like a goat’s, with mockery, irony, and frustration.

“Your face is curiously like Pan’s,” said Lou to him at dinner.

It was true, in a commonplace sense. He had the tilted eyebrows, the twinkling goatly look, and the pointed ears of a goat-Pan.

“People have said so,” he replied. “But I’m afraid it’s not the face of the Great

God Pan. Isn't it rather the Great Goat Pan!"

"I say, that's good!" cried Rico. "The Great Goat Pan!"

"I have always found it difficult," said the Dean, "to see the Great God Pan in that goat-legged old father of satyrs. He may have a good deal of influence — the world will always be full of goaty old satyrs. But we find them somewhat vulgar. The goaty old satyrs are too comprehensible to me to be venerable, and I fail to see a Great God in the father of them all."

"Your ears should be getting red," said Lou to Cartwright. She, too, had an odd squinting smile that suggested nymphs. so irresponsible and unbelieving.

"Oh no, nothing personal!" cried the Dean.

"I am not sure," said Cartwright, with a small smile. "But don't you imagine Pan once was a great god before the anthropomorphic Greeks turned him into half a man?"

"Ah! — maybe. This is very possible. But — I have noticed the limitation in myself — my mind has no grasp whatsoever of Europe before the Greeks arose. Mr. Wells's Outline does not help me there, either," the Dean added with a smile.

"But what was Pan before he was a man with goat legs?" asked Lou.

"Before he looked like me!" said Cartwright, with a faint grin. "I should say he was the god that is hidden in everything. In those days you saw the thing, you never saw the god in it: I mean in the tree or the fountain or the animal. If you ever saw the God instead of the thing, you died. If you saw it with the naked eye, that is. But in the night you might see the God. And you knew it was there."

"The modern pantheist not only sees the God in everything, he takes photographs of it," said the Dean.

"Oh, and the divine pictures he paints!" cried Rico.

"Quite!" said Cartwright.

"But if they never saw the God in the thing, the old ones, how did they know he was there? How did they have any Pan at all?" said Lou.

"Pan was the hidden mystery — the hidden cause. That's how it was a Great God. Pan wasn't he at all: not even a great God. He was Pan. All: what you see when you see in full. In the day-time you see the thing. But if your third eye is open, which sees only the things that can't be seen, you may see Pan within the thing, hidden: you may see with your third eye, which is darkness."

"Do you think I might see Pan in a horse, for example?"

"Easily. In St. Mawr!" — Cartwright gave her a knowing look.

"But," said Mrs. Witt, "it would be difficult, I should say, to open the third eye and see Pan in a man."

"Probably," said Cartwright, smiling. "In man he is over-visible: the old satyr:

the fallen Pan.”

“Exactly!” said Mrs. Witt. And she fell into a muse. “The fallen Pan!” she echoed. “Wouldn’t a man be wonderful in whom Pan hadn’t fallen!”

Over the coffee in the grey drawing-room she suddenly asked:

“Supposing, Mr. Cartwright, one *did* open the third eye and see Pan in an actual man — I wonder what it would be like?”

She half lowered her eyelids and tilted her face in a strange way, as if she were tasting something, and not quite sure.

“I wonder!” he said, smiling his enigmatic smile. But she could see he did not understand.

“Louise!” said Mrs. Witt at bed-time. “Come into my room for a moment, I want to ask you something.”

“What is it, mother?”

“You, you get something from what Mr. Cartwright said about seeing Pan with the third eye? Seeing Pan in something?”

Mrs. Witt came rather close and tilted her face with strange insinuating question at her daughter.

“I think I do, mother.”

“In what?” — The question came as a pistol-shot.

“I think, mother,” said Lou reluctantly, “in St. Mawr.”

“In a horse!” — Mrs. Witt contracted her eyes slightly. “Yes, I can see that. I know what you mean. It *is* in St. Mawr. It *is*! But in St. Mawr it makes me *afraid* — ” she dragged out the word. Then she came a step closer. “But, Louise, did you ever see it in a man?”

“What, mother?”

“Pan. Did you ever see Pan in a man, as you see Pan in St. Mawr?”

Louise hesitated.

“No, mother, I don’t think I did. When I look at men with my third eye, as you call it — I think I see — mostly — a sort of — pancake.” She uttered the last word with a despairing grin, not knowing quite what to say.

“Oh, Louise, isn’t that it! Doesn’t one always see a pancake! Now listen, Louise. Have you ever been in love?”

“Yes, as far as I understand it.”

“Listen, now. Did you ever see Pan in the man you loved? Tell me if you did.”

“As I see Pan in St. Mawr? — no, mother!” And suddenly her lips began to tremble and the tears came to her eyes.

“Listen, Louise. I’ve been in love innumerable times — and *really* in love twice. Twice! — yet for fifteen years I’ve left off wanting to have anything to do with a man, really. For fifteen years! And why? Do you know? Because I

couldn't see that peculiar hidden Pan in any of them. And I became that I needed to. I needed it. But it wasn't there. Not in any man. Even when I was in love with a man, it was for other things: because I *understood* him so well, or he understood me, or we had such sympathy. Never the hidden Pan. Do you understand what I mean? Unfallen Pan!"

"More or less, mother."

"But now my third eye is coming open, I believe. I am tired of all these men like breakfast cakes, with a teaspoonful of mind or a teaspoonful of spirit in them, for baking-powder. Isn't it extraordinary: that young man Cartwright talks about Pan, but he knows nothing of it all. He knows nothing of the unfallen Pan: only the fallen Pan with goat legs and a leer — and that sort of power, don't you know."

"But what do you know of the unfallen Pan, mother?"

"Don't ask me, Louise! I feel all of a tremble, as if I was just on the verge."

She flashed a little look of incipient triumph, and said goodnight.

An excursion on horseback had been arranged for the next day, to two old groups of rocks, called the Angel's Chair and the Devil's Chair, which crowned the moor-like hills looking into Wales, ten miles away. Everybody was going — they were to start early in the morning, and Lewis would be the guide, since no one exactly knew the way.

Lou got up soon after sunrise. There was a summer scent in the trees of early morning, and monkshood flowers stood up dark and tall, with shadows. She dressed in the green linen riding-skirt her maid had put ready for her, with a close bluish smock.

"Are you going out already, dear?" called Rico from his room.

"Just to smell the roses before we start, Rico."

He appeared in the doorway in his yellow silk pyjamas. His large blue eyes had that rolling, irritable look and the slightly bloodshot whites which made her want to escape.

"Booted and spurred! — the *energy!*" he cried.

"It's a lovely day to ride," she said.

"A lovely day to do anything *except* ride!" he said. "Why spoil the day riding?" — A curious bitter acid escaped into his tone. It was evident he hated the excursion.

"Why, we needn't go if you don't want to, Rico."

"Oh, I'm sure I shall love it, once I get started. It's all this business of *starting*, with horses and paraphernalia — "

Lou went into the yard. The horses were drinking at the trough under the pump, their colours strong and rich in the shadow of the tree.

“You’re not coming with us, Phoenix?” she said. “Lewis, he’s riding my horse.”

She could tell Phoenix did not like being left behind.

By half-past seven everybody was ready. The sun was in the yard, the horses were saddled. They came swishing their tails. Lewis brought out St. Mawr from his separate box, speaking to him very quietly in Welsh: a murmuring, soothing little speech. Lou, alert, could see that he was uneasy. “How is St. Mawr this morning?” she asked.

“He’s all right. He doesn’t like so many people. He’ll be all right once he’s started.”

The strangers were in the saddle: they moved out to the deep shade of the village road outside. Rico came to his horse to mount. St. Mawr jumped away as if he had seen the devil. “Steady, fool!” cried Rico.

The bay stood with his four feet spread, his neck arched, his big dark eye glancing sideways with that watchful, frightening look.

“You shouldn’t be irritable with him, Rico!” said Lou. “Steady then, St. Mawr! Be steady.”

But a certain anger rose also in her. The creature was so big, so brilliant, and so stupid, standing there with his hind legs spread, ready to jump aside or to rear terrifically, and his great eye glancing with a sort of suspicious frenzy. What was there to be suspicious of, after all? — Rico would do him no harm.

“No one will harm you, St. Mawr,” she reasoned, a bit exasperated.

The groom was talking quietly, murmuringly, in Welsh. Rico was slowly advancing again to put his foot in the stirrup. The stallion was watching from the corner of his eye, a strange glare of suspicious frenzy burning stupidly. Any moment his immense physical force might be let loose in a frenzy of panic — or malice. He was really very irritating.

“Probably he doesn’t like that apricot shirt,” said Mrs. Witt, “although it tones into him wonderfully well.”

She pronounced it *ap-ricot*, and it irritated Rico terribly. “Ought we to have *asked* him before we put it on?” he flashed, his upper lip lifting venomously.

“I should say you should,” replied Mrs. Witt coolly.

Rico turned with a sudden rush to the horse. Back went the great animal, with a sudden splashing crash of hoofs on the cobble-stones, and Lewis hanging on like a shadow. Up went the forefeet, showing the belly.

“The thing is accursed,” said Rico, who had dropped the reins in sudden shock, and stood marooned. His rage overwhelmed him like a black flood.

“Nothing in the world is so irritating as a horse that is acting up,” thought Lou.

“Say, Harry!” called Flora from the road. “Come out here into the road to

mount him.”

Lewis looked at Rico and nodded. Then soothing the big, quivering animal, he led him springily out to the road under the trees, where the three friends were waiting. Lou and her mother got quickly into the saddle to follow. And in another moment Rico was mounted and bouncing down the road in the wrong direction, Lewis following on the chestnut. It was some time before Rico could get St. Mawr round. Watching him from behind, those waiting could judge how the young baronet hated it.

But at last they set off — Rico ahead, unevenly but quietly, with the two Manby girls, Lou following with the fair young man who had been in a cavalry regiment and who kept looking round for Mrs. Witt.

“Don’t look round for me,” she called. “I’m riding behind, out of the dust.”

Just behind Mrs. Witt came Lewis. It was a whole cavalcade trotting in the morning sun past the cottages and the cottage gardens, round the field that was the recreation-ground, into the deep hedges of the lane.

“Why is St. Mawr so bad at starting? Can’t you get him Into better shape?” she asked over her shoulder.

“Beg your pardon, Mam!”

Lewis trotted a little nearer. She glanced over her shoulder at him, at his dark, unmoved face, his cool little figure. “I think Mani is so ugly. Why not leave it out!” she said. Then she repeated her question.

“St. Mawr doesn’t trust anybody,” Lewis replied. “Not you?”

“Yes, he trusts me — mostly.”

“Then why not other people?”

“They’re different.”

“All of them?”

“About all of them.”

“How are they different?”

He looked at her with his remote, uncanny grey eyes.

“Different,” he said, not knowing how else to put it.

They rode on slowly, up the steep rise of the wood, then down into a glade where ran a little railway built for hauling some mysterious mineral out of the hill in war-time, and now already abandoned. Even on this countryside the dead hand of the war lay like a corpse decomposing.

They rode up again, past the foxgloves under the trees. Ahead the brilliant St. Mawr and the sorrel and grey horses were swimming like butterflies through the sea of bracken, glittering from sun to shade, shade to sun. Then once more they were on a crest, and through the thinning trees could see the slopes of the moors beyond the next dip.

Soon they were in the open, rolling hills, golden in the morning and empty save for a couple of distant bilberry-pickers, whitish figures pick — pick — picking with curious, rather disgusting assiduity. The horses were on an old trail which climbed through the pinky tips of heather and ling, across patches of green bilberry. Here and there were tufts of harebells blue as bubbles.

They were out, high on the hills. And there to west lay Wales, folded in crumpled folds, goldish in the morning light, with its moor-like slopes and patches of corn uncannily distinct. Between was a hollow, wide valley of summer haze, showing white farms among trees, and grey slate roofs.

“Ride beside me,” she said to Lewis. “Nothing makes me want to go back to America like the old look of these little villages. — You have never been to America?”

“No, Mam.”

“Don’t you ever want to go?”

“I wouldn’t mind going.”

“But you’re not just crazy to go?”

“No, Mam.”

“Quite content as you are?”

He looked at her, and his pale, remote eyes met hers. “I don’t fret myself,” he replied.

“Not about anything at all — ever?”

His eyes glanced ahead, at the other riders.

“No, Mam!” he replied, without looking at her.

She rode a few moments in silence.

“What is that over there?” she asked, pointing across the valley. “What is it called?”

“Yon’s Montgomery.”

“Montgomery! And is that *Wales* — ?” she trailed the ending curiously.

“Yes, Mam.”

“Where you come from?”

“No, Mam! I come from Merioneth.”

“Not from Wales? I thought you were Welsh?”

“Yes, Mam. Merioneth *is* Wales.”

“And you are Welsh?”

“Yes, Mam.”

“I had a Welsh grandmother. But I come from Louisiana, and when I go back home, the negroes still call me Miss Rachel. ‘Oh, my, it’s little Miss Rachel come back home! Why, ain’t I mighty glad to see you — u, Miss Rachel!’ That gives me such a strange feeling, you know.”

The man glanced at her curiously, especially when she imitated the negroes.

“Do you feel strange when you go home?” she asked.

“I was brought up by an aunt and uncle,” he said. “I never want to see them.”

“And you don’t have any home?”

“No, Mam.”

“No wife nor anything?”

“No, Mam.”

“But what do you do with your life?”

“I keep to myself.”

“And care about nothing?”

“I mind St. Mawr.”

“But you’ve not always had St. Mawr — and you won’t always have him. — Were you in the war?”

“Yes, Mam.”

“At the front?”

“Yes, Mam — but I was a groom.”

“And you came out all right?”

“I lost my little finger from a bullet.”

He held up his small, dark left hand, from which the little finger was missing.

“And did you like the war — or didn’t you?”

“I didn’t like it.”

Again his pale grey eyes met hers, and they looked so nonhuman and uncommunicative, so without connection, and inaccessible, she was troubled.

“Tell me,” she said. “Did you never want a wife and a home and children, like other men?”

“No, Mam. I never wanted a home of my own.”

“Nor a wife of your own?”

“No, Mam.”

“Nor children of your own?”

“No, Mam.”

She reined in her horse.

“Now wait a minute,” she said. “Now tell me why.”

His horse came to standstill, and the two riders faced one another.

“Tell me why — I must know why you never wanted a wife and children and a home. I must know why you’re not like other men.”

“I never felt like it,” he said. “I made my life with horses.”

“Did you hate people very much? Did you have a very unhappy time as a child?”

“My aunt and uncle didn’t like me, and I didn’t like them.”

“So you’ve never liked anybody?”

“Maybe not,” he said. “Not to get as far as marrying them.” She touched her horse and moved on.

“Isn’t that curious!” she said. “I’ve loved people, at various times. But I don’t believe I’ve ever liked anybody, except a few of our negroes. I don’t like Louise, though she’s my daughter and I love her. But I don’t really *like* her. — I think you’re the first person I’ve ever liked since I was on our plantation, and we had some very *fine* negroes. — And I think that’s very curious. — Now I want to know if you like *me*.”

She looked at him searchingly, but he did not answer.

“Tell me,” she said. “I don’t mind if you say no. But tell me if you like me. I feel I must know.”

The flicker of a smile went over his face — a very rare thing with him.

“Maybe I do,” he said. He was thinking that she put him on a level with a negro slave on a plantation: in his idea, negroes were still slaves. But he did not care where she put him.

“Well, I’m glad — I’m glad if you like me. Because you *don’t* like most people, I know that.”

They had passed the hollow where the old Aldecar Chapel hid in damp isolation, beside the ruined mill, over the stream that came down from the moors. Climbing the sharp slope, they saw the folded hills like great shut fingers, with steep, deep clefts between. On the near skyline was a bunch of rocks: and away to the right another bunch.

“Yon’s the Angel’s Chair,” said Lewis, pointing to the nearer rocks. “And yon’s the Devil’s Chair, where we’re going.”

“Oh!” said Mrs. Witt. “And aren’t we going to the Angel’s Chair?”

“No, mam.”

“Why not?”

“There’s nothing to see there. The other’s higher, and bigger, and that’s where folks mostly go.”

“Is that so! — They give the Devil the higher seat in this country, do they? I think they’re right.” And as she got no answer, she added: “You believe in the Devil, don’t you?”

“I never met him,” he answered evasively.

Ahead, they could see the other horses twinkling in a cavalcade up the slope, the black, the bay, the two greys and the sorrel, sometimes bunching, sometimes straggling. At a gate all waited for Mrs. Witt. The fair young man fell in beside her, and talked hunting at her. He had hunted the fox over these hills, and was vigorously excited locating the spot where the hounds first gave cry, *etc.*

“Really!” said Mrs. Witt. “*Really!* Is that so!”

If irony could have been condensed to prussic acid, the fair young man would have ended his life’s history with his reminiscences.

They came at last, trotting in file along a narrow track between heather, along the saddle of a hill, to where the knot of pale granite suddenly cropped out. It was one of those places where the spirit of aboriginal England still lingers, the old savage England, whose last blood flows still in a few Englishmen, Welshmen, Cornishmen. The rocks, whitish with weather of all the ages, jutted against the blue August sky, heavy with age-moulded roundness.

Lewis stayed below with the horses, the party scrambled rather awkwardly, in their riding-boots, up the foot-worn boulders. At length they stood in the place called the Chair, looking west, west towards Wales, that rolled in golden folds upwards. It was neither impressive nor a very picturesque landscape: the hollow valley with farms, and then the rather bare upheaval of hills, slopes with corn and moor and pasture, rising like a barricade, seemingly high, slantingly. Yet it had a strange effect on the imagination.

“Oh, mother,” said Lou, “doesn’t it make you feel old, old, older than anything ever was?”

“It certainly does seem aged,” said Mrs. Witt.

“It makes me want to die,” said Lou. “I feel we’ve lasted almost too long.”

“Don’t say that, Lady Carrington. Why, you’re a spring chicken yet: or shall I say an unopened rose-bud,” remarked the fair young man.

“No,” said Lou. “All these millions of ancestors have used all the life up. We’re not really alive, in the sense that they were alive.”

“But who?” said Rico. “Who are *they*?”

“The people who lived on these hills in the days gone by.”

“But the same people still live on the hills, darling. It’s just the same stock.”

“No, Rico. That old fighting stock that worshipped devils among these stones — I’m sure they did — ”

“But look here, do you mean they were any better than we are?” asked the fair young man.

Lou looked at him quizzically.

“We don’t exist,” she said, squinting at him oddly.

“I jolly well know *I* do,” said the fair young man.

“I consider these days are the best ever, especially for girls,” said Flora Manby. “And, anyhow, they’re our own days, so I don’t jolly well see the use of crying them down.”

They were all silent, with the last echoes of emphatic *joie de vivre* trumpeting on the air, across the hills of Wales.

“Spoken like a brick, Flora,” said Rico. “Say it again, we may not have the Devil’s Chair for a pulpit next time.”

“I do,” reiterated Flora. “I think this is the best age there ever was for a girl to have a good time in. I read all through H. G. Wells’s History, and I shut it up and thanked my stars I live in nineteen-twenty odd, not in some other beastly date when a woman had to cringe before mouldy, domineering men.”

After this they turned to scramble to another part of the rocks, to the famous Needle’s Eye.

“Thank you so much, I am really better without help,” said Mrs. Witt to the fair young man, as she slid downwards till a piece of grey silk stocking showed above her tall boot. But she got her toe in a safe place, and in a moment stood beside him, while he caught her arm protectingly. He might as well have caught the paw of a mountain lion protectingly.

“I should like so much to know,” she said suavely, looking into his eyes with a demonish straight look, “what makes you so certain that you exist?”

He looked back at her, and his jaunty blue eyes went baffled. Then a slow, hot, salmon-coloured flush stole over his face, and he turned abruptly round.

The Needle’s Eye was a hole in the ancient grey rock, like a window, looking to England; England at the moment in shadow. A stream wound and glistened in the flat shadow, and beyond that the flat, insignificant hills heaped in mounds of shade. Cloud was coming — the English side was in shadow. Wales was still in the sun, but the shadow was spreading. The day was going to disappoint them. Lou was a tiny bit chilled already.

Luncheon was still several miles away. The party hastened down to the horses. Lou picked a few sprigs of ling, and some harebells, and some straggling yellow flowers: not because she wanted them, but to distract herself. The atmosphere of ‘enjoying ourselves’ was becoming cruel to her: it sapped all the life out of her. “Oh, if only I needn’t enjoy myself,” she moaned inwardly. But the Manby girls were enjoying themselves so much. “I think it’s frantically lovely up here,” said the other one — not Flora — Elsie.

“It is beautiful, isn’t it! I’m so glad you like it,” replied Rico. And he was really relieved and gratified, because the other one said she was enjoying it so frightfully. He dared not say to Lou, as he wanted to: “I’m afraid, Lou, darling, you don’t love it as much as we do.” — He was afraid of her answer: “No, dear, I don’t love it at all! I want to be away from these people.”

Slightly piqued, he rode on with the Manby group, and Lou came behind with her mother. Cloud was covering the sky with grey. There was a cold wind. Everybody was anxious to get to the farm for luncheon, and be safely home before rain came.

They were riding along one of the narrow little foot-tracks, mere grooves of grass between heather and bright green bilberry. The blond young man was ahead, then his wife, then Flora, then Rico. Lou, from a little distance, watched the glossy, powerful haunches of St. Mawr swaying with life, always too much life, like a menace. The fair young man was whistling a new dance tune.

“That’s an awfully attractive tune,” Rico called. “Do whistle it again, Fred, I should like to memorise it.”

Fred began to whistle it again.

At that moment St. Mawr exploded again, shied sideways as if a bomb had gone off, and kept backing through the heather.

“Fool!” cried Rico, thoroughly unnerved: he had been terribly sideways in the saddle, Lou had feared he was going to fall. But he got his seat, and pulled the reins viciously, to bring the horse to order, and put him on the track again. St. Mawr began to rear: his favourite trick. Rico got him forward a few yards, when up he went again.

“Fool!” yelled Rico, hanging in the air.

He pulled the horse over backwards on top of him.

Lou gave a loud, unnatural, horrible scream: she heard it herself, at the same time as she heard the crash of the falling horse. Then she saw a pale gold belly, and hoofs that worked and flashed in the air, and St. Mawr writhing, straining his head terrifically upwards, his great eyes starting from the naked lines of his nose. With a great neck arching cruelly from the ground, he was pulling frantically at the reins, which Rico still held tight. — Yes, Rico, lying strangely sideways, his eyes also starting from his yellow-white face, among the heather, still clutched the reins.

Young Edwards was rushing forward, and circling round the writhing, immense horse, whose pale-gold, inverted bulk seemed to fill the universe.

“Let him get up, Carrington! Let him get up!” he was yelling, darting warily near to get the reins. — Another spasmodic convulsion of the horse.

Horror! The young man reeled backwards with his face in his hands. He had got a kick in the race. Red blood running down his chin!

Lewis was there, on the ground, getting the reins out of Rico’s hands. St. Mawr gave a great curve like a fish, spread his forefeet on the earth and reared his head, looking round in a ghastly fashion. His eyes were arched, his nostrils wide, his face ghastly in a sort of panic. He rested thus, seated with his forefeet planted and his face in panic, almost like some terrible lizard, for several moments. Then he heaved sickeningly to his feet, and stood convulsed, trembling.

There lay Rico, crumpled and rather sideways, staring at the heavens from a

yellow, dead-looking face. Lewis, glancing round in a sort of horror, looked in dread at St. Mawr again. Flora had been hovering. — She now rushed screeching to the prostrate Rico:

“Harry! Harry! you’re not dead! Oh, Harry! Harry! Harry!”

Lou had dismounted. — She didn’t know when. She stood a little way off, as if spellbound, while Flora cried: *Harry! Harry! Harry!*

Suddenly Rico sat up.

“Where is the horse?” he said.

At the same time an added whiteness came on his face, and he bit his lip with pain, and he fell prostrate again in a faint. Flora rushed to put her arm round him.

Where was the horse? He had backed slowly away, in an agony of suspicion, while Lewis murmured to him in vain. His head was raised again, the eyes still starting from their sockets, and a terrible guilty, ghost-like look on his face. When Lewis drew a little nearer he twitched and shrank like a shaken steel spring, away — not to be touched. He seemed to be seeing legions of ghosts, down the dark avenues of all the centuries that have lapsed since the horse became subject to man.

And the other young man? He was still standing, at a little distance, with his face in his hands, motionless, the blood falling on his white shirt, and his wife at his side, pleading, distracted.

Mrs. Witt, too, was there, as if cast in steel, watching. She made no sound and did not move, only from a fixed, impassive face, watched each thing.

“Do tell me what you think is the matter,” Lou pleaded, distracted, to Flora, who was supporting Rico and weeping torrents of unknown tears.

Then Mrs. Witt came forward and began in a very practical manner to unclothe the shirt-neck and feel the young man’s heart. Rico opened his eyes again, said “*Really!*” and closed his eyes once more.

“It’s fainting!” said Mrs. Witt. “We have no brandy.” Lou, too weary to be able to feel anything, said:

“I’ll go and get some.”

She went to her alarmed horse, who stood among the others with her head down, in suspense. Almost unconsciously Lou mounted, set her face ahead, and was riding away.

Then Poppy shied too, with a sudden start, and Lou pulled up. “Why?” she said to her horse. “Why did you do that?”

She looked round, and saw in the heather a glimpse of yellow and black.

“A snake!” she said wonderingly.

And she looked closer.

It was a dead adder that had been drinking at a reedy pool in a little depression

just off the road, and had been killed with stones. There it lay, also crumpled, its head crushed, its gold-and-yellow back still glittering dully, and a bit of pale-blue showing, killed that morning.

Lou rode on, her face set towards the farm. An unspeakable weariness had overcome her. She could not even suffer. Weariness of spirit left her in a sort of apathy.

And she had a vision, a vision of evil. Or not strictly a vision. She became aware of evil, evil, evil, rolling in great waves over the earth. Always she had thought there was no such thing — only a mere negation of good. Now, like an ocean to whose surface she had risen, she saw the dark-grey waves of evil rearing in a great tide.

And it had swept mankind away without mankind's knowing. It had caught up the nations as the rising ocean might lift the fishes, and was sweeping them on in a great tide of evil. They did not know. The people did not know. They did not even wish it. They wanted to be good and to have everything joyful and enjoyable. Everything joyful and enjoyable: for everybody. This was what they wanted, if you asked them.

But at the same time, they had fallen under the spell of evil. It was a soft, subtle thing, soft as water, and its motion was soft and imperceptible, as the running of a tide is invisible to one who is out on the ocean. And they were all out on the ocean, being borne along in the current of the mysterious evil, creatures of the evil principle, as fishes are creatures of the sea.

There was no relief. The whole world was enveloped in one great flood. All the nations, the white, the brown, the black, the yellow, all were immersed, in the strange tide of evil that was subtly, irresistibly rising. No one, perhaps, deliberately wished it. Nearly every individual wanted peace and a good time all round: everybody to have a good time.

But some strange thing had happened, and the vast mysterious force of positive evil was let loose. She felt that from the core of Asia the evil welled up, as from some strange pole, and slowly was drowning earth.

It was something horrifying, something you could not escape from. It had come to her as in a vision, when she saw the pale gold belly of the stallion upturned, the hoofs working wildly, the wicked curved hams of the horse, and then the evil straining of that arched, fish-like neck, with the dilated eyes of the head. Thrown backwards, and working its hoofs in the air. Reversed, and purely evil.

She saw the same in people. They were thrown backwards, and writhing with evil. And the rider, crushed, was still reining them down.

What did it mean? Evil, evil, and a rapid return to the sordid chaos. Which

was wrong, the horse or the rider? Or both?

She thought with horror of St. Mawr, and of the look on his face. But she thought with horror, a colder horror, of Rico's face as he snarled *Fool!* His fear, his impotence as a master, as a rider, his presumption. And she thought with horror of those other people, so glib, so glibly evil.

What did they want to do, those Manby girls? Undermine, undermine, undermine. They wanted to undermine Rico, just as that fair young man would have liked to undermine her. Believe in nothing, care about nothing: but keep the surface easy, and have a good time. *Let us undermine one another. There is nothing to believe in, so let us undermine everything. But look out! No scenes, no spoiling the game. Stick to the rules of the game. Be sporting, and don't do anything that would make a commotion. Keep the game going smooth and jolly, and bear your bit like a sport. Never, by any chance, injure your fellow-man openly. But always injure him secretly. Make a fool of him, and undermine his nature. Break him up by undermining him, if you can. It's good sport.*

The evil! The mysterious potency of evil. She could see it all the time, in individuals, in society, in the press. There it was in socialism and bolshevism: the same evil. But bolshevism made a mess of the outside of life, so turn it down. Try fascism. Fascism would keep the surface of life intact, and carry on the undermining business all the better. All the better sport. Never draw blood. Keep the hemorrhage internal, invisible.

And as soon as fascism makes a break — which it is bound to, because all evil works up to a break — then turn it down. With gusto, turn it down.

Mankind, like a horse, ridden by a stranger, smooth-faced, evil rider. Evil himself, smooth-faced and pseudo-handsome, riding mankind past the dead snake, to the last break.

Mankind no longer its own master. Ridden by this pseudo-handsome ghoul of outward loyalty, inward treachery, in a game of betrayal, betrayal, betrayal. The last of the gods of our era, Judas supreme!

People performing outward acts of loyalty, piety, self-sacrifice. But inwardly bent on undermining, betraying. Directing all their subtle evil will against any positive living thing. Masquerading as the ideal, in order to poison the real.

Creation destroys as it goes, throws down one tree for the rise of another. But ideal mankind would abolish death, multiply itself million upon million, rear up city upon city, save every parasite alive, until the accumulation of mere existence is swollen to a horror. But go on saving life, the ghastly salvation army of ideal mankind. At the same time secretly, viciously, potently undermine the natural creation, betray it with kiss after kiss, destroy it from the inside, till you have the swollen rottenness of our teeming existences. — But keep the game

going. Nobody's going to make another bad break, such as Germany and Russia made.

Two bad breaks the secret evil has made: in Germany and in Russia. Watch it! Let evil keep a policeman's eye on evil! The surface of life must remain unruptured. Production must be heaped upon production. And the natural creation must be betrayed by many more kisses, yet. Judas is the last God, and, by heaven, the most potent.

But even Judas made a break: hanged himself, and his bowels gushed out. Not long after his triumph.

Man must destroy as he goes, as trees fall for trees to rise. The accumulation of life and things means rottenness. Life must destroy life, in the unfolding of creation. We save up life at the expense of the unfolding, till all is full of rottenness. Then at last we make a break.

What's to be done? Generally speaking, nothing. The dead will have to bury their dead, while the earth stinks of corpses. The individual can but depart from the mass, and try to cleanse himself. Try to hold fast to the living thing, which destroys as it goes, but remains sweet. And in his soul fight, fight, fight to preserve that which is life in him from the ghastly kisses and poison-bites of the myriad evil ones. Retreat to the desert, and fight. But in his soul adhere to that which is life itself, creatively destroying as it goes: destroying the stiff old thing to let the new bud come through. The one passionate principle of creative being, which recognises the natural good, and has a sword for the swarms of evil. Fights, fights, fights to protect itself. But with itself, is strong and at peace.

Lou came to the farm, and got brandy, and asked the men to come out to carry in the injured.

It turned out that the kick in the face had knocked a couple of young Edwards's teeth out, and would disfigure him a little.

"To go through the war, and then get this!" he mumbled, with a vindictive glance at St. Mawr.

And it turned out that Rico had two broken ribs and a crushed ankle. Poor Rico, he would limp for life.

"I want St. Mawr *shot!*" was almost his first word when he was in bed at the farm and Lou was sitting beside him. "What good would that do, dear?" she said.

"The brute is evil. I want him *shot!*"

Rico could make the last word sound like the spitting of a bullet.

"Do you want to shoot him yourself?"

"No. But I want to have him shot. I shall never be easy till I know he has a bullet through him. He's got a wicked character. I don't feel you are safe with

him down there. I shall get one of the Manbys' gamekeepers to shoot him. You might tell Flora — or I'll tell her myself, when she comes."

"Don't talk about it now, dear. You've got a temperature."

Was it true St. Mawr was evil? She would never forget him writhing and lunging on the ground, nor his awful face when he reared up. But then that noble look of his: surely he was not mean? Whereas all evil had an inner meanness, mean! Was he mean? Was he meanly treacherous? Did he know he could kill, and meanly wait his opportunity?

She was afraid. And if this were true, then he *should* be shot. Perhaps he ought to be shot.

This thought haunted her. Was there something mean and treacherous in St. Mawr's spirit, the vulgar evil? If so, then have him shot. At moments, an anger would rise in her, as she thought of his frenzied rearing, and his mad, hideous writhing on the ground, and in the heat of her anger she would want to hurry down to her mother's house and have the creature shot at once. It would be a satisfaction, and a vindication of human rights. Because after all, Rico was so considerate of the brutal horse. But not a spark of consideration did the stallion have for Rico. No, it was the slavish malevolence of a domesticated creature that kept cropping up in St. Mawr. The slave, taking his slavish vengeance, then dropping back into subservience.

All the slaves of this world, accumulating their preparations for slavish vengeance, and then, when they have taken it, ready to drop back into servility. Freedom! Most slaves can't be freed, no matter how you let them loose. Like domestic animals, they are, in the long run, more afraid of freedom than of masters: and freed by some generous master, they will at last crawl back to some mean boss, who will have no scruples about kicking them. Because, for them, far better kicks and servility than the hard, lonely responsibility of real freedom.

The wild animal is at every moment intensely self-disciplined, poised in the tension of self-defence, self-preservation and self-assertion. The moments of relaxation are rare and most carefully chosen. Even sleep is watchful, guarded, unrelaxing, the wild courage pitched one degree higher than the wild fear. Courage, the wild thing's courage to maintain itself alone and living in the midst of a diverse universe.

Did St. Mawr have this courage?

And did Rico?

Ah, Rico! He was one of mankind's myriad conspirators, who conspire to live in absolute physical safety, whilst willing the minor disintegration of all positive living.

But St. Mawr? Was it the natural wild thing in him which caused these

disasters? Or was it the slave, asserting himself for vengeance?

If the latter, let him be shot. It would be a great satisfaction to see him dead.

But if the former —

When she could leave Rico with the nurse, she motored down to her mother for a couple of days. Rico lay in bed at the farm.

Everything seemed curiously changed. There was a new silence about the place, a new coolness. Summer had passed with several thunderstorms, and the blue, cool touch of autumn was about the house. Dahlias and perennial yellow sunflowers were out, the yellow of ending summer, the red coals of early autumn. First mauve tips of Michaelmas daisies were showing. Something suddenly carried her away to the great bare spaces of Texas, the blue sky, the flat, burnt earth, the miles of sunflowers. Another sky, another silence, towards the setting sun.

And suddenly she craved again for the more absolute silence of America. English stillness was so soft, like an inaudible murmur of voices, of presences. But the silence in the empty spaces of America was still unutterable, almost cruel.

St. Mawr was in a small field by himself: she could not bear that he should be always in stable. Slowly she went through the gate towards him. And he stood there looking at her, the bright bay creature.

She could tell he was feeling somewhat subdued, after his late escapade. He was aware of the general human condemnation: the human damning. But something obstinate and uncanny in him made him not relent.

“Hello! St. Mawr!” she said, as she drew near, and he stood watching her, his ears pricked, his big eyes glancing sideways at her.

But he moved away when she wanted to touch him. “Don’t trouble,” she said. “I don’t want to catch you or do anything to you.”

He stood still, listening to the sound of her voice, and giving quick, small glances at her. His underlip trembled. But he did not blink. His eyes remained wide and unrelenting. There was a curious malicious obstinacy in him which roused her anger.

“I don’t want to touch you,” she said. “I only want to look at you, and even you can’t prevent that.”

She stood gazing hard at him, wanting to know, to settle the question of his meanness or his spirit. A thing with a brave spirit is not mean.

He was uneasy as she watched him. He pretended to hear something, the mares two fields away, and he lifted his head and neighed. She knew the powerful, splendid sound so well: like bells made of living membrane. And he looked so noble again, with his head tilted up, listening, and his male eyes

looking proudly over the distance, eagerly.

But it was all a bluff.

He knew, and became silent again. And as he stood there a few yards away from her, his head lifted and wary, his body full of power and tension, his face slightly averted from her, she felt a great animal sadness come from him. A strange animal atmosphere of sadness, that was vague and disseminated through the air, and made her feel as though she breathed grief. She breathed it into her breast, as if it were a great sigh down the ages, that passed into her breast. And she felt a great woe: the woe of human unworthiness. The race of men judged in the consciousness of the animals they have subdued, and there found unworthy, ignoble.

Ignoble men, unworthy of the animals they have subjugated, bred the woe in the spirit of their creatures. St. Mawr, that bright horse, one of the kings of creation in the order below man, it had been a fulfilment for him to serve the brave, reckless, perhaps cruel men of the past, who had a flickering, rising flame of nobility in them. To serve that flame of mysterious further nobility. Nothing matters, but that strange flame, of inborn nobility that obliges men to be brave, and onward plunging. And the horse will bear him on.

But now where is the flame of dangerous, forward-pressing nobility in men? Dead, dead, guttering out in a stink of self-sacrifice whose feeble light is a light of exhaustion and *laissez-faire*.

And the horse, is he to go on carrying man forward into this? — this gutter?

No! Man wisely invents motor-cars and other machines, automobile and locomotive. The horse is superannuated for man.

But alas, man is even more superannuated for the horse.

Dimly in a woman's muse, Lou realised this, as she breathed the horse's sadness, his accumulated vague woe from the generations of latter-day ignobility. And a grief and a sympathy flooded her, for the horse. She realised now how his sadness recoiled into these frenzies of obstinacy and malevolence. Underneath it all was grief, an unconscious, vague, pervading animal grief, which perhaps only Lewis understood, because he felt the same. The grief of the generous creature which sees all ends turning to the morass of ignoble living.

She did not want to say any more to the horse: she did not want to look at him any more. The grief flooded her soul, that made her want to be alone. She knew now what it all amounted to. She knew that the horse, born to serve nobly, had waited in vain for someone noble to serve. His spirit knew that nobility had gone out of men. And this left him high and dry, in a sort of despair.

As she walked away from him, towards the gate, slowly he began to walk after her.

Phoenix came striding through the gate towards her.

“You not afraid of that horse?” he asked sardonically, in his quiet, subtle voice.

“Not at the present moment,” she replied, even more quietly, looking direct at him. She was not in any mood to be jeered at.

And instantly the sardonic grimace left his face, followed by the sudden blankness, and the look of race misery in the keen eyes.

“Do you want me to be afraid?” she said, continuing to the gate.

“No, I don’t want it,” he replied, dejected.

“Are you afraid of him yourself?” she said, glancing round. St. Mawr had stopped, seeing Phoenix, and had turned away again.

“I’m not afraid of no horses,” said Phoenix.

Lou went on quietly. At the gate, she asked him: “Don’t you like St. Mawr, Phoenix?”

“I like him. He’s a very good horse.”

“Even after what he’s done to Sir Henry?”

“That don’t make no difference to him being a good horse.”

“But suppose he’d done it to you?”

“I don’t care. I say it my own fault.”

“Don’t you think he is wicked?”

“I don’t think so. He don’t kick anybody. He don’t bite anybody. He don’t pitch, he don’t buck, he don’t do nothing.”

“He rears,” said Lou.

“Well, what is rearing?” said the man, with a slow, contemptuous smile.

“A good deal, when a horse falls back on you.”

“That horse don’t want to fall back on you, if you don’t make him. If you know how to ride him. That horse wants his own way some time. If you don’t let him, you got to fight him. Then look out!”

“Look out he doesn’t kill you, you mean!”

“Look out you don’t let him,” said Phoenix, with his slow, grim, sardonic smile.

Lou watched the smooth, golden face with its thin line of moustache and its sad eyes with the glint in them. Cruel — there was something cruel in him, right down in the abyss of him. But at the same time, there was an aloneness, and a grim little satisfaction in a fight, and the peculiar courage of an inherited despair. People who inherit despair may at last turn it into greater heroism. It was almost so with Phoenix. Three-quarters of his blood was probably Indian and the remaining quarter, that came through the Mexican father, had the Spanish-American despair to add to the Indian. It was almost complete enough to leave him free to be heroic.

“What are we going to do with him, though?” she asked. “Why don’t you and Mrs. Witt go back to America — you never been West. You go West.”

“Where, to California?”

“No. To Arizona or New Mexico or Colorado or Wyoming, anywhere. Not to California.”

Phoenix looked at her keenly, and she saw the desire dark in him. He wanted

to go back. But he was afraid to go back alone, empty-handed, as it were. He had suffered too much, and in that country his sufferings would overcome him, unless he had some other background. He had been too much in contact with the white world, and his own world was too dejected, in a sense, too hopeless for his own hopelessness. He needed an alien contact to give him relief.

But he wanted to go back. His necessity to go back was becoming too strong for him.

“What is it like in Arizona?” she asked. “Isn’t it all pale-coloured sand and alkali, and a few cactuses, and terribly hot and deathly?”

“No!” he cried. “I don’t take you there. I take you to the mountains — trees —” he lifted up his hand and looked at the sky — “big trees — pine! *Pino-real* and *pinovetes*, smell good. And then you come down, *piñon*, not very tall, and cedro, cedar, smell good in the fire. And then you see the desert, away below, go miles and miles, and where the canyon go, the crack where it look red! I know, I been there, working a cattle ranch.”

He looked at her with a haunted glow in his dark eyes. The poor fellow was suffering from nostalgia. And as he glowed at her in that queer, mystical way, she too seemed to see that country, with its dark, heavy mountains holding in their lap the great stretches of pale, creased, silent desert that still is virgin of idea, its word unspoken.

Phoenix was watching her closely and subtly. He wanted something of her. He wanted it intensely, heavily, and he watched her as if he could force her to give it him. He wanted her to take him back to America, because, rudderless, he was afraid to go back alone. He wanted her to take him back: avidly he wanted it. She was to be the means to his end.

Why shouldn’t he go back by himself? Why should he crave for her to go too? Why should he want her there?

There was no answer, except that he did.

“Why, Phoenix,” she said, “I might possibly go back to America. But you know, Sir Henry would never go there. He doesn’t like America, though he’s never been. But I’m sure he’d never go there to live.”

“Let him stay here,” said Phoenix abruptly, the sardonic look on his face as he watched her face. “You come, and let him stay here.”

“Ah, that’s a whole story!” she said, and moved away.

As she went, he looked after her, standing silent and arrested and watching as an Indian watches. It was not love. Personal love counts so little when the greater griefs, the greater hopes, the great despairs and the great resolutions come upon us.

She found Mrs. Witt rather more silent, more firmly closed within herself,

than usual. Her mouth was shut tight, her brows were arched rather more imperiously than ever, she was revolving some inward problem about which Lou was far too wise to inquire.

In the afternoon Dean Vyner and Mrs. Vyner came to call on Lady Carrington.

“What bad luck this is, Lady Carrington!” said the Dean. “Knocks Scotland on the head for you this year, I’m afraid. How did you leave your husband?”

“He seems to be doing as well as he could dot” said Lou. “But how very unfortunate!” murmured the invalid Mrs. Vyner. “Such a handsome young man, in the bloom of youth! Does he suffer much pain?”

“Chiefly his foot,” said Lou.

“Oh, I do so hope they’ll be able to restore the ankle. Oh, how dreadful, to be lamed at his age!”

“The doctor doesn’t know. There may be a limp,” said Lou.

“That horse has certainly left his mark on two good-looking young fellows,” said the Dean. “If you don’t mind my saying so, Lady Carrington, I think he’s a bad egg.”

“Who, St. Mawr?” said Lou, in her American sing-song.

“Yes, Lady Carrington,” murmured Mrs. Vyner, in her invalid’s low tone. “Don’t you think he ought to be put away? He seems to me the incarnation of cruelty. His neigh. It goes through me like knives. Cruel! Cruel! Oh, I think he should be put away.”

“How put away?” murmured Lou, taking on an invalid’s low tone herself.

“Shot, I suppose,” said the Dean.

“It is quite painless. He’ll know nothing,” murmured Mrs. Vyner hastily. “And think of the harm he has done already! Horrible! Horrible!” she shuddered. “Poor Sir Henry lame for life, and Freddy Edwards disfigured. Besides all that has gone before. Ah, no, such a creature ought not to live!”;

“To live, and have a groom to look after him and feed him,” said the Dean. “It’s a bit thick, while he’s smashing up the very people that give him bread — or oats, since he’s a horse. But I suppose you’ll be wanting to get rid of him?”

“Rico does,” murmured Lou.

“Very naturally. So should I. A vicious horse is worse than a vicious man — except that you are free to put him six feet underground, and end his vice finally, by your own act.”

“Do you think St. Mawr is vicious?” said Lou.

“Well, of course — if we’re driven to definitions! — I *know* he’s dangerous.”

“And do you think we ought to shoot everything that is dangerous?” asked Lou, her colour rising.

“But, Lady Carrington, have you consulted your husband? Surely his wish

should be law, in a matter of this sort? And on such an occasion! For you, who are a woman, it is enough that the horse is cruel, cruel, evil! I felt it long before anything happened. That evil male cruelty! Ah!" and she clasped her hands convulsively.

"I suppose," said Lou slowly, "that St. Mawr is really Rico's horse: I gave him to him, I suppose. But I don't believe I could let him shoot him, for all that."

"Ah, Lady Carrington," said the Dean breezily, "you can shift the responsibility. The horse is a public menace, put it at that. We can get an order to have him done away with, at the public expense. And among ourselves we can find some suitable compensation for you, as a mark of sympathy. Which, believe me, is very sincere! One hates to have to destroy a fine-looking animal. But I would sacrifice a dozen rather than have our Rico limping."

"Yes, indeed," murmured Mrs. Vyner.

"Will you excuse me one moment, while I see about tea," said Lou, rising and leaving the room. Her colour was high, and there was a glint in her eyes. These people almost roused her to hatred. Oh, these awful, house-bred, house-inbred human beings, how repulsive they were!

She hurried to her mother's dressing-room. Mrs. Witt was very carefully putting a touch of red on her lips.

"Mother, they want to shoot St. Mawr," she said.

"I know," said Mrs. Witt, as calmly as if Lou had said tea was ready.

"Well — " stammered Lou, rather put out. "Don't you think it cheek?"

"It depends, I suppose, on the point of view," said Mrs. Witt dispassionately, looking closely at her lips. "I don't think the English climate agrees with me. I need something to stand up against, no matter whether it's great heat or great cold. This climate, like the food and the people, is most always lukewarm or tepid, one or the other. And the tepid and the lukewarm are not really my line." She spoke with a slow drawl.

"But they're in the drawing-room, mother, trying to force me to have St. Mawr killed."

"What about tea?" said Mrs. Witt.

"I don't care," said Lou.

Mrs. Witt worked the bell-handle.

"I suppose, Louise," she said, in her most beaming eighteenth-century manner, "that these are your guests, so you will preside over the ceremony of pouring out."

"No, mother, you do it. I can't smile to-day."

"I can," said Mrs. Witt.

And she bowed her head slowly, with a faint, ceremoniously-effusive smile, as

if handing a cup of tea. Lou's face flickered to a smile.

"Then you pour out for them. You can stand them better than I can."

"Yes," said Mrs. Witt. "I saw Mrs. Vyner's hat coming across the churchyard. It looks so like a crumpled cup and saucer, that I have been saying to myself ever since: 'Dear Mrs. Vyner, can't I fill your cup!' — and then pouring tea into that hat. And I hear the Dean responding: 'My head is covered with cream, my cup runneth over.' — That is the way they make me feel."

They marched downstairs, and Mrs. Witt poured tea with that devastating correctness which made Mrs. Vyner, who was utterly impervious to sarcasm, pronounce her 'indecipherably vulgar'.

But the Dean was the old bull-dog, and he had set his teeth in a subject.

"I was talking to Lady Carrington about that stallion, Mrs. Witt."

"Did you say stallion?" asked Mrs. Witt, with perfect neutrality.

"Why, yes, I presume that's what he is."

"I presume so," said Mrs. Witt colourlessly.

"I'm afraid Lady Carrington is a little sensitive on the wrong score," said the Dean.

"I beg your pardon," said Mrs. Witt, leaning forward in her most colourless polite manner. "You mean the stallion's score?"

"Yes," said the Dean testily. "The horse St. Mawr."

"The stallion St. Mawr," echoed Mrs. Witt, with utmost mild vagueness. She completely ignored Mrs. Vyner, who felt plunged like a specimen into methylated spirit. There was a moment's full-stop.

"Yes?" said Mrs. Witt naively.

"You agree that we can't have any more of these accidents to your young men?" said the Dean rather hastily.

"I certainly do!" Mrs. Witt spoke very slowly, and the Dean's lady began to look up. She might find a loop-hole through which to wriggle into the contest. "You know, Dean, that my son-in-law calls me, for preference, *belle-mère*! It sounds so awfully English when he says it: I always see myself as an old grey mare with a bell round her neck, leading a bunch of horses." She smiled a prim little smile, very conversationally. "Well!" and she pulled herself up from the aside. "Now as the bell-mare of the bunch of horses, I shall see to it that my son-in-law doesn't go too near that stallion again. That stallion won't stand mischief."

She spoke so earnestly that the Dean looked at her with round, wide eyes, completely taken aback.

"We all know, Mrs. Witt, that the author of the mischief is St. Mawr himself," he said, in a loud tone.

“Really! you think *that*?” Her voice went up in American surprise. “Why, how *strange* — !” and she lingered over the last word.

“Strange, eh? — After what’s just happened?” said the Dean, with a deadly little smile.

“Why, yes! Most strange! I saw with my own eyes my son-in-law pull that stallion over backwards, and hold him down with the reins as tight as he could hold them; pull St. Mawr’s head backwards on to the ground, till the groom had to crawl up and force the reins out of my son-in-law’s hands. Don’t you think that was mischievous on Sir Henry’s part?”

The Dean was growing purple. He made an apoplectic movement with his hand. Mrs. Vyner was turned to a seated pillar of salt, strangely dressed up.

“Mrs. Witt, you are playing on words.”

“No, Dean Vyner, I am not. My son-in-law pulled that horse over backwards and pinned him down with the reins.”

“I am sorry for the horse,” said the Dean, with heavy sarcasm.

“I am *very*,” said Mrs. Witt, “sorry for that stallion: *very*!” Here Mrs. Vyner rose as if a chair-spring had suddenly pro-pelled her to her feet. She was streaky pink in the face.

“Mrs. Witt,” she panted, “you misdirect your sympathies. That poor young man — in the beauty of youth.”

“Isn’t he *beautiful* — ” murmured Mrs. Witt, extravagantly in sympathy. “He’s my daughter’s husband!” And she looked at the petrified Lou.

“Certainly!” panted the Dean’s wife. “And you can defend that — that — ”

“That stallion,” said Mrs. Witt. “But you see, Mrs. Vyner,” she added, leaning forward female and confidential, “if the old grey mare doesn’t defend the stallion, who will? All the blooming young ladies will defend my beautiful son-in-law. You feel so *warmly* for him yourself! I’m an American woman, and I always have to stand up for the accused. And I stand up for that stallion. I say it is not right. He was pulled over backwards and then pinned down by my son-in-law — who may have meant to do it, or may not. And now people abuse him. — Just tell everybody, Mrs. Vyner and Dean Vyner” — she looked round at the Dean — “that the *belle-mère*’s sympathies are with the stallion.”

She looked from one to the other with a faint and gracious little bow, her black eyebrows arching in her eighteenth-century face like black rainbows, and her full, bold, grey eyes absolutely incomprehensible.

“Well, it’s a peculiar message to have to hand round, Mrs. Witt,” the Dean began to boom, when she interrupted him by laying her hand on his arm and leaning forward, looking up into his face like a clinging, pleading female:

“Oh, but *do* hand it, Dean, do hand it,” she pleaded, gazing intently into his

face.

He backed uncomfortably from that gaze.

“Since you wish it,” he said, in a chest voice.

“I most certainly do — ” she said, as if she were wishing the sweetest wish on earth. Then turning to Mrs. Vyner:

“Good-bye, Mrs. Vyner. We *do* appreciate your coming, my daughter and I.”

“I came out of kindness — — ” said Mrs. Vyner.

“Oh, I know it, I know it,” said Mrs. Witt. “Thank you so much. Good-bye! Good-bye, Dean! Who is taking the morning service on Sunday? I hope it is you, because I want to come.”

“It is me,” said the Dean. “Good-bye! Well, good-bye, Lady Carrington. I shall be going over to see our young man to-morrow, and will gladly take you or anything you have to send.”

“Perhaps mother would like to go,” said Lou softly, plaintively.

“Well, we shall see,” said the Dean. “Good-bye for the present!”

Mother and daughter stood at the window watching the two cross the churchyard. Dean and wife knew it, but daren’t look round, and daren’t admit the fact to one another.

Lou was grinning with a complete grin that gave her an odd, dryad or faun look, intensified.

“It was almost as good as pouring tea into her hat,” said Mrs. Witt serenely. “People like that tire me out. I shall take a glass of sherry.”

“So will I, mother. — It was even better than pouring tea in her hat. — You meant, didn’t you, if you poured tea in her hat, to put cream and sugar in first?”

“I did,” said Mrs. Witt.

But after the excitement of the encounter had passed away, Lou felt as if her life had passed away too. She went to bed, feeling she could stand no more.

In the morning she found her mother sitting at a window watching a funeral. It was raining heavily, so that some of the mourners even wore mackintosh coats. The funeral was in the poorer corner of the churchyard, where another new grave was covered with wreaths of sodden, shrivelling flowers. The yellowish coffin stood on wet earth in the rain: the curate held his hat, in a sort of permanent salute, above his head, like a little umbrella, as he hastened on with the service. The people seemed too wet to weep more wet.

It was a long coffin.

“Mother, do you really *like* watching?” asked Lou irritably, as Mrs. Witt sat in complete absorption.

“I do, Louise, I really enjoy it.”

“Enjoy, mother!” — Lou was almost disgusted.

“I’ll tell you why. I imagine I’m the one in the coffin — this is a girl of eighteen, who died of consumption — and those are my relatives, and I’m watching them put me away. And, you know, Louise, I’ve come to the conclusion that hardly anybody in the world really lives, and so hardly anybody really dies. They may well say: ‘Oh, Death, where is thy sting-a-ling-a-ling?’ Even Death can’t sting those that have never really lived. — I always used to want that — to die without death stinging me. — And I’m sure the girl in the coffin is saying to herself: ‘Fancy Aunt Emma putting on a drab slicker, and wearing it while they bury me. Doesn’t show much respect. But then my mother’s family always were common!’ I feel there should be a solemn burial of a roll of newspapers containing the account of the death and funeral next week. It would be just as serious: the grave of all the world’s remarks — ”

“I don’t want to think about it, mother. One ought to be able to laugh at it. I want to laugh at it.”

“Well, Louise, I think it’s just as great a mistake to laugh at everything as to cry at everything. Laughter’s not the one panacea, either. I should *really* like, before I do come to be buried in a box, to know where I am. That young girl in that coffin never was anywhere — any more than the newspaper remarks on her death and burial. And I begin to wonder if I’ve ever been anywhere. I seem to have been a daily sequence of newspaper remarks myself. I’m sure I never really conceived you and gave you birth. It all happened in newspaper notices. It’s a newspaper fact that you are my child, and that’s about all there is to it.”

Lou smiled as she listened.

“I always knew you were philosophic, mother. But I never dreamed at would come to elegies in a country churchyard, written to your motherhood.”

“Exactly, Louise! Here I sit and sing the elegy to my own motherhood. I never had any motherhood, except in newspaper fact. I never was a wife, except in newspaper notices. I never was a young girl, except in newspaper remarks. Bury everything I ever said or that was said about me, and you’ve buried *me*. But since Kind Words Can Never Die, I can’t be buried, and death has no sting-a-ling-a-ling for *me*! — Now listen to me, Louise: I want death to be real to me — not as it was to that young girl. I *want* it to hurt me, Louise. If it hurts me enough, I shall know I was alive.”

She set her face and gazed under half-dropped lids at the funeral, stoic, fate-like, and yet, for the first time, with a certain pure wistfulness of a young, virgin girl. This frightened Lou very much. She was so used to the matchless Amazon in her mother, that when she saw her sit there, still, wistful, virginal, tender as a girl who has never taken armour, wistful at the window that only looked on graves, a serious terror took hold of the young woman. The terror of too late!

Lou felt years, centuries older than her mother at that moment, with the tiresome responsibility of youth to protect and guide their elders.

“What can we do about it, mother?” she asked protectively.

“Do nothing, Louise. I’m not going to have anybody wisely steering my canoe, now I feel the rapids are near. I shall go with the river. Don’t you pretend to do anything for me. I’ve done enough mischief myself, that way. I’m going down the stream at last.”

There was a pause.

“But in actuality, what?” asked Lou, a little ironically. “I don’t quite know. Wait a while.”

“Go back to America?”

“That is possible.”

“I may come too.”

“I’ve always waited for you to go back of your own will.”

Lou went away, wandering round the house. She was so unutterably tired of everything — weary of the house, the graveyard, weary of the thought of Rico. She would have to go back to him to-morrow, to nurse him. Poor old Rico, going on like an amiable machine from day to day. It wasn’t his fault. But his life was a rattling nullity, and her life rattled in null correspondence. She had hardly strength enough to stop rattling and be still. Perhaps she had not strength enough.

She did not know. She felt so weak that unless something carried her away she would go on rattling her bit in the great machine of human life till she collapsed and her rattle rattled itself out, and there was a sort of barren silence where the sound of her had been.

She wandered out in the rain to the coach-house, where Lewis and Phoenix were sitting facing one another, one on a bin, the other on the inner doorstep.

“Well,” she said, smiling oddly. “What’s to be done?”

The two men stood up. Outside the rain fell steadily on the flagstones of the yard, past the leaves of trees. Lou sat down on the little iron step of the dogcart.

“That’s cold,” said Phoenix. “You sit here.” And he threw a yellow horse-blanket on the box where he had been sitting. “I don’t want to take your seat,” she said.

“All right, you take it.”

He moved across and sat gingerly on the shaft of the dogcart. Lou seated herself and loosened her soft tartan shawl. Her face was pink and fresh, and her dark hair curled almost merrily in the damp. But under her eyes were the fingerprints of deadly weariness.

She looked up at the two men, again smiling in her odd fashion.

“What are we going to do?” she asked.

They looked at her closely, seeking her meaning.

“What about?” said Phoenix, a faint smile reflecting on his face, merely because she smiled.

“Oh, everything,” she said, hugging her shawl again. “You know what they want? They want to shoot St. Mawr.” The two men exchanged glances.

“Who want it?” said Phoenix.

“Why — all our *friends!*” She made a little *moue*. “Dean Vyner does.”

Again the men exchanged glances. There was a pause. Then Phoenix said, looking aside:

“The boss is selling him.”

“Who?”

“Sir Henry.” — The half-breed always spoke the title with difficulty, and with a sort of sneer. “He sell him to Miss Manby.”

“How do you know?”

“The man from Corrabach told me last night. Flora, she say it.”

Lou’s eyes met the sardonic, empty-seeing eyes of Phoenix direct. There was too much sarcastic understanding. She looked aside.

“What else did he say?” she asked.

“I don’t know,” said Phoenix evasively. “He say they cut him — else shoot him. Think they cut him — and if he die, he die.”

Lou understood. He meant they would geld St. Mawr — at his age.

She looked at Lewis. He sat with his head down, so she could not see his face.

“Do you think it is true?” she asked. “Lewis? Do you think they would try to geld St. Mawr — to make him a gelding?” Lewis looked up at her. There was a faint deadly glimmer of contempt on his face.

“Very likely, Mam,” he said.

She was afraid of his cold, uncanny pale eyes, with their uneasy grey dawn of contempt. These two men, with their silent, deadly inner purpose, were not like other men. They seemed like two silent enemies of all the other men she knew. Enemies in the great white camp, disguised as servants, waiting the incalculable opportunity. What the opportunity might be, none knew.

“Sir Henry hasn’t mentioned anything to me about selling St. Mawr to Miss Manby,” she said.

The derisive flicker of a smile came on Phoenix’s face.

“He sell him first, and tell you then,” he said, with his deadly impassive manner.

“But do you really think so?” she asked.

It was extraordinary how much corrosive contempt Phoenix could convey,

saying nothing. She felt it almost as an insult. Yet it was a relief to her.

“You know, I can’t believe it. I can’t believe Sir Henry would want to have St. Mawr mutilated. I believe he’d rather shoot him.”

“You think so?” said Phoenix, with a faint grin.

Lou turned to Lewis.

“Lewis, will you tell me what you truly think?”

Lewis looked at her with a hard, straight, fearless British stare.

“That man Philips was in the ‘Moon and Stars’ last night. He said Miss Manby told him she was buying St. Mawr, and she asked him if he thought it would be safe to cut him and make a horse of him. He said it would be better, take some of the nonsense out of him. He’s no good for a sire, anyhow — ”

Lewis dropped his head again, and tapped a tattoo with the toe of his rather small foot.

“And what do you think?” said Lou. It occurred to her how sensible and practical Miss Manby was, so much more so than the Dean.

Lewis looked up at her with his pale eyes.

“It won’t have anything to do with me,” he said. “I shan’t go to Corrabach Hall.”

“What will you do, then?”

Lewis did not answer. He looked at Phoenix.

“Maybe him and me go to America,” said Phoenix, looking at the void.

“Can he get in?” said Lou.

“Yes, he can. I know how,” said Phoenix.

“And the money?” she said.

“We got money.”

There was a silence, after which she asked of Lewis: “You’d leave St. Mawr to his fate?”

“I can’t help his fate,” said Lewis. “There’s too many people In the world for me to help anything.”

“Poor St. Mawr!”

She went indoors again and up to her room: then higher, to the top rooms of the tall Georgian house. From one window she could see the fields in the rain. She could see St. Mawr himself, alone as usual, standing with his head up, looking across the fences. He was streaked dark with rain. Beautiful, with his poised head and massive neck and his supple hindquarters. He was neighing to Poppy. Clear on the wet wind came the sound of his bell-like, stallion’s calling, that Mrs. Vyner called cruel. It was a strange noise, with a splendour that belonged to another world age. The mean cruelty of Mrs. Vyner’s humanitarianism, the barren cruelty of Flora Manby, the eunuch cruelty of Rico.

Our whole eunuch civilisation, nasty-minded as eunuchs are, with their kind of sneaking, sterilising cruelty.

Yet even she herself, seeing St. Mawr's conceited march along the fence, could not help addressing him:

"Yes, my boy! If you knew what Miss Flora Manby was preparing for you! *She'll* sharpen a knife that will settle you." And Lou called her mother.

The two American women stood high at the window, overlooking the wet, close, hedged-and-fenced English landscape. Everything enclosed, enclosed, to stifling. The very apples on the trees looked so shut in, it was impossible to imagine any speck of 'Knowledge' lurking inside them. Good to eat, good to cook, good even for show. But the wild sap of untameable and inexhaustible knowledge — no! Bred out of them. Geldings, even the apples.

Mrs. Witt listened to Lou's half-humorous statements. "You must admit, mother, Flora is a sensible girl," she said.

"I admit it, Louise."

"She goes straight to the root of the matter."

"And eradicates the root. Wise girl! And what is your answer?"

"I don't know, mother. What would you say?"

"I know what I should say."

"Tell me."

"I should say: 'Miss Manby, you may have my husband, but not my horse. My husband won't need emasculating, and my horse I won't have you meddle with. I'll preserve one last male thing in the museum of this world, if I can.'"

Lou listened, smiling faintly.

"That's what I will say," she replied at length. "The funny thing is, mother, they think all their men with their bare faces or their little quotation-mark moustaches are so tremendously male. That fox-hunting one!"

"I know it. Like little male motorcars. Give him a little gas, and start him on the low gear, and away he goes: all his male gear rattling, like a cheap motorcar."

"I'm afraid I dislike men altogether, mother."

"You may, Louise. Think of Flora Manby, and how you love the fair sex."

"After all, St. Mawr is better. And I'm glad if he gives them a kick in the face."

"Ah, Louise!" Mrs. Witt suddenly clasped her hands with wicked passion. "Ay, *qué gozo!* as our Juan used to say, on your father's ranch in Texas." She gazed in a sort of wicked ecstasy out of the window.

They heard Lou's maid softly calling Lady Carrington from below. Lou went to the stairs.

“What is it?”

“Lewis want to speak to you, my Lady.”

“Send him into the sitting-room.”

The two women went down.

“What is it, Lewis?” asked Lou.

“Am I to bring in St. Mawr, in case they send for him from Corrabach?”

“No,” said Lou swiftly.

“Wait a minute,” put in Mrs. Witt. “What makes you think they will send for St. Mawr from Corrabach, Lewis?” she asked, suave as a grey leopard cat.

“Miss Manby went up to Flints Farm with Dean Vyner this morning, and they’ve just come back. They stopped the car, and Miss Manby got out at the field gate to look at St. Mawr. I’m thinking, if she made the bargain with Sir Henry, she’ll be sending a man over this afternoon, and if I’d better brush tit. Mawr down a bit, in case.”

The man stood strangely still, and the words came like shadows of his real meaning. It was a challenge.

“I see,” said Mrs. Witt slowly.

Lou’s face darkened. She, too, saw.

“So that is her game,” she said. “That is why they got me down here.”

“Never mind, Louise,” said Mrs. Witt. Then to Lewis: “Yes, please bring in St. Mawr. You wish it, don’t you, Louise?”

“Yes,” hesitated Lou. She saw by Mrs. Witt’s closed face that a counter-move was prepared.

“And Lewis,” said Mrs. Witt, “my daughter may wish you to ride St. Mawr this afternoon — not to Corrabach Hall.”

“Very good, Mam.”

Mrs. Witt sat silent for some time, after Lewis had gone, gathering inspiration from the wet, grisly grave-stones.

“Don’t you think it’s time we made a move, daughter?” she asked.

“Any move,” said Lou desperately.

“Very well then. My dearest friends, and my *only* friends, in this country, are in Oxfordshire. I will set off to *ride* to Merriton this afternoon, and Lewis will ride with me on St. Mawr.”

“But you can’t ride to Merriton in an afternoon,” said Lou.

“I know it. I shall ride across country. I shall *enjoy* it, Louise. — Yes. — I shall consider I am on my way back to America. I am most deadly tired of this country. From Merriton I shall make my arrangements to go to America, and take Lewis and Phoenix and St. Mawr along with me. I think they want to go. — You will decide for yourself.”

“Yes, I’ll come too,” said Lou casually.

“Very well. I’ll start immediately after lunch, for I can’t breathe in this place any longer. Where are Henry’s automobile maps?”

Afternoon saw Mrs. Witt, in a large waterproof cape, mounted on her horse, Lewis, in another cape, mounted on St. Mawr, trotting through the rain, splashing in the puddles, moving slowly southwards. They took the open country, and would pass quite close to Flints Farm. But Mrs. Witt did not care. With great difficulty she had managed to fasten a small waterproof roll behind her, containing her night things. She seemed to breathe the first breath of freedom.

And sure enough, an hour or so after Mrs. Witt’s departure, arrived Flora Manby in a splashed-up motorcar, accompanied by her sister, and bringing a groom and a saddle.

“Do you know, Harry sold me St. Mawr,” she said. “I’ just wild to get that horse in hand.”

“How?” said Lou.

“Oh, I don’t know. There are ways. Do you mind if Philips rides him over now to Corrabach? — Oh, I forgot, Harry sent you a note:

“Dearest Loulina: Have you been gone from here two days or two years? It seems the latter. You are terribly missed. Flora wanted so much to buy St. Mawr, to save us further trouble, that I have sold him to her. She is giving me what we paid: rather, what you paid, so of course the money is yours. I am thankful we are rid of the animal, and that he falls into competent hands — I asked her please to remove him from your charge to-day. And I can’t tell how much easier I am in my mind, to think of him gone. You are coming back to me to-morrow, aren’t you? I shall think of nothing but you, till I see you. Arrivederci, darling dear! R.”

“I’m so sorry,” said Lou. “Mother went on horseback to see some friends, and Lewis went with her on St. Mawr. He knows the road.”

“She’ll be back this evening?” said Flora.

“I don’t know. Mother is so uncertain. She may be away a day or two.”

“Well, here’s the cheque for St. Mawr.”

“No, I won’t take it now — no, thank you — not till mother comes back with the goods.”

Flora was chagrined. The two women knew they hated one another. The visit was a brief one.

Mrs. Witt rode on in the rain, which abated as the afternoon wore down, and the evening came without rain, and with a suffusion of pale yellow light. All the time she had trotted in silence, with Lewis just behind her. And she scarcely saw

the heather-covered hills with the deep clefts between them, nor the oak woods, nor the lingering foxgloves, nor the earth at all. Inside herself she felt a profound repugnance for the English country: she preferred even the crudeness of Central Park in New York.

And she felt an almost savage desire to get away from Europe, from everything European. Now she was really en route, she cared not a straw for St. Mawr or for Lewis or anything. Something just writhed inside her, all the time, against Europe. That closeness, that sense of cohesion, that sense of being fused into a lump with all the rest — no matter how much distance you kept — this drove her mad. In America the cohesion was a matter of choice and will. But in Europe it was organic, like the helpless particles of one sprawling body. And the great body in a state of incipient decay.

She was a woman of fifty-one: and she seemed hardly to have lived a day. She looked behind her — the thin trees and swamps of Louisiana, the sultry, sub-tropical excitement of decaying New Orleans, the vast bare dryness of Texas, with mobs of cattle in an illumined dust! The half-European thrills of New York! The false stability of Boston! A clever husband, who was a brilliant lawyer, but who was far more thrilled by his cattle ranch than by his law: and who drank heavily and died. The years of first widowhood in Boston, consoled by a self-satisfied sort of intellectual courtship from clever men. — For curiously enough, while she wanted it, she had always been able to compel men to pay court to her. All kinds of men. — Then a rather dashing time in New York — when she was in her early forties. Then the long visual, philandering in Europe. She left off ‘loving’, save through the eye, when she came to Europe. And when she made her trips to America, she found it was finished there also, her ‘loving’.

What was the matter? Examining herself, she had long ago decided that her nature was a destructive force. But then, she justified herself, she had only destroyed that which was destructible. If she could have found something indestructible, especially in men, though she would have fought against it, she would have been glad at last to be defeated by it.

That was the point. She really wanted to be defeated, in her own eyes. And nobody had ever defeated her. Men were never really her match. A woman of terrible strong health, she felt even that in her strong limbs there was far more electric power than in the limbs of any man she had met. That curious fluid electric force, that could make any man kiss her hand, if she so willed it. A queen, as far as she wished. And not having been very clever at school, she always had the greatest respect for the mental powers. Her own were not mental powers. Rather electric, as of some strange physical dynamo within her. So she had been ready to bow before Mind.

But alas! After a brief time, she had found Mind, at least the man who was supposed to have the mind, bowing before her. Her own peculiar dynamic force was stronger than the force of Mind. She could make Mind kiss her hand.

And not by any sensual tricks. She did not really care about sensualities, especially as a younger woman. Sex was a mere adjunct. She cared about the mysterious, intense, dynamic sympathy that could flow between her and some 'live' man — a man who was highly conscious, a real live wire. That she cared about.

But she had never rested until she had made the man she admired — and admiration was the roots of her attraction to any man — made him kiss her hand. In both cases, actual and metaphorical. Physical and metaphysical. Conquered his country.

She had always succeeded. And she believed that, if she cared, she always would succeed. In the world of living men. Because of the power that was in her, in her arms, in her strong, shapely, but terrible hands, in all the great dynamo of her body.

For this reason she had been so terribly contemptuous of Rico, and of Lou's infatuation. Ye gods! what was Rico in the scale of men!

Perhaps she despised the younger generation too easily. Because she did not see its sources of power, she concluded it was powerless. Whereas perhaps the power of accommodating oneself to any circumstance and committing oneself to no circumstance is the last triumph of mankind.

Her generation had had its day. She had had her day. The world of her men had sunk into a sort of insignificance. And with a great contempt she despised the world that had come into place instead: the world of Rico and Flora Manby, the world represented, to her, by the Prince of Wales.

In such a world there was nothing even to conquer. It gave everything and gave nothing to everybody and anybody all the time. Dio Benedetto! as Rico would say. A great complicated tangle of nonentities ravelled in nothingness. So it seemed to her.

Great God! This was the generation she had helped to bring into the world.

She had had her day. And, as far as the mysterious battle of life went, she had won all the way. Just as Cleopatra, in the mysterious business of a woman's life, won all the way. Though that bald, tough Caesar had drawn his iron from the fire without losing much of its temper. And he had gone his way. And Antony surely was splendid to die with.

In her life there had been no tough Caesar to go his way in cold blood, away from her. Her men had gone from her like dogs on three legs, into the crowd. And certainly there was no gorgeous Antony to die for and with.

Almost she was tempted in her heart to cry: "Conquer me, oh God, before I die!" — But then she had a terrible contempt for the God that was supposed to rule this universe. She felt she could make *Him* kiss her hand. Here she was a woman of fifty-one, past the change of life. And her great dread was to die an empty, barren death. Oh, if only Death might open dark wings of mystery and consolation. To die an easy, barren death. To pass out as she had passed in, without mystery or the rustling of darkness! That was her last, final, ashy dread.

"Old!" she said to herself. "I am not *old!* I have lived many years, that is all. But I am as timeless as an hour-glass that turns morning and night, and spills the hours of sleep one way, the hours of consciousness the other way, without itself being affected. Nothing in all my life has ever truly affected me. — I believe Cleopatra only tried the asp, as she tried her pearls in wine, to see if it would really, really have any effect on her. Nothing had ever really had any effect on her, neither Caesar nor Antony nor any of them. Never once had she really been lost, lost to herself. Then try death, see if that trick would work. If she would lose herself to herself that way. — Ah, death — !"

But Mrs. Witt mistrusted death too. She felt she might pass out as a bed of asters passes out in autumn, to mere nothingness. — And something in her longed to die, at least, *positively*: to be folded then at last into throbbing wings of mystery, like, a hawk that goes to sleep. Not like a thing made into a parcel and put into the last rubbish-heap.

So she rode trotting across the hills, mile after mile, in silence. Avoiding the roads, avoiding everything, avoiding everybody, just trotting forwards, towards night.

And by nightfall they had travelled twenty-five miles. She had motored around this country, and knew the little towns and the inns. She knew where she would sleep.

The morning came beautiful and sunny. A woman so strong in health, why should she ride with the fact of death before her eyes? But she did.

Yet in sunny morning she must do something about it.

"Lewis!" she said. "Come here and tell me something, please! Tell me," she said, "do you believe in God?"

"In God!" he said, wondering. "I never think about it."

"But do you say your prayers?"

"No, Mam!"

"Why don't you?"

He thought about it for some minutes.

"I don't like religion. My aunt and uncle were religious."

"You don't like religion," she repeated. "And you don't believe in God. —"

Well, then — ”

“Nay!” he hesitated. “I never said I didn’t believe in God. — Only I’m sure I’m not a Methodist. And I feel a fool in a proper church. — And I feel a fool saying my prayers. — And I feel a fool when ministers and parsons come getting at me. — I never think about God, if folks don’t try to make me.” He had a small, sly smile, almost gay.

“And you don’t like feeling a fool?” She smiled rather patronisingly.

“No, Mam.”

“Do I make you feel a fool?” she asked dryly.

He looked at her without answering.

“Why don’t you answer?” she said, pressing.

“I think you’d like to make a fool of me sometimes,” he said. “Now?” she pressed.

He looked at her with that slow, distant look.

“Maybe!” he said, rather unconcernedly.

Curiously, she couldn’t touch him. He always seemed to be watching her from a distance, as if from another country. Even if she made a fool of him, something in him would all the time be far away from her, not implicated.

She caught herself up in the personal game and returned to her own isolated question. A vicious habit made her start the personal tricks. She didn’t want to, really.

There was something about this little man — sometimes, to herself, she called him *Little Jack Horner, sat in a corner* — that irritated her and made her want to taunt him. His peculiar little inaccessibility, that was so tight and easy.

Then again, there was something, his way of looking at her as if he looked from out of another country, a country of which he was an inhabitant, and where she had never been: this touched her strangely. Perhaps behind this little man was the mystery. In spite of the fact that in actual life, in her world, he was only a groom, almost *chétif*, with his legs a little bit horsy and bowed; and of no education, saying ‘Yes, Mam!’ and ‘No, Mam!’ and accomplishing nothing, simply nothing at all on the face of the earth. Strictly a nonentity.

And yet, what made him perhaps the only real entity to her, his seeming to inhabit another world than hers. A world dark and still, where language never ruffled the growing leaves and seared their edges like a bad wind.

Was it an illusion, however? Sometimes she thought it was. Just bunkum, which she had faked up, in order to have something to mystify about.

But then, when she saw Phoenix and Lewis silently together, she knew there was another communion, silent, excluding her. And sometimes when Lewis was alone with St. Mawr: and once when she saw him pick up a bird that had stunned

itself against a wire: she had realised another world, silent, where each creature is alone in its own aura of silence, the mystery of power: as Lewis had power with St. Mawr, and even with Phoenix.

The visible world and the invisible. Or rather, the audible and the inaudible. She had lived so long, and so completely, in the visible, audible world. She would not easily admit that other, inaudible. She always wanted to jeer as she approached the brink of it.

Even now she wanted to jeer at the little fellow, because of his holding himself inaccessible within the inaudible, silent world. And she knew he knew it.

“Did you never want to be rich, and be a gentleman, like Sir Henry?” she asked.

“I would many times have liked to be rich. But I never exactly wanted to be a gentleman,” he said.

“Why not?”

“I can’t exactly say. I should be uncomfortable if I was like they are.”

“And are you comfortable now?”

“When I’m let alone.”

“And do they let you alone? Does the world let you alone?”

“No, they don’t.”

“Well then — !”

“I keep to myself all I can.”

“And are you comfortable, as you call it, when you keep to yourself?”

“Yes, I am.”

“But when you keep to yourself, what do you keep to? What precious treasure have you to keep to?”

He looked, and saw she was jeering.

“None,” he said. “I’ve got nothing of that sort.”

She rode impatiently on ahead.

And the moment she had done so, she regretted it. She might put the little fellow, with contempt, out of her reckoning. But no, she would not do it.

She had put so much out of her reckoning: soon she would be left in an empty circle, with her empty self at the centre. She reined in again.

“Lewis!” she said. “I don’t want you to take offence at anything I say.”

“No, Mam.”

“I don’t want you to say just ‘No, Mam!’ all the time!” she cried impulsively. “Promise me.”

“Yes, Mam!”

“But really! Promise me you won’t be offended at whatever I say.”

“Yes, Mam!”

She looked at him searchingly. To her surprise, she was almost in tears. A woman of her years! And with a servant!

But his face was blank and stony, with a stony, distant look of pride that made him inaccessible to her emotions. He met her eyes again: with that cold distant look, looking straight into her hot, confused, pained self. So cold and as if merely refuting her. He didn't believe her, nor trust her, nor like her even. She was an attacking enemy to him. Only he stayed really far away from her, looking down at her from a sort of distant hill where her weapons could not reach: not quite.

And at the same time, it hurt him in a dumb, living way, that she made these attacks on him. She could see the cloud of hurt in his eyes, no matter how distantly he looked at her.

They bought food in a village shop, and sat under a tree near a field where men were already cutting oats, in a warm valley. Lewis had stabled the horses for a couple of hours to feed and rest. But he came to join her under the tree, to eat. — He sat a little distance from her, with the bread and cheese in his small brown hands, eating silently, and watching the harvesters. She was cross with him, and therefore she was stingy, would give him nothing to eat but dry bread and cheese. Herself, she was not hungry. — So all the time he kept his face a little averted from her. As a matter of fact, he kept his whole being averted from her, away from her. He did not want to touch her, nor to be touched by her. He kept his spirit there, alert, on its guard, but out of contact. It was as if he had unconsciously accepted the battle, the old battle. He was her target, the old object of her deadly weapons. But he refused to shoot back. It was as if he caught all her missiles in full flight before they touched him, and silently threw them on the ground behind him. And in some essential part of himself he ignored her, staying in another world.

That other world! Mere male armour of artificial imperviousness! It angered her.

Yet she knew, by the way he watched the harvesters, and the grasshoppers popping into notice, that it was another world. And when a girl went by, carrying food to the field, it was at him she glanced. And he gave that quick, animal little smile that came from him unawares. Another world.

Yet also there was a sort of meanness about him: a *suffisance!* A keep-yourself-for-yourself, and don't give yourself away.

Well! — she rose impatiently.

It was hot in the afternoon, and she was rather tired. She went to the inn and slept, and did not start again till tea-time. Then they had to ride rather late. The sun sank, among a smell of cornfields, clear and yellow-red behind motionless

dark trees. Pale smoke rose from cottage chimneys. Not a cloud was in the sky, which held the upward-floating light like a bowl inverted on purpose. A new moon sparkled and was gone. It was beginning of night.

Away in the distance, they saw a curious pinkish glare of fire, probably furnaces. And Mrs. Witt thought she could detect the scent of furnace smoke, or factory smoke. But then she always said that of the English air: it was never quite free of the smell of smoke, coal smoke.

They were riding slowly on a path through fields, down a long slope. Away below was a puther of lights. All the darkness seemed full of half-spent crossing lights, a curious uneasiness. High in the sky a star seemed to be walking. It was an aeroplane with a light. Its buzz rattled above. Not a space, not a speck of this country that wasn't humanised, occupied by the human claim. Not even the sky.

They descended slowly through a dark wood, which they had entered through a gate. Lewis was all the time dismounting and opening gates, letting her pass, shutting the gate and mounting again.

So, in a while she came to the edge of the wood's darkness, and saw the open pale concave of the world beyond. The darkness was never dark. It shook with the concussion of many invisible lights, lights of towns, villages, mines, factories, furnaces, squatting in the valleys and behind all the hills.

Yet, as Rachel Witt drew rein at the gate emerging from the wood, a very big, soft star fell in heaven, cleaving the hubbub of this human night with a gleam from the greater world.

"See! a star falling!" said Lewis, as he opened the gate.

"I saw it," said Mrs. Witt, walking her horse past him.

There was a curious excitement of wonder, or magic, in the little man's voice. Even in this night something strange had stirred awake in him.

"You ask me about God," he said to her, walking his horse alongside in the shadow of the wood's edge, the darkness of the old Pan, that kept our artificially-lit world at bay. "I don't know about God. But when I see a star fall like that out of long-distance places in the sky: and the moon sinking saying Good-bye! Good-bye! Good-bye! and nobody listening: I think I hear something, though I wouldn't call it God."

"What then?" said Rachel Witt.

"And you smell the smell of oak leaves now," he said, "now the air is cold. They smell to me more alive than people. The trees hold their bodies hard and still, but they watch and listen with their leaves. And I think they say to me: 'Is that you passing there, Morgan Lewis? All right, you pass quickly, we shan't do anything to you. You are like a holly bush.'"

"Yes," said Rachel Witt dryly. "Why?"

“All the time the trees grow and listen. And if you cut a tree down without asking pardon, trees will hurt you sometime in your life, in the night-time.”

“I suppose,” said Rachel Witt, “that’s an old superstition.”

“They say that ash trees don’t like people. When the other people were most in the country — I mean like what they call fairies, that have all gone now — they liked ash trees best. And you know the little green things with little small nuts in them, that come flying from ash trees — *pigeons*, we call them — they’re the seeds — the other people used to catch them and eat them before they fell to the ground. And that made the people so they could hear trees living and feeling things. — But when all these people that there are now came to England, they liked the oak trees best, because their pigs ate the acorns. So now you can tell the ash trees are mad, they want to kill all these people. But the oak trees are many more than the ash trees.”

“And do you eat the ash tree seeds?” she asked.

“I always ate them when I was little. Then I wasn’t frightened of ash trees, like most of the others. And I wasn’t frightened of the moon. If you didn’t go near the fire all day, and if you didn’t eat any cooked food nor anything that had been in the sun, but only things like turnips or radishes or pignuts, and then went without any clothes on, in the full moon, then you could see the people in the moon, and go with them. They never have fire, and they never speak, and their bodies are clear almost like jelly. They die in a minute if there’s a bit of fire near them. But they know more than we. Because unless fire touches them, they never die. They see people live and they see people perish, and they say, people are only like twigs on a tree, you break them off the tree, and kindle fire with them. You made a fire of them, and they are gone, the fire is gone, everything is gone. But the people of the moon don’t die, and fire is nothing to them. They look at it from the distance of the sky, and see it burning things up, people all appearing and disappearing like twigs that come in spring and you cut them in autumn and make a fire of them and they are gone. And they say: What do people matter? If you want to matter, you must become a moon-boy. Then all your life, fire can’t blind you and people can’t hurt you. Because at full moon you can join the moon people, and go through the air and pass any cool places, pass through rocks and through the trunks of trees, and when you come to people lying warm in bed, you punish them.”

“How?”

“You sit on’ the pillow where they breathe, and you put a web across their mouth, so they can’t breathe the fresh air that comes from the moon. So they go on breathing the same air again and again, and that makes them more and more stupefied. The sun gives out heat, but the moon gives out fresh air. That’s what

the moon people do: they wash the air clean with moonlight.”

He was talking with a strange, eager *naïveté* that amused Rachel Witt, and made her a little uncomfortable in her skin. Was he after all no more than a sort of imbecile?

“Who told you all this stuff?” she asked abruptly.

And, as abruptly, he pulled himself up.

“We used to say it when we were children.”

“But you don’t believe it? It is only childishness, after all.” He paused a moment or two.

“No,” he said, in his ironical little day voice. “I know I shan’t make anything but a fool of myself, with that talk. But all sorts of things go through our heads, and some seem to linger, and some don’t. But you asking me about God put it into my mind, I suppose. I don’t know what sort of things I believe in: only I know it’s not what the chapel folks believe in. We none of us believe in them when it comes to earning a living, or, with you people, when it comes to spending your fortune. Then we know that bread costs money, and even your sleep you have to pay for. — That’s work. Or, with you people, it’s just owning property and seeing you get your value for your money. — But a man’s mind is always full of things. And some people’s minds, like my aunt and uncle, are full of religion and hell for everybody except themselves. And some people’s minds are all money, money, money, and how to get hold of something they haven’t got hold of yet. And some people, like you, are always curious about what everybody else in the world is after. And some people are all for enjoying themselves and being thought much of, and some, like Lady Carrington, don’t know what to do with themselves. Myself, I don’t want to have in my mind the things other people have in their minds. I’m one that likes my own things best. And if, when I see a bright star fall, like to-night, I think to myself: ‘There’s movement in the sky. The world is going to change again. They’re throwing something to us from the distance, and we’ve got to have it, whether we want it or not. To-morrow there will be a difference for everybody, thrown out of the sky upon us, whether we want it or not: then that’s how I want to think, so let me please myself.’“

“You know what a shooting star actually is, I suppose? — and that there are always many in August, because we pass through a region of them?”

“Yes, Mam, I’ve been told. But stones don’t come at us from the sky for nothing. Either it’s like when a man tosses an apple to you out of his orchard, as you go by. Or it’s like when somebody shies a stone at you to cut your head open. You’ll never make me believe the sky is like an empty house with a slate falling from the roof. The world has its own life, the sky has a life of its own,

and never is it like stones rolling down a rubbish-heap and falling into a pond. Many things twitch and twitter within the sky, and many things happen beyond us. My own way of thinking is my own way.”

“I never knew you talk so much.”

“No, Mam. It’s your asking me that about God. Or else it’s the night-time. I don’t believe in God and being good and going to heaven. Neither do I worship idols, so I’m not a heathen as my aunt called me. Never from a boy did I want to believe the things they kept grinding in their guts at home, and at Sunday school, and at school. A man’s mind has to be full of something, so I keep to what we used to think as lads. It’s childish nonsense, I know it. But it suits me. Better than other people’s stuff. Your man Phoenix is about the same, when he lets on. — Anyhow, it’s my own stuff that we believed as lads, and I like it better than other people’s stuff. — You asking about God made me let on. But I would never belong to any club, or trades union, and God’s the same to my mind.”

With this he gave a little kick to his horse, and St. Mawr went dancing excitedly along the highway they now entered, leaving Mrs. Witt to trot after as rapidly as she could.

When she came to the hotel, to which she had telegraphed for rooms, Lewis disappeared, and she was left thinking hard.

It was not till they were twenty miles from Merriton, riding through a slow morning mist, and she had a rather far-away, wistful look on her face, unusual for her, that she turned to him in the saddle and said:

“Now don’t be surprised, Lewis, at what I am going to say. I am going to ask you, now, supposing I wanted to marry you, what should you say?”

He looked at her quickly, and was at once on his guard. “That you didn’t mean it,” he replied hastily.

“Yes” — she hesitated, and her face looked wistful and tired. — “Supposing I *did* mean it. Supposing I did *really*, from my heart, want to marry you and be a wife to you” — she looked away across the fields — “then what should you say?”

Her voice sounded sad, a little broken.

“Why, Mam!” he replied, knitting his brow and shaking his head a little. “I should say you didn’t mean it, you know. Something would have come over you.”

“But supposing I *wanted* something to come over me?” He shook his head.

“It would never do, Mam Some people’s flesh and blood is kneaded like bread: and that’s me. And some are rolled like fine pastry, like Lady Carrington. And some are mixed with gunpowder. They’re like a cartridge you put in a gun, Mam.”

She listened impatiently.

“Don’t talk,” she said, “about bread and cakes and pastry, it all means nothing. You used to answer short enough ‘Yes, Mam! No, Mam!’ That will do now. Do you mean ‘Yes!’ or ‘No!?’”

His eyes met hers. She was again hectoring.

“No, Mam!” he said, quite neutral. “Why?”

As she waited for his answer, she saw the foundations of his loquacity dry up, his face go distant and mute again, as it always used to be, till these last two days, when it had had a funny touch of inconsequential merriness.

He looked steadily into her eyes, and his look was neutral, sombre, and hurt. He looked at her as if infinite seas, infinite spaces divided him and her. And his eyes seemed to put her away beyond some sort of fence. An anger congealed cold like lava, set impassive against her and all her sort.

“No, Mam. I couldn’t give my body to any woman who didn’t respect it.”

“But I do respect it, I do!” — she flushed hot like a girl.

“No, Mam. Not as *I* mean it,” he replied.

There was a touch of anger against her in his voice, and a distance of distaste.

“And how do you mean it?” she replied, the full sarcasm coming back into her tones. She could see that, as a woman to touch and fondle he saw her as repellent: only repellent.

“I have to be a servant to women now,” he said, “even to earn my wage. I could never touch with my body a woman whose servant I was.”

“You’re not my servant: my daughter pays your wages. — And all that is beside the point, between a man and a woman.”

“No woman who I touched with my body should ever speak to me as you speak to me, or think of me as you think of me,” he said.

“But! — ” she stammered. “I think of you — with love. And can you be so unkind as to notice the way I speak? You know it’s only my way.”

“You, as a woman,” he said, “you have no respect for a man.”

“Respect! Respect!” she cried. “I’m likely to lose what respect I have left. I know I can *love* a man. But whether a man can love a woman — ”

“No,” said Lewis. “I never could, and I think I never shall. Because I don’t want to. The thought of it makes me feel shame.”

“What do you mean” she cried.

“Nothing in the world,” he said, “would make me feel such shame as to have a woman shouting at me, or mocking at me, as I see women mocking and despising the men they marry. No woman shall touch my body and mock me or despise me. No woman.”

“But men must be mocked, or despised even, sometimes.”

“No. Not this man. Not by the woman I touch with my body.”

“Are you perfect?”

“I don’t know. But if I touch a woman with my body, it must put a lock on her, to respect what I will never have despised: never!”

“What will you never have despised?”

“My body! And my touch upon the woman.”

“Why insist so on your body?” — And she looked at him with a touch of contemptuous mockery, raillery.

He looked her in the eyes steadily, and coldly, putting her away from him, and himself far away from her.

“Do you expect that any woman still stay your humble slave to-day?” she asked cuttingly.

But he only watched her coldly, distant, refusing any connection.

“Between men and women, it’s a question of give and take. A man can’t expect *always* to be humbly adored.”

He watched her still, cold, rather pale, putting her far from him. Then he turned his horse and set off rapidly along the road, leaving her to follow.

She walked her horse and let him go, thinking to herself: “There’s a little bantam cock. And a groom! Imagine it! Thinking he can dictate to a woman!”

She was in love with him. And he, in an odd way, was in love with her. She had known it by the odd, uncanny merriment in him, and his unexpected loquacity. But he would not have her come physically near him. Unapproachable there as a cactus, guarding his ‘body’ from her contact. As if contact with her would be mortal insult and fatal injury to his marvellous ‘body’.

What a little cock-sparrow!

Let him ride ahead. He would have to wait for her somewhere.

She found him at the entrance to the next village. His face was pallid and set. She could tell he felt he had been insulted, so he had congealed into stiff insentience.

“At the bottom of all men is the same,” she said to herself: “an empty, male conceit of themselves.”

She, too, rode up with a face like a mask, and straight on to the hotel.

“Can you serve dinner to myself and my servant?” she asked at the inn: which, fortunately for her, accommodated motorists, otherwise they would have said ‘No!’

“I think,” said Lewis as they came in sight of Merriton, “I’d better give Lady Carrington a week’s notice.”

A complete little stranger! And an impudent one. “Exactly as you please,” she said.

She found several letters from her daughter at Marshal Place. “Dear Mother: No sooner had you gone off than Flora appeared, not at all in the bud, but rather in full blow. She demanded her victim; Shylock demanding the pound of flesh: and wanted to hand over the shekels.

“Joyfully I refused them. She said ‘Harry’ was much better, and invited him and me to stay at Corrabach Hall till he was quite well: it would be less strain on your household, while he was still in bed and helpless. So the plan is, that he shall be brought down on Friday, if he is really fit for the journey, and we drive straight to Corrabach. I am packing his bags and mine, clearing up our traces: his trunks to go to Corrabach, mine to stay here and make up their minds. — I am going to Flints Farm again to-morrow, dutifully, though I am no flower for the bedside. — I do so want to know if Rico has already called her Fiorita: or perhaps Florecita. It reminds me of old William’s joke: ‘Now yuh tell me, little Missy: which is the best posey that grow?’ And the hushed whisper in which he said the answer: ‘The Collyposy!’ Oh dear, I am so tired of feeling spiteful, but how else is one to feel?

“You looked most prosaically romantic, setting off in a rubber cape, followed by Lewis. Hope the roads were not very slippery, and that you had a good time, *à la Mademoiselle de Maupin*. Do remember, dear, not to devour little Lewis before you have got half-way — ”

“Dear Mother: I half expected word from you before I left, but nothing came. Forrester drove me up here just before lunch. Rico seems much better, almost himself, and a little more than that. He broached our staying at Corrabach very tactfully. I told him Flora had asked me, and it seemed a good plan. Then I told him about St. Mawr. He was a little piqued, and there was a pause of very disapproving silence. Then he said: ‘Very well, darling. If you wish to keep the animal, do so by all means. I make a present of him again.’ Me: ‘That’s so good of you, Rico. Because I know revenge is sweet.’ Rico: ‘Revenge, Loulina! I don’t think I was selling him for vengeance! Merely to get rid of him to Flora, who can keep better hold over him.’ Me: ‘But you know, dear, she was going to geld him!’ Rico: ‘I don’t think anybody knew it. We only wondered if it were possible, to make him more amenable. Did she tell you?’ Me: ‘No — Phoenix did. He had it from a groom.’ Rico: ‘Dear me! A concatenation of grooms! So your mother rode off with Lewis, and carried St. Mawr out of danger! I understand! Let us hope worse won’t befall.’ Me: ‘Whom?’ Rico: ‘Never mind, dear! It’s so lovely to see you. You are looking rested. I thought those Countess of Wilton roses the most marvellous things in the world, till you came, now they’re quite in the background.’ He had some very lovely roses in a crystal bowl: the room smelled of roses. Me: ‘Where did they come from?’ Rico: ‘Oh,

Flora brought them!’ Me: ‘Bowl and all?’ Rico: ‘Bowl and all! Wasn’t it dear of her?’ Me: ‘Why, yes! But then she’s the goddess of flowers, isn’t she?’ Poor darling, he was offended that I should twit him while he is ill, so I relented. He has had a couple of marvellous invalid’s bed-jackets sent from London: one a pinkish yellow, with rose-arabesque facings: this one in fine cloth. But unfortunately he has already dropped soup on it. The other is a lovely silvery and blue and green, soft brocade. He had that one on to receive me, and I at once complimented him on it. He has got a new ring too: sent by Aspasia Weingartner, a rather lovely intaglio of Priapus under an apple bough, at least, so he says it is. He made a naughty face, and said: ‘The Priapus stage is rather advanced for poor me.’ I asked what the Priapus stage was, but he said: ‘Oh, nothing!’ Then nurse said: ‘There’s a big classical dictionary that Miss Manby brought up, if you wish to see it.’ So I have been studying the Classical Gods. The world always was a queer place. It’s a very queer one when Rico is the god Priapus. He would go round the orchard painting life-like apples on the trees, and inviting nymphs to come and eat them. And the nymphs would pretend they were real: ‘Why, Sir Prippy, what stunningly naughty apples!’ There’s nothing so artificial as sinning nowadays. I suppose it once was real.

“I’m bored here: wish I had my horse.”

“Dear Mother: I’m so glad you are enjoying your ride. I’m sure it is like riding into history, like the Yankee at the Court of King Arthur, in those old by-lanes and Roman roads. They still fascinate me: at least, more before I get there than when I am actually there. I begin to feel real American and to resent the past. Why doesn’t the past decently bury itself instead of waiting to be admired by the present?

“Phoenix brought Poppy. I am so fond of her: rode for five hours yesterday. I was glad to get away from this farm. The doctor came, and said Rico would be able to go down to Corrabach to-morrow. Flora came to hear the bulletin, and sailed back full of zest. Apparently Rico is going to do a portrait of her, sitting up in bed. What a mercy the bedclothes won’t be mine when Priapus wields his palette from the pillow.

“Phoenix thinks you intend to go to America with St. Mawr, and that I am coming too, leaving Rico this side. — I wonder. I feel so unreal, nowadays, as if I too were nothing more than a painting by Rico on a millboard. I feel almost too unreal even to make up my mind to anything. It is terrible when the life-flow dies out of one, and everything is like cardboard, and oneself is like cardboard. I’m sure it is worse than being dead. I realised it yesterday when Phoenix and I had a picnic lunch by a stream. You see, I must imitate you in all things. He found me some watercresses, and they tasted so damp and alive, I knew how

deadened I was. Phoenix wants us to go and have a ranch in Arizona, and raise horses, with St. Mawr, if willing, for Father Abraham. I wonder if it matters what one does: if it isn't all the same thing over again? Only Phoenix, his funny blank face, makes my heart melt and go sad. But I believe he'd be cruel too. I saw it in his face when he didn't know I was looking. Anything, though, rather than this deadness and this paint-Priapus business. *Au revoir*, mother dear! Keep on having a good time — ”

“Dear Mother: I had your letter from Merriton: am so glad you arrived safe and sound in body and temper. There was such a funny letter from Lewis, too: I enclose it. What makes him take this extraordinary line? But I'm writing to tell him to take St. Mawr to London, and wait for me there. I have telegraphed Mrs. Squire to get the house ready for me. I shall go straight there.

“Things developed here, as they were bound to. I just couldn't bear it. No sooner was Rico put in the automobile than a self-conscious importance came over him, like when the wounded hero is carried into the middle of the stage. ‘Why so solemn, Rico dear?’ I asked him, trying to laugh him out of it. ‘Not solemn, dear, only feeling a little transient.’ I don't think he knew himself what he meant. Flora was on the steps as the car drew up, dressed in severe white. She only needed an apron to become a nurse: or a veil to become a bride. Between the two, she had an unbearable air of a woman in seduced circumstances, as *The Times* said. She ordered two menservants about in subdued, you would have said hushed, but competent tones. And then I saw there was a touch of the priestess about her as well: Cassandra preparing for her violation: Iphigenia, with Rico for Orestes, on a stretcher: he looking like Adonis, fully prepared to be an unconscionable time in dying. They had given him a lovely room downstairs, with doors opening on to a little garden all of its own. I believe it was Flora's boudoir. I left nurse and the men to put him to bed. Flora was hovering anxiously in the passage outside. ‘Oh, what a marvellous room! Oh, how colourful, how beautiful!’ came Rico's tones, the hero behind the scenes. I must say, it was like a harvest festival, with roses and gaillardias in the shadow, and cornflowers in the light, and a bowl of grapes, and nectarines among leaves. ‘I'm so anxious that he should be happy,’ Flora said to me in the passage. ‘You know him best. Is there anything else I could do for him?’ Me: ‘Why, if you went to the piano and sang, I'm sure he'd love it. Couldn't you sing: Oh, my love is like a rred, rred rose!’ — You know how Rico imitates Scotch!

“Thank goodness I have a bedroom upstairs: nurse sleeps in a little ante-chamber to Rico's room. The Edwards are still here, the blond young man with some very futuristic plaster on his face. ‘Awfully good of you to come!’ he said to me, looking at me out of one eye, and holding my hand fervently. How's that

for cheek: 'It's awfully good of Miss Manby to let me come,' said I. He: 'Ah, but Flora is always a sport, a topping good sport!'

"I don't know what's the matter, but it just all put me into a fiendish temper. I felt I couldn't sit there at luncheon with that bright, youthful company, and hear about their tennis and their polo and their hunting and have their flirtatiousness making me sick. So I asked for a tray in my room. Do as I might, I couldn't help being horrid.

"Oh, and Rico! He really is too awful. Lying there in bed with every ear open, like Adonis waiting to be persuaded not to die. Seizing a hushed moment to take Flora's hand and press it to his lips, murmuring: 'How awfully good you are to me, dear Flora!' And Flora: 'I'd be better if I knew how, Harry!' So cheerful with it all! No, it's too much. My sense of humour is leaving me: which means, I'm getting into too bad a temper to be able to ridicule it all. I suppose I feel in the minority. It's an awful thought, to think that most all the young people in the world are like this: so bright and cheerful, and sporting, and so brimming with libido. How awful!

"I said to Rico: 'You're very comfortable here, aren't you?' He: 'Comfortable! It's comparative heaven.' Me: 'Would you mind if I went away?' A deadly pause. He is deadly afraid of being left alone with Flora. He feels safe so long as I am about, and he can take refuge in his marriage ties. He: 'Where do you want to go, dear?' Me: 'To mother. To London. Mother is planning to go to America, and she wants me to go.' Rico: 'But you don't want to go t — he — e — re — e I' You know, mother, how Rico can put a venomous emphasis on a word, till it suggests pure poison. It nettled me. 'I'm not sure,' I said. Rico: 'Oh, but you can't stand that awful America.' Me: 'I want to try again.' Rico: 'But Lou dear, it will be winter before you get there. And this is absolutely the wrong moment for me to go over there. I am only just making headway over here. When I am absolutely sure of a position in England, then we nip across the Atlantic and scoop in a few dollars, if you like. Just now, even when I am well, would be fatal. I've only just sketched in the outline of my success in London, and one ought to arrive in New York ready-made as a famous and important Artist.' Me: 'But mother and I didn't think of going to New York. We thought we'd sail straight to New Orleans — if we could: or to Havana. And then go west to Arizona.' The poor boy looked at me in such distress. 'But Loulina darling, do you mean you want to leave me in the lurch for the winter season? You can't mean it. We're just getting on so splendidly, really!' — I was surprised at the depth of feeling in his voice: how tremendously his career as an artist — a popular artist — matters to him. I can never believe it. — You know, mother, you and I feel alike about daubing paint on canvas: every possible daub

that can be daubed has already been done, so people ought to leave off. Rico is so shrewd. I always think he's got his tongue in his cheek, and I'm always staggered once more to find that he takes it absolutely seriously. His career! The Modern British Society of Painters: perhaps even the Royal Academy! Those people we see in London, and those portraits Rico does! He may even be a second Laszlo, or a thirteenth Orpen, and die happy! Oh! mother! How can it really matter to anybody!

“But I was really rather upset when I realised how his heart was fixed on his career, and that I might be spoiling everything for him. So I went away to think about it. And then I realised how unpopular you are, and how unpopular I shall be myself, in a little while. A sort of hatred for people has come over me. I hate their ways and their bunk, and I feel like kicking them in the face, as St. Mawr did that young man. Not that I should ever do it. And I don't think I should ever have made my final announcement to Rico, if he hadn't been such a beautiful pig in clover, here at Corrabach Hall. He has known the Manbys all his life; they and he are sections of one engine. He would be far happier with Flora: or I won't say happier, because there is something in him which rebels: but he would on the whole fit much better. I myself am at the end of my limit, and beyond it. I can't 'mix' any more, and I refuse to. I feel like a bit of egg-shell in the mayonnaise: the only thing is to take it out, you can't beat it in. I *know* I shall cause a fiasco, even in Rico's career, if I stay. I shall go on being rude and hateful to people as I am at Corrabach, and Rico will lose all his nerve.

“So I have told him. I said this evening, when no one was about: ‘Rico dear, listen to me seriously. I can't stand these people. If you ask me to endure another week of them, I shall either become ill, or insult them, as mother does. And I don't want to do either.’ Rico: ‘But darling, isn't everybody perfect to you?’ Me: ‘I tell you, I shall just make a break, like St. Mawr, if I don't get out. I simply can't stand people.’ — The poor darling, his face goes so blank and anxious. He knows what I mean, because, except that they tickle his vanity all the time, he hates them as much as I do. But his vanity is the chief thing to him. He: ‘Lou darling, can't you wait till I get up, and we can go away to the Tyrol or somewhere for a spell?’ Me: ‘Won't you come with me to America, to the South-West? I believe it's marvellous country: — I saw his face switch into hostility; quite vicious. He: ‘Are you so keen on spoiling everything for me? Is that what I married you for? Do you do it deliberately?’ Me: ‘Everything is already spoilt for me. I tell you I can't stand people, your Floras and your Aspasia's, and your forthcoming young Englishmen. After all, I am an American, like mother, and I've got to go back.’ He: ‘Really! And am I to come along as part of the luggage? Labelled cabin!’ Me: ‘You do as you wish, Rico.’ He: ‘I

wish to God you did as you wished, Lou dear. I'm afraid you do as Mrs. Witt wishes. I always heard that the holiest thing in the world was a mother.' Me: 'No, dear, it's just that I can't stand people.' He (with a snarl): 'And I suppose I'm lumped in as PEOPLE!' And when he'd said it, it was true. We neither of us said anything for a time. Then he said, calculating: 'Very well, dear! You take a trip to the land of stars and stripes, and I'll stay here and go on with my work. And when you've seen enough of their stars and tasted enough of their stripes, you can come back and take your place again with me.' — We left it at that.

"You and I are supposed to have important business connected with our estates in Texas — it sounds so well — so we are making a hurried trip to the States, as they call them. I shall leave for London early next week — "

Mrs. Witt read this long letter with satisfaction. She herself had one strange craving: to get back to America. It was not that she idealised her native country: she was a tartar of restlessness there, quite as much as in Europe. It was not that she expected to arrive at any blessed abiding place. No, in America she would go on fuming and chafing the same. But at least she would be in America, in her own country. And that was what she wanted.

She picked up the sheet of poor paper that had been folded in Lou's letter. It was the letter from Lewis, quite nicely written. "Lady Carrington, I write to tell you and Sir Henry that I think I had better quit your service, as it would be more comfortable all round. If you will write and tell me what you want me to do with St. Mawr, I will do whatever you tell me. With kind regards to Lady Carrington and Sir Henry, I remain, Your obedient servant, Morgan Lewis."

Mrs. Witt put the letter aside, and sat looking out of the window. She felt, strangely, as if already her soul had gone away from her actual surroundings. She was there, in Oxfordshire, in the body, but her spirit had departed elsewhere. A listlessness was upon her. It was with an effort she roused herself, to write to her lawyer in London, to get her release from her English obligations. Then she wrote to the London hotel.

For the first time in her life she wished she had a maid to do little things for her. All her life she had had too much energy to endure anyone hanging round her, personally. Now she gave up. Her wrists seemed numb, as if the power in her were switched off.

When she went down they said Lewis had asked to speak to her. She had hardly seen him since they arrived at Merriton.

"I've had a letter from Lady Carrington, Mam. She says will I take St. Mawr to London and wait for her there. But she says I am to come to you, Mam, for definite orders."

"Very well, Lewis. I shall be going to London in a few days' time. You

arrange for St. Mawr to go up one day this week, and you will take him to the Mews. Come to me for anything you want. And don't talk of leaving my daughter. We want you to go with St. Mawr to America, with us and Phoenix."

"And your horse, Mam?"

"I shall leave him here at Merriton. I shall give him to Miss Atherton."

"Very good, Mam!"

"Dear Daughter: I shall be in my old quarters in Mayfair next Saturday, calling the same day at your house to see if everything is ready for you. Lewis has fixed up with the railway: he goes to town to-morrow. The reason of his letter was that I had asked him if he would care to marry me, and he turned me down with emphasis. But I will tell you about it. You and I are the scribe and the Pharisee; I never could write a letter, and you could never leave off — "

"Dearest Mother: I smelt something rash, but I know it's no use saying: How *could* you? I only wonder, though, that you should think of marriage. You know, dear, I ache in every fibre to be left alone, from all that sort of thing. I feel all bruises, like one who has been assassinated. I do so understand why Jesus said: '*Noli me tangere.*' Touch me not, I am not yet ascended unto the Father. Everything had hurt him so much, wearied him so beyond endurance, he felt he could not bear one little human touch on his body. I am like that. I can hardly bear even Elena to hand me a dress. As for a man — and marriage — ah, no! *Noli me tangere, homine!* I am not yet ascended unto the Father. Oh, leave me alone, leave me alone! That is all my cry to all the world.

"Curiously, I feel that Phoenix understands what I feel. He leaves me so understandingly alone, he almost gives me my sheath of aloneness: or at least, he protects me in my sheath. I am grateful for him.

"Whereas Rico feels my aloneness as a sort of shame to himself. He wants at least a blinding pretence of intimacy. Ah, intimacy! The thought of it fills me with aches, and the pretence of it exhausts me beyond myself.

"Yes, I long to go away to the West, to be away from the world like one dead and in another life, in a valley that life has not yet entered.

"Rico asked me: What are you doing with St. Mawr? When I said we were taking him with us, he said: '*Oh, the corpus delicti!*' Whether that means anything, I don't know. But he has grown sarcastic beyond my depth.

"I shall see you to-morrow — "

Lou arrived in town, at the dead end of August, with her maid and Phoenix. How wonderful it seemed to have London empty of all her set: her own little house to herself, with just the housekeeper and her own maid. The fact of being alone in those surroundings was so wonderful. It made the surroundings themselves seem all the more ghastly. Everything that had been actual to her was

turning ghostly: even her little drawing-room was the ghost of a room, belonging to the dead people who had known it, or to all the dead generations that had brought such a room into being, evolved it out of their quaint domestic desires. And now, in herself, those desires were suddenly spent: gone out like a lamp that suddenly dies. And then she saw her pale, delicate room with its little green agate bowl and its two little porcelain birds and its soft, roundish chairs, turned into something ghostly, like a room set out in a museum. She felt like fastening little labels on the furniture: 'Lady Louise Carrington Lounge Chair, Last used August, 1923: Not for the benefit of posterity: but to remove her own self into another world, another realm of existence.

"My house, my house, my house, how can I ever have taken so much pains about it?" she kept saying to herself. It was like one of her old hats, suddenly discovered neatly put away in an old hat-box. And what a horror: an old 'fashionable' hat.

Lewis came to see her, and he sat there in one of her delicate mauve chairs, with his feet on a delicate old carpet from Turkestan, and she just wondered. He wore his leather gaiters and khaki breeches as usual, and a faded blue shirt. But his beard and hair were trimmed, he was tidy. There was a certain fineness of contour about him, a certain subtle gleam, which made him seem, apart from his rough boots, not at all gross, or coarse, in that setting of rather silky, Oriental furnishings. Rather he made the Asiatic, sensuous exquisiteness of her old rugs and her old white Chinese figures seem a weariness. Beauty! What was beauty? she asked herself. The Oriental exquisiteness seemed to her all like dead flowers whose hour had come to be thrown away.

Lou could understand her mother's wanting, for a moment, to marry him. His detachedness and his acceptance of something in destiny which people cannot accept. Right in the middle of him he accepted something from destiny that gave him a quality of eternity. He did not care about persons, people, even events. In his own odd way he was an aristocrat, inaccessible in his aristocracy. But it was the aristocracy of the invisible powers, the greater influences, nothing to do with human society.

"You don't really want to leave St. Mawr, do you?" Lou asked him. "You don't really want to quit, as you said?"

He looked at her steadily from his pale grey eyes, without answering, not knowing what to say.

"Mother told me what she said to you. — But she doesn't mind, she says you are entirely within your rights. She has a real regard for you. But we mustn't let our regards run us into actions which are beyond our scope, must we? That makes everything unreal. But you will come with us to America with St. Mawr,

won't you? We depend on you."

"I don't want to be uncomfortable," he said.

"Don't be," she smiled. "I myself hate unreal situations — I feel I can't stand them any more. And most marriages are unreal situations. But apart from anything exaggerated, you like being with mother and me, don't you?"

"Yes, I do. I like Mrs. Witt as well. But not — "

"I know. There won't be any more of that — "

"You see, Lady Carrington", he said, with a little heat, "I'm not by nature a marrying man. And I'd feel I was selling myself."

"Quite! — Why do you think you are not a marrying man, though?"

"Me! I don't feel myself after I've been with women." He spoke in a low tone, looking down at his hands. "I feel messed up. I'm better to keep to myself. — Because — " and here he looked up with a flare in his eyes: "women — they only want to make you give in to them, so that they feel almighty, and you feel small."

"Don't you like feeling small?" Lou smiled. "And don't you want to make them give in to you?"

"Not me," he said. "I don't want nothing. Nothing, I want."

"Poor mother!" said Lou. "She thinks if she feels moved by a man, it must result in marriage — or that kind of thing. Surely she makes a mistake. I think you and Phoenix and mother and I might live somewhere in a far-away wild place, and make a good life: so long as we didn't begin to mix up marriage, or love or that sort of thing into it. It seems to me men and women have really hurt one another so much nowadays that they had better stay apart till they have learned to be gentle with one another again. Not all this forced passion and destructive philandering. Men and women should stay apart till their hearts grow gentle towards one another again. Now, it's only each one fighting for his own — or her own — underneath the cover of tenderness."

"*Dear! — darling! — Yes, my love!*" mocked Lewis, with a faint smile of amused contempt.

"Exactly. People always say *dearest!* when they hate each other most."

Lewis nodded, looking at her with a sudden sombre gloom in his eyes. A queer bitterness showed on his mouth. But even then he was so still and remote.

The housekeeper came and announced The Honourable Laura Ridley. This was like a blow in the face to Lou. She rose hurriedly — and Lewis rose, moving to the door.

"Don't go, please, Lewis," said Lou — and then Laura Ridley appeared in the doorway. She was a woman a few years older than Lou, but she looked younger. She might have been a shy girl of twenty-two, with her fresh complexion, her

hesitant manner, her round, startled brown eyes, her bobbed hair.

“Hello!” said the newcomer. “Imagine your being back! I saw you in Paddington.”

Those sharp eyes would see everything.

“I thought everyone was out of town,” said Lou. “This is Mr. Lewis.”

Laura gave him a little nod, then sat on the edge of her chair.

“No,” she said. “I did go to Ireland to my people, but I came back. I prefer London when I can be more or less alone in it. I thought I’d just run in for a moment before you’re gone again. — Scotland, isn’t it?”

“No, mother and I are going to America.”

“America! Oh, I thought it was Scotland.”

“It was. But we have suddenly to go to America.”

“I see! — And what about Rico?”

“He is staying on in Shropshire. Didn’t you hear of his accident?”

Lou told about it briefly.

“But how awful!” said Laura. “But there! I knew it! I had a premonition when I saw that ‘horse. We had a horse that killed a man. Then my father got rid of it. But ours was a mare, that one. Yours is a boy.”

“A full-grown man, I’m afraid.”

“Yes, of course, I remember. — But how awful! I suppose you won’t ride in the Row. The awful people that ride there nowadays, anyhow! Oh, aren’t they awful! Aren’t people monstrous, really! My word, when I see the horses crossing Hyde Park Corner on a wet day and coming down smash to those slippery stones, giving their riders a fractured skull! — No joke!”

She inquired details of Rico.

“Oh, I suppose I shall see him when he gets back,” she said. “But I’m sorry you are going. I shall miss you, I’m afraid. Though you won’t be staying long in America. No one stays there longer than they can help.”

“I think the winter through, at least,” said Lou.

“Oh, all the winter! So long? I’m sorry to hear *that*. You’re one of the few, very few people one can talk *really* simply with. Extraordinary, isn’t it, how few really simple people there are! And they get fewer and fewer. I stayed a fortnight with my people, and a week of that I was in bed. It was really horrible. They really try to take the life out of me, *really*! Just because one won’t be as they are, and play their game. I simply refused, and came away.”

“But you can’t cut yourself off altogether,” said Lou.

“No, I suppose not. One has to see somebody. Luckily one has a few artists for friends. They’re the only real people, anyhow — ” She glanced round inquisitively at Lewis, and said with a slight, impertinent, elvish smile on her

virgin face:

“Are you an artist?”

“No, Mam!” he said. “I’m a groom.”

“Oh, I see!” She looked him up and down.

“Lewis is St. Mawr’s master,” said Lou.

“Oh, the horse! the terrible horse!” She paused a moment. Then again she turned to Lewis with that faint smile, slightly condescending, slightly impertinent, slightly flirtatious.

“Aren’t you afraid of him?” she asked.

“No, Mam.”

“Aren’t you, *really!* — And can you always master him?”

“Mostly. He knows me.”

“Yes! I suppose that’s it.” — She looked him up and down again, then turned away to Lou.

“What have you been painting lately?” said Lou. Laura was not a bad painter.

“Oh, hardly anything. I haven’t been able to get on at all. This is one of my bad intervals.”

Here Lewis rose and looked at Lou.

“All right,” she said. “Come in after lunch, and we’ll finish those arrangements.”

Laura gazed after the man, as he dived out of the room, as if her eyes were gimlets that could bore into his secret. In the course of the conversation she said:

“What a curious little man that was!”

“Which?”

“The groom who was here just now. Very curious! Such peculiar eyes. I shouldn’t wonder if he had psychic powers.”

“What sort of psychic powers?” said Lou.

“Could see things. — And hypnotic, too. He might have hypnotic powers.”

“What makes you think so?”

“He gives me that sort of feeling. Very curious! Probably he hypnotises the horse. — Are you leaving the horse here, by the way, in stable?”

“No, taking him to America.”

“Taking him to America! How extraordinary!”

“It’s mother’s idea. She thinks he might be valuable as a stock horse on a ranch. You know we still have interest in a ranch in Texas.”

“Oh, I see! Yes, probably he’d be very valuable to improve the breed of the horses over there. — My father has some very lovely hunters. Isn’t it disgraceful, he would never let me ride!”

“Why?”

“Because we girls weren’t important, in his opinion. — So you’re taking the horse to America! With the little man?”

“Yes, St. Mawr will hardly behave without him.”

“I see — I see — ee — ee! Just you and Mrs. Witt and the little man. I’m sure you’ll find he has psychic powers.”

“I’m afraid I’m not so good at finding things out,” said Lou.

“Aren’t you? No, I suppose not. I am: I have a flair. I sort of *smell* things. Then the horse is already here, is he? When do you think you’ll sail?”

“Mother is finding a merchant boat that will go to Galveston, Texas, and take us along with the horse. She knows people who will find the right thing. But it takes time.”

“What a much nicer way to travel than on one of those great liners! Oh, how awful they are! So vulgar! Floating palaces they call them! My word, the people inside the palaces! — Yes, I should say that would be a much pleasanter way of travelling: on a cargo boat.”

Laura wanted to go down to the Mews to see St. Mawr. The two women went together.

St. Mawr stood in his box, bright and tense as usual.

“Yes!” said Laura Ridley, with a slight hiss. “Yes! Isn’t he beautiful. Such very perfect legs!” — She eyed him round with those gimlet, sharp eyes of hers. “Almost a pity to let him go out of England. We need some of his perfect bone, I feel. — But his eye. Hasn’t he got a look in it, my word!”

“I can never see that he looks wicked,” said Lou.

“Can’t you!” — Laura had a slight hiss in her speech, a sort of aristocratic decision in her enunciation, that got on Lou’s nerves. — “He looks wicked to me!”

“He’s not *mean*,” said Lou. “He’d never do anything mean to you.”

“Oh, mean! I dare say not. No! I’ll grant him that, he gives fair warning. His eye says *Beware!* — But isn’t he a beauty, *isn’t he!*” Lou could feel the peculiar reverence for St. Mawr’s breeding, his show qualities. Herself, all she cared about was the horse himself, his real nature. “Isn’t it extraordinary,” Laura continued, “that you never get a *really* perfectly satisfactory animal! There’s always something wrong. And in men too. Isn’t it curious? there’s always something — something wrong — or something missing. Why is it?”

“I don’t know,” said Lou. She felt unable to cope with any more. And she was glad when Laura left her.

The days passed slowly, quietly, London almost empty of Lou’s acquaintances. Mrs. Witt was busy getting all sorts of papers and permits: such a fuss! The battle light was still in her eye. But about her nose was a dusky,

pinched look that made Lou wonder.

Both women wanted to be gone: they felt they had already flown in spirit, and it was weary, having the body left behind.

At last all was ready: they only awaited the telegram to say when their cargo-boat would sail. Trunks stood there packed, like great stones locked for ever. The Westminster house seemed already a shell. Rico wrote and telegraphed tenderly, but there was a sense of relentless effort in it all, rather than of any tenderness. He had taken his position.

Then the telegram came, the boat was ready to sail.

“There, now!” said Mrs. Witt, as if it had been a sentence of death.

“Why do you look like that, mother?”

“I feel I haven’t an ounce of energy left in my body.”

“But how queer, for you, mother. Do you think you are ill?”

“No, Louise. I just feel that way: as if I hadn’t an ounce of energy left in my body.”

“You’ll feel yourself again, once you are away.”

“Maybe I shall.”

After all, it was only a matter of telephoning. The hotel and the railway porters and taxi-men would do the rest.

It was a grey, cloudy day, cold even. Mother and daughter sat in a cold first-class carriage and watched the little Hampshire country-side go past: little, old, unreal it seemed to them both, and passing away like a dream whose edges only are in consciousness. Autumn! Was this autumn? Were these trees, fields, villages? It seemed but the dim, dissolved edges of a dream, without inward substance.

At Southampton it was raining: and just a chaos, till they stepped on to a clean boat, and were received by a clean young captain, quite sympathetic, and quite a gentleman. Mrs. Witt, however, hardly looked at him, but went down to her cabin and lay down in her bunk.

There, lying concealed, she felt the engines start, she knew the voyage had begun. But she lay still. She saw the clouds and the rain, and refused to be disturbed.

Lou had lunch with the young captain, and she felt she ought to be flirty. The young man was so polite and attentive. And she wished so much she were alone.

Afterwards, she sat on deck and saw the Isle of Wight pass shadowy, in a misty rain. She didn’t know it was the Isle of Wight. To her, it was just the lowest bit of the British Isles. She saw it fading away: and with it, her life, going like a clot of shadow in a mist of nothingness. She had no feelings about it, none: neither about Rico, nor her London house, nor anything. All passing in a grey

curtain of rainy drizzle, like a death, and she, with not a feeling left.

They entered the Channel, and felt the slow heave of the sea. And soon the clouds broke in a little wind. The sky began to clear. By mid-afternoon it was blue summer, on the blue, running waters of the Channel. And soon, the ship steering for Santander, there was the coast of France, the rocks twinkling like some magic world.

The magic world! And back of it, that post-war Paris, which Lou knew only too well, and which depressed her so thoroughly. Or that post-war Monte Carlo, the Riviera still more depressing even than Paris. No, no one must land, even on magic coasts. Else you found yourself in a railway station and a centre of civilisation in five minutes.

Mrs. Witt hated the sea, and stayed, as a rule, practically the whole time' of the crossing in her bunk. There she was now, silent, shut up like a steel trap, as in her tomb. She did not even read. Just lay and stared at the passing sky. And the only thing to do was to leave her alone.

Lewis and Phoenix hung on the rail and watched everything. Or they went down to see St. Mawr. Or they stood talking in the doorway of the wireless operator's cabin. Lou begged the captain to give them jobs to do.

The queer, transitory, unreal feeling, as the ship crossed the great, heavy Atlantic. It was rather bad weather. And Lou felt, as she had felt before, that this grey, wolf-like, cold-blooded ocean hated men and their ships and their smoky passage. Heavy grey waves, a low-sagging sky: rain: yellow, weird evenings with snatches of sun: so it went on. Till they got way south, into the westward-running stream. Then they began to get blue weather and blue water.

To go south! Always to go south, away from the Arctic horror as far as possible! That was Lou's instinct. To go out of the clutch of greyness and low skies, of sweeping rain, and of slow, blanketing snow. Never again to see the mud and rain and snow of a northern winter, nor to feel the idealistic, Christianised tension of the now irreligious North.

As they neared Havana, and the water sparkled at night with phosphorus, and the flying-fishes came like drops of bright water, sailing out of the massive-slippery waves, Mrs. Witt emerged once more. She still had that shut-up, deathly look on her face. But she prowled round the deck, and manifested at least a little interest in affairs not her own. Here at sea she hardly remembered the existence of St. Mawr or Lewis or Phoenix. She was not very deeply aware even of Lou's existence. — But, of course, it would all come back, once they were on land.

They sailed in hot sunshine out of a blue, blue sea, past the castle into the harbour of Havana. There was a lot of shipping: and this was already America. Mrs. Witt had herself and Lou put ashore immediately. They took a motorcar

and drove at once to the great boulevard that is the centre of Havana. Here they saw a long rank of motorcars, all drawn up ready to take a couple of hundred American tourists for one more tour. There were the tourists, all with badges in their coats, lest they should get lost.

“They get so drunk by night,” said the driver in Spanish, “that the policemen find them lying in the road — turn them over, see the badge — and, hup! — carry them to their hotel.” He grinned sardonically.

Lou and her mother lunched at the Hotel d’Angleterre, and Mrs. Witt watched transfixed while a couple of her countrymen, a stout successful man and his wife, lunched abroad. They had cocktails — then lobster — and a bottle of hock — then a bottle of champagne — then a half-bottle of port. — And Mrs. Witt rose in haste as the liqueurs came. For that successful man and his wife had gone on imbibing with a sort of fixed and deliberate will, apparently tasting nothing, but saying to themselves: Now we’re drinking Rhine wine! Now we’re drinking 1912 champagne. Yah, Prohibition! Thou canst not put it over me. — Their complexions became more and more lurid. Mrs. Witt fled, fearing a Havana *débâcle*. But she said nothing.

In the afternoon, they motored into the country to see the great brewery gardens, the new villa suburb, and through the lanes past the old, decaying plantations with palm trees. In one lane they met the fifty motorcars with the two hundred tourists all with badges on their chests and self-satisfaction on their faces. Mrs. Witt watched in grim silence.

“*Plus ça change, plus c’est la même chose,*” said Lou, with a wicked little smile. “*On n’est pas mieux ici, mother.*”

“I know it,” said Mrs. Witt.

The hotels by the sea were all shut up: it was not yet the ‘y ‘season’. Not till November. And then I — Why, then Havana would be an American city, in full leaf of green dollar The green leaf of American prosperity shedding itself recklessly, from every roaming sprig of a tourist, over this city of sunshine and alcohol. Green leaves unfolded in Pittsburg and Chicago, showering in winter downfall in Havana.

Mother and daughter drank tea in a corner of the Mel d’Angleterre once more, and returned to the ferry.

The Gulf of Mexico was blue and rippling, with the phantom of islands on the south. Great porpoises rolled and leaped, running in front of the ship in the clear water, diving, travelling in perfect motion, straight, with the tip of the ship touching the tip of their tails, then rolling over, corkscrewing, and showing their bellies as they went. Marvellous! The marvellous beauty and fascination of natural wild things! The horror of man’s unnatural life, his heaped-up

civilisation! The flying fishes burst out of the sea in clouds of silvery, transparent motion. Blue above and below, the Gulf seemed a silent, empty, timeless place where man did not really reach. And Lou was again fascinated by the glamour of the universe. But bump! She and her mother were in a first-class hotel again, calling down the telephone for the bell-boy and iced water. And soon they were in a Pullman, off towards San Antonio.

It was America, it was Texas. They were at their ranch, on the great level of yellow autumn, with the vast sky above. And after all, from the hot, wide sky, and the hot, wide, red earth, there *did* come something new, something not used up. Lou did feel exhilarated.

The Texans were there, tall, blond people, ingenuously cheerful, ingenuously, childishly intimate, as if the fact that you had never seen them before was as nothing compared to the fact that you'd all been living in one room together all your lives, so that nothing was hidden from either of you. The one room being the mere shanty of the world in which we all live. Strange, uninspired cheerfulness, filling, as it were, the blank of complete incomprehension.

And off they set in their motorcars, chiefly high-legged Fords, rattling away down the red trails between yellow sunflowers or sere grass or dry cotton, away, away into great distances, cheerfully raising the dust of haste. It left Lou in a sort of blank amazement. But it left her amused, not depressed. The old screws of emotion and intimacy that had been screwed down so tightly upon her fell out of their holes here. The Texan intimacy weighed no more on her than a postage stamp, even if, for the moment, it stuck as close. And there was a certain underneath recklessness, even a stoicism. In all the apparently childish people, which left one free. They might appear childish: but they stoically depended on themselves alone, in reality. Not as in England, where every man waited to pour the burden of himself upon you.

St. Mawr arrived safely, a bit bewildered. The Texans eyed him closely, struck silent, as ever, by anything pure-bred and beautiful. He was somehow too beautiful, too perfected, in this great open country. The long-legged Texan horses, with their elaborate saddles, seemed somehow more natural.

Even St. Mawr felt himself strange, as it were naked and singled out, in this rough place. Like a jewel among stones, a pearl before swine, maybe. But the swine were no fools. They knew a pearl from a grain of maize, and a grain of maize from a pearl. And they knew what they wanted. When it was pearls, it was pearls; though chiefly, it was maize. Which shows good sense. They could see St. Mawr's points. Only he needn't draw the point too fine or it would just not pierce the tough skin of this country.

The ranch-man mounted him — just threw a soft skin over his back, jumped

on, and away down the red trail, raising the dust among the tall, wild, yellow of sunflowers, in the hot, wild sun. Then back again in a fume, and the man slipped off.

“He’s got the stuff in him, he sure has,” said the man.

And the horse seemed pleased with this rough handling. Lewis looked on in wonder, and a little envy.

Lou and her mother stayed a fortnight on the ranch. It was all so queer: so crude, so rough, so easy, so artificially civilised, and so meaningless. Lou could not get over the feeling that it all meant nothing. There were no roots of reality at all. No consciousness below the surface, no meaning in anything save the obvious, the blatantly obvious. It was like life enacted in a mirror. Visually, it was wildly vital. But there was nothing behind it. Or like a cinematograph: flat shapes, exactly like men, but without any substance of reality, rapidly rattling away with talk, emotions, activity, all in the flat, nothing behind it. No deeper consciousness at all. So it seemed to her.

One moved from dream to dream, from phantasm to phantasm.

But at least, this Texan life, if it had no bowels, no vitals, at least it could not prey on one’s own vitals. It was this much better than Europe.

Lewis was silent, and rather piqued. St. Mawr had already made advances to the boss’s long-legged, arched-necked glossy-maned Texan mare. And the boss was pleased.

What a world!

Mrs. Witt eyed it all shrewdly. But she failed to participate. Lou was a bit scared at the emptiness of it all, and the queer, phantasmal self-consciousness. Cowboys just as self-conscious as Rico, far more sentimental, inwardly vague and unreal. Cowboys that went after their cows in black Ford motorcars: and who self-consciously saw Lady Carrington falling to them, as elegant young ladies from the East fall to the noble cowboy of the films, or in Zane Grey. It was all film-psychology.

And at the same time, these boys led a hard, hard life, often dangerous and gruesome. Nevertheless, inwardly they were self-conscious film heroes. The boss himself, a man over forty, long and lean and with a great deal of stringy energy, showed off before her in a strong silent manner, existing for the time being purely in his imagination of the sort of picture he made to her, the sort of impression he made on her.

So they all were, coloured up like a Zane Grey book-jacket, all of them living in the mirror. The kind of picture they made to somebody else.

And at the same time, with energy, courage, and a stoical grit getting their work done, and putting through what they had to put through.

It left Lou blank with wonder. And in the face of this strange, cheerful living in the mirror — a rather cheap mirror at that — England began to seem real to her again.

Then she had to remember herself back in England. And no, oh God, England was not real either, except poisonously. What was real? What under heaven was real?

Her mother had gone dumb and, as it were, out of range. Phoenix was a bit assured and bouncy, back more or less in his own conditions. Lewis was a bit impressed by the emptiness of everything, the lack of concentration. And St. Mawr followed at the heels of the boss's long-legged black Texan mare, almost slavishly.

What, in heaven's name, was one to make of it all?

Soon, she could not stand this sort of living in a film-setting, with the mechanical energy of 'making good', that is, making money, to keep the show going. The mystic duty to 'make good', meaning to make the ranch pay a laudable interest on the 'owners' investment. Lou herself being one of the owners. And the interest that came to her, from her father's will, being the money she spent to buy St. Mawr and to fit up that house in Westminster. Then also the mystic duty to 'feel good'. Everybody had to *feel good, fine!* "How are you this morning, Mr. Latham?" — "*Fine!* Eh! Don't you feel good out here, eh? Lady Carrington?" — "*Fine!*" — Lou pronounced it with the same ringing conviction. It was Coué all the time!

"Shall we stay here long, mother?" she asked.

"Not a day longer than you want to, Louise. I stay entirely for your sake."

"Then let us go, mother."

They left St. Mawr and Lewis. But Phoenix wanted to come along. So they motored to San Antonio, got into the Pullman, and travelled as far as El Paso. Then they changed to go North. Santa Fe would be at least 'easy'. And Mrs. Witt had acquaintances there.

They found the fiesta over in Santa Fe: Indians, Mexicans, artists had finished their great effort to amuse and attract the tourists. "Welcome, Mr. Tourist" said a great board on one side of the high-road. And on the other side, a little nearer to town: "Thank You, Mr. Tourist."

"*Plus ça change* —" Lou began.

"*Ça ne change jamais* — except for the worse!" said Mrs. Witt, like a pistol going off. And Lou held her peace, after she had sighed to herself, and said in her own mind: 'Welcome Also, Mrs. and Miss Tourist!'

There was no getting a word out of Mrs. Witt these days. Whereas Phoenix was becoming almost loquacious.

They stayed a while in Santa Fé, in the clean, comfortable, 'homely' hotel, where 'every room had its bath': a spotless white bath, with very hot water night and day. The tourists and commercial travellers sat in the big hall down below, everybody living in the mirror! And of course, they knew Lady Carrington down to her shoe-soles. And they all expected her to know them down to their shoe-soles. For the only object of the mirror is to reflect images.

For two days mother and daughter ate in the mayonnaise intimacy of the dining-room. Then Mrs. Witt struck, and telephoned down every meal-time for her meal in her room. She got to staying in bed later and later, as on the ship. Lou became uneasy. This was worse than Europe.

Phoenix was still there, as a sort of half-friend, half-servant retainer. He was perfectly happy, roving round among the Mexicans and Indians, talking Spanish all day, and telling about England and his two mistresses, rolling the ball of his own importance.

"I'm afraid we've got Phoenix for life," said Lou.

"Not unless we wish," said Mrs. Witt indifferently. And she picked up a novel which she didn't want to read, but which she was going to read.

"What shall we do next, mother?" Lou asked.

"As far as I am concerned, there is no next," said Mrs. Witt. "Come, mother! Let's go back to Italy or somewhere, if it's as bad as that."

"Never again, Louise, shall I cross that water. I have come home to die."

"I don't see much home about it — the Gonzalez Hotel in Santa Fe."

"Indeed not! But as good as anywhere else to die in."

"Oh, mother, don't be silly! Shall we look for somewhere where we can be by ourselves?"

"I leave it to you, Louise. I have made my last decision."

"What is that, mother?"

"Never, never to make another decision!"

"Not even to decide to die?"

"No, not even that."

"Or not to die?"

"Not that either."

Mrs. Witt shut up like a trap. She refused to rise from her bed that day.

Lou went to consult Phoenix. The result was, the two set out to look at a little ranch that was for sale.

It was autumn, and the loveliest time in the south-west, where there is no spring, snow blowing into the hot lap of summer; and no real summer, hail falling in thick ice from the thunderstorms: and even no very definite winter, hot sun melting the snow and giving an impression of spring at any time. But

autumn there is, when the winds of the desert are almost still, and the mountains fume no clouds. But morning comes cold and delicate, upon the wild sunflowers and the puffing, yellow-flowered greasewood. For the desert blooms in autumn. In spring it is grey ash all the time, and only the strong breath of the summer sun, and the heavy splashing of thunder rain succeeds at last, by September, in blowing it into soft puffy yellow fire.

It was such a delicate morning when Lou drove out with Phoenix towards the mountains, to look at this ranch that a Mexican wanted to sell. For the brief moment the high mountains had lost their snow: it would be back again in a fortnight: and stood dim and delicate with autumn haze. The desert stretched away pale, as pale as the sky, but silvery and sere, with hummock-mounds of shadow, and long wings of shadow, like the reflection of some great bird. The same eagle shadows came like rude paintings of the outstretched bird, upon the mountains, where the aspens were turning yellow. For the moment, the brief moment, the great desert-and-mountain landscape had lost its certain cruelty, and looked tender, dreamy. And many, many birds were flickering around.

Lou and Phoenix bumped and hesitated over a long trail: then wound down into a deep canyon: and then the car began to climb, climb, climb, in steep rushes, and in long, heartbreaking, uneven pulls. The road was bad, and driving was no joke. But it was the sort of road Phoenix was used to. He sat impassive and watchful, and kept on, till his engine boiled. He was *himself* in this country: impassive, detached, self-satisfied, and silently assertive. Guarding himself at every moment, but, on his guard, sure of himself. Seeing no difference at all between Lou or Mrs. Witt and himself, except that they had money and he had none, while he had a native importance which they lacked. He depended on them for money, they on him for the power to live out here in the West. Intimately, he was as good as they. Money was their only advantage.

As Lou sat beside him in the front seat of the car, where it bumped less than behind, she felt this. She felt a peculiar, tough-necked arrogance in him, as if he were asserting himself to put something over her. He wanted her to allow him to make advances to her, to allow him to suggest that he should be her lover. And then, finally, she would marry him, and he would be on the same footing as she and her mother.

In return, he would look after her, and give her his support and countenance, as a man, and stand between her and the world. In this sense, he would be faithful to her, and loyal. But as far as other women went, Mexican women or Indian women: why, that was none of her business. His marrying her would be a pact between two aliens, on behalf of one another, and he would keep his part of it all right. But himself, as a private man and a predatory alien-blooded male, this

had nothing to do with her. It didn't enter into her scope and count. She was one of these nervous white women with lots of money. She was very nice, too. But as a squaw — as a real woman in a shawl whom a man went after for the pleasure of the night — why, she hardly counted. One of these white women who talk clever and know things like a man. She could hardly expect a half-savage male to acknowledge her as his female counterpart — No! She had the bucks! And she had all the paraphernalia of the white man's civilisation, which a savage can play with and so escape his own hollow boredom. But his own real female counterpart? — Phoenix would just have shrugged his shoulders, and thought the question not worth answering. How could there be any answer in her, to the phallic male in him? Couldn't! Yet it would flatter his vanity and his self-esteem immensely, to possess her. That would be possessing the very clue to the white man's overwhelming world. And if she would let him possess her, he would be absolutely loyal to her, as far as affairs and appearances went. Only, the aboriginal phallic male in him simply couldn't recognise her as a woman at all. In this respect, she didn't exist. It needed the shawled Indian or Mexican women, with their squeaky, plaintive voices, their shuffling, watery humility, and the dark glances of their big, knowing eyes. When an Indian woman looked at him from under her black fringe, with dark, half-secretive suggestion in her big eyes: and when she stood before him hugged in her shawl, in such apparently complete quiescent humility: and when she spoke to him in her mousey squeak of a high, plaintive voice, as if it were difficult for her female bashfulness even to emit so much sound: and when she shuffled away with her legs wide apart, because of her wide-topped, white, high buckskin boots with tiny white feet, and her dark-knotted hair so full of hard, yet subtle lure: and when he remembered the almost watery softness of the Indian woman's dark, warm flesh: then he was a male, an old, secretive, rat-like male. But before Lou's straightforwardness and utter sexual incompetence, he just stood in contempt. And to him, even a French cocotte was utterly devoid of the right sort of sex. She couldn't really move him. She couldn't satisfy the furtiveness in him. He needed this plaintive, squeaky, dark-fringed Indian quality, something furtive and soft and rat-like, really to rouse him.

Nevertheless, he was ready to trade his sex, which, in his opinion, every white woman was secretly pining for, for the white woman's money and social privileges. In the day-time, all the thrill and excitement of the white man's motorcars and moving pictures and ice-cream sodas, and so forth. In the night, the soft, watery-soft warmth of an Indian or half-Indian woman. This was Phoenix's idea of life for himself.

Meanwhile, if a white woman gave him the privileges of the white man's

world, he would do his duty by her as far as all that went.

Lou, sitting very, very still beside him as he drove the car — he was not a very good driver, not quick and marvellous as some white men are, particularly some French chauffeurs she had known, but usually a little behindhand in his movements — she knew more or less all that he felt. More or less she divined as a woman does. Even from a certain rather assured stupidity of his shoulders, and a certain rather stupid assertiveness of his knees, she knew him.

But she did not judge him too harshly. Somewhere deep, deep in herself she knew she too was at fault. And this made her sometimes inclined to humble herself, as a woman, before the furtive assertiveness of this underground, ‘knowing’ savage. He was so different from Rico.

Yet, after all, was he? In his rootlessness, his drifting, his real meaninglessness, was he different from Rico? And his childish, spellbound absorption in the motorcar, or in the moving pictures, or in an ice-cream soda — was it very different from Rico? Anyhow, was it really any better? Pleasanter, perhaps, to a woman, because of the childishness of it.

The same with his opinion of himself as a sexual male! So childish, really, it was almost thrilling to a woman. But then, so stupid also, with that furtive lurking in holes and imagining it could not be detected. He imagined he kept himself dark, in his sexual rat-holes. He imagined he was not detected.

No, no, Lou was not such a fool as she looked, in his eyes, anyhow. She knew what she wanted. She wanted relief from the nervous tension and irritation of her life, she wanted to escape from the friction which is the whole stimulus in modern social life. She wanted to be still: only that, to be very, very still, and recover her own soul.

When Phoenix presumed she was looking for some secretly sexual male such as himself, he was ridiculously mistaken. Even the illusion of the beautiful St. Mawr was gone. And Phoenix, roaming round like a sexual rat in promiscuous back yards! — *Merci, mon cher!* For that was all he was: a sexual rat in the great barn-yard of man’s habitat, looking for female rats!

Merci, mon cher! You are had.

Nevertheless, in his very mistakenness, he was a relief to her. His mistake was amusing rather than impressive. And the fact that one half of his intelligence was a complete dark blank, that too was a relief.

Strictly, and perhaps in the best sense, he was a servant. His very unconsciousness and his very limitation served as a shelter, as one shelters within the limitations of four walls. The very decided limits to his intelligence were a shelter to her. They made her feel safe.

But that feeling of safety did not deceive her. It was the feeling one derived

from having a true servant attached to one, a man whose psychic limitations left him incapable of anything but service, and whose strong flow of natural life, at the same time, made him need to serve.

And Lou, sitting there so very still and frail, yet self-contained, had not lived for nothing. She no longer wanted to fool herself. She had no desire at all to fool herself into thinking that a Phoenix might be a husband and a mate. No desire that way at all. His obtuseness was a servant's obtuseness. She was grateful to him for serving, and she paid him a wage. Moreover, she provided him with something to do, to occupy his life. In a sense, she gave him his life, and rescued him from his own boredom. It was a balance.

He did not know what she was thinking. There was a certain physical sympathy between them. His obtuseness made him think it was also a sexual sympathy.

"It's a nice trip, you and me," he said suddenly, turning and looking her in the eyes with an excited look, and ending on a foolish little laugh.

She realised that she should have sat in the back seat.

"But it's a bad road," she said. "Hadn't you better stop and put the sides of the hood up? Your engine is boiling."

He looked away with a quick switch of interest to the red thermometer in front of his machine.

"She's boiling," he said, stopping, and getting out with a quick alacrity to go to look at the engine.

Lou got out also, and went to the back seat, shutting the door decisively.

"I think I'll ride at the back," she said, "it gets so frightfully hot in front when the engine heats up. — Do you think she needs some water? Have you got some in the canteen?"

"She's full," he said, peering into the steaming valve.

"You can run a bit out, if you think there's any need. I wonder if it's much farther!"

"*Quién sabe!*" said he, slightly impertinent.

She relapsed into her own stillness. She realised how careful, how very careful she must be of relaxing into sympathy, and reposing, as it were, on Phoenix. He would read it as a sexual appeal. Perhaps he couldn't help it. She had only herself to blame. He was obtuse, as a man and a savage. He had only one interpretation, sex, for any woman's approach to him.

And she knew, with the last clear knowledge of weary disillusion, that she did not want to be mixed up in Phoenix's sexual promiscuities. The very thought was an insult to her. The crude, clumsy servant-male: no, no, not that. He was a good fellow, a very good fellow, as far as he went. But he fell far short of

physical intimacy.

“No, no,” she said to herself, “I was wrong to ride in the front seat with him. I must sit alone, just alone. Because sex, mere sex, is repellent to me. I will never prostitute myself again. Unless something touches my very spirit, the very quick of me, I will stay alone, just alone. Alone, and give myself only to the unseen presences, serve only the other, unseen presences.”

She understood now the meaning of the Vestal Virgins, the Virgins of the holy fire in the old temples. They were symbolic of herself, of woman weary of the embrace of incompetent men, weary, weary, weary of all that, turning to the unseen gods, the unseen spirits, the hidden fire, and devoting herself to that, and that alone. Receiving thence her pacification and her fulfilment.

Not these little, incompetent, childish self-opinionated men! Not these to touch her. She watched Phoenix’s rather stupid shoulders as he drove the car on between the piñon trees and the cedars of the narrow mesa ridge, to the mountain foot. He was a good fellow. But let him run among women of his own sort. Something was beyond him. And this something must remain beyond him, never allow itself to come within his reach. Otherwise he would paw it and mess it up, and be as miserable as a child that has broken its father’s watch.

No, no! She had loved an American, and lived with him for a fortnight. She had had a long, intimate friendship with an Italian. Perhaps it was love on his part. And she had yielded to him. Then her love and marriage to Rico.

And what of it all? Nothing. It was almost nothing. It was as if only the outside of herself, her top layers, were human. This inveigled her into intimacies. As soon as the intimacy penetrated, or attempted to penetrate, inside her, it was a disaster. Just a humiliation and a breaking down.

Within these outer layers of herself lay the successive inner sanctuaries of herself. And these were inviolable. She accepted it.

“I am not a marrying woman,” she said to herself. “I’m not a lover nor a mistress nor a wife. It is no good. Love can’t really come into me from the outside, and I can never, never mate with any man, since the mystic new man will never come to me. No, no, let me know myself and my role. I am one of the eternal Virgins, serving the eternal fire. My dealings with men have only broken my stillness and messed up my doorways. It has been my own fault. I ought to stay virgin, and still, very, very still, and serve the most perfect service. I want my temple and my loneliness and my Apollo mystery of the inner fire. And with men, only the delicate, subtler, more remote relations. No coming near. A coming near only breaks the delicate veils, and broken veils, like broken flowers, only lead to rotteness.”

She felt a great peace inside herself as she made this realisation. And a

thankfulness. Because, after all, it seemed to her that the hidden fire was alive and burning in this sky, over the desert, in the mountains. She felt a certain latent holiness in the very atmosphere, a young, spring-fire of latent holiness, such as she had never felt in Europe or in the East. "For me," she said, as she looked away at the mountains in shadow and the pale, warm desert beneath, with wings of shadow upon it: "For me, this place is sacred. It is blessed."

But as she watched Phoenix: as she remembered the motorcars and tourists, and the rather dreary Mexicans of Santa Fe, and the lurking, invidious Indians, with something of a rat-like secretiveness and defeatedness in their bearing, she realised that the latent fire of the vast landscape struggled under a great weight of dirt-like inertia. She had to mind the dirt, most carefully and vividly avoid it and keep it away from her, here in this place that at last seemed sacred to her.

The motorcar climbed up, past the tall pine trees, to the foot of the mountains, and came at last to a wire gate, where nothing was to be expected. Phoenix opened the gate, and they drove on, through more trees, into a clearing where dried-up bean plants were yellow.

"This man got no water for his beans," said Phoenix. "Not got much beans this year."

They climbed slowly up the incline, through more pine trees, and out into another clearing, where a couple of horses were grazing. And there they saw the ranch itself, little low cabins with patched roofs, under a few pine trees, and facing the long twelve-acre clearing, or field, where the Michaelmas daisies were purple mist, and spangled with clumps of yellow flowers.

"Not got no alfalfa here neither!" said Phoenix, as the car waded past the flowers. "Must be a dry place up here. Got no water, sure they haven't."

Yet it was the place Lou wanted. In an instant, her heart sprang to it. The instant the car stopped, and she saw the two cabins inside the rickety fence, the rather broken corral beyond, and behind all, tall, blue balsam pines, the round hills, the solid up-rise of the mountain flank: and getting down, she looked across the purple and gold of the clearing, downwards at the ring of pine trees standing so still, so crude and untameable, the motionless desert beyond the bristles of the pine crests, a thousand feet below: and beyond the desert, blue mountains, and far, far-off blue mountains in Arizona: "This is the place," she said to herself.

This little tumbledown ranch, only a homestead of a hundred and sixty acres, was, as it were, man's last effort towards the wild heart of the Rockies, at this point. Sixty years before, a restless schoolmaster had wandered out from the East, looking for gold among the mountains. He found a very little, then no more. But the mountains had got hold of him, he could not go back.

There was a little trickling spring of pure water, a thread of treasure perhaps better than gold. So the schoolmaster took up a homestead on the lot where this little spring arose. He struggled, and got himself his log cabin erected, his fence put up, sloping at the mountainside through the pine trees and dropping into the hollows where the ghost-white mariposa lilies stood leafless and naked in flower, in spring, on tall, invisible stems. He made the long clearing for alfalfa.

And fell so into debt that he had to trade his homestead away, to clear his debt. Then he made a tiny living teaching the children of the few American prospectors who had squatted in the valleys, beside the Mexicans.

The trader who got the ranch tackled it with a will. He built another log cabin and a big corral, and brought water from the canyon two miles and more across the mountain slope, in a little runnel ditch, and more water, piped a mile or more down the little canyon immediately above the cabins. He got a flow of water for his houses: for being a true American, he felt he could not really say he had conquered his environment till he had got running water, taps, and wash-hand basins inside his house.

Taps, running water and wash-hand basins he accomplished. And, undaunted through the years, he prepared the basin for a fountain in the little fenced-in enclosure, and he built a little bath-house. After a number of years, he sent up the enamelled bath-tub to be put in the little log bath-house on the little wild ranch hung right against the savage Rockies, above the desert.

But here the mountains finished him. He was a trader down below, in the Mexican village. This little ranch was, as it were, his hobby, his ideal. He and his New England wife spent their summers there: and turned on the taps in the cabins and turned them off again, and felt really that civilisation had conquered.

All this plumbing from the savage ravines of the canyons — . one of them nameless to this day — cost, however, money. In fact, the ranch cost a great deal of money. But it was all to be got back. The big clearing was to be irrigated for alfalfa, the little clearing for beans, and the third clearing, under the corral, for potatoes. All these things the trader could trade to the Mexicans, very advantageously.

And, moreover, since somebody had started a praise of the famous goats' cheese made by Mexican peasants in New Mexico, goats there should be.

Goats there were: five hundred of them, eventually. And they fed chiefly in the wild mountain hollows, the no-man's-land. The Mexicans call them fire-mouths, because everything they nibble dies. Not because of their flaming mouths, really, but because they nibble a live plant down, down to the quick, till it can put forth no more.

So, the energetic trader, in the course of five or six years, had got the ranch

ready. The long three-roomed cabin was for him and his New England wife. In the two-roomed cabin lived the Mexican family who really had charge of the ranch. For the trader was mostly fixed to his store, seventeen miles away, down in the Mexican village. /

The ranch lay over eight thousand feet up, the snows of winter came deep and the white goats, looking dirty yellow, swam in snow with their poor curved horns poking out like dead sticks. But the corral had a long, cosy, shut-in goat-shed all down one side, and into this crowded the five hundred, their acrid goat smell rising like hot acid over the snow. And the thin, pock-marked Mexican threw them alfalfa out of the log barn. Until the hot sun sank the snow again, and froze the surface, when patter-patter went the two thousand little goat-hoofs, over the silver-frozen snow, up at the mountain. Nibble, nibble, nibble, the fire-mouths, at every tender twig. And the goat-bell climbed, and the baa-ing came from among the dense and shaggy pine trees. And sometimes, in a soft drift under the trees, a goat, or several goats, went through, into the white depths, and some were lost thus, to reappear dead and frozen at the thaw.

By evening, they were driven down again, like a dirty yellowish-white stream carrying dark sticks on its yeasty surface, tripping and bleating over the frozen snow, past the bustling dark green pine trees, down to the trampled mess of the corral. And everywhere, everywhere over the snow, yellow stains and dark pills of goat-droppings melting into the surface crystal. On still, glittering nights, when the frost was hard, the smell of goats came up like some uncanny acid fire, and great stars sitting on the mountain's edge seemed to be watching like the eyes of a mountain lion, brought by the scent. Then the coyotes in the near canyon howled and sobbed, and ran like shadows over the snow. But the goat corral had been built tight.

In the course of years the goat-herd had grown from fifty to five hundred, and surely that was increase. The goat-milk cheeses sat drying on their little racks. In spring there was a great flowing and skipping of kids. In summer and early autumn, there was a pest of flies, rising from all that goat smell and that cast-out whey of goats' milk, after the cheese-making. The rats came, and the pack-rats, swarming.

And after all, it was difficult to sell or trade the cheeses, and little profit to be made. And in dry summers, no water came down in the narrow ditch-channel, that straddled in wooden runnels over the deep clefts in the mountainside. No water meant no alfalfa. In winter the goats scarcely drank at all. In summer they could be watered at the little spring. But the thirsty land was not so easy to accommodate.

Five hundred fine white Angora goats, with their massive handsome padres!

They were beautiful enough. And the trader made all he could of them. Come summer, they were run down into the narrow tank filled with the fiery dipping fluid. Then their lovely white wool was clipped. It was beautiful, and valuable, but comparatively little of it.

And it all cost, cost, cost. And a man was always let down. At one time no water. At another a poison weed. Then a sickness. Always some mysterious malevolence fighting, fighting against the will of man. A strange invisible influence coming out of the livid rock fastnesses in the bowels of those uncreated Rocky Mountains, preying upon the will of man, and slowly wearing down his resistance, his onward-pushing spirit. The curious, subtle thing, like a mountain fever, got into the blood, so that the men at the ranch, and the animals with them, had bursts of queer, violent, half-frenzied energy, in which, however, they were wont to lose their wariness. And then, damage of some sort. The horses ripped and cut themselves, or they were struck by lightning, the men had great hurts or sickness. A curious disintegration working all the time, a sort of malevolent breath, like a stupefying, irritant gas coming out of the unfathomed mountains.

The pack-rats with their bushy tails and big ears came down out of the hills, and were jumping and bouncing about: symbols of the curious debasing malevolence that was in the spirit of the place. The Mexicans in charge, good honest men, worked all they could. But they were like most of the Mexicans in the south-west, as if they had been pithed, to use one of Kipling's words. As if the invidious malevolence of the country itself had slowly taken all the pith of manhood from them, leaving a hopeless sort of corpus of a man.

And the same happened to the white men, exposed to the open country. Slowly, they were pithed. The energy went out of them. And more than that, the interest. An inertia of indifference invading the soul, leaving the body healthy and active, but wasting the soul, the living interest, quite away.

It was the New England wife of the trader who put most energy into the ranch. She looked on it as her home. She had a little white fence put all round the two cabins: the bright brass water-taps she kept shining in the two kitchens: outside the kitchen door she had a little kitchen garden and nasturtiums, after a great fight with invading animals, that nibbled everything away. And she got so far as the preparation of the round concrete basin which was to be a little pool, under the few enclosed pine trees between the two cabins, a pool with a tiny fountain jet.

But this, with the bath-tub, was her limit, as the five hundred goats were her man's limit. Out of the mountains came two breaths of influence: the breath of the curious, frenzied energy, that took away one's intelligence as alcohol or any

other stimulus does: and then the most strange indiviousness that ate away the soul. The woman loved her ranch, almost with passion. It was she who felt the stimulus more than the men. It seemed to enter her like a sort of sex passion, intensifying her ego, making her full of violence and of blind female energy. The energy and the blindness of it! A strange blind frenzy, like an intoxication while it lasted. And the sense of beauty that thrilled her New England woman's soul.

Her cabin faced the slow down-slope of the clearing, the alfalfa field: her long, low cabin, crouching under the great pine tree that threw up its trunk sheer in front of the house, in the yard. That pine tree was the guardian of the place. But a bristling, almost demonish guardian, from the far-off crude ages of the world. Its great pillar of pale, flakey-ribbed copper rose there in strange, callous indifference, and the grim permanence, which is in pine trees. A passionless, non-phallic column, rising in the shadows of the pre-sexual world, before the hot-blooded ithyphallic column ever erected itself. A cold, blossomless, resinous sap surging and oozing gum, from that pallid brownish bark. And the wind hissing in the needles, like a vast nest of serpents. And the pine cones falling plumb as the hail hit them. Then lying all over the yard, open in the sun like wooden roses, but hard, sexless, rigid with a blind will.

Past the column of that pine tree, the alfalfa field sloped gently down, to the circling guard of pine trees, from which silent, living barrier isolated pines rose to ragged heights at intervals, in blind assertiveness. Strange, those pine trees! In some lights all their needles glistened like polished steel, all subtly glittering with a whitish glitter among darkness, like real needles. Then again, at evening, the trunks would flare up orange red, and the tufts would be dark, alert tufts like a wolf's tail touching the air. Again, in the morning sunlight they would be soft and still, hardly noticeable. But all the same, present and watchful. Never sympathetic, always watchfully on their guard, and resistant, they hedged one in with the aroma and the power and the slight horror of the pre-sexual primeval world. The world where each creature was crudely limited to its own ego, crude and bristling and cold, and then crowding in packs like pine trees and wolves.

But beyond the pine trees, ah, there beyond, there was beauty for the spirit to soar in. The circle of pines, with the loose trees rising high and ragged at intervals, this was the barrier, the fence to the foreground. Beyond was only distance, the desert a thousand feet below, and beyond.

The desert swept its great fawn-coloured circle around, away beyond and below like a beach, with a long mountainside of pure blue shadow closing in the near corner, and strange, bluish hummocks of mountains rising like wet rock from a vast strand, away in the middle distance, and beyond, in the farthest distance, pale blue crests of mountains looking over the horizon from the west,

as if peering in from another world altogether.

Ah, that was beauty! — perhaps the most beautiful thing in the world. It was pure beauty, *absolute* beauty! There! That was it. To the little woman from New England, with her tense, fierce soul and her egoistic passion of service, this beauty was absolute, a *ne plus ultra*. From her doorway, from her porch, she could watch the vast, eagle-like wheeling of the daylight, that turned as the eagles which lived in the near rocks turned overhead in the blue, turning their luminous, dark-edged-patterned bellies and underwings upon the pure air, like winged orbs. So the daylight made the vast turn upon the desert, brushing the farthest out-watching mountains. And sometimes the vast strand of the desert would float with curious undulations and exhalations amid the blue fragility of mountains, whose upper edges were harder than the floating bases. And sometimes she would see the little brown adobe houses of the village Mexicans, twenty miles away, like little cube crystals of insect-houses dotting upon the desert, very distinct, with a cotton-wood tree or two rising near. And sometimes she would see the far-off rocks thirty miles away, where the canyon made a gateway between the mountains. Quite clear, like an open gateway out of the vast yard, she would see the cut-out bit of the canyon passage. And on the desert itself, curious, puckered folds of mesa-sides. And a blackish crack which in places revealed the otherwise invisible canyon of the Rio Grande. And beyond everything, the mountains like icebergs showing up from an outer sea. Then later, the sun would go down blazing above the shallow cauldron of simmering darkness, and the round mountains of Colorado would lump up into uncanny significance, northwards. That was always rather frightening. But morning came again, with the sun peeping over the mountain slopes and lighting the desert away in the distance long, long before it lighted on her yard. And then she would see another valley, like magic and very lovely, with green folds and long tufts of cotton-wood trees, and a few long-cubical adobe houses, lying floating in shallow light below, like a vision.

Ah! it was beauty, beauty absolute, at any hour of the day: whether the perfect clarity of morning or the mountains beyond the simmering desert at noon, or the purple lumping of northern mounds under a red sun at night. Or whether the dust whirled in tall columns, travelling across the desert far away, like pillars of cloud by day, tall, leaning pillars of dust hastening with ghostly haste: or whether, in the early part of the year, suddenly in the morning a whole sea of solid white would rise rolling below, a solid mist from melted snow, ghost-white under the mountain sun, the world below blotted out: or whether the black rain and cloud streaked down, far across the desert, and lightning stung down with sharp white stings on the horizon: or the cloud travelled and burst overhead, with rivers of

fluid blue fire running out of heaven and exploding on earth, and hail coming down like a world of ice shattered above: or the hot sun rode in again: or snow fell in heavy silence: or the world was blinding white under a blue sky, and one must hurry under the pine trees for shelter against that vast, white, back-beating light which rushed up at one and made one almost unconscious, amid the snow.

It was always beauty, *always!* It was always great, and splendid, and, for some reason, natural. It was never grandiose or theatrical. Always, for some reason, perfect. And quite simple, in spite of it all.

So it was, when you watched the vast and living landscape. The landscape lived, and lived as the world of the gods, unsullied and unconcerned. The great circling landscape lived its own life, sumptuous and uncaring. Man did not exist for it.

And if it had been a question simply of living through the eyes, into the distance, then this would have been Paradise, and the little New England woman on her ranch would have found what she was always looking for, the earthly paradise of the spirit.

But even a woman cannot live only into the distance, the beyond. Willy-nilly she finds herself juxtaposed to the near things, the thing in itself. And willy-nilly she is caught up into the fight with the immediate object.

The New England woman had fought to make the nearness as perfect as the distance: for the distance was absolute beauty. She had been confident of success. She had felt quite assured, when the water came running out of her bright brass taps, the wild water of the hills caught, tricked into the narrow iron pipes, and led tamely to her kitchen, to jump out over her sink, into her wash-basin, at her service. "There!" she said. "I have tamed the waters of the mountain to my service."

So she had, for the moment.

At the same time, the invisible attack was being made upon her. While she revelled in the beauty of the luminous world that wheeled around and below her, the grey, rat-like spirit of the inner mountains was attacking her from behind. She could not keep her attention. And, curiously, she could not keep even her speech. When she was saying something, suddenly the next word would be gone out of her, as if a pack-rat had carried it off. And she sat blank, stuttering, staring in the empty cupboard of her mind, like Mother Hubbard, and seeing the cupboard bare. And this irritated her husband intensely.

Her chickens, of which she was so proud, were carried away. Or they strayed. Or they fell sick. At first she could cope with their circumstances. But after a while, she couldn't. She couldn't care. A drug-like numbness possessed her spirit, and at the very middle of her, she couldn't care what happened to her

chickens.

The same when a couple of horses were struck by lightning. It frightened her. The rivers of fluid fire that suddenly fell out of the sky and exploded on the earth nearby, as if the whole earth had burst like a bomb, frightened her from the very core of her, and made her know, secretly and with cynical certainty, that *there was no merciful God in the heavens*. A very tall, elegant pine tree just above her cabin took the lightning, and stood tall and elegant as before, but with a white seam spiralling from its crest, all down its tall trunk, to earth. The perfect scar, white and long as lightning itself. And every time she looked at it, she said to herself, in spite of herself: "There is no Almighty loving God. The God there is shaggy as the pine trees, and horrible as the lightning." Outwardly, she never confessed this. Openly, she thought of her dear New England Church as usual. But in the violent undercurrent of her woman's soul, after the storms, she would look at that living, seamed tree, and the voice would say in her, almost savagely: 'What nonsense about Jesus and a God of Love, in a place like this! This is more awful and more splendid. I like it better.' The very chipmunks, in their jerky helter-skelter, the blue jays wrangling in the pine tree in the dawn, the grey squirrel undulating to the tree-trunk, then pausing to chatter at her and scold her, with a shrewd fearlessness, as if she were the alien, the outsider, the creature that should not be permitted among the trees, all destroyed the illusion she cherished, of love, universal love. There was no love on this ranch. There was life, intense, bristling life, full of energy, but also, with an undertone of savage sordidness.

The black ants in her cupboard, the pack-rats bouncing on her ceiling like hippopotami in the night, the two sick goats: there was a peculiar undercurrent of squalor, flowing under the curious tussle of wild life. That was it. The wild life, even the life of the trees and flowers seemed one bristling, hair-raising tussle. The very flowers came up bristly, and many of them were fang-mouthed, like the dead-nettle: and none had any real scent. But they were very fascinating, too, in their very fierceness. In May, the curious columbines of the stream-beds, columbines scarlet outside and yellow in, like the red and yellow of a herald's uniform — farther from the dove nothing could be: then the beautiful rosy-blue of the great tufts of the flower they called bluebell, but which was really a flower of the snap-dragon family: these grew in powerful beauty in the little clearing of the pine trees, followed by the flower the settlers had mysteriously called herb honeysuckle: a tangle of long drops of pure fire-red, hanging from slim invisible stalks of smoke colour. The purest, most perfect vermilion scarlet, cleanest fire-colour, hanging in long drops like a shower of fire-rain that is just going to strike the earth. A little later, more in the open, there came another sheer fire-red flower, sparking, fierce red stars running up a bristly grey ladder, as if the earth's

fire-centre had blown out some red sparks, white-speckled and deadly inside, puffing for a moment in the day air.

So it was! The alfalfa field was one raging, seething conflict of plants trying to get hold. One dry year, and the bristly wild things had got hold: the spiky, blue-leaved thistle-poppy with its moon-white flowers, the low clumps of blue nettle-flower, the later rush, after the serenity of June and July, the rush of red sparks and Michaelmas daisies, and the tough, wild sunflowers, strangling and choking the dark, tender green of the clover-like alfalfa! A battle, a battle, with banners of bright scarlet and yellow.

When a really defenceless flower did issue, like the moth-still, ghost-centred mariposa lily, with its inner moth-dust of yellow, it came invisible. There was nothing to be seen but a hair of greyish grass near the oak scrub. Behold, this invisible long stalk was balancing a white, ghostly, three-petalled flower, naked out of nothingness. A mariposa lily!

Only the pink wild roses smelled sweet, like the old world. They were sweet-briar roses. And the dark blue harebells among the oak scrub, like the ice-dark bubbles of the mountain flowers in the Alps, the Alpenglöckchen.

The roses of the desert are the cactus flowers, crystal of translucent yellow or of rose-colour. But set among spines the devil himself must have conceived in a moment of sheer ecstasy.

Nay, it was a world before and after the God of Love. Even the very humming-birds hanging about the flowering squaw-berry bushes, when the snow had gone, in May, they were before and after the God of Love. And the blue jays were crested dark with challenge, and the yellow-and-dark woodpecker was fearless like a warrior in war-paint, as he struck the wood. While on the fence the hawks sat motionless, like dark fists clenched under heaven, ignoring man and his ways.

Summer, it was true, unfolded the tender cotton-wood leaves, and the tender aspen. But what a tangle and a ghostly aloofness in the aspen thickets high up on the mountains, the coldness that is in the eyes and the long cornelian talons of the bear.

Summer brought the little wild strawberries, with their savage aroma, and the late summer brought the rose-jewel raspberries in the valley cleft. But how lonely, how harsh-lonely and menacing it was, to be alone in that shadowy, steep cleft of a canyon just above the cabins, picking raspberries, while the thunder gathered thick and blue-purple at the mountain-tops. The many wild raspberries hanging rose-red in the thickets. But the stream bed below all silent, waterless. And the trees all bristling in silence, and waiting like warriors at an outpost. And the berries waiting for the sharp-eyed, cold, long-snouted bear to come rambling

and shaking his heavy, sharp fur. The berries grew for the bears, and the little New England woman, with her uncanny sensitiveness to underlying influences, felt all the time she was stealing. Stealing the wild raspberries in the secret little canyon behind her home. And when she had made them into jam, she could almost taste the theft in her preserves.

She confessed nothing of this. She tried even to confess nothing of her dread. But she was afraid. Especially she was conscious of the prowling, intense aerial electricity all the summer, after June. The air was thick with wandering currents of fierce electric fluid, waiting to discharge themselves. And almost every day there was the rage and battle of thunder. But the air was never cleared. There was no relief. However, the thunder raged, and spent itself, yet, afterwards, among the sunshine was the strange lurking and wandering of the electric currents, moving invisible, with strange menace, between the atoms of the air. She knew. Oh, she knew!

And her love for her ranch turned sometimes into a certain repulsion. The underlying rat-dirt, the everlasting bristling tussle of the wild life, with the tangle and the bones strewing: Bones of horses struck by lightning, bones of dead cattle, skulls of goats with little horns: bleached, unburied bones. Then the cruel electricity of the mountains. And then, most mysterious but worst of all, the animosity of the spirit of place: the crude, half-created spirit of place, like some serpent-bird for ever attacking man, in a hatred of man's onward struggle towards further creation.

The seething cauldron of lower life, seething on the very tissue of the higher life, seething the soul away, seething at the marrow. The vast and unrelenting will of the swarming lower life, working forever against man's attempt at a higher life, a further created being.

At last, after many years, the little woman admitted to herself that she was glad to go down from the ranch, when November came with snows. She was glad to come to a more human home, her house in the village. And as winter passed by and spring came again, she knew she did not want to go up to the ranch again. It had broken something in her. It had hurt her terribly. It had maimed her for ever in her hope, her belief in paradise on earth. Now she hid from herself her own corpse, the corpse of her New England belief in a world ultimately all for love. The belief, and herself with it, was a corpse. The gods of those inner mountains were grim and invidious and relentless, huger than man, and lower than man. Yet man could never master them.

The little woman in her flower-garden away below, by the stream-irrigated village, hid away from the thought of it all. She would not go to the ranch any more.

The Mexicans stayed in charge, looking after the goats. But the place didn't pay. It didn't pay, not quite. It had paid. It might pay. But the effort, the effort! And as the marrow is eaten out of a man's bones and the soul out of his belly, contending with the strange rapacity of savage life, the lower stage of creation, he cannot make the effort any more.

Then also, the war came, making many men give up their enterprises at civilisation.

Every new stroke of civilisation has cost the lives of countless brave men, who have fallen defeated by the 'dragon', in their efforts to win the apples of the Hesperides, or the fleece of gold. Fallen in their efforts to overcome the old, half-sordid savagery of the lower stages of creation, and win to the next stage.

For all savagery is half sordid. And man is only himself when he is fighting on and on, to overcome the sordidness. And every civilisation, when it loses its inward vision and its cleaner energy, falls into a new sort of sordidness, more vast and more stupendous than the old savage sort. An Augean stable of metallic filth.

And all the time, man has to rouse himself afresh to cleanse the new accumulations of refuse. To win from the crude, wild nature the victory and the power to make another start, and to cleanse behind him the century-deep deposits of layer upon layer of refuse: even of tin cans.

The ranch dwindled. The flock of goats declined. The water ceased to flow. And at length the trader gave it up.

He rented the place to a Mexican, who lived on the handful of beans he raised, and who was being slowly driven out by the vermin.

And now arrived Lou, new blood to the attack. She went back to Santa Fe, saw the trader and a lawyer, and bought the ranch for twelve hundred dollars. She was so pleased with herself.

She sent upstairs to tell her mother.

"Mother, I've bought a ranch."

"It is just as well, for I can't stand the noise of automobiles outside here another week."

"It is quiet on my ranch, mother: the stillness simply speaks."

"I had rather it held its tongue. I am simply drugged with all the bad novels I have read. I feel as if the sky was a big cracked bell and a million clappers were hammering human speech out of it."

"Aren't you interested in my ranch, mother?"

"I hope I may be, by and by."

Mrs. Witt actually got up the next morning and accompanied her daughter in the hired motorcar, driven by Phoenix, to the ranch: which was called Las

Chivas. She sat like a pillar of salt, her face looking what the Indians call a False Face, meaning a mask. She seemed to have crystallised into a neutrality. She watched the desert with its tufts of yellow greasewood go lurching past: she saw the fallen apples on the ground in the orchards near the adobe cottages: she looked down into the deep arroyo, and at the stream they forded hi, the car, and at the mountains blocking up the sky ahead, all with indifference. High on the mountains was snow: lower, blue-grey livid rock: and below the livid rock the aspens were expiring their daffodil yellow, this year, and the oak scrub was dark and reddish, like gore. She saw it all with a sort of stony indifference.

“Don’t you think it’s lovely?” said Lou.

“I can see it is lovely,” replied her mother.

The Michaelmas daisies in the clearing as they drove up to the ranch were sharp-rayed with purple, like a coming night. Mrs. Witt eyed the two log cabins, one of which was dilapidated and practically abandoned. She looked at the rather rickety corral, whose long planks had silvered and warped in the fierce sun. On one of the roof-planks a pack-rat was sitting erect like an old Indian keeping watch on a pueblo roof. He showed his white belly, and folded his hands and lifted his big ears, for all the world like an old immobile Indian.

“Isn’t it for all the world as if he were the real boss of the place, Louise?” she said cynically.

And turning to the Mexican, who was a rag of a man but a pleasant, courteous fellow, she asked him why he didn’t shoot the rat.

“Not worth a shell!” said the Mexican, with a faint, hopeless smile.

Mrs. Witt paced round and saw everything: it did not take long. She gazed in silence at the water of the spring, trickling out of an iron pipe into a barrel, under the cotton-wood tree in an arroyo.

“Well, Louise,” she said. “I am glad you feel competent to cope with so much hopelessness and so many rats.”

“But, mother, you must admit it is beautiful.”

“Yes, I suppose it is. But to use one of your Henry’s phrases, beauty is a cold egg, as far as I am concerned.”

“Rico never would have said that beauty was a cold egg to him.”

“No, he wouldn’t. He sits on it like a broody old hen on a china imitation. — Are you going to bring him here?”

“Bring him I — No. But he can come if he likes,” stammered Lou.

“Oh — *h!* won’t it be beau — ti — ful!” cried Mrs. Witt, rolling her head and lifting her shoulders in savage imitation of her son-in-law.

“Perhaps he won’t come, mother,” said Lou, hurt.

“He will most certainly come, Louise, to see what’s doing: unless you tell him

you don't want him."

"Anyhow, I needn't think about it till spring," said Lou, anxiously pushing the matter aside.

Mrs. Witt climbed the steep slope above the cabins to the mouth of the little canyon. There she sat on a fallen tree and surveyed the world beyond: a world not of men. She could not fail to be roused.

"What is your idea in coming here, daughter?" she asked. "I love it here, mother."

"But what do you expect to achieve by it?"

"I was rather hoping, mother, to escape achievement. I'll tell you — and you mustn't get cross if it sounds silly. As far as people go, my heart is quite broken. And far as people go, I don't want any more. I can't stand any more. What heart I ever had for it — for life with people — is quite broken. I want to be alone, mother: with you here, and Phoenix perhaps to look after horses and drive a car. But I want to be by myself, really."

"With Phoenix in the background! Are you sure he won't be coming into the foreground before long?"

"No, mother, no more of that. If I've got to say it, Phoenix is a servant: he's really placed, as far as I can see. Always the same, playing about in the old back yard. I can't take those men seriously. I can't fool round with them, or fool myself about them. I can't and I won't fool myself any more, mother, especially about men. They don't count. So why should you want them to pay me out?"

For the moment, this silenced Mrs. Witt. Then she said:

"Why, I don't want it. Why should I? But after all, you've got to live. You've never *lived* yet: not in my opinion."

"Neither, mother, in my opinion, have you," said Lou dryly.

And this silenced Mrs. Witt altogether. She had to be silent, or angrily on the defensive. And the latter she wouldn't be. She couldn't really, in honesty.

"What do you call life?" Lou continued. "Wriggling half naked at a public show and going off in a taxi to sleep with some half-drunken fool who thinks he's a man because — Oh, mother, I don't even want to think of it. I know you have a lurking idea that *that is life*. Let it be so then. But leave me, out. Men in that aspect simply nauseate me: so grovelling and ratty. Life in that aspect simply drains all my life away. I tell you, for all that sort of thing, I'm broken, absolutely broken: if I wasn't broken to start with."

"Well, Louise," said Mrs. Witt after a pause, "I'm convinced that ever since men and women were men and women, people who took things seriously, and had time for it, got their hearts broken. Haven't I had mine broken! It's as sure as having your virginity broken: and it amounts to about as much. It's a beginning

rather than an end.”

“So it is, mother. It’s the beginning of something else, and the end of something that’s done with. I *know*, and there’s no altering it, that I’ve got to live differently. It sounds silly, but I don’t know how else to put it. I’ve got to live for something that matters, way, way down in me. And I think sex would matter, to my very soul, if it was really sacred. But cheap sex kills me.”

“You have had a fancy for rather cheap men, perhaps.”

“Perhaps I have. Perhaps I should always be a fool, where people are concerned. Now I want to leave off that kind of foolery. There’s something else, mother, that I want to give myself to. I know it. I know it absolutely. Why should I let myself be shouted down any more?”

Mrs. Witt sat staring at the distance, her face a cynical mask.

“What is the something bigger? And *pray*, what is it bigger than?” she asked, in that tone of honeyed suavity which was her deadliest poison. “I want to learn. I am out to know. I’m terribly intrigued by it. Something bigger! Girls in my generation occasionally entered convents for *something bigger*. I always wondered if they found it. They seemed to me inclined in the imbecile direction, but perhaps that was because I was *something less* — ”

There was a definite pause between the mother and daughter, a silence that was a pure breach. Then Lou said:

“You know quite well I’m not conventy, mother, whatever else I am — even a bit of an imbecile. But that kind of religion seems to me the other half of men. Instead of running after them you run away from them, and get the thrill that way. I don’t hate men *because* they’re men, as nuns do. I dislike them because they’re not men enough: babies, and playboys, and poor things showing off all the time, even to themselves.

“I don’t say I’m any better. I only wish, with all my soul, that some men were bigger and stronger and *deeper* than I am...”

“How do you know they’re not? — ” asked Mrs. Witt.

“How *do* I know? — ” said Lou mockingly.

And the pause that was a breach resumed itself. Mrs. Witt was teasing with a little stick the bewildered black ants among the fir-needles.

“And no doubt you are right about men,” she said at length. “But at your age, the only sensible thing is to try and keep up the illusion. After all, as you say, you may be no better.”

“I may be no better. But keeping up the illusion means fooling myself. And I won’t do it. When I see a man who is even a bit attractive to me — even as much as Phoenix — I say to myself: ‘Would you care for him afterwards? Does he really mean anything to you, except just a sensation?’ — And I know he doesn’t.

No, mother, of this I am convinced: either my taking a man shall have a meaning and a mystery that penetrates my very soul, or I will keep to myself. — And what I know is, that the time has come for me to keep to myself. No more messing about.”

“Very well, daughter. You will probably spend your life keeping to yourself.”

“Do you think I mind! There’s something else for me, mother. There’s something else even that loves me and wants me. I can’t tell you what it is. It’s a spirit. And it’s here, on this ranch. It’s here, in this landscape. It’s something more real to me than men are, and it soothes me, and it holds me up. I don’t know what it is, definitely. It’s something wild, that will hurt me sometimes and will wear me down sometimes. I know it. But it’s something big, bigger than men, bigger than people, bigger than religion. It’s something to do with wild America. And it’s something to do with me. It’s a mission, if you like. I am imbecile enough for that! — But it’s my mission to keep myself for the spirit that is wild, and has waited so long here: even waited for such as me. Now I’ve come! Now I’m here. Now I am where I want to be: with the spirit that wants me. — And that’s how it is. And neither Rico nor Phoenix nor anybody else really matters to me. They are in the world’s back-yard. And I am here, right deep in America, where there’s a wild spirit wants me, a wild spirit more than men. And it doesn’t want to save me either. It needs me. It craves for me. And to it, my sex is deep and sacred, deeper than I am, with a deep nature aware deep down of my sex. It saves me from cheapness, mother. And even you could never do that for me.”

Mrs. Witt rose to her feet and stood looking far, far away at the turquoise ridge of mountains half sunk under the horizon.

“How much did you say you paid for Las Chivas?” she asked

“Twelve hundred dollars,” said Lou, surprised.

“Then I call it cheap, considering all there is to it: even the name.”

THE END

THE VIRGIN AND THE GIPSY



This famous novella was written in 1926 and published posthumously in 1930. The tale concerns two sisters, daughters of an Anglican vicar, who return from overseas to a drab, lifeless vicarage in the post-First World War East Midlands. Their mother has run off, a scandal that is not talked about by the family. Their new home is dominated by a blind and selfish grandmother along with her mean spirited, poisonous daughter. The two girls, Yvette and Lucille, risk being suffocated by the life they now lead at the Vicarage. They try their utmost every day to bring colour and fun into their lives. Out on a trip with some friends one Sunday afternoon, Yvette encounters a Gypsy and his family and this meeting reinforces her disenchantment with the oppressive domesticity of the vicarage. It also awakens in her a sexual curiosity she has not felt before, despite having admirers. She also befriends a Jewish woman and her paramour. When her father finds out about this friendship, he threatens her with “the asylum” and Yvette realizes that at his heart her father, too, is mean spirited and shallow. At the end of the novel, one of the daughters is rescued during a surprise flood that washes through the home and drowns the grandmother. The rescuer who breathes life and warmth back into the virginal Yvette is the free-spirited Gypsy, whose name is finally revealed. The novella is now regarded as one of the best written in the twentieth century.



Lawrence and his wife Freida, 1926

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ONE

When the vicar's wife went off with a young and penniless man the scandal knew no bounds. Her two little girls were only seven and nine years old respectively. And the vicar was such a good husband. True, his hair was grey. But his moustache was dark, he was handsome, and still full of furtive passion for his unrestrained and beautiful wife.

Why did she go? Why did she burst away with such an *éclat* of revulsion, like a touch of madness?

Nobody gave any answer. Only the pious said she was a bad woman. While some of the good women kept silent. They knew.

The two little girls never knew. Wounded, they decided that it was because their mother found them negligible.

The ill wind that blows nobody any good swept away the vicarage family on its blast. Then lo and behold! the vicar, who was somewhat distinguished as an essayist and a controversialist, and whose case had aroused sympathy among the bookish men, received the living of Papplewick. The Lord had tempered the wind of misfortune with a rectorate in the north country.

The rectory was a rather ugly stone house down by the river Papple, before you come into the village. Further on, beyond where the road crosses the stream, were the big old stone cotton-mills, once driven by water. The road curved uphill, into the bleak stone streets of the village.

The vicarage family received decided modification, upon its transference into the rectory. The vicar, now the rector, fetched up his old mother and his sister, and a brother from the city. The two little girls had a very different milieu from the old home.

The rector was now forty-seven years old, he had displayed an intense and not very dignified grief after the flight of his wife. Sympathetic ladies had stayed him from suicide. His hair was almost white, and he had a wild-eyed, tragic look. You had only to look at him, to know how dreadful it all was, and how he had been wronged.

Yet somewhere there was a false note. And some of the ladies, who had sympathised most profoundly with the vicar, secretly rather disliked the rector. There was a certain furtive self-righteousness about him, when all was said and

done.

The little girls, of course, in the vague way of children, accepted the family verdict. Granny, who was over seventy and whose sight was failing, became the central figure in the house. Aunt Cissie, who was over forty, pale, pious, and gnawed by an inward worm, kept house. Uncle Fred, a stingy and grey-faced man of forty, who just lived dingily for himself, went into town every day. And the rector, of course, was the most important person, after Granny.

They called her The Mater. She was one of those physically vulgar, clever old bodies who had got her own way all her life by buttering the weaknesses of her men-folk. Very quickly she took her cue. The rector still “loved” his delinquent wife, and would “love her” till he died. Therefore hush! The rector’s feeling was sacred. In his heart was enshrined the pure girl he had wedded and worshipped.

Out in the evil world, at the same time, there wandered a disreputable woman who had betrayed the rector and abandoned his little children. She was now yoked to a young and despicable man, who no doubt would bring her the degradation she deserved. Let this be clearly understood, and then hush! For in the pure loftiness of the rector’s heart still bloomed the pure white snowflower of his young bride. This white snowflower did not wither. That other creature, who had gone off with that despicable young man, was none of his affair.

The Mater, who had been somewhat diminished and insignificant as a widow in a small house, now climbed into the chief arm-chair in the rectory, and planted her old bulk firmly again. She was not going to be dethroned. Astutely she gave a sigh of homage to the rector’s fidelity to the pure white snowflower, while she pretended to disapprove. In sly reverence for her son’s great love, she spoke no word against that nettle which flourished in the evil world, and which had once been called Mrs. Arthur Saywell. Now, thank heaven, having married again, she was no more Mrs. Arthur Saywell. No woman bore the rector’s name. The pure white snowflower bloomed *in perpetuum*, without nomenclature. The family even thought of her as She-who-was-Cynthia.

All this was water on the Mater’s mill. It secured her against Arthur’s ever marrying again. She had him by his feeblest weakness, his skulking self-love. He had married an imperishable white snowflower. Lucky man! He had been injured! Unhappy man! He had suffered. Ah, what a heart of love! And he had — forgiven! Yes, the white snowflower was forgiven. He even had made provision in his will for her, when that other scoundrel — But hush! Don’t even *think* too near to that horrid nettle in the rank outer world! She-who-was-Cynthia. Let the white snowflower bloom inaccessible on the heights of the past. The present is another story.

The children were brought up in this atmosphere of cunning self-sanctification

and of unmentionability. They too, saw the snowflower on inaccessible heights. They too knew that it was throned in lone splendour aloft their lives, never to be touched.

At the same time, out of the squalid world sometimes would come a rank, evil smell of selfishness and degraded lust, the smell of that awful nettle, She-who-was-Cynthia. This nettle actually contrived, at intervals, to get a little note through to her girls, her children. And at this the silver-haired Mater shook inwardly with hate. For if She-who-was-Cynthia ever came back, there wouldn't be much left of the Mater. A secret gust of hate went from the old granny to the girls, children of that foul nettle of lust, that Cynthia who had had such an affectionate contempt for the Mater.

Mingled with all this, was the children's perfectly distinct recollection of their real home, the Vicarage in the south, and their glamorous but not very dependable mother, Cynthia. She had made a great glow, a flow of life, like a swift and dangerous sun in the home, forever coming and going. They always associated her presence with brightness, but also with danger; with glamour, but with fearful selfishness.

Now the glamour was gone, and the white snowflower, like a porcelain wreath, froze on its grave. The danger of instability, the peculiarly *dangerous* sort of selfishness, like lions and tigers, was also gone. There was now a complete stability, in which one could perish safely.

But they were growing up. And as they grew, they became more definitely confused, more actively puzzled. The Mater, as she grew older, grew blinder. Somebody had to lead her about. She did not get up till towards midday. Yet blind or bed-ridden, she held the house.

Besides, she wasn't bed-ridden. Whenever the *men* were present, the Mater was in her throne. She was too cunning to court neglect. Especially as she had rivals.

Her great rival was the younger girl, Yvette. Yvette had some of the vague, careless blitheness of She-who-was-Cynthia. But this one was more docile. Granny perhaps had caught her in time. Perhaps!

The rector adored Yvette, and spoiled her with a doting fondness; as much as to say: am I not a soft-hearted, indulgent old boy! He liked to have weaknesses to a hair's-breadth. She knew them, this opinion of himself, and the Mater knew his and she traded on them by turning them into decorations for him, for his character. He wanted, in his own eyes, to have a fascinating character, as women want to have fascinating dresses. And the Mater cunningly put beauty-spots over his defects and deficiencies. Her mother-love gave her the clue to his weaknesses, and she hid them for him with decorations. Whereas She-who-was-

Cynthia — ! But don't mention *her*, in this connection. In her eyes, the rector was almost humpbacked and an idiot.

The funny thing was, Granny secretly hated Lucille, the elder girl, more than the pampered Yvette. Lucille, the uneasy and irritable, was more conscious of being under Granny's power, than was the spoilt and vague Yvette.

On the other hand, Aunt Cissie hated Yvette. She hated her very name. Aunt Cissie's life had been sacrificed to the Mater, and Aunt Cissie knew it, and the Mater knew she knew it. Yet as the years went on, it became a convention. The convention of Aunt Cissie's sacrifice was accepted by everybody, including the self-same Cissie. She prayed a good deal about it. Which also showed that she had her own private feelings somewhere, poor thing. She had ceased to be Cissie, she had lost her life and her sex. And now, she was creeping towards fifty, strange green flares of rage would come up in her, and at such times, she was insane.

But Granny held her in her power. And Aunt Cissie's one object in life was to look after The Mater.

Aunt Cissie's green flares of hellish hate would go up against all young things, sometimes. Poor thing, she prayed and tried to obtain forgiveness from heaven. But what had been done to her, *she* could not forgive, and the vitriol would spurt in her veins sometimes.

It was not as if the Mater were a warm, kindly soul. She wasn't. She only seemed it, cunningly. And the fact dawned gradually on the girls. Under her old-fashioned lace cap, under her silver hair, under the black silk of her stout, forward-bulging body, this old woman had a cunning heart, seeking forever her own female power. And through the weakness of the unfresh, stagnant men she had bred, she kept her power, as her years rolled on, seventy to eighty, and from eighty on the new lap, towards ninety.

For in the family there was a whole tradition of "loyalty"; loyalty to one another, and especially to the Mater. The Mater, of course, was the pivot of the family. The family was her own extended ego. Naturally she covered it with her power. And her sons and daughters, being weak and disintegrated, naturally were loyal. Outside the family, what was there for them but danger and insult and ignominy? Had not the rector experienced it, in his marriage. So now, caution! Caution and loyalty, fronting the world! Let there be as much hate and friction *inside* the family, as you like. To the outer world, a stubborn fence of unison.

TWO

But it was not until the girls finally came home from school, that they felt the full weight of Granny's dear old hand on their lives. Lucille was now nearly twenty-one, and Yvette nineteen. They had been to a good girls' school, and had had a finishing year in Lausanne, and were quite the usual thing, tall young creatures with fresh, sensitive faces and bobbed hair and young-manly, deuce-take-it manners.

"What's so awfully *boring* about Papplewick," said Yvette, as they stood on the Channel boat watching the grey, grey cliffs of Dover draw near, "is that there are no *men* about. Why doesn't Daddy have some good old sports for friends? As for Uncle Fred, he's the limit!"

"Oh, you never know what will turn up," said Lucille, more philosophic.

"You jolly well know what to expect," said Yvette. "Choir on Sundays, and I hate mixed choirs. Boys' voices are *lovely*, when there are no women. And Sunday School and Girls' Friendly, and socials, all the dear old souls that enquire after Granny! Not a decent young fellow for miles."

"Oh I don't know!" said Lucille. "There's always the Framleys. And you know Gerry Somercotes *adores* you."

"Oh but I *hate* fellows who adore me!" cried Yvette, turning up her sensitive nose. "They *bore* me. They hang on like lead."

"Well what *do* you want, if you can't stand being adored? *I* think it's perfectly all right to be adored. You know you'll never marry them, so why not let them go on adoring, if it amuses them."

"Oh but I *want* to get married," cried Yvette.

"Well in that case, let them go on adoring you till you find one that you can *possibly* marry."

"I never should, that way. Nothing puts me off like an adoring fellow. They *bore* me so! They make me feel beastly."

"Oh, so they do me, if they get pressing. But at a distance, I think they're rather nice."

"I should like to fall *violently* in love."

"Oh, very likely! I shouldn't! I should hate it. Probably so would you, if it actually happened. After all, we've got to settle down a bit, before we know what we want."

“But don’t you *hate* going back to Papplewick?” cried Yvette, turning up her young sensitive nose.

“No, not particularly. I suppose we shall be rather bored. I wish Daddy would get a car. I suppose we shall have to drag the old bikes out. Wouldn’t you like to get up to Tansy Moor?”

“Oh, *love* it! Though it’s an awful strain, shoving an old push-bike up those hills.”

The ship was nearing the grey cliffs. It was summer, but a grey day. The two girls wore their coats with fur collars turned up, and little *chic* hats pulled down over their ears. Tall, slender, fresh-faced, naïve, yet confident, too confident, in their school-girlish arrogance, they were so terribly English. They seemed so free, and were as a matter of fact so tangled and tied up, inside themselves. They seemed so dashing and unconventional, and were really so conventional, so, as it were, shut up indoors inside themselves. They looked like bold, tall young sloops, just slipping from the harbour, into the wide seas of life. And they were, as a matter of fact, two poor young rudderless lives, moving from one chain anchorage to another.

The rectory struck a chill into their hearts as they entered. It seemed ugly, and almost sordid, with the dank air of that middle-class, degenerated comfort which has ceased to be comfortable and has turned stuffy, unclean. The hard, stone house struck the girls as being unclean, they could not have said why. The shabby furniture seemed somehow sordid, nothing was fresh. Even the food at meals had that awful dreary sordidness which is so repulsive to a young thing coming from abroad. Roast beef and wet cabbage, cold mutton and mashed potatoes, sour pickles, inexcusable puddings.

Granny, who “loved a bit of pork,” also had special dishes, beef-tea and rusks, or a small savoury custard. The grey-faced Aunt Cissie ate nothing at all. She would sit at table, and take a single lonely and naked boiled potato on to her plate. She never ate meat. So she sat in sordid durance, while the meal went on, and Granny quickly slobbered her portion — lucky if she spilled nothing on her protuberant stomach. The food was not appetising in itself: how could it be, when Aunt Cissie hated food herself, hated the fact of eating, and never could keep a maidservant for three months. The girls ate with repulsion, Lucille bravely bearing up, Yvette’s tender nose showing her disgust. Only the rector, white-haired, wiped his long grey moustache with his serviette, and cracked jokes. He too was getting heavy and inert, sitting in his study all day, never taking exercise. But he cracked sarcastic little jokes all the time, sitting there under the shelter of the Mater.

The country, with its steep hills and its deep, narrow valleys, was dark and

gloomy, yet had a certain powerful strength of its own. Twenty miles away was the black industrialism of the north. Yet the village of Papplewick was comparatively lonely, almost lost, the life in it stony and dour. Everything was stone, with a hardness that was almost poetic, it was so unrelenting.

It was as the girls had known: they went back into the choir, they helped in the parish. But Yvette struck absolutely against Sunday School, the Band of Hope, the Girls' Friendlies — indeed against all those functions that were conducted by determined old maids and obstinate, stupid elderly men. She avoided church duties as much as possible, and got away from the rectory whenever she could. The Framleys, a big, untidy, jolly family up at the Grange, were an enormous standby. And if anybody asked her out to a meal, even if a woman in one of the workmen's houses asked her to stay to tea, she accepted at once. In fact, she was rather thrilled. She liked talking to the working men, they had often such fine, hard heads. But of course they were in another world.

So the months went by. Gerry Somercotes was still an adorer. There were others, too, sons of farmers or mill-owners. Yvette really ought to have had a good time. She was always out to parties and dances, friends came for her in their motor-cars, and off she went to the city, to the afternoon dance in the chief hotel, or in the gorgeous new Palais de Danse, called the Pally.

Yet she always seemed like a creature mesmerised. She was never free to be quite jolly. Deep inside her worked an intolerable irritation, which she thought she *ought* not to feel, and which she hated feeling, thereby making it worse. She never understood at all whence it arose.

At home, she truly was irritable, and outrageously rude to Aunt Cissie. In fact Yvette's awful temper became one of the family by-words.

Lucille, always more practical, got a job in the city as private secretary to a man who needed somebody with fluent French and shorthand. She went back and forth every day, by the same train as Uncle Fred. But she never travelled with him, and wet or fine, bicycled to the station, while he went on foot.

The two girls were both determined that what they wanted was a really jolly social life. And they resented with fury that the rectory was, for their friends, impossible. There were only four rooms downstairs: the kitchen, where lived the two discontented maidservants: the dark dining-room: the rector's study: and the big, "homely," dreary living-room or drawing-room. In the dining-room there was a gas fire. Only in the living-room was a good hot fire kept going. Because of course, here Granny reigned.

In this room the family was assembled. At evening, after dinner, Uncle Fred and the rector invariably played crossword puzzles with Granny.

"Now, Mater, are you ready? N blank blank blank blank W: a Siamese

functionary.”

“Eh? Eh? M blank blank blank blank W?”

Granny was hard of hearing.

“No Mater. Not M! N blank blank blank blank W: a Siamese functionary.”

“N blank blank blank blank W: a Chinese functionary.”

“SIAMESE.”

“Eh?”

“SIAMESE! SIAM!”

“A Siamese functionary! Now what can that be?” said the old lady profoundly, folding her hands on her round stomach. Her two sons proceeded to make suggestions, at which she said Ah! Ah! The rector was amazingly clever at crossword puzzles. But Fred had a certain technical vocabulary.

“This certainly is a hard nut to crack,” said the old lady, when they were all stuck.

Meanwhile Lucille sat in a corner with her hands over her ears, pretending to read, and Yvette irritably made drawings, or hummed loud and exasperating tunes, to add to the family concert. Aunt Cissie continually reached for a chocolate, and her jaws worked ceaselessly. She literally lived on chocolates. Sitting in the distance, she put another into her mouth, then looked again at the parish magazine. Then she lifted her head, and saw it was time to fetch Granny’s cup of Horlicks.

While she was gone, in nervous exasperation Yvette would open the window. The room was never fresh, she imagined it smelt: smelt of Granny. And Granny, who was hard of hearing, heard like a weasel when she wasn’t wanted to.

“Did you open the window, Yvette? I think you might remember there are older people than yourself in the room,” she said.

“It’s stifling! It’s unbearable! No wonder we’ve all of us always got colds.”

“I’m sure the room is large enough, and a good fire burning.” The old lady gave a little shudder. “A draught to give us all our death.”

“Not a draught at all,” roared Yvette. “A breath of fresh air.”

The old lady shuddered again, and said:

“Indeed!”

The rector, in silence, marched to the window and firmly closed it. He did not look at his daughter meanwhile. He hated thwarting her. But she must know what’s what!

The crossword puzzles, invented by Satan himself, continued till Granny had had her Horlicks, and was to go to bed. Then came the ceremony of Goodnight! Everybody stood up. The girls went to be kissed by the blind old woman. The rector gave his arm, and Aunt Cissie followed with a candle.

But this was already nine o'clock, although Granny was really getting old, and should have been in bed sooner. But when she was in bed, she could not sleep, till Aunt Cissie came.

"You see," said Granny, "I have *never* slept alone. For fifty-four years I never slept a night without the Pater's arm round me. And when he was gone, I tried to sleep alone. But as sure as my eyes closed to sleep, my heart nearly jumped out of my body, and I lay in a palpitation. Oh, you may think what you will, but it was a fearful experience, after fifty-four years of perfect married life! I would have prayed to be taken first, but the Pater, well, no I don't think he would have been able to bear up."

So Aunt Cissie slept with Granny. And she hated it. She said *she* could never sleep. And she grew greyer and greyer, and the food in the house got worse, and Aunt Cissie had to have an operation.

But The Mater rose as ever, towards noon, and at the mid-day meal, she presided from her arm-chair, with her stomach protruding, her reddish, pendulous face, that had a sort of horrible majesty, dropping soft under the wall of her high brow, and her blue eyes peering unseeing. Her white hair was getting scanty, it was altogether a little indecent. But the rector jovially cracked his jokes to her, and she pretended to disapprove. But she was perfectly complacent, sitting in her ancient obesity, and after meals, getting the wind from her stomach, pressing her bosom with her hand as she "rifted" in gross physical complacency.

What the girls minded most was that, when they brought their young friends to the house, Granny always was there, like some awful idol of old flesh, consuming all the attention. There was only the one room for everybody. And there sat the old lady, with Aunt Cissie keeping an acrid guard over her. Everybody must be presented first to Granny: she was ready to be genial, she liked company. She had to know who everybody was, where they came from, every circumstance of their lives. And then, when she was *au fait*, she could get hold of the conversation.

Nothing could be more exasperating to the girls. "Isn't old Mrs. Saywell wonderful! She takes *such* an interest in life, at nearly ninety!"

"She does take an interest in people's affairs, if that's life," said Yvette.

Then she would immediately feel guilty. After all, it *was* wonderful to be nearly ninety, and have such a clear mind! And Granny never *actually* did anybody any harm. It was more that she was in the way. And perhaps it was rather awful to hate somebody because they were old and in the way.

Yvette immediately repented, and was nice. Granny blossomed forth into reminiscences of when she was a girl, in the little town in Buckinghamshire. She talked and talked away, and was so entertaining. She really *was* rather

wonderful.

Then in the afternoon Lottie and Ella and Bob Framley came, with Leo Wetherell.

“Oh, come in!” — and in they all trooped to the sitting-room, where Granny, in her white cap, sat by the fire.

“Granny, this is Mr. Wetherell.”

“Mr. What-did-you-say? You must excuse me, I’m a little deaf!”

Granny gave her hand to the uncomfortable young man, and gazed silently at him, sightlessly.

“You are not from our parish?” she asked him.

“Dinnington!” he shouted.

“We want to go to a picnic tomorrow, to Bonsall Head, in Leo’s car. We can all squeeze in,” said Ella in a low voice.

“Did you say Bonsall Head?” asked Granny.

“Yes!”

There was a blank silence.

“Did you say you were going in a car?”

“Yes! In Mr. Wetherell’s.”

“I hope he’s a good driver. It’s a very dangerous road.”

“He’s a *very* good driver.”

“Not a very good driver?”

“Yes! He *is* a very good driver.”

“If you go to Bonsall Head, I think I must send a message to Lady Louth.”

Granny always dragged in this miserable Lady Louth, when there was company.

“Oh, we shan’t go that way,” cried Yvette.

“Which way?” said Granny. “You must go by Heanor.”

The whole party sat, as Bob expressed it, like stuffed ducks, fidgeting on their chairs.

Aunt Cissie came in — and then the maid with the tea. There was the eternal and everlasting piece of bought cake. Then appeared a plate of little fresh cakes. Aunt Cissie had actually sent to the baker’s.

“Tea, Mater!”

The old lady gripped the arms of her chair. Everybody rose and stood, while she waded slowly across, on Aunt Cissie’s arm, to her place at table.

During tea Lucille came in from town, from her job. She was simply worn out, with black marks under her eyes. She gave a cry, seeing all the company.

As soon as the noise had subsided, and the awkwardness was resumed, Granny said:

“You have never mentioned Mr. Wetherell to me, have you, Lucille?”

“I don’t remember,” said Lucille.

“You can’t have done. The name is strange to me.”

Yvette absently grabbed another cake, from the now almost empty plate. Aunt Cissie, who was driven almost crazy by Yvette’s vague and inconsiderate ways, felt the green rage fuse in her heart. She picked up her own plate, on which was the one cake she allowed herself, and said with vitriolic politeness, offering it to Yvette:

“Won’t you have mine?”

“Oh, thanks!” said Yvette, starting in her angry vagueness. And with an appearance of the same insouciance, she helped herself to Aunt Cissie’s cake also, adding as an afterthought: “If you’re sure you don’t want it.”

She now had two cakes on her plate. Lucille had gone white as a ghost, bending to her tea. Aunt Cissie sat with a green look of poisonous resignation. The awkwardness was an agony.

But Granny, bulkily enthroned and unaware, only said, in the centre of the cyclone:

“If you are motoring to Bonsall Head tomorrow, Lucille, I wish you would take a message from me to Lady Louth.”

“Oh!” said Lucille, giving a queer look across the table at the sightless old woman. Lady Louth was the King Charles’ Head of the family, invariably produced by Granny for the benefit of visitors. “Very well!”

“She was so very kind last week. She sent her chauffeur over with a Crossword Puzzle book for me.”

“But you thanked her then,” cried Yvette.

“I should like to send her a note.”

“We can post it,” cried Lucille.

“Oh no! I should like you to take it. When Lady Louth called last time . . .”

The young ones sat like a shoal of young fishes dumbly mouthing at the surface of the water, while Granny went on about Lady Louth. Aunt Cissie, the two girls knew, was still helpless, almost unconscious in a paroxysm of rage about the cake. Perhaps, poor thing, she was praying.

It was a mercy when the friends departed. But by that time the two girls were both haggard-eyed. And it was then that Yvette, looking round, suddenly saw the stony, implacable will-to-power in the old and motherly-seeming Granny. She sat there bulging backwards in her chair, impassive, her reddish, pendulous old face rather mottled, almost unconscious, but implacable, her face like a mask that hid something stony, relentless. It was the static inertia of her unsavoury power. Yet in a minute she would open her ancient mouth to find out every

detail about Leo Wetherell. For the moment she was hibernating in her oldness, her agedness. But in a minute her mouth would open, her mind would flicker awake, and with her insatiable greed for life, other people's life, she would start on her quest for every detail. She was like the old toad which Yvette had watched, fascinated, as it sat on the ledge of the beehive, immediately in front of the little entrance by which the bees emerged, and which, with a demonish lightning-like snap of its pursed jaws, caught every bee as it came out to launch into the air, swallowed them one after the other, as if it could consume the whole hive-full, into its aged, bulging, purse-like wrinkledness. It had been swallowing bees as they launched into the air of spring, year after year, year after year, for generations:

But the gardener, called by Yvette, was in a rage, and killed the creature with a stone.

“Appen tha *art* good for th' snails,” he said, as he came down with the stone. “But tha 'rt none goin' ter emp'y th' bee-'ive into thy guts.”

THREE

The next day was dull and low, and the roads were awful, for it had been raining for weeks, yet the young ones set off on their trip, without taking Granny's message either. They just slipped out while she was making her slow trip upstairs after lunch. Not for anything would they have called at Lady Louth's house. That widow of a knighted doctor, a harmless person indeed, had become an obnoxiousity in their lives.

Six young rebels, they sat very perkily in the car as they swished through the mud. Yet they had a peaked look too. After all, they had nothing really to rebel against, any of them. They were left so very free in their movements. Their parents let them do almost entirely as they liked. There wasn't really a fetter to break, nor a prison-bar to file through, nor a bolt to shatter. The keys of their lives were in their own hands. And there they dangled inert.

It is very much easier to shatter prison bars than to open undiscovered doors to life. As the younger generation finds out, somewhat to its chagrin. True, there was Granny. But poor old Granny, you couldn't actually say to her: "Lie down and die, you old woman!" She might be an old nuisance, but she never really *did* anything. It wasn't fair to hate her.

So the young people set off on their jaunt, trying to be very full of beans. They could really do as they liked. And so, of course, there was nothing to do but sit in the car and talk a lot of criticism of other people, and silly flirty gallantry that was really rather a bore. If there had only been a few "strict orders" to be disobeyed! But nothing: beyond the refusal to carry the message to Lady Louth, of which the rector would approve, because he didn't encourage King Charles' Head either.

They sang, rather scrappily, the latest would-be comic songs, as they went through the grim villages. In the great park the deer were in groups near the road, roe deer and fallow, nestling in the gloom of the afternoon under the oaks by the road, as if for the stimulus of human company.

Yvette insisted on stopping and getting out to talk to them. The girls, in their Russian boots, tramped through the damp grass while the deer watched them with big, unfrightened eyes. The hart trotted away mildly, holding back his head, because of the weight of the horns. But the doe, balancing her big ears, did not rise from under the tree, with her half-grown young ones, till the girls were

almost in touch. Then she walked lightfoot away, lifting her tail from her spotted flanks, while the young ones nimbly trotted.

“Aren’t they awfully dainty and nice!” cried Yvette. “You’d wonder they could lie so cosily in this horrid wet grass.”

“Well I suppose they’ve got to lie down *sometime*,” said Lucille. “And it’s *fairly* dry under the tree.” She looked at the crushed grass, where the deer had lain.

Yvette went and put her hand down, to feel how it felt.

“Yes!” she said, doubtfully, “I believe it’s a bit warm.”

The deer had bunched again a few yards away, and were standing motionless in the gloom of the afternoon. Away below the slopes of grass and trees, beyond the swift river with its balustraded bridge, sat the huge ducal house, one or two chimneys smoking bluely. Behind it rose purplish woods.

The girls, pushing their fur collars up to their ears, dangling one long arm, stood watching in silence, their wide Russian boots protecting them from the wet grass. The great house squatted square and creamy-grey below. The deer, in little groups, were scattered under the old trees close by. It all seemed so still, so unpretentious, and so sad.

“I wonder where the Duke is now,” said Ella.

“Not here, wherever he is,” said Lucille. “I expect he’s abroad where the sun shines.”

The motor horn called from the road, and they heard Leo’s voice:

“Come on boys! If we’re going to get to the Head and down to Amberdale for tea, we’d better move.”

They crowded into the car again, with chilled feet, and set off through the park, past the silent spire of the church, out through the great gates and over the bridge, on into the wide, damp, stony village of Woodlinkin, where the river ran. And thence, for a long time, they stayed in the mud and dark and dampness of the valley, often with sheer rock above them; the water brawling on one hand, the steep rock or dark trees on the other.

Till, through the darkness of overhanging trees, they began to climb, and Leo changed the gear. Slowly the car toiled up through the whitey-grey mud, into the stony village of Bolehill, that hung on the slope, round the old cross, with its steps, that stood where the road branched, on past the cottages whence came a wonderful smell of hot tea-cakes, and beyond, still upwards, under dripping trees and past broken slopes of bracken, always climbing. Until the cleft became shallower, and the trees finished, and the slopes on either side were bare, gloomy grass, with low dry-stone walls. They were emerging on to the Head.

The party had been silent for some time. On either side the road was grass,

then a low stone fence, and the swelling curve of the hill-summit, traced with the low, dry-stone walls. Above this, the low sky.

The car ran out, under the low, grey sky, on the naked tops.

“Shall we stay a moment?” called Leo.

“Oh yes!” cried the girls.

And they scrambled out once more, to look around. They knew the place quite well. But still, if one came to the Head, one got out to look.

The hills were like the knuckles of a hand, the dales were below, between the fingers, narrow, steep, and dark. In the deeps a train was steaming, slowly pulling north: a small thing of the underworld. The noise of the engine re-echoed curiously upwards. Then came the dull, familiar sound of blasting in a quarry.

Leo, always on the go, moved quickly.

“Shall we be going?” he said. “Do we *want* to get down to Amberdale for tea? Or shall we try somewhere nearer?”

They all voted for Amberdale, for the Marquis of Grantham.

“Well, which way shall we go back? Shall we go by Codnor and over Crossbill, or shall we go by Ashbourne?”

There was the usual dilemma. Then they finally decided on the Codnor top road. Off went the car, gallantly.

They were on the top of the world, now, on the back of the fist. It was naked, too, as the back of your fist, high under heaven, and dull, heavy green. Only it was veined with a network of old stone walls, dividing the fields, and broken here and there with ruins of old lead-mines and works. A sparse stone farm bristled with six naked sharp trees. In the distance was a patch of smokey grey stone, a hamlet. In some fields grey, dark sheep fed silently, somberly. But there was not a sound nor a movement. It was the roof of England, stony and arid as any roof. Beyond, below, were the shires.

““And see the coloured counties,”“ said Yvette to herself. Here anyhow they were not coloured. A stream of rooks trailed out from nowhere. They had been walking, pecking, on a naked field that had been manured. The car ran on between the grass and stone walls of the upland lane, and the young people were silent, looking out over the far network of stone fences, under the sky, looking for the curves downward that indicated a drop to one of the underneath, hidden dales.

Ahead was a light cart, driven by a man, and trudging along at the side was a woman, sturdy and elderly, with a pack on her back. The man in the cart had caught her up, and now was keeping pace.

The road was narrow. Leo sounded the horn sharply. The man on the cart looked round, but the woman on foot only trudged steadily, rapidly forward,

without turning her head.

Yvette's heart gave a jump. The man on the cart was a gipsy, one of the black, loose-bodied, handsome sort. He remained seated on his cart, turning round and gazing at the occupants of the motor-car, from under the brim of his cap. And his pose was loose, his gaze insolent in its indifference. He had a thin black moustache under his thin, straight nose, and a big silk handkerchief of red and yellow tied round his neck. He spoke a word to the woman. She stood a second, solid, to turn round and look at the occupants of the car, which had now drawn quite close. Leo honked the horn again, imperiously. The woman, who had a grey-and-white kerchief tied round her head, turned sharply, to keep pace with the cart, whose driver also had settled back, and was lifting the reins, moving his loose, light shoulders. But still he did not pull aside.

Leo made the horn scream, as he put the brakes on and the car slowed up near the back of the cart. The gipsy turned round at the din, laughing in his dark face under his dark-green cap, and said something which they did not hear, showing white teeth under the line of black moustache, and making a gesture with his dark, loose hand.

"Get out o' the way then!" yelled Leo.

For answer, the man delicately pulled the horse to a standstill, as it curved to the side of the road. It was a good roan horse, and a good, natty, dark-green cart.

Leo, in a rage, had to jam on the brake and pull up too.

"Don't the pretty young ladies want to hear their fortunes?" said the gipsy on the cart, laughing except for his dark, watchful eyes, which went from face to face, and lingered on Yvette's young, tender face.

She met his dark eyes for a second, their level search, their insolence, their complete indifference to people like Bob and Leo, and something took fire in her breast. She thought: "He is stronger than I am! He doesn't care!"

"Oh yes! let's!" cried Lucille at once.

"Oh yes!" chorused the girls.

"I say! What about the time?" cried Leo.

"Oh bother the old time! Somebody's always dragging in time by the forelock," cried Lucille.

"Well, if you don't mind *when* we get back, *I* don't!" said Leo heroically.

The gipsy man had been sitting loosely on the side of his cart, watching the faces. He now jumped softly down from the shaft, his knees a bit stiff. He was apparently a man something over thirty, and a beau in his way. He wore a sort of shooting-jacket, double-breasted, coming only to the hips, of dark green-and-black frieze; rather tight black trousers, black boots, and a dark-green cap; with the big yellow-and-red bandanna handkerchief round his neck. His appearance

was curiously elegant, and quite expensive in its gipsy style. He was handsome, too, pressing in his chin with the old, gipsy conceit, and now apparently not heeding the strangers any more, as he led his good roan horse off the road, preparing to back his cart.

The girls saw for the first time a deep recess in the side of the road, and two caravans smoking. Yvette got quickly down. They had suddenly come upon a disused quarry, cut into the slope of the road-side, and in this sudden lair, almost like a cave, were three caravans, dismantled for the winter. There was also deep at the back, a shelter built of boughs, as a stable for the horse. The grey, crude rock rose high above the caravans, and curved round towards the road. The floor was heaped chips of stone, with grasses growing among. It was a hidden, snug winter camp.

The elderly woman with the pack had gone in to one of the caravans, leaving the door open. Two children were peeping out, shewing black heads. The gipsy man gave a little call, as he backed his cart into the quarry, and an elderly man came out to help him untackle.

The gipsy himself went up the steps into the newest caravan, that had its door closed. Underneath, a tied-up dog ranged forth. It was a white hound spotted liver-coloured. It gave a low growl as Leo and Bob approached.

At the same moment, a dark-faced gipsy-woman with a pink shawl or kerchief round her head and big gold ear-rings in her ears, came down the steps of the newest caravan, swinging her flounced, voluminous green skirt. She was handsome in a bold, dark, long-faced way, just a bit wolfish. She looked like one of the bold, loping Spanish gipsies.

“Good-morning, my ladies and gentlemen,” she said, eyeing the girls from her bold, predative eyes. She spoke with a certain foreign stiffness.

“Good afternoon!” said the girls.

“Which beautiful little lady like to hear her fortune? Give me her little hand?”

She was a tall woman, with a frightening way of reaching forward her neck like a menace. Her eyes went from face to face, very active, heartlessly searching out what she wanted. Meanwhile the man, apparently her husband, appeared at the top of the caravan steps smoking a pipe, and with a small, black-haired child in his arms. He stood on his limber legs, casually looking down on the group, as if from a distance, his long black lashes lifted from his full, conceited, impudent black eyes. There was something peculiarly transfusing in his stare. Yvette felt it, felt it in her knees. She pretended to be interested in the white-and-liver-coloured hound.

“How much do you want, if we all have our fortunes told?” asked Lottie Framley, as the six fresh-faced young Christians hung back rather reluctantly

from this pagan pariah woman.

“All of you? ladies and gentlemen, all?” said the woman shrewdly.

“I don’t want mine told! You go ahead!” cried Leo.

“Neither do I,” said Bob. “You four girls.”

“The four ladies?” said the gipsy woman, eyeing them shrewdly, after having looked at the boys. And she fixed her price. “Each one give me a sheeling, and a little bit more for luck? a little bit!” She smiled in a way that was more wolfish than cajoling, and the force of her will was felt, heavy as iron beneath the velvet of her words.

“All right,” said Leo. “Make it a shilling a head. Don’t spin it out too long.”

“Oh, *you!*” cried Lucille at him. “We want to hear it *all.*”

The woman took two wooden stools, from under a caravan, and placed them near the wheel. Then she took the tall, dark Lottie Framley by the hand, and bade her sit down. “You don’t care if everybody hear?” she said, looking up curiously into Lottie’s face.

Lottie blushed dark with nervousness, as the gipsy woman held her hand, and stroked her palm with hard, cruel-seeming fingers.

“Oh, I don’t mind,” she said.

The gipsy woman peered into the palm, tracing the lines of the hand with a hard, dark forefinger. But she seemed clean.

And slowly she told the fortune, while the others, standing listening, kept on crying out: “Oh, that’s Jim Baggaley! Oh, I don’t believe it! Oh, that’s not true! A fair woman who lives beneath a tree! why whoever’s that?” until Leo stopped them with a manly warning:

“Oh, hold on, girls! You give everything away.”

Lottie retired blushing and confused, and it was Ella’s turn. She was much more calm and shrewd, trying to read the oracular words. Lucille kept breaking out with: Oh, I say! The gipsy man at the top of the steps stood imperturbable, without any expression at all. But his bold eyes kept staring at Yvette, she could feel them on her cheek, on her neck, and she dared not look up. But Framley would sometimes look up at him, and got a level stare back, from the handsome face of the male gipsy, from the dark conceited proud eyes. It was a peculiar look, in the eyes that belonged to the tribe of the humble: the pride of the pariah, the half-sneering challenge of the outcast, who sneered at law-abiding men, and went on his own way. All the time, the gipsy man stood there, holding his child in his arms, looking on without being concerned.

Lucille was having her hand read, — “You have been across the sea, and there you met a man — a brown-haired man — but he was too old — ”

“Oh, I *say!*” cried Lucille, looking round at Yvette.

But Yvette was abstracted, agitated, hardly heeding: in one of her mesmerised states.

“You will marry in a few years — not now, but a few years — perhaps four — and you will not be rich, but you will have plenty — enough — and you will go away, a long journey.”

“With my husband, or without?” cried Lucille.

“With him — ”

When it came to Yvette’s turn, and the woman looked up boldly, cruelly, searching for a long time in her face, Yvette said nervously:

“I don’t think I want mine told. No, I won’t have mine told! No I won’t, really!”

“You are afraid of some thing?” said the gipsy woman cruelly.

“No, it’s not that — ” Yvette fidgetted.

“You have some secret? You are afraid I shall say it. Come, would you like to go in the caravan, where nobody hears?”

The woman was curiously insinuating; while Yvette was always wayward, perverse. The look of perversity was on her soft, frail young face now, giving her a queer hardness.

“Yes!” she said suddenly. “Yes! I might do that!”

“Oh, I say!” cried the others. “Be a sport!”

“I don’t think you’d *better!*” cried Lucille.

“Yes!” said Yvette, with that hard little way of hers. “I’ll do that. I’ll go in the caravan.”

The gipsy woman called something to the man on the steps. He went into the caravan for a moment or two, then re-appeared, and came down the steps, setting the small child on its uncertain feet, and holding it by the hand. A dandy, in his polished black boots, tight black trousers and tight dark-green jersey, he walked slowly across, with the toddling child, to where the elderly gipsy was giving the roan horse a feed of oats, in the bough shelter between pits of grey rock, with dry bracken upon the stone-chip floor. He looked at Yvette as he passed, staring her full in the eyes, with his pariah’s bold yet dishonest stare. Something hard inside her met his stare. But the surface of her body seemed to turn to water. Nevertheless, something hard in her registered the peculiar pure lines of his face, of his straight, pure nose, of his cheeks and temples. The curious dark, suave purity of all his body, outlined in the green jersey: a purity like a living sneer.

And as he loped slowly past her, on his flexible hips, it seemed to her still that he was stronger than she was. Of all the men she had ever seen, this one was the only one who was stronger than she was, in her own kind of strength, her own kind of understanding.

So, with curiosity, she followed the woman up the steps of the caravan, the skirts of her well-cut tan coat swinging and almost showing her knees, under the pale-green cloth dress. She had long, long-striding, fine legs, too slim rather than too thick, and she wore curiously-patterned pale-and-fawn stockings of fine wool, suggesting the legs of some delicate animal.

At the top of the steps she paused and turned, debonair, to the others, saying in her naïve, lordly way, so off-hand:

“I won’t let her be long.”

Her grey fur collar was open, showing her soft throat and pale green dress, her little, plaited tan-coloured hat came down to her ears, round her soft, fresh face. There was something soft and yet overbearing, unscrupulous, about her. She knew the gipsy man had turned to look at her. She was aware of the pure dark nape of his neck, the black hair groomed away. He watched as she entered his house.

What the gipsy told her, no one ever knew. It was a long time to wait, the others felt. Twilight was deepening on the gloom, and it was turning raw and cold. From the chimney of the second caravan came smoke and a smell of rich food. The horse was fed, a yellow blanket strapped round him, the two gipsy men talked together in the distance, in low tones. There was a peculiar feeling of silence and secrecy in that lonely, hidden quarry.

At last the caravan door opened, and Yvette emerged, bending forward and stepping with long, witch-like slim legs down the steps. There was a stooping, witch-like silence about her as she emerged on the twilight.

“Did it seem long?” she said vaguely, not looking at anybody and keeping her own counsel hard within her soft, vague waywardness. “I hope you weren’t bored! Wouldn’t tea be nice! Shall we go?”

“You get in!” said Bob. “I’ll pay.”

The gipsy-woman’s full, metallic skirts of jade-green alpaca came swinging down the steps. She rose to her height, a big, triumphant-looking woman with a dark-wolf face. The pink cashmere kerchief, stamped with red roses, was slipping to one side over her black and crimped hair. She gazed at the young people in the twilight with bold arrogance.

Bob put two half-crowns in her hand.

“A little bit more, for luck, for your young lady’s luck,” she wheedled, like a wheedling wolf. “Another bit of silver, to bring you luck.”

“You’ve got a shilling for luck, that’s enough,” said Bob calmly and quietly, as they moved away to the car.

“A little bit of silver! Just a little bit, for your luck in love!”

Yvette, with the sudden long, startling gestures of her long limbs, swung

round as she was entering the car, and with long arm outstretched, strode and put something into the gipsy's hand, then stepped, bending her height, into the car.

"Prosperity to the beautiful young lady, and the gipsy's blessing on her," came the suggestive, half-sneering voice of the woman.

The engine *birred!* then *birred!* again more fiercely, and started. Leo switched on the lights, and immediately the quarry with the gipsies fell back into the blackness of night.

"Goodnight!" called Yvette's voice, as the car started. But hers was the only voice that piped up, chirpy and impudent in its nonchalance. The headlights glared down the stone lane.

"Yvette, you've got to tell us what she said to you," cried Lucille, in the teeth of Yvette's silent will *not* to be asked.

"Oh, nothing at *all* thrilling," said Yvette, with false warmth. "Just the usual old thing: a dark man who means good luck, and a fair one who means bad: and a death in the family, which if it means Granny, won't be so *very* awful: and I shall marry when I'm twenty-three, and have heaps of money and heaps of love, and two children. All sounds very nice, but it's a bit too much of a good thing, you know."

"Oh, but why did you give her more money?"

"Oh well, I wanted to! You *have* to be a bit lordly with people like that — "

FOUR

There was a terrific rumpus down at the rectory, on account of Yvette and the Window Fund. After the war, Aunt Cissie had set her heart on a stained glass window in the church, as a memorial for the men of the parish who had fallen. But the bulk of the fallen had been non-conformists, so the memorial took the form of an ugly little monument in front of the Wesleyan chapel.

This did not vanquish Aunt Cissie. She canvassed, she had bazaars, she made the girls get up amateur theatrical shows, for her precious window. Yvette, who quite liked the acting and showing-off part of it, took charge of the farce called *Mary in the Mirror*, and gathered in the proceeds, which were to be paid to the Window Fund when accounts were settled. Each of the girls was supposed to have a money-box for the Fund.

Aunt Cissie, feeling that the united sums must now almost suffice, suddenly called in Yvette's box. It contained fifteen shillings. There was a moment of green horror.

"Where is all the rest?"

"Oh!" said Yvette, casually. "I just borrowed it. It wasn't so awfully much."

"What about the three pounds thirteen for *Mary in the Mirror*?" asked Aunt Cissie, as if the jaws of Hell were yawning.

"Oh quite! I just borrowed it. I can pay it back."

Poor Aunt Cissie! The green tumour of hate burst inside her, and there was a ghastly, abnormal scene, which left Yvette shivering with fear and nervous loathing.

Even the rector was rather severe.

"If you needed money, why didn't you tell me?" he said coldly. "Have you ever been refused anything in reason?"

"I — I thought it didn't matter," stammered Yvette.

"And what have you done with the money?"

"I suppose I've spent it," said Yvette, with wide, distraught eyes and a peaked face.

"Spent it, on what?"

"I can't remember everything: stockings and things, and I gave some of it away."

Poor Yvette! Her lordly airs and ways were already hitting back at her, on the

reflex. The rector was angry: his face had a snarling, doggish look, a sort of sneer. He was afraid his daughter was developing some of the rank, tainted qualities of She-who-was-Cynthia.

“You *would* do the large with somebody else’s money, wouldn’t you?” he said, with a cold, mongrel sort of sneer, which showed what an utter unbeliever he was, at the heart. The inferiority of a heart which has no core of warm belief in it, no pride in life. He had utterly no belief in her.

Yvette went pale, and very distant. Her pride, that frail, precious flame which everybody tried to quench, recoiled like a flame blown far away, on a cold wind, as if blown out, and her face, white now and still like a snowdrop, the white snowflower of his conceit, seemed to have no life in it, only this pure, strange abstraction.

“He has no belief in me!” she thought in her soul. “I am really nothing to him. I am nothing, only a shameful thing. Everything is shameful, everything is shameful!”

A flame of passion or rage, while it might have overwhelmed or infuriated her, would not have degraded her as did her father’s disbelief, his final attitude of a sneer against her.

He became a little afraid, in the silence of sterile thought. After all, he needed the *appearance* of love and belief and bright life, he would never dare to face the fat worm of his own disbelief, that stirred in his heart.

“What have you to say for yourself?” he asked.

She only looked at him from that senseless snowdrop face which haunted him with fear, and gave him a helpless sense of guilt. That other one, She-who-was-Cynthia, she had looked back at him with the same numb, white fear, the fear of his degrading disbelief, the worm which was his heart’s core. He *knew* his heart’s core was a fat, awful worm. His dread was lest anyone else should know. His anguish of hate was against anyone who knew, and recoiled.

He saw Yvette recoiling, and immediately his manner changed to the worldly old good-humoured cynic which he affected.

“Ah well!” he said. “You have to pay it back, my girl, that’s all. I will advance you the money out of your allowance. But I shall charge you four percent a month interest. Even the devil himself must pay a percentage on his debts. Another time, if you can’t trust yourself, don’t handle money which isn’t your own. Dishonesty isn’t pretty.”

Yvette remained crushed, and deflowered and humiliated. She crept about, trailing the rays of her pride. She had a revulsion even from herself. Oh, why had she ever touched the leprous money! Her whole flesh shrank as if it were defiled. Why was that? Why, why was that?

She admitted herself wrong in having spent the money. “Of course I shouldn’t have done it. They are quite right to be angry,” she said to herself.

But where did the horrible wincing of her flesh come from? Why did she feel she had caught some physical contagion?

“Where you’re so *silly*, Yvette,” Lucille lectured her: poor Lucille was in great distress — “is that you give yourself away to them all. You might *know* they’d find out. I could have raised the money for you, and saved all this bother. It’s perfectly awful! But you never will think beforehand where your actions are going to land you! Fancy Aunt Cissie saying all those things to you! How *awful*! Whatever would Mamma have said, if she’d heard it?”

When things went very wrong, they thought of their mother, and despised their father and all the low brood of the Saywells. Their mother, of course, had belonged to a higher, if more dangerous and “immoral” world. More selfish, decidedly. But with a showier gesture. More unscrupulous and more easily moved to contempt: but not so humiliating. Yvette always considered that she got her fine, delicate flesh from her mother. The Saywells were all a bit leathery, and grubby somewhere inside. But then the Saywells never let you down. Whereas the fine She-who-was-Cynthia had let the rector down with a bang, and his little children along with him. Her little children! They could not quite forgive her.

Only dimly, after the row, Yvette began to realise the other sanctity of herself, the sanctity of her sensitive, clean flesh and blood, which the Saywells with their so-called morality, succeeded in defiling. They always wanted to defile it. They were the life unbelievers. Whereas, perhaps She-who-was-Cynthia had only been a moral unbeliever.

Yvette went about dazed and peaked and confused. The rector paid in the money to Aunt Cissie, much to that lady’s rage. The helpless tumour of her rage was still running. She would have liked to announce her niece’s delinquency in the parish magazine. It was anguish to the destroyed woman that she could not publish the news to all the world. The selfishness! The selfishness! The selfishness!

Then the rector handed his daughter a little account with himself: her debt to him, interest thereon, the amount deducted from her small allowance. But to her credit he had placed a guinea, which was the fee he had to pay for complicity.

“As father of the culprit,” he said humorously, “I am fined one guinea. And with that I wash the ashes out of my hair.”

He was always generous about money. But somehow, he seemed to think that by being free about money he could absolutely call himself a generous man. Whereas he used money, even generosity, as a hold over her.

But he let the affair drop entirely. He was by this time more amused than anything, to judge from appearances. He thought still he was safe.

Aunt Cissie, however, could not get over her convulsion. One night when Yvette had gone rather early, miserably, to bed, when Lucille was away at a party, and she was lying with soft, peaked limbs aching with a sort of numbness and defilement, the door softly opened, and there stood Aunt Cissie, pushing her grey-green face through the opening of the door. Yvette started up in terror.

“Liar! Thief! Selfish little beast!” hissed the maniacal face of Aunt Cissie. “You little hypocrite! You liar! You selfish beast! You greedy little beast!”

There was such extraordinary impersonal hatred in that grey-green mask, and those frantic words, that Yvette opened her mouth to scream with hysterics. But Aunt Cissie shut the door as suddenly as she had opened it, and disappeared. Yvette leaped from her bed and turned the key. Then she crept back, half demented with fear of the squalid abnormal, half numbed with paralysis of damaged pride. And amid it all, up came a bubble of distracted laughter. It was so filthily ridiculous!

Aunt Cissie’s behaviour did not hurt the girl so very much. It was after all somewhat fantastic. Yet hurt she was: in her limbs, in her body, in her sex, hurt. Hurt, numbed, and half destroyed, with only her nerves vibrating and jangled. And still so young, she could not conceive what was happening.

Only she lay and wished she were a gipsy. To live in a camp, in a caravan, and never set foot in a house, not know the existence of a parish, never look at a church. Her heart was hard with repugnance, against the rectory. She loathed these houses with their indoor sanitation and their bathrooms, and their extraordinary repulsiveness. She hated the rectory, and everything it implied. The whole stagnant, sewerage sort of life, where sewerage is never mentioned, but where it seems to smell from the centre of every two-legged inmate, from Granny to the servants, was foul. If gipsies had no bathrooms, at least they had no sewerage. There was fresh air. In the rectory there was *never* fresh air. And in the souls of the people, the air was stale till it stank.

Hate kindled her heart, as she lay with numbed limbs. And she thought of the words of the gipsy woman: “There is a dark man who never lived in a house. He loves you. The other people are treading on your heart. They will tread on your heart till you think it is dead. But the dark man will blow the one spark up into fire again, good fire. You will see what good fire.”

Even as the woman was saying it, Yvette felt there was some duplicity somewhere. But she didn’t mind. She hated with the cold, acrid hatred of a child the rectory interior, the sort of putridity in the life. She liked that big, swarthy, wolf-like gipsy-woman, with the big gold rings in her ears, the pink scarf over

her wavy black hair, the tight bodice of brown velvet, the green, fan-like skirt. She liked her dusky, strong, relentless hands, that had pressed so firm, like wolf's paws, in Yvette's own soft palm. She liked her. She liked the danger and the covert fearlessness of her. She liked her covert, unyielding sex, that was immoral, but with a hard, defiant pride of its own. Nothing would ever get that woman under. She would despise the rectory and the rectory morality, utterly! She would strangle Granny with one hand. And she would have the same contempt for Daddy and for Uncle Fred, as men, as she would have for fat old slobbery Rover, the Newfoundland dog. A great, sardonic female contempt, for such domesticated dogs, calling themselves men.

And the gipsy man himself! Yvette quivered suddenly, as if she had seen his big, bold eyes upon her, with the naked insinuation of desire in them. The absolutely naked insinuation of desire made her life prone and powerless in the bed, as if a drug had cast her in a new molten mould.

She never confessed to anybody that two of the ill-starred Window Fund pounds had gone to the gipsy woman. What if Daddy and Aunt Cissie knew *that!* Yvette stirred luxuriously in the bed. The thought of the gipsy had released the life of her limbs, and crystallised in her heart the hate of the rectory: so that now she felt potent, instead of impotent.

When, later, Yvette told Lucille about Aunt Cissie's dramatic interlude in the bedroom doorway, Lucille was indignant.

"Oh, hang it all!" cried she. "She might let it drop now. I should think we've heard enough about it by now! Good heavens, you'd think Aunt Cissie was a perfect bird of paradise! Daddy's dropped it, and after all, it's his business if it's anybody's. Let Aunt Cissie shut up!"

It was the very fact that the rector had dropped it, and that he again treated the vague and inconsiderate Yvette as if she were some specially-licensed being, that kept Aunt Cissie's bile flowing. The fact that Yvette really was most of the time unaware of other people's feelings, and being unaware, couldn't care about them, nearly sent Aunt Cissie mad. Why should that young creature, with a delinquent mother, go through life as a privileged being, even unaware of other people's existence, though they were under her nose.

Lucille at this time was very irritable. She seemed as if she simply went a little unbalanced, when she entered the rectory. Poor Lucille, she was so thoughtful and responsible. She did all the extra troubling, thought about doctors, medicines, servants, and all that sort of thing. She slaved conscientiously at her job all day in town, working in a room with artificial light from ten till five. And she came home to have her nerves rubbed almost to a frenzy by Granny's horrible and persistent inquisitiveness and parasitic agedness.

The affair of the Window Fund had apparently blown over, but there remained a stuffy tension in the atmosphere. The weather continued bad. Lucille stayed at home on the afternoon of her half holiday, and did herself no good by it. The rector was in his study, she and Yvette were making a dress for the latter young woman, Granny was resting on the couch.

The dress was of blue silk velours, French material, and was going to be very becoming. Lucille made Yvette try it on again: she was nervously uneasy about the hang, under the arms.

“Oh bother!” cried Yvette, stretching her long, tender, childish arms, that tended to go bluish with the cold. “Don’t be so frightfully *fussy*, Lucille! It’s quite all right.”

“If that’s all the thanks I get, slaving my half day away making dresses for you, I might as well do something for myself!”

“Well, Lucille! You know I never *asked* you! You know you can’t bear it unless you *do* supervise,” said Yvette, with that irritating blandness of hers, as she raised her naked elbows and peered over her shoulder into the long mirror.

“Oh yes! you never *asked* me!” cried Lucille. “As if I didn’t know what you meant, when you started sighing and flouncing about.”

“I!” said Yvette, with vague surprise. “Why, when did I start sighing and flouncing about?”

“Of course you know you did.”

“Did I? No, I didn’t know! When was it?” Yvette could put a peculiar annoyance into her mild, straying questions.

“I shan’t do another thing to this frock, if you don’t stand still and *stop* it,” said Lucille, in her rather sonorous, burning voice.

“You know you are most awfully nagging and irritable, Lucille,” said Yvette, standing as if on hot bricks.

“Now Yvette!” cried Lucille, her eyes suddenly flashing in her sister’s face, with wild flashes. “Stop it at once! Why should everybody put up with your abominable and overbearing temper!”

“Well, I don’t know about *my* temper,” said Yvette, writhing slowly out of the half-made frock, and slipping into her dress again.

Then, with an obstinate little look on her face, she sat down again at the table, in the gloomy afternoon, and began to sew at the blue stuff. The room was littered with blue clippings, the scissors were lying on the floor, the work-basket was spilled in chaos all over the table, and a second mirror was perched perilously on the piano.

Granny, who had been in a semi-coma, called a doze, roused herself on the big, soft couch and put her cap straight.

“I don’t get much peace for my nap,” she said, slowly feeling her thin white hair, to see that it was in order. She had heard vague noises.

Aunt Cissie came in, fumbling in a bag for a chocolate.

“I never saw such a mess!” she said. “You’d better clear some of that litter away, Yvette.”

“All right,” said Yvette. “I will in a minute.”

“Which means never!” sneered Aunt Cissie, suddenly darting and picking up the scissors.

There was silence for a few moments, and Lucille slowly pushed her hands in her hair, as she read a book.

“You’d better clear away, Yvette,” persisted Aunt Cissie.

“I will, before tea,” replied Yvette, rising once more and pulling the blue dress over her head, flourishing her long, naked arms through the sleeveless armholes. Then she went between the mirrors, to look at herself once more.

As she did so, she sent the second mirror, that she had perched carelessly on the piano, sliding with a rattle to the floor. Luckily it did not break. But everybody started badly.

“She’s smashed the mirror!” cried Aunt Cissie.

“Smashed a mirror! Which mirror! Who’s smashed it?” came Granny’s sharp voice.

“I haven’t smashed anything,” came the calm voice of Yvette. “It’s quite all right.”

“You’d better not perch it up there again,” said Lucille.

Yvette, with a little impatient shrug at all the fuss, tried making the mirror stand in another place. She was not successful.

“If one had a fire in one’s own room,” she said crossly, “one needn’t have a lot of people fussing when one wants to sew.”

“Which mirror are you moving about?” asked Granny.

“One of our own, that came from the Vicarage,” said Yvette rudely.

“Don’t break it in *this* house, wherever it came from,” said Granny.

There was a sort of family dislike for the furniture that had belonged to She-who-was-Cynthia. It was most of it shoved into the kitchen, and the servants’ bedrooms.

“Oh, *I’m* not superstitious,” said Yvette, “about mirrors or any of that sort of thing.”

“Perhaps you’re not,” said Granny. “People who never take the responsibility for their own actions usually don’t care what happens.”

“After all,” said Yvette, “I may say it’s my own looking-glass, even if I did break it.”

“And I say,” said Granny, “that there shall be no mirrors broken in *this* house, if we can help it; no matter who they belong to, or did belong to. Cissie, have I got my cap straight?”

Aunt Cissie went over and straightened the old lady. Yvette loudly and irritatingly trilled a tuneless tune.

“And now, Yvette, will you please clear away,” said Aunt Cissie.

“Oh bother!” cried Yvette angrily. “It’s simply *awful* to live with a lot of people who are always nagging and fussing over trifles.”

“What people, may I ask?” said Aunt Cissie ominously.

Another row was imminent. Lucille looked up with a queer cast in her eyes. In the two girls, the blood of She-who-was-Cynthia was roused.

“Of course you may ask! You know quite well I mean the people in this beastly house,” said the outrageous Yvette.

“At least,” said Granny, “we don’t come of half-depraved stock.”

There was a second’s electric pause. Then Lucille sprang from her low seat, with sparks flying from her.

“You shut up!” she shouted, in a blast full upon the mottled majesty of the old lady.

The old woman’s breast began to heave with heaven knows what emotions. The pause this time, as after the thunderbolt, was icy.

Then Aunt Cissie, livid, sprang upon Lucille, pushing her like a fury.

“Go to your room!” she cried hoarsely. “Go to your room!”

And she proceeded to push the white but fiery-eyed Lucille from the room. Lucille let herself be pushed, while Aunt Cissie vociferated:

“Stay in your room till you’ve apologised for this! — till you’ve apologised to the Mater for this!”

“I shan’t apologise!” came the clear voice of Lucille, from the passage, while Aunt Cissie shoved her.

Aunt Cissie drove her more wildly upstairs.

Yvette stood tall and bemused in the sitting-room, with the air of offended dignity, at the same time bemused, which was so odd on her. She still was bare-armed, in the half-made blue dress. And even *she* was half-aghast at Lucille’s attack on the majesty of age. But also, she was coldly indignant against Granny’s aspersion of the maternal blood in their veins.

“Of course I meant no offense,” said Granny.

“Didn’t you!” said Yvette coolly.

“Of course not. I only said we’re not depraved, just because we happen to be superstitious about breaking mirrors.”

Yvette could hardly believe her ears. Had she heard right? Was it possible! Or

was Granny, at her age, just telling a barefaced lie?

Yvette knew that the old woman was telling a cool, barefaced lie. But already, so quickly, Granny believed her own statement.

The rector appeared, having left time for a lull.

“What’s wrong?” he asked cautiously, genially.

“Oh, nothing!” drawled Yvette. “Lucille told Granny to shut up, when she was saying something. And Aunt Cissie drove her up to her room. *Tant de bruit pour une omelette!* Though Lucille was a bit over the mark, that time.”

The old lady couldn’t quite catch what Yvette said.

“Lucille really will have to learn to control her nerves,” said the old woman. “The mirror fell down, and it worried me. I said so to Yvette, and she said something about superstitions and the people in the beastly house. I told her the people in the house were not depraved, if they happened to mind when a mirror was broken. And at that Lucille flew at me and told me to shut up. It really is disgraceful how these children give way to their nerves. I know it’s nothing but nerves.”

Aunt Cissie had come in during this speech. At first even she was dumb. Then it seemed to her, it was as Granny had said.

“I have forbidden her to come down until she comes to apologise to the Mater,” she said.

“I doubt if she’ll apologise,” said the calm, queenly Yvette, holding her bare arms.

“And I don’t want any apology,” said the old lady. “It is merely nerves. I don’t know what they’ll come to, if they have nerves like that, at their age! She must take Vibrofat. — I am sure Arthur would like his tea, Cissie!”

Yvette swept her sewing together, to go upstairs. And again she trilled her tune, rather shrill and tuneless. She was trembling inwardly.

“More glad rags!” said her father to her, genially.

“More glad rags!” she re-iterated sagely, as she sauntered upstairs, with her day dress over one arm. She wanted to console Lucille, and ask her how the blue stuff hung now.

At the first landing, she stood as she nearly always did, to gaze through the window that looked to the road and the bridge. Like the Lady of Shalott, she seemed always to imagine that someone would come along singing *Tirra-lirra!* or something equally intelligent, by the river.

FIVE

It was nearly tea-time. The snowdrops were out by the short drive going to the gate from the side of the house, and the gardener was pottering at the round, damp flower-beds, on the wet grass that sloped to the stream. Past the gate went the whitish muddy road, crossing the stone bridge almost immediately, and winding in a curve up to the steep, clustering, stony, smoking northern village, that perched over the grim stone mills which Yvette could see ahead down the narrow valley, their tall chimney long and erect.

The rectory was on one side the Papple, in the rather steep valley, the village was beyond and above, further down, on the other side the swift stream. At the back of the rectory the hill went up steep, with a grove of dark, bare larches, through which the road disappeared. And immediately across stream from the rectory, facing the house, the river-bank rose steep and bushy, up to the sloping, dreary meadows, that sloped up again to dark hillsides of trees, with grey rock cropping out.

But from the end of the house, Yvette could only see the road curving round past the wall with its laurel hedge, down to the bridge, then up again round the shoulder to that first hard cluster of houses in Papplewick village, beyond the dry-stone walls of the steep fields.

She always expected *something* to come down the slant of the road from Papplewick, and she always lingered at the landing window. Often a cart came, or a motor-car, or a lorry with stone, or a laborer, or one of the servants. But never anybody who sang *Tirra-lirra!* by the river. The tirra-lirraing days seemed to have gone by.

This day, however, round the corner on the white-grey road, between the grass and the low stone walls, a roan horse came stepping bravely and briskly down-hill, driven by a man in a cap, perched on the front of his light cart. The man swayed loosely to the swing of the cart, as the horse stepped down-hill, in the silent sombreness of the afternoon. At the back of the cart, long duster-brooms of reed and feather stuck out, nodding on their stalks of cane.

Yvette stood close to the window, and put the casement-cloth curtains behind her, clutching her bare upper arms with the hands.

At the foot of the slope the horse started into a brisk trot to the bridge. The cart rattled on the stone bridge, the brooms bobbed and flustered, the driver sat as if

in a kind of dream, swinging along. It was like something seen in a sleep.

But as he crossed the end of the bridge, and was passing along the rectory wall, he looked up at the grim stone house that seemed to have backed away from the gate, under the hill. Yvette moved her hands quickly on her arms. And as quickly from under the peak of his cap, he had seen her, his swarthy predatory face was alert.

He pulled up suddenly at the white gate, still gazing upwards at the landing window; while Yvette, always clasping her cold and mottled arms, still gazed abstractedly down at him, from the window.

His head gave a little, quick jerk of signal, and he led his horse well aside, on to the grass. Then, limber and alert, he turned back the tarpaulin of the cart, fetched out various articles, pulled forth two or three of the long brooms of reed or turkey-feathers, covered the cart, and turned towards the house, looking up at Yvette as he opened the white gate.

She nodded to him, and flew to the bathroom to put on her dress, hoping she had disguised her nod so that he wouldn't be sure she had nodded. Meanwhile she heard the hoarse deep roaring of that old fool, Rover, punctuated by the yapping of that young idiot, Trixie.

She and the housemaid arrived at the same moment at the sitting-room door.

"Was it the man selling brooms?" said Yvette to the maid. "All right!" and she opened the door. "Aunt Cissie, there's a man selling brooms. Shall I go?"

"What sort of a man?" said Aunt Cissie, who was sitting at tea with the rector and the Mater: the girls having been excluded for once from the meal.

"A man with a cart," said Yvette.

"A gipsy," said the maid.

Of course Aunt Cissie rose at once. She had to look at him.

The gipsy stood at the back door, under the steep dark bank where the larches grew. The long brooms flourished from one hand, and from the other hung various objects of shining copper and brass: a saucepan, a candlestick, plates of beaten copper. The man himself was neat and dapper, almost rakish, in his dark green cap and double-breasted green check coat. But his manner was subdued, very quiet: and at the same time proud, with a touch of condescension and aloofness.

"Anything today, lady?" he said, looking at Aunt Cissie with dark, shrewd, searching eyes, but putting a very quiet tenderness into his voice.

Aunt Cissie saw how handsome he was, saw the flexible curve of his lips under the line of black moustache, and she was fluttered. The merest hint of roughness or aggression on the man's part would have made her shut the door contemptuously in his face. But he managed to insinuate such a subtle

suggestion of submission into his male bearing, that she began to hesitate.

“The candlestick is lovely!” said Yvette. “Did you make it?”

And she looked up at the man with her naïve, childlike eyes, that were as capable of double meanings as his own.

“Yes lady!” He looked back into her eyes for a second, with that naked suggestion of desire which acted on her like a spell, and robbed her of her will. Her tender face seemed to go into a sleep.

“It’s awfully nice!” she murmured vaguely.

Aunt Cissie began to bargain for the candlestick: which was a low, thick stem of copper, rising from a double bowl. With patient aloofness the man attended to her, without ever looking at Yvette, who leaned against the doorway and watched in a muse.

“How is your wife?” she asked him suddenly, when Aunt Cissie had gone indoors to show the candlestick to the rector, and ask him if he thought it was worth it.

The man looked fully at Yvette, and a scarcely discernible smile curled his lips. His eyes did not smile: the insinuation in them only hardened to a glare.

“She’s all right. When are you coming that way again?” he murmured, in a low, caressive, intimate voice.

“Oh, I don’t know,” said Yvette vaguely.

“You come Fridays, when I’m there,” he said. Yvette gazed over his shoulder as if she had not heard him. Aunt Cissie returned, with the candlestick and the money to pay for it. Yvette turned nonchalant away, trilling one of her broken tunes, abandoning the whole affair with a certain rudeness.

Nevertheless, hiding this time at the landing window, she stood to watch the man go. What she wanted to know, was whether he really had any power over her. She did not intend him to see her this time.

She saw him go down to the gate, with his brooms and pans, and out to the cart. He carefully stowed away his pans and his brooms, and fixed down the tarpaulin over the cart. Then with a slow, effortless spring of his flexible loins, he was on the cart again, and touching the horse with the reins. The roan horse was away at once, the cart-wheels grinding uphill, and soon the man was gone, without looking round. Gone like a dream which was only a dream, yet which she could not shake off.

“No, he hasn’t any power over me!” she said to herself: rather disappointed really, because she wanted somebody, or something to have power over her.

She went up to reason with the pale and overwrought Lucille, scolding her for getting into a state over nothing.

“What does it *matter*,” she expostulated, “if you told Granny to shut up! Why,

everybody ought to be told to shut up, when they're being beastly. But she didn't mean it, you know. No, she didn't mean it. And she's quite sorry she said it. There's absolutely no reason to make a fuss. Come on, let's dress ourselves up and sail down to dinner like duchesses. Let's have our own back that way. Come on, Lucille!"

There was something strange and mazy, like having cobwebs over one's face, about Yvette's vague blitheness; her queer, misty side-stepping from an unpleasantness. It was cheering too. But it was like walking in one of those autumn mists, when gossamer strands blow over your face. You don't quite know where you are.

She succeeded, however, in persuading Lucille, and the girls got out their best party frocks: Lucille in green and silver, Yvette in a pale lilac colour with turquoise chenille threading. A little rouge and powder, and their best slippers, and the gardens of paradise began to blossom. Yvette hummed and looked at herself, and put on her most *dégagé* airs of one of the young marchionesses. She had an odd way of slanting her eyebrows and pursing her lips, and to all appearances detaching herself from every earthly consideration, and floating through the cloud of her own pearl-coloured reserves. It was amusing, and not quite convincing.

"Of course I am beautiful, Lucille," she said blandly. "And you're perfectly lovely, now you look a bit reproachful. Of course you're the most aristocratic of the two of us, with your nose! And now your eyes look reproachful, that adds an appealing look, and you're perfect, perfectly lovely. But I'm more *winning*, in a way. — Don't you agree?" She turned with arch, complicated simplicity to Lucille.

She was truly simple in what she said. It was just what she thought. But it gave no hint of the very different *feeling* that also preoccupied her: the feeling that she had been looked upon, not from the outside, but from the inside, from her secret female self. She was dressing herself up and looking her most dazzling, just to counteract the effect that the gipsy had had on her, when he had looked at her, and seen none of her pretty face and her pretty ways, but just the dark, tremulous, potent secret of her virginity.

The two girls started downstairs in state when the dinner-gong rang: but they waited till they heard the voice of the men. Then they sailed down and into the sitting-room, Yvette preening herself in her vague, debonair way, always a little bit absent; and Lucille shy, ready to burst into tears.

"My goodness gracious!" exclaimed Aunt Cissie, who was still wearing her dark-brown knitted sports coat. "What an apparition! Wherever do you think you're going?"

“We’re dining with the family,” said Yvette naïvely, “and we’ve put on our best gewgaws in honour of the occasion.”

The rector laughed aloud, and Uncle Fred said:

“The family feels itself highly honoured.”

Both the elderly men were quite gallant, which was what Yvette wanted.

“Come and let me feel your dresses, do!” said Granny. “Are they your best? It is a shame I can’t see them.”

“Tonight, Mater,” said Uncle Fred, “we shall have to take the young ladies in to dinner, and live up to the honour. Will you go with Cissie?”

“I certainly will,” said Granny. “Youth and beauty must come first.”

“Well, tonight Mater!” said the rector, pleased.

And he offered his arm to Lucille, while Uncle Fred escorted Yvette.

But it was a dragged, dull meal, all the same. Lucille tried to be bright and sociable, and Yvette really was most amiable, in her vague, cobwebby way. Dimly, at the back of her mind, she was thinking: Why are we all only like mortal pieces of furniture? Why is nothing *important*?

That was her constant refrain, to herself: Why is nothing important? Whether she was in church, or at a party of young people, or dancing in the hotel in the city, the same little bubble of a question rose repeatedly on her consciousness: Why is nothing important?

There were plenty of young men to make love to her: even devotedly. But with impatience she had to shake them off. Why were they so unimportant? — so irritating!

She never even thought of the gipsy. He was a perfectly negligible incident. Yet the approach of Friday loomed strangely significant. “What are we doing on Friday?” she said to Lucille. To which Lucille replied that they were doing nothing. And Yvette was vexed.

Friday came, and in spite of herself she thought all day of the quarry off the road up high Bonsall Head. She wanted to be there. That was all she was conscious of. She wanted to be there. She had not even a dawning idea of going there. Besides, it was raining again. But as she sewed the blue dress, finishing it for the party up at Lambley Close, tomorrow, she just felt that her soul was up there, at the quarry, among the caravans, with the gipsies. Like one lost, or whose soul was stolen, she was not present in her body, the shell of her body. Her intrinsic body was away, at the quarry, among the caravans.

The next day, at the party, she had no idea that she was being sweet to Leo. She had no idea that she was snatching him away from the tortured Ella Framley. Not until, when she was eating her pistachio ice, he said to her:

“Why don’t you and me get engaged, Yvette? I’m absolutely sure it’s the right

thing for us both.”

Leo was a bit common, but good-natured, and well-off. Yvette quite liked him. But engaged! How perfectly silly! She felt like offering him a set of her silk underwear, to get engaged to.

“But I thought it was Ella!” she said, in wonder.

“Well! It might ha’ been, but for you. It’s your doings, you know! Ever since those gipsies told your fortune, I felt it was me or nobody, for you, and you or nobody, for me.”

“Really!” said Yvette, simply lost in amazement. “Really!”

“Didn’t you feel a bit the same?” he asked.

“Really!” Yvette kept on gasping softly, like a fish.

“You felt a bit the same, didn’t you?” he said.

“What? About what?” she asked, coming to.

“About me, as I feel about you.”

“Why? What? Getting engaged, you mean? I? no! Why how *could* I? I could never have dreamed of such an impossible thing.”

She spoke with her usual heedless candour, utterly unoccupied with his feelings.

“What was to prevent you?” he said, a bit nettled. “I thought you did.”

“Did you *really now*?” she breathed in amazement, with that soft, virgin, heedless candour which made her her admirers and her enemies.

She was so completely amazed, there was nothing for him to do but twiddle his thumbs in annoyance.

The music began, and he looked at her.

“No! I won’t dance any more,” she said, drawing herself up and gazing away rather loftily over the assembly, as if he did not exist. There was a touch of puzzled wonder on her brow, and her soft, dim virgin face did indeed suggest the snowdrop of her father’s pathetic imagery.

“But of course *you* will dance,” she said, turning to him with young condescension. “Do ask somebody to have this with you.”

He rose, angry, and went down the room.

She remained soft and remote in her amazement. Expect Leo to propose to her! She might as well have expected old Rover the Newfoundland dog to propose to her. Get engaged, to any man on earth? No, good heavens, nothing more ridiculous could be imagined!

It was then, in a fleeting side-thought, that she realised that the gipsy existed. Instantly, she was indignant. Him, of all things! Him! Never!

“Now why?” she asked herself, again in hushed amazement. “Why? It’s *absolutely* impossible: *absolutely*! So why is it?”

This was a nut to crack. She looked at the young men dancing, elbows out, hips prominent, waists elegantly in. They gave her no clue to her problem. Yet she did particularly dislike the forced elegance of the waists and the prominent hips, over which the well-tailored coats hung with such effeminate discretion.

“There is something about me which they don’t see and never would see,” she said angrily to herself. And at the same time, she was relieved that they didn’t and couldn’t. It made life so very much simpler.

And again, since she was one of the people who are conscious in visual images, she saw the dark-green jersey rolled on the black trousers of the gipsy, his fine, quick hips, alert as eyes. They were elegant. The elegance of these dancers seemed so stuffed, hips merely wadded with flesh. Leo the same, thinking himself such a fine dancer! and a fine figure of a fellow!

Then she saw the gipsy’s face; the straight nose, the slender mobile lips, and the level, significant stare of the black eyes, which seemed to shoot her in some vital, undiscovered place, unerring.

She drew herself up angrily. How dared he look at her like that! So she gazed glaringly at the insipid beaux on the dancing floor. And she despised them. Just as the raggle-taggle gipsy women despise men who are not gipsies, despise their dog-like walk down the streets, she found herself despising this crowd. Where among them was the subtle, lonely, insinuating challenge that could reach her?

She did not want to mate with a house-dog.

Her sensitive nose turned up, her soft brown hair fell like a soft sheath round her tender, flowerlike face, as she sat musing. She seemed so virginal. At the same time, there was a touch of the tall young virgin *witch* about her, that made the house-dog men shy off. She might metamorphose into something uncanny before you knew where you were.

This made her lonely, in spite of all the courting. Perhaps the courting only made her lonelier.

Leo, who was a sort of mastiff among the house-dogs, returned after his dance, with fresh cheery-O! courage.

“You’ve had a little think about it, haven’t you?” he said, sitting down beside her: a comfortable, well-nourished, determined sort of fellow. She did not know why it irritated her so unreasonably, when he hitched up his trousers at the knee, over his good-sized but not very distinguished legs, and lowered himself assuredly on to a chair.

“Have I?” she said vaguely. “About what?”

“You know what about,” he said. “Did you make up your mind?”

“Make up my mind about what?” she asked, innocently.

In her upper consciousness, she truly had forgotten.

“Oh!” said Leo, settling his trousers again. “About me and you getting engaged, you know.” He was almost as off-hand as she.

“Oh that’s *absolutely* impossible,” she said, with mild amiability, as if it were some stray question among the rest. “Why, I never even thought of it again. Oh, don’t talk about that sort of nonsense! That sort of thing is *absolutely* impossible,” she re-iterated like a child.

“That sort of thing is, is it?” he said, with an odd smile at her calm, distant assertion. “Well what sort of thing is possible, then? You don’t want to die an old maid, do you?”

“Oh I don’t mind,” she said absently.

“I do,” he said.

She turned round and looked at him in wonder.

“Why?” she said. “Why should you mind if I was an old maid?”

“Every reason in the world,” he said, looking up at her with a bold, meaningful smile, that wanted to make its meaning blatant, if not patent.

But instead of penetrating into some deep, secret place, and shooting her there, Leo’s bold and patent smile only hit her on the outside of the body, like a tennis ball, and caused the same kind of sudden irritated reaction.

“I think this sort of thing is awfully silly,” she said, with minx-like spite. “Why, you’re practically engaged to — to — ” she pulled herself up in time — “probably half a dozen other girls. I’m not flattered by what you’ve said. I should hate it if anybody knew! — Hate it! — I shan’t breathe a word of it, and I hope you’ll have the sense not to. — There’s Ella!”

And keeping her face averted from him, she sailed away like a tall, soft flower, to join poor Ella Framley.

Leo flapped his white gloves.

“Catty little bitch!” he said to himself. But he was of the mastiff type, he rather liked the kitten to fly in his face. He began definitely to single her out.

SIX

The next week it poured again with rain. And this irritated Yvette with strange anger. She had intended it should be fine. Especially she insisted it should be fine towards the weekend. Why, she did not ask herself.

Thursday, the half-holiday, came with a hard frost, and sun. Leo arrived with his car, the usual bunch. Yvette disagreeably and unaccountably refused to go.

“No thanks, I don’t feel like it,” she said.

She rather enjoyed being Mary-Mary-quite-contrary.

Then she went for a walk by herself, up the frozen hills, to the Black Rocks.

The next day also came sunny and frosty. It was February, but in the north country the ground did not thaw in the sun. Yvette announced that she was going for a ride on her bicycle, and taking her lunch, as she might not be back till afternoon.

She set off, not hurrying. In spite of the frost, the sun had a touch of spring. In the park, the deer were standing in the distance, in the sunlight, to be warm. One doe, white spotted, walked slowly across the motionless landscape.

Cycling, Yvette found it difficult to keep her hands warm, even when bodily she was quite hot. Only when she had to walk up the long hill, to the top, and there was no wind.

The upland was very bare and clear, like another world. She had climbed on to another level. She cycled slowly, a little afraid of taking the wrong lane, in the vast maze of stone fences. As she passed along the lane she thought was the right one, she heard a faint tapping noise, with a slight metallic resonance.

The gipsy man was seated on the ground with his back to the cart-shaft, hammering a copper bowl. He was in the sun, bare-headed, but wearing his green jersey. Three small children were moving quietly round, playing in the horse’s shelter: the horse and cart were gone. An old woman, bent, with a kerchief round her head, was cooking over a fire of sticks. The only sound was the rapid, ringing tap-tap-tap of the small hammer on the dull copper.

The man looked up at once, as Yvette stepped from her bicycle, but he did not move, though he ceased hammering. A delicate, barely discernible smile of triumph was on his face. The old woman looked round, keenly, from under her dirty grey hair. The man spoke a half-audible word to her, and she turned again to her fire. He looked up at Yvette.

“How are you all getting on?” she asked politely.

“All right, eh! You sit down a minute?” He turned as he sat, and pulled a stool from under the caravan for Yvette. Then, as she wheeled her bicycle to the side of the quarry, he started hammering again, with that bird-like, rapid light stroke.

Yvette went to the fire to warm her hands.

“Is this the dinner cooking?” she asked childishly, of the old gipsy, as she spread her long, tender hands, mottled red with the cold, to the embers.

“Dinner, yes!” said the old woman. “For him! And for the children.”

She pointed with the long fork at the three black-eyed, staring children, who were staring at her from under their black fringes. But they were clean. Only the old woman was not clean. The quarry itself they had kept perfectly clean.

Yvette crouched in silence, warming her hands. The man rapidly hammered away with intervals of silence. The old hag slowly climbed the steps to the third, oldest caravan. The children began to play again, like little wild animals, quiet and busy.

“Are they your children?” asked Yvette, rising from the fire and turning to the man.

He looked her in the eyes, and nodded.

“But where’s your wife?”

“She’s gone out with the basket. They’re all gone out, cart and all, selling things. I don’t go selling things. I make them, but I don’t go selling them. Not often. I don’t often.”

“You make all the copper and brass things?” she said.

He nodded, and again offered her the stool. She sat down.

“You said you’d be here on Fridays,” she said. “So I came this way, as it was so fine.”

“Very fine day!” said the gipsy, looking at her cheek, that was still a bit blanched by the cold, and the soft hair over her reddened ear, and the long, still mottled hands on her knee.

“You get cold, riding a bicycle?” he asked.

“My hands!” she said, clasping them nervously.

“You didn’t wear gloves?”

“I did, but they weren’t much good.”

“Cold comes through,” he said.

“Yes!” she replied.

The old woman came slowly, grotesquely down the steps of the caravan, with some enamel plates.

“The dinner cooked, eh?” he called softly.

The old woman muttered something, as she spread the plates near the fire.

Two pots hung from a long iron horizontal-bar, over the embers of the fire. A little pan seethed on a small iron tripod. In the sunshine, heat and vapour wavered together.

He put down his tools and the pot, and rose from the ground.

“You eat something along of us?” he asked Yvette, not looking at her.

“Oh, I brought my lunch,” said Yvette.

“You eat some stew?” he said. And again he called quietly, secretly to the old woman, who muttered in answer, as she slid the iron pot towards the end of the bar.

“Some beans, and some mutton in it,” he said.

“Oh thanks awfully!” said Yvette. Then suddenly taking courage, added: “Well yes, just a very little, if I may.”

She went across to untie her lunch from her bicycle, and he went up the steps to his own caravan. After a minute, he emerged, wiping his hands on a towel.

“You want to come up and wash your hands?” he said.

“No, I think not,” she said. “They are clean.”

He threw away his wash-water, and set off down the road with a high brass jug, to fetch clean water from the spring that trickled into a small pool, taking a cup to dip it with.

When he returned, he set the jug and the cup by the fire, and fetched himself a short log, to sit on. The children sat on the floor, by the fire, in a cluster, eating beans and bits of meat with spoon or fingers. The man on the log ate in silence, absorbedly. The woman made coffee in the black pot on the tripod, hobbling upstairs for the cups. There was silence in the camp. Yvette sat on her stool, having taken off her hat and shaken her hair in the sun.

“How many children have you?” Yvette asked suddenly.

“Say five,” he replied slowly, as he looked up into her eyes.

And again the bird of her heart sank down and seemed to die. Vaguely, as in a dream, she received from him the cup of coffee. She was aware only of his silent figure, sitting like a shadow there on the log, with an enamel cup in his hand, drinking his coffee in silence. Her will had departed from her limbs, he had power over her: his shadow was on her.

And he, as he blew his hot coffee, was aware of one thing only, the mysterious fruit of her virginity, her perfect tenderness in the body.

At length he put down his coffee-cup by the fire, then looked round at her. Her hair fell across her face, as she tried to sip from the hot cup. On her face was that tender look of sleep, which a nodding flower has when it is full out, like a mysterious early flower, she was full out, like a snowdrop which spreads its three white wings in a flight into the waking sleep of its brief blossoming. The

waking sleep of her full-opened virginity, entranced like a snowdrop in the sunshine, was upon her.

The gipsy, supremely aware of her, waited for her like the substance of shadow, as shadow waits and is there.

At length his voice said, without breaking the spell:

“You want to go in my caravan, now, and wash your hands?”

The childlike, sleep-waking eyes of her moment of perfect virginity looked into his, unseeing. She was only aware of the dark, strange effluence of him bathing her limbs, washing her at last purely will-less. She was aware of *him*, as a dark, complete power.

“I think I might,” she said.

He rose silently, then turned to speak, in a low command, to the old woman. And then again he looked at Yvette, and putting his power over her, so that she had no burden of herself, or of action.

“Come!” he said.

She followed simply, followed the silent, secret, overpowering motion of his body in front of her. It cost her nothing. She was gone in his will.

He was at the top of the steps, and she at the foot, when she became aware of an intruding sound. She stood still, at the foot of the steps. A motor-car was coming. He stood at the top of the steps, looking round strangely. The old woman harshly called something, as with rapidly increasing sound, a car rushed near. It was passing.

Then they heard the cry of a woman’s voice, and the brakes on the car. It had pulled up, just beyond the quarry.

The gipsy came down the steps, having closed the door of the caravan.

“You want to put your hat on,” he said to her.

Obediently she went to the stool by the fire, and took up her hat. He sat down by the cart-wheel, darkly, and took up his tools. The rapid tap-tap-tap of his hammer, rapid and angry now like the sound of a tiny machine-gun, broke out just as the voice of the woman was heard crying:

“May we warm our hands at the camp fire?”

She advanced, dressed in a sleek but bulky coat of sable fur. A man followed, in a blue great-coat; pulling off his fur gloves and pulling out a pipe.

“It looked so tempting,” said the woman in the coat of many dead little animals, smiling a broad, half-condescending, half-hesitant simper, around the company.

No one said a word.

She advanced to the fire, shuddering a little inside her coat, with the cold. They had been driving in an open car.

She was a very small woman, with a rather large nose: probably a Jewess. Tiny almost as a child, in that sable coat she looked much more bulky than she should, and her wide, rather resentful brown eyes of a spoilt Jewess gazed oddly out of her expensive get-up.

She crouched over the low fire, spreading her little hands, on which diamonds and emeralds glittered.

“Ugh!” she shuddered. “Of course we ought not to have come in an open car! But my husband won’t even let me say I’m cold!” She looked round at him with her large, childish, reproachful eyes, that had still the canny shrewdness of a bourgeois Jewess: a rich one, probably.

Apparently she was in love, in a Jewess’s curious way, with the big, blond man. He looked back at her with his abstracted blue eyes, that seemed to have no lashes, and a small smile creased his smooth, curiously naked cheeks. The smile didn’t mean anything at all.

He was a man one connects instantly with winter sports, skiing and skating. Athletic, unconnected with life, he slowly filled his pipe, pressing in the tobacco with long, powerful reddened finger.

The Jewess looked at him to see if she got any response from him. Nothing at all, but that odd, blank smile. She turned again to the fire, tilting her eyebrows and looking at her small, white, spread hands.

He slipped off his heavily lined coat, and appeared in one of the handsome, sharp-patterned knitted jerseys, in yellow and grey and black, over well-cut trousers, rather wide. Yes, they were both expensive! And he had a magnificent figure, an athletic, prominent chest. Like an experienced camper, he began building the fire together, quietly: like a soldier on campaign.

“D’you think they’d mind if we put some fir-cones on, to make a blaze?” he asked of Yvette, with a silent glance at the hammering gipsy.

“Love it, I should think,” said Yvette, in a daze, as the spell of the gipsy slowly left her, feeling stranded and blank.

The man went to the car, and returned with a little sack of cones, from which he drew a handful.

“Mind if we make a blaze?” he called to the gipsy.

“Eh?”

“Mind if we make a blaze with a few cones?”

“You go ahead!” said the gipsy.

The man began placing the cones lightly, carefully on the red embers. And soon, one by one, they caught fire, and burned like roses of flame, with a sweet scent.

“Ah lovely! lovely!” cried the little Jewess, looking up at her man again. He

looked down at her quite kindly, like the sun on ice. "Don't you love fire! Oh, I love it!" the little Jewess cried to Yvette, across the hammering.

The hammering annoyed her. She looked round with a slight frown on her fine little brows, as if she would bid the man stop. Yvette looked round too. The gipsy was bent over his copper bowl, legs apart, head down, lithe arm lifted. Already he seemed so far from her.

The man who accompanied the little Jewess strolled over to the gipsy, and stood in silence looking down on him, holding his pipe to his mouth. Now they were two men, like two strange male dogs, having to sniff one another.

"We're on our honeymoon," said the little Jewess, with an arch, resentful look at Yvette. She spoke in a rather high, defiant voice, like some bird, a jay, or a crook, calling.

"Are you really?" said Yvette.

"Yes! Before we're married! Have you heard of Simon Fawcett?" — she named a wealthy and well-known engineer of the north country. "Well, I'm Mrs. Fawcett, and he's just divorcing me!" She looked at Yvette with curious defiance and wistfulness.

"Are you really!" said Yvette.

She understood now the look of resentment and defiance in the little Jewess' big, childlike brown eyes. She was an honest little thing, but perhaps her honesty was *too* rational. Perhaps it partly explained the notorious unscrupulousness of the well-known Simon Fawcett.

"Yes! As soon as we get the divorce, I'm going to marry Major Eastwood."

Her cards were now all on the table. She was not going to deceive anybody.

Behind her, the two men were talking briefly. She glanced round, and fixed the gipsy with her big brown eyes.

He was looking up, as if shyly, at the big fellow in the sparkling jersey, who was standing pipe in mouth, man to man, looking down.

"With the horses back of Arras," said the gipsy, in a low voice.

They were talking war. The gipsy had served with the artillery teams, in the Major's own regiment.

"Ein schöner Mensch!" said the Jewess. "A handsome man, eh?"

For her, too, the gipsy was one of the common men, the Tommies.

"Quite handsome!" said Yvette.

"You are cycling?" asked the Jewess in a tone of surprise.

"Yes! Down to Papplewick. My father is rector of Papplewick: Mr. Saywell!"

"Oh!" said the Jewess. "I know! A clever writer! Very clever! I have read him."

The fir-cones were all consumed already, the fire was a tall pile now of

crumbling, shattering fire-roses. The sky was clouding over for afternoon. Perhaps towards evening it would snow.

The Major came back, and slung himself into his coat.

“I thought I remembered his face,” he said. “One of our grooms, A. 1. man with horses.”

“Look!” cried the Jewess to Yvette. “Why don’t you let us motor you down to Normanton. We live in Scoresby. We can tie the bicycle on behind.”

“I think I will,” said Yvette.

“Come!” called the Jewess to the peeping children, as the blond man wheeled away the bicycle. “Come! Come here!” and taking out her little purse, she held out a shilling.

“Come!” she cried. “Come and take it!”

The gipsy had laid down his work, and gone into his caravan. The old woman called hoarsely to the children, from the enclosure. The two elder children came stealing forward. The Jewess gave them the two bits of silver, a shilling and a florin, which she had in her purse, and again the hoarse voice of the unseen old woman was heard.

The gipsy descended from his caravan and strolled to the fire. The Jewess searched his face with the peculiar bourgeois boldness of her race.

“You were in the war, in Major Eastwood’s regiment!” she said.

“Yes, lady!”

“Imagine you both being here now! — It’s going to snow — ” she looked up at the sky.

“Later on,” said the man, looking at the sky.

He too had gone inaccessible. His race was very old, in its peculiar battle with established society, and had no conception of winning. Only now and then it could score.

But since the war, even the old sporting chance of scoring now and then, was pretty well quenched. There was no question of yielding. The gipsy’s eyes still had their bold look: but it was hardened and directed far away, the touch of insolent intimacy was gone. He had been through the war.

He looked at Yvette.

“You’re going back in the motor-car?” he said.

“Yes!” she replied, with a rather mincing mannerism. “The weather is so treacherous!”

“Traucherous weather!” he repeated, looking at the sky.

She could not tell in the least what his feelings were. In truth, she wasn’t very much interested. She was rather fascinated, now, by the little Jewess, mother of two children, who was taking her wealth away from the well-known engineer

and transferring it to the penniless, sporting young Major Eastwood, who must be five or six years younger than she. Rather intriguing!

The blond man returned.

“A cigarette, Charles!” cried the little Jewess, plaintively.

He took out his case, slowly, with his slow, athletic movement. Something sensitive in him made him slow, cautious, as if he had hurt himself against people. He gave a cigarette to his wife, then one to Yvette, then offered the case, quite simply, to the gipsy. The gipsy took one.

“Thank you sir!”

And he went quietly to the fire, and stooping, lit it at the red embers. Both women watched him.

“Well goodbye!” said the Jewess, with her odd bourgeois free-masonry. “Thank you for the warm fire.”

“Fire is everybody’s,” said the gipsy.

The young child came toddling to him.

“Goodbye!” said Yvette. “I hope it won’t snow for you.”

“We don’t mind a bit of snow,” said the gipsy.

“Don’t you?” said Yvette. “I should have thought you would!”

“No!” said the gipsy.

She flung her scarf royally over her shoulder, and followed the fur coat of the Jewess, which seemed to walk on little legs of its own.

SEVEN

Yvette was rather thrilled by the Eastwoods, as she called them. The little Jewess had only to wait three months now, for the final decree. She had boldly rented a small summer cottage, by the moors up at Scoresby, not far from the hills. Now it was dead winter, and she and the Major lived in comparative isolation, without any maid-servant. He had already resigned his commission in the regular army, and called himself Mr. Eastwood. In fact, they were already Mr. and Mrs. Eastwood, to the common world.

The little Jewess was thirty-six, and her two children were both over twelve years of age. The husband had agreed that she should have the custody, as soon as she was married to Eastwood.

So there they were, this queer couple, the tiny, finely-formed little Jewess with her big, resentful, reproachful eyes, and her mop of carefully-barbered black, curly hair, an elegant little thing in her way, and the big, pale-eyed young man, powerful and wintry, the remnant surely of some old uncanny Danish stock: living together in a small modern house near the moors and the hills, and doing their own housework.

It was a funny household. The cottage was hired furnished, but the little Jewess had brought along her dearest pieces of furniture. She had an odd little taste for the rococco, strange curving cupboards inlaid with mother of pearl, tortoiseshell, ebony, heaven knows what; strange tall flamboyant chairs, from Italy, with sea-green brocade: astonishing saints with wind-blown, richly-coloured carven garments and pink faces: shelves of weird old Saxe and Capo di Monte figurines: and finally, a strange assortment of astonishing pictures painted on the back of glass, done, probably in the early years of the nineteenth century, or in the late eighteenth.

In this crowded and extraordinary interior she received Yvette, when the latter made a stolen visit. A whole system of stoves had been installed into the cottage, every corner was warm, almost hot. And there was the tiny rococco figurine of the Jewess herself, in a perfect little frock, and an apron, putting slices of ham on the dish, while the great snow-bird of a major, in a white sweater and grey trousers, cut bread, mixed mustard, prepared coffee, and did all the rest. He had even made the dish of jugged hare which followed the cold meats and caviare.

The silver and the china were really valuable, part of the bride's trousseau.

The Major drank beer from a silver mug, the little Jewess and Yvette had champagne in lovely glasses, the Major brought in coffee. They talked away. The little Jewess had a burning indignation against her first husband. She was intensely moral, so moral, that she was a divorcée. The Major too, strange wintry bird, so powerful, handsome, too, in his way, but pale round the eyes as if he had no eyelashes, like a bird, he too had a curious indignation against life, because of the false morality. That powerful, athletic chest hid a strange, snowy sort of anger. And his tenderness for the little Jewess was based on his sense of outraged justice, the abstract morality of the north blowing him, like a strange wind, into isolation.

As the afternoon drew on, they went to the kitchen, the Major pushed back his sleeves, showing his powerful athletic white arms, and carefully, deftly washed the dishes, while the woman wiped. It was not for nothing his muscles were trained. Then he went round attending to the stoves of the small house, which only needed a moment or two of care each day. And after this, he brought out the small, closed car and drove Yvette home, in the rain, depositing her at the back gate, a little wicket among the larches, through which the earthen steps sloped downwards to the house.

She was really amazed by this couple.

“Really, Lucille!” she said. “I do meet the most extraordinary people!” And she gave a detailed description.

“I think they sound rather nice!” said Lucille. “I like the Major doing the housework, and looking so frightfully Bond-streety with it all. I should think, *when they’re married*, it would be rather fun knowing them.”

“Yes!” said Yvette vaguely. “Yes! Yes, it would!”

The very strangeness of the connection between the tiny Jewess and that pale-eyed, athletic young officer made her think again of her gipsy, who had been utterly absent from her consciousness, but who now returned with sudden painful force.

“What is it, Lucille,” she asked, “that brings people together? People like the Eastwoods, for instance? and Daddy and Mamma, so frightfully unsuitable? — and that gipsy woman who told my fortune, like a great horse, and the gipsy man, so fine and delicately cut? What is it?”

“I suppose it’s sex, whatever that is,” said Lucille.

“Yes, what is it? It’s not really anything *common*, like common sensuality, you know, Lucille. It really isn’t!”

“No, I suppose not,” said Lucille. “Anyhow I suppose it needn’t be.”

“Because you see, the *common* fellows, you know, who make a girl feel *low*: nobody cares much about them. Nobody feels any connection with them. Yet

they're supposed to be the sexual sort."

"I suppose," said Lucille, "there's the low sort of sex, and there's the other sort, that isn't low. It's frightfully complicated, really! I *loathe* common fellows. And I never feel anything *sexual* — " she laid a rather disgusted stress on the word — "for fellows who aren't common. Perhaps I haven't got any sex."

"That's just it!" said Yvette. "Perhaps neither of us has. Perhaps we haven't really *got* any sex, to connect us with men."

"How horrible it sounds: *connect us with men!*" cried Lucille, with revulsion. "Wouldn't you hate to be connected with men that way? Oh I think it's an awful pity there has to *be* sex! It would be so much better if we could still be men and women, without that sort of thing."

Yvette pondered. Far in the background was the image of the gipsy as he had looked round at her, when she had said: The weather is so treacherous. She felt rather like Peter when the cock crew, as she denied him. Or rather, she did not deny the gipsy; she didn't care about his part in the show, anyhow. It was some hidden part of herself which she denied: that part which mysteriously and unconfessedly responded to him. And it was a strange, lustrous black cock which crew in mockery of her.

"Yes!" she said vaguely. "Yes! Sex is an awful bore, you know Lucille. When you haven't got it, you feel you *ought* to have it, somehow. And when you've got it — or *if* you have it — " she lifted her head and wrinkled her nose disdainfully — "you hate it."

"Oh I don't know!" cried Lucille. "I think I should *like* to be awfully in love with a man."

"You think so!" said Yvette, again wrinkling her nose. "But if you were you wouldn't."

"How do you know?" asked Lucille.

"Well, I don't really," said Yvette. "But I think so! Yes, I think so!"

"Oh, it's very likely!" said Lucille disgustedly. "And anyhow one would be sure to get out of love again, and it would be merely disgusting."

"Yes," said Yvette. "It's a problem." She hummed a little tune.

"Oh hang it all, it's not a problem for us two, yet. We're neither of us really in love, and we probably never shall be, so the problem is settled that way."

"I'm not so sure!" said Yvette sagely. "I'm not so sure. I believe, one day, I shall fall *awfully* in love."

"Probably you never will," said Lucille brutally. "That's what most old maids are thinking all the time."

Yvette looked at her sister from pensive but apparently insouciant eyes.

"Is it?" she said. "Do you really think so, Lucille? How perfectly awful for

them, poor things! Why ever do they *care*?"

"Why do they?" said Lucille. "Perhaps they don't, really. — Probably it's all because people say: *Poor old girl, she couldn't catch a man.*"

"I suppose it is!" said Yvette. "They get to mind the beastly things people always do say about old maids. What a shame!"

"Anyhow we have a good time, and we do have lots of boys who make a fuss of us," said Lucille.

"Yes!" said Yvette. "Yes! But I couldn't possibly marry any of them."

"Neither could I," said Lucille. "But why shouldn't we! Why should we bother about marrying, when we have a perfectly good time with the boys who are awfully good sorts, and you must say, Yvette, awfully sporting and *decent* to us."

"Oh, they are!" said Yvette absently.

"I think it's time to think of marrying somebody," said Lucille, "when you feel you're *not* having a good time any more. Then marry, and just settle down."

"Quite!" said Yvette.

But now, under all her bland, soft amiability, she was annoyed with Lucille. Suddenly she wanted to turn her back on Lucille.

Besides, look at the shadows under poor Lucille's eyes, and the wistfulness in the beautiful eyes themselves. Oh, if some awfully nice, kind, protective sort of man would but marry her! And if the sporting Lucille would let him!

Yvette did not tell the rector, nor Granny, about the Eastwoods. It would only have started a lot of talk which she detested. The rector wouldn't have minded, for himself, privately. But he too knew the necessity of keeping as clear as possible from that poisonous, many-headed serpent, the tongue of the people.

"But I don't *want* you to come if your father doesn't know," cried the little Jewess.

"I suppose I'll have to tell him," said Yvette. "I'm sure he doesn't mind, really. But if he knew, he'd have to, I suppose."

The young officer looked at her with an odd amusement, bird-like and unemotional, in his keen eyes. He too was by way of falling in love with Yvette. It was her peculiar virgin tenderness, and her straying, absent-minded detachment from things, which attracted him.

She was aware of what was happening, and she rather preened herself. Eastwood piqued her fancy. Such a smart young officer, awfully good class, so calm and amazing with a motor-car, and quite a champion swimmer, it was intriguing to see him quietly, calmly washing dishes, smoking his pipe, doing his job so alert and skilful. Or, with the same interested care with which he made his investigation into the mysterious inside of an automobile, concocting juggled

hare in the cottage kitchen. Then going out in the icy weather and cleaning his car till it looked like a live thing, like a cat when she has licked herself. Then coming in to talk so unassumingly and responsively, if briefly, with the little Jewess. And apparently, never bored. Sitting at the window with his pipe, in bad weather, silent for hours, abstracted, musing, yet with his athletic body alert in its stillness.

Yvette did not flirt with him. But she *did* like him.

“But what about your future?” she asked him.

“What about it?” he said, taking his pipe from his mouth, the unemotional point of a smile in his bird’s eyes.

“A career! Doesn’t every man have to carve out a career? — like some huge goose with gravy?” She gazed with odd naïveté into his eyes.

“I’m perfectly all right today, and I shall be all right tomorrow,” he said, with a cold, decided look. “Why shouldn’t my future be continuous today’s and tomorrow’s?”

He looked at her with unmoved searching.

“Quite!” she said. “I hate jobs, and all that side of life.” But she was thinking of the Jewess’s money.

To which he did not answer. His anger was of the soft, snowy sort, which comfortably muffles the soul.

They had come to the point of talking philosophically together. The little Jewess looked a bit wan. She was curiously naïve and not possessive, in her attitude to the man. Nor was she at all catty with Yvette. Only rather wan, and dumb.

Yvette, on a sudden impulse, thought she had better clear herself.

“I think life’s *awfully* difficult,” she said.

“Life is!” cried the Jewess.

“What’s so beastly, is that one is supposed to *fall in love*, and get married!” said Yvette, curling up her nose.

“Don’t you *want* to fall in love and get married?” cried the Jewess, with great glaring eyes of astounded reproach.

“No, not particularly!” said Yvette. “Especially as one feels there’s nothing else to do. It’s an awful chicken coop one has to run into.”

“But you don’t know what love is?” cried the Jewess.

“No!” said Yvette. “Do you?”

“I!” bawled the tiny Jewess. “I! My goodness, don’t I!” She looked with reflective gloom at Eastwood, who was smoking his pipe, the dimples of his disconnected amusement showing on his smooth, scrupulous face. He had a very fine, smooth skin, which yet did not suffer from the weather, so that his face

looked naked as a baby's. But it was not a round face: it was characteristic enough, and took queer ironical dimples, like a mask which is comic but frozen.

"Do you mean to say you don't know what love is?" insisted the Jewess.

"No!" said Yvette, with insouciant candour. "I don't believe I do! Is it awful of me, at my age?"

"Is there never any man that makes you feel quite, quite different?" said the Jewess, with another big-eyed look at Eastwood. He smoked, utterly unimplicated.

"I don't think there is," said Yvette. "Unless — yes! — unless it is that gipsy" — she had put her head pensively sideways.

"Which gipsy?" bawled the little Jewess.

"The one who was a Tommy and looked after horses in Major Eastwood's regiment in the war," said Yvette coolly.

The little Jewess gazed at Yvette with great eyes of stupor.

"You're not in love with that *gipsy!*" she said.

"Well!" said Yvette. "I don't know. He's the only one that makes me feel — different! He really is!"

"But how? How? Has he ever *said* anything to you?"

"No! No!"

"Then how? What has he done?"

"Oh, just looked at me!"

"How?"

"Well you see, I don't know. But different! Yes, different! Different, quite different from the way any man ever looked at me."

"But *how* did he look at you?" insisted the Jewess.

"Why — as if he really, but *really, desired* me," said Yvette, her meditative face looking like the bud of a flower.

"What a vile fellow! What *right* had he to look at you like that?" cried the indignant Jewess.

"A cat may look at a king," calmly interposed the Major, and now his face had the smiles of a cat's face.

"You think he oughtn't to?" asked Yvette, turning to him.

"Certainly not! A gipsy fellow, with half a dozen dirty women trailing after him! Certainly not!" cried the tiny Jewess.

"I wondered!" said Yvette. "Because it *was* rather wonderful, really! And it was something quite different in my life."

"I think," said the Major, taking his pipe from his mouth, "that desire is the most wonderful thing in life. Anybody who can really feel it, is a king, and I envy nobody else!" He put back his pipe.

The Jewess looked at him stupefied.

“But Charles!” she cried. “Every common low man in Halifax feels nothing else!”

He again took his pipe from his mouth.

“That’s merely appetite,” he said.

And he put back his pipe.

“You think the gipsy is a real thing?” Yvette asked him. He lifted his shoulders.

“It’s not for me to say,” he replied. “If I were you, I should know, I shouldn’t be asking other people.”

“Yes — but — ” Yvette trailed out.

“Charles! You’re wrong! How *could* it be a real thing! As if she could possibly marry him and go round in a caravan!”

“I didn’t say marry him,” said Charles.

“Or a love affair! Why it’s monstrous! What would she think of herself! — That’s not love! That’s — that’s prostitution!”

Charles smoked for some moments.

“That gipsy was the best man we had, with horses. Nearly died of pneumonia. I thought he *was* dead. He’s a resurrected man to me. I’m a resurrected man myself, as far as that goes.” He looked at Yvette. “I was buried for twenty hours under snow,” he said. “And not much the worse for it, when they dug me out.”

There was a frozen pause in the conversation.

“Life’s awful!” said Yvette.

“They dug me out by accident,” he said.

“Oh! — ” Yvette trailed slowly. “It might be destiny, you know.”

To which he did not answer.

EIGHT

The rector heard about Yvette's intimacy with the Eastwoods, and she was somewhat startled by the result. She had thought he wouldn't care. Verbally, in his would-be humorous fashion, he was so entirely unconventional, such a frightfully good sport. As he said himself, he was a conservative anarchist, which meant, he was like a great many more people, a mere unbeliever. The anarchy extended to his humorous talk, and his secret thinking. The conservatism based on a mongrel fear of the anarchy, controlled every action. His thoughts, secretly, were something to be scared of. Therefore, in his life, he was fanatically afraid of the unconventional.

When his conservatism and his abject sort of fear were uppermost, he always lifted his lip and bared his teeth a little, in a dog-like sneer.

"I hear your latest friends are the half-divorced Mrs. Fawcett and the *maquereau* Eastwood," he said to Yvette.

She didn't know what a *maquereau* was, but she felt the poison in the rector's fangs.

"I just know them," she said. "They're awfully nice, really. And they'll be married in about a month's time."

The rector looked at her insouciant face with hatred. Somewhere inside him, he was cowed, he had been born cowed. And those who are born cowed are natural slaves, and deep instinct makes them fear with prisonous fear those who might suddenly snap the slave's collar round their necks.

It was for this reason the rector had so abjectly curled up, who still so abject curled up before She-who-was-Cynthia: because of his slave's fear of her contempt, the contempt of a born-free nature for a base-born nature.

Yvette too had a free-born quality. She too, one day, would know him, and clap the slave's collar of her contempt round his neck.

But should she? He would fight to the death, this time, first. The slave in him was cornered this time, like a cornered rat, and with the courage of a cornered rat.

"I suppose they're your sort!" he sneered.

"Well they are, really," she said, with that blithe vagueness. "I do like them awfully. They seem so solid, you know, so honest."

"You've got a peculiar notion of honesty!" he sneered. "A young sponge

going off with a woman older than himself, so that he can live on her money! The woman leaving her home and her children! I don't know where you get your idea of honesty. Not from me, I hope. — And you seem to be very well acquainted with them, considering you say you just know them. Where did you meet them?"

"When I was out bicycling. They came along in their car, and we happened to talk. She told me at once who she was, so that I shouldn't make a mistake. She is honest."

Poor Yvette was struggling to bear up.

"And how often have you seen them since?"

"Oh, I've just been over twice."

"Over where?"

"To their cottage in Scoresby."

He looked at her in hate, as if he could kill her. And he backed away from her, against the window-curtains of his study, like a rat at bay. Somewhere in his mind he was thinking unspeakable depravities about his daughter, as he had thought them of She-who-was-Cynthia. He was powerless against the lowest insinuations of his own mind. And these depravities which he attributed to the still-uncowed, but frightened girl in front of him, made him recoil, showing all his fangs in his handsome face.

"So you just know them, do you?" he said. "Lying is in your blood, I see. I don't believe you get it from me."

Yvette half averted her mute face, and thought of Granny's barefaced prevarication. She did not answer.

"What takes you creeping round such couples?" he sneered. "Aren't there enough decent people in the world, for you to know? Anyone would think you were a stray dog, having to run round indecent couples, because the decent ones wouldn't have you. Have you got something worse than lying, in your blood?"

"What have I got, worse than lying in my blood?" she asked. A cold deadness was coming over her. Was she abnormal, one of the semicriminal abnormalities? It made her feel cold and dead.

In his eyes, she was just brazening out the depravity that underlay her virgin, tender, bird-like face. She-who-was-Cynthia had been like this: a snowflake. And he had convulsions of sadistic horror, thinking what might be the *actual* depravity of She-who-was-Cynthia. Even his *own* love for her, which had been the lust love of the born cowed, had been a depravity, in secret, to him. So what must an illegal love be?

"You know best yourself, what you have got," he sneered. "But it is something you had best curb, and quickly, if you don't intend to finish in a

criminal-lunacy asylum.”

“Why?” she said, pale and muted, numbed with frozen fear. “Why criminal lunacy? What have I done?”

“That is between you and your Maker,” he jeered. “I shall never ask. But certain tendencies end in criminal lunacy, unless they are curbed in time.”

“Do you mean like knowing the Eastwoods?” asked Yvette, after a pause of numb fear.

“Do I mean like nosing round such people as Mrs. Fawcett, a Jewess, and ex-Major Eastwood, a man who goes off with an older woman for the sake of her money? Why yes, I do!”

“But you *can't* say that,” cried Yvette. “He’s an awfully simple, straightforward man.”

“He is apparently one of your sort.”

“Well. — In a way, I thought he was. I thought you’d like him too,” she said, simply, hardly knowing what she said.

The rector backed into the curtains, as if the girl menaced him with something fearful.

“Don’t say any more,” he snarled, abject. “Don’t say any more. You’ve said too much, to implicate you. I don’t want to learn any more horrors.”

“But what horrors?” she persisted.

The very naïveté of her unscrupulous innocence repelled him, cowed him still more.

“Say no more!” he said, in a low, hissing voice. “But I will kill you before you shall go the way of your mother.”

She looked at him, as he stood there backed against the velvet curtains of his study, his face yellow, his eyes distraught like a rat’s with fear and rage and hate, and a numb, frozen loneliness came over her. For her too, the meaning had gone out of everything.

It was hard to break the frozen, sterile silence that ensued. At last, however, she looked at him. And in spite of herself, beyond her own knowledge, the contempt for him was in her young, clear, baffled eyes. It fell like the slave’s collar over his neck, finally.

“Do you mean I mustn’t know the Eastwoods?” she said

“You can know them if you wish,” he sneered. “But you must not expect to associate with your Granny, and your Aunt Cissie, and Lucille, if you do. I cannot have *them* contaminated. Your Granny was a faithful wife and a faithful mother, if ever one existed. She has already had one shock of shame and abomination to endure. She shall never be exposed to another.”

Yvette heard it all dimly, half hearing.

“I can send a note and say you disapprove,” she said dimly.

“You follow your own course of action. But remember, you have to choose between clean people, and reverence for your Granny’s blameless old age, and people who are unclean in their minds and their bodies.”

Again there was a silence. Then she looked at him, and her face was more puzzled than anything. But somewhere at the back of her perplexity was that peculiar calm, virgin contempt of the free-born for the base-born. He, and all the Saywells, were base-born.

“All right,” she said. “I’ll write and say you disapprove.”

He did not answer. He was partly flattered, secretly triumphant, but abjectedly.

“I have tried to keep this from your Granny and Aunt Cissie,” he said. “It need not be public property, since you choose to make your friendship clandestine.”

There was a dreary silence.

“All right,” she said. “I’ll go and write.”

And she crept out of the room.

She addressed her little note to Mrs. Eastwood. “Dear Mrs. Eastwood, Daddy doesn’t approve of my coming to see you. So you will understand if we have to break it off. I’m awfully sorry — .” That was all.

Yet she felt a dreary blank when she had posted her letter. She was now even afraid of her own thoughts. She wanted, now, to be held against the slender, fine-shaped breast of the gipsy. She wanted him to hold her in his arms, if only for once, for once, and comfort and confirm her. She wanted to be confirmed by him, against her father, who had only a repulsive fear of her.

And at the same time she cringed and winced, so that she could hardly walk, for fear the thought was obscene, a criminal lunacy. It seemed to wound her heels as she walked, the fear. The fear, the great cold fear of the base-born, her father, everything human and swarming. Like a great bog humanity swamped her, and she sank in, weak at the knees, filled with repulsion and fear of every person she met.

She adjusted herself, however, quite rapidly to her new conception of people. She had to live. It is useless to quarrel with one’s bread and butter. And to expect a great deal out of life is puerile. So, with the rapid adaptability of the postwar generation, she adjusted herself to the new facts. Her father was what he was. He would always play up to appearances. She would do the same. She too would play up to appearances.

So, underneath the blithe, gossamer-straying insouciance, a certain hardness formed, like rock crystallising in her heart. She lost her illusions in the collapse of her sympathies. Outwardly, she seemed the same. Inwardly she was hard and

detached, and, unknown to herself, revengeful.

Outwardly she remained the same. It was part of her game. While circumstances remained as they were, she must remain, at least in appearance, true to what was expected of her.

But the revengefulness came out in her new vision of people. Under the rector's apparently gallant handsomeness, she saw the weak, feeble nullity. And she despised him. Yet still, in a way, she liked him too. Feelings are so complicated.

It was Granny whom she came to detest with all her soul. That obese old woman, sitting there in her blindness like some great red-blotched fungus, her neck swallowed between her heaped-up shoulders and her rolling, ancient chins, so that she was neckless as a double potato, her Yvette really hated, with that pure, sheer hatred which is almost a joy. Her hate was so clear, that while she was feeling strong, she enjoyed it.

The old woman sat with her big, reddened face pressed a little back, her lace cap perched on her thin white hair, her stub nose still assertive, and her old mouth shut like a trap. This motherly old soul, her mouth gave her away. It always had been one of the compressed sort. But in her great age, it had gone like a toad's lipless, the jaw pressing up like the lower jaw of a trap. The look Yvette most hated, was the look of that lower jaw pressing relentlessly up, with an ancient prognathous thrust, so that the snub nose in turn was forced to press upwards, and the whole face was pressed a little back, beneath the big, wall-like forehead. The will, the ancient, toad-like obscene *will* in the old woman, was fearful, once you saw it: a toad-like self-will that was godless, and less than human! It belonged to the old, enduring race of toads, or tortoises. And it made one feel that Granny would never die. She would live on like these higher reptiles, in a state of semi-coma, forever.

Yvette dared not even suggest to her father that Granny was not perfect. He would have threatened his daughter with the lunatic asylum. That was the threat he always seemed to have up his sleeve: the lunatic asylum. Exactly as if a distaste for Granny and for that horrible house of relatives was in itself a proof of lunacy, dangerous lunacy.

Yet in one of her moods of irritable depression, she did once fling out:

"How perfectly beastly, this house is! Aunt Lucy comes, and Aunt Nell, and Aunt Alice, and they make a ring like a ring of crows, with Granny and Aunt Cissie, all lifting their skirts up and warming their legs at the fire, and shutting Lucille and me out. We're nothing but outsiders in this beastly house!"

Her father glanced at her curiously. But she managed to put a petulance into her speech, and a mere cross rudeness into her look, so that he could laugh, as at

a childish tantrum. Somewhere, though, he knew that she coldly, venomously meant what she said, and he was wary of her.

Her life seemed now nothing but an irritable friction against the unsavoury household of the Saywells, in which she was immersed. She loathed the rectory with a loathing that consumed her life, a loathing so strong, that she could not really go away from the place. While it endured, she was spell-bound to it, in revulsion.

She forgot the Eastwoods again. After all! what was the revolt of the little Jewess, compared to Granny and the Saywell bunch! A husband was never more than a semicasual thing! But a family! — an awful, smelly family that would never disperse, stuck half dead round the base of a fungoid old woman! How was one to cope with that?

She did not forget the gipsy entirely. But she had no time for him. She, who was bored almost to agony, and who had nothing at all to do, she had not time to think even, seriously, of anything. Time being, after all, only the current of the soul in its flow.

She saw the gipsy twice. Once he came to the house, with things to sell. And she, watching him from the landing window, refused to go down. He saw her too, as he was putting his things back into his cart. But he too gave no sign. Being of a race that exists only to be harrying the outskirts of our society, forever hostile and living only by spoil, he was too much master to himself, and too wary, to expose himself openly to the vast and gruesome clutch of our law. He had been through the war. He had been enslaved against his will, that time.

So now, he showed himself at the rectory, and slowly, quietly busied himself at his cart outside the white gate, with that air of silent and forever-unyielding outsideness which gave him his lonely, predateive grace. He knew she saw him. And she should see him unyielding, quietly hawking his copper vessels, on an old, old war-path against such as herself.

Such as herself? Perhaps he was mistaken. Her heart, in its stroke, now rang hard as his hammer upon his copper, beating against circumstances. But he struck stealthily on the outside, and she still more secretly on the inside of the establishment. She liked him. She liked the quiet, noiseless clean-cut presence of him. She liked that mysterious endurance in him, which endures in opposition, without any idea of victory. And she liked that peculiar added relentlessness, the disillusion in hostility, which belongs to after the war. Yes, if she belonged to any side, and to any clan, it was to his. Almost she could have found in her heart to go with him, and be a pariah gipsy-woman.

But she was born inside the pale. And she liked comfort, and a certain prestige. Even as a mere rector's daughter, one did have a certain prestige. And

she liked that. Also she liked to chip against the pillars of the temple, from the inside. She wanted to be safe under the temple roof. Yet she enjoyed chipping fragments off the supporting pillars. Doubtless many fragments had been whittled away from the pillars of the Philistine, before Samson pulled the temple down.

“I’m not sure one shouldn’t have one’s fling till one is twenty-six, and then give in, and marry!”

This was Lucille’s philosophy, learned from older women. Yvette was twenty-one. It meant she had five more years in which to have this precious fling. And the fling meant, at the moment, the gipsy. The marriage, at the age of twenty-six, meant Leo or Gerry.

So, a woman could eat her cake and have her bread and butter.

Yvette, pitched in gruesome, deadlocked hostility to the Saywell household, was very old and very wise: with the agedness and the wisdom of the young, which always overleaps the agedness and the wisdom of the old, or the elderly.

The second time, she met the gipsy by accident. It was March, and sunny weather, after unheard-of rain. Celandines were yellow in the hedges, and primroses among the rocks. But still there came a smell of sulphur from far-away steelworks, out of the steel-blue sky.

And yet it was spring.

Yvette was cycling slowly along by Codnor Gate, past the lime quarries, when she saw the gipsy coming away from the door of a stone cottage. His cart stood there in the road. He was returning with his brooms and copper things, to the cart.

She got down from her bicycle. As she saw him, she loved with curious tenderness, the slim lines of his body in the green jersey, the turn of his silent face. She felt she knew him better than she knew anybody on earth, even Lucille, and belonged to him, in some way, for ever.

“Have you made anything new and nice?” she asked innocently, looking at his copper things.

“I don’t think,” he said, glancing back at her.

The desire was still there, still curious and naked, in his eyes. But it was more remote, the boldness was diminished. There was a tiny glint, as if he might dislike her. But this dissolved again, as he saw her looking among his bits of copper and brasswork. She searched them diligently.

There was a little oval brass plate, with a queer figure like a palm-tree beaten upon it.

“I like that,” she said. “How much is it?”

“What you like,” he said.

This made her nervous: he seemed off-hand, almost mocking.

"I'd rather you said," she told him, looking up at him.

"You give me what you like," he said.

"No!" she said, suddenly. "If you won't tell me I won't have it."

"All right," he said. "Two shilling."

She found half-a-crown, and he drew from his pocket a handful of silver, from which he gave her her sixpence.

"The old gipsy dreamed something about you," he said, looking at her with curious, searching eyes.

"Did she!" cried Yvette, at once interested. "What was it?"

"She said: Be braver in your heart, or you lose your game. She said it this way: Be braver in your body, or your luck will leave you. And she said as well: Listen for the voice of water."

Yvette was very much impressed.

"And what does it mean?" she asked.

"I asked her," he said. "She says she don't know."

"Tell me again what it was," said Yvette.

"'Be braver in your body, or your luck will go.' And: 'Listen for the voice of water.'"

He looked in silence at her soft, pondering face. Something almost like a perfume seemed to flow from her young bosom direct to him, in a grateful connection.

"I'm to be braver in my body, and I'm to listen for the voice of water! All right!" she said. "I don't understand, but perhaps I shall."

She looked at him with clear eyes. Man or woman is made up of many selves. With one self, she loved this gipsy man. With many selves, she ignored him or had a distaste for him.

"You're not coming up to the Head no more?" he asked.

Again she looked at him absently.

"Perhaps I will," she said, "some time. Some time!"

"Spring weather!" he said, smiling faintly and glancing round at the sun.

"We're going to break camp soon, and go away."

"When?" she said.

"Perhaps next week."

"Where to?"

Again he made a move with his head.

"Perhaps up north," he said.

She looked at him.

"All right!" she said. "Perhaps I *will* come up before you go, and say goodbye!"

to your wife and to the old woman who sent me the message.”

NINE

Yvette did not keep her promise. The few March days were lovely, and she let them slip. She had a curious reluctance always, towards taking action, or making any real move of her own. She always wanted someone else to make a move for her, as if she did not want to play her own game of life.

She lived as usual, went out to her friends, to parties, and danced with the undiminished Leo. She wanted to go up and say goodbye to the gipsies. She wanted to. And nothing prevented her.

On the Friday afternoon especially she wanted to go. It was sunny, and the last yellow crocuses down the drive were in full blaze, wide open, the first bees rolling in them. The Papple rushed under the stone bridge, uncannily full, nearly filling the arches. There was the scent of a mezereon tree.

And she felt too lazy, too lazy, too lazy. She strayed in the garden by the river, half dreamy, expecting something. While the gleam of spring sun lasted, she would be out of doors. Indoors Granny, sitting back like some awful old prelate, in her bulk of black silk and her white lace cap, was warming her feet by the fire, and hearing everything that Aunt Nell had to say. Friday was Aunt Nell's day. She usually came for lunch, and left after an early tea. So the mother and the large, rather common daughter, who was a widow at the age of forty, sat gossiping by the fire, while Aunt Cissie prowled in and out. Friday was the rector's day for going to town: it was also the housemaid's half day.

Yvette sat on a wooden seat in the garden, only a few feet above the bank of the swollen river, which rolled a strange, uncanny mass of water. The crocuses were passing in the ornamental beds, the grass was dark green where it was mown, the laurels looked a little brighter. Aunt Cissie appeared at the top of the porch steps, and called to ask if Yvette wanted that early cup of tea. Because of the river just below, Yvette could not hear what Aunt Cissie said, but she guessed, and shook her head. An early cup of tea, indoors, when the sun actually shone? No thanks!

She was conscious of her gipsy, as she sat there musing in the sun. Her soul had the half painful, half easing knack of leaving her, and straying away to some place, to somebody that had caught her imagination. Some days she would be all the Framleys, even though she did not go near them. Some days, she was all the

time in spirit with the Eastwoods. And today it was the gipsies. She was up at their encampment in the quarry. She saw the man hammering his copper, lifting his head to look at the road; and the children playing in the horse-shelter: and the women, the gipsy's wife and the strong, elderly woman, coming home with their packs, along with the elderly man. For this afternoon, she felt intensely that *that* was home for her: the gipsy camp, the fire, the stool, the man with the hammer, the old crone.

It was part of her nature, to get these fits of yearning for some place she knew; to be in a certain place; with somebody who meant home to her. This afternoon it was the gipsy camp. And the man in the green jersey made it home to her. Just to be where he was, that was to be at home. The caravans, the brats, the other women: everything was natural to her, her home, as if she had been born there. She wondered if the gipsy was aware of her: if he could see her sitting on the stool by the fire; if he would lift his head and see her as she rose, looking at him slowly and significantly, turning towards the steps of his caravan. Did he know? Did he know?

Vaguely she looked up the steep of dark larch trees north of the house, where unseen the road climbed, going towards the Head. There was nothing, and her glance strayed down again. At the foot of the slope the river turned, thrown back harshly, ominously, against the low rocks across stream, then pouring past the garden to the bridge. It was unnaturally full, and whitey-muddy, and ponderous, "Listen for the voice of water," she said to herself. "No need to listen for it, if the voice means the noise!"

And again she looked at the swollen river breaking angrily as it came round the bend. Above it the black-looking kitchen garden hung, and the hard-natured fruit trees. Everything was on the tilt, facing south and south-west, for the sun. Behind, above the house and the kitchen garden hung the steep little wood of withered-seeming larches. The gardener was working in the kitchen garden, high up there, by the edge of the larch-wood.

She heard a call. It was Aunt Cissie and Aunt Nell. They were on the drive, waving Goodbye! Yvette waved back. Then Aunt Cissie, pitching her voice against the waters, called:

"I shan't be long. Don't forget Granny is alone!"

"All right!" screamed Yvette rather ineffectually.

And she sat on her bench and watched the two undignified, long-coated women walk slowly over the bridge and begin the curving climb on the opposite slope, Aunt Nell carrying a sort of suit-case in which she brought a few goods for Granny and took back vegetables or whatever the rectory garden or cupboard was yielding. Slowly the two figures diminished, on the whitish, up-curving

road, laboring slowly up toward Papplewick village. Aunt Cissie was going as far as the village for something.

The sun was yellowing to decline. What a pity! Oh what a pity the sunny day was going, and she would have to turn indoors, to those hateful rooms, and Granny! Aunt Cissie would be back directly: it was past five. And all the others would be arriving from town, rather irritable and tired, soon after six.

As she looked uneasily round, she heard, across the running of water, the sharp noise of a horse and cart rattling on the road hidden in the larch trees. The gardener was looking up too. Yvette turned away again, lingering, strolling by the full river a few paces, unwilling to go in; glancing up the road to see if Aunt Cissie were coming. If she saw her, she would go indoors.

She heard somebody shouting, and looked round. Down the path through the larch-trees the gipsy was bounding. The gardener, away beyond, was also running. Simultaneously she became aware of a great roar, which, before she could move, accumulated to a vast deafening snarl. The gipsy was gesticulating. She looked round, behind her.

And to her horror and amazement, round the bend of the river she saw a shaggy, tawny wavefront of water advancing like a wall of lions. The roaring sound wiped out everything. She was powerless, too amazed and wonder-struck, she wanted to see it.

Before she could think twice, it was near, a roaring cliff of water. She almost fainted with horror. She heard the scream of the gipsy, and looked up to see him bounding upon her, his black eyes starting out of his head.

“Run!” he screamed, seizing her arm.

And in the instant the first wave was washing her feet from under her, swirling, in the insane noise, which suddenly for some reason seemed like stillness, with a devouring flood over the garden. The horrible mowing of water!

The gipsy dragged her heavily, lurching, plunging, but still keeping foot-hold both of them, towards the house. She was barely conscious: as if the flood was in her soul.

There was one grass-banked terrace of the garden, near the path round the house. The gipsy clawed his way up this terrace to the dry level of the path, dragging her after him, and sprang with her past the windows to the porch steps. Before they got there, a new great surge of water came mowing, mowing trees down even, and mowed them down too.

Yvette felt herself gone in an agonising mill-race of icy water, whirled, with only the fearful grip of the gipsy’s hand on her wrist. They were both down and gone. She felt a dull but stunning bruise somewhere.

Then he pulled her up. He was up, streaming forth water, clinging to the stem

of the great wisteria that grew against the wall, crushed against the wall by the water. Her head was above water, he held her arm till it seemed dislocated: but she could not get her footing. With a ghastly sickness like a dream, she struggled and struggled, and could not get her feet. Only his hand was locked on her wrist.

He dragged her nearer till her one hand caught his leg. He nearly went down again. But the wisteria held him, and he pulled her up to him. She clawed at him, horribly, and got to her feet, he hanging on like a man torn in two, to the wisteria trunk.

The water was above her knees. The man and she looked into each other's ghastly streaming faces.

"Get to the steps!" he screamed.

It was only just round the corner: four strides! She looked at him: she could not go. His eyes glared on her like a tiger's, and he pushed her from him. She clung to the wall, and the water seemed to abate a little. Round the corner she staggered, but staggering, reeled and was pitched up against the cornice of the balustrade of the porch steps, the man after her.

They got on to the steps, when another roar was heard amid the roar, and the wall of the house shook. Up heaved the water round their legs again, and the gipsy had opened the hall door. In they poured with the water, reeling to the stairs. And as they did so, they saw the short but strange bulk of Granny emerge in the hall, away down from the dining-room door. She had her hands lifted and clawing, as the first water swirled round her legs, and her coffin-like mouth was opened in a hoarse scream.

Yvette was blind to everything but the stairs. Blind, unconscious of everything save the steps rising beyond the water, she clambered up like a wet, shuddering cat, in a state of unconsciousness. It was not till she was on the landing, dripping and shuddering till she could not stand erect, clinging to the banisters, while the house shook and the water raved below, that she was aware of the sodden gipsy, in paroxysms of coughing at the head of the stairs, his cap gone, his black hair over his eyes, peering between his washed-down hair at the sickening heave of water below, in the hall. Yvette, fainting, looked too, and saw Granny bob up, like a strange float, her face purple, her blind blue eyes bolting, spume hissing from her mouth. One old purple hand clawed at a banister rail, and held for a moment, showing the glint of a wedding ring.

The gipsy, who had coughed himself free and pushed back his hair, said to that awful float-like face below:

"Not good enough! Not good enough!"

With a low thud like thunder, the house was struck again, and shuttered, and a strange cracking, rattling, spitting noise began. Up heaved the water like a sea.

The hand was gone, all sign of anything was gone, but upheaving water.

Yvette turned in blind unconscious frenzy, staggering like a wet cat to the upper stair-case, and climbing swiftly. It was not till she was at the door of her room that she stopped, paralysed by the sound of a sickening, tearing crash, while the house swayed.

“The house is coming down!” yelled the green-white face of the gipsy, in her face.

He glared into her crazed face.

“Where is the chimney? the back chimney? — which room? The chimney will stand — ”

He glared with strange ferocity into her face, forcing her to understand. And she nodded with a strange, crazed poise, nodded quite serenely, saying: “In here! In here! It’s all right.”

They entered her room, which had a narrow fire-place. It was a back room with two windows, one on each side the great chimney-flue. The gipsy, coughing bitterly and trembling in every limb, went to the window to look out.

Below, between the house and the steep rise of the hill, was a wild mill-race, of water rushing with refuse, including Rover’s green dog-kennel. The gipsy coughed and coughed, and gazed down blankly. Tree after tree went down, mown by the water, which must have been ten feet deep.

Shuddering and pressing his sodden arms on his sodden breast, a look of resignation on his livid face, he turned to Yvette. A fearful tearing noise tore the house, then there was a deep, watery explosion. Something had gone down, some part of the house, the floor heaved and wavered beneath them. For some moments both were suspended, stupefied. Then he roused.

“Not good enough! Not good enough! This will stand. This here will stand. See that chimney! like a tower. Yes! All right! All right. You take your clothes off and go to bed. You’ll die of the cold.”

“It’s all right! It’s quite all right!” she said to him, sitting on a chair and looking up into his face with her white, insane little face, round which the hair was plastered.

“No!” he cried. “No! Take your things off and I rub you with this towel. I rub myself. If the house falls then die warm. If it don’t fall, then live, not die of pneumonia.”

Coughing, shuddering violently, he pulled up his jersey hem and wrestled with all his shuddering, cold-cracked might, to get off his wet, tight jersey.

“Help me!” he cried, his face muffled.

She seized the edge of the jersey, obediently, and pulled with all her might. The garment came over his head, and he stood in his braces.

“Take your things off! Rub with this towel!” he commanded ferociously, the savageness of the war on him. And like a thing obsessed, he pushed himself out of his trousers, and got out of his wet, clinging shirt, emerging slim and livid, shuddering in every fibre with cold and shock.

He seized a towel, and began quickly to rub his body, his teeth chattering like plates rattling together. Yvette dimly saw it was wise. She tried to get out of her dress. He pulled the horrible wet death-gripping thing off her, then, resuming his rubbing, went to the door, tip-toeing on the wet floor.

There he stood, naked, towel in hand, petrified. He looked west, towards where the upper landing window had been, and was looking into the sunset, over an insane sea of waters, bristling with uptorn trees and refuse. The end corner of the house, where porch had been, and the stairs, had gone. The wall had fallen, leaving the floor sticking out. The stairs had gone.

Motionless, he watched the water. A cold wind blew in upon him. He clenched his rattling teeth with a great effort of will, and turned into the room again, closing the door.

Yvette, naked, shuddering so much that she was sick, was trying to wipe herself dry.

“All right!” he cried. “All right! The water don’t rise no more! All right!”

With his towel he began to rub her, himself shaking all over, but holding her gripped by the shoulder, and slowly, numbedly rubbing her tender body, even trying to rub up into some dryness the pitiful hair of her small head. Suddenly he left off.

“Better lie in the bed,” he commanded, “I want to rub myself.”

His teeth went snap-snap-snap-snap, in great snaps, cutting off his words. Yvette crept shaking and semi-conscious into her bed. He, making strained efforts to hold himself still and rub himself warm, went again to the north window, to look out.

The water had risen a little. The sun had gone down, and there was a reddish glow. He rubbed his hair into a black, wet tangle, then paused for breath, in a sudden access of shuddering, then looked out again, then rubbed again on his breast, and began to cough afresh, because of the water he had swallowed. His towel was red: he had hurt himself somewhere: but he felt nothing.

There was still the strange huge noise of water, and the horrible bump of things bumping against the walls. The wind was rising with sundown, cold and hard. The house shook with explosive thuds, and weird, weird frightening noises came up.

A terror creeping over his soul, he went again to the door. The wind, roaring with the waters, blew in as he opened it. Through the awesome gap in the house

he saw the world, the waters, the chaos of horrible waters, the twilight, the perfect new moon high above the sunset, a faint thing, and clouds pushing dark into the sky, on the cold, blustery wind.

Clenching his teeth again, fear mingling with resignation, or fatalism, in his soul, he went into the room and closed the door, picking up her towel to see if it were drier than his own, and less blood-stained, again rubbing his head, and going to the window.

He turned away, unable to control his spasms of shivering. Yvette had disappeared right under the bed-clothes, and nothing of her was visible but a shivering mound under the white quilt. He laid his hand on this shivering mound, as if for company. It did not stop shivering.

“All right!” he said. “All right! Water’s going down.”

She suddenly uncovered her head and peered out at him from a white face. She peered into his greenish, curiously calm face, semi-conscious. His teeth were chattering unheeded, as he gazed down at her, his black eyes still full of the fire of life and a certain vagabond calm of fatalistic resignation.

“Warm me!” she moaned, with chattering teeth. “Warm me! I shall die of shivering.”

A terrible convulsion went through her curled-up white body, enough indeed to rupture her and cause her to die.

The gipsy nodded, and took her in his arms, and held her in a clasp like a vice, to still his own shuddering. He himself was shuddering fearfully, and only semi-conscious. It was the shock.

The vice-like grip of his arms round her seemed to her the only stable point in her consciousness. It was a fearful relief to her heart, which was strained to bursting. And though his body, wrapped round her strange and lithe and powerful, like tentacles, rippled with shuddering as an electric current, still the rigid tension of the muscles that held her clenched steadied them both, and gradually the sickening violence of the shuddering, caused by shock, abated, in his body first, then in hers, and the warmth revived between them. And as it roused, their tortured, semi-conscious minds became unconscious, they passed away into sleep.

TEN

The sun was shining in heaven before men were able to get across the Papple with ladders. The bridge was gone. But the flood had abated, and the house, that leaned forwards as if it were making a stiff bow to the stream, stood now in mud and wreckage, with a great heap of fallen masonry and debris at the south-west corner. Awful were the gaping mouths of rooms!

Inside, there was no sign of life. But across-stream the gardener had come to reconnoitre, and the cook appeared, thrilled with curiosity. She had escaped from the back door and up through the larches to the high-road, when she saw the gipsy bound past the house: thinking he was coming to murder somebody. At the little top gate she had found his cart standing. The gardener had led the horse away to the Red Lion up at Darley, when night had fallen.

This the men from Papplewick learned when at last they got across the stream with ladders, and to the back of the house. They were nervous, fearing a collapse of the building, whose front was all undermined and whose back was choked up. They gazed with horror at the silent shelves of the rector's rows of books, in his torn-open study; at the big brass bedstead of Granny's room, the bed so deep and comfortably made, but one brass leg of the bedstead perched tentatively over the torn void; at the wreckage of the maid's room upstairs. The housemaid and the cook wept. Then a man climbed in cautiously through a smashed kitchen window, into the jungle and morass of the ground floor. He found the body of the old woman: or at least he saw her foot, in its flat black slipper, muddily protruding from a mud-heap of debris. And he fled.

The gardener said he was sure that Miss Yvette was not in the house. He had seen her and the gipsy swept away. But the policeman insisted on a search, and the Framley boys rushing up at last, the ladders were roped together. Then the whole party set up a loud yell. But without result. No answer from within.

A ladder was up, Bob Framley climbed, smashed a window, and clambered into Aunt Cissie's room. The perfect homely familiarity of everything terrified him like ghosts. The house might go down any minute.

They had just got the ladder up to the top floor, when men came running from Darley, saying the old gipsy had been to the Red Lion for the horse and cart, leaving word that his son had seen Yvette at the top of the house. But by that time the policeman was smashing the window of Yvette's room.

Yvette, fast asleep, started from under the bed-clothes with a scream, as the glass flew. She clutched the sheets round her nakedness. The policeman uttered a startled yell, which he converted into a cry of: Miss Yvette! Miss Yvette! He turned round on the ladder, and shouted to the faces below.

“Miss Yvette’s in bed! — in bed!”

And he perched there on the ladder, an unmarried man, clutching the window in peril, not knowing what to do.

Yvette sat up in bed, her hair in a matted tangle, and stared with wild eyes, clutching up the sheets at her naked breast. She had been so very fast asleep, that she was still not there.

The policeman, terrified at the flabby ladder, climbed into the room, saying:

“Don’t be frightened, Miss! Don’t you worry any more about it. You’re safe now.”

And Yvette, so dazed, thought he meant the gipsy. Where was the gipsy? This was the first thing in her mind. Where was her gipsy of this world’s-end night?

He was gone! He was gone! And a policeman was in the room! A policeman!

She rubbed her hand over her dazed brow.

“If you’ll get dressed, Miss, we can get you down to safe ground. The house is likely to fall. I suppose there’s nobody in the other rooms?”

He stepped gingerly into the passage, and gazed in terror through the torn-out end of the house, and far-off saw the rector coming down in a motor-car, on the sunlit hill.

Yvette, her face gone numb and disappointed, got up quickly, closing the bed-clothes, and looked at herself a moment, then opened her drawers for clothing. She dressed herself, then looked in a mirror, and saw her matted hair with horror. Yet she did not care. The gipsy was gone, anyhow.

Her own clothes lay in a sodden heap. There was a great sodden place on the carpet where his had been, and two blood-stained filthy towels. Otherwise there was no sign of him.

She was tugging at her hair when the policeman tapped at her door. She called him to come in. He saw with relief that she was dressed and in her right senses.

“We’d better get out of the house as soon as possible, Miss,” he re-iterated. “It might fall any minute.”

“Really!” said Yvette calmly. “Is it as bad as that?”

There were great shouts. She had to go to the window. There, below, was the rector, his arms wide open, tears streaming down his face.

“I’m perfectly all right, Daddy!” she said, with the calmness of her contradictory feelings. She would keep the gipsy a secret from him. At the same time, tears ran down her face.

“Don’t you cry, Miss, don’t you cry! The rector’s lost his mother, but he’s thanking his stars to have his daughter. We all thought you were gone as well, we did that!”

“Is Granny drowned?” said Yvette.

“I’m afraid she is, poor lady!” said the policeman, with a grave face.

Yvette wept away into her hanky, which she had had to fetch from a drawer.

“Dare you go down that ladder, Miss?” said the policeman.

Yvette looked at the sagging depth of it, and said promptly to herself: No! Not for anything! — But then she remembered the gipsy’s saying: “Be braver in the body.”

“Have you been in all the other rooms?” she said, in her keeping, turning to the policeman.

“Yes, Miss! But you was the only person in the house, you know, save the old lady. Cook got away in time, and Lizzie was up at her mother’s. It was only you and the poor old lady we was fretting about. Do you think you dare go down that ladder?”

“Oh, yes!” said Yvette with indifference. The gipsy was gone anyway.

And now the rector in torment watched his tall, slender daughter slowly stepping backwards down the sagging ladder, the policeman, peering heroically from the smashed window, holding the ladder’s top ends.

At the foot of the ladder Yvette appropriately fainted in her father’s arms, and was borne away with him, in the car, by Bob, to the Framley home. There the poor Lucille, a ghost of ghosts, wept with relief till she had hysterics, and even Aunt Cissie cried out among her tears: “Let the old be taken and the young spared! Oh I *can’t* cry for the Mater, now Yvette is spared!”

And she wept gallons.

The flood was caused by the sudden bursting of the great reservoir, up in Papple Highdale, five miles from the rectory. It was found out later that an ancient, perhaps even a Roman mine tunnel, unsuspected, undreamed of, beneath the reservoir dam, had collapsed, undermining the whole dam. That was why the Papple had been, for the last day, so uncannily full. And then the dam had burst.

The rector and the two girls stayed on at the Framleys’, till a new home could be found. Yvette did not attend Granny’s funeral. She stayed in bed.

Telling her tale, she only told how the gipsy had got her inside the porch, and she had crawled to the stairs out of the water. It was known that he had escaped: the old gipsy had said so, when he fetched the horse and cart from the Red Lion. Yvette could tell little. She was vague, confused, she seemed hardly to remember anything. But that was just like her.

It was Bob Framley who said:

“You know, I think that gipsy deserves a medal.”

The whole family was suddenly struck.

“Oh, we *ought* to thank him!” cried Lucille.

The rector himself went with Bob in the car. But the quarry was deserted. The gipsies had lifted camp and gone, no one knew whither.

And Yvette, lying in bed, moaned in her heart: Oh, I love him! I love him! I love him! — The grief over him kept her prostrate. Yet practically, she too was acquiescent in the fact of his disappearance. Her young soul knew the wisdom of it.

But after Granny’s funeral, she received a little letter, dated from some unknown place.

“Dear Miss, I see in the paper you are all right after your ducking, as is the same with me. I hope I see you again one day, maybe at Tideswell cattle fair, or maybe we come that way again. I come that day to say goodbye! and I never said it, well, the water give no time, but I live in hopes. Your obdt. servant Joe Boswell.”

And only then she realised that he had a name.

THE END

THE ESCAPED COCK



Also known as 'The Man Who Died'

I

There was a peasant near Jerusalem who acquired a young gamecock which looked a shabby little thing, but which put on brave feathers as spring advanced, and was resplendent with arched and orange neck by the time the fig trees were letting out leaves from their end-tips.

This peasant was poor, he lived in a cottage of mud-brick, and had only a dirty little inner courtyard with a tough fig tree for all his territory. He worked hard among the vines and olives and wheat of his master, then came home to sleep in the mud-brick cottage by the path. But he was proud of his young rooster. In the shut-in yard were three shabby hens which laid small eggs, shed the few feathers they had, and made a disproportionate amount of dirt. There was also, in a corner under a straw roof, a dull donkey that often went out with the peasant to work, but sometimes stayed at home. And there was the peasant's wife, a black-browed youngish woman who did not work too hard. She threw a little grain, or the remains of the porridge mess, to the fowls, and she cut green fodder with a sickle for the ass.

The young cock grew to a certain splendour. By some freak of destiny, he was a dandy rooster, in that dirty little yard with three patchy hens. He learned to crane his neck and give shrill answers to the crowing of other cocks, beyond the walls, in a world he knew nothing of. But there was a special fiery colour to his crow, and the distant calling of the other cocks roused him to unexpected outbursts.

"How he sings," said the peasant, as he got up and pulled his day-shirt over his head.

"He is good for twenty hens," said the wife.

The peasant went out and looked with pride at his young rooster. A saucy, flamboyant bird, that has already made the final acquaintance of the three tattered hens. But the cockerel was tipping his head, listening to the challenge of far-off unseen cocks, in the unknown world. Ghost voices, crowing at him mysteriously out of limbo. He answered with a ringing defiance, never to be

daunted.

“He will surely fly away one of these days,” said the peasant’s wife.

So they lured him with grain, caught him, though he fought with all his wings and feet, and they tied a cord round his shank, fastening it against the spur; and they tied the other end of the cord to the post that held up the donkey’s straw pent-roof.

The young cock, freed, marched with a prancing stride of indignation away from the humans, came to the end of his string, gave a tug and a hitch of his tied leg, fell over for a moment, scuffled frantically on the unclean earthen floor, to the horror of the shabby hens, then with a sickening lurch, regained his feet, and stood to think. The peasant and the peasant’s wife laughed heartily, and the young cock heard them. And he knew, with a gloomy, foreboding kind of knowledge that he was tied by the leg.

He no longer pranced and ruffled and forged his feathers. He walked within the limits of his tether sombrely. Still he gobbled up the best bits of food. Still, sometimes, he saved an extra-best bit for his favourite hen of the moment. Still he pranced with quivering, rocking fierceness upon such of his harem as came nonchalantly within range, and gave off the invisible lure. And still he crowed defiance to the cock-crows that showered up out of limbo, in the dawn.

But there was now a grim voracity in the way he gobbled his food, and a pinched triumph in the way he seized upon the shabby hens. His voice, above all, had lost the full gold of its clangour. He was tied by the leg, and he knew it. Body, soul and spirit were tied by that string.

Underneath, however, the life in him was grimly unbroken. It was the cord that should break. So one morning, just before the light of dawn, rousing from his slumbers with a sudden wave of strength, he leaped forward on his wings, and the string snapped. He gave a wild, strange squawk, rose in one lift to the top of the wall, and there he crowed a loud and splitting crow. So loud, it woke the peasant.

At the same time, at the same hour before dawn, on the same morning, a man awoke from a long sleep in which he was tied up. He woke numb and cold, inside a carved hole in the rock. Through all the long sleep his body had been full of hurt, and it was still full of hurt. He did not open his eyes. Yet he knew that he was awake, and numb, and cold, and rigid, and full of hurt, and tied up. His face was banded with cold bands, his legs were bandaged together. Only his hands were loose.

He could move if he wanted: he knew that. But he had no want. Who would want to come back from the dead? A deep, deep nausea stirred in him, at the premonition of movement. He resented already the fact of the strange,

incalculable moving that had already taken place in him: the moving back into consciousness. He had not wished it. He had wanted to stay outside, in the place where even memory is stone dead.

But now, something had returned to him, like a returned letter, and in that return he lay overcome with a sense of nausea. Yet suddenly his hands moved. They lifted up, cold, heavy and sore. Yet they lifted up, to drag away the cloth from his face, and push at the shoulder-bands. Then they fell again, cold, heavy, numb, and sick with having moved even so much, unspeakably unwilling to move further.

With his face cleared and his shoulders free, he lapsed again, and lay dead, resting on the cold nullity of being dead. It was the most desirable. And almost, he had it complete: the utter cold nullity of being outside.

Yet when he was most nearly gone, suddenly, driven by an ache at the wrists, his hands rose and began pushing at the bandages of his knees, his feet began to stir, even while his breast lay cold and dead still.

And at last, the eyes opened. On to the dark. The same dark! Yet perhaps there was a pale chink, of the all-disturbing light, prising open the pure dark. He could not lift his head. The eyes closed. And again it was finished.

Then suddenly he leaned up, and the great world reeled. Bandages fell away. And narrow walls of rock closed upon him, and gave the new anguish of imprisonment. There were chinks of light. With a wave of strength that came from revulsion, he leaned forward, in that narrow well of rock, and leaned frail hands on the rock near the chinks of light.

Strength came from somewhere, from revulsion; there was a crash and a wave of light, and the dead man was crouching in his lair, facing the animal onrush of light. Yet it was hardly dawn. And the strange, piercing keenness of daybreak's sharp breath was on him. It meant full awakening.

Slowly, slowly he crept down from the cell of rock with the caution of the bitterly wounded. Bandages and linen and perfume fell away, and he crouched on the ground against the wall of rock, to recover oblivion. But he saw his hurt feet touching the earth again, with unspeakable pain, the earth they had meant to touch no more, and he saw his thin legs that had died, and pain unknowable, pain like utter bodily disillusion, filled him so full that he stood up, with one torn hand on the ledge of the tomb.

To be back! To be back again, after all that! He saw the linen swathing-bands fallen round his dead feet, and stooping, he picked them up, folded them, and laid them back in the rocky cavity from which he had emerged. Then he took the perfumed linen sheet, wrapped it round him as a mantle, and turned away, to the wanness of the chill dawn.

He was alone; and having died, was even beyond loneliness.

Filled still with the sickness of unspeakable disillusion, the man stepped with wincing feet down the rocky slope, past the sleeping soldiers, who lay wrapped in their woollen mantles under the wild laurels. Silent, on naked scarred feet, wrapped in a white linen shroud, he glanced down for a moment on the inert, heap-like bodies of the soldiers. They were repulsive, a slow squalor of limbs, yet he felt a certain compassion. He passed on towards the road, lest they should wake.

Having nowhere to go, he turned from the city that stood on her hills. He slowly followed the road away from the town, past the olives, under which purple anemones were drooping in the chill of dawn, and rich-green herbage was pressing thick. The world, the same as ever, the natural world, thronging with greenness, a nightingale winsomely, wistfully, coaxingly calling from the bushes beside a runnel of water, in the world, the natural world of morning and evening, forever undying, from which he had died.

He went on, on scarred feet, neither of this world nor of the next. Neither here nor there, neither seeing nor yet sightless, he passed dimly on, away from the city and its precincts, wondering why he should be travelling, yet driven by a dim, deep nausea of disillusion, and a resolution of which he was not even aware.

Advancing in a kind of half-consciousness under the dry stone wall of the olive orchard, he was roused by the shrill, wild crowing of a cock just near him, a sound which made him shiver as if electricity had touched him. He saw a black and orange cock on a bough above the road, then running through the olives of the upper level, a peasant in a grey woollen shirt-tunic. Leaping out of greenness, came the black and orange cock with the red comb, his tail-feathers streaming lustrous.

“O, stop him, master!” called the peasant. “My escaped cock!”

The man addressed, with a sudden flicker of smile, opened his great white wings of a shroud in front of the leaping bird. The cock fell back with a squawk and a flutter, the peasant jumped forward, there was a terrific beating of wings and whirring of feathers, then the peasant had the escaped cock safely under his arm, its wings shut down, its face crazily craning forward, its round eyes goggling from its white chops.

“It’s my escaped cock!” said the peasant, soothing the bird with his left hand, as he looked perspiringly up into the face of the man wrapped in white linen.

The peasant changed countenance, and stood transfixed, as he looked into the dead-white face of the man who had died. That dead-white face, so still, with the black beard growing on it as if in death; and those wide-open, black, sombre

eyes, that had died! and those washed scars on the waxy forehead! The slow-blooded man of the field let his jaw drop, in childish inability to meet the situation.

“Don’t be afraid,” said the man in the shroud. “I am not dead. They took me down too soon. So I have risen up. Yet if they discover me, they will do it all over again...”

He spoke in a voice of old disgust. Humanity! Especially humanity in authority! There was only one thing it could do. He looked with black, indifferent eyes into the quick, shifty eyes of the peasant. The peasant quailed, and was powerless under the look of deathly indifference and strange, cold resoluteness. He could only say the one thing he was afraid to say:

“Will you hide in my house, master?”

“I will rest there. But if you tell anyone, you know what will happen. You will have to go before a judge.”

“Me! I shan’t speak. Let us be quick!”

The peasant looked round in fear, wondering sulkily why he had let himself in for this doom. The man with scarred feet climbed painfully up to the level of the olive garden, and followed the sullen, hurrying peasant across the green wheat among the olive trees. He felt the cool silkiness of the young wheat under his feet that had been dead, and the roughishness of its separate life was apparent to him. At the edges of rocks, he saw the silky, silvery-haired buds of the scarlet anemone bending downwards. And they, too, were in another world. In his own world he was alone, utterly alone. These things around him were in a world that had never died. But he himself had died, or had been killed from out of it, and all that remained now was the great void nausea of utter disillusion.

They came to a clay cottage, and the peasant waited dejectedly for the other man to pass.

“Pass!” he said. “Pass! We have not been seen.”

The man in white linen entered the earthen room, taking with him the aroma of strange perfumes. The peasant closed the door, and passed through the inner doorway into the yard, where the ass stood within the high walls, safe from being stolen. There the peasant, in great disquietude, tied up the cock. The man with the waxen face sat down on a mat near the hearth, for he was spent and barely conscious. Yet he heard outside the whispering of the peasant to his wife, for the woman had been watching from the roof.

Presently they came in, and the woman hid her face. She poured water, and put bread and dried figs on a wooden platter.

“Eat, master!” said the peasant. “Eat! No one has seen.”

But the stranger had no desire for food. Yet he moistened a little bread in the

water, and ate it, since life must be. But desire was dead in him, even for food and drink. He had risen without desire, without even the desire to live, empty save for the all-overwhelming disillusion that lay like nausea where his life had been. Yet perhaps, deeper even than disillusion, was a desireless resoluteness, deeper even than consciousness.

The peasant and his wife stood near the door, watching. They saw with terror the livid wounds on the thin, waxy hands and the thin feet of the stranger, and the small lacerations in the still dead forehead. They smelled with terror the scent of rich perfumes that came from him, from his body. And they looked at the fine, snowy, costly linen. Perhaps really he was a dead king, from the region of terrors. And he was still cold and remote in the region of death, with perfumes coming from his transparent body as if from some strange flower.

Having with difficulty swallowed some, the moistened bread, he lifted his eyes to them. He saw them as they were: limited, meagre in their life, without any splendour of gesture and of courage. But they were what they were, slow, inevitable parts of the natural world. They had no nobility, but fear made them compassionate.

And the stranger had compassion on them again, for he knew that they would respond best to gentleness, giving back a clumsy gentleness again.

“Do not be afraid,” he said to them gently. “Let me stay a little while with you. I shall not stay long. And then I shall go away for ever. But do not be afraid. No harm will come to you through me.”

They believed him at once, yet the fear did not leave them. And they said:

“Stay, master, while ever you will. Rest! Rest quietly!” But they were afraid.

So he let them be, and the peasant went away with the ass. The sun had risen bright, and in the dark house with the door shut, the man was again as if in the tomb. So he said to the woman: “I would lie in the yard.”

And she swept the yard for him, and laid him a mat, and he lay down under the wall in the morning sun. There he saw the first green leaves spurting like flames from the ends of the enclosed fig tree, out of the bareness to the sky of spring above. But the man who had died could not look, he only lay quite still in the sun, which was not yet too hot, and had no desire in him, not even to move. But he lay with his thin legs in the sun, his black, perfumed hair falling into the hollows of his neck, and his thin, colourless arms utterly inert. As he lay there, the hens clucked, and scratched, and the escaped cock, caught and tied by the leg again, cowered in a corner.

The peasant woman was frightened. She came peeping, and, seeing him never move, feared to have a dead man in the yard. But the sun had grown stronger, he opened his eyes and looked at her. And now she was frightened of the man who

was alive, but spoke nothing.

He opened his eyes, and saw the world again bright as glass. It was life, in which he had no share any more. But it shone outside him, blue sky, and a bare fig tree with little jets of green leaf. Bright as glass, and he was not of it, for desire had failed.

Yet he was there, and not extinguished. The day passed in a kind of coma, and at evening he went into the house. The peasant man came home, but he was frightened, and had nothing to say. The stranger, too, ate of the mess of beans, a little. Then he washed his hands and turned to the wall, and was silent. The peasants were silent too. They watched their guest sleep. Sleep was so near death he could still sleep.

Yet when the sun came up, he went again to lie in the yard. The sun was the one thing that drew him and swayed him, and he still wanted to feel the cool air of the morning in his nostrils, see the pale sky overhead. He still hated to be shut up.

As he came out, the young cock crowed. It was a diminished, pinched cry, but there was that in the voice of the bird stronger than chagrin. It was the necessity to live, and even to cry out the triumph of life. The man who had died stood and watched the cock who had escaped and been caught, ruffling himself up, rising forward on his toes, throwing up his head, and parting his beak in another challenge from life to death. The brave sounds rang out, and though they were diminished by the cord round the bird's leg, they were not cut off. The man who had died looked nakedly on life, and saw a vast resoluteness everywhere flinging itself up in stormy or subtle wave-crests, foam-tips emerging out of the blue invisible, a black and orange cock or the green flame-tongues out of the extremes of the fig tree. They came forth, these things and creatures of spring, glowing with desire and with assertion. They came like crests of foam, out of the blue flood of the invisible desire, out of the vast invisible sea of strength, and they came coloured and tangible, evanescent, yet deathless in their coming. The man who had died looked on the great swing into existence of things that had not died, but he saw no longer their tremulous desire to exist and to be. He heard instead their ringing, ringing, defiant challenge to all other things existing.

The man lay still, with eyes that had died now wide open and darkly still, seeing the everlasting resoluteness of life. And the cock, with the flat, brilliant glance, glanced back at him, with a bird's half-seeing look. And always the man who had died saw not the bird alone, but the short, sharp wave of life of which the bird was the crest. He watched the queer, beaky motion of the creature as it gobbled into itself the scraps of food; its glancing of the eye of life, ever alert and watchful, over-weening and cautious, and the voice of its life, crowing

triumph and assertion, yet strangled by a cord of circumstance. He seemed to hear the queer speech of very life, as the cock triumphantly imitated the clucking of the favourite hen, when she had laid an egg, a clucking which still had, in the male bird, the hollow chagrin of the cord round his leg. And when the man threw a bit of bread to the cock, it called with an extraordinary cooing tenderness, tousling and saving the morsel for the hens. The hens ran up greedily, and carried the morsel away beyond the reach of the string.

Then, walking complacently after them, suddenly the male bird's leg would hitch at the end of his tether, and he would yield with a kind of collapse. His flag fell, he seemed to diminish, he would huddle in the shade. And he was young, his tail-feathers, glossy as they were, were not fully grown. It was not till evening again that the tide of life in him made him forget. Then when his favourite hen came strolling unconcernedly near him, emitting the lure, he pounced on her with all his feathers vibrating. And the man who had died watched the unsteady, rocking vibration of the bent bird, and it was not the bird he saw, but one wave-tip of life overlapping for a minute another, in the tide of the swaying ocean of life. And the destiny of life seemed more fierce and compulsive to him even than the destiny of death. The doom of death was a shadow compared to the raging destiny of life, the determined surge of life.

At twilight the peasant came home with the ass, and he said: "Master! It is said that the body was stolen from the garden, and the tomb is empty, and the soldiers are taken away, accursed Romans! And the women are there to weep."

The man who had died looked at the man who had not died.

"It is well," he said. "Say nothing, and we are safe."

And the peasant was relieved. He looked rather dirty and stupid, and even as much flaminess as that of the young cock, which he had tied by the leg, would never glow in him. He was without fire. But the man who had died thought to himself:

"Why, then, should he be lifted up? Clods of earth are turned over for refreshment, they are not to be lifted up. Let the earth remain earthy, and hold its own against the sky. I was to seek to lift it up. I was wrong to try to interfere. The ploughshare of devastation will be set in the soil of Judea, and the life of this peasant will be overturned like the sods of the field. No man can save the earth from tillage. It is tillage, not salvation..."

So he saw the man, the peasant, with compassion; but the man who had died no longer wished to interfere in the soul of the man who had not died, and who could never die, save to return to earth. Let him return to earth in his own good hour, and let no one try to interfere when the earth claims her own.

So the man with scars let the peasant go from him, for the peasant had no

rebirth in him. Yet the man who had died said to himself: "He is my host."

And at dawn, when he was better, the man who had died rose up, and on slow, sore feet retraced his way to the garden. For he had been betrayed in a garden, and buried in a garden. And as he turned round the screen of laurels, near the rock-face, he saw a woman hovering by the tomb, a woman in blue and yellow. She peeped again into the mouth of the hole, that was like a deep cupboard. But still there was nothing. And she wrung her hands and wept. And as she turned away, she saw the man in white, standing by the laurels, and she gave a cry, thinking it might be a spy, and she said:

"They have taken him away!"

So he said to her:

"Madeleine!"

Then she reeled as if she would fall, for she knew him. And he said to her:

"Madeleine! Do not be afraid. I am alive. They took me down too soon, so I came back to life. Then I was sheltered in a house."

She did not know what to say, but fell at his feet to kiss them.

"Don't touch me, Madeleine," he said. "Not yet! I am not yet healed and in touch with men."

So she wept because she did not know what to do. And he said:

"Let us go aside, among the bushes, where we can speak unseen."

So in her blue mantle and her yellow robe, she followed him among the trees, and he sat down under a myrtle bush. And he said:

"I am not yet quite come to. Madeleine, what is to be done next?"

"Master!" she said. "Oh, we have wept for you! And will you come back to us?"

"What is finished is finished, and for me the end is past," he said. "The stream will run till no more rains fill it, then it will dry up. For me, that life is over."

"And will you give up your triumph?" she said sadly.

"My triumph," he said, "is that I am not dead. I have outlived my mission and know no more of it. It is my triumph. I have survived the day and the death of my interference, and am still a man. I am young still, Madeleine, not even come to middle age. I am glad all that is over. It had to be. But now I am glad it is over, and the day of my interference is done. The teacher and the saviour are dead in me; now I can go about my business, into my own single life."

She heard him, and did not fully understand. But what he said made her feel disappointed.

"But you will come back to us?" she said, insisting.

"I don't know what I shall do," he said. "When I am healed, I shall know better. But my mission is over, and my teaching is finished, and death has saved

me from my own salvation. Oh, Madeleine, I want to take my single way in life, which is my portion. My public life is over, the life of my self-importance. Now I can wait on life, and say nothing, and have no one betray me. I wanted to be greater than the limits of my hands and feet, so I brought betrayal on myself. And I know I wronged Judas, my poor Judas. For I have died, and now I know my own limits. Now I can live without striving to sway others any more. For my reach ends in my fingertips, and my stride is no longer than the ends of my toes. Yet I would embrace multitudes, I who have never truly embraced even one. But Judas and the high priests saved me from my own salvation, and soon I can turn to my destiny like a bather in the sea at dawn, who has just come down to the shore alone.”

“Do you want to be alone henceforward?” she asked. “And was your mission nothing? Was it all untrue?”

“Nay!” he said. “Neither were your lovers in the past nothing. They were much to you, but you took more than you gave. Then you came to me for salvation from your own excess. And I, in my mission, I too ran to excess. I gave more than I took, and that also is woe and vanity. So Pilate and the high priests saved me from my own excessive salvation. Don’t run to excess now in living, Madeleine. It only means another death.”

She pondered bitterly, for the need for excessive giving was in her, and she could not bear to be denied.

“And will you not come back to us?” she said. “Have you risen for yourself alone?”

He heard the sarcasm in her voice, and looked at her beautiful face which still was dense with excessive need for salvation from the woman she had been, the female who had caught men at her will. The cloud of necessity was on her, to be saved from the old, wilful Eve, who had embraced many men and taken more than she gave. Now the other doom was on her. She wanted to give without taking. And that, too, is hard, and cruel to the warm body.

“I have not risen from the dead in order to seek death again,” he said.

She glanced up at him, and saw the weariness settling again on his waxy face, and the vast disillusion in his dark eyes, and the underlying indifference. He felt her glance, and said to himself:

“Now my own followers will want to do me to death again, for having risen up different from their expectation.”

“But you will come to us, to see us, us who love you?” she said.

He laughed a little and said:

“Ah, yes.” Then he added: “Have you a little money? Will you give me a little money? I owe it.”

She had not much, but it pleased her to give it to him.

“Do you think,” he said to her, “that I might come and live with you in your house?”

She looked up at him with large blue eyes, that gleamed strangely.

“Now?” she said with peculiar triumph.

And he, who shrank now from triumph of any sort, his own or another’s, said:

“Not now! Later, when I am healed, and...and I am in touch with the flesh.”

The words faltered in him. And in his heart he knew he would never go to live in her house. For the flicker of triumph had gleamed in her eyes; the greed of giving. But she murmured in a humming rapture:

“Ah, you know I would give up everything to you.”

“Nay!” he said. “I didn’t ask that.”

A revulsion from all the life he had known came over him again, the great nausea of disillusion, and the spear-thrust through his bowels. He crouched under the myrtle bushes, without strength. Yet his eyes were open. And she looked at him again, and she saw that it was not the Messiah. The Messiah had not risen. The enthusiasm and the burning purity were gone, and the rapt youth. His youth was dead. This man was middle-aged and disillusioned, with a certain terrible indifference, and a resoluteness which love would never conquer. This was not the Master she had so adored, the young, flamy, unphysical exalter of her soul. This was nearer to the lovers she had known of old, but with a greater indifference to the personal issue, and a lesser susceptibility.

She was thrown out of the balance of her rapturous, anguished adoration. This risen man was the death of her dream.

“You should go now,” he said to her. “Do not touch me, I am in death. I shall come again here, on the third day. Come if you will, at dawn. And we will speak again.”

She went away, perturbed and shattered. Yet as she went, her mind discarded the bitterness of the reality, and she conjured up rapture and wonder, that the Master was risen and was not dead. He was risen, the Saviour, the exalter, the wonder-worker! He was risen, but not as man; as pure God, who should not be touched by flesh, and who should be rapt away into Heaven. It was the most glorious and most ghostly of the miracles.

Meanwhile the man who had died gathered himself together at last, and slowly made his way to the peasant’s house. He was glad to go back to them, and away from Madeleine and his own associates. For the peasants had the inertia of earth and would let him rest, and as yet, would put no compulsion on him.

The woman was on the roof, looking for him. She was afraid that he had gone away. His presence in the house had become like gentle wine to her. She

hastened to the door, to him.

“Where have you been?” she said. “Why did you go away?”

“I have been to walk in a garden, and I have seen a friend, who gave me a little money. It is for you.”

He held out his thin hand, with the small amount of money, all that Madeleine could give him. The peasant’s wife’s eyes glistened, for money was scarce, and she said:

“Oh, master! And is it truly mine?”

“Take it!” he said. “It buys bread, and bread brings life.”

So he lay down in the yard again, sick with relief at being alone again. For with the peasants he could be alone, but his own friends would never let him be alone. And in the safety of the yard, the young cock was dear to him, as it shouted in the helpless zest of life, and finished in the helpless humiliation of being tied by the leg. This day the ass stood swishing her tail under the shed. The man who had died lay down and turned utterly away from life, in the sickness of death in life.

But the woman brought wine and water, and sweetened cakes, and roused him, so that he ate a little, to please her. The day was hot, and as she crouched to serve him, he saw her breasts sway from her humble body, under her smock. He knew she wished he would desire her, and she was youngish, and not unpleasant. And he, who had never known a woman, would have desired her if he could. But he could not want her, though he felt gently towards her soft, crouching, humble body. But it was her thoughts, her consciousness, he could not mingle with. She was pleased with the money, and now she wanted to take more from him. She wanted the embrace of his body. But her little soul was hard, and short-sighted, and grasping, her body had its little greed, and no gentle reverence of the return gift. So he spoke a quiet, pleasant word to her and turned away. He could not touch the little, personal body, the little, personal life of this woman, nor in any other. He turned away from it without hesitation.

Risen from the dead, he had realised at last that the body, too, has its little life, and beyond that, the greater life. He was virgin, in recoil from the little, greedy life of the body. But now he knew that virginity is a form of greed; and that the body rises again to give and to take, to take and to give, ungreedily. Now he knew that he had risen for the woman, or women, who knew the greater life of the body, not greedy to give, not greedy to take, and with whom he could mingle his body. But having died, he was patient, knowing there was time, an eternity of time. And he was driven by no greedy desire, either to give himself to others, or to grasp anything for himself. For he had died.

The peasant came home from work and said:

“Master, I thank you for the money. But we did not want it. And all I have is yours.”

But the man who had died was sad, because the peasant stood there in the little, personal body, and his eyes were cunning and sparkling with the hope of greater rewards in money later on. True, the peasant had taken him in free, and had risked getting no reward. But the hope was cunning in him. Yet even this was as men are made. So when the peasant would have helped him to rise, for night had fallen, the man who had died said:

“Don’t touch me, brother. I am not yet risen to the Father.”

The sun burned with greater splendour, and burnished the young cock brighter. But the peasant kept the string renewed, and the bird was a prisoner. Yet the flame of life burned up to a sharp point in the cock, so that it eyed askance and haughtily the man who had died. And the man smiled and held the bird dear, and he said to it:

“Surely thou art risen to the Father, among birds.” And the young cock, answering, crowed.

When at dawn on the third morning the man went to the garden, he was absorbed, thinking of the greater life of the body, beyond the little, narrow, personal life. So he came through the thick screen of laurel and myrtle bushes, near the rock, suddenly, and he saw three women near the tomb. One was Madeleine, and one was the woman who had been his mother, and the third was a woman he knew, called Joan. He looked up, and saw them all, and they saw him, and they were all afraid.

He stood arrested in the distance, knowing they were there to claim him back, bodily. But he would in no wise return to them. Pallid, in the shadow of a grey morning that was blowing to rain, he saw them, and turned away. But Madeleine hastened towards him.

“I did not bring them,” she said. “They have come of themselves. See, I have brought you money!...Will you not speak to them?”

She offered him some gold pieces, and he took them, saying:

“May I have this money? I shall need it. I cannot speak to them, for I am not yet ascended to the Father. And I must leave you now.”

“Ah! Where will you go?” she cried.

He looked at her, and saw she was clutching for the man in him who had died and was dead, the man of his youth and his mission, of his chastity and his fear, of his little life, his giving without taking.

“I must go to my Father!” he said.

“And you will leave us? There is your mother!” she cried, turning round with the old anguish, which yet was sweet to her.

“But now I must ascend to my Father,” he said, and he drew back into the bushes, and so turned quickly, and went away, saying to himself:

“Now I belong to no one and have no connection, and mission or gospel is gone from me. Lo! I cannot make even my own life, and what have I to save?...I can learn to be alone.”

So he went back to the peasants’ house, to the yard where the young cock was tied by the leg with a string. And he wanted no one, for it was best to be alone; for the presence of people made him lonely. The sun and the subtle salve of spring healed his wounds, even the gaping wound of disillusion through his bowels was closing up. And his need of men and women, his fever to have them and to be saved by them, this too was healing in him. Whatever came of touch between himself and the race of men, henceforth, should come without trespass or compulsion. For he said to himself:

“I tried to compel them to live, so they compelled me to, die. It is always so, with compulsion. The recoil kills the advance. Now is my time to be alone.”

Therefore he went no more to the garden, but lay still and saw the sun, or walked at dusk across the olive slopes, among the green wheat, that rose a palm-breadth higher every sunny day. And always he thought to himself:

‘How good it is to have fulfilled my mission, and to be beyond it. Now I can be alone, and leave all things to themselves, and the fig tree may be barren if it will, and the rich may be rich. My way is my own alone.’

So the green jets of leaves unspread on the fig tree, with the bright, translucent, green blood of the tree. And the young cock grew brighter, more lustrous with the sun’s burnishing; yet always tied by the leg with a string. And the sun went down more and more in pomp, out of the gold and red-flushed air. The man who had died was aware of it all, and he thought:

‘The Word is but the midge that bites at evening. Man is tormented with words like midges, and they follow him right into the tomb. But beyond the tomb they cannot go. Now I have passed the place where words can bite no more and the air is clear, and there is nothing to say, and I am alone within my own skin, which is the walls of all my domain.’

So he healed of his wounds, and enjoyed his immortality of being alive without fret. For in the tomb he had slipped that noose which we call care. For in the tomb he had left his striving self, which cares and asserts itself. Now his uncaring self healed and became whole within his skin, and he smiled to himself with pure aloneness, which is one sort of immortality.

Then he said to himself: “I will wander the earth, and say nothing. For nothing is so marvellous as to be alone in the phenomenal world, which is raging, and yet apart. And I have not seen it, I was too much blinded by my confusion within

it. Now I will wander among the stirring of the phenomenal world, for it is the stirring of all things among themselves which leaves me purely alone.”

So he communed with himself, and decided to be a physician. Because the power was still in him to heal any man or child who touched his compassion. Therefore he cut his hair and his beard after the right fashion, and smiled to himself. And he bought himself shoes, and the right mantle, and put the right cloth over his head, hiding all the little scars. And the peasant said:

“Master, will you go forth from us?”

“Yes, for the time is come for me to return to men.”

So he gave the peasant a piece of money, and said to him:

“Give me the cock that escaped and is now tied by the leg. For he shall go forth with me.”

So for a piece of money the peasant gave the cock to the man who had died, and at dawn the man who had died set out into the phenomenal world, to be fulfilled in his own loneliness in the midst of it. For previously he had been too much mixed up in it. Then he had died. Now he must come back, to be alone in the midst. Yet even now he did not go quite alone, for under his arm, as he went, he carried the cock, whose tail fluttered gaily behind, and who craned his head excitedly, for he too was adventuring out for the first time into the wider phenomenal world, which is the stirring of the body of cocks also. And the peasant woman shed a few tears, but then went indoors, being a peasant, to look again at the pieces of money. And it seemed to her, a gleam came out of the pieces of money, wonderful.

The man who had died wandered on, and it was a sunny day. He looked around as he went, and stood aside as the pack-train passed by, towards the city. And he said to himself:

“Strange is the phenomenal world, dirty and clean together! And I am the same. Yet I am apart! And life bubbles variously. Why should I have wanted it to bubble all alike? What a pity I preached to them! A sermon is so much more likely to cake into mud, and to close the fountains, than is a psalm or a song. I made a mistake. I understand that they executed me for preaching to them. Yet they could not finally execute me, for now I am risen in my own aloneness, and inherit the earth, since I lay no claim on it. And I will be alone in the seethe of all things; first and foremost, for ever, I shall be alone. But I must toss this bird into the seethe of phenomena, for he must ride his wave. How hot he is with life! Soon, in some place, I shall leave him among the hens. And perhaps one evening I shall meet a woman who can lure my risen body, yet leave me my aloneness. For the body of my desire has died, and I am not in touch anywhere. Yet how do I know! All at least is life. And this cock gleams with bright aloneness, though

he answers the lure of hens. And I shall hasten on to that village on the hill ahead of me; already I am tired and weak, and want to close my eyes to everything.”

Hastening a little with the desire to have finished going, he overtook two men going slowly, and talking. And being soft-footed, he heard they were speaking of himself. And he remembered them, for he had known them in his life, the life of his mission. So he greeted them, but did not disclose himself in the dusk, and they did not know him. He said to them:

“What then of him who would be king, and was put to death for it?”

They answered suspiciously: “Why ask you of him?”

“I have known him, and thought much about him,” he said.

So they replied: “He has risen.”

“Yea! And where is he, and how does he live?”

“We know not, for it is not revealed. Yet he is risen, and in a little while will ascend unto the Father.”

“Yea! And where then is his Father?”

“Know ye not? You are then of the Gentiles! The Father is in Heaven, above the cloud and the firmament.”

“Truly? Then how will he ascend?”

“As Elijah the Prophet, he shall go up in a glory.”

“Even into the sky.”

“Into the sky.”

“Then is he not risen in the flesh?”

“He is risen in the flesh.”

“And will he take flesh up into the sky?”

“The Father in Heaven will take him up.”

The man who had died said no more, for his say was over, and words beget words, even as gnats. But the man asked him: “Why do you carry a cock?”

“I am a healer,” he said, “and the bird hath virtue.”

“You are not a believer?”

“Yea! I believe the bird is full of life and virtue.”

They walked on in silence after this, and he felt they disliked his answer. So he smiled to himself, for a dangerous phenomenon in the world is a man of narrow belief, who denies the right of his neighbour to be alone. And as they came to the outskirts of the village, the man who had died stood still in the gloaming and said in his old voice:

“Know ye me not?”

And they cried in fear: “Master!”

“Yea!” he said, laughing softly. And he turned suddenly away, down a side lane, and was gone under the wall before they knew.

So he came to an inn where the asses stood in the yard. And he called for fritters, and they were made for him. So he slept under a shed. But in the morning he was wakened by a loud crowing, and his cock's voice ringing in his ears. So he saw the rooster of the inn walking forth to battle, with his hens, a goodly number, behind him. Then the cock of the man who had died sprang forth, and a battle began between the birds. The man of the inn ran to save his rooster, but the man who had died said:

“If my bird wins I will give him thee. And if he lose, thou shalt eat him.”

So the birds fought savagely, and the cock of the man who had died killed the common cock of the yard. Then the man who had died said to his young cock:

“Thou at least hast found thy kingdom, and the females to thy body. Thy aloneness can take on splendour, polished by the lure of thy hens.”

And he left his bird there, and went on deeper into the phenomenal world, which is a vast complexity of entanglements and allurements. And he asked himself a last question:

“From what, and to what, could this infinite whirl be saved?”

So he went his way, and was alone. But the way of the world was past belief, as he saw the strange entanglement of passions and circumstance and compulsion everywhere, but always the dread insomnia of compulsion. It was fear, the ultimate fear of death, that made men mad. So always he must move on, for if he stayed, his neighbours wound the strangling of their fear and bullying round him. There was nothing he could touch, for all, in a mad assertion of the ego, wanted to put a compulsion on him, and violate his intrinsic solitude. It was the mania of cities and societies and hosts, to lay a compulsion upon a man, upon all men. For men and women alike were mad with the egoistic fear of their own nothingness. And he thought of his own mission, how he had tried to lay the compulsion of love on all men. And the old nausea came back on him. For there was no contact without a subtle attempt to inflict a compulsion. And already he had been compelled even into death. The nausea of the old wound broke out afresh, and he looked again on the world with repulsion, dreading its mean contacts.

II

The wind came cold and strong from inland, from the invisible snows of Lebanon. But the temple, facing south and west, towards Egypt, faced the splendid sun of winter as he curved down towards the sea, the warmth and radiance flooded in between the pillars of painted wood. But the sea was invisible, because of the trees, though its dashing sounded among the hum of pines. The air was turning golden to afternoon. The woman who served Isis stood in her yellow robe, and looked up at the steep slopes coming down to the sea, where the olive trees silvered under the wind like water splashing. She was alone save for the goddess. And in the winter afternoon the light stood erect and magnificent off the invisible sea, filling the hills of the coast. She went towards the sun, through the grove of Mediterranean pine trees and evergreen oaks, in the midst of which the temple stood, on a little, tree-covered tongue of land between two bays.

It was only a very little way, and then she stood among the dry trunks of the outermost pines, on the rocks under which the sea smote and sucked, facing the open where the bright sun gloried in winter. The sea was dark, almost indigo, running away from the land, and crested with white. The hand of the wind brushed it strangely with shadow, as it brushed the olives of the slopes with silver. And there was no boat out.

The three boats were drawn high up on the steep shingle of the little bay, by the small grey tower. Along the edge of the shingle ran a high wall, inside which was a garden occupying the brief flat of the bay, then rising in terraces up the steep slope of the coast. And there, some little way up, within another wall, stood the low white villa, white and alone as the coast, overlooking the sea. But higher, much higher up, where the olives had given way to pine trees again, ran the coast road, keeping to the height to be above the gullies that came down to the bays.

Upon it all poured the royal sunshine of the January afternoon. Or rather, all was part of the great sun, glow and substance and immaculate loneliness of the sea, and pure brightness.

Crouching in the rocks above the dark water, which only swung up and down, two slaves, half naked, were dressing pigeons for the evening meal. They pierced the throat of a blue, live bird, and let the drops of blood fall into the heaving sea, with curious concentration. They were performing some sacrifice, or working some incantation. The woman of the temple, yellow and white and

alone like a winter narcissus stood between the pines of the small, humped peninsula where the temple secretly hid, and watched.

A black-and-white pigeon, vividly white, like a ghost escaped over the low dark sea, sped out, caught the wind, tilted, rode, soared and swept over the pine trees, and wheeled away, a speck, inland. It had escaped. The priestess heard the cry of the boy slave, a garden slave of about seventeen. He raised his arms to heaven in anger as the pigeon wheeled away, naked and angry and young he held out his arms. Then he turned and seized the girl in an access of rage, and beat her with his fist that was stained with pigeon's blood. And she lay down with her face hidden, passive and quivering. The woman who owned them watched. And as she watched, she saw another onlooker, a stranger, in a low, broad hat, and a cloak of grey homespun, a dark bearded man standing on the little causeway of a rock that was the neck of her temple peninsula. By the blowing of his dark-grey cloak she saw him. And he saw her, on the rocks like a white-and-yellow narcissus, because of the flutter of her white linen tunic, below the yellow mantle of wool. And both of them watched the two slaves.

The boy suddenly left off beating the girl. He crouched over her, touching her, trying to make her speak. But she lay quite inert, face down on the smoothed rock. And he put his arms round her and lifted her, but she slipped back to earth like one dead, yet far too quickly for anything dead. The boy, desperate, caught her by the hips and hugged her to him, turning her over there. There she seemed inert, all her fight was in her shoulders. He twisted her over, intent and unconscious, and pushed his hands between her thighs, to push them apart. And in an instant he was covering her in the blind, frightened frenzy of a boy's first passion. Quick and frenzied his young body quivered naked on hers, blind, for a minute. Then it lay quite still, as if dead.

And then, in terror, he peeped up. He peeped round, and drew slowly to his feet, adjusting his loin-rag. He saw the stranger, and then he saw, on the rocks beyond, the lady of Isis, his mistress. And as he saw her, his whole body shrank and cowed, and with a strange cringing motion he scuttled lamely towards the door in the wall.

The girl sat up and looked after him. When she had seen him disappear, she too looked round. And she saw the stranger and the priestess. Then with a sullen movement she turned away, as if she had seen nothing, to the four dead pigeons and the knife, which lay there on the rock. And she began to strip the small feathers, so that they rose on the wind like dust.

The priestess turned away. Slaves! Let the overseer watch them. She was not interested. She went slowly through the pines again, back to the temple, which stood in the sun in a small clearing at the centre of the tongue of land. It was a

small temple of wood, painted all pink and white and blue, having at the front four wooden pillars rising like stems to the swollen lotus-bud of Egypt at the top, supporting the roof and open, spiky lotus-flowers of the outer frieze, which went round under the eaves. Two low steps of stone led up to the platform before the pillars, and the chamber behind the pillars was open. There a low stone altar stood, with a few embers in its hollow, and the dark stain of blood in its end groove.

She knew her temple so well, for she had built it at her own expense, and tended it for seven years. There it stood, pink and white, like a flower in the little clearing, backed by blackish evergreen oaks; and the shadow of afternoon was already washing over its pillar bases.

She entered slowly, passing through to the dark inner chamber, lighted by a perfumed oil-flame. And once more she pushed shut the door, and once more she threw a few grains of incense on a brazier before the goddess, and once more she sat down before her goddess, in the almost-darkness, to muse, to go away into the dreams of the goddess.

It was Isis; but not Isis, Mother of Horus. It was Isis Bereaved, Isis in Search. The goddess, in painted marble, lifted her face and strode, one thigh forward, through the frail fluting of her robe, in the anguish of bereavement and of search. She was looking for the fragments of the dead Osiris, dead and scattered asunder, dead, torn apart, and thrown in fragments over the wide world. And she must find his hands and his feet, his heart, his thighs, his head, his belly, she must gather him together and fold her arms round the re-assembled body till it became warm again, and roused to life, and could embrace her, and could fecundate her womb. And the strange rapture and anguish of search went on through the years, as she lifted her throat and her hollowed eyes looked inward, in the tormented ecstasy of seeking, and the delicate navel of her bud-like belly showed through the frail, girdled robe with the eternal asking, asking, of her search. And through the years she found him bit by bit, heart and head and limbs and body. And yet she had not found the last reality, the final clue to him, that alone could bring him really back to her. For she was Isis of the subtle lotus, the womb which waits submerged and in bud, waits for the touch of that other inward sun that streams its rays from the loins of the male Osiris.

This was the mystery the woman had served alone for seven years, since she was twenty, till now she was twenty-seven. Before, when she was young, she had lived in the world, in Rome, in Ephesus, in Egypt. For her father had been one of Anthony's captains and comrades, had fought with Anthony and had stood with him when Caesar was murdered, and through to the days of shame. Then he had come again across to Asia, out of favour with Rome, and had been

killed in the mountains beyond Lebanon. The widow, having no favour to hope for from Octavius, had retired to her small property on the coast under Lebanon, taking her daughter from the world, a girl of nineteen, beautiful but unmarried.

When she was young the girl had known Caesar, and had shrunk from his eagle-like rapacity. The golden Anthony had sat with her many a half-hour, in the splendour of his great limbs and glowing manhood, and talked with her of the philosophies and the gods. For he was fascinated as a child by the gods, though he mocked at them, and forgot them in his own vanity. But he said to her:

“I have sacrificed two doves for you, to Venus, for I am afraid you make no offering to the sweet goddess. Beware you will offend her. Come, why is the flower of you so cool within? Does never a ray nor a glance find its way through? Ah, come, a maid should open to the sun, when the sun leans towards her to caress her.”

And the big, bright eyes of Anthony laughed down on her, bathing her in his glow. And she felt the lovely glow of his male beauty and his amorousness bathe all her limbs and her body. But it was as he said: the very flower of her womb was cool, was almost cold, like a bud in shadow of frost, for all the flooding of his sunshine. So Anthony, respecting her father, who loved her, had left her.

And it had always been the same. She saw many men, young and old. And on the whole, she liked the old ones best, for they talked to her still and sincere, and did not expect her to open like a flower to the sun of their maleness. Once she asked a philosopher: “Are all women born to be given to men?” To which the old man answered slowly:

“Rare women wait for the re-born man. For the lotus, as you know, will not answer to all the bright heat of the sun. But she curves her dark, hidden head in the depths, and stirs not. Till, in the night, one of these rare, invisible suns that have been killed and shine no more, rises among the stars in unseen purple, and like the violet, sends its rare purple rays out into the night. To these the lotus stirs as to a caress, and rises upwards through the flood, and lifts up her bent head, and opens with an expansion such as no other flower knows, and spreads her sharp rays of bliss, and offers her soft, gold depths such as no other flower possesses, to the penetration of the flooding, violet-dark sun that has died and risen and makes no show. But for the golden brief day-suns of show such as Anthony, and for the hard winter suns of power, such as Caesar, the lotus stirs not, nor will ever stir. Those will only tear open the bud. Ah, I tell you, wait for the re-born and wait for the bud to stir.”

So she had waited. For all the men were soldiers or politicians in the Roman spell, assertive, manly, splendid apparently but of an inward meanness, an inadequacy. And Rome and Egypt alike had left her alone, unroused. And she

was a woman to herself, she would not give herself for a surface glow, nor marry for reasons. She would wait for the lotus to stir.

And then, in Egypt, she had found Isis, in whom she spelled her mystery. She had brought Isis to the shores of Sidon, and lived with her in the mystery of search; whilst her mother, who loved affairs, controlled the small estate and the slaves with a free hand.

When the woman had roused from her muse and risen to perform the last brief ritual to Isis, she replenished the lamp and left the sanctuary, locking the door. In the outer world, the sun had already set, and twilight was chill among the humming trees, which hummed still, though the wind was abating.

A stranger in a dark, broad hat rose from the corner of the temple steps, holding his hat in the wind. He was dark-faced, with a black pointed beard. "Oh, madam, whose shelter may I implore?" he said to the woman, who stood in her yellow mantle on a step above him, beside a pink-and-white painted pillar. Her face was rather long and pale, her dusky blonde hair was held under a thin gold net. She looked down on the vagabond with indifference. It was the same she had seen watching the slaves.

"Why come you down from the road?" she asked.

"I saw the temple like a pale flower on the coast, and would rest among the trees of the precincts, if the lady of the goddess permits."

"It is Isis in Search," she said, answering his first question. "The goddess is great," he replied.

She looked at him still with mistrust. There was a faint, remote smile in the dark eyes lifted to her, though the face was hollow with suffering. The vagabond divined her hesitation, and was mocking her.

"Stay here upon the steps," she said. "A slave will show you the shelter."

"The lady of Egypt is gracious."

She went down the rocky path of the humped peninsula in her gilded sandals. Beautiful were her ivory feet, beneath the white tunic, and above the saffron mantle her dusky-blond head bent as with endless musings. A woman entangled in her own dream. The man smiled a little, half bitterly, and sat again on the step to wait, drawing his mantle round him, in the cold twilight.

At length a slave appeared, also in hodden grey.

"Seek ye the shelter of our lady?" he said insolently. "Even so."

"Then come."

With the brusque insolence of a slave waiting on a vagabond, the young fellow led through the trees and down into a little gully in the rock, where, almost in darkness, was a small cave, with a litter of the tall heaths that grew on the waste places of the coast, under the stone-pines. The place was dark, but

absolutely silent from the wind. There was still a faint odour of goats.

“Here sleep!” said the slave. “For the goats come no more on this half-island. And there is water.” He pointed to a little basin of rock where the maidenhair fern fringed a dripping mouthful of water.

Having scornfully bestowed his patronage, the slave departed. The man who had died climbed out to the tip of the peninsula, where the wave thrashed. It was rapidly getting dark, and the stars were coming out. The wind was abating for the night. Inland, the steep grooved up-slope was dark to the long wavering outline of the crest against the translucent sky. Only now and then a lantern flickered towards the villa.

The man who had died went back to the shelter. There he took bread from his leather pouch, dipped it in the water of the tiny spring, and slowly ate. Having eaten and washed his mouth, he looked once more at the bright stars in the pure windy sky, then settled the heath for his bed. Having laid his hat and his sandals aside, and put his pouch under his cheek for a pillow, he slept, for he was very tired. Yet during the night the cold woke him pinching wearily through his weariness. Outside was brilliantly starry, and still windy. He sat and hugged himself in a sort of coma, and towards dawn went to sleep again.

In the morning the coast was still chill in shadow, though the sun was up behind the hills, when the woman came down from the villa towards the goddess. The sea was fair and pale blue, lovely in newness, and at last the wind was still. Yet the waves broke white in the many rocks, and tore in the shingle of the little bay. The woman came slowly towards her dream. Yet she was aware of an interruption.

As she followed the little neck of rock on to her peninsula, and climbed the slope between the trees to the temple, a slave came down and stood, making his obeisance. There was a faint insolence in his humility. “Speak!” she said.

“Lady, the man is there, he still sleeps. Lady, may I speak?”

“Speak!” she said, repelled by the fellow.

“Lady, the man is an escaped malefactor.”

The slave seemed to triumph in imparting the unpleasant news.

“By what sign?”

“Behold his hands and feet! Will the lady look on him?”

“Lead on!”

The slave led quickly over the mound of the hill down to the tiny ravine. There he stood aside, and the woman went into the crack towards the cave. Her heart beat a little. Above all, she must preserve her temple inviolate.

The vagabond was asleep with his cheek on his scrip, his mantle wrapped round him, but his bare, soiled feet curling side by side, to keep each other

warm, and his hand lying clenched in sleep. And in the pale skin of his feet usually covered by sandal-straps, she saw the scars, and in the palm of the loose hand.

She had no interest in men, particularly in the servile class. Yet she looked at the sleeping face. It was worn, hollow, and rather ugly. But, 'a true priestess, she saw the other kind of beauty in it, the sheer stillness of the deeper life. There was even a sort of majesty in the dark brows, over the still, hollow cheeks. She saw that his black hair, left long, in contrast to the Roman fashion, was touched with grey at the temples, and the black pointed beard had threads of grey. But that must be suffering or misfortune, for the man was young. His dusky skin had the silvery glisten of youth still.

There was a beauty of much suffering, and the strange calm candour of finer life in the whole delicate ugliness of the face. For the first time, she was touched on the quick at the sight of a man, as if the tip of a fine flame of living had touched her. It was the first time. Men had roused all kinds of feeling in her, but never had touched her with the flame-tip of life.

She went back under the rock to where the slave waited.

"Know!" she said. "This is no malefactor, but a free citizen of the east. Do not disturb him. But when he comes forth, bring him to me; tell him I would speak with him."

She spoke coldly, for she found slaves invariably repellent, a little repulsive. They were so embedded in the lesser life, and their appetites and their small consciousness were a little disgusting. So she wrapped her dream round her and went to the temple, where a slave girl brought winter roses and jasmine for the altar. But to-day, even in her ministrations, she was disturbed.

The sun rose over the hill, sparkling, the light fell triumphantly on the little pine-covered peninsula of the coast, and on the pink temple, in the pristine newness. The man who had died woke up, and put on his sandals. He put on his hat too, slung his scrip under his mantle, and went out, to see the morning in all its blue and its new gold. He glanced at the little yellow-and-white narcissus sparkling gaily in the rocks. And he saw the slave waiting for him like a menace.

"Master!" said the slave. "Our lady would speak with you at the house of Isis."

"It is well," said the wanderer.

He went slowly, staying to look at the pale blue sea like a flower in unruffled bloom, and the white fringes among the rocks, like white rock-flowers, the hollow slopes sheering up high from the shore, grey with olive trees and green with bright young wheat, and set with the white, small villa. All fair and pure in the January morning.

The sun fell on the corner of the temple, he sat down on the step in the sunshine, in the infinite patience of waiting. He had come back to life, but not the same life that he had left, the life of little people and the little day. Re-born, he was in the other life, the greater day of the human consciousness. And he was alone and apart from the little day, and out of contact with the daily people. Not yet had he accepted the irrevocable nail me tangere which separates the re-born from the vulgar. The separation was absolute, as yet here at the temple he felt peace, the hard, bright pagan peace with hostility of slaves beneath.

The woman came into the dark inner doorway of the temple from the shrine, and stood there, hesitating. She could see the dark figure of the man, sitting in that terrible stillness that was portentous to her, had something almost menacing in its patience.

She advanced across the outer chamber of the temple, and the man, becoming aware of her, stood up. She addressed him in Greek, but he said:

“Madam, my Greek is limited. Allow me to speak vulgar Syrian.”

“Whence come you? Whither go you?” she asked, with a hurried preoccupation of a priestess.

“From the east beyond Damascus — and I go west as the road goes,” he replied slowly.

She glanced at him with sudden anxiety and shyness.

“But why do you have the marks of a malefactor?” she asked abruptly.

“Did the Lady of Isis spy upon me in my sleep?” he asked, with a grey weariness.

“The slave warned me — your hands and feet — ” she said. He looked at her. Then he said:

“Will the Lady of Isis allow me to bid her farewell, and go up to the road?”

The wind came in a sudden puff, lifting his mantle and his hat. He put up his hand to hold the brim, and she saw again the thin brown hand with its scar.

“See! The scar!” she said, pointing.

“Even so!” he said. “But farewell, and to Isis my homage and my thanks for sleep.”

He was going. But she looked up at him with her wondering blue eyes.

“Will you not look at Isis?” she said, with sudden impulse. And something stirred in him, like pain.

“Where then?” he said.

“Come!”

He followed her into the inner shrine, into the almost-darkness. When his eyes got used to the faint glow of the lamp, he saw the goddess striding like a ship, eager in the swirl of her gown, and he made his obeisance.

“Great is Isis!” he said. “In her search she is greater than death. Wonderful is such walking in a woman, wonderful the goal. All men praise thee, Isis, thou greater than the mother unto man.”

The woman of Isis heard, and threw incense on the brazier. Then she looked at the man.

“Is it well with thee here?” she asked him. “Has Isis brought thee home to herself?”

He looked at the priestess in wonder and trouble. “I know not,” he said.

But the woman was pondering that this was the lost Osiris. She felt it in the quick of her soul. And her agitation was intense.

He would not stay in the close, dark, perfumed shrine. He went out again to the morning, to the cold air. He felt something approaching to touch him, and all his flesh was still woven with pain and the wild commandment: *Noli me tangere!* Touch me not! Oh, don’t touch me!

The woman followed into the open with timid eagerness. He was moving away.

“Oh, stranger, do not go! Oh, stay a while with Isis!”

He looked at her, at her face open like a flower, as if a sun had risen in her soul. And again his loins stirred.

“Would you detain me, girl of Isis?” he said.

“Stay! I am sure you are Osiris!” she said.

He laughed suddenly. “Not yet!” he said. Then he looked at her wistful face. “But I will sleep another night in the cave of the goats, if Isis wills it,” he added.

She put her hands together with a priestess’s childish happiness.

“Ah! Isis will be glad!” she said.

So he went down to the shore in great trouble, saying to himself: “Shall I give myself into this touch? Shall I give myself into this touch Men have tortured me to death with their touch. Yet this girl of Isis is a tender flame of healing. I am a physician, yet I have no healing like the flame of this tender girl. The flame of this tender girl! Like the first pale crocus of the spring. How could I have been blind to the healing and the bliss in the crocus-like body of a tender woman! Ah, tenderness! More terrible and lovely than the death I died — ”

He pried small shell-fish from the rocks, and ate them with relish and wonder for the simple taste of the sea. And inwardly he was tremulous, thinking: “Dare I come into touch? For this is farther than death. I have dared to let them lay hands on me and put me to death. But dare I come into this tender touch of life? Oh, this is harder — ”

But the woman went into the shrine again, and sat rapt in pure muse, through the long hours, watching the swirling stride of the yearning goddess, and the

navel of the bud-like belly, like a seal on the virgin urge of the search. And she gave herself to the woman-flow and to the urge of Isis in Search.

Towards sundown she went on the peninsula to look for him. And she found him gone towards the sun, as she had gone the day before, and sitting on the pine-needles at the foot of the tree, where she had stood when first she saw him. Now she approached tremulously and slowly, afraid, lest he did not want her. She stood near him unseen, till suddenly he glanced up at her from under his broad hat, and saw the westering sun on her netted hair. He was startled, yet he expected her.

“Is that your home?” he said, pointing to the white, low villa on the slope of olives.

“It is my mother’s house. She is a widow, and I am her only child.”

“And are these all her slaves?”

“Except those that are mine.”

Their eyes met for a moment.

“Will you too sit to see the sun go down?” he said.

He had not risen to speak to her. He had known too much pain. So she sat on the dry brown pine-needles, gathering her saffron mantle round her knees. A boat was coming in, out of the open glow into the shadow of the bay, and slaves were lifting small nets, their babble coming off the surface of the water.

“And this is home to you,” he said.

“But I serve Isis in Search,” she replied.

He looked at her. She was like a soft, musing cloud, somehow remote. His soul smote him with passion and compassion.

“Mayst thou find thy desire, maiden,” he said, with sudden earnestness.

“And art thou not Osiris?” she asked.

He flushed suddenly.

“Yes, if thou wilt heal me!” he said. “For the death aloofness is still upon me, and I cannot escape it.”

She looked at him for a moment in fear from the soft blue sun of her eyes. Then she lowered her head, and they sat in silence in the warmth and glow of the western sun: the man who had died, and the woman of the pure search.

The sun was curving down to the sea, in grand winter splendour. It fell on the twinkling, naked bodies of the slaves, with their ruddy broad hams and their small black heads, as they ran spreading the nets on the pebble beach. The all-tolerant Pan watched over them. All-tolerant Pan should be their god for ever.

The woman rose as the sun’s rim dipped, saying:

“If you will stay, I shall send down victual and covering.”

“The lady your mother, what will she say?”

The woman of Isis looked at him strangely, but with a tinge of misgiving.

“It is my own,” she said.

“It is good,” he said, smiling faintly and foreseeing difficulties.

He watched her go, with her absorbed, strange motion of the self-dedicate. Her dun head was a little bent, the white linen swung about her ivory ankles. And he saw the naked slaves stand to look at her, with a certain wonder, and even a certain mischief. But she passed intent through the door in the wall, on the bay.

The man who had died sat on at the foot of the tree overlooking the strand, for on the little shore everything happened. At the small stream which ran in round the corner of the property wall, women slaves were still washing linen, and now and again came the hollow chock! chock! chock! as they beat it against the smooth stones in the dark little hollow of the pool. There was a smell of olive refuse on the air; and sometimes still the faint rumble of the grindstone that was milling the olives, inside the garden, and the sound of the slave calling to the ass at the mill. Then through the doorway a woman stepped, a grey-haired woman in a mantle of whitish wool, and there followed her a bare-headed man in a toga, a Roman: probably her steward or overseer. They stood on the high shingle above the sea, and cast round a rapid glance. The broad-shouldered, ruddy-bodied slaves bent absorbed and abject over the nets, picking them clean, the women washing linen thrust their palms with energy down on the wash, the old slave bent absorbed at the water’s edge, washing the fish and the polyps of the catch. And the woman and the overseer saw it all in one glance. They also saw, seated at the foot of the tree on the rocks of the peninsula, the strange man silent and alone. And the man who had died saw that they spoke of him. Out of the little sacred world of the peninsula he looked on the common world, and saw it still hostile.

The sun was touching the sea, across the tiny bay stretched the shadow of the opposite humped headland. Over the shingle, now blue and cold in shadow, the elderly woman trod heavily, in shadow too, to look at the fish spread in the flat basket of the old man crouching at the water’s edge: a naked old slave with fat hips and shoulders, on whose soft, fairish-orange body the last sun twinkled, then died. The old slave continued cleaning the fish absorbedly, not looking up: as if the lady were the shadow of twilight falling on him.

Then from the gateway stepped two slave-girls with flat baskets on their heads, and from one basket the terra-cotta wine-jar and the oil-jar poked up, leaning slightly. Over the massive shingle, under the wall, came the girls, and the woman of Isis in her saffron mantle stepped in twilight after them. Out at sea, the sun still shone. Here was shadow. The mother with grey head stood at the sea’s edge and watched the daughter, all yellow and white, with dun blonde

head, swinging unseeing and unheeding after the slave-girls, towards the neck of rock of the peninsula; the daughter, travelling in her absorbed other-world. And not moving from her place, the elderly mother watched that procession of three file up the rise of the headland, between the trees, and disappear, shut in by trees. No slave had lifted a head to look. The grey-haired woman still watched the trees where her daughter had disappeared. Then she glanced again at the foot of the tree, where the man who had died was still sitting, inconspicuous now, for the sun had left him; and only the far blade of the sea shone bright. It was evening. Patience! Let destiny move!

The mother plodded with a stamping stride up the shingle: not long and swinging and rapt, like the daughter, but short and determined. Then down the rocks opposite came two naked slaves trotting with huge bundles of dark green on their shoulders, so their broad, naked legs twinkled underneath like insects' legs, and their heads were hidden. They came trotting across the shingle, heedless and intent on their way, when suddenly the man, the Roman-looking overseer, addressed them, and they stopped dead. They stood invisible under their loads, as if they might disappear altogether, now they were arrested. Then a hand came out and pointed to the peninsula. Then the two green-heaped slaves trotted on, towards the temple precincts. The grey-haired woman joined the man, and slowly the two passed through the door again, from the shingle of the sea to the property of the villa. Then the old, fat-shouldered slave rose, pallid in the shadow, with his tray of fish from the sea, and the woman rose from the pool, dusky and alive, piling the wet linen in a heap on to the flat baskets, and the slaves who had cleaned the net gathered its whitish folds together. And the old slave with the fish-basket on his shoulder, and the women slaves with the heaped baskets of wet linen on their heads, and the two slaves with the folded net, and the slave with oars on his shoulders, and the boy with the folded sail on his arm, gathered in a naked group near the door, and the man who had died heard the low buzz of their chatter. Then as the wind wafted cold; they began to pass through the door.

It was the life of the little day, the life of little people. And the man who had died said to himself: "Unless we encompass it in the greater day, and set the little life in the circle of the greater life, all is disaster."

Even the tops of the hills were in shadow. Only the sky was still upwardly radiant. The sea was a vast milky shadow. The man who had died rose a little stiffly and turned into the grove.

There was no one at the temple. He went on to his lair in the rock. There, the slave-men had carried out the old heath of the bedding, swept the rock floor, and were spreading with nice art the myrtle, then the rougher heath, then the soft,

bushy heath-tips on top, for a bed. Over it all they put a well-tanned white ox-skin. The maids had laid folded woollen covers at the head of the cave, and the wine-jar, the oil-jar, a terra-cotta drinking-cup and a basket containing bread, salt, cheese, dried figs and eggs stood neatly arranged. There was also a little brazier of charcoal. The cave was suddenly full, and a dwelling-place.

The woman of Isis stood in the hollow by the tiny spring.

Only one slave at a time could pass. The girl-slaves waited at the entrance to the narrow place. When the man who had died appeared, the woman sent the girls away. The men-slaves still arranged the bed, making the job as long as possible. But the woman of Isis dismissed them too. And the man who had died came to look at his house.

“Is it well?” the woman asked him.

“It is very well,” the man replied. “But the lady, your mother, and he who is no doubt the steward, watched while the slaves brought the goods. Will they not oppose you?”

“I have my own portion! Can I not give of my own? Who is going to oppose me and the gods?” she said, with a certain soft fury, touched with exasperation. So that he knew that her mother would oppose her, and that the spirit of the little life would fight against the spirit of the greater. And he thought: ‘Why did the woman of Isis relinquish her portion in the daily world? She should have kept her goods fiercely!’

“Will you eat and drink?” she said. “On the ashes are warm eggs. And I will go up to the meal at the villa. But in the second hour of the night I shall come down to the temple. O, then, will you come too to Isis?” She looked at him, and a queer glow dilated her eyes. This was her dream, and it was greater than herself. He could not bear to thwart her or hurt her in the least thing now. She was in the full glow of her woman’s mystery.

“Shall I wait at the temple?” he said.

“O, wait at the second hour and I shall come.” He heard the humming supplication in her voice and his fibres quivered. “But the lady, your mother?” he said gently.

The woman looked at him, startled.

“She will not thwart me!” she said.

So he knew that the mother would thwart the daughter, for the daughter had left her goods in the hands of her mother, who would hold fast to this power.

But she went, and the man who had died lay reclining on his couch, and ate the eggs from the ashes, and dipped his bread in oil, and ate it, for his flesh was dry: and he mixed wine and water, and drank. And so he lay still, and the lamp made a small bud of light.

He was absorbed and enmeshed in new sensations. The woman of Isis was lovely to him, not so much in form as in the wonderful womanly glow of her. Suns beyond suns had dipped her in mysterious fire, the mysterious fire of a potent woman, and to touch her was like touching the sun. Best of all was her tender desire for him, like sunshine, so soft and still.

“She is like sunshine upon me,” he said to himself, stretching his limbs. “I have never before stretched my limbs in such sunshine, as her desire for me. The greatest of all gods granted me this.”

At the same time he was haunted by the fear of the outer world. “If they can, they will kill us,” he said to himself. “But there is a law of the sun which protects us.”

And again he said to himself: “I have risen naked and branded. But if I am naked enough for this contact, I have not died in vain. Before I was clogged.”

He rose and went out. The night was chill and starry, and of a great wintry splendour. “There are destinies of splendour,” he said to the night, “after all our doom of littleness and meanness and pain.”

So he went up silently to the temple, and waited in darkness against the inner wall, looking out on a grey darkness, stars, and rims of trees. And he said again to himself: “There are destinies of splendour, and there is a greater power.”

So at last he saw the light of her silk lantern swinging, coming intermittent between the trees, yet coming swiftly. She was alone, and near, the light softly swishing on her mantle-hem. And he trembled with fear and with joy, saying to himself: “I am almost more afraid of this touch than I was of death. For I am more nakedly exposed to it.”

“I am here, Lady of Isis,” he said softly out of the dark. “Ah!” she cried, in fear also, yet in rapture. For she was given to her dream.

She unlocked the door of the shrine, and he followed after her. Then she latched the door shut again. The air inside was warm and close and perfumed. The man who had died stood by the closed door and watched the woman. She had come first to the goddess. And dim-lit, the goddess-statue stood surging forward, a little fearsome like a great woman-presence urging.

The priestess did not look at him. She took off her saffron mantle and laid it on a low couch. In the dim light she was bare-armed, in her girdled white tunic. But she was still hiding herself away from him. He stood back in shadow and watched her softly fan the brazier and fling on incense. Faint clouds of sweet aroma arose on the air. She turned to the statue in the ritual of approach, softly swaying forward with a slight lurch, like a moored boat, tipping towards the goddess.

He watched the strange rapt woman, and he said to himself: “I must leave her

alone in her rapture, her female mysteries.” So she tipped in her strange forward-swaying rhythm before the goddess. Then she broke into a murmur of Greek, which he could not understand. And, as she murmured, her swaying softly subsided, like a boat on a sea that grows still. And as he watched her, he saw her soul in its aloneness, and its female difference. He said to himself: “How different she is from me, how strangely different! She is afraid of me, and my male difference. She is getting herself naked and clear of her fear. How sensitive and softly alive she is, with a life so different from mine! How beautiful with a soft, strange courage, of life, so different from my courage of death! What a beautiful thing, like the heart of a rose, like the core of a flame. She is making herself completely penetrable. Ah! how terrible to fail her, or to trespass on her!”

She turned to him, her face glowing from the goddess. “You are Osiris, aren’t you?” she said naively.

“If you will,” he said.

“Will you let Isis discover you? Will you not take off your things?”

He looked at the woman, and lost his breath. And his wounds, and especially the death-wound through his belly, began to cry again.

“It has hurt so much!” he said. “You must forgive me if I am still held back.”

But he took off his cloak and his tunic and went naked towards the idol, his breast panting with the sudden terror of overwhelming pain, memory of overwhelming pain, and grief too bitter.

“They did me to death!” he said in excuse of himself, turning his face to her for a moment.

And she saw the ghost of the death in him as he stood there thin and stark before her, and suddenly she was terrified, and she felt robbed. She felt the shadow of the grey, grisly wing of death triumphant.

“Ah, Goddess,” he said to the idol in the vernacular. “I would be so glad to live, if you would give me my clue again.”

For her again he felt desperate, faced by the demand of life, and burdened still by his death.

“Let me anoint you!” the woman said to him softly. “Let me anoint the scars! Show me, and let me anoint them!”

He forgot his nakedness in this re-evoked old pain. He sat on the edge of the couch, and she poured a little ointment into the palm of his hand. And as she chafed his hand, it all came back, the nails, the holes, the cruelty, the unjust cruelty against him who had offered only kindness. The agony of injustice and cruelty came over him again, as in his death-hour. But she chafed the palm, murmuring: “What was torn becomes a new flesh, what was a wound is full of fresh life; this scar is the eye of the violet.”

And he could not help smiling at her, in her naïve priestess's absorption. This was her dream, and he was only a dream-object to her. She would never know or understand what he was. Especially she would never know the death that was gone before in him. But what did it matter? She was different. She was woman: her life and her death were different from him. Only she was good to him.

When she chafed his feet with oil and tender, tender healing, he could not refrain from saying to her:

"Once a woman washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with her hair, and poured on precious ointment."

The woman of Isis looked up at him from her earnest work, interrupted again.

"Were they hurt then?" she said. "Your feet?"

"No, no! It was while they were whole."

"And did you love her?"

"Love had passed in her. She only warned to serve," he replied. "She had been a prostitute."

"And did you let her serve you?" she asked.

"Yea."

"Did you let her serve you with the corpse of her love?"

"Ay!"

Suddenly it dawned on him: I asked them all to serve me with the corpse of their love. And in the end I offered them only the corpse of my love. This is my body — take and eat — my corpse —

A vivid shame went through him. 'After all,' he thought, 'I wanted them to love with dead bodies. If I had kissed Judas with live love, perhaps he would never have kissed me with death. Perhaps he loved me in the flesh, and I willed that he should love me bodilessly, with the corpse of love —'

There dawned on him the reality of the soft, warm love which is in touch, and which is full of delight. "And I told them, blessed are they that mourn," he said to himself. "Alas, if I mourned even this woman here, now I am in death, I should have to remain dead, and I want so much to live. Life has brought me to this woman with warm hands. And her touch is more to me now than all my words. For I want to live —"

"Go then to the goddess!" she said softly, gently pushing him towards Isis. And as he stood there dazed and naked as an unborn thing, he heard the woman murmuring to the goddess, murmuring, murmuring with a plaintive appeal. She was stooping now, looking at the scar in the soft flesh of the socket of his side, a scar deep and like an eye sore with endless weeping, just in the soft socket above the hip. It was here that his blood had left him, and his essential seed. The woman was trembling softly and murmuring in Greek. And he in the recurring

dismay of having died, and in the anguished perplexity of having tried to force life, felt his wounds crying aloud, and the deep places of the body howling again: “I have been murdered, and I lent myself to murder. They murdered me, but I lent myself to murder — ”

The woman, silent now, but quivering, laid oil in her hand and put her palm over the wound in his right side. He winced, and the wound absorbed his life again, as thousands of times before. And in the dark, wild pain and panic of his consciousness rang only one cry: “Oh, how can she take this death out of me? She can never know! She can never understand! She can never equal it!...”

In silence, she softly rhythmically chafed the scar with oil. Absorbed now in her priestess’s task, softly, softly gathering power, while the vitals of the man howled in panic. But as she gradually gathered power, and passed in a girdle round him to the opposite scar, gradually warmth began to take the place of the cold terror, and he felt: ‘I am going to be Warm again, and I am going to be whole! I shall be warm like the morning. I shall be a man. It doesn’t need understanding. It needs newness. She brings me newness — ’

And he listened to the faint, ceaseless wail of distress of his wounds, sounding as if for ever under the horizons of his consciousness. But the wail was growing dim, more dim.

He thought of the woman toiling over him: ‘She does not know! She does not realise the death in me. But she has another consciousness. She comes to me from the opposite end of the night.’

Having chafed all his lower body with oil, having worked with her slow intensity of a priestess, so that the sound of his wounds grew dimmer and dimmer, suddenly she put her breast against the wound in his left side, and her arms round him, folding over the wound in his right side, and she pressed him to her, in a power of living warmth, like the folds of a river. And the wailing died out altogether, and there was a stillness, and darkness in his soul, unbroken, dark stillness, wholeness.

Then slowly, slowly, in the perfect darkness of his inner man, he felt the stir of something coming. A dawn, a new sun. A new sun was coming up in him, in the perfect inner darkness of himself. He waited for it breathless, quivering with a fearful hope...”Now I am not myself. I am something new...”

And as it rose, he felt, with a cold breath of disappointment, the girdle of the living woman slip down from him, the warmth and the glow slipped from him, leaving him stark. She crouched, spent, at the feet of the goddess, hiding her face.

Stooping, he laid his hand softly on her warm, bright shoulder, and the shock of desire went through him, shock after shock, so that he wondered if it were

another sort of death: but full of magnificence.

Now all his consciousness was there in the crouching, hidden woman. He stooped beside her and caressed her softly, blindly, murmuring inarticulate things. And his death and his passion of sacrifice were all as nothing to him now, he knew only the crouching fullness of the woman there, the soft white rock of life..."On this rock I built my life." The deep-folded, penetrable rock of the living woman! The woman, hiding her face. Himself bending over, powerful and new like dawn.

He crouched to her, and he felt the blaze of his manhood and his power rise up in his loins, magnificent.

"I am risen!"

Magnificent, blazing indomitable in the depths of his loins, his own sun dawned, and sent its fire running along his limbs, so that his face shone unconsciously.

He untied the string on the linen tunic and slipped the garment down, till he saw the white glow of her white-gold breasts. And he touched them, and he felt his life go molten. "Father!" he said, "why did you hide this from me?" And he touched her with the poignancy of wonder, and the marvellous piercing transcendence of desire. "Lo!" he said, "this is beyond prayer." It was the deep, interfolded warmth, warmth living and penetrable, the woman, the heart of the rose! My mansion is the intricate warm rose, my joy is this blossom!

She looked up at him suddenly, her face like a lifted light, wistful, tender, her eyes like many wet flowers. And he drew her to his breast with a passion of tenderness and consuming desire, and the last thought: 'My hour is upon me, I am taken unawares — '

So he knew her, and was one with her.

Afterwards, with a dim wonder, she touched the great scars in his sides with her finger-tips, and said:

"But they no longer hurt?"

"They are suns!" he said. "They shine from your torch. They are my atonement with you."

And when they left the temple, it was the coldness before dawn. As he closed the door, he looked again at the goddess, and he said: "Lo, Isis is a kindly goddess; and full of tenderness. Great gods are warm-hearted, and have tender goddesses."

The woman wrapped herself in her mantle and went home in silence, sightless, brooding like the lotus softly shutting again, with its gold core full of fresh life. She saw nothing, for her own petals were a sheath to her. Only she thought: 'I am full of Osiris. I am full of the risen Osiris!'

But the man looked at the vivid stars before dawn, as they rained down to the sea, and the dog-star green towards the sea's rim. And he thought: 'How plastic it is, how full of curves and folds like an invisible rose of dark-petalled openness that shows where the dew touches its darkness! How full it is, and great beyond all gods. How it leans around me, and I am part of it, the great rose of Space. I am like a grain of its perfume, and the woman is a grain of its beauty. Now the world is one flower of many petalled darknesses, and I am in its perfume as in a touch.'

So, in the absolute stillness and fullness of touch, he slept in his cave while the dawn came. And after the dawn, the wind rose and brought a storm, with cold rain. So he stayed in his cave in the peace and the delight of being in touch, delighting to hear the sea, and the rain on the earth, and to see one white-and-gold narcissus bowing wet, and still wet. And he said: "This is the great atonement, the being in touch. The grey sea and the rain, the wet narcissus and the woman I wait for, the invisible Isis and the unseen sun are all in touch, and at one."

He waited at the temple for the woman, and she came in the rain. But she said to him:

"Let me sit awhile with Isis. And come to me, will you come to me, in the second hour of night?"

So he went back to the cave and lay in stillness and in the joy of being in touch, waiting for the woman who would come with the night, and consummate again the contact. Then when night came the woman came, and came gladly, for her great yearning, too, was upon her, to be in touch, to be in touch with him, nearer.

So the days came, and the nights came, and days came again, and the contact was perfected and fulfilled. And he said: "I will ask her nothing, not even her name, for a name would set her apart."

And she said to herself: "He is Osiris. I wish to know no more."

Plum blossom blew from the trees, the time of the narcissus was past, anemones lit up the ground and were gone, the perfume of bean-field was in the air. All changed, the blossom of the universe changed its petals and swung round to look another way. The spring was fulfilled, a contact was established, the man and the woman were fulfilled of one another, and departure was in the air.

One day he met her under the trees, when the morning sun was hot, and the pines smelled sweet, and on the hills the last pear blossom was scattering. She came slowly towards him, and in her gentle lingering, her tender hanging back from him, he knew a change in her.

"Hast thou conceived?" he asked her.

“Why?” she said.

“Thou art like a tree whose green leaves follow the blossom, full of sap. And there is a withdrawing about thee.”

“It is so,” she said. “I am with young by thee. Is it good?”

“Yea!” he said. “How should it not be good? So the nightingale calls no more from the valley-bed. But where wilt thou bear the child, for I am naked of all but life?”

“We will stay here,” she said.

“But the lady, your mother?”

A shadow crossed her brow. She did not answer.

“What when she knows?” he said.

“She begins to know.”

“And would she hurt you?”

“Ah, not me! What I have is all my own. And I shall be big with Osiris...But thou, do you watch her slaves.”

She looked at him, and the peace of her maternity was troubled by anxiety.

“Let not your heart be troubled!” he said. “I have died the death once.”

So he knew the time was come again for him to depart. He would go alone, with his destiny. Yet not alone, for the touch would be upon him, even as he left his touch on her. And invisible suns would go with him.

Yet he must go. For here on the bay the little life of jealousy and property was resuming sway again, as the suns of passionate fecundity relaxed their sway. In the name of property, the widow and her slaves would seek to be revenged on him for the bread he had eaten, and the living touch he had established, the woman he had delighted in. But he said: “Not twice! They shall not now profane the touch in me. My wits against theirs.”

So he watched. And he knew they plotted. So he moved from the little cave and found another shelter, a tiny cove of sand by the sea, dry and secret under the rocks.

He said to the woman:

“I must go now soon. Trouble is coming to me from the slaves. But I am a man, and the world is open. But what is between us is good, and is established. Be at peace. And when the nightingale calls again from your valley-bed, I shall come again, sure as spring.”

She said: “O, don’t go! Stay with me on half the island, and I will build a house for you and me under the pine trees by the temple, where we can live apart.”

Yet she knew that he would go. And even she wanted the coolness of her own air around her, and the release from anxiety.

“If I stay,” he said, “they will betray me to the Romans and to their justice. But I will never be betrayed again. So when I am gone, live in peace with the growing child. And I shall come again: all is good between us, near or apart. The suns come back in their seasons: and I shall come again.”

“Do not go yet,” she said. “I have set a slave to watch at the neck of the peninsula. Do not go yet, till the harm shows.”

But as he lay in his little cove, on a calm, still night, he heard the soft knock of oars, and the bump of a boat against the rock. So he crept out to listen. And he heard the Roman overseer say:

“Lead softly to the goat’s den. And Lysippus shall throw the net over the malefactor while he sleeps, and we will bring him before justice, and the Lady of Isis shall know nothing of it..”

The man who had died caught a whiff of flesh from the oiled and naked slaves as they crept up, then the faint perfume of the Roman. He crept nearer to the sea. The slave who sat in the boat sat motionless, holding the oars, for the sea was quite still. And the man who had died knew him.

So out of the deep cleft of a rock he said, in a clear voice:

“Art thou not that slave who possessed the maiden under the eyes of Isis? Art thou not the youth? Speak!”

The youth stood up in the boat in terror. His movement sent the boat bumping against the rock. The slave sprang out in wild fear, and fled up the rocks. The man who had died quickly seized the boat and stepped in, and pushed off. The oars were yet warm with the unpleasant warmth of the hands of the slaves. But the man pulled slowly out, to get into the current which set down the coast, and would carry him in silence. The high coast was utterly dark against the starry night. There was no glimmer from the peninsula: the priestess came no more at night. The man who had died rowed slowly on, with the current, and laughed to himself: “I have sowed the seed of my life and my resurrection, and put my touch forever upon the choice woman of this day, and I carry her perfume in my flesh like essence of roses. She is dear to me in the middle of my being. But the gold and flowing serpent is coiling up again, to sleep at the root of my tree.”

“So let the boat carry me. To-morrow is another day.”

THE END

The Short Stories



D. H. Lawrence, Katherine Mansfield, Frieda Lawrence and John Middleton Murry at their wedding in 1914

LIST OF THE SHORT STORIES IN CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER



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THE WOMAN WHO RODE AWAY
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THE UNDYING MAN
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THE LOVELY LADY
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THE BLUE MOCCASINS
RAWDON'S ROOF
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THE WOMAN WHO RODE AWAY
THINGS
TICKETS, PLEASE
TWO BLUE BIRDS
WINTRY PEACOCK
YOU TOUCHED ME



A PRELUDE

IN the kitchen of a small farm a little woman sat cutting bread and butter. The glow of the clear, ruddy fire was on her shining cheek and white apron; but grey hair will not take the warm caress of firelight.

She skilfully spread the softened butter, and cut off great slices from the floury loaf in her lap. Already two plates were piled, but she continued to cut.

Outside the naked ropes of the creeper tapped and lashed at the window.

The grey-haired mother looked up, and setting the butter on the hearth, rose and went to look out. The sky was heavy and grey as she saw it in the narrow band over the near black wood. So she turned and went to look through the tiny window which opened from the deep recess on the opposite side of the room. The northern sky was blacker than ever.

She turned away with a little sigh, and took a duster from the red, shining warming-pan to take the bread from the oven. Afterwards she laid the table for five.

There was a rumbling and a whirring in the corner, and the clock struck five. Like clocks in many farmers' kitchens, it was more than half an hour fast. The little woman hurried about, bringing milk and other things from the dairy; lifting the potatoes from the fire, peeping through the window anxiously. Very often her neck ached with watching the gate for a sign of approach.

There was a click of the yard gate. She ran to the window, but turned away again, and catching up the blue enamelled teapot, dropped into it a handful of tea from the caddy, and poured on the water. A clinking scrape of iron shod boots sounded outside, then the door opened with a burst as a burly, bearded man entered. He drooped at the shoulders, and leaned forward as a man who has worked heavily all his life.

'Hello, mother,' he said, loudly and cheerfully. 'Am I first? Aren't any of the lads down yet? Fred will be here in a minute.'

'I wish they would come,' said his wife, 'or else it'll rain before they're here.'

'Ay,' he assented, 'it's beginning, and it's cold rain an' all. Bit of sleet, I think,' and he sat down heavily in his armchair, looking at his wife as she knelt and turned the bread, and took a large jar of stewed apples from the oven.

'Well, mother,' he said, with a pleasant comfortable little smile, 'here's another Christmas for you and me. They keep passing us by.'

'Ay,' she answered, the effects of her afternoon's brooding now appearing.

‘They come and go, but they never find us any better off.’

‘It seems so,’ he said, a shade of regret appearing momentarily over his cheerfulness. ‘This year we’ve certainly had some very bad luck. But we keep straight — and we never regret that Christmas, see, it’s twenty-seven years since — twenty-seven years.’

‘No, perhaps not, but there’s Fred as hasn’t had above three pounds for the whole year’s work, and the other two at the pit.’

‘Well, what can I do? If I hadn’t lost the biggest part of the hay, and them two beasts —’

‘If —! Besides what prospects has he? Here he is working year in year out for you and getting nothing at the end of it. When you were his age, when you were 25, you were married and had two children. How can he ask anybody to marry him?’

‘I don’t know that he wants to. He’s fairly contented. Don’t be worrying about him and upsetting him. He’d only go and leave us if he got married. Besides, we may have a good year next year, and we can make this up.’

‘Ay, so you say.’

‘Don’t fret yourself to-night, lass. It’s true, things haven’t gone as we hoped they would. I never thought to see you doing all the work you have to do, but we’ve been very comfortable, all things considered, haven’t we?’

‘I never thought to see my first lad a farm labourer at 25, and the other two in the pit. Two of my sons in the pit!’

‘I’m sure I’ve done what I could, and’ — but they heard a scraping outside, and he said no more.

The eldest son tramped in, his great boots and his leggings all covered with mud. He took off his wet overcoat, and stood on the hearthrug, his hands spread out behind him in the warmth of the fire.

Looking smilingly at his mother, as she moved about the kitchen, he said:

‘You do look warm and cosy, mother. When I was coming up with the last load, I thought of you trotting about in that big, white apron, getting tea ready, watching the weather. There are the lads. Aren’t you quite contented now — perfectly happy?’

She laughed an odd little laugh, and poured out the tea. The boys came in from the pit, wet and dirty, with clean streaks down their faces where the rain had trickled. They changed their clothes and sat at the table. The elder was a big, heavy loosely-made fellow, with a long nose and chin, and comical wrinkling round his eyes. The younger, Arthur, was a handsome lad, dark-haired, with ruddy colour glowing through his dirt, and dark eyes. When he talked and laughed the red of his lips and the whiteness of his teeth and eyeballs stood out

in startling contrast to the surrounding black.

‘Mother, I’m glad to see thee,’ he said, looking at her with frank, boyish affection.

‘There, mother, what more can you want?’ asked her husband.

She took a bite of bread and butter, and looked up with a quaint, comical glance, as if she were given only her just dues, but for all that it pleased and amused her, only she was half shy, and a grain doubtful.

‘Lad,’ said Henry. ‘It’s Christmas Eve. The fire ought to burn its brightest.’

‘Yes. I will have just another potato, seeing as Christmas is the time for feeding. What are we going to do? Are we going to have a party, mother?’

‘Yes, if you want one.’

‘Party,’ laughed the father, ‘who’d come?’

‘We might ask somebody. We could have Nellie Wycherley, who used to come, an’ David Garton.’

‘We shall not do for Nellie nowadays,’ said the father, ‘I saw her on Sunday morning on the top road. She was drivin’ home with another young woman, an’ she stopped an’ asked me if we’d got any holly with berries on, an’ I said we hadn’t.’

Fred looked up from the book he was reading over tea. He had dark brown eyes, something like his mother’s, and they always drew attention when he turned them on anyone.

‘There is a tree covered in the wood,’ he said.

‘Well,’ answered the irresistible Henry, ‘that’s not ours, is it? An’ if she’s got that proud she won’t come near to see us, am I goin’ choppin’ trees down for her? If she’d come here an’ say she wanted a bit, I’d fetch her half the wood in but when she sits in the trap and looks down on you an’ asks, ‘Do you happen to hev a bush of berried holly in your hedges? Preston can’t find a sprig to decorate the house, and I hev some people coming down from town,’ then I tell her we’re all crying because we’ve none to decorate ourselves, and we want it the more ’cause nobody’s coming, neither from th’ town nor th’ country, an’ we’re likely to forget it’s Christmas if we’ve neither folks nor things to remind us.’

‘What did she say?’ asked the mother.

‘She said she was sorry, an’ I told her not to bother, it’s better lookin’ at folks than at bits o’ holly. The other lass was laughing, an’ she wanted to know what folks. I told her any as hadn’t got more pricks than a holly bush to keep you off.’

‘Ha! ha!’ laughed the father; ‘did she take it?’

‘The other girl nudged her, and they both began a laughing. Then Nellie told me to send down the guysers to-night. I said I would, but they’re not going now.’

‘Why not?’ asked Fred.

‘Billy Simpson’s got a gathered face, an’ Wardy’s gone to Nottingham.’

‘The company down at Ramsley Mill will have nobody to laugh at to-night,’ said Arthur.

‘Tell ye what,’ exclaimed Henry, ‘we’ll go.’

‘How can we, three of us?’ asked Arthur.

‘Well,’ persisted Henry, ‘we could dress up so as they’d niver know us, an’ hae a bit o’ fun. Hey!’ he suddenly shouted to Fred, who was reading, and taking no notice, ‘Hey, we’re going to the Mill guysing.’

‘Who is?’ asked the elder brother, somewhat surprised.

‘You an’ me, an’ our Arthur. I’ll be Beelzebub.’

Here he distorted his face to look diabolic, so that everybody roared.

‘Go,’ said his father, ‘you’ll make our fortunes.’

‘What!’ he exclaimed, ‘by making a fool of myself? They say fools for luck. What fools wise folk must be. Well, I’ll be the devil — are you shocked, mother? What will you be, Arthur?’

‘I don’t care,’ was the answer. ‘We can put some of that red paint on our faces, and some soot, they’d never know us. Shall we go, Fred?’

‘I don’t know.’

‘Why, I should like to see her with her company, to see if she has very fine airs. We could leave some holly for her in the scullery.’

‘All right, then.’

After tea all helped with the milking and feeding. Then Fred took a hedge knife and a hurricane lamp and went into the wood to cut some of the richly berried holly. When he got back he found his brothers roaring with laughter before the mirror. They were smeared with red and black, and had fastened on grotesque horsehair moustaches, so that they were entirely unrecognisable.

‘Oh, you are hideous,’ cried their mother. ‘Oh, it’s shameful to disfigure the work of the Almighty like that.’

Fred washed and proceeded to dress. They could not persuade him to use paint or soot. He rolled his sleeves up to the shoulder, and wrapped himself in a great striped horse rug. Then he tied a white cloth round his head, as the Bedouins do, and pulled out his moustache to fierce points. He looked at himself with approval, took an old sword from the wall, and held it in one naked, muscular arm.

‘Decidedly,’ he thought, ‘it is very picturesque, and I look very fine.’

‘Oh, that is grand,’ said his mother as he entered the kitchen. His dark eyes glowed with pleasure to hear her say it. He seemed somewhat excited, this bucolic young man. His tanned skin shone rich and warm under the white cloth, its coarseness hidden by the yellow lamplight. His eyes glittered like a true

Arab's, and it was to be noticed that the muscles of his sun-browned arms were tense with the grip of the broad hand.

It was remarkable how the dark folds of the rug and the flowing burnous glorified this young farmer, who, in his best clothes looked awkward and ungainly, and whose face a linen collar showed coarse, owing to exposure to the weather, and long application to heavy labour.

They set out to cross the two of their own fields, and two of their neighbour's, which separated their home from the mill. A few uncertain flakes of snow were eddying down, melting as they settled. The ground was wet, and the night very dark. But they knew the way well, and were soon at the gate leading to the mill yard. The dog began to bark furiously, but they called to him, 'Trip, Trip,' and knowing their voices, he was quieted.

Henry gave a thundering knock, and bawled in stentorian tones, 'Dun yer want guysers?'

A man came to the door, very tall, very ungainly, very swarthy.

'We non want yer.' he said, talking down his nose.

'Here comes Beelzebub,' banged away Henry thumping a pan which he carried. 'Here comes Beelzebub, an' he's come to th' right place.'

A big, bonny farm girl came to the door.

'Who is it?' she asked.

'Beelzebub, you know him well.' was the answer.

'I'll ask Miss Ellen it she wants you.'

Henry winked a red and black wink at the maid, saying, 'Never keep Satan on the doorstep,' and he stepped into the scullery.

The girl ran away, and soon was heard a laughing, and bright talking of women's voices drawing nearer to the kitchen.

'Tell them to come in,' said a voice.

The three trooped in and glanced round the big kitchen. They could only see Betty, seated as near to them as possible on the squab, her father, black and surly, in his armchair, and two women's figures in the deep shadows of one of the great ingle-nook seats.

'Ah,' said Beelzebub, 'this is a bit more like it, a bit hotter. The Devil feels at home here.'

They began the ludicrous old Christmas play that everyone knows so well. Beelzebub acted with much force, much noise, and some humour. St. George, that is Fred, played his part with zeal and earnestness most amusing, but at one of the most crucial moments he entirely forgot his speech, which, however, was speedily rectified by Beelzebub. Arthur was nervous and awkward, so that Beelzebub supplied him with most of his speeches.

After much horseplay, stabbing, falling on the floor, bangings of dripping-pans, and ludicrous striving to fill in the blanks, they came to an end.

They waited in silence.

‘Well what next?’ asked a voice from the shadows.

‘It’s your turn,’ said Beelzebub.

‘What do you want?’

‘As little as you have the heart to give.’

‘But,’ said another voice, one they knew well, ‘we have no heart to give at all.’

‘You did not know your parts well,’ said Blanche, the stranger. ‘The big fellow in the blanket deserves nothing.’

‘What about me?’ asked Arthur.

‘You,’ answered the same voice, ‘oh you’re a nice boy, and a lady’s thanks are enough reward for you.’

He blushed, and muttered something unintelligible.

‘There’ll be the Devil to pay,’ suggested Beelzebub.

‘Give the Devil his dues, Nell,’ said Blanche choking again with laughter. Nellie threw a large silver coin on the flagstone floor, but she was nervous and it rolled to the feet of Preston in his armchair.

‘Alf-a-cern!’ he exclaimed, ‘gie em thrippence, an’ they’re non worth that much.’

This was too much for the chivalrous St. George. He could bear no longer to stand in this ridiculous garb before his scornful lady-love and her laughing friend.

He snatched off his burnous and his robe, flung them over one arm, and with the other caught back Beelzebub, who would have gone to pick up the money. There he stood, St. George metamorphosed into a simple young farmer, with ruffled curly black hair, a heavy frown and bare arms.

‘Won’t you let him have it?’ asked Blanche. ‘Well, what do you want?’ she continued.

‘Nothing, thanks. I’m sorry we troubled you.’

‘Come on,’ he said, drawing the reluctant Beelzebub, and the three made their exit. Blanche laughed and laughed again to see the discomfited knight tramp out, rolling down his shirt sleeves.

Nellie did not laugh. Seeing him turn, she saw him again as a child, before her father had made money by the cattle-dealing, when she was a poor, wild little creature. But her father had grown rich and the mill was a big farm, and when the old cattle dealer had died, she became sole mistress. Then Preston, their chief man, came with Betty and Sarah, to live in, and take charge of the farm.

Nellie had seen little of her old friends since then. She had stayed a long time in town, and when she called on them after her return found them cool and estranged. So she had not been again, and now it was almost a year since she had spoken many words to Fred.

Her brief meditations were disturbed by a scream from Betty in the scullery, followed by the wild rush of that damsel into the kitchen.

‘What’s up?’ asked her father.

‘There’s somebody there got hold of my legs.’

Nellie felt suddenly her own loneliness. Preston struck a match and investigated. He returned with a bunch of glittering holly, thick with scarlet berries.

‘Here’s yer somebody,’ said he, flinging the bunch down on the table.

‘Oh, that is pretty,’ exclaimed Blanche. Nellie rose, looked, then hurried down the passage to the sitting-room, followed by her friend. There, to the consternation of Blanche, she sat down and began to cry.

‘Whatever is the matter?’ asked Blanche.

It was some time before she had a reply, then, ‘It’s so miserable,’ faltered Nellie, ‘and so lonely. I do think Will and Harry and Louie and all the others were mean not to come, then this wouldn’t have happened. It was such a shame — such a shame.’

‘What was a shame?’ asked Blanche.

‘Why, when he had got me that holly, and come down to see —’ she ended blushing.

‘Whom do you mean — the Bedouin?’

‘And I had not seen him for months, and he will think I am just a mean, proud thing.’

‘You don’t mean to say you care for him?’

Nellie’s tears began to flow again. ‘I do, and I wish this miserable farm and bit of money had never come between us. He’ll never come again, never, I know.’

‘Then,’ said Blanche, ‘you must go to him.’

‘Yes, and I will.’

‘Come along, then.’

In the meantime, the disappointed brothers had reached home. Fred had thrown down his Bedouin wardrobe, and put on his coat, muttering something about having a walk up the village. Then he had gone out, his mother’s eyes watching his exit with helpless grief, his father looking over his spectacles in a half-surprised paternal sympathy. However, they heard him tramp down the yard and enter the barn, and they knew he would soon recover. Then the lads went out, and nothing was heard in the kitchen save the beat of the clock and the

rustle of the newspaper, or the rattle of the board, as the mother rolled out paste for the mince-pies.

In the pitch-dark barn, the rueful Bedouin told himself that he expected no other than this, and that it was high time he ceased fooling himself with fancies, that he was well-cured, that even if she had invited him to stay, how could he; how could he have asked her; she must think he wanted badly to become master of Ramsley Mill. What a fool he had been to go — what a fool!

‘But,’ he argued, ‘let her think what she likes. I don’t care. She may remember if she can that I used to sole her boots with my father’s leather, and she went home in mine. She can remember that my mother taught her how to write and sew decently. I should think she must sometimes.’

Then he admitted to himself that he was sure she did not forget. He could feel quite well that she was wishing that this long estrangement might cease.

‘But,’ came the question, ‘why doesn’t she end it? Pah, It’s only my conceit; she thinks more of those glib, grinning fellows from the clerks’ stools. Let her, what do I care!’

Suddenly he heard voices from the field at the back, and sat up listening.

‘Oh, it’s a regular slough,’ said someone. ‘We can never get through the gate. See, let us climb the stockyard fence. They’ve put some new rails in. Can you manage, Blanche? Here, just between the lilac bush and the stack. What a blessing they keep Chris at the front! Mind, bend under this plum tree. Dare we go, Blanche?’

‘Go on, go on,’ whispered Blanche, and they crept up to the tiny window, through which the lamplight streamed uninterrupted. Fred stole out of the barn and hid behind the great water-butt. He saw them stoop and creep to the window and peep through. In the kitchen sat the father, smoking and appearing to read, but really staring into the fire. The mother was putting the top crusts on the little pies, but she was interrupted by the need to wipe her eyes.

‘Oh, Blanche,’ whispered Nellie, ‘he’s gone out.’

‘It looks like it,’ assented the other.

‘Perhaps he’s not, though,’ resumed the former bravely. ‘He’s very likely only in the parlour.’

‘That’s all right, then.’ said Blanche. ‘I thought we should have seen him looking so miserable. But, of course, he wouldn’t let his mother see it.’

‘Certainly not,’ said Blanche.

Fred chuckled.

‘But,’ she continued doubtfully, ‘If he has gone out, whatever shall we do? What can we tell his mother?’

‘Tell her we came up for fun.’

‘But if he’s out?’

‘Stay till he comes home.’

‘If it’s late?’

‘It’s Christmas Eve.’

‘Perhaps he doesn’t care after all.’

‘You think he does, so do I; and you’re quite sure you want him.’

‘You know I do, Blanche, and I always have done.’

‘Let us begin, then.’

‘What? ‘Good King Wenceslas?’’

The mother and father started as the two voices suddenly began to carol outside. She would have run to the door, but her husband waved her excitedly back. ‘Let them finish,’ his eyes shining. ‘Let them finish.’

The girls had retired from the window lest they should be seen, and stood near the water-but. When the old carol was finished, Nellie began the beautiful song of Giordani’s:

Turn once again, heal thou my pain,
Parted from thee, my heart is sore.

As she sang she stood holding a bough of the old plum tree, so close to Fred that by leaning forward he could have touched her coat. Carried away by the sweet pathos of her song, he could hardly refrain from rising and flinging his arms around her.

She finished, the door opened, showing a little woman holding out her hands.

Both girls made a motion towards her, but —

‘Nell, Nell,’ he whispered, and caught her in his arms. She gave a little cry of alarm and delight. Blanche stepped into the kitchen, and shut the door, laughing.

She sat in the low rocking-chair swinging to and fro in a delighted excitement, chattering brightly about a hundred things. And with a keen woman’s eye, she noticed the mother put her hands on her husband’s as she sat on the sofa by his chair, and saw him hold the shining stiffened hand in one of his, and stroke it with old, undiminished affection.

Soon the two came in, Nellie all blushing. Without a word she ran and kissed the little mother, lingering a moment over her before she turned to the quiet embrace of the father. Then she took off her hat, and brushed back the brown tendrils all curled so prettily by the damp.

Already she was at home.

A FLY IN THE OINTMENT

MURIEL had sent me some mauve primroses, slightly weather-beaten, and some honeysuckle — twine threaded with grey-green rosettes, and some timid hazel catkins. They had arrived in a forlorn little cardboard box just as I was rushing off to school.

‘Stick ’em in water!’ I said to Mrs Williams; and I left the house. But those mauve primroses had set my tone for the day: I was dreamy and reluctant; school and the sounds of the boys were unreal, unsubstantial; beyond these were the realities of my poor winter — trodden primroses and the pale hazel catkins that Muriel had sent me. Altogether the boys must have thought me a vacant fool; I regarded them as a punishment upon me.

I rejoiced exceedingly when night came, with the evening star, and the sky flushed dark blue, purple over the golden pomegranates of the lamps. I was as glad as if I had been hurrying home to Muriel, as if she would open the door to me, would keep me a little while in the fire-glow, with the splendid purple of the evening against the window, before she laughed and drew up her head proudly and flashed on the light over the tea-cups. But Eleanor, the girl, opened the door to me, and I poured out my tea in solitary state.

Mrs Williams had set out my winter posy for me on the table, and I thought of all the beautiful things we had done, Muriel and I, at home in the Midlands, of all the beautiful ways she had looked at me, of all the beautiful things I had said to her — or had meant to say. I went on imagining beautiful things to say to her, while she looked at me with her wonderful eyes from among the fir boughs in the wood. Meanwhile, I talked to my landlady about the neighbours.

Although I had much work to do, and although I laboured away at it, in the end there was nothing done. Then I felt very miserable, and sat still and sulked. At a quarter to eleven I said to myself:

‘This will never do,’ and I took up my pen and wrote a letter to Muriel.

‘It was not fair to send me those robins’ — we called the purple primroses ‘robins’, for no reason, unless that they bloomed in winter — ‘they have bewitched me. Their wicked, bleared little pinkish eyes follow me about, and I have to think of you and home, instead of doing what I’ve got to do. All the time while I was teaching I had a grasshopper chirruping away in my head and the arithmetic rattled like the carts on the street. Poor lads! I read their miserable pieces of composition on “Pancakes” over and over, and never saw them,

thinking “the primroses flower now because it is so sheltered under the plum-trees — those old trees with gummy bark”. You like biting through a piece of hard, bright gum. If your lips did not get so sticky. . .’

I will not say at what time I finished my letter. I can recall a sensation of being dim, oblivious of everything, smiling to myself as I sealed the envelope; of putting my books and papers in their places without the least knowledge of so doing, keeping the atmosphere of Strelley Mill close round me in my London lodging. I cannot remember turning off the electric light. The next thing of which I am conscious is pushing at the kitchen door.

The kitchen is at the back of the house. Outside in the dark was a little yard and a hand’s breadth of garden hacked by the railway embankment. I had come down the passage from my room in the front of the house, and stood pushing at the kitchen door to get a glass for some water. Evidently the oilcloth had turned up a little, and the edge of the door was under it. I woke up irritably, swore a little, pushed harder, and heard the oilcloth rip. Then I bent and put my hand through the small space of the door to flatten the oilcloth.

The kitchen was in darkness save for the red embers lying low in the stove. I started, but rather from sleepy wonder than anything else. The shock was not quite enough to bring me to. Pressing himself flat into the corner between the stove and the wall was a fellow. I wondered, and was disturbed; the greater part of me was away in the Midlands still. So I stood looking and blinking.

‘Why?’ I said helplessly. I think this very mildness must have terrified him. Immediately he shrank together and began to dodge about between the table and stove, whining, snarling, with an incredibly mongrel sound:

‘Don’t yer touch me! Don’t yer come grabbin’ at me! I’ll hit you between the eyes with this poker. I ain’t done nothin’ to you. Don’t yer touch me, yer bloody coward!’

All the time he was writhing about in the space in which I had him trapped, between the table and stove. I was much too dazed to do anything but stare. Then my blood seemed to change its quality. I came awake, sick and sharp with pain. It was such a display as I had seen before in school, and I felt again the old misery of helplessness and disgust. He dared not, I knew, strike, unless by trying to get hold of him I terrified him to the momentary madness of such a slum-rat.

‘Stop your row!’ I said, standing still and leaving him his room. ‘Shut your miserable row! Do you want to waken the children?’

‘Ah, but don’t you touch me, don’t you come no nearer!’

He had stopped writhing about, and was crouching at the defensive. The little frenzy, too, had gone out of his voice.

‘Put the poker down, you fool’ — I pointed to the corner of the stove, where

the poker used to stand. I supplied him with the definite idea of placing the poker in the corner, and in his crazy witless state he could not reject it. He did as I told him, but indefinitely, as if the action were secondhand. The poker, loosely dropped into the corner, slid to the ground with a clatter.

I looked from it to him, feeling him like a burden upon me, and in some way I was afraid of him, for my heart began to beat heavily. His own indefinite clumsiness, and the jangle of the poker on the hearth, and then my sudden spiritual collapse, unnerved him still more. He crouched there abjectly.

I took a box of matches from the mantelpiece and lit the gas at the pendant that hung in the middle of the bare little room. Then I saw that he was a youth of nineteen or so, narrow at the temples, with thin, pinched-looking brows. He was not ugly, nor did he look ill-fed. But he evidently came of a low breed. His hair had been cut close to his skull, leaving a tussocky fringe over his forehead to provide him with a 'topping', and to show that it was no prison crop which had bared him.

'I wasn't doin' no harm,' he whined resentfully, with still an attempt at a threat in his tones. 'I 'aven't done nuffin' to you; you leave me alone. What harm have I done?'

'Be quiet,' I said. 'You'll wake the children and the people.'

I went to the door and listened. No one was disturbed. Then I closed the door and pulled down the wide-opened window, which was, letting in the cold night air. As I did so I shivered, noting how ugly and shapeless the mangle looked in the yard, with the moonlight on its frosty cover.

The fellow was standing abjectly in the same place. He had evidently been rickety as a child. I sat down in the rocking-chair.

'What did you come in here for?' I asked, almost pleading.

'Well,' he retorted insolently. 'An' wouldn't you go somewhere if you 'edn't a place to go to of a night like this?'

'Look here,' I said coldly, a flash of hate in my blood; 'None of your chelp.'

'Well, I only come in for a warm,' he said, afraid not to appear defiant.

'No you didn't,' I replied. 'You came to take something. What did you want from here?' I looked round the kitchen unhappily. He looked back at me uneasily, then at his dirty hands, then at me again. He had brown eyes, in which low cunning floated like oil on the top of much misery.

'I might 'a took some boots' he said, with a little vaunt.

My heart sank. I hoped he would say 'food'. And I was responsible for him. I hated him.

'You want your neck breaking,' I said. 'We can hardly afford boots as it is.'

'I ain't never done it before! This is the first time —'

‘You miserable swine!’ I said. He looked at me with a flash of rat-fury.

‘Where do you live?’ I asked.

‘Exeter Road.’

‘And you don’t do any work?’

‘I couldn’t never get a job — except — I used to deliver laundry —’

‘And they turned you off for thieving?’

He shifted and stirred uneasily in his chair. As he was so manifestly uncomfortable, I did not press him.

‘Who do you live with?’

‘I live at ’ome.’

‘What does your father do?’

But he sat stubborn and would not answer. I thought of the gangs of youths who stood at the corner of the mean streets near the school, there all day long, month after month, fooling with the laundry girls and insulting passers-by.

‘But,’ I said, ‘what are you going to do?’

He hung his head again and fidgeted in his chair. Evidently what little thought he gave to the subject made him uncomfortable. He could not answer.

‘Get a laundry girl to marry you and live on her?’ I asked sarcastically.

He smiled sickly, evidently even a little bit flattered. What was the good of talking to him?

‘And loaf at the street corners till you go rotten?’ I said.

He looked up at me sullenly.

‘Well, I can’t get a job,’ he replied with insolence. He was not hopeless, but like a man born without expectations, apathetic, looking to be provided for, sullenly allowing everything.

‘No,’ I said, ‘if a man is worthy of his hire, the hire is worthy of a man — and I’m damned if you are a man!’

He grinned at me with sly insolence.

‘And would any woman have you?’ I asked.

Then he grinned slyly to himself, ducking his head to hide the joke. And I thought of the coloured primroses and of Muriel’s beautiful, pensive face. Then of him with his dirty clothes and his nasty skin! Then that, given a woman, he would be a father.

‘Well,’ I said, ‘it’s a knock-out.’

He gave me a narrow, sleering look.

‘You don’t know everyfing,’ he said in contempt.

I sat and wondered. And I knew I could not understand him, that I had no fellow feeling with him. He was something beyond me.

‘Well,’ I said helplessly, ‘you’d better go.’

I rose, feeling he had beaten me. He could affect and alter me: I could not affect nor alter him. He shambled off down the path. I watched him skulk under the lamp-posts, afraid of the police. Then I shut the door.

In the silence of the sleeping house I stood quite still for some minutes, up against the impassable fact of this man, beyond which I could not get. I could not accept him. I simply hated him. Then I climbed the stairs. It was like a nightmare. I thought he was a blot, like a blot fallen on my mind, something black and heavy out of which I could not extricate myself.

As I hung up my coat I felt Muriel's fat letter in my pocket. It made me a trifle sick. 'No!' I said, with a flush of rage against her perfect, serene purity, 'I don't want to think of her.' And I wound my watch up sullenly, feeling alone and wretched.

THE OLD ADAM

The maid who opened the door was just developing into a handsome womanhood. Therefore she seemed to have the insolent pride of one newly come to an inheritance. She would be a splendid woman to look at, having just enough of Jewish blood to enrich her comeliness into beauty. At nineteen her fine grey eyes looked challenge, and her warm complexion, her black hair looped up slack, enforced the sensuous folding of her mouth.

She wore no cap nor apron, but a well-looking sleeved overall such as even very ladies don.

The man she opened to was tall and thin, but graceful in his energy. He wore white flannels, carried a tennis-racket. With a light bow to the maid he stepped beside her on the threshold. He was one of those who attract by their movement, whose movement is watched unconsciously, as we watch the flight of a sea-bird waving its wing leisurely. Instead of entering the house, the young man stood beside the maid-servant and looked back into the blackish evening. When in repose, he had the diffident, ironic bearing so remarkable in the educated youth of to-day, the very reverse of that traditional aggressiveness of youth.

“It is going to thunder, Kate,” he said.

“Yes, I think it is,” she replied, on an even footing.

The young man stood a moment looking at the trees across the road, and on the oppressive twilight.

“Look,” he said, “there’s not a trace of colour in the atmosphere, though it’s sunset; all a dark, lustrous grey; and those oaks kindle green like a low fire — see!”

“Yes,” said Kate, rather awkwardly.

“A troublesome sort of evening; must be, because it’s your last with us.”

“Yes,” said the girl, flushing and hardening.

There was another pause; then:

“Sorry you’re going?” he asked, with a faint tang of irony.

“In some ways,” she replied, rather haughtily.

He laughed, as if he understood what was not said, then, with an “Ah well!” he passed along the hall.

The maid stood for a few moments clenching her young fists, clenching her very breast in revolt. Then she closed the door.

Edward Severn went into the dining-room. It was eight o’clock, very dark for

a June evening; on the dusk-blue walls only the gilt frames of the pictures glinted pale. The clock occupied the room with its delicate ticking.

The door opened into a tiny conservatory that was lined with a grapevine. Severn could hear, from the garden beyond, the high prattling of a child. He went to the glass door.

Running down the grass by the flower-border was a little girl of three, dressed in white. She was very bonny, very quick and intent in her movements; she reminded him of a fieldmouse which plays alone in the corn, for sheer joy. Severn lounged in the doorway, watching her. Suddenly she perceived him. She started, flashed into greeting, gave a little gay jump, and stood quite still again, as if pleading.

“Mr. Severn,” she cried, in wonderfully coaxing tones: “Come and see this.”

“What?” he asked.

“Com’ and see it,” she pleaded.

He laughed, knowing she only wanted to coax him into the garden; and he went.

“Look,” she said, spreading out her plump little arm.

“What?” he asked.

The baby was not going to admit that she had tricked him thither for her amusement.

“All gone up to buds,” she said, pointing to the closed marigolds. Then “See!” she shrieked, flinging herself at his legs, grasping the flannel of his trousers, and tugging at him wildly. She was a wild little Mænad. She flew shrieking like a revelling bird down the garden, glancing back to see if he were coming. He had not the heart to desist, but went swiftly after her. In the obscure garden, the two white figures darted through the flowering plants, the baby, with her full silk skirts, scudding like a ruffled bird, the man, lithe and fleet, snatching her up and smothering his face in hers. And all the time her piercing voice reechoed from his low calls of warning and of triumph as he hunted her. Often she was really frightened of him; then she clung fast round his neck, and he laughed and mocked her in a low, stirring voice, whilst she protested.

The garden was large for a London suburb. It was shut in by a high dark embankment, that rose above a row of black poplar trees. And over the spires of the trees, high up, slid by the golden-lighted trains, with the soft movement of caterpillars and a hoarse, subtle noise.

Mrs. Thomas stood in the dark doorway watching the night, the trains, the flash and run of the two white figures.

“And now we must go in,” she heard Severn say.

“No,” cried the baby, wild and defiant as a bacchanal. She clung to him like a

wild-cat.

“Yes,” he said. “Where’s your mother?”

“Give me a swing,” demanded the child.

He caught her up. She strangled him hard with her young arms.

“I said, where’s your mother?” he persisted, half smothered.

“She’s op’tairs,” shouted the child. “Give me a swing.”

“I don’t think she is,” said Severn.

“She is. Give me a swing, a swi-i-ing!”

He bent forward, so that she hung from his neck like a great pendant. Then he swung her, laughing low to himself while she shrieked with fear. As she slipped he caught her to his breast.

“Mary!” called Mrs. Thomas, in that low, songful tone of a woman when her heart is roused and happy.

“Mary!” she called, long and sweet.

“Oh, no!” cried the child quickly.

But Severn bore her off. Laughing, he bowed his head and offered to the mother the baby who clung round his neck.

“Come along here,” said Mrs. Thomas roguishly, clasping the baby’s waist with her hands.

“Oh, no,” cried the child, tucking her head into the young man’s neck.

“But it’s bed-time,” said the mother. She laughed as she drew at the child to pull her loose from Severn. The baby clung tighter, and laughed, feeling no determination in her mother’s grip. Severn bent his head to loosen the child’s hold, bowed, and swung the heavy baby on his neck. The child clung to him, bubbling with laughter; the mother drew at her baby, laughing low, while the man swung gracefully, giving little jerks of laughter.

“Let Mr. Severn undress me,” said the child, hugging close to the young man, who had come to lodge with her parents when she was scarce a month old.

“You’re in high favour to-night,” said the mother to Severn. He laughed, and all three stood a moment watching the trains pass and repass in the sky beyond the garden-end. Then they went indoors, and Severn undressed the child.

She was a beautiful girl, a bacchanal with her wild, dull-gold hair tossing about like a loose chaplet, her hazel eyes shining daringly, her small, spaced teeth glistening in little passions of laughter within her red, small mouth. The young man loved her. She was such a little bright wave of wilfulness, so abandoned to her impulses, so white and smooth as she lay at rest, so startling as she flashed her naked limbs about. But she was growing too old for a young man to undress.

She sat on his knee in her high-waisted night-gown, eating her piece of bread-

and-butter with savage little bites of resentment: she did not want to go to bed. But Severn made her repeat a Pater Noster. She lisped over the Latin, and Mrs. Thomas, listening, flushed with pleasure; although she was a Protestant, and although she deplored the unbelief of Severn, who had been a Catholic.

The mother took the baby to carry her to bed. Mrs. Thomas was thirty-four years old, full-bosomed and ripe. She had dark hair that twined lightly round her low, white brow. She had a clear complexion, and beautiful brows, and dark-blue eyes. The lower part of her face was heavy.

“Kiss me,” said Severn to the child.

He raised his face as he sat in the rocking-chair. The mother stood beside, looking down at him, and holding the laughing rogue of a baby against her breast. The man’s face was uptilted, his heavy brows set back from the laughing tenderness of his eyes, which looked dark, because the pupil was dilated. He pursed up his handsome mouth, his thick close-cut moustache roused.

He was a man who gave tenderness, but who did not ask for it. All his own troubles he kept, laughingly, to himself. But his eyes were very sad when quiet, and he was too quick to understand sorrow, not to know it.

Mrs. Thomas watched his fine mouth lifted for kissing. She leaned forward, lowering the baby, and suddenly, by a quick change in his eyes, she knew he was aware of her heavy woman’s breasts approaching down to him. The wild rogue of a baby bent her face to his, and then, instead of kissing him, suddenly licked his cheek with her wet, soft tongue. He started back in aversion, and his eyes and his teeth flashed with a dangerous laugh.

“No, no,” he laughed, in low strangled tones. “No dog-lick, my dear, oh no!”

The baby chuckled with glee, gave one wicked jerk of laughter, that came out like a bubble escaping.

He put up his mouth again, and again his face was horizontal below the face of the young mother. She looked down on him as if by a kind of fascination.

“Kiss me, then,” he said with thick throat.

The mother lowered the baby. She felt scarcely sure of her balance. Again the child, when near to his face, darted out her tongue to lick him. He swiftly averted his face, laughing in his throat.

Mrs. Thomas turned her face aside; she would see no more.

“Come then,” she said to the child. “If you won’t kiss Mr. Severn nicely — ”

The child laughed over the mother’s shoulder like a squirrel crouched there. She was carried to bed.

It was still not quite dark; the clouds had opened slightly. The young man flung himself into an arm-chair, with a volume of French verse. He read one lyric, then he lay still.

“What, all in the dark!” exclaimed Mrs. Thomas, coming in. “And reading by *this* light.” She rebuked him with timid affectionateness. Then, glancing at his white-flannelled limbs sprawled out in the gloom, she went to the door. There she turned her back to him, looking out.

“Don’t these flags smell strongly in the evening?” she said at length.

He replied with a few lines of the French he had been reading.

She did not understand. There was a peculiar silence.

“A peculiar, brutal, carnal scent, iris,” he drawled at length. “Isn’t it?”

She laughed shortly, saying: “Eh, I don’t know about that.”

“It is,” he asserted calmly.

He rose from his chair, went to stand beside her at the door.

There was a great sheaf of yellow iris near the window. Farther off, in the last twilight, a gang of enormous poppies balanced and flapped their gold-scarlet, which even the darkness could not quite put out.

“We ought to be feeling very sad,” she said after a while.

“Why?” he asked.

“Well — isn’t it Kate’s last night?” she said, slightly mocking.

“She’s a tartar, Kate,” he said.

“Oh, she’s too rude, she is really! The way she criticises the things you do, and her insolence — ”

“The things *I* do?” he asked.

“Oh no; you can’t do anything wrong. It’s the things *I* do.” Mrs. Thomas sounded very much incensed.

“Poor Kate, she’ll have to lower her key,” said Severn.

“Indeed she will, and a good thing too.”

There was silence again.

“It’s lightning,” he said at last.

“Where?” she asked, with a suddenness that surprised him. She turned, met his eyes for a second. He sank his head, abashed.

“Over there in the north-east,” he said, keeping his face from her. She watched his hand rather than the sky.

“Oh,” she said uninterestedly.

“The storm will wheel round, you’ll see,” he said.

“I hope it wheels the other way, then.”

“Well, it won’t. You don’t like lightning, do you? You’d even have to take refuge with Kate if I weren’t here.”

She laughed quietly at his irony.

“No,” she said, quite bitterly. “Mr. Thomas is never in when he’s wanted.”

“Well, as he won’t be urgently required, we’ll acquit him, eh?”

At that moment a white flash fell across the blackness. They looked at each other, laughing. The thunder came broken and hesitatingly.

“I think we’ll shut the door,” said Mrs. Thomas, in normal, sufficiently distant tones. A strong woman, she locked and bolted the stiff fastenings easily. Severn pressed on the light. Mrs. Thomas noticed the untidiness of the room. She rang, and presently Kate appeared.

“Will you clear baby’s things away?” she said, in the contemptuous tone of a hostile woman. Without answering, and in her superb, unhastening way, Kate began to gather up the small garments. Both women were aware of the observant, white figure of the man standing on the hearth. Severn balanced with a fine, easy poise, and smiled to himself, exulting a little to see the two women in this state of hostility. Kate moved about with bowed defiant head. Severn watched her curiously; he could not understand her. And she was leaving tomorrow. When she had gone out of the room, he remained still standing, thinking. Something in his lithe, vigorous balance, so alert, and white, and independent, caused Mrs. Thomas to glance at him from her sewing.

“I will let the blinds down,” he said, becoming aware that he was attracting attention.

“Thank you,” she replied conventionally.

He let the lattice blinds down, then flung himself into his chair.

Mrs. Thomas sat at the table, near him, sewing. She was a good-looking woman, well made. She sat under the one light that was turned on. The lampshade was of red silk lined with yellow. She sat in the warm-gold light. There was established between the two a peculiar silence, like suspense, almost painful to each of them, yet which neither would break. Severn listened to the snap of her needle, looked from the movement of her hand to the window, where the lightning beat and fluttered through the lattice. The thunder was as yet far off.

“Look,” he said, “at the lightning.”

Mrs. Thomas started at the sound of his voice, and some of the colour went from her face. She turned to the window.

There, between the cracks of the Venetian blinds, came the white flare of lightning, then the dark. Several storms were in the sky. Scarcely had one sudden glare fluttered and palpitated out, than another covered the window with white. It dropped, and another flew up, beat like a moth for a moment, then vanished. Thunder met and overlapped; two battles were fought together in the sky.

Mrs. Thomas went very pale. She tried not to look at the window, yet, when she felt the lightning blench the lamplight, she watched, and each time a flash leaped on the window, she shuddered. Severn, all unconsciously, was smiling with roused eyes.

“You don’t like it?” he said, at last, gently.

“Not much,” she answered, and he laughed.

“Yet all the storms are a fair way off,” he said. “Not one near enough to touch us.”

“No, but,” she replied, at last laying her hands in her lap, and turning to him, “it makes me feel worked up. You don’t know how it makes me feel, as if I couldn’t contain myself.”

She made a helpless gesture with her hand. He was watching her closely. She seemed to him pathetically helpless and bewildered; she was eight years older than he. He smiled in a strange, alert fashion, like a man who feels in jeopardy. She bent over her work, stitching nervously. There was a silence in which neither of them could breathe freely.

Presently a bigger flash than usual whitened through the yellow lamplight. Both glanced at the window, then at each other. For a moment it was a look of greeting; then his eyes dilated to a smile, wide with recklessness. He felt her waver, lose her composure, become incoherent. Seeing the faint helplessness of coming tears, he felt his heart thud to a crisis. She had her face at her sewing.

Severn sank in his chair, half suffocated by the beating of his heart. Yet, time after time, as the flashes came, they looked at each other, till in the end they both were panting, and afraid, not of the lightning but of themselves and of each other.

He was so much moved that he became conscious of his perturbation. “What the deuce is up?” he asked himself, wondering. At twenty-seven, he was quite chaste. Being highly civilised, he prized women for their intuition, and because of the delicacy with which he could transfer to them his thoughts and feelings, without cumbrous argument. From this to a state of passion he could only proceed by fine gradations, and such a procedure he had never begun. Now he was startled, astonished, perturbed, yet still scarcely conscious of his whereabouts. There was a pain in his chest that made him pant, and an involuntary tension in his arms, as if he must press someone to his breast. But the idea that this someone was Mrs. Thomas would have shocked him too much had he formed it. His passion had run on subconsciously, till now it had come to such a pitch it must drag his conscious soul into allegiance. This, however, would probably never happen; he would not yield allegiance, and blind emotion, in this direction, could not carry him alone.

Towards eleven o’clock Mr. Thomas came in.

“I wonder you come home at all,” Severn heard Mrs. Thomas say as her husband stepped indoors.

“I left the office at half-past ten,” the voice of Thomas replied, disagreeably.

“Oh, don’t try to tell me that old tale,” the woman answered contemptuously.

“I didn’t try anything at all, Gertie,” he replied with sarcasm. “Your question was answered.”

Severn imagined him bowing with affected, magisterial dignity, and he smiled. Mr. Thomas was something in the law.

Mrs. Thomas left her husband in the hall, came and sat down again at table, where she and Severn had just finished supper, both of them reading the while.

Thomas came in, flushed very red. He was of middle stature, a thickly-built man of forty, good-looking. But he had grown round-shouldered with thrusting forward his chin in order to look the aggressive, strong-jawed man. He *had* a good jaw; but his mouth was small and nervously pinched. His brown eyes were of the emotional, affectionate sort, lacking pride or any austerity.

He did not speak to Severn nor Severn to him. Although as a rule the two men were very friendly, there came these times when, for no reason whatever, they were sullenly hostile. Thomas sat down heavily, and reached his bottle of beer. His hands were thick, and in their movement rudimentary. Severn watched the thick fingers grasp the drinking-glass as if it were a treacherous enemy.

“Have you *had* supper, Gertie?” he asked, in tones that sounded like an insult. He could not bear that these two should sit reading as if he did not exist.

“Yes,” she replied, looking up at him in impatient surprise. “It’s late enough.” Then she buried herself again in her book.

Severn ducked low and grinned. Thomas swallowed a mouthful of beer.

“I wish you could answer my questions, Gertie, without superfluous detail,” he said nastily, thrusting out his chin at her as if cross-examining.

“Oh,” she said indifferently, not looking up. “Wasn’t my answer right, then?”

“Quite — I thank you,” he answered, bowing with great sarcasm. It was utterly lost on his wife.

“Hm-hm!” she murmured in abstraction, continuing to read.

Silence resumed. Severn was grinning to himself, chuckling.

“I *had* a compliment paid me to-night, Gertie,” said Thomas, quite amicably, after a while. He still ignored Severn.

“Hm-hm!” murmured his wife. This was a well-known beginning. Thomas valiantly struggled on with his courtship of his wife, swallowing his spleen.

“Councillor Jarndyce, in full committee — Are you listening, Gertie?”

“Yes,” she replied, looking up for a moment.

“You know Councillor Jarndyce’s style,” Thomas continued, in the tone of a man determined to be patient and affable: “ — the courteous Old English Gentleman — ”

“Hm-hm!” replied Mrs. Thomas.

“He was speaking in reply to . . .” Thomas gave innumerable wearisome details, which no one heeded.

“Then he bowed to me, then to the Chairman — ‘I am compelled to say, Mr. Chairman, that we have *one* cause for congratulation; we are inestimably fortunate in *one* member of our staff; there is one point of which we can always be sure — the point of *law*; and it is an important point, Mr. Chairman.’

“He bowed to the Chairman, he bowed to me. And you should have heard the applause all round that Council Chamber — that great, horseshoe table, you don’t know how impressive it is. And every face turned to me, and all round the board: ‘Hear — Hear!’ You don’t know what respect I command in *business*, Mrs. Thomas.”

“Then let it suffice you,” said Mrs. Thomas, calmly indifferent.

Mr. Thomas bit his bread-and-butter.

“The fat-head’s had two drops of Scotch, so he’s drawing on his imagination,” thought Severn chuckling deeply.

“I thought you said there was no meeting to-night,” Mrs. Thomas suddenly and innocently remarked after a while.

“There was a meeting, *in camera*,” replied her husband, drawing himself up with official dignity. His excessive and wounded dignity convulsed Severn; the lie disgusted Mrs. Thomas in spite of herself.

Presently Thomas, always courting his wife and insultingly overlooking Severn, raised a point of politics, passed a lordly opinion very offensive to the young man. Severn had risen, stretched himself, and laid down his book. He was leaning on the mantelpiece in an indifferent manner, as if he scarcely noticed the two talkers. But hearing Thomas pronounce like a boor upon the Woman’s Bill, he roused himself, and coolly contradicted his landlord. Mrs. Thomas shot a look of joy at the white-clad young man who lounged so scornfully on the hearth. Thomas cracked his knuckles one after another, and lowered his brown eyes, which were full of hate. After a sufficient pause, for his timidity was stronger than his impulse, he replied with a phrase that sounded final. Severn flipped the sense out of it with a few words. In the argument Severn, more cultured and far more nimble-witted than his antagonist, who hauled up his answers with a lawyer’s show of invincibility, but who had not any fineness of perception, merely spiked his opponent’s pieces and smiled at him. Also the young man enjoyed himself by looking down scornfully, straight into the brown eyes of his senior all the time, so that Thomas writhed.

Mrs. Thomas, meantime, took her husband’s side against women, without reserve. Severn was angry; he was scornfully angry with her. Mrs. Thomas glanced at him from time to time, a little ecstasy lighting her fine blue eyes. The

irony of her part was delicious to her. If she had sided with Severn, that young man would have pitied the forlorn man, and been gentle with him.

The battle of words had got quieter and more intense. Mrs. Thomas made no move to check it. At last Severn was aware he and Thomas were both getting overheated. Thomas had doubled and dodged painfully, like a half-frenzied rabbit that will not realise it is trapped. Finally his efforts had moved even his opponent to pity. Mrs. Thomas was not pitiful. She scorned her husband's dexterity of argument, when his intellectual dishonesty was so evident to her. Severn uttered his last phrases, and would say no more. Then Thomas cracked his knuckles one after the other, turned aside, consumed with morbid humiliation, and there was silence.

"I will go to bed," said Severn. He would have spoken some conciliatory words to his landlord; he lingered with that purpose; but he could not bring his throat to utter his purpose.

"Oh, before you go, do you mind, Mr. Severn, helping Mr. Thomas down with Kate's box? You may be gone before he's up in the morning, and the cab comes at ten. Do you mind?"

"Why should I?" replied Severn.

"Are you ready, Joe?" she asked her husband.

Thomas rose with the air of a man who represses himself and is determined to be patient.

"Where is it?" he asked.

"On the top landing. I'll tell Kate, and then we shan't frighten her. She has gone to bed."

Mrs. Thomas was quite mistress of the situation; both men were humble before her. She led the way, with a candle, to the third floor. There on the little landing, outside the closed door, stood a large tin trunk. The three were silent because of the baby.

"Poor Kate," Severn thought. "It's a shame to kick her out into the world, and all for nothing." He felt an impulse of hate towards womankind.

"Shall I go first, Mr. Severn?" asked Thomas.

It was surprising how friendly the two men were, as soon as they had something to do together, or when Mrs. Thomas was absent. Then they were comrades, Thomas, the elder, the thick-set, playing the protector's part, though always deferential to the younger, whimsical man.

"I had better go first," said Thomas kindly. "And if you put this round the handle, it won't cut your fingers."

He offered the young man a little flexible book from his pocket. Severn had such small, fine hands that Thomas pitied them.

Severn raised one end of the trunk. Leaning back, and flashing a smile to Mrs. Thomas, who stood with the candle, he whispered: "Kate's got a lot more impediments than I have."

"I know it's heavy," laughed Mrs. Thomas.

Thomas, waiting at the brink of the stairs, saw the young man tilting his bare throat towards the smiling woman, and whispering words which pleased her.

"At your pleasure, sir," he said in his most grating and official tones.

"Sorry," Severn flung out scornfully.

The elder man retreated very cautiously, stiffly lowering himself down one stair, looking anxiously behind.

"Are you holding the light for *me*, Gertie?" he snapped sarcastically, when he had managed one stair. She lifted the candle with a swoop. He was in a bustle and a funk, Severn, always indifferent, smiled slightly, and lowered the box with negligent ease of movement. As a matter of fact, three-quarters of the heavy weight: pressed on Thomas. Mrs. Thomas watched the two figures from above.

"If I slip now," thought Severn, as he noticed the anxious, red face of his landlord, "I should squash him like a shrimp," and he laughed to himself.

"Don't come yet," he called softly to Mrs. Thomas, whom he heard following. "If you slip, your husband's bottom-most under the smash. 'Beware the fearful avalanche!'"

He laughed, and Mrs. Thomas gave a little chuckle. Thomas, very red and flustered, glanced irritably back at them, but said nothing.

Near the bottom of the staircase there was a twist in the stairs. Severn was feeling particularly reckless. When he came to the turn, he chuckled to himself, feeling his house-slippers unsafe on the narrowed, triangular stairs. He loved a risk above all things, and a subconscious instinct made the risk doubly sweet when his rival was under the box. Though Severn would not knowingly have hurt a hair of his landlord's head.

When Thomas was beginning to sweat with relief, being only one step from the landing, Severn did slip, quite accidentally. The great box crashed as if in pain, Severn glissaded down the stairs. Thomas was flung backwards across the landing, and his head went thud against the banister post. Severn, seeing no great harm done, was struggling to his feet, laughing and saying: "I'm awfully sorry — " when Thomas got up. The elder man was infuriated like a bull. He saw the laughing face of Severn and he went mad. His brown eyes flared.

"You — — , you did it on purpose!" he shouted, and straightway he fetched the young man two heavy blows, upon the jaw and ear. Thomas, a footballer and a boxer in his youth, had been brought up among the roughs of Swansea; Severn in a religious college in France. The young man had never been struck in the

face before. He instantly went white and mad with rage. Thomas stood on guard, fists up. But on the small, lumbered landing there was no room for fight. Moreover, Severn had no instinct of fisticuffs. With open, stiff fingers, the young man sprang on his adversary. In spite of the blow he received, but did not feel, he flung himself again forward, and then, catching Thomas's collar, brought him down with a crash. Instantly his exquisite hands were dug in the other's thick throat, the linen collar having been torn open. Thomas fought madly, with blind, brute strength. But the other lay wrapped on him like a white steel, his rare intelligence concentrated, not scattered; concentrated on strangling Thomas swiftly. He pressed forward, forcing his landlord's head over the edge of the next flight of stairs. Thomas, stout and full-blooded, lost every trace of self-possession; he struggled like an animal at slaughter. The blood came out of his nose over his face; he made horrid choking sounds as he struggled.

Suddenly Severn felt his face turned between two hands. With a shock of real agony, he met the eyes of Kate. She bent forward, she captured his eyes.

"What do you think you're doing?" she cried in frenzy of indignation. She leaned over him in her night-dress, her two black plaits hanging perpendicular. He hid his face, and took his hands away. As he kneeled to rise, he glanced up the stairs. Mrs. Thomas stood against the banisters, motionless in a trance of horror and remorse. He saw the remorse plainly. Severn turned away his face, and was wild with shame. He saw his landlord kneeling, his hands at his throat, choking, rattling, and gasping. The young man's heart filled with remorse and grief. He put his arms round the heavy man, and raised him, saying tenderly:

"Let me help you up."

He had got Thomas up against the wall, when the choked man began to slide down again in collapse, gasping all the time pitifully.

"No, stand up; you're best standing up," commanded Severn sharply, rearing his landlord up again. Thomas managed to obey, stupidly. His nose still bled, he still held his throat and gasped with a crowing sound. But his breathing was getting deeper.

"Water, Kate — and sponge — cold," said Severn.

Kate was back in an instant. The young man bathed his landlord's face and temples and throat. The bleeding ceased directly, the stout man's breathing became a series of irregular, jerky gasps, like a child that has been sobbing hard. At last he took a long breath, and his breast settled into regular stroke, with little fluttering interruptions. Still holding his hand to his throat, he looked up with dazed, piteous brown eyes, mutely wretched and appealing. He moved his tongue as if to try it, put back his head a little, and moved the muscles of his throat. Then he replaced his hands on the place that ached.

Severn was grief-stricken. He would willingly, at that moment, have given his right hand for the man he had hurt.

Mrs. Thomas, meanwhile, stood on the stairs, watching: for a long time she dared not move, knowing she would sink down. She watched. One of the crises of her life was passing. Full of remorse, she passed over into the bitter land of repentance. She must no longer allow herself to hope for anything for herself. The rest of her life must be spent in self-abnegation: she must seek for no sympathy, must ask for no grace in love, no grace and harmony in living. Henceforward, as far as her own desires went, she was dead. She took a fierce joy in the anguish of it.

“Do you feel better?” Severn asked of the sick man. Thomas looked at the questioner with tragic brown eyes, in which was no anger, only mute self-pity. He did not answer, but looked like a wounded animal, very pitiable. Mrs. Thomas quickly repressed an impulse of impatient scorn, replacing it with a numb, abstract sense of duty, lofty and cold.

“Come,” said Severn, full of pity, and gentle as a woman. “Let me help you to bed.”

Thomas, leaning heavily on the young man, whose white garments were dabbled with blood and water, stumbled forlornly into his room. There Severn unlaced his boots and got off the remnant of his collar. At this point Mrs. Thomas came in. She had taken her part; she was weeping also.

“Thank you, Mr. Severn,” she said coldly. Severn, dismissed, slunk out of the room. She went up to her husband, took his pathetic head upon her bosom, and pressed it there. As Severn went downstairs, he heard the few sobs of the husband, among the quick sniffing of the wife’s tears. And he saw Kate, who had stood on the stairs to see all went well, climb up to her room with cold, calm face.

He locked up the house, put everything in order. Then he heated some water to bathe his face, which was swelling painfully. Having finished his fomentations, he sat thinking bitterly, with a good deal of shame.

As he sat, Mrs. Thomas came down for something. Her bearing was cold and hostile. She glanced round to see all was safe. Then:

“You will put out the light when you go to bed, Mr. Severn,” she said, more formally than a landlady at the seaside would speak. He was insulted: any ordinary being would turn off the light on retiring. Moreover, almost every night it was he who locked up the house, and came last to bed.

“I will, Mrs. Thomas,” he answered. He bowed, his eyes flickering with irony, because he knew his face was swollen.

She returned again after having reached the landing.

“Perhaps you wouldn’t mind helping *me* down with the box,” she said, quietly and coldly. He did not reply, as he would have done an hour before, that he certainly should not help her, because it was a man’s job, and she must not do it. Now, he rose, bowed, and went upstairs with her. Taking the greater part of the weight, he came quickly downstairs with the load.

“Thank you; it’s very good of you. Good-night,” said Mrs. Thomas, and she retired.

In the morning Severn rose late. His face was considerably swollen. He went in his dressing-gown across to Thomas’s room. The other man lay in bed, looking much the same as ever, but mournful in aspect, though pleased within himself at being coddled.

“How are you this morning?” Severn asked.

Thomas smiled, looked almost with tenderness up at his friend.

“Oh, I’m all right, thanks,” he replied.

He looked at the other’s swollen and bruised cheek, then again, affectionately, into Severn’s eyes.

“I’m sorry” — with a glance of indication — ”for that,” he said simply. Severn smiled with his eyes, in his own winsome manner.

“I didn’t know we were such essential brutes,” he said. “I thought I was so civilised . . .”

Again he smiled, with a wry, stiff mouth. Thomas gave a deprecating little grunt of a laugh.

“Oh, I don’t know,” he said. “It shows a man’s got some fight in him.”

He looked up in the other’s face appealingly. Severn smiled, with a touch of bitterness. The two men grasped hands.

To the end of their acquaintance, Severn and Thomas were close friends, with a gentleness in their bearing, one towards the other. On the other hand, Mrs. Thomas was only polite and formal with Severn, treating him as if he were a stranger.

Kate, her fate disposed of by her “betters”, passed out of their three lives.

LESSFORD'S RABBITS

ON Tuesday mornings I have to be at school at half past eight to administer the free breakfasts. Dinners are given in the canteen in one of the mean streets, where the children feed in a Church Mission room appropriately adorned by Sunday School cartoons showing the blessing of the little ones, and the feeding of the five thousand. We serve breakfasts, however, in school, in the wood-work room high up under the roof.

Tuesday morning sees me rushing up the six short flights of stone stairs, at twenty-five minutes to nine. It is my disposition to be late. I generally find a little crowd of children waiting in the 'art' room — so called because it is surrounded with a strip of blackboard too high for the tallest boy to reach — which is a sort of ante-room to the workshop where breakfast is being prepared. I hasten through the little throng to see if things are ready. There are two big girls putting out the basins, and another one looking in the pan to see if the milk is boiling. The room is warm, and seems more comfortable because the windows are high up under the beams of the slanting roof and the walls are all panelled with ruddy gold, varnished wood. The work bench is in the form of three sides of a square — or of an oblong — as the dining tables of the ancients used to be, I believe. At one of the extremities are the three vises, and at the other the great tin pan, like a fish kettle, standing on a gas ring. When the boys' basins are placed along the outer edge of the bench, the girls' on the inner, and the infants' on the lockers against the wall, we are ready. I look at the two rows of assorted basins, and think of the three bears. Then I admit the thirty, who bundle to their places and stand in position, girls on the inside facing boys on the outside, and quaint little infants with their toes kicking the lockers along the walls.

Last week the infant mistress did not come up, so I was alone. She is an impressive woman, who always commands the field. I stand in considerable awe of her. I feel like a reckless pleasure boat with one extravagant sail misbehaving myself in the track of a heavy earnest coaster when she bears down on me. I was considerably excited to find myself in sole charge. As I ushered in the children, the caretaker, a little fierce-eyed man with hollow cheeks and walrus moustache, entered with the large basket full of chunks of bread. He glared around without bidding me good morning.

'Miss Culloch not come?' he asked.

'As you see,' I replied.

He grunted, and put down the basket. Then he drew himself up like a fiery prophet, and stretching forth his hairy arm towards the opposite door, shouted loudly to the children:

‘None of you’s got to touch that other door there! You hear — you’re to leave it alone!’

The children stared at him without answering.

‘A brake as I’m making for these doors,’ he said confidentially to me, thrusting forward his extraordinarily hairy lean arms, and putting two fingers of one hand into the palm of the other, as if to explain his invention. I bowed.

‘Nasty things them swing doors’ — he looked up at me with his fierce eyes, and suddenly swished aside his right arm:

‘They come to like *that!*’ he exclaimed, ‘and a child’s fingers is cut off — clean!’ — he looked at me for ratification. I bowed.

‘It’ll be a good thing, I think,’ he concluded, considerably damped. I bowed again. Then he left me. The chief, almost the only duty of a caretaker, is to review the works of the head and of the staff, as a reviewer does books: at length and according to his superior light.

I told one of the girls to give three chunks of bread to each child, and, having fished a mysterious earwig out of the scalding milk, I filled the large enamelled jug — such as figures and has figured in the drawing lessons of every school in England, I suppose — and doled out the portions — about three-quarters of a pint per senior, and half a pint per infant. Everything was ready. I had to say grace. I dared not launch into the Infant mistress’ formula, thanking the Lord for his goodness — ‘and may we eat and drink to thine everlasting glory — Amen.’ I looked at the boys, dressed in mouldering garments of remote men, at the girls with their rat-tailed hair, and at the infants, quaint little mites on whom I wished, but could not bring myself to expend my handkerchief, and I wondered what I should say. The only other grace I knew was ‘For these and for all good things may the Lord make us truly thankful.’ But I wondered whom we should thank for the bad things. I was becoming desperate. I plunged:

‘Ready now — hands together, close eyes. “Let us eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die.”’ I felt myself flushing with confusion — what did I mean? But there was a universal clink of iron spoons on the basins, and a snuffling, slobbering sound of children feeding. They had not noticed, so it was all right. The infants were kneeling and squalling by the lockers, the boys were stretching wide their eyes and their mouths at the same time, to admit the spoon. They spilled the milk on their jackets and wiped it off with their sleeves, continuing to eat all the time.

‘Don’t slobber, lads, be decent,’ I said, rebuking them from my superior

sphere. They ate more carefully, glancing up at me when the spoon was at their mouths.

I began to count the number — nine boys, seven girls, and eleven infants. Not many. We could never get many boys to give in their names for free meals. I used to ask the Kelleets, who were pinched and pared thin with poverty:

‘Are you sure you don’t want either dinners or breakfasts, Kellet?’

He would look at me curiously, and say, with a peculiar small movement of his thin lips.

‘No Sir.’

‘But have you plenty — quite plenty?’

‘Yes Sir’ — he was very quiet, flushing at my questions. None — or very few — of the boys could endure to accept the meals. Not many parents would submit to the indignity of the officer’s inquirer and the boys, the most foolishly sensitive animals in the world, would, many of them, prefer to go short rather than to partake of charity meals of which all their school-mates were aware.

‘Halket — where is Halket?’ I asked.

‘Please Sir, his mother’s got work,’ replied Lessford, one of my own boys, a ruddy, bonny lad — many of those at breakfast were pictures of health. Lessford was brown-skinned and had fine dark eyes. He was a reticent, irresponsible creature, with a radical incapacity to spell and to read and to draw, but who sometimes scored at arithmetic. I should think he came of a long line of unrelievedly poor people. He was skilled in street lore, and cute at arithmetic, but blunt and blind to everything that needed a little delicacy of perception. He had an irritating habit of looking at me furtively, with his handsome dark eyes, glancing covertly again and again. Yet he was not a sneak; he gave himself the appearance of one. He was a well-built lad, and he looked well in the blue jersey he wore — there were great holes at the elbows, showing the whitish shirt and a brown bit of Lessford. At breakfasts he was a great eater. He would have five solid pieces of bread, and then ask for more.

We gave them bread and milk one morning, cocoa and currant bread the next. I happened to go one cocoa morning to take charge. Lessford, I noticed, did not eat by any means so much as on bread mornings. I was surprised. I asked him if he did not care for currant loaf, but he said he did. Feeling curious, I asked the other teachers what they thought of him. Mr Hayward, who took a currant bread morning, said he was sure the boy had a breakfast before he came to school; — Mr Jephson, who took a milk morning, said the lad was voracious, that it amused him to try to feed him up. I watched — turning suddenly to ask if anyone wanted a little more milk, and glancing over the top of the milk pan as I was emptying it.

I caught him: I saw him push a piece of bread under his jersey, glancing

furtively with a little quiver of apprehension up at me. I did not appear to notice, but when he was going downstairs I followed him and asked him to go into the class-room with me. I closed the door and sat down at my table: he stood hanging his head and marking with his foot on the floor. He came to me, very slowly, when I bade him. I put my hand on his jersey, and felt something underneath. He did not resist me, and I drew it out. It was his cap. He smiled, he could not help it, at my discomfiture. Then he pulled his lips straight and looked sulky. I tried again — and this time I found three pieces of bread in a kind of rough pocket inside the waist of his trousers. He looked at them blackly as I arranged them on the table before him, flushing under his brown skin.

‘What does this mean?’ I asked. He hung his head, and would not answer.

‘You may as well tell me — what do you want this for?’

‘Eat,’ he muttered, keeping his face bent. I put my hand under his chin and lifted up his face. He shut his eyes, and tried to move his face aside, as if from a very strong light which hurt him.

‘That is not true,’ I said. ‘I know perfectly well it is not true. You have a breakfast before you come. You do not come to eat. You come to take the food away.’

‘I never!’ he exclaimed sulkily.

‘No,’ I said. ‘You did not take any yesterday. But the day before you did.’

‘I never, I never!!’ he declared, more emphatically, in the tone of one who scores again. I considered.

‘Oh no — the day before was Sunday. Let me see. You took some on Thursday — yes, that was the last time — You took four or five pieces of bread — I hung fire; he did not contradict; ‘five, I believe,’ I added. He scraped his toe on the ground. I had guessed aright. He could not deny the definite knowledge of a number.

But I could not get another word from him. He stood and heard all I had to say, but he would not look up, or answer anything. I felt angry.

‘Well,’ I said, ‘if you come to breakfasts any more, you will be reported.’

Next day, when asked why he was absent from breakfast, he said his father had got a job.

He was a great nuisance for coming with dirty boots. Evidently he went roaming over fields and everywhere. I concluded he must have a strain of gipsy in him, a mongrel form common in the south of London. Halket was his great friend. They never played together at school, and they had no apparent common interests. Halket was a debonair, clever lad who gave great promise of turning out a neer-do-well. He was very lively, soon moved from tears to laughter; Lessford was an inveterate sulker. Yet they always hung together.

One day my bread-stealer arrived at half past two, when the register was closed. He was sweating, dishevelled, and his breast was heaving. He gave no word of explanation, but stood near the great blackboard, his head dropped, one leg loosely apart, panting.

‘Well!’ I exclaimed, ‘this is a nice thing! What have you to say?’ I rose from my chair.

Evidently he had nothing to say.

‘Come on,’ I said finally. ‘No foolery! Let me hear it.’ He knew he would have to speak. He looked up at me, his dark eyes blazing:

‘My rabbits has all gone!’ he cried, as a man would announce his wife and children slain. I heard Halket exclaim. I looked at him. He was half-out of the desk, his mercurial face blank with dismay.

‘Who’s ’ad ’em?’ he said, breathing the words almost in a whisper.

‘Did you leave th’ door open?’ Lessford bent forward like a serpent about to strike as he asked this. Halket shook his head solemnly:

‘No! I’ve not been near ’em today.’

There was a pause. It was time for me to reassume my position of authority. I told them both to sit down, and we continued the lesson. Halket crept near his comrade and began to whisper to him, but he received no response. Lessford sulked fixedly, not moving his head for more than an hour.

At playtime I began to question Halket: ‘Please Sir — we had some rabbits in a place on the allotments. We used to gather manure for a man, and he let us have half of his tool-house in the garden —.’

‘How many had you — rabbits?’

‘Please Sir — they varied. When we had young ones we used to have sixteen sometimes. We had two brown does and a black buck.’

I was somewhat taken back by this.

‘How long have you had them?’

‘A long time now Sir. We’ve had six lots of young ones.’

‘And what did you do with them?’

‘Fatten them, Sir’ — he spoke with a little triumph, but he was reluctant to say much more.

‘And what did you fatten them on?’

The boy glanced swiftly at me. He reddened, and for the first time became confused.

‘Green stuff, what we had given us out of the gardens, and what we got out of the fields.’

‘And bread,’ I answered quietly.

He looked at me. He saw I was not angry, only ironical. For a few moments he

hesitated, whether to lie or not. Then he admitted, very subdued:

‘Yes Sir.’

‘And what did you do with the rabbits?’ — he did not answer — ‘Come, tell me. I can find out whether or not.’

‘Sold them,’ — he hung his head guiltily.

‘Who did the selling?’

‘I, Sir — to a greengrocer.’

‘For how much?’

‘Eightpence each.’

‘And did your mothers know?’

‘No Sir.’ He was very subdued and guilty.

‘And what did you do with the money?’

‘Go to the Empire — generally.’

I asked him a day or two later if they had found the rabbits. They had not. I asked Halket what he supposed had become of them.

‘Please Sir — I suppose somebody must ’a stole them. The door was not broken. You could open our padlock with a hair-pin. I suppose somebody must have come after us last night when we’d fed them. I think I know who it is, too, Sir.’ He shook his head widely — ‘There’s a place where you can get into the allotments off the field —’

A LESSON ON A TORTOISE

IT was the last lesson on Friday afternoon, and this, with Standard VI, was Nature Study from half-past three till half-past four. The last lesson of the week is a weariness to teachers and scholars. It is the end; there is no need to keep up the tension of discipline and effort any longer, and, yielding to weariness, a teacher is spent.

But Nature Study is a pleasant lesson. I had got a big old tortoise, who had not yet gone to sleep, though November was darkening the early afternoon, and I knew the boys would enjoy sketching him. I put him under the radiator to warm while I went for a large empty shell that I had sawn in two to show the ribs of some ancient tortoise absorbed in his bony coat. When I came back I found Joe, the old reptile, stretching slowly his skinny neck, and looking with indifferent eyes at the two intruding boys who were kneeling beside him. I was too good-tempered to send them out again into the playground, too slack with the great relief of Friday afternoon. So I bade them put out the Nature books ready. I crouched to look at Joey, and stroked his horny, blunt head with my finger. He was quite lively. He spread out his legs and gripped the floor with his flat hand-like paws, then he slackened again as if from a yawn, dropping his head meditatively.

I felt pleased with myself, knowing that the boys would be delighted with the lesson. 'He will not want to walk,' I said to myself, 'and if he takes a sleepy stride, they'll be just in ecstasy, and I can easily calm him down to his old position.' So I anticipated their entry. At the end of playtime I went to bring them in. They were a small class of about thirty — my own boys. A difficult, mixed class, they were, consisting of six London Home boys, five boys from a fairly well-to-do Home for the children of actors, and a set of commoners varying from poor lads who hobbled to school, crippled by broken enormous boots, to boys who brought soft, light shoes to wear in school on snowy days. The Gordons were a difficult set; you could pick them out: crop haired, coarsely dressed lads, distrustful, always ready to assume the defensive. They would lie till it made my heart sick, if they were charged with offence, but they were willing, and would respond beautifully to an appeal. The actors were of different fibre: some gentle, a pleasure even to look at; others polite and obedient, but indifferent, covertly insolent and vulgar; all of them more or less gentlemanly.

The boys crowded round the table noisily as soon as they discovered Joe. 'Is

he alive? — Look, his head's coming out! He'll bite you? — He *won't!* — with much scorn — 'Please Sir, do tortoises bite?' I hurried them off to their seats in a little group in front, and pulled the table up to the desks. Joe kept fairly still. The boys nudged each other excitedly, making half audible remarks concerning the poor reptile, looking quickly from me to Joe and then to their neighbours. I set them sketching, but in their pleasure at the novelty they could not be still:

'Please Sir — shall we draw the marks on the shell? Please Sir, has he only got four toes?' — 'Toes!' echoes somebody, covertly delighted at the absurdity of calling the grains of claws 'toes'. 'Please Sir, he's moving — Please Sir!'

I stroked his neck and calmed him down:

'Now don't make me wish I hadn't brought him. That's enough. Miles — you shall go to the back and draw twigs if I hear you again! Enough now — be still, get on with the drawing, it's hard!'

I wanted peace for myself. They began to sketch diligently. I stood and looked across at the sunset, which I could see facing me through my window, a great gold sunset, very large and magnificent, rising up in immense gold beauty beyond the town, that was become a low dark strip of nothingness under the wonderful up-building of the western sky. The light, the thick, heavy golden sunlight which is only seen in its full dripping splendour in town, spread on the desks and the floor like gold lacquer. I lifted my hands, to take the sunlight on them, smiling faintly to myself, trying to shut my fingers over its tangible richness.

'Please Sir!' — I was interrupted — 'Please Sir, can we have rubbers?'

The question was rather plaintive. I had said they should have rubbers no more. I could not keep my stock, I could not detect the thief among them, and I was weary of the continual degradation of bullying them to try to recover what was lost among them. But it was Friday afternoon, very peaceful and happy. Like a bad teacher, I went back on my word:

'Well — !' I said, indulgently.

My monitor, a pale, bright, erratic boy, went to the cupboard and took out a red box.

'Please Sir!' he cried, then he stopped and counted again in the box. 'Eleven! There's only eleven, Sir, and there were fifteen when I put them away on Wednesday—!'

The class stopped, every face upturned. Joe sunk, and lay flat on his shell, his legs limp. Another of the hateful moments had come. The sunset was smeared out, the charm of the afternoon was smashed like a fair glass that falls to the floor. My nerves seemed to tighten, and to vibrate with sudden tension.

'Again!' I cried, turning to the class in passion, to the upturned faces, and the

sixty watchful eyes.

‘Again! I am sick of it, sick of it I am! A thieving, wretched set! — a skulking, mean lot!’ I was quivering with anger and distress.

‘Who is it? You must know! You are all as bad as one another, you hide it — a miserable—!’ I looked round the class in great agitation. The ‘Gordons’ with their distrustful faces, were noticeable:

‘Marples!’ I cried to one of them, ‘where are those rubbers?’

‘I don’t know where they are — I’ve never ’ad no rubbers’ — he almost shouted back, with the usual insolence of his set. I was more angry:

‘You must know! They’re gone — they don’t melt into air, they don’t fly — who took them then? Rawson, do you know anything of them?’

‘No Sir!’ he cried, with impudent indignation.

‘No, you intend to know nothing! Wood, have you any knowledge of these four rubbers?’

‘No!’ he shouted, with absolute insolence.

‘Come here!’ I cried, ‘come here! Fetch the cane, Burton. We’ll make an end, insolence and thieving and all.’

The boy dragged himself to the front of the class, and stood slackly, almost crouching, glaring at me. The rest of the ‘Gordons’ sat upright in their desks, like animals of a pack ready to spring. There was tense silence for a moment. Burton handed me the cane, and I turned from the class to Wood. I liked him best among the Gordons.

‘Now my lad!’ I said. ‘I’ll cane you for impudence first.’

He turned swiftly to me; tears sprang to his eyes.

‘Well,’ he shouted at me, ‘you always pick on the Gordons— you’re always on to us —!’ This was so manifestly untrue that my anger fell like a bird shot in a midflight.

‘Why!’ I exclaimed, ‘what a disgraceful untruth! I am always excusing you, letting you off—!’

‘But you pick on us — you start on us — you pick on Marples, an’ Rawson, an’ on me. You always begin with the Gordons.’

‘Well,’ I answered, justifying myself, ‘isn’t it natural? Haven’t you boys stolen — haven’t these boys stolen —several times — and been caught?’

‘That doesn’t say as we do now,’ he replied.

‘How am I to know? You don’t help me. How do I know? Isn’t it natural to suspect you—?’

‘Well, it’s not us. We know who it is. Everybody knows who it is — only they won’t tell.’

‘Who know?’ I asked.

‘Why Rawson, and Maddock, and Newling, and all of ‘em.’

I asked these boys if they could tell me. Each one shook his head, and said ‘No Sir.’ I went round the class. It was the same. They lied to me every one.

‘You see,’ I said to Wood.

‘Well — they won’t own up,’ he said. ‘I shouldn’t ’a done if you hadn’t ’a been goin’ to cane me.’

This frankness was painful, but I preferred it. I made them all sit down. I asked Wood to write his knowledge on a piece of paper, and I promised not to divulge. He would not. I asked the boys he had named, all of them. They refused. I asked them again — I appealed to them.

‘Let them all do it then!’ said Wood. I tore up scraps of paper, and gave each boy one.

‘Write on it the name of the boy you suspect. He is a thief and a sneak. He gives endless pain and trouble to us all. It is your duty.’

They wrote furtively, and quickly doubled up the papers. I collected them in the lid of the rubber box, and sat at the table to examine them. There was dead silence, they all watched me. Joe had withdrawn into his shell, forgotten.

A few papers were blank; several had ‘I suspect nobody’ — these I threw in the paper basket; two had the name of an old thief, and these I tore up; eleven bore the name of my assistant monitor a splendid, handsome boy, one of the oldest of the actors. I remembered how deferential and polite he had been when I had asked him, how ready to make barren suggestions; I remembered his shifty, anxious look during the questioning; I remembered how eager he had been to do things for me before the monitor came in the room. I knew it was he — without remembering.

‘Well!’ I said, feeling very wretched when I was convinced that the papers were right. ‘Go on with the drawing.’

They were very uneasy and restless, but quiet. From time to time they watched me. Very shortly, the bell rang. I told the two monitors to collect up the things, and I sent the class home. We did not go into prayers. I, and they, were in no mood for hymns and the evening prayer of gratitude.

When the monitors had finished, and I had turned out all the lights but one, I sent home Curwen, and kept my assistant-monitor a moment.

‘Ségar, do you know anything of my rubbers?’

‘No Sir’ — he had a deep, manly voice, and he spoke with earnest protestation — flushing.

‘No? Nor my pencils — nor my two books?’

‘No Sir! I know nothing about the books.’

‘No? The pencils then —?’

‘No Sir! Nothing! I don’t know anything about them.’

‘Nothing, Ségar?’

‘No Sir.’

He hung his head, and looked so humiliated, a fine, handsome lad, that I gave it up. Yet I knew he would be dishonest again, when the opportunity arrived.

‘Very well! You will not help as monitor any more. You will not come into the classroom until the class comes in — any more. You understand?’

‘Yes Sir’ — he was very quiet.

‘Go along then.’

He went out, and silently closed the door. I turned out the last light, tried the cupboards, and went home.

I felt very tired, and very sick. The night had come up, the clouds were moving darkly, and the sordid streets near the school felt like disease in the lamplight.

A MODERN LOVER

(Please also see the introduction to the novel 'Mr. Noon')

I

The road was heavy with mud. It was labour to move along it. The old, wide way, forsaken and grown over with grass, used not to be so bad. The farm traffic from Coney Grey must have cut it up. The young man crossed carefully again to the strip of grass on the other side.

It was a dreary, out-of-doors track, saved only by low fragments of fence and occasional bushes from the desolation of the large spaces of arable and of grassland on either side, where only the unopposed wind and the great clouds mattered, where even the little grasses bent to one another indifferent of any traveller. The abandoned road used to seem clean and firm. Cyril Mersham stopped to look round and to bring back old winters to the scene, over the ribbed red land and the purple wood. The surface of the field seemed suddenly to lift and break. Something had startled the peewits, and the fallow flickered over with pink gleams of birds white-breasting the sunset. Then the plovers turned, and were gone in the dusk behind.

Darkness was issuing out of the earth, and clinging to the trunks of the elms which rose like weird statues, lessening down the wayside. Mersham laboured forwards, the earth sucking and smacking at his feet. In front the Coney Grey farm was piled in shadow on the road. He came near to it, and saw the turnips heaped in a fabulous heap up the side of the barn, a buttress that rose almost to the eaves, and stretched out towards the cart-ruts in the road. Also, the pale breasts of the turnips got the sunset, and they were innumerable orange glimmers piled in the dusk. The two labourers who were pulping at the foot of the mound stood shadow-like to watch as he passed, breathing the sharp scent of turnips.

It was all very wonderful and glamorous here, in the old places that had seemed so ordinary. Three-quarters of the scarlet sun was settling among the branches of the elm in front, right ahead where he would come soon. But when he arrived at the brow where the hill swooped downwards, where the broad road ended suddenly, the sun had vanished from the space before him, and the evening star was white where the night urged up against the retreating, rose-coloured billow of day. Mersham passed through the stile and sat upon the remnant of the thorn tree on the brink of the valley. All the wide space before

him was full of a mist of rose, nearly to his feet. The large ponds were hidden, the farms, the fields, the far-off coal-mine, under the rosy outpouring of twilight. Between him and the spaces of Leicestershire and the hills of Derbyshire, between him and all the South Country which he had fled, was the splendid rose-red strand of sunset, and the white star keeping guard.

Here, on the lee-shore of day, was the only purple showing of the woods and the great hedge below him; and the roof of the farm below him, with a film of smoke rising up. Unreal, like a dream which wastes a sleep with unrest, was the South and its hurrying to and fro. Here, on the farther shore of the sunset, with the flushed tide at his feet, and the large star flashing with strange laughter, did he himself naked walk with lifted arms into the quiet flood of life.

What was it he wanted, sought in the slowly-lapsing tide of days? Two years he had been in the large city in the south. There always his soul had moved among the faces that swayed on the thousand currents in that node of tides, hovering and wheeling and flying low over the faces of the multitude like a sea-gull over the waters, stopping now and again, and taking a fragment of life — a look, a contour, a movement — to feed upon. Of many people, his friends, he had asked that they would kindle again the smouldering embers of their experience; he had blown the low fires gently with his breath, and had leaned his face towards their glow, and had breathed in the words that rose like fumes from the revived embers, till he was sick with the strong drug of sufferings and ecstasies and sensations, and the dreams that ensued. But most folk had choked out the fires of their fiercer experience with rubble of sentimentality and stupid fear, and rarely could he feel the hot destruction of Life fighting out its way.

Surely, surely somebody could give him enough of the philtre of life to stop the craving which tortured him hither and thither, enough to satisfy for a while, to intoxicate him till he could laugh the crystalline laughter of the star, and bathe in the retreating flood of twilight like a naked boy in the surf, clasping the waves and beating them and answering their wild clawings with laughter sometimes, and sometimes gasps of pain.

He rose and stretched himself. The mist was lying in the valley like a flock of folded sheep; Orion had strode into the sky, and the Twins were playing towards the West. He shivered, stumbled down the path, and crossed the orchard, passing among the dark trees as if among people he knew.

II

He came into the yard. It was exceedingly, painfully muddy. He felt a disgust of his own feet, which were cold, and numbed, and heavy.

The window of the house was uncurtained, and shone like a yellow moon, with only a large leaf or two of ivy, and a cord of honeysuckle hanging across it. There seemed a throng of figures moving about the fire. Another light gleamed mysteriously among the out-buildings. He heard a voice in the cow-shed, and the impatient movement of a cow, and the rhythm of milk in the bucket.

He hesitated in the darkness of the porch; then he entered without knocking. A girl was opposite him, coming out of the dairy doorway with a loaf of bread. She started, and they stood a moment looking at each other across the room. They advanced to each other; he took her hand, plunged overhead, as it were, for a moment in her great brown eyes. Then he let her go, and looked aside, saying some words of greeting. He had not kissed her; he realised that when he heard her voice:

“When did you come?”

She was bent over the table, cutting bread-and-butter. What was it in her bowed, submissive pose, in the dark, small head with its black hair twining and hiding her face, that made him wince and shrink and close over his soul that had been open like a foolhardy flower to the night? Perhaps it was her very submission, which trammelled him, throwing the responsibility of her wholly on him, making him shrink from the burden of her.

Her brothers were home from the pit. They were two well-built lads of twenty and twenty-one. The coal-dust over their faces was like a mask, making them inscrutable, hiding any glow of greeting, making them strangers. He could only see their eyes wake with a sudden smile, which sank almost immediately, and they turned aside. The mother was kneeling at a big brown stew-jar in front of the open oven. She did not rise, but gave him her hand, saying: “Cyril! How are you?” Her large dark eyes wavered and left him. She continued with the spoon in the jar.

His disappointment rose as water suddenly heaves up the side of a ship. A sense of dreariness revived, a feeling, too, of the cold wet mud that he had struggled through.

These were the people who, a few months before, would look up in one fine broad glow of welcome whenever he entered the door, even if he came daily. Three years before, their lives would draw together into one flame, and whole evenings long would flare with magnificent mirth, and with play. They had known each other’s lightest and deepest feelings. Now, when he came back to them after a long absence, they withdrew, turned aside. He sat down on the sofa under the window, deeply chagrined. His heart closed tight like a fir-cone, which had been open and full of naked seeds when he came to them.

They asked him questions of the South. They were starved for news, they said,

in that God-forsaken hole.

“It is such a treat to hear a bit of news from outside,” said the mother.

News! He smiled, and talked, plucking for them the leaves from off his tree: leaves of easy speech. He smiled, rather bitterly, as he slowly reeled off his news, almost mechanically. Yet he knew — and that was the irony of it — that they did not want his “records”; they wanted the timorous buds of his hopes, and the unknown fruits of his experience, full of the taste of tears and what sunshine of gladness had gone to their ripening. But they asked for his “news”, and, because of some subtle perversity, he gave them what they begged, not what they wanted, not what he desired most sincerely to give them.

Gradually he exhausted his store of talk, that he had thought was limitless. Muriel moved about all the time, laying the table and listening, only looking now and again across the barren garden of his talk into his windows. But he hardened his heart and turned his head from her. The boys had stripped to their waists, and had knelt on the hearth-rug and washed themselves in a large tin bowl, the mother sponging and drying their backs. Now they stood wiping themselves, the firelight bright and rosy on their fine torsos, their heavy arms swelling and sinking with life. They seemed to cherish the firelight on their bodies. Benjamin, the younger, leaned his breast to the warmth, and threw back his head, showing his teeth in a voluptuous little smile. Mersham watched them, as he had watched the peewits and the sunset.

Then they sat down to their dinners, and the room was dim with the steam of food. Presently the father and the eldest brother were in from the cow-sheds, and all assembled at table. The conversation went haltingly; a little badinage on Mersham’s part, a few questions on politics from the father. Then there grew an acute, fine feeling of discord. Mersham, particularly sensitive, reacted. He became extremely attentive to the others at table, and to his own manner of eating. He used English that was exquisitely accurate, pronounced with the Southern accent, very different from the heavily-sounded speech of the home folk. His nicety contrasted the more with their rough, country habit. They became shy and awkward, fumbling for something to say. The boys ate their dinners hastily, shovelling up the mass as a man shovels gravel. The eldest son clambered roughly with a great hand at the plate of bread-and-butter. Mersham tried to shut his eyes. He kept up all the time a brilliant tea-talk that they failed to appreciate in that atmosphere. It was evident to him; without forming the idea, he felt how irrevocably he was removing them from him, though he had loved them. The irony of the situation appealed to him, and added brightness and subtlety to his wit. Muriel, who had studied him so thoroughly, confusedly understood. She hung her head over her plate, and ate little. Now and again she

would look up at him, toying all the time with her knife — though it was a family for ugly hands — and would address him some barren question. He always answered the question, but he invariably disregarded her look of earnestness, lapped in his unbreakable armour of light irony. He acknowledged, however, her power in the flicker of irritation that accompanied his reply. She quickly hid her face again.

They did not linger at tea, as in the old days. The men rose, with an “Ah well!” and went about their farm-work. One of the lads lay sprawling for sleep on the sofa; the other lighted a cigarette and sat with his arms on his knees, blinking into the fire. Neither of them ever wore a coat in the house, and their shirt-sleeves and their thick bare necks irritated the stranger still further by accentuating his strangeness. The men came tramping in and out to the boiler. The kitchen was full of bustle, of the carrying of steaming water, and of draughts. It seemed like a place out of doors. Mersham shrank up in his corner, and pretended to read the *Daily News*. He was ignored, like an owl sitting in the stalls of cattle.

“Go in the parlour, Cyril. Why don’t you? It’s comfortable there.”

Muriel turned to him with this reproach, this remonstrance, almost chiding him. She was keenly aware of his discomfort, and of his painful discord with his surroundings. He rose without a word and obeyed her.

III

The parlour was a long, low room with red colourings. A bunch of mistletoe hung from the beam, and thickly-berried holly was over the pictures — over the little gilt-blazed water-colours that he hated so much because he had done them in his ‘teens, and nothing is so hateful as the self one has left. He dropped in the tapestried chair called the Countess, and thought of the changes which this room had seen in him. There, by that hearth, they had threshed the harvest of their youth’s experience, gradually burning the chaff of sentimentality and false romance that covered the real grain of life. How infinitely far away, now, seemed *Jane Eyre* and George Eliot. These had marked the beginning. He smiled as he traced the graph onwards, plotting the points with Carlyle and Ruskin, Schopenhauer and Darwin and Huxley, Omar Khayyam, the Russians, Ibsen and Balzac; then Guy de Maupassant and *Madame Bovary*. They had parted in the midst of *Madame Bovary*. Since then had come only Nietzsche and William James. They had not done so badly, he thought, during those years which now he was apt to despise a little, because of their dreadful strenuousness, and because of their later deadly, unrelieved seriousness. He wanted her to come in and talk

about the old times. He crossed to the other side of the fire and lay in the big horse-hair chair, which pricked the back of his head. He looked about, and stuffed behind him the limp green cushions that were always sweating down.

It was a week after Christmas. He guessed they had kept up the holly and mistletoe for him. The two photographs of himself still occupied the post of honour on the mantelpiece; but between them was a stranger. He wondered who the fellow could be; good-looking he seemed to be; but a bit of a clown beside the radiant, subtle photos of himself. He smiled broadly at his own arrogance. Then he remembered that Muriel and her people were leaving the farm come Lady-day. Immediately, in valediction, he began to call up the old days, when they had romped and played so boisterously, dances, and wild charades, and all mad games. He was just telling himself that those were the days, the days of unconscious, ecstatic fun, and he was smiling at himself over his information, when she entered.

She came in, hesitating. Seeing him sprawling in his old abandonment, she closed the door softly. For a moment or two she sat, her elbows on her knees, her chin in her hands, sucking her little finger, and withdrawing it from her lips with a little pop, looking all the while in the fire. She was waiting for him, knowing all the time he would not begin. She was trying to feel him, as it were. She wanted to assure herself of him after so many months. She dared not look at him directly. Like all brooding, constitutionally earnest souls, she gave herself away unwisely, and was defenceless when she found herself pushed back, rejected so often with contempt.

“Why didn’t you tell me you were coming?” she asked at last.

“I wanted to have exactly one of the old tea-times, and evenings.”

“Ay!” she answered with hopeless bitterness. She was a dreadful pessimist. People had handled her so brutally, and had cheaply thrown away her most sacred intimacies.

He laughed, and looked at her kindly.

“Ah, well, if I’d thought about it I should have known this was what to expect. It’s my own fault.”

“Nay,” she answered, still bitterly; “it’s not your fault. It’s ours. You bring us to a certain point, and when you go away, we lose it all again, and receive you like creatures who have never known you.”

“Never mind,” he said easily. “If it is so, it is! How are you?”

She turned and looked full at him. She was very handsome; heavily moulded, coloured richly. He looked back smiling into her big, brown, serious eyes.

“Oh, I’m very well,” she answered, with puzzled irony. “How are you?”

“Me? You tell me. What do you think of me?”

“What do I think?” She laughed a little nervous laugh and shook her head. “I don’t know. Why — you look well — and very much of a gentleman.”

“Ah — and you are sorry?”

“No — No, I am not! No! Only you’re different, you see.”

“Ah, the pity! I shall never be as nice as I was at twenty-one, shall I?” He glanced at his photo on the mantelpiece, and smiled, gently chaffing her.

“Well — you’re different — it isn’t that you’re not so nice, but different. I always think you’re like that, really.”

She too glanced at the photo, which had been called the portrait of an intellectual prig, but which was really that of a sensitive, alert, exquisite boy. The subject of the portrait lay smiling at her. Then it turned voluptuously, like a cat spread out in the chair.

“And this is the last of it all — !”

She looked up at him, startled and pitiful.

“Of this phase, I mean,” he continued, indicating with his eyes the room, the surroundings. “Of Crossleigh Bank, I mean, and this part of our lives.”

“Ay!” she said, bowing her head, and putting into the exclamation all her depth of sadness and regret. He laughed.

“Aren’t you glad?” he asked.

She looked up, startled, a little shocked.

“Good-bye’s a fine word,” he explained. “It means you’re going to have a change, and a change is what you, of all people, want.”

Her expression altered as she listened.

“It’s true,” she said. “I do.”

“So you ought to say to yourself, ‘What a treat! I’m going to say good-bye directly to the most painful phase of my life.’ You make up your mind it shall be the most painful, by refusing to be hurt so much in the future. There you are! ‘Men at most times are masters of their fates,’ etcetera.”

She pondered his method of reasoning, and turned to him with a little laughter that was full of pleading and yearning.

“Well,” he said, lying, amiably smiling, “isn’t that so? — and aren’t you glad?”

“Yes!” she nodded. “I am — very glad.”

He twinkled playfully at her, and asked, in a soft voice:

“Then what do you want?”

“Yes,” she replied, a little breathlessly. “What do I?” She looked at him with a rash challenge that pricked him.

“Nay,” he said, evading her, “do you even ask me that?”

She veiled her eyes, and said, meekly in excuse:

“It’s a long time since I asked you anything, isn’t it?”

“Ay! I never thought of it. Whom have you asked in the interim?”

“Whom have I asked?” — she arched her brows and laughed a monosyllable of scorn.

“No one, of course!” he said, smiling. “The world asks questions of you, you ask questions of me, and I go to some oracle in the dark, don’t I?”

She laughed with him.

“No!” he said, suddenly serious. “Supposing you must answer me a big question — something I can never find out by myself?”

He lay out indolently in the chair and began smiling again. She turned to look with intensity at him, her hair’s fine foliage all loose round her face, her dark eyes haunted with doubt, her finger at her lips. A slight perplexity flickered over his eyes.

“At any rate,” he said, “you have something to give me.”

She continued to look at him with dark, absorbing eyes. He probed her with his regard. Then he seemed to withdraw, and his pupils dilated with thought.

“You see,” he said, “life’s no good but to live — and you can’t live your life by yourself. You must have a flint and a steel, both, to make the spark fly. Supposing you be my flint, my white flint, to spurt out red fire for me?”

“But how do you mean?” she asked breathlessly.

“You see,” he continued, thinking aloud as usual: “thought — that’s not life. It’s like washing and combing and carding and weaving the fleece that the year of life has produced. Now I think — we’ve carded and woven to the end of our bundle — nearly. We’ve got to begin again — you and me — living together, see? Not speculating and poetising together — see?”

She did not cease to gaze absorbedly at him.

“Yes?” she whispered, urging him on.

“You see — I’ll come back to you — to you — ” He waited for her.

“But,” she said huskily, “I don’t understand.”

He looked at her with aggressive frankness, putting aside all her confusions.

“Fibber!” he said gently.

“But — ” she turned in her chair from him — ”but not clearly.”

He frowned slightly:

“Nay, you should be able by now to use the algebra of speech. Must I count up on your fingers for you what I mean, unit by unit, in bald arithmetic?”

“No — no!” she cried, justifying herself; “but how can I understand — the change in you? You used to say — you couldn’t. — Quite opposite.”

He lifted his head as if taking in her meaning.

“Ah, yes, I have changed. I forget. I suppose I must have changed in myself.

I'm older — I'm twenty-six. I used to shrink from the thought of having to kiss you, didn't I?" He smiled very brightly, and added, in a soft voice: "Well — I don't, now."

She flushed darkly and hid her face from him.

"Not," he continued, with slow, brutal candour — "not that I know any more than I did then — what love is — as you know it — but — I think you're beautiful — and we know each other so well — as we know nobody else, don't we? And so we . . ."

His voice died away, and they sat in a tense silence, listening to the noise outside, for the dog was barking loudly. They heard a voice speaking and quieting him. Cyril Mersham listened. He heard the clatter of the barn door latch, and a slurring ring of a bicycle-bell brushing the wall.

"Who is it?" he asked, unsuspecting.

She looked at him, and confessed with her eyes, guiltily, beseeching. He understood immediately.

"Good Lord! — Him?" He looked at the photo on the mantelpiece. She nodded with her usual despair, her finger between her lips again. Mersham took some moments to adjust himself to the new situation.

"Well! — so *he's* in my place! Why didn't you tell me?"

"How could I? — he's not. Besides — you never would have a place." She hid her face.

"No," he drawled, thinking deeply. "I wouldn't. It's my fault altogether." Then he smiled, and said whimsically: "But I thought you kept an old pair of my gloves in the chair beside you."

"So I did, so I did!" she justified herself again with extreme bitterness, "till you asked me for them. You told me to — to take another man — and I did as you told me — as usual."

"Did I tell you? — did I tell you? I suppose I must. I suppose I am a fool. And do you like him?"

She laughed aloud, with scorn and bitterness.

"He's very good — and he's very fond of me."

"Naturally!" said Mersham, smiling and becoming ironical. "And how firmly is he fixed?"

IV

She was mortified, and would not answer him. The question for him now was how much did this intruder count. He looked, and saw she wore no ring — but perhaps she had taken it off for his coming. He began diligently to calculate

what attitude he might take. He had looked for many women to wake his love, but he had been always disappointed. So he had kept himself virtuous, and waited. Now he would wait no longer. No woman and he could ever understand each other so well as he and Muriel whom he had fiercely educated into womanhood along with his own struggling towards a manhood of independent outlook. They had breathed the same air of thought, they had been beaten with the same storms of doubt and disillusionment, they had expanded together in days of pure poetry. They had grown so; spiritually, or rather psychically, as he preferred to say, they were married; and now he found himself thinking of the way she moved about the house.

The outer door had opened and a man had entered the kitchen, greeting the family cordially, and without any formality. He had the throaty, penetrating voice of a tenor singer, and it came distinctly over the vibrating rumble of the men's talking. He spoke good, easy English. The boys asked him about the "iron-men" and the electric haulage, and he answered them with rough technicalities, so Mer sham concluded he was a working electrician in the mine. They continued to talk casually for some time, though there was a false note of secondary interest in it all. Then Benjamin came forward and broke the check, saying, with a dash of braggart taunting:

"Muriel's in th' parlour, Tom, if you want her."

"Oh, is she? I saw a light in; I thought she might be." He affected indifference, as if he were kept thus at every visit. Then he added, with a touch of impatience, and of the proprietor's interest: "What is she doing?"

"She's talking. Cyril Mer sham's come from London."

"What! — is *he* here?"

Mer sham sat listening, smiling. Muriel saw his eyelids lift. She had run up her flag of challenge taut, but continually she slackened towards him with tenderness. Now her flag flew out bravely. She rose, and went to the door.

"Hello!" she said, greeting the stranger with a little song of welcome in one word, such as girls use when they become aware of the presence of their sweetheart.

"You've got a visitor, I hear," he answered.

"Yes. Come along, come in!"

She spoke softly, with much gentle caressing.

He was a handsome man, well set-up, rather shorter than Mer sham. The latter rose indolently, and held out his hand, smiling curiously into the beautiful, generous blue eyes of the other.

"Cyril — Mr. Vickers."

Tom Vickers crushed Mer sham's hand, and answered his steady, smiling

regard with a warm expansion of feeling, then bent his head, slightly confused.

“Sit here, will you?” said Mersham, languidly indicating the armchair.

“No, no, thanks, I won’t. I shall do here, thanks.” Tom Vickers took a chair and placed it in front of the fire. He was confusedly charmed with Mersham’s natural frankness and courtesy.

“If I’m not intruding,” he added, as he sat down.

“No, of course not!” said Muriel, in her wonderfully soft, fond tones — the indulgent tone of a woman who will sacrifice anything to love.

“Couldn’t!” added Mersham lazily. “We’re always a public meeting, Muriel and I. Aren’t we, Miel? We’re discussing affinities, that ancient topic. You’ll do for an audience. We agree so beastly well, we two. We always did. It’s her fault. Does she treat you so badly?”

The other was rather bewildered. Out of it all he dimly gathered that he was suggested as the present lover of Muriel, while Mersham referred to himself as the one discarded. So he smiled, reassured.

“How — badly?” he asked.

“Agreeing with you on every point?”

“No, I can’t say she does that,” said Vickers, smiling, and looking with little warm glances at her.

“Why, we never disagree, you know!” she remonstrated, in the same deep indulgent tone.

“I see,” Mersham said languidly, and yet keeping his wits keenly to the point. “*You* agree with everything *she* says. Lord, how interesting!”

Muriel arched her eyelids with a fine flare of intelligence across at him, and laughed.

“Something like that,” answered the other man, also indulgently, as became a healthy male towards one who lay limply in a chair and said clever nothings in a lazy drawl. Mersham noted the fine limbs, the solid, large thighs, and the thick wrists. He was classifying his rival among the men of handsome, healthy animalism, and good intelligence, who are children in simplicity, who can add two and two, but never xy and yx . His contours, his movements, his repose were, strictly, lovable. “But,” said Mersham to himself, “if I were blind, or sorrowful, or very tired, I should not want him. He is one of the men, as George Moore says, whom his wife would hate after a few years for the very way he walked across the floor. I can imagine him with a family of children, a fine father. But unless he had a domestic wife — ”

Muriel had begun to make talk to him.

“Did you cycle?” she asked, in that irritating private tone so common to lovers, a tone that makes a third person an impertinence.

“Yes — I was rather late,” he replied, in the same caressing manner. The sense did not matter, the caress was everything.

“Didn’t you find it very muddy?”

“Well, I did — but not any worse than yesterday.”

Mersham sprawled his length in the chair, his eyelids almost shut, his fine white hands hanging over the arms of the chair like dead-white stoats from a bough. He was wondering how long Muriel would endure to indulge her sweetheart thus. Soon she began to talk second-hand to Mersham. They were speaking of Tom’s landlady.

“You don’t care for her, do you?” she asked, laughing insinuatingly, since the shadow of his dislike for other women heightened the radiance of his affection for her.

“Well, I can’t say that I love her.”

“How is it you always fall out with your landladies after six months? You must be a wretch to live with.”

“Nay, I don’t know that I am. But they’re all alike; they’re jam and cakes at first, but after a bit they’re dry bread.”

He spoke with solemnity, as if he uttered a universal truth. Mersham’s eyelids flickered now and again. Muriel turned to him:

“Mr. Vickers doesn’t like lodgings,” she said.

Mersham understood that Vickers therefore wanted to marry her; he also understood that as the pretendant tired of his landladies, so his wife and he would probably weary one another. He looked this intelligence at Muriel, and drawled:

“Doesn’t he? Lodgings are ideal. A good lodger can always boss the show, and have his own way. It’s the time of his life.”

“I don’t think!” laughed Vickers.

“It’s true,” drawled Mersham torpidly, giving his words the effect of droll irony. “You’re evidently not a good lodger. You only need to sympathise with a landlady — against her husband generally — and she’ll move heaven and earth for you.”

“Ah!” laughed Muriel, glancing at Mersham. “Tom doesn’t believe in sympathising with women — especially married women.”

“I don’t!” said Tom emphatically, “ — it’s dangerous.”

“You leave it to the husband,” said Mersham.

“I do that! I don’t want ‘em coming to me with their troubles. I should never know the end.”

“Wise of you. Poor woman! So you’ll broach your barrel of sympathy for your wife, eh, and for nobody else?”

“That’s it. Isn’t that right?”

“Oh, quite. Your wife will be a privileged person. Sort of homebrewed beer to drink *ad infinitum*? Quite all right, that!”

“There’s nothing better,” said Tom, laughing.

“Except a change,” said Mersham. “Now, I’m like a cup of tea to a woman.”

Muriel laughed aloud at this preposterous cynicism, and knitted her brows to bid him cease playing ball with bombs.

“A fresh cup each time. Women never weary of tea. Muriel, I can see you having a rich time. Sort of long after-supper drowse with a good husband.”

“Very delightful!” said Muriel sarcastically.

“If she’s got a good husband, what more can she want?” asked Tom, keeping the tone of banter, but really serious and somewhat resentful.

“A lodger — to make things interesting.”

“Why,” said Muriel, intervening, “do women like you so?”

Mersham looked up at her, quietly, smiling into her eyes. She was really perplexed. She wanted to know what he put in the pan to make the balance go down so heavily on his side. He had, as usual, to answer her seriously and truthfully, so he said: “Because I can make them believe that black is green or purple — which it is, in reality.” Then, smiling broadly as she wakened again with admiration for him, he added: “But you’re trying to make me conceited, Miel — to stain my virgin modesty.”

Muriel glanced up at him with softness and understanding, and laughed low. Tom gave a guffaw at the notion of Mersham’s virgin modesty. Muriel’s brow wrinkled with irritation, and she turned from her sweetheart to look in the fire.

V

Mersham, all unconsciously, had now developed the situation to the climax he desired. He was sure that Vickers would not count seriously in Muriel’s movement towards himself. So he turned away, uninterested.

The talk drifted for some time, after which he suddenly bethought himself:

“I say, Mr. Vickers, will you sing for us? You do sing, don’t you?”

“Well — nothing to speak of,” replied the other modestly, wondering at Mersham’s sudden change of interest. He looked at Muriel.

“Very well,” she answered him, indulging him now like a child. “But — ” she turned to Mersham — ”but do you, really?”

“Yes, of course. Play some of the old songs. Do you play any better?”

She began “Honour and Arms”.

“No, not that!” cried Mersham. “Something quiet — ’*Sois triste et sois*

belle’.” He smiled gently at her, suggestively. “Try ‘*Du bist wie eine Blume*’ or ‘*Pur dicesti*’.”

Vickers sang well, though without much imagination. But the songs they sang were the old songs that Mersham had taught Muriel years before, and she played with one of his memories in her heart. At the end of the first song, she turned and found him looking at her, and they met again in the poetry of the past.

“Daffodils,” he said softly, his eyes full of memories.

She dilated, quivered with emotion, in response. They had sat on the rim of the hill, where the wild daffodils stood up to the sky, and there he had taught her, singing line by line: “*Du bist wie eine Blume*.” He had no voice, but a very accurate ear.

The evening wore on to ten o’clock. The lads came through the room on their way to bed. The house was asleep save the father, who sat alone in the kitchen, reading *The Octopus*. They went in to supper.

Mersham had roused himself and was talking well. Muriel stimulated him, always, and turned him to talk of art and philosophy — abstract things that she loved, of which only he had ever spoken to her, of which only he could speak, she believed, with such beauty. He used quaint turns of speech, contradicted himself waywardly, then said something sad and whimsical, all in a wistful, irresponsible manner so that even the men leaned indulgent and deferential to him.

“Life,” he said, and he was always urging this on Muriel in one form or another, “life is beautiful, so long as it is consuming you. When it is rushing through you, destroying you, life is glorious. It is best to roar away, like a fire with a great draught, white-hot to the last bit. It’s when you burn a slow fire and save fuel that life’s not worth having.”

“You believe in a short life and a merry,” said the father.

“Needn’t be either short or merry. Grief is part of the fire of life — and suffering — they’re the root of the flame of joy, as they say. No! With life, we’re like the man who was so anxious to provide for his old age that he died at thirty from inanition.”

“That’s what we’re not likely to do,” laughed Tom.

“Oh, I don’t know. You live most intensely in human contact — and that’s what we shrink from, poor timid creatures, from giving our souls to somebody to touch; for they, bungling fools, will generally paw it with dirty hands.”

Muriel looked at him with dark eyes of grateful understanding. She herself had been much pawed, brutally, by her brothers. But, then, she had been foolish in offering herself.

“And,” concluded Mersham, “you are washed with the whitest fire of life —

when you take a woman you love — and understand.”

Perhaps Mersham did not know what he was doing. Yet his whole talk lifted Muriel as in a net, like a sea-maiden out of the waters, and placed her in his arms, to breathe his thin, rare atmosphere. She looked at him, and was certain of his pure earnestness, and believed implicitly he could not do wrong.

Vickers believed otherwise. He would have expressed his opinion, whatever it might be, in an: “Oh, ay, he’s got plenty to say, and he’ll keep on saying it — but, hang it all . . .!”

For Vickers was an old-fashioned, inarticulate lover; such as has been found the brief joy and the unending disappointment of a woman’s life. At last he found he must go, as Mersham would not precede him. Muriel did not kiss him good-bye, nor did she offer to go out with him to his bicycle. He was angry at this, but more angry with the girl than with the man. He felt that she was fooling about, “showing off” before the stranger. Mersham was a stranger to him, and so, in his idea, to Muriel. Both young men went out of the house together, and down the rough brick track to the barn. Mersham made whimsical little jokes: “I wish my feet weren’t so fastidious. They dither when they go in a soft spot like a girl who’s touched a toad. Hark at that poor old wretch — she sounds as if she’d got whooping-cough.”

“A cow is not coughing when she makes that row,” said Vickers.

“Pretending, is she? — to get some Owbridge’s? Don’t blame her. I guess she’s got chilblains, at any rate. Do cows have chilblains, poor devils?”

Vickers laughed and felt he must take this man into his protection. “Mind,” he said, as they entered the barn, which was very dark. “Mind your forehead against this beam.” He put one hand on the beam, and stretched out the other to feel for Mersham. “Thanks,” said the latter gratefully. He knew the position of the beam to an inch, however dark the barn, but he allowed Vickers to guide him past it. He rather enjoyed being taken into Tom’s protection.

Vickers carefully struck a match, bowing over the ruddy core of light and illuminating himself like some beautiful lantern in the midst of the high darkness of the barn. For some moments he bent over his bicycle-lamp, trimming and adjusting the wick, and his face, gathering all the light on its ruddy beauty, seemed luminous and wonderful. Mersham could see the down on his cheeks above the razor-line, and the full lips in shadow beneath the moustache, and the brush of the eyebrows between the light.

“After all,” said Mersham, “he’s very beautiful; she’s a fool to give him up.”

Tom shut the lamp with a snap, and carefully crushed the match under his foot. Then he took the pump from the bicycle, and crouched on his heels in the dimness, inflating the tyre. The swift, unerring, untiring stroke of the pump, the

light balance and the fine elastic adjustment of the man's body to his movements pleased Mersham.

"She could have," he was saying to himself, "some glorious hours with this man — yet she'd rather have me, because I can make her sad and set her wondering."

But to the man he was saying:

"You know, love isn't the twin-soul business. With you, for instance, women are like apples on a tree. You can have one that you can reach. Those that look best are overhead, but it's no good bothering with them. So you stretch up, perhaps you pull down a bough and just get your fingers round a good one. Then it swings back and you feel wild and you say your heart's broken. But there are plenty of apples as good for you no higher than your chest."

Vickers smiled, and thought there was something in it — generally; but for himself, it was nothing.

They went out of the barn to the yard gate. He watched the young man swing over his saddle and vanish, calling "Good-night."

"*Sic transit*," he murmured — meaning Tom Vickers, and beautiful lustihood that is unconscious like a blossom.

Mersham went slowly in the house. Muriel was clearing away the supper things, and laying the table again for the men's breakfasts. But she was waiting for him as clearly as if she had stood watching in the doorway. She looked up at him, and instinctively he lifted his face towards her as if to kiss her. They smiled, and she went on with her work.

The father rose, stretching his burly form, and yawning. Mersham put on his overcoat.

"You will come a little way with me?" he said. She answered him with her eyes. The father stood, large and silent, on the hearth-rug. His sleepy, mazed disapproval had no more effect than a little breeze which might blow against them. She smiled brightly at her lover, like a child, as she pinned on her hat.

It was very dark outside in the starlight. He groaned heavily, and swore with extravagance as he went ankle-deep in mud.

"See, you should follow me. Come here," she commanded, delighted to have him in charge.

"Give me your hand," he said, and they went hand-in-hand over the rough places. The fields were open, and the night went up to the magnificent stars. The wood was very dark, and wet; they leaned forward and stepped stealthily, and gripped each other's hands fast with a delightful sense of adventure. When they stood and looked up a moment, they did not know how the stars were scattered among the tree-tops till he found the three jewels of Orion right in front.

There was a strangeness everywhere, as if all things had ventured out alive to play in the night, as they do in fairy-tales; the trees, the many stars, the dark spaces, and the mysterious waters below uniting in some magnificent game.

They emerged from the wood on to the bare hillside. She came down from the wood-fence into his arms, and he kissed her, and they laughed low together. Then they went on across the wild meadows where there was no path.

“Why don’t you like him?” he asked playfully.

“Need you ask?” she said simply.

“Yes. Because he’s heaps nicer than I am.”

She laughed a full laugh of amusement.

“He is! Look! He’s like summer, brown and full of warmth. Think how splendid and fierce he’d be — ”

“Why do you talk about him?” she said.

“Because I want you to know what you’re losing — and you won’t till you see him in my terms. He is very desirable — I should choose him in preference to me — for myself.”

“Should you?” she laughed. “But,” she added with soft certainty, “you don’t understand.”

“No — I don’t. I suppose it’s love; your sort, which is beyond me. I shall never be blindly in love, shall I?”

“I begin to think you never will,” she answered, not very sadly. “You won’t be blindly anything.”

“The voice of love!” he laughed; and then: “No, if you pull your flowers to pieces, and find how they pollinate, and where are the ovaries, you don’t go in blind ecstasies over to them. But they mean more to you; they are intimate, like friends of your heart, not like wonderful, dazing fairies.”

“Ay!” she assented, musing over it with the gladness of understanding him. “And then?”

Softly, almost without words, she urged him to the point.

“Well,” he said, “you think I’m a wonderful, magical person, don’t you? — and I’m not — I’m not as good, in the long run, as your Tom, who thinks you are a wonderful, magical person.”

She laughed and clung to him as they walked. He continued, very carefully and gently: “Now, I don’t imagine for a moment that you are princessy or angelic or wonderful. You often make me thundering mad because you’re an ass . . .”

She laughed low with shame and humiliation.

“Nevertheless — I come from the south to you — because — well, with you I can be just as I feel, conceited or idiotic, without being afraid to be myself . . .”

He broke off suddenly. "I don't think I've tried to make myself out to you — any bigger or better than I am?" he asked her wistfully.

"No," she answered, in beautiful, deep assurance. "No! That's where it is. You have always been so honest. You are more honest than anybody ever — " She did not finish, being deeply moved. He was silent for some time, then he continued, as if he must see the question to the end with her:

"But, you know — I do like you not to wear corsets. I like to see you move inside your dress."

She laughed, half shame, half pleasure.

"I wondered if you'd notice," she said.

"I did — directly." There was a space of silence, after which he resumed: "You see — we would marry tomorrow — but I can't keep myself. I am in debt — "

She came close to him, and took his arm.

" — And what's the good of letting the years go, and the beauty of one's youth — ?"

"No," she admitted, very slowly and softly, shaking her head.

"So — well! — you understand, don't you? And if you're willing — you'll come to me, won't you? — just naturally, as you used to come and go to church with me? — and it won't be — it won't be me coaxing you — reluctant? Will it?"

They had halted in front of a stile which they would have to climb. She turned to him in silence, and put up her face to him. He took her in his arms, and kissed her, and felt the night mist with which his moustache was drenched, and he bent his head and rubbed his face on her shoulder, and then pressed his lips on her neck. For a while they stood in silence, clasped together. Then he heard her voice, muffled in his shoulder, saying:

"But — but, you know — it's much harder for the woman — it means something so different for a woman."

"One can be wise," he answered, slowly and gently. "One need not blunder into calamities."

She was silent for a time. Then she spoke again.

"Yes, but — if it should be — you see — I couldn't bear it."

He let her go, and they drew apart, and the embrace no longer choked them from speaking. He recognised the woman defensive, playing the coward against her own inclinations, and even against her knowledge.

"If — if!" he exclaimed sharply, so that she shrank with a little fear. "There need be no ifs — need there?"

"I don't know," she replied, reproachfully, very quietly.

“If I say so — ” he said, angry with her mistrust. Then he climbed the stile, and she followed.

“But you *do* know,” he exclaimed. “I have given you books — ”

“Yes, but — ”

“But what?” He was getting really angry.

“It’s so different for a woman — you don’t know.”

He did not answer this. They stumbled together over the mole-hills, under the oak trees.

“And look — how we should have to be — creeping together in the dark — ”

This stung him; at once, it was as if the glamour went out of life. It was as if she had tipped over the fine vessel that held the wine of his desire, and had emptied him of all his vitality. He had played a difficult, deeply-moving part all night, and now the lights suddenly switched out, and there was left only weariness. He was silent, tired, very tired, bodily and spiritually. They walked across the wide, dark meadow with sunken heads. Suddenly she caught his arm.

“Don’t be cold with me!” she cried.

He bent and kissed in acknowledgment the lips she offered him for love.

“No,” he said drearily; “no, it is not coldness — only — I have lost hold — for to-night.” He spoke with difficulty. It was hard to find a word to say. They stood together, apart, under the old thorn tree for some minutes, neither speaking. Then he climbed the fence, and stood on the highway above the meadow.

At parting also he had not kissed her. He stood a moment and looked at her. The water in a little brook under the hedge was running, chuckling with extraordinary loudness: away on Nethermere they heard the sad, haunting cry of the wild-fowl from the North. The stars still twinkled intensely. He was too spent to think of anything to say; she was too overcome with grief and fear and a little resentment. He looked down at the pale blotch of her face upturned from the low meadow beyond the fence. The thorn boughs tangled above her, drooping behind her like the roof of a hut. Beyond was the great width of the darkness. He felt unable to gather his energy to say anything vital.

“Good-bye,” he said. “I’m going back — on Saturday. But — you’ll write to me. Good-bye.”

He turned to go. He saw her white uplifted face vanish, and her dark form bend under the boughs of the tree, and go out into the great darkness. She did not say good-bye.

GOOSE FAIR

I

Through the gloom of evening, and the flare of torches of the night before the fair, through the still fogs of the succeeding dawn came paddling the weary geese, lifting their poor feet that had been dipped in tar for shoes, and trailing them along the cobble-stones into the town. Last of all, in the afternoon, a country girl drove in her dozen birds, disconsolate because she was so late. She was a heavily built girl, fair, with regular features, and yet unprepossessing. She needed chiselling down, her contours were brutal. Perhaps it was weariness that hung her eyelids a little lower than was pleasant. When she spoke to her clumsily lagging birds it was in a snarling nasal tone. One of the silly things sat down in the gutter and refused to move. It looked very ridiculous, but also rather pitiful, squat there with its head up, refusing to be urged on by the ungentle toe of the girl. The latter swore heavily, then picked up the great complaining bird, and fronting her road stubbornly, drove on the lamentable eleven.

No one had noticed her. This afternoon the women were not sitting chatting on their doorsteps, seaming up the cotton hose, or swiftly passing through their fingers the piled white lace; and in the high dark houses the song of the hosiery frames was hushed: "Shackety-boom, Shackety-shackety-boom, Z — zzz!" As she dragged up Hollow Stone, people returned from the fair chaffed her and asked her what o'clock it was. She did not reply, her look was sullen. The Lace Market was quiet as the Sabbath: even the great brass plates on the doors were dull with neglect. There seemed an afternoon atmosphere of raw discontent. The girl stopped a moment before the dismal prospect of one of the great warehouses that had been gutted with fire. She looked at the lean, threatening walls, and watched her white flock waddling in reckless misery below, and she would have laughed out loud had the wall fallen flat upon them and relieved her of them. But the wall did not fall, so she crossed the road, and walking on the safe side, hurried after her charge. Her look was even more sullen. She remembered the state of trade — Trade, the invidious enemy; Trade, which thrust out its hand and shut the factory doors, and pulled the stockings off their seats, and left the web half-finished on the frame; Trade, which mysteriously choked up the sources of the rivulets of wealth, and blacker and more secret than a pestilence, starved the town. Through this morose atmosphere of bad trade, in the afternoon

of the first day of the fair, the girl strode down to the Poultry with eleven sound geese and one lame one to sell.

The Frenchmen were at the bottom of it! So everybody said, though nobody quite knew how. At any rate, they had gone to war with the Prussians and got beaten, and trade was ruined in Nottingham!

A little fog rose up, and the twilight gathered around. Then they flared abroad their torches in the fair, insulting the night. The girl still sat in the Poultry, and her weary geese unsold on the stones, illuminated by the hissing lamp of a man who sold rabbits and pigeons and such-like assorted live-stock.

II

In another part of the town, near Sneinton Church, another girl came to the door to look at the night. She was tall and slender, dressed with the severe accuracy which marks the girl of superior culture. Her hair was arranged with simplicity about the long, pale, cleanly cut face. She leaned forward very slightly to glance down the street, listening. She very carefully preserved the appearance of having come quite casually to the door, yet she lingered and lingered and stood very still to listen when she heard a footstep, but when it proved to be only a common man, she drew herself up proudly and looked with a small smile over his head. He hesitated to glance into the open hall, lighted so spaciouly with a scarlet-shaded lamp, and at the slim girl in brown silk lifted up before the light. But she, she looked over his head. He passed on.

Presently she started and hung in suspense. Somebody was crossing the road. She ran down the steps in a pretty welcome, not effuse, saying in quick, but accurately articulated words: "Will! I began to think you'd gone to the fair. I came out to listen to it. I felt almost sure you'd gone. You're coming in, aren't you?" She waited a moment anxiously. "We expect you to dinner, you know," she added wistfully.

The man, who had a short face and spoke with his lip curling up on one side, in a drawling speech with ironically exaggerated intonation, replied after a short hesitation:

"I'm awfully sorry, I am, straight, Lois. It's a shame. I've got to go round to the biz. Man proposes — the devil disposes." He turned aside with irony in the darkness.

"But surely, Will!" remonstrated the girl, keenly disappointed.

"Fact, Lois! — I feel wild about it myself. But I've got to go down to the works. They may be getting a bit warm down there, you know" — he jerked his head in the direction of the fair. "If the Lambs get frisky! — they're a bit off

about the work, and they'd just be in their element if they could set a lighted match to something — ”

“Will, you don't think — !” exclaimed the girl, laying her hand on his arm in the true fashion of romance, and looking up at him earnestly.

“Dad's not sure,” he replied, looking down at her with gravity. They remained in this attitude for a moment, then he said:

“I might stop a bit. It's all right for an hour, I should think.”

She looked at him earnestly, then said in tones of deep disappointment and of fortitude: “No, Will, you must go. You'd better go — ”

“It's a shame!” he murmured, standing a moment at a loose end. Then, glancing down the street to see he was alone, he put his arm round her waist and said in a difficult voice: “How goes it?”

She let him keep her for a moment, then he kissed her as if afraid of what he was doing. They were both uncomfortable.

“Well — !” he said at length.

“Good night!” she said, setting him free to go.

He hung a moment near her, as if ashamed. Then “Good night,” he answered, and he broke away. She listened to his footsteps in the night, before composing herself to turn indoors.

“Helloa!” said her father, glancing over his paper as she entered the dining-room. “What's up, then?”

“Oh, nothing,” she replied, in her calm tones. “Will won't be here to dinner tonight.”

“What, gone to the fair?”

“No.”

“Oh! What's got him then?”

Lois looked at her father, and answered:

“He's gone down to the factory. They are afraid of the hands.”

Her father looked at her closely.

“Oh, aye!” he answered, undecided, and they sat down to dinner.

III

Lois returned very early. She had a fire in her bedroom. She drew the curtains and stood holding aside a heavy fold, looking out at the night. She could see only the nothingness of the fog; not even the glare of the fair was evident, though the noise clamoured small in the distance. In front of everything she could see her own faint image. She crossed to the dressing-table, and there leaned her face to the mirror, and looked at herself. She looked a long time, then

she rose, changed her dress for a dressing-jacket, and took up *Sesame and Lilies*.

Late in the night she was roused from sleep by a bustle in the house. She sat up and heard a hurrying to and fro and the sound of anxious voices. She put on her dressing-gown and went out to her mother's room. Seeing her mother at the head of the stairs, she said in her quick, clean voice:

"Mother, what is it?"

"Oh, child, don't ask me! Go to bed, dear, do! I shall surely be worried out of my life."

"Mother, what is it?" Lois was sharp and emphatic.

"I hope your father won't go. Now I do hope your father won't go. He's got a cold as it is."

"Mother, tell me what is it?" Lois took her mother's arm.

"It's Selby's. I should have thought you would have heard the fire-engine, and Jack isn't in yet. I hope we're safe!" Lois returned to her bedroom and dressed. She coiled her plaited hair, and having put on a cloak, left the house.

She hurried along under the fog-dripping trees towards the meaner part of the town. When she got near, she saw a glare in the fog, and closed her lips tight. She hastened on till she was in the crowd. With peaked, noble face she watched the fire. Then she looked a little wildly over the fire-reddened faces in the crowd, and catching sight of her father, hurried to him.

"Oh, Dadda — is he safe? Is Will safe — ?"

"Safe, aye, why not? You've no business here. Here, here's Sampson, he'll take you home. I've enough to bother me; there's my own place to watch. Go home now, I can't do with you here."

"Have you seen Will?" she asked.

"Go home — Sampson, just take Miss Lois home — now!"

"You don't really know where he is — father?"

"Go home now — I don't want you here — " her father ordered peremptorily.

The tears sprang to Lois' eyes. She looked at the fire and the tears were quickly dried by fear. The flames roared and struggled upward. The great wonder of the fire made her forget even her indignation at her father's light treatment of herself and of her lover. There was a crashing and bursting of timber, as the first floor fell in a mass into the blazing gulf, splashing the fire in all directions, to the terror of the crowd. She saw the steel of the machines growing white-hot and twisting like flaming letters. Piece after piece of the flooring gave way, and the machines dropped in red ruin as the wooden framework burned out. The air became unbreathable; the fog was swallowed up; sparks went rushing up as if they would burn the dark heavens; sometimes cards of lace went whirling into the gulf of the sky, waving with wings of fire. It was

dangerous to stand near this great cup of roaring destruction.

Sampson, the grey old manager of Buxton and Co's, led her away as soon as she would turn her face to listen to him. He was a stout, irritable man. He elbowed his way roughly through the crowd, and Lois followed him, her head high, her lips closed. He led her for some distance without speaking, then at last, unable to contain his garrulous irritability, he broke out:

"What do they expect? What can they expect? They can't expect to stand a bad time. They spring up like mushrooms as big as a house-side, but there's no stability in 'em. I remember William Selby when he'd run on my errands. Yes, there's some as can make much out of little, and there's some as can make much out of nothing, but they find it won't last. William Selby's sprung up in a day, and he'll vanish in a night. You can't trust to luck alone. Maybe he thinks it's a lucky thing this fire has come when things are looking black. But you can't get out of it as easy as that. There's been a few too many of 'em. No, indeed, a fire's the last thing I should hope to come to — the very last!"

Lois hurried and hurried, so that she brought the old manager panting in distress up the steps of her home. She could not bear to hear him talking so. They could get no one to open the door for some time. When at last Lois ran upstairs, she found her mother dressed, but all unbuttoned again, lying back in the chair in her daughter's room, suffering from palpitation of the heart, with *Sesame and Lilies* crushed beneath her. Lois administered brandy, and her decisive words and movements helped largely to bring the good lady to a state of recovery sufficient to allow of her returning to her own bedroom.

Then Lois locked the door. She glanced at her fire-darkened face, and taking the flattened Ruskin out of the chair, sat down and wept. After a while she calmed herself, rose, and sponged her face. Then once more on that fatal night she prepared for rest. Instead, however, of retiring, she pulled a silk quilt from her disordered bed and wrapping it round her, sat miserably to think. It was two o'clock in the morning.

IV

The fire was sunk to cold ashes in the grate, and the grey morning was creeping through the half-opened curtains like a thing ashamed, when Lois awoke. It was painful to move her head: her neck was cramped. The girl awoke in full recollection. She sighed, roused herself and pulled the quilt closer about her. For a little while she sat and mused. A pale, tragic resignation fixed her face like a mask. She remembered her father's irritable answer to her question concerning her lover's safety — "Safe, aye — why not?" She knew that he

suspected the factory of having been purposely set on fire. But then, he had never liked Will. And yet — and yet — Lois' heart was heavy as lead. She felt her lover was guilty. And she felt she must hide her secret of his last communication to her. She saw herself being cross-examined — "When did you last see this man?" But she would hide what he had said about watching at the works. How dreary it was — and how dreadful. Her life was ruined now, and nothing mattered any more. She must only behave with dignity, and submit to her own obliteration. For even if Will were never accused, she knew in her heart he was guilty. She knew it was over between them.

It was dawn among the yellow fog outside, and Lois, as she moved mechanically about her toilet, vaguely felt that all her days would arrive slowly struggling through a bleak fog. She felt an intense longing at this uncanny hour to slough the body's trammelled weariness and to issue at once into the new bright warmth of the far Dawn where a lover waited transfigured; it is so easy and pleasant in imagination to step out of the chill grey dampness of another terrestrial daybreak, straight into the sunshine of the eternal morning! And who can escape his hour? So Lois performed the meaningless routine of her toilet, which at last she made meaningful when she took her black dress, and fastened a black jet brooch at her throat.

Then she went downstairs and found her father eating a mutton chop. She quickly approached and kissed him on the forehead. Then she retreated to the other end of the table. Her father looked tired, even haggard.

"You are early," he said, after a while. Lois did not reply. Her father continued to eat for a few moments, then he said:

"Have a chop — here's one! Ring for a hot plate. Eh, what? Why not?"

Lois was insulted, but she gave no sign. She sat down and took a cup of coffee, making no pretence to eat. Her father was absorbed, and had forgotten her.

"Our Jack's not come home yet," he said at last.

Lois stirred faintly. "Hasn't he?" she said.

"No." There was silence for a time. Lois was frightened. Had something happened also to her brother? This fear was closer and more irksome.

"Selby's was cleaned out, gutted. We had a near shave of it — "

"You have no loss, Dadda?"

"Nothing to mention." After another silence, her father said:

"I'd rather be myself than William Selby. Of course it may merely be bad luck — you don't know. But whatever it was, I wouldn't like to add one to the list of fires just now. Selby was at the 'George' when it broke out — I don't know where the lad was — !"

“Father,” broke in Lois, “why do you talk like that? Why do you talk as if Will had done it?” She ended suddenly. Her father looked at her pale, mute face.

“I don’t talk as if Will had done it,” he said. “I don’t even think it.”

Feeling she was going to cry, Lois rose and left the room. Her father sighed, and leaning his elbows on his knees, whistled faintly into the fire. He was not thinking about her.

Lois went down to the kitchen and asked Lucy, the parlour-maid, to go out with her. She somehow shrank from going alone, lest people should stare at her overmuch: and she felt an overpowering impulse to go to the scene of the tragedy, to judge for herself.

The churches were chiming half-past eight when the young lady and the maid set off down the street. Nearer the fair, swarthy, thin-legged men were pushing barrels of water towards the market-place, and the gipsy women, with hard brows, and dressed in tight velvet bodices, hurried along the pavement with jugs of milk, and great brass water ewers and loaves and breakfast parcels. People were just getting up, and in the poorer streets was a continual splash of tea-leaves, flung out on to the cobble-stones. A teapot came crashing down from an upper story just behind Lois, and she, starting round and looking up, thought that the trembling, drink-bleared man at the upper window, who was stupidly staring after his pot, had had designs on her life; and she went on her way shuddering at the grim tragedy of life.

In the dull October morning the ruined factory was black and ghastly. The window-frames were all jagged, and the walls stood gaunt. Inside was a tangle of twisted *débris*, the iron, in parts red with bright rust, looking still hot; the charred wood was black and satiny; from dishevelled heaps, sodden with water, a faint smoke rose dimly. Lois stood and looked. If he had done that! He might even be dead there, burned to ash and lost for ever. It was almost soothing to feel so. He would be safe in the eternity which now she must hope in.

At her side the pretty, sympathetic maid chatted plaintively. Suddenly, from one of her lapses into silence, she exclaimed:

“Why if there isn’t Mr Jack!”

Lois turned suddenly and saw her brother and her lover approaching her. Both looked soiled, untidy and wan. Will had a black eye, some ten hours old, well coloured. Lois turned very pale as they approached. They were looking gloomily at the factory, and for a moment did not notice the girls.

“I’ll be jiggered if there ain’t our Lois!” exclaimed Jack, the reprobate, swearing under his breath.

“Oh, God!” exclaimed the other in disgust.

“Jack, where have you been?” said Lois sharply, in keen pain, not looking at

her lover. Her sharp tone of suffering drove her lover to defend himself with an affectation of comic recklessness.

“In quod,” replied her brother, smiling sickly.

“Jack!” cried his sister very sharply.

“Fact.”

Will Selby shuffled on his feet and smiled, trying to turn away his face so that she should not see his black eye. She glanced at him. He felt her boundless anger and contempt, and with great courage he looked straight at her, smiling ironically. Unfortunately his smile would not go over his swollen eye, which remained grave and lurid.

“Do I look pretty?” he inquired with a hateful twist of his lip.

“Very!” she replied.

“I thought I did,” he replied. And he turned to look at his father’s ruined works, and he felt miserable and stubborn. The girl standing there so clean and out of it all! Oh, God, he felt sick. He turned to go home.

The three went together, Lois silent in anger and resentment. Her brother was tired and overstrung, but not suppressed. He chattered on blindly.

“It was a lark we had! We met Bob Osborne and Freddy Mansell coming down Poultry. There was girl with some geese. She looked a tanger sitting there, all like statues, her and the geese. It was Will who began it. He offered her three-pence and asked her to begin the show. She called him a — she called him something, and then somebody poked an old gander to stir him up, and somebody squirted him in the eye. He upped and squawked and started off with his neck out. Laugh! We nearly killed ourselves, keeping back those old birds with squirts and teasers. Oh, Lum! Those old geese, oh, scrimmy, they didn’t know where to turn, they fairly went off their dots, coming at us right an’ left, and such a row — it was fun, you never knew! Then the girl she got up and knocked somebody over the jaw, and we were right in for it. Well, in the end, Billy here got hold of her round the waist — ”

“Oh, dry it up!” exclaimed Will bitterly.

Jack looked at him, laughed mirthlessly, and continued: “An’ we said we’d buy her birds. So we got hold of one goose apiece — an’ they took some holding, I can tell you — and off we set round the fair, Billy leading with the girl. The bloomin’ geese squawked an’ pecked. Laugh — I thought I should a’ died. Well, then we wanted the girl to have her birds back — and then she fired up. She got some other chaps on her side, and there was a proper old row. The girl went tooth and nail for Will there — she was dead set against him. She gave him a black eye, by gum, and we went at it, I can tell you. It was a free fight, a beauty, an’ we got run in. I don’t know what became of the girl.”

Lois surveyed the two men. There was no glimmer of a smile on her face, though the maid behind her was sniggering. Will was very bitter. He glanced at his sweetheart and at the ruined factory.

“How’s dad taken it?” he asked, in a biting, almost humble tone.

“I don’t know,” she replied coldly. “Father’s in an awful way. I believe everybody thinks you set the place on fire.”

Lois drew herself up. She had delivered her blow. She drew herself up in cold condemnation and for a moment enjoyed her complete revenge. He was despicable, abject in his dishevelled, disfigured, unwashed condition.

“Aye, well, they made a mistake for once,” he replied, with a curl of the lip.

Curiously enough, they walked side by side as if they belonged to each other. She was his conscience-keeper. She was far from forgiving him, but she was still farther from letting him go. And he walked at her side like a boy who had to be punished before he can be exonerated. He submitted. But there was a genuine bitter contempt in the curl of his lip.

THE CHRISTENING

The mistress of the British School stepped down from her school gate, and instead of turning to the left as usual, she turned to the right. Two women who were hastening home to scramble their husbands' dinners together — it was five minutes to four — stopped to look at her. They stood gazing after her for a moment; then they glanced at each other with a woman's little grimace.

To be sure, the retreating figure was ridiculous: small and thin, with a black straw hat, and a rusty cashmere dress hanging full all round the skirt. For so small and frail and rusty a creature to sail with slow, deliberate stride was also absurd. Hilda Rowbotham was less than thirty, so it was not years that set the measure of her pace; she had heart disease. Keeping her face, that was small with sickness, but not uncomely, firmly lifted and fronting ahead, the young woman sailed on past the market-place, like a black swan of mournful, disreputable plumage.

She turned into Berryman's, the baker's. The shop displayed bread and cakes, sacks of flour and oatmeal, flitches of bacon, hams, lard and sausages. The combination of scents was not unpleasing. Hilda Rowbotham stood for some minutes nervously tapping and pushing a large knife that lay on the counter, and looking at the tall, glittering brass scales. At last a morose man with sandy whiskers came down the step from the house-place.

"What is it?" he asked, not apologizing for his delay.

"Will you give me six-pennyworth of assorted cakes and pastries — and put in some macaroons, please?" she asked, in remarkably rapid and nervous speech. Her lips fluttered like two leaves in a wind, and her words crowded and rushed like a flock of sheep at a gate.

"We've got no macaroons," said the man churlishly.

He had evidently caught that word. He stood waiting.

"Then I can't have any, Mr Berryman. Now I do feel disappointed. I like those macaroons, you know, and it's not often I treat myself. One gets so tired of trying to spoil oneself, don't you think? It's less profitable even than trying to spoil somebody else." She laughed a quick little nervous laugh, putting her hand to her face.

"Then what'll you have?" asked the man, without the ghost of an answering smile. He evidently had not followed, so he looked more glum than ever.

"Oh, anything you've got," replied the schoolmistress, flushing slightly. The

man moved slowly about, dropping the cakes from various dishes one by one into a paper bag.

“How’s that sister o’ yours getting on?” he asked, as if he were talking to the flour scoop.

“Whom do you mean?” snapped the schoolmistress.

“The youngest,” answered the stooping, pale-faced man, with a note of sarcasm.

“Emma! Oh, she’s very well, thank you!” The schoolmistress was very red, but she spoke with sharp, ironical defiance. The man grunted. Then he handed her the bag and watched her out of the shop without bidding her “Good afternoon”.

She had the whole length of the main street to traverse, a half-mile of slow-stepping torture, with shame flushing over her neck. But she carried her white bag with an appearance of steadfast unconcern. When she turned into the field she seemed to droop a little. The wide valley opened out from her, with the far woods withdrawing into twilight, and away in the centre the great pit streaming its white smoke and chuffing as the men were being turned up. A full, rose-coloured moon, like a flamingo flying low under the far, dusky east, drew out of the mist. It was beautiful, and it made her irritable sadness soften, diffuse.

Across the field, and she was at home. It was a new, substantial cottage, built with unstinted hand, such a house as an old miner could build himself out of his savings. In the rather small kitchen a woman of dark, saturnine complexion sat nursing a baby in a long white gown; a young woman of heavy, brutal cast stood at the table, cutting bread and butter. She had a downcast, humble mien that sat unnaturally on her, and was strangely irritating. She did not look round when her sister entered. Hilda put down the bag of cakes and left the room, not having spoken to Emma, nor to the baby, not to Mrs Carlin, who had come in to help for the afternoon.

Almost immediately the father entered from the yard with a dustpan full of coals. He was a large man, but he was going to pieces. As he passed through, he gripped the door with his free hand to steady himself, but turning, he lurched and swayed. He began putting the coals on the fire, piece by piece. One lump fell from his hand and smashed on the white hearth. Emma Rowbotham looked round, and began in a rough, loud voice of anger: “Look at you!” Then she consciously moderated her tones. “I’ll sweep it up in a minute — don’t you bother; you’ll only be going head first into the fire.”

Her father bent down nevertheless to clear up the mess he had made, saying, articulating his words loosely and slaving in his speech:

“The lousy bit of a thing, it slipped between my fingers like a fish.”

As he spoke he went tilting towards the fire. The dark-browed woman cried out: he put his hand on the hot stove to save himself: Emma swung round and dragged him off.

“Didn’t I tell you!” she cried roughly. “Now, have you burnt yourself?”

She held tight hold of the big man, and pushed him into his chair.

“What’s the matter?” cried a sharp voice from the other room. The speaker appeared, a hard well-favoured woman of twenty-eight. “Emma, don’t speak like that to father.” Then, in a tone not so cold, but just as sharp: “Now, father, what have you been doing?”

Emma withdrew to her table sullenly.

“It’s nöwt,” said the old man, vainly protesting. “It’s nöwt, at a’. Get on wi’ what you’re doin’.”

“I’m afraid ‘e’s burnt ‘is ‘and,” said the black-browed woman, speaking of him with a kind of hard pity, as if he were a cumbersome child. Bertha took the old man’s hand and looked at it, making a quick tut-tutting noise of impatience.

“Emma, get that zinc ointment — and some white rag,” she commanded sharply. The younger sister put down her loaf with the knife in it, and went. To a sensitive observer, this obedience was more intolerable than the most hateful discord. The dark woman bent over the baby and made silent, gentle movements of motherliness to it. The little one smiled and moved on her lap. It continued to move and twist.

“I believe this child’s hungry,” she said. “How long is it since he had anything?”

“Just afore dinner,” said Emma dully.

“Good gracious!” exclaimed Bertha. “You needn’t starve the child now you’ve got it. Once every two hours it ought to be fed, as I’ve told you; and now it’s three. Take him, poor little mite — I’ll cut the bread.” She bent and looked at the bonny baby. She could not help herself: she smiled, and pressed its cheek with her finger, and nodded to it, making little noises. Then she turned and took the loaf from her sister. The woman rose and gave the child to its mother. Emma bent over the little sucking mite. She hated it when she looked at it, and saw it as a symbol, but when she felt it, her love was like fire in her blood.

“I should think ‘e canna be comin’,” said the father uneasily, looking up at the clock.

“Nonsense, father — the clock’s fast! It’s but half-past four! Don’t fidget!” Bertha continued to cut the bread and butter.

“Open a tin of pears,” she said to the woman, in a much milder tone. Then she went into the next room. As soon as she was gone, the old man said again: “I should ha’e thought he’d ‘a’ been ‘ere by now, if he means comin’.”

Emma, engrossed, did not answer. The father had ceased to consider her, since she had become humbled.

“‘E’ll come — ’e’ll come!” assured the stranger.

A few minutes later Bertha hurried into the kitchen, taking off her apron. The dog barked furiously. She opened the door, commanded the dog to silence, and said: “He will be quiet now, Mr Kendal.”

“Thank you,” said a sonorous voice, and there was the sound of a bicycle being propped against a wall. A clergyman entered, a big-boned, thin, ugly man of nervous manner. He went straight to the father.

“Ah — how are you?” he asked musically, peering down on the great frame of the miner, ruined by locomotor ataxy.

His voice was full of gentleness, but he seemed as if he could not see distinctly, could not get things clear.

“Have you hurt you hand?” he said comfortingly, seeing the white rag.

“It wor nöwt but a pestered bit o’ coal as dropped, an’ I put my hand on th’ hub. I thought tha worna commin’.”

The familiar ‘tha’, and the reproach, were unconscious retaliation on the old man’s part. The minister smiled, half wistfully, half indulgently. He was full of vague tenderness. Then he turned to the young mother, who flushed sullenly because her dishonoured breast was uncovered.

“How are *you*?” he asked, very softly and gently, as if she were ill and he were mindful of her.

“I’m all right,” she replied, awkwardly taking his hand without rising, hiding her face and the anger that rose in her.

“Yes — yes” — he peered down at the baby, which sucked with distended mouth upon the firm breast. “Yes, yes.” He seemed lost in a dim musing.

Coming to, he shook hands unseeingly with the woman.

Presently they all went into the next room, the minister hesitating to help his crippled old deacon.

“I can go by myself, thank yer,” testily replied the father.

Soon all were seated. Everybody was separated in feeling and isolated at table. High tea was spread in the middle kitchen, a large, ugly room kept for special occasions.

Hilda appeared last, and the clumsy, raw-boned clergyman rose to meet her. He was afraid of this family, the well-to-do old collier, and the brutal, self-willed children. But Hilda was queen among them. She was the clever one, and had been to college. She felt responsible for the keeping up of a high standard of conduct in all the members of the family. There *was* a difference between the Rowbothams and the common collier folk. Woodbine Cottage was a superior

house to most — and was built in pride by the old man. She, Hilda, was a college-trained schoolmistress; she meant to keep up the prestige of her house in spite of blows.

She had put on a dress of green voile for this special occasion. But she was very thin; her neck protruded painfully. The clergyman, however, greeted her almost with reverence, and, with some assumption of dignity, she sat down before the tray. At the far end of the table sat the broken, massive frame of her father. Next to him was the youngest daughter, nursing the restless baby. The minister sat between Hilda and Bertha, hulking his bony frame uncomfortably.

There was a great spread on the table, of tinned fruits and tinned salmon, ham and cakes. Miss Rowbotham kept a keen eye on everything: she felt the importance of the occasion. The young mother who had given rise to all this solemnity ate in sulky discomfort, snatching sullen little smiles at her child, smiles which came, in spite of her, when she felt its little limbs stirring vigorously on her lap. Bertha, sharp and abrupt, was chiefly concerned with the baby. She scorned her sister, and treated her like dirt. But the infant was a streak of light to her. Miss Rowbotham concerned herself with the function and the conversation. Her hands fluttered; she talked in little volleys exceedingly nervous. Towards the end of the meal, there came a pause. The old man wiped his mouth with his red handkerchief, then, his blue eyes going fixed and staring, he began to speak, in a loose, slobbering fashion, charging his words at the clergyman.

“Well, mester — we’n axed you to come her ter christen this childt, an’ you’n come, an’ I’m sure we’re very thankful. I can’t see lettin’ the poor blessed childt miss baptizing, an’ they aren’t for goin’ to church wi’t — ” He seemed to lapse into a muse. “So,” he resumed, “we’v axed you to come here to do the job. I’m not sayin’ as it’s not ‘ard on us, it is. I’m breakin’ up, an’ mother’s gone. I don’t like leavin’ a girl o’ mine in a situation like ‘ers is, but what the Lord’s done, He’s done, an’ it’s no matter murmuring. . . . There’s one thing to be thankful for, an’ we *are* thankful for it: they never need know the want of bread.”

Miss Rowbotham, the lady of the family, sat very stiff and pained during this discourse. She was sensitive to so many things that she was bewildered. She felt her young sister’s shame, then a kind of swift protecting love for the baby, a feeling that included the mother; she was at a loss before her father’s religious sentiment, and she felt and resented bitterly the mark upon the family, against which the common folk could lift their fingers. Still she winced from the sound of her father’s words. It was a painful ordeal.

“It is hard for you,” began the clergyman in his soft, lingering, unworldly voice. “It is hard for you today, but the Lord gives comfort in His time. A man

child is born unto us, therefore let us rejoice and be glad. If sin has entered in among us, let us purify our hearts before the Lord. . . .”

He went on with his discourse. The young mother lifted the whimpering infant, till its face was hid in her loose hair. She was hurt, and a little glowering anger shone in her face. But nevertheless her fingers clasped the body of the child beautifully. She was stupefied with anger against this emotion let loose on her account.

Miss Bertha rose and went to the little kitchen, returning with water in a china bowl. She placed it there among the tea-things.

“Well, we’re all ready,” said the old man, and the clergyman began to read the service. Miss Bertha was godmother, the two men godfathers. The old man sat with bent head. The scene became impressive. At last Miss Bertha took the child and put it in the arms of the clergyman. He, big and ugly, shone with a kind of unreal love. He had never mixed with life, and women were all unliving, Biblical things to him. When he asked for the name, the old man lifted his head fiercely. “Joseph William, after me,” he said, almost out of breath.

“Joseph William, I baptize thee. . . .” resounded the strange, full, chanting voice of the clergyman. The baby was quite still.

“Let us pray!” It came with relief to them all. They knelt before their chairs, all but the young mother, who bent and hid herself over her baby. The clergyman began his hesitating, struggling prayer.

Just then heavy footsteps were heard coming up the path, ceasing at the window. The young mother, glancing up, saw her brother, black in his pit dirt, grinning in through the panes. His red mouth curved in a sneer; his fair hair shone above his blackened skin. He caught the eye of his sister and grinned. Then his black face disappeared. He had gone on into the kitchen. The girl with the child sat still and anger filled her heart. She herself hated now the praying clergyman and the whole emotional business; she hated her brother bitterly. In anger and bondage she sat and listened.

Suddenly her father began to pray. His familiar, loud, rambling voice made her shut herself up and become even insentient. Folks said his mind was weakening. She believed it to be true, and kept herself always disconnected from him.

“We ask Thee, Lord,” the old man cried, “to look after this child. Fatherless he is. But what does the earthly father matter before Thee? The child is Thine, he is Thy child. Lord, what father has a man but Thee? Lord, when a man says he is a father, he is wrong from the first word. For Thou art the Father, Lord. Lord, take away from us the conceit that our children are ours. Lord, Thou art Father of this child as is fatherless here. O God, Thou bring him up. For I have

stood between Thee and my children; I've had *my* way with them, Lord; I've stood between Thee and my children; I've cut 'em off from Thee because they were mine. And they've grown twisted, because of me. Who is their father, Lord, but Thee? But I put myself in the way, they've been plants under a stone, because of me. Lord, if it hadn't been for me, they might ha' been trees in the sunshine. Let me own it, Lord, I've done 'em mischief. It could ha' been better if they'd never known no father. No man is a father, Lord: only Thou art. They can never grow beyond Thee, but I hampered them. Lift 'em up again, and undo what I've done to my children. And let this young childt be like a willow tree beside the waters, with no father but Thee, O God. Aye an' I wish it had been so with my children, that they'd had no father but Thee. For I've been like a stone upon them, and they rise up and curse me in their wickedness. But let me go, an' lift Thou them up, Lord . . ."

The minister, unaware of the feelings of a father, knelt in trouble, hearing without understanding the special language of fatherhood. Miss Rowbotham alone felt and understood a little. Her heart began to flutter; she was in pain. The two younger daughters kneeled unhearing, stiffened and impervious. Bertha was thinking of the baby; and the younger mother thought of the father of her child, whom she hated. There was a clatter in the scullery. There the youngest son made as much noise as he could, pouring out the water for his wash, muttering in deep anger:

"Blortin', slaverin' old fool!"

And while the praying of his father continued, his heart was burning with rage. On the table was a paper bag. He picked it up and read, "John Berryman — Bread, Pastries, etc." Then he grinned with a grimace. The father of the baby was baker's man at Berryman's. The prayer went on in the middle kitchen. Laurie Rowbotham gathered together the mouth of the bag, inflated it, and burst it with his fist. There was a loud report. He grinned to himself. But he writhed at the same time with shame and fear of his father.

The father broke off from his prayer; the party shuffled to their feet. The young mother went into the scullery.

"What art doin', fool?" she said.

The collier youth tipped the baby under the chin, singing:

"Pat-a-cake, pat-a-cake, baker's man,
Bake me a cake as fast as you can. . . ."

The mother snatched the child away. "Shut thy mouth," she said, the colour coming into her cheek.

“Prick it and stick it and mark it with P,
And put it i’ th’ oven for baby an’ me. . . .”

He grinned, showing a grimy, and jeering and unpleasant red mouth and white teeth.

“I s’ll gi’e thee a dab ower th’ mouth,” said the mother of the baby grimly. He began to sing again, and she struck out at him.

“Now what’s to do?” said the father, staggering in.

The youth began to sing again. His sister stood sullen and furious.

“Why, does *that* upset you?” asked the eldest Miss Rowbotham, sharply, of Emma the mother. “Good gracious, it hasn’t improved your temper.”

Miss Bertha came in, and took the bonny baby.

The father sat big and unheeding in his chair, his eyes vacant, his physique wrecked. He let them do as they would, he fell to pieces. And yet some power, involuntary, like a curse, remained in him. The very ruin of him was like a lodestone that held them in its control. The wreck of him still dominated the house, in his dissolution even he compelled their being. They had never lived; his life, his will had always been upon them and contained them. They were only half-individuals.

The day after the christening he staggered in at the doorway declaring, in a loud voice, with joy in life still: “The daisies light up the earth, they clap their hands in multitudes, in praise of the morning.” And his daughters shrank, sullen.

A FRAGMENT OF STAINED GLASS

Beauvale is, or was, the largest parish in England. It is thinly populated, only just netting the stragglers from shoals of houses in three large mining villages. For the rest, it holds a great tract of woodland, fragment of old Sherwood, a few hills of pasture and arable land, three collieries, and, finally, the ruins of a Cistercian abbey. These ruins lie in a still rich meadow at the foot of the last fall of woodland, through whose oaks shines a blue of hyacinths, like water, in May-time. Of the abbey, there remains only the east wall of the chancel standing, a wild thick mass of ivy weighting one shoulder, while pigeons perch in the tracery of the lofty window. This is the window in question.

The vicar of Beauvale is a bachelor of forty-two years. Quite early in life some illness caused a slight paralysis of his right side, so that he drags a little, and so that the right corner of his mouth is twisted up into his cheek with a constant grimace, unhidden by a heavy moustache. There is something pathetic about this twist on the vicar's countenance: his eyes are so shrewd and sad. It would be hard to get near to Mr Colbran. Indeed, now, his soul had some of the twist of his face, so that, when he is not ironical, he is satiric. Yet a man of more complete tolerance and generosity scarcely exists. Let the boors mock him, he merely smiles on the other side, and there is no malice in his eyes, only a quiet expression of waiting till they have finished. His people do not like him, yet none could bring forth an accusation against him, save, that "You never can tell when he's having you."

I dined the other evening with the vicar in his study. The room scandalizes the neighbourhood because of the statuary which adorns it: a Laocoon and other classic copies, with bronze and silver Italian Renaissance work. For the rest, it is all dark and tawny.

Mr Colbran is an archaeologist. He does not take himself seriously, however, in his hobby, so that nobody knows the worth of his opinions on the subject.

"Here you are," he said to me after dinner, "I've found another paragraph for my great work."

"What's that?" I asked.

"Haven't I told you I was compiling a Bible of the English people — the Bible of their hearts — their exclamations in presence of the unknown? I've found a fragment at home, a jump at God from Beauvale."

"Where?" I asked, startled.

The vicar closed his eyes whilst looking at me.

“Only on parchment,” he said.

Then, slowly, he reached for a yellow book, and read, translating as he went:

“Then, while we chanted, came a crackling at the window, at the great east window, where hung our Lord on the Cross. It was a malicious covetous Devil wrathed by us, rended the lovely image of the glass. We saw the iron clutches of the fiend pick the window, and a face flaming red like fire in a basket did glower down on us. Our hearts melted away, our legs broke, we thought to die. The breath of the wretch filled the chapel.

“But our dear Saint, etc., etc., came hastening down heaven to defend us. The fiend began to groan and bray — he was daunted and beat off.

“When the sun uprose, and it was morning, some went out in dread upon the thin snow. There the figure of our Saint was broken and thrown down, whilst in the window was a wicked hole as from the Holy Wounds the Blessed Blood was run out at the touch of the Fiend, and on the snow was the Blood, sparkling like gold. Some gathered it up for the joy of this House. . . .”

“Interesting,” I said. “Where’s it from?”

“Beauvale records — fifteenth century.”

“Beauvale Abbey,” I said; “they were only very few, the monks. What frightened them, I wonder.”

“I wonder,” he repeated.

“Somebody climbed up,” I supposed, “and attempted to get in.”

“What?” he exclaimed, smiling.

“Well, what do you think?”

“Pretty much the same,” he replied. “I glossed it out for my book.”

“Your great work? Tell me.”

He put a shade over the lamp so that the room was almost in darkness.

“Am I more than a voice?” he asked.

“I can see your hand,” I replied. He moved entirely from the circle of light. Then his voice began, sing-song, sardonic:

“I was a serf in Rollestoun’s Newthorpe Manor, master of the stables I was. One day a horse bit me as I was grooming him. He was an old enemy of mine. I fetched him a blow across the nose. Then, when he got a chance, he lashed out at me and caught me a gash over the mouth. I snatched at a hatchet and cut his head. He yelled, fiend as he was, and strained for me with all his teeth bare. I brought him down.

“For killing him they flogged me till they thought I was dead. I was sturdy, because we horse-serfs got plenty to eat. I was sturdy, but they flogged me till I did not move. The next night I set fire to the stables, and the stables set fire to

the house. I watched and saw the red flame rise and look out of the window, I saw the folk running, each for himself, master no more than one of a frightened party. It was freezing, but the heat made me sweat. I saw them all turn again to watch, all rimmed with red. They cried, all of them when the roof went in, when the sparks splashed up at rebound. They cried then like dogs at the bagpipes howling. Master cursed me, till I laughed as I lay under a bush quite near.

“As the fire went down I got frightened. I ran for the woods, with fire blazing in my eyes and crackling in my ears. For hours I was all fire. Then I went to sleep under the bracken. When I woke it was evening. I had no mantle, was frozen stiff. I was afraid to move, lest all the sores of my back should be broken like thin ice. I lay still until I could bear my hunger no longer. I moved then to get used to the pain of movement, when I began to hunt for food. There was nothing to be found but hips.

“After wandering about till I was faint I dropped again in the bracken. The boughs above me creaked with frost. I started and looked round. The branches were like hair among the starlight. My heart stood still. Again there was a creak, creak, and suddenly a whoop, that whistled in fading. I fell down in the bracken like dead wood. Yet, by the peculiar whistling sound at the end, I knew it was only the ice bending or tightening in the frost. I was in the woods above the lake, only two miles from the Manor. And yet, when the lake whooped hollowly again, I clutched the frozen soil, every one of my muscles as stiff as the stiff earth. So all the night long I dare not move my face, but pressed it flat down, and taut I lay as if pegged down and braced.

“When morning came still I did not move, I lay still in a dream. By afternoon my ache was such it enlivened me. I cried, rocking my breath in the ache of moving. Then again I became fierce. I beat my hands on the rough bark to hurt them, so that I should not ache so much. In such a rage I was I swung my limbs to torture till I fell sick with pain. Yet I fought the hurt, fought it and fought by twisting and flinging myself, until it was overcome. Then the evening began to draw on. All day the sun had not loosened the frost. I felt the sky chill again towards afternoon. Then I knew the night was coming, and, remembering the great space I had just come through, horrible so that it seemed to have made me another man, I fled across the wood.

“But in my running I came upon the oak where hanged five bodies. There they must hang, bar-stiff, night after night. It was a terror worse than any. Turning, blundering through the forest, I came out where the trees thinned, where only hawthorns, ragged and shaggy, went down to the lake’s edge.

“The sky across was red, the ice on the water glistened as if it were warm. A few wild geese sat out like stones on the sheet of ice. I thought of Martha. She

was the daughter of the miller at the upper end of the lake. Her hair was red like beech leaves in a wind. When I had gone often to the mill with the horses she had brought me food.

“‘I thought,’ said I to her, ‘‘twas a squirrel sat on your shoulder. ‘Tis your hair fallen loose.’

“‘They call me the fox,’ she said.

“‘Would I were your dog,’ said I. She would bring me bacon and good bread, when I called at the mill with the horses. The thought of cakes of bread and of bacon made me reel as if drunk. I had torn at the rabbit holes, I had chewed wood all day. In such a dimness was my head that I felt neither the soreness of my wounds nor the cuts of thorns on my knees, but stumbled towards the mill, almost past fear of man and death, panting with fear of the darkness that crept behind me from trunk to trunk.

“Coming to the gap in the wood, below which lay the pond, I heard no sound. Always I knew the place filled with the buzz of water, but now it was silent. In fear of this stillness I ran forward, forgetting myself, forgetting the frost. The wood seemed to pursue me. I fell, just in time, down by a shed wherein were housed the few wintry pigs. The miller came riding in on his horse, and the barking of dogs was for him. I heard him curse the day, curse his servant, curse me, whom he had been out to hunt, in his rage of wasted labour, curse all. As I lay I heard inside the shed a sucking. Then I knew that the sow was there, and that the most of her sucking pigs would be already killed for tomorrow’s Christmas. The miller, from forethought to have young at that time, made profit by his sucking pigs that were sold for the mid-winter feast.

“When in a moment all was silent in the dusk, I broke the bar and came into the shed. The sow grunted, but did not come forth to discover me. By and by I crept in towards her warmth. She had but three young left, which now angered her, she being too full of milk. Every now and again she slashed at them and they squealed. Busy as she was with them, I in the darkness advanced towards her. I trembled so that scarce dared I trust myself near her, for long dared not put my naked face towards her. Shuddering with hunger and fear, I at last fed of her, guarding my face with my arm. Her own full young tumbled squealing against me, but she, feeling her ease, lay grunting. At last I, too, lay drunk, swooning.

“I was roused by the shouting of the miller. He, angered by his daughter who wept, abused her, driving her from the house to feed the swine. She came, bowing under a yoke, to the door of the shed. Finding the pin broken she stood afraid, then, as the sow grunted, she came cautiously in. I took her with my arm, my hand over her mouth. As she struggled against my breast my heart began to beat loudly. At last she knew it was I. I clasped her. She hung in my arms,

turning away her face, so that I kissed her throat. The tears blinded my eyes, I know not why, unless it were the hurt of my mouth, wounded by the horse, was keen.

“‘They will kill you,’ she whispered.

“‘No,’ I answered.

“And she wept softly. She took my head in her arms and kissed me, wetting me with her tears, brushing me with her keen hair, warming me through.

“‘I will not go away from here,’ I said. ‘Bring me a knife, and I will defend myself.’

“‘No,’ she wept. ‘Ah, no!’

“When she went I lay down, pressing my chest where she had rested on the earth, lest being alone were worse emptiness than hunger.

“Later she came again. I saw her bend in the doorway, a lanthorn hanging in front. As she peered under the redness of her falling hair, I was afraid of her. But she came with food. We sat together in the dull light. Sometimes still I shivered and my throat would not swallow.

“‘If,’ said I, ‘I eat all this you have brought me, I shall sleep till somebody finds me.’

“Then she took away the rest of the meat.

“‘Why,’ said I, ‘should I not eat?’ She looked at me in tears of fear.

“‘What?’ I said, but still she had no answer. I kissed her, and the hurt of my wounded mouth angered me.

“‘Now there is my blood,’ said I, ‘on your mouth.’ Wiping her smooth hand over her lips, she looked thereat, then at me.

“‘Leave me,’ I said, ‘I am tired.’ She rose to leave me.

“‘But bring a knife,’ I said. Then she held the lanthorn near my face, looking as at a picture.

“‘You look to me,’ she said, ‘like a stirk that is roped for the axe. Your eyes are dark, but they are wide open.’

“‘Then I will sleep,’ said I, ‘but will not wake too late.’

“‘Do not stay here,’ she said.

“‘I will not sleep in the wood,’ I answered, and it was my heart that spoke, ‘for I am afraid. I had better be afraid of the voice of man and dogs, than the sounds in the woods. Bring me a knife, and in the morning I will go. Alone will I not go now.’

“‘The searchers will take you,’ she said.

“‘Bring me a knife,’ I answered.

“‘Ah, go,’ she wept.

“‘Not now — I will not — ’

“With that she lifted the lanthorn, lit up her own face and mine. Her blue eyes dried of tears. Then I took her to myself, knowing she was mine.

“‘I will come again,’ she said.

“She went, and I folded my arms, lay down and slept.

“When I woke, she was rocking me wildly to rouse me.

“‘I dreamed,’ said I, ‘that a great heap, as if it were a hill, lay on me and above me.’

“She put a cloak over me, gave me a hunting-knife and a wallet of food, and other things I did not note. Then under her own cloak she hid the lanthorn.

“‘Let us go,’ she said, and blindly I followed her.

“When I came out into the cold someone touched my face and my hair.

“‘Ha!’ I cried, ‘who now — ?’ Then she swiftly clung to me, hushed me.

“‘Someone has touched me,’ I said aloud, still dazed with sleep.

“‘Oh hush!’ she wept. ‘‘Tis snowing.’ The dogs within the house began to bark. She fled forward, I after her. Coming to the ford of the stream she ran swiftly over, but I broke through the ice. Then I knew where I was. Snowflakes, fine and rapid, were biting at my face. In the wood there was no wind nor snow.

“‘Listen,’ said I to her, ‘listen, for I am locked up with sleep.’

“‘I hear roaring overhead,’ she answered. ‘I hear in the trees like great bats squeaking.’

“‘Give me your hand,’ said I.

“We heard many noises as we passed. Once as there uprose a whiteness before us, she cried aloud.

“‘Nay,’ said I, ‘do not untie thy hand from mine,’ and soon we were crossing fallen snow. But ever and again she started back from fear.

“‘When you draw back my arm,’ I said, angry, ‘you loosed a weal on my shoulder.’

“Thereafter she ran by my side, like a fawn beside its mother.

“‘We will cross the valley and gain the stream,’ I said. ‘That will lead us on its ice as on a path deep into the forest. There we can join the outlaws. The wolves are driven from this part. They have followed the driven deer.’

“We came directly on a large gleam that shaped itself up among flying grains of snow.

“‘Ah!’ she cried, and she stood amazed.

“Then I thought we had gone through the bounds into faery realm, and I was no more a man. How did I know what eyes were gleaming at me between the snow, what cunning spirits in the draughts of air? So I waited for what would happen, and I forgot her, that she was there. Only I could feel the spirits whirling and blowing about me.

“Whereupon she clung upon me, kissing me lavishly, and, were dogs or men or demons come upon us at that moment, she had let us be stricken down, nor heeded not. So we moved forward to the shadow that shone in colours upon the passing snow. We found ourselves under a door of light which shed its colours mixed with snow. This Martha had never seen, nor I, this door open for a red and brave issuing like fires. We wondered.

“‘It is faery,’ she said, and after a while, ‘Could one catch such — Ah, no!’

“Through the snow shone bunches of red and blue.

“‘Could one have such a little light like a red flower — only a little, like a rose-berry scarlet on one’s breast! — then one were singled out as Our Lady.’

“I flung off my cloak and my burden to climb up the face of the shadow. Standing on rims of stone, then in pockets of snow, I reached upward. My hand was red and blue, but I could not take the stuff. Like colour of a moth’s wing it was on my hand, it flew on the increasing snow. I stood higher on the head of a frozen man, reached higher my hand. Then I felt the bright stuff cold. I could not pluck it off. Down below she cried to me to come again to her. I felt a rib that yielded, I struck at it with my knife. There came a gap in the redness. Looking through I saw below as it were white stunted angels, with sad faces lifted in fear. Two faces they had each, and round rings of hair. I was afraid. I grasped the shining red, I pulled. Then the cold man under me sank, so I fell as if broken on to the snow.

“Soon I was risen again, and we were running downwards towards the stream. We felt ourselves eased when the smooth road of ice was beneath us. For a while it was resting, to travel thus evenly. But the wind blew round us, the snow hung upon us, we leaned us this way and that, towards the storm. I drew her along, for she came as a bird that stems lifting and swaying against the wind. By and by the snow came smaller, there was not wind in the wood. Then I felt nor labour, nor cold. Only I knew the darkness drifted by on either side, that overhead was a lane of paleness where a moon fled us before. Still, I can feel the moon fleeing from me, can feel the trees passing round me in slow dizzy reel, can feel the hurt of my shoulder and my straight arm torn with holding her. I was following the moon and the stream, for I knew where the water peeped from its burrow in the ground there were shelters of the outlaw. But she fell, without sound or sign.

“I gathered her up and climbed the bank. There all round me hissed the larchwood, dry beneath, and laced with its dry-fretted cords. For a little way I carried her into the trees. Then I laid her down till I cut flat hairy boughs. I put her in my bosom on this dry bed, so we swooned together through the night. I laced her round and covered her with myself, so she lay like a nut within its shell.

“Again, when morning came, it was pain of cold that woke me. I groaned, but my heart was warm as I saw the heap of red hair in my arms. As I looked at her, her eyes opened into mine. She smiled — from out of her smile came fear. As if in a trap she pressed back her head.

“‘We have no flint,’ said I.

“‘Yes — in the wallet, flint and steel and tinder box,’ she answered.

“‘God yield you blessing,’ I said.

“In a place a little open I kindled a fire of larch boughs. She was afraid of me, hovering near, yet never crossing a space.

“‘Come,’ said I, ‘let us eat this food.’

“‘Your face,’ she said, ‘is smeared with blood.’

“I opened out my cloak.

“‘But come,’ said I, ‘you are frosted with cold.’

“I took a handful of snow in my hand, wiping my face with it, which then I dried on my cloak.

“‘My face is no longer painted with blood, you are no longer afraid of me. Come here then, sit by me while we eat.’

“But as I cut the cold bread for her, she clasped me suddenly, kissing me. She fell before me, clasped my knees to her breast, weeping. She laid her face down to my feet, so that her hair spread like a fire before me. I wondered at the woman. ‘Nay,’ I cried. At that she lifted her face to me from below. ‘Nay,’ I cried, feeling my tears fall. With her head on my breast, my own tears rose from their source, wetting my cheek and her hair, which was wet with the rain of my eyes.

“Then I remembered and took from my bosom the coloured light of that night before. I saw it was black and rough.

“‘Ah,’ said I, ‘this is magic.’

“‘The black stone!’ she wondered.

“‘It is the red light of the night before,’ I said.

“‘It is magic,’ she answered.

“‘Shall I throw it?’ said I, lifting the stone, ‘shall I throw it away, for fear?’

“‘It shines!’ she cried, looking up. ‘It shines like the eye of a creature at night, the eye of a wolf in the doorway.’

“‘‘Tis magic,’ I said, ‘let me throw it from us.’ But nay, she held my arm.

“‘It is red and shining,’ she cried.

“‘It is a bloodstone,’ I answered. ‘It will hurt us, we shall die in blood.’

“‘But give it to me,’ she answered.

“‘It is red of blood,’ I said.

“‘Ah, give it to me,’ she called.

“‘It is my blood,’ I said.

“‘Give it,’ she commanded, low.

“‘It is my life-stone,’ I said.

“‘Give it me,’ she pleaded.

“‘I gave it her. She held it up, she smiled, she smiled in my face, lifting her arms to me. I took her with my mouth, her mouth, her white throat. Nor she ever shrank, but trembled with happiness.

“‘What woke us, when the woods were filling again with shadow, when the fire was out, when we opened our eyes and looked up as if drowned, into the light which stood bright and thick on the tree-tops, what woke us was the sound of wolves. . . .”

“‘Nay,” said the vicar, suddenly rising, “they lived happily ever after.”

“‘No,” I said.

DAUGHTERS OF THE VICAR

I

Mr Lindley was first vicar of Aldecross. The cottages of this tiny hamlet had nestled in peace since their beginning, and the country folk had crossed the lanes and farm-lands, two or three miles, to the parish church at Greymeed, on the bright Sunday mornings.

But when the pits were sunk, blank rows of dwellings started up beside the high roads, and a new population, skimmed from the floating scum of workmen, was filled in, the cottages and the country people almost obliterated.

To suit the convenience of these new collier-inhabitants, a church must be built at Aldecross. There was not too much money. And so the little building crouched like a humped stone-and-mortar mouse, with two little turrets at the west corners for ears, in the fields near the cottages and the apple trees, as far as possible from the dwellings down the high road. It had an uncertain, timid look about it. And so they planted big-leaved ivy, to hide its shrinking newness. So that now the little church stands buried in its greenery, stranded and sleeping among the fields, while the brick houses elbow nearer and nearer, threatening to crush it down. It is already obsolete.

The Reverend Ernest Lindley, aged twenty-seven, and newly married, came from his curacy in Suffolk to take charge of his church. He was just an ordinary young man, who had been to Cambridge and taken orders. His wife was a self-assured young woman, daughter of a Cambridgeshire rector. Her father had spent the whole of his thousand a year, so that Mrs Lindley had nothing of her own. Thus the young married people came to Aldecross to live on a stipend of about a hundred and twenty pounds, and to keep up a superior position.

They were not very well received by the new, raw, disaffected population of colliers. Being accustomed to farm labourers, Mr Lindley had considered himself as belonging indisputably to the upper or ordering classes. He had to be humble to the county families, but still, he was of their kind, whilst the common people were something different. He had no doubts of himself.

He found, however, that the collier population refused to accept this arrangement. They had no use for him in their lives, and they told him so, callously. The women merely said, "they were throng," or else, "Oh, it's no good you coming here, we're Chapel." The men were quite good-humoured so long as

he did not touch them too nigh, they were cheerfully contemptuous of him, with a preconceived contempt he was powerless against.

At last, passing from indignation to silent resentment, even, if he dared have acknowledged it, to conscious hatred of the majority of his flock, and unconscious hatred of himself, he confined his activities to a narrow round of cottages, and he had to submit. He had no particular character, having always depended on his position in society to give him position among men. Now he was so poor, he had no social standing even among the common vulgar tradespeople of the district, and he had not the nature nor the wish to make his society agreeable to them, nor the strength to impose himself where he would have liked to be recognized. He dragged on, pale and miserable and neutral.

At first his wife raged with mortification. She took on airs and used a high hand. But her income was too small, the wrestling with tradesmen's bills was too pitiful, she only met with general, callous ridicule when she tried to be impressive.

Wounded to the quick of her pride, she found herself isolated in an indifferent, callous population. She raged indoors and out. But soon she learned that she must pay too heavily for her outdoor rages, and then she only raged within the walls of the rectory. There her feeling was so strong, that she frightened herself. She saw herself hating her husband, and she knew that, unless she were careful, she would smash her form of life and bring catastrophe upon him and upon herself. So in very fear, she went quiet. She hid, bitter and beaten by fear, behind the only shelter she had in the world, her gloomy, poor parsonage.

Children were born one every year; almost mechanically, she continued to perform her maternal duty, which was forced upon her. Gradually, broken by the suppressing of her violent anger and misery and disgust, she became an invalid and took to her couch.

The children grew up healthy, but unwarmed and rather rigid. Their father and mother educated them at home, made them very proud and very genteel, put them definitely and cruelly in the upper classes, apart from the vulgar around them. So they lived quite isolated. They were good-looking, and had that curiously clean, semi-transparent look of the genteel, isolated poor.

Gradually Mr and Mrs Lindley lost all hold on life, and spent their hours, weeks and years merely haggling to make ends meet, and bitterly repressing and pruning their children into gentility, urging them to ambition, weighting them with duty. On Sunday morning the whole family, except the mother, went down the lane to church, the long-legged girls in skimpy frocks, the boys in black coats and long, grey, unfitting trousers. They passed by their father's parishioners with mute, clear faces, childish mouths closed in pride that was like a doom to them,

and childish eyes already unseeing. Miss Mary, the eldest, was the leader. She was a long, slim thing with a fine profile and a proud, pure look of submission to a high fate. Miss Louisa, the second, was short and plump and obstinate-looking. She had more enemies than ideals. She looked after the lesser children, Miss Mary after the elder. The collier children watched this pale, distinguished procession of the vicar's family pass mutely by, and they were impressed by the air of gentility and distance, they made mock of the trousers of the small sons, they felt inferior in themselves, and hate stirred their hearts.

In her time, Miss Mary received as governess a few little daughters of tradesmen; Miss Louisa managed the house and went among her father's churchgoers, giving lessons on the piano to the colliers' daughters at thirteen shillings for twenty-six lessons.

II

One winter morning, when his daughter Mary was about twenty years old, Mr Lindley, a thin, unobtrusive figure in his black overcoat and his wideawake, went down into Aldecross with a packet of white papers under his arm. He was delivering the parish almanacs.

A rather pale, neutral man of middle age, he waited while the train thumped over the level-crossing, going up to the pit which rattled busily just along the line. A wooden-legged man hobbled to open the gate, Mr Lindley passed on. Just at his left hand, below the road and the railway, was the red roof of a cottage, showing through the bare twigs of apple trees. Mr Lindley passed round the low wall, and descended the worn steps that led from the highway down to the cottage which crouched darkly and quietly away below the rumble of passing trains and the clank of coal-carts in a quiet little under-world of its own. Snowdrops with tight-shut buds were hanging very still under the bare currant bushes.

The clergyman was just going to knock when he heard a clinking noise, and turning saw through the open door of a black shed just behind him an elderly woman in a black lace cap stooping among reddish big cans, pouring a very bright liquid into a tundish. There was a smell of paraffin. The woman put down her can, took the tundish and laid it on a shelf, then rose with a tin bottle. Her eyes met those of the clergyman.

"Oh, is it you, Mr Lin'ley!" she said, in a complaining tone. "Go in."

The minister entered the house. In the hot kitchen sat a big, elderly man with a great grey beard, taking snuff. He grunted in a deep, muttering voice, telling the minister to sit down, and then took no more notice of him, but stared vacantly

into the fire. Mr Lindley waited.

The woman came in, the ribbons of her black lace cap, or bonnet, hanging on her shawl. She was of medium stature, everything about her was tidy. She went up a step out of the kitchen, carrying the paraffin tin. Feet were heard entering the room up the step. It was a little haberdashery shop, with parcels on the shelves of the walls, a big, old-fashioned sewing machine with tailor's work lying round it, in the open space. The woman went behind the counter, gave the child who had entered the paraffin bottle, and took from her a jug.

"My mother says shall yer put it down," said the child, and she was gone. The woman wrote in a book, then came into the kitchen with her jug. The husband, a very large man, rose and brought more coal to the already hot fire. He moved slowly and sluggishly. Already he was going dead; being a tailor, his large form had become an encumbrance to him. In his youth he had been a great dancer and boxer. Now he was taciturn, and inert. The minister had nothing to say, so he sought for his phrases. But John Durant took no notice, existing silent and dull.

Mrs Durant spread the cloth. Her husband poured himself beer into a mug, and began to smoke and drink.

"Shall you have some?" he growled through his beard at the clergyman, looking slowly from the man to the jug, capable of this one idea.

"No, thank you," replied Mr Lindley, though he would have liked some beer. He must set the example in a drinking parish.

"We need a drop to keep us going," said Mrs Durant.

She had rather a complaining manner. The clergyman sat on uncomfortably while she laid the table for the half-past ten lunch. Her husband drew up to eat. She remained in her little round armchair by the fire.

She was a woman who would have liked to be easy in her life, but to whose lot had fallen a rough and turbulent family, and a slothful husband who did not care what became of himself or anybody. So, her rather good-looking square face was peevish, she had that air of having been compelled all her life to serve unwillingly, and to control where she did not want to control. There was about her, too, that masterful *aplomb* of a woman who has brought up and ruled her sons: but even them she had ruled unwillingly. She had enjoyed managing her little haberdashery-shop, riding in the carrier's cart to Nottingham, going through the big warehouses to buy her goods. But the fret of managing her sons she did not like. Only she loved her youngest boy, because he was her last, and she saw herself free.

This was one of the houses the clergyman visited occasionally. Mrs Durant, as part of her regulation, had brought up all her sons in the Church. Not that she had any religion. Only, it was what she was used to. Mr Durant was without

religion. He read the fervently evangelical “Life of John Wesley” with a curious pleasure, getting from it a satisfaction as from the warmth of the fire, or a glass of brandy. But he cared no more about John Wesley, in fact, than about John Milton, of whom he had never heard.

Mrs Durant took her chair to the table.

“I don’t feel like eating,” she sighed.

“Why — aren’t you well?” asked the clergyman, patronizing.

“It isn’t that,” she sighed. She sat with shut, straight mouth. “I don’t know what’s going to become of us.”

But the clergyman had ground himself down so long, that he could not easily sympathize.

“Have you any trouble?” he asked.

“Ay, have I any trouble!” cried the elderly woman. “I shall end my days in the workhouse.”

The minister waited unmoved. What could she know of poverty, in her little house of plenty!

“I hope not,” he said.

“And the one lad as I wanted to keep by me — ” she lamented.

The minister listened without sympathy, quite neutral.

“And the lad as would have been a support to my old age! What is going to become of us?” she said.

The clergyman, justly, did not believe in the cry of poverty, but wondered what had become of the son.

“Has anything happened to Alfred?” he asked.

“We’ve got word he’s gone for a Queen’s sailor,” she said sharply.

“He has joined the Navy!” exclaimed Mr Lindley. “I think he could scarcely have done better — to serve his Queen and country on the sea . . .”

“He is wanted to serve *me*,” she cried. “And I wanted my lad at home.”

Alfred was her baby, her last, whom she had allowed herself the luxury of spoiling.

“You will miss him,” said Mr Lindley, “that is certain. But this is no regrettable step for him to have taken — on the contrary.”

“That’s easy for you to say, Mr Lindley,” she replied tartly. “Do you think I want my lad climbing ropes at another man’s bidding, like a monkey — ?”

“There is no *dishonour*, surely, in serving in the Navy?”

“Dishonour this dishonour that,” cried the angry old woman. “He goes and makes a slave of himself, and he’ll rue it.”

Her angry, scornful impatience nettled the clergyman and silenced him for some moments.

“I do not see,” he retorted at last, white at the gills and inadequate, “that the Queen’s service is any more to be called slavery than working in a mine.”

“At home he was at home, and his own master. *I* know he’ll find a difference.”

“It may be the making of him,” said the clergyman. “It will take him away from bad companionship and drink.”

Some of the Durants’ sons were notorious drinkers, and Alfred was not quite steady.

“And why indeed shouldn’t he have his glass?” cried the mother. “He picks no man’s pocket to pay for it!”

The clergyman stiffened at what he thought was an allusion to his own profession, and his unpaid bills.

“With all due consideration, I am glad to hear he has joined the Navy,” he said.

“Me with my old age coming on, and his father working very little! I’d thank you to be glad about something else besides that, Mr Lindley.”

The woman began to cry. Her husband, quite impassive, finished his lunch of meat-pie, and drank some beer. Then he turned to the fire, as if there were no one in the room but himself.

“I shall respect all men who serve God and their country on the sea, Mrs Durant,” said the clergyman stubbornly.

“That is very well, when they’re not your sons who are doing the dirty work. — It makes a difference,” she replied tartly.

“I should be proud if one of my sons were to enter the Navy.”

“Ay — well — we’re not all of us made alike — ”

The minister rose. He put down a large folded paper.

“I’ve brought the almanac,” he said.

Mrs Durant unfolded it.

“I do like a bit of colour in things,” she said, petulantly.

The clergyman did not reply.

“There’s that envelope for the organist’s fund — ” said the old woman, and rising, she took the thing from the mantelpiece, went into the shop, and returned sealing it up.

“Which is all I can afford,” she said.

Mr Lindley took his departure, in his pocket the envelope containing Mrs Durant’s offering for Miss Louisa’s services. He went from door to door delivering the almanacs, in dull routine. Jaded with the monotony of the business, and with the repeated effort of greeting half-known people, he felt barren and rather irritable. At last he returned home.

In the dining-room was a small fire. Mrs Lindley, growing very stout, lay on

her couch. The vicar carved the cold mutton; Miss Louisa, short and plump and rather flushed, came in from the kitchen; Miss Mary, dark, with a beautiful white brow and grey eyes, served the vegetables; the children chattered a little, but not exuberantly. The very air seemed starved.

“I went to the Durants,” said the vicar, as he served out small portions of mutton; “it appears Alfred has run away to join the Navy.”

“Do him good,” came the rough voice of the invalid.

Miss Louisa, attending to the youngest child, looked up in protest.

“Why has he done that?” asked Mary’s low, musical voice.

“He wanted some excitement, I suppose,” said the vicar. “Shall we say grace?”

The children were arranged, all bent their heads, grace was pronounced, at the last word every face was being raised to go on with the interesting subject.

“He’s just done the right thing, for once,” came the rather deep voice of the mother; “save him from becoming a drunken sot, like the rest of them.”

“They’re not *all* drunken, mama,” said Miss Louisa, stubbornly.

“It’s no fault of their upbringing if they’re not. Walter Durant is a standing disgrace.”

“As I told Mrs Durant,” said the vicar, eating hungrily, “it is the best thing he could have done. It will take him away from temptation during the most dangerous years of his life — how old is he — nineteen?”

“Twenty,” said Miss Louisa.

“Twenty!” repeated the vicar. “It will give him wholesome discipline and set before him some sort of standard of duty and honour — nothing could have been better for him. But — ”

“We shall miss him from the choir,” said Miss Louisa, as if taking opposite sides to her parents.

“That is as it may be,” said the vicar. “I prefer to know he is safe in the Navy, than running the risk of getting into bad ways here.”

“Was he getting into bad ways?” asked the stubborn Miss Louisa.

“You know, Louisa, he wasn’t quite what he used to be,” said Miss Mary gently and steadily. Miss Louisa shut her rather heavy jaw sulkily. She wanted to deny it, but she knew it was true.

For her he had been a laughing, warm lad, with something kindly and something rich about him. He had made her feel warm. It seemed the days would be colder since he had gone.

“Quite the best thing he could do,” said the mother with emphasis.

“I think so,” said the vicar. “But his mother was almost abusive because I suggested it.”

He spoke in an injured tone.

“What does she care for her children’s welfare?” said the invalid. “Their wages is all her concern.”

“I suppose she wanted him at home with her,” said Miss Louisa.

“Yes, she did — at the expense of his learning to be a drunkard like the rest of them,” retorted her mother.

“George Durant doesn’t drink,” defended her daughter.

“Because he got burned so badly when he was nineteen — in the pit — and that frightened him. The Navy is a better remedy than that, at least.”

“Certainly,” said the vicar. “Certainly.”

And to this Miss Louisa agreed. Yet she could not but feel angry that he had gone away for so many years. She herself was only nineteen.

III

It happened when Miss Mary was twenty-three years old, that Mr Lindley was very ill. The family was exceedingly poor at the time, such a lot of money was needed, so little was forthcoming. Neither Miss Mary nor Miss Louisa had suitors. What chance had they? They met no eligible young men in Aldecross. And what they earned was a mere drop in a void. The girls’ hearts were chilled and hardened with fear of this perpetual, cold penury, this narrow struggle, this horrible nothingness of their lives.

A clergyman had to be found for the church work. It so happened the son of an old friend of Mr Lindley’s was waiting three months before taking up his duties. He would come and officiate, for nothing. The young clergyman was keenly expected. He was not more than twenty-seven, a Master of Arts of Oxford, had written his thesis on Roman Law. He came of an old Cambridgeshire family, had some private means, was going to take a church in Northamptonshire with a good stipend, and was not married. Mrs Lindley incurred new debts, and scarcely regretted her husband’s illness.

But when Mr Massy came, there was a shock of disappointment in the house. They had expected a young man with a pipe and a deep voice, but with better manners than Sidney, the eldest of the Lindleys. There arrived instead a small, chétif man, scarcely larger than a boy of twelve, spectacled, timid in the extreme, without a word to utter at first; yet with a certain inhuman self-sureness.

“What a little abortion!” was Mrs Lindley’s exclamation to herself on first seeing him, in his buttoned-up clerical coat. And for the first time for many days, she was profoundly thankful to God that all her children were decent specimens.

He had not normal powers of perception. They soon saw that he lacked the full range of human feelings, but had rather a strong, philosophical mind, from which he lived. His body was almost unthinkable, in intellect he was something definite. The conversation at once took a balanced, abstract tone when he participated. There was no spontaneous exclamation, no violent assertion or expression of personal conviction, but all cold, reasonable assertion. This was very hard on Mrs Lindley. The little man would look at her, after one of her pronouncements, and then give, in his thin voice, his own calculated version, so that she felt as if she were tumbling into thin air through a hole in the flimsy floor on which their conversation stood. It was she who felt a fool. Soon she was reduced to a hardy silence.

Still, at the back of her mind, she remembered that he was an unattached gentleman, who would shortly have an income altogether of six or seven hundred a year. What did the man matter, if there were pecuniary ease! The man was a trifle thrown in. After twenty-two years her sentimentality was ground away, and only the millstone of poverty mattered to her. So she supported the little man as a representative of a decent income.

His most irritating habit was that of a sneering little giggle, all on his own, which came when he perceived or related some illogical absurdity on the part of another person. It was the only form of humour he had. Stupidity in thinking seemed to him exquisitely funny. But any novel was unintelligibly meaningless and dull, and to an Irish sort of humour he listened curiously, examining it like mathematics, or else simply not hearing. In normal human relationship he was not there. Quite unable to take part in simple everyday talk, he padded silently round the house, or sat in the dining-room looking nervously from side to side, always apart in a cold, rarefied little world of his own. Sometimes he made an ironic remark, that did not seem humanly relevant, or he gave his little laugh, like a sneer. He had to defend himself and his own insufficiency. And he answered questions grudgingly, with a yes or no, because he did not see their import and was nervous. It seemed to Miss Louisa he scarcely distinguished one person from another, but that he liked to be near her, or to Miss Mary, for some sort of contact which stimulated him unknown.

Apart from all this, he was the most admirable workman. He was unremittingly shy, but perfect in his sense of duty: as far as he could conceive Christianity, he was a perfect Christian. Nothing that he realized he could do for anyone did he leave undone, although he was so incapable of coming into contact with another being, that he could not proffer help. Now he attended assiduously to the sick man, investigated all the affairs of the parish or the church which Mr Lindley had in control, straightened out accounts, made lists of

the sick and needy, padded round with help and to see what he could do. He heard of Mrs Lindley's anxiety about her sons, and began to investigate means of sending them to Cambridge. His kindness almost frightened Miss Mary. She honoured it so, and yet she shrank from it. For, in it all Mr Massy seemed to have no sense of any person, any human being whom he was helping: he only realized a kind of mathematical working out, solving of given situations, a calculated well-doing. And it was as if he had accepted the Christian tenets as axioms. His religion consisted in what his scrupulous, abstract mind approved of.

Seeing his acts, Miss Mary must respect and honour him. In consequence she must serve him. To this she had to force herself, shuddering and yet desirous, but he did not perceive it. She accompanied him on his visiting in the parish, and whilst she was cold with admiration for him, often she was touched with pity for the little padding figure with bent shoulders, buttoned up to the chin in his overcoat. She was a handsome, calm girl, tall, with a beautiful repose. Her clothes were poor, and she wore a black silk scarf, having no furs. But she was a lady. As the people saw her walking down Aldecross beside Mr Massy, they said:

“My word, Miss Mary's got a catch. Did ever you see such a sickly little shrimp!”

She knew they were talking so, and it made her heart grow hot against them, and she drew herself as it were protectively towards the little man beside her. At any rate, she could see and give honour to his genuine goodness.

He could not walk fast, or far.

“You have not been well?” she asked, in her dignified way.

“I have an internal trouble.”

He was not aware of her slight shudder. There was silence, whilst she bowed to recover her composure, to resume her gentle manner towards him.

He was fond of Miss Mary. She had made it a rule of hospitality that he should always be escorted by herself or by her sister on his visits in the parish, which were not many. But some mornings she was engaged. Then Miss Louisa took her place. It was no good Miss Louisa's trying to adopt to Mr Massy an attitude of queenly service. She was unable to regard him save with aversion. When she saw him from behind, thin and bent-shouldered, looking like a sickly lad of thirteen, she disliked him exceedingly, and felt a desire to put him out of existence. And yet a deeper justice in Mary made Louisa humble before her sister.

They were going to see Mr Durant, who was paralysed and not expected to live. Miss Louisa was crudely ashamed at being admitted to the cottage in

company with the little clergyman.

Mrs Durant was, however, much quieter in the face of her real trouble.

“How is Mr Durant?” asked Louisa.

“He is no different — and we don’t expect him to be,” was the reply. The little clergyman stood looking on.

They went upstairs. The three stood for some time looking at the bed, at the grey head of the old man on the pillow, the grey beard over the sheet. Miss Louisa was shocked and afraid.

“It is so dreadful,” she said, with a shudder.

“It is how I always thought it would be,” replied Mrs Durant.

Then Miss Louisa was afraid of her. The two women were uneasy, waiting for Mr Massy to say something. He stood, small and bent, too nervous to speak.

“Has he any understanding?” he asked at length.

“Maybe,” said Mrs Durant. “Can you hear, John?” she asked loudly. The dull blue eye of the inert man looked at her feebly.

“Yes, he understands,” said Mrs Durant to Mr Massy. Except for the dull look in his eyes, the sick man lay as if dead. The three stood in silence. Miss Louisa was obstinate but heavy-hearted under the load of unlivingness. It was Mr Massy who kept her there in discipline. His non-human will dominated them all.

Then they heard a sound below, a man’s footsteps, and a man’s voice called subduedly:

“Are you upstairs, mother?”

Mrs Durant started and moved to the door. But already a quick, firm step was running up the stairs.

“I’m a bit early, mother,” a troubled voice said, and on the landing they saw the form of the sailor. His mother came and clung to him. She was suddenly aware that she needed something to hold on to. He put his arms round her, and bent over her, kissing her.

“He’s not gone, mother?” he asked anxiously, struggling to control his voice.

Miss Louisa looked away from the mother and son who stood together in the gloom on the landing. She could not bear it that she and Mr Massy should be there. The latter stood nervously, as if ill at ease before the emotion that was running. He was a witness, nervous, unwilling, but dispassionate. To Miss Louisa’s hot heart it seemed all, all wrong that they should be there.

Mrs Durant entered the bedroom, her face wet.

“There’s Miss Louisa and the vicar,” she said, out of voice and quavering.

Her son, red-faced and slender, drew himself up to salute. But Miss Louisa held out her hand. Then she saw his hazel eyes recognize her for a moment, and his small white teeth showed in a glimpse of the greeting she used to love. She

was covered with confusion. He went round to the bed; his boots clicked on the plaster floor, he bowed his head with dignity.

“How are you, dad?” he said, laying his hand on the sheet, faltering. But the old man stared fixedly and unseeing. The son stood perfectly still for a few minutes, then slowly recoiled. Miss Louisa saw the fine outline of his breast, under the sailor’s blue blouse, as his chest began to heave.

“He doesn’t know me,” he said, turning to his mother. He gradually went white.

“No, my boy!” cried the mother, pitiful, lifting her face. And suddenly she put her face against his shoulder, he was stooping down to her, holding her against him, and she cried aloud for a moment or two. Miss Louisa saw his sides heaving, and heard the sharp hiss of his breath. She turned away, tears streaming down her face. The father lay inert upon the white bed, Mr Massy looked queer and obliterated, so little now that the sailor with his sunburned skin was in the room. He stood waiting. Miss Louisa wanted to die, she wanted to have done. She dared not turn round again to look.

“Shall I offer a prayer?” came the frail voice of the clergyman, and all kneeled down.

Miss Louisa was frightened of the inert man upon the bed. Then she felt a flash of fear of Mr Massy, hearing his thin, detached voice. And then, calmed, she looked up. On the far side of the bed were the heads of the mother and son, the one in the black lace cap, with the small white nape of the neck beneath, the other, with brown, sun-scorched hair too close and wiry to allow of a parting, and neck tanned firm, bowed as if unwillingly. The great grey beard of the old man did not move, the prayer continued. Mr Massy prayed with a pure lucidity, that they all might conform to the higher Will. He was like something that dominated the bowed heads, something dispassionate that governed them inexorably. Miss Louisa was afraid of him. And she was bound, during the course of the prayer, to have a little reverence for him. It was like a foretaste of inexorable, cold death, a taste of pure justice.

That evening she talked to Mary of the visit. Her heart, her veins were possessed by the thought of Alfred Durant as he held his mother in his arms; then the break in his voice, as she remembered it again and again, was like a flame through her; and she wanted to see his face more distinctly in her mind, ruddy with the sun, and his golden-brown eyes, kind and careless, strained now with a natural fear, the fine nose tanned hard by the sun, the mouth that could not help smiling at her. And it went through her with pride, to think of his figure, a straight, fine jet of life.

“He is a handsome lad,” said she to Miss Mary, as if he had not been a year

older than herself. Underneath was the deeper dread, almost hatred, of the inhuman being of Mr Massy. She felt she must protect herself and Alfred from him.

“When I felt Mr Massy there,” she said, “I almost hated him. What right had he to be there!”

“Surely he has all right,” said Miss Mary after a pause. “He is *really* a Christian.”

“He seems to me nearly an imbecile,” said Miss Louisa.

Miss Mary, quiet and beautiful, was silent for a moment:

“Oh, no,” she said. “Not *imbecile* — ”

“Well then — he reminds me of a six months’ child — or a five months’ child — as if he didn’t have time to get developed enough before he was born.”

“Yes,” said Miss Mary, slowly. “There is something lacking. But there is something wonderful in him: and he is really *good* — ”

“Yes,” said Miss Louisa, “it doesn’t seem right that he should be. What right has *that* to be called goodness!”

“But it *is* goodness,” persisted Mary. Then she added, with a laugh: “And come, you wouldn’t deny that as well.”

There was a doggedness in her voice. She went about very quietly. In her soul, she knew what was going to happen. She knew that Mr Massy was stronger than she, and that she must submit to what he was. Her physical self was prouder, stronger than he, her physical self disliked and despised him. But she was in the grip of his moral, mental being. And she felt the days allotted out to her. And her family watched.

IV

A few days after, old Mr Durant died. Miss Louisa saw Alfred once more, but he was stiff before her now, treating her not like a person, but as if she were some sort of will in command and he a separate, distinct will waiting in front of her. She had never felt such utter steel-plate separation from anyone. It puzzled her and frightened her. What had become of him? And she hated the military discipline — she was antagonistic to it. Now he was not himself. He was the will which obeys set over against the will which commands. She hesitated over accepting this. He had put himself out of her range. He had ranked himself inferior, subordinate to her. And that was how he would get away from her, that was how he would avoid all connection with her: by fronting her impersonally from the opposite camp, by taking up the abstract position of an inferior.

She went brooding steadily and sullenly over this, brooding and brooding. Her

fierce, obstinate heart could not give way. It clung to its own rights. Sometimes she dismissed him. Why should he, inferior, trouble her?

Then she relapsed to him, and almost hated him. It was his way of getting out of it. She felt the cowardice of it, his calmly placing her in a superior class, and placing himself inaccessibly apart, in an inferior, as if she, the sensible woman who was fond of him, did not count. But she was not going to submit. Dogged in her heart she held on to him.

V

In six months' time Miss Mary had married Mr Massy. There had been no love-making, nobody had made any remark. But everybody was tense and callous with expectation. When one day Mr Massy asked for Mary's hand, Mr Lindley started and trembled from the thin, abstract voice of the little man. Mr Massy was very nervous, but so curiously absolute.

"I shall be very glad," said the vicar, "but of course the decision lies with Mary herself." And his still feeble hand shook as he moved a Bible on his desk.

The small man, keeping fixedly to his idea, padded out of the room to find Miss Mary. He sat a long time by her, while she made some conversation, before he had readiness to speak. She was afraid of what was coming, and sat stiff in apprehension. She felt as if her body would rise and fling him aside. But her spirit quivered and waited. Almost in expectation she waited, almost wanting him. And then she knew he would speak.

"I have already asked Mr Lindley," said the clergyman, while suddenly she looked with aversion at his little knees, "if he would consent to my proposal." He was aware of his own disadvantage, but his will was set.

She went cold as she sat, and impervious, almost as if she had become stone. He waited a moment nervously. He would not persuade her. He himself never even heard persuasion, but pursued his own course. He looked at her, sure of himself, unsure of her, and said:

"Will you become my wife, Mary?"

Still her heart was hard and cold. She sat proudly.

"I should like to speak to mama first," she said.

"Very well," replied Mr Massy. And in a moment he padded away.

Mary went to her mother. She was cold and reserved.

"Mr Massy has asked me to marry him, mama," she said. Mrs Lindley went on staring at her book. She was cramped in her feeling.

"Well, and what did you say?"

They were both keeping calm and cold.

“I said I would speak to you before answering him.”

This was equivalent to a question. Mrs Lindley did not want to reply to it. She shifted her heavy form irritably on the couch. Miss Mary sat calm and straight, with closed mouth.

“Your father thinks it would not be a bad match,” said the mother, as if casually.

Nothing more was said. Everybody remained cold and shut-off. Miss Mary did not speak to Miss Louisa, the Reverend Ernest Lindley kept out of sight.

At evening Miss Mary accepted Mr Massy.

“Yes, I will marry you,” she said, with even a little movement of tenderness towards him. He was embarrassed, but satisfied. She could see him making some movement towards her, could feel the male in him, something cold and triumphant, asserting itself. She sat rigid, and waited.

When Miss Louisa knew, she was silent with bitter anger against everybody, even against Mary. She felt her faith wounded. Did the real things to her not matter after all? She wanted to get away. She thought of Mr Massy. He had some curious power, some unanswerable right. He was a will that they could not controvert. — Suddenly a flush started in her. If he had come to her she would have flipped him out of the room. He was never going to touch *her*. And she was glad. She was glad that her blood would rise and exterminate the little man, if he came too near to her, no matter how her judgment was paralysed by him, no matter how he moved in abstract goodness. She thought she was perverse to be glad, but glad she was. “I would just flip him out of the room,” she said, and she derived great satisfaction from the open statement. Nevertheless, perhaps she ought still to feel that Mary, on her plane, was a higher being than herself. But then Mary was Mary, and she was Louisa, and that also was inalterable.

Mary, in marrying him, tried to become a pure reason such as he was, without feeling or impulse. She shut herself up, she shut herself rigid against the agonies of shame and the terror of violation which came at first. She *would* not feel, and she *would* not feel. She was a pure will acquiescing to him. She elected a certain kind of fate. She would be good and purely just, she would live in a higher freedom than she had ever known, she would be free of mundane care, she was a pure will towards right. She had sold herself, but she had a new freedom. She had got rid of her body. She had sold a lower thing, her body, for a higher thing, her freedom from material things. She considered that she paid for all she got from her husband. So, in a kind of independence, she moved proud and free. She had paid with her body: that was henceforward out of consideration. She was glad to be rid of it. She had bought her position in the world — that henceforth was taken for granted. There remained only the direction of her activity towards

charity and high-minded living.

She could scarcely bear other people to be present with her and her husband. Her private life was her shame. But then, she could keep it hidden. She lived almost isolated in the rectory of the tiny village miles from the railway. She suffered as if it were an insult to her own flesh, seeing the repulsion which some people felt for her husband, or the special manner they had of treating him, as if he were a "case". But most people were uneasy before him, which restored her pride.

If she had let herself, she would have hated him, hated his padding round the house, his thin voice devoid of human understanding, his bent little shoulders and rather incomplete face that reminded her of an abortion. But rigorously she kept to her position. She took care of him and was just to him. There was also a deep craven fear of him, something slave-like.

There was not much fault to be found with his behaviour. He was scrupulously just and kind according to his lights. But the male in him was cold and self-complete, and utterly domineering. Weak, insufficient little thing as he was, she had not expected this of him. It was something in the bargain she had not understood. It made her hold her head, to keep still. She knew, vaguely, that she was murdering herself. After all, her body was not quite so easy to get rid of. And this manner of disposing of it — ah, sometimes she felt she must rise and bring about death, lift her hand for utter denial of everything, by a general destruction.

He was almost unaware of the conditions about him. He did not fuss in the domestic way, she did as she liked in the house. Indeed, she was a great deal free of him. He would sit obliterated for hours. He was kind, and almost anxiously considerate. But when he considered he was right, his will was just blindly male, like a cold machine. And on most points he was logically right, or he had with him the right of the creed they both accepted. It was so. There was nothing for her to go against.

Then she found herself with child, and felt for the first time horror, afraid before God and man. This also she had to go through — it was the right. When the child arrived, it was a bonny, healthy lad. Her heart hurt in her body, as she took the baby between her hands. The flesh that was trampled and silent in her must speak again in the boy. After all, she had to live — it was not so simple after all. Nothing was finished completely. She looked and looked at the baby, and almost hated it, and suffered an anguish of love for it. She hated it because it made her live again in the flesh, when she *could* not live in the flesh, she could not. She wanted to trample her flesh down, down, extinct, to live in the mind. And now there was this child. It was too cruel, too racking. For she must love

the child. Her purpose was broken in two again. She had to become amorphous, purposeless, without real being. As a mother, she was a fragmentary, ignoble thing.

Mr Massy, blind to everything else in the way of human feeling, became obsessed by the idea of his child. When it arrived, suddenly it filled the whole world of feeling for him. It was his obsession, his terror was for its safety and well-being. It was something new, as if he himself had been born a naked infant, conscious of his own exposure, and full of apprehension. He who had never been aware of anyone else, all his life, now was aware of nothing but the child. Not that he ever played with it, or kissed it, or tended it. He did nothing for it. But it dominated him, it filled, and at the same time emptied his mind. The world was all baby for him.

This his wife must also bear, his question: "What is the reason that he cries?" — his reminder, at the first sound: "Mary, that is the child," — his restlessness if the feeding-time were five minutes past. She had bargained for this — now she must stand by her bargain.

VI

Miss Louisa, at home in the dingy vicarage, had suffered a great deal over her sister's wedding. Having once begun to cry out against it, during the engagement, she had been silenced by Mary's quiet: "I don't agree with you about him, Louisa, I *want* to marry him." Then Miss Louisa had been angry deep in her heart, and therefore silent. This dangerous state started the change in her. Her own revulsion made her recoil from the hitherto undoubted Mary.

"I'd beg the streets barefoot first," said Miss Louisa, thinking of Mr Massy.

But evidently Mary could perform a different heroism. So she, Louisa the practical, suddenly felt that Mary, her ideal, was questionable after all. How could she be pure — one cannot be dirty in act and spiritual in being. Louisa distrusted Mary's high spirituality. It was no longer genuine for her. And if Mary were spiritual and misguided, why did not her father protect her? Because of the money. He disliked the whole affair, but he backed away, because of the money. And the mother frankly did not care: her daughters could do as they liked. Her mother's pronouncement:

"Whatever happens to *him*, Mary is safe for life," — so evidently and shallowly a calculation, incensed Louisa.

"I'd rather be safe in the workhouse," she cried.

"Your father will see to that," replied her mother brutally. This speech, in its indirectness, so injured Miss Louisa that she hated her mother deep, deep in her

heart, and almost hated herself. It was a long time resolving itself out, this hate. But it worked and worked, and at last the young woman said:

“They are wrong — they are all wrong. They have ground out their souls for what isn’t worth anything, and there isn’t a grain of love in them anywhere. And I *will* have love. They want us to deny it. They’ve never found it, so they want to say it doesn’t exist. But I *will* have it. I *will* love — it is my birthright. I will love the man I marry — that is all I care about.”

So Miss Louisa stood isolated from everybody. She and Mary had parted over Mr Massy. In Louisa’s eyes, Mary was degraded, married to Mr Massy. She could not bear to think of her lofty, spiritual sister degraded in the body like this. Mary was wrong, wrong, wrong: she was not superior, she was flawed, incomplete. The two sisters stood apart. They still loved each other, they would love each other as long as they lived. But they had parted ways. A new solitariness came over the obstinate Louisa, and her heavy jaw set stubbornly. She was going on her own way. But which way? She was quite alone, with a blank world before her. How could she be said to have any way? Yet she had her fixed will to love, to have the man she loved.

VII

When her boy was three years old, Mary had another baby, a girl. The three years had gone by monotonously. They might have been an eternity, they might have been brief as a sleep. She did not know. Only, there was always a weight on top of her, something that pressed down her life. The only thing that had happened was that Mr Massy had had an operation. He was always exceedingly fragile. His wife had soon learned to attend to him mechanically, as part of her duty.

But this third year, after the baby girl had been born, Mary felt oppressed and depressed. Christmas drew near: the gloomy, unleavened Christmas of the rectory, where all the days were of the same dark fabric. And Mary was afraid. It was as if the darkness were coming upon her.

“Edward, I should like to go home for Christmas,” she said, and a certain terror filled her as she spoke.

“But you can’t leave baby,” said her husband, blinking.

“We can all go.”

He thought, and stared in his collective fashion.

“Why do you wish to go?” he asked.

“Because I need a change. A change would do me good, and it would be good for the milk.”

He heard the will in his wife's voice, and was at a loss. Her language was unintelligible to him. And while she was breeding, either about to have a child, or nursing, he regarded her as a special sort of being.

"Wouldn't it hurt baby to take her by the train?" he said.

"No," replied the mother, "why should it?"

They went. When they were in the train, it began to snow. From the window of his first-class carriage the little clergyman watched the big flakes sweep by, like a blind drawn across the country. He was obsessed by thought of the baby, and afraid of the draughts of the carriage.

"Sit right in the corner," he said to his wife, "and hold baby close back."

She moved at his bidding, and stared out of the window. His eternal presence was like an iron weight on her brain. But she was going partially to escape for a few days.

"Sit on the other side, Jack," said the father. "It is less draughty. Come to this window."

He watched the boy in anxiety. But his children were the only beings in the world who took not the slightest notice of him.

"Look, mother, look!" cried the boy. "They fly right in my face" — he meant the snowflakes.

"Come into this corner," repeated his father, out of another world.

"He's jumped on this one's back, mother, an' they're riding to the bottom!" cried the boy, jumping with glee.

"Tell him to come on this side," the little man bade his wife.

"Jack, kneel on this cushion," said the mother, putting her white hand on the place.

The boy slid over in silence to the place she indicated, waited still for a moment, then almost deliberately, stridently cried:

"Look at all those in the corner, mother, making a heap," and he pointed to the cluster of snowflakes with finger pressed dramatically on the pane, and he turned to his mother a bit ostentatiously.

"All in a heap!" she said.

He had seen her face, and had her response, and he was somewhat assured. Vaguely uneasy, he was reassured if he could win her attention.

They arrived at the vicarage at half-past two, not having had lunch.

"How are you, Edward?" said Mr Lindley, trying on his side to be fatherly. But he was always in a false position with his son-in-law, frustrated before him, therefore, as much as possible, he shut his eyes and ears to him. The vicar was looking thin and pale and ill-nourished. He had gone quite grey. He was, however, still haughty; but, since the growing-up of his children, it was a brittle

haughtiness, that might break at any moment and leave the vicar only an impoverished, pitiable figure. Mrs Lindley took all the notice of her daughter, and of the children. She ignored her son-in-law. Miss Louisa was clucking and laughing and rejoicing over the baby. Mr Massy stood aside, a bent, persistent little figure.

“Oh a pretty! — a little pretty! oh a cold little pretty come in a railway-train!” Miss Louisa was cooing to the infant, crouching on the hearthrug opening the white woollen wraps and exposing the child to the fireglow.

“Mary,” said the little clergyman, “I think it would be better to give baby a warm bath; she may take a cold.”

“I think it is not necessary,” said the mother, coming and closing her hand judiciously over the rosy feet and hands of the mite. “She is not chilly.”

“Not a bit,” cried Miss Louisa. “She’s not caught cold.”

“I’ll go and bring her flannels,” said Mr Massy, with one idea.

“I can bath her in the kitchen then,” said Mary, in an altered, cold tone.

“You can’t, the girl is scrubbing there,” said Miss Louisa. “Besides, she doesn’t want a bath at this time of day.”

“She’d better have one,” said Mary, quietly, out of submission. Miss Louisa’s gorge rose, and she was silent. When the little man padded down with the flannels on his arm, Mrs Lindley asked:

“Hadn’t *you* better take a hot bath, Edward?”

But the sarcasm was lost on the little clergyman. He was absorbed in the preparations round the baby.

The room was dull and threadbare, and the snow outside seemed fairy-like by comparison, so white on the lawn and tufted on the bushes. Indoors the heavy pictures hung obscurely on the walls, everything was dingy with gloom.

Except in the fireglow, where they had laid the bath on the hearth. Mrs Massy, her black hair always smoothly coiled and queenly, kneeled by the bath, wearing a rubber apron, and holding the kicking child. Her husband stood holding the towels and the flannels to warm. Louisa, too cross to share in the joy of the baby’s bath, was laying the table. The boy was hanging on the door-knob, wrestling with it to get out. His father looked round.

“Come away from the door, Jack,” he said, ineffectually. Jack tugged harder at the knob as if he did not hear. Mr Massy blinked at him.

“He must come away from the door, Mary,” he said. “There will be a draught if it is opened.”

“Jack, come away from the door, dear,” said the mother, dexterously turning the shiny wet baby on to her towelled knee, then glancing round: “Go and tell Auntie Louisa about the train.”

Louisa, also afraid to open the door, was watching the scene on the hearth. Mr Massy stood holding the baby's flannel, as if assisting at some ceremonial. If everybody had not been subduedly angry, it would have been ridiculous.

"I want to see out of the window," Jack said. His father turned hastily.

"Do *you* mind lifting him on to a chair, Louisa," said Mary hastily. The father was too delicate.

When the baby was flannelled, Mr Massy went upstairs and returned with four pillows, which he set in the fender to warm. Then he stood watching the mother feed her child, obsessed by the idea of his infant.

Louisa went on with her preparations for the meal. She could not have told why she was so sullenly angry. Mrs Lindley, as usual, lay silently watching.

Mary carried her child upstairs, followed by her husband with the pillows. After a while he came down again.

"What is Mary doing? Why doesn't she come down to eat?" asked Mrs Lindley.

"She is staying with baby. The room is rather cold. I will ask the girl to put in a fire." He was going absorbedly to the door.

"But Mary has had nothing to eat. It is *she* who will catch cold," said the mother, exasperated.

Mr Massy seemed as if he did not hear. Yet he looked at his mother-in-law, and answered:

"I will take her something."

He went out. Mrs Lindley shifted on her couch with anger. Miss Louisa glowered. But no one said anything, because of the money that came to the vicarage from Mr Massy.

Louisa went upstairs. Her sister was sitting by the bed, reading a scrap of paper.

"Won't you come down and eat?" the younger asked.

"In a moment or two," Mary replied, in a quiet, reserved voice, that forbade anyone to approach her.

It was this that made Miss Louisa most furious. She went downstairs, and announced to her mother:

"I am going out. I may not be home to tea."

VIII

No one remarked on her exit. She put on her fur hat, that the village people knew so well, and the old Norfolk jacket. Louisa was short and plump and plain. She had her mother's heavy jaw, her father's proud brow, and her own grey,

brooding eyes that were very beautiful when she smiled. It was true, as the people said, that she looked sulky. Her chief attraction was her glistening, heavy, deep-blond hair, which shone and gleamed with a richness that was not entirely foreign to her.

“Where am I going?” she said to herself, when she got outside in the snow. She did not hesitate, however, but by mechanical walking found herself descending the hill towards Old Aldecross. In the valley that was black with trees, the colliery breathed in stertorous pants, sending out high conical columns of steam that remained upright, whiter than the snow on the hills, yet shadowy, in the dead air. Louisa would not acknowledge to herself whither she was making her way, till she came to the railway crossing. Then the bunches of snow in the twigs of the apple tree that leaned towards the fence told her she must go and see Mrs Durant. The tree was in Mrs Durant’s garden.

Alfred was now at home again, living with his mother in the cottage below the road. From the highway hedge, by the railway crossing, the snowy garden sheered down steeply, like the side of a hole, then dropped straight in a wall. In this depth the house was snug, its chimney just level with the road. Miss Louisa descended the stone stairs, and stood below in the little backyard, in the dimness and the semi-secrecy. A big tree leaned overhead, above the paraffin hut. Louisa felt secure from all the world down there. She knocked at the open door, then looked round. The tongue of garden narrowing in from the quarry bed was white with snow: she thought of the thick fringes of snowdrops it would show beneath the currant bushes in a month’s time. The ragged fringe of pinks hanging over the garden brim behind her was whitened now with snowflakes, that in summer held white blossom to Louisa’s face. It was pleasant, she thought, to gather flowers that stooped to one’s face from above.

She knocked again. Peeping in, she saw the scarlet glow of the kitchen, red firelight falling on the brick floor and on the bright chintz cushions. It was alive and bright as a peep-show. She crossed the scullery, where still an almanac hung. There was no one about. “Mrs Durant,” called Louisa softly, “Mrs Durant.”

She went up the brick step into the front room, that still had its little shop counter and its bundles of goods, and she called from the stair-foot. Then she knew Mrs Durant was out.

She went into the yard to follow the old woman’s footsteps up the garden path.

She emerged from the bushes and raspberry canes. There was the whole quarry bed, a wide garden white and dimmed, brindled with dark bushes, lying half submerged. On the left, overhead, the little colliery train rumbled by. Right

away at the back was a mass of trees.

Louisa followed the open path, looking from right to left, and then she gave a cry of concern. The old woman was sitting rocking slightly among the ragged snowy cabbages. Louisa ran to her, found her whimpering with little, involuntary cries.

“Whatever have you done?” cried Louisa, kneeling in the snow.

“I’ve — I’ve — I was pulling a brussel-sprout stalk — and — oh-h! — something tore inside me. I’ve had a pain,” the old woman wept from shock and suffering, gasping between her whimpers, — “I’ve had a pain there — a long time — and now — oh — oh!” She panted, pressed her hand on her side, leaned as if she would faint, looking yellow against the snow. Louisa supported her.

“Do you think you could walk now?” she asked.

“Yes,” gasped the old woman.

Louisa helped her to her feet.

“Get the cabbage — I want it for Alfred’s dinner,” panted Mrs Durant. Louisa picked up the stalk of brussel-sprouts, and with difficulty got the old woman indoors. She gave her brandy, laid her on the couch, saying:

“I’m going to send for a doctor — wait just a minute.”

The young woman ran up the steps to the public-house a few yards away. The landlady was astonished to see Miss Louisa.

“Will you send for a doctor at once to Mrs Durant,” she said, with some of her father in her commanding tone.

“Is something the matter?” fluttered the landlady in concern.

Louisa, glancing out up the road, saw the grocer’s cart driving to Eastwood. She ran and stopped the man, and told him.

Mrs Durant lay on the sofa, her face turned away, when the young woman came back.

“Let me put you to bed,” Louisa said. Mrs Durant did not resist.

Louisa knew the ways of the working people. In the bottom drawer of the dresser she found dusters and flannels. With the old pit-flannel she snatched out the oven shelves, wrapped them up, and put them in the bed. From the son’s bed she took a blanket, and, running down, set it before the fire. Having undressed the little old woman, Louisa carried her upstairs.

“You’ll drop me, you’ll drop me!” cried Mrs Durant.

Louisa did not answer, but bore her burden quickly. She could not light a fire, because there was no fire-place in the bedroom. And the floor was plaster. So she fetched the lamp, and stood it lighted in one corner.

“It will air the room,” she said.

“Yes,” moaned the old woman.

Louisa ran with more hot flannels, replacing those from the oven shelves. Then she made a bran-bag and laid it on the woman's side. There was a big lump on the side of the abdomen.

"I've felt it coming a long time," moaned the old lady, when the pain was easier, "but I've not said anything; I didn't want to upset our Alfred."

Louisa did not see why "our Alfred" should be spared.

"What time is it?" came the plaintive voice.

"A quarter to four."

"Oh!" wailed the old lady, "he'll be here in half an hour, and no dinner ready for him."

"Let me do it?" said Louisa, gently.

"There's that cabbage — and you'll find the meat in the pantry — and there's an apple pie you can hot up. But *don't you* do it — !"

"Who will, then?" asked Louisa.

"I don't know," moaned the sick woman, unable to consider.

Louisa did it. The doctor came and gave serious examination. He looked very grave.

"What is it, doctor?" asked the old lady, looking up at him with old, pathetic eyes in which already hope was dead.

"I think you've torn the skin in which a tumour hangs," he replied.

"Ay!" she murmured, and she turned away.

"You see, she may die any minute — and it *may* be swaled away," said the old doctor to Louisa.

The young woman went upstairs again.

"He says the lump may be swaled away, and you may get quite well again," she said.

"Ay!" murmured the old lady. It did not deceive her. Presently she asked:

"Is there a good fire?"

"I think so," answered Louisa.

"He'll want a good fire," the mother said. Louisa attended to it.

Since the death of Durant, the widow had come to church occasionally, and Louisa had been friendly to her. In the girl's heart the purpose was fixed. No man had affected her as Alfred Durant had done, and to that she kept. In her heart, she adhered to him. A natural sympathy existed between her and his rather hard, materialistic mother.

Alfred was the most lovable of the old woman's sons. He had grown up like the rest, however, headstrong and blind to everything but his own will. Like the other boys, he had insisted on going into the pit as soon as he left school, because that was the only way speedily to become a man, level with all the other

men. This was a great chagrin to his mother, who would have liked to have this last of her sons a gentleman.

But still he remained constant to her. His feeling for her was deep and unexpressed. He noticed when she was tired, or when she had a new cap. And he bought little things for her occasionally. She was not wise enough to see how much he lived by her.

At the bottom he did not satisfy her, he did not seem manly enough. He liked to read books occasionally, and better still he liked to play the piccolo. It amused her to see his head nod over the instrument as he made an effort to get the right note. It made her fond of him, with tenderness, almost pity, but not with respect. She wanted a man to be fixed, going his own way without knowledge of women. Whereas she knew Alfred depended on her. He sang in the choir because he liked singing. In the summer he worked in the garden, attended to the fowls and pigs. He kept pigeons. He played on Saturday in the cricket or football team. But to her he did not seem the man, the independent man her other boys had been. He was her baby — and whilst she loved him for it, she was a little bit contemptuous of him.

There grew up a little hostility between them. Then he began to drink, as the others had done; but not in their blind, oblivious way. He was a little self-conscious over it. She saw this, and she pitied it in him. She loved him most, but she was not satisfied with him because he was not free of her. He could not quite go his own way.

Then at twenty he ran away and served his time in the Navy. This made a man of him. He had hated it bitterly, the service, the subordination. For years he fought with himself under the military discipline, for his own self-respect, struggling through blind anger and shame and a cramping sense of inferiority. Out of humiliation and self-hatred, he rose into a sort of inner freedom. And his love for his mother, whom he idealised, remained the fact of hope and of belief.

He came home again, nearly thirty years old, but naïve and inexperienced as a boy, only with a silence about him that was new: a sort of dumb humility before life, a fear of living. He was almost quite chaste. A strong sensitiveness had kept him from women. Sexual talk was all very well among men, but somehow it had no application to living women. There were two things for him, the *idea* of women, with which he sometimes debauched himself, and real women, before whom he felt a deep uneasiness, and a need to draw away. He shrank and defended himself from the approach of any woman. And then he felt ashamed. In his innermost soul he felt he was not a man, he was less than the normal man. In Genoa he went with an under officer to a drinking house where the cheaper sort of girl came in to look for lovers. He sat there with his glass, the girls looked

at him, but they never came to him. He knew that if they did come he could only pay for food and drink for them, because he felt a pity for them, and was anxious lest they lacked good necessities. He could not have gone with one of them: he knew it, and was ashamed, looking with curious envy at the swaggering, easy-passionate Italian whose body went to a woman by instinctive impersonal attraction. They were men, he was not a man. He sat feeling short, feeling like a leper. And he went away imagining sexual scenes between himself and a woman, walking wrapt in this indulgence. But when the ready woman presented herself, the very fact that she was a palpable woman made it impossible for him to touch her. And this incapacity was like a core of rottenness in him.

So several times he went, drunk, with his companions, to the licensed prostitute houses abroad. But the sordid insignificance of the experience appalled him. It had not been anything really: it meant nothing. He felt as if he were, not physically, but spiritually impotent: not actually impotent, but intrinsically so.

He came home with this secret, never changing burden of his unknown, unbestowed self torturing him. His navy training left him in perfect physical condition. He was sensible of, and proud of his body. He bathed and used dumbbells, and kept himself fit. He played cricket and football. He read books and began to hold fixed ideas which he got from the Fabians. He played his piccolo, and was considered an expert. But at the bottom of his soul was always this canker of shame and incompleteness: he was miserable beneath all his healthy cheerfulness, he was uneasy and felt despicable among all his confidence and superiority of ideas. He would have changed with any mere brute, just to be free of himself, to be free of this shame of self-consciousness. He saw some collier lurching straight forward without misgiving, pursuing his own satisfactions, and he envied him. Anything, he would have given anything for this spontaneity and this blind stupidity which went to its own satisfaction direct.

IX

He was not unhappy in the pit. He was admired by the men, and well enough liked. It was only he himself who felt the difference between himself and the others. He seemed to hide his own stigma. But he was never sure that the others did not really despise him for a ninny, as being less a man than they were. Only he pretended to be more manly, and was surprised by the ease with which they were deceived. And, being naturally cheerful, he was happy at his work. He was sure of himself there. Naked to the waist, hot and grimy with labour, they squatted on their heels for a few minutes and talked, seeing each other dimly by

the light of the safety lamps, while the black coal rose jutting round them, and the props of wood stood like little pillars in the low, black, very dark temple. Then the pony came and the gang-lad with a message from Number 7, or with a bottle of water from the horse-trough or some news of the world above. The day passed pleasantly enough. There was an ease, a go-as-you-please about the day underground, a delightful camaraderie of men shut off alone from the rest of the world, in a dangerous place, and a variety of labour, holing, loading, timbering, and a glamour of mystery and adventure in the atmosphere, that made the pit not unattractive to him when he had again got over his anguish of desire for the open air and the sea.

This day there was much to do and Durant was not in humour to talk. He went on working in silence through the afternoon.

“Loose-all” came, and they tramped to the bottom. The whitewashed underground office shone brightly. Men were putting out their lamps. They sat in dozens round the bottom of the shaft, down which black, heavy drops of water fell continuously into the sump. The electric lights shone away down the main underground road.

“Is it raining?” asked Durant.

“Snowing,” said an old man, and the younger was pleased. He liked to go up when it was snowing.

“It’ll just come right for Christmas,” said the old man.

“Ay,” replied Durant.

“A green Christmas, a fat churchyard,” said the other sententiously.

Durant laughed, showing his small, rather pointed teeth.

The cage came down, a dozen men lined on. Durant noticed tufts of snow on the perforated, arched roof of the chain, and he was pleased.

He wondered how it liked its excursion underground. But already it was getting soppy with black water.

He liked things about him. There was a little smile on his face. But underlying it was the curious consciousness he felt in himself.

The upper world came almost with a flash, because of the glimmer of snow. Hurrying along the bank, giving up his lamp at the office, he smiled to feel the open about him again, all glimmering round him with snow. The hills on either side were pale blue in the dusk, and the hedges looked savage and dark. The snow was trampled between the railway lines. But far ahead, beyond the black figures of miners moving home, it became smooth again, spreading right up to the dark wall of the coppice.

To the west there was a pinkness, and a big star hovered half revealed. Below, the lights of the pit came out crisp and yellow among the darkness of the

buildings, and the lights of Old Aldecross twinkled in rows down the bluish twilight.

Durant walked glad with life among the miners, who were all talking animatedly because of the snow. He liked their company, he liked the white dusky world. It gave him a little thrill to stop at the garden gate and see the light of home down below, shining on the silent blue snow.

X

By the big gate of the railway, in the fence, was a little gate, that he kept locked. As he unfastened it, he watched the kitchen light that shone on to the bushes and the snow outside. It was a candle burning till night set in, he thought to himself. He slid down the steep path to the level below. He liked making the first marks in the smooth snow. Then he came through the bushes to the house. The two women heard his heavy boots ring outside on the scraper, and his voice as he opened the door:

“How much worth of oil do you reckon to save by that candle, mother?” He liked a good light from the lamp.

He had just put down his bottle and snap-bag and was hanging his coat behind the scullery door, when Miss Louisa came upon him. He was startled, but he smiled.

His eyes began to laugh — then his face went suddenly straight, and he was afraid.

“Your mother’s had an accident,” she said.

“How?” he exclaimed.

“In the garden,” she answered. He hesitated with his coat in his hands. Then he hung it up and turned to the kitchen.

“Is she in bed?” he asked.

“Yes,” said Miss Louisa, who found it hard to deceive him. He was silent. He went into the kitchen, sat down heavily in his father’s old chair, and began to pull off his boots. His head was small, rather finely shapen. His brown hair, close and crisp, would look jolly whatever happened. He wore heavy moleskin trousers that gave off the stale, exhausted scent of the pit. Having put on his slippers, he carried his boots into the scullery.

“What is it?” he asked, afraid.

“Something internal,” she replied.

He went upstairs. His mother kept herself calm for his coming. Louisa felt his tread shake the plaster floor of the bedroom above.

“What have you done?” he asked.

“It’s nothing, my lad,” said the old woman, rather hard. “It’s nothing. You needn’t fret, my boy, it’s nothing more the matter with me than I had yesterday, or last week. The doctor said I’d done nothing serious.”

“What were you doing?” asked her son.

“I was pulling up a cabbage, and I suppose I pulled too hard; for, oh — there was such a pain — ”

Her son looked at her quickly. She hardened herself.

“But who doesn’t have a sudden pain sometimes, my boy. We all do.”

“And what’s it done?”

“I don’t know,” she said, “but I don’t suppose it’s anything.”

The big lamp in the corner was screened with a dark green, so that he could scarcely see her face. He was strung tight with apprehension and many emotions. Then his brow knitted.

“What did you go pulling your inside out at cabbages for,” he asked, “and the ground frozen? You’d go on dragging and dragging, if you killed yourself.”

“Somebody’s got to get them,” she said.

“You needn’t do yourself harm.”

But they had reached futility.

Miss Louisa could hear plainly downstairs. Her heart sank. It seemed so hopeless between them.

“Are you sure it’s nothing much, mother?” he asked, appealing, after a little silence.

“Ay, it’s nothing,” said the old woman, rather bitter.

“I don’t want you to — to — to be badly — you know.”

“Go an’ get your dinner,” she said. She knew she was going to die: moreover, the pain was torture just then. “They’re only cosseting me up a bit because I’m an old woman. Miss Louisa’s *very* good — and she’ll have got your dinner ready, so you’d better go and eat it.”

He felt stupid and ashamed. His mother put him off. He had to turn away. The pain burned in his bowels. He went downstairs. The mother was glad he was gone, so that she could moan with pain.

He had resumed the old habit of eating before he washed himself. Miss Louisa served his dinner. It was strange and exciting to her. She was strung up tense, trying to understand him and his mother. She watched him as he sat. He was turned away from his food, looking in the fire. Her soul watched him, trying to see what he was. His black face and arms were uncouth, he was foreign. His face was masked black with coal-dust. She could not see him, she could not even know him. The brown eyebrows, the steady eyes, the coarse, small moustache above the closed mouth — these were the only familiar indications. What was

he, as he sat there in his pit-dirt? She could not see him, and it hurt her.

She ran upstairs, presently coming down with the flannels and the bran-bag, to heat them, because the pain was on again.

He was half-way through his dinner. He put down the fork, suddenly nauseated.

“They will soothe the wrench,” she said. He watched, useless and left out.

“Is she bad?” he asked.

“I think she is,” she answered.

It was useless for him to stir or comment. Louisa was busy. She went upstairs. The poor old woman was in a white, cold sweat of pain. Louisa’s face was sullen with suffering as she went about to relieve her. Then she sat and waited. The pain passed gradually, the old woman sank into a state of coma. Louisa still sat silent by the bed. She heard the sound of water downstairs. Then came the voice of the old mother, faint but unrelaxing:

“Alfred’s washing himself — he’ll want his back washing — ”

Louisa listened anxiously, wondering what the sick woman wanted.

“He can’t bear if his back isn’t washed — ” the old woman persisted, in a cruel attention to his needs. Louisa rose and wiped the sweat from the yellowish brow.

“I will go down,” she said soothingly.

“If you would,” murmured the sick woman.

Louisa waited a moment. Mrs Durant closed her eyes, having discharged her duty. The young woman went downstairs. Herself, or the man, what did they matter? Only the suffering woman must be considered.

Alfred was kneeling on the hearthrug, stripped to the waist, washing himself in a large panchion of earthenware. He did so every evening, when he had eaten his dinner; his brothers had done so before him. But Miss Louisa was strange in the house.

He was mechanically rubbing the white lather on his head, with a repeated, unconscious movement, his hand every now and then passing over his neck. Louisa watched. She had to brace herself to this also. He bent his head into the water, washed it free of soap, and pressed the water out of his eyes.

“Your mother said you would want your back washing,” she said.

Curious how it hurt her to take part in their fixed routine of life! Louisa felt the almost repulsive intimacy being forced upon her. It was all so common, so like herding. She lost her own distinctness.

He ducked his face round, looking up at her in what was a very comical way. She had to harden herself.

“How funny he looks with his face upside down,” she thought. After all, there

was a difference between her and the common people. The water in which his arms were plunged was quite black, the soap-froth was darkish. She could scarcely conceive him as human. Mechanically, under the influence of habit, he groped in the black water, fished out soap and flannel, and handed them backward to Louisa. Then he remained rigid and submissive, his two arms thrust straight in the panchion, supporting the weight of his shoulders. His skin was beautifully white and unblemished, of an opaque, solid whiteness. Gradually Louisa saw it: this also was what he was. It fascinated her. Her feeling of separateness passed away: she ceased to draw back from contact with him and his mother. There was this living centre. Her heart ran hot. She had reached some goal in this beautiful, clear, male body. She loved him in a white, impersonal heat. But the sun-burnt, reddish neck and ears: they were more personal, more curious. A tenderness rose in her, she loved even his queer ears. A person — an intimate being he was to her. She put down the towel and went upstairs again, troubled in her heart. She had only seen one human being in her life — and that was Mary. All the rest were strangers. Now her soul was going to open, she was going to see another. She felt strange and pregnant.

“He’ll be more comfortable,” murmured the sick woman abstractedly, as Louisa entered the room. The latter did not answer. Her own heart was heavy with its own responsibility. Mrs Durant lay silent awhile, then she murmured plaintively:

“You mustn’t mind, Miss Louisa.”

“Why should I?” replied Louisa, deeply moved.

“It’s what we’re used to,” said the old woman.

And Louisa felt herself excluded again from their life. She sat in pain, with the tears of disappointment distilling her heart. Was that all?

Alfred came upstairs. He was clean, and in his shirt-sleeves. He looked a workman now. Louisa felt that she and he were foreigners, moving in different lives. It dulled her again. Oh, if she could only find some fixed relations, something sure and abiding.

“How do you feel?” he said to his mother.

“It’s a bit better,” she replied wearily, impersonally. This strange putting herself aside, this abstracting herself and answering him only what she thought good for him to hear, made the relations between mother and son poignant and cramping to Miss Louisa. It made the man so ineffectual, so nothing. Louisa groped as if she had lost him. The mother was real and positive — he was not very actual. It puzzled and chilled the young woman.

“I’d better fetch Mrs Harrison?” he said, waiting for his mother to decide.

“I suppose we shall have to have somebody,” she replied.

Miss Louisa stood by, afraid to interfere in their business. They did not include her in their lives, they felt she had nothing to do with them, except as a help from outside. She was quite external to them. She felt hurt and powerless against this unconscious difference. But something patient and unyielding in her made her say:

“I will stay and do the nursing; you can’t be left.”

The other two were shy, and at a loss for an answer.

“Wes’ll manage to get somebody,” said the old woman wearily. She did not care very much what happened, now.

“I will stay until to-morrow, in any case,” said Louisa. “Then we can see.”

“I’m sure you’ve no right to trouble yourself,” moaned the old woman. But she must leave herself in any hands.

Miss Louisa felt glad that she was admitted, even in an official capacity. She wanted to share their lives. At home they would need her, now Mary had come. But they must manage without her.

“I must write a note to the vicarage,” she said.

Alfred Durant looked at her inquiringly, for her service. He had always that intelligent readiness to serve, since he had been in the Navy. But there was a simple independence in his willingness, which she loved. She felt nevertheless it was hard to get at him. He was so deferential, quick to take the slightest suggestion of an order from her, implicitly, that she could not get at the man in him.

He looked at her very keenly. She noticed his eyes were golden brown, with a very small pupil, the kind of eyes that can see a long way off. He stood alert, at military attention. His face was still rather weather-reddened.

“Do you want pen and paper?” he asked, with deferential suggestion to a superior, which was more difficult for her than reserve.

“Yes, please,” she said.

He turned and went downstairs. He seemed to her so self-contained, so utterly sure in his movement. How was she to approach him? For he would take not one step towards her. He would only put himself entirely and impersonally at her service, glad to serve her, but keeping himself quite removed from her. She could see he felt real joy in doing anything for her, but any recognition would confuse him and hurt him. Strange it was to her, to have a man going about the house in his shirt-sleeves, his waistcoat unbuttoned, his throat bare, waiting on her. He moved well, as if he had plenty of life to spare. She was attracted by his completeness. And yet, when all was ready, and there was nothing more for him to do, she quivered, meeting his questioning look.

As she sat writing, he placed another candle near her. The rather dense light

fell in two places on the overfoldings of her hair till it glistened heavy and bright, like a dense golden plumage folded up. Then the nape of her neck was very white, with fine down and pointed wisps of gold. He watched it as it were a vision, losing himself. She was all that was beyond him, of revelation and exquisiteness. All that was ideal and beyond him, she was that — and he was lost to himself in looking at her. She had no connection with him. He did not approach her. She was there like a wonderful distance. But it was a treat, having her in the house. Even with this anguish for his mother tightening about him, he was sensible of the wonder of living this evening. The candles glistened on her hair, and seemed to fascinate him. He felt a little awe of her, and a sense of uplifting, that he and she and his mother should be together for a time, in the strange, unknown atmosphere. And, when he got out of the house, he was afraid. He saw the stars above ringing with fine brightness, the snow beneath just visible, and a new night was gathering round him. He was afraid almost with obliteration. What was this new night ringing about him, and what was he? He could not recognize himself nor any of his surroundings. He was afraid to think of his mother. And yet his chest was conscious of her, and of what was happening to her. He could not escape from her, she carried him with her into an unformed, unknown chaos.

XI

He went up the road in an agony, not knowing what it was all about, but feeling as if a red-hot iron were gripped round his chest. Without thinking, he shook two or three tears on to the snow. Yet in his mind he did not believe his mother would die. He was in the grip of some greater consciousness. As he sat in the hall of the vicarage, waiting whilst Mary put things for Louisa into a bag, he wondered why he had been so upset. He felt abashed and humbled by the big house, he felt again as if he were one of the rank and file. When Miss Mary spoke to him, he almost saluted.

“An honest man,” thought Mary. And the patronage was applied as salve to her own sickness. She had station, so she could patronize: it was almost all that was left to her. But she could not have lived without having a certain position. She could never have trusted herself outside a definite place, nor respected herself except as a woman of superior class.

As Alfred came to the latch-gate, he felt the grief at his heart again, and saw the new heavens. He stood a moment looking northward to the Plough climbing up the night, and at the far glimmer of snow in distant fields. Then his grief came on like physical pain. He held tight to the gate, biting his mouth, whispering

“Mother!” It was a fierce, cutting, physical pain of grief, that came on in bouts, as his mother’s pain came on in bouts, and was so acute he could scarcely keep erect. He did not know where it came from, the pain, nor why. It had nothing to do with his thoughts. Almost it had nothing to do with him. Only it gripped him and he must submit. The whole tide of his soul, gathering in its unknown towards this expansion into death, carried him with it helplessly, all the fritter of his thought and consciousness caught up as nothing, the heave passing on towards its breaking, taking him further than he had ever been. When the young man had regained himself, he went indoors, and there he was almost gay. It seemed to excite him. He felt in high spirits: he made whimsical fun of things. He sat on one side of his mother’s bed, Louisa on the other, and a certain gaiety seized them all. But the night and the dread was coming on.

Alfred kissed his mother and went to bed. When he was half undressed the knowledge of his mother came upon him, and the suffering seized him in its grip like two hands, in agony. He lay on the bed screwed up tight. It lasted so long, and exhausted him so much, that he fell asleep, without having the energy to get up and finish undressing. He awoke after midnight to find himself stone cold. He undressed and got into bed, and was soon asleep again.

At a quarter to six he woke, and instantly remembered. Having pulled on his trousers and lighted a candle, he went into his mother’s room. He put his hand before the candle flame so that no light fell on the bed.

“Mother!” he whispered.

“Yes,” was the reply.

There was a hesitation.

“Should I go to work?”

He waited, his heart was beating heavily.

“I think I’d go, my lad.”

His heart went down in a kind of despair.

“You want me to?”

He let his hand down from the candle flame. The light fell on the bed. There he saw Louisa lying looking up at him. Her eyes were upon him. She quickly shut her eyes and half buried her face in the pillow, her back turned to him. He saw the rough hair like bright vapour about her round head, and the two plaits flung coiled among the bedclothes. It gave him a shock. He stood almost himself, determined. Louisa cowered down. He looked, and met his mother’s eyes. Then he gave way again, and ceased to be sure, ceased to be himself.

“Yes, go to work, my boy,” said the mother.

“All right,” replied he, kissing her. His heart was down at despair, and bitter. He went away.

“Alfred!” cried his mother faintly.

He came back with beating heart.

“What, mother?”

“You’ll always do what’s right, Alfred?” the mother asked, beside herself in terror now he was leaving her. He was too terrified and bewildered to know what she meant.

“Yes,” he said.

She turned her cheek to him. He kissed her, then went away, in bitter despair. He went to work.

XII

By midday his mother was dead. The word met him at the pit-mouth. As he had known, inwardly, it was not a shock to him, and yet he trembled. He went home quite calmly, feeling only heavy in his breathing.

Miss Louisa was still at the house. She had seen to everything possible. Very succinctly, she informed him of what he needed to know. But there was one point of anxiety for her.

“You *did* half expect it — it’s not come as a blow to you?” she asked, looking up at him. Her eyes were dark and calm and searching. She too felt lost. He was so dark and inchoate.

“I suppose — yes,” he said stupidly. He looked aside, unable to endure her eyes on him.

“I could not bear to think you might not have guessed,” she said.

He did not answer.

He felt it a great strain to have her near him at this time. He wanted to be alone. As soon as the relatives began to arrive, Louisa departed and came no more. While everything was arranging, and a crowd was in the house, whilst he had business to settle, he went well enough, with only those uncontrollable paroxysms of grief. For the rest, he was superficial. By himself, he endured the fierce, almost insane bursts of grief which passed again and left him calm, almost clear, just wondering. He had not known before that everything could break down, that he himself could break down, and all be a great chaos, very vast and wonderful. It seemed as if life in him had burst its bounds, and he was lost in a great, bewildering flood, immense and unpeopled. He himself was broken and spilled out amid it all. He could only breathe panting in silence. Then the anguish came on again.

When all the people had gone from the Quarry Cottage, leaving the young man alone with an elderly housekeeper, then the long trial began. The snow had

thawed and frozen, a fresh fall had whitened the grey, this then began to thaw. The world was a place of loose grey slosh. Alfred had nothing to do in the evenings. He was a man whose life had been filled up with small activities. Without knowing it, he had been centralized, polarized in his mother. It was she who had kept him. Even now, when the old housekeeper had left him, he might still have gone on in his old way. But the force and balance of his life was lacking. He sat pretending to read, all the time holding his fists clenched, and holding himself in, enduring he did not know what. He walked the black and sodden miles of field-paths, till he was tired out: but all this was only running away from whence he must return. At work he was all right. If it had been summer he might have escaped by working in the garden till bedtime. But now, there was no escape, no relief, no help. He, perhaps, was made for action rather than for understanding; for doing than for being. He was shocked out of his activities, like a swimmer who forgets to swim.

For a week, he had the force to endure this suffocation and struggle, then he began to get exhausted, and knew it must come out. The instinct of self-preservation became strongest. But there was the question: Where was he to go? The public-house really meant nothing to him, it was no good going there. He began to think of emigration. In another country he would be all right. He wrote to the emigration offices.

On the Sunday after the funeral, when all the Durant people had attended church, Alfred had seen Miss Louisa, impassive and reserved, sitting with Miss Mary, who was proud and very distant, and with the other Lindleys, who were people removed. Alfred saw them as people remote. He did not think about it. They had nothing to do with his life. After service Louisa had come to him and shaken hands.

“My sister would like you to come to supper one evening, if you would be so good.”

He looked at Miss Mary, who bowed. Out of kindness, Mary had proposed this to Louisa, disapproving of herself even as she did so. But she did not examine herself closely.

“Yes,” said Durant awkwardly, “I’ll come if you want me.” But he vaguely felt that it was misplaced.

“You’ll come to-morrow evening, then, about half-past six.”

He went. Miss Louisa was very kind to him. There could be no music, because of the babies. He sat with his fists clenched on his thighs, very quiet and unmoved, lapsing, among all those people, into a kind of muse or daze. There was nothing between him and them. They knew it as well as he. But he remained very steady in himself, and the evening passed slowly. Mrs Lindley called him

“young man”.

“Will you sit here, young man?”

He sat there. One name was as good as another. What had they to do with him?

Mr Lindley kept a special tone for him, kind, indulgent, but patronizing. Durant took it all without criticism or offence, just submitting. But he did not want to eat — that troubled him, to have to eat in their presence. He knew he was out of place. But it was his duty to stay yet awhile. He answered precisely, in monosyllables.

When he left he winced with confusion. He was glad it was finished. He got away as quickly as possible. And he wanted still more intensely to go right away, to Canada.

Miss Louisa suffered in her soul, indignant with all of them, with him too, but quite unable to say why she was indignant.

XIII

Two evenings after, Louisa tapped at the door of the Quarry Cottage, at half-past six. He had finished dinner, the woman had washed up and gone away, but still he sat in his pit dirt. He was going later to the New Inn. He had begun to go there because he must go somewhere. The mere contact with other men was necessary to him, the noise, the warmth, the forgetful flight of the hours. But still he did not move. He sat alone in the empty house till it began to grow on him like something unnatural.

He was in his pit dirt when he opened the door.

“I have been wanting to call — I thought I would,” she said, and she went to the sofa. He wondered why she wouldn’t use his mother’s round armchair. Yet something stirred in him, like anger, when the housekeeper placed herself in it.

“I ought to have been washed by now,” he said, glancing at the clock, which was adorned with butterflies and cherries, and the name of “T. Brooks, Mansfield.” He laid his black hands along his mottled dirty arms. Louisa looked at him. There was the reserve, and the simple neutrality towards her, which she dreaded in him. It made it impossible for her to approach him.

“I am afraid,” she said, “that I wasn’t kind in asking you to supper.”

“I’m not used to it,” he said, smiling with his mouth, showing the interspaced white teeth. His eyes, however, were steady and unseeing.

“It’s not *that*,” she said hastily. Her repose was exquisite and her dark grey eyes rich with understanding. He felt afraid of her as she sat there, as he began to grow conscious of her.

“How do you get on alone?” she asked.

He glanced away to the fire.

“Oh — ” he answered, shifting uneasily, not finishing his answer.

Her face settled heavily.

“How close it is in this room. You have such immense fires. I will take off my coat,” she said.

He watched her take off her hat and coat. She wore a cream cashmir blouse embroidered with gold silk. It seemed to him a very fine garment, fitting her throat and wrists close. It gave him a feeling of pleasure and cleanness and relief from himself.

“What were you thinking about, that you didn’t get washed?” she asked, half intimately. He laughed, turning aside his head. The whites of his eyes showed very distinct in his black face.

“Oh,” he said, “I couldn’t tell you.”

There was a pause.

“Are you going to keep this house on?” she asked.

He stirred in his chair, under the question.

“I hardly know,” he said. “I’m very likely going to Canada.”

Her spirit became very quiet and attentive.

“What for?” she asked.

Again he shifted restlessly on his seat.

“Well” — he said slowly — ”to try the life.”

“But which life?”

“There’s various things — farming or lumbering or mining. I don’t mind much what it is.”

“And is that what you want?”

He did not think in these times, so he could not answer.

“I don’t know,” he said, “till I’ve tried.”

She saw him drawing away from her for ever.

“Aren’t you sorry to leave this house and garden?” she asked.

“I don’t know,” he answered reluctantly. “I suppose our Fred would come in — that’s what he’s wanting.”

“You don’t want to settle down?” she asked.

He was leaning forward on the arms of his chair. He turned to her. Her face was pale and set. It looked heavy and impassive, her hair shone richer as she grew white. She was to him something steady and immovable and eternal presented to him. His heart was hot in an anguish of suspense. Sharp twitches of fear and pain were in his limbs. He turned his whole body away from her. The silence was unendurable. He could not bear her to sit there any more. It made his

heart go hot and stifled in his breast.

“Were you going out to-night?” she asked.

“Only to the New Inn,” he said.

Again there was silence.

She reached for her hat. Nothing else was suggested to her. She *had* to go. He sat waiting for her to be gone, for relief. And she knew that if she went out of that house as she was, she went out a failure. Yet she continued to pin on her hat; in a moment she would have to go. Something was carrying her.

Then suddenly a sharp pang, like lightning, seared her from head to foot, and she was beyond herself.

“Do you want me to go?” she asked, controlled, yet speaking out of a fiery anguish, as if the words were spoken from her without her intervention.

He went white under his dirt.

“Why?” he asked, turning to her in fear, compelled.

“Do you want me to go?” she repeated.

“Why?” he asked again.

“Because I wanted to stay with you,” she said, suffocated, with her lungs full of fire.

His face worked, he hung forward a little, suspended, staring straight into her eyes, in torment, in an agony of chaos, unable to collect himself. And as if turned to stone, she looked back into his eyes. Their souls were exposed bare for a few moments. It was agony. They could not bear it. He dropped his head, whilst his body jerked with little sharp twitchings.

She turned away for her coat. Her soul had gone dead in her. Her hands trembled, but she could not feel any more. She drew on her coat. There was a cruel suspense in the room. The moment had come for her to go. He lifted his head. His eyes were like agate, expressionless, save for the black points of torture. They held her, she had no will, no life any more. She felt broken.

“Don’t you want me?” she said helplessly.

A spasm of torture crossed his eyes, which held her fixed.

“I — I — ” he began, but he could not speak. Something drew him from his chair to her. She stood motionless, spellbound, like a creature given up as prey. He put his hand tentatively, uncertainly, on her arm. The expression of his face was strange and inhuman. She stood utterly motionless. Then clumsily he put his arms round her, and took her, cruelly, blindly, straining her till she nearly lost consciousness, till he himself had almost fallen.

Then, gradually, as he held her gripped, and his brain reeled round, and he felt himself falling, falling from himself, and whilst she, yielded up, swooned to a kind of death of herself, a moment of utter darkness came over him, and they

began to wake up again as if from a long sleep. He was himself.

After a while his arms slackened, she loosened herself a little, and put her arms round him, as he held her. So they held each other close, and hid each against the other for assurance, helpless in speech. And it was ever her hands that trembled more closely upon him, drawing him nearer into her, with love.

And at last she drew back her face and looked up at him, her eyes wet, and shining with light. His heart, which saw, was silent with fear. He was with her. She saw his face all sombre and inscrutable, and he seemed eternal to her. And all the echo of pain came back into the rarity of bliss, and all her tears came up.

“I love you,” she said, her lips drawn and sobbing. He put down his head against her, unable to hear her, unable to bear the sudden coming of the peace and passion that almost broke his heart. They stood together in silence whilst the thing moved away a little.

At last she wanted to see him. She looked up. His eyes were strange and glowing, with a tiny black pupil. Strange, they were, and powerful over her. And his mouth came to hers, and slowly her eyelids closed, as his mouth sought hers closer and closer, and took possession of her.

They were silent for a long time, too much mixed up with passion and grief and death to do anything but hold each other in pain and kiss with long, hurting kisses wherein fear was transfused into desire. At last she disengaged herself. He felt as if his heart were hurt, but glad, and he scarcely dared look at her.

“I’m glad,” she said also.

He held her hands in passionate gratitude and desire. He had not yet the presence of mind to say anything. He was dazed with relief.

“I ought to go,” she said.

He looked at her. He could not grasp the thought of her going, he knew he could never be separated from her any more. Yet he dared not assert himself. He held her hands tight.

“Your face is black,” she said.

He laughed.

“Yours is a bit smudged,” he said.

They were afraid of each other, afraid to talk. He could only keep her near to him. After a while she wanted to wash her face. He brought her some warm water, standing by and watching her. There was something he wanted to say, that he dared not. He watched her wiping her face, and making tidy her hair.

“They’ll see your blouse is dirty,” he said.

She looked at her sleeves and laughed for joy.

He was sharp with pride.

“What shall you do?” he asked.

“How?” she said.

He was awkward at a reply.

“About me,” he said.

“What do you want me to do?” she laughed.

He put his hand out slowly to her. What did it matter!

“But make yourself clean,” she said.

XIV

As they went up the hill, the night seemed dense with the unknown. They kept close together, feeling as if the darkness were alive and full of knowledge, all around them. In silence they walked up the hill. At first the street lamps went their way. Several people passed them. He was more shy than she, and would have let her go had she loosened in the least. But she held firm.

Then they came into the true darkness, between the fields. They did not want to speak, feeling closer together in silence. So they arrived at the Vicarage gate. They stood under the naked horse-chestnut tree.

“I wish you didn’t have to go,” he said.

She laughed a quick little laugh.

“Come to-morrow,” she said, in a low tone, “and ask father.”

She felt his hand close on hers.

She gave the same sorrowful little laugh of sympathy. Then she kissed him, sending him home.

At home, the old grief came on in another paroxysm, obliterating Louisa, obliterating even his mother for whom the stress was raging like a burst of fever in a wound. But something was sound in his heart.

XV

The next evening he dressed to go to the vicarage, feeling it was to be done, not imagining what it would be like. He would not take this seriously. He was sure of Louisa, and this marriage was like fate to him. It filled him also with a blessed feeling of fatality. He was not responsible, neither had her people anything really to do with it.

They ushered him into the little study, which was fireless. By and by the vicar came in. His voice was cold and hostile as he said:

“What can I do for you, young man?”

He knew already, without asking.

Durant looked up at him, again like a sailor before a superior. He had the

subordinate manner. Yet his spirit was clear.

“I wanted, Mr Lindley — ” he began respectfully, then all the colour suddenly left his face. It seemed now a violation to say what he had to say. What was he doing there? But he stood on, because it had to be done. He held firmly to his own independence and self-respect. He must not be indecisive. He must put himself aside: the matter was bigger than just his personal self. He must not feel. This was his highest duty.

“You wanted — ” said the vicar.

Durant’s mouth was dry, but he answered with steadiness:

“Miss Louisa — Louisa — promised to marry me — ”

“You asked Miss Louisa if she would marry you — yes — ” corrected the vicar. Durant reflected he had not asked her this:

“If she would marry me, sir. I hope you — don’t mind.”

He smiled. He was a good-looking man, and the vicar could not help seeing it.

“And my daughter was willing to marry you?” said Mr Lindley.

“Yes,” said Durant seriously. It was pain to him, nevertheless. He felt the natural hostility between himself and the elder man.

“Will you come this way?” said the vicar. He led into the dining-room, where were Mary, Louisa, and Mrs Lindley. Mr Massy sat in a corner with a lamp.

“This young man has come on your account, Louisa?” said Mr Lindley.

“Yes,” said Louisa, her eyes on Durant, who stood erect, in discipline. He dared not look at her, but he was aware of her.

“You don’t want to marry a collier, you little fool,” cried Mrs Lindley harshly. She lay obese and helpless upon the couch, swathed in a loose, dove-grey gown.

“Oh, hush, mother,” cried Mary, with quiet intensity and pride.

“What means have you to support a wife?” demanded the vicar’s wife roughly.

“I!” Durant replied, starting. “I think I can earn enough.”

“Well, and how much?” came the rough voice.

“Seven and six a day,” replied the young man.

“And will it get to be any more?”

“I hope so.”

“And are you going to live in that poky little house?”

“I think so,” said Durant, “if it’s all right.”

He took small offence, only was upset, because they would not think him good enough. He knew that, in their sense, he was not.

“Then she’s a fool, I tell you, if she marries you,” cried the mother roughly, casting her decision.

“After all, mama, it is Louisa’s affair,” said Mary distinctly, “and we must

remember — ”

“As she makes her bed, she must lie — but she’ll repent it,” interrupted Mrs Lindley.

“And after all,” said Mr Lindley, “Louisa cannot quite hold herself free to act entirely without consideration for her family.”

“What do you want, papa?” asked Louisa sharply.

“I mean that if you marry this man, it will make my position very difficult for me, particularly if you stay in this parish. If you were moving quite away, it would be simpler. But living here in a collier’s cottage, under my nose, as it were — it would be almost unseemly. I have my position to maintain, and a position which may not be taken lightly.”

“Come over here, young man,” cried the mother, in her rough voice, “and let us look at you.”

Durant, flushing, went over and stood — not quite at attention, so that he did not know what to do with his hands. Miss Louisa was angry to see him standing there, obedient and acquiescent. He ought to show himself a man.

“Can’t you take her away and live out of sight?” said the mother. “You’d both of you be better off.”

“Yes, we can go away,” he said.

“Do you want to?” asked Miss Mary clearly.

He faced round. Mary looked very stately and impressive. He flushed.

“I do if it’s going to be a trouble to anybody,” he said.

“For yourself, you would rather stay?” said Mary.

“It’s my home,” he said, “and that’s the house I was born in.”

“Then” — Mary turned clearly to her parents, “I really don’t see how you can make the conditions, papa. He has his own rights, and if Louisa wants to marry him — ”

“Louisa, Louisa!” cried the father impatiently. “I cannot understand why Louisa should not behave in the normal way. I cannot see why she should only think of herself, and leave her family out of count. The thing is enough in itself, and she ought to try to ameliorate it as much as possible. And if — ”

“But I love the man, papa,” said Louisa.

“And I hope you love your parents, and I hope you want to spare them as much of the — the loss of prestige, as possible.”

“We *can* go away to live,” said Louisa, her face breaking to tears. At last she was really hurt.

“Oh, yes, easily,” Durant replied hastily, pale, distressed.

There was dead silence in the room.

“I think it would really be better,” murmured the vicar, mollified.

“Very likely it would,” said the rough-voiced invalid.

“Though I think we ought to apologize for asking such a thing,” said Mary haughtily.

“No,” said Durant. “It will be best all round.” He was glad there was no more bother.

“And shall we put up the banns here or go to the registrar?” he asked clearly, like a challenge.

“We will go to the registrar,” replied Louisa decidedly.

Again there was a dead silence in the room.

“Well, if you will have your own way, you must go your own way,” said the mother emphatically.

All the time Mr Massy had sat obscure and unnoticed in a corner of the room. At this juncture he got up, saying:

“There is baby, Mary.”

Mary rose and went out of the room, stately; her little husband padded after her. Durant watched the fragile, small man go, wondering.

“And where,” asked the vicar, almost genial, “do you think you will go when you are married?”

Durant started.

“I was thinking of emigrating,” he said.

“To Canada? or where?”

“I think to Canada.”

“Yes, that would be very good.”

Again there was a pause.

“We shan’t see much of you then, as a son-in-law,” said the mother, roughly but amicably.

“Not much,” he said.

Then he took his leave. Louisa went with him to the gate. She stood before him in distress.

“You won’t mind them, will you?” she said humbly.

“I don’t mind them, if they don’t mind me!” he said. Then he stooped and kissed her.

“Let us be married soon,” she murmured, in tears.

“All right,” he said. “I’ll go to-morrow to Barford.”

ODOUR OF CHRYSANTHEMUMS

I

The small locomotive engine, Number 4, came clanking, stumbling down from Selston — with seven full waggons. It appeared round the corner with loud threats of speed, but the colt that it startled from among the gorse, which still flickered indistinctly in the raw afternoon, outdistanced it at a canter. A woman, walking up the railway line to Underwood, drew back into the hedge, held her basket aside, and watched the footplate of the engine advancing. The trucks thumped heavily past, one by one, with slow inevitable movement, as she stood insignificantly trapped between the jolting black waggons and the hedge; then they curved away towards the coppice where the withered oak leaves dropped noiselessly, while the birds, pulling at the scarlet hips beside the track, made off into the dusk that had already crept into the spinney. In the open, the smoke from the engine sank and cleaved to the rough grass. The fields were dreary and forsaken, and in the marshy strip that led to the whimsey, a reedy pit-pond, the fowls had already abandoned their run among the alders, to roost in the tarred fowl-house. The pit-bank loomed up beyond the pond, flames like red sores licking its ashy sides, in the afternoon's stagnant light. Just beyond rose the tapering chimneys and the clumsy black head-stocks of Brinsley Colliery. The two wheels were spinning fast up against the sky, and the winding-engine rapped out its little spasms. The miners were being turned up.

The engine whistled as it came into the wide bay of railway lines beside the colliery, where rows of trucks stood in harbour.

Miners, single, trailing and in groups, passed like shadows diverging home. At the edge of the ribbed level of sidings squat a low cottage, three steps down from the cinder track. A large bony vine clutched at the house, as if to claw down the tiled roof. Round the bricked yard grew a few wintry primroses. Beyond, the long garden sloped down to a bush-covered brook course. There were some twiggy apple trees, winter-crack trees, and ragged cabbages. Beside the path hung dishevelled pink chrysanthemums, like pink cloths hung on bushes. A woman came stooping out of the felt-covered fowl-house, half-way down the garden. She closed and padlocked the door, then drew herself erect, having brushed some bits from her white apron.

She was a till woman of imperious mien, handsome, with definite black

eyebrows. Her smooth black hair was parted exactly. For a few moments she stood steadily watching the miners as they passed along the railway: then she turned towards the brook course. Her face was calm and set, her mouth was closed with disillusionment. After a moment she called:

“John!” There was no answer. She waited, and then said distinctly:

“Where are you?”

“Here!” replied a child’s sulky voice from among the bushes. The woman looked piercingly through the dusk.

“Are you at that brook?” she asked sternly.

For answer the child showed himself before the raspberry-canes that rose like whips. He was a small, sturdy boy of five. He stood quite still, defiantly.

“Oh!” said the mother, conciliated. “I thought you were down at that wet brook — and you remember what I told you — ”

The boy did not move or answer.

“Come, come on in,” she said more gently, “it’s getting dark. There’s your grandfather’s engine coming down the line!”

The lad advanced slowly, with resentful, taciturn movement. He was dressed in trousers and waistcoat of cloth that was too thick and hard for the size of the garments. They were evidently cut down from a man’s clothes.

As they went slowly towards the house he tore at the ragged wisps of chrysanthemums and dropped the petals in handfuls along the path.

“Don’t do that — it does look nasty,” said his mother. He refrained, and she, suddenly pitiful, broke off a twig with three or four wan flowers and held them against her face. When mother and son reached the yard her hand hesitated, and instead of laying the flower aside, she pushed it in her apron-band. The mother and son stood at the foot of the three steps looking across the bay of lines at the passing home of the miners. The trundle of the small train was imminent. Suddenly the engine loomed past the house and came to a stop opposite the gate.

The engine-driver, a short man with round grey beard, leaned out of the cab high above the woman.

“Have you got a cup of tea?” he said in a cheery, hearty fashion.

It was her father. She went in, saying she would mash. Directly, she returned.

“I didn’t come to see you on Sunday,” began the little grey-bearded man.

“I didn’t expect you,” said his daughter.

The engine-driver winced; then, reassuming his cheery, airy manner, he said:

“Oh, have you heard then? Well, and what do you think — ?”

“I think it is soon enough,” she replied.

At her brief censure the little man made an impatient gesture, and said coaxingly, yet with dangerous coldness:

“Well, what’s a man to do? It’s no sort of life for a man of my years, to sit at my own hearth like a stranger. And if I’m going to marry again it may as well be soon as late — what does it matter to anybody?”

The woman did not reply, but turned and went into the house. The man in the engine-cab stood assertive, till she returned with a cup of tea and a piece of bread and butter on a plate. She went up the steps and stood near the footplate of the hissing engine.

“You needn’t ‘a’ brought me bread an’ butter,” said her father. “But a cup of tea” — he sipped appreciatively — ”it’s very nice.” He sipped for a moment or two, then: “I hear as Walter’s got another bout on,” he said.

“When hasn’t he?” said the woman bitterly.

“I heered tell of him in the ‘Lord Nelson’ braggin’ as he was going to spend that b — — afore he went: half a sovereign that was.”

“When?” asked the woman.

“A’ Sat’day night — I know that’s true.”

“Very likely,” she laughed bitterly. “He gives me twenty-three shillings.”

“Aye, it’s a nice thing, when a man can do nothing with his money but make a beast of himself!” said the grey-whiskered man. The woman turned her head away. Her father swallowed the last of his tea and handed her the cup.

“Aye,” he sighed, wiping his mouth. “It’s a settler, it is — ”

He put his hand on the lever. The little engine strained and groaned, and the train rumbled towards the crossing. The woman again looked across the metals. Darkness was settling over the spaces of the railway and trucks: the miners, in grey sombre groups, were still passing home. The winding-engine pulsed hurriedly, with brief pauses. Elizabeth Bates looked at the dreary flow of men, then she went indoors. Her husband did not come.

The kitchen was small and full of firelight; red coals piled glowing up the chimney mouth. All the life of the room seemed in the white, warm hearth and the steel fender reflecting the red fire. The cloth was laid for tea; cups glinted in the shadows. At the back, where the lowest stairs protruded into the room, the boy sat struggling with a knife and a piece of whitewood. He was almost hidden in the shadow. It was half-past four. They had but to await the father’s coming to begin tea. As the mother watched her son’s sullen little struggle with the wood, she saw herself in his silence and pertinacity; she saw the father in her child’s indifference to all but himself. She seemed to be occupied by her husband. He had probably gone past his home, slunk past his own door, to drink before he came in, while his dinner spoiled and wasted in waiting. She glanced at the clock, then took the potatoes to strain them in the yard. The garden and fields beyond the brook were closed in uncertain darkness. When she rose with the

saucepan, leaving the drain steaming into the night behind her, she saw the yellow lamps were lit along the high road that went up the hill away beyond the space of the railway lines and the field.

Then again she watched the men trooping home, fewer now and fewer.

Indoors the fire was sinking and the room was dark red. The woman put her saucepan on the hob, and set a batter pudding near the mouth of the oven. Then she stood unmoving. Directly, gratefully, came quick young steps to the door. Someone hung on the latch a moment, then a little girl entered and began pulling off her outdoor things, dragging a mass of curls, just ripening from gold to brown, over her eyes with her hat.

Her mother chid her for coming late from school, and said she would have to keep her at home the dark winter days.

“Why, mother, it’s hardly a bit dark yet. The lamp’s not lighted, and my father’s not home.”

“No, he isn’t. But it’s a quarter to five! Did you see anything of him?”

The child became serious. She looked at her mother with large, wistful blue eyes.

“No, mother, I’ve never seen him. Why? Has he come up an’ gone past, to Old Brinsley? He hasn’t, mother, ‘cos I never saw him.”

“He’d watch that,” said the mother bitterly, “he’d take care as you didn’t see him. But you may depend upon it, he’s seated in the ‘Prince o’ Wales’. He wouldn’t be this late.”

The girl looked at her mother piteously.

“Let’s have our teas, mother, should we?” said she.

The mother called John to table. She opened the door once more and looked out across the darkness of the lines. All was deserted: she could not hear the winding-engines.

“Perhaps,” she said to herself, “he’s stopped to get some ripping done.”

They sat down to tea. John, at the end of the table near the door, was almost lost in the darkness. Their faces were hidden from each other. The girl crouched against the fender slowly moving a thick piece of bread before the fire. The lad, his face a dusky mark on the shadow, sat watching her who was transfigured in the red glow.

“I do think it’s beautiful to look in the fire,” said the child.

“Do you?” said her mother. “Why?”

“It’s so red, and full of little caves — and it feels so nice, and you can fair smell it.”

“It’ll want mending directly,” replied her mother, “and then if your father comes he’ll carry on and say there never is a fire when a man comes home

sweating from the pit. — A public-house is always warm enough.”

There was silence till the boy said complainingly: “Make haste, our Annie.”

“Well, I am doing! I can’t make the fire do it no faster, can I?”

“She keeps wafflin’ it about so’s to make ‘er slow,” grumbled the boy.

“Don’t have such an evil imagination, child,” replied the mother.

Soon the room was busy in the darkness with the crisp sound of crunching. The mother ate very little. She drank her tea determinedly, and sat thinking. When she rose her anger was evident in the stern unbending of her head. She looked at the pudding in the fender, and broke out:

“It is a scandalous thing as a man can’t even come home to his dinner! If it’s crozzled up to a cinder I don’t see why I should care. Past his very door he goes to get to a public-house, and here I sit with his dinner waiting for him — ”

She went out. As she dropped piece after piece of coal on the red fire, the shadows fell on the walls, till the room was almost in total darkness.

“I canna see,” grumbled the invisible John. In spite of herself, the mother laughed.

“You know the way to your mouth,” she said. She set the dustpan outside the door. When she came again like a shadow on the hearth, the lad repeated, complaining sulkily:

“I canna see.”

“Good gracious!” cried the mother irritably, “you’re as bad as your father if it’s a bit dusk!”

Nevertheless she took a paper spill from a sheaf on the mantelpiece and proceeded to light the lamp that hung from the ceiling in the middle of the room. As she reached up, her figure displayed itself just rounding with maternity.

“Oh, mother — !” exclaimed the girl.

“What?” said the woman, suspended in the act of putting the lamp glass over the flame. The copper reflector shone handsomely on her, as she stood with uplifted arm, turning to face her daughter.

“You’ve got a flower in your apron!” said the child, in a little rapture at this unusual event.

“Goodness me!” exclaimed the woman, relieved. “One would think the house was afire.” She replaced the glass and waited a moment before turning up the wick. A pale shadow was seen floating vaguely on the floor.

“Let me smell!” said the child, still rapturously, coming forward and putting her face to her mother’s waist.

“Go along, silly!” said the mother, turning up the lamp. The light revealed their suspense so that the woman felt it almost unbearable. Annie was still bending at her waist. Irritably, the mother took the flowers out from her apron-

band.

“Oh, mother — don’t take them out!” Annie cried, catching her hand and trying to replace the sprig.

“Such nonsense!” said the mother, turning away. The child put the pale chrysanthemums to her lips, murmuring:

“Don’t they smell beautiful!”

Her mother gave a short laugh.

“No,” she said, “not to me. It was chrysanthemums when I married him, and chrysanthemums when you were born, and the first time they ever brought him home drunk, he’d got brown chrysanthemums in his button-hole.”

She looked at the children. Their eyes and their parted lips were wondering. The mother sat rocking in silence for some time. Then she looked at the clock.

“Twenty minutes to six!” In a tone of fine bitter carelessness she continued: “Eh, he’ll not come now till they bring him. There he’ll stick! But he needn’t come rolling in here in his pit-dirt, for *I* won’t wash him. He can lie on the floor — Eh, what a fool I’ve been, what a fool! And this is what I came here for, to this dirty hole, rats and all, for him to slink past his very door. Twice last week — he’s begun now-”

She silenced herself, and rose to clear the table.

While for an hour or more the children played, subduedly intent, fertile of imagination, united in fear of the mother’s wrath, and in dread of their father’s home-coming, Mrs Bates sat in her rocking-chair making a ‘singlet’ of thick cream-coloured flannel, which gave a dull wounded sound as she tore off the grey edge. She worked at her sewing with energy, listening to the children, and her anger wearied itself, lay down to rest, opening its eyes from time to time and steadily watching, its ears raised to listen. Sometimes even her anger quailed and shrank, and the mother suspended her sewing, tracing the footsteps that thudded along the sleepers outside; she would lift her head sharply to bid the children ‘hush’, but she recovered herself in time, and the footsteps went past the gate, and the children were not flung out of their playing world.

But at last Annie sighed, and gave in. She glanced at her waggon of slippers, and loathed the game. She turned plaintively to her mother.

“Mother!” — but she was inarticulate.

John crept out like a frog from under the sofa. His mother glanced up.

“Yes,” she said, “just look at those shirt-sleeves!”

The boy held them out to survey them, saying nothing. Then somebody called in a hoarse voice away down the line, and suspense bristled in the room, till two people had gone by outside, talking.

“It is time for bed,” said the mother.

“My father hasn’t come,” wailed Annie plaintively. But her mother was primed with courage.

“Never mind. They’ll bring him when he does come — like a log.” She meant there would be no scene. “And he may sleep on the floor till he wakes himself. I know he’ll not go to work tomorrow after this!”

The children had their hands and faces wiped with a flannel. They were very quiet. When they had put on their nightdresses, they said their prayers, the boy mumbling. The mother looked down at them, at the brown silken bush of intertwining curls in the nape of the girl’s neck, at the little black head of the lad, and her heart burst with anger at their father who caused all three such distress. The children hid their faces in her skirts for comfort.

When Mrs Bates came down, the room was strangely empty, with a tension of expectancy. She took up her sewing and stitched for some time without raising her head. Meantime her anger was tinged with fear.

II

The clock struck eight and she rose suddenly, dropping her sewing on her chair. She went to the stairfoot door, opened it, listening. Then she went out, locking the door behind her.

Something scuffled in the yard, and she started, though she knew it was only the rats with which the place was overrun. The night was very dark. In the great bay of railway lines, bulked with trucks, there was no trace of light, only away back she could see a few yellow lamps at the pit-top, and the red smear of the burning pit-bank on the night. She hurried along the edge of the track, then, crossing the converging lines, came to the stile by the white gates, whence she emerged on the road. Then the fear which had led her shrank. People were walking up to New Brinsley; she saw the lights in the houses; twenty yards further on were the broad windows of the ‘Prince of Wales’, very warm and bright, and the loud voices of men could be heard distinctly. What a fool she had been to imagine that anything had happened to him! He was merely drinking over there at the ‘Prince of Wales’. She faltered. She had never yet been to fetch him, and she never would go. So she continued her walk towards the long straggling line of houses, standing blank on the highway. She entered a passage between the dwellings.

“Mr Rigley? — Yes! Did you want him? No, he’s not in at this minute.”

The raw-boned woman leaned forward from her dark scullery and peered at the other, upon whom fell a dim light through the blind of the kitchen window.

“Is it Mrs Bates?” she asked in a tone tinged with respect.

“Yes. I wondered if your Master was at home. Mine hasn’t come yet.”

“‘Asn’t ‘e! Oh, Jack’s been ‘ome an ‘ad ‘is dinner an’ gone out. E’s just gone for ‘alf an hour afore bedtime. Did you call at the ‘Prince of Wales’?”

“No — ”

“No, you didn’t like — ! It’s not very nice.” The other woman was indulgent. There was an awkward pause. “Jack never said nothink about — about your Mester,” she said.

“No! — I expect he’s stuck in there!”

Elizabeth Bates said this bitterly, and with recklessness. She knew that the woman across the yard was standing at her door listening, but she did not care. As she turned:

“Stop a minute! I’ll just go an’ ask Jack if e’ knows anythink,” said Mrs Rigley.

“Oh, no — I wouldn’t like to put — !”

“Yes, I will, if you’ll just step inside an’ see as th’ childer doesn’t come downstairs and set theirselves afire.”

Elizabeth Bates, murmuring a remonstrance, stepped inside. The other woman apologized for the state of the room.

The kitchen needed apology. There were little frocks and trousers and childish undergarments on the squab and on the floor, and a litter of playthings everywhere. On the black American cloth of the table were pieces of bread and cake, crusts, slops, and a teapot with cold tea.

“Eh, ours is just as bad,” said Elizabeth Bates, looking at the woman, not at the house. Mrs Rigley put a shawl over her head and hurried out, saying:

“I shanna be a minute.”

The other sat, noting with faint disapproval the general untidiness of the room. Then she fell to counting the shoes of various sizes scattered over the floor. There were twelve. She sighed and said to herself, “No wonder!” — glancing at the litter. There came the scratching of two pairs of feet on the yard, and the Ringleys entered. Elizabeth Bates rose. Rigley was a big man, with very large bones. His head looked particularly bony. Across his temple was a blue scar, caused by a wound got in the pit, a wound in which the coal-dust remained blue like tattooing.

“Asna ‘e come whoam yit?” asked the man, without any form of greeting, but with deference and sympathy. “I couldna say wheer he is — ‘e’s non ower theer!” — he jerked his head to signify the ‘Prince of Wales’.

“E’s ‘appen gone up to th’ ‘Yew’,” said Mrs Rigley.

There was another pause. Rigley had evidently something to get off his mind:

“Ah left ‘im finishin’ a stint,” he began. “Loose-all ‘ad bin gone about ten

minutes when we com'n away, an' I shouted, 'Are ter comin', Walt?' an' 'e said, 'Go on, Ah shanna be but a'ef a minnit,' so we com'n ter th' bottom, me an' Bowers, thinkin' as 'e wor just behint, an' 'ud come up i' th' next bantle — ”

He stood perplexed, as if answering a charge of deserting his mate. Elizabeth Bates, now again certain of disaster, hastened to reassure him:

“I expect 'e's gone up to th' 'Yew Tree', as you say. It's not the first time. I've fretted myself into a fever before now. He'll come home when they carry him.”

“Ay, isn't it too bad!” deplored the other woman.

“I'll just step up to Dick's an' see if 'e is theer,” offered the man, afraid of appearing alarmed, afraid of taking liberties.

“Oh, I wouldn't think of bothering you that far,” said Elizabeth Bates, with emphasis, but he knew she was glad of his offer.

As they stumbled up the entry, Elizabeth Bates heard Rigley's wife run across the yard and open her neighbour's door. At this, suddenly all the blood in her body seemed to switch away from her heart.

“Mind!” warned Rigley. “Ah've said many a time as Ah'd fill up them ruts in this entry, sumb'dy 'll be breakin' their legs yit.”

She recovered herself and walked quickly along with the miner.

“I don't like leaving the children in bed, and nobody in the house,” she said.

“No, you dunna!” he replied courteously. They were soon at the gate of the cottage.

“Well, I shanna be many minnits. Dunna you be frettin' now, 'e'll be all right,” said the butty.

“Thank you very much, Mr Rigley,” she replied.

“You're welcome!” he stammered, moving away. “I shanna be many minnits.”

The house was quiet. Elizabeth Bates took off her hat and shawl, and rolled back the rug. When she had finished, she sat down. It was a few minutes past nine. She was startled by the rapid chuff of the winding-engine at the pit, and the sharp whirr of the brakes on the rope as it descended. Again she felt the painful sweep of her blood, and she put her hand to her side, saying aloud, “Good gracious! — it's only the nine o'clock deputy going down,” rebuking herself.

She sat still, listening. Half an hour of this, and she was wearied out.

“What am I working myself up like this for?” she said pitiably to herself, “I s'll only be doing myself some damage.”

She took out her sewing again.

At a quarter to ten there were footsteps. One person! She watched for the door to open. It was an elderly woman, in a black bonnet and a black woollen shawl

— his mother. She was about sixty years old, pale, with blue eyes, and her face all wrinkled and lamentable. She shut the door and turned to her daughter-in-law peevishly.

“Eh, Lizzie, whatever shall we do, whatever shall we do!” she cried.

Elizabeth drew back a little, sharply.

“What is it, mother?” she said.

The elder woman seated herself on the sofa.

“I don’t know, child, I can’t tell you!” — she shook her head slowly. Elizabeth sat watching her, anxious and vexed.

“I don’t know,” replied the grandmother, sighing very deeply. “There’s no end to my troubles, there isn’t. The things I’ve gone through, I’m sure it’s enough — !” She wept without wiping her eyes, the tears running.

“But, mother,” interrupted Elizabeth, “what do you mean? What is it?”

The grandmother slowly wiped her eyes. The fountains of her tears were stopped by Elizabeth’s directness. She wiped her eyes slowly.

“Poor child! Eh, you poor thing!” she moaned. “I don’t know what we’re going to do, I don’t — and you as you are — it’s a thing, it is indeed!”

Elizabeth waited.

“Is he dead?” she asked, and at the words her heart swung violently, though she felt a slight flush of shame at the ultimate extravagance of the question. Her words sufficiently frightened the old lady, almost brought her to herself.

“Don’t say so, Elizabeth! We’ll hope it’s not as bad as that; no, may the Lord spare us that, Elizabeth. Jack Rigley came just as I was sittin’ down to a glass afore going to bed, an’ ‘e said, ‘‘Appen you’ll go down th’ line, Mrs Bates. Walt’s had an accident. ‘Appen you’ll go an’ sit wi’ ‘er till we can get him home.’ I hadn’t time to ask him a word afore he was gone. An’ I put my bonnet on an’ come straight down, Lizzie. I thought to myself, ‘Eh, that poor blessed child, if anybody should come an’ tell her of a sudden, there’s no knowin’ what’ll ‘appen to ‘er.’ You mustn’t let it upset you, Lizzie — or you know what to expect. How long is it, six months — or is it five, Lizzie? Ay!” — the old woman shook her head — “time slips on, it slips on! Ay!”

Elizabeth’s thoughts were busy elsewhere. If he was killed — would she be able to manage on the little pension and what she could earn? — she counted up rapidly. If he was hurt — they wouldn’t take him to the hospital — how tiresome he would be to nurse! — but perhaps she’d be able to get him away from the drink and his hateful ways. She would — while he was ill. The tears offered to come to her eyes at the picture. But what sentimental luxury was this she was beginning? — She turned to consider the children. At any rate she was absolutely necessary for them. They were her business.

“Ay!” repeated the old woman, “it seems but a week or two since he brought me his first wages. Ay — he was a good lad, Elizabeth, he was, in his way. I don’t know why he got to be such a trouble, I don’t. He was a happy lad at home, only full of spirits. But there’s no mistake he’s been a handful of trouble, he has! I hope the Lord’ll spare him to mend his ways. I hope so, I hope so. You’ve had a sight o’ trouble with him, Elizabeth, you have indeed. But he was a jolly enough lad wi’ me, he was, I can assure you. I don’t know how it is . . .”

The old woman continued to muse aloud, a monotonous irritating sound, while Elizabeth thought concentratedly, startled once, when she heard the winding-engine chuff quickly, and the brakes skirr with a shriek. Then she heard the engine more slowly, and the brakes made no sound. The old woman did not notice. Elizabeth waited in suspense. The mother-in-law talked, with lapses into silence.

“But he wasn’t your son, Lizzie, an’ it makes a difference. Whatever he was, I remember him when he was little, an’ I learned to understand him and to make allowances. You’ve got to make allowances for them — ”

It was half-past ten, and the old woman was saying: “But it’s trouble from beginning to end; you’re never too old for trouble, never too old for that — ” when the gate banged back, and there were heavy feet on the steps.

“I’ll go, Lizzie, let me go,” cried the old woman, rising. But Elizabeth was at the door. It was a man in pit-clothes.

“They’re bringin’ ‘im, Missis,” he said. Elizabeth’s heart halted a moment. Then it surged on again, almost suffocating her.

“Is he — is it bad?” she asked.

The man turned away, looking at the darkness:

“The doctor says ‘e’d been dead hours. ‘E saw ‘im i’ th’ lamp-cabin.”

The old woman, who stood just behind Elizabeth, dropped into a chair, and folded her hands, crying: “Oh, my boy, my boy!”

“Hush!” said Elizabeth, with a sharp twitch of a frown. “Be still, mother, don’t waken th’ children: I wouldn’t have them down for anything!”

The old woman moaned softly, rocking herself. The man was drawing away. Elizabeth took a step forward.

“How was it?” she asked.

“Well, I couldn’t say for sure,” the man replied, very ill at ease. “‘E wor finishin’ a stint an’ th’ butties ‘ad gone, an’ a lot o’ stuff come down atop ‘n ‘im.”

“And crushed him?” cried the widow, with a shudder.

“No,” said the man, “it fell at th’ back of ‘im. ‘E wor under th’ face, an’ it niver touched ‘im. It shut ‘im in. It seems ‘e wor smothered.”

Elizabeth shrank back. She heard the old woman behind her cry:

“What? — what did ‘e say it was?”

The man replied, more loudly: “‘E wor smothered!”

Then the old woman wailed aloud, and this relieved Elizabeth.

“Oh, mother,” she said, putting her hand on the old woman, “don’t waken th’ children, don’t waken th’ children.”

She wept a little, unknowing, while the old mother rocked herself and moaned. Elizabeth remembered that they were bringing him home, and she must be ready. “They’ll lay him in the parlour,” she said to herself, standing a moment pale and perplexed.

Then she lighted a candle and went into the tiny room. The air was cold and damp, but she could not make a fire, there was no fireplace. She set down the candle and looked round. The candle-light glittered on the lustre-glasses, on the two vases that held some of the pink chrysanthemums, and on the dark mahogany. There was a cold, deathly smell of chrysanthemums in the room. Elizabeth stood looking at the flowers. She turned away, and calculated whether there would be room to lay him on the floor, between the couch and the chiffonier. She pushed the chairs aside. There would be room to lay him down and to step round him. Then she fetched the old red tablecloth, and another old cloth, spreading them down to save her bit of carpet. She shivered on leaving the parlour; so, from the dresser-drawer she took a clean shirt and put it at the fire to air. All the time her mother-in-law was rocking herself in the chair and moaning.

“You’ll have to move from there, mother,” said Elizabeth. “They’ll be bringing him in. Come in the rocker.”

The old mother rose mechanically, and seated herself by the fire, continuing to lament. Elizabeth went into the pantry for another candle, and there, in the little penthouse under the naked tiles, she heard them coming. She stood still in the pantry doorway, listening. She heard them pass the end of the house, and come awkwardly down the three steps, a jumble of shuffling footsteps and muttering voices. The old woman was silent. The men were in the yard.

Then Elizabeth heard Matthews, the manager of the pit, say: “You go in first, Jim. Mind!”

The door came open, and the two women saw a collier backing into the room, holding one end of a stretcher, on which they could see the nailed pit-boots of the dead man. The two carriers halted, the man at the head stooping to the lintel of the door.

“Wheer will you have him?” asked the manager, a short, white-bearded man.

Elizabeth roused herself and came from the pantry carrying the unlighted candle.

“In the parlour,” she said.

“In there, Jim!” pointed the manager, and the carriers backed round into the tiny room. The coat with which they had covered the body fell off as they awkwardly turned through the two doorways, and the women saw their man, naked to the waist, lying stripped for work. The old woman began to moan in a low voice of horror.

“Lay th’ stretcher at th’ side,” snapped the manager, “an’ put ‘im on th’ cloths. Mind now, mind! Look you now — !”

One of the men had knocked off a vase of chrysanthemums. He stared awkwardly, then they set down the stretcher. Elizabeth did not look at her husband. As soon as she could get in the room, she went and picked up the broken vase and the flowers.

“Wait a minute!” she said.

The three men waited in silence while she mopped up the water with a duster.

“Eh, what a job, what a job, to be sure!” the manager was saying, rubbing his brow with trouble and perplexity. “Never knew such a thing in my life, never! He’d no business to ha’ been left. I never knew such a thing in my life! Fell over him clean as a whistle, an’ shut him in. Not four foot of space, there wasn’t — yet it scarce bruised him.”

He looked down at the dead man, lying prone, half naked, all grimed with coal-dust.

““Sphyxiated,” the doctor said. *It is the most terrible job I’ve ever known. Seems as if it was done o’ purpose. Clean over him, an’ shut ‘im in, like a mouse-trap*” — he made a sharp, descending gesture with his hand.

The colliers standing by jerked aside their heads in hopeless comment.

The horror of the thing bristled upon them all.

Then they heard the girl’s voice upstairs calling shrilly: “Mother, mother — who is it? Mother, who is it?”

Elizabeth hurried to the foot of the stairs and opened the door:

“Go to sleep!” she commanded sharply. “What are you shouting about? Go to sleep at once — there’s nothing — ”

Then she began to mount the stairs. They could hear her on the boards, and on the plaster floor of the little bedroom. They could hear her distinctly:

“What’s the matter now? — what’s the matter with you, silly thing?” — her voice was much agitated, with an unreal gentleness.

“I thought it was some men come,” said the plaintive voice of the child. “Has he come?”

“Yes, they’ve brought him. There’s nothing to make a fuss about. Go to sleep now, like a good child.”

They could hear her voice in the bedroom, they waited whilst she covered the children under the bedclothes.

“Is he drunk?” asked the girl, timidly, faintly.

“No! No — he’s not! He — he’s asleep.”

“Is he asleep downstairs?”

“Yes — and don’t make a noise.”

There was silence for a moment, then the men heard the frightened child again:

“What’s that noise?”

“It’s nothing, I tell you, what are you bothering for?”

The noise was the grandmother moaning. She was oblivious of everything, sitting on her chair rocking and moaning. The manager put his hand on her arm and bade her “Sh — sh!!”

The old woman opened her eyes and looked at him. She was shocked by this interruption, and seemed to wonder.

“What time is it?” — the plaintive thin voice of the child, sinking back unhappily into sleep, asked this last question.

“Ten o’clock,” answered the mother more softly. Then she must have bent down and kissed the children.

Matthews beckoned to the men to come away. They put on their caps and took up the stretcher. Stepping over the body, they tiptoed out of the house. None of them spoke till they were far from the wakeful children.

When Elizabeth came down she found her mother alone on the parlour floor, leaning over the dead man, the tears dropping on him.

“We must lay him out,” the wife said. She put on the kettle, then returning knelt at the feet, and began to unfasten the knotted leather laces. The room was clammy and dim with only one candle, so that she had to bend her face almost to the floor. At last she got off the heavy boots and put them away.

“You must help me now,” she whispered to the old woman. Together they stripped the man.

When they arose, saw him lying in the naïve dignity of death, the women stood arrested in fear and respect. For a few moments they remained still, looking down, the old mother whimpering. Elizabeth felt countermanded. She saw him, how utterly inviolable he lay in himself. She had nothing to do with him. She could not accept it. Stooping, she laid her hand on him, in claim. He was still warm, for the mine was hot where he had died. His mother had his face between her hands, and was murmuring incoherently. The old tears fell in succession as drops from wet leaves; the mother was not weeping, merely her tears flowed. Elizabeth embraced the body of her husband, with cheek and lips.

She seemed to be listening, inquiring, trying to get some connection. But she could not. She was driven away. He was impregnable.

She rose, went into the kitchen, where she poured warm water into a bowl, brought soap and flannel and a soft towel.

“I must wash him,” she said.

Then the old mother rose stiffly, and watched Elizabeth as she carefully washed his face, carefully brushing the big blond moustache from his mouth with the flannel. She was afraid with a bottomless fear, so she ministered to him. The old woman, jealous, said:

“Let me wipe him!” — and she kneeled on the other side drying slowly as Elizabeth washed, her big black bonnet sometimes brushing the dark head of her daughter. They worked thus in silence for a long time. They never forgot it was death, and the touch of the man’s dead body gave them strange emotions, different in each of the women; a great dread possessed them both, the mother felt the lie was given to her womb, she was denied; the wife felt the utter isolation of the human soul, the child within her was a weight apart from her.

At last it was finished. He was a man of handsome body, and his face showed no traces of drink. He was blonde, full-fleshed, with fine limbs. But he was dead.

“Bless him,” whispered his mother, looking always at his face, and speaking out of sheer terror. “Dear lad — bless him!” She spoke in a faint, sibilant ecstasy of fear and mother love.

Elizabeth sank down again to the floor, and put her face against his neck, and trembled and shuddered. But she had to draw away again. He was dead, and her living flesh had no place against his. A great dread and weariness held her: she was so unavailing. Her life was gone like this.

“White as milk he is, clear as a twelve-month baby, bless him, the darling!” the old mother murmured to herself. “Not a mark on him, clear and clean and white, beautiful as ever a child was made,” she murmured with pride. Elizabeth kept her face hidden.

“He went peaceful, Lizzie — peaceful as sleep. Isn’t he beautiful, the lamb? Ay — he must ha’ made his peace, Lizzie. ‘Appen he made it all right, Lizzie, shut in there. He’d have time. He wouldn’t look like this if he hadn’t made his peace. The lamb, the dear lamb. Eh, but he had a hearty laugh. I loved to hear it. He had the heartiest laugh, Lizzie, as a lad — ”

Elizabeth looked up. The man’s mouth was fallen back, slightly open under the cover of the moustache. The eyes, half shut, did not show glazed in the obscurity. Life with its smoky burning gone from him, had left him apart and utterly alien to her. And she knew what a stranger he was to her. In her womb was ice of fear, because of this separate stranger with whom she had been living

as one flesh. Was this what it all meant — utter, intact separateness, obscured by heat of living? In dread she turned her face away. The fact was too deadly. There had been nothing between them, and yet they had come together, exchanging their nakedness repeatedly. Each time he had taken her, they had been two isolated beings, far apart as now. He was no more responsible than she. The child was like ice in her womb. For as she looked at the dead man, her mind, cold and detached, said clearly: “Who am I? What have I been doing? I have been fighting a husband who did not exist. *He* existed all the time. What wrong have I done? What was that I have been living with? There lies the reality, this man.” — And her soul died in her for fear: she knew she had never seen him, he had never seen her, they had met in the dark and had fought in the dark, not knowing whom they met nor whom they fought. And now she saw, and turned silent in seeing. For she had been wrong. She had said he was something he was not; she had felt familiar with him. Whereas he was apart all the while, living as she never lived, feeling as she never felt.

In fear and shame she looked at his naked body, that she had known falsely. And he was the father of her children. Her soul was torn from her body and stood apart. She looked at his naked body and was ashamed, as if she had denied it. After all, it was itself. It seemed awful to her. She looked at his face, and she turned her own face to the wall. For his look was other than hers, his way was not her way. She had denied him what he was — she saw it now. She had refused him as himself. — And this had been her life, and his life. — She was grateful to death, which restored the truth. And she knew she was not dead.

And all the while her heart was bursting with grief and pity for him. What had he suffered? What stretch of horror for this helpless man! She was rigid with agony. She had not been able to help him. He had been cruelly injured, this naked man, this other being, and she could make no reparation. There were the children — but the children belonged to life. This dead man had nothing to do with them. He and she were only channels through which life had flowed to issue in the children. She was a mother — but how awful she knew it now to have been a wife. And he, dead now, how awful he must have felt it to be a husband. She felt that in the next world he would be a stranger to her. If they met there, in the beyond, they would only be ashamed of what had been before. The children had come, for some mysterious reason, out of both of them. But the children did not unite them. Now he was dead, she knew how eternally he was apart from her, how eternally he had nothing more to do with her. She saw this episode of her life closed. They had denied each other in life. Now he had withdrawn. An anguish came over her. It was finished then: it had become hopeless between them long before he died. Yet he had been her husband. But

how little! —

“Have you got his shirt, ‘Lizabeth?”

Elizabeth turned without answering, though she strove to weep and behave as her mother-in-law expected. But she could not, she was silenced. She went into the kitchen and returned with the garment.

“It is aired,” she said, grasping the cotton shirt here and there to try. She was almost ashamed to handle him; what right had she or anyone to lay hands on him; but her touch was humble on his body. It was hard work to clothe him. He was so heavy and inert. A terrible dread gripped her all the while: that he could be so heavy and utterly inert, unresponsive, apart. The horror of the distance between them was almost too much for her — it was so infinite a gap she must look across.

At last it was finished. They covered him with a sheet and left him lying, with his face bound. And she fastened the door of the little parlour, lest the children should see what was lying there. Then, with peace sunk heavy on her heart, she went about making tidy the kitchen. She knew she submitted to life, which was her immediate master. But from death, her ultimate master, she winced with fear and shame.

HER TURN

She was his second wife, and so there was between them that truce which is never held between a man and his first woman.

He was one for the women, and as such, an exception among the colliers. In spite of their prudery, the neighbour women liked him; he was big, naïve, and very courteous with them; he was so, even to his second wife.

Being a large man of considerable strength and perfect health, he earned good money in the pit. His natural courtesy saved him from enemies, while his fresh interest in life made his presence always agreeable. So he went his own way, had always plenty of friends, always a good job down pit.

He gave his wife thirty-five shillings a week. He had two grown-up sons at home, and they paid twelve shillings each. There was only one child by the second marriage, so Radford considered his wife did well.

Eighteen months ago, Bryan and Wentworth's men were out on strike for eleven weeks. During that time, Mrs. Radford could neither cajole nor entreat nor nag the ten shillings strike-pay from her husband. So that when the second strike came on, she was prepared for action.

Radford was going, quite inconspicuously, to the publican's wife at the "Golden Horn". She is a large, easy-going lady of forty, and her husband is sixty-three, moreover crippled with rheumatism. She sits in the little bar-parlour of the wayside public-house, knitting for dear life, and sipping a very moderate glass of Scotch. When a decent man arrives at the three-foot width of bar, she rises, serves him, surveys him over, and, if she likes his looks, says:

"Won't you step inside, sir?"

If he steps inside, he will find not more than one or two men present. The room is warm, quite small. The landlady knits. She gives a few polite words to the stranger, then resumes her conversation with the man who interests her most. She is straight, highly-coloured, with indifferent brown eyes.

"What was that you asked me, Mr. Radford?"

"What is the difference between a donkey's tail and a rainbow?" asked Radford, who had a consuming passion for conundrums.

"All the difference in the world," replied the landlady.

"Yes, but what special difference?"

"I s'll have to give it up again. You'll think me a donkey's head, I'm afraid."

"Not likely. But just you consider now, wheer . . ."

The conundrum was still under weigh, when a girl entered. She was swarthy, a fine animal. After she had gone out:

“Do you know who that is?” asked the landlady.

“I can’t say as I do,” replied Radford.

“She’s Frederick Pinnock’s daughter, from Stony Ford. She’s courting our Willy.”

“And a fine lass, too.”

“Yes, fine enough, as far as that goes. What sort of a wife’ll she make him, think you?”

“You just let me consider a bit,” said the man. He took out a pocket-book and a pencil. The landlady continued to talk to the other guests.

Radford was a big fellow, black-haired, with a brown moustache, and darkish blue eyes. His voice, naturally deep, was pitched in his throat, and had a peculiar, tenor quality, rather husky, and disturbing. He modulated it a good deal as he spoke, as men do who talk much with women. Always, there was a certain indolence in his carriage.

“Our mester’s lazy,” his wife said. “There’s many a bit of a jab wants doin’, but get him to do it if you can.”

But she knew he was merely indifferent to the little jobs, and not lazy.

He sat writing for about ten minutes, at the end of which time, he read:

“I see a fine girl full of life.

I see her just ready for wedlock,

But there’s jealousy between her eyebrows

And jealousy on her mouth.

I see trouble ahead.

Willy is delicate.

She would do him no good.

She would never see when he wasn’t well,

She would only see what she wanted — ”

So, in phrases, he got down his thoughts. He had to fumble for expression, and therefore anything serious he wanted to say he wrote in “poetry”, as he called it.

Presently, the landlady rose, saying:

“Well, I s’ll have to be looking after our mester. I s’ll be in again before we close.”

Radford sat quite comfortably on. In a while, he too bade the company good-night.

When he got home, at a quarter-past eleven, his sons were in bed, and his wife sat awaiting him. She was a woman of medium height, fat and sleek, a dumpling. Her black hair was parted smooth, her narrow-opened eyes were sly and

satirical, she had a peculiar twang in her rather sleering voice.

“Our missis is a puss-puss,” he said easily, of her. Her extraordinarily smooth, sleek face was remarkable. She was very healthy.

He never came in drunk. Having taken off his coat and his cap, he sat down to supper in his shirt-sleeves. Do as he might, she was fascinated by him. He had a strong neck, with the crisp hair growing low. Let her be angry as she would yet she had a passion for that neck of his, particularly when she saw the great vein rib under the skin.

“I think, missis,” he said, “I’d rather ha’e a smite o’ cheese than this meat.”

“Well, can’t you get it yourself?”

“Yi, surely I can,” he said, and went out to the pantry.

“I think, if yer comin’ in at this time of night, you can wait on yourself,” she justified herself.

She moved uneasily in her chair. There were several jam-tarts alongside the cheese on the dish he brought.

“Yi, Missis, them tan-tafflins’ll go down very nicely,” he said.

“Oh, will they! Then you’d better help to pay for them,” she said, amiably, but determined.

“Now what art after?”

“What am I after? Why, can’t you think?” she said sarcastically.

“I’m not for thinkin’, missis.”

“No, I know you’re not. But wheer’s my money? You’ve been paid the Union to-day. Wheer do I come in?”

“Tha’s got money, an’ tha mun use it.”

“Thank yer. An’ ‘aven’t you none, as well?”

“I hadna, not till we was paid, not a ha’p’ny.”

“Then you ought to be ashamed of yourself to say so.”

“Appen so.”

“We’ll go shares wi’ th’ Union money,” she said. “That’s nothing but what’s right.”

“We shonna. Tha’s got plenty o’ money as tha can use.”

“Oh, all right,” she said. “I will do.”

She went to bed. It made her feel sharp that she could not get at him.

The next day, she was just as usual. But at eleven o’clock she took her purse and went up town. Trade was very slack. Men stood about in gangs, men were playing marbles everywhere in the streets. It was a sunny morning. Mrs. Radford went into the furnisher-and-upholsterer’s shop.

“There’s a few things,” she said to Mr. Allcock, “as I’m wantin’ for the house, and I might as well get them now, while the men’s at home, and can shift me the

furniture.”

She put her fat purse on to the counter with a click. The man should know she was not wanting “strap”. She bought linoleum for the kitchen, a new wringer, a breakfast-service, a spring mattress, and various other things, keeping a mere thirty shillings, which she tied in a corner of her handkerchief. In her purse was some loose silver.

Her husband was gardening in a desultory fashion when she got back home. The daffodils were out. The colts in the field at the end of the garden were tossing their velvety brown necks.

“Sithee here, missis,” called Radford, from the shed which stood halfway down the path. Two doves in a cage were cooing.

“What have you got?” asked the woman, as she approached. He held out to her in his big, earthy hand a tortoise. The reptile was very, very slowly issuing its head again to the warmth.

“He’s wakkened up betimes,” said Radford.

“He’s like th’ men, wakened up for a holiday,” said the wife. Radford scratched the little beast’s scaly head.

“We pleased to see him out,” he said.

They had just finished dinner, when a man knocked at the door.

“From Allcock’s!” he said.

The plump woman took up the clothes-basket containing the crockery she had bought.

“Whativer hast got theer?” asked her husband.

“We’ve been wantin’ some breakfast-cups for ages, so I went up town an’ got ‘em this mornin’,” she replied.

He watched her taking out the crockery.

“Hm!” he said. “Tha’s been on th’ spend, seemly.”

Again there was a thud at the door. The man had put down a roll of linoleum. Mr. Radford went to look at it.

“They come rolling in!” he exclaimed.

“Who’s grumbled more than you about the raggy oilcloth of this kitchen?” said the insidious, cat-like voice of the wife.

“It’s all right, it’s all right,” said Radford.

The carter came up the entry with another roll, which he deposited with a grunt at the door.

“An’ how much do you reckon this lot is?” he asked.

“Oh, they’re all paid for, don’t worry,” replied the wife.

“Shall yer gi’e me a hand, mester?” asked the carter.

Radford followed him down the entry, in his easy, slouching way. His wife

went after. His waistcoat was hanging loose over his shirt. She watched his easy movement of well-being as she followed him, and she laughed to herself.

The carter took hold of one end of the wire mattress, dragged it forth.

“Well, this is a corker!” said Radford, as he received the burden.

“Now the mangle!” said the carter.

“What dost reckon tha’s been up to, missis?” asked the husband.

“I said to myself last wash-day, if I had to turn that mangle again, tha’d ha’er ter wash the clothes thyself.”

Radford followed the carter down the entry again. In the street, women were standing watching, and dozens of men were lounging round the cart. One officiously helped with the wringer.

“Gi’e him thrippence,” said Mrs. Radford.

“Gi’e him thysen,” replied her husband.

“I’ve no change under half a crown.”

Radford tipped the carter, and returned indoors. He surveyed the array of crockery, linoleum, mattress, mangle, and other goods crowding the house and the yard.

“Well, this is a winder!” he repeated.

“We stood in need of ‘em enough,” she replied.

“I hope tha’s got plenty more from wheer they came from,” he replied dangerously.

“That’s just what I haven’t.” She opened her purse. “Two half-crowns, that’s every copper I’ve got i’ th’ world.”

He stood very still as he looked.

“It’s right,” she said.

There was a certain smug sense of satisfaction about her. A wave of anger came over him, blinding him. But he waited and waited. Suddenly his arm leapt up, the fist clenched, and his eyes blazed at her. She shrank away, pale and frightened. But he dropped his fist to his side, turned, and went out, muttering. He went down to the shed that stood in the middle of the garden. There he picked up the tortoise, and stood with bent head, rubbing its horny head.

She stood hesitating, watching him. Her heart was heavy, and yet there was a curious, cat-like look of satisfaction round her eyes. Then she went indoors and gazed at her new cups, admiringly.

The next week he handed her his half-sovereign without a word.

“You’ll want some for yourself,” she said, and she gave him a shilling. He accepted it.

THE MINER AT HOME

LIKE most colliers, Bower had his dinner before he washed himself. It did not surprise his wife that he said little. He seemed quite amiable, but evidently did not feel confidential. Gertie was busy with the three children, the youngest of whom lay kicking on the sofa, preparing to squeal; therefore she did not concern herself overmuch with her husband, once having ascertained by a few shrewd glances at his heavy brows and his blue eyes, which moved conspicuously in his black face, that he was only pondering.

He smoked a solemn pipe until six o'clock. Although he was really a good husband, he did not notice that Gertie was tired. She was irritable at the end of the long day.

'Don't you want to wash yourself?' she asked, grudgingly, at six o'clock. It was sickening to have a man sitting there in his pit-dirt, never saying a word, smoking like a Red Indian.

'I'm ready, when you are,' he replied.

She lay the baby on the sofa, barricaded it with pillows, and brought from the scullery a great panchion, a bowl of heavy earthenware like brick, glazed inside to a dark mahogany colour. Tall and thin and very pale, she stood before the fire holding the great bowl, her grey eyes flashing.

'Get up, our Jack, this minute, or I'll squash thee under the blessed panchion.'

The fat boy of six, who was rolling on the rug in the firelight, said broadly:

'Squash me, then.'

'Get up,' she cried, giving him a push with her foot.

'Gi'e ower,' he said, rolling jollily.

'I'll smack you,' she said grimly, preparing to put down the panchion.

'Get up, thee,' shouted the father.

Gertie ladled water from the boiler with a tin ladling can. Drops fell from her ladle hissing into the red fire, splashing on to the white hearth, blazing like drops of flame on the flat-topped fender. The father gazed at it all, unmoved.

'I've told you,' he said, 'to put cold water in the panchion first. If one o' th' children goes an' falls in...'

'You can see as 'e doesn't then,' snapped she. She tempered the bowl with cold water, dropped in a flannel and a lump of soap, and spread the towel over the fender to warm.

Then, and only then, Bower rose. He wore no coat, and his arms were freckled

black. He stripped to the waist, hitched his trousers into the strap, and kneeled on the rug to wash himself. There was a great splashing and sputtering. The red firelight shone on his cap of white soap, and on the muscles of his back, on the strange working of his red and white muscular arms, that flashed up and down like individual creatures.

Gertie sat with the baby clawing at her ears and hair and nose. Continually she drew back her face and head from the cruel little baby-clasp. Jack was hanging on to the kitchen door.

‘Come away from that door,’ cried the mother.

Jack did not come away, but neither did he open the door and run the risk of incurring his father’s wrath. The room was very hot, but the thought of a draught is abhorrent to a miner.

With the baby on one arm, Gertie washed her husband’s back. She sponged it carefully with the flannel, and then, still with one hand, began to dry it on the rough towel.

‘Canna ter put th’ childt down an’ use both hands?’ said her husband.

‘Yes; an’ then if th’ childt screets, there’s a bigger to-do than iver. There’s no suitin’ some folk.’

‘The childt ’ud non screet.’

Gertie plumped it down. The baby began to cry. The wife rubbed her husband’s back till it grew pink, while Bower quivered with pleasure. As soon as she threw the towel down:

Shut that childt up,’ he said.

He wrestled his way into his shirt. His head emerged, with black hair standing roughly on end. He was rather an ugly man, just above medium height, and stiffly built. He had a thin black moustache over a full mouth, and a very full chin that was marred by a blue seam, where a horse had kicked him when he was a lad in the pit.

With both hands on the mantelpiece above his head, he stood looking in the fire, his whitish shirt hanging like a smock over his pit trousers.

Presently, still looking absently in the fire, he said: ‘Bill Andrews was standin’ at th’ pit top, an’ give ivery man as ’e come up one o’ these.’

He handed to his wife a small whity-blue paper, on which was printed simply:

February 14, 1912.

To the Manager —

I hereby give notice to leave your employment fourteen days from above date.

Signed —

Gertie read the paper, blindly dodging her head from the baby's grasp.

'An' what d'you reckon that's for?' she asked.

'I suppose it means as we come out.'

'I'm sure!' she cried in indignation. 'Well, *tha'rt* not goin' to sign it.'

'It'll ma'e no diff'rence whether I do or dunna — t'others will.'

'Then let 'em!' She made a small clicking sound in her mouth. 'This 'll ma'e th' third strike as we've had sin' we've been married; an' a fat lot th' better for it you are, arena you?'

He squirmed uneasily.

'No, but we mean to be,' he said.

'I'll tell you what, colliers is a discontented lot, as doesn't know what they do want. That's what they are.'

'Tha'd better not let some o' th' colliers as there is hear thee say so.'

'I don't care who hears me. An' there isn't a man in Eastwood but what'll say as th' last two strikes has ruined the place. There's that much bad blood now atween th' mesters an' th' men as there isn't a thing but what's askew. An' what *will* it be, I should like to know!'

'It's not on'y here; it's all ower th' country alike,' he gloated.

'Yes; it's them blessed Yorkshire an' Welsh colliers as does it. They're that bug nowadays, what wi' talkin' an' spoutin', they hardly know which side their back-side hangs. Here, take this childt!'

She thrust the baby into his arms, carried out the heavy bowlful of black suds, mended the fire, cleared round, and returned for the child.

'Ben Haseldine said, an' he's a union man — he told me when he come for th' union money yesterday, as th' men doesn't want to come out — not our men. It's th' union.'

'Tha knows nowt about it, woman. It's a' woman's jabber, from beginnin' to end.'

'You don't intend us to know. Who wants th' Minimum Wage? Butties doesn't. There th' butties'll be, havin' to pay seven shillin' a day to men as 'appen isn't worth a penny more than five.'

'But the butties is goin' to have eight shillin' accordin' to scale.'

'An' then th' men as can't work tip-top, an' is worth, 'appen, five shillin' a day, they get th' sack: an th' old men, an' so on.'

'Nowt o' th' sort, woman, nowt o' th' sort. Tha's got it off 'am-pat. There's goin' to be inspectors for all that, an' th' men'll get what they're worth, accordin' to age, an' so on.'

'An' accordin' to idleness an' — what somebody says about 'em. I'll back!

There'll be a lot o' fairness!

'Tha talks like a woman as knows nowt. What does thee know about it?'

'I know what you did at th' last strike. And I know this much, when Shipley men had *their* strike tickets, not one in three signed 'em — so there. An' *tha*'rt not goin' to!'

'We want a livin' wage,' he declared.

'Hanna you got one?' she cried.

'Han we?' he shouted. 'Han we? Who does more chaunterin' than thee when it's a short wik, an' tha gets 'appen a scroddy twenty-two shillin'? Tha goes at me 'ard enough.'

'Yi; but what better shall you be? What better *are* you for th' last two strikes — tell me that?'

'I'll tell thee this much, th' mesters doesna' mean us to ha'e owt. They promise, but they dunna keep it, not they. Up comes Friday night, an' nowt to draw, an' a woman fit to ha'e yer guts out for it.'

'It's nowt but th' day-men as wants the blessed Minimum Wage — it's not butties.'

'It's time as th' butties *did* ha'e ter let their men make a fair day's wage. Four an' sixpence a day is about as 'e's allowed to addle, whoiver he may be.'

'I wonder what you'll say next. You say owt as is put in your mouth, that's a fac'. What are thee, dost reckon? — are ter a butty, or day-man, or ostler, or are ter a mester? — for tha might be, ter hear thee talk.'

'I nedna neither. It ought to be fair a' round.'

'It ought, hang my rags, it ought! Tha'rt very fair to me, for instance.'

'An' arena I?'

'Tha thinks 'cause tha gi'es me a lousy thirty shillin' reg'lar th'art th' best man i' th' Almighty world. Tha mun be waited on han' an' foot, an' sided wi' whatever tha says. But I'm *not*! No, an' I'm not, not when it comes to strikes. I've seen enough on 'em.'

'Then niver open thy mouth again if it's a short wik, an' we're pinched.'

'We're niver pinched that much. An' a short wik isn't no shorter than a strike wik; put that i' thy pipe an' smoke it. It's th' idle men as wants th' strikes.'

'Shut thy mouth, woman. If every man worked as hard as I do...'

'He wouldn't ha'e as much to do as me; an' 'e wouldna. But *I*'ve nowt to do, as tha'rt flig ter tell me. No, it's th' idle men as wants th' strike. It's a union strike, this is, not a men's strike. You're sharpenin' th' knife for your own throats.'

'Am I not sick of a woman as listens to every tale as is poured into her ears? No, I'm not takin' th' kid. I'm goin' out.'

He put on his boots determinedly.

She rocked herself with vexation and weariness.

DELILAH AND MR BIRCUMSHAW

‘HE looked,’ said Mrs Bircumshaw to Mrs Gillatt, ‘he looked like a positive saint: one of the noble sort, you know, that will suffer with head up and with dreamy eyes. I nearly died of laughing.’

She spoke of Mr Bircumshaw, who darted a look at his wife’s friend. Mrs Gillatt broke into an almost derisive laugh. Bircumshaw shut tight his mouth, and set his large, square jaw. Frowning, he lowered his face out of sight.

Mrs Bircumshaw seemed to glitter in the twilight. She was like a little, uncanny machine, working unheard and unknown, but occasionally snapping a spark. A small woman, very quiet in her manner, it was surprising that people should so often say of her, ‘She’s *very vivacious*.’ It was her eyes: they were brown, very wide-open, very swift and ironic. As a rule she said little. This evening, her words and her looks were quick and brilliant. She had been married four years.

‘I was thankful, I can tell you, that you didn’t go,’ she continued to Mrs Gillatt. ‘For a church pageant, it was the most astonishing show. People blossomed out so differently. I never knew what a fine apostle was lost in Harry. When I saw him, I thought I should scream.’

‘You looked sober enough every time I noticed you,’ blurted Harry, in deep bass.

‘You were much too rapt to notice *me*,’ his wife laughed gaily. Nevertheless, her small head was lifted and alert, like a fighting bird’s. Mrs Gillatt fell instinctively into rank with her, unconscious of the thrill of battle that moved her.

Mr Bircumshaw, bowing forward, rested his arms on his knees, and whistled silently as he contemplated his feet. Also, he listened acutely to the women. He was a large-limbed, clean, powerful man, and a bank clerk. Son of a country clergyman, he had a good deal of vague, sensuous, religious feeling, but he lacked a Faith. He would have been a fine man to support a cause, but he had no cause. Even had he been forced to work hard and unremittingly, he would have remained healthy in spirit. As it was, he was a bank clerk, with a quantity of unspent energy turning sour in his veins, and a fair amount of barren leisure torturing his soul. He was degenerating: and now his wife turned upon him.

She had been a schoolteacher. He had had the money and the position. He was inclined to bully her, when he was not suited: which was fairly often.

‘Harry was one of the “Three Wise men”. You should have seen him, Mrs Gillatt. With his face coming out of that white forehead band, and the cloth that hung over his ears, he looked a picture. Imagine him — !’

Mrs Gillatt looked at Bircumshaw, imagining him. Then she threw up her hands and laughed aloud. It was ludicrous to think of Bircumshaw, a hulking, frequently churlish man, as one of the Magi. Mrs Gillatt was a rather beautiful woman of forty, almost too full in blossom. Better off than the Bircumshaws, she assumed the manner of patron and protector.

‘Oh,’ she cried, ‘I can see him I can see him looking great and grand — Abraham! Oh, he’s got that grand cut of face, and plenty of size.’

She laughed rather derisively. She was a man’s woman, by instinct serving flattery with mockery.

‘That’s it!’ cried the little wife, deferentially. ‘Abraham setting out to sacrifice. He marched — his march was splendid.’

The two women laughed together. Mrs Gillatt drew herself up superbly, laughing, then coming to rest.

‘And usually, you know,’ the wife broke off, ‘there’s a good deal of the whipped schoolboy about his walk.’

‘There is, Harry,’ laughed Mrs Gillatt, shaking her white and jewelled hand at him. ‘You just remember that for the next time, my lad.’ She was his senior by some eight years. He grinned sickly.

‘But now,’ Mrs Bircumshaw continued, ‘he marched like a young Magi. You could see a look of the Star in his eyes.’

‘Oh,’ cried Mrs Gillatt. ‘Oh! the look of the Star —!’

‘Oftener the look of the Great Bear, isn’t it?’ queried Mrs Bircumshaw.

‘That is quite true, Harry,’ said the elder woman, laughing.

Bircumshaw cracked his strong fingers, brutally.

‘Well, he came on,’ continued the wife, ‘with the light of the Star in his eyes, his mouth fairly sweet with Christian resignation —’

‘Oh!’ cried Mrs Gillatt, ‘oh — and he beats the baby. Christian resignation!’ She laughed aloud. ‘Let me hear of you beating that child again, Harry Bircumshaw, and I’ll Christian-resignation you —’

Suddenly she remembered that this might implicate her friend. ‘I came in yesterday,’ she explained, ‘at dinner. “What’s the matter, baby?” I said, “what are you crying for?” “Dadda beat baby — naughty baby.” It was a good thing you had gone back to business, my lad, I can tell you. ...’

Mrs Bircumshaw glanced swiftly at her husband. He had ducked his head and was breaking his knuckles tensely. She turned her head with a quick, thrilled movement, more than ever like a fighting bird.

‘And you know his nose,’ she said, blithely resuming her narrative, as if it were some bit of gossip. ‘You know it usually looks a sort of “Mind your own business or you’ll get a hit in the jaw” nose?’

‘Yes,’ cried Mrs Gillatt, ‘it does —’ and she seemed unable to contain her laughter. Then she dropped her fine head, pretending to be an angry buffalo glaring under bent brows, seeking whom he shall devour, in imitation of Harry’s nose.

Mrs Bircumshaw bubbled with laughter.

‘Ah!’ said Mrs Gillatt, and she winked at her friend as she sweetened Harry’s pill, ‘I know him — I know him.’ Then: ‘And what *did* his nose look like?’ she asked of the wife.

‘Like Sir Galahad on horseback,’ said Ethel Bircumshaw, spending her last shot.

Mrs Gillatt drew her hand down her own nose, which was straight, with thin, flexible nostrils.

‘How does it feel, Harry,’ she asked, ‘to stroke Galahad on horseback?’

‘I don’t know, I’m sure,’ he said icily.

‘Then stroke it, man, and tell me,’ cried the elder woman: with which *her* last shot was sped. There was a moment of painful silence.

‘And the way the others acted — it was screamingly funny,’ the wife started. Then the two women, with one accord, began to make mock of the other actors in the pageant, people they knew, ridiculing them, however, only for blemishes that Harry had not, pulling the others to pieces in places where Harry was solid, thus leaving their man erect like a hero among the litter of his acquaintances.

This did not mollify him: it only persuaded him he was a fine figure, not to be carped at.

Suddenly, before the women had gone far, Bircumshaw jumped up. Mrs Gillatt started. She got a glimpse of his strict form, in its blue serge, passing before her, then the door banged behind him.

Mrs Gillatt was really astonished. She had helped in clipping this ignoble Samson, all unawares, from instinct. She had no idea of what she had been doing. She sat erect and superb, the picture of astonishment that is merging towards contempt.

‘Is it someone at the door?’ she asked, listening.

Mrs Bircumshaw, with alert, listening eyes, shook her head quickly, with a meaning look of contempt.

‘Is he mad?’ whispered the elder woman. Her friend nodded. Then Mrs Gillatt’s eyes dilated, and her face hardened with scorn. Mrs Bircumshaw had not ceased to listen. She bent forward.

‘Praise him,’ she whispered, making a quick gesture that they should play a bit of fiction. They rose with zest to the game. ‘Praise him,’ whispered the wife. Then she herself began. Every woman is a first-rate actress in private. She leaned forward, and in a slightly lowered yet very distinct voice, screened as if for privacy, yet penetrating clearly to the ears of her husband — he had lingered in the hall, she could hear — she said:

‘You know Harry really acted splendidly.’

‘I know,’ said Mrs Gillatt eagerly. ‘I know. I know he’s a really good actor.’

‘He is. The others did look paltry beside him, I have to confess.’

Harry’s pride was soothed, but his wrath was not appeased.

‘Yes,’ he heard the screened voice of his wife say. ‘But for all that, I don’t care to see him on the stage. It’s not manly, somehow. It seems unworthy of a man with any character, somehow. Of course it’s all right for strangers — but for anyone you care for — anyone very near to you —’

Mrs Gillatt chuckled to herself: this was a thing well done. The two women, however, had not praised very long — and the wife’s praise was sincere by the time she had finished her first sentence — before they were startled by a loud ‘Thud!’ on the floor above their heads. Both started. It was dark, nearly nine o’clock. They listened in silence. Then came another ‘Thud!’

Mrs Bircumshaw gave a little spurt of bitter-contemptuous laughter.

‘He’s not —?’ began Mrs Gillatt.

‘He’s gone to bed, and announces the fact by dropping his boots as he takes them off,’ said the young wife bitterly:

Mrs Gillatt was wide-eyed with amazement. ‘You don’t mean it!’ she exclaimed.

Childless, married to an uxorious man whom she loved, this state of affairs was monstrous to her. Neither of the women spoke for a while. It was dark in the room. Then Mrs Gillatt began, sotto voce:

‘Well, I could never have believed it, no, not if you’d told me for ever. He’s always so fussy —’

So she went on. Mrs Bircumshaw let her continue. A restrained woman herself, the other’s outburst relieved her own tension. When she had sufficiently overcome her own emotion, and when she knew her husband to be in bed, she rose.

‘Come into the kitchen, we can talk there,’ she said. There was a new hardness in her voice. She had not ‘talked’ before to anyone, had never mentioned her husband in blame.

The kitchen was bare, with drab walls glistening to the naked gas-jet. The tiled floor was uncovered, cold and damp. Everything was clean, stark and cheerless.

The large stove, littered with old paper, was black, black-cold. There was a baby's high chair in one corner, and a teddybear, and a tin pigeon. Mrs Bircumshaw threw a cloth on the table that was pushed up under the drab-blinded window, against the great, black stove, which radiated coldness since it could not radiate warmth.

'Will you stay to supper?' asked Mrs Bircumshaw.

'What have you got?' was the frank reply.

'I'm afraid there's only bread and cheese.'

'No thanks then. I don't eat bread and cheese for supper, Ethel, and you ought not.'

They talked — or rather Mrs Gillatt held forth for a few minutes, on suppers. Then there was a silence.

'I never knew such a thing in my life,' began Mrs Gillatt, rather awkwardly, as a tentative: she wanted her friend to unbosom. 'Is he often like it?' she persisted.

'Oh yes.'

'Well, I can see now,' Mrs Gillatt declared, 'I can understand now. Often have I come in and seen you with your eyes all red: but you've not said anything, so I haven't liked to. But I know now. Just fancy — the brute! — and will he be all right when you go to bed?'

'Oh no.'

'Will he keep it up tomorrow?' Mrs Gillatt's tone expressed nothing short of amazed horror.

'Oh yes, and very likely for two or three days.'

'Oh the brute! the brute!! Well, this *has* opened my eyes. I've been watching a few of these men lately, and I tell you —. You'll not sleep with him tonight, shall you?'

'It would only make it worse.'

'Worse or not worse, I wouldn't. You've got another bed aired — you had visitors till yesterday — there's the bed — take baby and sleep there.'

'It would only make it worse,' said Mrs Bircumshaw, weariedly. Mrs Gillatt was silent a moment.

'Well — you're better to him than I should be, I can tell you,' she said. 'Ah, the brute, to think he should always be so fair and fussy to my face, and I think him so nice. But let him touch that child again — ! Haven't I seen her with her little arms red? "Gentlemanly" — so fond of quoting his "gentlemanly"! Eh, but this has opened my eyes, Ethel. Only let him touch that child again, to my knowledge. I only wish he would.'

Mrs Bircumshaw listened to this threat in silence. Yet she did wish she could see the mean bully in her husband matched by this spoiled, arrogant, generous

woman.

‘But tell him, Ethel,’ said Mrs Gillatt, bending from her handsome height, and speaking in considerate tones, ‘tell him that I saw nothing — nothing. Tell him I thought he had suddenly been called to the door: tell him that — and that I thought he’d gone down the “Drive” with a caller — say that — you can do it, it’s perfectly true — I did think so. So tell him — the brute!’

Mrs Bircumshaw listened patiently, occasionally smiling to herself. She would tell her husband nothing, would never mention the affair to him. Moreover, she intended her husband to think he had made a fool of himself before this handsome woman whom he admired so much.

Bircumshaw heard his wife’s friend take her leave. He had been in torment while the two women were together in the far-off kitchen. Now the brute in him felt more sure, more triumphant. He was afraid of *two* women: he could cow one. He felt he had something to punish: that he had his own dignity and authority to assert: and he was going to punish, was going to assert.

‘I should think,’ said Mrs Gillatt in departing, ‘that you won’t take him any supper.’

Mrs Bircumshaw felt a sudden blaze of anger against him. But she laughed deprecatingly.

‘You are a silly thing if you do,’ cried the other. ‘My word, I’d starve him if I had him.’

‘But you see you haven’t got him,’ said the wife quietly.

‘No, I’m thankful to say. But if I had — the brute!’

He heard her go, and was relieved. Now he could lie in bed and sulk to his heart’s content, and inflict the penalties of ill-humour on his insolent wife. He was such a lusty, emotional man — and he had nothing to do. What was his work to him? Scarcely more than nothing. And what was to fill the rest of his life — nothing. He wanted something to do, and he thought he wanted more done for him. So he got into this irritable, sore state of moral debility. A man cannot respect himself unless he does something. But he can do without his own positive self-respect, so long as his wife respects him. But when the man who has no foothold for self-esteem sees his wife and his wife’s friend despise him, it is hell: he fights for very life. So Bircumshaw lay in bed in this state of ignoble misery. His wife had striven for a long time to pretend he was still her hero: but he had tried her patience too far. Now he was confounding heroism, mastery, with brute tyranny. He would be a tyrant, if not a hero.

She, downstairs, occasionally smiled to herself. This time she had given him his dues. Though her heart was pained and anxious, still she smiled: she had clipped a large lock from her Samson. Her smile rose from the deep of her

woman's nature.

After having eaten a very little supper, she worked about the house till ten o'clock. Her face had regained that close impassivity which many women wear when alone. Still impassive, at the end of her little tasks she fetched the dinner joint and made him four sandwiches, carefully seasoned and trimmed. Pouring him a glass of milk, she went upstairs with the tray, which looked fresh and tempting.

He had been listening acutely to her last movements. As she entered, however, he lay well under the bedclothes, breathing steadily, pretending to sleep. She came in quite calmly.

'Here is your supper,' she said, in a quiet, indifferent tone, ignoring the fact that he was supposed to be asleep. Another lock fell from his strength. He felt virtue depart from him, felt weak and watery in spirit, and he hated her. He made no reply, but kept up his pretence of sleep.

She bent over the cot of the sleeping baby, a bonny child of three. The little one was flushed in her sleep. Her fist was clenched in a tangle of hair over her small round ear, whilst even in sleep she pouted in her wilful, imperious way. With very gentle fingers the mother loosened the bright hair and put it back from the full, small brow, that reminded one of the brow of a little Virgin by Memling. The father felt that he was left out, ignored. He would have wished to whisper a word to his wife, and so bring himself into the trinity, had he not been so wroth. He retired further into his manly bulk, felt weaker and more miserably insignificant, at the same time more enraged.

Mrs Bircumshaw slipped into bed quietly, settling to rest at once, as far as possible from the broad form of her husband. Both lay quite still, although, as each knew, neither slept. The man felt he wanted to move, but his will was so weak and shrinking, he could not rouse his muscles. He lay tense, paralyzed with self-conscious shrinking, yet bursting to move. She nestled herself down quite at ease. She did not care, this evening, how he felt or thought: for once she let herself rest in indifference.

Towards one o'clock in the morning, just as she was drifting into sleep, her eyes flew open. She did not start or stir; she was merely wide awake. A match had been struck.

Her husband was sitting up in bed, leaning forward to the plate on the chair. Very carefully, she turned her head just enough to see him. His big back bulked above her. He was leaning forward to the chair. The candle, which he had set on the floor, so that its light should not penetrate the sleep of his wife, threw strange shadows on the ceiling, and lighted his throat and underneath his strong chin. Through the arch of his arm, she could see his jaw and his throat working. For

some strange reason, he felt that he could not eat in the dark. Occasionally she could see his cheek bulged with food. He ate rapidly, almost voraciously, leaning over the edge of the bed and taking care of the crumbs. She noticed the weight of his shoulder muscles at rest upon the arm on which he leaned.

‘The strange animal!’ she said to herself, and she laughed, laughed heartily within herself.

‘Are they nice?’ she longed to say, slyly.

‘Are they nice?’ — she must say it — ‘are they nice?’ The temptation was almost too great. But she was afraid of this lusty animal startled at his feeding. She dared not twit him.

He took the milk, leaned back, almost arching backwards over her as he drank. She shrank with a little fear, a little repulsion, which was nevertheless half pleasurable. Cowering under his shadow, she shrugged with contempt, yet her eyes widened with a small, excited smile. This vanished, and a real scorn hardened her lips: when he was sulky his blood was cold as water, nothing could rouse it to passion; he resisted caresses as if he had thin acid in his veins. ‘Mean in the blood,’ she said to herself.

He finished the food and milk, licked his lips, nipped out the candle, then stealthily lay down. He seemed to sink right into a grateful sleep.

‘Nothing on earth is so vital to him as a meal,’ she thought.

She lay a long time thinking, before she fell asleep.

ONCE

THE morning was very beautiful. White packets of mist hung over the river, as if a great train had gone by leaving its steam idle, in a trail down the valley. The mountains were just faint grey-blue, with the slightest glitter of snow high up in the sunshine. They seemed to be standing a long way off watching me, and wondering. As I bathed in the shaft of sunshine that came through the wide-opened window, letting the water slip swiftly down my sides, my mind went wandering through the hazy morning, very sweet and far-off and still, so that I had hardly wit enough to dry myself. And as soon as I had got on my dressing-gown, I lay down again idly on the bed, looking out at the morning that still was greenish from the dawn, and thinking of Anita.

I had loved her when I was a boy. She was an aristocrat's daughter, but she was not rich. I was simply middle-class, then. I was much too green and humble-minded to think of making love to her. No sooner had she come home from school than she married an officer. He was rather handsome, something in the Kaiser's fashion, but stupid as an ass. And Anita was only eighteen. When at last she accepted me as a lover, she told me about it.

'The night I was married,' she said, 'I lay counting the flowers on the wall-paper, how many on a string; he bored me so.'

He was of good family, and of great repute in the Army, being a worker. He had the tenacity of a bulldog, and rode like a centaur. These things look well from a distance, but to live with they weary one beyond endurance, so Anita says.

She had her first child just before she was twenty: two years afterwards, another. Then no more. Her husband was something of a brute. He neglected her, though not outrageously, treated her as if she were a fine animal. To complete matters, he more than ruined himself owing to debts, gambling and otherwise, then utterly disgraced himself by using Government money and being caught.

'You have found a hair in your soup,' I wrote to Anita.

'Not a hair, a whole plait,' she replied.

After that, she began to have lovers. She was a splendid young creature, and was not going to sit down in her rather elegant flat in Berlin, to run to seed. Her husband was an officer in a crack regiment. Anita was superb to look at. He was proud to introduce her to his friends. Then, moreover, she had her own relatives

in Berlin, aristocratic but also rich, and moving in the first society. So she began to take lovers.

Anita shows her breeding: erect, rather haughty, with a good-humoured kind of scorn. She is tall and strong, her brown eyes are full of scorn, and she has a downy, warm-coloured skin, brownish to match her black hair.

At last she came to love me a little. Her soul is unspoiled. I think she has almost the soul of a virgin. I think, perhaps, it frets her that she has never really loved. She has never had the real respect — *Ehrfurcht* — for a man. And she has been here with me in the Tyrol these last ten days. I love her, and I am not satisfied with myself. Perhaps I too shall fall short.

‘You have never loved your men?’ I asked her.

‘I loved them — but I have put them all in my pocket,’ she said, with just the faintest disappointment in her good humour. She shrugged her shoulders at my serious gaze.

I lay wondering if I too were going into Anita’s pocket, along with her purse and her perfume and the little sweets she loved. It would almost have been delicious to do so. A kind of voluptuousness urged me to let her have me, to let her put me in her pocket. It would be so nice. But I loved her: it would not be fair to her. I wanted to do more than give her pleasure.

Suddenly the door opened on my musing, and Anita came into my bedroom. Startled, I laughed in my very soul, and I adored her. She was so natural! She was dressed in a transparent lacy chemise, that was slipping over her shoulder, high boots, upon one of which her string-coloured stocking had fallen. And she wore an enormous hat, black, lined with white, and covered with a tremendous creamy-brown feather, that streamed like a flood of brownish foam, swaying lightly. It was an immense hat on top of her shamelessness, and the great, soft feather seemed to spill over, fall with a sudden gush, as she put back her head.

She looked at me, then went straight to the mirror.

‘How do you like my hat?’ she said.

She stood before the panel of looking-glass, conscious only of her hat, whose great feather-strands swung in a tide. Her bare shoulder glistened, and through the fine web of her chemise I could see all her body in warm silhouette, with golden reflections under the breasts and arms. The light ran in silver up her lifted arms, and the gold shadow stirred as she arranged her hat.

‘How do you like my hat?’ she repeated.

Then, as I did not answer, she turned to look at me. I was still lying on the bed. She must have seen that I had looked at her, instead of at her hat, for a quick darkness and a frown came into her eyes, cleared instantly, as she asked, in a slightly hard tone:

‘Don’t you like it?’

‘It’s rather splendid,’ I answered. ‘Where did it come from?’

‘From Berlin this morning — or last evening,’ she replied.

‘It’s a bit huge,’ I ventured.

She drew herself up.

‘Indeed not!’ she said, turning to the mirror.

I got up, dropped off my dressing-gown, put a silk hat quite correctly on my head, and then, naked save for a hat and a pair of gloves, I went forward to her.

‘How do you like my hat?’ I asked her.

She looked at me and went off into a fit of laughter. She dropped her hat on to a chair, and sank on to the bed, shaking with laughter. Every now and then she lifted her head, gave one look from her dark eyes, then buried her face in the pillows. I stood before her clad in my hat, feeling a good bit of a fool. She peeped up again.

‘You are lovely, you are lovely!’ she cried.

With a grave and dignified movement I prepared to remove the hat, saying:

‘And even then, I lack high-laced boots and one stocking.’

But she flew at me, kept the hat on my head, and kissed me.

‘Don’t take it off,’ she implored. ‘I love you for it.’

So I sat down gravely and unembarrassed on the bed.

‘But don’t you like my hat?’ I said in injured tones. ‘I bought it in London last month.’

She looked up at me comically, and went into peals of laughter.

‘Think,’ she cried, ‘if all those Englishmen in Piccadilly went like that!’

That amused even me.

At last I assured her her hat was adorable, and, much to my relief, I got rid of my silk and into a dressing-gown.

‘You *will* cover yourself up,’ she said reproachfully. ‘And you look so nice with nothing on — but a hat.’

‘It’s that old Apple I can’t digest,’ I said.

She was quite happy in her shift and her high boots. I lay looking at her beautiful legs.

‘How many more men have you done that to?’ I asked.

‘What?’ she answered.

‘Gone into their bedrooms clad in a wisp of mist, trying a new hat on?’

She leaned over to me and kissed me.

‘Not many,’ she said. ‘I’ve not been *quite* so familiar before, I don’t think.’

‘I suppose you’ve forgotten,’ said I. ‘However, it doesn’t matter.’ Perhaps the slight bitterness in my voice touched her. She said almost indignantly:

‘Do you think I want to flatter you and make you believe you are the first that ever I really — *really* —’

‘I don’t know,’ I replied. ‘Neither you nor I are so easily deluded.’

She looked at me peculiarly and steadily.

‘I know all the time,’ said I, ‘that I am pro tem., and that I shan’t even last as long as most.’

‘You are sorry for yourself?’ she mocked.

I shrugged my shoulders, looking into her eyes. She caused me a good deal of agony, but I didn’t give into her.

‘I shan’t commit suicide,’ I replied.

‘*On est mort pour si longtemps,*’ she said, suddenly dancing on the bed. I loved her. She had the courage to live, almost joyously.

‘When you think back over your affairs — they are numerous, though you are only thirty-one —’

‘Not numerous — only several — and you *do* underline the thirty-one —,’ she laughed.

‘But how do you feel, when you think of them?’ I asked.

She knitted her eyebrows quaintly, and there was a shadow, more puzzled than anything, on her face.

‘There is something nice in all of them,’ she said. ‘Men are really fearfully good,’ she sighed.

‘If only they weren’t all pocket-editions,’ I mocked.

She laughed, then began drawing the silk cord through the lace of her chemise, pensively. The round caps of her shoulders gleamed like old ivory: there was a faint brown stain towards the arm-pit.

‘No,’ she said, suddenly lifting her head and looking me calmly into the eyes, ‘I have nothing to be ashamed of — that is, — no, I have nothing to be ashamed of!’

‘I believe you,’ I said. ‘And I don’t suppose you’ve done anything that even *I* shouldn’t be able to swallow — have you?’

I felt rather plaintive with my question. She looked at me and shrugged her shoulders.

‘I know you haven’t,’ I preached. ‘All your affairs have been rather decent. They’ve meant more to the men than they have to you.’

The shadows of her breasts, fine globes, shone warm through the linen veil. She was thinking.

‘Shall I tell you,’ she asked, ‘one thing I did?’

‘If you like,’ I answered. ‘But let me get you a wrap.’ I kissed her shoulder. It had the same fine, delicious coldness of ivory.

‘No — yes, you may,’ she replied.

I brought her a Chinese thing of black silk with gorgeous embroidered dragons, green as flame, writhing upon it.

‘How white against that black silk you are,’ I said, kissing the half globe of her breast, through the linen.

‘Lie there,’ she commanded me. She sat in the middle of the bed, whilst I lay looking at her. She picked up the black silk tassel of my dressing-gown and began flattening it out like a daisy.

‘Gretchen!’ I said.

‘ “Marguerite with one petal”,’ she answered in French, laughing. ‘I am ashamed of it, so you must be nice with me —’

‘Have a cigarette!’ I said.

She puffed wistfully for a few moments.

‘You’ve got to hear it,’ she said.

‘Go on!’

‘I was staying in Dresden in quite a grand hotel; which I rather enjoy: ringing bells, dressing three times a day, feeling half a great lady, half a cocotte. Don’t be cross with me for saying it: look at me! The man was at a garrison a little way off. I’d have married him if I could —’

She shrugged her brown, handsome shoulders, and puffed out a plume of smoke.

‘It began to bore me after three days. I was always alone, looking at shops alone, going to the opera alone — where the beastly men got behind their wives’ backs to look at me. In the end I got cross with my poor man, though of course it wasn’t his fault, that he couldn’t come.’

She gave a little laugh as she took a draw at her cigarette.

‘The fourth morning I came downstairs — I was feeling fearfully good-looking and proud of myself. I know I had a sort of *cafe’ au lait* coat and skirt, very pale — and its fit was a *joy!*’

After a pause, she continued: ‘And a big black hat with a cloud of white ospreys. I nearly jumped when a man almost ran into me. O jeh! it was a young officer, just bursting with life, a splendid creature: the German aristocrat at his best. He wasn’t over tall, in his dark blue uniform, but simply firm with life. An electric shock went through me, it slipped down me like fire, when I looked into his eyes. O jeh ! they just flamed with consciousness of me — and they were just the same colour as the soft-blue reverses of his uniform. He looked at me — ha! — and then, he bowed, the sort of bow a woman enjoys like a caress.

‘ “*Verzeihung, gnädiges Fräulein!*”

‘I just inclined my head, and we went our ways. It felt as if something

mechanical shifted us, not our wills.

‘I was restless that day, I could stay nowhere. Something stirred inside my veins. I was drinking tea on the Brühler Terasse, watching the people go by like a sort of mechanical procession, and the broad Elbe as a stiller background, when he stood before me, saluting, and taking a seat, half apologetically, half devil-may-care. I was not nearly so much surprised at him, as at the mechanical parading people. And I could see he thought me a cocotte —’

She looked thoughtfully across the room, the past roused dangerously in her dark eyes.

‘But the game amused and excited me. He told me he had to go to a Court ball tonight — and then he said, in his nonchalant yet pleadingly passionate way:

‘ “And afterwards —?”

‘ “And afterwards —!” I repeated.

‘ “May I —?” he asked.

‘Then I told him the number of my room.

‘I dawdled to the hotel, and dressed for dinner, and talked to somebody sitting next to me, but I was an hour or two ahead, when he would come. I arranged my silver and brushes and things, and I had ordered a great bunch of lilies of the valley; they were in a black bowl. There were delicate pink silk curtains, and the carpet was a cold colour, nearly white, with a tawny pink and turquoise ravelled border, a Persian thing, I should imagine. I know I liked it. And didn’t that room feel fresh, full of expectation, like myself!

‘That last half-hour of waiting — so funny — I seemed to have no feeling, no consciousness. I lay in the dark, holding my nice pale blue gown of *crêpe de Chine* against my body for comfort. There was a fumble at the door, and I caught my breath! Quickly he came in, locked the door, and switched on all the lights. There he stood, the centre of everything, the light shining on his bright brown hair. He was holding something under his cloak. Now he came to me, and threw on me from out of his cloak a whole armful of red and pink roses. It was delicious! Some of them were cold, when they fell on me. He took off his cloak. I loved his figure in its blue uniform; and then, oh jeh! he picked me off the bed, the roses and all, and kissed me — *how* he kissed me!’

She paused at the recollection.

‘I could feel his mouth through my thin gown. Then, he went still and intense. He pulled off my *saut-de-lit*, and looked at me. He held me away from him, his mouth parted with wonder, and yet, as if the gods would envy him — wonder and adoration and pride! I liked his worship. Then he laid me on the bed again, and covered me up gently, and put my roses on the other side of me, a heap just near my hair, on the pillow.

‘Quite unashamed and not the least conscious of himself, he got out of his clothes. And he was adorable — so young, and rather spare, but with a *rich* body, that simply glowed with love of me. He stood looking at me, quite humbly; and I held out my hands to him.

‘All that night we loved each other. There were crushed, crumpled little rose-leaves on him when he sat up, almost like crimson blood! Oh, and he was fierce, and at the same time, tender!’

Anita’s lips trembled slightly, and she paused. Then, very slowly, she went on:

‘When I woke in the morning he was gone, and just a few passionate words on his dancing-card with a gold crown, on the little table beside me, imploring me to see him again in the Brühler Terasse in the afternoon. But I took the morning express to Berlin —’

We both were still. The river rustled far off in the morning.

‘And —?’ I said.

‘And I never saw him again.’

We were both still. She put her arms round her bright knee, and caressed it, lovingly, rather plaintively, with her mouth. The brilliant green dragons on her wrap seemed to be snarling at me.

‘And you regret him?’ I said at length.

‘No,’ she answered, scarcely heeding me. ‘I remember the way he unfastened his sword-belt and trappings from his loins, flung the whole with a jingle on the other bed —’

I was burning now with rage against Anita. Why should she love a man for the way he unbuckled his belt!

‘With him,’ she mused, ‘everything felt so inevitable.’

‘Even your never seeing him again,’ I retorted.

‘Yes!’ she said, quietly.

Still musing, dreaming, she continued to caress her own knees.

‘He said to me: “We are like the two halves of a walnut”.’ And she laughed slightly. ‘He said some lovely things to me — “Tonight, you’re an Answer”. And then: “Whichever bit of you I touch seems to startle me afresh with joy”. And he said he should never forget the velvety feel of my skin. — Lots of beautiful things he told me.’

Anita cast them over pathetically in her mind. I sat biting my finger with rage.

‘— And I made him have roses in his hair. He sat so still and good while I trimmed him up, and was quite shy. He had a figure nearly like yours —’

Which compliment was a last insult to me.

‘And he had a long gold chain, threaded with little emeralds, that he wound round and round my knees, binding me like a prisoner, never thinking.’

‘And you wish he had kept you prisoner,’ I said.

‘No,’ she answered. ‘He couldn’t!’

‘I see! You just preserve him as the standard by which you measure the amount of satisfaction you get from the rest of us.’

‘Yes,’ she said, quietly.

Then I knew she was liking to make me furious.

‘But I thought you were rather ashamed of the adventure?’ I said.

‘No,’ she answered, perversely.

She made me tired. One could never be on firm ground with her. Always, one was slipping and plunging on uncertainly. I lay still, watching the sunshine streaming white outside.

‘What are you thinking?’ she asked.

‘The waiter will smile when we go down for coffee.’

‘No — tell me!’

‘It is half past nine.’

She fingered the string of her shift. ‘What were you thinking?’ she asked, very low.

‘I was thinking, all you want, you get.’

‘In what way?’

‘In love.’

‘And what do I want?’

‘Sensation.’

‘Do I?’

‘Yes.’

She sat with her head drooped down.

‘Have a cigarette,’ I said. ‘And are you going to that place for sleighing today?’

‘Why do you say I only want sensation?’ she asked quietly.

‘Because it’s all you’ll take from a man. — You *won’t* have a cigarette?’

‘No thanks — and what else could I take —?’

I shrugged my shoulders.

‘Nothing, I suppose,’ I replied.

Still she picked pensively at her chemise string.

‘Up to now, you’ve missed nothing — you haven’t felt the lack of anything — in love,’ I said.

She waited awhile.

‘Oh yes, I have,’ she said gravely.

Hearing her say it, my heart stood still.

A CHAPEL AND A HAY HUT AMONG THE MOUNTAINS

I

IT is all very well trying to wander romantically in the Tyrol. Sadly I sit on the bed, my head and shoulders emerging from the enormous overbolster like a cherub from a cloud, writing out of sheer exasperation, while Anita lies on the other bed and is amused.

Two days ago it began to rain. When I think of it I wonder. The gutter of the heavens hangs over the Tyrolese Alps.

We set off with the iridescent cloud of romance ahead, leading us southwards from the Isar towards Italy. We haven't got far. And the iridescent cloud, turned into a column of endless water, still endures around the house.

I omit the pathos of our setting forth, in the dimmery-glimmery light of the Isar Valley, before breakfast-time, with blue chicory flowers open like wonder on either side the road. Neither will I describe our crawling at dinnertime along the foot of the mountains, the rain running down our necks from the flabby straw hats, and dripping cruelly into one's boots from the pent-house of our rucksacks. We entered ashamed into a wayside inn, where seven ruddy, joyous peasants, three of them handsome, made a bonfire of their hearts in honour of Anita, whilst I sat in a corner and dripped...

Yesterday I admit it was fine in the afternoon and evening. We made tea by a waterfall among yellow-dangling noli-me-tangere flowers, while an inquisitive lot of mountains poked their heads up to look, and a great green grasshopper, armoured like Ivanhoe, took a flying leap into eternity over a lovely, black-blue gentian. At least I saw him no more.

They had told us there was a footpath over the mountain, three and a half hours to Glashütte. There was a faint track, and a myriad of strawberries like ruddy stars below, and a few dark bilberries. We climbed one great steep slope, and scrambled down beyond, into a pine wood. There it was damp and dark and depressing. But one makes the best of things, when one sets out on foot. So we toiled on for an hour, traversing the side of a slope, black, wet, gloomy, looking through the fir-trees across the gulf at another slope, black and gloomy and forbidding, shutting us back. For two hours we slipped and struggled, and still

there we were, clamped between these two black slopes, listening to the water that ran uncannily, noisily along the bottom of the trap.

We grew silent and hot with exertion and the dark monotony of the struggle. A rucksack also has its moments of treachery, close friend though it seems. You are quite certain of a delicate and beautiful balance on a slippery tree-root; you take the leap; then the ironic rucksack gives you a pull from behind, and you are grovelling.

And the path *had* been a path. The side of the dark slope, steep as a roof, had innumerable little bogs where waters tried to ooze out and call themselves streams, and could not. Across these bogs went an old bed of fir-boughs, dancy and treacherous. So, there was a path! Suddenly there were no more fir-boughs, and one stood lost before the squalor of the slope. I wiped my brow.

‘You so soon lose your temper,’ said Anita. So I stood aside, and yielded her the lead.

She blundered into another little track lower down.

‘You *see!*’ she said, turning round.

I did not answer. She began to hum a little tune, because her path descended. We slipped and struggled. Then her path vanished into the loudly-snorting, chuckling stream, and did not emerge.

‘Well?’ I said.

‘But where is it?’ she said with vehemence and pathos.

‘You see even *your* road ends in nowhere,’ I said.

‘I *hate* you when you preach,’ she flashed. ‘Besides it *doesn’t* end in nowhere.’

‘At any rate,’ I said, ‘we can’t sleep on the end of it.’

I found another track, but I entered on it delicately, without triumph. We went in silence. And it vanished into the same loudly-snorting stream.

‘Oh, don’t look like that!’ cried Anita. So I followed the bedraggled tail of her skirts once more up the wet, dark opposition of the slope. We found another path, and once more we lost the scent in the overjoyed stream.

‘Perhaps we’re supposed to go across,’ I said meekly, as we stood beside the waters.

‘I — *why* did I take a damp match of a man like you!’ she cried. ‘One could scratch you for ever and you wouldn’t strike.’

I looked at her, wondering, and turned to the stream, which was cunningly bethinking itself. There were chunks of rock, and spouts and combs and rattles of sly water. So I put my raincoat over my rucksack and ventured over.

The opposite bank was very steep and high. We were swallowed in this black gorge, swallowed to the bottom, and gazing upwards I set off on all fours,

climbing with my raincoat over my rucksack, cloakwise, to leave me free. I scrambled and hauled and struggled.

And from below came shriek upon shriek of laughter. I reached the top, and looked down. I could see nothing, only the whirring of laughter came up.

‘What is it?’ I called, but the sound was lost amid the cackle of the waters. So I crawled over the edge and sat in the gloomy solitude, extinguished.

Directly I heard a shrill, frightened call:

‘Where are you?’

My heart exulted and melted at the same moment.

‘Come along,’ I cried, satisfied that there was one spot in this gloomy solitude to call to.

She arrived, scared with the steep climb, and the fear of loneliness in this place.

‘I might never have found you again,’ she said.

‘I don’t intend you should lose me,’ I said. So she sat down, and presently her head began to nod with laughter, and her bosom shook with laughter, and she was laughing wildly without me.

‘Well, what?’ I said.

‘You — you looked like a camel — with a hump — climbing up,’ she shrieked.

‘We’d better be moving,’ I said. She slipped and laughed and struggled. At last we came to a beautiful savage road. It was the bed of some stream that came no more this way, a mass of clear boulders leading up the slope through the gloom.

‘We are coming out now,’ said Anita, looking ahead. I also was quite sure of it. But after an hour of climbing, we were still in the bed of clear boulders, between dark trees, among the toes of the mountains.

Anita spied a hunter’s hut, made of bark, and she went to investigate. Night was coming on.

‘I can’t get in,’ she called to me, obscurely.

‘Then come,’ I said.

It was too wet and cold to sleep out of doors in the woods. But instead of coming, she stooped in the dark twilight for strawberries. I waited like the shadow of wrath. But she, unconcerned, careless and happy in her contrariety, gathered strawberries among the shadows.

‘We *must* find a place to sleep in,’ I said. And my utter insistence took effect.

She realized that I was lost among the mountains, as well as she, that night and the cold and the great dark slopes were close upon us, and we were of no avail, even being two, against the coldness and desolation of the mountains.

So in silence we scrambled upwards, hand in hand. Anita was sure a dozen times that we were coming out. At last even she got disheartened.

Then, in the darkness, we spied a hut beside a path among the thinning fir-trees.

‘It will be a woodman’s hut,’ she said.

‘A shrine,’ I answered.

I was right for once. It was a wooden hut just like a model, with a black old wreath hanging on the door. There was a click of the latch in the cold, watchful silence of the upper mountains, and we entered.

By the grey darkness coming in from outside we made out the tiny chapel, candles on the altar and a whole covering of ex-voto pictures on the walls, and four little praying-benches. It was all close and snug as a box.

Feeling quite safe, and exalted in this rare, upper shadow, I lit the candles, all. Point after point of flame flowed out on the night. There were six. Then I took off my hat and my rucksack, and rejoiced, my heart at home.

The walls of the chapel were covered close with naked little pictures, all coloured, painted by the peasants on wood, and framed with little frames. I glanced round, saw the cows and the horses on the green meadows, the men on their knees in their houses, and I was happy as if I had found myself among the angels.

‘What wonderful luck!’ I said to Anita.

‘But what are we going to do?’ she asked.

‘Sleep on the floor — between the praying-desks. There’s just room.’

‘But we can’t sleep on a wooden floor,’ she said.

‘What better can you find?’

‘A hay hut. There must be a hay hut somewhere near. *We can’t* sleep here.’

‘Oh yes,’ I said.

But I was bound to look at the little pictures. I climbed on to a bench. Anita stood in the open doorway like a disconsolate, eternal angel. The light of the six dusky tapers glimmered on her discontented mouth. Behind her, I could see tips of fir branches just illuminated, and then the night.

She turned and was gone like darkness into the darkness. I heard her boots upon the stones. Then I turned to the little pictures I loved. Perched upon the praying-desks, I looked at one, and then another. They were picture-writings that seemed like my own soul talking to me. They were really little pictures for God, because horses and cows and men and women and mountains, they are His own language. How should He read German and English and Russian, like a schoolmaster? The peasants could trust Him to understand their pictures: they were not so sure that He would concern Himself with their written script.

I was looking at a pale blue picture. That was a bedroom, where a woman lay in bed, and a baby lay in a cradle not far away. The bed was blue, and it seemed to be falling out of the picture, so it gave me a feeling of fear and insecurity. Also, as the distance receded, the bedstead got wider, uneasily. The woman lay looking straight at me, from under the huge, blue-striped overbolster. Her pink face was round like a penny doll's, with the same round stare. And the baby, like a pink-faced farthing doll, also stared roundly.

‘Maria hat geholfen E.G. — 1777.’

I looked at them. And I knew that I was the husband looking and wondering. G., the husband, did not appear himself. It was from the little picture on his retina that this picture was reproduced. He could not sum it up, and explain it, this vision of his wife suffering in childbirth, and then lying still and at peace with the baby in the cradle. He could not make head or tail of it. But at least he could represent it, and hang it up like a mirror before the eyes of God, giving the statement even if he could get no explanation. And he was satisfied. And so, perforce, was I, though my heart began to knock for knowledge.

The men never actually saw themselves unless in precarious conditions. When their lives were threatened, then they had a fearful flash of self-consciousness, which haunted them till they had represented it. They represented themselves in all kinds of ridiculous postures, at the moment when the accident occurred.

Joseph Rieck, for example, was in a toppling-backward attitude rather like a footballer giving a very high kick and losing his balance. But on his left ankle had fallen a great grey stone, that might have killed him, squashing out much blood, orange-coloured — or so it looked by the candle-light — whilst the Holy Mary stood above in a bolster-frame of clouds, holding up her hands in mild surprise.

‘Joseph Rieck
Gott sey Danck gasagt 1834.’

It was curious that he thanked God because a stone had fallen on his ankle. But perhaps the thanks were because it had not fallen on his head. Or perhaps because the ankle had got better, though it looked a nasty smash, according to the picture. It didn't occur to him to thank God that all the mountains of the Tyrol had not tumbled on him the first day he was born. It doesn't occur to any of us. We wait till a big stone falls on our ankle. Then we paint a vivid picture and say: ‘In the midst of life we are in death,’ and we thank God that we've

escaped. All kinds of men were saying: 'Gott sey Danck'; either because big stones had squashed them, or because trees had come down on them whilst they were felling, or else because they'd tumbled over cliffs, or got carried away in streams: all little events which caused them to ejaculate: 'God be thanked, I'm still alive'.

Then some of the women had picture prayers that were touching, because they were prayers for other people, for their children and not for themselves. In a sort of cell kneeled a woman, wearing a Catherine of Russia kind of dress, opposite a kneeling man in Vicar of Wakefield attire. Between them, on the stone wall, hung two long iron chains with iron rings dangling at the end. Above these, framed in an oval of bolster-clouds, Christ on the Cross, and above Him, a little Maria, short in stature, something like Queen Victoria, with a very blue cloth over her head, falling down her dumpy figure. She, the Holy Mother of heaven, looked distressed. The woman kneeling in the cell put up her hands, saying:

'O Mutter Gottes von Rerelmos, Ich bitte mach mir mein Kind von Gefangenschaft los mach im von Eissen und Bandten frey wanz des Gottliche Willen sey.

Susanna Grillen 1783.'

I suppose Herr Grillen knew that it was not the affair of the Mutter Gottes. Poor Susanna Grillen! It was natural and womanly in her to identify the powers that be with the eternal powers. What I can't see, is whether the boy had really done anything wrong, or whether he had merely transgressed some law of some duke or king or community. I suppose the poor thing did not know herself how to make the distinction. But evidently the father, knowing he was in temporal difficulty, was not very active in asking help of the eternal.

One must look up the history of the Tyrol for the 1783 period.

A few pictures were family utterances, but the voice which spoke was always the voice of the mother. Marie Schneeberger thanked God for healing her son. She kneeled on one side of the bedroom, with her three daughters behind her; Schneeberger kneeled facing her, with a space between them, and his one son behind him. The Holy Mary floated above the space of their thanks. The whole family united this time to bless the heavenly powers that the bad had not been worse. And, in the face of the divine power, the man was separate from the woman, the daughter from the son, the sister from the brother — one set on one side, one set on the other, separate before the eternal grace, or the eternal fear.

The last set of pictures thanked God for the salvation of property. One lady had six cows — all red ones — painted feeding on a meadow with rocks behind.

All the cows I have seen in these parts have been dun or buff coloured. But these are red. And the goodwife thanks God very sincerely for restoring to her that which was lost for five days, viz, her six cows and the little cow-girl Kate. The little girl did not appear in the picture nor in the thanks: she was only mentioned as having been lost along with the cows. I do not know what became of her. Cows can always eat grass. I suppose she milked her beasts, and perhaps cranberries were ripe. But five days was a long time for poor Kathel.

There were hundreds of cattle painted standing on meadows like a child's Noah's Ark toys arranged in groups: a group of red cows, a group of brown horses, a group of brown goats, a few grey sheep; as if they had all been summoned into their classes. Then Maria in her cloud-frame blessed them. But standing there so hieroglyphic, the animals had a symbolic power. They did not merely represent property. They were the wonderful animal life which man must take for food. Arrayed there in their numbers, they were almost frightening, as if they might overthrow us, like an army.

Only one woman had had an accident. She was seen falling downstairs, just landing at the bottom into her peaceful kitchen where the kitten lay asleep by the stove. The kitten slept on, but Mary in a blue mantle appeared through the ceiling, mildly shocked and deprecating.

Alone among all the women, the women who had suffered childbirth or had suffered through some child of their own, was this housewife who had fallen downstairs into the kitchen where the cat slept peacefully. Perhaps she had not any children. However that may be, her position was ignoble, as she bumped on the bottom stair.

There they all were, in their ex-voto pictures that I think the women had ordered and paid for, these peasants of the valley below, pictured in their fear. They lived under the mountains where always was fear. Sometimes they knew it to close on a man or a woman. Then there was no peace in the heart of this man till the fear had been pictured, till he was represented in the grip of terror, and till the picture had been offered to the Deity, the dread, unnamed Deity; whose might must be acknowledged, whilst in the same picture the milder divine succour was represented and named and thanked. Deepest of all things, among the mountain darkneses, was the ever-felt fear. First of all gods was the unknown god who crushed life at any moment, and threatened it always. His shadow was over the valleys. And a tacit acknowledgement and propitiation of Him were the ex-voto pictures, painted out of fear and offered to Him unnamed. Whilst upon the face of them all was Mary the divine Succour, She, who had suffered, and knew. And that which had suffered and known, had prevailed, and was openly thanked. But that which had neither known nor suffered, the dread

unnamed, which had aimed and missed by a little, this must be acknowledged covertly. For his own soul's sake, man must acknowledge his own fear, acknowledge the power beyond him.

Whilst I was reading the inscriptions high up on the wall, Anita came back. She stood below me in her weatherbeaten panama hat, looking up dissatisfied. The light fell warm on her face. She was discontented and excited.

'There's a gorgeous hay hut a little farther on,' she said.

'Hold me a candle a minute, will you?' I said.

'A great hay hut full of hay, in an open space. I climbed in—'

'Do you mind giving me a candle for a moment?'

'But no — come along —'

'I just want to read this — give me a candle.' In a silence of impatience, she handed me one of the tapers. I was reading a little inscription.

'Won't you come?' she said.

'We could sleep well here,' I said. 'It is so dry and secure.'

'Why!' she cried irritably. 'Come to the hay hut and see.'

'In one moment,' I said.

She turned away.

'Isn't this altar adorable!' she cried. 'Lovely little paper roses, and ornaments.'

She was fingering some artificial flowers, thinking to put them in her hair. I jumped down, saying I must finish reading my pictures in the morning. So I gathered the rucksack and examined the cash-box by the door. It was open and contained six kreutzers. I put in forty pfennigs, out of my poor pocket, to pay for the candles. Then I called Anita away from the altar trinkets, and we closed the door, and were out in the darkness of the mountains.

II

I resented being dragged out of my kapelle into the black and dismal night. In the chapel were candles and a boarded floor. And the streams in the mountains refuse to run anywhere but down the paths made by man. Anita said: 'You cannot imagine how lovely your chapel looked, as I came on it from the dark, its row of candles shining, and all the inside warm!'

'Then why on earth didn't you stay there?' I said.

'But think of sleeping in a hay hut,' she cried.

'I think a kapelle is much more soul stirring,' I insisted.

'But much harder to the bones,' she replied.

We struggled out on to a small meadow, between the mountain tops. Anita

called it a kettle. I presumed then that we had come in by the spout and should have to get out by the lid. At any rate, the black heads of the mountains poked up all round, and I felt tiny, like a beetle in a basin.

The hay hut stood big and dark and solid, on the clear grass.

‘I know just how to get in,’ said Anita, who was full of joy now we were going to be uncomfortably situated. ‘And now we must eat and drink tea.’

‘Where’s your water?’ I asked.

She listened intently. There was a light swishing of pine-trees on the mountain side.

‘I hear it,’ she said.

‘Somewhere down some horrid chasm,’ I answered.

‘I will go and look,’ she said.

‘Well,’ I answered, ‘you needn’t go hunting on a hill-side where there isn’t the faintest sign of a rut or watercourse.’

We spoke *sotto voce*, because of the darkness and the stillness. I led down the meadow, nearly breaking my neck over the steepest places. Now I was very thirsty, and we had only a very little schnapps.

‘There is sure to be water in the lowest place,’ I said. She followed me stealthily and with glee. Soon we squelched in a soft place.

‘A confounded marsh,’ I said.

‘But,’ she answered, ‘I hear it trickling.’

‘What’s the good of its trickling, if it’s nasty.’

‘You *are* consoling,’ she mocked.

‘I suppose,’ I said, ‘it rises here. So if we can get at the Quelle —’

I don’t know why ‘Quelle’ was necessary, instead of ‘source’, but it was. We paddled up the wet place, and in the darkness found where the water welled out. Having filled our can, and our boots by the way, we trudged back. I slipped and spilled half the water.

‘This,’ said Anita, ‘makes me perfectly happy.’

‘I wish it did me,’ I replied.

‘Don’t you like it, dear?’ she said, grieved.

My feet were soddened and stone cold. Everywhere was wet, and very dark.

‘It’s all right,’ I said. ‘But the chapel —’

So we sat at the back of the hut, where the wind didn’t blow so badly, and we made tea and ate sausage. The wind wafted the flame of the spirit lamp about, drops of rain began to fall. In the pitch dark, we lost our sausage and the packet of tea among the logs.

‘At last I’m perfectly happy,’ Anita repeated.

I found it irritating to hear her. I was looking for the tea. Before we had

finished this precious meal, the rain came pelting down. We hurried the things into our rucksacks and bundled into the hut. There was one little bread left for morning.

The hut was as big as a small cottage. It was made of logs laid on top of one another, but they had not been properly notched, so there were stripes of light all round the Egyptian darkness. And in a hay hut one dares not strike a light.

‘There’s the ladder to the big part,’ said Anita.

The front compartment was only one-quarter occupied with hay: the back compartment was full nearly to the ceiling. I climbed up the ladder, and felt the hay, putting my hand straight into a nasty messy place where the water had leaked in among the hay from the roof.

‘That’s all puddly, and the man’ll have his whole crop rotten if he doesn’t watch it,’ I said. ‘It’s a stinking badly-made hay hut.’

‘Listen to the rain,’ whispered Anita.

It was rattling on the roof furiously. Then, although there were slots of light, and a hundred horse-power draught tearing across the hut, I was glad to be inside the place.

‘Hay,’ I remarked after a while, ‘has two disadvantages. It tickles like all the creeping insects, and it is porous to the wind.’

‘“Porous to the wind”,’ mocked Anita.

‘It is,’ I said.

There was a great preparation. All valuables, such as hair-pins and garters and pfennigs and hellers and trinkets and collar studs, I carefully collected in my hat. It was pitch dark. I laid the hat somewhere. We took off our soddened shoes and stockings. Imagining they would somehow generate heat and dry better, I pushed the boots into the wall of hay. Then I hung up various draggled garments, hoping they would dry.

‘I insist on your tying up your head in a hanky, and on my spreading my waistcoat for a pillow-cloth,’ I said.

Anita humbly submitted. She was too full of joy to refuse. We had no blankets, nothing but a Burberry each.

‘A good large hole,’ I said, ‘as large as a double grave. And I only hope it won’t be one.’

‘If you catch cold,’ said Anita, ‘I shall hate you.’

‘And if *you* catch cold,’ I answered, ‘I s’ll nurse you tenderly.’

‘You dear!’ she exclaimed, affectionately.

We dug like two moles at the grave.

‘But see the mountains of hay that come out,’ she said.

‘All right,’ I said, ‘you can amuse your German fancy by putting them back

again, and sleeping underneath them.'

'How lovely!' she cried.

'And how much lovelier a German fat bolster would be.'

'Don't!' she implored. 'Don't spoil it.'

'I'd sleep in a lobster-pot to please you,' I said.

'I don't want you to please me, I want you to be pleased,' she insisted.

'God help me, I *will* be pleased,' I promised.

At first it was pretty warm in the trough, but every minute I had to rub my nose or my neck. This hay was the most insidious, persistent stuff. However much I tried to fend it off, one blade tickled my nostrils, a seed fell on my eyelid, a great stalk went down my neck. I wrestled with it like a Hercules, to keep it at bay, but in vain. And Anita merely laughed at my puffs and snorts.

'Evidently,' I said, 'you have not so sensitive a skin as I.'

'Oh no — not so delicate and fine,' she mocked.

'In fact, you can't have,' I said, sighing. But presently, she also sighed.

'Why,' she said, 'did you choose a waistcoat for a pillow? I've always got my face in one of the armholes.'

'You should arrange it better,' I said.

We sighed, and suffered the fiendish ticklings of the hay. Then I suppose we slept, in a sort of fitful fever.

I was awakened by the cracks of thunder. Anita clutched me. It was fearfully dark. Like a great whip clacking, the thunder cracked and spattered over our hut, seemed to rattle backwards and forwards from the mountain peaks.

'Something more for your money,' I groaned, too sleepy to live.

'Does thunder strike hay huts?' Anita asked.

'Yes, it makes a dead set at them — simply preys on hay huts, does thunder,' I declared.

'Now you needn't frighten me,' she reproached.

'Go to sleep,' I commanded.

But she wouldn't. There was Anita, there was thunder, and lightning, then a raging wind and cataracts of rain, and the slow, persistent, evil tickling of the hay seeds, all warring on my sleepiness. Occasionally I got a wink. Then it began to get cold, with the icy wind rushing in through the wide slots between the logs of the walls. The miserable hay couldn't even keep us warm. Through the chinks of it penetrated the vicious wind. And Anita would not consent to be buried, she would have her shoulders and head clear. So of course we had little protection. It grew colder and colder, miserably cold. I burrowed deeper and deeper. Then I felt Anita's bare feet, and they were icy.

'Woman,' I said, 'poke your wretched head in, and be covered up, and save

what modicum of animal heat you can generate.'

'I must breathe,' she answered crossly.

'The hay is quite well aerated,' I assured her.

At last it began to get dawn. Slots of grey came in place of slots of blue-black, all round the walls. There was twilight in the crate of a hay hut. I could distinguish the ladder and the rucksacks. Somewhere outside, I thought, drowsily, a boy was kicking a salmon tin down the street; till it struck me as curious, and I remembered it was only the sound of a cow-bell, or a goat-bell.

'It's morning,' said Anita.

'Call this morning?' I groaned.

'Are you warm, dear?'

'Baked.'

'Shall we get up?'

'Yes. At all events we can be one degree more wretched and cold.'

'I'm perfectly happy,' she persisted.

'You look it,' I said.

Immediately she was full of fear.

'Do I look horrid?' she asked.

She was huddled in her coat: her tousled hair was full of hay.

I pulled on my boots and clambered through the square opening.

'But come and look!' I exclaimed.

It had snowed terrifically during the night; not down at our level, but a little higher up. We were on a grassy place, about half a mile across, and all round us was the blackness of pine-woods, rising up. Then suddenly in the middle air, it changed, and great peaks of snow balanced, intensely white, in the pallid dawn. All the upper world around us belonged to the sky; it was wonderfully white, and fresh, and awake with joy. I felt I had only to run upwards through the pine-trees, then I could tread the slopes that were really sky-slopes, could walk up the sky.

'No!' cried Anita, in protest, her eyes filling with tears. 'No!'

We had quite a solemn moment together, all because of that snow. And the fearfully gentle way we talked and moved, as if we were the only two people God had made, touches me to remember.

'Look!' cried Anita.

I thought at least the Archangel Gabriel was standing beside me. But she only meant my breath, that froze while on the air. It reminded me.

'And the cold!' I groaned. 'It fairly reduces one to an ash.'

'Yes, my dear — we must drink tea,' she replied solicitously. I took the can for water. Everything looked so different in the morning. I could find the marsh,

but not the water bubbling up. Anita came to look for me. She was barefoot, because her boots were wet. Over the icy mown meadow she came, took the can from me, and found the spring. I went back and prepared breakfast. There was one little roll, some tea, and some schnapps. Anita came with water, balancing it gingerly. She had a distracted look.

‘Oh, how it hurts!’ she cried. ‘The ice-cold stubbles, like blunt icy needles, they did hurt!’

I looked at her bare feet and was furious with her.

‘No one,’ I cried, ‘but a lunatic, would dream of going down there barefoot under these conditions —’

‘“Under these conditions”,’ she mocked.

‘It ought to have hurt you *more*,’ I cried. ‘There is no crime but stupidity.’

‘“Crime but stupidity”,’ she echoed, laughing at me.

Then I went to look at her feet.

We ate the miserable knob of bread, and swallowed the tea. Then I bullied Anita into coming away. She performed a beautiful toilet that I called the ‘brave Tyrolese’, and at last we set out. The snow all above us was laughing with brightness. But the earth, and our boots, were soddened.

‘Isn’t it wonderful!’ cried Anita.

‘Yes — with feet of clay,’ I answered. ‘Wet, raw clay!’

Sobered, we squelched along an indefinite track. Then we spied a little, dirty farm-house, and saw an uncouth-looking man go into the cow-sheds.

‘This,’ I said, ‘is where the villains and robbers live.’

Then we saw the woman. She was wearing the blue linen trousers that peasant women wear at work.

‘Go carefully,’ said Anita. ‘Perhaps she hasn’t performed her toilet.’

‘I shouldn’t think she’s got one to perform,’ I replied.

It was a deadly lonely place, high up, cold, and dirty. Even in such a frost, it stank bravely beneath the snow peaks. But I went softly.

Seeing Anita, the woman came to the door. She was dressed in blue overalls, trousers and bodice, the trousers tight round the ankles, nearly like the old-fashioned leg-of-mutton sleeves. She was pale, seemed rather deadened, as if this continuous silence acted on her like a deadening drug. Anita asked her the way. She came out to show us, as there was no track, walking before us with strides like a man, but in a tired, deadened sort of way. Her figure was not ugly, and the nape of her neck was a woman’s, with soft wisps of hair. She pointed us the way down.

‘How old was she?’ I asked Anita, when she had gone back.

‘How old do you think?’ replied Anita.

‘Forty to forty-five.’

‘Thirty-two or three,’ answered Anita.

‘How do you know, any more than I?’

‘I am sure.’

I looked back. The woman was going up the steep path in a mechanical, lifeless way. The brilliant snow glistened up above, in peaks. The hollow green cup that formed the farm was utterly still. And the woman seemed infected with all this immobility and silence. It was as if she were gradually going dead, because she had no place there. And I saw the man at the cow-shed door. He was thin, sandy moustaches; and there was about him the same look of distance, as if silence, loneliness, and the mountains deadened him too.

We went down between the rocks, in a cleft where a river rushed. On every side, streams fell and bounded down. Some, coming over the sheer wall of a cliff drifted dreamily down like a roving rope of mist. All round, so white and candid, were the flowers they call Grass of Parnassus, looking up at us, and the regal black-blue gentian reared themselves here and there.

(The following ending was erased.)

We ran ourselves warm, but I felt as if the fires had gone out inside me. Down and down we raced the streams, that fell into beautiful green pools, and fell out again with a roar. Anita actually wanted to bathe, but I forbade it. So after two hours’ running downhill, we came out in the level valley at Glashütte. It was raining now, a thick dree rain. We pushed on to a little Gasthaus, that was really the home of a forester. There the stove was going, so we drank quantities of coffee, ale, and went to bed.

‘You spent the night in a hay hut,’ said I to Anita. ‘And the next day in bed.’

‘But I’ve done it, and I loved it,’ said she. ‘And besides, it’s raining.’

And it continued to pour. So we stayed in the house of the Jäger, who had a good, hard wife. She made us comfortable. But she kept her children in hand. They sat still and good, with their backs against the stove, and watched.

‘Your children are good,’ I said.

‘They are wild ones,’ she answered, shaking her head sternly. And I saw the boy’s black eyes sparkle.

‘The boy is like his father,’ I said. She looked at him.

‘Yes — yes! perhaps,’ she said shortly.

But there was a proud stiffness in her neck, nevertheless. The father was a mark-worthy man, evidently. He was away in the forests now for a day or two. But he had photos of himself everywhere, a good-looking, well-made, conceited

Jäger, who was photographed standing with his right foot on the shoulder of a slaughtered chamois. And soon his wife had thawed sufficiently to tell me: 'Yes, he had accompanied the Crown Prince to shoot his first chamois.' And finally, she recited to us this letter, from the same Crown Prince:

'Lieber Karl, Ich möchte wissen wie und wann die letzte Gemse geschossen worden —'

NEW EVE AND OLD ADAM

I

“After all,” she said, with a little laugh, “I can’t see it was so wonderful of you to hurry home to me, if you are so cross when you do come.”

“You would rather I stayed away?” he asked.

“I wouldn’t mind.”

“You would rather I had stayed a day or two in Paris — or a night or two.”

She burst into a jeering “pouf!” of laughter.

“You!” she cried. “You and Parisian Nights’ Entertainment! What a fool you would look.”

“Still,” he said, “I could try.”

“You *would!*” she mocked. “You would go dribbling up to a woman. ‘Please take me — my wife is so unkind to me!’”

He drank his tea in silence. They had been married a year. They had married quickly, for love. And during the last three months there had gone on almost continuously that battle between them which so many married people fight, without knowing why. Now it had begun again. He felt the physical sickness rising in him. Somewhere down in his belly the big, feverish pulse began to beat, where was the inflamed place caused by the conflict between them.

She was a beautiful woman of about thirty, fair, luxuriant, with proud shoulders and a face borne up by a fierce, native vitality. Her green eyes had a curiously puzzled contraction just now. She sat leaning on the table against the tea-tray, absorbed. It was as if she battled with herself in him. Her green dress reflected in the silver, against the red of the firelight. Leaning abstractedly forward, she pulled some primroses from the bowl, and threaded them at intervals in the plait which bound round her head in the peasant fashion. So, with her little starred fillet of flowers, there was something of the Gretchen about her. But her eyes retained the curious half-smile.

Suddenly her face lowered gloomily. She sank her beautiful arms, laying them on the table. Then she sat almost sullenly, as if she would not give in. He was looking away out of the window. With a quick movement she glanced down at her hands. She took off her wedding-ring, reached to the bowl for a long flower-stalk, and shook the ring glittering round and round upon it, regarding the spinning gold, and spinning it as if she would spurn it. Yet there was something

about her of a fretful, naughty child as she did so.

The man sat by the fire, tired, but tense. His body seemed so utterly still because of the tension in which it was held. His limbs, thin and vigorous, lay braced like a listening thing, always vivid for action, yet held perfectly still. His face was set and expressionless. The wife was all the time, in spite of herself, conscious of him, as if the cheek that was turned towards him had a sense which perceived him. They were both rendered elemental, like impersonal forces, by the battle and the suffering.

She rose and went to the window. Their flat was the fourth, the top storey of a large house. Above the high-ridged, handsome red roof opposite was an assembly of telegraph wires, a square, squat framework, towards which hosts of wires sped from four directions, arriving in darkly-stretched lines out of the white sky. High up, at a great height, a seagull sailed. There was a noise of traffic from the town beyond.

Then, from behind the ridge of the house-roof opposite a man climbed up into the tower of wires, belted himself amid the netted sky, and began to work, absorbedly. Another man, half-hidden by the roof-ridge, stretched up to him with a wire. The man in the sky reached down to receive it. The other, having delivered, sank out of sight. The solitary man worked absorbedly. Then he seemed drawn away from his task. He looked round almost furtively, from his lonely height, the space pressing on him. His eyes met those of the beautiful woman who stood in her afternoon-gown, with flowers in her hair, at the window.

“I like you,” she said, in her normal voice.

Her husband, in the room with her, looked round slowly and asked:

“Whom do you like?”

Receiving no answer, he resumed his tense stillness.

She remained watching at the window, above the small, quiet street of large houses. The man, suspended there in the sky, looked across at her and she at him. The city was far below. Her eyes and his met across the lofty space. Then, crouching together again into his forgetfulness, he hid himself in his work. He would not look again. Presently he climbed down, and the tower of wires was empty against the sky.

The woman glanced at the little park at the end of the clear, grey street. The diminished, dark-blue form of a soldier was seen passing between the green stretches of grass, his spurs giving the faintest glitter to his walk.

Then she turned hesitating from the window, as if drawn by her husband. He was sitting still motionless, and detached from her, hard; held absolutely away from her by his will. She wavered, then went and crouched on the hearth-rug at

his feet, laying her head on his knee.

“Don’t be horrid with me!” she pleaded, in a caressing, languid, impersonal voice. He shut his teeth hard, and his lips parted slightly with pain.

“You know you love me,” she continued, in the same heavy, sing-song way. He breathed hard, but kept still.

“Don’t you?” she said, slowly, and she put her arms round his waist, under his coat, drawing him to her. It was as if flames of fire were running under his skin.

“I have never denied it,” he said woodenly.

“Yes,” she pleaded, in the same heavy, toneless voice. “Yes. You are always trying to deny it.” She was rubbing her cheek against his knee, softly. Then she gave a little laugh, and shook her head. “But it’s no good.” She looked up at him. There was a curious light in his eyes, of subtle victory. “It’s no good, my love, is it?”

His heart ran hot. He knew it was no good trying to deny he loved her. But he saw her eyes, and his will remained set and hard. She looked away into the fire.

“You hate it that you have to love me,” she said, in a pensive voice through which the triumph flickered faintly. “You hate it that you love me — and it is petty and mean of you. You hate it that you had to hurry back to me from Paris.”

Her voice had become again quite impersonal, as if she were talking to herself.

“At any rate,” he said, “it is your triumph.”

She gave a sudden, bitter-contemptuous laugh.

“Ha!” she said. “What is triumph to me, you fool! You can have your triumph. I should be only too glad to give it you.”

“And I to take it.”

“Then take it,” she cried, in hostility. “I offer it you often enough.”

“But you never mean to part with it.”

“It is a lie. It is you, you, who are too paltry to take a woman. How often do I fling myself at you — ”

“Then don’t — don’t.”

“Ha! — and if I don’t — I get nothing out of you. Self! self! that is all you are.”

His face remained set and expressionless. She looked up at him. Suddenly she drew him to her again, and hid her face against him.

“Don’t kick me off, Pietro, when I come to you,” she pleaded.

“You *don’t* come to me,” he answered stubbornly.

She lifted her head a few inches away from him and seemed to listen, or to think.

“What do I do, then?” she asked, for the first time quietly.

“You treat me as if I were a piece of cake, for you to eat when you wanted.”

She rose from him with a mocking cry of scorn, that yet had something hollow in its sound.

“Treat you like a piece of cake, do I!” she cried. “I, who have done all I have for you!”

There was a knock, and the maid entered with a telegram. He tore it open.

“No answer,” he said, and the maid softly closed the door.

“I suppose it is for you,” he said, bitingly, rising and handing her the slip of paper. She read it, laughed, then read it again, aloud:

“Meet me Marble Arch 7.30 — theatre — Richard.” Who is Richard?” she asked, looking at her husband rather interested. He shook his head.

“Nobody of mine,” he said. “Who is he?”

“I haven’t the faintest notion,” she said, flippantly.

“But,” and his eyes went bullying, “you *must* know.”

She suddenly became quiet, and jeering, took up his challenge.

“Why must I know?” she asked.

“Because it isn’t for me, therefore it must be for you.”

“And couldn’t it be for anybody else?” she sneered.

“Moest, 14 Merrilies Street,” he read, decisively.

For a second she was puzzled into earnestness.

“Pah, you fool,” she said, turning aside. “Think of your own friends,” and she flung the telegram away.

“It is not for me,” he said, stiffly and finally.

“Then it is for the man in the moon — I should think *his* name is Moest,” she added, with a pouf of laughter against him.

“Do you mean to say you know nothing about it?” he asked.

“Do you mean to say,” she mocked, mouthing the words, and sneering; “Yes, I do mean to say, poor little man.”

He suddenly went hard with disgust.

“Then I simply don’t believe you,” he said coldly.

“Oh — don’t you believe me!” she jeered, mocking the touch of sententiousness in his voice. “What a calamity. The poor man doesn’t believe!”

“It couldn’t possibly be any acquaintance of mine,” he said slowly.

“Then hold your tongue!” she cried harshly. “I’ve heard enough of it.”

He was silent, and soon she went out of the room. In a few minutes he heard her in the drawing-room, improvising furiously. It was a sound that maddened him: something yearning, yearning, striving, and something perverse, that counteracted the yearning. Her music was always working up towards a certain culmination, but never reaching it, falling away in a jangle. How he hated it. He

lit a cigarette, and went across to the sideboard for a whisky and soda. Then she began to sing. She had a good voice, but she could not keep time. As a rule it made his heart warm with tenderness for her, hearing her ramble through the songs in her own fashion, making Brahms sound so different by altering his time. But to-day he hated her for it. Why the devil couldn't she submit to the natural laws of the stuff!

In about fifteen minutes she entered, laughing. She laughed as she closed the door, and as she came to him where he sat.

"Oh," she said, "you silly thing, you silly thing! Aren't you a stupid clown?"

She crouched between his knees and put her arms round him. She was smiling into his face, her green eyes looking into his, were bright and wide. But somewhere in them, as he looked back, was a little twist that could not come loose to him, a little cast, that was like an aversion from him, a strain of hate for him. The hot waves of blood flushed over his body, and his heart seemed to dissolve under her caresses. But at last, after many months, he knew her well enough. He knew that curious little strain in her eyes, which was waiting for him to submit to her, and then would spurn him again. He resisted her while ever it was there.

"Why don't you let yourself love me?" she asked, pleading, but a touch of mockery in her voice. His jaw set hard.

"Is it because you are afraid?"

He heard the slight sneer.

"Of what?" he asked.

"Afraid to trust yourself?"

There was silence. It made him furious that she could sit there caressing him and yet sneer at him.

"What *have* I done with myself?" he asked.

"Carefully saved yourself from giving all to me, for fear you might lose something."

"Why should I lose anything?" he asked.

And they were both silent. She rose at last and went away from him to get a cigarette. The silver box flashed red with firelight in her hands. She struck a match, bungled, threw the stick aside, lit another.

"What did you come running back for?" she asked, insolently, talking with half-shut lips because of the cigarette. "I told you I wanted peace. I've had none for a year. And for the last three months you've done nothing but try to destroy me."

"You have not gone frail on it," he answered sarcastically.

"Nevertheless," she said, "I am ill inside me. I am sick of you — sick. You

make an eternal demand, and you give nothing back. You leave one empty.” She puffed the cigarette in feminine fashion, then suddenly she struck her forehead with a wild gesture. “I have a ghastly, empty feeling in my head,” she said. “I feel I simply *must* have rest — I must.”

The rage went through his veins like flame.

“From your labours?” he asked, sarcastically, suppressing himself.

“From you — from *you*?” she cried, thrusting forward her head at him. “You, who use a woman’s soul up, with your rotten life. I suppose it is partly your health, and you can’t help it,” she added, more mildly. “But I simply can’t stick it — I simply can’t, and that is all.”

She shook her cigarette carelessly in the direction of the fire. The ash fell on the beautiful Asiatic rug. She glanced at it, but did not trouble. He sat, hard with rage.

“May I ask how I use you up, as you say?” he asked.

She was silent a moment, trying to get her feeling into words. Then she shook her hand at him passionately, and took the cigarette from her mouth.

“By — by following me about — by not leaving me *alone*. You give me no peace — *I* don’t know what you do, but it is something ghastly.”

Again the hard stroke of rage went down his mind.

“It is very vague,” he said.

“I know,” she cried. “I can’t put it into words — but there it is. You — you don’t love. I pour myself out to you, and then — there’s nothing there — you simply aren’t there.”

He was silent for some time. His jaw set hard with fury and hate.

“We have come to the incomprehensible,” he said. “And now, what about Richard?”

It had grown nearly dark in the room. She sat silent for a moment. Then she took the cigarette from her mouth and looked at it.

“I’m going to meet him,” her voice, mocking, answered out of the twilight.

His head went molten, and he could scarcely breathe.

“Who is he?” he asked, though he did not believe the affair to be anything at all, even if there were a Richard.

“I’ll introduce him to you when I know him a little better,” she said. He waited.

“But who is he?”

“I tell you, I’ll introduce him to you later.”

There was a pause.

“Shall I come with you?”

“It would be like you,” she answered, with a sneer.

The maid came in, softly, to draw the curtains and turn on the light. The husband and wife sat silent.

"I suppose," he said, when the door was closed again, "you are wanting a Richard for a rest?"

She took his sarcasm simply as a statement.

"I am," she said. "A simple, warm man who would love me without all these reservation and difficulties. That is just what I do want."

"Well, you have your own independence," he said.

"Ha," she laughed. "You needn't tell me that. It would take more than you to rob me of my independence."

"I meant your own income," he answered quietly, while his heart was plunging with bitterness and rage.

"Well," she said, "I will go and dress."

He remained without moving, in his chair. The pain of this was almost too much. For some moments the great, inflamed pulse struck through his body. It died gradually down, and he went dull. He had not wanted to separate from her at this point of their union; they would probably, if they parted in such a crisis, never come together again. But if she insisted, well then, it would have to be. He would go away for a month. He could easily make business in Italy. And when he came back, they could patch up some sort of domestic arrangement, as most other folk had to do.

He felt full and heavy inside, and without the energy for anything. The thought of having to pack and take a train to Milan appalled him; it would mean such an effort of will. But it would have to be done, and so he must do it. It was no use his waiting at home. He might stay in town a night, at his brother-in-law's, and go away the next day. It were better to give her a little time to come to herself. She was really impulsive. And he did not really want to go away from her.

He was still sitting thinking, when she came downstairs. She was in costume and furs and toque. There was a radiant, half-wistful, half-perverse look about her. She was a beautiful woman, her bright, fair face set among the black furs.

"Will you give me some money?" she said. "There isn't any."

He took two sovereigns, which she put in her little black purse. She would go without a word of reconciliation. It made his heart set hard again.

"You would like me to go away for a moment?" he said, calmly.

"Yes," she answered, stubbornly.

"All right, then, I will. I must stop in town for to-morrow, but I will sleep at Edmund's."

"You could do that, couldn't you?" she said, accepting his suggestion, a little

bit hesitating.

“If you want me to.”

“I’m so *tired!*” she lamented.

But there was exasperation and hate in the last word, too.

“Very well,” he answered.

She finished buttoning her glove.

“You’ll go, then?” she said suddenly, brightly, turning to depart. “Good-bye.”

He hated her for the flippant insult of her leave-taking.

“I shall be at Edmund’s to-morrow,” he said.

“You will write to me from Italy, won’t you?”

He would not answer the unnecessary question.

“Have you taken the dead primroses out of your hair?” he asked.

“I haven’t,” she said.

And she unpinned her hat.

“Richard *would* think me cracked,” she said, picking out the crumpled, creamy fragments. She strewed the withered flowers carelessly on the table, set her hat straight.

“Do you *want* me to go?” he asked, again, rather yearning.

She knitted her brows. It irked her to resist the appeal. Yet she had in her breast a hard, repellent feeling for him. She had loved him, too. She had loved him dearly. And — he had not seemed to realise her. So that now she *did* want to be free of him for a while. Yet the love, the passion she had had for him clung about her. But she did want, first and primarily, to be free of him again.

“Yes,” she said, half pleading.

“Very well,” he answered.

She came across to him, and put her arms round his neck. Her hatpin caught his head, but he moved, and she did not notice.

“You don’t mind very much, do you, my love?” she said caressingly.

“I mind all the world, and all I am,” he said.

She rose from him, fretted, miserable, and yet determined.

“I *must* have some rest,” she repeated.

He knew that cry. She had had it, on occasions, for two months now. He had cursed her, and refused either to go away or to let her go. Now he knew it was no use.

“All right,” he said. “Go and get it from Richard.”

“Yes.” She hesitated. “Good-bye,” she called, and was gone.

He heard her cab whirr away. He had no idea whither she was gone — but probably to Madge, her friend.

He went upstairs to pack. Their bedroom made him suffer. She used to say, at

first, that she would give up anything rather than her sleeping with him. And still they were always together. A kind of blind helplessness drove them to one another, even when, after he had taken her, they only felt more apart than ever. It had seemed to her that he had been mechanical and barren with her. She felt a horrible feeling of aversion from him, inside her, even while physically she still desired him. His body had always a kind of fascination for her. But had hers for him? He seemed, often, just to have served her, or to have obeyed some impersonal instinct for which she was the only outlet, in his loving her. So at last she rose against him, to cast him off. He seemed to follow her so, to draw her life into his. It made her feel she would go mad. For he seemed to do it just blindly, without having any notion of her herself. It was as if she were sucked out of herself by some non-human force. As for him, he seemed only like an instrument for his work, his business, not like a person at all. Sometimes she thought he was a big fountain-pen which was always sucking at her blood for ink.

He could not understand anything of this. He loved her — he could not bear to be away from her. He tried to realise her and to give her what she wanted. But he could not understand. He could not understand her accusations against him. Physically, he knew, she loved him, or had loved him, and was satisfied by him. He also knew that she would have loved another man nearly as well. And for the rest, he was only himself. He could not understand what she said about his using her and giving her nothing in return. Perhaps he did not think of her, as a separate person from himself, sufficiently. But then he did not see, he could not see that she had any real personal life, separate from himself. He tried to think of her in every possible way, and to give her what she wanted. But it was no good; she was never at peace. And lately there had been growing a breach between them. They had never come together without his realising it, afterwards. Now he must submit, and go away.

And her quilted dressing-gown — it was a little bit torn, like most of her things — and her pearl-backed mirror, with one of the pieces of pearl missing — all her untidy, flimsy, lovable things hurt him as he went about the bedroom, and made his heart go hard with hate, in the midst of his love.

II

Instead of going to his brother-in-law's, he went to an hotel for the night. It was not till he stood in the lift, with the attendant at his side, that he began to realise that he was only a mile or so away from his own home, and yet farther away than any miles could make him. It was about nine o'clock. He hated his

bedroom. It was comfortable, and not ostentatious; its only fault was the neutrality necessary to an hotel apartment. He looked round. There was one semi-erotic Florentine picture of a lady with cat's eyes, over the bed. It was not bad. The only other ornament on the walls was the notice of hours and prices of meals and rooms. The couch sat correctly before the correct little table, on which the writing-sachet and ink-stand stood mechanically. Down below, the quiet street was half illuminated, the people passed sparsely, like stunted shadows. And of all times of the night, it was a quarter-past nine. He thought he would go to bed. Then he looked at the white-and-glazed doors which shut him off from the bath. He would bath, to pass the time away. In the bath-closet everything was so comfortable and white and warm — too warm; the level, unvarying heat of the atmosphere, from which there was no escape anywhere, seemed so hideously hotel-like; this central-heating forced a unity into the great building, making it more than ever like an enormous box with incubating cells. He loathed it. But at any rate the bath-closet was human, white and business-like and luxurious.

He was trying, with the voluptuous warm water, and the exciting thrill of the shower-bath, to bring back the life into his dazed body. Since she had begun to hate him, he had gradually lost that physical pride and pleasure in his own physique which the first months of married life had given him. His body had gone meaningless to him again, almost as if it were not there. It had wakened up, there had been the physical glow and satisfaction about his movements of a creature which rejoices in itself; a glow which comes on a man who loves and is loved passionately and successfully. Now this was going again. All the life was accumulating in his mental consciousness, and his body felt like a piece of waste. He was not aware of this. It was instinct which made him want to bathe. But that, too, was a failure. He went under the shower-spray with his mind occupied by business, or some care of affairs, taking the tingling water almost without knowing it, stepping out mechanically, as a man going through a barren routine. He was dry again, and looking out of the window, without having experienced anything during the last hour.

Then he remembered that she did not know his address. He scribbled a note and rang to have it posted.

As soon as he had turned out the light, and there was nothing left for his mental consciousness to flourish amongst, it dropped, and it was dark inside him as without. It was his blood, and the elemental male in it, that now rose from him; unknown instincts suffocated him, and he could not bear it, that he was shut in this great, warm building. He wanted to be outside, with space springing from him. But, again, the reasonable being in him knew it was ridiculous, and he remained staring at the dark, having the horrible sensation of a roof low down

over him; whilst that dark, unknown being, which lived below all his consciousness in the eternal gloom of his blood, heaved and raged blindly against him.

It was not his thoughts that represented him. They spun like straws or the iridescence of oil on a dark stream. He thought of her, sketchily, spending an evening of light amusement with the symbolical Richard. That did not mean much to him. He did not really speculate about Richard. He had the dark, powerful sense of her, how she wanted to get away from him and from the deep, underneath intimacy which had gradually come between them, back to the easy, everyday life where one knows nothing of the underneath, so that it takes its way apart from the consciousness. She did not want to have the deeper part of herself in direct contact with or under the influence of any other intrinsic being. She wanted, in the deepest sense, to be free of him. She could not bear the close, basic intimacy into which she had been drawn. She wanted her life for herself. It was true, her strongest desire had been previously to know the contact through the whole of her being, down to the very bottom. Now it troubled her. She wanted to disengage his roots. Above, in the open, she would live. But she must live perfectly free of herself, and not, at her source, be connected with anybody. She was using this symbolical Richard as a spade to dig him away from her. And he felt like a thing whose roots are all straining on their hold, and whose elemental life, that blind source, surges backwards and forwards darkly, in a chaos, like something which is threatened with spilling out of its own vessel.

This tremendous swaying of the most elemental part of him continued through the hours, accomplishing his being, whilst superficially he thought of the journey, of the Italian he would speak, how he had left his coat in the train, and the rascally official interpreter had tried to give him twenty lire for a sovereign — how the man in the hat-shop in the Strand had given him the wrong change — of the new shape in hats, and the new felt — and so on. Underneath it all, like the sea under a pleasure pier, his elemental, physical soul was heaving in great waves through his blood and his tissue, the sob, the silent lift, the slightly-washing fall away again. So his blood, out of whose darkness everything rose, being moved to its depth by her revulsion, heaved and swung towards its own rest, surging blindly to its own re-settling.

Without knowing it, he suffered that night almost more than he had ever suffered during his life. But it was all below his consciousness. It was his life itself at storm, not his mind and his will engaged at all.

In the morning he got up, thin and quiet, without much movement anywhere, only with some of the clearing afterstorm. His body felt like a clean, empty shell. His mind was limpidly clear. He went through the business of the toilet with a

certain accuracy, and at breakfast, in the restaurant, there was about him that air of neutral correctness which makes men seem so unreal.

At lunch, there was a telegram for him. It was like her to telegraph.

“Come to tea, my dear love.”

As he read it, there was a great heave of resistance in him. But then he faltered. With his consciousness, he remembered how impulsive and eager she was when she dashed off her telegram, and he relaxed. It went without saying that he would go.

III

When he stood in the lift going up to his own flat, he was almost blind with the hurt of it all. They had loved each other so much in his first home. The parlour-maid opened to him, and he smiled at her affectionately. In the golden-brown and cream-coloured hall — Paula would have nothing heavy or sombre about her — a bush of rose-coloured azaleas shone, and a little tub of lilies twinkled naïvely.

She did not come out to meet him.

“Tea is in the drawing-room,” the maid said, and he went in while she was hanging up his coat. It was a big room, with a sense of space, and a spread of whity carpet almost the colour of unpolished marble — and grey and pink border; of pink roses on big white cushions, pretty Dresden china, and deep chintz-covered chairs and sofas which looked as if they were used freely. It was a room where one could roll in soft, fresh-comfort, a room which had not much breakable in it, and which seemed, in the dusky spring evening, fuller of light than the streets outside.

Paula rose, looking queenly and rather radiant, as she held out her hand. A young man whom Peter scarcely noticed rose on the other side of the hearth.

“I expected you an hour ago,” she said, looking into her husband’s eyes. But though she looked at him, she did not see him. And he sank his head.

“This is another Moest,” she said, presenting the stranger. “He knows Richard, too.”

The young man, a German of about thirty, with a clean-shaven æsthetic face, long black hair brushed back a little wearily or bewildered from his brow, and inclined to fall in an odd loose strand again, so that he nervously put it back with his fine hand, looked at Moest and bowed. He had a finely-cut face, but his dark-blue eyes were strained, as if he did not quite know where he was. He sat down again, and his pleasant figure took a self-conscious attitude, of a man whose business it was to say things that should be listened to. He was not conceited or

affected — naturally sensitive and rather naïve; but he could only move in an atmosphere of literature and literary ideas; yet he seemed to know there was something else, vaguely, and he felt rather at a loss. He waited for the conversation to move his way, as, inert, an insect waits for the sun to set it flying.

“Another Moest,” Paula was pronouncing emphatically. “Actually another Moest, of whom we have never heard, and under the same roof with us.”

The stranger laughed, his lips moving nervously over his teeth.

“You are in this house?” Peter asked, surprised.

The young man shifted in his chair, dropped his head, looked up again.

“Yes,” he said, meeting Moest’s eyes as if he were somewhat dazzled. “I am staying with the Lauriers, on the second floor.”

He spoke English slowly, with a quaint, musical quality in his voice, and a certain rhythmic enunciation.

“I see; and the telegram was for you?” said the host.

“Yes,” replied the stranger, with a nervous little laugh.

“My husband,” broke in Paula, evidently repeating to the German what she had said before, for Peter’s benefit this time, “was quite convinced I had an *affaire*” — she pronounced it in the French fashion — “with this terrible Richard.”

The German gave his little laugh, and moved, painfully self-conscious, in his chair.

“Yes,” he said, glancing at Moest.

“Did you spend a night of virtuous indignation?” Paula laughed to her husband, “imagining my perfidy?”

“I did not,” said her husband. “Were you at Madge’s?”

“No,” she said. Then, turning to her guest: “Who is Richard, Mr. Moest?”

“Richard,” began the German, word by word, “is my cousin.” He glanced quickly at Paula, to see if he were understood. She rustled her skirts, and arranged herself comfortably, lying, or almost squatting, on the sofa by the fire. “He lives in Hampstead.”

“And what is he like?” she asked, with eager interest.

The German gave his little laugh. Then he moved his fingers across his brow, in his dazed fashion. Then he looked, with his beautiful blue eyes, at his beautiful hostess.

“I — ” He laughed again nervously. “He is a man whose parts — are not very much — very well known to me. You see,” he broke forth, and it was evident he was now conversing to an imaginary audience — “I cannot easily express myself in English. I — I never have talked it. I shall speak, because I know nothing of

modern England, a kind of Renaissance English.”

“How lovely!” cried Paula. “But if you would rather, speak German. We shall understand sufficiently.”

“I would rather hear some Renaissance English,” said Moest.

Paula was quite happy with the new stranger. She listened to descriptions of Richard, shifting animatedly on her sofa. She wore a new dress, of a rich red-tile colour, glossy and long and soft, and she had threaded daisies, like buttons, in the braided plait of her hair. Her husband hated her for these familiarities. But she was beautiful too, and warm-hearted. Only, through all her warmth and kindness, lay, he said, at the bottom, an almost feline selfishness, a coldness.

She was playing to the stranger — nay, she was not playing, she was really occupied by him. The young man was the favourite disciple of the most famous present-day German poet and *Meister*. He himself was occupied in translating Shakespeare. Having been always a poetic disciple, he had never come into touch with life save through literature, and for him, since he was a rather fine-hearted young man, with a human need to live, this was a tragedy. Paula was not long in discovering what ailed him, and she was eager to come to his rescue.

It pleased her, nevertheless, to have her husband sitting by, watching her. She forgot to give tea to anyone. Moest and the German both helped themselves, and the former attended also to his wife’s cup. He sat rather in the background, listening, and waiting. She had made a fool of him with her talk to this stranger of “Richard”; lightly and flippantly she had made a fool of him. He minded, but was used to it. Now she had absorbed herself in this dazed, starved, literature-bewildered young German, who was, moreover, really lovable, evidently a gentleman. And she was seeing in him her mission — ”just as”, said Moest bitterly to himself, “she saw her mission in me, a year ago. She is no woman. She’s got a big heart for everybody, but it must be like a common-room; she’s got no private, sacred heart, except perhaps for herself, where there’s no room for a man in it.”

At length the stranger rose to go, promising to come again.

“Isn’t he adorable?” cried Paula, as her husband returned to the drawing-room. “I think he is simply adorable.”

“Yes!” said Moest.

“He called this morning to ask about the telegram. But, poor devil, isn’t it a shame what they’ve done to him?”

“What who have done to him?” her husband asked coldly, jealous.

“Those literary creatures. They take a young fellow like that, and stick him up among the literary gods, like a mantelpiece ornament, and there he has to sit, being a minor ornament, while all his youth is gone. It is criminal.”

“He should get off the mantelpiece, then,” said Moest.

But inside him his heart was black with rage against her. What had she, after all, to do with this young man, when he himself was being smashed up by her? He loathed her pity and her kindness, which was like a charitable institution. There was no core to the woman. She was full of generosity and bigness and kindness, but there was no heart in her, no security, no place for one single man. He began to understand now sirens and sphinxes and the other Greek fabulous female things. They had not been created by fancy, but out of bitter necessity of the man’s human heart to express itself.

“Ha!” she laughed, half contemptuous. “Did *you* get off your miserable, starved isolation by yourself? — you didn’t. You had to be fetched down, and I had to do it.”

“Out of your usual charity,” he said.

“But you can sneer at another man’s difficulties,” she said.

“Your name ought to be Panacea, not Paula,” he replied.

He felt furious and dead against her. He could even look at her without the tenderness coming. And he was glad. He hated her. She seemed unaware. Very well; let her be so.

“Oh, but he makes me so miserable, to see him!” she cried. “Self-conscious, can’t get into contact with anybody, living a false literary life like a man who takes poetry as a drug. — One *ought* to help him.”

She was really earnest and distressed.

“Out of the frying-pan into the fire,” he said.

“I’d rather be in the fire any day, than in a frying-pan,” she said, abstractedly, with a little shudder. She never troubled to see the meaning of her husband’s sarcasms.

They remained silent. The maid came in for the tray, and to ask him if he would be in to dinner. He waited for his wife to answer. She sat with her chin in her hands, brooding over the young German, and did not hear. The rage flashed up in his heart. He would have liked to smash her out of this false absorption.

“No,” he said to the maid. “I think not. Are you at home for dinner, Paula?”

“Yes,” she said.

And he knew by her tone, easy and abstracted, that she intended him to stay, too. But she did not trouble to say anything.

At last, after some time, she asked:

“What did you do?”

“Nothing — went to bed early,” he replied.

“Did you sleep well?”

“Yes, thank you.”

And he recognised the ludicrous civilities of married people, and he wanted to go. She was silent for a time. Then she asked, and her voice had gone still and grave:

“Why don’t you ask me what I did?”

“Because I don’t care — you just went to somebody’s for dinner.”

“Why don’t you care what I do? Isn’t it your place to care?”

“About the things you do to spite me? — no!”

“Ha!” she mocked. “I did nothing to spite you. I was in deadly earnest.”

“Even with your Richard?”

“Yes,” she cried. “There *might* have been a Richard. What did you care!”

“In that case you’d have been a liar and worse, so why should I care about you then?”

“You *don’t* care about me,” she said, sullenly.

“You say what you please,” he answered.

She was silent for some time.

“And did you do absolutely nothing last night?” she asked.

“I had a bath and went to bed.”

Then she pondered.

“No,” she said, “you don’t care for me.”

He did not trouble to answer. Softly, a little china clock rang six.

“I shall go to Italy in the morning,” he said.

“Yes.”

“And,” he said, slowly, forcing the words out, “I shall stay at the Aquila Nera at Milan — you know my address.”

“Yes,” she answered.

“I shall be away about a month. Meanwhile you can rest.”

“Yes,” she said, in her throat, with a little contempt of him and his stiffness. He, in spite of himself, was breathing heavily. He knew that this parting was the real separation of their souls, marked the point beyond which they could go no farther, but accepted the marriage as a comparative failure. And he had built all his life on his marriage. She accused him of not loving her. He gripped the arms of his chair. Was there something in it? Did he only want the attributes which went along with her, the peace of heart which a man has in living to one woman, even if the love between them be not complete; the singleness and unity in his life that made it easy; the fixed establishment of himself as a married man with a home; the feeling that he belonged somewhere, that one woman existed — not was paid but *existed* — really to take care of him; was it these things he wanted, and not her? But he wanted her for these purposes — her, and nobody else. But was that not enough for her? Perhaps he wronged her — it was possible. What

she said against him was in earnest. And what she said in earnest he had to believe, in the long run, since it was the utterance of her being. He felt miserable and tired.

When he looked at her, across the gathering twilight of the room, she was staring into the fire and biting her finger-nail, restlessly, restlessly, without knowing. And all his limbs went suddenly weak, as he realised that she suffered too, that something was gnawing at her. Something in the look of her, the crouching, dogged, wondering look made him faint with tenderness for her.

“Don’t bite your finger-nails,” he said quietly, and, obediently, she took her hand from her mouth. His heart was beating quickly. He could feel the atmosphere of the room changing. It had stood aloof, the room, like something placed round him, like a great box. Now everything got softer, as if it partook of the atmosphere, of which he partook himself, and they were all one.

His mind reverted to her accusations, and his heart beat like a caged thing against what he could not understand. She said he did not love her. But he knew that in his way, he did. In his way — but was his way wrong? His way was himself, he thought, struggling. Was there something wrong, something missing in his nature, that he could not love? He struggled, as if he were in a mesh, and could not get out. He did not want to believe that he was deficient in his nature. Wherein was he deficient? It was nothing physical. She said he would not come out of himself, that he was no good to her, because he could not get outside himself. What did she mean? Not outside himself! It seemed like some acrobatic feat, some slippery, contortionist trick. No, he could not understand. His heart flashed hot with resentment. She did nothing but find fault with him. What did she care about him, really, when she could taunt him with not being able to take a light woman when he was in Paris? Though his heart, forced to do her justice, knew that for this she loved him, really.

But it was too complicated and difficult, and already, as they sat thinking, it had gone wrong between them and things felt twisted, horribly twisted, so that he could not breathe. He must go. He could dine at the hotel and go to the theatre.

“Well,” he said casually, “I must go. I think I shall go and see The ‘Black Sheep’.”

She did not answer. Then she turned and looked at him with a queer, half-bewildered, half-perverse smile that seemed conscious of pain. Her eyes, shining rather dilated and triumphant, and yet with something heavily yearning behind them, looked at him. He could not understand, and, between her appeal and her defiant triumph, he felt as if his chest was crushed so that he could not breathe.

“My love,” she said, in a little singing, abstract fashion, her lips somehow

sipping towards him, her eyes shining dilated; and yet he felt as if he were not in it, himself.

His heart was a flame that prevented his breathing. He gripped the chair like a man who is going to be put under torture.

“What?” he said, staring back at her.

“Oh, my love!” she said softly, with a little, intense laugh on her face, that made him pant. And she slipped from her sofa and came across to him quickly, and put her hand hesitating on his hair. The blood struck like flame across his consciousness, and the hurt was keen like joy, like the releasing of something that hurts as the pressure is relaxed and the movement comes, before the peace. Afraid, his fingers touched her hand, and she sank swiftly between his knees, and put her face on his breast. He held her head hard against his chest, and again and again the flame went down his blood, as he felt her round, small, nut of a head between his hands pressing into his chest where the hurt had been bruised in so deep. His wrists quivered as he pressed her head to him, as he felt the deadness going out of him; the real life released, flowing into his body again. How hard he had shut it off, against her, when she hated him. He was breathing heavily with relief, blindly pressing her head against him. He believed in her again.

She looked up, laughing, childish, inviting him with her lips. He bent to kiss her, and as his eyes closed, he saw hers were shut. The feeling of restoration was almost unbearable.

“Do you love me?” she whispered, in a little ecstasy.

He did not answer, except with the quick tightening of his arms, clutching her a little closer against him. And he loved the silkiness of her hair, and its natural scent. And it hurt him that the daisies she had threaded in should begin to wither. He resented their hurting her by their dying.

He had not understood. But the trouble had gone off. He was quiet, and he watched her from out of his sensitive stillness, a little bit dimly, unable to recover. She was loving to him, protective, and bright, laughing like a glad child too.

“We must tell Maud I shall be in to dinner,” he said.

That was like him — always aware of the practical side of the case, and the appearances. She laughed a little bit ironically. Why should she have to take her arm from round him, just to tell Maud he would be in to dinner?

“I’ll go,” she said.

He drew the curtains and turned on the light in the big lamp that stood in a corner. The room was dim, and palely warm. He loved it dearly.

His wife, when she came back, as soon as she had closed the door, lifted her

arms to him in a little ecstasy, coming to him. They clasped each other closer, body to body. And the intensity of his feeling was so fierce, he felt himself going dim, fusing into something soft and plastic between her hands. And this connection with her was bigger than life or death. And at the bottom of his heart was a sob.

She was gay and winsome at the dinner. Like lovers, they were just deliciously waiting for the night to come up. But there remained in him always the slightly broken feeling which the night before had left.

“And you won’t go to Italy,” she said, as if it were an understood thing.

She gave him the best things to eat, and was solicitous for his welfare — which was not usual with her. It gave him deep, shy pleasure. He remembered a verse she was often quoting as one she loved. He did not know it for himself:

“On my breasts I warm thy foot-soles;
Wine I pour, and dress thy meats;
Humbly, when my lord disposes,
Lie with him on perfumed sheets.”

She said it to him sometimes, looking up at him from the pillow. But it never seemed real to him. She might, in her sudden passion, put his feet between her breasts. But he never felt like a lord, never more pained and insignificant than at those times. As a little girl, she must have subjected herself before her dolls. And he was something like her lordliest plaything. He liked that too. If only . . .

Then, seeing some frightened little way of looking at him which she had, the pure pain came back. He loved her, and it would never be peace between them; she would never belong to him, as a wife. She would take him and reject him, like a mistress. And perhaps for that reason he would love her all the more; it might be so.

But then, he forgot. Whatever was or was not, now she loved him. And whatever came after, this evening he was the lord. What matter if he were deposed to-morrow, and she hated him!

Her eyes, wide and candid, were staring at him a little bit wondering, a little bit forlorn. She knew he had not quite come back. He held her close to him.

“My love,” she murmured consolingly. “My love.”

And she put her fingers through his hair, arranging it in little, loose curves, playing with it and forgetting everything else. He loved that dearly, to feel the light lift and touch — touch of her finger-tips making his hair, as she said, like an Apollo’s. She lifted his face to see how he looked, and, with a little laugh of love, kissed him. And he loved to be made much of by her. But he had the dim,

hurting sense that she would not love him to-morrow, that it was only her great need to love that exalted him to-night. He *knew* he was no king; he did not feel a king, even when she was crowning and kissing him.

“Do you love me?” she asked, playfully whispering.

He held her fast and kissed her, while the blood hurt in his heart-chambers.

“You know,” he answered, with a struggle.

Later, when he lay holding her with a passion intense like pain, the words blurted from him:

“Flesh of my flesh. Paula! — Will you — ?”

“Yes, my love,” she answered consolingly.

He bit his mouth with pain. For him it was almost an agony of appeal.

“But, Paula — I mean it — flesh of my flesh — a wife?”

She tightened her arms round him without answering. And he knew, and she knew, that she put him off like that.

IV

Two months later, she was writing to him in Italy: “Your idea of your woman is that she is an expansion, no, a *rib* of yourself, without any existence of her own. That I am a being by myself is more than you can grasp. I wish I could absolutely submerge myself in a man — and *so I do*. I *always* loved you . . .

“You will say ‘I was patient.’ Do you call that patient, hanging on for your needs, as you have done? The innermost life you have *always* had of me, and you held yourself aloof because you were afraid.

“The unpardonable thing was you told me you loved me. — Your *feelings* have hated me these three months, which did not prevent you from taking my love and every breath from me. — Underneath you undermined me, in some subtle, corrupt way that I did not see because I believed you, when you told me you loved me . . .

“The insult of the way you took me these last three months I shall never forgive you. I honestly *did* give myself, and always in vain and rebuffed. The strain of it all has driven me quite mad.

“You say I am a tragédienne, but I don’t do any of your perverse undermining tricks. You are always luring one into the open like a clever enemy, but you keep safely under cover all the time.

“This practically means, for me, that life is over, my belief in life — I hope it will recover, but it never could do so with you . . .”

To which he answered: “If I kept under cover it is funny, for there isn’t any cover now. — And you can hope, pretty easily, for your own recovery apart

from me. For my side, without you, I am done . . . But you lie to yourself. You *wouldn't* love *me*, and you won't be able to love anybody else — except yourself.”

LOVE AMONG THE HAYSTACKS

I

The two large fields lay on a hillside facing south. Being newly cleared of hay, they were golden green, and they shone almost blindingly in the sunlight. Across the hill, half-way up, ran a high hedge, that flung its black shadow finely across the molten glow of the sward. The stack was being built just above the hedge. It was of great size, massive, but so silvery and delicately bright in tone that it seemed not to have weight. It rose dishevelled and radiant among the steady, golden-green glare of the field. A little farther back was another, finished stack.

The empty wagon was just passing through the gap in the hedge. From the far-off corner of the bottom field, where the sward was still striped grey with winrows, the loaded wagon launched forward, to climb the hill to the stack. The white dots of the hay-makers showed distinctly among the hay.

The two brothers were having a moment's rest, waiting for the load to come up. They stood wiping their brows with their arms, sighing from the heat and the labour of placing the last load. The stack they rode was high, lifting them up above the hedge-tops, and very broad, a great slightly-hollowed vessel into which the sunlight poured, in which the hot, sweet scent of hay was suffocating. Small and inefficacious the brothers looked, half-submerged in the loose, great trough, lifted high up as if on an altar reared to the sun.

Maurice, the younger brother, was a handsome young fellow of twenty-one, careless and debonair, and full of vigour. His grey eyes, as he taunted his brother, were bright and baffled with a strong emotion. His swarthy face had the same peculiar smile, expectant and glad and nervous, of a young man roused for the first time in passion.

"Tha sees," he said, as he leaned on the pommel of his fork, "tha thowt as tha'd done me one, didna ter?" He smiled as he spoke, then fell again into his pleasant torment of musing.

"I thought nowt — tha knows so much," retorted Geoffrey, with the touch of a sneer. His brother had the better of him. Geoffrey was a very heavy, hulking fellow, a year older than Maurice. His blue eyes were unsteady, they glanced away quickly; his mouth was morbidly sensitive. One felt him wince away, through the whole of his great body. His inflamed self-consciousness was a disease in him.

“Ah but though, I know tha did,” mocked Maurice. “Tha went slinkin’ off” — Geoffrey winced convulsively — ”thinking as that wor the last night as any of us’ud ha’e ter stop here, an’ so tha’d leave me to sleep out, though it wor thy turn — ”

He smiled to himself, thinking of the result of Geoffrey’s ruse.

“I didna go slinkin’ off neither,” retorted Geoffrey, in his heavy, clumsy manner, wincing at the phrase. “Didna my feyther send me to fetch some coal — ”

“Oh yes, oh yes — we know all about it. But tha sees what tha missed, my lad.”

Maurice, chuckling, threw himself on his back in the bed of hay. There was absolutely nothing in his world, then, except the shallow ramparts of the stack, and the blazing sky. He clenched his fists tight, threw his arms across his face, and braced his muscles again. He was evidently very much moved, so acutely that it was hardly pleasant, though he still smiled. Geoffrey, standing behind him, could just see his red mouth, with the young moustache like black fur, curling back and showing the teeth in a smile. The elder brother leaned his chin on the pommel of his fork, looking out across the country.

Far away was the faint blue heap of Nottingham. Between, the country lay under a haze of heat, with here and there a flag of colliery smoke waving. But near at hand, at the foot of the hill, across the deep-hedged high road, was only the silence of the old church and the castle farm, among their trees. The large view only made Geoffrey more sick. He looked away, to the wagons crossing the field below him, the empty cart like a big insect moving down hill, the load coming up, rocking like a ship, the brown head of the horse ducking, the brown knees lifted and planted strenuously. Geoffrey wished it would be quick.

“Tha didna think — ”

Geoffrey started, coiled within himself, and looked down at the handsome lips moving in speech below the brown arms of his brother.

“Tha didna think ‘er’d be thur wi’ me — or tha wouldna ha’ left me to it,” Maurice said, ending with a little laugh of excited memory. Geoffrey flushed with hate, and had an impulse to set his foot on that moving, taunting mouth, which was there below him. There was silence for a time, then, in a peculiar tone of delight, Maurice’s voice came again, spelling out the words, as it were:

*“Ich bin klein, mein Herz ist rein,
Ist niemand d’rin als Christ allein.”*

Maurice chuckled, then, convulsed at a twinge of recollection, keen as pain, he

twisted over, pressed himself into the hay.

“Can thee say thy prayers in German?” came his muffled voice.

“I non want,” growled Geoffrey.

Maurice chuckled. His face was quite hidden, and in the dark he was going over again his last night’s experiences.

“What about kissing ‘er under th’ ear, Sonny,” he said, in a curious, uneasy tone. He writhed, still startled and inflamed by his first contact with love.

Geoffrey’s heart swelled within him, and things went dark. He could not see the landscape.

“An’ there’s just a nice two-handful of her bosom,” came the low, provocative tones of Maurice, who seemed to be talking to himself.

The two brothers were both fiercely shy of women, and until this hay harvest, the whole feminine sex had been represented by their mother and in presence of any other women they were dumb louts. Moreover, brought up by a proud mother, a stranger in the country, they held the common girls as beneath them, because beneath their mother, who spoke pure English, and was very quiet. Loud-mouthed and broad-tongued the common girls were. So these two young men had grown up virgin but tormented.

Now again Maurice had the start of Geoffrey, and the elder brother was deeply mortified. There was a danger of his sinking into a morbid state, from sheer lack of living, lack of interest. The foreign governess at the Vicarage, whose garden lay beside the top field, had talked to the lads through the hedge, and had fascinated them. There was a great elder bush, with its broad creamy flowers crumbling on to the garden path, and into the field. Geoffrey never smelled elder-flower without starting and wincing, thinking of the strange foreign voice that had so startled him as he mowed out with the scythe in the hedge bottom. A baby had run through the gap, and the Fräulein, calling in German, had come brushing down the flowers in pursuit. She had started so on seeing a man standing there in the shade, that for a moment she could not move: and then she had blundered into the rake which was lying by his side. Geoffrey, forgetting she was a woman when he saw her pitch forward, had picked her up carefully, asking: “Have you hurt you?”

Then she had broken into a laugh, and answered in German, showing him her arms, and knitting her brows. She was nettled rather badly.

“You want a dock leaf,” he said. She frowned in a puzzled fashion.

“A dock leaf?” she repeated. He had rubbed her arms with the green leaf.

And now, she had taken to Maurice. She had seemed to prefer himself at first. Now she had sat with Maurice in the moonlight, and had let him kiss her. Geoffrey sullenly suffered, making no fight.

Unconsciously, he was looking at the Vicarage garden. There she was, in a golden-brown dress. He took off his hat, and held up his right hand in greeting to her. She, a small, golden figure, waved her hand negligently from among the potato rows. He remained, arrested, in the same posture, his hat in his left hand, his right arm upraised, thinking. He could tell by the negligence of her greeting that she was waiting for Maurice. What did she think of himself? Why wouldn't she have him?

Hearing the voice of the wagoner leading the load, Maurice rose. Geoffrey still stood in the same way, but his face was sullen, and his upraised hand was slack with brooding. Maurice faced up-hill. His eyes lit up and he laughed. Geoffrey dropped his own arm, watching.

"Lad!" chuckled Maurice. "I non knowed 'er wor there." He waved his hand clumsily. In these matters Geoffrey did better. The elder brother watched the girl. She ran to the end of the path, behind the bushes, so that she was screened from the house. Then she waved her handkerchief wildly. Maurice did not notice the manoeuvre. There was the cry of a child. The girl's figure vanished, reappeared holding up a white childish bundle, and came down the path. There she put down her charge, sped up-hill to a great ash-tree, climbed quickly to a large horizontal bar that formed the fence there, and, standing poised, blew kisses with both her hands, in a foreign fashion that excited the brothers. Maurice laughed aloud, as he waved his red handkerchief.

"Well, what's the danger?" shouted a mocking voice from below. Maurice collapsed, blushing furiously.

"Nowt!" he called.

There was a hearty laugh from below.

The load rode up, sheered with a hiss against the stack, then sank back again upon the scotches. The brothers ploughed across the mass of hay, taking the forks. Presently a big, burly man, red and glistening, climbed to the top of the load. Then he turned round, scrutinized the hillside from under his shaggy brows. He caught sight of the girl under the ash-tree.

"Oh, that's who it is," he laughed. "I thought it was some such bird, but I couldn't see her."

The father laughed in a hearty, chaffing way, then began to teem the load. Geoffrey, on the stack above, received his great forkfuls, and swung them over to Maurice, who took them, placed them, building the stack. In the intense sunlight, the three worked in silence, knit together in a brief passion of work. The father stirred slowly for a moment, getting the hay from under his feet. Geoffrey waited, the blue tines of his fork glittering in expectation: the mass rose, his fork swung beneath it, there was a light clash of blades, then the hay

was swept on to the stack, caught by Maurice, who placed it judiciously. One after another, the shoulders of the three men bowed and braced themselves. All wore light blue, bleached shirts, that stuck close to their backs. The father moved mechanically, his thick, rounded shoulders bending and lifting dully: he worked monotonously. Geoffrey flung away his strength. His massive shoulders swept and flung the hay extravagantly.

“Dost want to knock me ower?” asked Maurice angrily. He had to brace himself against the impact. The three men worked intensely, as if some will urged them. Maurice was light and swift at the work, but he had to use his judgement. Also, when he had to place the hay along the far ends, he had some distance to carry it. So he was too slow for Geoffrey. Ordinarily, the elder would have placed the hay as far as possible where his brother wanted it. Now, however, he pitched his forkfuls into the middle of the stack. Maurice strode swiftly and handsomely across the bed, but the work was too much for him. The other two men, clenched in their receive and deliver, kept up a high pitch of labour. Geoffrey still flung the hay at random. Maurice was perspiring heavily with heat and exertion, and was getting worried. Now and again, Geoffrey wiped his arm across his brow, mechanically, like an animal. Then he glanced with satisfaction at Maurice’s moiled condition, and caught the next forkful.

“Wheer dost think thou’rt hollin’ it, fool!” panted Maurice, as his brother flung a forkful out of reach.

“Wheer I’ve a mind,” answered Geoffrey.

Maurice toiled on, now very angry. He felt the sweat trickling down his body: drops fell into his long black lashes, blinding him, so that he had to stop and angrily dash his eyes clear. The veins stood out in his swarthy neck. He felt he would burst, or drop, if the work did not soon slacken off. He heard his father’s fork dully scrape the cart bottom.

“There, the last,” the father panted. Geoffrey tossed the last light lot at random, took off his hat, and, steaming in the sunshine as he wiped himself, stood complacently watching Maurice struggle with clearing the bed.

“Don’t you think you’ve got your bottom corner a bit far out?” came the father’s voice from below. “You’d better be drawing in now, hadn’t you?”

“I thought you said next load,” Maurice called, sulkily.

“Aye! All right. But isn’t this bottom corner — ?”

Maurice, impatient, took no notice.

Geoffrey strode over the stack, and stuck his fork in the offending corner. “What — here?” he bawled in his great voice.

“Aye — isn’t it a bit loose?” came the irritating voice.

Geoffrey pushed his fork in the jutting corner, and, leaning his weight on the

handle, shoved. He thought it shook. He thrust again with all his power. The mass swayed.

“What art up to, tha fool!” cried Maurice, in a high voice.

“Mind who tha’rt callin’ a fool,” said Geoffrey, and he prepared to push again. Maurice sprang across, and elbowed his brother aside. On the yielding, swaying bed of hay, Geoffrey lost his foothold, and fell grovelling. Maurice tried the corner.

“It’s solid enough,” he shouted angrily.

“Aye — all right,” came the conciliatory voice of the father; “you do get a bit of rest now there’s such a long way to cart it,” he added reflectively.

Geoffrey had got to his feet.

“Tha’ll mind who tha’rt nudging, I can tell thee,” he threatened heavily; adding, as Maurice continued to work, “an’ tha non ca’s him a fool again, dost hear?”

“Not till next time,” sneered Maurice.

As he worked silently round the stack, he neared where his brother stood like a sullen statue, leaning on his fork-handle, looking out over the countryside. Maurice’s heart quickened in its beat. He worked forward, until a point of his fork caught in the leather of Geoffrey’s boot, and the metal rang sharply.

“Are ter going ta shift thysen?” asked Maurice threateningly. There was no reply from the great block. Maurice lifted his upper lip like a dog. Then he put out his elbow, and tried to push his brother into the stack, clear of his way.

“Who are ter shovin’?” came the deep, dangerous voice.

“Thaigh,” replied Maurice, with a sneer, and straightway the two brothers set themselves against each other, like opposing bulls, Maurice trying his hardest to shift Geoffrey from his footing, Geoffrey leaning all his weight in resistance. Maurice, insecure in his footing, staggered a little, and Geoffrey’s weight followed him. He went slithering over the edge of the stack.

Geoffrey turned white to the lips, and remained standing, listening. He heard the fall. Then a flush of darkness came over him, and he remained standing only because he was planted. He had not strength to move. He could hear no sound from below, was only faintly aware of a sharp shriek from a long way off. He listened again. Then he filled with sudden panic.

“Feyther!” he roared, in his tremendous voice: “Feyther! Feyther!”

The valley re-echoed with the sound. Small cattle on the hillside looked up. Men’s figures came running from the bottom field, and much nearer a woman’s figure was racing across the upper field. Geoffrey waited in terrible suspense.

“Ah-h!” he heard the strange, wild voice of the girl cry out. “Ah-h!” — and then some foreign wailing speech. Then: “Ah-h! Are you dea-ed!”

He stood sullenly erect on the stack, not daring to go down, longing to hide in the hay, but too sullen to stoop out of sight. He heard his eldest brother come up, panting:

“Whatever’s amiss!” and then the labourer, and then his father.

“Whatever have you been doing?” he heard his father ask, while yet he had not come round the corner of the stack. And then, in a low, bitter tone:

“Eh, he’s done for! I’d no business to ha’ put it all on that stack.”

There was a moment or two of silence, then the voice of Henry, the eldest brother, said crisply:

“He’s not dead — he’s coming round.”

Geoffrey heard, but was not glad. He had as lief Maurice were dead. At least that would be final: better than meeting his brother’s charges, and of seeing his mother pass to the sick-room. If Maurice was killed, he himself would not explain, no, not a word, and they could hang him if they liked. If Maurice were only hurt, then everybody would know, and Geoffrey could never lift his face again. What added torture, to pass along, everybody knowing. He wanted something that he could stand back to, something definite, if it were only the knowledge that he had killed his brother. He *must* have something firm to back up to, or he would go mad. He was so lonely, he who above all needed the support of sympathy.

“No, he’s commin’ to; I tell you he is,” said the labourer.

“He’s not dea-ed, he’s not dea-ed,” came the passionate, strange sing-song of the foreign girl. “He’s not dead — no-o.”

“He wants some brandy — look at the colour of his lips,” said the crisp, cold voice of Henry. “Can you fetch some?”

“Wha-at? Fetch?” Fräulein did not understand.

“Brandy,” said Henry, very distinct.

“Brrandy!” she re-echoed.

“You go, Bill,” groaned the father.

“Aye, I’ll go,” replied Bill, and he ran across the field.

Maurice was not dead, nor going to die. This Geoffrey now realized. He was glad after all that the extreme penalty was revoked. But he hated to think of himself going on. He would always shrink now. He had hoped and hoped for the time when he would be careless, bold as Maurice, when he would not wince and shrink. Now he would always be the same, coiling up in himself like a tortoise with no shell.

“Ah-h! He’s getting better!” came the wild voice of the Fräulein, and she began to cry, a strange sound, that startled the men, made the animal bristle within them. Geoffrey shuddered as he heard, between her sobbing, the

impatient moaning of his brother as the breath came back.

The labourer returned at a run, followed by the Vicar. After the brandy, Maurice made more moaning, hiccuping noise. Geoffrey listened in torture. He heard the Vicar asking for explanations. All the united, anxious voices replied in brief phrases.

“It was that other,” cried the Fräulein. “He knocked him over — Ha!”

She was shrill and vindictive.

“I don’t think so,” said the father to the Vicar, in a quite audible but private tone, speaking as if the Fräulein did not understand his English.

The Vicar addressed his children’s governess in bad German. She replied in a torrent which he would not confess was too much for him. Maurice was making little moaning, sighing noises.

“Where’s your pain, boy, eh?” the father asked, pathetically.

“Leave him alone a bit,” came the cool voice of Henry. “He’s winded, if no more.”

“You’d better see that no bones are broken,” said the anxious Vicar.

“It wor a blessing as he should a dropped on that heap of hay just there,” said the labourer. “If he’d happened to ha’ caught hisself on this nog o’ wood ‘e wouldna ha’ stood much chance.”

Geoffrey wondered when he would have courage to venture down. He had wild notions of pitching himself head foremost from the stack: if he could only extinguish himself, he would be safe. Quite frantically, he longed not to be. The idea of going through life thus coiled up within himself in morbid self-consciousness, always lonely, surly, and a misery, was enough to make him cry out. What would they all think when they knew he had knocked Maurice off that high stack?

They were talking to Maurice down below. The lad had recovered in great measure, and was able to answer faintly.

“Whatever was you doin’?” the father asked gently. “Was you playing about with our Geoffrey? — Aye, and where is he?”

Geoffrey’s heart stood still.

“I dunno,” said Henry, in a curious, ironic tone.

“Go an’ have a look,” pleaded the father, infinitely relieved over one son, anxious now concerning the other. Geoffrey could not bear that his eldest brother should climb up and question him in his high-pitched drawl of curiosity. The culprit doggedly set his feet on the ladder. His nailed boots slipped a rung.

“Mind yourself,” shouted the overwrought father.

Geoffrey stood like a criminal at the foot of the ladder, glancing furtively at the group. Maurice was lying, pale and slightly convulsed, upon a heap of hay.

The Fräulein was kneeling beside his head. The Vicar had the lad's shirt full open down the breast, and was feeling for broken ribs. The father kneeled on the other side, the labourer and Henry stood aside.

"I can't find anything broken," said the Vicar, and he sounded slightly disappointed.

"There's nowt broken to find," murmured Maurice, smiling.

The father started. "Eh?" he said. "Eh?" and he bent over the invalid.

"I say it's not hurt me," repeated Maurice.

"What were you doing?" asked the cold, ironic voice of Henry. Geoffrey turned his head away: he had not yet raised his face.

"Nowt as I know on," he muttered in a surly tone.

"Why!" cried Fräulein in a reproachful tone. "I see him — knock him over!" She made a fierce gesture with her elbow. Henry curled his long moustache sardonically.

"Nay lass, niver," smiled the wan Maurice. "He was fur enough away from me when I slipped."

"Oh, ah!" cried the Fräulein, not understanding.

"Yi," smiled Maurice indulgently.

"I think you're mistaken," said the father, rather pathetically, smiling at the girl as if she were "wanting".

"Oh no," she cried. "I see him."

"Nay, lass," smiled Maurice quietly.

She was a Pole, named Paula Jablonowsky: young, only twenty years old, swift and light as a wild cat, with a strange, wild-cat way of grinning. Her hair was blonde and full of life, all crisped into many tendrils with vitality, shaking round her face. Her fine blue eyes were peculiarly lidded, and she seemed to look piercingly, then languorously, like a wild cat. She had somewhat Slavonic cheekbones, and was very much freckled. It was evident that the Vicar, a pale, rather cold man, hated her.

Maurice lay pale and smiling in her lap, whilst she cleaved to him like a mate. One felt instinctively that they were mated. She was ready at any minute to fight with ferocity in his defence, now he was hurt. Her looks at Geoffrey were full of fierceness. She bowed over Maurice and caressed him with her foreign-sounding English.

"You say what you lai-ike," she laughed, giving him lordship over her.

"Hadn't you better be going and looking what has become of Margery?" asked the Vicar in tones of reprimand.

"She is with her mother — I heard her. I will go in a whai-ile," smiled the girl, coolly.

“Do you feel as if you could stand?” asked the father, still anxiously.

“Aye, in a bit,” smiled Maurice.

“You want to get up?” caressed the girl, bowing over him, till her face was not far from his.

“I’m in no hurry,” he replied, smiling brilliantly.

This accident had given him quite a strange new ease, an authority. He felt extraordinarily glad. New power had come to him all at once.

“You in no hurry,” she repeated, gathering his meaning. She smiled tenderly: she was in his service.

“She leaves us in another month — Mrs Inwood could stand no more of her,” apologized the Vicar quietly to the father.

“Why, is she — ?”

“Like a wild thing — disobedient, and insolent.”

“Ha!”

The father sounded abstract.

“No more foreign governesses for me.”

Maurice stirred, and looked up at the girl.

“You stand up?” she asked brightly. “You well?”

He laughed again, showing his teeth winsomely. She lifted his head, sprung to her feet, her hands still holding his head, then she took him under the armpits and had him on his feet before anyone could help. He was much taller than she. He grasped her strong shoulders heavily, leaned against her, and, feeling her round, firm breast doubled up against his side, he smiled, catching his breath.

“You see I’m all right,” he gasped. “I was only winded.”

“You all raight?” she cried, in great glee.

“Yes, I am.”

He walked a few steps after a moment.

“There’s nowt ails me, Father,” he laughed.

“Quite well, you?” she cried in a pleading tone. He laughed outright, looked down at her, touching her cheek with his fingers.

“That’s it — if tha likes.”

“If I lai-ike!” she repeated, radiant.

“She’s going at the end of three weeks,” said the Vicar consolingly to the farmer.

II

While they were talking, they heard the far-off hooting of a pit.

"There goes th' loose a'," said Henry, coldly. "We're *not* going to get that corner up to-day."

The father looked round anxiously.

"Now, Maurice, are you sure you're all right?" he asked.

"Yes, I'm all right. Haven't I told you?"

"Then you sit down there, and in a bit you can be getting dinner out. Henry, you go on the stack. Wheer's Jim? Oh, he's minding the hosses. Bill, and you, Geoffrey, you can pick while Jim loads."

Maurice sat down under the wych elm to recover. The Fräulein had fled back. He made up his mind to ask her to marry him. He had got fifty pounds of his own, and his mother would help him. For a long time he sat musing, thinking what he would do. Then, from the float he fetched a big basket covered with a cloth, and spread the dinner. There was an immense rabbit pie, a dish of cold potatoes, much bread, a great piece of cheese, and a solid rice pudding.

These two fields were four miles from the home farm. But they had been in the hands of the Wookeys for several generations, therefore the father kept them on, and everyone looked forward to the hay harvest at Greasley: it was a kind of picnic. They brought dinner and tea in the milk-float, which the father drove over in the morning. The lads and the labourers cycled. Off and on, the harvest lasted a fortnight. As the high road from Alfreton to Nottingham ran at the foot of the fields, someone usually slept in the hay under the shed to guard the tools. The sons took it in turns. They did not care for it much, and were for that reason anxious to finish the harvest on this day. But work went slack and disjointed after Maurice's accident.

When the load was teemed, they gathered round the white cloth, which was spread under a tree between the hedge and the stack, and, sitting on the ground, ate their meal. Mrs Wookey sent always a clean cloth, and knives and forks and plates for everybody. Mr Wookey was always rather proud of this spread: everything was so proper.

"There now," he said, sitting down jovially. "Doesn't this look nice now — eh?"

They all sat round the white spread, in the shadow of the tree and the stack, and looked out up the fields as they ate. From their shady coolness, the gold sward seemed liquid, molten with heat. The horse with the empty wagon

wandered a few yards, then stood feeding. Everything was still as a trance. Now and again, the horse between the shafts of the load that stood propped beside the stack, jingled his loose bit as he ate. The men ate and drank in silence, the father reading the newspaper, Maurice leaning back on a saddle, Henry reading the *Nation*, the others eating busily.

Presently "Helloa! 'Er's 'ere again!" exclaimed Bill. All looked up. Paula was coming across the field carrying a plate.

"She's bringing something to tempt your appetite, Maurice," said the eldest brother ironically. Maurice was midway through a large wedge of rabbit pie, and some cold potatoes.

"Aye, bless me if she's not," laughed the father. "Put that away, Maurice, it's a shame to disappoint her."

Maurice looked round very shamefaced, not knowing what to do with his plate.

"Give it over here," said Bill. "I'll polish him off."

"Bringing something for the invalid?" laughed the father to the Fräulein. "He's looking up nicely."

"I bring him some chicken, him!" She nodded her head at Maurice childishly. He flushed and smiled.

"Tha doesna mean ter bust 'im," said Bill.

Everybody laughed aloud. The girl did not understand, so she laughed also. Maurice ate his portion very sheepishly.

The father pitied his son's shyness.

"Come here and sit by me," he said. "Eh, Fräulein! Is that what they call you?"

"I sit by you, Father," she said innocently.

Henry threw his head back and laughed long and noiselessly.

She settled near to the big, handsome man.

"My name," she said, "is Paula Jablonsky."

"Is what?" said the father, and the other men went into roars of laughter.

"Tell me again," said the father. "Your name — ?"

"Paula."

"Paula? Oh — well, it's a rum sort of name, eh? His name — " he nodded at his son.

"Maurice — I know." She pronounced it sweetly, then laughed into the father's eyes. Maurice blushed to the roots of his hair.

They questioned her concerning her history, and made out that she came from Hanover, that her father was a shop-keeper, and that she had run away from home because she did not like her father. She had gone to Paris.

"Oh," said the father, now dubious. "And what did you do there?"

"In school — in a young ladies' school."

"Did you like it?"

"Oh no — no laife — no life!"

"What?"

"When we go out — two and two — all together — no more. Ah, no life, no life."

"Well, that's a winder!" exclaimed the father. "No life in Paris! And have you found much life in England?"

"No — ah no. I don't like it." She made a grimace at the Vicarage.

"How long have you been in England?"

"Chreestmas — so."

"And what will you do?"

"I will go to London, or to Paris. Ah, Paris! — Or get married!" She laughed into the father's eyes.

The father laughed heartily.

"Get married, eh? And who to?"

"I don't know. I am going away."

"The country's too quiet for you?" asked the father.

"Too quiet — hm!" she nodded in assent.

"You wouldn't care for making butter and cheese?"

"Making butter — hm!" She turned to him with a glad, bright gesture. "I like it."

"Oh," laughed the father. "You would, would you?"

She nodded vehemently, with glowing eyes.

"She'd like anything in the shape of a change," said Henry judicially.

"I think she would," agreed the father. It did not occur to them that she fully understood what they said. She looked at them closely, then thought with bowed head.

"Hullo!" exclaimed Henry, the alert. A tramp was slouching towards them through the gap. He was a very seedy, slinking fellow, with a tang of horsey braggadocio about him. Small, thin, and ferrety, with a week's red beard bristling on his pointed chin, he came slouching forward.

"Have yer got a bit of a job goin'?" he asked.

"A bit of a job," repeated the father. "Why, can't you see as we've a'most done?"

"Aye — but I noticed you was a hand short, an' I thowt as 'appen you'd gie me half a day."

"What, are *you* any good in a hay close?" asked Henry, with a sneer.

The man stood slouching against the haystack. All the others were seated on

the floor. He had an advantage.

"I could work aside any on yer," he bragged.

"Tha looks it," laughed Bill.

"And what's your regular trade?" asked the father.

"I'm a jockey by rights. But I did a bit o' dirty work for a boss o' mine, an' I was landed. "E got the benefit, I got kicked out. "E axed me — an' then 'e looked as if 'e'd never seed me."

"Did he, though!" exclaimed the father sympathetically.

"'E did that!" asserted the man.

"But we've got nothing for you," said Henry coldly.

"What does the boss say?" asked the man, impudent.

"No, we've no work you can do," said the father. "You can have a bit o' something to eat, if you like."

"I should be glad of it," said the man.

He was given the chunk of rabbit pie that remained. This he ate greedily. There was something debased, parasitic, about him, which disgusted Henry. The others regarded him as a curiosity.

"That was nice and tasty," said the tramp, with gusto.

"Do you want a piece of bread 'n' cheese?" asked the father.

"It'll help to fill up," was the reply.

The man ate this more slowly. The company was embarrassed by his presence, and could not talk. All the men lit their pipes, the meal over.

"So you dunna want any help?" said the tramp at last.

"No — we can manage what bit there is to do."

"You don't happen to have a fill of bacca to spare, do you?"

The father gave him a good pinch.

"You're all right here," he said, looking round. They resented this familiarity. However, he filled his clay pipe and smoked with the rest.

As they were sitting silent, another figure came through the gap in the hedge, and noiselessly approached. It was a woman. She was rather small and finely made. Her face was small, very ruddy, and comely, save for the look of bitterness and aloofness that it wore. Her hair was drawn tightly back under a sailor hat. She gave an impression of cleanness, of precision and directness.

"Have you got some work?" she asked of her man. She ignored the rest. He tucked his tail between his legs.

"No, they haven't got no work for me. They've just gave me a draw of bacca."

He was a mean crawl of a man.

"An' am I goin' to wait for you out there on the lane all day?"

"You needn't if you don't like. You could go on."

"Well, are you coming?" she asked contemptuously. He rose to his feet in a rickety fashion.

"You needn't be in such a mighty hurry," he said. "If you'd wait a bit you might get summat."

She glanced for the first time over the men. She was quite young, and would have been pretty, were she not so hard and callous-looking.

"Have you had your dinner?" asked the father.

She looked at him with a kind of anger, and turned away. Her face was so childish in its contours, contrasting strangely with her expression.

"Are you coming?" she said to the man.

"He's had his tuck-in. Have a bit, if you want it," coaxed the father.

"What have you had?" she flashed to the man.

"He's had all what was left o' th' rabbit pie," said Geoffrey, in an indignant, mocking tone, "and a great hunk o' bread an' cheese."

"Well, it was gave me," said the man.

The young woman looked at Geoffrey, and he at her. There was a sort of kinship between them. Both were at odds with the world. Geoffrey smiled satirically. She was too grave, too deeply incensed even to smile.

"There's a cake here, though — you can have a bit o' that," said Maurice blithely.

She eyed him with scorn.

Again she looked at Geoffrey. He seemed to understand her. She turned, and in silence departed. The man remained obstinately sucking at his pipe. Everybody looked at him with hostility.

"We'll be getting to work," said Henry, rising, pulling off his coat. Paula got to her feet. She was a little bit confused by the presence of the tramp.

"I go," she said, smiling brilliantly. Maurice rose and followed her sheepishly.

"A good grind, eh?" said the tramp, nodding after the Fräulein. The men only half-understood him, but they hated him.

"Hadh't you better be getting off?" said Henry.

The man rose obediently. He was all slouching, parasitic insolence. Geoffrey loathed him, longed to exterminate him. He was exactly the worst foe of the hyper-sensitive: insolence without sensibility, preying on sensibility.

"Aren't you goin' to give me summat for her? It's nowt she's had all day, to my knowin'. She'll 'appen eat it if I take it 'er — though she gets more than I've any knowledge of" — this with a lewd wink of jealous spite. "And then tries to keep a tight hand on me," he sneered, taking the bread and cheese, and stuffing it in his pocket.

III

Geoffrey worked sullenly all the afternoon, and Maurice did the horse-raking. It was exceedingly hot. So the day wore on, the atmosphere thickened, and the sunlight grew blurred. Geoffrey was picking with Bill — helping to load the wagons from the winrows. He was sulky, though extraordinarily relieved: Maurice would not tell. Since the quarrel neither brother had spoken to the other. But their silence was entirely amicable, almost affectionate. They had both been deeply moved, so much so that their ordinary intercourse was interrupted: but underneath, each felt a strong regard for the other. Maurice was peculiarly happy, his feeling of affection swimming over everything. But Geoffrey was still sullenly hostile to the most part of the world. He felt isolated. The free and easy intercommunication between the other workers left him distinctly alone. And he was a man who could not bear to stand alone, he was too much afraid of the vast confusion of life surrounding him, in which he was helpless. Geoffrey mistrusted himself with everybody.

The work went on slowly. It was unbearably hot, and everyone was disheartened.

"We s'll have getting-on-for another day of it," said the father at tea-time, as they sat under the tree.

"Quite a day," said Henry.

"Somebody'll have to stop, then," said Geoffrey. "It 'ud better be me."

"Nay, lad, I'll stop," said Maurice, and he hid his head in confusion.

"Stop again to-night!" exclaimed the father. "I'd rather you went home."

"Nay, I'm stoppin'," protested Maurice.

"He wants to do his courting," Henry enlightened them.

The father thought seriously about it.

"I don't know . . ." he mused, rather perturbed.

But Maurice stayed. Towards eight o'clock, after sundown, the men mounted their bicycles, the father put the horse in the float, and all departed. Maurice stood in the gap of the hedge and watched them go, the cart rolling and swinging downhill, over the grass stubble, the cyclists dipping swiftly like shadows in front. All passed through the gate, there was a quick clatter of hoofs on the roadway under the lime trees, and they were gone. The young man was very much excited, almost afraid, at finding himself alone.

Darkness was rising from the valley. Already, up the steep hill the cart-lamps crept indecisively, and the cottage windows were lit. Everything looked strange

to Maurice, as if he had not seen it before. Down the hedge a large lime-tree teemed with scent that seemed almost like a voice speaking. It startled him. He caught a breath of the over-sweet fragrance, then stood still, listening expectantly.

Up hill, a horse whinneyed. It was the young mare. The heavy horses went thundering across to the far hedge.

Maurice wondered what to do. He wandered round the deserted stacks restlessly. Heat came in wafts, in thick strands. The evening was a long time cooling. He thought he would go and wash himself. There was a trough of pure water in the hedge bottom. It was filled by a tiny spring that filtered over the brim of the trough down the lush hedge bottom of the lower field. All round the trough, in the upper field, the land was marshy, and there the meadow-sweet stood like clots of mist, very sickly-smelling in the twilight. The night did not darken, for the moon was in the sky, so that as the tawny colour drew off the heavens they remained pallid with a dimmed moon. The purple bell-flowers in the hedge went black, the ragged robin turned its pink to a faded white, the meadow-sweet gathered light as if it were phosphorescent, and it made the air ache with scent.

Maurice kneeled on the slab of stone bathing his hands and arms, then his face. The water was deliriously cool. He had still an hour before Paula would come: she was not due till nine. So he decided to take his bath at night instead of waiting till morning. Was he not sticky, and was not Paula coming to talk to him? He was delighted the thought had occurred to him. As he soused his head in the trough, he wondered what the little creatures that lived in the velvety silt at the bottom would think of the taste of soap. Laughing to himself, he squeezed his cloth into the water. He washed himself from head to foot, standing in the fresh, forsaken corner of the field, where no one could see him by daylight, so that now, in the veiled grey tinge of moonlight, he was no more noticeable than the crowded flowers. The night had on a new look: he never remembered to have seen the lustrous grey sheen of it before, nor to have noticed how vital the lights looked, like live folk inhabiting the silvery spaces. And the tall trees, wrapped obscurely in their mantles, would not have surprised him had they begun to move in converse. As he dried himself, he discovered little wanderings in the air, felt on his sides soft touches and caresses that were peculiarly delicious: sometimes they startled him, and he laughed as if he were not alone. The flowers, the meadow-sweet particularly, haunted him. He reached to put his hand over their fleeciness. They touched his thighs. Laughing, he gathered them and dusted himself all over with their cream dust and fragrance. For a moment he hesitated in wonder at himself: but the subtle glow in the hoary and black night

reassured him. Things never had looked so personal and full of beauty, he had never known the wonder in himself before.

At nine o'clock he was waiting under the elder-bush, in a state of high trepidation, but feeling that he was worthy, having a sense of his own wonder. She was late. At a quarter-past nine she came, flitting swiftly, in her own eager way.

"No, she would *not* go to sleep," said Paula, with a world of wrath in her tone. He laughed bashfully. They wandered out into the dim, hillside field.

"I have sat — in that bedroom — for an hour, for hours," she cried indignantly. She took a deep breath: "Ah, breathe!" she smiled.

She was very intense, and full of energy.

"I want" — she was clumsy with the language — "I want — I should laike — to run — there!" She pointed across the field.

"Let's run, then," he said, curiously.

"Yes!"

And in an instant she was gone. He raced after her. For all he was so young and limber, he had difficulty in catching her. At first he could scarcely see her, though he could hear the rustle of her dress. She sped with astonishing fleetness. He overtook her, caught her by the arm, and they stood panting, facing one another with laughter.

"I could win," she asserted blithely.

"Tha couldna," he replied, with a peculiar, excited laugh. They walked on, rather breathless. In front of them suddenly appeared the dark shapes of the three feeding horses.

"We ride a horse?" she said.

"What, bareback?" he asked.

"You say?" She did not understand.

"With no saddle?"

"No saddle — yes — no saddle."

"Coop, lass!" he said to the mare, and in a minute he had her by the forelock, and was leading her down to the stacks, where he put a halter on her. She was a big, strong mare. Maurice seated the Fräulein, clambered himself in front of the girl, using the wheel of the wagon as a mount, and together they trotted uphill, she holding lightly round his waist. From the crest of the hill they looked round.

The sky was darkening with an awning of cloud. On the left the hill rose black and wooded, made cosy by a few lights from cottages along the highway. The hill spread to the right, and tufts of trees shut round. But in front was a great vista of night, a sprinkle of cottage candles, a twinkling cluster of lights, like an elfish fair in full swing, at the colliery, an encampment of light at a village, a red

flare on the sky far off, above an iron-foundry, and in the farthest distance the dim breathing of town lights. As they watched the night stretch far out, her arms tightened round his waist, and he pressed his elbows to his side, pressing her arms closer still. The horse moved restlessly. They clung to each other.

"Tha doesna want to go right away?" he asked the girl behind him.

"I stay with you," she answered softly, and he felt her crouching close against him. He laughed curiously. He was afraid to kiss her, though he was urged to do so. They remained still, on the restless horse, watching the small lights lead deep into the night, an infinite distance.

"I don't want to go," he said, in a tone half pleading.

She did not answer. The horse stirred restlessly.

"Let him run," cried Paula, "fast!"

She broke the spell, startled him into a little fury. He kicked the mare, hit her, and away she plunged downhill. The girl clung tightly to the young man. They were riding bareback down a rough, steep hill. Maurice clung hard with hands and knees. Paula held him fast round the waist, leaning her head on his shoulders, and thrilling with excitement.

"We shall be off, we shall be off," he cried, laughing with excitement; but she only crouched behind and pressed tight to him. The mare tore across the field. Maurice expected every moment to be flung on to the grass. He gripped with all the strength of his knees. Paula tucked herself behind him, and often wrenched him almost from his hold. Man and girl were taut with effort.

At last the mare came to a standstill, blowing. Paula slid off, and in an instant Maurice was beside her. They were both highly excited. Before he knew what he was doing, he had her in his arms, fast, and was kissing her, and laughing. They did not move for some time. Then, in silence, they walked towards the stacks.

It had grown quite dark, the night was thick with cloud. He walked with his arm round Paula's waist, she with her arm round him. They were near the stacks when Maurice felt a spot of rain.

"It's going to rain," he said.

"Rain!" she echoed, as if it were trivial.

"I s'll have to put the stack-cloth on," he said gravely. She did not understand.

When they got to the stacks, he went round to the shed, to return staggering in the darkness under the burden of the immense and heavy cloth. It had not been used once during the hay harvest.

"What are you going to do?" asked Paula, coming close to him in the darkness.

"Cover the top of the stack with it," he replied. "Put it over the stack, to keep the rain out."

"Ah!" she cried, "up there!" He dropped his burden. "Yes," he answered.

Fumblingly he reared the long ladder up the side of the stack. He could not see the top.

"I hope it's solid," he said, softly.

A few smart drops of rain sounded drumming on the cloth. They seemed like another presence. It was very dark indeed between the great buildings of hay. She looked up the black wall, and shrank to him.

"You carry it up there?" she asked.

"Yes," he answered.

"I help you?" she said.

And she did. They opened the cloth. He clambered first up the steep ladder, bearing the upper part, she followed closely, carrying her full share. They mounted the shaky ladder in silence, stealthily.

IV

As they climbed the stacks a light stopped at the gate on the high road. It was Geoffrey, come to help his brother with the cloth. Afraid of his own intrusion, he wheeled his bicycle silently towards the shed. This was a corrugated iron erection, on the opposite side of the hedge from the stacks. Geoffrey let his light go in front of him, but there was no sign from the lovers. He thought he saw a shadow slinking away. The light of the bicycle lamp sheered yellowly across the dark, catching a glint of raindrops, a mist of darkness, shadow of leaves and strokes of long grass. Geoffrey entered the shed — no one was there. He walked slowly and doggedly round to the stacks. He had passed the wagon, when he heard something sheering down upon him. Starting back under the wall of hay, he saw the long ladder slither across the side of the stack, and fall with a bruising ring.

"What wor that?" he heard Maurice, aloft, ask cautiously.

"Something fall," came the curious, almost pleased voice of the Fräulein.

"It wor niver th' ladder," said Maurice. He peered over the side of the stack. He lay down, looking.

"It is an' a!" he exclaimed. "We knocked it down with the cloth, dragging it over."

"We fast up here?" she exclaimed with a thrill.

"We are that — without I shout and make 'em hear at the Vicarage."

"Oh no," she said quickly.

"I don't want to," he replied, with a short laugh. There came a swift clatter of raindrops on the cloth. Geoffrey crouched under the wall of the other stack.

"Mind where you tread — here, let me straighten this end," said Maurice, with a peculiar intimate tone — a command and an embrace. "We s'll have to sit under it. At any rate, we shan't get wet."

"Not get wet!" echoed the girl, pleased, but agitated.

Geoffrey heard the slide and rustle of the cloth over the top of the stack, heard Maurice telling her to "Mind!"

"Mind!" she repeated. "Mind! you say 'Mind!'"

"Well, what if I do?" he laughed. "I don't want you to fall over th' side, do I?" His tone was masterful, but he was not quite sure of himself.

There was silence a moment or two.

"Maurice!" she said, plaintively.

"I'm here," he answered, tenderly, his voice shaky with excitement that was

near to distress. "There, I've done. Now should we — we'll sit under this corner."

"Maurice!" she was rather pitiful.

"What? You'll be all right," he remonstrated, tenderly indignant.

"I be all raight," she repeated, "I be all raight, Maurice?"

"Tha knows tha will — I canna ca' thee Powla. Should I ca' thee Minnie?"

It was the name of a dead sister.

"Minnie?" she exclaimed in surprise.

"Aye, should I?"

She answered in full-throated German. He laughed shakily.

"Come on — come on under. But do yer wish you was safe in th' Vicarage? Should I shout for somebody?" he asked.

"I don't wish, no!" She was vehement.

"Art sure?" he insisted, almost indignantly.

"Sure — I quite sure." She laughed.

Geoffrey turned away at the last words. Then the rain beat heavily. The lonely brother slouched miserably to the hut, where the rain played a mad tattoo. He felt very miserable, and jealous of Maurice.

His bicycle lamp, downcast, shone a yellow light on the stark floor of the shed or hut with one wall open. It lit up the trodden earth, the shafts of tools lying piled under the beam, beside the dreary grey metal of the building. He took off the lamp, shone it round the hut. There were piles of harness, tools, a big sugar box, a deep bed of hay — then the beams across the corrugated iron, all very dreary and stark. He shone the lamp into the night: nothing but the furtive glitter of raindrops through the mist of darkness, and black shapes hovering round.

Geoffrey blew out the light and flung himself on to the hay. He would put the ladder up for them in a while, when they would be wanting it. Meanwhile he sat and gloated over Maurice's felicity. He was imaginative, and now he had something concrete to work upon. Nothing in the whole of life stirred him so profoundly, and so utterly, as the thought of this woman. For Paula was strange, foreign, different from the ordinary girls: the rousing, feminine quality seemed in her concentrated, brighter, more fascinating than in anyone he had known, so that he felt most like a moth near a candle. He would have loved her wildly — but Maurice had got her. His thoughts beat the same course, round and round. What was it like when you kissed her, when she held you tight round the waist, how did she feel towards Maurice, did she love to touch him, was he fine and attractive to her; what did she think of himself — she merely disregarded him, as she would disregard a horse in a field; why should she do so, why couldn't he make her regard himself, instead of Maurice: he would never command a woman's regard like that, he always gave in to her too soon; if only some woman

would come and take him for what he was worth, though he was such a stumbler and showed to such disadvantage, ah, what a grand thing it would be; how he would kiss her. Then round he went again in the same course, brooding almost like a madman. Meanwhile the rain drummed deep on the shed, then grew lighter and softer. There came the drip, drip of the drops falling outside.

Geoffrey's heart leaped up his chest, and he clenched himself, as a black shape crept round the post of the shed and, bowing, entered silently. The young man's heart beat so heavily in plunges, he could not get his breath to speak. It was shock, rather than fear. The form felt towards him. He sprang up, gripped it with his great hands, panting "Now, then!"

There was no resistance, only a little whimper of despair.

"Let me go," said a woman's voice.

"What are you after?" he asked, in deep, gruff tones.

"I thought 'e was 'ere," she wept despairingly, with little, stubborn sobs.

"An' you've found what you didn't expect, have you?"

At the sound of his bullying she tried to get away from him.

"Let me go," she said.

"Who did you expect to find here?" he asked, but more his natural self.

"I expected my husband — him as you saw at dinner. Let me go."

"Why, is it you?" exclaimed Geoffrey. "Has he left you?"

"Let me go," said the woman sullenly, trying to draw away. He realized that her sleeve was very wet, her arm slender under his grasp. Suddenly he grew ashamed of himself: he had no doubt hurt her, gripping her so hard. He relaxed, but did not let her go.

"An' are you searching round after that snipe as was here at dinner?" he asked. She did not answer.

"Where did he leave you?"

"I left him — here. I've seen nothing of him since."

"I s'd think it's good riddance," he said. She did not answer. He gave a short laugh, saying:

"I should ha' thought you wouldn't ha' wanted to clap eyes on him again."

"He's my husband — an' he's not goin' to run off if I can stop him."

Geoffrey was silent, not knowing what to say.

"Have you got a jacket on?" he asked at last.

"What do you think? You've got hold of it."

"You're wet through, aren't you?"

"I shouldn't be dry, comin' through that teemin' rain. But 'e's not here, so I'll go."

"I mean," he said humbly, "are you wet through?"

She did not answer. He felt her shiver.

"Are you cold?" he asked, in surprise and concern.

She did not answer. He did not know what to say.

"Stop a minute," he said, and he fumbled in his pocket for his matches. He struck a light, holding it in the hollow of his large, hard palm. He was a big man, and he looked anxious. Shedding the light on her, he saw she was rather pale, and very weary looking. Her old sailor hat was sodden and drooping with rain. She wore a fawn-coloured jacket of smooth cloth. This jacket was black-wet where the rain had beaten, her skirt hung sodden, and dripped on to her boots. The match went out.

"Why, you're wet through!" he said.

She did not answer.

"Shall you stop in here while it gives over?" he asked. She did not answer.

"'Cause if you will, you'd better take your things off, an' have th' rug. There's a horse-rug in the box."

He waited, but she would not answer. So he lit his bicycle lamp, and rummaged in the box, pulling out a large brown blanket, striped with scarlet and yellow. She stood stock still. He shone the light on her. She was very pale, and trembling fitfully.

"Are you that cold?" he asked in concern. "Take your jacket off, and your hat, and put this right over you."

Mechanically, she undid the enormous fawn-coloured buttons, and unpinned her hat. With her black hair drawn back from her low, honest brow, she looked little more than a girl, like a girl driven hard with womanhood by stress of life. She was small, and natty, with neat little features. But she shivered convulsively.

"Is something a-matter with you?" he asked.

"I've walked to Bulwell and back," she quivered, "looking for him — an' I've not touched a thing since this morning." She did not weep — she was too dreary-hardened to cry. He looked at her in dismay, his mouth half open: "Gormin", as Maurice would have said.

"'Aven't you had nothing to eat?" he said.

Then he turned aside to the box. There, the bread remaining was kept, and the great piece of cheese, and such things as sugar and salt, with all table utensils: there was some butter.

She sat down drearily on the bed of hay. He cut her a piece of bread and butter, and a piece of cheese. This she took, but ate listlessly.

"I want a drink," she said.

"We 'aven't got no beer," he answered. "My father doesn't have it."

"I want water," she said.

He took a can and plunged through the wet darkness, under the great black hedge, down to the trough. As he came back he saw her in the half-lit little cave sitting bunched together. The soaked grass wet his feet — he thought of her. When he gave her a cup of water, her hand touched his and he felt her fingers hot and glossy. She trembled so she spilled the water.

"Do you feel badly?" he asked.

"I can't keep myself still — but it's only with being tired and having nothing to eat."

He scratched his head contemplatively, waited while she ate her piece of bread and butter. Then he offered her another piece.

"I don't want it just now," she said.

"You'll have to eat summat," he said.

"I couldn't eat any more just now."

He put the piece down undecidedly on the box. Then there was another long pause. He stood up with bent head. The bicycle, like a restful animal, glittered behind him, turning towards the wall. The woman sat hunched on the hay, shivering.

"Can't you get warm?" he asked.

"I shall by an' by — don't you bother. I'm taking your seat — are you stopping here all night?"

"Yes."

"I'll be goin' in a bit," she said.

"Nay, I non want you to go. I'm thinkin' how you could get warm."

"Don't you bother about me," she remonstrated, almost irritably.

"I just want to see as the stacks is all right. You take your shoes an' stockin's an' all your wet things off: you can easy wrap yourself all over in that rug, there's not so much of you."

"It's raining — I s'll be all right — I s'll be going in a minute."

"I've got to see as the stacks is safe. Take your wet things off."

"Are you coming back?" she asked.

"I mightn't, not till morning."

"Well, I s'll be gone in ten minutes, then. I've no rights to be here, an' I s'll not let anybody be turned out for me."

"You won't be turning me out."

"Whether or no, I shan't stop."

"Well, shall you if I come back?" he asked. She did not answer.

He went. In a few moments, she blew the light out. The rain was falling steadily, and the night was a black gulf. All was intensely still. Geoffrey listened everywhere: no sound save the rain. He stood between the stacks, but only heard

the trickle of water, and the light swish of rain. Everything was lost in blackness. He imagined death was like that, many things dissolved in silence and darkness, blotted out, but existing. In the dense blackness he felt himself almost extinguished. He was afraid he might not find things the same. Almost frantically, he stumbled, feeling his way, till his hand touched the wet metal. He had been looking for a gleam of light.

"Did you blow the lamp out?" he asked, fearful lest the silence should answer him.

"Yes," she answered humbly. He was glad to hear her voice. Groping into the pitch-dark shed, he knocked against the box, part of whose cover served as table. There was a clatter and a fall.

"That's the lamp, an' the knife, an' the cup," he said. He struck a match.

"Th' cup's not broke." He put it into the box.

"But th' oil's spilled out o' th' lamp. It always was a rotten old thing." He hastily blew out his match, which was burning his fingers. Then he struck another light.

"You don't want a lamp, you know you don't, and I s'll be going directly, so you come an' lie down an' get your night's rest. I'm not taking any of your place."

He looked at her by the light of another match. She was a queer little bundle, all brown, with gaudy border folding in and out, and her little face peering at him. As the match went out she saw him beginning to smile.

"I can sit right at this end," she said. "You lie down."

He came and sat on the hay, at some distance from her. After a spell of silence:

"Is he really your husband?" he asked.

"He is!" she answered grimly.

"Hm!" Then there was silence again.

After a while: "Are you warm now?"

"Why do you bother yourself?"

"I don't bother myself — do you follow him because you like him?" He put it very timidly. He wanted to know.

"I don't — I wish he was dead," this with bitter contempt. Then doggedly; "But he's my husband."

He gave a short laugh.

"By Gad!" he said.

Again, after a while: "Have you been married long?"

"Four years."

"Four years — why, how old are you?"

"Twenty-three."

"Are you turned twenty-three?"

"Last May."

"Then you're four month older than me." He mused over it. They were only two voices in the pitch-black night. It was eerie silence again.

"And do you just tramp about?" he asked.

"He reckons he's looking for a job. But he doesn't like work in any shape or form. He was a stableman when I married him, at Greenhalgh's, the horse-dealers, at Chesterfield, where I was housemaid. He left that job when the baby was only two month, and I've been badgered about from pillar to post ever sin'. They say a rolling stone gathers no moss . . ."

"An' where's the baby?"

"It died when it was ten month old."

Now the silence was clinched between them. It was quite a long time before Geoffrey ventured to say sympathetically: "You haven't much to look forward to."

"I've wished many a score time when I've started shiverin' an' shakin' at nights, as I was taken bad for death. But we're not that handy at dying."

He was silent. "But what ever shall you do?" he faltered.

"I s'll find him, if I drop by th' road."

"Why?" he asked, wondering, looking her way, though he saw nothing but solid darkness.

"Because I shall. He's not going to have it all his own road."

"But why don't you leave him?"

"Because he's *not goin' to have it all his own road.*"

She sounded very determined, even vindictive. He sat in wonder, feeling uneasy, and vaguely miserable on her behalf. She sat extraordinarily still. She seemed like a voice only, a presence.

"Are you warm now?" he asked, half afraid.

"A bit warmer — but my feet!" She sounded pitiful.

"Let me warm them with my hands," he asked her. "I'm hot enough."

"No, thank you," she said, coldly.

Then, in the darkness, she felt she had wounded him. He was writhing under her rebuff, for his offer had been pure kindness.

"They're 'appen dirty," she said, half mocking.

"Well — mine is — an' I have a bath a'most every day," he answered.

"I don't know when they'll get warm," she moaned to herself.

"Well, then, put them in my hands."

She heard him faintly rattling the match-box, and then a phosphorescent glare began to fume in his direction. Presently he was holding two smoking, blue-green blotches of light towards her feet. She was afraid. But her feet ached so,

and the impulse drove her on, so she placed her soles lightly on the two blotches of smoke. His large hands clasped over her instep, warm and hard.

"They're like ice!" he said, in deep concern.

He warmed her feet as best he could, putting them close against him. Now and again convulsive tremors ran over her. She felt his warm breath on the balls of her toes, that were bunched up in his hands. Leaning forward, she touched his hair delicately with her fingers. He thrilled. She fell to gently stroking his hair, with timid, pleading finger-tips.

"Do they feel any better?" he asked, in a low voice, suddenly lifting his face to her. This sent her hand sliding softly over his face, and her finger-tips caught on his mouth. She drew quickly away. He put his hand out to find hers, in his other palm holding both her feet. His wandering hand met her face. He touched it curiously. It was wet. He put his big fingers cautiously on her eyes, into two little pools of tears.

"What's a matter?" he asked, in a low, choked voice.

She leaned down to him, and gripped him tightly round the neck, pressing him to her bosom in a little frenzy of pain. Her bitter disillusionment with life, her unalleviated shame and degradation during the last four years, had driven her into loneliness, and hardened her till a large part of her nature was caked and sterile. Now she softened again, and her spring might be beautiful. She had been in a fair way to make an ugly old woman.

She clasped the head of Geoffrey to her breast, which heaved and fell, and heaved again. He was bewildered, full of wonder. He allowed the woman to do as she would with him. Her tears fell on his hair, as she wept noiselessly; and he breathed deep as she did. At last she let go her clasp. He put his arms round her.

"Come and let me warm you," he said, folding her up on his knee, and lapping her with his heavy arms against himself. She was small and *câline*. He held her very warm and close. Presently she stole her arms round him.

"You *are* big," she whispered.

He gripped her hard, started, put his mouth down wanderingly, seeking her out. His lips met her temple. She slowly, deliberately turned her mouth to his, and with opened lips, met him in a kiss, his first love kiss.

V

It was breaking cold dawn when Geoffrey woke. The woman was still sleeping in his arms. Her face in sleep moved all his tenderness: the tight shutting of her mouth, as if in resolution to bear what was very hard to bear, contrasted so pitifully with the small mould of her features. Geoffrey pressed her to his bosom: having her, he felt he could bruise the lips of the scornful, and pass on erect, unabateable. With her to complete him, to form the core of him, he was firm and whole. Needing her so much, he loved her fervently.

Meanwhile the dawn came like death, one of those slow, livid mornings that seem to come in a cold sweat. Slowly, and painfully, the air began to whiten. Geoffrey saw it was not raining. As he was watching the ghastly transformation outside, he felt aware of something. He glanced down: she was open-eyed, watching him; she had golden-brown, calm eyes, that immediately smiled into his. He also smiled, bowed softly down and kissed her. They did not speak for some time. Then:

"What's thy name?" he asked curiously.

"Lydia," she said.

"Lydia!" he repeated, wonderingly. He felt rather shy.

"Mine's Geoffrey Wookey," he said.

She merely smiled at him.

They were silent for a considerable time. By morning light, things look small. The huge trees of the evening were dwindling to hoary, small, uncertain things, trespassing in the sick pallor of the atmosphere.

There was a dense mist, so that the light could scarcely breathe. Everything seemed to quiver with cold and sickliness.

"Have you often slept out?" he asked her.

"Not so very," she answered.

"You won't go after *him*?" he asked.

"I s'll have to," she replied, but she nestled in to Geoffrey. He felt a sudden panic.

"You musn't," he exclaimed, and she saw he was afraid for himself. She let it be, was silent.

"We couldn't get married?" he asked, thoughtfully.

"No."

He brooded deeply over this. At length:

"Would you go to Canada with me?"

"We'll see what you think in two months' time," she replied quietly, without bitterness.

"I s'll think the same," he protested, hurt.

She did not answer, only watched him steadily. She was there for him to do as he liked with; but she would not injure his fortunes; no, not to save his soul.

"Haven't you got no relations?" he asked.

"A married sister at Crick."

"On a farm?"

"No — married a farm labourer — but she's very comfortable. I'll go there, if you want me to, just till I can get another place in service."

He considered this.

"Could you get on a farm?" he asked wistfully.

"Greenhalgh's was a farm."

He saw the future brighten: she would be a help to him. She agreed to go to her sister, and to get a place of service — until Spring, he said, when they would sail for Canada. He waited for her assent.

"You will come with me, then?" he asked.

"When the time comes," she said.

Her want of faith made him bow his head: she had reason for it.

"Shall you walk to Crick, or go from Langley Mill to Ambergate? But it's only ten mile to walk. So we can go together up Hunt's Hill — you'd have to go past our lane-end, then I could easy nip down an' fetch you some money," he said, humbly.

"I've got half a sovereign by me — it's more than I s'll want."

"Let's see it," he said.

After a while, fumbling under the blanket, she brought out the piece of money. He felt she was independent of him. Brooding rather bitterly, he told himself she'd forsake him. His anger gave him courage to ask:

"Shall you go in service in your maiden name?"

"No."

He was bitterly wrathful with her — full of resentment.

"I bet I s'll niver see you again," he said, with a short, hard laugh. She put her arms round him, pressed him to her bosom, while the tears rose to her eyes. He was reassured, but not satisfied.

"Shall you write to me to-night?"

"Yes, I will."

"And can I write to you — who shall I write to?"

"Mrs Bredon."

"Bredon!" he repeated bitterly.

He was exceedingly uneasy.

The dawn had grown quite wan. He saw the hedges drooping wet down the grey mist. Then he told her about Maurice.

"Oh, you *shouldn't!*" she said. "You should ha' put the ladder up for them, you *should.*"

"Well — I don't care."

"Go and do it now — and I'll go."

"No, don't you. Stop an' see our Maurice, go on, stop an' see him — then I s'll be able to tell him."

She consented in silence. He had her promise she would not go before he returned. She adjusted her dress, found her way to the trough, where she performed her toilet.

Geoffrey wandered round to the upper field. The stacks looked wet in the mist, the hedge was drenched. Mist rose like steam from the grass, and the near hills were veiled almost to a shadow. In the valley, some peaks of black poplar showed fairly definite, jutting up. He shivered with chill.

There was no sound from the stacks, and he could see nothing. After all, he wondered, were they up there. But he reared the ladder to the place whence it had been swept, then went down the hedge to gather dry sticks. He was breaking off thin dead twigs under a holly tree when he heard, on the perfectly still air: "Well I'm dashed!"

He listened intently. Maurice was awake.

"Sithee here!" the lad's voice exclaimed. Then, after a while, the foreign sound of the girl:

"What — oh, thair!"

"Aye, th' ladder's there, right enough."

"You said it had fall down."

"Well, I heard it drop — an' I couldna feel it nor see it."

"You said it had fall down — you lie, you liar."

"Nay, as true as I'm here — "

"You tell me lies — make me stay here — you tell me lies — " She was passionately indignant.

"As true as I'm standing here — " he began.

"Lies! — lies! — lies!" she cried. "I don't believe you, never. You *mean*, you *mean*, *mean*!"

"A' raight, then!" he was now incensed, in his turn.

"You are bad, mean, mean, mean."

"Are yer commin' down?" asked Maurice, coldly.

"No — I will not come with you — mean, to tell me lies."

"Are ter commin' down?"

"No, I don't want you."

"A' raight, then!"

Geoffrey, peering through the holly tree, saw Maurice negotiating the ladder. The top rung was below the brim of the stack, and rested on the cloth, so it was dangerous to approach. The Fräulein watched him from the end of the stack, where the cloth thrown back showed the light, dry hay. He slipped slightly, she screamed. When he had got on to the ladder, he pulled the cloth away, throwing it back, making it easy for her to descend.

"Now are ter comin'?" he asked.

"No!" she shook her head violently, in a pet.

Geoffrey felt slightly contemptuous of her. But Maurice waited.

"Are ter comin'?" he called again.

"No," she flashed, like a wild cat.

"All right, then I'm going."

He descended. At the bottom, he stood holding the ladder.

"Come on, while I hold it steady," he said.

There was no reply. For some minutes he stood patiently with his foot on the bottom rung of the ladder. He was pale, rather washed-out in his appearance, and he drew himself together with cold.

"Are ter commin', or aren't ter?" he asked at length. Still there was no reply.

"Then stop up till tha'rt ready," he muttered, and he went away. Round the other side of the stacks he met Geoffrey.

"What, are thaigh here?" he exclaimed.

"Bin here a' naight," replied Geoffrey. "I come to help thee wi' th' cloth, but I found it on, an' th' ladder down, so I thowt tha'd gone."

"Did ter put th' ladder up?"

"I did a bit sin."

Maurice brooded over this, Geoffrey struggled with himself to get out his own news. At last he blurted:

"Tha knows that woman as wor here yis'day dinner — 'er come back, an' stopped i' th' shed a' night, out o' th' rain."

"Oh — ah!" said Maurice, his eye kindling, and a smile crossing his pallor.

"An' I s'll gi'e her some breakfast."

"Oh — ah!" repeated Maurice.

"It's th' man as is good-for-nowt, not her," protested Geoffrey. Maurice did not feel in a position to cast stones.

"Tha pleases thysen," he said, "what ter does." He was very quiet, unlike himself. He seemed bothered and anxious, as Geoffrey had not seen him before.

"What's up wi' thee?" asked the elder brother, who in his own heart was glad, and relieved.

"Nowt," was the reply.

They went together to the hut. The woman was folding the blanket. She was fresh from washing, and looked very pretty. Her hair, instead of being screwed tightly back, was coiled in a knot low down, partly covering her ears. Before, she had deliberately made herself plain-looking: now she was neat and pretty, with a sweet, womanly gravity.

"Hello. I didn't think to find you here," said Maurice, very awkwardly, smiling. She watched him gravely without reply. "But it was better in shelter than outside, last night," he added.

"Yes," she replied.

"Shall you get a few more sticks?" Geoffrey asked him. It was a new thing for Geoffrey to be leader. Maurice obeyed. He wandered forth into the damp, raw morning. He did not go to the stack, as he shrank from meeting Paula.

At the mouth of the hut, Geoffrey was making the fire. The woman got out coffee from the box: Geoffrey set the tin to boil. They were arranging breakfast when Paula appeared. She was hatless. Bits of hay stuck in her hair, and she was white-faced — altogether, she did not show to advantage.

"Ah — you!" she exclaimed, seeing Geoffrey.

"Hello!" he answered. "You're out early."

"Where's Maurice?"

"I dunno, he should be back directly."

Paula was silent.

"When have you come?" she asked.

"I come last night, but I could see nobody about. I got up half an hour sin', an' put th' ladder up ready to take the stack-cloth up."

Paula understood, and was silent. When Maurice returned with the faggots, she was crouched warming her hands. She looked up at him, but he kept his eyes averted from her. Geoffrey met the eyes of Lydia, and smiled. Maurice put his hands to the fire.

"You cold?" asked Paula tenderly.

"A bit," he answered, quite friendly, but reserved. And all the while the four sat round the fire, drinking their smoked coffee, eating each a small piece of toasted bacon, Paula watched eagerly for the eyes of Maurice, and he avoided her. He was gentle, but would not give his eyes to her looks. And Geoffrey smiled constantly to Lydia, who watched gravely.

The German girl succeeded in getting safely into the Vicarage, her escapade unknown to anyone save the housemaid. Before a week was out, she was openly

engaged to Maurice, and when her month's notice expired, she went to live at the farm.

Geoffrey and Lydia kept faith one with the other.

CHRISTS IN THE TIROL

THE real Tirol seems to come not far south of the Brenne and to extend right north to the Starnberger See. Even at Sterzing the rather gloomy atmosphere of the Tirolese Alps is dispersing, the approach of the south is felt. And strangely enough, the roadside crucifixes become less and less interesting after Sterzing. Walking from Munich down to Italy, I have looked at hundreds of *Martertafeln*, and now I miss them; these painted shrines on Lake Garda are not the same.

I, who see a tragedy in every cow, began by seeing one in the Secession pictures in Munich. All these new paintings seemed so shrill and restless. Those that were meant for joy shrieked joy, and sorrow was dished as a sensation, curiously, subtly spiced. I thought of some of our English artists, that seem to suck their sadness like a mournful lollipop. That is, at any rate, a more comfortable way. And then, for miles and endless miles, one must walk past crucifixes.

I got rather scared of them in the end. At first they were mostly factory-made, so that I did not notice them, any more than I noticed the boards with warnings, except just to observe they were there. And then, coming among the others carved in wood by the peasant artists, I began to notice. They create almost an atmosphere, an atmosphere of their own on the countryside.

The first I really saw, and the one that startled me into awareness, was in a marshy place at the foot of the mountains. A dead Christ hung in an old shrine. He was broad and handsome, he was a Bavarian peasant. I looked at his body and at his limbs, and recognized him almost as one of the men I had seen in the Gasthaus the evening before: a peasant farmer, working himself to the bone, but not giving in. His plain, rudimentary face stared straight in front, and the neck was stiffened. He might have said: "Yes, I am suffering. I look at you, and you can see me. Perhaps something will happen, will help. If not, I'll stick it". I loved him. He seemed stubborn and struggling from the root of his soul, his human soul. No Godship had been thrust upon him. He was human clay, a peasant Prometheus Christ, his poor soul bound in him, blind, but stubborn, struggling against the fact of the nails.

And after him, when I see so many Christs posing on the Cross, a la Guido Reni, I recognize them as the more conventional symbol, as devoid of personal meaning as is our St. George and the Dragon, and I go by.

But then there are so many Christs that are men, carved by men. In the Zemna

valley, right in the middle of the Tirol, there are half-a-dozen crucifixes, evidently by the same worker. They have all got the same body and the same face, though one has a fair beard. The largest of them is more than life-size. He has a strangely brutal face, that aches with weariness of pain, and he looks as if he were just dead. He has fallen forwards on the cross, the weight of his full-grown mature body tearing his hands on the nails. And on his rather ugly, passionate mouth is despair and bitterness and death. The peasants, as they drive their pack-horses along the dark valley, take off their hats in passing, half afraid. It is sombre and damp, and there hangs the falling body of the man who has died in bitterness of spirit. There is something dreadful about the bitter despair of the crucifix. I think of the man that carved it. He was afraid. They were nearly all afraid, when they carved and erected these monuments to physical pain, just as the sturdy peasants are afraid, as they take off their hats in the mountain gloom.

They are afraid of physical pain. It terrifies them. They raise, in their startled helplessness of suffering, these Christs, these human attempts at deciphering the riddle of pain. In the same way, more or less, they paint the little pictures of some calamity — a man drowned in a stream, or killed by a falling tree — and nail it up near the spot where the accident occurred. There are thousands of these pictures, painted just as a child would do them. A man is seen immersed in water up to the waist, his hands in the air. The water flows wildly, a bridge stands serenely, the man must either have his feet on the bottom or must be performing some rare swimming miracle. But it says the bridge broke beneath him and he was drowned. Yet he is seen hallooing wildly, the water not up to his breast. His neighbour painted the picture, partly out of a curious love of sensational mishap, partly out of genuine dread lest a bridge should fall under himself also. His family nailed the picture to the tree at the end of the broken bridge, partly to get prayers for his soul, partly to insist on the fact that “in the midst of life we are in death”. And we, as we look at it — when we are not amused — wonder if we have as great a horror and terror of death and pain as these people have; or if our horror and terror are only a little more complex; and if all art is not a kind of accustoming ourselves to the idea of suffering and death, so that we can more and more comprehend them, even if we do not really understand.

I can do with all the Christs that have a bit of fight in them, or some stillness of soul. But I hate the Christs who just suffer, or who just whine. Some of them look up to heaven, turn their eyes skyward and pull down the corners of their mouths. Then I say: “You haven’t got it bad enough, my dear fellow. Your cross isn’t much more than an ailment for you to whine about”. Some of them look pale and done-for, and I think: “Poor devil, he hadn’t got much spunk”. And then, some are just nothing. Indeed, I used to think I never should see a Christus

who was anything but neutral. In their attempts at drawing Jesus the artists have made so many bloodless creatures, neither man nor woman, and a good deal less interesting than either. They have extracted so many mundane qualities, that they have left nothing but a fishy neutrality, usually with curled hair, and offered it to us as a picture of Jesus.

I return to my peasant Christs, that I love. I have mentioned the stubborn, Prometheus Christ, and the bitter, despairing Christ, and the Christ like a pale, dead young man who has suffered too much, and the rather sentimental Christ: all of them men, and rather real.

Then, in a tiny glass case beside a high-road in the mountains, sits another Christ that half makes me laugh and half makes me want to sit down and weep. His little head rests on his hand, his elbow on his knee, and he meditates, half wearily. I am strongly reminded of Walther von der Vogelweide, and the German mediæval spirit. Detached, he sits and dreams and broods, in his little golden crown of thorns and his little red flannel cloak, that some peasant woman has stitched. "*Couvre-toi de gloire — couvre-toi de flanelle*", I think to myself. But he sits and dreams and broods. I think he is the forefather of the warm-hearted German philosopher and professor.

Beyond the Brenner, there seems again a kind of falsity in the Christs. The wayside chapels became fearfully ornate and florid, the Christus neutral, or sensational. There is in a chapel near St. Jakob the most ghastly Christus it is possible to imagine. He is seated, after the crucifixion, and in the most dreadful bloody mess. His eyes, which are turned slightly to look at you, are bloodshot till they are scarlet and glistening, and the very iris seems crimsoned. Where the skin is torn away at the wounds, the living red muscles are bare, and one can almost see the intestines, red with blood, bulging from the hole in the side. And the misery, and the almost low hate, the almost criminal look on the bloody disfigured face, is shocking. That is a Christ of the new, sensational sort.

I have not seen anyone salute the Christus, south of the Brenner, in the Austrian Tirol. There is a queer feeling about Austria, as if it were waiting to take its impression from some other nation. On the Franco-German frontier, one feels two distinct and antagonistic nationalities, mixing but not mingling. But Austria merges into Germany on one side, and merges into Italy on the other, till one looks for Austria, and wonders where it is. And Austria seems to be looking for itself. Its soldiers have no more nationality than the Chocolate Soldier's, and the Austrian official uniform is worthy of an essay to itself. It creates a dandy and a decent fellow, but no impression of office. At the back of the German official is Germany, at the back of an Austrian official — a gentle deprecation.

So, in Austria, I have seen a fallen Christus. It was on the Taufen, not so very

far from Meran. I was looking at the snow, and descending through the cold morning air, when I noticed a little Christus shed, very old. It was all of aged, silvery-grey wood, covered on the top with a thicket of grey-green lichen. And on the rocks at the foot of the cross was the armless Christus who had tumbled down, and lay on his back, in a weird attitude. It was one of the old peasant Christs, carved out of wood, with the curious long, wedge-shaped shins that are characteristic. The arms had broken off at the shoulders, and hung on their nails, as the *ex voto* limbs are hung in the shrines. But these dangled from their palms, upside-down, the muscles carved in wood looking startling. And the icy-cold wind blew them backwards and forwards. I dared not touch the fallen image, nor the arms. I wish a priest would go and make it right. And I wish he would wash off the nasty and sensational streams of blood that flow from the brow and knees and feet, hundreds of red stripes, down the body of so many Austrian Christs. They hide the man, and make a messy horror.

And I suppose most of the carvers of these wayside crucifixes were right. There was a Christ who rebelled against his suffering, and one who was bitter with a sense of futility, and one who gave in to his misery, and one who hated the persecutors, and one who dreamed wistfully, all on the same cross. And perhaps there was one who was peaceful in his sense of right, and one who was ashamed for having let the crowd make beasts of themselves, batten on his suffering, and one who thought: "I am of you, I might be among you, yelling at myself in the same cruel way. But I am not, and that is something —".

All those Christs, like a populace, hang in the mountains under their little sheds. And perhaps they are falling, one by one. And I suppose our Christs in England are such as Hamlet and Tom Jones and Jude the Obscure.

SECOND BEST

“Oh, I’m tired!” Frances exclaimed petulantly, and in the same instant she dropped down on the turf, near the hedge-bottom. Anne stood a moment surprised, then, accustomed to the vagaries of her beloved Frances, said:

“Well, and aren’t you always likely to be tired, after travelling that blessed long way from Liverpool yesterday?” and she plumped down beside her sister. Anne was a wise young body of fourteen, very buxom, brimming with common sense. Frances was much older, about twenty-three, and whimsical, spasmodic. She was the beauty and the clever child of the family. She plucked the goose-grass buttons from her dress in a nervous, desperate fashion. Her beautiful profile, looped above with black hair, warm with the dusky-and-scarlet complexion of a pear, was calm as a mask, her thin brown hand plucked nervously.

“It’s not the journey,” she said, objecting to Anne’s obtuseness. Anne looked inquiringly at her darling. The young girl, in her self-confident, practical way, proceeded to reckon up this whimsical creature. But suddenly she found herself full in the eyes of Frances; felt two dark, hectic eyes flaring challenge at her, and she shrank away. Frances was peculiar for these great, exposed looks, which disconcerted people by their violence and their suddenness.

“What’s a matter, poor old duck?” asked Anne, as she folded the slight, wilful form of her sister in her arms. Frances laughed shakily, and nestled down for comfort on the budding breasts of the strong girl.

“Oh, I’m only a bit tired,” she murmured, on the point of tears.

“Well, of course you are, what do you expect?” soothed Anne. It was a joke to Frances that Anne should play elder, almost mother to her. But then, Anne was in her unvexed teens; men were like big dogs to her: while Frances, at twenty-three, suffered a good deal.

The country was intensely morning-still. On the common everything shone beside its shadow, and the hillside gave off heat in silence. The brown turf seemed in a low state of combustion, the leaves of the oaks were scorched brown. Among the blackish foliage in the distance shone the small red and orange of the village.

The willows in the brook-course at the foot of the common suddenly shook with a dazzling effect like diamonds. It was a puff of wind. Anne resumed her normal position. She spread her knees, and put in her lap a handful of hazel nuts,

whity-green leafy things, whose one cheek was tanned between brown and pink. These she began to crack and eat. Frances, with bowed head, mused bitterly.

“Eh, you know Tom Smedley?” began the young girl, as she pulled a tight kernel out of its shell.

“I suppose so,” replied Frances sarcastically.

“Well, he gave me a wild rabbit what he’d caught, to keep with my tame one — and it’s living.”

“That’s a good thing,” said Frances, very detached and ironic.

“Well, it *is*! He reckoned he’d take me to Ollerton Feast, but he never did. Look here, he took a servant from the rectory; I saw him.”

“So he ought,” said Frances.

“No, he oughtn’t! and I told him so. And I told him I should tell you — an’ I have done.”

Click and snap went a nut between her teeth. She sorted out the kernel, and chewed complacently.

“It doesn’t make much difference,” said Frances.

“Well, ‘appen it doesn’t; but I was mad with him all the same.”

“Why?”

“Because I was; he’s no right to go with a servant.”

“He’s a perfect right,” persisted Frances, very just and cold.

“No, he hasn’t, when he’d said he’d take me.”

Frances burst into a laugh of amusement and relief.

“Oh, no; I’d forgot that,” she said, adding, “And what did he say when you promised to tell me?”

“He laughed and said, ‘he won’t fret her fat over that.’“

“And she won’t,” sniffed Frances.

There was silence. The common, with its sere, blonde-headed thistles, its heaps of silent bramble, its brown-husked gorse in the glare of sunshine, seemed visionary. Across the brook began the immense pattern of agriculture, white chequering of barley stubble, brown squares of wheat, khaki patches of pasture, red stripes of fallow, with the woodland and the tiny village dark like ornaments, leading away to the distance, right to the hills, where the check-pattern grew smaller and smaller, till, in the blackish haze of heat, far off, only the tiny white squares of barley stubble showed distinct.

“Eh, I say, here’s a rabbit hole!” cried Anne suddenly. “Should we watch if one comes out? You won’t have to fidget, you know.”

The two girls sat perfectly still. Frances watched certain objects in her surroundings: they had a peculiar, unfriendly look about them: the weight of greenish elderberries on their purpling stalks; the twinkling of the yellowing

crab-apples that clustered high up in the hedge, against the sky: the exhausted, limp leaves of the primroses lying flat in the hedge-bottom: all looked strange to her. Then her eyes caught a movement. A mole was moving silently over the warm, red soil, nosing, shuffling hither and thither, flat, and dark as a shadow, shifting about, and as suddenly brisk, and as silent, like a very ghost of *joie de vivre*. Frances started, from habit was about to call on Anne to kill the little pest. But, to-day, her lethargy of unhappiness was too much for her. She watched the little brute paddling, snuffing, touching things to discover them, running in blindness, delighted to ecstasy by the sunlight and the hot, strange things that caressed its belly and its nose. She felt a keen pity for the little creature.

“Eh, our Fran, look there! It’s a mole.”

Anne was on her feet, standing watching the dark, unconscious beast. Frances frowned with anxiety.

“It doesn’t run off, does it?” said the young girl softly. Then she stealthily approached the creature. The mole paddled fumblingly away. In an instant Anne put her foot upon it, not too heavily. Frances could see the struggling, swimming movement of the little pink hands of the brute, the twisting and twitching of its pointed nose, as it wrestled under the sole of the boot.

“It *does* wriggle!” said the bonny girl, knitting her brows in a frown at the eerie sensation. Then she bent down to look at her trap. Frances could now see, beyond the edge of the boot-sole, the heaving of the velvet shoulders, the pitiful turning of the sightless face, the frantic rowing of the flat, pink hands.

“Kill the thing,” she said, turning away her face.

“Oh — I’m not,” laughed Anne, shrinking. “You can, if you like.”

“I *don’t* like,” said Frances, with quiet intensity.

After several dabbling attempts, Anne succeeded in picking up the little animal by the scruff of its neck. It threw back its head, flung its long blind snout from side to side, the mouth open in a peculiar oblong, with tiny pinkish teeth at the edge. The blind, frantic mouth gaped and writhed. The body, heavy and clumsy, hung scarcely moving.

“Isn’t it a snappy little thing,” observed Anne twisting to avoid the teeth.

“What are you going to do with it?” asked Frances sharply.

“It’s got to be killed — look at the damage they do. I s’ll take it home and let dadda or somebody kill it. I’m not going to let it go.”

She swaddled the creature clumsily in her pocket-handkerchief and sat down beside her sister. There was an interval of silence, during which Anne combated the efforts of the mole.

“You’ve not had much to say about Jimmy this time. Did you see him often in Liverpool?” Anne asked suddenly.

“Once or twice,” replied Frances, giving no sign of how the question troubled her.

“And aren’t you sweet on him any more, then?”

“I should think I’m not, seeing that he’s engaged.”

“Engaged? Jimmy Barrass! Well, of all things! I never thought *he’d* get engaged.”

“Why not, he’s as much right as anybody else?” snapped Frances.

Anne was fumbling with the mole.

“‘Appen so,” she said at length; “but I never thought Jimmy would, though.”

“Why not?” snapped Frances.

“I don’t know — this blessed mole, it’ll not keep still! — who’s he got engaged to?”

“How should I know?”

“I thought you’d ask him; you’ve known him long enough. I s’d think he thought he’d get engaged now he’s a Doctor of Chemistry.”

Frances laughed in spite of herself.

“What’s that got to do with it?” she asked.

“I’m sure it’s got a lot. He’ll want to feel *somebody* now, so he’s got engaged. Hey, stop it; go in!”

But at this juncture the mole almost succeeded in wriggling clear. It wrestled and twisted frantically, waved its pointed blind head, its mouth standing open like a little shaft, its big, wrinkled hands spread out.

“Go in with you!” urged Anne, poking the little creature with her forefinger, trying to get it back into the handkerchief. Suddenly the mouth turned like a spark on her finger.

“Oh!” she cried, “he’s bit me.”

She dropped him to the floor. Dazed, the blind creature fumbled round. Frances felt like shrieking. She expected him to dart away in a flash, like a mouse, and there he remained groping; she wanted to cry to him to be gone. Anne, in a sudden decision of wrath, caught up her sister’s walking-cane. With one blow the mole was dead. Frances was startled and shocked. One moment the little wretch was fussing in the heat, and the next it lay like a little bag, inert and black — not a struggle, scarce a quiver.

“It is dead!” Frances said breathlessly. Anne took her finger from her mouth, looked at the tiny pinpricks, and said:

“Yes, he is, and I’m glad. They’re vicious little nuisances, moles are.”

With which her wrath vanished. She picked up the dead animal.

“Hasn’t it got a beautiful skin,” she mused, stroking the fur with her forefinger, then with her cheek.

“Mind,” said Frances sharply. “You’ll have the blood on your skirt!”

One ruby drop of blood hung on the small snout, ready to fall. Anne shook it off on to some harebells. Frances suddenly became calm; in that moment, grown-up.

“I suppose they have to be killed,” she said, and a certain rather dreary indifference succeeded to her grief. The twinkling crab-apples, the glitter of brilliant willows now seemed to her trifling, scarcely worth the notice. Something had died in her, so that things lost their poignancy. She was calm, indifference overlying her quiet sadness. Rising, she walked down to the brook course.

“Here, wait for me,” cried Anne, coming tumbling after.

Frances stood on the bridge, looking at the red mud trodden into pockets by the feet of cattle. There was not a drain of water left, but everything smelled green, succulent. Why did she care so little for Anne, who was so fond of her? she asked herself. Why did she care so little for anyone? She did not know, but she felt a rather stubborn pride in her isolation and indifference.

They entered a field where stooks of barley stood in rows, the straight, blonde tresses of the corn streaming on to the ground. The stubble was bleached by the intense summer, so that the expanse glared white. The next field was sweet and soft with a second crop of seeds; thin, straggling clover whose little pink knobs rested prettily in the dark green. The scent was faint and sickly. The girls came up in single file, Frances leading.

Near the gate a young man was mowing with the scythe some fodder for the afternoon feed of the cattle. As he saw the girls he left off working and waited in an aimless kind of way. Frances was dressed in white muslin, and she walked with dignity, detached and forgetful. Her lack of agitation, her simple, unheeding advance made him nervous. She had loved the far-off Jimmy for five years, having had in return his half-measures. This man only affected her slightly.

Tom was of medium stature, energetic in build. His smooth, fair-skinned face was burned red, not brown, by the sun, and this ruddiness enhanced his appearance of good humour and easiness. Being a year older than Frances, he would have courted her long ago had she been so inclined. As it was, he had gone his uneventful way amiably, chatting with many a girl, but remaining unattached, free of trouble for the most part. Only he knew he wanted a woman. He hitched his trousers just a trifle self-consciously as the girls approached. Frances was a rare, delicate kind of being, whom he realized with a queer and delicious stimulation in his veins. She gave him a slight sense of suffocation. Somehow, this morning, she affected him more than usual. She was dressed in white. He, however, being matter-of-fact in his mind, did not realize. His feeling

had never become conscious, purposive.

Frances knew what she was about. Tom was ready to love her as soon as she would show him. Now that she could not have Jimmy, she did not poignantly care. Still, she would have something. If she could not have the best — Jimmy, whom she knew to be something of a snob — she would have the second best, Tom. She advanced rather indifferently.

“You are back, then!” said Tom. She marked the touch of uncertainty in his voice.

“No,” she laughed, “I’m still in Liverpool,” and the undertone of intimacy made him burn.

“This isn’t you, then?” he asked.

Her heart leapt up in approval. She looked in his eyes, and for a second was with him.

“Why, what do you think?” she laughed.

He lifted his hat from his head with a distracted little gesture. She liked him, his quaint ways, his humour, his ignorance, and his slow masculinity.

“Here, look here, Tom Smedley,” broke in Anne.

“A mouidiwarp! Did you find it dead?” he asked.

“No, it bit me,” said Anne.

“Oh, aye! An’ that got your rag out, did it?”

“No, it didn’t!” Anne scolded sharply. “Such language!”

“Oh, what’s up wi’ it?”

“I can’t bear you to talk broad.”

“Can’t you?”

He glanced at Frances.

“It isn’t nice,” Frances said. She did not care, really. The vulgar speech jarred on her as a rule; Jimmy was a gentleman. But Tom’s manner of speech did not matter to her.

“I like you to talk *nice*ly,” she added.

“Do you,” he replied, tilting his hat, stirred.

“And generally you *do*, you know,” she smiled.

“I s’ll have to have a try,” he said, rather tensely gallant.

“What?” she asked brightly.

“To talk nice to you,” he said. Frances coloured furiously, bent her head for a moment, then laughed gaily, as if she liked this clumsy hint.

“Eh now, you mind what you’re saying,” cried Anne, giving the young man an admonitory pat.

“You wouldn’t have to give yon mole many knocks like that,” he teased, relieved to get on safe ground, rubbing his arm.

“No indeed, it died in one blow,” said Frances, with a flippancy that was hateful to her.

“You’re not so good at knockin’ ‘em?” he said, turning to her.

“I don’t know, if I’m cross,” she said decisively.

“No?” he replied, with alert attentiveness.

“I could,” she added, harder, “if it was necessary.”

He was slow to feel her difference.

“And don’t you consider it *is* necessary?” he asked, with misgiving.

“W — ell — is it?” she said, looking at him steadily, coldly.

“I reckon it is,” he replied, looking away, but standing stubborn.

She laughed quickly.

“But it isn’t necessary for *me*,” she said, with slight contempt.

“Yes, that’s quite true,” he answered.

She laughed in a shaky fashion.

“*I know it is*,” she said; and there was an awkward pause.

“Why, would you *like* me to kill moles then?” she asked tentatively, after a while.

“They do us a lot of damage,” he said, standing firm on his own ground, angered.

“Well, I’ll see the next time I come across one,” she promised, defiantly. Their eyes met, and she sank before him, her pride troubled. He felt uneasy and triumphant and baffled, as if fate had gripped him. She smiled as she departed.

“Well,” said Anne, as the sisters went through the wheat stubble; “I don’t know what you two’s been jawing about, I’m sure.”

“Don’t you?” laughed Frances significantly.

“No, I don’t. But, at any rate, Tom Smedley’s a good deal better to my thinking than Jimmy, so there — and nicer.”

“Perhaps he is,” said Frances coldly.

And the next day, after a secret, persistent hunt, she found another mole playing in the heat. She killed it, and in the evening, when Tom came to the gate to smoke his pipe after supper, she took him the dead creature.

“Here you are then!” she said.

“Did you catch it?” he replied, taking the velvet corpse into his fingers and examining it minutely. This was to hide his trepidation.

“Did you think I couldn’t?” she asked, her face very near his.

“Nay, I didn’t know.”

She laughed in his face, a strange little laugh that caught her breath, all agitation, and tears, and recklessness of desire. He looked frightened and upset. She put her hand to his arm.

“Shall you go out wi’ me?” he asked, in a difficult, troubled tone.

She turned her face away, with a shaky laugh. The blood came up in him, strong, overmastering. He resisted it. But it drove him down, and he was carried away. Seeing the winsome, frail nape of her neck, fierce love came upon him for her, and tenderness.

“We s’ll ‘ave to tell your mother,” he said. And he stood, suffering, resisting his passion for her.

“Yes,” she replied, in a dead voice. But there was a thrill of pleasure in this death.

THE SHADES OF SPRING

I

It was a mile nearer through the wood. Mechanically, Syson turned up by the forge and lifted the field-gate. The blacksmith and his mate stood still, watching the trespasser. But Syson looked too much a gentleman to be accosted. They let him go in silence across the small field to the wood.

There was not the least difference between this morning and those of the bright springs, six or eight years back. White and sandy-gold fowls still scratched round the gate, littering the earth and the field with feathers and scratched-up rubbish. Between the two thick holly bushes in the wood-hedge was the hidden gap, whose fence one climbed to get into the wood; the bars were scored just the same by the keeper's boots. He was back in the eternal.

Syson was extraordinarily glad. Like an uneasy spirit he had returned to the country of his past, and he found it waiting for him, unaltered. The hazel still spread glad little hands downwards, the bluebells here were still wan and few, among the lush grass and in shade of the bushes.

The path through the wood, on the very brow of a slope, ran winding easily for a time. All around were twiggy oaks, just issuing their gold, and floor spaces diapered with woodruff, with patches of dog-mercury and tufts of hyacinth. Two fallen trees still lay across the track. Syson jolted down a steep, rough slope, and came again upon the open land, this time looking north as through a great window in the wood. He stayed to gaze over the level fields of the hill-top, at the village which strewed the bare upland as if it had tumbled off the passing waggons of industry, and been forsaken. There was a stiff, modern, grey little church, and blocks and rows of red dwellings lying at random; at the back, the twinkling headstocks of the pit, and the looming pit-hill. All was naked and out-of-doors, not a tree! It was quite unaltered.

Syson turned, satisfied, to follow the path that sheered downhill into the wood. He was curiously elated, feeling himself back in an enduring vision. He started. A keeper was standing a few yards in front, barring the way.

"Where might you be going this road, sir?" asked the man. The tone of his question had a challenging twang. Syson looked at the fellow with an impersonal, observant gaze. It was a young man of four or five and twenty, ruddy and well favoured. His dark blue eyes now stared aggressively at the

intruder. His black moustache, very thick, was cropped short over a small, rather soft mouth. In every other respect the fellow was manly and good-looking. He stood just above middle height; the strong forward thrust of his chest, and the perfect ease of his erect, self-sufficient body, gave one the feeling that he was taut with animal life, like the thick jet of a fountain balanced in itself. He stood with the butt of his gun on the ground, looking uncertainly and questioningly at Syson. The dark, restless eyes of the trespasser, examining the man and penetrating into him without heeding his office, troubled the keeper and made him flush.

“Where is Naylor? Have you got his job?” Syson asked.

“You’re not from the House, are you?” inquired the keeper. It could not be, since everyone was away.

“No, I’m not from the House,” the other replied. It seemed to amuse him.

“Then might I ask where you were making for?” said the keeper, nettled.

“Where I am making for?” Syson repeated. “I am going to Willey-Water Farm.”

“This isn’t the road.”

“I think so. Down this path, past the well, and out by the white gate.”

“But that’s not the public road.”

“I suppose not. I used to come so often, in Naylor’s time, I had forgotten. Where is he, by the way?”

“Crippled with rheumatism,” the keeper answered reluctantly.

“Is he?” Syson exclaimed in pain.

“And who might you be?” asked the keeper, with a new intonation.

“John Adderley Syson; I used to live in Cordy Lane.”

“Used to court Hilda Millership?”

Syson’s eyes opened with a pained smile. He nodded. There was an awkward silence.

“And you — who are you?” asked Syson.

“Arthur Pilbeam — Naylor’s my uncle,” said the other.

“You live here in Nuttall?”

“I’m lodgin’ at my uncle’s — at Naylor’s.”

“I see!”

“Did you say you was goin’ down to Willey-Water?” asked the keeper.

“Yes.”

There was a pause of some moments, before the keeper blurted: “*I’m courtin’ Hilda Millership.*”

The young fellow looked at the intruder with a stubborn defiance, almost pathetic. Syson opened new eyes.

“Are you?” he said, astonished. The keeper flushed dark.

“She and me are keeping company,” he said.

“I didn’t know!” said Syson. The other man waited uncomfortably.

“What, is the thing settled?” asked the intruder.

“How, settled?” retorted the other sulkily.

“Are you going to get married soon, and all that?”

The keeper stared in silence for some moments, impotent.

“I suppose so,” he said, full of resentment.

“Ah!” Syson watched closely.

“I’m married myself,” he added, after a time.

“You are?” said the other incredulously.

Syson laughed in his brilliant, unhappy way.

“This last fifteen months,” he said.

The keeper gazed at him with wide, wondering eyes, apparently thinking back, and trying to make things out.

“Why, didn’t you know?” asked Syson.

“No, I didn’t,” said the other sulkily.

There was silence for a moment.

“Ah well!” said Syson, “I will go on. I suppose I may.” The keeper stood in silent opposition. The two men hesitated in the open, grassy space, set around with small sheaves of sturdy bluebells; a little open platform on the brow of the hill. Syson took a few indecisive steps forward, then stopped.

“I say, how beautiful!” he cried.

He had come in full view of the downslope. The wide path ran from his feet like a river, and it was full of bluebells, save for a green winding thread down the centre, where the keeper walked. Like a stream the path opened into azure shallows at the levels, and there were pools of bluebells, with still the green thread winding through, like a thin current of ice-water through blue lakes. And from under the twig-purple of the bushes swam the shadowed blue, as if the flowers lay in flood water over the woodland.

“Ah, isn’t it lovely!” Syson exclaimed; this was his past, the country he had abandoned, and it hurt him to see it so beautiful. Woodpigeons cooed overhead, and the air was full of the brightness of birds singing.

“If you’re married, what do you keep writing to her for, and sending her poetry books and things?” asked the keeper. Syson stared at him, taken aback and humiliated. Then he began to smile.

“Well,” he said, “I did not know about you . . .”

Again the keeper flushed darkly.

“But if you are married — ” he charged.

“I am,” answered the other cynically.

Then, looking down the blue, beautiful path, Syson felt his own humiliation. “What right *have* I to hang on to her?” he thought, bitterly self-contemptuous.

“She knows I’m married and all that,” he said.

“But you keep sending her books,” challenged the keeper.

Syson, silenced, looked at the other man quizzically, half pitying. Then he turned.

“Good day,” he said, and was gone. Now, everything irritated him: the two willows, one all gold and perfume and murmur, one silver-green and bristly, reminded him, that here he had taught her about pollination. What a fool he was! What god-forsaken folly it all was!

“Ah well,” he said to himself; “the poor devil seems to have a grudge against me. I’ll do my best for him.” He grinned to himself, in a very bad temper.

II

The farm was less than a hundred yards from the wood’s edge. The wall of trees formed the fourth side to the open quadrangle. The house faced the wood. With tangled emotions, Syson noted the plum blossom falling on the profuse, coloured primroses, which he himself had brought here and set. How they had increased! There were thick tufts of scarlet, and pink, and pale purple primroses under the plum trees. He saw somebody glance at him through the kitchen window, heard men’s voices.

The door opened suddenly: very womanly she had grown! He felt himself going pale.

“You? — Addy!” she exclaimed, and stood motionless.

“Who?” called the farmer’s voice. Men’s low voices answered. Those low voices, curious and almost jeering, roused the tormented spirit in the visitor. Smiling brilliantly at her, he waited.

“Myself — why not?” he said.

The flush burned very deep on her cheek and throat.

“We are just finishing dinner,” she said.

“Then I will stay outside.” He made a motion to show that he would sit on the red earthenware pipkin that stood near the door among the daffodils, and contained the drinking water.

“Oh no, come in,” she said hurriedly. He followed her. In the doorway, he glanced swiftly over the family, and bowed. Everyone was confused. The farmer, his wife, and the four sons sat at the coarsely laid dinner-table, the men with arms bare to the elbows.

“I am sorry I come at lunch-time,” said Syson.

“Hello, Addy!” said the farmer, assuming the old form of address, but his tone cold. “How are you?”

And he shook hands.

“Shall you have a bit?” he invited the young visitor, but taking for granted the offer would be refused. He assumed that Syson was become too refined to eat so roughly. The young man winced at the imputation.

“Have you had any dinner?” asked the daughter.

“No,” replied Syson. “It is too early. I shall be back at half-past one.”

“You call it lunch, don’t you?” asked the eldest son, almost ironical. He had once been an intimate friend of this young man.

“We’ll give Addy something when we’ve finished,” said the mother, an invalid, deprecating.

“No — don’t trouble. I don’t want to give you any trouble,” said Syson.

“You could allus live on fresh air an’ scenery,” laughed the youngest son, a lad of nineteen.

Syson went round the buildings, and into the orchard at the back of the house, where daffodils all along the hedgerow swung like yellow, ruffled birds on their perches. He loved the place extraordinarily, the hills ranging round, with bear-skin woods covering their giant shoulders, and small red farms like brooches clasping their garments; the blue streak of water in the valley, the bareness of the home pasture, the sound of myriad-threaded bird-singing, which went mostly unheard. To his last day, he would dream of this place, when he felt the sun on his face, or saw the small handfuls of snow between the winter twigs, or smelt the coming of spring.

Hilda was very womanly. In her presence he felt constrained. She was twenty-nine, as he was, but she seemed to him much older. He felt foolish, almost unreal, beside her. She was so static. As he was fingering some shed plum blossom on a low bough, she came to the back door to shake the table-cloth. Fowls raced from the stackyard, birds rustled from the trees. Her dark hair was gathered up in a coil like a crown on her head. She was very straight, distant in her bearing. As she folded the cloth, she looked away over the hills.

Presently Syson returned indoors. She had prepared eggs and curd cheese, stewed gooseberries and cream.

“Since you will dine to-night,” she said, “I have only given you a light lunch.”

“It is awfully nice,” he said. “You keep a real idyllic atmosphere — your belt of straw and ivy buds.”

Still they hurt each other.

He was uneasy before her. Her brief, sure speech, her distant bearing, were

unfamiliar to him. He admired again her grey-black eyebrows, and her lashes. Their eyes met. He saw, in the beautiful grey and black of her glance, tears and a strange light, and at the back of all, calm acceptance of herself, and triumph over him.

He felt himself shrinking. With an effort he kept up the ironic manner.

She sent him into the parlour while she washed the dishes. The long low room was refurnished from the Abbey sale, with chairs upholstered in claret-coloured rep, many years old, and an oval table of polished walnut, and another piano, handsome, though still antique. In spite of the strangeness, he was pleased. Opening a high cupboard let into the thickness of the wall, he found it full of his books, his old lesson-books, and volumes of verse he had sent her, English and German. The daffodils in the white window-bottoms shone across the room, he could almost feel their rays. The old glamour caught him again. His youthful water-colours on the wall no longer made him grin; he remembered how fervently he had tried to paint for her, twelve years before.

She entered, wiping a dish, and he saw again the bright, kernel-white beauty of her arms.

“You are quite splendid here,” he said, and their eyes met.

“Do you like it?” she asked. It was the old, low, husky tone of intimacy. He felt a quick change beginning in his blood. It was the old, delicious sublimation, the thinning, almost the vaporizing of himself, as if his spirit were to be liberated.

“Aye,” he nodded, smiling at her like a boy again. She bowed her head.

“This was the countess’s chair,” she said in low tones. “I found her scissors down here between the padding.”

“Did you? Where are they?”

Quickly, with a lilt in her movement, she fetched her work-basket, and together they examined the long-shanked old scissors.

“What a ballad of dead ladies!” he said, laughing, as he fitted his fingers into the round loops of the countess’s scissors.

“I knew you could use them,” she said, with certainty. He looked at his fingers, and at the scissors. She meant his fingers were fine enough for the small-looped scissors.

“That is something to be said for me,” he laughed, putting the scissors aside. She turned to the window. He noticed the fine, fair down on her cheek and her upper lip, and her soft, white neck, like the throat of a nettle flower, and her fore-arms, bright as newly blanched kernels. He was looking at her with new eyes, and she was a different person to him. He did not know her. But he could regard her objectively now.

“Shall we go out awhile?” she asked.

“Yes!” he answered. But the predominant emotion, that troubled the excitement and perplexity of his heart, was fear, fear of that which he saw. There was about her the same manner, the same intonation in her voice, now as then, but she was not what he had known her to be. He knew quite well what she had been for him. And gradually he was realizing that she was something quite other, and always had been.

She put no covering on her head, merely took off her apron, saying, “We will go by the larches.” As they passed the old orchard, she called him in to show him a blue-tit’s nest in one of the apple trees, and a sycock’s in the hedge. He rather wondered at her surety, at a certain hardness like arrogance hidden under her humility.

“Look at the apple buds,” she said, and he then perceived myriads of little scarlet balls among the drooping boughs. Watching his face, her eyes went hard. She saw the scales were fallen from him, and at last he was going to see her as she was. It was the thing she had most dreaded in the past, and most needed, for her soul’s sake. Now he was going to see her as she was. He would not love her, and he would know he never could have loved her. The old illusion gone, they were strangers, crude and entire. But he would give her her due — she would have her due from him.

She was brilliant as he had not known her. She showed him nests: a jenny wren’s in a low bush.

“See this jinty’s!” she exclaimed.

He was surprised to hear her use the local name. She reached carefully through the thorns, and put her fingers in the nest’s round door.

“Five!” she said. “Tiny little things.”

She showed him nests of robins, and chaffinches, and linnets, and buntings; of a wagtail beside the water.

“And if we go down, nearer the lake, I will show you a kingfisher’s . . .”

“Among the young fir trees,” she said, “there’s a throstle’s or a blackie’s on nearly every bough, every ledge. The first day, when I had seen them all, I felt as if I mustn’t go in the wood. It seemed a city of birds: and in the morning, hearing them all, I thought of the noisy early markets. I was afraid to go in my own wood.”

She was using the language they had both of them invented. Now it was all her own. He had done with it. She did not mind his silence, but was always dominant, letting him see her wood. As they came along a marshy path where forget-me-nots were opening in a rich blue drift: “We know all the birds, but there are many flowers we can’t find out,” she said. It was half an appeal to him,

who had known the names of things.

She looked dreamily across to the open fields that slept in the sun.

“I have a lover as well, you know,” she said, with assurance, yet dropping again almost into the intimate tone.

This woke in him the spirit to fight her.

“I think I met him. He is good-looking — also in Arcady.”

Without answering, she turned into a dark path that led up-hill, where the trees and undergrowth were very thick.

“They did well,” she said at length, “to have various altars to various gods, in old days.”

“Ah yes!” he agreed. “To whom is the new one?”

“There are no old ones,” she said. “I was always looking for this.”

“And whose is it?” he asked.

“I don’t know,” she said, looking full at him.

“I’m very glad, for your sake,” he said, “that you are satisfied.”

“Aye — but the man doesn’t matter so much,” she said. There was a pause.

“No!” he exclaimed, astonished, yet recognizing her as her real self.

“It is one’s self that matters,” she said. “Whether one is being one’s own self and serving one’s own God.”

There was silence, during which he pondered. The path was almost flowerless, gloomy. At the side, his heels sank into soft clay.

III

“I,” she said, very slowly, “I was married the same night as you.”

He looked at her.

“Not legally, of course,” she replied. “But — actually.”

“To the keeper?” he said, not knowing what else to say.

She turned to him.

“You thought I could not?” she said. But the flush was deep in her cheek and throat, for all her assurance.

Still he would not say anything.

“You see” — she was making an effort to explain — “I had to understand also.”

“And what does it amount to, this *understanding*?” he asked.

“A very great deal — does it not to you?” she replied. “One is free.”

“And you are not disappointed?”

“Far from it!” Her tone was deep and sincere.

“You love him?”

“Yes, I love him.”

“Good!” he said.

This silenced her for a while.

“Here, among his things, I love him,” she said.

His conceit would not let him be silent.

“It needs this setting?” he asked.

“It does,” she cried. “You were always making me to be not myself.”

He laughed shortly.

“But is it a matter of surroundings?” he said. He had considered her all spirit.

“I am like a plant,” she replied. “I can only grow in my own soil.”

They came to a place where the undergrowth shrank away, leaving a bare, brown space, pillared with the brick-red and purplish trunks of pine trees. On the fringe, hung the sombre green of elder trees, with flat flowers in bud, and below were bright, unfurling pennons of fern. In the midst of the bare space stood a keeper’s log hut. Pheasant-coops were lying about, some occupied by a clucking hen, some empty.

Hilda walked over the brown pine-needles to the hut, took a key from among the eaves, and opened the door. It was a bare wooden place with a carpenter’s bench and form, carpenter’s tools, an axe, snares, straps, some skins pegged down, everything in order. Hilda closed the door. Syson examined the weird flat coats of wild animals, that were pegged down to be cured. She turned some knotch in the side wall, and disclosed a second, small apartment.

“How romantic!” said Syson.

“Yes. He is very curious — he has some of a wild animal’s cunning — in a nice sense — and he is inventive, and thoughtful — but not beyond a certain point.”

She pulled back a dark green curtain. The apartment was occupied almost entirely by a large couch of heather and bracken, on which was spread an ample rabbit-skin rug. On the floor were patchwork rugs of cat-skin, and a red calf-skin, while hanging from the wall were other furs. Hilda took down one, which she put on. It was a cloak of rabbit-skin and of white fur, with a hood, apparently of the skins of stoats. She laughed at Syson from out of this barbaric mantle, saying:

“What do you think of it?”

“Ah — ! I congratulate you on your man,” he replied.

“And look!” she said.

In a little jar on a shelf were some sprays, frail and white, of the first honeysuckle.

“They will scent the place at night,” she said.

He looked round curiously.

“Where does he come short, then?” he asked. She gazed at him for a few moments. Then, turning aside:

“The stars aren’t the same with him,” she said. “You could make them flash and quiver, and the forget-me-nots come up at me like phosphorescence. You could make things *wonderful*. I have found it out — it is true. But I have them all for myself, now.”

He laughed, saying:

“After all, stars and forget-me-nots are only luxuries. You ought to make poetry.”

“Aye,” she assented. “But I have them all now.”

Again he laughed bitterly at her.

She turned swiftly. He was leaning against the small window of the tiny, obscure room, and was watching her, who stood in the doorway, still cloaked in her mantle. His cap was removed, so she saw his face and head distinctly in the dim room. His black, straight, glossy hair was brushed clean back from his brow. His black eyes were watching her, and his face, that was clear and cream, and perfectly smooth, was flickering.

“We are very different,” she said bitterly.

Again he laughed.

“I see you disapprove of me,” he said.

“I disapprove of what you have become,” she said.

“You think we might” — he glanced at the hut — “have been like this — you and I?”

She shook her head.

“You! no; never! You plucked a thing and looked at it till you had found out all you wanted to know about it, then you threw it away,” she said.

“Did I?” he asked. “And could your way never have been my way? I suppose not.”

“Why should it?” she said. “I am a separate being.”

“But surely two people sometimes go the same way,” he said.

“You took me away from myself,” she said.

He knew he had mistaken her, had taken her for something she was not. That was his fault, not hers.

“And did you always know?” he asked.

“No — you never let me know. You bullied me. I couldn’t help myself. I was glad when you left me, really.”

“I know you were,” he said. But his face went paler, almost deathly luminous.

“Yet,” he said, “it was you who sent me the way I have gone.”

“I!” she exclaimed, in pride.

“You *would* have me take the Grammar School scholarship — and you would have me foster poor little Botell’s fervent attachment to me, till he couldn’t live without me — and because Botell was rich and influential. You triumphed in the wine-merchant’s offer to send me to Cambridge, to befriend his only child. You wanted me to rise in the world. And all the time you were sending me away from you — every new success of mine put a separation between us, and more for you than for me. You never wanted to come with me: you wanted just to send me to see what it was like. I believe you even wanted me to marry a lady. You wanted to triumph over society in me.”

“And I am responsible,” she said, with sarcasm.

“I distinguished myself to satisfy you,” he replied.

“Ah!” she cried, “you always wanted change, change, like a child.”

“Very well! And I am a success, and I know it, and I do some good work. But — I thought you were different. What right have you to a man?”

“What do you want?” she said, looking at him with wide, fearful eyes.

He looked back at her, his eyes pointed, like weapons.

“Why, nothing,” he laughed shortly.

There was a rattling at the outer latch, and the keeper entered. The woman glanced round, but remained standing, fur-cloaked, in the inner doorway. Syson did not move.

The other man entered, saw, and turned away without speaking. The two also were silent.

Pilbeam attended to his skins.

“I must go,” said Syson.

“Yes,” she replied.

“Then I give you ‘To our vast and varying fortunes.’” He lifted his hand in pledge.

“‘To our vast and varying fortunes,’” she answered gravely, and speaking in cold tones.

“Arthur!” she said.

The keeper pretended not to hear. Syson, watching keenly, began to smile. The woman drew herself up.

“Arthur!” she said again, with a curious upward inflection, which warned the two men that her soul was trembling on a dangerous crisis.

The keeper slowly put down his tool and came to her.

“Yes,” he said.

“I wanted to introduce you,” she said, trembling.

“I’ve met him a’ready,” said the keeper.

“Have you? It is Addy, Mr Syson, whom you know about. — This is Arthur, Mr Pilbeam,” she added, turning to Syson. The latter held out his hand to the keeper, and they shook hands in silence.

“I’m glad to have met you,” said Syson. “We drop our correspondence, Hilda?”

“Why need we?” she asked.

The two men stood at a loss.

“Is there no need?” said Syson.

Still she was silent.

“It is as you will,” she said.

They went all three together down the gloomy path.

“‘Qu’il était bleu, le ciel, et grand l’espoir,’” quoted Syson, not knowing what to say.

“What do you mean?” she said. “Besides, we can’t walk in *our* wild oats — we never sowed any.”

Syson looked at her. He was startled to see his young love, his nun, his Botticelli angel, so revealed. It was he who had been the fool. He and she were more separate than any two strangers could be. She only wanted to keep up a correspondence with him — and he, of course, wanted it kept up, so that he could write to her, like Dante to some Beatrice who had never existed save in the man’s own brain.

At the bottom of the path she left him. He went along with the keeper, towards the open, towards the gate that closed on the wood. The two men walked almost like friends. They did not broach the subject of their thoughts.

Instead of going straight to the high-road gate, Syson went along the wood’s edge, where the brook spread out in a little bog, and under the alder trees, among the reeds, great yellow stools and bosses of marigolds shone. Threads of brown water trickled by, touched with gold from the flowers. Suddenly there was a blue flash in the air, as a kingfisher passed.

Syson was extraordinarily moved. He climbed the bank to the gorse bushes, whose sparks of blossom had not yet gathered into a flame. Lying on the dry brown turf, he discovered sprigs of tiny purple milkwort and pink spots of lousewort. What a wonderful world it was — marvellous, for ever new. He felt as if it were underground, like the fields of monotone hell, notwithstanding. Inside his breast was a pain like a wound. He remembered the poem of William Morris, where in the Chapel of Lyonesse a knight lay wounded, with the truncheon of a spear deep in his breast, lying always as dead, yet did not die,

while day after day the coloured sunlight dipped from the painted window across the chancel, and passed away. He knew now it never had been true, that which was between him and her, not for a moment. The truth had stood apart all the time.

Syson turned over. The air was full of the sound of larks, as if the sunshine above were condensing and falling in a shower. Amid this bright sound, voices sounded small and distinct.

“But if he’s married, an’ quite willing to drop it off, what has ter against it?” said the man’s voice.

“I don’t want to talk about it now. I want to be alone.”

Syson looked through the bushes. Hilda was standing in the wood, near the gate. The man was in the field, loitering by the hedge, and playing with the bees as they settled on the white bramble flowers.

There was silence for a while, in which Syson imagined her will among the brightness of the larks. Suddenly the keeper exclaimed “Ah!” and swore. He was gripping at the sleeve of his coat, near the shoulder. Then he pulled off his jacket, threw it on the ground, and absorbedly rolled up his shirt sleeve right to the shoulder.

“Ah!” he said vindictively, as he picked out the bee and flung it away. He twisted his fine, bright arm, peering awkwardly over his shoulder.

“What is it?” asked Hilda.

“A bee — crawled up my sleeve,” he answered.

“Come here to me,” she said.

The keeper went to her, like a sulky boy. She took his arm in her hands.

“Here it is — and the sting left in — poor bee!”

She picked out the sting, put her mouth to his arm, and sucked away the drop of poison. As she looked at the red mark her mouth had made, and at his arm, she said, laughing:

“That is the reddest kiss you will ever have.”

When Syson next looked up, at the sound of voices, he saw in the shadow the keeper with his mouth on the throat of his beloved, whose head was thrown back, and whose hair had fallen, so that one rough rope of dark brown hair hung across his bare arm.

“No,” the woman answered. “I am not upset because he’s gone. You won’t understand . . .”

Syson could not distinguish what the man said. Hilda replied, clear and distinct:

“You know I love you. He has gone quite out of my life — don’t trouble about him . . .” He kissed her, murmuring. She laughed hollowly.

“Yes,” she said, indulgent. “We will be married, we will be married. But not just yet.” He spoke to her again. Syson heard nothing for a time. Then she said:

“You must go home, now, dear — you will get no sleep.”

Again was heard the murmur of the keeper’s voice, troubled by fear and passion.

“But why should we be married at once?” she said. “What more would you have, by being married? It is most beautiful as it is.”

At last he pulled on his coat and departed. She stood at the gate, not watching him, but looking over the sunny country.

When at last she had gone, Syson also departed, going back to town.

STRIKE-PAY

Strike-money is paid in the Primitive Methodist Chapel. The crier was round quite early on Wednesday morning to say that paying would begin at ten o'clock.

The Primitive Methodist Chapel is a big barn of a place, built, designed, and paid for by the colliers themselves. But it threatened to fall down from its first form, so that a professional architect had to be hired at last to pull the place together.

It stands in the Square. Forty years ago, when Bryan and Wentworth opened their pits, they put up the "squares" of miners' dwellings. They are two great quadrangles of houses, enclosing a barren stretch of ground, littered with broken pots and rubbish, which forms a square, a great, sloping, lumpy playground for the children, a drying-ground for many women's washing.

Wednesday is still wash-day with some women. As the men clustered round the Chapel, they heard the thud-thud-thud of many pouches, women pounding away at the wash-tub with a wooden pestle. In the Square the white clothes were waving in the wind from a maze of clothes-lines, and here and there women were pegging out, calling to the miners, or to the children who dodged under the flapping sheets.

Ben Townsend, the Union agent, has a bad way of paying. He takes the men in order of his round, and calls them by name. A big, oratorical man with a grey beard, he sat at the table in the Primitive school-room, calling name after name. The room was crowded with colliers, and a great group pushed up outside. There was much confusion. Ben dodged from the Scargill Street list to the Queen Street. For this Queen Street men were not prepared. They were not to the fore.

"Joseph Grooby — Joseph Grooby! Now, Joe, where are you?"

"Hold on a bit, Sorry!" cried Joe from outside. "I'm shovin' up."

There was a great noise from the men.

"I'm takin' Queen Street. All you Queen Street men should be ready. Here you are, Joe," said the Union agent loudly.

"Five children!" said Joe, counting the money suspiciously.

"That's right, I think," came the mouthing voice. "Fifteen shillings, is it not?"

"A bob a kid," said the collier.

"Thomas Sedgwick — How are you, Tom? Missis better?"

"Ay, 'er's shapin' nicely. Tha'rt hard at work to-day, Ben." This was sarcasm

on the idleness of a man who had given up the pit to become a Union agent.

“Yes. I rose at four to fetch the money.”

“Dunna hurt thysen,” was the retort, and the men laughed.

“No — John Merfin!”

But the colliers, tired with waiting, excited by the strike spirit, began to rag. Merfin was young and dandiical. He was choir-master at the Wesleyan Chapel.

“Does your collar cut, John?” asked a sarcastic voice out of the crowd.

“Hymn Number Nine.

‘Diddle-diddle dumpling, my son John
Went to bed with his best suit on,’“

came the solemn announcement.

Mr. Merfin, his white cuffs down to his knuckles, picked up his half-sovereign, and walked away loftily.

“Sam Coutts!” cried the paymaster.

“Now, lad, reckon it up,” shouted the voice of the crowd, delighted.

Mr. Coutts was a straight-backed ne’er-do-well. He looked at his twelve shillings sheepishly.

“Another two-bob — he had twins a-Monday night — get thy money, Sam, tha’s earned it — tha’s addled it, Sam; dunna go be-out it. Let him ha’ the two bob for ‘is twins, mister,” came the clamour from the men around.

Sam Coutts stood grinning awkwardly.

“You should ha’ given us notice, Sam,” said the paymaster suavely. “We can make it all right for you next week — ”

“Nay, nay, nay,” shouted a voice. “Pay on delivery — the goods is there right enough.”

“Get thy money, Sam, tha’s addled it,” became the universal cry, and the Union agent had to hand over another florin, to prevent a disturbance. Sam Coutts grinned with satisfaction.

“Good shot, Sam,” the men exclaimed.

“Ephraim Wharmby,” shouted the pay-man.

A lad came forward.

“Gi’ him sixpence for what’s on t’road,” said a sly voice.

“Nay, nay,” replied Ben Townsend; “pay on delivery.”

There was a roar of laughter. The miners were in high spirits.

In the town they stood about in gangs, talking and laughing. Many sat on their heels in the market-place. In and out of the public-houses they went, and on every bar the half-sovereigns clicked.

“Comin’ ter Nottingham wi’ us, Ephraim?” said Sam Coutts to the slender, pale young fellow of about twenty-two.

“I’m non walkin’ that far of a gleamy day like this.”

“He has na got the strength,” said somebody, and a laugh went up.

“How’s that?” asked another pertinent voice.

“He’s a married man, mind yer,” said Chris Smitheringale, “an’ it ta’es a bit o’ keepin’ up.”

The youth was teased in this manner for some time.

“Come on ter Nottingham wi’s; tha’ll be safe for a bit,” said Coutts.

A gang set off, although it was only eleven o’clock. It was a nine-mile walk. The road was crowded with colliers travelling on foot to see the match between Notts and Aston Villa. In Ephraim’s gang were Sam Coutts, with his fine shoulders and his extra florin, Chris Smitheringale, fat and smiling, and John Wharmby, a remarkable man, tall, erect as a soldier, black-haired and proud; he could play any musical instrument, he declared.

“I can play owt from a comb up’ards. If there’s music to be got outer a thing, I back I’ll get it. No matter what shape or form of instrument you set before me, it doesn’t signify if I nivir clapped eyes on it before, I’s warrant I’ll have a tune out of it in five minutes.”

He beguiled the first two miles so. It was true, he had caused a sensation by introducing the mandoline into the townlet, filling the hearts of his fellow-colliers with pride as he sat on the platform in evening dress, a fine soldierly man, bowing his black head, and scratching the mewling mandoline with hands that had only to grasp the “instrument” to crush it entirely.

Chris stood a can round at the “White Bull” at Gilt Brook. John Wharmby took his turn at Kimberley top.

“We wanna drink again,” they decided, “till we’re at Cinder Hill. We’ll non stop i’ Nuttall.”

They swung along the high-road under the budding trees. In Nuttall churchyard the crocuses blazed with yellow at the brim of the balanced, black yews. White and purple crocuses dipt up over the graves, as if the churchyard were bursting out in tiny tongues of flame.

“Sithee,” said Ephraim, who was an ostler down pit, “sithee, here comes the Colonel. Sithee at his ‘osses how they pick their toes up, the beauties!”

The Colonel drove past the men, who took no notice of him.

“Hast heard, Sorry,” said Sam, “as they’re com’n out i’ Germany, by the thousand, an’ begun riotin’?”

“An’ comin’ out i’ France simbitar,” cried Chris.

The men all gave a chuckle.

“Sorry,” shouted John Wharmby, much elated, “we oughtna ter go back under a twenty per cent rise.”

“We should get it,” said Chris.

“An’ easy! They can do nowt bi-out us, we’n on’y ter stop out long enough.”

“I’m willin’,” said Sam, and there was a laugh. The colliers looked at one another. A thrill went through them as if an electric current passed.

“We’n on’y ter stick out, an’ we s’ll see who’s gaffer.”

“Us!” cried Sam. “Why, what can they do again’ us, if we come out all over th’ world?”

“Nowt!” said John Wharmby. “Th’ mesters is bobbin’ about like corks on a cassivoy a’ready.” There was a large natural reservoir, like a lake, near Bestwood, and this supplied the simile.

Again there passed through the men that wave of elation, quickening their pulses. They chuckled in their throats. Beyond all consciousness was this sense of battle and triumph in the hearts of the working-men at this juncture.

It was suddenly suggested at Nuttall that they should go over the fields to Bulwell, and into Nottingham that way. They went single file across the fallow, past the wood, and over the railway, where now no trains were running. Two fields away was a troop of pit ponies. Of all colours, but chiefly of red or brown, they clustered thick in the field, scarcely moving, and the two lines of trodden earth patches showed where fodder was placed down the field.

“Theer’s the pit ‘osses,” said Sam. “Let’s run ‘em.”

“It’s like a circus turned out. See them skewbawd ‘uns — seven skewbawd,” said Ephraim.

The ponies were inert, unused to freedom. Occasionally one walked round. But there they stood, two thick lines of ruddy brown and piebald and white, across the trampled field. It was a beautiful day, mild, pale blue, a “growing day”, as the men said, when there was the silence of swelling sap everywhere.

“Let’s ha’e a ride,” said Ephraim.

The younger men went up to the horses.

“Come on — co-ooop, Taffy — co-ooop, Ginger.”

The horses tossed away. But having got over the excitement of being above-ground, the animals were feeling dazed and rather dreary. They missed the warmth and the life of the pit. They looked as if life were a blank to them.

Ephraim and Sam caught a couple of steeds, on whose backs they went careering round, driving the rest of the sluggish herd from end to end of the field. The horses were good specimens, on the whole, and in fine condition. But they were out of their element.

Performing too clever a feat, Ephraim went rolling from his mount. He was

soon up again, chasing his horse. Again he was thrown. Then the men proceeded on their way.

They were drawing near to miserable Bulwell, when Ephraim, remembering his turn was coming to stand drinks, felt in his pocket for his beloved half-sovereign, his strike-pay. It was not there. Through all his pockets he went, his heart sinking like lead.

“Sam,” he said, “I believe I’n lost that ha’ef a sovereign.”

“Tha’s got it somewheer about thee,” said Chris.

They made him take off his coat and waistcoat. Chris examined the coat, Sam the waistcoat, whilst Ephraim searched his trousers.

“Well,” said Chris, “I’n foraged this coat, an’ it’s non theer.”

“An’ I’ll back my life as th’ on’y bit a metal on this wa’scoat is the buttons,” said Sam.

“An’ it’s non in my breeches,” said Ephraim. He took off his boots and his stockings. The half-sovereign was not there. He had not another coin in his possession.

“Well,” said Chris, “we mun go back an’ look for it.”

Back they went, four serious-hearted colliers, and searched the field, but in vain.

“Well,” said Chris, “we s’ll ha’e ter share wi’ thee, that’s a’.”

“I’m willin’,” said John Wharmby.

“An’ me,” said Sam.

“Two bob each,” said Chris.

Ephraim, who was in the depths of despair, shamefully accepted their six shillings.

In Bulwell they called in a small public-house, which had one long room with a brick floor, scrubbed benches and scrubbed tables. The central space was open. The place was full of colliers, who were drinking. There was a great deal of drinking during the strike, but not a vast amount drunk. Two men were playing skittles, and the rest were betting. The seconds sat on either side the skittle-board, holding caps of money, sixpences and coppers, the wagers of the “backers”.

Sam, Chris, and John Wharmby immediately put money on the man who had their favour. In the end Sam declared himself willing to play against the victor. He was the Bestwood champion. Chris and John Wharmby backed him heavily, and even Ephraim the Unhappy ventured sixpence.

In the end, Sam had won half a crown, with which he promptly stood drinks and bread and cheese for his comrades. At half-past one they set off again.

It was a good match between Notts and Villa — no goals at half-time, two-

none for Notts at the finish. The colliers were hugely delighted, especially as Flint, the forward for Notts, who was an Underwood man well known to the four comrades, did some handsome work, putting the two goals through.

Ephraim determined to go home as soon as the match was over. He knew John Wharmby would be playing the piano at the "Punch Bowl", and Sam, who had a good tenor voice, singing, while Chris cut in with witticisms, until evening. So he bade them farewell, as he must get home. They, finding him somewhat of a damper on their spirits, let him go.

He was the sadder for having witnessed an accident near the football-ground. A navvy, working at some drainage, carting an iron tip-tub of mud and emptying it, had got with his horse on to the deep deposit of ooze which was crusted over. The crust had broken, the man had gone under the horse, and it was some time before the people had realised he had vanished. When they found his feet sticking out, and hauled him forth, he was dead, stifled dead in the mud. The horse was at length hauled out, after having its neck nearly pulled from the socket.

Ephraim went home vaguely impressed with a sense of death, and loss, and strife. Death was loss greater than his own, the strike was a battle greater than that he would presently have to fight.

He arrived home at seven o'clock, just when it had fallen dark. He lived in Queen Street with his young wife, to whom he had been married two months, and with his mother-in-law, a widow of sixty-four. Maud was the last child remaining unmarried, the last of eleven.

Ephraim went up the entry. The light was burning in the kitchen. His mother-in-law was a big, erect woman, with wrinkled, loose face, and cold blue eyes. His wife was also large, with very vigorous fair hair, frizzy like unravelled rope. She had a quiet way of stepping, a certain cat-like stealth, in spite of her large build. She was five months pregnant.

"Might we ask wheer you've been to?" inquired Mrs. Marriott, very erect, very dangerous. She was only polite when she was very angry.

"I' bin ter th' match."

"Oh, indeed!" said the mother-in-law. "And why couldn't we be told as you thought of jaunting off?"

"I didna know mysen," he answered, sticking to his broad Derbyshire.

"I suppose it popped into your mind, an' so you darted off," said the mother-in-law dangerously.

"I didna. It wor Chris Smitheringale who exed me."

"An' did you take much invitin'?"

"I didna want ter goo."

“But wasn’t there enough man beside your jacket to say no?”

He did not answer. Down at the bottom he hated her. But he was, to use his own words, all messed up with having lost his strike-pay and with knowing the man was dead. So he was more helpless before his mother-in-law, whom he feared. His wife neither looked at him nor spoke, but kept her head bowed. He knew she was with her mother.

“Our Maud’s been waitin’ for some money, to get a few things,” said the mother-in-law.

In silence, he put five-and-sixpence on the table.

“Take that up, Maud,” said the mother.

Maud did so.

“You’ll want it for us board, shan’t you?” she asked, furtively, of her mother.

“Might I ask if there’s nothing you want to buy yourself, first?”

“No, there’s nothink I want,” answered the daughter.

Mrs. Marriott took the silver and counted it.

“And do you,” said the mother-in-law, towering upon the shrinking son, but speaking slowly and stately, “do you think I’m going to keep you and your wife for five and sixpence a week?”

“It’s a’ I’ve got,” he answered sulkily.

“You’ve had a good jaunt, my sirs, if it’s cost four and sixpence. You’ve started your game early, haven’t you?”

He did not answer.

“It’s a nice thing! Here’s our Maud an’ me been sitting since eleven o’clock this morning! Dinner waiting and cleared away, tea waiting and washed up; then in he comes crawling with five and sixpence. Five and sixpence for a man an’ wife’s board for a week, if you please!”

Still he did not say anything.

“You must think something of yourself, Ephraim Wharmby!” said his mother-in-law. “You must think something of yourself. You suppose, do you, *I’m* going to keep you an’ your wife, while you make a holiday, off on the nines to Nottingham, drink an’ women.”

“I’ve neither had drink nor women, as you know right well,” he said.

“I’m glad we know summat about you. For you’re that close, anybody’d think we was foreigners to you. You’re a pretty little jockey, aren’t you? Oh, it’s a gala time for you, the strike is. That’s all men strike for, indeed. They enjoy themselves, they do that. Ripping and racing and drinking, from morn till night, my sirs!”

“Is there on’y tea for me?” he asked, in a temper.

“Hark at him! Hark-ye! Should I ask you whose house you think you’re in?”

Kindly order me about, do. Oh, it makes him big, the strike does. See him land home after being out on the spree for hours, and give his orders, my sirs! Oh, strike sets the men up, it does. Nothing have they to do but guzzle and gallivant to Nottingham. Their wives'll keep them, oh yes. So long as they get something to eat at home, what more do they want! What more *should* they want, prithee? Nothing! Let the women and children starve and scrape, but fill the man's belly, and let him have his fling. My sirs, indeed, I think so! Let tradesmen go — what do they matter! Let rent go. Let children get what they can catch. Only the man will see *he's* all right. But not here, though!"

"Are you goin' ter gi'e me ony bloody tea?"

His mother-in-law started up.

"If tha dares ter swear at me, I'll lay thee flat."

"Are yer — goin' ter — gi'e me — any blasted, rotten, còssed, blòody tèa?" he bawled, in a fury, accenting every other word deliberately.

"Maud!" said the mother-in-law, cold and stately, "If you gi'e him any tea after that, you're a trollops." Whereupon she sailed out to her other daughters.

Maud quietly got the tea ready.

"Shall y'ave your dinner warmed up?" she asked.

"Ay."

She attended to him. Not that she was really meek. But — he was *her* man, not her mother's.

A SICK COLLIER

She was too good for him, everybody said. Yet still she did not regret marrying him. He had come courting her when he was only nineteen, and she twenty. He was in build what they call a tight little fellow; short, dark, with a warm colour, and that upright set of the head and chest, that flaunting way in movement recalling a mating bird, which denotes a body taut and compact with life. Being a good worker he had earned decent money in the mine, and having a good home had saved a little.

She was a cook at "Uplands", a tall, fair girl, very quiet. Having seen her walk down the street, Horsepool had followed her from a distance. He was taken with her, he did not drink, and he was not lazy. So, although he seemed a bit simple, without much intelligence, but having a sort of physical brightness, she considered, and accepted him.

When they were married they went to live in Scargill Street, in a highly respectable six-roomed house which they had furnished between them. The street was built up the side of a long, steep hill. It was narrow and rather tunnel-like. Nevertheless, the back looked out over the adjoining pasture, across a wide valley of fields and woods, in the bottom of which the mine lay snugly.

He made himself gaffer in his own house. She was unacquainted with a collier's mode of life. They were married on a Saturday. On the Sunday night he said:

"Set th' table for my breakfast, an' put my pit-things afront o' th' fire. I s'll be gettin' up at ha'ef pas' five. Tha nedna shift thysen not till when ter likes."

He showed her how to put a newspaper on the table for a cloth. When she demurred:

"I want none o' your white cloths i' th' mornin'. I like ter be able to slobber if I feel like it," he said.

He put before the fire his moleskin trousers, a clean singlet, or sleeveless vest of thick flannel, a pair of stockings and his pit boots, arranging them all to be warm and ready for morning.

"Now tha sees. That wants doin' ivery night."

Punctually at half past five he left her, without any form of leave-taking, going downstairs in his shirt.

When he arrived home at four o'clock in the afternoon his dinner was ready to be dished up. She was startled when he came in, a short, sturdy figure, with a

face indescribably black and streaked. She stood before the fire in her white blouse and white apron, a fair girl, the picture of beautiful cleanliness. He “clommaxed” in, in his heavy boots.

“Well, how ‘as ter gone on?” he asked.

“I was ready for you to come home,” she replied tenderly. In his black face the whites of his brown eyes flashed at her.

“An’ I wor ready for comin’,” he said. He planked his tin bottle and snap-bag on the dresser, took off his coat and scarf and waistcoat, dragged his armchair nearer the fire and sat down.

“Let’s ha’e a bit o’ dinner, then — I’m about clammed,” he said.

“Aren’t you goin’ to wash yourself first?”

“What am I to wesh mysen for?”

“Well, you can’t eat your dinner — ”

“Oh, strike a daisy, Missis! Dunna I eat my snap i’ th’ pit wi’out weshin’? — forced to.”

She served the dinner and sat opposite him. His small bullet head was quite black, save for the whites of his eyes and his scarlet lips. It gave her a queer sensation to see him open his red mouth and bare his white teeth as he ate. His arms and hands were mottled black; his bare, strong neck got a little fairer as it settled towards his shoulders, reassuring her. There was the faint indescribable odour of the pit in the room, an odour of damp, exhausted air.

“Why is your vest so black on the shoulders?” she asked.

“My singlet? That’s wi’ th’ watter droppin’ on us from th’ roof. This is a dry un as I put on afore I come up. They ha’e gre’t clothes-’osses, and’ as we change us things, we put ‘em on theer ter dry.”

When he washed himself, kneeling on the hearth-rug stripped to the waist, she felt afraid of him again. He was so muscular, he seemed so intent on what he was doing, so intensely himself, like a vigorous animal. And as he stood wiping himself, with his naked breast towards her, she felt rather sick, seeing his thick arms bulge their muscles.

They were nevertheless very happy. He was at a great pitch of pride because of her. The men in the pit might chaff him, they might try to entice him away, but nothing could reduce his self-assured pride because of her, nothing could unsettle his almost infantile satisfaction. In the evening he sat in his armchair chattering to her, or listening as she read the newspaper to him. When it was fine, he would go into the street, squat on his heels as colliers do, with his back against the wall of his parlour, and call to the passers-by, in greeting, one after another. If no one were passing, he was content just to squat and smoke, having such a fund of sufficiency and satisfaction in his heart. He was well married.

They had not been wed a year when all Brent and Wellwood's men came out on strike. Willy was in the Union, so with a pinch they scrambled through. The furniture was not all paid for, and other debts were incurred. She worried and contrived, he left it to her. But he was a good husband; he gave her all he had.

The men were out fifteen weeks. They had been back just over a year when Willy had an accident in the mine, tearing his bladder. At the pit head the doctor talked of the hospital. Losing his head entirely, the young collier raved like a madman, what with pain and fear of hospital.

"Tha s'lt go whoam, Willy, tha s'lt go whoam," the deputy said.

A lad warned the wife to have the bed ready. Without speaking or hesitating she prepared. But when the ambulance came, and she heard him shout with pain at being moved, she was afraid lest she should sink down. They carried him in.

"Yo' should 'a' had a bed i' th' parlour, Missis," said the deputy, "then we shouldn't a' had to hawkse 'im upstairs, an' it 'ud 'a' saved your legs."

But it was too late now. They got him upstairs.

"They let me lie, Lucy," he was crying, "they let me lie two mortal hours on th' sleek afore they took me outer th' stall. Th' peen, Lucy, th' peen; oh, Lucy, th' peen, th' peen!"

"I know th' pain's bad, Willy, I know. But you must try an' bear it a bit."

"Tha manna carry on in that form, lad, thy missis'll niver be able ter stan' it," said the deputy.

"I canna 'elp it, it's th' peen, it's th' peen," he cried again. He had never been ill in his life. When he had smashed a finger he could look at the wound. But this pain came from inside, and terrified him. At last he was soothed and exhausted.

It was some time before she could undress him and wash him. He would let no other woman do for him, having that savage modesty usual in such men.

For six weeks he was in bed, suffering much pain. The doctors were not quite sure what was the matter with him, and scarcely knew what to do. He could eat, he did not lose flesh, nor strength, yet the pain continued, and he could hardly walk at all.

In the sixth week the men came out in the national strike. He would get up quite early in the morning and sit by the window. On Wednesday, the second week of the strike, he sat gazing out on the street as usual, a bullet-headed young man, still vigorous-looking, but with a peculiar expression of hunted fear in his face.

"Lucy," he called, "Lucy!"

She, pale and worn, ran upstairs at his bidding.

"Gi'e me a han'kercher," he said.

"Why, you've got one," she replied, coming near.

“Tha nedna touch me,” he cried. Feeling his pocket, he produced a white handkerchief.

“I non want a white un, gi’e me a red un,” he said.

“An’ if anybody comes to see you,” she answered, giving him a red handkerchief.

“Besides,” she continued, “you needn’t ha’ brought me upstairs for that.”

“I b’lieve th’ peen’s commin’ on again,” he said, with a little horror in his voice.

“It isn’t, you know, it isn’t,” she replied. “The doctor says you imagine it’s there when it isn’t.”

“Canna I feel what’s inside me?” he shouted.

“There’s a traction-engine coming downhill,” she said. “That’ll scatter them. I’ll just go an’ finish your pudding.”

She left him. The traction-engine went by, shaking the houses. Then the street was quiet, save for the men. A gang of youths from fifteen to twenty-five years old were playing marbles in the middle of the road. Other little groups of men were playing on the pavement. The street was gloomy. Willy could hear the endless calling and shouting of men’s voices.

“Tha’rt skinchin’!”

“I arena!”

“Come ‘ere with that blood-alley.”

“Swop us four for’t.”

“Shonna, gie’s hold on’t.”

He wanted to be out, he wanted to be playing marbles. The pain had weakened his mind, so that he hardly knew any self-control.

Presently another gang of men lounged up the street. It was pay morning. The Union was paying the men in the Primitive Chapel. They were returning with their half-sovereigns.

“Sorry!” bawled a voice. “Sorry!”

The word is a form of address, corruption probably of ‘Sirrah’. Willy started almost out of his chair.

“Sorry!” again bawled a great voice. “Art goin’ wi’ me to see Notts play Villa?”

Many of the marble players started up.

“What time is it? There’s no treens, we s’ll ha’e ter walk.”

The street was alive with men.

“Who’s goin’ ter Nottingham ter see th’ match?” shouted the same big voice. A very large, tipsy man, with his cap over his eyes, was calling.

“Com’ on — aye, com’ on!” came many voices. The street was full of the

shouting of men. They split up in excited cliques and groups.

“Play up, Notts!” the big man shouted.

“Plee up, Notts!” shouted the youths and men. They were at kindling pitch. It only needed a shout to rouse them. Of this the careful authorities were aware.

“I’m goin’, I’m goin’!” shouted the sick man at his window.

Lucy came running upstairs.

“I’m goin’ ter see Notts play Villa on th’ Meadows ground,” he declared.

“You — *you* can’t go. There are no trains. You can’t walk nine miles.”

“I’m goin’ ter see th’ match,” he declared, rising.

“You know you can’t. Sit down now an’ be quiet.”

She put her hand on him. He shook it off.

“Leave me alone, leave me alone. It’s thee as ma’es th’ peen come, it’s thee. I’m goin’ ter Nottingham to see th’ football match.”

“Sit down — folks’ll hear you, and what will they think?”

“Come off’n me. Com’ off. It’s her, it’s her as does it. Com’ off.”

He seized hold of her. His little head was bristling with madness, and he was strong as a lion.

“Oh, Willy!” she cried.

“It’s ‘er, it’s ‘er. Kill her!” he shouted, “kill her.”

“Willy, folks’ll hear you.”

“Th’ peen’s commin’ on again, I tell yer. I’ll kill her for it.”

He was completely out of his mind. She struggled with him to prevent his going to the stairs. When she escaped from him, he was shouting and raving, she beckoned to her neighbour, a girl of twenty-four, who was cleaning the window across the road.

Ethel Mellor was the daughter of a well-to-do check-weighman. She ran across in fear to Mrs Horsepool. Hearing the man raving, people were running out in the street and listening. Ethel hurried upstairs. Everything was clean and pretty in the young home.

Willy was staggering round the room, after the slowly retreating Lucy, shouting:

“Kill her! Kill her!”

“Mr Horsepool!” cried Ethel, leaning against the bed, white as the sheets, and trembling. “Whatever are you saying?”

“I tell yer it’s ‘er fault as th’ peen comes on — I tell yer it is! Kill ‘er — kill ‘er!”

“Kill Mrs Horsepool!” cried the trembling girl. “Why, you’re ever so fond of her, you know you are.”

“The peen — I ha’e such a lot o’ peen — I want to kill ‘er.”

He was subsiding. When he sat down his wife collapsed in a chair, weeping noiselessly. The tears ran down Ethel's face. He sat staring out of the window; then the old, hurt look came on his face.

"What 'ave I been sayin'?" he asked, looking piteously at his wife.

"Why!" said Ethel, "you've been carrying on something awful, saying, 'Kill her, kill her!'"

"Have I, Lucy?" he faltered.

"You didn't know what you was saying," said his young wife gently but coldly.

His face puckered up. He bit his lip, then broke into tears, sobbing uncontrollably, with his face to the window.

There was no sound in the room but of three people crying bitterly, breath caught in sobs. Suddenly Lucy put away her tears and went over to him.

"You didn't know what you was sayin', Willy, I know you didn't. I knew you didn't, all the time. It doesn't matter, Willy. Only don't do it again."

In a little while, when they were calmer, she went downstairs with Ethel.

"See if anybody is looking in the street," she said.

Ethel went into the parlour and peeped through the curtains.

"Aye!" she said. "You may back your life Lena an' Mrs Severn'll be out gorging, and that clat-fartin' Mrs Allsop."

"Oh, I hope they haven't heard anything! If it gets about as he's out of his mind, they'll stop his compensation, I know they will."

"They'd never stop his compensation for *that*," protested Ethel.

"Well, they *have* been stopping some —"

"It'll not get about. I s'll tell nobody."

"Oh, but if it does, whatever shall we do? . . ."

THE PRUSSIAN OFFICER

I

They had marched more than thirty kilometres since dawn, along the white, hot road where occasional thickets of trees threw a moment of shade, then out into the glare again. On either hand, the valley, wide and shallow, glittered with heat; dark green patches of rye, pale young corn, fallow and meadow and black pine woods spread in a dull, hot diagram under a glistening sky. But right in front the mountains ranged across, pale blue and very still, snow gleaming gently out of the deep atmosphere. And towards the mountains, on and on, the regiment marched between the rye fields and the meadows, between the scraggy fruit trees set regularly on either side the high road. The burnished, dark green rye threw off a suffocating heat, the mountains drew gradually nearer and more distinct. While the feet of the soldiers grew hotter, sweat ran through their hair under their helmets, and their knapsacks could burn no more in contact with their shoulders, but seemed instead to give off a cold, prickly sensation.

He walked on and on in silence, staring at the mountains ahead, that rose sheer out of the land, and stood fold behind fold, half earth, half heaven, the heaven, the barrier with slits of soft snow, in the pale, bluish peaks.

He could now walk almost without pain. At the start, he had determined not to limp. It had made him sick to take the first steps, and during the first mile or so, he had compressed his breath, and the cold drops of sweat had stood on his forehead. But he had walked it off. What were they after all but bruises! He had looked at them, as he was getting up: deep bruises on the backs of his thighs. And since he had made his first step in the morning, he had been conscious of them, till now he had a tight, hot place in his chest, with suppressing the pain, and holding himself in. There seemed no air when he breathed. But he walked almost lightly.

The Captain's hand had trembled at taking his coffee at dawn: his orderly saw it again. And he saw the fine figure of the Captain wheeling on horseback at the farm-house ahead, a handsome figure in pale blue uniform with facings of scarlet, and the metal gleaming on the black helmet and the sword-scabbard, and dark streaks of sweat coming on the silky bay horse. The orderly felt he was connected with that figure moving so suddenly on horseback: he followed it like a shadow, mute and inevitable and damned by it. And the officer was always

aware of the tramp of the company behind, the march of his orderly among the men.

The Captain was a tall man of about forty, grey at the temples. He had a handsome, finely knit figure, and was one of the best horsemen in the West. His orderly, having to rub him down, admired the amazing riding-muscles of his loins.

For the rest, the orderly scarcely noticed the officer any more than he noticed himself. It was rarely he saw his master's face: he did not look at it. The Captain had reddish-brown, stiff hair, that he wore short upon his skull. His moustache was also cut short and bristly over a full, brutal mouth. His face was rather rugged, the cheeks thin. Perhaps the man was the more handsome for the deep lines in his face, the irritable tension of his brow, which gave him the look of a man who fights with life. His fair eyebrows stood bushy over light blue eyes that were always flashing with cold fire.

He was a Prussian aristocrat, haughty and overbearing. But his mother had been a Polish Countess. Having made too many gambling debts when he was young, he had ruined his prospects in the Army, and remained an infantry captain. He had never married: his position did not allow of it, and no woman had ever moved him to it. His time he spent riding — occasionally he rode one of his own horses at the races — and at the officers' club. Now and then he took himself a mistress. But after such an event, he returned to duty with his brow still more tense, his eyes still more hostile and irritable. With the men, however, he was merely impersonal, though a devil when roused; so that, on the whole, they feared him, but had no great aversion from him. They accepted him as the inevitable.

To his orderly he was at first cold and just and indifferent: he did not fuss over trifles. So that his servant knew practically nothing about him, except just what orders he would give, and how he wanted them obeyed. That was quite simple. Then the change gradually came.

The orderly was a youth of about twenty-two, of medium height, and well built. He had strong, heavy limbs, was swarthy, with a soft, black, young moustache. There was something altogether warm and young about him. He had firmly marked eyebrows over dark, expressionless eyes, that seemed never to have thought, only to have received life direct through his senses, and acted straight from instinct.

Gradually the officer had become aware of his servant's young, vigorous, unconscious presence about him. He could not get away from the sense of the youth's person, while he was in attendance. It was like a warm flame upon the older man's tense, rigid body, that had become almost unliving, fixed. There was

something so free and self-contained about him, and something in the young fellow's movement, that made the officer aware of him. And this irritated the Prussian. He did not choose to be touched into life by his servant. He might easily have changed his man, but he did not. He now very rarely looked direct at his orderly, but kept his face averted, as if to avoid seeing him. And yet as the young soldier moved unthinking about the apartment, the elder watched him, and would notice the movement of his strong young shoulders under the blue cloth, the bend of his neck. And it irritated him. To see the soldier's young, brown, shapely peasant's hand grasp the loaf or the wine-bottle sent a flash of hate or of anger through the elder man's blood. It was not that the youth was clumsy: it was rather the blind, instinctive sureness of movement of an unhampered young animal that irritated the officer to such a degree.

Once, when a bottle of wine had gone over, and the red gushed out on to the tablecloth, the officer had started up with an oath, and his eyes, bluey like fire, had held those of the confused youth for a moment. It was a shock for the young soldier. He felt something sink deeper, deeper into his soul, where nothing had ever gone before. It left him rather blank and wondering. Some of his natural completeness in himself was gone, a little uneasiness took its place. And from that time an undiscovered feeling had held between the two men.

Henceforward the orderly was afraid of really meeting his master. His subconsciousness remembered those steely blue eyes and the harsh brows, and did not intend to meet them again. So he always stared past his master, and avoided him. Also, in a little anxiety, he waited for the three months to have gone, when his time would be up. He began to feel a constraint in the Captain's presence, and the soldier even more than the officer wanted to be left alone, in his neutrality as servant.

He had served the Captain for more than a year, and knew his duty. This he performed easily, as if it were natural to him. The officer and his commands he took for granted, as he took the sun and the rain, and he served as a matter of course. It did not implicate him personally.

But now if he were going to be forced into a personal interchange with his master he would be like a wild thing caught, he felt he must get away.

But the influence of the young soldier's being had penetrated through the officer's stiffened discipline, and perturbed the man in him. He, however, was a gentleman, with long, fine hands and cultivated movements, and was not going to allow such a thing as the stirring of his innate self. He was a man of passionate temper, who had always kept himself suppressed. Occasionally there had been a duel, an outburst before the soldiers. He knew himself to be always on the point of breaking out. But he kept himself hard to the idea of the Service.

Whereas the young soldier seemed to live out his warm, full nature, to give it off in his very movements, which had a certain zest, such as wild animals have in free movement. And this irritated the officer more and more.

In spite of himself, the Captain could not regain his neutrality of feeling towards his orderly. Nor could he leave the man alone. In spite of himself, he watched him, gave him sharp orders, tried to take up as much of his time as possible. Sometimes he flew into a rage with the young soldier, and bullied him. Then the orderly shut himself off, as it were out of earshot, and waited, with sullen, flushed face, for the end of the noise. The words never pierced to his intelligence, he made himself, protectively, impervious to the feelings of his master.

He had a scar on his left thumb, a deep seam going across the knuckle. The officer had long suffered from it, and wanted to do something to it. Still it was there, ugly and brutal on the young, brown hand. At last the Captain's reserve gave way. One day, as the orderly was smoothing out the tablecloth, the officer pinned down his thumb with a pencil, asking:

“How did you come by that?”

The young man winced and drew back at attention.

“A wood axe, Herr Hauptmann,” he answered.

The officer waited for further explanation. None came. The orderly went about his duties. The elder man was sullenly angry. His servant avoided him. And the next day he had to use all his will-power to avoid seeing the scarred thumb. He wanted to get hold of it and — A hot flame ran in his blood.

He knew his servant would soon be free, and would be glad. As yet, the soldier had held himself off from the elder man. The Captain grew madly irritable. He could not rest when the soldier was away, and when he was present, he glared at him with tormented eyes. He hated those fine, black brows over the unmeaning, dark eyes, he was infuriated by the free movement of the handsome limbs, which no military discipline could make stiff. And he became harsh and cruelly bullying, using contempt and satire. The young soldier only grew more mute and expressionless.

“What cattle were you bred by, that you can't keep straight eyes? Look me in the eyes when I speak to you.”

And the soldier turned his dark eyes to the other's face, but there was no sight in them: he stared with the slightest possible cast, holding back his sight, perceiving the blue of his master's eyes, but receiving no look from them. And the elder man went pale, and his reddish eyebrows twitched. He gave his order, barrenly.

Once he flung a heavy military glove into the young soldier's face. Then he

had the satisfaction of seeing the black eyes flare up into his own, like a blaze when straw is thrown on a fire. And he had laughed with a little tremor and a sneer.

But there were only two months more. The youth instinctively tried to keep himself intact: he tried to serve the officer as if the latter were an abstract authority and not a man. All his instinct was to avoid personal contact, even definite hate. But in spite of himself the hate grew, responsive to the officer's passion. However, he put it in the background. When he had left the Army he could dare acknowledge it. By nature he was active, and had many friends. He thought what amazing good fellows they were. But, without knowing it, he was alone. Now this solitariness was intensified. It would carry him through his term. But the officer seemed to be going irritably insane, and the youth was deeply frightened.

The soldier had a sweetheart, a girl from the mountains, independent and primitive. The two walked together, rather silently. He went with her, not to talk, but to have his arm round her, and for the physical contact. This eased him, made it easier for him to ignore the Captain; for he could rest with her held fast against his chest. And she, in some unspoken fashion, was there for him. They loved each other.

The Captain perceived it, and was mad with irritation. He kept the young man engaged all the evenings long, and took pleasure in the dark look that came on his face. Occasionally, the eyes of the two men met, those of the younger sullen and dark, doggedly unalterable, those of the elder sneering with restless contempt.

The officer tried hard not to admit the passion that had got hold of him. He would not know that his feeling for his orderly was anything but that of a man incensed by his stupid, perverse servant. So, keeping quite justified and conventional in his consciousness, he let the other thing run on. His nerves, however, were suffering. At last he slung the end of a belt in his servant's face. When he saw the youth start back, the pain-tears in his eyes and the blood on his mouth, he had felt at once a thrill of deep pleasure and of shame.

But this, he acknowledged to himself, was a thing he had never done before. The fellow was too exasperating. His own nerves must be going to pieces. He went away for some days with a woman.

It was a mockery of pleasure. He simply did not want the woman. But he stayed on for his time. At the end of it, he came back in an agony of irritation, torment, and misery. He rode all the evening, then came straight in to supper. His orderly was out. The officer sat with his long, fine hands lying on the table, perfectly still, and all his blood seemed to be corroding.

At last his servant entered. He watched the strong, easy young figure, the fine eyebrows, the thick black hair. In a week's time the youth had got back his old well-being. The hands of the officer twitched and seemed to be full of mad flame. The young man stood at attention, unmoving, shut off.

The meal went in silence. But the orderly seemed eager. He made a clatter with the dishes.

"Are you in a hurry?" asked the officer, watching the intent, warm face of his servant. The other did not reply.

"Will you answer my question?" said the Captain.

"Yes, sir," replied the orderly, standing with his pile of deep Army plates. The Captain waited, looked at him, then asked again:

"Are you in a hurry?"

"Yes, sir," came the answer, that sent a flash through the listener.

"For what?"

"I was going out, sir."

"I want you this evening."

There was a moment's hesitation. The officer had a curious stiffness of countenance.

"Yes, sir," replied the servant, in his throat.

"I want you to-morrow evening also — in fact, you may consider your evenings occupied, unless I give you leave."

The mouth with the young moustache set close.

"Yes, sir," answered the orderly, loosening his lips for a moment.

He again turned to the door.

"And why have you a piece of pencil in your ear?"

The orderly hesitated, then continued on his way without answering. He set the plates in a pile outside the door, took the stump of pencil from his ear, and put it in his pocket. He had been copying a verse for his sweetheart's birthday card. He returned to finish clearing the table. The officer's eyes were dancing, he had a little, eager smile.

"Why have you a piece of pencil in your ear?" he asked.

The orderly took his hands full of dishes. His master was standing near the great green stove, a little smile on his face, his chin thrust forward. When the young soldier saw him his heart suddenly ran hot. He felt blind. Instead of answering, he turned dazedly to the door. As he was crouching to set down the dishes, he was pitched forward by a kick from behind. The pots went in a stream down the stairs, he clung to the pillar of the banisters. And as he was rising he was kicked heavily again, and again, so that he clung sickly to the post for some moments. His master had gone swiftly into the room and closed the door. The

maid-servant downstairs looked up the staircase and made a mocking face at the crockery disaster.

The officer's heart was plunging. He poured himself a glass of wine, part of which he spilled on the floor, and gulped the remainder, leaning against the cool, green stove. He heard his man collecting the dishes from the stairs. Pale, as if intoxicated, he waited. The servant entered again. The Captain's heart gave a pang, as of pleasure, seeing the young fellow bewildered and uncertain on his feet, with pain.

"Schöner!" he said.

The soldier was a little slower in coming to attention.

"Yes, sir!"

The youth stood before him, with pathetic young moustache, and fine eyebrows very distinct on his forehead of dark marble.

"I asked you a question."

"Yes, sir."

The officer's tone bit like acid.

"Why had you a pencil in your ear?"

Again the servant's heart ran hot, and he could not breathe. With dark, strained eyes, he looked at the officer, as if fascinated. And he stood there sturdily planted, unconscious. The withering smile came into the Captain's eyes, and he lifted his foot.

"I — I forgot it — sir," panted the soldier, his dark eyes fixed on the other man's dancing blue ones.

"What was it doing there?"

He saw the young man's breast heaving as he made an effort for words.

"I had been writing."

"Writing what?"

Again the soldier looked up and down. The officer could hear him panting. The smile came into the blue eyes. The soldier worked his dry throat, but could not speak. Suddenly the smile lit like a flame on the officer's face, and a kick came heavily against the orderly's thigh. The youth moved a pace sideways. His face went dead, with two black, staring eyes.

"Well?" said the officer.

The orderly's mouth had gone dry, and his tongue rubbed in it as on dry brown-paper. He worked his throat. The officer raised his foot. The servant went stiff.

"Some poetry, sir," came the crackling, unrecognizable sound of his voice.

"Poetry, what poetry?" asked the Captain, with a sickly smile.

Again there was the working in the throat. The Captain's heart had suddenly

gone down heavily, and he stood sick and tired.

“For my girl, sir,” he heard the dry, inhuman sound.

“Oh!” he said, turning away. “Clear the table.”

“Click!” went the soldier’s throat; then again, “click!” and then the half-articulate:

“Yes, sir.”

The young soldier was gone, looking old, and walking heavily.

The officer, left alone, held himself rigid, to prevent himself from thinking. His instinct warned him that he must not think. Deep inside him was the intense gratification of his passion, still working powerfully. Then there was a counter-action, a horrible breaking down of something inside him, a whole agony of reaction. He stood there for an hour motionless, a chaos of sensations, but rigid with a will to keep blank his consciousness, to prevent his mind grasping. And he held himself so until the worst of the stress had passed, when he began to drink, drank himself to an intoxication, till he slept obliterated. When he woke in the morning he was shaken to the base of his nature. But he had fought off the realization of what he had done. He had prevented his mind from taking it in, had suppressed it along with his instincts, and the conscious man had nothing to do with it. He felt only as after a bout of intoxication, weak, but the affair itself all dim and not to be recovered. Of the drunkenness of his passion he successfully refused remembrance. And when his orderly appeared with coffee, the officer assumed the same self he had had the morning before. He refused the event of the past night — denied it had ever been — and was successful in his denial. He had not done any such thing — not he himself. Whatever there might be lay at the door of a stupid, insubordinate servant.

The orderly had gone about in a stupor all the evening. He drank some beer because he was parched, but not much, the alcohol made his feeling come back, and he could not bear it. He was dulled, as if nine-tenths of the ordinary man in him were inert. He crawled about disfigured. Still, when he thought of the kicks, he went sick, and when he thought of the threat of more kicking, in the room afterwards, his heart went hot and faint, and he panted, remembering the one that had come. He had been forced to say, “For my girl.” He was much too done even to want to cry. His mouth hung slightly open, like an idiot’s. He felt vacant, and wasted. So, he wandered at his work, painfully, and very slowly and clumsily, fumbling blindly with the brushes, and finding it difficult, when he sat down, to summon the energy to move again. His limbs, his jaw, were slack and nerveless. But he was very tired. He got to bed at last, and slept inert, relaxed, in a sleep that was rather stupor than slumber, a dead night of stupefaction shot through with gleams of anguish.

In the morning were the manoeuvres. But he woke even before the bugle sounded. The painful ache in his chest, the dryness of his throat, the awful steady feeling of misery made his eyes come awake and dreary at once. He knew, without thinking, what had happened. And he knew that the day had come again, when he must go on with his round. The last bit of darkness was being pushed out of the room. He would have to move his inert body and go on. He was so young, and had known so little trouble, that he was bewildered. He only wished it would stay night, so that he could lie still, covered up by the darkness. And yet nothing would prevent the day from coming, nothing would save him from having to get up and saddle the Captain's horse, and make the Captain's coffee. It was there, inevitable. And then, he thought, it was impossible. Yet they would not leave him free. He must go and take the coffee to the Captain. He was too stunned to understand it. He only knew it was inevitable — inevitable, however long he lay inert.

At last, after heaving at himself, for he seemed to be a mass of inertia, he got up. But he had to force every one of his movements from behind, with his will. He felt lost, and dazed, and helpless. Then he clutched hold of the bed, the pain was so keen. And looking at his thighs, he saw the darker bruises on his swarthy flesh and he knew that, if he pressed one of his fingers on one of the bruises, he should faint. But he did not want to faint — he did not want anybody to know. No one should ever know. It was between him and the Captain. There were only the two people in the world now — himself and the Captain.

Slowly, economically, he got dressed and forced himself to walk. Everything was obscure, except just what he had his hands on. But he managed to get through his work. The very pain revived his dull senses. The worst remained yet. He took the tray and went up to the Captain's room. The officer, pale and heavy, sat at the table. The orderly, as he saluted, felt himself put out of existence. He stood still for a moment submitting to his own nullification — then he gathered himself, seemed to regain himself, and then the Captain began to grow vague, unreal, and the younger soldier's heart beat up. He clung to this situation — that the Captain did not exist — so that he himself might live. But when he saw his officer's hand tremble as he took the coffee, he felt everything falling shattered. And he went away, feeling as if he himself were coming to pieces, disintegrated. And when the Captain was there on horseback, giving orders, while he himself stood, with rifle and knapsack, sick with pain, he felt as if he must shut his eyes — as if he must shut his eyes on everything. It was only the long agony of marching with a parched throat that filled him with one single, sleep-heavy intention: to save himself.

II

He was getting used even to his parched throat. That the snowy peaks were radiant among the sky, that the whity-green glacier-river twisted through its pale shoals, in the valley below, seemed almost supernatural. But he was going mad with fever and thirst. He plodded on uncomplaining. He did not want to speak, not to anybody. There were two gulls, like flakes of water and snow, over the river. The scent of green rye soaked in sunshine came like a sickness. And the march continued, monotonously, almost like a bad sleep.

At the next farm-house, which stood low and broad near the high road, tubs of water had been put out. The soldiers clustered round to drink. They took off their helmets, and the steam mounted from their wet hair. The Captain sat on horseback, watching. He needed to see his orderly. His helmet threw a dark shadow over his light, fierce eyes, but his moustache and mouth and chin were distinct in the sunshine. The orderly must move under the presence of the figure of the horseman. It was not that he was afraid, or cowed. It was as if he was disembowelled, made empty, like an empty shell. He felt himself as nothing, a shadow creeping under the sunshine. And, thirsty as he was, he could scarcely drink, feeling the Captain near him. He would not take off his helmet to wipe his wet hair. He wanted to stay in shadow, not to be forced into consciousness. Starting, he saw the light heel of the officer prick the belly of the horse; the Captain cantered away, and he himself could relapse into vacancy.

Nothing, however, could give him back his living place in the hot, bright morning. He felt like a gap among it all. Whereas the Captain was prouder, overriding. A hot flash went through the young servant's body. The Captain was firmer and prouder with life, he himself was empty as a shadow. Again the flash went through him, dazing him out. But his heart ran a little firmer.

The company turned up the hill, to make a loop for the return. Below, from among the trees, the farm-bell clanged. He saw the labourers, mowing barefoot at the thick grass, leave off their work and go downhill, their scythes hanging over their shoulders, like long, bright claws curving down behind them. They seemed like dream-people, as if they had no relation to himself. He felt as in a blackish dream: as if all the other things were there and had form, but he himself was only a consciousness, a gap that could think and perceive.

The soldiers were tramping silently up the glaring hillside. Gradually his head began to revolve, slowly, rhythmically. Sometimes it was dark before his eyes, as if he saw this world through a smoked glass, frail shadows and unreal. It gave him a pain in his head to walk.

The air was too scented, it gave no breath. All the lush greenstuff seemed to

be issuing its sap, till the air was deathly, sickly with the smell of greenness. There was the perfume of clover, like pure honey and bees. Then there grew a faint acrid tang — they were near the beeches; and then a queer clattering noise, and a suffocating, hideous smell; they were passing a flock of sheep, a shepherd in a black smock, holding his crook. Why should the sheep huddle together under this fierce sun? He felt that the shepherd would not see him, though he could see the shepherd.

At last there was the halt. They stacked rifles in a conical stack, put down their kit in a scattered circle around it, and dispersed a little, sitting on a small knoll high on the hillside. The chatter began. The soldiers were steaming with heat, but were lively. He sat still, seeing the blue mountains rising upon the land, twenty kilometres away. There was a blue fold in the ranges, then out of that, at the foot, the broad, pale bed of the river, stretches of whity-green water between pinkish-grey shoals among the dark pine woods. There it was, spread out a long way off. And it seemed to come downhill, the river. There was a raft being steered, a mile away. It was a strange country. Nearer, a red-roofed, broad farm with white base and square dots of windows crouched beside the wall of beech foliage on the wood's edge. There were long strips of rye and clover and pale green corn. And just at his feet, below the knoll, was a darkish bog, where globe flowers stood breathless still on their slim stalks. And some of the pale gold bubbles were burst, and a broken fragment hung in the air. He thought he was going to sleep.

Suddenly something moved into this coloured mirage before his eyes. The Captain, a small, light-blue and scarlet figure, was trotting evenly between the strips of corn, along the level brow of the hill. And the man making flag-signals was coming on. Proud and sure moved the horseman's figure, the quick, bright thing, in which was concentrated all the light of this morning, which for the rest lay a fragile, shining shadow. Submissive, apathetic, the young soldier sat and stared. But as the horse slowed to a walk, coming up the last steep path, the great flash flared over the body and soul of the orderly. He sat waiting. The back of his head felt as if it were weighted with a heavy piece of fire. He did not want to eat. His hands trembled slightly as he moved them. Meanwhile the officer on horseback was approaching slowly and proudly. The tension grew in the orderly's soul. Then again, seeing the Captain ease himself on the saddle, the flash blazed through him.

The Captain looked at the patch of light blue and scarlet, and dark heads, scattered closely on the hillside. It pleased him. The command pleased him. And he was feeling proud. His orderly was among them in common subjection. The officer rose a little on his stirrups to look. The young soldier sat with averted,

dumb face. The Captain relaxed on his seat. His slim-legged, beautiful horse, brown as a beech nut, walked proudly uphill. The Captain passed into the zone of the company's atmosphere: a hot smell of men, of sweat, of leather. He knew it very well. After a word with the lieutenant, he went a few paces higher, and sat there, a dominant figure, his sweat-marked horse swishing its tail, while he looked down on his men, on his orderly, a nonentity among the crowd.

The young soldier's heart was like fire in his chest, and he breathed with difficulty. The officer, looking downhill, saw three of the young soldiers, two pails of water between them, staggering across a sunny green field. A table had been set up under a tree, and there the slim lieutenant stood, importantly busy. Then the Captain summoned himself to an act of courage. He called his orderly.

The flame leapt into the young soldier's throat as he heard the command, and he rose blindly, stifled. He saluted, standing below the officer. He did not look up. But there was the flicker in the Captain's voice.

"Go to the inn and fetch me . . ." the officer gave his commands. "Quick!" he added.

At the last word, the heart of the servant leapt with a flash, and he felt the strength come over his body. But he turned in mechanical obedience, and set off at a heavy run downhill, looking almost like a bear, his trousers bagging over his military boots. And the officer watched this blind, plunging run all the way.

But it was only the outside of the orderly's body that was obeying so humbly and mechanically. Inside had gradually accumulated a core into which all the energy of that young life was compact and concentrated. He executed his commission, and plodded quickly back uphill. There was a pain in his head, as he walked, that made him twist his features unknowingly. But hard there in the centre of his chest was himself, himself, firm, and not to be plucked to pieces.

The Captain had gone up into the wood. The orderly plodded through the hot, powerfully smelling zone of the company's atmosphere. He had a curious mass of energy inside him now. The Captain was less real than himself. He approached the green entrance to the wood. There, in the half-shade, he saw the horse standing, the sunshine and the flickering shadow of leaves dancing over his brown body. There was a clearing where timber had lately been felled. Here, in the gold-green shade beside the brilliant cup of sunshine, stood two figures, blue and pink, the bits of pink showing out plainly. The Captain was talking to his lieutenant.

The orderly stood on the edge of the bright clearing, where great trunks of trees, stripped and glistening, lay stretched like naked, brown-skinned bodies. Chips of wood littered the trampled floor, like splashed light, and the bases of the felled trees stood here and there, with their raw, level tops. Beyond was the

brilliant, sunlit green of a beech.

“Then I will ride forward,” the orderly heard his Captain say. The lieutenant saluted and strode away. He himself went forward. A hot flash passed through his belly, as he tramped towards his officer.

The Captain watched the rather heavy figure of the young soldier stumble forward, and his veins, too, ran hot. This was to be man to man between them. He yielded before the solid, stumbling figure with bent head. The orderly stooped and put the food on a level-sawn tree-base. The Captain watched the glistening, sun-inflamed, naked hands. He wanted to speak to the young soldier, but could not. The servant propped a bottle against his thigh, pressed open the cork, and poured out the beer into the mug. He kept his head bent. The Captain accepted the mug.

“Hot!” he said, as if amiably.

The flame sprang out of the orderly’s heart, nearly suffocating him.

“Yes, sir,” he replied, between shut teeth.

And he heard the sound of the Captain’s drinking, and he clenched his fists, such a strong torment came into his wrists. Then came the faint clang of the closing pot-lid. He looked up. The Captain was watching him. He glanced swiftly away. Then he saw the officer stoop and take a piece of bread from the tree-base. Again the flash of flame went through the young soldier, seeing the stiff body stoop beneath him, and his hands jerked. He looked away. He could feel the officer was nervous. The bread fell as it was being broken. The officer ate the other piece. The two men stood tense and still, the master laboriously chewing his bread, the servant staring with averted face, his fist clenched.

Then the young soldier started. The officer had pressed open the lid of the mug again. The orderly watched the lid of the mug, and the white hand that clenched the handle, as if he were fascinated. It was raised. The youth followed it with his eyes. And then he saw the thin, strong throat of the elder man moving up and down as he drank, the strong jaw working. And the instinct which had been jerking at the young man’s wrists suddenly jerked free. He jumped, feeling as if it were rent in two by a strong flame.

The spur of the officer caught in a tree-root, he went down backwards with a crash, the middle of his back thudding sickeningly against a sharp-edged tree-base, the pot flying away. And in a second the orderly, with serious, earnest young face, and underlip between his teeth, had got his knee in the officer’s chest and was pressing the chin backward over the farther edge of the tree-stump, pressing, with all his heart behind in a passion of relief, the tension of his wrists exquisite with relief. And with the base of his palms he shoved at the chin, with all his might. And it was pleasant, too, to have that chin, that hard jaw

already slightly rough with beard, in his hands. He did not relax one hair's breadth, but, all the force of all his blood exulting in his thrust, he shoved back the head of the other man, till there was a little "cluck" and a crunching sensation. Then he felt as if his head went to vapour. Heavy convulsions shook the body of the officer, frightening and horrifying the young soldier. Yet it pleased him, too, to repress them. It pleased him to keep his hands pressing back the chin, to feel the chest of the other man yield in expiration to the weight of his strong, young knees, to feel the hard twitchings of the prostrate body jerking his own whole frame, which was pressed down on it.

But it went still. He could look into the nostrils of the other man, the eyes he could scarcely see. How curiously the mouth was pushed out, exaggerating the full lips, and the moustache bristling up from them. Then, with a start, he noticed the nostrils gradually filled with blood. The red brimmed, hesitated, ran over, and went in a thin trickle down the face to the eyes.

It shocked and distressed him. Slowly, he got up. The body twitched and sprawled there, inert. He stood and looked at it in silence. It was a pity *it* was broken. It represented more than the thing which had kicked and bullied him. He was afraid to look at the eyes. They were hideous now, only the whites showing, and the blood running to them. The face of the orderly was drawn with horror at the sight. Well, it was so. In his heart he was satisfied. He had hated the face of the Captain. It was extinguished now. There was a heavy relief in the orderly's soul. That was as it should be. But he could not bear to see the long, military body lying broken over the tree-base, the fine fingers crisped. He wanted to hide it away.

Quickly, busily, he gathered it up and pushed it under the felled tree-trunks, which rested their beautiful, smooth length either end on logs. The face was horrible with blood. He covered it with the helmet. Then he pushed the limbs straight and decent, and brushed the dead leaves off the fine cloth of the uniform. So, it lay quite still in the shadow under there. A little strip of sunshine ran along the breast, from a chink between the logs. The orderly sat by it for a few moments. Here his own life also ended.

Then, through his daze, he heard the lieutenant, in a loud voice, explaining to the men outside the wood, that they were to suppose the bridge on the river below was held by the enemy. Now they were to march to the attack in such and such a manner. The lieutenant had no gift of expression. The orderly, listening from habit, got muddled. And when the lieutenant began it all again he ceased to hear.

He knew he must go. He stood up. It surprised him that the leaves were glittering in the sun, and the chips of wood reflecting white from the ground. For

him a change had come over the world. But for the rest it had not — all seemed the same. Only he had left it. And he could not go back. It was his duty to return with the beer-pot and the bottle. He could not. He had left all that. The lieutenant was still hoarsely explaining. He must go, or they would overtake him. And he could not bear contact with anyone now.

He drew his fingers over his eyes, trying to find out where he was. Then he turned away. He saw the horse standing in the path. He went up to it and mounted. It hurt him to sit in the saddle. The pain of keeping his seat occupied him as they cantered through the wood. He would not have minded anything, but he could not get away from the sense of being divided from the others. The path led out of the trees. On the edge of the wood he pulled up and stood watching. There in the spacious sunshine of the valley soldiers were moving in a little swarm. Every now and then, a man harrowing on a strip of fallow shouted to his oxen, at the turn. The village and the white-towered church was small in the sunshine. And he no longer belonged to it — he sat there, beyond, like a man outside in the dark. He had gone out from everyday life into the unknown, and he could not, he even did not want to go back.

Turning from the sun-blazing valley, he rode deep into the wood. Tree-trunks, like people standing grey and still, took no notice as he went. A doe, herself a moving bit of sunshine and shadow, went running through the flecked shade. There were bright green rents in the foliage. Then it was all pine wood, dark and cool. And he was sick with pain, he had an intolerable great pulse in his head, and he was sick. He had never been ill in his life. He felt lost, quite dazed with all this.

Trying to get down from the horse, he fell, astonished at the pain and his lack of balance. The horse shifted uneasily. He jerked its bridle and sent it cantering jerkily away. It was his last connection with the rest of things.

But he only wanted to lie down and not be disturbed. Stumbling through the trees, he came on a quiet place where beeches and pine trees grew on a slope. Immediately he had lain down and closed his eyes, his consciousness went racing on without him. A big pulse of sickness beat in him as if it throbbed through the whole earth. He was burning with dry heat. But he was too busy, too tearingly active in the incoherent race of delirium to observe.

III

He came to with a start. His mouth was dry and hard, his heart beat heavily, but he had not the energy to get up. His heart beat heavily. Where was he? — the barracks — at home? There was something knocking. And, making an effort, he

looked round — trees, and litter of greenery, and reddish, bright, still pieces of sunshine on the floor. He did not believe he was himself, he did not believe what he saw. Something was knocking. He made a struggle towards consciousness, but relapsed. Then he struggled again. And gradually his surroundings fell into relationship with himself. He knew, and a great pang of fear went through his heart. Somebody was knocking. He could see the heavy, black rags of a fir tree overhead. Then everything went black. Yet he did not believe he had closed his eyes. He had not. Out of the blackness sight slowly emerged again. And someone was knocking. Quickly, he saw the blood-disfigured face of his Captain, which he hated. And he held himself still with horror. Yet, deep inside him, he knew that it was so, the Captain should be dead. But the physical delirium got hold of him. Someone was knocking. He lay perfectly still, as if dead, with fear. And he went unconscious.

When he opened his eyes again, he started, seeing something creeping swiftly up a tree-trunk. It was a little bird. And the bird was whistling overhead. Tap-tap-tap — it was the small, quick bird rapping the tree-trunk with its beak, as if its head were a little round hammer. He watched it curiously. It shifted sharply, in its creeping fashion. Then, like a mouse, it slid down the bare trunk. Its swift creeping sent a flash of revulsion through him. He raised his head. It felt a great weight. Then, the little bird ran out of the shadow across a still patch of sunshine, its little head bobbing swiftly, its white legs twinkling brightly for a moment. How neat it was in its build, so compact, with pieces of white on its wings. There were several of them. They were so pretty — but they crept like swift, erratic mice, running here and there among the beech-mast.

He lay down again exhausted, and his consciousness lapsed. He had a horror of the little creeping birds. All his blood seemed to be darting and creeping in his head. And yet he could not move.

He came to with a further ache of exhaustion. There was the pain in his head, and the horrible sickness, and his inability to move. He had never been ill in his life. He did not know where he was or what he was. Probably he had got sunstroke. Or what else? — he had silenced the Captain for ever — some time ago — oh, a long time ago. There had been blood on his face, and his eyes had turned upwards. It was all right, somehow. It was peace. But now he had got beyond himself. He had never been here before. Was it life, or not life? He was by himself. They were in a big, bright place, those others, and he was outside. The town, all the country, a big bright place of light: and he was outside, here, in the darkened open beyond, where each thing existed alone. But they would all have to come out there sometime, those others. Little, and left behind him, they all were. There had been father and mother and sweetheart. What did they all

matter? This was the open land.

He sat up. Something scuffled. It was a little, brown squirrel running in lovely, undulating bounds over the floor, its red tail completing the undulation of its body — and then, as it sat up, furling and unfurling. He watched it, pleased. It ran on again, friskily, enjoying itself. It flew wildly at another squirrel, and they were chasing each other, and making little scolding, chattering noises. The soldier wanted to speak to them. But only a hoarse sound came out of his throat. The squirrels burst away — they flew up the trees. And then he saw the one peeping round at him, halfway up a tree-trunk. A start of fear went through him, though, in so far as he was conscious, he was amused. It still stayed, its little, keen face staring at him halfway up the tree-trunk, its little ears pricked up, its clawey little hands clinging to the bark, its white breast reared. He started from it in panic.

Struggling to his feet, he lurched away. He went on walking, walking, looking for something — for a drink. His brain felt hot and inflamed for want of water. He stumbled on. Then he did not know anything. He went unconscious as he walked. Yet he stumbled on, his mouth open.

When, to his dumb wonder, he opened his eyes on the world again, he no longer tried to remember what it was. There was thick, golden light behind golden-green glitterings, and tall, grey-purple shafts, and darkneses further off, surrounding him, growing deeper. He was conscious of a sense of arrival. He was amid the reality, on the real, dark bottom. But there was the thirst burning in his brain. He felt lighter, not so heavy. He supposed it was newness. The air was muttering with thunder. He thought he was walking wonderfully swiftly and was coming straight to relief — or was it to water?

Suddenly he stood still with fear. There was a tremendous flare of gold, immense — just a few dark trunks like bars between him and it. All the young level wheat was burnished gold glaring on its silky green. A woman, full-skirted, a black cloth on her head for head-dress, was passing like a block of shadow through the glistening, green corn, into the full glare. There was a farm, too, pale blue in shadow, and the timber black. And there was a church spire, nearly fused away in the gold. The woman moved on, away from him. He had no language with which to speak to her. She was the bright, solid unreality. She would make a noise of words that would confuse him, and her eyes would look at him without seeing him. She was crossing there to the other side. He stood against a tree.

When at last he turned, looking down the long, bare grove whose flat bed was already filling dark, he saw the mountains in a wonder-light, not far away, and radiant. Behind the soft, grey ridge of the nearest range the further mountains

stood golden and pale grey, the snow all radiant like pure, soft gold. So still, gleaming in the sky, fashioned pure out of the ore of the sky, they shone in their silence. He stood and looked at them, his face illuminated. And like the golden, lustrous gleaming of the snow he felt his own thirst bright in him. He stood and gazed, leaning against a tree. And then everything slid away into space.

During the night the lightning fluttered perpetually, making the whole sky white. He must have walked again. The world hung livid round him for moments, fields a level sheen of grey-green light, trees in dark bulk, and the range of clouds black across a white sky. Then the darkness fell like a shutter, and the night was whole. A faint flutter of a half-revealed world, that could not quite leap out of the darkness! — Then there again stood a sweep of pallor for the land, dark shapes looming, a range of clouds hanging overhead. The world was a ghostly shadow, thrown for a moment upon the pure darkness, which returned ever whole and complete.

And the mere delirium of sickness and fever went on inside him — his brain opening and shutting like the night — then sometimes convulsions of terror from something with great eyes that stared round a tree — then the long agony of the march, and the sun decomposing his blood — then the pang of hate for the Captain, followed by a pang of tenderness and ease. But everything was distorted, born of an ache and resolving into an ache.

In the morning he came definitely awake. Then his brain flamed with the sole horror of thirstiness! The sun was on his face, the dew was steaming from his wet clothes. Like one possessed, he got up. There, straight in front of him, blue and cool and tender, the mountains ranged across the pale edge of the morning sky. He wanted them — he wanted them alone — he wanted to leave himself and be identified with them. They did not move, they were still soft, with white, gentle markings of snow. He stood still, mad with suffering, his hands cramping and clutching. Then he was twisting in a paroxysm on the grass.

He lay still, in a kind of dream of anguish. His thirst seemed to have separated itself from him, and to stand apart, a single demand. Then the pain he felt was another single self. Then there was the clog of his body, another separate thing. He was divided among all kinds of separate beings. There was some strange, agonized connection between them, but they were drawing further apart. Then they would all split. The sun, drilling down on him, was drilling through the bond. Then they would all fall, fall through the everlasting lapse of space. Then again, his consciousness reasserted itself. He roused on to his elbow and stared at the gleaming mountains. There they ranked, all still and wonderful between earth and heaven. He stared till his eyes went black, and the mountains, as they stood in their beauty, so clean and cool, seemed to have it, that which was lost in

him.

IV

When the soldiers found him, three hours later, he was lying with his face over his arm, his black hair giving off heat under the sun. But he was still alive. Seeing the open, black mouth the young soldiers dropped him in horror.

He died in the hospital at night, without having seen again.

The doctors saw the bruises on his legs, behind, and were silent.

The bodies of the two men lay together, side by side, in the mortuary, the one white and slender, but laid rigidly at rest, the other looking as if every moment it must rouse into life again, so young and unused, from a slumber.

THE THORN IN THE FLESH

I

A wind was running, so that occasionally the poplars whitened as if a flame flew up them. The sky was broken and blue among moving clouds. Patches of sunshine lay on the level fields, and shadows on the rye and the vineyards. In the distance, very blue, the cathedral bristled against the sky, and the houses of the city of Metz clustered vaguely below, like a hill.

Among the fields by the lime trees stood the barracks, upon bare, dry ground, a collection of round-roofed huts of corrugated iron, where the soldiers' nasturtiums climbed brilliantly. There was a tract of vegetable garden at the side, with the soldiers' yellowish lettuces in rows, and at the back the big, hard drilling-yard surrounded by a wire fence.

At this time in the afternoon, the huts were deserted, all the beds pushed up, the soldiers were lounging about under the lime trees waiting for the call to drill. Bachmann sat on a bench in the shade that smelled sickly with blossom. Pale green, wrecked lime flowers were scattered on the ground. He was writing his weekly post card to his mother. He was a fair, long, limber youth, good looking. He sat very still indeed, trying to write his post card. His blue uniform, sagging on him as he sat bent over the card, disfigured his youthful shape. His sunburnt hand waited motionless for the words to come. "Dear mother" — was all he had written. Then he scribbled mechanically: "Many thanks for your letter with what you sent. Everything is all right with me. We are just off to drill on the fortifications — " Here he broke off and sat suspended, oblivious of everything, held in some definite suspense. He looked again at the card. But he could write no more. Out of the knot of his consciousness no word would come. He signed himself, and looked up, as a man looks to see if anyone has noticed him in his privacy.

There was a self-conscious strain in his blue eyes, and a pallor about his mouth, where the young, fair moustache glistened. He was almost girlish in his good looks and his grace. But he had something of military consciousness, as if he believed in the discipline for himself, and found satisfaction in delivering himself to his duty. There was also a trace of youthful swagger and dare-devilry about his mouth and his limber body, but this was in suppression now.

He put the post card in the pocket of his tunic, and went to join a group of his

comrades who were lounging in the shade, laughing and talking grossly. To-day he was out of it. He only stood near to them for the warmth of the association. In his own consciousness something held him down.

Presently they were summoned to ranks. The sergeant came out to take command. He was a strongly built, rather heavy man of forty. His head was thrust forward, sunk a little between his powerful shoulders, and the strong jaw was pushed out aggressively. But the eyes were smouldering, the face hung slack and sodden with drink.

He gave his orders in brutal, barking shouts, and the little company moved forward, out of the wire-fenced yard to the open road, marching rhythmically, raising the dust. Bachmann, one of the inner file of four deep, marched in the airless ranks, half suffocated with heat and dust and enclosure. Through the moving of his comrades' bodies, he could see the small vines dusty by the roadside, the poppies among the tares fluttering and blown to pieces, the distant spaces of sky and fields all free with air and sunshine. But he was bound in a very dark enclosure of anxiety within himself.

He marched with his usual ease, being healthy and well adjusted. But his body went on by itself. His spirit was clenched apart. And ever the few soldiers drew nearer and nearer to the town, ever the consciousness of the youth became more gripped and separate, his body worked by a kind of mechanical intelligence, a mere presence of mind.

They diverged from the high road and passed in single file down a path among trees. All was silent and green and mysterious, with shadow of foliage and long, green, undisturbed grass. Then they came out in the sunshine on a moat of water, which wound silently between the long, flowery grass, at the foot of the earthworks, that rose in front in terraces walled smooth on the face, but all soft with long grass at the top. Marguerite daisies and lady's-slipper glimmered white and gold in the lush grass, preserved here in the intense peace of the fortifications. Thickets of trees stood round about. Occasionally a puff of mysterious wind made the flowers and the long grass that crested the earthworks above bow and shake as with signals of oncoming alarm.

The group of soldiers stood at the end of the moat, in their light blue and scarlet uniforms, very bright. The sergeant was giving them instructions, and his shout came sharp and alarming in the intense, untouched stillness of the place. They listened, finding it difficult to make the effort of understanding.

Then it was over, and the men were moving to make preparations. On the other side of the moat the ramparts rose smooth and clear in the sun, sloping slightly back. Along the summit grass grew and tall daisies stood ledged high, like magic, against the dark green of the tree-tops behind. The noise of the town,

the running of tram-cars, was heard distinctly, but it seemed not to penetrate this still place.

The water of the moat was motionless. In silence the practice began. One of the soldiers took a scaling ladder, and passing along the narrow ledge at the foot of the earthworks, with the water of the moat just behind him, tried to get a fixture on the slightly sloping wall-face. There he stood, small and isolated, at the foot of the wall, trying to get his ladder settled. At last it held, and the clumsy, groping figure in the baggy blue uniform began to clamber up. The rest of the soldiers stood and watched. Occasionally the sergeant barked a command. Slowly the clumsy blue figure clambered higher up the wall-face. Bachmann stood with his bowels turned to water. The figure of the climbing soldier scrambled out on to the terrace up above, and moved, blue and distinct, among the bright green grass. The officer shouted from below. The soldier tramped along, fixed the ladder in another spot, and carefully lowered himself on to the rungs. Bachmann watched the blind foot groping in space for the ladder, and he felt the world fall away beneath him. The figure of the soldier clung cringing against the face of the wall, cleaving, groping downwards like some unsure insect working its way lower and lower, fearing every movement. At last, sweating and with a strained face, the figure had landed safely and turned to the group of soldiers. But still it had a stiffness and a blank, mechanical look, was something less than human.

Bachmann stood there heavy and condemned, waiting for his own turn and betrayal. Some of the men went up easily enough, and without fear. That only showed it could be done lightly, and made Bachmann's case more bitter. If only he could do it lightly, like that.

His turn came. He knew intuitively that nobody knew his condition. The officer just saw him as a mechanical thing. He tried to keep it up, to carry it through on the face of things. His inside gripped tight, as yet under control, he took the ladder and went along under the wall. He placed his ladder with quick success, and wild, quivering hope possessed him. Then blindly he began to climb. But the ladder was not very firm, and at every hitch a great, sick, melting feeling took hold of him. He clung on fast. If only he could keep that grip on himself, he would get through. He knew this, in agony. What he could not understand was the blind gush of white-hot fear, that came with great force whenever the ladder swerved, and which almost melted his belly and all his joints, and left him powerless. If once it melted all his joints and his belly, he was done. He clung desperately to himself. He knew the fear, he knew what it did when it came, he knew he had only to keep a firm hold. He knew all this. Yet, when the ladder swerved, and his foot missed, there was the great blast of

fear blowing on his heart and bowels, and he was melting weaker and weaker, in a horror of fear and lack of control, melting to fall.

Yet he groped slowly higher and higher, always staring upwards with desperate face, and always conscious of the space below. But all of him, body and soul, was growing hot to fusion point. He would have to let go for very relief's sake. Suddenly his heart began to lurch. It gave a great, sickly swoop, rose, and again plunged in a swoop of horror. He lay against the wall inert as if dead, inert, at peace, save for one deep core of anxiety, which knew that it was *not* all over, that he was still high in space against the wall. But the chief effort of will was gone.

There came into his consciousness a small, foreign sensation. He woke up a little. What was it? Then slowly it penetrated him. His water had run down his leg. He lay there, clinging, still with shame, half conscious of the echo of the sergeant's voice thundering from below. He waited, in depths of shame beginning to recover himself. He had been shamed so deeply. Then he could go on, for his fear for himself was conquered. His shame was known and published. He must go on.

Slowly he began to grope for the rung above, when a great shock shook through him. His wrists were grasped from above, he was being hauled out of himself up, up to the safe ground. Like a sack he was dragged over the edge of the earthworks by the large hands, and landed there on his knees, grovelling in the grass to recover command of himself, to rise up on his feet.

Shame, blind, deep shame and ignominy overthrew his spirit and left it writhing. He stood there shrunk over himself, trying to obliterate himself.

Then the presence of the officer who had hauled him up made itself felt upon him. He heard the panting of the elder man, and then the voice came down on his veins like a fierce whip. He shrank in tension of shame.

"Put up your head — eyes front," shouted the enraged sergeant, and mechanically the soldier obeyed the command, forced to look into the eyes of the sergeant. The brutal, hanging face of the officer violated the youth. He hardened himself with all his might from seeing it. The tearing noise of the sergeant's voice continued to lacerate his body.

Suddenly he set back his head, rigid, and his heart leapt to burst. The face had suddenly thrust itself close, all distorted and showing the teeth, the eyes smouldering into him. The breath of the barking words was on his nose and mouth. He stepped aside in revulsion. With a scream the face was upon him again. He raised his arm, involuntarily, in self-defence. A shock of horror went through him, as he felt his forearm hit the face of the officer a brutal blow. The latter staggered, swerved back, and with a curious cry, reeled backwards over the

ramparts, his hands clutching the air. There was a second of silence, then a crash to water.

Bachmann, rigid, looked out of his inner silence upon the scene. Soldiers were running.

“You’d better clear,” said one young, excited voice to him. And with immediate instinctive decision he started to walk away from the spot. He went down the tree-hidden path to the high road where the trams ran to and from the town. In his heart was a sense of vindication, of escape. He was leaving it all, the military world, the shame. He was walking away from it.

Officers on horseback rode sauntering down the street, soldiers passed along the pavement. Coming to the bridge, Bachmann crossed over to the town that heaped before him, rising from the flat, picturesque French houses down below at the water’s edge, up a jumble of roofs and chasms of streets, to the lovely dark cathedral with its myriad pinnacles making points at the sky.

He felt for the moment quite at peace, relieved from a great strain. So he turned along by the river to the public gardens. Beautiful were the heaped, purple lilac trees upon the green grass, and wonderful the walls of the horse-chestnut trees, lighted like an altar with white flowers on every ledge. Officers went by, elegant and all coloured, women and girls sauntered in the chequered shade. Beautiful it was, he walked in a vision, free.

II

But where was he going? He began to come out of his trance of delight and liberty. Deep within him he felt the steady burning of shame in the flesh. As yet he could not bear to think of it. But there it was, submerged beneath his attention, the raw, steady-burning shame.

It behoved him to be intelligent. As yet he dared not remember what he had done. He only knew the need to get away, away from everything he had been in contact with.

But how? A great pang of fear went through him. He could not bear his shamed flesh to be put again between the hands of authority. Already the hands had been laid upon him, brutally upon his nakedness, ripping open his shame and making him maimed, crippled in his own control.

Fear became an anguish. Almost blindly he was turning in the direction of the barracks. He could not take the responsibility of himself. He must give himself up to someone. Then his heart, obstinate in hope, became obsessed with the idea of his sweetheart. He would make himself her responsibility.

Blenching as he took courage, he mounted the small, quick-hurrying tram that

ran out of the town in the direction of the barracks. He sat motionless and composed, static.

He got out at the terminus and went down the road. A wind was still running. He could hear the faint whisper of the rye, and the stronger swish as a sudden gust was upon it. No one was about. Feeling detached and impersonal, he went down a field-path between the low vines. Many little vine trees rose up in spires, holding out tender pink shoots, waving their tendrils. He saw them distinctly and wondered over them. In a field a little way off, men and women were taking up the hay. The bullock-waggon stood by on the path, the men in their blue shirts, the women with white cloths over their heads carried hay in their arms to the cart, all brilliant and distinct upon the shorn, glowing green acres. He felt himself looking out of darkness on to the glamorous, brilliant beauty of the world around him, outside him.

The Baron's house, where Emilie was maidservant, stood square and mellow among trees and garden and fields. It was an old French grange. The barracks was quite near. Bachmann walked, drawn by a single purpose, towards the courtyard. He entered the spacious, shadowy, sun-swept place. The dog, seeing a soldier, only jumped and whined for greeting. The pump stood peacefully in a corner, under a lime tree, in the shade.

The kitchen door was open. He hesitated, then walked in, speaking shyly and smiling involuntarily. The two women started, but with pleasure. Emilie was preparing the tray for afternoon coffee. She stood beyond the table, drawn up, startled, and challenging, and glad. She had the proud, timid eyes of some wild animal, some proud animal. Her black hair was closely banded, her grey eyes watched steadily. She wore a peasant dress of blue cotton sprigged with little red roses, that buttoned tight over her strong maiden breasts.

At the table sat another young woman, the nursery governess, who was picking cherries from a huge heap, and dropping them into a bowl. She was young, pretty, freckled.

"Good day!" she said pleasantly. "The unexpected."

Emilie did not speak. The flush came in her dark cheek. She still stood watching, between fear and a desire to escape, and on the other hand joy that kept her in his presence.

"Yes," he said, bashful and strained, while the eyes of the two women were upon him. "I've got myself in a mess this time."

"What?" asked the nursery governess, dropping her hands in her lap. Emilie stood rigid.

Bachmann could not raise his head. He looked sideways at the glistening, ruddy cherries. He could not recover the normal world.

“I knocked Sergeant Huber over the fortifications down into the moat,” he said. “It was an accident — but — ”

And he grasped at the cherries, and began to eat them, unknowing, hearing only Emilie’s little exclamation.

“You knocked him over the fortifications!” echoed Fräulein Hesse in horror. “How?”

Spitting the cherry-stones into his hand, mechanically, absorbedly, he told them.

“Ach!” exclaimed Emilie sharply.

“And how did you get here?” asked Fräulein Hesse.

“I ran off,” he said.

There was a dead silence. He stood, putting himself at the mercy of the women. There came a hissing from the stove, and a stronger smell of coffee. Emilie turned swiftly away. He saw her flat, straight back and her strong loins, as she bent over the stove.

“But what are you going to do?” said Fräulein Hesse, aghast.

“I don’t know,” he said, grasping at more cherries. He had come to an end.

“You’d better go to the barracks,” she said. “We’ll get the Herr Baron to come and see about it.”

Emilie was swiftly and quietly preparing the tray. She picked it up, and stood with the glittering china and silver before her, impassive, waiting for his reply. Bachmann remained with his head dropped, pale and obstinate. He could not bear to go back.

“I’m going to try to get into France,” he said.

“Yes, but they’ll catch you,” said Fräulein Hesse.

Emilie watched with steady, watchful grey eyes.

“I can have a try, if I could hide till to-night,” he said.

Both women knew what he wanted. And they all knew it was no good. Emilie picked up the tray, and went out. Bachmann stood with his head dropped. Within himself he felt the dross of shame and incapacity.

“You’d never get away,” said the governess.

“I can try,” he said.

To-day he could not put himself between the hands of the military. Let them do as they liked with him to-morrow, if he escaped to-day.

They were silent. He ate cherries. The colour flushed bright into the cheek of the young governess.

Emilie returned to prepare another tray

“He could hide in your room,” the governess said to her.

The girl drew herself away. She could not bear the intrusion.

“That is all I can think of that is safe from the children,” said Fräulein Hesse.

Emilie gave no answer. Bachmann stood waiting for the two women. Emilie did not want the close contact with him.

“You could sleep with me,” Fräulein Hesse said to her.

Emilie lifted her eyes and looked at the young man, direct, clear, reserving herself.

“Do you want that?” she asked, her strong virginity proof against him.

“Yes — yes — ” he said uncertainly, destroyed by shame.

She put back her head.

“Yes,” she murmured to herself.

Quickly she filled the tray, and went out.

“But you can’t walk over the frontier in a night,” said Fräulein Hesse.

“I can cycle,” he said.

Emilie returned, a restraint, a neutrality, in her bearing.

“I’ll see if it’s all right,” said the governess.

In a moment or two Bachmann was following Emilie through the square hall, where hung large maps on the walls. He noticed a child’s blue coat with brass buttons on the peg, and it reminded him of Emilie walking holding the hand of the youngest child, whilst he watched, sitting under the lime tree. Already this was a long way off. That was a sort of freedom he had lost, changed for a new, immediate anxiety.

They went quickly, fearfully up the stairs and down a long corridor. Emilie opened her door, and he entered, ashamed, into her room.

“I must go down,” she murmured, and she departed, closing the door softly.

It was a small, bare, neat room. There was a little dish for holy-water, a picture of the Sacred Heart, a crucifix, and a *prie-Dieu*. The small bed lay white and untouched, the wash-hand bowl of red earth stood on a bare table, there was a little mirror and a small chest of drawers. That was all.

Feeling safe, in sanctuary, he went to the window, looking over the courtyard at the shimmering, afternoon country. He was going to leave this land, this life. Already he was in the unknown.

He drew away into the room. The curious simplicity and severity of the little Roman Catholic bedroom was foreign but restoring to him. He looked at the crucifix. It was a long, lean, peasant Christ carved by a peasant in the Black Forest. For the first time in his life, Bachmann saw the figure as a human thing. It represented a man hanging there in helpless torture. He stared at it, closely, as if for new knowledge.

Within his own flesh burned and smouldered the restless shame. He could not gather himself together. There was a gap in his soul. The shame within him

seemed to displace his strength and his manhood.

He sat down on his chair. The shame, the roused feeling of exposure acted on his brain, made him heavy, unutterably heavy.

Mechanically, his wits all gone, he took off his boots, his belt, his tunic, put them aside, and lay down, heavy, and fell into a kind of drugged sleep.

Emilie came in a little while, and looked at him. But he was sunk in sleep. She saw him lying there inert, and terribly still, and she was afraid. His shirt was unfastened at the throat. She saw his pure white flesh, very clean and beautiful. And he slept inert. His legs, in the blue uniform trousers, his feet in the coarse stockings, lay foreign on her bed. She went away.

III

She was uneasy, perturbed to her last fibre. She wanted to remain clear, with no touch on her. A wild instinct made her shrink away from any hands which might be laid on her.

She was a foundling, probably of some gipsy race, brought up in a Roman Catholic Rescue Home. A naïve, paganly religious being, she was attached to the Baroness, with whom she had served for seven years, since she was fourteen.

She came into contact with no one, unless it were with Ida Hesse, the governess. Ida was a calculating, good-natured, not very straight-forward flirt. She was the daughter of a poor country doctor. Having gradually come into connection with Emilie, more an alliance than an attachment, she put no distinction of grade between the two of them. They worked together, sang together, walked together, and went together to the rooms of Franz Brand, Ida's sweetheart. There the three talked and laughed together, or the women listened to Franz, who was a forester, playing on his violin.

In all this alliance there was no personal intimacy between the young women. Emilie was naturally secluded in herself, of a reserved, native race. Ida used her as a kind of weight to balance her own flighty movement. But the quick, shifty governess, occupied always in her dealings with admirers, did all she could to move the violent nature of Emilie towards some connection with men.

But the dark girl, primitive yet sensitive to a high degree, was fiercely virgin. Her blood flamed with rage when the common soldiers made the long, sucking, kissing noise behind her as she passed. She hated them for their almost jeering offers. She was well protected by the Baroness.

And her contempt of the common men in general was ineffable. But she loved the Baroness, and she revered the Baron, and she was at her ease when she was doing something for the service of a gentleman. Her whole nature was at peace

in the service of real masters or mistresses. For her, a gentleman had some mystic quality that left her free and proud in service. The common soldiers were brutes, merely nothing. Her desire was to serve.

She held herself aloof. When, on Sunday afternoon, she had looked through the windows of the Reichshalle in passing, and had seen the soldiers dancing with the common girls, a cold revulsion and anger had possessed her. She could not bear to see the soldiers taking off their belts and pulling open their tunics, dancing with their shirts showing through the open, sagging tunic, their movements gross, their faces transfigured and sweaty, their coarse hands holding their coarse girls under the arm-pits, drawing the female up to their breasts. She hated to see them clutched breast to breast, the legs of the men moving grossly in the dance.

At evening, when she had been in the garden, and heard on the other side of the hedge the sexual inarticulate cries of the girls in the embraces of the soldiers, her anger had been too much for her, and she had cried, loud and cold:

“What are you doing there, in the hedge?”

She would have had them whipped.

But Bachmann was not quite a common soldier. Fräulein Hesse had found out about him, and had drawn him and Emilie together. For he was a handsome, blond youth, erect and walking with a kind of pride, unconscious yet clear. Moreover, he came of a rich farming stock, rich for many generations. His father was dead, his mother controlled the moneys for the time being. But if Bachmann wanted a hundred pounds at any moment, he could have them. By trade he, with one of his brothers, was a waggon-builder. The family had the farming, smithy, and waggon-building of their village. They worked because that was the form of life they knew. If they had chosen, they could have lived independent upon their means.

In this way, he was a gentleman in sensibility, though his intellect was not developed. He could afford to pay freely for things. He had, moreover, his native, fine breeding. Emilie wavered uncertainly before him. So he became her sweetheart, and she hungered after him. But she was virgin, and shy, and needed to be in subjection, because she was primitive and had no grasp on civilized forms of living, nor on civilized purposes.

IV

At six o'clock came the inquiry of the soldiers: Had anything been seen of Bachmann? Fräulein Hesse answered, pleased to be playing a rôle:

“No, I've not seen him since Sunday — have you, Emilie?”

“No, I haven’t seen him,” said Emilie, and her awkwardness was construed as bashfulness. Ida Hesse, stimulated, asked questions, and played her part.

“But it hasn’t killed Sergeant Huber?” she cried in consternation.

“No. He fell into the water. But it gave him a bad shock, and smashed his foot on the side of the moat. He’s in hospital. It’s a bad look-out for Bachmann.”

Emilie, implicated and captive, stood looking on. She was no longer free, working with all this regulated system which she could not understand and which was almost god-like to her. She was put out of her place. Bachmann was in her room, she was no longer the faithful in service serving with religious surety.

Her situation was intolerable to her. All evening long the burden was upon her, she could not live. The children must be fed and put to sleep. The Baron and Baroness were going out, she must give them light refreshment. The manservant was coming in to supper after returning with the carriage. And all the while she had the insupportable feeling of being out of the order, self-responsible, bewildered. The control of her life should come from those above her, and she should move within that control. But now she was out of it, uncontrolled and troubled. More than that, the man, the lover, Bachmann, who was he, what was he? He alone of all men contained for her the unknown quantity which terrified her beyond her service. Oh, she had wanted him as a distant sweetheart, not close, like this, casting her out of her world.

When the Baron and Baroness had departed, and the young manservant had gone out to enjoy himself, she went upstairs to Bachmann. He had wakened up, and sat dimly in the room. Out in the open he heard the soldiers, his comrades, singing the sentimental songs of the nightfall, the drone of the concertina rising in accompaniment.

“Wenn ich zu mei . . . nem Kinde geh’ . . .
In seinem Au . . . g die Mutter seh’ . . .”

But he himself was removed from it now. Only the sentimental cry of young, unsatisfied desire in the soldiers’ singing penetrated his blood and stirred him subtly. He let his head hang; he had become gradually roused: and he waited in concentration, in another world.

The moment she entered the room where the man sat alone, waiting intensely, the thrill passed through her, she died in terror, and after the death, a great flame gushed up, obliterating her. He sat in trousers and shirt on the side of the bed. He looked up as she came in, and she shrank from his face. She could not bear it. Yet she entered near to him.

“Do you want anything to eat?” she said.

“Yes,” he answered, and as she stood in the twilight of the room with him, he could only hear his heart beat heavily. He saw her apron just level with his face. She stood silent, a little distance off, as if she would be there for ever. He suffered.

As if in a spell she waited, standing motionless and looming there, he sat rather crouching on the side of the bed. A second will in him was powerful and dominating. She drew gradually nearer to him, coming up slowly, as if unconscious. His heart beat up swiftly. He was going to move.

As she came quite close, almost invisibly he lifted his arms and put them round her waist, drawing her with his will and desire. He buried his face into her apron, into the terrible softness of her belly. And he was a flame of passion intense about her. He had forgotten. Shame and memory were gone in a whole, furious flame of passion.

She was quite helpless. Her hands leapt, fluttered, and closed over his head, pressing it deeper into her belly, vibrating as she did so. And his arms tightened on her, his hands spread over her loins, warm as flame on her loveliness. It was intense anguish of bliss for her, and she lost consciousness.

When she recovered, she lay translated in the peace of satisfaction.

It was what she had had no inkling of, never known could be. She was strong with eternal gratitude. And he was there with her. Instinctively with an instinct of reverence and gratitude, her arms tightened in a little embrace upon him who held her thoroughly embraced.

And he was restored and completed, close to her. That little, twitching, momentary clasp of acknowledgment that she gave him in her satisfaction, roused his pride unconquerable. They loved each other, and all was whole. She loved him, he had taken her, she was given to him. It was right. He was given to her, and they were one, complete.

Warm, with a glow in their hearts and faces, they rose again, modest, but transfigured with happiness.

“I will get you something to eat,” she said, and in joy and security of service again, she left him, making a curious little homage of departure. He sat on the side of the bed, escaped, liberated, wondering, and happy.

V

Soon she came again with the tray, followed by Fräulein Hesse. The two women watched him eat, watched the pride and wonder of his being, as he sat there blond and naïf again. Emilie felt rich and complete. Ida was a lesser thing

than herself.

“And what are you going to do?” asked Fräulein Hesse, jealous.

“I must get away,” he said.

But words had no meaning for him. What did it matter? He had the inner satisfaction and liberty.

“But you’ll want a bicycle,” said Ida Hesse.

“Yes,” he said.

Emilie sat silent, removed and yet with him, connected with him in passion. She looked from this talk of bicycles and escape.

They discussed plans. But in two of them was the one will, that Bachmann should stay with Emilie. Ida Hesse was an outsider.

It was arranged, however, that Ida’s lover should put out his bicycle, leave it at the hut where he sometimes watched. Bachmann should fetch it in the night, and ride into France. The hearts of all three beat hot in suspense, driven to thought. They sat in a fire of agitation.

Then Bachmann would get away to America, and Emilie would come and join him. They would be in a fine land then. The tale burned up again.

Emilie and Ida had to go round to Franz Brand’s lodging. They departed with slight leave-taking. Bachmann sat in the dark, hearing the bugle for retreat sound out of the night. Then he remembered his post card to his mother. He slipped out after Emilie, gave it her to post. His manner was careless and victorious, hers shining and trustful. He slipped back to shelter.

There he sat on the side of the bed, thinking. Again he went over the events of the afternoon, remembering his own anguish of apprehension because he had known he could not climb the wall without fainting with fear. Still, a flush of shame came alight in him at the memory. But he said to himself: “What does it matter? — I can’t help it, well then I can’t. If I go up a height, I get absolutely weak, and can’t help myself.” Again memory came over him, and a gush of shame, like fire. But he sat and endured it. It had to be endured, admitted, and accepted. “I’m not a coward, for all that,” he continued. “I’m not afraid of danger. If I’m made that way, that heights melt me and make me let go my water” — it was torture for him to pluck at this truth — ”if I’m made like that, I shall have to abide by it, that’s all. It isn’t all of me.” He thought of Emilie, and was satisfied. “What I am, I am; and let it be enough,” he thought.

Having accepted his own defect, he sat thinking, waiting for Emilie, to tell her. She came at length, saying that Franz could not arrange about his bicycle this night. It was broken. Bachmann would have to stay over another day.

They were both happy. Emilie, confused before Ida, who was excited and prurient, came again to the young man. She was stiff and dignified with an

agony of unusedness. But he took her between his hands, and uncovered her, and enjoyed almost like madness her helpless, virgin body that suffered so strongly, and that took its joy so deeply. While the moisture of torment and modesty was still in her eyes, she clasped him closer, and closer, to the victory and the deep satisfaction of both of them. And they slept together, he in repose still satisfied and peaceful, and she lying close in her static reality.

VI

In the morning, when the bugle sounded from the barracks they rose and looked out of the window. She loved his body that was proud and blond and able to take command. And he loved her body that was soft and eternal. They looked at the faint grey vapour of summer steaming off from the greenness and ripeness of the fields. There was no town anywhere, their look ended in the haze of the summer morning. Their bodies rested together, their minds tranquil. Then a little anxiety stirred in both of them from the sound of the bugle. She was called back to her old position, to realize the world of authority she did not understand but had wanted to serve. But this call died away again from her. She had all.

She went downstairs to her work, curiously changed. She was in a new world of her own, that she had never even imagined, and which was the land of promise for all that. In this she moved and had her being. And she extended it to her duties. She was curiously happy and absorbed. She had not to strive out of herself to do her work. The doing came from within her without call or command. It was a delicious outflow, like sunshine, the activity that flowed from her and put her tasks to rights.

Bachmann sat busily thinking. He would have to get all his plans ready. He must write to his mother, and she must send him money to Paris. He would go to Paris, and from thence, quickly, to America. It had to be done. He must make all preparations. The dangerous part was the getting into France. He thrilled in anticipation. During the day he would need a time-table of the trains going to Paris — he would need to think. It gave him delicious pleasure, using all his wits. It seemed such an adventure.

This one day, and he would escape then into freedom. What an agony of need he had for absolute, imperious freedom. He had won to his own being, in himself and Emilie, he had drawn the stigma from his shame, he was beginning to be himself. And now he wanted madly to be free to go on. A home, his work, and absolute freedom to move and to be, in her, with her, this was his passionate desire. He thought in a kind of ecstasy, living an hour of painful intensity.

Suddenly he heard voices, and a tramping of feet. His heart gave a great leap,

then went still. He was taken. He had known all along. A complete silence filled his body and soul, a silence like death, a suspension of life and sound. He stood motionless in the bedroom, in perfect suspension.

Emilie was busy passing swiftly about the kitchen preparing the children's breakfasts when she heard the tramp of feet and the voice of the Baron. The latter had come in from the garden, and was wearing an old green linen suit. He was a man of middle stature, quick, finely made, and of whimsical charm. His right hand had been shot in the Franco-Prussian war, and now, as always when he was much agitated, he shook it down at his side, as if it hurt. He was talking rapidly to a young, stiff Ober-leutnant. Two private soldiers stood bearishly in the doorway.

Emilie, shocked out of herself, stood pale and erect, recoiling.

"Yes, if you think so, we can look," the Baron was hastily and irascibly saying.

"Emilie," he said, turning to the girl, "did you put a post card to the mother of this Bachmann in the box last evening?"

Emilie stood erect and did not answer.

"Yes?" said the Baron sharply.

"Yes, Herr Baron," replied Emilie, neutral.

The Baron's wounded hand shook rapidly in exasperation. The lieutenant drew himself up still more stiffly. He was right.

"And do you know anything of the fellow?" asked the Baron, looking at her with his blazing, greyish-golden eyes. The girl looked back at him steadily, dumb, but her whole soul naked before him. For two seconds he looked at her in silence. Then in silence, ashamed and furious, he turned away.

"Go up!" he said, with his fierce, peremptory command, to the young officer.

The lieutenant gave his order, in military cold confidence, to the soldiers. They all tramped across the hall. Emilie stood motionless, her life suspended.

The Baron marched swiftly upstairs and down the corridor, the lieutenant and the common soldiers followed. The Baron flung open the door of Emilie's room and looked at Bachmann, who stood watching, standing in shirt and trousers beside the bed, fronting the door. He was perfectly still. His eyes met the furious, blazing look of the Baron. The latter shook his wounded hand, and then went still. He looked into the eyes of the soldier, steadily. He saw the same naked soul exposed, as if he looked really into the *man*. And the man was helpless, the more helpless for his singular nakedness.

"Ha!" he exclaimed impatiently, turning to the approaching lieutenant.

The latter appeared in the doorway. Quickly his eyes travelled over the bare-footed youth. He recognized him as his object. He gave the brief command to

dress.

Bachmann turned round for his clothes. He was very still, silent in himself. He was in an abstract, motionless world. That the two gentlemen and the two soldiers stood watching him, he scarcely realized. They could not see him.

Soon he was ready. He stood at attention. But only the shell of his body was at attention. A curious silence, a blankness, like something eternal, possessed him. He remained true to himself.

The lieutenant gave the order to march. The little procession went down the stairs with careful, respectful tread, and passed through the hall to the kitchen. There Emilie stood with her face uplifted, motionless and expressionless. Bachmann did not look at her. They knew each other. They were themselves. Then the little file of men passed out into the courtyard.

The Baron stood in the doorway watching the four figures in uniform pass through the chequered shadow under the lime trees. Bachmann was walking neutralized, as if he were not there. The lieutenant went brittle and long, the two soldiers lumbered beside. They passed out into the sunny morning, growing smaller, going towards the barracks.

The Baron turned into the kitchen. Emilie was cutting bread.

“So he stayed the night here?” he said.

The girl looked at him, scarcely seeing. She was too much herself. The Baron saw the dark, naked soul of her body in her unseeing eyes.

“What were you going to do?” he asked.

“He was going to America,” she replied, in a still voice.

“Pah! You should have sent him straight back,” fired the Baron.

Emilie stood at his bidding, untouched.

“He’s done for now,” he said.

But he could not bear the dark, deep nakedness of her eyes, that scarcely changed under this suffering.

“Nothing but a fool,” he repeated, going away in agitation, and preparing himself for what he could do.

THE SHADOW IN THE ROSE GARDEN

A rather small young man sat by the window of a pretty seaside cottage trying to persuade himself that he was reading the newspaper. It was about half-past eight in the morning. Outside, the glory roses hung in the morning sunshine like little bowls of fire tipped up. The young man looked at the table, then at the clock, then at his own big silver watch. An expression of stiff endurance came on to his face. Then he rose and reflected on the oil-paintings that hung on the walls of the room, giving careful but hostile attention to "The Stag at Bay". He tried the lid of the piano, and found it locked. He caught sight of his own face in a little mirror, pulled his brown moustache, and an alert interest sprang into his eyes. He was not ill-favoured. He twisted his moustache. His figure was rather small, but alert and vigorous. As he turned from the mirror a look of self-commiseration mingled with his appreciation of his own physiognomy.

In a state of self-suppression, he went through into the garden. His jacket, however, did not look dejected. It was new, and had a smart and self-confident air, sitting upon a confident body. He contemplated the Tree of Heaven that flourished by the lawn, then sauntered on to the next plant. There was more promise in a crooked apple tree covered with brown-red fruit. Glancing round, he broke off an apple and, with his back to the house, took a clean, sharp bite. To his surprise the fruit was sweet. He took another. Then again he turned to survey the bedroom windows overlooking the garden. He started, seeing a woman's figure; but it was only his wife. She was gazing across to the sea, apparently ignorant of him.

For a moment or two he looked at her, watching her. She was a good-looking woman, who seemed older than he, rather pale, but healthy, her face yearning. Her rich auburn hair was heaped in folds on her forehead. She looked apart from him and his world, gazing away to the sea. It irked her husband that she should continue abstracted and in ignorance of him; he pulled poppy fruits and threw them at the window. She started, glanced at him with a wild smile, and looked away again. Then almost immediately she left the window. He went indoors to meet her. She had a fine carriage, very proud, and wore a dress of soft white muslin.

"I've been waiting long enough," he said.

"For me or for breakfast?" she said lightly. "You know we said nine o'clock. I should have thought you could have slept after the journey."

“You know I’m always up at five, and I couldn’t stop in bed after six. You might as well be in pit as in bed, on a morning like this.”

“I shouldn’t have thought the pit would occur to you, here.”

She moved about examining the room, looking at the ornaments under glass covers. He, planted on the hearthrug, watched her rather uneasily, and grudgingly indulgent. She shrugged her shoulders at the apartment.

“Come,” she said, taking his arm, “let us go into the garden till Mrs Coates brings the tray.”

“I hope she’ll be quick,” he said, pulling his moustache. She gave a short laugh, and leaned on his arm as they went. He had lighted a pipe.

Mrs Coates entered the room as they went down the steps. The delightful, erect old lady hastened to the window for a good view of her visitors. Her china-blue eyes were bright as she watched the young couple go down the path, he walking in an easy, confident fashion, with his wife, on his arm. The landlady began talking to herself in a soft, Yorkshire accent.

“Just of a height they are. She wouldn’t ha’ married a man less than herself in stature, I think, though he’s not her equal otherwise.” Here her granddaughter came in, setting a tray on the table. The girl went to the old woman’s side.

“He’s been eating the apples, gran’,” she said.

“Has he, my pet? Well, if he’s happy, why not?”

Outside, the young, well-favoured man listened with impatience to the chink of the teacups. At last, with a sigh of relief, the couple came in to breakfast. After he had eaten for some time, he rested a moment and said:

“Do you think it’s any better place than Bridlington?”

“I do,” she said, “infinitely! Besides, I am at home here — it’s not like a strange seaside place to me.”

“How long were you here?”

“Two years.”

He ate reflectively.

“I should ha’ thought you’d rather go to a fresh place,” he said at length.

She sat very silent, and then, delicately, put out a feeler.

“Why?” she said. “Do you think I shan’t enjoy myself?”

He laughed comfortably, putting the marmalade thick on his bread.

“I hope so,” he said.

She again took no notice of him.

“But don’t say anything about it in the village, Frank,” she said casually. “Don’t say who I am, or that I used to live here. There’s nobody I want to meet, particularly, and we should never feel free if they knew me again.”

“Why did you come, then?”

“‘Why?’ Can’t you understand why?”

“Not if you don’t want to know anybody.”

“I came to see the place, not the people.”

He did not say any more.

“Women,” she said, “are different from men. I don’t know why I wanted to come — but I did.”

She helped him to another cup of coffee, solicitously.

“Only,” she resumed, “don’t talk about me in the village.” She laughed shakily. “I don’t want my past brought up against me, you know.” And she moved the crumbs on the cloth with her finger-tip.

He looked at her as he drank his coffee; he sucked his moustache, and putting down his cup, said phlegmatically:

“I’ll bet you’ve had a lot of past.”

She looked with a little guiltiness, that flattered him, down at the tablecloth.

“Well,” she said, caressive, “you won’t give me away, who I am, will you?”

“No,” he said, comforting, laughing, “I won’t give you away.”

He was pleased.

She remained silent. After a moment or two she lifted her head, saying:

“I’ve got to arrange with Mrs Coates, and do various things. So you’d better go out by yourself this morning — and we’ll be in to dinner at one.”

“But you can’t be arranging with Mrs Coates all morning,” he said.

“Oh, well — then I’ve some letters to write, and I must get that mark out of my skirt. I’ve got plenty of little things to do this morning. You’d better go out by yourself.”

He perceived that she wanted to be rid of him, so that when she went upstairs, he took his hat and lounged out on to the cliffs, suppressedly angry.

Presently she too came out. She wore a hat with roses, and a long lace scarf hung over her white dress. Rather nervously, she put up her sunshade, and her face was half-hidden in its coloured shadow. She went along the narrow track of flag-stones that were worn hollow by the feet of the fishermen. She seemed to be avoiding her surroundings, as if she remained safe in the little obscurity of her parasol.

She passed the church, and went down the lane till she came to a high wall by the wayside. Under this she went slowly, stopping at length by an open doorway, which shone like a picture of light in the dark wall. There in the magic beyond the doorway, patterns of shadow lay on the sunny court, on the blue and white sea-pebbles of its paving, while a green lawn glowed beyond, where a bay tree glittered at the edges. She tiptoed nervously into the courtyard, glancing at the house that stood in shadow. The uncurtained windows looked black and soulless,

the kitchen door stood open. Irresolutely she took a step forward, and again forward, leaning, yearning, towards the garden beyond.

She had almost gained the corner of the house when a heavy step came crunching through the trees. A gardener appeared before her. He held a wicker tray on which were rolling great, dark red gooseberries, overripe. He moved slowly.

“The garden isn’t open today,” he said quietly to the attractive woman, who was poised for retreat.

For a moment she was silent with surprise. How should it be public at all?

“When is it open?” she asked, quick-witted.

“The rector lets visitors in on Fridays and Tuesdays.”

She stood still, reflecting. How strange to think of the rector opening his garden to the public!

“But everybody will be at church,” she said coaxingly to the man. “There’ll be nobody here, will there?”

He moved, and the big gooseberries rolled.

“The rector lives at the new rectory,” he said.

The two stood still. He did not like to ask her to go. At last she turned to him with a winning smile.

“Might I have *one* peep at the roses?” she coaxed, with pretty wilfulness.

“I don’t suppose it would matter,” he said, moving aside: “you won’t stop long — ”

She went forward, forgetting the gardener in a moment. Her face became strained, her movements eager. Glancing round, she saw all the windows giving on to the lawn were curtainless and dark. The house had a sterile appearance, as if it were still used, but not inhabited. A shadow seemed to go over her. She went across the lawn towards the garden, through an arch of crimson ramblers, a gate of colour. There beyond lay the soft blue sea with the bay, misty with morning, and the farthest headland of black rock jutting dimly out between blue and blue of the sky and water. Her face began to shine, transfigured with pain and joy. At her feet the garden fell steeply, all a confusion of flowers, and away below was the darkness of tree-tops covering the beck.

She turned to the garden that shone with sunny flowers around her. She knew the little corner where was the seat beneath the yew tree. Then there was the terrace where a great host of flowers shone, and from this, two paths went down, one at each side of the garden. She closed her sunshade and walked slowly among the many flowers. All round were rose bushes, big banks of roses, then roses hanging and tumbling from pillars, or roses balanced on the standard bushes. By the open earth were many other flowers. If she lifted her head, the

sea was upraised beyond, and the Cape.

Slowly she went down one path, lingering, like one who has gone back into the past. Suddenly she was touching some heavy crimson roses that were soft as velvet, touching them thoughtfully, without knowing, as a mother sometimes fondles the hand of her child. She leaned slightly forward to catch the scent. Then she wandered on in abstraction. Sometimes a flame-coloured, scentless rose would hold her arrested. She stood gazing at it as if she could not understand it. Again the same softness of intimacy came over her, as she stood before a tumbling heap of pink petals. Then she wondered over the white rose, that was greenish, like ice, in the centre. So, slowly, like a white, pathetic butterfly, she drifted down the path, coming at last to a tiny terrace all full of roses. They seemed to fill the place, a sunny, gay throng. She was shy of them, they were so many and so bright. They seemed to be conversing and laughing. She felt herself in a strange crowd. It exhilarated her, carried her out of herself. She flushed with excitement. The air was pure scent.

Hastily, she went to a little seat among the white roses, and sat down. Her scarlet sunshade made a hard blot of colour. She sat quite still, feeling her own existence lapse. She was no more than a rose, a rose that could not quite come into blossom, but remained tense. A little fly dropped on her knee, on her white dress. She watched it, as if it had fallen on a rose. She was not herself.

Then she started cruelly as a shadow crossed her and a figure moved into her sight. It was a man who had come in slippers, unheard. He wore a linen coat. The morning was shattered, the spell vanished away. She was only afraid of being questioned. He came forward. She rose. Then, seeing him, the strength went from her and she sank on the seat again.

He was a young man, military in appearance, growing slightly stout. His black hair was brushed smooth and bright, his moustache was waxed. But there was something rambling in his gait. She looked up, blanched to the lips, and saw his eyes. They were black, and stared without seeing. They were not a man's eyes. He was coming towards her.

He stared at her fixedly, made unconscious salute, and sat down beside her on the seat. He moved on the bench, shifted his feet, saying, in a gentlemanly, military voice:

“I don't disturb you — do I?”

She was mute and helpless. He was scrupulously dressed in dark clothes and a linen coat. She could not move. Seeing his hands, with the ring she knew so well upon the little finger, she felt as if she were going dazed. The whole world was deranged. She sat unavailing. For his hands, her symbols of passionate love, filled her with horror as they rested now on his strong thighs.

“May I smoke?” he asked intimately, almost secretly, his hand going to his pocket.

She could not answer, but it did not matter, he was in another world. She wondered, craving, if he recognized her — if he could recognize her. She sat pale with anguish. But she had to go through it.

“I haven’t got any tobacco,” he said thoughtfully.

But she paid no heed to his words, only she attended to him. Could he recognize her, or was it all gone? She sat still in a frozen kind of suspense.

“I smoke John Cotton,” he said, “and I must economize with it, it is expensive. You know, I’m not very well off while these lawsuits are going on.”

“No,” she said, and her heart was cold, her soul kept rigid.

He moved, made a loose salute, rose, and went away. She sat motionless. She could see his shape, the shape she had loved, with all her passion: his compact, soldier’s head, his fine figure now slackened. And it was not he. It only filled her with horror too difficult to know.

Suddenly he came again, his hand in his jacket pocket.

“Do you mind if I smoke?” he said. “Perhaps I shall be able to see things more clearly.”

He sat down beside her again, filling a pipe. She watched his hands with the fine strong fingers. They had always inclined to tremble slightly. It had surprised her, long ago, in such a healthy man. Now they moved inaccurately, and the tobacco hung raggedly out of the pipe.

“I have legal business to attend to. Legal affairs are always so uncertain. I tell my solicitor exactly, precisely what I want, but I can never get it done.”

She sat and heard him talking. But it was not he. Yet those were the hands she had kissed, there were the glistening, strange black eyes that she had loved. Yet it was not he. She sat motionless with horror and silence. He dropped his tobacco pouch, and groped for it on the ground. Yet she must wait if he would recognize her. Why could she not go! In a moment he rose.

“I must go at once,” he said. “The owl is coming.” Then he added confidentially: “His name isn’t really the owl, but I call him that. I must go and see if he has come.”

She rose too. He stood before her, uncertain. He was a handsome, soldierly fellow, and a lunatic. Her eyes searched him, and searched him, to see if he would recognize her, if she could discover him.

“You don’t know me?” she asked, from the terror of her soul, standing alone.

He looked back at her quizzically. She had to bear his eyes. They gleamed on her, but with no intelligence. He was drawing nearer to her.

“Yes, I do know you,” he said, fixed, intent, but mad, drawing his face nearer

hers. Her horror was too great. The powerful lunatic was coming too near to her.

A man approached, hastening.

“The garden isn’t open this morning,” he said.

The deranged man stopped and looked at him. The keeper went to the seat and picked up the tobacco pouch left lying there.

“Don’t leave your tobacco, sir,” he said, taking it to the gentleman in the linen coat.

“I was just asking this lady to stay to lunch,” the latter said politely. “She is a friend of mine.”

The woman turned and walked swiftly, blindly, between the sunny roses, out of the garden, past the house with the blank, dark windows, through the sea-pebbled courtyard to the street. Hastening and blind, she went forward without hesitating, not knowing whither. Directly she came to the house she went upstairs, took off her hat, and sat down on the bed. It was as if some membrane had been torn in two in her, so that she was not an entity that could think and feel. She sat staring across at the window, where an ivy spray waved slowly up and down in the sea wind. There was some of the uncanny luminousness of the sunlit sea in the air. She sat perfectly still, without any being. She only felt she might be sick, and it might be blood that was loose in her torn entrails. She sat perfectly still and passive.

After a time she heard the hard tread of her husband on the floor below, and, without herself changing, she registered his movement. She heard his rather disconsolate footsteps go out again, then his voice speaking, answering, growing cheery, and his solid tread drawing near.

He entered, ruddy, rather pleased, an air of complacency about his alert figure. She moved stiffly. He faltered in his approach.

“What’s the matter?” he asked a tinge of impatience in his voice. “Aren’t you feeling well?”

This was torture to her.

“Quite,” she replied.

His brown eyes became puzzled and angry.

“What is the matter?” he said.

“Nothing.”

He took a few strides, and stood obstinately, looking out of the window.

“Have you run up against anybody?” he asked.

“Nobody who knows me,” she said.

His hands began to twitch. It exasperated him, that she was no more sensible of him than if he did not exist. Turning on her at length, driven, he asked:

“Something has upset you hasn’t it?”

“No, why?” she said neutral. He did not exist for her, except as an irritant. His anger rose, filling the veins in his throat.

“It seems like it,” he said, making an effort not to show his anger, because there seemed no reason for it. He went away downstairs. She sat still on the bed, and with the residue of feeling left to her, she disliked him because he tormented her. The time went by. She could smell the dinner being served, the smoke of her husband’s pipe from the garden. But she could not move. She had no being. There was a tinkle of the bell. She heard him come indoors. And then he mounted the stairs again. At every step her heart grew tight in her. He opened the door.

“Dinner is on the table,” he said.

It was difficult for her to endure his presence, for he would interfere with her. She could not recover her life. She rose stiffly and went down. She could neither eat nor talk during the meal. She sat absent, torn, without any being of her own. He tried to go on as if nothing were the matter. But at last he became silent with fury. As soon as it was possible, she went upstairs again, and locked the bedroom door. She must be alone. He went with his pipe into the garden. All his suppressed anger against her who held herself superior to him filled and blackened his heart. Though he had not know it, yet he had never really won her, she had never loved him. She had taken him on sufference. This had foiled him. He was only a labouring electrician in the mine, she was superior to him. He had always given way to her. But all the while, the injury and ignominy had been working in his soul because she did not hold him seriously. And now all his rage came up against her.

He turned and went indoors. The third time, she heard him mounting the stairs. Her heart stood still. He turned the catch and pushed the door — it was locked. He tried it again, harder. Her heart was standing still.

“Have you fastened the door?” he asked quietly, because of the landlady.

“Yes. Wait a minute.”

She rose and turned the lock, afraid he would burst it. She felt hatred towards him, because he did not leave her free. He entered, his pipe between his teeth, and she returned to her old position on the bed. He closed the door and stood with his back to it.

“What’s the matter?” he asked determinedly.

She was sick with him. She could not look at him.

“Can’t you leave me alone?” she replied, averting her face from him.

He looked at her quickly, fully, wincing with ignominy. Then he seemed to consider for a moment.

“There’s something up with you, isn’t there?” he asked definitely.

“Yes,” she said, “but that’s no reason why you should torment me.”

“I don’t torment you. What’s the matter?”

“Why should you know?” she cried, in hate and desperation.

Something snapped. He started and caught his pipe as it fell from his mouth. Then he pushed forward the bitten-off mouth-piece with his tongue, took it from off his lips, and looked at it. Then he put out his pipe, and brushed the ash from his waistcoat. After which he raised his head.

“I want to know,” he said. His face was greyish pale, and set uglily.

Neither looked at the other. She knew he was fired now. His heart was pounding heavily. She hated him, but she could not withstand him. Suddenly she lifted her head and turned on him.

“What right have you to know?” she asked.

He looked at her. She felt a pang of surprise for his tortured eyes and his fixed face. But her heart hardened swiftly. She had never loved him. She did not love him now.

But suddenly she lifted her head again swiftly, like a thing that tries to get free. She wanted to be free of it. It was not him so much, but it, something she had put on herself, that bound her so horribly. And having put the bond on herself, it was hardest to take it off. But now she hated everything and felt destructive. He stood with his back to the door, fixed, as if he would oppose her eternally, till she was extinguished. She looked at him. Her eyes were cold and hostile. His workman’s hands spread on the panels of the door behind him.

“You know I used to live here?” she began, in a hard voice, as if wilfully to wound him. He braced himself against her, and nodded.

“Well, I was companion to Miss Birch of Torril Hall — she and the rector were friends, and Archie was the rector’s son.” There was a pause. He listened without knowing what was happening. He stared at his wife. She was squatted in her white dress on the bed, carefully folding and re-folding the hem of her skirt. Her voice was full of hostility.

“He was an officer — a sub-lieutenant — then he quarrelled with his colonel and came out of the army. At any rate” — she plucked at her skirt hem, her husband stood motionless, watching her movements which filled his veins with madness — ”he was awfully fond of me, and I was of him — awfully.”

“How old was he?” asked the husband.

“When — when I first knew him? Or when he went away? — ”

“When you first knew him.”

“When I first knew him, he was twenty-six — now — he’s thirty-one — nearly thirty-two — because I’m twenty-nine, and he is nearly three years older — ”

She lifted her head and looked at the opposite wall.

“And what then?” said her husband.

She hardened herself, and said callously:

“We were as good as engaged for nearly a year, though nobody knew — at least — they talked — but — it wasn’t open. Then he went away — ”

“He chucked you?” said the husband brutally, wanting to hurt her into contact with himself. Her heart rose wildly with rage. Then “Yes”, she said, to anger him. He shifted from one foot to the other, giving a “Ph!” of rage. There was silence for a time.

“Then,” she resumed, her pain giving a mocking note to her words, “he suddenly went out to fight in Africa, and almost the very day I first met you, I heard from Miss Birch he’d got sunstroke — and two months after, that he was dead — ”

“That was before you took on with me?” said the husband.

There was no answer. Neither spoke for a time. He had not understood. His eyes were contracted uglily.

“So you’ve been looking at your old courting places!” he said. “That was what you wanted to go out by yourself for this morning.”

Still she did not answer him anything. He went away from the door to the window. He stood with his hands behind him, his back to her. She looked at him. His hands seemed gross to her, the back of his head paltry.

At length, almost against his will, he turned round, asking:

“How long were you carrying on with him?”

“What do you mean?” she replied coldly.

“I mean how long were you carrying on with him?”

She lifted her head, averting her face from him. She refused to answer. Then she said:

“I don’t know what you mean, by carrying on. I loved him from the first days I met him — two months after I went to stay with Miss Birch.”

“And do you reckon he loved you?” he jeered.

“I know he did.”

“How do you know, if he’d have no more to do with you?”

There was a long silence of hate and suffering.

“And how far did it go between you?” he asked at length, in a frightened, stiff voice.

“I hate your not-straightforward questions,” she cried, beside herself with his baiting. “We loved each other, and we *were* lovers — we were. I don’t care what *you* think: what have you got to do with it? We were lovers before ever I knew you — ”

“Lovers — lovers,” he said, white with fury. “You mean you had your fling with an army man, and then came to me to marry you when you’d done — ”

She sat swallowing her bitterness. There was a long pause.

“Do you mean to say you used to go — the whole hogger?” he asked, still incredulous.

“Why, what else do you think I mean?” she cried brutally.

He shrank, and became white, impersonal. There was a long, paralysed silence. He seemed to have gone small.

“You never thought to tell me all this before I married you,” he said, with bitter irony, at last.

“You never asked me,” she replied.

“I never thought there was any need.”

“Well, then, you *should* think.”

He stood with expressionless, almost childlike set face, revolving many thoughts, whilst his heart was mad with anguish.

Suddenly she added:

“And I saw him today,” she said. “He is not dead, he’s mad.”

Her husband looked at her, startled.

“Mad!” he said involuntarily.

“A lunatic,” she said. It almost cost her her reason to utter the word. There was a pause.

“Did he know you?” asked the husband in a small voice.

“No,” she said.

He stood and looked at her. At last he had learned the width of the breach between them. She still squatted on the bed. He could not go near her. It would be violation to each of them to be brought into contact with the other. The thing must work itself out. They were both shocked so much, they were impersonal, and no longer hated each other. After some minutes he left her and went out.

THE WHITE STOCKING

I

“I’m getting up, Teddilinks,” said Mrs Whiston, and she sprang out of bed briskly.

“What the Hanover’s got you?” asked Whiston.

“Nothing. Can’t I get up?” she replied animatedly.

It was about seven o’clock, scarcely light yet in the cold bedroom. Whiston lay still and looked at his wife. She was a pretty little thing, with her fleecy, short black hair all tousled . . . He watched her as she dressed quickly, flicking her small, delightful limbs, throwing her clothes about her. Her slovenliness and untidiness did not trouble him. When she picked up the edge of her petticoat, ripped off a torn string of white lace, and flung it on the dressing-table, her careless abandon made his spirit glow. She stood before the mirror and roughly scrambled together her profuse little mane of hair. He watched the quickness and softness of her young shoulders, calmly, like a husband, and appreciatively.

“Rise up,” she cried, turning to him with a quick wave of her arm — ”and shine forth.”

They had been married two years. But still, when she had gone out of the room, he felt as if all his light and warmth were taken away, he became aware of the raw, cold morning. So he rose himself, wondering casually what had roused her so early. Usually she lay in bed as late as she could.

Whiston fastened a belt round his loins and went downstairs in shirt and trousers. He heard her singing in her snatchy fashion. The stairs creaked under his weight. He passed down the narrow little passage, which she called a hall, of the seven and sixpenny house which was his first home.

He was a shapely young fellow of about twenty-eight, sleepy now and easy with well-being. He heard the water drumming into the kettle, and she began to whistle. He loved the quick way she dodged the supper cups under the tap to wash them for breakfast. She looked an untidy minx, but she was quick and handy enough.

“Teddilinks,” she cried.

“What?”

“Light a fire, quick.”

She wore an old, sack-like dressing-jacket of black silk pinned across her

breast. But one of the sleeves, coming unfastened, showed some delightful pink upper-arm.

“Why don’t you sew your sleeve up?” he said, suffering from the sight of the exposed soft flesh.

“Where?” she cried, peering round. “Nuisance,” she said, seeing the gap, then with light fingers went on drying the cups.

The kitchen was of fair size, but gloomy. Whiston poked out the dead ashes.

Suddenly a thud was heard at the door down the passage.

“I’ll go,” cried Mrs Whiston, and she was gone down the hall.

The postman was a ruddy-faced man who had been a soldier. He smiled broadly, handing her some packages.

“They’ve not forgot you,” he said impudently.

“No — lucky for them,” she said, with a toss of the head. But she was interested only in her envelopes this morning. The postman waited inquisitively, smiling in an ingratiating fashion. She slowly, abstractedly, as if she did not know anyone was there, closed the door in his face, continuing to look at the addresses on her letters.

She tore open the thin envelope. There was a long, hideous, cartoon valentine. She smiled briefly and dropped it on the floor. Struggling with the string of a packet, she opened a white cardboard box, and there lay a white silk handkerchief packed neatly under the paper lace of the box, and her initial, worked in heliotrope, fully displayed. She smiled pleasantly, and gently put the box aside. The third envelope contained another white packet — apparently a cotton handkerchief neatly folded. She shook it out. It was a long white stocking, but there was a little weight in the toe. Quickly, she thrust down her arm, wriggling her fingers into the toe of the stocking, and brought out a small box. She peeped inside the box, then hastily opened a door on her left hand, and went into the little, cold sitting-room. She had her lower lip caught earnestly between her teeth.

With a little flash of triumph, she lifted a pair of pearl earrings from the small box, and she went to the mirror. There, earnestly, she began to hook them through her ears, looking at herself sideways in the glass. Curiously concentrated and intent she seemed as she fingered the lobes of her ears, her head bent on one side.

Then the pearl earrings dangled under her rosy, small ears. She shook her head sharply, to see the swing of the drops. They went chill against her neck, in little, sharp touches. Then she stood still to look at herself, bridling her head in the dignified fashion. Then she simpered at herself. Catching her own eye, she could not help winking at herself and laughing.

She turned to look at the box. There was a scrap of paper with this posy:

“Pearls may be fair, but thou art fairer.
Wear these for me, and I’ll love the wearer.”

She made a grimace and a grin. But she was drawn to the mirror again, to look at her earrings.

Whiston had made the fire burn, so he came to look for her. When she heard him, she started round quickly, guiltily. She was watching him with intent blue eyes when he appeared.

He did not see much, in his morning-drowsy warmth. He gave her, as ever, a feeling of warmth and slowness. His eyes were very blue, very kind, his manner simple.

“What ha’ you got?” he asked.

“Valentines,” she said briskly, ostentatiously turning to show him the silk handkerchief. She thrust it under his nose. “Smell how good,” she said.

“Who’s that from?” he replied, without smelling.

“It’s a valentine,” she cried. “How da I know who it’s from?”

“I’ll bet you know,” he said.

“Ted! — I don’t!” she cried, beginning to shake her head, then stopping because of the earrings.

He stood still a moment, displeased.

“They’ve no right to send you valentines, now,” he said.

“Ted! — Why not? You’re not jealous, are you? I haven’t the least idea who it’s from. Look — there’s my initial” — she pointed with an emphatic finger at the heliotrope embroidery —

“E for Elsie,
Nice little gelsie,”

she sang.

“Get out,” he said. “You know who it’s from.”

“Truth, I don’t,” she cried.

He looked round, and saw the white stocking lying on a chair.

“Is this another?” he said.

“No, that’s a sample,” she said. “There’s only a comic.” And she fetched in the long cartoon.

He stretched it out and looked at it solemnly.

“Fools!” he said, and went out of the room.

She flew upstairs and took off the earrings. When she returned, he was crouched before the fire blowing the coals. The skin of his face was flushed, and slightly pitted, as if he had had small-pox. But his neck was white and smooth and goodly. She hung her arms round his neck as he crouched there, and clung to him. He balanced on his toes.

“This fire’s a slow-coach,” he said.

“And who else is a slow-coach?” she said.

“One of us two, I know,” he said, and he rose carefully. She remained clinging round his neck, so that she was lifted off her feet.

“Ha! — swing me,” she cried.

He lowered his head, and she hung in the air, swinging from his neck, laughing. Then she slipped off.

“The kettle is singing,” she sang, flying for the teapot. He bent down again to blow the fire. The veins in his neck stood out, his shirt collar seemed too tight.

“Doctor Wyer,
Blow the fire,
Puff! puff! puff!”

she sang, laughing.

He smiled at her.

She was so glad because of her pearl earrings.

Over the breakfast she grew serious. He did not notice. She became portentous in her gravity. Almost it penetrated through his steady good-humour to irritate him.

“Teddy!” she said at last.

“What?” he asked.

“I told you a lie,” she said, humbly tragic.

His soul stirred uneasily.

“Oh aye?” he said casually.

She was not satisfied. He ought to be more moved.

“Yes,” she said.

He cut a piece of bread.

“Was it a good one?” he asked.

She was piqued. Then she considered — *was* it a good one? Then she laughed.

“No,” she said, “it wasn’t up to much.”

“Ah!” he said easily, but with a steady strength of fondness for her in his tone. “Get it out then.”

It became a little more difficult.

“You know that white stocking,” she said earnestly. “I told you a lie. It wasn’t a sample. It was a valentine.”

A little frown came on his brow.

“Then what did you invent it as a sample for?” he said. But he knew this weakness of hers. The touch of anger in his voice frightened her.

“I was afraid you’d be cross,” she said pathetically.

“I’ll bet you were vastly afraid,” he said.

“I *was*, Teddy.”

There was a pause. He was resolving one or two things in his mind.

“And who sent it?” he asked.

“I can guess,” she said, “though there wasn’t a word with it — except — ”

She ran to the sitting-room and returned with a slip of paper.

“Pearls may be fair, but thou art fairer.

Wear these for me, and I’ll love the wearer.”

He read it twice, then a dull red flush came on his face.

“And *who* do you guess it is?” he asked, with a ringing of anger in his voice.

“I suspect it’s Sam Adams,” she said, with a little virtuous indignation.

Whiston was silent for a moment.

“Fool!” he said. “An’ what’s it got to do with pearls? — and how can he say ‘wear these for me’ when there’s only one? He hasn’t got the brain to invent a proper verse.”

He screwed the sup of paper into a ball and flung it into the fire.

“I suppose he thinks it’ll make a pair with the one last year,” she said.

“Why, did he send one then?”

“Yes. I thought you’d be wild if you knew.”

His jaw set rather sullenly.

Presently he rose, and went to wash himself, rolling back his sleeves and pulling open his shirt at the breast. It was as if his fine, clear-cut temples and steady eyes were degraded by the lower, rather brutal part of his face. But she loved it. As she whisked about, clearing the table, she loved the way in which he stood washing himself. He was such a man. She liked to see his neck glistening with water as he swilled it. It amused her and pleased her and thrilled her. He was so sure, so permanent, he had her so utterly in his power. It gave her a delightful, mischievous sense of liberty. Within his grasp, she could dart about excitingly.

He turned round to her, his face red from the cold water, his eyes fresh and very blue.

“You haven’t been seeing anything of him, have you?” he asked roughly.

“Yes,” she answered, after a moment, as if caught guilty. “He got into the tram

with me, and he asked me to drink a coffee and a Benedictine in the Royal.”

“You’ve got it off fine and glib,” he said sullenly. “And did you?”

“Yes,” she replied, with the air of a traitor before the rack.

The blood came up into his neck and face, he stood motionless, dangerous.

“It was cold, and it was such fun to go into the Royal,” she said.

“You’d go off with a nigger for a packet of chocolate,” he said, in anger and contempt, and some bitterness. Queer how he drew away from her, cut her off from him.

“Ted — how beastly!” she cried. “You know quite well — ” She caught her lip, flushed, and the tears came to her eyes.

He turned away, to put on his necktie. She went about her work, making a queer pathetic little mouth, down which occasionally dripped a tear.

He was ready to go. With his hat jammed down on his head, and his overcoat buttoned up to his chin, he came to kiss her. He would be miserable all the day if he went without. She allowed herself to be kissed. Her cheek was wet under his lips, and his heart burned. She hurt him so deeply. And she felt aggrieved, and did not quite forgive him.

In a moment she went upstairs to her earrings. Sweet they looked nestling in the little drawer — sweet! She examined them with voluptuous pleasure, she threaded them in her ears, she looked at herself, she posed and postured and smiled, and looked sad and tragic and winning and appealing, all in turn before the mirror. And she was happy, and very pretty.

She wore her earrings all morning, in the house. She was self-conscious, and quite brilliantly winsome, when the baker came, wondering if he would notice. All the tradesmen left her door with a glow in them, feeling elated, and unconsciously favouring the delightful little creature, though there had been nothing to notice in her behaviour.

She was stimulated all the day. She did not think about her husband. He was the permanent basis from which she took these giddy little flights into nowhere. At night, like chickens and curses, she would come home to him, to roost.

Meanwhile Whiston, a traveller and confidential support of a small firm, hastened about his work, his heart all the while anxious for her, yearning for surety, and kept tense by not getting it.

II

She had been a warehouse girl in Adams’s lace factory before she was married. Sam Adams was her employer. He was a bachelor of forty, growing stout, a man well dressed and florid, with a large brown moustache and thin hair.

From the rest of his well-groomed, showy appearance, it was evident his baldness was a chagrin to him. He had a good presence, and some Irish blood in his veins.

His fondness for the girls, or the fondness of the girls for him, was notorious. And Elsie, quick, pretty, almost witty little thing — she *seemed* witty, although, when her sayings were repeated, they were entirely trivial — she had a great attraction for him. He would come into the warehouse dressed in a rather sporting reefer coat, of fawn colour, and trousers of fine black-and-white check, a cap with a big peak and a scarlet carnation in his button-hole, to impress her. She was only half impressed. He was too loud for her good taste. Instinctively perceiving this, he sobered down to navy blue. Then a well-built man, florid, with large brown whiskers, smart navy blue suit, fashionable boots, and manly hat, he was the irreproachable. Elsie was impressed.

But meanwhile Whiston was courting her, and she made splendid little gestures, before her bedroom mirror, of the constant-and-true sort.

“True, true till death — ”

That was her song. Whiston was made that way, so there was no need to take thought for him.

Every Christmas Sam Adams gave a party at his house, to which he invited his superior work-people — not factory hands and labourers, but those above. He was a generous man in his way, with a real warm feeling for giving pleasure.

Two years ago Elsie had attended this Christmas-party for the last time. Whiston had accompanied her. At that time he worked for Sam Adams.

She had been very proud of herself, in her close-fitting, full-skirted dress of blue silk. Whiston called for her. Then she tripped beside him, holding her large cashmere shawl across her breast. He strode with long strides, his trousers handsomely strapped under his boots, and her silk shoes bulging the pockets of his full-skirted overcoat.

They passed through the park gates, and her spirits rose. Above them the Castle Rock looked grandly in the night, the naked trees stood still and dark in the frost, along the boulevard.

They were rather late. Agitated with anticipation, in the cloak-room she gave up her shawl, donned her silk shoes, and looked at herself in the mirror. The loose bunches of curls on either side her face danced prettily, her mouth smiled.

She hung a moment in the door of the brilliantly lighted room. Many people were moving within the blaze of lamps, under the crystal chandeliers, the full skirts of the women balancing and floating, the side-whiskers and white cravats

of the men bowing above. Then she entered the light.

In an instant Sam Adams was coming forward, lifting both his arms in boisterous welcome. There was a constant red laugh on his face.

“Come late, would you,” he shouted, “like royalty.”

He seized her hands and led her forward. He opened his mouth wide when he spoke, and the effect of the warm, dark opening behind the brown whiskers was disturbing. But she was floating into the throng on his arm. He was very gallant.

“Now then,” he said, taking her card to write down the dances, “I’ve got *carte blanche*, haven’t I?”

“Mr Whiston doesn’t dance,” she said.

“I am a lucky man!” he said, scribbling his initials. “I was born with an *amourette* in my mouth.”

He wrote on, quietly. She blushed and laughed, not knowing what it meant.

“Why, what is that?” she said.

“It’s you, even littler than you are, dressed in little wings,” he said.

“I should have to be pretty small to get in your mouth,” she said.

“You think you’re too big, do you!” he said easily.

He handed her her card, with a bow.

“Now I’m set up, my darling, for this evening,” he said.

Then, quick, always at his ease, he looked over the room. She waited in front of him. He was ready. Catching the eye of the band, he nodded. In a moment, the music began. He seemed to relax, giving himself up.

“Now then, Elsie,” he said, with a curious caress in his voice that seemed to lap the outside of her body in a warm glow, delicious. She gave herself to it. She liked it.

He was an excellent dancer. He seemed to draw her close in to him by some male warmth of attraction, so that she became all soft and pliant to him, flowing to his form, whilst he united her with him and they lapsed along in one movement. She was just carried in a kind of strong, warm flood, her feet moved of themselves, and only the music threw her away from him, threw her back to him, to his clasp, in his strong form moving against her, rhythmically, deliriously.

When it was over, he was pleased and his eyes had a curious gleam which thrilled her and yet had nothing to do with her. Yet it held her. He did not speak to her. He only looked straight into her eyes with a curious, gleaming look that disturbed her fearfully and deliriously. But also there was in his look some of the automatic irony of the *roué*. It left her partly cold. She was not carried away.

She went, driven by an opposite, heavier impulse, to Whiston. He stood looking gloomy, trying to admit that she had a perfect right to enjoy herself apart

from him. He received her with rather grudging kindness.

“Aren’t you going to play whist?” she asked.

“Aye,” he said. “Directly.”

“I do wish you could dance.”

“Well, I can’t,” he said. “So you enjoy yourself.”

“But I should enjoy it better if I could dance with you.”

“Nay, you’re all right,” he said. “I’m not made that way.”

“Then you ought to be!” she cried.

“Well, it’s my fault, not yours. You enjoy yourself,” he bade her. Which she proceeded to do, a little bit irked.

She went with anticipation to the arms of Sam Adams, when the time came to dance with him. It was so gratifying, irrespective of the man. And she felt a little grudge against Whiston, soon forgotten when her host was holding her near to him, in a delicious embrace. And she watched his eyes, to meet the gleam in them, which gratified her.

She was getting warmed right through, the glow was penetrating into her, driving away everything else. Only in her heart was a little tightness, like conscience.

When she got a chance, she escaped from the dancing-room to the card-room. There, in a cloud of smoke, she found Whiston playing cribbage. Radiant, roused, animated, she came up to him and greeted him. She was too strong, too vibrant a note in the quiet room. He lifted his head, and a frown knitted his gloomy forehead.

“Are you playing cribbage? Is it exciting? How are you getting on?” she chattered.

He looked at her. None of these questions needed answering, and he did not feel in touch with her. She turned to the cribbage-board.

“Are you white or red?” she asked.

“He’s red,” replied the partner.

“Then you’re losing,” she said, still to Whiston. And she lifted the red peg from the board. “One — two — three — four — five — six — seven — eight — Right up there you ought to jump — ”

“Now put it back in its right place,” said Whiston.

“Where was it?” she asked gaily, knowing her transgression. He took the little red peg away from her and stuck it in its hole.

The cards were shuffled.

“What a shame you’re losing!” said Elsie.

“You’d better cut for him,” said the partner.

She did so, hastily. The cards were dealt. She put her hand on his shoulder,

looking at his cards.

“It’s good,” she cried, “isn’t it?”

He did not answer, but threw down two cards. It moved him more strongly than was comfortable, to have her hand on his shoulder, her curls dangling and touching his ears, whilst she was roused to another man. It made the blood flame over him.

At that moment Sam Adams appeared, florid and boisterous, intoxicated more with himself, with the dancing, than with wine. In his eyes the curious, impersonal light gleamed.

“I thought I should find you here, Elsie,” he cried boisterously, a disturbing, high note in his voice.

“What made you think so?” she replied, the mischief rousing in her.

The florid, well-built man narrowed his eyes to a smile.

“I should never look for you among the ladies,” he said, with a kind of intimate, animal call to her. He laughed, bowed, and offered her his arm.

“Madam, the music waits.”

She went almost helplessly, carried along with him, unwilling, yet delighted.

That dance was an intoxication to her. After the first few steps, she felt herself slipping away from herself. She almost knew she was going, she did not even want to go. Yet she must have chosen to go. She lay in the arm of the steady, close man with whom she was dancing, and she seemed to swim away out of contact with the room, into him. She had passed into another, denser element of him, an essential privacy. The room was all vague around her, like an atmosphere, like under sea, with a flow of ghostly, dumb movements. But she herself was held real against her partner, and it seemed she was connected with him, as if the movements of his body and limbs were her own movements, yet not her own movements — and oh, delicious! He also was given up, oblivious, concentrated, into the dance. His eye was unseeing. Only his large, voluptuous body gave off a subtle activity. His fingers seemed to search into her flesh. Every moment, and every moment, she felt she would give way utterly, and sink molten: the fusion point was coming when she would fuse down into perfect unconsciousness at his feet and knees. But he bore her round the room in the dance, and he seemed to sustain all her body with his limbs, his body, and his warmth seemed to come closer into her, nearer, till it would fuse right through her, and she would be as liquid to him, as an intoxication only.

It was exquisite. When it was over, she was dazed, and was scarcely breathing. She stood with him in the middle of the room as if she were alone in a remote place. He bent over her. She expected his lips on her bare shoulder, and waited. Yet they were not alone, they were not alone. It was cruel.

“‘Twas good, wasn’t it, my darling?” he said to her, low and delighted. There was a strange impersonality about his low, exultant call that appealed to her irresistibly. Yet why was she aware of some part shut off in her? She pressed his arm, and he led her towards the door.

She was not aware of what she was doing, only a little grain of resistant trouble was in her. The man, possessed, yet with a superficial presence of mind, made way to the dining-room, as if to give her refreshment, cunningly working to his own escape with her. He was molten hot, filmed over with presence of mind, and bottomed with cold disbelief.

In the dining-room was Whiston, carrying coffee to the plain, neglected ladies. Elsie saw him, but felt as if he could not see her. She was beyond his reach and ken. A sort of fusion existed between her and the large man at her side. She ate her custard, but an incomplete fusion all the while sustained and contained her within the being of her employer.

But she was growing cooler. Whiston came up. She looked at him, and saw him with different eyes. She saw his slim, young man’s figure real and enduring before her. That was he. But she was in the spell with the other man, fused with him, and she could not be taken away.

“Have you finished your cribbage?” she asked, with hasty evasion of him.

“Yes,” he replied. “Aren’t you getting tired of dancing?”

“Not a bit,” she said.

“Not she,” said Adams heartily. “No girl with any spirit gets tired of dancing. — Have something else, Elsie. Come — sherry. Have a glass of sherry with us, Whiston.”

Whilst they sipped the wine, Adams watched Whiston almost cunningly, to find his advantage.

“We’d better be getting back — there’s the music,” he said. “See the women get something to eat, Whiston, will you, there’s a good chap.”

And he began to draw away. Elsie was drifting helplessly with him. But Whiston put himself beside them, and went along with them. In silence they passed through to the dancing-room. There Adams hesitated, and looked round the room. It was as if he could not see.

A man came hurrying forward, claiming Elsie, and Adams went to his other partner. Whiston stood watching during the dance. She was conscious of him standing there observant of her, like a ghost, or a judgment, or a guardian angel. She was also conscious, much more intimately and impersonally, of the body of the other man moving somewhere in the room. She still belonged to him, but a feeling of distraction possessed her, and helplessness. Adams danced on, adhering to Elsie, waiting his time, with the persistence of cynicism.

The dance was over. Adams was detained. Elsie found herself beside Whiston. There was something shapely about him as he sat, about his knees and his distinct figure, that she clung to. It was as if he had enduring form. She put her hand on his knee.

“Are you enjoying yourself?” he asked.

“*Ever so,*” she replied, with a fervent, yet detached tone.

“It’s going on for one o’clock,” he said.

“Is it?” she answered. It meant nothing to her.

“Should we be going?” he said.

She was silent. For the first time for an hour or more an inkling of her normal consciousness returned. She resented it.

“What for?” she said.

“I thought you might have had enough,” he said.

A slight soberness came over her, an irritation at being frustrated of her illusion.

“Why?” she said.

“We’ve been here since nine,” he said.

That was no answer, no reason. It conveyed nothing to her. She sat detached from him. Across the room Sam Adams glanced at her. She sat there exposed for him.

“You don’t want to be too free with Sam Adams,” said Whiston cautiously, suffering. “You know what he is.”

“How, free?” she asked.

“Why — you don’t want to have too much to do with him.”

She sat silent. He was forcing her into consciousness of her position. But he could not get hold of her feelings, to change them. She had a curious, perverse desire that he should not.

“I like him,” she said.

“What do you find to like in him?” he said, with a hot heart.

“I don’t know — but I like him,” she said.

She was immutable. He sat feeling heavy and dulled with rage. He was not clear as to what he felt. He sat there unliving whilst she danced. And she, distracted, lost to herself between the opposing forces of the two men, drifted. Between the dances, Whiston kept near to her. She was scarcely conscious. She glanced repeatedly at her card, to see when she would dance again with Adams, half in desire, half in dread. Sometimes she met his steady, glaucous eye as she passed him in the dance. Sometimes she saw the steadiness of his flank as he danced. And it was always as if she rested on his arm, were borne along, upborne by him, away from herself. And always there was present the other’s

antagonism. She was divided.

The time came for her to dance with Adams. Oh, the delicious closing of contact with him, of his limbs touching her limbs, his arm supporting her. She seemed to resolve. Whiston had not made himself real to her. He was only a heavy place in her consciousness.

But she breathed heavily, beginning to suffer from the closeness of strain. She was nervous. Adams also was constrained. A tightness, a tension was coming over them all. And he was exasperated, feeling something counteracting physical magnetism, feeling a will stronger with her than his own, intervening in what was becoming a vital necessity to him.

Elsie was almost lost to her own control. As she went forward with him to take her place at the dance, she stooped for her pocket-handkerchief. The music sounded for quadrilles. Everybody was ready. Adams stood with his body near her, exerting his attraction over her. He was tense and fighting. She stooped for her pocket-handkerchief, and shook it as she rose. It shook out and fell from her hand. With agony, she saw she had taken a white stocking instead of a handkerchief. For a second it lay on the floor, a twist of white stocking. Then, in an instant, Adams picked it up, with a little, surprised laugh of triumph.

“That’ll do for me,” he whispered — seeming to take possession of her. And he stuffed the stocking in his trousers pocket, and quickly offered her his handkerchief.

The dance began. She felt weak and faint, as if her will were turned to water. A heavy sense of loss came over her. She could not help herself anymore. But it was peace.

When the dance was over, Adams yielded her up. Whiston came to her.

“What was it as you dropped?” Whiston asked.

“I thought it was my handkerchief — I’d taken a stocking by mistake,” she said, detached and muted.

“And he’s got it?”

“Yes.”

“What does he mean by that?”

She lifted her shoulders.

“Are you going to let him keep it?” he asked.

“I don’t let him.”

There was a long pause.

“Am I to go and have it out with him?” he asked, his face flushed, his blue eyes going hard with opposition.

“No,” she said, pale.

“Why?”

“No — I don’t want to say anything about it.”

He sat exasperated and nonplussed.

“You’ll let him keep it, then?” he asked.

She sat silent and made no form of answer.

“What do you mean by it?” he said, dark with fury. And he started up.

“No!” she cried. “Ted!” And she caught hold of him, sharply detaining him.

It made him black with rage.

“Why?” he said.

Then something about her mouth was pitiful to him. He did not understand, but he felt she must have her reasons.

“Then I’m not stopping here,” he said. “Are you coming with me?”

She rose mutely, and they went out of the room. Adams had not noticed.

In a few moments they were in the street.

“What the hell do you mean?” he said, in a black fury.

She went at his side, in silence, neutral.

“That great hog, an’ all,” he added.

Then they went a long time in silence through the frozen, deserted darkness of the town. She felt she could not go indoors. They were drawing near her house.

“I don’t want to go home,” she suddenly cried in distress and anguish. “I don’t want to go home.”

He looked at her.

“Why don’t you?” he said.

“I don’t want to go home,” was all she could sob.

He heard somebody coming.

“Well, we can walk a bit further,” he said.

She was silent again. They passed out of the town into the fields. He held her by the arm — they could not speak.

“What’s a-matter?” he asked at length, puzzled.

She began to cry again.

At last he took her in his arms, to soothe her. She sobbed by herself, almost unaware of him.

“Tell me what’s a-matter, Elsie,” he said. “Tell me what’s a-matter — my dear — tell me, then — ”

He kissed her wet face, and caressed her. She made no response. He was puzzled and tender and miserable.

At length she became quiet. Then he kissed her, and she put her arms round him, and clung to him very tight, as if for fear and anguish. He held her in his arms, wondering.

“Ted!” she whispered, frantic. “Ted!”

“What, my love?” he answered, becoming also afraid.

“Be good to me,” she cried. “Don’t be cruel to me.”

“No, my pet,” he said, amazed and grieved. “Why?”

“Oh, be good to me,” she sobbed.

And he held her very safe, and his heart was white-hot with love for her. His mind was amazed. He could only hold her against his chest that was white-hot with love and belief in her. So she was restored at last.

III

She refused to go to her work at Adams’s any more. Her father had to submit and she sent in her notice — she was not well. Sam Adams was ironical. But he had a curious patience. He did not fight.

In a few weeks, she and Whiston were married. She loved him with passion and worship, a fierce little abandon of love that moved him to the depths of his being, and gave him a permanent surety and sense of realness in himself. He did not trouble about himself any more: he felt he was fulfilled and now he had only the many things in the world to busy himself about. Whatever troubled him, at the bottom was surety. He had found himself in this love.

They spoke once or twice of the white stocking.

“Ah!” Whiston exclaimed. “What does it matter?”

He was impatient and angry, and could not bear to consider the matter. So it was left unresolved.

She was quite happy at first, carried away by her adoration of her husband. Then gradually she got used to him. He always was the ground of her happiness, but she got used to him, as to the air she breathed. He never got used to her in the same way.

Inside of marriage she found her liberty. She was rid of the responsibility of herself. Her husband must look after that. She was free to get what she could out of her time.

So that, when, after some months, she met Sam Adams, she was not quite as unkind to him as she might have been. With a young wife’s new and exciting knowledge of men, she perceived he was in love with her, she knew he had always kept an unsatisfied desire for her. And, sportive, she could not help playing a little with this, though she cared not one jot for the man himself.

When Valentine’s day came, which was near the first anniversary of her wedding day, there arrived a white stocking with a little amethyst brooch. Luckily Whiston did not see it, so she said nothing of it to him. She had not the faintest intention of having anything to do with Sam Adams, but once a little

brooch was in her possession, it was hers, and she did not trouble her head for a moment how she had come by it. She kept it.

Now she had the pearl earrings. They were a more valuable and a more conspicuous present. She would have to ask her mother to give them to her, to explain their presence. She made a little plan in her head. And she was extraordinarily pleased. As for Sam Adams, even if he saw her wearing them, he would not give her away. What fun, if he saw her wearing his earrings! She would pretend she had inherited them from her grandmother, her mother's mother. She laughed to herself as she went down town in the afternoon, the pretty drops dangling in front of her curls. But she saw no one of importance.

Whiston came home tired and depressed. All day the male in him had been uneasy, and this had fatigued him. She was curiously against him, inclined, as she sometimes was nowadays, to make mock of him and jeer at him and cut him off. He did not understand this, and it angered him deeply. She was uneasy before him.

She knew he was in a state of suppressed irritation. The veins stood out on the backs of his hands, his brow was drawn stiffly. Yet she could not help goading him.

"What did you do wi' that white stocking?" he asked, out of a gloomy silence, his voice strong and brutal.

"I put it in a drawer — why?" she replied flippantly.

"Why didn't you put it on the fire back?" he said harshly. "What are you hoarding it up for?"

"I'm not hoarding it up," she said. "I've got a pair."

He relapsed into gloomy silence. She, unable to move him, ran away upstairs, leaving him smoking by the fire. Again she tried on the earrings. Then another little inspiration came to her. She drew on the white stockings, both of them.

Presently she came down in them. Her husband still sat immovable and glowering by the fire.

"Look!" she said. "They'll do beautifully."

And she picked up her skirts to her knees, and twisted round, looking at her pretty legs in the neat stockings.

He filled with unreasonable rage, and took the pipe from his mouth.

"Don't they look nice?" she said. "One from last year and one from this, they just do. Save you buying a pair."

And she looked over her shoulders at her pretty calves, and the dangling frills of her knickers.

"Put your skirts down and don't make a fool of yourself," he said.

"Why a fool of myself?" she asked.

And she began to dance slowly round the room, kicking up her feet half reckless, half jeering, in a ballet-dancer's fashion. Almost fearfully, yet in defiance, she kicked up her legs at him, singing as she did so. She resented him.

"You little fool, ha' done with it," he said. "And you'll backfire them stockings, I'm telling you." He was angry. His face flushed dark, he kept his head bent. She ceased to dance.

"I shan't," she said. "They'll come in very useful."

He lifted his head and watched her, with lighted, dangerous eyes.

"You'll put 'em on the fire back, I tell you," he said.

It was a war now. She bent forward, in a ballet-dancer's fashion, and put her tongue between her teeth.

"I shan't backfire them stockings," she sang, repeating his words, "I shan't, I shan't, I shan't."

And she danced round the room doing a high kick to the tune of her words. There was a real biting indifference in her behaviour.

"We'll see whether you will or not," he said, "trollops! You'd like Sam Adams to know you was wearing 'em, wouldn't you? That's what would please you."

"Yes, I'd like him to see how nicely they fit me, he might give me some more then."

And she looked down at her pretty legs.

He knew somehow that she *would* like Sam Adams to see how pretty her legs looked in the white stockings. It made his anger go deep, almost to hatred.

"Yer nasty trolley," he cried. "Put yer petticoats down, and stop being so foul-minded."

"I'm not foul-minded," she said. "My legs are my own. And why shouldn't Sam Adams think they're nice?"

There was a pause. He watched her with eyes glittering to a point.

"Have you been havin' owt to do with him?" he asked.

"I've just spoken to him when I've seen him," she said. "He's not as bad as you would make out."

"Isn't he?" he cried, a certain wakefulness in his voice. "Them who has anything to do wi' him is too bad for me, I tell you."

"Why, what are you frightened of him for?" she mocked.

She was rousing all his uncontrollable anger. He sat glowering. Every one of her sentences stirred him up like a red-hot iron. Soon it would be too much. And she was afraid herself; but she was neither conquered nor convinced.

A curious little grin of hate came on his face. He had a long score against her.

"What am I frightened of him for?" he repeated automatically. "What am I

frightened of him for? Why, for you, you stray-running little bitch.”

She flushed. The insult went deep into her, right home.

“Well, if you’re so dull — ” she said, lowering her eyelids, and speaking coldly, haughtily.

“If I’m so dull I’ll break your neck the first word you speak to him,” he said, tense.

“Pf!” she sneered. “Do you think I’m frightened of you?” She spoke coldly, detached.

She was frightened, for all that, white round the mouth.

His heart was getting hotter.

“You *will* be frightened of me, the next time you have anything to do with him,” he said.

“Do you think *you’d* ever be told — ha!”

Her jeering scorn made him go white-hot, molten. He knew he was incoherent, scarcely responsible for what he might do. Slowly, unseeing, he rose and went out of doors, stifled, moved to kill her.

He stood leaning against the garden fence, unable either to see or hear. Below him, far off, fumed the lights of the town. He stood still, unconscious with a black storm of rage, his face lifted to the night.

Presently, still unconscious of what he was doing, he went indoors again. She stood, a small stubborn figure with tight-pressed lips and big, sullen, childish eyes, watching him, white with fear. He went heavily across the floor and dropped into his chair.

There was a silence.

“*You’re* not going to tell me everything I shall do, and everything I shan’t,” she broke out at last.

He lifted his head.

“I tell you *this*,” he said, low and intense. “Have anything to do with Sam Adams, and I’ll break your neck.”

She laughed, shrill and false.

“How I hate your word ‘break your neck’,” she said, with a grimace of the mouth. “It sounds so common and beastly. Can’t you say something else — ”

There was a dead silence.

“And besides,” she said, with a queer chirrup of mocking laughter, “what do you know about anything? He sent me an amethyst brooch and a pair of pearl earrings.”

“He what?” said Whiston, in a suddenly normal voice. His eyes were fixed on her.

“Sent me a pair of pearl earrings, and an amethyst brooch,” she repeated,

mechanically, pale to the lips.

And her big, black, childish eyes watched him, fascinated, held in her spell.

He seemed to thrust his face and his eyes forward at her, as he rose slowly and came to her. She watched transfixed in terror. Her throat made a small sound, as she tried to scream.

Then, quick as lightning, the back of his hand struck her with a crash across the mouth, and she was flung back blinded against the wall. The shock shook a queer sound out of her. And then she saw him still coming on, his eyes holding her, his fist drawn back, advancing slowly. At any instant the blow might crash into her.

Mad with terror, she raised her hands with a queer clawing movement to cover her eyes and her temples, opening her mouth in a dumb shriek. There was no sound. But the sight of her slowly arrested him. He hung before her, looking at her fixedly, as she stood crouched against the wall with open, bleeding mouth, and wide-staring eyes, and two hands clawing over her temples. And his lust to see her bleed, to break her and destroy her, rose from an old source against her. It carried him. He wanted satisfaction.

But he had seen her standing there, a piteous, horrified thing, and he turned his face aside in shame and nausea. He went and sat heavily in his chair, and a curious ease, almost like sleep, came over his brain.

She walked away from the wall towards the fire, dizzy, white to the lips, mechanically wiping her small, bleeding mouth. He sat motionless. Then, gradually, her breath began to hiss, she shook, and was sobbing silently, in grief for herself. Without looking, he saw. It made his mad desire to destroy her come back.

At length he lifted his head. His eyes were glowing again, fixed on her.

“And what did he give them you for?” he asked, in a steady, unyielding voice.

Her crying dried up in a second. She also was tense.

“They came as valentines,” she replied, still not subjugated, even if beaten.

“When, to-day?”

“The pearl earrings to-day — the amethyst brooch last year.”

“You’ve had it a year?”

“Yes.”

She felt that now nothing would prevent him if he rose to kill her. She could not prevent him any more. She was yielded up to him. They both trembled in the balance, unconscious.

“What have you had to do with him?” he asked, in a barren voice.

“I’ve not had anything to do with him,” she quavered.

“You just kept ‘em because they were jewellery?” he said.

A weariness came over him. What was the worth of speaking any more of it? He did not care any more. He was dreary and sick.

She began to cry again, but he took no notice. She kept wiping her mouth on her handkerchief. He could see it, the blood-mark. It made him only more sick and tired of the responsibility of it, the violence, the shame.

When she began to move about again, he raised his head once more from his dead, motionless position.

“Where are the things?” he said.

“They are upstairs,” she quavered. She knew the passion had gone down in him.

“Bring them down,” he said.

“I won’t,” she wept, with rage. “You’re not going to bully me and hit me like that on the mouth.”

And she sobbed again. He looked at her in contempt and compassion and in rising anger.

“Where are they?” he said.

“They’re in the little drawer under the looking-glass,” she sobbed.

He went slowly upstairs, struck a match, and found the trinkets. He brought them downstairs in his hand.

“These?” he said, looking at them as they lay in his palm.

She looked at them without answering. She was not interested in them any more.

He looked at the little jewels. They were pretty.

“It’s none of their fault,” he said to himself.

And he searched round slowly, persistently, for a box. He tied the things up and addressed them to Sam Adams. Then he went out in his slippers to post the little package.

When he came back she was still sitting crying.

“You’d better go to bed,” he said.

She paid no attention. He sat by the fire. She still cried.

“I’m sleeping down here,” he said. “Go you to bed.”

In a few moments she lifted her tear-stained, swollen face and looked at him with eyes all forlorn and pathetic. A great flash of anguish went over his body. He went over, slowly, and very gently took her in his hands. She let herself be taken. Then as she lay against his shoulder, she sobbed aloud:

“I never meant — ”

“My love — my little love — ” he cried, in anguish of spirit, holding her in his arms.

THE THIMBLE

SHE had not seen her husband for ten months, not since her fortnight's honeymoon with him, and his departure for France. Then, in those excited days of the early war, he was her comrade, her counterpart in a sort of Bacchic revel before death. Now all that was shut off from her mind, as by a great rent in her life.

Since then, since the honeymoon, she had lived and died and come to life again. There had been his departure to the front. She had loved him then.

'If you want to love your husband,' she had said to her friends, with splendid recklessness, 'you should see him in khaki.' And she had really loved him, he was so handsome in uniform, well-built, yet with a sort of reserve and remoteness that suited the neutral khaki perfectly.

Before, as a barrister with nothing to do, he had been slack and unconvincing, a sort of hanger-on, and she had never come to the point of marrying him. For one thing they neither of them had enough money.

Then came the great shock of the war, his coming to her in a new light, as lieutenant in the artillery. And she had been carried away by his perfect calm manliness and significance, now he was a soldier. He seemed to have gained a fascinating importance that made her seem quite unimportant. It was she who was insignificant and subservient, he who was dignified, with a sort of indifferent lordliness.

So she had married him, all considerations flung to the wind, and had known the bewildering experience of their fortnight's honeymoon, before he left her for the front.

And she had never got over the bewilderment. She had, since then, never thought at all, she seemed to have rushed on in a storm of activity and sensation. There was a home to make, and no money to make it with: none to speak of. So, with the swift, business-like aptitude of a startled woman, she had found a small flat in Mayfair, had attended sales and bought suitable furniture, had made the place complete and perfect. She was satisfied. It was small and insignificant, but it was a complete unity.

Then she had had a certain amount of war-work to do, and she had kept up all her social activities. She had not had a moment which was not urgently occupied.

All the while came his letters from France, and she was writing her replies.

They both sent a good deal of news to each other, they both expressed their mutual passion.

Then suddenly, amid all this activity, she fell ill with pneumonia and everything lapsed into delirium. And whilst she was ill, he was wounded, his jaw smashed and his face cut up by the bursting of a shell. So they were both laid by.

Now, they were both better, and she was waiting to see him. Since she had been ill, while she had lain or sat in her room in the castle in Scotland, she had thought, thought very much. For she was a woman who was always trying to grasp the whole of her context, always trying to make a complete thing of her own life.

Her illness lay between her and her previous life like a dark night, like a great separation. She looked back, she remembered all she had done, and she was bewildered, she had no key to the puzzle. Suddenly she realized that she knew nothing of this man she had married, he knew nothing of her. What she had of him, vividly, was the visual image. She could see him, the whole of him, in her mind's eye. She could remember him with peculiar distinctness, as if the whole of his body were lit up by an intense light, and the image fixed on her mind.

But he was an impression, only a vivid impression. What her own impression was, she knew most vividly. But what *he* was *himself*: the very thought startled her, it was like looking into a perilous darkness. All that she knew of him was her own affair, purely personal to her, a subjective impression. But there must be a *man*, another being, somewhere in the darkness which she had never broached.

The thought frightened her exceedingly, and her soul, weak from illness, seemed to weep. Here was a new peril, a new terror. And she seemed to have no hope.

She could scarcely bear to think of him as she knew him. She could scarcely bear to conjure up that vivid image of him which remained from the days of her honeymoon. It was something false, it was something which had only to do with herself. The man himself was something quite other, something in the dark, something she dreaded, whose coming she dreaded, as if it were a mitigation of her own being, something set over against her, something that would annul her own image of herself.

Nervously she twisted her long white fingers. She was a beautiful woman, tall and loose and rather thin, with swinging limbs, one for whom the modern fashions were perfect. Her skin was pure and clear, like a Christmas rose, her hair was fair and heavy. She had large, slow, unswerving eyes, that sometimes looked blue and open with a childish candour, sometimes greenish and intent with thought, sometimes hard, sea-like, cruel, sometimes grey and pathetic.

Now she sat in her own room, in the flat in Mayfair, and he was coming to see

her. She was well again: just well enough to see him. But she was tired as she sat in the chair whilst her maid arranged her heavy, fair hair.

She knew she was a beauty, she knew it was expected of her that she should create an impression of modern beauty. And it pleased her, it made her soul rather hard and proud: but also, at the bottom, it bored her. Still, she would have her hair built high, in the fashionable mode, she would have it modelled to the whole form of her head, her figure. She lifted her eyes to look. They were slow, greenish, and cold like the sea at this moment, because she was so perplexed, so heavy with trying, all alone, always quite coldly alone, to understand, to understand and to adjust herself. It never occurred to her to expect anything of the other person: she was utterly self-responsible.

‘No,’ she said to her maid, in her slow, laconic, plangent voice, ‘don’t let it swell out over the ears, lift it straight up, then twist it under — like that — so it goes clean from the side of the face. Do you see?’

‘Yes, my lady.’

And the maid went on with the hair-dressing, and she with her slow, cold musing.

She was getting dressed now to see her bridegroom. The phrase, with its association in all the romances of the world, made her snigger involuntarily to herself. She was still like a schoolgirl, always seeing herself in her part. She got curious satisfaction from it, too. But also she was always humorously ironical when she found herself in these romantic situations. If brigands and robbers had carried her off, she would have played up to the event perfectly. In life, however, there was always a certain painful, laborious heaviness, a weight of self-responsibility. The event never carried her along, a helpless protagonist. She was always responsible, in whatever situation.

Now, this morning, her husband was coming to see her, and she was dressing to receive him. She felt heavy and inert as stone, yet inwardly trembling convulsively. The known man, he did not affect her. Heavy and inert in her soul, yet amused, she would play her part in his reception. But the unknown man, what was he? Her dark, unknown soul trembled apprehensively.

At any rate he would be different. She shuddered. The vision she had of him, of the good-looking, clean, slightly tanned, attractive man, ordinary and yet with odd streaks of understanding that made her ponder, this she must put away. They said his face was rather horribly cut up. She shivered. How she hated it, coldly hated and loathed it, the thought of disfigurement. Her fingers trembled, she rose to go downstairs. If he came he must not come into her bedroom.

So, in her fashionable but inexpensive black silk dress, wearing her jewels, her string of opals, her big, ruby brooch, she went downstairs. She knew how to

walk, how to hold her body according to the mode. She did it almost instinctively, so deep was her consciousness of the impression her own appearance must create.

Entering the small drawing-room she lifted her eyes slowly and looked at herself: a tall, loose woman in black, with fair hair raised up, and with slow, greenish, cold eyes looking into the mirror. She turned away with a cold, pungent sort of satisfaction. She was aware also of the traces of weariness and illness and age, in her face. She was twenty-seven years old.

So she sat on the little sofa by the fire. The room she had made was satisfactory to her, with its neutral, brown-grey walls, its deep brown, plain, velvety carpet, and the old furniture done in worn rose brocade, which she had bought from Countess Ambersyth's sale. She looked at her own large feet, upon the rose-red Persian rug.

Then nervously, yet quite calm, almost static, she sat still to wait. It was one of the moments of deepest suffering and suspense which she had ever known. She did not want to think of his disfigurement, she did not want to have any preconception of it. Let it come upon her. And the man, the unknown strange man who was coming now to take up his position over against her soul, her soul so naked and exposed from illness, the man to whose access her soul was to be delivered up! She could not bear it. Her face set pale, she began to lose her consciousness.

Then something whispered in her:

'If I am like this, I shall be quite impervious to him, quite oblivious of anything but the surface of him.' And an anxious sort of hope sent her hands down onto the sofa at her side, pressed upon the worn brocade, spread fiat. And she remained in suspense.

But could she bear it, could she bear it? She was weak and ill in a sort of after-death. Now what was this that she must confront, this other being? Her hands began to move slowly backwards and forwards on the sofa bed, slowly, as if the friction of the silk gave her some ease.

She was unaware of what she was doing. She was always so calm, so self-contained, so static; she was much too stoically well-bred to allow these outward nervous agitations. But now she sat still in suspense in the silent drawing-room, where the fire flickered over the dark brown carpet and over the pale rose furniture and over the pale face and the black dress and the white, sliding hands of the woman, and her hands slid backwards and forwards, backwards and forwards like a pleading, a hope, a tension of madness.

Her right hand came to the end of the sofa and pressed a little into the crack, the meeting between the arm and the sofa bed. Her long white fingers pressed

into the fissure, pressed and entered rhythmically, pressed and pressed further and further into the tight depths of the fissure, between the silken, firm upholstery of the old sofa, whilst her mind was in a trance of suspense, and the firelight flickered on the yellow chrysanthemums that stood in a jar in the window.

The working, slow, intent fingers pressed deeper and deeper in the fissure of the sofa, pressed and worked their way intently, to the bottom. It was the bottom. They were there, they made sure. Making sure, they worked all along, very gradually, along the tight depth of the fissure.

Then they touched a little extraneous object, and a consciousness awoke in the woman's mind. Was it something? She touched again. It was something hard and rough. The fingers began to ply upon it. How firmly it was embedded in the depths of the sofa-crack. It had a thin rim, like a ring, but it was not a ring. The fingers worked more insistently. What was this little hard object?

The fingers pressed determinedly, they moved the little object. They began to work it up to the light. It was coming, there was success. The woman's heart relaxed from its tension, now her aim was being achieved. Her long, strong, white fingers brought out the little find.

It was a thimble set with brilliants; it was an old, rather heavy thimble of tarnished gold, set round the base with little diamonds or rubies. Perhaps it was not gold, perhaps they were only paste.

She put it on her sewing finger. The brilliants sparkled in the firelight. She was pleased. It was a vulgar thing, a gold thimble with ordinary pin-head dents, and a belt of jewels around the base. It was large too, big enough for her. It must have been some woman's embroidery thimble, some bygone woman's, perhaps some Lady Ambersyth's. At any rate, it belonged to the days when women did stitching as a usual thing. But it was heavy, it would make one's hand ache.

She began to rub the gold with her handkerchief. There was an engraved monogram, an Earl's, and then Z, Z, and a date, 15 Oct., 1801. She was very pleased, trembling with the thought of the old romance. What did Z. stand for? She thought of her acquaintances, and could only think of Zouche. But he was not an Earl. Who would give the gift of a gold thimble set with jewels, in the year 1801? Perhaps it was a man come home from the wars: there were wars then.

The maid noiselessly opened the door and saw her mistress sitting in the soft light of the winter day, polishing something with her handkerchief.

'Mr Hepburn has come, my lady.'

'Has he!' answered the laconic, slightly wounded voice of the woman.

She collected herself and rose. Her husband was coming through the doorway,

past the maid. He came without hat or coat or gloves, like an inmate of the house. He was an inmate of the house.

‘How do you do?’ she said, with stoic, plangent helplessness. And she held out her hand.

‘How are *you*?’ he replied, rather mumbling, with a sort of muffled voice.

‘All right now, thanks,’ and she sat down again, her heart beating violently. She had not yet looked at his face. The muffled voice terrified her so much. It mumbled rather mouthlessly.

Abstractedly, she put the thimble on her middle finger, and continued to rub it with her handkerchief. The man sat in silence opposite, in an armchair. She was aware of his khaki trousers and his brown shoes. But she was intent on burnishing the thimble.

Her mind was in a trance, but as if she were on the point of waking, for the first time in her life, waking up.

‘What are you doing? What have you got?’ asked the mumbling, muffled voice. A pang went through her. She looked up at the mouth that produced the sound. It was broken in, the bottom teeth all gone, the side of the chin battered small, while a deep seam, a deep, horrible groove ran right into the middle of the cheek. But the mouth was the worst, sunk in at the bottom, with half the lip cut away.

‘It is treasure-trove,’ answered the plangent, cold-sounding voice. And she held out the thimble.

He reached to take it. His hand was white, and it trembled. His nerves were broken. He took the thimble between his fingers.

She sat obsessed, as if his disfigurement were photographed upon her mind, as if she were some sensitive medium to which the thing had been transferred. There it was, her whole consciousness was photographed into an image of his disfigurement, the dreadful sunken mouth that was not a mouth, which mumbled in talking to her, in a disfigurement of speech.

It was all accident, accident had taken possession of her very being. All she was, was purely accidental. It was like a sleep, a thin, taut, overfilming sleep in which the wakefulness struggles like a thing as yet unborn. She was sick in the thin, transparent membrane of her sleep, her overlying dream-consciousness, something actual but too unreal.

‘How treasure-trove?’ he mumbled. She could not understand.

She felt his moment’s hesitation before he tried again, and a hot pain pierced through her, the pain of his maimed, crippled effort.

‘Treasure-trove, you said,’ he repeated, with a sickening struggle to speak distinctly.

Her mind hovered, then grasped, then caught the threads of the conversation.

‘I found it,’ she said. Her voice was clear and vibrating as bronze, but cold. ‘I found it just before you came in.’

There was a silence. She was aware of the purely accidental condition of her whole being. She was framed and constructed of accident, accidental association. It was like being made up of dream-stuff, without sequence or adherence to any plan or purpose. Yet within the imprisoning film of the dream was herself, struggling unborn, struggling to come to life.

It was difficult to break the inert silence that had succeeded between them. She was afraid it would go on for ever. With a strange, convulsive struggle, she broke into communication with him.

‘I found it here, in the sofa,’ she said, and she lifted her eyes for the first time to him.

His forehead was white, and his hair brushed smooth, like a sick man’s. And his eyes were like the eyes of a child that has been ill, blue and abstract, as if they only listened from a long way off, and did not see any more. So far-off he looked, like a child that belongs almost more to death than to life. And her soul divined that he was waiting vaguely where the dark and the light divide, whether he should come in to life, or hesitate, and pass back.

She lowered her eyelids, and for a second she sat erect like a mask, with closed eyes, while a spasm of pure unconsciousness passed over her. It departed again, and she opened her eyes. She was awake.

She looked at him. His eyes were still abstract and without answer, changing only to the dream-psychology of his being. She contracted as if she were cold and afraid. They lit up now with a superficial over-flicker of interest.

‘Did you really? Why, how did it come there?’

It was the same voice, the same stupid interest in accidental things, the same man as before. Only the enunciation of the words was all mumbled and muffled, as if the speech itself were disintegrating.

Her heart shrank, to close again like an over-sensitive newborn thing, that is not yet strong enough in its own being. Yet once more she lifted her eyes, and looked at him.

He was flickering with his old, easily roused, spurious interest in the accidents of life. The film of separateness seemed to be coming over her. Yet his white forehead was somewhat deathly, with its smoothly brushed hair. He was like one dead. He was within the realm of death. His over-flicker of interest was only extraneous.

‘I suppose it had got pushed down by accident,’ she said, answering from her mechanical mind.

But her eyes were watching him who was dead, who was there like Lazarus before her, as yet unrisen.

‘How did it happen?’ she said, and her voice was changed, penetrating with sadness and approach. He knew what she meant.

‘Well, you see I was knocked clean senseless, and that was all I knew for three days. But it seems that it was a shell fired by one of our own fellows, and it hit me because it was faultily made.’

Her face was very still as she watched.

‘And how did you feel when you came round?’

‘I felt pretty bad, as you can imagine; there was a crack on the skull as well as this on the jaw.’

‘Did you think you were going to die?’

There was a long pause, whilst the man laughed self-consciously. But he laughed only with the upper part of his face: the maimed part remained still. And though the eyes seemed to laugh, just as of old, yet underneath them was a black, challenging darkness. She waited while this superficial smile of reserve passed away.

Then came the mumbling speech, simple, in confession.

‘Yes, I lay and looked at it.’

The darkness of his eyes was now watching her, her soul was exposed and newborn. The triviality was gone, the dream-psychology, the self-dependence. They were naked and newborn in soul, and depended on each other.

It was on the tip of her tongue to say: ‘And why didn’t you die?’ But instead, her soul, weak and newborn, looked helplessly at him.

‘I couldn’t while you were alive,’ he said.

‘What?’

‘Die.’

She seemed to pass away into unconsciousness. Then, as she came to, she said, as if in protest:

‘What difference should *I* make to you! You can’t live off me.’

He was watching her with unlighted, sightless eyes. There was a long silence. She was thinking, it was not her consciousness of him which had kept *her* alive. It was her own will.

‘What did you hope for, from me?’ she asked. His eyes darkened, his face seemed very white, he really looked like a dead man as he sat silent and with open, sightless eyes. Between his slightly-trembling fingers was balanced the thimble, that sparkled sometimes in the firelight. Watching him, a darkness seemed to come over her. She could not see, he was only a presence near her in the dark.

‘We are both of us helpless,’ she said, into the silence.

‘Helpless for what?’ answered his sightless voice.

‘To live,’ she said.

They seemed to be talking to each other’s souls, their eyes and minds were sightless.

‘We are helpless to live,’ he repeated.

‘Yes,’ she said.

There was still a silence.

‘I know,’ he said, ‘we are helpless to live. I knew that when I came round.’

‘I am as helpless as you are,’ she said.

‘Yes,’ came his slow, half-articulate voice. ‘I know that. You’re as helpless as I am.’

‘Well then?’

‘Well then, we are helpless. We are as helpless as babies,’ he said.

‘And how do you like being a helpless baby,’ came the ironic voice.

‘And how do you like being a helpless baby?’ he replied. There was a long pause. Then she laughed brokenly.

‘I don’t know,’ she said. ‘A helpless baby can’t know whether it likes being a helpless baby.’

‘That’s just the same. But I feel *hope*, don’t you?’ Again there was an unwilling pause on her part.

‘Hope of what?’

‘If I am a helpless baby now, that I shall grow into a man.’

She gave a slight, amused laugh.

‘And I ought to hope that I shall grow into a woman,’ she said.

‘Yes, of course.’

‘Then what am I now?’ she asked, humorously.

‘Now, you’re a helpless baby, as you said.’

It piqued her slightly. Then again, she knew it was true. ‘And what was I before — when I married you?’ she asked, challenging.

‘Why, then — I don’t know what you were. I’ve had my head cracked and some dark let in, since then. So I don’t know what you were, because it’s all gone, don’t you see.’

‘I see.’

There was a pause. She became aware of the room about her, of the fire burning low and red.

‘And what are we doing together?’ she said.

‘We’re going to love each other,’ he said.

‘Didn’t we love each other before?’ challenged her voice.

‘No, we couldn’t. We weren’t born.’

‘Neither were we dead,’ she answered.

He seemed struck.

‘Are we dead now?’ he asked in fear.

‘Yes, we are.’

There was a suspense of anguish, it was so true. Then we must be born again,’ he said.

‘Must we?’ said her deliberate, laconic voice. Yes, we must — otherwise —’ He did not finish.

‘And do you think we’ve got the power to come to life again now we’re dead?’ she asked.

‘I think we have,’ he said.

There was a long pause.

‘Resurrection?’ she said, almost as if mocking. They looked slowly and darkly into each other’s eyes. He rose unthinking, went over and touched her hand.

‘“Touch me not, for I am not yet ascended unto the Father,” ’ she quoted, in her level, cold-sounding voice.

‘No,’ he answered; ‘it takes time.’

The incongruous plainness of his statement made her jerk with laughter. At the same instant her face contracted and she said in a loud voice, as if her soul was being torn from her:

‘Am I going to love you?’

Again he stretched forward and touched her hand, with the tips of his fingers. And the touch lay still, completed there.

Then at length he noticed that the thimble was stuck on his little finger. In the same instant she also looked at it.

‘I want to throw it away,’ he said.

Again she gave a little jerk of laughter.

He rose, went to the window, and raised the sash. Then, suddenly with a strong movement of the arm and shoulder, he threw the thimble out into the murky street.

It bounded on the pavement opposite. Then a taxi-cab went by, and he could not see it any more.

ENGLAND, MY ENGLAND

He was working on the edge of the common, beyond the small brook that ran in the dip at the bottom of the garden, carrying the garden path in continuation from the plank bridge on to the common. He had cut the rough turf and bracken, leaving the grey, dryish soil bare. But he was worried because he could not get the path straight, there was a pleat between his brows. He had set up his sticks, and taken the sights between the big pine trees, but for some reason everything seemed wrong. He looked again, straining his keen blue eyes, that had a touch of the Viking in them, through the shadowy pine trees as through a doorway, at the green-grassed garden-path rising from the shadow of alders by the log bridge up to the sunlit flowers. Tall white and purple columbines, and the butt-end of the old Hampshire cottage that crouched near the earth amid flowers, blossoming in the bit of shaggy wildness round about.

There was a sound of children's voices calling and talking: high, childish, girlish voices, slightly didactic and tinged with domineering: 'If you don't come quick, nurse, I shall run out there to where there are snakes.' And nobody had the sangfroid to reply: 'Run then, little fool.' It was always, 'No, darling. Very well, darling. In a moment, darling. Darling, you must be patient.'

His heart was hard with disillusion: a continual gnawing and resistance. But he worked on. What was there to do but submit!

The sunlight blazed down upon the earth, there was a vividness of flamy vegetation, of fierce seclusion amid the savage peace of the commons. Strange how the savage England lingers in patches: as here, amid these shaggy gorse commons, and marshy, snake infested places near the foot of the south downs. The spirit of place lingering on primeval, as when the Saxons came, so long ago.

Ah, how he had loved it! The green garden path, the tufts of flowers, purple and white columbines, and great oriental red poppies with their black chaps and mulleins tall and yellow, this flamy garden which had been a garden for a thousand years, scooped out in the little hollow among the snake-infested commons. He had made it flame with flowers, in a sun cup under its hedges and trees. So old, so old a place! And yet he had re-created it.

The timbered cottage with its sloping, cloak-like roof was old and forgotten. It belonged to the old England of hamlets and yeomen. Lost all alone on the edge of the common, at the end of a wide, grassy, briar-entangled lane shaded with oak, it had never known the world of today. Not till Egbert came with his bride.

And he had come to fill it with flowers.

The house was ancient and very uncomfortable. But he did not want to alter it. Ah, marvellous to sit there in the wide, black, time-old chimney, at night when the wind roared overhead, and the wood which he had chopped himself sputtered on the hearth! Himself on one side the angle, and Winifred on the other.

Ah, how he had wanted her: Winifred! She was young and beautiful and strong with life, like a flame in sunshine. She moved with a slow grace of energy like a blossoming, red-flowered bush in motion. She, too, seemed to come out of the old England, ruddy, strong, with a certain crude, passionate quiescence and a hawthorn robustness. And he, he was tall and slim and agile, like an English archer with his long supple legs and fine movements. Her hair was nut-brown and all in energetic curls and tendrils. Her eyes were nut-brown, too, like a robin's for brightness. And he was white-skinned with fine, silky hair that had darkened from fair, and a slightly arched nose of an old country family. They were a beautiful couple.

The house was Winifred's. Her father was a man of energy, too. He had come from the north poor. Now he was moderately rich. He had bought this fair stretch of inexpensive land, down in Hampshire. Not far from the tiny church of the almost extinct hamlet stood his own house, a commodious old farmhouse standing back from the road across a bare grassed yard. On one side of this quadrangle was the long, long barn or shed which he had made into a cottage for his youngest daughter Priscilla. One saw little blue-and-white check curtains at the long windows, and inside, overhead, the grand old timbers of the high-pitched shed. This was Prissy's house. Fifty yards away was the pretty little new cottage which he had built for his daughter Magdalen, with the vegetable garden stretching away to the oak copse. And then away beyond the lawns and rose trees of the house-garden went the track across a shaggy, wild grass space, towards the ridge of tall black pines that grew on a dyke-bank, through the pines and above the sloping little bog, under the wide, desolate oak trees, till there was Winifred's cottage crouching unexpectedly in front, so much alone, and so primitive.

It was Winifred's own house, and the gardens and the bit of common and the boggy slope were hers: her tiny domain. She had married just at the time when her father had bought the estate, about ten years before the war, so she had been able to come to Egbert with this for a marriage portion. And who was more delighted, he or she, it would be hard to say. She was only twenty at the time, and he was only twenty-one. He had about a hundred and fifty pounds a year of his own — and nothing else but his very considerable personal attractions. He had no profession: he earned nothing. But he talked of literature and music, he

had a passion for old folk-music, collecting folk-songs and folk-dances, studying the Morris-dance and the old customs. Of course in time he would make money in these ways.

Meanwhile youth and health and passion and promise. Winifred's father was always generous: but still, he was a man from the north with a hard head and a hard skin too, having received a good many knocks. At home he kept the hard head out of sight, and played at poetry and romance with his literary wife and his sturdy, passionate girls. He was a man of courage, not given to complaining, bearing his burdens by himself. No, he did not let the world intrude far into his home. He had a delicate, sensitive wife whose poetry won some fame in the narrow world of letters. He himself, with his tough old barbarian fighting spirit, had an almost child-like delight in verse, in sweet poetry, and in the delightful game of a cultured home. His blood was strong even to coarseness. But that only made the home more vigorous, more robust and Christmassy. There was always a touch of Christmas about him, now he was well off. If there was poetry after dinner, there were also chocolates and nuts, and good little out-of-the-way things to be munching.

Well then, into this family came Egbert. He was made of quite a different paste. The girls and the father were strong-limbed, thick-blooded people, true English, as holly-trees and hawthorn are English. Their culture was grafted on to them, as one might perhaps graft a common pink rose on to a thornstem. It flowered oddly enough, but it did not alter their blood.

And Egbert was a born rose. The age-long breeding had left him with a delightful spontaneous passion. He was not clever, nor even 'literary'. No, but the intonation of his voice, and the movement of his supple, handsome body, and the fine texture of his flesh and his hair, the slight arch of his nose, the quickness of his blue eyes would easily take the place of poetry. Winifred loved him, loved him, this southerner, as a higher being. A higher being, mind you. Not a deeper. And as for him, he loved her in passion with every fibre of him. She was the very warm stuff of life to him.

Wonderful then, those days at Crockham Cottage, the first days, all alone save for the woman who came to work in the mornings. Marvellous days, when she had all his tall, supple, fine-fleshed youth to herself, for herself, and he had her like a ruddy fire into which he could cast himself for rejuvenation. Ah, that it might never end, this passion, this marriage! The flame of their two bodies burnt again into that old cottage, that was haunted already by so much by-gone, physical desire. You could not be in the dark room for an hour without the influences coming over you. The hot blood-desire of by-gone yeomen, there in this old den where they had lusted and bred for so many generations. The silent

house, dark, with thick, timbered walls and the big black chimney-place, and the sense of secrecy. Dark, with low, little windows, sunk into the earth. Dark, like a lair where strong beasts had lurked and mated, lonely at night and lonely by day, left to themselves and their own intensity for so many generations. It seemed to cast a spell on the two young people. They became different. There was a curious secret glow about them, a certain slumbering flame hard to understand, that enveloped them both. They too felt that they did not belong to the London world any more. Crockham had changed their blood: the sense of the snakes that lived and slept even in their own garden, in the sun, so that he, going forward with the spade, would see a curious coiled brownish pile on the black soil, which suddenly would start up, hiss, and dazzle rapidly away, hissing. One day Winifred heard the strangest scream from the flower-bed under the low window of the living room: ah, the strangest scream, like the very soul of the dark past crying aloud. She ran out, and saw a long brown snake on the flower-bed, and in its flat mouth the one hind leg of a frog was striving to escape, and screaming its strange, tiny, bellowing scream. She looked at the snake, and from its sullen flat head it looked at her, obstinately. She gave a cry, and it released the frog and slid angrily away.

That was Crockham. The spear of modern invention had not passed through it, and it lay there secret, primitive, savage as when the Saxons first came. And Egbert and she were caught there, caught out of the world.

He was not idle, nor was she. There were plenty of things to be done, the house to be put into final repair after the workmen had gone, cushions and curtains to sew, the paths to make, the water to fetch and attend to, and then the slope of the deep-soiled, neglected garden to level, to terrace with little terraces and paths, and to fill with flowers. He worked away, in his shirt-sleeves, worked all day intermittently doing this thing and the other. And she, quiet and rich in herself, seeing him stooping and labouring away by himself, would come to help him, to be near him. He of course was an amateur — a born amateur. He worked so hard, and did so little, and nothing he ever did would hold together for long. If he terraced the garden, he held up the earth with a couple of long narrow planks that soon began to bend with the pressure from behind, and would not need many years to rot through and break and let the soil slither all down again in a heap towards the stream-bed. But there you are. He had not been brought up to come to grips with anything, and he thought it would do. Nay, he did not think there was anything else except little temporary contrivances possible, he who had such a passion for his old enduring cottage, and for the old enduring things of the bygone England. Curious that the sense of permanency in the past had such a hold over him, whilst in the present he was all amateurish and sketchy.

Winifred could not criticize him. Town-bred, everything seemed to her splendid, and the very digging and shovelling itself seemed romantic. But neither Egbert nor she yet realized the difference between work and romance.

Godfrey Marshall, her father, was at first perfectly pleased with the ménage down at Crockham Cottage. He thought Egbert was wonderful, the many things he accomplished, and he was gratified by the glow of physical passion between the two young people. To the man who in London still worked hard to keep steady his modest fortune, the thought of this young couple digging away and loving one another down at Crockham Cottage, buried deep among the commons and marshes, near the pale-showing bulk of the downs, was like a chapter of living romance. And they drew the sustenance for their fire of passion from him, from the old man. It was he who fed their flame. He triumphed secretly in the thought. And it was to her father that Winifred still turned, as the one source of all surety and life and support. She loved Egbert with passion. But behind her was the power of her father. It was the power of her father she referred to, whenever she needed to refer. It never occurred to her to refer to Egbert, if she were in difficulty or doubt. No, in all the serious matters she depended on her father.

For Egbert had no intention of coming to grips with life. He had no ambition whatsoever. He came from a decent family, from a pleasant country home, from delightful surroundings. He should, of course, have had a profession. He should have studied law or entered business in some way. But no — that fatal three pounds a week would keep him from starving as long as he lived, and he did not want to give himself into bondage. It was not that he was idle. He was always doing something, in his amateurish way. But he had no desire to give himself to the world, and still less had he any desire to fight his way in the world. No, no, the world wasn't worth it. He wanted to ignore it, to go his own way apart, like a casual pilgrim down the forsaken sidetracks. He loved his wife, his cottage and garden. He would make his life there, as a sort of epicurean hermit. He loved the past, the old music and dances and customs of old England. He would try and live in the spirit of these, not in the spirit of the world of business.

But often Winifred's father called her to London: for he loved to have his children round him. So Egbert and she must have a tiny flat in town, and the young couple must transfer themselves from time to time from the country to the city. In town Egbert had plenty of friends, of the same ineffectual sort as himself, tampering with the arts, literature, painting, sculpture, music. He was not bored.

Three pounds a week, however, would not pay for all this. Winifred's father paid. He liked paying. He made her only a very small allowance, but he often

gave her ten pounds — or gave Egbert ten pounds. So they both looked on the old man as the mainstay. Egbert didn't mind being patronized and paid for. Only when he felt the family was a little too condescending, on account of money, he began to get huffy.

Then of course children came: a lovely little blonde daughter with a head of thistle-down. Everybody adored the child. It was the first exquisite blonde thing that had come into the family, a little mite with the white, slim, beautiful limbs of its father, and as it grew up the dancing, dainty movement of a wild little daisy-spirit. No wonder the Marshalls all loved the child: they called her Joyce. They themselves had their own grace, but it was slow, rather heavy. They had everyone of them strong, heavy limbs and darkish skins, and they were short in stature. And now they had for one of their own this light little cowslip child. She was like a little poem in herself.

But nevertheless, she brought a new difficulty. Winifred must have a nurse for her. Yes, yes, there must be a nurse. It was the family decree. Who was to pay for the nurse? The grandfather — seeing the father himself earned no money. Yes, the grandfather would pay, as he had paid all the lying-in expenses. There came a slight sense of money-strain. Egbert was living on his father-in-law.

After the child was born, it was never quite the same between him and Winifred. The difference was at first hardly perceptible. But it was there. In the first place Winifred had a new centre of interest. She was not going to adore her child. But she had what the modern mother so often has in the place of spontaneous love: a profound sense of duty towards her child. Winifred appreciated her darling little girl, and felt a deep sense of duty towards her. Strange, that this sense of duty should go deeper than the love for her husband. But so it was. And so it often is. The responsibility of motherhood was the prime responsibility in Winifred's heart: the responsibility of wifehood came a long way second.

Her child seemed to link her up again in a circuit with her own family. Her father and mother, herself, and her child, that was the human trinity for her. Her husband — ? Yes, she loved him still. But that was like play. She had an almost barbaric sense of duty and of family. Till she married, her first human duty had been towards her father: he was the pillar, the source of life, the everlasting support. Now another link was added to the chain of duty: her father, herself, and her child.

Egbert was out of it. Without anything happening, he was gradually, unconsciously excluded from the circle. His wife still loved him, physically. But, but — he was almost the unnecessary party in the affair. He could not complain of Winifred. She still did her duty towards him. She still had a physical passion

for him, that physical passion on which he had put all his life and soul. But — but —

It was for a long while an ever-recurring but. And then, after the second child, another blonde, winsome touching little thing, not so proud and flame-like as Joyce — after Annabel came, then Egbert began truly to realize how it was. His wife still loved him. But — and now the but had grown enormous — her physical love for him was of secondary importance to her. It became ever less important. After all, she had had it, this physical passion, for two years now. It was not this that one lived from. No, no — something sterner, realer.

She began to resent her own passion for Egbert — just a little she began to despise it. For after all there he was, he was charming, he was lovable, he was terribly desirable. But — but — oh, the awful looming cloud of that but! — he did not stand firm in the landscape of her life like a tower of strength, like a great pillar of significance. No, he was like a cat one has about the house, which will one day disappear and leave no trace. He was like a flower in the garden, trembling in the wind of life, and then gone, leaving nothing to show. As an adjunct, as an accessory, he was perfect. Many a woman would have adored to have him about her all her life, the most beautiful and desirable of all her possessions. But Winifred belonged to another school.

The years went by, and instead of coming more to grips with life, he relaxed more. He was of a subtle, sensitive, passionate nature. But he simply would not give himself to what Winifred called life, Work. No, he would not go into the world and work for money. No, he just would not. If Winifred liked to live beyond their small income — well, it was her look-out.

And Winifred did not really want him to go out into the world to work for money. Money became, alas, a word like a firebrand between them, setting them both aflame with anger. But that is because we must talk in symbols. Winifred did not really care about money. She did not care whether he earned or did not earn anything. Only she knew she was dependent on her father for three-fourths of the money spent for herself and her children, that she let that be the *casus belli*, the drawn weapon between herself and Egbert.

What did she want — what did she want? Her mother once said to her, with that characteristic touch of irony: ‘Well, dear, if it is your fate to consider the lilies, that toil not, neither do they spin, that is one destiny among many others, and perhaps not so unpleasant as most. Why do you take it amiss, my child?’

The mother was subtler than her children, they very rarely knew how to answer her. So Winifred was only more confused. It was not a question of lilies. At least, if it were a question of lilies, then her children were the little blossoms. They at least grew. Doesn’t Jesus say: ‘Consider the lilies how they grow.’ Good

then, she had her growing babies. But as for that other tall, handsome flower of a father of theirs, he was full grown already, so she did not want to spend her life considering him in the flower of his days.

No, it was not that he didn't earn money. It was not that he was idle. He was not idle. He was always doing something, always working away, down at Crockham, doing little jobs. But, oh dear, the little jobs — the garden paths — the gorgeous flowers — the chairs to mend, old chairs to mend!

It was that he stood for nothing. If he had done something unsuccessfully, and lost what money they had! If he had but striven with something. Nay, even if he had been wicked, a waster, she would have been more free. She would have had something to resist, at least. A waster stands for something, really. He says: 'No, I will not aid and abet society in this business of increase and hanging together, I will upset the apple-cart as much as I can, in my small way.' Or else he says: 'No, I will not bother about others. If I have lusts, they are my own, and I prefer them to other people's virtues.' So, a waster, a scamp, takes a sort of stand. He exposes himself to opposition and final castigation: at any rate in story-books.

But Egbert! What are you to do with a man like Egbert? He had no vices. He was really kind, nay generous. And he was not weak. If he had been weak Winifred could have been kind to him. But he did not even give her that consolation. He was not weak, and he did not want her consolation or her kindness. No, thank you. He was of a fine passionate temper, and of a rarer steel than she. He knew it, and she knew it. Hence she was only the more baffled and maddened, poor thing. He, the higher, the finer, in his way the stronger, played with his garden, and his old folk-songs and Morris-dances, just played, and let her support the pillars of the future on her own heart.

And he began to get bitter, and a wicked look began to come on his face. He did not give in to her; not he. There were seven devils inside his long, slim, white body. He was healthy, full of restrained life. Yes, even he himself had to lock up his own vivid life inside himself, now she would not take it from him. Or rather, now that she only took it occasionally. For she had to yield at times. She loved him so, she desired him so, he was so exquisite to her, the fine creature that he was, finer than herself. Yes, with a groan she had to give in to her own unquenched passion for him. And he came to her then — ah, terrible, ah, wonderful, sometimes she wondered how either of them could live after the terror of the passion that swept between them. It was to her as if pure lightning, flash after flash, went through every fibre of her, till extinction came.

But it is the fate of human beings to live on. And it is the fate of clouds that seem nothing but bits of vapour slowly to pile up, to pile up and fill the heavens and blacken the sun entirely.

So it was. The love came back, the lightning of passion flashed tremendously between them. And there was blue sky and gorgeousness for a little while. And then, as inevitably, as inevitably, slowly the clouds began to edge up again above the horizon, slowly, slowly to lurk about the heavens, throwing an occasional cold and hateful shadow: slowly, slowly to congregate, to fill the empyrean space.

And as the years passed, the lightning cleared the sky more and more rarely, less and less the blue showed. Gradually the grey lid sank down upon them, as if it would be permanent.

Why didn't Egbert do something, then? Why didn't he come to grips with life? Why wasn't he like Winifred's father, a pillar of society, even if a slender, exquisite column? Why didn't he go into harness of some sort? Why didn't he take some direction?

Well, you can bring an ass to the water, but you cannot make him drink. The world was the water and Egbert was the ass. And he wasn't having any. He couldn't: he just couldn't. Since necessity did not force him to work for his bread and butter, he would not work for work's sake. You can't make the columbine flowers nod in January, nor make the cuckoo sing in England at Christmas. Why? It isn't his season. He doesn't want to. Nay, he can't want to.

And there it was with Egbert. He couldn't link up with the world's work, because the basic desire was absent from him. Nay, at the bottom of him he had an even stronger desire: to hold aloof. To hold aloof. To do nobody any damage. But to hold aloof. It was not his season.

Perhaps he should not have married and had children. But you can't stop the waters flowing.

Which held true for Winifred, too. She was not made to endure aloof. Her family tree was a robust vegetation that had to be stirring and believing. In one direction or another her life had to go. In her own home she had known nothing of this diffidence which she found in Egbert, and which she could not understand, and which threw her into such dismay. What was she to do, what was she to do, in face of this terrible diffidence?

It was all so different in her own home. Her father may have had his own misgivings, but he kept them to himself. Perhaps he had no very profound belief in this world of ours, this society which we have elaborated with so much effort, only to find ourselves elaborated to death at last. But Godfrey Marshall was of tough, rough fibre, not without a vein of healthy cunning through it all. It was for him a question of winning through, and leaving the rest to heaven. Without having many illusions to grace him, he still did believe in heaven. In a dark and unquestioning way, he had a sort of faith: an acrid faith like the sap of some not-

to-be-exterminated tree. Just a blind acrid faith as sap is blind and acrid, and yet pushes on in growth and in faith. Perhaps he was unscrupulous, but only as a striving tree is unscrupulous, pushing its single way in a jungle of others.

In the end, it is only this robust, sap-like faith which keeps man going. He may live on for many generations inside the shelter of the social establishment which he has erected for himself, as pear-trees and currant bushes would go on bearing fruit for many seasons, inside a walled garden, even if the race of man were suddenly exterminated. But bit by bit the wall-fruit-trees would gradually pull down the very walls that sustained them. Bit by bit every establishment collapses, unless it is renewed or restored by living hands, all the while.

Egbert could not bring himself to any more of this restoring or renewing business. He was not aware of the fact: but awareness doesn't help much, anyhow. He just couldn't. He had the stoic and epicurean quality of his old, fine breeding. His father-in-law, however, though he was not one bit more of a fool than Egbert, realized that since we are here we may as well live. And so he applied himself to his own tiny section of the social work, and to doing the best for his family, and to leaving the rest to the ultimate will of heaven. A certain robustness of blood made him able to go on. But sometimes even from him spurted a sudden gall of bitterness against the world and its make-up. And yet — he had his own will-to-succeed, and this carried him through. He refused to ask himself what the success would amount to. It amounted to the estate down in Hampshire, and his children lacking for nothing, and himself of some importance in the world: and basta! — Basta! Basta!

Nevertheless do not let us imagine that he was a common pusher. He was not. He knew as well as Egbert what disillusion meant. Perhaps in his soul he had the same estimation of success. But he had a certain acrid courage, and a certain will-to-power. In his own small circle he would emanate power, the single power of his own blind self. With all his spoiling of his children, he was still the father of the old English type. He was too wise to make laws and to domineer in the abstract. But he had kept, and all honour to him, a certain primitive dominion over the souls of his children, the old, almost magic prestige of paternity. There it was, still burning in him, the old smoky torch or paternal godhead.

And in the sacred glare of this torch his children had been brought up. He had given the girls every liberty, at last. But he had never really let them go beyond his power. And they, venturing out into the hard white light of our fatherless world, learned to see with the eyes of the world. They learned to criticize their father, even, from some effulgence of worldly white light, to see him as inferior. But this was all very well in the head. The moment they forgot their tricks of criticism, the old red glow of his authority came over them again. He was not to

be quenched.

Let the psycho-analyst talk about father complex. It is just a word invented. Here was a man who had kept alive the old red flame of fatherhood, fatherhood that had even the right to sacrifice the child to God, like Isaac. Fatherhood that had life-and-death authority over the children: a great natural power. And till his children could be brought under some other great authority as girls; or could arrive at manhood and become themselves centres of the same power, continuing the same male mystery as men; until such time, willy-nilly, Godfrey Marshall would keep his children.

It had seemed as if he might lose Winifred. Winifred had adored her husband, and looked up to him as to something wonderful. Perhaps she had expected in him another great authority, a male authority greater, finer than her father's. For having once known the glow of male power, she would not easily turn to the cold white light of feminine independence. She would hunger, hunger all her life for the warmth and shelter of true male strength.

And hunger she might, for Egbert's power lay in the abnegation of power. He was himself the living negative of power. Even of responsibility. For the negation of power at last means the negation of responsibility. As far as these things went, he would confine himself to himself. He would try to confine his own influence even to himself. He would try, as far as possible, to abstain from influencing his children by assuming any responsibility for them. 'A little child shall lead them — ' His child should lead, then. He would try not to make it go in any direction whatever. He would abstain from influencing it. Liberty! —

Poor Winifred was like a fish out of water in this liberty, gasping for the denser element which should contain her. Till her child came. And then she knew that she must be responsible for it, that she must have authority over it.

But here Egbert silently and negatively stepped in. Silently, negatively, but fatally he neutralized her authority over her children.

There was a third little girl born. And after this Winifred wanted no more children. Her soul was turning to salt.

So she had charge of the children, they were her responsibility. The money for them had come from her father. She would do her very best for them, and have command over their life and death. But no! Egbert would not take the responsibility. He would not even provide the money. But he would not let her have her way. Her dark, silent, passionate authority he would not allow. It was a battle between them, the battle between liberty and the old blood-power. And of course he won. The little girls loved him and adored him. 'Daddy! Daddy!' They could do as they liked with him. Their mother would have ruled them. She would have ruled them passionately, with indulgence, with the old dark magic of

parental authority, something looming and unquestioned and, after all, divine: if we believe in divine authority. The Marshalls did, being Catholic.

And Egbert, he turned her old dark, Catholic blood-authority into a sort of tyranny. He would not leave her her children. He stole them from her, and yet without assuming responsibility for them. He stole them from her, in emotion and spirit, and left her only to command their behaviour. A thankless lot for a mother. And her children adored him, adored him, little knowing the empty bitterness they were preparing for themselves when they too grew up to have husbands: husbands such as Egbert, adorable and null.

Joyce, the eldest, was still his favourite. She was now a quicksilver little thing of six years old. Barbara, the youngest, was a toddler of two years. They spent most of their time down at Crockham, because he wanted to be there. And even Winifred loved the place really. But now, in her frustrated and blinded state, it was full of menace for her children. The adders, the poison-berries, the brook, the marsh, the water that might not be pure — one thing and another. From mother and nurse it was a guerilla gunfire of commands, and blithe, quicksilver disobedience from the three blonde, never-still little girls. Behind the girls was the father, against mother and nurse. And so it was.

‘If you don’t come quick, nurse, I shall run out there to where there are snakes.’

‘Joyce, you must be patient. I’m just changing Annabel.’

There you are. There it was: always the same. Working away on the common across the brook he heard it. And he worked on, just the same.

Suddenly he heard a shriek, and he flung the spade from him and started for the bridge, looking up like a startled deer. Ah, there was Winifred — Joyce had hurt herself. He went on up the garden.

‘What is it?’

The child was still screaming — now it was — ‘Daddy! Daddy! Oh — oh, Daddy!’ And the mother was saying:

‘Don’t be frightened, darling. Let mother look.’

But the child only cried:

‘Oh, Daddy, Daddy, Daddy!’

She was terrified by the sight of the blood running from her own knee. Winifred crouched down, with her child of six in her lap, to examine the knee. Egbert bent over also.

‘Don’t make such a noise, Joyce,’ he said irritably. ‘How did she do it?’

‘She fell on that sickle thing which you left lying about after cutting the grass,’ said Winifred, looking into his face with bitter accusation as he bent near.

He had taken his handkerchief and tied it round the knee. Then he lifted the

still sobbing child in his arms, and carried her into the house and upstairs to her bed. In his arms she became quiet. But his heart was burning with pain and with guilt. He had left the sickle there lying on the edge of the grass, and so his first-born child whom he loved so dearly had come to hurt. But then it was an accident — it was an accident. Why should he feel guilty? It would probably be nothing, better in two or three days. Why take it to heart, why worry? He put it aside.

The child lay on the bed in her little summer frock, her face very white now after the shock, Nurse had come carrying the youngest child: and little Annabel stood holding her skirt. Winifred, terribly serious and wooden-seeming, was bending over the knee, from which she had taken his blood-soaked handkerchief. Egbert bent forward, too, keeping more sangfroid in his face than in his heart. Winifred went all of a lump of seriousness, so he had to keep some reserve. The child moaned and whimpered.

The knee was still bleeding profusely — it was a deep cut right in the joint.

‘You’d better go for the doctor, Egbert,’ said Winifred bitterly.

‘Oh, no! Oh, no!’ cried Joyce in a panic.

‘Joyce, my darling, don’t cry!’ said Winifred, suddenly catching the little girl to her breast in a strange tragic anguish, the *Mater Dolorata*. Even the child was frightened into silence. Egbert looked at the tragic figure of his wife with the child at her breast, and turned away. Only Annabel started suddenly to cry: ‘Joycey, Joycey, don’t have your leg bleeding!’

Egbert rode four miles to the village for the doctor. He could not help feeling that Winifred was laying it on rather. Surely the knee itself wasn’t hurt! Surely not. It was only a surface cut.

The doctor was out. Egbert left the message and came cycling swiftly home, his heart pinched with anxiety. He dropped sweating off his bicycle and went into the house, looking rather small, like a man who is at fault. Winifred was upstairs sitting by Joyce, who was looking pale and important in bed, and was eating some tapioca pudding. The pale, small, scared face of his child went to Egbert’s heart.

‘Doctor Wing was out. He’ll be here about half past two,’ said Egbert.

‘I don’t want him to come,’ whimpered Joyce.

‘Joyce, dear, you must be patient and quiet,’ said Winifred. ‘He won’t hurt you. But he will tell us what to do to make your knee better quickly. That is why he must come.’

Winifred always explained carefully to her little girls: and it always took the words off their lips for the moment.

‘Does it bleed yet?’ said Egbert.

Winifred moved the bedclothes carefully aside.

‘I think not,’ she said.

Egbert stooped also to look.

‘No, it doesn’t,’ she said. Then he stood up with a relieved look on his face. He turned to the child.

‘Eat your pudding, Joyce,’ he said. ‘It won’t be anything. You’ve only got to keep still for a few days.’

‘You haven’t had your dinner, have you, Daddy?’

‘Not yet.’

‘Nurse will give it to you,’ said Winifred.

‘You’ll be all right, Joyce,’ he said, smiling to the child and pushing the blonde hair off her brow. She smiled back winsomely into his face.

He went downstairs and ate his meal alone. Nurse served him. She liked waiting on him. All women liked him and liked to do things for him.

The doctor came — a fat country practitioner, pleasant and kind.

‘What, little girl, been tumbling down, have you? There’s a thing to be doing, for a smart little lady like you! What! And cutting your knee! Tut-tut-tut! That wasn’t clever of you, now was it? Never mind, never mind, soon be better. Let us look at it. Won’t hurt you. Not the least in life. Bring a bowl with a little warm water, nurse. Soon have it all right again, soon have it all right.’

Joyce smiled at him with a pale smile of faint superiority. This was not the way in which she was used to being talked to.

He bent down, carefully looking at the little, thin, wounded knee of the child. Egbert bent over him.

‘Oh, dear, oh, dear! Quite a deep little cut. Nasty little cut. Nasty little cut. But, never mind. Never mind, little lady. We’ll soon have it better. Soon have it better, little lady. What’s your name?’

‘My name is Joyce,’ said the child distinctly.

‘Oh, really!’ he replied. ‘Oh, really! Well, that’s a fine name too, in my opinion. Joyce, eh? — And how old might Miss Joyce be? Can she tell me that?’

‘I’m six,’ said the child, slightly amused and very condescending.

‘Six! There now. Add up and count as far as six, can you? Well, that’s a clever little girl, a clever little girl. And if she has to drink a spoonful of medicine, she won’t make a murmur, I’ll be bound. Not like some little girls. What? Eh?’

‘I take it if mother wishes me to,’ said Joyce.

‘Ah, there now! That’s the style! That’s what I like to hear from a little lady in bed because she’s cut her knee. That’s the style — ’

The comfortable and prolix doctor dressed and bandaged the knee and recommended bed and a light diet for the little lady. He thought a week or a

fortnight would put it right. No bones or ligatures damaged — fortunately. Only a flesh cut. He would come again in a day or two.

So Joyce was reassured and stayed in bed and had all her toys up. Her father often played with her. The doctor came the third day. He was fairly pleased with the knee. It was healing. It was healing — yes — yes. Let the child continue in bed. He came again after a day or two. Winifred was a trifle uneasy. The wound seemed to be healing on the top, but it hurt the child too much. It didn't look quite right. She said so to Egbert.

'Egbert, I'm sure Joyce's knee isn't healing properly.'

'I think it is,' he said. 'I think it's all right.'

'I'd rather Doctor Wing came again — I don't feel satisfied.'

'Aren't you trying to imagine it worse than it really is?'

'You would say so, of course. But I shall write a post-card to Doctor Wing now.'

The doctor came next day. He examined the knee. Yes, there was inflammation. Yes, there might be a little septic poisoning — there might. There might. Was the child feverish?

So a fortnight passed by, and the child was feverish, and the knee was more inflamed and grew worse and was painful, painful. She cried in the night, and her mother had to sit up with her. Egbert still insisted it was nothing, really — it would pass. But in his heart he was anxious.

Winifred wrote again to her father. On Saturday the elderly man appeared. And no sooner did Winifred see the thick, rather short figure in its grey suit than a great yearning came over her.

'Father, I'm not satisfied with Joyce. I'm not satisfied with Doctor Wing.'

'Well, Winnie, dear, if you're not satisfied we must have further advice, that is all.'

The sturdy, powerful, elderly man went upstairs, his voice sounding rather grating through the house, as if it cut upon the tense atmosphere.

'How are you, Joyce, darling?' he said to the child. 'Does your knee hurt you? Does it hurt you, dear?'

'It does sometimes.' The child was shy of him, cold towards him.

'Well, dear, I'm sorry for that. I hope you try to bear it, and not trouble mother too much.'

There was no answer. He looked at the knee. It was red and stiff.

'Of course,' he said, 'I think we must have another doctor's opinion. And if we're going to have it, we had better have it at once. Egbert, do you think you might cycle in to Bingham for Doctor Wayne? I found him very satisfactory for Winnie's mother.'

‘I can go if you think it necessary,’ said Egbert.

‘Certainly I think it necessary. Even if there is nothing, we can have peace of mind. Certainly I think it necessary. I should like Doctor Wayne to come this evening if possible.’

So Egbert set off on his bicycle through the wind, like a boy sent on an errand, leaving his father-in-law a pillar of assurance, with Winifred.

Doctor Wayne came, and looked grave. Yes, the knee was certainly taking the wrong way. The child might be lame for life.

Up went the fire and fear and anger in every heart. Doctor Wayne came again the next day for a proper examination. And, yes, the knee had really taken bad ways. It should be X-rayed. It was very important.

Godfrey Marshall walked up and down the lane with the doctor, beside the standing motor-car: up and down, up and down in one of those consultations of which he had had so many in his life.

As a result he came indoors to Winifred.

‘Well, Winnie, dear, the best thing to do is to take Joyce up to London, to a nursing home where she can have proper treatment. Of course this knee has been allowed to go wrong. And apparently there is a risk that the child may even lose her leg. What do you think, dear? You agree to our taking her up to town and putting her under the best care?’

‘Oh, father, you know I would do anything on earth for her.’

‘I know you would, Winnie darling. The pity is that there has been this unfortunate delay already. I can’t think what Doctor Wing was doing. Apparently the child is in danger of losing her leg. Well then, if you will have everything ready, we will take her up to town tomorrow. I will order the large car from Denley’s to be here at ten. Egbert, will you take a telegram at once to Doctor Jackson? It is a small nursing home for children and for surgical cases, not far from Baker Street. I’m sure Joyce will be all right there.’

‘Oh, father, can’t I nurse her myself!’

‘Well, darling, if she is to have proper treatment, she had best be in a home. The X-ray treatment, and the electric treatment, and whatever is necessary.’

‘It will cost a great deal — ’ said Winifred.

‘We can’t think of cost, if the child’s leg is in danger — or even her life. No use speaking of cost,’ said the elder man impatiently.

And so it was. Poor Joyce, stretched out on a bed in the big closed motor-car — the mother sitting by her head, the grandfather in his short grey beard and a bowler hat, sitting by her feet, thick, and implacable in his responsibility — they rolled slowly away from Crockham, and from Egbert who stood there bareheaded and a little ignominious, left behind. He was to shut up the house and

bring the rest of the family back to town, by train, the next day.

Followed a dark and bitter time. The poor child. The poor, poor child, how she suffered, an agony and a long crucifixion in that nursing home. It was a bitter six weeks which changed the soul of Winifred for ever. As she sat by the bed of her poor, tortured little child, tortured with the agony of the knee, and the still worse agony of these diabolic, but perhaps necessary modern treatments, she felt her heart killed and going cold in her breast. Her little Joyce, her frail, brave, wonderful, little Joyce, frail and small and pale as a white flower! Ah, how had she, Winifred, dared to be so wicked, so wicked, so careless, so sensual.

‘Let my heart die! Let my woman’s heart of flesh die! Saviour, let my heart die. And save my child. Let my heart die from the world and from the flesh. Oh, destroy my heart that is so wayward. Let my heart of pride die. Let my heart die.’

So she prayed beside the bed of her child. And like the Mother with the seven swords in her breast, slowly her heart of pride and passion died in her breast, bleeding away. Slowly it died, bleeding away, and she turned to the Church for comfort, to Jesus, to the Mother of God, but most of all, to that great and enduring institution, the Roman Catholic Church. She withdrew into the shadow of the Church. She was a mother with three children. But in her soul she died, her heart of pride and passion and desire bled to death, her soul belonged to her church, her body belonged to her duty as a mother.

Her duty as a wife did not enter. As a wife she had no sense of duty: only a certain bitterness towards the man with whom she had known such sensuality and distraction. She was purely the Mater Dolorata. To the man she was closed as a tomb.

Egbert came to see his child. But Winifred seemed to be always seated there, like the tomb of his manhood and his fatherhood. Poor Winifred: she was still young, still strong and ruddy and beautiful like a ruddy hard flower of the field. Strange — her ruddy, healthy face, so sombre, and her strong, heavy, full-blooded body, so still. She, a nun! Never. And yet the gates of her heart and soul had shut in his face with a slow, resonant clang, shutting him out for ever. There was no need for her to go into a convent. Her will had done it.

And between this young mother and this young father lay the crippled child, like a bit of pale silk floss on the pillow, and a little white pain-quenched face. He could not bear it. He just could not bear it. He turned aside. There was nothing to do but to turn aside. He turned aside, and went hither and thither, desultory. He was still attractive and desirable. But there was a little frown between his brow as if he had been cleft there with a hatchet: cleft right in, for ever, and that was the stigma.

The child's leg was saved: but the knee was locked stiff. The fear now was lest the lower leg should wither, or cease to grow. There must be long-continued massage and treatment, daily treatment, even when the child left the nursing home. And the whole of the expense was borne by the grandfather.

Egbert now had no real home. Winifred with the children and nurse was tied to the little flat in London. He could not live there: he could not contain himself. The cottage was shut-up — or lent to friends. He went down sometimes to work in his garden and keep the place in order. Then with the empty house around him at night, all the empty rooms, he felt his heart go wicked. The sense of frustration and futility, like some slow, torpid snake, slowly bit right through his heart. Futility, futility: the horrible marsh-poison went through his veins and killed him.

As he worked in the garden in the silence of day he would listen for a sound. No sound. No sound of Winifred from the dark inside of the cottage: no sound of children's voices from the air, from the common, from the near distance. No sound, nothing but the old dark marsh-venomous atmosphere of the place. So he worked spasmodically through the day, and at night made a fire and cooked some food alone.

He was alone. He himself cleaned the cottage and made his bed. But his mending he did not do. His shirts were slit on the shoulders, when he had been working, and the white flesh showed through. He would feel the air and the spots of rain on his exposed flesh. And he would look again across the common, where the dark, tufted gorse was dying to seed, and the bits of cat-heather were coming pink in tufts, like a sprinkling of sacrificial blood.

His heart went back to the savage old spirit of the place: the desire for old gods, old, lost passions, the passion of the cold-blooded, darting snakes that hissed and shot away from him, the mystery of blood-sacrifices, all the lost, intense sensations of the primeval people of the place, whose passions seethed in the air still, from those long days before the Romans came. The seethe of a lost, dark passion in the air. The presence of unseen snakes.

A queer, baffled, half-wicked look came on his face. He could not stay long at the cottage. Suddenly he must swing on to his bicycle and go — anywhere. Anywhere, away from the place. He would stay a few days with his mother in the old home. His mother adored him and grieved as a mother would. But the little, baffled, half-wicked smile curled on his face, and he swung away from his mother's solicitude as from everything else.

Always moving on — from place to place, friend to friend: and always swinging away from sympathy. As soon as sympathy, like a soft hand, was reached out to touch him, away he swerved, instinctively, as a harmless snake

swerves and swerves and swerves away from an outstretched hand. Away he must go. And periodically he went back to Winifred.

He was terrible to her now, like a temptation. She had devoted herself to her children and her church. Joyce was once more on her feet; but, alas! lame, with iron supports to her leg, and a little crutch. It was strange how she had grown into a long, pallid, wild little thing. Strange that the pain had not made her soft and docile, but had brought out a wild, almost maenad temper in the child. She was seven, and long and white and thin, but by no means subdued. Her blonde hair was darkening. She still had long sufferings to face, and, in her own childish consciousness, the stigma of her lameness to bear.

And she bore it. An almost maenad courage seemed to possess her, as if she were a long, thin, young weapon of life. She acknowledged all her mother's care. She would stand by her mother for ever. But some of her father's fine-tempered desperation flashed in her.

When Egbert saw his little girl limping horribly — not only limping but lurching horribly in crippled, childish way, his heart again hardened with chagrin, like steel that is tempered again. There was a tacit understanding between him and his little girl: not what we would call love, but a weapon-like kinship. There was a tiny touch of irony in his manner towards her, contrasting sharply with Winifred's heavy, unleavened solicitude and care. The child flickered back to him with an answering little smile of irony and recklessness: an odd flippancy which made Winifred only the more sombre and earnest.

The Marshalls took endless thought and trouble for the child, searching out every means to save her limb and her active freedom. They spared no effort and no money, they spared no strength of will. With all their slow, heavy power of will they willed that Joyce should save her liberty of movement, should win back her wild, free grace. Even if it took a long time to recover, it should be recovered.

So the situation stood. And Joyce submitted, week after week, month after month to the tyranny and pain of the treatment. She acknowledged the honourable effort on her behalf. But her flamy reckless spirit was her father's. It was he who had all the glamour for her. He and she were like members of some forbidden secret society who know one another but may not recognize one another. Knowledge they had in common, the same secret of life, the father and the child. But the child stayed in the camp of her mother, honourably, and the father wandered outside like Ishmael, only coming sometimes to sit in the home for an hour or two, an evening or two beside the camp fire, like Ishmael, in a curious silence and tension, with the mocking answer of the desert speaking out of his silence, and annulling the whole convention of the domestic home.

His presence was almost an anguish to Winifred. She prayed against it. That little cleft between his brow, that flickering, wicked, little smile that seemed to haunt his face, and above all, the triumphant loneliness, the Ishmael quality. And then the erectness of his supple body, like a symbol. The very way he stood, so quiet, so insidious, like an erect, supple symbol of life, the living body, confronting her downcast soul, was torture to her. He was like a supple living idol moving before her eyes, and she felt if she watched him she was damned.

And he came and made himself at home in her little home. When he was there, moving in his own quiet way, she felt as if the whole great law of sacrifice, by which she had elected to live, were annulled. He annulled by his very presence the laws of her life. And what did he substitute? Ah, against that question she hardened herself in recoil.

It was awful to her to have to have him about — moving about in his shirt-sleeves, speaking in his tenor, throaty voice to the children. Annabel simply adored him, and he teased the little girl. The baby, Barbara, was not sure of him. She had been born a stranger to him. But even the nurse, when she saw his white shoulder of flesh through the slits of his torn shirt, thought it a shame.

Winifred felt it was only another weapon of his against her.

‘You have other shirts — why do you wear that old one that is all torn, Egbert?’ she said.

‘I may as well wear it out,’ he said subtly.

He knew she would not offer to mend it for him. She could not. And no, she would not. Had she not her own gods to honour? And could she betray them, submitting to his Baal and Ashtaroth? And it was terrible to her, his unsheathed presence, that seemed to annul her and her faith, like another revelation. Like a gleaming idol evoked against her, a vivid life-idol that might triumph.

He came and he went — and she persisted. And then the great war broke out. He was a man who could not go to the dogs. He could not dissipate himself. He was pure-bred in his Englishness, and even when he would have killed to be vicious, he could not.

So when the war broke out his whole instinct was against it: against war. He had not the faintest desire to overcome any foreigners or to help in their death. He had no conception of Imperial England, and Rule Britannia was just a joke to him. He was a pure-blooded Englishman, perfect in his race, and when he was truly himself he could no more have been aggressive on the score of his Englishness than a rose can be aggressive on the score of its rosiness.

No, he had no desire to defy Germany and to exalt England. The distinction between German and English was not for him the distinction between good and bad. It was the distinction between blue water-flowers and red or white bush-

blossoms: just difference. The difference between the wild boar and the wild bear. And a man was good or bad according to his nature, not according to his nationality.

Egbert was well-bred, and this was part of his natural understanding. It was merely unnatural to him to hate a nation en bloc. Certain individuals he disliked, and others he liked, and the mass he knew nothing about. Certain deeds he disliked, certain deeds seemed natural to him, and about most deeds he had no particular feeling.

He had, however, the one deepest pure-bred instinct. He recoiled inevitably from having his feelings dictated to him by the mass feeling. His feelings were his own, his understanding was his own, and he would never go back on either, willingly. Shall a man become inferior to his own true knowledge and self, just because the mob expects it of him?

What Egbert felt subtly and without question, his father-in-law felt also in a rough, more combative way. Different as the two men were, they were two real Englishmen, and their instincts were almost the same.

And Godfrey Marshall had the world to reckon with. There was German military aggression, and the English non-military idea of liberty and the 'conquests of peace' — meaning industrialism. Even if the choice between militarism and industrialism were a choice of evils, the elderly man asserted his choice of the latter, perforce. He whose soul was quick with the instinct of power.

Egbert just refused to reckon with the world. He just refused even to decide between German militarism and British industrialism. He chose neither. As for atrocities, he despised the people who committed them as inferior criminal types. There was nothing national about crime.

And yet, war! War! Just war! Not right or wrong, but just war itself. Should he join? Should he give himself over to war? The question was in his mind for some weeks. Not because he thought England was right and Germany wrong. Probably Germany was wrong, but he refused to make a choice. Not because he felt inspired. No. But just — war.

The deterrent was, the giving himself over into the power of other men, and into the power of the mob-spirit of a democratic army. Should he give himself over? Should he make over his own life and body to the control of something which he knew was inferior, in spirit, to his own self? Should he commit himself into the power of an inferior control? Should he? Should he betray himself?

He was going to put himself into the power of his inferiors, and he knew it. He was going to subjugate himself. He was going to be ordered about by petty canaille of non-commissioned officers — and even commissioned officers. He

who was born and bred free. Should he do it?

He went to his wife, to speak to her.

‘Shall I join up, Winifred?’

She was silent. Her instinct also was dead against it. And yet a certain profound resentment made her answer:

‘You have three children dependent on you. I don’t know whether you have thought of that.’

It was still only the third month of the war, and the old pre-war ideas were still alive.

‘Of course. But it won’t make much difference to them. I shall be earning a shilling a day, at least.’

‘You’d better speak to father, I think,’ she replied heavily.

Egbert went to his father-in-law. The elderly man’s heart was full of resentment.

‘I should say,’ he said rather sourly, ‘it is the best thing you could do.’

Egbert went and joined up immediately, as a private soldier. He was drafted into the light artillery.

Winifred now had a new duty towards him: the duty of a wife towards a husband who is himself performing his duty towards the world. She loved him still. She would always love him, as far as earthly love went. But it was duty she now lived by. When he came back to her in khaki, a soldier, she submitted to him as a wife. It was her duty. But to his passion she could never again fully submit. Something prevented her, for ever: even her own deepest choice.

He went back again to camp. It did not suit him to be a modern soldier. In the thick, gritty, hideous khaki his subtle physique was extinguished as if he had been killed. In the ugly intimacy of the camp his thoroughbred sensibilities were just degraded. But he had chosen, so he accepted. An ugly little look came on to his face, of a man who has accepted his own degradation.

In the early spring Winifred went down to Crockham to be there when primroses were out, and the tassels hanging on the hazel-bushes. She felt something like a reconciliation towards Egbert, now he was a prisoner in camp most of his days. Joyce was wild with delight at seeing the garden and the common again, after the eight or nine months of London and misery. She was still lame. She still had the irons up her leg. But she lurched about with a wild, crippled agility.

Egbert came for a week-end, in his gritty, thick, sand-paper khaki and puttees and the hideous cap. Nay, he looked terrible. And on his face a slightly impure look, a little sore on his lip, as if he had eaten too much or drunk too much or let his blood become a little unclean. He was almost uglily healthy, with the camp

life. It did not suit him.

Winifred waited for him in a little passion of duty and sacrifice, willing to serve the soldier, if not the man. It only made him feel a little more ugly inside. The week-end was torment to him: the memory of the camp, the knowledge of the life he led there; even the sight of his own legs in that abhorrent khaki. He felt as if the hideous cloth went into his blood and made it gritty and dirty. Then Winifred so ready to serve the soldier, when she repudiated the man. And this made the grit worse between his teeth. And the children running around playing and calling in the rather mincing fashion of children who have nurses and governesses and literature in the family. And Joyce so lame! It had all become unreal to him, after the camp. It only set his soul on edge. He left at dawn on the Monday morning, glad to get back to the realness and vulgarity of the camp.

Winifred would never meet him again at the cottage — only in London, where the world was with them. But sometimes he came alone to Crockham perhaps when friends were staying there. And then he would work awhile in his garden. This summer still it would flame with blue anchusas and big red poppies, the mulleins would sway their soft, downy erections in the air: he loved mulleins: and the honeysuckle would stream out scent like memory, when the owl was whooping. Then he sat by the fire with the friends and with Winifred's sisters, and they sang the folk-songs. He put on thin civilian clothes and his charm and his beauty and the supple dominancy of his body glowed out again. But Winifred was not there.

At the end of the summer he went to Flanders, into action. He seemed already to have gone out of life, beyond the pale of life. He hardly remembered his life any more, being like a man who is going to take a jump from a height, and is only looking to where he must land.

He was twice slightly wounded, in two months. But not enough to put him off duty for more than a day or two. They were retiring again, holding the enemy back. He was in the rear — three machine-guns. The country was all pleasant, war had not yet trampled it. Only the air seemed shattered, and the land awaiting death. It was a small, unimportant action in which he was engaged.

The guns were stationed on a little bushy hillock just outside a village. But occasionally, it was difficult to say from which direction, came the sharp crackle of rifle-fire, and beyond, the far-off thud of cannon. The afternoon was wintry and cold.

A lieutenant stood on a little iron platform at the top of the ladders, taking the sights and giving the aim, calling in a high, tense, mechanical voice. Out of the sky came the sharp cry of the directions, then the warning numbers, then 'Fire!' The shot went, the piston of the gun sprang back, there was a sharp explosion,

and a very faint film of smoke in the air. Then the other two guns fired, and there was a lull. The officer was uncertain of the enemy's position. The thick clump of horse-chestnut trees below was without change. Only in the far distance the sound of heavy firing continued, so far off as to give a sense of peace.

The gorse bushes on either hand were dark, but a few sparks of flowers showed yellow. He noticed them almost unconsciously as he waited, in the lull. He was in his shirt-sleeves, and the air came chill on his arms. Again his shirt was slit on the shoulders, and the flesh showed through. He was dirty and unkempt. But his face was quiet. So many things go out of consciousness before we come to the end of consciousness.

Before him, below, was the highroad, running between high banks of grass and gorse. He saw the whitish muddy tracks and deep scores in the road, where the part of the regiment had retired. Now all was still. Sounds that came, came from the outside. The place where he stood was still silent, chill, serene: the white church among the trees beyond seemed like a thought only.

He moved into a lightning-like mechanical response at the sharp cry from the officer overhead. Mechanism, the pure mechanical action of obedience at the guns. Pure mechanical action at the guns. It left the soul unburdened, brooding in dark nakedness. In the end, the soul is alone, brooding on the face of the uncreated flux, as a bird on a dark sea.

Nothing could be seen but the road, and a crucifix knocked slanting and the dark, autumnal fields and woods. There appeared three horsemen on a little eminence, very small, on the crest of a ploughed field. They were our own men. Of the enemy, nothing.

The lull continued. Then suddenly came sharp orders, and a new direction of the guns, and an intense, exciting activity. Yet at the centre the soul remained dark and aloof, alone.

But even so, it was the soul that heard the new sound: the new, deep 'papp!' of a gun that seemed to touch right upon the soul. He kept up the rapid activity at the machine-gun, sweating. But in his soul was the echo of the new, deep sound, deeper than life.

And in confirmation came the awful faint whistling of a shell, advancing almost suddenly into a piercing, tearing shriek that would tear through the membrane of life. He heard it in his ears, but he heard it also in his soul, in tension. There was relief when the thing had swung by and struck, away beyond. He heard the hoarseness of its explosion, and the voice of the soldier calling to the horses. But he did not turn round to look. He only noticed a twig of holly with red berries fall like a gift on to the road below.

Not this time, not this time. Whither thou goest I will go. Did he say it to the

shell, or to whom? Whither thou goest I will go. Then, the faint whistling of another shell dawned, and his blood became small and still to receive it. It drew nearer, like some horrible blast of wind; his blood lost consciousness. But in the second of suspension he saw the heavy shell swoop to earth, into the rocky bushes on the right, and earth and stones poured up into the sky. It was as if he heard no sound. The earth and stones and fragments of bush fell to earth again, and there was the same unchanging peace. The Germans had got the aim.

Would they move now? Would they retire? Yes. The officer was giving the last lightning-rapid orders to fire before withdrawing. A shell passed unnoticed in the rapidity of action. And then, into the silence, into the suspense where the soul brooded, finally crashed a noise and a darkness and a moment's flaming agony and horror. Ah, he had seen the dark bird flying towards him, flying home this time. In one instant life and eternity went up in a conflagration of agony, then there was a weight of darkness.

When faintly something began to struggle in the darkness, a consciousness of himself, he was aware of a great load and a clanging sound. To have known the moment of death! And to be forced, before dying, to review it. So, fate, even in death.

There was a resounding of pain. It seemed to sound from the outside of his consciousness: like a loud bell clanging very near. Yet he knew it was himself. He must associate himself with it. After a lapse and a new effort, he identified a pain in his head, a large pain that clanged and resounded. So far he could identify himself with himself. Then there was a lapse.

After a time he seemed to wake up again, and waking, to know that he was at the front, and that he was killed. He did not open his eyes. Light was not yet his. The clanging pain in his head rang out the rest of his consciousness. So he lapsed away from consciousness, in unutterable sick abandon of life.

Bit by bit, like a doom came the necessity to know. He was hit in the head. It was only a vague surmise at first. But in the swinging of the pendulum of pain, swinging ever nearer and nearer, to touch him into an agony of consciousness and a consciousness of agony, gradually the knowledge emerged — he must be hit in the head — hit on the left brow; if so, there would be blood — was there blood? — could he feel blood in his left eye? Then the clanging seemed to burst the membrane of his brain, like death-madness.

Was there blood on his face? Was hot blood flowing? Or was it dry blood congealing down his cheek? It took him hours even to ask the question: time being no more than an agony in darkness, without measurement.

A long time after he had opened his eyes he realized he was seeing something — something, something, but the effort to recall what was too great. No, no; no

recall!

Were they the stars in the dark sky? Was it possible it was stars in the dark sky? Stars? The world? Ah, no, he could not know it! Stars and the world were gone for him, he closed his eyes. No stars, no sky, no world. No, No! The thick darkness of blood alone. It should be one great lapse into the thick darkness of blood in agony.

Death, oh, death! The world all blood, and the blood all writhing with death. The soul like the tiniest little light out on a dark sea, the sea of blood. And the light guttering, beating, pulsing in a windless storm, wishing it could go out, yet unable.

There had been life. There had been Winifred and his children. But the frail death-agony effort to catch at straws of memory, straws of life from the past, brought on too great a nausea. No, No! No Winifred, no children. No world, no people. Better the agony of dissolution ahead than the nausea of the effort backwards. Better the terrible work should go forward, the dissolving into the black sea of death, in the extremity of dissolution, than that there should be any reaching back towards life. To forget! To forget! Utterly, utterly to forget, in the great forgetting of death. To break the core and the unit of life, and to lapse out on the great darkness. Only that. To break the clue, and mingle and commingle with the one darkness, without afterwards or forwards. Let the black sea of death itself solve the problem of futurity. Let the will of man break and give up.

What was that? A light! A terrible light! Was it figures? Was it legs of a horse colossal — colossal above him: huge, huge?

The Germans heard a slight noise, and started. Then, in the glare of a light-bomb, by the side of the heap of earth thrown up by the shell, they saw the dead face.

THE MORTAL COIL

I

She stood motionless in the middle of the room, something tense in her reckless bearing. Her gown of reddish stuff fell silkily about her feet; she looked tall and splendid in the candlelight. Her dark-blond hair was gathered loosely in a fold on top of her head, her young, blossom-fresh face was lifted. From her throat to her feet she was clothed in the elegantly-made dress of silky red stuff, the colour of red earth. She looked complete and lovely, only love could make her such a strange, complete blossom. Her cloak and hat were thrown across a table just in front of her.

Quite alone, abstracted, she stood there arrested in a conflict of emotions. Her hand, down against her skirt, worked irritably, the ball of the thumb rubbing, rubbing across the tips of the fingers. There was a slight tension between her lifted brows.

About her the room glowed softly, reflecting the candlelight from its whitewashed walls, and from the great, bowed, whitewashed ceiling. It was a large attic, with two windows, and the ceiling curving down on either side, so that both the far walls were low. Against one, on one side, was a single bed, opened for the night, the white over-bolster piled back. Not far from this was the iron stove. Near the window closest to the bed was a table with writing materials, and a handsome cactus-plant with clear scarlet blossoms threw its bizarre shadow on the wall. There was another table near the second window, and opposite was the door on which hung a military cloak. Along the far wall, were guns and fishing-tackle, and some clothes too, hung on pegs — all men's clothes, all military. It was evidently the room of a man, probably a young lieutenant.

The girl, in her pure red dress that fell about her feet, so that she looked a woman, not a girl, at last broke from her abstraction and went aimlessly to the writing-table. Her mouth was closed down stubbornly, perhaps in anger, perhaps in pain. She picked up a large seal made of agate, looked at the ingraven coat of arms, then stood rubbing her finger across the cut-out stone, time after time. At last she put the seal down, and looked at the other things — a beautiful old beer-mug used as a tobacco-jar, a silver box like an urn, old and of exquisite shape, a bowl of sealing wax. She fingered the pieces of wax. This, the dark-green, had

sealed her last letter. Ah, well! She carelessly turned over the blotting book, which again had his arms stamped on the cover. Then she went away to the window. There, in the window-recess, she stood and looked out. She opened the casement and took a deep breath of the cold night air. Ah, it was good! Far below was the street, a vague golden milky way beneath her, its tiny black figures moving and crossing and re-crossing with marionette, insect-like intentness. A small horse-car rumbled along the lines, so belittled, it was an absurdity. So much for the world! . . . he did not come.

She looked overhead. The stars were white and flashing, they looked nearer than the street, more kin to her, more real. She stood pressing her breast on her arms, her face lifted to the stars, in the long, anguished suspense of waiting. Noises came up small from the street, as from some insect-world. But the great stars overhead struck white and invincible, infallible. Her heart felt cold like the stars.

At last she started. There was a noisy knocking at the door, and a female voice calling:

“Anybody there?”

“Come in,” replied the girl.

She turned round, shrinking from this intrusion, unable to bear it, after the flashing stars.

There entered a thin, handsome dark girl dressed in an extravagantly-made gown of dark purple silk and dark blue velvet. She was followed by a small swarthy, inconspicuous lieutenant in pale-blue uniform.

“Ah *you!* . . . alone?” cried Teresa, the newcomer, advancing into the room. “Where’s the Fritz, then?”

The girl in red raised her shoulders in a shrug, and turned her face aside, but did not speak.

“Not here! You don’t know where he is? Ach, the dummy, the lout!” Teresa swung round on her companion.

“Where is he?” she demanded.

He also lifted his shoulders in a shrug.

“He said he was coming in half an hour,” the young lieutenant replied.

“Ha! — half an hour! Looks like it! How long is that ago — two hours?”

Again the young man only shrugged. He had beautiful black eye-lashes, and steady eyes. He stood rather deprecatingly, whilst his girl, golden like a young panther, hung over him.

“One knows where he is,” said Teresa, going and sitting on the opened bed. A dangerous contraction came between the brows of Marta, the girl in red, at this act.

“Wine, Women and Cards!” said Teresa, in her loud voice. “But they prefer the women on the cards.

‘My love he has four Queenies,
Four Queenies has my lo-o-ove,’“

she sang. Then she broke off, and turned to Podewils. “Was he winning when you left him, Karl?”

Again the young baron raised his shoulders.

“Tant pis que mal,” he replied, cryptically.

“Ah, *you!*” cried Teresa, “with your *tant pis que mal!* Are you tant pis que mal?” She laughed her deep, strange laugh. “Well,” she added, “he’ll be coming in with a fortune for you, Marta — ”

There was a vague, unhappy silence.

“I know his fortunes,” said Marta.

“Yes,” said Teresa, in sudden sober irony, “he’s a horse-shoe round your neck, is that young jockey. — But what are you going to do, Matzen dearest? You’re not going to wait for him any longer? — Don’t dream of it! The idea, waiting for that young gentleman as if you were married to him! — Put your hat on, dearest, and come along with us . . . Where are we going, Karl, you pillar of salt? — Eh? — Geier’s? — To Geier’s, Marta, my dear. Come, quick, up — you’ve been martyred enough, Marta, my martyr — haw! — haw!! — put your hat on. Up — away!”

Teresa sprang up like an explosion, anxious to be off.

“No, I’ll wait for him,” said Marta, sullenly.

“Don’t be such a fool!” cried Teresa, in her deep voice. “Wait for him! *I’d* give him wait for him. Catch this little bird waiting.” She lifted her hand and blew a little puff across the fingers. “Choo-fly!” she sang, as if a bird had just flown.

The young lieutenant stood silent with smiling dark eyes. Teresa was quick, and golden as a panther.

“No, but really, Marta, you’re not going to wait any more — really! It’s stupid for you to play Gretchen — your eyes are much too green. Put your hat on, there’s a darling.”

“No,” said Marta, her flower-like face strangely stubborn. “I’ll wait for him. He’ll have to come some time.”

There was a moment’s uneasy pause.

“Well,” said Teresa, holding her long shoulders for her cloak, “so long as you don’t wait as long as Lenora-fuhr-ums-Morgenrot — ! Adieu, my dear, God be

with you.”

The young lieutenant bowed a solicitous bow, and the two went out, leaving the girl in red once more alone.

She went to the writing table, and on a sheet of paper began writing her name in stiff Gothic characters, time after time:

Marta Hohenest

Marta Hohenest

Marta Hohenest.

The vague sounds from the street below continued. The wind was cold. She rose and shut the window. Then she sat down again.

At last the door opened, and a young officer entered. He was buttoned up in a dark-blue great-coat, with large silver buttons going down on either side of the breast. He entered quickly, glancing over the room, at Marta, as she sat with her back to him. She was marking with a pencil on paper. He closed the door. Then with fine beautiful movements he divested himself of his coat and went to hang it up. How well Marta knew the sound of his movements, the quick light step! But she continued mechanically making crosses on the paper, her head bent forward between the candles, so that her hair made fine threads and mist of light, very beautiful. He saw this, and it touched him. But he could not afford to be touched any further.

“You have been waiting?” he said formally. The insulting futile question! She made no sign, as if she had not heard. He was absorbed in the tragedy of himself, and hardly heeded her.

He was a slim, good-looking youth, clear-cut and delicate in mould. His features now were pale, there was something evasive in his dilated, vibrating eyes. He was barely conscious of the girl, intoxicated with his own desperation, that held him mindless and distant.

To her, the atmosphere of the room was almost unbreathable, since he had come in. She felt terribly bound, walled up. She rose with a sudden movement that tore his nerves. She looked to him tall and bright and dangerous, as she faced round on him.

“Have you come back with a fortune?” she cried, in mockery, her eyes full of dangerous light.

He was unfastening his belt, to change his tunic. She watched him up and down, all the time. He could not answer, his lips seemed dumb. Besides, silence was his strength.

“Have you come back with a fortune?” she repeated, in her strong, clear voice of mockery.

“No,” he said, suddenly turning. “Let it please you that — that I’ve come back

at all.”

He spoke desperately, and tailed off into silence. He was a man doomed. She looked at him: he was insignificant in his doom. She turned in ridicule. And yet she was afraid; she loved him.

He had stood long enough exposed, in his helplessness. With difficulty he took a few steps, went and sat down at the writing-table. He looked to her like a dog with its tail between its legs.

He saw the paper, where her name was repeatedly written. She must find great satisfaction in her own name, he thought vaguely. Then he picked up the seal and kept twisting it round in his fingers, doing some little trick. And continually the seal fell on to the table with a sudden rattle that made Marta stiffen cruelly. He was quite oblivious of her.

She stood watching as he sat bent forward in his stupefaction. The fine cloth of his uniform showed the moulding of his back. And something tortured her as she saw him, till she could hardly bear it: the desire of his finely-shaped body, the stupefaction and the abjectness of him now, his immersion in the tragedy of himself, his being unaware of her. All her will seemed to grip him, to bruise some manly nonchalance and attention out of him.

“I suppose you’re in a fury with me, for being late?” he said, with impotent irony in his voice. Her fury over trifles, when he was lost in calamity! How great was his real misery, how trivial her small offendedness!

Something in his tone burned her, and made her soul go cold.

“I’m not exactly pleased,” she said coldly, turning away to a window.

Still he sat bent over the table, twisting something with his fingers. She glanced round on him. How nervy he was! He had beautiful hands, and the big topaz signet-ring on his finger made yellow lights. Ah, if only his hands were really dare-devil and reckless! They always seemed so guilty, so cowardly.

“I’m done for now,” he said suddenly, as if to himself, tilting back his chair a little. In all his physical movement he was so fine and poised, so sensitive! Oh, and it attracted her so much!

“Why?” she said, carelessly.

An anger burned in him. She was so flippant. If he were going to be shot, she would not be moved more than about half a pound of sweets.

“Why!” he repeated laconically. “The same unimportant reason as ever.”

“Debts?” she cried, in contempt.

“Exactly.”

Her soul burned in anger.

“What have you done now? — lost more money?”

“Three thousand marks.”

She was silent in deep wrath.

“More fool you!” she said. Then, in her anger, she was silent for some minutes. “And so you’re done for, for three thousand marks?” she exclaimed, jeering at him. “You go pretty cheap.”

“Three thousand — and the rest,” he said, keeping up a manly *sang froid*.”

“And the rest!” she repeated in contempt. “And for three thousand — and the rest, your life is over!”

“My career,” he corrected her.

“Oh,” she mocked, “only your career! I thought it was a matter of life and death. Only your career? Oh, only that!”

His eyes grew furious under her mockery.

“My career *is* my life,” he said.

“Oh, is it! — You’re not a *man* then, you are only a career?”

“I am a gentleman.”

“Oh, are you! How amusing! How very amusing, to be a gentleman, and not a man! — I suppose that’s what it means, to be a gentleman, to have no guts outside your career?”

“Outside my honour — none.”

“And might I ask what *is* your honour?” She spoke in extreme irony.

“Yes, you may ask,” he replied coolly. “But if you don’t know without being told, I’m afraid I could never explain it.”

“Oh, you couldn’t! No, I believe you — you are incapable of explaining it, it wouldn’t bear explaining.” There was a long, tense pause. “So you’ve made too many debts, and you’re afraid they’ll kick you out of the army, therefore your honour is gone, is it? — And what then — what after that?”

She spoke in extreme irony. He winced again at her phrase “kick you out of the army”. But he tilted his chair back with assumed nonchalance.

“I’ve made too many debts, and I *know* they’ll kick me out of the army,” he repeated, thrusting the thorn right home to the quick. “After that — I can shoot myself. Or I might even be a waiter in a restaurant — or possibly a clerk, with twenty-five shillings a week.”

“Really! — All those alternatives! — Well, why not, why not be a waiter in the Germania? It might be awfully jolly.”

“Why not?” he repeated ironically. “Because it wouldn’t become me.”

She looked at him, at his aristocratic fineness of physique, his extreme physical sensitiveness. And all her German worship for his old, proud family rose up in her. No, he could not be a waiter in the Germania: she could not bear it. He was too refined and beautiful a thing.

“Ha!” she cried suddenly. “It wouldn’t come to that, either. If they kick you

out of the army, you'll find somebody to get round — you're like a cat, you'll land on your feet.”

But this was just what he was not. He was not like a cat. His self-mistrust was too deep. Ultimately he had no belief in himself, as a separate isolated being. He knew he was sufficiently clever, an aristocrat, good-looking, the sensitive superior of most men. The trouble was, that apart from the social fabric he belonged to, he felt himself nothing, a cipher. He bitterly envied the common working-men for a certain manly aplomb, a grounded, almost stupid self-confidence he saw in them. Himself — he could lead such men through the gates of hell — for what did he care about danger or hurt to himself, whilst he was leading? But — cut him off from all this, and what was he? A palpitating rag of meaningless human life.

But she, coming from the people, could not fully understand. And it was best to leave her in the dark. The free indomitable self-sufficient being which a man must be in his relation to a woman who loves him — this he could pretend. But he knew he was not it. He knew that the world of man from which he took his value was his mistress beyond any woman. He wished, secretly, cravingly, almost cravenly, in his heart, it was not so. But so it was.

Therefore, he heard her phrase “you're like a cat,” with some bitter envy.

“Whom shall I get round? — some woman, who will marry me?” he said.

This was a way out. And it was almost the inevitable thing, for him. But he felt it the last ruin of his manhood, even he.

The speech hurt her mortally, worse than death. She would rather he died, because then her own love would not turn to ash.

“Get married, then, if you want to,” she said, in a small broken voice.

“Naturally,” he said.

There was a long silence, a foretaste of barren hopelessness.

“Why is it so terrible to you,” she asked at length, “to come out of the army and trust to your own resources? Other men are strong enough.”

“Other men are not me,” he said.

Why would she torture him? She seemed to enjoy torturing him. The thought of his expulsion from the army was an agony to him, really worse than death. He saw himself in the despicable civilian clothes, engaged in some menial occupation. And he could not bear it. It was too heavy a cross.

Who was she to talk? She was herself, an actress, daughter of a tradesman. He was himself. How should one of them speak for the other? It was impossible. He loved her. He loved her far better than men usually loved their mistresses. He really cared. — And he was strangely proud of his love for her, as if it were a distinction to him . . . But there was a limit to her understanding. There was a

point beyond which she had nothing to do with him, and she had better leave him alone. Here in this crisis, which was *his* crisis, his downfall, she should not presume to talk, because she did not understand. — But she loved to torture him, that was the truth.

“Why should it hurt you to work?” she reiterated.

He lifted his face, white and tortured, his grey eyes flaring with fear and hate.

“Work!” he cried. “What do you think I am worth? — Twenty-five shillings a week, if I am lucky.”

His evident anguish penetrated her. She sat dumbfounded, looking at him with wide eyes. He was white with misery and fear; his hand, that lay loose on the table, was abandoned in nervous ignominy. Her mind filled with wonder, and with deep, cold dread. Did he really care so much? But did it *really* matter so much to him? When he said he was worth twenty-five shillings a week, he was like a man whose soul is pierced. He sat there, annihilated. She looked for him, and he was nothing then. She looked for the man, the free being that loved her. And he was not, he was gone, this blank figure remained. Something with a blanched face sat there in the chair, staring at nothing.

His amazement deepened with intolerable dread. It was as if the world had fallen away into chaos. Nothing remained. She seemed to grasp the air for foothold.

He sat staring in front of him, a dull numbness settled on his brain. He was watching the flame of the candle. And, in his detachment, he realized the flame was a swiftly travelling flood, flowing swiftly from the source of the wick through a white surge and on into the darkness above. It was like a fountain suddenly foaming out, then running on dark and smooth. Could one dam the flood? He took a piece of paper, and cut off the flame for a second.

The girl in red started at the pulse of the light. She seemed to come to, from some trance. She saw his face, clear now, attentive, abstract, absolved. He was quite absolved from his temporal self.

“It isn’t true,” she said, “is it? It’s not so tragic, really? — It’s only your pride is hurt, your silly little pride?” She was rather pleading.

He looked at her with clear steady eyes.

“My pride!” he said. “And isn’t my pride *me*? What am I without my pride?”

“You are *yourself*,” she said. “If they take your uniform off you, and turn you naked into the street, you are still *yourself*.”

His eyes grew hot. Then he cried:

“What does it mean, *myself*! It means I put on ready-made civilian clothes and do some dirty drudging elsewhere: that is what *myself* amounts to.”

She knitted her brows.

“But what you are *to me* — that naked self which you are to me — that is something, isn’t it? — everything,” she said.

“What is it, if it means nothing?” he said: “What is it, more than a pound of chocolate *dragées*? — It stands for nothing — unless as you say, a petty clerkship, at twenty-five shillings a week.”

These were all wounds to her, very deep. She looked in wonder for a few moments.

“And what does it stand for now?” she said. “A magnificent second-lieutenant!”

He made a gesture of dismissal with his hand.

She looked at him from under lowered brows.

“And our love!” she said. “It means nothing to you, nothing at all?”

“To me as a menial clerk, what does it mean? What does love mean! Does it mean that a man shall be no more than a dirty rag in the world? — What worth do you think I have in love, if in life I am a wretched inky subordinate clerk?”

“What does it matter?”

“It matters everything.”

There was silence for a time, then the anger flashed up in her.

“It doesn’t matter to you what *I* feel, whether *I* care or not,” she cried, her voice rising. “They’ll take his little uniform with buttons off him, and he’ll have to be a common little civilian, so all he can do is to shoot himself! — It doesn’t matter that I’m there — ”

He sat stubborn and silent. He thought her vulgar. And her raving did not alter the situation in the least.

“Don’t you see what value you put on *me*, you clever little man?” she cried in fury. “I’ve loved you, loved you with all my soul, for two years — and you’ve lied, and said you loved me. And now, what do I get? He’ll shoot himself, because his tuppenny vanity is wounded. — Ah, *fool* — !”

He lifted his head and looked at her. His face was fixed and superior.

“All of which,” he said, “leaves the facts of the case quite untouched!”

She hated his cool little speeches.

“Then shoot yourself,” she cried, “and you’ll be worth *less* than twenty-five shillings a week!”

There was a fatal silence.

“*Then* there’ll be no question of worth,” he said.

“Ha!” she ejaculated in scorn.

She had finished. She had no more to say. At length, after they had both sat motionless and silent, separate, for some time, she rose and went across to her hat and cloak. He shrank in apprehension. Now, he could not bear her to go. He

shrank as if he were being whipped. She put her hat on, roughly, then swung her warm plaid cloak over her shoulders. Her hat was of black glossy silk, with a sheeny heap of cocks-feathers, her plaid cloak was dark green and blue, it swung open above her clear harsh-red dress. How beautiful she was, like a fiery Madonna!

“Good-bye,” she said, in her voice of mockery. “I’m going now.”

He sat motionless, as if loaded with fetters. She hesitated, then moved towards the door.

Suddenly, with a spring like a cat, he was confronting her, his back to the door. His eyes were full and dilated, like a cat’s, his face seemed to gleam at her. She quivered, as some subtle fluid ran through her nerves.

“Let me go,” she said dumbly. “I’ve had enough.” His eyes, with a wide, dark electric pupil, like a cat’s, only watched her objectively. And again a wave of female submissiveness went over her.

“I want to go,” she pleaded. “You know it’s no good. — You know this is no good.”

She stood humbly before him. A flexible little grin quivered round his mouth.

“You know you don’t want me,” she persisted. “You know you don’t really want me. — You only do this to show your power over me — which is a mean trick.”

But he did not answer, only his eyes narrowed in a sensual, cruel smile. She shrank, afraid, and yet she was fascinated.

“You won’t go yet,” he said.

She tried in vain to rouse her real opposition.

“I shall call out,” she threatened. “I shall shame you before people.”

His eyes narrowed again in the smile of vindictive, mocking indifference.

“Call then,” he said.

And at the sound of his still, cat-like voice, an intoxication ran over her veins.

“I *will*,” she said, looking defiantly into his eyes. But the smile in the dark, full, dilated pupils made her waver into submission again.

“Won’t you let me go?” she pleaded sullenly.

Now the smile went openly over his face.

“Take your hat off,” he said.

And with quick, light fingers he reached up and drew out the pins of her hat, unfastened the clasp of her cloak, and laid her things aside.

She sat down in a chair. Then she rose again, and went to the window. In the street below, the tiny figures were moving just the same. She opened the window, and leaned out, and wept.

He looked round at her in irritation as she stood in her long, clear-red dress in

the window-recess, leaning out. She was exasperating.

“You will be cold,” he said.

She paid no heed. He guessed, by some tension in her attitude, that she was crying. It irritated him exceedingly, like a madness. After a few minutes of suspense, he went across to her, and took her by the arm. His hand was subtle, soft in its touch, and yet rather cruel than gentle.

“Come away,” he said. “Don’t stand there in the air — come away.”

He drew her slowly away to the bed, she sat down, and he beside her.

“What are you crying for?” he said in his strange, penetrating voice, that had a vibration of exultancy in it. But her tears only ran faster.

He kissed her face, that was soft, and fresh, and yet warm, wet with tears. He kissed her again, and again, in pleasure of the soft, wet saltiness of her. She turned aside and wiped her face with her handkerchief, and blew her nose. He was disappointed — yet the way she blew her nose pleased him.

Suddenly she slid away to the floor, and hid her face in the side of the bed, weeping and crying loudly:

“You don’t love me — Oh, you don’t love me — I thought you did, and you let me go on thinking it — but you don’t, no, you don’t, and I can’t bear it. — Oh, I can’t bear it.”

He sat and listened to the strange, animal sound of her crying. His eyes flickered with exultancy, his body seemed full and surcharged with power. But his brows were knitted in tension. He laid his hand softly on her head, softly touched her face, which was buried against the bed.

She suddenly rubbed her face against the sheets, and looked up once more.

“You’ve deceived me,” she said, as she sat beside him.

“Have I? Then I’ve deceived myself.” His body felt so charged with male vigour, he was almost laughing in his strength.

“Yes,” she said enigmatically, fatally. She seemed absorbed in her thoughts. Then her face quivered again.

“And I loved you so much,” she faltered, the tears rising. There was a clangour of delight in his heart.

“I love *you*,” he said softly, softly touching her, softly kissing her, in a sort of subtle, restrained ecstasy.

She shook her head stubbornly. She tried to draw away. Then she did break away, and turned to look at him, in fear and doubt. The little, fascinating, fiendish lights were hovering in his eyes like laughter.

“Don’t hurt me so much,” she faltered, in a last protest.

A faint smile came on his face. He took her face between his hands and covered it with soft, blinding kisses, like a soft, narcotic rain. He felt himself

such an unbreakable fountain-head of powerful blood. He was trembling finely in all his limbs, with mastery.

When she lifted her face and opened her eyes, her face was wet, and her greenish-golden eyes were shining, it was like sudden sunshine in wet foliage. She smiled at him like a child of knowledge, through the tears, and softly, infinitely softly he dried her tears with his mouth and his soft young moustache.

“You’d never shoot yourself, because you’re mine, aren’t you!” she said, knowing the fine quivering of his body, in mastery.

“Yes,” he said.

“Quite mine?” she said, her voice rising in ecstasy.

“Yes.”

“Nobody else but mine — nothing at all — ?”

“Nothing at all,” he re-echoed.

“But me?” came her last words of ecstasy.

“Yes.”

And she seemed to be released free into the infinite of ecstasy.

II

They slept in fulfilment through the long night. But then strange dreams began to fill them both, strange dreams that were neither waking nor sleeping; — only, in curious weariness, through her dreams, she heard at last a continual low rapping. She awoke with difficulty. The rapping began again — she started violently. It was at the door — it would be the orderly rapping for Friedeburg. Everything seemed wild and unearthly. She put her hand on the shoulder of the sleeping man, and pulled him roughly, waited a moment, then pushed him, almost violently, to awake him. He woke with a sense of resentment at her violent handling. Then he heard the knocking of the orderly. He gathered his senses.

"Yes, Heinrich!" he said.

Strange, the sound of a voice! It seemed a far-off tearing sound. Then came the muffled voice of the servant.

"Half past four, Sir."

"Right!" said Friedeburg, and automatically he got up and made a light. She was suddenly as wide awake as if it were daylight. But it was a strange, false day, like a delirium. She saw him put down the match, she saw him moving about, rapidly dressing. And the movement in the room was a trouble to her. He himself was vague and unreal, a thing seen but not comprehended. She watched all the acts of his toilet, saw all the motions, but never saw him. There was only a disturbance about her, which fretted her, she was not aware of any presence. Her mind, in its strange, hectic clarity, wanted to consider things in absolute detachment. For instance, she wanted to consider the cactus plant. It was a curious object with pure scarlet blossoms. Now, how did these scarlet blossoms come to pass, upon that earthly-looking unliving creature? Scarlet blossoms! How wonderful they were! What were they, then, how could one lay hold on their being? Her mind turned to him. Him, too, how could one lay hold on him, to have him? Where was he, what was he? She seemed to grasp at the air.

He was dipping his face in the cold water — the slight shock was good for him. He felt as if someone had stolen away his being in the night, he was moving about a light, quick shell, with all his meaning absent. His body was quick and active, but all his deep understanding, his soul was gone. He tried to rub it back into his face. He was quite dim, as if his spirit had left his body.

"Come and kiss me," sounded the voice from the bed. He went over to her automatically. She put her arms around him and looked into his face with her

clear brilliant, grey-green eyes, as if she too were looking for his soul.

"How are you?" came her meaningless words.

"All right."

"Kiss me."

He bent down and kissed her.

And still her clear, rather frightening eyes seemed to be searching for him inside himself. He was like a bird transfixed by her pellucid, grey-green, wonderful eyes. She put her hands into his soft, thick, fine hair, and gripped her hands full of his hair. He wondered with fear at her sudden painful clutching.

"I shall be late," he said.

"Yes," she answered. And she let him go.

As he fastened his tunic he glanced out of the window. It was still night: a night that must have lasted since eternity. There was a moon in the sky. In the streets below the yellow street-lamps burned small at intervals. This was the night of eternity.

There came a knock at the door, and the orderly's voice.

"Coffee, Sir."

"Leave it there."

They heard the faint jingle of the tray as it was set down outside.

Friedeburg sat down to put on his boots. Then, with a man's solid tread, he went and took in the tray. He felt properly heavy and secure now in his accoutrement. But he was always aware of her two wonderful, clear, unfolded eyes, looking on his heart, out of her uncanny silence.

There was a strong smell of coffee in the room.

"Have some coffee?" His eyes could not meet hers.

"No, thank you."

"Just a drop?"

"No, thank you."

Her voice sounded quite gay. She watched him dipping his bread in the coffee and eating quickly, absently. He did not know what he was doing, and yet the dipped bread and hot coffee gave him pleasure. He gulped down the remainder of his drink, and rose to his feet.

"I must go," he said.

There was a curious, poignant smile in her eyes. Her eyes drew him to her. How beautiful she was, and dazzling, and frightening, with this look of brilliant tenderness seeming to glitter from her face. She drew his head down to her bosom, and held it fast prisoner there, murmuring with tender, triumphant delight: "Dear! Dear!"

At last she let him lift his head, and he looked into her eyes, that seemed to

concentrate in a dancing, golden point of vision in which he felt himself perish.

"Dear!" she murmured. "You love me, don't you?"

"Yes," he said mechanically.

The golden point of vision seemed to leap to him from her eyes, demanding something. He sat slackly, as if spellbound. Her hand pushed him a little.

"Mustn't you go?" she said.

He rose. She watched him fastening the belt round his body, that seemed soft under the fine clothes. He pulled on his great-coat, and put on his peaked cap. He was again a young officer.

But he had forgotten his watch. It lay on the table near the bed. She watched him slinging it on his chain. He looked down at her. How beautiful she was, with her luminous face and her fine, stray hair! But he felt far away.

"Anything I can do for you?" he asked.

"No, thank you — I'll sleep," she replied, smiling. And the strange golden spark danced on her eyes again, again he felt as if his heart were gone, destroyed out of him. There was a fine pathos too in her vivid, dangerous face.

He kissed her for the last time, saying:

"I'll blow the candles out, then?"

"Yes, my love — and I'll sleep."

"Yes — sleep as long as you like."

The golden spark of her eyes seemed to dance on him like a destruction, she was beautiful, and pathetic. He touched her tenderly with his finger-tips, then suddenly blew out the candles, and walked across in the faint moonlight to the door.

He was gone. She heard his boots click on the stone stairs — she heard the far below tread of his feet on the pavement. Then he was gone. She lay quite still, in a swoon of deathly peace. She never wanted to move any more. It was finished. She lay quite still, utterly, utterly abandoned.

But again she was disturbed. There was a little tap at the door, then Teresa's voice saying, with a shuddering sound because of the cold:

"Ugh! — I'm coming to you, Marta my dear. I can't stand being left alone."

"I'll make a light," said Marta, sitting up and reaching for the candle. "Lock the door, will you, Resie, and then nobody can bother us."

She saw Teresa, loosely wrapped in her cloak, two thick ropes of hair hanging untidily. Teresa looked voluptuously sleepy and easy, like a cat running home to the warmth.

"Ugh!" she said, "it's cold!"

And she ran to the stove. Marta heard the chink of the little shovel, a stirring of coals, then a clink of the iron door. Then Teresa came running to the bed, with a

shuddering little run, she puffed out the light and slid in beside her friend.

"So cold!" she said, with a delicious shudder at the warmth. Marta made place for her, and they settled down.

"Aren't you glad you're not them?" said Resie, with a little shudder at the thought. "Ugh! — poor devils!"

"I am," said Marta.

"Ah, sleep — sleep, how lovely!" said Teresa, with deep content. "Ah, it's so good!"

"Yes," said Marta.

"Good morning, good night, my dear," said Teresa, already sleepily.

"Good night," responded Marta.

Her mind flickered a little. Then she sank unconsciously to sleep. The room was silent.

Outside, the setting moon made peaked shadows of the high-roofed houses; from twin towers that stood like two dark, companion giants in the sky, the hour trembled out over the sleeping town. But the footsteps of hastening officers and cowering soldiers rang on the frozen pavements. Then a lantern appeared in the distance, accompanied by the rattle of a bullock wagon. By the light of the lantern on the wagon-pole could be seen the delicately moving feet and the pale, swinging dewlaps of the oxen. They drew slowly on, with a rattle of heavy wheels, the banded heads of the slow beasts swung rhythmically.

Ah, this was life! How sweet, sweet each tiny incident was! How sweet to Friedeburg, to give his orders ringingly on the frosty air, to see his men like bears shambling and shuffling into their places, with little dancing movements of uncouth playfulness and resentment, because of the pure cold.

Sweet, sweet it was to be marching beside his men, sweet to hear the great thresh-thresh of their heavy boots in the unblemished silence, sweet to feel the immense mass of living bodies co-ordinated into oneness near him, to catch the hot waft of their closeness, their breathing. Friedeburg was like a man condemned to die, catching at every impression as at an inestimable treasure.

Sweet it was to pass through the gates of the town, the scanty, loose suburb, into the open darkness and space of the country. This was almost best of all. It was like emerging in the open plains of eternal freedom.

They saw a dark figure hobbling along under the dark side of a shed. As they passed, through the open door of the shed, in the golden light were seen the low rafters, the pale, silken sides of the cows, evanescent. And a woman with a red kerchief bound round her head lifted her face from the flank of the beast she was milking, to look at the soldiers threshing like multitudes of heavy ghosts down the darkness. Some of the men called to her, cheerfully, impudently. Ah, the

miraculous beauty and sweetness of the merest trifles like these!

They tramped on down a frozen, rutty road, under lines of bare trees. Beautiful trees! Beautiful frozen ruts in the road! Ah, even, in one of the ruts there was a silver of ice and of moon-glimpse. He heard ice tinkle as a passing soldier purposely put his toe in it. What a sweet noise!

But there was a vague uneasiness. He heard the men arguing as to whether dawn were coming. There was the silver moon, still riding on the high seas of the sky. A lovely thing she was, a jewel! But was there any blemish of day? He shrank a little from the rawness of the day to come. This night of morning was so rare and free.

Yes, he was sure. He saw a colourless paleness on the horizon. The earth began to look hard, like a great, concrete shadow. He shrank into himself. Glancing at the ranks of his men, he could see them like a company of rhythmic ghosts. The pallor was actually reflected on their livid faces. This was the coming day. It frightened him.

The dawn came. He saw the rosiness of it hang trembling with light, above the east. Then a strange glamour of scarlet passed over the land. At his feet, glints of ice flashed scarlet, even the hands of the men were red as they swung, sinister, heavy, reddened.

The sun surged up, her rim appeared, swimming with fire, hesitating, surging up. Suddenly there were shadows from trees and ruts, and grass was hoar and ice was gold against the ebony shadow. The faces of the men were alight, kindled with life. Ah, it was magical, it was all too marvellous! If only it were always like this!

When they stopped at the inn for breakfast, at nine o'clock, the smell of the inn went raw and ugly to his heart: beer and yesterday's tobacco!

He went to the door to look at the men biting huge bites from their hunks of grey bread, or cutting off pieces with their clasp-knives. This made him still happy. Women were going to the fountain for water, the soldiers were chaffing them coarsely. He liked all this.

But the magic was going, inevitably, the crystal delight was thawing to desolation in his heart, his heart was cold, cold mud. Ah, it was awful. His face contracted, he almost wept with cold, stark despair.

Still he had the work, the day's hard activity with the men. Whilst this lasted, he could live. But when this was over, and he had to face the horror of his own cold-thawing mud of despair: ah, it was not to be thought of. Still, he was happy at work with the men: the wild desolate place, the hard activity of mock warfare. Would to God it were real: war, with the prize of death!

By afternoon the sky had gone one dead, livid level of grey. It seemed low

down, and oppressive. He was tired, the men were tired, and this let the heavy cold soak in to them like despair. Life could not keep it out.

And now, when his heart was so heavy it could sink no more, he must glance at his own situation again. He must remember what a fool he was, his new debts like half thawed mud in his heart. He knew, with the cold misery of hopelessness, that he would be turned out of the army. What then? — what then but death? After all, death was the solution for him. Let it be so.

They marched on and on, stumbling with fatigue under a great leaden sky, over a frozen dead country. The men were silent with weariness, the heavy motion of their marching was like an oppression. Friedeburg was tired too, and deadened, as his face was deadened by the cold air. He did not think any more; the misery of his soul was like a frost inside him.

He heard someone say it was going to snow. But the words had no meaning for him. He marched as a clock ticks, with the same monotony, everything numb and cold-soddened.

They were drawing near to the town. In the gloom of the afternoon he felt it ahead, as unbearable oppression on him. Ah the hideous suburb! What was his life, how did it come to pass that life was lived in a formless, hideous grey structure of hell! What did it all mean? Pale, sulphur-yellow lights spotted the livid air, and people, like soddened shadows, passed in front of the shops that were lit up ghastly in the early twilight. Out of the colourless space, crumbs of snow came and bounced animatedly off the breast of his coat.

At length he turned away home, to his room, to change and get warm and renewed, for he felt as cold-soddened as the grey, cold, heavy bread which felt hostile in the mouths of the soldiers. His life was to him like this dead, cold bread in his mouth.

As he neared his own house, the snow was peppering thinly down. He became aware of some unusual stir about the house-door. He looked — a strange, closed-in wagon, people, police. The sword of Damocles that had hung over his heart, fell. O God, a new shame, some new shame, some new torture! His body moved on. So it would move on through misery upon misery, as is our fate. There was no emergence, only this progress through misery unto misery, till the end. Strange, that human life was so tenacious! Strange, that men had made of life a long, slow process of torture to the soul. Strange, that it was no other than this! Strange, that but for man, this misery would not exist. For it was not God's misery, but the misery of the world of man.

He saw two officials push something white and heavy into the cart, shut the doors behind with a bang, turn the silver handle, and run round to the front of the wagon. It moved off. But still most of the people lingered. Friedeburg drifted

near in that inevitable motion which carries us through all our shame and torture. He knew the people talked about him. He went up the steps and into the square hall.

There stood a police-officer, with a note-book in his hand, talking to Herr Kapell, the housemaster. As Friedeburg entered through the swing door, the housemaster, whose brow was wrinkled in anxiety and perturbation, made a gesture with his hand, as if to point out a criminal.

"Ah! — the Herr Baron von Friedeburg!" he said, in self-exculpation.

The police officer turned, saluted politely, and said, with the polite, intolerable *suffisance* of officialdom:

"Good evening! Trouble here!"

"Yes?" said Friedeburg.

He was so frightened, his sensitive constitution was so lacerated, that something broke in him, he was a subservient, murmuring ruin.

"Two young ladies found dead in your room," said the police-official, making an official statement. But under his cold impartiality of officialdom, what obscene unction! Ah, what obscene exposures now!

"Dead!" ejaculated Friedeburg, with the wide eyes of a child. He became quite child-like, the official had him completely in his power. He could torture him as much as he liked.

"Yes." He referred to his note-book. "Asphyxiated by fumes from the stove."

Friedeburg could only stand wide-eyed and meaningless.

"Please — will you go upstairs?"

The police-official marshalled Friedeburg in front of himself. The youth slowly mounted the stairs, feeling as if transfixed through the base of the spine, as if he would lose the use of his legs. The official followed close on his heels.

They reached the bedroom. The policeman unlocked the door. The housekeeper followed with a lamp. Then the official examination began.

"A young lady slept here last night?"

"Yes."

"Name, please?"

"Marta Hohenest."

"H-o-h-e-n-e-s-t," spelled the official. " — And address?"

Friedeburg continued to answer. This was the end of him. The quick of him was pierced and killed. The living dead answered the living dead in obscene antiphony. Question and answer continued, the note-book worked as the hand of the old dead wrote in it the replies of the young who was dead.

The room was unchanged from the night before. There was her heap of clothing, the lustrous, pure-red dress lying soft where she had carelessly dropped

it. Even, on the edge of the chair-back, her crimson silk garters hung looped.

But do not look, do not see. It is the business of the dead to bury their dead. Let the young dead bury their own dead, as the old dead have buried theirs. How can the dead remember, they being dead? Only the living can remember, and are at peace with their living who have passed away.

SAMSON AND DELILAH

A man got down from the motor-omnibus that runs from Penzance to St Just-in-Penwith, and turned northwards, uphill towards the Polestar. It was only half past six, but already the stars were out, a cold little wind was blowing from the sea, and the crystalline, three-pulse flash of the lighthouse below the cliffs beat rhythmically in the first darkness.

The man was alone. He went his way unhesitating, but looked from side to side with cautious curiosity. Tall, ruined power-houses of tin-mines loomed in the darkness from time to time, like remnants of some by-gone civilization. The lights of many miners' cottages scattered on the hilly darkness twinkled desolate in their disorder, yet twinkled with the lonely homeliness of the Celtic night.

He tramped steadily on, always watchful with curiosity. He was a tall, well-built man, apparently in the prime of life. His shoulders were square and rather stiff, he leaned forwards a little as he went, from the hips, like a man who must stoop to lower his height. But he did not stoop his shoulders: he bent his straight back from the hips.

Now and again short, stump, thick-legged figures of Cornish miners passed him, and he invariably gave them goodnight, as if to insist that he was on his own ground. He spoke with the west-Cornish intonation. And as he went along the dreary road, looking now at the lights of the dwellings on land, now at the lights away to sea, vessels veering round in sight of the Longships Lighthouse, the whole of the Atlantic Ocean in darkness and space between him and America, he seemed a little excited and pleased with himself, watchful, thrilled, veering along in a sense of mastery and of power in conflict.

The houses began to close on the road, he was entering the straggling, formless, desolate mining village, that he knew of old. On the left was a little space set back from the road, and cosy lights of an inn. There it was. He peered up at the sign: 'The Tinnors' Rest'. But he could not make out the name of the proprietor. He listened. There was excited talking and laughing, a woman's voice laughing shrilly among the men's.

Stooping a little, he entered the warmly-lit bar. The lamp was burning, a buxom woman rose from the white-scrubbed deal table where the black and white and red cards were scattered, and several men, miners, lifted their faces from the game.

The stranger went to the counter, averting his face. His cap was pulled down

over his brow.

‘Good-evening!’ said the landlady, in her rather ingratiating voice.

‘Good-evening. A glass of ale.’

‘A glass of ale,’ repeated the landlady suavely. ‘Cold night — but bright.’

‘Yes,’ the man assented, laconically. Then he added, when nobody expected him to say any more: ‘Seasonable weather.’

‘Quite seasonable, quite,’ said the landlady. ‘Thank you.’

The man lifted his glass straight to his lips, and emptied it. He put it down again on the zinc counter with a click.

‘Let’s have another,’ he said.

The woman drew the beer, and the man went away with his glass to the second table, near the fire. The woman, after a moment’s hesitation, took her seat again at the table with the card-players. She had noticed the man: a big fine fellow, well dressed, a stranger.

But he spoke with that Cornish-Yankee accent she accepted as the natural twang among the miners.

The stranger put his foot on the fender and looked into the fire. He was handsome, well coloured, with well-drawn Cornish eyebrows, and the usual dark, bright, mindless Cornish eyes. He seemed abstracted in thought. Then he watched the card-party.

The woman was buxom and healthy, with dark hair and small, quick brown eyes. She was bursting with life and vigour, the energy she threw into the game of cards excited all the men, they shouted, and laughed, and the woman held her breast, shrieking with laughter.

‘Oh, my, it’ll be the death o’ me,’ she panted. ‘Now, come on, Mr. Trevorrow, play fair. Play fair, I say, or I s’ll put the cards down.’

‘Play fair! Why who’s played unfair?’ ejaculated Mr. Trevorrow. ‘Do you mean t’accuse me, as I haven’t played fair, Mrs. Nankervis?’

‘I do. I say it, and I mean it. Haven’t you got the queen of spades? Now, come on, no dodging round me. I know you’ve got that queen, as well as I know my name’s Alice.’

‘Well — if your name’s Alice, you’ll have to have it — ’

‘Ay, now — what did I say? Did you ever see such a man? My word, but your missus must be easy took in, by the looks of things.’

And off she went into peals of laughter. She was interrupted by the entrance of four men in khaki, a short, stumpy sergeant of middle age, a young corporal, and two young privates. The woman leaned back in her chair.

‘Oh, my!’ she cried. ‘If there isn’t the boys back: looking perished, I believe — ’

‘Perished, Ma!’ exclaimed the sergeant. ‘Not yet.’

‘Near enough,’ said a young private, uncouthly.

The woman got up.

‘I’m sure you are, my dears. You’ll be wanting your suppers, I’ll be bound.’

‘We could do with ‘em.’

‘Let’s have a wet first,’ said the sergeant.

The woman bustled about getting the drinks. The soldiers moved to the fire, spreading out their hands.

‘Have your suppers in here, will you?’ she said. ‘Or in the kitchen?’

‘Let’s have it here,’ said the sergeant. ‘More cosier — if you don’t mind.’

‘You shall have it where you like, boys, where you like.’

She disappeared. In a minute a girl of about sixteen came in. She was tall and fresh, with dark, young, expressionless eyes, and well-drawn brows, and the immature softness and mindlessness of the sensuous Celtic type.

‘Ho, Maryann! Evenin’, Maryann! How’s Maryann, now?’ came the multiple greeting.

She replied to everybody in a soft voice, a strange, soft aplomb that was very attractive. And she moved round with rather mechanical, attractive movements, as if her thoughts were elsewhere. But she had always this dim far-awayness in her bearing: a sort of modesty. The strange man by the fire watched her curiously. There was an alert, inquisitive, mindless curiosity on his well-coloured face.

‘I’ll have a bit of supper with you, if I might,’ he said.

She looked at him, with her clear, unreasoning eyes, just like the eyes of some non-human creature.

‘I’ll ask mother,’ she said. Her voice was soft-breathing, gently singsong.

When she came in again:

‘Yes,’ she said, almost whispering. ‘What will you have?’

‘What have you got?’ he said, looking up into her face.

‘There’s cold meat — ’

‘That’s for me, then.’

The stranger sat at the end of the table and ate with the tired, quiet soldiers. Now, the landlady was interested in him. Her brow was knit rather tense, there was a look of panic in her large, healthy face, but her small brown eyes were fixed most dangerously. She was a big woman, but her eyes were small and tense. She drew near the stranger. She wore a rather loud-patterned flannelette blouse, and a dark skirt.

‘What will you have to drink with your supper?’ she asked, and there was a new, dangerous note in her voice.

He moved uneasily.

‘Oh, I’ll go on with ale.’

She drew him another glass. Then she sat down on the bench at the table with him and the soldiers, and fixed him with her attention.

‘You’ve come from St Just, have you?’ she said.

He looked at her with those clear, dark, inscrutable Cornish eyes, and answered at length:

‘No, from Penzance.’

‘Penzance! — but you’re not thinking of going back there tonight?’

‘No — no.’

He still looked at her with those wide, clear eyes that seemed like very bright agate. Her anger began to rise. It was seen on her brow. Yet her voice was still suave and deprecating.

‘I thought not — but you’re not living in these parts, are you?’

‘No — no, I’m not living here.’ He was always slow in answering, as if something intervened between him and any outside question.

‘Oh, I see,’ she said. ‘You’ve got relations down here.’

Again he looked straight into her eyes, as if looking her into silence.

‘Yes,’ he said.

He did not say any more. She rose with a flounce. The anger was tight on her brow. There was no more laughing and card-playing that evening, though she kept up her motherly, suave, good-humoured way with the men. But they knew her, they were all afraid of her.

The supper was finished, the table cleared, the stranger did not go. Two of the young soldiers went off to bed, with their cheery:

‘Goodnight, Ma. Goodnight, Maryann.’

The stranger talked a little to the sergeant about the war, which was in its first year, about the new army, a fragment of which was quartered in this district, about America.

The landlady darted looks at him from her small eyes, minute by minute the electric storm welled in her bosom, as still he did not go. She was quivering with suppressed, violent passion, something frightening and abnormal. She could not sit still for a moment. Her heavy form seemed to flash with sudden, involuntary movements as the minutes passed by, and still he sat there, and the tension on her heart grew unbearable. She watched the hands of the dock move on. Three of the soldiers had gone to bed, only the crop-headed, terrier-like old sergeant remained.

The landlady sat behind the bar fidgeting spasmodically with the newspaper. She looked again at the clock. At last it was five minutes to ten.

‘Gentlemen — the enemy!’ she said, in her diminished, furious voice. ‘Time, please. Time, my dears. And goodnight all!’

The men began to drop out, with a brief goodnight. It was a minute to ten. The landlady rose.

‘Come,’ she said. ‘I’m shutting the door.’

The last of the miners passed out. She stood, stout and menacing, holding the door. Still the stranger sat on by the fire, his black overcoat opened, smoking.

‘We’re closed now, sir,’ came the perilous, narrowed voice of the landlady.

The little, dog-like, hard-headed sergeant touched the arm of the stranger.

‘Closing time,’ he said.

The stranger turned round in his seat, and his quick-moving, dark, jewel-like eyes went from the sergeant to the landlady.

‘I’m stopping here tonight,’ he said, in his laconic Cornish-Yankee accent.

The landlady seemed to tower. Her eyes lifted strangely, frightening.

‘Oh! indeed!’ she cried. ‘Oh, indeed! And whose orders are those, may I ask?’

He looked at her again.

‘My orders,’ he said.

Involuntarily she shut the door, and advanced like a great, dangerous bird. Her voice rose, there was a touch of hoarseness in it.

‘And what might your orders be, if you please?’ she cried. ‘Who might you be, to give orders, in the house?’

He sat still, watching her.

‘You know who I am,’ he said. ‘At least, I know who you are.’

‘Oh, you do? Oh, do you? And who am I then, if you’ll be so good as to tell me?’

He stared at her with his bright, dark eyes.

‘You’re my Missis, you are,’ he said. ‘And you know it, as well as I do.’

She started as if something had exploded in her.

Her eyes lifted and flared madly.

‘Do I know it, indeed!’ she cried. ‘I know no such thing! I know no such thing! Do you think a man’s going to walk into this bar, and tell me off-hand I’m his Missis, and I’m going to believe him? — I say to you, whoever you may be, you’re mistaken. I know myself for no Missis of yours, and I’ll thank you to go out of this house, this minute, before I get those that will put you out.’

The man rose to his feet, stretching his head towards her a little. He was a handsomely built Cornishman in the prime of life.

‘What you say, eh? You don’t know me?’ he said, in his singsong voice, emotionless, but rather smothered and pressing: it reminded one of the girl’s. ‘I should know you anywhere, you see. I should! I shouldn’t have to look twice to

know you, you see. You see, now, don't you?'

The woman was baffled.

'So you may say,' she replied, staccato. 'So you may say. That's easy enough. My name's known, and respected, by most people for ten miles round. But I don't know you.'

Her voice ran to sarcasm. 'I can't say I know you. You're a perfect stranger to me, and I don't believe I've ever set eyes on you before tonight.'

Her voice was very flexible and sarcastic.

'Yes, you have,' replied the man, in his reasonable way. 'Yes, you have. Your name's my name, and that girl Maryann is my girl; she's my daughter. You're my Missis right enough. As sure as I'm Willie Nankervis.'

He spoke as if it were an accepted fact. His face was handsome, with a strange, watchful alertness and a fundamental fixity of intention that maddened her.

'You villain!' she cried. 'You villain, to come to this house and dare to speak to me. You villain, you down-right rascal!'

He looked at her.

'Ay,' he said, unmoved. 'All that.' He was uneasy before her. Only he was not afraid of her. There was something impenetrable about him, like his eyes, which were as bright as agate.

She towered, and drew near to him menacingly.

'You're going out of this house, aren't you?' — She stamped her foot in sudden madness. 'This minute!'

He watched her. He knew she wanted to strike him.

'No,' he said, with suppressed emphasis. 'I've told you, I'm stopping here.'

He was afraid of her personality, but it did not alter him. She wavered. Her small, tawny-brown eyes concentrated in a point of vivid, sightless fury, like a tiger's. The man was wincing, but he stood his ground. Then she bethought herself. She would gather her forces.

'We'll see whether you're stopping here,' she said. And she turned, with a curious, frightening lifting of her eyes, and surged out of the room. The man, listening, heard her go upstairs, heard her tapping at a bedroom door, heard her saying: 'Do you mind coming down a minute, boys? I want you. I'm in trouble.'

The man in the bar took off his cap and his black overcoat, and threw them on the seat behind him. His black hair was short and touched with grey at the temples. He wore a well-cut, well-fitting suit of dark grey, American in style, and a turn-down collar. He looked well-to-do, a fine, solid figure of a man. The rather rigid look of the shoulders came from his having had his collar-bone twice broken in the mines.

The little terrier of a sergeant, in dirty khaki, looked at him furtively.

‘She’s your Missis?’ he asked, jerking his head in the direction of the departed woman.

‘Yes, she is,’ barked the man. ‘She’s that, sure enough.’

‘Not seen her for a long time, haven’t ye?’

‘Sixteen years come March month.’

‘Hm!’

And the sergeant laconically resumed his smoking.

The landlady was coming back, followed by the three young soldiers, who entered rather sheepishly, in trousers and shirt and stocking-feet. The woman stood histrionically at the end of the bar, and exclaimed:

‘That man refuses to leave the house, claims he’s stopping the night here. You know very well I have no bed, don’t you? And this house doesn’t accommodate travellers. Yet he’s going to stop in spite of all! But not while I’ve a drop of blood in my body, that I declare with my dying breath. And not if you men are worth the name of men, and will help a woman as has no one to help her.’

Her eyes sparkled, her face was flushed pink. She was drawn up like an Amazon.

The young soldiers did not quite know what to do. They looked at the man, they looked at the sergeant, one of them looked down and fastened his braces on the second button.

‘What say, sergeant?’ asked one whose face twinkled for a little devilment.

‘Man says he’s husband to Mrs. Nankervis,’ said the sergeant.

‘He’s no husband of mine. I declare I never set eyes on him before this night. It’s a dirty trick, nothing else, it’s a dirty trick.’

‘Why, you’re a liar, saying you never set eyes on me before,’ barked the man near the hearth. ‘You’re married to me, and that girl Maryann you had by me — well enough you know it.’

The young soldiers looked on in delight, the sergeant smoked imperturbed.

‘Yes,’ sang the landlady, slowly shaking her head in supreme sarcasm, ‘it sounds very pretty, doesn’t it? But you see we don’t believe a word of it, and how are you going to prove it?’ She smiled nastily.

The man watched in silence for a moment, then he said:

‘It wants no proof.’

‘Oh, yes, but it does! Oh, yes, but it does, sir, it wants a lot of proving!’ sang the lady’s sarcasm. ‘We’re not such gulls as all that, to swallow your words whole.’

But he stood unmoved near the fire. She stood with one hand resting on the zinc-covered bar, the sergeant sat with legs crossed, smoking, on the seat

halfway between them, the three young soldiers in their shirts and braces stood wavering in the gloom behind the bar. There was silence.

‘Do you know anything of the whereabouts of your husband, Mrs. Nankervis? Is he still living?’ asked the sergeant, in his judicious fashion.

Suddenly the landlady began to cry, great scalding tears, that left the young men aghast.

‘I know nothing of him,’ she sobbed, feeling for her pocket handkerchief. ‘He left me when Maryann was a baby, went mining to America, and after about six months never wrote a line nor sent me a penny bit. I can’t say whether he’s alive or dead, the villain. All I’ve heard of him’s to the bad — and I’ve heard nothing for years an’ all, now.’ She sobbed violently.

The golden-skinned, handsome man near the fire watched her as she wept. He was frightened, he was troubled, he was bewildered, but none of his emotions altered him underneath.

There was no sound in the room but the violent sobbing of the landlady. The men, one and all, were overcome.

‘Don’t you think as you’d better go, for tonight?’ said the sergeant to the man, with sweet reasonableness. ‘You’d better leave it a bit, and arrange something between you. You can’t have much claim on a woman, I should imagine, if it’s how she says. And you’ve come down on her a bit too sudden-like.’

The landlady sobbed heart-brokenly. The man watched her large breasts shaken. They seemed to cast a spell over his mind.

‘How I’ve treated her, that’s no matter,’ he replied. ‘I’ve come back, and I’m going to stop in my own home — for a bit, anyhow. There you’ve got it.’

‘A dirty action,’ said the sergeant, his face flushing dark. ‘A dirty action, to come, after deserting a woman for that number of years, and want to force yourself on her! A dirty action — as isn’t allowed by the law.’

The landlady wiped her eyes.

‘Never you mind about law nor nothing,’ cried the man, in a strange, strong voice. ‘I’m not moving out of this public tonight.’

The woman turned to the soldiers behind her, and said in a wheedling, sarcastic tone:

‘Are we going to stand it, boys? — Are we going to be done like this, Sergeant Thomas, by a scoundrel and a bully as has led a life beyond mention, in those American mining-camps, and then wants to come back and make havoc of a poor woman’s life and savings, after having left her with a baby in arms to struggle as best she might? It’s a crying shame if nobody will stand up for me — a crying shame — !’

The soldiers and the little sergeant were bristling. The woman stooped and

rummaged under the counter for a minute. Then, unseen to the man away near the fire, she threw out a plaited grass rope, such as is used for binding bales, and left it lying near the feet of the young soldiers, in the gloom at the back of the bar.

Then she rose and fronted the situation.

‘Come now,’ she said to the man, in a reasonable, coldly-coaxing tone, ‘put your coat on and leave us alone. Be a man, and not worse than a brute of a German. You can get a bed easy enough in St Just, and if you’ve nothing to pay for it sergeant would lend you a couple of shillings, I’m sure he would.’

All eyes were fixed on the man. He was looking down at the woman like a creature spell-bound or possessed by some devil’s own intention.

‘I’ve got money of my own,’ he said. ‘Don’t you be frightened for your money, I’ve plenty of that, for the time.’

‘Well, then,’ she coaxed, in a cold, almost sneering propitiation, ‘put your coat on and go where you’re wanted — be a man, not a brute of a German.’

She had drawn quite near to him, in her challenging coaxing intentness. He looked down at her with his bewitched face.

‘No, I shan’t,’ he said. ‘I shan’t do no such thing. You’ll put me up for tonight.’

‘Shall I!’ she cried. And suddenly she flung her arms round him, hung on to him with all her powerful weight, calling to the soldiers: ‘Get the rope, boys, and fasten him up. Alfred — John, quick now — ’

The man reared, looked round with maddened eyes, and heaved his powerful body. But the woman was powerful also, and very heavy, and was clenched with the determination of death. Her face, with its exulting, horribly vindictive look, was turned up to him from his own breast; he reached back his head frantically, to get away from it. Meanwhile the young soldiers, after having watched this frightful Laocoon swaying for a moment, stirred, and the malicious one darted swiftly with the rope. It was tangled a little.

‘Give me the end here,’ cried the sergeant.

Meanwhile the big man heaved and struggled, swung the woman round against the seat and the table, in his convulsive effort to get free. But she pinned down his arms like a cuttlefish wreathed heavily upon him. And he heaved and swayed, and they crashed about the room, the soldiers hopping, the furniture bumping.

The young soldier had got the rope once round, the brisk sergeant helping him. The woman sank heavily lower, they got the rope round several times. In the struggle the victim fell over against the table. The ropes tightened till they cut his arms. The woman clung to his knees. Another soldier ran in a flash of

genius, and fastened the strange man's feet with the pair of braces. Seats had crashed over, the table was thrown against the wall, but the man was bound, his arms pinned against his sides, his feet tied. He lay half fallen, sunk against the table, still for a moment.

The woman rose, and sank, faint, on to the seat against the wall. Her breast heaved, she could not speak, she thought she was going to die. The bound man lay against the overturned table, his coat all twisted and pulled up beneath the ropes, leaving the loins exposed. The soldiers stood around, a little dazed, but excited with the row.

The man began to struggle again, heaving instinctively against the ropes, taking great, deep breaths. His face, with its golden skin, flushed dark and surcharged, he heaved again. The great veins in his neck stood out. But it was no good, he went relaxed. Then again, suddenly, he jerked his feet.

'Another pair of braces, William,' cried the excited soldier. He threw himself on the legs of the bound man, and managed to fasten the knees. Then again there was stillness. They could hear the clock tick.

The woman looked at the prostrate figure, the strong, straight limbs, the strong back bound in subjection, the wide-eyed face that reminded her of a calf tied in a sack in a cart, only its head stretched dumbly backwards. And she triumphed.

The bound-up body began to struggle again. She watched fascinated the muscles working, the shoulders, the hips, the large, clean thighs. Even now he might break the ropes. She was afraid. But the lively young soldier sat on the shoulders of the bound man, and after a few perilous moments, there was stillness again.

'Now,' said the judicious sergeant to the bound man, 'if we untie you, will you promise to go off and make no more trouble.'

'You'll not untie him in here,' cried the woman. 'I wouldn't trust him as far as I could blow him.'

There was silence.

'We might carry him outside, and undo him there,' said the soldier. 'Then we could get the policeman, if he made any bother.'

'Yes,' said the sergeant. 'We could do that.' Then again, in an altered, almost severe tone, to the prisoner. 'If we undo you outside, will you take your coat and go without creating any more disturbance?'

But the prisoner would not answer, he only lay with wide, dark, bright, eyes, like a bound animal. There was a space of perplexed silence.

'Well, then, do as you say,' said the woman irritably. 'Carry him out amongst you, and let us shut up the house.'

They did so. Picking up the bound man, the four soldiers staggered clumsily

into the silent square in front of the inn, the woman following with the cap and the overcoat. The young soldiers quickly unfastened the braces from the prisoner's legs, and they hopped indoors. They were in their stocking-feet, and outside the stars flashed cold. They stood in the doorway watching. The man lay quite still on the cold ground.

'Now,' said the sergeant, in a subdued voice, 'I'll loosen the knot, and he can work himself free, if you go in, Missis.'

She gave a last look at the dishevelled, bound man, as he sat on the ground. Then she went indoors, followed quickly by the sergeant. Then they were heard locking and barring the door.

The man seated on the ground outside worked and strained at the rope. But it was not so easy to undo himself even now. So, with hands bound, making an effort, he got on his feet, and went and worked the cord against the rough edge of an old wall. The rope, being of a kind of plaited grass, soon frayed and broke, and he freed himself. He had various contusions. His arms were hurt and bruised from the bonds. He rubbed them slowly. Then he pulled his clothes straight, stooped, put on his cap, struggled into his overcoat, and walked away.

The stars were very brilliant. Clear as crystal, the beam from the lighthouse under the cliffs struck rhythmically on the night. Dazed, the man walked along the road past the churchyard. Then he stood leaning up against a wall, for a long time.

He was roused because his feet were so cold. So he pulled himself together, and turned again in the silent night, back towards the inn.

The bar was in darkness. But there was a light in the kitchen. He hesitated. Then very quietly he tried the door.

He was surprised to find it open. He entered, and quietly closed it behind him. Then he went down the step past the bar-counter, and through to the lighted doorway of the kitchen. There sat his wife, planted in front of the range, where a furze fire was burning. She sat in a chair full in front of the range, her knees wide apart on the fender. She looked over her shoulder at him as he entered, but she did not speak. Then she stared in the fire again.

It was a small, narrow kitchen. He dropped his cap on the table that was covered with yellowish American cloth, and took a seat with his back to the wall, near the oven. His wife still sat with her knees apart, her feet on the steel fender and stared into the fire, motionless. Her skin was smooth and rosy in the firelight. Everything in the house was very clean and bright. The man sat silent, too, his head dropped. And thus they remained.

It was a question who would speak first. The woman leaned forward and poked the ends of the sticks in between the bars of the range. He lifted his head

and looked at her.

‘Others gone to bed, have they?’ he asked.

But she remained closed in silence.

‘S a cold night, out,’ he said, as if to himself.

And he laid his large, yet well-shapen workman’s hand on the top of the stove, that was polished black and smooth as velvet. She would not look at him, yet she glanced out of the corners of her eyes.

His eyes were fixed brightly on her, the pupils large and electric like those of a cat.

‘I should have picked you out among thousands,’ he said. ‘Though you’re bigger than I’d have believed. Fine flesh you’ve made.’

She was silent for some time. Then she turned in her chair upon him.

‘What do you think of yourself,’ she said, ‘coming back on me like this after over fifteen years? You don’t think I’ve not heard of you, neither, in Butte City and elsewhere?’

He was watching her with his clear, translucent, unchallenged eyes.

‘Yes,’ he said. ‘Chaps comes an’ goes — I’ve heard tell of you from time to time.’

She drew herself up.

‘And what lies have you heard about me?’ she demanded superbly.

‘I dunno as I’ve heard any lies at all — ’cept as you was getting on very well, like.’

His voice ran warily and detached. Her anger stirred again in her violently. But she subdued it, because of the danger there was in him, and more, perhaps, because of the beauty of his head and his level drawn brows, which she could not bear to forfeit.

‘That’s more than I can say of you,’ she said. ‘I’ve heard more harm than good about you.’

‘Ay, I dessay,’ he said, looking in the fire. It was a long time since he had seen the furze burning, he said to himself. There was a silence, during which she watched his face.

‘Do you call yourself a man?’ she said, more in contemptuous reproach than in anger. ‘Leave a woman as you’ve left me, you don’t care to what! — and then to turn up in this fashion, without a word to say for yourself.’

He stirred in his chair, planted his feet apart, and resting his arms on his knees, looked steadily into the fire, without answering. So near to her was his head, and the close black hair, she could scarcely refrain from starting away, as if it would bite her.

‘Do you call that the action of a man?’ she repeated.

‘No,’ he said, reaching and poking the bits of wood into the fire with his fingers. ‘I didn’t call it anything, as I know of. It’s no good calling things by any names whatsoever, as I know of.’

She watched him in his actions. There was a longer and longer pause between each speech, though neither knew it.

‘I wonder what you think of yourself!’ she exclaimed, with vexed emphasis. ‘I wonder what sort of a fellow you take yourself to be!’ She was really perplexed as well as angry.

‘Well,’ he said, lifting his head to look at her, ‘I guess I’ll answer for my own faults, if everybody else’ll answer for theirs.’

Her heart beat fiery hot as he lifted his face to her. She breathed heavily, averting her face, almost losing her self-control.

‘And what do you take me to be?’ she cried, in real helplessness.

His face was lifted watching her, watching her soft, averted face, and the softly heaving mass of her breasts.

‘I take you,’ he said, with that laconic truthfulness which exercised such power over her, ‘to be the deuce of a fine woman — darn me if you’re not as fine a built woman as I’ve seen, handsome with it as well. I shouldn’t have expected you to put on such handsome flesh: ‘struth I shouldn’t.’

Her heart beat fiery hot, as he watched her with those bright agate eyes, fixedly.

‘Been very handsome to you, for fifteen years, my sakes!’ she replied.

He made no answer to this, but sat with his bright, quick eyes upon her.

Then he rose. She started involuntarily. But he only said, in his laconic, measured way:

‘It’s warm in here now.’

And he pulled off his overcoat, throwing it on the table. She sat as if slightly cowed, whilst he did so.

‘Them ropes has given my arms something, by Ga-ard,’ he drawled, feeling his arms with his hands.

Still she sat in her chair before him, slightly cowed.

‘You was sharp, wasn’t you, to catch me like that, eh?’ he smiled slowly. ‘By Ga-ard, you had me fixed proper, proper you had. Darn me, you fixed me up proper — proper, you did.’

He leaned forwards in his chair towards her.

‘I don’t think no worse of you for it, no, darned if I do. Fine pluck in a woman’s what I admire. That I do, indeed.’

She only gazed into the fire.

‘We fet from the start, we did. And, my word, you begin again quick the

minute you see me, you did. Darn me, you was too sharp for me. A darn fine woman, puts up a darn good fight. Darn me if I could find a woman in all the darn States as could get me down like that. Wonderful fine woman you be, truth to say, at this minute.'

She only sat glowering into the fire.

'As grand a pluck as a man could wish to find in a woman, true as I'm here,' he said, reaching forward his hand and tentatively touching her between her full, warm breasts, quietly.

She started, and seemed to shudder. But his hand insinuated itself between her breasts, as she continued to gaze in the fire.

'And don't you think I've come back here a-begging,' he said. 'I've more than one thousand pounds to my name, I have. And a bit of a fight for a how-de-do pleases me, that it do. But that doesn't mean as you're going to deny as you're my Missis....'

ADOLF

WHEN we were children our father often worked on the night-shift. Once it was spring-time, and he used to arrive home, black and tired, just as we were downstairs in our night-dresses. Then night met morning face to face, and the contact was not always happy. Perhaps it was painful to my father to see us gaily entering upon the day into which he dragged himself soiled and weary. He didn't like going to bed in the spring morning sunshine.

But sometimes he was happy, because of his long walk through the dewy fields in the first daybreak. He loved the open morning, the crystal and the space, after a night down pit. He watched every bird, every stir in the trembling grass, answered the whinneying of the pee-wits and tweeted to the wrens. If he could, he also would have whinnied and tweeted and whistled, in a native language that was not human. He liked non-human things best.

One sunny morning we were all sitting at table when we heard his heavy slurring walk up the entry. We became uneasy. His was always a disturbing presence, trammeling. He passed the window darkly, and we heard him go into the scullery and put down his tin bottle. But directly he came into the kitchen. We felt at once that he had something to communicate. No one spoke. We watched his black face for a second.

'Give me a drink,' he said.

My mother hastily poured out his tea. He went to pour it out into the saucer. But instead of drinking, he suddenly put something on the table, among the tea-cups. A tiny brown rabbit! A small rabbit, a mere morsel, sitting against the bread as still as if it were a made thing.

'A rabbit! A young one! Who gave it you, father?'

But he laughed enigmatically, with a sliding motion of his yellow-grey eyes, and went to take off his coat. We pounced on the rabbit.

'Is it alive? Can you feel its heart beat?'

My father came back and sat down heavily in his arm-chair. He dragged his saucer to him, and blew his tea, pushing out his red lips under his black moustache.

'Where did you get it, father?'

'I picked it up,' he said, wiping his naked forearm over his mouth and beard.

'Where?'

'Is it a wild one?' came my mother's quick voice.

‘Yes, it is.’

‘Then why did you bring it?’ cried my mother.

‘Oh, we wanted it,’ came our cry.

‘Yes, I’ve no doubt you did —’ retorted my mother. But she was drowned in our clamour of questions.

On the field path, my father had found a dead mother rabbit and three dead little ones — this one alive, but unmoving.

‘But what had killed them, Daddy?’

‘I couldn’t say, my child. I s’d think she’d eaten something.’

‘Why did you bring it!’ again my mother’s voice of condemnation. ‘You know what it will be.’

My father made no answer, but we were loud in protest.

‘He must bring it. It’s not big enough to live by itself. It would die,’ we shouted.

‘Yes, and it will die now. And then there’ll be another outcry.’

My mother set her face against the tragedy of dead pets. Our hearts sank.

‘It won’t die, father, will it? Why will it? It won’t.’

‘I s’d think not,’ said my father.

‘You know well enough it will. Haven’t we had it all before — !’ said my mother.

‘They dunna always pine,’ replied my father testily.

But my mother reminded him of other little wild animals he had brought, which had sulked and refused to live, and brought storms of tears and trouble in our house of lunatics.

Trouble fell on us. The little rabbit sat on our lap, unmoving, its eye wide and dark. We brought it milk, warm milk, and held it to its nose. It sat as still as if it was far away, retreated down some deep burrow, hidden, oblivious. We wetted its mouth and whiskers with drops of milk. It gave no sign, did not even shake off the wet white drops. Somebody began to shed a few secret tears.

‘What did I say?’ cried my mother. ‘Take it and put it down the field.’

Her command was in vain. We were driven to get dressed for school. There sat the rabbit. It was like a tiny obscure cloud. Watching it, the emotions died out of our breast. Useless to love it, to yearn over it. Its little feelings were all ambushed. They must be circumvented. Love and affection were a trespass upon it. A little wild thing, it became more mute and asphyxiated still in its own arrest, when we approached with love. We must not love it. We must circumvent it, for its own existence.

So I passed the order to my sister and my mother. The rabbit was not to be spoken to, nor even looked at. Wrapping it in a piece of flannel, I put it in an

obscure corner of the cold parlour, and put a saucer of milk before its nose. My mother was forbidden to enter the parlour whilst we were at school.

‘As if I should take any notice of your nonsense,’ she cried, affronted. Yet I doubt if she ventured into that parlour.

At midday, after school, creeping into the front room, there we saw the rabbit still and unmoving in the piece of flannel. Strange grey-brown neutralization of life, still living! It was a sore problem to us.

‘Why won’t it drink its milk, mother?’ we whispered. Our father was asleep.

‘It prefers to sulk its life away, silly little thing.’ A profound problem. Prefers to sulk its life away! We put young dandelion leaves to its nose. The sphinx was not more oblivious.

At tea-time, however, it had hopped a few inches, out of its flannel, and there it sat again, uncovered, a little solid cloud of muteness, brown, with unmoving whiskers. Only its side palpitated slightly with life.

Darkness came, my father set off to work. The rabbit was still unmoving. Dumb despair was coming over the sisters, a threat of tears before bedtime. Clouds of my mother’s anger gathered, as she muttered against my father’s wantonness.

Once more the rabbit was wrapped in the old pit-singlet. But now it was carried into the scullery and put under the copper fire-place, that it might think itself inside a burrow. The saucers were placed about, four or five, here and there on the floor, so that if the little creature should chance to hop abroad, it could not fail to come upon some food. After this my mother was allowed to take from the scullery what she wanted and then she was forbidden to open the door.

When morning came, and it was light, I went downstairs. Opening the scullery door I heard a slight scuffle. Then I saw dabbles of milk all over the floor and tiny rabbit-droppings in the saucers. And there the miscreant, the tips of his ears showing behind a pair of boots. I peeped at him. He sat bright-eyed and askance, twitching his nose and looking at me while not looking at me.

He was alive — very much alive. But still we were afraid to trespass much on his confidence.

‘Father!’ My father was arrested at the door. ‘Father, the rabbit’s alive.’

‘Back your life it is,’ said my father.

‘Mind how you go in.’

By evening, however, the little creature was tame, quite tame. He was christened Adolf. We were enchanted by him. We couldn’t really love him, because he was wild and loveless to the end. But he was an unmixed delight.

We decided he was too small to live in a hutch — he must live at large in the house. My mother protested, but in vain. He was so tiny. So we had him upstairs,

and he dropped his tiny pills on the bed and we were enchanted.

Adolf made himself instantly at home. He had the run of the house, and was perfectly happy, with his tunnels and his holes behind the furniture.

We loved him to take meals with us. He would sit on the table humping his back, sipping his milk, shaking his whiskers and his tender ears, hopping off and hobbling back to his saucer, with an air of supreme unconcern. Suddenly he was alert. He hobbled a few tiny paces, and reared himself up inquisitively at the sugar-basin. He fluttered his tiny fore-paws, and then reached and laid them on the edge of the basin, whilst he craned his thin neck and peeped in. He trembled his whiskers at the sugar, then did his best to lift down a lump.

‘Do you think I will have it! Animals in the sugar pot!’ cried my mother, with a rap of her hand on the table.

Which so delighted the electric Adolf that he flung his hind-quarters and knocked over a cup.

‘It’s your own fault, mother. If you left him alone — ’

He continued to take tea with us. He rather liked warm tea. And he loved sugar. Having nibbled a lump, he would turn to the butter. There he was shooed off by our parent. He soon learned to treat her shooing with indifference. Still, she hated him to put his nose in the food. And he loved to do it. And so one day between them they overturned the cream-jug. Adolf deluged his little chest, bounced back in terror, was seized by his little ears by my mother and bounced down on the hearth-rug. There he shivered in momentary discomfort, and suddenly set off in a wild flight to the parlour.

This last was his happy hunting ground. He had cultivated the bad habit of pensively nibbling certain bits of cloth in the hearth-rug. When chased from this pasture, he would retreat under the sofa. There he would twinkle in Buddhist meditation until suddenly, no one knew why, he would go off like an alarm clock. With a sudden bumping scuffle he would whirl out of the room, going through the doorway with his little ears flying. Then we would hear his thunderbolt hurtling in the parlour, but before we could follow, the wild streak of Adolf would flash past us, on an electric wind that swept him round the scullery and carried him back, a little mad thing, flying possessed like a ball round the parlour. After which ebullition he would sit in a corner composed and distant, twitching his whiskers in abstract meditation. And it was in vain we questioned him about his outbursts. He just went off like a gun, and was as calm after it as a gun that smokes placidly.

Alas, he grew up rapidly. It was almost impossible to keep him from the outer door.

One day, as we were playing by the stile, I saw his brown shadow loiter across

the road and pass into the field that faced the houses. Instantly a cry of 'Adolf!' a cry he knew full well. And instantly a wind swept him away down the sloping meadow, his tail twinkling and zig-zagging through the grass. After him we pelted. It was a strange sight to see him, ears back, his little loins so powerful, flinging the world behind him. We ran ourselves out of breath, but could not catch him. Then somebody headed him off, and he sat with sudden unconcern, twitching his nose under a bunch of nettles.

His wanderings cost him a shock. One Sunday morning my father had just been quarrelling with a pedlar, and we were hearing the aftermath indoors, when there came a sudden unearthly scream from the yard. We flew out. There sat Adolf cowering under a bench, whilst a great black and white cat glowered intently at him, a few yards away. Sight not to be forgotten. Adolf rolling back his eyes and parting his strange muzzle in another scream, the cat stretching forward in a slow elongation.

Ha, how we hated that cat! How we pursued him over the chapel well and across the neighbours' gardens. Adolf was still only half grown.

'Cats!' said my mother. 'Hideous detestable animals, why do people harbour them!'

But Adolf was becoming too much for her. He dropped too many pills. And suddenly to hear him clumping downstairs when she was alone in the house was startling. And to keep him from the door was impossible. Cats prowled outside. It was worse than having a child to look after.

Yet we would not have him shut up. He became more lusty, more callous than ever. He was a strong kicker, and many a scratch on face and arms did we owe to him. But he brought his own doom on himself. The lace curtains in the parlour — my mother was rather proud of them — fell on to the floor very full. One of Adolf's joys was to scuffle wildly through them as though through some foamy undergrowth. He had already torn rents in them.

One day he entangled himself altogether. He kicked, he whirled round in a mad nebulous inferno. He screamed — and brought down the curtain-rod with a smash, right on the best beloved pelargonium, just as my mother rushed in. She extricated him, but she never forgave him. And he never forgave either. A heartless wildness had come over him.

Even we understood that he must go. It was decided; after a long deliberation, that my father should carry him back to the wild-woods. Once again he was stowed into the great pocket of the pit-jacket.

'Best pop him i' th' pot,' said my father, who enjoyed raising the wind of indignation.

And so, next day, our father said that Adolf, set down on the edge of the

coppice, had hopped away with utmost indifference, neither elated nor moved. We heard it and believed. But many, many were the heart searchings. How would the other rabbits receive him? Would they smell his tameness, his humanized degradation, and rend him? My mother pooh-poohed the extravagant idea.

However, he was gone, and we were rather relieved. My father kept an eye open for him. He declared that several times, passing the coppice in the early morning, he had seen Adolf peeping through the nettlestalks. He had called him, in an odd, high-voiced, cajoling fashion. But Adolf had not responded. Wildness gains so soon upon its creatures. And they become so contemptuous then of our tame presence. So it seemed to me. I myself would go to the edge of the coppice, and call softly. I myself would imagine bright eyes between the nettlestalks, flash of a white, scornful tail past the bracken. That insolent white tail, as Adolf turned his flank on us! It reminded me always of a certain rude gesture, and a certain unprintable phrase, which may not even be suggested.

But when naturalists discuss the meaning of the white rabbit's tail, that rude gesture and still ruder phrase always come to my mind. Naturalists say that the rabbit shows his white tail in order to guide his young safely after him, as a nurse-maid's flying strings are the signal to her toddling charges to follow on. How nice and naïve! I only know that my Adolf wasn't naïve. He used to whisk his flank at me, push his white feather in my eye, and say Merde! It's a rude word — but one which Adolf was always semaphoring at me, flag-wagging it with all the derision of his narrow haunches.

That's a rabbit all over — insolence, and the white flag of spiteful derision. Yes, and he keeps his flag flying to the bitter end, sporting, insolent little devil that he is. See him running for his life. Oh, how his soul is fanned to an ecstasy of fright, a fugitive whirl-wind of panic. Gone mad, he throws the world behind him, with astonishing hind legs. He puts back his head and lays his ears on his sides and rolls the white of his eyes in sheer ecstatic agony of speed. He knows the awful approach behind him: bullet or stoat. He knows! He knows, his eyes are turned back almost into his head. It is agony. But it is also ecstasy. Ecstasy! See the insolent white flag bobbing. He whirls on the magic wind of terror. All his pent-up soul rushes into agonized electric emotion of fear. He flings his self on, like a falling star swooping into extinction. White heat of the agony of fear. And at the same time, bob! bob! bob! goes the white tail, merde! merde! merde! it says to the pursuer. The rabbit can't help it. In his utmost extremity he still flings the insult at the pursuer. He is the unconquerable fugitive, the indomitable meek. No wonder the stoat becomes vindictive.

And if he escapes, this precious rabbit! Don't you see him sitting there, in his

earthly nook, a little ball of silence and rabbit-triumph? Don't you see the glint on his black eye? Don't you see, in his very immobility, how the whole world is merde to him? No conceit like the conceit of the meek. And if the avenging angel in the shape of the ghostly ferret steals down on him, there comes a shriek of terror out of that little hump of self-satisfaction sitting motionless in a corner. Falls the fugitive. But even fallen, his white feather floats. Even in death it seems to say: 'I am the meek, I am the righteous, I am the rabbit. All you rest, you are evil-doers, and you shall be *bien emmerdé*.'

TICKETS, PLEASE

There is in the Midlands a single-line tramway system which boldly leaves the county town and plunges off into the black, industrial countryside, up hill and down dale, through the long ugly villages of workmen's houses, over canals and railways, past churches perched high and nobly over the smoke and shadows, through stark, grimy cold little market-places, tilting away in a rush past cinemas and shops down to the hollow where the collieries are, then up again, past a little rural church, under the ash trees, on in a rush to the terminus, the last little ugly place of industry, the cold little town that shivers on the edge of the wild, gloomy country beyond. There the green and creamy coloured tram-car seems to pause and purr with curious satisfaction. But in a few minutes — the clock on the turret of the Co-operative Wholesale Society's Shops gives the time — away it starts once more on the adventure. Again there are the reckless swoops downhill, bouncing the loops: again the chilly wait in the hill-top market-place: again the breathless slithering round the precipitous drop under the church: again the patient halts at the loops, waiting for the outcoming car: so on and on, for two long hours, till at last the city looms beyond the fat gas-works, the narrow factories draw near, we are in the sordid streets of the great town, once more we sidle to a standstill at our terminus, abashed by the great crimson and cream-coloured city cars, but still perky, jaunty, somewhat dare-devil, green as a jaunty sprig of parsley out of a black colliery garden.

To ride on these cars is always an adventure. Since we are in wartime, the drivers are men unfit for active service: cripples and hunchbacks. So they have the spirit of the devil in them. The ride becomes a steeple-chase. Hurray! we have leapt in a clear jump over the canal bridges — now for the four-lane corner. With a shriek and a trail of sparks we are clear again. To be sure, a tram often leaps the rails — but what matter! It sits in a ditch till other trams come to haul it out. It is quite common for a car, packed with one solid mass of living people, to come to a dead halt in the midst of unbroken blackness, the heart of nowhere on a dark night, and for the driver and the girl conductor to call, 'All get off — car's on fire!' Instead, however, of rushing out in a panic, the passengers stolidly reply: 'Get on — get on! We're not coming out. We're stopping where we are. Push on, George.' So till flames actually appear.

The reason for this reluctance to dismount is that the nights are howlingly cold, black, and windswept, and a car is a haven of refuge. From village to

village the miners travel, for a change of cinema, of girl, of pub. The trams are desperately packed. Who is going to risk himself in the black gulf outside, to wait perhaps an hour for another tram, then to see the forlorn notice 'Depot Only', because there is something wrong! Or to greet a unit of three bright cars all so tight with people that they sail past with a howl of derision. Trams that pass in the night.

This, the most dangerous tram-service in England, as the authorities themselves declare, with pride, is entirely conducted by girls, and driven by rash young men, a little crippled, or by delicate young men, who creep forward in terror. The girls are fearless young hussies. In their ugly blue uniform, skirts up to their knees, shapeless old peaked caps on their heads, they have all the sangfroid of an old non-commissioned officer. With a tram packed with howling colliers, roaring hymns downstairs and a sort of antiphony of obscenities upstairs, the lasses are perfectly at their ease. They pounce on the youths who try to evade their ticket-machine. They push off the men at the end of their distance. They are not going to be done in the eye — not they. They fear nobody — and everybody fears them.

'Hello, Annie!'

'Hello, Ted!'

'Oh, mind my corn, Miss Stone. It's my belief you've got a heart of stone, for you've trod on it again.'

'You should keep it in your pocket,' replies Miss Stone, and she goes sturdily upstairs in her high boots.

'Tickets, please.'

She is peremptory, suspicious, and ready to hit first. She can hold her own against ten thousand. The step of that tram-car is her Thermopylae.

Therefore, there is a certain wild romance aboard these cars — and in the sturdy bosom of Annie herself. The time for soft romance is in the morning, between ten o'clock and one, when things are rather slack: that is, except market-day and Saturday. Thus Annie has time to look about her. Then she often hops off her car and into a shop where she has spied something, while the driver chats in the main road. There is very good feeling between the girls and the drivers. Are they not companions in peril, shipments aboard this careering vessel of a tram-car, for ever rocking on the waves of a stormy land?

Then, also, during the easy hours, the inspectors are most in evidence. For some reason, everybody employed in this tram-service is young: there are no grey heads. It would not do. Therefore the inspectors are of the right age, and one, the chief, is also good-looking. See him stand on a wet, gloomy morning, in his long oil-skin, his peaked cap well down over his eyes, waiting to board a car.

His face is ruddy, his small brown moustache is weathered, he has a faint impudent smile. Fairly tall and agile, even in his waterproof, he springs aboard a car and greets Annie.

‘Hello, Annie! Keeping the wet out?’

‘Trying to.’

There are only two people in the car. Inspecting is soon over. Then for a long and impudent chat on the foot-board, a good, easy, twelve-mile chat.

The inspector’s name is John Thomas Raynor — always called John Thomas, except sometimes, in malice, Coddy. His face sets in fury when he is addressed, from a distance, with this abbreviation. There is considerable scandal about John Thomas in half a dozen villages. He flirts with the girl conductors in the morning, and walks out with them in the dark night, when they leave their tram-car at the depot. Of course, the girls quit the service frequently. Then he flirts and walks out with the newcomer: always providing she is sufficiently attractive, and that she will consent to walk. It is remarkable, however, that most of the girls are quite comely, they are all young, and this roving life aboard the car gives them a sailor’s dash and recklessness. What matter how they behave when the ship is in port. Tomorrow they will be aboard again.

Annie, however, was something of a Tartar, and her sharp tongue had kept John Thomas at arm’s length for many months. Perhaps, therefore, she liked him all the more: for he always came up smiling, with impudence. She watched him vanquish one girl, then another. She could tell by the movement of his mouth and eyes, when he flirted with her in the morning, that he had been walking out with this lass, or the other, the night before. A fine cock-of-the-walk he was. She could sum him up pretty well.

In this subtle antagonism they knew each other like old friends, they were as shrewd with one another almost as man and wife. But Annie had always kept him sufficiently at arm’s length. Besides, she had a boy of her own.

The Statutes fair, however, came in November, at Bestwood. It happened that Annie had the Monday night off. It was a drizzling ugly night, yet she dressed herself up and went to the fair ground. She was alone, but she expected soon to find a pal of some sort.

The roundabouts were veering round and grinding out their music, the side shows were making as much commotion as possible. In the coco-nut shies there were no coco-nuts, but artificial wartime substitutes, which the lads declared were fastened into the irons. There was a sad decline in brilliance and luxury. None the less, the ground was muddy as ever, there was the same crush, the press of faces lighted up by the flares and the electric lights, the same smell of naphtha and a few fried potatoes, and of electricity.

Who should be the first to greet Miss Annie on the showground but John Thomas? He had a black overcoat buttoned up to his chin, and a tweed cap pulled down over his brows, his face between was ruddy and smiling and handy as ever. She knew so well the way his mouth moved.

She was very glad to have a 'boy'. To be at the Statutes without a fellow was no fun. Instantly, like the gallant he was, he took her on the dragons, grim-toothed, roundabout switchbacks. It was not nearly so exciting as a tram-car actually. But, then, to be seated in a shaking, green dragon, uplifted above the sea of bubble faces, careering in a rickety fashion in the lower heavens, whilst John Thomas leaned over her, his cigarette in his mouth, was after all the right style. She was a plump, quick, alive little creature. So she was quite excited and happy.

John Thomas made her stay on for the next round. And therefore she could hardly for shame repulse him when he put his arm round her and drew her a little nearer to him, in a very warm and cuddly manner. Besides, he was fairly discreet, he kept his movement as hidden as possible. She looked down, and saw that his red, clean hand was out of sight of the crowd. And they knew each other so well. So they warmed up to the fair.

After the dragons they went on the horses. John Thomas paid each time, so she could but be complaisant. He, of course, sat astride on the outer horse — named 'Black Bess' — and she sat sideways, towards him, on the inner horse — named 'Wildfire'. But of course John Thomas was not going to sit discreetly on 'Black Bess', holding the brass bar. Round they spun and heaved, in the light. And round he swung on his wooden steed, flinging one leg across her mount, and perilously tipping up and down, across the space, half lying back, laughing at her. He was perfectly happy; she was afraid her hat was on one side, but she was excited.

He threw quoits on a table, and won for her two large, pale-blue hat-pins. And then, hearing the noise of the cinemas, announcing another performance, they climbed the boards and went in.

Of course, during these performances pitch darkness falls from time to time, when the machine goes wrong. Then there is a wild whooping, and a loud smacking of simulated kisses. In these moments John Thomas drew Annie towards him. After all, he had a wonderfully warm, cosy way of holding a girl with his arm, he seemed to make such a nice fit. And, after all, it was pleasant to be so held: so very comforting and cosy and nice. He leaned over her and she felt his breath on her hair; she knew he wanted to kiss her on the lips. And, after all, he was so warm and she fitted in to him so softly. After all, she wanted him to touch her lips.

But the light sprang up; she also started electrically, and put her hat straight. He left his arm lying nonchalantly behind her. Well, it was fun, it was exciting to be at the Statutes with John Thomas.

When the cinema was over they went for a walk across the dark, damp fields. He had all the arts of love-making. He was especially good at holding a girl, when he sat with her on a stile in the black, drizzling darkness. He seemed to be holding her in space, against his own warmth and gratification. And his kisses were soft and slow and searching.

So Annie walked out with John Thomas, though she kept her own boy dangling in the distance. Some of the tram-girls chose to be huffy. But there, you must take things as you find them, in this life.

There was no mistake about it, Annie liked John Thomas a good deal. She felt so rich and warm in herself whenever he was near. And John Thomas really liked Annie, more than usual. The soft, melting way in which she could flow into a fellow, as if she melted into his very bones, was something rare and good. He fully appreciated this.

But with a developing acquaintance there began a developing intimacy. Annie wanted to consider him a person, a man; she wanted to take an intelligent interest in him, and to have an intelligent response. She did not want a mere nocturnal presence, which was what he was so far. And she prided herself that he could not leave her.

Here she made a mistake. John Thomas intended to remain a nocturnal presence; he had no idea of becoming an all-round individual to her. When she started to take an intelligent interest in him and his life and his character, he sheered off. He hated intelligent interest. And he knew that the only way to stop it was to avoid it. The possessive female was aroused in Annie. So he left her.

It is no use saying she was not surprised. She was at first startled, thrown out of her count. For she had been so very sure of holding him. For a while she was staggered, and everything became uncertain to her. Then she wept with fury, indignation, desolation, and misery. Then she had a spasm of despair. And then, when he came, still impudently, on to her car, still familiar, but letting her see by the movement of his head that he had gone away to somebody else for the time being, and was enjoying pastures new, then she determined to have her own back.

She had a very shrewd idea what girls John Thomas had taken out. She went to Nora Purdy. Nora was a tall, rather pale, but well-built girl, with beautiful yellow hair. She was rather secretive.

‘Hey!’ said Annie, accosting her; then softly, ‘Who’s John Thomas on with now?’

‘I don’t know,’ said Nora.

‘Why tha does,’ said Annie, ironically lapsing into dialect. ‘Tha knows as well as I do.’

‘Well, I do, then,’ said Nora. ‘It isn’t me, so don’t bother.’

‘It’s Cissy Meakin, isn’t it?’

‘It is, for all I know.’

‘Hasn’t he got a face on him!’ said Annie. ‘I don’t half like his cheek. I could knock him off the foot-board when he comes round at me.’

‘He’ll get dropped-on one of these days,’ said Nora.

‘Ay, he will, when somebody makes up their mind to drop it on him. I should like to see him taken down a peg or two, shouldn’t you?’

‘I shouldn’t mind,’ said Nora.

‘You’ve got quite as much cause to as I have,’ said Annie. ‘But we’ll drop on him one of these days, my girl. What? Don’t you want to?’

‘I don’t mind,’ said Nora.

But as a matter of fact, Nora was much more vindictive than Annie.

One by one Annie went the round of the old flames. It so happened that Cissy Meakin left the tramway service in quite a short time. Her mother made her leave. Then John Thomas was on the quivive. He cast his eyes over his old flock. And his eyes lighted on Annie. He thought she would be safe now. Besides, he liked her.

She arranged to walk home with him on Sunday night. It so happened that her car would be in the depot at half past nine: the last car would come in at 10.15. So John Thomas was to wait for her there.

At the depot the girls had a little waiting-room of their own. It was quite rough, but cosy, with a fire and an oven and a mirror, and table and wooden chairs. The half dozen girls who knew John Thomas only too well had arranged to take service this Sunday afternoon. So, as the cars began to come in, early, the girls dropped into the waiting-room. And instead of hurrying off home, they sat around the fire and had a cup of tea. Outside was the darkness and lawlessness of wartime.

John Thomas came on the car after Annie, at about a quarter to ten. He poked his head easily into the girls’ waiting-room.

‘Prayer-meeting?’ he asked.

‘Ay,’ said Laura Sharp. ‘Ladies only.’

‘That’s me!’ said John Thomas. It was one of his favourite exclamations.

‘Shut the door, boy,’ said Muriel Baggaley.

‘On which side of me?’ said John Thomas.

‘Which tha likes,’ said Polly Birkin.

He had come in and closed the door behind him. The girls moved in their circle, to make a place for him near the fire. He took off his great-coat and pushed back his hat.

‘Who handles the teapot?’ he said.

Nora Purdy silently poured him out a cup of tea.

‘Want a bit o’ my bread and drippin’?’ said Muriel Baggaley to him.

‘Ay, give us a bit.’

And he began to eat his piece of bread.

‘There’s no place like home, girls,’ he said.

They all looked at him as he uttered this piece of impudence. He seemed to be sunning himself in the presence of so many damsels.

‘Especially if you’re not afraid to go home in the dark,’ said Laura Sharp.

‘Me! By myself I am.’

They sat till they heard the last tram come in. In a few minutes Emma Houselay entered.

‘Come on, my old duck!’ cried Polly Birkin.

‘It is perishing,’ said Emma, holding her fingers to the fire.

‘But — I’m afraid to, go home in, the dark,’ sang Laura Sharp, the tune having got into her mind.

‘Who’re you going with tonight, John Thomas?’ asked Muriel Baggaley, coolly.

‘Tonight?’ said John Thomas. ‘Oh, I’m going home by myself tonight — all on my lonely-O.’

‘That’s me!’ said Nora Purdy, using his own ejaculation.

The girls laughed shrilly.

‘Me as well, Nora,’ said John Thomas.

‘Don’t know what you mean,’ said Laura.

‘Yes, I’m toddling,’ said he, rising and reaching for his overcoat.

‘Nay,’ said Polly. ‘We’re all here waiting for you.’

‘We’ve got to be up in good time in the morning,’ he said, in the benevolent official manner.

They all laughed.

‘Nay,’ said Muriel. ‘Don’t leave us all lonely, John Thomas. Take one!’

‘I’ll take the lot, if you like,’ he responded gallantly.

‘That you won’t either,’ said Muriel, ‘Two’s company; seven’s too much of a good thing.’

‘Nay — take one,’ said Laura. ‘Fair and square, all above board, and say which.’

‘Ay,’ cried Annie, speaking for the first time. ‘Pick, John Thomas; let’s hear

thee.'

'Nay,' he said. 'I'm going home quiet tonight. Feeling good, for once.'

'Whereabouts?' said Annie. 'Take a good 'un, then. But tha's got to take one of us!'

'Nay, how can I take one,' he said, laughing uneasily. 'I don't want to make enemies.'

'You'd only make one' said Annie.

'The chosen one,' added Laura.

'Oh, my! Who said girls!' exclaimed John Thomas, again turning, as if to escape. 'Well — good-night.'

'Nay, you've got to make your pick,' said Muriel. 'Turn your face to the wall, and say which one touches you. Go on — we shall only just touch your back — one of us. Go on — turn your face to the wall, and don't look, and say which one touches you.'

He was uneasy, mistrusting them. Yet he had not the courage to break away. They pushed him to a wall and stood him there with his face to it. Behind his back they all grimaced, tittering. He looked so comical. He looked around uneasily.

'Go on!' he cried.

'You're looking — you're looking!' they shouted.

He turned his head away. And suddenly, with a movement like a swift cat, Annie went forward and fetched him a box on the side of the head that sent his cap flying and himself staggering. He started round.

But at Annie's signal they all flew at him, slapping him, pinching him, pulling his hair, though more in fun than in spite or anger. He, however, saw red. His blue eyes flamed with strange fear as well as fury, and he butted through the girls to the door. It was locked. He wrenched at it. Roused, alert, the girls stood round and looked at him. He faced them, at bay. At that moment they were rather horrifying to him, as they stood in their short uniforms. He was distinctly afraid.

'Come on, John Thomas! Come on! Choose!' said Annie.

'What are you after? Open the door,' he said.

'We shan't — not till you've chosen!' said Muriel.

'Chosen what?' he said.

'Chosen the one you're going to marry,' she replied.

He hesitated a moment.

'Open the blasted door,' he said, 'and get back to your senses.' He spoke with official authority.

'You've got to choose!' cried the girls.

‘Come on!’ cried Annie, looking him in the eye.’ Come on! Come on!’

He went forward, rather vaguely. She had taken off her belt, and swinging it, she fetched him a sharp blow over the head with the buckle end. He sprang and seized her. But immediately the other girls rushed upon him, pulling and tearing and beating him. Their blood was now thoroughly up. He was their sport now. They were going to have their own back, out of him. Strange, wild creatures, they hung on him and rushed at him to bear him down. His tunic was torn right up the back, Nora had hold at the back of his collar, and was actually strangling him. Luckily the button burst. He struggled in a wild frenzy of fury and terror, almost mad terror. His tunic was simply torn off his back, his shirt-sleeves were torn away, his arms were naked. The girls rushed at him, clenched their hands on him and pulled at him: or they rushed at him and pushed him, butted him with all their might: or they struck him wild blows. He ducked and cringed and struck sideways. They became more intense.

At last he was down. They rushed on him, kneeling on him. He had neither breath nor strength to move. His face was bleeding with a long scratch, his brow was bruised.

Annie knelt on him, the other girls knelt and hung on to him. Their faces were flushed, their hair wild, their eyes were all glittering strangely. He lay at last quite still, with face averted, as an animal lies when it is defeated and at the mercy of the captor. Sometimes his eye glanced back at the wild faces of the girls. His breast rose heavily, his wrists were torn.

‘Now, then, my fellow!’ gasped Annie at length. ‘Now then — now — ’

At the sound of her terrifying, cold triumph, he suddenly started to struggle as an animal might, but the girls threw themselves upon him with unnatural strength and power, forcing him down.

‘Yes — now, then!’ gasped Annie at length.

And there was a dead silence, in which the thud of heart-beating was to be heard. It was a suspense of pure silence in every soul.

‘Now you know where you are,’ said Annie.

The sight of his white, bare arm maddened the girls. He lay in a kind of trance of fear and antagonism. They felt themselves filled with supernatural strength.

Suddenly Polly started to laugh — to giggle wildly — helplessly — and Emma and Muriel joined in. But Annie and Nora and Laura remained the same, tense, watchful, with gleaming eyes. He winced away from these eyes.

‘Yes,’ said Annie, in a curious low tone, secret and deadly. ‘Yes! You’ve got it now! You know what you’ve done, don’t you? You know what you’ve done.’

He made no sound nor sign, but lay with bright, averted eyes, and averted, bleeding face.

‘You ought to be killed, that’s what you ought,’ said Annie, tensely. ‘You ought to be killed.’ And there was a terrifying lust in her voice.

Polly was ceasing to laugh, and giving long-drawn Oh-h-hs and sighs as she came to herself.

‘He’s got to choose,’ she said vaguely.

‘Oh, yes, he has,’ said Laura, with vindictive decision.

‘Do you hear — do you hear?’ said Annie. And with a sharp movement, that made him wince, she turned his face to her.

‘Do you hear?’ she repeated, shaking him.

But he was quite dumb. She fetched him a sharp slap on the face. He started, and his eyes widened. Then his face darkened with defiance, after all.

‘Do you hear?’ she repeated.

He only looked at her with hostile eyes.

‘Speak!’ she said, putting her face devilishly near his.

‘What?’ he said, almost overcome.

‘You’ve got to choose!’ she cried, as if it were some terrible menace, and as if it hurt her that she could not exact more.

‘What?’ he said, in fear.

‘Choose your girl, Cuddy. You’ve got to choose her now. And you’ll get your neck broken if you play any more of your tricks, my boy. You’re settled now.’

There was a pause. Again he averted his face. He was cunning in his overthrow. He did not give in to them really — no, not if they tore him to bits.

‘All right, then,’ he said, ‘I choose Annie.’ His voice was strange and full of malice. Annie let go of him as if he had been a hot coal.

‘He’s chosen Annie!’ said the girls in chorus.

‘Me!’ cried Annie. She was still kneeling, but away from him. He was still lying prostrate, with averted face. The girls grouped uneasily around.

‘Me!’ repeated Annie, with a terrible bitter accent.

Then she got up, drawing away from him with strange disgust and bitterness.

‘I wouldn’t touch him,’ she said.

But her face quivered with a kind of agony, she seemed as if she would fall. The other girls turned aside. He remained lying on the floor, with his torn clothes and bleeding, averted face.

‘Oh, if he’s chosen — ’ said Polly.

‘I don’t want him — he can choose again,’ said Annie, with the same rather bitter hopelessness.

‘Get up,’ said Polly, lifting his shoulder. ‘Get up.’

He rose slowly, a strange, ragged, dazed creature. The girls eyed him from a distance, curiously, furtively, dangerously.

‘Who wants him?’ cried Laura, roughly.

‘Nobody,’ they answered, with contempt. Yet each one of them waited for him to look at her, hoped he would look at her. All except Annie, and something was broken in her.

He, however, kept his face closed and averted from them all. There was a silence of the end. He picked up the torn pieces of his tunic, without knowing what to do with them. The girls stood about uneasily, flushed, panting, tidying their hair and their dress unconsciously, and watching him. He looked at none of them. He espied his cap in a corner, and went and picked it up. He put it on his head, and one of the girls burst into a shrill, hysteric laugh at the sight he presented. He, however, took no heed, but went straight to where his overcoat hung on a peg. The girls moved away from contact with him as if he had been an electric wire. He put on his coat and buttoned it down. Then he rolled his tunic-rags into a bundle, and stood before the locked door, dumbly.

‘Open the door, somebody,’ said Laura.

‘Annie’s got the key,’ said one.

Annie silently offered the key to the girls. Nora unlocked the door.

‘Tit for tat, old man,’ she said. ‘Show yourself a man, and don’t bear a grudge.’

But without a word or sign he had opened the door and gone, his face closed, his head dropped.

‘That’ll learn him,’ said Laura.

‘Coddy!’ said Nora.

‘Shut up, for God’s sake!’ cried Annie fiercely, as if in torture.

‘Well, I’m about ready to go, Polly. Look sharp!’ said Muriel.

The girls were all anxious to be off. They were tidying themselves hurriedly, with mute, stupefied faces.

REX

SINCE every family has its black sheep, it almost follows that every man must have a sooty uncle. Lucky if he hasn't two. However, it is only with my mother's brother that we are concerned. She had loved him dearly when he was a little blond boy. When he grew up black, she was always vowing she would never speak to him again. Yet when he put in an appearance, after years of absence, she invariably received him in a festive mood, and was even flirtly with him.

He rolled up one day in a dog-cart, when I was a small boy. He was large and bullet-headed and blustering, and this time, sporty. Sometimes he was rather literary, sometimes coloured with business. But this time he was in checks, and was sporty. We viewed him from a distance.

The upshot was, would we rear a pup for him. Now my mother detested animals about the house. She could not bear the mix-up of human with animal life. Yet she consented to bring up the pup.

My uncle had taken a large, vulgar public-house in a large and vulgar town. It came to pass that I must fetch the pup. Strange for me, a member of the Band of Hope, to enter the big, noisy, smelly plate-glass and mahogany public-house. It was called The Good Omen. Strange to have my uncle towering over me in the passage, shouting 'Hello, Johnny, what d'yer want?' He didn't know me. Strange to think he was my mother's brother, and that he had his bouts when he read Browning aloud with emotion and éclat.

I was given tea in a narrow, uncomfortable sort of living-room, half kitchen. Curious that such a palatial pub should show such miserable private accommodations, but so it was. There was I, unhappy, and glad to escape with the soft fat pup. It was winter-time, and I wore a big-flapped black overcoat, half cloak. Under the cloak-sleeves I hid the puppy, who trembled. It was Saturday, and the train was crowded, and he whimpered under my coat. I sat in mortal fear of being hauled out for travelling without a dog-ticket. However, we arrived, and my torments were for nothing.

The others were wildly excited over the puppy. He was small and fat and white, with a brown-and-black head: a fox terrier. My father said he had a lemon head — some such mysterious technical phraseology. It wasn't lemon at all, but coloured like a field bee. And he had a black spot at the root of his spine.

It was Saturday night — bath-night. He crawled on the hearth-rug like a fat white teacup, and licked the bare toes that had just been bathed.

‘He ought to be called Spot,’ said one. But that was too ordinary. It was a great question, what to call him.

‘Call him Rex — the King,’ said my mother, looking down on the fat, animated little teacup, who was chewing my sister’s little toe and making her squeal with joy and tickles. We took the name in all seriousness.

‘Rex — the King!’ We thought it was just right. Not for years did I realise that it was a sarcasm on my mother’s part. She must have wasted some twenty years or more of irony on our incurable naïveté.

It wasn’t a successful name, really. Because my father and all the people in the street failed completely to pronounce the monosyllable Rex. They all said Rax. And it always distressed me. It always suggested to me seaweed, and rack-and-ruin. Poor Rex!

We loved him dearly. The first night we woke to hear him weeping and whinnying in loneliness at the foot of the stairs. When it could be borne no more, I slipped down for him, and he slept under the sheets.

‘I won’t have that little beast in the beds. Beds are not for dogs,’ declared my mother callously.

‘He’s as good as we are!’ we cried, injured.

‘Whether he is or not, he’s not going in the beds.’

I think now, my mother scorned us for our lack of pride. We were a little *infra dig*, we children.

The second night, however, Rex wept the same and in the same way was comforted. The third night we heard our father plod downstairs, heard several slaps administered to the yelling, dismayed puppy, and heard the amiable, but to us heartless voice saying ‘Shut it then! Shut thy noise, ’st hear? Stop in thy basket, stop there!’

‘It’s a shame!’ we shouted, in muffled rebellion, from the sheets.

‘I’ll give you shame, if you don’t hold your noise and go to sleep,’ called our mother from her room. Whereupon we shed angry tears and went to sleep. But there was a tension.

‘Such a houseful of idiots would make me detest the little beast, even if he was better than he is,’ said my mother.

But as a matter of fact, she did not detest Rexie at all. She only had to pretend to do so, to balance our adoration. And in truth, she did not care for close contact with animals. She was too fastidious. My father, however, would take on a real dog’s voice, talking to the puppy: a funny, high, sing-song falsetto which he seemed to produce at the top of his head. ‘S a pretty little dog! ’s a pretty little doggy! — ay! — yes! — he is, yes! — Wag thy strunt, then! Wag thy strunt, Rexie! — Ha-ha! Nay, tha munna —’ This last as the puppy, wild with

excitement at the strange falsetto voice, licked my father's nostrils and bit my father's nose with his sharp little teeth.

'E makes blood come,' said my father.

'Serves you right for being so silly with him,' said my mother. It was odd to see her as she watched the man, my father, crouching and talking to the little dog and laughing strangely when the little creature bit his nose and toused his beard. What does a woman think of her husband at such a moment?

My mother amused herself over the names we called him.

'He's an angel — he's a little butterfly — Rexie, my sweet!'

'Sweet! A dirty little object!' interpolated my mother. She and he had a feud from the first. Of course he chewed boots and worried our stockings and swallowed our garters. The moment we took off our stockings he would dart away with one, we after him. Then as he hung, growling vociferously, at one end of the stocking, we at the other, we would cry:

'Look at him, Mother! He'll make holes in it again.' Whereupon my mother darted at him and spanked him sharply.

'Let go, sir, you destructive little fiend.'

But he didn't let go. He began to growl with real rage, and hung on viciously. Mite as he was, he defied her with a manly fury. He did not hate her, nor she him. But they had one long battle with one another.

'I'll teach you, my Jockey! Do you think I'm going to spend my life darning after your destructive little teeth! I'll show you if I will!'

But Rexie only growled more viciously. They both became really angry, while we children expostulated earnestly with both. He would not let her take the stocking from him.

'You should tell him properly, Mother. He won't be driven,' we said.

'I'll drive him farther than he bargains for. I'll drive him out of my sight for ever, that I will,' declared my mother, truly angry. He would put her into a real temper, with his tiny, growling defiance.

'He's sweet! A Rexie, a little Rexie!'

'A filthy little nuisance! Don't think I'll put up with him.'

And to tell the truth, he was dirty at first. How could he be otherwise, so young! But my mother hated him for it. And perhaps this was the real start of their hostility. For he lived in the house with us. He would wrinkle his nose and show his tiny dagger-teeth in fury when he was thwarted, and his growls of real battle-rage against my mother rejoiced us as much as they angered her. But at last she caught him *in flagrante*. She pounced on him, rubbed his nose in the mess, and flung him out into the yard. He yelped with shame and disgust and indignation. I shall never forget the sight of him as he rolled over, then tried to

turn his head away from the disgust of his own muzzle, shaking his little snout with a sort of horror, and trying to sneeze it off. My sister gave a yell of despair, and dashed out with a rag and a pan of water, weeping wildly. She sat in the middle of the yard with the befouled puppy, and shedding bitter tears she wiped him and washed him clean. Loudly she reproached my mother. 'Look how much bigger you are than he is. It's a shame, it's a shame!'

'You ridiculous little lunatic, you've undone all the good it would do him, with your soft ways. Why is my life made a curse with animals! Haven't I enough as it is —'

There was a subdued tension afterwards. Rex was a little white chasm between us and our parent.

He became clean. But then another tragedy loomed. He must be docked. His floating puppy-tail must be docked short. This time my father was the enemy. My mother agreed with us that it was an unnecessary cruelty. But my father was adamant. 'The dog'll look a fool all his life, if he's not docked.' And there was no getting away from it. To add to the horror, poor Rex's tail must be *bitten* off. Why bitten? we asked aghast. We were assured that biting was the only way. A man would take the little tail and just nip it through with his teeth, at a certain joint. My father lifted his lips and bared his incisors, to suit the description. We shuddered. But we were in the hands of fate.

Rex was carried away, and a man called Rowbotham bit off the superfluity of his tail in the Nag's Head, for a quart of best and bitter. We lamented our poor diminished puppy, but agreed to find him more manly and *comme il faut*. We should always have been ashamed of his little whip of a tail, if it had not been shortened. My father said it had made a man of him.

Perhaps it had. For now his true nature came out. And his true nature, like so much else, was dual. First he was a fierce, canine little beast, a beast of rapine and blood. He longed to hunt, savagely. He lusted to set his teeth in his prey. It was no joke with him. The old canine Adam stood first in him, the dog with fangs and glaring eyes. He flew at us when we annoyed him. He flew at all intruders, particularly the postman. He was almost a peril to the neighbourhood. But not quite. Because close second in his nature stood that fatal need to love, the *besoin d'aimer* which at last makes an end of liberty. He had a terrible, terrible necessity to love, and this trammelled the native, savage hunting beast which he was. He was torn between two great impulses: the native impulse to hunt and kill, and the strange, secondary, supervening impulse to love and obey. If he had been left to my father and mother, he would have run wild and got himself shot. As it was, he loved us children with a fierce, joyous love. And we loved him.

When we came home from school we would see him standing at the end of the entry, cocking his head wistfully at the open country in front of him, and meditating whether to be off or not: a white, inquiring little figure, with green savage freedom in front of him. A cry from a far distance from one of us, and like a bullet he hurled himself down the road, in a mad game. Seeing him coming, my sister invariably turned and fled, shrieking with delighted terror. And he would leap straight up her back, and bite her and tear her clothes. But it was only an ecstasy of savage love, and she knew it. She didn't care if he tore her pinafores. But my mother did.

My mother was maddened by him. He was a little demon. At the least provocation, he flew. You had only to sweep the floor, and he bristled and sprang at the broom. Nor would he let go. With his scruff erect and his nostrils snorting rage, he would turn up the whites of his eyes at my mother, as she wrestled at the other end of the broom. 'Leave go, sir, leave go!' She wrestled and stamped her foot, and he answered with horrid growls. In the end it was she who had to let go. Then she flew at him, and he flew at her. All the time we had him, he was within a hair's-breadth of savagely biting her. And she knew it. Yet he always kept sufficient self-control.

We children loved his temper. We would drag the bones from his mouth, and put him into such paroxysms of rage that he would twist his head right over and lay it on the ground upside-down, because he didn't know what to do with himself, the savage was so strong in him and he must fly at us. 'He'll fly at your throat one of these days,' said my father. Neither he nor my mother dared have touched Rex's bone. It was enough to see him bristle and roll the whites of his eyes when they came near. How near he must have been to driving his teeth right into us, cannot be told. He was a horrid sight snarling and crouching at us. But we only laughed and rebuked him. And he would whimper in the sheer torment of his need to attack us.

He never did hurt us. He never hurt anybody, though the neighbourhood was terrified of him. But he took to hunting. To my mother's disgust, he would bring large dead bleeding rats and lay them on the hearth-rug, and she had to take them up on a shovel. For he would not remove them. Occasionally he brought a mangled rabbit, and sometimes, alas, fragmentary poultry. We were in terror of prosecution. Once he came home bloody and feathery and rather sheepish-looking. We cleaned him and questioned him and abused him. Next day we heard of six dead ducks. Thank heaven no one had seen him.

But he was disobedient. If he saw a hen he was off, and calling would not bring him back. He was worst of all with my father, who would take him walks on Sunday morning. My mother would not walk a yard with him. Once, walking

with my father, he rushed off at some sheep in a field. My father yelled in vain. The dog was at the sheep, and meant business. My father crawled through the hedge, and was upon him in time. And now the man was in a paroxysm of rage. He dragged the little beast into the road and thrashed him with a walking stick.

‘Do you know you’re thrashing that dog unmercifully?’ said a passerby.

‘Ay, an’ mean to,’ shouted my father.

The curious thing was that Rex did not respect my father any the more, for the beatings he had from him. He took much more heed of us children, always.

But he let us down also. One fatal Saturday he disappeared. We hunted and called, but no Rex. We were bathed, and it was bedtime, but we would not go to bed. Instead we sat in a row in our nightdresses on the sofa, and wept without stopping. This drove our mother mad.

‘Am I going to put up with it? Am I? And all for that hateful little beast of a dog! He shall go! If he’s not gone now, he shall go.’

Our father came in late, looking rather queer, with his hat over his eye. But in his staccato tippled fashion he tried to be consoling.

‘Never mind, my duckie, I s’ll look for him in the morning.’

Sunday came — oh, such a Sunday. We cried, and didn’t eat. We scoured the land, and for the first time realized how empty and wide the earth is, when you’re looking for something. My father walked for many miles — all in vain. Sunday dinner, with rhubarb pudding, I remember, and an atmosphere of abject misery that was unbearable.

‘Never,’ said my mother, ‘never shall an animal set foot in this house again, while I live. I knew what it would be! I knew.’

The day wore on, and it was the black gloom of bedtime, when we heard a scratch and an impudent little whine at the door. In trotted Rex, mud-black, disreputable, and impudent. His air of offhand ‘How d’ye do!’ was indescribable. He trotted around with *suffisance*, wagging his tail as if to say, ‘Yes, I’ve come back. But I didn’t need to. I can carry on remarkably well by myself.’ Then he walked to his water, and drank noisily and ostentatiously. It was rather a slap in the eye for us.

He disappeared once or twice in this fashion. We never knew where he went. And we began to feel that his heart was not so golden as we had imagined it.

But one fatal day reappeared my uncle and the dog-cart. He whistled to Rex, and Rex trotted up. But when he wanted to examine the lusty, sturdy dog, Rex became suddenly still, then sprang free. Quite jauntily he trotted round — but out of reach of my uncle. He leaped up, licking our faces, and trying to make us play.

‘Why, what ha’ you done wi’ the dog — you’ve made a fool of him. He’s

softer than grease. You've ruined him. You've made a damned fool of him,' shouted my uncle.

Rex was captured and hauled off to the dog-cart and tied to the seat. He was in a frenzy. He yelped and shrieked and struggled, and was hit on the head, hard, with the butt-end of my uncle's whip, which only made him struggle more frantically. So we saw him driven away, our beloved Rex, frantically, madly fighting to get to us from the high dog-cart, and being knocked down, while we stood in the street in mute despair.

After which, black tears, and a little wound which is still alive in our hearts.

I saw Rex only once again, when I had to call just once at The Good Omen. He must have heard my voice, for he was upon me in the passage before I knew where I was. And in the instant I knew how he loved us. He really loved us. And in the same instant there was my uncle with a whip, beating and kicking him back, and Rex cowering, bristling, snarling.

My uncle swore many oaths, how we had ruined the dog for ever, made him vicious, spoiled him for showing purposes, and been altogether a pack of mard-soft fools not fit to be trusted with any dog but a gutter-mongrel.

Poor Rex! We heard his temper was incurably vicious, and he had to be shot.

And it was our fault. We had loved him too much, and he had loved us too much. We never had another pet.

It is a strange thing, love. Nothing but love has made the dog lose his wild freedom, to become the servant of man. And this very servility or completeness of love makes him a term of deepest contempt — 'You dog!'

We should not have loved Rex so much, and he should not have loved us. There should have been a measure. We tended, all of us, to overstep the limits of our own natures. He should have stayed outside human limits, we should have stayed outside canine limits. Nothing is more fatal than the disaster of too much love. My uncle was right, we had ruined the dog.

My uncle was a fool, for all that.

YOU TOUCHED ME

The Pottery House was a square, ugly, brick house girt in by the wall that enclosed the whole grounds of the pottery itself. To be sure, a privet hedge partly masked the house and its ground from the pottery-yard and works: but only partly. Through the hedge could be seen the desolate yard, and the many-windowed, factory-like pottery, over the hedge could be seen the chimneys and the outhouses. But inside the hedge, a pleasant garden and lawn sloped down to a willow pool, which had once supplied the works.

The Pottery itself was now closed, the great doors of the yard permanently shut. No more the great crates with yellow straw showing through, stood in stacks by the packing shed. No more the drays drawn by great horses rolled down the hill with a high load. No more the pottery-lasses in their clay-coloured overalls, their faces and hair splashed with grey fine mud, shrieked and larked with the men. All that was over.

‘We like it much better — oh, much better — quieter,’ said Matilda Rockley.

‘Oh, yes,’ assented Emmie Rockley, her sister.

‘I’m sure you do,’ agreed the visitor.

But whether the two Rockley girls really liked it better, or whether they only imagined they did, is a question. Certainly their lives were much more grey and dreary now that the grey clay had ceased to spatter its mud and silt its dust over the premises. They did not quite realize how they missed the shrieking, shouting lasses, whom they had known all their lives and disliked so much.

Matilda and Emmie were already old maids. In a thorough industrial district, it is not easy for the girls who have expectations above the common to find husbands. The ugly industrial town was full of men, young men who were ready to marry. But they were all colliers or pottery-hands, mere workmen. The Rockley girls would have about ten thousand pounds each when their father died: ten thousand pounds’ worth of profitable house-property. It was not to be sneezed at: they felt so themselves, and refrained from sneezing away such a fortune on any mere member of the proletariat. Consequently, bank-clerks or nonconformist clergymen or even school-teachers having failed to come forward, Matilda had begun to give up all idea of ever leaving the Pottery House.

Matilda was a tall, thin, graceful fair girl, with a rather large nose. She was the Mary to Emmie’s Martha: that is, Matilda loved painting and music, and read a good many novels, whilst Emmie looked after the house-keeping. Emmie was

shorter, plumper than her sister, and she had no accomplishments. She looked up to Matilda, whose mind was naturally refined and sensible.

In their quiet, melancholy way, the two girls were happy. Their mother was dead. Their father was ill also. He was an intelligent man who had had some education, but preferred to remain as if he were one with the rest of the working people. He had a passion for music and played the violin pretty well. But now he was getting old, he was very ill, dying of a kidney disease. He had been rather a heavy whisky-drinker.

This quiet household, with one servant-maid, lived on year after year in the Pottery House. Friends came in, the girls went out, the father drank himself more and more ill. Outside in the street there was a continual racket of the colliers and their dogs and children. But inside the pottery wall was a deserted quiet.

In all this ointment there was one little fly. Ted Rockley, the father of the girls, had had four daughters, and no son. As his girls grew, he felt angry at finding himself always in a household of women. He went off to London and adopted a boy out of a Charity Institution. Emmie was fourteen years old, and Matilda sixteen, when their father arrived home with his prodigy, the boy of six, Hadrian.

Hadrian was just an ordinary boy from a Charity Home, with ordinary brownish hair and ordinary bluish eyes and of ordinary rather cockney speech. The Rockley girls — there were three at home at the time of his arrival — had resented his being sprung on them. He, with his watchful, charity-institution instinct, knew this at once. Though he was only six years old, Hadrian had a subtle, jeering look on his face when he regarded the three young women. They insisted he should address them as Cousin: Cousin Flora, Cousin Matilda, Cousin Emmie. He complied, but there seemed a mockery in his tone.

The girls, however, were kind-hearted by nature. Flora married and left home. Hadrian did very much as he pleased with Matilda and Emmie, though they had certain strictnesses. He grew up in the Pottery House and about the Pottery premises, went to an elementary school, and was invariably called Hadrian Rockley. He regarded Cousin Matilda and Cousin Emmie with a certain laconic indifference, was quiet and reticent in his ways. The girls called him sly, but that was unjust. He was merely cautious, and without frankness. His Uncle, Ted Rockley, understood him tacitly, their natures were somewhat akin. Hadrian and the elderly man had a real but unemotional regard for one another.

When he was thirteen years old the boy was sent to a High School in the County town. He did not like it. His Cousin Matilda had longed to make a little gentleman of him, but he refused to be made. He would give a little contemptuous curve to his lip, and take on a shy, charity-boy grin, when refinement was thrust upon him. He played truant from the High School, sold his

books, his cap with its badge, even his very scarf and pocket-handkerchief, to his school-fellows, and went raking off heaven knows where with the money. So he spent two very unsatisfactory years.

When he was fifteen he announced that he wanted to leave England and go to the Colonies. He had kept touch with the Home. The Rockleys knew that, when Hadrian made a declaration, in his quiet, half-jeering manner, it was worse than useless to oppose him. So at last the boy departed, going to Canada under the protection of the Institution to which he had belonged. He said good-bye to the Rockleys without a word of thanks, and parted, it seemed, without a pang. Matilda and Emmie wept often to think of how he left them: even on their father's face a queer look came. But Hadrian wrote fairly regularly from Canada. He had entered some electricity works near Montreal, and was doing well.

At last, however, the war came. In his turn, Hadrian joined up and came to Europe. The Rockleys saw nothing of him. They lived on, just the same, in the Pottery House. Ted Rockley was dying of a sort of dropsy, and in his heart he wanted to see the boy. When the armistice was signed, Hadrian had a long leave, and wrote that he was coming home to the Pottery House.

The girls were terribly fluttered. To tell the truth, they were a little afraid of Hadrian. Matilda, tall and thin, was frail in her health, both girls were worn with nursing their father. To have Hadrian, a young man of twenty-one, in the house with them, after he had left them so coldly five years before, was a trying circumstance.

They were in a flutter. Emmie persuaded her father to have his bed made finally in the morning-room downstairs, whilst his room upstairs was prepared for Hadrian. This was done, and preparations were going on for the arrival, when, at ten o'clock in the morning the young man suddenly turned up, quite unexpectedly. Cousin Emmie, with her hair bobbed up in absurd little bobs round her forehead, was busily polishing the stair-rods, while Cousin Matilda was in the kitchen washing the drawing-room ornaments in a lather, her sleeves rolled back on her thin arms, and her head tied up oddly and coquettishly in a duster.

Cousin Matilda blushed deep with mortification when the self-possessed young man walked in with his kit-bag, and put his cap on the sewing machine. He was little and self-confident, with a curious neatness about him that still suggested the Charity Institution. His face was brown, he had a small moustache, he was vigorous enough in his smallness.

'Well, is it Hadrian!' exclaimed Cousin Matilda, wringing the lather off her hand. 'We didn't expect you till tomorrow.'

'I got off Monday night,' said Hadrian, glancing round the room.

‘Fancy!’ said Cousin Matilda. Then, having dried her hands, she went forward, held out her hand, and said:

‘How are you?’

‘Quite well, thank you,’ said Hadrian.

‘You’re quite a man,’ said Cousin Matilda.

Hadrian glanced at her. She did not look her best: so thin, so large-nosed, with that pink-and-white checked duster tied round her head. She felt her disadvantage. But she had had a good deal of suffering and sorrow, she did not mind any more.

The servant entered — one that did not know Hadrian.

‘Come and see my father,’ said Cousin Matilda.

In the hall they roused Cousin Emmie like a partridge from cover. She was on the stairs pushing the bright stair-rods into place. Instinctively her hand went to the little knobs, her front hair bobbed on her forehead.

‘Why!’ she exclaimed, crossly. ‘What have you come today for?’

‘I got off a day earlier,’ said Hadrian, and his man’s voice so deep and unexpected was like a blow to Cousin Emmie.

‘Well, you’ve caught us in the midst of it,’ she said, with resentment. Then all three went into the middle room.

Mr. Rockley was dressed — that is, he had on his trousers and socks — but he was resting on the bed, propped up just under the window, from whence he could see his beloved and resplendent garden, where tulips and apple-trees were ablaze. He did not look as ill as he was, for the water puffed him up, and his face kept its colour. His stomach was much swollen. He glanced round swiftly, turning his eyes without turning his head. He was the wreck of a handsome, well-built man.

Seeing Hadrian, a queer, unwilling smile went over his face. The young man greeted him sheepishly.

‘You wouldn’t make a life-guardsmen,’ he said. ‘Do you want something to eat?’

Hadrian looked round — as if for the meal.

‘I don’t mind,’ he said.

‘What shall you have — egg and bacon?’ asked Emmie shortly.

‘Yes, I don’t mind,’ said Hadrian.

The sisters went down to the kitchen, and sent the servant to finish the stairs.

‘Isn’t he altered?’ said Matilda, sotto voce.

‘Isn’t he!’ said Cousin Emmie. ‘What a little man!’

They both made a grimace, and laughed nervously.

‘Get the frying-pan,’ said Emmie to Matilda.

‘But he’s as cocky as ever,’ said Matilda, narrowing her eyes and shaking her head knowingly, as she handed the frying-pan.

‘Mannie!’ said Emmie sarcastically. Hadrian’s new-fledged, cock-sure manliness evidently found no favour in her eyes.

‘Oh, he’s not bad,’ said Matilda. ‘You don’t want to be prejudiced against him.’

‘I’m not prejudiced against him, I think he’s all right for looks,’ said Emmie, ‘but there’s too much of the little mannie about him.’

‘Fancy catching us like this,’ said Matilda.

‘They’ve no thought for anything,’ said Emmie with contempt. ‘You go up and get dressed, our Matilda. I don’t care about him. I can see to things, and you can talk to him. I shan’t.’

‘He’ll talk to my father,’ said Matilda, meaningful.

‘Sly — !’ exclaimed Emmie, with a grimace.

The sisters believed that Hadrian had come hoping to get something out of their father — hoping for a legacy. And they were not at all sure he would not get it.

Matilda went upstairs to change. She had thought it all out how she would receive Hadrian, and impress him. And he had caught her with her head tied up in a duster, and her thin arms in a basin of lather. But she did not care. She now dressed herself most scrupulously, carefully folded her long, beautiful, blonde hair, touched her pallor with a little rouge, and put her long string of exquisite crystal beads over her soft green dress. Now she looked elegant, like a heroine in a magazine illustration, and almost as unreal.

She found Hadrian and her father talking away. The young man was short of speech as a rule, but he could find his tongue with his ‘uncle’. They were both sipping a glass of brandy, and smoking, and chatting like a pair of old cronies. Hadrian was telling about Canada. He was going back there when his leave was up.

‘You wouldn’t like to stop in England, then?’ said Mr. Rockley.

‘No, I wouldn’t stop in England,’ said Hadrian.

‘How’s that? There’s plenty of electricians here,’ said Mr. Rockley.

‘Yes. But there’s too much difference between the men and the employers over here — too much of that for me,’ said Hadrian.

The sick man looked at him narrowly, with oddly smiling eyes.

‘That’s it, is it?’ he replied.

Matilda heard and understood. ‘So that’s your big idea, is it, my little man,’ she said to herself. She had always said of Hadrian that he had no proper respect for anybody or anything, that he was sly and common. She went down to the

kitchen for a sotto voce confab with Emmie.

‘He thinks a rare lot of himself!’ she whispered.

‘He’s somebody, he is!’ said Emmie with contempt.

‘He thinks there’s too much difference between masters and men, over here,’ said Matilda.

‘Is it any different in Canada?’ asked Emmie.

‘Oh, yes — democratic,’ replied Matilda, ‘He thinks they’re all on a level over there.’

‘Ay, well he’s over here now,’ said Emmie dryly, ‘so he can keep his place.’

As they talked they saw the young man sauntering down the garden, looking casually at the flowers. He had his hands in his pockets, and his soldier’s cap neatly on his head. He looked quite at his ease, as if in possession. The two women, fluttered, watched him through the window.

‘We know what he’s come for,’ said Emmie, churlishly. Matilda looked a long time at the neat khaki figure. It had something of the charity-boy about it still; but now it was a man’s figure, laconic, charged with plebeian energy. She thought of the derisive passion in his voice as he had declaimed against the propertied classes, to her father.

‘You don’t know, Emmie. Perhaps he’s not come for that,’ she rebuked her sister. They were both thinking of the money.

They were still watching the young soldier. He stood away at the bottom of the garden, with his back to them, his hands in his pockets, looking into the water of the willow pond. Matilda’s dark-blue eyes had a strange, full look in them, the lids, with the faint blue veins showing, dropped rather low. She carried her head light and high, but she had a look of pain. The young man at the bottom of the garden turned and looked up the path. Perhaps he saw them through the window. Matilda moved into shadow.

That afternoon their father seemed weak and ill. He was easily exhausted. The doctor came, and told Matilda that the sick man might die suddenly at any moment — but then he might not. They must be prepared.

So the day passed, and the next. Hadrian made himself at home. He went about in the morning in his brownish jersey and his khaki trousers, collarless, his bare neck showing. He explored the pottery premises, as if he had some secret purpose in so doing, he talked with Mr. Rockley, when the sick man had strength. The two girls were always angry when the two men sat talking together like cronies. Yet it was chiefly a kind of politics they talked.

On the second day after Hadrian’s arrival, Matilda sat with her father in the evening. She was drawing a picture which she wanted to copy. It was very still, Hadrian was gone out somewhere, no one knew where, and Emmie was busy.

Mr. Rockley reclined on his bed, looking out in silence over his evening-sunny garden.

‘If anything happens to me, Matilda,’ he said, ‘you won’t sell this house — you’ll stop here — ’

Matilda’s eyes took their slightly haggard look as she stared at her father.

‘Well, we couldn’t do anything else,’ she said.

‘You don’t know what you might do,’ he said. ‘Everything is left to you and Emmie, equally. You do as you like with it — only don’t sell this house, don’t part with it.’

‘No,’ she said.

‘And give Hadrian my watch and chain, and a hundred pounds out of what’s in the bank — and help him if he ever wants helping. I haven’t put his name in the will.’

‘Your watch and chain, and a hundred pounds — yes. But you’ll be here when he goes back to Canada, father.’

‘You never know what’ll happen,’ said her father.

Matilda sat and watched him, with her full, haggard eyes, for a long time, as if tranced. She saw that he knew he must go soon — she saw like a clairvoyant.

Later on she told Emmie what her father had said about the watch and chain and the money.

‘What right has he’ — he — meaning Hadrian — ‘to my father’s watch and chain — what has it to do with him? Let him have the money, and get off,’ said Emmie. She loved her father.

That night Matilda sat late in her room. Her heart was anxious and breaking, her mind seemed entranced. She was too much entranced even to weep, and all the time she thought of her father, only her father. At last she felt she must go to him.

It was near midnight. She went along the passage and to his room. There was a faint light from the moon outside. She listened at his door. Then she softly opened and entered. The room was faintly dark. She heard a movement on the bed.

‘Are you asleep?’ she said softly, advancing to the side of the bed.

‘Are you asleep?’ she repeated gently, as she stood at the side of the bed. And she reached her hand in the darkness to touch his forehead. Delicately, her fingers met the nose and the eyebrows, she laid her fine, delicate hand on his brow. It seemed fresh and smooth — very fresh and smooth. A sort of surprise stirred her, in her entranced state. But it could not waken her. Gently, she leaned over the bed and stirred her fingers over the low-growing hair on his brow.

‘Can’t you sleep tonight?’ she said.

There was a quick stirring in the bed. 'Yes, I can,' a voice answered. It was Hadrian's voice. She started away. Instantly, she was wakened from her late-at-night trance. She remembered that her father was downstairs, that Hadrian had his room. She stood in the darkness as if stung.

'It is you, Hadrian?' she said. 'I thought it was my father.' She was so startled, so shocked, that she could not move. The young man gave an uncomfortable laugh, and turned in his bed.

At last she got out of the room. When she was back in her own room, in the light, and her door was closed, she stood holding up her hand that had touched him, as if it were hurt. She was almost too shocked, she could not endure.

'Well,' said her calm and weary mind, 'it was only a mistake, why take any notice of it.'

But she could not reason her feelings so easily. She suffered, feeling herself in a false position. Her right hand, which she had laid so gently on his face, on his fresh skin, ached now, as if it were really injured. She could not forgive Hadrian for the mistake: it made her dislike him deeply.

Hadrian too slept badly. He had been awakened by the opening of the door, and had not realized what the question meant. But the soft, straying tenderness of her hand on his face startled something out of his soul. He was a charity boy, aloof and more or less at bay. The fragile exquisiteness of her caress startled him most, revealed unknown things to him.

In the morning she could feel the consciousness in his eyes, when she came downstairs. She tried to bear herself as if nothing at all had happened, and she succeeded. She had the calm self-control, self-indifference, of one who has suffered and borne her suffering. She looked at him from her darkish, almost drugged blue eyes, she met the spark of consciousness in his eyes, and quenched it. And with her long, fine hand she put the sugar in his coffee.

But she could not control him as she thought she could. He had a keen memory stinging his mind, a new set of sensations working in his consciousness. Something new was alert in him. At the back of his reticent, guarded mind he kept his secret alive and vivid. She was at his mercy, for he was unscrupulous, his standard was not her standard.

He looked at her curiously. She was not beautiful, her nose was too large, her chin was too small, her neck was too thin. But her skin was clear and fine, she had a high-bred sensitiveness. This queer, brave, high-bred quality she shared with her father. The charity boy could see it in her tapering fingers, which were white and ringed. The same glamour that he knew in the elderly man he now saw in the woman. And he wanted to possess himself of it, he wanted to make himself master of it. As he went about through the old pottery-yard, his secretive

mind schemed and worked. To be master of that strange soft delicacy such as he had felt in her hand upon his face, — this was what he set himself towards. He was secretly plotting.

He watched Matilda as she went about, and she became aware of his attention, as of some shadow following her. But her pride made her ignore it. When he sauntered near her, his hands in his pockets, she received him with that same commonplace kindness which mastered him more than any contempt. Her superior breeding seemed to control him. She made herself feel towards him exactly as she had always felt: he was a young boy who lived in the house with them, but was a stranger. Only, she dared not remember his face under her hand. When she remembered that, she was bewildered. Her hand had offended her, she wanted to cut it off. And she wanted, fiercely, to cut off the memory in him. She assumed she had done so.

One day, when he sat talking with his ‘uncle’, he looked straight into the eyes of the sick man, and said:

‘But I shouldn’t like to live and die here in Rawsley.’

‘No — well — you needn’t,’ said the sick man.

‘Do you think Cousin Matilda likes it?’

‘I should think so.’

‘I don’t call it much of a life,’ said the youth. ‘How much older is she than me, Uncle?’

The sick man looked at the young soldier.

‘A good bit,’ he said.

‘Over thirty?’ said Hadrian.

‘Well, not so much. She’s thirty-two.’

Hadrian considered a while.

‘She doesn’t look it,’ he said.

Again the sick father looked at him.

‘Do you think she’d like to leave here?’ said Hadrian.

‘Nay, I don’t know,’ replied the father, restive.

Hadrian sat still, having his own thoughts. Then in a small, quiet voice, as if he were speaking from inside himself, he said:

‘I’d marry her if you wanted me to.’

The sick man raised his eyes suddenly, and stared. He stared for a long time. The youth looked inscrutably out of the window.

‘You!’ said the sick man, mocking, with some contempt. Hadrian turned and met his eyes. The two men had an inexplicable understanding.

‘If you wasn’t against it,’ said Hadrian.

‘Nay,’ said the father, turning aside, ‘I don’t think I’m against it. I’ve never

thought of it. But — But Emmie's the youngest.'

He had flushed, and looked suddenly more alive. Secretly he loved the boy.

'You might ask her,' said Hadrian.

The elder man considered.

'Hadn't you better ask her yourself?' he said.

'She'd take more notice of you,' said Hadrian.

They were both silent. Then Emmie came in.

For two days Mr. Rockley was excited and thoughtful. Hadrian went about quietly, secretly, unquestioning. At last the father and daughter were alone together. It was very early morning, the father had been in much pain. As the pain abated, he lay still, thinking.

'Matilda!' he said suddenly, looking at his daughter.

'Yes, I'm here,' she said.

'Ay! I want you to do something —'

She rose in anticipation.

'Nay, sit still. I want you to marry Hadrian —'

She thought he was raving. She rose, bewildered and frightened.

'Nay, sit you still, sit you still. You hear what I tell you.'

'But you don't know what you're saying, father.'

'Ay, I know well enough. I want you to marry Hadrian, I tell you.'

She was dumbfounded. He was a man of few words.

'You'll do what I tell you,' he said.

She looked at him slowly.

'What put such an idea in your mind?' she said proudly.

'He did.'

Matilda almost looked her father down, her pride was so offended.

'Why, it's disgraceful,' she said.

'Why?'

She watched him slowly.

'What do you ask me for?' she said. 'It's disgusting.'

'The lad's sound enough,' he replied, testily.

'You'd better tell him to clear out,' she said, coldly.

He turned and looked out of the window. She sat flushed and erect for a long time. At length her father turned to her, looking really malevolent.

'If you won't,' he said, 'you're a fool, and I'll make you pay for your foolishness, do you see?'

Suddenly a cold fear gripped her. She could not believe her senses. She was terrified and bewildered. She stared at her father, believing him to be delirious, or mad, or drunk. What could she do?

‘I tell you,’ he said. ‘I’ll send for Whittle tomorrow if you don’t. You shall neither of you have anything of mine.’

Whittle was the solicitor. She understood her father well enough: he would send for his solicitor, and make a will leaving all his property to Hadrian: neither she nor Emmie should have anything. It was too much. She rose and went out of the room, up to her own room, where she locked herself in.

She did not come out for some hours. At last, late at night, she confided in Emmie.

‘The sliving demon, he wants the money,’ said Emmie. ‘My father’s out of his mind.’

The thought that Hadrian merely wanted the money was another blow to Matilda. She did not love the impossible youth — but she had not yet learned to think of him as a thing of evil. He now became hideous to her mind.

Emmie had a little scene with her father next day.

‘You don’t mean what you said to our Matilda yesterday, do you, father?’ she asked aggressively.

‘Yes,’ he replied.

‘What, that you’ll alter your will?’

‘Yes.’

‘You won’t,’ said his angry daughter.

But he looked at her with a malevolent little smile.

‘Annie!’ he shouted. ‘Annie!’

He had still power to make his voice carry. The servant maid came in from the kitchen.

‘Put your things on, and go down to Whittle’s office, and say I want to see Mr. Whittle as soon as he can, and will he bring a will-form.’

The sick man lay back a little — he could not lie down. His daughter sat as if she had been struck. Then she left the room.

Hadrian was pottering about in the garden. She went straight down to him.

‘Here,’ she said. ‘You’d better get off. You’d better take your things and go from here, quick.’

Hadrian looked slowly at the infuriated girl.

‘Who says so?’ he asked.

‘We say so — get off, you’ve done enough mischief and damage.’

‘Does Uncle say so?’

‘Yes, he does.’

‘I’ll go and ask him.’

But like a fury Emmie barred his way.

‘No, you needn’t. You needn’t ask him nothing at all. We don’t want you, so

you can go.'

'Uncle's boss here.'

'A man that's dying, and you crawling round and working on him for his money! — you're not fit to live.'

'Oh!' he said. 'Who says I'm working for his money?'

'I say. But my father told our Matilda, and she knows what you are. She knows what you're after. So you might as well clear out, for all you'll get — guttersnipe!'

He turned his back on her, to think. It had not occurred to him that they would think he was after the money. He did want the money — badly. He badly wanted to be an employer himself, not one of the employed. But he knew, in his subtle, calculating way, that it was not for money he wanted Matilda. He wanted both the money and Matilda. But he told himself the two desires were separate, not one. He could not do with Matilda, without the money. But he did not want her for the money.

When he got this clear in his mind, he sought for an opportunity to tell it her, lurking and watching. But she avoided him. In the evening the lawyer came. Mr. Rockley seemed to have a new access of strength — a will was drawn up, making the previous arrangements wholly conditional. The old will held good, if Matilda would consent to marry Hadrian. If she refused then at the end of six months the whole property passed to Hadrian.

Mr. Rockley told this to the young man, with malevolent satisfaction. He seemed to have a strange desire, quite unreasonable, for revenge upon the women who had surrounded him for so long, and served him so carefully.

'Tell her in front of me,' said Hadrian.

So Mr. Rockley sent for his daughters.

At last they came, pale, mute, stubborn. Matilda seemed to have retired far off, Emmie seemed like a fighter ready to fight to the death. The sick man reclined on the bed, his eyes bright, his puffed hand trembling. But his face had again some of its old, bright handsomeness. Hadrian sat quiet, a little aside: the indomitable, dangerous charity boy.

'There's the will,' said their father, pointing them to the paper.

The two women sat mute and immovable, they took no notice.

'Either you marry Hadrian, or he has everything,' said the father with satisfaction.

'Then let him have everything,' said Matilda boldly.

'He's not! He's not!' cried Emmie fiercely. 'He's not going to have it. The guttersnipe!'

An amused look came on her father's face.

‘You hear that, Hadrian,’ he said.

‘I didn’t offer to marry Cousin Matilda for the money,’ said Hadrian, flushing and moving on his seat.

Matilda looked at him slowly, with her dark-blue, drugged eyes. He seemed a strange little monster to her.

‘Why, you liar, you know you did,’ cried Emmie.

The sick man laughed. Matilda continued to gaze strangely at the young man.

‘She knows I didn’t,’ said Hadrian.

He too had his courage, as a rat has indomitable courage in the end. Hadrian had some of the neatness, the reserve, the underground quality of the rat. But he had perhaps the ultimate courage, the most unquenchable courage of all.

Emmie looked at her sister.

‘Oh, well,’ she said. ‘Matilda — don’t bother. Let him have everything, we can look after ourselves.’

‘I know he’ll take everything,’ said Matilda, abstractedly.

Hadrian did not answer. He knew in fact that if Matilda refused him he would take everything, and go off with it.

‘A clever little mannie — !’ said Emmie, with a jeering grimace.

The father laughed noiselessly to himself. But he was tired....

‘Go on, then,’ he said. ‘Go on, let me be quiet.’

Emmie turned and looked at him.

‘You deserve what you’ve got,’ she said to her father bluntly.

‘Go on,’ he answered mildly. ‘Go on.’

Another night passed — a night nurse sat up with Mr. Rockley. Another day came. Hadrian was there as ever, in his woollen jersey and coarse khaki trousers and bare neck. Matilda went about, frail and distant, Emmie black-browed in spite of her blondness. They were all quiet, for they did not intend the mystified servant to learn anything.

Mr. Rockley had very bad attacks of pain, he could not breathe. The end seemed near. They all went about quiet and stoical, all unyielding. Hadrian pondered within himself. If he did not marry Matilda he would go to Canada with twenty thousand pounds. This was itself a very satisfactory prospect. If Matilda consented he would have nothing — she would have her own money.

Emmie was the one to act. She went off in search of the solicitor and brought him with her. There was an interview, and Whittle tried to frighten the youth into withdrawal — but without avail. The clergyman and relatives were summoned — but Hadrian stared at them and took no notice. It made him angry, however.

He wanted to catch Matilda alone. Many days went by, and he was not successful: she avoided him. At last, lurking, he surprised her one day as she

came to pick gooseberries, and he cut off her retreat. He came to the point at once.

‘You don’t want me, then?’ he said, in his subtle, insinuating voice.

‘I don’t want to speak to you,’ she said, averting her face.

‘You put your hand on me, though,’ he said. ‘You shouldn’t have done that, and then I should never have thought of it. You shouldn’t have touched me.’

‘If you were anything decent, you’d know that was a mistake, and forget it,’ she said.

‘I know it was a mistake — but I shan’t forget it. If you wake a man up, he can’t go to sleep again because he’s told to.’

‘If you had any decent feeling in you, you’d have gone away,’ she replied.

‘I didn’t want to,’ he replied.

She looked away into the distance. At last she asked:

‘What do you persecute me for, if it isn’t for the money. I’m old enough to be your mother. In a way I’ve been your mother.’

‘Doesn’t matter,’ he said. ‘You’ve been no mother to me. Let us marry and go out to Canada — you might as well — you’ve touched me.’

She was white and trembling. Suddenly she flushed with anger.

‘It’s so indecent,’ she said.

‘How?’ he retorted. ‘You touched me.’

But she walked away from him. She felt as if he had trapped her. He was angry and depressed, he felt again despised.

That same evening she went into her father’s room.

‘Yes,’ she said suddenly. ‘I’ll marry him.’

Her father looked up at her. He was in pain, and very ill.

‘You like him now, do you?’ he said, with a faint smile.

She looked down into his face, and saw death not far off. She turned and went coldly out of the room.

The solicitor was sent for, preparations were hastily made. In all the interval Matilda did not speak to Hadrian, never answered him if he addressed her. He approached her in the morning.

‘You’ve come round to it, then?’ he said, giving her a pleasant look from his twinkling, almost kindly eyes. She looked down at him and turned aside. She looked down on him both literally and figuratively. Still he persisted, and triumphed.

Emmie raved and wept, the secret flew abroad. But Matilda was silent and unmoved, Hadrian was quiet and satisfied, and nipped with fear also. But he held out against his fear. Mr. Rockley was very ill, but unchanged.

On the third day the marriage took place. Matilda and Hadrian drove straight

home from the registrar, and went straight into the room of the dying man. His face lit up with a clear twinkling smile.

‘Hadrian — you’ve got her?’ he said, a little hoarsely.

‘Yes,’ said Hadrian, who was pale round the gills.

‘Ay, my lad, I’m glad you’re mine,’ replied the dying man. Then he turned his eyes closely on Matilda.

‘Let’s look at you, Matilda,’ he said. Then his voice went strange and unrecognizable. ‘Kiss me,’ he said.

She stooped and kissed him. She had never kissed him before, not since she was a tiny child. But she was quiet, very still.

‘Kiss him,’ the dying man said.

Obediently, Matilda put forward her mouth and kissed the young husband.

‘That’s right! That’s right!’ murmured the dying man.

THE BLIND MAN

Isabel Pervin was listening for two sounds — for the sound of wheels on the drive outside and for the noise of her husband's footsteps in the hall. Her dearest and oldest friend, a man who seemed almost indispensable to her living, would drive up in the rainy dusk of the closing November day. The trap had gone to fetch him from the station. And her husband, who had been blinded in Flanders, and who had a disfiguring mark on his brow, would be coming in from the outhouses.

He had been home for a year now. He was totally blind. Yet they had been very happy. The Grange was Maurice's own place. The back was a farmstead, and the Wernhams, who occupied the rear premises, acted as farmers. Isabel lived with her husband in the handsome rooms in front. She and he had been almost entirely alone together since he was wounded. They talked and sang and read together in a wonderful and unspeakable intimacy. Then she reviewed books for a Scottish newspaper, carrying on her old interest, and he occupied himself a good deal with the farm. Sightless, he could still discuss everything with Wernham, and he could also do a good deal of work about the place — menial work, it is true, but it gave him satisfaction. He milked the cows, carried in the pails, turned the separator, attended to the pigs and horses. Life was still very full and strangely serene for the blind man, peaceful with the almost incomprehensible peace of immediate contact in darkness. With his wife he had a whole world, rich and real and invisible.

They were newly and remotely happy. He did not even regret the loss of his sight in these times of dark, palpable joy. A certain exultance swelled his soul.

But as time wore on, sometimes the rich glamour would leave them. Sometimes, after months of this intensity, a sense of burden overcame Isabel, a weariness, a terrible ennui, in that silent house approached between a colonnade of tall-shafted pines. Then she felt she would go mad, for she could not bear it. And sometimes he had devastating fits of depression, which seemed to lay waste his whole being. It was worse than depression — a black misery, when his own life was a torture to him, and when his presence was unbearable to his wife. The dread went down to the roots of her soul as these black days recurred. In a kind of panic she tried to wrap herself up still further in her husband. She forced the old spontaneous cheerfulness and joy to continue. But the effort it cost her was almost too much. She knew she could not keep it up. She felt she would scream

with the strain, and would give anything, anything, to escape. She longed to possess her husband utterly; it gave her inordinate joy to have him entirely to herself. And yet, when again he was gone in a black and massive misery, she could not bear him, she could not bear herself; she wished she could be snatched away off the earth altogether, anything rather than live at this cost.

Dazed, she schemed for a way out. She invited friends, she tried to give him some further connexion with the outer world. But it was no good. After all their joy and suffering, after their dark, great year of blindness and solitude and unspeakable nearness, other people seemed to them both shallow, prattling, rather impertinent. Shallow prattle seemed presumptuous. He became impatient and irritated, she was wearied. And so they lapsed into their solitude again. For they preferred it.

But now, in a few weeks' time, her second baby would be born. The first had died, an infant, when her husband first went out to France. She looked with joy and relief to the coming of the second. It would be her salvation. But also she felt some anxiety. She was thirty years old, her husband was a year younger. They both wanted the child very much. Yet she could not help feeling afraid. She had her husband on her hands, a terrible joy to her, and a terrifying burden. The child would occupy her love and attention. And then, what of Maurice? What would he do? If only she could feel that he, too, would be at peace and happy when the child came! She did so want to luxuriate in a rich, physical satisfaction of maternity. But the man, what would he do? How could she provide for him, how avert those shattering black moods of his, which destroyed them both?

She sighed with fear. But at this time Bertie Reid wrote to Isabel. He was her old friend, a second or third cousin, a Scotchman, as she was a Scotswoman. They had been brought up near to one another, and all her life he had been her friend, like a brother, but better than her own brothers. She loved him — though not in the marrying sense. There was a sort of kinship between them, an affinity. They understood one another instinctively. But Isabel would never have thought of marrying Bertie. It would have seemed like marrying in her own family.

Bertie was a barrister and a man of letters, a Scotchman of the intellectual type, quick, ironical, sentimental, and on his knees before the woman he adored but did not want to marry. Maurice Pervin was different. He came of a good old country family — the Grange was not a very great distance from Oxford. He was passionate, sensitive, perhaps over-sensitive, wincing — a big fellow with heavy limbs and a forehead that flushed painfully. For his mind was slow, as if drugged by the strong provincial blood that beat in his veins. He was very sensitive to his own mental slowness, his feelings being quick and acute. So that he was just the

opposite to Bertie, whose mind was much quicker than his emotions, which were not so very fine.

From the first the two men did not like each other. Isabel felt that they ought to get on together. But they did not. She felt that if only each could have the clue to the other there would be such a rare understanding between them. It did not come off, however. Bertie adopted a slightly ironical attitude, very offensive to Maurice, who returned the Scotch irony with English resentment, a resentment which deepened sometimes into stupid hatred.

This was a little puzzling to Isabel. However, she accepted it in the course of things. Men were made freakish and unreasonable. Therefore, when Maurice was going out to France for the second time, she felt that, for her husband's sake, she must discontinue her friendship with Bertie. She wrote to the barrister to this effect. Bertram Reid simply replied that in this, as in all other matters, he must obey her wishes, if these were indeed her wishes.

For nearly two years nothing had passed between the two friends. Isabel rather gloried in the fact; she had no compunction. She had one great article of faith, which was, that husband and wife should be so important to one another, that the rest of the world simply did not count. She and Maurice were husband and wife. They loved one another. They would have children. Then let everybody and everything else fade into insignificance outside this connubial felicity. She professed herself quite happy and ready to receive Maurice's friends. She was happy and ready: the happy wife, the ready woman in possession. Without knowing why, the friends retired abashed and came no more. Maurice, of course, took as much satisfaction in this connubial absorption as Isabel did.

He shared in Isabel's literary activities, she cultivated a real interest in agriculture and cattle-raising. For she, being at heart perhaps an emotional enthusiast, always cultivated the practical side of life, and prided herself on her mastery of practical affairs. Thus the husband and wife had spent the five years of their married life. The last had been one of blindness and unspeakable intimacy. And now Isabel felt a great indifference coming over her, a sort of lethargy. She wanted to be allowed to bear her child in peace, to nod by the fire and drift vaguely, physically, from day to day. Maurice was like an ominous thunder-cloud. She had to keep waking up to remember him.

When a little note came from Bertie, asking if he were to put up a tombstone to their dead friendship, and speaking of the real pain he felt on account of her husband's loss of sight, she felt a pang, a fluttering agitation of re-awakening. And she read the letter to Maurice.

'Ask him to come down,' he said.

'Ask Bertie to come here!' she re-echoed.

‘Yes — if he wants to.’

Isabel paused for a few moments.

‘I know he wants to — he’d only be too glad,’ she replied. ‘But what about you, Maurice? How would you like it?’

‘I should like it.’

‘Well — in that case — But I thought you didn’t care for him — ’

‘Oh, I don’t know. I might think differently of him now,’ the blind man replied. It was rather abstruse to Isabel.

‘Well, dear,’ she said, ‘if you’re quite sure — ’

‘I’m sure enough. Let him come,’ said Maurice.

So Bertie was coming, coming this evening, in the November rain and darkness. Isabel was agitated, racked with her old restlessness and indecision. She had always suffered from this pain of doubt, just an agonizing sense of uncertainty. It had begun to pass off, in the lethargy of maternity. Now it returned, and she resented it. She struggled as usual to maintain her calm, composed, friendly bearing, a sort of mask she wore over all her body.

A woman had lighted a tall lamp beside the table, and spread the cloth. The long dining-room was dim, with its elegant but rather severe pieces of old furniture. Only the round table glowed softly under the light. It had a rich, beautiful effect. The white cloth glistened and dropped its heavy, pointed lace corners almost to the carpet, the china was old and handsome, creamy-yellow, with a blotched pattern of harsh red and deep blue, the cups large and bell-shaped, the teapot gallant. Isabel looked at it with superficial appreciation.

Her nerves were hurting her. She looked automatically again at the high, uncurtained windows. In the last dusk she could just perceive outside a huge fir-tree swaying its boughs: it was as if she thought it rather than saw it. The rain came flying on the window panes. Ah, why had she no peace? These two men, why did they tear at her? Why did they not come — why was there this suspense?

She sat in a lassitude that was really suspense and irritation. Maurice, at least, might come in — there was nothing to keep him out. She rose to her feet. Catching sight of her reflection in a mirror, she glanced at herself with a slight smile of recognition, as if she were an old friend to herself. Her face was oval and calm, her nose a little arched. Her neck made a beautiful line down to her shoulder. With hair knotted loosely behind, she had something of a warm, maternal look. Thinking this of herself, she arched her eyebrows and her rather heavy eyelids, with a little flicker of a smile, and for a moment her grey eyes looked amused and wicked, a little sardonic, out of her transfigured Madonna face.

Then, resuming her air of womanly patience — she was really fatally self-determined — she went with a little jerk towards the door. Her eyes were slightly reddened.

She passed down the wide hall, and through a door at the end. Then she was in the farm premises. The scent of dairy, and of farm-kitchen, and of farm-yard and of leather almost overcame her: but particularly the scent of dairy. They had been scalding out the pans. The flagged passage in front of her was dark, puddled and wet. Light came out from the open kitchen door. She went forward and stood in the doorway. The farm-people were at tea, seated at a little distance from her, round a long, narrow table, in the centre of which stood a white lamp. Ruddy faces, ruddy hands holding food, red mouths working, heads bent over the tea-cups: men, land-girls, boys: it was tea-time, feeding-time. Some faces caught sight of her. Mrs. Wernham, going round behind the chairs with a large black teapot, halting slightly in her walk, was not aware of her for a moment. Then she turned suddenly.

‘Oh, is it Madam!’ she exclaimed. ‘Come in, then, come in! We’re at tea.’ And she dragged forward a chair.

‘No, I won’t come in,’ said Isabel, ‘I’m afraid I interrupt your meal.’

‘No — no — not likely, Madam, not likely.’

‘Hasn’t Mr. Pervin come in, do you know?’

‘I’m sure I couldn’t say! Missed him, have you, Madam?’

‘No, I only wanted him to come in,’ laughed Isabel, as if shyly.

‘Wanted him, did ye? Get you, boy — get up, now — ’

Mrs. Wernham knocked one of the boys on the shoulder. He began to scrape to his feet, chewing largely.

‘I believe he’s in top stable,’ said another face from the table.

‘Ah! No, don’t get up. I’m going myself,’ said Isabel.

‘Don’t you go out of a dirty night like this. Let the lad go. Get along wi’ ye, boy,’ said Mrs. Wernham.

‘No, no,’ said Isabel, with a decision that was always obeyed. ‘Go on with your tea, Tom. I’d like to go across to the stable, Mrs. Wernham.’

‘Did ever you hear tell!’ exclaimed the woman.

‘Isn’t the trap late?’ asked Isabel.

‘Why, no,’ said Mrs. Wernham, peering into the distance at the tall, dim clock.

‘No, Madam — we can give it another quarter or twenty minutes yet, good — yes, every bit of a quarter.’

‘Ah! It seems late when darkness falls so early,’ said Isabel.

‘It do, that it do. Bother the days, that they draw in so,’ answered Mrs. Wernham. ‘Proper miserable!’

‘They are,’ said Isabel, withdrawing.

She pulled on her overshoes, wrapped a large tartan shawl around her, put on a man’s felt hat, and ventured out along the causeways of the first yard. It was very dark. The wind was roaring in the great elms behind the outhouses. When she came to the second yard the darkness seemed deeper. She was unsure of her footing. She wished she had brought a lantern. Rain blew against her. Half she liked it, half she felt unwilling to battle.

She reached at last the just visible door of the stable. There was no sign of a light anywhere. Opening the upper half, she looked in: into a simple well of darkness. The smell of horses, and ammonia, and of warmth was startling to her, in that full night. She listened with all her ears, but could hear nothing save the night, and the stirring of a horse.

‘Maurice!’ she called, softly and musically, though she was afraid. ‘Maurice — are you there?’

Nothing came from the darkness. She knew the rain and wind blew in upon the horses, the hot animal life. Feeling it wrong, she entered the stable, and drew the lower half of the door shut, holding the upper part close. She did not stir, because she was aware of the presence of the dark hindquarters of the horses, though she could not see them, and she was afraid. Something wild stirred in her heart.

She listened intensely. Then she heard a small noise in the distance — far away, it seemed — the chink of a pan, and a man’s voice speaking a brief word. It would be Maurice, in the other part of the stable. She stood motionless, waiting for him to come through the partition door. The horses were so terrifyingly near to her, in the invisible.

The loud jarring of the inner door-latch made her start; the door was opened. She could hear and feel her husband entering and invisibly passing among the horses near to her, in darkness as they were, actively intermingled. The rather low sound of his voice as he spoke to the horses came velvety to her nerves. How near he was, and how invisible! The darkness seemed to be in a strange swirl of violent life, just upon her. She turned giddy.

Her presence of mind made her call, quietly and musically:

‘Maurice! Maurice — dea-ar!’

‘Yes,’ he answered. ‘Isabel?’

She saw nothing, and the sound of his voice seemed to touch her.

‘Hello!’ she answered cheerfully, straining her eyes to see him. He was still busy, attending to the horses near her, but she saw only darkness. It made her almost desperate.

‘Won’t you come in, dear?’ she said.

‘Yes, I’m coming. Just half a minute. Stand over — now! Trap’s not come, has it?’

‘Not yet,’ said Isabel.

His voice was pleasant and ordinary, but it had a slight suggestion of the stable to her. She wished he would come away. Whilst he was so utterly invisible she was afraid of him.

‘How’s the time?’ he asked.

‘Not yet six,’ she replied. She disliked to answer into the dark. Presently he came very near to her, and she retreated out of doors.

‘The weather blows in here,’ he said, coming steadily forward, feeling for the doors. She shrank away. At last she could dimly see him.

‘Bertie won’t have much of a drive,’ he said, as he closed the doors.

‘He won’t indeed!’ said Isabel calmly, watching the dark shape at the door.

‘Give me your arm, dear,’ she said.

She pressed his arm close to her, as she went. But she longed to see him, to look at him. She was nervous. He walked erect, with face rather lifted, but with a curious tentative movement of his powerful, muscular legs. She could feel the clever, careful, strong contact of his feet with the earth, as she balanced against him. For a moment he was a tower of darkness to her, as if he rose out of the earth.

In the house-passage he wavered, and went cautiously, with a curious look of silence about him as he felt for the bench. Then he sat down heavily. He was a man with rather sloping shoulders, but with heavy limbs, powerful legs that seemed to know the earth. His head was small, usually carried high and light. As he bent down to unfasten his gaiters and boots he did not look blind. His hair was brown and crisp, his hands were large, reddish, intelligent, the veins stood out in the wrists; and his thighs and knees seemed massive. When he stood up his face and neck were surcharged with blood, the veins stood out on his temples. She did not look at his blindness.

Isabel was always glad when they had passed through the dividing door into their own regions of repose and beauty. She was a little afraid of him, out there in the animal grossness of the back. His bearing also changed, as he smelt the familiar, indefinable odour that pervaded his wife’s surroundings, a delicate, refined scent, very faintly spicy. Perhaps it came from the pot-pourri bowls.

He stood at the foot of the stairs, arrested, listening. She watched him, and her heart sickened. He seemed to be listening to fate.

‘He’s not here yet,’ he said. ‘I’ll go up and change.’

‘Maurice,’ she said, ‘you’re not wishing he wouldn’t come, are you?’

‘I couldn’t quite say,’ he answered. ‘I feel myself rather on the *qui vive*.’

‘I can see you are,’ she answered. And she reached up and kissed his cheek. She saw his mouth relax into a slow smile.

‘What are you laughing at?’ she said roguishly.

‘You consoling me,’ he answered.

‘Nay,’ she answered. ‘Why should I console you? You know we love each other — you know how married we are! What does anything else matter?’

‘Nothing at all, my dear.’

He felt for her face, and touched it, smiling.

‘You’re all right, aren’t you?’ he asked, anxiously.

‘I’m wonderfully all right, love,’ she answered. ‘It’s you I am a little troubled about, at times.’

‘Why me?’ he said, touching her cheeks delicately with the tips of his fingers. The touch had an almost hypnotizing effect on her.

He went away upstairs. She saw him mount into the darkness, unseeing and unchanging. He did not know that the lamps on the upper corridor were unlighted. He went on into the darkness with unchanging step. She heard him in the bathroom.

Pervin moved about almost unconsciously in his familiar surroundings, dark though everything was. He seemed to know the presence of objects before he touched them. It was a pleasure to him to rock thus through a world of things, carried on the flood in a sort of blood-prescience. He did not think much or trouble much. So long as he kept this sheer immediacy of blood-contact with the substantial world he was happy, he wanted no intervention of visual consciousness. In this state there was a certain rich positivity, bordering sometimes on rapture. Life seemed to move in him like a tide lapping, and advancing, enveloping all things darkly. It was a pleasure to stretch forth the hand and meet the unseen object, clasp it, and possess it in pure contact. He did not try to remember, to visualize. He did not want to. The new way of consciousness substituted itself in him.

The rich suffusion of this state generally kept him happy, reaching its culmination in the consuming passion for his wife. But at times the flow would seem to be checked and thrown back. Then it would beat inside him like a tangled sea, and he was tortured in the shattered chaos of his own blood. He grew to dread this arrest, this throw-back, this chaos inside himself, when he seemed merely at the mercy of his own powerful and conflicting elements. How to get some measure of control or surety, this was the question. And when the question rose maddening in him, he would clench his fists as if he would compel the whole universe to submit to him. But it was in vain. He could not even compel himself.

Tonight, however, he was still serene, though little tremors of unreasonable exasperation ran through him. He had to handle the razor very carefully, as he shaved, for it was not at one with him, he was afraid of it. His hearing also was too much sharpened. He heard the woman lighting the lamps on the corridor, and attending to the fire in the visitor's room. And then, as he went to his room he heard the trap arrive. Then came Isabel's voice, lifted and calling, like a bell ringing:

'Is it you, Bertie? Have you come?'

And a man's voice answered out of the wind:

'Hello, Isabell There you are.'

'Have you had a miserable drive? I'm so sorry we couldn't send a closed carriage. I can't see you at all, you know.'

'I'm coming. No, I liked the drive — it was like Perthshire. Well, how are you? You're looking fit as ever, as far as I can see.'

'Oh, yes,' said Isabel. 'I'm wonderfully well. How are you? Rather thin, I think —'

'Worked to death — everybody's old cry. But I'm all right, Ciss. How's Pervin? — isn't he here?'

'Oh, yes, he's upstairs changing. Yes, he's awfully well. Take off your wet things; I'll send them to be dried.'

'And how are you both, in spirits? He doesn't fret?'

'No — no, not at all. No, on the contrary, really. We've been wonderfully happy, incredibly. It's more than I can understand — so wonderful: the nearness, and the peace —'

'Ah! Well, that's awfully good news —'

They moved away. Pervin heard no more. But a childish sense of desolation had come over him, as he heard their brisk voices. He seemed shut out — like a child that is left out. He was aimless and excluded, he did not know what to do with himself. The helpless desolation came over him. He fumbled nervously as he dressed himself, in a state almost of childishness. He disliked the Scotch accent in Bertie's speech, and the slight response it found on Isabel's tongue. He disliked the slight purr of complacency in the Scottish speech. He disliked intensely the glib way in which Isabel spoke of their happiness and nearness. It made him recoil. He was fretful and beside himself like a child, he had almost a childish nostalgia to be included in the life circle. And at the same time he was a man, dark and powerful and infuriated by his own weakness. By some fatal flaw, he could not be by himself, he had to depend on the support of another. And this very dependence enraged him. He hated Bertie Reid, and at the same time he knew the hatred was nonsense, he knew it was the outcome of his own

weakness.

He went downstairs. Isabel was alone in the dining-room. She watched him enter, head erect, his feet tentative. He looked so strong-blooded and healthy, and, at the same time, cancelled. Cancelled — that was the word that flew across her mind. Perhaps it was his scars suggested it.

‘You heard Bertie come, Maurice?’ she said.

‘Yes — isn’t he here?’

‘He’s in his room. He looks very thin and worn.’

‘I suppose he works himself to death.’

A woman came in with a tray — and after a few minutes Bertie came down. He was a little dark man, with a very big forehead, thin, wispy hair, and sad, large eyes. His expression was inordinately sad — almost funny. He had odd, short legs.

Isabel watched him hesitate under the door, and glance nervously at her husband. Pervin heard him and turned.

‘Here you are, now,’ said Isabel. ‘Come, let us eat.’

Bertie went across to Maurice.

‘How are you, Pervin,’ he said, as he advanced.

The blind man stuck his hand out into space, and Bertie took it.

‘Very fit. Glad you’ve come,’ said Maurice.

Isabel glanced at them, and glanced away, as if she could not bear to see them.

‘Come,’ she said. ‘Come to table. Aren’t you both awfully hungry? I am, tremendously.’

‘I’m afraid you waited for me,’ said Bertie, as they sat down.

Maurice had a curious monolithic way of sitting in a chair, erect and distant. Isabel’s heart always beat when she caught sight of him thus.

‘No,’ she replied to Bertie. ‘We’re very little later than usual. We’re having a sort of high tea, not dinner. Do you mind? It gives us such a nice long evening, uninterrupted.’

‘I like it,’ said Bertie.

Maurice was feeling, with curious little movements, almost like a cat kneading her bed, for his place, his knife and fork, his napkin. He was getting the whole geography of his cover into his consciousness. He sat erect and inscrutable, remote-seeming Bertie watched the static figure of the blind man, the delicate tactile discernment of the large, ruddy hands, and the curious mindless silence of the brow, above the scar. With difficulty he looked away, and without knowing what he did, picked up a little crystal bowl of violets from the table, and held them to his nose.

‘They are sweet-scented,’ he said. ‘Where do they come from?’

‘From the garden — under the windows,’ said Isabel.

‘So late in the year — and so fragrant! Do you remember the violets under Aunt Bell’s south wall?’

The two friends looked at each other and exchanged a smile, Isabel’s eyes lighting up.

‘Don’t I?’ she replied. ‘Wasn’t she queer!’

‘A curious old girl,’ laughed Bertie. ‘There’s a streak of freakishness in the family, Isabel.’

‘Ah — but not in you and me, Bertie,’ said Isabel. ‘Give them to Maurice, will you?’ she added, as Bertie was putting down the flowers. ‘Have you smelled the violets, dear? Do! — they are so scented.’

Maurice held out his hand, and Bertie placed the tiny bowl against his large, warm-looking fingers. Maurice’s hand closed over the thin white fingers of the barrister. Bertie carefully extricated himself. Then the two watched the blind man smelling the violets. He bent his head and seemed to be thinking. Isabel waited.

‘Aren’t they sweet, Maurice?’ she said at last, anxiously.

‘Very,’ he said. And he held out the bowl. Bertie took it. Both he and Isabel were a little afraid, and deeply disturbed.

The meal continued. Isabel and Bertie chatted spasmodically. The blind man was silent. He touched his food repeatedly, with quick, delicate touches of his knife-point, then cut irregular bits. He could not bear to be helped. Both Isabel and Bertie suffered: Isabel wondered why. She did not suffer when she was alone with Maurice. Bertie made her conscious of a strangeness.

After the meal the three drew their chairs to the fire, and sat down to talk. The decanters were put on a table near at hand. Isabel knocked the logs on the fire, and clouds of brilliant sparks went up the chimney. Bertie noticed a slight weariness in her bearing.

‘You will be glad when your child comes now, Isabel?’ he said.

She looked up to him with a quick wan smile.

‘Yes, I shall be glad,’ she answered. ‘It begins to seem long. Yes, I shall be very glad. So will you, Maurice, won’t you?’ she added.

‘Yes, I shall,’ replied her husband.

‘We are both looking forward so much to having it,’ she said.

‘Yes, of course,’ said Bertie.

He was a bachelor, three or four years older than Isabel. He lived in beautiful rooms overlooking the river, guarded by a faithful Scottish man-servant. And he had his friends among the fair sex — not lovers, friends. So long as he could avoid any danger of courtship or marriage, he adored a few good women with

constant and unflinching homage, and he was chivalrously fond of quite a number. But if they seemed to encroach on him, he withdrew and detested them.

Isabel knew him very well, knew his beautiful constancy, and kindness, also his incurable weakness, which made him unable ever to enter into close contact of any sort. He was ashamed of himself, because he could not marry, could not approach women physically. He wanted to do so. But he could not. At the centre of him he was afraid, helplessly and even brutally afraid. He had given up hope, had ceased to expect any more that he could escape his own weakness. Hence he was a brilliant and successful barrister, also littérateur of high repute, a rich man, and a great social success. At the centre he felt himself neuter, nothing.

Isabel knew him well. She despised him even while she admired him. She looked at his sad face, his little short legs, and felt contempt of him. She looked at his dark grey eyes, with their uncanny, almost childlike intuition, and she loved him. He understood amazingly — but she had no fear of his understanding. As a man she patronized him.

And she turned to the impassive, silent figure of her husband. He sat leaning back, with folded arms, and face a little upturned. His knees were straight and massive. She sighed, picked up the poker, and again began to prod the fire, to rouse the clouds of soft, brilliant sparks.

‘Isabel tells me,’ Bertie began suddenly, ‘that you have not suffered unbearably from the loss of sight.’

Maurice straightened himself to attend, but kept his arms folded.

‘No,’ he said, ‘not unbearably. Now and again one struggles against it, you know. But there are compensations.’

‘They say it is much worse to be stone deaf,’ said Isabel.

‘I believe it is,’ said Bertie. ‘Are there compensations?’ he added, to Maurice.

‘Yes. You cease to bother about a great many things.’ Again Maurice stretched his figure, stretched the strong muscles of his back, and leaned backwards, with uplifted face.

‘And that is a relief,’ said Bertie. ‘But what is there in place of the bothering? What replaces the activity?’

There was a pause. At length the blind man replied, as out of a negligent, unattentive thinking:

‘Oh, I don’t know. There’s a good deal when you’re not active.’

‘Is there?’ said Bertie. ‘What, exactly? It always seems to me that when there is no thought and no action, there is nothing.’

Again Maurice was slow in replying.

‘There is something,’ he replied. ‘I couldn’t tell you what it is.’

And the talk lapsed once more, Isabel and Bertie chatting gossip and

reminiscence, the blind man silent.

At length Maurice rose restlessly, a big, obtrusive figure. He felt tight and hampered. He wanted to go away.

‘Do you mind,’ he said, ‘if I go and speak to Wernham?’

‘No — go along, dear,’ said Isabel.

And he went out. A silence came over the two friends. At length Bertie said:

‘Nevertheless, it is a great deprivation, Cissie.’

‘It is, Bertie. I know it is.’

‘Something lacking all the time,’ said Bertie.

‘Yes, I know. And yet — and yet — Maurice is right. There is something else, something there, which you never knew was there, and which you can’t express.’

‘What is there?’ asked Bertie.

‘I don’t know — it’s awfully hard to define it — but something strong and immediate. There’s something strange in Maurice’s presence — indefinable — but I couldn’t do without it. I agree that it seems to put one’s mind to sleep. But when we’re alone I miss nothing; it seems awfully rich, almost splendid, you know.’

‘I’m afraid I don’t follow,’ said Bertie.

They talked desultorily. The wind blew loudly outside, rain chattered on the window-panes, making a sharp, drum-sound, because of the closed, mellow-golden shutters inside. The logs burned slowly, with hot, almost invisible small flames. Bertie seemed uneasy, there were dark circles round his eyes. Isabel, rich with her approaching maternity, leaned looking into the fire. Her hair curled in odd, loose strands, very pleasing to the man. But she had a curious feeling of old woe in her heart, old, timeless night-woe.

‘I suppose we’re all deficient somewhere,’ said Bertie.

‘I suppose so,’ said Isabel wearily.

‘Damned, sooner or later.’

‘I don’t know,’ she said, rousing herself. ‘I feel quite all right, you know. The child coming seems to make me indifferent to everything, just placid. I can’t feel that there’s anything to trouble about, you know.’

‘A good thing, I should say,’ he replied slowly.

‘Well, there it is. I suppose it’s just Nature. If only I felt I needn’t trouble about Maurice, I should be perfectly content — ’

‘But you feel you must trouble about him?’

‘Well — I don’t know — ’ She even resented this much effort.

The evening passed slowly. Isabel looked at the clock. ‘I say,’ she said. ‘It’s nearly ten o’clock. Where can Maurice be? I’m sure they’re all in bed at the

back. Excuse me a moment.'

She went out, returning almost immediately.

'It's all shut up and in darkness,' she said. 'I wonder where he is. He must have gone out to the farm —'

Bertie looked at her.

'I suppose he'll come in,' he said.

'I suppose so,' she said. 'But it's unusual for him to be out now.'

'Would you like me to go out and see?'

'Well — if you wouldn't mind. I'd go, but —' She did not want to make the physical effort.

Bertie put on an old overcoat and took a lantern. He went out from the side door. He shrank from the wet and roaring night. Such weather had a nervous effect on him: too much moisture everywhere made him feel almost imbecile. Unwilling, he went through it all. A dog barked violently at him. He peered in all the buildings. At last, as he opened the upper door of a sort of intermediate barn, he heard a grinding noise, and looking in, holding up his lantern, saw Maurice, in his shirt-sleeves, standing listening, holding the handle of a turnip-pulper. He had been pulping sweet roots, a pile of which lay dimly heaped in a corner behind him.

'That you, Wernham?' said Maurice, listening.

'No, it's me,' said Bertie.

A large, half-wild grey cat was rubbing at Maurice's leg. The blind man stooped to rub its sides. Bertie watched the scene, then unconsciously entered and shut the door behind him. He was in a high sort of barn-place, from which, right and left, ran off the corridors in front of the stalled cattle. He watched the slow, stooping motion of the other man, as he caressed the great cat.

Maurice straightened himself.

'You came to look for me?' he said.

'Isabel was a little uneasy,' said Bertie.

'I'll come in. I like messing about doing these jobs.'

The cat had reared her sinister, feline length against his leg, clawing at his thigh affectionately. He lifted her claws out of his flesh.

'I hope I'm not in your way at all at the Grange here,' said Bertie, rather shy and stiff.

'My way? No, not a bit. I'm glad Isabel has somebody to talk to. I'm afraid it's I who am in the way. I know I'm not very lively company. Isabel's all right, don't you think? She's not unhappy, is she?'

'I don't think so.'

'What does she say?'

‘She says she’s very content — only a little troubled about you.’

‘Why me?’

‘Perhaps afraid that you might brood,’ said Bertie, cautiously.

‘She needn’t be afraid of that.’ He continued to caress the flattened grey head of the cat with his fingers. ‘What I am a bit afraid of,’ he resumed, ‘is that she’ll find me a dead weight, always alone with me down here.’

‘I don’t think you need think that,’ said Bertie, though this was what he feared himself.

‘I don’t know,’ said Maurice. ‘Sometimes I feel it isn’t fair that she’s saddled with me.’ Then he dropped his voice curiously. ‘I say,’ he asked, secretly struggling, ‘is my face much disfigured? Do you mind telling me?’

‘There is the scar,’ said Bertie, wondering. ‘Yes, it is a disfigurement. But more pitiable than shocking.’

‘A pretty bad scar, though,’ said Maurice.

‘Oh, yes.’

There was a pause.

‘Sometimes I feel I am horrible,’ said Maurice, in a low voice, talking as if to himself. And Bertie actually felt a quiver of horror.

‘That’s nonsense,’ he said.

Maurice again straightened himself, leaving the cat.

‘There’s no telling,’ he said. Then again, in an odd tone, he added: ‘I don’t really know you, do I?’

‘Probably not,’ said Bertie.

‘Do you mind if I touch you?’

The lawyer shrank away instinctively. And yet, out of very philanthropy, he said, in a small voice: ‘Not at all.’

But he suffered as the blind man stretched out a strong, naked hand to him. Maurice accidentally knocked off Bertie’s hat.

‘I thought you were taller,’ he said, starting. Then he laid his hand on Bertie Reid’s head, closing the dome of the skull in a soft, firm grasp, gathering it, as it were; then, shifting his grasp and softly closing again, with a fine, close pressure, till he had covered the skull and the face of the smaller man, tracing the brows, and touching the full, closed eyes, touching the small nose and the nostrils, the rough, short moustache, the mouth, the rather strong chin. The hand of the blind man grasped the shoulder, the arm, the hand of the other man. He seemed to take him, in the soft, travelling grasp.

‘You seem young,’ he said quietly, at last.

The lawyer stood almost annihilated, unable to answer.

‘Your head seems tender, as if you were young,’ Maurice repeated. ‘So do

your hands. Touch my eyes, will you? — touch my scar.'

Now Bertie quivered with revulsion. Yet he was under the power of the blind man, as if hypnotized. He lifted his hand, and laid the fingers on the scar, on the scarred eyes. Maurice suddenly covered them with his own hand, pressed the fingers of the other man upon his disfigured eye-sockets, trembling in every fibre, and rocking slightly, slowly, from side to side. He remained thus for a minute or more, whilst Bertie stood as if in a swoon, unconscious, imprisoned.

Then suddenly Maurice removed the hand of the other man from his brow, and stood holding it in his own.

'Oh, my God' he said, 'we shall know each other now, shan't we? We shall know each other now.'

Bertie could not answer. He gazed mute and terror-struck, overcome by his own weakness. He knew he could not answer. He had an unreasonable fear, lest the other man should suddenly destroy him. Whereas Maurice was actually filled with hot, poignant love, the passion of friendship. Perhaps it was this very passion of friendship which Bertie shrank from most.

'We're all right together now, aren't we?' said Maurice. 'It's all right now, as long as we live, so far as we're concerned?'

'Yes,' said Bertie, trying by any means to escape.

Maurice stood with head lifted, as if listening. The new delicate fulfilment of mortal friendship had come as a revelation and surprise to him, something exquisite and un hoped-for. He seemed to be listening to hear if it were real.

Then he turned for his coat.

'Come,' he said, 'we'll go to Isabel.'

Bertie took the lantern and opened the door. The cat disappeared. The two men went in silence along the causeways. Isabel, as they came, thought their footsteps sounded strange. She looked up pathetically and anxiously for their entrance. There seemed a curious elation about Maurice. Bertie was haggard, with sunken eyes.

'What is it?' she asked.

'We've become friends,' said Maurice, standing with his feet apart, like a strange colossus.

'Friends!' re-echoed Isabel. And she looked again at Bertie. He met her eyes with a furtive, haggard look; his eyes were as if glazed with misery.

'I'm so glad,' she said, in sheer perplexity.

'Yes,' said Maurice.

He was indeed so glad. Isabel took his hand with both hers, and held it fast.

'You'll be happier now, dear,' she said.

But she was watching Bertie. She knew that he had one desire — to escape

from this intimacy, this friendship, which had been thrust upon him. He could not bear it that he had been touched by the blind man, his insane reserve broken in. He was like a mollusk whose shell is broken.

THE WITCH A LA MODE

When Bernard Coutts alighted at East Croydon he knew he was tempting Providence.

“I may just as well,” he said to himself, “stay the night here, where I am used to the place, as go to London. I can’t get to Connie’s forlorn spot to-night, and I’m tired to death, so why shouldn’t I do what is easiest?”

He gave his luggage to a porter.

Again, as he faced the approaching tram-car: “I don’t see why I shouldn’t go down to Purley. I shall just be in time for tea.”

Each of these concessions to his desires he made against his conscience. But beneath his sense of shame his spirit exulted.

It was an evening of March. In the dark hollow below Crown Hill the buildings accumulated, bearing the black bulk of the church tower up into the rolling and smoking sunset.

“I know it so well,” he thought. “And love it,” he confessed secretly in his heart.

The car ran on familiarly. The young man listened for the swish, watched for the striking of the blue splash overhead, at the bracket. The sudden fervour of the spark, splashed out of the mere wire, pleased him.

“Where does it come from?” he asked himself, and a spark struck bright again. He smiled a little, roused.

The day was dying out. One by one the arc lamps fluttered or leaped alight, the strand of copper overhead glistened against the dark sky that now was deepening to the colour of monkshood. The tram-car dipped as it ran, seeming to exult. As it came clear of the houses, the young man, looking west, saw the evening star advance, a bright thing approaching from a long way off, as if it had been bathing in the surf of the daylight, and now was walking shorewards to the night. He greeted the naked star with a bow of the head, his heart surging as the car leaped.

“It seems to be greeting me across the sky — the star,” he said, amused by his own vanity.

Above the colouring of the afterglow the blade of the new moon hung sharp and keen. Something recoiled in him.

“It is like a knife to be used at a sacrifice,” he said to himself. Then, secretly: “I wonder for whom?”

He refused to answer this question, but he had the sense of Constance, his betrothed, waiting for him in the Vicarage in the north. He closed his eyes.

Soon the car was running full-tilt from the shadow to the fume of yellow light at the terminus, where shop on shop and lamp beyond lamp heaped golden fire on the floor of the blue night. The car, like an eager dog, ran in home, sniffing with pleasure the fume of lights.

Coutts flung away uphill. He had forgotten he was tired. From the distance he could distinguish the house, by the broad white cloth of alyssum flowers that hung down the garden walls. He ran up the steep path to the door, smelling the hyacinths in the dark, watching for the pale fluttering of daffodils and the steadier show of white crocuses on the grassy banks.

Mrs. Braithwaite herself opened the door to him.

“There!” she exclaimed. “I expected you. I had your card saying you would cross from Dieppe to-day. You wouldn’t make up your mind to come here, not till the last minute, would you? No — that’s what I expected. You know where to put your things; I don’t think we’ve altered anything in the last year.”

Mrs. Braithwaite chattered on, laughing all the time. She was a young widow, whose husband had been dead two years. Of medium height, sanguine in complexion and temper, there was a rich oily glisten in her skin and in her black hair, suggesting the flesh of a nut. She was dressed for the evening in a long gown of soft, mole-coloured satin.

“Of course, I’m delighted you’ve come,” she said at last, lapsing into conventional politeness, and then, seeing his eyes, she began to laugh at her attempt at formality.

She let Coutts into a small, very warm room that had a dark, foreign sheen, owing to the black of the curtains and hangings covered thick with glistening Indian embroidery, and to the sleekness of some Indian ware. A rosy old gentleman, with exquisite white hair and side-whiskers, got up shakily and stretched out his hand. His cordial expression of welcome was rendered strange by a puzzled, wondering look of old age, and by a certain stiffness of his countenance, which now would only render a few expressions. He wrung the newcomer’s hand heartily, his manner contrasting pathetically with his bowed and trembling form.

“Oh, why — why, yes, it’s Mr. Coutts! H’m — ay. Well, and how are you — h’m? Sit down, sit down.” The old man rose again, bowing, waving the young man into a chair. “Ay! well, and how are you? . . . What? Have some tea — come on, come along; here’s the tray. Laura, ring for fresh tea for Mr. Courts. But I will do it.” He suddenly remembered his old gallantry, forgot his age and uncertainty. Fumbling, he rose to go to the bell-pull.

“It’s done, Pater — the tea will be in a minute,” said his daughter in high, distinct tones. Mr. Cleveland sank with relief into his chair.

“You know, I’m beginning to be troubled with rheumatism,” he explained in confidential tones. Mrs. Braithwaite glanced at the young man and smiled. The old gentleman babbled and chattered. He had no knowledge of his guest beyond the fact of his presence; Coutts might have been any other young man, for all his host was aware.

“You didn’t tell us you were going away. Why didn’t you?” asked Laura, in her distinct tones, between laughing and reproach. Coutts looked at her ironically, so that she fidgeted with some crumbs on the cloth.

“I don’t know,” he said. “Why do we do things?”

“I’m sure I don’t know. Why do we? Because we want to, I suppose,” and she ended again with a little run of laughter. Things were so amusing, and she was so healthy.

“Why *do* we do things, Pater?” she suddenly asked in a loud voice, glancing with a little chuckle of laughter at Coutts.

“Ay — why do we do things? What things?” said the old man, beginning to laugh with his daughter.

“Why, any of the things that we do.”

“Eh? Oh!” The old man was illuminated, and delighted. “Well, now, that’s a difficult question. I remember, when I was a little younger, we used to discuss Free Will — got very hot about it . . .” He laughed, and Laura laughed, then said, in a high voice:

“Oh! Free Will! We shall really think you’re *passé*, if you revive that, Pater.”

Mr. Cleveland looked puzzled for a moment. Then, as if answering a conundrum, he repeated:

“Why do we do things? Now, why *do* we do things?”

“I suppose,” he said, in all good faith, “it’s because we can’t help it — eh? What?”

Laura laughed. Coutts showed his teeth in a smile.

“That’s what I think, Pater,” she said loudly.

“And are you still engaged to your Constance?” she asked of Coutts, with a touch of mockery this time. Coutts nodded.

“And how is she?” asked the widow.

“I believe she is very well — unless my delay has upset her,” said Coutts, his tongue between his teeth. It hurt him to give pain to his fiancée, and yet he did it wilfully.

“Do you know, she always reminds me of a Bunbury — I call her your Miss Bunbury,” Laura laughed.

Coutts did not answer.

“We missed you so much when you first went away,” Laura began, reestablishing the proprieties.

“Thank you,” he said. She began to laugh wickedly.

“On Friday evenings,” she said, adding quickly: “Oh, and this is Friday evening, and Winifred is coming just as she used to — how long ago? — ten months?”

“Ten months,” Coutts corroborated.

“Did you quarrel with Winifred?” she asked suddenly.

“Winifred never quarrels,” he answered.

“I don’t believe she does. Then why *did* you go away? You are such a puzzle to me, you know — and I shall never rest till I have had it out of you. Do you mind?”

“I like it,” he said, quietly, flashing a laugh at her.

She laughed, then settled herself in a dignified, serious way.

“No, I can’t make you out at all — nor can I Winifred. You *are* a pair! But it’s you who are the real wonder. When are you going to be married?”

“I don’t know — When I am sufficiently well off.”

“I *asked* Winifred to come to-night,” Laura confessed. The eyes of the man and woman met.

“Why is she so ironic to me? — does she really like me?” Coutts asked of himself. But Laura looked too bonny and jolly to be fretted by love.

“And Winifred won’t tell me a word,” she said.

“There is nothing to tell,” he replied.

Laura looked at him closely for a few moments. Then she rose and left the room.

Presently there arrived a German lady with whom Coutts was slightly acquainted. At about half-past seven came Winifred Varley. Courts heard the courtly old gentleman welcoming her in the hall, heard her low voice in answer. When she entered, and saw him, he knew it was a shock to her, though she hid it as well as she could. He suffered too. After hesitating for a second in the doorway, she came forward, shook hands without speaking, only looking at him with rather frightened blue eyes. She was of medium height, sturdy in build. Her face was white and impassive, without the least trace of a smile. She was a blonde of twenty-eight, dressed in a white gown just short enough not to touch the ground. Her throat was solid and strong, her arms heavy and white and beautiful, her blue eyes heavy with unacknowledged passion. When she had turned away from Coutts, she flushed vividly. He could see the pink in her arms and throat, and he flushed in answer.

“That blush would hurt her,” he said to himself, wincing.

“I did not expect to see you,” she said, with a reedy timbre of voice, as if her throat were half-closed. It made his nerves tingle.

“No — nor I you. At least . . .” He ended indefinitely.

“You have come down from Yorkshire?” she asked. Apparently she was cold and self-possessed. Yorkshire meant the Rectory where his fiancée lived; he felt the sting of sarcasm.

“No,” he answered. “I am on my way there.”

There was a moment’s pause. Unable to resolve the situation, she turned abruptly to her hostess.

“Shall we play, then?”

They adjourned to the drawing-room. It was a large room upholstered in dull yellow. The chimney-piece took Coutts’ attention. He knew it perfectly well, but this evening it had a new, lustrous fascination. Over the mellow marble of the mantel rose an immense mirror, very translucent and deep, like deep grey water. Before this mirror, shining white as moons on a soft grey sky, was a pair of statues in alabaster, two feet high. Both were nude figures. They glistened under the side lamps, rose clean and distinct from their pedestals. The Venus leaned slightly forward, as if anticipating someone’s coming. Her attitude of suspense made the young man stiffen. He could see the clean suavity of her shoulders and waist reflected white on the deep mirror. She shone, catching, as she leaned forward, the glow of the lamp on her lustrous marble loins.

Laura played Brahms; the delicate, winsome German lady played Chopin; Winifred played on her violin a Grieg sonata, to Laura’s accompaniment. After having sung twice, Coutts listened to the music. Unable to criticise, he listened till he was intoxicated. Winifred, as she played, swayed slightly. He watched the strong forward thrust of her neck, the powerful and angry striking of her arm. He could see the outline of her figure; she wore no corsets; and he found her of resolute independent build. Again he glanced at the Venus bending in suspense. Winifred was blonde with a solid whiteness, an isolated woman.

All the evening, little was said, save by Laura. Miss Syfurt exclaimed continually: “Oh, that is fine! You play gra-and, Miss Varley, don’t you know. If I could play the violin — ah! the violin!”

It was not later than ten o’clock when Winifred and Miss Syfurt rose to go, the former to Croydon, the latter to Ewell.

“We can go by car together to West Croydon,” said the German lady, gleefully, as if she were a child. She was a frail, excitable little woman of forty, naïve and innocent. She gazed with bright brown eyes of admiration on Coutts.

“Yes, I am glad,” he answered.

He took up Winifred's violin, and the three proceeded downhill to the tram-terminus. There a car was on the point of departure. They hurried forward. Miss Syfurt mounted the step. Coutts waited for Winifred. The conductor called:

"Come along, please, if you're going."

"No," said Winifred. "I prefer to walk this stage."

"We can walk from West Croydon," said Coutts.

The conductor rang the bell.

"Aren't you coming?" cried the frail, excitable little lady, from the footboard. "Aren't you coming? — Oh!"

"I walk from West Croydon every day; I prefer to walk here, in the quiet," said Winifred.

"Aw! aren't you coming with me?" cried the little lady, quite frightened. She stepped back, in supplication, towards the footboard. The conductor impatiently buzzed the bell. The car started forward, Miss Syfurt staggered, was caught by the conductor.

"Aw!" she cried, holding her hand out to the two who stood on the road, and breaking almost into tears of disappointment. As the tram darted forward she clutched at her hat. In a moment she was out of sight.

Coutts stood wounded to the quick by this pain given to the frail, child-like lady.

"We may as well," said Winifred, "walk over the hill to 'The Swan'." Her note had that intense reedy quality which always set the man on edge; it was the note of her anger, or, more often, of her tortured sense of discord. The two turned away, to climb the hill again. He carried the violin; for a long time neither spoke.

"Ah, how I hate her, how I hate her!" he repeated in his heart. He winced repeatedly at the thought of Miss Syfurt's little cry of supplication. He was in a position where he was not himself, and he hated her for putting him there, forgetting that it was he who had come, like a moth to the candle. For half a mile he walked on, his head carried stiffly, his face set, his heart twisted with painful emotion. And all the time, as she plodded, head down, beside him, his blood beat with hate of her, drawn to her, repelled by her.

At last, on the high-up, naked down, they came upon those meaningless pavements that run through the grass, waiting for the houses to line them. The two were thrust up into the night above the little flowering of the lamps in the valley. In front was the daze of light from London, rising midway to the zenith, just fainter than the stars. Across the valley, on the blackness of the opposite hill, little groups of lights like gnats seemed to be floating in the darkness. Orion was heeled over the West. Below, in a cleft in the night, the long, low garland of arc

lamps strung down the Brighton Road, where now and then the golden tram-cars flew along the track, passing each other with a faint, angry sound.

“It is a year last Monday since we came over here,” said Winifred, as they stopped to look about them.

“I remember — but I didn’t know it was then,” he said. There was a touch of hardness in his voice. “I don’t remember our dates.”

After a wait, she said in a very low, passionate tones:

“It is a beautiful night.”

“The moon has set, and the evening star,” he answered; “both were out as I came down.”

She glanced swiftly at him to see if this speech was a bit of symbolism. He was looking across the valley with a set face. Very slightly, by an inch or two, she nestled towards him.

“Yes,” she said, half-stubborn, half-pleading. “But the night is a very fine one, for all that.”

“Yes,” he replied, unwillingly.

Thus, after months of separation, they dove-tailed into the same love and hate.

“You are staying down here?” she asked at length, in a forced voice. She never intruded a hair’s-breadth on the most trifling privacy; in which she was Laura’s antithesis; so that this question was almost an impertinence for her. He felt her shrink.

“Till the morning — then Yorkshire,” he said cruelly.

He hated it that she could not bear outspokenness.

At that moment a train across the valley threaded the opposite darkness with its gold thread. The valley re-echoed with vague threat. The two watched the express, like a gold-and-black snake, curve and dive seawards into the night. He turned, saw her full, fine face tilted up to him. It showed pale, distinct, and firm, very near to him. He shut his eyes and shivered.

“I hate trains,” he said, impulsively.

“Why?” she asked, with a curious, tender little smile that caressed, as it were, his emotion towards her.

“I don’t know; they pitch one about here and there . . .”

“I thought,” she said, with faint irony, “that you preferred change.”

“I do like life. But now I should like to be nailed to something, if it were only a cross.”

She laughed sharply, and said, with keen sarcasm:

“Is it so difficult, then, to let yourself be nailed to a cross? I thought the difficulty lay in getting free.”

He ignored her sarcasm on his engagement.

“There is nothing now that matters,” he said, adding quickly, to forestall her: “Of course I’m wild when dinner’s late, and so on; but . . . apart from those things . . . nothing seems to matter.”

She was silent.

“One goes on — remains in office, so to speak; and life’s all right — only, it doesn’t seem to matter.”

“This does sound like complaining of trouble because you’ve got none,” she laughed.

“Trouble . . .” he repeated. “No, I don’t suppose I’ve got any. Vexation, which most folk call trouble; but something I really grieve about in my soul — no, nothing. I wish I had.”

She laughed again sharply; but he perceived in her laughter a little keen despair.

“I find a lucky pebble. I think, now I’ll throw it over my left shoulder, and wish. So I spit over my little finger, and throw the white pebble behind me, and then, when I want to wish, I’m done. I say to myself: ‘Wish,’ and myself says back: ‘I don’t want anything.’ I say again: ‘Wish, you fool,’ but I’m as dumb of wishes as a newt. And then, because it rather frightens me, I say in a hurry: ‘A million of money.’ Do you know what to wish for when you see the new moon?”

She laughed quickly.

“I think so,” she said. “But my wish varies.”

“I wish mine did,” he said, whimsically lugubrious.

She took his hand in a little impulse of love.

They walked hand in hand on the ridge of the down, bunches of lights shining below, the big radiance of London advancing like a wonder in front.

“You know . . .” he began, then stopped.

“I don’t . . .” she ironically urged.

“Do you want to?” he laughed.

“Yes; one is never at peace with oneself till one understands.”

“Understands what?” he asked brutally. He knew she meant that she wanted to understand the situation he and she were in.

“How to resolve the discord,” she said, balking the issue. He would have liked her to say: “What you want of me.”

“Your foggy weather of symbolism, as usual,” he said.

“The fog is not of symbols,” she replied, in her metallic voice of displeasure. “It may be symbols are candles in a fog.”

“I prefer my fog without candles. I’m the fog, eh? Then I’ll blow out your candle, and you’ll see me better. Your candles of speech, symbols and so forth, only lead you more wrong. I’m going to wander blind, and go by instinct, like a

moth that flies and settles on the wooden box his mate is shut up in.”

“Isn’t it an *ignis fatuus* you are flying after, at that rate?” she said.

“Maybe, for if I breathe outwards, in the positive movement towards you, you move off. If I draw in a vacant sigh of soulfulness, you flow nearly to my lips.”

“This is a very interesting symbol,” she said, with sharp sarcasm.

He hated her, truly. She hated him. Yet they held hands fast as they walked.

“We are just the same as we were a year ago,” he laughed. But he hated her, for all his laughter.

When, at the “Swan and Sugar-Loaf”, they mounted the car, she climbed to the top, in spite of the sharp night. They nestled side by side, shoulders caressing, and all the time that they ran under the round lamps neither spoke.

At the gate of a small house in a dark tree-lined street, both waited a moment. From her garden leaned an almond tree whose buds, early this year, glistened in the light of the street lamp, with theatrical effect. He broke off a twig.

“I always remember this tree,” he said; “how I used to feel sorry for it when it was full out, and so lively, at midnight in the lamplight. I thought it must be tired.”

“Will you come in?” she asked tenderly.

“I did get a room in town,” he answered, following her.

She opened the door with her latch-key, showing him, as usual, into the drawing-room. Everything was just the same; cold in colouring, warm in appointment; ivory-coloured walls, blond, polished floor, with thick ivory-coloured rugs; three deep arm-chairs in pale amber, with large cushions; a big black piano, a violin-stand beside it; and the room very warm with a clear red fire, the brass shining hot. Coutts, according to his habit, lit the piano-candles and lowered the blinds.

“I say,” he said; “this is a variation from your line!”

He pointed to a bowl of magnificent scarlet anemones that stood on the piano.

“Why?” she asked, pausing in arranging her hair at the small mirror.

“On the *piano!*” he admonished.

“Only while the table was in use,” she smiled, glancing at the litter of papers that covered her table.

“And then — *red* flowers!” he said.

“Oh, I thought they were such a fine piece of colour,” she replied.

“I would have wagered you would buy freesias,” he said.

“Why?” she smiled. He pleased her thus.

“Well — for their cream and gold and restrained, bruised purple, and their scent. I can’t believe you bought scentless flowers!”

“What!” She went forward, bent over the flowers.

“I had not noticed,” she said, smiling curiously, “that they were scentless.”

She touched the velvet black centres.

“Would you have bought them had you noticed?” he asked.

She thought for a moment, curiously.

“I don’t know . . . probably I should not.”

“You would never buy scentless flowers,” he averred. “Any more than you’d love a man because he was handsome.”

“I did not know,” she smiled. She was pleased.

The housekeeper entered with a lamp, which she set on a stand.

“You will illuminate me?” he said to Winifred. It was her habit to talk to him by candle-light.

“I have thought about you — now I will look at you,” she said quietly, smiling.

“I see — To confirm your conclusions?” he asked.

Her eyes lifted quickly in acknowledgment of his guess.

“That is so,” she replied.

“Then,” he said, “I’ll wash my hands.”

He ran upstairs. The sense of freedom, of intimacy, was very fascinating. As he washed, the little everyday action of twining his hands in the lather set him suddenly considering his other love. At her house he was always polite and formal; gentlemanly, in short. With Connie he felt the old, manly superiority; he was the knight, strong and tender, she was the beautiful maiden with a touch of God on her brow. He kissed her, he softened and selected his speech for her, he forbore from being the greater part of himself. She was his betrothed, his wife, his queen, whom he loved to idealise, and for whom he carefully modified himself. She should rule him later on — that part of him which was hers. But he loved her, too, with a pitying, tender love. He thought of her tears upon her pillow in the northern Rectory, and he bit his lip, held his breath under the strain of the situation. Vaguely he knew she would bore him. And Winifred fascinated him. He and she really played with fire. In her house, he was roused and keen. But she was not, and never could be, frank. So he was not frank, even to himself. Saying nothing, betraying nothing, immediately they were together they began the same game. Each shuddered, each defenceless and exposed, hated the other by turns. Yet they came together again. Couotts felt a vague fear of Winifred. She was intense and unnatural — and he became unnatural and intense, beside her.

When he came downstairs she was fingering the piano from the score of “Walküre”.

“First wash in England,” he announced, looking at his hands. She laughed swiftly. Impatient herself of the slightest soil, his indifference to temporary

grubbiness amused her.

He was a tall, bony man, with small hands and feet. His features were rough and rather ugly, but his smile was taking. She was always fascinated by the changes in him. His eyes, particularly, seemed quite different at times; sometimes hard, insolent, blue; sometimes dark, full of warmth and tenderness; sometimes flaring like an animal's.

He sank wearily into a chair.

"My chair," he said, as if to himself.

She bowed her head. Of compact physique, uncorseted, her figure bowed richly to the piano. He watched the shallow concave between her shoulders, marvelling at its rich solidity. She let one arm fall loose, he looked at the shadows in the dimples of her elbow. Slowly smiling a look of brooding affection, of acknowledgment upon him for a forgetful moment, she said:

"And what have you done lately?"

"Simply nothing," he replied quietly. "For all that these months have been so full of variety, I think they will sink out of my life; they will evaporate and leave no result; I shall forget them."

Her blue eyes were dark and heavy upon him, watching. She did not answer. He smiled faintly at her.

"And you?" he said, at length.

"With me it is different," she said quietly.

"You sit with your crystal," he laughed.

"While you tilt . . ." She hung on her ending.

He laughed, sighed, and they were quiet awhile.

"I've got such a skinful of heavy visions, they come sweating through my dreams," he said.

"Whom have you read?" She smiled.

"Meredith. Very healthy," he laughed.

She laughed quickly at being caught.

"Now, have you found out all you want?" he asked.

"Oh, no," she cried with full throat.

"Well, finish, at any rate. I'm not diseased. How are you?"

"But . . . but . . ." she stumbled on doggedly. "What *do* you intend to do?"

He hardened the line of his mouth and eyes, only to retort with immediate lightness:

"Just go on."

This was their battlefield: she could not understand how he could marry: it seemed almost monstrous to her; she fought against his marriage. She looked up at him, witch-like, from under bent brows. Her eyes were dark blue and heavy.

He shivered, shrank with pain. She was so cruel to that other, common, everyday part of him.

“I wonder you dare go on like it,” she said.

“Why dare?” he replied. “What’s the odds?”

“I don’t know,” she answered, in deep, bitter displeasure.

“And I don’t care,” he said.

“But . . .” she continued, slowly, gravely pressing the point: “You know what you intend to do.”

“Marry — settle — be a good husband, good father, partner in the business; get fat, be an amiable gentleman — Q.E.F.”

“Very good,” she said, deep and final.

“Thank you.”

“I did not congratulate you,” she said.

“Ah!” His voice tailed off into sadness and self-mistrust. Meanwhile she watched him heavily. He did not mind being scrutinised: it flattered him.

“Yes, it is, or may be, very good,” she began; “but *why* all this? — *why*?”

“And why not? And why? — Because I want to.”

He could not leave it thus flippantly.

“You know, Winifred, we should only drive each other into insanity, you and I: become abnormal.”

“Well,” she said, “and even so, why the other?”

“My marriage? — I don’t know. Instinct.”

“One has so many instincts,” she laughed bitterly.

That was a new idea to him.

She raised her arms, stretched them above her head, in a weary gesture. They were fine, strong arms. They reminded Coutts of Euripides’ “Bacchae”: white, round arms, long arms. The lifting of her arms lifted her breasts. She dropped suddenly as if inert, lolling her arms against the cushions.

“I really don’t see why you should be,” she said drearily, though always with a touch of a sneer, “why we should always — be fighting.”

“Oh, yes, you do,” he replied. It was a deadlock which he could not sustain.

“Besides,” he laughed, “it’s your fault.”

“Am I so bad?” she sneered.

“Worse,” he said.

“But” — she moved irritably — “is this to the point?”

“What point?” he answered; then, smiling: “You know you only like a wild-goose chase.”

“I do,” she answered plaintively. “I miss you very much. You snatch things from the Kobolds for me.”

“Exactly,” he said in a biting tone. “Exactly! That’s what you want me for. I am to be your crystal, your ‘genius’. My length of blood and bone you don’t care a rap for. Ah, yes, you like me for a crystal-glass, to see things in: to hold up to the light. I’m a blessed Lady-of-Shalott looking-glass for you.”

“You talk to *me*,” she said, dashing his fervour, “of my fog of symbols!”

“Ah, well, if so, ‘tis your own asking.”

“I did not know it.” She looked at him coldly. She was angry.

“No,” he said.

Again, they hated each other.

“The old ancients,” he laughed, “gave the gods the suet and intestines: at least, I believe so. They ate the rest. You shouldn’t be a goddess.”

“I wonder, among your rectory acquaintances, you haven’t learned better manners,” she answered in cold contempt. He closed his eyes, lying back in his chair, his legs sprawled towards her.

“I suppose we’re civilised savages,” he said sadly. All was silent. At last, opening his eyes again, he said: “I shall have to be going directly, Winifred; it is past eleven . . .” Then the appeal in his voice changed to laughter. “Though I know I shall be winding through all the *Addios* in ‘Traviata’ before you can set me travelling.” He smiled gently at her, then closed his eyes once more, conscious of deep, but vague, suffering. She lay in her chair, her face averted, rosily, towards the fire. Without glancing at her he was aware of the white approach of her throat towards her breast. He seemed to perceive her with another, unknown sense that acted all over his body. She lay perfectly still and warm in the fire-glow. He was dimly aware that he suffered.

“Yes,” she said at length; “if we were linked together we should only destroy each other.”

He started, hearing her admit, for the first time, this point of which he was so sure.

“You should never *marry* anyone,” he said.

“And you,” she asked in irony, “must offer your head to harness and be bridled and driven?”

“There’s the makings of quite a good, respectable trotter in me,” he laughed. “Don’t you see it’s what I *want* to be?”

“I’m not sure,” she laughed in return.

“I think so.”

They were silent for a time. The white lamp burned steadily as moonlight, the red fire like sunset; there was no stir or flicker.

“And what of you?” he asked.

She crooned a faint, tired laugh.

“If you are jetsam, as you say you are,” she answered, “I am flotsam. I shall lie stranded.”

“Nay,” he pleaded. “When were you wrecked?”

She laughed quickly, with a sound like a tinkle of tears.

“Oh, dear Winifred!” he cried despairingly.

She lifted her arms towards him, hiding her face between them, looking up through the white closure with dark, uncanny eyes, like an invocation. His breast lifted towards her uptilted arms. He shuddered, shut his eyes, held himself rigid. He heard her drop her arms heavily.

“I must go,” he said in a dull voice.

The rapidly-chasing quivers that ran in tremors down the front of his body and limbs made him stretch himself, stretch hard.

“Yes,” she assented gravely; “you must go.”

He turned to her. Again looking up darkly, from under her lowered brows, she lifted her hands like small white orchids towards him. Without knowing, he gripped her wrists with a grasp that circled his blood-red nails with white rims.

“Good-bye,” he said, looking down at her. She made a small, moaning noise in her throat, lifting her face so that it came open and near to him like a suddenly-risen flower, borne on a strong white stalk. She seemed to extend, to fill the world, to become atmosphere and all. He did not know what he was doing. He was bending forward, his mouth on hers, her arms round his neck, and his own hands, still fastened on to her wrists, almost bursting the blood under his nails with the intensity of their grip. They remained for a few moments thus, rigid. Then, weary of the strain, she relaxed. She turned her face, offered him her throat, white, hard, and rich, below the ear. Stooping still lower, so that he quivered in every fibre at the strain, he laid his mouth to the kiss. In the intense silence, he heard the deep, dull pulsing of her blood, and a minute click of a spark within the lamp.

Then he drew her from the chair up to him. She came, arms always round his neck, till at last she lay along his breast as he stood, feet planted wide, clasping her tight, his mouth on her neck. She turned suddenly to meet his full, red mouth in a kiss. He felt his moustache prick back into his lips. It was the first kiss she had genuinely given. Dazed, he was conscious of the throb of one great pulse, as if his whole body were a heart that contracted in throbs. He felt, with an intolerable ache, as if he, the heart, were setting the pulse in her, in the very night, so that everything beat from the throb of his overstrained, bursting body.

The hurt became so great it brought him out of the reeling stage to distinct consciousness. She clipped her lips, drew them away, leaving him her throat. Already she had had enough. He opened his eyes as he bent with his mouth on

her neck, and was startled; there stood the objects of the room, stark; there, close below his eyes, were the half-sunk lashes of the woman, swooning on her unnatural ebb of passion. He saw her thus, knew that she wanted no more of him than that kiss. And the heavy form of this woman hung upon him. His whole body ached like a swollen vein, with heavy intensity, while his heart grew dead with misery and despair. This woman gave him anguish and a cutting-short like death; to the other woman he was false. As he shivered with suffering, he opened his eyes again, and caught sight of the pure ivory of the lamp. His heart flashed with rage.

A sudden involuntary blow of his foot, and he sent the lamp-stand spinning. The lamp leaped off, fell with a smash on the fair, polished floor. Instantly a bluish hedge of flame quivered, leaped up before them. She had lightened her hold round his neck, and buried her face against his throat. The flame veered at her, blue, with a yellow tongue that licked her dress and her arm. Convulsive, she clutched him, almost strangled him, though she made no sound.

He gathered her up and bore her heavily out of the room. Slipping from her clasp, he brought his arms down her form, crushing the starting blaze of her dress. His face was singed. Staring at her, he could scarcely see her.

“I am not hurt,” she cried. “But you?”

The housekeeper was coming; the flames were sinking and waving up in the drawing-room. He broke away from Winifred, threw one of the great woollen rugs on to the flame, then stood a moment looking at the darkness.

Winifred caught at him as he passed her.

“No, no,” he answered, as he fumbled for the latch. “I’m not hurt. Clumsy fool I am — clumsy fool!”

In another instant he was gone, running with burning-red hands held out blindly, down the street.

WINTRY PEACOCK

There was thin, crisp snow on the ground, the sky was blue, the wind very cold, the air clear. Farmers were just turning out the cows for an hour or so in the midday, and the smell of cow-sheds was unendurable as I entered Tible. I noticed the ash-twigs up in the sky were pale and luminous, passing into the blue. And then I saw the peacocks. There they were in the road before me, three of them, and tailless, brown, speckled birds, with dark-blue necks and ragged crests. They stepped archly over the filigree snow, and their bodies moved with slow motion, like small, light, flat-bottomed boats. I admired them, they were curious. Then a gust of wind caught them, heeled them over as if they were three frail boats opening their feathers like ragged sails. They hopped and skipped with discomfort, to get out of the draught of the wind. And then, in the lee of the walls, they resumed their arch, wintry motion, light and unballasted now their tails were gone, indifferent. They were indifferent to my presence. I might have touched them. They turned off to the shelter of an open shed.

As I passed the end of the upper house, I saw a young woman just coming out of the back door. I had spoken to her in the summer. She recognized me at once, and waved to me. She was carrying a pail, wearing a white apron that was longer than her preposterously short skirt, and she had on the cotton bonnet. I took off my hat to her and was going on. But she put down her pail and darted with a swift, furtive movement after me.

‘Do you mind waiting a minute?’ she said. ‘I’ll be out in a minute.’

She gave me a slight, odd smile, and ran back. Her face was long and sallow and her nose rather red. But her gloomy black eyes softened caressively to me for a moment, with that momentary humility which makes a man lord of the earth.

I stood in the road, looking at the fluffy, dark-red young cattle that moored and seemed to bark at me. They seemed happy, frisky cattle, a little impudent, and either determined to go back into the warm shed, or determined not to go back, I could not decide which.

Presently the woman came forward again, her head rather ducked. But she looked up at me and smiled, with that odd, immediate intimacy, something witch-like and impossible.

‘Sorry to keep you waiting,’ she said. ‘Shall we stand in this cart-shed — it will be more out of the wind.’

So we stood among the shafts of the open cart-shed that faced the road. Then she looked down at the ground, a little sideways, and I noticed a small black frown on her brows. She seemed to brood for a moment. Then she looked straight into my eyes, so that I blinked and wanted to turn my face aside. She was searching me for something and her look was too near. The frown was still on her keen, sallow brow.

‘Can you speak French?’ she asked me abruptly.

‘More or less,’ I replied.

‘I was supposed to learn it at school,’ she said. ‘But I don’t know a word.’ She ducked her head and laughed, with a slightly ugly grimace and a rolling of her black eyes.

‘No good keeping your mind full of scraps,’ I answered.

But she had turned aside her sallow, long face, and did not hear what I said. Suddenly again she looked at me. She was searching. And at the same time she smiled at me, and her eyes looked softly, darkly, with infinite trustful humility into mine. I was being cajoled.

‘Would you mind reading a letter for me, in French,’ she said, her face immediately black and bitter-looking. She glanced at me, frowning.

‘Not at all,’ I said.

‘It’s a letter to my husband,’ she said, still scrutinizing.

I looked at her, and didn’t quite realize. She looked too far into me, my wits were gone. She glanced round. Then she looked at me shrewdly. She drew a letter from her pocket, and handed it to me. It was addressed from France to Lance-Corporal Goyte, at Tible. I took out the letter and began to read it, as mere words. ‘Mon cher Alfred’ — it might have been a bit of a torn newspaper. So I followed the script: the trite phrases of a letter from a French-speaking girl to an English soldier. ‘I think of you always, always. Do you think sometimes of me?’ And then I vaguely realized that I was reading a man’s private correspondence. And yet, how could one consider these trivial, facile French phrases private! Nothing more trite and vulgar in the world, than such a love-letter — no newspaper more obvious.

Therefore I read with a callous heart the effusions of the Belgian damsel. But then I gathered my attention. For the letter went on, ‘Notre cher petit bébé — our dear little baby was born a week ago. Almost I died, knowing you were far away, and perhaps forgetting the fruit of our perfect love. But the child comforted me. He has the smiling eyes and virile air of his English father. I pray to the Mother of Jesus to send me the dear father of my child, that I may see him with my child in his arms, and that we may be united in holy family love. Ah, my Alfred, can I tell you how I miss you, how I weep for you. My thoughts are

with you always, I think of nothing but you, I live for nothing but you and our dear baby. If you do not come back to me soon, I shall die, and our child will die. But no, you cannot come back to me. But I can come to you, come to England with our child. If you do not wish to present me to your good mother and father, you can meet me in some town, some city, for I shall be so frightened to be alone in England with my child, and no one to take care of us. Yet I must come to you, I must bring my child, my little Alfred to his father, the big, beautiful Alfred that I love so much. Oh, write and tell me where I shall come. I have some money, I am not a penniless creature. I have money for myself and my dear baby — ’

I read to the end. It was signed: ‘Your very happy and still more unhappy Élise.’ I suppose I must have been smiling.

‘I can see it makes you laugh,’ said Mrs. Goyte, sardonically. I looked up at her.

‘It’s a love-letter, I know that,’ she said. ‘There’s too many “Alfreds” in it.’

‘One too many,’ I said.

‘Oh, yes — And what does she say — Eliza? We know her name’s Eliza, that’s another thing.’ She grimaced a little, looking up at me with a mocking laugh.

‘Where did you get this letter?’ I said.

‘Postman gave it me last week.’

‘And is your husband at home?’

‘I expect him home tonight. He’s been wounded, you know, and we’ve been applying for him home. He was home about six weeks ago — he’s been in Scotland since then. Oh, he was wounded in the leg. Yes, he’s all right, a great strapping fellow. But he’s lame, he limps a bit. He expects he’ll get his discharge — but I don’t think he will. We married? We’ve been married six years — and he joined up the first day of the war. Oh, he thought he’d like the life. He’d been through the South African War. No, he was sick of it, fed up. I’m living with his father and mother — I’ve no home of my own now. My people had a big farm — over a thousand acres — in Oxfordshire. Not like here — no. Oh, they’re very good to me, his father and mother. Oh, yes, they couldn’t be better. They think more of me than of their own daughters. But it’s not like being in a place of your own, is it? You can’t really do as you like. No, there’s only me and his father and mother at home. Before the war? Oh, he was anything. He’s had a good education — but he liked the farming better. Then he was a chauffeur. That’s how he knew French. He was driving a gentleman in France for a long time — ’

At this point the peacocks came round the corner on a puff of wind.

‘Hello, Joey!’ she called, and one of the birds came forward, on delicate legs. Its grey speckled back was very elegant, it rolled its full, dark-blue neck as it moved to her. She crouched down. ‘Joey, dear,’ she said, in an odd, saturnine caressive voice, ‘you’re bound to find me, aren’t you?’ She put her face forward, and the bird rolled his neck, almost touching her face with his beak, as if kissing her.

‘He loves you,’ I said.

She twisted her face up at me with a laugh.

‘Yes,’ she said, ‘he loves me, Joey does,’ — then, to the bird — ‘and I love Joey, don’t I. I do love Joey.’ And she smoothed his feathers for a moment. Then she rose, saying: ‘He’s an affectionate bird.’

I smiled at the roll of her ‘bir-rrd’.

‘Oh, yes, he is,’ she protested. ‘He came with me from my home seven years ago. Those others are his descendants — but they’re not like Joey — are they, dee-urr?’ Her voice rose at the end with a witch-like cry.

Then she forgot the birds in the cart-shed and turned to business again.

‘Won’t you read that letter?’ she said. ‘Read it, so that I know what it says.’

‘It’s rather behind his back,’ I said.

‘Oh, never mind him,’ she cried. ‘He’s been behind my back long enough — all these four years. If he never did no worse things behind my back than I do behind his, he wouldn’t have cause to grumble. You read me what it says.’

Now I felt a distinct reluctance to do as she bid, and yet I began — ‘My dear Alfred.’

‘I guessed that much,’ she said. ‘Eliza’s dear Alfred.’ She laughed. ‘How do you say it in French? Eliza?’

I told her, and she repeated the name with great contempt — *Élise*.

‘Go on,’ she said. ‘You’re not reading.’

So I began — ‘I have been thinking of you sometimes — have you been thinking of me?’ —

‘Of several others as well, beside her, I’ll wager,’ said Mrs. Goyte.

‘Probably not,’ said I, and continued. ‘A dear little baby was born here a week ago. Ah, can I tell you my feelings when I take my darling little brother into my arms — ’

‘I’ll bet it’s his,’ cried Mrs. Goyte.

‘No,’ I said. ‘It’s her mother’s.’

‘Don’t you believe it,’ she cried. ‘It’s a blind. You mark, it’s her own right enough — and his.’

‘No,’ I said, ‘it’s her mother’s.’ ‘He has sweet smiling eyes, but not like your beautiful English eyes — ’

She suddenly struck her hand on her skirt with a wild motion, and bent down, doubled with laughter. Then she rose and covered her face with her hand.

‘I’m forced to laugh at the beautiful English eyes,’ she said.

‘Aren’t his eyes beautiful?’ I asked.

‘Oh, yes — very! Go on! — Joey, dear, dee-urr, Joey!’ — this to the peacock.

— ‘Er — We miss you very much. We all miss you. We wish you were here to see the darling baby. Ah, Alfred, how happy we were when you stayed with us. We all loved you so much. My mother will call the baby Alfred so that we shall never forget you — ’

‘Of course it’s his right enough,’ cried Mrs. Goyte.

‘No,’ I said. ‘It’s the mother’s.’ Er — ‘My mother is very well. My father came home yesterday — on leave. He is delighted with his son, my little brother, and wishes to have him named after you, because you were so good to us all in that terrible time, which I shall never forget. I must weep now when I think of it. Well, you are far away in England, and perhaps I shall never see you again. How did you find your dear mother and father? I am so happy that your wound is better, and that you can nearly walk — ’

‘How did he find his dear wife!’ cried Mrs. Goyte. ‘He never told her he had one. Think of taking the poor girl in like that!’

‘We are so pleased when you write to us. Yet now you are in England you will forget the family you served so well — ’

‘A bit too well — eh, Joey!’ cried the wife.

‘If it had not been for you we should not be alive now, to grieve and to rejoice in this life, that is so hard for us. But we have recovered some of our losses, and no longer feel the burden of poverty. The little Alfred is a great comfort to me. I hold him to my breast and think of the big, good Alfred, and I weep to think that those times of suffering were perhaps the times of a great happiness that is gone for ever.’

‘Oh, but isn’t it a shame, to take a poor girl in like that!’ cried Mrs. Goyte. ‘Never to let on that he was married, and raise her hopes — I call it beastly, I do.’

‘You don’t know,’ I said. ‘You know how anxious women are to fall in love, wife or no wife. How could he help it, if she was determined to fall in love with him?’

‘He could have helped it if he’d wanted.’

‘Well,’ I said, ‘we aren’t all heroes.’

‘Oh, but that’s different! The big, good Alfred! — did ever you hear such tommy-rot in your life! Go on — what does she say at the end?’

‘Er — We shall be pleased to hear of your life in England. We all send many

kind regards to your good parents. I wish you all happiness for your future days. Your very affectionate and ever-grateful Élise.'

There was silence for a moment, during which Mrs. Goyte remained with her head dropped, sinister and abstracted. Suddenly she lifted her face, and her eyes flashed.

'Oh, but I call it beastly, I call it mean, to take a girl in like that.'

'Nay,' I said. 'Probably he hasn't taken her in at all. Do you think those French girls are such poor innocent things? I guess she's a great deal more downy than he.'

'Oh, he's one of the biggest fools that ever walked,' she cried.

'There you are!' said I.

'But it's his child right enough,' she said.

'I don't think so,' said I.

'I'm sure of it.'

'Oh, well,' I said, 'if you prefer to think that way.'

'What other reason has she for writing like that —'

I went out into the road and looked at the cattle.

'Who is this driving the cows?' I said. She too came out.

'It's the boy from the next farm,' she said.

'Oh, well,' said I, 'those Belgian girls! You never know where their letters will end. And, after all, it's his affair — you needn't bother.'

'Oh — !' she cried, with rough scorn — 'it's not me that bothers. But it's the nasty meanness of it — me writing him such loving letters' — she put her hand before her face and laughed malevolently — 'and sending him parcels all the time. You bet he fed that gurr! on my parcels — I know he did. It's just like him. I'll bet they laughed together over my letters. I bet anything they did —'

'Nay,' said I. 'He'd burn your letters for fear they'd give him away.'

There was a black look on her yellow face. Suddenly a voice was heard calling. She poked her head out of the shed, and answered coolly:

'All right!' Then turning to me: 'That's his mother looking after me.'

She laughed into my face, witch-like, and we turned down the road.

When I awoke, the morning after this episode, I found the house darkened with deep, soft snow, which had blown against the large west windows, covering them with a screen. I went outside, and saw the valley all white and ghastly below me, the trees beneath black and thin looking like wire, the rock-faces dark between the glistening shroud, and the sky above sombre, heavy, yellowish-dark, much too heavy for this world below of hollow bluey whiteness figured with black. I felt I was in a valley of the dead. And I sensed I was a prisoner, for the snow was everywhere deep, and drifted in places. So all the morning I remained

indoors, looking up the drive at the shrubs so heavily plumed with snow, at the gateposts raised high with a foot or more of extra whiteness. Or I looked down into the white-and-black valley that was utterly motionless and beyond life, a hollow sarcophagus.

Nothing stirred the whole day — no plume fell off the shrubs, the valley was as abstracted as a grove of death. I looked over at the tiny, half-buried farms away on the bare uplands beyond the valley hollow, and I thought of Tible in the snow, of the black witch-like little Mrs. Goyte. And the snow seemed to lay me bare to influences I wanted to escape.

In the faint glow of the half-clear light that came about four o'clock in the afternoon, I was roused to see a motion in the snow away below, near where the thorn trees stood very black and dwarfed, like a little savage group, in the dismal white. I watched closely. Yes, there was a flapping and a struggle — a big bird, it must be, labouring in the snow. I wondered. Our biggest birds, in the valley, were the large hawks that often hung flickering opposite my windows, level with me, but high above some prey on the steep valleyside. This was much too big for a hawk — too big for any known bird. I searched in my mind for the largest English wild birds, geese, buzzards.

Still it laboured and strove, then was still, a dark spot, then struggled again. I went out of the house and down the steep slope, at risk of breaking my leg between the rocks. I knew the ground so well — and yet I got well shaken before I drew near the thorn-trees.

Yes, it was a bird. It was Joey. It was the grey-brown peacock with a blue neck. He was snow-wet and spent.

'Joey — Joey, de-urr!' I said, staggering unevenly towards him. He looked so pathetic, rowing and struggling in the snow, too spent to rise, his blue neck stretching out and lying sometimes on the snow, his eye closing and opening quickly, his crest all battered.

'Joey dee-uur! Dee-urr!' I said caressingly to him. And at last he lay still, blinking, in the surged and furrowed snow, whilst I came near and touched him, stroked him, gathered him under my arm. He stretched his long, wetted neck away from me as I held him, none the less he was quiet in my arm, too tired, perhaps, to struggle. Still he held his poor, crested head away from me, and seemed sometimes to droop, to wilt, as if he might suddenly die.

He was not so heavy as I expected, yet it was a struggle to get up to the house with him again. We set him down, not too near the fire, and gently wiped him with cloths. He submitted, only now and then stretched his soft neck away from us, avoiding us helplessly. Then we set warm food by him. I put it to his beak, tried to make him eat. But he ignored it. He seemed to be ignorant of what we

were doing, recoiled inside himself inexplicably. So we put him in a basket with cloths, and left him crouching oblivious. His food we put near him. The blinds were drawn, the house was warm, it was night. Sometimes he stirred, but mostly he huddled still, leaning his queer crested head on one side. He touched no food, and took no heed of sounds or movements. We talked of brandy or stimulants. But I realized we had best leave him alone.

In the night, however, we heard him thumping about. I got up anxiously with a candle. He had eaten some food, and scattered more, making a mess. And he was perched on the back of a heavy arm-chair. So I concluded he was recovered, or recovering.

The next day was clear, and the snow had frozen, so I decided to carry him back to Tible. He consented, after various flappings, to sit in a big fish-bag with his battered head peeping out with wild uneasiness. And so I set off with him, slithering down into the valley, making good progress down in the pale shadow beside the rushing waters, then climbing painfully up the arrested white valleyside, plumed with clusters of young pine trees, into the paler white radiance of the snowy, upper regions, where the wind cut fine. Joey seemed to watch all the time with wide anxious, unseeing eye, brilliant and inscrutable. As I drew near to Tible township he stirred violently in the bag, though I do not know if he had recognized the place. Then, as I came to the sheds, he looked sharply from side to side, and stretched his neck out long. I was a little afraid of him. He gave a loud, vehement yell, opening his sinister beak, and I stood still, looking at him as he struggled in the bag, shaken myself by his struggles, yet not thinking to release him.

Mrs. Goyte came darting past the end of the house, her head sticking forward in sharp scrutiny. She saw me, and came forward.

‘Have you got Joey?’ she cried sharply, as if I were a thief.

I opened the bag, and he flopped out, flapping as if he hated the touch of the snow now. She gathered him up, and put her lips to his beak. She was flushed and handsome, her eyes bright, her hair slack, thick, but more witch-like than ever. She did not speak.

She had been followed by a grey-haired woman with a round, rather sallow face and a slightly hostile bearing.

‘Did you bring him with you, then?’ she asked sharply. I answered that I had rescued him the previous evening.

From the background slowly approached a slender man with a grey moustache and large patches on his trousers.

‘You’ve got ’im back ‘gain, ah see,’ he said to his daughter-in-law. His wife explained how I had found Joey.

‘Ah,’ went on the grey man. ‘It wor our Alfred scared him off, back your life. He must’a flyed ower t’valley. Tha ma’ thank thy stars as ‘e wor fun, Maggie. ‘E’d a bin froze. They a bit nesh, you know,’ he concluded to me.

‘They are,’ I answered. ‘This isn’t their country.’

‘No, it isna,’ replied Mr. Goyte. He spoke very slowly and deliberately, quietly, as if the soft pedal were always down in his voice. He looked at his daughter-in-law as she crouched, flushed and dark, before the peacock, which would lay its long blue neck for a moment along her lap. In spite of his grey moustache and thin grey hair, the elderly man had a face young and almost delicate, like a young man’s. His blue eyes twinkled with some inscrutable source of pleasure, his skin was fine and tender, his nose delicately arched. His grey hair being slightly ruffled, he had a debonair look, as of a youth who is in love.

‘We mun tell ‘im it’s come,’ he said slowly, and turning he called: ‘Alfred — Alfred! Wheer’s ter gotten to?’

Then he turned again to the group.

‘Get up then, Maggie, lass, get up wi’ thee. Tha ma’es too much o’ th’bod.’

A young man approached, wearing rough khaki and kneebreeches. He was Danish looking, broad at the loins.

‘I’s come back then,’ said the father to the son; ‘leastwise, he’s bin browt back, flyed ower the Griff Low.’

The son looked at me. He had a devil-may-care bearing, his cap on one side, his hands stuck in the front pockets of his breeches. But he said nothing.

‘Shall you come in a minute, Master,’ said the elderly woman, to me.

‘Ay, come in an’ ha’e a cup o’ tea or summat. You’ll do wi’ summat, carrin’ that bod. Come on, Maggie wench, let’s go in.’

So we went indoors, into the rather stuffy, overcrowded living-room, that was too cosy, and too warm. The son followed last, standing in the doorway. The father talked to me.

Maggie put out the tea-cups. The mother went into the dairy again.

‘Tha’lt rouse thysen up a bit again, now, Maggie,’ the father-in-law said — and then to me: ‘‘ers not bin very bright sin’ Alfred came whoam, an’ the bod flyed awee. ‘E come whoam a Wednesday night, Alfred did. But ay, you knowed, didna yer. Ay, ‘e comed ‘a Wednesday — an’ I reckon there wor a bit of a to-do between ‘em, worn’t there, Maggie?’

He twinkled maliciously to his daughter-in-law, who was flushed, brilliant and handsome.

‘Oh, be quiet, father. You’re wound up, by the sound of you,’ she said to him, as if crossly. But she could never be cross with him.

“Ers got ‘er colour back this mornin’,” continued the father-in-law slowly. ‘It’s bin heavy weather wi’ ‘er this last two days. Ay — ‘er’s bin northeast sin ‘er seed you a Wednesday.’

‘Father, do stop talking. You’d wear the leg off an iron pot. I can’t think where you’ve found your tongue, all of a sudden,’ said Maggie, with caressive sharpness.

‘Ah’ve found it wheer I lost it. Aren’t goin’ ter come in an’ sit thee down, Alfred?’

But Alfred turned and disappeared.

“E’s got th’ monkey on ‘is back ower this letter job,” said the father secretly to me. ‘Mother, ‘er knows nowt about it. Lot o’ tom-foolery, isn’t it? Ay! What’s good o’ makkin’ a peck o’ trouble over what’s far enough off, an’ ned niver come no nigher. No — not a smite o’ use. That’s what I tell ‘er. ‘Er should ta’e no notice on’t. Ty, what can y’ expect.’

The mother came in again, and the talk became general. Maggie flashed her eyes at me from time to time, complacent and satisfied, moving among the men. I paid her little compliments, which she did not seem to hear. She attended to me with a kind of sinister, witch-like graciousness, her dark head ducked between her shoulders, at once humble and powerful. She was happy as a child attending to her father-in-law and to me. But there was something ominous between her eyebrows, as if a dark moth were settled there — and something ominous in her bent, hulking bearing.

She sat on a low stool by the fire, near her father-in-law. Her head was dropped, she seemed in a state of abstraction. From time to time she would suddenly recover, and look up at us, laughing and chatting. Then she would forget again. Yet in her hulking black forgetting she seemed very near to us.

The door having been opened, the peacock came slowly in, prancing calmly. He went near to her and crouched down, coiling his blue neck. She glanced at him, but almost as if she did not observe him. The bird sat silent, seeming to sleep, and the woman also sat hulking and silent, seemingly oblivious. Then once more there was a heavy step, and Alfred entered. He looked at his wife, and he looked at the peacock crouching by her. He stood large in the doorway, his hands stuck in front of him, in his breeches pockets. Nobody spoke. He turned on his heel and went out again.

I rose also to go. Maggie started as if coming to herself.

‘Must you go?’ she asked, rising and coming near to me, standing in front of me, twisting her head sideways and looking up at me. ‘Can’t you stop a bit longer? We can all be cosy today, there’s nothing to do outdoors.’ And she laughed, showing her teeth oddly. She had a long chin.

I said I must go. The peacock uncoiled and coiled again his long blue neck, as he lay on the hearth. Maggie still stood close in front of me, so that I was acutely aware of my waistcoat buttons.

‘Oh, well,’ she said, ‘you’ll come again, won’t you? Do come again.’

I promised.

‘Come to tea one day — yes, do!’

I promised — one day.

The moment I went out of her presence I ceased utterly to exist for her — as utterly as I ceased to exist for Joey. With her curious abstractedness she forgot me again immediately. I knew it as I left her. Yet she seemed almost in physical contact with me while I was with her.

The sky was all pallid again, yellowish. When I went out there was no sun; the snow was blue and cold. I hurried away down the hill, musing on Maggie. The road made a loop down the sharp face of the slope. As I went crunching over the laborious snow I became aware of a figure striding down the steep scarp to intercept me. It was a man with his hands in front of him, half stuck in his breeches pockets, and his shoulders square — a real farmer of the hills; Alfred, of course. He waited for me by the stone fence.

‘Excuse me,’ he said as I came up.

I came to a halt in front of him and looked into his sullen blue eyes. He had a certain odd haughtiness on his brows. But his blue eyes stared insolently at me.

‘Do you know anything about a letter — in French — that my wife opened — a letter of mine —?’

‘Yes,’ said I. ‘She asked me to read it to her.’

He looked square at me. He did not know exactly how to feel.

‘What was there in it?’ he asked.

‘Why?’ I said. ‘Don’t you know?’

‘She makes out she’s burnt it,’ he said.

‘Without showing it you?’ I asked.

He nodded slightly. He seemed to be meditating as to what line of action he should take. He wanted to know the contents of the letter: he must know: and therefore he must ask me, for evidently his wife had taunted him. At the same time, no doubt, he would like to wreak untold vengeance on my unfortunate person. So he eyed me, and I eyed him, and neither of us spoke. He did not want to repeat his request to me. And yet I only looked at him, and considered.

Suddenly he threw back his head and glanced down the valley. Then he changed his position — he was a horse-soldier. Then he looked at me confidentially.

‘She burnt the blasted thing before I saw it,’ he said.

‘Well,’ I answered slowly, ‘she doesn’t know herself what was in it.’

He continued to watch me narrowly. I grinned to myself.

‘I didn’t like to read her out what there was in it,’ I continued.

He suddenly flushed so that the veins in his neck stood out, and he stirred again uncomfortably.

‘The Belgian girl said her baby had been born a week ago, and that they were going to call it Alfred,’ I told him.

He met my eyes. I was grinning. He began to grin, too.

‘Good luck to her,’ he said.

‘Best of luck,’ said I.

‘And what did you tell her?’ he asked.

‘That the baby belonged to the old mother — that it was brother to your girl, who was writing to you as a friend of the family.’

He stood smiling, with the long, subtle malice of a farmer.

‘And did she take it in?’ he asked.

‘As much as she took anything else.’

He stood grinning fixedly. Then he broke into a short laugh.

‘Good for her’ he exclaimed cryptically.

And then he laughed aloud once more, evidently feeling he had won a big move in his contest with his wife.

‘What about the other woman?’ I asked.

‘Who?’

‘Élise.’

‘Oh’ — he shifted uneasily — ‘she was all right — ’

‘You’ll be getting back to her,’ I said.

He looked at me. Then he made a grimace with his mouth.

‘Not me,’ he said. ‘Back your life it’s a plant.’

‘You don’t think the cher petit bébé is a little Alfred?’

‘It might be,’ he said.

‘Only might?’

‘Yes — an’ there’s lots of mites in a pound of cheese.’ He laughed boisterously but uneasily.

‘What did she say, exactly?’ he asked.

I began to repeat, as well as I could, the phrases of the letter:

‘Mon cher Alfred — Figure-toi comme je suis desolée — ’

He listened with some confusion. When I had finished all I could remember, he said:

‘They know how to pitch you out a letter, those Belgian lasses.’

‘Practice,’ said I.

‘They get plenty,’ he said.

There was a pause.

‘Oh, well,’ he said. ‘I’ve never got that letter, anyhow.’

The wind blew fine and keen, in the sunshine, across the snow. I blew my nose and prepared to depart.

‘And she doesn’t know anything?’ he continued, jerking his head up the hill in the direction of Tible.

‘She knows nothing but what I’ve said — that is, if she really burnt the letter.’

‘I believe she burnt it,’ he said, ‘for spite. She’s a little devil, she is. But I shall have it out with her.’ His jaw was stubborn and sullen. Then suddenly he turned to me with a new note.

‘Why?’ he said. ‘Why didn’t you wring that b — — peacock’s neck-that b — — Joey?’

‘Why?’ I said. ‘What for?’

‘I hate the brute,’ he said. ‘I had a shot at him — ’

I laughed. He stood and mused.

‘Poor little Elise,’ he murmured.

‘Was she small — petite?’ I asked. He jerked up his head.

‘No,’ he said. ‘Rather tall.’

‘Taller than your wife, I suppose.’

Again he looked into my eyes. And then once more he went into a loud burst of laughter that made the still, snow-deserted valley clap again.

‘God, it’s a knockout!’ he said, thoroughly amused. Then he stood at ease, one foot out, his hands in his breeches pockets, in front of him, his head thrown back, a handsome figure of a man.

‘But I’ll do that blasted Joey in — ’ he mused.

I ran down the hill, shouting with laughter.

FANNY AND ANNIE

Flame-lurid his face as he turned among the throng of flame-lit and dark faces upon the platform. In the light of the furnace she caught sight of his drifting countenance, like a piece of floating fire. And the nostalgia, the doom of homecoming went through her veins like a drug. His eternal face, flame-lit now! The pulse and darkness of red fire from the furnace towers in the sky, lighting the desultory, industrial crowd on the wayside station, lit him and went out.

Of course he did not see her. Flame-lit and unseeing! Always the same, with his meeting eyebrows, his common cap, and his red-and-black scarf knotted round his throat. Not even a collar to meet her! The flames had sunk, there was shadow.

She opened the door of her grimy, branch-line carriage, and began to get down her bags. The porter was nowhere, of course, but there was Harry, obscure, on the outer edge of the little crowd, missing her, of course.

‘Here! Harry!’ she called, waving her umbrella in the twilight. He hurried forward.

‘Tha’s come, has ter?’ he said, in a sort of cheerful welcome. She got down, rather flustered, and gave him a peck of a kiss.

‘Two suit-cases!’ she said.

Her soul groaned within her, as he clambered into the carriage after her bags. Up shot the fire in the twilight sky, from the great furnace behind the station. She felt the red flame go across her face. She had come back, she had come back for good. And her spirit groaned dismally. She doubted if she could bear it.

There, on the sordid little station under the furnaces, she stood, tall and distinguished, in her well-made coat and skirt and her broad grey velour hat. She held her umbrella, her bead chatelaine, and a little leather case in her grey-gloved hands, while Harry staggered out of the ugly little train with her bags.

‘There’s a trunk at the back,’ she said in her bright voice. But she was not feeling bright. The twin black cones of the iron foundry blasted their sky-high fires into the night. The whole scene was lurid. The train waited cheerfully. It would wait another ten minutes. She knew it. It was all so deadly familiar.

Let us confess it at once. She was a lady’s maid, thirty years old, come back to marry her first-love, a foundry worker: after having kept him dangling, off and on, for a dozen years. Why had she come back? Did she love him? No. She didn’t pretend to. She had loved her brilliant and ambitious cousin, who had

jilted her, and who had died. She had had other affairs which had come to nothing. So here she was, come back suddenly to marry her first-love, who had waited — or remained single — all these years.

‘Won’t a porter carry those?’ she said, as Harry strode with his workman’s stride down the platform towards the guard’s van.

‘I can manage,’ he said.

And with her umbrella, her chatelaine, and her little leather case, she followed him.

The trunk was there.

‘We’ll get Heather’s greengrocer’s cart to fetch it up,’ he said.

‘Isn’t there a cab?’ said Fanny, knowing dismally enough that there wasn’t.

‘I’ll just put it aside o’ the penny-in-the-slot, and Heather’s greengrocers’ll fetch it about half past eight,’ he said.

He seized the box by its two handles and staggered with it across the level-crossing, bumping his legs against it as he waddled. Then he dropped it by the red sweet-meats machine.

‘Will it be safe there?’ she said.

‘Ay — safe as houses,’ he answered. He returned for the two bags. Thus laden, they started to plod up the hill, under the great long black building of the foundry. She walked beside him — workman of workmen he was, trudging with that luggage. The red lights flared over the deepening darkness. From the foundry came the horrible, slow clang, clang, clang of iron, a great noise, with an interval just long enough to make it unendurable.

Compare this with the arrival at Gloucester: the carriage for her mistress, the dog-cart for herself with the luggage; the drive out past the river, the pleasant trees of the carriage-approach; and herself sitting beside Arthur, everybody so polite to her.

She had come home — for good! Her heart nearly stopped beating as she trudged up that hideous and interminable hill, beside the laden figure. What a come-down! What a come-down! She could not take it with her usual bright cheerfulness. She knew it all too well. It is easy to bear up against the unusual, but the deadly familiarity of an old stale past!

He dumped the bags down under a lamp-post, for a rest. There they stood, the two of them, in the lamplight. Passers-by stared at her, and gave good-night to Harry. Her they hardly knew, she had become a stranger.

‘They’re too heavy for you, let me carry one,’ she said.

‘They begin to weigh a bit by the time you’ve gone a mile,’ he answered.

‘Let me carry the little one,’ she insisted.

‘Tha can ha’e it for a minute, if ter’s a mind,’ he said, handing over the valise.

And thus they arrived in the streets of shops of the little ugly town on top of the hill. How everybody stared at her; my word, how they stared! And the cinema was just going in, and the queues were tailing down the road to the corner. And everybody took full stock of her. 'Night, Harry!' shouted the fellows, in an interested voice.

However, they arrived at her aunt's — a little sweet-shop in a side street. They 'pinged' the door-bell, and her aunt came running forward out of the kitchen.

'There you are, child! Dying for a cup of tea, I'm sure. How are you?'

Fanny's aunt kissed her, and it was all Fanny could do to refrain from bursting into tears, she felt so low. Perhaps it was her tea she wanted.

'You've had a drag with that luggage,' said Fanny's aunt to Harry.

'Ay — I'm not sorry to put it down,' he said, looking at his hand which was crushed and cramped by the bag handle.

Then he departed to see about Heather's greengrocery cart.

When Fanny sat at tea, her aunt, a grey-haired, fair-faced little woman, looked at her with an admiring heart, feeling bitterly sore for her. For Fanny was beautiful: tall, erect, finely coloured, with her delicately arched nose, her rich brown hair, her large lustrous grey eyes. A passionate woman — a woman to be afraid of. So proud, so inwardly violent! She came of a violent race.

It needed a woman to sympathize with her. Men had not the courage. Poor Fanny! She was such a lady, and so straight and magnificent. And yet everything seemed to do her down. Every time she seemed to be doomed to humiliation and disappointment, this handsome, brilliantly sensitive woman, with her nervous, overwrought laugh.

'So you've really come back, child?' said her aunt.

'I really have, Aunt,' said Fanny.

'Poor Harry! I'm not sure, you know, Fanny, that you're not taking a bit of an advantage of him.'

'Oh, Aunt, he's waited so long, he may as well have what he's waited for.' Fanny laughed grimly.

'Yes, child, he's waited so long, that I'm not sure it isn't a bit hard on him. You know, I like him, Fanny — though as you know quite well, I don't think he's good enough for you. And I think he thinks so himself, poor fellow.'

'Don't you be so sure of that, Aunt. Harry is common, but he's not humble. He wouldn't think the Queen was any too good for him, if he'd a mind to her.'

'Well — It's as well if he has a proper opinion of himself.'

'It depends what you call proper,' said Fanny. 'But he's got his good points —

'Oh, he's a nice fellow, and I like him, I do like him. Only, as I tell you, he's

not good enough for you.'

'I've made up my mind, Aunt,' said Fanny, grimly.

'Yes,' mused the aunt. 'They say all things come to him who waits —'

'More than he's bargained for, eh, Aunt?' laughed Fanny rather bitterly.

The poor aunt, this bitterness grieved her for her niece.

They were interrupted by the ping of the shop-bell, and Harry's call of 'Right!' But as he did not come in at once, Fanny, feeling solicitous for him presumably at the moment, rose and went into the shop. She saw a cart outside, and went to the door.

And the moment she stood in the doorway, she heard a woman's common vituperative voice crying from the darkness of the opposite side of the road:

'Tha'rt theer, ar ter? I'll shame thee, Mester. I'll shame thee, see if I dunna.'

Startled, Fanny stared across the darkness, and saw a woman in a black bonnet go under one of the lamps up the side street.

Harry and Bill Heather had dragged the trunk off the little dray, and she retreated before them as they came up the shop step with it.

'Wheer shalt ha'e it?' asked Harry.

'Best take it upstairs,' said Fanny.

She went up first to light the gas.

When Heather had gone, and Harry was sitting down having tea and pork pie, Fanny asked:

'Who was that woman shouting?'

'Nay, I canna tell thee. To somebody, Is'd think,' replied Harry. Fanny looked at him, but asked no more.

He was a fair-haired fellow of thirty-two, with a fair moustache. He was broad in his speech, and looked like a foundry-hand, which he was. But women always liked him. There was something of a mother's lad about him — something warm and playful and really sensitive.

He had his attractions even for Fanny. What she rebelled against so bitterly was that he had no sort of ambition. He was a moulder, but of very commonplace skill. He was thirty-two years old, and hadn't saved twenty pounds. She would have to provide the money for the home. He didn't care. He just didn't care. He had no initiative at all. He had no vices — no obvious ones. But he was just indifferent, spending as he went, and not caring. Yet he did not look happy. She remembered his face in the fire-glow: something haunted, abstracted about it. As he sat there eating his pork pie, bulging his cheek out, she felt he was like a doom to her. And she raged against the doom of him. It wasn't that he was gross. His way was common, almost on purpose. But he himself wasn't really common. For instance, his food was not particularly important to

him, he was not greedy. He had a charm, too, particularly for women, with his blondness and his sensitiveness and his way of making a woman feel that she was a higher being. But Fanny knew him, knew the peculiar obstinate limitedness of him, that would nearly send her mad.

He stayed till about half past nine. She went to the door with him.

‘When are you coming up?’ he said, jerking his head in the direction, presumably, of his own home.

‘I’ll come tomorrow afternoon,’ she said brightly. Between Fanny and Mrs. Goodall, his mother, there was naturally no love lost.

Again she gave him an awkward little kiss, and said good-night.

‘You can’t wonder, you know, child, if he doesn’t seem so very keen,’ said her aunt. ‘It’s your own fault.’

‘Oh, Aunt, I couldn’t stand him when he was keen. I can do with him a lot better as he is.’

The two women sat and talked far into the night. They understood each other. The aunt, too, had married as Fanny was marrying: a man who was no companion to her, a violent man, brother of Fanny’s father. He was dead, Fanny’s father was dead.

Poor Aunt Lizzie, she cried woefully over her bright niece, when she had gone to bed.

Fanny paid the promised visit to his people the next afternoon. Mrs. Goodall was a large woman with smooth-parted hair, a common, obstinate woman, who had spoiled her four lads and her one vixen of a married daughter. She was one of those old-fashioned powerful natures that couldn’t do with looks or education or any form of showing off. She fairly hated the sound of correct English. She thee’d and tha’d her prospective daughter-in-law, and said:

‘I’m none as ormin’ as I look, seest ta.’

Fanny did not think her prospective mother-in-law looked at all orming, so the speech was unnecessary.

‘I towd him mysen,’ said Mrs. Goodall, ‘‘Er’s held back all this long, let ‘er stop as ‘er is. ‘E’d none ha’ had thee for my tellin’ — tha hears. No, ‘e’s a fool, an’ I know it. I says to him, ‘Tha looks a man, doesn’t ter, at thy age, goin’ an’ openin’ to her when ter hears her scrat’ at th’ gate, after she’s done gallivantin’ round wherever she’d a mind. That looks rare an’ soft.’ But it’s no use o’ any talking: he answered that letter o’ thine and made his own bad bargain.’

But in spite of the old woman’s anger, she was also flattered at Fanny’s coming back to Harry. For Mrs. Goodall was impressed by Fanny — a woman of her own match. And more than this, everybody knew that Fanny’s Aunt Kate had left her two hundred pounds: this apart from the girl’s savings.

So there was high tea in Princes Street when Harry came home black from work, and a rather acrid odour of cordiality, the vixen Jinny darting in to say vulgar things. Of course Jinny lived in a house whose garden end joined the paternal garden. They were a clan who stuck together, these Goodalls.

It was arranged that Fanny should come to tea again on the Sunday, and the wedding was discussed. It should take place in a fortnight's time at Morley Chapel. Morley was a hamlet on the edge of the real country, and in its little Congregational Chapel Fanny and Harry had first met.

What a creature of habit he was! He was still in the choir of Morley Chapel — not very regular. He belonged just because he had a tenor voice, and enjoyed singing. Indeed his solos were only spoilt to local fame because when he sang he handled his aitches so hopelessly.

‘And I saw ‘eaven hopened And be’old, a wite ‘orse-’

This was one of Harry's classics, only surpassed by the fine outburst of his heaving:

‘Hangels — hever bright an’ fair-’

It was a pity, but it was inalterable. He had a good voice, and he sang with a certain lacerating fire, but his pronunciation made it all funny. And nothing could alter him.

So he was never heard save at cheap concerts and in the little, poorer chapels. The others scoffed.

Now the month was September, and Sunday was Harvest Festival at Morley Chapel, and Harry was singing solos. So that Fanny was to go to afternoon service, and come home to a grand spread of Sunday tea with him. Poor Fanny! One of the most wonderful afternoons had been a Sunday afternoon service, with her cousin Luther at her side, Harvest Festival in Morley Chapel. Harry had sung solos then — ten years ago. She remembered his pale blue tie, and the purple asters and the great vegetable marrows in which he was framed, and her cousin Luther at her side, young, clever, come down from London, where he was getting on well, learning his Latin and his French and German so brilliantly.

However, once again it was Harvest Festival at Morley Chapel, and once again, as ten years before, a soft, exquisite September day, with the last roses pink in the cottage gardens, the last dahlias crimson, the last sunflowers yellow. And again the little old chapel was a bower, with its famous sheaves of corn and corn-plaited pillars, its great bunches of grapes, dangling like tassels from the pulpit corners, its marrows and potatoes and pears and apples and damsons, its purple asters and yellow Japanese sunflowers. Just as before, the red dahlias round the pillars were dropping, weak-headed among the oats. The place was crowded and hot, the plates of tomatoes seemed balanced perilously on the

gallery front, the Rev. Enderby was weirder than ever to look at, so long and emaciated and hairless.

The Rev. Enderby, probably forewarned, came and shook hands with her and welcomed her, in his broad northern, melancholy singsong before he mounted the pulpit. Fanny was handsome in a gauzy dress and a beautiful lace hat. Being a little late, she sat in a chair in the side-aisle wedged in, right in front of the chapel. Harry was in the gallery above, and she could only see him from the eyes upwards. She noticed again how his eyebrows met, blond and not very marked, over his nose. He was attractive too: physically lovable, very. If only — if only her pride had not suffered! She felt he dragged her down.

‘Come, ye thankful people come, Raise the song of harvest-home. All is safely gathered in Ere the winter storms begin — ’

Even the hymn was a falsehood, as the season had been wet, and half the crops were still out, and in a poor way.

Poor Fanny! She sang little, and looked beautiful through that inappropriate hymn. Above her stood Harry — mercifully in a dark suit and dark tie, looking almost handsome. And his lacerating, pure tenor sounded well, when the words were drowned in the general commotion. Brilliant she looked, and brilliant she felt, for she was hot and angrily miserable and inflamed with a sort of fatal despair. Because there was about him a physical attraction which she really hated, but which she could not escape from. He was the first man who had ever kissed her. And his kisses, even while she rebelled from them, had lived in her blood and sent roots down into her soul. After all this time she had come back to them. And her soul groaned, for she felt dragged down, dragged down to earth, as a bird which some dog has got down in the dust. She knew her life would be unhappy. She knew that what she was doing was fatal. Yet it was her doom. She had to come back to him.

He had to sing two solos this afternoon: one before the ‘address’ from the pulpit and one after. Fanny looked at him, and wondered he was not too shy to stand up there in front of all the people. But no, he was not shy. He had even a kind of assurance on his face as he looked down from the choir gallery at her: the assurance of a common man deliberately entrenched in his commonness. Oh, such a rage went through her veins as she saw the air of triumph, laconic, indifferent triumph which sat so obstinately and recklessly on his eyelids as he looked down at her. Ah, she despised him! But there he stood up in that choir gallery like Balaam’s ass in front of her, and she could not get beyond him. A certain winsomeness also about him. A certain physical winsomeness, and as if his flesh were new and lovely to touch. The thorn of desire rankled bitterly in her heart.

He, it goes without saying, sang like a canary this particular afternoon, with a certain defiant passion which pleasantly crisped the blood of the congregation. Fanny felt the crisp flames go through her veins as she listened. Even the curious loud-mouthed vernacular had a certain fascination. But, oh, also, it was so repugnant. He would triumph over her, obstinately he would drag her right back into the common people: a doom, a vulgar doom.

The second performance was an anthem, in which Harry sang the solo parts. It was clumsy, but beautiful, with lovely words.

‘They that sow in tears shall reap in joy, He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed Shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him — ’

‘Shall doubtless come, Shall doubtless come — ’ softly intoned the altos — ‘Bringing his she-e-eaves with him,’ the trebles flourished brightly, and then again began the half-wistful solo:

‘They that sow in tears shall reap in joy — ’

Yes, it was effective and moving.

But at the moment when Harry’s voice sank carelessly down to his close, and the choir, standing behind him, were opening their mouths for the final triumphant outburst, a shouting female voice rose up from the body of the congregation. The organ gave one startled trump, and went silent; the choir stood transfixed.

‘You look well standing there, singing in God’s holy house,’ came the loud, angry female shout. Everybody turned electrified. A stoutish, red-faced woman in a black bonnet was standing up denouncing the soloist. Almost fainting with shock, the congregation realized it. ‘You look well, don’t you, standing there singing solos in God’s holy house, you, Goodall. But I said I’d shame you. You look well, bringing your young woman here with you, don’t you? I’ll let her know who she’s dealing with. A scamp as won’t take the consequences of what he’s done.’ The hard-faced, frenzied woman turned in the direction of Fanny. ‘That’s what Harry Goodall is, if you want to know.’

And she sat down again in her seat. Fanny, startled like all the rest, had turned to look. She had gone white, and then a burning red, under the attack. She knew the woman: a Mrs. Nixon, a devil of a woman, who beat her pathetic, drunken, red-nosed second husband, Bob, and her two lanky daughters, grown-up as they were. A notorious character. Fanny turned round again, and sat motionless as eternity in her seat.

There was a minute of perfect silence and suspense. The audience was open-mouthed and dumb; the choir stood like Lot’s wife; and Harry, with his music-sheet, stood there uplifted, looking down with a dumb sort of indifference on

Mrs. Nixon, his face naïve and faintly mocking. Mrs. Nixon sat defiant in her seat, braving them all.

Then a rustle, like a wood when the wind suddenly catches the leaves. And then the tall, weird minister got to his feet, and in his strong, bell-like, beautiful voice — the only beautiful thing about him — he said with infinite mournful pathos:

‘Let us unite in singing the last hymn on the hymn-sheet; the last hymn on the hymn-sheet, number eleven.

‘Fair waved the golden corn, In Canaan’s pleasant land.’

The organ tuned up promptly. During the hymn the offertory was taken. And after the hymn, the prayer.

Mr. Enderby came from Northumberland. Like Harry, he had never been able to conquer his accent, which was very broad. He was a little simple, one of God’s fools, perhaps, an odd bachelor soul, emotional, ugly, but very gentle.

‘And if, O our dear Lord, beloved Jesus, there should fall a shadow of sin upon our harvest, we leave it to Thee to judge, for Thou art judge. We lift our spirits and our sorrow, Jesus, to Thee, and our mouths are dumb. O, Lord, keep us from forward speech, restrain us from foolish words and thoughts, we pray Thee, Lord Jesus, who knowest all and judgest all.’

Thus the minister said in his sad, resonant voice, washed his hands before the Lord. Fanny bent forward open-eyed during the prayer. She could see the roundish head of Harry, also bent forward. His face was inscrutable and expressionless. The shock left her bewildered. Anger perhaps was her dominating emotion.

The audience began to rustle to its feet, to ooze slowly and excitedly out of the chapel, looking with wildly-interested eyes at Fanny, at Mrs. Nixon, and at Harry. Mrs. Nixon, shortish, stood defiant in her pew, facing the aisle, as if announcing that, without rolling her sleeves up, she was ready for anybody. Fanny sat quite still. Luckily the people did not have to pass her. And Harry, with red ears, was making his way sheepishly out of the gallery. The loud noise of the organ covered all the downstairs commotion of exit.

The minister sat silent and inscrutable in his pulpit, rather like a death’s-head, while the congregation filed out. When the last lingerers had unwillingly departed, craning their necks to stare at the still seated Fanny, he rose, stalked in his hooked fashion down the little country chapel and fastened the door. Then he returned and sat down by the silent young woman.

‘This is most unfortunate, most unfortunate!’ he moaned. ‘I am so sorry, I am so sorry, indeed, indeed, ah, indeed!’ he sighed himself to a close.

‘It’s a sudden surprise, that’s one thing,’ said Fanny brightly.

‘Yes — yes — indeed. Yes, a surprise, yes. I don’t know the woman, I don’t know her.’

‘I know her,’ said Fanny. ‘She’s a bad one.’

‘Well! Well!’ said the minister. ‘I don’t know her. I don’t understand. I don’t understand at all. But it is to be regretted, it is very much to be regretted. I am very sorry.’

Fanny was watching the vestry door. The gallery stairs communicated with the vestry, not with the body of the chapel. She knew the choir members had been peeping for information.

At last Harry came — rather sheepishly — with his hat in his hand.

‘Well!’ said Fanny, rising to her feet.

‘We’ve had a bit of an extra,’ said Harry.

‘I should think so,’ said Fanny.

‘A most unfortunate circumstance — a most unfortunate circumstance. Do you understand it, Harry? I don’t understand it at all.’

‘Ah, I understand it. The daughter’s goin’ to have a childt, an’ ‘er lays it on to me.’

‘And has she no occasion to?’ asked Fanny, rather censorious.

‘It’s no more mine than it is some other chap’s,’ said Harry, looking aside.

There was a moment of pause.

‘Which girl is it?’ asked Fanny.

‘Annie — the young one — ’

There followed another silence.

‘I don’t think I know them, do I?’ asked the minister.

‘I shouldn’t think so. Their name’s Nixon — mother married old Bob for her second husband. She’s a tanger — ’s driven the gel to what she is. They live in Manners Road.’

‘Why, what’s amiss with the girl?’ asked Fanny sharply. ‘She was all right when I knew her.’

‘Ay — she’s all right. But she’s always in an’ out o’ th’ pubs, wi’ th’ fellows,’ said Harry.

‘A nice thing!’ said Fanny.

Harry glanced towards the door. He wanted to get out.

‘Most distressing, indeed!’ The minister slowly shook his head.

‘What about tonight, Mr. Enderby?’ asked Harry, in rather a small voice. ‘Shall you want me?’

Mr. Enderby looked up painedly, and put his hand to his brow. He studied Harry for some time, vacantly. There was the faintest sort of a resemblance between the two men.

‘Yes,’ he said. ‘Yes, I think. I think we must take no notice, and cause as little remark as possible.’

Fanny hesitated. Then she said to Harry.

‘But will you come?’

He looked at her.

‘Ay, I s’ll come,’ he said.

Then he turned to Mr. Enderby.

‘Well, good-afternoon, Mr. Enderby,’ he said.

‘Good-afternoon, Harry, good-afternoon,’ replied the mournful minister. Fanny followed Harry to the door, and for some time they walked in silence through the late afternoon.

‘And it’s yours as much as anybody else’s?’ she said.

‘Ay,’ he answered shortly.

And they went without another word, for the long mile or so, till they came to the corner of the street where Harry lived. Fanny hesitated. Should she go on to her aunt’s? Should she? It would mean leaving all this, for ever. Harry stood silent.

Some obstinacy made her turn with him along the road to his own home. When they entered the house-place, the whole family was there, mother and father and Jinny, with Jinny’s husband and children and Harry’s two brothers.

‘You’ve been having yours ears warmed, they tell me,’ said Mrs. Goodall grimly.

‘Who telled thee?’ asked Harry shortly.

‘Maggie and Luke’s both been in.’

‘You look well, don’t you!’ said interfering Jinny.

Harry went and hung his hat up, without replying.

‘Come upstairs and take your hat off,’ said Mrs. Goodall to Fanny, almost kindly. It would have annoyed her very much if Fanny had dropped her son at this moment.

‘What’s ‘er say, then?’ asked the father secretly of Harry, jerking his head in the direction of the stairs whence Fanny had disappeared.

‘Nowt yet,’ said Harry.

‘Serve you right if she chucks you now,’ said Jinny. ‘I’ll bet it’s right about Annie Nixon an’ you.’

‘Tha bets so much,’ said Harry.

‘Yi — but you can’t deny it,’ said Jinny.

‘I can if I’ve a mind.’

His father looked at him inquiringly.

‘It’s no more mine than it is Bill Bower’s, or Ted Slaney’s, or six or seven on

'em,' said Harry to his father.

And the father nodded silently.

'That'll not get you out of it, in court,' said Jinny.

Upstairs Fanny evaded all the thrusts made by his mother, and did not declare her hand. She tidied her hair, washed her hands, and put the tiniest bit of powder on her face, for coolness, there in front of Mrs. Goodall's indignant gaze. It was like a declaration of independence. But the old woman said nothing.

They came down to Sunday tea, with sardines and tinned salmon and tinned peaches, besides tarts and cakes. The chatter was general. It concerned the Nixon family and the scandal.

'Oh, she's a foul-mouthed woman,' said Jinny of Mrs. Nixon. 'She may well talk about God's holy house, she had. It's first time she's set foot in it, ever since she dropped off from being converted. She's a devil and she always was one. Can't you remember how she treated Bob's children, mother, when we lived down in the Buildings? I can remember when I was a little girl she used to bathe them in the yard, in the cold, so that they shouldn't splash the house. She'd half kill them if they made a mark on the floor, and the language she'd use! And one Saturday I can remember Garry, that was Bob's own girl, she ran off when her stepmother was going to bathe her — ran off without a rag of clothes on — can you remember, mother? And she hid in Smedley's closes — it was the time of mowing-grass — and nobody could find her. She hid out there all night, didn't she, mother? Nobody could find her. My word, there was a talk. They found her on Sunday morning —'

'Fred Coutts threatened to break every bone in the woman's body, if she touched the children again,' put in the father.

'Anyhow, they frightened her,' said Jinny. 'But she was nearly as bad with her own two. And anybody can see that she's driven old Bob till he's gone soft.'

'Ah, soft as mush,' said Jack Goodall. 'E'd never addle a week's wage, nor yet a day's if th' chaps didn't make it up to him.'

'My word, if he didn't bring her a week's wage, she'd pull his head off,' said Jinny.

'But a clean woman, and respectable, except for her foul mouth,' said Mrs. Goodall. 'Keeps to herself like a bull-dog. Never lets anybody come near the house, and neighbours with nobody.'

'Wanted it thrashed out of her,' said Mr. Goodall, a silent, evasive sort of man.

'Where Bob gets the money for his drink from is a mystery,' said Jinny.

'Chaps treats him,' said Harry.

'Well, he's got the pair of frightenedest rabbit-eyes you'd wish to see,' said

Jinny.

‘Ay, with a drunken man’s murder in them, I think,’ said Mrs. Goodall.

So the talk went on after tea, till it was practically time to start off to chapel again.

‘You’ll have to be getting ready, Fanny,’ said Mrs. Goodall.

‘I’m not going tonight,’ said Fanny abruptly. And there was a sudden halt in the family. ‘I’ll stop with you tonight, Mother,’ she added.

‘Best you had, my gel,’ said Mrs. Goodall, flattered and assured.

MONKEY NUTS

At first Joe thought the job O.K. He was loading hay on the trucks, along with Albert, the corporal. The two men were pleasantly billeted in a cottage not far from the station: they were their own masters, for Joe never thought of Albert as a master. And the little sidings of the tiny village station was as pleasant a place as you could wish for. On one side, beyond the line, stretched the woods: on the other, the near side, across a green smooth field red houses were dotted among flowering apple trees. The weather being sunny, work being easy, Albert, a real good pal, what life could be better! After Flanders, it was heaven itself.

Albert, the corporal, was a clean-shaven, shrewd-looking fellow of about forty. He seemed to think his one aim in life was to be full of fun and nonsense. In repose, his face looked a little withered, old. He was a very good pal to Joe, steady, decent and grave under all his 'mischief'; for his mischief was only his laborious way of skirting his own ennui.

Joe was much younger than Albert — only twenty-three. He was a tallish, quiet youth, pleasant looking. He was of a slightly better class than his corporal, more personable. Careful about his appearance, he shaved every day. 'I haven't got much of a face,' said Albert. 'If I was to shave every day like you, Joe, I should have none.'

There was plenty of life in the little goods-yard: three porter youths, a continual come and go of farm wagons bringing hay, wagons with timber from the woods, coal carts loading at the trucks. The black coal seemed to make the place sleepier, hotter. Round the big white gate the stationmaster's children played and his white chickens walked, whilst the stationmaster himself, a young man getting too fat, helped his wife to peg out the washing on the clothes line in the meadow.

The great boat-shaped wagons came up from Playcross with the hay. At first the farm-men waggoned it. On the third day one of the land-girls appeared with the first load, drawing to a standstill easily at the head of her two great horses. She was a buxom girl, young, in linen overalls and gaiters. Her face was ruddy, she had large blue eyes.

'Now that's the waggoner for us, boys,' said the corporal loudly.

'Whoa!' she said to her horses; and then to the corporal: 'Which boys do you mean?'

'We are the pick of the bunch. That's Joe, my pal. Don't you let on that my

name's Albert,' said the corporal to his private. 'I'm the corporal.'

'And I'm Miss Stokes,' said the land-girl coolly, 'if that's all the boys you are.'

'You know you couldn't want more, Miss Stokes,' said Albert politely. Joe, who was bare-headed, whose grey flannel sleeves were rolled up to the elbow, and whose shirt was open at the breast, looked modestly aside as if he had no part in the affair.

'Are you on this job regular, then?' said the corporal to Miss Stokes.

'I don't know for sure,' she said, pushing a piece of hair under her hat, and attending to her splendid horses.

'Oh, make it a certainty,' said Albert.

She did not reply. She turned and looked over the two men coolly. She was pretty, moderately blonde, with crisp hair, a good skin, and large blue eyes. She was strong, too, and the work went on leisurely and easily.

'Now!' said the corporal, stopping as usual to look round, 'pleasant company makes work a pleasure — don't hurry it, boys.' He stood on the truck surveying the world. That was one of his great and absorbing occupations: to stand and look out on things in general. Joe, also standing on the truck, also turned round to look what was to be seen. But he could not become blankly absorbed, as Albert could.

Miss Stokes watched the two men from under her broad felt hat. She had seen hundreds of Alberts, khaki soldiers standing in loose attitudes, absorbed in watching nothing in particular. She had seen also a good many Joes, quiet, good-looking young soldiers with half-averted faces. But there was something in the turn of Joe's head, and something in his quiet, tender-looking form, young and fresh — which attracted her eye. As she watched him closely from below, he turned as if he felt her, and his dark-blue eye met her straight, light-blue gaze. He faltered and turned aside again and looked as if he were going to fall off the truck. A slight flush mounted under the girl's full, ruddy face. She liked him.

Always, after this, when she came into the sidings with her team, it was Joe she looked for. She acknowledged to herself that she was sweet on him. But Albert did all the talking. He was so full of fun and nonsense. Joe was a very shy bird, very brief and remote in his answers. Miss Stokes was driven to indulge in repartee with Albert, but she fixed her magnetic attention on the younger fellow. Joe would talk with Albert, and laugh at his jokes. But Miss Stokes could get little out of him. She had to depend on her silent forces. They were more effective than might be imagined.

Suddenly, on Saturday afternoon, at about two o'clock, Joe received a bolt from the blue — a telegram: 'Meet me Belbury Station 6.00 p.m. today. M.S.'

He knew at once who M.S. was. His heart melted, he felt weak as if he had had a blow.

‘What’s the trouble, boy?’ asked Albert anxiously.

‘No — no trouble — it’s to meet somebody.’ Joe lifted his dark-blue eyes in confusion towards his corporal.

‘Meet somebody!’ repeated the corporal, watching his young pal with keen blue eyes. ‘It’s all right, then; nothing wrong?’

‘No — nothing wrong. I’m not going,’ said Joe.

Albert was old and shrewd enough to see that nothing more should be said before the housewife. He also saw that Joe did not want to take him into confidence. So he held his peace, though he was piqued.

The two soldiers went into town, smartened up. Albert knew a fair number of the boys round about; there would be plenty of gossip in the market-place, plenty of lounging in groups on the Bath Road, watching the Saturday evening shoppers. Then a modest drink or two, and the movies. They passed an agreeable, casual, nothing-in-particular evening, with which Joe was quite satisfied. He thought of Belbury Station, and of M.S. waiting there. He had not the faintest intention of meeting her. And he had not the faintest intention of telling Albert.

And yet, when the two men were in their bedroom, half undressed, Joe suddenly held out the telegram to his corporal, saying: ‘What d’you think of that?’

Albert was just unbuttoning his braces. He desisted, took the telegram form, and turned towards the candle to read it.

‘Meet me Belbury Station 6.00 p.m. today. M.S.,’ he read, sotto voce. His face took on its fun-and-nonsense look.

‘Who’s M.S.?’ he asked, looking shrewdly at Joe.

‘You know as well as I do,’ said Joe, non-committal.

‘M.S.,’ repeated Albert. ‘Blamed if I know, boy. Is it a woman?’

The conversation was carried on in tiny voices, for fear of disturbing the householders.

‘I don’t know,’ said Joe, turning. He looked full at Albert, the two men looked straight into each other’s eyes. There was a lurking grin in each of them.

‘Well, I’m — blamed!’ said Albert at last, throwing the telegram down emphatically on the bed.

‘Wha-at?’ said Joe, grinning rather sheepishly, his eyes clouded none the less.

Albert sat on the bed and proceeded to undress, nodding his head with mock gravity all the while. Joe watched him foolishly.

‘What?’ he repeated faintly.

Albert looked up at him with a knowing look.

‘If that isn’t coming it quick, boy!’ he said. ‘What the blazes! What ha’ you bin doing?’

‘Nothing!’ said Joe.

Albert slowly shook his head as he sat on the side of the bed.

‘Don’t happen to me when I’ve bin doin’ nothing,’ he said. And he proceeded to pull off his stockings.

Joe turned away, looking at himself in the mirror as he unbuttoned his tunic.

‘You didn’t want to keep the appointment?’ Albert asked, in a changed voice, from the bedside.

Joe did not answer for a moment. Then he said:

‘I made no appointment.’

‘I’m not saying you did, boy. Don’t be nasty about it. I mean you didn’t want to answer the — unknown person’s summons — shall I put it that way?’

‘No,’ said Joe.

‘What was the deterring motive?’ asked Albert, who was now lying on his back in bed.

‘Oh,’ said Joe, suddenly looking round rather haughtily. ‘I didn’t want to.’ He had a well-balanced head, and could take on a sudden distant bearing.

‘Didn’t want to — didn’t cotton on, like. Well — they be artful, the women —’ he mimicked his landlord. ‘Come on into bed, boy. Don’t loiter about as if you’d lost something.’

Albert turned over, to sleep.

On Monday Miss Stokes turned up as usual, striding beside her team. Her ‘whoa!’ was resonant and challenging, she looked up at the truck as her steeds came to a standstill. Joe had turned aside, and had his face averted from her. She glanced him over — save for his slender succulent tenderness she would have despised him. She sized him up in a steady look. Then she turned to Albert, who was looking down at her and smiling in his mischievous turn. She knew his aspects by now. She looked straight back at him, though her eyes were hot. He saluted her.

‘Beautiful morning, Miss Stokes.’

‘Very!’ she replied.

‘Handsome is as handsome looks,’ said Albert.

Which produced no response.

‘Now, Joe, come on here,’ said the corporal. ‘Don’t keep the ladies waiting — it’s the sign of a weak heart.’

Joe turned, and the work began. Nothing more was said for the time being. As the week went on all parties became more comfortable. Joe remained silent,

averted, neutral, a little on his dignity. Miss Stokes was off-hand and masterful. Albert was full of mischief.

The great theme was a circus, which was coming to the market town on the following Saturday.

‘You’ll go to the circus, Miss Stokes?’ said Albert.

‘I may go. Are you going?’

‘Certainly. Give us the pleasure of escorting you.’

‘No, thanks.’

‘That’s what I call a flat refusal — what, Joe? You don’t mean that you have no liking for our company, Miss Stokes?’

‘Oh, I don’t know,’ said Miss Stokes. ‘How many are there of you?’

‘Only me and Joe.’

‘Oh, is that all?’ she said, satirically.

Albert was a little nonplussed.

‘Isn’t that enough for you?’ he asked.

‘Too many by half,’ blurted out Joe, jeeringly, in a sudden fit of uncouth rudeness that made both the others stare.

‘Oh, I’ll stand out of the way, boy, if that’s it,’ said Albert to Joe. Then he turned mischievously to Miss Stokes. ‘He wants to know what M. stands for,’ he said, confidentially.

‘Monkeys,’ she replied, turning to her horses.

‘What’s M.S.?’ said Albert.

‘Monkey nuts,’ she retorted, leading off her team.

Albert looked after her a little discomfited. Joe had flushed dark, and cursed Albert in his heart.

On the Saturday afternoon the two soldiers took the train into town. They would have to walk home. They had tea at six o’clock, and lounged about till half past seven. The circus was in a meadow near the river — a great red-and-white striped tent. Caravans stood at the side. A great crowd of people was gathered round the ticket-caravan.

Inside the tent the lamps were lighted, shining on a ring of faces, a great circular bank of faces round the green grassy centre. Along with some comrades, the two soldiers packed themselves on a thin plank seat, rather high. They were delighted with the flaring lights, the wild effect. But the circus performance did not affect them deeply. They admired the lady in black velvet with rose-purple legs who leapt so neatly on to the galloping horse; they watched the feats of strength and laughed at the clown. But they felt a little patronizing, they missed the sensational drama of the cinema.

Half-way through the performance Joe was electrified to see the face of Miss

Stokes not very far from him. There she was, in her khaki and her felt hat, as usual; he pretended not to see her. She was laughing at the clown; she also pretended not to see him. It was a blow to him, and it made him angry. He would not even mention it to Albert. Least said, soonest mended. He liked to believe she had not seen him. But he knew, fatally, that she had.

When they came out it was nearly eleven o'clock; a lovely night, with a moon and tall, dark, noble trees: a magnificent May night. Joe and Albert laughed and chaffed with the boys. Joe looked round frequently to see if he were safe from Miss Stokes. It seemed so.

But there were six miles to walk home. At last the two soldiers set off, swinging their canes. The road was white between tall hedges, other stragglers were passing out of the town towards the villages; the air was full of pleased excitement.

They were drawing near to the village when they saw a dark figure ahead. Joe's heart sank with pure fear. It was a figure wheeling a bicycle; a land girl; Miss Stokes. Albert was ready with his nonsense. Miss Stokes had a puncture.

'Let me wheel the rattler,' said Albert.

'Thank you,' said Miss Stokes. 'You are kind.'

'Oh, I'd be kinder than that, if you'd show me how,' said Albert.

'Are you sure?' said Miss Stokes.

'Doubt my words?' said Albert. 'That's cruel of you, Miss Stokes.'

Miss Stokes walked between them, close to Joe.

'Have you been to the circus?' she asked him.

'Yes,' he replied, mildly.

'Have you been?' Albert asked her.

'Yes. I didn't see you,' she replied.

'What! — you say so! Didn't see us! Didn't think us worth looking at,' began Albert. 'Aren't I as handsome as the clown, now? And you didn't as much as glance in our direction? I call it a downright oversight.'

'I never saw you,' reiterated Miss Stokes. 'I didn't know you saw me.'

'That makes it worse,' said Albert.

The road passed through a belt of dark pine-wood. The village, and the branch road, was very near. Miss Stokes put out her fingers and felt for Joe's hand as it swung at his side. To say he was staggered is to put it mildly. Yet he allowed her softly to clasp his fingers for a few moments. But he was a mortified youth.

At the cross-road they stopped — Miss Stokes should turn off. She had another mile to go.

'You'll let us see you home,' said Albert.

'Do me a kindness,' she said. 'Put my bike in your shed, and take it to Baker's

on Monday, will you?’

‘I’ll sit up all night and mend it for you, if you like.’

‘No thanks. And Joe and I’ll walk on.’

‘Oh — ho! Oh — ho!’ sang Albert. ‘Joe! Joe! What do you say to that, now, boy? Aren’t you in luck’s way. And I get the bloomin’ old bike for my pal. Consider it again, Miss Stokes.’

Joe turned aside his face, and did not speak.

‘Oh, well! I wheel the grid, do I? I leave you, boy — ’

‘I’m not keen on going any further,’ barked out Joe, in an uncouth voice. ‘She hain’t my choice.’

The girl stood silent, and watched the two men.

‘There now!’ said Albert. ‘Think o’ that! If it was me now — ’ But he was uncomfortable. ‘Well, Miss Stokes, have me,’ he added.

Miss Stokes stood quite still, neither moved nor spoke. And so the three remained for some time at the lane end. At last Joe began kicking the ground — then he suddenly lifted his face. At that moment Miss Stokes was at his side. She put her arm delicately round his waist.

‘Seems I’m the one extra, don’t you think?’ Albert inquired of the high bland moon.

Joe had dropped his head and did not answer. Miss Stokes stood with her arm lightly round his waist. Albert bowed, saluted, and bade good-night. He walked away, leaving the two standing.

Miss Stokes put a light pressure on Joe’s waist, and drew him down the road. They walked in silence. The night was full of scent — wild cherry, the first bluebells. Still they walked in silence. A nightingale was singing. They approached nearer and nearer, till they stood close by his dark bush. The powerful notes sounded from the cover, almost like flashes of light — then the interval of silence — then the moaning notes, almost like a dog faintly howling, followed by the long, rich trill, and flashing notes. Then a short silence again.

Miss Stokes turned at last to Joe. She looked up at him, and in the moonlight he saw her faintly smiling. He felt maddened, but helpless. Her arm was round his waist, she drew him closely to her with a soft pressure that made all his bones rotten.

Meanwhile Albert was waiting at home. He put on his overcoat, for the fire was out, and he had had malarial fever. He looked fitfully at the Daily Mirror and the Daily Sketch, but he saw nothing. It seemed a long time. He began to yawn widely, even to nod. At last Joe came in.

Albert looked at him keenly. The young man’s brow was black, his face sullen.

‘All right, boy?’ asked Albert.

Joe merely grunted for a reply. There was nothing more to be got out of him. So they went to bed.

Next day Joe was silent, sullen. Albert could make nothing of him. He proposed a walk after tea.

‘I’m going somewhere,’ said Joe.

‘Where — Monkey nuts?’ asked the corporal. But Joe’s brow only became darker.

So the days went by. Almost every evening Joe went off alone, returning late. He was sullen, taciturn and had a hang-dog look, a curious way of dropping his head and looking dangerously from under his brows. And he and Albert did not get on so well any more with one another. For all his fun and nonsense, Albert was really irritable, soon made angry. And Joe’s stand-offish sulkiness and complete lack of confidence riled him, got on his nerves. His fun and nonsense took a biting, sarcastic turn, at which Joe’s eyes glittered occasionally, though the young man turned unheeding aside. Then again Joe would be full of odd, whimsical fun, outshining Albert himself.

Miss Stokes still came to the station with the wain: Monkey-nuts, Albert called her, though not to her face. For she was very clear and good-looking, almost she seemed to gleam. And Albert was a tiny bit afraid of her. She very rarely addressed Joe whilst the hay-loading was going on, and that young man always turned his back to her. He seemed thinner, and his limber figure looked more slouching. But still it had the tender, attractive appearance, especially from behind. His tanned face, a little thinned and darkened, took a handsome, slightly sinister look.

‘Come on, Joe!’ the corporal urged sharply one day. ‘What’re you doing, boy? Looking for beetles on the bank?’

Joe turned round swiftly, almost menacing, to work.

‘He’s a different fellow these days, Miss Stokes,’ said Albert to the young woman. ‘What’s got him? Is it Monkey nuts that don’t suit him, do you think?’

‘Choked with chaff, more like,’ she retorted. ‘It’s as bad as feeding a threshing machine, to have to listen to some folks.’

‘As bad as what?’ said Albert. ‘You don’t mean me, do you, Miss Stokes?’

‘No,’ she cried. ‘I don’t mean you.’

Joe’s face became dark red during these sallies, but he said nothing. He would eye the young woman curiously, as she swung so easily at the work, and he had some of the look of a dog which is going to bite.

Albert, with his nerves on edge, began to find the strain rather severe. The next Saturday evening, when Joe came in more black-browed than ever, he

watched him, determined to have it out with him.

When the boy went upstairs to bed, the corporal followed him. He closed the door behind him carefully, sat on the bed and watched the younger man undressing. And for once he spoke in a natural voice, neither chaffing nor commanding.

‘What’s gone wrong, boy?’

Joe stopped a moment as if he had been shot. Then he went on unwinding his puttees, and did not answer or look up.

‘You can hear, can’t you?’ said Albert, nettled.

‘Yes, I can hear,’ said Joe, stooping over his puttees till his face was purple.

‘Then why don’t you answer?’

Joe sat up. He gave a long, sideways look at the corporal. Then he lifted his eyes and stared at a crack in the ceiling.

The corporal watched these movements shrewdly.

‘And then what?’ he asked, ironically.

Again Joe turned and stared him in the face. The corporal smiled very slightly, but kindly.

‘There’ll be murder done one of these days,’ said Joe, in a quiet, unimpassioned voice.

‘So long as it’s by daylight — ’ replied Albert. Then he went over, sat down by Joe, put his hand on his shoulder affectionately, and continued, ‘What is it, boy? What’s gone wrong? You can trust me, can’t you?’

Joe turned and looked curiously at the face so near to his.

‘It’s nothing, that’s all,’ he said laconically.

Albert frowned.

‘Then who’s going to be murdered? — and who’s going to do the murdering? — me or you — which is it, boy?’ He smiled gently at the stupid youth, looking straight at him all the while, into his eyes. Gradually the stupid, hunted, glowering look died out of Joe’s eyes. He turned his head aside, gently, as one rousing from a spell.

‘I don’t want her,’ he said, with fierce resentment.

‘Then you needn’t have her,’ said Albert. ‘What do you go for, boy?’

But it wasn’t as simple as all that. Joe made no remark.

‘She’s a smart-looking girl. What’s wrong with her, my boy? I should have thought you were a lucky chap, myself.’

‘I don’t want ‘er,’ Joe barked, with ferocity and resentment.

‘Then tell her so and have done,’ said Albert. He waited awhile. There was no response. ‘Why don’t you?’ he added.

‘Because I don’t,’ confessed Joe, sulkily.

Albert pondered — rubbed his head.

‘You’re too soft-hearted, that’s where it is, boy. You want your mettle dipping in cold water, to temper it. You’re too soft-hearted — ’

He laid his arm affectionately across the shoulders of the younger man. Joe seemed to yield a little towards him.

‘When are you going to see her again?’ Albert asked. For a long time there was no answer.

‘When is it, boy?’ persisted the softened voice of the corporal.

‘Tomorrow,’ confessed Joe.

‘Then let me go,’ said Albert. ‘Let me go, will you?’

The morrow was Sunday, a sunny day, but a cold evening. The sky was grey, the new foliage very green, but the air was chill and depressing. Albert walked briskly down the white road towards Beeley. He crossed a larch plantation, and followed a narrow by-road, where blue speedwell flowers fell from the banks into the dust. He walked swinging his cane, with mixed sensations. Then having gone a certain length, he turned and began to walk in the opposite direction.

So he saw a young woman approaching him. She was wearing a wide hat of grey straw, and a loose, swinging dress of nigger-grey velvet. She walked with slow inevitability. Albert faltered a little as he approached her. Then he saluted her, and his roguish, slightly withered skin flushed. She was staring straight into his face.

He fell in by her side, saying impudently:

‘Not so nice for a walk as it was, is it?’

She only stared at him. He looked back at her.

‘You’ve seen me before, you know,’ he said, grinning slightly. ‘Perhaps you never noticed me. Oh, I’m quite nice looking, in a quiet way, you know. What — ?’

But Miss Stokes did not speak: she only stared with large, icy blue eyes at him. He became self-conscious, lifted up his chin, walked with his nose in the air, and whistled at random. So they went down the quiet, deserted grey lane. He was whistling the air: ‘I’m Gilbert, the filbert, the colonel of the nuts.’

At last she found her voice:

‘Where’s Joe?’

‘He thought you’d like a change: they say variety’s the salt of life — that’s why I’m mostly in pickle.’

‘Where is he?’

‘Am I my brother’s keeper? He’s gone his own ways.’

‘Where?’

‘Nay, how am I to know? Not so far but he’ll be back for supper.’

She stopped in the middle of the lane. He stopped facing her.

‘Where’s Joe?’ she asked.

He struck a careless attitude, looked down the road this way and that, lifted his eyebrows, pushed his khaki cap on one side, and answered:

‘He is not conducting the service tonight: he asked me if I’d officiate.’

‘Why hasn’t he come?’

‘Didn’t want to, I expect. I wanted to.’

She stared him up and down, and he felt uncomfortable in his spine, but maintained his air of nonchalance. Then she turned slowly on her heel, and started to walk back. The corporal went at her side.

‘You’re not going back, are you?’ he pleaded. ‘Why, me and you, we should get on like a house on fire.’

She took no heed, but walked on. He went uncomfortably at her side, making his funny remarks from time to time. But she was as if stone deaf. He glanced at her, and to his dismay saw the tears running down her cheeks. He stopped suddenly, and pushed back his cap.

‘I say, you know — ’ he began.

But she was walking on like an automaton, and he had to hurry after her.

She never spoke to him. At the gate of her farm she walked straight in, as if he were not there. He watched her disappear. Then he turned on his heel, cursing silently, puzzled, lifting off his cap to scratch his head.

That night, when they were in bed, he remarked: ‘Say, Joe, boy; strikes me you’re well-off without Monkey nuts. Gord love us, beans ain’t in it.’

So they slept in amity. But they waited with some anxiety for the morrow.

It was a cold morning, a grey sky shifting in a cold wind, and threatening rain. They watched the wagon come up the road and through the yard gates. Miss Stokes was with her team as usual; her ‘Whoa!’ rang out like a war-whoop.

She faced up at the truck where the two men stood.

‘Joe!’ she called, to the averted figure which stood up in the wind.

‘What?’ he turned unwillingly.

She made a queer movement, lifting her head slightly in a sipping, half-inviting, half-commanding gesture. And Joe was crouching already to jump off the truck to obey her, when Albert put his hand on his shoulder.

‘Half a minute, boy! Where are you off? Work’s work, and nuts is nuts. You stop here.’

Joe slowly straightened himself.

‘Joe!’ came the woman’s clear call from below.

Again Joe looked at her. But Albert’s hand was on his shoulder, detaining him. He stood half averted, with his tail between his legs.

‘Take your hand off him, you!’ said Miss Stokes.

‘Yes, Major,’ retorted Albert satirically.

She stood and watched.

‘Joe!’ Her voice rang for the third time.

Joe turned and looked at her, and a slow, jeering smile gathered on his face.

‘Monkey nuts!’ he replied, in a tone mocking her call.

She turned white — dead white. The men thought she would fall. Albert began yelling to the porters up the line to come and help with the load. He could yell like any non-commissioned officer upon occasion.

Some way or other the wagon was unloaded, the girl was gone. Joe and his corporal looked at one another and smiled slowly. But they had a weight on their minds, they were afraid.

They were reassured, however, when they found that Miss Stokes came no more with the hay. As far as they were concerned, she had vanished into oblivion. And Joe felt more relieved even than he had felt when he heard the firing cease, after the news had come that the armistice was signed.

THE WILFUL WOMAN

NOVEMBER of the year 1916. A woman travelling from New York to the South West, by one of the tourist trains. On the third day the train lost time more and more. She raged with painful impatience. No good, at every station the train sat longer. They had passed the prairie lands and entered the mountain and desert region. They ought soon to arrive, soon. This was already the desert of grey-white sage and blue mountains. She ought to be there, soon, soon she ought to be there. This journey alone should be over. But the train comfortably stretched its length in the stations, and would never arrive. There was no end. It could not arrive. She could not bear it.

The woman sat in that cubby-hole at the end of the Pullman which is called in America a Drawing-Room. She had the place to herself and her bags. Volts of distracted impatience and heartbrokenness surged out of her, so that the negro did not dare to come in and sweep her floor with his little brush and dustpan. He left the 'Room' unswept for the afternoon.

Frustration and a painful volcanic pressure of impatience. The train would not arrive, *could* not arrive. That was it.

She was a sturdy woman with a round face, like an obstinate girl of fourteen. Like an obstinate girl of fourteen she sat there devouring her unease, her heavy, muscular fore-arms inert in her lap. So still, yet at such a pressure. So child-like — yet a woman approaching forty. So naïve looking, softly full and feminine. And curiously heartbroken at being alone, travelling alone. Of course any man might have rushed to save her, and reap the reward of her soft, heavy, grateful magnetism. But wait a bit. Her thick, dark brows like curved horns over the naïve-looking face; and her bright, hazel-grey eyes, clear at the first glance as candour and unquenchable youth, at the second glance made up all of devilish grey and yellow bits, as opals are, and the bright candour of youth resolving into something dangerous as the headlights of a great machine coming full at you in the night. Mr Hercules had better think twice before he rushed to pick up this seductive serpent of loneliness that lay on the western trail. He had picked a snake up long ago, without hurting himself. But that was before Columbus discovered America.

Why did she feel that the train would never arrive, *could* never arrive, with her in it. Who knows? But that was how she did feel. The train would never arrive. Simple fate. Perhaps she felt that some power of her will would at last neutralize

altogether the power of the engines, and there would come an end to motion, so there they would sit, forever, the train and she, at a deadlock on the Santa Fe Line. She had left New York in a sort of frenzy. Since they had passed Kansas City, Gate of the West, the thing had been getting unbearable. Since they had passed La Junta and come to the desert and the Rockies, the fatality had as good as happened. Yet she was only a few hours from her destination. And she would never get there. This train would never bring her there. Her head was one mass of thoughts and frenzied ideas almost to madness.

Then she sprang out of her Pullman. It was somewhere after Trinidad, she didn't bother where. 'Put my bags out,' she said to the negro, and he, looking at those serpent-blazing eyes under those eyebrows like thorn bushes, silently obeyed. Yet with her mouth she smiled a little and was cajoling, and his tip was reckless. Man must needs be mollified. She remembered to be just sufficiently soft and feminine. But she was distracted and heartbroken.

Started her next whirl. She must have an automobile, she *would* have an automobile, to be driven this hundred or hundred and fifty miles that remained. Yes, she would have an automobile. But she had got out at a station where, at least that afternoon, there was no automobile. Nevertheless, she *would* have an automobile. So at last was produced an old worn-out Dodge with no springs left, belonging to a boy of sixteen. Yes, she would have that. The boy had never travelled that trail, didn't know the way. No matter, she would go. She would get to Lamy in front of that hateful train which she had left. And the boy would get twenty-six dollars. Good enough!

She had never been west before, so she reckoned without her host. She had still to learn what trails round the Rockies and across the desert are like. She imagined roads, or forest tracks. She found what actually is a trail in the south west — a blind squirm up sand-banks, a blind rattle along dry river-beds, a breathless scramble in deep cañons over what look like simple landslides and precipices, the car at an angle of forty-five degrees above a green rocky river, banging itself to bits against boulders, surging through the river then back again through the river and once more swooping through the river with the devil's own scramble up a rocky bank on the other side, and a young boy driving on, driving ahead, without knowing where, or what was happening to him, twenty-six dollars at the end. So out on the lurch and bump of the open white-sage desert once more, to follow the trail by scent rather than by sight, cart-ruts this way, tracks that way, please yourself in the god-forsaken landscape, bolting into a slope of piñon and cedar, dark-green bush-scrub, then dropping down to a wire fence and a gate, a sort of ranch, and a lost village of houses like brown mud boxes plonked down in the grey wilderness, with a bigger mud box, oblong,

which the boy told her was the sort of church place where the Penitentes scourge and torture themselves, windowless so that no one shall hear their shrieks and groans.

By nightfall she had had a lot of the nonsense bumped and bruised out of her, knocked about as if she were a penitente herself. Not that she was a *penitente*: not she. But at least here was a country that hit her with hard knuckles, right through to the bone. It was something of a country.

Luckily, she had telegraphed to Mark, who would be waiting for her at Lamy station. Mark was her husband — her third. One dead, one divorced, and Mark alternately torn to atoms and thrown to the four corners of the universe, then rather sketchily gathered up and put together again by a desirous, if still desperate Isis. She had torn him in two and pitched him piecemeal away into the south-western desert. Now she was after him once more, going to put humpty-dumpty together again with a slam. With a slam that might finally do for him.

Of course he is an artist, a foreigner, a Russian. Of course she is an American woman, several generations of wealth and tradition in various cities of New York state behind her, several generations of visiting Europe and staying in the Meurice and seeing Napoleon III or Gambetta or whoever was figuring on the stage of Paris. She herself had stayed in the old Meurice. She too had had her apartment in a fine old hotel, and if there was no Napoleon III left for her, there had been ex-Princesses of Saxony, d'Annunzio, Duse, Isadora Duncan or Matisse.

These American families do actually tend to cumulate and culminate in one daughter. Not that the family had as yet cumulated in Sybil Mond. She had started as Sybil Hamnett, and had been successively Sybil Thomas and Sybil Danks before she married the Jewish artist from somewhere Poland way, who was, in her family's eyes, the anticlimax. But she herself admitted no possibility of anticlimax for herself, and kept unpleasant surprises still in store for her family. Her family being her mother and the General, Sybil's second step-father. For she was as well-off for step-fathers as for husbands.

The family had actually culminated in Sybil: all the force of the Hamnetts, on her father's side, and the push of the Wilcoxes, on her mother's, focused into this one highly-explosive daughter. No question of dribbling out. Sybil at forty was heavy with energy like a small bison, and strong and young-looking as if she were thirty, often giving the impression of soft crudeness as if she were sixteen. The old colonial vigour had, we repeat, collected in her as in some final dam, like the buffalo's force in his forehead. But the old colonial riches had not yet descended upon her. She had her own sufficient income, but the mass of the family wealth rested on her mother, who, aided by the General, exemplified it in

the correct and magnificent Italian Mansion on Lake Erie.

The rickety machine in which she rode had of course no headlights, and the November night fell. The boy hadn't thought to put the lamps on. No headlights! Frustration, always frustration. Sybil annihilated the boy in her soul, and sat still. Or rather, with her body lashed and bruised, her soul sat crying and ominous. There was nothing to be done but to scramble for the nearest station again.

On then, under the many sharp, small stars of the desert. The air was cold in her nostrils, the desert seemed weird and uncanny. But — it was terra nova. It was a new world, the desert at the foot of the mountains, the high desert above the gorges of the canons, the world of three altitudes. Strange! — doomful!

Yes, destiny had made her get out of the train and into this rickety machine. Destiny even had made the boy bring no headlights. Her ponderous storm began to evaporate. She looked round the night as they emerged from a dark cañon out onto a high flat bit of vague desert, with mountains guarding the flatness beyond, shadows beyond the shadows.

It impressed her, although she *must* get to her journey end, she *must* arrive. No, it was not like desert. Rather like wilderness, the wilderness of the temptation, for example. Shadowy scrub of pale grey sage, knee-high, waist-high, on the flat of the table land; and on the slopes of the mountains that rose still further, starting off the flat table, scrub of gnarled pine and cedar, still hardly more than bushes, but like those Japanese dwarf-trees, full of age, torture and power. Strange country — weird — frightening too. It would need a battle to gain hold over such a land. It would need a battle. She snuffed the curiously-scented air of the desert. With her tongue almost jerked out of her mouth by the jumping of the car, she sat inwardly motionless, facing destiny again. It was her destiny she should come to this land. It was her destiny she should see it for the first time thus, alone, lost, without light. That was destiny, that threw her naked like the black queen onto this unknown chess-board. She hugged her furs and her fate round her, in the cold, rare air, and was somewhat relieved. Her battle! Her hope!

And thus by eight o'clock the frozen, disappointed, but dogged boy brought her to the railway again, as she bade him. It was impossible for him to get her to Lamy without lights or anything. He must forfeit some of the twenty-six dollars. He was disappointed, but he admitted the truth of her contention.

Wagon-Mound, or some such name. She remembered a sort of dome of a hill in the night. After which nothing to be done but to go to the 'hotel', to wait three hours for the slow train which followed the one she had abandoned way back at Trinidad.

THE HORSE DEALER'S DAUGHTER

'Well, Mabel, and what are you going to do with yourself?' asked Joe, with foolish flippancy. He felt quite safe himself. Without listening for an answer, he turned aside, worked a grain of tobacco to the tip of his tongue, and spat it out. He did not care about anything, since he felt safe himself.

The three brothers and the sister sat round the desolate breakfast table, attempting some sort of desultory consultation. The morning's post had given the final tap to the family fortunes, and all was over. The dreary dining-room itself, with its heavy mahogany furniture, looked as if it were waiting to be done away with.

But the consultation amounted to nothing. There was a strange air of ineffectuality about the three men, as they sprawled at table, smoking and reflecting vaguely on their own condition. The girl was alone, a rather short, sullen-looking young woman of twenty-seven. She did not share the same life as her brothers. She would have been good-looking, save for the impassive fixity of her face, 'bull-dog', as her brothers called it.

There was a confused tramping of horses' feet outside. The three men all sprawled round in their chairs to watch. Beyond the dark holly-bushes that separated the strip of lawn from the highroad, they could see a cavalcade of shire horses swinging out of their own yard, being taken for exercise. This was the last time. These were the last horses that would go through their hands. The young men watched with critical, callous look. They were all frightened at the collapse of their lives, and the sense of disaster in which they were involved left them no inner freedom.

Yet they were three fine, well-set fellows enough. Joe, the eldest, was a man of thirty-three, broad and handsome in a hot, flushed way. His face was red, he twisted his black moustache over a thick finger, his eyes were shallow and restless. He had a sensual way of uncovering his teeth when he laughed, and his bearing was stupid. Now he watched the horses with a glazed look of helplessness in his eyes, a certain stupor of downfall.

The great draught-horses swung past. They were tied head to tail, four of them, and they heaved along to where a lane branched off from the highroad, planting their great hoofs floutingly in the fine black mud, swinging their great rounded haunches sumptuously, and trotting a few sudden steps as they were led into the lane, round the corner. Every movement showed a massive, slumbrous

strength, and a stupidity which held them in subjection. The groom at the head looked back, jerking the leading rope. And the calvalcade moved out of sight up the lane, the tail of the last horse, bobbed up tight and stiff, held out taut from the swinging great haunches as they rocked behind the hedges in a motionlike sleep.

Joe watched with glazed hopeless eyes. The horses were almost like his own body to him. He felt he was done for now. Luckily he was engaged to a woman as old as himself, and therefore her father, who was steward of a neighbouring estate, would provide him with a job. He would marry and go into harness. His life was over, he would be a subject animal now.

He turned uneasily aside, the retreating steps of the horses echoing in his ears. Then, with foolish restlessness, he reached for the scraps of bacon-rind from the plates, and making a faint whistling sound, flung them to the terrier that lay against the fender. He watched the dog swallow them, and waited till the creature looked into his eyes. Then a faint grin came on his face, and in a high, foolish voice he said:

‘You won’t get much more bacon, shall you, you little b — — ?’

The dog faintly and dismally wagged its tail, then lowered his haunches, circled round, and lay down again.

There was another helpless silence at the table. Joe sprawled uneasily in his seat, not willing to go till the family conclave was dissolved. Fred Henry, the second brother, was erect, clean-limbed, alert. He had watched the passing of the horses with more sang-froid. If he was an animal, like Joe, he was an animal which controls, not one which is controlled. He was master of any horse, and he carried himself with a well-tempered air of mastery. But he was not master of the situations of life. He pushed his coarse brown moustache upwards, off his lip, and glanced irritably at his sister, who sat impassive and inscrutable.

‘You’ll go and stop with Lucy for a bit, shan’t you?’ he asked. The girl did not answer.

‘I don’t see what else you can do,’ persisted Fred Henry.

‘Go as a skivvy,’ Joe interpolated laconically.

The girl did not move a muscle.

‘If I was her, I should go in for training for a nurse,’ said Malcolm, the youngest of them all. He was the baby of the family, a young man of twenty-two, with a fresh, jaunty museau.

But Mabel did not take any notice of him. They had talked at her and round her for so many years, that she hardly heard them at all.

The marble clock on the mantel-piece softly chimed the half-hour, the dog rose uneasily from the hearthrug and looked at the party at the breakfast table. But still they sat on in ineffectual conclave.

‘Oh, all right,’ said Joe suddenly, à propos of nothing. ‘I’ll get a move on.’

He pushed back his chair, straddled his knees with a downward jerk, to get them free, in horsy fashion, and went to the fire. Still he did not go out of the room; he was curious to know what the others would do or say. He began to charge his pipe, looking down at the dog and saying, in a high, affected voice:

‘Going wi’ me? Going wi’ me are ter? Tha’rt goin’ further than tha counts on just now, dost hear?’

The dog faintly wagged its tail, the man stuck out his jaw and covered his pipe with his hands, and puffed intently, losing himself in the tobacco, looking down all the while at the dog with an absent brown eye. The dog looked up at him in mournful distrust. Joe stood with his knees stuck out, in real horsy fashion.

‘Have you had a letter from Lucy?’ Fred Henry asked of his sister.

‘Last week,’ came the neutral reply.

‘And what does she say?’

There was no answer.

‘Does she ask you to go and stop there?’ persisted Fred Henry.

‘She says I can if I like.’

‘Well, then, you’d better. Tell her you’ll come on Monday.’

This was received in silence.

‘That’s what you’ll do then, is it?’ said Fred Henry, in some exasperation.

But she made no answer. There was a silence of futility and irritation in the room. Malcolm grinned fatuously.

‘You’ll have to make up your mind between now and next Wednesday,’ said Joe loudly, ‘or else find yourself lodgings on the kerbstone.’

The face of the young woman darkened, but she sat on immutable.

‘Here’s Jack Fergusson!’ exclaimed Malcolm, who was looking aimlessly out of the window.

‘Where?’ exclaimed Joe, loudly.

‘Just gone past.’

‘Coming in?’

Malcolm craned his neck to see the gate.

‘Yes,’ he said.

There was a silence. Mabel sat on like one condemned, at the head of the table. Then a whistle was heard from the kitchen. The dog got up and barked sharply. Joe opened the door and shouted:

‘Come on.’

After a moment a young man entered. He was muffled up in overcoat and a purple woollen scarf, and his tweed cap, which he did not remove, was pulled down on his head. He was of medium height, his face was rather long and pale,

his eyes looked tired.

‘Hello, Jack! Well, Jack!’ exclaimed Malcolm and Joe. Fred Henry merely said, ‘Jack.’

‘What’s doing?’ asked the newcomer, evidently addressing Fred Henry.

‘Same. We’ve got to be out by Wednesday. — Got a cold?’

‘I have — got it bad, too.’

‘Why don’t you stop in?’

‘Me stop in? When I can’t stand on my legs, perhaps I shall have a chance.’

The young man spoke huskily. He had a slight Scotch accent.

‘It’s a knock-out, isn’t it,’ said Joe, boisterously, ‘if a doctor goes round croaking with a cold. Looks bad for the patients, doesn’t it?’

The young doctor looked at him slowly.

‘Anything the matter with you, then?’ he asked sarcastically.

‘Not as I know of. Damn your eyes, I hope not. Why?’

‘I thought you were very concerned about the patients, wondered if you might be one yourself.’

‘Damn it, no, I’ve never been patient to no flaming doctor, and hope I never shall be,’ returned Joe.

At this point Mabel rose from the table, and they all seemed to become aware of her existence. She began putting the dishes together. The young doctor looked at her, but did not address her. He had not greeted her. She went out of the room with the tray, her face impassive and unchanged.

‘When are you off then, all of you?’ asked the doctor.

‘I’m catching the eleven-forty,’ replied Malcolm. ‘Are you goin’ down wi’ th’ trap, Joe?’

‘Yes, I’ve told you I’m going down wi’ th’ trap, haven’t I?’

‘We’d better be getting her in then. — So long, Jack, if I don’t see you before I go,’ said Malcolm, shaking hands.

He went out, followed by Joe, who seemed to have his tail between his legs.

‘Well, this is the devil’s own,’ exclaimed the doctor, when he was left alone with Fred Henry. ‘Going before Wednesday, are you?’

‘That’s the orders,’ replied the other.

‘Where, to Northampton?’

‘That’s it.’

‘The devil!’ exclaimed Fergusson, with quiet chagrin.

And there was silence between the two.

‘All settled up, are you?’ asked Fergusson.

‘About.’

There was another pause.

‘Well, I shall miss yer, Freddy, boy,’ said the young doctor.

‘And I shall miss thee, Jack,’ returned the other.

‘Miss you like hell,’ mused the doctor.

Fred Henry turned aside. There was nothing to say. Mabel came in again, to finish clearing the table.

‘What are you going to do, then, Miss Pervin?’ asked Fergusson. ‘Going to your sister’s, are you?’

Mabel looked at him with her steady, dangerous eyes, that always made him uncomfortable, unsettling his superficial ease.

‘No,’ she said.

‘Well, what in the name of fortune are you going to do? Say what you mean to do,’ cried Fred Henry, with futile intensity.

But she only averted her head, and continued her work. She folded the white table-cloth, and put on the chenille cloth.

‘The sulkiest bitch that ever trod!’ muttered her brother.

But she finished her task with perfectly impassive face, the young doctor watching her interestedly all the while. Then she went out.

Fred Henry stared after her, clenching his lips, his blue eyes fixing in sharp antagonism, as he made a grimace of sour exasperation.

‘You could bray her into bits, and that’s all you’d get out of her,’ he said, in a small, narrowed tone.

The doctor smiled faintly.

‘What’s she going to do, then?’ he asked.

‘Strike me if I know!’ returned the other.

There was a pause. Then the doctor stirred.

‘I’ll be seeing you tonight, shall I?’ he said to his friend.

‘Ay — where’s it to be? Are we going over to Jessdale?’

‘I don’t know. I’ve got such a cold on me. I’ll come round to the Moon and Stars, anyway.’

‘Let Lizzie and May miss their night for once, eh?’

‘That’s it — if I feel as I do now.’

‘All’s one — ’

The two young men went through the passage and down to the back door together. The house was large, but it was servantless now, and desolate. At the back was a small bricked house-yard, and beyond that a big square, gravelled fine and red, and having stables on two sides. Sloping, dank, winter-dark fields stretched away on the open sides.

But the stables were empty. Joseph Pervin, the father of the family, had been a man of no education, who had become a fairly large horse dealer. The stables

had been full of horses, there was a great turmoil and come-and-go of horses and of dealers and grooms. Then the kitchen was full of servants. But of late things had declined. The old man had married a second time, to retrieve his fortunes. Now he was dead and everything was gone to the dogs, there was nothing but debt and threatening.

For months, Mabel had been servantless in the big house, keeping the home together in penury for her ineffectual brothers. She had kept house for ten years. But previously, it was with unstinted means. Then, however brutal and coarse everything was, the sense of money had kept her proud, confident. The men might be foul-mouthed, the women in the kitchen might have bad reputations, her brothers might have illegitimate children. But so long as there was money, the girl felt herself established, and brutally proud, reserved.

No company came to the house, save dealers and coarse men. Mabel had no associates of her own sex, after her sister went away. But she did not mind. She went regularly to church, she attended to her father. And she lived in the memory of her mother, who had died when she was fourteen, and whom she had loved. She had loved her father, too, in a different way, depending upon him, and feeling secure in him, until at the age of fifty-four he married again. And then she had set hard against him. Now he had died and left them all hopelessly in debt.

She had suffered badly during the period of poverty. Nothing, however, could shake the curious sullen, animal pride that dominated each member of the family. Now, for Mabel, the end had come. Still she would not cast about her. She would follow her own way just the same. She would always hold the keys of her own situation. Mindless and persistent, she endured from day to day. Why should she think? Why should she answer anybody? It was enough that this was the end, and there was no way out. She need not pass any more darkly along the main street of the small town, avoiding every eye. She need not demean herself any more, going into the shops and buying the cheapest food. This was at an end. She thought of nobody, not even of herself. Mindless and persistent, she seemed in a sort of ecstasy to be coming nearer to her fulfilment, her own glorification, approaching her dead mother, who was glorified.

In the afternoon she took a little bag, with shears and sponge and a small scrubbing brush, and went out. It was a grey, wintry day, with saddened, dark-green fields and an atmosphere blackened by the smoke of foundries not far off. She went quickly, darkly along the causeway, heeding nobody, through the town to the churchyard.

There she always felt secure, as if no one could see her, although as a matter of fact she was exposed to the stare of everyone who passed along under the

churchyard wall. Nevertheless, once under the shadow of the great looming church, among the graves, she felt immune from the world, reserved within the thick churchyard wall as in another country.

Carefully she clipped the grass from the grave, and arranged the pinky-white, small chrysanthemums in the tin cross. When this was done, she took an empty jar from a neighbouring grave, brought water, and carefully, most scrupulously sponged the marble headstone and the coping-stone.

It gave her sincere satisfaction to do this. She felt in immediate contact with the world of her mother. She took minute pains, went through the park in a state bordering on pure happiness, as if in performing this task she came into a subtle, intimate connexion with her mother. For the life she followed here in the world was far less real than the world of death she inherited from her mother.

The doctor's house was just by the church. Fergusson, being a mere hired assistant, was slave to the countryside. As he hurried now to attend to the outpatients in the surgery, glancing across the graveyard with his quick eye, he saw the girl at her task at the grave. She seemed so intent and remote, it was like looking into another world. Some mystical element was touched in him. He slowed down as he walked, watching her as if spell-bound.

She lifted her eyes, feeling him looking. Their eyes met. And each looked again at once, each feeling, in some way, found out by the other. He lifted his cap and passed on down the road. There remained distinct in his consciousness, like a vision, the memory of her face, lifted from the tombstone in the churchyard, and looking at him with slow, large, portentous eyes. It was portentous, her face. It seemed to mesmerize him. There was a heavy power in her eyes which laid hold of his whole being, as if he had drunk some powerful drug. He had been feeling weak and done before. Now the life came back into him, he felt delivered from his own fretted, daily self.

He finished his duties at the surgery as quickly as might be, hastily filling up the bottles of the waiting people with cheap drugs. Then, in perpetual haste, he set off again to visit several cases in another part of his round, before teatime. At all times he preferred to walk, if he could, but particularly when he was not well. He fancied the motion restored him.

The afternoon was falling. It was grey, deadened, and wintry, with a slow, moist, heavy coldness sinking in and deadening all the faculties. But why should he think or notice? He hastily climbed the hill and turned across the dark-green fields, following the black cinder-track. In the distance, across a shallow dip in the country, the small town was clustered like smouldering ash, a tower, a spire, a heap of low, raw, extinct houses. And on the nearest fringe of the town, sloping into the dip, was Oldmeadow, the Pervins' house. He could see the

stables and the outbuildings distinctly, as they lay towards him on the slope. Well, he would not go there many more times! Another resource would be lost to him, another place gone: the only company he cared for in the alien, ugly little town he was losing. Nothing but work, drudgery, constant hastening from dwelling to dwelling among the colliers and the iron-workers. It wore him out, but at the same time he had a craving for it. It was a stimulant to him to be in the homes of the working people, moving as it were through the innermost body of their life. His nerves were excited and gratified. He could come so near, into the very lives of the rough, inarticulate, powerfully emotional men and women. He grumbled, he said he hated the hellish hole. But as a matter of fact it excited him, the contact with the rough, strongly-feeling people was a stimulant applied direct to his nerves.

Below Oldmeadow, in the green, shallow, soddened hollow of fields, lay a square, deep pond. Roving across the landscape, the doctor's quick eye detected a figure in black passing through the gate of the field, down towards the pond. He looked again. It would be Mabel Pervin. His mind suddenly became alive and attentive.

Why was she going down there? He pulled up on the path on the slope above, and stood staring. He could just make sure of the small black figure moving in the hollow of the failing day. He seemed to see her in the midst of such obscurity, that he was like a clairvoyant, seeing rather with the mind's eye than with ordinary sight. Yet he could see her positively enough, whilst he kept his eye attentive. He felt, if he looked away from her, in the thick, ugly falling dusk, he would lose her altogether.

He followed her minutely as she moved, direct and intent, like something transmitted rather than stirring in voluntary activity, straight down the field towards the pond. There she stood on the bank for a moment. She never raised her head. Then she waded slowly into the water.

He stood motionless as the small black figure walked slowly and deliberately towards the centre of the pond, very slowly, gradually moving deeper into the motionless water, and still moving forward as the water got up to her breast. Then he could see her no more in the dusk of the dead afternoon.

'There!' he exclaimed. 'Would you believe it?'

And he hastened straight down, running over the wet, soddened fields, pushing through the hedges, down into the depression of callous wintry obscurity. It took him several minutes to come to the pond. He stood on the bank, breathing heavily. He could see nothing. His eyes seemed to penetrate the dead water. Yes, perhaps that was the dark shadow of her black clothing beneath the surface of the water.

He slowly ventured into the pond. The bottom was deep, soft clay, he sank in, and the water clasped dead cold round his legs. As he stirred he could smell the cold, rotten clay that fouled up into the water. It was objectionable in his lungs. Still, repelled and yet not heeding, he moved deeper into the pond. The cold water rose over his thighs, over his loins, upon his abdomen. The lower part of his body was all sunk in the hideous cold element. And the bottom was so deeply soft and uncertain, he was afraid of pitching with his mouth underneath. He could not swim, and was afraid.

He crouched a little, spreading his hands under the water and moving them round, trying to feel for her. The dead cold pond swayed upon his chest. He moved again, a little deeper, and again, with his hands underneath, he felt all around under the water. And he touched her clothing. But it evaded his fingers. He made a desperate effort to grasp it.

And so doing he lost his balance and went under, horribly, suffocating in the foul earthy water, struggling madly for a few moments. At last, after what seemed an eternity, he got his footing, rose again into the air and looked around. He gasped, and knew he was in the world. Then he looked at the water. She had risen near him. He grasped her clothing, and drawing her nearer, turned to take his way to land again.

He went very slowly, carefully, absorbed in the slow progress. He rose higher, climbing out of the pond. The water was now only about his legs; he was thankful, full of relief to be out of the clutches of the pond. He lifted her and staggered on to the bank, out of the horror of wet, grey clay.

He laid her down on the bank. She was quite unconscious and running with water. He made the water come from her mouth, he worked to restore her. He did not have to work very long before he could feel the breathing begin again in her; she was breathing naturally. He worked a little longer. He could feel her live beneath his hands; she was coming back. He wiped her face, wrapped her in his overcoat, looked round into the dim, dark-grey world, then lifted her and staggered down the bank and across the fields.

It seemed an unthinkably long way, and his burden so heavy he felt he would never get to the house. But at last he was in the stable-yard, and then in the house-yard. He opened the door and went into the house. In the kitchen he laid her down on the hearthrug, and called. The house was empty. But the fire was burning in the grate.

Then again he kneeled to attend to her. She was breathing regularly, her eyes were wide open and as if conscious, but there seemed something missing in her look. She was conscious in herself, but unconscious of her surroundings.

He ran upstairs, took blankets from a bed, and put them before the fire to

warm. Then he removed her saturated, earthy-smelling clothing, rubbed her dry with a towel, and wrapped her naked in the blankets. Then he went into the dining-room, to look for spirits. There was a little whisky. He drank a gulp himself, and put some into her mouth.

The effect was instantaneous. She looked full into his face, as if she had been seeing him for some time, and yet had only just become conscious of him.

‘Dr. Fergusson?’ she said.

‘What?’ he answered.

He was divesting himself of his coat, intending to find some dry clothing upstairs. He could not bear the smell of the dead, clayey water, and he was mortally afraid for his own health.

‘What did I do?’ she asked.

‘Walked into the pond,’ he replied. He had begun to shudder like one sick, and could hardly attend to her. Her eyes remained full on him, he seemed to be going dark in his mind, looking back at her helplessly. The shuddering became quieter in him, his life came back in him, dark and unknowing, but strong again.

‘Was I out of my mind?’ she asked, while her eyes were fixed on him all the time.

‘Maybe, for the moment,’ he replied. He felt quiet, because his strength had come back. The strange fretful strain had left him.

‘Am I out of my mind now?’ she asked.

‘Are you?’ he reflected a moment. ‘No,’ he answered truthfully, ‘I don’t see that you are.’ He turned his face aside. He was afraid now, because he felt dazed, and felt dimly that her power was stronger than his, in this issue. And she continued to look at him fixedly all the time. ‘Can you tell me where I shall find some dry things to put on?’ he asked.

‘Did you dive into the pond for me?’ she asked.

‘No,’ he answered. ‘I walked in. But I went in overhead as well.’

There was silence for a moment. He hesitated. He very much wanted to go upstairs to get into dry clothing. But there was another desire in him. And she seemed to hold him. His will seemed to have gone to sleep, and left him, standing there slack before her. But he felt warm inside himself. He did not shudder at all, though his clothes were sodden on him.

‘Why did you?’ she asked.

‘Because I didn’t want you to do such a foolish thing,’ he said.

‘It wasn’t foolish,’ she said, still gazing at him as she lay on the floor, with a sofa cushion under her head. ‘It was the right thing to do. I knew best, then.’

‘I’ll go and shift these wet things,’ he said. But still he had not the power to move out of her presence, until she sent him. It was as if she had the life of his

body in her hands, and he could not extricate himself. Or perhaps he did not want to.

Suddenly she sat up. Then she became aware of her own immediate condition. She felt the blankets about her, she knew her own limbs. For a moment it seemed as if her reason were going. She looked round, with wild eye, as if seeking something. He stood still with fear. She saw her clothing lying scattered.

‘Who undressed me?’ she asked, her eyes resting full and inevitable on his face.

‘I did,’ he replied, ‘to bring you round.’

For some moments she sat and gazed at him awfully, her lips parted.

‘Do you love me then?’ she asked.

He only stood and stared at her, fascinated. His soul seemed to melt.

She shuffled forward on her knees, and put her arms round him, round his legs, as he stood there, pressing her breasts against his knees and thighs, clutching him with strange, convulsive certainty, pressing his thighs against her, drawing him to her face, her throat, as she looked up at him with flaring, humble eyes, of transfiguration, triumphant in first possession.

‘You love me,’ she murmured, in strange transport, yearning and triumphant and confident. ‘You love me. I know you love me, I know.’

And she was passionately kissing his knees, through the wet clothing, passionately and indiscriminately kissing his knees, his legs, as if unaware of every thing.

He looked down at the tangled wet hair, the wild, bare, animal shoulders. He was amazed, bewildered, and afraid. He had never thought of loving her. He had never wanted to love her. When he rescued her and restored her, he was a doctor, and she was a patient. He had had no single personal thought of her. Nay, this introduction of the personal element was very distasteful to him, a violation of his professional honour. It was horrible to have her there embracing his knees. It was horrible. He revolted from it, violently. And yet — and yet — he had not the power to break away.

She looked at him again, with the same supplication of powerful love, and that same transcendent, frightening light of triumph. In view of the delicate flame which seemed to come from her face like a light, he was powerless. And yet he had never intended to love her. He had never intended. And something stubborn in him could not give way.

‘You love me,’ she repeated, in a murmur of deep, rhapsodic assurance. ‘You love me.’

Her hands were drawing him, drawing him down to her. He was afraid, even a little horrified. For he had, really, no intention of loving her. Yet her hands were

drawing him towards her. He put out his hand quickly to steady himself, and grasped her bare shoulder. A flame seemed to burn the hand that grasped her soft shoulder. He had no intention of loving her: his whole will was against his yielding. It was horrible. And yet wonderful was the touch of her shoulders, beautiful the shining of her face. Was she perhaps mad? He had a horror of yielding to her. Yet something in him ached also.

He had been staring away at the door, away from her. But his hand remained on her shoulder. She had gone suddenly very still. He looked down at her. Her eyes were now wide with fear, with doubt, the light was dying from her face, a shadow of terrible greyness was returning. He could not bear the touch of her eyes' question upon him, and the look of death behind the question.

With an inward groan he gave way, and let his heart yield towards her. A sudden gentle smile came on his face. And her eyes, which never left his face, slowly, slowly filled with tears. He watched the strange water rise in her eyes, like some slow fountain coming up. And his heart seemed to burn and melt away in his breast.

He could not bear to look at her any more. He dropped on his knees and caught her head with his arms and pressed her face against his throat. She was very still. His heart, which seemed to have broken, was burning with a kind of agony in his breast. And he felt her slow, hot tears wetting his throat. But he could not move.

He felt the hot tears wet his neck and the hollows of his neck, and he remained motionless, suspended through one of man's eternities. Only now it had become indispensable to him to have her face pressed close to him; he could never let her go again. He could never let her head go away from the close clutch of his arm. He wanted to remain like that for ever, with his heart hurting him in a pain that was also life to him. Without knowing, he was looking down on her damp, soft brown hair.

Then, as it were suddenly, he smelt the horrid stagnant smell of that water. And at the same moment she drew away from him and looked at him. Her eyes were wistful and unfathomable. He was afraid of them, and he fell to kissing her, not knowing what he was doing. He wanted her eyes not to have that terrible, wistful, unfathomable look.

When she turned her face to him again, a faint delicate flush was glowing, and there was again dawning that terrible shining of joy in her eyes, which really terrified him, and yet which he now wanted to see, because he feared the look of doubt still more.

'You love me?' she said, rather faltering.

'Yes.' The word cost him a painful effort. Not because it wasn't true. But

because it was too newly true, the saying seemed to tear open again his newly-torn heart. And he hardly wanted it to be true, even now.

She lifted her face to him, and he bent forward and kissed her on the mouth, gently, with the one kiss that is an eternal pledge. And as he kissed her his heart strained again in his breast. He never intended to love her. But now it was over. He had crossed over the gulf to her, and all that he had left behind had shrivelled and become void.

After the kiss, her eyes again slowly filled with tears. She sat still, away from him, with her face drooped aside, and her hands folded in her lap. The tears fell very slowly. There was complete silence. He too sat there motionless and silent on the hearthrug. The strange pain of his heart that was broken seemed to consume him. That he should love her? That this was love! That he should be ripped open in this way! — Him, a doctor! — How they would all jeer if they knew! — It was agony to him to think they might know.

In the curious naked pain of the thought he looked again to her. She was sitting there drooped into a muse. He saw a tear fall, and his heart flared hot. He saw for the first time that one of her shoulders was quite uncovered, one arm bare, he could see one of her small breasts; dimly, because it had become almost dark in the room.

‘Why are you crying?’ he asked, in an altered voice.

She looked up at him, and behind her tears the consciousness of her situation for the first time brought a dark look of shame to her eyes.

‘I’m not crying, really,’ she said, watching him half frightened.

He reached his hand, and softly closed it on her bare arm.

‘I love you! I love you!’ he said in a soft, low vibrating voice, unlike himself.

She shrank, and dropped her head. The soft, penetrating grip of his hand on her arm distressed her. She looked up at him.

‘I want to go,’ she said. ‘I want to go and get you some dry things.’

‘Why?’ he said. ‘I’m all right.’

‘But I want to go,’ she said. ‘And I want you to change your things.’

He released her arm, and she wrapped herself in the blanket, looking at him rather frightened. And still she did not rise.

‘Kiss me,’ she said wistfully.

He kissed her, but briefly, half in anger.

Then, after a second, she rose nervously, all mixed up in the blanket. He watched her in her confusion, as she tried to extricate herself and wrap herself up so that she could walk. He watched her relentlessly, as she knew. And as she went, the blanket trailing, and as he saw a glimpse of her feet and her white leg, he tried to remember her as she was when he had wrapped her in the blanket.

But then he didn't want to remember, because she had been nothing to him then, and his nature revolted from remembering her as she was when she was nothing to him.

A tumbling, muffled noise from within the dark house startled him. Then he heard her voice: — 'There are clothes.' He rose and went to the foot of the stairs, and gathered up the garments she had thrown down. Then he came back to the fire, to rub himself down and dress. He grinned at his own appearance when he had finished.

The fire was sinking, so he put on coal. The house was now quite dark, save for the light of a street-lamp that shone in faintly from beyond the holly trees. He lit the gas with matches he found on the mantel-piece. Then he emptied the pockets of his own clothes, and threw all his wet things in a heap into the scullery. After which he gathered up her sodden clothes, gently, and put them in a separate heap on the copper-top in the scullery.

It was six o'clock on the clock. His own watch had stopped. He ought to go back to the surgery. He waited, and still she did not come down. So he went to the foot of the stairs and called:

'I shall have to go.'

Almost immediately he heard her coming down. She had on her best dress of black voile, and her hair was tidy, but still damp. She looked at him — and in spite of herself, smiled.

'I don't like you in those clothes,' she said.

'Do I look a sight?' he answered.

They were shy of one another.

'I'll make you some tea,' she said.

'No, I must go.'

'Must you?' And she looked at him again with the wide, strained, doubtful eyes. And again, from the pain of his breast, he knew how he loved her. He went and bent to kiss her, gently, passionately, with his heart's painful kiss.

'And my hair smells so horrible,' she murmured in distraction. 'And I'm so awful, I'm so awful! Oh, no, I'm too awful.' And she broke into bitter, heart-broken sobbing. 'You can't want to love me, I'm horrible.'

'Don't be silly, don't be silly,' he said, trying to comfort her, kissing her, holding her in his arms. 'I want you, I want to marry you, we're going to be married, quickly, quickly — to-morrow if I can.'

But she only sobbed terribly, and cried:

'I feel awful. I feel awful. I feel I'm horrible to you.'

'No, I want you, I want you,' was all he answered, blindly, with that terrible intonation which frightened her almost more than her horror lest he should not

want her.

THE PRIMROSE PATH

A young man came out of the Victoria station, looking undecidedly at the taxi-cabs, dark-red and black, pressing against the kerb under the glass-roof. Several men in greatcoats and brass buttons jerked themselves erect to catch his attention, at the same time keeping an eye on the other people as they filtered through the open doorways of the station. Berry, however, was occupied by one of the men, a big, burly fellow whose blue eyes glared back and whose red-brown moustache bristled in defiance.

‘Do you want a cab, sir?’ the man asked, in a half-mocking, challenging voice. Berry hesitated still.

‘Are you Daniel Sutton?’ he asked.

‘Yes,’ replied the other defiantly, with uneasy conscience.

‘Then you are my uncle,’ said Berry.

They were alike in colouring, and somewhat in features, but the taxi driver was a powerful, well-fleshed man who glared at the world aggressively, being really on the defensive against his own heart. His nephew, of the same height, was thin, well-dressed, quiet and indifferent in his manner. And yet they were obviously kin.

‘And who the devil are you?’ asked the taxi driver.

‘I’m Daniel Berry,’ replied the nephew.

‘Well, I’m damned — never saw you since you were a kid.’

Rather awkwardly at this late hour the two shook hands.

‘How are you, lad?’

‘All right. I thought you were in Australia.’

‘Been back three months — bought a couple of these damned things’ — he kicked the tyre of his taxi-cab in affectionate disgust. There was a moment’s silence.

‘Oh, but I’m going back out there. I can’t stand this cankering, rotten-hearted hell of a country any more; you want to come out to Sydney with me, lad. That’s the place for you — beautiful place, oh, you could wish for nothing better. And money in it, too. — How’s your mother?’

‘She died at Christmas,’ said the young man.

‘Dead! What! — our Anna!’ The big man’s eyes stared, and he recoiled in fear. ‘God, lad,’ he said, ‘that’s three of ‘em gone!’

The two men looked away at the people passing along the pale grey

pavements, under the wall of Trinity Church.

‘Well, strike me lucky!’ said the taxi driver at last, out of breath. ‘She wor th’ best o’ th’ bunch of ‘em. I see nowt nor hear nowt from any of ‘em — they’re not worth it, I’ll be damned if they are — our sermon-lapping Adela and Maud,’ he looked scornfully at his nephew. ‘But she was the best of ‘em, our Anna was, that’s a fact.’

He was talking because he was afraid.

‘An’ after a hard life like she’d had. How old was she, lad?’

‘Fifty-five.’

‘Fifty-five ...’ He hesitated. Then, in a rather hushed voice, he asked the question that frightened him:

‘And what was it, then?’

‘Cancer.’

‘Cancer again, like Julia! I never knew there was cancer in our family. Oh, my good God, our poor Anna, after the life she’d had! — What, lad, do you see any God at the back of that? — I’m damned if I do.’

He was glaring, very blue-eyed and fierce, at his nephew. Berry lifted his shoulders slightly.

‘God?’ went on the taxi driver, in a curious intense tone, ‘You’ve only to look at the folk in the street to know there’s nothing keeps it going but gravitation. Look at ‘em. Look at him!’ — A mongrel-looking man was nosing past. ‘Wouldn’t he murder you for your watch-chain, but that he’s afraid of society. He’s got it in him.... Look at ‘em.’

Berry watched the towns-people go by, and, sensitively feeling his uncle’s antipathy, it seemed he was watching a sort of danse macabre of ugly criminals.

‘Did you ever see such a God-forsaken crew creeping about! It gives you the very horrors to look at ‘em. I sit in this damned car and watch ‘em till, I can tell you, I feel like running the cab amuck among ‘em, and running myself to kingdom come — ’

Berry wondered at this outburst. He knew his uncle was the black-sheep, the youngest, the darling of his mother’s family. He knew him to be at outs with respectability, mixing with the looser, sporting type, all betting and drinking and showing dogs and birds, and racing. As a critic of life, however, he did not know him. But the young man felt curiously understanding. ‘He uses words like I do, he talks nearly as I talk, except that I shouldn’t say those things. But I might feel like that, in myself, if I went a certain road.’

‘I’ve got to go to Watmore,’ he said. ‘Can you take me?’

‘When d’you want to go?’ asked the uncle fiercely.

‘Now.’

‘Come on, then. What d’yer stand gassin’ on th’ causeway for?’

The nephew took his seat beside the driver. The cab began to quiver, then it started forward with a whirr. The uncle, his hands and feet acting mechanically, kept his blue eyes fixed on the highroad into whose traffic the car was insinuating its way. Berry felt curiously as if he were sitting beside an older development of himself. His mind went back to his mother. She had been twenty years older than this brother of hers whom she had loved so dearly. ‘He was one of the most affectionate little lads, and such a curly head! I could never have believed he would grow into the great, coarse bully he is — for he’s nothing else. My father made a god of him — well, it’s a good thing his father is dead. He got in with that sporting gang, that’s what did it. Things were made too easy for him, and so he thought of no one but himself, and this is the result.’

Not that ‘Joky’ Sutton was so very black a sheep. He had lived idly till he was eighteen, then had suddenly married a young, beautiful girl with clear brows and dark grey eyes, a factory girl. Having taken her to live with his parents he, lover of dogs and pigeons, went on to the staff of a sporting paper. But his wife was without uplift or warmth. Though they made money enough, their house was dark and cold and uninviting. He had two or three dogs, and the whole attic was turned into a great pigeon-house. He and his wife lived together roughly, with no warmth, no refinement, no touch of beauty anywhere, except that she was beautiful. He was a blustering, impetuous man, she was rather cold in her soul, did not care about anything very much, was rather capable and close with money. And she had a common accent in her speech. He outdid her a thousand times in coarse language, and yet that cold twang in her voice tortured him with shame that he stamped down in bullying and in becoming more violent in his own speech.

Only his dogs adored him, and to them, and to his pigeons, he talked with rough, yet curiously tender caresses while they leaped and fluttered for joy.

After he and his wife had been married for seven years a little girl was born to them, then later, another. But the husband and wife drew no nearer together. She had an affection for her children almost like a cool governess. He had an emotional man’s fear of sentiment, which helped to nip his wife from putting out any shoots. He treated his children roughly, and pretended to think it a good job when one was adopted by a well-to-do maternal aunt. But in his soul he hated his wife that she could give away one of his children. For after her cool fashion, she loved him. With a chaos of a man such as he, she had no chance of being anything but cold and hard, poor thing. For she did love him.

In the end he fell absurdly and violently in love with a rather sentimental young woman who read Browning. He made his wife an allowance and

established a new ménage with the young lady, shortly after emigrating with her to Australia. Meanwhile his wife had gone to live with a publican, a widower, with whom she had had one of those curious, tacit understandings of which quiet women are capable, something like an arrangement for provision in the future.

This was as much as the nephew knew. He sat beside his uncle, wondering how things stood at the present. They raced lightly out past the cemetery and along the boulevard, then turned into the rather grimy country. The mud flew out on either side, there was a fine mist of rain which blew in their faces. Berry covered himself up.

In the lanes the high hedges shone black with rain. The silvery grey sky, faintly dappled, spread wide over the low, green land. The elder man glanced fiercely up the road, then turned his red face to his nephew.

‘And how’re you going on, lad?’ he said loudly. Berry noticed that his uncle was slightly uneasy of him. It made him also uncomfortable. The elder man had evidently something pressing on his soul.

‘Who are you living with in town?’ asked the nephew. ‘Have you gone back to Aunt Maud?’

‘No,’ barked the uncle. ‘She wouldn’t have me. I offered to — I want to — but she wouldn’t.’

‘You’re alone, then?’

‘No, I’m not alone.’

He turned and glared with his fierce blue eyes at his nephew, but said no more for some time. The car ran on through the mud, under the wet wall of the park.

‘That other devil tried to poison me,’ suddenly shouted the elder man. ‘The one I went to Australia with.’ At which, in spite of himself, the younger smiled in secret.

‘How was that?’ he asked.

‘Wanted to get rid of me. She got in with another fellow on the ship... By Jove, I was bad.’

‘Where? — on the ship?’

‘No,’ bellowed the other. ‘No. That was in Wellington, New Zealand. I was bad, and got lower an’ lower — couldn’t think what was up. I could hardly crawl about. As certain as I’m here, she was poisoning me, to get to th’ other chap — I’m certain of it.’

‘And what did you do?’

‘I cleared out — went to Sydney — ’

‘And left her?’

‘Yes, I thought begod, I’d better clear out if I wanted to live.’

‘And you were all right in Sydney?’

‘Better in no time — I know she was putting poison in my coffee.’

‘Hm!’

There was a glum silence. The driver stared at the road ahead, fixedly, managing the car as if it were a live thing. The nephew felt that his uncle was afraid, quite stupefied with fear, fear of life, of death, of himself.

‘You’re in rooms, then?’ asked the nephew.

‘No, I’m in a house of my own,’ said the uncle defiantly, ‘wi’ th’ best little woman in th’ Midlands. She’s a marvel. — Why don’t you come an’ see us?’

‘I will. Who is she?’

‘Oh, she’s a good girl — a beautiful little thing. I was clean gone on her first time I saw her. An’ she was on me. Her mother lives with us — respectable girl, none o’ your....’

‘And how old is she?’

‘ — how old is she? — she’s twenty-one.’

‘Poor thing.’

‘She’s right enough.’

‘You’d marry her — getting a divorce — ?’

‘I shall marry her.’

There was a little antagonism between the two men.

‘Where’s Aunt Maud?’ asked the younger.

‘She’s at the Railway Arms — we passed it, just against Rollin’s Mill Crossing.... They sent me a note this morning to go an’ see her when I can spare time. She’s got consumption.’

‘Good Lord! Are you going?’

‘Yes — ’

But again Berry felt that his uncle was afraid.

The young man got through his commission in the village, had a drink with his uncle at the inn, and the two were returning home. The elder man’s subject of conversation was Australia. As they drew near the town they grew silent, thinking both of the public-house. At last they saw the gates of the railway crossing were closed before them.

‘Shan’t you call?’ asked Berry, jerking his head in the direction of the inn, which stood at the corner between two roads, its sign hanging under a bare horse-chestnut tree in front.

‘I might as well. Come in an’ have a drink,’ said the uncle.

It had been raining all the morning, so shallow pools of water lay about. A brewer’s wagon, with wet barrels and warm-smelling horses, stood near the door of the inn. Everywhere seemed silent, but for the rattle of trains at the crossing. The two men went uneasily up the steps and into the bar. The place was paddled

with wet feet, empty. As the bar-man was heard approaching, the uncle asked, his usual bluster slightly hushed by fear:

‘What yer goin’ ta have, lad? Same as last time?’

A man entered, evidently the proprietor. He was good-looking, with a long, heavy face and quick, dark eyes. His glance at Sutton was swift, a start, a recognition, and a withdrawal, into heavy neutrality.

‘How are yer, Dan?’ he said, scarcely troubling to speak.

‘Are yer, George?’ replied Sutton, hanging back. ‘My nephew, Dan Berry. Give us Red Seal, George.’

The publican nodded to the younger man, and set the glasses on the bar. He pushed forward the two glasses, then leaned back in the dark corner behind the door, his arms folded, evidently preferring to get back from the watchful eyes of the nephew.

‘ — ’s luck,’ said Sutton.

The publican nodded in acknowledgement. Sutton and his nephew drank.

‘Why the hell don’t you get that road mended in Cinder Hill — ,’ said Sutton fiercely, pushing back his driver’s cap and showing his short-cut, bristling hair.

‘They can’t find it in their hearts to pull it up,’ replied the publican, laconically.

‘Find in their hearts! They want settin’ in barrows an’ runnin’ up an’ down it till they cried for mercy.’

Sutton put down his glass. The publican renewed it with a sure hand, at ease in whatsoever he did. Then he leaned back against the bar. He wore no coat. He stood with arms folded, his chin on his chest, his long moustache hanging. His back was round and slack, so that the lower part of his abdomen stuck forward, though he was not stout. His cheek was healthy, brown-red, and he was muscular. Yet there was about him this physical slackness, a reluctance in his slow, sure movements. His eyes were keen under his dark brows, but reluctant also, as if he were gloomily apathetic.

There was a halt. The publican evidently would say nothing. Berry looked at the mahogany bar-counter, sloped with beer, at the whisky-bottles on the shelves. Sutton, his cap pushed back, showing a white brow above a weather-reddened face, rubbed his cropped hair uneasily.

The publican glanced round suddenly. It seemed that only his dark eyes moved.

‘Going up?’ he asked.

And something, perhaps his eyes, indicated the unseen bed-chamber.

‘Ay — that’s what I came for,’ replied Sutton, shifting nervously from one foot to the other. ‘She’s been asking for me?’

‘This morning,’ replied the publican, neutral.

Then he put up a flap of the bar, and turned away through the dark doorway behind. Sutton, pulling off his cap, showing a round, short-cropped head which now was ducked forward, followed after him, the buttons holding the strap of his greatcoat behind glittering for a moment.

They climbed the dark stairs, the husband placing his feet carefully, because of his big boots. Then he followed down the passage, trying vaguely to keep a grip on his bowels, which seemed to be melting away, and definitely wishing for a neat brandy. The publican opened a door. Sutton, big and burly in his greatcoat, went past him.

The bedroom seemed light and warm after the passage. There was a red eider-down on the bed. Then, making an effort, Sutton turned his eyes to see the sick woman. He met her eyes direct, dark, dilated. It was such a shock he almost started away. For a second he remained in torture, as if some invisible flame were playing on him to reduce his bones and fuse him down. Then he saw the sharp white edge of her jaw, and the black hair beside the hollow cheek. With a start he went towards the bed.

‘Hello, Maud!’ he said. ‘Why, what ye been doin’?’

The publican stood at the window with his back to the bed. The husband, like one condemned but on the point of starting away, stood by the bedside staring in horror at his wife, whose dilated grey eyes, nearly all black now, watched him wearily, as if she were looking at something a long way off.

Going exceedingly pale, he jerked up his head and stared at the wall over the pillows. There was a little coloured picture of a bird perched on a bell, and a nest among ivy leaves beneath. It appealed to him, made him wonder, roused a feeling of childish magic in him. They were wonderfully fresh, green ivy leaves, and nobody had seen the nest among them save him.

Then suddenly he looked down again at the face on the bed, to try and recognize it. He knew the white brow and the beautiful clear eyebrows. That was his wife, with whom he had passed his youth, flesh of his flesh, his, himself. Then those tired eyes, which met his again from a long way off, disturbed him until he did not know where he was. Only the sunken cheeks, and the mouth that seemed to protrude now were foreign to him, and filled him with horror. It seemed he lost his identity. He was the young husband of the woman with the clear brows; he was the married man fighting with her whose eyes watched him, a little indifferently, from a long way off; and he was a child in horror of that protruding mouth.

There came a crackling sound of her voice. He knew she had consumption of the throat, and braced himself hard to bear the noise.

‘What was it, Maud?’ he asked in panic.

Then the broken, crackling voice came again. He was too terrified of the sound of it to hear what was said. There was a pause.

‘You’ll take Winnie?’ the publican’s voice interpreted from the window.

‘Don’t you bother, Maud, I’ll take her,’ he said, stupefying his mind so as not to understand.

He looked curiously round the room. It was not a bad bedroom, light and warm. There were many medicine bottles aggregated in a corner of the washstand — and a bottle of Three Star brandy, half full. And there were also photographs of strange people on the chest of drawers. It was not a bad room.

Again he started as if he were shot. She was speaking. He bent down, but did not look at her.

‘Be good to her,’ she whispered.

When he realized her meaning, that he should be good to their child when the mother was gone, a blade went through his flesh.

‘I’ll be good to her, Maud, don’t you bother,’ he said, beginning to feel shaky.

He looked again at the picture of the bird. It perched cheerfully under a blue sky, with robust, jolly ivy leaves near. He was gathering his courage to depart. He looked down, but struggled hard not to take in the sight of his wife’s face.

‘I s’ll come again, Maud,’ he said. ‘I hope you’ll go on all right. Is there anything as you want?’

There was an almost imperceptible shake of the head from the sick woman, making his heart melt swiftly again. Then, dragging his limbs, he got out of the room and down the stairs.

The landlord came after him.

‘I’ll let you know if anything happens,’ the publican said, still laconic, but with his eyes dark and swift.

‘Ay, a’ right,’ said Button blindly. He looked round for his cap, which he had all the time in his hand. Then he got out of doors.

In a moment the uncle and nephew were in the car jolting on the level crossing. The elder man seemed as if something tight in his brain made him open his eyes wide, and stare. He held the steering wheel firmly. He knew he could steer accurately, to a hair’s breadth. Glaring fixedly ahead, he let the car go, till it bounded over the uneven road. There were three coal-carts in a string. In an instant the car grazed past them, almost biting the kerb on the other side. Sutton aimed his car like a projectile, staring ahead. He did not want to know, to think, to realize, he wanted to be only the driver of that quick taxi.

The town drew near, suddenly. There were allotment-gardens with dark-purple twiggy fruit-trees and wet alleys between the hedges. Then suddenly the

streets of dwelling-houses whirled close, and the car was climbing the hill, with an angry whirr, — up — up — till they rode out on to the crest and could see the tram-cars, dark-red and yellow, threading their way round the corner below, and all the traffic roaring between the shops.

‘Got anywhere to go?’ asked Sutton of his nephew.

‘I was going to see one or two people.’

‘Come an’ have a bit o’ dinner with us,’ said the other.

Berry knew that his uncle wanted to be distracted, so that he should not think nor realize. The big man was running hard away from the horror of realization.

‘All right,’ Berry agreed.

The car went quickly through the town. It ran up a long street nearly into the country again. Then it pulled up at a house that stood alone, below the road.

‘I s’ll be back in ten minutes,’ said the uncle.

The car went on to the garage. Berry stood curiously at the top of the stone stairs that led from the highroad down to the level of the house, an old stone place. The garden was dilapidated. Broken fruit-trees leaned at a sharp angle down the steep bank. Right across the dim grey atmosphere, in a kind of valley on the edge of the town, new suburb-patches showed pinkish on the dark earth. It was a kind of unresolved borderland.

Berry went down the steps. Through the broken black fence of the orchard, long grass showed yellow. The place seemed deserted. He knocked, then knocked again. An elderly woman appeared. She looked like a housekeeper. At first she said suspiciously that Mr. Sutton was not in.

‘My uncle just put me down. He’ll be in in ten minutes,’ replied the visitor.

‘Oh, are you the Mr. Berry who is related to him?’ exclaimed the elderly woman. ‘Come in — come in.’

She was at once kindly and a little bit servile. The young man entered. It was an old house, rather dark, and sparsely furnished. The elderly woman sat nervously on the edge of one of the chairs in a drawing-room that looked as if it were furnished from dismal relics of dismal homes, and there was a little straggling attempt at conversation. Mrs. Greenwell was evidently a working class woman unused to service or to any formality.

Presently she gathered up courage to invite her visitor into the dining-room. There from the table under the window rose a tall, slim girl with a cat in her arms. She was evidently a little more lady-like than was habitual to her, but she had a gentle, delicate, small nature. Her brown hair almost covered her ears, her dark lashes came down in shy awkwardness over her beautiful blue eyes. She shook hands in a frank way, yet she was shrinking. Evidently she was not sure how her position would affect her visitor. And yet she was assured in herself,

shrinking and timid as she was.

‘She must be a good deal in love with him,’ thought Berry.

Both women glanced shamefacedly at the roughly laid table. Evidently they ate in a rather rough and ready fashion.

Elaine — she had this poetic name — fingered her cat timidly, not knowing what to say or to do, unable even to ask her visitor to sit down. He noticed how her skirt hung almost flat on her hips. She was young, scarce developed, a long, slender thing. Her colouring was warm and exquisite.

The elder woman bustled out to the kitchen. Berry fondled the terrier dogs that had come curiously to his heels, and glanced out of the window at the wet, deserted orchard.

This room, too, was not well furnished, and rather dark. But there was a big red fire.

‘He always has fox terriers,’ he said.

‘Yes,’ she answered, showing her teeth in a smile.

‘Do you like them, too?’

‘Yes’ — she glanced down at the dogs. ‘I like Tam better than Sally — ’

Her speech always tailed off into an awkward silence.

‘We’ve been to see Aunt Maud,’ said the nephew.

Her eyes, blue and scared and shrinking, met his.

‘Dan had a letter,’ he explained. ‘She’s very bad.’

‘Isn’t it horrible!’ she exclaimed, her face crumbling up with fear.

The old woman, evidently a hard-used, rather down-trodden workman’s wife, came in with two soup-plates. She glanced anxiously to see how her daughter was progressing with the visitor.

‘Mother, Dan’s been to see Maud,’ said Elaine, in a quiet voice full of fear and trouble.

The old woman looked up anxiously, in question.

‘I think she wanted him to take the child. She’s very bad, I believe,’ explained Berry.

‘Oh, we should take Winnie!’ cried Elaine. But both women seemed uncertain, wavering in their position. Already Berry could see that his uncle had bullied them, as he bullied everybody. But they were used to unpleasant men, and seemed to keep at a distance.

‘Will you have some soup?’ asked the mother, humbly.

She evidently did the work. The daughter was to be a lady, more or less, always dressed and nice for when Sutton came in.

They heard him heavily running down the steps outside. The dogs got up. Elaine seemed to forget the visitor. It was as if she came into life. Yet she was

nervous and afraid. The mother stood as if ready to exculpate herself.

Sutton burst open the door. Big, blustering, wet in his immense grey coat, he came into the dining-room.

‘Hello!’ he said to his nephew, ‘making yourself at home?’

‘Oh, yes,’ replied Berry.

‘Hello, Jack,’ he said to the girl. ‘Got owt to grizzle about?’

‘What for?’ she asked, in a clear, half-challenging voice, that had that peculiar twang, almost petulant, so female and so attractive. Yet she was defiant like a boy.

‘It’s a wonder if you haven’t,’ growled Sutton. And, with a really intimate movement, he stooped down and fondled his dogs, though paying no attention to them. Then he stood up, and remained with feet apart on the hearthrug, his head ducked forward, watching the girl. He seemed abstracted, as if he could only watch her. His greatcoat hung open, so that she could see his figure, simple and human in the great husk of cloth. She stood nervously with her hands behind her, glancing at him, unable to see anything else. And he was scarcely conscious but of her. His eyes were still strained and staring, and as they followed the girl, when, long-limbed and languid, she moved away, it was as if he saw in her something impersonal, the female, not the woman.

‘Had your dinner?’ he asked.

‘We were just going to have it,’ she replied, with the same curious little vibration in her voice, like the twang of a string.

The mother entered, bringing a saucepan from which she ladled soup into three plates.

‘Sit down, lad,’ said Sutton. ‘You sit down, Jack, an’ give me mine here.’

‘Oh, aren’t you coming to table?’ she complained.

‘No, I tell you,’ he snarled, almost pretending to be disagreeable. But she was slightly afraid even of the pretence, which pleased and relieved him. He stood on the hearthrug eating his soup noisily.

‘Aren’t you going to take your coat off?’ she said. ‘It’s filling the place full of steam.’

He did not answer, but, with his head bent forward over the plate, he ate his soup hastily, to get it done with. When he put down his empty plate, she rose and went to him.

‘Do take your coat off, Dan,’ she said, and she took hold of the breast of his coat, trying to push it back over his shoulder. But she could not. Only the stare in his eyes changed to a glare as her hand moved over his shoulder. He looked down into her eyes. She became pale, rather frightened-looking, and she turned her face away, and it was drawn slightly with love and fear and misery. She tried

again to put off his coat, her thin wrists pulling at it. He stood solidly planted, and did not look at her, but stared straight in front. She was playing with passion, afraid of it, and really wretched because it left her, the person, out of count. Yet she continued. And there came into his bearing, into his eyes, the curious smile of passion, pushing away even the death-horror. It was life stronger than death in him. She stood close to his breast. Their eyes met, and she was carried away.

‘Take your coat off, Dan,’ she said coaxingly, in a low tone meant for no one but him. And she slid her hands on his shoulder, and he yielded, so that the coat was pushed back. She had flushed, and her eyes had grown very bright. She got hold of the cuff of his coat. Gently, he eased himself, so that she drew it off. Then he stood in a thin suit, which revealed his vigorous, almost mature form.

‘What a weight!’ she exclaimed, in a peculiar penetrating voice, as she went out hugging the overcoat. In a moment she came back.

He stood still in the same position, a frown over his fiercely staring eyes. The pain, the fear, the horror in his breast were all burning away in the new, fiercest flame of passion.

‘Get your dinner,’ he said roughly to her.

‘I’ve had all I want,’ she said. ‘You come an’ have yours.’

He looked at the table as if he found it difficult to see things.

‘I want no more,’ he said.

She stood close to his chest. She wanted to touch him and to comfort him. There was something about him now that fascinated her. Berry felt slightly ashamed that she seemed to ignore the presence of others in the room.

The mother came in. She glanced at Sutton, standing planted on the hearthrug, his head ducked, the heavy frown hiding his eyes. There was a peculiar braced intensity about him that made the elder woman afraid. Suddenly he jerked his head round to his nephew.

‘Get on wi’ your dinner, lad,’ he said, and he went to the door. The dogs, which had continually lain down and got up again, uneasy, now rose and watched. The girl went after him, saying, clearly:

‘What did you want, Dan?’

Her slim, quick figure was gone, the door was closed behind her.

There was silence. The mother, still more slave-like in her movement, sat down in a low chair. Berry drank some beer.

‘That girl will leave him,’ he said to himself. ‘She’ll hate him like poison. And serve him right. Then she’ll go off with somebody else.’

And she did.

THE OVERTONE

His wife was talking to two other women. He lay on the lounge pretending to read. The lamps shed a golden light, and, through the open door, the night was lustrous, and a white moon went like a woman, unashamed and naked across the sky. His wife, her dark hair tinged with grey looped low on her white neck, fingered as she talked the pearl that hung in a heavy, naked drop against the bosom of her dress. She was still a beautiful woman, and one who dressed like the night, for harmony. Her gown was of silk lace, all in flakes, as if the fallen, pressed petals of black and faded-red poppies were netted together with gossamer about her. She was fifty-one, and he was fifty-two. It seemed impossible. He felt his love cling round her like her dress, like a garment of dead leaves. She was talking to a quiet woman about the suffrage. The other girl, tall, rather aloof, sat listening in her chair, with the posture of one who neither accepts nor rejects, but who allows things to go on around her, and will know what she thinks only when she must act. She seemed to be looking away into the night. A scent of honeysuckle came through the open door. Then a large grey moth blundered into the light.

It was very still, almost too silent, inside the room. Mrs. Renshaw's quiet, musical voice continued:

“But think of a case like Mrs. Mann's now. She is a clever woman. If she had slept in my cradle, and I in hers, she would have looked a greater lady than I do at this minute. But she married Mann, and she has seven children by him, and goes out charring. Her children she can never leave. So she must stay with a dirty, drunken brute like Mann. If she had an income of two pounds a week, she could say to him: ‘Sir, good-bye to you,’ and she would be well rid. But no, she is tied to him for ever.”

They were discussing the State-endowment of mothers. She and Mrs. Hankin were bitterly keen upon it. Elsa Laskell sat and accepted their talk as she did the scent of the honeysuckle or the blundering adventure of the moth round the silk: it came burdened, not with the meaning of the words, but with the feeling of the woman's heart as she spoke. Perhaps she heard a nightingale in the park outside — perhaps she did. And then this talk inside drifted also to the girl's heart, like a sort of inarticulate music. Then she was vaguely aware of the man sprawled in his homespun suit upon the lounge. He had not changed for dinner: he was called unconventional.

She knew he was old enough to be her father, and yet he looked young enough to be her lover. They all seemed young, the beautiful hostess, too, but with a meaningless youth that cannot ripen, like an unfertilised flower which lasts a long time. He was a man she classed as a Dane — with fair, almost sandy hair, blue eyes, long loose limbs, and a boyish activity. But he was fifty-two — and he lay looking out on the night, with one of his hands swollen from hanging so long inert, silent. The women bored him.

Elsa Laskell sat in a sort of dreamy state, and the feelings of her hostess, and the feeling of her host drifted like iridescence upon the quick of her soul, among the white touch of that moon out there, and the exotic heaviness of the honeysuckle, and the strange flapping of the moth. So still, it was, behind the murmur of talk: a silence of being. Of the third woman, Mrs Hankin, the girl had no sensibility. But the night and the moon, the moth, Will Renshaw and Edith Renshaw and herself were all in full being, a harmony.

To him it was six months after his marriage, and the sky was the same, and the honeysuckle in the air. He was living again his crisis, as we all must, fretting and fretting against our failure, till we have worn away the thread of our life. It was six months after his marriage, and they were down at the little bungalow on the bank of the Soar. They were comparatively poor, though her father was rich, and his was well-to-do. And they were alone in the little two-roomed bungalow that stood on its wild bank over the river, among the honeysuckle bushes. He had cooked the evening meal, they had eaten the omelette and drank the coffee, and all was settling into stillness.

He sat outside, by the remnants of the fire, looking at the country lying level and lustrous grey opposite him. Trees hung like vapour in a perfect calm under the moonlight. And that was the moon so perfectly naked and unfaltering, going her errand simply through the night. And that was the river faintly rustling. And there, down the darkness, he saw a flashing of activity white betwixt black twigs. It was the water mingling and thrilling with the moon. So! It made him quiver, and reminded him of the starlit rush of a hare. There was vividness then in all this lucid night, things flashing and quivering with being, almost as the soul quivers in the darkness of the eye. He could feel it. The night's great circle was the pupil of an eye, full of the mystery, and the unknown fire of life, that does not burn away, but flickers unquenchable.

So he rose, and went to look for his wife. She sat with her dark head bent into the light of a reading lamp, in the little hut. She wore a white dress, and he could see her shoulders' softness and curve through the lawn. Yet she did not look up when he moved. He stood in the doorway, knowing that she felt his presence. Yet she gave no sign.

“Will you come out?” he asked.

She looked up at him as if to find out what he wanted, and she was rather cold to him. But when he had repeated his request, she had risen slowly to acquiesce, and a tiny shiver had passed down her shoulders. So he unhung from its peg her beautiful Paisley shawl, with its tempered colours that looked as if they had faltered through the years and now were here in their essence, and put it round her. They sat again outside the little hut, under the moonlight. He held both her hands. They were heavy with rings. But one ring was his wedding ring. He had married her, and there was nothing more to own. He owned her, and the night was the pupil of her eye, in which was everything. He kissed her fingers, but she sat and made no sign. It was as he wished. He kissed her fingers again.

Then a corncrake began to call in the meadow across the river, a strange, dispassionate sound, that made him feel not quite satisfied, not quite sure. It was not all achieved. The moon, in her white and naked candour, was beyond him. He felt a little numbness, as one who has gloves on. He could not feel that clear, clean moon. There was something betwixt him and her, as if he had gloves on. Yet he ached for the clear touch, skin to skin — even of the moonlight. He wanted a further purity, a newer cleanness and nakedness. The corncrake cried too. And he watched the moon, and he watched her light on his hands. It was like a butterfly on his glove, that he could see, but not feel. And he wanted to unglove himself. Quite clear, quite, quite bare to the moon, the touch of everything, he wanted to be. And after all, his wife was everything — moon, vapour of trees, trickling water and drift of perfume — it was all his wife. The moon glistened on her finger-tips as he cherished them, and a flash came out of a diamond, among the darkness. So, even here in the quiet harmony, life was at a flash with itself.

“Come with me to the top of the red hill,” he said to his wife quietly.

“But why?” she asked.

“Do come.”

And dumbly she acquiesced, and her shawl hung gleaming above the white flash of her skirt. He wanted to hold her hand, but she was walking apart from him, in her long shawl. So he went to her side, humbly. And he was humble, but he felt it was great. He had looked into the whole of the night, as into the pupil of an eye. And now, he would come perfectly clear out of all his embarrassments of shame and darkness, clean as the moon who walked naked across the night, so that the whole night was as an effluence from her, the whole of it was hers, held in her effluence of moonlight, which was her perfect nakedness, uniting her to everything. Covering was barrier, like cloud across the moon.

The red hill was steep, but there was a tiny path from the bungalow, which he

had worn himself. And in the effort of climbing, he felt he was struggling nearer and nearer to himself. Always he looked half round, where, just behind him, she followed, in the lustrous obscurity of her shawl. Her steps came with a little effort up the steep hill, and he loved her feet, he wanted to kiss them as they strove upwards in the gloom. He put aside the twigs and branches. There was a strong scent of honeysuckle like a thick strand of gossamer over his mouth.

He knew a place on the ledge of the hill, on the lip of the cliff, where the trees stood back and left a little dancing-green, high up above the water, there in the midst of miles of moonlit, lonely country. He parted the boughs, sure as a fox that runs to its lair. And they stood together on this little dancing-green presented towards the moon, with the red cliff cumbered with bushes going down to the river below, and the haze of moon-dust on the meadows, and the trees behind them, and only the moon could look straight into the place he had chosen.

She stood always a little way behind him. He saw her face all compounded of shadows and moonlight, and he dared not kiss her yet.

“Will you,” he said, “will you take off your things and love me here?”

“I can’t,” she said.

He looked away to the moon. It was difficult to ask her again, yet it meant so much to him. There was not a sound in the night. He put his hand to his throat and began to unfasten his collar.

“Take off all your things and love me,” he pleaded.

For a moment she was silent.

“I can’t,” she said.

Mechanically, he had taken off his flannel collar and pushed it into his pocket. Then he stood on the edge of the land, looking down into all that gleam, as into the living pupil of an eye. He was bareheaded to the moon. Not a breath of air ruffled his bare throat. Still, in the dropping folds of her shawl, she stood, a thing of dusk and moonlight, a little back. He ached with the earnestness of his desire. All he wanted was to give himself, clean and clear, into this night, this time. Of which she was all, she was everything. He could go to her now, under the white candour of the moon, without shame or shadow, but in his completeness loving her completeness, without a stain, without a shadow between them such as even a flower could cast. For this he yearned as never in his life he could yearn more deeply.

“Do take me,” he said, gently parting the shawl on her breast. But she held it close, and her voice went hard.

“No — I can’t,” she said.

“Why?”

“I can’t — let us go back.”

He looked again over the countryside of dimness, saying in a low tone, his back towards her:

“But I love you — and I want you so much — like that, here and now. I’ll never ask you anything again,” he said quickly, passionately, as he turned to her. “Do this for me,” he said. “I’ll never trouble you for anything again. I promise.”

“I can’t,” she said stubbornly, with some hopelessness in her voice.

“Yes,” he said. “Yes. You trust me, don’t you?”

“I don’t want it. Not here — not now,” she said.

“Do,” he said. “Yes.”

“You can have me in the bungalow. Why do you want me here?” she asked.

“But I do. Have me, Edith. Have me now.”

“No,” she said, turning away. “I want to go down.”

“And you won’t?”

“No — I can’t.”

There was something like fear in her voice. They went down the hill together. And he did not know how he hated her, as if she had kept him out of the promised land that was justly his. He thought he was too generous to bear her a grudge. So he had always held himself deferential to her. And later that evening he had loved her. But she had hated it, it had been really his hate ravaging her. Why had he lied, calling it love? Ever since, it had seemed the same, more or less. So that he had ceased to come to her, gradually. For one night she had said: “I think a man’s body is ugly — all in parts with mechanical joints.” And now he had scarcely had her for some years. For she thought him an ugliness. And there were no children.

Now that everything was essentially over for both of them, they lived on the surface, and had good times. He drove to all kinds of unexpected places in his motor-car, bathed where he liked, said what he liked, and did what he liked. But nobody minded very much his often aggressive unconventionality. It was only fencing with the foils. There was no danger in his thrusts. He was a castrated bear. So he prided himself on being a bear, on being known as an uncouth bear.

It was not often he lay and let himself drift. But always when he did, he held it against her that on the night when they climbed the red bank, she refused to have him. There were perhaps many things he might have held against her, but this was the only one that remained: his real charge against her on the Judgment Day. Why had she done it? It had been, he might almost say, a holy desire on his part. It had been almost like taking off his shoes before God. Yet she refused him, she who was his religion to him. Perhaps she had been afraid, she who was so good — afraid of the big righteousness of it — as if she could not trust herself so near the Burning Bush, dared not go near for transfiguration, afraid of herself.

It was a thought he could not bear. Rising softly, because she was still talking, he went out into the night.

Elsa Laskell stirred uneasily in her chair. Mrs. Renshaw went on talking like a somnambule, not because she really had anything to say about the State-endowment of mothers, but because she had a weight on her heart that she wanted to talk away. The girl heard, and lifted her hand, and stirred her fingers uneasily in the dark-purple porphyry bowl, where pink rose-leaves and crimson, thrown this morning from the stem, lay gently shrivelling. There came a slight acrid scent of new rose-petals. And still the girl lifted her long white fingers among the red and pink in the dark bowl, as if they stirred in blood.

And she felt the nights behind like a purple bowl into which the woman's heart-beats were shed, like rose-leaves fallen and left to wither and go brown. For Mrs. Renshaw had waited for him. During happy days of stillness and blueness she had moved, while the sunshine glancing through her blood made flowers in her heart, like blossoms underground thrilling with expectancy, lovely fragrant things that would have delight to appear. And all day long she had gone secretly and quietly saying, saying: "To-night — to-night they will blossom for him. To-night I shall be a bed of blossom for him, all narcissi and fresh fragrant things shaking for joy, when he comes with his deeper sunshine, when he turns the darkness like mould, and brings them forth with his sunshine for spade. Yea, there are two suns; him in the sky and that other, warmer one whose beams are our radiant bodies. He is a sun to me, shining full on my heart when he comes, and everything stirs." But he had come like a bitter morning. He had never bared the sun of himself to her — a sullen day he had been on her heart, covered with cloud impenetrable. She had waited so heavy anxious, with such a wealth of possibility. And he in his blindness had never known. He could never let the real rays of his love through the cloud of fear and mistrust. For once she had denied him. And all her flowers had been shed inwards so that her heart was like a heap of leaves, brown, withered, almost scentless petals that had never given joy to anyone. And yet again she had come to him pregnant with beauty and love, but he had been afraid. When she lifted her eyes to him, he had looked aside. The kisses she needed like warm raindrops he dared not give, till she was parched and gone hard, and did not want them. Then he gave kisses enough. But he never trusted himself. When she was open and eager to him, he was afraid. When she was shut, it was like playing at pride, to pull her petals apart, a game that gave him pleasure.

So they had been mutually afraid of each other, but he most often. Whenever she had needed him at some mystery of love, he had overturned her censers and her sacraments, and made profane love in her sacred place. Which was why, at

last, she had hated his body; but perhaps she had hated it at first, or feared it so much that it was hate.

And he had said to her: “If we don’t have children, you might have them by another man — ” which was surely one of the cruellest things a woman ever heard from her husband. For so little was she his, that he would give her a caller and not mind. This was all the wife she was to him. He was a free and easy man, and brought home to dinner any man who pleased him, from a beggar upwards. And his wife was to be as public as his board.

Nay, to the very bowl of her heart, any man might put his lips and he would not mind. And so, she sadly set down the bowl from between her two hands of offering, and went always empty, and aloof.

Yet they were married, they were good friends. It was said they were the most friendly married couple in the county. And this was it. And all the while, like a scent, the bitter psalm of the woman filled the room.

“Like a garden in winter, I was full of bulbs and roots, I was full of little flowers, all conceived inside me.

“And they were all shed away unborn, little abortions of flowers.

“Every day I went like a bee gathering honey from the sky and among the stars I rummaged for yellow honey, filling it in my comb.

“Then I broke the comb, and put it to your lips. But you turned your mouth aside and said: ‘You have made my face unclean, and smeared my mouth.’

“And week after week my body was a vineyard, my veins were vines. And as the grapes, the purple drops grew full and sweet, I crushed them in a bowl, I treasured the wine.

“Then when the bowl was full I came with joy to you. But you in fear started away, and the bowl was thrown from my hands, and broke in pieces at my feet.

“Many times, and many times, I said: ‘The hour is striking,’ but he answered: ‘Not yet.’

“Many times and many times he has heard the cock crow, and gone out and wept, he knew not why.

“I was a garden and he ran in me as in the grass.

“I was a stream, and he threw his waste in me.

“I held the rainbow balanced on my outspread hands, and he said: ‘You open your hands and give me nothing.’

“What am I now but a bowl of withered leaves, but a kaleidoscope of broken beauties, but an empty bee-hive, yea, a rich garment rusted that no one has worn, a dumb singer, with the voice of a nightingale yet making discord.

“And it was over with me, and my hour is gone. And soon like a barren sea-shell on the strand, I shall be crushed underfoot to dust.

“But meanwhile I sing to those that listen with their ear against me, of the sea that gave me form and being, the everlasting sea, and in my song is nothing but bitterness, for of the fluid life of the sea I have no more, but I am to be dust, that powdery stuff the sea knows not. I am to be dead, who was born of life, silent who was made a mouth, formless who was all of beauty. Yea, I was a seed that held the heavens lapped up in bud, with a whirl of stars and a steady moon.

“And the seed is crushed that never sprouted, there is a heaven lost, and stars and a moon that never came forth.

“I was a bud that never was discovered, and in my shut chalice, skies and lake water and brooks lie crumbling, and stars and the sun are smeared out, and birds are a little powdery dust, and their singing is dry air, and I am a dark chalice.”

And the girl, hearing the hostess talk, still talk, and yet her voice like the sound of a sea-shell whispering hoarsely of despair, rose and went out into the garden, timidly, beginning to cry. For what should she do for herself?

Renshaw, leaning on the wicket that led to the paddock, called:

“Come on, don’t be alarmed — Pan is dead.”

And then she bit back her tears. For when he said, “Pan is dead,” he meant Pan was dead in his own long, loose Dane’s body. Yet she was a nymph still, and if Pan were dead, she ought to die. So with tears she went up to him.

“It’s all right out here,” he said. “By Jove, when you see a night like this, how can you say that life’s tragedy — or death either, for that matter?”

“What is it then?” she asked.

“Nay, that’s one too many — a joke, eh?”

“I think,” she said, “one has no business to be irreverent.”

“Who?” he asked.

“You,” she said, “and me, and all of us.”

Then he leaned on the wicket, thinking till he laughed.

“Life’s a real good thing,” he said.

“But why protest it?” she answered.

And again he was silent.

“If the moon came nearer and nearer,” she said, “and were a naked woman, what would you do?”

“Fetch a wrap, probably,” he said.

“Yes — you would do that,” she answered.

“And if he were a man, ditto?” he teased.

“If a star came nearer and were a naked man, I should look at him.”

“That is surely very improper,” he mocked, with still a tinge of yearning.

“If he were a star come near — ” she answered.

Again he was silent.

“You are a queer fish of a girl,” he said.

They stood at the gate, facing the silver-grey paddock. Presently their hostess came out, a long shawl hanging from her shoulders.

“So you are here,” she said. “Were you bored?”

“I was,” he replied amiably. “But there, you know I always am.”

“And I forgot,” replied the girl.

“What were you talking about?” asked Mrs. Renshaw, simply curious. She was not afraid of her husband’s running loose.

“We were just saying ‘Pan is dead’,” said the girl.

“Isn’t that rather trite?” asked the hostess.

“Some of us miss him fearfully,” said the girl.

“For what reason?” asked Mrs. Renshaw.

“Those of us who are nymphs — just lost nymphs among farm-lands and suburbs. I wish Pan were alive.”

“Did he die of old age?” mocked the hostess.

“Don’t they say, when Christ was born, a voice was heard in the air saying: ‘Pan is dead.’ I wish Christ needn’t have killed Pan.”

“I wonder how He managed it,” said Renshaw.

“By disapproving of him, I suppose,” replied his wife. And her retort cut herself, and gave her a sort of fakir pleasure.

“The men are all women now,” she said, “since the fauns died in a frost one night.”

“A frost of disapproval,” said the girl.

“A frost of fear,” said Renshaw.

There was a silence.

“Why was Christ afraid of Pan?” said the girl suddenly.

“Why was Pan so much afraid of Christ that he died?” asked Mrs. Renshaw bitterly.

“And all his fauns in a frost one night,” mocked Renshaw. Then a light dawned on him. “Christ was woman and Pan was man,” he said. It gave him a real joy to say this bitterly, keenly — a thrust into himself, and into his wife. “But the fauns and satyrs are there — you have only to remove the surplices that all men wear nowadays.”

“Nay,” said Mrs. Renshaw, “it is not true — the surplices have grown into their limbs, like Hercules’s garment.”

“That his wife put on him,” said Renshaw.

“Because she was afraid of him — not because she loved him,” said the girl.

“She imagined that all her lonely wasted hours wove him a robe of love,” said Mrs. Renshaw. “It was to her horror she was mistaken. You can’t weave love out

of waste.”

“When I meet a man,” said the girl, “I shall look down the pupil of his eye, for a faun. And after a while it will come, skipping — ”

“Perhaps a satyr,” said Mrs. Renshaw bitterly.

“No,” said the girl, “because satyrs are old, and I have seen some fearfully young men.”

“Will is young even now — quite a boy,” said his wife.

“Oh no!” cried the girl. “He says that neither life nor death is a tragedy. Only somebody very old could say that.”

There was a tension in the night. The man felt something give way inside him.

“Yes, Edith,” he said, with a quiet, bitter joy of cruelty, “I am old.”

The wife was frightened.

“You are always preposterous,” she said quickly, crying inside herself. She knew she herself had been never young.

“I shall look in the eyes of my man for the faun,” the girl continued in a sing-song, “and I shall find him. Then I shall pretend to run away from him. And both our surplices, and all the crucifix, will be outside the wood. Inside nymph and faun, Pan and his satyrs — ah, yes: for Christ and the Cross is only for day-time, and bargaining. Christ came to make us deal honourably.

“But love is no deal, nor merchant’s bargaining, and Christ neither spoke of it nor forbade it. He was afraid of it. If once His faun, the faun of the young Jesus had run free, seen one white nymph’s brief breast, He would not have been content to die on a Cross — and then the men would have gone on cheating the women in life’s business, all the time. Christ made one bargain in mankind’s business — and He made it for the women’s sake — I suppose for His mother’s, since He was fatherless. And Christ made a bargain for me, and I shall avail myself of it. I won’t be cheated by my man. When between my still hands I weave silk out of the air, like a cocoon, He shall not take it to pelt me with. He shall draw it forth and weave it up. For I want to finger the sunshine I have drawn through my body, stroke it, and have joy of the fabric.

“And when I run wild on the hills, with Dionysus, and shall come home like a bee that has rolled in floury crocuses, he must see the wonder on me, and make bread of it.

“And when I say to him, ‘It is harvest in my soul’, he shall look in my eyes and lower his nets where the shoal moves in a throng in the dark, and lift out the living blue silver for me to see, and know, and taste.

“All this, my faun in commerce, my faun at traffic with me.

“And if he cheat me, he must take his chance.

“But I will not cheat him, in his hour, when he runs like a faun after me. I

shall flee, but only to be overtaken. I shall flee, but never out of the wood to the crucifix. For that is to deny I am a nymph; since how can a nymph cling at the crucifix? Nay, the cross is the sign I have on my money, for honesty.

“In the morning, when we come out of the wood, I shall say to him: ‘Touch the cross, and prove you will deal fairly,’ and if he will not, I will set the dogs of anger and judgment on him, and they shall chase him. But if, perchance, some night he contrive to crawl back into the wood, beyond the crucifix, he will be faun and I nymph, and I shall have no knowledge what happened outside, in the realm of the crucifix. But in the morning, I shall say: ‘Touch the cross, and prove you will deal fairly.’ And being renewed, he will touch the cross.

“Many a dead faun I have seen, like dead rabbits poisoned lying about the paths, and many a dead nymph, like swans that could not fly and the dogs destroyed.

“But I am a nymph and a woman, and Pan is for me, and Christ is for me.

“For Christ I cover myself in my robe, and weep, and vow my vow of honesty.

“For Pan I throw my coverings down and run headlong through the leaves, because of the joy of running.

“And Pan will give me my children and joy, and Christ will give me my pride.

“And Pan will give me my man, and Christ my husband.

“To Pan I am nymph, to Christ I am woman.

“And Pan is in the darkness, and Christ in the pale light.

“And night shall never be day, and day shall never be night.

“But side by side they shall go, day and night, night and day, for ever apart, for ever together.

“Pan and Christ, Christ and Pan.

“Both moving over me, so when in the sunshine I go in my robes among my neighbours, I am a Christian. But when I run robeless through the dark-scented woods alone, I am Pan’s nymph.

“Now I must go, for I want to run away. Not run away from myself, but to myself.

“For neither am I a lamp that stands in the way in the sunshine.

“Now am I a sundial foolish at night.

“I am myself, running through light and shadow for ever, a nymph and a Christian; I, not two things, but an apple with a gold side and a red, a freckled deer, a stream that tinkles and a pool where light is drowned; I, no fragment, no half-thing like the day, but a blackbird with a white breast and underwings, a peewit, a wild thing, beyond understanding.”

“I wonder if we shall hear the nightingale to-night,” said Mrs. Renshaw.

“He’s a gurgling fowl — I’d rather hear a linnet,” said Renshaw. “Come a

drive with me to-morrow, Miss Laskell.”

And the three went walking back to the house. And Elsa Laskell was glad to get away from them.

THE BORDER LINE

Katherine Farquhar was a handsome woman of forty, no longer slim, but attractive in her soft, full, feminine way. The French porters ran round her, getting a voluptuous pleasure from merely carrying her bags. And she gave them ridiculously high tips, because, in the first place, she had never really known the value of money, and secondly, she had a morbid fear of underpaying anyone, but particularly a man who was eager to serve her.

It was really a joke to her, how eagerly these Frenchmen — all sorts of Frenchmen — ran round her and *Madamed* her. Their voluptuous obsequiousness. Because, after all, she was Boche. Fifteen years of marriage to an Englishman — or rather to two Englishmen — had not altered her racially. Daughter of a German Baron she was, and remained, in her own mind and body, although England had become her life-home. And surely she looked German, with her fresh complexion and her strong, full figure. But like most people in the world, she was a mixture, with Russian blood and French blood also in her veins. And she had lived in one country and another, till she was somewhat indifferent to her surroundings. So that perhaps the Parisian men might be excused for running round her so eagerly, and getting a voluptuous pleasure from calling a taxi for her, or giving up a place in the omnibus to her, or carrying her bags, or holding the menu card before her. Nevertheless, it amused her. And she had to confess she liked them, these Parisians. They had their own kind of manliness, even if it wasn't an English sort; and if a woman looked pleasant and soft-fleshed, and a wee bit helpless, they were ardent and generous. Katherine understood so well that Frenchmen were rude to the dry, hard-seeming, competent Englishwoman or American. She sympathized with the Frenchman's point of view: too much obvious capacity to help herself is a disagreeable trait in a woman.

At the Gare de l'Est, of course, everybody was expected to be Boche, and it was almost a convention, with the porters, to assume a certain small-boyish superciliousness. Nevertheless, there was the same voluptuous scramble to escort Katherine Farquhar to her seat in the first-class carriage. *Madame* was travelling alone.

She was going to Germany via Strasburg, meeting her sister in Baden-Baden. Philip, her husband, was in Germany collecting some sort of evidence for his newspaper. Katherine felt a little weary of newspapers, and of the sort of

“evidence” that is extracted out of nowhere to feed them. However, Philip was quite clever, he was a little somebody in the world.

Her world, she had realized, consisted almost entirely of little somebodies. She was outside the sphere of the nobodies, always had been. And the Somebodies with a capital S, were all safely dead. She knew enough of the world to-day to know that it is not going to put up with any great Somebody: but many little nobodies and a sufficient number of little somebodies. Which, after all, is as it should be, she felt.

Sometimes she had vague misgivings.

Paris, for example, with its Louvre and its Luxembourg and its cathedral, seemed intended for Somebody. In a ghostly way it called for some supreme Somebody. But all its little men, nobodies and somebodies, were as sparrows twittering for crumbs, and dropping their little droppings on the palace cornices.

To Katherine, Paris brought back again her first husband, Alan Anstruther, that red-haired fighting Celt, father of her two grown-up children. Alan had had a weird innate conviction that he was beyond ordinary judgment. Katherine could never quite see where it came in. Son of a Scottish baronet, and captain in a Highland regiment did not seem to her stupendous. As for Alan himself, he was handsome in uniform, with his kilt swinging and his blue eye glaring. Even stark naked and without any trimmings, he had a bony, dauntless, overbearing manliness of his own. The one thing Katherine could *not quite* appreciate was his silent, indomitable assumption that he was actually firstborn, a born lord. He was a clever man too, ready to assume that General This or Colonel That might really be his superior. Until he actually came into contact with General This or Colonel That. Whereupon his overweening blue eye arched in his bony face, and a faint tinge of contempt infused itself into his homage.

Lordly or not, he wasn't much of a success in the worldly sense. Katherine had loved him, and he had loved her: that was indisputable. But when it came to innate conviction of lordliness, it was a question which of them was worse. For she, in her amiable, queen-bee self thought that ultimately hers was the right to the last homage.

Alan had been too unyielding and haughty to say much. But sometimes he would stand and look at her in silent rage, wonder, and indignation. The wondering indignation had been *almost* too much for her. What did the man think he was?

He was one of the hard, clever Scotsmen, with a philosophic tendency, but without sentimentality. His contempt of Nietzsche, whom she adored, was intolerable. Alan just asserted himself like a pillar of rock, and expected the tides of the modern world to recede around him. They didn't.

So he concerned himself with astronomy, gazing through a telescope and watching the worlds beyond worlds. Which seemed to give him relief.

After ten years, they had ceased to live together, passionate as they both were. They were too proud and unforgiving to yield to one another, and much too haughty to yield to any outsider.

Alan had a friend, Philip, also a Scotsman, and a university friend. Philip, trained for the bar, had gone into journalism, and had made himself a name. He was a little black Highlander, of the insidious sort, clever, and *knowing*. This look of knowing in his dark eyes, and the feeling of secrecy that went with his dark little body, made him interesting to women. Another thing he could do was to give off a great sense of warmth and offering, like a dog when it loves you. He seemed to be able to do this at will. And Katherine, after feeling cool about him and rather despising him for years, at last fell under the spell of the dark, insidious fellow.

“You!” she said to Alan, whose overweening masterfulness drove her wild. “You don’t even know that a woman exists. And that’s where Philip Farquhar is more than you are. He *does* know something of what a woman *is*.”

“Bah! the little — — ” said Alan, using an obscene word of contempt.

Nevertheless, the friendship endured, kept up by Philip, who had an almost uncanny love for Alan. Alan was mostly indifferent. But he was used to Philip, and habit meant a great deal to him.

“Alan really is an amazing man!” Philip would say to Katherine. “He is the only real man, what I call a real man, that I have ever met.”

“But why is he the only real man?” she asked. “Don’t you call *yourself* a real man?”

“Oh, *I* — I’m different! My strength lies in giving in — and then recovering myself. I do let myself be swept away. But so far, I’ve always managed to get myself back again. Alan — ” and Philip even had a half-reverential, half-envious way of uttering the word — ”Alan *never* lets himself be swept away. And he’s the only man I know who doesn’t.”

“Yah!” she said. “He is fooled by plenty of things. You can fool him through his vanity.”

“No,” said Philip. “Never altogether. You *can’t* deceive him right through. When a thing really touches Alan, it is tested once and for all. You know if it’s false or not. He’s the only man I ever met who *can’t help* being real.”

“Ha! You overrate his reality,” said Katherine, rather scornfully.

And later, when Alan shrugged his shoulders with that mere indifferent tolerance, at the mention of Philip, she got angry.

“You are a poor friend,” she said.

“Friend!” he answered. “I never was Farquhar’s friend! If he asserts that he’s mine, that’s his side of the question. I never positively cared for the man. He’s too much over the wrong side of the border for me.”

“Then,” she answered, “you’ve no business to let him *consider* he is your friend. You’ve no right to let him think so much of you. You should tell him you don’t like him.”

“I’ve told him a dozen times. He seems to enjoy it. It seems part of his game.”

And he went away to his astronomy.

Came the war, and the departure of Alan’s regiment for France.

“There!” he said. “Now you have to pay the penalty of having married a soldier. You find him fighting your own people. So it is.”

She was too much struck by this blow even to weep.

“Good-bye!” he said, kissing her gently, lingeringly. After all, he had been a husband to her.

And as he looked back at her, with the gentle, protective husband-knowledge in his blue eyes, and at the same time that other quiet realization of destiny, her consciousness fluttered into incoherence. She only wanted to alter everything, to alter the past, to alter all the flow of history — the terrible flow of history. Secretly somewhere inside herself she felt that with her queen-bee love, and queen-bee will, she *could* divert the whole flow of history — nay, even reverse it.

But in the remote, realizing look that lay at the back of his eyes, back of all his changeless husband-care, she saw that it could never be so. That the whole of her womanly, motherly concentration could never put back the great flow of human destiny. That, as he said, only the cold strength of a man, accepting the destiny of destruction, could see the human flow through the chaos and beyond to a new outlet. But the chaos first, and the long rage of destruction.

For an instant her will broke. Almost her soul seemed broken. And then he was gone. And as soon as he was gone she recovered the core of her assurance.

Philip was a great consolation to her. He asserted that the war was monstrous, that it should never have been, and that men should refuse to consider it as anything but a colossal, disgraceful accident.

She, in her German soul, knew that it was no accident. It was inevitable, and even necessary. But Philip’s attitude soothed her enormously, restored her to herself.

Alan never came back. In the spring of 1915 he was missing. She had never mourned for him. She had never really considered him dead. In a certain sense she had triumphed. The queen-bee had recovered her sway, as queen of the earth; the woman, the mother, the female with the ear of corn in her hand, as

against the man with the sword.

Philip had gone through the war as a journalist, always throwing his weight on the side of humanity, and human truth and peace. He had been an inexpressible consolation. And in 1921 she had married him.

The thread of fate might be spun, it might even be measured out, but the hand of Lachesis had been stayed from cutting it through.

At first it was wonderfully pleasant and restful and voluptuous, especially for a woman of thirty-eight, to be married to Philip. Katherine felt he caressed her senses, and soothed her, and gave her what she wanted.

Then, gradually, a curious sense of degradation started in her spirit. She felt unsure, uncertain. It was almost like having a disease. Life became dull and unreal to her, as it had never been before. She did not even struggle and suffer. In the numbness of her flesh she could feel no reactions. Everything was turning into mud.

Then again, she would recover, and *enjoy* herself wonderfully. And after a while, the suffocating sense of nullity and degradation once more. Why, why, why did she feel degraded, in her secret soul? *Never*, of course, outwardly.

The memory of Alan came back into her. She still thought of him and his relentlessness with an arrested heart, but without the angry hostility she used to feel. A little awe of him, of his memory, stole back into her spirit. She resisted it. She was not used to feeling awe.

She realized, however, the difference between being married to a soldier, a ceaseless born fighter, a sword not to be sheathed, and this other man, this cunning civilian, this subtle equivocator, this adjuster of the scales of truth.

Philip was cleverer than she was. He set her up, the queen-bee, the mother, the woman, the female judgment, and he served her with subtle, cunning homage. He put the scales, the balance in her hand. But also, cunningly, he blindfolded her, and manipulated the scales when she was sightless.

Dimly she realized all this. But only dimly, confusedly, because she was blindfolded. Philip had the subtle, fawning power that could keep her always blindfolded.

Sometimes she gasped and gasped from her oppressed lungs. And sometimes the bony, hard, masterful, but honest face of Alan would come back, and suddenly it would seem to her that she was all right again, that the strange, voluptuous suffocation, which left her soul in mud, was gone, and she could breathe air of the open heavens once more. Even fighting air.

It came to her on the boat crossing the Channel. Suddenly she seemed to feel Alan at her side again, as if Philip had never existed. As if Philip had never meant anything more to her than the shop-assistant measuring off her orders.

And, escaping, as it were, by herself across the cold, wintry Channel, she suddenly deluded herself into feeling as if Philip had never existed, only Alan had ever been her husband. He was her husband still. And she was going to meet him.

This gave her her blitheness in Paris, and made the Frenchman so nice to her. For the Latins love to feel a woman is really enveloped in the spell of some man. Beyond all race is the problem of man and woman.

Katherine now sat dimly, vaguely excited and almost happy in the railway-carriage on the Est railroad. It was like the old days when she was going home to Germany. Or even more like the old days when she was coming back to Alan. Because, in the past, when he was her husband, feel as she might towards him, she could never get over the sensation that the wheels of the railway-carriage had wings, when they were taking her back to him. Even when she knew that he was going to be awful to her, hard and relentless and destructive, still the motion went on wings.

Whereas towards Philip she moved with a strange, disintegrating reluctance. She decided not to think of him.

As she looked unseeing out of the carriage window, suddenly, with a jolt, the wintry landscape realized itself in her consciousness. The flat, grey, wintry landscape, ploughed fields of greyish earth that looked as if they were compound of the clay of dead men. Pallid, stark, thin trees stood like wire beside straight, abstract roads. A ruined farm between a few more wire trees. And a dismal village filed past, with smashed houses like rotten teeth between the straight rows of the village street.

With sudden horror she realized that she must be in the Marne country, the ghastly Marne country, century after century digging the corpses of frustrated men into its soil. The border country, where the Latin races and the Germanic neutralize one another into horrid ash.

Perhaps even the corpse of her own man among that grey clay.

It was too much for her. She sat ashy herself with horror, wanting to escape.

“If I had only known,” she said. “If only I had known, I would have gone by Basle.”

The train drew up at Soissons; name ghastly to her. She simply tried to make herself unreceptive to everything. And mercifully luncheon was served, she went down to the restaurant car, and sat opposite to a little French officer in horizon-blue uniform, who suggested anything but war. He looked so naïve, rather childlike and nice, with the certain innocence that so many French people preserve under their so-called wickedness, that she felt really relieved. He bowed to her with an odd, shy little bow when she returned him his half-bottle of red

wine, which had slowly jiggled its way the length of the table, owing to the motion of the train. How nice he was! And how he would give himself to a woman, if she would only find real pleasure in the male that he was.

Nevertheless, she herself felt very remote from this business of male and female, and giving and taking.

After luncheon, in the heat of the train and the flush of her half-bottle of white wine, she went to sleep again, her feet grilling uncomfortably on the iron plate of the carriage floor. And as she slept, life, as she had known it, seemed all to turn artificial to her, the sunshine of the world an artificial light, with smoke above, like the light of torches, and things artificially growing, in a night that was lit up artificially with such intensity that it gave the illusion of day. It had been an illusion, her life-day, as a ballroom evening is an illusion. Her love and her emotions, her very panic of love, had been an illusion. She realized how love had become panic-stricken inside her, during the war.

And now even this panic of love was an illusion. She had run to Philip to be saved. And now, both her panic-love and Philip's salvation were an illusion.

What remained then? Even panic-stricken love, the intensest thing, perhaps, she had ever felt, was only an illusion. What was left? The grey shadows of death?

When she looked out again it was growing dark, and they were at Nancy. She used to know this country as a girl. At half-past seven she was in Strasburg, where she must stay the night as there was no train over the Rhine till morning.

The porter, a blond, hefty fellow, addressed her at once in Alsatian German. He insisted on escorting her safely to her hotel — a German hotel — keeping guard over her like an appointed sentinel, very faithful and competent, so different from Frenchmen.

It was a cold, wintry night, but she wanted to go out after dinner to see the minster. She remembered it all so well, in that other life.

The wind blew icily in the street. The town seemed empty, as if its spirit had left it. The few squat, hefty foot-passengers were all talking the harsh Alsatian German. Shop-signs were in French, often with a little concession to German underneath. And the shops were full of goods, glutted with goods from the once-German factories of Mulhausen and other cities.

She crossed the night-dark river, where the washhouses of the washerwomen were anchored along the stream, a few odd women still kneeling over the water's edge, in the dim electric light, rinsing their clothes in the grim, cold water. In the big square the icy wind was blowing, and the place seemed a desert. A city once more conquered.

After all she could not remember her way to the cathedral. She saw a French

policeman in his blue cape and peaked cap, looking a lonely, vulnerable, silky specimen in this harsh Alsatian city. Crossing over to him she asked him in French where was the cathedral.

He pointed out to her, the first turning on the left. He did not seem hostile: nobody seemed really hostile. Only the great frozen weariness of winter in a conquered city, on a weary everlasting border-line.

And the Frenchmen seemed far more weary, and also, more sensitive than the crude Alsations.

She remembered the little street, the old, overhanging houses with black timbers and high gables. And like a great ghost, a reddish flush in its darkness, the uncanny cathedral breasting the oncomer, standing gigantic, looking down in darkness out of darkness, on the pigmy humanness of the city. It was built of reddish stone, that had a flush in the night, like dark flesh. And vast, an incomprehensibly tall, strange thing, it looked down out of the night. The great rose window, poised high, seemed like the breast of the vast Thing, and prisms and needles of stone shot up, as if it were plumage, dimly, half-visible in heaven.

There it was, in the upper darkness of the ponderous winter night, like a menace. She remembered, her spirit used in the past to soar aloft with it. But now, looming with a faint rust of blood out of the upper black heavens, the Thing stood suspended, looking down with vast, demonish menace, calm and implacable.

Mystery and dim, ancient fear came over the woman's soul. The cathedral looked so strange and demonish-heathen. And an ancient, indomitable blood seemed to stir in it. It stood there like some vast silent beast with teeth of stone, waiting, and wondering when to stoop against this pallid humanity.

And dimly she realized that behind all the ashy pallor and sulphur of our civilization, lurks the great blood-creature waiting, implacable and eternal, ready at last to crush our white brittleness and let the shadowy blood move erect once more, in a new implacable pride and strength. Even out of the lower heavens looms the great blood-dusky Thing, blotting out the Cross it was supposed to exalt.

The scroll of the night sky seemed to roll back, showing a huge, blood-dusky presence looming enormous, stooping, looking down, awaiting its moment.

As she turned to go away, to move away from the closed wings of the minster, she noticed a man standing on the pavement, in the direction of the post-office, which functions obscurely in the Cathedral Square. Immediately, she knew that that man, standing dark and motionless, was Alan. He was alone, motionless, remote.

He did not move towards her. She hesitated, then went in his direction, as if

going to the post-office. He stood perfectly motionless, and her heart died as she drew near. Then, as she passed, he turned suddenly, looking down on her.

It was he, though she could hardly see his face, it was so dark, with a dusky glow in the shadow.

“Alan!” she said.

He did not speak, but laid his hand detainingly on her arm, as he used in the early days, with strange silent authority. And turning her with a faint pressure on her arm, he went along with her, leisurely, through the main street of the city, under the arcade where the shops were still lighted up.

She glanced at his face: it seemed much more dusky, and duskily ruddy, than she had known him. He was a stranger: and yet it was he, no other. He said nothing at all. But that was also in keeping. His mouth was closed, his watchful eyes seemed changeless, and there was a shadow of silence around him, impenetrable, but not cold. Rather aloof and gentle, like the silence that surrounds a wild animal.

She knew that she was walking with his spirit. But that even did not trouble her. It seemed natural. And there came over her again the feeling she had forgotten, the restful, thoughtless pleasure of a woman who moves in the aura of the man to whom she belongs. As a young woman she had had this unremarkable, yet very precious feeling, when she was with her husband. It had been a full contentment; and perhaps the fullness of it had made her unconscious of it. Later, it seemed to her she had almost wilfully destroyed it, this soft flow of contentment which she, a woman, had from him as a man.

Now, afterwards, she realized it. And as she walked at his side through the conquered city, she realized that it was the one enduring thing a woman can have, the intangible soft flood of contentment that carries her along at the side of the man she is married to. It is her perfection and her highest attainment.

Now, in the afterwards, she knew it. Now the strife was gone. And dimly she wondered why, why, why she had ever fought against it. No matter what the man does or is, as a person, if a woman can move at his side in this dim, full flood of contentment, she has the highest of him, and her scratching efforts at getting more than this, are her ignominious efforts at self-nullity.

Now, she knew it, and she submitted. Now that she was walking with a man who came from the halls of death, to her, for her relief. The strong, silent kindness of him towards her, even now, was able to wipe out the ashy, nervous horror of the world from her body. She went at his side still and released, like one newly unbound, walking in the dimness of her own contentment.

At the bridge-head he came to a standstill, and drew his hand from her arm. She knew he was going to leave her. But he looked at her from under his peaked

cap, darkly but kindly, and he waved his hand with a slight, kindly gesture of farewell and of promise, as if in the farewell he promised never to leave her, never to let the kindness go out in his heart, to let it stay hers always.

She hurried over the bridge with tears running down her cheeks, and on to her hotel. Hastily she climbed to her room. And as she undressed, she avoided the sight of her own face in the mirror. She must not rupture the spell of his presence.

Now, in the afterwards she realized *how* careful she must be, not to break the mystery that enveloped her. Now that she knew he had come back to her from the dead, she was aware how precious and how fragile the coming was. He had come back with his heart dark and kind, wanting her even in the afterwards. And not in any sense must she go against him. The warm, powerful, silent ghost had come back to her. It was he. She must not even try to think about him definitely, not to realize him or to understand. Only in her own woman's soul could she silently ponder him, darkly, and know him present in her, without ever staring at him or trying to find him out. Once she tried to lay hands on him, to *have* him, to *realize* him, he would be gone for ever, and gone for ever this last precious flood of her woman's peace.

"Ah, no!" she said to herself. "If he leaves his peace with me, I must ask no questions whatsoever."

And she repented, silently, of the way she had questioned and demanded answers, in the past. What were the answers, when she had got them? Terrible ash in the mouth.

She now knew the supreme modern terror, of a world all ashy and nerve-dead. If a man could come back out of death to save her from this, she would not ask questions of him, but be humble, and beyond tears grateful.

In the morning, she went out into the icy wind, under the grey sky, to see if he would be there again. Not that she *needed* him: his presence was still about her. But he might be waiting.

The town was stony and cold. The people looked pale, chilled through, and doomed in some way. Very far from her they were. She felt a sort of pity for them, but knew she could do nothing, nothing in time or eternity. And they looked at her, and looked quickly away again, as if they were uneasy in themselves.

The cathedral reared its great reddish-grey façade in the stark light; but it did not loom as in the night. The cathedral square was hard and cold. Inside, the church was cold and repellent, in spite of the glow of stained glass. And he was nowhere to be found.

So she hastened away to her hotel and to the station, to catch the 10.30 train

into Germany.

It was a lonely, dismal train, with a few forlorn souls waiting to cross the Rhine. Her Alsatian porter looked after her with the same dogged care as before. She got into the first-class carriage that was going through to Prague — she was the only passenger travelling first. A real French porter, in blouse and moustache, and swagger, tried to say something a bit jeering to her, in his few words of German. But she only looked at him, and he subsided. He didn't really want to be rude. There was a certain hopelessness even about that.

The train crept slowly, disheartened, out of town. She saw the weird humped-up creature of the cathedral in the distance, pointing its one finger above the city. Why, oh, why, had the old Germanic races put it there, like that!

Slowly the country disintegrated into the Rhine flats and marshes, the canals, the willow trees, the overflow streams, the wet places frozen but not flooded. Weary the place all seemed. And old Father Rhine flowing in greenish volume, implacable, separating the races now weary of race struggle, but locked in the toils as in the coils of a great snake, unable to escape. Cold, full, green, and utterly disheartening the river came along under the wintry sky, passing beneath the bridge of iron.

There was a long wait in Kehl, where the German officials and the French observed a numb, dreary kind of neutrality. Passport and customs examination was soon over. But the train waited and waited, as if unable to get away from that one point of pure negation, where the two races neutralized one another, and no polarity was felt, no life — no principle dominated.

Katherine Farquhar just sat still, in the suspended silence of her husband's return. She heeded neither French nor German, spoke one language or the other at need, hardly knowing. She waited, while the hot train steamed and hissed, arrested at the perfect neutral point of the new border line, just across the Rhine.

And at last a little sun came out, and the train silently drew away, nervously, from the neutrality.

In the great flat field, of the Rhine plain, the shallow flood water was frozen, the furrows ran straight towards nowhere, the air seemed frozen too, but the earth felt strong and barbaric, it seemed to vibrate, with its straight furrows, in a deep, savage undertone. There was the frozen, savage thrill in the air also, something wild and unsubdued, pre-Roman.

This part of the Rhine valley, even on the right bank in Germany, was occupied by the French; hence the curious vacancy, the suspense, as if no men lived there, but some spirit was watching, watching over the vast, empty, straight-furrowed fields and the water-meadows. Stillness, emptiness, suspense, and a sense of something still impending.

A long wait in the station of Appenweier, on the main line of the Right-bank Railway. The station was empty. Katherine remembered its excited, thrilling bustle in pre-war days.

“Yes,” said the German guard to the station-master. “What do they hurry us out of Strasburg for, if they are only going to keep us so long here?”

The heavy Badisch German! The sense of resentful impotence in the Germans! Katherine smiled to herself. She realized that here the train left the occupied territory.

At last they set off, northwards, free for the moment, in Germany. It was the land beyond the Rhine, Germany of the pine forests. The very earth seemed strong and unsubdued, bristling with a few reeds and bushes, like savage hair. There was the same silence, and waiting, and the old barbaric undertone of the white-skinned north, under the waning civilization. The audible overtone of our civilization seemed to be wearing thin, the old, low, pine-forest hum and roar of the ancient north seemed to be sounding through. At least, in Katherine’s inner ear.

And there were the ponderous hills of the Black Forest, heaped and waiting sullenly, as if guarding the inner Germany. Black round hills, black with forest, save where white snow-patches of field had been cut out. Black and white, waiting there in the near distance, in sullen guard.

She knew the country so well. But not in this present mood, the emptiness, the sullenness, the heavy, recoiled waiting.

Steinbach! Then she was nearly there! She would have to change in Oos, for Baden-Baden, her destination. Probably Philip would be there to meet her in Oos; he would have come down from Heidelberg.

Yes, there he was! And at once she thought he looked ill, yellowish. His figure hollow and defeated.

“Aren’t you well?” she asked, as she stepped out of the train on to the empty station.

“I’m so frightfully cold,” he said. “I can’t get warm.”

“And the train was so hot,” she said.

At last a porter came to carry her bags across to the little connecting train.

“How are you?” he said, looking at her with a certain pinched look in his face, and fear in his eyes.

“All right! It all feels very queer,” she said.

“I don’t know how it is,” he said, “but Germany freezes my inside, and does something to my chest.”

“We needn’t stay long,” she said easily.

He was watching the bright look in her face. And she was thinking how queer

and *chétif* he looked! Extraordinary! As she looked at him she felt for the first time, with curious clarity, that it was humiliating to be married to him, even in name. She was humiliated even by the fact that her name was Katherine Farquhar. Yet she used to think it a nice name!

“Just think of me married to that little man!” she thought to herself. “Think of my having his name!”

It didn’t fit. She thought of her own name: Katherine von Todtnau; or of her married name: Katherine Anstruther. The first seemed most fitting. But the second was her second nature. The third, Katherine Farquhar, wasn’t her at all.

“Have you seen Marianne?” she asked.

“Oh, yes!”

He was very brief. What was the matter with him?

“You’ll have to be careful, with your cold,” she said politely.

“I *am* careful!” he cried petulantly.

Marianne, her sister, was at the station, and in two minutes they were rattling away in German and laughing and crying and exploding with laughter again, Philip quite ignored. In these days of frozen economy, there was no taxi. A porter would wheel up the luggage on a trolley, the new arrivals walked to their little hotel, through the half-deserted town.

“But the little one is quite nice!” said Marianne deprecatingly.

“Isn’t he!” cried Katherine in the same tone.

And both sisters stood still and laughed in the middle of the street. “The little one” was Philip.

“The other was more a man,” said Marianne. “But I’m sure this one is easier. *The little one!* Yes, he *should* be easier,” and she laughed in her mocking way.

“The stand-up-mannikin!” said Katherine, referring to those little toy men weighted at the base with lead, that always stand up again.

“Yes! Yes!” cried Marianne. “I’m sure he *always* comes up again! Prumm!” She made a gesture of knocking him over. “And there he rises once more!” She slowly raised her hand, as if the mannikin were elevating himself.

The two sisters stood in the street laughing consumedly.

Marianne also had lost her husband in the war. But she seemed only more reckless and ruthless.

“Ah, Katy!” she said, after dinner. “You are always such a good child! But you are different. Harder! No, you are not the same good Katy, the same kind Katy. You are no longer kind.”

“And you?” said Katy.

“Ah, me! I don’t matter. I watch what the end will be.”

Marianne was six years older than Katherine, and she had now ceased to

struggle for anything at all. She was a woman who had lived her life. So at last, life seemed endlessly quaint and amusing to her. She accepted everything, wondering over the powerful primitiveness of it all, at the root-pulse.

“I don’t care any more at all what people do or don’t do,” she said. “Life is a great big tree, and the dead leaves fall. But very wonderful is the pulse in the roots! So strong, and so pitiless.”

It was as if she found a final relief in the radical pitilessness of the Tree of Life.

Philip was very unhappy in this atmosphere. At the core of him a Scotch sentimentalist, he had calculated, very cannily, that the emotional, sentimental values would hold good as long as he lived, which was long enough for him. The old male pride and power were doomed. They had finally fallen in the war. Alan with them. But the emotional, sentimental values still held good.

Only not here in Germany. Here the very emotions had become exhausted. “Give us pitilessness. Give us the Tree of Life in winter, dehumanized and ruthless.” So everything seemed to say. And it was too much for him.

He wanted to be soft and sweet and loving, at evening, to Katherine. But there came Marianne’s hollow, reckless laugh at the door; he was frustrated. And —

“Ach! Is it possible that anybody forty years old should still be in love? Ach! I had thought it impossible any more; after the war! Even a little indecent, shall I say!” laughed Marianne, seeing the frustrated languishing look on his face.

“If *love* isn’t left, what is?” he said petulantly.

“Ach! I don’t know! Really I don’t. Can’t you tell me?” she asked with a weird naïveté of the *afterwards*.

He gathered himself together, the little stand-up-mannikin, waiting till Marianne was gone and he could be softly alone with Katherine.

When the two were alone he said:

“I’m most frightfully glad you’ve come, Kathy. I could hardly have held out another day without you. I feel you’re the only thing on earth that remains real.”

“You don’t seem very real to me,” she said.

“I’m not real! I’m *not*! — not when I’m alone. But when I am with you I am the most real man alive. I know it!”

He asserted this with vehemence and a weird, personal sort of passion that used to thrill her, but now repelled her.

“Why should you need me?” she said. “I am real without you.”

She was thinking of Alan.

This was a blow to Philip. He considered for a moment. Then he said:

“Yes. You are! You are always real. But that’s because you are a woman. A man without a woman *can’t* be real.”

He twisted his face and shook his hand with a sort of false vehemence.

She looked at him, was repelled. After all, Alan could wander alone in the lonely places of the dead, and still be the ultimate real thing, to her.

She had given her allegiance elsewhere. Strange, how unspeakably cold she felt towards this little equivocal civilian.

“Don’t let us talk to-night,” she said. “I am so sleepy. I want to go to sleep this very minute. You don’t mind, do you? Good-night!”

She went to her room, with the green glazed stove. Outside she could see the trees of Seufzer Allee, and the intense winter night. Curiously dark and wolfish the nights came on, with the little town obscurely lighted, for economy’s sake, and no tramcars running, for economy’s sake, and the whole place, strangely, slipping back from our civilization, people moving in the dark like in a barbarian village, with the thrill of fear and menace in the wolfish air.

She slept soundly, none the less. But the raw air scraped her chest.

In the morning Philip was looking yellower, and coughing a good deal. She urged him to stay in bed. She wanted, really, to be free of him. And she also wanted him to be safe, too. He insisted, however, on staying about.

She could tell he had something on his mind. At last it came out.

“Do you dream much here?” he said.

“I think I did dream,” she said. “But I can’t remember what about.”

“I dream terribly,” he said.

“What sort of dreams?”

“All sorts!” He gave a rueful laugh. “But nearly always about Alan.” He glanced at her quickly to see how she took it. She gave no sign.

“And what about him?” she said calmly.

“Oh! — ” he gave a desperate little gesture. “Why last night I dreamed that I woke up, and someone was lying on my bed, *outside* the bedclothes. I thought at first it was you, so I wanted to speak to you. But I couldn’t. Then I knew it was Alan, lying there in the cold. And he was terribly heavy. He was so heavy I couldn’t move, because the bedclothes — you know I don’t have that bolster thing — they were so tight on me, I could hardly breathe, they were like tight lead round me. It was so awful, they were like a lead coffin-shell. And he was lying outside with that terrible weight. When I woke at last, I thought I was dead.”

“It’s because you’ve got a cold on your chest,” she said. “Why won’t you stay in bed and see a doctor?”

“I don’t *want* a doctor,” he said.

“You’re so obstinate! At least you should drink the waters here. They’d be good for you.”

During the day she walked in the woods with Marianne. It was sunny, and there was thin snow. But the cold in the air was heavy, stormy, unbreakable, and the woods seemed black, black. In a hollow open space, like a bowl, were little tortured bare vines. Never had she seen the pale vine-stocks look so tortured. And the black trees seemed to grow out of unutterably cold depths, and they seemed to be drinking away what warmth of life there was, while the vines in the clearing writhed with cold as leaves writhe in a fire.

After sunset, before dinner-time, she wanted to go to drink the hot waters from the spring at the big bath-hall under the New Castle. Philip insisted on going with her, though she urged him to stay indoors. They went down the dark hill and between the dark buildings of reddish stone, like the stone of Strasburg Cathedral.

At the obscure fountain in the alcove of the courtyard a little group of people were waiting, dark and silent, like dark spirits round a source of steam. Some had come to drink. Some had come for a pail of hot water. Some had come merely to warm their fingers and get something hot inside them. Some had come furtively, with hot-water bottles, to warm their icy beds a little. Everybody was bed-rock poor and silent, but well-clad, respectable, unbeaten.

Katherine and Philip waited a while. Then, in a far corner of the dark rocky grotto, where the fountain of hot water came out of the wall, Katherine saw Alan standing. He was standing as if waiting his turn to drink, behind the other people. Philip apparently did not see him.

She pressed forward in the silent sombre group of people, and held her glass under the tap, above the pail which a man was filling. The hot water ran over her fingers gratefully. She rinsed her glass down the fountain bowl.

“Na!” said the man of the pail, in his rough, but reckless, good-humoured Badisch: “Throw it in the bucket. It’s only wash-water.”

She laughed, and lifted her pocket-glass to drink. It was something of an ordeal among the group of silent people there in the almost dark. There was a feeble lamp outside in the courtyard; inside the grotto was deep shadow.

Nevertheless, Alan was watching her, and she drank to him, in the hot, queer, hellish-tasting water. She drank a second small glassful. Then she filled the glass again, in front of all the waiting people and handed it to Philip.

She did not look at Alan, but away in the courtyard, where more people were approaching, and where the steam of the springs rose from the grating in the ground, ghostly on the night air.

Philip drew back a little to drink. But at the first mouthful he choked, and began to cough. He coughed and coughed, in a convulsed spasm as if choking. She went to him anxiously. And then she saw that Alan also had come forward,

and stood beside her, behind the coughing little Philip.

“What is it?” she said to the coughing man. “Did some of the water go the wrong way?”

He shook his head, but could not answer. At length, exhausted, but quiet, he handed her the glass, and they moved away from the silent group of watchful dark people.

And Alan was walking on her other side holding her hand.

When they came into the hall of the hotel she saw with horror that there was a red smear of blood on Philip’s chin, and red blotches on his overcoat.

“What have you done?” she cried.

He looked down at his breast, then up at her with haunted eyes. Fear, an agony and a horror of fear in his face. He went ghastly pale. Thinking he would swoon, she put her arm round him. But she felt someone silently but firmly, and with strange, cold power, pulling her arm away. She knew it was Alan.

The hotel porter helped Philip up to his room, and she assisted her husband to undress and get to bed. But each time her hand touched the sick man’s body, to sustain him, she felt it drawn silently, coldly, powerfully away, with complete relentlessness.

The doctor came and made his examination. He said it was not serious: only the rupture of a superficial blood-vessel. The patient must lie quite still and warm, and take light food. Avoid all excitement or agitation.

Philip’s face had a haunted, martyred, guilty look. She soothed him as much as possible, but dared hardly touch him.

“Won’t you sleep with me to-night, in case I dream?” he said to her, with big, excruciating eyes full of fear.

“You’ll be better alone,” she said softly. “You’ll be better alone. I’ll tuck you up warm, and sit with you a while. Keep yourself all covered up!”

She tucked him close, and sat by the bed. On the other side of the bed sat Alan, bare-headed, with his silent, expressionless, reddish face. The closed line of his lips, under the small reddish moustache, never changed, and he kept his eyelids half lowered. But there was a wonderful changeless dignity in his pose, as if he could sit thus, silent, and waiting, through the centuries. And through the warm air of the room he radiated this strange, stony coldness, that seemed heavy as the hand of death. It did not hurt Katherine. But Philip’s face seemed chilled and bluish.

Katherine went to her room, when the sick man slept. Alan did not follow her. And she did not question. It was for the two men to work out destiny between them.

In the night, towards morning she heard a hoarse, horrible cry. She ran to

Philip's room. He was sitting up in bed, blood running down his chin, his face livid, and his eyes rolling delirious.

"What is it?" she said in panic.

"He lay on top of me!" cried Philip, rolling his eyes inwards in horror. "He lay on top of me, and turned my heart cold and burst my blood-vessel in my chest."

Katherine stood petrified. There was blood all over the sheets. She rang the bell violently. Across the bed stood Alan, looking at her with his unmoving blue eyes, just watching her. She could feel the strange stone-coldness of his presence touching even her heart. And she looked back at him humbly, she knew he had power over her too. That strange, cold, stony touch on her heart.

The servants came, and the doctor. And Alan went away. Philip was washed and changed, and went peacefully to sleep, looking like a corpse.

The day passed slowly. Alan did not appear. Even now, Katherine wanted him to come. Awful though he was, she wanted him to be there, to give her her surety, even though it was only the surety of dread; and her contentment, though it were the contentment of death.

At night she had a sofa-bed brought for her into Philip's room. He seemed quieter, better. She had not left him all day. And Alan had not appeared. At half-past nine, Philip sleeping quietly, she too lay down to sleep.

She woke in the night feeling the same stone-coldness in the air. Had the stove gone out? Then she heard Philip's whispering call of terror: "*Katherine! Katherine!*" She went over quickly, and slipped into his bed, putting her arms round him. He was shuddering, and stony cold. She drew him to her.

But immediately two hands cold and strong as iron seized her arms and pulled them away. She was pushed out of the bed, and pushed on to the floor of the bedroom. For an instant, the rage came into her heart, she wanted to get up and fight for the dying man. But a greater power, the knowledge of the uselessness and the fatal dishonourableness of her womanly interference made her desist. She lay for a time helpless and powerless on the floor, in her nightdress.

Then she felt herself lifted. In the dimness of coming dawn, she knew it was Alan. She could see the breast of his uniform — the old uniform she had known long before the war. And his face bending over her, cool and fresh.

He was still cold. But the stoniness had gone out of him, she did not mind his coldness. He pressed her firm hand hard to his own hard body. He was hard and cold like a tree, and alive. And the prickling of his moustache was the cold prickling of fir-needles.

He held her fast and hard, and seemed to possess her through every pore of her body. Not now the old, procreative way of possession. He held her fast, and possessed her through every pore in her body. Then he laid her in her own bed,

to sleep.

When she awoke, the sun was shining, and Philip lay dead in a pool of blood.

Somehow she did not mind. She was only thinking of Alan. After all, she belonged to the man who could keep her. To the only man who knew how to keep her, and could only possess her through all the pores of her body, so that there was no recoil from him. Not just through one act, one function holding her. But as a cloud holds a shower.

The men that were just functional men: let them pass and perish. She wanted her contentment like life itself, through every pore, through every bit of her. The man who could hold her as the wind held her, as the air held her, all surrounded. The man whose aura permeated into every vein, through all her pores, as the scent of a pine-tree when one stands beneath it. A man, not like a faun or a satyr or an angel or a demon, but like the Tree of Life itself, implacable and unquestionable and permeating, voiceless, abiding.

In the afternoon she went to walk by herself. She climbed uphill, steep, past the New Castle, and up through the pine-woods, climbing upwards to the Old Castle. There it stood, among dense trees, its old, rose-red stone walls broken and silent. Two men, queer, wild ruffians with bundles on their backs, stood in the broken, roofless hall, looking round.

“Yes,” the elder one, with the round beard, was saying, “There are no more Dukes of Baden, and counts and barons and peers of the realm are as much in ruin as this place. Soon we shall be all alike, *Lumpen*, tramps.”

“Also no more ladies,” said the younger one, in a lower voice. “Every tramp can have his lady.”

Katherine heard him, with a pang of fear. Knowing the castle, she climbed the stairs and round the balustrade above the great hall, looking out far over the country. The sun was sinking. The Rhine was a dim magnesium ribbon, away on the plain. Across was the Russian Chapel; below, on the left, the town, and the Lichtenthal. No more gamblers, no more cosmopolitan play. Evening and the dark round hills going lonely, snow on the Merkur hill.

Mercury! Hermes! The messenger! Even as she thought it, standing there on the wall, Alan came along and stood beside her, and she felt at ease. The two men down below were looking up at her. They watched in silence, not knowing the way up. They were in the cold shadow of the hall below. A little, lingering sun, reddish, caught her where she was, above.

Again, for the last time, she looked over the land: the sun sinking below the Rhine, the hills of Germany this side, and the frozen stillness of the winter afternoon. “Yes, let us go,” she heard the elder man’s voice. “We are hardly men or women any more. We are more like the men and women who have drunk in

this hall, living after our day.”

“Only we eat and smile still, and the men want the women still.”

“No! No! A man forgets his trouser-lining when he sees the ghost and the woman together.”

The two tramps turned and departed, heavy-shod, up the hill.

Katherine felt Alan’s touch on her arm, and she climbed down from the old, broken castle. He led her through the woods, past the red rocks. The sun had sunk, the trees were blue. He lingered again under a great pine-tree, in the shadow. And again, as he pressed her fast, and pressed his cold face against her, it was as if the wood of the tree itself were growing round her, the hard, live wood compressing and almost devouring her, the sharp needles brushing her face, the limbs of the living tree enveloping her, crushing her in the last, final ecstasy of submission, squeezing from her the last drop of her passion, like the cold, white berries of the mistletoe on the Tree of Life.

THE PRINCESS



Greasley Church, c.1929, D.H. Lawrence, Emily Lawrence, Ada Lawrence Clarke and Gertrude Cooper on the back row, and Jack Clarke in front row centre

THE PRINCESS

To her father, she was The Princess. To her Boston aunts and uncles she was just *Dollie Urquhart, poor little thing*.

Colin Urquhart was just a bit mad. He was of an old Scottish family, and he claimed royal blood. The blood of Scottish kings flowed in his veins. On this point, his American relatives said, he was just a bit “off”. They could not bear any more to be told *which* royal blood of Scotland blued his veins. The whole thing was rather ridiculous, and a sore point. The only fact they remembered was that it was not Stuart.

He was a handsome man, with a wide-open blue eye that seemed sometimes to be looking at nothing, soft black hair brushed rather low on his low, broad brow, and a very attractive body. Add to this a most beautiful speaking voice, usually rather hushed and diffident, but sometimes resonant and powerful like bronze, and you have the sum of his charms. He looked like some old Celtic hero. He looked as if he should have worn a greyish kilt and a sporran, and shown his knees. His voice came direct out of the hushed Ossianic past.

For the rest, he was one of those gentlemen of sufficient but not excessive means who fifty years ago wandered vaguely about, never arriving anywhere, never doing anything, and never definitely being anything, yet well received in the good society of more than one country.

He did not marry till he was nearly forty, and then it was a wealthy Miss Prescott, from New England. Hannah Prescott at twenty-two was fascinated by the man with the soft black hair not yet touched by grey, and the wide, rather vague blue eyes. Many women had been fascinated before her. But Colin Urquhart, by his very vagueness, had avoided any decisive connection.

Mrs. Urquhart lived three years in the mist and glamour of her husband’s presence. And then it broke her. It was like living with a fascinating spectre. About most things he was completely, even ghostly oblivious. He was always charming, courteous, perfectly gracious in that hushed, musical voice of his. But absent. When all came to all, he just wasn’t there. “Not all there,” as the vulgar say.

He was the father of the little girl she bore at the end of the first year. But this did not substantiate him the more. His very beauty and his haunting musical quality became dreadful to her after the first few months. The strange echo: he was like a living echo! His very flesh, when you touched it, did not seem quite

the flesh of a real man.

Perhaps it was that he was a little bit mad. She thought it definitely the night her baby was born.

“Ah, so my little princess has come at last!” he said, in his throaty, singing Celtic voice, like a glad chant, swaying absorbed.

It was a tiny, frail baby, with wide, amazed blue eyes. They christened it Mary Henrietta. She called the little thing *My Dollie*. He called it always *My Princess*.

It was useless to fly at him. He just opened his wide blue eyes wider, and took a child-like, silent dignity there was no getting past.

Hannah Prescott had never been robust. She had no great desire to live. So when the baby was two years old she suddenly died.

The Prescotts felt a deep but unadmitted resentment against Colin Urquhart. They said he was selfish. Therefore they discontinued Hannah’s income, a month after her burial in Florence, after they had urged the father to give the child over to them, and he had courteously, musically, but quite finally refused. He treated the Prescotts as if they were not of his world, not realities to him: just casual phenomena, or gramophones, talking-machines that had to be answered. He answered them. But of their actual existence he was never once aware.

They debated having him certified unsuitable to be guardian of his own child. But that would have created a scandal. So they did the simplest thing, after all — washed their hands of him. But they wrote scrupulously to the child, and sent her modest presents of money at Christmas, and on the anniversary of the death of her mother.

To The Princess her Boston relatives were for many years just a nominal reality. She lived with her father, and he travelled continually, though in a modest way, living on his moderate income. And never going to America. The child changed nurses all the time. In Italy it was a contadina; in India she had an ayah; in Germany she had a yellow-haired peasant girl.

Father and child were inseparable. He was not a recluse. Wherever he went he was to be seen paying formal calls going out to luncheon or to tea, rarely to dinner. And always with the child. People called her Princess Urquhart, as if that were her christened name.

She was a quick, dainty little thing with dark gold hair that went a soft brown, and wide, slightly prominent blue eyes that were at once so candid and so knowing. She was always grown up; she never really grew up. Always strangely wise, and always childish.

It was her father’s fault.

“My little Princess must never take too much notice of people and the things they say and do,” he repeated to her. “People don’t know what they are doing

and saying. They chatter-chatter, and they hurt one another, and they hurt themselves very often, till they cry. But don't take any notice, my little Princess. Because it is all nothing. Inside everybody there is another creature, a demon which doesn't care at all. You peel away all the things they say and do and feel, as cook peels away the outside of the onions. And in the middle of everybody there is a green demon which you can't peel away. And this green demon never changes, and it doesn't care at all about all the things that happen to the outside leaves of the person, all the chatter-chatter, and all the husbands and wives and children, and troubles and fusses. You peel everything away from people, and there is a green, upright demon in every man and woman; and this demon is a man's real self, and a woman's real self. It doesn't really care about anybody, it belongs to the demons and the primitive fairies, who never care. But, even so, there are big demons and mean demons, and splendid demonish fairies, and vulgar ones. But there are no royal fairy women left. Only you, my little Princess. You are the last of the royal race of the old people; the last, my Princess. There are no others. You and I are the last. When I am dead there will be only you. And that is why, darling, you will never care for any of the people in the world very much. Because their demons are all dwindled and vulgar. They are not royal. Only you are royal, after me. Always remember that. And always remember, it is a *great secret*. If you tell people, they will try to kill you, because they will envy you for being a Princess. It is our great secret, darling. I am a prince, and you a princess, of the old, old blood. And we keep our secret between us, all alone. And so, darling, you must treat all people very politely, because *noblesse oblige*. But you must never forget that you alone are the last of Princesses, and that all other are less than you are, less noble, more vulgar. Treat them politely and gently and kindly, darling. But you are the Princess, and they are commoners. Never try to think of them as if they were like you. They are not. You will find, always, that they are lacking, lacking in the royal touch, which only you have — ”

The Princess learned her lesson early — the first lesson, of absolute reticence, the impossibility of intimacy with any other than her father; the second lesson, of naïve, slightly benevolent politeness. As a small child, something crystallised in her character, making her clear and finished, and as impervious as crystal.

“Dear child!” her hostesses said of her. “She is so quaint and old-fashioned; such a lady, poor little mite!”

She was erect, and very dainty. Always small, nearly tiny in physique, she seemed like a changeling beside her big, handsome, slightly mad father. She dressed very simply, usually in blue or delicate greys, with little collars of old Milan point, or very finely-worked linen. She had exquisite little hands, that

made the piano sound like a spinet when she played. She was rather given to wearing cloaks and capes, instead of coats, out of doors, and little eighteenth-century sort of hats. Her complexion was pure apple-blossom.

She looked as if she had stepped out of a picture. But no one, to her dying day, ever knew exactly the strange picture her father had framed her in and from which she never stepped.

Her grandfather and grandmother and her Aunt Maud demanded twice to see her, once in Rome and once in Paris. Each time they were charmed, piqued, and annoyed. She was so exquisite and such a little virgin. At the same time so knowing and so oddly assured. That odd, assured touch of condescension, and the inward coldness, infuriated her American relations.

Only she really fascinated her grandfather. He was spellbound; in a way, in love with the little faultless thing. His wife would catch him brooding, musing over his grandchild, long months after the meeting, and craving to see her again. He cherished to the end the fond hope that she might come to live with him and her grandmother.

“Thank you so much, grandfather. You are so very kind. But Papa and I are such an old couple, you see, such a crochety old couple, living in a world of our own.”

Her father let her see the world — from the outside. And he let her read. When she was in her teens she read Zola and Maupassant, and with the eyes of Zola and Maupassant she looked on Paris. A little later she read Tolstoi and Dostoevsky. The latter confused her. The others, she seemed to understand with a very shrewd, canny understanding, just as she understood the Decameron stories as she read them in their old Italian, or the Nibelung poems. Strange and *uncanny*, she seemed to understand things in a cold light perfectly, with all the flush of fire absent. She was something like a changeling, not quite human.

This earned her, also, strange antipathies. Cabmen and railway porters, especially in Paris and Rome, would suddenly treat her with brutal rudeness, when she was alone. They seemed to look on her with sudden violent antipathy. They sensed in her curious impertinence, an easy, sterile impertinence towards the things *they* felt most. She was so assured, and her flower of maidenhood was so scentless. She could look at a lusty, sensual Roman cabman as if he were a sort of grotesque, to make her smile. She knew all about him, in Zola. And the peculiar condescension with which she would give him her order, as if she, frail, beautiful thing, were the only reality, and he, coarse monster, was a sort of Caliban floundering in the mud on the margin of the pool of the perfect lotus, would suddenly enrage the fellow, the real Mediterranean who prided himself on his *beauté male*, and to whom the phallic mystery was still the only mystery.

And he would turn a terrible face on her, bully her in a brutal, coarse fashion — hideous. For to him she had only the blasphemous impertinence of her own sterility.

Encounters like these made her tremble, and made her know she must have support from the outside. The power of her spirit did not extend to these low people, and they had all the physical power. She realised an implacability of hatred in their turning on her. But she did not lose her head. She quietly paid out money and turned away.

Those were dangerous moments, though, and she learned to be prepared for them. The Princess she was, and the fairy from the North, and could never understand the volcanic phallic rage with which coarse people could turn on her in a paroxysm of hatred. They never turned on her father like that. And quite early she decided it was the New England mother in her whom they hated. Never for one minute could she see with the old Roman eyes, see herself as sterility, the barren flower taking on airs and an intolerable impertinence. This was what the Roman cabman saw in her. And he longed to crush the barren blossom. Its sexless beauty and its authority put him in a passion of brutal revolt.

When she was nineteen her grandfather died, leaving her a considerable fortune in the safe hands of responsible trustees. They would deliver her her income, but only on condition that she resided for six months in the year in the United States.

“Why should they make me conditions?” she said to her father. “I refuse to be imprisoned six months in the year in the United States. We will tell them to keep their money.”

“Let us be wise, my little Princess, let us be wise. No, we are almost poor, and we are never safe from rudeness. I cannot allow anybody to be rude to me. I hate it, I hate it!” His eyes flamed as he said it. “I could kill any man or woman who is rude to me. But we are in exile in the world. We are powerless. If we were really poor, we should be quite powerless, and then I should die. No, my Princess. Let us take their money, then they will not dare to be rude to us. Let us take it, as we put on clothes, to cover ourselves from their aggressions.”

There began a new phase, when the father and daughter spent their summers on the Great Lakes or in California, or in the South-West. The father was something of a poet, the daughter something of a painter. He wrote poems about the lakes or the redwood trees, and she made dainty drawings. He was physically a strong man, and he loved the out-of-doors. He would go off with her for days, paddling in a canoe and sleeping by a camp-fire. Frail little Princess, she was always undaunted, always undaunted. She would ride with him on horseback over the mountain trails till she was so tired she was nothing but a bodiless

consciousness sitting astride her pony. But she never gave in. And at night he folded her in her blanket on a bed of balsam pine twigs, and she lay and looked at the stars unmurmuring. She was fulfilling her rôle.

People said to her as the years passed, and she was a woman of twenty-five, then a woman of thirty, and always the same virgin dainty Princess, 'knowing' in a dispassionate way, like an old woman, and utterly intact:

"Don't you ever think what you will do when your father is no longer with you?"

She looked at her interlocutor with that cold, elfin detachment of hers:

"No, I never think of it," she said.

She had a tiny, but exquisite little house in London, and another small, perfect house in Connecticut, each with a faithful housekeeper. Two homes, if she chose. And she knew many interesting literary and artistic people. What more?

So the years passed imperceptibly. And she had that quality of the sexless fairies, she did not change. At thirty-three she looked twenty-three.

Her father, however, was ageing, and becoming more and more queer. It was now her task to be his guardian in his private madness. He spent the last three years of life in the house in Connecticut. He was very much estranged, sometimes had fits of violence which almost killed the little Princess. Physical violence was horrible to her; it seemed to shatter her heart. But she found a woman a few years younger than herself, well-educated and sensitive, to be a sort of nurse-companion to the mad old man. So the fact of madness was never openly admitted. Miss Cummins, the companion, had a passionate loyalty to the Princess, and a curious affection, tinged with love, for the handsome, white-haired, courteous old man, who was never at all aware of his fits of violence once they had passed.

The Princess was thirty-eight years old when her father died. And quite unchanged. She was still tiny, and like a dignified, scentless flower. Her soft brownish hair, almost the colour of beaver fur, was bobbed, and fluffed softly round her apple-blossom face, that was modelled with an arched nose like a proud old Florentine portrait. In her voice, manner and bearing she was exceedingly still, like a flower that has blossomed in a shadowy place. And from her blue eyes looked out the Princess's eternal laconic challenge, that grew almost sardonic as the years passed. She was the Princess, and sardonically she looked out on a princeless world.

She was relieved when her father died, and at the same time, it was as if everything had evaporated around her. She had lived in a sort of hot-house, in the aura of her father's madness. Suddenly the hot-house had been removed from around her, and she was in the raw, vast, vulgar open air.

Quoi faire? What was she to do? She seemed faced with absolute nothingness. Only she had Miss Cummins, who shared with her the secret, and almost the passion for her father. In fact, the Princess felt that her passion for her mad father had in some curious way transferred itself largely to Charlotte Cummins during the last years. And now Miss Cummins was the vessel that held the passion for the dead man. She herself, the Princess, was an empty vessel.

An empty vessel in the enormous warehouse of the world.

Quoi faire? What was she to do? She felt that, since she could not evaporate into nothingness, like alcohol from an unstoppered bottle, she must *do* something. Never before in her life had she felt the incumbency. Never, never had she felt she must *do* anything. That was left to the vulgar.

Now her father was dead, she found herself on the *fringe* of the vulgar crowd, sharing their necessity to *do* something. It was a little humiliating. She felt herself becoming vulgarised. At the same time she found herself looking at men with a shrewder eye: an eye to marriage. Not that she felt any sudden interest in men, or attraction towards them. No. She was still neither interested nor attracted towards men vitally. But *marriage*, that peculiar abstraction, had imposed a sort of spell on her. She thought that *marriage*, in the blank abstract, was the thing she ought to *do*. That *marriage* implied a man she also knew. She knew all the facts. But the man seemed a property of her own mind rather than a thing in himself, another thing.

Her father died in the summer, the month after her thirty-eighth birthday. When all was over, the obvious thing to do, of course, was to travel. With Miss Cummins. The two women knew each other intimately, but they were always Miss Urquhart and Miss Cummins to one another, and a certain distance was instinctively maintained. Miss Cummins, from Philadelphia, of scholastic stock, and intelligent but untravelled, four years younger than the Princess, felt herself immensely the junior of her 'lady'. She had a sort of passionate veneration for the Princess, who seemed to her ageless, timeless. She could not see the rows of tiny, dainty, exquisite shoes in the Princess's cupboard without feeling a stab at the heart, a stab of tenderness and reverence, almost of awe.

Miss Cummins also was virginal, but with a look of puzzled surprise in her brown eyes. Her skin was pale and clear, her features well modelled, but there was a certain blankness in her expression, where the Princess had an odd touch of Renaissance grandeur. Miss Cummins's voice was also hushed almost to a whisper; it was the inevitable effect of Colin Urquhart's room. But the hushedness had a hoarse quality.

The Princess did not want to go to Europe. Her face seemed turned west. Now her father was gone, she felt she would go west, westwards, as if for ever.

Following, no doubt, the March of Empire, which is brought up rather short on the Pacific coast, among swarms of wallowing bathers.

No, not the Pacific coast. She would stop short of that. The South-West was less vulgar. She would go to New Mexico.

She and Miss Cummins arrived at the Rancho del Cerro Gordo towards the end of August, when the crowd was beginning to drift back east. The ranch lay by a stream on the desert some four miles from the foot of the mountains, a mile away from the Indian pueblo of San Cristobal. It was a ranch for the rich; the Princess paid thirty dollars a day for herself and Miss Cummins. But then she had a little cottage to herself, among the apple trees of the orchard, with an excellent cook. She and Miss Cummins, however, took dinner at evening in the large guest-house. For the Princess still entertained the idea of *marriage*.

The guests at the Rancho del Cerro Gordo were of all sorts, except the poor sort. They were practically all rich, and many were romantic. Some were charming, others were vulgar, some were movie people, quite quaint and not unattractive in their vulgarity, and many were Jews. The Princess did not care for Jews, though they were usually the most interesting to *talk* to. So she talked a good deal with the Jews, and painted with the artists, and rode with the young men from college, and had altogether quite a good time. And yet she felt something of a fish out of water, or a bird in the wrong forest. And *marriage* remained still completely in the abstract. No connecting it with any of these young men, even the nice ones.

The Princess looked just twenty-five. The freshness of her mouth, the hushed, delicate-complexioned virginity of her face gave her not a day more. Only a certain laconic look in her eyes was disconcerting. When she was *forced* to write her age, she put twenty-eight, making the figure *two* rather badly, so that it just avoided being a three.

Men hinted marriage at her. Especially boys from college suggested it from a distance. But they all failed before the look of sardonic ridicule in the Princess's eyes. It always seemed to her rather preposterous, quite ridiculous, and a tiny bit impertinent on their part.

The only man that intrigued her at all was one of the guides, a man called Romero — Domingo Romero. It was he who had sold the ranch itself to the Wilkiesons, ten years before, for two thousand dollars. He had gone away, then reappeared at the old place. For he was the son of the old Romero, the last of the Spanish family that had owned miles of land around San Cristobal. But the coming of the white man and the failure of the vast flocks of sheep, and the fatal inertia which overcomes all men, at last, on the desert near the mountains, had finished the Romero family. The last descendants were just Mexican peasants.

Domingo, the heir, had spent his two thousand dollars, and was working for white people. He was now about thirty years old, a tall, silent fellow, with a heavy closed mouth and black eyes that looked across at one almost sullenly. From behind he was handsome, with a strong, natural body, and the back of his neck very dark and well-shapen, strong with life. But his dark face was long and heavy, almost sinister, with that peculiar heavy meaninglessness in it, characteristic of the Mexicans of his own locality. They are strong, they seem healthy. They laugh and joke with one another. But their physique and their natures seem static, as if there were nowhere, nowhere at all for their energies to go, and their faces, degenerating to misshapen heaviness, seem to have no *raison d'être*, no radical meaning. Waiting either to die or to be aroused into passion and hope. In some of the black eyes a queer, haunting mystic quality, sombre and a bit gruesome, the skull-and-cross-bones look of the Penitentes. They had found their *raison d'être* in self-torture and death-worship. Unable to wrest a *positive* significance for themselves from the vast, beautiful, but vindictive landscape they were born into, they turned on their own selves, and worshipped death through self-torture. The mystic gloom of this showed in their eyes.

But as a rule the dark eyes of the Mexicans were heavy and half alive, sometimes hostile, sometimes kindly, often with the fatal Indian glaze on them, or the fatal Indian glint.

Domingo Romero was *almost* a typical Mexican to look at, with the typical heavy, dark, long face, clean-shaven, with an almost brutally heavy mouth. His eyes were black and Indian-looking. Only, at the centre of their hopelessness was a spark of pride, or self-confidence, or dauntlessness. Just a spark in the midst of the blackness of static despair.

But this spark was the difference between him and the mass of men. It gave a certain alert sensitiveness to his bearing and a certain beauty to his appearance. He wore a low-crowned black hat, instead of the ponderous headgear of the usual Mexican, and his clothes were thinnish and graceful. Silent, aloof, almost imperceptible in the landscape, he was an admirable guide, with a startling quick intelligence that anticipated difficulties about to rise. He could cook, too, crouching over the camp-fire and moving his lean deft brown hands. The only fault he had was that he was not forthcoming, he wasn't chatty and cosy.

"Oh, don't send Romero with us," the Jews would say. "One can't get any response from him."

Tourists come and go, but they rarely see anything, inwardly. None of them ever saw the spark at the middle of Romero's eye; they were not alive enough to see it.

The Princess caught it one day, when she had him for a guide. She was fishing

for trout in the canyon, Miss Cummins was reading a book, the horses were tied under the trees, Romero was fixing a proper fly on her line. He fixed the fly and handed her the line, looking up at her. And at that moment she caught the spark in his eye. And instantly she knew that he was a gentleman, that his 'demon', as her father would have said, was a fine demon. And instantly her manner towards him changed.

He had perched her on a rock over a quiet pool, beyond the cottonwood trees. It was early September, and the canyon already cool, but the leaves of the cottonwoods were still green. The Princess stood on her rock, a small but perfectly-formed figure, wearing a soft, close grey sweater and neatly-cut grey riding-breeches, with tall black boots, her fluffy brown hair straggling from under a little grey felt hat. A woman? Not quite. A changeling of some sort, perched in outline there on the rock, in the bristling wild canyon. She knew perfectly well how to handle a line. Her father had made a fisherman of her.

Romero, in a black shirt and with loose black trousers pushed into wide black riding-boots, was fishing a little farther down. He had put his hat on a rock behind him; his dark head was bent a little forward, watching the water. He had caught three trout. From time to time he glanced up-stream at the Princess, perched there so daintily. He saw she had caught nothing.

Soon he quietly drew in his line and came up to her. His keen eye watched her line, watched her position. Then, quietly, he suggested certain changes to her, putting his sensitive brown hand before her. And he withdrew a little, and stood in silence, leaning against a tree, watching her. He was helping her across the distance. She knew it, and thrilled. And in a moment she had a bite. In two minutes she landed a good trout. She looked round at him quickly, her eyes sparkling, the colour heightened in her cheeks. And as she met his eyes a smile of greeting went over his dark face, very sudden, with an odd sweetness.

She knew he was helping her. And she felt in his presence a subtle, insidious male *kindliness* she had never known before waiting upon her. Her cheek flushed, and her blue eyes darkened.

After this, she always looked for him, and for that curious dark beam of a man's kindness which he could give her, as it were, from his chest, from his heart. It was something she had never known before.

A vague, unspoken intimacy grew up between them. She liked his voice, his appearance, his presence. His natural language was Spanish; he spoke English like a foreign language, rather slow, with a slight hesitation, but with a sad, plangent sonority lingering over from his Spanish. There was a certain subtle correctness in his appearance; he was always perfectly shaved; his hair was thick and rather long on top, but always carefully groomed behind. And his fine black

cashmere shirt, his wide leather belt, his well-cut, wide black trousers going into the embroidered cowboy boots had a certain inextinguishable elegance. He wore no silver rings or buckles. Only his boots were embroidered and decorated at the top with an inlay of white *suède*. He seemed elegant, slender, yet he was very strong.

And at the same time, curiously, he gave her the feeling that death was not far from him. Perhaps he too was half in love with death. However that may be, the sense she had that death was not far from him made him 'possible' to her.

Small as she was, she was quite a good horsewoman. They gave her at the ranch a sorrel mare, very lovely in colour, and well-made, with a powerful broad neck and the hollow back that betokens a swift runner. Tansy, she was called. Her only fault was the usual mare's failing, she was inclined to be hysterical.

So that every day the Princess set off with Miss Cummins and Romero, on horseback, riding into the mountains. Once they went camping for several days, with two more friends in the party.

"I think I like it better," the Princess said to Romero, "when we three go alone."

And he gave her one of his quick, transfiguring smiles.

It was curious no white man had ever showed her this capacity for subtle gentleness, this power to *help* her in silence across a distance, if she were fishing without success, or tired of her horse, or if Tansy suddenly got scared. It was as if Romero could send her *from his heart* a dark beam of succour and sustaining. She had never known this before, and it was very thrilling.

Then the smile that suddenly creased his dark face, showing the strong white teeth. It creased his face almost into a savage grotesque. And at the same time there was in it something so warm, such a dark flame of kindness for her, she was elated into her true Princess self.

Then that vivid, latent spark in his eye, which she had seen, and which she knew he was aware she had seen. It made an inter-recognition between them, silent and delicate. Here he was delicate as a woman in this subtle inter-recognition.

And yet his presence only put to flight in her the *idée fixe* of 'marriage'. For some reason, in her strange little brain, the idea of *marrying* him could not enter. Not for any definite reason. He was in himself a gentleman, and she had plenty of money for two. There was no actual obstacle. Nor was she conventional.

No, now she came down to it, it was as if their two 'dæmons' could marry, were perhaps married. Only their two *selves*, Miss Urquhart and Señor Domingo Romero, were for some reason incompatible. There was a peculiar subtle intimacy of inter-recognition between them. But she did not see in the least how

it would lead to marriage. Almost she could more easily marry one of the nice boys from Harvard or Yale.

The time passed, and she let it pass. The end of September came, with aspens going yellow on the mountain heights, and oak-scrub going red. But as yet the cottonwoods in the valley and canyons had not changed.

“When will you go away?” Romero asked her, looking at her fixedly, with a blank black eye.

“By the end of October,” she said. “I have promised to be in Santa Barbara at the beginning of November.”

He was hiding the spark in his eye from her. But she saw the peculiar sullen thickening of his heavy mouth.

She had complained to him many times that one never saw any wild animals, except chipmunks and squirrels, and perhaps a skunk and a porcupine. Never a deer, or a bear, or a mountain lion.

“Are there no bigger animals in these mountains?” she asked, dissatisfied.

“Yes,” he said. “There are deer — I see their tracks. And I saw the tracks of a bear.”

“But why can one never see the animals themselves?” She looked dissatisfied and wistful like a child.

“Why, it’s pretty hard for you to see them. They won’t let you come close. You have to keep still, in a place where they come. Or else you have to follow their tracks a long way.”

“I can’t bear to go away till I’ve seen them: a bear, or a deer — ”

The smile came suddenly on his face, indulgent.

“Well, what do you want? Do you want to go up into the mountains to some place, to wait till they come?”

“Yes,” she said, looking up at him with a sudden naïve impulse of recklessness.

And immediately his face became sombre again, responsible.

“Well,” he said, with slight irony, a touch of mockery of her. “You will have to find a house. It’s very cold at night now. You would have to stay all night in a house.”

“And there are no houses up there?” she said.

“Yes,” he replied. “There is a little shack that belongs to me, that a miner built a long time ago, looking for gold. You can go there and stay one night, and maybe you see something. Maybe! I don’t know. Maybe nothing come.”

“How much chance is there?”

“Well, I don’t know. Last time when I was there I see three deer come down to drink at the water, and I shot two raccoons. But maybe this time we don’t see

anything.”

“Is there water there?” she asked.

“Yes, there is a little round pond, you know, below the spruce trees. And the water from the snow runs into it.”

“Is it far away?” she asked.

“Yes, pretty far. You see that ridge there” — and turning to the mountains he lifted his arm in the gesture which is somehow so moving, out in the West, pointing to the distance — “that ridge where there are no trees, only rock” — his black eyes were focussed on the distance, his face impassive, but as if in pain — “you go round that ridge, and along, then you come down through the spruce trees to where that cabin is. My father bought that placer claim from a miner who was broke, but nobody ever found any gold or anything, and nobody ever goes there. Too lonesome!”

The Princess watched the massive, heavy-sitting, beautiful bulk of the Rocky Mountains. It was early in October, and the aspens were already losing their gold leaves; high up, the spruce and pine seemed to be growing darker; the great flat patches of oak scrub on the heights were red like gore.

“Can I go over there?” she asked, turning to him and meeting the spark in his eye.

His face was heavy with responsibility.

“Yes,” he said, “you can go. But there’ll be snow over the ridge, and it’s awful cold, and awful lonesome.”

“I should like to go,” she said, persistent.

“All right,” he said. “You can go if you want to.”

She doubted, though, if the Wilkiesons would let her go; at least alone with Romero and Miss Cummins.

Yet an obstinacy characteristic of her nature, an obstinacy tinged perhaps with madness, had taken hold of her. She wanted to look over the mountains into their secret heart. She wanted to descend to the cabin below the spruce trees, near the tarn of bright green water. She wanted to see the wild animals move about in their wild unconsciousness.

“Let us say to the Wilkiesons that we want to make the trip round the Frijoles canyon,” she said.

The trip round the Frijoles canyon was a usual thing. It would not be strenuous, nor cold, nor lonely: they could sleep in the log house that was called an hotel.

Romero looked at her quickly.

“If you want to say that,” he replied, “you can tell Mrs. Wilkieson. Only I know she’ll be mad with me if I take you up in the mountains to that place. And

I've got to go there first with a pack-horse, to take lots of blankets and some bread. Maybe Miss Cummins can't stand it. Maybe not. It's a hard trip."

He was speaking, and thinking, in the heavy, disconnected Mexican fashion.

"Never mind!" The Princess was suddenly very decisive and stiff with authority. "I want to do it. I will arrange with Mrs. Wilkieson. And we'll go on Saturday."

He shook his head slowly.

"I've got to go up on Sunday with a pack-horse and blankets," he said. "Can't do it before."

"Very well!" she said, rather piqued. "Then we'll start on Monday."

She hated being thwarted even the tiniest bit.

He knew that if he started with the pack on Sunday at dawn he would not be back until late at night. But he consented that they should start on Monday morning at seven. The obedient Miss Cummins was told to prepare for the Frijoles trip. On Sunday Romero had his day off. He had not put in an appearance when the Princess retired on Sunday night, but on Monday morning, as she was dressing, she saw him bringing in the three horses from the corral. She was in high spirits.

The night had been cold. There was ice at the edges of the irrigation ditch, and the chipmunks crawled into the sun and lay with wide, dumb, anxious eyes, almost too numb to run.

"We may be away two or three days," said the Princess.

"Very well. We won't begin to be anxious about you before Thursday, then," said Mrs. Wilkieson, who was young and capable: from Chicago. "Anyway," she added, "Romero will see you through. He's so trustworthy."

The sun was already on the desert as they set off towards the mountains, making the greasewood and the sage pale as pale-grey sands, luminous the great level around them. To the right glinted the shadows of the adobe pueblo, flat and almost invisible on the plain, earth of its earth. Behind lay the ranch and the tufts of tall, plummy cottonwoods, whose summits were yellowing under the perfect blue sky.

Autumn breaking into colour in the great spaces of the South-West.

But the three trotted gently along the trail, towards the sun that sparkled yellow just above the dark bulk of the ponderous mountains. Side-slopes were already gleaming yellow, flaming with a second light, under coldish blue of the pale sky. The front slopes were in shadow, with submerged lustre of red oak scrub and dull-gold aspens, blue-black pines and grey-blue rock. While the canyon was full of a deep blueness.

They rode single file, Romero first, on a black horse. Himself in black, made a

flickering black spot in the delicate pallor of the great landscape, where even pine trees at a distance take a film of blue paler than their green. Romero rode on in silence past the tufts of furry greasewood. The Princess came next, on her sorrel mare. And Miss Cummins, who was not quite happy on horseback, came last, in the pale dust that the others kicked up. Sometimes her horse sneezed, and she started.

But on they went at a gentle trot. Romero never looked round. He could hear the sound of the hoofs following, and that was all he wanted.

For the rest, he held ahead. And the Princess, with that black, unheeding figure always travelling away from her, felt strangely helpless, withal elated.

They neared the pale, round foot-hills, dotted with the round dark piñon and cedar shrubs. The horses clinked and trotted among the stones. Occasionally a big round greasewood held out fleecy tufts of flowers, pure gold. They wound into blue shadow, then up a steep stony slope, with the world lying pallid away behind and below. Then they dropped into the shadow of the San Cristobal canyon.

The stream was running full and swift. Occasionally the horses snatched at a tuft of grass. The trail narrowed and became rocky; the rocks closed in; it was dark and cool as the horses climbed and climbed upwards, and the tree trunks crowded in the shadowy, silent tightness of the canyon. They were among cottonwood trees that ran straight up and smooth and round to an extraordinary height. Above, the tips were gold, and it was sun. But away below, where the horses struggled up the rocks and wound among the trunks, there was still blue shadow by the sound of waters and an occasional grey festoon of old man's beard, and here and there a pale, dripping crane's-bill flower among the tangle and the débris of the virgin place. And again the chill entered the Princess's heart as she realised what a tangle of decay and despair lay in the virgin forests.

They scrambled downwards, splashed across stream, up rocks and along the trail of the other side. Romero's black horse stopped, looked down quizzically at the fallen trees, then stepped over lightly. The Princess's sorrel followed, carefully. But Miss Cummins's buckskin made a fuss, and had to be got round.

In the same silence, save for the clinking of the horses and the splashing as the trail crossed stream, they worked their way upwards in the tight, tangled shadow of the canyon. Sometimes, crossing stream, the Princess would glance upwards, and then always her heart caught in her breast. For high up, away in heaven, the mountain heights shone yellow, dappled with dark spruce firs, clear almost as speckled daffodils against the pale turquoise blue lying high and serene above the dark-blue shadow where the Princess was. And she would snatch at the blood-red leaves of the oak as her horse crossed a more open slope, not knowing

what she felt.

They were getting fairly high, occasionally lifted above the canyon itself, in the low groove below the speckled, gold-sparkling heights which towered beyond. Then again they dipped and crossed stream, the horses stepping gingerly across a tangle of fallen, frail aspen stems, then suddenly floundering in a mass of rocks. The black emerged ahead, his black tail waving. The Princess let her mare find her own footing; then she too emerged from the clatter. She rode on after the black. Then came a great frantic rattle of the buckskin behind. The Princess was aware of Romero's dark face looking round, with a strange, demon-like watchfulness, before she herself looked round, to see the buckskin scrambling rather lamely beyond the rocks, with one of his pale buff knees already red with blood.

"He almost went down!" called Miss Cummins.

But Romero was already out of the saddle and hastening down the path. He made quiet little noises to the buckskin, and began examining the cut knee.

"Is he hurt?" cried Miss Cummins anxiously, and she climbed hastily down.

"Oh, my goodness!" she cried, as she saw the blood running down the slender buff leg of the horse in a thin trickle. "Isn't that *awful*?" She spoke in a stricken voice, and her face was white.

Romero was still carefully feeling the knee of the buckskin. Then he made him walk a few paces. And at last he stood up straight and shook his head.

"Not very bad!" he said. "Nothing broken."

Again he bent and worked at the knees. Then he looked up at the Princess.

"He can go on," he said. "It's not bad."

The Princess looked down at the dark face in silence.

"What, go on right up here?" cried Miss Cummins. "How many hours?"

"About five!" said Romero simply.

"Five hours!" cried Miss Cummins. "A horse with a lame knee! And a steep mountain! Why-y!"

"Yes, it's pretty steep up there," said Romero, pushing back his hat and staring fixedly at the bleeding knee. The buckskin stood in a stricken sort of dejection. "But I think he'll make it all right," the man added.

"Oh!" cried Miss Cummins, her eyes bright with sudden passion of unshed tears. "I wouldn't think of it. I wouldn't ride him up there, not for any money."

"Why wouldn't you?" asked Romero.

"It *hurts* him."

Romero bent down again to the horse's knee.

"Maybe it hurts him a little," he said. "But he can make it all right, and his leg won't get stiff."

“What! Ride him five hours up the steep mountains?” cried Miss Cummins. “I couldn’t. I just couldn’t do it. I’ll lead him a little way and see if he can go. But I *couldn’t* ride him again. I couldn’t. Let me walk.”

“But Miss Cummins, dear, if Romero says he’ll be all right?” said the Princess.

“I know it hurts him. Oh, I just couldn’t bear it.”

There was no doing anything with Miss Cummins. The thought of a hurt animal always put her into a sort of hysterics.

They walked forward a little, leading the buckskin. He limped rather badly. Miss Cummins sat on a rock.

“Why, it’s agony to see him!” she cried. “It’s *cruel!*”

“He won’t limp after a bit, if you take no notice of him,” said Romero. “Now he plays up, and limps very much, because he wants to make you see.”

“I don’t think there can be much playing up,” said Miss Cummins bitterly. “We can see how it must hurt him.”

“It don’t hurt much,” said Romero.

But now Miss Cummins was silent with antipathy.

It was a deadlock. The party remained motionless on the trail, the Princess in the saddle, Miss Cummins seated on a rock, Romero standing black and remote near the drooping buckskin.

“Well!” said the man suddenly at last. “I guess we go back, then.”

And he looked up swiftly at his horse, which was cropping at the mountain herbage and treading on the trailing reins.

“No!” cried the Princess. “Oh no!” Her voice rang with a great wail of disappointment and anger. Then she checked herself.

Miss Cummins rose with energy.

“Let me lead the buckskin home,” she said, with cold dignity, “and you two go on.”

This was received in silence. The Princess was looking down at her with a sardonic, almost cruel gaze.

“We’ve only come about two hours,” said Miss Cummins. “I don’t mind a bit leading him home. But I *couldn’t* ride him. I *couldn’t* have him ridden with that knee.”

This again was received in dead silence. Romero remained impassive, almost inert.

“Very well, then,” said the Princess. “You lead him home. You’ll be quite all right. Nothing can happen to you, possibly. And say to them that we have gone on and shall be home tomorrow — or the day after.”

She spoke coldly and distinctly. For she could not bear to be thwarted.

“Better all go back, and come again another day,” said Romero — non-committal.

“There will never *be* another day,” cried the Princess. “I want to go on.”

She looked at him square in the eyes, and met the spark in his eye.

He raised his shoulders slightly.

“If you want it,” he said. “I’ll go on with you. But Miss Cummins can ride my horse to the end of the canyon, and I lead the buckskin. Then I come back to you.”

It was arranged so. Miss Cummins had her saddle put on Romero’s black horse, Romero took the buckskin’s bridle, and they started back. The Princess rode very slowly on, upwards, alone. She was at first so angry with Miss Cummins that she was blind to everything else. She just let her mare follow her own inclinations.

The peculiar spell of anger carried the Princess on, almost unconscious, for an hour or so. And by this time she was beginning to climb pretty high. Her horse walked steadily all the time. They emerged on a bare slope, and the trail wound through frail aspen stems. Here a wind swept, and some of the aspens were already bare. Others were fluttering their discs of pure, solid yellow leaves, so *nearly* like petals, while the slope ahead was one soft, glowing fleece of daffodil yellow; fleecy like a golden foxskin, and yellow as daffodils alive in the wind and the high mountain sun.

She paused and looked back. The near great slopes were mottled with gold and the dark hue of spruce, like some unsinged eagle, and the light lay gleaming upon them. Away through the gap of the canyon she could see the pale blue of the egg-like desert, with the crumpled dark crack of the Rio Grande Canyon. And far, far off, the blue mountains like a fence of angels on the horizon.

And she thought of her adventure. She was going on alone with Romero. But then she was very sure of herself, and Romero was not the kind of man to do anything to her against her will. This was her first thought. And she just had a fixed desire to go over the brim of the mountains, to look into the inner chaos of the Rockies. And she wanted to go with Romero, because he had some peculiar kinship with her; there was some peculiar link between the two of them. Miss Cummins anyhow would have been only a discordant note.

She rode on, and emerged at length in the lap of the summit. Beyond her was a great concave of stone and stark, dead-grey trees, where the mountain ended against the sky. But nearer was the dense black, bristling spruce, and at her feet was the lap of the summit, a flat little valley of sere grass and quiet-standing yellow aspens, the stream trickling like a thread across.

It was a little valley or shell from which the stream was gently poured into the

lower rocks and trees of the canyon. Around her was a fairy-like gentleness, the delicate sere grass, the groves of delicate-stemmed aspens dropping their flakes of bright yellow. And the delicate, quick little stream threading through the wild, sere grass.

Here one might expect deer and fawns and wild things, as in a little paradise. Here she was to wait for Romero, and they were to have lunch.

She unfastened her saddle and pulled it to the ground with a crash, letting her horse wander with a long rope. How beautiful Tansy looked, sorrel, among the yellow leaves that lay like a patina on the sere ground. The Princess herself wore a fleecy sweater of a pale, sere buff, like the grass, and riding-breeches of a pure orange-tawny colour. She felt quite in the picture.

From her saddle-pouches she took the packages of lunch, spread a little cloth, and sat to wait for Romero. Then she made a little fire. Then she ate a devilled egg. Then she ran after Tansy, who was straying across-stream. Then she sat in the sun, in the stillness near the aspens, and waited.

The sky was blue. Her little alp was soft and delicate as fairy-land. But beyond and up jutted the great slopes, dark with the pointed feathers of spruce, bristling with grey dead trees among grey rock, or dappled with dark and gold. The beautiful, but fierce, heavy cruel mountains, with their moments of tenderness.

She saw Tansy start, and begin to run. Two ghost-like figures on horseback emerged from the black of the spruce across the stream. It was two Indians on horseback, swathed like seated mummies in their pale-grey cotton blankets. Their guns jutted beyond the saddles. They rode straight towards her, to her thread of smoke.

As they came near, they unswathed themselves and greeted her, looking at her curiously from their dark eyes. Their black hair was somewhat untidy, the long rolled plaits on their shoulders were soiled. They looked tired.

They got down from their horses near her little fire — a camp was a camp — swathed their blankets round their hips, pulled the saddles from their ponies and turned them loose, then sat down. One was a young Indian whom she had met before, the other was an older man.

“You all alone?” said the younger man.

“Romero will be here in a minute,” she said, glancing back along the trail.

“Ah, Romero! You with him? Where are you going?”

“Round the ridge,” she said. “Where are you going?”

“We going down to Pueblo.”

“Been out hunting? How long have you been out?”

“Yes. Been out five days.” The young Indian gave a little meaningless laugh.

“Got anything?”

“No. We see tracks of two deer — but not got nothing.”

The Princess noticed a suspicious-looking bulk under one of the saddles — surely a folded-up deer. But she said nothing.

“You must have been cold,” she said.

“Yes, very cold in the night. And hungry. Got nothing to eat since yesterday. Eat it all up.” And again he laughed his little meaningless laugh. Under their dark skins, the two men looked peaked and hungry. The Princess rummaged for food among the saddle-bags. There was a lump of bacon — the regular stand-back — and some bread. She gave them this, and they began toasting slices of it on long sticks at the fire. Such was the little camp Romero saw as he rode down the slope: the Princess in her orange breeches, her head tied in a blue-and-brown silk kerchief, sitting opposite the two dark-headed Indians across the camp-fire, while one of the Indians was leaning forward toasting bacon, his two plaits of braid-hair dangling as if wearily.

Romero rode up, his face expressionless. The Indians greeted him in Spanish. He unsaddled his horse, took food from the bags, and sat down at the camp to eat. The Princess went to the stream for water, and to wash her hands.

“Got coffee?” asked the Indians.

“No coffee this outfit,” said Romero.

They lingered an hour or more in the warm midday sun. Then Romero saddled the horses. The Indians still squatted by the fire. Romero and the Princess rode away, calling *Adios!* to the Indians over the stream and into the dense spruce whence two strange figures had emerged.

When they were alone, Romero turned and looked at her curiously, in a way she could not understand, with such a hard glint in his eyes. And for the first time she wondered if she was rash.

“I hope you don’t mind going alone with me,” she said.

“If you want it,” he replied.

They emerged at the foot of the great bare slope of rocky summit, where dead spruce trees stood sparse and bristling like bristles on a grey dead hog. Romero said the Mexicans, twenty years back, had fired the mountains, to drive out the whites. This grey concave slope of summit was corpse-like.

The trail was almost invisible. Romero watched for the trees which the Forest Service had blazed. And they climbed the stark corpse slope, among dead spruce, fallen and ash-grey, into the wind. The wind came rushing from the west, up the funnel of the canyon, from the desert. And there was the desert, like a vast mirage tilting slowly upwards towards the west, immense and pallid, away beyond the funnel of the canyon. The Princess could hardly look.

For an hour their horses rushed the slope, hastening with a great working of

the haunches upwards, and halting to breathe, scrambling again, and rowing their way up length by length, on the livid, slanting wall. While the wind blew like some vast machine.

After an hour they were working their way on the incline, no longer forcing straight up. All was grey and dead around them; the horses picked their way over the silver-grey corpses of the spruce. But they were near the top, near the ridge.

Even the horses made a rush for the last bit. They had worked round to a scrap of spruce forest near the very top. They hurried in, out of the huge, monstrous, mechanical wind, that whistled inhumanly and was palely cold. So, stepping through the dark screen of trees, they emerged over the crest.

In front now was nothing but mountains, ponderous, massive, down-sitting mountains, in a huge and intricate knot, empty of life or soul. Under the bristling black feathers of spruce near-by lay patches of white snow. The lifeless valleys were concaves of rock and spruce, the rounded summits and the hog-backed summits of grey rock crowded one behind the other like some monstrous herd in arrest.

It frightened the Princess, it was so inhuman. She had not thought it could be so inhuman, so, as it were, anti-life. And yet now one of her desires was fulfilled. She had seen it, the massive, gruesome, repellent core of the Rockies. She saw it there beneath her eyes, in its gigantic, heavy gruesomeness.

And she wanted to go back. At this moment she wanted to turn back. She had looked down into the intestinal knot of these mountains. She was frightened. She wanted to go back.

But Romero was riding on, on the lee side of the spruce forest, above the concaves of the inner mountains. He turned round to her and pointed at the slope with a dark hand.

“Here a miner has been trying for gold,” he said. It was a grey scratched-out heap near a hole — like a great badger hole. And it looked quite fresh.

“Quite lately?” said the Princess.

“No, long ago — twenty, thirty years.” He had reined in his horse and was looking at the mountains. “Look!” he said. “There goes the Forest Service trail — along those ridges, on the top, way over there till it comes to Lucytown, where is the Government road. We go down there — no trail — see behind that mountain — you see the top, no trees, and some grass?”

His arm was lifted, his brown hand pointing, his dark eyes piercing into the distance, as he sat on his black horse twisting round to her. Strange and ominous, only the demon of himself, he seemed to her. She was dazed and a little sick, at that height, and she could not see any more. Only she saw an eagle turning in the air beyond, and the light from the west showed the pattern on him underneath.

“Shall I ever be able to go so far?” asked the Princess faintly, petulantly.

“Oh yes! All easy now. No more hard places.”

They worked along the ridge, up and down, keeping on the lee side, the inner side, in the dark shadow. It was cold. Then the trail laddered up again, and they emerged on a narrow ridge-track, with the mountain slipping away enormously on either side. The Princess was afraid. For one moment she looked out, and saw the desert, the desert ridges, more desert, more blue ridges, shining pale and very vast, far below, vastly palely tilting to the western horizon. It was ethereal and terrifying in its gleaming, pale, half-burnished immensity, tilted at the west. She could not bear it. To the left was the ponderous, involved mass of mountains all kneeling heavily.

She closed her eyes and let her consciousness evaporate away. The mare followed the trail. So on and on, in the wind again.

They turned their backs to the wind, facing inwards to the mountains. She thought they had left the trail; it was quite invisible.

“No,” he said, lifting his hand and pointing. “Don’t you see the blazed trees?”

And making an effort of consciousness, she was able to perceive on a pale-grey dead spruce stem the old marks where an axe had chipped a piece away. But with the height, the cold, the wind, her brain was numb.

They turned again and began to descend; he told her they had left the trail. The horses slithered in the loose stones, picking their way downward. It was afternoon, the sun stood obtrusive and gleaming in the lower heavens — about four o’clock. The horses went steadily, slowly, but obstinately onwards. The air was getting colder. They were in among the lumpish peaks and steep concave valleys. She was barely conscious at all of Romero.

He dismounted and came to help her from her saddle. She tottered, but would not betray her feebleness.

“We must slide down here,” he said. “I can lead the horses.”

They were on a ridge, and facing a steep bare slope of pallid, tawny mountain grass on which the western sun shone full. It was steep and concave. The Princess felt she might start slipping, and go down like a toboggan into the great hollow.

But she pulled herself together. Her eye blazed up again with excitement and determination. A wind rushed past her; she could hear the shriek of spruce trees far below. Bright spots came on her cheeks as her hair blew across. She looked a wild, fairy-like little thing.

“No,” she said. “I will take my horse.”

“Then mind she doesn’t slip down on top of you,” said Romero. And away he went, nimbly dropping down the pale, steep incline, making from rock to rock,

down the grass, and following any little slanting groove. His horse hopped and slithered after him, and sometimes stopped dead, with forefeet pressed back, refusing to go farther. He, below his horse, looked up and pulled the reins gently, and encouraged the creature. Then the horse once more dropped his forefeet with a jerk, and the descent continued.

The Princess set off in blind, reckless pursuit, tottering and yet nimble. And Romero, looking constantly back to see how she was faring, saw her fluttering down like some queer little bird, her orange breeches twinkling like the legs of some duck, and her head, tied in the blue and buff kerchief, bound round and round like the head of some blue-topped bird. The sorrel mare rocked and slipped behind her. But down came the Princess in a reckless intensity, a tiny, vivid spot on the great hollow flank of the tawny mountain. So tiny! Tiny as a frail bird's egg. It made Romero's mind go blank with wonder.

But they had to get down, out of that cold and dragging wind. The spruce trees stood below, where a tiny stream emerged in stones. Away plunged Romero, zigzagging down. And away behind, up the slope, fluttered the tiny, bright-coloured Princess, holding the end of the long reins, and leading the lumbering, four-footed, sliding mare.

At last they were down. Romero sat in the sun, below the wind, beside some squaw-berry bushes. The Princess came near, the colour flaming in her cheeks, her eyes dark blue, much darker than the kerchief on her head, and glowing unnaturally.

"We make it," said Romero.

"Yes," said the Princess, dropping the reins and subsiding on to the grass, unable to speak, unable to think.

But, thank heaven, they were out of the wind and in the sun.

In a few minutes her consciousness and her control began to come back. She drank a little water. Romero was attending to the saddles. Then they set off again, leading the horses still a little farther down the tiny stream-bed. Then they could mount.

They rode down a bank and into a valley grove dense with aspens. Winding through the thin, crowding, pale-smooth stems, the sun shone flickering beyond them, and the disc-like aspen leaves, waving queer mechanical signals, seemed to be splashing the gold light before her eyes. She rode on in a splashing dazzle of gold.

Then they entered shadow and the dark, resinous spruce trees. The fierce boughs always wanted to sweep her off her horse. She had to twist and squirm past.

But there was a semblance of an old trail. And all at once they emerged in the

sun on the edge of the spruce grove, and there was a little cabin, and the bottom of a small, naked valley with grey rock and heaps of stones, and a round pool of intense green water, dark green. The sun was just about to leave it.

Indeed, as she stood, the shadow came over the cabin and over herself; they were in the lower gloom, a twilight. Above, the heights still blazed.

It was a little hole of a cabin, near the spruce trees, with an earthen floor and an unhinged door. There was a wooden bed-bunk, three old sawn-off log-lengths to sit on as stools, and a sort of fireplace; no room for anything else. The little hole would hardly contain two people. The roof had gone — but Romero had laid on thick spruce boughs.

The strange squalor of the primitive forest pervaded the place, the squalor of animals and their droppings, the squalor of the wild. The Princess knew the peculiar repulsiveness of it. She was tired and faint.

Romero hastily got a handful of twigs, set a little fire going in the stove grate, and went out to attend to the horses. The Princess vaguely, mechanically, put sticks on the fire, in a sort of stupor, watching the blaze, stupefied and fascinated. She could not make much fire — it would set the whole cabin alight. And smoke oozed out of the dilapidated mud-and-stone chimney.

When Romero came in with the saddle-pouches and saddles, hanging the saddles on the wall, there sat the little Princess on her stump of wood in front of the dilapidated fire-grate, warming her tiny hands at the blaze, while her oranges breeches glowed almost like another fire. She was in a sort of stupor.

“You have some whisky now, or some tea? Or wait for some soup?” he asked.

She rose and looked at him with bright, dazed eyes, half comprehending; the colour glowing hectic in her cheeks.

“Some tea,” she said, “with a little whisky in it. Where’s the kettle?”

“Wait,” he said. “I’ll bring the things.”

She took her cloak from the back of her saddle, and followed him into the open. It was a deep cup of shadow. But above the sky was still shining, and the heights of the mountains were blazing with aspen like fire blazing.

Their horses were cropping the grass among the stones. Romero clambered up a heap of grey stones and began lifting away logs and rocks, till he had opened the mouth of one of the miner’s little old workings. This was his cache. He brought out bundles of blankets, pans for cooking, a little petrol camp-stove, an axe, the regular camp outfit. He seemed so quick and energetic and full of force. This quick force dismayed the Princess a little.

She took a saucepan and went down the stones to the water. It was very still and mysterious, and of a deep green colour, yet pure, transparent as glass. How cold the place was! How mysterious and fearful.

She crouched in her dark cloak by the water, rinsing the saucepan, feeling the cold heavy above her, the shadow like a vast weight upon her, bowing her down. The sun was leaving the mountain-tops, departing, leaving her under profound shadow. Soon it would crush her down completely.

Sparks? Or eyes looking at her across the water? She gazed, hypnotised. And with her sharp eyes she made out in the dusk the pale form of a bob-cat crouching by the water's edge, pale as the stones among which it crouched, opposite. And it was watching her with cold, electric eyes of strange intentness, a sort of cold, icy wonder and fearlessness. She saw its *museau* pushed forward, its tufted ears pricking intensely up. It was watching her with cold, animal curiosity, something demonish and conscienceless.

She made a swift movement, spilling her water. And in a flash the creature was gone, leaping like a cat that is escaping; but strange and soft in its motion, with its little bob-tail. Rather fascinating. Yet that cold, intent, demonish watching! She shivered with cold and fear. She knew well enough the dread and repulsiveness of the wild.

Romero carried in the bundles of bedding and the camp outfit. The windowless cabin was already dark inside. He lit a lantern, and then went out again with the axe. She heard him chopping wood as she fed sticks to the fire under her water. When he came in with an armful of oak-scrub faggots, she had just thrown the tea into the water.

"Sit down," she said, "and drink tea."

He poured a little bootleg whisky into the enamel cups, and in the silence the two sat on the log-ends, sipping the hot liquid and coughing occasionally from the smoke.

"We burn these oak sticks," he said. "They don't make hardly any smoke."

Curious and remote he was, saying nothing except what had to be said. And she, for her part, was as remote from him. They seemed far, far apart, worlds apart, now they were so near.

He unwrapped one bundle of bedding, and spread the blankets and the sheepskin in the wooden bunk.

"You lie down and rest," he said, "and I make the supper."

She decided to do so. Wrapping her cloak round her, she lay down in the bunk, turning her face to the wall. She could hear him preparing supper over the little petrol stove. Soon she could smell the soup he was heating; and soon she heard the hissing of fried chicken in a pan.

"You eat your supper now?" he said.

With a jerky, despairing movement, she sat up in the bunk, tossing back her hair. She felt cornered.

“Give it me here,” she said.

He handed her first the cupful of soup. She sat among the blankets, eating it slowly. She was hungry. Then he gave her an enamel plate with pieces of fried chicken and currant jelly, butter and bread. It was very good. As they ate the chicken he made the coffee. She said never a word. A certain resentment filled her. She was cornered.

When supper was over he washed the dishes, dried them, and put everything away carefully, else there would have been no room to move in the hole of a cabin. The oak-wood gave out a good bright heat.

He stood for a few moments at a loss. Then he asked her:

“You want to go to bed soon?”

“Soon,” she said. “Where are you going to sleep?”

“I make my bed here — ” he pointed to the floor along the wall. “Too cold out of doors.”

“Yes,” she said. “I suppose it is.”

She sat immobile, her cheeks hot, full of conflicting thoughts. And she watched him while he folded the blankets on the floor, a sheepskin underneath. Then she went out into night.

The stars were big. Mars sat on the edge of a mountain, for all the world like the blazing eye of a crouching mountain lion. But she herself was deep, deep below in a pit of shadow. In the intense silence she seemed to hear the spruce forest crackling with electricity and cold. Strange, foreign stars floated on that unmoving water. The night was going to freeze. Over the hills came the far sobbing-singing howling of the coyotes. She wondered how the horses would be.

Shuddering a little, she turned to the cabin. Warm light showed through its chinks. She pushed at the rickety, half-opened door.

“What about the horses?” she said.

“My black, he won’t go away. And your mare will stay with him. You want to go to bed now?”

“I think I do.”

“All right. I feed the horses some oats.”

And he went out into the night.

He did not come back for some time. She was lying wrapped up tight in the bunk.

He blew out the lantern, and sat down on his bedding to take off his clothes. She lay with her back turned. And soon, in the silence, she was asleep.

She dreamed it was snowing, and the snow was falling on her through the roof, softly, softly, helplessly, and she was going to be buried alive. She was growing colder and colder, the snow was weighing down on her. The snow was

going to absorb her.

She awoke with a sudden convulsion, like pain. She was really very cold; perhaps the heavy blankets had numbed her. Her heart seemed unable to beat, she felt she could not move.

With another convulsion she sat up. It was intensely dark. There was not even a spark of fire, the light wood had burned right away. She sat in thick oblivious darkness. Only through a chink she could see a star.

What did she want? Oh, what did she want? She sat in bed and rocked herself woefully. She could hear the steady breathing of the sleeping man. She was shivering with cold; her heart seemed as if it could not beat. She wanted warmth, protection, she wanted to be taken away from herself. And at the same time, perhaps more deeply than anything, she wanted to keep herself intact, intact, untouched, that no one should have any power over her, or rights to her. It was a wild necessity in her that no one, particularly no man, should have any rights or power over her, that no one and nothing should possess her.

Yet that other thing! And she was so cold, so shivering, and her heart could not beat. Oh, would not someone help her heart to beat?

She tried to speak, and could not. Then she cleared her throat.

“Romero,” she said strangely, “it is so cold.”

Where did her voice come from, and whose voice was it, in the dark?

She heard him at once sit up, and his voice, startled, with a resonance that seemed to vibrate against her, saying:

“You want me to make you warm?”

“Yes.”

As soon as he had lifted her in his arms, she wanted to scream to him not to touch her. She stiffened herself. Yet she was dumb.

And he was warm, but with a terrible animal warmth that seemed to annihilate her. He panted like an animal with desire. And she was given over to this thing.

She had never, never wanted to be given over to this. But she had *willed* that it should happen to her. And according to her will, she lay and let it happen. But she never wanted it. She never wanted to be thus assailed and handled, and mauled. She wanted to keep herself to herself.

However, she had willed it to happen, and it had happened. She panted with relief when it was over.

Yet even now she had to lie within the hard, powerful clasp of this other creature, this man. She dreaded to struggle to go away. She dreaded almost too much the icy cold of that other bunk.

“Do you want to go away from me?” asked his strange voice. Oh, if it could only have been a thousand miles away from her! Yet she had willed to have it

thus close.

“No,” she said.

And she could feel a curious joy and pride surging up again in him: at her expense. Because he had got her. She felt like a victim there. And he was exulting in his power over her, his possession, his pleasure.

When dawn came, he was fast asleep. She sat up suddenly.

“I want a fire,” she said.

He opened his brown eyes wide, and smiled with a curious tender luxuriousness.

“I want you to make a fire,” she said.

He glanced at the chinks of light. His brown face hardened to the day.

“All right,” he said. “I’ll make it.”

She hid her face while he dressed. She could not bear to look at him. He was so suffused with pride and luxury. She hid her face almost in despair. But feeling the cold blast of air as he opened the door, she wriggled down into the warm place where he had been. How soon the warmth ebbed, when he had gone!

He made a fire and went out, returning after a while with water.

“You stay in bed till the sun comes,” he said. “It very cold.”

“Hand me my cloak.”

She wrapped the cloak fast round her, and sat up among the blankets. The warmth was already spreading from the fire.

“I suppose we will start back as soon as we’ve had breakfast?”

He was crouching at his camp-stove making scrambled eggs. He looked up suddenly, transfixed, and his brown eyes, so soft and luxuriously widened, looked straight at her.

“You want to?” he said.

“We’d better get back as soon as possible,” she said, turning aside from his eyes.

“You want to get away from me?” he asked, repeating the question of the night in a sort of dread.

“I want to get away from here,” she said decisively. And it was true. She wanted supremely to get away, back to the world of people.

He rose slowly to his feet, holding the aluminium frying-pan.

“Don’t you like last night?” he asked.

“Not really,” she said. “Why? Do you?”

He put down the frying-pan and stood staring at the wall. She could see she had given him a cruel blow. But she did not relent. She was getting her own back. She wanted to regain possession of all herself, and in some mysterious way she felt that he possessed some part of her still.

He looked round at her slowly, his face greyish and heavy.

“You Americans,” he said, “you always want to do a man down.”

“I am not American,” she said. “I am British. And I don’t want to do any man down. I only want to go back now.”

“And what will you say about me, down there?”

“That you were very kind to me, and very good.”

He crouched down again, and went on turning the eggs. He gave her her plate, and her coffee, and sat down to his own food.

But again he seemed not to be able to swallow. He looked up at her.

“You don’t like last night?” he asked.

“Not really,” she said, though with some difficulty. “I don’t care for that kind of thing.”

A blank sort of wonder spread over his face at these words, followed immediately by a black look of anger, and then a stony, sinister despair.

“You don’t?” he said, looking her in the eyes.

“Not really,” she replied, looking back with steady hostility into his eyes.

Then a dark flame seemed to come from his face.

“I make you,” he said, as if to himself.

He rose and reached her clothes, that hung on a peg: the fine linen underwear, the orange breeches, the fleecy jumper, the blue-and-bluff kerchief; then he took up her riding-boots and her bead moccasins. Crushing everything in his arms, he opened the door. Sitting up, she saw him stride down to the dark-green pool in the frozen shadow of that deep cup of a valley. He tossed the clothing and the boots out on the pool. Ice had formed. And on the pure, dark green mirror, in the slaty shadow, the Princess saw her things lying, the white linen, the orange breeches, the black boots, the blue moccasins, a tangled heap of colour. Romero picked up rocks and heaved them out at the ice, till the surface broke and the fluttering clothing disappeared in the rattling water, while the valley echoed and shouted again with the sound.

She sat in despair among the blankets, hugging tight her pale-blue cloak. Romero strode straight back to the cabin.

“Now you stay here with me,” he said.

She was furious. Her blue eyes met his. They were like two demons watching one another. In his face, beyond a sort of unrelieved gloom, was a demonish desire for death.

He saw her looking round the cabin, scheming. He saw her eyes on his rifle. He took the gun and went out with it. Returning, he pulled out her saddle, carried it to the tarn, and threw it in. Then he fetched his own saddle, and did the same.

“Now will you go away?” he said, looking at her with a smile.

She debated within herself whether to coax him and wheedle him. But she knew he was already beyond it. She sat among her blankets in a frozen sort of despair, hard as hard ice with anger.

He did the chores, and disappeared with the gun. She got up in her blue pyjamas, huddled in her cloak, and stood in the doorway. The dark-green pool was motionless again, the stony slopes were pallid and frozen. Shadow still lay, like an after-death, deep in this valley. Always in the distance she saw the horses feeding. If she could catch one! The brilliant yellow sun was half-way down the mountain. It was nine o'clock.

All day she was alone, and she was frightened. What she was frightened of she didn't know. Perhaps the crackling in the dark spruce wood. Perhaps just the savage, heartless wildness of the mountains. But all day she sat in the sun in the doorway of the cabin, watching, watching for hope. And all the time her bowels were cramped with fear.

She saw a dark spot that probably was a bear, roving across the pale grassy slope in the far distance, in the sun.

When, in the afternoon, she saw Romero approaching, with silent suddenness, carrying his gun and a dead deer, the cramp in her bowels relaxed, then became colder. She dreaded him with a cold dread.

"There is deer-meat," he said, throwing the dead doe at her feet.

"You don't want to go away from here," he said. "This is a nice place."

She shrank into the cabin.

"Come into the sun," he said, following her. She looked up at him with hostile, frightened eyes.

"Come into the sun," he repeated, taking her gently by the arm, in a powerful grasp.

She knew it was useless to rebel. Quietly he led her out, and seated himself in the doorway, holding her still by the arm.

"In the sun it is warm," he said. "Look, this is a nice place. You are such a pretty white woman, why do you want to act mean to me? Isn't this a nice place? Come! Come here! It is sure warm here."

He drew her to him, and in spite of her stony resistance, he took her cloak from her, holding her in her thin blue pyjamas.

"You sure are a pretty little white woman, small and pretty," he said. "You sure won't act mean to me — you don't want to, I know you don't."

She, stony and powerless, had to submit to him. The sun shone on her white, delicate skin.

"I sure don't mind hell fire," he said. "After this."

A queer, luxurious good humour seemed to possess him again. But though

outwardly she was powerless, inwardly she resisted him, absolutely and stonily.

When later he was leaving her again, she said to him suddenly:

“You think you can conquer me this way. But you can’t. You can never conquer me.”

He stood arrested, looking back at her, with many emotions conflicting in his face — wonder, surprise, a touch of horror, and an unconscious pain that crumpled his face till it was like a mask. Then he went out without saying a word, hung the dead deer on a bough, and started to flay it. While he was at this butcher’s work, the sun sank and cold night came on again.

“You see,” he said to her as he crouched, cooking the supper, “I ain’t going to let you go. I reckon you called to me in the night, and I’ve some right. If you want to fix it up right now with me, and say you want to be with me, we’ll fix it up now and go down to the ranch tomorrow and get married or whatever you want. But you’ve got to say you want to be with me. Else I shall stay right here, till something happens.”

She waited a while before she answered:

“I don’t want to be with anybody against my will. I don’t dislike you; at least, I didn’t, till you tried to put your will over mine. I won’t have anybody’s will put over me. You can’t succeed. Nobody could. You can never get me under your will. And you won’t have long to try, because soon they will send someone to look for me.”

He pondered this last, and she regretted having said it. Then, sombre, he bent to the cooking again.

He could not conquer her, however much he violated her. Because her spirit was hard and flawless as a diamond. But he could shatter her. This she knew. Much more, and she would be shattered.

In a sombre, violent excess he tried to expend his desire for her. And she was racked with an agony, and felt each time she would die. Because, in some peculiar way, he had got hold of her, some unrealised part of her which she never wished to realise. Racked with a burning, tearing anguish, she felt that the thread of her being would break, and she would die. The burning heat that racked her inwardly.

If only, only she could be alone again, cool and intact! If only she could recover herself again, cool and intact! Would she ever, ever, ever be able to bear herself again?

Even now she did not hate him. It was beyond that. Like some racking, hot doom. Personally he hardly existed.

The next day he would not let her have any fire, because of attracting attention with the smoke. It was a grey day, and she was cold. He stayed round, and

heated soup on the petrol stove. She lay motionless in the blankets.

And in the afternoon she pulled the clothes over her head and broke into tears. She had never really cried in her life. He dragged the blankets away and looked to see what was shaking her. She sobbed in helpless hysterics. He covered her over again and went outside, looking at the mountains, where clouds were dragging and leaving a little snow. It was a violent, windy, horrible day, the evil of winter rushing down.

She cried for hours. And after this a great silence came between them. They were two people who had died. He did not touch her any more. In the night she lay and shivered like a dying dog. She felt that her very shivering would rupture something in her body, and she would die.

At last she had to speak.

“Could you make a fire? I am so cold,” she said, with chattering teeth.

“Want to come over here?” came his voice.

“I would rather you made me a fire,” she said, her teeth knocking together and chopping the words in two.

He got up and kindled a fire. At last the warmth spread, and she could sleep.

The next day was still chilly, with some wind. But the sun shone. He went about in silence, with a dead-looking face. It was now so dreary and so like death she wished he would do anything rather than continue in this negation. If now he asked her to go down with him to the world and marry him, she would do it. What did it matter? Nothing mattered any more.

But he would not ask her. His desire was dead and heavy like ice within him. He kept watch around the house.

On the fourth day as she sat huddled in the doorway in the sun, hugged in a blanket, she saw two horsemen come over the crest of the grassy slope — small figures. She gave a cry. He looked up quickly and saw the figures. The men had dismounted. They were looking for the trail.

“They are looking for me,” she said.

“*Muy bien*,” he answered in Spanish.

He went and fetched his gun, and sat with it across his knees.

“Oh!” she said. “Don’t shoot!”

He looked across at her.

“Why?” he said. “You like staying with me?”

“No,” she said. “But don’t shoot.”

“I ain’t going to Pen,” he said.

“You won’t have to go to Pen,” she said. “Don’t shoot!”

“I’m going to shoot,” he muttered.

And straightaway he kneeled and took very careful aim. The Princess sat on in

an agony of helplessness and hopelessness.

The shot rang out. In an instant she saw one of the horses on the pale grassy slope rear and go rolling down. The man had dropped in the grass, and was invisible. The second man clambered on his horse, and on that precipitous place went at a gallop in a long swerve towards the nearest spruce tree cover. Bang! Bang! went Romero's shots. But each time he missed, and the running horse leaped like a kangaroo towards cover.

It was hidden. Romero now got behind a rock; tense silence, in the brilliant sunshine. The Princess sat on the bunk inside the cabin, crouching, paralysed. For hours, it seemed, Romero knelt behind this rock, in his black shirt, bare-headed, watching. He had a beautiful, alert figure. The Princess wondered why she did not feel sorry for him. But her spirit was hard and cold, her heart could not melt. Though now she would have called him to her, with love.

But no, she did not love him. She would never love any man. Never! It was fixed and sealed in her, almost vindictively.

Suddenly she was so startled she almost fell from the bunk. A shot rang out quite close from behind the cabin. Romero leaped straight into the air, his arms fell outstretched, turning as he leaped. And even while he was in the air, a second shot rang out, and he fell with a crash, squirming, his hands clutching the earth towards the cabin door.

The Princess sat absolutely motionless, transfixed, staring at the prostrate figure. In a few moments the figure of a man in the Forest Service appeared close to the house; a young man in a broad-brimmed Stetson hat, dark flannel shirt, and riding-boots, carrying a gun. He strode over to the prostrate figure.

"Got you, Romero!" he said aloud. And he turned the dead man over. There was already a little pool of blood where Romero's breast had been.

"H'm!" said the Forest Service man. "Guess I got you nearer than I thought."

And he squatted there, staring at the dead man.

The distant calling of his comrade aroused him. He stood up.

"Hullo, Bill!" he shouted. "Yep! Got him! Yep! Done him in, apparently."

The second man rode out of the forest on a grey horse. He had a ruddy, kind face, and round brown eyes, dilated with dismay.

"He's not passed out?" he asked anxiously.

"Looks like it," said the first young man coolly.

The second dismounted and bent over the body. Then he stood up again, and nodded.

"Yea-a!" he said. "He's done in all right. It's him all right, boy! It's Domingo Romero."

"Yep! I know it!" replied the other.

Then in perplexity he turned and looked into the cabin, where the Princess squatted, staring with big owl eyes from her red blanket.

“Hello!” he said, coming towards the hut. And he took his hat off. Oh, the sense of ridicule she felt! Though he did not mean any.

But she could not speak, no matter what she felt.

“What’d this man start firing for?” he asked.

She fumbled for words, with numb lips.

“He had gone out of his mind!” she said, with solemn, stammering conviction.

“Good Lord! You mean to say he’d gone out of his mind? Whew! That’s pretty awful! That explains it then. H’m!”

He accepted the explanation without more ado.

With some difficulty they succeeded in getting the Princess down to the ranch. But she, too, was not a little mad.

“I’m not quite sure where I am,” she said to Mrs. Wilkieson, as she lay in bed. “Do you mind explaining?”

Mrs. Wilkieson explained tactfully.

“Oh yes!” said the Princess. “I remember. And I had an accident in the mountains, didn’t I? Didn’t we meet a man who’d gone mad, and who shot my horse from under me?”

“Yes, you met a man who had gone out of his mind.”

The real affair was hushed up. The Princess departed east in a fortnight’s time, in Miss Cummins’s care. Apparently she had recovered herself entirely. She was the Princess, and a virgin intact.

But her bobbed hair was grey at the temples, and her eyes were a little mad. She was slightly crazy.

“Since my accident in the mountains, when a man went mad and shot my horse from under me, and my guide had to shoot him dead, I have never felt quite myself.”

So she put it.

Later, she married an elderly man, and seemed pleased.

JIMMY AND THE DESPERATE WOMAN

“He is very fine and strong somewhere, but he does need a level-headed woman to look after him.”

That was the *friendly* feminine verdict upon him. It flattered him, it pleased him, it galled him.

Having divorced a very charming and clever wife, who had held this opinion for ten years, and at last had got tired of the level-headed protective game, his gall was uppermost.

“I want to throw Jimmy out on the world, but I know the poor little man will go and fall on some woman’s bosom. That’s the worst of him. If he could only stand alone for ten minutes. But he can’t. At the same time, there *is* something fine about him, something rare.”

This had been Clarissa’s summing-up as she floated away in the arms of the rich young American. The rich young American got rather angry when Jimmy’s name was mentioned. Clarissa was now *his* wife. But she did sometimes talk as if she were still married to Jimmy.

Not in Jimmy’s estimation, however. That worm had turned. Gall was uppermost. Gall and wormwood. He knew exactly what Clarissa thought — and said — about him. And the “something fine, something rare, something strong” which he was supposed to have “about him” was utterly outbalanced, in his feelings at least, by the “poor little man” nestled upon “some woman’s bosom”, which he was supposed to *be*.

“I am *not*,” he said to himself, “a poor little man nestled upon some woman’s bosom. If I could only find the right sort of woman, she should nestle on mine.”

Jimmy was now thirty-five, and this point, to nestle or to be nestled, was the emotional crux and turning-point.

He imagined to himself some really *womanly* woman, to whom he should be *only* “fine and strong”, and not for one moment “the poor little man”. Why not some simple uneducated girl, some Tess of the D’Urbervilles, some wistful Gretchen, some humble Ruth gleaning an aftermath? Why not? Surely the world was full of such!

The trouble was he never met them. He only met sophisticated women. He really never had a chance of meeting “real” people. So few of us ever do. Only the people we *don’t* meet are the “real” people, the simple, genuine, direct spontaneous, unspoilt souls. Ah, the simple, genuine, unspoilt people we *don’t*

meet! What a tragedy it is!

Because, of course, they must be there! Somewhere! Only we never come across them.

Jimmy was terribly handicapped by his position. It brought him into contact with so many people. Only never the right sort. Never the “real” people: the simple, genuine, unspoilt, etc., *etc.*

He was editor of a high-class, rather high-brow, rather successful magazine, and his rather personal, very candid editorials brought him shoals, swarms, hosts of admiring acquaintances. Realise that he was handsome, and could be extraordinarily “nice”, when he liked, and was really very clever, in his own critical way, and you see how many chances he had of being adored and protected.

In the first place his good looks: the fine, clean lines of his face, like the face of the laughing faun in one of the faun’s unlaughing, moody moments. The long, clean lines of the cheeks, the strong chin and the slightly arched, full nose, the beautiful dark-grey eyes with long lashes, and the thick black brows. In his mocking moments, when he seemed most himself, it was a pure Pan face, with thick black eyebrows cocked up, and grey eyes with a sardonic goaty gleam, and nose and mouth curling with satire. A good-looking, smooth-skinned satyr. That was Jimmy at his best. In the opinion of his men friends.

In his own opinion, he was a sort of Martyred Saint Sebastian, at whom the wicked world shot arrow after arrow — Mater Dolorosa nothing to him — and he counted the drops of blood as they fell: when he could keep count. Sometimes — as for instance when Clarissa said she was really departing with the rich young American, and should she divorce Jimmy, or was Jimmy going to divorce her? — then the arrows assailed him like a flight of starlings flying straight at him, jabbing at him, and the drops of martyred blood simply spattered down, he couldn’t keep count.

So, naturally, he divorced Clarissa.

In the opinion of his men friends, he was, or should be, a consistently grinning faun, satyr, or Pan-person. In his own opinion, he was a Martyred Saint Sebastian with the mind of Plato. In the opinion of his woman friends, he was a fascinating little man with a profound understanding of life and the capacity really to understand a woman and to make a woman feel a queen; which of course was to make a woman feel her *real* self . . .

He might, naturally, have made rich and resounding marriages, especially after the divorce. He didn’t. The reason was, secretly, his resolve never to make any woman feel a queen any more. It was the turn of the women to make him feel a king.

Some unspoilt, unsophisticated, wild-blooded woman, to whom he would be a sort of Solomon of wisdom, beauty, and wealth. She would need to be in reduced circumstances to appreciate his wealth, which amounted to the noble sum of three thousand pounds and a little week-ending cottage in Hampshire. And to be unsophisticated she would have to be a woman of the people. Absolutely.

At the same time, not just the “obscure vulgar simplican”.

He received many letters, many, many, many, enclosing poems, stories, articles, or more personal unbosomings. He read them all: like a solemn rook pecking and scratching among the litter.

And one — not one letter, but one correspondent — might be *the* one — Mrs Emilia Pinnegar, who wrote from a mining village in Yorkshire. She was, of course, unhappily married.

Now Jimmy had always had a mysterious feeling about these dark and rather dreadful mining villages in the north. He himself had scarcely set foot north of Oxford. He felt that these miners up there must be the real stuff. And Pinnegar was a name, surely! And Emilia!

She wrote a poem, with a brief little note, that, if the editor of the *Commentator* thought the verses of no value, would he simply destroy them. Jimmy, as editor of the *Commentator*, thought the verses quite good and admired the brevity of the note. But he wasn't sure about printing the poem. He wrote back, Had Mrs Pinnegar nothing else to submit?

Then followed a correspondence. And at length, upon request, this from Mrs Pinnegar:

“You ask me about myself, but what shall I say? I am a woman of thirty-one, with one child, a girl of eight, and I am married to a man who lives in the same house with me, but goes to another woman. I try to write poetry, if it is poetry, because I have no other way of expressing myself at all, and even if it doesn't matter to anybody besides myself, I feel I must and will express myself, if only to save myself from developing cancer or some disease that women have. I was a school-teacher before I was married, and I got my certificates at Rotherham College. If I could, I would teach again, and live alone. But married teachers can't get jobs any more, they aren't allowed — ”

THE COAL MINER

By His Wife

The donkey-engine's beating noise
And the rattle, rattle of the sorting screens
Come down on me like the beat of his heart,

And mean the same as his breathing means.

The burning big pit-hill with fumes
Fills the air like the presence of that fair-haired man.
And the burning fire burning deeper and deeper
Is his will insisting since time began.

As he breathes the chair goes up and down
In the pit-shaft; he lusts as the wheel-fans spin
The sucking air: he lives in the coal
Underground: and his soul is a strange engine.

That is the manner of man he is.
I married him and I should know.
The mother earth from bowels of coal
Brought him forth for the overhead woe.

This was the poem that the editor of the *Commentator* hesitated about. He reflected, also, that Mrs Pinnegar didn't sound like one of the nestling, unsophisticated rustic type. It was something else that still attracted him: something desperate in a woman, something tragic.

THE NEXT EVENT

If at evening, when the twilight comes,
You ask me what the day has been,
I shall not know. The distant drums
Of some new-comer intervene

Between me and the day that's been.
Some strange man leading long columns
Of unseen soldiers through the green
Sad twilight of these smoky slums.

And as the darkness slowly numbs
My senses, everything I've seen
Or heard the daylight through, becomes
Rubbish behind an opaque screen.

Instead, the sound of muffled drums
 Inside myself: I have to lean
And listen as my strength succumbs,
 To hear what these oncomings mean.

Perhaps the Death-God striking his thumbs
 On the drums in a deadly rat-ta-ta-plan.
Or a strange man marching slow as he strums
 The tune of a new weird hope in Man.

What does it matter! The day that began
 In coal-dust is ending the same, in crumbs
Of darkness like coal. I live if I can;
 If I can't, then I welcome whatever comes.

This poem sounded so splendidly desperate, the editor of the *Commentator* decided to print it, and, moreover, to see the authoress. He wrote, Would she care to see him, if he happened to be in her neighbourhood? He was going to lecture in Sheffield. She replied, Certainly.

He gave his afternoon lecture, on *Men in Books and Men in Life*. Naturally, men in books came first. Then he caught a train to reach the mining village where the Pinnegars lived.

It was February, with gruesome patches of snow. It was dark when he arrived at Mill Valley, a sort of thick, turgid darkness full of menace, where men speaking in a weird accent went past like ghosts, dragging their heavy feet and emitting the weird scent of the coal-mine underworld. Weird and a bit gruesome it was.

He knew he had to walk uphill to the little market-place. As he went, he looked back and saw the black valleys with bunches of light, like camps of demons it seemed to him. And the demonish smell of sulphur and coal in the air, in the heavy, pregnant, clammy darkness.

They directed him to New London Lane, and down he went down another hill. His skin crept a little. The place felt uncanny and hostile, hard, as if iron and minerals breathed into the black air. Thank goodness he couldn't see much, or be seen. When he had to ask his way the people treated him in a "heave-half-a-brick-at-him" fashion.

After much weary walking and asking, he entered a lane between trees, in the cold slushy mud of the unfrozen February. The mines, apparently, were on the outskirts of the town, in some mud-sunk country. He could see the red, sore fires

of the burning pit-hill through the trees, and he smelt the sulphur. He felt like some modern Ulysses wandering in the realms of Hecate. How much more dismal and horrible, a modern Odyssey among mines and factories, than any Sirens, Scyllas or Charybdises.

So he mused to himself as he waded through icy black mud, in a black lane, under black trees that moaned an accompaniment to the sound of the coal-mine's occasional hissing and chuffing, under a black sky that quenched even the electric sparkle of the colliery. And the place seemed unhabitated like a cold black jungle.

At last he came in sight of a glimmer. Apparently, there were dwellings. Yes, a new little street, with one street-lamp, and the houses all apparently dark. He paused. Absolute desertion. Then three children.

They told him the house, and he stumbled up a dark passage. There was light on the little backyard. He knocked, in some trepidation. A rather tall woman, looking down at him with a "Who are you?" look, from the step above.

"Mrs Pinnegar?"

"Oh, is it you, Mr Frith? Come in."

He stumbled up the step into the glaring light of the kitchen. There stood Mrs Pinnegar, a tall woman with a face like a mask of passive anger, looking at him coldly. Immediately he felt his own shabbiness and smallness. In utter confusion, he stuck out his hand.

"I had an awful time getting here," he said. "I'm afraid I shall make a frightful mess of your house." He looked down at his boots.

"That's all right," she said. "Have you had your tea?"

"No — but don't you bother about me."

There was a little girl with fair hair in a fringe over her forehead, troubled blue eyes under the fringe, and two dolls. He felt easier.

"Is this your little girl?" he asked. "She's awfully nice. What is her name?"

"Jane."

"How are you, Jane?" he said. But the child only stared at him with the baffled, bewildered, pained eyes of a child who lives with hostile parents.

Mrs Pinnegar set his tea, bread and butter, jam, and buns. Then she sat opposite him. She was handsome, dark straight brows and grey eyes with yellow grains in them, and a way of looking straight at you as if she were used to holding her own. Her eyes were the nicest part of her. They had a certain kindness, mingled, like the yellow grains among the grey, with a relentless, unyielding feminine will. Her nose and mouth were straight, like a Greek mask, and the expression was fixed. She gave him at once the impression of a woman who has made a mistake, who knows it, but who will not change: who cannot

now change.

He felt very uneasy. Being a rather small, shambling man, she made him aware of his physical inconspicuousness. And she said not a word, only looked down on him, as he drank his tea, with that changeless look of a woman who is holding her own against Man and Fate. While, from the corner across the kitchen, the little girl with her fair hair and her dolls, watched him also in absolute silence, from her hot blue eyes.

“This seems a pretty awful place,” he said to her.

“It is. It’s absolutely awful,” the woman said.

“You ought to get away from it,” he said.

But she received this in dead silence.

It was exceedingly difficult to make any headway. He asked about Mr Pinnegar. She glanced at the clock.

“He comes up at nine,” she said.

“Is he down the mine?”

“Yes. He’s on the afternoon shift.”

There was never a sound from the little girl.

“Doesn’t Jane ever talk?” he asked.

“Not much,” said her mother, glancing round.

He talked a little about his lectures, about Sheffield, about London. But she was not really interested. She sat there rather distant, very laconic, looking at him with those curious unyielding eyes. She looked to him like a woman who has had her revenge, and is left stranded on the reefs where she wrecked her opponent. Still unrelenting, unregretting, unyielding, she seemed rather undecided as to what her revenge had been, and what it had all been about.

“You ought to get away from here,” he said to her.

“Where to?” she asked.

“Oh” — he made a vague gesture — “anywhere, so long as it is *quite* away.”

She seemed to ponder this, under her portentous brow.

“I don’t see what difference it would make,” she said. Then glancing round at her child: “I don’t see what difference anything would make, except getting out of the world altogether. But there’s *her* to consider.” And she jerked her head in the direction of the child.

Jimmy felt definitely frightened. He wasn’t used to this sort of grimness. At the same time he was excited. This handsome, laconic woman, with her soft brown hair and her unflinching eyes with their gold flecks, seemed to be challenging him to something. There was a touch of challenge in her remaining gold-flecked kindness. Somewhere, she had a heart. But what had happened to it? And why?

What had gone wrong with her? In some way, she must have gone against herself.

“Why don’t you come and live with me?” he said, like the little gambler he was.

The queer, conflicting smile was on his face. He had taken up her challenge, like a gambler. The very sense of a gamble, in which he could not lose desperately, excited him. At the same time, he was scared of her, and determined to get beyond his scare.

She sat and watched him, with the faintest touch of a grim smile on her handsome mouth.

“How do you mean, live with you?” she said.

“Oh — I mean what it usually means,” he said, with a little puff of self-conscious laughter.

“You’re evidently not happy here. You’re evidently in the wrong circumstances altogether. You’re obviously *not* just an ordinary woman. Well, then, break away. When I say, Come and live with me, I mean just what I say. Come to London and live with me, as my wife, if you like, and then if we want to marry, when you get a divorce, why, we can do it.”

Jimmy made this speech more to himself than to the woman. That was how he was. He worked out all his things inside himself, as if it were all merely an interior problem of his own. And while he did so, he had an odd way of squinting his left eye and wagging his head loosely, like a man talking absolutely to himself, and turning his eyes inwards.

The woman watched him in a sort of wonder. This was something she was *not* used to. His extraordinary manner, and his extraordinary bald proposition, roused her from her own tense apathy.

“Well!” she said. “That’s got to be thought about. What about *her*?” — and again she jerked her head towards the round-eyed child in the corner. Jane sat with a completely expressionless face, her little red mouth fallen a little open. She seemed in a sort of trance: as if she understood like a grown-up person, but, as a child, sat in a trance, unconscious.

The mother wheeled round in her chair and stared at her child. The little girl stared back at her mother, with hot, troubled, almost guilty blue eyes. And neither said a word. Yet they seemed to exchange worlds of meaning.

“Why, of course,” said Jimmy, twisting his head again; “she’d come, too.”

The woman gave a last look at her child, then turned to him, and started watching *him* with that slow, straight stare.

“It’s not” — he began, stuttering — “it’s not anything *sudden* and unconsidered on my part. I’ve been considering it for quite a long time — ever

since I had the first poem, and your letter.”

He spoke still with his eyes turned inwards, talking to himself.” And the woman watched him unflinchingly.

“Before you ever saw me?” she asked, with a queer irony.

“Oh, of course. Of course before I ever saw you. Or else I never *should* have seen you. From the very first, I had a definite feeling — ”

He made odd, sharp gestures, like a drunken man, and he spoke like a drunken man, his eyes turned inward, talking to himself. The woman was no more than a ghost moving inside his own consciousness, and he was addressing her there.

The actual woman sat outside looking on in a sort of wonder. This was really something new to her.

“And now you see me, do you want me, really, to come to London?”

She spoke in a dull tone of incredulity. The thing was just a little preposterous to her. But why not? It would have to be something a little preposterous, to get her out of the tomb she was in.

“Of course I do!” he cried, with another scoop of his head and scoop of his hand. “*Now* I do *actually* want you, now I actually see you.” He never looked at her. His eyes were still turned in. He was still talking to himself, in a sort of drunkenness with himself.

To her, it was something extraordinary. But it roused her from apathy.

He became aware of the hot blue eyes of the hot-cheeked little girl fixed upon him from the distant corner. And he gave a queer little giggle.

“Why, it’s more than I could ever have hoped for,” he said, “to have you and Jane to live with me! Why, it will mean *life* to me.” He spoke in an odd, strained voice, slightly delirious. And for the first time he looked up at the woman and, apparently, *straight* at her. But, even as he seemed to look straight at her, the curious cast was in his eye, and he was only looking at himself, inside himself, at the shadows inside his own consciousness.

“And when would you like me to come?” she asked, rather coldly.

“Why, as soon as possible. Come back with me to-morrow, if you will. I’ve got a little house in St John’s Wood, *waiting* for you. Come with me to-morrow. That’s the simplest.”

She watched him for some time, as he sat with ducked head. He looked like a man who is drunk — drunk with himself. He was going bald at the crown, his rather curly black hair was thin.

“I couldn’t come to-morrow, I should need a few days,” she said.

She wanted to see his face again. It was as if she could not remember what his face was like, this strange man who had appeared out of nowhere, with such a strange proposition.

He lifted his face, his eyes still cast in that inturned, blind look. He looked now like a Mephistopheles who has gone blind. With his black brows cocked up, Mephistopheles, Mephistopheles blind and begging in the street.

“Why, of course it’s wonderful that it’s happened like this for me,” he said, with odd pouting emphasis, pushing out his lips. “I was finished, absolutely finished. I was finished while Clarissa was with me. But after she’d gone, I was *absolutely* finished. And I thought there was no chance for me in the world again. It seems to me perfectly marvellous that this has happened — that I’ve come across you — ” he lifted his face sightlessly — ”and Jane — Jane — why she’s *really* too good to be true.” He gave a slight hysterical laugh. “She really is.”

The woman, and Jane, watched him with some embarrassment.

“I shall have to settle up here, with Mr Pinnegar,” she said, rather coldly musing. “Do you want to see him?”

“Oh, I — ” he said, with a deprecating gesture, “I don’t *care*. But if you think I’d better — why, certainly — ”

“I do think you’d better,” she said.

“Very well, then, I *will*. I’ll see him whenever you like.”

“He comes in soon after nine,” she said.

“All right, I’ll see him then. Much better. But I suppose I’d better see about finding a place to sleep first. Better not leave it too late.”

“I’ll come with you and ask for you.”

“Oh, you’d better not, really. If you tell me where to go — ”

He had taken on a protective tone: he was protecting her against herself and against scandal. It was his manner, his rather Oxfordy manner, more than anything else, that went beyond her. She wasn’t used to it.

Jimmy plunged out into the gulping blackness of the Northern night, feeling how horrible it was, but pressing his hat on his brow in a sense of strong adventure. He was going through with it.

At the baker’s shop, where she had suggested he should ask for a bed, they would have none of him. Absolutely they didn’t like the looks of him. At the Pub, too, they shook their heads: didn’t want to have anything to do with him. But, in a voice more expostulatingly Oxford than ever, he said:

“But look here — you can’t ask a man to sleep under one of these hedges. Can’t I see the landlady?”

He persuaded the landlady to promise to let him sleep on the big, soft settee in the parlour, where the fire was burning brightly. Then, saying he would be back about ten, he returned through mud and drizzle up New London Lane.

The child was in bed, a saucepan was boiling by the fire. Already the lines had

softened a little in the woman's face.

She spread a cloth on the table. Jimmy sat in silence, feeling that she was hardly aware of his presence. She was absorbed, no doubt, in the coming of her husband. The stranger merely sat on the sofa, and waited. He felt himself wound up tight. And once he was really wound up, he could go through with anything.

They heard the nine-o'clock whistle at the mine. The woman then took the saucepan from the fire and went into the scullery. Jimmy could smell the smell of potatoes being strained. He sat quite still. There was nothing for him to do or to say. He was wearing his big black-rimmed spectacles, and his face, blank and expressionless in the suspense of waiting, looked like the death-mask of some sceptical philosopher, who could wait through the ages, and who could hardly distinguish life from death at any time.

Came the heavy-shod tread up the house entry, and the man entered, rather like a blast of wind. The fair moustache stuck out from the blackish, mottled face, and the fierce blue eyes rolled their whites in the coal-blackened sockets.

"This gentleman is Mr Frith," said Emily Pinnegar.

Jimmy got up, with a bit of an Oxford wriggle, and held out his hand, saying: "How do you do?"

His grey eyes, behind the spectacles, had an uncanny whitish gleam.

"My hand's not fit to shake hands," said the miner. "Take a seat."

"Oh, nobody minds coal-dust," said Jimmy, subsiding on to the sofa. "It's clean dirt."

"They say so," said Pinnegar.

He was a man of medium height, thin, but energetic in build.

Mrs Pinnegar was running hot water into a pail from the bright brass tap of the stove, which had a boiler to balance the oven. Pinnegar dropped heavily into a wooden armchair, and stooped to pull off his ponderous grey pit-boots. He smelled of the strange, stale underground. In silence he pulled on his slippers, then rose, taking his boots into the scullery. His wife followed with the pail of hot water. She returned and spread a coarse roller-towel on the steel fender. The man could be heard washing in the scullery, in the semi-dark. Nobody said anything. Mrs Pinnegar attended to her husband's dinner.

After a while, Pinnegar came running in, naked to the waist, and squatted plumb in front of the big red fire, on his heels. His head and face and the front part of his body were all wet. His back was grey and unwashed. He seized the towel from the fender and began to rub his face and head with a sort of brutal vigour, while his wife brought a bowl, and with a soapy flannel silently washed his back, right down to the loins, where the trousers were rolled back. The man was entirely oblivious of the stranger — this washing was part of the collier's

ritual, and nobody existed for the moment. The woman, washing her husband's back, stooping there as he kneeled with knees wide apart, squatting on his heels on the rag hearthrug, had a peculiar look on her strong, handsome face, a look sinister and derisive. She was deriding something or somebody; but Jimmy could not make out whom or what.

It was a new experience for him to sit completely and brutally excluded, from a personal ritual. The collier vigorously rubbed his own fair short hair, till it all stood on end, then he stared into the red-hot fire, oblivious, while the red colour burned in his cheeks. Then again he rubbed his breast and his body with the rough towel, brutally, as if his body were some machine he was cleaning, while his wife, with a peculiar slow movement, dried his back with another towel.

She took away the towel and bowl. The man was dry. He still squatted with his hands on his knees, gazing abstractedly, blankly into the fire. That, too, seemed part of his daily ritual. The colour flushed in his cheeks, his fair moustache was rubbed on end. But his hot blue eyes stared hot and vague into the red coals, while the red glare of the coal fell on his breast and naked body.

He was a man of about thirty-five, in his prime, with a pure smooth skin and no fat on his body. His muscles were not large, but quick, alive with energy. And as he squatted bathing abstractedly in the glow of the fire, he seemed like some pure-moulded engine that sleeps between its motions, with incomprehensible eyes of dark iron-blue.

He looked round, always averting his face from the stranger on the sofa, shutting him out of consciousness. The wife took out a bundle from the dresser-cupboard, and handed it to the out-stretched, work-scarred hand of the man on the hearth. Curious, that big, horny, work-battered clean hand, at the end of the suave, thin naked arm.

Pinnegar unrolled his shirt and undervest in front of the fire, warmed them for a moment in the glow, vaguely, sleepily, then pulled them over his head. And then at last he rose, with his shirt hanging over his trousers, and in the same abstract, sleepy way, shutting the world out of his consciousness, he went out again to the scullery, pausing at the same dresser-cupboard to take out his rolled-up day trousers.

Mrs Pinnegar took away the towels and set the dinner on the table — rich, oniony stew out of a hissing brown stew-jar, boiled potatoes, and a cup of tea. The man returned from the scullery, in his clean flannelette shirt and black trousers, his fair hair neatly brushed. He planked his wooden armchair beside the table, and sat heavily down, to eat.

Then he looked at Jimmy, as one wary, probably hostile man looks at another.

“You're a stranger in these parts, I gather?” he said. There was something

slightly formal, even a bit pompous, in his speech.

“An absolute stranger,” replied Jimmy, with a slight aside grin.

The man dabbed some mustard on his plate, and glanced at his food to see if he would like it.

“Come from a distance, do you?” he asked, as he began to eat. As he ate, he seemed to become oblivious again of Jimmy, bent his head over his plate, and ate. But probably he was ruminating something all the time, with barbaric wariness.

“From London,” said Jimmy, warily.

“London!” said Pinnegar, without looking from his plate.

Mrs Pinnegar came and sat, in ritualistic silence, in her tail-backed rocking-chair under the light.

“What brings you this way, then?” asked Pinnegar, stirring his tea.

“Oh!” Jimmy writhed a little on the sofa. “I came to see Mrs Pinnegar.”

The miner took a hasty gulp of tea.

“You’re acquainted then, are you?” he said, still without looking round. He sat with his side-face to Jimmy.

“Yes, we are *now*,” explained Jimmy. “I didn’t know Mrs Pinnegar till this evening. As a matter of fact, she sent me some poems for the *Commentator* — I’m the editor — and I thought they were good, so I wrote and told her so. Then I felt I wanted to come and see her, and she was willing, so I came.”

The man reached out, cut himself a piece of bread, and swallowed a large mouthful.

“You thought her poetry was good?” he said, turning at last to Jimmy and looking straight at him, with a stare something like the child’s, but aggressive. “Are you going to put it in your magazine?”

“Yes, I think I am,” said Jimmy.

“I never read but one of her poems — something about a collier she knew all about, because she’d married him,” he said, in his peculiar harsh voice, that had a certain jeering clang in it, and a certain indomitableness.

Jimmy was silent. The other man’s harsh fighting-voice made him shrink.

“I could never get on with the *Commentator* myself,” said Pinnegar, looking round for his pudding, pushing his meat-plate aside. “Seems to me to go a long way round to get nowhere.”

“Well, probably it *does*,” said Jimmy, squirming a little. “But so long as the way is interesting! I don’t see that anything gets anywhere at present — certainly no periodical.”

“I don’t know,” said Pinnegar. “There’s some facts in the *Liberator* — and there’s some ideas in the *Janus*. I can’t see the use myself, of all these feelings

folk say they have. They get you nowhere.”

“But,” said Jimmy, with a slight pouf of laughter, “where do you *want* to get? It’s all very well talking about getting somewhere, but where, where in the world to-day do you *want* to get? In general, I mean. If you want a better job in the mine — all right, go ahead and get it. But when you begin to talk about getting somewhere in *life* — why, you’ve got to know what you’re talking about.”

“I’m a man, aren’t I?” said the miner, going very still and hard.

“But what do you *mean*, when you say you’re a man?” snarled Jimmy, really exasperated. “What do you mean? Yes, you *are* a man. But what about it?”

“Haven’t I the right to say I won’t be made use of?” said the collier, slow, harsh, and heavy.

“You’ve got a right to *say* it,” retorted Jimmy, with a pouf of laughter. “But it doesn’t *mean* anything. We’re all made use of, from King George downwards. We have to be. When you eat your pudding you’re making use of hundreds of people — including your wife.”

“I know it. I know it. It makes no difference, though. I’m not going to be made use of.”

Jimmy shrugged his shoulders.

“Oh, all right!” he said. “That’s just a phrase, like any other.”

The miner sat very still in his chair, his face going hard and remote. He was evidently thinking over something that was stuck like a barb in his consciousness, something he was trying to harden over, as the skin sometimes hardens over a steel splinter in the flesh.

“I’m nothing but made use of,” he said, now talking hard and final, to himself, and staring out into space. “Down the pit, I’m made use of, and they give me a wage, such as it is. At the house, I’m made use of, and my wife sets the dinner on the table as if I was a customer in a shop.”

“But what do you *expect*?” cried Jimmy, writhing in his chair.

“Me? What do I expect? I expect nothing. But I tell you what — ” he turned, and looked straight and hard into Jimmy’s eyes — “I’m not going to put up with anything, either.”

Jimmy saw the hard finality in the other man’s eyes, and squirmed away from it.

“If you *know* what you’re not going to put up with — ” he said.

“I don’t want my wife writing poetry! And sending it to a parcel of men she’s never seen. I don’t want my wife sitting like Queen Boadicea, when I come home, and a face like a stone wall with holes is it. I don’t know what’s wrong with her. She doesn’t know herself. But she does as she likes. Only, mark you, I do the same.”

“Of course!” cried Jimmy, though there was no of course about it.

“She’s told you I’ve got another woman?”

“Yes.”

“And I’ll tell you for why. If I give in to the coal face, and go down the mine every day to eight hours’ slavery, more or less, somebody’s got to give in to me.”

“Then,” said Jimmy, after a pause, “if you mean you want your wife to submit to you — well, that’s the problem. You have to marry the woman who *will* submit.”

It was amazing, this from Jimmy. He sat there and lectured the collier like a Puritan Father, completely forgetting the disintegrating flutter of Clarissa, in his own background.

“I want a wife who’ll please me, who’ll want to please me,” said the collier.

“Why should *you* be pleased, any more than anybody else?” asked the wife coldly.

“My child, my little girl wants to please me — if her mother would let her. But the women hang together. I tell you” — and here he turned to Jimmy, with a blaze in his dark blue eyes — “I want a woman to please me, a woman who’s anxious to please me. And if I can’t find her in my own home, I’ll find her out of it.”

“I hope she pleases you,” said the wife, rocking slightly.

“Well,” said the man, “she does.”

“Then why don’t you go and live with her altogether?” she said.

He turned and looked at her.

“Why don’t I?” he said. “Because I’ve got my home. I’ve got my house, I’ve got my wife, let her be what she may, as a woman to live with. And I’ve got my child. Why should I break it all up?”

“And what about me?” she asked, coldly and fiercely.

“You? You’ve got a home. You’ve got a child. You’ve got a man who works for you. You’ve got what you want. You do as you like — ”

“Do I?” she asked, with intolerable sarcasm.

“Yes. Apart from the bit of work in the house, you do as you like. If you want to go, you can go. But while you live in my house, you must respect it. You bring no men here, you see.”

“Do *you* respect your home?” she said.

“Yes! I do! If I get another woman — who pleases me — I deprive you of nothing. All I ask of you is to do your duty as a housewife.”

“Down to washing your back!” she said, heavily sarcastic; and, Jimmy thought, a trifle vulgar.

“Down to washing my back, since it’s got to be washed,” he said.

“What about the other woman? Let her do it.”

“This is my home.”

The wife gave a strange movement, like a mad woman.

Jimmy sat rather pale and frightened. Behind the collier’s quietness he felt the concentration of almost cold anger and an unchanging will. In the man’s lean face he could see the bones, the fixity of the male bones, and it was as if the human soul, or spirit, had gone into the living skull and skeleton, almost invulnerable.

Jimmy, for some strange reason, felt a wild anger against this bony and logical man. It was the hard-driven coldness, fixity, that he could not bear.

“Look here!” he cried, in a resonant Oxford voice, his eyes glaring and casting inwards behind his spectacles. “You say Mrs Pinnegar is *free* — free to do as she pleases. In that case, you have no objection if she comes with me right away from here.”

The collier looked at the pale, strange face of the editor in wonder. Jimmy kept his face slightly averted, and sightless, seeing nobody. There was a Mephistophelian tilt about the eyebrows, and a Martyred Sebastian straightness about the mouth.

“Does she *want* to?” asked Pinnegar, with devastating incredulity. The wife smiled faintly, grimly. She could see the vanity of her husband in his utter inability to believe that she could prefer the other man to him.

“That,” said Jimmy, “you must ask her yourself. But it’s what I came here for: to ask her to come and live with me, and bring the child.”

“You came without having seen her, to ask her that?” said the husband, in growing wonder.

“Yes,” said Jimmy, vehemently, nodding his head with drunken emphasis. “Yes! Without ever having seen her!”

“You’ve caught a funny fish this time, with your poetry,” he said, turning with curious husband-familiarity to his wife. She hated this offhand husband-familiarity.

“What sort of fish have *you* caught?” she retorted. “And what did you catch *her* with?”

“Bird-lime!” he said, with a faint, quick grin.

Jimmy was sitting in suspense. They all three sat in suspense, for some time.

“And what are you saying to him?” said the collier at length.

Jimmy looked up, and the malevolent half-smile on his face made him look rather handsome again, a mixture of faun and Mephisto. He glanced curiously, invitingly, at the woman who was watching him from afar.

“I say yes!” she replied, in a cool voice.

The husband became very still, sitting erect in his wooden armchair and staring into space. It was as if he were fixedly watching something fly away from him, out of his own soul. But he was not going to yield at all, to any emotion.

He could not now believe that this woman should *want* to leave him. Yet she did.

“I’m sure it’s all for the best,” said Jimmy, in his Puritan-Father voice. “You don’t mind, really” — he drawled uneasily — “if she brings the child. I give you my word I’ll do my very best for it.”

The collier looked at him as if he were very far away. Jimmy quailed under the look. He could see that the other man was relentlessly killing the emotion in himself, stripping himself, as it were, of his own flesh, stripping himself to the hard unemotional bone of the human male.

“I give her a blank cheque,” said Pinnegar, with numb lips. “She does as she pleases.”

“So much for fatherly love, compared with selfishness,” she said.

He turned and looked at her with that curious power of remote anger. And immediately she became still, quenched.

“I give you a blank cheque, as far as I’m concerned,” he repeated abstractedly.

“It is blank indeed!” she said, with her first touch of bitterness.

Jimmy looked at the clock. It was growing late: he might be shut out of the public-house. He rose to go, saying he would return in the morning. He was leaving the next day, at noon, for London.

He plunged into the darkness and mud of that black, night-ridden country. There was a curious elation in his spirits, mingled with fear. But then he always needed an element of fear, really, to elate him. He thought with terror of those two human beings left in that house together. The frightening state of tension! He himself could never bear an extreme tension. He always had to compromise, to become apologetic and pathetic. He would be able to manage Mrs Pinnegar that way. Emily! He must get used to saying it. Emily! The Emilia was absurd. He had never known an Emily.

He felt really scared, and really elated. He was doing something big. It was not that he was in *love* with the woman. But, my God, he wanted to take her away from that man. And he wanted the adventure of her. Absolutely the adventure of her. He felt really elated, really himself, really manly.

But in the morning he returned rather sheepishly to the collier’s house. It was another dark, drizzling day, with black trees, black road, black hedges, blackish brick houses, and the smell and the sound of collieries under a skyless day. Like

living in some weird underground.

Unwillingly he went up that passage-entry again, and knocked at the back door, glancing at the miserable little back garden with its cabbage-stalks and its ugly sanitary arrangements.

The child opened the door to him: with her fair hair, flushed cheeks, and hot, dark-blue eyes.

“Hello, Jane!” he said.

The mother stood tall and square, by the table, watching him with portentous eyes, as he entered. She was handsome, but her skin was not very good: as if the battle had been too much for her health. Jimmy glanced up at her smiling his slow, ingratiating smile, that always brought a glow of success into a woman’s spirit. And as he saw her gold-flecked eyes searching in his eyes, without a bit of kindness, he thought to himself: “My God, however am I going to sleep with that woman!” His will was ready, however, and he would manage it somehow.

And when he glanced at the motionless, bony head and lean figure of the collier seated in the wooden armchair by the fire, he was the more ready. He must triumph over that man.

“What train are you going by?” asked Mrs Pinnegar.

“By the twelve thirty.” He looked up at her as he spoke, with the wide, shining, childlike, almost coy eyes that were his peculiar asset. She looked down at him in a sort of interested wonder. She seemed almost fascinated by his childlike, shining, inviting dark-grey eyes, with their long lashes: such an absolute change from that resentful unyielding that looked out always from the back of her husband’s blue eyes. Her husband always seemed like a menace to her, in his thinness, his concentration, his eternal unyielding. And this man looked at one with the wide, shining, fascinating eyes of a young Persian kitten, something at once bold and shy and coy and strangely inviting. She fell at once under their spell.

“You’ll have dinner before you go,” she said.

“No!” he cried in panic, unwilling indeed to eat before that other man. “No, I ate a fabulous breakfast. I will get a sandwich when I change in Sheffield: *really!*”

She had to go out shopping. She said she would go out to the station with him when she got back. It was just after eleven.

“But look here,” he said, addressing also the thin abstracted man who sat unnoticed, with a newspaper, “we’ve got to get this thing settled. I *want* Mrs Pinnegar to come and live with me, her and the child. And she’s coming! So don’t you think, now, it would be better if she came right along with me to-day! Just put a few things in a bag and come along. Why drag the thing out?”

“I tell you,” replied the husband, “she has a blank cheque from me to do as she likes.”

“All right, then! Won’t you do that? Won’t you come along with me now?” said Jimmy, looking up at her exposedly, but casting his eyes a bit inwards. Throwing himself with deliberate impulsiveness on her mercy.

“I can’t!” she said decisively. “I can’t come to-day.”

“But why not — really? Why not, while I’m here? You have that blank cheque, you can do as you please — ”

“The blank cheque won’t get me far,” she said rudely; “I can’t come to-day, anyhow.”

“When can you come, then?” he said, with that queer, petulant pleading. “The sooner the better, surely.”

“I can come on Monday,” she said abruptly.

“Monday!” He gazed up at her in a kind of panic, through his spectacles. Then he set his teeth again, and nodded his head up and down. “All right, then! To-day is Saturday. Then Monday!”

“If you’ll excuse me,” she said, “I’ve got to go out for a few things. I’ll walk to the station with you when I get back.”

She bundled Jane into a little sky-blue coat and bonnet, put on a heavy black coat and black hat herself, and went out.

Jimmy sat very uneasily opposite the collier, who also wore spectacles to read. Pinnegar put down the newspaper and pulled the spectacles off his nose, saying something about a Labour Government.

“Yes,” said Jimmy. “After all, best be logical. If you *are* democratic, the only logical thing is a Labour Government. Though, personally, one Government is as good as another, to me.”

“Maybe so!” said the collier. “But *something’s* got to come to an end, sooner or later.”

“Oh, a great deal!” said Jimmy, and they lapsed into silence.

“Have you been married before?” asked Pinnegar, at length.

“Yes. My wife and I are divorced.”

“I suppose you want me to divorce *my* wife?” said the collier.

“Why — yes! — that would be best — ”

“It’s the same to me,” said Pinnegar; “divorce or no divorce. I’ll *live* with another woman, but I’ll never *marry* another. Enough is as good as a feast. But if she wants a divorce, she can have it.”

“It would certainly be best,” said Jimmy.

There was a long pause. Jimmy wished the woman would come back.

“I look on you as an instrument,” said the miner. “Something had to break.

You are the instrument that breaks it.”

It was strange to sit in the room with this thin, remote, wilful man. Jimmy was a bit fascinated by him. But, at the same time, he hated him because he could not be in the same room with him without being under his spell. He felt himself dominated. And he hated it.

“My wife,” said Pinnegar, looking up at Jimmy with a peculiar, almost humorous, teasing grin, “expects to see me go to the dogs when she leaves me. It is her last hope.”

Jimmy ducked his head and was silent, not knowing what to say. The other man sat still in his chair, like a sort of infinitely patient prisoner, looking away out of the window and waiting.

“She thinks,” he said again, “that she has some wonderful future awaiting her somewhere, and you’re going to open the door.”

And again the same amused grin was in his eyes.

And again Jimmy was fascinated by the man. And again he hated the spell of this fascination. For Jimmy wanted to be, in his own mind, the strongest man among men, but particularly among women. And this thin, peculiar man could dominate him. He knew it. The very silent unconsciousness of Pinnegar dominated the room, wherever he was.

Jimmy hated this.

At last Mrs Pinnegar came back, and Jimmy set off with her. He shook hands with the collier.

“Good-bye!” he said.

“Good-bye!” said Pinnegar, looking down at him with those amused blue eyes, which Jimmy knew he would never be able to get beyond.

And the walk to the station was almost a walk of conspiracy against the man left behind, between the man in spectacles and the tall woman. They arranged the details for Monday. Emily was to come by the nine o’clock train: Jimmy would meet her at Marylebone, and instal her in his house in St John’s Wood. Then, with the child, they would begin a new life. Pinnegar would divorce his wife, or she would divorce him: and then, another marriage.

Jimmy got a tremendous kick out of it all on the journey home. He felt he had really done something desperate and adventurous. But he was in too wild a flutter to analyse any results. Only, as he drew near London, a sinking feeling came over him. He was desperately tired after it all, almost too tired to keep up.

Nevertheless, he went after dinner and sprang it all on Severn.

“You damn fool!” said Severn, in consternation. “What did you do it for?”

“Well,” said Jimmy, writhing. “Because *I wanted* to.”

“Good God! The woman sounds like the head of Medusa. You’re a hero of

some stomach, I must say! Remember Clarissa?”

“Oh,” writhed Jimmy. “But this is different.”

“Ay, her name’s Emma, or something of that sort, isn’t it?”

“Emily!” said Jimmy briefly.

“Well, you’re a fool, anyway, so you may as well keep on acting in character. I’ve no doubt, by playing weeping-willow, you’ll outlive all the female storms you ever prepare for yourself. I never yet did see a weeping-willow uprooted by a gale, so keep on hanging your harp on it, and you’ll be all right. Here’s luck! But for a man who was looking for a little Gretchen to adore him, you’re a corker!”

Which was all that Severn had to say. But Jimmy went home with his knees shaking. On Sunday morning he wrote an anxious letter. He didn’t know how to begin it: *Dear Mrs Pinnegar* and *Dear Emily* seemed either too late in the day or too early. So he just plunged in, without dear anything.

“I want you to have this before you come. Perhaps we have been precipitate. I only beg you to decide *finally*, for yourself, before you come. Don’t come, please, unless you are absolutely sure of yourself. If you are *in the least* unsure, wait a while, wait till you are quite certain, one way or the other.

“For myself, if you don’t come I shall understand. But please send me a telegram. If you do come, I shall welcome both you and the child. Yours ever — J.F.”

He paid a man his return fare, and three pounds extra, to go on the Sunday and deliver this letter.

The man came back in the evening. He had delivered the letter. There was no answer.

Awful Sunday night: tense Monday morning!

A telegram: “*Arrive Marylebone 12.50 with Jane. Yours ever. Emily.*”

Jimmy set his teeth and went to the station. But when he felt her looking at him, and so met her eyes: and after that saw her coming slowly down the platform, holding the child by the hand, her slow cat’s eyes smouldering under her straight brows, smouldering at him: he almost swooned. A sickly grin came over him as he held out his hand. Nevertheless he said:

“I’m *awfully* glad you came.”

And as he sat in the taxi, a perverse but intense desire for her came over him, making him almost helpless. He could feel, so strongly, the presence of that other man about her, and this went to his head like neat spirits. That other man! In some subtle, inexplicable way, he was actually bodily present, the husband. The woman moved in his aura. She was hopelessly married to him.

And this went to Jimmy’s head like neat whisky. Which of the two would fall

before him with a greater fall — the woman, or the man, her husband?

THE FLYING FISH

1 Departure from Mexico

COME home else no Day in Daybrook.' This cablegram was the first thing Gethin Day read of the pile of mail which he found at the hotel in the lost town of South Mexico, when he returned from his trip to the coast. Though the message was not signed, he knew whom it came from and what it meant.

He lay in his bed in the hot October evening, still sick with malaria. In the flush of fever he saw yet the parched, stark mountains of the south, the villages of reed huts lurking among trees, the black-eyed natives with the lethargy, the ennui, the pathos, the beauty of an exhausted race; and above all he saw the weird, uncanny flowers, which he had hunted from the high plateaux, through the valleys, and down to the steaming crocodile heat of the *tierra caliente*, towards the sandy, burning, intolerable shores. For he was fascinated by the mysterious green blood that runs in the veins of plants, and the purple and yellow and red blood that colours the faces of flowers. Especially the unknown flora of South Mexico attracted him, and above all he wanted to trace to the living plant the mysterious essences and toxins known with such strange elaboration to the Mayas, the Zapotecas, and the Aztecs.

His head was humming like a mosquito, his legs were paralysed for the moment by the heavy quinine injection the doctor had injected into them, and his soul was as good as dead with the malaria; so he threw all his letters unopened on the floor, hoping never to see them again. He lay with the pale yellow cablegram in his hand: 'Come home else no Day in Daybrook.' Through the open doors from the patio of the hotel came the heavy scent of that invisible green night-flower the natives call *Buena de Noche*. The little Mexican servant-girl strode in barefoot with a cup of tea, her flounced cotton skirt swinging, her long black hair down her back. She asked him in her birdlike Spanish if he wanted nothing more. '*Nada más,*' he said. 'Nothing more; leave me and shut the door.'

He wanted to shut out the scent of that powerful green inconspicuous night-flower he knew so well.

No Day in Daybrook;
For the Vale a bad outlook.

No Day in Daybrook! There had been Days in Daybrook since time began: at least, so he imagined.

Daybrook was a sixteenth-century stone house, among the hills in the middle of England. It stood where Crichdale bends to the south and where Ashleydale joins in. 'Daybrook standeth at the junction of the ways and at the centre of the trefoil. Even it rides within the Vale as an ark between three seas; being indeed the ark of these vales, if not of all England.' So had written Sir Gilbert Day, he who built the present Daybrook in the sixteenth century. Sir Gilbert's *Book of Days*, so beautifully written out on vellum and illuminated by his own hand, was one of the treasures of the family.

Sir Gilbert had sailed the Spanish seas in his day, and had come home rich enough to rebuild the old house of Daybrook according to his own fancy. He had made it a beautiful pointed house, rather small, standing upon a knoll above the river Ashe, where the valley narrowed and the woods rose steep behind. 'Nay,' wrote this quaint Elizabethan, 'though I say that Daybrook is the ark of the Vale, I mean not the house itself, but He that Day, that lives in the house in his day. While Day there be in Daybrook, the floods shall not cover the Vale nor shall they ride over England completely.'

Gethin Day was nearing forty, and he had not spent much of his time in Daybrook. He had been a soldier and had wandered in many countries. At home his sister Lydia, twenty years older than himself, had been the Day in Daybrook. Now from her cablegram he knew she was either ill or already dead.

She had been rather hard and grey like the rock of Crichdale, but faithful and a pillar of strength. She had let him go his own way, but always when he came home, she would look into his blue eyes with her searching uncanny grey look and ask: 'Well, have you come, or are you still wandering?' 'Still wandering, I think,' he said. 'Mind you don't wander into a cage one of these days,' she replied; 'you would find far more room for yourself in Daybrook than in these foreign parts, if you knew how to come into your own.'

This had always been the burden of her song to him: *if you knew how to come into your own*. And it had always exasperated him with a sense of futility; though whether his own futility or Lydia's, he had never made out.

Lydia was wrapt up in old Sir Gilbert's *Book of Days*; she had written out for her brother a fair copy, neatly bound in green leather, and had given it him without a word when he came of age, merely looking at him with that uncanny look of her grey eyes, expecting something of him, which always made him start away from her.

The *Book of Days* was a sort of secret family bible at Daybrook. It was never

shown to strangers, nor ever mentioned outside the immediate family. Indeed in the family it was never openly alluded to. Only on solemn occasions, or on rare evenings, at twilight, when the evening star shone, had the father, now dead, occasionally read aloud to the two children from the nameless work.

In the copy she had written out for Gethin, Lydia had used different coloured inks in different places. Gethin imagined that her favourite passages were those in the royal-blue ink, where the page was almost as blue as the cornflowers that grew tall beside the walks in the garden at Daybrook.

‘Beauteous is the day of the yellow sun which is the common day of men; but even as the winds roll unceasing above the trees of the world, so doth that Greater Day, which is the Uncommon Day, roll over the unclipt bushes of our little daytime. Even also as the morning sun shakes his yellow wings on the horizon and rises up, so the great bird beyond him spreads out his dark blue feathers, and beats his wings in the tremor of the Greater Day.’

Gethin knew a great deal of his *Book of Days* by heart. In a dilettante fashion, he had always liked rather highflown poetry, but in the last years, something in the hard, fierce, finite sun of Mexico, in the dry terrible land, and in the black staring eyes of the suspicious natives, had made the ordinary day lose its reality to him. It had cracked like some great bubble, and to his uneasiness and terror, he had seemed to see through the fissures the deeper blue of that other Greater Day where moved the other sun shaking its dark blue wings. Perhaps it was the malaria; perhaps it was his own inevitable development; perhaps it was the presence of those handsome, dangerous, wide-eyed men left over from the ages before the flood in Mexico, which caused his old connections and his accustomed world to break for him. He was ill, and he felt as if at the very middle of him, beneath his navel, some membrane were torn, some membrane which had connected him with the world and its day. The natives who attended him, quiet, soft, heavy, and rather helpless, seemed, he realized, to be gazing from their wide black eyes always into that greater day whence they had come and where they wished to return. Men of a dying race, to whom the busy sphere of the common day is a cracked and leaking shell.

He wanted to go home. He didn't care now whether England was tight and little and over-crowded and far too full of furniture. He no longer minded the curious quiet atmosphere of Daybrook in which he had felt he would stifle as a young man. He no longer resented the weight of family tradition, nor the peculiar sense of authority which the house seemed to have over him. Now he was sick from the soul outwards, and the common day had cracked for him, and the uncommon day was showing him its immensity, he felt that home was the place. It did not matter that England was small and tight and over-furnished, if

the Greater Day were roundabout. He wanted to go home, away from these big wild countries where men were dying back into the Greater Day, home where he dare face the sun behind the sun, and come into his own in the Greater Day.

But he was as yet too ill to go. He lay in the nausea of the tropics, and let the days pass over him. The door of his room stood open on to the patio where green banana trees and high strange-sapped flowering shrubs rose from the water-sprinkled earth towards that strange rage of blue which was the sky over the shadow-heavy, perfume-soggy air of the closed-in courtyard. Dark-blue shadows moved from the side of the patio, disappeared, then appeared on the other side. Evening had come, and the barefoot natives in white calico flitted with silent rapidity across, and across, for ever going, yet mysteriously going nowhere, threading the timelessness with their transit, like swallows of darkness.

The window of the room, opposite the door, opened on to the tropical parched street. It was a big window, came nearly down to the floor, and was heavily barred with upright and horizontal bars. Past the window went the natives, with the soft, light rustle of their sandals. Big straw hats balanced, dark cheeks, calico shoulders brushed with the silent swiftness of the Indian past the barred window-space. Sometimes children clutched the bars and gazed in, with great shining eyes and straight blue-black hair, to see the Americano lying in the majesty of a white bed. Sometimes a beggar stood there, sticking a skinny hand through the iron grille and whimpering the strange, endless, pullulating whimper of the beggar — ‘*por amor de Dios!*’ — on and on and on, as it seemed for an eternity. But the sick man on the bed endured it with the same endless endurance in resistance, endurance in resistance which he had learned in the Indian countries. Aztec or Mixtec, Zapotec or Maya, always the same power of serpent-like torpor of resistance.

The doctor came — an educated Indian: though he could do nothing but inject quinine and give a dose of calomel. But he was lost between the two days, the fatal greater day of the Indians, the fussy, busy lesser day of the white people.

‘How is it going to finish?’ he said to the sick man, seeking a word. ‘How is it going to finish with the Indians, with the Mexicans? Now the soldiers are all taking *marihuana* — hashish!’

‘They are all going to die. They are all going to kill themselves — all — all,’ said the Englishman, in the faint permanent delirium of his malaria. ‘After all, beautiful it is to be dead, and quite departed.’

The doctor looked at him in silence, understanding only too well. ‘Beautiful it is to be dead!’ It is the refrain which hums at the centre of every Indian heart, where the greater day is hemmed in by the lesser. The despair that comes when the lesser day hems in the greater. Yet the doctor looked at the gaunt white man

in malice: — ‘What, would you have us quite gone, you Americans?’

At last, Gethin Day crawled out into the plaza. The square was like a great low fountain of green and of dark shade, now it was autumn and the rains were over. Scarlet craters rose the canna flowers, licking great red tongues, and tropical yellow. Scarlet, yellow, green, blue-green, sunshine intense and invisible, deep indigo shade! and small, white-clad natives pass, passing, across the square, through the green lawns, under the indigo shade, and across the hollow sunshine of the road into the arched arcades of the low Spanish buildings, where the shops were. The low, baroque Spanish buildings stood back with a heavy, sick look, as if they too felt the endless malaria in their bowels, the greater day of the stony Indian crushing the more jaunty, lean European day which they represented. The yellow cathedral leaned its squat, earthquake-shaken towers, the bells sounded hollow. Earth-coloured tiny soldiers lay and stood around the entrance to the municipal palace, which was so baroque and Spanish, but which now belonged to the natives. Heavy as a strange bell of shadow-coloured glass, the shadow of the greater day hung over this coloured plaza which the Europeans had created, like an oasis, in the lost depths of Mexico. Gethin Day sat half lying on one of the broken benches, while tropical birds flew and twittered in the great trees, and natives twittered or flitted in silence, and he knew that here, the European day was annulled again. His body was sick with the poison that lurks in all tropical air, his soul was sick with that other day, that rather awful greater day which permeates the little days of the old races. He wanted to get out, to get out of this ghastly tropical void into which he had fallen.

Yet it was the end of November before he could go. Little revolutions had again broken the thread of railway at the end of which the southern town hung revolving like a spider. It was a narrow-gauge railway, one single narrow little track which ran over the plateau, then slipped down, down the long *barranca*, descending five thousand feet down to the valley which was a cleft in the plateau, then up again seven thousand feet, to the higher plateau to the north. How easy to break the thread! One of the innumerable little wooden bridges destroyed, and it was done. The three hundred miles to the north were impassable wilderness, like the hundred and fifty miles through the low-lying jungle to the south.

At last however he could crawl away. The train came again. He had cabled to England, and had received the answer that his sister was dead. It seemed so natural, there under the powerful November sun of southern Mexico, in the drugging powerful odours of the night-flowers, that Lydia should be dead. She seemed so much more *real*, shall we say actually vital, in death. Dead, he could think of her as quite near and comforting and real, whereas while she was alive,

she was so utterly alien, remote and fussy, ghostlike in her petty Derbyshire day.

‘For the little day is like a house with the family round the hearth, and the door shut. Yet outside whispers the Greater Day, wall-less, and hearthless. And the time will come at last when the walls of the little day shall fall, and what is left of the family of men shall find themselves outdoors in the Greater Day, houseless and abroad, even here between the knees of the Vales, even in Crichdale. It is a doom that will come upon tall men. And then they will breathe deep, and be breathless in the great air, and salt sweat will stand on their brow, thick as buds on sloe-bushes when the sun comes back. And little men will shudder and die out, like clouds of grasshoppers falling in the sea. Then tall men will remain alone in the land, moving deeper in the Greater Day, and moving deeper. Even as the flying fish, when he leaves the air and recovereth his element in the depth, plunges and invisibly rejoices. So will tall men rejoice, after their flight of fear, through the thin air, pursued by death. For it is on wings of fear, sped from the mouth of death, that the flying fish riseth twinkling in the air, and rustles in astonishment silvery through the thin small day. But he dives again into the great peace of the deeper day, and under the belly of death, and passes into his own.’

Gethin read again his *Book of Days*, in the twilight of his last evening. Personally, he resented the symbolism and mysticism of his Elizabethan ancestor. But it was in his veins. And he was going home, back, back to the house with the flying fish on the roof. He felt an immense doom over everything, still the same next morning, when, an hour after dawn, the little train ran out from the doomed little town, on to the plateau, where the cactus thrust up its fluted tubes, and where the mountains stood back, blue, cornflower-blue, so dark and pure in form, in the land of the Greater Day, the day of demons. The little train, with two coaches, one full of natives, the other with four or five ‘white’ Mexicans, ran fussily on, in the little day of toys and men’s machines. On the roof sat tiny, earthy-looking soldiers, faces burnt black, with cartridge-belts and rifles. They clung on tight, not to be shaken off. And away went this weird toy, this crazy little caravan, over the great lost land of cacti and mountains standing back, on to the shut-in defile where the long descent began.

At half-past ten, at a station some distance down the *barranca*, a station connected with old silver mines, the train stood, and all descended to eat: the eternal turkey with black sauce, potatoes, salad, and apple pie — the American apple pie, which is a sandwich of cooked apple between two layers of pie-crust. And also beer, from Puebla. Two Chinamen administered the dinner, in all the decency, cleanness and well-cookedness of the little day of the white men, which they reproduce so well. There it was, the little day of our civilization. Outside,

the little train waited. The little black-faced soldiers sharpened their knives. The vast, varying declivity of the *barranca* stood in sun and shadow as on the day of doom, untouched.

On again, winding, descending the huge and savage gully or crack in the plateau-edge, where no men lived. Bushes trailed with elegant pink creeper, such as is seen in hothouses, enormous blue convolvuluses opened out, and in the unseemly tangle of growth, bulbous orchids jutted out from trees, and let hang a trail of white or yellow flower. The strange, entangled squalor of the jungle.

Gethin Day looked down the ravine, where water was running. He saw four small deer lifting their heads from drinking, to look at the train. '*Los venados! los venados!*' he heard the soldiers softly calling. As if knowing they were safe, the deer stood and wondered, away there in the Greater Day, in the manless space, while the train curled round a sharp jutting rock.

They came at last to the bottom, where it was very hot, and a few wild men hung round with the sword-like knives of the sugar-cane. The train seemed to tremble with fear all the time, as if its thread might be cut. So frail, so thin the thread of the lesser day, threading with its business the great reckless heat of the savage land. So frail a thread, so easily snapped!

But the train crept on, northwards, upwards. And as the stupor of heat began to pass, in the later afternoon, the sick man saw among mango trees, beyond the bright green stretches of sugar-cane, white clusters of a village, with the coloured dome of a church all yellow and blue with shiny majolica tiles. Spain putting the bubbles of her little day among the blackish trees of the unconquerable.

He came at nightfall to a small square town, more in touch with civilization, where the train ended its frightened run. He slept there. And next day he took another scrap of a train across to the edge of the main plateau. The country was wild, but more populous. An occasional big *hacienda* with sugar-mills stood back among the hills. But it was silent. Spain had spent the energy of her little day here, now the silence, the terror of the Greater Day, mysterious with death, was filling in again.

On the train a native, a big, handsome man, wandered back and forth among the uneasy Mexican travellers with a tray of glasses of ice-cream. He was no doubt of the Tiascala tribe. Gethin Day looked at him and met his glistening dark eyes. '*Quiere helados, Señor?*' said the Indian, reaching a glass with his dark, subtle-skinned, workless hand. And in the soft, secret tones of his voice, Gethin Day heard the sound of the Greater Day. '*Gracias!*'

'*Padrón! Padrón!*' moaned a woman at the station. '*Por amor do Dios, Padrón!*' and she held out her hand for a few centavos. And in the moaning

croon of her Indian voice the Englishman heard again the fathomless crooning appeal of the Indian women, moaning stranger, more terrible than the ring-dove, with a sadness that had no horizon, and a rocking, moaning appeal that drew out the very marrow of the soul of a man. Over the door of her womb was written not only: '*Lasciate ogni speranza, voi ch'entrate,*' but: '*Perdite ogni pianto, voi ch'uscite.*' For the men who had known these women were beyond weeping and beyond even despair, mute in the timeless compulsion of the Greater Day. Big, proud men could sell glasses of ice-cream at twenty-five centavos, and not really know they were doing it. They were elsewhere, beyond despair. Only sometimes the last passion of the death-lust would sweep them, shut up as they were in the white man's lesser day, belonging as they did to the greater day.

The little train ran on to the main plateau, and to the junction with the main-line railway called the Queen's Own, a railway that still belongs to the English, and that joins Mexico City with the Gulf of Mexico. Here, in the big but forlorn railway restaurant the Englishman ordered the regular meal, that came with American mechanical take-it-or-leave-it flatness. He ate what he could, and went out again. There the vast plains were level and bare, under the blue winter sky, so pure, and not too hot, and in the distance the white cone of the volcano of Orizaba stood perfect in the middle air.

'There is no help. O man. Fear gives thee wings like a bird, death comes after thee open-mouthed, and thou soarest on the wind like a fly. But thy flight is not far, and thy flying is not long. Thou art a fish of the timeless Ocean, and must needs fall back. Take heed lest thou break thyself in the fall! For death is not in dying, but in the fear. Cease then the struggle of thy flight, and fall back into the deep element where death is and is not, and life is not a fleeing away. It is a beautiful thing to live and to be alive. Live then in the Greater Day, and let the waters carry thee, and the flood bear thee along, and live, only live, no more of this hurrying away.'

'No more of this hurrying away.' Even the Elizabethans had known it, the restlessness, the 'hurrying away'. Gethin Day knew he had been hurrying away. He had hurried perhaps a little too far, just over the edge. Now, try as he might, he was aware of a gap in his time-space *continuum*; he was, in the words of his ancestor, aware of the Greater Day showing through the cracks in the ordinary day. And it was useless trying to fill up the cracks. The little day was destined to crumble away, as far as he was concerned, and he would *have* to inhabit the greater day. The very sight of the volcano cone in mid-air made him know it. His little self was used up, worn out. He felt sick and frail, facing this change of life.

'Be still, then, be still! Wrap thyself in patience, shroud thyself in peace, as the tall volcano clothes himself in snow. Yet he looks down in him, and sees wet sun

in him molten and of great force, stirring with the scald sperm of life. Be still, above the sperm of life, which spills alone in its hour. Be still, as an apple on its core, as a nightingale in winter, as a long-waiting mountain upon its fire. Be still, upon thine own sun.

‘For thou hast a sun in thee. Thou hast a sun in thee, and it is not timed. Therefore wait. Wait, and be at peace with thine own sun, which is thy sperm of life. Be at peace with thy sun in thee, as the volcano is, and the dark holly-bush before berry-time, and the long hours of night. Abide by thy sun in thee, even the onion doth so, though you see it not. Yet peel her, and her sun in thine eyes maketh tears. Each thing hath its little sun, even in the wicked house-fly something twinkleth.’

Standing there on the platform of the station open to the great plains of the plateau, Gethin Day said to himself: My old ancestor is more real to me than the restaurant, and the dinner I have eaten, after all. The train still did not come. He turned to another page of cornflower-blue writing, hoping to find something amusing.

‘When earth inert lieth too heavy, then Vesuvius spitteth out fire. And if a nightingale would not sing, his song unsung in him would slay him. For to the nightingale his song is Nemesis, and unsung songs are the Erinyes, the impure Furies of vengeance. And thy sun in thee is thy all in all, so be patient, and take no care. Take no care, for what thou knowest is ever less than what thou art. The full fire even of thine own sun in thine own body, thou canst never know. So how shouldst thou load care upon thy Sun? Take heed, take thought, take pleasure, take pain, take all things as thy sun stirs. Only fasten not thyself in care about anything, for care is impiety, it spits upon the sun.’

It was the white and still volcano, visionary across the swept plain, that looked back at him as he glanced up from his *Book of Days*. But there the train came, thundering, with all the mock majesty of great equipage, and the Englishman entered the Pullman car, and sat with his book in his pocket.

The train, almost with the splendour of the Greater Day, yet rickety and foolish at last, raced on the level, entered the defile, and crept, cautiously twining round and round, down the cliff-face of the plateau, with the low lands lying thousands of feet below, specked with a village or two like fine specks. Yet the low lands drew up, and the pine trees were gone far above, and at last the thick trees crowded the line, and dark-faced natives ran beside the train selling gardenias, gardenia perfume heavy in all the air. But the train nearly empty.

Veracruz at nightfall was a modern stone port, but disheartened and tropical, mostly shut up, abandoned, as if life had quietly left it. Great customs buildings, unworking, acres of pianofortes in packing-cases, all the endless jetsam of the

little day of commerce flung up here and waiting, acres of goods unattended to, waiting till the labour of Veracruz should cease to be on strike. A town, a port struck numb, the inner sun striking vengefully at the little life of commerce. The day's sun set, there was a heavy orange light over the waters, something sinister, a gloom, a deep resentment in nature, even in the washing of the warm sea. In these salt waters natives were still baptized to Christianity, and the socialists, in mockery perhaps, baptized themselves into the mystery of frustration and revenge. The port was in the hands of strikers and wild out-of-workers, and was blank. Officials had almost disappeared. Even here, a woman, a 'lady' examined the passports.

But the ship rode at the end of the jetty: the one lonely passenger ship. There was one other steamer — from Sweden, a cargo boat. For the rest, the port was deserted. It was a point where the wild primeval day of this continent met the busy white man's day, and the two annulled one another. The result was a port of nullity, nihilism concrete and actual, calling itself the city of the True Cross.

2 The Gulf

In the morning they sailed off, away from the hot shores, from the high land hanging up inwards. And world gives place to world. In an hour, it was only ship and ocean, the world of land and affairs was gone.

There were few people on board. In the second-class saloon only seventeen souls. Gethin Day was travelling second. It was a German boat, he knew it would be clean and comfortable. The second-class fare was already forty-five pounds. And a man who is not rich, and who would live his life under as little compulsion as possible, must calculate keenly with money and its power. For the lesser day of money and the mealy-mouthed Mammon is always ready for a victim, and a man who has glimpsed the Greater Day, and the inward sun, will not fall into the clutches of Mammon's mean day, if he can help it. Gethin Day had a moderate income, and he looked on this as his bulwark against Mammon's despicable authority. The thought of earning a living was repulsive and humiliating to him.

In the first-class saloon were only four persons: two Danish merchants, stout and wealthy, who had been part of a bunch of Danish business men invited by the Mexican government to look at the business resources of the land. They had been feted and feasted, and shown what they were meant to see, so now, fuller of business than ever, they were going back to Copenhagen to hatch the eggs they had conceived. But they had also eaten Oysters in Veracruz, and the oysters also

were inside them. They fell sick of poison, and lay deathly ill all the voyage, leaving the only other first-class passengers, an English knight and his son, alone in their glory. Gethin Day was sincerely glad he had escaped the first class, for the voyage was twenty days.

The seventeen souls of the second class were four of them English, two Danish, five Spaniards, five Germans, and a Cuban. They all sat at one long table in the dining-saloon, the Cuban at one end of the table, flanked by four English on his left, facing the five Spaniards across the table. Then came the two Danes, facing one another, and being buffer-state between the rest and the five Germans, who occupied the far end of the table. It was a German boat, so the Germans were very noisy, and the stewards served them first. The Spaniards and the Cuban were mum, the English were stiff, the Danes were uneasy, the Germans were boisterous, and so the first luncheon passed. It was the lesser day of the ship, and small enough. The menu being in correct German and doubtful Spanish, the Englishwoman on Gethin Day's right put up a lorgnette and stared at it. She was unable to stare it out of countenance, so she put it down and ate uninformed as to what she was eating. The Spaniard opposite Gethin Day had come to table without collar or tie, doing the bluff, go-to-hell colonial touch, almost in his shirt-sleeves. He was a man of about thirty-two. He brayed at the steward in strange, harsh Galician Spanish, the steward grinned somewhat sneeringly and answered in German, having failed to understand, and not prepared to exert himself to try. Down the table a blonde horse of a woman was shouting at the top of her voice, in harsh North-German, to a Herr Doktor with turned-up moustaches who presided at the German head of the table. The Spaniards bent forward in a row to look with a sort of silent horror at the yelling woman, then they looked at one another with a faint grimace of mocking repulsion. The Galician banged the table with the empty wine-decanter: wine was 'included'. The steward, with a sneering little grin at such table-manners, brought a decanter half full. Wine was not *ad lib.*, but *á discretion*. The Spaniards, having realized this, henceforth snatched it quickly and pretty well emptied the decanter before the English got a shot at it. Which somewhat amused the table-stewards, who wanted to see the two foreign lots fight it out. But Gethin Day solved this problem by holding out his hand to the fat, clean-shaven Basque, as soon as the decanter reached that gentleman, and saying: 'May I serve the lady?' Whereupon the Basque handed over the decanter, and Gethin helped the two ladies and himself, before handing back the decanter to the Spaniards. — Man wants but little here below, but he's damn well got to see he gets it. — All this is part of the little day, which has to be seen to. Whether it is interesting or not depends on one's state of soul.

Bristling with all the bristles of offence and defence which a man has to put up the first days in such a company, Gethin Day would go off down the narrow gangway of the bottom deck, down into the steerage, where the few passengers lay about in shirt and trousers, on to the very front tip of the boat.

She was a long, narrow, old ship, long like a cigar, and not much space in her. Yet she was pleasant, and had a certain grace of her own, was a real ship, not merely a 'liner'. She seemed to travel swift and clean, piercing away into the Gulf.

Gethin Day would sit for hours at the very tip of the ship, on the bowsprit, looking out into the whitish sunshine of the hot Gulf of Mexico. Here he was alone, and the world was all strange white sunshine, candid, and water, warm, bright water, perfectly pure beneath him, of an exquisite frail green. It lifted vivid wings from the running tip of the ship, and threw white pinion-spray from its green edges. And always, always, always it was in the two-winged fountain, as the ship came like life between, and always the spray fell swishing, pattering from the green arch of the water-wings. And below, as yet untouched, a moment ahead, always a moment ahead, and perfectly untouched, was the lovely green depth of the water, depth, deep, shallow-pale emerald above an under sapphire-green, dark and pale, blue and shimmer-green, two waters, many waters, one water, perfect in unison, one moment ahead of the ship's bows, so serene, fathomless and pure and free of time. It was very lovely, and on the softly-lifting bowsprit of the long, swift ship the body was cradled in the sway of timeless life, the soul lay in the jewel-coloured moment, the jewel-pure eternity of this gulf of nowhere.

And always, always, like a dream, the flocks of flying fish swept into the air, from nowhere, and went brilliantly twinkling in their flight of silvery watery wings rapidly fluttering, away, low as swallows over the smooth curved surface of the sea, then gone again, vanished, without splash or evidence; gone. One alone like a little silver twinkle. Gone! The sea was still and silky-surfaced, blue and softly heaving, empty, purity itself, sea, sea, sea.

Then suddenly the faint whispering crackle, and a cloud of silver on webs of pure, fluttering water was soaring low over the surface of the sea, at an angle from the ship, as if jetted away from the cut-water soaring in a low arc, fluttering with the wild emphasis of grasshoppers or locusts suddenly burst out of the grass, in a wild rush to make away, make away, and making it, away, away, then suddenly gone, like a lot of lights blown out in one breath. And still the ship did not pause, any more than the moon pauses, neither to look nor catch breath. But the soul pauses and holds its breath, for wonder, wonder, which is the very breath of the soul.

All the long morning he would be there curled in the wonder of this gulf of creation, where the flying fishes on translucent wings swept in their ecstatic clouds out of the water, in a terror that was brilliant as joy, in a joy brilliant with terror, with wings made of pure water flapping with great speed, and long-shafted bodies of translucent silver like squirts of living water, there in air, brilliant in air, before suddenly they had disappeared, and the blue sea was trembling with a delicate frail surface of green, the still sea lay one moment ahead, untouched, untouched since time began, in its watery loveliness.

Sometimes a ship's officer would come and peer over the edge, and look at him lying there. But nothing was said. People didn't like looking over the edge. It was too beautiful, too pure and lovely, the Greater Day. They shoved their snouts a moment over the rail, then withdrew, faintly abashed, faintly sneering, faintly humiliated. After all, they showed snouts, nothing but snouts, to the unbegotten morning, so they might well be humiliated.

Sometimes an island, two islands, three, would show up, dismal and small, with the peculiar American gloom. No land! The soul wanted to see the land. Only the uninterrupted water was purely lovely, pristine.

And the third morning there was a school of porpoises leading the ship. They stayed below surface all the time, so there was no hullabaloo of human staring. Only Gethin Day saw them. And what joy! what joy of life! what marvellous pure joy of being a porpoise within the great sea, of being many porpoises heading and mocking in translucent onrush the menacing, yet futile onrush of a vast ship!

It was a spectacle of the purest and most perfected joy in life that Gethin Day ever saw. The porpoises were ten or a dozen, round-bodied torpedo fish, and they stayed there as if they were not moving, always there, with no motion apparent, under the purely pellucid water, yet speeding on at just the speed of the ship, without the faintest show of movement, yet speeding on in the most miraculous precision of speed. It seemed as if the tail-flukes of the last fish exactly touched the ship's bows, under-water, with the frailest, yet precise and permanent touch. It seemed as if nothing moved, yet fish and ship swept on through the tropical ocean. And the fish moved, they changed places all the time. They moved in a little cloud, and with the most wonderful sport they were above, they were below, they were to the fore, yet all the time the same one speed, the same one speed, and the last fish just touching with his tail-flukes the iron cut-water of the ship. Some would be down in the blue, shadowy, but horizontally motionless in the same speed. Then with a strange revolution, these would be up in pale green water, and others would be down. Even the toucher, who touched the ship, would in a twinkling be changed. And ever, ever the same

pure horizontal speed, sometimes a dark back skimming the water's surface light, from beneath, but never the surface broken. And ever the last fish touching the ship, and ever the others speeding in motionless, effortless speed, and intertwining with strange silkiness as they sped, intertwining among one another, fading down to the dark blue shadow, and strangely emerging again among the silent, swift others, in pale green water. All the time, so swift, they seemed to be laughing.

Gethin Day watched spell-bound, minute after minute, an hour, two hours, and still it was the same, the ship speeding, cutting the water, and the strong-bodied fish heading in perfect balance of speed underneath, mingling among themselves in some strange single laughter of multiple consciousness, giving off the joy of life, sheer joy of life, togetherness in pure complete motion, many lusty-bodied fish enjoying one laugh of life, sheer togetherness, perfect as passion. They gave off into the water their marvellous joy of life, such as the man had never met before. And it left him wonderstruck.

'But they know joy, they know pure joy!' he said to himself in amazement. 'This is the most laughing joy I have ever seen, pure and unmixed. I always thought flowers had brought themselves to the most beautiful perfection in nature. But these fish, these fleshy, warm-bodied fish achieve more than flowers, heading along. This is the purest achievement of joy I have seen in all life: these strong, careless fish. Men have not got in them that secret to be alive together and make one like a single laugh, yet each fish going his own gait. This is sheer joy — and men have lost it, or never accomplished it. The cleverest sportsmen in the world are owls beside these fish. And the togetherness of love is nothing to the spinning unison of dolphins playing under-sea. It would be wonderful to know joy as these fish know it. The life of the deep waters is ahead of us, it contains sheer togetherness and sheer joy. We have never got there.'

There as he leaned over the bowsprit he was mesmerized by one thing only, by joy, by joy of life, fish speeding in water with playful joy. No wonder Ocean was still mysterious, when such red hearts beat in it! No wonder man, with his tragedy, was a pale and sickly thing in comparison! What civilization will bring us to such a pitch of swift laughing togetherness, as these fish have reached?

3 The Atlantic

The ship came in the night to Cuba, to Havana. When she became still, Gethin Day looked out of his port-hole and saw little lights on upreared darkness. Havana!

They went on shore next morning, through the narrow dock-streets near the wharf, to the great boulevard. It was a lovely warm morning, already early December, and the town was in the streets, going to mass, or coming out of the big, unpleasant old churches. The Englishman wandered with the two Danes for an hour or so, in the not very exciting city. Many Americans were wandering around, and nearly all wore badges of some sort. The city seemed, on the surface at least, very American. And underneath, it did not seem to have any very deep character of its own left.

The three men hired a car to drive out and about. The elder of the Danes, a man of about forty-five, spoke fluent colloquial Spanish, learned on the oil-fields of Tampico. 'Tell me,' he said to the chauffeur, 'why do all these *americanos*, these Yankees, wear badges on themselves?'

He spoke, as foreigners nearly always do speak of the Yankees, in a tone of half-spiteful jeering.

'Ah, Señor,' said the driver, with a Cuban grin. 'You know they all come here to drink. They drink so much that they all get lost at night, so they all wear a badge: name, name of hotel, place where it is. Then our policemen find them in the night, turn them over as they lie on the pavement, read name, name of hotel, and place, and so they are put on a cart and carted to home. Ah, the season is only just beginning. Wait a week or two, and they will lie in the streets at night like a battle, and the police doing Red Cross work, carting them to their hotels. Ah, *los americanos*! They are so good. You know they own us now. Yes, they own us. They own Havana. We are a Republic owned by the Americans. *Muy bien*, we give them drink, they give us money. Bah!'

And he grinned with a kind of acrid indifference. He sneered at the whole show, but he wasn't going to do anything about it.

The car drove out to the famous beer-gardens, where all drank beer — then to the inevitable cemetery, which almost rivalled that of New Orleans. 'Every person buried in this cemetery guarantees to put up a tomb-monument costing not less than fifty-thousand dollars.' Then they drove past the new suburb of villas, springing up neat and tidy, spickand-span, same all the world over. Then they drove out into the country, past the old sugar *haciendas* and to the hills.

And to Gethin Day it was all merely depressing and void of real interest. The Yankees owned it all. It had not much character of its own. And what character it had was the peculiar, dreary character of all America wherever it is a little abandoned. The peculiar gloom of Connecticut or New Jersey, Louisiana or Georgia, a sort of dreariness in the very bones of the land, that shows through immediately the human effort sinks. How quickly the gloom and the inner dreariness of Cuba must have affected the spirit of the Conquistadores, even

Columbus!

They drove back to town and ate a really good meal, and watched a stout American couple, apparently man and wife, lunching with a bottle of champagne, a bottle of hock, and a bottle of Burgundy for the two of them, and apparently drinking them all at once. It made one's head reel.

The bright, sunny afternoon they spent on the esplanade by the sea. There the great hotels were still shut. But they had, so to speak, half an eye open: a tea-room going, for example.

And Day thought again, how tedious the little day can be! How difficult to spend even one Sunday looking at a city like Havana, even if one has spent the morning driving into the country. The infinite tedium of looking at things! the infinite boredom of things anyhow. Only the rippling, bright, pale-blue sea, and the old fort, gave one the feeling of life. The rest, the great esplanade, the great boulevard, the great hotels, all seemed what they were, dead, dried concrete, concrete, dried deadness.

Everybody was thankful to be back on the ship for dinner, in the dark loneliness of the wharves. See Naples and die. Go seeing any place, and you'll be half dead of exhaustion and tedium by dinner time.

So! good-bye, Havana! The engines were going before breakfast time. It was a bright blue morning. Wharves and harbour slid past, the high bows moved backwards. Then the ship deliberately turned her back on Cuba and the sombre shore, and began to move north, through the blue day, which passed like a sleep. They were moving now into wide space.

The next morning they woke to greyness, grey low sky, and hideous low grey water, and a still air. Sandwiched between two greynesses, the long, wicked old ship sped on, as unto death.

'What has happened?' Day asked of one of the officers.

'We have come north, to get into the current running east. We come north about the latitude of New York, then we run due east with the stream.'

'What a wicked shame!'

And indeed it was. The sun was gone, the blueness was gone, life was gone. The Atlantic was like a cemetery, an endless, infinite cemetery of greyness, where the bright, lost world of Atlantis is buried. It was December, grey, dark December on a waste of ugly, dead-grey water, under a dead-grey sky.

And so they ran into a swell, a long swell whose oily, sickly waves seemed hundreds of miles long, and travelling in the same direction as the ship's course. The narrow cigar of a ship heaved up the upslope with a nauseating heave, up, up, up, till she righted for a second sickeningly on the top, then tilted, and her

screw raced like a dentist's burr in a hollow tooth. Then down she slid, down the long, shivering downslope, leaving all her guts behind her, and the guts of all the passengers too. In an hour, everybody was deathly white, and sicklily grinning, thinking it a sort of joke that would soon be over. Then everybody disappeared, and the game went on: up, up, up, heavingly up, till a pause, ah! —then burr-rr-rr! as the screw came out of water and shattered every nerve. Then whoooosh! the long and awful downrush, leaving the entrails behind.

She was like a plague-ship, everybody disappeared, stewards and everybody. Gethin Day felt as if he had taken poison: and he slept — slept, slept, slept, and yet was all the time aware of the ghastly motion — up, up, up, heavingly up, then ah! one moment, followed by the shattering burr-rr-rr! and the unspeakable ghastliness of the downhill slither, where death seemed inside the entrails, and water chattered like the after-death. He was aware of the hour-long moaning, moaning of the Spanish doctor's fat, pale Mexican wife, two cabins away. It went on for ever. Everything went on for ever. Everything was like this for ever, for ever. And he slept, slept, slept, for thirty hours, yet knowing it all, registering just the endless repetition of the motion, the ship's loud squeaking and chirruping, and the ceaseless moaning of the woman.

Suddenly at tea-time the second day he felt better. He got up. The ship was empty. A ghastly steward gave him a ghastly cup of tea, then disappeared. He dozed again, but came to dinner.

They were three people at the long table, in the horribly travelling grey silence: himself, a young Dane, and the elderly, dried Englishwoman. She talked, talked. The three looked in terror at *Sauerkraut* and smoked loin of pork. But they ate a little. Then they looked out on the utterly repulsive, grey, oily, windless night. Then they went to bed again.

The third evening it began to rain, and the motion was subsiding. They were running out of the swell. But it was an experience to remember.

The short story was left unfinished

THE WOMAN WHO RODE AWAY

I

She had thought that this marriage, of all marriages, would be an adventure. Not that the man himself was exactly magical to her. A little, wiry, twisted fellow, twenty years older than herself, with brown eyes and greying hair, who had come to America a scrap of a wastrel, from Holland, years ago, as a tiny boy, and from the gold-mines of the west had been kicked south into Mexico, and now was more or less rich, owning silver-mines in the wilds of the Sierra Madre: it was obvious that the adventure lay in his circumstances, rather than his person. But he was still a little dynamo of energy, in spite of accidents survived, and what he had accomplished he had accomplished alone. One of those human oddments there is no accounting for.

When she actually *saw* what he had accomplished, her heart quailed. Great green-covered, unbroken mountain-hills, and in the midst of the lifeless isolation, the sharp pinkish mounds of the dried mud from the silver-works. Under the nakedness of the works, the walled-in, one-storey adobe house, with its garden inside, and its deep inner verandah with tropical climbers on the sides. And when you looked up from this shut-in flowered patio, you saw the huge pink cone of the silver-mud refuse, and the machinery of the extracting plant against heaven above. No more.

To be sure, the great wooden doors were often open. And then she could stand outside, in the vast open world. And see great, void, tree-clad hills piling behind one another, from nowhere into nowhere. They were green in autumn time. For the rest, pinkish, stark dry, and abstract.

And in his battered Ford car her husband would take her into the dead, thrice-dead little Spanish town forgotten among the mountains. The great, sundried dead church, the dead portales, the hopeless covered market-place, where, the first time she went, she saw a dead dog lying between the meat stalls and the vegetable array, stretched out as if for ever, nobody troubling to throw it away. Deadness within deadness.

Everybody feebly talking silver, and showing bits of ore. But silver was at a standstill. The great war came and went. Silver was a dead market. Her husband's mines were closed down. But she and he lived on in the adobe house under the works, among the flowers that were never very flowery to her.

She had two children, a boy and a girl. And her eldest, the boy, was nearly ten years old before she aroused from her stupor of subjected amazement. She was now thirty-three, a large, blue-eyed, dazed woman, beginning to grow stout. Her little, wiry, tough, twisted, brown-eyed husband was fifty-three, a man as tough as wire, tenacious as wire, still full of energy, but dimmed by the lapse of silver from the market, and by some curious inaccessibility on his wife's part.

He was a man of principles, and a good husband. In a way, he doted on her. He never quite got over his dazzled admiration of her. But essentially, he was still a bachelor. He had been thrown out on the world, a little bachelor, at the age of ten. When he married he was over forty, and had enough money to marry on. But his capital was all a bachelor's. He was boss of his own works, and marriage was the last and most intimate bit of his own works.

He admired his wife to extinction, he admired her body, all her points. And she was to him always the rather dazzling Californian girl from Berkeley, whom he had first known. Like any sheik, he kept her guarded among those mountains of Chihuahua. He was jealous of her as he was of his silver-mine: and that is saying a lot.

At thirty-three she really was still the girl from Berkeley, in all but physique. Her conscious development had stopped mysteriously with her marriage, completely arrested. Her husband had never become real to her, neither mentally nor physically. In spite of his late sort of passion for her, he never meant anything to her, physically. Only morally he swayed her, downed her, kept her in an invincible slavery.

So the years went by, in the adobe house strung round the sunny patio, with the silver-works overhead. Her husband was never still. When the silver went dead, he ran a ranch lower down, some twenty miles away, and raised pure-bred hogs, splendid creatures. At the same time, he hated pigs. He was a squeamish waif of an idealist, and really hated the physical side of life. He loved work, work, work, and making things. His marriage, his children, were something he was making, part of his business, but with a sentimental income this time.

Gradually her nerves began to go wrong: she must get out. She must get out. So he took her to El Paso for three months. And at least it was the United States.

But he kept his spell over her. The three months ended: back she was, just the same, in her adobe house among those eternal green or pinky-brown hills, void as only the undiscovered is void. She taught her children, she supervised the Mexican boys who were her servants. And sometimes her husband brought visitors, Spaniards or Mexicans or occasionally white men.

He really loved to have white men staying on the place. Yet he had not a moment's peace when they were there. It was as if his wife were some peculiar

secret vein of ore in his mines, which no one must be aware of except himself. And she was fascinated by the young gentlemen, mining engineers, who were his guests at times. He, too, was fascinated by a real gentleman. But he was an old-timer miner with a wife, and if a gentleman looked at his wife, he felt as if his mine were being looted, the secrets of it pryed out.

It was one of these young gentlemen who put the idea into her mind. They were all standing outside the great wooden doors of the patio, looking at the outer world. The eternal, motionless hills were all green, it was September, after the rains. There was no sign of anything, save the deserted mine, the deserted works, and a bunch of half-deserted miner's dwellings.

"I wonder," said the young man, "what there is behind those great blank hills."

"More hills," said Lederman. "If you go that way, Sonora and the coast. This way is the desert — you came from there — And the other way, hills and mountains."

"Yes, but what *lives* in the hills and mountains? *Surely* there is something wonderful? It looks so like nowhere on earth: like being on the moon."

"There's plenty of game, if you want to shoot. And Indians, if you call *them* wonderful."

"Wild ones?"

"Wild enough."

"But friendly?"

"It depends. Some of them are quite wild, and they don't let anybody near. They kill a missionary at sight. And where a missionary can't get, nobody can."

"But what does the government say?"

"They're so far from everywhere, the government leaves 'em alone. And they're wily; if they think there'll be trouble, they send a delegation to Chihuahua and make a formal submission. The government is glad to leave it at that."

"And do they live quite wild, with their own savage customs and religion?"

"Oh, yes. They use nothing but bows and arrows. I've seen them in town, in the Plaza, with funny sort of hats with flowers round them, and a bow in one hand, quite naked except for a sort of shirt, even in cold weather — striding round with their savage's bare legs."

"But don't you suppose it's wonderful, up there in their secret villages?"

"No. What would there be wonderful about it? Savages are savages, and all savages behave more or less alike: rather low-down and dirty, unsanitary, with a few cunning tricks, and struggling to get enough to eat."

"But surely they have old, old religions and mysteries — it *must* be wonderful, surely it must."

“I don’t know about mysteries — howling and heathen practices, more or less indecent. No, I see nothing wonderful in that kind of stuff. And I wonder that you should, when you have lived in London or Paris or New York — ”

“Ah, *everybody* lives in London or Paris or New York” — said the young man, as if this were an argument.

And his peculiar vague enthusiasm for unknown Indians found a full echo in the woman’s heart. She was overcome by a foolish romanticism more unreal than a girl’s. She felt it was her destiny to wander into the secret haunts of these timeless, mysterious, marvellous Indians of the mountains.

She kept her secret. The young man was departing, her husband was going with him down to Torreon, on business: — would be away for some days. But before the departure, she made her husband talk about the Indians: about the wandering tribes, resembling the Navajo, who were still wandering free; and the Yaquis of Sonora: and the different groups in the different valleys of Chihuahua State.

There was supposed to be one tribe, the Chilchuis, living in a high valley to the south, who were the sacred tribe of all the Indians. The descendants of Montezuma and of the old Aztec or Totonac kings still lived among them, and the old priests still kept up the ancient religion, and offered human sacrifices — so it was said. Some scientists had been to the Chilchui country, and had come back gaunt and exhausted with hunger and bitter privation, bringing various curious, barbaric objects of worship, but having seen nothing extraordinary in the hungry, stark village of savages.

Though Lederman talked in this off-hand way, it was obvious he felt some of the vulgar excitement at the idea of ancient and mysterious savages.

“How far away are they?” she asked.

“Oh — three days on horseback — past Cuchitee and a little lake there is up there.”

Her husband and the young man departed. The woman made her crazy plans. Of late, to break the monotony of her life, she had harassed her husband into letting her go riding with him, occasionally, on horseback. She was never allowed to go out alone. The country truly was not safe, lawless and crude.

But she had her own horse, and she dreamed of being free as she had been as a girl, among the hills of California.

Her daughter, nine years old, was now in a tiny convent in the little half-deserted Spanish mining-town five miles away.

“Manuel,” said the woman to her house-servant, “I’m going to ride to the convent to see Margarita, and take her a few things. Perhaps I shall stay the night in the convent. You look after Freddy and see everything is all right till I come

back.”

“Shall I ride with you on the master’s horse, or shall Juan?” asked the servant.

“Neither of you. I shall go alone.”

The young man looked her in the eyes, in protest. Absolutely impossible that the woman should ride alone!

“I shall go alone,” repeated the large, placid-seeming, fair-complexioned woman, with peculiar overbearing emphasis. And the man silently, unhappily yielded.

“Why are you going alone, mother?” asked her son, as she made up parcels of food.

“Am I *never* to be let alone? Not one moment of my life?” she cried, with sudden explosion of energy. And the child, like the servant, shrank into silence.

She set off without a qualm, riding astride on her strong roan horse, and wearing a riding suit of coarse linen, a riding skirt over her linen breeches, a scarlet neck-tie over her white blouse, and a black felt hat on her head. She had food in her saddle-bags, an army canteen with water, and a large, native blanket tied on behind the saddle. Peering into the distance, she set off from her home. Manuel and the little boy stood in the gateway to watch her go. She did not even turn to wave them farewell.

But when she had ridden about a mile, she left the wild road and took a small trail to the right, that led into another valley, over steep places and past great trees, and through another deserted mining-settlement. It was September, the water was running freely in the little stream that had fed the now-abandoned mine. She got down to drink, and let the horse drink too.

She saw natives coming through the trees, away up the slope. They had seen her, and were watching her closely. She watched in turn. The three people, two women and a youth, were making a wide detour, so as not to come too close to her. She did not care. Mounting, she trotted ahead up the silent valley, beyond the silver-works, beyond any trace of mining. There was still a rough trail, that led over rocks and loose stones into the valley beyond. This trail she had already ridden, with her husband. Beyond that she knew she must go south.

Curiously she was not afraid, although it was a frightening country, the silent, fatal-seeming mountain-slopes, the occasional distant, suspicious, elusive natives among the trees, the great carrion birds occasionally hovering, like great flies, in the distance, over some carrion or some ranch house or some group of huts.

As she climbed, the trees shrank and the trail ran through a thorny scrub, that was trailed over with blue convolvulus and an occasional pink creeper. Then these flowers lapsed. She was nearing the pine-trees.

She was over the crest, and before her another silent, void, green-clad valley.

It was past midday. Her horse turned to a little runlet of water, so she got down to eat her midday meal. She sat in silence looking at the motionless unliving valley, and at the sharp-peaked hills, rising higher to rock and pine-trees, southwards. She rested two hours in the heat of the day, while the horse cropped around her.

Curious that she was neither afraid nor lonely. Indeed, the loneliness was like a drink of cold water to one who is very thirsty. And a strange elation sustained her from within.

She travelled on, and camped at night in a valley beside a stream, deep among the bushes. She had seen cattle and had crossed several trails. There must be a ranch not far off. She heard the strange wailing shriek of a mountain-lion, and the answer of dogs. But she sat by her small camp fire in a secret hollow place and was not really afraid. She was buoyed up always by the curious, bubbling elation within her.

It was very cold before dawn. She lay wrapped in her blanket looking at the stars, listening to her horse shivering, and feeling like a woman who has died and passed beyond. She was not sure that she had not heard, during the night, a great crash at the centre of herself, which was the crash of her own death. Or else it was a crash at the centre of the earth, and meant something big and mysterious.

With the first peep of light she got up, numb with cold, and made a fire. She ate hastily, gave her horse some pieces of oil-seed cake, and set off again. She avoided any meeting — and since she met nobody, it was evident that she in turn was avoided. She came at last in sight of the village of Cuchitee, with its black houses with their reddish roofs, a sombre, dreary little cluster below another silent, long-abandoned mine. And beyond, a long, great mountain-side, rising up green and light to the darker, shaggier green of pine trees. And beyond the pine trees stretches of naked rock against the sky, rock slashed already and brindled with white stripes of snow. High up, the new snow had already begun to fall.

And now, as she neared, more or less, her destination, she began to go vague and disheartened. She had passed the little lake among yellowing aspen trees whose white trunks were round and suave like the white round arms of some woman. What a lovely place! In California she would have raved about it. But here she looked and saw that it was lovely, but she didn't care. She was weary and spent with her two nights in the open, and afraid of the coming night. She didn't know where she was going, or what she was going for. Her horse plodded dejectedly on, towards that immense and forbidding mountain-slope, following a stony little trail. And if she had had any will of her own left, she would have turned back, to the village, to be protected and sent home to her husband.

But she had no will of her own. Her horse splashed through a brook, and turned up a valley, under immense yellowing cotton-wood trees. She must have been near nine thousand feet above sea-level, and her head was light with the altitude and with weariness. Beyond the cotton-wood trees she could see, on each side, the steep sides of mountain-slopes hemming her in, sharp-plumaged with overlapping aspen, and, higher up, with sprouting, pointed spruce and pine tree. Her horse went on automatically. In this tight valley, on this slight trail, there was nowhere to go but ahead, climbing.

Suddenly her horse jumped, and three men in dark blankets were on the trail before her.

“Adios!” came the greeting, in the full, restrained Indian voice.

“Adios!” she replied, in her assured, American woman’s voice.

“Where are you going?” came the quiet question, in Spanish.

The men in the dark sarapes had come closer, and were looking up at her.

“On ahead,” she replied coolly, in her hard, Saxon Spanish.

These were just natives to her: dark-faced, strongly-built men in dark sarapes and straw hats. They would have been the same as the men who worked for her husband, except, strangely, for the long black hair that fell over their shoulders. She noted this long black hair with a certain distaste. These must be the wild Indians she had come to see.

“Where do you come from?” the same man asked. It was always the one man who spoke. He was young, with quick, large, bright black eyes that glanced sideways at her. He had a soft black moustache on his dark face, and a sparse tuft of beard, loose hairs on his chin. His long black hair, full of life, hung unrestrained on his shoulders. Dark as he was, he did not look as if he had washed lately.

His two companions were the same, but older men, powerful and silent. One had a thin black line of moustache, but was beardless. The other had the smooth cheeks and the sparse dark hairs marking the lines of his chin with the beard characteristic of the Indians.

“I come from far away,” she replied, with half-jocular evasion.

This was received in silence.

“But where do you live?” asked the young man, with that same quiet insistence.

“In the north,” she replied airily.

Again there was a moment’s silence. The young man conversed quietly, in Indian, with his two companions.

“Where do you want to go, up this way?” he asked suddenly, with challenge and authority, pointing briefly up the trail.

“To the Chilchui Indians,” answered the woman laconically.

The young man looked at her. His eyes were quick and black, and inhuman. He saw, in the full evening light, the faint sub-smile of assurance on her rather large, calm, fresh-complexioned face; the weary, bluish lines under her large blue eyes; and in her eyes, as she looked down at him, a half-childish, half-arrogant confidence in her own female power. But in her eyes also, a curious look of trance.

“*Usted es Señora?* You are a lady?” the Indian asked her.

“Yes, I am a lady,” she replied complacently.

“With a family?”

“With a husband and two children, boy and girl,” she said.

The Indian turned to his companions and translated, in the low, gurgling speech, like hidden water running. They were evidently at a loss.

“Where is your husband?” asked the young man.

“Who knows?” she replied airily. “He has gone away on business for a week.”

The black eyes watched her shrewdly. She, for all her weariness, smiled faintly in the pride of her own adventure and the assurance of her own womanhood, and the spell of the madness that was on her.

“And what do *you* want to do?” the Indian asked her.

“I want to visit the Chilchui Indians — to see their houses and to know their gods,” she replied.

The young man turned and translated quickly, and there was a silence almost of consternation. The grave elder men were glancing at her sideways, with strange looks, from under their decorated hats. And they said something to the young man, in deep chest voices.

The latter still hesitated. Then he turned to the woman.

“Good!” he said. “Let us go. But we cannot arrive until to-morrow. We shall have to make a camp to-night.”

“Good!” she said. “I can make a camp.”

Without more ado, they set off at a good speed up the stony trail. The young Indian ran alongside her horse’s head, the other two ran behind. One of them had taken a thick stick, and occasionally he struck her horse a resounding blow on the haunch, to urge him forward. This made the horse jump, and threw her back in the saddle, which, tired as she was, made her angry.

“Don’t do that!” she cried, looking round angrily at the fellow. She met his black, large, bright eyes, and for the first time her spirit really quailed. The man’s eyes were not human to her, and they did not see her as a beautiful white woman. He looked at her with a black, bright inhuman look, and saw no woman in her at all. As if she were some strange, unaccountable *thing*, incomprehensible

to him, but inimical. She sat in her saddle in wonder, feeling once more as if she had died. And again he struck her horse, and jerked her badly in the saddle.

All the passionate anger of the spoilt white woman rose in her. She pulled her horse to a standstill, and turned with blazing eyes to the man at her bridle.

“Tell that fellow not to touch my horse again,” she cried. She met the eyes of the young man, and in their bright black inscrutability she saw a fine spark, as in a snake’s eye, of derision. He spoke to his companion in the rear, in the low tones of the Indian. The man with the stick listened without looking. Then, giving a strange low cry to the horse, he struck it again on the rear, so that it leaped forward spasmodically up the stony trail, scattering the stones, pitching the weary woman in her seat.

The anger flew like a madness into her eyes, she went white at the gills. Fiercely she reined in her horse. But before she could turn, the young Indian had caught the reins under the horse’s throat, jerked them forward, and was trotting ahead rapidly, leading the horse.

The woman was powerless. And along with her supreme anger there came a slight thrill of exultation. She knew she was dead.

The sun was setting, a great yellow light flooded the last of the aspens, flared on the trunks of the pine-trees, the pine-needles bristled and stood out with dark lustre, the rocks glowed with unearthly glamour. And through this effulgence the Indian at her horse’s head trotted unweariedly on, his dark blanket swinging, his bare legs glowing with a strange transfigured ruddiness in the powerful light, and his straw hat with its half-absurd decorations of flowers and feathers shining showily above his river of long black hair. At times he would utter a low call to the horse, and then the other Indian, behind, would fetch the beast a whack with the stick.

The wonder-light faded off the mountains, the world began to grow dark, a cold air breathed down. In the sky, half a moon was struggling against the glow in the west. Huge shadows came down from steep rocky slopes. Water was rushing. The woman was conscious only of her fatigue, her unspeakable fatigue, and the cold wind from the heights. She was not aware how moonlight replaced daylight. It happened while she travelled unconscious with weariness.

For some hours they travelled by moonlight. Then suddenly they came to a standstill. The men conversed in low tones for a moment.

“We camp here,” said the young man.

She waited for him to help her down. He merely stood holding the horse’s bridle. She almost fell from the saddle, so fatigued.

They had chosen a place at the foot of rocks that still gave off a little warmth of the sun. One man cut pine-boughs, another erected little screens of pine-

boughs against the rock for shelter, and put boughs of balsam pine for beds. The third made a small fire, to heat tortillas. They worked in silence.

The woman drank water. She did not want to eat — only to lie down.

“Where do I sleep?” she asked.

The young man pointed to one of the shelters. She crept in and lay inert. She did not care what happened to her, she was so weary, and so beyond everything. Through the twigs of spruce she could see the three men squatting round the fire on their hams, chewing the tortillas they picked from the ashes with their dark fingers, and drinking water from a gourd. They talked in low, muttering tones, with long intervals of silence. Her saddle and saddle-bags lay not far from the fire, unopened, untouched. The men were not interested in her nor her belongings. There they squatted with their hats on their heads, eating, eating mechanically, like animals, the dark sarape with its fringe falling to the ground before and behind, the powerful dark legs naked and squatting like an animal’s, showing the dirty white shirt and the sort of loin-cloth which was the only other garment, underneath. And they showed no more sign of interest in her than if she had been a piece of venison they were bringing home from the hunt, and had hung inside a shelter.

After a while they carefully extinguished the fire, and went inside their own shelter. Watching through the screen of boughs, she had a moment’s thrill of fear and anxiety, seeing the dark forms cross and pass silently in the moonlight. Would they attack her now?

But no! They were as if oblivious of her. Her horse was hobbled; she could hear it hopping wearily. All was silent, mountain-silent, cold, deathly. She slept and woke and slept in a semi-conscious numbness of cold and fatigue. A long, long night, icy and eternal, and she aware that she had died.

II

Yet when there was a stirring, and a clink of flint and steel, and the form of a man crouching like a dog over a bone, at a red splutter of fire, and she knew it was morning coming, it seemed to her the night had passed too soon.

When the fire was going, she came out of her shelter with one real desire left: for coffee. The men were warming more tortillas.

“Can we make coffee?” she asked.

The young man looked at her, and she imagined the same faint spark of derision in his eyes. He shook his head.

“We don’t take it,” he said. “There is no time.”

And the elder men, squatting on their haunches, looked up at her in the terrible

paling dawn, and there was not even derision in their eyes. Only that intense, yet remote, inhuman glitter which was terrible to her. They were inaccessible. They could not see her as a woman at all. As if she *were* not a woman. As if, perhaps, her whiteness took away all her womanhood, and left her as some giant, female white ant. That was all they could see in her.

Before the sun was up, she was in the saddle again, and they were climbing steeply, in the icy air. The sun came, and soon she was very hot, exposed to the glare in the bare places. It seemed to her they were climbing to the roof of the world. Beyond against heaven were slashes of snow.

During the course of the morning, they came to a place where the horse could not go farther. They rested for a time with a great slant of living rock in front of them, like the glossy breast of some earth-beast. Across this rock, along a wavering crack, they had to go. It seemed to her that for hours she went in torment, on her hands and knees, from crack to crevice, along the slanting face of this pure rock-mountain. An Indian in front and an Indian behind walked slowly erect, shod with sandals of braided leather. But she in her riding-boots dared not stand erect.

Yet what she wondered, all the time, was why she persisted in clinging and crawling along these mile-long sheets of rock. Why she did not hurl herself down, and have done! The world was below her.

When they emerged at last on a stony slope, she looked back, and saw the third Indian coming carrying her saddle and saddle-bags on his back, the whole hung from a band across his forehead. And he had his hat in his hand, as he stepped slowly, with the slow, soft, heavy tread of the Indian, unwavering in the chinks of rock, as if along a scratch in the mountain's iron shield.

The stony slope led downwards. The Indians seemed to grow excited. One ran ahead at a slow trot, disappearing round the curve of stones. And the track curved round and down, till at last in the full blaze of the mid-morning sun, they could see a valley below them, between walls of rock, as in a great wide chasm let in the mountains. A green valley, with a river, and trees, and clusters of low flat sparkling houses. It was all tiny and perfect, three thousand feet below. Even the flat bridge over the stream, and the square with the houses around it, the bigger buildings piled up at opposite ends of the square, the tall cotton-wood trees, the pastures and stretches of yellow-sere maize, the patches of brown sheep or goats in the distance, on the slopes, the railed enclosures by the stream-side. There it was, all small and perfect, looking magical, as any place will look magical, seen from the mountains above. The unusual thing was that the low houses glittered white, whitewashed, looking like crystals of salt, or silver. This frightened her.

They began the long, winding descent at the head of the barranca, following the stream that rushed and fell. At first it was all rocks: then the pine-trees began, and soon, the silver-limbed aspens. The flowers of autumn, big pink daisy-like flowers, and white ones, and many yellow flowers, were in profusion. But she had to sit down and rest, she was so weary. And she saw the bright flowers shadowily, as pale shadows hovering, as one who is dead must see them.

At length came grass and pasture-slopes between mingled aspen and pine-trees. A shepherd, naked in the sun save for his hat and his cotton loin-cloth, was driving his brown sheep away. In a grove of trees they sat and waited, she and the young Indian. The one with the saddle had also gone forward.

They heard a sound of someone coming. It was three men, in fine sarapes of red and orange and yellow and black, and with brilliant feather headdresses. The oldest had his grey hair braided with fur, and his red and orange-yellow sarape was covered with curious black markings, like a leopard-skin. The other two were not grey-haired, but they were elders too. Their blankets were in stripes, and their headdresses not so elaborate.

The young Indian addressed the elders in a few quiet words. They listened without answering or looking at him or at the woman, keeping their faces averted and their eyes turned to the ground, only listening. And at length they turned and looked at the woman.

The old chief, or medicine-man, whatever he was, had a deeply wrinkled and lined face of dark bronze, with a few sparse grey hairs round the mouth. Two long braids of grey hair, braided with fur and coloured feathers, hung on his shoulders. And yet, it was only his eyes that mattered. They were black and of extraordinary piercing strength, without a qualm of misgiving in their demonish, dauntless power. He looked into the eyes of the white woman with a long, piercing look, seeking she knew not what. She summoned all her strength to meet his eyes and keep up her guard. But it was no good. He was not looking at her as one human being looks at another. He never even perceived her resistance or her challenge, but looked past them both, into she knew not what.

She could see it was hopeless to expect any human communication with this old being.

He turned and said a few words to the young Indian.

“He asks what do you seek here?” said the young man in Spanish.

“I? Nothing! I only came to see what it was like.”

This was again translated, and the old man turned his eyes on her once more. Then he spoke again, in his low muttering tone, to the young Indian.

“He says, why does she leave her house with the white men? Does she want to bring the white man’s God to the Chilchui?”

“No,” she replied, foolhardy. “I came away from the white man’s God myself. I came to look for the God of Chilchui.”

Profound silence followed, when this was translated. Then the old man spoke again, in a small voice almost of weariness.

“Does the white woman seek the gods of the Chilchui because she is weary of her own God?” came the question.

“Yes, she does. She is tired of the white man’s God,” she replied, thinking that was what they wanted her to say. She would like to serve the gods of the Chilchui.

She was aware of an extraordinary thrill of triumph and exultance passing through the Indians, in the tense silence that followed when this was translated. Then they all looked at her with piercing black eyes, in which a steely covetous intent glittered incomprehensible. She was the more puzzled, as there was nothing sensual or sexual in the look. It had a terrible glittering purity that was beyond her. She was afraid, she would have been paralysed with fear, had not something died within her, leaving her with a cold, watchful wonder only.

The elders talked a little while, then the two went away, leaving her with the young man and the oldest chief. The old man now looked at her with a certain solicitude.

“He says are you tired?” asked the young man.

“Very tired,” she said.

“The men will bring you a carriage,” said the young Indian.

The carriage, when it came, proved to be a litter consisting of a sort of hammock of dark woollen frieze, slung on to a pole which was borne on the shoulders of two long-haired Indians. The woollen hammock was spread on the ground, she sat down on it, and the two men raised the pole to their shoulders. Swinging rather as if she were in a sack, she was carried out of the grove of trees, following the old chief, whose leopard-spotted blanket moved curiously in the sunlight.

They had emerged in the valley-head. Just in front were the maize fields, with ripe ears of maize. The corn was not very tall, in this high altitude. The well-worn path went between it, and all she could see was the erect form of the old chief, in the flame and black sarape, stepping soft and heavy and swift, his head forward, looking to neither to right nor left. Her bearers followed, stepping rhythmically, the long blue-black hair glistening like a river down the naked shoulders of the man in front.

They passed the maize, and came to a big wall or earthwork made of earth and adobe bricks. The wooden doors were open. Passing on, they were in a network of small gardens, full of flowers and herbs and fruit trees, each garden watered

by a tiny ditch of running water. Among each cluster of trees and flowers was a small, glittering white house, windowless, and with closed door. The place was a network of little paths, small streams, and little bridges among square, flowering gardens.

Following the broadest path — a soft narrow track between leaves and grass, a path worn smooth by centuries of human feet, no hoof of horse nor any wheel to disfigure it — they came to the little river of swift bright water, and crossed on a log bridge. Everything was silent — there was no human being anywhere. The road went on under magnificent cotton-wood trees. It emerged suddenly outside the central plaza or square of the village.

This was a long oblong of low white houses with flat roofs, and two bigger buildings, having as it were little square huts piled on top of bigger long huts, stood at either end of the oblong, facing each other rather askew. Every little house was a dazzling white, save for the great round beam-ends which projected under the flat eaves, and for the flat roofs. Round each of the bigger buildings, on the outside of the square, was a stockyard fence, inside which was garden with trees and flowers, and various small houses.

Not a soul was in sight. They passed silently between the houses into the central square. This was quite bare and arid, the earth trodden smooth by endless generations of passing feet, passing across from door to door. All the doors of the windowless houses gave on to this blank square, but all the doors were closed. The firewood lay near the threshold, a clay oven was still smoking, but there was no sign of moving life.

The old man walked straight across the square to the big house at the end, where the two upper storeys, as in a house of toy bricks, stood each one smaller than the lower one. A stone staircase, outside, led up to the roof of the first storey.

At the foot of this staircase the litter-bearers stood still, and lowered the woman to the ground.

“You will come up,” said the young Indian who spoke Spanish.

She mounted the stone stairs to the earthen roof of the first house, which formed a platform round the wall of the second storey. She followed around this platform to the back of the big house. There they descended again, into the garden at the rear.

So far they had seen no one. But now two men appeared, bare-headed, with long braided hair, and wearing a sort of white shirt gathered into a loin-cloth. These went along with the three newcomers, across the garden where red flowers and yellow flowers were blooming, to a long, low white house. There they entered without knocking.

It was dark inside. There was a low murmur of men's voices. Several men were present, their white shirts showing in the gloom, their dark faces invisible. They were sitting on a great log of smooth old wood, that lay along the far wall. And save for this log, the room seemed empty. But no, in the dark at one end was a couch, a sort of bed, and someone lying there, covered with furs.

The old Indian in the spotted sarape, who had accompanied the woman, now took off his hat and his blanket and his sandals. Laying them aside, he approached the couch, and spoke in a low voice. For some moments there was no answer. Then an old man with the snow-white hair hanging round his darkly-visible face, roused himself like a vision, and leaned on one elbow, looking vaguely at the company, in tense silence.

The grey-haired Indian spoke again, and then the young Indian, taking the woman's hand, led her forward. In her linen riding habit, and black boots and hat, and her pathetic bit of a red tie, she stood there beside the fur-covered bed of the old, old man, who sat reared up, leaning on one elbow, remote as a ghost, his white hair streaming in disorder, his face almost black, yet with a far-off intentness, not of this world, leaning forward to look at her.

His face was so old, it was like dark glass, and the few curling hairs that sprang white from his lips and chin were quite incredible. The long white locks fell unbraided and disorderly on either side of the glassy dark face. And under a faint powder of white eyebrows, the black eyes of the old chief looked at her as if from the far, far dead, seeing something that was never to be seen.

At last he spoke a few deep, hollow words, as if to the dark air.

"He says, do you bring your heart to the god of the Chilchui?" translated the young Indian.

"Tell him yes," she said, automatically.

There was a pause. The old Indian spoke again, as if to the air. One of the men present went out. There was a silence as if of eternity, in the dim room that was lighted only through the open door.

The woman looked round. Four old men with grey hair sat on the log by the wall facing the door. Two other men, powerful and impassive, stood near the door. They all had long hair, and wore white shirts gathered into a loin-cloth. Their powerful legs were naked and dark. There was a silence like eternity.

At length the man returned, with white and dark clothing on his arm. The young Indian took them, and holding them in front of the woman, said:

"You must take off your clothes, and put these on."

"If all you men will go out," she said.

"No one will hurt you," he said quietly.

"Not while you men are here," she said.

He looked at the two men by the door. They came quickly forward, and suddenly gripped her arms as she stood, without hurting her, but with great power. Then two of the old men came, and with curious skill slit her boots down with keen knives, and drew them off, and slit her clothing so that it came away from her. In a few moments she stood there white and uncovered. The old man on the bed spoke, and they turned her round for him to see. He spoke again, and the young Indian deftly took the pins and comb from her fair hair, so that it fell over her shoulders in a bunched tangle.

Then the old man spoke again. The Indian led her to the bedside. The white-haired, glassy-dark old man moistened his fingertips at his mouth, and most delicately touched her on the breasts and on the body, then on the back. And she winced strangely each time, as the fingertips drew along her skin, as if Death itself were touching her.

And she wondered, almost sadly, why she did not feel shamed in her nakedness. She only felt sad and lost. Because nobody felt ashamed. The elder men were all dark and tense with some other deep, gloomy, incomprehensible emotion, which suspended all her agitation, while the young Indian had a strange look of ecstasy on his face. And she, she was only utterly strange and beyond herself, as if her body were not her own.

They gave her the new clothing: a long white cotton shift, that came to her knees: then a tunic of thick blue woollen stuff, embroidered with scarlet and green flowers. It was fastened over one shoulder only, and belted with a braided sash of scarlet and black wool.

When she was thus dressed, they took her away, barefoot, to a little house in the stockaded garden. The young Indian told her she might have what she wanted. She asked for water to wash herself. He brought it in a jar, together with a long wooden bowl. Then he fastened the gate-door of her house, and left her a prisoner. She could see through the bars of the gate-door of her house, the red flowers of the garden, and a humming bird. Then from the roof of the big house she heard the long, heavy sound of a drum, unearthly to her in its summons, and an uplifted voice calling from the housetop in a strange language, with a far-away emotionless intonation, delivering some speech or message. And she listened as if from the dead.

But she was very tired. She lay down on a couch of skins, pulling over her the blanket of dark wool, and she slept, giving up everything.

When she woke it was late afternoon, and the young Indian was entering with a basket-tray containing food, tortillas and corn-mush with bits of meat, probably mutton, and a drink made of honey, and some fresh plums. He brought her also a long garland of red and yellow flowers with knots of blue buds at the

end. He sprinkled the garland with water from a jar, then offered it to her, with a smile. He seemed very gentle and thoughtful, and on his face and in his dark eyes was a curious look of triumph and ecstasy, that frightened her a little. The glitter had gone from the black eyes, with their curving dark lashes, and he would look at her with this strange soft glow of ecstasy that was not quite human, and terribly impersonal, and which made her uneasy.

“Is there anything you want?” he said, in his low, slow, melodious voice, that always seemed withheld, as if he were speaking aside to somebody else, or as if he did not want to let the sound come out to her.

“Am I going to be kept a prisoner here?” she asked.

“No, you can walk in the garden to-morrow,” he said softly. Always this curious solicitude.

“Do you like that drink?” he said, offering her a little earthenware cup. “It is very refreshing.”

She sipped the liquor curiously. It was made with herbs and sweetened with honey, and had a strange, lingering flavour. The young man watched her with gratification.

“It has a peculiar taste,” she said.

“It is very refreshing,” he replied, his black eyes resting on her always with that look of gratified ecstasy. Then he went away. And presently she began to be sick, and to vomit violently, as if she had no control over herself.

Afterwards she felt a great soothing languor steal over her, her limbs felt strong and loose and full of languor, and she lay on her couch listening to the sounds of the village, watching the yellowing sky, smelling the scent of burning cedar-wood, or pinewood. So distinctly she heard the yapping of tiny dogs, the shuffle of far-off feet, the murmur of voices, so keenly she detected the smell of smoke, and flowers, and evening falling, so vividly she saw the one bright star infinitely remote, stirring above the sunset, that she felt as if all her senses were diffused on the air, that she could distinguish the sound of evening flowers unfolding, and the actual crystal sound of the heavens, as the vast belts of the world-atmosphere slid past one another, and as if the moisture ascending and the moisture descending in the air resounded like some harp in the cosmos.

She was a prisoner in her house and in the stockaded garden, but she scarcely minded. And it was days before she realised that she never saw another woman. Only the men, the elderly men of the big house, that she imagined must be some sort of temple, and the men priests of some sort. For they always had the same colours, red, orange, yellow, and black, and the same grave, abstracted demeanour.

Sometimes an old man would come and sit in her room with her, in absolute

silence. None spoke any language but Indian, save the one younger man. The older men would smile at her, and sit with her for an hour at a time, sometimes smiling at her when she spoke in Spanish, but never answering save with this slow, benevolent-seeming smile. And they gave off a feeling of almost fatherly solicitude. Yet their dark eyes, brooding over her, had something away in their depths that was awesomely ferocious and relentless. They would cover it with a smile, at once, if they felt her looking. But she had seen it.

Always they treated her with this curious impersonal solicitude, this utterly impersonal gentleness, as an old man treats a child. But underneath it she felt there was something else, something terrible. When her old visitor had gone away, in his silent, insidious, fatherly fashion, a shock of fear would come over her; though of what she knew not.

The young Indian would sit and talk with her freely, as if with great candour. But with him, too, she felt that everything real was unsaid. Perhaps it was unspeakable. His big dark eyes would rest on her almost cherishingly, touched with ecstasy, and his beautiful, slow, languorous voice would trail out its simple, ungrammatical Spanish. He told her he was the grandson of the old, old man, son of the man in the spotted sarape: and they were caciques, kings from the old, old days, before even the Spaniards came. But he himself had been in Mexico City, and also in the United States. He had worked as a labourer, building the roads in Los Angeles. He had travelled as far as Chicago.

“Don’t you speak English, then?” she asked.

His eyes rested on her with a curious look of duplicity and conflict, and he mutely shook his head.

“What did you do with your long hair, when you were in the United States?” she asked. “Did you cut it off?”

Again, with the look of torment in his eyes, he shook his head.

“No,” he said, in a low, subdued voice, “I wore a hat, and a handkerchief tied round my head.”

And he relapsed into silence, as if of tormented memories.

“Are you the only man of your people who has been to the United States?” she asked him.

“Yes. I am the only one who has been away from here for a long time. The others come back soon, in one week. They don’t stay away. The old men don’t let them.”

“And why did you go?”

“The old men want me to go — because I shall be the Cacique — ”

He talked always with the same naïveté, an almost childish candour. But she felt that this was perhaps just the effect of his Spanish. Or perhaps speech

altogether was unreal to him. Anyhow, she felt that all the real things were kept back.

He came and sat with her a good deal — sometimes more than she wished — as if he wanted to be near her. She asked him if he was married. He said he was — with two children.

“I should like to see your children,” she said.

But he answered only with that smile, a sweet, almost ecstatic smile above which the dark eyes hardly changed from their enigmatic abstraction.

It was curious, he would sit with her by the hour, without even making her self-conscious, or sex-conscious. He seemed to have no sex, as he sat there so still and gentle and apparently submissive, with his head bent a little forward, and the river of glistening black hair streaming maidenly over his shoulders.

Yet when she looked again, she saw his shoulders broad and powerful, his eyebrows black and level, the short, curved, obstinate black lashes over his lowered eyes, the small, fur-like line of moustache above his blackish, heavy lips, and the strong chin, and she knew that in some other mysterious way he was darkly and powerfully male. And he, feeling her watching him, would glance up at her swiftly with a dark, lurking look in his eyes, which immediately he veiled with that half-sad smile.

The days and the weeks went by, in a vague kind of contentment. She was uneasy sometimes, feeling she had lost the power over herself. She was not in her own power, she was under the spell of some other control. And at times she had moments of terror and horror. But then these Indians would come and sit with her, casting their insidious spell over her by their very silent presence, their silent, sexless, powerful physical presence. As they sat they seemed to take her will away, leaving her will-less and victim to her own indifference. And the young man would bring her sweetened drink, often the same emetic drink, but sometimes other kinds. And after drinking, the languor filled her heavy limbs, her senses seemed to float in the air, listening, hearing. They had brought her a little female dog, which she called Flora. And once, in the trance of her senses, she felt she *heard* the little dog conceive, in her tiny womb, and begin to be complex, with young. And another day she could hear the vast sound of the earth going round, like some immense arrow-string booming.

But as the days grew shorter and colder, when she was cold, she would get a sudden revival of her will, and a desire to go out, to go away. And she insisted to the young man, she wanted to go out.

So one day, they let her climb to the topmost roof of the big house where she was, and look down the square. It was the day of the big dance, but not everybody was dancing. Women with babies in their arms stood in their

doorways, watching. Opposite, at the other end of the square, there was a throng before the other big house, and a small, brilliant group on the terrace-roof of the first storey, in front of wide open doors of the upper storey. Through these wide open doors she could see fire glinting in darkness and priests in headdresses of black and yellow and scarlet feathers, wearing robe-like blankets of black and red and yellow, with long green fringes, were moving about. A big drum was beating slowly and regularly, in the dense, Indian silence. The crowd below waited —

Then a drum started on a high beat, and there came the deep, powerful burst of men singing a heavy, savage music, like a wind roaring in some timeless forest, many mature men singing in one breath, like the wind; and long lines of dancers walked out from under the big house. Men with naked, golden-bronze bodies and streaming black hair, tufts of red and yellow feathers on their arms, and kilts of white frieze with a bar of heavy red and black and green embroidery round their waists, bending slightly forward and stamping the earth in their absorbed, monotonous stamp of the dance, a fox-fur, hung by the nose from their belt behind, swaying with the sumptuous swaying of a beautiful fox-fur, the tip of the tail writhing above the dancer's heels. And after each man, a woman with a strange elaborate headdress of feathers and seashells, and wearing a short black tunic, moving erect, holding up tufts of feathers in each hand, swaying her wrists rhythmically and subtly beating the earth with her bare feet.

So, the long line of the dance unfurling from the big house opposite. And from the big house beneath her, strange scent of incense, strange tense silence, then the answering burst of inhuman male singing, and the long line of the dance unfurling.

It went on all day, the insistence of the drum, the cavernous, roaring, storm-like sound of male singing, the incessant swinging of the fox-skins behind the powerful, gold-bronze, stamping legs of the men, the autumn sun from a perfect blue heaven pouring on the rivers of black hair, men's and women's, the valley all still, the walls of rock beyond, the awful huge bulking of the mountain against the pure sky, its snow seething with sheer whiteness.

For hours and hours she watched, spell-bound, and as if drugged. And in all the terrible persistence of the drumming and the primeval, rushing deep singing, and the endless stamping of the dance of fox-tailed men, the tread of heavy, bird-erect women in their black tunics, she seemed at last to feel her own death; her own obliteration. As if she were to be obliterated from the field of life again. In the strange towering symbols on the heads of the changeless, absorbed women she seemed to read once more the *Mene Mene Tekel Upharsin*. Her kind of womanhood, intensely personal and individual, was to be obliterated again, and

the great primeval symbols were to tower once more over the fallen individual independence of woman. The sharpness and the quivering nervous consciousness of the highly-bred white woman was to be destroyed again, womanhood was to be cast once more into the great stream of impersonal sex and impersonal passion. Strangely, as if clairvoyant, she saw the immense sacrifice prepared. And she went back to her little house in a trance of agony.

After this, there was always a certain agony when she heard the drums at evening, and the strange uplifted savage sound of men singing round the drum, like wild creatures howling to the invisible gods of the moon and the vanished sun. Something of the chuckling, sobbing-cry of the coyote, something of the exultant bark of the fox, the far-off wild melancholy exultance of the howling wolf, the torment of the puma's scream, and the insistence of the ancient fierce human male, with his lapses of tenderness and his abiding ferocity.

Sometimes she would climb the high roof after nightfall, and listen to the dim cluster of young men round the drum on the bridge just beyond the square, singing by the hour. Sometimes there would be a fire, and in the fire-glow, men in their white shirts or naked save for a loin-cloth, would be dancing and stamping like spectres, hour after hour in the dark cold air, within the fire-glow, forever dancing and stamping like turkeys, or dropping squatting by the fire to rest, throwing their blankets round them.

"Why do you all have the same colours?" she asked the young Indian. "Why do you all have red and yellow and black, over your white shirts? And the women have black tunics?"

He looked into her eyes, curiously, and the faint, evasive smile came on to his face. Behind the smile lay a soft, strange malignancy.

"Because our men are the fire and the daytime, and our women are the spaces between the stars at night," he said.

"Aren't the women even stars?" she said.

"No. We say they are the spaces between the stars, that keep the stars apart."

He looked at her oddly, and again the touch of derision came into his eyes.

"White people," he said, "they know nothing. They are like children, always with toys. We know the sun, and we know the moon. And we say, when a white woman sacrifice herself to our gods, then our gods will begin to make the world again, and the white man's gods will fall to pieces."

"How sacrifice herself?" she asked quickly.

And he, as quickly covered, covered himself with a subtle smile.

"She sacrifice her own gods and come to our gods, I mean that," he said, soothingly.

But she was not reassured. An icy pang of fear and certainty was at her heart.

“The sun he is alive at one end of the sky,” he continued, “and the moon lives at the other end. And the man all the time have to keep the sun happy in his side of the sky, and the woman have to keep the moon quiet at her side of the sky. All the time she have to work at this. And the sun can’t ever go into the house of the moon, and the moon can’t ever go into the house of the sun, in the sky. So the woman, she asks the moon to come into her cave, inside her. And the man, he draws the sun down till he has the power of the sun. All the time he do this. Then when the man gets a woman, the sun goes into the cave of the moon, and that is how everything in the world starts.”

She listened, watching him closely, as one enemy watches another who is speaking with double meaning.

“Then,” she said, “why aren’t you Indians masters of the white men?”

“Because,” he said, “the Indian got weak, and lost his power with the sun, so the white men stole the sun. But they can’t keep him — they don’t know how. They got him, but they don’t know what to do with him, like a boy who catch a big grizzly bear, and can’t kill him, and can’t run away from him. The grizzly bear eats the boy that catch him, when he want to run away from him. White men don’t know what they are doing with the sun, and white women don’t know what they do with the moon. The moon she got angry with white women, like a puma when someone kills her little ones. The moon, she bites white women — here inside,” and he pressed his side. “The moon, she is angry in a white woman’s cave. The Indian, can see it — And soon,” he added, “the Indian women get the moon back and keep her quiet in their house. And the Indian men get the sun, and the power over all the world. White men don’t know what the sun is. They never know.”

He subsided into a curious exultant silence.

“But,” she faltered, “why do you hate us so? Why do you hate me?”

He looked up suddenly with a light on his face, and a startling flame of a smile.

“No, we don’t hate,” he said softly, looking with a curious glitter into her face.

“You do,” she said, forlorn and hopeless.

And after a moment’s silence, he rose and went away.

III

Winter had now come, in the high valley, with snow that melted in the day’s sun, and nights that were bitter cold. She lived on, in a kind of daze, feeling her power ebbing more and more away from her, as if her will were leaving her. She felt always in the same relaxed, confused, victimised state, unless the sweetened

herb drink would numb her mind altogether, and release her senses into a sort of heightened, mystic acuteness and a feeling as if she were diffusing out deliciously into the harmony of things. This at length became the only state of consciousness she really recognised: this exquisite sense of bleeding out into the higher beauty and harmony of things. Then she could actually hear the great stars in heaven, which she saw through her door, speaking from their motion and brightness, saying things perfectly to the cosmos, as they trod in perfect ripples, like bells on the floor of heaven, passing one another and grouping in the timeless dance, with the spaces of dark between. And she could hear the snow on a cold, cloudy day twittering and faintly whistling in the sky, like birds that flock and fly away in autumn, suddenly calling farewell to the invisible moon, and slipping out of the plains of the air, releasing peaceful warmth. She herself would call to the arrested snow to fall from the upper air. She would call to the unseen moon to cease to be angry, to make peace again with the unseen sun like a woman who ceases to be angry in her house. And she would smell the sweetness of the moon relaxing to the sun in the wintry heaven, when the snow fell in a faint, cold-perfumed relaxation, as the peace of the sun mingled again in a sort of unison with the peace of the moon.

She was aware too of the sort of shadow that was on the Indians of the valley, a deep, stoical disconsolation, almost religious in its depth.

“We have lost our power over the sun, and we are trying to get him back. But he is wild with us, and shy like a horse that has got away. We have to go through a lot.” So the young Indian said to her, looking into her eyes with a strained meaning. And she, as if bewitched, replied:

“I hope you will get him back.”

The smile of triumph flew over his face.

“Do you hope it?” he said.

“I do,” she answered fatally.

“Then all right,” he said. “We shall get him.”

And he went away in exultance.

She felt she was drifting on some consummation, which she had no will to avoid, yet which seemed heavy and finally terrible to her.

It must have been almost December, for the days were short, when she was taken again before the aged man, and stripped of her clothing, and touched with the old fingertips.

The aged cacique looked her in the eyes, with his eyes of lonely, far-off, black intentness, and murmured something to her.

“He wants you to make the sign of peace,” the young man translated, showing her the gesture. “Peace and farewell to him.”

She was fascinated by the black, glass-like, intent eyes of the old cacique, that watched her without blinking, like a basilisk's, overpowering her. In their depths also she saw a certain fatherly compassion, and pleading. She put her hand before her face, in the required manner, making the sign of peace and farewell. He made the sign of peace back again to her, then sank among his furs. She thought he was going to die, and that he knew it.

There followed a day of ceremonial, when she was brought out before all the people, in a blue blanket with white fringe, and holding blue feathers in her hands. Before an altar of one house, she was perfumed with incense and sprinkled with ash. Before the altar of the opposite house she was fumigated again with incense by the gorgeous, terrifying priests in yellow and scarlet and black, their faces painted with scarlet paint. And then they threw water on her. Meanwhile she was faintly aware of the fire on the altar, the heavy, heavy sound of a drum, the heavy sound of men beginning powerfully, deeply, savagely to sing, the swaying of the crowd of faces in the plaza below, and the formation for a sacred dance.

But at this time her commonplace consciousness was numb, she was aware of her immediate surroundings as shadows, almost immaterial. With refined and heightened senses she could hear the sound of the earth winging on its journey, like a shot arrow, the ripple-rustling of the air, and the boom of the great arrow-string. And it seemed to her there were two great influences in the upper air, one golden towards the sun, and one invisible silver; the first travelling like rain ascending to the gold presence sunwards, the second like rain silverly descending the ladders of space towards the hovering, lurking clouds over the snowy mountain-top. Then between them, another presence, waiting to shake himself free of moisture, of heavy white snow that had mysteriously collected about him. And in summer, like a scorched eagle, he would wait to shake himself clear of the weight of heavy sunbeams. And he was coloured like fire. And he was always shaking himself clear, of snow or of heavy heat, like an eagle rustling.

Then there was a still stranger presence, standing watching from the blue distance, always watching. Sometimes running in upon the wind, or shimmering in the heat-waves. The blue wind itself, rushing as it were out of the holes in the earth into the sky, rushing out of the sky down upon the earth. The blue wind, the go-between, the invisible ghost that belonged to two worlds, that played upon the ascending and the descending chords of the rains.

More and more her ordinary personal consciousness had left her, she had gone into that other state of passional cosmic consciousness, like one who is drugged. The Indians, with their heavily religious natures, had made her succumb to their

vision.

Only one personal question she asked the young Indian:

“Why am I the only one that wears blue?”

“It is the colour of the wind. It is the colour of what goes away and is never coming back, but which is always here, waiting like death among us. It is the colour of the dead. And it is the colour that stands away off, looking at us from the distance, that cannot come near to us. When we go near, it goes farther. It can't be near. We are all brown and yellow and black hair, and white teeth and red blood. We are the ones that are here. You with blue eyes, you are the messengers from the far-away, you cannot stay, and now it is time for you to go back.”

“Where to?” she asked.

“To the way-off things like the sun and the blue mother of rain, and tell them that we are the people on the world again, and we can bring the sun to the moon again, like a red horse to a blue mare; we are the people. The white women have driven back the moon in the sky, won't let her come to the sun. So the sun is angry. And the Indian must give the moon to the sun.”

“How?” she said.

“The white woman got to die and go like a wind to the sun, tell him the Indians will open the gate to him. And the Indian women will open the gate to the moon. The white women don't let the moon come down out of the blue coral. The moon used to come down among the Indian women, like a white goat among the flowers. And the sun want to come down to the Indian men, like an eagle to the pine-trees. The sun, he is shut out behind the white man, and the moon she is shut out behind the white woman, and they can't get away. They are angry, everything in the world gets angrier. The Indian says, he will give the white woman to the sun, so the sun will leap over the white man and come to the Indian again. And the moon will be surprised, she will see the gate open, and she not know which way to go. But the Indian woman will call to the moon, *Come! Come! Come back into my grasslands. The wicked white woman can't harm you any more.* Then the sun will look over the heads of the white men, and see the moon in the pastures of our women, with the Red Men standing around like pine trees. Then he will leap over the heads of the white men, and come running past to the Indians through the spruce trees. And we, who are red and black and yellow, we who stay, we shall have the sun on our right hand and the moon on our left. So we can bring the rain down out of the blue meadows, and up out of the black; and we can call the wind that tells the corn to grow, when we ask him, and we shall make the clouds to break, and the sheep to have twin lambs. And we shall be full of power, like a spring day. But the white people will be a hard

winter, without snow — ”

“But,” said the white woman, “I don’t shut out the moon — how can I?”

“Yes,” he said, “you shut the gate, and then laugh, think you have it all your own way.”

She could never quite understand the way he looked at her. He was always so curiously gentle, and his smile was so soft. Yet there was such glitter in his eyes, and an unrelenting sort of hate came out of his words, a strange, profound, impersonal hate. Personally he liked her, she was sure. He was gentle with her, attracted by her in some strange, soft, passionless way. But impersonally he hated her with a mystic hatred. He would smile at her, winningly. Yet if, the next moment, she glanced round at him unawares, she would catch that gleam of pure after-hate in his eyes.

“Have I got to die and be given to the sun?” she asked.

“Sometime,” he said, laughing evasively. “Sometime we all die.”

They were gentle with her, and very considerate with her. Strange men, the old priests and the young cacique alike, they watched over her and cared for her like women. In their soft, insidious understanding, there was something womanly. Yet their eyes, with that strange glitter, and their dark, shut mouths that would open to the broad jaw, the small, strong, white teeth, had something very primitively male and cruel.

One wintry day, when snow was falling, they took her to a great dark chamber in the big house. The fire was burning in a corner on a high raised dais under a sort of hood or canopy of adobe-work. She saw in the fire-glow, the glowing bodies of the almost naked priests, and strange symbols on the roof and walls of the chamber. There was no door or window in the chamber, they had descended by a ladder from the roof. And the fire of pinewood danced continually, showing walls painted with strange devices, which she could not understand, and a ceiling of poles making a curious pattern of black and red and yellow, and alcoves or niches in which were curious objects she could not discern.

The older priests were going through some ceremony near the fire, in silence, intense Indian silence. She was seated on a low projection of the wall, opposite the fire, two men seated beside her. Presently they gave her a drink from a cup, which she took gladly, because of the semi-trance it would induce.

In the darkness and in the silence she was accurately aware of everything that happened to her: how they took off her clothes, and, standing her before a great, weird device on the wall, coloured blue and white and black, washed her all over with water and the amole infusion; washed even her hair, softly, carefully, and dried it on white cloths, till it was soft and glistening. Then they laid her on a couch under another great indecipherable image of red and black and yellow,

and now rubbed all her body with sweet-scented oil, and massaged all her limbs, and her back, and her sides, with a long, strange, hypnotic massage. Their dark hands were incredibly powerful, yet soft with a watery softness she could not understand. And the dark faces, leaning near her white body, she saw were darkened with red pigment, with lines of yellow round the cheeks. And the dark eyes glittered absorbed, as the hands worked upon the soft white body of the woman.

They were so impersonal, absorbed in something that was beyond her. They never saw her as a personal woman: she could tell that. She was some mystic object to them, some vehicle of passions too remote for her to grasp. Herself in a state of trance, she watched their faces bending over her, dark, strangely glistening with the transparent red paint, and lined with bars of yellow. And in this weird, luminous-dark mask of living face, the eyes were fixed with an unchanging steadfast gleam, and the purplish-pigmented lips were closed in a full, sinister, sad grimace. The immense fundamental sadness, the grimace of ultimate decision, the fixity of revenge, and the nascent exultance of those that are going to triumph — these things she could read in their faces, as she lay and was rubbed into a misty glow, by their uncanny dark hands. Her limbs, her flesh, her very bones at last seemed to be diffusing into a roseate sort of mist, in which her consciousness hovered like some sun-gleam in a flushed cloud.

She knew the gleam would fade, the cloud would go grey. But at present she did not believe it. She knew she was a victim; that all this elaborate work upon her was the work of victimising her. But she did not mind. She wanted it.

Later, they put a short blue tunic on her and took her to the upper terrace, and presented her to the people. She saw the plaza below her full of dark faces and of glittering eyes. There was no pity: only the curious hard exultance. The people gave a subdued cry when they saw her, and she shuddered. But she hardly cared.

Next day was the last. She slept in a chamber of the big house. At dawn they put on her a big blue blanket with a fringe, and led her out into the plaza, among the throng of silent, dark-blanketed people. There was pure white snow on the ground, and the dark people in their dark-brown blankets looked like inhabitants of another world.

A large drum was slowly pounding, and an old priest was declaring from a housetop. But it was not till noon that a litter came forth, and the people gave that low, animal cry which was so moving. In the sack-like litter sat the old, old cacique, his white hair braided with black braid and large turquoise stones. His face was like a piece of obsidian. He lifted his hand in token, and the litter stopped in front of her. Fixing her with his old eyes, he spoke to her for a few moments, in his hollow voice. No one translated.

Another litter came, and she was placed in it. Four priests moved ahead, in their scarlet and yellow and black, with plumed headdresses. Then came the litter of the old cacique. Then the light drums began, and two groups of singers burst simultaneously into song, male and wild. And the golden-red, almost naked men, adorned with ceremonial feathers and kilts, the rivers of black hair down their backs, formed into two files and began to tread the dance. So they threaded out of the snowy plaza, in two long, sumptuous lines of dark red-gold and black and fur, swaying with a faint tinkle of bits of shell and flint, winding over the snow between the two bee-clusters of men who sang around the drum.

Slowly they moved out, and her litter, with its attendance of feathered, lurid, dancing priests, moved after. Everybody danced the tread of the dance-step, even, subtly, the litter-bearers. And out of the plaza they went, past smoking ovens, on the trail to the great cotton-wood trees, that stood like grey-silver lace against the blue sky, bare and exquisite above the snow. The river, diminished, rushed among fangs of ice. The chequer-squares of gardens within fences were all snowy, and the white houses now looked yellowish.

The whole valley glittered intolerably with pure snow, away to the walls of the standing rock. And across the flat cradle of snow-bed wound the long thread of the dance, shaking slowly and sumptuously in its orange and black motion. The high drums thudded quickly, and on the crystalline frozen air the swell and roar of the chant of savages was like an obsession.

She sat looking out of her litter with big, transfixed blue eyes, under which were the wan markings of her drugged weariness. She knew she was going to die, among the glisten of this snow, at the hands of this savage, sumptuous people. And as she stared at the blaze of blue sky above the slashed and ponderous mountain, she thought: "I am dead already. What difference does it make, the transition from the dead I am to the dead I shall be, very soon!" Yet her soul sickened and felt wan.

The strange procession trailed on, in perpetual dance, slowly across the plain of snow, and then entered the slopes between the pine-trees. She saw the copper-dark men dancing the dance-tread, onwards, between the copper-pale tree trunks. And at last she, too, in her swaying litter, entered the pine-trees.

They were travelling on and on, upwards, across the snow under the trees, past the superb shafts of pale, flaked copper, the rustle and shake and tread of the threading dance, penetrating into the forest, into the mountain. They were following a stream-bed: but the stream was dry, like summer, dried up by the frozenness of the head-waters. There were dark, red-bronze willow bushes with wattles like wild hair, and pallid aspen trees looking like cold flesh against the snow. Then jutting dark rocks.

At last she could tell that the dancers were moving forward no more. Nearer and nearer she came upon the drums, as to a lair of mysterious animals. Then through the bushes she emerged into a strange amphitheatre. Facing was a great wall of hollow rock, down the front of which hung a great, dripping, fang-like spoke of ice. The ice came pouring over the rock from the precipice above, and then stood arrested, dripping out of high heaven, almost down to the hollow stones where the stream-pool should be below. But the pool was dry.

On either side the dry pool, the lines of dancers had formed, and the dance was continuing without intermission, against a background of bushes.

But what she felt was that fanged inverted pinnacle of ice, hanging from the lip of the dark precipice above. And behind the great rope of ice, she saw the leopard-like figures of priests climbing the hollow cliff face, to the cave that, like a dark socket, bored a cavity, an orifice, half way up the crag.

Before she could realise, her litter-bearers were staggering in the footholds, climbing the rock. She, too, was behind the ice. There it hung, like a curtain that is not spread, but hangs like a great fang. And near above her was the orifice of the cave sinking dark into the rock. She watched it as she swayed upwards.

On the platform of the cave stood the priests, waiting in all their gorgeousness of feathers and fringed robes, watching her ascent. Two of them stooped to help her litter-bearer. And at length she was on the platform of the cave, far in behind the shaft of ice, above the hollow amphitheatre among the bushes below, where men were dancing, and the whole populace of the village was clustered in silence.

The sun was sloping down the afternoon sky, on the left. She knew that this was the shortest day of the year, and the last day of her life. They stood her facing the iridescent column of ice, which fell down marvellously arrested, away in front of her.

Some signal was given, and the dance below stopped. There was now absolute silence. She was given a little to drink, then two priests took off her mantle and her tunic, and in her strange pallor she stood there, between the lurid robes of the priests, beyond the pillar of ice, beyond and above the dark-faced people. The throng below gave the low, wild cry. Then the priests turned her round, so she stood with her back to the open world, her long blond hair to the people below. And they cried again.

She was facing the cave, inwards. A fire was burning and flickering in the depths. Four priests had taken off their robes, and were almost as naked as she was. They were powerful men in the prime of life, and they kept their dark, painted faces lowered.

From the fire came the old, old priest, with an incense-pan. He was naked and

in a state of barbaric ecstasy. He fumigated his victim, reciting at the same time in a hollow voice. Behind him came another robeless priest, with two flint knives.

When she was fumigated, they laid her on a large flat stone, the four powerful men holding her by the outstretched arms and legs. Behind stood the aged man, like a skeleton covered with dark glass, holding a knife and transfixedly watching the sun; and behind him again was another naked priest, with a knife.

She felt little sensation, though she knew all that was happening. Turning to the sky, she looked at the yellow sun. It was sinking. The shaft of ice was like a shadow between her and it. And she realised that the yellow rays were filling half the cave, though they had not reached the altar where the fire was, at the far end of the funnel-shaped cavity.

Yes, the rays were creeping round slowly. As they grew ruddier, they penetrated farther. When the red sun was about to sink, he would shine full through the shaft of ice deep into the hollow of the cave, to the innermost.

She understood now that this was what the men were waiting for. Even those that held her down were bent and twisted round, their black eyes watching the sun with a glittering eagerness, and awe, and craving. The black eyes of the aged cacique were fixed like black mirrors on the sun, as if sightless, yet containing some terrible answer to the reddening winter planet. And all the eyes of the priests were fixed and glittering on the sinking orb, in the reddening, icy silence of the winter afternoon.

They were anxious, terribly anxious, and fierce. Their ferocity wanted something, and they were waiting the moment. And their ferocity was ready to leap out into a mystic exultance, of triumph. But still they were anxious.

Only the eyes of that oldest man were not anxious. Black, and fixed, and as if sightless, they watched the sun, seeing beyond the sun. And in their black, empty concentration there was power, power intensely abstract and remote, but deep, deep to the heart of the earth, and the heart of the sun. In absolute motionlessness he watched till the red sun should send his ray through the column of ice. Then the old man would strike, and strike home, accomplish the sacrifice and achieve the power.

The mastery that man must hold, and that passes from race to race.

SUN

I

“Take her away, into the sun,” the doctor said. She herself was sceptical of the sun, but she permitted herself to be carried away, with her child, and a nurse, and her mother, over the sea.

The ship sailed at midnight. And for two hours her husband stayed with her, while the child was put to bed, and the passengers came on board. It was a black night, the Hudson swayed with heaving blackness, shaken over with spilled dribbles of light. She leaned over the rail, and looking down thought: this is the sea; it is deeper than one imagines, and fuller of memories. At that moment the sea seemed to heave like the serpent of chaos that has lived for ever.

“These partings are no good, you know,” her husband was saying, at her side. “They’re no good. I don’t like them.”

His tone was full of apprehension, misgiving, and there was a certain clinging to the last straw of hope.

“No, neither do I,” she responded in a flat voice. She remembered how bitterly they wanted to get away from one another, he and she. The emotion of parting gave a slight tug at her emotions, but only caused the iron that had gone into her soul to gore deeper.

So, they looked at their sleeping son, and the father’s eyes were wet. But it is not the wetting of the eyes that counts, it is the deep iron rhythm of habit, the year-long, life-habits; the deep-set stroke of power.

And in their two lives, the stroke of power was hostile, his and hers. Like two engines running at variance, they shattered one another.

“All ashore! All ashore!”

“Maurice, you must go.”

And she thought to herself: For him it is All Ashore! For me it is Out to Sea!

Well, he waved his hanky on the midnight dreariness of the pier, as the boat inched away; one among a crowd. One among a crowd! C’est ça!

The ferry-boats, like great dishes piled with rows of lights, were still slanting across the Hudson. That black mouth must be the Lackawanna Station.

The ship ebbed on between the lights, the Hudson seemed interminable. But at last they were round the bend, and there was the poor harvest of lights at the Battery. Liberty flung up her torch in a tantrum. There was the wash of the sea.

And though the Atlantic was grey as lava, they did come at last into the sun. Even she had a house above the bluest of seas, with a vast garden, or vineyard, all vines and olives, dropping steeply in terrace after terrace, to the strip of coast plain; and the garden full of secret places, deep groves of lemon far down in the cleft of earth, and hidden, pure green reservoirs of water; then a spring issuing out of a little cavern, where the old Sicules had drunk before the Greeks came; and a grey goat bleating, stabled in an ancient tomb with the niches empty. There was the scent of mimosa, and beyond, the snow of the volcano.

She saw it all, and in a measure it was soothing. But it was all external. She didn't really care about it. She was herself just the same, with all her anger and frustration inside her, and her incapacity to feel anything real. The child imitated her, and preyed on her peace of mind. She felt so horribly, ghastly responsible for him: as if she must be responsible for every breath he drew. And that was torture to her, to the child, and to everybody else concerned.

"You know, Juliet, the doctor told you to lie in the sun, without your clothes. Why don't you?" said her mother.

"When I am fit to do so, I will. Do you want to kill me?" Juliet flew at her.

"To kill you, no! Only to do you good."

"For God's sake, leave off wanting to do me good."

The mother at last was so hurt and incensed, she departed.

The sea went white, and then invisible. Pouring rain fell. It was cold, in the house built for the sun.

Again a morning when the sun lifted himself molten and sparkling, naked over the sea's rim. The house faced south-east, Juliet lay in her bed and watched him rise. It was as if she had never seen the sun rise before. She had never seen the naked sun stand up pure upon the sea-line, shaking the night off himself, like wetness. And he was full and naked. And she wanted to come to him.

So the desire sprang secretly in her, to be naked to the sun. She cherished her desire like a secret. She wanted to come together with the sun.

But she would have to go away from the house — away from people. And it is not easy, in a country where every olive tree has eyes, and every slope is seen from afar, to go hidden, and have intercourse with the sun.

But she found a place: a rocky bluff shoved out to the sea and sun, and overgrown with the large cactus called prickly pear. Out of this thicket of cactus rose one cypress tree, with a pallid, thick trunk, and a tip that leaned over, flexible, in the blue. It stood like a guardian looking to sea; or a candle whose huge flame was darkness against light: the long tongue of darkness licking up at the sky.

Juliet sat down by the cypress tree, and took off her clothes. The contorted

cactus made a forest, hideous yet fascinating, about her. She sat and offered her bosom to the sun, sighing, even now, with a certain hard pain, against the cruelty of having to give herself: but exulting that at last it was no human lover.

But the sun marched in blue heaven and sent down his rays as he went. She felt the soft air of the sea on her breasts, that seemed as if they would never ripen. But she hardly felt the sun. Fruits that would wither and not mature, her breasts.

Soon, however, she felt the sun inside them, warmer than ever love had been, warmer than milk or the hands of her baby. At last, her breasts were like long white grapes in the hot sun.

She slid off all her clothes, and lay naked in the sun, and as she lay she looked up through her fingers at the central sun, his blue pulsing roundness, whose outer edges streamed brilliance. Pulsing with marvellous blue, and alive, and streaming white fire from his edges, the Sun! He faced down to her with blue body of fire, and enveloped her breasts and her face, her throat, her tired belly, her knees, her thighs and her feet.

She lay with shut eyes, the colour of rosy flame through her lids. It was too much. She reached and put leaves over her eyes. Then she lay again, like a long gourd in the sun, green that must ripen to gold.

She could feel the sun penetrating into her bones; nay, further, even into her emotions and thoughts. The dark tensions of her emotion began to give way, the cold dark clots of her thoughts began to dissolve. She was beginning to be warm right through. Turning over, she let her shoulders lie in the sun, her loins, the backs of her thighs, even her heels. And she lay half stunned with the strangeness of the thing that was happening to her. Her weary, chilled heart was melting, and in melting, evaporating. Only her womb remained tense and resistant, the eternal resistance. It would resist even the sun.

When she was dressed again she lay once more and looked up at the cypress tree, whose crest, a filament, fell this way and that in the breeze. Meanwhile, she was conscious of the great sun roaming in heaven, and of her own resistance.

So, dazed, she went home, only half-seeing, sun-blinded and sun-dazed. And her blindness was like a richness to her, and her dim, warm, heavy half-consciousness was like wealth.

“Mummy! Mummy!” her child came running towards her, calling in that peculiar bird-like little anguish of want, always wanting her. She was surprised that her drowsed heart for once felt none of the anxious love-tension in return. She caught the child up in her arms, but she thought: He should not be such a lump! If he had any sun in him, he would spring up. — And she felt again the unyielding resistance of her womb, against him and everything.

She resented, rather, his little hands clutching at her, especially her neck. She pulled her throat away. She did not want him getting hold of it. She put the child down.

“Run!” she said. “Run in the sun!”

And there and then she took off his clothes and set him naked on the warm terrace.

“Play in the sun!” she said.

He was frightened and wanted to cry. But she, in the warm indolence of her body, and the complete indifference of her heart, and the resistance of her womb, rolled him an orange across the red tiles, and with his soft, unformed little body he toddled after it. Then, immediately he had it, he dropped it because it felt strange against his flesh. And he looked back at her, wrinkling his face to cry, frightened because he was stark.

“Bring me the orange,” she said, amazed at her own deep indifference to his trepidation. “Bring Mummy the orange.”

“He shall not grow up like his father,” she said to herself. “Like a worm that the sun has never seen.”

II

She had had the child so much on her mind, in a torment of responsibility, as if, having borne him, she had to answer for his whole existence. Even if his nose were running, it had been repulsive and a goad in her vitals, as if she must say to herself: Look at the thing you brought forth!

Now a change took place. She was no longer vitally consumed about the child, she took the strain of her anxiety and her will from off him. And he thrived all the more for it.

She was thinking inside herself, of the sun in his splendour, and his entering into her. Her life was now a secret ritual. She always lay awake, before dawn, watching for the grey to colour to pale gold, to know if clouds lay on the sea's edge. Her joy was when he rose all molten in his nakedness, and threw off blue-white fire, into the tender heaven.

But sometimes he came ruddy, like a big, shy creature. And sometimes slow and crimson red, with a look of anger, slowly pushing and shouldering. Sometimes again she could not see him, only the level cloud threw down gold and scarlet from above, as he moved behind the wall.

She was fortunate. Weeks went by, and though the dawn was sometimes clouded, and afternoon was sometimes grey, never a day passed sunless, and most days, winter though it was, streamed radiant. The thin little wild crocuses

came up mauve and striped, the wild narcissus hung their winter stars.

Every day, she went down to the cypress tree, among the cactus grove on the knoll with yellowish cliffs at the foot. She was wiser and subtler now, wearing only a dove-grey wrapper, and sandals. So that in an instant, in any hidden niche, she was naked to the sun. And the moment she was covered again she was grey and invisible.

Every day, in the morning towards noon, she lay at the foot of the powerful, silver-pawed cypress tree, while the sun strode jovial in heaven. By now she knew the sun in every thread of her body. Her heart of anxiety, that anxious, straining heart, had disappeared altogether, like a flower that falls in the sun, and leaves only a little ripening fruit. And her tense womb, though still closed, was slowly unfolding, slowly, slowly, like a lily bud under water, as the sun mysteriously touched it. Like a lily bud under water it was slowly rising to the sun, to expand at last, to the sun, only to the sun.

She knew the sun in all her body, the blue-molten with his white fire edges, throwing off fire. And, though he shone on all the world, when she lay unclothed he focussed on her. It was one of the wonders of the sun, he could shine on a million people, and still be the radiant, splendid, unique sun, focussed on her alone.

With her knowledge of the sun, and her conviction that the sun was gradually penetrating her to know her, in the cosmic carnal sense of the word, came over her a feeling of a detachment from people, and a certain contemptuous tolerance for human beings altogether. They were so un-elemental, so unsunned. They were so like graveyard worms.

Even the peasants passing up the rocky, ancient little road with their donkeys, sun-blackened as they were, were not sunned right through. There was a little soft white core of fear, like a snail in a shell, where the soul of the man cowered in fear of the natural blaze of life. He dared not quite see the sun: always innerly cowed. All men were like that.

Why admit men!

With her indifference to people, to men, she was not now so cautious about being seen. She had told Marinina, who went shopping for her in the village, that the doctor had ordered sun-baths. Let that suffice.

Marinina was a woman of sixty or more, tall, thin, erect, with curling dark-grey hair, and dark-grey eyes that had the shrewdness of thousands of years in them, with the laugh, half mockery, that underlies all long experience. Tragedy is lack of experience.

“It must be beautiful to go naked in the sun,” said Marinina, with a shrewd laugh in her eyes as she looked keenly at the other woman. Juliet’s fair, bobbed

hair curled in a little cloud at her temples. Marinina was a woman of Magna Graecia, and had far memories. She looked again at Juliet.

“But when a woman is beautiful, she can show herself to the sun? eh? isn’t it true?” she added, with that queer, breathless little laugh of the women of the past.

“Who knows if I am beautiful!” said Juliet.

But beautiful or not, she felt that by the sun she was appreciated. Which is the same.

When, out of the sun at noon, sometimes she stole down over the rocks and past the cliff-edge, down to the deep gully where the lemons hung in cool eternal shadow; and in the silence slipped off her wrapper to wash herself quickly at one of the deep, clear green basins, she would notice, in the bare green twilight under the lemon leaves, that all her body was rosy, rosy, and turning to gold. She was like another person. She was another person.

So she remembered that the Greeks had said a white unsunned body was unhealthy, and fishy.

And she would rub a little olive oil into her skin, and wander a moment in the dark underworld of the lemons, balancing a lemon-flower in her navel, laughing to herself. There was just a chance some peasant might see her. But if he did, he would be more afraid of her than she of him. She knew of the white core of fear in the clothed bodies of men.

She knew it even in her little son. How he mistrusted her, now that she laughed at him, with the sun in her face! She insisted on his toddling naked in the sunshine, every day. And now his little body was pink too, his blond hair was pushed thick from his brow, his cheeks had a pomegranate scarlet, in the delicate gold of the sunny skin. He was bonny and healthy, and the servants, loving his gold and red and blue, called him an angel from heaven.

But he mistrusted his mother: she laughed at him. And she saw, in his wide blue eyes, under the little frown, that centre of fear, misgiving, which she believed was at the centre of all male eyes, now. She called it fear of the sun. And her womb stayed shut against all men, sun-fearers.

“He fears the sun,” she would say to herself, looking down into the eyes of the child.

And as she watched him toddling, swaying, tumbling in the sunshine, making his little bird-like noises, she saw that he held himself tight and hidden from the sun, inside himself, and his balance was clumsy, his movements a little gross. His spirit was like a snail in a shell, in a damp, cold crevice inside himself. It made her think of his father. And she wished she could make him come forth, break out in a gesture of recklessness, a salutation to the sun.

She determined to take him with her, down to the cypress tree among the cactus. She would have to watch him, because of the thorns. But surely in that place he would come forth from the little shell, deep inside him. That little civilised tension would disappear off his brow.

She spread a rug for him and sat down. Then she slid off her wrapper and lay down herself, watching a hawk high in the blue, and the tip of the cypress hanging over.

The boy played with stones on the rug. When he got up to toddle away, she got up too. He turned and looked at her. Almost, from his blue eyes, it was the challenging, warm look of the true male. And he was handsome, with the scarlet in the golden blond of his skin. He was not really white. His skin was gold-dusky.

“Mind the thorns, darling,” she said.

“Thorns!” re-echoed the child, in a birdy chirp, still looking at her over his shoulder, like some naked *putto* in a picture, doubtful.

“Nasty prickly thorns.”

“Ickly thorns!”

He staggered in his little sandals over the stones, pulling at the dry mint. She was quick as a serpent, leaping to him, when he was going to fall against the prickles. It surprised even herself. “What a wild cat I am, really!” she said to herself.

She brought him every day, when the sun shone, to the cypress tree.

“Come!” she said, “Let us go to the cypress tree.”

And if there was a cloudy day, with the tramontana blowing, so that she could not go down, the child would chirp incessantly: “Cypress tree! Cypress tree!”

He missed it as much as she did.

It was not just taking sun-baths. It was much more than that. Something deep inside her unfolded and relaxed, and she was given to a cosmic influence. By some mysterious will inside her, deeper than her known consciousness and her known will, she was put into connection with the sun, and the stream of the sun flowed through her, round her womb. She herself, her conscious self, was secondary, a secondary person, almost an onlooker. The true Juliet lived in the dark flow of the sun within her deep body, like a river of dark rays circling, circling dark and violet round the sweet, shut bud of her womb.

She had always been mistress of herself, aware of what she was doing, and held tense in her own command. Now she felt inside her quite another sort of power, something greater than herself, darker and more savage, the element flowing upon her. Now she was vague, in the spell of a power beyond herself.

III

The end of February was suddenly very hot. Almond blossom was falling like pink snow, in the touch of the smallest breeze. The mauve, silky little anemones were out, the asphodels tall in bud, and the sea was corn-flower blue.

Juliet had ceased to care about anything. Now, most of the day, she and the child were naked in the sun, and it was all she wanted. Sometimes she went down to the sea to bathe: often she wandered in the gullies where the sun shone in, and she was out of sight. Sometimes she saw a peasant with an ass, and he saw her. But she went so simply and quietly with her child; and the fame of the sun's healing power, for the soul as well as for the body, had already spread among the people; so that there was no excitement.

The child and she were now both tanned with a rosy-golden tan, all over. "I am another being," she said to herself, as she looked at her red-gold breasts and thighs.

The child, too, was another creature, with a peculiar, quiet, sun-darkened absorption. Now he played by himself in silence, and she need hardly notice him. He seemed no longer to notice when he was alone.

There was not a breeze, and the sea was ultramarine. She sat by the great silver paw of the cypress tree, drowsed in the sun, but her breasts alert, full of sap. She was becoming aware of an activity rousing in her, an activity which would bring another self awake in her. She still did not want to be aware. The new rousing would mean a new contact, and this she did not want. She knew well enough the vast cold apparatus of civilisation, and what contact with it meant; and how difficult it was to evade.

The child had gone a few yards down the rocky path, round the great sprawling of a cactus. She had seen him, a real gold-brown infant of the winds, with burnt gold hair and red cheeks, collecting the speckled pitcher-flowers and laying them in rows. He could balance now, and was quick for his own emergencies, like an absorbed young animal playing.

Suddenly she heard him speaking: *Look, Mummy! Mummy look!* A note in his bird-like voice made her lean forward sharply.

Her heart stood still. He was looking over his naked little shoulder at her, and pointing with a loose little hand at a snake which had reared itself up a yard away from him, and was opening its mouth so that its forked, soft tongue flickered black like a shadow, uttering a short hiss.

"Look! Mummy!"

"Yes, darling, it's a snake!" came the slow deep voice. He looked at her, his wide blue eyes uncertain whether to be afraid or not. Some stillness of the sun in

her reassured him.

“Snake!” he chirped.

“Yes, darling! Don’t touch it, it can bite.”

The snake had sunk down, and was reaching away from the coils in which it had been basking asleep, and slowly easing its long, gold-brown body into the rocks, with slow curves. The boy turned and watched it in silence. Then he said:

“Snake going!”

“Yes! Let it go. It likes to be alone.”

He still watched the slow, easing length as the creature drew itself apathetic out of sight.

“Snake gone back,” he said.

“Yes, it is gone back. Come to Mummy a moment.”

He came and sat with his plump, naked little body on her naked lap, and she smoothed his burnt, bright hair. She said nothing, feeling that everything was past. The curious careless power of the sun filled her, filled the whole place like a charm, and the snake was part of the place, along with her and the child.

Another day, in the dry stone wall of one of the olive terraces, she saw a black snake horizontally creeping.

“Marinina,” she said, “I saw a black snake. Are they harmful?”

“Ah, the black snakes, no! But the yellow ones, yes! If the yellow ones bite you, you die. But they frighten me, they frighten me, even the black ones, when I see one.”

Juliet still went to the cypress tree with the child. But she always looked carefully round, before she sat down, examining everywhere the child might go. Then she would lie and turn to the sun again, her tanned, pear-shaped breasts pointing up. She would take no thought for the morrow. She refused to think outside the garden, and she could not write letters. She would tell the nurse to write. So she lay in the sun, but not for long, for it was getting strong, fierce. And in spite of herself, the bud that had been tight and deep immersed in the innermost gloom of her, was rearing, rearing and straightening its curved stem, to open its dark tips and show a gleam of rose. Her womb was coming open wide with rosy ecstasy, like a lotus flower.

IV

Spring was becoming summer, in the south of the sun, and the rays were very powerful. In the hot hours she would lie in the shade of trees, or she would even go down to the depths of the cool lemon grove. Or sometimes she went in the shadowy deeps of the gullies, at the bottom of the little ravine, towards home.

The child fluttered around in silence, like a young animal absorbed in life.

Going slowly home in her nakedness down among the bushes of the dark ravine, one noon, she came round a rock suddenly upon the peasant of the next *podere*, who was stooping binding up a bundle of brush-wood he had cut, his ass standing near. He was wearing summer cotton trousers, and stooping his buttocks towards her. It was utterly still and private down in the dark bed of the little ravine. A weakness came over her, for a moment she could not move. The man lifted the bundle of wood with powerful shoulders, and turned to the ass. He started and stood transfixed as he saw her, as if it were a vision. Then his eyes met hers, and she felt the blue fire running through her limbs to her womb, which was spreading in the helpless ecstasy. Still they looked into each other's eyes, and the fire flowed between them, like the blue, streaming fire from the heart of the sun. And she saw the phallus rise under his clothing, and knew he would come towards her.

“Mummy, a man! Mummy!” The child had put a hand against her thigh.
“Mummy, a man!”

She heard the note of fear and swung round.

“It's all right, boy!” she said, and taking him by the hand, she led him back round the rock again, while the peasant watched her naked, retreating buttocks lift and fall.

She put on her wrap, and taking the boy in her arms, began to stagger up a steep goat-track through the yellow-flowering tangle of shrubs, up to the level of day, and the olive trees below the house. There she sat down to collect herself.

The sea was blue, very blue and soft and still-looking, and her womb inside her was wide open, wide open like a lotus flower, or a cactus flower, in a radiant sort of eagerness. She could feel it, and it dominated her consciousness. And a biting chagrin burned in her breast, against the child, against the complication of frustration.

She knew the peasant by sight: a man something over thirty, broad and very powerfully set. She had many times watched him from the terrace of her house: watched him come with his ass, watched him trimming the olive trees, working alone, always alone and physically powerful, with a broad red face and a quiet self-possession. She had spoken to him once or twice, and met his big blue eyes, dark and southern hot. And she knew his sudden gestures, a little violent and over-generous. But she had never thought of him. Save she had noticed that he was always very clean and well-cared for: and then she had seen his wife one day, when the latter had brought the man's meal, and they sat in the shade of a carob tree, on either side the spread white cloth. And then Juliet had seen that the man's wife was older than he, a dark, proud, gloomy woman. And then a young

woman had come with a child, and the man had danced with the child, so young and passionate. But it was not his own child: he had no children. It was when he danced with the child, in such a sprightly way, as if full of suppressed passion, that Juliet had first really noticed him. But even then, she had never thought of him. Such a broad red face, such a great chest, and rather short legs. Too much a crude beast for her to think of, a peasant.

But now the strange challenge of his eyes had held her, blue and overwhelming like the blue sun's heart. And she had seen the fierce stirring of the phallus under his thin trousers: for her. And with his red face, and with his broad body, he was like the sun to her, the sun in its broad heat.

She felt him so powerfully, that she could not go further from him.

She continued to sit there under the tree. Then she heard nurse tinkling a bell at the house and calling. And the child called back. She had to rise and go home.

In the afternoon she sat on the terrace of her house, that looked over the olive slopes to the sea. The man came and went, came and went to the little hut on his *podere*, on the edge of the cactus grove. And he glanced again at her house, at her sitting on the terrace. And her womb was open to him.

Yet she had not the courage to go down to him. She was paralysed. She had tea, and still sat there on the terrace. And the man came and went, and glanced, and glanced again. Till the evening bell had jangled from the capuchin church at the village gate, and the darkness came on. And still she sat on the terrace. Till at last in the moonlight she saw him load his ass and drive it sadly along the path to the little road. She heard him pass on the stones of the road behind her house. He was gone — gone home to the village, to sleep, to sleep with his wife, who would want to know why he was so late. He was gone in dejection.

Juliet sat late on into the night, watching the moon on the sea. The sun had opened her womb, and she was no longer free. The trouble of the open lotus blossom had come upon her, and now it was she who had not the courage to take the steps across the gully.

But at last she slept. And in the morning she felt better. Her womb seemed to have closed again: the lotus flower seemed back in bud again. She wanted so much that it should be so. Only the immersed bud, and the sun! She would never think of that man.

She bathed in one of the great tanks away down in the lemon-grove, down in the far ravine, far as possible from the other wild gully, and cool. Below, under the lemons, the child was wading among the yellow oxalis flowers of the shadow, gathering fallen lemons, passing with his tanned little body into flecks of light, moving all dappled. She sat in the sun on the steep bank in the gully, feeling almost free again, the flower drooping in shadowy bud, safe inside her.

Suddenly, high over the land's edge, against the full-lit pale blue sky, Marinina appeared, a black cloth tied round her head, calling quietly: *Signora! Signora Giulietta!*

Juliet faced round, standing up. Marinina paused a moment, seeing the naked woman standing alert, her sun-faded hair in a little cloud. Then the swift old woman came down the slant of the steep, sun-blazed track.

She stood a few steps, erect, in front of the sun-coloured woman, and eyed her shrewdly.

"But how beautiful you are, you!" she said coolly, almost cynically. "Your husband has come."

"What husband?" cried Juliet.

The old woman gave a shrewd bark of a little laugh, the mockery of the woman of the past.

"Haven't you got one, a husband, you?" she said, taunting.

"How? Where? In America," said Juliet.

The old woman glanced over her shoulder, with another noiseless laugh.

"No America at all. He was following me here. He will have missed the path." And she threw back her head in the noiseless laugh of women.

The paths were all grown high with grass and flowers and nepitella, till they were like bird-tracks in an eternally wild place. Strange, the vivid wildness of the old classic places, that have known men so long.

Juliet looked at the Sicilian woman with meditating eyes.

"Oh very well," she said at last. "Let him come."

And a little flame leaped in her. It was the opening flower. At least he was a man.

"Bring him here? Now?" asked Marinina, her mocking, smoke-grey eyes looking with laughter into Juliet's eyes. Then she gave a little jerk of her shoulders.

"All right! As you wish! But for him it is a rare one!" She opened her mouth with a noiseless laugh of amusement then she pointed down to the child, who was heaping lemons against his little chest. "Look how beautiful the child is! An angel from heaven! That certainly will please him, poor thing. Then I shall bring him?"

"Bring him," said Juliet.

The old woman scrambled rapidly up the track again, and found Maurice at a loss among the vine terraces, standing there in his grey felt hat and dark-grey city suit. He looked pathetically out of place, in that resplendent sunshine and the grace of the old Greek world; like a blot of ink on the pale, sun-glowing slope.

“Come!” said Marinina to him. “She is down here.”

And swiftly she led the way, striding with a long stride, marking the way through the grasses. Suddenly she stopped on the brow of the slope. The tops of the lemon trees were dark, away below.

“You, you go down here,” she said to him, and he thanked her, glancing up at her swiftly.

He was a man of forty, clean-shaven, grey-faced, very quiet and really shy. He managed his own business carefully without startling success, but efficiently. And he confided in nobody. The old woman of Magna Graecia saw him at a glance: he is good, she said to herself, but not a man, poor thing.

“Down there is the Signora,” said Marinina, pointing like one of the Fates.

And again he said, “Thank you! Thank you!” without a twinkle, and stepped carefully into the track. Marinina lifted her chin with a joyful wickedness. Then she strode off towards the house.

Maurice was watching his step, through the tangle of Mediterranean herbage, so he did not catch sight of his wife till he came round a little bend, quite near her. She was standing erect and nude by the jutting rock, glistening with the sun and with warm life. Her breasts seemed to be lifting up, alert, to listen, her thighs looked brown and fleet. Inside her, the lotus of her womb was wide open, spread almost gaping in the violet rays of the sun, like a great lotus flower. And she thrilled helplessly: a man was coming. Her glance on him, as he came gingerly, like ink on blotting-paper, was swift and nervous.

Maurice, poor fellow, hesitated and glanced away from her, turning his face aside.

“Hello, Julie!” he said, with a little nervous cough. “Splendid! Splendid!”

He advanced with his face averted, shooting further glances at her, furtively, as she stood with the peculiar satiny gleam of the sun on her tanned skin. Somehow she did not seem so terribly naked. It was the golden-rose of the sun that clothed her.

“Hello Maurice!” she said, hanging back from him, and a cold shadow falling on the open flower of her womb. “I wasn’t expecting you so soon.”

“No,” he said. “No! I managed to slip away a little earlier.”

And again he coughed unawares. Furtively, purposely he had taken her by surprise. They stood several yards away from one another, and there was silence. But this was a new Julie to him, with the suntanned, wind-stroked thighs: not that nervous New York woman.

“Well!” he said, “er — this is splendid — splendid! You are — er — splendid! — Where is the boy?”

He felt, in his far-off depths, the desire stirring in him for the limbs and sun-

wrapped flesh of the woman: the woman of flesh. It was a new desire in his life, and it hurt him. He wanted to side-track.

“There he is,” she said, pointing down to where a naked urchin in the deep shade was piling fallen lemons together.

The father gave an odd little laugh, almost neighing.

“Ah! yes! There he is! So there’s the little man! Fine!” His nervous, suppressed soul was thrilling with violent thrills, he clung to the straw of his upper consciousness. “Hello, Johnny!” he called, and it sounded rather feeble. “Hello Johnny!”

The child looked up, spilling lemons from his chubby arms, but did not respond.

“I guess we’ll go down to him,” said Juliet, as she turned and went striding down the path. In spite of herself, the cold shadow was lifting off the open flower of her womb, and every petal was thrilling again. Her husband followed, watching the rosy, fleet-looking lifting and sinking of her quick hips, as she swayed a little in the socket of her waist. He was dazed with admiration, but also at a deadly loss. He was used to her as a person. And this was no longer a person, but a fleet sun-strong body, soulless and alluring as a nymph, twinkling its haunches. What would he do with himself? He was utterly out of the picture, in his dark grey suit and pale grey hat, and his grey, monastic face of a shy business man, and his grey mercantile mentality. Strange thrills shot through his loins and his legs. He was terrified, and he felt he might give a wild whoop of triumph, and jump towards that woman of tanned flesh.

“He looks all right, doesn’t he,” said Juliet, as they came through the deep sea of yellow-flowering oxalis, under the lemon-trees.

“Ah! — yes! yes! Splendid! Splendid! — Hello Johnny! Do you know Daddy? Do you know Daddy, Johnny?”

He squatted down, forgetting his trouser-crease, and held out his hands.

“Lemons!” said the child, birdily chirping. “Two lemons!”

“Two lemons!” replied the father. “Lots of lemons!”

The infant came and put a lemon in each of his father’s open hands. Then he stood back to look.

“Two lemons!” repeated the father. “Come, Johnny! Come and say Hello! to Daddy.”

“Daddy going back?” said the child.

“Going back? Well — well — not today.”

And he took his son in his arms.

“Take a coat off! Daddy take a coat off!” said the boy, squirming debonair away from the cloth.

“All right, son! Daddy take a coat off.”

He took off his coat and laid it carefully aside, then looked at the creases in his trousers, hitched them a little, and crouched down and took his son in his arms. The child’s warm naked body against him made him feel faint. The naked woman looked down at the rosy infant in the arms of the man in his shirt-sleeves. The boy had pulled off his father’s hat, and Juliet looked at the sleek black-and-grey hair of her husband, not a hair out of place. And utterly, utterly sunless! The cold shadow was over the flower of her womb again. She was silent for a long time, while the father talked to the child, who had been fond of his Daddy.

“What are you going to do about it, Maurice?” she said suddenly. He looked at her swiftly, sideways, hearing her abrupt American voice. He had forgotten her.

“Er — about what, Julie?”

“Oh, everything! About this! I can’t go back into East Forty-Seventh.”

“Er — ” he hesitated, “no, I suppose not — Not just now, at least.”

“Never!” she said abruptly, and there was a silence.

“Well — er — I don’t know,” he said.

“Do you think you can come out here?” she said savagely.

“Yes! — I can stay for a month. I think I can manage a month,” he hesitated. Then he ventured a complicated, shy peep at her, and turned away his face again.

She looked down at him, her alert breasts lifted with a sigh, as if she would impatiently shake the cold shadow of sunlessness off her.

“I can’t go back,” she said slowly, “I can’t go back on this sun. If you can’t come here — ”

She ended on an open note. But the voice of the abrupt, personal American woman had died out, and he heard the voice of the woman of flesh, the sun-ripe body. He glanced at her again and again, with growing desire and lessening fear.

“No!” he said. “This kind of thing suits you. You are splendid. — No, I don’t think you can go back.”

And at the caressive sound of his voice, in spite of her, her womb-flower began to open and thrill its petals.

He was thinking visionarily of her in the New York flat, pale, silent, oppressing him terribly. He was the soul of gentle timidity in his human relations, and her silent, awful hostility after the baby was born had frightened him deeply. Because he had realized that she could not help it. Women were like that. Their feelings took a reverse direction, even against their own selves, and it was awful — devastating. Awful, awful to live in the house with a woman like that, whose feelings were reversed even against herself. He had felt himself borne down under the stream of her heavy hostility. She had ground even herself

down to the quick, and the child as well. No, anything rather than that. Thank God, that menacing ghost-woman seemed to be sunned out of her now.

“But what about you?” she asked.

“I? Oh, I! — I can carry on in the business, and — er come over here for long holidays — so long as you like to stay here. You stay as long as you wish — ” He looked down a long time at the earth. He was so frightened of rousing that menacing, avenging spirit of womanhood in her, he did so hope she might stay as he had seen her now, like a naked, ripening strawberry, a female like a fruit. He glanced up at her with a touch of supplication in his uneasy eyes.

“Even for ever?” she said.

“Well — er — yes, if you like. For ever is a long time. One can’t set a date.”

“And can I do anything I like?” She looked him straight in the eyes, challenging. And he was powerless against her rosy, wind-hardened nakedness, in his fear of arousing that other woman in her, the personal American woman, spectral and vengeful.

“Er — yes! — I suppose so! So long as you don’t make yourself unhappy — or the boy.”

Again he looked up at her with a complicated, uneasy appeal — thinking of the child, but hoping for himself.

“I won’t,” she said quickly.

“No!” he said, “No! I don’t think you will.”

There was a pause. The bells of the village were hastily clanging mid-day. That meant lunch.

She slipped into her grey crêpe kimono, and fastened a broad green sash around her waist. Then she slipped a little blue shirt over the boy’s head, and they went up to the house.

At table she watched her husband, his grey city face, his glued, grey-black hair, his very precise table manners, and his extreme moderation in eating and drinking. Sometimes he glanced at her furtively, from under his black lashes. He had the uneasy, gold-grey eyes of a creature that has been caught young, and reared entirely in captivity, strange and cold, knowing no warm hopes. Only his black eye-brows and eye-lashes were nice. She did not take him in. She did not realize him. Being so sunned, she could not see him, his sunlessness was like nonentity.

They went on to the balcony for coffee, under the rosy mass of the bougainvillea. Below, beyond, on the next *podere*, the peasant and his wife were sitting under the carob tree, near the tall green wheat, sitting facing one another across a little white cloth spread on the ground. There was still a huge piece of bread — but they had finished eating and sat with dark wine in their glasses.

The peasant looked up at the terrace, as soon as the American emerged. Juliet put her husband with his back to the scene. Then she sat down, and looked back at the peasant. Until she saw his dark-visaged wife turn to look too.

V

The man was hopelessly in love with her. She saw his broad, rather short red face gazing up at her fixedly: till his wife turned too to look, then he picked up his glass and tossed the wine down his throat. The wife stared long at the figures on the balcony. She was handsome and rather gloomy, and surely older than he, with that great difference that lies between a rather overwhelming, superior woman over forty, and her more irresponsible husband of thirty-five or so. It seemed like the difference of a whole generation. "He is my generation," thought Juliet, "and she is Maurice's generation." Juliet was not yet thirty.

The peasant in his white cotton trousers and pale pink shirt, and battered old straw hat, was attractive, so clean, and full of the cleanliness of health. He was stout and broad, and seemed shortish, but his flesh was full of vitality, as if he were always about to spring up into movement, to work, even, as she had seen him with the child, to play. He was the type of Italian peasant that wants to make an offering of himself, passionately wants to make an offering of himself, of his powerful flesh and thudding blood-stroke. But he was also completely a peasant, in that he would wait for the woman to make the move. He would hang round in a long, consuming passivity of desire, hoping, hoping for the woman to come for him. But he would never try to advance to her: never. She would have to make the advance. Only he would hang round, within reach.

Feeling her look at him, he flung off his old straw hat, showing his round, close-cropped brown head, and reached out with a large brown-red hand for the great loaf, from which he broke a piece and started chewing with bulging cheek. He knew she was looking at him. And she had such power over him, the hot inarticulate animal, with such a hot, massive blood-stream down his great veins! He was hot through with countless suns, and mindless as noon. And shy with a violent, farouche shyness, that would wait for her with consuming wanting, but would never, never move towards her.

With him, it would be like bathing in another kind of sunshine, heavy and big and perspiring: and afterwards one would forget. Personally, he would not exist. It would be just a bath of warm, powerful life — then separating and forgetting. Then again, the procreative bath, like sun.

But would that not be good! She was so tired of personal contacts, and having to talk with the man afterwards. With that healthy creature, one would just go

satisfied away, afterwards. As she sat there, she felt the life streaming from him to her, and her to him. She knew by his movements he felt her even more than she felt him. It was almost a definite pain of consciousness in the body of each of them, and each sat as if distracted, watched by a keen-eyed spouse, possessor.

And Juliet thought: Why shouldn't I go to him! Why shouldn't I bear his child? It would be like bearing a child to the unconscious sun and the unconscious earth, a child like a fruit. — And the flower of her womb radiated. It did not care about sentiment or possession. It wanted man-dew only, utterly improvident. But her heart was clouded with fear. She dare not! She dare not! If only the man would find some way! But he would not. He would only hover and wait, hover in endless desire, waiting for her to cross the gully. And she dare not, she dare not. And he would hang round.

“You are not afraid of people seeing you when you take your sun-baths?” said her husband, turning round and looking across at the peasants. The saturnine wife over the gully, turned also to stare at the Villa. It was a kind of battle.

“No! One needn't be seen. Will you do it too? Will you take the sun-baths?” said Juliet to him.

“Why — er — yes! I think I should like to, while I am here.”

There was a gleam in his eyes, a desperate kind of courage of desire to taste this new fruit, this woman with rosy, sun-ripening breasts tilting within her wrapper. And she thought of him with his blanched, etiolated little city figure, walking in the sun in the desperation of a husband's rights. And her mind swooned again. The strange, branded little fellow, the good citizen, branded like a criminal in the naked eye of the sun. How he would hate exposing himself!

And the flower of her womb went dizzy, dizzy. She knew she would take him. She knew she would bear his child. She knew it was for him, the branded little city man, that her womb was open radiating like a lotus, like the purple spread of a daisy anemone, dark at the core. She knew she would not go across to the peasant; she had not enough courage, she was not free enough. And she knew the peasant would never come for her, he had the dogged passivity of the earth, and would wait, wait, only putting himself in her sight, again and again, lingering across her vision, with the persistency of animal yearning.

She had seen the flushed blood in the peasant's burnt face, and felt the jetting, sudden blue heat pouring over her from his kindled eyes, and the rousing of his big penis against his body — for her, surging for her. Yet she would never come to him — she daren't, she daren't, so much was against her. And the little etiolated body of her husband, city-branded, would possess her, and his little, frantic penis would beget another child in her. She could not help it. She was bound to the vast, fixed wheel of circumstance, and there was no Perseus in the

universe to cut the bonds.

SMILE

He had decided to sit up all night, as a kind of penance. The telegram had simply said: "Ophelia's condition critical." He felt, under the circumstances, that to go to bed in the *wagon-lit* would be frivolous. So he sat wearily in the first-class compartment as night fell over France.

He ought, of course, to be sitting by Ophelia's bedside. But Ophelia didn't want him. So he sat up in the train.

Deep inside him was a black and ponderous weight: like some tumour filled with sheer gloom, weighing down his vitals. He had always taken life seriously. Seriousness now overwhelmed him. His dark, handsome, clean-shaven face would have done for Christ on the Cross, with the thick black eyebrows tilted in the dazed agony.

The night in the train was like an inferno: nothing was real. Two elderly Englishwomen opposite him had died long ago, perhaps even before he had. Because, of course, he was dead himself.

Slow, grey dawn came in the mountains of the frontier, and he watched it with unseeing eyes. But his mind repeated:

"And when the dawn came, dim and sad
And chill with early showers,
Her quiet eyelids closed: she had
Another morn than ours."

And his monk's changeless, tormented face showed no trace of the contempt he felt, even self-contempt, for this bathos, as his critical mind judged it.

He was in Italy: he looked at the country with faint aversion. Not capable of much feeling any more, he had only a tinge of aversion as he saw the olives and the sea. A sort of poetic swindle.

It was night again when he reached the home of the Blue Sisters, where Ophelia had chosen to retreat. He was ushered into the Mother Superior's room, in the palace. She rose and bowed to him in silence, looking at him along her nose. Then she said in French:

"It pains me to tell you. She died this afternoon."

He stood stupefied, not feeling much, anyhow, but gazing at nothingness from his handsome, strong-featured monk's face.

The Mother Superior softly put her white, handsome hand on his arm and gazed up into his face, leaning to him.

“Courage!” she said softly. “Courage, no?”

He stepped back. He was always scared when a woman leaned at him like that. In her voluminous skirts, the Mother Superior was very womanly.

“Quite!” he replied in English. “Can I see her?”

The Mother Superior rang a bell, and a young sister appeared. She was rather pale, but there was something naïve and mischievous in her hazel eyes. The elder woman murmured an introduction, the young woman demurely made a slight reverence. But Matthew held out his hand, like a man reaching for the last straw. The young nun unfolded her white hands and shyly slid one into his, passive as a sleeping bird.

And out of the fathomless Hades of his gloom he thought: “What a nice hand!”

They went along a handsome but cold corridor, and tapped at a door. Matthew, walking in far-off Hades, still was aware of the soft, fine voluminousness of the women’s black skirts, moving with soft, fluttered haste in front of him.

He was terrified when the door opened, and he saw the candles burning round the white bed, in the lofty, noble room. A sister sat beside the candles, her face dark and primitive, in the white coif, as she looked up from her breviary. Then she rose, a sturdy woman, and made a little bow, and Matthew was aware of creamy-dusky hands twisting a black rosary, against the rich, blue silk of her bosom.

The three sisters flocked silent, yet fluttered and very feminine, in their volumes of silky black skirts, to the bedhead. The Mother Superior leaned, and with utmost delicacy lifted the veil of white lawn from the dead face.

Matthew saw the dead, beautiful composure of his wife’s face, and instantly, something leaped like laughter in the depths of him, he gave a little grunt, and an extraordinary smile came over his face.

The three nuns, in the candle glow that quivered warm and quick like a Christmas tree, were looking at him with heavily compassionate eyes, from under their coif-bands. They were like a mirror. Six eyes suddenly started with a little fear, then changed, puzzled, into wonder. And over the three nuns’ faces, helplessly facing him in the candle-glow, a strange, involuntary smile began to come. In the three faces, the same smile growing so differently, like three subtle flowers opening. In the pale young nun, it was almost pain, with a touch of mischievous ecstasy. But the dark Ligurian face of the watching sister, a mature, level-browed woman, curled with a pagan smile, slow, infinitely subtle in its

archaic humour. It was the Etruscan smile, subtle and unabashed, and unanswerable.

The Mother Superior, who had a large-featured face something like Matthew's own, tried hard not to smile. But he kept his humorous, malevolent chin uplifted at her, and she lowered her face as the smile grew, grew and grew over her face.

The young, pale sister suddenly covered her face with her sleeve, her body shaking. The Mother Superior put her arm over the girl's shoulder, murmuring with Italian emotion: "Poor little thing! Weep, then, poor little thing!" But the chuckle was still there, under the emotion. The sturdy dark sister stood unchanging, clutching the black beads, but the noiseless smile immovable.

Matthew suddenly turned to the bed, to see if his dead wife had observed him. It was a movement of fear.

Ophelia lay so pretty and so touching, with her peaked, dead little nose sticking up, and her face of an obstinate child fixed in the final obstinacy. The smile went away from Matthew, and the look of super-martyrdom took its place. He did not weep: he just gazed without meaning. Only, on his face deepened the look: I knew this martyrdom was in store for me!

She was so pretty, so childlike, so clever, so obstinate, so worn — and so dead! He felt so blank about it all.

They had been married ten years. He himself had not been perfect — no, no, not by any means! But Ophelia had always wanted her own will. She had loved him, and grown obstinate, and left him, and grown wistful, or contemptuous, or angry, a dozen times, and a dozen times come back to him.

They had no children. And he, sentimentally, had always wanted children. He felt very largely sad.

Now she would never come back to him. This was the thirteenth time, and she was gone for ever.

But was she? Even as he thought it, he felt her nudging him somewhere in the ribs, to make him smile. He writhed a little, and an angry frown came on his brow. He was not *going* to smile! He set his square, naked jaw, and bared his big teeth, as he looked down at the infinitely provoking dead woman. "At it again!" — he wanted to say to her, like the man in Dickens.

He himself had not been perfect. He was going to dwell on his own imperfections.

He turned suddenly to the three women, who had faded backwards beyond the candles, and now hovered, in the white frames of their coifs, between him and nowhere. His eyes glared, and he bared his teeth.

"*Mea culpa! Mea culpa!*" he snarled.

"*Macchè!*" exclaimed the daunted Mother Superior, and her two hands flew

apart, then together again, in the density of the sleeves, like birds nesting in couples.

Matthew ducked his head and peered round, prepared to bolt. The Mother Superior, in the background, softly intoned a Pater Noster, and her beads dangled. The pale young sister faded farther back. But the black eyes of the sturdy, black-avised sister twinkled like eternally humorous stars upon him, and he felt the smile digging him in the ribs again.

“Look here!” he said to the women, in expostulation, “I’m awfully upset. I’d better go.”

They hovered in fascinating bewilderment. He ducked for the door. But even as he went, the smile began to come on his face, caught by the tail of the sturdy sister’s black eye, with its everlasting twink. And, he was secretly thinking, he wished he could hold both her creamy-dusky hands, that were folded like mating birds, voluptuously.

But he insisted on dwelling upon his own imperfections. *Mea culpa!* he howled at himself. And even as he howled it, he felt something nudge him in the ribs, saying to him: *Smile!*

The three women left behind in the lofty room looked at one another, and their hands flew up for a moment, like six birds flying suddenly out of the foliage, then settling again.

“Poor thing!” said the Mother Superior, compassionately.

“Yes! Yes! Poor thing!” cried the young sister, with naïve, shrill impulsiveness.

“Già!” said the dark-avised sister.

The Mother Superior noiselessly moved to the bed, and leaned over the dead face.

“She seems to know, poor soul!” she murmured. “Don’t you think so?”

The three coifed heads leaned together. And for the first time they saw the faint ironical curl at the corners of Ophelia’s mouth. They looked in fluttering wonder.

“She has seen him!” whispered the thrilling young sister.

The Mother Superior delicately laid the fine-worked veil over the cold face. Then they murmured a prayer for the anima, fingering their beads. Then the Mother Superior set two of the candles straight upon their spikes, clenching the thick candle with firm, soft grip, and pressing it down.

The dark-faced, sturdy sister sat down again with her little holy book. The other two rustled softly to the door, and out into the great white corridor. There softly, noiselessly sailing in all their dark drapery, like dark swans down a river, they suddenly hesitated. Together they had seen a forlorn man’s figure, in a

melancholy overcoat, loitering in the cold distance at the corridor's end. The Mother Superior suddenly pressed her pace into an appearance of speed.

Matthew saw them bearing down on him, these voluminous figures with framed faces and lost hands. The young sister trailed a little behind.

“*Pardon, ma Mère!*” he said, as if in the street. “I left my hat somewhere. . . .”

He made a desperate, moving sweep with his arm, and never was man more utterly smileless.

THE LAST LAUGH

There was a little snow on the ground, and the church clock had just struck midnight. Hampstead in the night of winter for once was looking pretty, with clean white earth and lamps for moon, and dark sky above the lamps.

A confused little sound of voices, a gleam of hidden yellow light. And then the garden door of a tall, dark Georgian house suddenly opened, and three people confusedly emerged. A girl in a dark blue coat and fur turban, very erect: a fellow with a little dispatch-case, slouching: a thin man with a red beard, bareheaded, peering out of the gateway down the hill that swung in a curve downwards towards London.

“Look at it! A new world!” cried the man in the beard, ironically, as he stood on the step and peered out.

“No, Lorenzo! It’s only white-wash!” cried the young man in the overcoat. His voice was handsome, resonant, plangent, with a weary sardonic touch. As he turned back his face was dark in shadow.

The girl with the erect, alert head, like a bird, turned back to the two men.

“What was that?” she asked, in her quick, quiet voice.

“Lorenzo says it’s a new world. I say it’s only white-wash,” cried the man in the street.

She stood still and lifted her woolly, gloved finger. She was deaf and was taking it in.

Yes, she had got it. She gave a quick, chuckling laugh, glanced very quickly at the man in the bowler hat, then back at the man in the stucco gateway, who was grinning like a satyr and waving good-bye.

“Good-bye, Lorenzo!” came the resonant, weary cry of the man in the bowler hat.

“Good-bye!” came the sharp, night-bird call of the girl.

The green gate slammed, then the inner door. The two were alone in the street, save for the policeman at the corner. The road curved steeply downhill.

“You’d better mind how you *step!*” shouted the man in the bowler hat, leaning near the erect, sharp girl, and slouching in his walk. She paused a moment, to make sure what he had said.

“Don’t mind me, I’m quite all right. Mind yourself!” she said quickly. At that very moment he gave a wild lurch on the slippery snow, but managed to save himself from falling. She watched him on tiptoes of alertness. His bowler hat

bounced away in the thin snow. They were under a lamp near the curve. As he ducked for his hat he showed a bald spot, just like a tonsure, among his dark, thin, rather curly hair. And when he looked up at her, with his thick black brows sardonically arched, and his rather hooked nose self-derisive, jamming his hat on again, he seemed like a satanic young priest. His face had beautiful lines, like a faun, and a doubtful martyred expression. A sort of faun on the Cross, with all the malice of the complication.

“Did you hurt yourself?” she asked in her quick, cool, unemotional way.

“No!” he shouted derisively.

“Give me the machine, won’t you?” she said, holding out her woolly hand. “I believe I’m safer.”

“Do you *want* it?” he shouted.

“Yes, I’m sure I’m safer.”

He handed her the little brown dispatch-case, which was really a Marconi listening machine for her deafness. She marched erect as ever. He shoved his hands deep in his overcoat pockets and slouched along beside her, as if he wouldn’t make his legs firm. The road curved down in front of them, clean and pale with snow under the lamps. A motorcar came churning up. A few dark figures slipped away into the dark recesses of the houses, like fishes among rocks above a sea-bed of white sand. On the left was a tuft of trees sloping upwards into the dark.

He kept looking around, pushing out his finely shaped chin and his hooked nose as if he were listening for something. He could still hear the motorcar climbing on to the Heath. Below was the yellow, foul-smelling glare of the Hampstead Tube Station. On the right the trees.

The girl, with her alert pink-and-white face, looked at him sharply, inquisitively. She had an odd nymph-like inquisitiveness, sometimes like a bird, sometimes a squirrel, sometimes a rabbit: never quite like a woman. At last he stood still, as if he would go no farther. There was a curious, baffled grin on his smooth, cream-coloured face.

“James,” he said loudly to her, leaning towards her ear. “Do you hear somebody *laughing*?”

“Laughing?” she retorted quickly. “Who’s laughing?”

“I don’t know. *Somebody!*” he shouted, showing his teeth at her in a very odd way.

“No, I hear nobody,” she announced.

“But it’s most *extraordinary!*” he cried, his voice slurring up and down. “Put on your machine.”

“Put it on?” she retorted. “What for?”

“To see if you can *hear* it,” he cried.

“Hear what?”

“The *laughing*. Somebody laughing. It’s most *extraordinary*.”

She gave her odd little chuckle and handed him her machine. He held it while she opened the lid and attached the wires, putting the band over her head and the receivers at her ears, like a wireless operator. Crumbs of snow fell down the cold darkness. She switched on: little yellow lights in glass tubes shone in the machine. She was connected, she was listening. He stood with his head ducked, his hands shoved down in his overcoat pockets.

Suddenly he lifted his face and gave the weirdest, slightly neighing laugh, uncovering his strong, spaced teeth, and arching his black brows, and watching her with queer, gleaming, goat-like eyes.

She seemed a little dismayed.

“There!” he said. “Didn’t you hear it?”

“I heard *you!*” she said, in a tone which conveyed that *that* was enough.

“But didn’t you hear *it!*” he cried, unfurling his lips oddly again.

“No!” she said.

He looked at her vindictively, and stood again with ducked head. She remained erect, her fur hat in her hand, her fine bobbed hair banded with the machine-band and catching crumbs of snow, her odd, bright-eyed, deaf nymph’s face lifted with blank listening.

“There!” he cried, suddenly jerking up his gleaming face. “You mean to tell me you can’t — ” He was looking at her almost diabolically. But something else was too strong for him. His face wreathed with a startling, peculiar smile, seeming to gleam, and suddenly the most extraordinary laugh came bursting out of him, like an animal laughing. It was a strange, neighing sound, amazing in her ears. She was startled, and switched her machine quieter.

A large form loomed up: a tall, clean-shaven young policeman.

“A radio?” he asked laconically.

“No, it’s my machine. I’m deaf!” said Miss James quickly and distinctly. She was not the daughter of a peer for nothing.

The man in the bowler hat lifted his face and glared at the fresh-faced young policeman with a peculiar white glare in his eyes.

“Look here!” he said distinctly. “Did you hear someone laughing?”

“Laughing? I heard you, sir.”

“No, *not* me.” He gave an impatient jerk of his arm, and lifted his face again. His smooth, creamy face seemed to gleam, there were subtle curves of derisive triumph in all its lines. He was careful not to look directly at the young policeman. “The most extraordinary laughter I ever heard,” he added, and the

same touch of derisive exultation sounded in his tones.

The policeman looked down on him cogitatively.

“It’s perfectly all right,” said Miss James coolly. “He’s not drunk. He just hears something that we don’t hear.”

“Drunk!” echoed the man in the bowler hat, in profoundly amused derision. “If I were merely drunk — ” And off he went again in the wild, neighing, animal laughter, while his averted face seemed to flash.

At the sound of the laughter something roused in the blood of the girl and of the policeman. They stood nearer to one another, so that their sleeves touched and they looked wonderingly across at the man in the bowler hat. He lifted his black brows at them.

“Do you mean to say you heard nothing?” he asked.

“Only you,” said Miss James.

“Only you, sir!” echoed the policeman.

“What was it like?” asked Miss James.

“Ask me to *describe* it!” retorted the young man, in extreme contempt. “It’s the most marvellous sound in the world.”

And truly he seemed wrapped up in a new mystery.

“Where does it come from?” asked Miss James, very practical.

“Apparently,” it answered in contempt, “from over there.” And he pointed to the trees and bushes inside the railings over the road.

“Well, let’s go and see!” she said. “I can carry my machine and go on listening.”

The man seemed relieved to get rid of the burden. He shoved his hands in his pockets again and sloped off across the road. The policeman, a queer look flickering on his fresh young face, put his hand round the girl’s arm carefully and subtly, to help her. She did not lean at all on the support of the big hand, but she was interested, so she did not resent it. Having held herself all her life intensely aloof from physical contact, and never having let any man touch her, she now, with a certain nymph-like voluptuousness, allowed the large hand of the young policeman to support her as they followed the quick wolf-like figure of the other man across the road uphill. And she could feel the presence of the young policeman, through all the thickness of his dark-blue uniform, as something young and alert and bright.

When they came up to the man in the bowler hat, he was standing with his head ducked, his ears pricked, listening beside the iron rail inside which grew big black holly trees tufted with snow, and old, ribbed, silent English elms.

The policeman and the girl stood waiting. She was peering into the bushes with the sharp eyes of a deaf nymph, deaf to the world’s noises. The man in the

bowler hat listened intensely. A lorry rolled downhill, making the earth tremble.

“There!” cried the girl, as the lorry rumbled darkly past. And she glanced round with flashing eyes at her policeman, her fresh soft face gleaming with startled life. She glanced straight into the puzzled, amused eyes of the young policeman. He was just enjoying himself.

“Don’t you see?” she said, rather imperiously.

“What is it, Miss?” answered the policeman.

“I mustn’t point,” she said. “Look where I look.”

And she looked away with brilliant eyes, into the dark holly bushes. She must see something, for she smiled faintly, with subtle satisfaction, and she tossed her erect head in all the pride of vindication. The policeman looked at her instead of into the bushes. There was a certain brilliance of triumph and vindication in all the poise of her slim body.

“I always knew I should see him,” she said triumphantly to herself.

“Whom do you see?” shouted the man in the bowler hat.

“Don’t you see him too?” she asked, turning round her soft, arch, nymph-like face anxiously. She was anxious for the little man to see.

“No, I see nothing. What do you see, James?” cried the man in the bowler hat, insisting.

“A man.”

“Where?”

“There. Among the holly bushes.”

“Is he there now?”

“No! He’s gone.”

“What sort of a man?”

“I don’t know.”

“What did he look like?”

“I can’t tell you.”

But at that instant the man in the bowler hat turned suddenly, and the arch, triumphant look flew to his face.

“Why, he must be *there!*” he cried, pointing up the grove. “Don’t you hear him laughing? He must be behind those trees.”

And his voice, with curious delight, broke into a laugh again, as he stood and stamped his feet on the snow, and danced to his own laughter, ducking his head. Then he turned away and ran swiftly up the avenue lined with old trees.

He slowed down as a door at the end of a garden path, white with untouched snow, suddenly opened, and a woman in a long-fringed black shawl stood in the light. She peered out into the night. Then she came down to the low garden gate. Crumbs of snow still fell. She had dark hair and a tall dark comb.

“Did you knock at my door?” she asked of the man in the bowler hat.

“I? No!”

“Somebody knocked at my door.”

“Did they? Are you sure? They can’t have done. There are no footmarks in the snow.”

“Nor are there!” she said. “But somebody knocked and called something.”

“That’s very curious,” said the man. “Were you expecting someone?”

“No. Not exactly expecting anyone. Except that one is always expecting Somebody, you know.” In the dimness of the snow-lit night he could see her making big, dark eyes at him.

“Was it someone laughing?” he said.

“No. It was no one laughing, exactly. Someone knocked, and I ran to open, hoping as one always hopes, you know — ”

“What?”

“Oh — that something wonderful is going to happen.”

He was standing close to the low gate. She stood on the opposite side. Her hair was dark, her face seemed dusky, as she looked up at him with her dark, meaningful eyes.

“Did you wish someone would come?” he asked.

“Very much,” she replied, in her plangent Jewish voice. She must be a Jewess.

“No matter who?” he said, laughing.

“So long as it was a man I could like,” she said, in a low, meaningful, falsely shy voice.

“Really!” he said. “Perhaps after all it was I who knocked — without knowing.”

“I think it was,” she said. “It must have been.”

“Shall I come in?” he asked, putting his hand on the little gate.

“Don’t you think you’d better?” she replied.

He bent down, unlatching the gate. As he did so the woman in the black shawl turned, and, glancing over her shoulder, hurried back to the house, walking unevenly in the snow, on her high-heeled shoes. The man hurried after her, hastening like a hound to catch up.

Meanwhile the girl and the policeman had come up. The girl stood still when she saw the man in the bowler hat going up the garden walk after the woman in the black shawl with the fringe.

“Is he going in?” she asked quickly.

“Looks like it, doesn’t it?” said the policeman.

“Does he know that woman?”

“I can’t say. I should say he soon will,” replied the policeman.

“But who is she?”

“I couldn’t say who she is.”

The two dark, confused figures entered the lighted doorway, then the door closed on them.

“He’s gone,” said the girl outside on the snow. She hastily began to pull off the band of her telephone receiver, and switched off her machine. The tubes of secret light disappeared, she packed up the little leather case. Then, pulling on her soft fur cap, she stood once more ready.

The slightly martial look which her long dark-blue military-seeming coat gave her was intensified, while the slightly anxious, bewildered look on her face had gone. She seemed to stretch herself, to stretch her limbs free. And the inert look had left her full soft cheeks. Her cheeks were alive with the glimmer of pride and a new dangerous surety.

She looked quickly at the tall young policeman. He was clean-shaven, fresh-faced, smiling oddly under his helmet, waiting in subtle patience, a few yards away. She saw that he was a decent young man, one of the waiting sort.

The second of ancient fear was followed at once in her by a blithe, unaccustomed sense of power.

“Well!” she said. “I should say it’s no use waiting.” She spoke decisively.

“You don’t have to wait for him, do you?” asked the policeman.

“Not at all. He’s much better where he is.” She laughed an odd, brief laugh. Then glancing over her shoulder, she set off down the hill, carrying her little case. Her feet felt lighter, her legs felt long and strong. She glanced over her shoulder again. The young policeman was following her, and she laughed to herself. Her limbs felt so lithe and so strong, if she wished she could easily run faster than he. If she wished she could easily kill him, even with her hands.

So it seemed to her. But why kill him? He was a decent young fellow. She had in front of her eyes the dark face among the holly bushes, with the brilliant, mocking eyes. Her breast felt full of power, and her legs felt long and strong and wild. She was surprised herself at the strong, bright, throbbing sensation beneath her breasts, a sensation of triumph and rosy anger. Her hands felt keen on her wrists. She who had always declared she had not a muscle in her body! Even now, it was not muscle, it was a sort of flame.

Suddenly it began to snow heavily, with fierce frozen puffs of wind. The snow was small, in frozen grains, and hit sharp on her face. It seemed to whirl round her as if she herself were whirling in a cloud. But she did not mind. There was a flame in her, her limbs felt flamey and strong, amid the whirl.

And the whirling snowy air seemed full of presences, full of strange unheard voices. She was used to the sensation of noises taking place which she could not

hear. This sensation became very strong. She felt something was happening in the wild air.

The London air was no longer heavy and clammy, saturated with ghosts of the unwilling dead. A new, clean tempest swept down from the Pole, and there were noises.

Voices were calling. In spite of her deafness she could hear someone, several voices, calling and whistling, as if many people were hallooing through the air:

“He’s come back! Aha! He’s come back!”

There was a wild, whistling, jubilant sound of voices in the storm of snow. Then obscured lightning winked through the snow in the air.

“Is that thunder and lightning?” she asked of the young policeman, as she stood still, waiting for his form to emerge through the veil of whirling snow.

“Seems like it to me,” he said.

And at that very moment the lightning blinked again, and the dark, laughing face was near her face, it almost touched her cheek.

She started back, but a flame of delight went over her.

“There!” she said. “Did you see that?”

“It lightened,” said the policeman.

She was looking at him almost angrily. But then the clean, fresh animal look of his skin, and the tame-animal look in his frightened eyes amused her, she laughed her low, triumphant laugh. He was obviously afraid, like a frightened dog that sees something uncanny.

The storm suddenly whistled louder, more violently, and, with a strange noise like castanets, she seemed to hear voices clapping and crying:

“He is here! He’s come back!”

She nodded her head gravely.

The policeman and she moved on side by side. She lived alone in a little stucco house in a side street down the hill. There was a church and a grove of trees and then the little old row of houses. The wind blew fiercely, thick with snow. Now and again a taxi went by, with its lights showing weirdly. But the world seemed empty, uninhabited save by snow and voices.

As the girl and the policeman turned past the grove of trees near the church, a great whirl of wind and snow made them stand still, and in the wild confusion they heard a whirling of sharp, delighted voices, something like seagulls, crying:

“He’s here! He’s here!”

“Well, I’m jolly glad he’s back,” said the girl calmly.

“What’s that?” said the nervous policeman, hovering near the girl.

The wind let them move forward. As they passed along the railings it seemed to them the doors of the church were open, and the windows were out, and the

snow and the voices were blowing in a wild career all through the church.

“How extraordinary that they left the church open!” said the girl.

The policeman stood still. He could not reply.

And as they stood they listened to the wind and the church full of whirling voices all calling confusedly.

“Now I hear the laughing,” she said suddenly.

It came from the church: a sound of low, subtle, endless laughter, a strange, naked sound.

“Now I hear it!” she said.

But the policeman did not speak. He stood cowed, with his tail between his legs, listening to the strange noises in the church.

The wind must have blown out one of the windows, for they could see the snow whirling in volleys through the black gap, and whirling inside the church like a dim light. There came a sudden crash, followed by a burst of chuckling, naked laughter. The snow seemed to make a queer light inside the building, like ghosts moving, big and tall.

There was more laughter, and a tearing sound. On the wind, pieces of paper, leaves of books, came whirling among the snow through the dark window. Then a white thing, soaring like a crazy bird, rose up on the wind as if it had wings, and lodged on a black tree outside, struggling. It was the altar-cloth.

There came a bit of gay, trilling music. The wind was running over the organ-pipes like pan-pipes, quickly up and down. Snatches of wild, gay, trilling music, and bursts of the naked low laughter.

“Really!” said the girl. “This is most extraordinary. Do you hear the music and the people laughing?”

“Yes, I hear somebody on the organ!” said the policeman.

“And do you get the puff of warm wind? Smelling of spring. Almond blossom, that’s what it is! A most marvellous scent of almond blossom. *Isn’t* it an extraordinary thing!”

She went on triumphantly past the church, and came to the row of little old houses. She entered her own gate in the little railed entrance.

“Here I am!” she said finally. “I’m home now. Thank you very much for coming with me.”

She looked at the young policeman. His whole body was white as a wall with snow, and in the vague light of the arc-lamp from the street his face was humble and frightened.

“Can I come in and warm myself a bit?” he asked humbly. She knew it was fear rather than cold that froze him. He was in mortal fear.

“Well!” she said. “Stay down in the sitting-room if you like. But don’t come

upstairs, because I am alone in the house. You can make up the fire in the sitting-room, and you can go when you are warm.”

She left him on the big, low couch before the fire, his face bluish and blank with fear. He rolled his blue eyes after her as she left the room. But she went up to her bedroom and fastened her door.

In the morning she was in her studio upstairs in her little house, looking at her own paintings and laughing to herself. Her canaries were talking and shrilly whistling in the sunshine that followed the storm. The cold snow outside was still clean, and the white glare in the air gave the effect of much stronger sunshine than actually existed.

She was looking at her own paintings, and chuckling to herself over their comicalness. Suddenly they struck her as absolutely absurd. She quite enjoyed looking at them, they seemed to her so grotesque. Especially her self-portrait, with its nice brown hair and its slightly opened rabbit-mouth and its baffled uncertain rabbit-eyes. She looked at the painted face and laughed in a long, rippling laugh, till the yellow canaries like faded daffodils almost went mad in an effort to sing louder. The girl’s long, rippling laugh sounded through the house uncannily.

The housekeeper, a rather sad-faced young woman of a superior sort — nearly all people in England are of the superior sort, superiority being an English ailment — came in with an inquiring and rather disapproving look.

“Did you call, Miss James?” she asked loudly.

“No. No, I didn’t call. Don’t shout, I can hear quite well,” replied the girl.

The housekeeper looked at her again.

“You knew there was a young man in the sitting-room?” she said.

“No. Really!” cried the girl. “What, the young policeman? I’d forgotten all about him. He came in in the storm to warm himself. Hasn’t he gone?”

“No, Miss James.”

“How extraordinary of him! What time is it? Quarter to nine! Why didn’t he go when he was warm? I must go and see him, I suppose.”

“He says he’s lame,” said the housekeeper censoriously and loudly.

“Lame! That’s extraordinary. He certainly wasn’t last night. But don’t shout. I can hear quite well.”

“Is Mr. Marchbanks coming in to breakfast, Miss James?” said the housekeeper, more and more censorious.

“I couldn’t say. But I’ll come down as soon as mine is ready. I’ll be down in a minute, anyhow, to see the policeman. Extraordinary that he is still here.”

She sat down before her window, in the sun, to think a while. She could see the snow outside, the bare, purplish trees. The air all seemed rare and different.

Suddenly the world had become quite different: as if some skin or integument had broken, as if the old, mouldering London sky had crackled and rolled back, like an old skin, shrivelled, leaving an absolutely new blue heaven.

“It really is extraordinary!” she said to herself. “I certainly saw that man’s face. What a wonderful face it was! I shall never forget it. Such laughter! He laughs longest who laughs last. He certainly will have the last laugh. I like him for that: he will laugh last. Must be someone really extraordinary! How very nice to be the one to laugh last. He certainly will. What a wonderful being! I suppose I must call him a being. He’s not a person exactly.

“But how wonderful of him to come back and alter all the world immediately! *Isn’t* that extraordinary. I wonder if he’ll have altered Marchbanks. Of course Marchbanks never *saw* him. But he heard him. Wouldn’t that do as well, I wonder! — I *wonder!*”

She went off into a muse about Marchbanks. She and he were *such* friends. They had been friends like that for almost two years. Never lovers. Never that at all. But *friends*.

And after all, she had been in love with him: in her head. This seemed now so funny to her: that she had been, in her head, so much in love with him. After all, life was too absurd.

Because now she saw herself and him as such a funny pair. He so funnily taking life terribly seriously, especially his own life. And she so ridiculously *determined* to save him from himself. Oh, how absurd! *Determined* to save him from himself, and wildly in love with him in the effort. The determination to save him from himself.

Absurd! Absurd! Absurd! Since she had seen the man laughing among the holly bushes — *such* extraordinary, wonderful laughter — she had seen her own ridiculousness. Really, what fantastic silliness, saving a man from himself! Saving anybody. What fantastic silliness! How much more amusing and lively to let a man go to perdition in his own way. Perdition was more amusing than salvation anyhow, and a much better place for most men to go to.

She had never been in love with any man, and only spuriously in love with Marchbanks. She saw it quite plainly now. After all, what nonsense it all was, this being-in-love business. Thank goodness she had never made the humiliating mistake.

No, the man among the holly bushes had made her see it all so plainly: the ridiculousness of being in love, the *infra dig.* business of chasing a man or being chased by a man.

“Is love *really* so absurd and *infra dig.*?” she said aloud to herself.

“Why, of course!” came a deep, laughing voice.

She started round, but nobody was to be seen.

“I expect it’s that man again!” she said to herself. “It really *is* remarkable, you know. I consider it’s a remarkable thing that I never really wanted a man, *any* man. And there I am over thirty. It *is* curious. Whether it’s something wrong with me, or right with me, I can’t say. I don’t know till I’ve proved it. But I believe, if that man kept on laughing something would happen to me.”

She smelt the curious smell of almond blossom in the room, and heard the distant laugh again.

“I do wonder why Marchbanks went with that woman last night — that Jewish-looking woman. Whatever could he want of her? — or she of him? So strange, as if they both had made up their minds to something! How extraordinarily puzzling life is! So messy, it all seems.

“Why does nobody laugh in life like that man? He *did* seem so wonderful. So scornful! And so proud! And so real! With those laughing, scornful, amazing eyes, just laughing and disappearing again. I can’t imagine him chasing a Jewish-looking woman. Or chasing any woman, thank goodness. It’s all so messy. My policeman would be messy if one would let him: like a dog. I do dislike dogs, really I do. And men do seem so doggy! — ”

But even while she mused, she began to laugh again to herself with a long, low chuckle. How wonderful of that man to come and laugh like that and make the sky crack and shrivel like an old skin! Wasn’t he wonderful! Wouldn’t it be wonderful if he just touched her. Even touched her. She felt, if he touched her, she herself would emerge new and tender out of the old, hard skin. She was gazing abstractedly out of the window.

“There he comes, just now,” she said abruptly. But she meant Marchbanks, not the laughing man.

There he came, his hands still shoved down in his overcoat pockets, his head still rather furtively ducked in the bowler hat, and his legs still rather shambling. He came hurrying across the road, not looking up, deep in thought, no doubt. Thinking profoundly, with agonies of agitation, no doubt about his last night’s experience. It made her laugh.

She, watching from the window above, burst into a long laugh, and the canaries went off their heads again.

He was in the hall below. His resonant voice was calling, rather imperiously:

“James! Are you coming down?”

“No,” she called. “You come up.”

He came up two at a time, as if his feet were a bit savage with the stairs for obstructing him.

In the doorway he stood staring at her with a vacant, sardonic look, his grey

eyes moving with a queer light. And she looked back at him with a curious, rather haughty carelessness.

“Don’t you want your breakfast?” she asked. It was his custom to come and take breakfast with her each morning.

“No,” he answered loudly. “I went to a tea-shop.”

“Don’t shout,” she said. “I can hear you quite well.”

He looked at her with mockery and a touch of malice.

“I believe you always could,” he said, still loudly.

“Well, anyway, I can now, so you needn’t shout,” she replied.

And again his grey eyes, with the queer, greyish phosphorescent gleam in them, lingered malignantly on her face.

“Don’t look at me,” she said calmly. “I know all about everything.”

He burst into a pouf of malicious laughter.

“Who taught you — the policeman?” he cried.

“Oh, by the way, he must be downstairs! No, he was only incidental. So, I suppose, was the woman in the shawl. Did you stay all night?”

“Not entirely. I came away before dawn. What did you do?”

“Don’t shout. I came home long before dawn.” And she seemed to hear the long, low laughter.

“Why, what’s the matter?” he said curiously. “What have you been doing?”

“I don’t quite know. Why? — are you going to call me to account?”

“Did you hear that laughing?”

“Oh yes. And many more things. And saw things too.”

“Have you seen the paper?”

“No. Don’t shout, I can hear.”

“There’s been a great storm, blew out the windows and doors of the church outside here, and pretty well wrecked the place.”

“I saw it. A leaf of the church Bible blew right in my face: from the Book of Job — ” She gave a low laugh.

“But what else did you see?” he cried loudly.

“I saw *him*.”

“Who?”

“Ah, that I can’t say.”

“But what was he like?”

“That I can’t tell you. I don’t really know.”

“But you must know. Did your policeman see him too?”

“No, I don’t suppose he did. My policeman!” And she went off into a long ripple of laughter. “He is by no means mine. But I *must* go downstairs and see him.”

“It’s certainly made you very strange,” Marchbanks said. “You’ve got no *soul*, you know.”

“Oh, thank goodness for that!” she cried. “My policeman has one, I’m sure. *My policeman!*” And she went off again into a long peal of laughter, the canaries peeling shrill accompaniment.

“What’s the matter with you?” he said.

“Having no soul. I never had one really. It was always fobbed off on me. Soul was the only thing there was between you and me. Thank goodness it’s gone. Haven’t you lost yours? The one that seemed to worry you, like a decayed tooth?”

“But what are you *talking* about?” he cried.

“I don’t know,” she said. “It’s all so extraordinary. But look here, I *must* go down and see my policeman. He’s downstairs in the sitting-room. You’d better come with me.”

They went down together. The policeman in his waistcoat and shirtsleeves was lying on the sofa, with a very long face.

“Look here!” said Miss James to him. “Is it true you’re lame?”

“It is true. That’s why I’m here. I can’t walk,” said the fair-haired young man as tears came to his eyes.

“But how did it happen? You weren’t lame last night,” she said.

“I don’t know how it happened — but when I woke up and tried to stand up, I couldn’t do it.” The tears ran down his distressed face.

“How very extraordinary!” she said. “What can we do about it?”

“Which foot is it?” asked Marchbanks. “Let us have a look at it.”

“I don’t like to,” said the poor devil.

“You’d better,” said Miss James.

He slowly pulled off his stocking, and showed his white left foot curiously clubbed, like the weird paw of some animal. When he looked at it himself, he sobbed.

And as he sobbed, the girl heard again the low, exulting laughter. But she paid no heed to it, gazing curiously at the weeping young policeman.

“Does it hurt?” she asked.

“It does if I try to walk on it,” wept the young man.

“I’ll tell you what,” she said. “We’ll telephone for a doctor, and he can take you home in a taxi.”

The young fellow shamefacedly wiped his eyes.

“But have you no idea how it happened?” asked Marchbanks anxiously.

“I haven’t myself,” said the young fellow.

At that moment the girl heard the low, eternal laugh right in her ear. She

started, but could see nothing.

She started round again as Marchbanks gave a strange, yelping cry, like a shot animal. His white face was drawn, distorted in a curious grin, that was chiefly agony but partly wild recognition. He was staring with fixed eyes at something. And in the rolling agony of his eyes was the horrible grin of a man who realises he had made a final, and this time fatal, fool of himself.

“Why,” he yelped in a high voice, “I knew it was he!” And with a queer shuddering laugh he pitched forward on the carpet and lay writhing for a moment on the floor. Then he lay still, in a weird, distorted position, like a man struck by lightning.

Miss James stared with round, staring brown eyes.

“Is he dead?” she asked quickly.

The young policeman was trembling so that he could hardly speak. She could hear his teeth chattering.

“Seems like it,” he stammered.

There was a faint smell of almond blossom in the air.

GLAD GHOSTS

I knew Carlotta Fell in the early days before the war. Then she was escaping into art, and was just “Fell”. That was at our famous but uninspired school of art, the Thwaite, where I myself was diligently murdering my talent. At the Thwaite they always gave Carlotta the Still-life prizes. She accepted them calmly, as one of our conquerors, but the rest of the students felt vicious about it. They called it buttering the laurels, because Carlotta was Hon., and her father a well-known peer.

She was by way of being a beauty too. Her family was not rich, yet she had come into five hundred a year of her own, when she was eighteen; and that, to us, was an enormity. Then she appeared in the fashionable papers, affecting to be wistful, with pearls, slanting her eyes. Then she went and did another of her beastly still-lives, a cactus-in-a-pot.

At the Thwaite, being snobs, we were proud of her too. She showed off a bit, it is true, playing bird of paradise among the pigeons. At the same time, she *was* thrilled to be with us, and out of her own set. Her wistfulness and yearning “for something else” was absolutely genuine. Yet she was not going to hobnob with us either, at least not indiscriminately.

She was ambitious, in a vague way. She wanted to coruscate, somehow or other. She had a family of clever and “distinguished” uncles, who had flattered her. What then?

Her cactuses-in-a-pot were admirable. But even she didn’t expect them to start a revolution. Perhaps she would rather glow in the wide if dirty skies of life than in the somewhat remote and unsatisfactory ether of Art.

She and I were “friends” in a bare, stark, but real sense. I was poor, but I didn’t really care. She didn’t really care either. Whereas I did care about some passionate vision which, I could feel, lay embedded in the half-dead body of this life. The quick body within the dead. I could *feel* it. And I wanted to get at it, if only for myself.

She didn’t know what I was after. Yet she could feel that I was It, and, being an aristocrat of the Kingdom of It, as well as the realm of Great Britain, she was loyal — loyal to me because of It, the quick body which I imagined within the dead.

Still, we never had much to do with one another. I had no money. She never wanted to introduce me to her own people. I didn’t want it either. Sometimes we

had lunch together, sometimes we went to a theatre, or we drove in the country, in some car that belonged to neither of us. We never flirted or talked love. I don't think she wanted it, any more than I did. She wanted to marry into her own surroundings, and I knew she was of too frail a paste to face my future.

Now I come to think of it, she was always a bit sad when we were together. Perhaps she looked over seas she would never cross. She belonged finally, fatally, to her own class. Yet I think she hated them. When she was in a group of people who talked "smart", titles and *beau monde* and all that, her rather short nose would turn up, her wide mouth press into discontent, and a languor of bored irritation come even over her broad shoulders. Bored irritation, and a loathing of climbers, a loathing of the ladder altogether. She hated her own class: yet it was also sacrosanct to her. She disliked, even to me, mentioning the titles of her friends. Yet the very hurried resentment with which she said, when I asked her: Who is it — ?

"Lady Nithsdale, Lord Staines — old friends of my mother," proved that the coronet was wedged into her brow, like a ring of iron grown into a tree.

She had another kind of reverence for a true artist: perhaps more genuine, perhaps not; anyhow, more free and easy.

She and I had a curious understanding in common: an inkling, perhaps, of the unborn body of life hidden within the body of this half-death which we call life: and hence a tacit hostility to the commonplace world, its inert laws. We were rather like two soldiers on a secret mission into enemy country. Life, and people, was an enemy country to us both. But she would never declare herself.

She always came to me to find out what I thought, particularly in a moral issue. Profoundly, fretfully discontented with the conventional moral standards, she didn't know how to take a stand of her own. So she came to me. She had to try to get her own feelings straightened out. In that she showed her old British fibre. I told her what, as a young man, I thought: and usually she was resentful. She did so want to be conventional. She would even act quite perversely, in her determination to be conventional. But she always had to come back to me, to ask me again. She depended on me morally. Even when she disagreed with me, it soothed her, and restored her to know my point of view. Yet she disagreed with me.

We had then a curious abstract intimacy, that went very deep, yet showed no obvious contact. Perhaps I was the only person in the world with whom she felt, in her uneasy self, at home, at peace. And to me, she was always of my own *intrinsic* sort, of my own species. Most people are just another species to me. They might as well be turkeys.

But she would always *act* according to the conventions of her class, even

perversely. And I knew it.

So, just before the war she married Lord Lathkill. She was twenty-one. I did not see her till war was declared; then she asked me to lunch with her and her husband, in town. He was an officer in a Guards regiment, and happened to be in uniform, looking very handsome and well set-up, as if he expected to find the best of life served up to him for ever. He was very dark, with dark eyes and fine black hair, and a very beautiful, diffident voice, almost womanish in its slow, delicate inflections. He seemed pleased and flattered at having Carlotta for a wife.

To me he was beautifully attentive, almost deferential, because I was poor, and of the other world, those poor devils of outsiders. I laughed at him a little, and laughed at Carlotta, who was a bit irritated by the gentle delicacy with which he treated me.

She was elated too. I remember her saying:

“We need war, don’t you think? Don’t you think men need the fight, to keep life chivalrous and put martial glamour into it?”

And I remember saying: “I think we need some sort of fight; but my sort isn’t the war sort.” It was August, we could take it lightly.

“What’s your sort?” she asked quickly.

“I don’t know: single-handed, anyhow,” I said, with a grin. Lord Lathkill made me feel like a lonely sansculotte, he was so completely unostentatious, so very willing to pay all the attention to me, and yet so subtly complacent, so unquestionably sure of his position. Whereas I was not a very sound earthenware pitcher which had already gone many times to the well.

He was not conceited, not half as *conceited* as I was. He was willing to leave me all the front of the stage, even with Carlotta. He felt so sure of some things, like a tortoise in a glittering, polished tortoise-shell that mirrors eternity. Yet he was not quite easy with me.

“You are Derbyshire?” I said to him, looking into his face. “So am I! I was born in Derbyshire.”

He asked me with a gentle, uneasy sort of politeness, where? But he was a bit taken aback. And his dark eyes, brooding over me, had a sort of fear in them. At the centre they were hollow with a certain misgiving. He was so sure of *circumstances*, and not by any means sure of the man in the middle of the *circumstances*. Himself! Himself! That was already a ghost.

I felt that he saw in me something crude but real, and saw himself as something in its own way perfect, but quite unreal. Even his love for Carlotta, and his marriage, was a circumstance that was inwardly unreal to him. One could tell by the curious way in which he waited, before he spoke. And by the

hollow look, almost a touch of madness, in his dark eyes, and in his soft, melancholy voice.

I could understand that she was fascinated by him. But God help him if ever circumstances went against him!

She had to see me again, a week later, to talk about him. So she asked me to the opera. She had a box, and we were alone, and the notorious Lady Perth was two boxes away. But this was one of Carlotta's conventional perverse little acts, with her husband in France. She only wanted to talk to me about him.

So she sat in the front of her box, leaning a little to the audience and talking sideways to me. Anyone would have known at once there was a *liaison* between us, how *dangereuse* they would never have guessed. For there, in the full view of the world — her world at least, not mine — she was talking sideways to me, saying in a hurried, yet stony voice:

“What do you think of Luke?”

She looked up at me heavily, with her sea-coloured eyes, waiting for my answer.

“He's tremendously charming,” I said, above the theatreful of faces.

“Yes, he's that!” she replied, in the flat, plangent voice she had when she was serious, like metal ringing flat, with a strange far-reaching vibration. “Do you think he'll be happy?”

“*Be* happy!” I ejaculated. “When, *be* happy?”

“With me,” she said, giving a sudden little snirt of laughter, like a schoolgirl, and looking up me shyly, mischievously, anxiously.

“If you make him,” I said, still casual.

“How can I make him?”

She said it with flat plangent earnestness. She was always like that, pushing me deeper in than I wanted to go.

“Be happy yourself, I suppose: and quite sure about it. And then *tell* him you're happy, and tell him he is, too, and he'll be it.”

“Must I do all that?” she said rapidly. “Not otherwise?”

I knew I was frowning at her, and she was watching my frown.

“Probably not,” I said roughly. “He'll never make up his mind about it himself.”

“How did you know?” she asked, as if it had been a mystery.

“I didn't. It only seems to me like that.”

“Seems to you like that,” she re-echoed, in that sad, clean monotone of finality, always like metal. I appreciate it in her, that she does not murmur or whisper. But I wished she left me alone, in that beastly theatre.

She was wearing emeralds, on her snow-white skin, and leaning forward

gazing fixedly down into the auditorium, as a crystal-gazer into a crystal. Heaven knows if she saw all those little facets of faces and plastrons. As for me, I knew that, like a sansculotte, I should never be king till breeches were off.

“I had terrible work to make him marry me,” she said, in her swift, clear, low tones.

“Why?”

“He was frightfully in love with me. *He is!* But he thinks he’s unlucky. . . .”

“Unlucky, how? In cards or in love?” I mocked.

“In both,” she said briefly, with sudden cold resentment at my flippancy. There was over her eyes a glaze of fear. “It’s in their family.”

“What did you say to him?” I asked, rather laboured feeling the dead weight.

“I promised to have luck for two,” she said. “And war was declared a fortnight later.”

“Ah, well!” I said. “That’s the world’s luck, not yours.”

“Quite!” she said.

There was a pause.

“Is his family supposed to be unlucky?” I asked.

“The Worths? Terribly! They really are!”

It was interval, and the box door had opened. Carlotta always had her eye, a good half of it at least, on the external happenings. She rose, like a reigning beauty — which she wasn’t, and never became — to speak to Lady Perth, and out of spite, did not introduce me.

Carlotta and Lord Lathkill came, perhaps a year later, to visit us when we were in a cottage in Derbyshire, and he was home on leave. She was going to have a child, and was slow, and seemed depressed. He was vague, charming, talking about the country and the history of the lead-mines. But the two of them seemed vague, as if they never got anywhere.

The last time I saw them was when the war was over, and I was leaving England. They were alone at dinner, save for me. He was still haggard, with a wound in the throat. But he said he would soon be well. His slow, beautiful voice was a bit husky now. And his velvety eyes were hardened, haggard, but there was weariness, emptiness in the hardness.

I was poorer than ever, and felt a little weary myself. Carlotta was struggling with his silent emptiness. Since the war, the melancholy fixity of his eyes was more noticeable, the fear at the centre was almost monomania. She was wilting and losing her beauty.

There were twins in the house. After dinner, we went straight up to look at them, to the night nursery. They were two boys, with their father’s fine dark hair, both of them.

He had put out his cigar, and leaned over the cots, gazing in silence. The nurse, dark-faced and faithful, drew back. Carlotta glanced at her children; but more helplessly, she gazed at him.

“Bonny children! Bonny boys, aren’t they, nurse?” I said softly.

“Yes, sir!” she said quickly. “They are!”

“Ever think I’d have twins, roistering twins?” said Carlotta, looking at me.

“I never did,” said I.

“Ask Luke whether it’s bad luck or bad management,” she said, with that schoolgirl’s snirt of laughter, looking up apprehensively at her husband.

“Oh, I!” he said, turning suddenly and speaking loud, in his wounded voice. “I call it amazing good luck, myself! Don’t know what other people think about it.” Yet he had the fine, wincing fear in his body, of an injured dog.

After that, for years I did not see her again. I heard she had a baby girl. Then a catastrophe happened: both the twins were killed in a motor-car accident in America, motoring with their aunt.

I learned the news late, and did not write to Carlotta. What could I say?

A few months later, crowning disaster, the baby girl died of some sudden illness. The Lathkill ill-luck seemed to be working surely.

Poor Carlotta! I had no further news of her, only I heard that she and Lord Lathkill were both living in seclusion, with his mother, at the place in Derbyshire.

When circumstances brought me to England, I debated within myself, whether I should write or not to Carlotta. At last I sent a note to the London address.

I had a reply from the country: “So glad you are within reach again! When will you come and see us?”

I was not very keen on going to Riddings. After all, it was Lord Lathkill’s place, and Lady Lathkill, his mother, was old and of the old school. And I always something of a sansculotte, who will only be king when breeches are off.

“Come to town,” I wrote, “and let us have lunch together.”

She came. She looked older, and pain had drawn horizontal lines across her face.

“You’re not a bit different,” she said to me.

“And you’re only a little bit,” I said.

“Am I!” she replied, in a deadened, melancholic voice. “Perhaps! I suppose while we live we’ve got to live. What do you think?”

“Yes, I think it. To be the living dead, that’s awful.”

“Quite!” she said, with terrible finality.

“How is Lord Lathkill?” I asked.

“Oh,” she said. “It’s finished him, as far as living is concerned. But he’s very

willing for *me* to live.”

“And you, are you willing?” I said.

She looked up into my eyes, strangely.

“I’m not sure,” she said. “I need help. What do you think about it?”

“Oh, God, live if you can!”

“Even take help?” she said, with her strange involved simplicity.

“Ah, certainly.”

“Would you recommend it?”

“Why, yes! You are a young thing — ” I began.

“Won’t you come down to Riddings?” she said quickly.

“And Lord Lathkill — and his mother?” I asked.

“They want you.”

“Do you want me to come?”

“I want you to, yes! Will you?”

“Why, yes, if you want me.”

“When, then?”

“When you wish.”

“Do you mean it?”

“Why, of course.”

“You’re not afraid of the Lathkill ill-luck?”

“*I!*” I exclaimed in amazement; such amazement, that she gave her schoolgirl snirt of laughter.

“Very well, then,” she said. “Monday? Does that suit you?”

We made arrangements, and I saw her off at the station.

I knew Riddings, Lord Lathkill’s place, from the outside. It was an old Derbyshire stone house, at the end of the village of Middleton: a house with three sharp gables, set back not very far from the high road, but with a gloomy moor for a park behind.

Monday was a dark day over the Derbyshire hills. The green hills were dark, dark green, the stone fences seemed almost black. Even the little railway station, deep in the green, cleft hollow, was of stone, and dark and cold, and seemed in the underworld.

Lord Lathkill was at the station. He was wearing spectacles, and his brown eyes stared strangely. His black hair fell lank over his forehead.

“I’m so awfully glad you’ve come,” he said. “It is cheering Carlotta up immensely.”

Me, as a man myself, he hardly seemed to notice. I was something which had arrived, and was expected. Otherwise he had an odd, unnatural briskness of manner.

“I hope I shan’t disturb your mother, Lady Lathkill,” I said as he tucked me up in the car.

“On the contrary,” he sang, in his slow voice, “she is looking forward to your coming as much as we both are. Oh no, don’t look on mother as too old-fashioned, she’s not so at all. She’s tremendously up to date in art and literature and that kind of thing. She has her leaning towards the uncanny — spiritualism, and that kind of thing — nowadays, but Carlotta and I think that if it gives her an interest, all well and good.”

He tucked me up most carefully in the rugs, and the servant put a foot-warmer at my feet.

“Derbyshire, you know, is a cold county,” continued Lord Lathkill, “especially among the hills.”

“It’s a very dark county,” I said.

“Yes, I suppose it is, to one coming from the tropics. We, of course, don’t notice it; we rather like it.”

He seemed curiously smaller, shrunken, and his rather long cheeks were sallow. His manner, however, was much more cheerful, almost communicative. But he talked, as it were, to the faceless air, not really to me. I wasn’t really there at all. He was talking to himself. And when once he looked at me, his brown eyes had a hollow look, like gaps with nothing in them except a haggard, hollow fear. He was gazing through the windows of nothingness, to see if I were really there.

It was dark when we got to Riddings. The house had no door in the front, and only two windows upstairs were lit. It did not seem very hospitable. We entered at the side, and a very silent manservant took my things.

We went upstairs in silence, in the dead-seeming house. Carlotta had heard us, and was at the top of the stairs. She was already dressed; her long white arms were bare; she had something glittering on a dull green dress.

“I was so afraid you wouldn’t come,” she said, in a dulled voice, as she gave me her hand. She seemed as if she would begin to cry. But of course she wouldn’t. The corridor, dark-panelled and with blue carpet on the floor, receded dimly, with a certain dreary gloom. A servant was diminishing in the distance, with my bags, silently. There was a curious, unpleasant sense of the fixity of the materials of the house, the obscene triumph of dead matter. Yet the place was warm, central-heated. Carlotta pulled herself together and said, dulled: “Would you care to speak to my mother-in-law before you go to your room? She would like it.”

We entered a small drawing-room abruptly. I saw the water-colours on the walls and a white-haired lady in black bending round to look at the door as she

rose cautiously.

“This is Mr. Morier, Mother-in-law,” said Carlotta, in her dull, rather quick way, “on his way to his room.”

The dowager Lady Lathkill came a few steps forward, leaning from heavy hips, and gave me her hand. Her crest of hair was snow white, and she had curious blue eyes, fixed, with a tiny dot of a pupil, peering from her pink, soft-skinned face of an old and well-preserved woman. She wore a lace fichu. The upper part of her body was moderately slim, leaning forward slightly from her heavy black-silk hips.

She murmured something to me, staring at me fixedly for a long time, but as a bird does, with shrewd, cold far-distant sight. As a hawk, perhaps, looks shrewdly far down, in his search. Then, muttering, she presented to me the other two people in the room: a tall, short-faced, swarthy young woman with the hint of a black moustache; and a plump man in a dinner-jacket, rather bald and ruddy, with a little grey moustache, but yellow under the eyes. He was Colonel Hale.

They all seemed awkward, as if I had interrupted them at a séance. I didn't know what to say: they were utter strangers to me.

“Better come and choose your room, then,” said Carlotta, and I bowed dumbly, following her out of the room. The old Lady Lathkill still stood planted on her heavy hips, looking half round after us with her ferret's blue eyes. She had hardly any eyebrows, but they were arched high up on her pink, soft forehead, under the crest of icily white hair. She had never emerged for a second from the remote place where she unyieldingly kept herself.

Carlotta, Lord Lathkill and I tramped in silence down the corridor and round a bend. We could none of us get a word out. As he suddenly rather violently flung open a door at the end of the wing, he said, turning round to me with a resentful, hang-dog air:

“We did you the honour of offering you our ghost room. It doesn't look much, but it's our equivalent for a royal apartment.”

It was a good-sized room with faded, red-painted panelling showing remains of gilt, and the usual big, old mahogany furniture, and a big pinky-faded carpet with big, whitish, faded roses. A bright fire was burning in the stone fire-place.

“Why?” said I, looking at the stretches of the faded, once handsome carpet.

“Why what?” said Lord Lathkill. “Why did we offer you this room?”

“Yes! No! Why is it your equivalent for a royal apartment?”

“Oh, because our ghost is as rare as sovereignty in her visits, and twice as welcome. Her gifts are infinitely more worth having.”

“What sort of gifts?”

“The family fortune. She invariably restores the family fortune. That's why

we put you here, to tempt her.”

“What temptation should *I* be? — especially to restoring your family fortunes. I didn’t think they needed it, anyhow.”

“Well!” he hesitated. “Not exactly in money: we can manage modestly that way; but in everything else but money — ”

There was a pause. I was thinking of Carlotta’s “luck for two”. Poor Carlotta! She looked worn now. Especially her chin looked worn, showing the edge of the jaw. She had sat herself down in a chair by the fire, and put her feet on the stone fender, and was leaning forward, screening her face with her hand, still careful of her complexion. I could see her broad, white shoulders, showing the shoulder-blades, as she leaned forward, beneath her dress. But it was as if some bitterness had soaked all the life out of her, and she was only weary, or inert, drained of her feelings. It grieved me, and the thought passed through my mind that a man should take her in his arms and cherish her body, and start her flame again. If she would let him, which was doubtful.

Her courage was fallen, in her body; only her spirit fought on. She would have to restore the body of her life, and only a living body could do it.

“What *about* your ghost?” I said to him. “Is she really ghastly?”

“Not at all!” he said. “She’s supposed to be lovely. But I have no experience, and I don’t know anybody who has. We hoped you’d come, though, and tempt her. Mother had a message about you, you know.”

“No, I didn’t know.”

“Oh yes! When you were still in Africa. The medium said: ‘There is a man in Africa. I can only see M, a double M. He is thinking of your family. It would be good if he entered your family.’ Mother was awfully puzzled, but Carlotta said ‘Mark Morier’ at once.”

“That’s not why I asked you down,” said Carlotta quickly, looking round, shading her eyes with her hand as she looked at me.

I laughed, saying nothing.

“But, of course,” continued Lord Lathkill, “you *needn’t* have this room. We have another one ready as well. Would you like to see it?”

“How does your ghost manifest herself?” I said, parrying.

“Well, I hardly know. She seems to be a very grateful *presence*, and that’s about all I do know. She was apparently quite *persona grata* to everyone she visited. *Gratissima*, apparently!”

“*Benissimo!*” said I.

A servant appeared in the doorway, murmuring something I could not hear. Everybody in the house, except Carlotta and Lord Lathkill, seemed to murmur under their breath.

“What’s she say?” I asked.

“If you will stay in this room? I told her you might like a room on the front. And if you’ll take a bath?” said Carlotta.

“Yes!” said I. And Carlotta repeated to the maidservant.

“And for heaven’s sake speak to me loudly,” said I to that elderly correct female in her starched collar, in the doorway.

“Very good, sir!” she piped up. “And shall I make the bath hot or medium?”

“Hot!” said I, like a cannon-shot.

“Very good, sir!” she piped up again, and her elderly eyes twinkled as she turned and disappeared.

Carlotta laughed, and I sighed.

We were six at table. The pink Colonel with the yellow creases under his blue eyes sat opposite me, like an old boy with a liver. Next him sat Lady Lathkill, watching from her distance. Her pink, soft old face, naked-seeming, with its pinpoint blue eyes, was a real modern witch-face.

Next me, on my left, was the dark young woman, whose slim, swarthy arms had an indiscernible down on them. She had a blackish neck, and her expressionless yellow-brown eyes said nothing, under level black brows. She was inaccessible. I made some remarks, without result. Then I said:

“I didn’t hear your name when Lady Lathkill introduced me to you.”

Her yellow-brown eyes stared into mine for some moments before she said:

“Mrs Hale!” Then she glanced across the table. “Colonel Hale is my husband.”

My face must have signalled my surprise. She stared into my eyes very curiously, with a significance I could not grasp, a long, hard stare. I looked at the bald, pink head of the Colonel bent over his soup, and I returned to my own soup.

“Did you have a good time in London?” said Carlotta.

“No,” said I. “It was dismal.”

“Not a good word to say for it?”

“Not one.”

“No nice people?”

“Not my sort of nice.”

“What’s your sort of nice?” she asked, with a little laugh.

The other people were stone. It was like talking into a chasm.

“Ah! If I knew myself, I’d look for them! But not sentimental, with a lot of sappy emotions on top, and nasty ones underneath.”

“Who are you thinking of?” Carlotta looked up at me as the man brought the fish. She had a crushed sort of roguishness. The other diners were images.

“I? Nobody. Just everybody. No, I think I was thinking of the Obelisk Memorial Service.”

“Did you go to it?”

“No, but I fell into it.”

“Wasn’t it moving?”

“Rhubarb, senna, that kind of moving!”

She gave a little laugh, looking up into my face, from the fish.

“What was wrong with it?”

I noticed that the Colonel and Lady Lathkill each had a little dish of rice, no fish, and that they were served second — oh, humility! — and that neither took the white wine. No, they had no wine-glasses. The remoteness gathered about them, like the snows on Everest. The dowager peered across at me occasionally, like a white ermine of the snow, and she had that cold air about her, of being good, and containing a secret of goodness: remotely, ponderously, fixedly knowing better. And I, with my chatter, was one of those fabulous fleas that are said to hop upon glaciers.

“Wrong with it? *It* was wrong, all wrong. In the rain, a sappy crowd, with sappy bare heads, sappy emotions, sappy chrysanthemums and prickly laurustinus! A steam of wet mob-emotions! Ah, no, it shouldn’t be allowed.”

Carlotta’s face had fallen. She again could feel death in her bowels, the kind of death the war signifies.

“Wouldn’t you have us honour the dead?” came Lady Lathkill’s secretive voice across at me, as if a white ermine had barked.

“Honour the dead!” My mind opened in amazement. “Do you think they’d be honoured?”

I put the question in all sincerity.

“They would understand the *intention* was to honour them,” came her reply.

I felt ashamed.

“If I were dead, would I be honoured if a great, steamy wet crowd came after me with sappy chrysanthemums and prickly laurustinus? Ugh! I’d run to the nethermost ends of Hades. Lord, how I’d run from them!”

The manservant gave us roast mutton, and Lady Lathkill and the Colonel chestnuts in sauce. Then he poured the burgundy. It was good wine. The pseudo-conversation was interrupted.

Lady Lathkill ate in silence, like an ermine in the snow, feeding on his prey. Sometimes she looked round the table, her blue eyes peering fixedly, completely uncommunicative. She was very watchful to see that we were all properly attended to; “The currant jelly for Mr. Morier,” she would murmur, as if it were her table. Lord Lathkill, next her, ate in complete absence. Sometimes she

murmured to him, and he murmured back, but I never could hear what they said. The Colonel swallowed the chestnuts in dejection, as if all were weary duty to him now. I put it down to his liver.

It was an awful dinner-party. I never could hear a word anybody said, except Carlotta. They all let their words die in their throats, as if the larynx were the coffin of sound.

Carlotta tried to keep her end up, the cheerful hostess sort of thing. But Lady Lathkill somehow, in silence and apparent humility, had stolen the authority that goes with hostess, and she clung on to it grimly, like a white ermine sucking a rabbit. Carlotta kept glancing miserably at me, to see what I thought. I didn't think anything. I just felt frozen within the tomb. And I drank the good, good warm burgundy.

"Mr. Morier's glass!" murmured Lady Lathkill, and her blue eyes with their black pin-points rested on mine a moment.

"Awfully nice to drink good burgundy!" said I pleasantly.

She bowed her head slightly, and murmured something inaudible.

"I beg your pardon?"

"Very glad you like it!" she repeated, with distaste at having to say it again, out loud.

"Yes, I do. It's good."

Mrs. Hale, who had sat tall and erect and alert, like a black she-fox, never making a sound, looked round at me to see what sort of specimen I was. She was just a bit intrigued.

"Yes, thanks," came a musical murmur from Lord Lathkill. "I think I *will* take some more."

The man, who had hesitated, filled his glass.

"I'm awfully sorry I can't drink wine," said Carlotta absently. "It has the wrong effect on me."

"I should say it has the wrong effect on everybody," said the Colonel, with an uneasy attempt to be there. "But some people like the effect, and some don't."

I looked at him in wonder. Why was he chipping in? He looked as if he'd liked the effect well enough, in his day.

"Oh no!" retorted Carlotta coldly. "The effect on different people is quite different."

She closed with finality, and a further frost fell on the table.

"Quite so," began the Colonel, trying, since he'd gone off the deep end, to keep afloat.

But Carlotta turned abruptly to me.

"Why is it, do you think, that the effect is so different on different people?"

“And on different occasions,” said I, grinning through my burgundy. “Do you know what they say? They say that alcohol, if it has an effect on your psyche, takes you back to old states of consciousness, and old reactions. But some people it doesn’t stimulate at all, there is only a nervous reaction of repulsion.”

“There’s certainly a nervous reaction of repulsion in me,” said Carlotta.

“As there is in all higher natures,” murmured Lady Lathkill.

“Dogs hate whisky,” said I.

“That’s quite right,” said the Colonel. “Scared of it!”

“I’ve often thought,” said I, “about those old states of consciousness. It’s supposed to be an awful retrogression, reverting back to them. Myself, my desire to go onwards takes me back a little.”

“Where to?” said Carlotta.

“Oh, I don’t know! To where you feel it a bit warm, and like smashing the glasses, don’t you know?”

*“J’avons bien bu et nous boirons!
Cassons les verres nous les payerons!
Compagnons! Voyez vous bien!
Voyez vous bien!
Voyez! voyez! voyez vous bien
Que les d’moiselles sont belles
Où nous allons!”*

I had the effrontery to sing this verse of an old soldier’s song while Lady Lathkill was finishing her celery and nut salad. I sang it quite nicely, in a natty, well-balanced little voice, smiling all over my face meanwhile. The servant, as he went round for Lady Lathkill’s plate, furtively fetched a look at me. *Look!* thought I. *You chicken that’s come untrussed!*

The partridges had gone, we had swallowed the *flan*, and were at dessert. They had accepted my song in complete silence. Even Carlotta! My *flan* had gone down in one gulp, like an oyster.

“You’re quite right!” said Lord Lathkill, amid the squashing of walnuts. “I mean the state of mind of a Viking, shall we say, or of a Catiline conspirator, might be frightfully good for us, if we could recapture it.”

“A Viking!” said I, stupefied. And Carlotta gave a wild snirt of laughter.

“Why not a Viking?” he asked in all innocence.

“A Viking!” I repeated, and swallowed my port. Then I looked round at my black-browed neighbour.

“Why do you never say anything?” I asked.

“What should I say?” she replied, frightened at the thought.

I was finished. I gazed into my port as if expecting the ultimate revelation.

Lady Lathkill rustled her finger-tips in the finger-bowl, and laid down her napkin decisively. The Colonel, old buck, rose at once to draw back her chair. *Place aux hommes!* I bowed to my neighbour, Mrs. Hale, a most disconcerting bow, and she made a circuit to get by me.

“You won’t be awfully long?” said Carlotta, looking at me with her slow, hazel-green eyes, between mischief and wistfulness and utter depression.

Lady Lathkill steered heavily past me as if I didn’t exist, perching rather forward, with her crest of white hair, from her big hips. She seemed abstracted, concentrated on something, as she went.

I closed the door, and turned to the men.

*“Dans la première auberge
J’eus b’en bu!”*

sang I in a little voice.

“Quite right,” said Lord Lathkill. “You’re quite right.”

And we sent the port round.

“This house,” I said, “needs a sort of spring-cleaning.”

“You’re quite right,” said Lord Lathkill.

“There’s a bit of a dead smell!” said I. “We need Bacchus, and Eros, to sweeten it up, to freshen it.”

“You think Bacchus and Eros?” said Lord Lathkill, with complete seriousness; as if one might have telephoned for them.

“In the best sense,” said I. As if we were going to get them from Fortnum and Mason’s, at least.

“What exactly is the best sense?” asked Lord Lathkill.

“Ah! The flame of life! There’s a dead smell here.”

The Colonel fingered his glass with thick, inert fingers uneasily.

“Do you think so?” he said, looking up at me heavily.

“Don’t you?”

He gazed at me with blank, glazed blue eyes, that had deathly yellow stains underneath. Something was wrong with him, some sort of breakdown. He should have been a fat, healthy, jolly old boy. Not very old either: probably not quite sixty. But with this collapse on him, he seemed, somehow, to smell.

“You know,” he said, staring at me with a sort of gruesome challenge, then looking down at his wine, “there’s more things than we’re aware of happening to us!” He looked up at me again, shutting his full lips under his little grey

moustache, and gazing with a glazed defiance.

“Quite!” said I.

He continued to gaze at me with glazed, gruesome defiance.

“Ha!” He made a sudden movement, and seemed to break up, collapse and become brokenly natural. “There, you’ve said it. I married my wife when I was a kid of twenty.”

“Mrs. Hale?” I exclaimed.

“Not this one” — he jerked his head towards the door — “my first wife.” There was a pause; he looked at me with shamed eyes, then turned his wine-glass round and his head dropped. Staring at his twisting glass, he continued: “I married her when I was twenty, and she was twenty-eight. You might say, she married me. Well, there it was! We had three children — I’ve got three married daughters — and we got on all right. I suppose she mothered me, in a way. And I never thought a thing. I was content enough, wasn’t tied to her apron-strings, and she never asked questions. She was always fond of me, and I took it for granted. I took it for granted. Even when she died — I was away in Salonika — I took it for granted, if you understand me. It was part of the rest of things — war — life — death. I knew I should feel lonely when I got back. Well, then I got buried — shell dropped, and the dug-out caved in — and that queered me. They sent me home. And the minute I saw the Lizard light — it was evening when we got up out of the Bay — I realised that Lucy had been waiting for me. I could feel her there, at my side, more plainly than I feel you now. And do you know, at that moment I woke up to her, and she made an awful impression on me. She seemed, if you get me, tremendously powerful, important; everything else dwindled away. There was the Lizard light blinking a long way off, and that meant home. And all the rest was my wife, Lucy: as if her skirts filled all the darkness. In a way, I was frightened; but that was because I couldn’t quite get myself into line. I felt: *Good God! I never knew her!* And she was this tremendous thing! I felt like a child, and as weak as a kitten. And, believe me or not, from that day to this she’s never left me. I know quite well she can hear what I’m saying. But she’ll let me tell you. I knew that at dinner-time.”

“But what made you marry again?” I said.

“She made me!” He went a trifle yellow on his cheek-bones. “I could feel her telling me: *‘Marry! Marry!’* Lady Lathkill had messages from her too; she was her great friend in life. I didn’t think of marrying. But Lady Lathkill had the same message, that I must marry. Then a medium described the girl in detail: my present wife. I knew her at once, friend of my daughters. After that the messages became more insistent, waking me three and four times in the night. Lady Lathkill urged me to propose, and I did it, and was accepted. My present wife

was just twenty-eight, the age Lucy had been — ”

“How long ago did you marry the present Mrs. Hale?”

“A little over a year ago. Well, I thought I had done what was required of me. But directly after the wedding, such a state of terror came over me — perfectly unreasonable — I became almost unconscious. My present wife asked me if I was ill, and I said I was. We got to Paris. I felt I was dying. But I said I was going out to see a doctor, and I found myself kneeling in a church. Then I found peace — and Lucy. She had her arms round me, and I was like a child at peace. I must have knelt there for a couple of hours in Lucy’s arms. I *never* felt like that when she was alive: why, I couldn’t stand that sort of thing! It’s all come on after — after — And now, I daren’t offend Lucy’s spirit. If I do, I suffer tortures till I’ve made peace again, till she folds me in her arms. Then I can live. But she won’t let me go near the present Mrs. Hale. I — I — I daren’t go near her.”

He looked up at me with fear, and shame, and shameful secrecy, and a sort of gloating showing in his unmanned blue eyes. He had been talking as if in his sleep.

“Why did your dead wife urge you to marry again?” I said.

“I don’t know,” he replied. “I don’t know. She was older than I was, and all the cleverness was on her side. She was a very clever woman, and I was never much in the intellectual line myself. I just took it for granted she liked me. She never showed jealousy, but I think now, perhaps she was jealous all the time, and kept it under. I don’t know. I think she never felt quite straight about having married me. It seems like that. As if she had something on her mind. Do you know, while she was alive, I never gave it a thought. And now I’m aware of nothing else but her. It’s as if her spirit wanted to live in my body, or at any rate — I don’t know — ”

His blue eyes were glazed, almost fishy, with fear and gloating shame. He had a short nose, and full, self-indulgent lips, and a once-comedy chin. Eternally a careless boy of thirteen. But now, care had got him in decay.

“And what does your present wife say?” I asked.

He poured himself some more wine.

“Why,” he replied, “except for her, I shouldn’t mind so much. She says nothing. Lady Lathkill has explained everything to her, and she agrees that — that — a spirit from the other side is more important than mere pleasure — you know what I mean. Lady Lathkill says that this is a preparation for my next incarnation, when I am going to serve Woman, and help Her to take Her place.”

He looked up again, trying to be proud in his shame.

“Well, what a damned curious story!” exclaimed Lord Lathkill. “Mother’s idea for herself — she had it in a message too — is that she is coming on earth

the next time to save the animals from the cruelty of man. That's why she hates meat at table, or anything that has to be killed."

"And does Lady Lathkill encourage you in this business with your dead wife?" said I.

"Yes. She helps me. When I get as you might say at cross-purposes with Lucy — with Lucy's spirit, that is — Lady Lathkill helps to put it right between us. Then I'm all right, when I know I'm loved."

He looked at me stealthily, cunningly.

"Then you're all wrong," said I, "surely."

"And do you mean to say," put in Lord Lathkill, "that you don't live with the present Mrs. Hale at all? Do you mean to say you never *have* lived with her?"

"I've got a higher claim on me," said the unhappy Colonel.

"My God!" said Lord Lathkill.

I looked in amazement: the sort of chap who picks up a woman and has a good time with her for a week, then goes home as nice as pie, and now look at him! It was obvious that he had a terror of his black-browed new wife, as well as of Lucy's spirit. A devil and a deep blue sea with a vengeance!

"A damned curious story!" mused Lord Lathkill. "I'm not so sure I like it. Something's wrong somewhere. We shall have to go upstairs."

"Wrong!" said I. "Why, Colonel, don't you turn round and quarrel with the spirit of your first wife, fatally and finally, and get rid of her?"

The Colonel looked at me, still diminished and afraid, but perking up a bit, as we rose from table.

"How would you go about it?" he said.

"I'd just face her, wherever she seemed to be, and say: '*Lucy, go to blazes!*'"

Lord Lathkill burst into a loud laugh, then was suddenly silent as the door noiselessly opened, and the dowager's white hair and pointed, uncanny eyes peered in, then entered.

"I think I left my papers in here, Luke," she murmured.

"Yes, mother. There they are. We're just coming up."

"Take your time."

He held the door, and ducking forward, she went out again, clutching some papers. The Colonel had blanched yellow on his cheek-bones.

We went upstairs to the small drawing-room.

"You were a long time," said Carlotta, looking in all our faces. "Hope the coffee's not cold. We'll have fresh if it is."

She poured out, and Mrs. Hale carried the cups. The dark young woman thrust out her straight, dusky arm, offering me sugar, and gazing at me with her unchanging, yellow-brown eyes. I looked back at her, and being clairvoyant in

this house, was conscious of the curves of her erect body, the sparse black hairs there would be on her strong-skinned dusky thighs. She was a woman of thirty, and she had had a great dread lest she should never marry. Now she was as if mesmerised.

“What do you do usually in the evenings?” I said.

She turned to me as if startled, as she nearly always did when addressed.

“We do nothing,” she replied. “Talk; and sometimes Lady Lathkill reads.”

“What does she read?”

“About spiritualism.”

“Sounds pretty dull.”

She looked at me again, but she did not answer. It was difficult to get anything out of her. She put up no fight, only remained in the same swarthy, passive, negative resistance. For a moment I wondered that no men made love to her: it was obvious they didn't. But then, modern young men are accustomed to being attracted, flattered, impressed: they expect an effort to please. And Mrs. Hale made none: didn't know how. Which for me was her mystery. She was passive, static, locked up in a resistant passivity that had fire beneath it.

Lord Lathkill came and sat by us. The Colonel's confession had had an effect on him.

“I'm afraid,” he said to Mrs. Hale, “you have a thin time here.”

“Why?” she asked.

“Oh, there is so little to amuse you. Do you like to dance?”

“Yes,” she said.

“Well, then,” he said, “let us go downstairs and dance to the Victrola. There are four of us. You'll come, of course?” he said to me.

Then he turned to his mother.

“Mother, we shall go down to the morning-room and dance. Will you come? Will you, Colonel?”

The dowager gazed at her son.

“I will come and look on,” she said.

“And I will play the pianola, if you like,” volunteered the Colonel. We went down and pushed aside the chintz chairs and the rugs. Lady Lathkill sat in a chair, the Colonel worked away at the pianola. I danced with Carlotta, Lord Lathkill with Mrs. Hale.

A quiet soothing came over me, dancing with Carlotta. She was very still and remote, and she hardly looked at me. Yet the touch of her was wonderful, like a flower that yields itself to the morning. Her warm, silken shoulder was soft and grateful under my hand, as if it knew me with that second knowledge which is part of one's childhood, and which so rarely blossoms again in manhood and

womanhood. It was as if we had known each other perfectly, as children, and now, as man and woman met in the full, further sympathy. Perhaps, in modern people, only after long suffering and defeat, can the naked intuition break free between woman and man.

She, I knew, let the strain and the tension of all her life depart from her then, leaving her nakedly still, within my arm. And I only wanted to be with her, to have her in my touch.

Yet after the second dance she looked at me, and suggested that she should dance with her husband. So I found myself with the strong, passive shoulder of Mrs. Hale under my hand, and her inert hand in mine, as I looked down at her dusky, dirty-looking neck — she wisely avoided powder. The duskiness of her mesmerised body made me see the faint dark sheen of her thighs, with intermittent black hairs. It was as if they shone through the silk of her mauve dress, like the limbs of a half-wild animal that is locked up in its own helpless dumb winter, a prisoner.

She knew, with the heavy intuition of her sort, that I glimpsed her crude among the bushes, and felt her attraction. But she kept looking away over my shoulder, with her yellow eyes, towards Lord Lathkill.

Myself or him, it was a question of which got there first. But she preferred him. Only for some things she would rather it were me.

Luke had changed curiously. His body seemed to have come alive, in the dark cloth of his evening suit; his eyes had a devil-may-care light in them, his long cheeks a touch of scarlet, and his black hair fell loose over his forehead. He had again some of that Guardsman's sense of well-being and claim to the best in life, which I had noticed the first time I saw him. But now it was a little more florid, defiant, with a touch of madness.

He looked down at Carlotta with uncanny kindness and affection. Yet he was glad to hand her over to me. He, too, was afraid of her: as if with her his bad luck had worked. Whereas, in a throb of crude brutality, he felt it would not work with the dark young woman. So, he handed Carlotta over to me with relief, as if, with me, she would be safe from the doom of his bad luck. And he, with the other woman, would be safe from it too. For the other woman was outside the circle.

I was glad to have Carlotta again: to have that inexpressible delicate and complete quiet of the two of us, resting my heart in a balance now at last physical as well as spiritual. Till now, it had always been a fragmentary thing. Now, for this hour at least, it was whole, a soft, complete, physical flow, and a unison deeper even than childhood.

As she danced she shivered slightly, and I seemed to smell frost in the air. The

Colonel, too, was not keeping the rhythm.

“Has it turned colder?” I said.

“I wonder,” she answered, looking up at me with a slow beseeching. Why, and for what was she beseeching me? I pressed my hand a little closer, and her small breasts seemed to speak to me. The Colonel recovered the rhythm again.

But at the end of the dance she shivered again, and it seemed to me I too was chilled.

“Has it suddenly turned colder?” I said, going to the radiator. It was quite hot.

“It seems to me it has,” said Lord Lathkill in a queer voice.

The Colonel was sitting abjectly on the music-stool, as if broken.

“Shall we have another? Shall we try a tango?” said Lord Lathkill. “As much of it as we can manage?”

“I — I — ” the Colonel began, turning round on the seat, his face yellow. “I’m not sure — ”

Carlotta shivered. The frost seemed to touch my vitals. Mrs. Hale stood stiff, like a pillar of brown rock-salt, staring at her husband.

“We had better leave off,” murmured Lady Lathkill, rising.

Then she did an extraordinary thing. She lifted her face, staring to the other side, and said suddenly, in a clear, cruel sort of voice:

“Are you here, Lucy?”

She was speaking across to the spirits. Deep inside me leaped a jump of laughter. I wanted to howl with laughter. Then instantly I went inert again. The chill gloom seemed to deepen suddenly in the room, everybody was overcome. On the piano-seat the Colonel sat yellow and huddled, with a terrible hang-dog look of guilt on his face. There was a silence, in which the cold seemed to creak. Then came again the peculiar bell-like ringing of Lady Lathkill’s voice:

“Are you here? What do you wish us to do?”

A dead and ghastly silence, in which we all remained transfixed. Then from somewhere came two slow thuds, and a sound of drapery moving. The Colonel, with mad fear in his eyes, looked round at the uncurtained windows, and crouched on his seat.

“We must leave this room,” said Lady Lathkill.

“I’ll tell you what, mother,” said Lord Lathkill curiously; “you and the Colonel go up, and we’ll just turn on the Victrola.”

That was almost uncanny of him. For myself, the cold effluence of these people had paralysed me. Now I began to rally. I felt that Lord Lathkill was sane, it was these other people who were mad.

Again from somewhere indefinite came two slow thuds.

“We must leave this room,” repeated Lady Lathkill in monotony.

“All right, mother. You go. I’ll just turn on the Victrola.”

And Lord Lathkill strode across the room. In another moment the monstrous barking howl of the opening of a jazz tune, an event far more extraordinary than thuds, poured from the unmoving bit of furniture called a Victrola.

Lady Lathkill silently departed. The Colonel got to his feet.

“I wouldn’t go if I were you, Colonel,” said I. “Why not dance? I’ll look on this time.”

I felt as if I were resisting a rushing, cold, dark current.

Lord Lathkill was already dancing with Mrs. Hale, skating delicately along, with a certain smile of obstinacy, secrecy, and excitement kindled on his face. Carlotta went up quietly to the Colonel, and put her hand on his broad shoulder. He let himself be moved into the dance, but he had no heart in it.

There came a heavy crash, out of the distance. The Colonel stopped as if shot: in another moment he would go down on his knees. And his face was terrible. It was obvious he really felt another presence, other than ours, blotting us out. The room seemed dreary and cold. It was heavy work, bearing up.

The Colonel’s lips were moving, but no sound came forth. Then, absolutely oblivious of us, he went out of the room.

The Victrola had run down. Lord Lathkill went to wind it up again, saying:

“I suppose mother knocked over a piece of furniture.”

But we were all of us depressed, in abject depression.

“Isn’t it awful!” Carlotta said to me, looking up beseechingly.

“Abominable!” said I.

“What do you think there is in it?”

“God knows. The only thing is to stop it, as one does hysteria. It’s on a par with hysteria.”

“Quite,” she said.

Lord Lathkill was dancing, and smiling very curiously down into his partner’s face. The Victrola was at its loudest.

Carlotta and I looked at one another, with hardly the heart to start again. The house felt hollow and gruesome. One wanted to get out, to get away from the cold, uncanny blight which filled the air.

“Oh, I say, keep the ball rolling,” called Lord Lathkill.

“Come,” I said to Carlotta.

Even then she hung back a little. If she had not suffered, and lost so much, she would have gone upstairs at once to struggle in the silent wrestling of wills with her mother-in-law. Even now, *that* particular fight drew her, almost the strongest. But I took her hand.

“Come,” I said. “Let us dance it down. We’ll roll the ball the opposite way.”

She danced with me, but she was absent, unwilling. The empty gloom of the house, the sense of cold, and of deadening opposition, pressed us down. I was looking back over my life, and thinking how the cold weight of an unliving spirit was slowly crushing all warmth and vitality out of everything. Even Carlotta herself had gone numb again, cold and resistant even to me. The thing seemed to happen wholesale in her.

“One has to choose to live,” I said, dancing on. But I was powerless. With a woman, when her spirit goes inert in opposition, a man can do nothing. I felt my life-flow sinking in my body.

“This house is awfully depressing,” I said to her, as we mechanically danced. “Why don’t you *do* something? Why don’t you get out of this tangle? Why don’t you break it?”

“How?” she said.

I looked down at her, wondering why she was suddenly hostile.

“You needn’t fight,” I said. “You needn’t fight it. Don’t get tangled up in it. Just side-step, on to another ground.”

She made a pause of impatience before she replied:

“I don’t see where I am to side-step to, precisely.”

“You do,” said I. “A little while ago, you were warm and unfolded and good. Now you are shut up and prickly, in the cold. You needn’t be. Why not stay warm?”

“It’s nothing I do,” she said coldly.

“It is. Stay warm to me. I am here. Why clutch in a tug-of-war with Lady Lathkill?”

“Do I clutch in a tug-of-war with my mother-in-law?”

“You know you do.”

She looked up at me, with a faint little shadow of guilt and beseeching, but with a *moue* of cold obstinacy dominant.

“Let’s have done,” said I.

And in cold silence we sat side by side on the lounge.

The other two danced on. They at any rate were in unison. One could see from the swing of their limbs. Mrs. Hale’s yellow-brown eyes looked at me every time she came round.

“Why does she look at me?” I said.

“I can’t imagine,” said Carlotta, with a cold grimace.

“I’d better go upstairs and see what’s happening,” she said, suddenly rising and disappearing in a breath.

Why should she go? Why should she rush off to the battle of wills with her mother-in-law? In such a battle, while one has any life to lose, one can only lose

it. There is nothing positively to be done, but to withdraw out of the hateful tension.

The music ran down. Lord Lathkill stopped the Victrola.

“Carlotta gone?” he said.

“Apparently.”

“Why didn’t you stop her?”

“Wild horses wouldn’t stop her.”

He lifted his hand with a mocking gesture of helplessness.

“The lady loves her will,” he said. “Would you like to dance?”

I looked at Mrs. Hale.

“No,” I said. “I won’t butt in. I’ll play the pianola. The Victrola’s a brute.”

I hardly noticed the passage of time. Whether the others danced or not, I played, and was unconscious of almost everything. In the midst of one rattling piece, Lord Lathkill touched my arm.

“Listen to Carlotta. She says closing time,” he said, in his old musical voice, but with the sardonic ring of war in it now.

Carlotta stood with her arms dangling, looking like a penitent schoolgirl.

“The Colonel has gone to bed. He hasn’t been able to manage a reconciliation with Lucy,” she said. “My mother-in-law thinks we ought to let him try to sleep.”

Carlotta’s slow eyes rested on mine, questioning, penitent — or so I imagined — and somewhat sphinx-like.

“Why, of course,” said Lord Lathkill. “I wish him all the sleep in the world.”

Mrs. Hale said never a word.

“Is mother retiring too?” asked Luke.

“I think so.”

“Ah! then supposing we up and look at the supper-tray.”

We found Lady Lathkill mixing herself some nightcap brew over a spirit-lamp: something milky and excessively harmless. She stood at the sideboard stirring her potatoes, and hardly noticed us. When she had finished she sat down with her steaming cup.

“Colonel Hale all right, mother?” said Luke, looking across at her.

The dowager, under her uplift of white hair, stared back at her son. There was an eye-battle for some moments, during which he maintained his arch, debonair ease, just a bit crazy.

“No,” said Lady Lathkill, “he is in great trouble.”

“Ah!” replied her son. “Awful pity we can’t do anything for him. But if flesh and blood can’t help him, I’m afraid I’m a dud. Suppose he didn’t mind our dancing? Frightfully good for *us*! We’ve been forgetting that we’re flesh and

blood, mother.”

He took another whisky and soda, and gave me one. And in a paralysing silence Lady Lathkill sipped her hot brew, Luke and I sipped our whiskies, the young woman ate a little sandwich. We all preserved an extraordinary aplomb, and an obstinate silence.

It was Lady Lathkill who broke it. She seemed to be sinking downwards, crouching into herself like a skulking animal.

“I suppose,” she said, “we shall all go to bed?”

“You go mother. We’ll come along in a moment.”

She went, and for some time we four sat silent. The room seemed to become pleasanter, the air was more grateful.

“Look here,” said Lord Lathkill at last. “What do you think of this ghost business?”

“I?” said I. “I don’t like the atmosphere it produces. There may be ghosts, and spirits, and all that. The dead must be somewhere; there’s no such place as nowhere. But they don’t affect me particularly. Do they you?”

“Well,” he said, “no, not directly. Indirectly I suppose it does.”

“I think it makes a horribly depressing atmosphere, spiritualism,” said I. “I want to kick.”

“Exactly! And ought one?” he asked in his terribly sane-seeming way.

This made me laugh. I knew what he was up to.

“I don’t know what you mean by *ought*,” said I. “If I really want to kick, if I know I can’t stand a thing, I kick. Who’s going to authorise me, if my own genuine feeling doesn’t?”

“Quite,” he said, staring at me like an owl, with a fixed, meditative stare.

“Do you know,” he said, “I suddenly thought at dinner-time, what corpses we all were, sitting eating our dinners. I thought it when I saw you look at those little Jerusalem artichoke things in a white sauce. Suddenly it struck me, you were alive and twinkling, and we were all bodily dead. Bodily dead, if you understand. Quite alive in other directions, but bodily dead. And whether we ate vegetarian or meat made no difference. We were bodily dead.”

“Ah, with a slap in the face,” said I, “we come to life! You or I or anybody.”

“I *do* understand poor Lucy,” said Luke. “Don’t you? She forgot to be flesh and blood while she was alive, and now she can’t forgive herself, nor the Colonel. That must be pretty rough, you know, not to realise it till you’re dead, and you haven’t, so to speak, anything left to go on. I mean, it’s awfully important to be flesh and blood.”

He looked so solemnly at us, we three broke simultaneously into an uneasy laugh.

“Oh, but I *do* mean it,” he said. “I’ve only realised how very extraordinary it is to be a man of flesh and blood, alive. It seems so ordinary, in comparison, to be dead, and merely spirit. That seems so commonplace. But fancy having a living face, and arms, and thighs. Oh, my God, I’m glad I’ve realised in time!”

He caught Mrs. Hale’s hand, and pressed her dusky arm against his body.

“Oh, but if one had died without realising it!” he cried. “Think how ghastly for Jesus, when He was risen and wasn’t touchable! How very awful, to have to say *Noli me tangere!* Ah, touch me, touch me *alive!*”

He pressed Mrs. Hale’s hand convulsively against his breast. The tears had already slowly gathered in Carlotta’s eyes and were dropping on to her hands in her lap.

“Don’t cry, Carlotta,” he said. “Really, don’t. We haven’t killed one another. We’re too decent, after all. We’ve almost become two spirits side by side. We’ve almost become two ghosts to one another, wrestling. Oh, but I want you to get back your body, even if I can’t give it to you. I want my flesh and blood, Carlotta, and I want you to have yours. We’ve suffered so much the other way. And the children, it is as well they are dead. They were born of our will and our disembodiment. Oh, I feel like the Bible. Clothe me with flesh again, and wrap my bones with sinew, and let the fountain of blood cover me. My spirit is like a naked nerve on the air.”

Carlotta had ceased to weep. She sat with her head dropped, as if asleep. The rise and fall of her small, slack breasts was still heavy, but they were lifting on a heaving sea of rest. It was as if a slow, restful dawn were rising in her body, while she slept. So slack, so broken she sat, it occurred to me that in this crucifixion business the crucified does not put himself alone on the cross. The woman is nailed even more inexorably up, and crucified in the body even more cruelly.

It is a monstrous thought. But the deed is even more monstrous. Oh, Jesus, didn’t you know that you couldn’t be crucified alone? — that the two thieves crucified along with you were the two women, your wife and mother! You called them two thieves. But what would they call you, who had their women’s bodies on the cross? The abominable trinity on Calvary!

I felt an infinite tenderness for my dear Carlotta. She could not yet be touched. But my soul streamed to her like warm blood. So she sat slack and drooped, as if broken. But she was not broken. It was only the great release.

Luke sat with the hand of the dark young woman pressed against his breast. His face was warm and fresh, but he too breathed heavily, and stared unseeing. Mrs. Hale sat at his side erect and mute. But she loved him, with erect, black-faced, remote power.

“Morier!” said Luke to me. “If you can help Carlotta, you will, won’t you? I can’t do any more for her now. We are in mortal fear of each other.”

“As much as she’ll let me,” said I, looking at her drooping figure, that was built on such a strong frame.

The fire rustled on the hearth as we sat in complete silence. How long it lasted I cannot say. Yet we were none of us startled when the door opened.

It was the Colonel, in a handsome brocade dressing-gown, looking worried.

Luke still held the dark young woman’s hand clasped against his thigh. Mrs. Hale did not move.

“I thought you fellows might help me,” said the Colonel, in a worried voice, as he closed the door.

“What is wrong, Colonel?” said Luke.

The Colonel looked at him, looked at the clasped hands of Luke and the dark young woman, looked at me, looked at Carlotta, without changing his expression of anxiety, fear, and misery. He didn’t care about us.

“I can’t sleep,” he said. “It’s gone wrong again. My head feels as if there was a cold vacuum in it, and my heart beats, and something screws up inside me. I know it’s Lucy. She hates me again. I can’t stand it.”

He looked at us with eyes half-glazed, obsessed. His face seemed as if the flesh were breaking under the skin, decomposing.

“Perhaps, poor thing,” said Luke, whose madness seemed really sane this night, “perhaps you hate *her*.”

Luke’s strange concentration instantly made us feel a tension, as of hate, in the Colonel’s body.

“I?” The Colonel looked up sharply, like a culprit. “I! I wouldn’t say that, if I were you.”

“Perhaps that’s what’s the matter,” said Luke, with mad, beautiful calm. “Why can’t you feel kindly towards her, poor thing! She must have been done out of a lot while she lived.”

It was as if he had one foot in life and one in death, and knew both sides. To us it was like madness.

“I — I!” stammered the Colonel; and his face was a study. Expression after expression moved across it: of fear, repudiation, dismay, anger, repulsion, bewilderment, guilt. “I was good to her.”

“Ah, yes,” said Luke. “Perhaps *you* were good to her. But was your body good to poor Lucy’s body, poor dead thing!”

He seemed to be better acquainted with the ghost than with us.

The Colonel gazed blankly at Luke, and his eyes went up and down, up and down, up and down, up and down.

“My body!” he said blankly.

And he looked down amazedly at his little round stomach, under the silk gown, and his stout knee, in its blue-and-white pyjama.

“My body!” he repeated blankly.

“Yes,” said Luke. “Don’t you see, you may have been awfully good to her. But her poor woman’s body, were you ever good to that?”

“She had everything she wanted. She had three of my children,” said the Colonel dazedly.

“Ah yes, that may easily be. But your body of a man, was it ever good to her body of a woman? That’s the point. If you understand the marriage service: with my body I thee worship. That’s the point. No getting away from it.”

The queerest of all accusing angels did Lord Lathkill make, as he sat there with the hand of the other man’s wife clasped against his thigh. His face was fresh and naïve, and the dark eyes were bright with a clairvoyant candour, that was like madness, and perhaps was supreme sanity.

The Colonel was thinking back, and over his face a slow understanding was coming.

“It may be,” he said. “It may be. Perhaps, that way, I despised her. It may be, it may be.”

“I know,” said Luke. “As if she weren’t worth noticing, what you did to her. Haven’t I done it myself? And don’t I know now, it’s a horrible thing to do, to oneself as much as to her? Her poor ghost, that ached, and never had a real body! It’s not so easy to worship with the body. Ah, if the Church taught us *that* sacrament: *with my body I thee worship!* that would easily make up for any honouring and obeying the woman might do. But that’s why she haunts you. You ignored and disliked her body, and she was only a living ghost. Now she wails in the afterworld, like a still-wincing nerve.”

The Colonel hung his head, slowly pondering. Pondering with all his body. His young wife watched the sunken, bald head in a kind of stupor. His day seemed so far from her day. Carlotta had lifted her face; she was beautiful again, with the tender before-dawn freshness of a new understanding.

She was watching Luke, and it was obvious he was another man to her. The man she knew, the Luke who was her husband was gone, and this other strange, uncanny creature had taken his place. She was filled with wonder. Could one so change, as to become another creature entirely? Ah, if it were so! If she herself could cease to be! If that woman who was married to Luke, married to him in an intimacy of misfortune that was like a horror, could only cease to be, and let a new, delicately-wild Carlotta take her place!

“It may be,” said the Colonel, lifting his head. “It may be.” There seemed to

come a relief over his soul, as he realised. "I didn't worship her with my body. I think maybe I worshipped other women that way; but maybe I never did. But I thought I was good to her. And I thought she didn't want it."

"It's no good thinking. We all want it," asserted Luke. "And before we die, we know it. I say, before we die. It may be after. But everybody wants it, let them say and do what they will. Don't you agree, Morier?"

I was startled when he spoke to me. I had been thinking of Carlotta: how she was looking like a girl again, as she used to look at the Thwaite, when she painted cactuses-in-a-pot. Only now, a certain rigidity of the will had left her, so that she looked even younger than when I first knew her, having now a virginal, flower-like *stillness* which she had not had then. I had always believed that people could be born again: if they would only let themselves.

"I'm sure they do," I said to Luke.

But I was thinking, if people were born again, the old circumstances would not fit the new body.

"What about yourself, Luke?" said Carlotta abruptly.

"I!" he exclaimed, and the scarlet showed in his cheek. "I! I'm not fit to be spoken about. I've been moaning like the ghost of disembodiment myself, ever since I became a man."

The Colonel said never a word. He hardly listened. He was pondering, pondering. In this way, he, too, was a brave man.

"I have an idea what you mean," he said. "There's no denying it, I didn't like her body. And now, I suppose it's too late."

He looked up bleakly: in a way, willing to be condemned, since he knew vaguely that something was wrong. Anything better than the blind torture.

"Oh, I don't know," said Luke. "Why don't you, even now, love her a little with your real heart? Poor disembodied thing! Why don't you take her to your warm heart, even now, and comfort her inside there? Why don't you be kind to her poor ghost, bodily?"

The Colonel did not answer. He was gazing fixedly at Luke. Then he turned, and dropped his head, alone in a deep silence. Then, deliberately, but not lifting his head, he pulled open his dressing-gown at the breast, unbuttoned the top of his pyjama jacket, and sat perfectly still, his breast showing white and very pure, so much younger and purer than his averted face. He breathed with difficulty, his white breast rising irregularly. But in the deep isolation where he was, slowly a gentleness of compassion came over him, moulding his elderly features with strange freshness, and softening his blue eye with a look it had never had before. Something of the tremulous gentleness of a young bridegroom had come upon him, in spite of his baldness, his silvery little moustache, the weary marks of his

face.

The passionate, compassionate soul stirred in him and was pure, his youth flowered over his face and eyes.

We sat very still, moved also in the spirit of compassion. There seemed a presence in the air, almost a smell of blossom, as if time had opened and gave off the perfume of spring. The Colonel gazed in silence into space, his smooth white chest, with the few dark hairs, open and rising and sinking with life.

Meanwhile his dark-faced young wife watched as if from afar. The youngness that was on him was not for her.

I knew that Lady Lathkill would come. I could feel her far off in her room, stirring and sending forth her rays. Swiftly I steeled myself to be in readiness. When the door opened I rose and walked across the room.

She entered with characteristic noiselessness, peering in round the door, with her crest of white hair, before she ventured bodily in. The Colonel looked at her swiftly, and swiftly covered his breast, holding his hand at his bosom, clutching the silk of his robe.

“I was afraid,” she murmured, “that Colonel Hale might be in trouble.”

“No,” said I. “We are all sitting very peacefully. There is no trouble.”

Lord Lathkill also rose.

“No trouble at all, I assure you, mother!” he said.

Lady Lathkill glanced at us both, then turned heavily to the Colonel.

“She is unhappy tonight?” she asked.

The Colonel winced.

“No,” he said hurriedly. “No, I don’t think so.” He looked up at her with shy, wincing eyes.

“Tell me what I can do,” she said in a very low tone, bending towards him.

“Our ghost is walking tonight, mother,” said Lord Lathkill. “Haven’t you felt the air of spring, and smelt the plum-blossom? Don’t you feel us all young? Our ghost is walking, to bring Lucy home. The Colonel’s breast is quite extraordinary, white as plum-blossom, mother, younger-looking than mine, and he’s already taken Lucy into his bosom, in his breast, where he breathes like the wind among trees. The Colonel’s breast is white and extraordinarily beautiful, mother. I don’t wonder poor Lucy yearned for it, to go home into it at last. It’s like going into an orchard of plum-blossom for a ghost.”

His mother looked round at him, then back at the Colonel, who was still clutching his hand over his chest, as if protecting something.

“You see, I didn’t understand where I’d been wrong,” he said, looking up at her imploringly. “I never realised that it was my body which had not been good to her.”

Lady Lathkill curved sideways to watch him. But her power was gone. His face had come smooth with the tender glow of compassionate life, that flowers again. She could not get at him.

“It’s no good, mother. You know our ghost is walking. She’s supposed to be absolutely like a crocus, if you know what I mean: harbinger of spring in the earth. So it says in my great-grandfather’s diary: for she rises with silence like a crocus at the feet, and violets in the hollows of the heart come out. For she is of the feet and the hands, the thighs and breast, the face and the all-concealing belly, and her name is silent, but her odour is of spring, and her contact is the all-in-all.” He was quoting from his great-grandfather’s diary, which only the sons of the family read. And as he quoted he rose curiously on his toes, and spread his fingers, bringing his hands together till the finger-tips touched. His father had done that before him, when he was deeply moved.

Lady Lathkill sat down heavily in the chair next the Colonel.

“How do you feel?” she asked him, in a secretive mutter.

He looked round at her, with the large blue eyes of candour.

“I never knew what was wrong,” he said, a little nervously. “She only wanted to be looked after a bit, not to be a homeless, houseless ghost. It’s all right! She’s all right here.” He pressed his clutched hand on his breast. “It’s all right; it’s all right. She’ll be all right now.”

He rose, a little fantastic in his brocade gown, but once more manly, candid, and sober.

“With your permission,” he said, “I will retire.” — He made a little bow. — “I am glad you helped me. I didn’t know — didn’t know.”

But the change in him, and his secret wondering were so strong in him, he went out of the room scarcely being aware of us.

Lord Lathkill threw up his arms, and stretched quivering.

“Oh, pardon, pardon,” he said, seeming, as he stretched, quivering, to grow bigger and almost splendid, sending out rays of fire to the dark young woman. “Oh, mother, thank you for my limbs, and my body! Oh, mother, thank you for my knees and my shoulders at this moment! Oh, mother, thank you that my body is straight and alive! Oh, mother, torrents of spring, torrents of spring, whoever said that?”

“Don’t you forget yourself, my boy?” said his mother.

“Oh no, dear no! Oh, mother dear, a man has to be in love in his thighs, the way you ride a horse. Why don’t we stay in love that way all our lives? Why do we turn into corpses with consciousness? Oh, mother of my body, thank you for my body, you strange woman with white hair! I don’t know much about you, but my body came from you, so thank you, my dear. I shall think of you tonight!”

“Hadn’t we better go?” she said, beginning to tremble.

“Why, yes,” he said, turning and looking strangely at the dark woman. “Yes, let us go; let us go!”

Carlotta gazed at him, then, with strange, heavy, searching look, at me. I smiled to her, and she looked away. The dark young woman looked over her shoulder as she went out. Lady Lathkill hurried past her son, with head ducked. But still he laid his hand on her shoulder, and she stopped dead.

“Good night, mother; mother of my face and my thighs. Thank you for the night to come, dear mother of my body.”

She glanced up at him rapidly, nervously, then hurried away. He stared after her, then switched off the light.

“Funny old mother!” he said. “I never realised before that she was the mother of my shoulders and my hips, as well as my brain. Mother of my thighs!”

He switched off some of the lights as we went, accompanying me to my room.

“You know,” he said, “I can understand that the Colonel is happy, now the forlorn ghost of Lucy is comforted in his heart. After all, he married her! And she must be content at last: he has a beautiful chest, don’t you think? Together they will sleep well. And then he will begin to live the life of the living again. How friendly the house feels tonight! But, after all, it is my old home. And the smell of plum-blossom — don’t you notice it? It is our ghost, in silence like a crocus. There, your fire has died down! But it’s a nice room! I hope our ghost will come to you. I think she will. Don’t speak to her. It makes her go away. She, too, is a ghost of silence. We talk far too much. But now I am going to be silent too, and a ghost of silence. Good night!”

He closed the door softly and was gone. And softly, in silence, I took off my things. I was thinking of Carlotta, and a little sadly, perhaps, because of the power of circumstance over us. This night I could have worshipped her with my body, and she, perhaps, was stripped in the body to be worshipped. But it was not for me, at this hour, to fight against circumstances.

I had fought too much, even against the most imposing circumstances, to use any more violence for love. Desire is a sacred thing, and should not be violated.

“Hush!” I said to myself. “I will sleep, and the ghost of my silence can go forth, in the subtle body of desire, to meet that which is coming to meet it. Let my ghost go forth, and let me not interfere. There are many intangible meetings, and unknown fulfilments of desire.”

So I went softly to sleep, as I wished to, without interfering with the warm, crocus-like ghost of my body.

And I must have gone far, far down the intricate galleries of sleep, to the very heart of the world. For I know I passed on beyond the strata of images and

words, beyond the iron veins of memory, and even the jewels of rest, to sink in the final dark like a fish, dumb, soundless, and imageless, yet alive and swimming.

And at the very core of the deep night the ghost came to me, at the heart of the ocean of oblivion, which is also the heart of life. Beyond hearing, or even knowledge of contact, I met her and knew her. How I know it I don't know. Yet I know it with eyeless, wingless knowledge.

For man in the body is formed through countless ages, and at the centre is the speck, or spark upon which all his formation has taken place. It is even not himself, deep beyond his many depths. Deep from him calls to deep. And according as deep answers deep, man glistens and surpasses himself.

Beyond all the pearly mufflings of consciousness, of age upon age of consciousness, deep calls yet to deep, and sometimes is answered. It is calling and answering, new-awakened God calling within the deep of man, and new God calling answer from the other deep. And sometimes the other deep is a woman, as it was with me, when my ghost came.

Women were not unknown to me. But never before had woman come, in the depths of night, to answer my deep with her deep. As the ghost came, came as a ghost of silence, still in the depth of sleep.

I know she came. I know she came even as a woman, to my man. But the knowledge is darkly naked as the event. I only know, it was so. In the deep of sleep a call was called from the deeps of me, and answered in the deeps, by a woman among women. Breasts or thighs or face. I remember not a touch, no, nor a movement of my own. It is all complete in the profundity of darkness. Yet I know it was so.

I awoke towards dawn, from far, far away. I was vaguely conscious of drawing nearer and nearer, as the sun must have been drawing towards the horizon, from the complete beyond. Till at last the faint pallor of mental consciousness coloured my waking.

And then I was aware of a pervading scent, as of plum-blossom, and a sense of extraordinary silkiness — though where, and in what contact, I could not say. It was as the first blemish of dawn.

And even with so slight a conscious registering, *it* seemed to disappear. Like a whale that has sounded to the bottomless seas. That knowledge of *it*, which was the mating of the ghost and me, disappeared from me, in its rich weight of certainty, as the scent of the plum-blossom moved down the lanes of my consciousness, and my limbs stirred in a silkiness for which I have no comparison.

As I became aware, I also became uncertain. I wanted to be certain of *it*, to

have definite evidence. And as I sought for evidence, *it* disappeared, my perfect knowledge was gone. I no longer knew in full.

Now as the daylight slowly amassed, in the windows from which I had put back the shutters, I sought in myself for evidence, and in the room.

But I shall never know. I shall never know if it was a ghost, some sweet spirit from the innermost of the ever-deepening cosmos; or a woman, a very woman, as the silkiness of my limbs seems to attest; or a dream, a hallucination! I shall never know. Because I went away from Riddings in the morning on account of the sudden illness of Lady Lathkill.

“You will come again,” Luke said to me. “And in any case, you will never really go away from us.”

“Good-bye,” she said to me. “At last it was perfect!”

She seemed so beautiful, when I left her, as if it were the ghost again, and I was far down the deeps of consciousness.

The following autumn, when I was overseas once more, I had a letter from Lord Lathkill. He wrote very rarely.

“Carlotta has a son,” he said, “and I an heir. He has yellow hair, like a little crocus, and one of the young plum trees in the orchard has come out of all season into blossom. To me he is flesh and blood of our ghost itself. Even mother doesn’t look over the wall, to the other side, any more. It’s all this side for her now.

“So our family refuses to die out, by the grace of our ghost. We are calling him Gabriel.

“Dorothy Hale also is a mother, three days before Carlotta. She has a black lamb of a daughter, called Gabrielle. By the bleat of the little thing, I know its father. Our own is a blue-eyed one, with the dangerous repose of a pugilist. I have no fears of our family misfortune for him, ghost-begotten and ready-fisted.

“The Colonel is very well, quiet, and self-possessed. He is farming in Wiltshire, raising pigs. It is a passion with him, the *crème de la crème* of swine. I admit, he has golden sows as elegant as a young Diane de Poitiers, and young hogs like Perseus in the first red-gold flush of youth. He looks me in the eye, and I look him back, and we understand. He is quiet, and proud now, and very hale and hearty, raising swine *ad maiorem gloriam Dei*. A good sport!

“I am in love with this house and its inmates, including the plum-blossom-scented one, she who visited you, in all the peace. I cannot understand why you wander in uneasy and distant parts of the earth. For me, when I am at home, I am there. I have peace upon my bones, and if the world is going to come to a violent and untimely end, as prophets aver, I feel the house of Lathkill will survive, built upon our ghost. So come back, and you’ll find we shall not have gone away. . .

THE ROCKING-HORSE WINNER

There was a woman who was beautiful, who started with all the advantages, yet she had no luck. She married for love, and the love turned to dust. She had bonny children, yet she felt they had been thrust upon her, and she could not love them. They looked at her coldly, as if they were finding fault with her. And hurriedly she felt she must cover up some fault in herself. Yet what it was that she must cover up she never knew. Nevertheless, when her children were present, she always felt the centre of her heart go hard. This troubled her, and in her manner she was all the more gentle and anxious for her children, as if she loved them very much. Only she herself knew that at the centre of her heart was a hard little place that could not feel love, no, not for anybody. Everybody else said of her: "She is such a good mother. She adores her children." Only she herself, and her children themselves, knew it was not so. They read it in each other's eyes.

There were a boy and two little girls. They lived in a pleasant house, with a garden, and they had discreet servants, and felt themselves superior to anyone in the neighbourhood.

Although they lived in style, they felt always an anxiety in the house. There was never enough money. The mother had a small income, and the father had a small income, but not nearly enough for the social position which they had to keep up. The father went in to town to some office. But though he had good prospects, these prospects never materialised. There was always the grinding sense of the shortage of money, though the style was always kept up.

At last the mother said, "I will see if *I* can't make something." But she did not know where to begin. She racked her brains, and tried this thing and the other, but could not find anything successful. The failure made deep lines come into her face. Her children were growing up, they would have to go to school. There must be more money, there must be more money. The father, who was always very handsome and expensive in his tastes, seemed as if he never *would* be able to do anything worth doing. And the mother, who had a great belief in herself, did not succeed any better, and her tastes were just as expensive.

And so the house came to be haunted by the unspoken phrase: *There must be more money! There must be more money!* The children could hear it all the time, though nobody said it aloud. They heard it at Christmas, when the expensive and splendid toys filled the nursery. Behind the shining modern rocking-horse,

behind the smart doll's-house, a voice would start whispering: "There *must* be more money! There *must* be more money!" And the children would stop playing, to listen for a moment. They would look into each other's eyes, to see if they had all heard. And each one saw in the eyes of the other two that they too had heard. "There *must* be more money! There *must* be more money!"

It came whispering from the springs of the still-swaying rocking-horse, and even the horse, bending his wooden, champing head, heard it. The big doll, sitting so pink and smirking in her new pram, could hear it quite plainly, and seemed to be smirking all the more self-consciously because of it. The foolish puppy, too, that took the place of the teddy-bear, he was looking so extraordinarily foolish for no other reason but that he heard the secret whisper all over the house: "There *must* be more money."

Yet nobody ever said it aloud. The whisper was everywhere, and therefore no one spoke it. Just as no one ever says: "We are breathing!" in spite of the fact that breath is coming and going all the time.

"Mother!" said the boy Paul one day. "Why don't we keep a car of our own? Why do we always use uncle's, or else a taxi?"

"Because we're the poor members of the family," said the mother.

"But why *are* we, mother?"

"Well — I suppose," she said slowly and bitterly, "it's because your father has no luck."

The boy was silent for some time.

"Is luck money, mother?" he asked, rather timidly.

"No, Paul! Not quite. It's what causes you to have money."

"Oh!" said Paul vaguely. "I thought when Uncle Oscar said *filthy lucker*, it meant money."

"*Filthy lucre* does mean money," said the mother. "But it's lucre, not luck."

"Oh!" said the boy. "Then what *is* luck, mother?"

"It's what causes you to have money. If you're lucky you have money. That's why it's better to be born lucky than rich. If you're rich, you may lose your money. But if you're lucky, you will always get more money."

"Oh! Will you! And is father not lucky?"

"Very unlucky, I should say," she said bitterly.

The boy watched her with unsure eyes.

"Why?" he asked.

"I don't know. Nobody ever knows why one person is lucky and another unlucky."

"Don't they? Nobody at all? Does *nobody* know?"

"Perhaps God! But He never tells."

“He ought to, then. And aren’t you lucky either, mother?”

“I can’t be, if I married an unlucky husband.”

“But by yourself, aren’t you?”

“I used to think I was, before I married. Now I think I am very unlucky indeed.”

“Why?”

“Well — never mind! Perhaps I’m not really,” she said.

The child looked at her, to see if she meant it. But he saw, by the lines of her mouth, that she was only trying to hide something from him.

“Well, anyhow,” he said stoutly, “I’m a lucky person.”

“Why?” said his mother, with a sudden laugh.

He stared at her. He didn’t even know why he had said it.

“God told me,” he asserted, brazening it out.

“I hope He did, dear!” she said, again with a laugh, but rather bitter.

“He did, mother!”

“Excellent!” said the mother, using one of her husband’s exclamations.

The boy saw she did not believe him; or rather, that she paid no attention to his assertion. This angered him somewhere, and made him want to compel her attention.

He went off by himself, vaguely, in a childish way, seeking for the clue to “luck”. Absorbed, taking no heed of other people, he went about with a sort of stealth, seeking inwardly for luck. He wanted luck, he wanted it, he wanted it. When the two girls were playing dolls, in the nursery, he would sit on his big rocking-horse, charging madly into space, with a frenzy that made the little girls peer at him uneasily. Wildly the horse careered, the waving dark hair of the boy tossed, his eyes had a strange glare in them. The little girls dared not speak to him.

When he had ridden to the end of his mad little journey, he climbed down and stood in front of his rocking-horse, staring fixedly into its lowered face. Its red mouth was slightly open, its big eye was wide and glassy bright.

“Now!” he would silently command the snorting steed. “Now take me to where there is luck! Now take me!”

And he would slash the horse on the neck with the little whip he had asked Uncle Oscar for. He *knew* the horse could take him to where there was luck, if only he forced it. So he would mount again, and start on his furious ride, hoping at last to get there. He knew he could get there.

“You’ll break your horse, Paul!” said the nurse.

“He’s always riding like that! I wish he’d leave off!” said his elder sister Joan.

But he only glared down on them in silence. Nurse gave him up. She could

make nothing of him. Anyhow he was growing beyond her.

One day his mother and his Uncle Oscar came in when he was on one of his furious rides. He did not speak to them.

“Hallo! you young jockey! Riding a winner?” said his uncle.

“Aren’t you growing too big for a rocking-horse? You’re not a very little boy any longer, you know,” said his mother.

But Paul only gave a blue glare from his big, rather close-set eyes. He would speak to nobody when he was in full tilt. His mother watched him with an anxious expression on her face.

At last he suddenly stopped forcing his horse into the mechanical gallop, and slid down.

“Well, I got there!” he announced fiercely, his blue eyes still flaring, and his sturdy long legs straddling apart.

“Where did you get to?” asked his mother.

“Where I wanted to go to,” he flared back at her.

“That’s right, son!” said Uncle Oscar. “Don’t you stop till you get there. What’s the horse’s name?”

“He doesn’t have a name,” said the boy.

“Gets on without all right?” asked the uncle.

“Well, he has different names. He was called Sansovino last week.”

“Sansovino, eh? Won the Ascot. How did you know his name?”

“He always talks about horse-races with Bassett,” said Joan.

The uncle was delighted to find that his small nephew was posted with all the racing news. Bassett, the young gardener who had been wounded in the left foot in the war, and had got his present job through Oscar Cresswell, whose batman he had been, was a perfect blade of the “turf”. He lived in the racing events, and the small boy lived with him.

Oscar Cresswell got it all from Bassett.

“Master Paul comes and asks me, so I can’t do more than tell him, sir,” said Bassett, his face terribly serious, as if he were speaking of religious matters.

“And does he ever put anything on a horse he fancies?”

“Well — I don’t want to give him away — he’s a young sport, a fine sport, sir. Would you mind asking him himself? He sort of takes a pleasure in it, and perhaps he’d feel I was giving him away, sir, if you don’t mind.”

Bassett was serious as a church.

The uncle went back to his nephew, and took him off for a ride in the car.

“Say, Paul, old man, do you ever put anything on a horse?” the uncle asked.

The boy watched the handsome man closely.

“Why, do you think I oughtn’t to?” he parried.

“Not a bit of it! I thought perhaps you might give me a tip for the Lincoln.”

The car sped on into the country, going down to Uncle Oscar’s place in Hampshire.

“Honour bright?” said the nephew.

“Honour bright, son!” said the uncle.

“Well, then, Daffodil.”

“Daffodil! I doubt it, sonny. What about Mirza?”

“I only know the winner,” said the boy. “That’s Daffodil!”

“Daffodil, eh?” There was a pause. Daffodil was an obscure horse comparatively.

“Uncle!”

“Yes, son?”

“You won’t let it go any further, will you? I promised Bassett.”

“Bassett be damned, old man! What’s he got to do with it?”

“We’re partners! We’ve been partners from the first! Uncle, he lent me my first five shillings, which I lost. I promised him, honour bright, it was only between me and him: only you gave me that ten-shilling note I started winning with, so I thought you were lucky. You won’t let it go any further, will you?”

The boy gazed at his uncle from those big, hot, blue eyes, set rather close together. The uncle stirred and laughed uneasily.

“Right you are, son! I’ll keep your tip private. Daffodil, eh! How much are you putting on him?”

“All except twenty pounds,” said the boy. “I keep that in reserve.”

The uncle thought it a good joke.

“You keep twenty pounds in reserve, do you, you young romancer? What are you betting, then?”

“I’m betting three hundred,” said the boy gravely. “But it’s between you and me, Uncle Oscar! Honour bright?”

The uncle burst into a roar of laughter.

“It’s between you and me all right, you young Nat Gould,” he said, laughing. “But where’s your three hundred?”

“Bassett keeps it for me. We’re partners.”

“You are, are you! And what is Bassett putting on Daffodil?”

“He won’t go quite as high as I do, I expect. Perhaps he’ll go a hundred and fifty.”

“What, pennies?” laughed the uncle.

“Pounds,” said the child, with a surprised look at his uncle. “Bassett keeps a bigger reserve than I do.”

Between wonder and amusement, Uncle Oscar was silent. He pursued the

matter no further, but he determined to take his nephew with him to the Lincoln races.

“Now, son,” he said, “I’m putting twenty on Mirza, and I’ll put five for you on any horse you fancy. What’s your pick?”

“Daffodil, uncle!”

“No, not the fiver on Daffodil!”

“I should if it was my own fiver,” said the child.

“Good! Good! Right you are! A fiver for me and a fiver for you on Daffodil.”

The child had never been to a race-meeting before, and his eyes were blue fire. He pursed his mouth tight, and watched. A Frenchman just in front had put his money on Lancelot. Wild with excitement, he flayed his arms up and down, yelling ‘*Lancelot! Lancelot!*’ in his French accent.

Daffodil came in first, Lancelot second, Mirza third. The child, flushed and with eyes blazing, was curiously serene. His uncle brought him five five-pound notes: four to one.

“What am I to do with these?” he cried, waving them before the boy’s eyes.

“I suppose we’ll talk to Bassett,” said the boy. “I expect I have fifteen hundred now: and twenty in reserve: and this twenty.”

His uncle studied him for some moments.

“Look here, son!” he said. “You’re not serious about Bassett and that fifteen hundred, are you?”

“Yes, I am. But it’s between you and me, uncle! Honour bright!”

“Honour bright all right, son! But I must talk to Bassett.”

“If you’d like to be a partner, uncle, with Bassett and me, we could all be partners. Only you’d have to promise, honour bright, uncle, not to let it go beyond us three. Bassett and I are lucky, and you must be lucky, because it was your ten shillings I started winning with . . .”

Uncle Oscar took both Bassett and Paul into Richmond Park for an afternoon, and there they talked.

“It’s like this, you see, sir,” Bassett said. “Master Paul would get me talking about racing events, spinning yarns, you know, sir. And he was always keen on knowing if I’d made or if I’d lost. It’s about a year since, now, that I put five shillings on Blush of Dawn for him: and we lost. Then the luck turned, with that ten shillings he had from you: that we put on Singhalese. And since that time, it’s been pretty steady, all things considering. What do you say, Master Paul?”

“We’re all right when we’re *sure*,” said Paul. “It’s when we’re not quite sure that we go down.”

“Oh, but we’re careful then,” said Bassett.

“But when are you *sure*?” smiled Uncle Oscar.

“It’s Master Paul, sir,” said Bassett, in a secret, religious voice. “It’s as if he had it from heaven. Like Daffodil now, for the Lincoln. That was as sure as eggs.”

“Did you put anything on Daffodil?” asked Oscar Cresswell.

“Yes, sir. I made my bit.”

“And my nephew?”

Bassett was obstinately silent, looking at Paul.

“I made twelve hundred, didn’t I, Bassett? I told uncle I was putting three hundred on Daffodil.”

“That’s right,” said Bassett, nodding.

“But where’s the money?” asked the uncle.

“I keep it safe locked up, sir. Master Paul, he can have it any minute he likes to ask for it.”

“What, fifteen hundred pounds?”

“And twenty! And *forty*, that is, with the twenty he made on the course.”

“It’s amazing!” said the uncle.

“If Master Paul offers you to be partners, sir, I would, if I were you: if you’ll excuse me,” said Bassett.

Oscar Cresswell thought about it.

“I’ll see the money,” he said.

They drove home again, and sure enough, Bassett came round to the garden-house with fifteen hundred pounds in notes. The twenty pounds reserve was left with Joe Glee, in the Turf Commission deposit.

“You see, it’s all right, uncle, when I’m *sure*! Then we go strong, for all we’re worth. Don’t we, Bassett?”

“We do that, Master Paul.”

“And when are you sure?” said the uncle, laughing.

“Oh, well, sometimes I’m *absolutely* sure, like about Daffodil,” said the boy; “and sometimes I have an idea; and sometimes I haven’t even an idea, have I, Bassett? Then we’re careful, because we mostly go down.”

“You do, do you! And when you’re sure, like about Daffodil, what makes you sure, sonny?”

“Oh, well, I don’t know,” said the boy uneasily. “I’m sure, you know, uncle; that’s all.”

“It’s as if he had it from heaven, sir,” Bassett reiterated.

“I should say so!” said the uncle.

But he became a partner. And when the Leger was coming on, Paul was “sure” about Lively Spark, which was a quite inconsiderable horse. The boy insisted on putting a thousand on the horse, Bassett went for five hundred, and

Oscar Cresswell two hundred. Lively Spark came in first, and the betting had been ten to one against him. Paul had made ten thousand.

“You see,” he said, “I was absolutely sure of him.”

Even Oscar Cresswell had cleared two thousand.

“Look here, son,” he said, “this sort of thing makes me nervous.”

“It needn’t, uncle! Perhaps I shan’t be sure again for a long time.”

“But what are you going to do with your money?” asked the uncle.

“Of course,” said the boy, “I started it for mother. She said she had no luck, because father is unlucky, so I thought if *I* was lucky, it might stop whispering.”

“What might stop whispering?”

“Our house! I *hate* our house for whispering.”

“What does it whisper?”

“Why — why” — the boy fidgeted — “why, I don’t know! But it’s always short of money, you know, uncle.”

“I know it, son, I know it.”

“You know people send mother writs, don’t you, uncle?”

“I’m afraid I do,” said the uncle.

“And then the house whispers like people laughing at you behind your back. It’s awful, that is! I thought if I was lucky — ”

“You might stop it,” added the uncle.

The boy watched him with big blue eyes, that had an uncanny cold fire in them, and he said never a word.

“Well then!” said the uncle. “What are we doing?”

“I shouldn’t like mother to know I was lucky,” said the boy.

“Why not, son?”

“She’d stop me.”

“I don’t think she would.”

“Oh!” — and the boy writhed in an odd way — “I *don’t* want her to know, uncle.”

“All right, son! We’ll manage it without her knowing.”

They managed it very easily. Paul, at the other’s suggestion, handed over five thousand pounds to his uncle, who deposited it with the family lawyer, who was then to inform Paul’s mother that a relative had put five thousand pounds into his hands, which sum was to be paid out a thousand pounds at a time, on the mother’s birthday, for the next five years.

“So she’ll have a birthday present of a thousand pounds for five successive years,” said Uncle Oscar. “I hope it won’t make it all the harder for her later.”

Paul’s mother had her birthday in November. The house had been “whispering” worse than ever lately, and even in spite of his luck, Paul could not

bear up against it. He was very anxious to see the effect of the birthday letter, telling his mother about the thousand pounds.

When there were no visitors, Paul now took his meals with his parents, as he was beyond the nursery control. His mother went into town nearly every day. She had discovered that she had an odd knack of sketching furs and dress materials, so she worked secretly in the studio of a friend who was the chief “artist” for the leading drapers. She drew the figures of ladies in furs and ladies in silk and sequins for the newspaper advertisements. This young woman artist earned several thousand pounds a year, but Paul’s mother only made several hundreds, and she was again dissatisfied. She so wanted to be first in something, and she did not succeed, even in making sketches for drapery advertisements.

She was down to breakfast on the morning of her birthday. Paul watched her face as she read her letters. He knew the lawyer’s letter. As his mother read it, her face hardened and became more expressionless. Then a cold, determined look came on her mouth. She hid the letter under the pile of others, and said not a word about it.

“Didn’t you have anything nice in the post for your birthday, mother?” said Paul.

“Quite moderately nice,” she said, her voice cold and absent.

She went away to town without saying more.

But in the afternoon Uncle Oscar appeared. He said Paul’s mother had had a long interview with the lawyer, asking if the whole five thousand could not be advanced at once, as she was in debt.

“What do you think, uncle?” said the boy.

“I leave it to you, son.”

“Oh, let her have it, then! We can get some more with the other,” said the boy.

“A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush, laddie!” said Uncle Oscar.

“But I’m sure to *know* for the Grand National; or the Lincolnshire; or else the Derby. I’m sure to know for *one* of them,” said Paul.

So Uncle Oscar signed the agreement, and Paul’s mother touched the whole five thousand. Then something very curious happened. The voices in the house suddenly went mad, like a chorus of frogs on a spring evening. There were certain new furnishings, and Paul had a tutor. He was *really* going to Eton, his father’s school, in the following autumn. There were flowers in the winter, and a blossoming of the luxury Paul’s mother had been used to. And yet the voices in the house, behind the sprays of mimosa and almond-blossom, and from under the piles of iridescent cushions, simply trilled and screamed in a sort of ecstasy: “There *must* be more money! Oh-h-h! There *must* be more money! Oh, now, now-w! now-w-w — there *must* be more money! — more than ever! More than

ever!”

It frightened Paul terribly. He studied away at his Latin and Greek with his tutors. But his intense hours were spent with Bassett. The Grand National had gone by: he had not “known”, and had lost a hundred pounds. Summer was at hand. He was in agony for the Lincoln. But even for the Lincoln he didn’t “know”, and he lost fifty pounds. He became wild-eyed and strange, as if something were going to explode in him.

“Let it alone, son! Don’t you bother about it!” urged Uncle Oscar. But it was as if the boy couldn’t really hear what his uncle was saying.

“I’ve got to know for the Derby! I’ve *got* to know for the Derby!” the child reiterated, his big blue eyes blazing with a sort of madness.

His mother noticed how overwrought he was.

“You’d better go to the seaside. Wouldn’t you like to go now to the seaside, instead of waiting? I think you’d better,” she said, looking down at him anxiously, her heart curiously heavy because of him.

But the child lifted his uncanny blue eyes.

“I couldn’t possibly go before the Derby, mother!” he said. “I couldn’t possibly!”

“Why not?” she said, her voice becoming heavy when she was opposed. “Why not? You can still go from the seaside to see the Derby with your Uncle Oscar, if that’s what you wish. No need for you to wait here. Besides, I think you care too much about these races. It’s a bad sign. My family has been a gambling family, and you won’t know till you grow up how much damage it has done. But it has done damage. I shall have to send Bassett away, and ask Uncle Oscar not to talk racing to you, unless you promise to be reasonable about it: go away to the seaside and forget it. You’re all nerves!”

“I’ll do what you like, mother, so long as you don’t send me away till after the Derby,” the boy said.

“Send you away from where? Just from this house?”

“Yes,” he said, gazing at her.

“Why, you curious child, what makes you care about this house so much, suddenly? I never knew you loved it!”

He gazed at her without speaking. He had a secret within a secret, something he had not divulged, even to Bassett or to his Uncle Oscar.

But his mother, after standing undecided and a little bit sullen for some moments, said:

“Very well, then! Don’t go to the seaside till after the Derby, if you don’t wish it. But promise me you won’t let your nerves go to pieces! Promise you won’t think so much about horse-racing and *events*, as you call them!”

“Oh no!” said the boy, casually. “I won’t think much about them, mother. You needn’t worry. I wouldn’t worry, mother, if I were you.”

“If you were me and I were you,” said his mother, “I wonder what we *should* do!”

“But you know you needn’t worry, mother, don’t you?” the boy repeated.

“I should be awfully glad to know it,” she said wearily.

“Oh, well, you *can*, you know. I mean you *ought* to know you needn’t worry!” he insisted.

“Ought I? Then I’ll see about it,” she said.

Paul’s secret of secrets was his wooden horse, that which had no name. Since he was emancipated from a nurse and a nursery governess, he had had his rocking-horse removed to his own bedroom at the top of the house.

“Surely you’re too big for a rocking-horse!” his mother had remonstrated.

“Well, you see, mother, till I can have a *real* horse, I like to have *some* sort of animal about,” had been his quaint answer.

“Do you feel he keeps you company?” she laughed.

“Oh yes! He’s very good, he always keeps me company, when I’m there,” said Paul.

So the horse, rather shabby, stood in an arrested prance in the boy’s bedroom.

The Derby was drawing near, and the boy grew more and more tense. He hardly heard what was spoken to him, he was very frail, and his eyes were really uncanny. His mother had sudden strange seizures of uneasiness about him. Sometimes, for half an hour, she would feel a sudden anxiety about him that was almost anguish. She wanted to rush to him at once, and know he was safe.

Two nights before the Derby, she was at a big party in town, when one of her rushes of anxiety about her boy, her first-born, gripped her heart till she could hardly speak. She fought with the feeling, might and main, for she believed in common-sense. But it was too strong. She had to leave the dance and go downstairs to telephone to the country. The children’s nursery governess was terribly surprised and startled at being rung up in the night.

“Are the children all right, Miss Wilmot?”

“Oh yes, they are quite all right.”

“Master Paul? Is he all right?”

“He went to bed as right as a trivet. Shall I run up and look at him?”

“No!” said Paul’s mother reluctantly. “No! Don’t trouble. It’s all right. Don’t sit up. We shall be home fairly soon.” She did not want her son’s privacy intruded upon.

“Very good,” said the governess.

It was about one o’clock when Paul’s mother and father drove up to their

house. All was still. Paul's mother went to her room and slipped off her white fur cloak. She had told her maid not to wait up for her. She heard her husband downstairs, mixing a whisky-and-soda.

And then, because of the strange anxiety at her heart, she stole upstairs to her son's room. Noiselessly she went along the upper corridor. Was there a faint noise? What was it?

She stood, with arrested muscles, outside his door, listening. There was a strange, heavy, and yet not loud noise. Her heart stood still. It was a soundless noise, yet rushing and powerful. Something huge, in violent, hushed motion. What was it? What in God's Name was it? She ought to know. She felt that she *knew* the noise. She knew what it was.

Yet she could not place it. She couldn't say what it was. And on and on it went, like a madness.

Softly, frozen with anxiety and fear, she turned the door-handle.

The room was dark. Yet in the space near the window, she heard and saw something plunging to and fro. She gazed in fear and amazement.

Then suddenly she switched on the light, and saw her son, in his green pyjamas, madly surging on his rocking-horse. The blaze of light suddenly lit him up, as he urged the wooden horse, and lit her up, as she stood, blonde, in her dress of pale green and crystal, in the doorway.

"Paul!" she cried. "Whatever are you doing?"

"It's Malabar!" he screamed, in a powerful, strange voice. "It's Malabar!"

His eyes blazed at her for one strange and senseless second, as he ceased urging his wooden horse. Then he fell with a crash to the ground, and she, all her tormented motherhood flooding upon her, rushed to gather him up.

But he was unconscious, and unconscious he remained, with some brain-fever. He talked and tossed, and his mother sat stonily by his side.

"Malabar! It's Malabar! Bassett, Bassett, I *know*: it's Malabar!"

So the child cried, trying to get up and urge the rocking-horse that gave him his inspiration.

"What does he mean by Malabar?" asked the heart-frozen mother.

"I don't know," said the father, stonily.

"What does he mean by Malabar?" she asked her brother Oscar.

"It's one of the horses running for the Derby," was the answer.

And, in spite of himself, Oscar Cresswell spoke to Bassett, and himself put a thousand on Malabar: at fourteen to one.

The third day of the illness was critical: they were watching for a change. The boy, with his rather long, curly hair, was tossing ceaselessly on the pillow. He neither slept nor regained consciousness, and his eyes were like blue stones. His

mother sat, feeling her heart had gone, turned actually into a stone.

In the evening, Oscar Cresswell did not come, but Bassett sent a message, saying could he come up for one moment, just one moment? Paul's mother was very angry at the intrusion, but on second thoughts she agreed. The boy was the same. Perhaps Bassett might bring him to consciousness.

The gardener, a shortish fellow with a little brown moustache and sharp little brown eyes, tiptoed into the room, touched his imaginary cap to Paul's mother, and stole to the bedside, staring with glittering, smallish eyes at the tossing, dying child.

"Master Paul!" he whispered. "Master Paul! Malabar came in first all right, a clean win. I did as you told me. You've made over seventy thousand pounds, you have; you've got over eighty thousand. Malabar came in all right, Master Paul."

"Malabar! Malabar! Did I say Malabar, mother? Did I say Malabar? Do you think I'm lucky, mother? I knew Malabar, didn't I? Over eighty thousand pounds! I call that lucky, don't you, mother? Over eighty thousand pounds! I knew, didn't I know I knew? Malabar came in all right. If I ride my horse till I'm sure, then I tell you, Basset, you can go as high as you like. Did you go for all you were worth, Bassett?"

"I went a thousand on it, Master Paul."

"I never told you, mother, that if I can ride my horse, and *get there*, then I'm absolutely sure — oh, absolutely! Mother, did I ever tell you? I *am* lucky!"

"No, you never did," said the mother.

But the boy died in the night.

And even as he lay dead, his mother heard her brother's voice saying to her: "My God, Hester, you're eighty-odd thousand to the good, and a poor devil of a son to the bad. But, poor devil, poor devil, he's best gone out of a life where he rides his rocking-horse to find a winner."

MERCURY

IT was Sunday, and very hot. The holiday-makers flocked to the hill of Mercury, to rise two thousand feet above the steamy haze of the valleys. For the summer had been very wet, and the sudden heat covered the land in hot steam.

Every time it made the ascent, the funicular was crowded. It hauled itself up the steep incline, that towards the top looked almost perpendicular, the steel thread of the rails in the gulf of pine-trees hanging like an iron rope against a wall. The women held their breath, and didn't look. Or they looked back towards the sinking levels of the river, steamed and dim, far-stretching over the frontier.

When you arrived at the top, there was nothing to do. The hill was a pine-covered cone; paths wound between the high tree-trunks, and you could walk round and see the glimpses of the world all round, all round: the dim, far river-plain, with a dull glint of the great stream, to westwards; southwards the black, forest-covered, agile-looking hills, with emerald-green clearings and a white house or two; east, the inner valley, with two villages, factory chimneys, pointed churches, and hills beyond; and north, the steep hills of forest, with reddish crags and reddish castle ruins. The hot sun burned overhead, and all was in steam.

Only on the very summit of the hill there was a tower, an outlook tower; a long restaurant with its beer-garden, all the little yellow tables standing their round disks under the horse-chestnut trees; then a bit of a rock-garden on the slope. But the great trees began again in wilderness a few yards off.

The Sunday crowd came up in waves from the funicular. In waves they ebbed through the beer-garden. But not many sat down to drink. Nobody was spending any money. Some paid to go up the outlook tower, to look down on a world of vapours and black, agile-crouching hills, and half-cooked towns. Then everybody dispersed along the paths, to sit among the trees in the cool air.

There was not a breath of wind. Lying and looking upwards at the shaggy, barbaric middle-world of the pine trees, it was difficult to decide whether the pure high trunks supported the upper thicket of darkness, or whether they descended from it like great cords stretched downwards. Anyhow, in between the tree-top world and the earth-world went the wonderful clean cords of innumerable proud tree-trunks, clear as rain. And as you watched, you saw that the upper world was faintly moving, faintly, most faintly swaying, with a circular movement, though the lower trunks were utterly motionless and monolithic.

There was nothing to do. In all the world, there was nothing to do, and nothing to be done. Why have we all come to the top of the Merkur? There is nothing for us to do.

What matter? We have come a stride beyond the world. Let it steam and cook its half-baked reality below there. On the hill of Mercury we take no notice. Even we do not trouble to wander and pick the fat, blue, sourish bilberries. Just lie and see the rain-pure tree-trunks like chords of music between two worlds.

The hours pass by: people wander and disappear and reappear. All is hot and quiet. Humanity is rarely boisterous any more. You go for a drink: finches run among the few people at the tables: everybody glances at everybody, but with remoteness.

There is nothing to do but to return and lie down under the pine trees. Nothing to do. But why do anything, anyhow? The desire to do anything has gone. The tree-trunks, living like rain, they are quite active enough.

At the foot of the obsolete tower there is an old tablet-stone with a very much battered Mercury, in relief. There is also an altar, or votive stone, both from the Roman times. The Romans are supposed to have worshipped Mercury on the summit. The battered god, with his round sun-head, looks very hollow-eyed and unimpressive in the purplish-red sandstone of the district. And no one any more will throw grains of offering in the hollow of the votive stone: also common, purplish-red sandstone, very local and un-Roman.

The Sunday people do not even look. Why should they? They keep passing on into the pine trees. And many sit on the benches; many lie upon the long chairs. It is very hot, in the afternoon, and very still.

Till there seems a faint whistling in the tops of the pine trees, and out of the universal semi-consciousness of the afternoon arouses a bristling uneasiness. The crowd is astir, looking at the sky. And sure enough, there is a great flat blackness reared up in the western sky, curled with white wisps and loose breast-feathers. It looks very sinister, as only the elements still can look. Under the sudden weird whistling of the upper pine trees, there is a subdued babble and calling of frightened voices.

They want to get down; the crowd want to get down off the hill of Mercury, before the storm comes. At any price to get off the hill! They stream towards the funicular, while the sky blackens with incredible rapidity. And as the crowd presses down towards the little station, the first blaze of lightning opens out, followed immediately by a crash of thunder, and great darkness. In one strange movement, the crowd takes refuge in the deep veranda of the restaurant, pressing among the little tables in silence. There is no rain, and no definite wind, only a sudden coldness which makes the crowd press closer.

They press closer, in the darkness and the suspense. They have become curiously unified, the crowd, as if they had fused into one body. As the air sends a chill waft under the veranda the voices murmur plaintively, like birds under leaves, the bodies press closer together, seeking shelter in contact.

The gloom, dark as night, seems to continue a long time. Then suddenly the lightning dances white on the floor, dances and shakes upon the ground, up and down, and lights up the white striding of a man, lights him up only to the hips, white and naked and striding, with fire on his heels. He seems to be hurrying, this fiery man whose upper half is invisible, and at his naked heels white little flames seem to flutter. His flat, powerful thighs, his legs white as fire stride rapidly across the open, in front of the veranda, dragging little white flames at the ankles, with the movement. He is going somewhere, swiftly.

In the great bang of the thunder the apparition disappears. The earth moves, and the house jumps in complete darkness. A faint whimpering of terror comes from the crowd, as the cold air swirls in. But still, upon the darkness, there is no rain. There is no relief: a long wait.

Brilliant and blinding, the lightning falls again; a strange bruising thud comes from the forest, as all the little tables and the secret tree-trunks stand for one unnatural second exposed. Then the blow of the thunder, under which the house and the crowd reel as under an explosion. The storm is playing directly upon the Merkur. A belated sound of tearing branches comes out of the forest.

And again the white splash of the lightning on the ground: but nothing moves. And again the long, rattling, instantaneous volleying of the thunder, in the darkness.

The crowd is panting with fear, as the lightning again strikes white, and something again seems to burst, in the forest, as the thunder crashes.

At last, into the motionlessness of the storm, in rushes the wind, with the fiery flying of bits of ice, and the sudden sea-like roaring of the pine trees. The crowd winces and draws back, as the bits of ice hit in the face like fire. The roar of the trees is so great, it becomes like another silence. And through it is heard the crashing and splintering of timber, as the hurricane concentrates upon the hill.

Down comes the hail, in a roar that covers every other sound, threshing ponderously upon the ground and the roofs and the trees. And as the crowd surges irresistibly into the interior of the building, from the crushing of this ice-fall, still amid the sombre hoarseness sounds the tinkle and crackle of things breaking.

After an eternity of dread, it ends suddenly. Outside is a faint gleam of yellow light, over the snow and the endless debris of twigs and things broken. It is very cold, with the atmosphere of ice and deep winter. The forest looks wan, above

the white earth, where the ice-balls lie in their myriads, six inches deep, littered with all the twigs and things they have broken.

‘Yes! Yes!’ say the men, taking sudden courage as the yellow light comes into the air. ‘Now we can go!’

The first brave ones emerge, picking up the big hail-stones, pointing to the overthrown tables. Some, however, do not linger. They hurry to the funicular station, to see if the apparatus is still working.

The funicular station is on the north side of the hill. The men come back, saying there is no one there. The crowd begins to emerge upon the wet, crunching whiteness of the hail, spreading around in curiosity, waiting for the men who operate the funicular.

On the south side of the outlook tower two bodies lay in the cold but thawing hail. The dark-blue of the uniforms showed blackish. Both men were dead. But the lightning had completely removed the clothing from the legs of one man, so that he was naked from the hips down. There he lay, his face sideways on the snow, and two drops of blood running from his nose into his big, blond, military moustache. He lay there near the votive stone of the Mercury. His companion, a young man, lay face downwards, a few yards behind him.

The sun began to emerge. The crowd gazed in dread, afraid to touch the bodies of the men. Why had they, the dead funicular men, come round to this side of the hill, anyhow?

The funicular would not work. Something had happened to it in the storm. The crowd began to wind down the bare hill, on the sloppy ice. Everywhere the earth bristled with broken pine boughs and twigs. But the bushes and the leafy trees were stripped absolutely bare, to a miracle. The lower earth was leafless and naked as in winter.

‘Absolute winter!’ murmured the crowd, as they hurried, frightened, down the steep, winding descent, extricating themselves from the fallen pine-branches.

Meanwhile the sun began to steam in great heat.

IN LOVE

“Well, my dear!” said Henrietta. “If I had such a worried look on my face, when I was going down to spend the weekend with the man I was engaged to — and going to be married to in a month — well! I should either try and change my face, or hide my feelings, or something.”

“You shut up!” said Hester curtly. “Don’t look at my face, if it doesn’t please you.”

“Now, my dear Hester, don’t go into one of your tempers! Just look in the mirror, and you’ll see what I mean.”

“Who cares what you mean! You’re not responsible for my face,” said Hester desperately, showing no intention of looking in the mirror, or of otherwise following her sister’s kind advice.

Henrietta, being the younger sister, and mercifully unengaged, hummed a tune lightly. She was only twenty-one, and had not the faintest intention of jeopardising her peace of mind by accepting any sort of fatal ring. Nevertheless, it *was* nice to see Hester “getting off”, as they say; for Hester was nearly twenty-five, which is serious.

The worst of it was, lately Hester had had her famous “worried” look on her face, when it was a question of the faithful Joe: dark shadows under the eyes, drawn lines down the cheeks. And when Hester looked like that, Henrietta couldn’t help feeling the most horrid jangled echo of worry and apprehension in her own heart, and she hated it. She simply couldn’t stand that sudden feeling of fear.

“What I mean to say,” she continued, “is — that it’s jolly unfair to Joe, if you go down looking like that. Either put a better face on it, or — ” But she checked herself. She was going to say “don’t go”. But really, she did hope that Hester would go through with this marriage. Such a weight off her, Henrietta’s, mind.

“Oh, hang!” cried Hester. “Shut up!” And her dark eyes flashed a spark of fury and misgiving at the young Henrietta.

Henrietta sat down on the bed, lifted her chin, and composed her face like a meditating angel. She really was intensely fond of Hester, and the worried look was such a terribly bad sign.

“Look here, Hester!” she said. “Shall I come down to Markbury with you? *I* don’t mind, if you’d like me to.”

“My dear girl,” cried Hester in desperation, “what earthly use do you think

that would be?”

“Well, I thought it might take the edge off the intimacy, if that’s what worries you.”

Hester re-echoed with a hollow, mocking laugh.

“Don’t be such a *child*, Henrietta, really!” she said.

And Hester set off alone, down to Wiltshire, where her Joe had just started a little farm, to get married on. After being in the artillery, he had got sick and tired of business: besides, Hester would never have gone into a little suburban villa. Every woman sees her home through a wedding ring. Hester had only taken a squint through her engagement ring, so far. But Ye Gods! not Golders Green, not even Harrow!

So Joe had built a little brown wooden bungalow — largely with his own hands: and at the back was a small stream with two willows, old ones. At the sides were brown sheds, and chicken-runs. There were pigs in a hog-proof wire fence, and two cows in a field, and a horse. Joe had thirty-odd acres, with only a youth to help him. But of course, there would be Hester.

It all looked very new and tidy. Joe was a worker. He too looked rather new and tidy, very healthy and pleased with himself. He didn’t even see the “worried look”. Or if he did, he only said:

“You’re looking a bit fagged, Hester. Going up to the City takes it out of you, more than you know. You’ll be another girl down here.”

“Shan’t I just!” cried Hester.

She did like it, too! — the lots of white and yellow hens, and the pigs so full of pep! And the yellow thin blades of willow leaves showering softly down at the back of her house from the leaning old trees. She liked it awfully: especially the yellow leaves on the earth.

She told Joe she thought it was all lovely, topping, fine! And he was awfully pleased. Certainly *he* looked fit enough.

The mother of the helping youth gave them dinner at half-past twelve. The afternoon was all sunshine and little jobs to do, after she had dried the dishes for the mother of the youth.

“Not long now, miss, before you’ll be cooking at this range: and a good little range it is.”

“Not long now, no!” echoed Hester, in the hot little wooden kitchen, that was over-heated from the range.

The woman departed. After tea, the youth also departed and Joe and Hester shut up the chickens and the pigs. It was nightfall. Hester went in and made the supper, feeling somehow a bit of a fool, and Joe made a fire in the living-room, he feeling rather important and luscious.

He and Hester would be alone in the bungalow, till the youth appeared next morning. Six months ago, Hester would have enjoyed it. They were so perfectly comfortable together, he and she. They had been friends, and his family and hers had been friends for years, donkey's years. He was a perfectly decent boy, and there would never have been anything messy to fear from him. Nor from herself. Ye Gods, no!

But now, alas, since she had promised to marry him, he had made the wretched mistake of falling "in love" with her. He had never been that way before. And if she had known he would get this way now, she would have said decidedly: Let us remain friends, Joe, for this sort of thing is a come-down. Once he started cuddling and petting, she couldn't stand him. Yet she felt she ought to. She imagined she even ought to like it. Though where the *ought* came from, she could not see.

"I'm afraid, Hester," he said sadly, "you're not in love with me as I am with you."

"Hang it all!" she cried. "If I'm not, you ought to be jolly well thankful, that's all I've got to say."

Which double-barrelled remark he heard, but did not register. He never liked looking anything in the very pin-point middle of the eye. He just left it, and left all her feelings comfortably in the dark. Comfortably for him, that is.

He was extremely competent at motorcars and farming and all that sort of thing. And surely she, Hester, was as complicated as a motorcar! Surely she had as many subtle little valves and magnetos and accelerators and all the rest of it, to her make-up! If only he would try to handle *her* as carefully as he handled his car! She needed starting, as badly as ever any automobile did. Even if a car had a self-starter, the man had to give it the right twist. Hester felt she would need a lot of cranking up, if ever she was to start off on the matrimonial road with Joe. And he, the fool, just sat in a motionless car and pretended he was making heaven knows how many miles an hour.

This evening she felt really desperate. She had been quite all right doing things with him, during the afternoon, about the place. Then she liked being with him. But now that it was evening and they were alone, the stupid little room, the cosy fire, Joe, Joe's pipe, and Joe's smug sort of hypocritical face, all was just too much for her.

"Come and sit here, dear," said Joe persuasively, patting the sofa at his side. And she, because she believed a *nice* girl would have been only too delighted to go and sit "there", went and sat beside him. But she was boiling. What cheek! What cheek of him even to have a sofa! She loathed the vulgarity of sofas.

She endured his arm round her waist, and a certain pressure of his biceps

which she presumed was cuddling. He had carefully knocked his pipe out. But she thought how smug and silly his face looked, all its natural frankness and straight-forwardness had gone. How ridiculous of him to stroke the back of her neck! How idiotic he was, trying to be lovey-dovey! She wondered what sort of sweet nothings Lord Byron, for example, had murmured to his various ladies. Surely not so blithering, not so incompetent! And how monstrous of him, to kiss her like that.

“I’d infinitely rather you’d play to me, Joe,” she snapped.

“You don’t want me to play to you to-night, do you, dear?” he said.

“Why not to-night? I’d love to hear some Tchaikowsky, something to stir me up a bit.”

He rose obediently and went to the piano. He played quite well. She listened. And Tchaikowsky might have stirred her up all right. The music itself, that is. If she hadn’t been so desperately aware that Joe’s love-making, if you can call it such, became more absolutely impossible after the sound of the music.

“That was fine!” she said. “Now do me my favourite nocturne.”

While he concentrated on the fingering, she slipped out of the house.

Oh! she gasped a sigh of relief to be in the cool October air. The darkness was dim. In the west was a half moon freshly shining, and all the air was motionless, dimness lay like a haze on the earth.

Hester shook her hair, and strode away from the bungalow, which was a perfect little drum, re-echoing to her favourite nocturne. She simply rushed to get out of ear-shot.

Ah! the lovely night! She tossed her short hair again, and felt like Mazeppa’s horse, about to dash away into the infinite. Though the infinite was only a field belonging to the next farm. But Hester felt herself seething in the soft moonlight. Oh! to rush away over the edge of the beyond! if the beyond, like Joe’s bread-knife, did have an edge to it. “I know I’m an idiot,” she said to herself. But that didn’t take away the wild surge of her limbs. Oh! If there were only some other solution, instead of Joe and his spooning. Yes, SPOONING! The word made her lose the last shred of her self-respect, but she said it aloud.

There was, however, a bunch of strange horses in this field, so she made her way cautiously back through Joe’s fence. It was just like him, to have such a little place that you couldn’t get away from the sound of his piano, without trespassing on somebody else’s ground.

As she drew near the bungalow, however, the drumming of Joe’s piano suddenly ceased. Oh, Heaven! She looked wildly round. An old willow leaned over the stream. She stretched, crouching, and with the quickness of a long cat, climbed up into the net of cool-bladed foliage.

She had scarcely shuffled and settled into a tolerable position when he came round the corner of the house and into the moonlight, looking for her. How dare he look for her! She kept as still as a bat among the leaves, watching him as he sauntered with erect, tiresomely manly figure and lifted head, staring round in the darkness. He looked for once very ineffectual, insignificant, and at a loss. Where was his supposed male magic? Why was he so slow and unequal to the situation?

There! He was calling softly and self-consciously: "Hester! Hester! Where have you put yourself?"

He was angry really. Hester kept still in her tree, trying not to fidget. She had not the faintest intention of answering him. He might as well have been on another planet. He sauntered vaguely and unhappily out of sight.

Then she had a qualm. "Really, my girl, it's a bit thick, the way you treat him! Poor old Joe!"

Immediately something began to hum inside her: "I hear those tender voices calling Poor Old Joe!"

Nevertheless, she didn't want to go indoors to spend the evening *tête-à-tête* — my word! — with him.

"Of course it's absurd to think I could possibly fall in love like that. I would rather fall into one of his pig-troughs. It's so frightfully common. As a matter of fact, it's just a proof that he doesn't love me."

This thought went through her like a bullet. "The very fact of his being in love with me proves that he doesn't love me. No man that loved a woman could be in love with her like that. It's so insulting to her."

She immediately began to cry, and fumbling in her sleeve for her hanky, she nearly fell out of the tree. Which brought her to her senses.

In the obscure distance she saw him returning to the house, and she felt bitter. "Why did he start all this mess? I never wanted to marry anybody, and I certainly never bargained for anybody falling in love with me. Now I'm miserable, and I feel abnormal. Because the majority of girls must like this in-love business, or men wouldn't do it. And the majority must be normal. So I'm abnormal, and I'm up a tree. I loathe myself. As for Joe, he's spoilt all there was between us, and he expects me to marry him on the strength of it. It's perfectly sickening! What a mess life is. How I loathe messes!"

She immediately shed a few more tears, in the course of which she heard the door of the bungalow shut with something of a bang. He had gone indoors, and he was going to be righteously offended. A new misgiving came over her.

The willow tree was uncomfortable. The air was cold and damp. If she caught another chill she'd probably snuffle all winter long. She saw the lamplight

coming from the window of the bungalow, and she said “Damn!” which meant, in her case, that she was feeling bad.

She slid down out of the tree, and scratched her arm and probably damaged one of her nicest pair of stockings. “Oh, hang!” she said with emphasis, preparing to go into the bungalow and have it out with poor old Joe. “I will *not* call him Poor Old Joe!”

At that moment she heard a motorcar slow down in the lane, and there came a low, cautious toot from a hooter. Headlights shone at a standstill near Joe’s new iron gate.

“The cheek of it! The unbearable cheek of it! There’s that young Henrietta come down on me!”

She flew along Joe’s cinder-drive like a Mænad.

“Hello, Hester!” came Henrietta’s young voice, coolly floating from the obscurity of the car. “How’s everything?”

“What cheek!” cried Hester. “What amazing cheek!” She leaned on Joe’s iron gate and panted.

“How’s everything?” repeated Henrietta’s voice blandly.

“What do you mean by it?” demanded Hester, still panting.

“Now, my girl, don’t go off at a tangent! We weren’t coming in unless you came out. You needn’t think we want to put our noses in your affairs. We’re going down to camp on Bonamy. Isn’t the weather too divine!”

Bonamy was Joe’s pal, also an old artillery man, who had set up a “farm” about a mile farther along the land. Joe was by no means a Robinson Crusoe in his bungalow.

“Who are you, anyway?” demanded Hester.

“Same old birds,” said Donald, from the driver’s seat. Donald was Joe’s brother. Henrietta was sitting in front, next to him.

“Same as ever,” said Teddy, poking his head out of the car. Teddy was a second cousin.

“Well,” said Hester, sort of climbing down. “I suppose you may as well come in, now you *are* here. Have you eaten?”

“Eaten, yes,” said Donald. “But we aren’t coming in this trip, Hester; don’t you fret.”

“Why not?” flashed Hester, up in arms.

“Fraid of brother Joe,” said Donald.

“Besides, Hester,” said Henrietta anxiously, “you know you don’t want us.”

“Henrietta, don’t be a fool!” flashed Hester.

“Well, Hester — !” remonstrated the pained Henrietta.

“Come on in, and no more nonsense!” said Hester.

“Not this trip, Hester,” said Donald.

“No, sir!” said Teddy.

“But what idiots you all are! Why not?” cried Hester.

“Fraid of our elder brother,” said Donald.

“All right,” said Hester. “Then I’ll come along with you.”

She hastily opened the gate.

“Shall I just have a peep? I’m pining to see the house,” said Henrietta, climbing with a long leg over the door of the car.

The night was now dark, the moon had sunk. The two girls crunched in silence along the cinder track to the house.

“You’d say, if you’d rather I didn’t come in — or if Joe’d rather,” said Henrietta anxiously. She was very much disturbed in her young mind, and hoped for a clue. Hester walked on without answering. Henrietta laid her hand on her sister’s arm. Hester shook it off, saying:

“My dear Henrietta, do be normal!”

And she rushed up the three steps to the door, which she flung open, displaying the lamp-lit living-room, Joe in an arm-chair by the low fire, his back to the door. He did not turn round.

“Here’s Henrietta!” cried Hester, in a tone which meant: “*How’s that?*”

He got up and faced round, his brown eyes in his stiff face very angry.

“How did *you* get here?” he asked rudely.

“Came in a car,” said young Henrietta, from her Age of Innocence.

“With Donald and Teddy — they’re just outside the gate,” said Hester. “The old gang!”

“Coming in?” asked Joe, with greater anger in his voice.

“I suppose you’ll go out and invite them,” said Hester.

Joe said nothing, just stood like a block.

“I expect you’ll think it’s awful of me to come intruding,” said Henrietta meekly. “We’re just going on to Bonamy’s.” She gazed innocently round the room. “But it’s an adorable little place, awfully good taste in a cottagey sort of way. I like it awfully. Can I warm my hands?”

Joe moved from in front of the fire. He was in his slippers. Henrietta dangled her long red hands, red from the night air, before the grate.

“I’ll rush right away again,” she said.

“Oh-h,” drawled Hester curiously. “Don’t do that!”

“Yes, I must. Donald and Teddy are waiting.”

The door stood wide open, the headlights of the car could be seen in the lane.

“Oh-h!” Again that curious drawl from Hester. “I’ll tell them you’re staying the night with me. I can do with a bit of company.”

Joe looked at her.

“What’s the game?” he said.

“No game at all! Only now Tatty’s come, she may as well stay.”

“Tatty” was the rather infrequent abbreviation of “Henrietta”.

“Oh, but Hester!” said Henrietta. “I’m going on to Bonamy’s with Donald and Teddy.”

“Not if I want you to stay here!” said Hester.

Henrietta looked all surprised, resigned helplessness.

“What’s the game?” repeated Joe. “Had you fixed up to come down here to-night?”

“No, Joe, really!” said Henrietta, with earnest innocence. “I hadn’t the faintest idea of such a thing, till Donald suggested it, at four o’clock this afternoon. Only the weather was too perfectly divine, we had to go out somewhere, so we thought we’d descend on Bonamy. I hope *he* won’t be frightfully put out as well.”

“And if we had arranged it, it wouldn’t have been a crime,” struck in Hester. “And, anyway, now you’re here you might as well all camp here.”

“Oh no, Hester! I know Donald will never come inside the gate. He was angry with me for making him stop, and it was I who tooted. It wasn’t him, it was me. The curiosity of Eve, I suppose. Anyhow, I’ve put my foot in it, as usual. So now I’d better clear out as fast as I can. Good night!”

She gathered her coat round her with one arm and moved vaguely to the door.

“In that case, I’ll come along with you,” said Hester.

“But Hester!” cried Henrietta. And she looked inquiringly at Joe.

“I know as little as you do,” he said, “what’s going on.”

His face was wooden and angry, Henrietta could make nothing of him.

“Hester!” cried Henrietta. “Do be sensible! What’s gone wrong! Why don’t you at least *explain*, and give everybody a chance! Talk about being normal! — you’re always flinging it at *me*!”

There was a dramatic silence.

“What’s happened?” Henrietta insisted, her eyes very bright and distressed, her manner showing that she was determined to be sensible.

“Nothing, of course!” mocked Hester.

“Do *you* know, Joe?” said Henrietta, like another Portia, turning very sympathetically to the man.

For a moment Joe thought how much nicer Henrietta was than her sister.

“I only know she asked me to play the piano, and then she dodged out of the house. Since then, her steering-gear’s been out of order.”

“Ha-ha-ha!” laughed Hester falsely and melodramatically. “I like that. I like

my dodging out of the house! I went for a breath of fresh air. I should like to know whose steering-gear is out of order, talking about my dodging out of the house!”

“You dodged out of the house,” said Joe.

“Oh, did I? And why should I, pray?”

“I suppose you have your own reasons.”

“I have too. And very good reasons.”

There was a moment of stupefied amazement. . . . Joe and Hester had known each other so well, for such a long time. And now look at them!

“But why did you, Hester?” asked Henrietta, in her most breathless, naïve fashion.

“Why did I what?”

There was a low toot from the motorcar in the lane.

“They’re calling me! Good-bye!” cried Henrietta, wrapping her coat round her and turning decisively to the door.

“If you go, my girl, I’m coming with you,” said Hester.

“But why?” cried Henrietta in amazement. The horn tooted again. She opened the door and called into the night:

“Half a minute!” Then she closed the door again, softly, and turned once more in her amazement to Hester.

“But why, Hester?”

Hester’s eyes almost squinted with exasperation. She could hardly bear even to glance at the wooden and angry Joe.

“Why?”

“Why?” came the soft reiteration of Henrietta’s question.

All the attention focused on Hester, but Hester was a sealed book.

“Why?”

“She doesn’t know herself,” said Joe, seeing a loop-hole.

Out rang Hester’s crazy and melodramatic laugh.

“Oh, doesn’t she!” Her face flew into sudden strange fury. “Well, if you want to know, I absolutely *can’t stand* your making love to me, if that’s what you call the business.”

Henrietta let go the door-handle and sank weakly into a chair.

The worst had come to the worst. Joe’s face became purple, then slowly paled to yellow.

“Then,” said Henrietta in a hollow voice, “you can’t marry him.”

“I couldn’t possibly marry him if he kept on being *in love* with me.” She spoke the two words with almost snarling emphasis.

“And you couldn’t possibly marry him if he *wasn’t*,” said the guardian angel,

Henrietta.

“Why not,” cried Hester. “I could stand him all right till he started being in love with me. Now, he’s simply out of the question.”

There was a pause, out of which came Henrietta’s:

“After all, Hester, a man’s *supposed* to be in love with the woman he wants to marry.”

“Then he’d better keep it to himself, that’s all I’ve got to say.”

There was a pause. Joe, silent as ever, looked more wooden and sheepishly angry.

“But Hester! Hasn’t a man *got* to be in love with you — ?”

“Not with me! You’ve not had it to put up with, my girl.”

Henrietta sighed helplessly.

“Then you can’t marry him, that’s obvious. What an awful pity!”

A pause.

“Nothing can be so perfectly humiliating as a man making love to you,” said Hester. “I *loathe* it.”

“Perhaps it’s because it’s the wrong man,” said Henrietta sadly, with a glance at the wooden and sheepish Joe.

“I don’t believe I could stand that sort of thing, with *any* man. Henrietta, do you know what it is, being stroked and cuddled? It’s too perfectly awful and ridiculous.”

“Yes!” said Henrietta, musing sadly. “As if one were a perfectly priceless meat-pie, and the dog licked it tenderly before he gobbled it up. It *is* rather sickening, I agree.”

“And what’s so awful, a perfectly decent man will go and get that way. Nothing is so awful as a man who has fallen in love,” said Hester.

“I know what you mean, Hester. So doggy!” said Henrietta sadly.

The motor-horn tooted exasperatedly. Henrietta rose like a Portia who has been a failure. She opened the door and suddenly yelled fiercely into the night:

“Go on without me. I’ll walk. Don’t wait.”

“How long will you be?” came a voice.

“I don’t know. If I want to come, I’ll walk,” she yelled.

“Come back for you in an hour.”

“Right,” she shrieked, and slammed the door in their distant faces. Then she sat down dejectedly, in the silence. She was going to stand by Hester. That *fool*, Joe, standing there like a mutton-head!

They heard the car start, and retreat down the lane.

“Men are awful!” said Henrietta dejectedly.

“Anyhow, you’re mistaken,” said Joe with sudden venom to Hester. “I’m not

in love with you, Miss Clever.”

The two women looked at him as if he were Lazarus risen.

“And I never was in love with you, that way,” he added, his brown eyes burning with a strange fire of self-conscious shame and anger, and naked passion.

“Well, what a liar you must be then. That’s all I can say!” replied Hester coldly.

“Do you mean,” said young Henrietta acidly, “that you put it all on?”

“I thought she expected it of me,” he said, with a nasty little smile that simply paralysed the two young women. If he had turned into a boa-constrictor, they would not have been more amazed. That sneering little smile! Their good-natured Joe!

“I thought it was expected of me,” he repeated, jeering.

Hester was horrified.

“Oh, but how beastly of you to do it!” cried Henrietta to him.

“And what a lie!” cried Hester. “He liked it.”

“Do you think he did, Hester?” said Henrietta.

“I liked it in a way,” he said impudently. “But I shouldn’t have liked it, if I thought she didn’t.”

Hester flung out her arms.

“Henrietta,” she cried, “why can’t we kill him?”

“I wish we could,” said Henrietta.

“What are you to do when you know a girl’s rather strict, and you like her for it — and you’re not going to be married for a month — and — and you — and you’ve got to get over the interval somehow — and what else does Rudolf Valentino do for you? — you like *him* — ”

“He’s dead, poor dear. But I loathed him, *really*,” said Hester.

“You didn’t seem to,” said he.

“Well, anyhow, you aren’t Rudolf Valentino, and I loathe *you* in the rôle.”

“You won’t get a chance again. I loathe *you* altogether.”

“And I’m extremely relieved to hear it, my boy.”

There was a lengthy pause, after which Henrietta said with decision:

“Well, that’s that! Will you come along to Bonamy’s with me, Hester, or shall I stay here with you?”

“I don’t care, my girl,” said Hester with bravado.

“Neither do I care what you do,” said he. “But I call it pretty rotten of you, not to tell me right out, at first.”

“I thought it was real with you then, and I didn’t want to hurt you,” said Hester.

“You look as if you didn’t want to hurt me,” he said.

“Oh, now,” she said, “since it was all pretence, it doesn’t matter.”

“I should say it doesn’t,” he retorted.

There was a silence. The clock, which was intended to be their family clock, ticked rather hastily.

“Anyway,” he said, “I consider you’ve let me down.”

“I like that!” she cried, “considering what you’ve played off on me!”

He looked her straight in the eye. They knew each other so well.

Why had he tried that silly love-making game on her? It was a betrayal of their simple intimacy. He saw it plainly, and repented.

And she saw the honest, patient love for her in his eyes, and the queer, quiet central desire. It was the first time she had seen it, that quiet, patient, central desire of a young man who has suffered during his youth, and seeks now almost with the slowness of age. A hot flush went over her heart. She felt herself responding to him.

“What have you decided, Hester?” said Henrietta.

“I’ll stay with Joe, after all,” said Hester.

“Very well,” said Henrietta. “And I’ll go along to Bonamy’s.” She opened the door quietly, and was gone.

Joe and Hester looked at one another from a distance.

“I’m sorry, Hester,” said he.

“You know, Joe,” she said, “I don’t mind what you do, if you love me *really*.”

NONE OF THAT!

I met Luis Colmenares in Venice, not having seen him for years. He is a Mexican exile living on the scanty remains of what was once wealth, and eking out a poor and lonely existence by being a painter. But his art is only a sedative to him. He wanders about like a lost soul, mostly in Paris or in Italy, where he can live cheaply. He is rather short, rather fat, pale, with black eyes, which are always looking the other way, and a spirit the same, always averted.

“Do you know who is in Venice?” he said to me. “Cuesta! He is in the Hôtel Romano. I saw him bathing yesterday on the Lido.”

There was a world of gloomy mockery in this last sentence.

“Do you mean Cuesta, the bullfighter?” I asked.

“Yes. Don’t you know, he retired? Do you remember? An American woman left him a lot of money. Did you ever see him?”

“Once,” said I.

“Was it before the revolution? Do you remember, he retired and bought a *hacienda* very cheap from one of Madero’s generals, up in Chihuahua? It was after the Carranzista, and I was already in Europe.”

“How does he look now?” I said.

“Enormously fat, like a yellow, round, small whale in the sea. You saw him? You know he was rather short and rather fat always. I think his mother was a Mixtec Indian woman. Did you ever know him?”

“No,” said I. “Did you?”

“Yes. I knew him in the old days, when I was rich, and thought I should be rich for ever.”

He was silent, and I was afraid he had shut up for good. It was unusual for him to be even as communicative as he had been. But it was evident that having seen Cuesta, the toreador whose fame once rang through Spain and through Latin America, had moved him deeply. He was in a ferment, and could not quite contain himself.

“But he wasn’t interesting, was he?” I said. “Wasn’t he just a — a bullfighter — a brute?”

Colmenares looked at me out of his own blackness. He didn’t want to talk. Yet he had to.

“He was a brute, yes,” he admitted grudgingly. “But not just a brute. Have you seen him when he was at his best? Where did you see him? I never liked him in

Spain, he was too vain. But in Mexico he was very good. Have you seen him play with the bull, and play with death? He was marvellous. Do you remember him, what he looked like?"

"Not very well," said I.

"Short, and broad, and rather fat, with rather a yellow colour, and a pressed-in nose. But his eyes, they were marvellous, also rather small, and yellow, and when he looked at you, so strange and cool, you felt your inside melting. Do you know that feeling? He looked into the last little place of you, where you keep your courage. Do you understand? And you felt yourself melting. Do you know what I mean?"

"More or less, perhaps," said I.

Colmenares' black eyes were fixed on my face, dilated and gleaming, but not really seeing me at all. He was seeing the past. Yet a curious force streamed out of his face; one understood him by the telepathy of passion, inverted passion.

"And in the bullring he was marvellous. He would stand with his back to the bull, and pretend to be adjusting his stockings, while the bull came charging on him. And with a little glance over his shoulder, he would make a small movement, and the bull had passed him without getting him. Then he would smile a little, and walk after it. It is marvellous that he was not killed hundreds of times, but I saw him bathing on the Lido to-day, like a fat, yellow, small whale. It is extraordinary! But I did not see his eyes. . . ."

A queer look of abstracted passion was on Colmenares' fat, pale, clean-shaven face. Perhaps the toreador had cast a spell over him, as over so many people in the old and the new world.

"It is strange that I have never seen eyes anywhere else like his. Did I tell you, they were yellow, and not like human eyes at all? They didn't look at you. I don't think they ever looked at anybody. He only looked at the little bit inside your body where you keep your courage. I don't think he could see people, any more than an animal can: I mean see them personally, as I see you and you see me. He was an animal, a marvellous animal. I have often thought, if human beings had not developed minds and speech, they would have become marvellous animals like Cuesta, with those marvellous eyes, much more marvellous than a lion's or a tiger's. Have you noticed a lion or a tiger never sees you personally? It never really looks at you. But also it is afraid to look at the last little bit of you, where your courage lives inside you. But Cuesta was not afraid. He looked straight at it, and it melted."

"And what was he like, in ordinary life?" said I.

"He did not talk, was very silent. He was not clever at all. He was not even clever enough to be a general. And he could be very brutal and disgusting. But

usually he was quiet. But he was always *something*. If you were in a room with him, you always noticed him more than anybody, more than women or men, even very clever people. He was stupid, but he made you physically aware of him; like a cat in the room. I tell you, that little bit of you where you keep your courage was enchanted by him; he put over you an enchantment.”

“Did he do it on purpose?”

“Well! It is hard to say. But he knew he could do it. To some people, perhaps, he could not do it. But he never saw such people. He only saw people who were in his enchantment. And of course, in the bullring, he mesmerised everybody. He could draw the natural magnetism of everybody to him — everybody. And then he was marvellous, he played with death as if it were a kitten, so quick, quick as a star, and calm as a flower, and all the time, laughing at death. It is marvellous he was never killed. But he retired very young. And then suddenly it was he who killed the bull, with one hand, one stroke. He was very strong. And the bull sank down at his feet, heavy with death. The people went mad! And he just glanced at them, with his yellow eyes, in a cool, beautiful contempt, as if he were an animal that wrapped the skin of death round him. Ah, he was wonderful! And to-day I saw him bathing on the Lido, in an American bathing-suit, with a woman. His bathing-suit was just a little more yellow than he is. I have held the towel when he was being rubbed down and massaged often. He had the body of an Indian, very smooth, with hardly any hair, and creamy-yellow. I always thought it had something childish about it, so soft. But also, it had the same mystery as his eyes, as if you could never touch it, as if, when you touched it, still it was not he. When he had no clothes on, he was naked. But it seemed he would have many, many more nakednesses before you really came to *him*. Do you understand me at all? Or does it seem to you foolish?”

“It interests me,” I said. “And women, of course, fell for him by the thousand?”

“By the million! And they were mad because of him. Women went mad, once they felt him. It was not like Rudolf Valentino, sentimental. It was madness, like cats in the night which howl, no longer knowing whether they are on earth or in hell or in paradise. So were the women. He could have had forty beautiful women every night, and different ones each night, from the beginning of the year to the end.”

“But he didn’t, naturally?”

“Oh no! At first, I think, he took many women. But later, when I knew him, he took none of those that besieged him. He had two Mexican women whom he lived with, humble women, Indians. And all the others he spat at, and spoke of them with terrible, obscene language. I think he would have liked to whip them,

or kill them, for pursuing him.”

“Only he must enchant them when he was in the bullring,” said I.

“Yes. But that was like sharpening his knife on them.”

“And when he retired — he had plenty of money — how did he amuse himself?”

“He was rich, he had a big hacienda, and many people like slaves to work for him. He raised cattle. I think he was very proud to be hacendado and padrón of so many people, with a little army of his own. I think he was proud, living like a king. I had not heard of him for years. Now, suddenly, he is in Venice with a Frenchwoman who talks bad Spanish — ”

“How old is he?”

“How old? He is about fifty, or a little less.”

“So young! And will you speak to him?”

“I don’t know. I can’t make up my mind. If I speak to him, he will think I want money.”

There was a certain note of hatred now in Colmenares’ voice.

“Well, why shouldn’t he give you money? He is still rich, I suppose?”

“Rich, yes! He must always be rich. He has got American money. An American woman left him half a million dollars. Did you ever hear of it?”

“No. Then why shouldn’t he give you money? I suppose you often gave him some, in the past?”

“Oh, that — that is *quite* the past. He will never give me anything — or a hundred francs, something like that! Because he is mean. Did you never hear of the American woman who left him half a million dollars, and committed suicide?”

“No. When was it?”

“It was a long time ago — about 1914 or 1913. I had already lost all my money. Her name was Ethel Cane. Did you never hear of her?”

“I don’t think I did,” I said, feeling it remiss not to have heard of the lady.

“Ah! You should have known her. She was extraordinary. I had known her in Paris, even before I came back to Mexico and knew Cuesta well. She was almost as extraordinary as Cuesta: one of those American women, born rich, but what we should call provincial. She didn’t come from New York or Boston, but somewhere else. Omaha or something. She was blonde, with thick, straight, blonde hair, and she was one of the very first to wear it short, like a Florentine page-boy. Her skin was white, and her eyes very blue, and she was not thin. At first, there seemed something childish about her — do you know that look, rather round cheeks and clear eyes, so false-innocent? Her eyes especially were warm and naïve and false-innocent, but full of light. Only sometimes they were

bloodshot. Oh, she was extraordinary! It was only when I knew her better I noticed how her blonde eyebrows gathered together above her nose, in a diabolic manner. She was much too much a personality to be a lady, and she had all that terrible American energy! Ah, energy! She was a dynamo. In Paris she was married to a dapper little pink-faced American who got yellow at the gills, bilious, running after her when she would not have him. He painted pictures and wanted to be modern. She knew all the people, and had all sorts come to her, as if she kept a human menagerie. And she bought old furniture and brocades; she would go mad if she saw someone get a piece of velvet brocade with the misty bloom of years on it, that she coveted. She coveted such things with lust, and would go into a strange sensual trance, looking at some old worm-eaten chair. And she would go mad if someone else got it, and not she: that nasty old wormy chair of the quattrocento! Things! She was mad about 'things'. But it was only for a time. She always got tired, especially of her own enthusiasms.

"That was when I knew her in Paris. Then I think she divorced that husband, and, when the revolutions in Mexico became quieter, she came to Mexico. I think she was fascinated by the idea of Carranza. If ever she heard of a man who seemed to have a dramatic sort of power in him, she must know that man. It was like her lust for brocade and old chairs and a perfect æsthetic setting. Now it was to know the most dangerous man, especially if he looked like a prophet or a reformer. She was a socialist also, at this time. She no longer was in love with chairs.

"She found me again in Mexico: she knew thousands of people, and whenever one of them might be useful to her, she remembered him. So she remembered me, and it was nothing to her that I was now poor. I knew she thought of me as 'that little Luis Something', but she had a certain use for me, and found, perhaps, a certain little flavour in me. At least she asked me often to dinner, or to drive with her. She was curious, quite reckless and a dare-devil, yet shy and awkward out of her own *milieu*. It was only in intimacy that she was unscrupulous and dauntless as a devil incarnate. In public, and in strange places, she was very uneasy, like one who has a bad conscience towards society, and is afraid of it. And for that reason she could never go out without a man to stand between her and all the others.

"While she was in Mexico, I was that man. She soon discovered that I was satisfactory. I would perform all the duties of a husband without demanding any of the rights. Which was what she wanted. I think she was looking round for a remarkable and epoch-making husband. But, of course, it would have to be a husband who would be a fitting instrument for her remarkable and epoch-making energy and character. She was extraordinary, but she could only work

through individuals, through others. By herself she could accomplish nothing. She lay on a sofa and mused and schemed, with the energy boiling inside her. Only when she had a group, or a few real individuals, or just one man, then she could start something, and make them all dance in a tragi-comedy, like marionettes.

“But in Mexico, men do not care for women who will make them dance like puppets. In Mexico, women must run in the dust like the Indian women, with meek little heads. American women are not very popular. Their energy, and their power to make other people do things, are not in request. The men would rather go to the devil in their own way than be sent there by the women, with a little basket in which to bring home the goods.

“So Ethel found not a cold shoulder, but a number of square, fat backs turned to her. They didn’t want her. The revolutionaries would not take any notice of her at all. They wanted no women interfering. General Isidor Garabay danced with her, and expected her immediately to become his mistress. But, as she said, she was having *none of that*. She had a terrible way of saying ‘I’m having none of that!’ — like hitting a mirror with a hammer. And as nobody wanted to get into trouble over her, they were having none of her.

“At first, of course, when the generals saw her white shoulders and blonde hair and innocent face, they thought at once: ‘Here is a *type* for us!’ They were not deceived by her innocent look. But they were deceived by what looked like her helplessness. The blood would come swelling into her neck and face, her eyes would go hot, her whole figure would swell with repellent energy, and she would say something very American and very crushing, in French, or in American. None of *that!* Stop *that!*

“She, too, had a lot of power. She could send out of her body a repelling energy, to compel people to submit to her will. Men in Europe or the United States nearly always crumpled up before her. But in Mexico she had come to the wrong shop. The men were a law to themselves. While she was winning and rather lovely, with her blue eyes so full of light and her white skin glistening with energetic health, they expected her to become at once their mistress. And when they saw, very quickly, that she was having *none of that*, they turned on their heels and showed her their fat backs. Because she was clever, and remarkable, and had wonderful energy and a wonderful power for making people dance while she pulled the strings, they didn’t care a bit. They, too, wanted *none of that*. They would, perhaps, have carried her off and shared her as a mistress, except for the fear of trouble with the American Government.

“So, soon, she began to be bored, and to think of returning to New York. She said that Mexico was a place without a soul and without a culture, and it had not

even brain enough to be mechanically efficient. It was a city and a land of naughty little boys doing obscene little things, and one day it would learn its lesson. I told her that history is the account of a lesson which nobody ever learns, and she told me the world certainly *had* progressed. Only not in Mexico, she supposed. I asked her why she had come, then, to Mexico. And she said she had thought there was something doing, and she would like to be in it. But she found it was only naughty and mostly cowardly little boys letting off guns and doing mediocre obscenities, so she would leave them to it. I told her I supposed it was life. And she replied that since it was not good enough for her, it was not life to her.

“She said all she wanted was to live the life of the imagination and get it acted on. At that time, I thought this ridiculous. I thought she was just trying to find somebody to fall in love with. Later, I saw she was right. She had an imaginary picture of herself as an extraordinary and potent woman who would make a stupendous change in the history of man. Like Catherine of Russia, only cosmopolitan, not merely Russian. And it is true, she *was* an extraordinary woman, with tremendous power of will, and truly amazing energy, even for an American woman. She was like a locomotive-engine stoked up inside and bursting with steam, which it has to let off by rolling a lot of trucks about. But I did not see how this was to cause a change in the tide of mortal affairs. It was only a part of the hubbub of traffic. She sent the trucks bouncing against one another with a clash of buffers, and sometimes she derailed some unfortunate item of the rolling-stock. But I did not see how this was to change the history of mankind. She seemed to have arrived just a little late, as some heroes, and heroines also, to-day, always do.

“I wondered always, why she did not take a lover. She was a woman between thirty and forty, very healthy and full of this extraordinary energy. She saw many men, and was always drawing them out, always on the *qui vive* to start them rolling down some incline. She attracted men, in a certain way. Yet she had no lover.

“I wondered even with regard to myself. We were friends, and a great deal together. Certainly I was under her spell. I came running as soon as I thought she wanted me. I did the things she suggested I should do. Even among my own acquaintances, when I found everybody laughing at me and disliking me for being at the service of an American woman, and I tried to rebel against her, and put her in her place, as the Mexicans say — which means to them, in bed with no clothes on — still, the moment I saw her, with a look and a word she won me round. She was very clever. She flattered me, of course. She made me feel intelligent. She drew me out. There was her cleverness. She made *me* clever. I

told her all about Mexico: all my life: all my ideas of history, philosophy. I sounded awfully clever and original, to myself. And she listened with such attention, which I thought was deep interest in what I was saying. But she was waiting for something she could fasten on, so that she could ‘start something’. That was her constant craving, to ‘start something’. But, of course, I thought she was interested in *me*.

“She would lie on a large couch that was covered with old sarapes — she began to buy them as soon as she came to Mexico — herself wrapped in a wonderful black shawl that glittered all over with brilliant birds and flowers in vivid colour, a very fine specimen of the embroidered shawls our Mexican ladies used to wear at a bullfight or in an open-air *fiesta*: and there, with her white arms glistening through the long fringe of the shawl, the old Italian jewellery rising on her white, dauntless breast, and her short, thick, blonde hair falling like yellow metal, she would draw me out, draw me out. I never talked so much in my life before or since. Always talk! And I believe I talked very well, really, really very clever. But nothing besides talk! Sometimes I stayed till after midnight. And sometimes she would snort with impatience or boredom, rather like a horse, flinging back her head and shaking that heavy blonde hair. And I think some part of her wanted me to make love to her.

“But I didn’t. I couldn’t. I was there, under her influence, in her power. She could draw me out in talk, marvellously. I’m sure I was very clever indeed. But any other part of me was stiff, petrified. I couldn’t even touch her. I couldn’t even take her hand in mine. It was a physical impossibility. When I was away from her, I could think of her white, healthy body with a voluptuous shiver. I could even run to her apartment, intending to kiss her, and make her my mistress that very night. But the moment I was in her presence, it left me. I could not touch her. I was averse from touching her. Physically, for some reason, I hated her.

“And I felt within myself, it was because she was repelling me and because she was always hating men, hating all active maleness in a man. She only wanted passive maleness, and then this ‘talk’, this life of the imagination, as she called it. Inside herself she seethed, and she thought it was because she wanted to be made love to, very much made love to. But it wasn’t so. She seethed against all men, with repulsion. She was cruel to the body of a man. But she excited his mind, his spirit. She loved to do that. She loved to have a man hanging round, like a servant. She loved to stimulate him, especially his mind. And she, too, when the man was not there, she thought she wanted him to be her lover. But when he was there, and he wanted to gather for himself that mysterious fruit of her body, she revolted against him with a fearful hate. A man

must be *absolutely* her servant, and only that. That was what she meant by the life of the imagination.

“And I was her servant. Everybody jeered at me. But I said to myself. I would make her my mistress. I almost set my teeth to do it. That was when I was away from her. When I came to her, I could not even touch her. When I tried to make myself touch her, something inside me began to shudder. It was impossible. And I knew it was because, with her inner body, she was repelling me, always really repelling me.

“Yet she wanted me too. She was lonely: lonesome, she said. She was lonesome, and she would have liked to get me making love to her external self. She would even, I think, have become my mistress, allowed me to take her sometimes for a little, miserable humiliating moment, then quickly have got rid of me again. But I couldn’t do it. Her inner body *never* wanted me. And I couldn’t just be her prostitute. Because immediately she would have despised me, and insulted me if I had persisted in trying to get some satisfaction of her. I knew it. She had already had two husbands, and she was a woman who always ached to tell *all*, everything. She had told me too much. I had seen one of her American husbands. I did not choose to see myself in a similar light: or plight.

“No, she wanted to live the life of the imagination. She said the imagination could master everything; so long, of course, as one was not shot in the head, or had an eye put out. Talking of the Mexican atrocities, and of the famous case of raped nuns, she said it was all nonsense that a woman was broken because she had been raped. She could rise above it. The imagination could rise above *anything*, that was not real organic damage. If one lived the life of the imagination, one could rise above any experience that ever happened to one. One could even commit murder, and rise above that. By using the imagination, and by using cunning, a woman can justify herself in anything, even the meanest and most bad things. A woman uses her imagination on her own behalf, and she becomes more innocent to herself than an innocent child, no matter what bad things she has done.”

“Men do that, too,” I interrupted. “It’s the modern dodge. That’s why everybody to-day is innocent. To the imagination all things are pure, if you did them yourself.”

Colmenares looked at me with quick, black eyes, to see if I were mocking him. He did not care about me and my interruptions. He was utterly absorbed in his recollections of that woman, who had made him so clever, and who had made him her servant, and from whom he had never had any satisfaction.

“And then what?” I asked him. “Then did she try her hand on Cuesta?”

“Ah!” said Colmenares, rousing, and glancing at me suspiciously again. “Yes!

That was what she did. And I was jealous. Though I couldn't bring myself to touch her, yet I was excruciated with jealousy, because she was interested in someone else. She was interested in someone besides myself, and my vanity suffered tortures of jealousy. Why was I such a fool? Why, even now, could I kill that fat, yellow pig Cuesta? A man is always a fool."

"How did she meet the bullfighter?" I asked. "Did you introduce him to her?"

"She went once to the bullfight, because everyone was talking about Cuesta. She did not care for such things as the bullring; she preferred the modern theatre, Duse and Reinhardt, and 'things of the imagination'. But now she was going back to New York, and she had never seen a bullfight, so she must see one. I got seats in the shade — high up, you know — and went with her.

"At first she was very disgusted, and very contemptuous, and a little bit frightened, you know, because a Mexican crowd in a bullring is not very charming. She was afraid of people. But she sat stubborn and sulky, like a sulky child, saying: 'Can't they do anything more subtle than this, to get a thrill? It's on such a low level!'

"But when Cuesta at last began to play with a bull, she began to get excited. He was in pink and silver, very gorgeous, and looking very ridiculous, as usual. Till he began to play; and then there really was something marvellous in him, you know, so quick and so light and so playful — do you know? When he was playing with a bull and playing with death in the ring, he was the most playful thing I have ever seen: more playful than kittens or leopard cubs: and you know how they play; do you? Oh, marvellous! More gay and light than if they had lots of wings all over them, all wings of playing! Well, he was like that, playing with death in the ring, as if he had all kinds of gay little wings to spin him with the quickest, tiniest, most beautiful little movements, quite unexpected, like a soft leopard cub. And then at the end, when he killed the bull and the blood squirted past him, ugh! it was as if all his body laughed, and still the same soft, surprised laughter like a young thing, but more cruel than anything you can imagine. He fascinated me, but I always hated him. I would have liked to stick him as he stuck the bulls.

"I could see that Ethel was trying not to be caught by his spell. He had the most curious charm, quick and unexpected like play, you know, like leopard kittens, or slow sometimes, like tiny little bears. And yet the perfect cruelty. It was the joy in cruelty! She hated the blood and messiness and dead animals. Ethel hated all that. It was not the life of the imagination. She was very pale, and very silent. She leaned forward and hardly moved, looking white and obstinate and subdued. And Cuesta had killed three bulls before she made any sign of any sort. I did not speak to her. The fourth bull was a beauty, full of life, curling and

prancing like a narcissus-flower in January. He was a very special bull, brought from Spain, and not so stupid as the others. He pawed the ground and blew the breath on the ground, lowering his head. And Cuesta opened his arms to him with a little smile, but endearing, lovingly endearing, as a man might open his arms to a little maiden he really loves, but, really, for her to come to his body, his warm, open body, to come softly. So he held his arms out to the bull, with love. And that was what fascinated the women. They screamed and they fainted, longing to go into the arms of Cuesta, against his soft, round body, that was more yearning than a fico. But the bull, of course, rushed past him, and only got two darts sticking in his shoulder. That was the love.

“Then Ethel shouted, *Bravo! Bravo!* and I saw that she, too, had gone mad. Even Cuesta heard her, and he stopped a moment and looked at her. He saw her leaning forward, with her short, thick hair hanging like yellow metal, and her face dead-white, and her eyes glaring to his, like a challenge. They looked at one another, for a second, and he gave a little bow, then turned away. But he was changed. He didn’t play so unconsciously any more: he seemed to be thinking of something, and forgetting himself. I was afraid he would be killed; but so afraid! He seemed absent-minded, and taking risks too great. When the bull came after him over the gangway barrier, he even put his hand on its head as he vaulted back, and one horn caught his sleeve and tore it just a little. Then he seemed to be absent-mindedly looking at the tear, while the bull was almost touching him again. And the bull was mad. Cuesta was a dead man it seemed, for sure: yet he seemed to wake up and *waked* himself just out of reach. It was like an awful dream, and it seemed to last for hours. I think it must have been a long time, before the bull was killed. He killed him at last, as a man takes his mistress at last because he is almost tired of playing with her. But he liked to kill his own bull.

“Ethel was looking like death, with beads of perspiration on her face. And she called to him: ‘That’s enough! That’s enough now! *Ya es bastante! Basta!*’ He looked at her, and heard what she said. They were both alike there, they heard and saw in a flash. And he lifted his face, with the rather squashed nose and the yellow eyes, and he looked at her, and though he was so far away, he seemed quite near. And he was smiling like a small boy. But I could see he was looking at the little place in her body, where she kept her courage. And she was trying to catch his look on her imagination, not on her naked body inside. And they both found it difficult. When he tried to look at her, she set her imagination in front of him, like a mirror they put in front of a wild dog. And when she tried to catch him in her imagination, he seemed to melt away, and was gone. So neither really had caught the other.

“But he played with two more bulls, and killed them, without ever looking at her. And she went away when the people were applauding him, and did not look at him. Neither did she speak to me of him. Neither did she go to any more bullfights.

“It was Cuesta who spoke to me of her, when I met him at Clavel’s house. He said to me in his very coarse Spanish: ‘And what about your American skirt?’ I told him, there was nothing to say about her. She was leaving for New York. So he told me to ask her if she would like to come and say good-bye to Cuesta, before she went. I said to him: ‘But why should I mention your name to her, She has never mentioned yours to me.’ He made an obscene joke to me.

“And it must have been because I was thinking of him that she said that evening: ‘Do you know Cuesta?’ I told her I did, and she asked me what I thought of him. I told her I thought he was a marvellous beast, but he wasn’t really a man. ‘But he is a beast with imagination,’ she said to me. ‘Couldn’t one get a response out of him?’ I told her I didn’t know, but I didn’t want to try. I would leave Cuesta to the bullring. I would never dream of trying my imagination on him. She said, always ready with an answer: ‘But wasn’t there a marvellous *thing* in him, something quite exceptional?’ I said, maybe! But so has a rattlesnake a marvellous thing in him: two things, one in his mouth, one in his tail. But I didn’t want to try to get response out of a rattlesnake. She wasn’t satisfied, though. She was tortured. I said to her: ‘Anyhow, you are leaving on Thursday.’ ‘No, I’ve put it off,’ she said. ‘Till when?’ ‘Indefinite,’ she said.

“I could tell she was tormented. She had been tormented ever since she had been to the bullfight, because she couldn’t get past Cuesta. She couldn’t get past him, as the Americans say. He seemed like a fat, squat, yellow-eyed demon just smiling at her, and dancing ahead of her. ‘Why don’t you bring him here?’ she said at last, though she didn’t want to say it. — ‘But why? What is the good of bringing him here? Would you bring a criminal here, or a yellow scorpion?’ — ‘I would if I wanted to find out about it.’ — ‘But what is there to find out about Cuesta? He is just a sort of beast. He is less than a man.’ — ‘Maybe he’s a *schwarze Bestie*,’ she said, ‘and I’m a *blonde Bestie*. Anyway, bring him.’

“I always did what she wanted me, though I never wanted to myself. So it was now. I went to a place where I knew Cuesta would be, and he asked me: ‘How is the blonde skirt? Has she gone yet?’ I said, ‘No. Would you like to see her?’ He looked at me with his yellow eyes, and that pleasant look which was really hate undreaming. ‘Did she tell you to ask me?’ he said. ‘No,’ I said. ‘We were talking of you, and she said, bring the fabulous animal along and let us see what he really is.’ — ‘He is the animal for her meat, this one,’ he said, in his vulgar way. Then he pretended he wouldn’t come. But I knew he would. So I said I would

call for him.

“We were going in the evening, after tea, and he was dressed to kill, in a light French suit. We went in his car. But he didn’t take flowers or anything. Ethel was nervous and awkward, offering us cocktails and cigarettes, and speaking French, though Cuesta didn’t understand any French at all. There was another old American woman there, for chaperon.

“Cuesta just sat on a chair, with his knees apart and his hands between his thighs, like an Indian. Only his hair, which was done up in his little pigtail, and taken back from his forehead, made him look like a woman, or a Chinaman; and his flat nose and little yellow eyes made him look like a Chinese idol, maybe a god or a demon, as you please. He just sat and said nothing, and had that look on his face which wasn’t a smile, and wasn’t a grimace, it was nothing. But to me it meant rhapsodic hate.

“She asked him in French if he liked his profession, and how long he had been doing it, and if he got a great kick out of it, and was he a pure-blood Indian? — all that kind of thing. I translated to him as short as possible, Ethel flushing with embarrassment. He replied just as short, to me, in his coarse, flat sort of voice, as if he knew it was mere pretence. But he looked at her, straight into her face, with that strange, far-off sort of stare, yet very vivid, taking no notice of her, yet staring right into her: as if all that she was putting forward to him was merely window-dressing, and he was just looking way in, to the marshes and the jungle in her, where she didn’t even look herself. It made one feel as if there was a mountain behind her, Popocatepetl, that he was staring at, expecting a mountain-lion to spring down off a tree on the slopes of the mountain, or a snake to lean down from a bough. But the mountain was all she stood for, and the mountain-lion or the snake was her own animal self, that he was watching for, like a hunter.

“We didn’t stay long, but when we left she asked him to come in whenever he liked. He wasn’t really the person to have calling on one: and he knew it, as she did. But he thanked her, and hoped he would one day be able to receive her at her — meaning his — humble house in the Guadalupe Road, where everything was her own. She said: ‘Why, sure, I’ll come one day. I should love to.’ Which he understood, and bowed himself out like some quick but lurking animal: quick as a scorpion, with silence of venom the same.

“After that he would call fairly often, at about five o’clock, but never alone, always with some other man. And he never said anything, always responded to her questions in the same short way, and always looked at her when he was speaking to the other man. He never once *spoke* to her — always spoke to his interpreter, in his flat, coarse Spanish. And he always looked at her when he was

speaking to someone else.

“She tried every possible manner in which to touch his imagination: but never with any success. She tried the Indians, the Aztecs, the history of Mexico, politics, Don Porfirio, the bullring, love, women, Europe, America — and all in vain. All she got out of him was *Verdad!* He was utterly uninterested. He actually *had* no mental imagination. Talk was just noise to him. The only spark she roused was when she talked of money. Then the queer half-smile deepened on his face, and he asked his interpreter if the Señora was very rich. To which Ethel replied she didn’t really know what he meant by rich: he must be rich himself. At which he asked the interpreter friend if she had more than a million American dollars. To which she replied that perhaps she had — but she wasn’t sure. And he looked at her so strangely, even more like a yellow scorpion about to sting.

“I asked him later, what made him put such a crude question? Did he think of offering to marry her? ‘Marry a — — ?’ he replied, using an obscene expression. But I didn’t know even then what he really intended. Yet I saw he had her on his mind.

“Ethel was gradually getting into a state of tension. It was as if something tortured her. She seemed like a woman who would go insane. I asked her: ‘Why, whatever’s wrong with you?’ ‘I’ll tell you, Luis,’ she said, ‘but don’t you say anything to anybody, mind. It’s Cuesta! I don’t know whether I want him or not.’ — ‘You don’t know whether he wants *you* or not,’ said I. — ‘I can handle that,’ she said, ‘if I know about myself: if I know my own mind. But I don’t. My mind says he’s a nada-nada, a dumb-bell, no brain, no imagination, no anything. But my body says he marvellous, and he’s got something I haven’t got, and he’s stronger than I am, and he’s more an angel or a devil than a man, and I’m too merely human to get him — and all that, till I feel I shall just go crazy, and take an overdose of drugs. What am I to *do* with my body, I tell you? What am I to *do* with it? I’ve got to master it. I’ve got to be *more* than that man. I’ve got to get all round him, and past him. I’ve *got* to.’ — ‘Then just take the train to New York to-night, and forget him,’ I said. — ‘I can’t! That’s sidetracking. I *won’t* sidetrack my body. I’ve got to get the best of it. I’ve got to.’ — ‘Well,’ I said, ‘you’re a point or two beyond me. If it’s a question of getting all round Cuesta, and getting past him, why, take the train, and you’ll forget him in a fortnight. Don’t fool yourself you’re in love with the fellow.’ — ‘I’m afraid he’s stronger than I am,’ she cried out. — ‘And what then? He’s stronger than I am, but that doesn’t prevent me sleeping. A jaguar even is stronger than I am, and an anaconda could swallow me whole. I tell you, it’s all in a day’s march. There’s a kind of animal called Cuesta. Well, what of it?’

“She looked at me, and I could tell I made no impression on her. She despised me. She sort of wanted to go off the deep end about something. I said to her: ‘God’s love, Ethel, cut out the Cuesta caprice! It’s not even good acting.’ But I might just as well have mewed, for all the notice she took of me.

“It was as if some dormant Popocatepetl inside her had begun to erupt. She didn’t love the fellow. Yet she was in a blind kill-me-quick sort of state, neither here nor there, nor hot or cold, not desirous nor undesirous, but just simply *insane*. In a certain kind of way, she seemed to want him. And in a very definite kind of way she seemed *not* to want him. She was in a kind of hysterics, lost her feet altogether. I tried might and main to get her away to the United States. She’d have come sane enough, once she was there. But I thought she’d kill me, when she found I’d been trying to interfere. Oh, she was not quite in her mind, that’s sure.

“‘If my body is stronger than my imagination, I shall kill myself,’ she said. — ‘Ethel,’ I said, ‘people who talk of killing themselves always call a doctor if they cut their finger. What’s the quarrel between your body and your imagination? Aren’t they the same thing?’ — ‘No!’ she said. ‘If the imagination has the body under control, you can do anything, it doesn’t matter what you do, physically. If my body was under the control of my imagination, I could take Cuesta for my lover, and it would be an imaginative act. But if my body acted without my imagination, I — I’d kill myself.’ — ‘But what do you mean by your body acting without your imagination?’ I said. ‘You are not a child. You’ve been married twice. You know what it means. You even have two children. You must have had at least several lovers. If Cuesta is to be another of your lovers, I think it is deplorable, but I think it only shows you are very much like the other woman who fall in love with him. If you’ve fallen in love with him, your imagination has nothing to do but accept the fact and put as many roses on the ass’s head as you like.’ She looked at me very solemnly, and seemed to think about it. Then she said: ‘But my imagination has not fallen in love with him. He wouldn’t meet me imaginatively. He’s a brute. And once I start, where’s it going to end? I’m afraid my body has fallen — not fallen in love with him, but fallen *for* him. It’s abject! And if I can’t get my body on its feet again, and either forget him or else get him to make it an imaginative act with me — I — I shall kill myself.’ — ‘All right,’ said I. ‘I don’t know what you are talking about, imaginative acts and unimaginative acts. The act is always the same.’ — ‘It isn’t!’ she cried, furious with me. ‘It is either imaginative or else it’s *impossible* — to me.’ Well, I just spread my hands. What could I say, or do? I simply hated her way of putting it. Imaginative act! Why, I would hate performing an

imaginative act with a woman. Damn it, the act is either real, or let it alone. But now I knew why I had never touched her, or even kissed her, not once: because I couldn't stand that imaginative sort of bullying from her. It is death to a man.

"I said to Cuesta: 'Why do you go to Ethel? Why don't you stay away, and make her go back to the United States? Are you in love with her?' He was obscene, as usual. 'Am I in love with a cuttlefish, that is all arms and eyes, and no legs or tail! That blonde is a cuttlefish. She is an octopus, all arms and eyes and beak, and a lump of jelly.' — 'Then why don't you leave her alone?' — 'Even cuttlefish is good when it's cooked in sauce,' he said. 'You had much better leave her alone,' I said. — 'Leave her alone yourself, my esteemed Señor,' he said to me. And I knew I had better go no further.

"She said to him one evening, when only I was there — and she said it in Spanish, direct to him: 'Why do you never come alone to see me? Why do you always come with another person? Are you afraid?' He looked at her, and his eyes never changed. But he said, in his usual flat, meaningless voice: 'It is because I cannot speak, except Spanish.' — 'But we could understand one another,' she said, giving one of her little violent snorts of impatience and embarrassed rage. 'Who knows!' he replied, imperturbably.

"Afterwards, he said to me: 'What does she want? She hates a man as she hates a red-hot iron. A white devil, as sacred as the communion wafer!' — 'Then why don't you leave her alone?' I said. — 'She is so rich,' he smiled. 'She has all the world in her thousand arms. She is as rich as God. The Archangels are poor beside her, she is so rich and so white-skinned and white-souled.' — 'Then all the more, why don't you leave her alone?' But he did not answer me.

"He went alone, however, to see her. But always in the early evening. And he never stayed more than half an hour. His car, well-known everywhere, waited outside: till he came out in his French-grey suit and glistening brown shoes, his hat rather on the back of his head.

"What they said to one another, I don't know. But she became always more distraught and absorbed, as if she were brooding over a single idea. I said to her: 'Why take it seriously? Dozens of women have slept with Cuesta, and think no more of it. Why take him seriously?' — 'I don't,' she said. 'I take myself seriously, that's the point.' — 'Let it be the point. Go on taking yourself seriously, and leave him out of the question altogether.'

"But she was tired of my playing the wise uncle, and I was tired of her taking herself seriously. She took herself so seriously, it seemed to me she would deserve what she got, playing the fool with Cuesta. Of course she did not love him at all. She only wanted to see if she could make an impression on him, make him yield to her will. But all the impression she made on him was to make him

call her a squid and an octopus and other nice things. And I could see their 'love' did not go forward at all.

"Have you made love to her?" I asked him. — 'I have not touched the zopilote,' he said. 'I hate her bare white neck.'

"But still he went to see her: always, for a very brief call, before sundown. She asked him to come to dinner with me. He said he could never come to dinner, nor after dinner, as he was always engaged from eight o'clock in the evening onwards. She looked at him as much as to tell him she knew it was a lie and a subterfuge, but he never turned a hair. He was, she put it, utterly unimaginative: an impervious animal.

"You, however, come one day to your poor house in the Guadalupe Road,' he said — meaning his house. He had said it, suggestively, several times.

"But you are always engaged in the evening,' she said.

"Come, then, at night — come at eleven, when I am free,' he said, with supreme animal impudence, looking into her eyes.

"Do you receive calls so late?' she said, flushing with anger and embarrassment and obstinacy.

"At times,' he said. 'When it is very special.'

"A few days later, when I called to see her as usual, I was told she was ill, and could see no one. The next day, she was still not to be seen. She had had a dangerous nervous collapse. The third day, a friend rang me up to say Ethel was dead.

"The thing was hushed up. But it was known she had poisoned herself. She left a note to me, in which she merely said: 'It is as I told you. Good-bye. But my testament holds good.'

"In her will, she had left half her fortune to Cuesta. The will had been made some ten days before her death — and it was allowed to stand. He took the money — "

Colmenares' voice tailed off into silence.

"Her body had got the better of her imagination, after all," I said.

"It was worse than that," he said.

"How?"

He was a long time before he answered. Then he said: "She actually went to Cuesta's house that night, way down there beyond the Volador market. She went by appointment. And there in his bedroom he handed her over to half a dozen of his bullring gang, with orders not to bruise her. Yet at the inquest there were a few deep, strange bruises, and the doctors made reports. Then apparently the visit to Cuesta's house came to light, but no details were ever told. Then there was another revolution, and in the hubbub this affair was dropped. It was too

shady, anyhow. Ethel had certainly encouraged Cuesta at her apartment.”

“But how do you know he handed her over like that?”

“One of the men told me himself. He was shot afterwards.”

THE UNDYING MAN

LONG ago in Spain there were two very learned men, so clever and knowing so much that they were famous all over the world. One was called Rabbi Moses Maimonides, a Jew — blessed be his memory! — and the other was called Aristotle, a Christian who belonged to the Greeks.

These two were great friends, because they had always studied together and found out many things together. At last after many years, they found out a thing they had been specially trying for. They discovered that if you took a tiny little vein out of a man's body, and put it in a glass jar with certain leaves and plants, it would gradually begin to grow, and would grow and grow until it became a man. When it had grown as big as a boy, you could take it out of the jar, and then it would live and keep on growing till it became a man, a fine man who would never die. He would be undying. Because he had never been born, he would never die, but live for ever and ever. Because the wisest men on earth had made him, and he didn't have to be born.

When they were quite sure it was so, then the Rabbi Moses Maimonides and the Christian Aristotle decided they would really make a man. Up till then, they had only experimented. But now they would make the real undying man.

The question was, from whom should they take the little vein? Because the man they took it from would die. So at first they decided to take it from a slave. But then they thought, a slave wasn't good enough to make the beginnings of the undying man. So they decided to ask one of their devoted students to sacrifice himself. But that did not seem right either, because they might get a man they didn't really like, and whom they wouldn't want to be the beginning of the man who would never die. So at last, they decided to leave it to fate; they gathered together their best and most learned disciples, and they all agreed to draw lots. The lot fell to Aristotle, to have the little vein cut from his body.

So Aristotle had to agree. But before he would have the little vein cut out of his body, Aristotle asked Maimonides to take him by the hand and swear by their clasped hands that he would never interfere with the growth of the little vein, never at any time or in any way. Maimonides took him by the hand and swore. And then Aristotle had the little vein cut out of his body by Maimonides himself.

So now Maimonides alone took the little vein and placed it among the leaves and herbs, as they had discovered, in the great glass jar, and he sealed the jar. Then he set the jar on a shelf in his own room where nobody entered but himself,

and he waited. The days passed by, and he recited his prayers, pacing back and forth in his room among his books, and praying loudly as he paced, as the Jews do. Then he returned to his books and his chemistry. But every day he looked at the jar, to see if the little vein had changed. For a long time it did not change. So he thought it was in vain.

Then at last it seemed to change, to have grown a little. Rabbi Moses Maimonides gazed at the jar transfixed, and forgot everything else in all the wide world; lost to all and everything, he gazed into the jar. And at last he saw the tiniest, tiniest tremor in the little vein, and he knew it was a tremor of growth. He sank on the floor and lay unconscious, because he had seen the first tremor of growth of the undying man.

When he came to himself, the room was dusk, it was almost night. And Rabbi Moses Maimonides was afraid. He did not know what he was afraid of. He rose to his feet, and glanced towards the jar. And it seemed to him, in the darkness on the shelf there was a tiny red glow, like the smallest ember of fire. But it did not go out, as the last ember of fire goes out while you watch. It stayed on, and glowed a tiny dying glow that did not die. Then he knew he saw the glow of the life of the undying man, and he was afraid.

He locked his room, where no one ever entered but himself, and went out into the town. People greeted him with bows and reverences, for he was the most learned of all rabbis. But tonight they all seemed very far from him. They looked small and they grimaced like monkeys in his eyes. And he thought to himself: they will all die! They grimace in this fashion, like monkeys, because they will all die. Only I shall not die!

But as he thought this, his heart stood still, because he knew that he too would die. He stood still in the street, though rain was falling, and people crept past him humbly, thinking he was praying some great prayer. But he was only locked in this one thought: I shall die and pass away, but that little red spark which came from Aristotle the Christian, it will never die. It will live for ever and ever, like God. God alone lives for ever and ever. But this man in the jar will also live for ever and ever, even that red spark. He will be a man, and live for ever and ever, as good as God. Nay, better than God! For surely, to be as good as God, and to be also a man and alive, that would be better even than being God!

Rabbi Moses Maimonides started at this thought as if he had been stung. And immediately he began to walk down the street towards home, to see if the red glow were really glowing. When he got to his door, he stood still, afraid to open. He could not open.

So suddenly he cried a great fierce cry to God, to help him and His people. A great fierce cry for help. For they were God's people, God's chosen people.

Though they grimaced in the sight of Rabbi Moses Maimonides like monkeys, they were beautiful in the sight of God, and the best Jews among them would sit in high, high places in the eternal glory of God, in the after-life.

This thought so emboldened Maimonides that he opened his door and entered his room. But he stood again as if pierced through the body by that strange red light, like no light of God, which glowed so tiny and yet was so fierce and strong. 'Fierce and strong! fierce and strong!' he kept muttering to himself as he paced back and forth in his room. 'Fierce and strong!' His servant thought he was praying, and she dared not bring his food to the door. 'Fierce and strong!' — he paced back and forth. And he himself thought he was praying. He was so used to praying the ritual prayers as he paced in his room, that now he thought he was praying to the one and only God. But in fact, all he was saying was 'Fierce and strong! Fierce and strong!'

At last he sank down in exhaustion, and then his woman tapped at his door and set down the tray. But he told her to take the tray away, he would not eat in his room, but would come downstairs. For he could not eat in the presence of that little red glow.

So he made his ablutions and went downstairs and ate. And he slept in the guest-room, for he could not sleep in the presence of the little red glow. Indeed he could not sleep at all, but lay and groaned in spirit, thinking of that little red light which alone of all light was not the light of God. And he knew it would grow and grow, and be a man, most splendid, a man who would never die. And all the people would think: What is the most wonderful of all things, seen or unseen? — And there would come the

THE MAN WHO WAS THROUGH WITH THE WORLD

THERE was a man not long ago, who felt he was through with the world, so he decided to be a hermit. He had a little money, and he knew that nowadays there are no hermitages going rent-free. So he bought a bit of wild land on a mountain-side, with a few chestnut trees growing on it. He waited till spring; then went up and started building himself a little cabin, with the stones from the hillside. By summer, he had got himself a nice little hut with a chimney and one little window, a table, a chair, a bed, and the smallest number of things a hermit may need. Then he considered himself set up as a hermit.

His hermitage stood in a sheltered nook in the rocks of the mountain, and through the open door he looked out on the big, staggering chestnut trees of the upper region. These trees, this bit of property was his legal own, but he wanted to dedicate it to somebody: to God, preferably.

He felt, however, a bit vague about God. In his youth he had been sent to Sunday School, but he had long been through with all that. He had, as a matter of fact, even forgotten the Lord's Prayer, like the old man in the Tolstoi parable. If he tried to remember it, he mixed it up with The Lord is my Shepherd, and felt annoyed. He might, of course, have fetched himself a Bible. But he was through with all that.

Because, before he was through with everything, he had read quite a lot about Brahma and Krishna and Shiva, and Buddha and Confucius and Mithras, not to mention Zeus and Aphrodite and that bunch, nor the Wotan family. So when he began to think: The Lord is my Shepherd, somehow Shiva would start dancing a Charleston in the back of his mind, and Mithras would take the bull by the horns, and Mohammed would start patting the buttery flanks of Ayesha, and Abraham would be sitting down to a good meal off a fat ram, till the grease ran down his beard. So that it was very difficult to concentrate on God with a large 'g', and the hermit had a natural reluctance to go into refinements of the great I Am, or of thatness. He wanted to get away from all that sort of thing. For what else had he become a hermit?

But alas, he found it wasn't so easy. If you're a hermit, you've got to concentrate. You've got to sit in the door of your hut in the sunshine, and concentrate on something holy. This hermit would sit in the door of his hut in the sunshine right enough, but he couldn't find anything holy enough really to keep

him concentrated. If he tried some nice Eastern mode of meditation, and sat cross-legged with a faint lotus-like smile on his face, some dog-in-the-manger inside him growled: Oh, cut it out, Henry, Nirvana's a cold egg for the likes of you.

So gradually the hermit became desperate. There he was, all rigged up quite perfect as a holy man, a hermit, and an anchorite, and he felt like an acrobat trying to hang on to a tight wire with his eyebrows. He simply had nothing to hold on to. There wasn't a single holiness or high-and-mightiness that interested him enough to bring concentration. And a hermit with nothing to concentrate on is like a fly in the cream jug.

Spring changed into summer. The primroses by the little stream where the hermit dipped his water faded and were gone, only their large leaves spread to the hotter days. The violets flickered to a finish; at last not a purple spark was left. The chestnut burrs upon the ground finally had melted away, the leaves overhead had emerged and over-lapped one another, to make the green roof of summer. And the hermit was bored, and rather angry with himself and everything else. He saw nobody up there: an occasional goat-boy, an occasional hunter shooting little birds went by, looking askance. The hermit nodded a salutation, but no more.

Then at intervals he went down to the village for food. The village was four long miles away, down the steep side of the mountain. And when you got there, you found nothing but the silence, the dirt, the poverty and the suspicion of a mountain hamlet. And there was very little to buy.

The hermit always hurried back to his hermitage in disgust. Absence from his fellow-men did not make him love them any the more. On the contrary, they seemed more repulsive and smelly, when he came among them, after his isolation among the chestnut trees, and their weird sort of greed about money, tiny sums of money, made them seem like a plague of caterpillars to him. 'People badly need to have souls, to hatch out with wings after death,' he thought to himself, 'for they really are repulsive pale grubs in this life.'

So he went back to his hermitage glad to get away from his fellow-men, but no happier at having to hang on to his solitude by his eyebrows, in danger of slipping off any minute. For he still had nothing to concentrate on, and no sense of holiness came to soothe him.

He had brought no books with him, having renounced the world of which they are part. Sometimes he regretted this, sometimes he didn't. But he did nothing about it. He lived stubbornly on from day to day, letting his brown beard grow bushy round his nose, and his black hair long on his neck. When it was warm enough, he went nude, with just a loincloth. For long hours he sat near his hut in

the sun, not meditating, not even musing, just being stubborn, and getting browned to a beautiful gold-brown colour. He did not mind so much, while the sun shone, and he could stroll nude through the trees, or sit out in the glow or in the shade. Then he didn't mind not being able to meditate nor to concentrate, and not having any holiness to bless himself with. The sun on his body seemed to do all the meditating and concentrating he needed. His limbs were thin, and golden brown, and his thin body was as brown as his face. He was, like the savage in the story, 'face all over'.

'I am face all over,' he thought to himself, with a smile. The strings of the chestnut flowers had fallen, the fruits set and grew big, of a clear green colour, and fuzzy. The hermit had to decide whether he would stay on after the chestnuts had come down, when the snow would fall and the mountains lapse into isolation. He was still hanging on to solitude by his eyebrows, and nothing holy had turned up for him to concentrate on.

But he was getting used to the condition. And the very fact that he was alone, that no people came near him, was a source of positive satisfaction. He decided he would stay on all Winter.

This, however, meant getting in certain supplies for the cold months, and especially boots and clothing and bedding, for he had no mind to mortify the flesh by shivering with cold. The snow would lie round his cabin, and the icy wind would whistle through his chestnut trees in huge blasts. Prepare for the wrath to come.

So he put on his decent suit of clothes, clipped his beard a little, descended, took the post-omnibus and then the train, and found himself in the city. His chief feeling was that everything smelled unpleasantly, that the noise was hellish, and that people had terrible and repulsive faces; and that everywhere was a rancid odour of money, a terrible over-smell that reeked from everything animate and inanimate.

He bought his necessities with disgust, hurrying to get it over. Everybody stared at him as if he were a cameleopard, and he knew the police wanted to arrest him at sight. He had to spend the night in town, so he stayed at the big hotel near the station. And he fixed the clerk with a cold and haughty eye, and spoke in his coldest, calmly arrogant voice, knowing that if he were for one moment modest or uncertain, the worm behind the desk would deny him a room.

As it was, he had to put up with an inner bedroom, beside the lift. But at dawn, he left the place, having settled his bill the night before, and getting all his bundles into a carriage, drove across to the station. The porter who helped him eyed him with the usual insolent stare, and took his tip and dodged away with the air of a contemptuous human being who has just about had enough of

attending to animals in a menagerie.

The hermit, for his part, hired a donkey at the village, piled his goods upon it, and shook the stink of his fellow-men out of his clothing. Never had he been so glad to climb through the trees. Never had anything looked so nice as his stone hut with its barrel roof, the first yellow leaves of the chestnuts dropping around it, and the rosy little cyclamens in the moss just near the door.

It was a warm afternoon. He hastily took off his clothing and put it in the sun, to remove the taint of the city and the train. He went down to his pool to wash himself, and stayed naked in the sun till sunset, to clear himself from the pollution of people.

There followed a busy period. He gathered the chestnuts scrupulously as they fell, piling them in a heap near the door, then carefully getting them from their burrs, and spreading the bright nuts on his small roof. He built a lean-to against his little house, and stacked his wood there, that he cut in the forest. Also he began to collect the big pine-cones that have pine-kernels inside them: though for these it was as yet full early.

Already the mornings and evenings were touched with ice. He emerged in the morning in warm woollen clothing, which he peeled off as the sun rose, and at last went about in his own brown skin. But many days were cold, and many were rainy, and he had to remain covered up.

Then he was never happy. He found, the more clothing he had to wear, the more he was restless and needed to think, needed some sort of salvation; and on the other hand, the more he could go naked in the sun, the less he went in need of any salvation. So while he could, he went about stark, and gradually he grew tougher. But as winter and the snow-winds swept the mountains, he could less and less afford to lose his bodily heat, by exposing himself.

In the days of cold rain, he did his chores in his hut, and made himself bread, and cooked pies, and mended his clothes.

THE MAN WHO LOVED ISLANDS

First Island

There was a man who loved islands. He was born on one, but it didn't suit him, as there were too many other people on it, besides himself. He wanted an island all of his own: not necessarily to be alone on it, but to make it a world of his own.

An island, if it is big enough, is no better than a continent. It has to be really quite small, before it *feels like* an island; and this story will show how tiny it has to be, before you can presume to fill it with your own personality.

Now circumstances so worked out, that this lover of islands, by the time he was thirty-five, actually acquired an island of his own. He didn't own it as freehold property, but he had a ninety-nine years' lease of it, which, as far as a man and an island are concerned, is as good as everlasting. Since, if you are like Abraham, and want your offspring to be numberless as the sands of the sea-shore, you don't choose an island to start breeding on. Too soon there would be overpopulation, overcrowding, and slum conditions. Which is a horrid thought, for one who loves an island for its insulation. No, an island is a nest which holds one egg, and one only. This egg is the islander himself.

The island acquired by our potential islander was not in the remote oceans. It was quite near at home, no palm-trees nor boom of surf on the reef, nor any of that kind of thing; but a good solid dwelling-house, rather gloomy, above the landing-place, and beyond, a small farmhouse with sheds, and a few outlying fields. Down on the little landing bay were three cottages in a row, like coastguards' cottages, all neat and white-washed.

What could be more cozy and home-like? It was four miles if you walked all round your island, through the gorse and the blackthorn bushes, above the steep rocks of the sea and down in the little glades where the primroses grew. If you walked straight over the two humps of hills, the length of it, through the rocky fields where the cows lay chewing, and through the rather sparse oats, on into the gorse again, and so to the low cliffs' edge, it took you only twenty minutes. And when you came to the edge, you could see another, bigger island lying beyond. But the sea was between you and it. And as you returned over the turf where the short, downland cowslips nodded you saw to the east still another island, a tiny one this time, like the calf of the cow. This tiny island also

belonged to the islander.

Thus it seems that even islands like to keep each other company.

Our islander loved his island very much. In early spring, the little ways and glades were a snow of blackthorn, a vivid white among the celtic stillness of close green and grey rock, blackbirds calling out in the whiteness their first long, triumphant calls. After the blackthorn and the nestling primroses came the blue apparition of hyacinths, like elfin lakes and slipping sheets of blue, among the bushes and under the glade of trees. And many birds with nests you could peep into, on the island all your own. Wonderful what a great world it was!

Followed summer, and the cowslips gone, the wild roses faintly fragrant through the haze. There was a field of hay, the foxgloves stood looking down. In a little cove, the sun was on the pale granite where you bathed, and the shadow was in the rocks. Before the mist came stealing, and you went home through the ripening oats, the glare of the sea fading from the high air as the foghorn started to moo on the other island. And then the sea-fog went, it was autumn, and oat-sheaves lying prone; the great moon, another island, rose golden out of the sea, and, rising higher, the world of the sea was white.

So autumn ended with rain, and winter came, dark skies and dampness and rain, but rarely frost. The island, your island, cowered dark, holding away from you. You could feel, down in the wet, sombre hollows, the resentful spirit coiled upon itself, like a wet dog coiled in gloom, or a snake that is neither asleep nor awake. Then in the night, when the wind left off blowing in great gusts and volleys, as at sea, you felt that your island was a universe, infinite and old as the darkness; not an island at all, but an infinite dark world where all the souls from all the other bygone nights lived on, and the infinite distance was near.

Strangely, from your little island in space, you were gone forth into the dark, great realms of time, where all the souls that never die veer and swoop on their vast, strange errands. The little earthly island has dwindled, like a jumping-off place, into nothingness, for you have jumped off, you know not how, into the dark wide mystery of time, where the past is vastly alive, and the future is not separated off.

This is the danger of becoming an islander. When, in the city, you wear your white spats and dodge the traffic with the fear of death down your spine, then you are quite safe from the terrors of infinite time. The moment is your little islet in time, it is the spatial universe that careers round you.

But once isolate yourself on a little island in the sea of space, and the moment begins to heave and expand in great circles, the solid earth is gone, and your slippery, naked dark soul finds herself out in the timeless world, where the chariots of the so-called dead dash down the old streets of centuries, and souls

crowd on the footways that we, in the moment, call bygone years. The souls of all the dead are alive again, and pulsating actively around you. You are out in the other infinity.

Something of this happened to our islander. Mysterious “feelings” came upon him, that he wasn’t used to; strange awarenesses of old, far-gone men, and other influences; men of Gaul, with big moustaches, who had been on his island, and had vanished from the face of it, but not out of the air of night. They were there still, hurtling their big, violent, unseen bodies through the night. And there were priests, with golden knives and mistletoe; then other priests with a crucifix; then pirates with murder on the sea.

Our islander was uneasy. He didn’t believe, in the daytime, in any of this nonsense. But at night it just was so. He had reduced himself to a single point in space, and, a point being that which has neither length nor breadth, he had to step off it into somewhere else. Just as you must step into the sea, if the waters wash your foothold away, so he had, at night, to step off into the otherworld of undying time.

He was uncannily aware, as he lay in the dark, that the blackthorn grove that seemed a bit uncanny even in the realm of space and day, at night was crying with old men of an invisible race, around the altar stone. What was a ruin under the hornbeam trees by day, was a moaning of bloodstained priests with crucifixes, on the ineffable night. What was a cave and hidden beach between coarse rocks, became in the invisible dark the purple-lipped imprecation of pirates.

To escape any more of this sort of awareness, our islander daily concentrated upon his material island. Why should it not be the Happy Isle at last? Why not the last small isle of the Hesperides, the perfect place, all filled with his own gracious, blossom-like spirit? A minute world of pure perfection, made by man, himself.

He began, as we begin all our attempts to regain Paradise, by spending money. The old, semi-feudal dwelling-house he restored, let in more light, put clear lovely carpets on the floor, clear, flower-petal curtains at the sullen windows, and wines in the cellars of rock. He brought over a buxom housekeeper from the world, and a soft-spoken, much-experienced butler. These too were to be islanders.

In the farmhouse he put a bailiff, with two farm-hands. There were Jersey cows, tinkling a slow bell, among the gorse. There was a call to meals at midday, and the peaceful smoking of chimneys at evening, when rest descended.

A jaunty sailing-boat with a motor accessory rode in the shelter in the bay, just below the row of three white cottages. There was also a little yawl, and two row-

boats drawn up on the sand. A fishing net was drying on its supports, a boat-load of new white planks stood crisscross, a woman was going to the well with a bucket.

In the end cottage lived the skipper of the yacht, and his wife and son. He was a man from the other, large island, at home on this sea. Every fine day he went out fishing, with his son, every fine day there was fresh fish on the island.

In the middle cottage lived an old man and wife, a very faithful couple. The old man was a carpenter, and man of many jobs. He was always working, always the sound of his plane or his saw: lost in his work, he was another kind of islander.

In the third cottage was the mason, a widower with a son and two daughters. With the help of his boy, this man dug ditches and built fences, raised buttresses and erected a new outbuilding, and hewed stone from the little quarry. His daughters worked at the big house.

It was a quiet, busy little world. When the islander brought you over as his guest, you met first the dark-bearded, thin, smiling skipper, Arnold, then his boy Charles. At the house, the smooth-lipped butler who had lived all over the world valeted you, and created that curious creamy-smooth, disarming sense of luxury around you which only a perfect and rather untrustworthy servant can create. He disarmed you and had you at his mercy. The buxom housekeeper smiled and treated you with the subtly respectful familiarity, that is only dealt out to the true gentry. And the rosy maid threw a glance at you, as if you were very wonderful, coming from the great outer world. Then you met the smiling but watchful bailiff, who came from Cornwall, and the shy farm-hand from Berkshire, with his clean wife and two little children, then the rather sulky farm-hand from Suffolk. The mason, a Kent man, would talk to you by the yard, if you let him. Only the old carpenter was gruff and elsewhere absorbed.

Well then, it was a little world to itself, and everybody feeling very safe, and being very nice to you, as if you were really something special. But it was the islander's world, not yours. He was the Master. The special smile, the special attention was to the Master. They all knew how well off they were. So the islander was no longer Mr So-and-So. To everyone on the island, even to you yourself, he was "the Master".

Well, it was ideal. The Master was no tyrant. Ah no! He was a delicate, sensitive, handsome Master, who wanted everything perfect and everybody happy. Himself, of course, to be the fount of this happiness and perfection.

But in his way, he was a poet. He treated his guests royally, his servants liberally. Yet he was shrewd, and very wise. He never came the boss over his people. Yet he kept his eye on everything, like a shrewd; blue-eyed young

Hermes. And it was amazing what a lot of knowledge he had at hand. Amazing what he knew about Jersey cows, and cheese-making, ditching and fencing, flowers and gardening, ships and the sailing of ships. He was a fount of knowledge about everything, and this knowledge he imparted to his people in an odd, half-ironical, half-portentous fashion, as if he really belonged to the quaint, half-real world of the gods.

They listened to him with their hats in their hands. He loved white clothes; or creamy white; and cloaks, and broad hats. So, in fine weather, the bailiff would see the elegant tall figure in creamy-white serge coming like some bird over the fallow, to look at the weeding of the turnips. Then there would be a doffing of hats, and a few minutes of whimsical, shrewd, wise talk, to which the bailiff answered admiringly, and the farm-hands listened in silent wonder, leaning on their hoes. The bailiff was almost tender, to the Master.

Or, on a windy morning, he would stand with his cloak blowing in the sticky sea-wind, on the edge of the ditch that was being dug to drain a little swamp, talking in the teeth of the wind to the man below; who looked up at him with steady and inscrutable eyes.

Or at evening in the rain he would be seen hurrying across the yard, the broad hat turned against the rain. And the farm-wife would hurriedly exclaim: "The Master! Get up, John, and clear him a place on the sofa." And then the door opened, and it was a cry of: "Why of all things, if it isn't the Master! Why, have ye turned out then of a night like this, to come across to the like of we?" And the bailiff took his cloak, and the farm-wife his hat, the two farm-hands drew their chairs to the back, he sat on the sofa and took a child up near him. He was wonderful with children, talked to them simply wonderful, made you think of Our Saviour Himself, said the woman.

Always he was greeted with smiles, and the same peculiar deference, as if he were a higher, but also frailer being. They handled him almost tenderly, and almost with adulation. But when he left, or when they spoke of him, they had often a subtle, mocking smile on their faces. There was no need to be afraid of "the Master". Just let him have his own way. Only the old carpenter was sometimes sincerely rude to him; so he didn't care for the old man.

It is doubtful whether any of them really liked him, man to man, or even woman to man. But then it is doubtful if he really liked any of them, as man to man, or man to woman. He wanted them to be happy, and the little world to be perfect. But any one who wants the world to be perfect must be careful not to have real likes and dislikes. A general good-will is all you can afford.

The sad fact is, alas, that general good-will is always felt as something of an insult, by the mere object of it; and so it breeds a quite special brand of malice.

Surely general good-will is a form of egoism, that it should have such a result!

Our islander, however, had his own resources. He spent long hours in his library, for he was compiling a book of reference to all the flowers mentioned in the Greek and Latin authors. He was not a great classical scholar: the usual public-school equipment. But there are such excellent translations nowadays. And it was so lovely, tracing flower after flower as it blossomed in the ancient world.

So the first year on the island passed by. A great deal had been done. Now the bills flooded in, and the Master, conscientious in all things, began to study them. The study left him pale and breathless. He was not a rich man. He knew he had been making a hole in his capital, to get the island into running order. When he came to look, however, there was hardly anything left but hole. Thousands and thousands of pounds had the island swallowed into nothingness.

But surely the bulk of the spending was over! Surely the island would now begin to be self-supporting, even if it made no profit! Surely he was safe. He paid a good many of the bills, and took a little heart. But he had had a shock, and the next year, the coming year, there must be economy, frugality. He told his people so, in simple and touching language. And they said: "Why surely! Surely!"

So, while the wind blew and the rain lashed outside, he would sit in his library with the bailiff over a pipe and a pot of beer, discussing farm projects. He lifted his narrow handsome face, and his blue eye became dreamy. "*What* a wind!" It blew like cannon shots. He thought of his island, lashed with foam, and inaccessible, and he exulted . . . No, he must not lose it. He turned back to the farm projects with the zest of genius, and his hands flicked white emphasis, while the bailiff intoned: "Yes, Sir! Yes, Sir! You're right, Master!"

But the man was hardly listening. He was looking at the Master's blue lawn shirt and curious pink tie with the fiery red stone, at the enamel sleeve-links, and at the ring with the peculiar scarab. The brown searching eyes of the man of the soil glanced repeatedly over the fine, immaculate figure of the Master, with a sort of slow, calculating wonder. But if he happened to catch the Master's bright, exalted glance, his own eye lit up with a careful cordiality and deference, as he bowed his head slightly.

Thus between them they decided what crops should be sown, what fertilizers should be used in different places, which breed of pigs should be imported, and which line of turkeys. That is to say, the bailiff, by continually cautiously agreeing with the Master, kept out of it, and let the young man have his own way.

The Master knew what he was talking about. He was brilliant at grasping the

gist of a book, and knowing how to apply his knowledge. On the whole, his ideas were sound. The bailiff even knew it. But in the man of the soil there was no answering enthusiasm. The brown eyes smiled their cordial deference, but the thin lips never changed. The Master pursed his own flexible mouth in a boyish versatility, as he cleverly sketched in his ideas to the other man, and the bailiff made eyes of admiration, but in his heart he was not attending, he was only watching the Master as he would have watched a queer, alien animal, quite without sympathy, not implicated.

So, it was settled, and the Master rang for Elvery, the butler, to bring a sandwich. He, the Master, was pleased. The butler saw it, and came back with anchovy and ham sandwiches, and a newly opened bottle of vermouth. There was always a newly opened bottle of something.

It was the same with the mason. The Master and he discussed the drainage of a bit of land, and more pipes were ordered, more special bricks, more this, more that.

Fine weather came at last, there was a little lull in the hard work on the island. The Master went for a short cruise in his yacht. It was not really a yacht, just a neat little bit of a yawl. They sailed along the coast of the mainland, and put in at the ports. At every port some friend turned up, the butler made elegant little meals in the cabin. Then the Master was invited to villas and hotels, his people disembarked him as if he were a prince.

And oh, how expensive it turned out! He had to telegraph to the bank for money. And he went home again, to economize.

The marsh-marigolds were blazing in the little swamp where the ditches were being dug for drainage. He almost regretted, now, the work in hand. The yellow beauties would not blaze again.

Harvest came, and a bumper crop. There must be a harvest-home supper. The long barn was now completely restored and added to. The carpenter had made long tables. Lanterns hung from the beams of the high-pitched roof. All the people of the island were assembled. The bailiff presided. It was a gay scene.

Towards the end of the supper the Master, in a velvet jacket, appeared with his guests. Then the bailiff rose and proposed: "The Master! Long life and health to the Master!" All the people drank the health with great enthusiasm and cheering. The Master replied with a little speech: They were on an island in a little world of their own. It depended on them all to make this world a world of true happiness and content. Each must do his part. He hoped he himself did what he could, for his heart was in his island, and with the people of his island.

The butler responded: As long as the island had such a Master, it could not but be a little heaven for all the people on it. — This was seconded with virile

warmth by the bailiff and the mason, the skipper was beside himself. Then there was dancing, the old carpenter was fiddler.

But under all this, things were not well. The very next morning came the farm-boy to say that a cow had fallen over the cliff. The Master went to look. He peered over the not very high declivity, and saw her lying dead, on a green ledge under a bit of late-flowering broom. A beautiful, expensive creature, already looking swollen. But what a fool, to fall so unnecessarily!

It was a question of getting several men to haul her up the bank: and then of skinning and burying her. No one would eat the meat. How repulsive it all was!

This was symbolic of the island. As sure as the spirits rose in the human breast, with a movement of joy, an invisible hand struck malevolently out of the silence. There must not be any joy, nor even any quiet peace. A man broke a leg, another was crippled with rheumatic fever. The pigs had some strange disease. A storm drove the yacht on a rock. The mason hated the butler, and refused to let his daughter serve at the house.

Out of the very air came a stony, heavy malevolence. The island itself seemed malicious. It would go on being hurtful and evil for weeks at a time. Then suddenly again one morning it would be fair, lovely as a morning in Paradise, everything beautiful and flowing. And everybody would begin to feel a great relief, and a hope for happiness.

Then as soon as the Master was opened out in spirit like an open flower, some ugly blow would fall. Somebody would send him an anonymous note, accusing some other person on the island. Somebody else would come hinting things against one of his servants.

“Some folks thinks they’ve got an easy job out here, with all the pickings they make!” the mason’s daughter screamed at the suave butler, in the Master’s hearing. He pretended not to hear.

“My man says this island is surely one of the lean kine of Egypt, it would swallow a sight of money, and you’d never get anything back out of it,” confided the farm-hand’s wife to one of the Master’s visitors.

The people were not contented. They were not islanders. “We feel we’re not doing right by the children,” said those who had children. “We feel we’re not doing right by ourselves,” said those who had no children. And the various families fairly came to hate one another.

Yet the island was so lovely. When there was a scent of honey-suckle, and the moon brightly flickering down on the sea, then even the grumblers felt a strange nostalgia for it. It set you yearning, with a wild yearning; perhaps for the past, to be far back in the mysterious past of the island, when the blood had a different throb. Strange floods of passion came over you, strange violent lusts and

imaginings of cruelty. The blood and the passion and the lust which the island had known. Uncanny dreams, half-dreams, half-evocated yearnings.

The Master himself began to be a little afraid of his island. He felt here strange violent feelings he had never felt before, and lustful desires that he had been quite free from. He knew quite well now that his people didn't love him at all. He knew that their spirits were secretly against him, malicious, jeering, envious, and lurking to down him. He became just as wary and secretive with regard to them.

But it was too much. At the end of the second year, several departures took place. The housekeeper went. The Master always blamed self-important women most. The mason said he wasn't going to be monkeyed about any more, so he took his departure, with his family. The rheumatic farm-hand left.

And then the year's bills came in, the Master made up his accounts. In spite of good crops, the assets were ridiculous, against the spending. The island had again lost, not hundreds but thousands of pounds. It was incredible. But you simply couldn't believe it! Where had it all gone?

The Master spent gloomy nights and days, going through accounts in the library. He was thorough. It became evident, now the housekeeper had gone, that she had swindled him. Probably everybody was swindling him. But he hated to think it, so he put the thought away.

He emerged, however, pale and hollow-eyed from his balancing of unbalanceable accounts, looking as if something had kicked him in the stomach. It was pitiable. But the money had gone, and there was an end of it. Another great hole in his capital. How could people be so heartless?

It couldn't go on, that was evident. He would soon be bankrupt. He had to give regretful notice to his butler. He was afraid to find out how much his butler had swindled him. Because the man was such a wonderful butler, after all. And the farm-bailiff had to go. The Master had no regrets in that quarter. The losses on the farm had almost embittered him.

The third year was spent in rigid cutting down of expenses. The island was still mysterious and fascinating. But it was also treacherous and cruel, secretly, fathomlessly malevolent. In spite of all its fair show of white blossom and bluebells, and the lovely dignity of foxgloves bending their rose-red bells, it was your implacable enemy.

With reduced staff, reduced wages, reduced splendour, the third year went by. But it was fighting against hope. The farm still lost a good deal. And once more, there was a hole in that remnant of capital. Another hole, in that which was already a mere remnant round the old holes. The island was mysterious in this also: it seemed to pick the very money out of your pocket, as if it were an

octopus with invisible arms stealing from you in every direction.

Yet the Master still loved it. But with a touch of rancour now.

He spent, however, the second half of the fourth year intensely working on the mainland, to be rid of it. And it was amazing how difficult he found it to dispose of an island. He had thought that everybody was pining for such an island as his; but not at all. Nobody would pay any price for it. And he wanted now to get rid of it, as a man who wants a divorce at any cost.

It was not till the middle of the fifth year that he transferred it, at a considerable loss to himself, to an hotel company who were willing to speculate in it. They were to turn it into a handy honeymoon-and-golf island!

Then, take that island which didn't know when it was well off! Now be a honeymoon-and-golf island!

Second Island

The islander had to move. But he was not going to the mainland. Oh, no! He moved to the smaller island, which still belonged to him. And he took with him the faithful old carpenter and wife, the couple he never really cared for; also a widow and daughter, who had kept house for him the last year; also an orphan lad, to help the old man.

The small island was very small; but, being a hump of rock in the sea, it was bigger than it looked. There was a little track among rocks and bushes, winding and scrambling up and down around the islet, so that it took you twenty minutes to do the circuit. It was more than you would have expected.

Still, it was an island. The islander moved himself, with all his books, into the commonplace six-roomed house up to which you had to scramble from the rocky landing-place. There were also two joined-together cottages. The old carpenter lived in one, with his wife and the lad, the widow and daughter lived in the other.

At last all was in order. The Master's books filled two rooms. It was already autumn, Orion lifting out of the sea. And in the dark nights, the Master could see the lights on his late island, where the hotel company were entertaining guests who would advertise the new resort for honeymoon-golfers.

On his hump of rock, however, the Master was still master. He explored the crannies, the odd handbreadths of grassy level, the steep little cliffs where the last harebells hung, and the seeds of summer were brown above the sea, lonely and untouched. He peered down the old well. He examined the stone pen where the pig had been kept. Himself, he had a goat.

Yes, it was an island. Always, always, underneath among the rocks the celtic sea sucked and washed and smote its feathery greyness. How many different noises of the sea! deep explosions, rumblings, strange long sighs and whistling noises; then voices, real voices of people clamouring as if they were in a market, under the waters; and again, the far-off ringing of a bell, surely an actual bell! then a tremulous trilling noise, very long and alarming, and an undertone of hoarse gasping.

On this island there were no human ghosts, no ghosts of any ancient race. The sea, and the spume and the wind and the weather, had washed them all out, washed them out, so there was only the sound of the sea itself, its own ghost, myriad-voiced, communing and plotting and shouting all winter long. And only the smell of the sea, with a few bristly bushes of gorse and coarse tufts of heather, among the grey, pellucid rocks, in the grey, more pellucid air. The coldness, the greyness, even the soft, creeping fog of the sea! and the islet of rock humped up in it all, like the last point in space.

Green star Sirius stood over the sea's rim. The island was a shadow. Out at sea a ship showed small lights. Below, in the rocky cove, the row-boat and the motor-boat were safe. A light shone in the carpenter's kitchen. That was all.

Save, of course, that the lamp was lit in the house, where the widow was preparing supper, her daughter helping. The islander went in to his meal. Here he was no longer the Master, he was an islander again and he had peace. The old carpenter, the widow and daughter were all faithfulness itself. The old man worked while ever there was light to see, because he had a passion for work. The widow and her quiet, rather delicate daughter of thirty-three worked for the Master, because they loved looking after him, and they were infinitely grateful for the haven he provided them. But they didn't call him "the Master". They gave him his name: "Mr Cathcart, Sir!" softly, and reverently. And he spoke back to them also softly, gently, like people far from the world, afraid to make a noise.

The island was no longer a "world". It was a sort of refuge. The islander no longer struggled for anything. He had no need. It was as if he and his few dependents were a small flock of sea-birds alighted on this rock, as they travelled through space, and keeping together without a word. The silent mystery of travelling birds.

He spent most of his day in his study. His book was coming along. The widow's daughter could type out his manuscript for him, she was not uneducated. It was the one strange sound on the island, the typewriter. But soon even its spattering fitted in with the sea's noises, and the wind's.

The months went by. The islander worked away in his study, the people of the

island went quietly about their concerns. The goat had a little black kid with yellow eyes. There were mackerel in the sea. The old man went fishing in the row-boat, with the lad. When the weather was calm enough, they went off in the motor-boat to the biggest island, for the post. And they brought supplies, never a penny wasted. And the days went by, and the nights, without desire, without *ennui*.

The strange stillness from all desire was a kind of wonder to the islander. He didn't want anything. His soul at last was still in him, his spirit was like a dim-lit cave under water, where strange sea-foliage expands upon the watery atmosphere, and scarcely sways, and a mute fish shadowily slips in and slips away again. All still and soft and uncrying, yet alive as rooted seaweed is alive.

The islander said to himself: "Is this happiness?" He said to himself: "I am turned into a dream. I feel nothing, or I don't know what I feel. Yet it seems to me I am happy."

Only he had to have something upon which his mental activity could work. So he spent long, silent hours in his study, working not very fast, nor very importantly, letting the writing spin softly from him as if it were drowsy gossamer. He no longer fretted whether it were good or not, what he produced. He slowly, softly spun it like gossamer, and, if it were to melt away as gossamer in autumn melts, he would not mind. It was only the soft evanescence of gossamery things which now seemed to him permanent. The very mist of eternity was in them. Whereas stone buildings, cathedrals for example, seemed to him to howl with temporary resistance, knowing they must fall at last; the tension of their long endurance seemed to howl forth from them all the time.

Sometimes he went to the mainland and to the city. Then he went elegantly, dressed in the latest style, to his club. He sat in a stall at the theatre, he shopped in Bond Street. He discussed terms for publishing his book. But over his face was that gossamery look of having dropped out of the race of progress, which made the vulgar city people feel they had won it over him, and made him glad to go back to his island.

He didn't mind if he never published his book. The years were blending into a soft mist, from which nothing obtruded. Spring came. There was never a primrose on his island, but he found a winter-aconite. There were two little sprayed bushes of blackthorn, and some wind-flowers. He began to make a list of the flowers on his islet, and that was absorbing. He noted a wild currant bush, and watched for the elder flowers on a stunted little tree, then for the first yellow rags of the broom, and wild roses. Bladder campion, orchids, stitchwort, celandine, he was prouder of them than if they had been people on his island. When he came across the golden saxifrage, so inconspicuous in a damp corner,

he crouched over it in a trance, he knew not for how long, looking at it. Yet it was nothing to look at. As the widow's daughter found, when he showed it her.

He had said to her, in real triumph:

"I found the golden saxifrage this morning."

The name sounded splendid. She looked at him with fascinated brown eyes, in which was a hollow ache that frightened him a little.

"Did you, Sir? Is it a nice flower?"

He pursed his lips and tilted his brows.

"Well — not showy exactly. I'll show it you if you like."

"I should like to see it."

She was so quiet, so wistful. But he sensed in her a persistency which made him uneasy. She said she was so happy: really happy. She followed him quietly, like a shadow, on the rocky track where there was never room for two people to walk side by side. He went first, and could feel her there, immediately behind him, following so submissively, gloating on him from behind.

It was a kind of pity for her which made him become her lover: though he never realized the extent of the power she had gained over him, and how *she* willed it. But the moment he had fallen, a jangling feeling came upon him, that it was all wrong. He felt a nervous dislike of her. He had not wanted it. And it seemed to him, as far as her physical self went, she had not wanted it either. It was just her will. He went away, and climbed at the risk of his neck down to a ledge near the sea. There he sat for hours, gazing all jangled at the sea, and saying miserably to himself: "We didn't want it. We didn't really want it."

It was the automatism of sex that had caught him again. Not that he hated sex. He deemed it, as the Chinese do, one of the great life-mysteries. But it had become mechanical, automatic, and he wanted to escape that. Automatic sex shattered him, and filled him with a sort of death. He thought he had come through, to a new stillness of desirelessness. Perhaps beyond that, there was a new fresh delicacy of desire, an unentered frail communion of two people meeting on untrodden ground.

But be that as it might, this was not it. This was nothing new or fresh. It was automatic, and driven from the will. Even she, in her true self, hadn't wanted it. It was automatic in her.

When he came home, very late, and saw her face white with fear and apprehension of his feeling against her, he pitied her, and spoke to her delicately, reassuringly. But he kept himself remote from her.

She gave no sign. She served him with the same silence, the same hidden hunger to serve him, to be near where he was. He felt her love following him with strange, awful persistency. She claimed nothing. Yet now, when he met her

bright, brown, curiously vacant eyes, he saw in them the mute question. The question came direct at him, with a force and a power of will he never realized.

So he succumbed, and asked her again.

“Not,” she said, “if it will make you hate me.”

“Why should it?” he replied, nettled. “Of course not.”

“You know I would do anything on earth for you.”

It was only afterwards, in his exasperation, he remembered what she had said, and was more exasperated. Why should she pretend to do this *for him*? Why not for herself? But in his exasperation, he drove himself deeper in. In order to achieve some sort of satisfaction, which he never did achieve, he abandoned himself to her. Everybody on the island knew. But he did not care.

Then even what desire he had left him, and he felt only shattered. He felt that only with her will had she wanted him. Now he was shattered and full of self-contempt. His island was smirched and spoiled. He had lost his place in the rare, desireless levels of Time to which he had at last arrived, and he had fallen right back. If only it had been true, delicate desire between them, and a delicate meeting on the third rare place where a man might meet a woman, when they were both true to the frail, sensitive, crocus flame of desire in them. But it had been no such thing: automatic, an act of will, not of true desire, it left him feeling humiliated.

He went away from the islet, in spite of her mute reproach. And he wandered about the continent, vainly seeking a place where he could stay. He was out of key; he did not fit in the world any more.

There came a letter from Flora — her name was Flora — to say she was afraid she was going to have a child. He sat down as if he were shot, and he remained sitting. But he replied to her: “Why be afraid? If it is so, it is so, and we should rather be pleased than afraid.”

At this very moment, it happened there was an auction of islands. He got the maps, and studied them. And at the auction he bought, for very little money, another island. It was just a few acres of rock away in the north, on the outer fringe of the isles. It was low, it rose out of the great ocean. There was not a building, not even a tree on it. Only northern sea-turf, a pool of rain-water, a bit of sedge, rock, and sea-birds. Nothing else. Under the weeping wet western sky.

He made a trip to visit his new possession. For several days, owing to the seas, he could not approach it. Then, in a light sea-mist, he landed, and saw it hazy, low, stretching apparently a long way. But it was illusion. He walked over the wet, springy turf, and dark-grey sheep tossed away from him, spectral, bleating hoarsely. And he came to the dark pool, with the sedge. Then on in the dampness, to the grey sea sucking angrily among the rocks.

This was indeed an island.

So he went home to Flora. She looked at him with guilty fear, but also with a triumphant brightness in her uncanny eyes. And again he was gentle, he reassured her, even he wanted her again, with that curious desire that was almost like toothache. So he took her to the mainland, and they were married, since she was going to have his child.

They returned to the island. She still brought in his meals, her own along with them. She sat and ate with him. He would have it so. The widowed mother preferred to stay in the kitchen. And Flora slept in the guest-room of his house, mistress of his house.

His desire, whatever it was, died in him with nauseous finality. The child would still be months coming. His island was hateful to him, vulgar, a suburb. He himself had lost all his finer distinction. The weeks passed in a sort of prison, in humiliation. Yet he stuck it out, till the child was born. But he was meditating escape. Flora did not even know.

A nurse appeared, and ate at table with them. The doctor came sometimes, and, if the sea were rough, he too had to stay. He was cheery over his whisky.

They might have been a young couple in Golders Green.

The daughter was born at last. The father looked at the baby, and felt depressed, almost more than he could bear. The millstone was tied round his neck. But he tried not to show what he felt. And Flora did not know. She still smiled with a kind of half-witted triumph in her joy, as she got well again. Then she began again to look at him with those aching, suggestive, somehow impudent eyes. She adored him so.

This he could not stand. He told her that he had to go away for a time. She wept, but she thought she had got him. He told her he had settled the best part of his property on her, and wrote down for her what income it would produce. She hardly listened, only looked at him with those heavy, adoring, impudent eyes. He gave her a cheque-book, with the amount of her credit duly entered. This did arouse her interest. And he told her, if she got tired of the island, she could choose her home wherever she wished.

She followed him with those aching, persistent brown eyes, when he left, and he never even saw her weep.

He went straight north, to prepare his third island.

The Third Island

The third island was soon made habitable. With cement and the big pebbles

from the shingle beach, two men built him a hut, and roofed it with corrugated iron. A boat brought over a bed and table, and three chairs, with a good cupboard, and a few books. He laid in a supply of coal and paraffin and food — he wanted so little.

The house stood near the flat shingle bay where he landed, and where he pulled up his light boat. On a sunny day in August the men sailed away and left him. The sea was still and pale blue. On the horizon he saw the small mail-steamer slowly passing northwards, as if she were walking. She served the outer isles twice a week. He could row out to her if need be, in calm weather, and he could signal her from a flagstaff behind his cottage.

Half a dozen sheep still remained on the island, as company; and he had a cat to rub against his legs. While the sweet, sunny days of the northern autumn lasted, he would walk among the rocks, and over the springy turf of his small domain, always coming to the ceaseless, restless sea. He looked at every leaf, that might be different from another, and he watched the endless expansion and contraction of the water-tossed seaweed. He had never a tree, not even a bit of heather to guard. Only the turf, and tiny turf-plants, and the sedge by the pool, the seaweed in the ocean. He was glad. He didn't want trees or bushes. They stood up like people, too assertive. His bare, low-pitched island in the pale blue sea was all he wanted.

He no longer worked at his book. The interest had gone. He liked to sit on the low elevation of his island, and see the sea; nothing but the pale, quiet sea. And to feel his mind turn soft and hazy, like the hazy ocean. Sometimes, like a mirage, he would see the shadow of land rise hovering to northwards. It was a big island beyond. But quite without substance.

He was soon almost startled when he perceived the steamer on the near horizon, and his heart contracted with fear, lest it were going to pause and molest him. Anxiously he watched it go, and not till it was out of sight did he feel truly relieved, himself again. The tension of waiting for human approach was cruel. He did not want to be approached. He did not want to hear voices. He was shocked by the sound of his own voice, if he inadvertently spoke to his cat. He rebuked himself for having broken the great silence. And he was irritated when his cat would look up at him and mew faintly, plaintively. He frowned at her. And she knew. She was becoming wild, lurking in the rocks, perhaps fishing.

But what he disliked most was when one of the lumps of sheep opened its mouth and baa-ed its hoarse, raucous baa. He watched it, and it looked to him hideous and gross. He came to dislike the sheep very much.

He wanted only to hear the whispering sound of the sea, and the sharp cries of the gulls, cries that came out of another world to him. And best of all, the great

silence.

He decided to get rid of the sheep, when the boat came. They were accustomed to him now, and stood and stared at him with yellow or colourless eyes, in an insolence that was almost cold ridicule. There was a suggestion of cold indecency about them. He disliked them very much. And when they jumped with staccato jumps off the rocks, and their hoofs made the dry, sharp hit, and the fleece flopped on their square backs — he found them repulsive, degrading.

The fine weather passed, and it rained all day. He lay a great deal on his bed, listening to the water trickling from his roof into the zinc water-butt, looking through the open door at the rain, the dark rocks, the hidden sea. Many gulls were on the island now: many sea-birds of all sorts. It was another world of life. Many of the birds he had never seen before. His old impulse came over him, to send for a book, to know their names. In a flicker of the old passion, to know the name of everything he saw, he even decided to row out to the steamer. The names of these birds! he must know their names, otherwise he had not got them, they were not quite alive to him.

But the desire left him, and he merely watched the birds as they wheeled or walked around him, watched them vaguely, without discrimination. All interest had left him. Only there was one gull, a big handsome fellow, who would walk back and forth, back and forth in front of the open door of the cabin, as if he had some mission there. He was big, and pearl-grey, and his roundnesses were as smooth and lovely as a pearl. Only the folded wings had shut black pinions, and on the closed black feathers were three very distinct white dots, making a pattern. The islander wondered very much, why this bit of trimming on the bird out of the far, cold seas. And as the gull walked back and forth, back and forth in front of the cabin, strutting on pale-dusky gold feet, holding up his pale yellow beak, that was curved at the tip, with curious alien importance, the man wondered over him. He was portentous, he had a meaning.

Then the bird came no more. The island, which had been full of sea-birds, the flash of wings, the sound and cut of wings and sharp eerie cries in the air, began to be deserted again. No longer they sat like living eggs on the rocks and turf, moving their heads, but scarcely rising into flight round his feet. No longer they ran across the turf among the sheep, and lifted themselves upon low wings. The host had gone. But some remained, always.

The days shortened, and the world grew eerie. One day the boat came: as if suddenly, swooping down. The islander found it a violation. It was torture to talk to those two men, in their homely clumsy clothes. The air of familiarity around them was very repugnant to him. Himself, he was neatly dressed, his cabin was neat and tidy. He resented any intrusion, the clumsy homeliness, the heavy-

footedness of the two fishermen was really repulsive to him.

The letters they had brought, he left lying unopened in a little box. In one of them was his money. But he could not bear to open even that one. Any kind of contact was repulsive to him. Even to read his name on an envelope. He hid the letters away.

And the hustle and horror of getting the sheep caught and tied and put in the ship made him loathe with profound repulsion the whole of the animal creation. What repulsive god invented animals, and evil-smelling men? To his nostrils, the fishermen and the sheep alike smelled foul; an uncleanness on the fresh earth.

He was still nerve-wracked and tortured when the ship at last lifted sail and was drawing away, over the still sea. And sometimes days after, he would start with repulsion, thinking he heard the munching of sheep.

The dark days of winter drew on. Sometimes there was no real day at all. He felt ill, as if he were dissolving, as if dissolution had already set in inside him. Everything was twilight, outside, and in his mind and soul. Once, when he went to the door, he saw black heads of men swimming in his bay. For some moments he swooned unconscious. It was the shock, the horror of unexpected human approach. The horror in the twilight! And not till the shock had undermined him and left him disembodied, did he realize that the black heads were the heads of seals swimming in. A sick relief came over him. But he was barely conscious, after the shock. Later on, he sat and wept with gratitude, because they were not men. But he never realized that he wept. He was too dim. Like some strange, ethereal animal, he no longer realized what he was doing.

Only he still derived his single satisfaction from being alone, absolutely alone, with the space soaking into him. The grey sea alone, and the footing of his sea-washed island. No other contact. Nothing human to bring its horror into contact with him. Only space, damp, twilit, sea-washed space! This was the bread of his soul.

For this reason, he was most glad when there was a storm, or when the sea was high. Then nothing could get at him. Nothing could come through to him from the outer world. True, the terrific violence of the wind made him suffer badly. At the same time, it swept the world utterly out of existence for him. He always liked the sea to be heavily rolling and tearing. Then no boat could get at him. It was like eternal ramparts round his island.

He kept no track of time, and no longer thought of opening a book. The print, the printed letters, so like the depravity of speech, looked obscene. He tore the brass label from his paraffin stove. He obliterated any bit of lettering in his cabin.

His cat had disappeared. He was rather glad. He shivered at her thin, obtrusive

call. She had lived in the coal shed. And each morning he had put her a dish of porridge, the same as he ate. He washed her saucer with repulsion. He did not like her writhing about. But he fed her scrupulously. Then one day she did not come for her porridge: she always mewed for it. She did not come again.

He prowled about his island in the rain, in a big oil-skin coat, not knowing what he was looking at, nor what he went out to see. Time had ceased to pass. He stood for long spaces, gazing from a white, sharp face, with those keen, far-off blue eyes of his, gazing fiercely and almost cruelly at the dark sea under the dark sky. And if he saw the labouring sail of a fishing boat away on the cold waters, a strange malevolent anger passed over his features.

Sometimes he was ill. He knew he was ill, because he staggered as he walked, and easily fell down. Then he paused to think what it was. And he went to his stores and took out dried milk and malt, and ate that. Then he forgot again. He ceased to register his own feelings.

The days were beginning to lengthen. All winter the weather had been comparatively mild, but with much rain, much rain. He had forgotten the sun. Suddenly, however, the air was very cold, and he began to shiver. A fear came over him. The sky was level and grey, and never a star appeared at night. It was very cold. More birds began to arrive. The island was freezing. With trembling hands he made a fire in his grate. The cold frightened him.

And now it continued, day after day, a dull, deathly cold. Occasional crumblings of snow were in the air. The days were greyly longer, but no change in the cold. Frozen grey daylight. The birds passed away, flying away. Some he saw lying frozen. It was as if all life were drawing away, contracting away from the north, contracting southwards. "Soon", he said to himself, "it will all be gone, and in all these regions nothing will be alive." He felt a cruel satisfaction in the thought.

Then one night there seemed to be a relief: he slept better, did not tremble half awake, and writhe so much, half-conscious. He had become so used to the quaking and writhing of his body, he hardly noticed it. But when for once it slept deep, he noticed that.

He awoke in the morning to a curious whiteness. His window was muffled. It had snowed. He got up and opened his door, and shuddered. Ugh! how cold! All white, with a dark leaden sea, and black rocks curiously speckled with white. The foam was no longer pure. It seemed dirty. And the sea ate at the whiteness of the corpse-like land. Crumbles of snow were silting down the dead air.

On the ground the snow was a foot deep, white and smooth and soft, windless. He took a shovel to clear round his house and shed. The pallor of morning darkened. There was a strange rumbling of far-off thunder, in the frozen air, and

through the newly-falling snow, a dim flash of lightning. Snow now fell steadily down, in the motionless obscurity.

He went out for a few minutes. But it was difficult. He stumbled and fell in the snow, which burned his face. Weak, faint, he toiled home. And when he recovered, he took the trouble to make hot milk.

It snowed all the time. In the afternoon again there was a muffled rumbling of thunder, and flashes of lightning blinking reddish through the falling snow. Uneasy, he went to bed and lay staring fixedly at nothing.

Morning seemed never to come. An eternity long he lay and waited for one alleviating pallor on the night. And at last it seemed the air was paler. His house was a cell faintly illuminated with white light. He realized the snow was walled outside his window. He got up, in the dead cold. When he opened his door, the motionless snow stopped him in a wall as high as his breast. Looking over the top of it, he felt the dead wind slowly driving, saw the snow-powder lift and travel like a funeral train. The blackish sea churned and champed, seeming to bite at the snow, impotent. The sky was grey, but luminous.

He began to work in a frenzy, to get at his boat. If he was to be shut in, it must be by his own choice, not by the mechanical power of the elements. He must get to the sea. He must be able to get at his boat.

But he was weak, and at times the snow overcame him. It fell on him, and he lay buried and lifeless. Yet every time, he struggled alive before it was too late, and fell upon the snow with the energy of fever. Exhausted, he would not give in. He crept indoors and made coffee and bacon. Long since he had cooked so much. Then he went at the snow once more. He must conquer the snow, this new, white brute force which had accumulated against him.

He worked in the awful, dead wind, pushing the snow aside, pressing it with his shovel. It was cold, freezing hard in the wind, even when the sun came out for a while, and showed him his white, lifeless surroundings, the black sea rolling sullen, flecked with dull spume, away to the horizons. Yet the sun had power on his face. It was March.

He reached the boat. He pushed the snow away, then sat down under the lee of the boat, looking at the sea, which nearly swirled to his feet, in the high tide. Curiously natural the pebbles looked, in a world gone all uncanny. The sun shone no more. Snow was falling in hard crumbs, that vanished as if by miracle as they touched the hard blackness of the sea. Hoarse waves rang in the shingle, rushing up at the snow. The wet rocks were brutally black. And all the time the myriad swooping crumbs of snow, demonish, touched the dark sea and disappeared.

During the night there was a great storm. It seemed to him he could hear the

vast mass of the snow striking all the world with a ceaseless thud; and over it all, the wind roared in strange hollow volleys, in between which came a jump of blindfold lightning, then the low roll of thunder heavier than the wind. When at last the dawn faintly discoloured the dark, the storm had more or less subsided, but a steady wind drove on. The snow was up to the top of his door.

Sullenly, he worked to dig himself out. And he managed, through sheer persistency, to get out. He was in the tail of a great drift, many feet high. When he got through, the frozen snow was not more than two feet deep. But his island was gone. Its shape was all changed, great heaping white hills rose where no hills had been, inaccessible, and they fumed like volcanoes, but with snow powder. He was sickened and overcome.

His boat was in another, smaller drift. But he had not the strength to clear it. He looked at it helplessly. The shovel slipped from his hands, and he sank in the snow, to forget. In the snow itself, the sea resounded.

Something brought him to. He crept to his house. He was almost without feeling. Yet he managed to warm himself, just that part of him which leaned in snow-sleep over the coal fire. Then again, he made hot milk. After which, carefully, he built up the fire.

The wind dropped. Was it night again? In the silence, it seemed he could hear the panther-like dropping of infinite snow. Thunder rumbled nearer, crackled quick after the bleared reddened lightning. He lay in bed in a kind of stupor. The elements! The elements! His mind repeated the word dumbly. You can't win against the elements.

How long it went on, he never knew. Once, like a wraith, he got out, and climbed to the top of a white hill on his unrecognizable island. The sun was hot. "It is summer", he said to himself, "and the time of leaves." He looked stupidly over the whiteness of his foreign island, over the waste of the lifeless sea. He pretended to imagine he saw the wink of a sail. Because he knew too well there would never again be a sail on that stark sea.

As he looked, the sky mysteriously darkened and chilled. From far off came the mutter of the unsatisfied thunder, and he knew it was the signal of the snow rolling over the sea. He turned, and felt its breath on him.

THE LOVELY LADY

At seventy-two, Pauline Attenborough could still sometimes be mistaken, in the half-light, for thirty. She really was a wonderfully-preserved woman, of perfect *chic*. Of course it helps a great deal to have the right frame. She would be an exquisite skeleton, and her skull would be an exquisite skull, like that of some Etruscan woman with feminine charm still in the swerve of the bone and the pretty, naïve teeth.

Mrs Attenborough's face was of the perfect oval and slightly flat type that wears best. There is no flesh to sag. Her nose rode serenely, in its finely-bridged curve. Only the big grey eyes were a tiny bit prominent, on the surface of her face, and they gave her away most. The bluish lids were heavy, as if they ached sometimes with the strain of keeping the eyes beneath them arch and bright; and at the corners of the eyes were fine little wrinkles which would slacken into haggardness, then be pulled up tense again to that bright, gay look like a Leonardo woman who really could laugh outright.

Her niece Cecilia was perhaps the only person in the world who was aware of the invisible little wire which connected Pauline's eye-wrinkles with Pauline's willpower. Only Cecilia consciously watched the eyes go haggard and old and tired, and remain so, for hours; until Robert came home. Then ping! — the mysterious little wire that worked between Pauline's will and her face went taut, the weary, haggard, prominent eyes suddenly began to gleam, the eyelids arched, the queer, curved eyebrows which floated in such frail arches on Pauline's forehead began to gather a mocking significance, and you had the *real* lovely lady, in all her charm.

She really had the secret of everlasting youth; that is to say, she could don her youth again like an eagle. But she was sparing of it. She was wise enough not to try being young for too many people. Her son Robert, in the evenings, and Sir Wilfrid Knipe sometimes in the afternoon to tea; then occasional visitors on Sunday, when Robert was home — for these she was her lovely and changeless self, that age could not wither, nor custom stale; so bright and kindly and yet subtly mocking, like Mona Lisa, who knew a thing or two. But Pauline knew more, so she needn't be smug at all. She could laugh that lovely, mocking Bacchante laugh of hers, which was at the same time never malicious, always good-naturedly tolerant, both of virtues and vices — the former, of course, taking much more tolerating. So she suggested, roguishly.

Only with her niece Cecilia she did not trouble to keep up the glamour. Ciss was not very observant, anyhow; and, more than that, she was plain; more still, she was in love with Robert; and most of all, she was thirty, and dependent on her aunt Pauline. Oh, Cecilia — why make music for her?

Cecilia, called by her aunt and by her cousin Robert just Ciss, like a cat spitting, was a big, dark-complexioned, pug-faced young woman who very rarely spoke, and when she did couldn't get it out. She was the daughter of a poor Congregational clergyman who had been, while he lived, brother to Ronald, Aunt Pauline's husband. Ronald and the Congregational minister were both well dead, and Aunt Pauline had had charge of Ciss for the last five years.

They lived all together in a quite exquisite though rather small Queen Anne house some twenty-five miles out of town, secluded in a little dale, and surrounded by small but very quaint and pleasant grounds. It was an ideal place and an ideal life for Aunt Pauline, at the age of seventy-two. When the kingfishers flashed up the little stream in her garden, going under the alders, something still flashed in her heart. She was that kind of woman.

Robert, who was two years older than Ciss, went every day to town, to his chambers in one of the Inns. He was a barrister, and, to his secret but very deep mortification, he earned about a hundred pounds a year. He simply *couldn't* get above that figure, though it was rather easy to get below it. Of course, it didn't matter. Pauline had money. But then, what was Pauline's was Pauline's, and though she could give almost lavishly, still, one was always aware of having a *lovely* and *undeserved* present made to one. Presents are so much nicer when they're undeserved, Aunt Pauline would say.

Robert, too, was plain, and almost speechless. He was medium sized, rather broad and stout, though not fat. Only his creamy, clean-shaven face was rather fat, and sometimes suggestive of an Italian priest, in its silence and its secrecy. But he had grey eyes like his mother, but very shy and uneasy, not bold like hers. Perhaps Ciss was the only person who fathomed his awful shyness and *malaise*, his habitual feeling that he was in the wrong place: almost like a soul that has got into a wrong body. But he never did anything about it. He went up to Chambers, and read law. It was, however, all the weird old processes that interested him. He had, unknown to everybody but his mother, a quite extraordinary collection of old Mexican legal documents — reports of processes and trials, pleas, accusations: the weird and awful mixture of ecclesiastical law and common law in seventeenth-century Mexico. He had started a study in this direction through coming across the report of a trial of two English sailors, for murder, in Mexico, in 1620, and he had gone on, when the next document was an accusation against a Don Miguel Estrada for seducing one of the nuns of the

Sacred Heart Convent in Oaxaca in 1680.

Pauline and her son Robert had wonderful evenings with these old papers. The lovely lady knew a little Spanish. She even looked a trifle Spanish herself, with a high comb and a marvellous dark-brown shawl embroidered in thick silvery silk embroidery. So she would sit at the perfect old table, soft as velvet in its deep brown surface, a high comb in her hair, ear-rings with dropping pendants in her ears, her arms bare and still beautiful, a few strings of pearls round her throat, a puce velvet dress on and this or another beautiful shawl, and by candlelight she looked, yes, a Spanish high-bred beauty of thirty-two or three. She set the candles to give her face just the chiaroscuro she knew suited her; her high chair that rose behind her face was done in old green brocade, against which her face emerged like a Christmas rose.

They were always three at table, and they always drank a bottle of champagne: Pauline two glasses, Ciss two glasses, Robert the rest. The lovely lady sparkled and was radiant. Ciss, her black hair bobbed, her broad shoulders in a very nice and becoming dress that Aunt Pauline had helped her to make, stared from her aunt to her cousin and back again, with rather confused, mute hazel eyes, and played the part of an audience suitably impressed. She *was* impressed, somewhere, all the time. And even rendered speechless by Pauline's brilliancy, even after five years. But at the bottom of her consciousness was the *data* of as weird a document as Robert ever studied: all the things she knew about her aunt and her cousin.

Robert was always a gentleman, with an old-fashioned, punctilious courtesy that covered his shyness quite completely. He was, and Ciss knew it, more confused than shy. He was worse than she was. Cecilia's own confusion dated from only five years back. Robert's must have started before he was born. In the lovely lady's womb he must have felt *very* confused.

He paid all his attention to his mother, drawn to her as a humble flower to the sun. And yet, priest-like, he was all the time aware, with the tail of his consciousness, that Ciss was there, and that she was a bit shut out of it, and that something wasn't right. He was aware of the third consciousness in the room. Whereas to Pauline, her niece Cecilia was an appropriate part of her own setting, rather than a distinct consciousness.

Robert took coffee with his mother and Ciss in the warm drawing-room, where all the furniture was so lovely, all collectors' pieces — Mrs Attenborough had made her own money, dealing privately in pictures and furniture and rare things from barbaric countries — and the three talked desultorily till about eight or half-past. It was very pleasant, very cosy, very homely even; Pauline made a real home cosiness out of so much elegant material. The chat was simple, and

nearly always bright. Pauline was her *real* self, emanating a friendly mockery and an odd, ironic gaiety — till there came a little pause.

At which Ciss always rose and said good-night, and carried out the coffee-tray, to prevent Burnett from intruding any more.

And then! ah, then, the lovely, glowing intimacy of the evening, between mother and son, when they deciphered manuscripts and discussed points, Pauline with that eagerness of a girl for which she was famous. And it was quite genuine. In some mysterious way she had *saved up* her power for being thrilled, in connection with a man. Robert, solid, rather quiet and subdued, seemed like the elder of the two — almost like a priest with a young girl pupil. And that was rather how he felt.

Ciss had a flat for herself just across the courtyard, over the old coach-house and stables. There were no horses. Robert kept his car in the coach-house. Ciss had three very nice rooms up there, stretching along in a row one after the other, and she had got used to the ticking of the stable clock.

But sometimes she did not go to her rooms. In the summer she would sit on the lawn, and from the open window of the drawing-room upstairs she would hear Pauline's wonderful, heart-searching laugh. And in winter the young woman would put on a thick coat and walk slowly to the little balustraded bridge over the stream, and then look back at the three lighted windows of that drawing-room where mother and son were so happy together.

Ciss loved Robert, and she believed that Pauline intended the two of them to marry — when she was dead. But poor Robert, he was so convulsed with shyness already, with man or woman. What would he be when his mother was dead? — in a dozen more years. He would be just a shell, the shell of a man who had never lived.

The strange, unspoken sympathy of the young with one another, when they are overshadowed by the old, was one of the bonds between Robert and Ciss. But another bond, which Ciss did not know how to draw tight, was the bond of passion. Poor Robert was by nature a passionate man. His silence and his agonised, though hidden, shyness were both the result of a secret physical passionateness. And how Pauline could play on this! Ah, Ciss was not blind to the eyes which he fixed on his mother — eyes fascinated yet humiliated, full of shame. He was ashamed that he was not a man. And he did not love his mother. He was fascinated by her. Completely fascinated. And for the rest, paralysed in a life-long confusion.

Ciss stayed in the garden till the lights leapt up in Pauline's bedroom — about ten o'clock. The lovely lady had retired. Robert would now stay another hour or so, alone. Then he, too, would retire. Ciss, in the dark outside, sometimes wished

she could creep up to him and say: "Oh, Robert! It's all wrong!" But Aunt Pauline would hear. And, anyhow, Ciss couldn't do it. She went off to her own rooms, once more, once more, and so for ever.

In the morning coffee was brought up on a tray to each of the rooms of the three relatives. Ciss had to be at Sir Wilfrid Knipe's at nine o'clock, to give two hours' lessons to his little grand-daughter. It was her sole serious occupation, except that she played the piano for the love of it. Robert set off to town about nine. And as a rule, Aunt Pauline appeared to lunch, though sometimes not till tea-time. When she appeared, she looked fresh and young. But she was inclined to fade rather rapidly, like a flower without water, in the daytime. Her hour was the candle hour.

So she always rested in the afternoon. When the sun shone, if possible she took a sun-bath. This was one of her secrets. Her lunch was very light; she could take her sun-and-air-bath before noon or after, as it pleased her. Often it was in the afternoon, when the sun shone very warmly into a queer little yew-walled square just behind the stables. Here Ciss stretched out the lying-chair and rugs, and put the light parasol handy in the silent little enclosure of thick dark yew-hedges beyond the old red walls of the unused stables. And hither came the lovely lady with her book. Ciss then had to be on guard in one of her own rooms, should her aunt, who was very keen-eared, hear a footstep.

One afternoon it occurred to Cecilia that she herself might while away this rather long afternoon hour by taking a sun-bath. She was growing restive. The thought of the flat roof of the stable buildings, to which she could climb from a loft at the end, started her on a new adventure. She often went on to the roof; she had to, to wind up the stable clock, which was a job she had assumed to herself. Now she took a rug, climbed out under the heavens, looked at the sky and the great elm-tops, looked at the sun, then took off her things and lay down perfectly securely, in a corner of the roof under the parapet, full in the sun.

It was rather lovely, to bask all one's length like this in warm sun and air. Yes, it was very lovely! It even seemed to melt some of the hard bitterness of her heart, some of that core of unspoken resentment which never dissolved. Luxuriously, she spread herself, so that the sun should touch her limbs fully, fully. If she had no other lover, she should have the sun! She rolled over voluptuously.

And suddenly her heart stood still in her body, and her hair almost rose on end as a voice said very softly, musingly, in her ear:

"No, Henry dear! It was not my fault you died instead of marrying that Claudia. No, darling. I was quite, quite willing for you to marry her, unsuitable though she was."

Cecilia sank down on her rug, powerless and perspiring with dread. That awful voice, so soft, so musing, yet so unnatural. Not a human voice at all. Yet there must, there *must* be someone on the roof! Oh, how unspeakably awful!

She lifted her weak head and peeped across the sloping leads. Nobody! The chimneys were too narrow to shelter anybody. There was nobody on the roof. Then it must be someone in the trees, in the elms. Either that, or — terror unspeakable — a bodiless voice! She reared her head a little higher.

And as she did so, came the voice again:

“No, darling! I told you you would tire of her in six months. And you see it was true, dear. It was true, true, true! I wanted to spare you that. So it wasn’t I who made you feel weak and disabled, wanting that very silly Claudia — poor thing, she looked so woebegone afterwards! — wanting her and not wanting her. You got yourself into that perplexity, my dear. I only warned you. What else could I do? And you lost your spirit and died without ever knowing me again. It was bitter, bitter — ”

The voice faded away. Cecilia subsided weakly on to her rug, after the anguished tension of listening. Oh, it was awful. The sun shone, the sky was blue, all seemed so lovely and afternoony and summery. And yet, oh, horror! — she was going to be forced to believe in the supernatural! And she loathed the supernatural, ghosts and voices and rappings and all the rest.

But that awful, creepy, bodiless voice, with its rusty sort of whispers of an overtone! It had something so fearfully familiar in it, too! And yet was so utterly uncanny. Poor Cecilia could only lie there unclothed, and so all the more agonisingly helpless, inert, collapsed in sheer dread.

And then she heard the thing sigh! — a deep sigh that seemed weirdly familiar, yet was not human. “Ah well, ah well! the heart must bleed. Better it should bleed than break. It is grief, grief! But it wasn’t my fault, dear. And Robert could marry our poor, dull Ciss tomorrow, if he wanted her. But he doesn’t care about it, so why force him into anything?” The sounds were very uneven, sometimes only a husky sort of whisper. Listen! Listen!

Cecilia was about to give vent to loud and piercing screams of hysteria, when the last two sentences arrested her. All her caution and her cunning sprang alert. It was Aunt Pauline! It *must* be Aunt Pauline, practising ventriloquism, or something like that. What a devil she was!

Where was she? She must be lying down there, right below where Cecilia herself was lying. And it was either some fiend’s trick of ventriloquism, or else thought-transference. The sounds were very uneven; sometimes quite inaudible, sometimes only a brushing sort of noise. Ciss listened intently. No, it could not be ventriloquism. It was worse: some form of thought-transference that

conveyed itself like sound. Some horror of that sort! Cecilia still lay weak and inert, too terrified to move; but she was growing calmer with suspicion. It was some diabolic trick of that unnatural woman.

But *what* a devil of a woman! She even knew that she, Cecilia, had mentally accused her of killing her son Henry. Poor Henry was Robert's elder brother, twelve years older than Robert. He had died suddenly when he was twenty-two, after an awful struggle with himself, because he was passionately in love with a young and very good-looking actress, and his mother had humorously despised him for the attachment. So he had caught some sudden ordinary disease, but the poison had gone to his brain and killed him before he ever regained consciousness. Ciss knew the few facts from her own father. And lately she had been thinking that Pauline was going to kill Robert as she had killed Henry. It was clear murder: a mother murdering her sensitive sons, who were fascinated by her: the Circe!

"I suppose I may as well get up," murmured the dim, unbreathing voice. "Too much sun is as bad as too little. Enough sun, enough love-thrill, enough proper food, and not too much of any of them, and a woman might live for ever. I verily believe, for ever. If she absorbs as much vitality as she expends. Or perhaps a trifle more!"

It was certainly Aunt Pauline! How — how terrible! She, Ciss, was hearing Aunt Pauline's thoughts. Oh, how ghastly! Aunt Pauline was sending out her thoughts in a sort of radio, and she, Ciss, had to *hear* what her aunt was thinking. How ghastly! How insufferable! One of them would surely have to die.

She twisted and lay inert and crumpled, staring vacantly in front of her. Vacantly! Vacantly! And her eyes were staring almost into a hole. She was staring in it unseeing, a hole going down in the corner, from the lead gutter. It meant nothing to her. Only it frightened her a little more.

When suddenly, out of the hole came a sigh and a last whisper: "Ah well! Pauline! Get up, it's enough for to-day." Good God! Out of the hole of the rain-pipe! The rain-pipe was acting as a speaking-tube! Impossible! No, quite possible. She had read of it even in some book. And Aunt Pauline, like the old and guilty woman she was talked aloud to herself. That was it!

A sullen exultance sprang in Ciss's breast. *That* was why she would never have anybody, not even Robert, in her bedroom. That was why she never dozed in a chair, never sat absent-minded anywhere, but went to her room, and kept to her room, except when she roused herself to be alert. When she slackened off she talked to herself! She talked in a soft little crazy voice to herself. But she was not crazy. It was only her thoughts murmuring themselves aloud.

So she had qualms about poor Henry! Well she might have! Ciss believed that

Aunt Pauline had loved her big, handsome, brilliant first-born much more than she loved Robert, and that his death had been a terrible blow and a chagrin to her. Poor Robert had been only ten years old when Henry died. Since then he had been the substitute.

Ah, how awful!

But Aunt Pauline was a strange woman. She had left her husband when Henry was a small child, some years even before Robert was born. There was no quarrel. Sometimes she saw her husband again, quite amiably, but a little mockingly. And she even gave him money.

For Pauline earned all her own. Her father had been a Consul in the East and in Naples, and a devoted collector of beautiful exotic things. When he died, soon after his grandson Henry was born, he left his collection of treasures to his daughter. And Pauline, who had really a passion and a genius for loveliness, whether in texture or form or colour, had laid the basis of her fortune on her father's collection. She had gone on collecting, buying where she could, and selling to collectors or to museums. She was one of the first to sell old, weird African figures to the museums, and ivory carvings from New Guinea. She bought Renoir as soon as she saw his pictures. But not Rousseau. And all by herself she made a fortune.

After her husband died she had not married again. She was not even *known* to have had lovers. If she did have lovers, it was not among the men who admired her most and paid her devout and open attendance. To these she was a "friend".

Cecilia slipped on her clothes and caught up her rug, hastening carefully down the ladder to the loft. As she descended she heard the ringing, musical call: "All right, Ciss" — which meant that the lovely lady was finished, and returning to the house. Even her voice was wonderfully young and sonorous, beautifully balanced and self-possessed. So different from the little voice in which she talked to herself. *That* was much more the voice of an old woman.

Ciss hastened round to the yew enclosure, where lay the comfortable *chaise longue* with the various delicate rugs. Everything Pauline had was choice, to the fine straw mat on the floor. The great yew walls were beginning to cast long shadows. Only in the corner where the rugs tumbled their delicate colours was there hot, still sunshine.

The rugs folded up, the chair lifted away, Cecilia stooped to look at the mouth of the rain-pipe. There it was, in the corner, under a little hood of masonry and just projecting from the thick leaves of the creeper on the wall. If Pauline, lying there, turned her face towards the wall, she would speak into the very mouth of the tube. Cecilia was reassured. She had heard her aunt's thoughts indeed, but by no uncanny agency.

That evening, as if aware of something, Pauline was a little quieter than usual, though she looked her own serene, rather mysterious self. And after coffee she said to Robert and Ciss:

“I’m so sleepy. The sun has made me so sleepy. I feel full of sunshine like a bee. I shall go to bed, if you don’t mind. You two sit and have a talk.”

Cecilia looked quickly at her cousin.

“Perhaps you’d rather be alone?” she said to him.

“No — no,” he replied. “Do keep me company for a while, if it doesn’t bore you.”

The windows were open, the scent of honeysuckle wafted in, with the sound of an owl. Robert smoked in silence. There was a sort of despair in his motionless, rather squat body. He looked like a caryatid bearing a weight.

“Do you remember Cousin Henry?” Cecilia asked him suddenly.

He looked up in surprise.

“Yes. Very well,” he said.

“What did he look like?” she said, glancing into her cousin’s big, secret-troubled eyes, in which there was so much frustration.

“Oh, he was handsome: tall, and fresh-coloured, with mother’s soft brown hair.” As a matter of fact, Pauline’s hair was grey. “The ladies admired him very much; and he was at all the dances.”

“And what kind of character had he?”

“Oh, very good-natured and jolly. He liked to be amused. He was rather quick and clever, like mother, and very good company.”

“And did he love your mother?”

“Very much. She loved him too — better than she does me, as a matter of fact. He was so much more nearly her idea of a man.”

“Why was he more her idea of a man?”

“Tall — handsome — attractive, and very good company — and would, I believe, have been very successful at law. I’m afraid I am merely negative in all those respects.”

Ciss looked at him attentively, with her slow-thinking hazel eyes. Under his impassive mask she knew he suffered.

“Do you think you are so much more negative than he?” she said.

He did not lift his face. But after a few moments he replied:

“My life, certainly, is a negative affair.”

She hesitated before she dared ask him:

“And do you mind?”

He did not answer her at all. Her heart sank.

“You see, I’m afraid my life is as negative as yours is,” she said. “And I’m

beginning to mind bitterly. I'm thirty."

She saw his creamy, well-bred hand tremble.

"I suppose," he said, without looking at her, "one will rebel when it is too late."

That was queer, from him.

"Robert!" she said. "Do you like me at all?"

She saw his dusky-creamy face, so changeless in its folds, go pale.

"I am very fond of you," he murmured.

"Won't you kiss me? Nobody ever kisses me," she said pathetically.

He looked at her, his eyes strange with fear and a certain haughtiness. Then he rose, and came softly over to her, and kissed her gently on the cheek.

"It's an awful shame, Ciss!" he said softly.

She caught his hand and pressed it to her breast.

"And sit with me sometimes in the garden," she said, murmuring with difficulty. "Won't you?"

He looked at her anxiously and searchingly.

"What about mother?"

Ciss smiled a funny little smile, and looked into his eyes. He suddenly flushed crimson, turning aside his face. It was a painful sight.

"I know," he said. "I am no lover of women."

He spoke with sarcastic stoicism, against himself, but even she did not know the shame it was to him.

"You never try to be," she said.

Again his eyes changed uncannily.

"Does one have to try?" he said.

"Why, yes. One never does anything if one doesn't try."

He went pale again.

"Perhaps you are right," he said.

In a few minutes she left him, and went to her rooms. At least she had tried to take off the everlasting lid from things.

The weather continued sunny, Pauline continued her sun-baths, and Ciss lay on the roof eavesdropping, in the literal sense of the word. But Pauline was not to be heard. No sound came up the pipe. She must be lying with her face away into the open. Ciss listened with all her might. She could just detect the faintest, faintest murmur away below, but no audible syllable.

And at night, under the stars, Cecilia sat and waited in silence, on the seat which kept in view the drawing-room windows and the side door into the garden. She saw the light go up in her aunt's room. She saw the lights at last go out in the drawing-room. And she waited. But he did not come. She stayed on in

the darkness half the night, while the owl hooted. But she stayed alone.

Two days she heard nothing; her aunt's thoughts were not revealed; and at evening nothing happened. Then, the second night, as she sat with heavy, helpless persistence in the garden, suddenly she started. He had come out. She rose and went softly over the grass to him.

"Don't speak!" he murmured.

And in silence, in the dark, they walked down the garden and over the little bridge to the paddock, where the hay, cut very late, was in cock. There they stood disconsolate under the stars.

"You see," he said, "how can I ask for love, if I don't feel any love in myself? You know I have a real regard for you —"

"How *can* you feel any love, when you never feel anything?" she said.

"That is true," he replied.

And she waited for what next.

"And how can I marry?" he said. "I am a failure even at making money. I can't ask my mother for money."

She sighed deeply.

"Then don't bother yet about marrying," she said. "Only love me a little. Won't you?"

He gave a short laugh.

"It sounds so atrocious, to say it is hard to begin," he said.

She sighed again. He was so stiff to move.

"Shall we sit down a minute?" she said. And then, as they sat on the hay, she added: "May I touch you? Do you mind?"

"Yes, I mind. But do as you wish," he replied, with that mixture of shyness and queer candour which made him a little ridiculous, as he knew quite well. But in his heart there was almost murder.

She touched his black, always tidy, hair, with her fingers.

"I suppose I shall rebel one day," he said again suddenly.

They sat some time, till it grew chilly. And he held her hand fast, but he never put his arms round her. At last she rose, and went indoors, saying good-night.

The next day, as Cecilia lay stunned and angry on the roof, taking her sun-bath, and becoming hot and fierce with sunshine, suddenly she started. A terror seized her in spite of herself. It was the voice.

"Caro, caro, tu non l'hai visto!" it was murmuring away, in a language Cecilia did not understand. She lay and writhed her limbs in the sun, listening intently to words she could not follow. Softly, whisperingly, with infinite caressiveness and yet with that subtle, insidious arrogance under its velvet, came the voice, murmuring in Italian: "Bravo, si, molto bravo, poverino, ma uomo come te non

sarà mai, mai, mai!” Oh, especially in Italian Cecilia heard the poisonous charm of the voice, so caressive, so soft and flexible, yet so utterly egoistic. She hated it with intensity as it sighed and whispered out of nowhere. Why, why should it be so delicate, so subtle and flexible and beautifully controlled, when she herself was so clumsy? Oh, poor Cecilia, she writhed in the afternoon sun, knowing her own clownish clumsiness and lack of suavity, in comparison.

“No, Robert dear, you will never be the man your father was, though you have some of his looks. He was a marvellous lover, soft as a flower yet piercing as a humming-bird. Cara, cara mia bellissima, ti ho aspettato come l’agonissante aspetta la morte, morte deliziosa, quasi quasi troppo deliziosa per una mera anima humana. He gave himself to a woman as he gave himself to God. Mauro! Mauro! How you loved me! How you loved me!”

The voice ceased in reverie, and Cecilia knew what she had guessed before — that Robert was not the son of her Uncle Ronald, but of some Italian.

“I am disappointed in you, Robert. There is no poignancy in you. Your father was a Jesuit, but he was the most perfect and poignant lover in the world. You are a Jesuit like a fish in a tank. And that Ciss of yours is the cat fishing for you. It is less edifying even than poor Henry.”

Cecilia suddenly bent her mouth down to the tube, and said in a deep voice:

“Leave Robert alone! Don’t kill him as well.”

There was dead silence in the hot July afternoon that was lowering for thunder. Cecilia lay prostrate, her heart beating in great thumps. She was listening as if her whole soul were an ear. At last she caught the whisper:

“Did someone speak?”

She leaned again to the mouth of the tube:

“Don’t kill Robert as you killed me,” she said, with slow enunciation, and a deep but small voice.

“Ah!” came the sharp little cry. “Who is that speaking?”

“Henry,” said the deep voice.

There was dead silence. Poor Cecilia lay with all the use gone out of her. And there was dead silence. Till at last came the whisper:

“I didn’t kill Henry. No, no! No, no! Henry, surely you can’t blame me! I loved you, dearest; I only wanted to help you.”

“You killed me!” came the deep, artificial, accusing voice. “Now let Robert live. Let him go! Let him marry!”

There was a pause.

“How very, very awful!” mused the whispering voice. “Is it possible, Henry, you are a spirit, and you condemn me?”

“Yes, I condemn you!”

Cecilia felt all the pent-up rage going down that rain-pipe. At the same time, she almost laughed. It was awful.

She lay and listened and listened. No sound! As if time had ceased, she lay inert in the weakening sun, till she heard a far-off rumble of thunder. She sat up. The sky was yellowing. Quickly she dressed herself, went down, and out to the corner of the stables.

“Aunt Pauline!” she called discreetly. “Did you hear thunder?”

“Yes. I am going in. Don’t wait,” came a feeble voice.

Cecilia retired, and from the loft watched, spying, as the figure of the lovely lady, wrapped in a lovely wrap of old blue silk, went rather tottering to the house.

The sky gradually darkened. Cecilia hastened in with the rugs. Then the storm broke. Aunt Pauline did not appear to tea. She found the thunder trying. Robert also did not arrive till after tea, in the pouring rain. Cecilia went down the covered passage to her own house, and dressed carefully for dinner, putting some white columbines at her breast.

The drawing-room was lit with a softly-shaded lamp. Robert, dressed, was waiting, listening to the rain. He too seemed strangely crackling and on edge. Cecilia came in, with the white flowers nodding at her dusky breast. Robert was watching her curiously, a new look on his face. Cecilia went to the bookshelves near the door, and was peering for something, listening acutely. She heard a rustle, then the door softly opening. And as it opened, Ciss suddenly switched on the strong electric light by the door.

Her aunt, in a dress of black lace over ivory colour, stood in the doorway. Her face was made up, but haggard with a look of unspeakable irritability, as if years of suppressed exasperation and dislike of her fellow-men had suddenly crumpled her into an old witch.

“Oh, aunt!” cried Cecilia.

“Why, mother, you’re a little old lady!” came the astounded voice of Robert — like an astonished boy, as if it were a joke.

“Have you only just found it out?” snapped the old woman venomously.

“Yes! Why, I thought — ” his voice tailed out in misgiving.

The haggard, old Pauline, in a frenzy of exasperation, said:

“Aren’t we going down?”

She had not even noticed the excess of light, a thing she shunned. And she went downstairs almost tottering.

At table she sat with her face like a crumpled mask of unspeakable irritability. She looked old, very old, and like a witch. Robert and Cecilia fetched furtive glances at her. And Ciss, watching Robert, saw that he was so astonished and

repelled by his mother's looks that he was another man.

"What kind of a drive home did you have?" snapped Pauline, with an almost gibbering irritability.

"It rained, of course," he said.

"How clever of you to have found that out!" said his mother, with the grisly grin of malice that had succeeded her arch smile.

"I don't understand," he said, with quiet suavity.

"It's apparent," said his mother, rapidly and sloppily eating her food.

She rushed through the meal like a crazy dog, to the utter consternation of the servant. And the moment it was over she darted in a queer, crab-like way upstairs. Robert and Cecilia followed her, thunderstruck, like two conspirators.

"You pour the coffee. I loathe it! I'm going. Good-night!" said the old woman, in a succession of sharp shots. And she scrambled out of the room.

There was a dead silence. At last he said:

"I'm afraid mother isn't well. I must persuade her to see a doctor."

"Yes," said Cecilia.

The evening passed in silence. Robert and Ciss stayed on in the drawing-room, having lit a fire. Outside was cold rain. Each pretended to read. They did not want to separate. The evening passed with ominous mysteriousness, yet quickly.

At about ten o'clock the door suddenly opened, and Pauline appeared, in a blue wrap. She shut the door behind her, and came to the fire. Then she looked at the two young people in hate, real hate.

"You two had better get married quickly," she said, in an ugly voice. "It would look more decent; such a passionate pair of lovers!"

Robert looked up at her quietly.

"I thought you believed that cousins should not marry, mother," he said.

"I do. But you're not cousins. Your father was an Italian priest." Pauline held her daintily-slipped foot to the fire, in an old coquettish gesture. Her body tried to repeat all the old graceful gestures. But the nerve had snapped, so it was a rather dreadful caricature.

"Is that really true, mother?" he asked.

"True! What do you think? He was a distinguished man, or he wouldn't have been my lover. He was far too distinguished a man to have had you for a son. But that joy fell to me."

"How unfortunate all round," he said slowly.

"Unfortunate for you? *You* were lucky. It was *my* misfortune," she said acidly to him.

She was really a dreadful sight, like a piece of lovely Venetian glass that has

been dropped and gathered up again in horrible, sharp-edged fragments.

Suddenly she left the room again.

For a week it went on. She did not recover. It was as if every nerve in her body had suddenly started screaming in an insanity of discordance. The doctor came, and gave her sedatives, for she never slept. Without drugs she never slept at all, only paced back and forth in her room, looking hideous and evil, reeking with malevolence. She could not bear to see either her son or her niece. Only when either of them came she asked, in pure malice:

“Well! When’s the wedding? Have you celebrated the nuptials yet?”

At first Cecilia was stunned by what she had done. She realised vaguely that her aunt, once a definite thrust of condemnation had penetrated her beautiful armour, had just collapsed, squirming, inside her shell. It was too terrible. Ciss was almost terrified into repentance. Then she thought: “This is what she always was. Now let her live the rest of her days in her true colours.”

But Pauline would not live long. She was literally shrivelling away. She kept her room, and saw no one. She had her mirrors taken away.

Robert and Cecilia sat a good deal together. The jeering of the mad Pauline had not driven them apart, as she had hoped. But Cecilia dared not confess to him what she had done.

“Do you think your mother ever loved anybody?” Ciss asked him tentatively, rather wistfully, one evening.

He looked at her fixedly.

“Herself!” he said at last.

“She didn’t even *love* herself,” said Ciss. “It was something else. What was it?” She lifted a troubled, utterly puzzled face to him.

“Power,” he said curtly.

“But what power?” she asked. “I don’t understand.”

“Power to feed on other lives,” he said bitterly. “She was beautiful, and she fed on life. She has fed on me as she fed on Henry. She put a sucker into one’s soul, and sucked up one’s essential life.”

“And don’t you forgive her?”

“No.”

“Poor Aunt Pauline!”

But even Ciss did not mean it. She was only aghast.

“I *know* I’ve got a heart,” he said, passionately striking his breast. “But it’s almost sucked dry. I *know* I’ve got a soul, somewhere. But it’s gnawed bare. I *hate* people who want power over others.”

Ciss was silent. What was there to say?

And two days later Pauline was found dead in her bed, having taken too much

veronal, for her heart was weakened.

From the grave even she hit back at her son and her niece. She left Robert the noble sum of one thousand pounds, and Ciss one hundred. All the rest, with the nucleus of her valuable antiques, went to form the “Pauline Attenborough Museum”.

TWO BLUE BIRDS

There was a woman who loved her husband, but she could not live with him. The husband, on his side, was sincerely attached to his wife, yet he could not live with her. They were both under forty, both handsome and both attractive. They had the most sincere regard for one another, and felt, in some odd way, eternally married to one another. They knew one another more intimately than they knew anybody else, they felt more known to one another than to any other person.

Yet they could not live together. Usually, they kept a thousand miles apart, geographically. But when he sat in the greyness of England, at the back of his mind, with a certain grim fidelity, he was aware of his wife, her strange yearning to be loyal and faithful, having her gallant affairs away in the sun, in the south. And she, as she drank her cocktail on the terrace over the sea, and turned her grey, sardonic eyes on the heavy dark face of her admirer, whom she really liked quite a lot, she was actually preoccupied with the clear-cut features of her handsome young husband, thinking of how he would be asking his secretary to do something for him, asking in that good-natured, confident voice of a man who knows that his request will be only too gladly fulfilled.

The secretary, of course, adored him. She was *very* competent, quite young, and quite good-looking. She adored him. But then all his servants always did, particularly his women-servants. His men-servants were likely to swindle him.

When a man has an adoring secretary, and you are the man's wife, what are you to do? Not that there was anything 'wrong' — if you know what I mean! — between them. Nothing you could call adultery, to come down to brass tacks. No, no! They were just the young master and his secretary. He dictated to her, she slaved for him and adored him, and the whole thing went on wheels.

He didn't 'adore' her. A man doesn't need to adore his secretary. But he depended on her. "I simply rely on Miss Wrexall." Whereas he could never rely on his wife. The one thing he knew finally about *her* was that she didn't intend to be relied on.

So they remained friends, in the awful unspoken intimacy of the once-married. Usually each year they went away together for a holiday, and, if they had not been man and wife, they would have found a great deal of fun and stimulation in one another. The fact that they were married, had been married for the last dozen years, and couldn't live together for the last three or four, spoilt them for one

another. Each had a private feeling of bitterness about the other.

However, they were awfully kind. He was the soul of generosity, and held her in real tender esteem, no matter how many gallant affairs she had. Her gallant affairs were part of her modern necessity. "After all, I've got to *live*. I can't turn into a pillar of salt in five minutes just because you and I can't live together! It takes years for a woman like me to turn into a pillar of salt. At least I hope so!"

"Quite!" he replied. "Quite! By all means put them in pickle, make pickled cucumbers of them, before you crystallise out. That's my advice."

He was like that: so awfully clever and enigmatic. She could more or less fathom the idea of the pickled cucumbers, but the 'crystallising out' — what did that signify?

And did he mean to suggest that he himself had been well pickled and that further immersion was for him unnecessary, would spoil his flavour? Was that what he meant? And herself, was she the brine and the vale of tears?

You never knew how catty a man was being, when he was really clever and enigmatic, withal a bit whimsical. He was adorably whimsical, with a twist of his flexible, vain mouth, that had a long upper lip, so fraught with vanity! But then a handsome, clear-cut, histrionic young man like that, how could he help being vain? The women made him so.

Ah, the women! How nice men would be if there were no other women!

And how nice the women would be if there were no other men! That's the best of a secretary. She may have a husband, but a husband is the mere shred of a man, compared to a boss, a chief, a man who dictates to you and whose words you faithfully write down and then transcribe. Imagine a wife writing down anything her husband said to her! But a secretary! Every *and* and *but* of his she preserves for ever. What are candied violets in comparison!

Now it is all very well having gallant affairs under the southern sun, when you know there is a husband whom you adore dictating to a secretary whom you are too scornful to hate yet whom you rather despise, though you allow she has her good points, away north in the place you ought to regard as home. A gallant affair isn't much good when you've got a bit of grit in your eye. Or something at the back of your mind.

What's to be done? The husband, of course, did not send his wife away.

"You've got your secretary and your work," she said. "There's no room for me."

"There's a bedroom and a sitting-room exclusively for you," he replied. "And a garden and half a motor-car. But please yourself entirely. Do what gives you most pleasure."

"In that case," she said, "I'll just go south for the winter."

“Yes, do!” he said. “You always enjoy it.”

“I always do,” she replied.

They parted with a certain relentlessness that had a touch of wistful sentiment behind it. Off she went to her gallant affairs, that were like the curate’s egg, palatable in parts. And he settled down to work. He said he hated working, but he never did anything else. Ten or eleven hours a day. That’s what it is to be your own master!

So the winter wore away, and it was spring, when the swallows homeward fly, or northward, in this case. This winter, one of a series similar, had been rather hard to get through. The bit of grit in the gallant lady’s eye had worked deeper in the more she blinked. Dark faces might be dark, and icy cocktails might lend a glow; she blinked her hardest to blink that bit of grit away, without success. Under the spicy balls of the mimosa she thought of that husband of hers in his library, and of that neat, competent but *common* little secretary of his, for ever taking down what he said!

“How a man can *stand* it! How *she* can stand it, common little thing as she is, I don’t know!” the wife cried to herself.

She meant this dictating business, this ten hours a day intercourse, *à deux*, with nothing but a pencil between them, and a flow of words.

What was to be done? Matters, instead of improving, had grown worse. The little secretary had brought her mother and sister into the establishment. The mother was a sort of cook-housekeeper, the sister was a sort of upper maid — she did the fine laundry, and looked after ‘his’ clothes, and valeted him beautifully. It was really an excellent arrangement. The old mother was a splendid plain cook, the sister was all that could be desired as a valet de chambre, a fine laundress, an upper parlour-maid, and a table-waiter. And all economical to a degree. They knew his affairs by heart. His secretary flew to town when a creditor became dangerous, and she *always* smoothed over the financial crisis.

‘He’, of course, had debts, and he was working to pay them off. And if he had been a fairy prince who could call the ants to help him, he would not have been more wonderful than in securing this secretary and her family. They took hardly any wages. And they seemed to perform the miracle of loaves and fishes daily.

‘She’, of course, was the wife who loved her husband, but helped him into debt, and she still was an expensive item. Yet when she appeared at her ‘home’, the secretarial family received her with most elaborate attentions and deference. The knight returning from the Crusades didn’t create a greater stir. She felt like Queen Elizabeth at Kenilworth, a sovereign paying a visit to her faithful subjects. But perhaps there lurked always this hair in her soup! Won’t they be

glad to be rid of me again!

But they protested No! No! They had been waiting and hoping and praying she would come. They had been pining for her to be there, in charge: the mistress, 'his' wife. Ah, 'his' wife!

'His' wife! His halo was like a bucket over her head.

The cook-mother was 'of the people', so it was the upper-maid daughter who came for orders.

"What will you order for to-morrow's lunch and dinner, Mrs. Gee?"

"Well, what do you usually have?"

"Oh, we want *you* to say."

"No, what do you *usually* have?"

"We don't have anything fixed. Mother goes out and chooses the best she can find, that is nice and fresh. But she thought you would tell her now what to get."

"Oh, I don't know! I'm not very good at that sort of thing. Ask her to go on just the same; I'm quite sure she knows best."

"Perhaps you'd like to suggest a sweet?"

"No, I don't care for sweets — and you know Mr. Gee doesn't. So don't make one for me."

Could anything be more impossible! They had the house spotless and running like a dream; how could an incompetent and extravagant wife dare to interfere, when she saw their amazing and almost inspired economy! But they ran the place on simply nothing!

Simply marvellous people! And the way they strewed palm branches under her feet!

But that only made her feel ridiculous.

"Don't you think the family manage very well?" he asked her tentatively.

"Awfully well! Almost romantically well!" she replied. "But I suppose you're perfectly happy?"

"I'm perfectly comfortable," he replied.

"I can see you are," she replied. "Amazingly so! I never knew such comfort! Are you sure it isn't bad for you?"

She eyed him stealthily. He looked very well, and extremely handsome, in his histrionic way. He was shockingly well-dressed and valeted. And he had that air of easy aplomb and good humour which is so becoming to a man, and which he only acquires when he is cock of his own little walk, made much of by his own hens.

"No!" he said, taking his pipe from his mouth and smiling whimsically round at her. "Do I look as if it were bad for me?"

"No, you don't," she replied promptly: thinking, naturally, as a woman is

supposed to think nowadays, of his health and comfort, the foundation, apparently, of all happiness.

Then, of course, away she went on the back-wash.

“Perhaps for your work, though, it’s not so good as it is for *you*,” she said in a rather small voice. She knew he couldn’t bear it if she mocked at his work for one moment. And he knew that rather small voice of hers.

“In what way?” he said, bristles rising.

“Oh, I don’t know,” she answered indifferently. “Perhaps it’s not good for a man’s work if he is too comfortable.”

“I don’t know about *that!*” he said, taking a dramatic turn round the library and drawing at his pipe. “Considering I work, actually, by the clock, for twelve hours a day, and for ten hours when it’s a short day, I don’t think you can say I am deteriorating from easy comfort.”

“No, I suppose not,” she admitted.

Yet she did think it, nevertheless. His comfortableness didn’t consist so much in good food and a soft bed, as in having nobody, absolutely nobody and nothing to contradict him. “I do like to think he’s got nothing to aggravate him,” the secretary had said to the wife.

“Nothing to aggravate him!” What a position for a man! Fostered by women who would let nothing ‘aggravate’ him. If anything would aggravate his wounded vanity, this would!

So thought the wife. But what was to be done about it? In the silence of midnight she heard his voice in the distance, dictating away, like the voice of God to Samuel, alone and monotonous, and she imagined the little figure of the secretary busily scribbling shorthand. Then in the sunny hours of morning, while he was still in bed — he never rose till noon — from another distance came that sharp insect noise of the typewriter, like some immense grasshopper chirping and rattling. It was the secretary, poor thing, typing out his notes.

That girl — she was only twenty-eight — really slaved herself to skin and bone. She was small and neat, but she was actually worn out. She did far more work than he did, for she had not only to take down all those words he uttered, she had to type them out, make three copies, while he was still resting.

“What on earth she gets out of it,” thought the wife, “I don’t know. She’s simply worn to the bone, for a very poor salary, and he’s never kissed her, and never will, if I know anything about him.”

Whether his never kissing her — the secretary, that is — made it worse or better, the wife did not decide. He never kissed anybody. Whether she herself —

the wife, that is — wanted to be kissed by him, even that she was not clear about. She rather thought she didn't.

What on earth did she want then? She was his wife. What on earth did she want of him?

She certainly didn't want to take him down in shorthand, and type out again all those words. And she didn't really want him to kiss her; she knew him too well. Yes, she knew him too well. If you know a man too well, you don't want him to kiss you.

What then? What did she want? Why had she such an extraordinary hang-over about him? Just because she was his wife? Why did she rather 'enjoy' other men — and she was relentless about enjoyment — without ever taking them seriously? And why must she take him so damn seriously, when she never really 'enjoyed' him?

Of course she *had* had good times with him, in the past, before — ah! before a thousand things, all amounting really to nothing. But she enjoyed him no more. She never even enjoyed being with him. There was a silent, ceaseless tension between them, that never broke, even when they were a thousand miles apart.

Awful! That's what you call being married! What's to be done about it? Ridiculous, to know it all and not do anything about it!

She came back once more, and there she was, in her own house, a sort of super-guest, even to him. And the secretarial family devoting their lives to him.

Devoting their lives to him! But actually! Three women pouring out their lives for him day and night! And what did they get in return? Not one kiss! Very little money, because they knew all about his debts, and had made it their life business to get them paid off! No expectations! Twelve hours' work a day! Comparative isolation, for he saw nobody!

And beyond that? Nothing! Perhaps a sense of uplift and importance because they saw his name and photograph in the newspaper sometimes. But would anybody believe that it was good enough?

Yet they adored it! They seemed to get a deep satisfaction out of it, like people with a mission. Extraordinary!

Well, if they did, let them. They were, of course, rather common, 'of the people'; there might be a sort of glamour in it for them.

But it was bad for him. No doubt about it. His work was getting diffuse and poor in quality — and what wonder! His whole tone was going down — becoming commoner. Of course it was bad for him.

Being his wife, she felt she ought to do something to save him. But how could she? That perfectly devoted, marvellous secretarial family, how could she make an attack on them? Yet she'd love to sweep them into oblivion. Of course they

were bad for him: ruining his work, ruining his reputation as a writer, ruining his life. Ruining him with their slavish service.

Of course she ought to make an onslaught on them! But how *could* she? Such devotion! And what had she herself to offer in their place? Certainly not slavish devotion to him, nor to his flow of words! Certainly not!

She imagined him stripped once more naked of secretary and secretarial family, and she shuddered. It was like throwing the naked baby in the dust-bin. Couldn't do that!

Yet something must be done. She felt it. She was almost tempted to get into debt for another thousand pounds, and send in the bill, or have it sent in to him, as usual.

But no! Something more drastic!

Something more drastic, or perhaps more gentle. She wavered between the two. And wavering, she first did nothing, came to no decision, dragged vacantly on from day to day, waiting for sufficient energy to take her departure once more.

It was spring! What a fool she had been to come up in spring! And she was forty! What an idiot of a woman to go and be forty!

She went down the garden in the warm afternoon, when birds were whistling loudly from the cover, the sky being low and warm, and she had nothing to do. The garden was full of flowers: he loved them for their theatrical display. Lilac and snowball bushes, and laburnum and red may, tulips and anemones and coloured daisies. Lots of flowers! Borders of forget-me-nots! Bachelor's buttons! What absurd names flowers had! She would have called them blue dots and yellow blobs and white frills. Not so much sentiment after all!

There is a certain nonsense, something showy and stagey about spring, with its pushing leaves and chorus-girl flowers, unless you have something corresponding inside you. Which she hadn't.

Oh, heaven! Beyond the hedge she heard a voice, a steady rather theatrical voice. Oh, heaven! He was dictating to his secretary in the garden. Good God, was there nowhere to get away from it!

She looked around: there was indeed plenty of escape. But what was the good of escaping? He would go on and on. She went quietly towards the hedge, and listened.

He was dictating a magazine article about the modern novel. "What the modern novel lacks is architecture." Good God! Architecture! He might just as well say: What the modern novel lacks is whalebone, or a teaspoon, or a tooth stopped.

Yet the secretary took it down, took it down, took it down! No, this could not

go on! It was more than flesh and blood could bear.

She went quietly along the hedge, somewhat wolf-like in her prowl, a broad, strong woman in an expensive mustard-coloured silk jersey and cream-coloured pleated skirt. Her legs were long and shapely, and her shoes were expensive.

With a curious wolf-like stealth she turned the hedge and looked across at the small, shaded lawn where the daisies grew impertinently. 'He' was reclining in a coloured hammock under the pink-flowering horse-chestnut tree, dressed in white serge with a fine yellow-coloured linen shirt. His elegant hand dropped over the side of the hammock and beat a sort of vague rhythm to his words. At a little wicker table the little secretary, in a green knitted frock, bent her dark head over her note-book, and diligently made those awful shorthand marks. He was not difficult to take down, as he dictated slowly, and kept a sort of rhythm, beating time with his dangling hand.

"In every novel there must be one outstanding character with which we always sympathise — with *whom* we always sympathise — even though we recognise it — even when we are most aware of the human frailties — "

Every man his own hero, thought the wife grimly, forgetting that every woman is intensely her own heroine.

But what did startle her was a blue bird dashing about near the feet of the absorbed, shorthand-scribbling little secretary. At least it was a blue-tit, blue with grey and some yellow. But to the wife it seemed blue, that juicy spring day, in the translucent afternoon. The blue bird, fluttering round the pretty but rather *common* little feet of the little secretary.

The blue bird! The blue bird of happiness! Well, I'm blest, — thought the wife. Well, I'm blest!

And as she was being blest, appeared another blue bird — that is, another blue-tit — and began to wrestle with the first blue-tit. A couple of blue birds of happiness, having a fight over it! Well, I'm blest!

She was more or less out of sight of the human preoccupied pair. But 'he' was disturbed by the fighting blue birds, whose little feathers began to float loose.

"Get out!" he said to them mildly, waving a dark-yellow handkerchief at them. "Fight your little fight, and settle your private affairs elsewhere, my dear little gentlemen."

The little secretary looked up quickly, for she had already begun to write it down. He smiled at her his twisted whimsical smile.

"No, don't take that down," he said affectionately. "Did you see those two tits laying into one another?"

"No!" said the little secretary, gazing brightly round, her eyes half-blinded with work.

But she saw the queer, powerful, elegant, wolf-like figure of the wife, behind her, and terror came into her eyes.

"I did!" said the wife, stepping forward with those curious, shapely, she-wolf legs of hers, under the very short skirt.

"Aren't they extraordinarily vicious little beasts?" said he.

"Extraordinarily!" she re-echoed, stooping and picking up a little breast-feather. "Extraordinarily! See how the feathers fly!"

And she got the feather on the tip of her finger, and looked at it. Then she looked at the secretary, then she looked at him. She had a queer, were-wolf expression between her brows.

"I think," he began, "these are the loveliest afternoons, when there's no direct sun, but all the sounds and the colours and the scents are sort of dissolved, don't you know, in the air, and the whole thing is steeped, steeped in spring. It's like being on the inside; you know how I mean, like being inside the egg and just ready to chip the shell."

"Quite like that!" she assented, without conviction.

There was a little pause. The secretary said nothing. They were waiting for the wife to depart again.

"I suppose," said the latter, "you're awfully busy, as usual?"

"Just about the same," he said, pursing his mouth deprecatingly.

Again the blank pause, in which he waited for her to go away again.

"I know I'm interrupting you," she said.

"As a matter of fact," he said, "I was just watching those two blue-tits."

"Pair of little demons!" said the wife, blowing away the yellow feather from her finger-tip.

"Absolutely!" he said.

"Well, I'd better go, and let you get on with your work," she said.

"No hurry!" he said, with benevolent nonchalance. "As a matter of fact, I don't think it's a great success, working out of doors."

"What made you try it?" said the wife. "You know you never could do it."

"Miss Wrexall suggested it might make a change. But I don't think it altogether helps, do you, Miss Wrexall?"

"I'm sorry," said the little secretary.

"Why should *you* be sorry?" said the wife, looking down at her as a wolf might look down half-benignly at a little black-and-tan mongrel. "You only suggested it for his good, I'm sure!"

"I thought the air might be good for him," the secretary admitted.

"Why do people like you never think about yourselves?" the wife asked.

The secretary looked her in the eye.

“I suppose we do, in a different way,” she said.

“A *very* different way!” said the wife ironically. “Why don’t you make *him* think about *you*?” she added, slowly, with a sort of drawl. “On a soft spring afternoon like this, you ought to have him dictating poems to you, about the blue birds of happiness fluttering round your dainty little feet. I know *I* would, if I were his secretary.”

There was a dead pause. The wife stood immobile and statuesque, in an attitude characteristic of her, half turning back to the little secretary, half averted. She half turned her back on everything.

The secretary looked at him.

“As a matter of fact,” he said, “I was doing an article on the Future of the Novel.”

“I know that,” said the wife. “That’s what’s so awful! Why not something lively in the life of the novelist?”

There was a prolonged silence, in which he looked pained, and somewhat remote, statuesque. The little secretary hung her head. The wife sauntered slowly away.

“Just where were we, Miss Wrexall?” came the sound of his voice.

The little secretary started. She was feeling profoundly indignant. Their beautiful relationship, his and hers, to be so insulted!

But soon she was veering down-stream on the flow of his words, too busy to have any feelings, except one of elation at being so busy.

Tea-time came; the sister brought out the tea-tray into the garden. And immediately, the wife appeared. She had changed, and was wearing a chicory-blue dress of fine cloth. The little secretary had gathered up her papers and was departing, on rather high heels.

“Don’t go, Miss Wrexall,” said the wife.

The little secretary stopped short, then hesitated.

“Mother will be expecting me,” she said.

“Tell her you’re not coming. And ask your sister to bring another cup. I want you to have tea with us.”

Miss Wrexall looked at the man, who was reared on one elbow in the hammock, and was looking enigmatical, Hamletish.

He glanced at her quickly, then pursed his mouth in a boyish negligence.

“Yes, stay and have tea with us for once,” he said. “I see strawberries, and I know you’re the bird for them.”

She glanced at him, smiled wanly, and hurried away to tell her mother. She even stayed long enough to slip on a silk dress.

“Why, how smart you are!” said the wife, when the little secretary reappeared

on the lawn, in chicory-blue silk.

“Oh, don’t look at my dress, compared to yours!” said Miss Wrexall. They were of the same colour, indeed!

“At least you earned yours, which is more than I did mine,” said the wife, as she poured tea. “You like it strong?”

She looked with her heavy eyes at the smallish, birdy, blue-clad, overworked young woman, and her eyes seemed to speak many inexplicable dark volumes.

“Oh, as it comes, thank you,” said Miss Wrexall, leaning nervously forward.

“It’s coming pretty black, if you want to ruin your digestion,” said the wife.

“Oh, I’ll have some water in it, then.”

“Better, I should say.”

“How’d the work go — all right?” asked the wife, as they drank tea, and the two women looked at each other’s blue dresses.

“Oh!” he said. “As well as you can expect. It was a piece of pure flummery. But it’s what they want. Awful rot, wasn’t it, Miss Wrexall?”

Miss Wrexall moved uneasily on her chair.

“It interested me,” she said, “though not so much as the novel.”

“The novel? Which novel?” said the wife. “Is there another new one?”

Miss Wrexall looked at him. Not for words would she give away any of his literary activities.

“Oh, I was just sketching out an idea to Miss Wrexall,” he said.

“Tell us about it!” said the wife. “Miss Wrexall, *you* tell us what it’s about.”

She turned on her chair, and fixed the little secretary.

“I’m afraid” — Miss Wrexall squirmed — “I haven’t got it very clearly myself, yet.”

“Oh, go along! Tell us what you *have* got then!”

Miss Wrexall sat dumb and very vexed. She felt she was being baited. She looked at the blue pleatings of her skirt.

“I’m afraid I can’t,” she said.

“Why are you afraid you can’t? You’re so *very* competent. I’m sure you’ve got it all at your finger-ends. I expect you write a good deal of Mr. Gee’s books for him, really. He gives you the hint, and you fill it all in. Isn’t that how you do it?” She spoke ironically, and as if she were teasing a child. And then she glanced down at the fine pleatings of her own blue skirt, very fine and expensive.

“Of course you’re not speaking seriously?” said Miss Wrexall, rising on her mettle.

“Of course I am! I’ve suspected for a long time — at least, for some time — that you write a good deal of Mr. Gee’s books for him, from his hints.”

It was said in a tone of raillery, but it was cruel.

“I should be terribly flattered,” said Miss Wrexall, straightening herself, “if I didn’t know you were only trying to make me feel a fool.”

“Make you feel a fool? My dear child! — why, nothing could be farther from me! You’re twice as clever, and a million times as competent as I am. Why, my dear child, I’ve the greatest admiration for you! I wouldn’t do what you do, not for all the pearls in India. I *couldn’t* anyhow — ”

Miss Wrexall closed up and was silent.

“Do you mean to say my books read as if — ” he began, rearing up and speaking in a harrowed voice.

“I do!” said the wife. “*Just* as if Miss Wrexall had written them from your hints. I *honestly* thought she did — when you were too busy — ”

“How very clever of you!” he said.

“Very!” she said. “Especially if I was wrong!”

“Which you were,” he said.

“How very extraordinary!” she cried. “Well, I am once more mistaken!”

There was a complete pause.

It was broken by Miss Wrexall, who was nervously twisting her fingers.

“You want to spoil what there is between me and him, I can see that,” she said bitterly.

“My dear, but what *is* there between you and him?” asked the wife.

“I was *happy* working with him, working for him! I was *happy* working for him!” cried Miss Wrexall, tears of indignant anger and chagrin in her eyes.

“My dear child!” cried the wife, with simulated excitement, “go *on* being happy working with him, go on being happy while you can! If it makes you happy, why then, enjoy it! Of course! Do you think I’d be so cruel as to want to take it away from you? — working with him? *I* can’t do shorthand and typewriting and double-entrance book-keeping, or whatever it’s called. I tell you, I’m utterly incompetent. I never earn anything. I’m the parasite of the British oak, like the mistletoe. The blue bird doesn’t flutter round my feet. Perhaps they’re too big and trampling.”

She looked down at her expensive shoes.

“If I *did* have a word of criticism to offer,” she said turning to her husband, “it would be to you, Cameron, for taking so much from her and giving her nothing.”

“But he gives me everything, everything!” cried Miss Wrexall. “He gives me everything!”

“What do you mean by everything?” said the wife, turning on her sternly.

Miss Wrexall pulled up short. There was a snap in the air, and a change of currents.

“I mean nothing that *you* need begrudge me,” said the little secretary rather haughtily. “I’ve never made myself cheap.”

There was a blank pause.

“My God!” said the wife. “You don’t call that being cheap? Why, I should say you got nothing out of him at all, you only give! And if you don’t call that making yourself cheap — my God!”

“You see, we see things different,” said the secretary.

“I should say we do! — *thank God!*” rejoined the wife.

“On whose behalf are you thanking God?” he asked sarcastically.

“Everybody’s, I suppose! Yours, because you get everything for nothing, and Miss Wrexall’s, because she seems to like it, and mine because I’m well out of it all.”

“You *needn’t* be out of it all,” cried Miss Wrexall magnanimously, “if you didn’t *put* yourself out of it all.”

“Thank you, my dear, for your offer,” said the wife, rising, “but I’m afraid no man can expect *two* blue birds of happiness to flutter round his feet, tearing out their little feathers!”

With which she walked away.

After a tense and desperate interim, Miss Wrexall cried:

“And *really*, need any woman be jealous of me?”

“Quite!” he said.

And that was all he did say.

A DREAM OF LIFE

NOTHING depresses me more than to come home to the place where I was born, and where I lived my first twenty years, here, at Newthorpe, this coal-mining village on the Nottingham-Derby border. The place has grown, but not very much, the pits are poor. Only it has changed. There is a tram-line from Nottingham through the one street, and buses to Nottingham and Derby. The shops are bigger, more plate-glassy: there are two picture-palaces, and one Palais de Danse.

But nothing can save the place from the poor, grimy, mean effect of the Midlands, the little grimy brick houses with slate roofs, the general effect of paltriness, smallness, meanness, fathomless ugliness, combined with a sort of chapel-going respectability. It is the same as when I was a boy, only more so.

Now, it is all tame. It was bad enough, thirty years ago, when it was still on the upward grade, economically. But then the old race of miners were not immensely respectable. They filled the pubs with smoke and bad language, and they went with dogs at their heels. There was a sense of latent wildness and unbrokenness, a weird sense of thrill and adventure in the pitch-dark Midland nights, and roaring footballing Saturday afternoons. The country in between the colliery regions had a lonely sort of fierceness and beauty, half-abandoned, and threaded with poaching colliers and whippet dogs. Only thirty years ago!

Now it seems so different. The colliers of today are the men of my generation, lads I went to school with. I find it hard to believe. They were rough, wild lads. They are not rough, wild men. The board-school, the Sunday-school, the Band of Hope, and, above all, their mothers got them under. Got them under, made them tame. Made them sober, conscientious, and decent. Made them good husbands. When I was a boy, a collier who was a good husband was an exception to the rule, and while the women with bad husbands pointed him out as a shining example, they also despised him a little, as a petticoat man.

But nearly all the men of my generation are good husbands. There they stand, at the Street corners, pale, shrunken, well-dressed, decent, and *under*. The drunken colliers of my father's generation were not got under. The decent colliers of my generation are got under entirely. They are so patient, so forbearing, so willing to listen to reason, so ready to put themselves aside. And there they stand, at the Street corners and the entry-ends, the rough lads I went to school with, men now, with smart daughters and bossy wives and cigarette-

smoking lads of their own. There they stand, then, and white as cheap wax candles, spectral, as if they had no selves anymore: decent, patient, self-effacing sort of men, who have seen the war and the high-watermark wages, and now are down again, under, completely under, with not a tuppence to rattle in their pockets. There they are, poor as their fathers before them, but poor with a hopeless outlook and a new and expensive world around them.

When I was a boy, the men still used to sing: 'There's a good time coming, boys, there's a good time coming!' Well, it has come and gone. If anybody sang now, they'd sing: 'It's a bad time now, and a worse time coming.' But the men of my generation are dumb: they have been got under and made good.

As for the next generation, that is something different. As soon as mothers become self-conscious, sons become what their mothers make them. My mother's generation was the first generation of working-class mothers to become really self-conscious. Our grandmothers were still too much under our grandfathers' thumb, and there was still too much masculine kick against petticoat rule. But with the next generation, the woman freed herself at least mentally and spiritually from the husband's domination, and then she became that great institution, that character-forming power, the mother of my generation. I am sure the character of nine-tenths of the men of my generation was formed by the mother: the character of the daughters too.

And what sort of characters? Well, the woman of my mother's generation was in reaction against the ordinary high-handed, obstinate husband who went off to the pub to enjoy himself and to waste the bit of money that was so precious to the family. The woman felt herself the higher moral being: and justly, as far as economic morality goes. She therefore assumed the major responsibility for the family, and the husband let her. So she proceeded to mould a generation.

Mould it to the shape of her own unfulfilled desire, of course. What had she wanted, all her life? — a 'good' husband, gentle and understanding and moral, one who did not go to pubs and drink and waste the bit of wages, but who lived for his wife and his children.

Millions of mothers in Great Britain, in the latter half of Victoria's reign, unconsciously proceeded to produce sons to pattern. And they produced them, by the million: good sons, who would make good, steady husbands who would live for their wives and families. And there they are! we've got 'em now! the men of my generation, men between forty and fifty, men who almost all had Mothers with a big *m*.

And then the daughters! Because the mothers who produced so many 'good sons' and future 'good husbands' were at the same time producing daughters, perhaps without taking so much thought or exercising so much willpower over

it, but producing them just as inevitably.

What sort of daughters came from these morally responsible mothers? As we should expect, daughters morally confident. The mothers had known some little hesitancy in their moral supremacy. But the daughters were quite assured. The daughters were always right. They were born with a sense of self-rightness that sometimes was hoity-toity, and sometimes was seemingly wistful: but there it was, the inevitable sense that I-am-right. This the women of my generation drew in with their mothers' milk, this feeling that they were 'right' and must be 'right' and nobody must gainsay them. It is like being born with one eye: you can't help it.

We are such stuff as our grandmothers' dreams are made on. This terrible truth should never be forgotten. Our grandmothers dreamed of wonderful 'free' womanhood in a 'pure' world, surrounded by 'adoring, humble, high-minded' men. Our mothers started to put the dream into practice. And we are the fulfilment. We are such stuff as our grandmothers' dreams were made on.

For I think it cannot be denied that ours is the generation of 'free' womanhood, and a helplessly 'pure' world, and of pathetic 'adoring, humble, high-minded' men.

We are, more or less, such stuff as our grandmothers' dreams are made on. But the dream changes with every new generation of grandmothers. Already my mother, while having a definite ideal for her sons, of 'humble, adoring, high-minded' men, began to have secret dreams of her own: dreams of some Don Juan sort of person whose influence would make the vine of Dionysus grow and coil over the pulpit of our Congregational Chapel. I myself, her son, could see the dream peeping out, thrusting little tendrils through her paved intention of having 'good sons'. It was my turn to be the 'good son'. It would be my son's turn to fulfil the other dream, or dreams: the secret ones.

Thank God I have no son to undertake the onerous burden. Oh, if only every father could say to his boy: Look here, my son! These are your grandmother's dreams of a man. Now you look out! — My dear old grandmother, my mother's mother, I'm sure she dreamed me almost to a t, except for a few details.

But the daughter starts, husbandly speaking, where the mother leaves off. The daughters of my mother, and of the mothers of my generation, start, as a rule, with 'good husbands', husbands who never fundamentally contradict them, whose lifelong attitude is: All right, dear! I know I'm wrong, as usual. This is the attitude of the husband of my generation.

It alters the position of the wife entirely. It is a fight for the woman to get the reins into her own hands, but once she's got them, there she is! the reins have got her. She's got to drive somewhere, to steer the matrimonial cart in some

direction. ‘All right, dear! I’ll let you decide it, since you know better than I do!’ says the husband, in every family matter. So she must keep on deciding. Or, if the husband balks her occasionally, she must keep up the pressure till he gives in.

Now driving the matrimonial cart is quite an adventure for a time, while the children are little, and all that. But later, the woman begins to think to herself: ‘Oh, damn the cart! Where do I come in?’ She begins to feel she’s getting nothing out of it. It’s not good enough. Whether you’re the horse or whether you’re the driver doesn’t make any odds. So long as you’re both harnessed to the cart.

Then the woman of my generation begins to have ideas about her sons. They’d better not be so all-forsaken ‘good’ as their father has been. They’d better be more sporting, and give a woman a bit more ‘life’. After all, what’s a family? It swallows a woman up until she’s fifty, and then puts the remains of her aside. Not good enough! No! My sons must be more manly, make plenty of money for a woman and give her a ‘life’, and not be such a muff about ‘goodness’ and being ‘right’. What is being ‘right’, after all? Better enjoy yourself while you’ve got the chance.

So the sons of the younger generation emerge into the world — my sons, if I’d got any — with the intrinsic maternal charge ringing in their ears: ‘Make some money and give yourself a good time — and all of us. Enjoy yourself!’

The young men of the younger generation begin to fulfil the hidden dreams of my mother. They are jazzy —but not coarse. They are a bit Don-Juanish, but, let us hope, entirely without brutality or vulgarity. They are more elegant, and not much more moral. But they are still humble. before a woman, especially *the* woman!

It is the secret dream of my mother, coming true.

And if you want to know what the next generation will be like, you must fathom the secret dreams of your wife: the woman of forty or so. There you will find the clue. And if you want to be more precise, then find out what is the young woman of twenty’s ideal of a man.

The poor young woman of twenty, she is rather stumped for an ideal of a man. So perhaps the next generation but one won’t be anything at all.

We are such stuff as our grandmothers’ dreams are made on. Even colliers are such stuff as their grandmothers’ dreams are made on. And if Queen Victoria’s dream was King George, then Queen Alexandra’s was the Prince of Wales, and Queen Mary’s will be — what?

But all this doesn’t take away from the fact that my home place is more depressing to me than death, and I wish my grandmother and all her generation

had been better dreamers. ‘Those maids, thank God, are ’neath the sod,’ but their dreams we still have with us. It is a terrible thing to dream dreams that shall become flesh.

And when I see the young colliers dressed up like the Prince of Wales, dropping in to the Miners’ Welfare for another drink, or into the ‘Pally’ for a dance — in evening suit to beat the band — or scooting down the black roads on a motor-bike, a leggy damsel behind — then I wish the mothers of my own generation, my own mother included, had been a little less *frivolous* as a dreamer. In life, so deadly earnest! And oh, what frivolous dreams our mothers must have had, as they sat in the pews of the Congregational Chapel with faces like saints! They must unconsciously have been dreaming jazz and short skirts, the Palais de Danse, the Film, and the motor-bike. It is enough to embitter one’s most sacred memories. ‘Lead Kindly Light’ —unto the ‘Pally’. The eleventh commandment: ‘Enjoy yourselves!’

Well, well! Even grandmothers’ dreams don’t always come true, that is, they aren’t allowed to. They’d come true right enough otherwise. But sometimes fate, and that long dragon the concatenation of circumstance, intervene. I am sure my mother never dreamed a dream that wasn’t well-off. My poor old grandmother might still dream noble poverty — myself, to wit! But my mother? Impossible! In her secret dreams, the sleeve-links were solid gold, and the socks were silk.

And now fate, the monster, frustrates. The pits don’t work. There’s reduced wages and short pay. The young colliers will have a hard time buying another pair of silk socks for the ‘Pally’ when these are worn out. They’ll have to go in wool. As for the young lady’s fur coat — well, well! let’s hope it is seal, or some other hard-wearing skin, and not that evanescent chinchilla or squirrel that moults in a season.

For the young lady won’t get another fur coat in a hurry, if she has to wait for her collier father to buy it. Not that he would refuse it her. What is a man for, except to provide for his wife and daughters? But you can’t get blood out of a stone, nor cash out of a collier, not any more.

It is a soft, hazy October day, with the dark green Midlands fields looking somewhat sunken, and the oak trees brownish, the mean houses shabby and scaly, and the whole countryside somewhat dead, expunged, faintly blackened under the haze. It is a queer thing that countries die along with their inhabitants. This countryside is dead: or so inert, it is as good as dead. The old sheep-bridge where I used to swing as a boy is now an iron affair. The brook where we caught minnows now runs on a concrete bed. The old sheep-dip, the dipping-hole, as we called it, where we bathed, has somehow disappeared, so has the mill-dam and the little water-fall. It’s all a concrete arrangement now, like a sewer. And the

people's lives are the same, all running in concrete channels like a vast cloaca.

At Engine Lane Crossing, where I used to sit as a tiny child and watch the trucks shunting with a huge grey horse and a man with a pole, there are now no trucks. It is October, and there should be hundreds. But there are no orders. The pits are turning half-time. Today they are not turning at all. The men are all at home: no orders, no work.

And the pit is fuming silently, there is no rattle of screens, and the head-stock wheels are still. That was always an ominous sign, except on Sundays: even when I was a small child. The head-stock wheels twinkling against the sky, that meant work and life, men 'earning a living', if living can be earned.

But the pit is foreign to me anyhow, so many new big buildings round it, electric plant and all the rest. It's a wonder even the shafts are the same. But they must be: the shafts where we used to watch the cage-loads of colliers coming up suddenly, with a start: then the men streaming out to turn in their lamps, then trailing off, all grey, along the lane home; while the screens still rattled, and the pony on the sky-line still pulled along the tub of 'dirt', to tip over the edge of the pit-bank.

It is different now: all is much more impersonal and mechanical and abstract. I don't suppose the children of today drop 'nuts' of coal down the shaft, on Sunday afternoons, to hear them hit, hit with an awful resonance against the sides far down, before there comes the last final plump into the endlessly far-off sump. My father was always so angry if he knew we dropped coals down the shaft: If there was a man at t'bottom, it'd kill 'im straight off. How should you like that? — We didn't quite know how we should have liked it.

But anyhow Moorgreen is no more what it was: or it is too much more. Even the rose-bay willow-herb, which seems to love collieries, no longer showed its hairy autumn thickets and its last few spikes of rose around the pit-pond and on the banks. Only the yellow snapdragon, toad-flax, still was there.

Up from Moorgreen goes a footpath past the quarry and up the fields, out to Renshaw's farm. This was always a favourite walk of mine. Beside the path lies the old quarry, part of it very old and deep and filled in with oak trees and guelder-rose and tangle of briars, the other part open, with square wall neatly built up with dry-stone on the side under the plough-fields, and the bed still fairly level and open. This open part of the quarry was blue with dog-violets in spring, and, on the smallish brambles, the first handsome blackberries came in autumn. Thank heaven, it is late October, and too late for blackberries, or there would still be here some wretched men with baskets, ignominiously combing the brambles for the last berry. When I was a boy, how a man, a full-grown miner, would have been despised for going with a little basket lousing the hedges for a

blackberry or two. But the men of my generation put their pride in their pocket, and now their pockets are empty.

The quarry was a haunt of mine, as a boy. I loved it because, in the open part, it seemed so sunny and dry and warm, the pale stone, the pale, slightly sandy bed, the dog-violets and the early daisies. And then the old part, the deep part, was such a fearsome place. It was always dark — you had to crawl under bushes. And you came upon honeysuckle and nightshade, that no one ever looked upon. And at the dark sides were little, awful rocky caves, in which I imagined the adders lived.

There was a legend that these little caves or niches in the rocks were ‘everlasting wells’, like the everlasting wells at Matlock. At Matlock the water drips in caves, and if you put an apple in there, or a bunch of grapes, or even if you cut your hand off and put it in, it won’t decay, it will turn everlasting. Even if you put a bunch of violets in, they won’t die, they’ll turn everlasting.

Later, when I grew up and went to Matlock — only sixteen miles away — and saw the infamous everlasting wells, that the water only made a hoary nasty crust of stone on everything, and the stone hand was only a glove stuffed with sand, being ‘petrified’, I was disgusted. But still, when I see the stone fruits that people have in bowls for decoration, purple, semi-translucent stone grapes, and lemons, I think: these are the real fruits from the everlasting wells.

In the soft, still afternoon I found the quarry not very much changed. The red berries shone quietly on the briars. And in this still, warm, secret place of the earth I felt my old childish longing to pass through a gate, into a deeper, sunnier, more silent world.

The sun shone in, but the shadows already were deep. Yet I had to creep away into the darkness of bushes, into the lower hollow of the tree-filled quarry. I felt, as I had always felt, there was something there. And as I wound my way, stooping, through the unpleasant tangle, I started, hearing a sudden rush and clatter of falling earth. Some part of the quarry must be giving way.

I found the place, away at the depth under the trees and bushes, a new place where yellow earth and whitish earth and pale rock had slid down new in a heap. And at the top of the heap was a crack, a little slantingly upright slit or orifice in the rock.

I looked at the new place curiously, the pallid new earth and rock among the jungle of vegetation, the little opening above, into the earth. A touch of sunlight came through the oak-leaves and fell on the new place and the aperture, and the place flashed and twinkled. I had to climb up to look at it.

It was a little crystalline cavity in the rock, all crystal, a little pocket or womb of quartz, among the common stone. It was pale and colourless, the stuff we call

spar, from which they make little bowls and mementoes, in Matlock. But through the flat-edged, colourless crystal of the spar ran a broad vein of purplish crystal, wavering inwards as if it were arterial. And that was a vein of the Blue John spar that is rather precious.

The place fascinated me, especially the vein of purple, and I had to clamber into the tiny cave, which would just hold me. It seemed warm in there, as if the shiny rock were warm and alive, and it seemed to me there was a strange perfume, of rock, of living rock like hard, bright flesh, faintly perfumed with phlox. It was a subtle yet most fascinating secret perfume, an inward perfume. I crept right into the little cavity, into the narrow inner end where the vein of purple ran, and I curled up there, like an animal in its hole. 'Now,' I thought, 'for a little while I am safe and sound, and the vulgar world doesn't exist for me.' I curled together with soft, curious voluptuousness. The scent of inwardness and of life, a queer scent like phlox, with a faint narcotic inner quality like opium or like truffles, became very vivid to me, then faded. I suppose I must have gone to sleep.

Later, I don't know how much later, it may have been a minute, or an eternity, I was wakened by feeling something lifting me, lifting me with a queer, half-sickening motion, curiously exciting, in a slow little rhythmic heave that was at once soft and powerful, gentle and violent, grateful and violating. I could do nothing, not even wake up: yet I was not really terrified, only utterly wonderstruck.

Then the lifting and heaving ceased, and I was cold. Something harsh passed over me: I realized it was my face: I realized I had a face. Then immediately a sharpness and bitingness flew into me, flew right into me, through what must have been my nostrils, into my body, what must have been my breast. Roused by a terrific shock of amazement, suddenly a new thing rushed into me, right into me, with a sweep that swept me away, and at the same time I felt that first thing moving somewhere in me, there was a movement that came aloud.

There were some dizzy moments when my I, my consciousness, wheeled and swooped like an eagle that is going to wheel away into the sky and be gone. Yet I felt her, my I, my life, wheeling closer, closer, my consciousness. And suddenly she closed with me, and I knew, I came awake.

I knew. I knew I was alive. I even heard a voice say: 'He's alive!' Those were the first words I heard.

And I opened my eyes again and blinked with terror, knowing the light of day. I shut them again, and felt sensations out in space, somewhere, and yet upon me. Again my eyes were opened, and I even saw objects, great things that were here and were there and then were not there. And the sensations out in space drew

nearer, as it were, to me, the middle me.

So consciousness swooped and swerved, returning in great swoops. I realized that I was I, and that this I was also a body that ended abruptly in feet and hands. Feet! yes, feet! I remembered even the word. Feet!

I roused a little, and saw a greyish pale nearness that I recognized was my body, and something terrible moving upon it and making sensations in it. Why was it grey, my own nearness? Then I felt that other sensation, that I call aloudness, and I knew it. It was 'Dust of ages!' That was the aloudness: 'Dust of ages!'

In another instant I knew that violent movingness that was making sensations away out upon me. It was somebody. In terror and wonder the realization came to me: it was somebody, another one, a man. A man, making sensations on me! A man, who made the aloudness: 'Dust of ages.' A man! Still I could not grasp it. The conception would not return whole to me.

Yet once it had lodged within me, my consciousness established itself. I moved. I even moved my legs, my far-off feet. Yes! And an aloudness came out of me, even of me. I knew. I even knew now that I had a throat. And in another moment I should know something else.

It came all of a sudden. I saw the man's face. I saw it, a ruddy sort of face with a nose and a trimmed beard. I even knew more. I said: 'Why —?'

And the face quickly looked at me, with blue eyes into my eyes, and I struggled as if to get up.

'Art awake?' it said.

And somewhere, I knew there was the word Yes! But it had not yet come to me.

But I knew, I knew! Dimly I came to know that I was lying in sun on new earth that was spilled before my little, opened cave. I remembered my cave. But why I should be lying grey and stark-naked on earth in the sun outside I did not know; nor what the face was, nor whose.

Then there was more aloudness, and there was another one. I realized there could be more than one other one. More than one! More than one! I felt a new sudden something that made all of me move at once, in many directions, it seemed, and I became once more aware of the extent of me, and an aloudness came from my throat. And I remembered even that new something that was upon me. Many sensations galloping in all directions! But it was one dominant, drowning. It was water. Water! I even remembered water, or I knew I knew it. They were washing me. I even looked down and saw the whiteness: me, myself, white, a body.

And I remembered, that when all of me had moved to the touch of water, and I

had made an aloudness in my throat, the men had laughed. Laughed! I remembered laughter.

So as they washed me, I came to myself. I even sat up. And I saw earth and rock, and a sky that I knew was afternoon. And I was stark-naked, and there were two men washing me, and they too were stark-naked. But I was white, pure white, and thin, and they were ruddy, and not thin.

They lifted me, and I leaned on one, standing, while the other washed me. The one I leaned on was warm, and his life softly warmed me. The other one rubbed me gently. I was alive. I saw my white feet like two curious flowers, and I lifted them one after another, remembering walking.

The one held me, and the other put a woollen shirt or smock over me. It was pale grey and red. Then they fastened shoes on my feet. Then the free one went to the cave, peering, and he came back with things in his hands: buttons, some discoloured yet unwasted coins, a dull but not rusted pocket-knife, a waistcoat buckle, and a discoloured watch, whose very face was dark. Yet I knew these things were mine.

‘Where are my clothes?’ I said.

I felt eyes looking at me, two blue eyes, two brown eyes, full of strange life.

‘My clothes !’ I said.

They looked at one another, and made strange speech. Then the blue-eyed one said to me:

‘Gone! Dust of ages!’

They were strange men to me, with their formal, peaceful faces and trimmed beards, like old Egyptians. The one on whom I was unconsciously leaning stood quite still, and he was warmer than the afternoon sunshine. He seemed to give off life to me, I felt a warmth suffusing into me, an inflooding of strength. My heart began to lift with strange, exultant strength. I turned to look at the man I was resting on, and met the blue, quiet shimmer of his eyes. He said something to me, in the quiet, full voice, and I nearly understood, because it was like the dialect. He said it again, softly and calmly, speaking to the inside of me, so that I understood as a dog understands, from the voice, not from the words.

‘Can ta goo, o shollt be carried?’

It sounded to me like that, like the dialect.

‘I think I can walk,’ said I, in a voice that sounded harsh after the soft, deep modulation of the other.

He went slowly down the heap of loose earth and stones, which I remembered had fallen. But it was different. There were no trees in an old quarry hollow. This place was bare, like a new working. And when we came out, it was another place altogether. Below was a hollow of trees, and a bare, grassy hillside swept

away, with clumps of trees, like park-land. There was no colliery, no railway, no hedges, no square, shut-in fields. And yet the land looked tended.

We stood on a little path of paved stone, only about a yard wide. Then the other man came up from the quarry, carrying tools and wearing a grey shirt or smock with a red cord. He spoke with that curious soft inwardness, and we turned down the path, myself still leaning on the shoulder of the first man. I felt myself quivering with a new strength, and yet ghostlike. I had a curious sensation of lightness, not touching the ground as I walked, as if my hand that rested on the man's shoulder buoyed me up. I wanted to know whether I was really buoyant, as in a dream.

I took my hand suddenly from the man's shoulder, and stood still. He turned and looked at me.

'I can walk alone,' I said, and as in a dream I took a few paces forward. It was true. I was filled with a curious rushing strength that made me almost buoyant, scarcely needing to touch the ground. I was curiously, quiveringly strong, and at the same time buoyant.

'I can go alone!' I said to the man.

They seemed to understand, and to smile, the blue-eyed one showing his teeth when he smiled. I had a sudden idea: How beautiful they are, like plants in flower! But still, it was something I felt, rather than saw.

The blue-eyed one went in front, and I walked on the narrow path with my rushing buoyancy, terribly elated and proud, forgetting everything, the other man following silently behind. Then I was aware that the path had turned and ran beside a road in a hollow where a stream was, and a cart was clanking slowly ahead, drawn by two oxen and led by a man who was entirely naked.

I stood still, on the raised, paved path, trying to think, trying, as it were, to come awake. I was aware that the sun was sinking behind me, golden in the October afternoon. I was aware that the man in front of me also had no clothes on whatsoever, and he would soon be cold.

Then I made an effort, and looked round. On the slopes to the left were big, rectangular patches of dark plough-land. And men were ploughing still. On the right were hollow meadows, beyond the stream, with tufts of trees and many speckled cattle being slowly driven forwards. And in front the road swerved on, past a mill-pond and a mill, and a few little houses, and then swerved up a rather steep hill. And at the top of the hill was a town, all yellow in the late afternoon light, with yellow, curved walls rising massive from the yellow-leaved orchards, and above, buildings swerving in a long, oval curve, and round, faintly conical towers rearing up. It had something at once soft and majestic about it, with its soft yet powerful curves, and no sharp angles or edges, the whole substance

seeming soft and golden like the golden flesh of a city.

And I knew, even while I looked at it, that it was the place where I was born, the ugly colliery townlet of dirty red brick. Even as a child, coming home from Moorgreen, I had looked up and seen the squares of miners' dwellings, built by the Company, rising from the hill-top in the afternoon light like the walls of Jerusalem, and I had wished it were a golden city, as in the hymns we sang in the Congregational Chapel.

Now it had come true. But the very realization, and the very intensity of my looking, had made me lose my strength and my buoyancy. I turned forlorn to the men who were with me. The blue-eyed one came and took my arm, and laid it across his shoulder, laying his left hand round my waist, on my hip.

And almost immediately the soft, warm rhythm of his life pervaded me again, and the memory in me which was my old self went to sleep. I was like a wound, and the touch of these men healed me at once. We went on again, along the raised pavement.

Three horsemen came cantering up, from behind. All the world was turning home towards the town, at sunset. The horsemen slackened pace as they came abreast. They were men in soft, yellow sleeveless tunics, with the same still, formal Egyptian faces and trimmed beards as my companions. Their arms and legs were bare, and they rode without stirrups. But they had curious hats of beech-leaves on their heads. They glanced at us sharply and my companions saluted respectfully. Then the riders cantered ahead again, the golden tunics softly fluttering. No one spoke at all. There was a great stillness in all the world, and yet a magic of close-interwoven life.

The road now began to be full of people, slowly passing up the hill towards the town. Most were bare-headed, wearing the sleeveless woollen shirt of grey and red, with a red girdle, but some were clean-shaven, and dressed in grey shirts, and some carried tools, some fodder. There were women too, in blue or lilac smocks, and some men in scarlet smocks. But among the rest, here and there were men like my guide, quite naked, and some young women, laughing together as they went, had their blue smocks folded to a pad on their heads, as they carried their bundles, and their slender, rosy-tanned bodies were quite naked, save for a little girdle of white and green and purple cord fringe that hung round their hips and swung as they walked. Only they had soft shoes on their feet.

They all glanced at me, and some spoke a word of salute to my companions, but no one asked questions. The naked girls went very stately, with bundles on their heads, yet they laughed more than the men. And they were comely as berries on a bush. That was what they reminded me of: rose-berries on a bush.

That was the quality of all the people: an inner stillness and ease, like plants. that come to flower and fruit. The individual was like a whole fruit, body and mind and spirit, without split. It made me feel a curious, sad sort of envy, because I was not so whole, and at the same time, I was wildly elated, my rushing sort of energy seemed to come upon me again. I felt as if I were just going to plunge into the deeps of life, for the first time: belated, and yet a pioneer of pioneers.

I saw ahead the great rampart walls of the town — then the road suddenly curved to gateway, all the people flowing in, in two slow streams, through the narrow side entrances.

It was a big gateway of yellow stone, and inside was a clear space, paved mostly with whitish stones, and around it stood buildings in the yellow stone, golden-looking, with pavement arcades supported on yellow pillars. My guides turned into a chamber where men in green stood on guard, and several peasants were waiting. They made way, and I was taken before a man who reclined on a dark-yellow couch, himself wearing a yellow tunic. He was blond, with the trimmed beard and hair worn long, cut round like the hair of a Florentine page. Though he was not handsome, he had a curious quality of beauty, that came from within. But this time, it was the beauty of a flower rather than of a berry.

My guides saluted him and explained briefly and quietly, in words I could only catch a drift of. Then the man looked at me, quietly, gently, yet I should have been afraid, if I had been his enemy. He spoke to me, and I thought he asked if I wanted to stay in their town.

‘Did you ask me if I want to stay here?’ I replied. ‘You see, I don’t even know where I am.’

‘You are in this town of Nethrupp,’ he said, in slow English, like a foreigner. ‘Will you stay some time with us?’

‘Why, thank you, if I may,’ I said, too helplessly bewildered to know what I was saying.

We were dismissed, with one of the guards in green. The people were all streaming down the side street, between the yellow-coloured houses, some going under the pillared porticoes, some in the open road. Somewhere ahead a wild music began to ring out, like three bagpipes squealing and droning. The people pressed forward, and we came to a great oval space on the ramparts, facing due west. The sun, a red ball, was near the horizon.

We turned into a wide entrance and went up a flight of stairs. The man in green opened a door and ushered me in.

‘All is thine!’ he said.

My naked guide followed me into the room, which opened on to the oval and the west. He took a linen shirt and a woollen tunic from a small cupboard, and

smilingly offered them to me. I realized he wanted his own shirt back, and I quickly gave it him, and his shoes. He put my hand quickly between his two hands, then slipped into his shirt and shoes, and was gone.

I dressed myself in the clothes he had laid out, a blue-and-white striped tunic, and white stockings, and blue cloth shoes, and went to the window. The red sun was almost touching the tips of the tree-covered hills away in the west, Sherwood Forest grown dense again. It was the landscape I knew best on earth, and still I knew it, from the shapes.

There was a curious stillness in the square. I stepped out of my window on to the terrace, and looked down. The crowd had gathered in order, a cluster of men on the left, in grey, grey-and-scarlet, and pure scarlet, and a cluster of women on the right, in tunics of all shades of blue and crocus lilac. In the vaulted porticoes were more people. And the red sun shone on all, till the square glowed again.

When the ball of fire touched the tree-tops, there was a queer squeal of bagpipes, and the square suddenly started into life. The men were stamping softly, like bulls, the women were softly swaying, and softly clapping their hands, with a strange noise, like leaves. And from under the vaulted porticoes, at opposite ends of the egg-shaped oval, came the soft booming and trilling of women and men singing against one another in the strangest pattern of sound.

It was all kept very soft, soft-breathing. Yet the dance swept into swifter and swifter rhythm, with the most extraordinary incalculable unison. I do not believe there was any outside control of the dance. The thing happened by instinct, like the wheeling and flashing of a shoal of fish or of a flock of birds dipping and spreading in the sky. Suddenly, in one amazing wing-movement, the arms of all the men would flash up into the air, naked and glowing, and with the soft, rushing sound of pigeons alighting the men ebbed in a spiral, grey and sparkled with scarlet, bright arms slowly leaning, upon the women, who rustled all crocus-blue, rustled like an aspen, then in one movement scattered like sparks, in every direction, from under the enclosing, sinking arms of the men, and suddenly formed slender rays of lilac branching out from red and grey knot of the men.

All the time the sun was slowly sinking, shadow was falling, and the dance was moving slower, the women wheeling blue around the obliterated sun. They were dancing the sun down, and dancing as birds wheel and dance, and fishes in shoals, controlled by some strange unanimous instinct. It was at once terrifying and magnificent, I wanted to die, so as not to see it, and I wanted to rush down, to be one of them. To be a drop in that wave of life.

The sun had gone, the dance unfolded and faced inwards to the town, the men softly stamping, the women rustling and softly clapping, the voices of the singers

drifting on like a twining wind. And slowly, in one slow wing-movement, the arms of the men rose up unanimous, in a sort of salute, and as the arms of the men were sinking, the arms of the women softly rose. It gave the most marvellous impression of soft, slow flight of two many-pinioned wings, lifting and sinking like the slow drift of an owl. Then suddenly everything ceased. The people scattered silently.

And two men came into the oval, the one with glowing lamps hung on a pole he carried across his shoulder, while the other quickly hung up the lamps within the porticoes, to light the town. It was night.

Someone brought us a lighted lamp, and was gone. It was evening, and I was alone in a smallish room with a small bed, a lamp on the floor, and an unlighted fire of wood on the small hearth. It was very simple and natural. There was a small outfit of clothing in the cupboard, with a thick blue cloak. And there were a few plates and dishes. But in the room there were no chairs, but a long, folded piece of dark felt, on which one could recline. The light shone upwards from below, lighting the walls of creamy smoothness, like a chalk enamel. And I was alone, utterly alone, within a couple of hundred yards of the very spot where I was born.

I was afraid: afraid for myself. These people, it seemed to me, were not people, not human beings in my sense of the word. They had the stillness and the completeness of plants. And see how they could melt into one amazing instinctive thing, a human flock of motion.

I sat on the ground on the dark-blue felt, wrapped in the blue mantle, because I was cold and had no means of lighting the fire. Someone tapped at the door, and a man of the green guard entered. He had the same quiet, fruit-like glow of the men who had found me, a quality of beauty that came from inside, in some queer physical way. It was a quality I loved, yet it made me angry. It made me feel like a green apple, as if they had had all the real sun.

He took me out, and showed me lavatories and baths, with two lusty men standing under the douches. Then he took me down to a big circular room with a raised hearth in the centre, and a blazing wood fire whose flame and smoke rose to a beautiful funnel-shaped canopy or chimney of stone. The hearth spread out beyond the canopy, and here some men reclined on the folded felts, with little white cloths before them, eating an evening meal of stiff porridge and milk, with liquid butter, fresh lettuce, and apples. They had taken off their clothes, and lay with the firelight flickering on their healthy, fruit-like bodies, the skin glistening faintly with oil. Around the circular wall ran a broad dais where other men reclined, either eating or resting. And from time to time a man came in with his food, or departed with his dishes.

My guide took me out, to peep in a steaming room where each man washed his plate and spoon and hung them in his own little rack. Then my guide gave me a cloth and tray and dishes, and we went to a simple kitchen, where the porridge stood in great bowls over a slow fire, the melted butter was in a deep silver pan, the milk and the lettuce and fruit stood near the door. Three cooks guarded the kitchen, but the men from outside came quietly and took what they needed or what they wanted, helping themselves, then returning to the great round room, or going away to their own little rooms. There was an instinctive cleanliness and decency everywhere, in every movement, in every act. It was as if the deepest instinct had been cultivated in the people, to be comely. The soft, quiet comeliness was like a dream, a dream of life at last come true.

I took a little porridge, though I had little desire to eat. I felt a curious surge of force in me: yet I was like a ghost, among these people. My guide asked me, would I eat in the round hall, or go up to my room? I understood, and chose the round hall. So I hung my cloak in the curving lobby, and entered the men's hall. There I lay on a felt against the wall, and watched the men, and listened.

They seemed to slip out of their clothing as soon as they were warm, as if clothes were a burden or a slight humiliation. And they lay and talked softly, intermittently, with low laughter, and some played games with draughtsmen and chessmen, but mostly they were still.

The room was lit by hanging lamps, and it had no furniture at all. I was alone, and I was ashamed to take off my white sleeveless shirt. I felt, somehow, these men had no right to be so unashamed and self-possessed.

The green guard came again, and asked me, would I go to see somebody whose name I did not make out. So I took my mantle, and we went into the softly-lighted street, under the porticoes. People were passing, some in cloaks, some only in tunics, and women were tripping along.

We climbed up towards the top of the town, and I felt I must be passing the very place where I was born, near where the Wesleyan Chapel stood. But now it was all softly lighted, golden-coloured porticoes, with people passing in green or blue or grey-and-scarlet cloaks.

We came out on top into a circular space, it must have been where our Congregational Chapel stood, and in the centre of the circle rose a tower shaped tapering rather like a lighthouse, and rosy-coloured in the lamplight. Away in the sky, at the club-shaped tip of the tower, glowed one big ball of light.

We crossed, and mounted the steps of another building, through the great hall where people were passing; on to a door at the end of a corridor, where a green guard was seated. The guard rose and entered to announce us, then I followed through an antechamber to an inner room with a central hearth and a fire of

clear-burning wood.

A man came forward to meet me, wearing a thin, carmine-coloured tunic. He had brown hair and a stiff reddish-brown beard, and an extraordinary glimmering kind of beauty. Instead of the Egyptian calmness and fruit-like impassivity of the ordinary people, or the steady, flower-like radiance of the chieftain in yellow, at the city gates, this man had a quavering glimmer like light coming through water. He took my cloak from me; and I felt at once he understood.

‘It is perhaps cruel to awaken,’ he said, in slow, conscious English, ‘even at a good moment.’

‘Tell me where I am!’ I said.

‘We call it Nethrupp — but was it not Newthorpe? — Tell me, when did you go to sleep?’

‘This afternoon, it seems — in October, 1927.’

‘October, nineteen-twenty-seven!’ He repeated the words curiously, smiling.

‘Did I really sleep? Am I really awake?’

‘Are you not awake?’ he said smiling. ‘Will you recline upon the cushions? Or would you rather sit? See!’ — He showed me a solid oak armchair, of the modern furniture-revival sort, standing alone in the room. But it was black with age, and shrunken-seeming. I shivered.

‘How old is that chair?’ I said.

‘It is just about a thousand years! a case of special preservation,’ he said.

I could not help it. I just sat on the rugs and burst into tears, weeping my soul away.

The man sat perfectly still for a long time. Then he came and put my hand between his two.

‘Don’t cry!’ he said. ‘Don’t cry! Man was a perfect child so long. Now we try to be men, not fretful children. Don’t cry! Is not this better?’

‘When is it? What year is this?’ I asked.

‘What year? We call it the year of the acorn. But you mean its arithmetic? You would call it the year two thousand nine hundred and twenty-seven.’

‘It cannot be,’ I said.

‘Yet still it is.’

‘Then I am a thousand and forty-two years old!’

‘And why not?’

‘But how can I be?’

‘How? You went to sleep, like a chrysalis: in one of the earth’s little chrysalis wombs: and your clothes turned to dust, yet they left the buttons: and you woke up like a butterfly. But why not? Why are you afraid to be a butterfly that wakes

up out of the dark for a little while, beautiful? Be beautiful, then, like a white butterfly. Take off your clothes and let the firelight fall on you. What is given, accept then —'

'How long shall I live now, do you think?' I asked him.

'Why will you always measure? Life is not a clock.'

It is true. I am like a butterfly, and I shall only live a little while. That is why I don't want to eat.

THINGS

They were true idealists, from New England. But that is some time ago: before the War. Several years before the War they met and married; he a tall, keen-eyed young man from Connecticut, she a smallish, demure, Puritan-looking young woman from Massachusetts. They both had a little money. Not much, however. Even added together it didn't make three thousand dollars a year. Still — they were free. Free!

Ah! — freedom! To be free to live one's own life! To be twenty-five and twenty-seven, a pair of true idealists with a mutual love of beauty and an inclination towards "Indian thought" — meaning, alas! Mrs Besant — and an income a little under three thousand dollars a year! But what is money? All one wishes to do is to live a full and beautiful life. In Europe, of course, right at the fountain-head of tradition. It might possibly be done in America: in New England, for example. But at forfeiture of a certain amount of "beauty". True beauty takes a long time to mature. The baroque is only half-beautiful, half-matured. No, the real silver bloom, the real golden-sweet bouquet of beauty, had its roots in the Renaissance, not in any later or shallower period.

Therefore, the two idealists, who were married in New Haven, sailed at once to Paris: Paris of the old days. They had a studio apartment on the Boulevard Montparnasse, and they became real Parisians, in the old, delightful sense, not in the modern, vulgar. It was the shimmer of the pure impressionists, Monet and his followers, the world seen in terms of pure light, light broken and unbroken. How lovely! How lovely! how lovely the nights, the river, the mornings in the old streets and by the flower-stalls and the book-stalls, the afternoons up on Montmartre or in the Tuileries, the evenings on the boulevards!

They both painted, but not desperately. Art had not taken them by the throat, and they did not take Art by the throat. They painted: that's all. They knew people — nice people, if possible, though one had to take them mixed. And they were happy.

Yet it seems as if human beings must set their claws in *something*. To be "free", to be "living a full and beautiful life", you must, alas! be attached to something. A "full and beautiful life" means a tight attachment to *something* — at least, it is so for all idealists — or else a certain boredom supervenes; there is a certain waving of loose ends upon the air, like the waving, yearning tendrils of the vine that spread and rotate, seeking something to clutch, something up which

to climb towards the necessary sun. Finding nothing, the vine can only trail, half-fulfilled, upon the ground. Such is freedom — a clutching of the right pole. And human beings are all vines. But especially the idealist. He is a vine, and he needs to clutch and climb. And he despises the man who is a mere *potato*, or turnip, or lump of wood.

Our idealists were frightfully happy, but they were all the time reaching out for something to cotton on to. At first, Paris was enough. They explored Paris *thoroughly*. And they learned French till they almost felt like French people, they could speak it so glibly.

Still, you know, you never talk French with your *soul*. It can't be done. And though it's very thrilling, at first, talking in French to clever Frenchmen — they seem so much cleverer than oneself — still, in the long run, it is not satisfying. The endlessly clever *materialism* of the French leaves you cold, in the end, gives a sense of barrenness and incompatibility with true New England depth. So our two idealists felt.

They turned away from France — but ever so gently. France had disappointed them. “We've loved it, and we've got a great deal out of it. But after a while, a considerable while — several years, in fact — Paris leaves one feeling disappointed. It hasn't quite got what one wants.”

“But Paris isn't France.”

“No, perhaps not. France is quite different from Paris. And France is lovely — quite lovely. But *to us*, though we love it, it doesn't say a great deal.”

So, when the War came, the idealists moved to Italy. And they loved Italy. They found it beautiful, and more poignant than France. It seemed much nearer to the New England conception of beauty: something pure, and full of sympathy, without the *materialism* and the *cynicism* of the French. The two idealists seemed to breathe their own true air in Italy.

And in Italy, much more than in Paris, they felt they could thrill to the teachings of the Buddha. They entered the swelling stream of modern Buddhistic emotion, and they read the books, and they practised meditation, and they deliberately set themselves to eliminate from their own souls greed, pain, and sorrow. They did not realise — yet — that Buddha's very eagerness to free himself from pain and sorrow is in itself a sort of greed. No, they dreamed of a perfect world, from which all greed, and nearly all pain, and a great deal of sorrow, were eliminated.

But America entered the War, so the two idealists had to help. They did hospital work. And though their experience made them realise more than ever that greed, pain, and sorrow *should* be eliminated from the world, nevertheless, the Buddhism, or the theosophy, didn't emerge very triumphant from the long

crisis. Somehow, somewhere, in some part of themselves, they felt that greed, pain and sorrow would never be eliminated, because most people don't care about eliminating them, and never will care. Our idealists were far too Western to think of abandoning all the world to damnation while they saved their two selves. They were far too unselfish to sit tight under a bho-tree and reach Nirvana in a mere couple.

It was more than that, though. They simply hadn't enough *Sitzfleisch* to squat under a bho-tree and get to Nirvana by contemplating anything, least of all their own navel. If the whole wide world was not going to be saved, they, personally, were not so very keen on being saved just by themselves. No, it would be so lonesome. They were New Englanders, so it must be all or nothing. Greed, pain and sorrow must either be eliminated *from all the world*, or else what was the use of eliminating them from oneself? No use at all! One was just a victim.

And so — although they still *loved* “Indian thought”, and felt very tender about it: well, to go back to our metaphor, the pole up which the green and anxious vines had clambered so far now proved dry-rotten. It snapped, and the vines came slowly subsiding to earth again. There was no crack and crash. The vines held themselves up by their own foliage, for a while. But they subsided. The beanstalk of “Indian thought” had given way before Jack had climbed off the tip of it to a further world.

They subsided with a slow rustle back to earth again. But they made no outcry. They were again “disappointed”. But they never admitted it. “Indian thought” had let them down. But they never complained. Even to one another they never said a word. But they were disappointed, faintly but deeply disillusioned, and they both knew it. But the knowledge was tacit.

And they still had so much in their lives. They still had Italy — dear Italy. And they still had freedom, the priceless treasure. And they still had so much “beauty”. About the fullness of their lives they were not quite so sure. They had one little boy, whom they loved as parents should love their children, but whom they wisely refrained from fastening upon, to build their lives on him. No, no, they must live their own lives! They still had strength of mind to know that.

But they were now no longer so very young. Twenty-five and twenty-seven had become thirty-five and thirty-seven. And though they had had a very wonderful time in Europe, and though they still loved Italy — dear Italy! — yet: they were disappointed. They had got a lot out of it: oh, a very great deal indeed! Still, it hadn't given them quite, not *quite*, what they had expected; Europe was lovely, but it was dead. Living in Europe, you were living on the past. And Europeans, with all their superficial charm, were not *really* charming. They were materialistic, they had no real *soul*. They just did not understand the inner urge

of the spirit, because the inner urge was dead in them; they were all survivals. There, that was the truth about Europeans: they were survivals, with no more getting ahead in them.

It was another bean-pole, another vine-support crumbled under the green life of the vine. And very bitter it was, this time. For up the old tree-trunk of Europe the green vine had been clambering silently for more than ten years, ten hugely important years, the years of real living. The two idealists had *lived* in Europe, lived on Europe and on European life and European things as vines in an everlasting vineyard.

They had made their home here: a home such as you could never make in America. Their watchword had been “beauty”. They had rented, the last four years, the second floor of an old Palazzo on the Arno, and here they had all their “things”. And they derived a profound satisfaction from their apartment: the lofty, silent, ancient rooms with windows on the river, with glistening, dark-red floors, and the beautiful furniture that the idealists had “picked up”.

Yes, unknown to themselves, the lives of the idealists had been running with a fierce swiftness horizontally, all the time. They had become tense, fierce hunters of “things” for their home. While their soul was climbing up to the sun of old European culture or old Indian thought, their passions were running horizontally, clutching at “things”. Of course, they did not buy the things for the things’ sakes, but for the sake of “beauty”. They looked upon their home as a place entirely furnished by loveliness, not by “things” at all. Valerie had some very lovely curtains at the windows of the long *salotto*, looking on the river: curtains of queer ancient material that looked like finely knitted silk, most beautifully faded down from vermilion and orange and gold and black, to a sheer soft glow. Valerie hardly ever came into the *salotto* without mentally falling on her knees before the curtains. “Chartres!” she said. “To me they are Chartres!” And Melville never turned and looked at his sixteenth-century Venetian book-case, with its two or three dozen of choice books, without feeling his marrow stir in his bones. The holy of holies!

The child silently, almost sinisterly, avoided any rude contact with these ancient monuments of furniture, as if they had been nests of sleeping cobras, or that “thing” most perilous to the touch — the Ark of the Covenant. His childish awe was silent, and cold, but final.

Still, a couple of New England idealists cannot live merely on the bygone glory of their furniture. At least, one couple could not. They got used to the marvellous Bologna cupboard, they got used to the wonderful Venetian book-case, and the books, and the Siena curtains and bronzes, and the lovely sofas and side-tables and chairs they had “picked up” in Paris. Oh, they had been picking

things up since the first day they landed in Europe. And they were still at it. It is the last interest Europe can offer to an outsider: or to an insider either.

When people came, and were thrilled by the Melville interior, then Valerie and Erasmus felt they had not lived in vain: that they still were living. But in the long mornings, when Erasmus was desultorily working at Renaissance Florentine literature, and Valerie was attending to the apartment; and in the long hours after lunch; and in the long, usually very cold and oppressive evenings in the ancient palazzo: then the halo died from around the furniture, and the things became things, lumps of matter that just stood there or hung there, *ad infinitum*, and said nothing; and Valerie and Erasmus almost hated them. The glow of beauty, like every other glow, dies down unless it is fed. The idealists still dearly loved their things. But they had got them. And the sad fact is, things that glow vividly while you're getting them go almost quite cold after a year or two. Unless, of course, people envy you them very much, and the museums are pining for them. And the Melvilles' "things", though very good, were not quite as good as that.

So the glow gradually went out of everything, out of Europe, out of Italy — "the Italians are *dears*" — even out of that marvellous apartment on the Arno. "Why, if I had this apartment I'd never, never even want to go out of doors! It's too lovely and perfect." That was something, of course, to hear that.

And yet Valerie and Erasmus went out of doors; they even went out to get away from its ancient, cold-floored, stone-heavy silence and dead dignity. "We're living on the past, you know, Dick," said Valerie to her husband. She called him Dick.

They were grimly hanging on. They did not like to give in. They did not like to own up that they were through. For twelve years, now, they had been "free" people, living a "full and beautiful life". And America for twelve years had been their anathema, the Sodom and Gomorrah of industrial materialism.

It wasn't easy to own that you were "through". They hated to admit that they wanted to go back. But at last, reluctantly, they decided to go, "for the boy's sake". "We can't *bear* to leave Europe. But Peter is an American, so he had better look at America while he's young." The Melvilles had an entirely English accent and manner — almost — a little Italian and French here and there.

They left Europe behind, but they took as much of it along with them as possible. Several van-loads, as a matter of fact. All those adorable and irreplaceable "things". And all arrived in New York, idealists, child, and the huge bulk of Europe they had lugged along.

Valerie had dreamed of a pleasant apartment, perhaps on Riverside Drive, where it was not so expensive as east of Fifth Avenue, and where all their

wonderful things would look marvellous. She and Erasmus house-hunted. But, alas! their income was quite under three thousand dollars a year. They found — well, everybody knows what they found. Two small rooms and a kitchenette, and don't let us unpack a *thing*!

The chunk of Europe which they had bitten off went into a warehouse, at fifty dollars a month. And they sat in two small rooms and a kitchenette, and wondered why they'd done it.

Erasmus, of course, ought to get a job. This was what was written on the wall, and what they both pretended not to see. But it had been the strange, vague threat that the Statue of Liberty had always held over them: "Thou shalt get a job!" Erasmus had the tickets, as they say. A scholastic career was still possible for him. He had taken his exams, brilliantly at Yale, and had kept up his "researches" all the time he had been in Europe.

But both he and Valerie shuddered. A scholastic career! The scholastic world! The *American* scholastic world! Shudder upon shudder! Give up their freedom, their full and beautiful life? Never! Never! Erasmus would be forty next birthday.

The "things" remained in warehouse. Valerie went to look at them. It cost her a dollar an hour, and horrid pangs. The "things", poor things, looked a bit shabby and wretched in that warehouse.

However, New York was not all America. There was the great clean West. So the Melvilles went West, with Peter, but without the things. They tried living the simple life in the mountains. But doing their own chores became almost a nightmare. "Things" are all very well to look at, but it's awful handling them, even when they're beautiful. To be the slave of hideous things, to keep a stove going, cook meals, wash dishes, carry water, and clean floors: pure horror of sordid anti-life!

In the cabin on the mountains Valerie dreamed of Florence, the lost apartment; and her Bologna cupboard and Louis Quinze chairs, above all, her "Chartres" curtains, stored in New York — and costing fifty dollars a month.

A millionaire friend came to the rescue, offering them a cottage on the Californian coast — California! Where the new soul is to be born in man. With joy the idealists moved a little farther west, catching at new vine-props of hope.

And finding them straws! The millionaire cottage was perfectly equipped. It was perhaps as labour-savingsly perfect as is possible: electric heating and cooking, a white-and-pearl-enamelled kitchen, nothing to make dirt except the human being himself. In an hour or so the idealists had got through their chores. They were "free" — free to hear the great Pacific pounding the coast, and to feel a new soul filling their bodies.

Alas! the Pacific pounded the coast with hideous brutality, brute force itself! And the new soul, instead of sweetly stealing into their bodies, seemed only meanly to gnaw the old soul out of their bodies. To feel you are under the fist of the most blind and crunching brute force: to feel that your cherished idealist's soul is being gnawed out of you, and only irritation left in place of it: well, it isn't good enough.

After about nine months the idealists departed from the Californian west. It had been a great experience; they were glad to have had it. But, in the long run, the West was not the place for them, and they knew it. No, the people who wanted new souls had better get them. They, Valerie and Erasmus Melville, would like to develop the old soul a little further. Anyway, they had not felt any influx of new soul on the Californian coast. On the contrary.

So, with a slight hole in their material capital, they returned to Massachusetts and paid a visit to Valerie's parents, taking the boy along. The grandparents welcomed the child — poor expatriated boy — and were rather cold to Valerie, but really cold to Erasmus. Valerie's mother definitely said to Valerie one day that Erasmus ought to take a job, so that Valerie could live decently. Valerie haughtily reminded her mother of the beautiful apartment on the Arno, and the "wonderful" things in store in New York, and of the "marvellous and satisfying life" she and Erasmus had led. Valerie's mother said that she didn't think her daughter's life looked so very marvellous at present: homeless, with a husband idle at the age of forty, a child to educate, and a dwindling capital, looked the reverse of marvellous to *her*. Let Erasmus take some post in one of the universities.

"What post? What university?" interrupted Valerie.

"That could be found, considering your father's connections and Erasmus's qualifications," replied Valerie's mother. "And you could get all your valuable things out of store, and have a really lovely home, which everybody in America would be proud to visit. As it is, your furniture is eating up your income, and you are living like rats in a hole, with nowhere to go to."

This was very true. Valerie was beginning to pine for a home, with her "things". Of course, she could have sold her furniture for a substantial sum. But nothing would have induced her to. Whatever else passed away — religions, cultures, continents, and hopes — Valerie would *never* part from the "things" which she and Erasmus had collected with such passion. To these she was nailed.

But she and Erasmus still would not give up that freedom, that full and beautiful life they had so believed in. Erasmus cursed America. He did not *want* to earn a living. He panted for Europe.

Leaving the boy in charge of Valerie's parents, the two idealists once more set off for Europe. In New York they paid two dollars and looked for a brief, bitter hour at their "things". They sailed "student class" — that is, third. Their income now was less than two thousand dollars, instead of three. And they made straight for Paris — cheap Paris.

They found Europe, this time, a complete failure. "We have returned like dogs to our vomit," said Erasmus; "but the vomit has staled in the meantime." He found he couldn't stand Europe. It irritated every nerve in his body. He hated America, too. But America at least was a darn sight better than this miserable, dirt-eating continent; which was by no means cheap any more, either.

Valerie, with her heart on her things — she had really burned to get them out of that warehouse, where they had stood now for three years, eating up two thousand dollars — wrote to her mother she thought Erasmus would come back if he could get some suitable work in America. Erasmus, in a state of frustration bordering on rage and insanity, just went round Italy in a poverty-stricken fashion, his coat-cuffs frayed, hating everything with intensity. And when a post was found for him in Cleveland University, to teach French, Italian, and Spanish literature, his eyes grew more beady, and his long, queer face grew sharper and more rat-like with utter baffled fury. He was forty, and the job was upon him.

"I think you'd better accept, dear. You don't care for Europe any longer. As you say, it's dead and finished. They offer us a house on the College lot, and mother says there's room in it for all our things. I think we'd better cable 'Accept'."

He glowered at her like a cornered rat. One almost expected to see rat's whiskers twitching at the sides of the sharp nose.

"Shall I send the cablegram?" she asked.

"Send it!" he blurted.

And she went out and sent it.

He was a changed man, quieter, much less irritable. A load was off him. He was inside the cage.

But when he looked at the furnaces of Cleveland, vast and like the greatest of black forests, with red-and white-hot cascades of gushing metal, and tiny gnomes of men, and terrific noises, gigantic, he said to Valerie:

"Say what you like, Valerie, this is the biggest thing the modern world has to show."

And when they were in their up-to-date little house on the college lot of Cleveland University, and that woe-begone débris of Europe — Bologna cupboard, Venice book-shelves, Ravenna bishop's chair, Louis Quinze side-tables, "Chartres" curtains, Siena bronze lamps — all were arrayed, and all

looked perfectly out of keeping, and therefore very impressive; and when the idealists had had a bunch of gaping people in, and Erasmus had showed off in his best European manner, but still quite cordial and American, and Valerie had been most ladylike, but for all that “we prefer America”; then Erasmus said, looking at her with the queer sharp eyes of a rat: —

“Europe’s the mayonnaise all right, but America supplies the good old lobster — what?”

“Every time!” she said, with satisfaction.

And he peered at her. He was in the cage: but it was safe inside. And she, evidently, was her real self at last. She had got the goods. Yet round his nose was a queer, evil, scholastic look, of pure scepticism. But he liked lobster.

THE BLUE MOCCASINS

The fashion in women changes nowadays even faster than women's fashions. At twenty, Lina M'Leod was almost painfully modern. At sixty almost obsolete!

She started off in life to be really independent. In that remote day, forty years ago, when a woman said she was going to be independent, it meant she was having no nonsense with men. She was kicking over the masculine traces, and living her own life, manless.

To-day, when a girl says she is going to be independent, it means she is going to devote her attentions almost exclusively to men; though not necessarily to "a man".

Miss M'Leod had an income from her mother. Therefore, at the age of twenty, she turned her back on that image of tyranny, her father, and went to Paris to study art. Art having been studied, she turned her attention to the globe of earth. Being terribly independent, she soon made Africa look small; she dallied energetically with vast hinterlands of China; and she knew the Rocky Mountains and the deserts of Arizona as if she had been married to them. All this, to escape mere man.

It was in New Mexico she purchased the blue moccasins, blue bead moccasins, from an Indian who was her guide and her subordinate. In her independence she made use of men, of course, but merely as servants, subordinates.

When the war broke out she came home. She was then forty-five, and already going grey. Her brother, two years older than herself, but a bachelor, went off to the war; she stayed at home in the small family mansion in the country, and did what she could. She was small and erect and brief in her speech, her face was like pale ivory, her skin like a very delicate parchment, and her eyes were very blue. There was no nonsense about her, though she did paint pictures. She never even touched her delicately parchment face with pigment. She was good enough as she was, honest-to-God, and the country town had a tremendous respect for her.

In her various activities she came pretty often into contact with Percy Barlow, the clerk at the bank, He was only twenty-two when she first set eyes on him in 1914, and she immediately liked him. He was a stranger in the town, his father being a poor country vicar in Yorkshire. But he was of the confiding sort. He soon confided in Miss M'Leod, for whom he had a towering respect, how he

disliked his step-mother, how he feared his father, was but as wax in the hands of that downright woman, and how, in consequence, he was homeless. Wrath shone in his pleasant features, but somehow it was an amusing wrath; at least to Miss M'Leod.

He was distinctly a good-looking boy, with stiff dark hair and odd, twinkling grey eyes under thick dark brows, and a rather full mouth and a queer, deep voice that had a caressing touch of hoarseness. It was his voice that somehow got behind Miss M'Leod's reserve. Not that he had the faintest intention of so doing. He looked up to her immensely: "She's miles above me."

When she watched him playing tennis, letting himself go a bit too much, hitting too hard, running too fast, being too nice to his partner, her heart yearned over him. The orphan in him! Why should he go and be shot? She kept him at home as long as possible, working with her at all kinds of war-work. He was so absolutely willing to do everything she wanted: devoted to her.

But at last the time came when he must go. He was now twenty-four and she was forty-seven. He came to say good-bye, in his awkward fashion. She suddenly turned away, leaned her forehead against the wall, and burst into bitter tears. He was frightened out of his wits. Before he knew what was happening he had his arm in front of his face and was sobbing too.

She came to comfort him. "Don't cry, dear, don't! It will all be all right,"

At last he wiped his face on his sleeve and looked at her sheepishly. "It was you crying as did me in," he said. Her blue eyes were brilliant with tears. She suddenly kissed him.

"You are such a dear!" she said wistfully. Then she added, flushing suddenly vivid pink under her transparent parchment skin: "It wouldn't be right for you to marry an old thing like me, would it?"

He looked at her dumbfounded.

"No, I'm too old," she added hastily.

"Don't talk about old! You're not old!" he said hotly.

"At least I'm too old for *that*," she said sadly.

"Not as far as I'm concerned," he said. "You're younger than me, in most ways, I'm hanged if you're not!"

"Are you hanged if I'm not?" she teased wistfully.

"I am," he said. "And if I thought you wanted me, I'd be jolly proud if you married me. I would, I assure you."

"Would you?" she said, still teasing him.

Nevertheless, the next time he was home on leave she married him, very quietly, but very definitely. He was a young lieutenant. They stayed in her family home, Twybit Hall, for the honeymoon. It was her house now, her brother

being dead. And they had a strangely happy month. She had made a strange discovery: a man.

He went off to Gallipoli, and became a captain. He came home in 1919, still green with malaria, but otherwise sound. She was in her fiftieth year. And she was almost white-haired; long, thick, white hair, done perfectly, and perfectly creamy, colourless face, with very blue eyes.

He had been true to her, not being very forward with women. But he was a bit startled by her white hair. However, he shut his eyes to it, and loved her. And she, though frightened and somewhat bewildered, was happy. But she was bewildered. It always seemed awkward to her, that he should come wandering into her room in his pyjamas when she was half dressed, and brushing her hair. And he would sit there silent, watching her brush the long swinging river of silver, of her white hair, the bare, ivory-white, slender arm working with a strange mechanical motion, sharp and forcible, brushing down the long silvery stream of hair. He would sit as if mesmerised, just gazing. And she would at last glance round sharply, and he would rise, saying some little casual thing to her and smiling to her oddly with his eyes. Then he would go out, his thin cotton pyjamas hitching up over his hips, for he was a rather big-built fellow. And she would feel dazed, as if she did not quite know her own self any more. And the queer, ducking motion of his silently going out of her door impressed her ominously, his curious cat head, his big hips and limbs.

They were alone in the house, save for the servants. He had no work. They lived modestly, for a good deal of her money had been lost during the war. But she still painted pictures. Marriage had only stimulated her to this. She painted canvases of flowers, beautiful flowers that thrilled her soul. And he would sit, pipe in fist, silent, and watch her. He had nothing to do. He just sat and watched her small, neat figure and her concentrated movements as she painted. Then he knocked out his pipe and filled it again.

She said that at last she was perfectly happy. And he said that he was perfectly happy. They were always together. He hardly went out, save riding in the lanes. And practically nobody came to the house.

But still, they were very silent with one another. The old chatter had died out. And he did not read much. He just sat still, and smoked, and was silent. It got on her nerves sometimes, and she would think as she had thought in the past, that the highest bliss a human being can experience is perhaps the bliss of being quite alone, quite, quite alone.

His bank firm offered to make him manager of the local branch, and, at her advice, he accepted. Now he went out of the house every morning and came home every evening, which was much more agreeable. The rector begged him to

sing again in the church choir: and again she advised him to accept. These were the old grooves in which his bachelor life had run. He felt more like himself.

He was popular: a nice, harmless fellow, everyone said of him. Some of the men secretly pitied him. They made rather much of him, took him home to luncheon, and let him loose with their daughters. He was popular among the daughters too: naturally, for if a girl expressed a wish, he would instinctively say: "What! Would you like it? I'll get it for you." And if he were not in a position to satisfy the desire, he would say: "I only wish I could do it for you. I'd do it like a shot." All of which he meant.

At the same time, though he got on so well with the maidens of the town, there was no coming forward about him. He was, in some way, not wakened up. Good-looking, and big, and serviceable, he was inwardly remote, without self-confidence, almost without a self at all.

The rector's daughter took upon herself to wake him up. She was exactly as old as he was, a smallish, rather sharp-faced young woman who had lost her husband in the war, and it had been a grief to her. But she took the stoic attitude of the young: You've got to live, so you may as well do it! She was a kindly soul, in spite of her sharpness. And she had a very perky little red-brown Pomeranian dog that she had bought in Florence in the street, but which had turned out a handsome little fellow. Miss M'Leod looked down a bit on Alice Howells and her pom, so Mrs. Howells felt no special love for Miss M'Leod — "Mrs. Barlow, that is!" she would add sharply. "For it's quite impossible to think of her as anything but Miss M'Leod!"

Percy was really more at ease at the rectory, where the pom yapped and Mrs. Howells changed her dress three or four times a day, and looked it, than in the semi-cloisteral atmosphere of Twybit Hall, where Miss M'Leod wore tweeds and a natural knitted jumper, her skirts rather long, her hair done up pure silver, and painted her wonderful flower pictures in the deepening silence of the daytime. At evening she would go up to change, after he came home. And though it thrilled her to have a man coming into her room as he dressed, snapping his collar-stud, to tell her something trivial as she stood bare-armed in her silk slip, rapidly coiling up the rope of silver hair behind her head, still, it worried her. When he was there, he couldn't keep away from her. And he would watch her, watch her, watch her as if she was the ultimate revelation. Sometimes it made her irritable. She was so absolutely used to her own privacy. What was he looking at? She never watched *him*. Rather she looked the other way. His watching tried her nerves. She was turned fifty. And his great silent body loomed almost dreadful.

He was quite happy playing tennis or croquet with Alice Howells and the rest.

Alice was choir-mistress, a bossy little person outwardly, inwardly rather forlorn and affectionate, and not very sure that life hadn't let her down for good. She was now over thirty — and had no one but the pom and her father and the parish — nothing in her really intimate life. But she was very cheerful, busy, even gay, with her choir and school work, her dancing, and flirting, and dressmaking.

She was intrigued by Percy Barlow. "How *can* a man be so nice to *everybody*?" she asked him, a little exasperated. "Well, why not?" he replied, with the odd smile of his eyes. "It's not why he shouldn't, but how he manages to do it! How can you have so much good-nature? I *have* to be catty to some people, but you're nice to *everybody*."

"Oh, am I!" he said ominously.

He was like a man in a dream, or in a cloud. He was quite a good bank-manager, in fact very intelligent. Even in appearance, his great charm was his beautifully-shaped head. He had plenty of brains, really. But in his will, in his body, he was asleep. And sometimes this lethargy, or coma, made him look haggard. And sometimes it made his body seem inert and despicable, meaningless.

Alice Howells longed to ask him about his wife. "Do you love her? *Can* you really care for her?" But she daren't. She daren't ask him one word about his wife. Another thing she couldn't do, she couldn't persuade him to dance. Never, not once. But in everything else he was pliable as wax.

Mrs. Barlow — Miss M'Leod — stayed out at Twybit all the time. She did not even come in to church on Sunday. She had shaken off church, among other things. And she watched Percy depart, and felt just a little humiliated. He was going to sing in the choir! Yes, marriage was also a humiliation to her. She had distinctly married beneath her.

The years had gone by: she was now fifty-seven, Percy was thirty-four. He was still, in many ways, a boy. But in his curious silence, he was ageless. She managed him with perfect ease. If she expressed a wish, he acquiesced at once. So now it was agreed he should not come to her room any more. And he never did. But sometimes she went to him in his room, and was winsome in a pathetic, heart-breaking way.

She twisted him round her little finger, as the saying goes. And yet secretly she was afraid of him. In the early years he had displayed a clumsy but violent sort of passion, from which she had shrunk away. She felt it had nothing to do with her. It was just his indiscriminating desire for Woman, and for his own satisfaction. Whereas she was not just unidentified Woman, to give him his general satisfaction. So she had recoiled, and withdrawn herself. She had put him off. She had regained the absolute privacy of her room.

He was perfectly sweet about it. Yet she was uneasy with him now. She was afraid of him; or rather, not of him, but of a mysterious something in him. She was not a bit afraid of *him*, oh no! And when she went to him now, to be nice to him, in her pathetic winsomeness of an unused woman of fifty-seven, she found him sweet-natured as ever, but really indifferent. He saw her pathos and her winsomeness. In some way, the mystery of her, her thick white hair, her vivid blue eyes, her ladylike refinement still fascinated him. But his bodily desire for her had gone, utterly gone. And secretly, she was rather glad. But as he looked at her, looked at her, as he lay there so silent, she was afraid, as if some finger were pointed at her. Yet she knew, the moment she spoke to him, he would twist his eyes to that good-natured and “kindly” smile of his.

It was in the late, dark months of this year that she missed the blue moccasins. She had hung them on a nail in his room. Not that he ever wore them: they were too small. Nor did she: they were too big. Moccasins are male footwear, among the Indians, not female. But they were of a lovely turquoise-blue colour, made all of little turquoise beads, with little forked flames of dead-white and dark-green. When, at the beginning of their marriage, he had exclaimed over them, she had said: “Yes! Aren’t they a lovely colour! So blue!” And he had replied: “Not as blue as your eyes, even then.”

So, naturally, she had hung them up on the wall in his room, and there they had stayed. Till, one November day, when there were no flowers, and she was pining to paint a still-life with something blue in it — oh, so blue, like delphiniums! — she had gone to his room for the moccasins. And they were not there. And though she hunted, she could not find them. Nor did the maids know anything of them.

So she asked him: “Percy, do you know where those blue moccasins are, which hung in your room?” There was a moment’s dead silence. Then he looked at her with his good-naturedly twinkling eyes, and said: “No, *I* know nothing of them.” There was another dead pause. She did not believe him. But being a perfect lady, she only said, as she turned away: “Well then, how curious it is!” And there was another dead pause. Out of which he asked her what she wanted them for, and she told him. Whereon the matter lapsed.

It was November, and Percy was out in the evening fairly often now. He was rehearsing for a “play” which was to be given in the church schoolroom at Christmas. He had asked her about it. “Do you think it’s a bit *infra dig.*, if I play one of the characters?” She had looked at him mildly, disguising her real feeling. “If you don’t feel *personally* humiliated,” she said, “then there’s nothing else to consider.” And he had answered: “Oh, it doesn’t upset *me* at all.” So she mildly said: “Then do it, by all means.” Adding at the back of her mind: If it amuses

you, child! — but she thought, a change had indeed come over the world, when the master of Twybit Hall, or even, for that matter, the manager of the dignified Stubb's Bank, should perform in public on a schoolroom stage in amateur theatricals. And she kept calmly aloof, preferring not to know any details. She had a world of her own.

When he had said to Alice Howells: "You don't think other folk'll mind — clients of the bank and so forth — think it beneath my dignity?" she had cried, looking up into his twinkling eyes: "Oh, you don't have to keep *your* dignity on ice, Percy — any more than I do mine."

The play was to be performed for the first time on Christmas Eve: and after the play, there was the midnight service in church. Percy therefore told his wife not to expect him home till the small hours, at least. So he drove himself off in the car.

As night fell, and rain, Miss M'Leod felt a little forlorn. She was left out of everything. Life was slipping past her. It was Christmas Eve, and she was more alone than she had ever been. Percy only seemed to intensify her aloneness, leaving her in this fashion.

She decided not to be left out. She would go to the play too. It was past six o'clock, and she had worked herself into a highly nervous state. Outside was darkness and rain: inside was silence, forlornness. She went to the telephone and rang up the garage in Shrewbury. It was with great difficulty she got them to promise to send a car for her: Mr. Slater would have to fetch her himself in the two-seater runabout: everything else was out.

She dressed nervously, in a dark-green dress with a few modest jewels. Looking at herself in the mirror, she still thought herself slim, young-looking and distinguished. She did not see how old-fashioned she was, with her uncompromising erectness, her glistening knob of silver hair sticking out behind, and her long dress.

It was a three-mile drive in the rain, to the small country town. She sat next to old Slater, who was used to driving horses and was nervous and clumsy with a car, without saying a word. He thankfully deposited her at the gate of St. Barnabas' School.

It was almost half-past-seven. The schoolroom was packed and buzzing with excitement. "I'm afraid we haven't a seat left, Mrs. Barlow!" said Jackson, one of the church sidesmen, who was standing guard in the school porch, where people were still fighting to get in. He faced her in consternation. She faced him in consternation. "Well, I shall have to stay somewhere, till Mr. Barlow can drive me home," she said. "Couldn't you put me a chair somewhere?"

Worried and flustered, he went worrying and flustering the other people in

charge. The schoolroom was simply packed solid. But Mr. Simmons, the leading grocer, gave up his chair in the front row to Mrs. Barlow, whilst he sat in a chair right under the stage, where he couldn't see a thing. But he could see Mrs. Barlow seated between his wife and daughter, speaking a word or two to them occasionally, and that was enough.

The lights went down: *The Shoes of Shagput* was about to begin. The amateur curtains were drawn back, disclosing the little amateur stage with a white amateur back-cloth daubed to represent a Moorish courtyard. In stalked Percy, dressed as a Moor, his face darkened. He looked quite handsome, his pale grey eyes queer and startling in his dark face. But he was afraid of the audience — he spoke away from them, stalking around clumsily. After a certain amount of would-be funny dialogue, he tripped the heroine, Alice Howells, of course. She was an Eastern houri, in white gauze Turkish trousers, silver veil, and — the blue moccasins. The whole stage was white, save for her blue moccasins, Percy's dark-green sash, and a negro boy's red fez.

When Mrs. Barlow saw the blue moccasins, a little bomb of rage exploded in her. This, of all places! The blue moccasins that she had bought in the western deserts! The blue moccasins that were not so blue as her own eyes! *Her* blue moccasins! On the feet of that creature, Mrs. Howells.

Alice Howells was not afraid of the audience. She looked full at them, lifting her silver veil. And of course she saw Mrs. Barlow, sitting there like the Ancient of Days in judgment, in the front row. And a bomb of rage exploded in *her* breast too.

In the play, Alice was the wife of the grey-bearded old Caliph, but she captured the love of the young Ali, otherwise Percy, and the whole business was the attempt of these two to evade Caliph and negro-eunuchs and ancient crones, and get into each other's arms. The blue shoes were very important: for while the sweet Lelia wore them, the gallant Ali was to know there was danger. But when she took them off, he might approach her.

It was all quite childish, and everybody loved it, and Miss M'Leod might have been quite complacent about it all, had not Alice Howells got her monkey up, so to speak. Alice with a lot of make-up, looked boldly handsome. And suddenly bold she was, bold as the devil. All these years the poor young widow had been "good", slaving in the parish, and only even flirting just to cheer things up, never going very far and knowing she could never get anything out of it, but determined never to mope.

Now the sight of Miss M'Leod sitting there so erect, so coolly "higher plane", and calmly superior, suddenly let loose a devil in Alice Howells. All her limbs went suave and molten, as her young sex, long pent up, flooded even to her

finger-tips. Her voice was strange, even to herself, with its long, plaintive notes. She felt all her movements soft and fluid, she felt herself like living liquid. And it was lovely. Underneath it all was the sting of malice against Miss M'Leod, sitting there so erect, with her great knob of white hair.

Alice's business, as the lovely Leila, was to be seductive to the rather heavy Percy. And seductive she was. In two minutes, she had him spellbound. He saw nothing of the audience. A faint, fascinated grin came on to his face, as he acted up to the young woman in the Turkish trousers. His rather full, hoarse voice changed and became clear, with a new, naked clang in it. When the two sang together, in the simple banal duets of the play, it was with a most fascinating intimacy. And when, at the end of Act One, the lovely Leila kicked off the blue moccasins, saying: "Away, shoes of bondage, shoes of sorrow!" and danced a little dance all alone, barefoot, in her Turkish trousers, in front of her fascinated hero, his smile was so spellbound that everybody else was spellbound too.

Miss M'Leod's indignation knew no bounds. When the blue moccasins were kicked across the stage by the brazen Alice, with the words: "Away, shoes of bondage, shoes of sorrow!" the elder woman grew pink with fury, and it was all she could do not to rise and snatch the moccasins from the stage, and bear them away. She sat in speechless indignation during the brief curtain between Act One and Act Two. Her moccasins! Her blue moccasins! Of the sacred blue colour, the turquoise of heaven.

But there they were, in Act Two, on the feet of the bold Alice. It was becoming too much. And the love-scenes between Percy and the young woman were becoming nakedly shameful. Alice grew worse and worse. She was worked up now, caught in her own spell, and unconscious of everything save of him, and the sting of that other woman, who presumed to own him. Own him? Ha-ha! For he was fascinated. The queer smile on his face, the concentrated gleam of his eyes, the queer way he leaned forward from his loins towards her, the new, reckless, throaty twang in his voice — the audience had before their eyes a man spellbound and lost in passion.

Miss M'Leod sat in shame and torment, as if her chair was red-hot. She too was fast losing her normal consciousness, in the spell of rage. She was outraged. The second Act was working up to its climax. The climax came. The lovely Leila kicked off the blue shoes: "Away, shoes of bondage, away!" and flew barefoot to the enraptured Ali, flinging herself into his arms. And if ever a man was gone in sheer desire, it was Percy, as he pressed the woman's lithe form against his body, and seemed unconsciously to envelop her, unaware of everything else. While she, blissful in his spell, but still aware of the audience and of the superior Miss M'Leod, let herself be wrapped closer and closer.

Miss M'Leod rose to her feet and looked towards the door. But the way out was packed, with people standing holding their breath as the two on the stage remained wrapped in each other's arms, and the three fiddles and the flute softly woke up. Miss M'Leod could not bear it. She was on her feet, and beside herself. She could not get out. She could not sit down again.

"Percy!" she said, in a low clear voice. "Will you hand me my moccasins?"

He lifted his face like a man startled in a dream, lifted his face from the shoulder of his Leila. His gold-grey eyes were like softly-startled flames. He looked in sheer horrified wonder at the little white-haired woman standing below.

"Eh?" he said, purely dazed

"Will you please hand me my moccasins!" — and she pointed to where they lay on the stage.

Alice had stepped away from him, and was gazing at the risen viper of the little elderly woman on the tip of the audience. Then she watched him move across the stage, bending forward from the loins in his queer mesmerised way, pick up the blue moccasins, and stoop down to hand them over the edge of the stage to his wife, who reached up for them.

"Thank you!" said Miss M'Leod, seating herself, with the blue moccasins in her lap.

Alice recovered her composure, gave a sign to the little orchestra, and began to sing at once, strong and assured, to sing her part in the duet that closed the Act. She knew she could command public opinion in her favour.

He too recovered at once, the little smile came back on his face, he calmly forgot his wife again as he sang his share in the duet. It was finished. The curtains were pulled to. There was immense cheering. The curtains opened, and Alice and Percy bowed to the audience, smiling both of them their peculiar secret smile, while Miss M'Leod sat with the blue moccasins in her lap.

The curtains were closed, it was the long interval. After a few moments of hesitation, Mrs. Barlow rose with dignity, gathered her wrap over her arm, and with the blue moccasins in her hand, moved towards the door. Way was respectfully made for her.

"I should like to speak to Mr. Barlow," she said to Jackson, who had anxiously ushered her in, and now would anxiously usher her out.

"Yes, Mrs. Barlow."

He led her round to the smaller class-room at the back, that acted as dressing-room. The amateur actors were drinking lemonade, and chattering freely. Mrs. Howells came forward, and Jackson whispered the news to her. She turned to Percy.

“Percy, Mrs. Barlow wants to speak to you. Shall I come with you?”

“Speak to me? Aye, come on with me.”

The two followed the anxious Jackson into the other half-lighted class-room, where Mrs. Barlow stood in her wrap, holding the moccasins. She was very pale, and she watched the two butter-muslin Turkish figures enter, as if they could not possibly be real. She ignored Mrs. Howells entirely.

“Percy,” she said, “I want you to drive me home.”

“Drive you home!” he echoed.

“Yes, please!”

“Why — when?” he said, with vague bluntness.

“Now — if you don’t mind — ”

“What — in this get-up?” He looked at himself.

“I could wait while you changed.”

There was a pause. He turned and looked at Alice Howells, and Alice Howells looked at him. The two women saw each other out of the corners of their eyes: but it was beneath notice. He turned to his wife, his black face ludicrously blank, his eyebrows cocked.

“Well, you see,” he said, “it’s rather awkward. I can hardly hold up the third Act while I’ve taken you home and got back here again, can I?”

“So you intend to play in the third Act?” she asked with cold ferocity.

“Why, I must, mustn’t I?” he said blankly.

“Do you *wish* to?” she said, in all her intensity.

“I do, naturally. I want to finish the thing up properly,” he replied, in the utter innocence of his head; about his heart he knew nothing.

She turned sharply away.

“Very well!” she said. And she called to Jackson, who was standing dejectedly near the door: “Mr Jackson, will you please find some car or conveyance to take me home?”

“Aye! I say, Mr. Jackson,” called Percy in his strong, democratic voice, going forward to the man. “Ask Tom Lomas if he’ll do me a good turn and get my car out of the rectory garage, to drive Mrs. Barlow home. Aye, ask Tom Lomas! And if not him, ask Mr. Pilkington — Leonard. The key’s there. You don’t mind, do you? I’m ever so much obliged — ”

The three were left awkwardly alone again.

“I expect you’ve had enough with two acts,” said Percy soothingly to his wife. “These things aren’t up to your mark. I know it. They’re only child’s play. But, you see, they please the people. We’ve got a packed house, haven’t we?”

His wife had nothing to answer. He looked so ludicrous, with his dark-brown face and butter-muslin bloomers. And his mind was so ludicrously innocent. His

body, however, was not so ridiculously innocent as his mind, as she knew when he turned to the other woman.

“You and I, we’re more on the nonsense level, aren’t we?” he said, with the new, throaty clang of naked intimacy in his voice. His wife shivered.

“Absolutely on the nonsense level,” said Alice, with easy assurance.

She looked into his eyes, then she looked at the blue moccasins in the hand of the other woman. He gave a little start, as if realising something for himself.

At that moment Tom Lomas looked in, saying heartily: “Right you are, Percy! I’ll have my car here in half a tick. I’m more handy with it than yours.”

“Thanks, old man! You’re a Christian.”

“Try to be — especially when you turn Turk! Well — ” He disappeared.

“I say, Lina,” said Percy in his most amiable democratic way, “would you mind leaving the moccasins for the next act? We s’ll be in a bit of a hole without them.”

Miss M’Leod faced him and stared at him with the full blast of her forget-me-not blue eyes, from her white face.

“Will you pardon me if I don’t?” she said.

“What!” he exclaimed. “Why? Why not? It’s nothing but play, to amuse the people. I can’t see how it can hurt the *moccasins*. I understand you don’t quite like seeing me make a fool of myself. But, anyhow, I’m a bit of a born fool. What?” — and his blackened face laughed with a Turkish laugh. “Oh, yes, you have to realise I rather enjoy playing the fool,” he resumed. “And, after all, it doesn’t really hurt *you*, now does it? Shan’t you leave us those moccasins for the last act?”

She looked at him, then at the moccasins in her hand. No, it was useless to yield to so ludicrous a person. The vulgarity of his wheedling, the commonness of the whole performance! It was useless to yield even the moccasins. It would be treachery to herself.

“I’m sorry,” she said. “But I’d so much rather they weren’t used for this kind of thing. I never intended them to be.” She stood with her face averted from the ridiculous couple.

He changed as if she had slapped his face. He sat down on top of the low pupils’ desk and gazed with glazed interest round the class-room. Alice sat beside him, in her white gauze and her bedizened face. They were like two rebuked sparrows on one twig, he with his great, easy, intimate limbs, she so light and alert. And as he sat he sank into an unconscious physical sympathy with her. Miss M’Leod walked towards the door.

“You’ll have to think of something as’ll do instead,” he muttered to Alice in a low voice, meaning the blue moccasins. And leaning down, he drew off one of

the grey shoes she had on, caressing her foot with the slip of his hand over its slim, bare shape. She hastily put the bare foot behind her other, shod foot.

Tom Lomas poked in his head, his overcoat collar turned up to his ears.

“Car’s here,” he said.

“Right-o! Tom! I’ll chalk it up to thee, lad!” said Percy with heavy breeziness. Then, making a great effort with himself, he rose heavily and went across to the door, to his wife, saying to her, in the same stiff voice of false heartiness:

“You’ll be as right as rain with Tom. You won’t mind if I don’t come out? No! I’d better not show myself to the audience. Well — I’m glad you came, if only for a while. Good-bye then! I’ll be home after the service — but I shan’t disturb you. Good-bye! Don’t get wet now — ” And his voice, falsely cheerful, stiff with anger, ended in a clang of indignation.

Alice Howells sat on the infants’ bench in silence. She was ignored. And she was unhappy, uneasy, because of the scene.

Percy closed the door after his wife. Then he turned with a looming slowness to Alice, and said in a hoarse whisper: “Think o’ that, now!”

She looked up at him anxiously. His face, in its dark pigment, was transfigured with indignant anger. His yellow-grey eyes blazed, and a great rush of anger seemed to be surging up volcanic in him. For a second his eyes rested on her upturned, troubled, dark-blue eyes, then glanced away, as if he didn’t want to look at her in his anger. Even so, she felt a touch of tenderness in his glance.

“And that’s all she’s ever cared about — her own things and her own way,” he said, in the same hoarse whisper, hoarse with suddenly-released rage. Alice Howells hung her head in silence.

“Not another damned thing, but what’s her own, her own — and her own holy way — damned holy-holy-holy, all to herself.” His voice shook with hoarse, whispering rage, burst out at last.

Alice Howells looked up at him in distress.

“Oh, don’t say it!” she said. “I’m sure she’s fond of you.”

“*Fond* of me! Fond of *me*!” he blazed, with a grin of transcendent irony. “It makes her sick to look at me. I am a hairy brute, I own it. Why, she’s never once touched me to be fond of me — never once — though she pretends sometimes. But a man knows — ” and he made a grimace of contempt. “He knows when a woman’s just stroking him, good doggie! — and when she’s really a bit woman-fond of him. That woman’s never been real fond of anybody or anything, all her life — she couldn’t, for all her show of kindness. She’s limited to herself, that woman is; and I’ve looked up to her as if she was God. More fool me! If God’s not good-natured and good-hearted, then what is He — ?”

Alice sat with her head dropped, realising once more that men aren't really fooled. She was upset, shaken by his rage, and frightened, as if she too were guilty. He had sat down blankly beside her. She glanced up at him.

"Never mind!" she said soothingly. "You'll like her again to-morrow."

He looked down at her with a grin, a grey sort of grin. "Are you going to stroke me 'good doggie!' as well?" he said.

"Why?" she asked, blank.

But he did not answer. Then after a while he resumed: "Wouldn't even leave the moccasins! And she's hung them up in my room, left them there for years — any man'd consider they were his. And I did want this show to-night to be a success! What are you going to do about it?"

"I've sent over for a pair of pale-blue satin bed-slippers of mine — they'll do just as well," she replied.

"Aye! For all that, it's done me in."

"You'll get over it."

"Happen so! She's curdled my inside, for all that. I don't know how I'm going to be civil to her."

"Perhaps you'd better stay at the rectory to-night," she said softly.

He looked into her eyes. And in that look, he transferred his allegiance.

"You don't want to be drawn in, do you?" he asked, with troubled tenderness.

But she only gazed with wide, darkened eyes into his eyes, so she was like an open, dark doorway to him. His heart beat thick, and the faint, breathless smile of passion came into his eyes again.

"You'll have to go on, Mrs. Howells. We can't keep them waiting any longer."

It was Jim Stokes, who was directing the show. They heard the clapping and stamping of the impatient audience.

"Goodness!" cried Alice Howells, darting to the door.

RAWDON'S ROOF

Rawdon was the sort of man who said, privately, to his men friends, over a glass of wine after dinner: "No woman shall sleep again under my roof!"

He said it with pride, rather vaunting, pursing his lips. "Even my housekeeper goes home to sleep."

But the housekeeper was a gentle old thing of about sixty, so it seemed a little fantastic. Moreover, the man had a wife, of whom he was secretly rather proud, as a piece of fine property, and with whom he kept up a very witty correspondence, epistolary, and whom he treated with humorous gallantry when they occasionally met for half an hour. Also he had a love affair going on. At least, if it wasn't a love affair, what was it? However!

"No, I've come to the determination that no woman shall ever sleep under my roof again — not even a female cat!"

One looked at the roof, and wondered what it had done amiss. Besides, it wasn't his roof. He only rented the house. What does a man mean, anyhow, when he says "my roof"? *My* roof! The only roof I am conscious of having, myself, is the top of my head. However, he hardly can have meant that no woman should sleep under the elegant dome of his skull. Though there's no telling. You see the top of a sleek head through a window, and you say: "By Jove, what a pretty girl's head!" And after all, when the individual comes out, it's in trousers.

The point, however, is that Rawdon said so emphatically — no, not emphatically, succinctly: "No woman shall ever again sleep under my roof." It was a case of futurity. No doubt he had had his ceilings whitewashed, and their memories put out. Or rather, repainted, for it was a handsome wooden ceiling. Anyhow, if ceilings have eyes, as walls have ears, then Rawdon had given his ceilings a new outlook, with a new coat of paint, and all memory of any woman's having slept under them — for after all, in decent circumstances we sleep under ceilings, not under roofs — was wiped out for ever.

"And will you neither sleep under any woman's roof?"

That pulled him up rather short. He was not prepared to sauce his gander as he had sauced his goose. Even I could see the thought flitting through his mind, that some of his pleasantest holidays depended on the charm of his hostess. Even some of the nicest hotels were run by women.

"Ah! Well! That's not quite the same thing, you know. When one leaves one's

own house one gives up the keys of circumstance, so to speak. But, as far as possible, I make it a rule not to sleep under a roof that is openly, and obviously, and obtrusively a woman's roof!"

"Quite!" said I with a shudder. "So do I!"

Now I understood his mysterious love affair less than ever. He was never known to speak of this love affair: he did not even write about it to his wife. The lady — for she was a lady — lived only five minutes' walk from Rawdon. She had a husband, but he was in diplomatic service or something like that, which kept him occupied in the sufficiently-far distance. Yes, far enough. And, as a husband, he was a complete diplomat. A balance of power. If he was entitled to occupy the wide field of the world, she, the other and contrasting power, might concentrate and consolidate her position at home.

She was a charming woman, too, and even a beautiful woman. She had two charming children, long-legged, stinky, clove-pink-half-opened sort of children. But really charming. And she was a woman with a certain mystery. She never talked. She never said anything about herself. Perhaps she suffered; perhaps she was frightfully happy, and made *that* her cause for silence. Perhaps she was wise enough even to be beautifully silent about her happiness. Certainly she never mentioned her sufferings, or even her trials: and certainly she must have a fair handful of the latter, for Alec Drummond sometimes fled home in the teeth of a gale of debts. He simply got through his own money and through hers, and, third and fatal stride, through other people's as well. Then something had to be done about it. And Janet, dear soul, had to put her hat on and take journeys. But she never said anything of it. At least, she did just hint that Alec didn't *quite* make enough money to meet expenses. But after all, we don't go about with our eyes shut, and Alec Drummond, whatever else he did, didn't hide his prowess under a bushel.

Rawdon and he were quite friendly, but really! None of them ever talked. Drummond didn't talk, he just went off and behaved in his own way. And though Rawdon would chat away till the small hours, *he* never "talked". Not to his nearest male friend did he ever mention Janet save as a very pleasant woman and his neighbour: he admitted he adored her children. They often came to see him.

And one felt about Rawdon, he was making a mystery of something. And that was rather irritating. He went every day to see Janet, and of course we saw him going: going or coming. How can one help but see? But he always went in the morning, at about eleven, and did not stay for lunch: or he went in the afternoon, and came home to dinner. Apparently he was never there in the evening. Poor Janet, she lived like a widow.

Very well, if Rawdon wanted to make it so blatantly obvious that it was only platonic, purely platonic, why wasn't he natural? Why didn't he say simply: "I'm very fond of Janet Drummond, she is my very dear friend?" Why did he sort of curl up at the very mention of her name, and curdle into silence: or else say rather forcedly: "Yes, she is a charming woman. I see a good deal of her, but chiefly for the children's sake. I'm devoted to the children!" Then he would look at one in such a curious way, as if he were hiding something. And after all, what was there to hide? If he was the woman's friend, why not? It could be a charming friendship. And if he were her lover, why, heaven bless me, he ought to have been proud of it, and showed just a glint, just an honest man's glint.

But no, never a glint of pride or pleasure in the relation either way. Instead of that, this rather theatrical reserve. Janet, it is true, was just as reserved. If she could, she avoided mentioning his name. Yet one knew, sure as houses, she felt something. One suspected her of being more in love with Rawdon than ever she had been with Alec. And one felt that there was a hush put upon it all. She had had a hush put upon her. By whom? By both the men? Or by Rawdon only? Or by Drummond? Was it for her husband's sake? Impossible! For her children's? But why! Her children were devoted to Rawdon.

It had now become the custom for them to go to him three times a week, for music. I don't mean he taught them the piano. Rawdon was a very refined musical amateur. He had them sing, in their delicate girlish voices, delicate little songs, and really he succeeded wonderfully with them; he made them so true, which children rarely are, musically, and so pure and effortless, like little flamelets of sound. It really was rather beautiful, and sweet of him. And he taught them *music*, the delicacy of the feel of it. They had a regular teacher for the practice.

Even the little girls, in their young little ways, were in love with Rawdon! So if their mother were in love too, in her ripened womanhood, why not?

Poor Janet! She was so still, and so elusive: the hush upon her! She was rather like a half-opened rose that somebody had tied a string round, so that it couldn't open any more. But why? Why? In her there was a real touch of mystery. One could never *ask* her, because one knew her heart was too keenly involved: or her pride.

Whereas there was, really, no mystery about Rawdon, refined and handsome and subtle as he was. He *had* no mystery: at least, to a man. What *he* wrapped himself up in was a certain amount of mystification.

Who wouldn't be irritated to hear a fellow saying, when for months and months he has been paying a daily visit to a lonely and very attractive woman — nay, lately even a twice-daily visit, even if always before sundown — to hear

him say, pursing his lips after a sip of his own very moderate port: "I've taken a vow that no woman shall sleep under my roof again!"

I almost snapped out: "Oh, what the hell! And what about your Janet?" But I remembered in time, it was not *my* affair, and if he wanted to have his mystifications, let him have them.

If he meant he wouldn't have his wife sleep under his roof again, that one could understand. They were really very witty with one another, he and she, but fatally and damnably married.

Yet neither wanted a divorce. And neither put the slightest claim to any control over the other's behaviour. He said: "Women live on the moon, men on the earth." And she said: "I don't mind in the least if he loves Janet Drummond, poor thing. It would be a change for him, from loving himself. And a change for her, if somebody loved her —"

Poor Janet! But he wouldn't have her sleep under his roof, no, not for any money. And apparently he never slept under hers — if she could be said to have one. So what the deuce?

Of course, if they were friends, just friends, all right! But then in that case, why start talking about not having a woman sleep under your roof? Pure mystification!

The cat never came out of the bag. But one evening I distinctly heard it mewling inside its sack, and I even believe I saw a claw through the canvas.

It was in November — everything much as usual — myself pricking my ears to hear if the rain had stopped, and I could go home, because I was just a little bored about "cornemuse" music. I had been having dinner with Rawdon, and listening to him ever since on his favourite topic: not, of course, women, and why they shouldn't sleep under his roof, but fourteenth-century melody and windbag accompaniment.

It was not late — not yet ten o'clock — but I was restless, and wanted to go home. There was no longer any sound of rain. And Rawdon was perhaps going to make a pause in his monologue.

Suddenly there was a tap at the door, and Rawdon's man, Hawken, edged in. Rawdon, who had been a major in some fantastic capacity during the war, had brought Hawken back with him. This fresh-faced man of about thirty-five appeared in the doorway with an intensely blank and bewildered look on his face. He was really an extraordinarily good actor.

"A lady, sir!" he said, with a look of utter blankness.

"A what?" snapped Rawdon.

"A lady!" — then with a most discreet drop in his voice: "Mrs. Drummond, sir!" He looked modestly down at his feet.

Rawdon went deathly white, and his lips quivered.

“Mrs. Drummond! Where?”

Hawken lifted his eyes to his master in a fleeting glance.

“I showed her into the dining-room, there being no fire in the drawing-room.”

Rawdon got to his feet and took two or three agitated strides. He could not make up his mind. At last he said, his lips working with agitation:

“Bring her in here.”

Then he turned with a theatrical gesture to me.

“What this is all about, I *don't* know,” he said.

“Let me clear out,” said I, making for the door.

He caught me by the arm.

“No, for God's sake! For God's sake, stop and see me through!”

He gripped my arm till it really hurt, and his eyes were quite wild. I did not know my Olympic Rawdon.

Hastily I backed away to the side of the fire — we were in Rawdon's room, where the books and piano were — and Mrs. Drummond appeared in the doorway. She was much paler than usual, being a rather warm-coloured woman, and she glanced at me with big reproachful eyes, as much as to say: You intruder! You interloper! For my part, I could do nothing but stare. She wore a black wrap, which I knew quite well, over her black dinner-dress.

“Rawdon!” she said, turning to him and blotting out my existence from her consciousness. Hawken softly closed the door, and I could *feel* him standing on the threshold outside, listening keen as a hawk.

“Sit down, Janet,” said Rawdon, with a grimace of a sour smile, which he could not get rid of once he had started it, so that his face looked very odd indeed, like a mask which he was unable either to fit on or take off. He had several conflicting expressions all at once, and they had all stuck.

She let her wrap slip back on her shoulders, and knitted her white fingers against her skirt, pressing down her arms, and gazing at him with a terrible gaze. I began to creep to the door.

Rawdon started after me.

“No, don't go! Don't go! I specially want you not to go,” he said in extreme agitation.

I looked at her. She was looking at him with a heavy, sombre kind of stare. Me she absolutely ignored. Not for a second could she forgive me for existing on the earth. I slunk back to my post behind the leather armchair, as if hiding.

“Do sit down, Janet,” he said to her again. “And have a smoke. What will you drink?”

“Nothanks!” she said, as if it were one word slurred out. “Nothanks.”

And she proceeded again to fix him with that heavy, portentous stare.

He offered her a cigarette, his hand trembling as he held out the silver box.

“Nothanks!” she slurred out again, not even looking at the box, but keeping him fixed with that dark and heavy stare.

He turned away, making a great delay lighting a cigarette, with his back to her, to get out of the stream of that stare. He carefully went for an ash-tray, and put it carefully within reach — all the time trying not to be swept away on that stare. And she stood with her fingers locked, her straight, plump, handsome arms pressed downwards against her skirt, and she gazed at him.

He leaned his elbow on the mantelpiece abstractedly for a moment — then he started suddenly, and rang the bell. She turned her eyes from him for a moment, to watch his middle finger pressing the bell-button. Then there was a tension of waiting, an interruption in the previous tension. We waited. Nobody came. Rawdon rang again.

“That’s very curious!” he murmured to himself. Hawken was usually so prompt. Hawken, not being a woman, slept under the roof, so there was no excuse for his not answering the bell. The tension in the room had now changed quality, owing to this new suspense. Poor Janet’s sombre stare became gradually loosened, so to speak. Attention was divided. Where was Hawken? Rawdon rang the bell a third time, a long peal. And now Janet was no longer the centre of suspense. Where was Hawken? The question loomed large over every other.

“I’ll just look in the kitchen,” said I, making for the door.

“No, no. I’ll go,” said Rawdon.

But I was in the passage — and Rawdon was on my heels. The kitchen was very tidy and cheerful, but empty; only a bottle of beer and two glasses stood on the table. To Rawdon the kitchen was as strange a world as to me — he never entered the servants’ quarters. But to me it was curious that the bottle of beer was empty, and both the glasses had been used. I knew Rawdon wouldn’t notice.

“That’s very curious!” said Rawdon: meaning the absence of his man.

At that moment we heard a step on the servants’ stairs, and Rawdon opened the door to reveal Hawken descending with an armful of sheets and things.

“What are you doing?”

“Why! — ” and a pause. “I was airing the clean laundry, like — not to waste the fire last thing.”

Hawken descended into the kitchen with a very flushed face and very bright eyes and rather ruffled hair, and proceeded to spread the linen on chairs before the fire.

“I hope I’ve not done wrong, sir,” he said in his most winning manner. “Was you ringing?”

“Three times! Leave that linen and bring a bottle of the fizz.”

“I’m sorry, sir. You can’t hear the bell from the front, sir.”

It was perfectly true. The house was small, but it had been built for a very nervous author, and the servants’ quarters were shut off, padded from the rest of the house.

Rawdon said no more about the sheets and things, but he looked more peaked than ever.

We went back to the music-room. Janet had gone to the hearth, and stood with her hand on the mantel. She looked round at us, baffled.

“We’re having a bottle of fizz,” said Rawdon. “Do let me take your wrap.”

“And where was Hawken?” she asked satirically.

“Oh, busy somewhere upstairs.”

“He’s a busy young man, that!” she said sardonically. And she sat uncomfortably on the edge of the chair where I had been sitting.

When Hawken came with the tray, she said:

“I’m not going to drink.”

Rawdon appealed to me, so I took a glass. She looked inquiringly at the flushed and bright-eyed Hawken, as if she understood something.

The manservant left the room. We drank our wine, and the awkwardness returned.

“Rawdon!” she said suddenly, as if she were firing a revolver at him. “Alec came home to-night in a bigger mess than ever, and wanted to make love to me to get it off his mind. I can’t stand it any more. I’m in love with you, and I simply can’t stand Alec getting too near to me. He’s dangerous when he’s crossed — and when he’s worked up. So I just came here. I didn’t see what else I could do.”

She left off as suddenly as a machine-gun leaves off firing. We were just dazed.

“You are quite right,” Rawdon began, in a vague and neutral tone. . . .

“I am, am I not?” she said eagerly.

“I’ll tell you what I’ll do,” he said. “I’ll go round to the hotel to-night, and you can stay here.”

“Under the kindly protection of Hawken, you mean!” she said, with quiet sarcasm.

“Why! — I could send Mrs. Betts, I suppose,” he said.

Mrs. Betts was his housekeeper.

“You couldn’t stay and protect me yourself?” she said quietly.

“I! I! Why, I’ve made a vow — haven’t I, Joe?” — he turned to me — “not to have any woman sleep under my roof again.” — He got the mixed sour smile on

his face.

She looked up at the ceiling for a moment, then lapsed into silence. Then she said:

“Sort of monastery, so to speak!”

And she rose and reached for her wrap, adding:

“I’d better go, then.”

“Joe will see you home,” he said.

She faced round on me.

“Do you mind *not* seeing me home, Mr. Bradley?” she said, gazing at me.

“Not if you don’t want me,” said I.

“Hawken will drive you,” said Rawdon.

“Oh, no, he won’t!” she said. “I’ll walk. Good-night.”

“I’ll get my hat,” stammered Rawdon, in an agony. “Wait! Wait! The gate will be locked.”

“It was open when I came,” she said.

He rang for Hawken to unlock the iron doors at the end of the short drive, whilst he himself huddled into a greatcoat and scarf, fumbling for a flashlight.

“You won’t go till I come back, will you?” he pleaded to me. “I’d be awfully glad if you’d stay the night. The sheets *will* be aired.”

I had to promise — and he set off with an umbrella, in the rain, at the same time asking Hawken to take a flashlight and go in front. So that was how they went, in single file along the path over the fields to Mrs. Drummond’s house, Hawken in front, with flashlight and umbrella, curving round to light up in front of Mrs. Drummond, who, with umbrella only, walked isolated between two lights, Rawdon shining his flashlight on her from the rear from under his umbrella. I turned indoors.

So that was over! At least, for the moment!

I thought I would go upstairs and see how damp the bed in the guest-chamber was before I actually stayed the night with Rawdon. He never had guests — preferred to go away himself.

The guest-chamber was a good room across a passage and round a corner from Rawdon’s room — its door just opposite the padded service-door. This latter service-door stood open, and a light shone through. I went into the spare bedroom, switching on the light.

To my surprise, the bed looked as if it had just been left — the sheets tumbled, the pillows pressed. I put in my hands under the bedclothes, and it was warm. Very curious!

As I stood looking round in mild wonder, I heard a voice call softly: “Joe!”

“Yes!” said I instinctively, and, though startled, strode at once out of the room

and through the servants' door, towards the voice. Light shone from the open doorway of one of the servants' rooms.

There was a muffled little shriek, and I was standing looking into what was probably Hawken's bedroom, and seeing a soft and pretty white leg and a pretty feminine posterior very thinly dimmed in a rather short night-dress, just in the act of climbing into a narrow little bed, and, then arrested, the owner of the pretty posterior burying her face in the bedclothes, to be invisible, like the ostrich in the sand.

I discreetly withdrew, went downstairs and poured myself a glass of wine. And very shortly Rawdon returned looking like Hamlet in the last act.

He said nothing, neither did I. We sat and merely smoked. Only as he was seeing me upstairs to bed, in the now immaculate bedroom, he said pathetically:

"Why aren't women content to be what a man wants them to be?"

"Why aren't they!" said I wearily.

"I thought I had made everything clear," he said.

"You start at the wrong end," said I.

And as I said it, the picture came into my mind of the pretty feminine butt-end in Hawken's bedroom. Yes, Hawken made better starts, wherever he ended.

When he brought me my cup of tea in the morning, he was very soft and cat-like. I asked him what sort of day it was, and he asked me if I'd had a good night, and was I comfortable.

"Very comfortable!" said I. "But I turned you out, I'm afraid."

"Me, sir?" He turned on me a face of utter bewilderment.

But I looked him in the eye.

"Is your name Joe?" I asked him.

"You're right, sir."

"So is mine," said I. "However, I didn't see her face, so it's all right. I suppose you were a bit tight, in that little bed!"

"Well, sir!" and he flashed me a smile of amazing impudence, and lowered his tone to utter confidence. "This is the best bed in the house, this is." And he touched it softly.

"You've not tried them all, surely?"

A look of indignant horror on his face!

"No, sir, indeed I haven't."

That day, Rawdon left for London, on his way to Tunis, and Hawken was to follow him. The roof of his house looked just the same.

The Drummonds moved too — went away somewhere, and left a lot of unsatisfied tradespeople behind.

MOTHER AND DAUGHTER

Virginia Bodoin had a good job: she was head of a department in a certain government office, held a responsible position, and earned, to imitate Balzac and be precise about it, seven hundred and fifty pounds a year. That is already something. Rachel Bodoin, her mother, had an income of about six hundred a year, on which she had lived in the capitals of Europe since the effacement of a never very important husband.

Now, after some years of virtual separation and “freedom”, mother and daughter once more thought of settling down. They had become, in course of time, more like a married couple than mother and daughter. They knew one another very well indeed, and each was a little “nervous” of the other. They had lived together and parted several times. Virginia was now thirty, and she didn’t look like marrying. For four years she had been as good as married to Henry Lubbock, a rather spoilt young man who was musical. Then Henry let her down: for two reasons. He couldn’t stand her mother. Her mother couldn’t stand him. And anybody whom Mrs Bodoin could not stand she managed to sit on, disastrously. So Henry had writhed horribly, feeling his mother-in-law sitting on him tight, and Virginia, after all, in a helpless sort of family loyalty, sitting alongside her mother. Virginia didn’t really want to sit on Henry. But when her mother egged her on, she couldn’t help it. For ultimately, her mother had power over her; a strange *female* power, nothing to do with parental authority. Virginia had long thrown parental authority to the winds. But her mother had another, much subtler form of domination, female and thrilling, so that when Rachel said: Let’s squash him! Virginia had to rush wickedly and gleefully to the sport. And Henry knew quite well when he was being squashed. So that was one of his reasons for going back on Vinny. — He called her Vinny, to the superlative disgust of Mrs Bodoin, who always corrected him: My daughter *Virginia* —

The second reason was, again to be Balzacian, that Virginia hadn’t a sou of her own. Henry had a sorry two hundred and fifty. Virginia, at the age of twenty-four, was already earning four hundred and fifty. But she was earning them. Whereas Henry managed to earn about twelve pounds per annum, by his precious music. He had realized that he would find it hard to earn more. So that marrying, except with a wife who could keep him, was rather out of the question. Vinny would inherit her mother’s money. But then Mrs Bodoin had the health and muscular equipment of the Sphinx. She would live forever, seeking

whom she might devour, and devouring him. Henry lived with Vinny for two years, in the married sense of the words: and Vinny felt they *were* married, minus a mere ceremony. But Vinny had her mother always in the background; often as far back as Paris or Biarritz, but still, within letter reach. And she never realized the funny little grin that came on her own elvish face when her mother, even in a letter, spread her skirts and calmly sat on Henry. She never realized that in spirit she promptly and mischievously sat on him too: she could no more have helped it than the tide can help turning to the moon. And she did not dream that he felt it, and was utterly mortified in his masculine vanity. Women, very often, hypnotize one another, and then, hypnotized, they proceed gently to wring the neck of the man they think they are loving with all their hearts. Then they call it utter perversity on his part, that he doesn't like having his neck wrung. They think he is repudiating a heart-felt love. For they are hypnotized. Women hypnotize one another, without knowing it.

In the end, Henry backed out. He saw himself being simply reduced to nothingness by two women, an old witch with muscles like the Sphinx, and a young, spellbound witch, lavish, elvish and weak, who utterly spoilt him but who ate his marrow.

Rachel would write from Paris: My dear Virginia, as I had a windfall in the way of an investment, I am sharing it with you. You will find enclosed my cheque for twenty pounds. No doubt you will be needing it to buy Henry a suit of clothes, since the spring is apparently come, and the sunlight may be tempted to show him up for what he is worth. I don't want my daughter going around with what is presumably a street-corner musician, but please pay the tailor's bill yourself, or you may have to do it over again later. — Henry got a suit of clothes, but it was as good as a shirt of Nessus, eating him away with subtle poison.

So he backed out. He didn't jump out, or bolt, or carve his way out at the sword's point. He sort of faded out, distributing his departure over a year or more. He was fond of Vinny, and he could hardly do without her, and he was sorry for her. But at length he couldn't see her apart from her mother. She was a young, weak, spendthrift witch, accomplice of her tough-clawed witch of a mother.

Henry made other alliances, got a good hold on elsewhere, and gradually extricated himself. He saved his life, but he had lost, he felt, a good deal of his youth and marrow. He tended now to go fat, a little puffy, somewhat insignificant. And he had been handsome and striking-looking.

The two witches howled when he was lost to them. Poor Virginia was really half crazy, she didn't know what to do with herself. She had a violent recoil

from her mother. Mrs Bodoin was filled with furious contempt for her daughter: that she should let such a hooked fish slip out of her hands! that she should allow such a person to turn her down! — "I don't quite see my daughter seduced and thrown over by a sponging individual such as Henry Lubbock," she wrote. "But if it has happened, I suppose it is somebody's fault — "

There was a mutual recoil, which lasted nearly five years. But the spell was not broken. Mrs Bodoin's mind never left her daughter, and Virginia was ceaselessly aware of her mother, somewhere in the universe. They wrote, and met at intervals, but they kept apart in recoil.

The spell, however, was between them, and gradually it worked. They felt more friendly. Mrs Bodoin came to London. She stayed in the same quiet hotel with her daughter: Virginia had had two rooms in an hotel for the past three years. And, at last, they thought of taking an apartment together.

Virginia was now over thirty. She was still thin and odd and elvish, with a very slight and piquant cast in one of her brown eyes, and she still had her odd, twisted smile, and her slow, rather deep-toned voice, that caressed a man like the stroking of subtle finger-tips. Her hair was still a natural tangle of curls, a bit dishevelled. She still dressed with a natural elegance which tended to go wrong and a tiny bit sluttish. She still might have a hole in her expensive and perfectly new stockings, and still she might have to take off her shoes in the drawing-room, if she came to tea, and sit there in her stockinged-feet. True, she had elegant feet: she was altogether elegantly shaped. But it wasn't that. It was neither coquetry nor vanity. It was simply that, after having gone to a good shoemaker and paid five guineas for a pair of perfectly simple and natural shoes, made to her feet, the said shoes would hurt her excruciatingly, when she had walked half a mile in them, and she would simply have to take them off, even if she sat on the kerb to do it. It was a fatality. There was a touch of the *gamin* in her very feet, a certain sluttishness that wouldn't let them stay properly in nice proper shoes. She practically always wore her mother's old shoes. — Of course I go through life in mother's old shoes. If she died and left me without a supply, I suppose I should have to go in a bathchair, she would say, with her odd twisted little grin. She was so elegant, and yet a slut. It was her charm, really.

Just the opposite of her mother. They could wear each other's shoes and each other's clothes, which seemed remarkable, for Mrs Bodoin seemed so much the bigger of the two. But Virginia's shoulders were broad, if she was thin, she had a strong frame, even when she looked a frail rag.

Mrs Bodoin was one of those women of sixty or so, with a terrible inward energy and a violent sort of vitality. But she managed to hide it. She sat with perfect repose, and folded hands. One thought: What a calm woman! Just as one

may look at the snowy summit of a quiescent volcano, in the evening light, and think: What peace!

It was a strange *muscular* energy which possessed Mrs Bodoin, as it possesses, curiously enough, many women over fifty, and is usually distasteful in its manifestations. Perhaps it accounts for the lassitude of the young.

But Mrs Bodoin recognized the bad taste in her energetic coevals, so she cultivated repose. Her very way of pronouncing the word, in two syllables: repose, making the second syllable run on into the twilight, showed how much suppressed energy she had. Faced with the problem of iron-grey hair and black eyebrows, she was too clever to try dyeing herself back into youth. She studied her face, her whole figure, and decided that it was *positive*. There was no denying it. There was no wispiness, no hollowness, no limp frail blossom-on-a-bending-stalk about her. Her figure, though not stout, was full, strong, and *cambré*. Her face had an aristocratic arched nose, aristocratic, who-the-devil-are-you grey eyes, and cheeks rather long but also rather full. Nothing appealing or youthfully skittish here.

Like an independent woman, she used her wits, and decided most emphatically not to be either youthful or skittish or appealing. She would keep her dignity, for she was fond of it. She was positive. She liked to be positive. She was used to her positivity. So she would just *be* positive.

She turned to the positive period; to the eighteenth century, to Voltaire, to Ninon de l'Enclos and the Pompadour, to Madame la Duchesse and Monsieur le Marquis. She decided that she was not much in the line of la Pompadour or la Duchesse, but almost exactly in the line of Monsieur le Marquis. And she was right. With hair silvering to white, brushed back clean from her positive brow and temples, cut short, but sticking out a little behind, with her rather full, pink face and thin black eyebrows plucked to two fine, superficial crescents, her arching nose and her rather full insolent eyes she was perfectly eighteenth-century, the early half. That she was Monsieur le Marquis rather than Madame la Marquise made her really modern.

Her appearance was perfect. She wore delicate combinations of grey and pink, maybe with a darkening iron-grey touch, and her jewels were of soft old coloured paste. Her bearing was a sort of alert repose, very calm, but very assured. There was, to use a vulgarism, no getting past her.

She had a couple of thousand pounds she could lay hands on. Virginia, of course, was always in debt. But, after all, Virginia was not to be sniffed at. She made seven hundred and fifty a year.

Virginia was oddly clever, and not clever. She didn't *really* know anything, because anything and everything was interesting to her for the moment, and she

picked it up at once. She picked up languages with extraordinary ease, she was fluent in a fortnight. This helped her enormously with her job. She could prattle away with heads of industry, let them come from where they liked. But she didn't *know* any language, not even her own. She picked things up in her sleep, so to speak, without knowing anything about them.

And this made her popular with men. With all her curious facility, they didn't feel small in front of her, because she was like an instrument. She had to be prompted. Some man had to set her in motion, and then she worked, really cleverly. She could collect the most valuable information. She was very useful. She worked with men, spent most of her time with men, her friends were practically all men. She didn't feel easy with women.

Yet she had no lover, nobody seemed eager to marry her, nobody seemed eager to come close to her at all. Mrs Bodoin said: I'm afraid Virginia is a one-man woman. I am a one-man woman. So was my mother, and so was my grandmother. Virginia's father was the only man in my life, the only one. And I'm afraid Virginia is the same, tenacious. Unfortunately, the man was what he was, and her life is just left there.

Henry had said, in the past, that Mrs Bodoin wasn't a one-man woman, she was a no-man woman, and that if she could have had her way, everything male would have been wiped off the face of the earth, and only the female element left.

However, Mrs Bodoin thought that it was now time to make a move. So she and Virginia took a quite handsome apartment in one of the old Bloomsbury Squares, fitted it up and furnished it with extreme care, and with some quite lovely things, got in a very good man, an Austrian, to cook, and they set up married life together, mother and daughter.

At first it was rather thrilling. The two reception-rooms, looking down on the dirty old trees of the square garden, were of splendid proportions, and each with three great windows coming down low, almost to the level of the knees. The chimney-piece was late eighteenth-century. Mrs Bodoin furnished the rooms with a gentle suggestion of Louis Seize merged with Empire, without keeping to any particular style. But she had, saved from her own home, a really remarkable Aubusson carpet. It looked almost new, as if it had been woven two years ago, and was startling, yet somehow rather splendid, as it spread its rose-red borders and wonderful florid array of silver-grey and gold-grey roses, lilies and gorgeous swans and trumpeting volutes away over the floor. Very aesthetic people found it rather loud, they preferred the worn, dim yellowish Aubusson in the big bedroom. But Mrs Bodoin loved her drawing-room carpet. It was positive, but it was not vulgar. It had a certain grand air in its floridity. She felt it gave her a

proper footing. And it behaved very well with her painted cabinets and grey-and-gold brocade chairs and big Chinese vases, which she liked to fill with big flowers: single Chinese peonies, big roses, great tulips, orange lilies. The dim room of London, with all its atmospheric colour, would stand the big, free, fisticuffing flowers.

Virginia, for the first time in her life, had the pleasure of making a home. She was again entirely under her mother's spell, and swept away, thrilled to her marrow. She had had no idea that her mother had got such treasures as the carpets and painted cabinets and brocade chairs up her sleeve: many of them the débris of the Fitzpatrick home in Ireland, Mrs Bodoin being a Fitzpatrick. Almost like a child, like a bride, Virginia threw herself into the business of fixing up the rooms. "Of course, Virginia, I consider this is *your* apartment," said Mrs Bodoin. "I am nothing but your *dame de compagnie*, and shall carry out your wishes entirely, if you will only express them."

Of course Virginia expressed a few, but not many. She introduced some wild pictures bought from impecunious artists whom she patronized. Mrs Bodoin thought the pictures positive about the wrong things, but as far as possible, she let them stay: looking on them as the necessary element of modern ugliness. But by that element of modern ugliness, wilfully so, it was easy to see the things that Virginia had introduced into the apartment.

Perhaps nothing goes to the head like setting up house. You can get drunk on it. You feel you are creating something. Nowadays it is no longer the "home", the domestic nest. It is "my rooms", or "my house", the great garment which reveals and clothes "my personality". Mrs Bodoin, deliberately scheming for Virginia, kept moderately cool over it, but even she was thrilled to the marrow, and of an intensity and ferocity with the decorators and furnishers, astonishing. But Virginia was just all the time tipsy with it, as if she had touched some magic button on the grey wall of life, and with an Open Sesame! her lovely and coloured rooms had begun to assemble out of fairyland. It was far more vivid and wonderful to her than if she had inherited a duchy.

The mother and daughter, the mother in a sort of faded russet crimson and the daughter in silver, began to entertain. They had, of course, mostly men. It filled Mrs Bodoin with a sort of savage impatience to entertain women. Besides, most of Virginia's acquaintances were men. So there were dinners and well-arranged evenings.

It went well, but something was missing. Mrs Bodoin wanted to be gracious, so she held herself rather back. She stayed a little distant, was calm, reposed, eighteenth-century, and determined to be a foil to the clever and slightly-elvish Virginia. It was a pose, and alas, it stopped something. She was very nice with

the men, no matter what her contempt of them. But the men were uneasy with her: afraid.

What they all felt, all the men guests, was that *for them*, nothing really happened. Everything that happened was between mother and daughter. All the flow was between mother and daughter. A subtle, hypnotic spell encompassed the two women, and try as they might, the men were shut out. More than one young man, a little dazzled, *began* to fall in love with Virginia. But it was impossible. Not only was he shut out, he was, in some way, annihilated. The spontaneity was killed in his bosom. While the two women sat, brilliant and rather wonderful, in magnetic connection at opposite ends of the table, like two witches, a double Circe turning the men not into swine — the men would have liked that well enough — but into lumps.

It was tragic. Because Mrs Bodoin wanted Virginia to fall in love and marry. She really wanted it, and she attributed Virginia's lack of forthcoming to the delinquent Henry. She never realized the hypnotic spell, which of course encompassed her as well as Virginia, and made men just an impossibility to both women, mother and daughter alike.

At this time, Mrs Bodoin hid her humour. She had a really marvellous faculty of humorous imitation. She could imitate the Irish servants from her old home, or the American women who called on her, or the modern lady-like young men, the asphodels, as she called them: "Of course you know the asphodel is a kind of onion! Oh yes, just an over-bred onion": who wanted, with their murmuring voices and peeping under their brows, to make her feel very small and very bourgeois. She could imitate them all with a humour that was really touched with genius. But it was devastating. It demolished the objects of her humour so absolutely, smashed them to bits with a ruthless hammer, pounded them to nothing so terribly, that it frightened people, particularly men. It frightened men off.

So she hid it. She hid it. But there it was, up her sleeve, her merciless, hammer-like humour, which just smashed its object on the head and left him brained. She tried to disown it. She tried to pretend, even to Virginia, that she had the gift no more. But in vain; the hammer hidden up her sleeve hovered over the head of every guest, and every guest felt his scalp creep, and Virginia felt her inside creep with a little, mischievous, slightly idiotic grin, as still another fool male was mystically knocked on the head. It was a sort of uncanny sport.

No, the plan was not going to work: the plan of having Virginia fall in love and marry. Of course the men *were* such lumps, such *oeufs farcies*. There was one, at least, that Mrs Bodoin had real hopes of. He was a healthy and normal and very good-looking boy of good family, with no money, alas, but clerking to

the House of Lords and very hopeful, and not very clever, but simply in love with Virginia's cleverness. He was just the one Mrs Bodoin would have married for herself. True, he was only twenty-six, to Virginia's thirty-one. But he had rowed in the Oxford eight, and adored horses, talked horses adorably, and was simply infatuated by Virginia's cleverness. To him Virginia had the finest mind on earth. She was as wonderful as Plato, but infinitely more attractive, because she was a woman, and winsome with it. Imagine a winsome Plato with untidy curls and the tiniest little brown-eyed squint and just a hint of woman's pathetic need for a protector, and you may imagine Adrian's feeling for Virginia. He adored her on his knees, but he felt he could protect her.

"Of course he's just a very nice *boy!*" said Mrs Bodoin. "He's a boy, and that's all you can say. And he always will be a boy. But that's the very nicest kind of man, the only kind you can live with: the eternal boy. Virginia, aren't you attracted to him?"

"Yes, Mother! I think he's an awfully nice *boy*, as you say," replied Virginia, in her rather slow, musical, whimsical voice. But the mocking little curl in the intonation put the lid on Adrian. Virginia was not marrying a nice *boy!* She could be malicious too, against her mother's taste. And Mrs Bodoin let escape her a faint gesture of impatience.

For she had been planning her own retreat, planning to give Virginia the apartment outright, and half of her own income, if she would marry Adrian. Yes, the mother was already scheming how best she could live with dignity on three hundred a year, once Virginia was happily married to that most attractive if slightly brainless *boy*.

A year later, when Virginia was thirty-two, Adrian, who had married a wealthy American girl and been transferred to a job in the legation at Washington in the meantime, faithfully came to see Virginia as soon as he was in London, faithfully knelt at her feet, faithfully thought her the most wonderful spiritual being, and faithfully felt that she, Virginia, could have done wonders with him, which wonders would now never be done, for he had married in the meantime.

Virginia was looking haggard and worn. The scheme of a *ménage à deux* with her mother had not succeeded. And now, work was telling on the younger woman. It is true, she was amazingly facile. But facility wouldn't get her all the way. She had to earn her money, and earn it hard. She had to slog, and she had to concentrate. While she could work by quick intuition and without much responsibility, work thrilled her. But as soon as she had to get down to it, as they say, grip and slog and concentrate, in a really responsible position, it wore her out terribly. She had to do it all off her nerves. She hadn't the same sort of

fighting power as a man. Where a man can summon his old Adam in him to fight through his work, a woman has to draw on her nerves, and on her nerves alone. For the old Eve in her will have nothing to do with such work. So that mental responsibility, mental concentration, mental slogging wear out a woman terribly, especially if she is head of a department, and not working *for* somebody.

So poor Virginia was worn out. She was thin as a rail. Her nerves were frayed to bits. And she could never forget her beastly work. She would come home at teatime speechless and done for. Her mother, tortured by the sight of her, longed to say: Has anything gone wrong, Virginia? Have you had anything particularly trying at the office today? — But she learned to hold her tongue, and say nothing. The question would be the last straw to Virginia's poor overwrought nerves, and there would be a little scene which, despite Mrs Bodoin's calm and forbearance, offended the elder woman to the quick. She had learned, by bitter experience, to leave her child alone, as one would leave a frail tube of vitriol alone. But of course, she could not keep her *mind* off Virginia. That was impossible. And poor Virginia, under the strain of work and the strain of her mother's awful ceaseless mind, was at the very end of her strength and resources.

Mrs Bodoin had always disliked the fact of Virginia's doing a job. But now she hated it. She hated the whole government office with violent and virulent hate. Not only was it undignified for Virginia to be tied up there, but it was turning her, Mrs Bodoin's daughter, into a thin, nagging, fearsome old maid. Could anything be more utterly English and humiliating to a well-born Irishwoman?

After a long day attending to the apartment, skilfully darning one of the brocade chairs, polishing the Venetian mirrors to her satisfaction, selecting flowers, doing certain shopping and housekeeping, attending perfectly to everything, then receiving callers in the afternoon, with never-ending energy, Mrs Bodoin would go up from the drawing-room after tea and write a few letters, take her bath, dress with great care — she enjoyed attending to her person — and come down to dinner as fresh as a daisy, but far more energetic than that quiet flower. She was ready now for a full evening.

She was conscious, with gnawing anxiety, of Virginia's presence in the house, but she did not see her daughter till dinner was announced. Virginia slipped in, and away to her room unseen, never going into the drawing-room to tea. If Mrs Bodoin heard her daughter's key in the latch, she quickly retired into one of the rooms till Virginia was safely through. It was too much for poor Virginia's nerves even to catch sight of anybody in the house, when she came in from the office. Bad enough to hear the murmur of visitors' voices behind the drawing-

room door.

And Mrs Bodoin would wonder: How is she? How is she to-night? I wonder what sort of a day she's had? — And this thought would roam prowling through the house, to where Virginia was lying on her back in her room. But the mother would have to consume her anxiety till dinner-time. And then Virginia would appear, with black lines under her eyes, thin, tense, a young woman out of an office, the stigma upon her: badly dressed, a little acid in humour, with an impaired digestion, not interested in anything, blighted by her work. And Mrs Bodoin, humiliated at the very sight of her, would control herself perfectly, say nothing but the mere smooth nothings of casual speech, and sit in perfect form presiding at a carefully-cooked dinner thought out entirely to please Virginia. Then Virginia hardly noticed what she ate.

Mrs Bodoin was pining for an evening with life in it. But Virginia would lie on the couch and put on the loudspeaker. Or she would put a humorous record on the gramophone, and be amused, and hear it again, and be amused, and hear it again, six times, and six times be amused by a mildly funny record that Mrs Bodoin now knew off by heart. "Why, Virginia, I could repeat that record over to you, if you wished it, without your troubling to wind up that gramophone." — And Virginia, after a pause in which she seemed not to have heard what her mother said, would reply, "I'm sure you could, mother". And that simple speech would convey such volumes of contempt for all that Rachel Bodoin was or ever could be or ever had been, contempt for her energy, her vitality, her mind, her body, her very existence, that the elder woman would curl. It seemed as if the ghost of Robert Bodoin spoke out of the mouth of the daughter, in deadly venom. — Then Virginia would put on the record for the seventh time.

During the second ghastly year, Mrs Bodoin realized that the game was up. She was a beaten woman, a woman without object or meaning any more. The hammer of her awful female humour, which had knocked so many people on the head, all the people, in fact, that she had come into contact with, had at last flown backwards and hit herself on the head. For her daughter was her other self, her *alter ego*. The secret and the meaning and the power of Mrs Bodoin's whole life lay in the hammer, that hammer of her living humour which knocked everything on the head. That had been her lust and her passion, knocking everybody and everything humorously on the head. She had felt inspired in it: it was a sort of mission. And she had hoped to hand on the hammer to Virginia, her clever, unsolid but still actual daughter, Virginia. Virginia was the continuation of Rachel's own self. Virginia was Rachel's *alter ego*, her other self.

But, alas, it was a half-truth. Virginia had had a father. This fact, which had been utterly ignored by the mother, was gradually brought home to her by the

curious recoil of the hammer. Virginia was her father's daughter. Could anything be more unseemly, horrid, more perverse in the natural scheme of things? For Robert Bodoin had been fully and deservedly knocked on the head by Rachel's hammer. Could anything, then, be more disgusting than that he should resurrect again in the person of Mrs Bodoin's own daughter, her own *alter ego* Virginia, and start hitting back with a little spiteful hammer that was David's pebble against Goliath's battle-axe!

But the little pebble was mortal. Mrs Bodoin felt it sink into her brow, her temple, and she was finished. The hammer fell nerveless from her hand.

The two women were now mostly alone. Virginia was too tired to have company in the evening. So there was the gramophone or loudspeaker, or else silence. Both women had come to loathe the apartment. Virginia felt it was the last grand act of bullying on her mother's part, she felt bullied by the assertive Aubusson carpet, by the beastly Venetian mirrors, by the big overcultured flowers. She even felt bullied by the excellent food, and longed again for a Soho restaurant and her two poky shabby rooms in the hotel. She loathed the apartment: she loathed everything. But she had not the energy to move. She had not the energy to do anything. She crawled to her work, and for the rest, she lay flat, gone.

It was Virginia's worn-out inertia that really finished Mrs Bodoin. That was the pebble that broke the bone of her temple: "To have to attend my daughter's funeral, and accept the sympathy of all her fellow-clerks in her office, no, that is a final humiliation which I must spare myself. No! If Virginia must be a lady-clerk, she must be it henceforth on her own responsibility. I will retire from her existence."

Mrs Bodoin had tried hard to persuade Virginia to give up her work and come and live with her. She had offered her half her income. In vain. Virginia stuck to her office.

Very well! So be it! — The apartment was a fiasco, Mrs Bodoin was longing, longing to tear it to pieces again. One last and final blow of the hammer! — "Virginia, don't you think we'd better get rid of this apartment, and live around as we used to? Don't you think we'll do that?" — "But all the money you've put into it? And the lease for ten years!" cried Virginia, in a kind of inertia. — "Never mind! We had the pleasure of making it. And we've had as much pleasure out of living in it as we shall ever have. Now we'd better get rid of it — quickly — don't you think?"

Mrs Bodoin's arms were twitching to snatch the pictures off the walls, roll up the Aubusson carpet, take the china out of the ivory-inlaid cabinet there and then, at that very moment.

“Let us wait till Sunday before we decide,” said Virginia.

“Till Sunday! Four days! As long as that? Haven’t we already decided in our own minds?” said Mrs Bodoïn.

“We’ll wait till Sunday, anyhow,” said Virginia.

The next evening, the Armenian came to dinner. Virginia called him Arnold, with the French pronunciation, Arnault. Mrs Bodoïn, who barely tolerated him, and could never get his name, which seemed to have a lot of bouyoums in it, called him either the Armenian, or the Rahat Lakoum, after the name of the sweetmeat, or simply The Turkish Delight.

“Arnault is coming to dinner to-night, Mother.”

“Really! The Turkish Delight is coming here to dinner? Shall I provide anything special?” — Her voice sounded as if she would suggest snails in aspic.

“I don’t think so.”

Virginia had seen a good deal of the Armenian at the office, when she had to negotiate with him on behalf of the Board of Trade. He was a man of about sixty, a merchant, had been a millionaire, was ruined during the war, but was now coming on again, and represented trade in Bulgaria. He wanted to negotiate with the British Government, and the British Government sensibly negotiated with him: at first through the medium of Virginia. Now things were going satisfactorily between Monsieur Arnault, as Virginia called him, and the Board of Trade, so that a sort of friendship had followed the official relations.

The Turkish Delight was sixty, grey-haired and fat. He had numerous grandchildren growing up in Bulgaria, but he was a widower. He had a grey moustache cut like a brush, and glazed brown eyes over which hung heavy lids with white lashes. His manner was humble, but in his bearing there was a certain dogged conceit. One notices the combination sometimes in Jews. He had been very wealthy and kow-towed to, he had been ruined and humiliated, terribly humiliated, and now, doggedly, he was rising up again, his sons backing him, away in Bulgaria. One felt he was not alone. He had his sons, his family, his tribe behind him, away in the Near East.

He spoke bad English, but fairly fluent guttural French. He did not speak much, but he sat. He sat, with his short, fat thighs, as if for eternity, *there*. There was a strange potency in his fat immobile sitting, as if his posterior were connected with the very centre of the earth. And his brain, spinning away at the one point in question, business, was very agile. Business absorbed him. But not in a nervous, personal way. Somehow the family, the tribe was always felt behind him. It was business for the family, the tribe.

With the English he was humble, for the English like such aliens to be humble, and he had had a long schooling from the Turks. And he was always an

outsider. Nobody would ever take any notice of him in society. He would just be an outsider, *sitting*.

“I hope, Virginia, you won’t ask that Turkish-carpet gentleman when we have other people. *I* can bear it,” said Mrs Bodoïn. “Some people might mind.”

“Isn’t it hard when you can’t choose your own company in your own house!” mocked Virginia.

“No! *I* don’t care. I can meet anything; and I’m sure, in the way of selling Turkish carpets, your acquaintance is very good. But I don’t suppose you look on him as a personal friend — ?”

“I do. I like him quite a lot.”

“Well — ! as you will. But consider your *other* friends.”

Mrs Bodoïn was really mortified this time. She looked on the Armenian as one looks on the fat Levantine in a fez who tries to sell one hideous tapestries at Port Said, or on the sea-front at Nice, as being outside the class of human beings, and in the class of insects. That he had been a millionaire, and might be a millionaire again, only added venom to her feeling of disgust at being forced into contact with such scum. She could not even squash him, or annihilate him. In scum, there is nothing to squash, for scum is only the unpleasant residue of that which was never anything but squashed.

However, she was not quite just. True, he was fat, and he sat, with short thighs, like a toad, as if seated for a toad’s eternity. His colour was of a dirty sort of paste, his black eyes were glazed under heavy lids. And he never spoke until spoken to, waiting in his toad’s silence, like a slave.

But his thick, fine white hair, which stood up on his head like a soft brush, was curiously virile. And his curious small hands, of the same soft dull paste, had a peculiar, fat, soft masculine breeding of their own. And his dull brown eye could glint with the subtlety of serpents, under the white brush of eyelash. He was tired, but he was not defeated. He had fought, and won, and lost, and was fighting again, always at a disadvantage. He belonged to a defeated race which accepts defeat, but which gets its own back by cunning. He was the father of sons, the head of a family, one of the heads of a defeated but indestructible tribe. He was not alone, and so you could not lay your finger on him. His whole consciousness was patriarchal and tribal. And somehow, he was humble, but he was indestructible.

At dinner he sat half-effaced, humble, yet with the conceit of the humble. His manners were perfectly good, rather French. Virginia chattered to him in French, and he replied with that peculiar nonchalance of the boulevards, which was the only manner he could command when speaking French. Mrs Bodoïn understood, but she was what one would call a heavy-footed linguist, so when she said

anything, it was intensely in English. And the Turkish Delight replied in his clumsy English, hastily. It was not his fault that French was being spoken. It was Virginia's.

He was very humble, conciliatory, with Mrs Bodoin. But he cast at her sometimes that rapid glint of a reptilian glance as if to say: Yes! I see you! You are a handsome figure. As an *objet de vertu* you are almost perfect. — Thus his connoisseur's, antique-dealer's eye would appraise her. But then his thick white eyebrows would seem to add: But what, under holy Heaven, are you as a woman? You are neither wife nor mother nor mistress, you have no perfume of sex, you are more dreadful than a Turkish soldier or an English official. No man on earth could embrace you. You are a ghou, you are a strange genie from the underworld! — And he would secretly invoke the holy names, to shield him.

Yet he was in love with Virginia. He saw, first and foremost, the child in her, as if she were a lost child in the gutter, a waif with a faint, fascinating cast in her brown eyes, waiting till someone would pick her up. A fatherless waif! And he was tribal father, father through all the ages.

Then, on the other hand, he knew her peculiar disinterested cleverness in affairs. That, too, fascinated him: that odd, almost second-sight cleverness about business, and entirely impersonal, entirely in the air. It seemed to him very strange. But it would be an immense help to him in his schemes. He did not really understand the English. He was at sea with them. But with her, he would have a clue to everything. For she was, finally, quite a somebody among these English, these English officials.

He was about sixty. His family was established, in the East, his grandsons were growing up. It was necessary for him to live in London, for some years. This girl would be useful. She had no money, save what she would inherit from her mother. But he would risk that: she would be an investment in his business. And then the apartment. He liked the apartment extremely. He recognized the *cachet*, and the lilies and swans of the Aubusson carpet really did something to him. Virginia said to him: Mother gave me the apartment. — So he looked on that as safe. And finally, Virginia was almost a virgin, probably quite a virgin, and, as far as the paternal oriental male like himself was concerned, entirely virgin. He had a very small idea of the silly puppy-sexuality of the English, so different from the prolonged male voluptuousness of his own pleasures. And last of all, he was physically lonely, getting old, and tired.

Virginia of course did not know why she liked being with Arnault. Her cleverness was amazingly stupid when it came to life, to living. She said he was "quaint". She said his nonchalant French of the boulevards was "amusing". She found his business cunning "intriguing", and the glint in his dark glazed eyes,

under the white, thick lashes, “sheiky”. She saw him quite often, had tea with him in his hotel, and motored with him one day down to the sea.

When he took her hand in his own soft still hands, there was something so caressing, so possessive in his touch, so strange and positive in his leaning towards her, that though she trembled with fear, she was helpless. — ”But you are so thin, dear little thin thing, you need repose, repose, for the blossom to open, poor little blossom, to become a little fat!” he said in his French.

She quivered, and was helpless. It certainly was quaint! He was so strange and positive, he seemed to have all the power. The moment he realized that she would succumb into his power, he took full charge of the situation, he lost all his hesitation and his humility. He did not want just to make love to her: he wanted to marry her, for all his multifarious reasons. And he must make himself master of her.

He put her hand to his lips, and seemed to draw her life to his in kissing her thin hand. “The poor child is tired, she needs repose, she needs to be caressed and cared for,” he said in his French. And he drew nearer to her.

She looked up in dread at his glinting, tired dark eyes under the white lashes. But he used all his will, looking back at her heavily and calculating that she must submit. And he brought his body quite near to her, and put his hand softly on her face, and made her lay her face against his breast, as he soothingly stroked her arm with his other hand, “Dear little thing! dear little thing! Arnault loves her so dearly! Arnault loves her! Perhaps she will marry her Arnault. Dear little girl, Arnault will put flowers in her life, and make her life perfumed with sweetness and content.”

She leaned against his breast and let him caress her. She gave a fleeting, half poignant, half vindictive thought to her mother. Then she felt in the air the sense of destiny, destiny. Oh so nice, not to have to struggle. To give way to destiny.

“Will she marry her old Arnault? Eh? Will she marry him?” he asked in a soothing, caressing voice, at the same time compulsive.

She lifted her head and looked at him: the thick white brows, the glinting, tired dark eyes. How queer and comic! How comic to be in his power! And he was looking a little baffled.

“Shall I?” she said, with her mischievous twist of a grin.

“Mais oui!” he said, with all the sang froid of his old eyes. “Mais oui! Je te contenterai, tu le verras.”

“Tu me contenteras!” she said, with a flickering smile of real amusement at his assurance. “Will you really content me?”

“But surely! I assure it you. And you will marry me?”

“You must tell mother,” she said, and hid wickedly against his waistcoat

again, while the male pride triumphed in him.

Mrs Bodoin had no idea that Virginia was intimate with the Turkish Delight: she did not inquire into her daughter's movements. During the famous dinner, she was calm and a little aloof, but entirely self-possessed. When, after coffee, Virginia left her alone with the Turkish Delight, she made no effort at conversation, only glanced at the rather short, stout man in correct dinner-jacket, and thought how his sort of fatness called for a fez and the full muslin breeches of a bazaar merchant in *The Thief of Baghdad*.

"Do you really prefer to smoke a hookah?" she asked him, with a slow drawl.

"What is a hookah, please?"

"One of those water-pipes. Don't you all smoke them, in the East?"

He only looked mystified and humble, and silence resumed. She little knew what was simmering inside his stillness.

"Madame," he said, "I want to ask you something."

"You do? Then why not ask it?" came her slightly melancholy drawl.

"Yes! It is this. I wish I may have the honour to marry your daughter. She is willing."

There was a moment's blank pause. Then Mrs Bodoin leaned towards him from her distance, with curious portentousness.

"What was that you said?" she asked. "Repeat it!"

"I wish I may have the honour to marry your daughter. She is willing to take me."

His dark, glazed eyes looked at her, then glanced away again. Still leaning forward, she gazed fixedly on him, as if spellbound, turned to stone. She was wearing pink topaz ornaments, but he judged they were paste, moderately good.

"Did I hear you say she is willing to take you?" came the slow, melancholy, remote voice.

"Madame, I think so," he said, with a bow.

"I think we'll wait till she comes," she said, leaning back.

There was silence. She stared at the ceiling. He looked closely round the room, at the furniture, at the china in the ivory-inlaid cabinet.

"I can settle five thousand pounds on Mademoiselle Virginia, Madame," came his voice. "Am I correct to assume that she will bring this apartment and its appointments into the marriage settlement?"

Absolute silence. He might as well have been on the moon. But he was a good sitter. He just sat until Virginia came in.

Mrs Bodoin was still staring at the ceiling. The iron had entered her soul finally and fully. Virginia glanced at her, but said:

"Have a whisky-and-soda, Arnault?"

He rose and came towards the decanters, and stood beside her: a rather squat, stout man with white head, silent with misgiving. There was the fizz of the syphon: then they came to their chairs.

“Arnault has spoken to you, Mother?” said Virginia.

Mrs Bodoin sat up straight, and gazed at Virginia with big, owlish eyes, haggard. Virginia was terrified, yet a little thrilled. Her mother was beaten.

“Is it true, Virginia, that you are *willing* to marry this — oriental gentleman?” asked Mrs Bodoin slowly.

“Yes, Mother, quite true,” said Virginia, in her teasing soft voice.

Mrs Bodoin looked owlish and dazed.

“May I be excused from having any part in it, or from having anything to do with your future *husband* — I mean having any business to transact with him?” she asked dazedly, in her slow, distinct voice.

“Why, of course!” said Virginia, frightened, smiling oddly.

There was a pause. Then Mrs Bodoin, feeling old and haggard, pulled herself together again.

“Am I to understand that your future husband would like to possess this apartment?” came her voice.

Virginia smiled quickly and crookedly. Arnault just sat, planted on his posterior, and heard. She reposed on him.

“Well — perhaps!” said Virginia. “Perhaps he would like to know that I possessed it.” She looked at him.

Arnault nodded gravely.

“And do you *wish* to possess it?” came Mrs Bodoin’s slow voice. “If it your intention to *inhabit* it, with your *husband*?” She put eternities into her long, stressed words.

“Yes, I think it is,” said Virginia. “You know you *said* the apartment was mine, Mother.”

“Very well! It shall be so. I shall send my lawyer to this — oriental gentleman, if you will leave written instructions on my writing-table. May I ask when you think of getting — *married*?”

“When do you think, Arnault?” said Virginia.

“Shall it be, in two weeks?” he said, sitting erect, with his fists on his knees.

“In about a fortnight, Mother,” said Virginia.

“I have heard! In two weeks! Very well! In two weeks everything shall be at your disposal. And now, please excuse me.” She rose, made a slight general bow, and moved calmly and dimly from the room. It was killing her, that she could not shriek aloud and beat that Levantine out of the house. But she couldn’t. She had imposed the restraint on herself.

Arnault stood and looked with glistening eyes round the room. It would be his. When his sons came to England, here he would receive them.

He looked at Virginia. She too was white and haggard, now. And she hung away from him, as if in resentment. She resented the defeat of her mother. She was still capable of dismissing him for ever, and going back to her mother.

“Your mother is a wonderful lady,” he said, going to Virginia and taking her hand. “But she has no husband to shelter her, she is unfortunate. I am sorry she will be alone. I should be happy if she would like to stay here with us.”

The sly old fox knew what he was about.

“I’m afraid there’s no hope of that,” said Virginia, with a return to her old irony.

She sat on the couch, and he caressed her softly and paternally, and the very incongruity of it, there in her mother’s drawing-room, amused her. And because he saw that the things in the drawing-room were handsome and valuable, and now they were his, his blood flushed and he caressed the thin girl at his side with passion, because she represented these valuable surroundings, and brought them to his possession. And he said: “And with me you will be very comfortable, very content, oh, I shall make you content, not like Madame your mother. And you will get fatter, and bloom like the rose. I shall make you bloom like the rose. And shall we say next week, hein? Shall it be next week, next Wednesday, that we marry? Wednesday is a good day. Shall it be then?”

“Very well!” said Virginia, caressed again into a luxurious sense of destiny, reposing on fate, having to make no effort, no more effort, all her life.

Mrs Bodoin moved into an hotel next day, and came into the apartment to pack up and extricate herself and her immediate personal belongings only when Virginia was necessarily absent. She and her daughter communicated by letter, as far as was necessary.

And in five days’ time Mrs Bodoin was clear. All business that could be settled was settled, all her trunks were removed. She had five trunks, and that was all. Denuded and outcast, she would depart to Paris, to live out the rest of her days.

The last day, she waited in the drawing-room till Virginia should come home. She sat there in her hat and street things, like a stranger.

“I just waited to say good-bye,” she said. “I leave in the morning for Paris. This is my address. I think everything is settled; if not, let me know and I’ll attend to it. Well, good-bye! — and I hope you’ll be *very happy!*”

She dragged out the last words sinisterly; which restored Virginia, who was beginning to lose her head.

“Why, I think I may be,” said Virginia, with the twist of a smile.

“I shouldn’t wonder,” said Mrs Bodoin pointedly and grimly. “I think the Armenian grandpapa knows very well what he’s about. You’re just the harem type, after all.” The words came slowly, dropping, each with a plop! of deep contempt.

“I suppose I am! Rather fun!” said Virginia. “But I wonder where I got it? Not from you, Mother — ” she drawled mischievously.

“I should say *not*.”

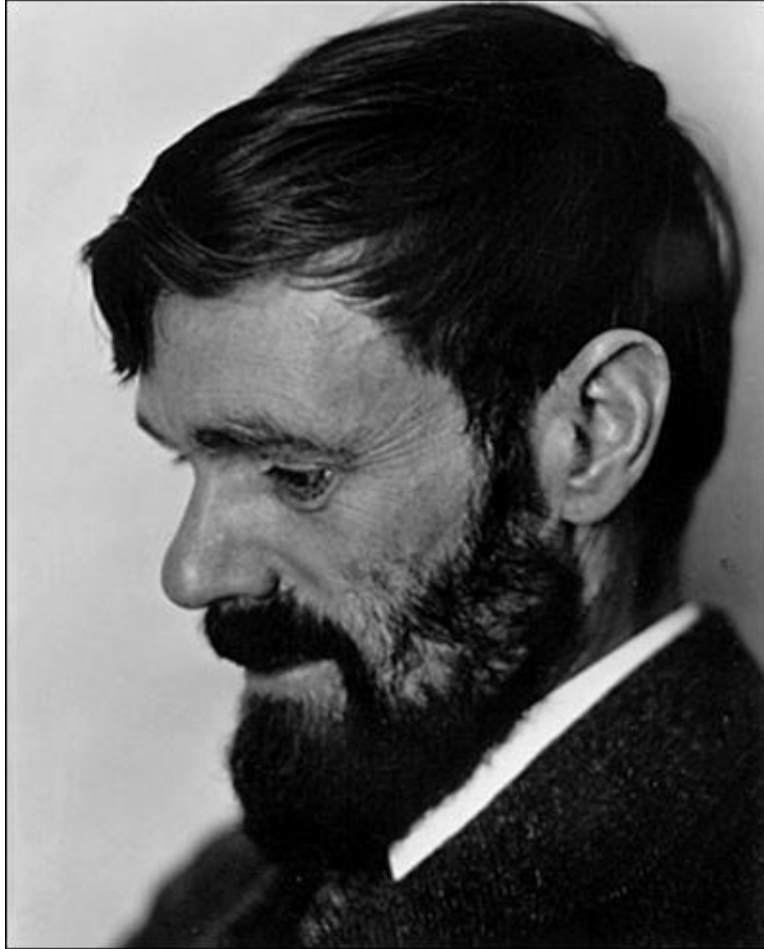
“Perhaps daughters go by contraries, like dreams,” mused Virginia wickedly. “All the harem was left out of you, so perhaps it all had to be put back into me.”

Mrs Bodoin flashed a look at her.

“You have *all my pity!*” she said.

“Thank you, dear. You have just a bit of mine.”

The Plays



THE MARRIED MAN



A PLAY IN FOUR ACTS

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ACT I

A bedroom shared by GRAINGER and BRENTNALL in the cottage of MRS PLUM. Both men are dressing. GRAINGER goes to the door and calls to MRS PLUM.

GRAINGER: Bring me some collars up.

BRENTNALL: And what are you going to do?

GRAINGER: God knows.

BRENTNALL: How much money have you got?

GRAINGER: Four damn quid.

BRENTNALL: Hm! — You're well off, considering. But what do you think of doing?

GRAINGER: I don't know.

BRENTNALL: Where do you think of going Saturday?

GRAINGER: Hell.

BRENTNALL: Too expensive, my boy — four quid won't carry you there.

GRAINGER: Oh chuck it, Billy.

BRENTNALL: What the Hanover's the good of chucking it? You're not a blooming cock robin, to take no thought for the morrow.

Enter MRS PLUM with the collars.

MRS PLUM: Gee, I'm sorry I forgot 'em, Dr Grainger. I'm ever so sorry.

GRAINGER: Don't fret yourself about that, Mrs Plum. You're all right, you are.

MRS PLUM: Gee, but I can't get it out of my head, that there what you've just told me.

GRAINGER: You want to sneeze hard, Mrs Plum. That'll shift it.

MRS PLUM (laughing): Hee-hee — hark you there now. And have you got rid of it off your mind, Dr Grainger?

GRAINGER: My head's as clear as a bell o' brass, Mrs Plum. Nothing ails me.

MRS PLUM: My word, it doesn't. My word, but you're looking well, you're a sight better than when you come. Isn't he, Mr Brentnall?

BRENTNALL: He's too healthy for anything, Mrs Plum — he's so healthy, he'd walk slap into a brick wall, and never know he'd hurt himself.

MRS PLUM: Gee — I don't know. But that there as you told me, Dr Grainger —

GRAINGER: Here, you go and see if that's Jack Magneer, and if it is, let him come up.

MRS PLUM: You're a caution, you are that, Dr Grainger.

Exit MRS PLUM.

BRENTNALL: The girl is gone on you, the kid is yours. You are a married man, and you mean to abide by your family?

GRAINGER: What the devil else is there to do?

BRENTNALL: Very well. Have you bothered about another job?

GRAINGER: No — I did when I was in Wolverhampton. Look what a fiendish

business it is, offering yourself and being refused like a dog.

BRENTNALL: So you've taken no steps.

GRAINGER: No.

BRENTNALL: And you've absolutely no idea what you're going to do on Saturday, when you've finished here?

GRAINGER: No.

BRENTNALL: And yet you mean to stick by your wife and kid?

GRAINGER: What else can I do?

BRENTNALL: Well, you're a beauty! You're just skulking, like a frightened rabbit.

GRAINGER: Am I, begad?

BRENTNALL: Are you fond of the kid?

GRAINGER: I shouldn't like anything to happen to it.

BRENTNALL: Neither should I. But the feelings of your breast towards it — ?

GRAINGER: Well, I'm a lot fonder of that youngster at my digs in Wolverhampton — you know —

BRENTNALL: Then you feel no paternal emotion?

GRAINGER: No. Don't talk rot.

BRENTNALL: How often have you been over to see your wife?

GRAINGER: Once.

BRENTNALL: Once since you were married?

GRAINGER: Yes.

BRENTNALL: And that when the baby was first born?

GRAINGER: Yes.

BRENTNALL: And you're living — which, a recluse, or a gay bachelor?

GRAINGER: You can imagine me a recluse.

BRENTNALL: You're a blossom, Georgie, you're a jewel of a muddler.

GRAINGER: How could I help it! I was careful enough with the girl — I never thought, to tell you the truth, that — here's Jack!

BRENTNALL: That what?

GRAINGER: Shut up. Jack's a fine fellow.

BRENTNALL: Needs to be, to match you.

GRAINGER: Now Bill Brentnall, none of your sark.

JACK'S VOICE: How long are you going to be?

GRAINGER: How-do Jack! Shan't be a sec. Come up.

Enter JACK MAGNEER — aged 33 — very big, a farmer, something of a gentleman, wears leggings and breeches, and a black bow tie.

JACK: Seem to be donning yourselves up — how are you?

GRAINGER: Mr Magneer — Mr Brentnall: Jack — Billy.

JACK: Yis, quite so. How are you, Billy?

BRENTNALL: I'm very well. You're Miss Magneer's brother?

GRAINGER: Sally's.

JACK: Yis, I am, and what of it?

BRENTNALL: Oh — only you are lucky.

GRAINGER whistles gaily.

JACK: What you whistling for, George lad? Aren't I lucky?

GRAINGER: I wish Sally was my sister, Jack.

JACK: Yis, you do, an' so do I, George lad — then me an' you'd be brothers. — Oh, my good God, are you going to be all night titivating yourselves up?

GRAINGER: Jack's in a hurry.

JACK: No I'm not, but damn it all —

GRAINGER: Alright Jacko, alright. I know she's a very nice girl —

BRENTNALL: Where are you taking me?

GRAINGER: To see some real fine girls.

JACK: Not so much fine girls, Billy — some damn nice girls, nice girls, mind you.

GRAINGER: Quite right, Jacko. (Seriously.) No, but they are, Billy, real nice girls. Three sisters, orphans.

JACK: An' the oldest of them will happen to be Mrs Grainger — eh, what?

GRAINGER: Liar!

JACK: You see Billy, it's like this. I'm glad you've come, because it levels us up. I believe you're a nice chap. Don't you take me wrong. I mean you're not one of these damn sods as can see nowt in a girl but — you know.

BRENTNALL: Yes.

GRAINGER: Yes, Billy knows. Most moral young man.

JACK: Fooling apart, George, aren't they nice girls?

GRAINGER: Really nice girls, they are.

JACK: But you see, there's three of 'em — an' we've never been but two of us — d'you twig?

BRENTNALL: I twig.

JACK: But no fooling, mind you.

BRENTNALL: Thanks for your caution, Mr Magneer.

JACK: Oh no, no. Nothing of the sort: only they are nice girls — you see what I mean — oh no, Billy —

GRAINGER: And three of 'em.

BRENTNALL: And the odd one falls to me. Thanks, I was born to oblige.

JACK: Now Billy, no. I want you t'have a good time. You see what I mean. I'm willing to step aside. You're here only for a bit — I'm always here. So I want you —

GRAINGER: "I want all of you t'have a good time."

JACK: Yis, I do. I do that, George.

GRAINGER: That's always Jacko's cry — "I want you t'have it your own road. I'm willing any road. I want you t'have a good time." Self-effacing chap is Jack.

BRENTNALL: Do I put on a dinner jacket?

GRAINGER: Good God, no — have you brought one?

BRENTNALL: Well — I might have to dine at some people's down towards

Ashbourne.

CURTAIN

ACT II

A long, low dining-room — table laid for supper — bowls of crimson and white flowers, a large lamp — an old-fashioned room, furnished with taste.

The oldest MISS CALLADINE — aged 32, tall, slim, pale, dressed in black, wearing Parma violets, looks ladylike, but rather yearning. She walks about restlessly. Enter DR GRAINGER.

ANNIE: Aren't you late?

GRAINGER: A little — waiting for my friend. He's gone round to "The George" with Jack — some arrangement about farm stock. (He takes both her hands, which she offers him yearningly, and, after glancing round, kisses her hastily, as if unwillingly.) Where's Emily?

ANNIE: Emily and Ada are both entertaining Mrs Wesson in the drawing-room. I hope they'll get rid of her before Jack comes. I'm afraid we are being talked about. I'm afraid I'm not doing my duty by the girls.

GRAINGER: What do you mean?

ANNIE: You are here so often.

GRAINGER: I'm going away directly, so you'll be safe after Saturday.

ANNIE: Really going away on Saturday — really — really. (Puts her hands on his shoulders.)

GRAINGER: That's right.

ANNIE: Then people will talk more than ever. I shall be considered loose: and what's to become of the girls —

GRAINGER: You considered loose — oh Cæsar!

ANNIE: Where are you going?

GRAINGER: Don't know.

ANNIE: Why won't you tell me?

GRAINGER: Because I don't know. I am waiting for a letter — it will come tomorrow. Either I shall be going to Scotland, or down to London — one or the other, but I don't know which.

ANNIE: Scotland or London!

GRAINGER: I hope it's London.

ANNIE: Why do you?

GRAINGER: Well — more life, for one thing.

ANNIE: And is it "life" you want? That sort of life?

GRAINGER: Not that sort, exactly — but — oh, by the way, I told you I was bringing my friend —

ANNIE: Mr Brentnall — yes.

GRAINGER: Well, don't be surprised if I seem rather different tonight, will

you? Billy's very circumspect, very circumspect — nice, mind you, but good.

ANNIE: I see.

GRAINGER: You'll like him though.

ANNIE (bitingly): In spite of his goodness.

GRAINGER: Yes, I know you like "life" better than "goodness" — don't you now?

He puts his hand under her chin.

ANNIE (drawing away): You seem to know a great deal about me.

GRAINGER: I know what you want.

ANNIE: What?

GRAINGER (glancing round to see if he is safe — taking her in his arms, pressing her close, kissing her. She submits because she can scarcely help herself — there is a sound of feet and voices — he hastily releases her): That!

ANNIE (struggling with herself): Indeed no, Dr Grainger.

GRAINGER: That's the ticket — keep it up, Annie.

Enter EMILY and ADA CALLADINE — EMILY, aged 27, quiet, self-possessed, dressed all in black — ADA, aged 23 — rather plump, handsome, charmingly young and wicked-looking — dressed in black and purple, with a crimson flower.

ANNIE: Has Mrs Wesson gone?

ADA: Not before she heard a man's voice — I told her you were engaged.

GRAINGER: You what?

ADA (bursting with laughter): I told her Annie was engaged.

ANNIE (severely): With a caller, you mean, Ada?

GRAINGER: Oh, I see.

ADA: Yes — oh yes — oh how funny!

GRAINGER: Not funny at all — Jack's doing some business round at "The George", Emily.

EMILY: Is he?

GRAINGER (discomfited): I think I'll go and hurry them up.

ADA: Do!

ANNIE: You think it is quite safe to bring your good friend here?

GRAINGER: Oh, quite safe, Annie — don't be alarmed. Ta-ta!

Exit GRAINGER. He is heard running down the stairs.

ANNIE: I don't think Dr Grainger improves on acquaintance.

ADA: We've never got any further with him, so we can't say.

EMILY: Why do you think so, Annie?

ANNIE (rather haughtily): You would not guess what he said to me.

ADA: I think you've given him rather a long rope.

ANNIE (with dignity): If I have, he's hit me across the face with it.

EMILY: What did he say, Annie?

ANNIE: He is bringing a friend — a school and college friend — in a bank in London now — rather genteel, I believe. Well, Dr Grainger said to me this evening: "You know my friend is very circumspect, very circumspect, so you

won't be surprised if my behaviour is rather different this evening."

ADA: Oh indeed!

EMILY: You should have kept him more in his place, Annie.

ANNIE: I should, but I thought he was a gentleman. I don't know how we're going to receive them this evening.

EMILY: We need simply take no notice of him, and be just polite.

ANNIE: But we don't know what he may have told his friend about us.

EMILY: I never cared for him.

ADA: Oh, what ripping fun!

ANNIE: Ada, be careful what you do and say.

ADA: It's not I who've put my foot in it. It is you if anyone.

ANNIE: I have been too free, perhaps; but you cannot say I have put my foot in it. I wish I had never admitted Dr Grainger at all — but he came with Jack —

EMILY: We shall go through alright with it. Simply despise Dr Grainger.

ANNIE: He is despicable.

ADA: He is here.

ANNIE: Emily, will you go downstairs and receive them? ADA, you stay here.

Exit EMILY — voices downstairs.

ADA: They are all three here — I must go also.

Exit ADA.

ANNIE CALLADINE straightens her hair before the mirror, rubs out her

wrinkles, puts her flowers nicely, and seats herself with much composure. Enter GRAINGER and BRENTNALL, followed by ADA CALLADINE.

GRAINGER (stiffly): Miss Annie Calladine — Mr Brentnall.

BRENTNALL: What a nice smell of flowers.

ANNIE: It is the mezereon that Mr Magneer brought.

BRENTNALL: Did Mr Magneer bring flowers? I shouldn't have thought the idea could occur to him.

ANNIE: He always brings flowers from the garden. It would never occur to him to buy them for us.

BRENTNALL: I see — how nice of him.

GRAINGER: All country fellows cart handfuls of flowers that they've got out of their own gardens, to their girls.

ANNIE: Nevertheless, Mr Magneer does it nicely.

Enter MAGNEER and EMILY.

JACK: Now we seem as if we're going to be alright. What do you say, George?

GRAINGER: I say the same.

ANNIE: Do take a seat, all of you. Jack, you love the couch —

JACK: It's a very nice couch, this is. (Sits down.)

BRENTNALL: I should think it would be the easiest thing in life to write a poem about a couch. I wonder if the woman was giving Cowper a gentle hint —

ADA (shrieking with laughter): Yes — yes — yes!

BRENTNALL: I never see a couch but my heart moves to poetry. The very buttons must be full of echoes —

JACK (bending his ear): Can't hear 'em, Billy.

BRENTNALL: Will none of you tune his ear?

ADA: Yes — yes!

EMILY (seating herself quietly beside JACK): What is it you are listening for, Jack?

JACK (awkwardly): I've no idea.

ANNIE: Where will you sit, Mr Brentnall? Do choose a comfortable chair.

BRENTNALL (seating himself beside her): Thanks very much.

JACK: Nay — nay — nay, Billy.

BRENTNALL (rising suddenly): Er — there's a broken spring in that chair, Miss Calladine. (He crosses the hearth.)

ANNIE: I'm so sorry — have a cushion — do!

BRENTNALL: Will you allow me to sit here?

ADA: Let me give you some supper.

GRAINGER: Shall I administer the drinks?

GRAINGER gives the women burgundy, the men whisky and soda. ADA CALLADINE hands round food. GRAINGER seats himself reluctantly beside ANNIE CALLADINE — ADA CALLADINE takes a low chair next to BRENTNALL.

JACK: Now we are alright — at least I hope so.

BRENTNALL (to ADA): You are quite alright?

ADA (laughing): As far as I know.

BRENTNALL (to EMILY): I can see you are perfectly at home. (EMILY bows quietly, with a smile.) And you, Miss Calladine?

ANNIE: Thank you!

BRENTNALL: Gentlemen — the ladies!

GRAINGER (ironically): God bless ‘em.

JACK: Amen! (They drink.)

ADA: Ladies — the gentlemen!

ANNIE: God help them.

EMILY: Amen! (They drink.)

BRENTNALL: Wherein must the Lord help us, Miss Calladine?

ANNIE: To run away, Mr Brentnall.

EMILY: Annie!

ADA: To come to the scratch, you mean.

BRENTNALL: Ha! Gentlemen — to marriage!

JACK: I don’t think!

ANNIE: What is your comment, Dr Grainger?

GRAINGER: Mine!

BRENTNALL: Dr Grainger is a confirmed misogynist.

GRAINGER: Shut up, you fool.

ANNIE: Oh — we’ve not heard so before.

JACK: D'you mean George doesn't believe in marriage? Nay, you're wrong there. When th' time comes —

ANNIE: When does the time come for a man to marry, Jack?

JACK: When he can't help it, I s'd think. (Silence.)

BRENTNALL: You're very quiet, George.

GRAINGER: Don't you be a fool.

ANNIE: Your humour is not very complimentary this evening, Dr Grainger.

JACK: There's perhaps too many of us in th' room, eh?

ANNIE: Not too many for me, Jack.

ADA (bursting into laughter): Do be complimentary, somebody, if only to cheer us up.

JACK (putting his arm round EMILY'S waist): Yis, I will.

BRENTNALL (putting his arm round ADA'S neck): May I kiss you, Ada?

ADA (laughing): How (laughs) — how awfully nice (laughs heartily) of you. (BRENTNALL kisses her.)

JACK: Oh my God, now we're coming on. (He kisses EMILY furtively.)

BRENTNALL: Mind your own business.

Seizes a newspaper, and screens it before him and ADA — they put their heads together.

JACK: I call that comin' on — eh what?

BRENTNALL (to ADA — behind the newspaper): Well, I'll be damned!

ANNIE (loudly and sarcastically): Do you like the flavour, Mr Brentnall?

BRENTNALL (from behind the paper): Excellent! (Sotto voce.) You are awfully jolly.

JACK (bouncing with surprise): Well strike me lucky!

BRENTNALL (throwing him another newspaper): Here you are then!

JACK: Good God! (He spreads the paper before him and EMILY.)

GRAINGER: You damn fool, Billy Brentnall.

BRENTNALL: Dog in the manger. (Softly to ADA.) Do you think I'm a fool? No, you like me.

JACK (from behind his paper): How're you going on, Billy?

BRENTNALL: Fine. How're you going on, George?

The four peep over their newspapers at GRAINGER and ANNIE.

BRENTNALL: Temperature down at freezing point over there?

GRAINGER: I'll have it out of you for this, William.

ANNIE: Why, what has Mr Brentnall done amiss, Dr Grainger?

BRENTNALL (from behind his paper): Oh, it's not I. It's George's sins finding him out. Be sure your sins will find you out.

ADA (softly): You're not a bit what I thought you would be.

BRENTNALL (softly): Worse or better?

ADA (laughing): Oh — better.

BRENTNALL: What did you think I should be?

ADA: Circumspect.

GRAINGER sends a cushion smashing through their paper.

JACK: What the devil's up, George?

ANNIE: Oh, it annoys him to see other people enjoying themselves when he can't.

BRENTNALL (spreading the paper for screen): The nail on the head, Miss — may I say Annie?

ANNIE: Yes, Mr Brentnall.

BRENTNALL: I wish I were two men, Annie.

GRAINGER sends the cushion again smashing through the newspaper.

JACK: God help thee George, do settle down.

BRENTNALL (spreading the paper again): It's high time he did — settle down, Georgie — it's good advice.

ADA (softly): What makes him so cross tonight?

BRENTNALL (softly): Don't know — unless he's shy.

ADA (bursting with laughter): Shy!

BRENTNALL: Why, isn't he?

ADA: You should see the way he carries on —

BRENTNALL: With you?

ADA: Annie.

The cushion crashes through the paper.

JACK: Damn thee George, take Annie downstairs a minute, if tha can't bide still.

GRAINGER: That fool there — !

BRENTNALL (restoring the fragments of paper — softly — to ADA): You know there's a secret about Dr Grainger.

ADA: Oh! (Laughs.) Do tell me.

GRAINGER: Billy Brentnall!

BRENTNALL: I hear you calling me.

ADA: Do tell me the secret.

BRENTNALL: Kiss me then. (They kiss — she laughs.) You are awfully jolly. (Kisses her under the ear.)

ADA (shaking with laughter): Don't, don't, oh don't!

BRENTNALL: Does my moustache tickle you? Sorry.

JACK: Nation seize me, did ever you hear?

GRAINGER: Such a fool? I'll bet you never did.

ADA: Tell me that secret.

BRENTNALL: George has got another girl.

ADA: Who? Where?

GRAINGER: Oh, cheese it, Billy.

BRENTNALL: Sally Magneer.

GRAINGER: Damn you.

ADA: No!

BRENTNALL: Fact! She told me herself.

JACK: What's that, George?

GRAINGER (to BRENTNALL): Liar!

BRENTNALL: It's the truth — mine's pistols.

JACK: You're a devil, George, you're a devil.

GRAINGER (bitterly): I am that!

EMILY: And what is Mr Brentnall?

JACK (shaking his head): Nay, I'm not going to say. (He rises heavily, draws EMILY after him, and goes out of the room.)

BRENTNALL (rising): Well, this newspaper's no more good.

ADA: There's a fire in the drawing-room — and real screens there.

BRENTNALL: And Jack does occupy himself. Right you are.

GRAINGER: Chuck it, Billy.

BRENTNALL: What?

GRAINGER: None o' that.

BRENTNALL: Well, I'll go to —

GRAINGER: I've no doubt.

ANNIE: Dr Grainger is afraid of being left alone: he must have someone to protect him.

BRENTNALL: What from?

ANNIE: Presumably from me. (To GRAINGER.) Will you go down with Ada to the drawing-room? Ada, do you mind?

ADA: Not at all. (Exit ADA.)

GRAINGER (bitterly): Very nice of you, Annie, very nice of you. (Exit GRAINGER.)

BRENTNALL and ANNIE seat themselves.

ANNIE: What do you think of all this, Mr Brentnall?

BRENTNALL: Why, it's a mere lark. Jack is really courting Emily, and Ada is sheer mischief, and I'm quite decent, really.

ANNIE: Are you really?

BRENTNALL: Judge from your own instinct.

ANNIE: I think you are — and is Dr Grainger?

BRENTNALL: What do you think?

ANNIE: There is something not nice about him.

BRENTNALL: Has he been courting you?

ANNIE (drawing herself up): Well — !

BRENTNALL: You see, it's a pity —

ANNIE: What is a pity?

BRENTNALL: Why — shall I say just what I think — ?

ANNIE: I want you to.

BRENTNALL: Well then — it's a pity that girls like you — you are over thirty?

ANNIE: Yes.

BRENTNALL: It's a pity that so many of the best women let their youth slip by, because they don't find a man good enough — and then, when dissatisfaction becomes a torture — later on — you are dissatisfied with life, you do lack something big.

ANNIE: Yes.

BRENTNALL: When it comes to that stage, the want of a man is a torture to you. And since the common men make the advances —

ANNIE: Yes!

BRENTNALL (putting his arm round her and kissing her): You are either driven to a kind of degradation, or you go nearly, slightly mad from want —

ANNIE: Yes!

BRENTNALL (kissing her): If you want love from men like Grainger, take it for what it's worth — because we're made so that either we must have love, or starve and go slightly mad.

ANNIE: But I don't want that kind of love.

BRENTNALL: But do be honest with yourself. Don't cause a split between your conscious self and your unconscious — that is insanity. You do want love, almost any sort. Make up your mind what you'll accept, or what you won't, but keep your ideal intact. Whatever men you take, keep the idea of man intact: let your soul wait whether your body does or not. But don't drag the first down to the second. Do you understand?

ANNIE: I could love you.

BRENTNALL: But I am going away in a day or two, and most probably shall not be here again — and I am engaged. You see, so many women are too good for the men, that for every decent man, there are thirty decent women. And you decent women go and waste and wither away. Do think it out square, and make

the best of it. Virginity and all that is no good to you.

ANNIE: And what would you advise?

BRENTNALL: Know men, and have men, if you must. But keep your soul virgin, wait and believe in the good man you may never have.

ANNIE: It is not very — what made Dr Grainger so queer tonight?

BRENTNALL: Because he's married.

ANNIE: I felt it — to whom?

BRENTNALL: A girl in Wolverhampton — married last January, a son in March, now it's June.

ANNIE: Oh, the liar! — And what sort of girl?

BRENTNALL: Decent, I believe.

ANNIE: Does she love him?

BRENTNALL: Yes.

ANNIE: The brute — the —

BRENTNALL: He doesn't love her, you see —

ANNIE: It makes it no better — and she doesn't know how he's —

BRENTNALL: Of course not.

ANNIE: I wonder if I know her — what's her name?

BRENTNALL: Marson — her people are tailors in Broad Street.

ANNIE: No, I don't know her! — But to think —

BRENTNALL: Don't be too ready to blame.

ANNIE: You men are all alike.

BRENTNALL: Not true — who is coming?

ANNIE: I don't know.

Enter SALLY MAGNEER — a very big, strapping farmer's daughter, evidently moderately well off.

SALLY: Good evening — Jack here?

ANNIE: Good evening. Yes, I believe he's in the drawing-room with Dr Grainger.

SALLY: That's how you arrange it, is it? (To BRENTNALL.) Nice, isn't it?

BRENTNALL: Very nice.

SALLY: Who else is in the drawing-room?

ANNIE: My sisters. I believe they're having some music.

SALLY: They don't make much noise over it, anyway. Can I go and see?

ANNIE: Certainly.

BRENTNALL opens the door for her, and whistles quickly a private call — repeats it. GRAINGER'S whistle is heard in answer.

SALLY: Alright, I won't drop in on you too sudden. (Exit SALLY.)

ANNIE: What impertinence!

BRENTNALL (laughing): She's made a dead set at Grainger. If he weren't married, she'd get him.

ANNIE: How disgusting!

BRENTNALL: Maybe — but a woman who determines soon enough to get married, succeeds. Delay is fatal — and marriage is beastly, on most occasions.

ANNIE: I will go to the drawing-room. Will you excuse me? (Exit ANNIE. BRENTNALL pours himself a drink. Enter GRAINGER.)

GRAINGER: What the hell have you been up to?

BRENTNALL: What the hell have you been up to?

GRAINGER: What have you been stuffing into Annie?

BRENTNALL: What have you been stuffing into Ada?

GRAINGER: Nothing, you devil.

BRENTNALL: Nothing, you devil.

GRAINGER: What's Sally after?

BRENTNALL: You.

GRAINGER: She ought to be shot.

BRENTNALL: So ought you.

Enter JACK.

JACK: What the hell's up tonight?

BRENTNALL: My tail, and George's dander, and your — but what's Miss Magneer after?

JACK: That's what I want to know. You know George here, he's a devil. He's been on wi' some little game with our Sally.

GRAINGER: You sweet liar, Jack.

JACK: Now George, what is it?

GRAINGER: Nothing, Jack. Sally's taken a fancy to me, an' gives me no chance. Can't you see for yourself?

JACK: I can, George — an' tha shanner be pestered.

GRAINGER: There's Charlie Greenhalgh won't speak to me now — thinks I'm running him off. I've no desire to run Charlie off.

JACK: Sally's as good as you, George.

GRAINGER: Maybe, and a thousand times better. But that doesn't say as I want to marry her.

JACK: No, George, no, that is so, lad.

Enter SALLY and the other ladies.

SALLY: How would you arrange six folks in three chairs — ?

GRAINGER: Couldn't do it.

SALLY: I don't think! What's your opinion, Ada?

ADA: Why am I asked for my opinion? I've never sat in a chair with Dr Grainger.

SALLY: Where have you sat then?

ADA: I may have sat on his knee while he sat in the chair.

SALLY: Here, young man, explain yourself.

GRAINGER: Well, I'll be damned!

BRENTNALL: Sooner or later.

JACK: Now look here, our Sally, we're havin' none o' this. Charlie Greenhalgh is your man; you stick to him, and leave other young fellows alone.

SALLY: Oh you are good, Jack! And what about the girl you took to Blackpool?

JACK: Say no more, Sally, now say no more.

SALLY: No, I won't. Do you want me to drive you up to Selson, because th' cart's at the door?

JACK: No, we'll walk up.

GRAINGER: I dunno, Jack. It's getting late, and I believe Billy's tired. He's a convalescent, you know.

JACK: Never thought of it, lad. Sorry — sorry.

They bid good night. Exeunt SALLY and GRAINGER, EMILY, JACK, and ADA.

ANNIE: Isn't he a thing!

BRENTNALL: He's not bad — do be honest.

ANNIE: Oh but!

BRENTNALL: Remember what I say — don't starve yourself, and don't degrade the idea of men.

ANNIE: And shall I never see you again?

BRENTNALL: If I can, I will come again.

ANNIE: Good-bye.

He kisses her rather sorrowfully, and departs. ANNIE CALLADINE closes the door — drinks the last drain from his glass — weeps — dries her eyes as the girls come upstairs. There is a calling of good-bye from outside.

ADA: What's amiss?

ANNIE: Plenty.

EMILY: What?

ANNIE: Dr Grainger is only married and got a child.

ADA and EMILY: No — where — is his wife living?

ANNIE: His wife is at her home, in Wolverhampton — Broad Street.

ADA: I'll write to her — I will — I will.

ANNIE: No, Ada — no.

ADA: I will — I will — I will: “Dear Mrs George Grainger, come and look after your husband. He is running the rig out here, and if you don't come quick — ”

She has flung her writing case on to the table, and sits down to write. Vain cries of “Ada,” “Ada,” from ANNIE CALLADINE.

CURTAIN

ACT III

The kitchen at MAGNEER'S farm, SALLY MAGNEER, EMILY CALLADINE, ADA CALLADINE. MR MAGNEER, farmer, not fat, but well looking: grey hair, black moustache; at present rather maudlin. JACK MAGNEER, still in riding breeches and leggings. GRAINGER and BRENTNALL, both in tennis flannels. JACK and EMILY sit together on a large

old couch, GRAINGER next to them. SALLY is in a chair, looking as if any moment she would take wing. BRETNALL is flirting with ADA CALLADINE.

MR MAGNEER: An' so you really goin' ter leave us, Dr Grainger.

GRAINGER: That is so, Mr Magneer.

MR MAGNEER: An' when might you be goin'?

GRAINGER: Saturday.

MR MAGNEER: To-morrow! My word, that's sharp. Well, I know one as'll be sorry you goin'.

SALLY: Shut up, Father. (She giggles, and twists her handkerchief to GRAINGER.) We s'll be seeing you again, though?

GRAINGER: Well, I really can't say — I'm going to London.

SALLY: London! Whatever are you going there for?

BRETNALL: Set up a wife and family.

SALLY: What, all at once? — Give us a chance.

BRETNALL: Not a ghost of a chance, Sally.

ADA CALLADINE laughs uncontrollably.

GRAINGER: Got a joke over there?

ADA (laughing): Yes — yes — yes!

SALLY (jumping up): Just look at your glass! (Takes GRAINGER'S tumbler and proceeds to mix him rum.) Why ever didn't you speak?

MR MAGNEER: Yes, you must shout up when you're emp'y.

SALLY (to GRAINGER): Like it sweet?

GRAINGER (ironically): Not too much.

SALLY (taking the glass and standing in front of him): How's this for you?

GRAINGER (sipping): Quite alright, thank you, Sally.

MR MAGNEER (laughing): "Quite alright," hark ye! It's "quite alright." (He gives a great wink at BRETNALL. SALLY begins to giggle.)

GRAINGER (lugubriously): Sally's got 'em again.

JACK: Sit you down, Sally, an' don't look so long o' th' leg.

SALLY giggles half hysterically, and sinks beside GRAINGER, who edges away. She leans towards him — laughs uncontrollably.

MR MAGNEER: Now we're comin' on. What yer doin' at 'er, Doctor?

GRAINGER: Begad, I'm doing nothing, Mr Magneer. I dunno what's got her.

MR MAGNEER (laughs): He dunno, doesn't know what's got her. (To BRETNALL.) We don't, do we?

BRETNALL: Not a bit.

GRAINGER: I'll have a drop more water. (Rises and goes to table.)

MR MAGNEER: Come Sally, my lass, come.

SALLY dries her eyes, still giggles, rises. GRAINGER hastily takes an odd chair at the table. She stands beside him.

JACK: Are ter goin' ter sit thysen down, Sally?

SALLY: Am I hurtin' you by standin'?

JACK: Yis, you are.

BRENTNALL: Fill me up, Sally, there's a dear. (SALLY takes his glass.)

MR MAGNEER: Sally Magneer, there's a dear.

GRAINGER: Isn't Charlie coming?

SALLY: No, did you want him?

GRAINGER: No — but I thought you did.

SALLY (beginning to giggle): Did you? You happen thought wrong.

BRENTNALL: Poor Charlie.

SALLY: What do you know about him?

BRENTNALL: Now Sally! It's best to be on with the new love before you're off with the old.

SALLY (giggling): I don't know what you mean.

JACK: Art thou going to sit down?

SALLY: Yes. (Retires discomfited to the couch.)

BRENTNALL (rising): I'll get a light.

GRAINGER: Matches?

BRENTNALL (going to fire): Never mind. (Lights his cigarette with a spill.)

ADA (laughing): Good-bye, Billy.

BRENTNALL (blowing her kisses): Farewell, farewell. (Sinks on the couch beside SALLY.)

SALLY: What have you come for?

BRENTNALL: Won't you have me, Sally?

SALLY: I don't know.

GRAINGER (shuffling the cards): A hand of crib, Mr Magneer?

MR MAGNEER: I don't mind if I do. Fill up.

BRENTNALL (taking SALLY'S hand): Hurt your finger?

SALLY: My thumb.

BRENTNALL: Shame! What did you do?

SALLY: Chopped it.

BRENTNALL: How rotten. Is it getting better?

MR MAGNEER: There's a bit o' proud flesh in it.

GRAINGER: Your crib, Mr Magneer.

SALLY (unwinding the bandage): Yes, it's going on alright now.

BRENTNALL (examining it closely): Yes, that's healing right enough, but a nasty gash! What did Charlie say to it?

SALLY: Charlie!

BRENTNALL: Yes, Charlie. He's your fellow, isn't he?

SALLY: I don't know so much about that.

BRENTNALL: I heard you were as good as engaged.

SALLY: Oh, did you — who's been telling you?

BRENTNALL: Mrs Plum.

SALLY: She knows so much, you see.

BRENTNALL: Let me wrap it up for you. (Bandages her thumb.) But isn't it right?

SALLY: Not as I know of.

BRENTNALL: Oh, I'm sorry.

SALLY: Who are you sorry for?

BRENTNALL: Charlie, of course, poor devil.

SALLY: You needn't be sorry for him. Take your sorrow where your love lies.

BRENTNALL: Then I s'll have to be sorry for you, Sally.

SALLY: I don't think.

BRENTNALL (putting his arm round her waist): I'm sorry you've got a bad finger, Sally.

SALLY (beginning to giggle): Are you?

BRENTNALL: You don't mind that I'm not Dr Grainger, do you, Sally?

SALLY: What do you mean?

BRENTNALL: You'd as leave have me as Dr Grainger?

SALLY: Yes, if you like.

BRENTNALL (kissing her): That's right. (She giggles.)

MR MAGNEER: Whey! Whey — up! Sally, thou scawdrag!

SALLY (giggling hysterically): What am I a scawdrag for?

MR MAGNEER: Hark ye, hark ye! Jack, art takin' notice over there?

JACK: Billy's alright, Dad.

MR MAGNEER: Billy? By gosh! Billy!

GRAINGER: Turn, Mr Magneer.

ADA (pegging): Two for his knobs.

BRENTNALL: You'd as leave have me as Dr Grainger? (Kisses her under the ear.)

SALLY (with suppressed shrieks): Oh, oh, don't tickle!

GRAINGER (turning around — with contempt): She'll never stop, Billy, she's got gigglemania.

MR MAGNEER: Giggolo — what? That's a good 'un!

BRENTNALL: Yes, she will stop — take me seriously, Sally, do!

(Squeezes her — SALLY giggles wildly. Her head rolls.)

MR MAGNEER: Hark at that — take him seriously!

SALLY (exhausted): Don't! Don't! Oh don't!

BRENTNALL: Sally, my dear, you are too discouraging for anything. Sit with me nicely.

SALLY: Oh! (Lays her head on his shoulder.)

BRENTNALL: Now we're coming on. (Kisses her.) You've not chipped with Charlie, have you?

SALLY: What d'you want to know for?

BRENTNALL: Sally, my darling.

MR MAGNEER: Gosh, it's come to "darling" — "darling Sally"!

BRENTNALL: You haven't, have you?

SALLY: No.

BRENTNALL: Why hasn't he come tonight?

SALLY: Because he wasn't asked.

BRENTNALL: Has he cooled off lately?

SALLY: I don't care whether he has or not.

BRENTNALL: Neither do I. (Kisses her under the ear. She squeals.)

JACK: God love you, Sally!

ADA: Don't play cribbage any more, Mr Magneer. Do play the comb-band.

MR MAGNEER (throwing away his cards): No, I won't play any more. Fill up an' let's have a dance.

ADA: Yes, yes, yes!

The men drink — SALLY and GRAINGER push aside the table.

GRAINGER: Comb-band, Mr Magneer?

MR MAGNEER (wrapping the comb in tissue paper): That's the very item. (He staggers slightly — all the men are affected by drink.)

SALLY (to GRAINGER): You're going to have one with me?

GRAINGER (awkwardly): Er — I'd promised Ada.

ADA: That doesn't matter. Mr Brentnall will dance with me.

MR MAGNEER (sounding the comb): Now then, are you ready? Sally's the belle of the ball, and you, Doctor, it's your party — so lead off.

GRAINGER: Polka — plain polka.

BRENTNALL: We shan't have breath to speak a word.

SALLY: Oh my goodness!

The comb-band buzzes away — they start to dance in a prancing fashion.

SALLY: You're not going to leave me?

GRAINGER: I s'll have to.

SALLY: But you can't.

GRAINGER: Why not?

SALLY: You can't leave me now.

GRAINGER: But I've got to go to London —

JACK: Do you reckon you're really fond of me?

EMILY: I know I am — I don't reckon.

JACK: Not so very good —

EMILY: Why not?

JACK: Do you reckon you've been nice to me all this while?

EMILY: All what while?

JACK: While I've been coming to see you.

EMILY: And have you been very nice to me, Jack?

JACK: Well, haven't I?

EMILY: No, Jack, you haven't.

JACK: What do you mean?

ADA: I posted her the letter yesterday.

BRENTNALL: Why, did you know the address?

ADA: Yes, you told Annie.

BRENTNALL: Did I? Oh Lord, you little imp.

ADA: It's our turn now.

BRENTNALL: Whose turn?

ADA: The women's.

BRENTNALL: Don't be a vixen —

GRAINGER: Well, you won't say anything, will you? You see how I'm fixed.

SALLY: I don't know.

GRAINGER: I'll see you to-morrow — keep it back till then.

SALLY: You'll see me to-morrow?

GRAINGER: Yes —

JACK: You think I ought to get engaged to you?

EMILY: Or else you ought never to have come as you have — you had the option.

JACK: I dunna want to get married, somehow, Emily.

EMILY: Is that final, Jack?

JACK: What do you say?

EMILY: You leave me nothing to say.

JACK: Good God, Emily, I'm not a brute.

EMILY: I've heard you say so often, Jack. But you don't think it's been very happy for me — our — our friendship?

JACK: Good God, Emily — have I been — ?

EMILY: Afraid of me, Jack. It's rather humiliating.

JACK: You can have me if you like — I'm not good enough —

EMILY: You know I consider you good enough.

JACK: Yis — I know you do.

EMILY: Men lack honour nowadays.

JACK: Good God!

They dance — SALLY suddenly drops exhausted on a couch — GRAINGER moves to the other side of the room. JACK MAGNEER flings off his coat.

JACK: By the Lord, it's hot work! Take your coat off, George.

GRAINGER and BRENTNALL take off their coats.

MR MAGNEER: My word, you went well. Have a drink.

SALLY: Is th' door open? Set the back door open, Jack.

He goes out and returns.

BRENTNALL: Have the next with me, Sally.

SALLY: I will if you like.

ADA: What shall it be?

BRENTNALL: Waltz Valeta.

GRAINGER: Try a tune, Mr Magneer.

MR MAGNEER, having repapered his comb, tries a tune. GRAINGER instructs him. They start off, SALLY with BRENTNALL, GRAINGER with ADA CALLADINE.

BRENTNALL: Why would you rather dance with Dr Grainger?

SALLY: I wouldn't.

BRENTNALL: Yes, you would. Don't forget the two shuffle steps — one — two!

SALLY: I've never done that before.

BRENTNALL: Something I've taught you then. But why would you rather dance with Grainger?

SALLY: I wouldn't.

BRENTNALL: You would.

SALLY: I wouldn't.

BRENTNALL: You would. You're in love with him.

SALLY: Me! That I never am!

BRENTNALL: You are!

SALLY: Well, I never did!

BRENTNALL: And you're a fool to be in love with him.

SALLY: Why?

BRENTNALL: For the best of all reasons.

SALLY: What's that?

BRENTNALL: Because he's married.

SALLY: He's not!

BRENTNALL: He is — and has got a son.

SALLY: Where?

BRENTNALL: In Wolverhampton, where he came from.

SALLY: Oh, let's sit down.

BRENTNALL: No, you must dance with me. Don't you like to dance with me? It's too bad, Sally.

SALLY: I'm getting dizzy.

BRENTNALL: You can't, not in Valeta. Besides, we'll walk the waltz steps. (He puts his arm around her.)

SALLY: It's not right about Dr Grainger, is it?

A LADY in motor cloak and wrap appears in the doorway. The men, slightly tipsy, bend talking to their partners, who are engrossed. No one notices the newcomer.

BRENTNALL: It is, on my honour. You believe me, Sally?

She looks him earnestly in the face, as they dance the forward step. When they come together for the waltz, he kisses her.

You believe me?

SALLY (almost in tears): Yes.

BRENTNALL: It is true. Poor Sally. (Kisses her again. They begin to laugh.)

JACK: Alright, I niver looked at it in that light.

EMILY: I know you didn't.

JACK: We'll count as we're engaged from now, then?

EMILY: What will your father say?

JACK: He'll be just fussy.

EMILY: I want him to know — I am so fond of him.

ADA: Oh!

GRAINGER: What?

They break apart. JACK and BRENTNALL keep on dancing, the latter kissing SALLY. GRAINGER goes unsteadily to the doorway.

THE LADY: I called to see Mr Brentnall — but don't disturb him, he looks so happy.

GRAINGER: Does — does he know you?

THE LADY: A little. (She laughs.)

GRAINGER: Billy! Billy!

BRENTNALL (looking up): What now? (Sees the lady.) No!

He leaves SALLY — she sways, he catches her again, takes her to a seat, draws his fingers across her cheek caressingly, and goes to the doorway, reeling

slightly.

Quite giddy, don't you know! Space is so small.

THE LADY: Not much room for you to spread out, was there?

BRENTNALL: Was I hugging Sally?

THE LADY: Sally! How lovely, how perfectly lovely!

BRENTNALL: Did I kiss her?

THE LADY: "Did I kiss her?" No, no, you poor dear, you didn't kiss her.

BRENTNALL: You mean I am drunk.

THE LADY: Are you drunk? No!

BRENTNALL: I am slightly tipsy, more with dancing than drink. Shall I come away?

THE LADY: Shall he come away — oh, you dear! Why should I decide for you?

BRENTNALL: Are you cross?

THE LADY: Not in the least. Go and kiss Sally if you will.

BRENTNALL: Poor Sally — I don't want to kiss her now.

THE LADY: How perfectly lovely! Do introduce me.

BRENTNALL: Mr Magneer, Sally Magneer, Emily Calladine, Ada Calladine, Jack Magneer, Dr Grainger — all of you, Elsa Smith.

ELSA: How awfully nice! Can I come in?

MR MAGNEER (springing up and bowing tipsily): Make yourself at 'ome, you're very welcome, Miss, you're very welcome.

ELSA: Thank you so much! I should love to dance. I've got two friends in the motor car. May I fetch them?

MR MAGNEER: Anybody you like, they're all welcome here, and there's plenty to drink for all.

ELSA: So nice!

Exit ELSA.

GRAINGER: Who the devil —

BRENTNALL: My betrothed, my fiancée, my girl.

CHORUS OF WOMEN: You don't mean it!

SALLY: Well! Men — !

ADA: Men?

EMILY: Men!

MR MAGNEER: Ooh — you're done this time, Billy!

GRAINGER: Well, you devil, Billy Brentnall!

JACK: It's a corker, Billy, it's a winder.

EMILY: Are you any better, Jack?

JACK (fiercely): Look here, Dad. I'm engaged to Emily here, fair and square.

MR MAGNEER: Come here, Em'ler my ducky, come hither. (EMILY goes very reluctantly. He kisses her.) I like thee, Em'ler, I like thee. (Kisses her again.)

JACK: Cheese it, Dad.

MR MAGNEER: It's a winder, it is an' all. — An' aren't you goin' to be engaged an' all, Dr Grainger?

GRAINGER: Not this time.

MR MAGNEER: Hm! 'Appen you are engaged!

GRAINGER: No, I'm not.

MR MAGNEER: Come then, come then, come then.

Re-enter ELSA SMITH, with a lady and gentleman.

ELSA: All of you — Gladys and Tom. Gladys — That's Will —

MR MAGNEER: Ay, ay, Billy! Billy! (It amuses him highly.)

BRENTNALL (bowing): I was to come to dinner tonight, I clean forgot. Don't be angry.

TOM: Cheek, if no more.

ELSA: Oh, you don't know Will, you don't.

MR MAGNEER: An you don't know Billy, Miss, it strikes me. (Laughter)

BRENTNALL: Leave me alone — I say, Elsa, Jack (pointing) has just got engaged to Emily.

ELSA: How perfectly charming. I love it all so much.

BRENTNALL: What?

ELSA: You — this.

BRENTNALL: Take your cloak off.

Helps her. She is a handsome woman, large, blonde, about 30 — dressed for dinner. Tom and Gladys disrobe — they are in dinner dress also.

TOM (cynically): I suppose these are adventures.

GLADYS: Don't be a fool, Tom.

ELSA: This is fun.

BRENTNALL: Will you dance with me, Elsa?

ELSA: No, I won't.

BRENTNALL: Angry with me?

ELSA: No. I can dance with you any day.

GRAINGER: May I have the pleasure?

ELSA: No — forgive me (very kindly) — but I do want to dance with Jack. (To EMILY.) May I?

EMILY: Certainly. (JACK pulls a face.)

ELSA: He doesn't want me — but I won't let him off — no.

JACK: I'm shy, as a matter of fact.

ELSA: How lovely!

MR MAGNEER (to GLADYS): Now Miss, you choose.

GLADYS: Will, you must dance with me.

BRENTNALL (going to her side): You are shy.

MR MAGNEER: Now Ada, your turn to pick.

ADA looks wickedly at TOM — he bows.

TOM: Thank you.

ADA: Are you shy? (She laughs wickedly.)

MR MAGNEER: Now for Dr Grainger. (He holds his fists to EMILY.) Which of 'em? (EMILY touches the right fist.) Wrong! (Showing a coin in his left.) Sally gets him.

SALLY: Sally doesn't.

GRAINGER: Come on, Sally.

MR MAGNEER: Now then, what is it?

BRENTNALL: Waltz.

The comb begins to buzz — the partners set off dancing — MR MAGNEER breaks the time — they laugh — he beckons EMILY, holds the comb in one hand, her with the other, and dances prancingly, buzzing breathlessly.

CURTAIN

ACT IV

The bedroom in the cottage, same as Act I. It is nine o'clock in the morning. GRAINGER and BRENTNALL are in bed.

GRAINGER: Billy! (No answer.) You mean to say you're at it yet? (No answer.) Well, I'll be damned; you're a better sleeper even than a liar. (No answer.) Oh strike! (Shies a pillow at BRENTNALL.)

BRENTNALL: What the — !

GRAINGER: I should say so.

BRENTNALL: Dog in the manger! Go to sleep. I loathe the small hours. Oh-h! (Yawns.)

GRAINGER: Small hours, begad! It's past nine o'clock.

BRENTNALL (half asleep): Early, frostily early.

GRAINGER: You mean to say — ! (He shies the bolster, viciously.)

BRENTNALL: Don't, George! (Sleeps.)

GRAINGER: Devil! (Shies slippers, one after the other.)

BRENTNALL (sitting up suddenly — furious): Go to blazes! (Lies down again.)

GRAINGER: If you go to sleep again, Billy B., I'll empty the water bottle over you — I will.

BRENTNALL: I'm not asleep.

GRAINGER: Billy!

BRENTNALL: What?

GRAINGER: Did you square Sally?

BRENTNALL: Eh?

GRAINGER: No, look here, Billy —

BRENTNALL (stretching his arms): Georgie, you ought to be dead.

GRAINGER: I've no doubt. Billy Brentnall!

BRENTNALL: What?

GRAINGER: Did you square Sally?

BRENTNALL: Sally — Sally — Sally —

GRAINGER: Chuck it, fool.

BRENTNALL: I don't know.

GRAINGER: What d'you mean?

BRENTNALL: I told her you were a married man with a family, and begad, you look it —

GRAINGER: That's not the point.

BRENTNALL: I apologize. I say to Sally: "He's a married man." Sally says to me: "He's not." I say: "He is." Sally says: "I'm dizzy." I say: "You might well be."

GRAINGER: Chuck it, do chuck it.

BRENTNALL: It's the solemn fact. And our confab ended there.

GRAINGER: It did!

BRENTNALL: It did.

GRAINGER: Hm!

BRENTNALL: You're going to London to my rooms, aren't you?

GRAINGER: You say so.

BRENTNALL: Very well then — there's an end of Sally.

GRAINGER: I'm not so sure.

BRENTNALL: Why?

GRAINGER: She said she was coming round here.

BRENTNALL: When?

GRAINGER: This morning.

BRENTNALL: Then don't get up till this afternoon, and then belt for the station.

GRAINGER: I've not settled up at the Surgery.

BRENTNALL: Thou bungler — has Sally really got a case against you?

GRAINGER: She's got a case against some man or other, and she'd prefer it to be me.

BRENTNALL: But she must see you're quite a cold egg. And has Charlie Greenhalgh really cried off?

GRAINGER: No — at least — poor old Charlie's in a bit of a mess.

BRENTNALL: How?

GRAINGER: He was secretary to the football club — and he falsified the balance sheet, and failed to produce about fifteen quid.

BRENTNALL: He's not in a very rosy condition for marriage. However, old Magneer's not short of money?

GRAINGER: He isn't, begad!

BRENTNALL: Alright — let him work the oracle. Sally's no fool — and she'll be just as well, married to Charlie. You say his farm is going to the dogs. Alright, she'll shoo the dogs off.

GRAINGER: Very nice.

BRENTNALL: I think so.

GRAINGER: Who's that?

BRENTNALL: Dunno — get under the bed-clothes.

Sound of footsteps — enter JACK MAGNEER.

JACK: Letting the day get well aired?

BRENTNALL: I don't believe in running risks through the chill, damp air of early morning.

JACK: I s'd think you don't.

BRENTNALL: Take a seat.

JACK: So you're going to-day, George?

GRAINGER: I am, Jack — and sorry to leave you.

JACK: What's this our Sally's been telling me?

GRAINGER: Couldn't say, Jack.

JACK: As you're married —

BRENTNALL: And got a kid, quite right.

JACK: Is it, George?

GRAINGER: I believe so.

JACK: Hm! (A pause.)

BRENTNALL: Well, Jack, say he has your sympathy.

JACK: Yis — yis — he has. But I'm not so sure —

BRENTNALL: Eh Jack, it's a hole we might any of us slip into.

JACK: Seemingly. But why didn't you tell me, George?

BRENTNALL: Don't, Jack. Don't you see, I could give the whole of that recitation. "We've been good friends, George, and you'd no need to keep me in the dark like that. It's a false position for me, as well as for you, etc., etc." That's what you want to say?

JACK: Yis — and besides —

BRENTNALL: Well, look here, Jack, you might have done it yourself. George was let in down at Wolverhampton — kicked out of the town because he owned up and married the girl — hadn't either a penny or a job — girl has a good home. Would you have wanted to tell the whole story to these prating fools round here?

JACK: No, I can't say as I should. But then —

BRENTNALL: Then what?

JACK: There's our Sally, and there's Annie —

BRENTNALL: What about 'em?

JACK: He's courted 'em both — they're both up to the eyes in love with him —

BRENTNALL: Not Annie. On the quiet, she's rather gone on me. I showed George up in his true light to her.

GRAINGER: Rotter — rotter!

BRENTNALL: And I stepped into the limelight, and the trick was done.

JACK: You're a devil, Billy. — But look here, George, our Sally —

GRAINGER: Yes —

JACK: She's — she's gone a long way —

BRENTNALL (quietly): How do you mean, Jack?

JACK: Well, she's given up Charlie Greenhalgh —

BRENTNALL: Not quite. And you know, Jack, she really loves Charlie, at the bottom. There's something fascinating about George.

GRAINGER: Damn your eyes, shut up, Billy.

BRENTNALL: There's something fascinating about George. He can't help it. The women melt like wax before him. They're all over him. It's not his beauty, it's his manliness. He can't help it.

GRAINGER: I s'll smash you, Billy Brentnall, if you don't shut up.

JACK: Yis, there's something in it, George.

BRENTNALL: There is, Jack. Well, he can't help himself, so you've got to help him. It's no good hitting him when he's down.

JACK: I'm not hitting him.

BRENTNALL: And what you've got to do, you've got to get Charlie Greenhalgh and your Sally together again.

JACK: Me! — It's nowt to do with me.

BRENTNALL: Yes, it has. Charlie's not been up to your place lately, has he?

JACK: No.

BRENTNALL: And do you know why?

JACK: Yis.

BRENTNALL: It's not so much because of George. Have you heard he's fifteen quid out with the football club.

JACK: I've heard a whisper.

BRENTNALL: Well, you help him, Jack, for Sally's sake. She loves him, Jack, she does. And if she married him quick, she'll pull him through, for she seems to have a business head on her, and a farming head.

JACK: She has that.

BRENTNALL: Well, you'll do what you can for poor old Charlie, won't you?

JACK: I will, Billy. And what time are you going?

BRENTNALL: 2.50 train.

JACK: Well — me and you's been good pals, George. I must say I'd ha' done anything for you —

GRAINGER: I know you would, Jack.

JACK: Yis, an' I would — an' I would.

BRENTNALL: I'm going up to Blythe Hall against Ashbourne for a day or two, Jack. Shall you come up for tennis?

JACK: I hardly think so — we s'll be busy just now.

BRENTNALL: Sunday afternoon — yes you will.

JACK: Goodbye, Billy.

BRENTNALL: Au revoir, Jack.

JACK: Well — goodbye, George — lad. We've not done amiss while you've been here. I s'll miss thee.

GRAINGER: You've been alright to me, Jack.

JACK: Yis — I try to do what I can for folks.

Exit JACK.

BRENTNALL: The atmosphere clears, George.

GRAINGER: Oh damn you, shut up.

BRENTNALL: "Oh, what a sin is base ingratitude!"

GRAINGER: What did you tell Annie about me?

BRENTNALL: I said you were quite manly, and couldn't help yourself; all the virtues of good nature and so on, but a bit of a libidinous goat.

GRAINGER: Thank you — very nice of you.

BRENTNALL: Add to this that you won't face a situation, but always funk it, and you understand why Annie suddenly transferred her affections to me. For I showed myself, by contrast, a paragon of all virtues.

GRAINGER: You would.

BRENTNALL: I did.

GRAINGER: I shan't go to London to your rooms.

BRENTNALL: Now George, my dear chap — —

GRAINGER: I shall not, Billy.

BRENTNALL: Then where will you go?

GRAINGER: Hell!

BRENTNALL: My dear, dear fellow, you've neither the cash nor the ability.

GRAINGER: Well, you're a —

BRENTNALL: Shall we get up?

GRAINGER: I will, whether you will or not. (Sits on the side of the bed whistling "On the Banks of Allan Water". Footsteps on the stairs — enter GRAINGER'S wife, ETHEL — rather thin, with a light costume.)

ETHEL: George! (She goes forward and kisses him, not noticing BRENTNALL.) George! (Sinks her head on his shoulder.) George!

GRAINGER: Ethel — well I'm blessed! (Kisses her.)

ETHEL (drawing away): I had to come.

GRAINGER: Yes.

ETHEL: Are you angry?

GRAINGER: Me angry! What should I be angry for?

ETHEL: I thought you might be.

GRAINGER: What made you come?

ETHEL: I heard you were going away — and your letters seemed so constrained. Are you — ?

GRAINGER: What?

ETHEL: Going away?

GRAINGER: I s'll have to — this job's done.

ETHEL: You never told me.

GRAINGER: What was the good?

ETHEL: Where are you going?

GRAINGER: Dunno — I don't know in the least.

ETHEL: Oh George, you must come home. Mother says you must.

GRAINGER: Hm!

ETHEL: Won't you?

GRAINGER: I'd rather not.

ETHEL: What will you do, then?

GRAINGER: I may — I shall probably get a job in London.

ETHEL: Oh George, don't, don't go to London.

GRAINGER: What else can I do?

ETHEL: Come home to Mother with me.

GRAINGER: I'll be damned if I will.

ETHEL: No, you never will do anything I ask you.

GRAINGER: I shan't do that.

ETHEL: Don't you want to be with me?

GRAINGER: If I want ever so badly, I can't, with no money.

ETHEL: Then how are you going to live alone, with no money?

GRAINGER: I can manage for myself.

ETHEL: I know what you want, you want to run away. It is mean, mean of you.

GRAINGER: What's the good of my coming to your place, there, where they kicked me out?

ETHEL: And what if you've nowhere else to go? And what are you going to do in London?

GRAINGER: Look for a job.

ETHEL: And what when you've got one?

GRAINGER: Save up to get some things together.

ETHEL: How much have you saved here?

GRAINGER: Not a fat lot — but I have saved.

ETHEL: How much?

GRAINGER: Some — at any rate.

ETHEL: Have you been miserable? I know you like plenty of life. Has it made you miserable to be tied up?

GRAINGER: Not miserable — but it's been a bit of a devil.

ETHEL: We ought to live together.

GRAINGER: On what?

ETHEL: On what we can get.

GRAINGER: No, thank you.

ETHEL: We might as well not be married. I believe you hate me for having married you. Do you — do you?

GRAINGER: Now Ethel, drop it. Don't get excited. You know I don't feel anything of the sort.

ETHEL (weeping): But you don't love me.

GRAINGER (tenderly): Why, I do, Ethel, I do.

ETHEL: I love you, George, I love you.

GRAINGER: Poor old Ethel — and I love you. And whoever says I don't, is a liar.

ETHEL: You've been true to me, George?

GRAINGER: What do you mean?

ETHEL: Have you been true to me?

BRENTNALL: No, he hasn't.

GRAINGER (fiercely): Now Billy!

BRENTNALL: I am your husband's old friend, Brentnall, and your friend, Mrs Grainger. (Gets out of bed, shakes hands with ETHEL.)

ETHEL: I didn't know you were there.

BRENTNALL: Never mind. (Puts on a dressing-gown.)

ETHEL: Do you say George hasn't been true to me?

BRENTNALL: I do. Do you really love him?

ETHEL: He is my husband.

BRENTNALL: You do love him, I can see. Then, look here, keep him. You can do it, I should think. Keep him. And you, George, be decent.

GRAINGER: Be decent yourself.

BRENTNALL: I am. (Lights a cigarette.) You don't mind if I smoke?

ETHEL: No. George, oh George! It's not true what he says, is it?

GRAINGER: No!

ETHEL (weeping): I couldn't bear it. (Embracing him.) I couldn't bear it.

BRENTNALL (aside): That's the ticket.

GRAINGER: Never mind, little girl — never mind.

ETHEL: You won't leave me again?

BRENTNALL (aside): Good shot!

GRAINGER: What can I do?

ETHEL: I've got seventy pounds, George, I've got seventy pounds.

GRAINGER: I don't want your money, Ethel.

ETHEL: You don't mind making a fool of me, and neglecting me, but you won't have my money.

GRAINGER: Now Ethel —

ETHEL (flashing): Isn't it so?

GRAINGER: No, Ethel.

ETHEL: Then we'll live together on seventy pounds, till you get a job?

GRAINGER: But you see —

ETHEL (turning, flashing, to BRENTNALL): Has he been living straight — do they know here he's married?

BRENTNALL: I've told a few of them.

ETHEL (turning slowly to GRAINGER): Now then —

GRAINGER: You can do what the hell you like.

ETHEL: Then I shall live with you, from this minute onwards.

BRENTNALL: Knocked out, George!

GRAINGER: Curse you, Brentnall.

BRENTNALL: You are a rotter, my dear fellow.

ETHEL (weeping): There's baby crying.

Exit ETHEL, weeping. BRENTNALL smokes a cigarette — GRAINGER fumes.

BRENTNALL (throwing him a dressing-gown): You'd better clothe yourself — you'll feel stronger.

GRAINGER (getting into the dressing-gown): What d'you reckon you're up to?

BRENTNALL: Don't be a fool, George, don't be a swine. If you're going to clear out, stand up and say so honourably! Say you'll not abide by your marriage. You can do that, with decency.

GRAINGER: How the devil can I?

BRENTNALL: Will you?

GRAINGER: No, damn it, how can I? I'm not a —

BRENTNALL: Very well then, you won't clear out, you won't renounce your marriage. Very well then, go and live with the girl, and be decent. Have a cigarette! (GRAINGER takes a cigarette.)

GRAINGER: It's a cursed rotten hole —

BRENTNALL: Then for the Lord's sake, make it as comfortable as possible, if you're going to stop in it.

GRAINGER: Hark!

BRENTNALL: Sally!

GRAINGER: It is, begad!

ETHEL appears.

ETHEL: There's a woman enquiring for you.

GRAINGER: What for — what does she want?

ETHEL: She wants you.

GRAINGER: Hm! Is it Sally? She's been running after me ever since I've been here, bless her.

BRENTNALL: Let's have her up. (Calling.) Do come upstairs, Miss Magneer. It's quite decent.

GRAINGER: It's a bit thick, Billy.

Enter SALLY.

BRENTNALL (to SALLY): Excuse our appearance, won't you? How do you do? (Shakes hands.)

SALLY: How do you do?

BRENTNALL: Have you been introduced to Mrs Grainger? Mrs Doctor

Grainger — Miss Magneer.

SALLY: I've been given to understand this is Mrs Doctor Grainger — and that the baby downstairs —

BRENTNALL: Is Master Jimmy Grainger. Quite so.

SALLY: I think it is quite so. It's happened quite so, but it's not quite the thing.

BRENTNALL: Don't let us quarrel, Sally. Don't be quarrelling with us the last half-hour we shall be here.

SALLY: Perhaps not. But what was he masquerading round as not married for, if he had a wife and a child?

ETHEL: You see, Miss Magneer, the fact that Dr Grainger chose to keep his marriage a secret wouldn't have hurt you, unless you'd rushed in to be hurt.

SALLY: Yes — meaning to say as I ran after him. (To GRAINGER.) Eh?

GRAINGER: Well — what else can you call it, Sally?

SALLY: And who wanted me to walk down the fields with him, the first time he saw me?

GRAINGER: I must say I think you wanted me quite as much, if not more, than I wanted you, Sally.

SALLY: Oh, did I?

ETHEL: I have no doubt of it.

SALLY: And did every single girl you met want you then, Dr Grainger?

GRAINGER: I never said so nor meant so.

SALLY: The one downstairs, for instance.

GRAINGER: Who d'you mean?

SALLY: Annie Calladine.

GRAINGER: What's she doing here?

ETHEL: She met me at the station. I left her holding baby.

SALLY: Let her come up, and say her share. No, you daren't and you know it.

GRAINGER: Daren't I? I say, Annie — Annie!

ANNIE'S VOICE: Yes!

GRAINGER: Would you mind coming upstairs a minute?

SALLY: Now you s'll hear her side, as well.

Enter ANNIE.

BRENTNALL: You will excuse us — we were not expecting callers.

ANNIE: How do you do?

GRAINGER: Annie, Sally wants you to say everything you can against me, in Ethel's hearing.

ANNIE: I don't wish to say everything I can against you, Dr Grainger. But I do wish to say this, that you are a danger to every unmarried girl, when you go about as you have gone, here. And Mrs Grainger had better look after you very closely, if she means to keep you.

GRAINGER: Thank you, Annie, very nice.

ANNIE: Almost as nice as you have been to me.

GRAINGER: I'm not aware that I've done you much damage.

ANNIE: If you haven't, it's not your fault.

ETHEL flings herself suddenly on the bed, weeping wildly.

SALLY: I'm thankful I'm not his wife.

ANNIE: And I am more than thankful.

BRENTNALL: Don't cry, Mrs Grainger. George is alright, really.

ANNIE (fiercely): He is not, Mr Brentnall.

SALLY: Neither is he.

BRENTNALL: Nay, don't cry, Mrs Grainger.

ELSA SMITH'S VOICE, calling in a jolly singsong: "Knabe, Knabe, wo bist du?"

BRENTNALL: Gott sei dank, du bist gekommen. Komm hinauf.

ELSA SMITH'S VOICE: Ja! (Runs upstairs — enter, chattering in German.) Oh!

BRENTNALL (shaking hands): Frightful muddle! Miss Annie Calladine — Mrs Grainger's awfully cut up because George has been flirting round.

ELSA: With you, Miss Magneer — and Miss Calladine?

SALLY: Not to mention the rest.

ELSA: Oh — oh! I'm sorry. But don't cry, Mrs Grainger, please. He's not a villain if he makes love to the other girls, surely. Perhaps it's not nice. But it was under trying circumstances.

BRENTNALL: That's what I say.

ELSA: Yes, yes. You're just as bad yourself. I know you.

BRENTNALL: Nay Elsa, I'm not the same.

ELSA: Oh, oh — now don't try to duck your head in the whitewash pail with me, no. I won't have it. Don't cry, Mrs Grainger, don't cry. He loves you, I'm sure he does, even if he makes love to the others. (To GRAINGER.) Don't you? (No reply.) Now you are sulking just like a great baby. And then that's your little baby downstairs? Ah, the dear! (Sobbing from ETHEL.) Never mind, never mind, cry out your cry, then let me talk to you.

BRENTNALL: Come by motor-car?

ELSA: Yes, Will Hobson drove me.

BRENTNALL: Ha!

ELSA: I like him, so you needn't say "Ha!"

BRENTNALL: Ha!

ELSA (laughing — putting her hand on his shoulder): Not had breakfast, and smoking, and talking to ladies. Aren't you ashamed, sir?

BRENTNALL: I've nothing to be ashamed of.

ELSA (laughing): No, no; hear him. (Kisses him.) You are a dear, but a dreadful liar.

BRENTNALL: Nay, I'll be damned — I beg your pardon.

ELSA: No, you never use bad language, do you?

BRENTNALL: Not in the presence of ladies.

ELSA: Well, now listen, I prefer to have you as you are with men. If you swear when you are with men, I prefer you to swear when you are with me. Will you promise me you will?

BRENTNALL: It wouldn't be a hard promise to keep.

ELSA: Promise me you won't have one philosophy when you are with men, in your smoke-room, and another when you are with me, in the drawing-room.

Promise me you will be faithful to your philosophy that you have with other men, even before me, always.

BRENTNALL: Ha! Not so easy.

ELSA: Promise me. I want the real you, not your fiction.

BRENTNALL: I promise to do my best.

ELSA: Yes, and I trust you, you are so decent.

BRENTNALL: Nay, Elsa —

ELSA: Yes you are. Oh I see your faults, I do. But you are decent. (To ETHEL, who has stopped crying, but who still lies on the bed.) Don't be too cross with Dr Grainger, will you, Mrs Grainger? It's not very dreadful. Perhaps Miss Magneer loved him a little —

SALLY: That I never did —

ELSA (laughing): Yes, you did. And (to ANNIE) you were inclined to love him?

ANNIE: That is the worst part of it.

ELSA: Well, I, who am a woman, when I see other women who are sweet or handsome or charming, I look at them and think: "Well, how can a man help loving them, to some extent? Even if he loves me, if I am not there, how can he help loving them?"

ANNIE: But not a married man.

ELSA: I think a man ought to be fair. He ought to offer his love for just what it is — the love of a man married to another woman — and so on. And, if there is any strain, he ought to tell his wife — "I love this other woman."

SALLY: It's worse than Mormons.

BRENTNALL: But better than subterfuge, bestiality, or starvation and sterility.

ELSA: Yes, yes. If only men were decent enough.

BRENTNALL: And women.

ELSA: Yes. Don't fret, Mrs Grainger. By loving these two women, Dr Grainger has not lost any of his love for you. I would stay with him.

SALLY: He certainly never loved me — except for what he could get.

ELSA: Ha-ha! (Very quaint and very earnest.) That is rather dreadful. But yes, he must have loved you — something in you.

SALLY: It was something.

ELSA: Yes, I see what you mean — but I don't think you're quite right. No, it's not quite so brutal.

BRENTNALL: Shall I walk across to you after lunch?

ELSA: Yes, do that.

ANNIE: I think I will go. Goodbye, Dr Grainger. (Shakes hands.) Goodbye, Sally. Goodbye, Mr Brentnall.

BRENTNALL: Goodbye, Annie. Remember what I told you, and decide for the best. Don't be afraid. (Kisses her.)

ELSA: Yes. I think, with a little love, we can help each other so much.

ANNIE (to ELSA): Goodbye. (Crossing and putting her arms round ETHEL.) He isn't bad, dear. You must bring out the best in him. The baby is a dear. And you'll write to me.

Exit ANNIE.

SALLY: Well, goodbye all. And if I were your wife, Dr Grainger, I'd keep the bit between your teeth.

ELSA: No, no. No one should be driven like a horse between the shafts. Each

should live his own life; you are there to help your husband, not to drive him.

SALLY: And to watch he doesn't help himself too often. Well, goodbye. Shall we be seeing you again, Mr Brentnall?

BRENTNALL: Next week.

SALLY: Right — do come. Goodbye.

Exit SALLY.

ELSA (crossing to ETHEL): Goodbye. Don't make sorrow and trouble in the world; try to make happiness. I think Satan is in hard judgment, even more than is sin. Try to exonerate.

ETHEL: It's such a shock.

ELSA (kissing her): Ah yes, it is cruel. But don't let your own suffering blind you, try not to. Goodbye. (Kisses her.) Goodbye, Dr Grainger. (Shakes hands.)

BRENTNALL: I will see you downstairs — by the way, Grainger and Mrs Grainger are going to stay in my rooms.

ELSA: How perfectly delightful! Then I shall see you in London. How lovely! Goodbye.

BRENTNALL: I suppose I'm respectable enough to see you downstairs.

Exeunt ELSA and BRENTNALL. GRAINGER and his wife sit silent a while. They are afraid of each other.

GRAINGER: Will you go to London to Billy's rooms?

ETHEL: Does he want us to?

GRAINGER: I suppose so.

Silence.

GRAINGER: Will you?

ETHEL: Do you want me to?

GRAINGER: You please yourself. I'm not coming to Wolverhampton.

ETHEL (trying not to cry): Well, we'll go to London.

GRAINGER: It's a damned mess.

ETHEL (crying): You'd better do just as you like, then, and I'll go home.

GRAINGER: I didn't mean that.

ETHEL (crying): I'll go home.

GRAINGER: Don't begin again, Ethel.

ETHEL: You hate the thought of being married to me. So you can be free of me.

GRAINGER: And what about the baby? Don't talk rot, Ethel. (Puts his arm round her.)

ETHEL: You don't care for that, either.

GRAINGER: Don't I — you don't know. They all make me look as black as I can —

ETHEL: Well, I don't know.

GRAINGER: Yes they do — and they always have done. I never have had anybody to stick up for me. (Weeps a few tears.) I've had a rotten time, a rotten time.

ETHEL: And so have I.

GRAINGER: You don't know what it is to be a man.

ETHEL: I know what it is to be your wife.

GRAINGER: Are you going to sling it in my teeth for ever?

ETHEL: No, I'm not. But what did you marry me for? (Cries.)

GRAINGER (embracing her): You're the only girl I could have married, Ethel. I've been a rotter to you, I have.

ETHEL: Never mind, we shall get on together, we shall. Mind, somebody is coming.

A knock — enter MRS PLUM with the baby.

MRS PLUM: He wants you, the precious little lad, he does. Oh Dr Grainger, let me see you hold him! (Gives the baby to GRAINGER.)

Enter BRENTNALL.

BRENTNALL: That's the way, George.

GRAINGER: Shut up, fool.

CURTAIN

THE FIGHT FOR BARBARA



A COMEDY IN FOUR ACTS

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CHARACTERS

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DR FREDERICK TRESSIDER

LADY CHARLCOTE

Scene: A Villa in Italy

ACT I

8.30 in the morning. The kitchen of an Italian villa — a big open fireplace of stone, with a little charcoal grate — fornello — on either side — cupboards, table, rush-bottom chairs with high backs — many bright copper pans of all sizes hanging up. The door-bell rings in the kitchen — rings hard — after a minute a door is heard to bang.

Enter WESSON, in dressing-gown and pyjamas: a young man of about twenty-six, with thick hair ruffled from sleep. He crosses and goes through door R. Sounds of voices. Re-enter WESSON, followed by Italian maid-servant, FRANCESCA, young, fair, pretty — wears a black lace scarf over her head. She carries a saucepan full of milk. On the table stand a soup-tureen and an enamel jug.

FRANCESCA: Questa? (Puts her hand on the jug.)

WESSON: No, in the other. (She pours the milk into the tureen.)

FRANCESCA (smiling): Abondante misura!

WESSON: What's that? Come?

FRANCESCA: Abondante misura latte!

WESSON: Oh — full measure. Si! — running over!

FRANCESCA: Ranning ova. (Both laugh.)

WESSON: Right you are — you're learning English.

FRANCESCA: Come?

WESSON: Vous apprenez anglais — voi — inglese!

FRANCESCA: O — non — niente inglese!

WESSON: Nothing English? Oh yes! Er — fa tempo cattivo!

FRANCESCA: Tempo cattivo — si.

WESSON: Rotten weather —

FRANCESCA: Come?

WESSON: It's all the same. (She puts the lid on her saucepan and turns away.)
Er — what day is it? — er — giorno che giorno?

FRANCESCA: Oggi? Domenica.

WESSON: Domenica! — dimanche — Sonntag — Sunday.

FRANCESCA: Come?

WESSON: Sunday!

FRANCESCA: Senty!

WESSON: That's it. (Both laugh — she blushes and turns away — bows.)

FRANCESCA: Buon giorno, Signore.

WESSON: Buon giorno.

Exit FRANCESCA R. He drinks some milk, wipes his mouth and begins to whistle: "Put me among the girls!" — takes some branches of olive and ilex from a box near the fire — puts them in the fireplace. As he is so doing, enter Left — BARBARA — age about twenty-six — fair — rather a fine young woman, holding her blue silk dressing-gown about her. She stands in the doorway L., holding up her finger.

BARBARA: Yes, you may well whistle that! I heard you, Giacometti.

WESSON (turning round): And did it fetch you out of bed?

BARBARA: Yes, it did. I heard your dulcet tones.

WESSON: They were no dulcetter than usual.

BARBARA: And, pray, what right had they to be as dulcet! — (draws herself up) — to a little servant-maid, indeed!

WESSON: She's awfully nice, and quite a lady.

BARBARA: Yes — yes — I know you! She's pretty, is she?

WESSON: Awfully pretty! (Lighting the heap of branches in the fire.) These matches are the stinking devil.

BARBARA: Aren't they! I tried to light a cigarette with them, and I thought I should have died!

WESSON: You should have waited till the sulphur had burned away (laughing). And the pretty maid had got a mantilla on this morning.

BARBARA: Ah! I suppose the poor thing had been to church.

WESSON: It took my breath away when I opened the door, and I said "Oh!"

BARBARA: Giacomo!

WESSON: Do call me Jimmy — I hate to be Italianized! — and she blushed like fury.

BARBARA: Poor thing! Really, Giacometti, really, you are impossible.

WESSON: What for?

BARBARA: Fancy saying "Oh!" to the young maid! Remember, you're a gentleman in her eyes.

WESSON: And what's wrong with saying "Oh!" when she's got a fascinating mantilla on? I can't say delicate things in Italian — and — "Oh!" — who can't say "Oh!" — after all, what is there in it?

BARBARA: What could have been more expressive! Think of the poor thing, how embarrassed she must feel.

The fire blazes up in the big chimney.

Oh, how beautiful! Now that makes me perfectly happy. How gorgeous! How adorable! No, but, Wesson, I don't like it.

WESSON: What's that, the fire?

BARBARA: No, the little servant-maid. And you made her feel so uncomfortable.

WESSON: I didn't.

BARBARA: You must have done! Think — to her, at any rate, you're a gentleman.

WESSON: A thundering lot of a gentleman, when she finds me lighting the fire and grinding the coffee —

BARBARA: Yes, but no doubt she thinks that's an eccentricity.

WESSON: There's a lot of eccentricity about living on a hundred-and-twenty a year, the pair of us.

BARBARA: And you must remember how fearfully poor these Italians are —

WESSON: It's enough for me how fearfully poor we are ourselves — you in your silk dressing-gown! It'll be some time before you get such a one out of our purse.

BARBARA: Well, it doesn't matter — you are a gentleman here. Look, this flat is quite grand.

WESSON: It will be when you have to clean it.

BARBARA: I don't mind cleaning it; don't be horrid! This adorable fire! But you won't do it, will you?

WESSON: What?

BARBARA: Say "Oh!" to the little maid. It's not nice, really.

WESSON: Well, you see, it popped out when I saw the mantilla. I s'll be used to it another time.

BARBARA: And you won't say it?

WESSON: I won't say "Oh!"; oh dear, oh no, never no more, I won't. (Sings.)

BARBARA (kissing him): Dear!

WESSON (kissing her): What d'yer want?

BARBARA: I love you.

WESSON: So you ought.

BARBARA: Why ought I?

WESSON (at the fire): There you are, you see, that's how to set a fornello going.

BARBARA (teasing): Oh — oh, is it? And now you're going to make coffee l'Italienne, aren't you? Oh, you wonderful person!

WESSON: I am.

Gets the coffee-mill from cupboard — grinds coffee on the table, singing:

Johnny used to grind the coffee-mill,
Mix the sugar with the sand;
But he got run in and all through mixing

His master's money with his own.

BARBARA: What is that beautiful and classic song?

WESSON sings it again.

BARBARA (laughing): Oh, you common, common brat! Anybody could tell your father was a coal-miner.

WESSON: A butty collier — and I wish yours had been ditto — you'd ha' been more use. Think of me, Lord of Creation, getting the breakfast ready. (She takes his head between her hands, and ruffles his hair.) While you stand messing about.

BARBARA: Oh, your lovely hair! — it makes waves just like the Apollo Belvedere.

WESSON: And come again to-morrer.

BARBARA: Don't — don't laugh at yourself — or at me when I say it's nice hair. It is, Giacomo, it's really beautiful.

WESSON: I know; it's the Apollo Belvedere, and my beautiful nose is Antinous, and my lovely chin is Endymion — clear out.

BARBARA: You are horrid to yourself! Why won't you let me say you're nice?

WESSON: Because the water's boiling.

BARBARA: You're not a bit nice.

WESSON: Mind! — my water's boiling! (Breaks away — making coffee in a brass jug.) If this was Pimlico or Bloomsbury, and this was a London kitchen, you wouldn't love me, would you?

BARBARA: If you could do anything so horrid as to stifle me in a poor part of London, I would not love you — I would hate you for ever. Think of me!

WESSON: But because we come careering to Italy, and the pans are of copper

and brass, you adore me, don't you?

BARBARA: Yes — on the whole.

WESSON: That is, for the first month or two. We've been here six weeks.

BARBARA: Think of it — Giacomo mio, it seems like six minutes — it frightens me.

WESSON (hesitating): It doesn't seem three months since we left England, does it?

BARBARA: I can't believe we're here yet. Giacomo, Giacomo, why is it so new, every day? Giacomo, why is it always more? It's always more, isn't it?

WESSON (putting his arms round her): You're a Judy! (Kisses her.)

BARBARA: Do you love me?

WESSON: Not a bit.

BARBARA: Not a teenty bit?

WESSON: Not a seroddy atom. (Laughs — tightens her in his arms — kisses her.)

BARBARA: You're a common thing!

WESSON: Am I no gentleman, as Frederick said?

BARBARA: No, no one could ever accuse you of being a gentleman.

WESSON: Am I a lout?

BARBARA: Oh — did it call him a lout!

WESSON: Am I a clodhopper?

BARBARA: Now — that makes me happy! That Frederick should call you a

clodhopper — no, that is too much joy!

WESSON: Have they called me any more names?

BARBARA: You forget the clumsy clown —

WESSON: That your papa would have kicked downstairs — think of the poor old winded baronet —

BARBARA: Who's had his Selma all his life! And then says you're a degraded scoundrel for running away with me.

WESSON: Yes — his rotten old cheek.

BARBARA: He's a failure, too, you know — Papa's a failure! Why are all people failures?

WESSON: Couldn't say.

BARBARA: It's because their women have been so rotten to them. Mama treated my father badly, she did, just because of his Selma.

WESSON: You'd let me have a Selma, wouldn't you?

BARBARA: What! I'd show you — I'll show you if you try any of your little games on me. But poor Papa — everything he has done has gone wrong — his money — he had no son —

WESSON: So there'll be no fifth baronet — how sad — what an awful loss to society!

BARBARA: And here am I, his favourite daughter, have run away with the son of a coal-miner, from my good and loving husband.

WESSON: The right worthy Frederick Tressider, doctor of medicine. Gentleman of means. Worth a dozen of me.

BARBARA: Oh, how I hated his wooden face!

WESSON: Well, you knocked spots off it pretty roughly.

BARBARA: How common, how inexpressibly common your language is.

WESSON: There goes the milk. (Dashes to the fire.) Are you going to have bregger in the kitchen, or in the bedroom?

BARBARA: We'll have it here for once. Should we — because of this lovely fire — put some more sticks on.

WESSON: Put 'em on yourself — or, wait a minute — want eggs, or don't you?

BARBARA: Yes, let's have eggs.

WESSON: You're a lazy little devil.

BARBARA: Think — think how I worked yesterday!

WESSON: Yes — it nearly killed you, didn't it!

Silence for a moment.

BARBARA: Poor Frederick. He does love me! If I'd seen it before I'd left him — I don't think I could have done it. Why did he always hide it from me?

WESSON: He didn't. You merely never saw it.

BARBARA: Oh, but it never came out!

WESSON: What did you want him to do! He loved you right enough; you merely didn't love him — and there it stands.

BARBARA: But — I knew he was in love with me — but — why could I never feel his love? Why could I never feel it warm me?

WESSON: Because you never wanted to. You were non-conductive to this particular form of love, that's all.

BARBARA: Think, I was married to him for three years, and I was no nearer to

him than I am to that fornello.

WESSON: Poor devil — it wasn't his fault.

BARBARA: Yes, I have treated him badly.

WESSON: You might have done worse by staying with him.

BARBARA: But think — how he adored me! Why did it never seem anything to me, his love? But think, Giacomo, how he must suffer — such a highly esteemed man, and so proud and sensitive —

WESSON: And we'd only known each other three weeks.

BARBARA: Oh, Giacomo; it makes me tremble! Do you think we shall bring it off?

WESSON: We shall — if we make up our minds to. But if you keep footling with the idea of Frederick, and your people, and duty — then we shan't.

BARBARA: But, Giacomo — they loved me so.

WESSON: So do I.

BARBARA: Yes, but they needed me more. And I belonged to them! And they say love wears off — and if it does!

WESSON: You were saying only a minute since it was always more.

BARBARA: Giacomo, I'm frightened.

WESSON: What of?

BARBARA: Of everything — and sometimes I wonder — don't be cross if I say it, will you?

WESSON: Say what you like.

BARBARA: Sometimes I wonder — it seems horrid — I wonder if I can trust

you.

WESSON: Why?

BARBARA: You are so queer — and I am so all alone — and if you weren't good to me —

WESSON: I think you needn't be mean —

BARBARA: But look — you seem to want to take me away from everything and everybody. I feel as if you wanted to swallow me, and take my will away. You won't do it, will you, Giacomo?

WESSON: You're fatter than I am — ask a cat not to swallow a camel.

BARBARA: But do you think Frederick will divorce me?

WESSON: You'll have to insist on it.

BARBARA: No — I can't — it seems so cruel. I can't, dear. He's so cut up. You know, he says he can't publicly accuse me.

WESSON: If he'd hate you and have done with it, it would be easier. Or if he loved you, he would offer you divorce. But no, he messes about between one thing and another, and sentimentalizes.

BARBARA: But he does love me, Giacomo.

WESSON: And a fat lot of use it is to you. But he sees you don't clearly want a divorce and so he hangs on. Now he talks about your going to live with your mother, and repenting, then he'll have you back. But you like to leave a loophole by which you could creep out and go back, don't you? Ah, you do.

BARBARA: No — no — don't say it — don't say it. Only I'm frightened.

WESSON: You know your people have given out you've gone into a convent in France, for a little while, because you had got religious ideas or something like that. And I know they think you'll come crawling back at last — and Frederick is waiting for you — he's waiting — and you like to have it so — you do.

BARBARA (putting her arms round his neck): No, it's not true, Giacometti, it's not true. I do love you, don't I?

WESSON: You only don't want to belong to me.

BARBARA: But I do belong to you.

WESSON: You don't — you tamper with the idea of Frederick.

BARBARA: He'd never do to me what you want to do.

WESSON: What?

BARBARA: Humble me, and make me nothing — and then swallow me. And it's wrong. It's wrong for you to want to swallow me. I am myself — and you ought to leave me free.

WESSON: Well, so I do.

BARBARA: You don't. All the time you're at me. Oh, and I hate you so sometimes, Giacomo. Now you're cross with me.

WESSON: I should think the eggs are done.

BARBARA (seating herself): I'm hungry, Giacomo — are you?

WESSON: No — it makes me sick, the way you're always bleeding my self-respect.

BARBARA: I! I! Why it's I who've given you your self-respect. Think of the crumpled up, despairing, hating creature that came into Mrs Kelly's drawing-room — and now look at yourself.

WESSON: But you won't love me — you want to keep upper hand.

BARBARA (laughing with scorn): There you are quite mistaken. I want there to be no upper hand. I only want both of us to be free to be ourselves — and you seem as if you can't have it — you want to bully me, you want to bully me

inside.

WESSON: All right — eat your breakfast then.

BARBARA: And it makes me feel as if I want to run — I want to run from you.

WESSON: Back to Frederick.

BARBARA: Yes — poor Frederick — he never made me feel like this. I was always a free woman with him.

WESSON: And mightily you regretted it.

BARBARA: No — no! Not that! Your idea of marriage is like the old savages: hit a woman on the head and run off with her.

WESSON: Very well.

The bell rings noisily.

There's the butcher.

Goes out door R — voices — re-enter WESSON.

What do you want?

BARBARA: I don't know — what do we?

WESSON: I! —

He turns round. The butcher, a handsome young fellow of about twenty, has followed him and stands in the doorway.

BARBARA: Oh! — Buon giorno!

BUTCHER: Buon giorno, signora.

BARBARA: Piove?

BUTCHER: Sì.

BARBARA: Ah! — e il lago — ?

BUTCHER: È burrascoso.

BARBARA: Ah — tempo cattivo per voi.

The butcher laughs.

WESSON: What do you want?

BARBARA: Er — ha vitello?

BUTCHER: Sì — Sì — quanto?

BARBARA: How much do we want?

WESSON: Mezzo chilo.

BARBARA: Mezzo chilo.

BUTCHER (touching his hood): Grazia — buon giorno.

The door is heard to close.

BARBARA: Oh, I like him, I like him — you said he wasn't nice.

WESSON: He's not — look at the way he comes in.

BARBARA: I like it. It's so decided, at any rate. I hate English people for the way they always hang fire.

WESSON: Do you?

BARBARA: Yes! I like him as he stands there — he looks like a wild young bull or something, peering out of his hood.

WESSON: And you flirt with him.

BARBARA: Wesson!

WESSON: I know it's a great insult to say so. But he is good-looking — and see the way you stretch out your arm, and show your throat.

BARBARA: But Wesson, how can you. I simply spoke to him. And when you think of yourself with the servant maid —

WESSON: I only laugh — you sort of show yourself.

BARBARA: Well, really, this is too much!

WESSON: True, whether or not. And you're always doing it. You always want men to think I don't keep you. You write to your mother like that, you write to Frederick like that — always as if I didn't keep you, as if you were rather undecided, you would make up your mind to walk away from me in a little while, probably.

BARBARA: How can you be so false? It would serve you right if I did leave you.

WESSON: I know that, you've said it before.

BARBARA: Really — no one but a common man would say I flirted with that butcher —

WESSON: Well, I am common — what's the odds? You've lived with me for three months.

BARBARA: That doesn't say I shall live with you for ever.

WESSON: You can go the minute you want to go.

BARBARA: Ha, could I! It's easy for you to talk. You'd see, when it came to it, how you would let me go.

WESSON: I wouldn't try to stop you, if you really, really wanted to leave me. But you've got to convince me of that first.

BARBARA: You think there's not another like you, don't you?

WESSON: For you, there isn't.

BARBARA: I'm not so sure.

WESSON: I am! But try, only try. Only try, and make your mistake. But it'll be too late, once you've done it.

BARBARA: Pooh! you needn't think you'll threaten me.

WESSON: I only tell you. Can I give you anything?

BARBARA: The honey.

He rises and gets it from the cupboard.

WESSON: I wait on you, yet I want to bully you.

BARBARA: Yes, it's subtler than that.

WESSON: If you let me wait on you, you leave yourself in my hands.

BARBARA: Not a bit of it — not a bit of it! Do you think it makes any difference to me? Frederick would have waited on me on his knees.

WESSON: Then it's time somebody taught you you're not as great as you think. You imagine you're the one and only phoenix.

BARBARA (laughing): And I am, aren't I, Giacometti? Say I am.

WESSON: I say you're a pecky, scratchy one, at that rate.

BARBARA: No — no! Say I'm nice — say I'm ever so nice.

WESSON: On rare occasions.

BARBARA: Always — say always.

WESSON: It wouldn't be true.

BARBARA: Yes — yes, it would, Giacomo. See, I'm ever so nice, aren't I? I'm ever so nice! Look at my nice arms, how they love you.

WESSON: Better than you do.

BARBARA: No — not better than I do. Come and kiss them. Come and give them a little kiss.

WESSON (going and kissing her arms): You're cruel, if you're nothing else.

BARBARA: No, I'm not. Say I'm not. Kiss me!

WESSON, laughing shakily, kisses her — A voice is heard outside. "La posta."

WESSON: Oh, Lord, there's the postman — he's the serpent in my Eden.

VOICE: La posta!

WESSON goes to the door, re-enters with letters.

WESSON (tearing open an envelope): The serpent's left his venom.

BARBARA (making a frightened face): Is it Frederick?

WESSON: And your mother.

BARBARA: Oh dear! Gia, I can't stand it.

WESSON: Why not?

BARBARA: I can't stand it — I can't — poor Frederick. If he was ill, Giacomo?

WESSON: He'd have to get better.

BARBARA: He might die.

WESSON: He wouldn't be such a fool. What's up in your letter?

BARBARA (wiping her eyes): It seems so cruel!

WESSON: Your father's ill.

BARBARA (starting and snatching the letter from his hand): Papa!

She reads, crying quietly. WESSON sits waiting — he has read Frederick's letter.

BARBARA (looking up): Is he very ill, Giacomo?

WESSON: No.

BARBARA: They'll say it's me.

WESSON: Let 'em. It's the whisky, as a matter of fact.

BARBARA: Look how cruel mama is, "Your father is very ill, but he does not wish to see you while you continue your present mode of life. The doctor says he is to be spared all strain and anxiety."

WESSON: And they're thinking of going to Harrogate, so he's not at death's door.

BARBARA: And look at Frederick's letter — "Ever since you drove a spike into my brain, on February the 24th, I have been mad." Do you think he is mad, Giacomo?

WESSON: A bit, perhaps — but so were you when you lived with him — going clean cracked.

BARBARA: He won't commit suicide, will he?

WESSON: No — no more than I shall.

BARBARA (reading): "There are some nights when I never sleep at all — I try to work, but my brain has gone." (Shudders.)

WESSON: It is vile — but I can't help it. Think of the hell if you went back to him.

BARBARA (reading — laughs): “Do not speak of Wesson. I do not wish to hear of his existence, or to know that he exists. Only, if ever he crosses my path, I will crush him like a beetle.” How strong his feelings are!

WESSON: His words, you mean.

BARBARA: No, he is passionate — you don't know. And he can hate.

WESSON: He can sound like it.

BARBARA: But if he came here and killed you?

WESSON: I should offer myself to the knife, of course. I must practise being “dangerous” in readiness. (Puts a pointed kitchen knife between his teeth.) So!

BARBARA: Oh, you are lovely! (Laughs.) Let me kiss you. (He takes the knife from between his teeth — she kisses him.) Oh, the way he submits! Doesn't he like it, then?

WESSON: He likes it all right — but he's sick of this tragedy.

BARBARA: Are you tired of me, Giacomo?

WESSON: Tired of the mess we're in, that's all.

BARBARA: Do you want to be rid of me?

WESSON: I want to be sure of you.

BARBARA: Well, and you are. Do you think Frederick will ever let me go?

WESSON: You must insist on his divorcing you.

BARBARA: But I daren't, Giacomo, I daren't.

WESSON: You'd rather remain as we are?

BARBARA: No — no! Only he seems something so sure — you know — like when he said: “You have dishonoured our marriage vow, but I never will.”

WESSON: That's as he pleases.

BARBARA: But it's rather fine.

WESSON: He is fine, in a thousand ways where I'm not. But you never loved him.

BARBARA: No — I never loved him. Poor Frederick, it doesn't seem fair, does it?

WESSON: It does not. You were rottenly unfair to him.

BARBARA: In what way?

WESSON: Holding him cheap. Holding his love for you lightly, when it was the biggest thing about him.

BARBARA: Why did it never seem so much to me, till I'd left him?

WESSON: You hated him. While he could keep you, he felt a man — but you didn't mean to be kept — you tortured him — you fought against him — you undermined him — you were killing him.

BARBARA: Oh no — oh no! I never hated him. I did a lot for him.

WESSON: You, perhaps, had plenty of good-will towards him — but you tortured him like hell. You, with your kindness, are one of the cruellest things going.

BARBARA: How can you say so, Giacomo! Am I cruel to you?

WESSON: You are.

BARBARA (laughing): It seems to me only funny when you say I'm cruel — I,

who wouldn't hurt a fly.

WESSON: Then I wish I was a fly, and not a man.

BARBARA: Aw, did it be a man! — did it be a little man in trousers, then, did it!

WESSON: It did! — I think they're getting a bit impatient, your people. You'll see they'll combine forces just now to get you back.

BARBARA: Even if they did, I'd be gone again in three weeks.

WESSON: But if they got hold of the right handle, they'd get you back and keep you.

BARBARA: What handle?

WESSON: Oh, I dunno. Your pity, your self-sacrifice, your desire to be straight.

BARBARA: Self-sacrifice! There's a lot of self-sacrifice about me. (Laughs.) They'd find I don't work well with that handle.

WESSON: You don't know yourself. You keep them dangling.

BARBARA: Why do you hate me?

WESSON: Go to hell.

BARBARA (plaintive): Are you cross with me? But you are! (very plaintive). Why are you cross with me, Giacomo, when I love you?

WESSON: You — you only love yourself.

BARBARA: No, Giacometti, no, I don't. See how loving I am, really — see how unselfish I am —

WESSON: So unselfish you'd rob Peter to pay Paul, then go back to Peter to console him.

BARBARA: You're horrid to me.

WESSON: And you are worse to me.

BARBARA: But I'm not.

WESSON: Hm.

BARBARA (mocking him): "Hm!" — what common grunts! Kiss me (pleading): Don't you want to kiss me?

WESSON: No.

BARBARA (sadly): Aw!

WESSON (turning and taking her in his arms): You're a baggage.

BARBARA: Do you want to kiss me? (She draws back.)

WESSON: Resigned, I kiss the rod.

BARBARA: And am I the rod? Oh, Giacomo, think of me as a rod.

WESSON: You see if Frederick and your mother aren't up to some little trick just now.

BARBARA: I'm frightened, Giacomo.

WESSON: Then you're frightened of yourself, of your own hesitating, half-and-half, neither-fish-flesh-fowl — nor — good-red-herring self.

CURTAIN

ACT II

Evening, several days after the first act. The dining-room of the same villa — a rather large room, with piano, writing-desk and old furniture. In the big bay window, which looks over a garden on to the lake, is a large couch. BARBARA is lying on the couch. WESSON, without his collar and tie, sits beside her.

WESSON: You've got a nice chin.

BARBARA: Frederick used to adore it.

WESSON: Then he'd no business to.

BARBARA (putting her arms round his neck): Dear!

WESSON: Don't you wish there'd never been any Frederick — or anybody else —

BARBARA: Well, you haven't much room to talk; look what a mess your women had got you into.

WESSON: But don't you wish we could have come straight to each other, and been married simply, before we'd knocked about?

BARBARA: I don't trust marriage.

WESSON: Because you were stupid and married wrong — that's not the fault of marriage.

BARBARA: No — but I don't trust it.

WESSON: Folk are such fools, they should marry the right people.

BARBARA: Even when the right people are married, they go wrong.

WESSON: No — I don't believe it — and I don't believe you love me — and whether you do or not, I do love you.

BARBARA: Because you've decided to.

WESSON: Yes, because I know. I may hate you, I may rage against you, I may sneer at you — very well! It doesn't alter the fact that I love you.

BARBARA: It seems to me so queer, to make up your mind that you love anybody.

WESSON: You poke holes in me — well, I'll patch 'em up — I won't give in.

BARBARA: Oh — oh — the dear! He's on his nice little high horse, is he? Oh! — he should be on the roundabouts, on his wooden prancer!

WESSON: Or on a roundabout chicken.

BARBARA: And he looks so pathetic on his chicken — the dear. (Kisses him.)

WESSON: Will you stick to me, Barbara?

BARBARA: Oh, did it want to be stuck to? It shall then — Oh, it's nice hair!

WESSON: Till death do us part —

BARBARA: Aw, is it talking about death, is it — aw!

WESSON: It's ten-past-six. What train did your mother say — the five-to-six?

BARBARA (starting): No, half-past seven.

WESSON: The six train has just gone.

BARBARA: Are you frightened?

WESSON: No — no — I'm not frightened. Only we're rather raw, really, about the business. It seems funny that we're a scandal.

BARBARA: Doesn't it!

WESSON: I'll go and look if I can see anybody, shall I?

BARBARA: Yes! Kiss me first. (He kisses her.)

Exit WESSON. BARBARA sits up straightening her hair. She is in Bavarian peasant dress, with bare arms and throat. WESSON comes running in.

WESSON: I don't think it's she — but there is a woman —

BARBARA: Good gracious — and look at us! (She flies out — her voice is heard, excited): yes — it's she. Quick!

WESSON: Well, I must get my collar on first.

In a great flurry, he ties his tie, then runs out. The stage is empty. Then voices are heard.

VOICE OF BARBARA: Poor Mama!

They both laugh — there is silence. The door-bell rings loudly. BARBARA rushes in and stands near the door. WESSON is heard outside.

VOICE OF WESSON: Oh, how do you do! This is earlier than we thought.

VOICE OF LADY CHARLCOTE: How do you do, Mr Wesson?

Enter LADY CHARLCOTE — about sixty — white hair, shortish, stout, rather handsome — looks resentful — uglily dressed.

BARBARA: Oh — Mama!

Runs forward, laughing shakily — does not kiss — takes her mother's hand — then stands embarrassed.

LADY CHARLCOTE (looking round): Yes —

BARBARA: Take your things off —

LADY CHARLCOTE: But I mustn't stay — I mustn't stay. (Taking off her gloves — nervous.) I want to say to you, Mr Wesson, why don't you do something for Barbara?

WESSON (astonished): But I do.

LADY CHARLCOTE: But you don't. A married woman, and you keep her here with you as she is. It is wrong, quite wrong.

WESSON: But you don't know — you don't understand.

LADY CHARLCOTE: Yes, yes, I do understand. It is you who don't understand. What right have you to do it? Barbara has a husband in England, a good honest gentleman, who is going mad because of her. She is here, but she can go back.

BARBARA: But, Mama, what I do, I do of myself. (She is crocheting nervously.)

LADY CHARLCOTE: Yes. (Turning to WESSON.) You have not got even enough money to keep her. She has to have money from her sister, from her friends. She is the daughter of a high-born and highly cultured gentleman.

BARBARA: But if I choose to do it, Mama, it is my own affair.

LADY CHARLCOTE: No, it isn't. Think of your father — think of Frederick. (Turning to WESSON.) And do you expect to build up happiness on the ruins of this life? You cannot. Think of your future. You can do nothing with my daughter. You can't put her in her own station, you can't even give her an honest name. Is she to live with you, and take money from her husband and her friends?

WESSON: She needn't take any money from anybody.

LADY CHARLCOTE: And you say you will live here. You try it for six months, Mr Wesson, and you will wish yourself dead, you will find it so dull.

And Barbara is to be the servant, and she is to have no friends, no, not a friend in the world, but is to live buried here among these common Italians. Another man's wedding ring and engagement ring on her finger at this minute. The very bills of her last dresses left for her husband to pay.

BARBARA: But, Mama, I'm not a horse that is to be kept. You don't consider me.

LADY CHARLCOTE: Yes, it is you I consider. How can any man say he loves you, when he brings you into this shame. Where will you live?

WESSON: But if there were a divorce —

LADY CHARLCOTE (to him): You think only of yourself. Think of her father. He is getting old now. Where will he go, that he can hold his head up. It is a shame that will kill him. It will kill everybody. (Beginning to cry — looking in her handbag for a hanky.) We are old, and hoped to live at last in peace. Haven't we had trouble enough in our lives? And how can I sleep at night, thinking of my daughter, and what is to become of her. Her father does not want to see her again. (Cries.) There is no rest, and no peace. Her husband comes, and it nearly kills me to see the state he is in. A woman — what is to become of her, what is to become of her. And you keep her here.

WESSON: No — I don't keep her.

LADY CHARLCOTE: Yes, you keep her here — the daughter of a highly cultured gentleman, as your mistress. It is impossible. And her husband is so good. He will have her back in spite of all, and everything can be hushed up —

BARBARA: I don't want things to be hushed up. What I do I want to be done openly —

LADY CHARLCOTE: Don't be a fool — you can't live on ideas.

WESSON: No — I don't want people to talk —

LADY CHARLCOTE: But they will talk. Sir William and I have come out here because they've started — and his heart so bad! We expect to be considered by our children, but they turn on us. It's not natural that we should have all this

trouble now, when we're not expecting it. Everything begins to look comfortable, and Barbara so well settled, when this happens. As her mother, as a woman older than yourself, I've got to tell you it's wrong, absolutely wrong, and can only end in sorrow. You will see in a few years' time where you will be. It is my duty to warn you. And you must let Barbara go back with me.

WESSON shakes his head — BARBARA crochets nervously — there is silence.

BARBARA: Has Papa come with you, then?

LADY CHARLCOTE: Yes — we're staying a month with Laura in Gardone.

WESSON (rising): Let me give you something to eat.

LADY CHARLCOTE: No — no — I must be going at once. I must be going. It's such a long way to the station.

WESSON: Excuse me.

Exit WESSON.

BARBARA (quietly): How does Frederick look?

LADY CHARLCOTE: Oh, poor fellow! If you saw him, you could never do it.

BARBARA (bending her head over her work): Is he ill?

LADY CHARLCOTE: Ill! — poor fellow! He is three parts mad! And he loves you, Barbara, he loves you! How can you throw away the love of a man like that?

BARBARA: Does he really want me, or does he want his reputation — or rather mine.

LADY CHARLCOTE: Poor fellow — such a position to leave him in. And has he ever been anything but good to you? You have had everything you wanted —

BARBARA: I haven't. He has been good to me — I wish he hadn't, it would have been easier. He has been good to me, and he's given me everything he

could. But I haven't had what I wanted, no, and he couldn't give it me.

LADY CHARLCOTE: And do you mean that this man can?

BARBARA crochets in silence — they wait for each other.

BARBARA: Will it kill him?

LADY CHARLCOTE: I tell him, at this rate he won't live long.

Enter WESSON with a tray, wine, biscuits, bread and butter.

WESSON: Will you have a glass of wine — it's "vin de pays", but it's — at any rate, it's all right for me, though I'm no connoisseur.

LADY CHARLCOTE: No, thank you.

WESSON: Could I make you a cup of tea?

LADY CHARLCOTE: Oh no, thank you very much.

BARBARA: Is Papa in Gardone?

LADY CHARLCOTE: In Brescia — but he doesn't want to see you. Oh, thank you — But he expects you to come back in a proper state of mind — I think it's all you can do, to make the best of it now. This is impossible. (Neither of them answers.) And we are staying at the Monte Baldo. You will write to me, Barbara.

BARBARA: Yes. Good-bye, Mama. (They shake hands.)

LADY CHARLCOTE: Good-bye. (To WESSON): Oh, don't you trouble to come out.

WESSON: I think it is no good for Barbara to go back to Frederick. It would only be misery for them both. They can't —

Exit talking. BARBARA remains alone. Her hands fall in her lap, and she broods. There is sound of a carriage — re-enter WESSON — he flings his cap on the table. When BARBARA hears him coming she picks up her crocheting.

When he enters she looks up with a laugh.

BARBARA: Poor Mama — always full of commonsense. She was always a good one at showing the sensible side of the affair. But didn't it seem common to you — like any of the women of the common people you've told me about?

WESSON: Just. Only it's natural. At any rate she wasn't lofty.

BARBARA: Oh no — Mama would never have been that. She would have said just the same to a Grand Duke.

WESSON: She wouldn't — look at the money business. You don't need any of their money — we can live on what I earn.

BARBARA: And I don't mind making your bed. I wouldn't do it for any man — no, I wouldn't. But I don't mind.

WESSON: If I can't give you much money, well, I give you everything I've got.

BARBARA: Yes, it was mean of her, bringing that up — it's like kicking a man when he's down.

WESSON: But I suppose anybody would do it. She doesn't seem superior, that's one thing. But I hate them! Why can't they leave us alone! What do I care what the old Mrs Baronet says.

BARBARA (laughing): You looked as if you didn't care — the way you sat in that chair. (Imitates him, half crouching.)

WESSON: Well — that coming all at once —

BARBARA: When we'd been so happy — yes, it was a bit overwhelming!

WESSON: I thought the heavens had opened and the last day come.

BARBARA: You looked it — the way you sat crumpled up in that chair. (Laughs.)

WESSON: What could I do?

BARBARA (laughing): You looked so frightened, so crumpled up! I expected you every minute to wither away into nothing. (Laughs uncontrollably) I thought there'd be nothing left of you (interrupted by her laughter). You — you seemed to get less and less — till — (helpless with laughter) I thought you'd be gone. (laughing) I was frightened — I wanted to get hold of your coat-tails (laugh) to keep you.

WESSON: Well, what could I do?

BARBARA: I thought you were going to creep under that desk. (Shaking and helpless with laughter, she points to the hole under the writing desk, by which he sits.) I thought you were going to crawl inside like a dog into a kennel (helpless laughter) and pop your head out, and look sideways at her, and say “Yap — yap” in a little, frightened voice — then rush inside.

WESSON: Well — if she'd been a man, I might have shouted — but what else could I do?

BARBARA: You looked so crumpled up, with your little tail between your legs. (Laughs.) You did want to get into that corner. (Laughs helplessly — then rises.) Mind, let me show you. (Laughing, she almost falls to the floor, then creeps inside the space under the desk — pokes out her head — falls face forward on the floor with laughter — lifts up her face, peering sideways.) Yap — yap yap! Yap! — the little dog! (She shrieks with laughter — he giggles from time to time — she rises again.)

WESSON: No — I wasn't as bad as that.

BARBARA (shrieking): You were, you were! I thought I should have died. And every minute I had visions of you collapsing under the desk and barking at Mama. (Laughing.) Poor Mama, what would she have done if you had?

WESSON: I wish I had.

BARBARA: I wish you had, I wish you had! (Drying her eyes.) But no, you sat there getting less and less. You can go so little, like a dying pig.

WESSON: Well, you were impressed, you know you were.

BARBARA: I wasn't — I wanted to scream. Why didn't you suddenly get up and flap your arms like a cockerel and crow?

WESSON: But what good would it have done?

BARBARA: It would have been so beautiful. Or you might have got astride on a chair and gone riding round the room, shouting.

WESSON: I might have done a lot of things.

BARBARA: Oh, you might, and you did nothing but crumple up! What a pity! (Beginning to laugh again.) You looked anything but a hero that time.

WESSON: I didn't feel a hero. And if I'd crowed like a cock I shouldn't have looked a hero.

BARBARA: Mama little thought what havoc she'd work in our little ménage. (Laughing.) But why do you take it so seriously?

WESSON: I don't take it seriously, but I reckon it's rather rotten of her. We thought she was coming friendlily, to help. . . . What will you eat?

BARBARA: I don't mind a bit.

WESSON (drinking wine): Drink?

BARBARA: Thank you. (She drinks a little.)

WESSON: I told her the only thing possible was a divorce.

BARBARA: You know what a muddler she is. She blows with every wind.

WESSON: I don't care how she blows, so long as we can get that divorce.

BARBARA: If she goes and gets Frederick's back up now, God knows when you'll get it, I tell you.

WESSON: I don't care — they can all go to hell! But until you stand up in front

of me and say, “I want definitely to go back to Frederick — you’re no good to me”, I shall tell them to go to blazes.

BARBARA: It looks as if you’ll tell them a lot. Poor little dog, is his tail coming up again? Come here and be kissed.

WESSON: I don’t want to be kissed. Will you eat now?

BARBARA: Just as you like.

WESSON: A tray is ready.

Goes out — returns immediately with the supper tray.

BARBARA: Poor Frederick — it does twist my inside to think about him.

WESSON: And a lot of good may it do you.

BARBARA: Do you think he really might go mad?

WESSON: Not unless he’s weak-minded to start with.

BARBARA: Well, he isn’t — his mind is stronger than yours, if it came to it.

WESSON (rather ashamed): I know he’s not — and he won’t go mad.

BARBARA: But he loves me so. (Plaintively.)

WESSON: He should have more sense, then, for you don't love him.

BARBARA: But I do, Giacomo.

WESSON: Very well, you do, then.

BARBARA: And I can't bear him to suffer.

WESSON: You made him suffer worse underneath, twisting your spear in his secret wound, before you left him, than you do now that it's open. He can doctor an open wound. A secret one drives him mad.

BARBARA: But I didn't torture him. I was a joy to him. And think of it, Giacomo, I was the only joy he'd ever had in his life.

WESSON: And the only sorrow.

BARBARA: Why do you want to say horrid things about me?

WESSON: I don't.

BARBARA: But you do! Look, you say I tortured Frederick.

WESSON: So you did. So you torture me.

BARBARA: But how? — tell me how, Giacomo.

WESSON: You needn't laugh at me when I'm feeling a fool.

BARBARA: You hate me, Giacomo.

WESSON: Does it please you?

BARBARA: Why should it please me? Why should it please me, Giacomo?

WESSON: It appears to. You seem to exult.

BARBARA: I exult because you wither away when Mama scolds you! I assure you I don't exult in your heroic appearance then.

WESSON: I don't ask you to.

BARBARA: What does he want then — does he want me to fall at his feet and worship him, does he then? (She does so — goes on her knees at his feet, puts her forehead to the ground — raises it up and down — in a consoling, mocking voice.) La — di-da — di-da! — did it want to be worshipped?

WESSON (seizing her by the arm): Get up, you lunatic.

BARBARA: But don't you like to be worshipped?

WESSON (gripping her arm): Get up.

She rises slowly — he grips both her arms.

You love! You love only yourself!

BARBARA (putting her tongue out at him): Tra — la-la — la!

WESSON: Yes.

BARBARA: Tra — la-la — la! (He remains holding her — she says, almost pleading): Let me go.

WESSON: I won't.

BARBARA: I'll make you.

WESSON: Try!

BARBARA: I will!

WESSON: Try! (A moment of silence.)

BARBARA (subduedly): You hurt my arms.

WESSON (through his teeth): And why shouldn't I?

BARBARA: Don't be horrid.

WESSON puts his arms round her, fastens her close.

WESSON: Oh, you're not faithful to me!

His voice is like a cry. He reaches forward, his mouth to her throat.

BARBARA (thickly): I am.

CURTAIN

ACT III

SCENE I

Morning, the next day. BARBARA in walking-out dress, WESSON in an old jacket.

BARBARA: What time did the man say Mama would be here?

WESSON: I understood she would come for you in a carriage at ten o'clock.

BARBARA: And did she really say you mustn't come?

WESSON: She said she wished to drive alone with you.

BARBARA: Put your coat on and come, too.

WESSON: No — perhaps she wants to talk to you, and to have you to herself a bit. It's natural. You needn't do anything that you don't want to do.

BARBARA: Why should she ask me for a drive without you? It's like her impudence — I won't go!

WESSON: Yes, you'd better.

BARBARA: You'd say I'd better do any miserable thing they liked to ask me.

WESSON: Alright.

BARBARA: Why don't you say I oughtn't to go for a drive with Mama without you?

WESSON: Because I don't care — your mother can use all her persuasions and reasons till she's sick of it.

BARBARA: But why should she?

WESSON: It's probably the shortest way, if we stick to ourselves all through.

BARBARA: A fine lot of sticking to yourself you do, don't you? Think of the shrivelling creature whom Mama scolded yesterday.

WESSON: I was true to myself, then — and to you.

BARBARA: Were you — were you! Then I'll have another kind of fidelity, thank you.

WESSON: You won't. And now you'd better go.

BARBARA: Go!

WESSON: For your drive. You'll find Lady Charlcote before you get to the Piazza.

BARBARA: And if I don't choose to?

WESSON (shrugging): You'll please yourself.

BARBARA: Tra — la-la — la!

WESSON: I wish you'd go.

BARBARA: Why do you wish I'd go? I will, then.

Exit — the door is heard to bang. WESSON watches her.

WESSON: There goes the carriage, and the old lady. I should like to murder the twopence-ha'penny lot of them, with their grizzling and whining and chuffing. If they'd leave us alone we should be alright — damn them! Miserable bits of shouters! My mother was worth a million of 'em, for they've none of 'em the backbone of a flea — She doesn't want to stick to me — she doesn't want to love me — she won't let herself love me. She wants to save some rotten rag of independence — she's afraid to let herself go and to belong to me.

He goes to the sideboard, drinks wine, looks at a book, throws it down, plays a dozen chords on the piano, gets up, drinks more wine, sits down to write, and remains perfectly still, as if transfixed — all the time he has moved quietly — the door-bell rings — he does not hear — it rings louder — he starts up and goes to the door — is heard saying, "How do you do? Will you come in?" Enter SIR WILLIAM CHARLCOTE — short, stout, a gentleman — grey bristling moustache.

WESSON: Will you sit down?

SIR WILLIAM (taking a seat near the door): Thank you.

WESSON (offering cigarettes in a threepenny packet): Excuse the packet.

SIR WILLIAM: Thank you, I have some of my own.

WESSON throws the packet on the table and sits on the couch.

WESSON: It's a nice day.

SIR WILLIAM: Yes. (Clearing his throat.) I called to hear from yourself an account of what you intend to do.

WESSON (knitting his fingers): I intend to do nothing but what I am doing.

SIR WILLIAM: And what is that?

WESSON: Living here — working —

SIR WILLIAM: And keeping my daughter under the present conditions?

WESSON: Barbara stays as long as she will. I am here for her while she wants me.

SIR WILLIAM: But you have no right to be here for her to want.

WESSON: But I say, while ever she wants me, I am here for her.

SIR WILLIAM: Don't you see that is cowardly and base.

WESSON: Is it the morality of it you want to discuss?

SIR WILLIAM: Yes — yes — it is the right of it. You may perhaps think I have no room to talk. That is like your damned impudence.

WESSON: But that's not the point.

SIR WILLIAM: A man has a right to any woman whom he can get, so long as she's not a married woman. Go with all the unmarried women you like. But touch a married woman, and you are a scoundrel.

WESSON: So!

SIR WILLIAM: It destroys the whole family system, and strikes at the whole of society. A man who does it is as much a criminal as a thief, a burglar, or even a murderer. You see my point?

WESSON: Your point of view.

SIR WILLIAM: You see so much. Then you see what you are doing: a criminal act against the State, against the rights of man altogether, against Dr Tressider, and against my daughter.

WESSON: So!

SIR WILLIAM: And seeing that, only an — only a criminal by conviction can continue in what he is doing — a fellow who deserves to be locked up.

WESSON: If life went according to deserts.

SIR WILLIAM: If you intend to behave in the least like a man, you will clear out of this place —

WESSON: I've got the house on a six months' lease.

SIR WILLIAM: I will pay the lease.

WESSON: It is paid — but I like the place, and prefer to stay.

SIR WILLIAM: That is, you will continue to keep my daughter in — in — in this shame and scandal —

WESSON: She chooses to stay.

SIR WILLIAM: If plain reasoning will not convince you, we must try other methods.

WESSON: Very well.

SIR WILLIAM: You — whom I thought to be doing a service by asking you to

my house —

The bell rings.

WESSON (rising): Excuse me a moment.

Exit — voices — enter BARBARA, followed by LADY CHARLCOTE and WESSON.

BARBARA: Papa!

SIR WILLIAM: I came to speak with this man.

BARBARA: But why behind my back?

SIR WILLIAM: I will come when I like. I will not have women, and especially women like you, about me when I have anything to say.

BARBARA: Nor more will I have men like you interfering with my affairs behind my back, Papa!

LADY CHARLCOTE: For shame, Barbara.

BARBARA (turning, flashing): What right has he to come bullying Wesson behind my back. I came away with him — it was I who suggested he should come to Italy with me when I was coming to see Laura. So when you have anything to say, Papa, say it to me — if you dare.

SIR WILLIAM: Dare! Dare!

BARBARA: Whom are you talking to, Papa — and you of all people! I did not love Frederick, and I won't live with him — so there — and you may go.

SIR WILLIAM (picking up his hat): I never want to see you again.

LADY CHARLCOTE: Barbara, you should respect your father.

BARBARA: Mama — you — you — then let him respect me, and the man I live with.

Exit SIR WILLIAM.

LADY CHARLCOTE: What has he said?

WESSON: It does not matter.

LADY CHARLCOTE: Well — now you must make the best of your own affairs — for you've cut off all your own people from you, Barbara.

BARBARA: I have not cut myself off — it's you who have left me in the lurch. I was miserable with Frederick. I felt I couldn't stand it. You would have helped me to have had lovers, Mama. But because I come away decently and openly you all turn on me.

LADY CHARLCOTE: You know it is impossible —

BARBARA: Very well, I will be impossible!

LADY CHARLCOTE: I shall never leave you in the lurch. (Crying.) You are my daughter, whatever happens.

Exit — WESSON hurries to the door after her — it is heard to close — he returns.

BARBARA: Why do you let them trample on you? Why do you play the poor worm? It drives me mad!

WESSON: But you don't want me to insult your father.

BARBARA: But why do you let yourself be bullied and treated like dirt?

WESSON: I don't.

BARBARA: You do — you do — and I hate you for it.

WESSON: Very well. (She sits down on the couch, twisting her handkerchief. He seats himself beside her and takes her hand.) Never mind, they'll get over it.

BARBARA: Papa won't — and I have loved him so.

WESSON: He will.

BARBARA: He won't! Oh, but I hate him — a mean funkler! But he always was a funkler. He had his Selma on the sly, and when Mama found him out — it positively broke him. What did he say to you?

WESSON: He explained his point of view, which seems to me perfectly logical.

BARBARA: And I suppose you agreed with him?

WESSON: No; I didn't agree with him — only I understood.

BARBARA: And you cringed to him, I know you did.

WESSON: I don't think so.

BARBARA: And now they've left me.

WESSON: Never mind — they can slam at us, but we can stand it.

BARBARA: But it's so horrible — and I have to fight for you, as if you weren't a man.

WESSON: I don't think you have any need.

BARBARA: Yes, but I have — and all the burden falls on me — you don't take your share.

WESSON: Surely I do! Never mind, I know it's horrid for you. But you will stick to me, won't you?

BARBARA: I didn't think it would be so hard — I have to fight you, and them, and everybody. Not a soul in the world gives me the tiniest bit of help.

WESSON: That's only because you feel rotten. I love you, Barbara.

BARBARA: Doesn't it make you hate me, all this horridness?

WESSON: Why should it? I don't care what comes, so that we get a little closer.

BARBARA: But it's worth it, isn't it, Giacomo? — say I'm worth it.

WESSON (putting his arms round her and kissing her): You're the only thing in life and in the world that I've got — you are.

BARBARA: Are you sure?

WESSON: I've got my work, which isn't life. Then there's nothing else but you — not a thing — and if you leave me — well, I've done.

BARBARA: How do you mean, done?

WESSON: Only my effort at life. I shall feel as if I had made my big effort — put all my money down — and lost. The only thing remaining would be to go on and make the best of it.

BARBARA: I suppose that's how Frederick feels.

WESSON: I suppose it is — if only he would get a grip on and try to make the best of it.

BARBARA: But it's not so easy.

WESSON: No, it isn't, poor devil. But if he's got to do it, he may as well.

BARBARA: Oh, do you love me enough, Giacomo?

WESSON: I love you enough for whatever you want me for.

BARBARA: Sure?

WESSON: Sure! The question is, do you love me enough?

BARBARA: I love you better than you love me.

WESSON: Take your hat off, I can't kiss you.

BARBARA (obediently removing her hat): Mama told me Papa was coming — I was furious, it seemed such a mean dodge. They are mean, though, and sordid. Did he say horrid things to you?

WESSON: He said he'd thrash me.

BARBARA (laughing): Fancy little Papa!

WESSON: Are you miserable? Are you sorry you're done out of your drive?

BARBARA: No, I'm thankful to be back with you. If only they left us in peace, we could be so happy.

WESSON: They seem to grudge it us, don't they?

BARBARA: Yes! And Mama says perhaps Frederick's coming.

WESSON: At any rate we s'll have had 'em all, then.

BARBARA: But I couldn't bear to see him, Giacomo!

WESSON: Then don't see him.

BARBARA: But he might do something mad.

WESSON: Let him.

BARBARA: No — I couldn't bear it. I couldn't bear it if anything happened to him.

WESSON: Why should anything happen to him?

BARBARA: And what would he do if he saw me? Would he go quite mad?

WESSON: You're not such a magical person as all that.

BARBARA: But you don't know him.

WESSON: Quite sufficiently.

BARBARA: Isn't it funny — when I was first engaged to him, and was reading Othello, I thought what a good Othello he'd make, better than the real one.

WESSON: You feel sure he'll slay you, poor Desdemona.

BARBARA (laughing): Yes — he's so Othelloish.

WESSON: And you so Desdemoniacal, aren't you?

BARBARA (laughing): What does that mean?

WESSON: It means you sit sighing by a sycamore tree, you poor soul.

BARBARA (kissing him): O, I love you!

WESSON: Do you?

CURTAIN

SCENE II

Evening of the same day, WESSON sits alone, writing. Enter BARBARA, resplendent in an evening dress, with ornament in her hair. She stands in the doorway, looking across at herself in a mirror.

BARBARA: You've never seen me in this before. (He looks up — puts his pen between his teeth — she preens herself.)

WESSON (after a moment): I hate it.

BARBARA (hurt): But why? — I look nice. Don't I look nice?

WESSON: I hate it — I hate it — you belong to those others in it.

BARBARA: But how nasty of you, Giacometti! It's only the dress — the woman is just the same.

WESSON: She's not. She's according to her frock, which is Frederick's. You put it on for Frederick, not for me.

BARBARA: I didn't. I want you to see how grand I can look. Don't you really think I look nice?

WESSON: No — I'd rather see you in your kitchen pinafore.

BARBARA: See how you want to drag me down. But you've got an evening suit. (Laughing): Does it really hurt you? (Sits down and begins to play a dance on the piano — it is the "Blue Danube" — she breaks off.) It's the dearest dress I ever had.

WESSON: Take it off, Barbara.

BARBARA (slowing down — she is very quiet): Yes.

Rises — exit slowly. He sits chewing his pen — in a moment she rushes back, lays her hands on his shoulder.

BARBARA: There's Frederick!

WESSON: Rubbish! — Where?

BARBARA: At the gate — with Mama — I saw them from the bedroom

window.

LADY CHARLCOTE'S voice is heard calling "Barbara!"

BARBARA: Quick! I'll call to them from the window I'm coming — I will —
(Moves to the window.)

WESSON: What's the good? Let them go away again.

BARBARA: I'll call now —

WESSON: Damn!

He moves grudgingly to the door.

BARBARA stands with her hands clasped over her bare breast, terrified — listening. The gate is heard to bang open — voices — enter FREDERICK, alone — a haggard, handsome man of forty, brown moustache, dark brown eyes, greying at the temples. He hesitates at the door.

FREDERICK (ironically): May I come in?

BARBARA (frightened): What do you want?

FREDERICK: Merely permission to speak to you.

BARBARA: You know you may speak to me.

They hesitate — enter WESSON, followed by LADY CHARLCOTE.

WESSON: Barbara, do you want me to go with Lady Charlcote to the Hotel Cervo for half an hour?

BARBARA: I don't know. (Sinks on to the couch.)

WESSON: You must tell me to go.

DR TRESSIDER looks at him sideways and shows his teeth, but does not speak — BARBARA watches the two men in terror.

BARBARA: Perhaps you'd better go — Mama can stay with me.

LADY CHARLCOTE: I think Frederick has the right to speak to you alone, Barbara.

BARBARA (almost whispering): But why — ?

FREDERICK: Are you afraid that I may abduct you?

LADY CHARLCOTE: No, Frederick, I don't think it is fair to leave her alone with you.

FREDERICK (nastily): Don't you? Perhaps it isn't safe —

LADY CHARLCOTE: You might not be responsible for what you did.

FREDERICK: So the only place for me is the lunatic asylum.

BARBARA: If you are like that, Frederick, I don't know what you can want to speak to me at all for.

FREDERICK: It is a question for surprise.

BARBARA: I'd much rather you did treat me as dirt, and left me alone.

WESSON: Will you sit down, Lady Charlcote?

FREDERICK (to WESSON): Will you please take yourself away, while I speak to my wife?

BARBARA: Yes, go, Wesson.

LADY CHARLCOTE: I would go for a few minutes, Mr Wesson. It can't do you any harm. Things will settle themselves then.

WESSON (to BARBARA): Must I?

BARBARA: Only to the — to one of the other rooms.

WESSON: I'll go to the bedroom, then.

Exit sullenly.

FREDERICK (taking a seat): I'm glad you look so well, Barbara.

LADY CHARLCOTE: You won't do any good that way, Frederick.

FREDERICK (turning slowly to her): Perhaps you'll tell me what to say!

LADY CHARLCOTE: You needn't behave like a fool, at any rate.

BARBARA: I'm afraid you've been ill, Frederick.

FREDERICK: Yes — I am ill! I am glad to see you are so well.

BARBARA: Don't, Frederick — what is the good of this — what is the good of it? Let us make the best we can now —

FREDERICK: Exactly!

BARBARA: Then the only sane thing would be to say what you came to say and let us get it over.

FREDERICK: I came for your instructions, of course.

BARBARA: It seems rather stupid, don't you think?

FREDERICK: I've no doubt I always was stupid — a trusting fool —

BARBARA: You know it wasn't like that. Do you really wish to speak to me?

FREDERICK: Yes, I think I can honestly say I do. It, no doubt, surprises you.

BARBARA: Then for God's sake don't torture me any longer.

FREDERICK: It would be a pity! But what I have to say I have to say to my wife, not to the world at large, or even to my mother-in-law, or your paramour.

BARBARA: Perhaps you had better leave us alone, Mama.

FREDERICK: Hadn't you better consider again, Barbara? Wouldn't that be giving me too much encouragement? I might take a liberty. I might even ask you to gallivant with me, like a seductive footman, or dustman. (There is silence.)

LADY CHARLCOTE: I can go into another room. (Making signs to BARBARA.) Where can I go, Barbara?

BARBARA rises — they go out together — FREDERICK looks round — gnaws the ends of his moustache. Re-enter BARBARA — she leaves the door open — he glances, sees it, but makes no remark.

BARBARA (taking her former seat): Mama is in my bedroom.

FREDERICK: Anything to say to me?

BARBARA: Don't be horrid with me, Frederick. I know I deserve it —

FREDERICK: I'll try not to be. (He sits devouring her with his eyes.) You're in full-dress tonight, madam! Was it a great occasion?

BARBARA: No — I put it on — it's the first time.

FREDERICK: You look the thing in it. I turned up to see you on your mettle, by good luck.

BARBARA: Don't.

FREDERICK: Beautiful good luck. War-paint, I suppose!

BARBARA: You told me once you'd never be hard on a woman.

FREDERICK: I'm sorry if I'm hard on you — that would be unjust!

BARBARA: Don't talk like that — Frederick.

FREDERICK: What shall we talk about — you or me?

BARBARA: Tell me about yourself —

FREDERICK: Ha! — how I suffered, you mean?

BARBARA: I know it's been awful for you.

FREDERICK: Do you really — I shouldn't have thought it.

BARBARA: Oh, but I do! It's nearly driven me cracked sometimes.

FREDERICK: Ha! It was kind of you.

BARBARA (going forward impulsively and putting her hand on his knee):
Don't —

FREDERICK: I won't — but tell me what — I must —

BARBARA: Don't be like this — I can't bear it.

FREDERICK: You might tell me what you can bear.

BARBARA: Why can't you cast me off — why can't you find some other woman — there's Annabel, who adores you — or Lizzie Burroughs —

FREDERICK: You think they'd make good successors to you?

BARBARA: You might love them better than me — you might! See, I was not faithful to you.

FREDERICK (laughing): I wouldn't rub it in, if I were you.

BARBARA (frightened): But I'm not!

FREDERICK: So you think I might do well to marry again?

BARBARA: I thought — I can't bear — to think of you being lonely.

FREDERICK: And you'd give me a wedding present, I dare say, and give the

woman advice how to fool me.

BARBARA: No — no — I won't let you say these things —

FREDERICK: I dare say. You were wasted on me, weren't you?

BARBARA: You were good to me — but you never understood me —

FREDERICK: I'm sorry! I understood you wanted a decent life, and I worked hard for you. I understood you wanted some amusement — you did exactly as you liked — you had everything I had — and had your own way. I was faithful to you from the day I saw you — and before that. You might have called me a model husband. I suppose that was my fault.

BARBARA (crying): No — it wasn't your fault to be a good husband — that's why I love you still — in a way — you were so good to me — but — you weren't near to me —

FREDERICK: I think I was as near as ever you'd let me come.

BARBARA: No — no — can't you remember — when we were first married — I thought marriage would be a jolly thing — I thought I could have lovely games with the man. Can you remember, when I climbed to the top of the cupboard, in Lucerne? I thought you'd look for me, and laugh, and fetch me down. No, you were terrified. You daren't even come in the room. You stood in the door looking frightened to death. And I climbed down. And that's how it always was. I had to climb down.

FREDERICK: And so you left me?

BARBARA: Yes! I couldn't live with you.

FREDERICK: Because I didn't drag you by the ankle from the cupboard tops!

BARBARA: Yes — that's it.

FREDERICK: And how long did it take you to find this out?

BARBARA: You know very well that I was only introduced to Wesson about a

month before — you knew all about it.

FREDERICK: And may I inquire after the predecessors of this clown?

BARBARA: Yourself.

FREDERICK: I enjoy that honour alone, do I — with the miserable clown —

BARBARA: You were not going to speak of him.

FREDERICK: And pray, when did you find out then that I had not — not found the real you.

BARBARA: The first night of our marriage — when I stood on that balcony and wanted to drown myself — and you were asleep.

FREDERICK: And afterwards — I suppose you forgot it?

BARBARA: Sometimes. You were good to me — and I didn't think then there could be anything else.

FREDERICK: Than what?

BARBARA: Than going on as I was — as your wife.

FREDERICK: And you never loved me?

BARBARA: Sometimes — when you were so nice to me —

FREDERICK: Out of gratitude, as it were, and feeling you ought to love me.

BARBARA: I always felt I ought to love you.

FREDERICK: But could never bring it off. Ha! — thank you for the try, at any rate.

BARBARA: And of course sometimes I hated you.

FREDERICK: Naturally.

BARBARA: And now it's over.

FREDERICK: As you say — it's over.

There is a long silence.

FREDERICK (in a sudden outburst): Woman, do you know I've given my life to you? Do you know, everything I did, everything I thought, everywhere I went, was for you? I have worked till I reeled, I was so tired. I have been your slave —

BARBARA: That's it — I didn't want you to be my slave —

FREDERICK: I — I — I have done everything. How often have I asked you, "What do you want of me?" Why didn't you tell me then? Why didn't you say? Why have you deceived me all this while, letting me think you loved me?

BARBARA: I didn't deceive you; (crying) I didn't know myself.

FREDERICK: How many times have you had your arms round my neck, and said, "Do you love me?" — I might well answer, "Malheureusement." What was that but deceit —

BARBARA: It wasn't lying to you, Frederick — you did love me, and I wanted you to love me —

FREDERICK: What right had you to want me to love you, when you cared not a couple of straws about me?

BARBARA: I did want you to love me — you were all I had —

FREDERICK: Until another came along, and then you threw my love away like a piece of dirty paper wrapping.

BARBARA: No — no — I didn't!

FREDERICK: What else have you done? You have thrown me away like a bit of paper off a parcel. You got all the goods out of the packet, and threw me away — I gave you everything, my life, everything, and it is not worth the stump of a

cigarette, when it comes to — I tell you, this is the end of me. I could work then, but now my brain has gone.

BARBARA: No, Frederick, no — you will work again.

FREDERICK: I tell you I can no more work now than you can row a boat when you have lost the oars. I am done for — as a man you see me here a ruin. Some nights I sleep, some nights I never close my eyes. I force myself to keep sane. But in the end my brain will go — and then I shall make an end —

BARBARA (going over to him, kneeling with her hand on his knee, crying): No — no, Frederick — no — no!

FREDERICK: Then I shall go to Wood Norton — do you remember, where I saw you first — a girl of eighteen with a sash? I shall go to that pine wood where the little grove of larches is, and I shall make an end.

BARBARA (her head on his knee — weeping): Oh, what can I do — what can I do?

FREDERICK: I've no doubt it all sounds very melodramatic — but it's the truth for me. Then your work will be finished. I have loved you. I would have spilt my blood on every paving stone in Bromley for you, if you had wanted me to —

BARBARA: But I didn't want you to. I wanted you to come near to me and make me yours and you be mine. But you went on worshipping me instead of loving me — kissing my feet instead of helping me. You put me on a pedestal, and I was miserable.

FREDERICK: And you never loved me all the time!

BARBARA: I did love you — I did love you!

FREDERICK (his fists clenched — shuddering): I could strangle you!

BARBARA (terrified): Don't — don't — I shall scream! (She gets up afraid and draws back. He gets hold of one of her arms.)

FREDERICK: You devil — you devil — you devil! But you belong to me, do

you hear? — you belong to me!

BARBARA (pushing him away): Don't — don't — let me go — I shall call Mama — oh —

He releases her — she flings herself face down on the sofa — he sits crouching, glaring. Silence for some time.

FREDERICK: Well, have you been there long enough?

BARBARA (sitting up): Yes — long enough to know that it never was any good, and it never would be any good.

FREDERICK: “It never was any good, and never would be any good” — what?

BARBARA: You and me.

FREDERICK: You and me! Do you mean to tell me that my life has been a lie and a falsity?

BARBARA: Why?

FREDERICK: You were my life — you — and you say it was never any good between us.

BARBARA: But you had your work. Think, if you had to choose between me and your work.

FREDERICK: You might as well ask an apple-tree to choose between enjoying the sunshine and growing its own apples: the one depends on the other and is the result of the other.

BARBARA: No, Frederick. Why, look how happy you could be with your work when I was miserable.

FREDERICK: But you had no reason to be. I gave you everything you asked for. What did you want?

BARBARA: I suppose I wanted something you could not give.

FREDERICK (glaring at her — after a silence, suddenly): I had a good mind to murder you.

BARBARA (frightened): Why?

FREDERICK: I had a good mind to murder you as you sit there.

BARBARA (frightened): See — see how you loved me!

FREDERICK: How I loved you! Yes — you see! You see how I loved you, you callous devil! Haven't I loved you with every breath I've fetched — haven't I?

BARBARA: But what was the good of loving me if you had all the fun out of it? It didn't seem anything to me because I didn't realize — I didn't know —

FREDERICK: You didn't love me!

BARBARA: No — well — you should have seen that I did. It doesn't do me any good, if a man dies for love of me, unless there is some answer in me, so that it lives in me.

FREDERICK: I ought to have killed myself rather than marry you.

BARBARA: But I couldn't help that, could I?

FREDERICK: No, you could help nothing. You could only throw me away like waste-paper that had wrapped up a few years of your life.

BARBARA: I'm sorry, Frederick. I'll do what I can; I will, really.

FREDERICK: What will you do?

BARBARA: Don't you trust me?

FREDERICK: Trust you, yes! You can go on doing as you like with me.

BARBARA: There you are, you see, resigned. Resigned from the very start — resigned to lose. You are, and you always were.

FREDERICK: Very well, you little devil — it seems you were determined —

BARBARA: What?

FREDERICK: To destroy me.

BARBARA (going and putting her arms round his neck): No — no, Frederick. I'd do an awful lot for you — I really would — I have loved you.

FREDERICK: What, for example?

BARBARA: I'd help you with the people in Chislehurst — come and live for a time in the same house.

FREDERICK (holding her by the arms and looking in her eyes): Will you give up this man and come back to me?

BARBARA: Oh — what's the good of promising, Frederick — I might only break it again. Don't force me.

FREDERICK: Will you try? Will you try me again for three months?

BARBARA: Come and live with you again?

FREDERICK: Yes.

BARBARA: As your wife?

FREDERICK: Yes.

BARBARA: Altogether as your wife?

FREDERICK: Yes — or even — at first —

BARBARA (piteously): I don't know, Frederick.

FREDERICK: Will you think about it?

BARBARA: But I don't know! What is the good of thinking about it? But I don't know, Frederick.

FREDERICK: You can make up your mind.

BARBARA: But I can't — I can't — it pulls both ways. I don't know, Frederick.

FREDERICK: Will you know better tomorrow — will you come, then, and tell me — will you?

BARBARA: But I shan't know any better tomorrow. It's now! And I can't tell. Don't make me decide, Frederick!

FREDERICK: What?

BARBARA: Which way. Don't make me decide! (She goes and sits on the couch, hiding her face in a cushion.)

FREDERICK (suddenly flings his arms on the table and sobs): Oh, good God — I can't bear it!

BARBARA (looks at him, goes and puts her hand on his shoulder): Don't, Frederick — don't! I will make up my mind, I will!

FREDERICK (his face muffled): I can't stand it.

BARBARA: No, dear. (He sobs — she touches his hair.) Don't! Don't! You shall — I will do — what I can.

FREDERICK (his face still hidden): It will kill me, Barbara.

BARBARA: No, dear — no, it won't. I must think of something. I will tell you tomorrow. I will come and tell you —

FREDERICK (his face still hidden): What?

BARBARA: I don't know, dear — but I will see — I will come. Look at me — look at me. (He lifts his face.) Dear! (He folds her in his arms — she puts her

head back as he kisses her.) There's Mama! He listens — hears a sound, snatches his hat and dashes out — BARBARA turns to the piano — straightens her hair — stands waiting. Enter LADY CHARLCOTE.

LADY CHARLCOTE: Has Frederick gone?

BARBARA: Yes.

Enter WESSON.

LADY CHARLCOTE: What have you decided?

BARBARA: I don't know.

LADY CHARLCOTE: That's no answer. Have you decided nothing?

BARBARA: No.

LADY CHARLCOTE: I hope he won't go and jump in the lake.

BARBARA: I said I'd see him tomorrow.

LADY CHARLCOTE: Then he won't be such a fool. How did he behave?

BARBARA: Oh, don't talk about it, Mama!

LADY CHARLCOTE: And are you coming to the Monte Baldo tomorrow then?

BARBARA: Yes.

LADY CHARLCOTE: What time?

BARBARA: In the morning — about eleven.

LADY CHARLCOTE: And you'll bring him your answer then?

BARBARA: Yes.

LADY CHARLCOTE: Well, you must decide for the best for yourself. Only

don't go and make a double mess of it, that's all.

BARBARA: How do you mean, a double mess?

LADY CHARLCOTE: You'll have to stick to one or the other now, at any rate — so you'd better stick to the one you can live with, and not to the one you can do without — for if you get the wrong one, you might as well drown two people then instead of one.

BARBARA: I don't know — I shall know tomorrow, Mama. Good night.

LADY CHARLCOTE (kissing her — crying): Well — all you can do now is to make the bed for yourself. Good night! Oh, don't trouble to come out, Mr Wesson, don't.

WESSON follows her. Exit both. BARBARA sits down and begins to play a waltz on the piano. Re-enter WESSON.

WESSON: Frederick wasn't far off — he hadn't drowned himself.

BARBARA goes on playing.

WESSON: I don't particularly want to hear that piano, Barbara.

BARBARA: Don't you? (Plays a few more bars, then stops.) What do you want?

WESSON: So you are going to see him tomorrow.

BARBARA: I am.

WESSON: What for?

BARBARA (hesitating): To tell him I'll go back to him.

She remains with her back to WESSON — he sits at the table. There is dead silence.

WESSON: Did you tell him that tonight?

BARBARA: No.

WESSON: Why not?

BARBARA: Because I didn't want to.

WESSON: Did you give him hopes of that answer?

BARBARA: I don't know.

WESSON: You do! Tell me.

BARBARA: I say I don't know.

WESSON: Then you're lying. I don't believe you intended to tell him that. I believe you say it to make me wild.

BARBARA: I don't.

WESSON: Then go now.

BARBARA: I said I'd go tomorrow.

WESSON: If you're going back to Frederick in the morning, you're not going to spend a night under this roof — hear that?

BARBARA: Why not? I've spent a good many nights under this roof — what does one more or less matter?

WESSON: While you've been with me here I considered you as a woman who wanted to stick to me as a wife — and as anything else I don't want you.

BARBARA: Very much as a wife you considered me at first — you were as unsure of us as ever I was.

WESSON: That was at the very first.

BARBARA: Was it — was it?

WESSON: Whether or not — that's what I say now.

BARBARA: "Whether or not!" — you would say that. At any rate, Frederick wouldn't say "whether or not".

WESSON: And you want to go back to him?

BARBARA: All men are alike. They don't care what a woman wants. They try to get hold of what they want themselves, as if it were a pipe. As for the woman, she's not considered — and so — that's where you make your mistake, gentlemen.

WESSON: Want? What do you want?

BARBARA: That's for you to find out.

WESSON: What you want is some of the conceit knocking out of you.

BARBARA: You do it, Mr Tuppenny-ha'penny.

WESSON: If Frederick hadn't been such a damn fool he'd have taken you down a peg or two. Now, you think yourself so blighted high and mighty that nobody's good enough to dangle after you.

BARBARA: Only a little puppy-dog that barks at my skirts.

WESSON: Very well, then the little puppy-dog will bark. Are you going to see Frederick in the morning?

BARBARA: Yes.

WESSON: And are you going to tell him, then, that you're going back to him?

BARBARA: I don't know.

WESSON: You must know then, because if you are, you're not going to stop the night in this house.

BARBARA: Pooh! What do I care about your house?

WESSON: You know it was really you who wanted it, and whose it is.

BARBARA: As if I care for this house — I'd leave it any minute. I'll leave it now.

WESSON: If you're going to go back to Frederick, leave it now. I ask you to.

BARBARA: Oh, very well — that is soon done.

She goes out quickly.

CURTAIN

ACT IV

Ten minutes later. WESSON is smoking. Enter BARBARA, dressed, with her hat on.

BARBARA: Here I am, then!

WESSON: Are you going straight to Gardone, to the Monte Baldo?

BARBARA: No — I'm going to the Hotel Cervo.

WESSON: But you can't — she knows us, the landlady — and thinks we're man and wife. You can't make that mess. If you're going, go straight to Frederick to-night — I'll see you there.

BARBARA: I'm not going to Frederick to-night — I'm not going to Gardone — I'm going to the Hotel Cervo.

WESSON: How much money have you got?

BARBARA: None.

WESSON: Then I won't give you any.

BARBARA: Don't you trouble — I wouldn't take any of your money.

WESSON: Have you got your night-things in the handbag?

BARBARA: Yes.

WESSON: Some soap — some hankies?

BARBARA: No — forgotten 'em.

WESSON: You would.

Exit — comes running back in a moment, puts the things in her bag.

BARBARA: Thank you.

WESSON: And your box I'll pack to-morrow. The things you said were mine I shall put in.

BARBARA: You needn't.

WESSON: I shall. I've never given you anything, so you've nothing to return.

BARBARA: No — you were always stingy.

WESSON: Very well — Frederick isn't.

BARBARA: I suppose it's having been brought up so poor, you can't help it.

WESSON: We won't discuss me now, nor my bringing-up.

BARBARA: Oh, alright!

WESSON: I consider I owe you, of money you had, about eleven pounds. I'll be stingy and keep one of them. Here's ten out of the forty we'd got.

BARBARA: I shan't have them.

WESSON: You can't go without any money.

BARBARA: Yes, I can.

WESSON: No, you can't. If you don't have these ten pounds, I'll post them to Frederick to you.

BARBARA: Alright.

WESSON (feeling in his pocket): Well, have ten lire, at any rate.

BARBARA: No, I won't have anything.

WESSON: You ought to be murdered for your obstinacy.

BARBARA: Not twice in one night.

WESSON: Very well, then — I will come with you down the village, since you're frightened of the men.

BARBARA: You needn't — I'm not frightened.

WESSON: No — you're too damned high and mighty to possess a single one of the human virtues or vices, you are! (A silence.) Do you want to go, really?

BARBARA: Yes.

WESSON: Liar! — Liar! — you are showing off! (Snatches the handbag and flings it into the kitchen.) Fool's idiotic theatrical game. Take that hat off.

BARBARA: You're giving your orders.

WESSON: Alright. (Seizes the hat, flings it through the door.)

BARBARA (flashing): What are you doing?

WESSON: Stopping you being a fool. Take your coat off.

BARBARA: I shall take my coat off when I please. Indeed, you needn't show off, for the minute I want to walk out of this house I shall walk out, and you nor anybody else will prevent me.

WESSON (taking up his position with his back to the door): Alright — you want to walk out now, and see!

BARBARA: If I want to —

WESSON: Want to, then —

BARBARA (with a laugh of scorn): Ha — you stop me! (Marches up to him with her breast high. He stands immovable.) Come out! (He shakes his head.) Come out!

WESSON: I told you I wouldn't.

BARBARA: Won't you?

Seizes him. He grapples with her. They struggle. He forces her backward, flings her with a smash on to the couch.

WESSON: You shan't! (Goes and locks the door — stands at a loss.)

BARBARA (recovering): It's very heroic — but I go to-morrow, whether or not.

WESSON: You'll pass the night in this room then. (He sits down — there is silence for some minutes — at last he looks up, speaks falteringly.) You don't want to leave me, do you, Barbara? (No answer.) You don't want to? (Silence.) Well, whether you think you do or not, I shall never believe you want to leave me, not really — so there! (A silence.)

BARBARA: A woman couldn't want to leave such a wonder as you, you think.

WESSON: You can't want to leave me.

BARBARA: Why not?

WESSON (sulkily): Because I don't believe you can. (There is a silence.)

BARBARA (with difficulty): A sort of faith performance!

He looks at her steadily, rises, goes and sits beside her.

WESSON: Barbican!

BARBARA (dropping her head on his shoulder with a cry): It's so hard on him, Giacomo.

WESSON (putting his arms round her): Never mind, he'll suffer at first, then

he'll get better.

BARBARA (crying): He won't.

WESSON: He will — he shall — he shall! And you'll see he will. He'll be alright in the end. You were too big a mouthful for him to swallow, and he was choking.

BARBARA: But I make him suffer so.

WESSON (kissing and kissing her): No — it's my fault. You don't want to leave me, do you?

BARBARA: I don't know what to do.

WESSON: Stay with me, Barbican, my darling, and we'll manage that he's alright.

BARBARA: It's not fair when a man goes loving you so much when you don't love him — it makes you feel as if you'd have to go back to him.

WESSON: You can't go back to him — it would be wrong. His love isn't living for you.

BARBARA: It isn't, is it, Giacomo?

WESSON: No — kiss me, Barbara, will you? (She kisses him.) I love you, Barbara.

BARBARA: Do you really love me?

WESSON: Malheureusement.

BARBARA: He says that.

WESSON: And I don't mean it. I'm glad I love you, even if you torture me into hell.

BARBARA: But do you love me an awful lot?

WESSON: More than enough.

BARBARA: Really?

WESSON: Truly.

BARBARA: But if he dies, I shall torment the life out of you.

WESSON: You'll do that anyway.

BARBARA (looking up — taking his face between her hands): Shall I? — No!
— Say no — say I am a joy to you.

WESSON: You are a living joy to me, you are — especially this evening.

BARBARA (laughs): No — but am I really?

WESSON: Yes.

BARBARA: Kiss me — kiss me — and love me — love me a fearful lot — love me a fearful lot.

WESSON: I do. And to-morrow you'll just say to Frederick, "I can't come back — divorce me if you love me." You'll say it, won't you? (kissing her.)

BARBARA: Yes.

WESSON: If it kills him — it won't kill him — but you'll say it?

BARBARA (hiding her face): Must I, Giacomo?

WESSON: Yes.

BARBARA: Then I s'll have to — oh dear! But you'll love me — love me a lot.
(She clings to him wildly.)

WESSON: I do — and I will.

BARBARA: Love me a fearful lot!

CURTAIN

DAVID



A PLAY IN SIXTEEN SCENES

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CHARACTERS

DAVID, son of Jesse

SAUL, King of Israel

SAMUEL, Prophet of God

JONATHAN, son of Saul

ABNER, leader of Saul's host

AGAG, King of Amalek

MERAB, daughter of Saul

MICHAL, daughter of Saul

WOMAN-SERVANT

MAIDENS

JESSE, father of David

ELIAB, ABINADAB, SHAMMAH, brothers of David

Fourth, Fifth, Sixth, and Seventh Brothers of David

ADRIEL the Meholathite

Captains, Fighting-Men, Herald, Armour-Bearer, Elders, Neighbours, Prophets,
Herdsmen, and Lad.

SCENE I

Courtyard of SAUL'S house in Gilgal: sort of compound with an adobe house beyond.

AGAG, bound, seated on the ground, and fastened by a rope to a post of the shed. Men with spears. Enter MERAB and MICHAL, daughters of SAUL, with tambourines. MAIDENS.

MERAB (running and dancing): Saul came home with the spoil of the Amalekite.

MAIDENS: Hie! Amalekite! Hie! Amalekite!

MICHAL: Saul threw his spear into the desert of Shur, through the heart of the Amalekite.

MAIDENS: Struck the Amalekite, pierced him to the ground.

MICHAL: Wind of the desert blows between the ribs of Amalek, only the jackal is fat on that land. Who smote the Amalekite, as a sand-storm smites the desert?

MAIDENS: Saul! Saul! Saul is the slayer and the death of Amalek.

MERAB (before AGAG): What is this dog with a string round his neck?

MAIDENS: What dog is this?

MICHAL: I know this dog, men used to call it King!

MAIDENS: Look at this King!

MERAB: Agag, Agag, King of the Amalekites! Dog on a string at the heel of

mighty Saul!

MICHAL (speaking to AGAG): Are you the King of the Amalekites?

AGAG: I am he, maiden!

MICHAL: I thought it was a dog my father had brought home, and tied to a post.

MERAB: Why are you alone, Agag? Where are all your armed men, that ran like lions, round the road to Egypt? Where are your women, with gold on their foreheads? Let us hear the tinkle of the bracelets of your women, O King, King Agag, King of mighty Amalek!

MAIDENS (laughing — shaking tambourines in AGAG'S face — spitting on him): Dog! Dog! Dog of an Amalekite!

MICHAL: Who hung on the heels of Israel when they journeyed out of the wilderness of Shur, coming from Egypt, in the days of our fathers, in the day of Moses, our great deliverer?

MAIDENS: Ay! Ay! Who threw their spears in the backs of the wandering Israelites?

MICHAL: Who killed our women, and the weary ones, and the heavy-footed, in the bitter days of wandering, when we came up out of Egypt?

MERAB: Who among our enemies was accursed like the Amalekite? When Moses held the rod of God uplifted in his hand, Joshua smote the Amalekite till the sun went down. But even when the sun was gone, came the voice of the Almighty: War, and war with Amalek, till Amalek is put out from under heaven.

MICHAL: Dog! Son of dogs that lay in wait for us as we passed by! Dog! Why has Saul left you eyes to see, and ears to hear!

SAUL (coming from house): Agag is among the maidens!

MICHAL: See, Father, is this a king?

SAUL: Even so.

MICHAL: It is a dog that cannot scratch his own fleas.

SAUL: Even so, it is a king: King of rich Amalek. Have you seen the presents he has brought for the household of Saul?

MICHAL: For the daughters of Saul, Father?

SAUL: Surely for Merab and Michal, daughters of Saul. (To a man.) Ho! Bring the basket of spoils for the daughters of the King.

MICHAL: Listen! Listen! King Agag seeks a wife in Gilgal! Oh, Father, I do not like him! He looks like a crow the dogs have played with. Merab, here is a King for your hand!

MERAB: Death is his portion, the Amalekite.

MICHAL: Will you put him to death, Father? Let us laugh a little longer at his Amalek nose.

Enter man with basket — also JONATHAN and ABNER.

SAUL: See the gifts of Agag, King of Amalek, to the daughters of Saul! Tissue from Egypt, head-veils from Pharaoh's house! And see, red robes from Tyre, and yellow from Sidon.

MICHAL (screams): That for me, Father, that for me! Give the other to Merab. — Ah! Ah! Ah! — Thank you, King Agag; thank you, King of Amalek.

SAUL: Goldsmith's work for arms and ankles, gold and dropping silver, for the ears.

MICHAL: Give me those! Give me those! Give the others to Merab! Ay! Ay! Maidens! How am I? — See, Agag, noble Agag, how am I now? Listen! (She dances, the ornaments clink.) They say: Noble Agag! — King of Givers! Poor draggled crow that had gold in its nest! Caw! King Agag! Caw! It's a daughter of Saul, of long-limbed Saul, smiter of Amalek, who tinkles with joys of the Amalekite.

JONATHAN: Peace, maiden! Go in and spin wool with the women. You are too much among the men.

MICHAL: Art thou speaking, O Jonathan, full of thy own manhood?

JONATHAN: Take in these spoils from the eye of men, and the light of day. Father, there came one saying that Samuel sought you in Carmel.

SAUL: Let him find me in Gilgal.

ABNER: They are calling even now at the gate. (Moves to gate.)

SAUL (to girls): Go to the house and hide your spoil, for if this prophet of prophets finds the treasure of the Amalekite upon you, he will tear it away, and curse your youth.

MICHAL: That he shall not! Oh, Merab, you got the blue shawl from me! Run! Maidens! Run! Farewell, King Agag, your servant thanks your lordship! — Caw! — Nay, he cannot even say caw!

Exit — running — MICHAL, and other MAIDENS follow.

ABNER: It is so, my lord. Samuel even now has passed the stone of directions, seeking Saul in Gilgal.

SAUL: It is well. He has come to bless our triumph.

JONATHAN: Father, will you leave that man in the sight of Samuel?

SAUL: No! Go you quickly into the house, O Agag! Take him quickly, men, and let no mouth speak his name.

Exeunt AGAG and men.

JONATHAN: I have a misgiving, Father, that Samuel comes not in peace, after Saul in Gilgal.

SAUL: Has Saul laid low the Amalekite, to fear the coming of an old prophet?

ABNER: Samuel is a jealous man, full of the tyranny of prophecy. Shall we wait him here, or go into the house and be seated on the mats? Or shall we go forth from the gate towards him?

SAUL: I will stay here, and brighten my sword-edge in the waiting.

ABNER (at the gate — calling): He is coming across the field; an old man in a mantle, alone, followed by two of his prophets.

JONATHAN (joining ABNER): It is he. And coming in anger.

ABNER: In anger against whom?

JONATHAN: Against my father. Because we have not destroyed the Amalekite utterly, but have saved the best spoil.

ABNER: Nay, but it is a foolish thing, to throw fine linen into the fire, and fat young oxen down a dry well.

JONATHAN: It was the commandment.

ABNER: Why should the maidens not rejoice in their ornaments, and the God of the Unknown Name enjoy the scent of blood-sacrifice?

They retreat from the gate; SAUL sharpens his sword. After a pause, enter SAMUEL, followed by the prophets.

SAUL (laying down his sword): Blessed be thou of the Lord! I have performed the commandment of the Lord.

SAMUEL: What meaneth the bleating of the sheep in my ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear?

SAUL: They have brought them from the Amalekites. The people spared the best of the sheep, and of the oxen, to sacrifice unto thy God, but the rest we have utterly destroyed.

SAMUEL: Stay, and I will tell thee what I have heard out of the inner darkness, this night.

SAUL: Say on.

SAMUEL: When thou wast little in thine own sight, wast thou not made the chieftain of the tribes of Israel, and the Deep poured His power over thee, to anoint thee King? And the Voice out of the deeps sent thee on a journey, saying: Go, and utterly destroy the sinners the Amalekites, and fight against them until they be consumed. — Why then did you not obey the Voice, instead of flying upon the spoil, and doing evil in the sight of the Unclosing Eyes?

SAUL: Yea, I have obeyed the Voice from the beyond. I have gone the way which the Great One sent me, and have brought Agag the King of Amalek prisoner, and have utterly destroyed the Amalekites. But the people took the spoil, sheep and oxen, the chief of the things which should have been utterly destroyed, to sacrifice in Gilgal unto the Lord thy God.

SAMUEL: Does the Breather of the skies take as great delight in sacrifice and burnt offerings as in obedience to the Voice that spoke on the breath of the night? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams.

SAUL: Is not God the sender of life, and the bread of life? And shall we deny the meat and destroy the bread that is sent?

SAMUEL: Behold, is the Lord my God a sutler, to stock the larders of Saul? Lo, He heeds not the fat beef nor the fine raiment, but threshes out His anger in the firmament. Amalek has defied the living Breath, and cried mockery on the Voice of the Beyond. Therefore the living Wrath will wipe out the Amalekite, by the hand of His servant, Israel. And if the Nameless is without compunction, whence the compunction of Saul?

SAUL: I feared the people, and obeyed their voice.

SAMUEL: Yea, that was bravely done! Thou didst not fear the Great Lord, thou fearedst the people, smaller than thyself. Thou didst not obey the Cry from the midst of the dark, but the voice of the people! — I tell thee, rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord the Lord hath also rejected thee from being King.

SAUL: Shall a King not hearken to the voice of his people?

SAMUEL: The people cried for a King, in the frowardness of their hearts. But can they make a King out of one of themselves? Can they whistle a lion forth from a litter of dogs? The people cried for a King, and the Lord gave to them. Even thee, Saul. But why art thou King? Because of the voice of the people?

SAUL: Thou didst choose me out.

SAMUEL: The finger of the Thunder pointed me to thee, and the Wind of Strength blew me in thy way. And thou art King because from out of the middle world the great Wish settled upon thee. And thou art King because the Lord poured the oil of His might over thee. But thou art disobedient, and shuttest thine ears to the Voice. Thou hearest the barkings of dogs and the crying of the people, and the Voice of the Midmost is nothing to thee. Therefore thou hast become as nothing unto the Lord, and He that chose thee rejecteth thee again. The power of the Lord shall fall away from thee, and thou shalt become again a common man, and a little thing, as when the Lord first found thee.

SAUL: I have sinned. For I have transgressed the commandments of the Lord, which thou didst hear out of the deeps of the night. Because I feared the people, and obeyed their voice. But now, I pray thee, pardon my sin, and turn again with me, that I may find the Lord, to worship Him.

SAMUEL: I will not return with thee: for thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, and the Lord hath rejected thee from being King over Israel. (SAMUEL turns away. SAUL catches hold of the hem of SAMUEL'S garment and it tears in his hand.) The Lord hath rent the Kingdom of Israel away from thee this day, and hath given it to a neighbour of thine, that is better than thou (pause); — and the Mighty One that moveth Israel will not lie, nor repent towards thee again: for He is not a man that He should repent.

SAUL: I have sinned, I have sinned, I have turned my face the wrong way. Yet honour me now, I pray thee! Honour me before the elders of my people, and before Israel, and turn again with me, that I may find the Lord thy God, and worship Him.

SAMUEL (turning): Thou hast turned away from the Hidden Sun, and the gleam is dying from out of thy face. Thou hast disowned the Power that made thee, and

the glow is leaving thy limbs, the glisten of oil is waning on thy brow, and the vision is dying in thy breast. Yet because thou art the Lord's anointed I will bless thee again in the sight of the elders. Yet if the Lord hath decided against thee, what avails an old man's blessing?

SAUL: Yet bless me, my Father.

SAMUEL (lifting his hand): The Lord be with thee! The Lord's strength strengthen thee! The power and the might of the Lord brighten thine eyes and light thy face: the Lord's life lift thy limbs and gladden the walls of thy breast, and put power in thy belly and thy hips! The Lord's haste strengthen thy knees and quicken thy feet!

SAUL (lifting both hands to heaven): Lo, I have sinned, and lost myself, I have been mine own undoing. But I turn again to Innermost, where the flame is, and the wings are throbbing. Hear me, take me back! Brush me again with the wings of life, breathe on me with the breath of Thy desire, come in unto me, and be with me, and dwell in me. For without the presence of the awful Lord, I am an empty shell. Turn to me, and fill my heart, and forgive my transgression. For I will wash myself clean of Amalek, to the last speck, and remove the source of my sinning. (Drops his hands — turns to SAMUEL.) Is it well, O Samuel?

SAMUEL: May it be well! Bring me hither Agag, King of the Amalekites.

SAUL: Ho, Jonathan, send here Agag the Amalekite. And send thou the chief of the herdsmen, O Abner, for we must wipe away the stain of Amalek swiftly, out of Gilgal.

Exeunt JONATHAN and ABNER.

SAUL (to SAMUEL): The Lord shall be with me again this day, that the Kingdom be not rent from me.

SAMUEL: Who knoweth the ways of the Deep? I will entreat, ah! for thee in the night-time, and in the day. But if He hath turned His face away, what am I but an old man crying like an infant in the night!

Enter AGAG — coming forward delicately.

AGAG: Surely the bitterness of death is past.

SAMUEL (seizing SAUL'S sword): As thy sword hath made women childless, so shall thy mother be childless among women. (Rushes on AGAG with sword — AGAG steps behind a wall, SAMUEL upon him.)

Enter HERDSMAN.

JONATHAN: Better it had been in battle, on the field of the fight.

ABNER: It is a sacrifice.

SAUL (to HERDSMAN): Gather together the cattle of the Amalekite which came as spoil, and fasten them in a pen. Leave out no sheep and no calf, nor any goat, but put them all in.

HERDSMAN: It shall be as Saul says.

Exit HERDSMAN.

SAMUEL (entering with red sword): I have hewed him in pieces before the Lord, and his blood has gone up to the Most High; it is in the nostrils of the God of Wrath.

SAUL: Come now, I pray thee, within the house, and let them bring water for thy feet and food to gladden thine heart.

SAMUEL: It may not be. But I must go to Ramah to entreat for thee before the Lord, and even now must I go. And may the Might be with thee.

CURTAIN

SCENE II

A room in Ramah. Night. SAMUEL in prayer.

SAMUEL: Speak to me out of the whirlwind, come to me from behind the sun, listen to me where the winds are hastening. When the power of the whirlwind moves away from me, I am a worthless old man. Out of the deep of deeps comes a breath upon me, and my old flesh freshens like a flower. I know no age. Oh, upon the wings of distance turn to me, send the fanning strength into my hips. I am sore for Saul, and my old bones are weary for the King. My heart is like a fledgling in a nest, abandoned by its mother. My heart opens its mouth with vain cries, weak and meaningless, and the Mover of the deeps will not stoop to me. My bowels are twisted in a knot of grief, in a knot of anguish for my son, for him whom I anointed beneath the firmament of might. On earth move men and beasts, they nourish themselves and know not how they are alive. But in all the places moves Unseen Almighty, like a breath among the stars, or the moon, like the sea turning herself over. I eat bread, but my soul faints, and wine will not heal my bones. Nothing is good for me but God. Like waters He moves through the world, like a fish I swim in the flood of God Himself. Answer me, Mover of the waters, speak to me as waves speak without mouths. Saul has fallen off, as a ripe fig falls and bursts. He, anointed, he moved in the flood of power, he was God's, he was not his own. Now he is cast up like a fish among the dry stones, he beats himself against the sun-licked pebbles. He jumped out from the deeps of the Lord, the sea of God has seen him depart. He will die within the smell of his own violence. Lord, Lord, Ocean and Mover of oceans, lick him into the flood of Thyself. Wilt Thou not reach for him with the arm of a long wave, and catch him back into the deeps of living God? Is he lost from the sway of the tide for ever and for ever? When the rain wets him, will it wet him Godless, and will the wind blow on him without God in it? Lord, wilt Thou not reach for him, he is Thine anointed? Bitter are the waters of old age, and tears fall inward on the heart. Saul is the son whom I anointed, and Saul has crawled away from God, he creeps up the rocks in vanity, the stink of him will rise up like a dead crab. Lord, is it verily so with Saul, is he gone out from Thee for ever, like a creeping thing

crawled in vanity from the element of elements? I am old, and my tears run inward, they deaden my heart because of Saul. For Saul has crawled away from the Fountain of Days, and the Ancient of Days will know him no more. I hear the voice of the Lord like waters washing through the night, saying: Saul has fallen away and is no more in the way of the power of God. Yea, what is love, that I should love him! He is fallen away, and stinketh like a dead crab, and my love stinks with him. I must wash myself because of Saul, and strip myself of him again, and go down into the deeps of God. Speak, Lord, and I will obey. Tell me, and I will do it. I sink like a stone in the sea, and nothing of my own is left me. I am gone away from myself, I disappear in the deeps of God. And the oracle of the Lord stirs me, as the fountains of the deep. Lo! I am not mine own. The flood has covered me and the waters of the beginning sound in the shell of my heart. And I will find another King for Israel, I shall know him by the whispers of my heart. Lo, I will fill the horn with oil again, with the oil from the body of Him, and I will go into the hills of Judah. I will find out one, in whom the power sleeps. And I will pour potency over his head and anoint him with God's fecundity, and place him beyond forgetting. I will go into the hills of Judah, where the sheep feed among the rocks, and find a man fresh in the morning of God. And he shall be King. On the morrow I will gather myself and go, silently, carrying the kingship away from Saul, because the virtue is gone out of him. And Saul will kill me with a spear, in one stroke, for rage he will kill me, if I tell him. But I shall not tell him. I shall say: I must away to the land of Judah, it is the time to sacrifice in the place of Bethlehem, the appointed time is at hand. — So I shall go away from Saul for ever, and never shall I see his face again. I shall hide myself away from his face, lest he hurt himself, slaying me. I shall go in the morning with sure feet, but the shell of my heart will be weary. For I am the Lord's and servant of the Lord, and I go in obedience, even with the alacrity of willingness. But alas, that I should have loved Saul, and had pride in him! I am old.

CURTAIN

SCENE III

Bethlehem: an open place in the village. An old man on a roof calling aloud and kindling a signal fire.

1ST ELDER (calling, on the roof): Come in! Come in! Come in! Come all men in! Come all in to the place of counsel! Gather into the place of counsel, all men gather now. Come in! Come in!

2ND ELDER (on the plaza): What now?

3RD ELDER: The watchman on the fourth hill saw a host of prophets coming, even Samuel among them.

2ND ELDER: Yea! What does this bode?

JESSE: What have we done wrong, that Samuel comes down upon us? If he curses us we are dead men.

4TH ELDER: Dread is on me. The sun looks darkened.

3RD ELDER: Nay, let us wait. It may be he comes in peace.

ELIAB (brother of DAVID): Why do we, who are men that fear not the lion nor the bear, nor even the Philistine, tremble before the raging of these prophets?

2ND ELDER: Hush then! For the Bolt is above us, and can strike out of a clear sky. Canst thou hear His meaning, or know His vision, Who is secret save to the prophets? Peace then, hush thy mouth.

JESSE: Verily, there is no open vision, and the word of One is precious. Without Samuel, we should stare with the stare of deaf men, and the fixed eyes of the blind. We should run our faces against the wall, and fall with our feet into a hole.

We should not hear the lion roaring upon us.

ELIAB: Not so, my Father. Without a prophet I seek the lion when he roars about the herd, I slay him without advice from the Lord. We live our lives as men, by the strength of our right hand. Why heed the howlings of priests in linen ephods, one or many!

JESSE: My son, shut thy teeth on such words. Seal thy heart to silence. The strength of a man lasts for a little time, and wastes like the oil in a lamp. You are young, and your lamp is unbroken. But those that live long needs must renew their strength again, and have their vessel replenished. And only from the middle-middle of all the worlds, where God stirs amid His waters, can strength come to us.

ELIAB: Will it not come without Samuel?

JESSE: There is a path that the gazelle cannot follow, and the lion knows not, nor can the eagle fly it. Rare is the soul of the prophet, that can find the hidden path of the Lord. There is no open vision, and we, who can see the lion in the thicket, cannot see the Lord in the darkness, nor hear Him out of the cloud. But the word of One is precious, and we perish without it.

ELIAB: I cannot bow my heart to Samuel. Is he a King to lead us into battle, and share the spoil with us? Why should we fare worse without him?

JESSE: My son, day follows day, and night travels between the days. But the heart of man cannot wander among the years like a wild ass in the wilderness, running hither and thither. The heart at last stands still, crying: Whither? Whither? Like a lost foal whinnying for his dam, the heart cries and nickers for God, and will not be comforted. Then comes the prophet with the other vision in his eyes, and the inner hearing in his ears, and he uncovers the secret path of the Lord, Who is at the middlemost place of all. And when the heart is in the way of God, it runs softly and joyously, without weariness.

ELIAB: I would sooner follow the King, with spear and shield.

JESSE: Samuel is more precious than the King, and more to be obeyed. As God is to Samuel, Samuel to the King is God. The King is as a boy awaiting his father's bidding, uneasy till he is told what he shall do. Even so Samuel speaks

to Saul, with the mouth of authority, to be obeyed. For he is the lips of God.

ELIAB: For me, give me the right arm of Saul.

SAMUEL enters — followed by wild prophets. The ELDERS go to meet him.

1ST ELDER: The Lord be with thee!

SAMUEL: The Lord keep this people!

1ST ELDER: Comest thou in peace?

SAMUEL: In peace. I come to sacrifice unto the Lord. Sanctify yourselves and come to sacrifice, according to your families. Renew your clothes and purify yourselves.

1ST ELDER: Into which house will you go?

SAMUEL: Into the house of Jesse.

JESSE: I am here, my lord.

SAMUEL: Call your household together, and sanctify yourselves, for we will sacrifice a heifer to the Lord this day, in your house. And it shall be a feast unto you.

CURTAIN

SCENE IV

JESSE'S house. A small inner courtyard: a rude altar smoking, and blood sprinkled round: SAMUEL before the altar, hands bloody. In another part a large red fire with a great pot seething, and pieces of meat roasting on spits. JESSE turning the spits. It is evening, sun going down.

SAMUEL: Call your sons. Call them one by one to pass before me. For I will look on them, before we sit around to the feast of the sacrifice.

JESSE: They are in the house, waiting. I will call the first-born first. (Calling.) Eliab, come forth! Samuel asks for thee!

ELIAB (entering): The Lord be with you.

SAMUEL (aside): Surely the Lord's anointed is before Him! (Gazes at ELIAB who is big and handsome.)

SAMUEL (aside): I shall not look on his countenance, nor on the height of his stature. For the voice of my soul tells me he is rejected. The Lord sees not as men see. For man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart.

SAMUEL (to JESSE): Him hath the Lord not chosen. Call thy other son.

JESSE: Ha! Abinadab! And, Eliab, gather all thy brothers together, for the feast shall be set forth.

Exit ELIAB.

ABINADAB (entering): The Lord be with you.

SAMUEL (gazing on ABINADAB): Neither hath the Lord chosen this.

JESSE: Go thou, Abinadab! Be all thy brethren ready in the house?

ABINADAB: They be all there, waiting for the sacrifice meat.

JESSE (calling): Come, Shammah! And when I call, come you others in your order, one by one.

SHAMMAH (entering): The Lord be with you.

SAMUEL (slowly): Neither hath the Lord chosen this.

JESSE: Go thou! Nay! Rather go to the fire and turn the spitted meat.

SHAMMAH: Yea! For it should not singe.

JESSE (calling): Ho! Son! Come forward!

FOURTH SON: The Lord be with you!

SAMUEL: Neither hath the Lord chosen this.

JESSE: Go thou hence, and wait yet a while.

FOURTH SON: What wouldst thou then with me?

JESSE (calling): Ho! Son! (To him who waits.) Nay, go or stay, as thou wilt. But stand aside. (He stands aside.)

FIFTH SON: The Lord be with you.

JESSE: Turn thy face to the sun, that it may be seen.

SAMUEL: Neither hath the Lord chosen this.

JESSE: Thou art not he whom Samuel seeks. Stand thou aside. (Calling.) Ho! Son! (To him who waits.) Bring in thy brother.

Enter SIXTH SON: all the other brothers edge in after him.

SIXTH SON: The Lord be with you!

SAMUEL: Neither hath the Lord chosen this.

SIXTH SON: Wherefore hast thou called me, my Father?

JESSE: Samuel would look on the faces of all my sons. Go now! Who then was not called? Who among you has not come forward?

SEVENTH SON: I! Wilt thou me?

JESSE: Nay, but come into the light before the prophet of God.

SAMUEL: Neither hath the Lord chosen this.

JESSE: Nay, then it is finished, for there be no more.

SAMUEL: Are here all thy children?

JESSE: Yea, verily, there remaineth yet the youngest. And behold he keepeth the sheep.

SAMUEL: Send and fetch him. For we will not sit down till he come hither.

JESSE: Go thou, Shammah, for he will be coming in now. I will see — !

Exit JESSE, also SHAMMAH.

ELIAB: My lord, will the Lord of Hosts anoint a King, while Saul yet liveth?

SAMUEL: My son, out of the deep cloud the lightning cometh, and toucheth its own. Even so, from the whirlwind of the whole world's middle, leaneth out the Wonderful and toucheth His own, but whether the anointing be for prophecy or priesthood, or for a leader or a King over Israel, the Mover of all hath it in His own deeps.

ELIAB: Yea! But if the Lord anoint a man to be King, can the Lord again take back the anointing, and wipe out the oil, and remove the gift, and undo the man He has made?

SAMUEL: The power is beyond us, both before and after. Am I not anointed before the people? But if I should say: The power is my own; I will even do my own bidding, then this is the sin of witchcraft, which stealeth the power of the

whirlwind for its own. And the power will be taken from me, and I shall fall into a pit.

ELIAB: It is a hard thing, to be the Lord's anointed.

SAMUEL: For the froward and irreverent spirit, it is a thing wellnigh impossible.

Enter JESSE with DAVID.

JESSE: This is David, the last of the sons of Jesse.

Enter SHAMMAH.

SAMUEL (aside): I shall arise and anoint him. For this is he. (Aloud.) The Lord hath chosen this one. (Takes the horn of oil and holds it over DAVID'S head.) The skies will anoint thee with their glory, the oil of the Sun is poured over thee, and the strength of His power. Thou shalt be a master of the happenings among men. Answer then. Does thy soul go forth to the Deep, does the Wonderer move in thy soul?

DAVID: Yea, my lord. Surely my soul leaps with God!

SAMUEL (anointing DAVID): The Glory pours Himself out on thee. The Chooser chooseth thee. Thou shalt be no more thine own, for the chosen belongs to the Chooser. When thou goest in, it shall be at the whisper of the Mover, and when thou comest out, it shall be the Lord. Thy strength is at the heart of the world, and thy desires are from thence. The walls of thy breast are the front of the Lord, thy loins are the Deep's, and the fire within them is His. The Lord looketh out of thy eyes and sits on thy lips. Thou closest thy fist on the Deep, and thy knees smile with His strength. He holdeth the bow of thy body erect, and thy thighs are the pillars of His presence. Henceforward thou art not thine own. The Lord is upon thee, and thou art His.

DAVID (making an obeisance): I am thy servant, my lord.

SAMUEL: Ye shall sit around, and divide the meat, and eat of the feast, and bid the neighbours to your feast of sacrifice this night.

They move around, fetching trenchers of wood, and a huge dish, and a heap of flat bread. They begin to take the meat from the fire, and with a cry lift down the pot.

JESSE: David is a child, and the Lord hath chosen him. What shall become of him? Make it plain to us, O Samuel, this night!

SAMUEL: Ask not, for none knoweth. Let him live till such time as the Unseen stretcheth out His hands upon him. When the time is fulfilled, then we shall know. Beforehand no man knoweth. And now the meat is ready from the fire, and the feast of sacrifice is prepared, and I have done. Eat you of the feast, and live before the Lord, and be blessed. Speak nothing of this hour, lest mischance befall you. I go my way. Do not seek to stay me. Call whom ye will to meat, eat then what is before you, for this is your hour.

JESSE: The sun has gone down, and it is night. Wilt thou verily go forth?

Exit SAMUEL.

ELIAB: He has anointed the youngest, and the oldest he has passed over.

JESSE: It is the Lord. Go, Abinadab, and bid in the neighbours to the feast.

ELIAB: Nay, it is Samuel, who envies a strong man his strength, and settles on the weak.

JESSE: These things, at this hour, thou shalt not say. Is my son David chosen beneath the heavens, and shall Eliab his brother cast it up a reproach to him? Yea! pile up the dish from the pot, that it may cool, and not burn the hand of him that tasteth.

ELIAB (to DAVID): Wilt thou be a priest in a blue ephod?

DAVID: I know not. To-day and to-morrow I shall keep my father's sheep. More I know not.

ELIAB: Canst thou see the Bolt within the cloud? Canst thou hear His voice out of the ground?

DAVID: I know not. I wish the Lord be with me.

ELIAB: Is He nearer thee, than thine own father?

DAVID: My father sits before me and I see his face. But the Lord is in my limbs as a wind in a tree, and the tree is shaken.

ELIAB: Is not the Lord also in me, thou stripling? Is thine the only body that is visited?

DAVID: I know not. My own heart I know. Thou knowest thine own. I wish the Lord be with me.

ELIAB: Yea, I know my own heart indeed. Neither is it the heart of a whelp that minds the sheep, but the heart of a man that holds a spear. Canst thou draw my bow, or wield my sword?

DAVID: My day is not yet come.

JESSE: It is enough. The guests we have bidden are here! O David, my son, even carry out their portion to the womenfolk, for they may not come here. And think thou no more of this day. The Lord will move in His own time, thou canst not hasten Him. Exit DAVID. (To the NEIGHBOURS.) Nay, come! And sit ye to meat! For we will eat this night of the sacrifice that Samuel hath slain before the Lord.

NEIGHBOURS: Peace be to this house! And is Samuel at once gone forth? Yea! Good seemeth thy feast, O Jesse!

JESSE: An heifer, of the first year, fat and goodly! Reach forth thy hand.

They all sit around the huge, smoking platter. JESSE dips in his hand, and carries the mess to his mouth.

NEIGHBOUR: Yea! Good is the feast! And blessed be Samuel, who came to Bethlehem this day!

Re-enter DAVID: sits down and eats. They all dip their hands in the great platter, and eat in silence.

Verily, this is a great feast! Surely the Lord hath visited thy house this day, O Jesse!

CURTAIN

SCENE V

SAUL'S house in Gilgal. MERAB and MICHAL in the courtyard, spinning wool, with their maidens. They are laughing and giggling.

1ST MAIDEN: Now I'll ask one! I'll ask one.

MERAB: Ask then!

3RD MAIDEN: Why does a cow look over a wall?

MICHAL: Yah! Yah! We know that old one. We all know it.

MERAB: Who knows the answer? Hold your hand up.

Only MICHAL holds up her hand.

3RD MAIDEN: There! There! They don't know it! Why does a cow look over a wall?

1ST MAIDEN: To see what's on the other side.

MICHAL: Wrong! Wrong! How silly! (Laughter.)

2ND MAIDEN: Because it wants to get out.

MICHAL: Wrong! And it's such an easy one.

3RD MAIDEN: Why does a cow look over a wall?

4TH MAIDEN: To scratch its neck. (Much laughter.)

3RD MAIDEN: Wrong! Wrong! All wrong! Give it up!

MICHAL: No! No! Let them guess again. Why does a cow look over a wall?

1ST MAIDEN: To see if David's coming to drive her to pasture. (Wild laughter.)

MICHAL: That's wrong! That's not the answer!

MERAB: Give it up?

3RD MAIDEN (laughing wildly): To see if David's coming to drive her to pasture!

MICHAL: That's not the answer, Stupid!

1ST MAIDEN: Why not, say I? It's as good as the real answer. — The cows of Jesse will have to look a long time over a wall. (Much laughter.) No doubt they're looking at this moment. (Shrieks of laughter.) Moo-oo! Moo-oo! David, come home. (Hysterical laughter.)

MICHAL: Fool! Fool! That's not the answer.

1ST MAIDEN: Yes. That's the answer in Bethlehem. Why does a Bethlehem cow look over a wall? — Because David's come to Gilgal. (Much laughter.)

MICHAL: That's wrong! That's wrong!

2ND MAIDEN: It's not wrong for a Bethlehem cow.

MICHAL: But it's not a Bethlehem cow. (Much laughter.)

1ST MAIDEN: Is it the heifers of Gilgal? (Wild laughter.)

4TH MAIDEN: Why do the heifers of King Saul look over the wall in Gilgal?

1ST MAIDEN: Listening to the music. (Wild laughter.)

MERAB (amid her laughter): If my father hears us!

MICHAL: You are all fools! You don't know the right answer. You can't guess it! You can't guess it.

2ND MAIDEN: Well, what is it then? Only Michal knows what the cow is looking for! (Laughter.)

MAIDENS: Go on! Go on! Tell us, Michal!

MICHAL: Because she can't see through it. (Laughter.)

1ST MAIDEN: See through what? (Wild laughter.)

MAIDENS: See through what? (All laughing.)

2ND MAIDEN: Because who can't see through what? (Shrieks of laughter.)

1ST MAIDEN: What a senseless answer! Because she can't see through it! (Shrieks of laughter.)

MICHAL: You are all fools! fools! fools! You know nothing. You don't know anything.

Enter SAUL — angry.

SAUL: Enough! Enough! What is all this? Is there a madness among the women? Silence, I say!

MICHAL: We are but telling riddles.

SAUL: It shall not be! What! am I to hear the shrieks of my daughters' folly spoiling the morning? I will riddle you a riddle you shall not care for. (MAIDENS steal away.)

MERAB: We had thought my father was abroad among the men.

SAUL: You had thought, had you! And your father's being abroad was timely to let loose your ribaldry!

MICHAL: Nay, Father, there was no ribaldry. The maid did only ask, why does a cow look over a wall?

SAUL (shouting): Be still! Or I will run this spear through your body. Am I to wrestle with the Lord and fail because of the wantoning of my daughters among their maidens! Oh! cursed in my offspring as in all things!

MERAB steals away.

Cursed above all in my womenfolk!

MICHAL: Could we not help you, Father, to strive with the Lord? They say the wise women can command the spirits of the deep.

SAUL: Art thou then a seeress? art thou amongst the witches?

MICHAL: Not so. But Saul my father is among the wondrous. Should not his daughter be as wise as the wise women who can see into the mysteries?

SAUL (groaning): This is the sin of witchcraft! The hand of my children is against me!

MICHAL: Nay, Father, we would indeed be for you, and not against you.

SAUL: I have sworn to wipe out the sin of witchcraft from the land, I have sworn the death of all who lure the people with spirits and with wizardry. I have killed the soothsayers in the towns and the villages.

MICHAL: But, Father, might I not see the Bolt in a cloud, or call the Spirits out of the earth! I am your daughter, is that to be a witch?

SAUL: Thou art a spawn of evil, and I will run thee through.

MICHAL: But why! Oh, why!

SAUL: Thy soul is a soul of a witch that workest against thy father. I call on the Lord, and my heart foams, because He will not hear me. I know it now. It is thee, thou witch! (Wanting to strike her with the spear.)

MICHAL (weeping): It is not so! It is not so! The people say of thee, the Lord has departed from thee, and I would only help thee with the Lord, as Jonathan helps thee against the Philistines.

SAUL (horrified): Is the Deep a Philistine! Nay, now I know thou art the brood of witches, who catch the powers of the earth by cunning. Now I will surely pierce thee through, that my house may be pure, and the Fire may look on me again.

MICHAL (screams): My lord! My lord!

SAUL: I will pierce thee through. For I have sworn the death of all witches, and such as steal the powers of earth and sky by their cunning. It will be as good a deed in the sight of the Lord, as when the prophet of God slew Agag, and Samuel will turn to me again. For I am empty when the Lord abandons me. And evil spirits break into my empty place, and torture me. — I will surely slay this witch, though she were seven times my youngest. For she lifts the latch to the evil spirit that gets into my soul unawares.

MICHAL: My lord! My lord! I am no witch! I am not!

SAUL: Thou art a witch, and thy hand worketh against me, even when thou knowest not. Nay, thou art a witch and thy soul worketh witchcraft even when thou sleepest. Therefore I will pierce thee through. And I will say unto the people: Saul hath slain the witch that gnawed nearest into his heart.

MICHAL: I will not be slain! (Shrieks.)

Enter JONATHAN and DAVID, running.

JONATHAN: My Father!

DAVID: O King!

SAUL: This is the witch that hinders me with the Lord!

JONATHAN: This, Father! Why, Michal is a child, what can she know of witchcraft?

SAUL: It is in her will. My soul tells me that women with their evil intentions are playing against me, with the Lord. And this is she. She shall die as the others, seeresses, died, to cleanse the land before the Lord God.

DAVID: But yet, O King, thy servant has heard it is a hard thing to be a witch, a work of silent labour and of years. And this maiden your daughter is not silent, I think, nor does she seem to waste her young brows in secret labours.

JONATHAN: This is true enough. She is a feather-brain.

SAUL: Yet is her spirit against her father's.

MICHAL (still weeping): No! No! I would help him.

DAVID: If some spirit of evil hinder King Saul with the Lord of Hosts, it will be more than the whims of a girl. The spirits that hamper the soul of the King cannot be children and girls.

SAUL: It may be so. Yet though I wrestle, the spirit of the Deep will not come to me. And the wound is greater than a wound in battle, bleeding inwardly. I am a strange man unto myself.

DAVID: Yet Saul is King, comely in his pride, and a great leader in battle. His deeds cry unto the whirlwind and are heard. Why should Saul wrestle with the Lord? Saul speaks in actions, and in the time of action the spirit of God comes upon him, and he is King in the sight of all men.

SAUL: It is even so. Yet my soul does not cease to ache, like the soul of a

scorned woman, because the Lord will not descend upon me and give me peace in strength.

DAVID: Who is strong like Saul, in Israel?

SAUL: Yet his strength is as a drunken man's — great with despair.

DAVID: Nay, O King! These are fancies. How can my lord speak of despair, when victory is with him, and the light is on his brow in the sight of all Israel!

SAUL: Can I so deceive myself?

DAVID: Surely the King deceives himself.

JONATHAN: Surely, Father, it is a strange self-deception you put on yourself.

SAUL: Can it be so? Yet if so, why does Samuel visit me no more, and withhold his blessing? And why do I feel the ache in me, and the void, where the Full should be? I cannot get at the Lord.

MICHAL: May I speak, my Father?

SAUL: Yea!

MICHAL: Why not laugh as you used to laugh. Father, and throw the spear in sport, at a mark, not grip it in anger? Saul is beautiful among men, to make women weep for joy if he smile at them. Yet his face is heavy with a frown.

SAUL: Why should I smile at thee, witch?

MICHAL: To gladden me, Father. For I am no witch.

SAUL: And when dost thou need gladdening, say?

MICHAL: Now, Father, even here!

SAUL: Thy sorrows are deep, I warrant me.

Touches her cheek with his fingers.

MICHAL: Yea! Did not this strange young man — indeed he is but a boy — find me chidden and disgraced and in tears before the King?

SAUL: And what then?

MICHAL: Who is this boy from the sheepfolds of Bethlehem, that he should think lightly of the King's daughter in Gilgal?

DAVID: Nay! What man could think lightly of Michal the daughter of Saul? Her eyes are like the stars shining through a tree at midnight.

MICHAL: Why through a tree?

SAUL (laughing suddenly): Thou bird of the pert whistle! Run! Run, quail! Get thee among the maidens! Thou hast piped long enough before the men.

MICHAL: Even if I run my thoughts run with me.

SAUL: What thoughts, bird of mischief?

MICHAL: That this boy, ruddy with the shepherd's sun, has seen my tears and my disgrace.

DAVID: Surely the tears of Michal are like falling stars in the lonely midnight.

MICHAL: Why, again, in the night?

SAUL (laughing aloud): Be gone! Be gone! No more!

Exit MICHAL.

SAUL: She is a chick of the King's nest! Think not of her, David!

DAVID: But she is pleasant to think of.

SAUL: Even when she mocks thee?

DAVID: Very pleasant.

SAUL: The young men flee from a mocking woman.

DAVID: Not when the voice is sweet.

SAUL: Is Michal's voice sweet? To me at times it is snarling and bad in my ears.

DAVID: That is only when the harp-strings of the King's ears are unstrung.

SAUL: It may be. Yet I think I am cursed in my womenfolk. Was not the mother of Jonathan a thorn in my heart? What dost thou prescribe for a thorn in the heart, young wiseling?

DAVID: Pluck it out, O King, and throw it aside, and it is forgotten.

SAUL: But is it easy to pluck out a rancorous woman from the heart?

DAVID: I have no certain knowledge. Yet it should not be hard, I think.

SAUL: How?

DAVID: A man asks in his heart: Lord, Who fannest the fire of my soul into strength, does the woman cast fuel on the Lord's fire within me, or does she cast wet sand? Then if the Lord says: She casts wet sand, she departs for ever from a man's presence, and a man will go nigh unto her no more, because she seeks to quench the proper fire which is within him.

SAUL: Thou art wiser than if thou hadst been many times wived. Thou art a cocksure stripling.

DAVID: My brothers say of me, I am a cocksure malapert. Yet I do not wish to be! Why am I so, my lord?

SAUL (laughing): It must be the Lord made thee so.

DAVID: My brother has struck me in the face, before now, for words in which I saw no harm.

SAUL (laughing): Didst see the harm afterwards?

DAVID: Not I. I had a bruised mouth, and that was harm enough. But I thought still the words were wise.

SAUL (laughing): Dost think so even yet?

DAVID: Yea, they were wise words. But unwisely spoken.

SAUL (laughing heartily): The Lord sends the wisdom, and leaves thee to spend it! You offer a tit-bit to a wolf, and he take your fingers as well.

DAVID: I shall learn in the King's household.

SAUL: Among the wolves?

DAVID: Nay, the lion is nobler than the wolf.

SAUL: He will not grudge thee thy callow wisdom. — I go to speak with Abner.

DAVID: Can I serve the King in anything?

SAUL: Not now.

Exit SAUL.

DAVID: He has gone in good humour.

JONATHAN: We found him in an evil one.

DAVID: Evil spirits out of the earth possess him, and laughter from a maiden sounds to him as the voice of a hyena sounds to a wounded man stricken in the feet.

JONATHAN: It is so. He rails at his daughter, and at the mother who bore me, till my heart swells with anger. Yet he was not always so. Why is it?

DAVID: He has lost the Lord, he says.

JONATHAN: But how? Have I lost the Lord, too?

DAVID: Nay! You are good.

JONATHAN: I wish I knew how my father had lost the Lord. — You, David, the Dawn is with you. It is in your face. — Do you wrestle before the Lord?

DAVID: Who am I, that I should wrestle before the Lord? But when I feel the Glory is with me, my heart leaps like a young kid, and bounds in my bosom, and my limbs swell like boughs that put forth buds. — Yet I would not be vainglorious.

JONATHAN: Do you dwell willingly here in Gilgal?

DAVID: I am strange here, and I miss my father, and the hills where the sheep are, in Bethlehem. Yet I comfort myself, turning my soul to the Nameless; and the flame flares up in my heart, and dries my tears, and I am glad.

JONATHAN: And when my father has been bitter and violent, and you go alone in tears, in a strange place — I have seen the tears, and my heart has been sad — then do you yearn for Bethlehem, and your own?

DAVID: I am weak still. — But when I see the stars, and the Lord in darkness alive between them, I am at home, and Bethlehem or Gilgal is the same to me.

JONATHAN: When I lie alone in camp, and see the stars, I think of my mother, and my father, and Michal, and the home place. — You, the Lord becomes a home to you, wherever you are.

DAVID: It is so. I had not thought of it.

JONATHAN: I fear you would never love man nor woman, nor wife nor child, dearly.

DAVID: Nay! I love my father dearly, and my brothers and my mother.

JONATHAN: But when the Lord enters your soul, father or mother or friend is as nothing to you.

DAVID: Why do you say so? — They are the same. But when the Lord is there, all the branches are hidden in blossom.

JONATHAN: Yea! — I, alas, love man or woman with the heart's tenderness, and even the Lord cannot make me forget.

DAVID: But nor do I forget. — It is as if all caught fire at once, in the flame of the Hope.

JONATHAN: Sometimes I think the Lord takes from me the flame I have. I love my father. And my father lifts the short spear at me, in wild anger, because, he says, the Fire has left him, and I am undutiful.

DAVID: The King is the Lord's anointed. The King has known, as none know, the strong gladness of the Lord's presence in his limbs. And then the pain of wanting the Lord, when He cometh not, passes the pain of a woman moaning for the man she loves, who has abandoned her.

JONATHAN: Yet we love the King. The people look up to him. Abner, the chief captain, is faithful to him unto death. Is this nothing to a man?

DAVID: To a man, it is much. To the Lord's anointed, it is much riches. But to the King whom the Lord hath rejected, even love is a hurt.

JONATHAN: Is my father truly rejected from being King, as Samuel said? And merely that he spared Agag and a few Amalekite cattle? I would not willingly have drawn the sword on naked Agag.

DAVID: Who knows? I know not. — When a people choose a King, then the will of the people is as God to the King. But when the Lord of All chooses a King, then the King must answer to the Lord of All.

JONATHAN: And the Lord of All required the death of defenceless Agag?

DAVID: Amalek has set his will against the Whirlwind. There are two motions in the world. The will of man for himself, and the desire that moves the Whirlwind. When the two are one, all is well, but when the will of man is against the Whirlwind, all is ill, at last. So all is decreed ill, that is Amalek. And Amalek must die, for he obstructs the desire of the breathing God.

JONATHAN: And my father?

DAVID: He is King, and the Lord's anointed.

JONATHAN: But his will is the will of a man, and he cannot bend it with the Lord's desire?

DAVID: It seems he cannot. Yet I know nothing.

JONATHAN: It grieves me for my father. Why is it you can soothe him? Why cannot I?

DAVID: I know not. It is the Lord.

JONATHAN: And why do I love thee?

DAVID: It is the Lord.

JONATHAN: But do you love me again, David?

DAVID: If a man from the sheep dare love the King's son, then I love Jonathan. But hold it not against me for presumption.

JONATHAN: Of a surety, lovest thou me, David?

DAVID: As the Lord liveth.

JONATHAN: And it shall be well between us, for ever?

DAVID: Thou art the King's son. But as the Lord liveth and keepeth us, it shall be well between me and thee. And I will serve thee.

JONATHAN: Nay, but love my soul.

DAVID: Thy soul is dear to my soul, dear as life.

They embrace silently.

JONATHAN: And if my father sends thee away, never forget me.

DAVID: Not while my heart lives, can I forget thee. — But David will easily pass from the mind of the son of the King.

JONATHAN: Ah never! For my heart is sorrowful, with my father, and thou art my comfort. I would thou wert King's son, and I shepherd in Bethlehem.

DAVID: Say not so, lest thine anger rise on me at last, to destroy me.

JONATHAN: Nay, it will not.

CURTAIN

SCENE VI

Yard of SAUL'S house in Gilgal. MICHAL, with tambourine, singing or talking to herself.

MICHAL: As for me, I am sad, I am sad, I am sad, and why should I not be sad? All things together want to make me sad. I hate the house when the men are gone to war. All the men are gone out against the Philistine. Gone these many days. And never a victory. No one coming home with spoil, and no occasion to dance. I am sad, I am sad, my life is useless to me. Even when they come, they will not bring David. My father looked pleasantly on him for a while, then sent him away. So are men! Such is a king! Sent him away again! And I know, some day when the Lord has left Saul, he will marry me to some old sheik. — Unless

he dies in the war. Anyhow, everybody is gone, and I am dull, dull. They say it is the Lord. But why should the Lord make the house of Saul dreary? As for me, I don't know whether the Lord is with me, or whether He is not with me. How should I know? Why should I care? A woman looks with different eyes into her heart, and, Lord or no Lord, I want what I want. I wish I had a sure charm to call back David, son of Jesse. The spells I have tried were no good. I shall try again with the sand and the bones. (She puts a little sand, and three small white bones, in her tambourine — mutters and bends — tosses her tambourine softly and drops it on the ground. Kneels and gazes intently.) Bones, bones, show me the ways in the sand. Sand, lie still; sand, lie still and speak. Now then, I see the hills of Judah, where Bethlehem is. But David is not there, he is gone. At least I don't see him. In the sand is a road to Gilgal, by the white crown-bone. But he is not coming this way, that I can see. Where else? Where else? This must be Elah in the sand, where my father is. And there is Shochoh, opposite, where the Philistines are. Ah yes, two hills, and a valley between, with a brook in the bottom. And my father with our men on one slope, the Philistines on the other. Ah yes, that will be my father among our men; at least that is his black tent. But Jonathan is not there. O woe, if Jonathan were killed! My heart is afraid for Jonathan. Though how should I know Jonathan as a speck of sand, anyhow? There is nothing in the sand. I am no wise woman, nor a seeress, even though I would like to be. How dull it is! How dull it is here! How dull it is to be a woman! (Throws away her tambourine.) Why do they sit in front of the Philistines without defeating them!

WATCHMAN (entering from the gate): Men are coming, from the host of Saul. They come with a litter.

SOLDIER (entering): The Lord strengthen you.

MICHAL: Who comes? Is it news of victory?

SOLDIER: No, lady! Jonathan is wounded in the knee, and comes home to rest.

MICHAL: Wounded in the knee? And what else?

SOLDIER: How, else?

MICHAL: Oh, slow-witted! What other news? Are the Philistines defeated and slaughtered?

SOLDIER: Nay, they are not.

MICHAL: Then what has happened?

SOLDIER: Naught has happened.

MICHAL: Where is the King? Is all well with him?

SOLDIER: The King is with the host at Elah, and all is well with him.

MICHAL: Then where are the Philistines?

SOLDIER: The Philistines are arranged over against us, on the opposite hill at Shochoh.

MICHAL: And what has happened? Do Israel and the Philistines sing songs to one another?

SOLDIER: Nay! A portion of the men go forth to fight, wellnigh each day. And the champions of the Philistines come each day to challenge us.

MICHAL: And who answers out of Israel?

SOLDIER: None answers.

MICHAL: None answers! Yea, that is news to hear! Has Israel never a champion? Is my father, the King, sick?

SOLDIER: Many champions have we, forsooth. But we are men. And this Philistine is huge: he is out of the old days, before the Flood. He is a huge giant, whose great voice alone shakes the tents.

MICHAL: And not one man answers his challenge?

SOLDIER: Nay, where shall we find a huge giant among us, to answer him?

MICHAL: If he were a mountain, I would prick him with my needle.

SOLDIER: Yes, and would you might prick the eyeballs of him!

Enter litter-bearers with JONATHAN.

MICHAL: This is most strange! — Ah, Jonathan, and art thou wounded in the knee?

JONATHAN: Yea!

MICHAL: The Lord be praised it is not in the calf!

JONATHAN: Hush, shrew!

MICHAL: Did the Philistine giant wound thee in the knee, O Jonathan?

JONATHAN: A Philistine wounded me.

MICHAL: But I hear they boast a giant, a champion.

JONATHAN: Yea, verily.

MICHAL: A huge unheard-of giant.

JONATHAN: Huge enough: and heard daily.

MICHAL: What does he say, daily?

JONATHAN: Oh — he asks that we send down a man to fight with him. And if he, the Philistine of Gath, slay our man, then shall all Israel be servant to the Philistines. But if our man slay this Goliath, then the Philistines shall be our servants. And seeing that this giant be so large, no ordinary man can get past his sword to attack him, therefore the King is not willing that the fight be settled between champions, lest we lose our freedom in a moment.

MICHAL: And dare no man go up against this huge one?

JONATHAN: Nay, many dare. And many a man seeks to go. I myself would willingly go. Though I know I should die. But what would I care about dying, if the Philistine died first? Yet I doubt I should die first, and Israel be delivered

into bondage. Hence the King will accept no champion from our midst. But we shall sally forth in daily companies, and defeat the Philistines at length.

MICHAL: At a great length.

JONATHAN: Hast thou wounds or pain, to find it so?

MICHAL: Yea, the wound of shame, that Israel, challenged, is dumb. Israel has no champion! What wound of shame for the woman!

JONATHAN: Why risk the nation in a fight between champions? We are all champions, and we all fight the Philistine.

MICHAL: Only not this big one.

JONATHAN: In single combat, with the fate of the nation hanging in the issue, no! But if Goliath mingle in the battle ranks, then every man of Benjamin will have at him.

MICHAL: And mingles he not in the battle ranks?

JONATHAN: Ah no! He saves himself for the single combat, for this bawling of the challenge and the rattling of the oversized shield.

MICHAL: Some man should think of a way.

JONATHAN: Think thou! I must rest, and recover, and return to the field of battle.

CURTAIN

SCENE VII

The camp of the Israelites at Elah. In the background, black tents of worsted. Morning. Men assembling in arms, to battle. Much shouting of war-cries — much noise of war-like anticipation. DAVID entering, carrying a staff.

DAVID: Is yon the tent of Eliab of Bethlehem?

SOLDIER: The tent of the sons of Jesse.

SHAMMAH (coming armed from the tent): Is not this our brother David? (calling.) Ho! David is here! (embracing DAVID.) And art thou also come to the fight?

ELIAB (also armed): What, David! Hast thou left the sheep to come among the men-at-arms? (They embrace.)

DAVID: My father sent me here to inquire of you, and to bring you bread, and the cheeses for the captain of your thousand. The loaves and the parched corn and the cheeses have I left with the keeper of the victuals. But where is Abinadab?

ELIAB: With the host, where we must form to battle.

The men are forming in loose array, ABINADAB comes and embraces DAVID.

ABINADAB: Hast thou come from Bethlehem? And how is our father, and all the homestead?

DAVID: Yea, all are well. My father sent me with victual, and to see how you fare, and to take your pledge.

ELIAB: The pledge we will give you after the fight. And how fares my young son at home?

CAPTAIN (calling): The thousand of Judah, get you to your hundreds: get you to your places. (Bustle of men falling into rank.)

DAVID (following his brothers): Your son was bitten by a hound, but all is well.

ELIAB: What hound, forsooth? And lives the dog yet?

SAUL (passing): Five hundred of Benjamin, lead into the valley!

SOLDIERS: Ah! Ah! The five hundred are moving forth! (Loud shouting of SOLDIERS.)

DAVID: And how goes the fight?

SHAMMAH: Wellah, this way and that, as wind bloweth!

DAVID: The days are many, that you are afield. My father grew uneasy, and could stay no longer. Long days and no news are ill to live, said he.

ELIAB: Tell my father, this is no folding of sheep, out here.

DAVID: And has no weighty blow been struck, on either side?

SOLDIERS (calling): Ha! Ha! The five hundred are near the brook! And behold, the Philistine champion cometh forth from the ranks, to meet them. (Hush in the camp.)

MIGHTY VOICE OF GOLIATH: Ho! Ho, there! Israel! Why are ye come to set your battle array? Am I not a Philistine, and ye servants to Saul? Choose you a man for you, and let him come down to me.

DAVID (in the hush): But who is this?

SOLDIERS: Ha! Ha! The five hundred are fleeing back from him! They are sore afraid.

A hush.

SHAMMAH: This is Goliath, their champion.

VOICE OF GOLIATH: Ha! ha! Why run ye? Choose you a man for you, and let him come down to me. If he can fight with me, and kill me, then will we be your servants. But if I prevail against him, and kill him, then shall ye be our servants, and serve us. It is fairly said. Choose you a man for you!

DAVID (in the hush): Surely he is a huge man! Goeth no man forth to meet him?

SOLDIER: Have you seen this man! Surely, forty days has he come up to defy Israel. And it shall be, that the man who killeth him, the King will enrich him with great riches, and will give him his daughter, and make his father's house free in Israel.

DAVID: What will the King do to the man that killeth this Philistine and taketh away the reproach from Israel? Will he surely give him his daughter? The daughter of his house in Gilgal?

SOLDIER: Ay, surely he will. And much riches. And make his father's house free in Israel.

DAVID: Who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?

SOLDIERS: Ah! He is what thou seest.

DAVID: As the Lord liveth, there shall be an end to him.

SOLDIERS: Would it were so! But who shall do it?

DAVID: Is the Lord naught in the reckoning? The Lord is with me, and I will do it.

SOLDIERS: Thou? How canst thou kill this great giant?

DAVID: I can do it. I will kill him, as the Lord liveth in me, were his name six times Goliath.

SOLDIER: Nay, but how?

DAVID: The Lord will show you how. I, I will kill him.

ELIAB (coming forward): What art thou doing here? Why camest thou hither, and with whom hast thou left those few sheep in the wilderness? I know thy pride, and the naughtiness of thy heart. For thou art come down that thou mightest see the battle.

DAVID: What have I now done? Was I not sent by my father, for a cause?

ELIAB (turning away in anger): Thou didst persuade him, in the vanity of thy mind.

SOLDIER: Shall we say to Saul of thee, that thou art minded to kill the giant?

DAVID: Say so to him. For the Lord is with me.

ANOTHER SOLDIER: Verily, feelest thou in the power to kill this mighty man?

DAVID: Verily! And is it sooth the King will give his daughter to him that slayeth the roaring Philistine?

SOLDIER: Yea, it is sooth, for it is so proclaimed. But tell us how thou wilt come nigh him, to slay him.

DAVID: The Lord will show you.

SOLDIERS: Saul is coming.

SAUL (approaching): Which is this man will go forth against the Philistine?

DAVID: Let no man's heart fail because of the giant, for thy servant will go out and fight with him.

SAUL: Thou? Thou art not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him, for thou art but a youth, and he is a man of war from his youth.

DAVID: Thy servant slew both the lion and the bear; and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be as one of them, seeing he hath defied the armies of the living God.

SAUL: But neither lion nor bear came against thee in greaves of brass nor armed with sword a man's length. How shallst thou fight with this giant in panoply?

DAVID: The Lord that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, He will deliver me out of the hand of the Philistine.

SAUL: Thou shalt go. And the Lord be with thee. (To ARMOUR-BEARER.) Fetch hither my armour, and another sword. For we will put them on him.

Exit ARMOUR-BEARER.

DAVID: Shall thy servant go in armour clad?

SAUL: How else canst thou keep thy life?

VOICE OF GOLIATH: Ho! men of Saul! Is there no man among you, to answer when a fighter calls? Are you all maidens, combing your hair? Where is Saul, the slayer of foemen? Is he crying like a quail to his God? Call to Baal, and call to Astaroth, for the God of Israel is a pigeon in a box.

DAVID: Ha! Lord God! Deliver him into my hand this day!

SAUL: Yea!

Enter ARMOUR-BEARER.

Put the coat of proof upon him, and the helmet of brass.

They put the armour of the KING on DAVID.

DAVID: I am not used to it.

SAUL (unbuckling his sword): Take thou my sword.

DAVID (girding it on): Thy servant hath honour beyond his lot. Lo! I am strange

in this array! The Lord hath not intended it for me. (Takes shield.)

SAUL: Now thou art ready. A man shall bear thy shield.

DAVID: Then let me go. But let me assay this sword and battle harness that is on me. (Sets forth. Tries his sword; goes a little way. Turns suddenly back.) I cannot go with these, for I have not proved them.

Drops his shield. Hastily unbuckles sword, and gives it to SAUL. Unfastens the helmet. The ARMOUR-BEARER disarms DAVID.

SAUL: Then thou goest not! Uncovered thou canst not go.

DAVID: As the Lord liveth, I will go with naught but God upon me.

VOICE OF GOLIATH: The God of Israel is a blue pigeon in a box, and the men of Israel are quails in the net of the Philistine. Baal is laughing aloud, and Astarte smiles behind her sleeve, for Israel is no more than worms in a dung-hill.

DAVID: I shall go. Sound the trumpet!

He picks up his staff, recrosses hastily to the back of the stage, downwards as to a valley. Stoops in the distance: meanwhile trumpet sounds and the voice of the HERALD is heard, crying:

HERALD: Come down, Goliath! Come forward, Philistine! For Israel sendeth a champion against thee. (Noise of shouting in both camps.)

SHAMMAH: See, David is picking smooth stones from the brook bed.

ABINADAB: He has put them in his leather pouch, and taken his sling in his hand. Surely he will go after the Philistine as after a wolf.

SAUL: The Philistine cometh down with his shield-bearer before him. — Yea, but the youth is naked and unafraid.

VOICE OF GOLIATH: Where art thou, champion of Israel? I see thee not. Hast thou already perished of thy dread?

VOICE OF DAVID (small): Yea, I am coming.

VOICE OF GOLIATH: Thou!

SAUL: How he disdains the youth! If we have lost all on this throw!

VOICE OF GOLIATH: Am I a dog, that thou comest to me with staves? Now shall Astaroth slay thee with spittle, and Baal shall break thy bones with a loud laugh.

VOICE OF DAVID: Thou comest to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield: but I come to thee in the name of the Lord of Hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, Whom thou hast defied.

VOICE OF GOLIATH: Come! Ha-ha! Come to me, and I will give thy flesh to the fowls of the air, and to the wild beasts of the hills.

Meanwhile the bystanders, SHAMMAH, ABINADAB, SOLDIERS, all save the ARMOUR-BEARER and SAUL, have been running to the far background, to look closer.

VOICE OF DAVID: This day will the Lord deliver thee into my hand; and I will smite thee, and take thy head from thee.

VOICE OF GOLIATH: Ha! Ha! Canst thou chirp? Come over, thou egg, that they see me swallow thee. (Loud yelling from Philistines.)

VOICE OF DAVID: I will give the carcass of the host of the Philistines this day to the fowls of the air, and to the beasts of the earth. That all the earth may know there is a God in Israel. (Loud yelling of Israel.)

VOICE OF GOLIATH: Come, thou whistling bird! Come! Seest thou this sword? (Loud yelling of Philistines.)

VOICE OF DAVID: Yea! and all this people shall know that the Lord saveth not with sword and spear: for the battle is the Lord's, and He will deliver you into our hands. (Great defiance heard in Israel.)

VOICE OF GOLIATH: Must we die of thy talking? And wilt thou not come

forth? Then must I fetch thee. . . . (Tumult in Philistia.)

ARMOUR-BEARER: The Philistine is hastening down! — Oh, and behold, the youth is running at him fast! Ha-a-a!

ARMOUR-BEARER rushes away, leaving SAUL alone.

SAUL (in a pause): Ah! Ah! — Lord, my Lord! — Is he down? (Great shouting heard — men running.) What? Yea, the Philistine has fallen! The boy but slang a stone at him! It is the Lord! Nay, he riseth not! — Ah God! was it so easy a thing? Why had I not done it! See, see, Saul, see, thou King of Israel, see this nameless boy who hath run upon the fallen Philistine, and seized his sword from his hand, and stands upon his body hewing at the neck of the giant! Ah, sight for the King of Israel, who stands alone, in safety, far off, and watches this thing done for him! Yea, they may shout! It is not for me. It is for that boy, whom I know not. How should I know him, with his young beard on his lip! It is a hard thing to hack off the head of such a giant, and he cannot find the neck joint. I see him stooping! (A great wild shout is heard.) Ah! Even so! Even so!

ABNER enters, running.

ABNER: The youth hath slain the Philistine with a stone from a sling, and even now has hewn his head loose, and is holding it up before the armies.

SAUL: Even so!

ABNER: Yea! He stands upon the body of that which was Goliath, and holds up the head to Israel! The Lord has prevailed. (Loud shouting.)

SOLDIERS (running past): The host of the Philistines is in flight! After them! After them!

ABNER: Shall we not pursue? Will not the King lead the pursuit? Lo! they flee in abandon, flinging away their spears in their haste.

SAUL: This needs no leader. Any man can strike in the back of a running enemy. What of the youth?

ABNER: He hath stripped the Philistine of his gear. Yea, I can see the body of

the giant naked in blood upon the ground.

SAUL: Who is this youth? Whose son is he?

ABNER: As thy soul liveth, O King, I cannot tell.

SAUL: Enquire thou whose son the stripling is.

ABNER: He is coming towards the brook. I will bring him hither.

Exit ABNER.

SAUL: Yea, he is coming! And alone up the slope, for the men have gone like hounds after the Philistine, and to the stripping of the tents. Yea, as bees swarm in upon the sweetmeats, when the window is opened. This is a day to make songs for. But not in the name of Saul. Whom will the maidens sing to? To him yonder, coming up the hill slowly, with the swinging head, and the bright brass armour of the Philistine. To that ruddy-faced fair youth, with a young beard on his mouth. It seems I should know him, if I would. Yea, I shall know him in my hour. Ah the blithe thing! Ah the blithe boy! Ah God! God! was I not blithe? Where is it gone? Yea, where! Blitheness in a man is the Lord in his body. Nay, boy, boy! I would not envy thee the head of the Philistine. Nay, I would not envy thee the Kingdom itself. But the blitheness of thy body, that is thy Lord in thee, I envy it thee with a sore envy. For once my body too was blithe. But it hath left me. It hath left me. Not because I am old. And were I ancient as Samuel is, I could still have the alertness of God in me, and the blithe bearing of the living God upon me. I have lost the best. I had it, and have let it go. Ha! whither is he going? He turns aside, among the tents. Aha! Aha! So it is. Among the tents of Judah, and to the booth of the Bethlehemite! So, he has gone in to lay down his spoil, the helmet of brass, and the greaves of brass, the coat, the great sword, and the shirt fringed with scarlet. Lay them by, they are thine. Yea, they are thine, lay them in thy tent. No need to bring them unto the King. They are no king's spoil. Yea, lead him hither, Abner! Lead him hither! He is bringing the head in his hand. Oh yes, the champion, the victor! He is bringing the head in his hand, to swing it under the nose of the King. But the sword, the great sword, and the greaves of brass and the body-spoil he has e'en laid by in his own tent, where no man may lay hand on it. Oh! it is a shrewd youth, and a canny youth, cunning as the Lord makes them.

Enter DAVID, with head of GOLIATH — and ABNER.

SAUL: So! Comest thou again?

DAVID: Even so! To lay the head of thine enemy before thee, O King!

SAUL: Whose son art thou, thou young man?

DAVID: I am the son of thy servant Jesse the Bethlehemite.

SAUL: Art thou so! Ay, thou art David! And brother to Eliab, and Abinadab, and Shammah, three men of war! — Thou hast put cunning in thy skill, and slain thine enemy as he were a hare among the bushes.

ABNER: See! The place where the stone sunk in, in the side of the forehead bone! It lies still there, the stone of David.

SAUL: Yea, that was death without weapons meeting, indeed.

ABNER: Surely the Lord was in that round stone, that digged the pit in Goliath's head-bone!

DAVID: Except the Lord had been with me, I had not done it.

SOLDIERS (standing round): Yea, the Lord sped the hand of David. The Lord is with this young man.

SAUL: Praise we must give to the Lord, and to David the promised reward. Seekest thou thy reward at the King's hand, thou young man?

DAVID: It is as the King willeth. Yet what should the reward be?

SAUL: Hast thou not heard it proclaimed?

DAVID: Nay, I arrived but in the dawn, with provender from my father to my brethren.

SAUL: Didst thou not set forth even now against the Philistine, hoping big for the reward?

DAVID: Not so, O King. But the Lord moved me to go, to take off the shame and the reproach from the army of the living God.

SAUL: Thou hast done well! Yet claimest thou thy reward?

DAVID: Shall I not hear from the King's mouth, what the reward should be?

SAUL: How was it said, Abner? Recallest thou?

ABNER: Yea, O King! Riches and the King's daughter, and freedom for his father's house, to the man that should slay Goliath in the single combat.

SAUL: Single-handed hath David slain Goliath, indeed! Even without any combat at all. But how likest thou thy reward, thou young man?

DAVID: Were it mine, O King, I should rejoice for my father's sake and fall to the ground beneath the honour put upon me, being son-in-law to the King.

SAUL: Even so! Now thou shalt stay with me, and live in my house and return no more to thy father's house. And all shall be done to thee, as was said. — For surely thou hast brought much honour upon Israel. And we will make much of thee. For thou art champion of Israel in the sight of all the people. And thou shalt sit at the King's right hand, that all men may delight in thee. Yet, since thou art young, and fresh from the sheepfold, we will not hasten thee to thy confusion. But thou shalt dwell as a son among us, and rise in degree as a son rises, sitting at the King's meat. And behold, my elder daughter Merab, her will I give thee to wife. Only be thou valiant for me, and fight the Lord's battles.

DAVID: Let but thy servant serve thee, O King, in the sight of the Lord. And Saul will take the head of this Philistine to put it on a pole?

SAUL: Nay! Thou thyself shalt bring it before the people, in Jerusalem of Judah.

CURTAIN

SCENE VIII

The king's tent at Elah: a square tent of dark worsted, with the wide front open. Heaps of panoply and spoil without. Within, in the public part of the tent, SAUL, with DAVID on his right hand, JONATHAN on his left, and sitting around, the CAPTAINS of the armies of Israel.

SAUL: We have numbered the armies in tens, in hundreds, and in thousands. And now are all men returned from pursuing after the Philistine, and the spoil is all brought in. And the wounded of the Philistine have fallen by the way, even to the valley of Ekron and the gates of Gath, their dead are more than their living. Yet are their princes within the land, holding on to strong places. Therefore we will rejoice not yet, nor go home to the feasting. But while his heart is sunk low, we will follow up the Philistine in every place where he holds out. Is it sooth?

CAPTAINS: It is good, O King.

ABNER: The blow that was struck with a pebble, we will follow up with swords and spears, till in the Lord's name not one uncircumcised remains in the land.

CAPTAINS: It is good! It is good! (They strike their shields.)

SAUL (presenting DAVID): This is David, that slew Goliath the Philistine, and delivered Israel from reproach. Sits not David high in the heart of every man in Israel, this day?

CAPTAINS: Yea! David! David! (Striking shields.)

SAUL: Who is first among the men of war this day? Is it not David, my son David?

CAPTAINS: David! David! It is David!

SAUL: Yea, Captains! Your King is but captain of the captains! Whom shall we set over the men of war this day? Shall it not be David? This time, shall not David lead the hosts? Is he not the first against the Philistine? Yea, in this foray of triumph and this campaign of victory, should any man lead but David?

CAPTAINS: It is good! David shall command, till we return home this time from smiting the Philistine. (They clash shields with martial noise.)

SAUL (to DAVID): Hearest thou, David, son of my delight?

DAVID: O King, I am no leader of men of war. I have no skill in arts of battle. Honour me not to my confusion.

SAUL: Nay, this time shalt thou take the charge. For in this fight art thou the first man among the men of war in Israel. Answer, Captains! Is it not so?

CAPTAINS: Verily! This time we will have David.

ABNER: Verily, save David lead us, we will not go.

The CAPTAINS rise, and lift locked shields before DAVID as if to raise him up.

SAUL: If we go not now, we lose the golden hour. The choice is upon thee, David.

DAVID: Thy servant will do according to thy will, O King, and according to the will of Abner, and of the Captains. (He rises before the CAPTAINS.) But I am young, and not brought up to war. And the Captains and the strong men will laugh at me, seeing my inexperience and my presumption.

ABNER: Nay! No man shall find occasion to laugh at thee, for the fight is in thee as in a young eagle. Leading to war shalt thou learn war.

DAVID: It is as the King and the Captains shall bid me.

SAUL (rising): We will make ready, and send out the news through the camp: In

this is David our leader! Then David shall choose his men, and go forth. He shall give his orders, and the Captains shall march at his bidding. David, the day is thine!

Salutes. The CAPTAINS again salute DAVID with spear on shield, then they go out.

CAPTAINS: To thee, David!

Exeunt CAPTAINS.

DAVID (to JONATHAN): How shall I bring this to a pass?

JONATHAN: Thy soul will not fail thee. Thou art the young lion of Judah, thou art the young eagle of the Lord. O David, is it well between me and thee, and hast thou verily not forgotten me?

DAVID: Verily, thou hast not left my soul. But how shall I go before these men?

JONATHAN: We have sworn a covenant, is it not between us? Wilt thou not swear with me, that our souls shall be as brothers, closer even than the blood? O David, my heart hath no peace save all be well between thy soul and mine, and thy blood and mine.

DAVID: As the Lord liveth, the soul of Jonathan is dearer to me than a brother's. — O brother, if I were but come out of this pass, and we might live before the Lord, together!

JONATHAN: What fearest thou then?

DAVID: In the Lord, I fear nothing. But before the faces of men, my heart misgives me.

JONATHAN: Sittest thou not high in the hearts of Israel?

DAVID: Yea, but who am I, to be suddenly lifted up! Will they not throw me as suddenly down?

JONATHAN: Who would throw thee down, that art strong as a young eagle, and

subtle as the leopard?

DAVID: I will rest in the Lord.

JONATHAN: And in me wilt thou not trust?

DAVID: I will trust thee, Jonathan, and cleave to thee till the sun sets on me. Thou art good to me as man never before was good to me, and I have not deserved it. Say thou wilt not repent of thy kindness towards me!

JONATHAN: O brother, give me the oath, that naught shall sunder our souls, for ever.

DAVID: As the Lord liveth, my soul shall not part for ever from the soul of my brother Jonathan; but shall go with him up the steeps of heaven, or down the sides of the pit. And between his house and my house the covenant shall be everlasting. For as the hearts of men are made on earth, the heart of Jonathan is gentlest and most great.

JONATHAN: The covenant is between us. (Covers his face.)

DAVID (after a pause): But how shall I go before these captains, O my brother? Comest thou not with me? Wilt thou not stand by me? Oh, come!

JONATHAN: I am limping still in the knee, and how shall I lead a foray? But thou art mine and I am thine. And I will clothe thee in my clothes, and give thee my sword and my bow, and so shall my spirit be added to thy spirit, and thou shalt be as the King's son and the eagle of the Lord, in the eyes of the people.

Takes off striped coat, or wide-sleeved tunic.

DAVID: But can I do this thing?

JONATHAN: Yea! That all men know thou art as the King's son in the world. For the eagle hath gold in his feathers and the young lion is bright. So shall David be seen in Israel.

DAVID slowly pulls off his loose robe, a herdsman's tunic cut off at the knee. JONATHAN takes off his sleeveless shirt, and is seen in his leather loin-strap.

From his upper arm he takes a metal bracelet.

JONATHAN: Even all my garments thou shalt take, even the armlet that should not leave me till I die. And thou shalt wear it for ever. And thy garments will I take upon me, so the honour shall be mine.

DAVID pulls off his shirt, and is seen in the leather loin-strap, JONATHAN puts his bracelet on DAVID'S arm, then his own shirt over DAVID'S head, and holds up his coloured robe. DAVID robed, JONATHAN brings him a coloured head-kerchief and girdle, then his sword and his bow and quiver and shoes. JONATHAN puts on DAVID'S clothes.

DAVID: How do I appear?

JONATHAN: Even as the eagle in his own plumage. It is said, David, that thou art anointed of Samuel, before the Lord. Is it so?

DAVID: Yea.

JONATHAN: Thou hast the sun within thee, who shall deny thee?

DAVID: Why speakest thou sadly, Jonathan, brother?

JONATHAN: Lest thou go beyond me, and be lost to me.

DAVID: Lord! Lord! Let not my soul part from the soul of Jonathan for ever, for all that man can be to man on earth, is he to me.

JONATHAN: Would I could give thee more!

SAUL (entering): Yea! And which now is the King's son, and which the shepherd?

DAVID: Thy son would have it so, O King.

JONATHAN: It is well, Father! Shall not the leader shine forth?

SAUL: Even so. And the young King-bird shall moult his feathers in the same hour.

JONATHAN: The robe of David honours the shoulders of Jonathan.

SAUL: Art thou ready, thou brave young man?

DAVID: I am ready, O King.

SAUL: The host is in array, awaiting thy coming.

DAVID: I will come where the King leads me.

SAUL (to JONATHAN): Put another robe upon thee, ere thou come forth.

JONATHAN: I will not come forth. (Turns abruptly.)

DAVID follows SAUL from the tent — loud shouting of the army.

JONATHAN (alone): If the Lord hath anointed him for the kingdom, Jonathan will not quarrel with the Lord. My father knoweth. Yet Saul will strain against God. The Lord hath not revealed Himself unto me: save that once I saw the glisten in my father that now I see in David. My life belongs to my father, but my soul is David's. I cannot help it. The Lord sees fit to split me between King and King-to-be, and already I am torn asunder as between two wild horses straining opposite ways. Yet my blood is my father's. And my soul is David's. And the right hand and the left hand are strangers on me.

CURTAIN

SCENE IX

Outside the courtyard of SAUL'S house in Gilgal. Doorway of courtyard seen open. MAIDENS running forth with instruments of music. Men-servants gazing into the distance. People waiting.

MAIDENS: Lu-lu-a-li-lu-lu-lu! Lu-lu-lu-li-a-li-lu-lu! A-li-lu-lu-lu-a-li-lu! Lu-al-li-lu! Lu-al-li-lu-a!

MERAB: Out of Judah Saul comes in!

MICHAL: David slew the Philistine.

MERAB AND HER MAIDENS: Out of Judah Saul comes in!

MICHAL AND HER MAIDENS: David slew the Philistine.

ALL (repeat several times): A-li-lu-lu! A-li-lu-lu-lu! Lu! lu! lu! lu! li! lu! lu! a! li! lu! lu! lu! lu!

MERAB: All the Philistine has fled.

MICHAL: By the roadside fell their dead.

MERAB: Wounded fell down in the path.

MICHAL: Beyond Ekron unto Gath.

MERAB AND MAIDENS: All the Philistine has fled.

MICHAL AND MAIDENS: By the roadside fell their dead.

MERAB AND MAIDENS: Wounded fell down in the path.

MICHAL AND MAIDENS: Beyond Ekron unto Gath.

ALL (repeat continuously): Lu-li-lu-lu-lu! Lu-lu-li-a-lu-lu! Li-a-li-lu-lu-lu! Lu! Lu! Lu! A! li! Lu! Lu! Lu! Lu! Li! A! Lu! Lu! Li! Lu! A! Li! Lu! Lu! Lu! Lu! u!

MERAB: Saul in thousands slew their men!

MICHAL: David slew his thousands ten!

MERAB AND MAIDENS: Saul in thousands slew their men!

MICHAL AND MAIDENS: David slew his thousands ten! Oh! Lu! Lu! Lu! Lu!
Lu! Lu! A! Li! Lu! Lu! Lu!

ALL: Lu! Lu! Lu! Li! Lu! Lu! Lu! — A-li-lu-lu-a-li-lu-lu! Lu-a-li-lu-lu-lu! Lu-
lu-lu!

MERAB: Out of Judah Saul comes in.

MICHAL: David slew the Philistine.

MERAB AND MAIDENS: Out of Judah Saul comes in.

MICHAL AND MAIDENS: David slew the Philistine.

ALL: Lu-li-lu-lu-lu-li-lu! Lu-lu-a-li-lu-lu-lu!

They continue the repetition of the simple rhymes, as SAUL draws near, followed by DAVID, JONATHAN, ABNER and the armed men. The MAIDENS keep up the singing, all the time dancing; MERAB with her MAIDENS on one side of the men, MICHAL and her MAIDENS on the other, singing loudly back and forth all the time. The men pass slowly into the gate, without response. The MAIDENS run peering at the spoil the servant-men are carrying in. All pass in at the gate.

CURTAIN

SCENE X

Courtyard of SAUL'S house in Gilgal. Confusion of people and men just come in — MAIDENS still singing outside.

ABNER: The King is returned to his own house once more full of victory. When shall we slay the sacrifice?

SAUL: To-night I will slay a bull calf for my house, and an ox will I sacrifice for my household. And for the men will we slay oxen and sheep and goats.

ABNER: Yea! For this is a great day before the Lord in Israel! And we will sprinkle the spoil with the sacrifice.

SAUL: Hast thou heard the song of the women? Nay, hearest thou? Hark! (In the distance is heard the singing.)

MERAB: Saul in thousands slew their men.

MICHAL: David slew his thousands ten.

ALL: Lu-lu-lu-li-lu-lu-a! A-li-lu-lu-a-li-lu!

ABNER: Ay!

SAUL: May such mouths be bruised!

ABNER: Nay! Nay! King Saul! In this hour!

SAUL: In this instant! They have ascribed to David ten thousands, and to me they have ascribed but thousands. And what can he have more, but the Kingdom?

ABNER: Nay, nay, O Saul! It is but the light words of women. Ay, let them sing! For as vain women they fancy naught but that head of Goliath, with the round stone sunken in. But the King is King.

SAUL: Shall that shepherd oust me, even from the mouths of the maidens?

ABNER: Nay, this is folly, and less than kingly.

MICHAL (followed by MERAB — running round the KING with their tambourines): Lu-li-lu-lu-a-li-lu! A-li-lu-lu-a-li-lu-lu-lu!

SAUL: Away!

MERAB AND MICHAL: Lu-lu-lu-lu! Saul, the King! Lu-lu-lu-lu-al-li-lu-lu! Saul! Saul! Lu-lu-lu! Saul! Saul! Lu-lu-lu!

SAUL: Peace, I say!

Exit SAUL, passing into house.

MERAB AND MICHAL: Jonathan and David. Lu-lu-lu! Here they come, the friendly two! Lu-lu-lu-lu-a-li-lu! Lu-lu-a-li-lu-lu-lu!

MERAB: Jonathan is kingly bred.

MICHAL: David took Goliath's head.

BOTH: Jonathan and David! Lu-lu-lu! — a! Here they come, the loving two-a!

MICHAL (to DAVID): Where is the giant's head?

DAVID: It is in Jerusalem of Judah, O Maiden.

MICHAL: Why did you not bring it here, that we might see it?

DAVID: I am of Judah, and they would have it there.

MICHAL: But Saul is King, and could have it where he would.

DAVID: Saul would leave it in Jerusalem.

MICHAL: And the armour, and the greaves of brass, and the shield, and the sword? The coat of brass that weighs five thousand shekels. Where are these? I want to see them, O David!

DAVID: The armour is in my father's house, and in Jerusalem. The sword lies before the Lord in Ramah, with Samuel, O Maiden!

MICHAL: Why take it to Samuel? Do you not know my name, O David!

DAVID: You are Michal.

MICHAL: I am she. And this is Merab! Look at him, Merab, and see if you like him. Is it true, O my brother Jonathan, that the King will give Merab his daughter to the slayer of the Philistine?

JONATHAN: He hath said so.

MICHAL: To us he has not said one word. O Merab! Look at thy man! How likest thou him?

MERAB: I will not look at him yet.

MICHAL: Oh, thou! Thou hast spied out every hair in his beard. Is he not fox-red? I think the beard of a man should be raven-black. O Merab, thy David is very ruddy.

MERAB: Nay! He is not yet mine, nor I his.

MICHAL: Thou wouldst it were so! Aiee! Thou art hasty and beforehand with the red youth! Shame on thee, that art a King's daughter.

MERAB: Nay, now, I have said naught.

MICHAL: Thou shouldst have said somewhat, to cover thy unmaidenly longing. — O David, this Merab sighs in her soul for you. How like you her?

DAVID: She is fair and a modest maiden.

MICHAL: As am not I! Oh, but I am Saul's very daughter, and a hawk that soars kinghigh. And what has David brought, to lay before Merab?

DAVID: All I have is laid before the King.

MICHAL: But naught of the Philistine Goliath! All that spoil you took home to your father's house, as the fox brings his prey to his own hole. Ah, David, the wary one!

MERAB: It was his own! Where should he take it, but to his father's house!

MICHAL: Is not the King his father! Why should he not bring it here? Is Merab not worth the bride-money?

JONATHAN: Oh, peace! Thou art all mischief, Michal. Thou shouldst be married to a Philistine, for his undoing.

MICHAL: Ayee! This David has come back to trouble us! Why didst not thou slay the Philistine, Jonathan?

JONATHAN: Peace! Let us go in, David! These maidens are too forward. My father did never succeed in ruling his household of women.

MICHAL: Ayee! His household of women! Thou, Jonathan! Go in, David! They shall not put poison in your meat.

As DAVID and JONATHAN depart she sings:

Empty-handed David came!
Merab saw him full of shame!
Lu-lu-lu-lu-lu-li-lu! A-li-lu-a! A-li-lu!
Empty-handed David came!
Merab saw him full of shame!
A-li-lu-lu! A-li-lu-li! Li-lu-li-lu-a!

(To MERAB.) So he has come!

MERAB: Even so! Yet his brow says: Have a care!

MICHAL: Have a care, Merab! Have a care, David! Have a care, Michal! Have a care, Jonathan! Have a care, King Saul! I do not like his brow, it is too studied.

MERAB: Nay, it is manly, and grave.

MICHAL: Ayee! Ayee! He did not laugh. He did not once laugh. It will not be well, Merab!

MERAB: What will not be well?

MICHAL: The King will not give thee to him.

MERAB: But the King hath spoken.

MICHAL: I have read the brow of Saul, and it was black. I have looked at David's brow, and it was heavy and secret. The King will not give thee to David, Merab. I know it, I know it.

MERAB: A King should keep his word!

MICHAL: What! Art thou hot with anger against thy father, lest he give thee not to this shepherd boy! David hath cast a spell on Merab! The ruddy herdsman out of Judah has thrown a net over the King's daughter! Oh, poor quail! poor partridge!

MERAB: I am not caught! I am not!

MICHAL: Thou art caught! And not by some chieftain, nor by some owner of great herds. But by a sheep-tending boy! Oh, fie!

MERAB: Nay, I do not want him.

MICHAL: Yea, thou dost. And if some man of great substance came, and my father would give thee to him, thou wouldst cry: Nay! Nay! Nay! I am David's!

MERAB: Never would I cry this and that thou sayest. For I am not his. — And am I not first daughter of the King!

MICHAL: Thou waitest and pantest after that red David. And he will climb high in the sight of Israel, upon the mound of Merab. I tell thee, he is a climber who would climb above our heads.

MERAB: Above my head he shall not climb.

MICHAL:

Empty-handed David came!
Merab saw him full of shame!
Lu-li-lu-li! Lu-li-lu-lu-li! A-li-lu-lu!

CURTAIN

SCENE XI

Room in KING'S house at Gilgal. Bare adobe room, mats on the floor. SAUL, ABNER and ADRIEL reclining around a little open hearth.

SAUL: And how is the slayer of Goliath looked upon, in Gilgal?

ABNER: Yea! he is a wise young man, he brings no disfavour upon himself.

SAUL: May Baal finish him! And how looks he on the King's daughter? Does he eye Merab as a fox eyes a young lamb?

ABNER: Nay, he is wise, a young man full of discretion, watching well his

steps.

SAUL: Ay is he! Smooth-faced and soft-footed, as Joseph in the house of Pharaoh! I tell you, I like not this weasel.

ABNER: Nay, he is no enemy of the King. His eyes are clear, with the light of the Lord God. But he is alone and shy, as a rude young shepherd.

SAUL: Thou art his uncle, surely. I tell you, I will send him back to Bethlehem, to the sheep-cotes.

ABNER: He is grown beyond the sheep-cotes, O King! And wilt thou send him back into Judah, while the giant's head still blackens above the gates of Jerusalem, and David is darling of all Judea, in the hearts of the men of Judah? Better keep him here, where the King alone can honour him.

SAUL: I know him! Should I send him away, he will have them name him King in Judah, and Samuel will give testimony. Yea, when he carried the sword of the giant before Samuel in Ramah, did not Samuel bless him in the sight of all men, saying: Thou art chosen of the Lord out of Israel!

ABNER: If it be so, O King, we cannot put back the sun in heaven. Yet is David faithful servant to the King, and full of love for Jonathan. I find in him no presumption.

SAUL: My household is against me. Ah, this is the curse upon me! My children love my chief enemy, him who hath supplanted me before the Lord. Yea, my children pay court to David, and my daughters languish for him. But he shall not rise upon me. I say he shall not! Nor shall he marry my elder daughter Merab. Wellah, and he shall not.

ABNER: Yet Saul has given his word.

SAUL: And Saul shall take it back. What man should keep his word with a supplanter? Abner, have we not appointed him captain over a thousand? Captain over a thousand in the army of Saul shall he be. Oh yes! And to-morrow I will say to him, I will even say it again: Behold Merab, my elder daughter, her will I give thee to wife: only be thou valiant for me, and fight the Lord's battles. And then he shall go forth with his thousand again, quickly, against the Philistine. Let

not my hand be upon him, but let the hand of the Philistine be upon him.

ABNER: But if the Lord be with him, and he fall not, but come back once more with spoil, wilt thou then withhold the hand of thy daughter Merab from him?

SAUL: He shall not have her! Nay, I know not. When the day comes that he returns back to this house, then Saul will answer him. We will not tempt the Thunderer.

ADRIEL: I have it sure, from Eliab his brother, that David was anointed by Samuel to be King over Israel, secretly, in the house of his father Jesse. And Eliab liketh not the youngster, saying he was ever heady, naughty-hearted, full of a youngling's naughty pride, and the conceit of the father's favourite. Now the tale is out in Judah, and many would have him King, saying: Why should Judah look to a King out of Benjamin? Is there no horn-anointed among the men of Judah?

SAUL: So is it! So is it! — To-morrow he shall go forth with his men, and the hand of the Philistine shall be upon him. I will not lift my hand upon him, for fear of the Dark! Yet where is he now? What is he conniving at this moment, in the house of Saul? Go see what he is about, O Adriel!

Exit ADRIEL.

ABNER: It is a bad thing, O Saul, to let this jealous worm eat into a King's heart, that always was noble!

SAUL: I cannot help it. The worm is there. And since the women sang — nay, in all the cities they sang the same — Saul hath slain his thousands, but David hath slain his tens of thousands, it gnaws me, Abner, and I feel I am no longer King in the sight of the Lord.

ABNER: Canst thou not speak with the Morning Wind? And if the Lord of Days have chosen David to be king over Israel after thee, canst thou not answer the great Wish of the Heavens, saying: It is well!?

SAUL: I cannot! I cannot deny my house, and my blood! I cannot cast down my own seed, for the seed of Jesse to sprout. I cannot! Wellah, and I will not! Speak not to me of this!

ABNER: Yet wert thou chosen of God! And always hast thou been a man of the bright horn.

SAUL: Yea, and am I brought to this pass! Yea, and must I cut myself off? Almost will I rather be a man of Belial, and call on Baal. Surely Astaroth were better to me. For I have kept the faith, yet must I cut myself off! Wellah, is there no other strength?

ABNER: I know not. Thou knowest, who hast heard the thunder and hast felt the Thunderer.

SAUL: I hear It no more, for It hath closed Its lips to me. But other voices hear I in the night — other voices!

Enter ADRIEL.

SAUL: Well, and where is he?

ADRIEL: He is sitting in the house of Jonathan, and they make music together, so the women listen.

SAUL: Ah! And sings the bird of Bethlehem? What songs now?

ADRIEL: Even to the Lord: How excellent is thy name in all the earth. And men and women listen diligently, to learn as it droppeth from his mouth. And Jonathan, for very love, writes it down.

SAUL: Nay, canst thou not remember?

ADRIEL: I cannot, O King. Hark!

A man is heard in the courtyard, singing loud and manly, from Psalm viii.

Voice of singer: What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?

For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour.

Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands;

Thou hast put all things under his feet:

All sheep and oxen, yea, and the beasts of the field;

The fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea, and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the seas.

O Lord our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth!

SAUL listens moodily.

SAUL: I hear him! Yea, they sing after him! He will set all Israel singing after him, and all men in all lands. All the world will sing what he sings. And I shall be dumb. Yea, I shall be dumb, and the lips of my house will be dust! What, am I naught; and set at naught! What do I know? Shall I go down into the grave silenced, and like one mute with ignorance? Ha! Ha! There are wells in the desert that go deep. And even there we water the sheep, when our faces are blackened with drought. Hath Saul no sight into the unseen? Ha, look! look down the deep well, how the black water is troubled. — Yea, and I see death, death, death! I see a sword through my body, and the body of Jonathan gaping wounds, and my son Abinadab, and my son Melchishua, and my son Ishbosheth lying in blood. Nay, I see the small pale issue of my house creeping on broken feet, as a lamed worm. Yea, yea, what an end! And the seed of David rising up and covering the earth, many, with a glory about them, and the wind of the Lord in their hair. Nay, then they wheel against the sun, and are dark, like the locusts sweeping in heaven, like the pillars of locusts moving, yea, as a tall, dark cloud upon the land. Till they drop in drops of blood, like thunder-rain, and the land is red. Then they turn again into the glory of the Lord. Yea, as a flight of birds down all the ages, now shedding sun and the gleam of God, now shedding shadow and the fall of blood, now as quails chirping in the spring, now as the locust pillars of cloud, as death upon the land. And they thicken and thicken, till the world's air grates and clicks as with the wings of locusts. And man is his own devourer, and the Deep turns away, without wish to look on him further. So the earth is a desert, and manless, yet covered with houses and iron. Yea, David, the pits are digged even under the feet of thy God, and thy God shall fall in. Oh, their God shall fall into the pit, that the sons of David have digged. Oh, men can

dig a pit for the most high God, and He falls in — as they say of the huge elephant in the lands beyond the desert. And the world shall be Godless, there shall no God walk on the mountains, no whirlwind shall stir like a heart in the deeps of the blue firmament. And God shall be gone from the world. Only men there shall be, in myriads, like locusts, clicking and grating upon one another, and crawling over one another. The smell of them shall be as smoke, but it shall rise up into the air, without finding the nostrils of God. For God shall be gone! gone! gone! And men shall inherit the earth! Yea, like locusts and whirring on wings like locusts. To this the seed of David shall come, and this is their triumph, when the house of Saul has been swept up, long, long ago into the body of God. Godless the world! Godless the men in myriads even like locusts. No God in the air! No God on the mountains! Even out of the deeps of the sky they lured Him, into their pit! So the world is empty of God, empty, empty, like a blown egg-shell bunged with wax and floating meaningless. God shall fall Himself into the pit these men shall dig for Him! Ha! Ha! O David's Almighty, even He knows not the depth of the dark wells in the desert, where men may still water their flocks! Ha! Ha! Lord God of Judah, thou peepst not down the pit where the black water twinkles. Ha-ha! Saul peeps and sees the fate that wells up from below! Ha! Lo! Death and blood, what is this Almighty that sees not the pits digged for Him by the children of men? Ha! Ha! saith Saul. Look in the black mirror! Ha!

ABNER: It is not well, O King.

SAUL: Ha! It is very well! It is very well. Let them lay their trap for his Lord. For his Lord will fall into it. Aha! Aha! Give them length of days. I do not ask it.

ABNER: My lord, the darkness is over your heart.

SAUL: And over my eyes! Ha! And on the swim of the dark are visions. What? Are the demons not under the works of God, as worms are under the roots of the vine? Look! (Stares transfixed.)

ABNER (to ADRIEL): Go quickly and bring Jonathan, and David, for the Kings is prophesying with the spirit of the under-earth.

Exit ADRIEL.

SAUL: The room is full of demons! I have known it filled with the breath of

Might. The glisten of the dark, old movers that first got the world into shape. They say the god was once as a beetle, but vast and dark. And he rolled the earth into a ball, and laid his seed in it. Then he crept clicking away to hide for ever, while the earth brought forth after him. He went down a deep pit. The gods do not die. They go down a deep pit, and live on at the bottom of oblivion. And when a man staggers, he stumbles and falls backwards down the pit — down the pit, down through oblivion after oblivion, where the gods of the past live on. And they laugh, and eat his soul. And the time will come when even the God of David will fall down the endless pit, till He passes the place where the serpent lies living under oblivion, on to where the Beetle of the Beginning lives under many layers of dark. I see it! Aha! I see the Beetle clambering upon Him, Who was the Lord of Hosts.

ABNER: I cannot hear thee, O King. I would e'en be deaf in this hour. Peace! I bid thee! Peace!

SAUL: What? Did someone speak within the shadow? Come thou forth then from the shadow, if thou hast aught to say.

ABNER: I say Peace! Peace, thou! Say thou no more!

SAUL: What? Peace! saith the voice? And what is peace? Hath the Beetle of the Beginning peace, under many layers of oblivion? Or the great serpent coiled for ever, is he coiled upon his own peace?

Enter JONATHAN, DAVID, and MEN.

SAUL (continuing): I tell you, till the end of time, unrest will come upon the serpent of serpents, and he will lift his head and hiss against the children of men — thus will he hiss! (SAUL hisses.) Hiss! Hiss! and he will strike the children of men — thus —

SAUL strikes as a serpent, and with his javelin.

JONATHAN: Father, shall we sound music?

SAUL: Father! Who is father? Know ye not, the vast, dark, shining beetle was the first father, who laid his eggs in a dead ball of the dust of forgotten gods? And out of the egg the serpent of gold, who was great Lord of Life, came forth.

JONATHAN (to DAVID): Now sing, that peace may come back upon us.

DAVID: If he heed me. (Sings Psalm viii.)

SAUL meanwhile raves — then sinks into gloom, staring fixedly.

SAUL: And the serpent was golden with life. But he said to himself: I will lay an egg. So he laid the egg of his own undoing. And the Great White Bird came forth. Some say a dove, some say an eagle, some say a swan, some say a goose — all say a bird. And the serpent of the sun's life turned dark, as all the gods turn dark. Yea, and the Great White Bird beat wings in the firmament, so the dragon slid into a hole, the serpent crawled out of sight, down to the oblivion of oblivion, yet above the oblivion of the Beetle.

DAVID meanwhile sings.

SAUL (striking with his hands as if at a wasp): Na-a! But what is this sound that comes like a hornet at my ears, and will not let me prophesy! Away! Away!

JONATHAN: My Father, it is a new song to sing.

SAUL: What art thou, Jonathan, thy father's enemy?

JONATHAN: Listen to the new song, Father.

SAUL: What? (Hearkens a moment.) I will not hear it! What! I say I will not hear it! Trouble me not, nor stop the dark fountain of my prophecy! I will not hearken! (Listens.)

DAVID (singing): When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained.

SAUL: What! art thou there, thou brown hornet, thou stealer of life's honey! What, shalt thou stay in my sight! (Suddenly hurls his javelin at DAVID. DAVID leaps aside.)

JONATHAN: My Father, this shall not be!

SAUL: What! art thou there? Bring me here my dart.

JONATHAN (picking up the javelin): Look then at the hole in the wall! Is not that a reproach against the house of the King for ever? (Gives the javelin to SAUL.)

SAUL sinks into moody silence, staring. DAVID begins to sing very softly.

DAVID (singing): O Lord our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth!
Who has set thy glory above the heavens.

SAUL very softly, with the soft, swift suddenness of a great cat, leaps round and hurls the javelin again. DAVID as swiftly leaps aside.

SAUL: I will smite David even to the wall.

ABNER: Go hence, David! Swiftly hence!

JONATHAN: Twice, Father!

Exit DAVID.

ABNER (seizing javelin): The evil spirits upon thee have done this. O Saul!
They have not prevailed.

SAUL: Have I pierced him? Is he down with the dead? Can we lay him in the sides of the pit?

ABNER: He is not dead! He is gone forth.

SAUL (wearily): Gone forth! Ay! He is gone forth! — What, did I seek to slay him?

JONATHAN: Yea, twice.

SAUL: I was out of myself. I was then beside myself.

ABNER: Yea, the evil spirits were upon thee.

SAUL: Tell him, O Jonathan, Saul seeks not his life. Nay! Nay! Do I not love him, even as thou dost, but more, even as a father! O David! David! I have loved thee. Oh, I have loved thee and the Lord in thee. — And now the evil days have come upon me, and I have thrown the dart against thee, and against the Lord. I am a man given over to trouble, and tossed between two winds. Lo, how can I walk before the faces of men! (Covers his face with his mantle.)

ABNER: The evil spirits have left him. Peace comes with sorrow.

JONATHAN: And only then.

SAUL: Bring David hither to me, for I will make my peace with him, for my heart is very sore.

JONATHAN: Verily, shall it be peace?

SAUL: Yea! For I fear the Night.

Exit JONATHAN.

Surely now will David publish it in Judah: Saul hath lilted his hand to slay me.

ABNER: He will not publish it in Judah.

SAUL: And wherefore not? Is he not as the apple of their eyes to the men of Judah, who love not overmuch the tribe of Benjamin?

ABNER: But David is the King's man.

SAUL: Ah, would it were verily so.

Enter JONATHAN and DAVID.

DAVID: The Lord strengthen the King!

SAUL: Ah, David, my son, come, and come in peace. For my hands are bare and my heart is washed and my eyes are no longer deluded. May the Lord be with thee, David, and hold it not against me, what I have done. Spirits of the earth possess me, and I am not my own. Thou shalt not cherish it in thy heart, what

Saul did against thee, in the season of his bewilderment?

DAVID: Naught has the King done against me. And the heart of thy servant knoweth no ill.

SAUL: Hatest thou me not, David?

DAVID: Let the word be unspoken, my Father!

SAUL: Ah, David! David! Why can I not love thee untroubled? — But I will right the wrong. — Thou shalt henceforth be captain of the thousand of Hebron, and dwell in thine own house, by the men. And behold, Merab, my elder daughter, I will give thee to wife.

DAVID: Who am I, and what is my life, or my father's family in Israel, that I should be son-in-law to the King?

SAUL: Nay, thou art of mine own heart, and the Lord is thy great strength. Only be valiant for me, and fight the Lord's battles.

DAVID: All my life is the King's, and my strength is to serve.

SAUL: It shall be well. And with thy thousand shalt thou succour Israel.

CURTAIN

SCENE XII

The well at Gilgal: MAIDENS coming with water-jars. Two HERDSMEN

filling the trough — one below, at the water, one on the steps. They swing the leathern bucket back and forth with a rough chant: the lower shepherd swinging the load to the upper, who swings it to the trough, and hands it back. DAVID approaching.

1ST HERDSMAN: Ya! David missed her.

2ND HERDSMAN: Let him get her sister — Oh! Oh-oh-h!

1ST HERDSMAN: Ya! David missed her.

2ND HERDSMAN: Let him get her sister — Oh-h-h-h! (Continue several times.)

1ST MAIDEN: How long, O Herdsman!

2ND HERDSMAN: Ho-o-o! Enough!

1ST HERDSMAN (coming up): Ya! David missed her!

MAIDENS run away from him.

1ST MAIDEN: Ho, thou! Seest thou not David?

1ST HERDSMAN: Yea, he is there! Ho! David! And hast thou missed her?

MAIDENS laugh.

DAVID: What sayest thou, O Man?

1ST HERDSMAN: Thou hast missed her — say! — am I not right?

DAVID: And whom have I missed?

1ST HERDSMAN: Wellah! And knowest thou not?

DAVID: Nay!

1ST HERDSMAN: Wellah! But Merab, the King's elder daughter! Wellah! We feasted her week half a moon ago, whilst you and your men were gone forth against the Philistines. Wellah, man, and didst thou not know?

DAVID: Sayest thou so?

1ST HERDSMAN: Wellah! And is it not so? Say, Maidens, hath not Adriel the Meholathite got Merab, Saul's daughter, to wife? And hath he not spent his week with her? Wellah, thou art ousted from that bed, O David.

DAVID: And hath the King given his daughter Merab unto Adriel the Meholathite! Wellah, shall he not do as he choose, with his own?

1ST HERDSMAN: Ay, wellah, shall he! But thou wert promised. And in thy stead, another hath gone in unto her. Is it not so, O Maidens? Sleeps not Merab in the tent of Adriel the Meholathite?

1ST MAIDEN: Yea, the King hath married her to the man.

DAVID: And sings she as she shakes his butter-skin?

1ST MAIDEN: Nay, as yet she sings not. But if David sits here beneath the tree, she will come with her jar. Nay, is that not Adriel the Meholathite himself, coming forth? O Herdsman, drive not the cattle as yet to the drinking troughs! (Goes down and fills her pitcher.)

2ND MAIDEN: Will David sit awhile beneath the tree?

DAVID: Yea!

2ND MAIDEN: Then shall Michal, daughter of Saul, come hither with her water-jar. Is it well, O David?

DAVID: Yea, it is very well.

MAIDEN goes down with her pitcher.

ADRIEL: Ha, David! And art thou returned? I have not seen thee before the

King.

DAVID: I returned but yesterday. And I saw the King at the dawn. Now art thou become a great man in Israel, O Adriel, and son-in-law to the King. How fareth Merab in the tents of the Meholathite?

ADRIEL: Yea, and blithely. And to-morrow even in the early day will I set her on an ass, and we will get us to my father's house. For he is old, and the charge of his possessions is heavy upon him, and he fain would see his daughter Merab, who shall bring him sons — sons to gladden him. And she shall have her handmaidens about her, and her store-barns of wool, and corn, and clotted figs, and bunches of raisins, all her wealth she shall see in store!

DAVID: May she live content, and bring thee sons, even males of worth.

ADRIEL: The Lord grant it! And thou hast come home once more with spoil! How thou chastenest the Philistine! Yea, and behold, the King hath delight in thee, and all his servants love thee! Lo! I am the King's son-in-law, of Merab. Now, therefore, be thou also the King's son-in-law, for there is yet a daughter.

DAVID: Seemeth it to you a light thing, to be the King's son-in-law, seeing that I am a poor man, and lightly esteemed?

ADRIEL: By my beard, the King delighteth in thee, and all his servants love thee. There is no man in Israel more fit to take a daughter of the King.

DAVID: Yea, there be men of mighty substance such as thou, whose flocks have not been counted, and who send men-at-arms pricking with iron lance-points, to the King's service. But what have I, save the bare hands and heart of a faithful servant?

ADRIEL: Nay, thy name is high among men. But lo! here cometh Saul, as he hath promised. He is coming out to my tents. I will go forward to bring him in. Come thou?

DAVID: Nay! Leave me here.

Exit ADRIEL.

1ST HERDSMAN: I have heard the mouth of Adriel, O David! Surely he is the King's listener.

DAVID: And thou! Who made thee a listener?

1ST HERDSMAN: Nay, I must guard the water-troughs till the cattle have drunk. Adriel hath flocks and men-servants, but David hath the Lord, and the hearts of all Israel! Better a brave and bright man, with a face that shines to the heart, than a great owner of troops and herds, who struts with arms akimbo. As I plant this driving-stick in the soft earth, so hath the Lord planted David in the heart of Israel. I say: Stick, may thou flourish! May thou bud and blossom and be a great tree. For thou art not as the javelin of Saul, levelled at David's bosom.

DAVID: Peace! Saul cometh.

1ST HERDSMAN: Wellah! And I will go down to the water. (Goes to the well.)

DAVID: The Lord strengthen the King.

SAUL: Art thou my son, David? Yea, David, have they told thee, I have married my daughter Merab unto Adriel the Meholathite, even to him who stands here?

DAVID: Yea, O Saul! They told me the King's pleasure. May the Lord bless thy house for ever!

SAUL: Have I not promised my daughter unto thee? But my servants tell me the heart of Michal goes forth wishful unto David. Say now, is she fair in thine eyes?

DAVID: Yea! Yea, O King, yea!

SAUL: When the new moon shows her tender horns above the west, thou shalt this day be my son-in-law in one of the twain.

DAVID: Let thy servant but serve the King!

SAUL: Yea, an thou serve me, it shall be on the day of the new moon.

DAVID: Yea, will I serve without fail.

SAUL: So be it!

Exit with ADRIEL.

HERDSMAN (coming up): Now is David the richest man in Israel — in promises! Wilt thou not sell me a King's promise, for this my camel-stick?

DAVID: It is well.

HERDSMAN: Sayest thou? Then it is a bargain? Wellah! Take my stick. It is worth the word of a King.

DAVID: Peace!

HERDSMAN: Thou meanest war!

DAVID: How?

HERDSMAN: If thou get her, it is war. If thou get her not, it is more war. Sayest thou peace?

MAIDENS (running): Oh, master David, hath Saul passed with Adriel?

HERDSMAN: They have passed, letting fall promises as the goat droppeth pills.

DAVID: Peace, O Man!

MAIDEN: Oh, master David, shall Michal come forth to fill her water-jar? For Merab is setting meats before the King, in the booth of Adriel. Oh, David, shall Michal bring her jar to the well?

HERDSMAN: Ay, wellah, shall she! And I will hold back the cattle this little while, for I hear their voices.

Exit HERDSMAN.

DAVID: Run back quickly and let her come.

Exit MAIDEN.

DAVID (alone): Lord! dost Thou send this maiden to me? My entrails strain in me, for Michal, daughter of Saul. Lord God of my Salvation, my wanting of this maiden is next to my wanting Thee. My body is a strung bow. Lord, let me shoot mine arrow unto this mark. Thou fillest me with desire as with thunder, Thy lightning is in my loins, and my breast like a cloud leans forward for her. Lord! Lord! Thy left hand is about her middle, and Thy right hand grasps my life. So Thou bringest us together in Thy secret self, that it may be fulfilled for Thee in us. Lord of the Great Wish, I will not let her go.

MICHAL (entering — covering her chin and throat with her kerchief): Wilt thou let me pass to fill my jar, O thou stranger?

DAVID: Come, Michal, and I will fill thy jar.

She comes forward — he takes her jar and goes down the steps. Returning he sets it on the ground at his feet.

MICHAL: Oh, David! And art thou still unslain?

DAVID: As the Lord wills, no man shall slay me. And livest thou in thine house lonely, without thy sister Merab?

MICHAL: Is thy heart sore in thee, David, that thou hast lost Merab? Her heart is gentle, and she sighed for thee. But e'en she obeyed.

DAVID: She hath a man of more substance than David. And my heart is very glad on her account.

MICHAL: It is well.

DAVID: O Michal, didst thou come willingly to the well, when the maiden told thee I waited here?

MICHAL: Yea, willingly.

DAVID: O Michal, my heart runs before me, when it sees thee far off, like one eager to come to his own place. Oh, thou with the great eyes of the wilderness,

shall my heart leap to thee, and shall thou not say Nay! to it?

MICHAL: What said my father, O David, when he passed?

DAVID: He said: when the new moon showeth her horns in the west, on this day shalt thou surely be my son-in-law of one of the twain.

MICHAL: Yea, and is thy heart uplifted, to be a King's son-in-law?

DAVID: So she be Michal, my body is uplifted like the sail of a ship when the wind arouses.

MICHAL: Nay, thou art a seeker of honours! Merab had been just as well to thy liking.

DAVID: Ah, no! Ah! Ah! Merab is gentle and good, and my heart softened with kindness for her, as a man unto a woman. But thou art like the rising moon, that maketh the limbs of the mountain glisten. O Michal, we twain are upon the hillsides of the Lord, and surely He will bring our strength together!

MICHAL: And if the Lord God say thee nay!

DAVID: He will not. He hath thy life in His left hand, and my life He holdeth in His right hand. And surely He will lay us together in the secret of His desire, and I shall come unto thee by the Lord's doing.

MICHAL: But if He say thee nay, thou wilt let me go.

DAVID: Thou knowest not the Lord my God. The flame He kindles He will not blow out. He is not yea-and-nay! But my Lord my God loveth a bright desire and yearneth over a great Wish, for its fulfilment. Oh, the Lord my God is a glowing flame and He loveth all things that do glow. So loves He thee, Michal, O woman before me, for thou glowest like a young tree in full flower, with flowers of gold and scarlet, and dark leaves. O thou young pomegranate tree, flowers and fruit together show on thy body. And flame calleth to flame, for flame is the body of God, like flowers of flame. Oh, and God is a great Wish, and a great Desire, and a pure flame for ever. Thou art kindled of the Lord, O Michal, and He will not let thee go.

MICHAL: Yet the Lord Himself will not marry me.

DAVID: I will marry thee, for the Lord hath kindled me unto thee, and hath said: Go to her, for the fruits of the pomegranate are ripe.

MICHAL: Will thou not seek me for thyself?

DAVID: Yea, for my very self; and for my very self; and for the Lord's own self in me.

MICHAL: Ever thou puttest the Lord between me and thee.

DAVID: The Lord is a sweet wind that fills thy bosom and thy belly as the sail of a ship; so I see thee sailing delicately towards me, borne onwards by my Lord.

MICHAL: Oh, David, would the new moon were come! For I fear my father, and I misdoubt his hindrances.

DAVID: Thinkest thou, he would marry thee away, as Merab?

MICHAL: Nay, but thou must make a song, and sing it before all Israel, that Michal is thine by the King's promise, no man shall look on her but David.

DAVID: Yea! I will make a song. And yea, I will not let thee go. Thou shalt come to me as wife, and I will know thee, and thou shalt lie in my bosom. Yea! As the Lord liveth!

MICHAL: And as the Lord liveth, not even my father shall constrain me, to give me to another man, before the new moon showeth her horns.

DAVID: It is well, O Michal! O Michal, wife of David, thou shalt sleep in my tent! In the tent of the men of war, beside the sword of David, Michal sleeps, and the hand of David is upon her hip. He has sealed her with his seal, and Michal of David is her name, and kingdoms shall he bring down to her. Michael of David shall blossom in the land, her name shall blossom in the mouths of soldiers as the rose of Sharon after rain. And men-at-arms shall shout her name, like a victory cry it shall be heard. And she shall be known in the land but as Michal of David; blossom of God, keeper of David's nakedness.

MICHAL: They shall not reive me from thee. — I see men coming.

DAVID: Wilt thou go?

MICHAL: I shall call my maidens. So ho! So ho! (Waves the end of her kerchief.)

HERDSMAN (entering): There are two captains, servants of Saul, coming even now from the booths of the Meholathite, where the King is.

MICHAL: Yea, let them come, and we will hear the words they put forth.

HERDSMAN: And the cattle are being driven round by the apricot garden. They will soon be here.

DAVID: In two words we shall have the mind of Saul from these captains.

MAIDENS enter, running.

MAIDENS: O Michal, men are approaching!

MICHAL: Fill you your jar, and with one ear let us listen. David stays under the tree.

1ST MAIDEN: Stars are in thine eyes, O Michal, like a love night!

2ND MAIDEN: Oh! and the perfume of a new-opened flower! What sweetness has she heard?

3RD MAIDEN: Oh, say! what words like honey, and like new sweet dates of the Oasis, hath David the singer said to Michal? Oh, that we might have heard!

1ST CAPTAIN (entering): David is still at the well?

DAVID: Yea, after war and foray, happy is the homely passage at the well?

2ND CAPTAIN: Wilt thou return to the King's house with us, and we will tell thee what is toward: even the words of Saul concerning thee.

DAVID: Say on! For I must in the other way.

1ST CAPTAIN: The King delighteth in thee more than in any man of Israel. For no man layeth low the King's enemies like David, in the land.

DAVID: Sayest thou so?

1ST CAPTAIN: Yea! And when the new moon shows her horns shalt thou be son-in-law to Saul, in his daughter Michal.

DAVID: As the Lord, and the King, willeth. Saul hath said as much to me, even now. Yet I am a poor man, and how shall the King at last accept me?

2ND CAPTAIN: This too hath Saul considered. And he hath said: Tell my son David, the King desireth not any bride-money, nay, neither sheep nor oxen nor asses, nor any substance of his. But an hundred foreskins of the Philistines shall he bring to the King, to be avenged of his enemies.

1ST CAPTAIN: So said the King: Before the new moon, as she cometh, sets on her first night, shall David bring the foreskins of an hundred Philistines unto Saul. And that night shall Saul deliver Michal, his daughter, unto David, and she shall sleep in David's house.

2ND CAPTAIN: And Israel shall be avenged of her enemies.

DAVID: Hath the King verily sent this message to me?

1ST CAPTAIN: Yea, he hath sent it, and a ring from his own hand. Lo! here it is! For said Saul: Let David keep this for a pledge between me and him, in this matter. And when he returneth, he shall give me my ring again, and the foreskins of the Philistine, and I will give him my daughter Michal to wife.

DAVID: Yea! Then I must hence, and call my men, and go forth against the Philistine. For while the nights are yet moonless, and without point of moon, will I return with the tally.

Exit DAVID.

2ND CAPTAIN: Yea, he is gone on the King's errand.

1ST CAPTAIN: Let him meet what the King wishes.

Exeunt 1ST and 2ND CAPTAINS.

HERDSMAN: Yea, I know what ye would have. Ye would slay David with the sword of the Philistine. For who keeps promise with a dead man! (MICHAL and MAIDENS edge in.) Hast thou heard, O Michal? David is gone forth against the Philistine. For Saul asketh an hundred foreskins of the enemy as thy bride-money. Is it not a tall dowry?

MICHAL: Yea! hath my father done this!

HERDSMAN: Wellah, hath he! For dead men marry no king's daughters. And the spear of some Philistine shall beget death in the body of David. Thy father hath made thee dear!

MICHAL: Nay, he hath made my name cheap in all Israel.

2ND HERDSMAN (entering): Run, Maidens! The cattle are coming round the wall, athirst!

MAIDENS (shouldering their jars): Away! Away!

Exeunt.

CURTAIN

SCENE XIII

A room in DAVID'S house in Gilgal. Almost dark. DAVID alone, speaking softly: an image in a corner.

DAVID: Give ear to my words, O Lord, consider my meditation.

Hearken unto the voice of my cry, my King, and my God: for unto thee will I pray.

My voice shalt thou hear in the morning, O Lord; in the morning will I direct my prayer unto thee, and will look up.

For thou art not a God that hast pleasure in wickedness: neither shall evil dwell with thee.

The foolish shall not stand in thy sight: thou hatest all workers of iniquity.

Thou shalt destroy them that speak leasing: the Lord will abhor the bloody and deceitful man.

But as for me, I will come into thy house in the multitude of thy mercy: and in thy fear will I worship toward thy holy temple.

Lead me, O Lord, in thy righteousness, because of mine enemies; make thy way straight before my face.

For there is no faithfulness in their mouth; their inward part is very wickedness; their throat is an open sepulchre: they flatter with their tongue.

Destroy thou them, O God; let them fall by their own counsels; cast them out in the multitude of their transgressions; for they have rebelled against thee.

But let all those that put their trust in thee rejoice: let them ever shout for joy, because thou defendest them: let them also that love thy name be joyful in thee.

For thou, Lord, wilt bless the righteous; with favour wilt thou compass him, as with a shield.

Pause.

Nay Lord, I am Thy anointed, and Thy son. With the oil of anointment hast Thou begotten me. Oh, I am twice begotten: of Jesse, and of God! I go forth as a son of God, and the Lord is with me. Yet for this they hate me, and Saul seeks to destroy me. What can I do, O Lord, in this pass?

Enter MICHAL, through curtain at side, with tray and lamp.

MICHAL: The dawn is at hand. Art thou not faint with this long watching before the Lord? Oh! why wilt thou leave thy bed and thy pleasure of the night, to speak out into the empty, chill hour towards morning? Come then, eat of the food which I have brought.

DAVID: I will not eat now, for my soul still yearns away from me.

MICHAL: Art thou sick?

DAVID: Yea! My soul is sick.

MICHAL: Why?

DAVID: Nay, thou knowest. Thy father hates me beyond measure.

MICHAL: But I love you.

DAVID (takes her hand): Yea!

MICHAL: Is it nothing to you that Michal is your wife and loves you?

DAVID: Verily, it is not nothing. But, Michal, what will come to me at last? From moon to moon Saul's anger waxes. I shall lose my life at last. And what good shall I be to thee then?

MICHAL: Ah, no! Ah, no! Never shall I see thee dead. First thou shalt see me dead. Never, never shall I tear my hair for thee, as a widow. It shall not be. If thou go hence, it shall not be into death.

DAVID: Yet death is near. From month to month, since I came back with the foreskins of the Philistine, and got thee to wife, Saul has hated me more. Michal loves David, and Saul's hate waxes greater. Jonathan loves David, and the King commands Jonathan, saying: There, where thou seest him, there shalt thou slay David.

MICHAL: My father is no more a man. He is given over entirely to evil spirits. But Jonathan will save thee through it all.

DAVID: The Lord will save me. And Jonathan is dearer to me than a heart's brother.

MICHAL: Think, O husband, if Saul hateth thee, how Michal and Jonathan, who are children of Saul, do love thee.

DAVID: Yea, verily! It is like the rainbow in the sky unto me. But, O Michal, how shall we win through? I have loved Saul. And I have not it in me to hate him. Only his perpetual anger puts on me a surpassing heaviness, and a weariness, so my flesh wearies upon my bones.

MICHAL: But why? Why? Why does it matter to thee? I love thee, all the time — Jonathan loves thee — thy men love thee. Why does the frenzy of one distracted man so trouble thee? Why? It is out of all measure.

DAVID: Nay, he is Saul, and the Lord's anointed. And he is King over all Israel.

MICHAL: And what then? He is no man among men any more. Evil possesses him. Why heed him, and wake in the night for him?

DAVID: Because he is the Lord's anointed, and one day he will kill me.

MICHAL: He will never kill thee. Thou sayest thyself the Lord will prevent him. And if not the Lord, then I will prevent him — for I am not yet nothing in Gilgal. And Jonathan will prevent him. And the captains will prevent him. And art thou not also the Lord's anointed? And will not the Lord set thee King on the hill of Zion, in thine own Judah?

DAVID: O Michal! O Michal! That the hand of the Lord's anointed should be lifted against the Lord's anointed! What can I do? For Saul is the Lord's, and I

may not even see an enemy in him. I cannot verily! Yet he seeks to slay me. All these months since he gave thee to me, after I brought the foreskins of the Philistine for thy dowry, he has hated me more, and sought my life. Before the moon of our marriage was waned away thy father commanded his servants, and even Jonathan, to slay David on that spot where they should find him. So Jonathan came to me in haste and secret, and sent me away into the fields by night and hid me. Yea, before the month of our marriage was finished I had to flee from thee in the night, and leave my place cold.

MICHAL: But not for long. Not for long. Jonathan persuaded my father, so he took thee back. Even he loved thee again.

DAVID: Yea, he also loves me! But Saul is a man falling backward down a deep pit, that must e'en clutch what is nearest him, and drag it down along with him.

MICHAL: But Saul swore: As the Lord liveth, David shall not be slain.

DAVID: Ay, he swore. But before two moons were passed his brow was black again. And when the season of the year came, that the Kings of the Philistine go forth, I went up against them, and fought. The months of the fighting I fought with them, and all the people rejoiced. But I saw with a sinking heart the face of Saul blacken, blacken darker with greater hate! Yea, he hath loved me, as the Lord's anointed must love the Lord's anointed. But Saul is slipping backward down the pit of despair, away from God. And each time he strives to come forth, the loose earth yields beneath his feet, and he slides deeper. So the upreach of his love fails him, and the downslide of his hate is great and greater in weight. I cannot hate him — nor love him — but, O Michal, I am oppressed with a horror of him.

MICHAL: Nay, do not dwell on him.

DAVID: And the year went round its course, and once more there was war with the Philistine. And once more we prevailed, in the Lord. And once more the armies shouted my name. And once more I came home to thee — and thou didst sing. And my heart did sing above thee. But as a bird hushes when the shadow of the hawk dances upon him from heaven, my heart went hushed under the shadow of Saul. And my heart could not sing between thy breasts, as it wanted to, even the heart of a bridegroom. For the shadow of Saul was upon it.

MICHAL: Oh, why do you care? Why do you care? Why do you not love me and never care?

DAVID: It is not in me. I have been blithe of thy love and thy body. But now three days ago, even in the midst of my blitheness, Saul again threw his javelin at me — yea, even in the feast. And I am marked among all men. And the end draws nigh. — For scarce may I leave this house, lest at some corner they slay me.

MICHAL: What end, then? What end draws nigh?

DAVID: I must get me gone. I must go into the wilderness.

MICHAL (weeping): Oh, bitter! Bitter! My joy has been torn from me, as an eagle tears a lamb from the ewe. I have no joy in my life, nor in the body of my lord and my husband. A serpent is hid in my marriage bed, my joy is venomed. Oh, that they had wed me to a man that moved me not, rather than be moved to so much hurt.

DAVID: Nay, nay! Oh, nay, nay! Between me and thee is no bitterness, and between my body and thy body there is constant joy! Nay, nay! Thou art a flame to me of man's forgetting, and God's presence. Nay, nay! Thou shalt not weep for me, for thou art a delight to me, even a delight and a forgetting.

MICHAL: No! No! Thou leavest me in the night, to make prayers and moaning before the Lord. Oh, that thou hadst never married in thy body the daughter of thine enemy!

DAVID: Say not so, it is a wrong thing; thou art sweet to me, and all my desire.

MICHAL: It is not true! Thou moanest, and leavest me in the night, to fall before the Lord.

DAVID: Yea, trouble is come upon me. And I must take my trouble to the Lord. But thy breasts are my bliss and my forgetting. Oh, do not remember my complaining! But let thyself be sweet to me, and let me sleep among the lilies.

MICHAL: Thou wilt reproach me again with my father.

DAVID: Ah, no! Ah, never I reproached thee! But now I can forget, I can forget all but thee, and the blossom of thy sweetness. Oh, come with me, and let me know thee. For thou art ever again as new to me.

MICHAL (rising as he takes her hand): Nay, thou wilt turn the bitterness of thy spirit upon me again.

DAVID: Ah, no! I will not! But the gate of my life can I open to thee again, and the world of bitterness shall be gone under as in a flood.

MICHAL: And wilt thou not leave me?

DAVID: Nay, lift up thy voice no more, for the hour of speech has passed.

Exeunt DAVID and MICHAL through curtain at back.

SCENE XIV

The same room, unchanged, an hour or so later: but the grey light of day. A WOMAN-SERVANT comes in. There is a wooden image in a corner.

WOMAN-SERVANT: Yea, the lighted lamp, and the food! My lord David hath kept watch again before the Lord, and tears will fall in Michal's bosom, and darken her heart! Aiee! Aiee! That Saul should so hate the life of David! Surely the evil spirits are strong upon the King.

BOY (entering): Jonathan, the King's son, is below, knocking softly at the door.

WOMAN-SERVANT: Go! Open swiftly, and make fast again. Aiee! Aiee! My

lord Jonathan comes too early for a pleasure visit. I will see if they sleep.

Exit WOMAN-SERVANT through the curtain.

Enter JONATHAN. JONATHAN stands silent, pensive. Goes to window. Re-enter WOMAN-SERVANT. She starts, seeing JONATHAN — then puts her hand on her mouth.

WOMAN-SERVANT: O my lord Jonathan! Hush!

JONATHAN: They are sleeping still?

WOMAN-SERVANT: They are sleeping the marriage sleep. David hath even watched before the Lord, in the night. But now with Michal he sleeps the marriage sleep in the lands of peace. Now grant a son shall come of it, to ease the gnawing of Michal's heart.

JONATHAN: What gnaws in Michal's heart?

WOMAN-SERVANT: Ah, my lord, her love even for David, that will not be appeased. If the Giver gave her a son, so should her love for David abate, and cease to gnaw in her.

JONATHAN: But why should it gnaw in her? Hath she not got him, and the joy of him?

WOMAN-SERVANT: O Jonathan, she is even as the house of Saul. What she hath cannot appease her.

JONATHAN: What then would she more?

WOMAN-SERVANT: She is of the house of Saul, and her very love is pain to her. Each cloud that crosses her is another death of her love. Ah, it is better to let love come and to let it go, even as the winds of the hills blow along the heavens. The sun shines, and is dulled, and shines again; it is the day, and its alterings; and after, it is night.

JONATHAN: David and Michal are asleep?

WOMAN-SERVANT: In the marriage sleep. Oh, break it not!

JONATHAN: The sun will soon rise. Lo! this house is upon the wall of the city, and the fields and the hills lie open.

WOMAN-SERVANT: Shall I bring food to Jonathan?

JONATHAN: Nay! Hark! Men are crying at the city's western gate, to open. The day is beginning.

WOMAN-SERVANT: May it bring good to this house!

JONATHAN: It is like to bring evil.

WOMAN-SERVANT: Ah, my lord!

DAVID (appearing through the curtain at the back): Jonathan!

JONATHAN: David! Thou art awake!

DAVID (laughing): Yea! Am I not? Thou art my brother Jonathan, art thou not? (They embrace.)

JONATHAN: O David, the darkness was upon my father in the night, and he hath again bid slay thee. Leave not the house. Unbar not the door! Watch! And be ready to flee! If armed men stand round the door (enter MICHAL), then let down the boy from the window, and send instantly to me. I will come with thy men and with mine, and we will withstand the hosts of Saul, if need be.

MICHAL: Is something new toward?

JONATHAN: My father bade his men take David, and slay him in the dawn. I must away, lest they see that I have warned thee. Farewell, O David!

DAVID: Farewell, my brother Jonathan! But I will come down the stair with thee.

Exeunt DAVID and JONATHAN.

MICHAL: Yea! Yea! So sure as it is well between me and him, so sure as we have peace in one another, so sure as we are together — comes this evil wind, and blows upon us! And oh, I am weary of my life, because of it!

WOMAN-SERVANT: Aiee! Aiee! Say not so, O Michal! For thy days are many before thee.

MICHAL: This time, an they take him, they will surely kill him.

WOMAN-SERVANT: Sayest thou so! Oh, why, in the Lord's name!

MICHAL: I know it. If they take him this time, he is lost.

WOMAN-SERVANT: Oh, then shall they surely not take him! Oh, but what shall we do?

MICHAL: Creep thou on the roof! Let no man see thee. And there lie: watch if armed men approach the house.

Enter DAVID.

DAVID: There is no one there.

MICHAL: They will come as the sun comes. (To WOMAN.) Go thou and watch.

WOMAN-SERVANT: Verily I will!

Exit WOMAN-SERVANT.

MICHAL: O David! So sure as it is springtime in me, and my body blossoms like an almond-tree, comes this evil wind upon me, and withers my bud! Oh, how can I bring forth children to thee when the spear of this vexation each time pierces my womb?

DAVID: Trouble not thyself, my flower. No wind shall wither thee.

MICHAL: Oh, but I know. This time, an they take thee, thou shalt lose thy life. — And Jonathan will not save thee.

DAVID: Nay! Be not afraid for me.

MICHAL: Yes! I am afraid! I am afraid! Ho! Ho, there! (Claps her hands. Enter BOY. To BOY.) Bring the water-skin for thy master, filled with water. And his pouch with bread — for he goeth on a journey. — O David! David! Now take thy cloak, and thy bow, and thy spear, and put on thy shoes. For thou must go! Jonathan cannot avail thee this time.

DAVID: Nay! Why shall I flee, when the sun is rising?

MICHAL: Yea! If thou go not before the sun is here in the morning shalt thou be slain. Oh make ready! Thy shoes! Put them on! (DAVID reluctantly obeys.) Thy cloak, so they shall not know thee! (He puts it on.) Thy spear and bow!

Enter BOY.

BOY: Here is the pouch and the water-flask.

MICHAL: Run, bring figs and dry curds. Dost thou hear aught at the door?

BOY: Naught!

Exit BOY.

MICHAL: O David, art thou ready! Oh, that thou leavest me!

DAVID: I need not go! Yea, to comfort thee, I will go to the place that Jonathan knoweth of, and thou shalt send thither for me. Or wilt thou —

Re-enter WOMAN-SERVANT.

WOMAN-SERVANT: O Michal! O David, master! There be men-at-arms approaching, under the wall, and walking by stealth. Oh, flee! Oh, flee! for they mean thy life.

MICHAL: Now must thou go by the window, into the fields. I see the sun's first glitter. Even for this hour have I kept the new rope ready. (She fastens the rope to a stout stake, and flings the ends from the window. To DAVID.) Go! Go!

Swiftly be gone!

DAVID: I will come again to thee. Sooner or later as the Lord liveth, I will take thee again to me, unto my bed and my body.

MICHAL: Hark! They knock! Ha — a!

Enter BOY.

BOY: There are men at the door!

MICHAL: Go! Call to them! Ask what they want! But touch thou not the door!

DAVID meanwhile climbs through the window — the stake holds the rope.

WOMAN-SERVANT (climbing with her hands): So! So! So! My lord David! So! So! Swing him not against the wall, O spiteful rope. So! So! He kicks free! Yea! And God be praised, he is on the ground, looking an instant at his hands. So he looks up and departs! Lifts his hand and departs!

MICHAL: Is he gone? Draw in the rope, and hide it safe.

WOMAN-SERVANT: That I will!

Meanwhile MICHAL has flung back the curtain of the recess where the low earthen bank of the bed is seen with skins and covers. She takes the wooden image of a god and lays it in the bed, puts a pillow at its head, and draws the bed-cover high over it.

MICHAL (to herself): Yea, and my house's god which is in my house, shall lie in my husband's place, and the image of my family god, which came of old from my mother's house, shall deceive them. For my house has its own gods, yea, from of old, and shall they forsake me?

Enter BOY.

BOY: They demand to enter. The King asketh for David, that he go before the King's presence.

MICHAL: Go thou, say to them: My lord and my master, David, is sick in his bed.

BOY: I will say that.

Exit BOY.

WOMAN-SERVANT: Sit thou nigh the bed. And if they still will come up thou shalt say he sleepeth.

MICHAL: Yea, will I. (Sits by bed.) O god of my household, O god of my mother's house, O god in the bed of David, save me now!

Enter BOY.

BOY: They will e'en set eyes on my master.

MICHAL: Stay! Say to them, that their captains shall come up, two only: but softly, for my lord David hath been sick these three days, and at last sleepeth.

BOY: I will tell them.

Exit BOY.

WOMAN-SERVANT: And I too will go bid them hush.

Exit WOMAN-SERVANT. MICHAL sits in silence. Enter two CAPTAINS with the WOMAN-SERVANT.

WOMAN-SERVANT: There he sleepeth in the bed.

MICHAL: Sh-h-h!

1ST CAPTAIN: I will go even now and tell the King.

Exeunt the CAPTAINS after a pause.

CURTAIN

Curtain rises after a short time on same scene.

WOMAN-SERVANT (rushing in): They are coming again down the street, but boldly now.

MICHAL: Yea! Let them come! By this time is David beyond their reach, in the secret place.

WOMAN-SERVANT: Oh, and what shall befall thee! Oh!

MICHAL: I am the King's daughter. Even Saul shall not lift his hand against me. Go down thou to the door, and hold the men whilst thou mayst. Why should we admit them forthwith? Say that Michal is performing her ablutions.

WOMAN-SERVANT: Will I not!

Exit WOMAN-SERVANT.

MICHAL: And shall I strip the bed? They will search the house and the fields. Nay, I will leave it, and they shall see how they were fools. O teraphim, O my god of my own house, hinder them and help me. O thou my teraphim, watch for me!

Sound of knocking below.

VOICE OF SERVANT: Ho, ye! Who knocks, in the Lord's name?

VOICE OF CAPTAIN: Open! Open ye! In the name of the King.

VOICE OF SERVANT: What would ye in this house of sickness?

VOICE OF CAPTAIN: Open, and thou shalt know.

VOICE OF SERVANT: I may not open, save Michal bid me.

VOICE OF CAPTAIN: Then bid Michal bid thee open forthwith.

VOICE OF SERVANT: O thou captain of the loud shout, surely thou wert here before! Know then, my master is sick, and my mistress performeth her ablutions in the sight of the Lord. At this moment may I not open.

VOICE OF CAPTAIN: An thou open not, it shall cost thee.

VOICE OF SERVANT: Nay, now, is not my mistress King's daughter, and is not her command laid on me? O Captain, wilt thou hold it against me, who tremble between two terrors?

VOICE OF CAPTAIN: Tremble shalt thou, when the terror nips thee. E'en open the door, lest we break it in.

VOICE OF SERVANT: Oh, what uncouth man is this, that will break down the door of the King's daughter, and she naked at her bath, before the Lord!

VOICE OF CAPTAIN: We do but the King's bidding.

VOICE OF SERVANT: How can that be? What, did the King indeed bid ye break down the door of his daughter's house, and she uncovered in the Lord's sight, at her ablutions?

VOICE OF CAPTAIN: Yea! The King bade us bring before him instantly the bed of David, and David upon the bed!

VOICE OF SERVANT: Oh, now, what unseemly thing is this! Hath not the King legs long enough? And can he not walk hither on his feet? Oh, send, fetch the King, I pray thee, thou Captain. Say, I pray thee, that Michal prays the King come hither.

VOICE OF CAPTAIN: Word shall be sent. Yet open now this door, that the bird escapes me not.

VOICE OF SERVANT: O Captain! And is my master then a bird? O would he were, even the young eagle, that he might spread wing! O man, hast thou no fear what may befall thee, that thou namest David a bird? O Israel, uncover now thine ear!

VOICE OF CAPTAIN: I name him not.

VOICE OF SERVANT: And what would ye, with this bird my master! Oh, the Lord forbid that any man should call him a bird!

VOICE OF CAPTAIN: We e'en must bring him upon his bed before the King.

VOICE OF SERVANT: Now what is this! Will the King heal him with mighty spells? Or is David on his sick-bed to be carried before the people, that they may know his plight? What new wonder is this?

VOICE OF CAPTAIN: I cannot say — Yet I will wait no longer.

MICHAL: Open, Maiden! Let them come up.

VOICE OF SERVANT: Oh, my mistress crieth unto me, that I open. Yea, O Michal, I will e'en open to these men. For who dare look aslant at the King's daughter?

Enter CAPTAIN, followed by SOLDIERS.

CAPTAIN: Is David still in the bed? An he cannot rise, will we carry him upon the bed, before the King.

MICHAL: Now what is this?

CAPTAIN: Sleeps he yet? Ho, David, sleepest thou?

2ND SOLDIER: We will take up the bed, and wake him.

3RD SOLDIER: He stirs not at all.

CAPTAIN (to MICHAL): Yea, rouse him and tell him the King's will.

MICHAL: I will not rouse him.

CAPTAIN (going to the bed): Ho, thou! Ho! David! (He suddenly pulls back the bed-cover.) What is this? (Sudden loud shrilling laughter from the WOMAN-SERVANT, who flees when the men look round.)

SOLDIERS (crowding): We are deceived. Ha-ha! It is a man of wood and a goats'-hair bolster! Ha-ha-ha! What husband is this of Michal's?

MICHAL: My teraphim, and the god of my house.

CAPTAIN: Where hast thou hidden David?

MICHAL: I have not hidden him.

Pause.

VOICE OF SAUL (on the stair): Why tarry ye here? What! Must the King come on his own errands? (Enter SAUL.) And are ye here?

MICHAL: The Lord strengthen thee, my Father.

SAUL: Ha! Michal! And can then David not rise from his bed, when the King sendeth for him?

CAPTAIN: Lo! O King! Behold the sick man on the bed! We are deceived of Michal.

SAUL: What is this? (Flings the image across the room.)

MICHAL: Oh, my teraphim! Oh, god of my house! Oh, alas, alas, now will misfortune fall on my house! Oh, woe is! woe is me! (Kneels before teraphim.)

SAUL: Where is David? Why hast thou deceived me?

MICHAL: O god of my house, god of my mother's house, visit it not upon me!

SAUL: Answer me, or I will slay thee!

MICHAL: God of my house, I am slain! I am slain!

SAUL: Where is David?

MICHAL: O my lord, he is gone; he is gone ere the sun made day.

SAUL: Yea, thou hast helped him against me.

MICHAL (weeping): Oh! Oh! He said unto me: Let me go; why shouldst thou make me slay thee, to trouble my face in the sight of men. I could not hinder him, he would have slain me there!

SAUL: Why hast thou deceived me so, and sent away mine enemy, that he escaped?

MICHAL (weeping): I could not prevent him.

SAUL: Even when did he go?

MICHAL: He rose up before the Lord, in the deep night. And then he would away, while no man saw.

SAUL: Whither is he gone?

MICHAL: Verily, and verily, I know not.

Pause.

SAUL: So! He hath escaped me! And my flesh and my blood hath helped mine enemy. Woe to you, Michal! Woe to you! Who have helped your father's enemy, who would pull down thy father to the ground. Lo! my flesh and my blood rebel against me, and my seed lies in wait for me, to make me fall!

MICHAL: Oh, why must David be slain?

SAUL: Woe to you, Michal! And David shall bring woe to you, and woe upon you. David shall pull down Saul, and David shall pull down Jonathan; thee, Michal, he will pull down, yea, and all thy house. Oh, thou mayst call on the teraphim of thy house. But if thy teraphim love thy house, then would he smite

David speedily to the death, for if David liveth I shall not live, and thou shalt not live, and thy brother shall not live. For David will bring us all down in blood.

MICHAL (weeping): O my Father, prophesy not against him!

SAUL: It shall be so. What, have I no insight into the dark! And thou art now a woman abandoned of her man, and thy father castest thee off, because thou hast deceived him, and brought about his hurt.

MICHAL: O my Father, forgive me! Hold it not against me!

SAUL: Nay, thou hast bent thy will against thy father, and called destruction upon thy father's house.

MICHAL: Ah, no! Ah, no!

CURTAIN

SCENE XV

Naioth in Ramah. A round, pyramid-like hill, with a stair-like way to the top, where is a rude rock altar. Many PROPHETS, young and old, wild and dressed in blue ephods without mantle, on the summit of the hill and down the slope. Some have harps, psalteries, pipes and tabrets. There is wild music and rough, ragged chanting. They are expecting something. Below, SAMUEL and DAVID, talking. Not far on a PROPHET in attendance.

PROPHETS (on hill — irregularly crying and chanting): This is the place of the Lord! Upon us shines the Unseen! Yea, here is very God! Who dare come into the glory! O thou, filled with the Lord, sing with me on this high place. For the egg of the world is filled with God.

SAMUEL (speaking to DAVID): It is time thou shouldst go. As a fox with the dogs upon him, hast thou much fleeing to do.

DAVID: Must I always flee, my Father? I am already weary of flight.

SAMUEL: Yea, to flee away is thy portion. Saul cometh hither to seek thee. But surely shall he fall before the Lord. When he gets him back to his own city, enquire thou what is his will towards thee. And if it still be evil, then flee from him diligently, while he lives.

DAVID: And shall there never be peace between Saul's house and mine?

SAMUEL: Who knows the Lord utterly! If there be not peace this time, then shall there never in life be peace between thee and him, nor thy house and his.

DAVID: Yet am I his son-in-law, in Michal my wife! And my flesh yearneth unto mine own.

SAMUEL: Is the house of Saul thine own?

DAVID: Yea, verily!

SAMUEL: Dost thou say, Yea, verily? Hark, now! If this time there be peace between thee and him, it should be peace. But if not, then think of naught but to flee, and save thyself, and keep on fleeing while Saul yet liveth. The Lord's choice is on thee, and thou shalt be King in thy day. As for me, I shall never see thy day.

DAVID: Would I could make my peace with Saul! Would I could return to mine own house, and to mine own wife, and to the men of my charge!

SAMUEL: My son, once the Lord chose Saul. Now hath He passed Saul over and chosen thee. Canst thou look guiltless into the face of Saul? Can he look guiltless into thy face? Can ye look into each other's faces, as men who are open

and at peace with one another?

DAVID: Yet would I serve him faithfully.

SAMUEL: Yea, verily! And in thine heart, art thou King, and pullest the crown from his brow with thine eyes.

DAVID: O my Father, I would not!

SAMUEL: Wouldst thou not? Willst thou say to me here and now: As the Lord liveth, I will not be King! But Saul and his house shall rule Israel for ever: and Jonathan my friend shall be King over me! Wilt thou say that to me?

DAVID: Does Samuel bid me say this thing?

SAMUEL: He bids thee not. But for Saul's sake, and for Jonathan's, and for Michal's, and for peace, wilt thou say it? Answer me from thine own heart, for I know the smell of false words. Yea, I bid thee, speak!

DAVID: The Lord shall do unto me as He will.

SAMUEL: Yea, for the Lord hath anointed thee, and thou shalt rule Israel when Saul is dead, and I am dead, and the Judges of Israel are passed away. For my day is nearly over, and thine is another day. Yea, Saul has lived in my day, but thou livest in thine own day, that I know not of.

DAVID: O my lord, is there naught but wrath and sorrow between me and Saul henceforth?

SAMUEL: The Lord will show! Knowest thou not?

DAVID: I would it were peace!

SAMUEL: Wouldst thou verily? When the wind changes, will it not push the clouds its own way? Will fire leap lively in wet rain? The Lord is all things. And Saul hath seen a tall and rushing flame and hath gone mad, for the flame rushed over him. Thou seest thy God in thine own likeness, afar off, or as a brother beyond thee, who fulfils thy desire. Saul yearneth for the flame: thou for thy tomorrow's glory. The God of Saul hath no face. But thou wilt bargain with thy

God. So be it! I am old, and would have done. Flee thou, flee, and flee again, and once more, flee. So shalt thou at last have the kingdom and the glory in the sight of men. I anointed thee, but I would see thee no more, for my heart is weary of its end.

DAVID: Wilt thou not bless me?

SAMUEL: Yea, I will bless thee! Yea, I will bless thee, my son. Yea, for now thy way is the way of might; yea, and even for a long space of time it shall be so. But after many days, men shall come again to the faceless flame of my Strength, and of Saul's. Yea, I will bless thee! Thou art brave, and alone, and by cunning must thou live, and by cunning shall thy house live for ever. But hath not the Lord created the fox, and the weasel that boundeth and skippeth like a snake!

DAVID: O Samuel, I have but tried to be wise! What should I do, and how should I walk in the sight of men? Tell me, my Father, and I will do it.

SAMUEL: Thou wilt not. Thou walkest wisely, and thy Lord is with thee. Yea, each man's Lord is his own, though God be but one. I know not thy Lord. Yet walk thou with Him. Yea, thou shalt bring a new day for Israel. Yea, thou shalt be great, thou shalt fight as a flower fighteth upwards, through the stones and alone with God, to flower in the sun at last. For the yearning of the Lord streameth as a sun, even upon the stones. (A tumult above among the PROPHETS. SAMUEL looks up — continues abstractedly.) Yea, and as a flower thou shalt fade. But Saul was once a burning bush, afire with God. Alas, that he saw his own image mirrored in the faces of men! (A blare of music above.)

SAMUEL (to PROPHET): What see ye?

PROPHETS (shouting): The sun on the arms of the King.

SAMUEL (to DAVID): Now shalt thou go! For I, too, will not set mine eyes upon Saul the King.

DAVID: Bless me then, O my Father!

SAMUEL: The Lord fill thy heart and thy soul! The Lord quicken thee! The Lord kindle thy spirit, so thou fall into no snare! And now get thee gone! And

when Saul is returned to his own place, enquire thou secretly his will towards thee. And then act wisely, as thou knowest.

DAVID: I go forth into the fields, as a hare when the hound gives mouth! But if the Lord go with me . . .

Exit DAVID.

SAMUEL (to PROPHET): Is Saul surely in sight?

PROPHET: Verily, he is not far off. He has passed the well of Shecu.

SAMUEL: Has he company of men?

PROPHET: Ten armed men has he.

SAMUEL: Will he still bring armed men to the high place? Lo! Say thou to him: Samuel hath gone before the Lord, in the hidden places of the Hill.

PROPHET: I will e'en say it.

SAMUEL: Say also to him: David, the anointed, is gone, we know not whither. And let the company of the prophets come down towards the King.

PROPHET: It shall be so.

Exit SAMUEL.

PROPHET (climbing hill and calling): O ye Prophets of the Lord, put yourselves in array, to meet Saul the King.

2ND PROPHET (on hill with flute — sounds flute loudly with a strong tune — shouts): Oh, come, all ye that know our God! Oh, put yourselves in array, ye that know the Name. For that which is without name is lovelier than anything named! (Sounds the tune strongly.)

PROPHETS gather in array — musicians in front; they chant slowly. As SAUL approaches they slowly descend.

CHORUS OF PROPHETS: Armies there are, for the Lord our God!
Armies there are against the Lord!
Wilt thou shake spears in the face of Almighty God?
Lo! in thy face shakes the lightning. [Bis.
Countest thou thyself a strong man, sayest thou Ha-ha!
Lo! We are strong in the Lord! Our arrow seest thou not!
Yet with the unseen arrows of high heaven
Pierce we the wicked man's feet, pierce we his feet in the fight.
Lo! the bow of our body is strung by God.
Lo! how He taketh aim with arrow-heads of our wrath!
Prophet of God is an arrow in full flight
And he shall pierce thy shield, thou, thou Lord's enemy.
Long is the fight, yet the unseen arrows fly
Keen to a wound in the soul of the great Lord's enemy.
Slowly he bleeds, yet the red drops run away
Unseen and inwardly, as bleeds the wicked man.
Bleeding of God! Secretly of God.

SAUL enters with ARMED MEN. PROPHETS continue to chant.

SAUL: Peace be with you!

PROPHET: Peace be with the King!

SAUL: Lo! ye prophets of God! Is not Samuel set over you?

PROPHET: Yea! O King!

SAUL (beginning to come under the influence of the chant and to take the rhythm in his voice): Is Samuel not here?

PROPHET: He hath gone up before the Lord!

SAUL: Surely the Lord is in this place! Surely the great brightness (Looks round.) — and the son of Jesse, is he among the prophets?

PROPHET: Nay, he has gone hence.

SAUL: Gone! Gone! What, has he fled from the high place! Surely he feared the

glory! Yea, the brightness! So he has fled before the flame! Thus shall he flee before the flame! But gone? Whither gone?

PROPHET: We know not whither.

SAUL: Even let him go! Even let him go whither he will! Yea, even let him go! Yea! Come we forth after such as he? Let him go! Is not the Lord here? Surely the brightness is upon the hill! Surely it gleams upon this high place!

LEADER OF MEN-AT-ARMS: Tarry we here, O King? Where shall we seek the son of Jesse?

SAUL: Even where ye will.

LEADER: Tarrieth the King here?

SAUL: Yea! I will know if the Lord is verily in this place.

PROPHET: Verily He is here.

Company of PROPHETS still chant.

SAUL (going slowly forward): Art Thou here, O Lord? What? Is this Thy brightness upon the hill? What? Art Thou here in Thy glory?

COMPANY OF PROPHETS: Fire within fire is the presence of the Lord!
Sun within the sun is our God! [Bis.
Rises the sun among the hills of thy heart
Rising to shine in thy breast? [Bis.

SAUL: Yea! O Prophets! Am I not King? Shall not the Sun of suns rise among the hills of my heart, and make dawn in my body? What! Shall these prophets know the glory of the Lord, and shall the son of Kish stay under a cloud? (Sticks his spear into the ground, and unbuckles his sword-belt.)

LEADER OF ARMED MEN: Wilt thou go up before the Lord, O King? Then camp we here, to await thy pleasure.

SAUL: I will go up. Camp an ye will.

LEADER: Even camp we here. (They untackle.)

SAUL: Ha! Ha! Is there a glory upon the prophets? Do their voices resound like rocks in the valley! Ha! Ha! Thou of the sudden fire! I am coming! Yea! I will come into the glory! (Advancing, throws down his woollen mantle. The IST PROPHET takes it up.)

CHORUS OF PROPHETS: Whiteness of wool helps thee not in the high place
Colours on thy coat avail thee naught. [Bis.
Fire unto fire only speaks, and only flame
Beckons to flame of the Lord! [Bis.

The PROPHETS divide and make way as SAUL comes up.

SAUL: Is my heart a cold hearth? Is my heart fireless unto Thee? Kindler! it shall not be so! My heart shall shine to Thee, yea, unshadow itself. Yea, the fire in me shall mount to the fire of Thee, Thou Wave of Brightness!

SOLDIER (below — with loud and sudden shout): The sun is in my heart. Lo! I shine forth!

SAUL (with suddenness): I will come up! Oh! I will come up! Dip me in the flame of brightness, Thou Bright One, call up the sun in my heart, out of the clouds of me. Lo! I have been darkened and deadened with ashes! Blow a fierce flame on me, from the middle of Thy glory, O Thou of the faceless flame. (Goes slowly forward.) Oh, dip me in the ceaseless flame!

Throws down his coat, or wide-sleeved tunic, that came below the knee and was heavily embroidered at neck and sleeves in many colours: is seen in the sleeveless shirt that comes half-way down the thigh.

SOLDIER (below): Kings come and pass away, but the flame is flame for ever. The Lord is here, like a tree of white fire! Yea, and the white glory goes in my nostrils like a scent.

SAUL: Shall a soldier be more blessed than I? Lo! I am not dead, thou Almighty! My flesh is still flame, still steady flame. Flame to flame calleth, and that which is dead is cast away. (Flings off his shirt: is seen, a dark-skinned man

in leathern loin-girdle.) Nay, I carry naught upon me, the long flame of my body leans to the flame of all glory! I am no king, save in the Glory of God. I have no kingdom, save my body and soul. I have no name. But as a slow and dark flame leaneth to a great glory of flame, and is sipped up, naked and nameless lean I to the glory of the Lord.

CHORUS OF PROPHETS: Standeth a man upon the stem of upright knees
Openeth the navel's closed bud, unfoldeth the flower of the breast!
Lo! Like the cup of a flower, with morning sun
Filled is thy breast with the Lord, filled is thy navel's wide flower!

SOLDIER: Oh, come! For a little while the glory of the Lord stands upon the high place! Oh, come! before they build Him houses, and enclose Him within a roof! Oh, it is good to live now, with the light of the first day's sun upon the breast. For when the seed of David have put the Lord inside a house, the glory will be gone, and men will walk with no transfiguration! Oh, come to this high place! Oh, come!

SAUL: Surely I feel my death upon me! Surely the sleep of sleeps descends. (Casts himself down.) I cast myself down, night and day; as in death, lie I naked before God. Ah, what is life to me! Alas that a man must live till death visit him! — that he cannot walk away into the cloud of Sun! Alas for my life! For my children and my children's children, alas! For the son of Jesse will wipe them out! Alas for Israel! For the fox will trap the lion of strength, and the weasel that is a virgin, and bringeth forth her young from her mouth, shall be at the throats of brave men! Yea, by cunning shall Israel prosper, in the days of the seed of David: and by cunning and lurking in holes of the earth shall the seed of Jesse fill the earth. Then the Lord of Glory will have drawn far off, and gods shall be pitiful, and men shall be as locusts. But I, I feel my death upon me, even in the glory of the Lord. Yea, leave me in peace before my death, let me retreat into the flame!

A pause.

ANOTHER SOLDIER: Saul hath abandoned his kingdom and his men! Yea, he puts the Lord between him and his work!

PROPHET: E'en let him be! For his loss is greater than another's triumph.

SOLDIER: Yea! But wherefore shall a man leave his men leaderless — even for the Lord!

1ST SOLDIER (prophesying): When thou withdrawest Thy glory, let me go with Thee, O Brightest, even into the fire of Thee!

CHORUS OF PROPHETS: Cast thyself down, that the Lord may snatch thee up. Fall before the Lord, and fall high.

All things come forth from the flame of Almighty God, Some things shall never return! [Bis.

Some have their way and their will, and pass at last
To the worm's waiting mouth. [Bis.

But the high Lord He leans down upon the hill,

And wraps His own in His flame,

Wraps them as whirlwind from the world,

Leaves not one sigh for the grave. . . .

CURTAIN

SCENE XVI

Late afternoon. A rocky place outside Gilgal. DAVID is hiding near the stone Ezel.

DAVID (alone): Now, if Jonathan comes not, I am lost. This is the fourth day, and evening is nigh. Lo! Saul seeketh my life. O Lord, look upon me, and hinder mine enemies! Frustrate them, make them stumble, O my God! So near am I to

Gilgal, yet between me and mine own house lies the whole gap of death. Yea, Michal, thou art not far from me. Yet art thou distant even as death. I hide and have hidden. Three days have I hidden, and eaten scant bread. Lo! Is this to be the Lord's anointed! Saul will kill me, and I shall die! There! Someone moves across the field! Ah, watch! watch! Is it Jonathan? It is two men; yea, it is two men. And one walks before the other. Surely it is Jonathan and his lad! Surely he has kept his word! O Lord, save me now from mine enemies, for they compass me round. O Lord my God, put a rope round the neck of my enemy, lest he rush forward and seize me in the secret place. Yea, it is Jonathan, in a striped coat. And a man behind him carrieth the bow. Yea, now must I listen, and uncover my ears, for this is life or death. O that he may say: Behold, the arrows are on this side of thee, take them! For then I can come forth and go to my house, and the King will look kindly on me. — But he comes slowly, and sadly. And he will say: The arrows are beyond thee — and I shall have to flee away like a hunted dog, into the desert. — It will be so! Yea! And I must hide lest that lad who follows Jonathan should see me, and set Saul's soldiery upon me.

Exit DAVID after a pause.

Enter JONATHAN with bow, and LAD with quiver.

JONATHAN (stringing his bow): Lo! this is the stone Ezel. Seest thou the dead bush, like a camel's head? That is a mark I have shot at, and now, before the light falls, will I put an arrow through his nose. (Takes an arrow.) Will this fly well? (Balancing it.)

LAD: It is well shafted, O Jonathan.

JONATHAN: Ay! Let us shoot. (Takes aim — shoots.) Yea, it touched the camel's ear, but not his nose! Give me another! (Shoots.) Ah! Hadst thou a throat, thou camel, thou wert dead. Yet is thy nose too cheerful! Let us try again! (Takes another arrow — shoots.) Surely there is a scratch upon thy nose-tip! Nay, I am not myself! Give me the quiver. And run thou, take up the arrows ere the shadows come.

LAD: I will find them.

He runs, as he goes JONATHAN shoots an arrow over his head. The LAD runs after it — stops.

JONATHAN: Is not the arrow beyond thee?

LAD: One is here! Here, another!

JONATHAN: The arrow is beyond thee! Make speed! Haste! Stay not!

LAD: Three have I! But the fourth —

JONATHAN: The arrow is beyond thee! Run, make haste!

LAD: I see it not! I see it not! Yea, it is there within bush. I have it, and it is whole. O master, is this all?

JONATHAN: There is one more. Behold it is beyond thee.

LAD (running): I see it not! I see it not! Yea, it is here!

JONATHAN: It is all. Come, then! Come! Nay, the light is fading and I cannot see. Take thou the bow and the arrows, and go home. For I will rest here awhile by the stone Ezel.

LAD: Will my master come home alone?

JONATHAN: Yea will I, with the peace of day's-end upon me. Go now, and wait me in the house. I shall soon come.

Exit LAD. JONATHAN sits down on a stone till he is gone.

JONATHAN (calling softly): David! David!

DAVID comes forth, weeping. Falls on his face to the ground and bows himself three times before JONATHAN. JONATHAN raises him. They kiss one another, and weep.

DAVID: Ah, then it is death, it is death to me from Saul?

JONATHAN: Yea, he seeks thy life, and thou must flee far hence.

DAVID (weeping): Ah, Jonathan! Thy servant thanks thee from his heart. But ah, Jonathan, it is bitter to go, to flee like a dog, to be houseless and homeless and wifeless, without a friend or helpmate! Oh, what have I done, what have I done! Tell me, what have I done! And slay me if I be in fault.

JONATHAN (in tears): Thou art not in fault. Nay, thou art not! But thou art anointed, and thou shalt be King. Hath not Samuel said it even now, in Naioth, when he would not look upon the face of Saul! Yea, thou must flee until thy day come, and the day of the death of Saul, and the day of the death of Jonathan.

DAVID (weeping): Oh, I have not chosen this. This have I not taken upon myself. This is put upon me, I have not chosen it! I do not want to go! Yea, let me come to Gilgal and die, so I see thy face, and the face of Michal, and the face of the King. Let me die! Let me come to Gilgal and die! (Flings himself on the ground in a paroxysm of grief.)

JONATHAN: Nay! Thou shalt not die. Thou shalt flee! And till Saul be dead, thou shalt flee. But when Saul has fallen, and I have fallen with my father — for even now my life follows my father — then thou shalt be King.

DAVID: I cannot go!

JONATHAN: Yea! Thou shalt go now. For they will send forth men to meet me, ere the dark. Rise now, and be comforted. (DAVID rises.)

DAVID: Why shouldst thou save me! Why dost thou withhold thy hand! Slay me now!

JONATHAN: I would not slay thee, nor now nor ever. But leave me now, and go. And go in peace, forasmuch as we have sworn both of us in the name of the Lord, saying: The Lord be between me and thee, and between my seed and thy seed for ever.

DAVID: Yea, the covenant is between us! And I will go, and keep it.

They embrace in silence, and in silence DAVID goes out.

JONATHAN (alone in the twilight): Thou goest, David! And the hope of Israel with thee! I remain, with my father, and the star-stone falling to despair. Yet

what is it to me! I would not see thy new day, David. For thy wisdom is the wisdom of the subtle, and behind thy passion lies prudence. And naked thou wilt not go into the fire. Yea, go thou forth, and let me die. For thy virtue is in thy wit, and thy shrewdness. But in Saul have I known the magnanimity of a man. Yea, thou art a smiter down of giants, with a smart stone! Great men and magnanimous, men of the faceless flame, shall fall from Strength, fall before thee, thou David, shrewd whelp of the lion of Judah! Yet my heart yearns hot over thee, as over a tender, quick child. And the heart of my father yearns, even amid its dark wrath. But thou goest forth, and knowest no depth of yearning, thou son of Jesse. Yet go! For my twilight is more to me than thy day, and my death is dearer to me than thy life! Take it! Take thou the kingdom, and the days to come. In the flames of death where Strength is, I will wait and watch till the day of David at last shall be finished, and wisdom no more be fox-faced, and the blood gets back its flame. Yea, the flame dies not, though the sun's red dies! And I must get me to the city.

Rises and departs hastily.

CURTAIN

THE DAUGHTER-IN-LAW



A PLAY IN FOUR ACTS

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CHARACTERS

MRS GASCOIGNE

LUTHER

JOE

MRS PURDY

MINNIE

The action of the play takes place in the kitchen of Luther Gascoigne's new home.

ACT I

SCENE I

A collier's kitchen — not poor. Windsor chairs, deal table, dresser of painted wood, sofa covered with red cotton stuff. Time: About half-past two of a winter's afternoon.

A large, stoutish woman of sixty-five, with smooth black hair parted down the middle of her head: MRS GASCOIGNE.

Enter a young man, about twenty-six, dark, good-looking; has his right arm in a sling; does not take off cap: JOE GASCOIGNE.

MRS GASCOIGNE: Well, I s'd ha' thought thy belly 'ud a browt thee whoam afore this.

JOE sits on sofa without answering.

Doesn't ter want no dinner?

JOE (looking up): I want it if the' is ony.

MRS GASCOIGNE: An' if the' isna, tha can go be out? Tha talks large, my fine jockey! (She puts a newspaper on the table; on it a plate and his dinner.) Wheer dost reckon ter's bin?

JOE: I've bin ter th' office for my munny.

MRS GASCOIGNE: Tha's niver bin a' this while at th' office.

JOE: They kep' me ower an hour, an' then gen me nowt.

MRS GASCOIGNE: Gen thee nowt! Why, how do they ma'e that out? It's a wik sin' tha got hurt, an' if a man wi' a broken arm canna ha' his fourteen shillin' a week accident pay, who can, I s'd like to know?

JOE: They'll gie me nowt, whether or not.

MRS GASCOIGNE: An' for why, pritheer?

JOE (does not answer for some time; then, sullenly): They reckon I niver got it while I wor at work.

MRS GASCOIGNE: Then where did ter get it, might I ax? I'd think they'd like to lay it onto me.

JOE: Tha talks like a fool, Mother.

MRS GASCOIGNE: Tha looks like one, me lad.

She has given him his dinner; he begins to eat with a fork.

Here, hutch up, gammy-leg — gammy-arm.

He makes room; she sits by him on the sofa and cuts up his meat for him.

It's a rum un as I should start ha'in' babies again, an' feedin' 'em wi' spoon-meat. (Gives him a spoon.) An' now let's hear why they winna gi'e thee thy pay. Another o' Macintyre's dirty knivey dodges, I s'd think.

JOE: They reckon I did it wi' foolery, an' not wi' work.

MRS GASCOIGNE: Oh indeed! An' what by that?

JOE (eating): They wanna gie me nowt, that's a'.

MRS GASCOIGNE: It's a nice thing! An' what did ter say?

JOE: I said nowt.

MRS GASCOIGNE: Tha wouldna'! Tha stood like a stuffed duck, an' said thank-yer.

JOE: Well, it wor raight.

MRS GASCOIGNE: How raight?

JOE: I did do it wi' foolery.

MRS GASCOIGNE: Then what did ter go axin' fer pay fer?

JOE: I did it at work, didna I? An' a man as gets accident at work's titled ter disability pay, isna he?

MRS GASCOIGNE: Tha said a minnit sin' as tha got it wi' foolery.

JOE: An' so I did.

MRS GASCOIGNE: I niver 'eered such talk i' my life.

JOE: I dunna care what ter's 'eered an' what t'asna. I wor foolin' wi' a wringer an' a pick-heft — ta's it as ter's a mind.

MRS GASCOIGNE: What, down pit?

JOE: I' th' stall, at snap time.

MRS GASCOIGNE: Showin' off a bit, like?

JOE: Ye'.

MRS GASCOIGNE: An' what then?

JOE: Th' wringer gen me a rap ower th'arm, an' that's a'.

MRS GASCOIGNE: An' tha reported it as a accident?

JOE: It wor accident, worn't it? I niver did it a'purpose.

MRS GASCOIGNE: But a pit accident.

JOE: Well, an' what else wor't? It wor a h'accident I got i' th' pit, i' th' sta' wheer I wor workin'.

MRS GASCOIGNE: But not while tha wor workin'.

JOE: What by that? — it wor a pit accident as I got i' th' stall.

MRS GASCOIGNE: But tha didna tell 'em how it happened.

JOE: I said some stuff fell on my arm, an' brok' it. An' worna that trew?

MRS GASCOIGNE: It wor very likely trew enough, lad, if on'y they'd ha' believed it.

JOE: An they would ha' believed it, but for Hewett bully-raggin' Bettsworth 'cos he knowed he was a chappil man. (He imitates the underground manager, Hewett, and Bettsworth, a butty.) "About this accident, Bettsworth. How exactly did it occur?" "I couldn't exactly say for certing, sir, because I wasn't linkin'." "Then tell me as near as you can." "Well, Mester, I'm sure I don't know." "That's curious, Bettsworth — I must have a report. Do you know anything about it, or don't you? It happened in your stall; you're responsible for it, and I'm responsible for you." "Well, Gaffer, what's right's right, I suppose, ter th' mesters or th' men. An' 'e wor conjurin' a' snap-time wi' a pick-heft an' a wringer, an' the wringer caught 'im ower th' arm." "I thought you didn't know!" "I said for certain — I didn't see exactly how 'twas done."

MRS GASCOIGNE: Hm.

JOE: Bettsworth 'ud non ha' clat-fasted but for nosy Hewett. He says, "Yo know, Joseph, when he says to me, 'Do you know anything about that haccident?' — then I says to myself, 'Take not the word of truth hutterly outer thy mouth.'"

MRS GASCOIGNE: If he took a bit o' slaver ouden's mouth, it 'ud do.

JOE: So this mornin' when I went ter th' office, Mester Salmon he com out an' said: "Ow did this haccident occur, Joseph?" and I said, "Some stuff fell on't." So he says, "Stuff fell on't, stuff fell on't! You mean coal or rock or what?" So I says, "Well, it worn't a thipenny bit." "No," he says, "but what was it?" "It wor a piece o' clunch," I says. "You don't use clunch for wringers," he says, "do you?" "The wringin' of the nose bringeth forth blood," I says —

MRS GASCOIGNE: Why, you know you never did. (She begins making a pudding.)

JOE: No — b'r I'd ha' meant t'r'a done.

MRS GASCOIGNE: We know thee! Tha's done thysen one i' th' eye this time. When dost think tha'll iver get ter be a butty, at this rate? There's Luther nowt b'r a day man yet.

JOE: I'd as lief be a day man as a butty, i' pits that rat-gnawed there's hardly a stall worth havin'; an' a company as 'ud like yer ter scrape yer tabs afore you went home, for fear you took a grain o' coal.

MRS GASCOIGNE: Maybe — but tha's got ter get thy livin' by 'em.

JOE: I hanna. I s'll go to Australia.

MRS GASCOIGNE: Tha'lt do no such thing, while I'm o' this earth.

JOE: Ah, but though, I shall — else get married, like our Luther.

MRS GASCOIGNE: A fat sight better off tha'lt be for that.

JOE: You niver know, Mother, dun yer?

MRS GASCOIGNE: You dunna, me lad — not till yer find yerself let in. Marriage is like a mouse-trap, for either man or woman. You've soon come to th' end o' th' cheese.

JOE: Well, ha'ef a loaf's better nor no bread.

MRS GASCOIGNE: Why, wheer's th' loaf as tha'd like ter gnawg a' thy life?

JOE: Nay, nowhere yet.

MRS GASCOIGNE: Well, dunna thee talk, then. Tha's done thysen harm enow for one day, wi' thy tongue.

JOE: An' good as well, Mother — I've aten my dinner, a'most.

MRS GASCOIGNE: An' swilled thy belly afore that, methinks.

JOE: Niver i' this world!

MRS GASCOIGNE: And I've got thee to keep on ten shillin's a wik club-money, han I?

JOE: Tha needna, if ter doesna want. Besides, we s'll be out on strike afore we know wheer we are.

MRS GASCOIGNE: I'm sure. You've on'y bin in —

JOE: Now, Mother, spit on thy hands an' ta'e fresh hold. We s'll be out on strike in a wik or a fortnit —

MRS GASCOIGNE: Strike's a' they're fit for — a pack o' slutherers as . . .

Her words tail off as she goes into pantry.

JOE (to himself): Tha goes chunterin' i' th' pantry when somebody's at th' door.
(Rises, goes to door.)

MRS PURDY'S VOICE: Is your mother in?

JOE: Yi, 'er's in right enough.

MRS PURDY: Well, then, can I speak to her?

JOE (calling): Mrs Purdy wants ter speak to thee, Mother.

MRS GASCOIGNE crosses the kitchen heavily, with a dripping-pan; stands in doorway.

MRS GASCOIGNE: Good afternoon.

MRS PURDY: Good afternoon.

MRS GASCOIGNE: Er — what is it?

MRS PURDY enters. She is a little fat, red-faced body in bonnet and black cape.

MRS PURDY: I wanted to speak to yer rather pertickler.

MRS GASCOIGNE (giving way): Oh, yes?

ALL THREE enter the kitchen. MRS PURDY stands near the door.

MRS PURDY (nodding at JOE): Has he had a haccident?

MRS GASCOIGNE: Broke his arm.

MRS PURDY: Oh my! that's nasty. When did 'e do that?

MRS GASCOIGNE: A wik sin' to-day.

MRS PURDY: In th' pit?

MRS GASCOIGNE: Yes — an's not goin' to get any accident pay — says as 'e worn't workin'; he wor foolin' about.

MRS PURDY: T-t-t-t! Did iver you know! I tell you what, missis, it's a wonder they let us live on the face o' the earth at all — it's a wonder we don't have to fly up i' th' air like birds.

JOE: There'd be a squark i' th' sky then!

MRS PURDY: But it is indeed. It's somethink awful. They've gave my mester a dirty job o' nights, at a guinea a week, an' he's worked fifty years for th' company, an' isn't but sixty-two now — said he wasn't equal to stall-workin',

whereas he has to slave on th' roads an' comes whoam that tired he can't put's food in's mouth.

JOE: He's about like me.

MRS PURDY: Yis. But it's no nice thing, a guinea a week.

MRS GASCOIGNE: Well, that's how they're servin' 'em a' round — widders' coals stopped — leadin' raised to four-an'-eight — an' ivry man niggled down to nothink.

MRS PURDY: I wish I'd got that Fraser strung up by th' heels — I'd ma'e his sides o' bacon rowdy.

MRS GASCOIGNE: He's put a new manager to ivry pit, an' ivry one a nigger-driver.

MRS PURDY: Says he's got to economise — says the company's not a philanthropic concern —

MRS GASCOIGNE: But ta'es twelve hundred a year for hissen.

MRS PURDY: A mangy bachelor wi' 'is iron-men.

JOE: But they wanna work.

MRS PURDY: They say how he did but coss an' swear about them American Cutters. I should like to see one set outer 'im — they'd work hard enough rippin's guts out — even iron's got enough sense for that. (She suddenly subsides.)

There is a pause.

MRS GASCOIGNE: How do you like living down Nethergreen?

MRS PURDY: Well — we're very comfortable. It's small, but it's handy, an' sin' the mester's gone down t'a guinea —

MRS GASCOIGNE: It'll do for you three.

MRS PURDY: Yes.

Another pause.

MRS GASCOIGNE: The men are comin' out again, they say.

MRS PURDY: Isn't it summat sickenin'? Well, I've werritted an' werritted till I'm soul-sick —

JOE: It sends yer that thin an' threadbare, y'have ter stop sometime.

MRS PURDY: There can be as much ache in a motherly body as in bones an' gristle, I'm sure o' that.

JOE: Nay, I'm more than bones an' gristle.

MRS PURDY: That's true as the day.

Another long pause.

MRS GASCOIGNE: An' how have yer all bin keepin'?

MRS PURDY: Oh, very nicely — except our Bertha.

MRS GASCOIGNE: Is she poorly, then?

MRS PURDY: That's what I com ter tell yer. I niver knowed a word on't till a Sat'day, nor niver noticed a thing. Then she says to me, as white as a sheet, "I've been sick every morning, Mother," an' it com across me like a shot from a gun. I sunk down i' that chair an' couldna fetch a breath. — An' me as prided myself! I've often laughed about it, an' said I was thankful my children had all turned out so well, lads an' wenches as well, an' said it was a'cause they was all got of a Sunday — their father was too drunk a' Saturday, an' too tired o' wik-days. An' it's a fact, they've all turned out well, for I'd allers bin to chappil. Well, I've said it for a joke, but now it's turned on me. I'd better ha' kep' my tongue still.

JOE: It's not me, though, missis. I wish it wor.

MRS PURDY: There's no occasions to ma'e gam' of it neither, as far as I can see. The youngest an' the last of 'em as I've got, an' a lass as I liked, for she's simple, but she's good-natured, an' him a married man. Thinks I to myself, "I'd better go to's mother, she'll ha'e more about 'er than's new wife — for she's a stuck-up piece o' goods as ever trod."

MRS GASCOIGNE: Why, what d'yer mean?

MRS PURDY: I mean what I say — an' there's no denyin' it. That girl — well, it's nigh on breakin' my heart, for I'm that short o' breath. (Sighs.) I'm sure!

MRS GASCOIGNE: Why don't yer say what yer mean?

MRS PURDY: I've said it, haven't I? There's my gal gone four month wi' childt to your Luther.

MRS GASCOIGNE: Nay, nay, nay, missis! You'll never ma'e me believe it.

MRS PURDY: Glad would I be if I nedna. But I've gone through it all since Sat'day on. I've wanted to break every bone in 'er body — an' I've said I should on'y be happy if I was scraightin' at 'er funeral — an' I've said I'd wring his neck for 'im. But it doesn't alter it — there it is — an' there it will be. An' I s'll be a grandmother where my heart heaves, an' maun drag a wastrel baby through my old age. An' it's neither a cryin' nor a laughin' matter, but it's a matter of a girl wi' child, an' a man six week married.

MRS GASCOIGNE: But our Luther never went wi' your Bertha. How d'you make it out?

MRS PURDY: Yea, yea, missis — yea indeed.

JOE: Yi, Mother, he's bin out wi' 'er. She wor pals wi' Liza Ann Varley, as went out wi' Jim Horrocks. So Jim he passed Bertha onter our Luther. Why, I've had many a glass wi' the four of 'em, i' "Th' Ram".

MRS GASCOIGNE: I niver knowed nowt o' this afore.

JOE: Tha doesna know ivrythink, Mother.

MRS GASCOIGNE: An' it's well I don't, methinks.

JOE: Tha doesna want, neither.

MRS GASCOIGNE: Well, I dunno what we're goin' to do, missis. He's a young married man.

MRS PURDY: An' she's a girl o' mine.

MRS GASCOIGNE: How old is she?

MRS PURDY: She wor twenty-three last September.

MRS GASCOIGNE: Well then, I sh'd 'a thought she'd ha' known better.

MRS PURDY: An' what about him, missis, as goes and gets married t'r another fine madam d'rectly after he's been wi' my long lass?

JOE: But he never knowed owt about.

MRS PURDY: He'd seen th' blossom i' flower, if he hadna spotted the fruit a-comin'.

JOE: Yi — but —

MRS GASCOIGNE: Yi but what?

JOE: Well — you dunna expect — ivry time yer cast yer bread on th' wathers, as it'll come whoam to you like.

MRS GASCOIGNE: Well, I dunno what we're goin' to do.

MRS PURDY: I thought I'd better come to you, rather than —

JOE: Ah, you non want it gettin' about — an' she'd best not know — if it can be helped.

MRS GASCOIGNE: I can't see for why.

MRS PURDY: No indeed — a man as plays fast an' loose first wi' one an' then goes an' marries another stuck-up piece . . .

MRS GASCOIGNE: An' a wench as goes sittin' i' "Th' Ram" wi th' fellers mun expect what she gets, missis.

MRS PURDY: 'Appen so, 'appen so. An' th' man maun abide by what he's gi'en.

MRS GASCOIGNE: I dunno what we're goin' to do!

JOE: We'd best keep it as quiet as we can.

MRS PURDY: I thinks to mysen, "It'll non become me to go an' jack up a married couple, for if he's at fault, it's her as 'ud ha'e ter suffer." An' though she's haughty, I knowed her mother, as nice a body as ever stept, an' treated scandylous by Jim Hetherington. An', thinks I, she's a horphan, if she's got money, an' nobbut her husband i' th' world. Thinks I to mysen it's no good visitin' it on 'er head, if he's a villain. For whatever th' men does, th' women maun ma'e up for. An' though I do consider as it's nowt b'r a dirty trick o' his'n to ta'e a poor lass like my long thing, an' go an' marry a woman wi' money —

MRS GASCOIGNE: Woman wi' money, an' peace go wi' 'er, 'er an' 'er money! What she's got, she'll keep, you take my word for it, missis.

MRS PURDY: Yes, an' she's right of it.

JOE: Nay, Mother, she's non close.

MRS GASCOIGNE: Isn't she? — oh, isn't she? An' what is she then? All she wanted was as much for her money as she could get. An' when she fun as nob'dy was for sale but our Luther, she says, "Well, I'll take it."

JOE: Nay, it worna like that — it wor him as wor that come-day-go-day —

MRS PURDY: God send Sunday.

MRS GASCOIGNE: An' what more canna man do, think yer, but ax a woman? When has thee ever done as much?

JOE: No, I hanna, 'cos I've niver seen th' woman as I wanted to say "snap" — but he slormed an' she —

MRS GASCOIGNE: Slormed! Thee slorm but one fiftieth part to any lass thee likes, an' see if 'er's not all over thee afore tha's said six words. Slormed! 'Er wor that high an' mighty, 'er wanted summat bett'nor 'im.

JOE: Nay — I reckon he niver showed the spunk of a sprat-herring to 'er.

MRS GASCOIGNE: Did thee show any more? Hast iver done? Yet onybody 'ud think tha wor for marryin' 'er thysen.

JOE: If I'd ha' bin for marryin' 'er, I'd ha' gone wholesale, not ha' fudged and haffled.

MRS GASCOIGNE: But tha worna for marryin' neither 'er nor nobody.

JOE: No, I worna.

MRS GASCOIGNE: No, tha worna.

There is a long pause. The mother turns half apologetically, half explanatorily, to MRS PURDY.

It's like this 'ere, missis, if you'll not say nothink about it — sin' it's got to come out atween us. He courted Minnie Hetherington when she wor at her uncle's, at th' "Bell o' Brass", an' he wor nowt bu'r a lad o' twenty-two, an' she twenty-one. An' he wor gone on 'er right enow. Then she had that row wi' 'er uncle, for she wor iver overbearin' an' chancy. Then our Luther says to me, "I s'll ax 'er to marry me, Mother," an' I says: "Tha pleases thysen, but ter my thinkin' tha'rt a sight too young an' doesna know thy own mind." Howsoever, much notice 'e takes o' me.

JOE: He took a lot o' notice on thee, tha knows well enough.

MRS GASCOIGNE: An' for what shouldn't he? Hadn't I bin a good mother to 'im i' ivry shape an' form? Let her make him as good a wife as I made him a mother! Well — we'll see. You'll see him repent the day. But they're not to be

bidden. An' so, missis, he did ax 'er, as 'e'd said 'e should. But hoity-toity an' no thank yer, she wasna for havin' him, but mun go an' be a nursery governess up i' Manchester. Thinks I to myself, she's after a town johnny, a Bertie-Willie an' a yard o' cuffs. But he kep' on writin' to 'er, now an' again — an' she answered — as if she wor standin' at top of a flight of steps —

JOE: An' 'appen on'y wanted fetchin' down.

MRS GASCOIGNE: Wi' a kick from behint, if I'd ha' had th' doin' o't. So they go mornin' on. He sees 'er once i' a blew moon. If he goes ter Manchester, she condescends to see him for a couple of hours. If she comes here, she ca's i' this house wi' a "how-do-you-do, Mrs Gascoigne", an' off again. If they go f'r a walk . . .

JOE: He's whoam again at nine o'clock.

MRS GASCOIGNE: If they go for a walk it's "Thank you, I mustn't be very late. Good night, Luther." I thought it ud niver come ter nothink. Then 'er uncle dies an' leaves her a hundred pounds, which considerin' th' way she'd been with 'im, was more than I'd ha' gen her — an' she was a bit nicer. She writes ter Luther ter come an' see 'er an' stop a couple o' days. He ta'es her to the the-etter, an's for goin' i' th' pit at a shillin', when she says: "It's my treat, Luther, and five shillin' seats apiece, if you please."

JOE: An' he couldna luik at th' performance, for fear as the folks was luikin' at 'im.

MRS GASCOIGNE: An' after th' the-etter, it must be supper wi' a man i' a tail-coat an' silver forks, an' she pays. "Yes," says I when he told me, "that's the tricks of servants, showin' off afore decent folk."

JOE: She could do what she liked, couldn't she?

MRS GASCOIGNE: Well, an' after that, he didna write, 'cept to say thank yer. For it put 'im in a horkard position. That wor four years ago, an' she's nobbut seen him three times sin' that. If she could but ha' snapped up somebody else, it 'ud bin good-bye to Luther —

JOE: As tha told him many a time.

MRS GASCOIGNE: As I told him many a time, for am I to sit an' see my own lad bitted an' bobbed, tasted an' spit out by a madam i' service? Then all of a suddin, three months back, come a letter: "Dear Luther, I have been thinking it over, an' have come to the opinion that we'd better get married now, if we are ever goin' to. We've been dallying on all these years, and we seem to get no further. So we'd better make the plunge, if ever we're going to. Of course you will say exactly what you think. Don't agree to anything unless you want to. I only want to say that I think, if we're ever going to be married, we'd better do it without waiting any longer." Well, missis, he got that letter when he com whoam fra work. I seed him porin' an' porin', but I says nowt. Then he ate some o's dinner, and went out. When he com in, it wor about haef past ten, an' 'e wor white as a sheet. He gen me that letter, an' says: "What's think o' that, Mother?" Well, you could ha' knocked me down wi' a feather when I'd read it. I says: "I think it's tidy cheek, my lad." He took it back an' puts 's pocket, an' after a bit, 'e says: "What should ter say, Mother?" "Tha says what's a mind, my lad," I says. So he begins unlacin' 's boots. Sudden he stops, an' wi's boot-tags rattlin', goes rummagin' for th' pen an' ink. "What art goin' to say?" I says. "I'm goin' ter say, 'er can do as 'er's a mind. If 'er wants ter be married, 'er can, an' if 'er doesna, 'er nedna." So I thinks we could leave it at that. He sits him down, an' doesna write more nor a side an' a haef. I thinks: "That's done it, it'll be an end between them two now." He niver gen th' letter to me to read.

JOE: He did to me. He says: "I'm ready an' willin' to do what you want, whenever yer want. I'm earnin' about thirty-five bob a week, an' haven't got any money because my mother gi'es me what I ax for ter spend. But I can have what I ask for to set up house with. Your loving — Luther." He says to me: "Dost think it's a'right?" I says: "I s'd think so; 'er maun ma'e what 'er likes out on't."

MRS GASCOIGNE: On th' Monday after, she wor here livin' at 'er A'nt's an' th' notice was in at th' registrar. I says: "What money dost want?" He says: "Thee buy what tha thinks we s'll want." So he tells Minnie, an' she says: "Not bi-out I'm theer." Well, we goes ter Nottingham, an' she will ha'e nowt b'r old-fashioned stuff. I says: "That's niver my mind, Minnie." She says: "Well, I like it, an' yo'll see it'll look nice. I'll pay for it." Which to be sure I never let her. For she'd had a mester as made a fool of her, tellin' her this an' that, what wor good taste, what wor bad.

JOE: An' it does look nice, Mother, their house.

MRS GASCOIGNE: We'll see how it looks i' ten years' time, my lad, wi' th' racket an' tacket o' children. For it's not serviceable, missis.

MRS PURDY (who has been a sympathetic and exclamative listener): Then it's no good.

MRS GASCOIGNE: An' that's how they got married.

JOE: An' he went about wi's tail atween his legs, scared outer's life.

MRS GASCOIGNE: For I said no more. If he axed me owt, I did it; if he wanted owt, I got it. But it wasn't for me to go interferin' where I wasn't wanted.

JOE: If ever I get married, Mother, I s'll go i' lodgin's six month aforehand.

MRS GASCOIGNE: Tha'd better — ter get thysen a bit case-hardened.

JOE: Yi. But I'm goin' t'r Australia.

MRS GASCOIGNE: I come withee, then.

JOE: Tha doesna.

MRS GASCOIGNE: I dunna fret — tha'lt non go.

MRS PURDY: Well, it was what I should call a bit off-hand, I must say.

MRS GASCOIGNE: You can see now how he got married, an' who's to blame.

JOE: Nay, yo' canna ma'e 'er to blame for Bertha. Liza Ann Varley's ter blame for th' lass goin' out o' nights.

MRS PURDY: An' there I thought they wor both i' Varley's — not gallivantin'.

JOE: They often was. An' Jim Horrocks is ter blame fer couplin' 'er onter our Luther, an' him an' her's ter blame for the rest. I dunno how you can lay it on Minnie. You might as well lay it on 'er if th' childt wor mine.

MRS GASCOIGNE (sharply): Tha'd ha'e more sense!

JOE: I'd try.

MRS GASCOIGNE: But now she's played fast an' loose wi' him — twice I know he axed 'er to ha'e him — now she's asked for what she's got. She's put her puddin' in her mouth, an' if she's burnt herself, serve her right.

MRS PURDY: Well, I didn't want to go to court. I thought, his mother'll be th' best one to go to —

MRS GASCOIGNE: No — you mun go to him hisself — go an' tell him i' front of her — an' if she wants anything, she mun ma'e arrangements herself.

JOE: What was you thinkin' of, Missis Purdy?

MRS PURDY: Well, I was thinkin', she's a poor lass — an' I didn't want 'er to go to court, for they ax such questions — an' I thought it was such a thing, him six wik married — though to be sure I'd no notions of how it was — I thought, we might happen say, it was one o' them electricians as was along when they laid th' wires under th' road down to Batsford — and —

JOE: And arrange for a lump sum, like?

MRS PURDY: Yes — we're poor, an' she's poor — an' if she had a bit o' money of 'er own — for we should niver touch it — it might be a inducement to some other young feller — for, poor long thing, she's that simple —

MRS GASCOIGNE: Well, ter my knowledge, them as has had a childt seems to get off i' marriage better nor many as hasn't. I'm sure, there's a lot o' men likes it, if they think a woman's had a baby by another man.

MRS PURDY: That's nothing to trust by, missis; you'll say so yourself.

JOE: An' about how much do you want? Thirty pounds?

MRS PURDY: We want what's fair. I got it fra Emma Stapleton; they had forty wi' their Lucy.

JOE: Forty pound?

MRS PURDY: Yes.

MRS GASCOIGNE: Well, then, let her find it. She's paid for nothing but the wedding. She's got money enough, if he's none. Let her find it. She made the bargain, she maun stick by it. It was her dip i' th' bran-tub — if there's a mouse nips hold of her finger, she maun suck it better, for nobody axed her to dip.

MRS PURDY: You think I'd better go to him? Eh, missis, it's a nasty business. But right's right.

MRS GASCOIGNE: Right is right, Mrs Purdy. And you go tell him a-front of her — that's the best thing you can do. Then iverything's straight.

MRS PURDY: But for her he might ha' married our Bertha.

MRS GASCOIGNE: To be sure, to be sure.

MRS PURDY: What right had she to snatch when it pleased her?

MRS GASCOIGNE: That's what I say. If th' woman ca's for th' piper, th' woman maun pay th' tune.

MRS PURDY: Not but what —

JOE: It's a nasty business.

MRS GASCOIGNE: Nasty or not, it's hers now, not mine. He's her husband. "My son's my son till he takes him a wife," an' no longer. Now let her answer for it.

MRS PURDY: An' you think I'd better go when they're both in?

MRS GASCOIGNE: I should go tonight, atween six an' seven, that's what I should do.

JOE: I never should. If I was you, I'd settle it wi'out Minnie's knowin' — it's bad enough.

MRS GASCOIGNE: What's bad enough?

JOE: Why, that.

MRS GASCOIGNE: What?

JOE: Him an' 'er — it's bad enough as it is.

MRS GASCOIGNE (with great bitterness): Then let it be a bit worse, let it be a bit worse. Let her have it, then; it'll do her good. Who is she, to trample eggs that another hen would sit warm? No — Mrs Purdy, give it her. It'll take her down a peg or two, and, my sirs, she wants it, my sirs, she needs it!

JOE (muttering): A fat lot o' good it'll do.

MRS GASCOIGNE: What has thee ter say, I should like to know? Fed an' clothed an' coddled, tha art, an' not a thing tha lacks. But wait till I'm gone, my lad; tha'll know what I've done for thee, then, tha will.

JOE: For a' that, it's no good 'er knowin'.

MRS GASCOIGNE: Isna it? — isna it? If it's not good for 'er, it's good for 'im.

JOE: I dunna believe it.

MRS GASCOIGNE: Who asked thee to believe it? Tha's showed thysen a wise man this day, hasn't ter? Wheer should ter be terday but for me? Wheer should ter iver ha' bin? An' then tha sits up for to talk. It ud look better o' thee not to spit i' th' hand as holds thy bread an' butter.

JOE: Neither do I.

MRS GASCOIGNE: Doesn't ter! Tha has a bit too much chelp an' chunter. It doesna go well, my lad. Tha wor blortin' an' bletherin' down at th' office a bit sin', an' a mighty fool tha made o' thysen. How should thee like to go home wi' thy tale o' to-day, to Minnie, might I ax thee?

JOE: If she didna like it, she could lump it.

MRS GASCOIGNE: It 'ud be thee as 'ud lump, my lad. But what does thee know about it? 'Er's rip th' guts out on thee like a tiger, an' stan' grinnin' at thee when tha shrivelled up 'cause tha'd no inside left.

MRS PURDY: She looks it, I must admit — every bit of it.

JOE: For a' that, it's no good her knowing.

MRS GASCOIGNE: Well, I say it is — an' thee, tha shiftly little know-all, as blorts at one minute like a suckin' calf an' th' next blethers like a hass, dunna thee come layin' th' law down to me, for I know better. No, Mrs Purdy, it's no good comin' to me. You've a right to some compensation, an' that lass o' yours has; but let them as cooked the goose eat it, that's all. Let him arrange it hisself — an' if he does nothink, put him i' court, that's all.

MRS PURDY: He's not goin' scot-free, you may back your life o' that.

MRS GASCOIGNE: You go down tonight atween six an' seven, an' let 'em have it straight. You know where they live?

MRS PURDY: I' Simson Street?

MRS GASCOIGNE: About four houses up — next Holbrooks.

MRS PURDY (rising): Yes.

JOE: An' it'll do no good. Gie me th' money, Mother; I'll pay it.

MRS GASCOIGNE: Tha wanna!

JOE: I've a right to th' money — I've addled it.

MRS GASCOIGNE: A' right — an' I've saved it for thee. But tha has none on't till tha knocks me down an' ta'es it out o' my pocket.

MRS PURDY: No — let them pay themselves. It's not thy childt, is it?

JOE: It isna — but the money is.

MRS GASCOIGNE: We'll see.

MRS PURDY: Well, I mun get back. Thank yer, missis.

MRS GASCOIGNE: And thank you! I'll come down to-morrow — at dark hour.

MRS PURDY: Thank yer. — I hope yer arm'll soon be better.

JOE: Thank yer.

MRS GASCOIGNE: I'll come down to-morrow. You'll go tonight — atween six an' seven?

MRS PURDY: Yes — if it mun be done, it mun. He took his own way, she took hers, now I mun take mine. Well, good afternoon. I mun see about th' mester's dinner.

JOE: And you haven't said nothink to nobody?

MRS PURDY: I haven't — I shouldn't be flig, should I?

JOE: No — I should keep it quiet as long's you can.

MRS GASCOIGNE: There's no need for a' th' world to know — but them as is concerned maun abide by it.

MRS PURDY: Well, good afternoon.

MRS GASCOIGNE: Good afternoon.

JOE: Good afternoon.

Exit MRS PURDY.

Well, that's a winder!

MRS GASCOIGNE: Serve her right, for tip-callin' wi'm all those years.

JOE: She niver ought to know.

MRS GASCOIGNE: I — I could fetch thee a wipe ower th' face, I could!

He sulks. She is in a rage.

SCENE II

The kitchen of LUTHER GASCOIGNE'S new home.

It is pretty — in “cottage” style; rush-bottomed chairs, black oak-bureau, brass candlesticks, delft, *etc.* Green cushions in chairs. Towards five o'clock. Firelight. It is growing dark.

MINNIE GASCOIGNE is busy about the fire: a tall, good-looking young woman, in a shirt-blouse and dark skirt, and apron. She lifts lids of saucepans, etc., hovers impatiently, looks at clock, begins to trim lamp.

MINNIE: I wish he'd come. If I didn't want him, he'd be here half-an-hour since. But just because I've got a pudding that wants eating on the tick . . . ! He — he's never up to the cratch; he never is. As if the day wasn't long enough!

Sound of footsteps. She seizes a saucepan, and is rushing towards the door. The latch has clacked. LUTHER appears in the doorway, in his pit-dirt — a collier of medium height, with fair moustache. He has a red scarf knotted round his throat, and a cap with a Union medal. The two almost collide.

LUTHER: My word, you're on the hop!

MINNIE (disappearing into scullery): You nearly made me drop the saucepan. Why are you so late?

LUTHER: I'm non late, am I?

MINNIE: You're twenty minutes later than yesterday.

LUTHER: Oh ah, I stopped finishing a stint, an' com up wi' a'most th' last batch.

He takes a tin bottle and a dirty calico snap-bag out of his pocket, puts them on the bureau; goes into the scullery.

MINNIE'S VOICE: No!

She comes hurrying out with the saucepan. In a moment, LUTHER follows. He has taken off his coat and cap, his heavy trousers are belted round his hips, his arms are bare to above the elbow, because the pit-singlet of thick flannel is almost sleeveless.

LUTHER: Tha art throng!

MINNIE (at the fire, flushed): Yes, and everything's ready, and will be spoiled.

LUTHER: Then we'd better eat it afore I wash me.

MINNIE: No — no — it's not nice —

LUTHER: Just as ter's a mind — but there's scarce a collier in a thousand washes hissen afore he has his dinner. We niver did a-whoam.

MINNIE: But it doesn't look nice.

LUTHER: Eh, wench, tha'lt soon get used ter th' looks on me. A bit o' dirt's like a veil on my face — I shine through th' 'andsomer. What hast got? (He peers over her range.)

MINNIE (waving a fork): You're not to look.

LUTHER: It smells good.

MINNIE: Are you going to have your dinner like that?

LUTHER: Ay, lass — just for once.

He spreads a newspaper in one of the green-cushioned armchairs and sits down. She disappears into the scullery with a saucepan. He takes off his great pit-boots. She sets a soup-tureen on the table, and lights the lamp. He watches her face in the glow.

Tha'rt non bad-luikin' when ter's a mind.

MINNIE: When have I a mind?

LUTHER: Tha's allers a mind — but when ter lights th' lamp tha'rt i' luck's way.

MINNIE: Come on, then.

He drags his chair to the table.

LUTHER: I s'll ha'e ter ha'e a newspaper afront on me, or thy cloth'll be a blackymoor. (Begins disarranging the pots.)

MINNIE: Oh, you are a nuisance! (Jumps up.)

LUTHER: I can put 'em a' back again.

MINNIE: I know your puttings back.

LUTHER: Tha couldna get married by thysen, could ter? — so tha'lt ha'e ter ma'e th' best on me.

MINNIE: But you're such a bother — never here at the right time — never doing the right thing —

LUTHER: An' my mouth's ter wide an' my head's ter narrow. Shalt iver ha' come ter th' end of my faults an' failin's?

MINNIE (giving him soup): I wish I could.

LUTHER: An' now tha'lt snap mu head off 'cos I slobber, shanna tha?

MINNIE: Then don't slobber.

LUTHER: I'll try my luck. What hast bin doin' a' day?

MINNIE: Working.

LUTHER: Has our Joe bin in?

MINNIE: No. I rather thought he might, but he hasn't.

LUTHER: You've not been up home?

MINNIE: To your mother's? No, what should I go there for?

LUTHER: Eh, I dunno what ter should go for — I thought tha 'appen might.

MINNIE: But what for?

LUTHER: Nay — I niver thowt nowt about what for.

MINNIE: Then why did you ask me?

LUTHER: I dunno. (A pause.)

MINNIE: Your mother can come here, can't she?

LUTHER: Ay, she can come. Tha'll be goin' up wi' me tonight — I want ter go an' see about our Joe.

MINNIE: What about him?

LUTHER: How he went on about's club money. Shall ter come wi' me?

MINNIE: I wanted to do my curtains.

LUTHER: But tha's got a' day to do them in.

MINNIE: But I want to do them tonight — I feel like it.

LUTHER: A' right. — I shanna be long, at any rate.

(A pause.)

What dost keep lookin' at?

MINNIE: How?

LUTHER: Tha keeps thy eye on me rarely.

MINNIE (laughing): It's your mouth — it looks so red and bright, in your black face.

LUTHER: Does it look nasty to thee?

MINNIE: No — no-o.

LUTHER (pushing his moustache, laughing): It ma'es you look like a nigger, i' your pit-dirt — th' whites o' your eyes!

MINNIE: Just.

She gets up to take his plate; goes and stands beside him. He lifts his face to her.

I want to see if I can see you; you look so different.

LUTHER: Tha can see me well enough. Why dost want to?

MINNIE: It's almost like having a stranger.

LUTHER: Would ter rather?

MINNIE: What?

LUTHER: Ha'e a stranger?

MINNIE: What for?

LUTHER: Hao — I dunno.

MINNIE (touching his hair): You look rather nice — an' your hair's so dirty.

LUTHER: Gi'e me a kiss.

MINNIE: But where? You're all grime.

LUTHER: I'm sure I've licked my mouth clean.

MINNIE (stooping suddenly, and kissing him): You don't look nearly such a tame rabbit, in your pit-dirt.

LUTHER (catching her in his arms): Dunna I? (Kisses her.) What colour is my eyes?

MINNIE: Bluey-grey.

LUTHER: An' thine's grey an' black.

MINNIE: Mind! (She looks at her blouse when he releases her.)

LUTHER (timid): Have I blacked it?

MINNIE: A bit.

She goes to the scullery; returns with another dish.

LUTHER: They talkin' about comin' out again

MINNIE (returning): Good laws! — they've no need.

LUTHER: They are, though.

MINNIE: It's a holiday they want.

LUTHER: Nay, it isna. They want th' proper scale here, just as they ha'e it ivrywhere else.

MINNIE: But if the seams are thin, and the company can't afford.

LUTHER: They can afford a' this gret new electric plant; they can afford to build new houses for managers, an' ter give blo — ter give Frazer twelve hundred a year.

MINNIE: If they want a good manager to make the pits pay, they have to give him a good salary.

LUTHER: So's he can clip down our wages.

MINNIE: Why, what are yours clipped down?

LUTHER: Mine isn't, but there's plenty as is.

MINNIE: And will this strike make a butty of you?

LUTHER: You don't strike to get made a butty on.

MINNIE: Then how do you do it? You're thirty-one.

LUTHER: An' there's many as owd as me as is day-men yet.

MINNIE: But there's more that aren't, that are butties.

LUTHER: Ay, they've had luck.

MINNIE: Luck! You mean they've had some go in them.

LUTHER: Why, what can I do more than I am doin'?

MINNIE: It isn't what you do, it's how you do it. Sluther through any job; get to th' end of it, no matter how. That's you.

LUTHER: I hole a stint as well as any man.

MINNIE: Then I back it takes you twice as long.

LUTHER: Nay, nor that neither.

MINNIE: I know you're not much of a workman — I've heard it from other butties, that you never put your heart into anything.

LUTHER: Who hast heard it fra?

MINNIE: From those that know. And I could ha' told it them, for I know you. You'll be a day-man at seven shillings a day till the end of your life — and you'll be satisfied, so long as you can shilly-shally through. That's what your mother did for you — mardin' you up till you were all mard-soft.

LUTHER: Tha's got a lot ter say a' of a suddin. Thee shut thy mouth.

MINNIE: You've been dragged round at your mother's apron-strings, all the lot of you, till there isn't half a man among you.

LUTHER: Tha seems fond enough of our Joe.

MINNIE: He is th' best in the bunch.

LUTHER: Tha should ha' married him, then.

MINNIE: I shouldn't have had to ask him, if he was ready.

LUTHER: I'd axed thee twice afore — tha knowed tha could ha'e it when ter wanted.

MINNIE: Axed me! It was like asking me to pull out a tooth for you.

LUTHER: Yi, an' it felt like it

MINNIE: What?

LUTHER: Axin' thee to marry me. I'm blessed if it didna feel like axin' the doctor to pull ten teeth out of a stroke.

MINNIE: And then you expect me to have you!

LUTHER: Well, tha has done, whether or not.

MINNIE: I — yes, I had to fetch you, like a mother fetches a kid from school. A pretty sight you looked. Didn't your mother give you a ha'penny to spend, to get you to go?

LUTHER: No; she spent it for me.

MINNIE: She would! She wouldn't even let you spend your own ha'penny. You'd have lost it, or let somebody take it from you.

LUTHER: Yi. Thee.

MINNIE: Me! — me take anything from you! Why, you've got nothing worth having.

LUTHER: I dunno — tha seems ter think so sometimes.

MINNIE: Oh! Shilly-shally and crawl, that's all you can do. You ought to have stopped with your mother.

LUTHER: I should ha' done, if tha hadna hawked me out.

MINNIE: You aren't fit for a woman to have married, you're not.

LUTHER: Then why did thee marry me? It wor thy doin's.

MINNIE: Because I could get nobody better.

LUTHER: I'm more class than I thought for, then.

MINNIE: Are you! Are you!

JOE'S voice is heard.

JOE: I'm comin' in, you two, so stop snaggin' an' snarlin'.

LUTHER: Come in; ‘er’ll ‘appen turn ‘er tap on thee.

JOE enters.

JOE: Are you eatin’ yet?

LUTHER: Ay — it ta’es ‘er that long ter tell my sins. Tha’s just come right for puddin’. Get thee a plate outer t’cupboard — an’ a spoon outer t’basket.

JOE (at the cupboard): You’ve got ivrythink tip-top. What should ter do if I broke thee a plate, Minnie?

MINNIE: I should break another over your head.

He deliberately drops and smashes a plate. She flushes crimson.

LUTHER: Well, I’m glad it worna me.

JOE: I’m that clumsy wi’ my left ‘and, Minnie! Why doesna ter break another ower my head?

LUTHER (rising and putting pudding on a plate): Here, ta’e this an’ sit thee down.

His brother seats himself.

Hold thy knees straight, an’ for God’s sake dunna thee break this. Can ter manage?

JOE: I reckon so. If I canna, Minnie’ll feed me wi’ a spoon. Shonna ter?

MINNIE: Why did you break my plate?

JOE: Nay, I didna break it — it wor the floor.

MINNIE: You did it on purpose.

JOE: How could I? I didn’t say ter th’ floor: “Break thou this plate, O floor!”

MINNIE: You have no right.

JOE (addressing the floor): Tha'd no right to break that plate — dost hear? I'd a good mind ter drop a bit o' puddin' on thy face.

He balances the spoon; the plate slides down from his knee, smash into the fender.

MINNIE (screams): It's my best service! (Begins to sob.)

LUTHER: Nay, our Joe!

JOE: 'Er's no occasions ter sraight. I bought th' service an' I can get th' plates matched. What's her grizzlin' about?

MINNIE: I shan't ask you to get them matched.

JOE: Dunna thee, an' then tha runs no risk o' bein' denied.

MINNIE: What have you come here like this for?

JOE: I haena come here like this. I come ter tell yer our Harriet says, would yer mind goin' an' tellin' 'er what she can do with that childt's coat, as she's made a' wrong. If you'd looked slippy, I'd ha' ta'en yer ter th' Cinematograph after. But, dearly-beloved brethren, let us weep; these our dear departed dinner-plates . . . Come, Minnie, drop a tear as you pass by.

LUTHER (to MINNIE): Tha needna fret, Minnie, they can easy be matched again.

MINNIE: You're just pleased to see him make a fool of me, aren't you?

LUTHER: He's non made a fool o' thee — tha's made a fool o' thysen, sraightin' an' carryin' on.

JOE: It's a fact, Minnie. Nay, let me kiss thee better.

She has risen, with shut face.

He approaches with outstretched left arm. She swings round, fetches him a blow over his upper right arm. He bites his lip with pain.

LUTHER (rising): Has it hurt thee, lad? Tha shouldna fool wi' her.

MINNIE watches the two brothers with tears of mortification in her eyes. Then she throws off her apron, pins on her hat, puts on her coat, and is marching out of the house.

LUTHER: Are you going to Harriet's?

JOE: I'll come and fetch you in time for th' Cinematograph.

The door is heard to bang.

JOE (picking up broken fragments of plates): That's done it.

LUTHER: It's bad luck — ne'er mind. How art goin' on?

JOE: Oh, alright.

LUTHER: What about thy club money?

JOE: They wanna gi'e't me. But, I say, sorry — tha'rt for it.

LUTHER: Ay — I dunno what 'er married me for, f'r it's nowt bu' fault she finds wi' me, from th' minnit I come i' th' house to th' minnit I leave it.

JOE: Dost wish tha'd niver done it? — niver got married?

LUTHER (sulky): I dunno — sometimes.

JOE (with tragic emphasis): Then it's the blasted devil!

LUTHER: I dunno — I'm married to 'er, an' she's married to me, so she can pick holes i' me as much as she likes —

JOE: As a rule, she's nice enough wi' me.

LUTHER: She's nice wi' ivrybody but me.

JOE: An' dost ter care?

LUTHER: Ay — I do.

JOE: Why doesn't ter go out an' leave her?

LUTHER: I dunno.

JOE: By the Lord, she'd cop it if I had 'er.

Pause.

LUTHER: I wor comin' up tonight.

JOE: I thought tha would be. But there's Mrs Purdy comin' ter see thee.

LUTHER: There's who?

JOE: Mrs Purdy. Didna ter ha'e a bit of a go wi' their Bertha, just afore Minnie wrote thee?

LUTHER: Ay. Why?

JOE: 'Er mother says she's wi' childt by thee. She come up ter my mother this afternoon, an' said she wor comin' here tonight.

LUTHER: Says what?

JOE: Says as their Bertha's goin' ter ha'e a child, an' 'er lays it on ter thee.

LUTHER: Oh, my good God!

JOE: Isna it right?

LUTHER: It's right if 'er says so.

JOE: Then it's the blasted devil! (A pause.) So I come on here ter see if I could get Minnie to go up to our Harriet.

LUTHER: Oh, my good God!

JOE: I thought, if we could keep it from 'er, we might settle summat, an' 'er niver know.

LUTHER (slowly): My God alive!

JOE: She said she'd hush it up, an' lay it ont'r a electrician as laid th' cable, an' is gone goodness knows where — make an arrangement, for forty pound.

LUTHER (thoughtfully): I wish I wor struck dead.

JOE: Well, tha arena', an' so tha'd better think about it. My mother said as Minnie ought to know, but I say diff'rent, an' if Mrs Purdy doesna tell her, nobody need.

LUTHER: I wish I wor struck dead. I wish a ton o' rock 'ud fa' on me to-morrer.

JOE: It wanna for wishin'.

LUTHER: My good God!

JOE: An' so — I'll get thee forty quid, an' lend it thee. When Mrs Purdy comes, tell her she shall ha'e twenty quid this day week, an' twenty quid a year from now, if thy name's niver been mentioned. I believe 'er's a clat-fart.

LUTHER: Me a childt by Bertha Purdy! But — but what's that for — now there's Minnie?

JOE: I dunno what it's for, but theer it is, as I'm tellin' thee. I'll stop for another haef an hour, an' if 'er doesna come, than mun see to 'er by thysen.

LUTHER: 'Er'll be back afore ha'ef an hour's up. Tha mun go an' stop 'er . . . I — I niver meant — Look here, our Joe, I — if I — if she — if she — My God, what have I done now!

JOE: We can stop her from knowin’.

LUTHER (looking round): She’ll be comin’ back any minnit. Nay, I niver meant t’r ha’. Joe . . .

JOE: What?

LUTHER: She — she —

JOE: ‘Er niver ned know.

LUTHER: Ah, but though . . .

JOE: What?

LUTHER: I — I — I’ve done it.

JOE: Well, it might ha’ happened t’r anybody.

LUTHER: But when ‘er knows — an’ it’s me as has done it . . .

JOE: It wouldn’t ha’ mattered o’ anyhow, if it had bin sumb’dy else. But tha knows what ter’s got ter say. Arena’ ter goin’ ter wesh thee? Go an’ get th’ panchion.

LUTHER (rising): ‘Er’ll be comin’ in any minnit.

JOE: Get thee weshed, man.

LUTHER (fetching a bucket and lading-can from the scullery, and emptying water from the boiler): Go an’ ta’e ‘er somewhere, while Mrs Purdy goes, shall ter?

JOE: D’rectly. Tha heered what I telled thee?

There is a noise of splashing in the scullery. Then a knock.

JOE goes to the door. He is heard saying “Come in.”

Enter MRS PURDY.

MRS PURDY: I hope I've not come a-mealtimes.

JOE: No, they've finished. Minnie's gone up t'r our Harriet's.

MRS PURDY: Thank the Lord for small mercies — for I didn't fancy sittin' an' tellin' her about our Bertha.

JOE: We dunna want 'er ter know. Sit thee down.

MRS PURDY: I'm of that mind, mester, I am. As I said, what's th' good o' jackin' up a young married couple? For it won't unmarry 'em nor ma'e things right. An' yet, my long lass oughtner ter bear a' th' brunt.

JOE: Well, an' 'er isna goin' to.

MRS PURDY: Is that Mester weshin'?

JOE: Ah.

MRS PURDY: 'As ter towd him?

JOE: Ah.

MRS PURDY: Well, it's none o' my wishin's, I'm sure o' that. Eh, dear, you've bin breakin' th' crockery a'ready!

JOE: Yes, that's me, bein' wallit.

MRS PURDY: T-t-t! So this is 'ow she fancied it?

JOE: Ah, an' it non luiks bad, does it?

MRS PURDY: Very natty. Very nice an' natty.

JOE (taking up the lamp): Come an' look at th' parlour.

JOE and MRS PURDY exit R.

MRS PURDY'S VOICE: Yis — yis — it's nice an' plain. But a bit o' red plush is 'andsomer, to my mind. It's th'old-fashioned style, like! My word, but them three ornyments is gaudy-lookin'.

JOE: An' they reckon they're worth five pound. 'Er mester gen 'em 'er.

MRS PURDY: I'd rather had th' money.

JOE: Ah, me an' a'.

During this time, LUTHER has come hurrying out of the scullery into the kitchen, rubbing his face with a big roller-towel. He is naked to the waist. He kneels with his knees on the fender, sitting on his heels, rubbing himself. His back is not washed. He rubs his hair dry.

Enter JOE, with the lamp, followed by MRS PURDY.

MRS PURDY: It's uncommon, very uncommon, Mester Gaskin — and looks well, too, for them as likes it. But it hardly goes wi' my fancy, somehow, startin' wi' second-hand, owd-fashioned stuff. You dunno who's sotten themselves on these 'ere chairs, now, do you?

LUTHER: It ma'es no diff'rence to me who's sot on 'em an' who 'asna.

MRS PURDY: No — you get used to'm.

LUTHER (to JOE): Shall thee go up t'r our Harriet's?

JOE: If ter's a mind. (Takes up his cap. To MRS PURDY): An' you two can settle as best you can.

MRS PURDY: Yes — yes. I'm not one for baulkin' mysen an' cuttin' off my nose ter spite my face.

LUTHER has finished wiping himself. He takes a shifting shirt from the bureau, and struggles into it; then goes into the scullery.

JOE: An' you sure you'll keep it quiet, missis?

MRS PURDY: Am I goin' bletherin' up street an' down street, think yer?

JOE: An' dunna tell your Bob.

MRS PURDY: I've more sense. There's not a word 'e 'ears a-whoam as is of any count, for out it 'ud leak when he wor canned. Yes, my guyney — we know what our mester is.

Re-enter LUTHER, in shirt and black trousers. He drops his pit-trousers and singlet beside the hearth.

MRS PURDY bends down and opens his pit-trousers.

MRS PURDY: Nay, if ter drops 'em of a heap, they niver goin' ter get dry an' cosy. Tha sweats o' th' hips, as my lads did.

LUTHER: Well, go thy ways, Joe.

JOE: Ay — well — good luck. An' good night, Mrs Purdy.

MRS PURDY: Good night.

Exit JOE.

There are several moments of silence.

LUTHER puts the broken pots on the table.

MRS PURDY: It's sad work, Mester Gaskin, f'r a' on us.

LUTHER: Ay.

MRS PURDY: I left that long lass o' mine fair gaunt, fair chalked of a line, I did, poor thing. Not bu' what 'er should 'a 'ad more sense.

LUTHER: Ah!

MRS PURDY: But it's no use throwin' good words after bad deeds. Not but

what it's a nasty thing for yer t'r 'a done, it is — an' yer can scarce look your missis i' th' face again, I should think. (Pause.) But I says t'r our Bertha, "It's his'n, an' he mun pay!" Eh, but how 'er did but scraight an' cry. It fair turned me ower. "Dunna go to 'm, Mother," 'er says, "dunna go to 'm for to tell him!" "Yi," I says, "right's right — tha doesna get off wi' nowt, nor shall 'e neither. 'E wor but a scamp to do such a thing," I says, yes, I did. For you was older nor 'er. Not but what she was old enough ter ha'e more sense. But 'er wor allers one o' th' come-day go-day sort, as 'ud gi'e th' clothes off 'er back an' niver know 'er wor nek'd — a gra't soft looney as she is, an' serves 'er right for bein' such a gaby. Yi, an' I believe 'er wor fond on thee — if a wench can be fond of a married man. For one blessing, 'er doesna know what 'er wor an' what 'er worn't. For they mau talk o' bein' i' love — but you non in love wi' onybody, wi'out they's a chance o' their marryin' you — howiver much you may like 'em. An' I'm thinkin', th' childt'll set 'er up again when it comes, for 'er's gone that wezzel-brained an' doited, I'm sure! An' it's a mort o' trouble for me, mester, a sight o' trouble it is. Not as I s'll be hard on 'er. She knowed I wor comin' 'ere tonight, an's not spoke a word for hours. I left 'er sittin' on th' sofey hangin' 'er 'ead. But it's a weary business, mester, an' nowt ter be proud on. I s'd think tha wishes tha'd niver clapt eyes on our Bertha.

LUTHER (thinking hard): I dunna — I dunna. An' I dunna wish as I'd niver seen 'er, no, I dunna. 'Er liked me, an' I liked 'er.

MRS PURDY: An' 'appen, but for this 'ere marriage o' thine, tha'd 'a married 'er.

LUTHER: Ah, I should. F'r 'er liked me, an' 'er worna neither nice nor near, nor owt else, an' 'er'd bin fond o' me.

MRS PURDY: 'Er would, an' it's a thousand pities. But what's done's done.

LUTHER: Ah, I know that.

MRS PURDY: An' as for yer missis —

LUTHER: 'Er mun do as 'er likes.

MRS PURDY: But tha'rt not for tellin' 'er?

LUTHER: 'Er — 'er'll know some time or other.

MRS PURDY: Nay, nay, 'er nedna. You married now, lad, an' you canna please yoursen.

LUTHER: It's a fact.

MRS PURDY: An' Lizzy Stapleton, she had forty pound wi' 'er lad, an' it's not as if you hadn't got money. An' to be sure, we've none.

LUTHER: No, an' I've none.

MRS PURDY: Yes, you've some atween you — an' — well . . .

LUTHER: I can get some.

MRS PURDY: Then what do you say?

LUTHER: I say as Bertha's welcome t'r any forty pounds, if I'd got it. For — for — missis, she wor better to me than iver my wife's bin.

MRS PURDY (frightened by his rage): Niver, lad!

LUTHER: She wor — ah but though she wor. She thought a lot on me.

MRS PURDY: An' so I'm sure your missis does. She naggles thy heart out, maybe. But that's just the wrigglin' a place out for hersen. She'll settle down comfortable, lad.

LUTHER (bitterly): Will she!

MRS PURDY: Yi — yi. An' tha's done 'er a crewel wrong, my lad. An' tha's done my gel one as well. For, though she was old enough to know better, yet she's good-hearted and trusting, an' 'ud gi'e 'er shoes off 'er feet. An' tha's landed 'er, tha knows. For it's not th' bad women as 'as bastards nowadays — they've a sight too much gumption. It's fools like our'n — poor thing.

LUTHER: I've done everything that was bad, I know that.

MRS PURDY: Nay — nay — young fellers, they are like that. But it's wrong, for look at my long lass sittin' theer on that sofe, as if 'er back wor broke.

LUTHER (loudly): But I dunna wish I'd niver seen 'er, I dunna. It wor — it wor — she wor good to me, she wor, an' I dunna wish I'd niver done it.

MRS PURDY: Then tha ought, that's a'. For I do — an' 'er does.

LUTHER: Does 'er say 'er wishes 'er'd niver seen me?

MRS PURDY: 'Er says nowt o' nohow.

LUTHER: Then 'er doesna wish it. An' I wish I'd ha' married 'er.

MRS PURDY: Come, my lad, come. Married tha art —

LUTHER (bitterly): Married I am, an' I wish I worna. Your Bertha 'er'd 'a thought a thousand times more on me than she does. But I'm wrong, wrong, wrong, i' ivry breath I take. An' I will be wrong, yi, an' I will be wrong.

MRS PURDY: Hush thee — there's somebody comin'.

They wait.

Enter JOE and MINNIE, JOE talking loudly.

MINNIE: No, you've not, you've no right at all. (To LUTHER): Haven't you even cleared away? (To MRS PURDY): Good evening.

MRS PURDY: Good evenin', missis. I was just goin' — I've bin sayin' it looks very nice, th' 'ouse.

MINNIE: Do you think so?

MRS PURDY: I do, indeed.

MINNIE: Don't notice of the mess we're in, shall you? He (pointing to JOE) broke the plates — and then I had to rush off up to Mrs Preston's afore I could clear away. And he hasn't even mended the fire.

LUTHER: I can do — I niver noticed.

MINNIE (to MRS PURDY): Have a piece of cake? (Goes to cupboard.)

MRS PURDY: No, thanks, no, thanks. I mun get off afore th' Co-op shuts up. Thank yer very much. Well — good night, all.

JOE opens the door; MRS PURDY goes out.

MINNIE (bustling, clearing away as LUTHER comes in with coals): Did you settle it?

LUTHER: What?

MINNIE: What she'd come about.

LUTHER: Ah.

MINNIE: An' I bet you'll go and forget.

LUTHER: Oh ah!

MINNIE: And poor old Bob Purdy will go on just the same.

LUTHER: Very likely.

MINNIE: Don't let the dust all go on the hearth. Why didn't you clear away? The house was like a pigsty for her to come into.

LUTHER: Then I wor the pig.

MINNIE (halting): Why — who's trod on your tail now?

LUTHER: There'd be nobody to tread on it if tha wor out.

MINNIE: Oh — oh, dearo' me. (To JOE): I think we'd better go to the Cinematograph, and leave him to nurse his sore tail.

JOE: We better had.

LUTHER: An' joy go with yer.

MINNIE: We certainly shan't leave it at home. (To JOE): What time does it begin?

JOE: Seven o'clock.

MINNIE: And I want to call in Sisson's shop. Shall you go with me, or wouldn't you condescend to go shopping with me? (She has cleared the table, brought a tray and a bowl, and is washing up the pots.)

JOE: Dost think I'm daunted by Polly Sisson?

MINNIE: You're braver than most men if you dare go in a shop. Here, take a towel and wipe these pots.

JOE: How can I?

MINNIE: If you were a gentleman, you'd hold the plates in your teeth to wipe them.

JOE: Tha wouldna look very ladylike at th' end on't.

MINNIE: Why?

JOE: Why, hast forgot a'ready what a shine tha kicked up when I broke them two other plates? (He has got a towel, and wedging a plate against his thighs, is laboriously wiping it.)

MINNIE: I never kicked up a shine. It is nice of you!

JOE: What?

MINNIE: To do this for me.

LUTHER has begun sweeping the hearth.

JOE: Tha's got two servants.

MINNIE: But I'm sure you want to smoke while you're doing it — don't you now?

JOE: Sin' tha says so. (Fumbles in his pocket.)

MINNIE (hastily wiping her hands, puts a cigarette between his lips — gets matches from the mantelpiece, ignoring her husband, who is kneeling sweeping the hearth — lights his cigarette): It's so nice to have a lamed man. You feel you've got an excuse for making a fuss of him. You've got awfully nice eyes and eyebrows. I like dark eyes.

JOE: Oh ah!

LUTHER rises hastily, goes in the passage, crosses the room quietly. He wears his coat, a red scarf and a cap.

MINNIE: There's more go in them than in blue. (Watches her husband go out. There is silence between the two.)

JOE: He'll come round again.

MINNIE: He'll have to. He'll go on sulking now. (Her face breaks.) You — you don't know how hard it is.

JOE: What?

MINNIE (crying a few fierce tears): This . . .

JOE (aghast): What?

MINNIE: Why — you don't know. You don't know how hard it is, with a man as — as leaves you alone all the time.

JOE: But — he niver hardly goes out.

MINNIE: No, but — you don't know — he leaves me alone, he always has done — and there's nobody . . .

JOE: But he . . .

MINNIE: He never trusts me — he leaves me so alone — and — (a little burst of tears) it is hard! (She changes suddenly.) You've wiped your plates; my word, you are a champion.

JOE: I think so an' a'.

MINNIE: I hope the pictures will be jolly — but the sad ones make me laugh more, don't they you?

JOE: I canna do wi' 'em.

CURTAIN

ACT II

The same evening — eleven o'clock, LUTHER'S house.

MINNIE, alone, weeping. She gets up, fills the kettle, puts it on the hob, sits down, weeps again; then hears somebody coming, dries her eyes swiftly, turns the lamp low.

Enter LUTHER. He stands in the doorway — is rather tipsy; flings his cap down, sits in his chair, lurching it slightly. Neither speaks for some moments.

LUTHER: Well, did yer like yer pictures?

MINNIE: Where have you been?

LUTHER: What does it matter where I've been?

MINNIE: Have you been drinking?

LUTHER: What's it matter if I have?

MINNIE: It matters a lot to me

LUTHER: Oh ah!

MINNIE: Do you think I'm going to sleep with a man who is half-drunk?

LUTHER: Nay, I non know who tha'rt goin' ter sleep wi'.

MINNIE (rising): I shall make the bed in the other room.

LUTHER: Tha's no 'casions. I s'll do very nicely on t' sofa; it's warmer.

MINNIE: Oh, you can have your own bed.

LUTHER: If tha doesna sleep in it, I dunna.

MINNIE: And if you do, I don't.

LUTHER: Tha pleases thysen. Tha can sleep by thysen for iver, if ter's a mind to't.

MINNIE (who has stood hesitating): Oh, very well!

She goes upstairs, returns immediately with a pillow and two blankets, which she throws on the sofa.

LUTHER: Thank yer kindly.

MINNIE: Shall you rake?

LUTHER: I'll rake.

She moves about; lays table for his morning's breakfast: a newspaper, cup, plate, *etc.* — no food, because it would go dry; rinses his tin pit-bottle, puts it and his snap-bag on the table.

I could do it for mysen. Tha ned do nowt for me.

MINNIE: Why this sudden fit of unselfishness?

LUTHER: I niver want thee to do nowt for me, niver no more. No, not so much as lift a finger for me — not if I wor dyin'.

MINNIE: You're not dying; you're only tipsy.

LUTHER: Well, it's no matter to thee what I am.

MINNIE: It's very comfortable for you to think so.

LUTHER: I know nowt about that.

MINNIE (after a pause): Where have you been to-night?

LUTHER: There an' back, to see how far it is.

MINNIE (making an effort): Have you been up to your mother's?

LUTHER: Where I've bin, I've bin, and where I haven't, I haven't.

MINNIE: Pah! — you needn't try to magnify it and make a mountain. You've been to your mother's, and then to "The Ram".

LUTHER: All right — if tha knows, tha knows, an' theer's an end on't.

MINNIE: You talk like a fool.

LUTHER: That comes o' bein' a fool.

MINNIE: When were you a fool?

LUTHER: Ivry day o' my life, an' ivry breath I've ta'en.

MINNIE (having finished work, sits down again): I suppose you haven't got it in you to say anything fresh.

LUTHER: Why, what dost want me ter say? (He looks at her for the first time.)

MINNIE (with a queer catch): You might be more of a man if you said you were sorry.

LUTHER: Sorry! Sorry for what?

MINNIE: You've nothing to be sorry for, have you?

LUTHER (looking at her, quickly): What art goin' ter say?

MINNIE: It's what are you going to say. (A silence.)

LUTHER (doggedly): I'm goin' ter say nowt.

MINNIE (bitterly): No, you're not man enough to say anything — you can only slobber. You do a woman a wrong, but you're never man enough to say you're sorry for it. You're not a man, you're not — you're something crawling!

LUTHER: I'm glad! I'm glad! I'm glad! No, an' I wouldna ta'e't back, no. 'Er wor nice wi' me, which is a thing tha's niver bin. An' so tha's got it, an' mun keep it.

MINNIE: Who was nice with you?

LUTHER: She was — an' would ha'e bin at this minnit, but for thee.

MINNIE: Pah! — you're not fit to have a wife. You only want your mother to rock you to sleep.

LUTHER: Neither mother, nor wife, neither thee nor onybody do I want — no — no.

MINNIE: No — you've had three cans of beer.

LUTHER: An' if ter niver sleeps i' th' bed wi' me again, an' if ter niver does a hand's turn for me niver no more, I'm glad, I'm glad. I non want thee. I non want ter see thee.

MINNIE: You mean coward. Good God! I never thought you were such a mean coward as this.

LUTHER: An' as for thy money — yi, I wouldna smell on't. An' neither thine, nor our Joe's, nor my mother's will I ha'e. What I addle's my own. What I gi'e thee, I gie thee. An' she maun ha'e ten shillin's a month, an' tha maun abide by't.

MINNIE: What are you talking about?

LUTHER: My mother wouldna gi'e me th' money. She says she's done her share. An' tha's done thine. An' I've done mine, begod. An' what yer canna

chew yer maun swaller.

MINNIE: You must be quite drunk.

LUTHER: Must I? Alright, it's Dutch courage then. A'right, then Dutch courage it is. But I tell thee, tha does as ter's a mind. Tha can leave me, an' go back inter service, if ter wants. What's it ter me, if I'm but a lump o' suck i' th' 'ouse wheer tha art? Tha should ha' had our Joe — he's got more go than me. An' I should ha' had 'er. I'd got go enough for her; 'appen a bit too much.

MINNIE: Her? Who?

LUTHER: Her! An' I'm glad 'er's wi' my childt. I'm glad I did it. I'm glad! For tha's wiped tha feet on me enough. Yi, tha's wiped thy feet on me till what's it to me if tha does it or not? It isna! An' now — tha maun abide by what ter's got, tha maun. I s'll ha'e to — an' by plenty I hadna got I've abided. An' so — an' so — yi.

MINNIE: But who is it you — who is she?

LUTHER: Tha knowed a' along.

MINNIE: Who is it?

They are both silent.

Aren't you going to speak?

LUTHER: What's the good?

MINNIE (coldly): But I must know.

LUTHER: Tha does know.

MINNIE: I can assure you I don't.

LUTHER: Then assure thysen an' find out.

Another silence.

MINNIE: Do you mean somebody is going to have a baby by you?

LUTHER: I mean what I've said, an' I mean nowt else.

MINNIE: But you must tell me.

LUTHER: I've boiled my cabbage twice a'ready, hanna I?

MINNIE: Do you mean somebody is going to have a child by you?

LUTHER: Tha can chew it ower, if ter's a mind.

MINNIE (helpless): But . . . (She struggles with herself, then goes calm.)

LUTHER: That's what I say — but . . . !

A silence.

MINNIE: And who is she?

LUTHER: Thee, for a' I know.

MINNIE (calmly, patiently): I asked you a question.

LUTHER: Ah — an' I 'eered thee.

MINNIE: Then answer me — who is she?

LUTHER: Tha knows well enow — tha knowed afore they'd tow'd thee —

MINNIE: Nobody has told me. Who is she?

LUTHER: Well, tha's seed 'er mother.

MINNIE (numb): Mrs Purdy?

LUTHER: Yi.

MINNIE: Their Bertha?

LUTHER: Yi.

A silence.

MINNIE: Why didn't you tell me?

LUTHER: Tell thee what?

MINNIE: This.

LUTHER: Tha knowed afore I did.

MINNIE: I know now.

LUTHER: Me an' a'.

A pause.

MINNIE: Didn't you know till to-night?

LUTHER: Our Joe telled me when tha'd just gone — I niver dreamt afore — an' then 'er mother . . .

MINNIE: What did her mother come for?

LUTHER: Ter see if we could hush it up a'cause o' thee, an' gi'e 'er a lump sum.

MINNIE: Hush it up because of me?

LUTHER: Ah — lay it ont'r an electrician as wor wi' th' gang as laid th' cable down to Balford — he's gone God knows where.

MINNIE: But it's yours.

LUTHER: I know that.

MINNIE: Then why lay it onto somebody else?

LUTHER: Because o' thee.

MINNIE: But why because of me?

LUTHER: To stop thee knowin', I s'd think.

MINNIE: And why shouldn't I know?

LUTHER: Eh, I dunno.

A pause.

MINNIE: And what were you going to do to stop me knowing?

LUTHER: 'Er axed for forty pounds down.

MINNIE: And if you paid forty pounds, you got off scot-free?

LUTHER: Summat so.

MINNIE: And where were the forty pounds coming from?

LUTHER: Our Joe said 'e'd lend 'em me. I thought my mother would, but 'er said 'er wouldna — neither would she gi'e't our Joe ter lend me, she said. For I wor a married man now, an' it behoved my wife to look after me. An' I thought tha knowed. I thought tha'd twigged, else bin telled. An' I didna care, an' dunna care.

MINNIE: And this is what you married me to!

LUTHER: This is what tha married me to. But I'll niver ax thee for, no, not so much as the liftin' of a finger — no —

MINNIE: But when you wrote and told me you were willing to marry me, why didn't you tell me this?

LUTHER: Because — as I've telled thee — I didna know till this very mortal

night.

MINNIE: But you knew you'd been with her.

LUTHER: Ay, I knowed that.

A pause.

MINNIE: And why didn't you tell me?

LUTHER: What for should I tell thee? What good would it ha' done thee? Tha niver towd me nowt.

MINNIE: So that is how you look at it?

LUTHER: I non care how I look at it.

A pause.

MINNIE: And was there anybody else?

LUTHER: How dost mean?

MINNIE: Have you been with any other woman?

LUTHER: I dunno — I might — I dunno.

MINNIE: That means you have.

LUTHER: I'm thirty.

MINNIE: And who were they?

LUTHER: I dunno. I've niver bin much wi' anybody — little, very little — an' then it wor an off-chance. Our Joe wor more that way than me — I worn't that way.

A pause.

MINNIE: So — this was what I waited for you for!

LUTHER: Yha niver waited for me. Tha had me a'cause tha couldna get nobody better.

MINNIE: And so —

LUTHER (after a moment): Yi, an' so. An' so, I non care what ter does. If ter leaves me —

MINNIE (in a flash): What's the good of me leaving you? Aren't I married to you — tied to you?

LUTHER: Tha could leave me whether or not. I should go t'r Australia wi' our Joe.

MINNIE: And what about that girl?

LUTHER: I should send 'er th' money.

MINNIE: And what about me?

LUTHER: Tha'd please thysen.

MINNIE: Should you like me to leave you, and let you go to Australia?

LUTHER: 'Appen I should.

MINNIE: What did you marry me for?

LUTHER: 'Cos tha axed me.

MINNIE: Did you never care for me?

He does not answer.

Didn't you?

He does not answer.

Didn't you?

LUTHER (slowly): You niver wanted me — you thought me dirt.

MINNIE: Ha! (A pause.) You can have the forty pounds.

LUTHER (very doggedly): I shanna.

MINNIE: She's got to be paid.

LUTHER: Tha keeps thy money.

MINNIE: Then where shall you get it from?

LUTHER: I s'll pay 'er month by month.

MINNIE: But you can't. Think!

LUTHER: Then I'll borrow forty quid somewhere else, an' pay it back i' instalments. Tha keeps thy money.

MINNIE: You can borrow it from me.

LUTHER: I shall not.

MINNIE: Very well. I only wanted not to have the bother of paying month by month. I think I shall go back to my old place.

LUTHER: Tha pleases thysen.

MINNIE: And you can go and live with your mother again.

LUTHER: That I should niver do — but tha pleases thysen. We've bin married seven wik come Tuesday.

MINNIE: I niver ought to ha' done it.

LUTHER: What?

MINNIE: Married you.

LUTHER: No.

MINNIE: For you never cared enough.

LUTHER: Yi — it's my fault.

MINNIE: Yes.

LUTHER: It would be. Tha's niver made a fault i' thy life.

MINNIE: Who are you, to talk about my faults!

LUTHER: Well —

A pause.

MINNIE: I shall write to Mr Westlake to-morrow.

LUTHER: Tha does as pleases thee.

MINNIE: And if they can't take me back straight away, I shall ask him if he knows another place.

LUTHER: A'right. An' we'll sell th' furniture.

MINNIE (looking round at her home): Yes.

LUTHER: It'll non bring ha'ef tha giv for't — but it'll bring enough ter ta'e me out theer.

MINNIE: I'll make up what you lose by it, since I chose it.

LUTHER: Tha can give ter them as'll ha'e.

MINNIE: But I shall feel I owe it you.

LUTHER: I've had six weeks o' married life wi' thee. I mun pay for that.

MINNIE: You are mean, mean.

LUTHER: I know — though tha'rt first as has telled me so. When dost reckon tha'lt go?

MINNIE: I'll go to-morrow if you want to get rid of me.

LUTHER: Nay — tha does just as pleases thysen. I non want ter get rid on thee. Nay, nay, it's not that. It's thee as wants ter go.

MINNIE: At any rate, I s'll have a place inside a fortnight.

LUTHER (dully): Alright.

MINNIE: So I shall have to trouble you till then.

LUTHER: But I dunna want thee ter do owt for me — no, I dunna.

MINNIE: I shall keep the house, in payment for my board and lodgings. And I'll make the bed up in the back room, and I'll sleep there, because it's not furnished, and the house is yours.

LUTHER: Th'art — tha'rt — I wish I might strike thee down!

MINNIE: And I shall keep the account of every penny I spend, and you must just pay the bills.

LUTHER (rising suddenly): I'll murder thee afore tha does.

He goes out. She sits twisting her apron. He returns with a large lump of coal in his hands, and rakes the fire.

MINNIE: You cared more for her than for me.

LUTHER: For who?

MINNIE: For her. She was the sort of sawney you ought to have had. Did she

think you perfect?

LUTHER (with grim satisfaction): She liked me.

MINNIE: And you could do just as you wanted with her?

LUTHER: She'd ha' done owt for me.

MINNIE: And it flattered you, did it? Because a long stalk wi' no flower was at your service, it flattered you, did it? My word, it ought — As for your Joe, he's not a fool like you, and that's why women think more of him. He wouldn't want a Bertha Purdy. He'd get a woman who was something — and because he knew how to appreciate her. You — what good are you?

LUTHER: I'm no good, but to fetch an' carry.

MINNIE: And a tuppenny scullery-girl could do that as well.

LUTHER: Alright.

MINNIE: I'll bet even Bertha Purdy thinks what a clown you are. She never wanted you to marry her, did she?

LUTHER: She knowed I wouldn't.

MINNIE: You flatter yourself. I'll bet she never wanted you. I shouldn't be surprised if the child isn't somebody else's, that she just foists on you because you're so soft.

LUTHER: Oh ah!

MINNIE: It even flatters you to think it's yours.

LUTHER: Oh ah!

MINNIE: And quite right too — for it's the only thing you could have to be proud of. And then really it's not you . . .

LUTHER: Oh ah!

MINNIE: If a woman has a child, and you think you're the cause, do you think it's your doings?

LUTHER: If tha has one, it will be.

MINNIE: And is that anything for you to be proud of? Me whom you've insulted and deceived and treated as no snail would treat a woman! And then you expect me to bear your children!

LUTHER: I dunna expect thee. If tha does tha does.

MINNIE: And you gloat over it and feel proud of it!

LUTHER: Yi, I do.

MINNIE: No — no! I'd rather have married a tramp off the streets than you. And — and I don't believe you can have children.

LUTHER: Theer tha knows tha'rt a liar.

MINNIE: I hate you.

LUTHER: Alright.

MINNIE: And I will leave you, I will.

LUTHER: Tha's said so afore.

MINNIE: And I mean it.

LUTHER: Alright.

MINNIE: But it's your mother's doing. She mollycoddled and marded you till you weren't a man — and now — I have to pay for it.

LUTHER: Oh ah!

MINNIE: No, you're not a man!

LUTHER: Alright. They's plenty of women as would say I am.

MINNIE: They'd be lying to get something out of you.

LUTHER: Why, what could they get outer me?

MINNIE: Yes — yes — what could they . . . (She stutters to a close.)

He begins to take off his boots.

LUTHER: If tha'rt goin', tha'd better go afore th' strike begins. We should be on short commons then — ten bob a wik.

MINNIE: There's one thing, you'd be on short commons without me. For nobody would keep you for ten shillings a week, unless you went to your mother's.

LUTHER: I could live at our Harriet's, an' pay 'er off after. An' there'd be th' furniture sold.

MINNIE: And you'd be delighted if there was a strike, so you could loaf about. You don't even get drunk. You only loaf. You're lazy, lazy, and without the stomach of a louse. You want a strike.

LUTHER: Alright.

MINNIE: And I hope you'll get what you deserve, I do.

LUTHER: Tha'rt gi'en it me.

MINNIE (lifting her hand suddenly): How dare you say so — how dare you! I'm too good for you.

LUTHER (sullenly): I know.

MINNIE: Yes.

She gets a candle, lights it, and goes to bed. He flings on his scarf and coat and

waistcoat, throws the pillow on the hearthrug, wraps himself in the blankets, blows the lamp out, and lies down.

CURTAIN

ACT III

A fortnight later — afternoon. The kitchen of LUTHER GASCOIGNE'S house.

MRS GASCOIGNE, senior, alone. Enter MINNIE GASCOIGNE, dressed from travelling. She is followed by a CABMAN carrying a bag.

MRS GASCOIGNE: What — is it you!

MINNIE: Yes. Didn't you get my wire?

MRS GASCOIGNE: Thy wire! Dost mean a tallygram? No, we'n had nowt though th' house 'as bin shut up.

MINNIE (to the CABMAN): Thank you. How much?

CABMAN: Ha'ef-a-crown.

MRS GASCOIGNE: Ha'ef-a-crown for commin' from th' Midland station! Why, tha non know what's talkin' about.

MINNIE (paying him): Thank you.

CABMAN: Thank yer. Good afternoon. The CABMAN goes out.

MRS GASCOIGNE: My word, tha knows how ter ma'e th' money fly.

MINNIE: I couldn't carry a bag.

MRS GASCOIGNE: Tha could ha' come i' th' 'bus ter Eastwood an' then a man 'ud 'a browt it on.

MINNIE: It is raining.

MRS GASCOIGNE: Tha'rt neither sugar nor salt.

MINNIE: I wonder you didn't get my telegram.

MRS GASCOIGNE: I tell thee, th' 'ouse wor shut up last night.

MINNIE: Oh!

MRS GASCOIGNE: I dunno wheer 'e slep' — wi' some o's pals I should think.

MINNIE: Oh!

MRS GASCOIGNE: Thinks I to mysen, I'd better go an' get some dinner ready down theer. So I telled our Joe ter come 'ere for's dinner as well, but they'm neither on 'em bin in yet. That's allers t'road when it's strike. They stop mormin' about, bletherin' and boomin' an' meals, bless yer, they don't count. Tha's bin i' Manchester four days then?

MINNIE: Yes.

MRS GASCOIGNE: Ay. — Our Luther's niver bin up ter tell me. If I hadna ha' met Mrs Pervin fra next door here, I should niver ha' knowed a word. That wor yisterday. So I sent our Joe down. But it seems 'e's neither bin a-whoam yesterday nor th' day afore. He slep' i' th' 'ouse by hissien for two nights. So Mrs Sharley said. He said tha'd gone ter Manchester on business.

MINNIE: Yes.

MRS GASCOIGNE: But he niver come ter tell me nowt on't.

MINNIE: Didn't he?

MRS GASCOIGNE: It's trew what they say:

“My son's my son till he ta'es him a wife,
But my daughter's my daughter the whole of her life.”

MINNIE: Do you think so?

MRS GASCOIGNE: I'm sure. An' th' men's been out ten days now, an' such carryin's-on.

MINNIE: Oh! Why — what?

MRS GASCOIGNE: Meetin's ivry mornin' — crier for ever down th' street wi's bell — an' agitators. They say as Fraser dursn't venture out o' th' door. Watna' pit-top's bin afire, and there's a rigiment o' soldiers drillin' i' th' statutes ground — bits o' things they are, an' a', like a lot o' little monkeys i' their red coats — Staffordshire men. But wiry, so they say. Same as marched wi' Lord Roberts to Candyhar. But not a man among 'em. If you watch out fra th' gardin end, you'll see 'em i' th' colliers' train goin' up th' line ter Watna' — wi' their red coats jammed i' th' winders. They say as Fraser's got ten on 'em in's house ter guard him — an' they's sentinels at pit top, standin' wi' their guns, an' th' men crackin' their sides wi' laughing at 'em.

MINNIE: What for?

MRS GASCOIGNE: Nay, that I canna tell thee. They've got the Black Watch up at Heanor — so they says — great big Scotchmen i' kilts. They look well, ha'en them i' Heanor, wi' a' them lasses.

MINNIE: And what is all the fuss about?

MRS GASCOIGNE: Riotin'. I thought tha'd bobbled off ter Manchester ter be i' safety.

MINNIE: Oh, no — I never knew there was any danger.

MRS GASCOIGNE: No more there is, as far as that goes. What's up atween you an' our Luther?

MINNIE: Oh, nothing particular.

MRS GASCOIGNE: I knowed summat wor amiss, when 'e niver come up. It's a fortnight last Tuesday, sin' 'e's set foot i' my house — an' I've niver clapt eyes on him. I axed our Joe, but he's as stubborn as a jackass, an' you canna get a word out on 'im, not for love nor money.

MINNIE: Oh!

MRS GASCOIGNE: Talks o' goin' t'r Australay. But not if I can help it. An' hints as if our Luther — you not thinkin' of it, are you?

MINNIE: No, I'm not — not that I know of.

MRS GASCOIGNE: H'm! It's a rum go, when nobody seems ter know where they are, nor what they're goin' ter do. But there's more blort than bustle, i' this world. What took thee to Manchester?

MINNIE: Oh, I just wanted to go, on business.

MRS GASCOIGNE: Summat about thy money, like?

MINNIE: Yes.

MRS GASCOIGNE: Our Luther wor axin' me for forty pound, th' last time 'e wor up — but I didna see it. No — I fun' him a' as 'e wanted for's marriage, and gen 'im ten pound i' hand, an' I thought it 'ud suffice. An' as for forty pound — it's ter much, that's what I think.

MINNIE: I don't.

MRS GASCOIGNE: Oh, well, if tha doesna, a' well an' good. 'Appen he's paid it, then?

MINNIE: Paid it! Why, wheer was he to get it from?

MRS GASCOIGNE: I thought you had it atween you.

MINNIE: We haven't.

MRS GASCOIGNE: Why, how dost mean?

MINNIE: I mean we've neither of us got as much as forty pounds.

MRS GASCOIGNE: Dost mean tha hasna?

MINNIE: No, I haven't.

MRS GASCOIGNE: What's a-gait now?

MINNIE: Nothing.

MRS GASCOIGNE: What hast bin up to?

MINNIE: I? Nothing. I went to Manchester to settle a little business, that's all.

MRS GASCOIGNE: And wheer did ter stop?

MINNIE: I stayed with my old master.

MRS GASCOIGNE: Wor there no missis, then?

MINNIE: No — his wife is dead. You know I was governess for his grandchildren, who were born in India.

MRS GASCOIGNE: H'm! So tha went to see him?

MINNIE: Yes — I've always told him everything.

MRS GASCOIGNE: So tha went clat-fartin' ter 'im about our Luther, did ter?

MINNIE: Well — he's the only soul in the world that I can go to.

MRS GASCOIGNE: H'm! It doesna become thee, methinks.

MINNIE: Well!

Footsteps are heard.

MRS GASCOIGNE: Here's them lads, I s'd think.

Enter LUTHER and JOE.

JOE (to MINNIE): Hello! has thee come?

MINNIE: Yes. I sent a wire, and thought someone might come to meet me.

JOE: Nay, there wor no wire. We thought tha'd gone for good.

MINNIE: Who thought so?

JOE: Well — didna tha say so?

MINNIE: Say what?

JOE: As tha'd go, an' he could do what he liked?

MINNIE: I've said many things.

MRS GASCOIGNE: So that was how it stood! Tha'rt a fool, our Luther. If ter ta'es a woman at 'er word, well, tha deserves what ter gets.

LUTHER: What am I to do, might I ax?

MRS GASCOIGNE: Nay, that thy wits should tell thee. Wheer hast bin these two days?

LUTHER: I walked ower wi' Jim Horrocks ter their Annie's i' Mansfield.

MRS GASCOIGNE: I'm sure she'd got enough to do, without two men planting themselves on her. An' how did ter get back?

LUTHER: Walked.

MRS GASCOIGNE: Trapsein' thy shoe-leather off thee feet, walkin' twenty miles. Hast had thy dinner?

JOE: We've both had free dinners at th' Methodist Chapel.

LUTHER: I met Tom Heseldine i' "Th' Badger Box", Mother.

MRS GASCOIGNE: Oh ay! Wide-mouthed as iver, I reckon.

JOE: Just same. But what dost think, Mother? It's leaked out as Fraser's got a lot o' chaps to go to-morrer mornin', ter see after th' roads an' a' that.

MRS GASCOIGNE: Th' roads wants keepin' safe, dunna they?

JOE: Yi — but if th' mesters wanna ha'e th' union men, let 'em do it themselves.

MRS GASCOIGNE: Tha talks like a fool.

LUTHER: What right ha' they ter get a lot of scawdrags an' blacklegs in ter do our work? A' th' pit maun fa' in, if they wanna settle it fair wi' us.

JOE: Then workin's is ours, an' th' mesters'. If th' mesters wanna treat us fair, then they mun keep 'em right themselves. They non goin' ter ha'e no third body in.

MINNIE: But even when it's settled, how are you going back, if the roof has come in, and the roads are gone?

JOE: Tha mun ax th' mesters that. If we canna go back ter th' rotten owd pits no more, we mun look elsewhere. An' th' mesters can sit atop o' their pits an' stroke 'em.

LUTHER (to MINNIE): If I got a woman in to do th' housework as tha wanna do for me, tha'd sit smilin', shouldn't ter?

MINNIE: She could do as she liked.

LUTHER: Alright. Then, Mother, ‘appen tha’lt boss this house. She run off ter Manchester, an’ left me ter starve. So ‘appen tha’lt come an’ do for me.

MRS GASCOIGNE: Nay — if ter wants owt tha mun come ter me.

JOE: That’s right. Dunna thee play blackleg i’ this establishment.

MRS GASCOIGNE: I s’ll mind my own business.

JOE (to MINNIE): Now, does thee think it right, Minnie, as th’ mesters should get a lot o’ crawlin’ buggers in ter keep their pits i’ order, when th’ keepin’ o’ them pits i’ order belongs by right to us?

MINNIE: It belongs to whosoever the masters pay to do it.

LUTHER: A’ right. Then it belongs to me to ha’e any woman in ter do for me, as I’ve a mind. Tha’s gone on strike, so I ha’e the right ter get anybody else.

MINNIE: When have I gone on strike? I have always done your housework.

LUTHER: Housework — yi! But we dunna on’y keep th’ roof from comin’ in. We get as well. An’ even th’ housework tha went on strike wi’. Tha skedaddled off ter Manchester, an’ left me to’t.

MINNIE: I went on business.

LUTHER: An’ we’ve come out on strike “on business”.

MINNIE: You’ve not; it’s a game.

LUTHER: An’ the mesters’ll ta’e us back when they’re ready, or when they’re forced to. An’ same wi’ thee by me.

MINNIE: Oh!

JOE: We got it fr’ Tom Rooke — ’e wor goin’ ter turn ‘em down. At four to-morrer mornin’, there’s ower twenty men goin’ down.

MRS GASCOIGNE: What a lot of fools men are! As if th' pits didn't need ter be kep' tidy, ready for you to go back to'm.

JOE: They'll be kep' tidy by us, then an' when we've a mind — an' by nobody else.

MRS GASCOIGNE: Tha talks very high an' mighty. That's because I ha'e th' feedin' on thee.

JOE: You put it like our Luther says, then. He stands for t'mesters, an' Minnie stands for t'men — cos 'er's gone on strike. Now becos she's went ter Manchester, had he got ony right ter ha'e Lizzie Charley in for a couple o' nights an' days?

MRS GASCOIGNE: Tha talks like a fool!

JOE: I dunna.

MINNIE: He's welcome to Lizzie Charley.

JOE: Alright. — She's a nice gel. We'll ax 'er to come in an' manage th' 'ouse — he can pay 'er.

MINNIE: What with?

JOE: Niver you mind. Should yer like it?

MINNIE: He can do just as he likes.

JOE: Then should I fetch her? — should I, Luther?

LUTHER: If ter's a mind.

JOE: Should I, then, Minnie?

MINNIE: If he wants her.

LUTHER: I want somebody ter look after me.

JOE: Right tha art. (Puts his cap on.) I'll say as Minnie canna look after th' house, will 'er come. That it?

LUTHER: Ah.

MRS GASCOIGNE: Dunna be a fool. Tha's had a can or two.

JOE: Well — 'er'll be glad o' the job.

MRS GASCOIGNE: You'd better stop him, one of you.

LUTHER: I want somebody ter look after me — an' tha wanna.

MRS GASCOIGNE: Eh dear o' me! Dunna thee be a fool, our Joe.

Exit JOE.

What wor this job about goin' ter Manchester?

LUTHER: She said she wouldna live wi' me, an' so 'er went. I thought 'er'd gone for good.

MINNIE: You didn't — you knew.

LUTHER: I knowed what tha'd tow'd me — as tha'd live wi' me no longer. Tha's come back o' thy own accord.

MINNIE: I never said I shouldn't come back.

LUTHER: Tha said as tha wouldna live wi' me. An' tha didna, neither, — not for —

MRS GASCOIGNE: Well, Minnie, you've brought it on your own head. You put him off, an' you put him off, as if 'e was of no account, an' then all of a sudden you invited him to marry you —

MINNIE: Put him off! He didn't need much putting off. He never came any faster than a snail.

MRS GASCOIGNE: Twice, to my knowledge, he axed thee — an' what can a man do more?

MINNIE: Yes, what! A gramophone in breeches could do as much.

MRS GASCOIGNE: Oh, indeed! What ailed him was, he wor in collier's britches, i'stead o' a stool-arsed Jack's.

MINNIE: No — what ailed him was that you kept him like a kid hanging on to you.

MRS GASCOIGNE: An' tha bit thy own nose off, when ter said him nay. For had ter married him at twenty-three, there'd ha' been none of this trouble.

MINNIE: And why didn't I? Why didn't I? Because he came in his half-hearted "I will if you like" fashion, and I despised him, yes I did.

MRS GASCOIGNE: And who are you to be despising him, I should like to know?

MINNIE: I'm a woman, and that's enough. But I know now, it was your fault. You held him, and persuaded him that what he wanted was you. You kept him, like a child, you even gave him what money he wanted, like a child. He never roughed it — he never faced out anything. You did all that for him.

MRS GASCOIGNE: And what if I did! If you made as good a wife to him as I made a mother, you'd do.

MINNIE: Should I? You didn't care what women your sons went with, so long as they didn't love them. What do you care really about this affair of Bertha Purdy? You don't. All you cared about was to keep your sons for yourself. You kept the solid meal, and the orts and slarts any other woman could have. But I tell you, I'm not for having the orts and slarts, and your leavings from your sons. I'll have a man, or nothing, I will.

MRS GASCOIGNE: It's rare to be some folks, ter pick and choose.

MINNIE: I can't pick and choose, no. But what I won't have, I won't have, and that is all.

MRS GASCOIGNE (to LUTHER): Have I ever kept thee from doin' as tha wanted? Have I iver marded and coddled thee?

LUTHER: Tha hasna, beguy!

MINNIE: No, you haven't, perhaps, not by the look of things. But you've bossed him. You've decided everything for him, really. He's depended on you as much when he was thirty as when he was three. You told him what to do, and he did it.

MRS GASCOIGNE: My word, I've never known all he did.

MINNIE: You have — everything that mattered. You maybe didn't know it was Bertha Purdy, but you knew it was some woman like her, and what did you care? She had the orts and slarts, you kept your son. And you want to keep him, even now. Yes — and you do keep him.

MRS GASCOIGNE: We're learnin' a thing or two, Luther.

LUTHER: Ay.

Enter JOE.

MINNIE: Yes! What did you care about the woman who would have to take some after you? Nothing! You left her with just the slarts of a man. Yes.

MRS GASCOIGNE: Indeed! I canna see as you're so badly off. You've got a husband as doesn't drink, as waits on you hand and foot, as gives you a free hand in everything. It's you as doesn't know when you're well off, madam.

MINNIE: I'd rather have had a husband who knocked me about than a husband who was good to me because he belonged to his mother. He doesn't and can't really care for me. You stand before him. His real caring goes to you. Me he only wants sometimes.

JOE: She'll be in in a minute.

MRS GASCOIGNE: Tha'rt the biggest fool an' jackanapes, our Joe, as iver God made.

MINNIE: If she crosses that doorstep, then I go for good.

MRS GASCOIGNE (bursting into fury — to JOE): Tha see what thy bobby interferin' has done.

JOE: Nay — that's how it stood.

MRS GASCOIGNE: Tha mun go an' stop her, our Luther. Tell 'er it wor our Joe's foolery. An' look sharp.

LUTHER: What should I go for?

LUTHER goes out, furious.

MINNIE: You see — you see! His mother's word is law to him. He'd do what I told him, but his feel would be for you. He's got no feeling for me. You keep all that.

MRS GASCOIGNE: You talk like a jealous woman.

MINNIE: I do! And for that matter, why doesn't Joe marry, either? Because you keep him too. You know, in spite of his bluster, he cares more for your little finger than he does for all the women in the world — or ever will. And it's wrong — it's wrong. How is a woman ever to have a husband, when the men all belong to their mothers? It's wrong.

MRS GASCOIGNE: Oh, indeed! — is it? You know, don't you? You know everything.

MINNIE: I know this, because I've suffered from it. Your elder sons you let go, and they are husbands. But your young sons you've kept. And Luther is your son, and the man that lives with me. But first, he's your son. And Joe ought never to marry, for he'd break a woman's heart.

MRS GASCOIGNE: Tha hears, lad! We're bein' told off.

JOE: Ah, I hear. An' what's more, it's true, Mother.

MINNIE: It is — it is. He only likes playing round me and getting some pleasure out of teasing me, because he knows I'm safely married to Luther, and can never look to him to marry me and belong to me. He's safe, so he likes me. If I were single, he'd be frightened to death of me.

JOE: Happen I should.

MRS GASCOIGNE: Tha'rt a fool.

MINNIE: And that's what you've done to me — that's my life spoiled — spoiled — ay, worse than if I'd had a drunken husband that knocked me about. For it's dead.

MRS GASCOIGNE: Tha'rt shoutin' because nowt ails thee — that's what tha art.

JOE: Nay, Mother, tha knows it's right. Tha knows tha's got me — an'll ha'e me till ter dies — an' after that — yi.

MRS GASCOIGNE: Tha talks like a fool.

JOE: And sometimes, Mother, I wish I wor dead, I do.

MINNIE: You see, you see! You see what you've done to them. It's strong women like you, who were too much for their husbands — ah!

JOE: Tha knows I couldna leave thee, Mother — tha knows I couldna. An' me, a young man, belongs to thy owd age. An' there's nowheer for me to go, Mother. For tha'rt gettin' nearer to death an' yet I canna leave thee to go my own road. An' I wish, yi, often, as I wor dead.

MRS GASCOIGNE: Dunna, lad — dunna let 'er put these ideas i' thy head.

JOE: An' I can but fritter my days away. There's no goin' forrard for me.

MRS GASCOIGNE: Nay, lad, nay — what lad's better off than thee, dost reckon?

JOE: If I went t'r Australia, th' best part on me wouldna go wi' me.

MRS GASCOIGNE: Tha wanna go t'r Australia!

JOE: If I went, I should be a husk of a man. I'm allers a husk of a man, Mother. There's nowt solid about me. The' isna.

MRS GASCOIGNE: Whatever dost mean? You've a' set on me at once.

JOE: I'm nowt, Mother, an' I count for nowt. Yi, an' I know it.

MRS GASCOIGNE: Tha does. Tha sounds as if tha counts for nowt, as a rule, doesn't ter?

JOE: There's not much of a man about me. T'other chaps is more of fools, but they more of men an' a' — an' they know it.

MRS GASCOIGNE: That's thy fault.

JOE: Yi — an' will be — ter th' end o' th' chapter.

Enter LUTHER.

MINNIE: Did you tell her?

LUTHER: Yes.

MINNIE: We'll have some tea, should we?

JOE: Ay, let's. For it's bin dry work.

She sets the kettle on.

MRS GASCOIGNE: I mun be goin'.

MINNIE: Wait and have a cup of tea. I brought a cake.

JOE: But we non goin' ter ha'e it, are we, Luther, these 'ere blacklegs goin' down interferin'.

LUTHER: We arena.

MRS GASCOIGNE: But how are you going to stop them?

JOE: We s'll manage it, one road or t'other.

MRS GASCOIGNE: You'll non go gettin' yourselves into trouble.

LUTHER: We in trouble enow.

MINNIE: If you'd have had Lizzie Charley in, what should you have paid her with?

LUTHER: We should ha' found the money somewhere.

MINNIE: Do you know what I had to keep house on this week, Mother?

MRS GASCOIGNE: Not much, sin' there wor nowt but ten shillin' strike pay.

MINNIE: He gave me five shillings.

LUTHER: Tha could ha' had what things ter wanted on strap.

MINNIE: No — but why should you keep, to drink on, as much as you give me to keep house on? Five shillings!

JOE: Five bob's non a whackin' sight o' pocket money for a man's week.

MINNIE: It is, if he earns nothing. It was that as finished me off.

JOE: Well, tha niver ned go short — tha can let him.

MINNIE: I knew that was what he thought. But if he wouldna have my money for one thing, he wasn't going to for another.

MRS GASCOIGNE: Why, what wouldn't he have it for?

MINNIE: He wouldn't have that forty pounds, when I went on my knees to beg and beseech him to.

LUTHER: Tha did! Tha throwed it at me as if I wor a beggar as stank.

MINNIE: And you wouldn't have it when I asked you.

LUTHER: No — an' wouldna ha'e it now.

MINNIE: You can't.

LUTHER: I dunna want it.

MINNIE: And if you don't find money to keep the house on, we shall both of us starve. For you've got to keep me. And I've got no money of my own now.

LUTHER: Why, what dost mean?

MINNIE: I mean what I say.

MRS GASCOIGNE: Why, what?

MINNIE: I was sick of having it between us. It was but a hundred and twenty. So I went to Manchester and spent it.

MRS GASCOIGNE: Tha's bin an' spent a hundred and twenty pound i' four days?

MINNIE: Yes, I have.

MRS GASCOIGNE: Whativer are we comin' to!

JOE: That wor a stroke worth two. Tell us what tha bought.

MINNIE: I bought myself a ring, for one thing. I thought if I ever had any children, and they asked me where was my engagement ring, I should have to show them something, for their father's sake. Do you like it? (Holds out her hand to JOE.)

JOE: My word, but that's a bobby-dazzler. Look, Mother.

MRS GASCOIGNE: H'm.

JOE takes the ring off.

JOE: My word, but that's a diamond, if you like. How much did it cost?

MINNIE: Thirty pounds. I've got the bill in my pocket.

MRS GASCOIGNE: I only hope you'll niver come to want some day.

MINNIE: Luther must see to that.

JOE: And what else did ter buy?

MINNIE: I'll show you. (Gets her bag, unlocks it, takes out three prints.)

JOE: I dunna reckon much ter these.

MRS GASCOIGNE: Nor me neither. An' how much has ter gen for them apiece?

MINNIE: That was twenty-five pounds. They're beautiful prints.

MRS GASCOIGNE: I dunna believe a word tha says.

MINNIE: I'll show you the bill. My master's a collector, and he picked them for me. He says they're well worth the money. And I like them.

MRS GASCOIGNE: Well, I niver seed such a job in my life. T-t-t-t! Well, a' I can say is, I hope tha'll niver come ter want. Throwin' good money i' th' gutter like this. Nay, I feel fair bad. Nay! T-t-t-t! Such tricks! And such bits o' dirty paper!

JOE: I'd rather ha'e the Co-op almanack.

MRS GASCOIGNE: So would I, any day! What dost say to't, our Luther?

LUTHER: 'Er does as 'er likes.

MINNIE: I had a lovely time with Mr Westlake, choosing them at the dealer's. He is clever.

MRS GASCOIGNE: Tha tow'd him tha wanted to get rid o' thy money, did ter?

MINNIE: No — I said I wanted some pictures for the parlour, and asked him if he'd help me choose.

MRS GASCOIGNE: Good money thrown away. Maybe the very bread of your children.

MINNIE: Nay, that's Luther's duty to provide.

MRS GASCOIGNE: Well, a' I can say is, I hope you may never come ter want. If our Luther died . . .

MINNIE: I should go back to work.

MRS GASCOIGNE: But what if tha'd three or four children?

MINNIE: A hundred and twenty pounds wouldn't make much odds then.

MRS GASCOIGNE: Well, a' I can say, I hope tha'lt niver live ter rue the day.

JOE: What dost think on 'er, Luther?

LUTHER: Nay, she's done as she liked with her own.

MINNIE (emptying her purse in her lap): I've got just seventeen shillings. You drew your strike pay yesterday. How much have you got of that, Luther?

LUTHER: Three bob.

MINNIE: And do you want to keep it?

LUTHER: Ah.

MINNIE: Very well . . . I shall spend this seventeen shillings till it's gone, and then we shall have to live on soup-tickets.

MRS GASCOIGNE: I'll back my life!

JOE: And who'll fetch the soup?

MINNIE: Oh, I shall. I've been thinking, that big jug will do nicely. I'm in the same boat as other men's wives now, and so I must do the same.

JOE: They'll gi'e you strap at West's.

MINNIE: I'm not going to run up bills, no, I'm not. I'll go to the free teas, and fetch soup, an' with ten shillings a week we shall manage.

MRS GASCOIGNE: Well, that's one road, lass.

MINNIE: It's the only one. And now, if he can provide, he must, and if he can't, he must tell me so, and I'll go back into service, and not be a burden to him.

MRS GASCOIGNE: High and mighty, high and mighty! We'll see, my lass; we'll see.

MINNIE: That's all we can do.

MRS GASCOIGNE: Tha doesna care how he takes it.

MINNIE: The prints belong to both of us. (Hands them to LUTHER.) You haven't said if you like them yet.

LUTHER (taking them, suddenly rams them in the fire): Tha can go to hell.

MINNIE (with a cry): Ah! — that's my ninety pounds gone. (Tries to snatch them out.)

MRS GASCOIGNE (beginning to cry): Come, Joe, let's go; let's go, my lad. I've seen as much this day as ever my eyes want to see. Let's go, my lad. (Gets up, beginning to tie on her bonnet.)

MINNIE (white and intense, to LUTHER): Should you like to throw my ring after them? It's all I've got left. (She holds out her hand — he flings it from

him.)

LUTHER: Yi, what do I care what I do! (Clenching his fists as if he would strike her.) — what do I! — what do I — !

MRS GASCOIGNE (putting on her shawl): A day's work — a day's work! Ninety pound! Nay — nay, oh, nay — nay, oh, nay — nay! Let's go, Joe, my lad. Eh, our Luther, our Luther! Let's go, Joe. Come.

JOE: Ah, I'll come, Mother.

MRS GASCOIGNE: Luther!

LUTHER: What?

MRS GASCOIGNE: It's a day's work, it is, wi' thee. Eh dear! Come, let's go, Joe. Let's go whoam.

LUTHER: An' I'll go.

MRS GASCOIGNE: Dunna thee do nowt as ter'll repent of, Luther — dunna thee. It's thy mother axes thee. Come, Joe.

MRS GASCOIGNE goes out, followed by JOE. LUTHER stands with face averted from his wife; mutters something, reaches for his cap, goes out. MINNIE stands with her hand on the mantelpiece.

CURTAIN

ACT IV

The following morning — about 5 a.m. A candle is burning.

MINNIE sits by the fire in a dressing-gown. She is weeping. A knock, and MRS GASCOIGNE'S voice. MINNIE goes to open the door; re-enters with her mother-in-law, the latter with a big brown shawl over her head.

MRS GASCOIGNE: Is Luther a-whoam?

MINNIE: No — he's not been in all night.

MRS GASCOIGNE: T-t-t-t! Now wherever can they be? Joe's not in neither.

MINNIE: Isn't he?

MRS GASCOIGNE: No. He said he might be late, so I went to bed, and slept a bit uneasy-like till about four o'clock. Then I wakes up a' of a sudden, an' says: "I'm by mysen i' th' house!" It gave me such a turn I daresn't shout. So I gets me up, an' goes ter his room, an' he'd niver bin i' bed a' night. Well, I went down, but no signs nowhere. An' 'im wi' a broken arm. An' I listened an' I listened — an' then methinks I heered a gun go off. I felt as if I should die if I stopped by mysen another minute. So I on's wi' my shawl an' nips down here. There's not a soul astir nowhere. I a'most dropped when I seed your light. Hasn't Luther bin in a' night, dost say?

MINNIE: He went out with you, and he never came in again. I went to bed, thinking perhaps he'd be sleeping on the sofa. And then I came down, and he wasn't here.

MRS GASCOIGNE: Well, I've seen nowt of him, for he never come up to our house. — Now I wonder what's afoot wi' th' silly fools?

MINNIE: I thought he'd gone and left me.

MRS GASCOIGNE: It's more like some o' this strike work. When I heered that gun, I said: "Theer goes one o' my lads!"

MINNIE: You don't think they're killed?

MRS GASCOIGNE: Heaven knows what they are. But I niver thought he'd ha' served me this trick — left me by myself without telling me, and gone cutting off a' th' night through — an' him wi' a broken arm.

MINNIE: Where do you think they've gone?

MRS GASCOIGNE: The Lord above alone knows — but I'se warrant it's one o' these riotin' tricks — stopping them blacklegs as wor goin' down to see to th' roads.

MINNIE: Do you think — ?

MRS GASCOIGNE: I'll back anything. For I heered th' winding engines plain as anything. Hark!

They listen.

MINNIE: I believe I can hear them.

MRS GASCOIGNE: Th' ingines?

MINNIE: Yes.

MRS GASCOIGNE: They're winding something down. Eh dear, what a dead world it seems, wi' none o' th' pits chuffin' an' no steam wavin' by day, an' no lights shinin' by night. You may back your life there was a gang of 'em going to stop that lot of blacklegs. And there'd be soldiers for a certainty. If I didn't hear a shot, I heered summat much like one.

MINNIE: But they'd never shoot, would they?

MRS GASCOIGNE: Haven't they shot men up an' down th' country? Didn't I

know them lads was pining to go an' be shot at? I did. Methinks when I heard that gun, "They'd niver rest till this had happened."

MINNIE: But they're not shot, Mother. You exaggerate.

MRS GASCOIGNE: I niver said they wor. But if anything happens to a man, my lass, you may back your life, nine cases out o' ten, it's a spit on th' women.

MINNIE: Oh, what a thing to say! Why, there are accidents.

MRS GASCOIGNE: Yes, an' men verily gets accidents, to pay us out, I do believe. They get huffed up, they bend down their faces, and they say to theirselves: "Now I'll get myself hurt, an' she'll be sorry," else: "Now I'll get myself killed, an' she'll ha'e nobody to sleep wi' 'er, an' nobody to nag at." Oh, my lass, I've had a husband an' six sons. Children they are, these men, but, my word, they're revengeful children. Children men is a' the days o' their lives. But they're master of us women when their dander's up, an' they pay us back double an' treble — they do — an' you mun allers expect it.

MINNIE: But if they went to stop the blacklegs, they wouldn't be doing it to spite us.

MRS GASCOIGNE: Wouldn't they! Yi, but they would. My lads 'ud do it to spite me, an' our Luther 'ud do it to spite thee. Yes — and it's trew. For they'd run theirselves into danger and lick their lips for joy, thinking, if I'm killed, then she maun lay me out. Yi — I seed it in our mester. He got killed a' pit. An' when I laid him out, his face wor that grim, an' his body that stiff, an' it said as plain as plain: "Nowthen, you've done for me." For it's risky work, handlin' men, my lass, an' niver thee pray for sons — Not but what daughters is any good. Th' world is made o' men, for me, lass — there's only the men for me. An' tha'rt similar. An' so, tha'lt reap trouble by the peck, an' sorrow by the bushel. For when a woman builds her life on men, either husbands or sons, she builds on summat as sooner or later brings the house down crash on her head — yi, she does.

MINNIE: But it depends how and what she builds.

MRS GASCOIGNE: It depends, it depends. An' tha thinks tha can steer clear o' what I've done. An' perhaps tha can. But steer clear the whole length o' th' road,

tha canna, an' tha'lt see. Nay, a childt is a troublesome pleasure to a woman, but a man's a trouble pure and simple.

MINNIE: I'm sure it depends what you make of him.

MRS GASCOIGNE: Maybe — maybe. But I've allers tried to do my best, i' spite o' what tha said against me this afternoon.

MINNIE: I didn't mean it — I was in a rage.

MRS GASCOIGNE: Yi, tha meant it plain enow. But I've tried an' tried my best for my lads, I have — an' this is what owd age brings me — wi' 'em.

MINNIE: Nay, Mother — nay. See how fond they are of you.

MRS GASCOIGNE: Yi — an' they go now i' their mischief, yes, tryin' to get killed, to spite me. Yi!

MINNIE: Nay. Nay.

MRS GASCOIGNE: It's true. An' tha can ha'e Luther. Tha'lt get him, an' tha can ha'e him.

MINNIE: Do you think I shall?

MRS GASCOIGNE: I can see. Tha'lt get him — but tha'lt get sorrow wi' 'em, an' wi' th' sons tha has. See if tha doesna.

MINNIE: But I don't care. Only don't keep him from me. It leaves me so — with nothing — not even trouble.

MRS GASCOIGNE: He'll come to thee — an' he'll think no more o' me as is his mother than he will o' that poker.

MINNIE: Oh, no — oh, no.

MRS GASCOIGNE: Yi — I know well — an' then that other.

There is a silence — the two women listening.

MINNIE: If they'd been hurt, we should ha' known by now.

MRS GASCOIGNE: Happen we should. If they come, they'll come together. An' they'll come to this house first.

A silence. MINNIE starts.

Did ter hear owt?

MINNIE: Somebody got over the stile.

MRS GASCOIGNE (listening): Yi.

MINNIE (listening): It is somebody.

MRS GASCOIGNE: I' t' street.

MINNIE (starting up): Yes.

MRS GASCOIGNE: Comin'? It's Luther. (Goes to the door.) An' it's on'y Luther.

Both women stand, the mother nearer the door. The door opens — a slight sluther. Enter LUTHER, with blood on his face — rather shaky and dishevelled.

My boy! my boy!

LUTHER: Mother! (He goes blindly.) Where's Minnie?

MINNIE (with a cry): Oh!

MRS GASCOIGNE: Wheer's Joe? — wheer's our Joe?

LUTHER (to MINNIE, queer, stunned, almost polite): It worn't 'cause I wor mad wi' thee I didna come whoam.

MRS GASCOIGNE (clutching him sternly): Where's Joe?

LUTHER: He's gone up street — he thought tha might ha' wakkened.

MRS GASCOIGNE: Wakkened enow.

MRS GASCOIGNE goes out.

MINNIE: Oh, what have you done?

LUTHER: We'd promised not to tell nobody — else I should. We stopped them blacklegs — leastways — but it worn't because I — I — (He stops to think.) I wor mad wi' thee, as I didna come whoam.

MINNIE: What have you done to your head?

LUTHER: It wor a stone or summat catched it. It's gev me a headache. Tha mun — tha mun tie a rag round it — if ter will. (He sways as he takes his cap off.)

She catches him in her arms. He leans on her as if he were tipsy.

Minnie —

MINNIE: My love — my love!

LUTHER: Minnie — I want thee ter ma'e what tha can o' me. (He sounds almost sleepy.)

MINNIE (crying): My love — my love!

LUTHER: I know what tha says is true.

MINNIE: No, my love — it isn't — it isn't.

LUTHER: But if ter'lt ma'e what ter can o' me — an' then if ter has a childt — tha'lt happen ha'e enow.

MINNIE: No — no — it's you. It's you I want. It's you.

LUTHER: But tha's allers had me.

MINNIE: No, never — and it hurt so.

LUTHER: I thowt tha despised me.

MINNIE: Ah — my love!

LUTHER: Dunna say I'm mean, to me — an' got no go.

MINNIE: I only said it because you wouldn't let me love you.

LUTHER: Tha didna love me.

MINNIE: Ha! — it was you.

LUTHER: Yi. (He looses himself and sits down heavily.) I'll ta'e my boots off.
(He bends forward.)

MINNIE: Let me do them. (He sits up again.)

LUTHER: It's started bleedin'. I'll do 'em i' ha'ef a minute.

MINNIE: No — trust me — trust yourself to me. Let me have you now for my own. (She begins to undo his boots.)

LUTHER: Dost want me?

MINNIE (she kisses his hands): Oh, my love! (She takes him in her arms.)

He suddenly begins to cry.

CURTAIN

THE WIDOWING OF MRS HOLROYD



A PLAY IN THREE ACTS

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CHARACTERS

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HOLROYD

BLACKMORE

JACK HOLROYD

MINNIE HOLROYD

GRANDMOTHER

RIGLEY

CLARA

LAURA

MANAGER

TWO MINERS

The action of the play takes place in the Holroyds' cottage

ACT I

SCENE I

The kitchen of a miner's small cottage. On the left is the fireplace, with a deep, full red fire. At the back is a white-curtained window, and beside it the outer door of the room. On the right, two white wooden stairs intrude into the kitchen below the closed stairfoot door. On the left, another door.

The room is furnished with a chintz-backed sofa under the window, a glass-knobbed painted dresser on the right, and in the centre, toward the fire, a table with a red and blue check tablecloth. On one side of the hearth is a wooden rocking-chair, on the other an arm-chair of round staves. An unlighted copper-shaded lamp hangs from the raftered ceiling. It is dark twilight, with the room full of warm fireglow. A woman enters from the outer door. As she leaves the door open behind her, the colliery rail can be seen not far from the threshold, and, away back, the headstocks of a pit.

The woman is tall and voluptuously built. She carries a basket heaped full of washing, which she has just taken from the clotheslines outside. Setting down the basket heavily, she feels among the clothes. She lifts out a white heap of sheets and other linen, setting it on the table; then she takes a woollen shirt in her hand.

MRS HOLROYD (aloud, to herself): You know they're not dry even now, though it's been as fine as it has. (She spreads the shirt on the back of her rocking-chair, which she turns to the fire.)

VOICE (calling from outside): Well, have you got them dry?

MRS HOLROYD starts up, turns and flings her hand in the direction of the open door, where appears a man in blue overalls, swarfed and greased. He carries a dinner-basket.

MRS HOLROYD: You — you — I don't know what to call you! The idea of shouting at me like that — like the Evil One out of the darkness!

BLACKMORE: I ought to have remembered your tender nerves. Shall I come in?

MRS HOLROYD: No — not for your impudence. But you're late, aren't you?

BLACKMORE: It's only just gone six. We electricians, you know, we're the gentlemen on a mine: ours is gentlemen's work. But I'll bet Charles Holroyd was home before four.

MRS HOLROYD (bitterly): Ay, and gone again before five.

BLACKMORE: But mine's a lad's job, and I do nothing! — Where's he gone?

MRS HOLROYD (contemptuously): Dunno! He'd got a game on somewhere — toffed himself up to the nines, and skedaddled off as brisk as a turkey-cock. (She smirks in front of the mirror hanging on the chimney-piece, in imitation of a man brushing his hair and moustache and admiring himself.)

BLACKMORE: Though turkey-cocks aren't brisk as a rule. Children playing?

MRS HOLROYD (recovering herself, coldly): Yes. And they ought to be in.

She continues placing the flannel garments before the fire, on the fender and on chair-backs, till the stove is hedged in with a steaming fence; then she takes a sheet in a bundle from the table, and goes up to BLACKMORE, who stands watching her.

Here, take hold, and help me fold it.

BLACKMORE: I shall swarf it up.

MRS HOLROYD (snatching back the sheet): Oh, you're as tiresome as everybody else.

BLACKMORE (putting down his basket and moving to door on right): Well, I can soon wash my hands.

MRS HOLROYD (ceasing to flap and fold pillow-cases): That roller-towel's ever so dirty. I'll get you another. (She goes to a drawer in the dresser, and then back toward the scullery, from which comes the sound of water.)

BLACKMORE: Why, bless my life, I'm a lot dirtier than the towel. I don't want another.

MRS HOLROYD (going into the scullery): Here you are.

BLACKMORE (softly, now she is near him): Why did you trouble now? Pride, you know, pride, nothing else.

MRS HOLROYD (also playful): It's nothing but decency.

BLACKMORE (softly): Pride, pride, pride!

A child of eight suddenly appears in the doorway.

JACK: Oo, how dark!

MRS HOLROYD (hurrying agitated into the kitchen): Why, where have you been — what have you been doing now?

JACK (surprised): Why — I've only been out to play.

MRS HOLROYD (still sharply): And where's Minnie?

A little girl of six appears by the door.

MINNIE: I'm here, mam, and what do you think — ?

MRS HOLROYD (softening, as she recovers equanimity): Well, and what should I think?

JACK: Oh, yes, mam — you know my father — ?

MRS HOLROYD (ironically): I should hope so.

MINNIE: We saw him dancing, mam, with a paper bonnet.

MRS HOLROYD: What — ?

JACK: There's some women at New Inn, what's come from Nottingham —

MINNIE: An' he's dancin' with the pink one.

JACK: Shut up, our Minnie. An' they've got paper bonnets on —

MINNIE: All colours, mam!

JACK (getting angry): Shut up, our Minnie! An' my dad's dancing with her.

MINNIE: With the pink-bonnet one, mam.

JACK: Up in the club-room over the bar.

MINNIE: An' she's a lot littler than him, mam.

JACK (piteously): Shut up, our Minnie — An' you can see 'em go past the window, 'cause there isn't no curtains up, an' my father's got the pink bonnet one —

MINNIE: An' there's a piano, mam —

JACK: An' lots of folks outside watchin', lookin' at my dad! He can dance, can't he, mam?

MRS HOLROYD (she has been lighting the lamp, and holds the lamp-glass): And who else is there?

MINNIE: Some more men — an' all the women with paper bonnets on.

JACK: There's about ten, I should think, an' they say they came in a brake from Nottingham.

MRS HOLROYD, trying to replace the lamp-glass over the flame, lets it drop on the floor with a smash.

JACK: There, now — now we'll have to have a candle.

BLACKMORE (appearing in the scullery doorway with the towel): What's that — the lamp-glass?

JACK: I never knowed Mr Blackmore was here.

BLACKMORE (to MRS HOLROYD): Have you got another?

MRS HOLROYD: No. (There is silence for a moment.) We can manage with a candle for to-night.

BLACKMORE (stepping forward and blowing out the smoky flame): I'll see if I can't get you one from the pit. I shan't be a minute.

MRS HOLROYD: Don't — don't bother — I don't want you to.

He, however, unscrews the burner and goes.

MINNIE: Did Mr Blackmore come for tea, mam?

MRS HOLROYD: No; he's had no tea.

JACK: I bet he's hungry. Can I have some bread?

MRS HOLROYD (she stands a lighted candle on the table): Yes, and you can get your boots off to go to bed.

JACK: It's not seven o'clock yet.

MRS HOLROYD: It doesn't matter.

MINNIE: What do they wear paper bonnets for, mam?

MRS HOLROYD: Because they're brazen hussies.

JACK: I saw them having a glass of beer.

MRS HOLROYD: A nice crew!

JACK: They say they are old pals of Mrs Meakins. You could hear her screaming o' laughin', an' my dad says: "He-ah, missis — here — a dog's-nose for the Dachsen — hopin' it'll smell samthing" — What's a dog's-nose?

MRS HOLROYD (giving him a piece of bread and butter): Don't ask me, child. How should I know?

MINNIE: Would she eat it, mam?

MRS HOLROYD: Eat what?

MINNIE: Her in the pink bonnet — eat the dog's-nose?

MRS HOLROYD: No, of course not. How should I know what a dog's-nose is?

JACK: I bet he'll never go to work to-morrow, mother — will he?

MRS HOLROYD: Goodness knows. I'm sick of it — disgracing me. There'll be the whole place cackling this now. They've no sooner finished about him getting taken up for fighting than they begin on this. But I'll put a stop to it some road or other. It's not going on, if I know it: it isn't.

She stops, hearing footsteps, and BLACKMORE enters.

BLACKMORE: Here we are then — got one all right.

MINNIE: Did they give it you, Mr Blackmore?

BLACKMORE: No, I took it.

He screws on the burner and proceeds to light the lamp. He is a tall, slender, mobile man of twenty-seven, brown-haired, dressed in blue overalls. JACK

HOLROYD is a big, dark, ruddy, lusty lad. MINNIE is also big, but fair.

MINNIE: What do you wear blue trousers for, Mr Blackmore?

BLACKMORE: They're to keep my other trousers from getting greasy.

MINNIE: Why don't you wear pit-breeches, like dad's?

JACK: 'Cause he's a 'lectrician. Could you make me a little injun what would make electric light?

BLACKMORE: I will, some day.

JACK: When?

MINNIE: Why don't you come an' live here?

BLACKMORE (looking swiftly at MRS HOLROYD): Nay, you've got your own dad to live here.

MINNIE (plaintively): Well, you could come as well. Dad shouts when we've gone to bed, an' thumps the table. He wouldn't if you was here.

JACK: He dursn't —

MRS HOLROYD: Be quiet now, be quiet. Here, Mr Blackmore. (She again gives him the sheet to fold.)

BLACKMORE: Your hands are cold.

MRS HOLROYD: Are they? — I didn't know.

BLACKMORE puts his hand on hers.

MRS HOLROYD (confusedly, looking aside): You must want your tea.

BLACKMORE: I'm in no hurry.

MRS HOLROYD: Selvidge to selvidge. You'll be quite a domestic man, if you

go on.

BLACKMORE: Ay.

They fold the two sheets.

BLACKMORE: They are white, your sheets!

MRS HOLROYD: But look at the smuts on them — look! This vile hole! I'd never have come to live here, in all the thick of the pit-grime, and lonely, if it hadn't been for him, so that he shouldn't call in a public-house on his road home from work. And now he slinks past on the other side of the railway, and goes down to the New Inn instead of coming in for his dinner. I might as well have stopped in Bestwood.

BLACKMORE: Though I rather like this little place, standing by itself.

MRS HOLROYD: Jack, can you go and take the stockings in for me? They're on the line just below the pigsty. The prop's near the apple-tree — mind it. Minnie, you take the peg-basket.

MINNIE: Will there be any rats, mam?

MRS HOLROYD: Rats — no. They'll be frightened when they hear you, if there are.

The children go out.

BLACKMORE: Poor little beggars!

MRS HOLROYD: Do you know, this place is fairly alive with rats. They run up that dirty vine in front of the house — I'm always at him to cut it down — and you can hear them at night overhead like a regiment of soldiers tramping. Really, you know, I hate them.

BLACKMORE: Well — a rat is a nasty thing!

MRS HOLROYD: But I s'll get used to them. I'd give anything to be out of this place.

BLACKMORE: It is rotten, when you're tied to a life you don't like. But I should miss it if you weren't here. When I'm coming down the line to the pit in the morning — it's nearly dark at seven now — I watch the firelight in here. Sometimes I put my hand on the wall outside where the chimney runs up to feel it warm. There isn't much in Bestwood, is there?

MRS HOLROYD: There's less than nothing if you can't be like the rest of them — as common as they're made.

BLACKMORE: It's a fact — particularly for a woman — But this place is cosy — God love me, I'm sick of lodgings.

MRS HOLROYD: You'll have to get married — I'm sure there are plenty of nice girls about.

BLACKMORE: Are there? I never see 'em. (He laughs.)

MRS HOLROYD: Oh, come, you can't say that.

BLACKMORE: I've not seen a single girl — an unmarried girl — that I should want for more than a fortnight — not one.

MRS HOLROYD: Perhaps you're very particular.

She puts her two palms on the table and leans back. He draws near to her, dropping his head.

BLACKMORE: Look here!

He has put his hand on the table near hers.

MRS HOLROYD: Yes, I know you've got nice hands — but you needn't be vain of them.

BLACKMORE: No — it's not that — But don't they seem — (he glances swiftly at her; she turns her head aside; he laughs nervously) — they sort of go well with one another. (He laughs again.)

MRS HOLROYD: They do, rather —

They stand still, near one another, with bent heads, for a moment. Suddenly she starts up and draws her hand away.

BLACKMORE: Why — what is it?

She does not answer. The children come in — JACK with an armful of stockings, MINNIE with the basket of pegs.

JACK: I believe it's freezing, mother.

MINNIE: Mr Blackmore, could you shoot a rat an' hit it?

BLACKMORE (laughing): Shoot the lot of 'em, like a wink.

MRS HOLROYD: But you've had no tea. What an awful shame to keep you here!

BLACKMORE: Nay, I don't care. It never bothers me.

MRS HOLROYD: Then you're different from most men.

BLACKMORE: All men aren't alike, you know.

MRS HOLROYD: But do go and get some tea.

MINNIE (plaintively): Can't you stop, Mr Blackmore?

BLACKMORE: Why, Minnie?

MINNIE: So's we're not frightened. Yes, do. Will you?

BLACKMORE: Frightened of what?

MINNIE: 'Cause there's noises, an' rats — an' perhaps dad'll come home and shout.

BLACKMORE: But he'd shout more if I was here.

JACK: He doesn't when my uncle John's here. So you stop, an' perhaps he won't.

BLACKMORE: Don't you like him to shout when you're in bed?

They do not answer, but look seriously at him.

CURTAIN

SCENE II

The same scene, two hours later. The clothes are folded in little piles on the table and the sofa.

MRS HOLROYD is folding a thick flannel undervest or singlet which her husband wears in the pit and which has just dried on the fender.

MRS HOLROYD (to herself): Now, thank goodness, they're all dried. It's only nine o'clock, so he won't be in for another two hours, the nuisance. (She sits on the sofa, letting her arms hang down in dejection. After a minute or two she jumps up, to begin rudely dropping the piles of washed clothes in the basket.) I don't care, I'm not going to let him have it all his way — no! (She weeps a little, fiercely, drying her eyes on the edge of her white apron.) Why should I put up with it all? — He can do what he likes. But I don't care, no, I don't —

She flings down the full clothes-basket, sits suddenly in the rocking-chair, and weeps. There is the sound of coarse, bursting laughter, in vain subdued, and a man's deep guffaws. Footsteps draw near. Suddenly the door opens, and a little, plump, pretty woman of thirty, in a close-fitting dress and a giddy, frilled bonnet of pink paper, stands perkily in the doorway. MRS HOLROYD springs up; her small, sensitive nose is inflamed with weeping, her eyes are wet and flashing. She fronts the other woman.

CLARA (with a pert smile and a jerk of the head): Good evenin'!

MRS HOLROYD: What do you want?

CLARA (she has a Yorkshire accent): Oh, we've not come beggin' — this is a visit.

She stuffs her handkerchief in front of her mouth in a little snorting burst of laughter. There is the sound of another woman behind going off into uncontrollable laughter, while a man guffaws.

MRS HOLROYD (after a moment of impotence — tragically): What — !

CLARA (faltering slightly, affecting a polite tone): We thought we'd just call —

She stuffs her handkerchief in front of her explosive laughter — the other woman shrieks again, beginning high, and running down the scale.

MRS HOLROYD: What do you mean? — What do you want here?

CLARA (she bites her lip): We don't want anything, thanks. We've just called. (She begins to laugh again — so does the other.) Well, I don't think much of the manners in this part of the country. (She takes a few hesitating steps into the kitchen.)

MRS HOLROYD (trying to shut the door upon her): No, you are not coming in.

CLARA (preventing her closing the door): Dear me, what a to-do! (She struggles with the door. The other woman comes up to help; a man is seen in the background.)

LAURA: My word, aren't we good enough to come in?

MRS HOLROYD, finding herself confronted by what seems to her excitement a crowd, releases the door and draws back a little — almost in tears of anger.

MRS HOLROYD: You have no business here. What do you want?

CLARA (putting her bonnet straight and entering in brisk defiance): I tell you we've only come to see you. (She looks round the kitchen, then makes a gesture toward the arm-chair.) Can I sit here? (She plumps herself down.) Rest for the weary.

A woman and a man have followed her into the room. LAURA is highly coloured, stout, some forty years old, wears a blue paper bonnet, and looks like the landlady of a public-house. Both she and CLARA wear much jewellery. LAURA is well dressed in a blue cloth dress. HOLROYD is a big blond man. His cap is pushed back, and he looks rather tipsy and lawless. He has a heavy blond moustache. His jacket and trousers are black, his vest grey, and he wears a turn-down collar with dark bow.

LAURA (sitting down in a chair on right, her hand on her bosom, panting): I've laughed till I feel fair bad.

CLARA: 'Aven't you got a drop of nothink to offer us, mester? Come, you are slow. I should 'ave thought a gentleman like you would have been out with the glasses afore we could have got breaths to ask you.

HOLROYD (clumsily): I dunna believe there's owt in th' 'ouse but a bottle of stout.

CLARA (putting her hand on her stomach): It feels as if th' kettle's going to boil over.

She stuffs her handkerchief in front of her mouth, throws back her head, and snorts with laughter, having now regained her confidence. LAURA laughs in the last state of exhaustion, her hand on her breast.

HOLROYD: Shall ta ha'e it then?

CLARA: What do you say, Laura — are you having a drop?

LAURA (submissively, and naturally tongue-tied): Well — I don't mind — I will if you do.

CLARA (recklessly): I think we'll 'ave a drop, Charlie, an' risk it. It'll 'appen hold the rest down.

There is a moment of silence, while HOLROYD goes into the scullery. CLARA surveys the room and the dramatic pose of MRS HOLROYD curiously.

HOLROYD (suddenly): Heh! What, come 'ere — !

There is a smash of pots, and a rat careers out of the scullery. LAURA, the first to see it, utters a scream, but is fastened to her chair, unable to move.

CLARA (jumps up to the table, crying): It's a rat — Oh, save us! (She scrambles up, banging her head on the lamp, which swings violently.)

MRS HOLROYD (who, with a little shriek, jerks her legs up on to the sofa, where she was stiffly reclining, now cries in despairing falsetto, stretching forth her arms): The lamp — mind, the lamp!

CLARA steadies the lamp, and holds her hand to her head.

HOLROYD (coming from the scullery, a bottle of stout in his hand): Where is he?

CLARA: I believe he's gone under the sofa. My, an' he's a thumper, if you like, as big as a rabbit.

HOLROYD advances cautiously toward the sofa.

LAURA (springing suddenly into life): Hi, hi, let me go — let me go — Don't touch him — Where is he? (She flees and scrambles on to CLARA'S arm-chair, catching hold of the latter's skirts.)

CLARA: Hang off — do you want to have a body down — Mind, I tell you.

MRS HOLROYD (bunched up on the sofa, with crossed hands holding her arms, fascinated, watches her husband as he approaches to stoop and attack the rat; she suddenly screams): Don't, he'll fly at you.

HOLROYD: He'll not get a chance.

MRS HOLROYD: He will, he will — and they're poisonous! (She ends on a very high note. Leaning forward on the sofa as far as she dares, she stretches out her arms to keep back her husband, who is about to kneel and search under the sofa for the rat.)

HOLROYD: Come off, I canna see him.

MRS HOLROYD: I won't let you; he'll fly at you.

HOLROYD: I'll settle him —

MRS HOLROYD: Open the door and let him go.

HOLROYD: I shonna. I'll settle him. Shut thy claver. He'll non come anigh thee.

He kneels down and begins to creep to the sofa. With a great bound, MRS HOLROYD flies to the door and flings it open. Then she rushes back to the couch.

CLARA: There he goes!

HOLROYD (simultaneously): Hi! — Ussza! (He flings the bottle of stout out of the door.)

LAURA (piteously): Shut the door, do.

HOLROYD rises, dusting his trousers knees, and closes the door. LAURA heavily descends and drops in the chair.

CLARA: Here, come an' help us down, Charlie. Look at her; she's going off.

Though LAURA is still purple-red, she sinks back in the chair. HOLROYD goes to the table. CLARA places her hands on his shoulders and jumps lightly down. Then she pushes HOLROYD with her elbow.

Look sharp, get a glass of water.

She unfastens LAURA'S collar and pulls off the paper bonnet. MRS HOLROYD sits up, straightens her clothing, and tries to look cold and contemptuous. HOLROYD brings a cup of water. CLARA sprinkles her friend's face. LAURA sighs and sighs again very deeply, then draws herself up painfully.

CLARA (tenderly): Do you feel any better — shall you have a drink of water?

(LAURA mournfully shakes her head; CLARA turns sharply to HOLROYD.)

She'll 'ave a drop o' something.

HOLROYD goes out. CLARA meanwhile fans her friend with a handkerchief. HOLROYD brings stout. She pours out the stout, smells the glass, smells the bottle — then finally the cork.

Eh, mester, it's all of a work — it's had a foisty cork.

At that instant the stairfoot door opens slowly, revealing the children — the girl peering over the boy's shoulder — both in white nightgowns. Everybody starts. LAURA gives a little cry, presses her hand on her bosom, and sinks back, gasping.

CLARA (appealing and anxious, to MRS HOLROYD): You don't 'appen to 'ave a drop of brandy for her, do you, missis?

MRS HOLROYD rises coldly without replying, and goes to the stairfoot door where the children stand.

MRS HOLROYD (sternly, to the children): Go to bed!

JACK: What's a matter, mother?

MRS HOLROYD: Never you mind, go to bed!

CLARA (appealingly): Be quick, missis.

MRS HOLROYD, glancing round, sees LAURA going purple, and runs past the children upstairs. The boy and girl sit on the lowest stair. Their father goes out of the house, shamefaced. MRS HOLROYD runs downstairs with a little brandy in a large bottle.

CLARA: Thanks, awfully. (To LAURA) Come on, try an' drink a drop, there's a dear.

They administer brandy to LAURA. The children sit watching, open-eyed. The girl stands up to look.

MINNIE (whispering): I believe it's blue bonnet.

JACK (whispering): It isn't — she's in a fit.

MINNIE (whispering): Well, look under th' table — JACK peers under — there's 'er bonnet. (JACK creeps forward.) Come back, our Jack.

JACK (returns with the bonnet): It's all made of paper.

MINNIE: Let's have a look — it's stuck together, not sewed.

She tries it on. HOLROYD enters — he looks at the child.

MRS HOLROYD (sharply, glancing round): Take that off!

MINNIE hurriedly takes the bonnet from her head. Her father snatches it from her and puts it on the fire.

CLARA: There, you're coming round now, love.

MRS HOLROYD turns away. She sees HOLROYD'S eyes on the brandy-bottle, and immediately removes it, corking it up.

MRS HOLROYD (to CLARA): You will not need this any more?

CLARA: No, thanks. I'm very much obliged.

MRS HOLROYD (does not unbend, but speaks coldly to the children):

Come, this is no place for you — come back to bed.

MINNIE: No, mam, I don't want to.

MRS HOLROYD (contralto): Come along!

MINNIE: I'm frightened, mam.

MRS HOLROYD: Frightened, what of?

MINNIE: Oo, there was a row.

MRS HOLROYD (taking MINNIE in her arms): Did they frighten you, my pet?
(She kisses her.)

JACK (in a high whisper): Mother, it's pink bonnet and blue bonnet, what was dancing.

MINNIE (whimpering): I don't want to go to bed, mam, I'm frightened.

CLARA (who has pulled off her pink bonnet and revealed a jug-handle coiffure): We're going now, duckie — you're not frightened of us, are you?

MRS HOLROYD takes the girl away before she can answer. JACK lingers behind.

HOLROYD: Now then, get off after your mother.

JACK (taking no notice of his father): I say, what's a dog's-nose?

CLARA ups with her handkerchief and LAURA responds with a faint giggle.

HOLROYD: Go thy ways upstairs.

CLARA: It's only a small whiskey with a spoonful of beer in it, my duck.

JACK: Oh!

CLARA: Come here, my duck, come on.

JACK curious, advances.

CLARA: You'll tell your mother we didn't mean no harm, won't you?

JACK (touching her earrings): What are they made of?

CLARA: They're only earrings. Don't you like them?

JACK: Um! (He stands surveying her curiously. Then he touches a bracelet made of many little mosaic brooches.) This is pretty, isn't it?

CLARA (pleased): Do you like it?

She takes it off. Suddenly MRS HOLROYD is heard calling, 'Jack, Jack!' CLARA starts.

HOLROYD: Now then, get off!

CLARA (as JACK is reluctantly going): Kiss me good night, duckie, an' give this to your sister, shall you?

She hands JACK the mosaic bracelet. He takes it doubtfully. She kisses him. HOLROYD watches in silence.

LAURA (suddenly, pathetically): Aren't you going to give me a kiss, an' all?

JACK yields her his cheek, then goes.

CLARA (to HOLROYD): Aren't they nice children?

HOLROYD: Ay.

CLARA (briskly): Oh, dear, you're very short, all of a sudden. Don't answer if it hurts you.

LAURA: My, isn't he different?

HOLROYD (laughing forcedly): I'm no different.

CLARA: Yes, you are. You shouldn't 'ave brought us if you was going to turn funny over it.

HOLROYD: I'm not funny.

CLARA: No, you're not. (She begins to laugh. LAURA joins in in spite of herself.) You're about as solemn as a roast potato. (She flings up her hands, claps them down on her knees, and sways up and down as she laughs, LAURA joining in, hand on breast.) Are you ready to be mashed? (She goes off again — then suddenly wipes the laughter off her mouth and is solemn.) But look 'ere, this'll never do. Now I'm going to be quiet. (She prims herself.)

HOLROYD: Tha'd 'appen better.

CLARA: Oh, indeed! You think I've got to pull a mug to look decent? You'd have to pull a big un, at that rate.

She bubbles off, uncontrollably — shaking herself in exasperation meanwhile. LAURA joins in. HOLROYD leans over close to her.

HOLROYD: Tha's got plenty o' fizz in thee, seemly.

CLARA (putting her hand on his face and pushing it aside, but leaving her hand over his cheek and mouth like a caress): Don't, you've been drinking. (She begins to laugh.)

HOLROYD: Should we be goin' then?

CLARA: Where do you want to take us?

HOLROYD: Oh — you please yourself o' that! Come on wi' me.

CLARA (sitting up prim): Oh, indeed!

HOLROYD (catching hold of her): Come on, let's be movin' — (he glances apprehensively at the stairs).

CLARA: What's your hurry?

HOLROYD (persuasively): Yi, come on wi' thee.

CLARA: I don't think. (She goes off, uncontrollably.)

HOLROYD (sitting on the table, just above her): What's use o' sittin' 'ere?

CLARA: I'm very comfy: I thank thee.

HOLROYD: Tha'rt a baffling little 'ussy.

CLARA (running her hand along his thigh): Aren't you havin' nothing, my dear? (Offers him her glass.)

HOLROYD (getting down from the table and putting his hand forcibly on her shoulder): No. Come on, let's shift.

CLARA (struggling): Hands off!

She fetches him a sharp slap across the face. MRS HOLROYD is heard coming downstairs. CLARA, released, sits down, smoothing herself. HOLROYD looks evil. He goes out to the door.

CLARA (to MRS HOLROYD, penitently): I don't know what you think of us, I'm sure.

MRS HOLROYD: I think nothing at all.

CLARA (bubbling): So you fix your thoughts elsewhere, do you? (Suddenly changing to seriousness.) No, but I have been awful to-night.

MRS HOLROYD (contralto, emphatic): I don't want to know anything about you. I shall be glad when you'll go.

CLARA: Turning-out time, Laura.

LAURA (turtling): I'm sorry, I'm sure.

CLARA: Never mind. But as true as I'm here, missis, I should never ha' come if I'd thought. But I had a drop — it all started with your husband sayin' he wasn't a married man.

LAURA (laughing and wiping her eyes): I've never knowed her to go off like it — it's after the time she's had.

CLARA: You know, my husband was a brute to me — an' I was in bed three month after he died. He was a brute, he was. This is the first time I've been out; it's a'most the first laugh I've had for a year.

LAURA: It's true, what she says. We thought she'd go out of 'er mind. She never spoke a word for a fortnight.

CLARA: Though he's only been dead for two months, he was a brute to me. I was as nice a young girl as you could wish when I married him and went to the Fleece Inn — I was.

LAURA: Killed hissself drinking. An' she's that excitable, she is. We s'll 'ave an awful time with 'er to-morrow, I know.

MRS HOLROYD (coldly): I don't know why I should hear all this.

CLARA: I know I must 'ave seemed awful. An' them children — aren't they nice little things, Laura?

LAURA: They are that.

HOLROYD (entering from the door): Hanna you about done theer?

CLARA: My word, if this is the way you treat a lady when she comes to see you. (She rises.)

HOLROYD: I'll see you down th' line.

CLARA: You're not coming a stride with us.

LAURA: We've got no hat, neither of us.

CLARA: We've got our own hair on our heads, at any rate. (Drawing herself up suddenly in front of MRS HOLROYD.) An' I've been educated at a boarding school as good as anybody. I can behave myself either in the drawing-room or in the kitchen as is fitting and proper. But if you'd buried a husband like mine, you wouldn't feel you'd much left to be proud of — an' you might go off occasionally.

MRS HOLROYD: I don't want to hear you.

CLARA (bobbing a curtsy): Sorry I spoke.

She goes out stiffly, followed by LAURA.

HOLROYD (going forward): You mun mind th' points down th' line.

CLARA'S VOICE: I thank thee, Charlie — mind thy own points.

He hesitates at the door — returns and sits down. There is silence in the room. HOLROYD sits with his chin in his hand. MRS HOLROYD listens. The footsteps and voices of the two women die out. Then she closes the door. HOLROYD begins to unlace his boots.

HOLROYD (ashamed yet defiant, withal anxious to apologize): Wheer's my slippers?

MRS HOLROYD sits on the sofa with face averted and does not answer.

HOLROYD: Dost hear? (He pulls off his boots, noisily, and begins to hunt under the sofa.) I canna find the things. (No answer.) Humph! — then I'll do be 'out 'em. (He stumps about in his stockinged feet; going into the scullery, he brings out the loaf of bread; he returns into the scullery.) Wheer's th' cheese? (No answer — suddenly) God blast it! (He hobbles into the kitchen.) I've trod on that broken basin, an' cut my foot open. (MRS HOLROYD refuses to take any notice. He sits down and looks at his sole — pulls off his stocking and looks again.) It's lamed me for life. (MRS HOLROYD glances at the wound.) Are 'na ter goin' ter get me öwt for it?

MRS HOLROYD: Psh!

HOLROYD: Oh, a' right then. (He hops to the dresser, opens a drawer, and pulls out a white rag; he is about to tear it.)

MRS HOLROYD (snatching it from him): Don't tear that!

HOLROYD (shouting): Then what the deuce am I to do? (MRS HOLROYD sits stonily.) Oh, a' right then! (He hops back to his chair, sits down, and begins to pull on his stocking.) A' right then — a' right then. (In a fever of rage he begins pulling on his boots.) I'll go where I can find a bit o' rag.

MRS HOLROYD: Yes, that's what you want! All you want is an excuse to be off again — "a bit of rag"!

HOLROYD (shouting): An' what man'd want to stop in wi' a woman sittin' as fow as a jackass, an' canna get a word from 'er edgeways.

MRS HOLROYD: Don't expect me to speak to you after to-night's show. How dare you bring them to my house, how dare you?

HOLROYD: They've non hurt your house, have they?

MRS HOLROYD: I wonder you dare to cross the doorstep.

HOLROYD: I s'll do what the deuce I like. They're as good as you are.

MRS HOLROYD (stands speechless, staring at him; then low): Don't you come near me again —

HOLROYD (suddenly shouting, to get his courage up): She's as good as you are, every bit of it.

MRS HOLROYD (blazing): Whatever I was and whatever I may be, don't you ever come near me again.

HOLROYD: What! I'll show thee. What's the hurt to you if a woman comes to the house? They're women as good as yourself, every whit of it.

MRS HOLROYD: Say no more. Go with them then, and don't come back.

HOLROYD: What! Yi, I will go, an' you s'll see. What! You think you're something, since your uncle left you that money, an' Blackymore puttin' you up to it. I can see your little game. I'm not as daft as you imagine. I'm no fool, I tell you.

MRS HOLROYD: No, you're not. You're a drunken beast, that's all you are.

HOLROYD: What, what — I'm what? I'll show you who's gaffer, though. (He threatens her.)

MRS HOLROYD (between her teeth): No, it's not going on. If you won't go, I will.

HOLROYD: Go then, for you've always been too big for your shoes, in my house —

MRS HOLROYD: Yes — I ought never to have looked at you. Only you showed a fair face then.

HOLROYD: What! What! We'll see who's master i' this house. I tell you, I'm goin' to put a stop to it. (He brings his fist down on the table with a bang.) It's going to stop. (He bangs the table again.) I've put up with it long enough. Do you think I'm a dog in the house, an' not a man, do you —

MRS HOLROYD: A dog would be better.

HOLROYD: Oh! Oh! Then we'll see. We'll see who's the dog and who isna. We're goin' to see. (He bangs the table.)

MRS HOLROYD: Stop thumping that table! You've wakened those children once, you and your trollops.

HOLROYD: I shall do what the deuce I like!

MRS HOLROYD: No more, you won't, no more. I've stood this long enough. Now I'm going. As for you — you've got a red face where she slapped you.

Now go to her.

HOLROYD: What? What?

MRS HOLROYD: For I'm sick of the sights and sounds of you.

HOLROYD (bitterly): By God, an' I've known it a long time.

MRS HOLROYD: You have, and it's true.

HOLROYD: An' I know who it is th'rt hankerin' after.

MRS HOLROYD: I only want to be rid of you.

HOLROYD: I know it mighty well. But I know him!

MRS HOLROYD sinking down on the sofa, suddenly begins to sob half-hysterically. HOLROYD watches her. As suddenly, she dries her eyes.

MRS HOLROYD: Do you think I care about what you say? (Suddenly.) Oh, I've had enough. I've tried, I've tried for years, for the children's sakes. Now I've had enough of your shame and disgrace.

HOLROYD: Oh, indeed!

MRS HOLROYD (her voice is dull and inflexible): I've had enough. Go out again after those trollops — leave me alone. I've had enough. (HOLROYD stands looking at her.) Go, I mean it, go out again. And if you never come back again, I'm glad. I've had enough. (She keeps her face averted, will not look at him, her attitude expressing thorough weariness.)

HOLROYD: All right then!

He hobbles, in unlaced boots, to the door. Then he turns to look at her. She turns herself still farther away, so that her back is towards him. He goes.

CURTAIN

ACT II

The scene is the same, two hours later. The cottage is in darkness, save for the firelight. On the table is spread a newspaper. A cup and saucer, a plate, a piece of bacon in the frying tin are on the newspaper ready for the miner's breakfast. MRS HOLROYD has gone to bed. There is a noise of heavy stumbling down the three steps outside.

BLACKMORE'S VOICE: Steady, now, steady. It's all in darkness. Missis! — Has she gone to bed?

He tries the latch — shakes the door.

HOLROYD'S VOICE (He is drunk.): Her's locked me out. Let me smash that bloody door in. Come out — come out — ussza! (He strikes a heavy blow on the door. There is a scuffle.)

BLACKMORE'S VOICE: Hold on a bit — what're you doing?

HOLROYD'S VOICE: I'm smashing that blasted door in.

MRS HOLROYD (appearing and suddenly drawing the bolts, flinging the door open): What do you think you're doing?

HOLROYD (lurching into the room, snarling): What? What? Tha thought tha'd play thy monkey tricks on me, did ter? (Shouting.) But I'm going to show thee. (He lurches at her threateningly; she recoils.)

BLACKMORE (seizing him by the arm): Here, here — ! Come and sit down and be quiet.

HOLROYD (snarling at him): What? — What? An' what's thäigh got ter do wi' it. (Shouting.) What's thäigh got ter do wi' it?

BLACKMORE: Nothing — nothing; but it's getting late, and you want your supper.

HOLROYD (shouting): I want nöwt. I'm allowed nöwt in this 'ouse. (Shouting louder.) 'Er begrudges me ivry morsel I ha'e.

MRS HOLROYD: Oh, what a story!

HOLROYD (shouting): It's the truth, an' you know it.

BLACKMORE (conciliatory): You'll rouse the children. You'll rouse the children, at this hour.

HOLROYD (suddenly quiet): Not me — not if I know it. I shan't disturb 'em — bless 'em.

He staggers to his arm-chair and sits heavily.

BLACKMORE: Shall I light the lamp?

MRS HOLROYD: No, don't trouble. Don't stay any longer, there's no need.

BLACKMORE (quietly): I'll just see it's alright.

He proceeds in silence to light the lamp. HOLROYD is seen dropping forward in his chair. He has a cut on his cheek. MRS HOLROYD is in an old-fashioned dressing-gown. BLACKMORE has an overcoat buttoned up to his chin. There is a very large lump of coal on the red fire.

MRS HOLROYD: Don't stay any longer.

BLACKMORE: I'll see it's alright.

MRS HOLROYD: I shall be all right. He'll go to sleep now.

BLACKMORE: But he can't go like that.

MRS HOLROYD: What has he done to his face?

BLACKMORE: He had a row with Jim Goodwin.

MRS HOLROYD: What about?

BLACKMORE: I don't know.

MRS HOLROYD: The beast!

BLACKMORE: By Jove, and isn't he a weight! He's getting fat, must be —

MRS HOLROYD: He's big made — he has a big frame.

BLACKMORE: Whatever he is, it took me all my time to get him home. I thought I'd better keep an eye on him. I knew you'd be worrying. So I sat in the smoke-room and waited for him. Though it's a dirty hole — and dull as hell.

MRS HOLROYD: Why did you bother?

BLACKMORE: Well, I thought you'd be upset about him. I had to drink three whiskies — had to, in all conscience — (smiling).

MRS HOLROYD: I don't want to be the ruin of you.

BLACKMORE (smiling): Don't you? I thought he'd pitch forward on to the lines and crack his skull.

HOLROYD has been sinking farther and farther forward in drunken sleep. He suddenly jerks too far and is awakened. He sits upright, glaring fiercely and dazedly at the two, who instantly cease talking.

HOLROYD (to BLACKMORE): What are thäigh doin' 'ere?

BLACKMORE: Why, I came along with you.

HOLROYD: Thou'rt a liar, I'm only just come in.

MRS HOLROYD (coldly): He is no liar at all. He brought you home because you were too drunk to come yourself.

HOLROYD (starting up): Thou'rt a liar! I niver set eyes on him this night, afore now.

MRS HOLROYD (with a "Pf" of contempt): You don't know what you have done to-night.

HOLROYD (shouting): I s'll not ha'e it, I tell thee.

MRS HOLROYD: Psh!

HOLROYD: I s'll not ha'e it. I s'll ha'e no carryin's on i' my 'ouse —

MRS HOLROYD (shrugging her shoulders): Talk when you've got some sense.

HOLROYD (fiercely): I've as much sense as thäigh. Am I a fool? Canna I see? What's he doin' here then, answer me that. What — ?

MRS HOLROYD: Mr Blackmore came to bring you home because you were too drunk to find your own way. And this is the thanks he gets.

HOLROYD (contemptuously): Blackymore, Blackymore. It's him tha cuts thy cloth by, is it?

MRS HOLROYD (hotly): You don't know what you're talking about, so keep your tongue still.

HOLROYD (bitingly): I don't know what I'm talking about — I don't know what I'm talking about — don't I? An' what about him standing there then, if I don't know what I'm talking about? — What?

BLACKMORE: You've been to sleep, Charlie, an' forgotten I came in with you, not long since.

HOLROYD: I'm not daft, I'm not a fool. I've got eyes in my head and sense. You needn't try to get over me. I know what you're up to.

BLACKMORE (flushing): It's a bit off to talk to me like that, Charlie, I must say.

HOLROYD: I'm not good enough for 'er. She wants Mr Blackymore. He's a gentleman, he is. Now we have it all; now we understand.

MRS HOLROYD: I wish you understood enough to keep your tongue still.

HOLROYD: What? What? I'm to keep my tongue still, am I? An' what about Mr Blackymore?

MRS HOLROYD (fiercely): Stop your mouth, you — you vulgar, low-minded brute.

HOLROYD: Am I? Am I? An' what are you? What tricks are you up to, an' all? But that's alright — that's alright. (Shouting.) That's alright, if it's you.

BLACKMORE: I think I'd better go. You seem to enjoy — er — er — calumniating your wife.

HOLROYD (mockingly): Calamniating — calamniating — I'll give you calamniating, you mealy-mouthed jockey: I'll give you calamniating.

BLACKMORE: I think you've said about enough.

HOLROYD: 'Ave I, 'ave I? Yer flimsy jack — 'ave I? (In a sudden burst.) But I've not done wi' thee yet?

BLACKMORE (ironically): No, and you haven't.

HOLROYD (shouting — pulling himself up from the arm-chair): I'll show thee — I'll show thee.

BLACKMORE laughs.

HOLROYD: Yes! — yes, my young monkey. It's thäigh, is it?

BLACKMORE: Yes, it's me.

HOLROYD (shouting): An' I'll ma'e thee wish it worn't, I will. What — ? What? Tha'd come slivin' round here, would ta? (He lurches forward at BLACKMORE with clenched fist.)

MRS HOLROYD: Drunken, drunken fool — oh, don't.

HOLROYD (turning to her): What?

She puts up her hands before her face. BLACKMORE seizes the upraised arm and swings HOLROYD round.

BLACKMORE (in a towering passion): Mind what tha'rt doing!

HOLROYD (turning fiercely on him — incoherent): Wha' — wha' — !

He aims a heavy blow. BLACKMORE evades it, so that he is struck on the side of the chest. Suddenly he shows his teeth. He raises his fists ready to strike HOLROYD when the latter stands to advantage.

MRS HOLROYD (rushing upon BLACKMORE): No, no! Oh, no!

She flies and opens the door, and goes out. BLACKMORE glances after her, then at HOLROYD, who is preparing, like a bull, for another charge. The young man's face lights up.

HOLROYD: Wha' — wha' — !

As he advances, BLACKMORE quickly retreats out-of-doors. HOLROYD plunges upon him. BLACKMORE slips behind the door-jamb, puts out his foot, and trips HOLROYD with a crash upon the brick yard.

MRS HOLROYD: Oh, what has he done to himself?

BLACKMORE (thickly): Tumbled over himself.

HOLROYD is seen struggling to rise, and is heard incoherently cursing.

MRS HOLROYD: Aren't you going to get him up?

BLACKMORE: What for?

MRS HOLROYD: But what shall we do?

BLACKMORE: Let him go to hell.

HOLROYD, who has subsided, begins to snarl and struggle again.

MRS HOLROYD (in terror): He's getting up.

BLACKMORE: Alright, let him.

MRS HOLROYD looks at BLACKMORE, suddenly afraid of him also.

HOLROYD (in a last frenzy): I'll show thee — I'll —

He raises himself up, and is just picking his balance when BLACKMORE, with a sudden light kick, sends him sprawling again. He is seen on the edge of the light to collapse into stupor.

MRS HOLROYD: He'll kill you, he'll kill you!

BLACKMORE laughs short.

MRS HOLROYD: Would you believe it! Oh, isn't it awful! (She begins to weep in a little hysteria; BLACKMORE stands with his back leaning on the doorway, grinning in a strained fashion.) Is he hurt, do you think?

BLACKMORE: I don't know — I should think not.

MRS HOLROYD: I wish he was dead; I do, with all my heart.

BLACKMORE: Do you? (He looks at her quickly; she wavers and shrinks; he begins to smile strainedly as before.) You don't know what you wish, or what you want.

MRS HOLROYD (troubled): Do you think I could get past him to come inside?

BLACKMORE: I should think so.

MRS HOLROYD, silent and troubled, manoeuvres in the doorway, stepping over her husband's feet, which lie on the threshold.

BLACKMORE: Why, you've got no shoes and stockings on!

MRS HOLROYD: No. (She enters the house and stands trembling before the fire.)

BLACKMORE (following her): Are you cold?

MRS HOLROYD: A little — with standing on the yard.

BLACKMORE: What a shame!

She, uncertain of herself, sits down. He drops on one knee, awkwardly, and takes her feet in his hands.

MRS HOLROYD: Don't — no, don't!

BLACKMORE: They are frightfully cold. (He remains, with head sunk, for some moments, then slowly rises.) Damn him!

They look at each other; then, at the same time, turn away.

MRS HOLROYD: We can't leave him lying there.

BLACKMORE: No — no! I'll bring him in.

MRS HOLROYD: But — !

BLACKMORE: He won't wake again. The drink will have got hold of him by now. (He hesitates.) Could you take hold of his feet — he's so heavy.

MRS HOLROYD: Yes.

They go out and are seen stooping over HOLROYD.

BLACKMORE: Wait, wait, till I've got him — half a minute.

MRS HOLROYD backs in first. They carry HOLROYD in and lay him on the sofa.

MRS HOLROYD: Doesn't he look awful?

BLACKMORE: It's more mark than mar. It isn't much, really.

He is busy taking off HOLROYD'S collar and tie, unfastening the waistcoat, the braces and the waist buttons of the trousers; he then proceeds to unlace the drunken man's boots.

MRS HOLROYD (who has been watching closely): I shall never get him upstairs.

BLACKMORE: He can sleep here, with a rug or something to cover him. You don't want him — upstairs?

MRS HOLROYD: Never again.

BLACKMORE (after a moment or two of silence): He'll be alright down here. Have you got a rug?

MRS HOLROYD: Yes.

She goes upstairs. BLACKMORE goes into the scullery, returning with a lading can and towel. He gets hot water from the boiler. Then, kneeling down, he begins to wipe the drunken man's face lightly with the flannel, to remove the blood and dirt.

MRS HOLROYD (returning): What are you doing?

BLACKMORE: Only wiping his face to get the dirt out.

MRS HOLROYD: I wonder if he'd do as much for you.

BLACKMORE: I hope not.

MRS HOLROYD: Isn't he horrible, horrible —

BLACKMORE (looks up at her): Don't look at him then.

MRS HOLROYD: I can't take it in, it's too much.

BLACKMORE: He won't wake. I will stay with you.

MRS HOLROYD (earnestly): No — oh, no.

BLACKMORE: There will be the drawn sword between us. (He indicates the figure of HOLROYD, which lies, in effect, as a barrier between them.)

MRS HOLROYD (blushing): Don't!

BLACKMORE: I'm sorry.

MRS HOLROYD (after watching him for a few moments lightly wiping the sleeping man's face with a towel): I wonder you can be so careful over him.

BLACKMORE (quietly): It's only because he's helpless.

MRS HOLROYD: But why should you love him ever so little?

BLACKMORE: I don't — only he's helpless. Five minutes since I could have killed him.

MRS HOLROYD: Well, I don't understand you men.

BLACKMORE: Why?

MRS HOLROYD: I don't know.

BLACKMORE: I thought as I stood in that doorway, and he was trying to get up — I wished as hard as I've ever wished anything in my life —

MRS HOLROYD: What?

BLACKMORE: That I'd killed him. I've never wished anything so much in my life — if wishes were anything.

MRS HOLROYD: Don't, it does sound awful.

BLACKMORE: I could have done it, too. He ought to be dead.

MRS HOLROYD (pleading): No, don't! You know you don't mean it, and you make me feel so awful.

BLACKMORE: I do mean it. It is simply true, what I say.

MRS HOLROYD: But don't say it.

BLACKMORE: No?

MRS HOLROYD: No, we've had enough.

BLACKMORE: Give me the rug.

She hands it him, and he tucks HOLROYD up.

MRS HOLROYD: You only do it to play on my feelings.

BLACKMORE (laughing shortly): And now give me a pillow — thanks.

There is a pause — both look at the sleeping man.

BLACKMORE: I suppose you're fond of him, really.

MRS HOLROYD: No more.

BLACKMORE: You were fond of him?

MRS HOLROYD: I was — yes.

BLACKMORE: What did you like in him?

MRS HOLROYD (uneasily): I don't know.

BLACKMORE: I suppose you really care about him, even now?

MRS HOLROYD: Why are you so sure of it?

BLACKMORE: Because I think it is so.

MRS HOLROYD: I did care for him — now he has destroyed it —

BLACKMORE: I don't believe he can destroy it.

MRS HOLROYD (with a short laugh): Don't you? When you are married you try. You'll find it isn't so hard.

BLACKMORE: But what did you like in him — because he was good-looking, and strong, and that?

MRS HOLROYD: I liked that as well. But if a man makes a nuisance of himself, his good looks are ugly to you, and his strength loathsome. Do you think I care

about a man because he's got big fists, when he is a coward in his real self?

BLACKMORE: Is he a coward?

MRS HOLROYD: He is — a pettifogging, paltry one.

BLACKMORE: And so you've really done with him?

MRS HOLROYD: I have.

BLACKMORE: And what are you going to do?

MRS HOLROYD: I don't know.

BLACKMORE: I suppose nothing. You'll just go on — even if you've done with him — you'll go on with him.

There is a long pause.

BLACKMORE: But was there nothing else in him but his muscles and his good looks to attract you to him?

MRS HOLROYD: Why? What does it matter?

BLACKMORE: What did you think he was?

MRS HOLROYD: Why must we talk about him?

BLACKMORE: Because I can never quite believe you.

MRS HOLROYD: I can't help whether you believe it or not.

BLACKMORE: Are you just in a rage with him, because of to-night?

MRS HOLROYD: I know, to-night finished it. But it was never right between us.

BLACKMORE: Never?

MRS HOLROYD: Not once. And then to-night — no, it's too much; I can't stand any more of it.

BLACKMORE: I suppose he got tipsy. Then he said he wasn't a married man — vowed he wasn't, to those paper bonnets. They found out he was, and said he was frightened of his wife getting to know. Then he said they should all go to supper at his house — I suppose they came out of mischief.

MRS HOLROYD: He did it to insult me.

BLACKMORE: Oh, he was a bit tight — you can't say it was deliberate.

MRS HOLROYD: No, but it shows how he feels toward me. The feeling comes out in drink.

BLACKMORE: How does he feel toward you?

MRS HOLROYD: He wants to insult me, and humiliate me, in every moment of his life. Now I simply despise him.

BLACKMORE: You really don't care any more about him?

MRS HOLROYD: No.

BLACKMORE (hesitates): And you would leave him?

MRS HOLROYD: I would leave him, and not care that about him any more. (She snaps her fingers.)

BLACKMORE: Will you come with me?

MRS HOLROYD (after a reluctant pause): Where?

BLACKMORE: To Spain: I can any time have a job there, in a decent part. You could take the children.

The figure of the sleeper stirs uneasily — they watch him.

BLACKMORE: Will you?

MRS HOLROYD: When would you go?

BLACKMORE: To-morrow, if you like.

MRS HOLROYD: But why do you want to saddle yourself with me and the children?

BLACKMORE: Because I want to.

MRS HOLROYD: But you don't love me?

BLACKMORE: Why don't I?

MRS HOLROYD: You don't.

BLACKMORE: I don't know about that. I don't know anything about love. Only I've gone on for a year, now, and it's got stronger and stronger —

MRS HOLROYD: What has?

BLACKMORE: This — this wanting you, to live with me. I took no notice of it for a long time. Now I can't get away from it, at no hour and nohow. (He still avoids direct contact with her.)

MRS HOLROYD: But you'd like to get away from it.

BLACKMORE: I hate a mess of any sort. But if you'll come away with me — you and the children —

MRS HOLROYD: But I couldn't — you don't love me —

BLACKMORE: I don't know what you mean by I don't love you.

MRS HOLROYD: I can feel it.

BLACKMORE: And do you love me? (A pause.)

MRS HOLROYD: I don't know. Everything is so — so —

There is a long pause.

BLACKMORE: How old are you?

MRS HOLROYD: Thirty-two.

BLACKMORE: I'm twenty-seven.

MRS HOLROYD: And have you never been in love?

BLACKMORE: I don't think so. I don't know.

MRS HOLROYD: But you must know. I must go and shut that door that keeps clicking.

She rises to go upstairs, making a clatter at the stairfoot door. The noise rouses her husband. As she goes upstairs, he moves, makes coughing sounds, turns over, and then suddenly sits upright, gazing at BLACKMORE. The latter sits perfectly still on the sofa, his head dropped, hiding his face. His hands are clasped. They remain thus for a minute.

HOLROYD: Hello! (He stares fixedly.) Hello! (His tone is undecided, as if he mistrusts himself.) What are — who are ter? (BLACKMORE does not move; HOLROYD stares blankly; he then turns and looks at the room.) Well, I dunna know.

He staggers to his feet, clinging to the table, and goes groping to the stairs. They creak loudly under his weight. A door-latch is heard to click. In a moment MRS HOLROYD comes quickly downstairs.

BLACKMORE: Has he gone to bed?

MRS HOLROYD (nodding): Lying on the bed.

BLACKMORE: Will he settle now?

MRS HOLROYD: I don't know. He is like that sometimes. He will have delirium tremens if he goes on.

BLACKMORE (softly): You can't stay with him, you know.

MRS HOLROYD: And the children?

BLACKMORE: We'll take them.

MRS HOLROYD: Oh!

Her face puckers to cry. Suddenly he starts up and puts his arms round her, holding her protectively and gently, very caressingly. She clings to him. They are silent for some moments.

BLACKMORE (struggling, in an altered voice): Look at me and kiss me.

Her sobs are heard distinctly. BLACKMORE lays his hand on her cheek, caressing her always with his hand.

BLACKMORE: My God, but I hate him! I wish either he was dead or me. (MRS HOLROYD hides against him; her sobs cease; after a while he continues in the same murmuring fashion.) It can't go on like it any more. I feel as if I should come in two. I can't keep away from you. I simply can't. Come with me. Come with me and leave him. If you knew what a hell it is for me to have you here — and to see him. I can't go without you, I can't. It's been hell every moment for six months now. You say I don't love you. Perhaps I don't, for all I know about it. But oh, my God, don't keep me like it any longer. Why should he have you — and I've never had anything.

MRS HOLROYD: Have you never loved anybody?

BLACKMORE: No — I've tried. Kiss me of your own wish — will you?

MRS HOLROYD: I don't know.

BLACKMORE (after a pause): Let's break clear. Let's go right away. Do you care for me?

MRS HOLROYD: I don't know. (She loosens herself, rises dumbly.)

BLACKMORE: When do you think you will know?

She sits down helplessly.

MRS HOLROYD: I don't know.

BLACKMORE: Yes, you do know, really. If he was dead, should you marry me?

MRS HOLROYD: Don't say it —

BLACKMORE: Why not? If wishing of mine would kill him, he'd soon be out of the way.

MRS HOLROYD: But the children!

BLACKMORE: I'm fond of them. I shall have good money.

MRS HOLROYD: But he's their father.

BLACKMORE: What does that mean — ?

MRS HOLROYD: Yes, I know — (a pause) but —

BLACKMORE: Is it him that keeps you?

MRS HOLROYD: No.

BLACKMORE: Then come with me. Will you? (He stands waiting for her; then he turns and takes his overcoat; pulls it on, leaving the collar turned up, ceasing to twist his cap.) Well — will you tell me to-morrow?

She goes forward and flings her arms round his neck. He suddenly kisses her passionately.

MRS HOLROYD: But I ought not. (She draws away a little; he will not let her go.)

BLACKMORE: Yes, it's alright. (He holds her close.)

MRS HOLROYD: Is it?

BLACKMORE: Yes, it is. It's alright.

He kisses her again. She releases herself but holds his hand. They keep listening.

MRS HOLROYD: Do you love me?

BLACKMORE: What do you ask for?

MRS HOLROYD: Have I hurt you these months?

BLACKMORE: You haven't. And I don't care what it's been if you'll come with me. (There is a noise upstairs and they wait.) You will soon, won't you?

She kisses him.

MRS HOLROYD: He's not safe. (She disengages herself and sits on the sofa.)

BLACKMORE (takes a place beside her, holding her hand in both his): You should have waited for me.

MRS HOLROYD: How wait?

BLACKMORE: And not have married him.

MRS HOLROYD: I might never have known you — I married him to get out of my place.

BLACKMORE: Why?

MRS HOLROYD: I was left an orphan when I was six. My Uncle John brought me up, in the Coach and Horses at Rainsworth. He'd got no children. He was good to me, but he drank. I went to Mansfield Grammar School. Then he fell out with me because I wouldn't wait in the bar, and I went as nursery governess to Berryman's. And I felt I'd nowhere to go, I belonged to nowhere, and nobody cared about me, and men came after me, and I hated it. So to get out of it, I married the first man that turned up.

BLACKMORE: And you never cared about him?

MRS HOLROYD: Yes, I did. I did care about him. I wanted to be a wife to him. But there's nothing at the bottom of him, if you know what I mean. You can't get anywhere with him. There's just his body and nothing else. Nothing that keeps him, no anchor, no roots, nothing satisfying. It's a horrible feeling there is about him, that nothing is safe or permanent — nothing is anything —

BLACKMORE: And do you think you can trust me?

MRS HOLROYD: I think you're different from him.

BLACKMORE: Perhaps I'm not.

MRS HOLROYD (warmly): You are.

BLACKMORE: At any rate, we'll see. You'll come on Saturday to London?

MRS HOLROYD: Well, you see, there's my money. I haven't got it yet. My uncle has left me about a hundred and twenty pounds.

BLACKMORE: Well, see the lawyer about it as soon as you can. I can let you have some money if you want any. But don't let us wait after Saturday.

MRS HOLROYD: But isn't it wrong?

BLACKMORE: Why, if you don't care for him, and the children are miserable between the two of you — which they are —

MRS HOLROYD: Yes.

BLACKMORE: Well, then I see no wrong. As for him — he would go one way, and only one way, whatever you do. Damn him, he doesn't matter.

MRS HOLROYD: No.

BLACKMORE: Well, then — have done with it. Can't you cut clean of him? Can't you now?

MRS HOLROYD: And then — the children —

BLACKMORE: They'll be alright with me and you — won't they?

MRS HOLROYD: Yes —

BLACKMORE: Well, then. Now, come and have done with it. We can't keep on being ripped in two like this. We need never hear of him any more.

MRS HOLROYD: Yes — I love you. I do love you —

BLACKMORE: Oh, my God! (He speaks with difficulty — embracing her.)

MRS HOLROYD: When I look at him, and then at you — ha — (She gives a short laugh.)

BLACKMORE: He's had all the chance — it's only fair — Lizzie —

MRS HOLROYD: My love.

There is silence. He keeps his arm round her. After hesitating, he picks up his cap.

BLACKMORE: I'll go then — at any rate. Shall you come with me?

She follows him to the door.

MRS HOLROYD: I'll come on Saturday.

BLACKMORE: Not now?

CURTAIN

ACT III

Scene, the same. Time, the following evening, about seven o'clock. The table is half-laid, with a large cup and saucer, plate, etc., ready for HOLROYD'S dinner, which, like all miners, he has when he comes home between four and five o'clock. On the other half of the table MRS HOLROYD is ironing. On the hearth stand newly baked loaves of bread. The irons hang at the fire. JACK, with a bowler hat hanging at the back of his head, parades up to the sofa, on which stands MINNIE engaged in dusting a picture. She has a soiled white apron tied behind her, to make a long skirt.

JACK: Good mornin', missis. Any scissors or knives to grind?

MINNIE (peering down from the sofa): Oh, I can't be bothered to come downstairs. Call another day.

JACK: I shan't.

MINNIE (keeping up her part): Well, I can't come down now. (JACK stands irresolute.) Go on, you have to go and steal the baby.

JACK: I'm not.

MINNIE: Well, you can steal the eggs out of the fowl-house.

JACK: I'm not.

MINNIE: Then I shan't play with you.

JACK takes off his bowler hat and flings it on the sofa; tears come in MINNIE'S eyes.

Now I'm not friends. (She surveys him ruefully; after a few moments of silence she clambers down and goes to her mother.) Mam, he won't play with me.

MRS HOLROYD (crossly): Why don't you play with her? If you begin bothering, you must go to bed.

JACK: Well, I don't want to play.

MRS HOLROYD: Then you must go to bed.

JACK: I don't want to.

MRS HOLROYD: Then what do you want, I should like to know?

MINNIE: I wish my father'd come.

JACK: I do.

MRS HOLROYD: I suppose he thinks he's paying me out. This is the third time this week he's slunk past the door and gone down to Old Brinsley instead of coming in to his dinner. He'll be as drunk as a lord when he does come.

The children look at her plaintively.

MINNIE: Isn't he a nuisance?

JACK: I hate him. I wish he'd drop down th' pit-shaft.

MRS HOLROYD: Jack! — I never heard such a thing in my life! You mustn't say such things — it's wicked.

JACK: Well, I do.

MRS HOLROYD (loudly): I won't have it. He's your father, remember.

JACK (in a high voice): Well, he's always comin' home an' shoutin' an' bangin' on the table. (He is getting tearful and defiant.)

MRS HOLROYD: Well, you mustn't take any notice of him.

MINNIE (wistfully): 'Appen if you said something nice to him, mother, he'd happen go to bed, and not shout.

JACK: I'd hit him in the mouth.

MRS HOLROYD: Perhaps we'll go to another country, away from him — should we?

JACK: In a ship, mother?

MINNIE: In a ship, mam?

MRS HOLROYD: Yes, in a big ship, where it's blue sky, and water and palm-trees, and —

MINNIE: An' dates — ?

JACK: When should we go?

MRS HOLROYD: Some day.

MINNIE: But who'd work for us? Who should we have for father?

JACK: You don't want a father. I can go to work for us.

MRS HOLROYD: I've got a lot of money now, that your uncle left me.

MINNIE (after a general thoughtful silence): An' would my father stop here?

MRS HOLROYD: Oh, he'd be alright.

MINNIE: But who would he live with?

MRS HOLROYD: I don't know — one of his paper bonnets, if he likes.

MINNIE: Then she could have her old bracelet back, couldn't she?

MRS HOLROYD: Yes — there it is on the candlestick, waiting for her.

There is a sound of footsteps — then a knock at the door. The children start.

MINNIE (in relief): Here he is.

MRS HOLROYD goes to the door. BLACKMORE enters.

BLACKMORE: It is foggy to-night — Hello, aren't you youngsters gone to bed?

MINNIE: No, my father's not come home yet.

BLACKMORE (turning to MRS HOLROYD): Did he go to work then, after last night?

MRS HOLROYD: I suppose so. His pit things were gone when I got up. I never thought he'd go.

BLACKMORE: And he took his snap as usual?

MRS HOLROYD: Yes, just as usual. I suppose he's gone to the New Inn. He'd say to himself he'd pay me out. That's what he always does say, "I'll pay thee out for that bit — I'll ma'e thee regret it."

JACK: We're going to leave him.

BLACKMORE: So you think he's at the New Inn?

MRS HOLROYD: I'm sure he is — and he'll come when he's full. He'll have a bout now, you'll see.

MINNIE: Go and fetch him, Mr Blackmore.

JACK: My mother says we shall go in a ship and leave him.

BLACKMORE (after looking keenly at JACK: to MRS HOLROYD): Shall I go and see if he's at the New Inn?

MRS HOLROYD: No — perhaps you'd better not —

BLACKMORE: Oh, he shan't see me. I can easily manage that.

JACK: Fetch him, Mr Blackmore.

BLACKMORE: Alright, Jack. (To MRS HOLROYD.) Shall I?

MRS HOLROYD: We're always pulling on you — But yes, do!

BLACKMORE goes out.

JACK: I wonder how long he'll be.

MRS HOLROYD: You come and go to bed now: you'd better be out of the way when he comes in.

MINNIE: And you won't say anything to him, mother, will you?

MRS HOLROYD: What do you mean?

MINNIE: You won't begin of him — row him.

MRS HOLROYD: Is he to have all his own way? What would he be like, if I didn't row him?

JACK: But it doesn't matter, mother, if we're going to leave him —

MINNIE: But Mr Blackmore'll come back, won't he, mam, and dad won't shout before him?

MRS HOLROYD (beginning to undress the children): Yes, he'll come back.

MINNIE: Mam — could I have that bracelet to go to bed with?

MRS HOLROYD: Come and say your prayers.

They kneel, muttering in their mother's apron.

MINNIE (suddenly lifting her head): Can I, mam?

MRS HOLROYD (trying to be stern): Have you finished your prayers?

MINNIE: Yes.

MRS HOLROYD: If you want it — beastly thing! (She reaches the bracelet down from the mantelpiece.) Your father must have put it up there — I don't know where I left it. I suppose he'd think I was proud of it and wanted it for an ornament.

MINNIE gloats over it. MRS HOLROYD lights a candle and they go upstairs. After a few moments the outer door opens, and there enters an old woman. She is of middling stature and wears a large grey shawl over her head. After glancing sharply round the room, she advances to the fire, warms herself, then, taking off her shawl, sits in the rocking-chair. As she hears MRS HOLROYD'S footsteps, she folds her hands and puts on a lachrymose expression, turning down the corners of her mouth and arching her eyebrows.

MRS HOLROYD: Hello, mother, is it you?

GRANDMOTHER: Yes, it's me. Haven't you finished ironing?

MRS HOLROYD: Not yet.

GRANDMOTHER: You'll have your irons red-hot.

MRS HOLROYD: Yes, I s'll have to stand them to cool. (She does so, and moves about at her ironing.)

GRANDMOTHER: And you don't know what's become of Charles?

MRS HOLROYD: Well, he's not come home from work yet. I supposed he was at the New Inn — Why?

GRANDMOTHER: That young electrician come knocking asking if I knew where he was. "Eh," I said, "I've not set eyes on him for over a week — nor his wife neither, though they pass th' garden gate every time they go out. I know nowt on 'im." I axed him what was the matter, so he said Mrs Holroyd was

anxious because he'd not come home, so I thought I'd better come and see. Is there anything up?

MRS HOLROYD: No more than I've told you.

GRANDMOTHER: It's a rum 'un, if he's neither in the New Inn nor the Prince o' Wales. I suppose something you've done's set him off.

MRS HOLROYD: It's nothing I've done.

GRANDMOTHER: Eh, if he's gone off and left you, whatever shall we do! Whatever 'ave you been doing?

MRS HOLROYD: He brought a couple of bright daisies here last night — two of those trollops from Nottingham — and I said I'd not have it.

GRANDMOTHER (sighing deeply): Ay, you've never been able to agree.

MRS HOLROYD: We agreed well enough except when he drank like a fish and came home rolling.

GRANDMOTHER (whining): Well, what can you expect of a man as 'as been shut up i' th' pit all day? He must have a bit of relaxation.

MRS HOLROYD: He can have it different from that, then. At any rate, I'm sick of it.

GRANDMOTHER: Ay, you've a stiff neck, but it'll be bowed by you're my age.

MRS HOLROYD: Will it? I'd rather it were broke.

GRANDMOTHER: Well — there's no telling what a jealous man will do. (She shakes her head.)

MRS HOLROYD: Nay, I think it's my place to be jealous, when he brings a brazen hussy here and sits carryin' on with her.

GRANDMOTHER: He'd no business to do that. But you know, Lizzie, he's got

something on his side.

MRS HOLROYD: What, pray?

GRANDMOTHER: Well, I don't want to make any mischief, but you're my son's wife, an' it's nothing but my duty to tell you. They've been saying a long time now as that young electrician is here a bit too often.

MRS HOLROYD: He doesn't come for my asking.

GRANDMOTHER: No, I don't suppose he wants for asking. But Charlie's not the man to put up with that sort o' work.

MRS HOLROYD: Charlie put up with it! If he's anything to say, why doesn't he say it, without going to other folks . . . ?

GRANDMOTHER: Charlie's never been near me with a word — nor 'as he said a word elsewhere to my knowledge. For all that, this is going to end with trouble.

MRS HOLROYD: In this hole, every gossiping creature thinks she's got the right to cackle about you — sickening! And a parcel of lies.

GRANDMOTHER: Well, Lizzie, I've never said anything against you. Charlie's been a handful of trouble. He made my heart ache once or twice afore you had him, and he's made it ache many, many's the time since. But it's not all on his side, you know.

MRS HOLROYD (hotly): No, I don't know.

GRANDMOTHER: You thought yourself above him, Lizzie, an' you know he's not the man to stand it.

MRS HOLROYD: No, he's run away from it.

GRANDMOTHER (venomously): And what man wouldn't leave a woman that allowed him to live on sufferance in the house with her, when he was bringing the money home?

MRS HOLROYD: “Sufferance!” — Yes, there’s been a lot of letting him live on “sufferance” in the house with me. It is I who have lived on sufferance, for his service and pleasure. No, what he wanted was the drink and the public house company, and because he couldn’t get them here, he went out for them. That’s all.

GRANDMOTHER: You have always been very clever at hitting things off, Lizzie. I was always sorry my youngest son married a clever woman. He only wanted a bit of coaxing and managing, and you clever women won’t do it.

MRS HOLROYD: He wanted a slave, not a wife.

GRANDMOTHER: It’s a pity your stomach wasn’t too high for him, before you had him. But no, you could have eaten him ravishing at one time.

MRS HOLROYD: It’s a pity you didn’t tell me what he was before I had him. But no, he was all angel. You left me to find out what he really was.

GRANDMOTHER: Some women could have lived with him happy enough. An’ a fat lot you’d have thanked me for my telling.

There is a knock at the door. MRS HOLROYD opens.

RIGLEY: They tell me, missus, as your mester’s not hoom yet.

MRS HOLROYD: No — who is it?

GRANDMOTHER: Ask him to step inside. Don’t stan’ there lettin’ the fog in.

RIGLEY steps in. He is a tall, bony, very roughly hewn collier.

RIGLEY: Good evenin’.

GRANDMOTHER: Oh, is it you, Mr Rigley? (In a querulous, spiteful tone to MRS HOLROYD.) He butties along with Charlie.

MRS HOLROYD: Oh!

RIGLEY: Au’ han yer seen nowt on ‘im?

MRS HOLROYD: No — was he all right at work?

RIGLEY: Well, e' wor nowt to mention. A bit short, like: 'adna much to say. I canna ma'e out what 'e's done wi' 'issen. (He is manifestly uneasy, does not look at the two women.)

GRANDMOTHER: An' did 'e come up i' th' same bantle wi' you?

RIGLEY: No — 'e didna. As Ah was comin' out o' th' stall, Ah shouted, "Art comin', Charlie? We're a' off." An' 'e said, "Ah'm comin' in a minute." 'E wor just finishin' a stint, like, an' 'e wanted ter get it set. An' 'e 'd been a bit roughish in 'is temper, like, so I thöwt 'e didna want ter walk to th' bottom wi' us. . . .

GRANDMOTHER (wailing): An' what's 'e gone an' done to himself?

RIGLEY: Nay, missis, yo munna ax me that. 'E's non done owt as Ah know on. On'y I wor thinkin', 'appen summat 'ad 'appened to 'im, like, seein' as nob'dy had any knowings of 'im comin' up.

MRS HOLROYD: What is the matter, Mr Rigley? Tell us it out.

RIGLEY: I canna do that, missis. It seems as if 'e niver come up th' pit — as far as we can make out. 'Appen a bit o' stuff's fell an' pinned 'im.

GRANDMOTHER (wailing): An' 'ave you left 'im lying down there in the pit, poor thing?

RIGLEY (uneasily): I couldna say for certain where 'e is.

MRS HOLROYD (agitated): Oh, it's very likely not very bad, mother! Don't let us run to meet trouble.

RIGLEY: We 'ave to 'ope for th' best, missis, all on us.

GRANDMOTHER (wailing): Eh, they'll bring 'im 'ome, I know they will, smashed up an' broke! An' one of my sons they've burned down pit till the flesh dropped off 'im, an' one was shot till 'is shoulder was all of a mosh, an' they

brought 'em 'ome to me. An' now there's this. . . .

MRS HOLROYD (shuddering): Oh, don't, mother. (Appealing to RIGLEY.) You don't know that he's hurt?

RIGLEY (shaking his head): I canna tell you.

MRS HOLROYD (in a high hysterical voice): Then what is it?

RIGLEY (very uneasy): I canna tell you. But yon young electrician — Mr Blackmore — 'e rung down to the night deputy, an' it seems as though there's been a fall or summat. . . .

GRANDMOTHER: Eh, Lizzie, you parted from him in anger. You little knowed how you'd meet him again.

RIGLEY (making an effort): Well, I'd 'appen best be goin' to see what's betide.

He goes out.

GRANDMOTHER: I'm sure I've had my share of bad luck, I have. I'm sure I've brought up five lads in the pit, through accidents and troubles, and now there's this. The Lord has treated me very hard, very hard. It's a blessing, Lizzie, as you've got a bit of money, else what would 'ave become of the children?

MRS HOLROYD: Well, if he's badly hurt, there'll be the Union-pay, and sick-pay — we shall manage. And perhaps it's not very much.

GRANDMOTHER: There's no knowin' but what they'll be carryin' him to die 'i th' hospital.

MRS HOLROYD: Oh, don't say so, mother — it won't be so bad, you'll see.

GRANDMOTHER: How much money have you, Lizzie, comin'?

MRS HOLROYD: I don't know — not much over a hundred pounds.

GRANDMOTHER (shaking her head): An' what's that, what's that?

MRS HOLROYD (sharply): Hush!

GRANDMOTHER (crying): Why, what?

MRS HOLROYD opens the door. In the silence can be heard the pulsing of the fan engine, then the driving engine chuffs rapidly: there is a skirr of brakes on the rope as it descends.

MRS HOLROYD: That's twice they've sent the chair down — I wish we could see. . . . Hark!

GRANDMOTHER: What is it?

MRS HOLROYD: Yes — it's stopped at the gate. It's the doctor's.

GRANDMOTHER (coming to the door): What, Lizzie?

MRS HOLROYD: The doctor's motor. (She listens acutely.) Dare you stop here, mother, while I run up to the top an' see?

GRANDMOTHER: You'd better not go, Lizzie, you'd better not. A woman's best away.

MRS HOLROYD: It is unbearable to wait.

GRANDMOTHER: Come in an' shut the door — it's a cold that gets in your bones.

MRS HOLROYD goes in.

MRS HOLROYD: Perhaps while he's in bed we shall have time to change him. It's an ill wind brings no good. He'll happen be a better man.

GRANDMOTHER: Well, you can but try. Many a woman's thought the same.

MRS HOLROYD: Oh, dear, I wish somebody would come. He's never been hurt since we were married.

GRANDMOTHER: No, he's never had a bad accident, all the years he's been in

the pit. He's been luckier than most. But everybody has it, sooner or later.

MRS HOLROYD (shivering): It is a horrid night.

GRANDMOTHER (querulous): Yes, come your ways in.

MRS HOLROYD: Hark!

There is a quick sound of footsteps. BLACKMORE comes into the light of the doorway.

BLACKMORE: They're bringing him.

MRS HOLROYD (quickly putting her hand over her breast): What is it?

BLACKMORE: You can't tell anything's the matter with him — it's not marked him at all.

MRS HOLROYD: Oh, what a blessing! And is it much?

BLACKMORE: Well —

MRS HOLROYD: What is it?

BLACKMORE: It's the worst.

GRANDMOTHER: Who is it? — What does he say?

MRS HOLROYD sinks on the nearest chair with a horrified expression. BLACKMORE pulls himself together and enters the room. He is very pale.

BLACKMORE: I came to tell you they're bringing him home.

GRANDMOTHER: And you said it wasn't very bad, did you?

BLACKMORE: No — I said it was — as bad as it could be.

MRS HOLROYD (rising and crossing to her MOTHER-IN-LAW, flings her arms round her; in a high voice): Oh, mother, what shall we do? What shall we

do?

GRANDMOTHER: You don't mean to say he's dead?

BLACKMORE: Yes.

GRANDMOTHER (staring): God help us, and how was it?

BLACKMORE: Some stuff fell.

GRANDMOTHER (rocking herself and her daughter-in-law — both weeping): Oh, God have mercy on us! Oh, God have mercy on us! Some stuff fell on him. An' he'd not even time to cry for mercy; oh, God spare him! Oh, what shall we do for comfort? To be taken straight out of his sins. Oh, Lizzie, to think he should be cut off in his wickedness! He's been a bad lad of late, he has, poor lamb. He's gone very wrong of late years, poor dear lamb, very wrong. Oh, Lizzie, think what's to become of him now! If only you'd have tried to be different with him.

MRS HOLROYD (moaning): Don't, mother, don't. I can't bear it.

BLACKMORE (cold and clear): Where will you have him laid? The men will be here in a moment.

MRS HOLROYD (starting up): They can carry him up to bed —

BLACKMORE: It's no good taking him upstairs. You'll have to wash him and lay him out.

MRS HOLROYD (startled): Well —

BLACKMORE: He's in his pit-dirt.

GRANDMOTHER: He is, bless him. We'd better have him down here, Lizzie, where we can handle him.

MRS HOLROYD: Yes.

She begins to put the tea things away, but drops the sugar out of the basin and

the lumps fly broadcast.

BLACKMORE: Never mind, I'll pick those up. You put the children's clothes away.

MRS HOLROYD stares witless around. The GRANDMOTHER sits rocking herself and weeping. BLACKMORE clears the table, putting the pots in the scullery. He folds the white tablecloth and pulls back the table. The door opens. MRS HOLROYD utters a cry. RIGLEY enters.

RIGLEY: They're bringing him now, missis.

MRS HOLROYD: Oh!

RIGLEY (simply): There must ha' been a fall directly after we left him.

MRS HOLROYD (frowning, horrified): No — no!

RIGLEY (to BLACKMORE): It fell a' back of him, an' shut 'im in as you might shut a loaf 'i th' oven. It never touched him.

MRS HOLROYD (staring distractedly): Well, then —

RIGLEY: You see, it come on 'im as close as a trap on a mouse, an' gen him no air, an' what wi' th' gas, it smothered him. An' it wouldna be so very long about it neither.

MRS HOLROYD (quiet with horror): Oh!

GRANDMOTHER: Eh, dear — dear. Eh, dear — dear.

RIGLEY (looking hard at her): I wasna to know what 'ud happen.

GRANDMOTHER (not heeding him, but weeping all the time): But the Lord gave him time to repent. He'd have a few minutes to repent. Ay, I hope he did, I hope he did, else what was to become of him. The Lord cut him off in his sins, but He gave him time to repent.

RIGLEY looks away at the wall. BLACKMORE has made a space in the middle

of the floor.

BLACKMORE: If you'll take the rocking-chair off the end of the rug, Mrs Holroyd, I can pull it back a bit from the fire, and we can lay him on that.

GRANDMOTHER (petulantly): What's the good of messing about — (She moves.)

MRS HOLROYD: It suffocated him?

RIGLEY (shaking his head, briefly): Yes. 'Appened th' afterdamp —

BLACKMORE: He'd be dead in a few minutes.

MRS HOLROYD: No — oh, think!

BLACKMORE: You mustn't think.

RIGLEY (suddenly): They commin'!

MRS HOLROYD stands at bay. The GRANDMOTHER half rises. RIGLEY and BLACKMORE efface themselves as much as possible. A man backs into the room, bearing the feet of the dead man, which are shod in great pit boots. As the head bearer comes awkwardly past the table, the coat with which the body is covered slips off, revealing HOLROYD in his pit-dirt, naked to the waist.

MANAGER (a little stout, white-bearded man): Mind now, mind. Ay, missis, what a job, indeed, it is! (Sharply.) Where mun they put him?

MRS HOLROYD (turning her face aside from the corpse): Lay him on the rug.

MANAGER: Steady now, do it steady.

SECOND BEARER (rising and pressing back his shoulders): By Guy, but 'e 'ings heavy.

MANAGER: Yi, Joe, I'll back my life o' that.

GRANDMOTHER: Eh, Mr Chambers, what's this affliction on my old age. You

kept your sons out o' the pit, but all mine's in. And to think of the trouble I've had — to think o' the trouble that's come out of Brinsley pit to me.

MANAGER: It has that, it 'as that, missis. You seem to have had more'n your share; I'll admit it, you have.

MRS HOLROYD (who has been staring at the men): It is too much!

BLACKMORE frowns; RIGLEY glowers at her.

MANAGER: You never knowed such a thing in your life. Here's a man, holin' a stint, just finishin', (He puts himself as if in the holer's position, gesticulating freely.) an' a lot o' stuff falls behind him, clean as a whistle, shuts him up safe as a worm in a nut and niver touches him — niver knowed such a thing in your life.

MRS HOLROYD: Ugh!

MANAGER: It niver hurt him — niver touched him.

MRS HOLROYD: Yes, but — but how long would he be (She makes a sweeping gesture; the MANAGER looks at her and will not help her out.) — how long would it take — ah — to — to kill him?

MANAGER: Nay, I canna tell ye. 'E didna seem to ha' strived much to get out — did he, Joe?

SECOND BEARER: No, not as far as Ah'n seen.

FIRST BEARER: You look at 'is 'ands, you'll see then. 'E'd non ha'e room to swing the pick.

The MANAGER goes on his knees.

MRS HOLROYD (shuddering): Oh, don't!

MANAGER: Ay, th' nails is broken a bit —

MRS HOLROYD (clenching her fists): Don't!

MANAGER: 'E'd be sure ter ma'e a bit of a fight. But th' gas 'ud soon get hold on 'im. Ay, it's an awful thing to think of, it is indeed.

MRS HOLROYD (her voice breaking): I can't bear it!

MANAGER: Eh, dear, we none on us know what's comin' next.

MRS HOLROYD (getting hysterical): Oh, it's too awful, it's too awful!

BLACKMORE: You'll disturb the children.

GRANDMOTHER: And you don't want them down here.

MANAGER: 'E'd no business to ha' been left, you know.

RIGLEY: An' what man, dost think, wor goin' to sit him down on his hams an' wait for a chap as wouldna say "thank yer" for his cump'ny? 'E'd bin ready to fall out wi' a flicker o' the candle, so who dost think wor goin' ter stop when we knowed 'e on'y kep on so's to get shut on us.

MANAGER: Tha'rt quite right, Bill, quite right. But theer you are.

RIGLEY: Ah' if we'd stopped, what good would it ha' done —

MANAGER: No, 'appen not, 'appen not.

RIGLEY: For, not known —

MANAGER: I'm sayin' nowt agen thee, neither one road nor t'other. (There is general silence — then, to MRS HOLROYD.) I should think th' inquest'll be at th' New Inn to-morrow, missis. I'll let you know.

MRS HOLROYD: Will there have to be an inquest?

MANAGER: Yes — there'll have to be an inquest. Shall you want anybody in, to stop with you to-night?

MRS HOLROYD: No.

MANAGER: Well, then, we'd best be goin'. I'll send my missis down first thing in the morning. It's a bad job, a bad job, it is. You'll be a' right then?

MRS HOLROYD: Yes.

MANAGER: Well, good night then — good night all.

ALL: Good night. Good night.

The MANAGER, followed by the two bearers, goes out, closing the door.

RIGLEY: It's like this, missis. I never should ha' gone, if he hadn't wanted us to.

MRS HOLROYD: Yes, I know.

RIGLEY: 'E wanted to come up by 's sen.

MRS HOLROYD (wearily): I know how it was, Mr Rigley.

RIGLEY: Yes —

BLACKMORE: Nobody could foresee.

RIGLEY (shaking his head): No. If there's owt, missis, as you want —

MRS HOLROYD: Yes — I think there isn't anything.

RIGLEY (after a moment): Well — good night — we've worked i' the same stall ower four years now —

MRS HOLROYD: Yes.

RIGLEY: Well, good night, missis.

MRS HOLROYD and BLACKMORE: Good night.

The GRANDMOTHER all this time has been rocking herself to and fro, moaning and murmuring beside the dead man. When RIGLEY has gone MRS

HOLROYD stands staring distractedly before her. She has not yet looked at her husband.

GRANDMOTHER: Have you got the things ready, Lizzie?

MRS HOLROYD: What things?

GRANDMOTHER: To lay the child out.

MRS HOLROYD (she shudders): No — what?

GRANDMOTHER: Haven't you put him by a pair o' white stockings, nor a white shirt?

MRS HOLROYD: He's got a white cricketing shirt — but not white stockings.

GRANDMOTHER: Then he'll have to have his father's. Let me look at the shirt, Lizzie. (MRS HOLROYD takes one from the dresser drawer.) This'll never do — a cold, canvas thing wi' a turndown collar. I s'll 'ave to fetch his father's. (Suddenly.) You don't want no other woman to touch him, to wash him and lay him out, do you?

MRS HOLROYD (weeping): No.

GRANDMOTHER: Then I'll fetch him his father's gear. We mustn't let him set, he'll be that heavy, bless him. (She takes her shawl.) I shan't be more than a few minutes, an' the young fellow can stop here till I come back.

BLACKMORE: Can't I go for you, Mrs Holroyd?

GRANDMOTHER: No. You couldn't find the things. We'll wash him as soon as I get back, Lizzie.

MRS HOLROYD: Alright.

She watches her mother-in-law go out. Then she starts, goes in the scullery for a bowl, in which she pours warm water. She takes a flannel and soap and towel. She stands, afraid to go any further.

BLACKMORE: Well!

MRS HOLROYD: This is a judgment on us.

BLACKMORE: Why?

MRS HOLROYD: On me, it is —

BLACKMORE: How?

MRS HOLROYD: It is.

BLACKMORE shakes his head.

MRS HOLROYD: Yesterday you talked of murdering him.

BLACKMORE: Well!

MRS HOLROYD: Now we've done it.

BLACKMORE: How?

MRS HOLROYD: He'd have come up with the others, if he hadn't felt — felt me murdering him.

BLACKMORE: But we can't help it.

MRS HOLROYD: It's my fault.

BLACKMORE: Don't be like that!

MRS HOLROYD (looking at him — then indicating her husband): I daren't see him.

BLACKMORE: No?

MRS HOLROYD: I've killed him, that is all.

BLACKMORE: No, you haven't.

MRS HOLROYD: Yes, I have.

BLACKMORE: We couldn't help it.

MRS HOLROYD: If he hadn't felt, if he hadn't known, he wouldn't have stayed, he'd have come up with the rest.

BLACKMORE: Well, and even if it was so, we can't help it now.

MRS HOLROYD: But we've killed him.

BLACKMORE: Ah, I'm tired —

MRS HOLROYD: Yes.

BLACKMORE (after a pause): Shall I stay?

MRS HOLROYD: I — I daren't be alone with him.

BLACKMORE (sitting down): No.

MRS HOLROYD: I don't love him. Now he's dead. I don't love him. He lies like he did yesterday.

BLACKMORE: I suppose, being dead — I don't know —

MRS HOLROYD: I think you'd better go.

BLACKMORE (rising): Tell me.

MRS HOLROYD: Yes.

BLACKMORE: You want me to go.

MRS HOLROYD: No — but do go. (They look at each other.)

BLACKMORE: I shall come to-morrow.

BLACKMORE goes out.

MRS HOLROYD stands very stiff, as if afraid of the dead man. Then she stoops down and begins to sponge his face, talking to him.

MRS HOLROYD: My dear, my dear — oh, my dear! I can't bear it, my dear — you shouldn't have done it. You shouldn't have done it. Oh — I can't bear it, for you. Why couldn't I do anything for you? The children's father — my dear — I wasn't good to you. But you shouldn't have done this to me. Oh, dear, oh, dear! Did it hurt you? — oh, my dear, it hurt you — oh, I can't bear it. No, things aren't fair — we went wrong, my dear. I never loved you enough — I never did. What a shame for you! It was a shame. But you didn't — you didn't try. I would have loved you — I tried hard. What a shame for you! It was so cruel for you. You couldn't help it — my dear, my dear. You couldn't help it. And I can't do anything for you, and it hurt you so! (She weeps bitterly, so her tears fall on the dead man's face; suddenly she kisses him.) My dear, my dear, what can I do for you, what can I? (She weeps as she wipes his face gently.)

Enter GRANDMOTHER.

GRANDMOTHER (putting a bundle on the table, and taking off her shawl): You're not all by yourself?

MRS HOLROYD: Yes.

GRANDMOTHER: It's a wonder you're not frightened. You've not washed his face.

MRS HOLROYD: Why should I be afraid of him — now, mother?

GRANDMOTHER (weeping): Ay, poor lamb, I can't think as ever you could have had reason to be frightened of him, Lizzie.

MRS HOLROYD: Yes — once —

GRANDMOTHER: Oh, but he went wrong. An' he was a taking lad, as iver was. (She cries pitifully.) And when I waked his father up and told him, he sat up in bed staring over his whiskers, and said should he come up? But when I'd managed to find the shirt and things, he was still in bed. You don't know what it

is to live with a man that has no feeling. But you've washed him, Lizzie?

MRS HOLROYD: I was finishing his head.

GRANDMOTHER: Let me do it, child.

MRS HOLROYD: I'll finish that.

GRANDMOTHER: Poor lamb — poor dear lamb! Yet I wouldn't wish him back, Lizzie. He must ha' died peaceful, Lizzie. He seems to be smiling. He always had such a rare smile on him — not that he's smiled much of late —

MRS HOLROYD: I loved him for that.

GRANDMOTHER: Ay, my poor child — my poor child.

MRS HOLROYD: He looks nice, mother.

GRANDMOTHER: I hope he made his peace with the Lord.

MRS HOLROYD: Yes.

GRANDMOTHER: If he hadn't time to make his peace with the Lord, I've no hopes of him. Dear o' me, dear o' me. Is there another bit of flannel anywhere?

MRS HOLROYD rises and brings a piece. The GRANDMOTHER begins to wash the breast of the dead man.

GRANDMOTHER: Well, I hope you'll be true to his children at least, Lizzie. (MRS HOLROYD weeps — the old woman continues her washing.) Eh — and he's fair as a lily. Did you ever see a man with a whiter skin — and flesh as fine as the driven snow. He's beautiful, he is, the lamb. Many's the time I've looked at him, and I've felt proud of him, I have. And now he lies here. And such arms on 'im! Look at the vaccination marks, Lizzie. When I took him to be vaccinated, he had a little pink bonnet with a feather. (Weeps.) Don't cry, my girl, don't. Sit up an' wash him a' that side, or we s'll never have him done. Oh, Lizzie!

MRS HOLROYD (sitting up, startled): What — what?

GRANDMOTHER: Look at his poor hand!

She holds up the right hand. The nails are bloody.

MRS HOLROYD: Oh, no! Oh, no! No!

Both women weep.

GRANDMOTHER (after a while): We maun get on, Lizzie.

MRS HOLROYD (sitting up): I can't touch his hands.

GRANDMOTHER: But I'm his mother — there's nothing I couldn't do for him.

MRS HOLROYD: I don't care — I don't care.

GRANDMOTHER: Prithree, prithree, Lizzie, I don't want thee goin' off, Lizzie.

MRS HOLROYD (moaning): Oh, what shall I do!

GRANDMOTHER: Why, go thee an' get his feet washed. He's setting stiff, and how shall we get him laid out?

MRS HOLROYD, sobbing, goes, kneels at the miner's feet, and begins pulling off the great boots.

GRANDMOTHER: There's hardly a mark on him. Eh, what a man he is! I've had some fine sons, Lizzie, I've had some big men of sons.

MRS HOLROYD: He was always a lot whiter than me. And he used to chaff me.

GRANDMOTHER: But his poor hands! I used to thank God for my children, but they're rods o' trouble, Lizzie, they are. Unfasten his belt, child. We mun get his things off soon, or else we s'll have such a job.

MRS HOLROYD, having dragged off the boots, rises. She is weeping.

CURTAIN

A COLLIER'S FRIDAY NIGHT



A PLAY IN THREE ACTS

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CHARACTERS

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ACT II

ACT III

CHARACTERS

MRS LAMBERT

LAMBERT

NELLIE LAMBERT

ERNEST LAMBERT

MAGGIE PEARSON

GERTIE COOMBER

BEATRICE WYLD

BARKER

CARLIN

The action of the play takes place in the kitchen of the Lamberts' house.

ACT I

The kitchen or living-room of a working-man's house. At the back the fireplace, with a large fire burning. On the left, on the oven side of the stove, a WOMAN of some fifty-five years sits in a wooden rocking-chair, reading. Behind her and above her, in the recess made by the fireplace, four shelves of books, the shelf-covers being of green serge, with woollen ball fringe, and the books being ill-assorted school books, with an edition of Lessing, florid in green and gilt, but tarnished. On the left, a window looking on a garden where the rain is dripping through the first twilight. Under the window, a sofa, the bed covered with red chintz. By the side of the window, on the wall near the ceiling, a quiver clothes-horse is outspread with the cotton articles which have been ironed, hanging to air. Under the outspread clothes is the door which communicates with the scullery and with the yard. On the right side of the fireplace, in the recess equivalent to that where the bookshelves stand, a long narrow window, and below it, a low, brown, fixed cupboard, whose top forms a little sideboard, on which stand a large black enamel box of oil-colours, and a similar japanned box of water-colours, with Reeve's silver trade-mark. There is also on the cupboard top a tall glass jar containing ragged pink chrysanthemums. On the right is a bookcase upon a chest of drawers. This piece of furniture is of stained polished wood in imitation of mahogany. The upper case is full of books, seen through the two flimsy glass doors: a large set of the World's Famous Literature in dark green at the top — then on the next shelf prize-books in calf and gold, and imitation soft leather poetry-books, and a Nuttall's dictionary and Cassell's French, German and Latin dictionaries. On each side of the bookcase are prints from water-colours, large, pleasing and well framed in oak. Between the little brown cupboard and the bookcase, an armchair, small, round, with many little staves; a comfortable chair such as is seen in many working-class kitchens; it has a red chintz cushion. There is another Windsor chair on the other side of the bookcase. Over the mantelpiece, which is high, with brass candlesticks and two "Coronation" tumblers in enamel, hangs a picture of Venice, from one of Stead's Christmas Numbers — nevertheless, satisfactory enough.

The WOMAN in the rocking-chair is dressed in black, and wears a black sateen apron. She wears spectacles, and is reading *The New Age*. Now and again

she looks over her paper at a piece of bread which stands on a hanging bar before the fire, propped up by a fork, toasting. There is a little pile of toast on a plate on the boiler hob beside a large saucepan; the kettle and a brown teapot are occupying the oven-top near the WOMAN. The table is laid for tea, with four large breakfast-cups in dark-blue willow-pattern, and plates similar. It is an oval mahogany table, large enough to seat eight comfortably. The WOMAN sees the piece of bread smoking, and takes it from the fire. She butters it and places it on the plate on the hob, after which she looks out of the window, then, taking her paper, sits down again in her place.

SOMEONE passes the long narrow window, only the head being seen, then quite close to the large window on the left. There is a noise as the outer door opens and is shut, then the kitchen door opens, and a GIRL enters. She is tall and thin, and wears a long grey coat and a large blue hat, quite plain. After glancing at the table, she crosses the room, drops her two exercise-books on the wooden chair by the bookcase, saying:

NELLIE LAMBERT: Oh! I am weary.

MOTHER: You are late.

NELLIE: I know I am. It's Agatha Karton — she is a great gaby. There's always something wrong with her register, and old Tommy gets in such a fever, the great kid.

She takes off her hat, and going to the door on right, stands in the doorway, hanging it up with her coat on the pegs in the passage, just by the doorway.

And I'm sure the youngsters have been regular little demons; I could have killed them.

MOTHER: I've no doubt they felt the same towards you, poor little wretches.

NELLIE (with a short laugh): I'll bet they did, for I spanked one or two of 'em well.

MOTHER: Trust you, trust you! You'll be getting the mothers if you're not

careful.

NELLIE (contemptuously): I had one old cat this afternoon. But I told her straight. I said: "If your Johnny, or Sammy, or whatever he is, is a nuisance, he'll be smacked, and there's an end of it." She was mad, but I told her straight; I didn't care. She can go to Tommy if she likes: I know he'll fuss her round, but I'll tell him too. Pah! he fusses the creatures up! — I would!

She comes towards the table, pushing up her hair with her fingers. It is heavy and brown, and has been flattened by her hat. She glances at herself in the little square mirror which hangs from a nail under the right end of the mantelpiece, a mere unconscious glance which betrays no feeling, and is just enough to make her negligently touch her hair again. She turns a trifle fretfully to the table.

NELLIE: Is there only potted meat? You know I can't bear it.

MOTHER (conciliatorily): Why, I thought you'd like it, a raw day like this — and with toast.

NELLIE: You know I don't. Why didn't you get some fruit? — a little tin of apricots —

MOTHER: I thought you'd be sick of apricots — I know Ernest is.

NELLIE: Well, I'm not — you know I'm not. Pappy potted meat!

She sits down on the sofa wearily. Her MOTHER pours out two cups of tea, and replaces the pot on the hob.

MOTHER: Won't you have some, then?

NELLIE (petulantly): No, I don't want it.

The MOTHER stands irresolute a moment, then she goes out. NELLIE reaches over to the bookshelves and takes a copy of *The Scarlet Pimpernel*, which she opens on the table, and reads, sipping her tea but not eating. In a moment or two she glances up, as the MOTHER passes the window and enters the scullery. There is the sound of the opening of a tin.

NELLIE: Have you fetched some? — Oh, you are a sweetling!

The MOTHER enters, with a little glass dish of small tinned apricots. They begin tea.

MOTHER: Polly Goddard says her young man got hurt in the pit this morning.

NELLIE: Oh — is it much? (She looks up from her book.)

MOTHER: One of his feet crushed. Poor Polly's very sad. What made her tell me was Ben Goddard going by. I didn't know he was at work again, but he was just coming home, and I asked her about him, and then she went on to tell me of her young man. They're all coming home from Selson, so I expect your Father won't be long.

NELLIE: Goodness! — I hope he'll let us get our tea first.

MOTHER: Well, you were late. If he once gets seated in the Miner's Arms there's no telling when he comes.

NELLIE: I don't care when he does, so long as he doesn't come yet.

MOTHER: Oh, it's all very well!

They both begin to read as they eat. After a moment another girl runs past the window and enters. She is a plump, fair girl, pink and white. She has just run across from the next house.

GERTIE COOMBER: Hello, my duck, and how are you?

NELLIE (looking up): Oh, alright, my bird.

GERTIE: Friday to-night. No Eddie for you! Oh, poor Nellie! Aren't I glad, though! (She snaps her fingers quaintly.)

The MOTHER laughs.

NELLIE: Mean cat!

GERTIE (giggling): No, I'm not a mean cat. But I like Friday night; we can go jinking off up town and wink at the boys. I like market night. (She puts her head on one side in a peculiar, quaint, simple fashion.)

The MOTHER laughs.

NELLIE: You wink! If she so much as sees a fellow who'd speak to her, she gets behind me and stands on one foot and then another.

GERTIE: I don't! No, I don't, Nellie Lambert. I go like this: "Oh, good evening, how are you? I'm sure I'm very pleased — " (She says this in a very quaint "prunes-and-prisms" manner, with her chin in the air and her hand extended. At the end she giggles.)

The MOTHER, with her cup in her hand, leans back and laughs. NELLIE, amused in spite of herself, smiles shortly.

NELLIE: You are a daft object! What about last week, when David Thompson —

GERTIE puts her hand up and flips the air with affected contempt.

GERTIE: David Thompson! A bacon sawyer! Ph!

NELLIE: What a name! Not likely. Mrs Grocock! (She giggles.) Oh dear no, nothing short of Mrs Carooso.

She holds back the skirts of her long pinafore with one hand and affects the Gibson bend.

MOTHER (laughing heartily): Caruso! Caruso! A great fat fellow — !

GERTIE: Besides, a collier! I'm not going to wash stinking pit-things.

NELLIE: You don't know what you'll do yet, my girl. I never knew such cheek! I should think you want somebody grand, you do.

GERTIE: I do that. Somebody who'll say, "Yes, dear. Oh yes, dear! Certainly, certainly!"

She simpers across the room, then giggles.

NELLIE: You soft cat, you! But look here, Gert, you'll get paid out, treating Bernard Hufton as you do.

GERTIE (suddenly irritated): Oh, I can't abide him. I always feel as if I could smack his face. He thinks himself slikey. He always makes my —

A head passes the narrow side window.

Oh, glory! there's Mr Lambert. I'm off!

She draws back against the bookcase. A man passes the large window. The door opens and he enters. He is a man of middling stature, a miner, black from the pit. His shoulders are pushed up because he is cold. He has a bushy iron-grey beard. He takes from his pocket a tin bottle and a knotted "snap" bag — his food bag of dirty calico — and puts them with a bang on the table. Then he drags his heavily-shod feet to the door on right; he limps slightly, one leg being shorter than the other. He hangs up his coat and cap in the passage and comes back into the living-room. No one speaks. He wears a grey-and-black neckerchief and, being coatless, his black arms are bare to the elbows, where end the loose dirty sleeves of his flannel singlet. The MOTHER rises and goes to the scullery, carrying the heavy saucepan. The man gets hold of the table and pulls it nearer the fire, away from his daughter.

NELLIE: Why can't you leave the table where it was! We don't want it stuck on top of the fire.

FATHER: Ah dun, if you dunna.

He drags up his armchair and sits down at the table full in front of the fire.

'An yer got a drink for me?

The MOTHER comes and pours out a cup of tea, then goes back to the scullery.

It's a nice thing as a man as comes home from th' pit parched up canna ha'e a drink got 'im. (He speaks disagreeably.)

MOTHER: Oh, you needn't begin! I know you've been stopping, drinking.

FATHER: Dun yer? — Well, yer know too much, then. You wiser than them as knows, you are!

There is a general silence, as if the three listeners were shrugging their shoulders in contempt and anger. The FATHER pours out his tea into his saucer, blows it and sucks it up. NELLIE looks up from her book and glowers at him with ferocity. GERTIE puts her hand before her mouth and giggles behind his back at the noise. He does not drink much, but sets the cup back in the saucer and lays his grimed arms wearily along the table. The MOTHER enters with a plate of cabbage.

MOTHER: Here, that's a clean cloth.

She does not speak unkindly.

FATHER (brutally): You should put a dotty (dirty) 'un on, then. The MOTHER takes a newspaper and spreads it over the cloth before him. She kneels at the oven, takes out a stew-jar, and puts meat and gravy on the plate with the cabbage, and sets it before him. He does not begin at once to eat. The MOTHER puts back her chair against the wall and sits down.

MOTHER: Are your trousers wet?

FATHER (as he eats): A bit.

MOTHER: Then why don't you take them off?

FATHER (in a tone of brutal authority): Fetch my breeches an' wa's'coat down, Nellie.

NELLIE (continuing to read, her hands pushed in among her hair): You can ask me properly.

The FATHER pushes his beard forward and glares at her with futile ferocity. She reads on. GERTIE COOMBER, at the back, shifts from one foot to the other, then coughs behind her hand as if she had a little cold. The MOTHER

risers and goes out by door on right.

FATHER: You lazy, idle bitch, you let your mother go!

NELLIE (shrugging her shoulders): You can shut up. (She speaks with cold contempt.)

GERTIE sighs audibly. The tension of the scene will not let her run home. NELLIE looks up, flushed, carefully avoiding her father.

NELLIE: Aren't you going to sit down, Gert?

GERTIE: No, I'm off.

NELLIE: Wait a bit and I'll come across with you. I don't want to stop here.

The FATHER stirs in his chair with rage at the implication. The MOTHER comes downstairs and enters with a pair of black trousers, from which the braces are trailing, and a black waistcoat lined with cream and red lining. She drops them against her husband's chair.

MOTHER (kindly, trying to restore the atmosphere): Aren't you going to sit down, Gertie? Go on the stool.

GERTIE takes a small stool on the right side of fireplace, and sits toying with the bright brass tap of the boiler. The MOTHER goes out again on right, and enters immediately with five bread tins and a piece of lard paper. She stands on the hearthrug greasing the tins. The FATHER kicks off his great boots and stands warming his trousers before the fire, turning them and warming them thoroughly.

GERTIE: Are they cold, Mr Lambert?

FATHER: They are that! Look you, they steaming like a sweating hoss.

MOTHER: Get away, man! The driest thing in the house would smoke if you held it in front of the fire like that.

FATHER (shortly): Ah, I know I'm a liar. I knowed it to begin wi'.

NELLIE (much irritated): Isn't he a nasty-tempered kid!

GERTIE: But those front bedrooms are clammy.

FATHER (gratified): They h'are, Gertie, they h'are.

GERTIE (turning to avoid NELLIE'S contempt and pottering the fire): I know the things I bring down from ours, they fair damp in a day.

FATHER: They h'are, Gertie, I know it. And I wonder how 'er'd like to clap 'er arse into wet breeches.

He goes scrambling off to door on right, trailing his breeches.

NELLIE (fiercely): Father!

GERTIE puts her face into her hands and laughs with a half-audible laugh that shakes her body.

I can't think what you've got to laugh at, Gertie Coomber.

The MOTHER, glancing at her irate daughter, laughs also. She moves aside the small wooden rocking-chair, and, drawing forth a great panchion of dough from the corner under the bookshelves, begins to fill the bread tins. She sets them on the hearth — which has no fender, the day being Friday, when the steel fender is put away, after having been carefully cleaned to be saved for Saturday afternoon. The FATHER enters, the braces of his trousers dangling, and drops the heavy moleskin pit breeches in corner on right.

NELLIE: I wonder why you can't put them in the scullery; the smell of them's hateful.

FATHER: You mun put up wi' it, then. If you were i' th' pit you'd niver put your nose up at them again.

He sits down and recommences eating. The sound further irritates his daughter, who again pushes her fingers into her hair, covering her ears with her palms. Her father notices, and his manners become coarser. NELLIE rises, leaving her book

open on the table.

NELLIE: Come on, Gert! (She speaks with contemptuous impatience.)

The FATHER watches them go out. He lays his arms along the newspaper, wearily.

FATHER: I'm too tired ter h'eat.

MOTHER (sniffing, and hardening a little): I wonder why you always have to go and set her off in a tantrum as soon as you come in.

FATHER: A cheeky bitch; 'er wants a good slap at th' side o' th' mouth!

MOTHER (incensed): If you've no more sense than that, I don't wonder —

FATHER: You don't wonder — you don't wonder! No, I know you don't wonder. It's you as eggs 'em on against me, both on 'em.

MOTHER (scornfully): You set them against yourself. You do your best for it, every time they come in.

FATHER: Do I, do I! I set 'em against me, do I? I'm going to stand 'em orderin' me about, an' turnin' their noses up, am I?

MOTHER: You shouldn't make them turn their noses up, then. If you do your best for it, what do you expect?

FATHER: A jumped-up monkey! An' it's you as 'as made 'em like it, the pair on 'em. There's neither of 'em but what treats me like a dog. I'm not daft! I'm not blind! I can see it.

MOTHER: If you're so clever at seeing it, I should have thought you'd have sense enough not to begin it and carry it on as you do.

FATHER: Me begin it! When do I begin it? You niver hear me say a word to 'em, till they've snapped at me as if I was a — as if I was a — No, it's you as puts 'em on in. It's you, you blasted —

He bangs the table with his fist. The MOTHER puts the bread in the oven, from which she takes a rice pudding; then she sits down to read. He glares across the table, then goes on eating. After a little while he pushes the plate from him. The MOTHER affects not to notice for a moment.

‘An yer got any puddin’?

MOTHER: Have you finished?

She rises, takes a plate and, crouching on the hearth, gives him his pudding. She glances at the clock, and clears the tea-things from her daughter’s place. She puts another piece of toast down, there remaining only two pieces on the plate.

FATHER (looking at the rice pudding): Is this what you’n had?

MOTHER: No; we had nothing.

FATHER: No, I’ll bet you non ‘ad this baby pap.

MOTHER: No, I had nothing for a change, and Nellie took her dinner.

FATHER (eating unwillingly): Is there no other puddin’ as you could ‘a made?

MOTHER: Goodness, man, are you so mightily particular about your belly? This is the first rice pudding you’ve had for goodness knows how long, and — No, I couldn’t make any other. In the first place, it’s Friday, and in the second, I’d nothing to make it with.

FATHER: You wouldna ha’e, not for me. But if you ‘a wanted —

MOTHER (interrupting): You needn’t say any more. The fact of the matter is, somebody’s put you out at the pit, and you come home to vent your spleen on us.

FATHER (shouting): You’re a liar, you’re a liar! A man comes home after a hard day’s work to folks as ‘as never a word to say to ‘im, ‘as shuts up the minute ‘e enters the house, as ‘ates the sight of ‘im as soon as ‘e comes in th’ room — !

MOTHER (with fierceness): We’ve had quite enough, we’ve had quite enough!

Our Ernest'll be in in a minute and we're not going to have this row going on; he's coming home all the way from Derby, trailing from college to a house like this, tired out with study and all this journey: we're not going to have it, I tell you.

Her husband stares at her dumbly, betwixt anger and shame and sorrow, of which an undignified rage is predominant. The MOTHER carries out some pots to the scullery, re-enters, takes the slice of toast and butters it.

FATHER: It's about time as we had a light on it; I canna see what I'm eatin'.

The MOTHER puts down the toast on the hob, and having fetched a dustpan from the scullery, goes out on right to the cellar to turn on the gas and to bring coals. She is heard coming up the steps heavily. She mends the fire, and then lights the gas at a brass pendant hanging over the table. Directly after there enters a young man of twenty-one, tall and broad, pale, clean-shaven, with the brownish hair of the "ginger" class, which is all ruffled when he has taken off his cap, after having pulled various books from his pockets and put them on the little cupboard top. He takes off his coat at door right as his sister has done.

ERNEST (blowing slightly through pursed lips): Phew! It is hot in here!

FATHER (bluntly, but amiably): Hot! It's non hot! I could do wi' it ten times hotter.

MOTHER: Oh, you! You've got, as I've always said, a hide like a hippopotamus. You ought to have been a salamander.

FATHER: Oh ah, I know tha'll ha'e summat ter say.

MOTHER: Is it raining now, Ernest?

ERNEST: Just a drizzle in the air, like a thick mist.

MOTHER: Ay, isn't it sickening? You'd better take your boots off.

ERNEST (sitting in his sister's place on the sofa): Oh, they're not wet.

MOTHER: They must be damp.

ERNEST: No, they're not. There's a pavement all the way. Here, look at my rose! One of the girls in Coll. gave it me, and the tan-yard girls tried to beg it. They are brazen hussies! "Gi'e's thy flower, Sorry; gi'e's thy buttonhole" — and one of them tried to snatch it. They have a bobby down by the tan-yard brook every night now. Their talk used to be awful, and it's so dark down there, under the trees. Where's Nellie?

MOTHER: In Coomers'.

ERNEST: Give me a bit of my paper, Father. You know the leaf I want: that with the reviews of books on.

FATHER: Nay, I know nowt about reviews o' books. Here t'art. Ta'e it.

FATHER hands the newspaper to his son, who takes out two leaves and hands the rest back.

ERNEST: Here you are; I only want this.

FATHER: Nay, I non want it. I mun get me washed. We s'll ha'e th' men here directly.

ERNEST: I say, Mater, another seven-and-six up your sleeve?

MOTHER: I'm sure! And in the middle of the term, too! What's it for this time?

ERNEST: Piers the Ploughman, that piffle, and two books of Horace: Quintus Horatius Flaccus, dear old chap.

MOTHER: And when have you to pay for them?

ERNEST: Well, I've ordered them, and they'll come on Tuesday. I'm sure I don't know what we wanted that Piers Ploughman for — it's sheer rot, and old Beasley could have gassed on it without making us buy it, if he'd liked. Yes, I did feel wild. Seven-and-sixpence!

FATHER: I should non get tem, then. You needna buy 'em unless you like. Dunna get 'em, then.

ERNEST: Well, I've ordered them.

FATHER: If you 'anna the money you canna 'a'e 'em, whether or not.

MOTHER: Don't talk nonsense. If he has to have them, he has. But the money you have to pay for books, and they're no good when you've done with them! — I'm sure it's really sickening, it is!

ERNEST: Oh, never mind, Little; I s'll get 'em for six shillings. Is it a worry, Mütterchen?

MOTHER: It is, but I suppose if it has to be, it has.

ERNEST: Old Beasley is an old chough. While he was lecturing this afternoon Arnold and Hinrich were playing nap; and the girls always write letters, and I went fast asleep.

FATHER: So that's what you go'n to Collige for, is it?

ERNEST (nettled): No, it isn't. Only old Beasley's such a dry old ass, with his lectures on Burke. He's a mumbling parson, so what do you expect?

The FATHER grunts, rises and fetches a clean new bucket from the scullery. He hangs this on the top of the boiler, and turns on the water. Then he pulls on his flannel singlet and stands stripped to the waist, watching the hot water dribble into the bucket. The pail half-filled, he goes out to the scullery on left.

Do you know what Professor Staynes said this morning, Mother? He said I'd got an instinct for Latin — and you know he's one of the best fellows in England on the classics: edits Ovid and whatnot. An instinct for Latin, he said.

MOTHER (smiling, gratified): Well, it's a funny thing to have an instinct for.

ERNEST: I generally get an alpha plus. That's the highest, you know, Mater. Prof. Staynes generally gives me that.

MOTHER: Your grandfather was always fond of dry reading: economics and history. But I don't know where an instinct for Latin comes from — not from the

Lamberts, that's a certainty. Your Aunt Ellen would say, from the Vernons.

She smiles ironically as she rises to pour him another cup of tea, taking the teapot from the hob and standing it, empty, on the father's plate.

ERNEST: Who are the Vernons?

MOTHER (smiling): It's a wonder your Aunt Ellen or your Aunt Eunice has never told you. . . .

ERNEST: Well, they haven't. What is it, Mütter?

MOTHER (sniffing): A parcel of nonsense. . . .

ERNEST: Oh, go on, Ma, you are tantalizing! You hug it like any blessed girl.

MOTHER: Yes, your Aunt Ellen always said she would claim the peacock and thistle for her crest, if ever . . .

ERNEST (delighted): The Peacock and Thistle! It sounds like the name of a pub.

MOTHER: My great-great-grandfather married a Lady Vernon — so they say. As if it made any matter — a mere tale!

ERNEST: Is it a fact though, Matoushka? Why didn't you tell us before?

MOTHER (sniffing): What should I repeat such —

FATHER (shouting from the scullery, whence has come the noise of his washing): 'An yer put that towil ter dry?

MOTHER (muttering): The towel's dry enough.

She goes out and is heard taking the roller towel from behind the outer door. She returns, and stands before the fire, holding the towel to dry. ERNEST LAMBERT, having frowned and shrugged his shoulders, is reading.

MOTHER: I suppose you won't have that bit of rice pudding?

Her son looks up, reaches over and takes the brown dish from the hearth. He begins to eat from the dish.

ERNEST: I went to the “Savoy” to-day.

MOTHER: I shouldn’t go to that vegetable place. I don’t believe there’s any substance in it.

ERNEST: Substance! Oh, lord! I had an asparagus omelette, I believe they called it; it was too much for me! A great stodgy thing! But I like the Savoy, generally. It was —

Somebody comes running across the yard. NELLIE LAMBERT enters with a rush.

NELLIE: Hello! have you done?

FATHER (from the scullery): Are you going to shut that doo-ar! (Shouting.)

NELLIE (with a quick shrug of the shoulders): It is shut. (brightly, to her brother) Who brought this rose? It’ll just do for me. Who gave it you? — Lois?

ERNEST (flushing): What do you want to know for? You’re always saying “Lois”. I don’t care a button about Lois.

NELLIE: Keep cool, dear boy, keep cool.

She goes flying lightly round, clearing the table. The FATHER, dripping, bending forward almost double, comes hurrying from the scullery to the fire. NELLIE whisks by him, her long pinafore rustling.

FATHER (taking the towel): Ow (she) goes rushin’ about, draughtin’. (Rubs his head, sitting on his heels very close to the fire.)

NELLIE (smiling contemptuously, to herself): Poor kid!

FATHER (having wiped his face): An’ there isn’t another man in th’ kingdom as ‘ud stan’ i’ that scullery stark naked. It’s like standin’ i’ t’ cowl watter.

MOTHER (calmly): Many a man stands in a colder.

FATHER (shortly): Ah, I'll back; I'll back there is! Other men's wives brings th' puncheon on to th' 'earthstone, an' gets the watter for 'em, an' —

MOTHER: Other men's wives may do: more fools them: you won't catch me.

FATHER: No, you wanna; you may back your life o' that! An' what if you 'ad to?

MOTHER: Who'd make me?

FATHER (blustering): Me.

MOTHER (laughing shortly): Not half a dozen such.

The FATHER grunts. NELLIE, having cleared the table, pushes him aside a little and lets the crumbs fall into hearth.

FATHER: A lazy, idle, stinkin' trick!

She whisks the tablecloth away without speaking.

An' tha doesna come waftin' in again when I'm washin' me, tha remembers.

ERNEST (to his mother, who is turning the bread): Fancy! Swinburne's dead.

MOTHER: Yes, so I saw. But he was getting on.

FATHER (to NELLIE, who has come to the boiler and is kneeling, getting a lading-can full of water): Here, Nellie, gie my back a wash.

She goes out, and comes immediately with flannel and soap. She claps the flannel on his back.

(Wincing) Ooo! The nasty bitch!

NELLIE bubbles with laughter. The MOTHER turns aside to laugh.

NELLIE: You great baby, afraid of a cold flannel!

She finishes washing his back and goes into the scullery to wash the pots. The FATHER takes his flannel shirt from the bookcase cupboard and puts it on, letting it hang over his trousers. Then he takes a little blue-striped cotton bag from his pit trousers' pocket and throws it on the table to his wife.

FATHER: Count it. (He shuffles upstairs.)

The MOTHER counts the money, putting it in little piles, checking it from two white papers. She leaves it on the table. ERNEST goes into the scullery to wash his hands and is heard talking to his sister, who is wiping the pots. A knock at the outer door.

ERNEST: Good evening, Mr Barker.

A VOICE: Good evenin', Ernest.

A miner enters: pale, short, but well-made. He has a hard-looking head with short black hair. He lays his cap on a chair.

Good evenin', Missis. 'Asn't Carlin come? Mester upstairs?

MOTHER: Yes, he'll be down in a minute. I don't expect Mr Carlin will be many minutes. Sit down, Mr Barker. How's that lad of yours?

BARKER: Well, 'e seems to be goin' on nicely, thank yer. Dixon took th' splints off last wik.

MOTHER: Oh, well, that's better. He'll be alright directly. I should think he doesn't want to go in the pit again.

BARKER: 'E doesna. 'E says 'e shall go farmin' wi' Jakes; but I shanna let 'im. It's nowt o' a sort o' job, that.

MOTHER: No, it isn't. (Lowering her voice.) And how's missis?

BARKER (also lowering his voice): Well, I don't know. I want ter get back as soon as I'n got a few groceries an' stuff in. I sent for Mrs Smalley afore I com'n

out. An' I'm come an' forgot th' market bag.

MOTHER (going into the scullery): Have mine, have mine. Nay, I've got another. (Brings him a large carpet bag with leather handles.)

BARKER: Thank yer, Missis. I can bring it back next wik. You sure you wanna want it?

Another knock. Enter another man, fair, pale, smiling, an inconsiderable man.

CARLIN: Hgh! Tha's bested me then? Good evenin', Missis.

BARKER: Yes, I'n bet thee.

Enter the FATHER. He has put on a turn-down collar and a black tie, and his black waistcoat is buttoned, but he wears no coat. The other men take off the large neckerchiefs, grey and white silk, in fine check, and show similar collars. The FATHER assumes a slight tone of superiority.

FATHER: Well, you've arrived, then! An' 'ow's the missis by now, Joe?

BARKER: Well, I dun know, Walter. It might be any minnit.

FATHER (sympathetically): Hu! We may as well set to, then, an' get it done.

They sit at the table, on the side of the fire. ERNEST LAMBERT comes in and takes an exercise-book from the shelves and begins to do algebra, using a text-book. He writes with a fountain-pen.

CARLIN: They gran' things, them fountain-pens.

BARKER: They are that!

CARLIN: What's th' mak on it, Ernest?

ERNEST: It's an Onoto.

BARKER: Oh-ah! An' 'ow dun yer fill it? They says as it hold wi' a vacuum.

ERNEST: It's like this: you push this down, put the nib in th' ink, and then pull it out. It's a sort of a pump.

BARKER: Um! It's a canny thing, that!

CARLIN: It is an' a'.

FATHER: Yes, it's a very good idea. (He is slightly condescending.)

MOTHER: Look at the bread, Ernest.

ERNEST: Alright, Mater.

She goes upstairs, it being tacitly understood that she shall not know how much money falls to her husband's share as chief "butty" in the weekly reckoning.

BARKER: Is it counted?

FATHER: Yes. It's alright, Ernest?

ERNEST (not looking up): Yes.

They begin to reckon, first putting aside the wages of their day men; then the FATHER and BARKER take four-and-three-pence, as equivalent to CARLIN'S rent, which has been stopped; then the FATHER gives a coin each, dividing the money in that way. It is occasionally a puzzling process and needs the Ready Reckoner from the shelf behind.

END OF ACT I

ACT II

Scene, as before: the men are just finishing reckoning. BARKER and CARLIN, talking in a mutter, put their money in their pockets. ERNEST LAMBERT is drawing a circle with a pair of compasses. CARLIN rises.

CARLIN: Well, I might as well be shiftin’.

BARKER: Ay, I mun get off.

Enter NELLIE, who has finished washing the pots, drying her hands on a small towel. She crosses to the mirror hanging at the right extremity of the mantelpiece.

CARLIN: Well, Nellie!

NELLIE (very amiably, even gaily): Good evening, Mr Carlin. Just off?

CARLIN: Yes — ah mun goo.

BARKER: An’ ‘ow’s th’ instrument by now, Nellie?

NELLIE: The instrument? Oh, the piano! Ours is a tinny old thing. Oh, yes, you’re learning. How are you getting on?

BARKER: Oh, we keep goin’ on, like. ‘Ave you got any fresh music?

FATHER: Ah, I bet ‘er ‘as. Ow’s gerrin’ some iv’ry day or tow.

NELLIE: I’ve got some Grieg — lovely! Hard, though. It is funny — ever so funny.

BARKER: An’ yer iver ‘eared that piece “The Maiden’s Prayer”?

NELLIE (turning aside and laughing): Yes. Do you like it? It is pretty, isn’t it?

BARKER: I 'ad that for my last piece.

NELLIE: Did you? Can you play it?

BARKER (with some satisfaction): Yes, I can do it pretty fair. 'An yer got th' piece?

NELLIE: Yes. Will you play it for us? Half a minute.

She finishes stroking her hair up with her side-combs, and, taking the matches from the mantelpiece, leads the way to the door.

Come on.

FATHER: Yes, step forward, Joe.

BARKER goes out after NELLIE. Through the open door comes the crashing sound of the miner's banging through *The Maiden's Prayer* on an old sharp-toned piano. CARLIN stands listening, and shakes his head at the FATHER, who smiles back, glancing at the same time nervously at his son, who has buried his hands in his hair.

CARLIN: Well, are ter comin' down, George? (He moves towards the door.)

FATHER (lighting his pipe — between the puffs): In about quarter of an hour, Fred.

CARLIN: Good night, then. Good night, Ernest. (He goes out.)

The MOTHER is heard coming downstairs. She glances at her son, and shuts the passage door. Then she hurries to the oven and turns the bread. As she moves away again her husband thrusts out his hand and gives her something.

FATHER (going towards the passage door): I know it's a bad wik. (He goes out.)

MOTHER (counts the money he has given her, gives a little rapid clicking with her tongue on the roof of her mouth, tossing her head up once): Twenty-eight shillings! (Counts again.) Twenty-eight shillings! (To her son.) And what was

the cheque?

ERNEST (looking up, with a frown of irritation): Eight pounds one and six, and stoppages.

MOTHER: And he gives me a frowsty twenty-eight . . . and I've got his club to pay, and you a pair of boots. . . . Twenty-eight! . . . I wonder if he thinks the house is kept on nothing. . . . I'll take good care he gets nothing extra, I will, too. . . . I knew it, though — I knew he'd been running up a nice score at the Tunns' — that's what it is. There's rent, six-and-six, and clubs seven shillings, besides insurance and gas and everything else. I wonder how he thinks it's done — I wonder if he thinks we live on air?

ERNEST (looking up with pain and irritation): Oh, Mater, don't bother! What's the good? If you worry for ever it won't make it any more.

MOTHER (softened, conquering her distress): Oh, yes, it's all very well for you, but if I didn't worry what would become of us I should like to know?

GERTIE COOMBER runs in. She is wearing a large blue felt hat and a Norfolk costume; she is carrying a round basket. From the parlour comes the sound of Grieg's Anitra's Tanz, and then Ase's Tod, played well, with real sympathy.

GERTIE (with a little shy apprehension): Who's in the parlour?

MOTHER: It's only Mr Barker. (Smiling slightly.) He wanted to show Nellie how well he could play "The Maiden's Prayer".

GERTIE suddenly covers her mouth and laughs.

GERTIE (still laughing): He, he! I'll bet it was a thump! Pomp! Pomp! (Makes a piano-thumping gesture.) Did you hear it, Ernest?

ERNEST (not looking up): Infernal shindy.

GERTIE puts up her shoulders and giggles, looking askance at the student who, she knows, is getting tired of interruptions.

MOTHER: Yes, I wish he'd go — (almost whispering) — and his wife is

expecting to go to bed any minute.

GERTIE puts her lower lip between her teeth and looks serious. The music stops. BARKER and NELLIE are heard talking, then the FATHER. There is a click of boots on the tiled passage and they enter.

NELLIE: What did you think of Mr Barker, Mother? — don't you think it's good? I think it's wonderful — don't you, Ernest?

ERNEST (grunting): Um — it is.

GERTIE COOMBER suddenly hides behind her friend and laughs.

MOTHER (to BARKER): Yes, I'm sure you get on wonderfully — wonderfully — considering.

BARKER: Yes, ah's non done so bad, I think.

FATHER: Tha 'asna, Joe, tha 'asna, indeed!

MOTHER: Don't forget the bag, Mr Barker — I know you'll want it.

BARKER: Oh, thank yer. Well, I mun goo. Tha'rt comin' down, George?

FATHER: Yes, I'm comin' down, Joe. I'll just get my top-coat on, an' then — (He struggles awkwardly into his overcoat.)

BARKER resumes his grey muffler.

BARKER: Well, good night, everybody; good night, Ernest — an' thank yer, Missis.

MOTHER: I hope things will be — (She nods significantly.) — alright.

BARKER: Ah, thank yer, I hope it will. I expect so: there's no reason why it shouldn't. Good night.

ALL: Good night, Mr Barker.

The FATHER and BARKER go out. Immediately NELLIE flings her arms round GERTIE'S neck.

NELLIE: Save me, Gert, save me! I thought I was done for that time. . . . I gave myself up! The poor piano! Mother, it'll want tuning now, if it never did before.

MOTHER (with slight asperity, half-amused): It may want at it, then.

GERTIE (laughing): You're done, Nellie, you're done brown! If it's like dropping a saucepan-lid — no — you've got to put up with it!

NELLIE: I don't care. It couldn't be much worse than it is, rotten old thing. (She pulls off her pinafore and hangs it over the back of a chair, then goes to the mirror, once more to arrange her hair.)

GERTIE: Oh, come on, Nellie, Cornell's will be crammed.

NELLIE: Don't worry, my dear. What are you going to fetch? Anything nice?

GERTIE: No, I'm not — only bacon and cheese; they send you any stuff: cat and candles — any muck!

The MOTHER takes the little stool and sits down on it on the hearthrug, lacing up her boots.

MOTHER: I suppose you're not going out, Ernest?

ERNEST: No.

MOTHER: Oh — so you can look after the bread. There are two brown loaves at the top; they'll be about half an hour; the white one's nearly done. Put the other in as soon as they come out. Don't go and forget them, now.

ERNEST: No.

MOTHER: He says "No!" (She shakes her head at him with indulgent, proud affection.)

NELLIE (as if casually, yet at once putting tension into the atmosphere): Is Mag

coming down?

He does not answer immediately.

MOTHER: I should think not, a night like this, and all the mud there is.

ERNEST: She said she'd come and do some French. Why?

NELLIE (with a half-smile, off-handedly): Nothing.

MOTHER: You'd never think she'd trapse through all this mud. . . .

NELLIE: Don't bother. She'd come if she had to have water-wings to flop through.

GERTIE begins to giggle at the idea. The MOTHER sniffs.

ERNEST (satirically): Just as you'd flounder to your Eddie.

GERTIE lifts her hands with a little sharp gesture as if to say, "Now the fun's begun!"

NELLIE (turning suddenly, afire with scorn): Oh, should I? You'd catch me running after anybody!

MOTHER (rising): There, that'll do. Why don't you go up town, if you're going?

NELLIE LAMBERT haughtily marches off and puts on a dark coat and a blue hat.

NELLIE: Is it raining, Gert?

GERTIE: No, it's quite fine.

NELLIE: I'll bet it's fine!

GERTIE: Well, you asked me. It is fine; it's not raining.

The MOTHER re-enters from the passage, bringing a bonnet and a black coat.

NELLIE: Want me to bring anything, Mater?

MOTHER: I shall leave the meat for you.

NELLIE: Alright. Come on, Gert.

They go out.

MOTHER (She dreads that her son is angry with her and, affecting carelessness, puts the question to him, to find out): Should we be getting a few Christmas-tree things for little Margaret? I expect Emma and Joe will be here for Christmas: it seems nothing but right, and it's only six weeks now.

ERNEST (coldly): Alright.

He gets up and takes another book from the shelf without looking at her. She stands a moment suspended in the act of putting a pin through her bonnet.

MOTHER: Well, I think we ought to make a bit of Christmas for the little thing, don't you?

ERNEST: Ay. You gave our things to the lads, didn't you? (He still does not look up from his books.)

MOTHER (with a sound of failure in her voice): Yes. And they've kept them better than ever I thought they would. They've only broken your blue bird — the one you bought when you were quite little.

There is a noise of footsteps and a knock at the door. The MOTHER answers.

(Trying to be affable, but diffident, her gorge having risen a little.) Oh, is it you, Maggie? Come in. How ever have you got down, a night like this? Didn't you get over the ankles in mud?

She re-enters, followed by a ruddy girl of twenty, a full-bosomed, heavily-built girl, of medium stature and handsome appearance, ruddy and black. She is wearing a crimson tam-o'-shanter and a long grey coat. She keeps her head

lowered, and glancing only once splendidly at ERNEST, replies with a strange, humble defiance:

MAGGIE: No — oh, it's not so bad: besides, I came all round by the road.

MOTHER: I should think you're tired, after school.

MAGGIE: No; it's a relief to walk in the open; and I rather like a black night; you can wrap yourself up in it. Is Nellie out?

MOTHER (stiffly): Yes; she's gone up town.

MAGGIE (non-significantly): Ah, I thought I passed her. I wasn't sure. She wouldn't notice me; it is dark over the fields.

MOTHER: Yes, it is. I'm sure I'm awful at recognizing people.

MAGGIE: Yes — and so am I, generally. But it's no good bothering. If they like to take offence, they have to. . . . I can't help it.

The MOTHER sniffs slightly. She goes into the passage and returns with a string net bag. She is ready to go out.

MOTHER (still distantly): Won't you take your things off? (Looks at the bread once more before going.)

MAGGIE: Ah, thanks, I will.

She takes on her hat and coat and hangs them in the passage. She is wearing a dark blue cloth "pinafore-dress", and beneath the blue straps and shoulder pieces a blouse of fine woollen stuff with a small intricate pattern of brown and red. She is flushed and handsome; her features are large, her eyes dark, and her hair falls in loose profusion of black tendrils about her face. The coil at the back is coming undone; it is short and not heavy. She glances supremely at ERNEST, feeling him watching her.

MOTHER (at the oven): You hear, Ernest? This white cake will be done in about five minutes, and the brown loaves in about twenty.

ERNEST: Alright, my dear.

This time it is she who will not look at him.

MAGGIE (laughing a low, short laugh): My hair! — is it a sight? I have to keep my coat collar up, or it would drop right down — what bit of it there is.

She stands away from the mirror, pinning it up; but she cannot refrain from just one glance at herself.

ERNEST LAMBERT watches her, and then turns to his MOTHER, who is pulling on a pair of shabby black gloves. MRS LAMBERT, however, keeps her eyes consciously averted; she is offended, and is a woman of fierce pride.

MOTHER: Well, I expect I shall see you again, Maggie.

MAGGIE (with a faint, grave triumph): It depends what time you come back. I shan't have to be late.

MOTHER: Oh, you'll be here when I get back.

MAGGIE (submissive, but with minute irony): Very well.

MOTHER: And don't forget that bread, Ernest.

She picks her bag off the table and goes out, without having looked at either of them.

ERNEST (affectionately): No, Little, I won't.

There is a pause for a moment. MAGGIE PEARSON sits in the armchair opposite him, who is on the sofa, and looks straight at him. He raises his head after a moment and smiles at her.

MAGGIE: Did you expect me?

ERNEST (nodding): I knew you'd come. You know, when you feel as certain as if you couldn't possibly be mistaken. But I did swear when I came out of Coll. and found it raining.

MAGGIE: So did I. Well, not swear, but I was mad. Hasn't it been a horrid week?

ERNEST: Hasn't it? — and I've been so sick of things.

MAGGIE: Of what?

ERNEST: Oh, of fooling about at College — and everything.

MAGGIE (grimly): You'd be sicker of school.

ERNEST: I don't know. At any rate I should be doing something real, whereas, as it is — oh, Coll.'s all foolery and flummery.

MAGGIE: I wish I had a chance of going. I feel as if they'd been pulling things away from me all week — like a baby that has had everything taken from it.

ERNEST (laughing): Well, if school pulls all your playthings and pretty things away from you, College does worse: it makes them all silly and idiotic, and you hate them — and — what then — !

MAGGIE (seriously): Why? How?

ERNEST: Oh, I don't know. You have to fool about so much, and listen when you're not interested, and see old professors like old dogs walking round as large as life with ancient bones they've buried and scratched up again a hundred times; and they're just as proud as ever. It's such a farce! And when you see that farce, you see all the rest: all the waddling tribe of old dogs with their fossil bones — parsons and professors and councillors — wagging their tails and putting their paws on the bones and barking their important old barks — and all the puppies yelping loud applause.

MAGGIE (accepting him with earnestness): Ay! But are they all alike?

ERNEST: Pretty well. It makes you a bit sick. I used to think men in great places were great —

MAGGIE (fervently): I know you did.

ERNEST: — and then to find they're no better than yourself — not a bit —

MAGGIE: Well, I don't see why they should be.

ERNEST (ignoring her): — it takes the wind out of your sails. What's the good of anything if that's a farce?

MAGGIE: What?

ERNEST: The folks at the top. By Jove, if you once lose your illusion of "great men", you're pretty well disillusioned of everything — religion and everything.

MAGGIE sits absorbedly, sadly biting her forefinger: an act which irritates him.

(Suddenly): What time did Mother go out?

MAGGIE (starting): I don't know — I never noticed the time.

ERNEST (rising and going to the oven, picking up the oven-cloth from the hearth): At any rate I should think it's five minutes.

He goes to the oven door, and takes from the lower shelf a "cake" loaf, baked in a dripping-pan, and, turning it over, taps it with his knuckles.

ERNEST: I should think it's done. I'll give it five minutes to soak.

He puts the bread in the oven shelf, turns the brown loaves, and shuts the oven door. Then he rises and takes a little notebook from the shelf.

Guess what I've been doing.

MAGGIE (rising, dilating, reaching towards him): I don't know. What?

ERNEST (smiling): Verses.

MAGGIE (putting out her hand to him, supplicating): Give them to me!

ERNEST (still smiling): They're such piffle.

MAGGIE (betwixt supplication and command): Give them to me.

He hands her the little volume, and goes out to the scullery. She sits down and reads with absorption. He returns in a moment, his hands dripping with clear water, and, pulling forward the panchion from the corner, takes out the last piece of white dough, scrapes the little pieces together, and begins to work the mass into a flattish ball, passing it from hand to hand. Then he drops the dough into the dripping-pan, and leaves it standing on the hearth. When he rises and looks at her, she looks up at him swiftly, with wide, brown, glowing eyes, her lips parted. He stands a moment smiling down at her.

ERNEST: Well, do you like them?

MAGGIE (nodding several times, does not reply for a second): Yes, I do.

ERNEST: They're not up to much, though.

MAGGIE (softly): Why not?

ERNEST (slightly crestfallen at her readiness to accept him again): Well, are they?

MAGGIE (nodding again): Yes, they are! What makes you say they're not? I think they're splendid.

ERNEST (smiling, gratified, but not thinking the same himself): Which do you like best?

MAGGIE (softly and thoughtfully): I don't know. I think this is so lovely, this about the almond tree.

ERNEST (smiling): And you under it.

She laughs up at him a moment, splendidly.

But that's not the best.

MAGGIE (looking at him expectantly): No?

ERNEST: That one, “A Life History”, is the best.

MAGGIE (wondering): Yes?

ERNEST (smiling): It is. It means more. Look how full of significance it is, when you think of it. The profs. would make a great long essay out of the idea. Then the rhythm is finer: it’s more complicated.

MAGGIE (seizing the word to vindicate herself when no vindication is required): Yes, it is more complicated: it is more complicated in every way. You see, I didn’t understand it at first. It is best. Yes, it is. (She reads it again.)

He takes the loaf from the oven and puts the fresh one in.

ERNEST: What have you been doing?

MAGGIE (faltering, smiling): I? Only — only some French.

ERNEST: What, your diary?

MAGGIE (laughing, confused): Ah — but I don’t think I want you to see it.

ERNEST: Now, you know you wrote it for me! Don’t you think it was a good idea, to get you to write your diary in French? You’d never have done any French at all but for that, and you’d certainly never have told me. . . . You never tell me your side.

MAGGIE: There’s nothing to tell.

ERNEST (shaking his finger excitedly): That’s just what you say, that’s just what you say! As many things happen for you as for me.

MAGGIE: Oh, but you go to Derby every day, and you see folks, and I —

ERNEST (flinging his hand at her): Piffle! I tell you — do I tell you the train was late? Do I — ?

MAGGIE (interrupting, laughing in confusion and humility): Yes, you do — ah!

He has stopped suddenly with tremendous seriousness and excitement.

ERNEST: When?

MAGGIE (nervous, apologizing, laughing): On Sunday — when you told me you'd have —

ERNEST (flinging her words aside with excited gesture): There you are! — you're raking up a trifle to save you from the main issue. Just like a woman! What I said was (He becomes suddenly slow and fierce.) you never tell me about you, and you drink me up, get me up like a cup with both hands and drink yourself breathless — and — and there you are — you, you never pour me any wine of yourself —

MAGGIE (watching him, fascinated and a little bit terror-struck): But isn't it your fault?

He turns on her with a fierce gesture. She starts.

ERNEST: How can it be, when I'm always asking you — ? (He scratches his head with wild exasperation.)

MAGGIE (almost inaudibly): Well —

He blazes at her so fiercely, she does not continue, but drops her head and looks at her knee, biting her finger.

ERNEST (abruptly): Come on — let's see what hundreds of mistakes . . .

She looks at him; dilates, laughs nervously, and goes to her coat, returning with a school exercise-book, doubled up.

He sits on the sofa, brings her beside him with a swift gesture. Then he looks up at the fire, and starts away round the table.

ERNEST (going into the scullery and crossing the room with dustpan): I must mend the fire. There's a book of French verse with my books. Be looking at that while I . . .

His voice descends to the cellar, where he is heard hammering the coal. He returns directly.

She stands at the little cupboard, with her face in a book. She is very short-sighted.

He mends the fire without speaking to her, and goes out to wash his hands.

ERNEST (returning): Well, what do you think of it? I got it for fourpence.

MAGGIE: I like it ever so much.

ERNEST: You've hardly seen it yet. Come on.

They sit together on the sofa and read from the exercise-book, she nervously.

(Suddenly): Now, look here — Oh, the poor verbs! I don't think anybody dare treat them as you do! Look here!

She puts her head closer.

He jerks back his head, rubbing his nose frantically, laughing.

Your hair did tickle me!

She turns her face to his, laughing, with open mouth. He breaks the spell.

Well, have you seen it?

MAGGIE (hesitating, peering across the lines): No-o-o.

ERNEST (suddenly thrusting his finger before her): There! I wonder it doesn't peck your nose off. You are a —

She has discovered her mistake and draws back with a little vibrating laugh of shame and conviction.

You hussy, what should it have been?

MAGGIE (hesitating): “Eurent?”

ERNEST (sitting suddenly erect and startling her up too): What! The preterite? The preterite? And you’re talking about going to school!

She laughs at him with nervous shame; when he glares at her, she dilates with fine terror.

(Ominously): Well — ?

MAGGIE (in the depths of laughing despair, very softly and timidly): I don’t know.

ERNEST (relaxing into pathetic patience): Verbs of motion take être, and if you do a thing frequently, use the imperfect. You are — Well, you’re inexpressible!

They turn to the diary: she covered with humiliation, he aggrieved. They read for a while, he shaking his head when her light springing hair tickles him again.

(Softly): What makes you say that?

MAGGIE (softly): What?

ERNEST: That you are “un enfant de Samedi” — a Saturday child?

MAGGIE (mistrusting herself so soon): Why — it’s what they say, you know.

ERNEST (gently): How?

MAGGIE: Oh — when a child is serious; when it doesn’t play except on Saturdays, when it is quite free.

ERNEST: And you mean you don’t play?

She looks at him seriously.

No, you haven’t got much play in you, have you? — I fool about so much.

MAGGIE (nodding): That's it. You can forget things and play about. I always think of Francis Thompson's Shelley, you know — how he made paper boats. . .

ERNEST (flattered at the comparison): But I don't make paper boats. I tell you, you think too much about me. I tell you I have got nothing but a gift of coloured words. And do I teach you to play? — not to hold everything so serious and earnest? (He is very serious.)

She nods at him again. He looks back at the paper. It is finished. Then they look at one another, and laugh a little laugh, not of amusement.

ERNEST: Ah, your poor diary! (He speaks very gently.)

She hides her head and is confused.

I haven't marked the rest of the mistakes. Never mind — we won't bother, shall we? You'd make them again, just the same.

She laughs. They are silent a moment or two; it is very still.

You know (He begins sadly, and she does not answer.) — you think too much of me — you do, you know.

She looks at him with a proud, sceptical smile.

(Suddenly wroth): You are such a flat, you won't believe me! But I know — if I don't, who does? It's just like a woman, always aching to believe in somebody or other, or something or other.

She smiles.

I say, what will you have? Baudelaire?

MAGGIE (not understanding): What?

ERNEST: Baudelaire.

MAGGIE (nervous, faltering): But who's — ?

ERNEST: Do you mean to say you don't know who Baudelaire is?

MAGGIE (defensively): How should I?

ERNEST: Why, I gassed to you for half an hour about him, a month back — and now he might be a Maori — !

MAGGIE: It's the names — being foreign.

ERNEST: Baudelaire — Baudelaire — it's no different from Pearson!

MAGGIE (laughing): It sounds a lot better.

ERNEST (laughing, also, and opening the book): Come on! Here, let's have *Maîtresse des Maîtresses*; should we?

MAGGIE (with gentle persuasiveness): Yes. You'll read it?

ERNEST: You can have a go, if you like.

They both laugh. He begins to read *Le Balcon* in tolerably bad French, but with some genuine feeling. She watches him all the time. At the end, he turns to her in triumph, and she looks back in ecstasy.

There! isn't that fine?

She nods repeatedly.

That's what they can do in France. It's so heavy and full and voluptuous: like oranges falling and rolling a little way along a dark-blue carpet; like twilight outside when the lamp's lighted; you get a sense of rich, heavy things, as if you smelt them, and felt them about you in the dusk: isn't it?

She nods again.

Ah, let me read you *The Albatross*. This is one of the best — anybody would say so — you see, fine, as good as anything in the world. (Begins to read.)

There is a light, quick step outside, and a light tap at the door, which opens.

They frown at each other, and he whispers:

ERNEST: Damn! (Aloud.) Hell, Beat!

There enters a girl of twenty-three or four; short, slight, pale, with dark circles under her rather large blue eyes, and with dust-coloured hair. She wears a large brown beaver hat and a long grey-green waterproof-coat.

BEATRICE WYLD: Hello, Ernest, how are ter? Hello, Mag! Are they all out?

ERNEST (shutting up the book and drawing away from MAGGIE. The action is reciprocal — BEATRICE WYLD seats herself in the armchair opposite): They've gone up town. I don't suppose Nellie will be long.

BEATRICE (coughing, speaking demurely): No, she won't see Eddie to-night.

ERNEST (leaning back): Not till after ten.

BEATRICE (rather loudly, sitting up): What! Does he come round after they shut up shop?

ERNEST (smiling ironically): Ay, if it's getting on for eleven — !

BEATRICE (turning in her chair): Good lawk! — are they that bad? Isn't it fair sickenin'?

ERNEST: He gets a bit wild sometimes.

BEATRICE: I should think so, at that price. Shall you ever get like that, Mag?

MAGGIE: Like what, Beatrice?

BEATRICE: Now, Maggie Pearson, don't pretend to be 'ormin'. She knows as well as I do, doesn't she, Ernest?

MAGGIE: Indeed I don't. (She is rather high-and-mighty, but not impressive.)

BEATRICE: Garn! We know you, don't we, Ernie? She's as bad as anybody at the bottom, but she pretends to be mighty 'ormin'.

MAGGIE: I'm sure you're mistaken, Beatrice.

BEATRICE: Not much of it, old girl. We're not often mistaken, are we, Ernie? Get out; we're the "dead certs" — aren't we, Willie? (She laughs with mischievous exultance, her tongue between her teeth.)

MAGGIE (with great but ineffectual irony): Oh, I'm glad somebody is a "dead cert". I'm very glad indeed! I shall know where to find one now.

BEATRICE: You will, Maggie.

There is a slight, dangerous pause.

BEATRICE (demurely): I met Nellie and Gertie, coming.

ERNEST: Ay, you would.

MAGGIE (bitterly): Oh, yes.

BEATRICE (still innocently): She had got a lovely rose. I wondered —

ERNEST: Yes, she thought Eddie would be peeping over the mousetraps and bird-cages. I bet she examines those drowning-mouse engines every time she goes past.

BEATRICE (with vivacity): Not likely, not likely! She marches by as if there was nothing but a blank in the atmosphere. You watch her. Eyes Right! — but she nudges Gert to make her see if he's there.

ERNEST (laughing): And then she turns in great surprise.

BEATRICE: No, she doesn't. She keeps "Eyes Front", and smiles like a young pup — and the blushes! — Oh, William, too lov'ly f'r anyfing!

ERNEST: I'll bet the dear boy enjoys that blush.

BEATRICE: Ra-ther! (Artlessly revenant à son mouton.) And he'll have the rose and all, to rejoice the cockles of his heart this time.

ERNEST (trying to ward it off): Ay. I suppose you'll see him with it on Sunday.

BEATRICE (still innocently): It was a beauty, William! Did you bring it for her?

ERNEST: I got it in Derby.

BEATRICE (unmasking): Did you? Who gave it you, Willie?

ERNEST (evasively, pretending to laugh): Nay, it wouldn't do to tell.

BEATRICE: Oh, William, do tell us! Was it the Dark, or the Athletics?

ERNEST: What if it was neither?

BEATRICE: Oh, Willie, another! Oh, it is shameful! Think of the poor things, what damage you may do them.

ERNEST (uneasily): Yes, they are delicate pieces of goods, women. Men have to handle them gently; like a man selling millinery.

BEATRICE (hesitating, then refraining from answering this attack fully): It's the hat-pins, Willie dear. But do tell us. Was it the Gypsy? — let's see, you generally call it her in German, don't you? — What's the German for gypsy, Maggie? — But was it the Gypsy, or the Athletic Girl that does Botany?

ERNEST (shaking his head): No. It was an Erewhonian.

BEATRICE (knitting her brows): Is that the German for another? Don't say so, William! (Sighs heavily.) "Sigh no more, ladies" — Oh, William! And these two are quite fresh ones, and all. Do you like being a mutton-bone, William? — one bitch at one end and one at the other? Do you think he's such a juicy bone to squabble for, Maggie?

MAGGIE (red and mortified): I'm sure I don't think anything at all about it, Beatrice.

BEATRICE: No; we've got more sense, we have, Maggie. We know him too well — he's not worth it, is he?

MAGGIE PEARSON does not reply.

BEATRICE WYLD looks at her dress, carefully rubbing off some spot or other; then she resumes:

BEATRICE: But surely it's not another, Willie?

ERNEST: What does it matter who it is? Hang me, I've not spoken to — I've hardly said ten words — you said yourself, I've only just known them.

BEATRICE: Oh, Willie, I'm sure I thought it was most desperate — from what you told me.

There is another deadly silence. BEATRICE resumes innocently, quite unperturbed.

Has he told you, MAGGIE?

MAGGIE (very coldly): I'm sure I don't know.

BEATRICE (simply): Oh, he can't have done, then. You'd never have forgot. There's one like a Spaniard — or was it like an Amazon, Willie?

ERNEST: Go on. Either'll do.

BEATRICE: A Spanish Amazon, Maggie — olive-coloured, like the colour of a young clear bit of sea-weed, he said — and, oh, I know! “great free gestures” — a cool clear colour, not red. Don't you think she'd be lovely?

MAGGIE: I do indeed.

BEATRICE: Too lovely f'r anyfing? — And the other. Oh, yes: “You should see her run up the college stairs! She can go three at a time, like a hare running uphill.” — And she was top of the Inter. list for Maths and Botany. Don't you wish you were at college, Maggie?

MAGGIE: For some things.

BEATRICE: I do. We don't know what he's up to when he's there, do we?

MAGGIE: I don't know that we're so very anxious —

BEATRICE (convincingly): We're not, but he thinks we are, and I believe he makes it all up. I bet the girls just think: "H'm. Here's a ginger-and-white fellow; let's take a bit of the conceit out of him" — and he thinks they're gone on him, doesn't he?

MAGGIE: Very likely.

BEATRICE: He does, Maggie; that's what he does. And I'll bet, if we could hear him — the things he says about us! I'll bet he says there's a girl with great brown eyes —

ERNEST: Shut up, Beat! you little devil — you don't know when to stop.

BEATRICE (affecting great surprise): William! Maggie! Just fancy!!

There is another silence, not ominous this time, but charged with suspense.

What am I a devil for? (Half timidly.)

ERNEST (flushing up at the sound of her ill-assurance): Look here; you may just as well drop it. It's stale, it's flat. It makes no mark, don't flatter yourself — we're sick of it, that's all. It's a case of ennui. Vous m'agacez les nerfs. Il faut aller au diable. (He rises, half laughing, and goes for the dustpan.)

BEATRICE (her nose a trifle out of joint): Translate for us, Maggie.

MAGGIE shakes her head, without replying. She has a slight advantage now.

ERNEST crosses the room to go to coal-cellar.

BEATRICE coughs slightly, adjusts her tone to a casual, disinterested conversation, and then says, from sheer inability to conquer her spite:

You do look well, Maggie. I don't think I've seen anybody with such a colour. It's fair fine.

MAGGIE laughs and pulls a book towards her. There is silence.

ERNEST'S steps are heard descending to the cellar and hammering the coal. Presently he re-mounts. The girls are silent, MAGGIE pretending to read; BEATRICE staring across the room, half smiling, tapping her feet.

ERNEST (hurrying in and putting the coal on the hob): Begum, what about the bread?

MAGGIE (starting up and dilating towards him with her old brilliance): Oh, what have we — ? Is it — ? Oh!

ERNEST has forestalled her at the oven. There issues a great puff of hot smoke. He draws back a little, and MAGGIE utters a quick, tremulous "Oh!"

BEATRICE (with concern): Hel-lo, Ernest! that smells a bit thick!

He pulls out the loaves one after another. There is one brown loaf much blackened, one in tolerable condition, and the white "cake" very much scorched on one side.

BEATRICE begins to laugh, in spite of her sympathy at the dismay; he is kneeling on the hearth, the oven door open, the oven-cloth in his hand, and the burnt bread toppled out of its tins on the hearth before him. MAGGIE is bending over his shoulder, in great concern. BEATRICE sputters with more laughter. ERNEST looks up at her, and the dismay and chagrin on his face change also to an irresistible troubled amusement at the mishap, and he laughs heartily. MAGGIE joins in, strainedly at first, then with natural shaking, and all three laugh with abandonment, BEATRICE putting her hand up over her face, and again doubling over till her head touches her knees.

ERNEST: No — no! Won't Ma be wild, though! — What a beastly shame!

BEATRICE breaks out afresh, and he, though grieved, bubbles again into grudging laughter.

Another day and the rotten fire would burn slow, but to-night it's ramped like —

BEATRICE: Hell, Ernie!

She goes off again into a wild tossing of laughter, hesitating a moment to watch him as he lugubriously picks up the worst loaf and eyes it over.

ERNEST (grimly): It's black bread now, that they talk about. (He sniffs the loaf.)

BEATRICE resumes her mad, interrupted laughter. MAGGIE sits down on the sofa and laughs till the tears come.

ERNEST taps the loaf with his finger.

BEATRICE: Are you trying to see if it's done, William? (From naïve irony she departs into laughter.)

ERNEST (answers, his lugubrious soul struggling with laughter, the girls laughing the while): No; I was listening if it sounded hollow. Hark!

They listen. Laughter.

It sounds cindery. I wonder how deep it goes. (In a spirit of curiosity, he rises and fetches a knife, and, pulling a newspaper over the hearth, begins to cut away the burnt crust. The bread-charcoal falls freely on the paper. He looks at the loaf.) By Jove, there is a lot! It's like a sort of fine coke.

The girls laugh their final burst, and pant with exhaustion, their hands pressed in their sides.

It's about done for, at any rate. (Puts it down and takes another brown loaf; taps it.) This is not so bad, really, is it? (Sadly.) It sounds a bit desiccated, though. Poor Ma! (He laughs.) She'll say it's your fault, Mag.

MAGGIE (with astonished, incredulous laughter): Me?

BEATRICE: She will, Mag, she will! She'll say if you hadn't been here making a fuss of him —

MAGGIE (still laughing): I'd better go before she comes.

BEATRICE: You want to scrape that with the nutmeg-grater, Ernest. Where is it? Here, give it me.

She takes the loaf, and ERNEST goes out and returns with the grater. She begins to grate the loaf.

MAGGIE takes up the white "cake" and feels the pale side, tapping the bottom.

MAGGIE (with decision): This isn't done. It's no good cutting it off till it's all finished. I may as well put it in again. (She feels the heat of the two shelves, and puts the loaf on the upper.)

ERNEST picks up the ruined loaf.

ERNEST: What will she say when she sees this?

MAGGIE: Put it on the fire and have done with it.

They look at her in some astonishment at the vandalism of the remark.

ERNEST: But . . . (He looks at the loaf on all sides.)

MAGGIE: It's no good, and it'll only grieve their poor hearts if they see it. "What the heart doesn't . . ."

BEATRICE: Ay, put it on, William. What's it matter? Tell 'em the cat ate it.

ERNEST (hesitating): Should I?

BEATRICE (nudging his elbow): Ay, go on.

He puts the loaf on the fire, which is not yet mended, and they stand watching the transparent flames lick it up.

ERNEST (half sad, whimsically, repentant): The Staff of Life — !

MAGGIE: It's a faggot now, not a staff.

ERNEST: Ah, well! (He slides all the cinders and BEATRICE'S scrapings together in the newspaper and pours them in the fire.)

BEATRICE (holding up her scraped loaf): It doesn't show, being brown. You want to wrap it in a damp cloth now. Have you got a cloth?

ERNEST: What? — a clean tea-towel?

BEATRICE: Ay, that'll do. Come here; let's go and wet it.

She goes out, and re-enters directly with the towel screwed up. She folds it round the loaf, the others watching. She sets the shrouded loaf on the table, and they all sit down. There is a little pause.

Have you given over coming down to chapel now, Maggie?

MAGGIE: N-no. I don't know that I have. Why?

BEATRICE: You don't often put in an appearance now.

MAGGIE (a trifle petulantly): Don't I? Well, I don't feel like it, I suppose.

BEATRICE: William, you have something to answer for, my boy. (She speaks portentously.)

ERNEST: Shall I? Ne'er mind; I'll say "adsum" every time. Recording Angel: "Ernest Lambert." — "Adsum!"

BEATRICE: But you don't know what the little Mas say about you, my lad.

ERNEST: The dear little Mas! They will be gossiping about —

BEATRICE (springing from her chair): Look out! there's Nellie. Take that in th' pantry, William. Come out!

She thrusts the towelled loaf into ERNEST'S hands, and he hurries away with it, while she hastily shoots the coal on the fire, and, putting down the dustpan by

the boiler, sits in her chair and looks “‘ormin’.”

Enter NELLIE LAMBERT and GERTIE COOMBER, blinking.

NELLIE (bending her head to shield her eyes): Hasn't Ma come? I never saw her. Hullo, Maggie, you've not gone yet, you see. (She sniffs and goes straight to the oven.) Goodness, what a smell of burning! Have you been and forgotten the bread? (She kneels and looks in the oven.)

BEATRICE (very quietly and negligently): Ernest forgot that one. It's only a bit caught.

NELLIE peeps in the panchion where the other loaves are — those baked by the mother.

NELLIE: He generally forgets if Maggie's here.

BEATRICE bursts out laughing.

MAGGIE (rising, indignant): Why, Nellie, when has it ever been burnt before?

NELLIE (smiling a careless smile): Many a time.

MAGGIE: Not when I've been here.

NELLIE: Aren't you going to sit down a bit, Gert?

GERTIE: No, I'm off. Our Frances'll be wanting her ducks. (She laughs, but does not go.)

MAGGIE, her head hanging, goes to put on her hat and coat. The other girls smile, meaningly, at one another.

Are you going, then, Maggie?

MAGGIE (distantly): Yes, it's getting late. I've a long walk, you see.

GERTIE: You have! I'm glad I've not got it. I often wonder how you dare go through those woods on a pitch-dark night.

BEATRICE: I daresn't. (She laughs at herself.)

MAGGIE: I'd rather go through our wood than through Nottingham Road, with the people — !

BEATRICE: I'm glad you would, for I wouldn't.

ERNEST LAMBERT pulls on his overcoat and his cap. He gathers certain books. He looks at MAGGIE, and she at him.

MAGGIE: Well, good night, everybody. I shall have to go. (She hesitates, finding it difficult to break away.)

BEATRICE AND NELLIE: Good night.

GERTIE: Good night, Maggie. I hope it won't be too muddy for you.

MAGGIE laughs slightly.

NELLIE (as the two go through the door, loudly): And don't be ever so late back, our Ernest!

They do not reply. As their steps are heard passing the wide window, BEATRICE flings up her arms and her feet in an ungraceful, exultant glee, flicking her fingers with noiseless venom.

BEATRICE (in an undertone): I gave her beans!

NELLIE (turning, with a smile, and lighting up): Did you? What did you say?

GERTIE (amused, giggling, but shamefaced): Did you?

BEATRICE (exultant): Oh, lum! I'll bet her cheeks are warm!

END OF ACT II

ACT III

The same room, half an hour later.

BEATRICE WYLD sits in the arm-chair, and NELLIE LAMBERT on the sofa, the latter doing drawn-thread work on a white tray-cloth, part of which is fixed in a ring: at this part NELLIE is stitching.

BEATRICE: Ah, it makes you grin! the way she used to talk before she had him!

NELLIE: She did. She thought nobody was as good as her Arthur. She's found her mistake out.

BEATRICE: She has an' all! He wanted some chips for his supper the other night, when I was there. "Well," I said, "it's not far to Fretwell's, Arthur." He did look mad at me. "I'm not going to fetch chips," he said, a cocky little fool; and he crossed his little legs till I should 'a liked to have smacked his mouth. I said to her, "Well, Mabel, if you do, you're a fool!" — in her state, and all the men that were about! He's not a bit of consideration. You never saw anybody as fagged as she looks.

NELLIE: She does. I felt fair sorry for her when I saw her last Sunday but one. She doesn't look like she used.

BEATRICE: By Jove, she doesn't! He's brought her down a good many pegs. I shouldn't wonder if she wasn't quite safe, either. She told me she had awful shooting pains up her side, and they last for five minutes.

NELLIE (looking up): Oh?

BEATRICE: Ay! I'm glad I'm not in her shoes. They may talk about getting married as they like! Not this child!

NELLIE: Not to a thing like him.

BEATRICE: I asked her if she didn't feel frightened, an' she said she didn't care a scrap. I should care, though — and I'll bet she does, at the bottom.

The latch clicks. The MOTHER enters, carrying a large net full of purchases, and a brown-paper parcel. She lets these fall heavily on the table, and sits on the nearest chair, panting a little, with evident labour of the heart.

MOTHER: Yes, my lady! — you called for that meat, didn't you?

NELLIE (rising and going to look in the parcels): Well, my duck, I looked for you downtown; then when I was coming back, I forgot all about it.

MOTHER: And I — was silly enough — to lug it myself —

NELLIE (crossing to her mother, all repentant): Well, what did you for? — you knew I could fetch it again! You do do such ridiculous things! (She begins to take off her mother's bonnet.)

MOTHER: Yes! We know your fetching it — again. If I hadn't met little Abel Gibson — I really don't think I should have got home.

BEATRICE (leaning forward): If Nellie forgets it, you should forget it, Mrs Lambert. I'm sure you ought not to go lugging all those things.

MOTHER: But I met young Abel Gibson just when I was thinking I should have to drop them — and I said: "Here, Abel, my lad, are you going home?" and he said he was, so I told him he could carry my bag. He's a nice little lad. He says his father hasn't got much work, poor fellow. I believe that woman's a bad manager. She'd let that child clean up when he got home — and he said his Dad always made the beds. She's not a nice woman, I'm sure. (She shakes her head and begins to unfasten her coat.)

NELLIE, seeing her mother launched into easy gossip, is at ease on her score, and returns to the bags.

You needn't go looking; there's nothing for you.

NELLIE (petulantly): You always used to bring us something —

MOTHER: Ay, I've no doubt I did. . . . (She sniffs and looks at BEATRICE WYLD.)

NELLIE (still looking, unconvinced): Hello! Have a grape, Beatrice. (She offers BEATRICE a white-paper bag of very small black grapes.)

MOTHER: They want washing first, to get the sawdust out. Our Ernest likes those little grapes, and they are cheap: only four-pence.

BEATRICE (looking up from the bag): Oh, they are cheap. No, I won't have any, Nellie, thanks.

NELLIE: I'll wash them.

MOTHER: Just let the tap run on them — and get a plate.

NELLIE: Well, as if I shouldn't get a plate! The little Ma thinks we're all daft.

MOTHER (sniffing — it is her manner of winking): Is all the bread done?

NELLIE: Yes. I took the last out about a quarter of an hour ago.

MOTHER (to BEATRICE): Was Maggie Pearson gone when you came?

BEATRICE: No — she's only been gone about three-quarters of an hour.

MOTHER (tossing her head and lowering her tone confidentially): Well, really! I stopped looking at a man selling curtains a bit longer than I should, thinking she'd be gone.

BEATRICE: Pah! — it makes you sick, doesn't it?

MOTHER: It does. You wouldn't think she'd want to come trailing down here in weather like this, would you?

BEATRICE: You wouldn't. I'll bet you'd not catch me! — and she knows what

you think, alright.

MOTHER: Of course she does.

BEATRICE: She wouldn't care if the old Dad was here, scowling at her; she'd come.

MOTHER: If that lad was at home.

BEATRICE (scornfully): Ay!

The MOTHER rises and goes out with her coat.

NELLIE enters, with a plate of wet black grapes.

NELLIE: Now, Beat! (Offering the grapes.)

BEATRICE: No, Nellie, I don't think I'll have any.

NELLIE: Go on — have some! Have some — go on! (Speaks rather imperatively.)

BEATRICE takes a few grapes in her hand.

What a scroddy few! Here, have some more.

BEATRICE (quietly): No, Nellie, thanks, I won't have any more. I don't think they'd suit me.

NELLIE sits down and begins to eat the grapes, putting the skins on a piece of paper.

The MOTHER re-enters. She looks very tired. She begins carrying away the little parcels.

NELLIE: Don't you put those away, mother; I'll do it in a minute.

The MOTHER continues. NELLIE rises in a moment or two, frowning.

You are a persistent little woman! Why don't you wait a bit and let me do it?

MOTHER: Because your father will be in in a minute, and I don't want him peeking and prying into everything, thinking I'm a millionaire. (She comes and sits down in her rocking-chair by the oven.)

NELLIE continues to carry away the goods, which have littered the table, looking into every parcel.

NELLIE: Hello! what are these little things?

MOTHER: Never you mind.

NELLIE: Now, little woman, don't you try to hug yourself and be secretive. What are they?

MOTHER: They're pine-kernels. (Turning to BEATRICE.) Our Ernest's always talking about the nut-cakes he gets at Mrs Dacre's; I thought I'd see what they were like. Put them away; don't let him see them. I shan't let him know at all, if they're not up to much. I'm not going to have him saying Mother Dacre's things are better than mine.

BEATRICE: I wouldn't — for I'm sure they're not.

MOTHER: Still, I rather like the idea of nuts. Here, give me one; I'll try it.

They each eat a pine-kernel with the air of a connoisseur in flavours.

(smiling to herself): Um — aren't they oily!

BEATRICE: They are! But I rather like them.

NELLIE: So do I. (Takes another.)

MOTHER (gratified): Here, put them away, miss!

NELLIE takes another. The MOTHER rises and snatches them away from her, really very pleased.

There won't be one left, I know, if I leave them with her. (She puts them away.)

NELLIE (smiling and nodding her head after her mother; in a whisper): Isn't she fussy?

BEATRICE puts out her tongue and laughs.

MOTHER (returning): I tried a gelatine sponge last week. He likes it much better than cornflour. Mrs Dacre puts them in mincemeat, instead of suet — the pine-kernels. I must try a bit.

BEATRICE: Oh! it sounds better.

MOTHER (seating herself): It does. (She looks down at the bread.)

BEATRICE puts up her shoulders in suspense.

I think you let this one dry up.

NELLIE: No, I didn't. It was our Ernest who let it burn.

MOTHER: Trust him! And what's he done? (She begins to look round.)

BEATRICE pulls a very wry face, straightens it quickly and says calmly:

BEATRICE: Is your clock right, Mrs Lambert?

MOTHER (looking round at the clock): Ten minutes — ten minutes fast. Why, what time is it?

BEATRICE: Good lack! (Rising suddenly.) It's half-past ten! Won't our Pa rave! "Yes, my gel — it's turning-out time again. We're going to have a stop put to it." And our mother will recite! Oh, the recitations! — there's no shutting her up when she begins. But at any rate, she shuts our Pa up, and he's a nuisance when he thinks he's got just cause to be wrath. — Where did I put my things?

MOTHER: I should think that Nellie's put hers on top. (She looks at NELLIE.) Don't sit there eating every one of those grapes. You know our Ernest likes them.

NELLIE (suddenly incensed): Good gracious! I don't believe I've had more than half a dozen of the things!

MOTHER (laughing and scornful): Half a dozen!

NELLIE: Yes, half a dozen. — Beatrice, we can't have a thing in this house — everything's for our Ernest.

MOTHER: What a story! What a story! But he does like those little grapes.

NELLIE: And everything else.

MOTHER (quietly, with emphasis): He gets a good deal less than you.

NELLIE (withdrawing from dangerous ground): I'll bet.

GERTIE COOMBER runs in.

BEATRICE: Hello, Gert, haven't you seen John?

GERTIE (putting up her chin): No.

BEATRICE: A little nuisance! — fancy!

GERTIE: Eh, I don't care — not me.

NELLIE: No, it's her fault. She never does want to see him. I wonder any fellow comes to her.

GERTIE (nonchalantly): Um — so do I.

BEATRICE: Get out, Gert; you know you're fretting your heart out 'cause he's not come.

GERTIE (with great scorn): Am I? Oh, am I? Not me! If I heard him whistling this moment, I wouldn't go out to him.

NELLIE: Wouldn't you! I'd shove you out, you little cat!

GERTIE (with great assumption of amusing dignity): Oh, would you, indeed!

They all laugh.

BEATRICE pins on her hat before the mirror.

You haven't got Ernest to take you home to-night, Beat. Where is he? With Maggie Pearson? Hasn't he come back yet?

MOTHER (with some bitterness): He hasn't. An' he's got to go to college to-morrow. Then he reckons he can get no work done.

GERTIE: Ha! — they're all alike when it suits them.

MOTHER: I should thank her not to come down here messing every Friday and Sunday.

NELLIE: Ah, she's always here. I should be ashamed of myself.

BEATRICE: Well — our Pa! I must get off. Good night, everybody. See you to-morrow, Nell.

NELLIE: I'll just come with you across the field.

She fetches a large white cashmere shawl and puts it over her head. She disposes it round her face at the mirror.

BEATRICE winks at the MOTHER.

GERTIE: She's going to look for Eddie.

NELLIE (blushing): Well, what if I am? Shan't be many minutes, Ma.

MOTHER (rather coldly): I should think not! I don't know what you want at all going out at this time o' night.

NELLIE shrugs her shoulders, and goes out with BEATRICE WYLD, who laughs and bids another good night.

MOTHER (when they have gone): A silly young hussy, gadding to look for him. As if she couldn't sleep without seeing him.

GERTIE: Oh, he always says, "Come and look for me about eleven." I bet he's longing to shut that shop up.

MOTHER (shortly): Ha! he's softer than she is, and I'm sure that's not necessary. I can't understand myself how folks can be such looneys. I'm sure I was never like it.

GERTIE: And I'm sure I never should be. I often think, when John's coming, "Oh, hang it, I wish he'd stay away!"

MOTHER: Ah, but that's too bad, Gertie. If you feel like that you'd better not keep it on any longer. — Yet I used to be about the same myself. I was born with too much sense for that sort of slobber.

GERTIE: Yes, isn't it hateful? I often think, "Oh, get off with you!" I'm sure I should never be like Nellie. — Isn't Ernest late? You'll have Mr Lambert in first.

MOTHER (bitterly): He is late. He must have gone every bit of the way.

GERTIE: Nay, I bet he's not — that.

There is silence a moment.

The MOTHER remembers the bread.

MOTHER (turning round and looking in the panchion): Well, there ought to be two more brown loaves. What have they done with them, now? (Turns over the loaves, and looks about.)

GERTIE (laughing): I should think they've gone and eaten them, between them.

MOTHER: That's very funny. (She rises, and is going to look round the room.)

There is a whistle outside.

GERTIE (turning her head sharply aside): Oh, hang it! I'm not going — I'm not!

MOTHER: Who is it? John?

GERTIE: It is, and I'm not going.

The whistle is heard again.

He can shut up, 'cause I'm not going!

MOTHER (smiling): You'll have to just go and speak to him, if he's waiting for you.

The whistle is heard louder.

GERTIE: Isn't it hateful! I don't care. I'll tell him I was in bed. I should be if my father wasn't at the "Ram".

MOTHER (sighing): Ay! But you may guess he's seen Nellie, and she's been saying something to him.

GERTIE: Well, she needn't, then!

The whistle goes again.

GERTIE cannot resist the will of the other, especially as the MOTHER bids her go. She flings her hand, and turns with great impatience.

He can shut up! What's he want to come at this time for? Oh, hang him!

She goes out slowly and unwillingly, her lips closed angrily. The MOTHER smiles, sighs, and looks sad and tired again.

MOTHER (to herself): It's a very funny thing!

She wanders round the room, looking for the bread. She lights a taper and goes into the scullery.

(re-passing, she repeats): A very remarkable thing!

She goes into the pantry on right, and after a moment returns with the loaf in the damp cloth, which she has unfolded. She stands looking at the loaf, repeating a sharp little sound against her palate with her tongue, quickly vibrating her head up and down.

(to herself): So this is it, is it? It's a nice thing! — And they put it down there, thinking I shouldn't see it. It's a nice thing! (Goes and looks in the oven, then says bitterly): I always said she was a deep one. And he thinks he'll stop out till his father comes! — And what have they done with the other? — Burnt it, I should think. That's what they've done. It's a nice thing — a nice thing! (She sits down in the rocking-chair, perfectly rigid, still overdone with weariness and anger and pain.)

After a moment, the garden gate is heard to bang back, and a heavy step comes up the path, halting, punctuated with the scratch and thrust of a walking-stick, rather jarring on the bricked yard.

The FATHER enters. He also bends his head a little from the light, peering under his hat-brim.

The MOTHER has quickly taken the withered loaf and dropped it in among the others in the panchion.

The FATHER does not speak, but goes straight to the passage, and hangs up his hat, overcoat, and jacket, then returns and stands very near the fire, holding his hands close down to the open ruddy grate. He sways slightly when he turns, after a moment or two, and stands with his hands spread behind his back, very near the fire.

The MOTHER turns away her head from him.

He remains thus for a minute or so, then he takes a step forward, and, leaning heavily on the table, begins to pick the grapes from the plate, spitting out the skins into his right hand and flinging them at random towards the fire behind his back, leaning all the time heavily with the left hand on the table.

After a while this irritates the MOTHER exceedingly.

MOTHER: You needn't eat all those grapes. There's somebody else!

FATHER (speaking with an exaggerated imitation of his son's English): "Somebody else!" Yes, there is "somebody else"! (He pushes the plate away and the grapes roll on the table.) I know they was not bought for me! I know it! I know it! (His voice is rising.) Somebody else! Yes, there is somebody else! I'm not daft! I'm not a fool. Nothing's got for me. No-o. You can get things for them, you can.

The MOTHER turns away her head, with a gesture of contempt.

(Continues with maddening tipsy, ironic snarl): I'm not a fool! I can see it! I can see it! I'm not daft! There's nothing for me, but you begrudge me every bit I put in my mouth.

MOTHER (with cold contempt): You put enough down your own throat. There's no need for anybody else. You take good care you have your share.

FATHER: I have my share. Yes, I do, I do!

MOTHER (contemptuously): Yes, you do.

FATHER: Yes, I do. But I shouldn't if you could help it, you begrudging bitch. What did you put away when I came in, so that I shouldn't see it? Something! Yes! Something you'd got for them! Nobody else. Yes! I know you'd got it for somebody else!

MOTHER (quietly, with bitter scorn): As it happens, it was nothing.

FATHER (his accent is becoming still more urban. His O's are A's, so that "nothing" is "nathing"): Nathing! Nathing! You're a liar, you're a liar. I heard the scuffle. You don't think I'm a fool, do you, woman?

She curls her lips in a deadly smile.

FATHER: I know, I know! Do you have what you give me for dinner? No, you don't. You take good care of it!

MOTHER: Look here, you get your good share. Don't think you keep the house. Do you think I manage on the few lousy shillings you give me? No, you get as much as you deserve, if any man did. And if you had a rice pudding, it was because we had none. Don't come here talking. You look after yourself, there's no mistake.

FATHER: An' I mean to, an' I mean to!

MOTHER: Very well, then!

FATHER (suddenly flaring): But I'm not going to be treated like a dog in my own house! I'm not, so don't think it! I'm master in this house, an' I'm going to be. I tell you, I'm master of this house.

MOTHER: You're the only one who thinks so.

FATHER: I'll stop it! I'll put a stop to it. They can go — they can go!

MOTHER: You'd be on short commons if they did.

FATHER: What? What? Me! You saucy bitch, I can keep myself, an' you as well, an' him an' all as holds his head above me — am doing — an' I'll stop it, I'll stop it — or they can go.

MOTHER: Don't make any mistake — you don't keep us. You hardly keep yourself.

FATHER: Do I? — do I? And who does keep 'em, then?

MOTHER: I do — and the girl.

FATHER: You do, do you, you snappy little bitch! You do, do you? Well, keep 'em yourself, then. Keep that lad in his idleness yourself, then.

MOTHER: Very willingly, very willingly. And that lad works ten times as hard as you do.

FATHER: Does he? I should like to see him go down th' pit every day! I should like to see him working every day in th' hole. No, he won't dirty his fingers.

MOTHER: Yes, you wanted to drag all the lads into the pit, and you only begrudge them because I wouldn't let them.

FATHER (shouting): You're a liar — you're a liar! I never wanted 'em in th' pit.

MOTHER (interrupting): You did your best to get the other two there, anyway.

FATHER (still shouting): You're a liar — I never did anything of the sort. What other man would keep his sons doing nothing till they're twenty-two? Where would you find another? Not that I begrudge it him — I don't, bless him. . . .

MOTHER: Sounds like it.

FATHER: I don't. I begrudge 'em nothing. I'm willing to do everything I can for 'em, and 'ow do they treat me? Like a dog, I say, like a dog!

MOTHER: And whose fault is it?

FATHER: Yours, you stinking hussy! It's you as makes 'em like it. They're like you. You teach 'em to hate me. You make me like dirt for 'em: you set 'em against me . . .

MOTHER: You set them yourself.

FATHER (shouting): You're a liar! (He jumps from his chair and stands bending towards her, his fist clenched and ready and threatening.) It's you. It always 'as been you. You've done it —

Enter ERNEST LAMBERT.

ERNEST (pulling off his cap and flashing with anger): It's a fine row you're kicking up. I should bring the neighbours in!

FATHER: I don't care a damn what I do, you sneering devil, you! (He turns to his son, but remains in the same crouching, threatening attitude.)

ERNEST (flaring): You needn't swear at me, either.

FATHER: I shall swear at who the devil I like. Who are you, you young hound — who are you, you measley little —

ERNEST: At any rate, I'm not a foul-mouthed drunken fool.

FATHER (springing towards him): What! I'll smite you to the ground if you say it again, I will, I will!

ERNEST: Pah!

He turns his face aside in contempt from the fist brandished near his mouth.

FATHER (shouting): What! Say it! I'll drive my fist through you!

ERNEST (suddenly tightening with rage as the fist is pushed near his face): Get away, you spitting old fool!

The FATHER jerks nearer and trembles his fist so near the other's nose that he draws his head back, quivering with intense passion and loathing, and lifts his hands.

MOTHER: Ernest, Ernest, don't!

There is a slight relaxation.

(Lamentable, pleading): Don't say any more, Ernest! Let him say what he likes. What should I do if . . .

There is a pause.

ERNEST continues rigidly to glare into space beyond his father.

The FATHER turns to the MOTHER with a snarling movement, which is nevertheless a movement of defeat. He withdraws, sits down in the arm-chair, and begins, fumbling, to get off his collar and tie, and afterwards his boots.

ERNEST has taken a book, and stands quite motionless, looking at it. There is heard only the slash of the FATHER'S bootlaces. Then he drags off the boot,

and it falls with a loud noise.

ERNEST, very tense, puts down the book, takes off his overcoat, hangs it up, and returns to the side of the sofa nearest the door, where he sits, pretending to read.

There is silence for some moments, and again the whip of bootlaces. Suddenly a snarl breaks the silence.

FATHER: But don't think I'm going to be put down in my own house! It would take a better man than you, you white-faced jockey — or your mother either — or all the lot of you put together! (He waits awhile.) I'm not daft — I can see what she's driving at. (Silence.) I'm not a fool, if you think so. I can pay you yet, you sliving bitch! (He sticks out his chin at his wife.)

ERNEST lifts his head and looks at him.

(Turns with renewing ferocity on his son): Yes, and you either. I'll stand no more of your chelp. I'll stand no more! Do you hear me?

MOTHER: Ernest!

ERNEST looks down at his book.

The FATHER turns to the MOTHER.

FATHER: Ernest! Ay, prompt him! Set him on — you know how to do it — you know how to do it!

There is a persistent silence.

I know it! I know it! I'm not daft, I'm not a fool! (The other boot falls to the floor.)

He rises, pulling himself up with the arms of the chair, and, turning round, takes a Waterbury watch with a brass chain from the wall beside the bookcase: his pit watch that the MOTHER hung there when she put his pit-trousers in the cupboard — and winds it up, swaying on his feet as he does so. Then he puts it back on the nail, and a key swings at the end of the chain. Then he takes a silver

watch from his pocket, and, fumbling, missing the keyhole, winds that up also with a key, and, swaying forward, hangs it up over the cupboard. Then he lurches round, and, limping pitiably, goes off upstairs. There is a heavy silence. The Waterbury watch can be heard ticking.

ERNEST: I would kill him, if it weren't that I shiver at the thought of touching him.

MOTHER: Oh, you mustn't! Think how awful it would be if there were anything like that. I couldn't bear it.

ERNEST: He is a damned, accursed fool!

The MOTHER sighs. ERNEST begins to read.

There is a quick patter of feet, and GERTIE COOMBER comes running in.

GERTIE: Has Mr Lambert come?

MOTHER: Ay — in bed.

GERTIE: My father hasn't come yet. Isn't it sickening?

MOTHER: It is, child. They want horsewhipping, and those that serve them, more.

GERTIE: I'm sure we haven't a bit of peace of our lives. I'm sure when mother was alive, she used to say her life was a burden, for she never knew when he'd come home, or how.

MOTHER: And it is so.

GERTIE: Did you go far, Ernest?

ERNEST (not looking up): I don't know. Middling.

MOTHER: He must have gone about home, for he's not been back many minutes.

GERTIE: There's our Frances shouting!

She runs off.

MOTHER (quietly): What did you do with that other loaf?

ERNEST (looking up, smiling): Why, we forgot it, and it got all burned.

MOTHER (rather bitterly): Of course you forgot it. And where is it?

ERNEST: Well, it was no good keeping it. I thought it would only grieve your heart, the sight of it, so I put it on the fire.

MOTHER: Yes, I'm sure! That was a nice thing to do, I must say! . . . Put a brown loaf on the fire, and dry the only other one up to a cinder!

The smile dies from his face, and he begins to frown.

(She speaks bitterly): It's always alike, though. If Maggie Pearson's here, nobody else matters. It's only a laughing matter if the bread gets burnt to cinders and put on the fire. (Suddenly bursts into a glow of bitterness.) It's all very well, my son — you may talk about caring for me, but when it comes to Maggie Pearson it's very little you care for me — or Nellie — or anybody else.

ERNEST (dashing his fingers through his hair): You talk just like a woman! As if it makes any difference! As if it makes the least difference!

MOTHER (folding her hands in her lap and turning her face from him): Yes, it does.

ERNEST (frowning fiercely): It doesn't. Why should it? If I like apples, does it mean I don't like — bread? You know, Ma, it doesn't make any difference.

MOTHER (doggedly): I know it does.

ERNEST (shaking his finger at her): But why should it, why should it? You know you wouldn't be interested in the things we talk about: you know you wouldn't.

MOTHER: Why shouldn't I?

ERNEST: Should you, now? Look here: we talked about French poetry. Should you care about that?

No answer.

You know you wouldn't! And then we talked about those pictures at the Exhibition — about Frank Brangwyn — about Impressionism — for ever such a long time. You would only be bored by that —

MOTHER: Why should I? You never tried.

ERNEST: But you wouldn't. You wouldn't care whether it's Impressionism or pre-Raphaelism. (Pathetically.)

MOTHER: I don't see why I shouldn't.

ERNEST (ruffling his hair in despair; after a pause): And, besides, there are lots of things you can't talk to your own folks about, that you would tell a stranger.

MOTHER (bitterly): Yes, I know there are.

ERNEST (wildly): Well, I can't help it — can I, now?

MOTHER (reluctantly): No — I suppose not — if you say so.

ERNEST: But you know — !

MOTHER (turning aside again; with some bitterness and passion): I do know, my boy — I do know!

ERNEST: But I can't help it.

His MOTHER does not reply, but sits with her face averted.

Can I, now? Can I?

MOTHER: You say not.

ERNEST (changing the position again): And you wouldn't care if it was Alice, or Lois, or Louie. You never row me if I'm a bit late when I've been with them. . . It's just Maggie, because you don't like her.

MOTHER (with emphasis): No, I don't like her — and I can't say I do.

ERNEST: But why not? Why not? She's as good as I am — and I'm sure you've nothing against her — have you, now?

MOTHER (shortly): No, I don't know I've anything against her.

ERNEST: Well, then, what do you get so wild about?

MOTHER: Because I don't like her, and I never shall, so there, my boy!

ERNEST: Because you've made up your mind not to.

MOTHER: Very well, then.

ERNEST (bitterly): And you did from the beginning, just because she happened to care for me.

MOTHER (with coldness): And does nobody else care for you, then, but her?

ERNEST (knitting his brows and shaking his hands in despair): Oh, but it's not a question of that.

MOTHER (calmly, coldly): But it is a question of that.

ERNEST (fiercely): It isn't! You know it isn't! I care just as much for you as ever — you know I do.

MOTHER: It looks like it, when night after night you leave me sitting up here till nearly eleven — and gone eleven sometimes —

ERNEST: Once, Mother, once — and that was when it was her birthday.

MOTHER (turning to him with the anger of love): And how many times is it a

quarter to eleven, and twenty to?

ERNEST: But you'd sit up just the same if I were in; you'd sit up reading — you know you would.

MOTHER: You don't come in to see.

ERNEST: When I am in, do you go to bed before then?

MOTHER: I do.

ERNEST: Did you on Wednesday night, or on Tuesday, or on Monday?

MOTHER: No; because you were working.

ERNEST: I was in.

MOTHER: I'm not going to go to bed and leave you sitting up, and I'm not going to go to bed to leave you to come in when you like . . . so there!

ERNEST (beginning to unfasten his boots): Alright — I can't help it, then.

MOTHER: You mean you won't.

There is a pause. ERNEST hangs his head, forgetting to unlace his boot further.

ERNEST (pathetically): You don't worry our Nellie. Look, she's out now. You never row her.

MOTHER: I do. I'm always telling her.

ERNEST: Not like this.

MOTHER: I do! I called her all the names I could lay my tongue to last night.

ERNEST: But you're not nasty every time she goes out to see Eddie, and you don't for ever say nasty things about him. . . .

There is a moment of silence, while he waits for an answer.

ERNEST: And I always know you'll be sitting here working yourself into a state if I happen to go up to Herod's Farm.

MOTHER: Do I? — and perhaps you would, if you sat here waiting all night —

ERNEST: But, Ma, you don't care if Nellie's out.

MOTHER (after brooding awhile; with passion): No, my boy, because she doesn't mean the same to me. She has never understood — she has not been — like you. And now — you seem to care nothing — you care for anything more than home: you tell me nothing but the little things: you used to tell me everything; you used to come to me with everything; but now — I don't do for you now. You have to find somebody else.

ERNEST: But I can't help it. I can't help it. I have to grow up — and things are different to us now.

MOTHER (bitterly): Yes, things are different to us now. They never used to be. And you say I've never tried to care for her. I have — I've tried and tried to like her, but I can't, and it's no good.

ERNEST (pathetically): Well, my dear, we shall have to let it be, then, and things will have to go their way. (He speaks with difficulty.) You know, Mater — I don't care for her — really — not half as I care for you. Only, just now — well, I can't help it, I can't help it. But I care just the same — for you — I do.

MOTHER (turning with a little cry): But I thought you didn't!

He takes her in his arms, and she kisses him, and he hides his face in her shoulder. She holds him closely for a moment; then she kisses him and gently releases him. He kisses her. She gently draws away, saying, very tenderly:

MOTHER: There! — Nellie will be coming in.

ERNEST (after a pause): And you do understand, don't you, Mater?

MOTHER (with great gentleness, having decided not to torment him): Yes, I understand now. (She bluffs him.)

ERNEST takes her hand and strokes it a moment. Then he bends down and continues to unfasten his boots. It is very silent.

I'm sure that hussy ought to be in — just look at the time!

ERNEST: Ay, it's scandalous!

There are in each of their voices traces of the recent anguish, which makes their speech utterly insignificant. Nevertheless, in thus speaking, each reassures the other that the moment of abnormal emotion and proximity is passed, and the usual position of careless intimacy is reassumed.

MOTHER (rising): I shall have to go and call her — a brazen baggage!

There is a rattle of the yard gate, and NELLIE runs in, blinking very much.

NELLIE (out of breath; but very casually): Hello, our Ernest, you home?

MOTHER: Yes, miss, and been home long ago. I'll not have it, my lady, so you needn't think it. You're not going to be down there till this time of night! It's disgraceful. What will his mother say, do you think, when he walks in at past eleven?

NELLIE: She can say what she likes. Besides, she'll be in bed.

MOTHER: She'll hear him, for all that. I'd be ashamed of myself, that I would, standing out there slobbering till this time of night! I don't know how anyone can be such a fool!

NELLIE (smiling): Perhaps not, my dear.

MOTHER (slightly stung): No, and I should be sorry. I don't know what he wants running up at this time of a night.

NELLIE: Oh, Mother, don't go on again! We've heard it a dozen times.

MOTHER: And you'll hear it two dozen.

ERNEST, having got off his shoes, begins to take off his collar and tie.

NELLIE sits down in the arm-chair.

NELLIE (dragging up the stool and beginning to unlace her boots): I could hear my father carrying on again. Was he a nuisance?

MOTHER: Is he ever anything else when he's like that?

NELLIE: He is a nuisance. I wish he was far enough! Eddie could hear every word he said.

ERNEST: Shame! Shame!

NELLIE (in great disgust): It is! He never hears anything like that. Oh, I was wild. I could have killed him!

MOTHER: You should have sent him home; then he'd not have heard it at all.

NELLIE: He'd only just come, so I'm sure I wasn't going to send him home then.

ERNEST: So you heard it all, to the mild-and-bitter end?

NELLIE: No, I didn't. And I felt such a fool!

ERNEST: You should choose your spot out of earshot, not just by the garden gate. What did you do?

NELLIE: I said, "Come on, Eddie, let's get away from this lot." I'm sure I shouldn't have wondered if he'd gone home and never come near again.

MOTHER (satirically): What for?

NELLIE: Why — when he heard that row.

MOTHER: I'm sure it was very bad for him, poor boy.

NELLIE (fiercely): How should you like it?

MOTHER: I shouldn't have a fellow there at that time at all.

ERNEST: You thought a father-in-law that kicked up a shindy was enough to scare him off, did you? Well, if you choose your girl, you can't choose your father-in-law — you'll have to tell him that.

NELLIE has taken off her shoes. She stands in front of the mirror and uncoils her hair, and plaits it in a thick plait which hangs down her back.

MOTHER: Come, Ernest; you'll never want to get up in the morning.

NELLIE (suddenly): Oh! There now! I never gave him that rose. (She looks down at her bosom and lifts the head of a rather crushed rose.) What a nuisance!

ERNEST: The sad history of a rose between two hearts:

“Rose, red rose, that burns with a low flame,
What has broken you?
Hearts, two hearts caught up in a game
Of shuttlecock — Amen!”

NELLIE (blushing): Go on, you soft creature! (Looks at the rose.)

ERNEST: Weep over it.

NELLIE: Shan't!

ERNEST: And pickle it, like German girls do.

NELLIE: Don't be such a donkey.

ERNEST: Interesting item: final fate of the rose.

NELLIE goes out; returns in a moment with the rose in an egg-cup in one hand, and a candle in the other.

The MOTHER rises.

ERNEST: I'll rake, Mother.

NELLIE lights her candle, takes her shawl off the table, kisses her mother good night, and bids her brother good night as he goes out to the cellar.

The MOTHER goes about taking off the heavy green tablecloth, disclosing the mahogany, and laying a doubled tablecloth half across. She sets the table with a cup and saucer, plate, knife, sugar-basin, brown-and-white teapot and tea-caddy. Then she fetches a tin bottle and a soiled snapbag, and lays them together on the bare half of the table. She puts out the salt and goes and drags the pit-trousers from the cupboard and puts them near the fire.

Meanwhile ERNEST has come from the cellar with a large lump of coal, which he pushes down in the fireplace so that it shall not lodge and go out.

MOTHER: You'll want some small bits. — And bring a few pieces for him in the morning.

ERNEST (returning to the cellar with the dust-pan): Alright! I'll turn the gas out now.

The MOTHER fetches another candle and continues her little tasks. The gas goes suddenly down and dies slowly out.

ERNEST comes up with his candlestick on a shovelful of coal. He puts the candle on the table, and puts some coal on the fire, round the "raker". The rest he puts in the shovel on the hearth. Then he goes to wash his hands.

The MOTHER, leaving her candle in the scullery, comes in with an old iron fire-screen which she hangs on the bars of the grate, and the ruddy light shows over and through the worn iron top.

ERNEST is heard jerking the roller-towel. He enters, and goes to his mother, kissing her forehead, and then her cheek, stroking her cheek with his finger-tips.

ERNEST: Good night, my dear.

MOTHER: Good night. — Don't you want a candle?

ERNEST: No — blow it out. Good night.

MOTHER (very softly): Good night.

There is in their tones a dangerous gentleness — so much gentleness that the safe reserve of their souls is broken.

ERNEST goes upstairs. His bedroom door is heard to shut.

The MOTHER stands and looks in the fire. The room is lighted by the red glow only. Then in a moment or two she goes into the scullery, and after a minute — during which running of water is heard — she returns with her candle, looking little and bowed and pathetic, and crosses the room, softly closing the passage door behind her.

END OF ACT III

THE MERRY-GO-ROUND



A PLAY IN FIVE ACTS

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CHARACTERS

MRS HEMSTOCK

NURSE BROADBANKS

MR HEMSTOCK

HARRY HEMSTOCK

BARON RUDOLF VON RUGE

THE BAKER, JOB ARTHUR BOWERS

MRS SUSY SMALLEY

DR FOULES

RACHEL WILCOX

BARONESS VON RUGE

MR WILCOX

ACT I

SCENE I

The downstairs front room of a moderate-sized cottage. There is a wide fireplace, with a heaped-up ashy fire. The parlour is used as a bedroom, and contains a heavy old-fashioned mahogany dressing-table, a washstand, and a bedstead whose canopy is missing, so that the handsome posts stand like ruined columns. The room is in an untidy, neglected condition, medicine bottles and sickroom paraphernalia littered about. In the bed, a woman between sixty and seventy, with a large-boned face, and a long plait of fine dark hair. Enter the parish NURSE, in uniform, but without cloak and bonnet. She is a well-built woman of some thirty years, smooth-haired, pale, soothing in manner.

MRS HEMSTOCK: Eh, Nurse, I'm glad to see thee. I han been motherless while thou's been away.

NURSE: Haven't they looked after you, Mrs Hemstock?

MRS HEMSTOCK: They hanna, Nurse. Here I lie, day in, day out, like a beetle on my back, an' not a soul comes nigh me, saving th' Mester, when 'e's forced. An' 'im. (She points to mirror of dressing-table.)

NURSE: Who is that, Mrs Hemstock?

MRS HEMSTOCK: Canna ter see 'im? That little fat chap as stands there laughing at me.

NURSE: There's no little fat chap, Mrs Hemstock.

MRS HEMSTOCK: There is an' a'. He's bobbing a' thee now.

NURSE, who has been rolling up her sleeves, showing a fine white arm, throws her rolled cuffs at the mirror.

NURSE: Then we'll send him away.

MRS HEMSTOCK: Nay, dunna thee hurt him. 'E's nowt but a little chap!

NURSE: I'll wash you, shall I?

MRS HEMSTOCK: Tha nedna but gi' me a catlick. I'm as snug as a bug in a rug.

NURSE (laughing): Very well.

She goes into the kitchen.

MRS HEMSTOCK (calling): Who's in there, Nurse?

NURSE: There's nobody, Mrs Hemstock.

MRS HEMSTOCK: I bet he's gallivanting off after some woman.

NURSE (calling): Who?

MRS HEMSTOCK: Why, our Mester. 'E's a ronk 'un, I can tell you. 'As our Harry done it?

NURSE: Done what, Mrs Hemstock?

MRS HEMSTOCK: Cut 'is throat. 'E's allers threatenin'!

NURSE (entering with a jug of hot water): What! You're not serious, Mrs Hemstock.

MRS HEMSTOCK: Aren't I? But I am. An' 'e'll do it one o' these days, if 'e's not a'ready. I 'avena clapped eyes on him for five days.

NURSE: How is that?

MRS HEMSTOCK: Eh, dunna ax me. 'E niver comes in if 'e can 'elp it.

NURSE: How strange! Why is it, do you think?

MRS HEMSTOCK: Summat's gen 'im mulligurles. 'E'll not live long.

NURSE: What! Harry? He's quite young, and has nothing the matter, has he?

MRS HEMSTOCK: You know, Nurse, I 'as a fish inside me. I wor like Jonah back'ards. I used ter feel it floppin' about in my inside like a good 'un, an' nobody'd get it out —

NURSE: But Harry hasn't got a fish in his inside —

MRS HEMSTOCK: 'E 'asna — but I believe 'e's got a leech.

NURSE: Oh!

MRS HEMSTOCK: Dunna thee wet my 'air, Nurse — it ma'es it go grey.

NURSE (smiling): Very well, I'll be careful. But what makes you say Harry has a leech in his inside?

MRS HEMSTOCK: On 'is 'eart. 'Asn't ter noticed 'e gets as white-faced as a flat fish? It's that.

NURSE: Oh, and did he swallow it?

MRS HEMSTOCK: 'E didna. 'E bred it like a mackerel's head breeds maggots.

NURSE: How dreadful!

MRS HEMSTOCK: When you've owt up with you, you allers breed summat.

NURSE: And what was up with Mr Hemstock?

MRS HEMSTOCK: With our Mester?

NURSE: With Harry.

MRS HEMSTOCK: You knowed, didna you, as 'e'd had ructions wi' Rachel Wilcox?

NURSE: No.

MRS HEMSTOCK: Oh, yes. 'E fell off 'is bike eighteen month sin', a'most into her lap, an' 'er's been sick for 'im ever sin'.

NURSE: But he didn't care for her?

MRS HEMSTOCK: I dunno. 'E went out wi' 'er for about twelve month — but 'e never wanted 'er. 'E's funny, an' allers 'as been.

NURSE: Rather churlish?

MRS HEMSTOCK: No — 'e wor allers one o' the' lovin' sor' when 'e wor but a lad, 'd follow me about, and "mammy" me.

NURSE: But he got into bad ways —

MRS HEMSTOCK: Well, I got sick of him stormin' about like a cat lookin' for her kittens, so I hustled him out. 'E began drinkin' a bit, an' carryin' on. I thought 'e wor goin' to be like his father for women. But 'e wor allers a mother's lad — an' Rachel Wilcox cured him o' women.

NURSE: She's not a nice girl.

MRS HEMSTOCK: 'E'd only ter stick 'is 'ead out of the door an' 'er'd run like a pig as 'ears the bucket. 'Er wor like a cat foriver slidin', rubbin' 'erself against him.

NURSE: How dreadful!

MRS HEMSTOCK: But I encouraged 'er. I thought 'e wor such a soft 'un, at 'is age, a man of thirty!

NURSE: Was he always quiet?

MRS HEMSTOCK: Eh, bless you. 'E'd talk the leg off an iron pot, once on a day. But now, it's like pottering to get a penny out of a money box afore you can get a word from 'im edgeways.

NURSE: And he won't come to see you.

MRS HEMSTOCK: Not him! 'E once had a rabbit what got consumption, an' 'e wouldn't kill it, nor let me, neither would he go near it, so it died of starvation, an' 'e throwed a hammer at me for telling him so. You see — harsh! That's our Mester.

NURSE: Yes. Do I hurt you? They've let your hair get very cotted.

MRS HEMSTOCK: Get it out, Nurse — never mind me.

Enter MR HEMSTOCK, a very white-haired old man, clean-shaven, with brown eyes. There is a certain courtliness in his quiet bearing.

MR HEMSTOCK: I'm glad to see you back, Nurse — very glad. (He bows by instinct.)

NURSE: Thank you, Mr Hemstock. I'm pleased to see you again.

MRS HEMSTOCK (to her husband): Tha'rt not 'alf as glad to see her as I am. 'Ere I lie from hour to hour, an' niver a sound but cows rumblin' and cocks shoutin'. An' where dost reckon tha's been? Tha's been slivin' somewhere like a tomcat, ever sin' breakfast.

MR HEMSTOCK (to NURSE): I've been gone ten minutes. (To his wife.)I've on'y been for a penn'orth of barm ter ma'e thee some barm dumplings.

MRS HEMSTOCK: An' wheer's our Harry?

MR HEMSTOCK: He's in garden, diggin'.

MRS HEMSTOCK: What are ter out o' breath wi'?

MR HEMSTOCK: I've been runnin' our Susy's kids. They was drivin' our fowls again.

MRS HEMSTOCK: Tha shouldna ha' wanted ter come here, a mile away from anybody but our Susy.

NURSE: It is rather lonely — only Mrs Smalley's farm and your cottage. And the children are rather wild.

MRS HEMSTOCK: Let me live in a street. What does colliers want livin' in country cottages, wi' nowt but fowls an' things shoutin' at you or takin' no notice of you, as if you was not there?

MR HEMSTOCK (to NURSE): We came for the garden.

NURSE: I suppose you are still on strike.

MR HEMSTOCK: There's talk of settlement. I see they're opening some of the pits. But I've done, you know.

NURSE: Of course you have, Mr Hemstock. Harry will be glad to begin, though.

MR HEMSTOCK: I'm afraid whether 'e'll get a job. You see —

MRS HEMSTOCK: What hast got for dinner?

MR HEMSTOCK: Roast pork, rushes, barm dumplings.

MRS HEMSTOCK: Then look slippy about gettin' it ready. I'm clammin'. Ha' thy heels crack.

MR HEMSTOCK (to NURSE): You wouldn't think she'd been bedfast thirteen month, would you?

MRS HEMSTOCK: Tha nedna ha'e none o' thy palaver wi' Nurse. Nurse, ta'e no notice o' a word 'e says. (HEMSTOCK goes out.)

MRS HEMSTOCK: He's a good cook, and that's all you can say for him.

NURSE: I think he's very good to you, Mrs Hemstock.

MRS HEMSTOCK: He's too busy runnin' after a parcel o' women to be good to me.

NURSE: If all men were as good —

MRS HEMSTOCK: Tha's niver had him to put up wi'. Tha's niver been married, 'as ter?

NURSE: No, Mrs Hemstock.

MRS HEMSTOCK: A man's fair enough to you' face — if 'e's not as fow as a jackass; but let you' back be turned, an' you no more know what's in his breeches an' waistcoat than if 'e wor another man.

NURSE: Oh, Mrs Hemstock!

MRS HEMSTOCK: Yes, an' tha'll "oh" when tha knows.

NURSE: I'm sure you're getting tired. Won't you have your bed made?

MRS HEMSTOCK: Sin' it's gone that long, it might easy go a bit longer.

NURSE: Why, when was it made last?

MRS HEMSTOCK: How long has thee been gone away?

NURSE: Three weeks.

MRS HEMSTOCK: Then it's that long.

NURSE: Oh, what a shame! Wouldn't Mrs Smalley do it?

MRS HEMSTOCK: Our Susy! 'Er'd better not show 'er face inside that door.

NURSE: What a pity she's so quarrelsome! But you will have it made?

MRS HEMSTOCK: I know tha'll whittle me to death if I dunna. Does tha like roast pork?

NURSE: Fairly. Now, shall I lift you onto the couch?

MRS HEMSTOCK: No, tha wunna. I want na droppin' an' smashin' like a pot. I'm nowt but noggins o' bone, like iron bars in a paper bag. Eh, if I wor but the staunch fourteen stone I used to be.

NURSE: You've been a big woman.

MRS HEMSTOCK: I could ha' shadowed thee an' left plenty to spare. How heavy are ter, Nurse?

NURSE: I don't know — about ten and a half stone. Will Mr Hemstock lift you, then?

MRS HEMSTOCK: I say, Nurse — just look under the bed, atween th' bed slats at th' bottom corner, an' see if tha can see th' will.

NURSE (doubtful): What! (She stoops dubiously.)

MRS HEMSTOCK: Right hand corner. I told the doctor to put it there. Canna ter see it?

NURSE: Oh, yes, here it is. (She reappears with an envelope.)

MRS HEMSTOCK: That's it — it's fastened safe. It's a new will, Nurse. I made 'em do it while tha wor away — doctor and Mr Leahy.

NURSE: Oh, yes —

MRS HEMSTOCK: An' I'm not goin' ter ha'e none on 'em gleggin' at it. I know our Susy often has a bit of a rummage, but I'm sharper than 'er thinks for.

NURSE: And what shall I do with it, Mrs Hemstock?

MRS HEMSTOCK: Why, get upon th' table, an' look if there isna a hole in top o' the bedpost, at th' head there, where a peg used ter fit in.

NURSE (climbing up): Yes, there is.

MRS HEMSTOCK: Then roll it up, an' shove it in. On'y leave a scroddy bit out.

NURSE: That's done it, then.

MRS HEMSTOCK: Tha'll know where it is, then. Tha ought, tha's been more to me than any of my own for these twelve month.

NURSE: Oh, Mrs Hemstock, I hope —

MRS HEMSTOCK: Nay, tha nedna — tha'rt knowin' nowt, I tell thee. How much dost reckon I've got, Nurse?

NURSE: I don't know, Mrs Hemstock.

MRS HEMSTOCK: Over five hundred, I can tell thee. I made 'em in a little shop as I had in Northrop when the collieries hadna started long — an' I did well — an' so did our Mester — an' so 'as th' lads done —

NURSE: It is a good thing, for now they're both out of work they'd have nothing.

MRS HEMSTOCK: Oh, our Harry's got a bit of his own, an' our Mester's got about a hundred. It'll keep 'em goin' for a bit, wi'out mine.

NURSE: You are queer, Mrs Hemstock.

MRS HEMSTOCK: Ha, that's what they say about th' Almighty — they canna ma'e Him out. But I'll warrant He knows His own business, as I do.

NURSE: Oh, Mrs Hemstock.

MRS HEMSTOCK: Yes, an' I want my bed makin', dunna I? Shout our Harry. Harry! Harry!

After a moment, HARRY enters: a man of moderate stature, rather strongly built: dark hair, heavy, dark moustache, pale, rather hollow cheeks, dangerous-

looking brown eyes. A certain furious shrinking from contact makes him seem young, in spite of a hangdog, heavy slouch.

HARRY (to his mother — in broad dialect): What's want?

MRS HEMSTOCK: I s'd think it is "What's want" an' I hanna set eyes on thee for pretty nigh a week. Tha'll happen come to lie thyself, my lad, an' then tha can think o' me hours an' hours by mysen.

HARRY: What's want?

MRS HEMSTOCK: An' why art paddlin' about in thy stockin' feet for? Tha 'asna gumption enough ter put thy slippers on, if ter's been i' th' garden. Nurse, gi' me a drop o' brandy. (She lies back exhausted. NURSE administers.)

NURSE: Your mother wants lifting onto the couch, Mr Hemstock. (He comes forward.) Perhaps you will wash your hands in this water, will you — (He obeys sullenly.)

MRS HEMSTOCK: Tha'd better wesh 'em for 'im, Nurse, 'e's nowt but a baby. 'As 'er caught thee yet? (He does not answer.) 'E dursna go round th' corner, Nurse, for fear of a bogey — durst ter, eh? 'E's scared to death of a wench, so 'e goes about wi' a goose.

A goose comes paddling into the room and wanders up to HARRY.

NURSE: Hullo, Patty! You dear old silly.

MRS HEMSTOCK: Dost like 'er, Nurse?

NURSE: She's a dear old thing.

MRS HEMSTOCK: Then tha'll like him. He's just the same: soft, canna say a word, thinks a mighty lot of himself, an's scared to death o' nowt.

NURSE: Oh, Mrs Hemstock!

MRS HEMSTOCK: I canna abide a sawney.

NURSE: Are you ready, Mr Hemstock?

He comes forward. NURSE wraps Mrs Hemstock in a quilt.

MRS HEMSTOCK: To think as I should be crippled like this!

NURSE: Yes, it is dreadful.

HARRY lifts his mother — NURSE showing him how.

MRS HEMSTOCK: Tha's got fingers like gre't tree-roots.

NURSE shows him how to place his hands. Then she lifts the trailing quilt and follows him to the couch.

MRS HEMSTOCK (rather faintly): I canna abide to feel a man's arms shiverin' agen me. It ma'es me feel like a tallywag post hummin'.

NURSE: There, be still — you are upset. I'm sure Mr Hemstock did it gently.

She stoops and strokes Tatty, who is crouched near the bed. HARRY moves as if to go.

Will you fetch clean sheets and pillow slips — be quick, will you?

HARRY goes out. NURSE begins to make the bed.

MRS HEMSTOCK: Isna 'e like that there goose, now?

NURSE: Well, I'm sure Patty's a very lovable creature.

MRS HEMSTOCK: I'm glad tha thinks so. It's not many as can find in their heart to love a gaby like that.

NURSE: Poor Patty!

MRS HEMSTOCK: An' that other hussy on'y wants him cause she canna get him.

NURSE: It's often the case.

MRS HEMSTOCK: It is wi' a woman who's that cunning at kissin' an' cuddlin' that a man 'ud run after 'er a hundred miles for the same again.

NURSE: Is she clever, then?

MRS HEMSTOCK: She melts herself into a man like butter in a hot tater. She ma'es him feel like a pearl button swimmin' away in hot vinegar. That's what I made out from 'im.

NURSE: She's not a nice girl.

MRS HEMSTOCK: An' 'e hated her cause I shoved him at her.

NURSE: But you don't care for her, surely.

MRS HEMSTOCK: Canna bear her. A pussy cat always rubbin' 'erself agen a man's legs — an' one o' the quiet sort. But for all that, I should like to see him married afore I die. I dunna like, Nurse, leavin' 'im like 'e is. 'E wor my darlin'.

NURSE (softly): Yes.

MRS HEMSTOCK: An' 'e niver wor a drunkard, but 'e's the makin's of one.

NURSE: Surely not — oh, how dreadful!

Enter HARRY with bedding. He helps NURSE shake up and make the bed.

NURSE: How sweet the sheets are! They were aired on the currant bushes. Did Mrs Smalley wash them?

MRS HEMSTOCK: Our Susy! Not likely. She'd never do a hand's turn. I expect our Harry there washed 'em — an' 'is father. Dunna look so; canna ter answer a bit of a question? (He does not answer.) 'E looks as if 'e'd swallowed a year o' foul weather.

NURSE: Hem at the top. (She stumbles over Patty.) Oh, poor Patty — poor old bird! Come here then, you dear old thing — did I hurt you?

MRS HEMSTOCK: Tha's more fondness for that goose than I han, Nurse. It's too much like him. Birds of a feather flock together.

NURSE: You include me.

MRS HEMSTOCK: If tha likes.

NURSE: It's not a compliment.

MRS HEMSTOCK: It isna. Tha'rt a lady, an' han a lady's time, an' tha'rt a fool if tha changes.

NURSE: I am not so sure —

MRS HEMSTOCK: Tha gets a good wage, an' th' minute tha enters a house everybody gets up to run about after thee. What more dost want?

NURSE: I don't know.

MRS HEMSTOCK: No, I s'd think tha doesna.

NURSE: Sometimes I get tired, and then — I wish — I wish I'd somebody to fad after me a bit. I nurse so many people, and —

MRS HEMSTOCK: Tha'd like nursin' thysen. Eh, bless you, a man's knee's a chair as is soon worn out.

NURSE: It's not that — I should like a home of my own, where I could be private. There's a lonely corner in most of us that not all the friends in the world can fill up —

MRS HEMSTOCK: And a husband only changes a lonely corner into a lonely house.

NURSE: Perhaps so. But I should like to be able to shut my own doors, and shut all the world out, and be at home, quiet, comfortable.

MRS HEMSTOCK: You'd find you shut the door to stop folks hearing you

crying.

NURSE (bending down and stroking Patty): Perhaps so.

MRS HEMSTOCK: Tha art fond o' that bird.

NURSE (flushing): I am.

MRS HEMSTOCK: If I wor thee, our Harry, I wouldna let Patty beat me, even.

HARRY: What dost mean?

MRS HEMSTOCK: Stroke him, Nurse — and say "Poor old Harry".

NURSE: Mr Hemstock will have a grudge against me if you slate him so in my presence.

MRS HEMSTOCK: And would it grieve thee?

NURSE: I should be sorry.

MRS HEMSTOCK (after a pause — vehemently): Ha, if he worn't such a slow fool! Can thee lift me back, Nurse?

NURSE: Won't you let Mr Hemstock — ?

MRS HEMSTOCK: No — thee do it.

Exit HARRY.

Did ter niver ha'e a sweetheart, Nurse?

NURSE: Yes — when I was in the hospital. He was a doctor.

MRS HEMSTOCK: An' where is he?

NURSE: He was too good for me, his mother said, and so —

MRS HEMSTOCK: Tha'rt well rid o' such a draggletail. How long is it since?

NURSE: Eight years.

MRS HEMSTOCK: Oh, so tha'rt none heartbroken. We'n got a new assistant. I like him better than the owd doctor. His name's Foules.

NURSE: What!

CURTAIN

SCENE II

Time: the same. The kitchen of HEMSTOCK'S house, a large, low, old-fashioned room. Fowls are pecking on the floor. HARRY, in a coarse apron, is washing the floor. MR HEMSTOCK, at the table, is mixing flour in a bowl.

MR HEMSTOCK: Who wor that scraightin' a bit sin'?

HARRY: Our Susy's kid.

MR HEMSTOCK: What for?

HARRY: I fetched him a wipe across th' mouth.

MR HEMSTOCK: There's more bother then —

HARRY: He was settin' that dog on th' fowls again.

MR HEMSTOCK: We s'll be having her round in a tear, directly, then.

HARRY: Well, I'm not —

There is a knock: and in the open doorway at the back a little, withered, old clergyman, the BARON, is seen.

BARON: How is the sick woman this morning? (He speaks with a very foreign German accent.)

MR HEMSTOCK: I think she's middlin', thank you.

BARON: I will go and see her, and speak to her.

HARRY: We've told you a dozen times 'er na wants you.

BARON: It is my duty that I shall go —

HARRY (rising from his knees): Tha are na — !

BARON: I am the vicar of this parish. I am the Baron von Ruge. I will do my duty —

HARRY (confronting him): Tha'rt na goin' to bother her. Her na wants thee.

BARON: Stand clear of my way, sir — I will go, I will not be barred, I will go to her, I will remind her —

HARRY (frustrating his efforts): 'Er na wants thee —

He suddenly moves: the BARON rushes into Patty. The goose flaps and squawks and attacks him. The BARON retreats hastily. Enter NURSE.

NURSE: Whatever is the matter?

MR HEMSTOCK: It's Patty haulin' the Baron out —

NURSE: Oh dear — how dreadful!

MR HEMSTOCK: 'E's bin plenty of times, an' every time our Harry tells 'im as Missis won't be bothered wi' him —

NURSE: What a pity she won't see him. Don't you think if you let him go —

HARRY: Ask 'er thysen if 'er wants 'im — an' if 'er doesna want 'im, 'e's na goin' —

NURSE: But what a pity — !

MR HEMSTOCK: You can't make heads or tails of what 'e says. I can't think what they want wi' a bit of a German Baron bein' a vicar in England — in this country an' a', where there wants a bluff man.

NURSE: He's a Polish nobleman, Mr Hemstock, exiled after fighting for his country. He's a brave man, and a good gentleman. I like him very much.

MR HEMSTOCK: He treats you as if you was dirt, an' talks like a chokin' cock —

HARRY: An' 'e's na goin' pesterin' 'er when 'er doesna want 'im.

NURSE: Well, of course you know best — but don't you think Mrs Hemstock ought to see a minister? I think —

Enter the BAKER, a big, stout, pale man of about forty.

BAKER: Been havin' a shindy with the Baron?

MR HEMSTOCK: He wants to see the Missis, an' we not let him.

BAKER: You'd best keep th' right side of 'im. (He swings his large basket, which he carries sackwise on his shoulder, down to a chair.) The strike is settled, an' th' men's goin' back on the old terms.

NURSE: Oh, I'm so glad.

BAKER: Fisher's a deep 'un. The Company'll know yet as they've got a

manager.

NURSE (to HARRY): So you'll be going back to work soon, Mr Hemstock. You will be glad.

MR HEMSTOCK: Me — I s'll never work again. An' it's doubtful as our Harry won't get on —

BAKER: They gave you a place before the strike, didn't they, where you had to work you inside out for about fifteen shillings a week?

HARRY: Ha.

He goes out.

MR HEMSTOCK: Yes, they treated him very shabbily.

BAKER: I bet it was th' owd Baron. He's a good hand at having your eye for a word, an' your tooth for a look. I bet Harry'll get no job —

MR HEMSTOCK: No, I'm afraid 'e wanna. The Baron will go down to Fisher —

BAKER: And Harry can go down to — his godfather, eh, Nurse?

NURSE: I don't understand.

BAKER: Old Harry.

MR HEMSTOCK: I hope to goodness 'e will get something to do, else 'e'll mope himself into the cut, or the 'sylum, afore long.

BAKER: Oh, it's love what's upset him, isn't it? Rachel Wilcox was too much for his stomach —

MR HEMSTOCK: I dunno what it is.

BAKER: She's a bit of a ronk 'un. She was his first cigar, an' it's left him sick yet. She's not half bad, you know, if you can stand 'em strong.

NURSE goes out.

I've scared Nurse off. — But Harry's got a bit of a thin stomach, hasn't he? Rachel's not a half bad little ha-p'orth.

MR HEMSTOCK: Some's got a stomach for tan-tafflins, an' some 'ud rather ha'e bread an' butter —

BAKER: And Rachel's creamy — she's a cream horn of plenty — eh, what?

MR HEMSTOCK: A bit sickly.

BAKER: I dunno — it 'ud take a lot o' rich food to turn me. How many — ?

MR HEMSTOCK: One of yesterday's bakin', please.

BAKER sets the loaf on the table.

BAKER: Your Susy wa'nt in — I wonder what she wants. Where is she, do you know?

MR HEMSTOCK: She'll be somewhere lookin' after th' land.

BAKER: I reckon she makes a rare farmer.

MR HEMSTOCK: Yes.

BAKER: Bill left the place in a bit of a mess —

MR HEMSTOCK: A man as drinks himself to death —

BAKER: Ay! She wishes she'd had me astead of him, she says. I tell her it's never too late to mend. He's made the hole, I'll be the patch. But it's not much of a place, Smalley's farm — ?

MR HEMSTOCK: It takes her all her time to manage an' pay off Bill's debts.

BAKER: Debts — why, I thought from what she said —

Enter SUSY SMALLEY, a buxom, ruddy, bold woman of thirty-five, wearing thick boots and a dark blue milkmaid bonnet.

MRS SMALLEY: Wheer's our Harry?

MR HEMSTOCK: I dunno. 'E went out a bit sin' —

MRS SMALLEY: An' wheer is 'e? I'll let him know whether he's —

Enter HARRY.

Oh, I've foun' thee, have I? What dost reckon tha's been doin' to my lad?

HARRY: Tha nedna ha' hunted for me. I wor nobbut i' th' garden.

BAKER: You should ha' looked in th' parsley bed, Susy.

MRS SMALLEY: That's wheer to find babies — an' I'll baby him. What did thee hit my lad for?

HARRY: Ask thysen.

MRS SMALLEY: I'm axin' thee. Tha thinks because I hanna a man to stand up for me, tha can —

HARRY: There's a lot o' helpless widder about thee!

MRS SMALLEY: No, an' it's a good thing I'm not helpless, else I should be trod underfoot like straw, by a parcel of —

HARRY: It's tha as does th' treadin'. Tha's trod your Bill a long way underfoot — six foot or more.

BAKER: It's a fat sight deeper than that afore you get to blazes.

MRS SMALLEY: Whatever our Bill was or wan't, 'e was not a' idle skilk livin' on two old folks, devourin' 'em.

NURSE (entering): Oh, think of your mother, Mrs Smalley.

MRS SMALLEY: I s'll think of who I like —

BAKER: An' who do you like, Susy?

MRS SMALLEY: You keep your "Susy" to yourself —

BAKER: Only too glad, when I get her —

MRS SMALLEY: An' we don't thank Nurse Broadbanks for interferin'. She only comes carneyin' round for what she gets. Our Harry an' her's matched; a pair of mealy-mouthed creeps, deep as they make 'em. An' my father's not much better. What all of 'em's after's my mother's money.

NURSE: Oh, for shame, for shame!

HARRY: Shut thy mouth, or I'll shut it for thee.

MRS SMALLEY: Oh, shall you? I should like to see you. It's as much as you durst do to hit a child, you great coward, you kid.

MR HEMSTOCK: Shut it up, now, shut it up!

MRS SMALLEY: But I'll let him know, if he touches my child again; I'll give him what for. I'll thrash him myself —

BAKER: That's your brother, not your husband.

MRS SMALLEY: I will an' a'. Him an' his blessed fowls! 'E's nobbut a chuck himself, as dursn't say boh to a goose, an' as hides in th' water-butt if his girl comes to see him —

HARRY dashes forward as if to strike her. The BAKER interposes.

BAKER: Here, none o' that, none o' that!

MRS SMALLEY: A great coward! He thinks he'll show Nurse Broadbanks what he is, does he? I hope she'll storm round him after this bit.

HARRY (in a fury): If tha doesn't —

MR HEMSTOCK: Let's have no more of it, let's have no more of it —

BAKER: How much bread, Mrs Smalley? I reckon your Bill bettered himself when he flitted — what? I don't think. How many loaves? I saved you a crusty one.

MR HEMSTOCK: She's crust enough on her —

BAKER: Oh, I like 'em a bit brown. Good morning, everybody.

He swings up his basket and follows MRS SMALLEY out.

NURSE: How shameful to make a disturbance like that!

MR HEMSTOCK: We never have a bit of peace. She won't do a hand's turn in the house, and seems as if she can't bear herself because we manage without her.

HARRY: She's after the money.

NURSE: How dreadful! You are a strange family.

She goes into the parlour again, and keeps coming in and out with water ewer and so on. MR HEMSTOCK flourishes his balls of dough. HARRY puts on the saucepan.

MR HEMSTOCK: Dost think Job Arthur will marry our Susy?

HARRY: No.

MR HEMSTOCK: He seems to hang round her a good bit. Your mother often says he lets his bread get stale stoppin' there.

HARRY: If 'e married 'er, 'e'll settle her.

MR HEMSTOCK: Yes — he's all there.

HARRY: All but what he's short to pay his debts.

He goes out.

NURSE: I think I've done everything, Mr Hemstock.

She begins packing her black bag.

MR HEMSTOCK: Could you wait half a minute while I go — to Goddard's?

NURSE: Well — ten minutes.

The old man takes a jar from the cupboard, and puts on his hat. At the door he meets the doctor, a clean-shaven fair man rather full at the stomach and low at the chest.

DR FOULES: Good morning, Mr Hemstock — you are going out?

MR HEMSTOCK: For a second, Doctor, just to the shop.

DR FOULES: I see. Then shall I go in?

MR HEMSTOCK: Oh, yes, Doctor.

DR FOULES: Thank you.

He enters. NURSE is just putting on her bonnet. The doctor stands confused.

NURSE (low and purring): Good morning.

DR FOULES: Nurse Broadbanks!

NURSE (low): Yes — just fancy.

DR FOULES: Well. I am surprised. Who ever —

NURSE: I knew it was you. No other doctor would have been so polite about entering the house.

DR FOULES: Well — I can hardly find words — I am sure —

NURSE: Fancy your keeping your old shyness.

DR FOULES (flushing): I don't know that I do —

NURSE: I should have thought it would have worn off — all the experience you have had.

DR FOULES: Have I had so much experience?

NURSE: Eight years.

DR FOULES: Ah, Nurse, we don't measure experience by years.

NURSE: Surely, you have a quotation!

DR FOULES (smiling): No, I have not — for a wonder. Indeed I'm growing out of touch with literature.

NURSE: I shall not know you. You used to be —

DR FOULES: Vox, et præterea nihil. "A voice, and nothing more."

NURSE: You are yourself. But you have not had much experience, in eight years?

DR FOULES: Not much has happened to me.

NURSE: And you a doctor!

DR FOULES: And I a doctor!

NURSE: But you have lost your old æsthetic look — wistful, I nearly said.

DR FOULES: Damnosa quid non imminuit dies? "Whom has not pernicious time impaired?"

NURSE: Not your stock of learning, evidently.

DR FOULES (bowing): Nor your wit, Nurse. Suum cuique. You have not — ?

NURSE: What?

DR FOULES: You have not — married?

NURSE: Nurse Broadbanks.

DR FOULES: Of course — ha ha — how slow of me. Verbum sat sapienti.

NURSE: And you — ?

DR FOULES: What, Nurse?

NURSE: Married?

DR FOULES: No, Nurse, I am not. Nor, if it is anything to your satisfaction, likely to be.

NURSE: Your mother is still alive?

DR FOULES (bowing): Rem acu tetigisti. “You have pricked the point with your needle.”

NURSE: I beg your pardon.

DR FOULES: Do not, I beg, do not.

NURSE: Semper idem — I know so much Latin.

DR FOULES: In what am I always the same, Nurse?

NURSE: Well — your politeness.

DR FOULES: Suaviter in modo, fortiter in re. My old motto, you remember.

NURSE: I do not know the English for it.

DR FOULES: “Gentle in manner, resolute in deed.”

NURSE: In what deed, may I ask, Doctor?

DR FOULES: You may ask, Nurse. I am afraid I cannot tell you. And I, may I ask what you have done?

NURSE: Worked enough to be rather tired, Doctor — and found the world full of friends.

DR FOULES: Non multa sed multum. “Not many things, but much,” Nurse. I could not say so much.

NURSE (laughing): No?

DR FOULES: Quid rides? “Wherefore do you laugh?”

NURSE: She lives with you here?

DR FOULES: My mother? Yes.

NURSE: It will always be said of you — ”He was a good son.”

DR FOULES: I hope so, Nurse.

NURSE: Yes — it is the best.

DR FOULES (softly): You look sad.

NURSE: Not on my own behalf, Doctor.

DR FOULES: On mine, Nurse?

NURSE (reluctantly): No, not quite that.

DR FOULES: *Tædium vitæ* — all unresolved emotions and sicknesses go under that “weariness of life”.

NURSE: Life? Doctor — do we get enough life to be weary of it? Work,

perhaps.

DR FOULES: It may be — but —

NURSE: You don't want life.

DR FOULES (smiling): Not much. I see too much of it to want it.

NURSE: Your mother will, I hope, live long enough to save you from experience.

DR FOULES: I hope it is a good wish, Nurse.

NURSE: Do you doubt it?

DR FOULES: Will you come and see us, Nurse?

NURSE: And see your mother?

DR FOULES: And see my mother, Nurse. (He bows.)

NURSE (smiling): Thank you — I will.

Enter HARRY — he stands rather confused in the doorway.

DR FOULES: Good morning, Mr Hemstock. How is Mrs Hemstock this morning?

HARRY: 'Er's pretty middlin', I believe.

Enter MR HEMSTOCK.

DR FOULES: I have just discovered that Nurse and I are old friends.

MR HEMSTOCK: I am glad of that —

DR FOULES: Thank you.

NURSE: Dr Foules used to be my sweetheart.

MR HEMSTOCK: You don't mean it!

DR FOULES: Is it so long ago, Nurse, that you jest about it?

NURSE: I do not jest, Doctor. You are always to be taken very seriously.

DR FOULES (bowing): Thank you.

NURSE (to HARRY): Where did I leave my galoshes, Mr Hemstock?

HARRY: I'll fetch 'em.

He brings them in.

NURSE: How good of you to clean them for me!

They all stand watching while NURSE pulls them on.

DR FOULES: "A world full of friends," Nurse.

NURSE: Mr Hemstock and I are very good friends — are we not, Mr Hemstock?

HARRY: I dinna know — you know best — 'appen we are.

DR FOULES: You are repudiated, Nurse.

NURSE: Twice! You shouldn't have begun it.

DR FOULES: I am very sorry. It is never too late to mend.

NURSE: We've heard that before this morning. I must go.

DR FOULES: You will come and see us — soon.

NURSE: I am at your disposal, Doctor. Good day, everybody.

ALL: Good day, Nurse.

DR FOULES: Well, I will see how Mrs Hemstock is.

He goes out.

MR HEMSTOCK: He's a nice fellow.

HARRY: Hm!

MR HEMSTOCK: Fancy he used ter court Nurse! I shouldna be surprised if they got together again.

HARRY: It doesna matter to me whether 'er does or not.

MR HEMSTOCK: No, it na matters to us — on'y I should like to see her settled wi' a decent chap. She's a good woman for any man. If I'd a been thy age —

HARRY: Wi' that other hangin' round — an' no work to do — tha's ha' done wonders.

MR HEMSTOCK: T'other — tha's gin 'er the sack — an' tha can get work elsewhere.

HARRY: Dost think 'er'd ha'e me! (He laughs contemptuously.)

There is a noise of yelping and crying. The men stand and listen.

MR HEMSTOCK: It's that dog! — An' Nurse!

HARRY rushes out. There is a great yelping and ki-yi-ing, a scream from NURSE. Immediately NURSE enters, carrying Patty, who flaps in a torn and gory state. HARRY follows. NURSE, panting, sets down Patty.

MR HEMSTOCK: Whatever —

HARRY (flushing in fury): Has it hurt thee — did it touch thee?

NURSE: Me!

HARRY: I'll break its neck.

NURSE: Oh — don't be —

HARRY: Where did it touch thee? There's blood on thee.

NURSE: It's not me, it's Patty.

HARRY: 'Appen tha non knows — 'appen it catched thee. Look at thy arm — look there!

NURSE: No — I'm not hurt, I'm sure I'm not.

HARRY: I'll break its neck, the brute.

NURSE: It had got hold of poor Patty by the wing — poor old bird.

HARRY: Look at thy cuffs. I'll break its neck.

NURSE: No — oh no, don't go out — no — get me some warm water, will you — and I'll see to Patty.

HARRY brings a bowl of warm water. NURSE takes bandaging from her bag.

MR HEMSTOCK: It's been at her before.

NURSE (to HARRY): You look after her other wing — keep her still — poor old bird — (She proceeds to dress the wounded wing.)

MR HEMSTOCK: She'd be alright, Nurse, without you bothering.

NURSE: The idea — poor old thing!

MR HEMSTOCK: We've been many time worse hurt at pit, an' not half that attention.

NURSE: But — you see, you're not geese.

HARRY: We're not of as much count.

NURSE: Hand me the scissors, please — you don't know what you are —

DR FOULES enters and stands in doorway.

MR HEMSTOCK: I keep telling him, if he set more stock by himself other folks 'ud think better of him.

NURSE: They might know him a little better if he'd let them.

DR FOULES: I see my help is superfluous.

NURSE: Yes, Doctor — it's one of the lower animals.

DR FOULES: Ah —

CURTAIN

ACT II

SCENE I

The same evening. The HEMSTOCKS' kitchen, with the lamp lighted. The BAKER and HARRY sit with glasses of whisky.

BAKER: An' tha doesn't want 'er?

HARRY: I heave at the sight of her.

BAKER: She'll ha'e a bit o' money, I reckon.

HARRY: She's got to wait till old Hezekiah cops out, first.

BAKER: Hm! That'll be a long time yet — if he doesn't get married again. They say he's hankerin' after Nurse.

HARRY: 'Er'll niver ha'e 'im.

BAKER: Too old. But what hast got against Rachel?

HARRY: Nowt — but I heave wi' sickness at the thought of 'er.

BAKER: Hm! I like one as'll give as much as she takes.

HARRY: Sight more.

BAKER: It depends who's who.

HARRY: I can never make out why she went in service at the vicarage.

BAKER: Can't you? I've had many a nice evening up there. Baron an' Baroness go to bed at nine o'clock and then — Oh, all the girls know the advantage of being at the vicarage.

HARRY: Oh — an' does she ha'e thee up in the kitchen?

BAKER: Does she not half.

HARRY: I thought she wor so much struck on me!

BAKER: You wait a minute. If she can't feed i' th' paddock she'll feed at th' roadside. Not but what she's all right, you know.

HARRY: I do know.

BAKER: She's not got the spirit of your Susy. By Jove, she's a terror. No liberties there.

HARRY: Not likely.

BAKER: They say Bill left 'er in debt.

HARRY: He did.

BAKER: Hm! She'll have a long pull, then, to get it paid off.

HARRY: She's a-waitin' for my mother's money.

BAKER: Is she likely to get much?

HARRY: Happen a couple o' hundred — happen nowt.

BAKER: Depends on the will?

HARRY: Yes.

BAKER: A couple of hundred. . . .

HARRY: About that apiece, we should ha'e.

BAKER: Hm! You've seen the will?

HARRY: No — my mother takes good care o' that.

BAKER: Then none of you know? But you've some idea.

HARRY: We hanna. My mother's funny — there's no tellin' what 'er might do.

BAKER: Hm! She might leave the money away from her own children?

HARRY: I shouldna be a bit surprised.

BAKER: Hm! An' your Susy —

MRS SMALLEY (entering): What about your Susy?

BAKER: Hello!

MRS SMALLEY: You're stoppin' a precious long time. Where might you be bound to-night?

BAKER: Not far.

MRS SMALLEY: No further than the vicarage, an' that's two closes off. But Rachel'll be givin' you up.

BAKER: 'Appen so.

MRS SMALLEY: Then she'll be tryin' her chances down here.

BAKER: I wish her luck.

HARRY (going out): I'll go an' get a bit o' bacca.

MRS SMALLEY: An' what do you call luck?

BAKER: Which do you reckon is a lucky-bag, me or your Harry?

MRS SMALLEY: You're both about as good: he's only got a little bunged-up whistle in him, an' many a hand's ferreted in you an' fetched out what's worth havin'.

BAKER: So I'm not worth havin'?

MRS SMALLEY: No, you're not, that's flat.

BAKER: So you wouldn't have me?

MRS SMALLEY: You're giving yourself away, are you?

BAKER (incisively): No, I'm not.

MRS SMALLEY: Indeed. And what's your figure, may I ask?

BAKER: A couple of hundred, to you; to anyone else, more.

MRS SMALLEY: Thank you for the offer — very kind of you, I'm sure. And how much is it to Rachel?

BAKER: Two hundred an' fifty.

MRS SMALLEY: Oh! So I'm worth fifty pound to you, am I — after I've put my two hundred down. Ready money?

BAKER: Six months bill.

MRS SMALLEY: You are a swine.

BAKER: Do you accept?

MRS SMALLEY: You are a pig! You'd eat cinders if you could get nowt else.

BAKER: I should. I'd rather have you than any of the boiling; but I must, I must, have —

MRS SMALLEY: Two hundred?

BAKER: Not less.

MRS SMALLEY: Six months bill.

BAKER: Six months bill.

MRS SMALLEY: I hope you'll get it.

BAKER: I intend to.

MRS SMALLEY (after a speechless moment): You are a devil when you've had a drop.

BAKER: Am I a dear one?

MRS SMALLEY: Do you call yourself cheap?

BAKER: What do you think? I was always one of the “take it or leave it” sellers.

MRS SMALLEY: I think you imagine yourself worth a great sight more than you are.

BAKER: Hm! I should have thought you’d have found the figure easy. And I’ve always said I’d rather it was you than anybody.

MRS SMALLEY: You was mighty slow, then, once on a day.

BAKER: I was a young cock-sparrow then — common — but wouldn’t die in a cage.

MRS SMALLEY: An’ what do you reckon you are now?

BAKER: I’m an old duck that knows “dilly-dilly”!

MRS SMALLEY: “Come and be killed.”

BAKER: Scatter me a bit of golden corn — two hundred — and you may wring my neck.

MRS SMALLEY: You must have an empty crop.

BAKER: A few pebbles that’ll digest me if I don’t —

MRS SMALLEY: Debts?

BAKER: I said pebbles.

MRS SMALLEY: You’re a positive fiend in drink.

BAKER: But what about — ?

Enter RACHEL, a tall, pale girl, with dark circles under her eyes. She has a consumed look, as if her quiet pallor smothered a fire. She wears a servant's cap and apron covered by a large dark shawl. She enters softly.

RACHEL: I thought I heard you two.

MRS SMALLEY (startled): You might knock!

RACHEL: Were you talking secrets?

BAKER: Have you come to look for me, Rachel?

RACHEL (cuttingly): You think a mighty lot of yourself.

BAKER: Have a drop of Scotch? No? How's that? There's Harry's glass — drink out of that.

RACHEL: You're very clever at giving away what's not your own. Give me yours.

BAKER: I've not finished with it — but you can drink with me. Here!

RACHEL: No, thank you.

BAKER (softly, smiling): Why, what has offended you?

RACHEL: Nothing, indeed.

BAKER: That's alright. I don't like you to be offended. As a sign of good luck. (She sips.) Thanks. I'm sorry I'm late.

RACHEL: You're not there yet, so you can't be late.

BAKER: Yes, I am there. What farther have I to go?

RACHEL (singing):

“You've got a long way to go,
You've got a long way to go,”

MRS SMALLEY (singing in a masculine voice):

“Before you get hold of the donkey’s tether
You’ve got a long way to go.”

BAKER (singing in a fine bass):

“If I had an ass and he wouldn’t go,
Would I wallop him? Oh, dear no!
I’d give him some corn and say ‘Gee whow,
Neddy, stand still while I mount, oh ho!’“

MRS SMALLEY: He’s the donkey.

BAKER: Who doesn’t make an ass of himself sometimes?

MRS SMALLEY: And we’ve got to give him some corn.

BAKER: For you’ll never catch him to get hold of his tail — salt’s no good.

MRS SMALLEY: How much corn? Tell her.

BAKER: Two hundred — and fifty — golden grains. No more.

RACHEL: What’s up with him to-night?

MRS SMALLEY: Oh, he’s had a drop, an’ it always sets him on edge. He’s like a razor. When he’s had a drop, if you stroke him you cut yourself a-two.

RACHEL: Goodness!

BAKER: Rachel, I’d sell my immortal soul for two hundred — and fifty — golden sovereigns.

RACHEL: I’m not buying immortal souls, thanks.

BAKER: With this (He spreads out his hands.) — this paper and string to wrap it in.

RACHEL: An' a nice parcel of goods you are!

BAKER: I'm a lucky bag, Rachel. You don't know all that's in me, yet.

RACHEL: And what is that, pray?

BAKER: I don't know myself. But you shall have leave to rummage me. (He throws open his arms.) Look! (He rises from his chair, as it were superbly. He is a fine, portly, not unhandsome man. He strikes a "superb" attitude.) Look, Rachel. For two hundred and fifty pounds, three months bill, I am (He bows.) your slave. You shall (He speaks with cynical sincerity.) bring down my head as low as you like (He bows low.), I swear it, and I never swore a lie.

RACHEL: But what do you want two hundred and fifty pounds for?

HARRY (entering): Has Nurse come?

BAKER: Not yet. Are you going to finish your glass? It has taken me all my time to stop the women sipping from it.

RACHEL: Story! You know I wouldn't —

BAKER: Hush! Don't be rash now, or you'll hate me to-morrow.

RACHEL: And should you care?

BAKER: I am willing to give you full rights over my immortal soul and this paper and string —

MRS SMALLEY: For two hundred down —

BAKER (bowing — then looking to RACHEL): And fifty, Mrs Smalley.

RACHEL: What do you think of it, Susy? Is it a bargain?

BAKER (setting his cap on the back of his head and pulling on a large overcoat — he is well dressed): We have not struck hands yet.

MRS SMALLEY (to RACHEL): What do you say?

RACHEL: Nay, I want to hear what you say.

MRS SMALLEY: I'm going to say nowt, yet a while —

RACHEL: Well, we'll see. (She pulls her shawl over her head to follow him.)

BAKER: Nay — I'm going down Northrop — on business.

RACHEL: Wasn't you coming up?

BAKER: To the vicarage? I had this to tell you; that is all.

RACHEL: Well, I must say — but come up just for —

BAKER: Not for a moment, Rachel. I am going down Northrop.

MRS SMALLEY: It's no good you saying nothing, Rachel. You might as well save your breath.

BAKER (smiling to RACHEL): You hear? I'll see you in the morning. Good night all.

Exit BAKER.

RACHEL (looking after him): I hate him.

MRS SMALLEY: I'm going home.

She hurries out. There is an awkward pause. HARRY sits bending over the fire.

RACHEL: How is your mother?

HARRY: Same.

RACHEL: Who's with her?

HARRY: Dad.

RACHEL: Where's Patty?

HARRY: Cupboard.

RACHEL: When do you expect Nurse?

HARRY: Dunno.

RACHEL: Have you been drinking whisky? (No answer.) Are you going to leave these glasses for Nurse to see? (No answer.) Are you going to let her see you drinking? (No answer.) Well, I do reckon you might speak to a body. I've not spoke to you for a week — hardly seen you. I can see you in your garden from the vicarage front bedrooms. I often watch you. Do you want your glass?

HARRY: Gi'e's it here!

RACHEL: You might say thank you. Job Arthur Bowers wants me to marry him. And I shouldn't be surprised if I did. (She cries.)

HARRY: Well, tha nedna scraight.

RACHEL: No — I mun only cry when I'm by myself. (Sobs.) I'm sure I'm sobbing half the night. (She cries.) Do you sleep bad? You do get up early — I can see your candle at half-past three, and you don't know how it frightens me.

HARRY: What's it frighten thee for?

RACHEL: I don't know. I feel frightened, for you seem so funny nowadays.

HARRY: 'As ter on'y just foun' it out?

RACHEL: You know I've told you about it many a time.

HARRY: A sight too often.

RACHEL: You are horrid. What have I done? Tell me.

HARRY: I'm non goin' to be made shift of. Tha'rt non goin' ter ma'e a spitton

of me, ter spit the taste of somebody else out of thy mouth into.

RACHEL: Well, if I've been hateful, you've drove me to it — haven't you?

HARRY: I've told thee, I dunna want thee.

RACHEL: An' I went into service, so's I'd have something to do — an' so's I should be near — when —

HARRY: Go on — an' so's — an' so's an' so's — I'm thy spitton, tha can spit owt inter me.

RACHEL: You're right, you're full o' sawdust.

HARRY (showing his teeth): What?

RACHEL: Sawdust, like a dummy. You've no more life in you.

HARRY (in a passion): What! What!

RACHEL: Sawdust.

HARRY (springing and seizing her by the shoulders): I'll settle thee!

RACHEL: You've been drinking.

HARRY (shouting): I'll settle thee, if I hang for it!

RACHEL: You're hurting me!

HARRY (quietly): Come here. (He binds her in her large shawl.)

RACHEL: Oh! What are you doing?

HARRY: I'll ha'e thee now, I will. (He seats her in the big armchair, strapping her with a leather belt he takes from his waist.)

RACHEL (quietly): Have you gone mad?

HARRY: Now then — answer me! Did ter court Bill Naylor a' the time as thou wert goin' wi' me?

RACHEL: No.

HARRY (his fist close to her eyes — loudly): Trewth!

RACHEL: Yes.

HARRY: Did ter tell him I used ter shout out that somebody wor coming if thou wanted to kiss me?

RACHEL: Yes.

HARRY: An' as I was allers swallerin' my spittle for fright?

RACHEL: Yes.

HARRY: An' I wor like a girl, as dursn't look thee atween the eyes, for all I was worth?

RACHEL: Yes.

HARRY: An' dursn't I?

RACHEL: Yes — an' don't. (She closes her eyes.)

HARRY: What! An' all t'other things about me as the pit was full of?

RACHEL: Oh, no! Oh, no!

HARRY: Yes, tha did!

RACHEL: No, oh no, Harry!

HARRY: An' are ter courtin' Job Arthur Bowers?

RACHEL: Oh!

HARRY: Scream, an' I'll squeeze thy head again' that chair-back till it cracks like a nut.

RACHEL (whimpering): Oh dear, oh dear.

HARRY: It is "oh dear" — an' it 'as been for me "oh dear". Listen 'ere, tha brazend hussy. Tha keeps thy face shut when tha comes near me. Dost hear?

RACHEL: Yes.

HARRY: None o' thy cheek, not another word, in future — or I'll — what?

RACHEL: No.

HARRY: An' dunna touch me till tha'rt axed. Not so much as wi' thy frock. Dost hear?

RACHEL: Yes.

HARRY: What dost hear?

RACHEL: I mustn't touch you.

HARRY: Not till thou'rt axed. An' lu' thee here, my lady — I s'll brain thee if tha says a word to me — sithee? (He thrusts his fist in her face.)

RACHEL: Somebody will come — let me go, let me go!

HARRY: An' what I've said, I mean — drunk or sover. Sithee?

RACHEL: Yes, Harry! Oh, let me go.

HARRY: I'll let thee go. (He does so, slowly.) An' tha can go wi' who tha likes, an' marry who tha likes, but if tha says a word about me, I'll come for thee. There! (He unbinds her. She lays her hand on his sleeve.) No! (He shakes her off. She rises and stands dejectedly before him.) I hate thee now enough to strangle thee.

RACHEL (bursting into tears): Oh, you are —

HARRY: Now go wi' who tha likes — get off.

RACHEL: You are —

HARRY: I want none o' thee — go!

She is departing.

An' ta'e thy shawl wi' thee.

She, weeping, picks up her shawl.

An' lap it round thee — it's a raw night.

She does so. He speaks gently now.

Now go.

Exit RACHEL. HARRY pours himself another glass of whisky. He goes to the cupboard.

Patty! Pat!

He puts his face caressingly among the bird's feathers.

We'll settle her Pat — eh? We'll stop her gallop. Hey, Pat!

He tosses the bird into the air wildly.

CURTAIN

SCENE II

A few moments later. The road just outside the HEMSTOCKS'. Deep darkness: two cottage lights in the background. In the foreground, a large white swing gate leading from the farmyard into the road, a stile beside the gate. MRS SMALLEY leans against the big white gatepost. Enter RACHEL, drying her tears, from the background. She steps through the stile. SUSY moves.

RACHEL: Oh! Oh! Oh Harry!

MRS SMALLEY: It's only me; shut up.

RACHEL: Oh, you did give me a turn, Susy!

MRS SMALLEY: Whatever's up?

RACHEL: Nothing. Who are you looking for?

MRS SMALLEY: Nobody.

RACHEL: Has Job Arthur gone?

MRS SMALLEY: You saw him go.

RACHEL: Not that I care.

MRS SMALLEY: I bet you don't. You carry on as if you don't care. You do. You needn't pretend to be so mighty struck on our Harry, you know it's all sham.

RACHEL: It's not, Susy. There's no sham about it; I wish there was. He's got

his eye on Nurse, it's my belief.

MRS SMALLEY: An' she's got her eye on my mother's money, I know. She's sniffing like a cat over a mouse hole, an' cottoning on to our Harry.

RACHEL: She's deep, she is — an' he'd be as big as a lord for at the bottom he's that stuck-up he doesn't know what to do with himself.

MRS SMALLEY: I believe she knows something about the will.

RACHEL: Well, surely —

MRS SMALLEY: An' from summat as my mother let drop, I'd be bound she's in it, wi' our Harry.

RACHEL: His mother always made me cheap in his eyes.

MRS SMALLEY: If I could get to know —

RACHEL: Doesn't your Harry know?

MRS SMALLEY: How should I know what he knows?

RACHEL: My father's pining for Nurse, the old fool. I wish he'd get her. His money might get her. I'll buck him up.

MRS SMALLEY: I'll get in her way wi' our Harry as much as I can.

RACHEL: Alright. You are a bit gone on Job Arthur, aren't you?

MRS SMALLEY: He should ha' married me, by rights, twelve years back.

RACHEL: There's something fascinating about him. Does he really want £250?

MRS SMALLEY: Yes.

RACHEL: I believe my father would give it me, if I got married to please him.

MRS SMALLEY: Alright, there's your chance then.

RACHEL: You needn't be nasty, Susy. I don't want the chance.

MRS SMALLEY: You dodge round too many corners, like a ferret, you do.

RACHEL: At any rate, I'm not waiting for somebody to die and leave me bait to chuck to a fat fist of a fellow.

MRS SMALLEY: You'd better mind what you're saying, Rachel Wilcox.

RACHEL: I don't care about you. So there.

MRS SMALLEY: Doesn't 'er though? What about our Harry? I'll let him know a thing or two.

RACHEL: It's you as has been saying things, I know. You've been telling him about Job Arthur Bowers.

MRS SMALLEY: Oh, have I? You're mighty clever.

RACHEL: You don't need to be clever to see through you. But I'll make you pay for it, my lady.

MRS SMALLEY: What? Come out here —

RACHEL: There's the Baron — an' they don't know I'm out!

She runs into hiding as a lantern appears down the lane. SUSY draws after her.

SUSY: What's he after?

RACHEL: Lovers. They hunt 'em out every Monday night. Shut up now. (In a whisper.) Does my white apron show?

BARON: We haf done good work this night.

BARONESS (tall and spare, in an antique cloak and bonnet): Seven couples, Baron — and we have only been out an hour. Isn't it terrible!

BARON: These miners are not men — they are animals that prowl by night.

BARONESS: The girls are worse, with their faces of brass. It is they who entice the young men into these naughty holes and crannies.

BARON: But if a man haf honour, will he not woo a maiden in her father's house, in the presence of her family?

BARONESS: This is a parish of sin, Baron, the people love sin.

BARON: Defiant in sin, they are! But I will overthrow them. I will drive them before me into the pit.

BARONESS: To think of that brazen besom telling us to go home and go to bed —

BARON: And the man — ah, infamous, gross insult! And coward, to revile me that I have no child.

BARONESS: If they had a few less — and they born of sin — the low women! That is the house of the woman Hemstock. Have you seen her?

BARON: Not yet. I will not bury her, heathen and blasphemous woman. She shall not soil my graveyard of good dead. And those, her men folk, obstreperous and enemies of God, I will bow low their necks —

BARONESS: Hush, there are some — I believe there are — behind the gate —

BARON: More? Ah, misery, more than linked worms! Where? My dull eyes!

BARONESS: There — behind the gatepost —

BARON (holding aloft the candle): Lovers, if you be there, why do you suck at sin? Is this honour, you man? There is no one there, Baroness.

BARONESS: Yes, Baron, yes. I can see her apron. Who are you? Come out of there. You, girl, I see you. Come out, for shame. You do not know what you are doing; or, if you do, you are the depth of wickedness. (A titter is heard.)

BARON: Where is the man? Show yourself, sir. Let me see the man. You lurk, sir, in a hole like a rat. Ah, the disgrace of mankind.

BARONESS: What is going to become of you, girl? Go home, before it is too late. Go home and learn to do your housework.

BARON: You press into the boughs of the trees, but the boughs are the little arms of God. You hide yourselves deep in the darkness, which is but the pupil of the eye of God. Ah, like a hot spark you fret the eye of God with your lust.

BARONESS: You will rue it this time next year, I tell you.

BARON: The face of the man is full of shame, it is afraid lest it fall under my eye.

He holds the lantern peering at the woman. The BARONESS hovers close behind. RACHEL pushes SUSY out upon the little man. The lantern is extinguished.

BARONESS: Oh, oh, come away, Baron, come away!

BARON: Ha! Ha! (His voice is screaming.) It is the attack! Stand behind me, Baroness, I defend you. (He ends on a high note, flourishing a stick he carries.) I have hit him! Ha! Come on!

MRS SMALLEY: You've hit me, you little swine.

BARON: Stand behind me, Baroness. I defeat this man — I — (He chokes with gutturals and consonants.)

MRS SMALLEY: Would you, you little swine!

BARON: I will thrash you — I will thrash you — low-bred knave, I will — (He sputters into German.)

MRS SMALLEY: Let me get hold on thee, I'll crack thy little yed for thee.

BARONESS: Baron, Baron, they are murdering you!

BARON: Ah, my sword, my sword! Baroness, my sword! I keep him at bay with this stick.

MRS SMALLEY: I'll show thee, the little nuisance, whether tha'rt ter hit me on the shoulder.

BARON: I have not my strength of old, if I had my sword he were killed.

BARONESS: Thy are murdering the Baron! Help! Help! Oh Baron —

RACHEL (suddenly rushing at her): Shut up, you old chuck! Shoo!

BARONESS (screaming): Baron! Rudolf, Rudolf! Oh-h — !

BARON (groaning): Ah, Baroness!

He turns. SUSY rushes through his guard and seizes his wrist.

MRS SMALLEY: I'll have that stick!

BARON: The lady — the Baroness von Ruge, my wife, let me go to her!

MRS SMALLEY: Drop that stick, tha little — !

BARON: Little, little again! Ah, my sword to thee. Let go my wrists, foul one, base one, fight thus! (He lapses into a foreign fizzle.)

BARONESS (fleeing): Help, help, help!

RACHEL (catching her by the end of her long cloak and pulling her round backwards): Whoa, you're going a bit too fast!

BARONESS: Whose voice is that? What? Oh-h — !

Enter NURSE.

NURSE (breathless): Whatever is the matter? Who is it?

MRS SMALLEY: Drop that stick, little lizard —

BARON: My wife! God, think of my wife!

BARONESS: Baron — they're killing me — Baron!

NURSE: Baroness! Oh, for shame — oh, how dreadful!

She runs to RACHEL, who flees.

HARRY (rushing up): What's goin' off?

NURSE: The poor Baron — an old man! Oh, how dreadful!

BARONESS: Rudolf, Rudolf! Where am I — what — where?

BARON: I will kill you.

HARRY (to his sister): Has ter no more sense, gre't hound?

MRS SMALLEY: What's tha got ter do wi' it? (to the BARON) Drop that stick!

BARON: I will certainly —

HARRY: Come off! (He wrenches loose her wrists.)

BARON: Ha! (In triumph.) Thief! (He rushes forward. SUSY avoids him quickly. He attacks HARRY, fetching him a smart whack.)

HARRY: The little wasp —

NURSE: Don't, Mr Hemstock — don't hurt him!

BARON: Ha! (He rushes again. HARRY dodges to avoid him, stumbles, the BARON gets in a blow. HARRY goes down.) Ha, I have smitten him — Ha!

BARONESS (fleeing): Baron — help! Help! Baron —

BARON (pursuing): My wife —

NURSE (to BARONESS): Come away, Baroness, come away quickly. The Baron is alright.

BARONESS: I have lost a galosher, he has lost his hat, and the lantern — oh!

BARON: Ah, Baroness, safe! God be glorified. What — oh, only Nurse. We haf been ambushed by a band of ruffians.

NURSE: You had better hurry to the vicarage, Baron, you will take cold.

BARON: Speak not to me of cold. We haf narrowly escaped. Are you wounded,

Baroness?

BARONESS: Where is your hat, and the lantern, and my galosher?

BARON: What matter —

NURSE: You had better take the Baroness home, Baron. She will be ill.

BARONESS: We can't afford to lose them — the lantern and your hat and a pair of galoshes.

BARON: Speak not of such —

They leave.

HARRY (rising slowly): The little snipe!

MRS SMALLEY: It serves thee right.

CURTAIN

SCENE III

The kitchen of the HEMSTOCKS' house. MR HEMSTOCK is stirring a saucepan over the fire.

NURSE (entering): I am late. Are you making the food? I'm sorry.

MR HEMSTOCK: I hardly liked leavin' her — she's funny tonight. What's a' th' row been about?

NURSE: Somebody buffeting the Baron and Baroness. I've just seen them safely on the path. Has Harry come in?

MR HEMSTOCK: No — hark — here he is! Whatever!

The door opens. Enter HARRY, very muddy, blood running down his cheek.

Whatever 'as ter done to thysen?

HARRY: Fell down.

NURSE: Oh dear — how dreadful! Come and let me look! What a gash! I must bind it up. It is not serious.

MR HEMSTOCK: Tha'd better ta'e thy jacket off, afore Nurse touches thee.

HARRY does so. MR HEMSTOCK continues making the food. NURSE sets the kettle on the fire and gets a bowl.

NURSE (to HARRY): You feel faint — would you like to lie down?

HARRY: I'm a' right.

NURSE: Yes, you are all right, I think. Sit here. What a house of calamities! However did it happen?

HARRY: The Baron hit me, and I fell over the lantern.

NURSE: Dear me — how dreadful!

HARRY: I feel fair dizzy, Nurse — as soft as grease.

NURSE: You are sure to do.

Exit MR HEMSTOCK with basin.

HARRY: Drunk, like. Tha'rt as good as a mother to me, Nurse.

NURSE: Am I?

HARRY: My mother worna one ter handle you very tender. 'Er wor rough, not like thee.

NURSE: You see, she hadn't my practice.

HARRY: She 'adna thy hands. 'Er's rayther bad to-day, Nurse. I s'll be glad when 'er's gone. It ma'es yer feel as if you was screwed in a tight jacket — as if you'd burst innerds.

NURSE: I understand — it has been so long.

HARRY: It has. I feel as if I should burst. Tha has got a nice touch wi' thee, Nurse. 'Appen 'er'll leave me a bit of money —

NURSE: Oh, Mr Hemstock!

HARRY: An' if I could get some work — dost think I ought to get married, Nurse?

NURSE: Certainly, when you've found the right woman.

HARRY: If I was in steady work — Nurse, dost think I'm a kid?

NURSE: No — why?

HARRY: I want motherin', Nurse. I feel as if I could scaight. I've been that worked-up this last eight month —

NURSE: I know, it has been dreadful for you.

HARRY: I dunna want huggin' an' kissin', Nurse. I want — thar't a nurse, aren't ter?

NURSE: Yes, I'm a nurse.

HARRY: I s'll reckon I'm badly, an' then tha can nurse me.

NURSE: You are sick —

HARRY: I am, Nurse, I'm heartsick of everything.

NURSE: I know you are —

HARRY: An' after my mother's gone — what am I to do?

NURSE: What creatures you are, you men. You all live by a woman.

HARRY: I've lived by my mother. What am I to do, Nurse?

NURSE: You must get married —

HARRY: If I was in steady work —

NURSE: You'll get work, I'm sure.

HARRY: And if my mother leaves me some money —

NURSE: I must tell you where the will is, for fear anything should happen.

HARRY: Then I can ax — is it done, Nurse?

NURSE: Just finished.

HARRY: Should I lie down?

NURSE: Let me straighten the sofa for you; don't get up yet. Then I must see to Mrs Hemstock, and I'll speak to you about the Baroness's things, and about the will, when I come back. How does the head feel?

HARRY: Swimming, like — like a puff o' steam wafflin'.

NURSE: Come along — come and lie down — there, I'll cover you up.

MR HEMSTOCK (entering): Is he badly?

NURSE: I think he'll be fairly by to-morrow.

MR HEMSTOCK: Tha'rt cading him a bit, Nurse.

NURSE: It is what will do him good — to be spoiled a while.

MR HEMSTOCK: 'Appen so — but it'll be a wonder.

NURSE: Why?

MR HEMSTOCK: Spoilin' is spoilin', Nurse, especially for a man.

NURSE: Oh, I don't know. How is Mrs Hemstock?

MR HEMSTOCK: Funny. I canna ma'e heads or tails of her.

CURTAIN

ACT III

SCENE I

The morning after the previous scene. The dining-room at the vicarage, a spacious but sparsely furnished apartment, the BARON considering himself in all circumstances a soldier. The BARON, in martial-looking smoking jacket, is seated at a desk, writing, saying the words aloud. The clock shows eleven. Enter BARONESS, in tight-sleeved paisley dressing-gown, ruched at neck and down the front. She wears a mobcap.

BARON (rising hastily and leading her to her chair): You are sure, Baroness, you are sufficiently recovered to do this?

BARONESS: I am only pinned together, Baron. I shall collapse if the least thing happens.

BARON: It shall not happen.

BARONESS: My head has threshed round like a windmill all night.

BARON: Did I sleep?

BARONESS: No, Baron, no, no! How do you find yourself this morning?

BARON: Younger, Baroness. I have heard the clash of battle.

BARONESS: I was so afraid you had felt it.

BARON: I — I — but I shall fall to no sickness. I shall receive the thrust when I am in the pulpit, I shall hear the cry, “Rudolf von Ruge”! I fling up my hand, and my spirit stands at attention before the Commander.

BARONESS: Oh Baron, don't. I shall dread Sunday.

BARON: Dread it, Baroness! Ah, when it comes, what glory! Baroness, I have fought obscurely. I have fought the small, inconspicuous fight, wounded with many little wounds of ignominy. But then — what glory!

BARONESS: Has Nurse come yet?

BARON: She has not, Baroness.

BARONESS: I wish she would.

BARON: You feel ill — hide nothing from me.

BARONESS: She promised to try and get the things. I know the hat will be ruined, but if we recover the galosh and the lantern, 'twill be a salvation.

BARON: 'Tis nothing.

BARONESS: 'Tis, Baron, your hat cost 15/ — — and my pair of galoshes, 3/6, and the lantern, 2/11. What is that, Baron? Reckon it up.

BARON: I cannot — I have not — (a pause) it is twenty-one shillings and one penny.

BARONESS: 15/ — and 3/6 — 15, 16, 17, 18 — that's 18/6 and 2/11 — 18 — 19, 20. (Counting.) And five pence, Baron. Twenty-one shillings and five pence.

BARON: 'Tis nothing, Baroness.

BARONESS: 'Tis a great deal, Baron. Hark! Who is that called?

BARON: I cannot hear.

BARONESS: I will go and see.

BARON: No, Baroness — I go.

BARONESS: To the kitchen, Baron?

Exit. The BARON, at the window, cries on the Lord, in German.

NURSE (at the door): Good morning.

BARONESS (hastily turning back): Have you got them?

NURSE: The hat and the galosh — we couldn't find the lantern.

BARONESS: Those wicked Hemstocks have appropriated it.

NURSE: No, Baroness, I think not.

BARONESS: Your hat is not ruined, Baron — a miracle. Put it on — it looks as good as new. What a blessing. Just a little brushing — and my galosh is not hurt. But to think those wretches should secrete my lantern. I will show them —

BARON: Baroness!

BARONESS: I was going to the kitchen. I hear a man's voice.

NURSE: The Baker's cart is there.

BARONESS: Ah! (Exit BARONESS.)

NURSE: I am very glad the Baroness is not ill this morning.

BARON: Ah Nurse, the villainy of this world. Believe that a number of miners, ruffians, should ambush and attack the Baroness and me, out of wrath at our good work. The power of evil is strong, Nurse.

NURSE: It is, Baron, I'm sorry to say.

BARON: I think those people Hemstock instigated this, Nurse.

NURSE: No, Baron, I am sure not.

BARON: Will you say why you are sure, Nurse?

NURSE: I saw, Baron. It was not Harry Hemstock, nor his father.

BARON: Then who, Nurse? They are criminals. It is wickedness to cover their sin. Then who, Nurse?

NURSE: Some people from Northrop. I cannot say whom. You know, Baron, you are an aristocrat, and these people hate you for it.

BARON: The mob issues from its lair like a plague of rats. Shall it put us down and devour the land? Ah, its appetite is base, each for his several stomach. You knew them, Nurse?

NURSE: No, Baron.

BARON: You heard them — what they said — their voices.

NURSE: I heard one say “Catch hold of Throttle-ha’penny!”

BARON: “Catch hold of Trottle-ha’penny” — Throttle-ha’penny, what is that?

NURSE: I think it means the Baroness. They are so broad, these people, I can’t understand them.

BARON: I will punish them. Under the sword they shall find wisdom.

BARONESS’S VOICE: Oh, shameless! Shameless!

RACHEL’S VOICE: He was looking at my brooch.

BARONESS’S VOICE: Come here, Baker, come back.

BAKER’S VOICE: A stale loaf to change, Baroness?

BARONESS’S VOICE: You shall go before the Baron this time. Go in the dining-room, Rachel.

BAKER’S VOICE: Me too?

Enter RACHEL, in cap and apron, the BAKER, and the BARONESS.

BAKER (entering): Thank you, Missis. Good morning, Nurse. Expect to find the Baroness in bed? I did.

BARONESS (to RACHEL): Stand there!

BARON (sternly to BAKER): Stand there! Take a seat, Nurse. Pray be seated,

Baroness.

BAKER (seating himself in the armchair): Hope I haven't got your chair, Baron.

BARON: Stand, sir.

BAKER (to NURSE, as he rises): Nearly like my father said to the curate: "They're a' mine!"

BARON: Baroness!

BARONESS: He was, Baron, he was —

RACHEL: He was bending down to look at my new brooch. (She shows it.)

BARONESS: With his arm —

BAKER: On her apron strings —

BARONESS: He was stooping —

BAKER: To look at her new brooch.

BARON: Silence!

BARONESS: He kissed her.

BARON: Coward! Coward! Coward, sir!

BAKER: Ditto to you, Mister.

BARON: What! Sir! Do you know — ?

BAKER: That you are the "Baron von Ruge"? No, I've only your bare word for it.

NURSE: For shame, Mr Bowers.

BAKER: When a little old man, Nurse, calls a big young man a coward, he's

presuming on his years and size to bully, and I say, a bully's a coward.

BARON: You contaminate my maid.

BAKER: I contaminate your maid?

BARONESS: The shameless baggage. What have I always said of her!

BARON: Baroness von Ruge! (to BAKER) You are going to marry her?

BAKER: It's a question generally put to the woman.

BARON: Answer me, sir.

BAKER: I couldn't say which she's going to marry, out of her one or two fellows.

BARONESS: Shameless! Ah, the slut!

BARON: I repeat, sir — do you intend to marry this maid?

BAKER: I hadn't fully made up my mind —

BARON: Then, sir, you are a villain —

BAKER: You've got the muscle of your years up, Mister —

BARON: You threaten me!

BARONESS: Baron!

RACHEL: I sh'd have thought you'd more about you, Job Arthur Bowers.

NURSE (deprecating): Oh, Mr Bowers!

BAKER: Right you are, Nurse!

BARON: I say, sir, a man who kisses a maid —

BAKER: Ought to be hanged for it — so say I.

BARON: Sir, your facetiousness is untimely. I say, a man who kisses a maid —

BARONESS: Baron, such people do not understand —

BARON (kissing her hand): Baroness!

RACHEL (melting): We're not given the chance.

BARON: Sir, is there no reverence in a kiss? If you strike a match against the box, even, you wonder at the outburst of fire. Then, sir — but do you wonder at nothing?

BAKER: Nothing's surprising — but everything is comical, Baron, that's how I find it.

BARON (puzzled and distressed): So! So! Ah, but a woman is, according to her image in the eye of the men.

BAKER (looking at the BARONESS): Some of us must have fancy eyes.

NURSE: How can you be so flippant?

BARONESS: A woman is what a man makes her.

BAKER: By gum, there's no tellin' what you might manufacture in time, then. It's a big job to begin of.

RACHEL (laughing): For shame, Job Arthur.

BARONESS: What have you to say? You bad creature! What wonder men are as they are?

BAKER: When the women make them.

BARON: You are of my parish?

BAKER: Yes — but I'm in Northrop Church choir.

BARON: You are a chorister? You wish to marry Rachel?

BAKER: As I say, I haven't decided.

BARON: But what are you doing? What of this maid?

BARONESS: What does he care! Are you a married man, Baker?

BAKER: Not that I know to, Missis.

BARON: Sir, I am an old man, you remind me —

BAKER: Beg pardon, Baron.

BARON: And — a powerless — and I will say it, I will — a useless —

BARONESS: Baron!

BARON: Sir — I shall soon be called in — and, sir, you are of my parish, Rachel is of my house. What have I done, who am responsible?

BAKER: Nay, Baron, I can't see as you're to fault.

BARON: My fault, sir, is failure, and failure without honour. In three campaigns, which are my life, I have been miserably beaten.

BARONESS: No, Baron, no. How are you to blame?

NURSE: No, Baron, you have not failed.

BARON: In Poland, in London, and in my parish of Greenway. Baroness, we retire to a cottage; I sit still and contain myself, under sentence — Baroness, your pardon!

BARONESS: You shall not retire, Baron. Before God, I witness, you are no failure. Ah, Rachel, see now what you've done.

RACHEL (weeping): It's not me.

BAKER: Nay, for that matter — would you marry me, Rachel, eh?

RACHEL: Opportunity's a fine thing, you mean.

BAKER: Will you marry me, Rachel?

RACHEL: I — yes, I will, Job Arthur.

BARON: She loves you, she let you kiss her. But you, sir, do you honour her?

BAKER: I do.

BARON: Then will you leave me?

BAKER: Good morning, sir — and thank you.

He and RACHEL leave.

BARONESS: You are not ill, Baron?

BARON: No, Baroness. Nurse, who is this man?

NURSE: The Baker? Oh, he's Job Arthur Bowers — a bit racketsy. He lives down Greenhill with his old mother. She's as deaf as a post, and a little bit crazed. But she's very fond of her son.

BARON: Ah! She is mad? She is old? Will Rachel be good to her?

BARONESS: I very much doubt it.

NURSE: Rachel will be afraid of Job Arthur Bowers. He is too big for her ever to get her apron strings round him.

BARON (smiling slightly): I began to be afraid, Nurse —

BARONESS (at the window): He is bringing my lantern.

NURSE: Who? Ah, that's right.

BARONESS: Will you ring, Baron? I will question that young man. We must get to the bottom of last night's affair, Baron.

BARON: Those ruffians shall not go unpunished. Still I have power for that.

BARONESS (to RACHEL): Show that young man in here. Nurse, you will help us. We must hold our own against these ungodly creatures. Must we not, Baron?

BARON: Ah, Baroness, still we fight.

RACHEL: Harry Hemstock.

HARRY (entering, his head bound up): I've brought this 'ere hurricane-lamp.

BARONESS: Thank you. And where did you find it?

HARRY: Where you'd lost it.

BARONESS: What have you done to your head?

HARRY (after a silence): You should know.

BARONESS: There, Baron. I was right. And you would have stolen the lantern if Nurse had not —

BARON: Leave the lantern, Baroness. Sir, who were your accomplices in this nightly attack?

HARRY: What's 'e mean, Nurse?

NURSE: The Baron means what men were those that attacked the Baroness and him last night. I say they were some men out of Northrop — that you could not recognize them. Mr Hemstock came to your assistance, Baron.

BARON: Is that so?

HARRY: I pulled 'er off'n thee.

BARON: What is it he says, Nurse?

NURSE: He says he pulled the man away who was trying to hold you.

BARON: Ah! Tell me, sir — who was this ruffian?

HARRY: I non know, no.

BARON: Who struck you that blow? That you must know, and that must be told to me.

HARRY: Tha ought ter know thysen.

BARONESS: You are speaking to the Baron, remember.

HARRY: An't wor him as gin me a crack ower th' yed.

BARON: Then you were with the enemy. Now I behold you, sir. I will cause you, sir, I will make you to confess. I will see you punished. You shall suffer this course.

NURSE: You are mistaken, Baron.

BARON: Nurse, I will conduct this inquiry of myself. It is not of myself. But your cowardice, yours and those others', to attack a lady, by night. There is a penalty for such, sir; I say you are vile, and you shall name me the other villains.

HARRY: There was no other villains — without you call a couple of women villains.

BARON: What mean you by a couple of women?

BARONESS: He doesn't know what he is talking about.

NURSE: There were some men, Mr Hemstock — from Northrop.

HARRY: Well, if there wan, I didna see 'em. All I see'd was two women draggin' at th' old Baron.

BARON: You mean to say we were attacked only by two women — Baroness?

NURSE: He must be mistaken.

BARONESS: These people would say anything.

BARON: Tell me, sir, tell me the truth at once.

HARRY: I've told you the truth.

BARON: It was some men, Baroness? At least, Baroness, one man there was —

BARONESS: There was one man — how many more I can't say.

BARON: The throat of these people is fuller of untruth than a bird's gizzard —

HARRY: It is the truth I've told you.

BARON: Nurse — speak — was it two women?

NURSE: It certainly was men, Baron.

HARRY: Well, it certainly wan't, an' I'm not a liar.

BARON: Then it was two women?

HARRY: It was.

BARON: And a woman has smitten your head?

HARRY: No, you did that yourself, with your thick stick, when I'd pulled our Susy off'n you. An' I fell over your lantern and it cut me.

BARONESS: A likely tale.

HARRY: Is it true, Nurse Broadbanks?

NURSE: I think you are mistaken, Mr Hemstock. Oh, do not be so persistent.

HARRY: I'll not be made a liar of. Wheer's Rachel?

BARONESS: Why Rachel? She has nothing to do with it.

HARRY: Fetch her in then.

NURSE: She has just been in. She is engaged to Job Arthur Bowers —

HARRY: I don't care what she is.

BARON: I will ring.

BARONESS: Do not, Baron, do not trouble.

BARON: Sir, it was not two women — I defy you, sir. You make me a silly thing; it is your spleen.

BARONESS: You had better go, you.

HARRY: I'm not going to be made a liar of.

Enter RACHEL.

Rachel, who was it knocked the Baron's hat off an' shook him last night?

NURSE: Do you know the names of those men from Northrop, Rachel?

RACHEL: It wan't him, Baron, he helped you.

BARON: He would patch me with shame. You saw this attack?

RACHEL: I was just slipping down to get some milk from Mrs Smalley, there was none for supper —

BARON: And what did you see?

RACHEL: I saw some men, an' I heard some shouting, and I saw somebody hit him on the head. Then I ran home, and I'd just got in when you came.

HARRY: Why, wan't it you and our Susy as was raggin' the Baron an' Baroness, an' I come up an' stopped you?

RACHEL: Me! Me an' your Susy?

HARRY: You shammer!

RACHEL: I know you went up an' stopped the men, whoever they was —

HARRY: So I'm a liar? So I'm a liar?

BARONESS: Yes — and you may go.

HARRY: So I'm a liar, Nurse Broadbanks?

He goes out.

BARON: God help us, we begin to believe in the plots they imagine against us. (He looks at his hands.) It was not two women, Baroness?

BARONESS: No, Baron, no.

BARON: You saw several men, Nurse?

NURSE: Yes, Baron.

BARON: Rachel — but why weep! Rachel — he defended me against men?

RACHEL (sobbing): Yes, Baron.

BARONESS: Rachel, leave the room.

RACHEL leaves.

BARON: Nurse, I am a soldier.

NURSE: You are, Baron.

BARON: I must reward that — fellow — although —

NURSE: It is good of you, Baron.

BARONESS: And you called yourself a failure, Rudolf.

BARON: I can — I must speak for him at the colliery. There I still have some influence.

NURSE: It is so good of you.

BARON: He has suffered already for his opposition. It is not good for the enemies of God to prosper. But I will write to my nephew.

NURSE: I could leave a letter, Baron — I am going past the colliery.

BARON: I will write now — then my honour is free. (Seats himself at the desk.)
“My dear Nephew, I am placed under an obligation to that man of whom I have spoken to you before, Henry Hemstock, of the cottage at the end of the glebe close. It is within the bounds of your generosity to relieve me of this burden of gratitude contracted to one of such order. You will, of your fullness of spirit, lap over the confine of my debt with bounty. Your Aunt salutes you, and I reach you my right hand. Rudolf von Ruge.” — The manager of the collieries is as my own son to me, Nurse.

BARONESS: And he is a good son. He is my nephew.

NURSE: I will leave the letter.

CURTAIN

SCENE II

Evening of the same day. NURSE'S room, the sitting-room of a miner's cottage: comfortable, warm, pleasant. NURSE in the armchair on one side of the fire. MR WILCOX on the other. He is a stout, elderly miner, with grey round whiskers and a face like a spaniel.

MR WILCOX: No, Nurse, I've not a bit of comfort.

NURSE: Why shouldn't Rachel stay and look after you?

MR WILCOX: Nay, don't ask me — an ungrateful hussy. And I can't seem to get a housekeeper as'll manage for me.

NURSE: It is difficult.

MR WILCOX: I've been trying this last ten years, an' I've not had a good one yet. Either they eat you up, or waste, or drink. What do you think to-day? You know how it was raining. I got home from pit soaked. No breeches an' waistcoat put to warm — fire nearly out.

NURSE: Oh, it is too bad.

MR WILCOX: An' in the fender, a great row of roast potatoes, hard as nag-nails — not done a bit —

NURSE: What a shame —

MR WILCOX: An' not a morsel of meat to eat to them. She'd aten the great piece of cold mutton left from yesterday, an' then said I hadn't left 'er no money for no meat.

NURSE: How stupid!

MR WILCOX: So it was taters — you had to chomp ‘em like raw turnip — an’ drippin’ — an’ a bit of a batter puddin’ tough as whit-leather.

NURSE: Poor man.

MR WILCOX: An’ no fire — there never is when I come home. I believe she sells the coal.

NURSE: Isn’t it dreadful?

MR WILCOX: An’ they’re all alike.

NURSE: I suppose they are.

MR WILCOX: They are. You know I’m an easy man to live with, Nurse.

NURSE: I’m sure you are.

MR WILCOX: One as gives very little trouble. Nay, I can fettle for myself — an’ does so.

NURSE: I have seen you.

MR WILCOX: And I think I deserve a bit better treatment, Nurse.

NURSE: I’m sure you do.

MR WILCOX: An’ I ought to be able to get it. If I was drunken or thriftless I should say nothing.

NURSE: But you’re not.

MR WILCOX: No, I’m not. I’ve been a steady and careful man all my life. A Chapel-going man, whereas you’re Church — but that’s a detail.

NURSE: It ought not to matter.

MR WILCOX: You know, Nurse, I’ve got four good houses — lets at six

shillings each.

NURSE: Yes, I know you have.

MR WILCOX: Besides a tidy bit in the bank.

NURSE: And you have saved it all?

MR WILCOX: Every penny.

NURSE: Ha!

MR WILCOX: An' there's on'y Rachel. I'd give her a couple of houses straight off, an' then we should be alright there: nobody could grumble.

NURSE: You could do that, of course.

MR WILCOX: Nurse, do you know how old I am?

NURSE: No, Mr Wilcox.

MR WILCOX: I'm just fifty-eight.

NURSE: Hm! I should have thought you were more.

MR WILCOX: I'm not.

NURSE: It is comparatively young.

MR WILCOX: It's not old, is it? And though I've been a widower these ten years — I'm not — I'm not good for nowt, d'yer see?

NURSE: Of course you're not.

MR WILCOX: An' you know, Nurse, you're just the one for me.

NURSE (laughing): Am I, Mr Wilcox?

MR WILCOX: Nurse, will you tell me your name?

NURSE: Broadbanks.

MR WILCOX: You know I meant your Christian name. Don't torment me, Nurse, I can't stand it.

NURSE: I was baptized Millicent Emily.

MR WILCOX: "Millicent Emily" — it's like the "Song of Solomon". Can I say it again?

NURSE: If you will say it only to yourself.

MR WILCOX: My name is James — Jim for short.

NURSE: I thought it was Hezekiah — or Ezekiel.

MR WILCOX: Hezekiah's my second name — James Hezekiah.

NURSE: I like Hezekiah better.

MR WILCOX: Do you — I thought you didn't. Oh, I'm glad you like it. But yours is lovely.

NURSE: I prefer Nurse.

MR WILCOX: So do I — nice and short. (A pause.) Shall I sing to you, Nurse?

NURSE: Do you sing?

MR WILCOX: Oh, yes — I used to be a great one at "Ora pro Nobis". Should I sing you "Gentle Annie"? I used to sing that forty years since.

NURSE: When you were courting, Mr Wilcox?

MR WILCOX: Afore that.

He hesitates — goes to the piano and, after fumbling, begins to vamp to "What Are the Wild Waves Saying". He begins to sing, "lamentoso".

NURSE: There's someone at the door!

Not hearing, or observing, he continues to play. She opens to DR FOULES: they stand smiling. MR WILCOX stops playing and wheels round.

DR FOULES: "Music, when soft voices die, vibrates in the memory."

NURSE: Mr Wilcox was enlivening my leisure. Do you know Mr Wilcox, Dr Foules?

DR FOULES: I have not had the pleasure till now.

He bows.

MR WILCOX: Good even' — I wasn't aware as anybody was here.

DR FOULES: "By rapture's blaze impelled he swelled the artless lay."

NURSE: I think Mr Wilcox sings very well indeed. Will you finish, Mr Wilcox?

MR WILCOX: No, thanks, I must be going.

DR FOULES: Pray do not let me hasten you away.

MR WILCOX: Oh, I was just going. Well — happen you'll call at our house, Nurse?

NURSE: I will, Mr Wilcox.

He leaves.

DR FOULES: Did I interrupt you?

NURSE: You did not interrupt me.

DR FOULES: Then I incur no disfavour?

NURSE: Not for stopping poor Mr Wilcox at "Brother, I hear no singing" —

Poor man!

DR FOULES: You pity him?

NURSE: I do.

DR FOULES: Ah! Is it of the mind-melting sort?

NURSE: I do not understand.

DR FOULES: “For pity melts the mind to love” —

NURSE: No — poor man. I can just imagine my mother, if I took him down to Kent. Well, you’ve done a nice thing for yourself —

DR FOULES: You daren’t face family criticism?

NURSE: I daren’t.

DR FOULES: Ah! Then he does aspire?

NURSE: Poor old fellow!

DR FOULES: I do not like your pity, Nurse — however near akin it may be to something better.

NURSE: You have often incurred it, Doctor.

DR FOULES: Which of the two, Nurse?

NURSE: The pity, of course. I have said “poor boy”.

DR FOULES: Why?

NURSE: Why? (She laughs.) Because, I suppose, you were pitiable.

DR FOULES (blushing): You mean I was to be pitied. Why?

NURSE: Because you were not like the Pears’ Soapy baby — ”He won’t be

happy till he gets it,” but you went on washing your self without soap, good as gold.

DR FOULES: I cannot apply your simile.

NURSE: Perhaps not. I never was literary.

DR FOULES: You have grown brilliant — and caustic, if I may say so.

NURSE: It is the first time I have been accused of brilliance.

DR FOULES: Then perhaps I am the steel which sheds the sparks from your flint.

NURSE: Oh, the sparks may come, but they’re not noticed. Perhaps you are only the literary man who catches them on his tinder and blows them into notice. You love a phrase beyond everything.

DR FOULES: Really — I hardly recognize you, Nurse.

NURSE: And what did your mother say of me?

DR FOULES: I thank you for calling so soon. Did she seem changed, to you?

NURSE: She looks very ill.

DR FOULES: Yes, I am worried.

NURSE: You are afraid it is something serious?

DR FOULES: Yes.

NURSE: I hope not. But it put me about to see her looking so frail. She was very kind to me.

DR FOULES: You are very good, Nurse.

NURSE: It is my duty to be sympathetic, Doctor.

DR FOULES: And use is second nature. I will take courage, Nurse.

NURSE: Will it not be a complete disguise?

DR FOULES: Your duty does not extend to me, Nurse.

NURSE: No, Doctor.

DR FOULES: You wish me to see you in your new guise, Nurse. You stick daw's feathers among your dove's plumage.

NURSE (laughing): What, am I a dove then? It is a silly bird.

DR FOULES: You have had a hard time, Nurse?

NURSE: I have got over the hardness, thank you. It is all moderate, now.

DR FOULES: Might it not be more than moderate?

NURSE: I hope it will be some day.

DR FOULES: Could I help it, do you think?

NURSE: Everybody helps it, by being amiable —

DR FOULES: But might I not help it — more particularly? You used to —

NURSE: Say you are in love with me, Doctor —

DR FOULES: I have always been —

NURSE: Then the light has been under a bushel.

DR FOULES: "Blown to a core of ardour by the awful breath of —" (He smiles very confusedly.) I may hope then, Nurse.

NURSE (smiling): Along with Mr Wilcox.

DR FOULES: Thank you for the company.

NURSE: Look here, Arthur, you have lived like a smug little candle in a corner, with your mother to shelter you from every draught. Now you can get blown a bit. I do not feel inclined to shelter you for the rest of your life.

DR FOULES: Thank you.

NURSE: I am sorry if I am nasty. But I am angry with you.

DR FOULES: It is evident.

NURSE: And I will still come and see your mother, if I may. She is a woman to respect.

DR FOULES: I do not order my mother's comings and goings. The case is the reverse, you remember.

NURSE: Very well. On your high horse, you are more like the nursery than ever.

DR FOULES: Thank you.

NURSE (mimicking): Thank you.

DR FOULES: I am surprised —

NURSE: I am surprised — but — was that someone at the door?

DR FOULES: I could not tell you.

NURSE: Excuse me, I will see.

DR FOULES: Let me go, first. (Catching his hat to depart.)

NURSE (opening the door): You, Mr Hemstock. Will you come in?

Enter HARRY.

DR FOULES: Good evening, Mr Hemstock. I will make way for you.

NURSE: "Applications considered Tuesday, between seven and nine p.m." That is your meaning, Doctor?

DR FOULES: With your usual astuteness, you have it.

NURSE: With my usual astuteness, I have avoided so far the "Matrimonial Post". This is the irony of fate, Doctor. It never rains but it pours.

DR FOULES (bowing to NURSE and HARRY): The third time pays for all, they say.

NURSE (laughing): I will tell you to-morrow.

DR FOULES: It will not be too late to drop me a post card.

NURSE: I will see. Good night, Dr Foules.

DR FOULES: Good night, Nurse Broadbanks. I wish you luck.

NURSE: And lifelong happiness.

DR FOULES: Good night!

Exit DR FOULES.

NURSE: He is very pleasant, isn't he?

HARRY: They say so.

NURSE: How is Mrs Hemstock?

HARRY: She's worse. She's not speakin'.

NURSE: Oh, I'm sorry to hear that. Did you want me to do anything? Poor thing, it will be a relief when she's gone.

HARRY: The 'owd doctor's bin. He told us to ax you to see her settled down —

NURSE: Shall I come now?

HARRY: Or in about half an hour's time — when you're ready.

NURSE: I may as well come now — when I've just tidied the room. Are you going to sit up with her?

HARRY: No — my father is, an' our Susy. I'm going to work.

NURSE: Going to work? I thought you hadn't a place.

HARRY: They sent me word as I wor to go to-morrow — buttyin' wi' Joe Birkin.

NURSE: And will it be a good place?

HARRY: Ha! It's a sight better than ever I expected.

NURSE: Oh, that is nice, isn't it?

HARRY: It's better nor mormin' about at home.

NURSE: It is. I'm so glad, Mr Hemstock. Then you'll stop at Greenway?

HARRY: I'm reckonin' so. There's nowt else, is there?

NURSE: No — why should there be? You'll have to begin afresh after Mrs Hemstock has gone —

HARRY: I s'll make a start o' some sort.

NURSE: You will? Do you know, I've had old Mr Wilcox here tonight.

HARRY: Oh — ah?

NURSE: He's so comical. He was singing to me. (She laughs into her hand.)

HARRY: He must ha' wanted summat to do —

NURSE: I think so. You never heard anything like it in your life.

HARRY: 'E never wor but dosy-baked.

NURSE (purring): What does that mean?

HARRY: Soft, batchy, sawney.

NURSE: Poor old chap. It's no use being angry with him, is it?

HARRY: What for?

NURSE: For thinking I would accept him.

HARRY: No, it's not good bein' mad wi' him.

NURSE: He looked so crestfallen.

HARRY: He'll be just as game by to-morrow.

NURSE: Of course he will. Men only pretend to be so heartbroken. By supper-time they've forgotten.

HARRY: An' what's a woman do?

NURSE: I don't know. You see it means more to a woman. It's her life. To a man it's only a pleasant change.

HARRY: To all appearances, you'd think it worn't such a life-an'-death affair to her.

NURSE: Why?

HARRY: Woman is reckoned to be pinin' for you, goes an' makes a liar an' a fool of you in front of other folks.

NURSE: You mean Rachel Wilcox.

HARRY: Ah — 'appen I do.

NURSE: But, poor old Baron, it would have killed him.

HARRY: Then let him die. What good is he, here or anywhere else?

NURSE: Oh, Mr Hemstock!

HARRY: Besides, she did it to spite me, because 'er wor mad wi' me.

NURSE: But she is engaged to Mr Bowers.

HARRY: 'Appen so. 'Er bites 'er nose off to spite her face.

NURSE: But poor old Baron — it would have been so cruel.

HARRY: Would he have stopped tellin' everybody else the truth?

NURSE: But you can't judge in that way —

HARRY: Why canna I? You make a liar an' a swine of me, an' a dam' fool of him —

NURSE: Oh, come, Mr Hemstock.

HARRY: He is a little fool — an' wants to boss everybody else wi' it, an' a' —

NURSE: You ought not to speak of the Baron like that.

HARRY: No, it's all palaver, an' smooth talk. I'll see anybody in hell before I'm fed wi' mealy-mouthed words like a young pigeon.

NURSE: I think you don't know what you're talking about.

HARRY: Dunna I though, but I do. I'm not going to be made a convenience of, an' then buttered up, like a trussed fowl.

NURSE: There is no one wants to butter you up, to my knowledge.

HARRY: Alright, then — then there isn't.

NURSE: And all this, I think, has been very uncalled for — and unnecessary.

HARRY: Alright, then — an' it has. But I'm not a kid, nor to be treated like one —

NURSE: It's there you make your mistake.

HARRY: Nay, it's somebody else as had made a mistake.

NURSE: Yes — we do think the quiet vessels are the full ones. But it seems they only want shaking to rattle worse than any.

HARRY: Alright. Say what you like.

NURSE: Thank you, I don't wish to say any more, except that I pity whoever has you, for you seem to be in a state of chronic bad temper.

HARRY: Alright — I'll be going.

NURSE (who has been tidying the room): I will be at your house in ten minutes.

HARRY: There's no occasion to hurry — am I to wait for you?

NURSE: No, thank you — I would rather come alone.

CURTAIN

ACT IV

The evening after the last scene. It is the third day of the play. The kitchen at the HEMSTOCKS'.

NURSE: And what about the fire in the room?

SUSY: I'll let it go out and take the ashes up by daylight. It's falling dusk, an' I don't like being in by myself.

NURSE: Poor Mrs Hemstock — she went away quickly at the last.

SUSY (red-eyed — sniffing): She did that. Eh, but wan't she wasted? A fair skeleton! I'm glad you laid her out, Nurse.

NURSE: I shall miss her. I've been coming here over a year now.

SUSY: I hope I don't lie like that. She used to be as strong as a horse. But she was hard, you know.

NURSE: Perhaps she had enough to make her.

SUSY: She had — wi' my father an' the lads. She was easiest wi' our Harry. He was always mother's lad.

NURSE: Yet they have been so indifferent —

SUSY: At the bottom they haven't. She never forgave him for going with Rachel Wilcox — an' he was always funny-tempered, would rool up like a pea-bug, at a word.

NURSE: I thought she favoured Rachel Wilcox.

SUSY: No, hated her; but she used her to make game of him.

NURSE: She is engaged to the Baker now.

SUSY: Yes. He's only having her for her money — an' she'll hate him when she's rubbed the fur off a bit. But she's one would fuss round a pair of breeches

on a clothesline, rather than have no man.

NURSE: I don't like her.

SUSY: Not many does. She fair pines for our Harry, yet she'd have Job Arthur for fear of getting nobody.

NURSE: How dreadful! (She goes for her cloak.)

SUSY: Nay, dunna go. Stop an' ha'e a cup o' tea. I durstn't stop in by mysen. The kettle'll boil in a minute. (She lays the table.)

NURSE: I really ought to go.

SUSY: Don't, I should be scared to death. You'll stop five minutes, Nurse.

NURSE: A quarter of an hour.

SUSY (staring): What's that?

NURSE (going to the door): It's only Patty.

SUSY: She's been that lost a' day without our Harry.

NURSE: Poor old Patty!

Enter HARRY.

SUSY: Tha'rt a bit sooner than I thought fer.

HARRY (surly): Am I?

SUSY: I hanna been able to get thee no dinner.

HARRY: Why?

SUSY: She on'y died at two o'clock — an' we've been busy ever sin', haven't we, Nurse?

NURSE: We have, Mrs Smalley.

SUSY: Shall ter ha'e tea wi' me an' Nurse?

HARRY: No.

SUSY: What then?

HARRY: Nowt.

SUSY: Shall ter wesh thysen?

HARRY: Ha.

SUSY: Pump wor frozen this mornin' —

HARRY: I know.

SUSY fetches a large red pancheon from outside, puts in cold water, brings towel and soap, setting all on a stool on hearth-rug. HARRY sets tin bottle and knotted snap-bag on table, takes off his cap, red wool scarf, coat, and waistcoat. He pours hot water from boiler into pancheon, strips off his singlet or vest — he wears no shirt — and kneels down to wash. NURSE and SUSY sit down to tea.

NURSE (to HARRY): You must be tired to-day. (No answer.)

SUSY: I bet his hands is sore — are they? (No answer.) Best leave him alone — they always grumble about their hands, first day.

HARRY: Wheer's my Dad?

SUSY: Gone to registrar's.

NURSE: Yes, they must take some time to harden.

SUSY: Shall you sit there, Nurse? I'd better light the lamp, you can't see.

HARRY: Tha nedna.

SUSY: What's thaigh to stop me for?

NURSE: No — I like the twilight — really.

SUSY: There's a lot o' dirt wi' a collier — an' mess.

NURSE: Yes.

SUSY: I allers said I'd not marry one. I'd had enough wi' my father an' th' lads.

NURSE: They say it's clean dirt.

SUSY: Is it? Muck an' mess, to my thinkin'.

NURSE: Yes, I suppose so. I used to think it would be dreadful.

SUSY: But you've altered.

NURSE: Well, I've thought about it — I'm afraid I should never fit in.

SUSY: No — you're too much of a lady — you like a lady's ways.

NURSE: I don't know. Perhaps one does get a bit finicky after a certain time.

SUSY (to HARRY): Dost want thy back doin'?

He grunts assent. She washes his back with a flannel, and wipes it as she talks.

NURSE: It's the thought of it day after day, day after day — it is rather appalling.

SUSY: The thought of any man, like that, is.

NURSE (smiling): It was not the man — it was the life — the company one would have to keep.

SUSY: Yes. So you wouldn't marry a collier, Nurse?

NURSE: Yes, I would — for all that. If I cared for him.

SUSY: That makes the difference.

NURSE: It does.

SUSY: I can't imagine you married to a collier.

NURSE: Sometimes it seems mad, to me; sometimes it doesn't.

SUSY: I shouldn't ha' thought, though, Nurse, you'd ha' had one —

NURSE: No? I might.

SUSY: Not an old one?

NURSE: Certainly not an old one. Not Mr Wilcox.

SUSY: Ha. Have another cup? I wish Patty would keep still. She fair worrits me. I'm sure I'd like to drop your cup, she made me jump that much.

NURSE: I am surprised you are nervous.

SUSY: We all are. I wonder, Nurse, where my mother's will is?

NURSE: Oh — I meant to have told you. In the socket of the bedpost nearest the drawers, at the top.

SUSY: Would you believe it!

NURSE: She was very quaint sometimes. Poor Mrs Hemstock.

SUSY: Do you think she was in her right mind?

NURSE: Oh, yes — and Doctor does, too.

SUSY: Well — I used to have my doubts.

NURSE: Poor Mrs Hemstock.

A knock.

SUSY: Oh!

RACHEL (entering): I thought there was nobody in, seeing no light. Is Nurse here?

NURSE: Yes.

RACHEL: The Baroness wants you to go up, she's got a pain. I've been to your place for you.

NURSE: Poor Baroness! What is the matter?

RACHEL: She's got a pain in her shoulder.

NURSE: Rheumatism?

RACHEL: She says she believes it's pleurisy.

NURSE (smiling): Poor old Baroness; she does fancy.

RACHEL: But she won't pay for a doctor, fancy or no fancy, not if she can help it. Her fancy mustn't cost her anything.

NURSE: She knows I can treat her. I can go straight there.

RACHEL: Oh, an' will you go an' see what's up with my father? He's not been to work — been in bed all day — can't eat — won't have the doctor — fading away —

NURSE: That is sad! What ails him?

RACHEL: I don't know — Minnie's been up for me. Says he feels hot inside, an' believes he's got an inflammation.

NURSE: I'll call if I have time. I must go.

RACHEL: He's done nothing but ask were his eyes bloodshot, and would

Minnie be frightened if he turned delirious. She's frit — an' I can't go down —

NURSE: I will call. Good night, everybody.

Exit NURSE.

SUSY: I must light the lamp.

RACHEL: I didn't hear till four o'clock as she'd gone. Was she unconscious?

SUSY: Yes, all day.

RACHEL (to HARRY — who is struggling into his shirt): And was you at work? Fancy, you been at home all this time, then it to happen the first day you was away. Things do happen cruel.

SUSY: Shall you give him his tea, while I go an' see to my lad?

RACHEL: I mustn't be long.

SUSY goes out.

What shall you have?

HARRY: Nowt.

RACHEL: Oh, you must 'ave somethink. Just a cup of tea, if nothing else. Come on — come an' sit here. See, it's waiting. You must be fair sinkin' after bein' at work all day. I've thought of you every minute, I'm sure. I've heard the driving engines shuddering every time, an' I've thought of you. (She cuts bread and toasts it.) They say you're hard, but they don't know. (Suspicion of tears.) I used to think myself as you was a kid, a frightened bit of a rabbit — but I know different now. (She cries.) I know what you've had to go through — an' I've been a cat to you, I have. I know what you've felt — as if you was pushed up against a wall, an' all the breath squeezed out of you — her dyin' by inches — an' I've been a cat to you. (She butters the toast.)

HARRY: Tha needna do that for me.

RACHEL: Yes, do eat a bit — you'll be sinkin'. I've had no tea — I'll eat a bit with you, if you will. (She sits down, drinks tea, and eats a little.) You know I've fair hated myself — I've wished I was dead. But I needn't talk about myself. Are your hands sore?

HARRY: A bit.

RACHEL: I knew they must be — because you've worked like a horse, I know you have, to stop thinking. I can see you're dog-tired. Let me look. (She takes his hand.) Fair raw! (Melting into tears.) You don't care a bit about yourself, you don't, an' it's not fair.

HARRY: Tha hasna bothered thysen above thy boot-tops.

RACHEL: I know I haven't. Oh, I was jealous of your mother, 'cause I knowed you was fonder of her —

HARRY: Tha nedna — (She weeps — he hides his face.)

RACHEL: I s'll never forgive myself —

HARRY: Dunna —

RACHEL, sobbing, goes to him, takes his head on her bosom, and rocks it.

RACHEL: An' I've been such a cat to thee, Harry.

HARRY (putting his arms round her waist): I've not seen her for two days.

RACHEL: Never mind, never mind. She's been wandering — never mind.

HARRY: Now 'er's gone.

RACHEL: Never mind, we s'll die ourselves someday, we shall. I know tha loved her, better than me — tha allers would — I know. But let me be wi' thee. (She sits down on his knee.) Let me stop wi' thee, tha wants somebody. An' I care for nowt but thee — tha knows I do.

HARRY: Should we go an' look at her?

RACHEL (kissing him): We will. (She kisses him again.) Tha's been like a bird on a frozen pond, tha has. Tha's been frozen out —

HARRY: Rachel?

RACHEL: What?

HARRY: Dunna kiss me yet —

RACHEL: No — I won't — I won't.

HARRY: Afterwards —

RACHEL: Yes, I know — I know. (Silence a moment.) Come then, we'll go an' look at her.

She lights a candle, takes his hand. They go into the front room.

Enter SUSY.

SUSY: Where are they? I'd think they've carted off an' left th' house empty. (Calls.) Rachel! Oh my goodness! Harry!

Enter RACHEL and HARRY, both with red eyes, from the sickroom.

Oh, here you are.

RACHEL: Yes. Did you think I'd gone?

HARRY pulls on his coat and goes out.

SUSY: Yes — you said you was in a hurry.

RACHEL: I shall have to be goin'.

SUSY: I wish my father would come. Is he grumpy yet?

RACHEL: Harry? No, he's not grumpy, no.

SUSY: What? Have you made it up?

RACHEL: There was nothing to make.

SUSY: I'm glad to hear it. What about Job Arthur?

RACHEL: I never did care a bit about him or anybody else —

SUSY: No, but —

RACHEL: Well, but what?

SUSY: Has he asked you? Has he promised you? Our Harry?

RACHEL: Yes, not in words — but I know.

SUSY: You don't. Nurse wants him, an' Nurse'll get him.

RACHEL: She won't.

SUSY: You see.

RACHEL: Don't you fret your fat. He's not that easy to grab.

SUSY: But he's got a fancy for Nurse. He's as proud as they make 'em, an' it would just suit him to crow over us, marryin' a lady.

RACHEL: A lady!

SUSY: Well, you know what I mean. An' I believe there's summat in the will for her. My mother harped on her an' our Harry —

RACHEL: An' does she know?

SUSY: She's not far off o' guessin', I'll be bound. She is a deep one, Nurse is.

RACHEL: She is. Oh, she'd soon know everything if she got a sniff. An' has your father got the will?

SUSY: No, it's in the front room.

RACHEL: Well — you should get it, an' see what it says. You should come in for something, and then —

SUSY: Durst you come with me?

RACHEL: Yes, I durst come.

SUSY: Should us then?

RACHEL: Yes, let us. You could burn it if there was owt you didn't like.

SUSY: Durst you get it? (She lights a candle.)

RACHEL: Yes, if you'll show me.

They go into the next room.

SUSY'S VOICE: Doesn't it smell cold a'ready. Oh!

RACHEL'S VOICE: It does.

SUSY'S VOICE: Look, you want to get on this table. This blessed candle does jump.

RACHEL'S VOICE: I could ha' sworn tha sheet moved.

A shriek from SUSY — shrieks from RACHEL — a bump — more shrieks. SUSY rushes across the kitchen out of doors. In a moment HARRY appears in the outer doorway. RACHEL flies blindly into him.

HARRY: Whatever's up?

RACHEL: Oh Harry! Oh Harry!

HARRY: Well — what's up? What's ter got in thy hand?

RACHEL: Oh, whatever was it? Let's go.

HARRY: What wor that? What!

He starts as Patty walks mildly from the front room.

It wor nowt but our Patty.

RACHEL: I thought I should have died.

HARRY: What wor ther doin'?

RACHEL: I fell off that table. Oh, and I have bruised my arm.

HARRY: What wor you doin'? What's this?

SUSY (entering): Oh Rachel!

RACHEL: It was only Patty.

SUSY: Did you get it? Oh, look at our Harry opening it!

HARRY: Why, it's th' will. I sh'd ha' thought you'd have more about you —
(He reads.)

SUSY: What's it say?

HARRY: Look for thysen, if tha'rt in such a mighty hurry.

SUSY (reading): Five hundred and fifty pounds for him and Nurse Broadbanks if they marry — an' if not, to be divided between me an' him. What did I say! Would you credit, now? But there's one thing, Nurse won't have him.

RACHEL: He doesn't want her.

HARRY: She's worth a million such as you, cats as wants nowt but to lap at a full saucer. You couldna let her lie quiet for five minutes, but must be after her bit of money.

RACHEL: Indeed, I didn't want the money.

SUSY: He wants it himself, an' that's what he's been contrivin' for all along — him an' that slivin' Nurse. There's a pair of 'em.

HARRY: There's a pair of you, more like it — a couple of slitherin' cats, nowt else. No more you think of her, than if she wor a dead fish wi' the money in her mouth. But you shan't have it, you shan't, if I can scotch you.

RACHEL: Oh, Mr Sharp-shins, you think you know everything, do you? You're mistaken. It's not fair, it isn't. I only —

HARRY: Tha needs to tell me nowt.

NURSE (entering): Oh, you are here! The Baroness asked me to call and see where you were, Rachel.

RACHEL: And now you've seen, you can go back an' tell her you've been.

HARRY: They've been after th' will, couldna let her rest still in her own room, but what must they do, go ferretin' for her money —

SUSY: Shut thy mouth, tha's said enough.

HARRY: That I hanna. They'd claw the stuff out of her hand, if it wor there —

SUSY: Hadn't we a right to see the will?

HARRY: There's a lot of right about you. Here, come here. Give us hold of it.

SUSY: I shan't.

HARRY: What! Now, Nurse, thee read it. We'n all read. Now thee read it. (NURSE reads.) Hast got it all? Tha sees?

NURSE: Yes, I understand it.

HARRY: An' what dost say?

NURSE: I say nothing.

SUSY: This is what she's been working for.

HARRY: Then let them as has worked be paid. What? I say "snip", Nurse, will tha say "snap"? Come on — "snap" me, Nurse. Say "snap". Snip?

NURSE: This is hardly the occasion.

RACHEL: He doesn't love you, Nurse. This is only his temper.

NURSE: I think, out of respect to the dead, we ought not to go on like this.

SUSY: You'll be precise and proper — all lardy-da. Oh yes — but you've got what you've been aiming at, haven't you? You've worked it round very clever. You see what carneyin' 'll do for you, Rachel. If you'd ha' buttered your words, you might ha' been alright.

RACHEL: I couldn't creep.

HARRY: No; you could slither, though.

NURSE: I'm afraid I must be going.

SUSY: Yes, you can smile to yourself, and hug yourself under your cloak in the dark. It's worth marryin' him for, five hundred and fifty pounds.

NURSE goes out.

HARRY: She's a lady, she is, an' she makes you two look small.

RACHEL: Well, Harry, you can think what you like about me: and you always have thought me as bad as you could imagine. But I only did it to help Susy — and all I've done I've done with you sleering at me. An' I shan't marry Job Arthur; I s'll go in service in Derby. An' you needn't sleer at me no more — because it's your fault, even more than mine.

HARRY: A' right, ma'e it my fault.

RACHEL: As much as mine, I said.

HARRY: Dunna let me stop thee from ha'ain' Job Arthur.

RACHEL: Job Arthur's a man as can play his own tune on any mortal woman, brazen as brass, or cuddlin' as a fiddle —

HARRY: Or as ronk as an old mouth organ.

RACHEL: Or like a bagpipe as wants squeezin', or a mandolin as wants tickling. He gets a tune out of the whole job lot, the whole band —

HARRY: Shut up.

RACHEL: But I'll buy you a cuckoo-clock to keep you company.

HARRY: I'll buy my own.

RACHEL (flapping her arms suddenly at him): Cuckoo! Cuckoo! Cuckoo!

CURTAIN

ACT V

SCENE I

The Sunday following the last scene. The porch of Grunston Church. The HEMSTOCKS have attended the post-funeral service. Mourners are leaving the church.

1ST MOURNER: Well, I niver knowed the likes —

2ND MOURNER: What?

1ST MOURNER: Nurse Broadbanks to be axed wi' old Hezekiah Wilcox, an' Job Arthur Bowers wi' Rachel Wilcox.

3RD MOURNER: An' what about it?

1ST MOURNER: Well, I never thought Nurse would have him an' everybody said Job Arthur would never marry now.

2ND MOURNER: I'm not surprised at neither of 'em.

1ST MOURNER: I was never more taken in in my life.

Exit 1ST and 2ND MOURNERS.

SUSY: No.

3RD MOURNER: I don't call it decent — two sets of banns put up at a funeral

Sunday. They might ha' waited till next week.

SUSY: I'm going to see about this.

3RD MOURNER: Yes, th' old Baron wants telling, the old nuisance, for he's nothing else.

Exit SUSY and 3RD MOURNER.

4TH MOURNER (sighing): That did me good. I'm sure I've fair cried my eyes up.

5TH MOURNER: You can't make out half the old Baron says, but he makes you feel funny.

4TH MOURNER: As if you'd got ghosts in your bowels. An' when he said — what was it?

5TH MOURNER: Was it Hezekiah Wilcox wi' Nurse Broadbanks?

4TH MOURNER: Yes — fancy 'em both bein' there to hear it. What a come-down for her.

5TH MOURNER: I dunno. The old chap's tidy well off —

4TH MOURNER: But he's mushy — he slavers like a slobbering spaniel —

5TH MOURNER: Well, women like that sort.

Exit 4TH and 5TH MOURNERS.

MR HEMSTOCK: I allers thought 'er'd a worn widow's weeds for me —

HARRY: Dost wish it wor that road about?

MR HEMSTOCK: Nay, I non know —

HARRY: Are ter stoppin'?

MR HEMSTOCK: I want ter speak ter Nurse.

HARRY: I'm goin' then.

MR HEMSTOCK: Dunna thee — tha wait a bit.

HARRY: Nay.

Exit HARRY.

BAKER (in very genteel black): Good morning, Mr Hemstock.

MR HEMSTOCK: Good morning.

BAKER: We got more than we bargained for.

MR HEMSTOCK: Yes, a bit surprisin'.

BAKER: I'm going to strike — Nurse for a mother-in-law is too much for a good thing. Why, bless me, you want to be careful what relatives you have — some you can't help — but a mother-in-law, you can.

MR HEMSTOCK: I want to speak to Nurse.

MR WILCOX (frock-coated): You've 'ad a big loss, Mr Hemstock — I've been through it myself, so I know what it is.

BAKER: Here, I say, Hezekiah — I don't mind you for a father-in-law —

MR WILCOX: Hello, Job Arthur! Well, I never! I am surprised, I can tell you.

BAKER: So'm I.

MR WILCOX: But it's a glad surprise — I'd rather say "My son" to you, Job Arthur —

BAKER: Hold on a bit, Hezekiah; you've always stood me as a good uncle, let's leave it at that.

MR WILCOX: I'll make you a wedding present of it, Job Arthur — that little thing, you know.

BAKER: I do, worse luck! I've pledged my soul and my honour to you, uncle, my uncle on the pop-shop side, but my body's my ewe lamb — I don't sell. Good morning, Dr Foules.

DR FOULES: Good morning. Er — excuse me — but Nurse Broadbanks has not gone yet?

BAKER: Not yet, Doctor. Here's her husband-that-is-to-be waiting for her.

DR FOULES: Ha!

MR WILCOX: Nurse has not gone yet, Doctor.

DR FOULES: Thank you.

BAKER: Let's have a look! (He peeps into the church.) Oh — oh Baron, may I speak to you?

Enter BARON, in surplice, with BARONESS and NURSE.

BARON: And you, what have you to say?

BAKER: Not much. Only there's a bit of an alteration wants makin'. Rachel's given me the sack.

BARON: I do not understand, sir.

BARONESS: He wishes to escape from his promise. He wishes to dodge Rachel.

BARON: You, sir, have you not given your word?

BAKER: And you're welcome keep it, for what it's worth. But you can't cork a woman's promise, Baroness. In short, Baron — and Mr Wilcox — Rachel has asked to be released from her engagement — hem! — with me — and I have felt it my duty to release her. (He bows.)

BARON: It is an indignity to the Church. It is insult to the Holy Church.

BARONESS: I do not believe this man. It is his ruse to escape from a bond.

MR WILCOX: Yes, my lady, that's what it is — my poor girl — Nurse! Nurse?

NURSE: Let Rachel come herself.

BARONESS: She shall.

BARON (to MR HEMSTOCK): Go and bring Rachel here.

MR HEMSTOCK (shrugging): Where am I to go?

NURSE: Please, Mr Hemstock.

He goes.

BARON: Sir, I believe you are a scoundrel.

BAKER: I wouldn't deny it, Baron.

MR WILCOX: No — we know him too well — he'd better not begin denyin'.

NURSE: This is the man, Baron — the — the — the Wilcox.

BARON: What! What!

BARONESS: What do you mean, you old wicked man, insulting Nurse in this fashion?

BARON: You — you — you, sir! If you speak I will cut you down. The double shame, the double blasphemy! Ah! Leave from my sight — go — don't stir, sir, till you answer.

DR FOULES: May I ask, Nurse, if I am to congratulate you on your banns?

NURSE: I should think you have no need to ask. I am ready to die. I am so

mortified and ashamed.

BAKER: Hello — I am only the mote in the eye of the Church, am I? Oh uncle, uncle!

DR FOULES: Then it is a mistake?

NURSE: Worse. It is a mean, base contrivance to trap me. I knew nothing of these banns — I could have dropped. He knows I wouldn't marry him — no, not if — not if —

BAKER: You died in a ditch with your shoes on. I'm undone this time, curse it. Uncle, have a pound of flesh, will you, instead? I could spare a pound and a half, cut judiciously.

BARON: What do you say, sir?

BAKER: I'm inviting him to have his pound of flesh, instead of his two hundred pounds of money. Though it's dear meat, I own.

NURSE: What do you mean, Mr Bowers?

BAKER: I owe him £180, and he'll foreclose on our house in a couple of months. Then goodbye my bakery, and they cart my old mother to a lunatic asylum, though she's no more mad than I am.

BARONESS: And what have you done with the money?

BAKER: Paid some of my debts, Baroness — and some of it I have — as it were, eaten. So in a pound of flesh he'd get his money glorified.

BARON: What do you say, sir?

MR WILCOX: I say nothing.

CURTAIN

SCENE II

The vicarage garden wall, under which runs the path. RACHEL looks over the wall; enter HARRY.

RACHEL: All by yourself? Where's the others?

HARRY: Stopping.

RACHEL: Did they give my father's banns out?

HARRY: His'n an' thine.

RACHEL: What! Mine! Why, I told Job Arthur as I wouldn't have him.

HARRY: 'Appen so.

RACHEL: I did. An' he's never told the Baron. Whatever shall I do?

HARRY: What?

RACHEL: You don't believe as I told him.

HARRY: I believe nowt.

RACHEL: But I did, an' he's agreed. And did they ask my father and Nurse?

HARRY: Yes.

RACHEL: Oh — but I shan't have him — I shan't. The Baron'll give it me — but I shan't have him. You needn't believe me, if you don't want to.

HARRY: When did ter tell Job Arthur?

RACHEL: Yesterday. An' he was glad. He doesn't really care for me.

HARRY: Are ter having me on?

RACHEL: May I be struck dead this minute if I am.

HARRY: An' what shall ter do?

RACHEL: I don't know — go to Derby. Perhaps I'll learn to be a nurse.

HARRY: She's marryin' thy father.

RACHEL (melting into tears): Don't — tha's hurt me enough. (Dashing away her tears.) Well, I must go in and see to the dinner. Then I'll tell the Baron, and have my head bitten off. (She turns to go.)

HARRY: Are ter sure tha told Job Arthur?

RACHEL: Go and ask him.

HARRY: There's no tellin' what tha does.

RACHEL: No — there isn't — for the simple reason that I've built my house on the sand.

HARRY: How dost mean?

RACHEL: You know right enough. Well, I'll go an' warm th' rice pudding up.

HARRY: Rachel — dost care for me?

RACHEL: You'll make me wild in a minute.

HARRY: Rachel — dunna go — it's that lonely.

RACHEL: I s'll have to go and put that pudding in.

HARRY: Come down here first — a minute.

RACHEL: Come you up here.

HARRY (climbing up): Rachel.

RACHEL: What?

HARRY: It seems that quiet-like — dunna go an' leave me. I go rummagin' down i' the loose ground, to look at th' coffin.

RACHEL: Do you?

HARRY: I do. I feel as if I should have to get at her an' mak' her speak. I canna stand this dead o'night quiet.

RACHEL: No.

HARRY: Comin' out of church into this sunshine's like goin' in a cinematograph show. Things jumps about in a flare of light, an' you expect it every minute to go out an' be pitch dark. All the shoutin' an' singin', an' yet there's a sort of quiet, Rachel.

RACHEL: Never mind — it will be so for a bit.

HARRY: I canna be by myself, though, I canna.

RACHEL: There are plenty of people.

HARRY: Nay, I non want 'em.

RACHEL: Only Nurse.

HARRY: Nor her neither — never.

RACHEL: ‘Appen so.

HARRY: Tha doesna believe me?

RACHEL: “I believe nowt.”

HARRY: I wish I may drop dead this minute if I ever did care for her.

RACHEL (smiling): You thought you did?

HARRY: ‘Appen I did think so.

RACHEL: I know you did.

HARRY: But ‘er knows nowt about me, like thee.

RACHEL: No.

HARRY: Shall ter ha’e me, Rachel?

RACHEL: You want me?

HARRY: Let us be married afore the week’s out, Rachel. Dunna leave me by mysen.

RACHEL: Are you in a hurry now, at the last pinch?

HARRY: Shall ter, Rachel?

RACHEL: Yes. (He kisses her.)

MR HEMSTOCK (entering): I should ha thought you’d more about you than to be kissin’ there where everybody can see you — an’ to-day.

RACHEL: There’s nobody but you.

MR HEMSTOCK: You don’t know who there is.

RACHEL: And I don't care. We're going to be married directly.

MR HEMSTOCK: It'll look nice, that will — his mother buried yesterday.

HARRY: It ma'es no difference to her, does it?

MR HEMSTOCK: Tha'rt a fawce un, Rachel. Tha's contrived it, after a'. Tha'rt a fawce un, an' no mistake. But tha's got to come to the Baron.

RACHEL: What for?

MR HEMSTOCK: Nay, dunna ask me. Tha'd better look sharp. Ma'e thy heels crack.

RACHEL. What's up now, I wonder?

They go out.

CURTAIN

SCENE III

The church porch.

BARON: Do not speak, sir. You have vilified me, you have held up the Church to ridicule.

MR WILCOX: I can speak, can't I?

BARON: Do not speak, you shall not, do not speak. We will not hear your voice. You are a blasphemer.

MR WILCOX: I can't see but what a Methodist's as good as a Church, whatever. What have I done, what have I done?

BARONESS: What have you done!

MR WILCOX: Whatever anybody says, there's nobody can say I've never done anything as wan't right.

BARON: What, sir, what —

BAKER: Here's Rachel.

SUSY: I'll bet it's her doin's. She's the deepest I ever met, bar none.

BARON: Rachel?

RACHEL: Yes, Baron.

BARON: Who wrote to see the letter of the banns for your father and Nurse?

MR WILCOX: I did.

BARON: Scoundrel! Impostor!

NURSE: You had not the slightest justification for it.

DR FOULES: Surely, Nurse, you are flattered. A woman loves a peremptory wooing.

MR WILCOX: You accepted me on Friday night, Nurse, you know you did.

NURSE: I did no such thing.

BAKER: Now, Rachel, speak up. I say you've refused me —

RACHEL: So I have.

BAKER: Of course. And I forgot to take the banns back.

RACHEL: That's your lookout.

BARON: Rachel! Ah, insolent!

BAKER: Now, my case settled — did Nurse accept your father? Of course not.

RACHEL: She did.

MR WILCOX: There you are.

NURSE: I did not. I would not demean myself. I did not.

BARONESS: This is very funny, Nurse.

BARON: I have spoken the banns.

MR WILCOX: Come now, Nurse.

NURSE: You horrid, hateful old man. You know you worked yourself into a state, I thought you were delirious, and I had to promise anything.

MR WILCOX: A promise is a promise.

SUSY: Of all the deep-uns, Rachel, you cap all.

RACHEL: What's it to do with me?

NURSE: You pestered and pestered and pestered me.

DR FOULES: All's fair in love and war, Nurse.

BARON: What were the exact words?

RACHEL: “Yes, yes. I’ll marry you — if you’ll settle down now and go to sleep.”

NURSE: Why! What! You are an underhand thing.

RACHEL: What if I did happen to hear?

NURSE: You were listening!

RACHEL: I could hear it all.

NURSE: How hateful, how hateful!

BARON: I do not understand — explain.

NURSE: He was shamming —

MR WILCOX: She’s had me on a string —

RACHEL: She’s sniffed at him for months, wondering whether or not to lick him up.

DR FOULES: The debatable tit-bit.

BARON: I will understand this matter. Speak, Nurse.

NURSE: He shammed fever, delirium — and to comfort him, to soothe him, I said I would marry him. I thought he was raving. And I would not marry him — I’d rather beg in the streets.

MR WILCOX: Oh, but Nurse, Nurse, look here.

BARON: Silence, sir, silence. You are a base, malingering pulamiting wretch.

RACHEL: Well, she came to see him often enough, and stopped long enough —

BARONESS: You cannot, Baron, blame the man for everything.

DR FOULES: A man who was delirious in fever on Friday night would hardly be disporting himself at church on Sunday morning —

MR WILCOX: I'm not disporting myself.

BARONESS: I don't know. It's not much, and there are still miracles.

DR FOULES: Surely miracles are not wasted on — Methodists, Baroness?

BARONESS: I do not know — I do not know. Rachel, did you put the pudding to warm?

RACHEL: Yes'm.

BARONESS: Then it's burnt to a cinder.

BARON: You, sir, you Wilcox, are a base scoundrel.

MR WILCOX: She shall pay for this.

NURSE: I must have it contradicted — I must.

BAKER: I will contradict it, Nurse.

DR FOULES: And I.

MR HEMSTOCK: And me.

HARRY: An' me.

BARONESS: But I'm not so sure —

BARON: Enough, enough. I am again a disgrace and a laughing stock. You, sir, you Wilcox —

MR WILCOX: What, Baron von Ruge?

BARON: You — you — you are a scoundrel.

BAKER: It's old news.

BARON: I withdraw and refute these double banns next Sunday.

MR WILCOX: Not with my consent.

BARON: Do not speak. And in the public paper must be refutation.

NURSE: Oh, isn't it dreadful!

SUSY: Folks shouldn't shilly-shally.

BARON: And then — I have done.

DR FOULES: Perhaps you can say there was a mistake. Substitute my name for that of Mr Wilcox.

BAKER: All's fair in love and war. Substitute Mrs Smalley's name for Rachel's.

RACHEL: A change for the better is always welcome. Substitute Harry Hemstock for Job Arthur Bowers.

BARON: This is madness and insult.

DR FOULES: It is deadly earnest, Baron. Nurse, will you be asked in church with me next Sunday?

BAKER: Susy, will you be asked in church with me next Sunday?

HARRY: Rachel, shall you be axed in church with me next Sunday?

BARON: Enough, enough! Go away, I will suffer no more of this!

BARONESS: Such wicked frivolity! Rachel, go home at once to see to that pudding.

DR FOULES: We are most deeply serious, Nurse, are we not?

BAKER: Susy, are we not?

HARRY: Rachel, are we not?

RACHEL: Chorus of ladies, “Yes”!

NURSE AND SUSY: Chorus of ladies, “Yes”!

DR FOULES: Millicent Broadbanks — Arthur William Foules.

BAKER: Job Arthur Bowers — Susan Smalley, née Hemstock, widow.

HARRY: Rachel Wilcox — Harry Hemstock.

BARON: Away! Away!

DR FOULES: Baron, you should play Duke to our “As You Like It”.

BARON: I do not like it, I will not.

SUSY: Then lump it.

MR WILCOX: I call it scandalous, going on like this.

RACHEL: Like it or lump it, Father, like it or lump it.

DR FOULES: You accept me, Nurse?

NURSE: I do, Doctor. (He kisses her hand.)

BAKER: You accept me, Susan?

SUSY: This once, Job Arthur. (He kisses her cheek.)

RACHEL (after a moment): Come on here, Harry. (They kiss on the mouth.)

BARON: Go away from here. You shall not pollute my church.

BARONESS: It is disgraceful.

MR WILCOX: They want horsewhipping, every one of them.

MR HEMSTOCK: Well — I must say —

DR FOULES: It's "As You Like It".

BAKER: It's "As You Lump It", Hezekiah.

CURTAIN

TOUCH AND GO



A PLAY IN THREE ACTS

CHARACTERS

ACT I

ACT II

ACT III

CHARACTERS

GERALD BARLOW

MR BARLOW (his father)

OLIVER TURTON

JOB ARTHUR FREER

WILLIE HOUGHTON

ALFRED BREFFITT

WILLIAM (a butler)

CLERKS, MINERS, etc.

ANABEL WRATH

MRS BARLOW

WINIFRED BARLOW

EVA (a maid)

ACT I

SCENE I

Sunday morning. Market-place of a large mining village in the Midlands. A man addressing a small gang of colliers from the foot of a stumpy memorial obelisk. Church bells heard. Churchgoers passing along the outer pavements.

WILLIE HOUGHTON: What's the matter with you folks, as I've told you before, and as I shall keep on telling you every now and again, though it doesn't make a bit of difference, is that you've got no idea of freedom whatsoever. I've lived in this blessed place for fifty years, and I've never seen the spark of an idea, nor of any response to an idea, come out of a single one of you, all the time. I don't know what it is with colliers — whether it's spending so much time in the bowels of the earth — but they never seem to be able to get their thoughts above their bellies. If you've got plenty to eat and drink, and a bit over to keep the missis quiet, you're satisfied. I never saw such a satisfied bloomin' lot in my life as you Barlow and Walsall's men are, really. Of course you can growse as well as anybody, and you do growse. But you don't do anything else. You're stuck in a sort of mud of contentment, and you feel yourselves sinking, but you make no efforts to get out. You bleat a bit, like sheep in a bog — but you like it, you know. You like sinking in — you don't have to stand on your own feet then.

I'll tell you what'll happen to you chaps. I'll give you a little picture of what you'll be like in the future. Barlow and Walsall's 'll make a number of compounds, such as they keep niggers in in South Africa, and there you'll be kept. And every one of you'll have a little brass collar round his neck, with a number on it. You won't have names any more. And you'll go from the compound to the pit, and from the pit back again to the compound. You won't be

allowed to go outside the gates, except at weekends. They'll let you go home to your wives on Saturday nights, to stop over Sunday. But you'll have to be in again by half-past nine on Sunday night; and if you're late, you'll have your next weekend knocked off. And there you'll be — and you'll be quite happy. They'll give you plenty to eat, and a can of beer a day, and a bit of bacca — and they'll provide dominoes and skittles for you to play with. And you'll be the most contented set of men alive. — But you won't be men. You won't even be animals. You'll go from number one to number three thousand, a lot of numbered slaves — a new sort of slaves —

VOICE: An' wheer shall thee be, Willie?

WILLIE: Oh, I shall be outside the palings, laughing at you. I shall have to laugh, because it'll be your own faults. You'll have nobody but yourself to thank for it. You don't want to be men. You'd rather not be free — much rather. You're like those people spoken of in Shakespeare: "Oh, how eager these men are to be slaves!" I believe it's Shakespeare — or the Bible — one or the other — it mostly is —

ANABEL WRATH (passing to church): It was Tiberius.

WILLIE: Eh?

ANABEL: Tiberius said it.

WILLIE: Tiberius! — Oh, did he? (Laughs.) Thanks! Well, if Tiberius said it, there must be something in it. And he only just missed being in the Bible, anyway. He was a day late, or they'd have had him in. "Oh, how eager these men are to be slaves!" — It's evident the Romans deserved all they got from Tiberius — and you'll deserve all you get, every bit of it. But don't you bother, you'll get it. You won't be at the mercy of Tiberius, you'll be at the mercy of something a jolly sight worse. Tiberius took the skin off a few Romans, apparently. But you'll have the soul taken out of you — every one of you. And I'd rather lose my skin than my soul, any day. But perhaps you wouldn't.

VOICE: What art makin' for, Willie? Tha seems to say a lot, but tha goes round it. Tha'rt like a donkey on a gin. Tha gets ravelled.

WILLIE: Yes, that's just it. I am precisely like a donkey on a gin — a donkey

that's trying to wind a lot of colliers up to the surface. There's many a donkey that's brought more colliers than you up to see daylight, by trotting round. — But do you want to know what I'm making for? I can soon tell you that. You Barlow and Walsall's men, you haven't a soul to call your own. Barlow and Walsall's have only to say to one of you, Come, and he cometh; Go, and he goeth, Lie down and be kicked, and he lieth down and he is kicked — and serve him jolly well right.

VOICE: Ay — an' what about it? Tha's got a behind o' thy own, hasn't ter?

WILLIE: Do you stand there and ask me what about it, and haven't the sense to alter it? Couldn't you set up a proper Government to-morrow, if you liked? Couldn't you contrive that the pits belonged to you, instead of you belonging to the pits, like so many old pit-ponies that stop down till they are blind, and take to eating coal-slack for meadow-grass, not knowing the difference? If only you'd learn to think, I'd respect you. As you are, I can't, not if I try my hardest. All you can think of is to ask for another shilling a day. That's as far as your imagination carries you. And perhaps you get sevenpence ha'penny, but pay for it with half a crown's worth of sweat. The masters aren't fools — as you are. They'll give you two-thirds of what you ask for, but they'll get five-thirds of it back again — and they'll get it out of your flesh and blood, too, in jolly hard work. Shylock wasn't in it with them. He only wanted a pound of flesh. But you cheerfully give up a pound a week, each one of you, and keep on giving it up. — But you don't seem to see these things. You can't think beyond your dinners and your 'lowance. You think if you can get another shilling a day you're set up. You make me tired, I tell you.

JOB ARTHUR FREER: We think of others besides ourselves.

WILLIE: Hello, Job Arthur — are you there? I didn't recognise you without your frock-coat and silk hat — on the Sabbath. — What was that you said? You think of something else, besides yourselves? — Oh ay — I'm glad to hear it. Did you mean your own importance?

A motor car, GERALD BARLOW driving, OLIVER TURTON with him, has pulled up.

JOB ARTHUR (glancing at the car): No, I didn't.

WILLIE: Didn't you, though? — Come, speak up, let us have it. The more the merrier. You were going to say something.

JOB ARTHUR: Nay, you were doing the talking.

WILLIE: Yes, so I was, till you interrupted, with a great idea on the tip of your tongue. Come, spit it out. No matter if Mr Barlow hears you. You know how sorry for you we feel, that you've always got to make your speeches twice — once to those above, and once to us here below. I didn't mean the angels and the devils, but never mind. Speak up, Job Arthur.

JOB ARTHUR: It's not everybody as has as much to say as you, Mr Houghton.

WILLIE: No, not in the open — that's a fact. Some folks says a great deal more, in semi-private. You were just going to explain to me, on behalf of the men, whom you so ably represent and so wisely lead, Job Arthur — we won't say by the nose — you were just going to tell me — on behalf of the men, of course, not of the masters — that you think of others, besides yourself. Do you mind explaining what others?

JOB ARTHUR: Everybody's used to your talk, Mr Houghton, and for that reason it doesn't make much impression. What I meant to say, in plain words, was that we have to think of what's best for everybody, not only for ourselves.

WILLIE: Oh, I see. What's best for everybody! I see! Well, for myself, I'm much obliged — there's nothing for us to do, gentlemen, but for all of us to bow acknowledgments to Mr Job Arthur Freer, who so kindly has all our interests at heart.

JOB ARTHUR: I don't profess to be a red-rag Socialist. I don't pretend to think that if the Government had the pits it would be any better for us. No. What I mean is, that the pits are there, and every man on this place depends on them, one way or another. They're the cow that gives the milk. And what I mean is, how every man shall have a proper share of the milk, which is food and living. I don't want to kill the cow and share up the meat. It's like killing the goose that laid the golden egg. I want to keep the cow healthy and strong. And the cow is the pits, and we're the men that depend on the pits.

WILLIE: Who's the cat that's going to lick the cream?

JOB ARTHUR: My position is this — and I state it before masters and men — that it's our business to strike such a balance between the interests of the men and the interests of the masters that the pits remain healthy, and everybody profits.

WILLIE: You're out for the millennium, I can see — with Mr Job Arthur Freer striking the balance. We all see you, Job Arthur, one foot on either side of the fence, balancing the see-saw, with masters at one end and men at the other. You'll have to give one side a lot of pudding. — But go back a bit, to where we were before the motor car took your breath away. When you said, Job Arthur, that you think of others besides yourself, didn't you mean, as a matter of fact, the office men? Didn't you mean that the colliers, led — we won't mention noses — by you, were going to come out in sympathy with the office clerks, supposing they didn't get the rise in wages which they've asked for — the office clerks? Wasn't that it?

JOB ARTHUR: There's been some talk among the men of standing by the office. I don't know what they'll do. But they'll do it of their own decision, whatever it is.

WILLIE: There's not a shadow of doubt about it, Job Arthur. But it's a funny thing the decisions all have the same foxy smell about them, Job Arthur.

OLIVER TURTON (calling from the car): What was the speech about, in the first place?

WILLIE: I beg pardon?

OLIVER: What was the address about, to begin with?

WILLIE: Oh, the same old hat — Freedom. But partly it's given to annoy the Unco Guid, as they pass to their Sabbath banquet of self-complacency.

OLIVER: What about Freedom?

WILLIE: Very much as usual, I believe. But you should have been here ten minutes sooner, before we began to read the lessons. (Laughs.)

ANABEL W. (moving forward, and holding out her hand): You'd merely have been told what Freedom isn't: and you know that already. How are you, Oliver?

OLIVER: Good God, Anabel! — are you part of the meeting? How long have you been back in England?

ANABEL: Some months, now. My family have moved here, you know.

OLIVER: Your family! Where have they moved from? — from the moon?

ANABEL: No, only from Derby. — How are you, Gerald?

GERALD twists in his seat to give her his hand.

GERALD: I saw you before.

ANABEL: Yes, I know you did.

JOB ARTHUR has disappeared. The men disperse sheepishly into groups, to stand and sit on their heels by the walls and the causeway edge. WILLIE HOUGHTON begins to talk to individuals.

OLIVER: Won't you get in and drive on with us a little way?

ANABEL: No, I was going to church.

OLIVER: Going to church! Is that a new habit?

ANABEL: Not a habit. But I've been twice since I saw you last.

OLIVER: I see. And that's nearly two years ago. It's an annual thing, like a birthday?

ANABEL: No. I'll go on, then.

OLIVER: You'll be late now.

ANABEL: Shall I? It doesn't matter.

OLIVER: We are going to see you again, aren't we?

ANABEL (after a pause): Yes, I hope so, Oliver.

OLIVER: How have you been these two years — well? — happy?

ANABEL: No, neither. How have you?

OLIVER: Yes, fairly happy. Have you been ill?

ANABEL: Yes, in France I was very ill.

OLIVER: Your old neuritis?

ANABEL: No. My chest. Pneumonia — oh, a complication.

OLIVER: How sickening! Who looked after you? Is it better?

ANABEL: Yes, it's a great deal better.

OLIVER: And what are you doing in England — working?

ANABEL: No, not much. — I won't keep the car here: good-bye.

GERALD: Oh, it's alright.

OLIVER: But, Anabel — we must fix a meeting. I say, wait just a moment. Could I call on your people? Go into town with me one day. I don't know whether Gerald intends to see you — whether he intends to ask you to Lilley Close.

GERALD: I —

ANABEL: He's no need. I'm fixed up there already.

GERALD: What do you mean?

ANABEL: I am at Lilley Close every day — or most days — to work with your sister Winifred in the studio.

GERALD: What? — why, how's that?

ANABEL: Your father asked me. My father was already giving her some lessons.

GERALD: And you're at our house every day?

ANABEL: Most days.

GERALD: Well, I'm — well, I'll be — you managed it very sharp, didn't you? I've only been away a fortnight.

ANABEL: Your father asked me — he offered me twelve pounds a month — I wanted to do something.

GERALD: Oh yes, but you didn't hire yourself out at Lilley Close as a sort of upper servant just for twelve pounds a month.

ANABEL: You're wrong — you're wrong. I'm not a sort of upper servant at all — not at all.

GERALD: Oh yes, you are, if you're paid twelve pounds a month — three pounds a week. That's about what Father's sick-nurse gets, I believe. You're a kind of upper servant, like a nurse. You don't do it for twelve pounds a month. You can make twelve pounds in a day, if you like to work at your little models: I know you can sell your little statuette things as soon as you make them.

ANABEL: But I can't make them. I can't make them. I've lost the spirit — the joie de vivre — I don't know what, since I've been ill. I tell you I've got to earn something.

GERALD: Nevertheless, you won't make me believe, Anabel, that you've come and buried yourself in the provinces — such provinces — just to earn Father's three pounds a week. Why don't you admit it, that you came back to try and take up the old threads?

OLIVER: Why not, Gerald? Don't you think we ought to take up the old threads?

GERALD: I don't think we ought to be left without choice. I don't think Anabel ought to come back and thrust herself on me — for that's what it amounts to, after all — when one remembers what's gone before.

ANABEL: I don't thrust myself on you at all. I know I'm a fool, a fool, to come back. But I wanted to. I wanted to see you again. Now I know I've presumed. I've made myself cheap to you. I wanted to — I wanted to. And now I've done it, I won't come to Lilley Close again, nor anywhere where you are. Tell your father I have gone to France again — it will be true.

GERALD: You play tricks on me — and on yourself. You know you do. You do it for the pure enjoyment of it. You're making a scene here in this filthy market-place, just for the fun of it. You like to see these accursed colliers standing eyeing you, and squatting on their heels. You like to catch me out, here where I'm known, where I've been the object of their eyes since I was born. This is a great coup de main for you. I knew it the moment I saw you here.

OLIVER: After all, we are making a scene in the market-place. Get in, Anabel, and we'll settle the dispute more privately. I'm glad you came back, anyhow. I'm glad you came right down on us. Get in, and let us run down to Whatmore.

ANABEL: No, Oliver. I don't want to run down to Whatmore. I wanted to see you — I wanted to see Gerald — and I've seen him — and I've heard him. That will suffice me. We'll make an end of the scene in the market-place. (She turns away.)

OLIVER: I knew it wasn't ended. I knew she would come back and tell us she'd come. But she's done her bit — now she'll go again. My God, what a fool of a world! — You go on, Gerald — I'll just go after her and see it out. (Calls.) One moment, Anabel.

ANABEL (calling): Don't come, Oliver. (Turns.)

GERALD: Anabel! (Blows the horn of the motor car violently and agitatedly — she looks round — turns again as if frightened.) God damn the woman! (Gets down from the car.) Drive home for me, Oliver.

CURTAIN

SCENE II

WINIFRED'S studio at Lilley Close. ANABEL and WINIFRED working at a model in clay.

WINIFRED: But isn't it lovely to be in Paris, and to have exhibitions, and to be famous?

ANABEL: Paris was a good place. But I was never famous.

WINIFRED: But your little animals and birds were famous. Jack said so. You know he brought us that bronze thrush that is singing, that is in his room. He has only let me see it twice. It's the loveliest thing I've ever seen. Oh, if I can do anything like that! — I've worshipped it, I have. Is it your best thing?

ANABEL: One of the best.

WINIFRED: It must be. When I see it, with its beak lifted, singing, something comes loose in my heart, and I feel as if I should cry, and fly up to heaven. Do you know what I mean? Oh, I'm sure you do, or you could never have made that thrush. Father is so glad you've come to show me how to work. He says now I shall have a life-work, and I shall be happy. It's true, too.

ANABEL: Yes, till the life-work collapses.

WINIFRED: Oh, it can't collapse. I can't believe it could collapse. Do tell me

about something else you made, which you loved — something you sculpted. Oh, it makes my heart burn to hear you! — Do you think I might call you Anabel? I should love to. You do call me Winifred already.

ANABEL: Yes, do.

WINIFRED: Won't you tell me about something else you made — something lovely?

ANABEL: Well, I did a small kitten — asleep — with its paws crossed. You know, Winifred, that wonderful look that kittens have, as if they were blown along like a bit of fluff — as if they weighed nothing at all — just wafted about — and yet so alive — do you know — ?

WINIFRED: Darlings — darlings — I love them!

ANABEL: Well, my kitten really came off — it had that quality. It looked as if it had just wafted there.

WINIFRED: Oh, yes! — oh, I know! And was it in clay?

ANABEL: I cut it in soft grey stone as well. I loved my kitten. An Armenian bought her.

WINIFRED: And where is she now?

ANABEL: I don't know — in Armenia, I suppose, if there is such a place. It would have to be kept under glass, because the stone wouldn't polish — and I didn't want it polished. But I dislike things under glass — don't you?

WINIFRED: Yes, I do. We had a golden clock, but Gerald wouldn't have the glass cover, and Daddy wouldn't have it without. So now the clock is in Father's room. Gerald often went to Paris. Oliver used to have a studio there. I don't care much for painting — do you?

ANABEL: No. I want something I can touch, if it's something outside me.

WINIFRED: Yes, isn't it wonderful, when things are substantial. Gerald and Oliver came back yesterday from Yorkshire. You know we have a colliery there.

ANABEL: Yes, I believe I've heard.

WINIFRED: I want to introduce you to Gerald, to see if you like him. He's good at the bottom, but he's very overbearing and definite.

ANABEL: Is he?

WINIFRED: Terribly clever in business. He'll get awfully rich.

ANABEL: Isn't he rich enough already?

WINIFRED: Oh yes, because Daddy is rich enough, really. I think if Gerald was a bit different, he'd be really nice. Now he's so managing. It's sickening. Do you dislike managing people, Anabel?

ANABEL: I dislike them extremely, Winifred.

WINIFRED: They're such a bore.

ANABEL: What does Gerald manage?

WINIFRED: Everything. You know he's revolutionized the collieries and the whole Company. He's made a whole new thing of it, so modern. Father says he almost wishes he'd let it die out — let the pits be closed. But I suppose things must be modernized, don't you think? Though it's very unpeaceful, you know, really.

ANABEL: Decidedly unpeaceful, I should say.

WINIFRED: The colliers work awfully hard. The pits are quite wonderful now. Father says it's against nature — all this electricity and so on. Gerald adores electricity. Isn't it curious?

ANABEL: Very. How are you getting on?

WINIFRED: I don't know. It's so hard to make things balance as if they were alive. Where is the balance in a thing that's alive?

ANABEL: The poise? Yes, Winifred — to me, all the secret of life is in that — just the — the inexpressible poise of a living thing, that makes it so different from a dead thing. To me it's the soul, you know — all living things have it — flowers, trees as well. It makes life always marvellous.

WINIFRED: Ah, yes! — ah, yes! If only I could put it in my model.

ANABEL: I think you will. You are a sculptor, Winifred. — Isn't there someone there?

WINIFRED (running to the door): Oh, Oliver!

OLIVER: Hello, Winnie! Can I come in? This is your sanctum: you can keep us out if you like.

WINIFRED: Oh, no. Do you know Miss Wrath, Oliver? She's a famous sculptress.

OLIVER: Is she? We have met. — Is Winifred going to make a sculptress, do you think?

ANABEL: I do.

OLIVER: Good! I like your studio, Winnie. Awfully nice up here over the out-buildings. Are you happy in it?

WINIFRED: Yes, I'm perfectly happy — only I shall never be able to make real models, Oliver — it's so difficult.

OLIVER: Fine room for a party — give us a studio party one day, Win, and we'll dance.

WINIFRED (flying to him): Yes, Oliver, do let us dance. What shall we dance to?

OLIVER: Dance? — Dance Vigni-vignons — we all know that. Ready?

WINIFRED: Yes.

They begin to sing, dancing meanwhile, in a free little ballet-manner, a wine-dance, dancing separate and then together.

De terre en vigne
La voilà la jolie vigne,
Vigni-vignons — vignons le vin,
La voilà la jolie vigne au vin,
La voilà la jolie vigne.

OLIVER: Join in — join in, all.

ANABEL joins in; the three dance and move in rhythm.

WINIFRED: I love it — I love it! Do Ma capote à trois boutons — you know it, don't you, Anabel? Ready — now —

They begin to dance to a quick little march-rhythm, all singing and dancing till they are out of breath.

OLIVER: Oh! — tired! — let us sit down.

WINIFRED: Oliver! — oh, Oliver! — I love you and Anabel.

OLIVER: Oh, Winifred, I brought you a present — you'll love me more now.

WINIFRED: Yes, I shall. Do give it me.

OLIVER: I left it in the morning-room. I put it on the mantelpiece for you.

WINIFRED: Shall I go for it?

OLIVER: There it is, if you want it.

WINIFRED: Yes — do you mind? I won't be long.

WINIFRED goes out.

OLIVER: She's a nice child.

ANABEL: A very nice child.

OLIVER: Why did you come back, Anabel?

ANABEL: Why does the moon rise, Oliver?

OLIVER: For some mischief or other, so they say.

ANABEL: You think I came back for mischief's sake?

OLIVER: Did you?

ANABEL: No.

OLIVER: Ah!

ANABEL: Tell me, Oliver, how is everything now? — how is it with you? — how is it between us all?

OLIVER: How is it between us all? — How isn't it, is more the mark.

ANABEL: Why?

OLIVER: You made a fool of us.

ANABEL: Of whom?

OLIVER: Well — of Gerald particularly — and of me.

ANABEL: How did I make a fool of you, Oliver?

OLIVER: That you know best, Anabel.

ANABEL: No, I don't know. Was it ever right between Gerald and me, all the three years we knew each other — we were together?

OLIVER: Was it all wrong?

ANABEL: No, not all. But it was terrible. It was terrible, Oliver. You don't realize. You don't realize how awful passion can be, when it never resolves, when it never becomes anything else. It is hate, really.

OLIVER: What did you want the passion to resolve into?

ANABEL: I was blinded — maddened. Gerald stung me and stung me till I was mad. I left him for reason's sake, for sanity's sake. We should have killed one another.

OLIVER: You stung him too, you know — and pretty badly, at the last: you dehumanized him.

ANABEL: When? When I left him, you mean?

OLIVER: Yes, when you went away with that Norwegian — playing your game a little too far.

ANABEL: Yes, I knew you'd blame me. I knew you'd be against me. But don't you see, Oliver, you helped to make it impossible for us.

OLIVER: Did I? I didn't intend to.

ANABEL: Ha, ha, Oliver! Your good intentions! They are too good to bear investigation, my friend. Ah, but for your good and friendly intentions —

OLIVER: You might have been alright?

ANABEL: No, no, I don't mean that. But we were a vicious triangle, Oliver — you must admit it.

OLIVER: You mean my friendship with Gerald went against you?

ANABEL: Yes. And your friendship with me went against Gerald.

OLIVER: So I am the devil in the piece.

ANABEL: You see, Oliver, Gerald loved you far too well ever to love me altogether. He loved us both. But the Gerald that loved you so dearly, old, old friends as you were, and trusted you, he turned a terrible face of contempt on me. You don't know, Oliver, the cold edge of Gerald's contempt for me — because he was so secure and strong in his old friendship with you. You don't know his sneering attitude to me in the deepest things — because he shared the deepest things with you. He had a passion for me. But he loved you.

OLIVER: Well, he doesn't any more. We went apart after you had gone. The friendship has become almost casual.

ANABEL: You see how bitterly you speak.

OLIVER: Yet you didn't hate me, Anabel.

ANABEL: No, Oliver — I was awfully fond of you. I trusted you — and I trust you still. You see I knew how fond Gerald was of you. And I had to respect this feeling. So I had to be aware of you: I had to be conscious of you: in a way, I had to love you. You understand how I mean? Not with the same fearful love with which I loved Gerald. You seemed to me warm and protecting — like a brother, you know — but a brother one loves.

OLIVER: And then you hated me?

ANABEL: Yes, I had to hate you.

OLIVER: And you hated Gerald?

ANABEL: Almost to madness — almost to madness.

OLIVER: Then you went away with that Norwegian. What of him?

ANABEL: What of him? Well, he's dead.

OLIVER: Ah! That's why you came back?

ANABEL: No, no. I came back because my only hope in life was in coming back. Baard was beautiful — and awful. You know how glisteningly blond he

was. Oliver, have you ever watched the polar bears? He was cold as iron when it is so cold that it burns you. Coldness wasn't negative with him. It was positive — and awful beyond expression — like the aurora borealis.

OLIVER: I wonder you ever got back.

ANABEL: Yes, so do I. I feel as if I'd fallen down a fissure in the ice. Yet I have come back, haven't I?

OLIVER: God knows! At least, Anabel, we've gone through too much ever to start the old game again. There'll be no more sticky love between us.

ANABEL: No, I think there won't, either.

OLIVER: And what of Gerald?

ANABEL: I don't know. What do you think of him?

OLIVER: I can't think any more. I can only blindly go from day to day, now.

ANABEL: So can I. Do you think I was wrong to come back? Do you think I wrong Gerald?

OLIVER: No. I'm glad you came. But I feel I can't know anything. We must just go on.

ANABEL: Sometimes I feel I ought never to have come to Gerald again — never — never — never.

OLIVER: Just left the gap? — Perhaps, if everything has to come asunder. But I think, if ever there is to be life — hope, — then you had to come back. I always knew it. There is something eternal between you and him; and if there is to be any happiness, it depends on that. But perhaps there is to be no more happiness — for our part of the world.

ANABEL (after a pause): Yet I feel hope — don't you?

OLIVER: Yes, sometimes.

ANABEL: It seemed to me, especially that winter in Norway, — I can hardly express it, — as if any moment life might give way under one, like thin ice, and one would be more than dead. And then I knew my only hope was here — the only hope.

OLIVER: Yes, I believe it. And I believe —

Enter MRS BARLOW.

MRS BARLOW: Oh, I wanted to speak to you, Oliver.

OLIVER: Shall I come across?

MRS BARLOW: No, not now. I believe Father is coming here with Gerald.

OLIVER: Is he going to walk so far?

MRS BARLOW: He will do it. — I suppose you know Oliver?

ANABEL: Yes, we have met before.

MRS BARLOW (to OLIVER): You didn't mention it. Where have you met Miss Wrath? She's been about the world, I believe.

ANABEL: About the world? — no, Mrs Barlow. If one happens to know Paris and London —

MRS BARLOW: Paris and London! Well, I don't say you are altogether an adventuress. My husband seems very pleased with you — for Winifred's sake, I suppose — and he's wrapped up in Winifred.

ANABEL: Winifred is an artist.

MRS BARLOW: All my children have the artist in them. They get it from my family. My father went mad in Rome. My family is born with a black fate — they all inherit it.

OLIVER: I believe one is master of one's fate sometimes, Mrs Barlow. There are moments of pure choice.

MRS BARLOW: Between two ways to the same end, no doubt. There's no changing the end.

OLIVER: I think there is.

MRS BARLOW: Yes, you have a parvenu's presumptuousness somewhere about you.

OLIVER: Well, better than a blue-blooded fatalism.

MRS BARLOW: The fate is in the blood: you can't change the blood.

Enter WINIFRED.

WINIFRED: Oh, thank you, Oliver, for the wolf and the goat, thank you so much! — The wolf has sprung on the goat, Miss Wrath, and has her by the throat.

ANABEL: The wolf?

OLIVER: It's a little marble group — Italian — in hard marble.

WINIFRED: The wolf — I love the wolf — he pounces so beautifully. His backbone is so terribly fierce. I don't feel a bit sorry for the goat, somehow.

OLIVER: I didn't. She is too much like the wrong sort of clergyman.

WINIFRED: Yes — such a stiff, long face. I wish he'd kill her.

MRS BARLOW: There's a wish!

WINIFRED: Father and Gerald are coming. That's them, I suppose.

Enter MR BARLOW and GERALD.

MR BARLOW: Ah, good morning — good morning — quite a little gathering!
Ah —

OLIVER: The steps tire you, Mr Barlow.

MR BARLOW: A little — a little — thank you. — Well, Miss Wrath, are you quite comfortable here?

ANABEL: Very comfortable, thanks.

GERALD: It was clever of you, Father, to turn this place into a studio.

MR BARLOW: Yes, Gerald. You make the worldly schemes and I the homely. Yes, it's a delightful place. I shall come here often if the two young ladies will allow me. — By the way, Miss Wrath, I don't know if you have been introduced to my son Gerald. I beg your pardon. Miss Wrath, Gerald — my son, Miss Wrath. (They bow.) Well, we are quite a gathering, quite a pleasant little gathering. We never expected anything so delightful a month ago, did we, Winifred, darling?

WINIFRED: No, Daddy, it's much nicer than expectations.

MR BARLOW: So it is, dear — to have such exceptional companionship and such a pleasant retreat. We are very happy to have Miss Wrath with us — very happy.

GERALD: A studio's awfully nice, you know; it is such a retreat. A newspaper has no effect in it — falls quite flat, no matter what the headlines are.

MR BARLOW: Quite true, Gerald, dear. It is a sanctum the world cannot invade — unlike all other sanctuaries, I am afraid.

GERALD: By the way, Oliver — to go back to profanities — the colliers really are coming out in support of the poor, ill-used clerks.

MR BARLOW: No, no, Gerald — no, no! Don't be such an alarmist. Let us leave these subjects before the ladies. No, no: the clerks will have their increase quite peacefully.

GERALD: Yes, dear father — but they can't have it peacefully now. We've been threatened already by the colliers — we've already received an ultimatum.

MR BARLOW: Nonsense, my boy — nonsense! Don't let us split words. You won't go against the clerks in such a small matter. Always avoid trouble over small matters. Don't make bad feeling — don't make bad blood.

MRS BARLOW: The blood is already rotten in this neighbourhood. What it needs is letting out. We need a few veins opening, or we shall have mortification setting in. The blood is black.

MR BARLOW: We won't accept your figure of speech literally, dear. No, Gerald, don't go to war over trifles.

GERALD: It's just over trifles that one must make war, Father. One can yield gracefully over big matters. But to be bullied over trifles is a sign of criminal weakness.

MR BARLOW: Ah, not so, not so, my boy. When you are as old as I am, you will know the comparative insignificance of these trifles.

GERALD: The older I get, Father, the more such trifles stick in my throat.

MR BARLOW: Ah, it is an increasingly irritable disposition in you, my child. Nothing costs so bitterly, in the end, as a stubborn pride.

MRS BARLOW: Except a stubborn humility — and that will cost you more. Avoid humility, beware of stubborn humility: it degrades. Hark, Gerald — fight! When the occasion comes, fight! If it's one against five thousand, fight! Don't give them your heart on a dish! Never! If they want to eat your heart out, make them fight for it, and then give it them poisoned at last, poisoned with your own blood. — What do you say, young woman?

ANABEL: Is it for me to speak, Mrs Barlow?

MRS BARLOW: Weren't you asked?

ANABEL: Certainly I would never give the world my heart on a dish. But can't there ever be peace — real peace?

MRS BARLOW: No — not while there is devilish enmity.

MR BARLOW: You are wrong, dear, you are wrong. The peace can come, the peace that passeth all understanding.

MRS BARLOW: That there is already between me and Almighty God. I am at peace with the God that made me, and made me proud. With men who humiliate me I am at war. Between me and the shameful humble there is war to the end, though they are millions and I am one. I hate the people. Between my race and them there is war — between them and me, between them and my children — for ever war, for ever and ever.

MR BARLOW: Ah, Henrietta — you have said all this before.

MRS BARLOW: And say it again. Fight, Gerald. You have my blood in you, thank God. Fight for it, Gerald. Spend it as if it were costly, Gerald, drop by drop. Let no dogs lap it. — Look at your father. He set his heart on a plate at the door, for the poorest mongrel to eat up. See him now, wasted and crossed out like a mistake — and swear, Gerald, swear to be true to my blood in you. Never lie down before the mob, Gerald. Fight it and stab it, and die fighting. It's a lost hope — but fight!

GERALD: Don't say these things here, Mother.

MRS BARLOW: Yes, I will — I will. I'll say them before you, and the child Winifred — she knows. And before Oliver and the young woman — they know, too.

MR BARLOW: You see, dear, you can never understand that, although I am weak and wasted, although I may be crossed out from the world like a mistake, I still have peace in my soul, dear, the peace that passeth all understanding.

MRS BARLOW: And what right have you to it? All very well for you to take peace with you into the other world. What do you leave for your sons to inherit?

MR BARLOW: The peace of God, Henrietta, if there is no peace among men.

MRS BARLOW: Then why did you have children? Why weren't you celibate? They have to live among men. If they have no place among men, why have you put them there? If the peace of God is no more than the peace of death, why are your sons born of you? How can you have peace with God, if you leave no peace

for your sons — no peace, no pride, no place on earth?

GERALD: Nay, Mother, nay. You shall never blame Father on my behalf.

MRS BARLOW: Don't trouble — he is blameless — I, a hulking, half-demented woman, I am glad when you blame me. But don't blame me when I tell you to fight. Don't do that, or you will regret it when you must die. Ah, your father was stiff and proud enough before men of better rank than himself. He was overbearing enough with his equals and his betters. But he humbled himself before the poor, he made me ashamed. He must hear it — he must hear it! Better he should hear it than die coddling himself with peace. His humility, and my pride, they have made a nice ruin of each other. Yet he is the man I wanted to marry — he is the man I would marry again. But never, never again would I give way before his goodness. Gerald, if you must be true to your father, be true to me as well. Don't set me down at nothing because I haven't a humble case.

GERALD: No, Mother — no, dear Mother. You see, dear Mother, I have rather a job between the two halves of myself. When you come to have the wild horses in your own soul, Mother, it makes it difficult.

MRS BARLOW: Never mind, you'll have help.

GERALD: Thank you for the assurance, darling. — Father, you don't mind what Mother says, I hope. I believe there's some truth in it — don't you?

MR BARLOW: I have nothing to say.

WINIFRED: I think there's some truth in it, Daddy. You were always worrying about those horrid colliers, and they didn't care a bit about you. And they ought to have cared a million pounds.

MR BARLOW: You don't understand, my child.

CURTAIN

ACT II

SCENE: Evening of the same day. Drawing-room at Lilley Close. MR BARLOW, GERALD, WINIFRED, ANABEL, OLIVER present. BUTLER pours coffee.

MR BARLOW: And you are quite a stranger in these parts, Miss Wrath?

ANABEL: Practically. But I was born at Derby.

MR BARLOW: I was born in this house — but it was a different affair then: my father was a farmer, you know. The coal has brought us what moderate wealth we have. Of course, we were never poor or needy — farmers, substantial farmers. And I think we were happier so — yes. — Winnie, dear, hand Miss Wrath the sweets. I hope they're good. I ordered them from London for you. — Oliver, my boy, have you everything you like? That's right. — It gives me such pleasure to see a little festive gathering in this room again. I wish Bertie and Elinor might be here. What time is it, Gerald?

GERALD: A quarter to nine, Father.

MR BARLOW: Not late yet. I can sit with you another half-hour. I am feeling better to-day. Winifred, sing something to us.

WINIFRED: Something jolly, Father?

MR BARLOW: Very jolly, darling.

WINIFRED: I'll sing "The Lincolnshire Poacher", shall I?

MR BARLOW: Do, darling, and we'll all join in the chorus. — Will you join in the chorus, Miss Wrath?

ANABEL: I will. It is a good song.

MR BARLOW: Yes, isn't it!

WINIFRED: All dance for the chorus, as well as singing.

They sing; some pirouette a little for the chorus.

MR BARLOW: Ah, splendid, splendid! There is nothing like gaiety.

WINIFRED: I do love to dance about. I know: let us do a little ballet — four of us — oh, do!

GERALD: What ballet, Winifred?

WINIFRED: Any. Eva can play for us. She plays well.

MR BARLOW: You won't disturb your mother? Don't disturb Eva if she is busy with your mother.

Exit WINIFRED.

If only I can see Winifred happy, my heart is at rest: if only I can hope for her to be happy in her life.

GERALD: Oh, Winnie's alright, Father — especially now she has Miss Wrath to initiate her into the mysteries of life and labour.

ANABEL: Why are you ironical?

MR BARLOW: Oh, Miss Wrath, believe me, we all feel that — it is the greatest possible pleasure to me that you have come.

GERALD: I wasn't ironical, I assure you.

MR BARLOW: No, indeed — no, indeed! We have every belief in you.

ANABEL: But why should you have?

MR BARLOW: Ah, my dear child, allow us the credit of our own discernment. And don't take offence at my familiarity. I am afraid I am spoilt since I am an invalid.

Re-enter WINIFRED, with EVA.

MR BARLOW: Come, Eva, you will excuse us for upsetting your evening. Will you be so good as to play something for us to dance to?

EVA: Yes, sir. What shall I play?

WINIFRED: Mozart — I'll find you the piece. Mozart's the saddest musician in the world — but he's the best to dance to.

MR BARLOW: Why, how is it you are such a connoisseur in sadness, darling?

GERALD: She isn't. She's a flagrant amateur.

EVA plays; they dance a little ballet.

MR BARLOW: Charming — charming, Miss Wrath: will you allow me to say Anabel, we shall all feel so much more at home? Yes — thank you — er — you enter into the spirit of it wonderfully, Anabel, dear. The others are accustomed to play together. But it is not so easy to come in on occasion as you do.

GERALD: Oh, Anabel's a genius! — I beg your pardon, Miss Wrath — familiarity is catching.

MR BARLOW: Gerald, my boy, don't forget that you are virtually host here.

EVA: Did you want any more music, sir?

GERALD: No, don't stay, Eva. We mustn't tire Father.

Exit EVA.

MR BARLOW: I am afraid, Anabel, you will have a great deal to excuse in us, in the way of manners. We have never been a formal household. But you have lived in the world of artists: you will understand, I hope.

ANABEL: Oh, surely —

MR BARLOW: Yes, I know. We have been a turbulent family, and we have had our share of sorrow, even more, perhaps, than of joys. And sorrow makes one indifferent to the conventionalities of life.

GERALD: Excuse me, Father: do you mind if I go and write a letter I have on my conscience?

MR BARLOW: No, my boy. (Exit GERALD.) We have had our share of sorrow and of conflict, Miss Wrath, as you may have gathered.

ANABEL: Yes — a little.

MR BARLOW: The mines were opened when my father was a boy — the first — and I was born late, when he was nearly fifty. So that all my life has been involved with coal and colliers. As a young man, I was gay and thoughtless. But I married young, and we lost our first child through a terrible accident. Two children we have lost through sudden and violent death. (WINIFRED goes out unnoticed.) It made me reflect. And when I came to reflect, Anabel, I could not justify my position in life. If I believed in the teachings of the New Testament — which I did, and do — how could I keep two or three thousand men employed underground in the mines, at a wage, let us say, of two pounds a week, whilst I lived in this comfortable house, and took something like two thousand pounds a year — let us name any figure —

ANABEL: Yes, of course. But is it money that really matters, Mr Barlow?

MR BARLOW: My dear, if you are a working man, it matters. When I went into the homes of my poor fellows, when they were ill or had had accidents — then I knew it mattered. I knew that the great disparity was wrong — even as we are taught that it is wrong.

ANABEL: Yes, I believe that the great disparity is a mistake. But take their lives, Mr Barlow. Do you think they would live more, if they had more money?

Do you think the poor live less than the rich? — is their life emptier?

MR BARLOW: Surely their lives would be better, Anabel.

OLIVER: All our lives would be better, if we hadn't to hang on in the perpetual tug-of-war, like two donkeys pulling at one carrot. The ghastly tension of possessions, and struggling for possession, spoils life for everybody.

MR BARLOW: Yes, I know now, as I knew then, that it was wrong. But how to avoid the wrong? If I gave away the whole of my income, it would merely be an arbitrary dispensation of charity. The money would still be mine to give, and those that received it would probably only be weakened instead of strengthened. And then my wife was accustomed to a certain way of living, a certain establishment. Had I any right to sacrifice her, without her consent?

ANABEL: Why, no!

MR BARLOW: Again, if I withdrew from the Company, if I retired on a small income, I knew that another man would automatically take my place, and make it probably harder for the men.

ANABEL: Of course — while the system stands, if one makes self-sacrifice one only panders to the system, makes it fatter.

MR BARLOW: One panders to the system — one panders to the system. And so, you see, the problem is too much. One man cannot alter or affect the system; he can only sacrifice himself to it. Which is the worst thing probably that he can do.

OLIVER: Quite. But why feel guilty for the system? — everybody supports it, the poor as much as the rich. If every rich man withdrew from the system, the working classes and socialists would keep it going, every man in the hope of getting rich himself at last. It's the people that are wrong. They want the system much more than the rich do — because they are much more anxious to be rich — never having been rich, poor devils.

MR BARLOW: Just the system. So I decided at last that the best way was to give every private help that lay in my power. I would help my men individually and personally, wherever I could. Not one of them came to me and went away

unheard; and there was no distress which could be alleviated that I did not try to alleviate. Yet I am afraid that the greatest distress I never heard of, the most distressed never came to me. They hid their trouble.

ANABEL: Yes, the decent ones.

MR BARLOW: But I wished to help — it was my duty. Still, I think that, on the whole, we were a comfortable and happy community. Barlow and Walsall's men were not unhappy in those days, I believe. We were liberal; the men lived.

OLIVER: Yes, that is true. Even twenty years ago the place was still jolly.

MR BARLOW: And then, when Gerald was a lad of thirteen, came the great lock-out. We belonged to the Masters' Federation — I was but one man on the Board. We had to abide by the decision. The mines were closed till the men would accept the reduction. — Well, that cut my life across. We were shutting the men out from work, starving their families, in order to force them to accept a reduction. It may be the condition of trade made it imperative. But, for myself, I would rather have lost everything. — Of course, we did what we could. Food was very cheap — practically given away. We had open kitchen here. And it was mercifully warm summer-time. Nevertheless, there was privation and suffering, and trouble and bitterness. We had the redcoats down — even to guard this house. And from this window I saw Whatmore head-stocks ablaze, and before I could get to the spot the soldiers had shot two poor fellows. They were not killed, thank God —

OLIVER: Ah, but they enjoyed it — they enjoyed it immensely. I remember what grand old sporting weeks they were. It was like a fox-hunt, so lively and gay — bands and tea-parties and excitement everywhere, pit-ponies loose, men all over the countryside —

MR BARLOW: There was a great deal of suffering which you were too young to appreciate. However, since that year I have had to acknowledge a new situation — a radical if unspoken opposition between masters and men. Since that year we have been split into opposite camps. Whatever I might privately feel, I was one of the owners, one of the masters, and therefore in the opposite camp. To my men I was an oppressor, a representative of injustice and greed. Privately, I like to think that even to this day they bear me no malice, that they have some lingering regard for me. But the master stands before the human

being, and the condition of war overrides individuals — they hate the master, even whilst, as a human being, he would be their friend. I recognize the inevitable justice. It is the price one has to pay.

ANABEL: Yes, it is difficult — very.

MR BARLOW: Perhaps I weary you?

ANABEL: Oh, no — no.

MR BARLOW: Well — then the mines began to pay badly. The seams ran thin and unprofitable, work was short. Either we must close down or introduce a new system, American methods, which I dislike so extremely. Now it really became a case of men working against machines, flesh and blood working against iron, for a livelihood. Still, it had to be done — the whole system revolutionized. Gerald took it in hand — and now I hardly know my own pits, with the great electric plants and strange machinery, and the new coal-cutters — iron men, as the colliers call them — everything running at top speed, utterly dehumanized, inhuman. Well, it had to be done; it was the only alternative to closing down and throwing three thousand men out of work. And Gerald has done it. But I can't bear to see it. The men of this generation are not like my men. They are worn and gloomy; they have a hollow look that I can't bear to see. They are a great grief to me. I remember my men even twenty years ago — a noisy, lively, careless set, who kept the place ringing. Now it is too quiet — too quiet. There is something wrong in the quietness, something unnatural. I feel it is unnatural; I feel afraid of it. And I cannot help feeling guilty.

ANABEL: Yes — I understand. It terrifies me.

MR BARLOW: Does it? — does it? — Yes. — And as my wife says, I leave it all to Gerald — this terrible situation. But I appeal to God, if anything in my power could have averted it, I would have averted it. I would have made any sacrifice. For it is a great and bitter trouble to me.

ANABEL: Ah, well, in death there is no industrial situation. Something must be different there.

MR BARLOW: Yes — yes.

OLIVER: And you see sacrifice isn't the slightest use. If only people would be sane and decent.

MR BARLOW: Yes, indeed. — Would you be so good as to ring, Oliver? I think I must go to bed.

ANABEL: Ah, you have overtired yourself.

MR BARLOW: No, my dear — not overtired. Excuse me if I have burdened you with all this. It relieves me to speak of it.

ANABEL: I realize how terrible it is, Mr Barlow — and how helpless one is.

MR BARLOW: Thank you, my dear, for your sympathy.

OLIVER: If the people for one minute pulled themselves up and conquered their mania for money and machine excitement, the whole thing would be solved. — Would you like me to find Winnie and tell her to say good night to you?

MR BARLOW: If you would be so kind. (Exit OLIVER.) Can't you find a sweet that you would like, my dear? Won't you take a little cherry brandy?

Enter BUTLER.

ANABEL: Thank you.

WILLIAM: You will go up, sir?

MR BARLOW: Yes, William.

WILLIAM: You are tired to-night, sir.

MR BARLOW: It has come over me just now.

WILLIAM: I wish you went up before you became so overtired, sir. Would you like Nurse?

MR BARLOW: No, I'll go with you, William. Good night, my dear.

ANABEL: Good night, Mr Barlow. I am so sorry if you are overtired.

Exit BUTLER and MR BARLOW. ANABEL takes a drink and goes to the fire.
Enter GERALD.

GERALD: Father gone up?

ANABEL: Yes.

GERALD: I thought I heard him. Has he been talking too much? — Poor Father, he will take things to heart.

ANABEL: Tragic, really.

GERALD: Yes, I suppose it is. But one can get beyond tragedy — beyond the state of feeling tragical, I mean. Father himself is tragical. One feels he is mistaken — and yet he wouldn't be any different, and be himself, I suppose. He's sort of crucified on an idea of the working people. It's rather horrible when he's one father. — However, apart from tragedy, how do you like being here, in this house?

ANABEL: I like the house. It's rather too comfortable.

GERALD: Yes. But how do you like being here?

ANABEL: How do you like my being in your home?

GERALD: Oh, I think you're very decorative.

ANABEL: More decorative than comfortable?

GERALD: Perhaps. But perhaps you give the necessary finish to the establishment.

ANABEL: Like the correct window-curtains?

GERALD: Yes, something like that. I say, why did you come, Anabel? Why did you come slap-bang into the middle of us? — It's not expostulation — I want to know.

ANABEL: You mean you want to be told.

GERALD: Yes, I want to be told.

ANABEL: That's rather mean of you. You should savvy, and let it go without saying.

GERALD: Yes, but I don't savvy.

ANABEL: Then wait till you do.

GERALD: No, I want to be told. There's a difference in you, Anabel, that puts me out, rather. You're sort of softer and sweeter — I'm not sure whether it isn't a touch of Father in you. There's a little sanctified smudge on your face. Are you really a bit sanctified?

ANABEL: No, not sanctified. It's true I feel different. I feel I want a new way of life — something more dignified, more religious, if you like — anyhow, something positive.

GERALD: Is it the change of heart, Anabel?

ANABEL: Perhaps it is, Gerald.

GERALD: I'm not sure that I like it. Isn't it like a berry that decides to get very sweet, and goes soft?

ANABEL: I don't think so.

GERALD: Slightly sanctimonious. I think I liked you better before. I don't think I like you with this touch of aureole. People seem to me so horribly self-satisfied when they get a change of heart — they take such a fearful lot of credit to themselves on the strength of it.

ANABEL: I don't think I do. — Do you feel no different, Gerald?

GERALD: Radically, I can't say I do. — I feel very much more indifferent.

ANABEL: What to?

GERALD: Everything.

ANABEL: You're still angry — that's what it is.

GERALD: Oh yes, I'm angry. But that is part of my normal state.

ANABEL: Why are you angry?

GERALD: Is there any reason why I shouldn't be angry? I'm angry because you treated me — well, so impudently, really — clearing out and leaving one to whistle to the empty walls.

ANABEL: Don't you think it was time I cleared out, when you became so violent, and really dangerous, really like a madman?

GERALD: Time or not time, you went — you disappeared and left us high and dry — and I am still angry. — But I'm not only angry about that. I'm angry with the colliers, with Labour for its low-down impudence — and I'm angry with Father for being so ill — and I'm angry with Mother for looking such a hopeless thing — and I'm angry with Oliver because he thinks so much —

ANABEL: And what are you angry with yourself for?

GERALD: I'm angry with myself for being myself — I always was that. I was always a curse to myself.

ANABEL: And that's why you curse others so much?

GERALD: You talk as if butter wouldn't melt in your mouth.

ANABEL: You see, Gerald, there has to be a change. You'll have to change.

GERALD: Change of heart? — Well, it won't be to get softer, Anabel.

ANABEL: You needn't be softer. But you can be quieter, more sane even. There ought to be some part of you that can be quiet and apart from the world, some part that can be happy and gentle.

GERALD: Well, there isn't. I don't pretend to be able to extricate a soft sort of John Halifax, Gentleman, out of the machine I'm mixed up in, and keep him to gladden the connubial hearth. I'm angry, and I'm angry right through, and I'm not going to play bo-peep with myself, pretending I'm not.

ANABEL: Nobody asks you to. But is there no part of you that can be a bit gentle and peaceful and happy with a woman?

GERALD: No, there isn't. — I'm not going to smug with you — no, not I. You're smug in your coming back. You feel virtuous, and expect me to rise to it. I won't.

ANABEL: Then I'd better have stayed away.

GERALD: If you want me to virtue-ize and smug with you, you had.

ANABEL: What do you want, then?

GERALD: I don't know. I know I don't want that.

ANABEL: Oh, very well. (Goes to the piano; begins to play.)

Enter MRS BARLOW.

GERALD: Hello, Mother! Father has gone to bed.

MRS BARLOW: Oh, I thought he was down here talking. You two alone?

GERALD: With the piano for chaperone, Mother.

MRS BARLOW: That's more than I gave you credit for. I haven't come to chaperone you either, Gerald.

GERALD: Chaperone me, Mother! Do you think I need it?

MRS BARLOW: If you do, you won't get it. I've come too late to be of any use in that way, as far as I hear.

GERALD: What have you heard, Mother?

MRS BARLOW: I heard Oliver and this young woman talking.

GERALD: Oh, did you? When? What did they say?

MRS BARLOW: Something about married in the sight of heaven, but couldn't keep it up on earth.

GERALD: I don't understand.

MRS BARLOW: That you and this young woman were married in the sight of heaven, or through eternity, or something similar, but that you couldn't make up your minds to it on earth.

GERALD: Really! That's very curious, Mother.

MRS BARLOW: Very common occurrence, I believe.

GERALD: Yes, so it is. But I don't think you heard quite right, dear. There seems to be some lingering uneasiness in heaven as a matter of fact. We'd quite made up our minds to live apart on earth. But where did you hear this, Mother?

MRS BARLOW: I heard it outside the studio door this morning.

GERALD: You mean you happened to be on one side of the door while Oliver and Anabel were talking on the other?

MRS BARLOW: You'd make a detective, Gerald — you're so good at putting two and two together. I listened till I'd heard as much as I wanted. I'm not sure I didn't come down here hoping to hear another conversation going on.

GERALD: Listen outside the door, darling?

MRS BARLOW: There'd be nothing to listen to if I were inside.

GERALD: It isn't usually done, you know.

MRS BARLOW: I listen outside doors when I have occasion to be interested —

which isn't often, unfortunately for me.

GERALD: But I've a queer feeling that you have a permanent occasion to be interested in me. I only half like it.

MRS BARLOW: It's surprising how uninteresting you are, Gerald, for a man of your years. I have not had occasion to listen outside a door, for you, no, not for a great while, believe me.

GERALD: I believe you implicitly, darling. But do you happen to know me through and through, and in and out, all my past and present doings, Mother? Have you a secret access to my room, and a spy-hole, and all those things? This is uncomfortably thrilling. You take on a new lustre.

MRS BARLOW: Your memoirs wouldn't make you famous, my son.

GERALD: Infamous, dear?

MRS BARLOW: Good heavens, no! What a lot you expect from your very mild sins! You and this young woman have lived together, then?

GERALD: Don't say "this young woman", Mother dear — it's slightly vulgar. It isn't for me to compromise Anabel by admitting such a thing, you know.

MRS BARLOW: Do you ask me to call her Anabel? I won't.

GERALD: Then say "this person", Mother. It's more becoming.

MRS BARLOW: I didn't come to speak to you, Gerald. I know you. I came to speak to this young woman.

GERALD: "Person", Mother. — Will you curtsy, Anabel? And I'll twist my handkerchief. We shall make a Cruikshank drawing, if Mother makes her hair a little more slovenly.

MRS BARLOW: You and Gerald were together for some time?

GERALD: Three years, off and on, Mother.

MRS BARLOW: And then you suddenly dropped my son, and went away?

GERALD: To Norway, Mother — so I have gathered.

MRS BARLOW: And now you have come back because that last one died?

GERALD: Is he dead, Anabel? How did he die?

ANABEL: He was killed on the ice.

GERALD: Oh, God!

MRS BARLOW: Now, having had your fill of tragedy, you have come back to be demure and to marry Gerald. Does he thank you?

GERALD: You must listen outside the door, Mother, to find that out.

MRS BARLOW: Well, it's your own affair.

GERALD: What a lame summing up, Mother! — quite unworthy of you.

ANABEL: What did you wish to say to me, Mrs Barlow? Please say it.

MRS BARLOW: What did I wish to say! Ay, what did I wish to say! What is the use of my saying anything? What am I but a buffoon and a slovenly caricature in the family?

GERALD: No, Mother dear, don't climb down — please don't. Tell Anabel what you wanted to say.

MRS BARLOW: Yes — yes — yes. I came to say — don't be good to my son — don't be good to him.

GERALD: Sounds weak, dear — mere contrariness.

MRS BARLOW: Don't presume to be good to my son, young woman. I won't have it, even if he will. You hear me?

ANABEL: Yes. I won't presume, then.

GERALD: May she presume to be bad to me, Mother?

MRS BARLOW: For that you may look after yourself. — But a woman who was good to him would ruin him in six months, take the manhood out of him. He has a tendency, a secret hankering, to make a gift of himself to somebody. He shan't do it. I warn you. I am not a woman to be despised.

ANABEL: No — I understand.

MRS BARLOW: Only one other thing I ask. If he must fight — and fight he must — let him alone: don't you try to shield him or save him. Don't interfere — do you hear?

ANABEL: Not till I must.

MRS BARLOW: Never. Learn your place, and keep it. Keep away from him, if you are going to be a wife to him. Don't go too near. And don't let him come too near. Beat him off if he tries. Keep a solitude in your heart even when you love him best. Keep it. If you lose it, you lose everything.

GERALD: But that isn't love, Mother.

MRS BARLOW: What?

GERALD: That isn't love.

MRS BARLOW: What? What do you know of love, you ninny? You only know the feeding-bottle. It's what you want, all of you — to be brought up by hand, and mew about love. Ah, God! — Ah, God! — that you should none of you know the only thing which would make you worth having.

GERALD: I don't believe in your only thing, Mother. But what is it?

MRS BARLOW: What you haven't got — the power to be alone.

GERALD: Sort of megalomania, you mean?

MRS BARLOW: What? Megalomania! What is your love but a megalomania,

flowing over everybody, and everything like spilt water? Megalomania! I hate you, you softy! I would beat you (suddenly advancing on him and beating him fiercely) — beat you into some manhood — beat you —

GERALD: Stop, Mother — keep off.

MRS BARLOW: It's the men who need beating nowadays, not the children. Beat the softness out of him, young woman. It's the only way, if you love him enough — if you love him enough.

GERALD: You hear, Anabel?

Speak roughly to your little boy,
And beat him when he sneezes.

MRS BARLOW (catching up a large old fan, and smashing it about his head): You softy — you piffler — you will never have had enough! Ah, you should be thrust in the fire, you should, to have the softness and the brittleness burnt out of you!

The door opens — OLIVER TURTON enters, followed by JOB ARTHUR FREER. MRS BARLOW is still attacking GERALD. She turns, infuriated.

Go out! Go out! What do you mean by coming in unannounced? Take him upstairs — take that fellow into the library, Oliver Turton.

GERALD: Mother, you improve our already pretty reputation. Already they say you are mad.

MRS BARLOW (ringing violently): Let me be mad then. I am mad — driven mad. One day I shall kill you, Gerald.

GERALD: You won't, Mother, because I shan't let you.

MRS BARLOW: Let me! — let me! As if I should wait for you to let me!

GERALD: I am a match for you even in violence, come to that.

MRS BARLOW: A match! A damp match. A wet match.

Enter BUTLER.

WILLIAM: You rang, madam?

MRS BARLOW: Clear up those bits. — Where are you going to see that white-faced fellow? Here?

GERALD: I think so.

MRS BARLOW: You will still have them coming to the house, will you? You will still let them trample in our private rooms, will you? Bah! I ought to leave you to your own devices.

Exit MRS BARLOW.

GERALD: When you've done that, William, ask Mr Freer to come down here.

WILLIAM: Yes, sir.

A pause. Exit WILLIAM.

GERALD: So — o — o. You've had another glimpse of the family life.

ANABEL: Yes. Rather — disturbing.

GERALD: Not at all, when you're used to it. Mother isn't as mad as she pretends to be.

ANABEL: I don't think she's mad at all. I think she has most desperate courage.

GERALD: "Courage" is good. That's a new term for it.

ANABEL: Yes, courage. When a man says "courage" he means the courage to die. A woman means the courage to live. That's what women hate men most for;

that they haven't the courage to live.

GERALD: Mother takes her courage into both hands rather late.

ANABEL: We're a little late ourselves.

GERALD: We are, rather. By the way, you seem to have had plenty of the courage of death — you've played a pretty deathly game, it seems to me — both when I knew you and afterwards, you've had your finger pretty deep in the death-pie.

ANABEL: That's why I want a change of — of —

GERALD: Of heart? — Better take Mother's tip, and try the poker.

ANABEL: I will.

GERALD: Ha — corraggio!

ANABEL: Yes — corraggio!

GERALD: Corraggiaccio!

ANABEL: Corraggione!

GERALD: Cock-a-doodle-doo!

Enter OLIVER and FREER.

Oh, come in. Don't be afraid; it's a charade. (ANABEL rises.) No, don't go, Anabel. Corraggio! Take a seat, Mr Freer.

JOB ARTHUR: Sounds like a sneezing game, doesn't it?

GERALD: It is. Do you know the famous rhyme:

Speak roughly to your little boy,

And beat him when he sneezes?

JOB ARTHUR: No, I can't say I do.

GERALD: My mother does. Will you have anything to drink? Will you help yourself?

JOB ARTHUR: Well — no — I don't think I'll have anything, thanks.

GERALD: A cherry brandy? — Yes? — ANABEL, what's yours.

ANABEL: Did I see Kümmel?

GERALD: You did. (They all take drinks.) What's the latest, Mr Freer?

JOB ARTHUR: The latest? Well, I don't know, I'm sure —

GERALD: Oh, yes. Trot it out. We're quite private.

JOB ARTHUR: Well — I don't know. There's several things.

GERALD: The more the merrier.

JOB ARTHUR: I'm not so sure. The men are in a very funny temper, Mr Barlow — very funny.

GERALD: Coincidence — so am I. Not surprising, is it?

JOB ARTHUR: The men, perhaps not.

GERALD: What else, Job Arthur?

JOB ARTHUR: You know the men have decided to stand by the office men?

GERALD: Yes.

JOB ARTHUR: They've agreed to come out next Monday.

GERALD: Have they?

JOB ARTHUR: Yes; there was no stopping them. They decided for it like one man.

GERALD: How was that?

JOB ARTHUR: That's what surprises me. They're a jolly sight more certain over this than they've ever been over their own interests.

GERALD: All their love for the office clerks coming out in a rush?

JOB ARTHUR: Well, I don't know about love; but that's how it is.

GERALD: What is it, if it isn't love?

JOB ARTHUR: I can't say. They're in a funny temper. It's hard to make out.

GERALD: A funny temper, are they? Then I suppose we ought to laugh.

JOB ARTHUR: No, I don't think it's a laughing matter. They're coming out on Monday for certain.

GERALD: Yes — so are daffodils.

JOB ARTHUR: Beg pardon?

GERALD: Daffodils.

JOB ARTHUR: No, I don't follow what you mean.

GERALD: Don't you? But I thought Alfred Breffitt and William Straw were not very popular.

JOB ARTHUR: No, they aren't — not in themselves. But it's the principle of the thing — so it seems.

GERALD: What principle?

JOB ARTHUR: Why, all sticking together, for one thing — all Barlow and Walsall's men holding by one another.

GERALD: United we stand?

JOB ARTHUR: That's it. And then it's the strong defending the weak as well. There's three thousand colliers standing up for thirty-odd office men. I must say I think it's sporting myself.

GERALD: You do, do you? United we stand, divided we fall. What do they stand for, really? What is it?

JOB ARTHUR: Well — for their right to a living wage. That's how I see it.

GERALD: For their right to a living wage! Just that?

JOB ARTHUR: Yes, sir — that's how I see it.

GERALD: Well, that doesn't seem so preposterously difficult, does it?

JOB ARTHUR: Why, that's what I think myself, Mr Gerald. It's such a little thing.

GERALD: Quite. I suppose the men themselves are to judge what is a living wage?

JOB ARTHUR: Oh, I think they're quite reasonable, you know.

GERALD: Oh, yes, eminently reasonable. Reason's their strong point. — And if they get their increase, they'll be quite contented?

JOB ARTHUR: Yes, as far as I know, they will.

GERALD: As far as you know? Why, is there something you don't know? — something you're not sure about?

JOB ARTHUR: No — I don't think so. I think they'll be quite satisfied this time.

GERALD: Why this time? Is there going to be a next time — every-day-has-its-to-morrow kind of thing?

JOB ARTHUR: I don't know about that. It's a funny world, Mr Barlow.

GERALD: Yes, I quite believe it. How do you see it funny?

JOB ARTHUR: Oh, I don't know. Everything's in a funny state.

GERALD: What do you mean by everything?

JOB ARTHUR: Well — I mean things in general — Labour, for example.

GERALD: You think Labour's in a funny state, do you? What do you think it wants? What do you think, personally?

JOB ARTHUR: Well, in my own mind, I think it wants a bit of its own back.

GERALD: And how does it mean to get it?

JOB ARTHUR: Ha! that's not so easy to say. But it means to have it, in the long run.

GERALD: You mean by increasing demands for higher wages?

JOB ARTHUR: Yes, perhaps that's one road.

GERALD: Do you see any other?

JOB ARTHUR: Not just for the present.

GERALD: But later on?

JOB ARTHUR: I can't say about that. The men will be quiet enough for a bit, if it's alright about the office men, you know.

GERALD: Probably. But have Barlow and Walsall's men any special grievance apart from the rest of the miners?

JOB ARTHUR: I don't know. They've no liking for you, you know, sir.

GERALD: Why?

JOB ARTHUR: They think you've got a down on them.

GERALD: Why should they?

JOB ARTHUR: I don't know, sir; but they do.

GERALD: So they have a personal feeling against me? You don't think all the colliers are the same, all over the country?

JOB ARTHUR: I think there's a good deal of feeling —

GERALD: Of wanting their own back?

JOB ARTHUR: That's it.

GERALD: But what can they do? I don't see what they can do. They can go out on strike — but they've done that before, and the owners, at a pinch, can stand it better than they can. As for the ruin of the industry, if they do ruin it, it falls heaviest on them. In fact, it leaves them destitute. There's nothing they can do, you know, that doesn't hit them worse than it hits us.

JOB ARTHUR: I know there's something in that. But if they had a strong man to head them, you see —

GERALD: Yes, I've heard a lot about that strong man — but I've never come across any signs of him, you know. I don't believe in one strong man appearing out of so many little men. All men are pretty big in an age, or in a movement, which produces a really big man. And Labour is a great swarm of hopelessly little men. That's how I see it.

JOB ARTHUR: I'm not so sure about that.

GERALD: I am. Labour is a thing that can't have a head. It's a sort of unwieldy monster that's bound to run its skull against the wall sooner or later, and knock

out what bit of brain it's got. You see, you need wit and courage and real understanding if you're going to do anything positive. And Labour has none of these things — certainly it shows no sign of them.

JOB ARTHUR: Yes, when it has a chance, I think you'll see plenty of courage and plenty of understanding.

GERALD: It always has a chance. And where one sees a bit of courage, there's no understanding; and where there's some understanding, there's absolutely no courage. It's hopeless, you know — it would be far best if they'd all give it up, and try a new line.

JOB ARTHUR: I don't think they will.

GERALD: No, I don't either. They'll make a mess, and when they've made it, they'll never get out of it. They can't — they're too stupid.

JOB ARTHUR: They've never had a try yet.

GERALD: They're trying every day. They just simply couldn't control modern industry — they haven't the intelligence. They've no life intelligence. The owners may have little enough, but Labour has none. They're just mechanical little things that can make one or two motions, and they're done. They've no more idea of life than a lawn-mower has.

JOB ARTHUR: It remains to be seen.

GERALD: No, it doesn't. It's perfectly obvious — there's nothing remains to be seen. All that Labour is capable of, is smashing things up. And even for that I don't believe it has either energy or the courage or the bit of necessary passion, or slap-dash — call it whatever you will. However, we'll see.

JOB ARTHUR: Yes, sir. Perhaps you see now why you're not so very popular, Mr Gerald.

GERALD: We can't all be popular, Job Arthur. You're very high up in popularity, I believe.

JOB ARTHUR: Not so very. They listen to me a bit. But you never know when

they'll let you down. I know they'll let me down one day — so it won't be a surprise.

GERALD: I should think not.

JOB ARTHUR: But about the office men, Mr Gerald. You think it'll be alright?

GERALD: Oh, yes, that'll be alright.

JOB ARTHUR: Easiest for this time, anyhow, sir. We don't want bloodshed, do we?

GERALD: I shouldn't mind at all. It might clear the way to something. But I have absolutely no belief in the power of Labour even to bring about anything so positive as bloodshed.

JOB ARTHUR: I don't know about that — I don't know. — Well.

GERALD: Have another drink before you go. — Yes, do. Help yourself.

JOB ARTHUR: Well — if you're so pressing. (Helps himself.) Here's luck, all!

ALL: Thanks.

GERALD: Take a cigar — there's the box. Go on — take a handful — fill your case.

JOB ARTHUR: They're a great luxury nowadays, aren't they? Almost beyond a man like me.

GERALD: Yes, that's the worst of not being a bloated capitalist. Never mind, you'll be a Cabinet Minister some day. — Oh, alright — I'll open the door for you.

JOB ARTHUR: Oh, don't trouble. Good night — good night.

Exeunt JOB ARTHUR and GERALD.

OLIVER: Oh God, what a world to live in!

ANABEL: I rather liked him. What is he?

OLIVER: Checkweighman — local secretary for the Miners' Federation — plays the violin well, although he was a collier, and it spoilt his hands. They're a musical family.

ANABEL: But isn't he rather nice?

OLIVER: I don't like him. But I confess he's a study. He's the modern Judas.

ANABEL: Don't you think he likes Gerald?

OLIVER: I'm sure he does. The way he suns himself here — like a cat purring in his luxuriation.

ANABEL: Yes, I don't mind it. It shows a certain sensitiveness and a certain taste.

OLIVER: Yes, he has both — touch of the artist, as Mrs Barlow says. He loves refinement, culture, breeding, all those things — loves them — and a presence, a fine free manner.

ANABEL: But that is nice in him.

OLIVER: Quite. But what he loves, and what he admires, and what he aspires to, he must betray. It's his fatality. He lives for the moment when he can kiss Gerald in the Garden of Olives, or wherever it was.

ANABEL: But Gerald shouldn't be kissed.

OLIVER: That's what I say.

ANABEL: And that's what his mother means as well, I suppose.

Enter GERALD.

GERALD: Well — you've heard the voice of the people.

ANABEL: He isn't the people.

GERALD: I think he is, myself — the epitome.

OLIVER: No, he's a special type.

GERALD: Ineffectual, don't you think?

ANABEL: How pleased you are, Gerald! How pleased you are with yourself! You love the turn with him.

GERALD: It's rather stimulating, you know.

ANABEL: It oughtn't to be, then.

OLIVER: He's your Judas, and you love him.

GERALD: Nothing so deep. He's just a sort of Æolian harp that sings to the temper of the wind. I find him amusing.

ANABEL: I think it's boring.

OLIVER: And I think it's nasty.

GERALD: I believe you're both jealous of him. What do you think of the British working man, Oliver?

OLIVER: It seems to me he's in nearly as bad a way as the British employer: he's nearly as much beside the point.

GERALD: What point?

OLIVER: Oh, just life.

GERALD: That's too vague, my boy. Do you think they'll ever make a bust-up?

OLIVER: I can't tell. I don't see any good in it, if they do.

GERALD: It might clear the way — and it might block the way for ever:

depends what comes through. But, sincerely, I don't think they've got it in them.

ANABEL: They may have something better.

GERALD: That suggestion doesn't interest me, Anabel. Ah well, we shall see what we shall see. Have a whisky and soda with me, Oliver, and let the troubled course of this evening run to a smooth close. It's quite like old times. Aren't you smoking, Anabel?

ANABEL: No, thanks.

GERALD: I believe you're a reformed character. So it won't be like old times, after all.

ANABEL: I don't want old times. I want new ones.

GERALD: Wait till Job Arthur has risen like Antichrist, and proclaimed the resurrection of the gods. — Do you see Job Arthur proclaiming Dionysus and Aphrodite?

ANABEL: It bores me. I don't like your mood. Good night.

GERALD: Oh, don't go.

ANABEL: Yes, good night.

Exit ANABEL.

OLIVER: She's not reformed, Gerald. She's the same old moral character — moral to the last bit of her, really — as she always was.

GERALD: Is that what it is? — But one must be moral.

OLIVER: Oh, yes. Oliver Cromwell wasn't as moral as Anabel is — nor such an iconoclast.

GERALD: Poor old Anabel!

OLIVER: How she hates the dark gods!

GERALD: And yet they cast a spell over her. Poor old Anabel! Well, Oliver, is Bacchus the father of whisky?

OLIVER: I don't know. — I don't like you either. You seem to smile all over yourself. It's objectionable. Good night.

GERALD: Oh, look here, this is censorious.

OLIVER: You smile to yourself.

Exit OLIVER.

CURTAIN

ACT III

SCENE I

An old park. Early evening. In the background a low Georgian hall, which has been turned into offices for the Company, shows windows already lighted. GERALD and ANABEL walk along the path.

ANABEL: How beautiful this old park is!

GERALD: Yes, it is beautiful — seems so far away from everywhere, if one doesn't remember that the hall is turned into offices. — No one has lived here since I was a little boy. I remember going to a Christmas party at the Walsalls'.

ANABEL: Has it been shut up so long?

GERALD: The Walsalls didn't like it — too near the ugliness. They were county, you know — we never were: Father never gave Mother a chance, there. And besides, the place is damp, cellars full of water.

ANABEL: Even now?

GERALD: No, not now — they've been drained. But the place would be too damp for a dwelling-house. It's alright as offices. They burn enormous fires. The rooms are quite charming. This is what happens to the stately homes of England — they buzz with inky clerks, or their equivalent. Stateliness is on its last legs.

ANABEL: Yes, it grieves me — though I should be bored if I had to be stately, I think. — Isn't it beautiful in this light, like an eighteenth-century aquatint? I'm

sure no age was as ugly as this, since the world began.

GERALD: For pure ugliness, certainly not. And I believe none has been so filthy to live in. — Let us sit down a minute, shall we? and watch the rooks fly home. It always stirs sad, sentimental feelings in me.

ANABEL: So it does in me. — Listen! one can hear the coal-carts on the road — and the brook — and the dull noise of the town — and the beating of New London pit — and voices — and the rooks — and yet it is so still. We seem so still here, don't we?

GERALD: Yes.

ANABEL: Don't you think we've been wrong?

GERALD: How?

ANABEL: In the way we've lived — and the way we've loved.

GERALD: It hasn't been heaven, has it? Yet, I don't know that we've been wrong, Anabel. We had it to go through.

ANABEL: Perhaps. — And, yes, we've been wrong too.

GERALD: Probably. Only, I don't feel it like that.

ANABEL: Then I think you ought. You ought to feel you've been wrong.

GERALD: Yes, probably. Only, I don't. I can't help it. I think we've gone the way we had to go, following our own natures.

ANABEL: And where has it landed us?

GERALD: Here.

ANABEL: And where is that?

GERALD: Just on this bench in the park, looking at the evening.

ANABEL: But what next?

GERALD: God knows! Why trouble?

ANABEL: One must trouble. I want to feel sure.

GERALD: What of?

ANABEL: Of you — and of myself.

GERALD: Then be sure.

ANABEL: But I can't. Think of the past — what it's been.

GERALD: This isn't the past.

ANABEL: But what is it? Is there anything sure in it? Is there any real happiness?

GERALD: Why not?

ANABEL: But how can you ask? Think of what our life has been.

GERALD: I don't want to.

ANABEL: No, you don't. But what do you want?

GERALD: I'm alright, you know, sitting here like this.

ANABEL: But one can't sit here for ever, can one?

GERALD: I don't want to.

ANABEL: And what will you do when we leave here?

GERALD: God knows! Don't worry me. Be still a bit.

ANABEL: But I'm worried. You don't love me.

GERALD: I won't argue it.

ANABEL: And I'm not happy.

GERALD: Why not, Anabel?

ANABEL: Because you don't love me — and I can't forget.

GERALD: I do love you — and to-night I've forgotten.

ANABEL: Then make me forget, too. Make me happy.

GERALD: I can't make you — and you know it.

ANABEL: Yes, you can. It's your business to make me happy. I've made you happy.

GERALD: You want to make me unhappy.

ANABEL: I do think you're the last word in selfishness. If I say I can't forget, you merely say, "I've forgotten"; and if I say I'm unhappy, all you can answer is that I want to make you unhappy. I don't in the least. I want to be happy myself. But you don't help me.

GERALD: There is no help for it, you see. If you were happy with me here you'd be happy. As you aren't, nothing will make you — not genuinely.

ANABEL: And that's all you care.

GERALD: No — I wish we could both be happy at the same moment. But apparently we can't.

ANABEL: And why not? — Because you're selfish, and think of nothing but yourself and your own feelings.

GERALD: If it is so, it is so.

ANABEL: Then we shall never be happy.

GERALD: Then we shan't. (A pause.)

ANABEL: Then what are we going to do?

GERALD: Do?

ANABEL: Do you want me to be with you?

GERALD: Yes.

ANABEL: Are you sure?

GERALD: Yes.

ANABEL: Then why don't you want me to be happy?

GERALD: If you'd only be happy, here and now —

ANABEL: How can I?

GERALD: How can't you? — You've got a devil inside you.

ANABEL: Then make me not have a devil.

GERALD: I've known you long enough — and known myself long enough — to know I can make you nothing at all, Anabel: neither can you make me. If the happiness isn't there — well, we shall have to wait for it, like a dispensation. It probably means we shall have to hate each other a little more. — I suppose hate is a real process.

ANABEL: Yes, I know you believe more in hate than in love.

GERALD: Nobody is more weary of hate than I am — and yet we can't fix our own hour, when we shall leave off hating and fighting. It has to work itself out in us.

ANABEL: But I don't want to hate and fight with you any more. I don't believe in it — not any more.

GERALD: It's a cleansing process — like Aristotle's Katharsis. We shall hate ourselves clean at last, I suppose.

ANABEL: Why aren't you clean now? Why can't you love? (He laughs.) Do you love me?

GERALD: Yes.

ANABEL: Do you want to be with me for ever?

GERALD: Yes.

ANABEL: Sure?

GERALD: Quite sure.

ANABEL: Why are you so cool about it?

GERALD: I'm not. I'm only sure — which you are not.

ANABEL: Yes, I am — I want to be married to you.

GERALD: I know you want me to want you to be married to me. But whether off your own bat you have a positive desire that way, I'm not sure. You keep something back — some sort of female reservation — like a dagger up your sleeve. You want to see me in transports of love for you.

ANABEL: How can you say so? There — you see — there — this is the man that pretends to love me, and then says I keep a dagger up my sleeve. You liar!

GERALD: I do love you — and you do keep a dagger up your sleeve — some devilish little female reservation which spies at me from a distance, in your soul, all the time, as if I were an enemy.

ANABEL: How can you say so? — Doesn't it show what you must be yourself? Doesn't it show? — What is there in your soul?

GERALD: I don't know.

ANABEL: Love, pure love? — Do you pretend it's love?

GERALD: I'm so tired of this.

ANABEL: So am I, dead tired: you self-deceiving, self-complacent thing. Ha! — aren't you just the same. You haven't altered one scrap, not a scrap.

GERALD: Alright — you are always free to change yourself.

ANABEL: I have changed, I am better, I do love you — I love you wholly and unselfishly — I do — and I want a good new life with you.

GERALD: You're terribly wrapped up in your new goodness. I wish you'd make up your mind to be downright bad.

ANABEL: Ha! — Do you? — You'd soon see. You'd soon see where you'd be if — There's somebody coming. (Rises.)

GERALD: Never mind; it's the clerks leaving work, I suppose. Sit still.

ANABEL: Won't you go?

GERALD: No. (A man draws near, followed by another.) Good evening.

CLERK: Good evening, sir. (Passes on.) Good evening, Mr Barlow.

ANABEL: They are afraid.

GERALD: I suppose their consciences are uneasy about this strike.

ANABEL: Did you come to sit here just to catch them, like a spider waiting for them?

GERALD: No. I wanted to speak to Breffitt.

ANABEL: I believe you're capable of any horridness.

GERALD: Alright, you believe it. (Two more figures approach.) Good evening.

CLERKS: Good night, sir. (One passes, one stops.) Good evening, Mr Barlow. Er — did you want to see Mr Breffitt, sir?

GERALD: Not particularly.

CLERK: Oh! He'll be out directly, sir — if you'd like me to go back and tell him you wanted him.

GERALD: No, thank you.

CLERK: Good night, sir. Excuse me asking.

GERALD: Good night.

ANABEL: Who is Mr Breffitt?

GERALD: He is the chief clerk — and cashier — one of Father's old pillars of society.

ANABEL: Don't you like him?

GERALD: Not much.

ANABEL: Why? — You seem to dislike very easily.

GERALD: Oh, they all used to try to snub me, these old buffers. They detest me like poison, because I am different from Father.

ANABEL: I believe you enjoy being detested.

GERALD: I do. (Another clerk approaches — hesitates — stops.)

CLERK: Good evening, sir. Good evening, Mr Barlow. Er — did you want anybody at the office, sir? We're just closing.

GERALD: No, I didn't want anybody.

CLERK: Oh, no, sir. I see. Er — by the way, sir — er — I hope you don't think this — er — bother about an increase — this strike threat — started in the office.

GERALD: Where did it start?

CLERK: I should think it started — where it usually starts, Mr Barlow — among a few loud-mouthed people who think they can do as they like with the men. They're only using the office men as a cry — that's all. They've no interest in us. They want to show their power. — That's how it is, sir.

GERALD: Oh, yes.

CLERK: We're powerless, if they like to make a cry out of us.

GERALD: Quite.

CLERK: We're as much put out about it as anybody.

GERALD: Of course.

CLERK: Yes — well — good night, sir. (Clerks draw near — there is a sound of loud young voices and bicycle bells. Bicycles sweep past.)

CLERKS: Good night, sir. — Good night, sir.

GERALD: Good night. — They're very bucked to see me sitting here with a woman — a young lady as they'll say. I guess your name will be flying round to-morrow. They stop partly to have a good look at you. Do they know you, do you think?

ANABEL: Sure.

CLERKS: Mr Breffitt's just coming, sir. — Good night, sir. — Good night, sir. (Another bicycle passes.)

ANABEL: The bicycles don't see us. — Isn't it rather hateful to be a master? The attitude of them all is so ugly. I can quite see that it makes you rather a bully.

GERALD: I suppose it does. (Figure of a large man approaches.)

BREFFITT: Oh — ah — it's Mr Gerald! — I couldn't make out who it was. — Were you coming up to the office, sir? Do you want me to go back with you?

GERALD: No, thank you — I just wanted a word with you about this agitation. It'll do just as well here. It's a pity it started — that the office should have set it going, Breffitt.

BREFFITT: It's none of the office's doing, I think you'll find, Mr Gerald. The office men did nothing but ask for a just advance — at any rate, times and prices being what they are, I consider it a fair advance. If the men took it up, it's because they've got a set of loud-mouthed blatherers and agitators among them like Job Arthur Freer, who deserve to be hung — and hanging they'd get, if I could have the judging of them.

GERALD: Well — it's very unfortunate — because we can't give the clerks their increase now, you know.

BREFFITT: Can't you? — can't you? I can't see that it would be anything out of the way, if I say what I think.

GERALD: No. They won't get any increase now. It shouldn't have been allowed to become a public cry with the colliers. We can't give in now.

BREFFITT: Have the Board decided that?

GERALD: They have — on my advice.

BREFFITT: Hm! then the men will come out.

GERALD: We will see.

BREFFITT: It's trouble for nothing — it's trouble that could be avoided. The clerks could have their advance, and it would hurt nobody.

GERALD: Too late now. — I suppose if the men come out, the clerks will come out with them?

BREFFITT: They'll have to — they'll have to.

GERALD: If they do, we may then make certain alterations in the office staff which have needed making for some time.

BREFFITT: Very good — very good. I know what you mean. — I don't know how your father bears all this, Mr Gerald.

GERALD: We keep it from him as much as possible. — You'll let the clerks know the decision. And if they stay out with the men, I'll go over the list of the staff with you. It has needed revising for a long time.

BREFFITT: I know what you mean — I know what you mean — I believe I understand the firm's interest in my department. I ought, after forty years studying it. I've studied the firm's interests for forty years, Mr Gerald. I'm not likely to forget them now.

GERALD: Of course.

BREFFITT: But I think it's a mistake — I think it's a mistake, and I'm bound to say it, to let a great deal of trouble rise for a very small cause. The clerks might have had what they reasonably asked for.

GERALD: Well, it's too late now.

BREFFITT: I suppose it is — I suppose it is. I hope you'll remember, sir, that I've put the interest of the firm before everything — before every consideration.

GERALD: Of course, Breffitt.

BREFFITT: But you've not had any liking for the office staff, I'm afraid, sir — not since your father put you amongst us for a few months. — Well, sir, we shall weather this gale, I hope, as we've weathered those in the past. Times don't become better, do they? Men are an ungrateful lot, and these agitators should be lynched. They would, if I had my way.

GERALD: Yes, of course. Don't wait.

BREFFITT: Good night to you.

Exit BREFFITT.

GERALD: Good night.

ANABEL: He's the last, apparently.

GERALD: We'll hope so.

ANABEL: He puts you in a fury.

GERALD: It's his manner. My father spoilt them — abominable old limpets. And they're so self-righteous. They think I'm a sort of criminal who has instigated this new devilish system which runs everything so close and cuts it so fine — as if they hadn't made this inevitable by their shameless carelessness and wastefulness in the past. He may well boast of his forty years — forty years' crass, stupid wastefulness.

Two or three more clerks pass, talking till they approach the seat, then becoming silent after bidding good night.

ANABEL: But aren't you a bit sorry for them?

GERALD: Why? If they're poor, what does it matter in a world of chaos?

ANABEL: And aren't you an obstinate ass not to give them the bit they want. It's mere stupid obstinacy.

GERALD: It may be. I call it policy.

ANABEL: Men always do call their obstinacy policy.

GERALD: Well, I don't care what happens. I wish things would come to a head. I only fear they won't.

ANABEL: Aren't you rather wicked? — Asking for strife?

GERALD: I hope I am. It's quite a relief to me to feel that I may be wicked. I fear I'm not. I can see them all anticipating victory, in their low-down fashion wanting to crow their low-down crowings. I'm afraid I feel it's a righteous cause, to cut a lot of little combs before I die.

ANABEL: But if they're in the right in what they want?

GERALD: In the right — in the right! — They're just greedy, incompetent, stupid, gloating in a sense of the worst sort of power. They're like vicious children, who would like to kill their parents so that they could have the run of the larder. The rest is just cant.

ANABEL: If you're the parent in the case, I must say you flow over with loving-kindness for them.

GERALD: I don't — I detest them. I only hope they will fight. If they would, I'd have some respect for them. But you'll see what it will be.

ANABEL: I wish I needn't, for it's very sickening.

GERALD: Sickening beyond expression.

ANABEL: I wish we could go right away.

GERALD: So do I — if one could get oneself out of this. But one can't. It's the same wherever you have industrialism — and you have industrialism everywhere, whether it's Timbuctoo or Paraguay or Antananarivo.

ANABEL: No, it isn't: you exaggerate.

JOB ARTHUR (suddenly approaching from the other side): Good evening, Mr Barlow. I heard you were in here. Could I have a word with you?

GERALD: Get on with it, then.

JOB ARTHUR: Is it right that you won't meet the clerks?

GERALD: Yes.

JOB ARTHUR: Not in any way?

GERALD: Not in any way whatsoever.

JOB ARTHUR: But — I thought I understood from you the other night —

GERALD: It's all the same what you understood.

JOB ARTHUR: Then you take it back, sir?

GERALD: I take nothing back, because I gave nothing.

JOB ARTHUR: Oh, excuse me, excuse me, sir. You said it would be alright about the clerks. This lady heard you say it.

GERALD: Don't you call witnesses against me. — Besides, what does it matter to you? What in the name of —

JOB ARTHUR: Well, sir, you said it would be alright, and I went on that —

GERALD: You went on that! Where did you go to?

JOB ARTHUR: The men'll be out on Monday.

GERALD: So shall I.

JOB ARTHUR: Oh, yes, but — where's it going to end?

GERALD: Do you want me to prophesy? When did I set up for a public prophet?

JOB ARTHUR: I don't know, sir. But perhaps you're doing more than you know. There's a funny feeling just now among the men.

GERALD: So I've heard before. Why should I concern myself with their feelings? Am I to cry when every collier bumps his funny-bone — or to laugh?

JOB ARTHUR: It's no laughing matter, you see.

GERALD: And I'm sure it's no crying matter — unless you want to cry, do you see?

JOB ARTHUR: Ah, but, very likely, it wouldn't be me who would cry. — You

don't know what might happen, now.

GERALD: I'm waiting for something to happen. I should like something to happen — very much — very much indeed.

JOB ARTHUR: Yes, but perhaps you'd be sorry if it did happen.

GERALD: Is that a warning or a threat?

JOB ARTHUR: I don't know — it might be a bit of both. What I mean to say —

GERALD (suddenly seizing him by the scruff of the neck and shaking him): What do you mean to say? — I mean you to say less, do you see? — a great deal less — do you see? You've run on with your saying long enough: that clock had better run down. So stop your sayings — stop your sayings, I tell you — or you'll have them shaken out of you — shaken out of you — shaken out of you, do you see? (Suddenly flings him aside.)

JOB ARTHUR, staggering, falls.

ANABEL: Oh no! — oh, no!

GERALD: Now get up, Job Arthur; and get up wiser than you went down. You've played your little game and your little tricks and made your little sayings long enough. You're going to stop now. We've had quite enough of strong men of your stamp, Job Arthur — quite enough — such Labour leaders as you.

JOB ARTHUR: You'll be sorry, Mr Barlow — you'll be sorry. You'll wish you'd not attacked me.

GERALD: Don't you trouble about me and my sorrow. Mind your own.

JOB ARTHUR: You will — you'll be sorry. You'll be sorry for what you've done. You'll wish you'd never begun this.

GERALD: Begun — begun? — I'd like to finish, too, that I would. I'd like to finish with you, too — I warn you.

JOB ARTHUR: I warn you — I warn you. You won't go on much longer. Every

parish has its own vermin.

GERALD: Vermin?

JOB ARTHUR: Every parish has its own vermin; it lies with every parish to destroy its own. We shan't have a clean parish till we've destroyed the vermin we've got.

GERALD: Vermin? The fool's raving. Vermin! — Another phrase-maker, by God! Another phrase-maker to lead the people. — Vermin? What vermin? I know quite well what I mean by vermin, Job Arthur. But what do you mean? Vermin? Explain yourself.

JOB ARTHUR: Yes, vermin. Vermin is what lives on other people's lives, living on their lives and profiting by it. We've got 'em in every parish — vermin, I say — that live on the sweat and blood of the people — live on it, and get rich on it — get rich through living on other people's lives, the lives of the working men — living on the bodies of the working men — that's vermin — if it isn't, what is it? And every parish must destroy its own — every parish must destroy its own vermin.

GERALD: The phrase, my God! the phrase.

JOB ARTHUR: Phrase or no phrase, there it is, and face it out if you can. There it is — there's not one in every parish — there's more than one — there's a number —

GERALD (suddenly kicking him): Go! (Kicks him.) Go! (Kicks him.) Go! (JOB ARTHUR falls.) Get out! (Kicks him.) Get out, I say! Get out, I tell you! Get out! Get out! — Vermin! — Vermin! — I'll vermin you! I'll put my foot through your phrases. Get up, I say, get up and go — go!

JOB ARTHUR: It'll be you as'll go, this time.

GERALD: What? What? — By God! I'll kick you out of this park like a rotten bundle if you don't get up and go.

ANABEL: No, Gerald, no. Don't forget yourself. It's enough now. It's enough now. — Come away. Do come away. Come away — leave him —

JOB ARTHUR (still on the ground): It's your turn to go. It's you as'll go, this time.

GERALD (looking at him): One can't even tread on you.

ANABEL: Don't, Gerald, don't — don't look at him. — Don't say any more, you, Job Arthur. — Come away, Gerald. Come away — come — do come.

GERALD (turning): That a human being! My God! — But he's right — it's I who go. It's we who go, Anabel. He's still there. — My God! a human being!

CURTAIN

SCENE II

Market-place as in Act I. WILLIE HOUGHTON, addressing a large crowd of men from the foot of the obelisk.

WILLIE: And now you're out on strike — now you've been out for a week pretty nearly, what further are you? I heard a great deal of talk about what you were going to do. Well, what are you going to do? You don't know. You've not the smallest idea. You haven't any idea whatsoever. You've got your leaders. Now then, Job Arthur, throw a little light on the way in front, will you: for it seems to me we're lost in a bog. Which way are we to steer? Come — give the

word, and let's gee-up.

JOB ARTHUR: You ask me which way we are to go. I say we can't go our own way, because of the obstacles that lie in front. You've got to remove the obstacles from the way.

WILLIE: So said Balaam's ass. But you're not an ass — beg pardon, and you're not Balaam — you're Job. And we've all got to be little Jobs, learning how to spell patience backwards. We've lost our jobs and we've found a Job. It's picking up a scorpion when you're looking for an egg. — Tell us what you propose doing. . . . Remove an obstacle from the way! What obstacle? And whose way?

JOB ARTHUR: I think it's pretty plain what the obstacle is.

WILLIE: Oh ay. Tell us then.

JOB ARTHUR: The obstacle to Labour is Capital.

WILLIE: And how are we going to put salt on Capital's tail?

JOB ARTHUR: By Labour we mean us working men; and by Capital we mean those that derive benefit from us, take the cream off us and leave us the skim.

WILLIE: Oh yes.

JOB ARTHUR: So that, if you're going to remove the obstacle, you've got to remove the masters, and all that belongs to them. Does everybody agree with me?

VOICES (loud): Ah, we do — yes — we do that — we do an' a' — yi — yi — that's it!

WILLIE: Agreed unanimously. But how are we going to do it? Do you propose to send for Williamson's furniture van, to pack them in? I should think one pantehnicon would do, just for this parish. I'll drive. Who'll be the vanmen to lift and carry?

JOB ARTHUR: It's no use fooling. You've fooled for thirty years, and we're no

further. What's got to be done will have to be begun. It's for every man to sweep in front of his own doorstep. You can't call your neighbours dirty till you've washed your own face. Every parish has got its own vermin, and it's the business of every parish to get rid of its own.

VOICES: That's it — that's it — that's the ticket — that's the style!

WILLIE: And are you going to comb 'em out, or do you propose to use Keating's?

VOICES: Shut it! Shut it up! Stop thy face! Hold thy gab! — Go on, Job Arthur.

JOB ARTHUR: How it's got to be done is for us all to decide. I'm not one for violence, except it's a force-put. But it's like this. We've been travelling for years to where we stand now — and here the road stops. There's only room for one at a time on this path. There's a precipice below and a rock-face above. And in front of us stand the masters. Now there's three things we can do. We can either throw ourselves over the precipice; or we can lie down and let the masters walk over us; or we can get on.

WILLIE: Yes. That's alright. But how are you going to get on?

JOB ARTHUR: Well — we've either got to throw the obstacle down the cliff — or walk over it.

VOICES: Ay — ay — ay — yes — that's a fact.

WILLIE: I quite follow you, Job Arthur. You've either got to do for the masters — or else just remove them, and put them somewhere else.

VOICES: Ged rid on 'em — drop 'em down the shaft — sink 'em — ha' done wi' 'em — drop 'em down the shaft — bust the beggars — what do you do wi' vermin?

WILLIE: Supposing you begin. Supposing you take Gerald Barlow, and hang him up from this lamp-post, with a piece of coal in his mouth for a sacrament —

VOICES: Ay — serve him right — serve the beggar right! Shove it down 's throttle — ay!

WILLIE: Supposing you do it — supposing you've done it — and supposing you aren't caught and punished — even supposing that — what are you going to do next? that's the point.

JOB ARTHUR: We know what we're going to do. Once we can get our hands free, we know what we're going to do.

WILLIE: Yes, so do I. You're either going to make such a mess that we shall never get out of it — which I don't think you will do, for the English working man is the soul of obedience and order, and he'd behave himself to-morrow as if he was at Sunday school, no matter what he does to-day. — No, what you'll do, Job Arthur, you'll set up another lot of masters, such a jolly sight worse than what we've got now. I'd rather be mastered by Gerald Barlow, if it comes to mastering, than by Job Arthur Freer — oh, such a lot! You'll be far less free with Job Arthur for your boss than ever you were with Gerald Barlow. You'll be far more degraded. — In fact, though I've preached socialism in the market-place for thirty years — if you're going to start killing the masters to set yourselves up for bosses — why, kill me along with the masters. For I'd rather die with somebody who has one tiny little spark of decency left — though it is a little tiny spark — than live to triumph with those that have none.

VOICES: Shut thy face, Houghton — shut it up — shut him up — hustle the beggar! Hoi! — hoi-ee! — whoo! — whoam-it, whoam-it! — whoo! — bow-wow! — wet-whiskers! —

WILLIE: And it's no use you making fools of yourselves — (His words are heard through an ugly, jeering, cold commotion.)

VOICE (loudly): He's comin'.

VOICES: Who?

VOICE: Barlow. — See 's motor? — comin' up — sithee?

WILLIE: If you've any sense left — (Suddenly and violently disappears.)

VOICES: Sorry! — he's comin' — 's comin' — sorry, ah! Who's in? — That's Turton drivin' — yi, he's behind wi' a woman — ah, he's comin' — he'll non

go back — hold on. Sorry! — wheer's 'e comin'? — up from Loddo — ay — (The cries die down — the motor car slowly comes into sight, OLIVER driving, GERALD and ANABEL behind. The men stand in a mass in the way.)

OLIVER: Mind yourself, there. (Laughter.)

GERALD: Go ahead, Oliver.

VOICE: What's yer 'urry?

Crowd sways and surges on the car. OLIVER is suddenly dragged out. GERALD stands up — he, too, is seized from behind — he wrestles — is torn out of his great-coat — then falls — disappears. Loud cries — "Hi! — hoi! — hoi-ee!" all the while. The car shakes and presses uneasily.

VOICE: Stop the blazin' motor, somebody.

VOICE: Here y'are! — hold a minute. (A man jumps in and stops the engine — he drops in the driver's seat.)

COLLIER (outside the car): Step down, miss.

ANABEL: I am Mrs Barlow.

COLLIER: Missis, then. (Laugh.) Step down — lead 'er forrard. Take 'em forrard — take 'em forrard.

JOB ARTHUR: Ay, make a road.

GERALD: You're makin' a proper fool of yourself now, Freer.

JOB ARTHUR: You've brought it on yourself. You've made fools of plenty of men.

COLLIERS: Come on, now — come on! Whoa! — whoa! — he's a jibber — go pretty now, go pretty!

VOICES (suddenly): Lay hold o' Houghton — nab 'im — seize 'im — rats! — rats! — bring 'im forrard!

ANABEL (in a loud, clear voice): I never knew anything so ridiculous.

VOICES (falsetto): Ridiculous! Oh, ridiculous! Mind the step, dear! — I'm Mrs Barlow! — Oh, are you? — Tweet — tweet!

JOB ARTHUR: Make a space, boys, make a space. (He stands with prisoners in a cleared space before the obelisk.) Now — now — quiet a minute — we want to ask a few questions of these gentlemen.

VOICES: Quiet! — quiet — Sh-h-h! Sh-h-h! — Answer pretty — answer pretty now! — Quiet! — Shh-h-h!

JOB ARTHUR: We want to ask you, Mr Gerald Barlow, why you have given occasion for this present trouble?

GERALD: You are a fool.

VOICES: Oh! — oh! — naughty Barlow! — naughty baa-lamb — answer pretty — answer pretty — be good baa-lamb — baa — baa! — answer pretty when gentleman asks you.

JOB ARTHUR: Quiet a bit. Sh-h-h! — We put this plain question to you, Mr Barlow. Why did you refuse to give the clerks this just and fair advance, when you knew that by refusing you would throw three thousand men out of employment?

GERALD: You are a fool, I say.

VOICES: Oh! — oh! — won't do — won't do, Barlow — wrong answer — wrong answer — be good baa-lamb — naughty boy — naughty boy!

JOB ARTHUR: Quiet a bit — now! — If three thousand men ask you a just, straightforward question, do you consider they've no right to an answer?

GERALD: I would answer you with my foot.

VOICES (amid a threatening scuffle): Da-di-da! Hark ye — hark ye! Oh — whoa — whoa a bit! — won't do! — won't do! — naughty — naughty — say

you're sorry — say you're sorry — kneel and say you're sorry — kneel and beg pardon!

JOB ARTHUR: Hold on a bit — keep clear!

VOICES: Make him kneel — make him kneel — on his knees with him!

JOB ARTHUR: I think you'd better kneel down.

The crowd press on GERALD — he struggles — they hit him behind the knees, force him down.

OLIVER: This is shameful and unnecessary.

VOICES: All of 'em — on your knees — all of 'em — on their knees!

They seize OLIVER and WILLIE and ANABEL, hustling. ANABEL kneels quietly — the others struggle.

WILLIE: Well, of all the damned, dirty, cowardly —

VOICES: Shut up, Houghton — shut him up — squeeze him!

OLIVER: Get off me — let me alone — I'll kneel.

VOICES: Good little doggies — nice doggies — kneel and beg pardon — yap-yap — answer — make him answer!

JOB ARTHUR (holding up his hand for silence): It would be better if you answered straight off, Barlow. We want to know why you prevented that advance?

VOICES (after a pause): Nip his neck! Make him yelp!

OLIVER: Let me answer, then. — Because it's worse, perhaps, to be bullied by three thousand men than by one man.

VOICES: Oh! — oh! — dog keeps barking — stuff his mouth — stop him up — here's a bit of paper — answer. Barlow — nip his neck — stuff his mug —

make him yelp — cork the bottle!

They press a lump of newspaper into OLIVER'S mouth, and bear down on GERALD.

JOB ARTHUR: Quiet — quiet — quiet — a minute, everybody. We give him a minute — we give him a minute to answer.

VOICES: Give him a minute — a holy minute — say your prayers, Barlow — you've got a minute — tick-tick, says the clock — time him!

JOB ARTHUR: Keep quiet.

WILLIE: Of all the damned, cowardly —

VOICES: Sh-h-h! — Squeeze him — throttle him! Silence is golden, Houghton. — Close the shutters, Willie's dead. — Dry up, wet-whiskers!

JOB ARTHUR: You've fifteen seconds.

VOICES: There's a long, long trail a-winding —

JOB ARTHUR: The minute's up. — We ask you again, Gerald Barlow, why you refused a just and fair demand, when you know it was against the wishes of three thousand men all as good as yourself?

VOICES: And a sight better — I don't think — we're not all vermin — we're not all crawlers, living off the sweat of other folks — we're not all parish vermin — parish vermin.

JOB ARTHUR: And on what grounds you think you have no occasion to answer the straightforward question we put you here?

ANABEL (after a pause): Answer them, Gerald. What's the use of prolonging this?

GERALD: I've nothing to answer.

VOICES: Nothing to answer — Gerald, darling — Gerald, duckie — oh, lovey-

dovey — I've nothing to answer — no, by God — no, by God, he hasna — nowt to answer — ma'e him find summat, then — answer for him — gi'e him 's answer — let him ha'e it — go on — mum — mum — lovey-dovey — rub his nose in it — kiss the dirt, ducky — bend him down — rub his nose in — he's saying something — oh no, he isn't — sorry I spoke — bend him down!

JOB ARTHUR: Quiet a bit — quiet, everybody — he's got to answer — keep quiet. — Now — (A silence.) Now then, Barlow, will you answer, or won't you? (Silence.)

ANABEL: Answer them, Gerald — never mind.

VOICES: Sh-h-h! Sh-h-h! (Silence.)

JOB ARTHUR: You won't answer, Barlow?

VOICE: Down the beggar!

VOICES: Down him — put his nose down — flatten him!

The crowd surges and begins to howl — they sway dangerously — GERALD is spread-eagled on the ground, face down.

JOB ARTHUR: Back — back — back a minute — back — back! (They recoil.)

WILLIE: I hope there's a God in heaven.

VOICES: Put him down — flatten him!

WILLIE is flattened on the ground.

JOB ARTHUR: Now then — now then — if you won't answer, Barlow, I can't stand here for you any more. — Take your feet off him, boys, and turn him over. Turn him over — let us look at him. Let us see if he can speak. (They turn him over, with another scuffle.) Now then, Barlow — you can see the sky above you. Now do you think you're going to play with three thousand men, with their lives and with their souls? — now do you think you're going to answer them with your foot? — do you — do you?

The crowd has begun to sway and heave dangerously, with a low, muffled roar, above which is heard JOB ARTHUR'S voice. As he ceases, the roar breaks into a yell — the crowd heaves.

VOICES: Down him — crack the vermin — on top of him — put your foot on the vermin!

ANABEL (with a loud, piercing cry, suddenly starting up): Ah no! Ah no! Ah-h-h-h no-o-o-o! Ah-h-h-h no-o-o-o! Ah-h-h-h no-o-o-o! No-o-o-o! No-o-o-o! No-o-o! No-o-o! — Ah-h-h-h! — it's enough, it's enough, it's enough! It's enough — he's a man as you are. He's a man as you are. He's a man as you are. He's a man as you are. (Weeps — a breath of silence.)

OLIVER: Let us stop now — let us stop now. Let me stand up. (Silence.) I want to stand up. (A muffled noise.)

VOICE: Let him get up. (OLIVER rises.)

OLIVER: Be quiet. Be quiet. — Now — choose! Choose! Choose! Choose what you will do! Only choose! Choose! — it will be irrevocable. (A moment's pause.) Thank God we haven't gone too far. — Gerald, get up. (Men still hold him down.)

JOB ARTHUR: Isn't he to answer us? Isn't he going to answer us?

OLIVER: Yes, he shall answer you. He shall answer you. But let him stand up. No more of this. Let him stand up. He must stand up. (Men still hold GERALD down. OLIVER takes hold of their hands and removes them.) Let go — let go now. Yes, let go — yes — I ask you to let go. (Slowly, sullenly, the men let go. GERALD is free, but he does not move.) There — get up, Gerald! Get up! You aren't hurt, are you? You must get up — it's no use. We're doing our best — you must do yours. When things are like this, we have to put up with what we get. (GERALD rises slowly and faces the mob. They roar dully.) You ask why the clerks didn't get this increase? Wait! Wait! Do you still wish for any answer, Mr Freer?

JOB ARTHUR: Yes, that's what we've been waiting for.

OLIVER: Then answer, Gerald.

GERALD: They've trodden on my face.

OLIVER: No matter. Job Arthur will easily answer that you've trodden on their souls. Don't start an altercation. (The crowd is beginning to roar.)

GERALD: You want to know why the clerks didn't get their rise? — Because you interfered and attempted to bully about it, do you see. That's why.

VOICES: You want bullying. — You'll get bullying, you will.

OLIVER: Can't you see it's no good, either side? It's no mortal use. We might as well all die to-morrow, or to-day, or this minute, as go on bullying one another, one side bullying the other side, and the other side bullying back. We'd better all die.

WILLIE: And a great deal better. I'm damned if I'll take sides with anybody against anything, after this. If I'm to die, I'll die by myself. As for living, it seems impossible.

JOB ARTHUR: Have the men nothing to be said for their side?

OLIVER: They have a great deal — but not everything, you see.

JOB ARTHUR: Haven't they been wronged? And aren't they wronged?

OLIVER: They have — and they are. But haven't they been wrong themselves, too? — and aren't they wrong now?

JOB ARTHUR: How?

OLIVER: What about this affair? Do you call it right?

JOB ARTHUR: Haven't we been driven to it?

OLIVER: Partly. And haven't you driven the masters to it, as well?

JOB ARTHUR: I don't see that.

OLIVER: Can't you see that it takes two to make a quarrel? And as long as each party hangs on to its own end of the stick, and struggles to get full hold of the stick, the quarrel will continue. It will continue till you've killed one another. And even then, what better shall you be? What better would you be, really, if you'd killed Gerald Barlow just now? You wouldn't, you know. We're all human beings, after all. And why can't we try really to leave off struggling against one another, and set up a new state of things?

JOB ARTHUR: That's all very well, you see, while you've got the goods.

OLIVER: I've got very little, I assure you.

JOB ARTHUR: Well, if you haven't, those you mix with have. They've got the money, and the power, and they intend to keep it.

OLIVER: As for power, somebody must have it, you know. It only rests with you to put it into the hands of the best men, the men you really believe in. — And as for money, it's life, it's living that matters, not simply having money.

JOB ARTHUR: You can't live without money.

OLIVER: I know that. And therefore why can't we have the decency to agree simply about money — just agree to dispose of it so that all men could live their own lives.

JOB ARTHUR: That's what we want to do. But the others, such as Gerald Barlow, they keep the money — and the power.

OLIVER: You see, if you wanted to arrange things so that money flowed more naturally, so that it flowed naturally to every man, according to his needs, I think we could all soon agree. But you don't. What you want is to take it away from one set and give it to another — or keep it yourselves.

JOB ARTHUR: We want every man to have his proper share.

OLIVER: I'm sure I do. I want every man to be able to live and be free. But we shall never manage it by fighting over the money. If you want what is natural and good, I'm sure the owners would soon agree with you.

JOB ARTHUR: What? Gerald Barlow agree with us?

OLIVER: Why not? I believe so.

JOB ARTHUR: You ask him.

OLIVER: Do you think, Gerald, that if the men really wanted a whole, better way, you would agree with them?

GERALD: I want a better way myself — but not their way.

JOB ARTHUR: There, you see!

VOICES: Ah-h! look you! — That's him — that's him all over.

OLIVER: You want a better way, — but not his way: he wants a better way — but not your way. Why can't you both drop your butts, and simply say you want a better way, and believe yourselves and one another when you say it? Why can't you?

GERALD: Look here! I'm quite as tired of my way of life as you are of yours. If you make me believe you want something better, then I assure you I do: I want what you want. But Job Arthur Freer's not the man to lead you to anything better. You can tell what people want by the leaders they choose, do you see? You choose leaders whom I respect, and I'll respect you, do you see? As it is, I don't. And now I'm going.

VOICES: Who says? — Oh ay! — Who says goin'?

GERALD: Yes, I'm going. About this affair here we'll cry quits; no more said about it. About a new way of life, a better way all round — I tell you I want it and need it as much as ever you do. I don't care about money really. But I'm never going to be bullied.

VOICE: Who doesn't care about money?

GERALD: I don't. I think we ought to be able to alter the whole system — but not by bullying, not because one lot wants what the other has got.

VOICE: No, because you've got everything.

GERALD: Where's my coat? Now then, step out of the way.

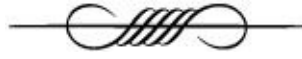
They move towards the car.

CURTAIN

The Travel Writing



TWILIGHT IN ITALY



This collection of travel sketches was first published in 1916.



From September 1912 to April 1913, Lawrence lived in the tranquil village of Villa near Villa Igea. "Twilight in Italy" contains beautiful descriptions of the Gargnano area and its inhabitants.

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THE CRUCIFIX ACROSS THE MOUNTAINS

The imperial road to Italy goes from Munich across the Tyrol, through Innsbruck and Bozen to Verona, over the mountains. Here the great processions passed as the emperors went South, or came home again from rosy Italy to their own Germany.

And how much has that old imperial vanity clung to the German soul? Did not the German kings inherit the empire of bygone Rome? It was not a very real empire, perhaps, but the sound was high and splendid.

Maybe a certain Grössenwahn is inherent in the German nature. If only nations would realize that they have certain natural characteristics, if only they could understand and agree to each other's particular nature, how much simpler it would all be.

The imperial procession no longer crosses the mountains, going South. That is almost forgotten, the road has almost passed out of mind. But still it is there, and its signs are standing.

The crucifixes are there, not mere attributes of the road, yet still having something to do with it. The imperial processions, blessed by the Pope and accompanied by the great bishops, must have planted the holy idol like a new plant among the mountains, there where it multiplied and grew according to the soil, and the race that received it.

As one goes among the Bavarian uplands and foothills, soon one realizes here is another land, a strange religion. It is a strange country, remote, out of contact. Perhaps it belongs to the forgotten, imperial processions.

Coming along the clear, open roads that lead to the mountains, one scarcely notices the crucifixes and the shrines. Perhaps one's interest is dead. The crucifix itself is nothing, a factory-made piece of sentimentalism. The soul ignores it.

But gradually, one after another looming shadowily under their hoods, the crucifixes seem to create a new atmosphere over the whole of the countryside, a darkness, a weight in the air that is so unnaturally bright and rare with the reflection from the snows above, a darkness hovering just over the earth. So rare and unearthly the light is, from the mountains, full of strange radiance. Then every now and again recurs the crucifix, at the turning of an open, grassy road, holding a shadow and a mystery under its pointed hood.

I was startled into consciousness one evening, going alone over a marshy place at the foot of the mountains, when the sky was pale and unearthly, invisible, and the hills were nearly black. At a meeting of the tracks was a

crucifix, and between the feet of the Christ a handful of withered poppies. It was the poppies I saw, then the Christ.

It was an old shrine, the wood-sculpture of a Bavarian peasant. The Christ was a peasant of the foot of the Alps. He had broad cheekbones and sturdy limbs. His plain, rudimentary face stared fixedly at the hills, his neck was stiffened, as if in resistance to the fact of the nails and the cross, which he could not escape. It was a man nailed down in spirit, but set stubbornly against the bondage and the disgrace. He was a man of middle age, plain, crude, with some of the meanness of the peasant, but also with a kind of dogged nobility that does not yield its soul to the circumstance. Plain, almost blank in his soul, the middle-aged peasant of the crucifix resisted unmoving the misery of his position. He did not yield. His soul was set, his will was fixed. He was himself, let his circumstances be what they would, his life fixed down.

Across the marsh was a tiny square of orange-coloured light, from the farmhouse with the low, spreading roof. I remembered how the man and his wife and the children worked on till dark, silent and intent, carrying the hay in their arms out of the streaming thunder-rain into the shed, working silent in the soaking rain.

The body bent forward towards the earth, closing round on itself; the arms clasped full of hay, clasped round the hay that presses soft and close to the breast and the body, that pricks heat into the arms and the skin of the breast, and fills the lungs with the sleepy scent of dried herbs: the rain that falls heavily and wets the shoulders, so that the shirt clings to the hot, firm skin and the rain comes with heavy, pleasant coldness on the active flesh, running in a trickle down towards the loins, secretly; this is the peasant, this hot welter of physical sensation. And it is all intoxicating. It is intoxicating almost like a soporific, like a sensuous drug, to gather the burden to one's body in the rain, to stumble across the living grass to the shed, to relieve one's arms of the weight, to throw down the hay on to the heap, to feel light and free in the dry shed, then to return again into the chill, hard rain, to stoop again under the rain, and rise to return again with the burden.

It is this, this endless heat and rousedness of physical sensation which keeps the body full and potent, and flushes the mind with a blood heat, a blood sleep. And this sleep, this heat of physical experience, becomes at length a bondage, at last a crucifixion. It is the life and the fulfilment of the peasant, this flow of sensuous experience. But at last it drives him almost mad, because he cannot escape.

For overhead there is always the strange radiance of the mountains, there is the mystery of the icy river rushing through its pink shoals into the darkness of

the pine-woods, there is always the faint tang of ice on the air, and the rush of hoarse-sounding water.

And the ice and the upper radiance of snow are brilliant with timeless immunity from the flux and the warmth of life. Overhead they transcend all life, all the soft, moist fire of the blood. So that a man must needs live under the radiance of his own negation.

There is a strange, clear beauty of form about the men of the Bavarian highlands, about both men and women. They are large and clear and handsome in form, with blue eyes very keen, the pupil small, tightened, the iris keen, like sharp light shining on blue ice. Their large, full-moulded limbs and erect bodies are distinct, separate, as if they were perfectly chiselled out of the stuff of life, static, cut off. Where they are everything is set back, as in a clear frosty air.

Their beauty is almost this, this strange, clean-cut isolation, as if each one of them would isolate himself still further and for ever from the rest of his fellows.

Yet they are convivial, they are almost the only race with the souls of artists. Still they act the mystery plays with instinctive fullness of interpretation, they sing strangely in the mountain fields, they love make-belief and mummary, their processions and religious festivals are profoundly impressive, solemn, and rapt.

It is a race that moves on the poles of mystic sensual delight. Every gesture is a gesture from the blood, every expression is a symbolic utterance.

For learning there is sensuous experience, for thought there is myth and drama and dancing and singing. Everything is of the blood, of the senses. There is no mind. The mind is a suffusion of physical heat, it is not separated, it is kept submerged.

At the same time, always, overhead, there is the eternal, negative radiance of the snows. Beneath is life, the hot jet of the blood playing elaborately. But above is the radiance of changeless not-being. And life passes away into this changeless radiance. Summer and the prolific blue-and-white flowering of the earth goes by, with the labour and the ecstasy of man, disappears, and is gone into brilliance that hovers overhead, the radiant cold which waits to receive back again all that which has passed for the moment into being.

The issue is too much revealed. It leaves the peasant no choice. The fate gleams transcendent above him, the brightness of eternal, unthinkable not-being. And this our life, this admixture of labour and of warm experience in the flesh, all the time it is steaming up to the changeless brilliance above, the light of the everlasting snows. This is the eternal issue.

Whether it is singing or dancing or play-acting or physical transport of love, or vengeance or cruelty, or whether it is work or sorrow or religion, the issue is always the same at last, into the radiant negation of eternity. Hence the beauty

and completeness, the finality of the highland peasant. His figure, his limbs, his face, his motion, it is all formed in beauty, and it is all completed. There is no flux nor hope nor becoming, all is, once and for all. The issue is eternal, timeless, and changeless. All being and all passing away is part of the issue, which is eternal and changeless. Therefore there is no becoming and no passing away. Everything is, now and for ever. Hence the strange beauty and finality and isolation of the Bavarian peasant.

It is plain in the crucifixes. Here is the essence rendered in sculpture of wood. The face is blank and stiff, almost expressionless. One realizes with a start how unchanging and conventionalized is the face of the living man and woman of these parts, handsome, but motionless as pure form. There is also an underlying meanness, secretive, cruel. It is all part of the beauty, the pure, plastic beauty. The body also of the Christ is stiff and conventionalized, yet curiously beautiful in proportion, and in the static tension which makes it unified into one clear thing. There is no movement, no possible movement. The being is fixed, finally. The whole body is locked in one knowledge, beautiful, complete. It is one with the nails. Not that it is languishing or dead. It is stubborn, knowing its own undeniable being, sure of the absolute reality of the sensuous experience. Though he is nailed down upon an irrevocable fate, yet, within that fate he has the power and the delight of all sensuous experience. So he accepts the fate and the mystic delight of the senses with one will, he is complete and final. His sensuous experience is supreme, a consummation of life and death at once.

It is the same at all times, whether it is moving with the scythe on the hill-slopes, or hewing the timber, or steering the raft down the river which is all effervescent with ice; whether it is drinking in the Gasthaus, or making love, or playing some mummer's part, or hating steadily and cruelly, or whether it is kneeling in spellbound subjection in the incense-filled church, or walking in the strange, dark, subject-procession to bless the fields, or cutting the young birch-trees for the feast of Frohenleichnam, it is always the same, the dark, powerful mystic, sensuous experience is the whole of him, he is mindless and bound within the absoluteness of the issue, the unchangeability of the great icy not-being which holds good for ever, and is supreme.

Passing further away, towards Austria, travelling up the Isar, till the stream becomes smaller and whiter and the air is colder, the full glamour of the northern hills, which are so marvellously luminous and gleaming with flowers, wanes and gives way to a darkness, a sense of ominousness. Up there I saw another little Christ, who seemed the very soul of the place. The road went beside the river, that was seething with snowy ice-bubbles, under the rocks and the high, wolf-like pine-trees, between the pinkish shoals. The air was cold and hard and high,

everything was cold and separate. And in a little glass case beside the road sat a small, hewn Christ, the head resting on the hand; and he meditates, half-wearily, doggedly, the eyebrows lifted in strange abstraction, the elbow resting on the knee. Detached, he sits and dreams and broods, wearing his little golden crown of thorns, and his little cloak of red flannel that some peasant woman has stitched for him.

No doubt he still sits there, the small, blank-faced Christ in the cloak of red flannel, dreaming, brooding, enduring, persisting. There is a wistfulness about him, as if he knew that the whole of things was too much for him. There was no solution, either, in death. Death did not give the answer to the soul's anxiety. That which is, is. It does not cease to be when it is cut. Death cannot create nor destroy. What is, is.

The little brooding Christ knows this. What is he brooding, then? His static patience and endurance is wistful. What is it that he secretly yearns for, amid all the placidity of fate? 'To be, or not to be,' this may be the question, but is it not a question for death to answer. It is not a question of living or not-living. It is a question of being — to be or not to be. To persist or not to persist, that is not the question; neither is it to endure or not to endure. The issue, is it eternal not-being? If not, what, then, is being? For overhead the eternal radiance of the snow gleams unflinching, it receives the efflorescence of all life and is unchanged, the issue is bright and immortal, the snowy not-being. What, then, is being?

As one draws nearer to the turning-point of the Alps, towards the culmination and the southern slope, the influence of the educated world is felt once more. Bavaria is remote in spirit, as yet unattached. Its crucifixes are old and grey and abstract, small like the kernel of the truth. Further into Austria they become new, they are painted white, they are larger, more obtrusive. They are the expressions of a later, newer phase, more introspective and self-conscious. But still they are genuine expressions of the people's soul.

Often one can distinguish the work of a particular artist here and there in a district. In the Zemm valley, in the heart of the Tyrol, behind Innsbruck, there are five or six crucifixes by one sculptor. He is no longer a peasant working out an idea, conveying a dogma. He is an artist, trained and conscious, probably working in Vienna. He is consciously trying to convey a *feeling*, he is no longer striving awkwardly to render a truth, a religious fact.

The chief of his crucifixes stands deep in the Klamm, in the dank gorge where it is always half-night. The road runs under the rock and the trees, half-way up the one side of the pass. Below, the stream rushes ceaselessly, embroiled among great stones, making an endless loud noise. The rock face opposite rises high overhead, with the sky far up. So that one is walking in a half-night, an

underworld. And just below the path, where the pack-horses go climbing to the remote, infolded villages, in the cold gloom of the pass hangs the large, pale Christ. He is larger than life-size. He has fallen forward, just dead, and the weight of the full-grown, mature body hangs on the nails of the hands. So the dead, heavy body drops forward, sags, as if it would tear away and fall under its own weight.

It is the end. The face is barren with a dead expression of weariness, and brutalized with pain and bitterness. The rather ugly, passionate mouth is set for ever in the disillusionment of death. Death is the complete disillusionment, set like a seal over the whole body and being, over the suffering and weariness and the bodily passion.

The pass is gloomy and damp, the water roars unceasingly, till it is almost like a constant pain. The driver of the pack-horses, as he comes up the narrow path in the side of the gorge, cringes his sturdy cheerfulness as if to obliterate himself, drawing near to the large, pale Christ, and he takes his hat off as he passes, though he does not look up, but keeps his face averted from the crucifix. He hurries by in the gloom, climbing the steep path after his horses, and the large white Christ hangs extended above.

The driver of the pack-horses is afraid. The fear is always there in him, in spite of his sturdy, healthy robustness. His soul is not sturdy. It is blanched and whitened with fear. The mountains are dark overhead, the water roars in the gloom below. His heart is ground between the mill-stones of dread. When he passes the extended body of the dead Christ he takes off his hat to the Lord of Death. Christ is the Deathly One, He is Death incarnate.

And the driver of the pack-horses acknowledges this deathly Christ as supreme Lord. The mountain peasant seems grounded upon fear, the fear of death, of physical death. Beyond this he knows nothing. His supreme sensation is in physical pain, and in its culmination. His great climax, his consummation, is death. Therefore he worships it, bows down before it, and is fascinated by it all the while. It is his fulfilment, death, and his approach to fulfilment is through physical pain.

And so these monuments to physical death are found everywhere in the valleys. By the same hand that carved the big Christ, a little further on, at the end of a bridge, was another crucifix, a small one. This Christ had a fair beard, and was thin, and his body was hanging almost lightly, whereas the other Christ was large and dark and handsome. But in this, as well as in the other, was the same neutral triumph of death, complete, negative death, so complete as to be abstract, beyond cynicism in its completeness of leaving off.

Everywhere is the same obsession with the fact of physical pain, accident, and

sudden death. Wherever a misfortune has befallen a man, there is nailed up a little memorial of the event, in propitiation of the God of hurt and death. A man is standing up to his waist in water, drowning in full stream, his arms in the air. The little painting in its wooden frame is nailed to the tree, the spot is sacred to the accident. Again, another little crude picture fastened to a rock: a tree, falling on a man's leg, smashes it like a stalk, while the blood flies up. Always there is the strange ejaculation of anguish and fear, perpetuated in the little paintings nailed up in the place of the disaster.

This is the worship, then, the worship of death and the approaches to death, physical violence, and pain. There is something crude and sinister about it, almost like depravity, a form of reverting, turning back along the course of blood by which we have come.

Turning the ridge on the great road to the south, the imperial road to Rome, a decisive change takes place. The Christs have been taking on various different characters, all of them more or less realistically conveyed. One Christus is very elegant, combed and brushed and foppish on his cross, as Gabriele D'Annunzio's son posing as a martyred saint. The martyrdom of this Christ is according to the most polite convention. The elegance is very important, and very Austrian. One might almost imagine the young man had taken up this striking and original position to create a delightful sensation among the ladies. It is quite in the Viennese spirit. There is something brave and keen in it, too. The individual pride of body triumphs over every difficulty in the situation. The pride and satisfaction in the clean, elegant form, the perfectly trimmed hair, the exquisite bearing, are more important than the fact of death or pain. This may be foolish, it is at the same time admirable.

But the tendency of the crucifix, as it nears the ridge to the south, is to become weak and sentimental. The carved Christs turn up their faces and roll back their eyes very piteously, in the approved Guido Reni fashion. They are overdoing the pathetic turn. They are looking to heaven and thinking about themselves, in self-commiseration. Others again are beautiful as elegies. It is dead Hyacinth lifted and extended to view, in all his beautiful, dead youth. The young, male body droops forward on the cross, like a dead flower. It looks as if its only true nature were to be dead. How lovely is death, how poignant, real, satisfying! It is the true elegiac spirit.

Then there are the ordinary, factory-made Christs, which are not very significant. They are as null as the Christs we see represented in England, just vulgar nothingness. But these figures have gashes of red, a red paint of blood, which is sensational.

Beyond the Brenner, I have only seen vulgar or sensational crucifixes. There

are great gashes on the breast and the knees of the Christ-figure, and the scarlet flows out and trickles down, till the crucified body has become a ghastly striped thing of red and white, just a sickly thing of striped red.

They paint the rocks at the corners of the tracks, among the mountains; a blue and white ring for the road to Ginzling, a red smear for the way to St Jakob. So one follows the blue and white ring, or the three stripes of blue and white, or the red smear, as the case may be. And the red on the rocks, the dabs of red paint, are of just the same colour as the red upon the crucifixes; so that the red upon the crucifixes is paint, and the signs on the rocks are sensational, like blood.

I remember the little brooding Christ of the Isar, in his little cloak of red flannel and his crown of gilded thorns, and he remains real and dear to me, among all this violence of representation.

'Couvre-toi de gloire, Tartarin — couvre-toi de flanelle.' Why should it please me so that his cloak is of red flannel?

In a valley near St Jakob, just over the ridge, a long way from the railway, there is a very big, important shrine by the roadside. It is a chapel built in the baroque manner, florid pink and cream outside, with opulent small arches. And inside is the most startling sensational Christus I have ever seen. He is a big, powerful man, seated after the crucifixion, perhaps after the resurrection, sitting by the grave. He sits sideways, as if the extremity were over, finished, the agitation done with, only the result of the experience remaining. There is some blood on his powerful, naked, defeated body, that sits rather hulked. But it is the face which is so terrifying. It is slightly turned over the hulked, crucified shoulder, to look. And the look of this face, of which the body has been killed, is beyond all expectation horrible. The eyes look at one, yet have no seeing in them, they seem to see only their own blood. For they are bloodshot till the whites are scarlet, the iris is purpled. These red, bloody eyes with their stained pupils, glancing awfully at all who enter the shrine, looking as if to see through the blood of the late brutal death, are terrible. The naked, strong body has known death, and sits in utter dejection, finished, hulked, a weight of shame. And what remains of life is in the face, whose expression is sinister and gruesome, like that of an unrelenting criminal violated by torture. The criminal look of misery and hatred on the fixed, violated face and in the bloodshot eyes is almost impossible. He is conquered, beaten, broken, his body is a mass of torture, an unthinkable shame. Yet his will remains obstinate and ugly, integral with utter hatred.

It is a great shock to find this figure sitting in a handsome, baroque, pink-washed shrine in one of those Alpine valleys which to our thinking are all flowers and romance, like the picture in the Tate Gallery. 'Spring in the Austrian Tyrol' is to our minds a vision of pristine loveliness. It contains also this Christ

of the heavy body defiled by torture and death, the strong, virile life overcome by physical violence, the eyes still looking back bloodshot in consummate hate and misery.

The shrine was well kept and evidently much used. It was hung with ex-voto limbs and with many gifts. It was a centre of worship, of a sort of almost obscene worship. Afterwards the black pine-trees and the river of that valley seemed unclean, as if an unclean spirit lived there. The very flowers seemed unnatural, and the white gleam on the mountain-tops was a glisten of supreme, cynical horror.

After this, in the populous valleys, all the crucifixes were more or less tainted and vulgar. Only high up, where the crucifix becomes smaller and smaller, is there left any of the old beauty and religion. Higher and higher, the monument becomes smaller and smaller, till in the snows it stands out like a post, or a thick arrow stuck barb upwards. The crucifix itself is a small thing under the pointed hood, the barb of the arrow. The snow blows under the tiny shed, upon the little, exposed Christ. All round is the solid whiteness of snow, the awful curves and concaves of pure whiteness of the mountain top, the hollow whiteness between the peaks, where the path crosses the high, extreme ridge of the pass. And here stands the last crucifix, half buried, small and tufted with snow. The guides tramp slowly, heavily past, not observing the presence of the symbol, making no salute. Further down, every mountain peasant lifted his hat. But the guide tramps by without concern. His is a professional importance now.

On a small mountain track on the Jaufen, not far from Meran, was a fallen Christ. I was hurrying downhill to escape from an icy wind which almost took away my consciousness, and I was looking up at the gleaming, unchanging snow-peaks all round. They seemed like blades immortal in the sky. So I almost ran into a very old Martertafel. It leaned on the cold, stony hillside surrounded by the white peaks in the upper air.

The wooden hood was silver-grey with age, and covered, on the top, with a thicket of lichen, which stuck up in hoary tufts. But on the rock at the foot of the post was the fallen Christ, armless, who had tumbled down and lay in an unnatural posture, the naked, ancient wooden sculpture of the body on the naked, living rock. It was one of the old uncouth Christs hewn out of bare wood, having the long, wedge-shaped limbs and thin flat legs that are significant of the true spirit, the desire to convey a religious truth, not a sensational experience.

The arms of the fallen Christ had broken off at the shoulders, and they hung on their nails, as ex-voto limbs hang in the shrines. But these arms dangled from the palms, one at each end of the cross, the muscles, carved sparely in the old wood, looking all wrong, upside down. And the icy wind blew them backwards

and forwards, so that they gave a painful impression, there in the stark, sterile place of rock and cold. Yet I dared not touch the fallen body of the Christ, that lay on its back in so grotesque a posture at the foot of the post. I wondered who would come and take the broken thing away, and for what purpose.

ON THE LAGO DI GARDA

1

THE SPINNER AND THE MONKS

The Holy Spirit is a Dove, or an Eagle. In the Old Testament it was an Eagle; in the New Testament it is a Dove.

And there are, standing over the Christian world, the Churches of the Dove and the Churches of the Eagle. There are, moreover, the Churches which do not belong to the Holy Spirit at all, but which are built to pure fancy and logic; such as the Wren Churches in London.

The Churches of the Dove are shy and hidden: they nestle among trees, and their bells sound in the mellowness of Sunday; or they are gathered into a silence of their own in the very midst of the town, so that one passes them by without observing them; they are as if invisible, offering no resistance to the storming of the traffic.

But the Churches of the Eagle stand high, with their heads to the skies, as if they challenged the world below. They are the Churches of the Spirit of David, and their bells ring passionately, imperiously, falling on the subservient world below.

The Church of San Francesco was a Church of the Dove. I passed it several times in the dark, silent little square, without knowing it was a church. Its pink walls were blind, windowless, unnoticeable, it gave no sign, unless one caught sight of the tan curtain hanging in the door, and the slit of darkness beneath. Yet it was the chief church of the village.

But the Church of San Tommaso perched over the village. Coming down the cobbled, submerged street, many a time I looked up between the houses and saw the thin old church standing above in the light, as if it perched on the house-roofs. Its thin grey neck was held up stiffly, beyond was a vision of dark foliage, and the high hillside.

I saw it often, and yet for a long time it never occurred to me that it actually existed. It was like a vision, a thing one does not expect to come close to. It was there standing away upon the house-tops, against a glamour of foliaged hillside. I was submerged in the village, on the uneven, cobbled street, between old high walls and cavernous shops and the houses with flights of steps.

For a long time I knew how the day went, by the imperious clangour of midday and evening bells striking down upon the houses and the edge of the

lake. Yet it did not occur to me to ask where these bells rang. Till at last my everyday trance was broken in upon, and I knew the ringing of the Church of San Tommaso. The church became a living connexion with me.

So I set out to find it, I wanted to go to it. It was very near. I could see it from the piazza by the lake. And the village itself had only a few hundreds of inhabitants. The church must be within a stone's throw.

Yet I could not find it. I went out of the back door of the house, into the narrow gully of the back street. Women glanced down at me from the top of the flights of steps, old men stood, half-turning, half-crouching under the dark shadow of the walls, to stare. It was as if the strange creatures of the undershadow were looking at me. I was of another element.

The Italian people are called 'Children of the Sun'. They might better be called 'Children of the Shadow'. Their souls are dark and nocturnal. If they are to be easy, they must be able to hide, to be hidden in lairs and caves of darkness. Going through these tiny chaotic backways of the village was like venturing through the labyrinth made by furtive creatures, who watched from out of another element. And I was pale, and clear, and evanescent, like the light, and they were dark, and close, and constant, like the shadow.

So I was quite baffled by the tortuous, tiny, deep passages of the village. I could not find my way. I hurried towards the broken end of a street, where the sunshine and the olive trees looked like a mirage before me. And there above me I saw the thin, stiff neck of old San Tommaso, grey and pale in the sun. Yet I could not get up to the church, I found myself again on the piazza.

Another day, however, I found a broken staircase, where weeds grew in the gaps the steps had made in falling, and maidenhair hung on the darker side of the wall. I went up unwillingly, because the Italians used this old staircase as a privy, as they will any deep side-passage.

But I ran up the broken stairway, and came out suddenly, as by a miracle, clean on the platform of my San Tommaso, in the tremendous sunshine.

It was another world, the world of the eagle, the world of fierce abstraction. It was all clear, overwhelming sunshine, a platform hung in the light. Just below were the confused, tiled roofs of the village, and beyond them the pale blue water, down below; and opposite, opposite my face and breast, the clear, luminous snow of the mountain across the lake, level with me apparently, though really much above.

I was in the skies now, looking down from my square terrace of cobbled pavement, that was worn like the threshold of the ancient church. Round the terrace ran a low, broad wall, the coping of the upper heaven where I had climbed.

There was a blood-red sail like a butterfly breathing down on the blue water, whilst the earth on the near side gave off a green-silver smoke of olive trees, coming up and around the earth-coloured roofs.

It always remains to me that San Tommaso and its terrace hang suspended above the village, like the lowest step of heaven, of Jacob's ladder. Behind, the land rises in a high sweep. But the terrace of San Tommaso is let down from heaven, and does not touch the earth.

I went into the church. It was very dark, and impregnated with centuries of incense. It affected me like the lair of some enormous creature. My senses were roused, they sprang awake in the hot, spiced darkness. My skin was expectant, as if it expected some contact, some embrace, as if it were aware of the contiguity of the physical world, the physical contact with the darkness and the heavy, suggestive substance of the enclosure. It was a thick, fierce darkness of the senses. But my soul shrank.

I went out again. The paved threshold was clear as a jewel, the marvellous clarity of sunshine that becomes blue in the height seemed to distil me into itself.

Across, the heavy mountain crouched along the side of the lake, the upper half brilliantly white, belonging to the sky, the lower half dark and grim. So, then, that is where heaven and earth are divided. From behind me, on the left, the headland swept down out of a great, pale-grey, arid height, through a rush of russet and crimson, to the olive smoke and the water of the level earth. And between, like a blade of the sky cleaving the earth asunder, went the pale-blue lake, cleaving mountain from mountain with the triumph of the sky.

Then I noticed that a big, blue-checked cloth was spread on the parapet before me, over the parapet of heaven. I wondered why it hung there.

Turning round, on the other side of the terrace, under a caper-bush that hung like a blood-stain from the grey wall above her, stood a little grey woman whose fingers were busy. Like the grey church, she made me feel as if I were not in existence. I was wandering by the parapet of heaven, looking down. But she stood back against the solid wall, under the caper-bush, unobserved and unobserving. She was like a fragment of earth, she was a living stone of the terrace, sun-bleached. She took no notice of me, who was hesitating looking down at the earth beneath. She stood back under the sun-bleached solid wall, like a stone rolled down and stayed in a crevice.

Her head was tied in a dark-red kerchief, but pieces of hair, like dirty snow, quite short, stuck out over her ears. And she was spinning. I wondered so much, that I could not cross towards her. She was grey, and her apron, and her dress, and her kerchief, and her hands and her face were all sun-bleached and sun-

stained, greyey, bluey, brownly, like stones and half-coloured leaves, sunny in their colourlessness. In my black coat, I felt myself wrong, false, an outsider.

She was spinning, spontaneously, like a little wind. Under her arm she held a distaff of dark, ripe wood, just a straight stick with a clutch at the end, like a grasp of brown fingers full of a fluff of blackish, rusty fleece, held up near her shoulder. And her fingers were plucking spontaneously at the strands of wool drawn down from it. And hanging near her feet, spinning round upon a black thread, spinning busily, like a thing in a gay wind, was her shuttle, her bobbin wound fat with the coarse, blackish worsted she was making.

All the time, like motion without thought, her fingers teased out the fleece, drawing it down to a fairly uniform thickness: brown, old, natural fibres that worked as in a sleep, the thumb having a long grey nail; and from moment to moment there was a quick, downward rub, between thumb and forefinger, of the thread that hung in front of her apron, the heavy bobbin spun more briskly, and she felt again at the fleece as she drew it down, and she gave a twist to the thread that issued, and the bobbin spun swiftly.

Her eyes were clear as the sky, blue, empyrean, transcendent. They were clear, but they had no looking in them. Her face was like a sun-worn stone.

‘You are spinning,’ I said to her.

Her eyes glanced over me, making no effort of attention.

‘Yes,’ she said.

She saw merely a man’s figure, a stranger standing near. I was a bit of the outside, negligible. She remained as she was, clear and sustained like an old stone upon the hillside. She stood short and sturdy, looking for the most part straight in front, unseeing, but glancing from time to time, with a little, unconscious attention, at the thread. She was slightly more animated than the sunshine and the stone and the motionless caper-bush above her. Still her fingers went along the strand of fleece near her breast.

‘That is an old way of spinning,’ I said.

‘What?’

She looked up at me with eyes clear and transcendent as the heavens. But she was slightly roused. There was the slight motion of the eagle in her turning to look at me, a faint gleam of rapt light in her eyes. It was my unaccustomed Italian.

‘That is an old way of spinning,’ I repeated.

‘Yes — an old way,’ she repeated, as if to say the words so that they should be natural to her. And I became to her merely a transient circumstance, a man, part of the surroundings. We divided the gift of speech, that was all.

She glanced at me again, with her wonderful, unchanging eyes, that were like

the visible heavens, unthinking, or like two flowers that are open in pure clear unconsciousness. To her I was a piece of the environment. That was all. Her world was clear and absolute, without consciousness of self. She was not self-conscious, because she was not aware that there was anything in the universe except *her* universe. In her universe I was a stranger, a foreign *signore*. That I had a world of my own, other than her own, was not conceived by her. She did not care.

So we conceive the stars. We are told that they are other worlds. But the stars are the clustered and single gleaming lights in the night-sky of our world. When I come home at night, there are the stars. When I cease to exist as the microcosm, when I begin to think of the cosmos, then the stars are other worlds. Then the macrocosm absorbs me. But the macrocosm is not me. It is something which I, the microcosm, am not.

So that there is something which is unknown to me and which nevertheless exists. I am finite, and my understanding has limits. The universe is bigger than I shall ever see, in mind or spirit. There is that which is not me.

If I say 'The planet Mars is inhabited,' I do not know what I mean by 'inhabited', with reference to the planet Mars. I can only mean that that world is not my world. I can only know there is that which is not me. I am the microcosm, but the macrocosm is that also which I am not.

The old woman on the terrace in the sun did not know this. She was herself the core and centre to the world, the sun, and the single firmament. She knew that I was an inhabitant of lands which she had never seen. But what of that! There were parts of her own body which she had never seen, which physiologically she could never see. They were none the less her own because she had never seen them. The lands she had not seen were corporate parts of her own living body, the knowledge she had not attained was only the hidden knowledge of her own self. She *was* the substance of the knowledge, whether she had the knowledge in her mind or not. There was nothing which was not herself, ultimately. Even the man, the male, was part of herself. He was the mobile, separate part, but he was none the less herself because he was sometimes severed from her. If every apple in the world were cut in two, the apple would not be changed. The reality is the apple, which is just the same in the half-apple as in the whole.

And she, the old spinning-woman, was the apple, eternal, unchangeable, whole even in her partiality. It was this which gave the wonderful clear unconsciousness to her eyes. How could she be conscious of herself when all was herself?

She was talking to me of a sheep that had died, but I could not understand

because of her dialect. It never occurred to her that I could not understand. She only thought me different, stupid. And she talked on. The ewes had lived under the house, and a part was divided off for the he-goat, because the other people brought their she-goats to be covered by the he-goat. But how the ewe came to die I could not make out.

Her fingers worked away all the time in a little, half-fretful movement, yet spontaneous as butterflies leaping here and there. She chattered rapidly on in her Italian that I could not understand, looking meanwhile into my face, because the story roused her somewhat. Yet not a feature moved. Her eyes remained candid and open and unconscious as the skies. Only a sharp will in them now and then seemed to gleam at me, as if to dominate me.

Her shuttle had caught in a dead chicory plant, and spun no more. She did not notice. I stooped and broke off the twigs. There was a glint of blue on them yet. Seeing what I was doing, she merely withdrew a few inches from the plant. Her bobbin hung free.

She went on with her tale, looking at me wonderfully. She seemed like the Creation, like the beginning of the world, the first morning. Her eyes were like the first morning of the world, so ageless.

Her thread broke. She seemed to take no notice, but mechanically picked up the shuttle, wound up a length of worsted, connected the ends from her wool strand, set the bobbin spinning again, and went on talking, in her half-intimate, half-unconscious fashion, as if she were talking to her own world in me.

So she stood in the sunshine on the little platform, old and yet like the morning, erect and solitary, sun-coloured, sun-discoloured, whilst I at her elbow, like a piece of night and moonshine, stood smiling into her eyes, afraid lest she should deny me existence.

Which she did. She had stopped talking, did not look at me any more, but went on with her spinning, the brown shuttle twisting gaily. So she stood, belonging to the sunshine and the weather, taking no more notice of me than of the dark-stained caper-bush which hung from the wall above her head, whilst I, waiting at her side, was like the moon in the daytime sky, overshadowed, obliterated, in spite of my black clothes.

‘How long has it taken you to do that much?’ I asked.

She waited a minute, glanced at her bobbin.

‘This much? I don’t know. A day or two.’

‘But you do it quickly.’

She looked at me, as if suspiciously and derisively. Then, quite suddenly, she started forward and went across the terrace to the great blue-and-white checked cloth that was drying on the wall. I hesitated. She had cut off her consciousness

from me. So I turned and ran away, taking the steps two at a time, to get away from her. In a moment I was between the walls, climbing upwards, hidden.

The schoolmistress had told me I should find snowdrops behind San Tommaso. If she had not asserted such confident knowledge I should have doubted her translation of *perce-neige*. She meant Christmas roses all the while.

However, I went looking for snowdrops. The walls broke down suddenly, and I was out in a grassy olive orchard, following a track beside pieces of fallen overgrown masonry. So I came to skirt the brink of a steep little gorge, at the bottom of which a stream was rushing down its steep slant to the lake. Here I stood to look for my snowdrops. The grassy, rocky bank went down steep from my feet. I heard water tittle-tattling away in deep shadow below. There were pale flecks in the dimness, but these, I knew, were primroses. So I scrambled down.

Looking up, out of the heavy shadow that lay in the cleft, I could see, right in the sky, grey rocks shining transcendent in the pure empyrean. 'Are they so far up?' I thought. I did not dare to say, 'Am I so far down?' But I was uneasy. Nevertheless it was a lovely place, in the cold shadow, complete; when one forgot the shining rocks far above, it was a complete, shadowless world of shadow. Primroses were everywhere in nests of pale bloom upon the dark, steep face of the cleft, and tongues of fern hanging out, and here and there under the rods and twigs of bushes were tufts of wrecked Christmas roses, nearly over, but still, in the coldest corners, the lovely buds like handfuls of snow. There had been such crowded sumptuous tufts of Christmas roses everywhere in the stream-gullies, during the shadow of winter, that these few remaining flowers were hardly noticeable.

I gathered instead the primroses, that smelled of earth and of the weather. There were no snowdrops. I had found the day before a bank of crocuses, pale, fragile, lilac-coloured flowers with dark veins, pricking up keenly like myriad little lilac-coloured flames among the grass, under the olive trees. And I wanted very much to find the snowdrops hanging in the gloom. But there were not any.

I gathered a handful of primroses, then I climbed suddenly, quickly out of the deep watercourse, anxious to get back to the sunshine before the evening fell. Up above I saw the olive trees in the sunny golden grass, and sunlit grey rocks immensely high up. I was afraid lest the evening would fall whilst I was groping about like an otter in the damp and the darkness, that the day of sunshine would be over.

Soon I was up in the sunshine again, on the turf under the olive trees, reassured. It was the upper world of glowing light, and I was safe again.

All the olives were gathered, and the mills were going night and day, making a

great, acrid scent of olive oil in preparation, by the lake. The little stream rattled down. A mule driver 'Hued!' to his mules on the Strada Vecchia. High up, on the Strada Nuova, the beautiful, new, military high-road, which winds with beautiful curves up the mountain-side, crossing the same stream several times in clear-leaping bridges, travelling cut out of sheer slope high above the lake, winding beautifully and gracefully forward to the Austrian frontier, where it ends: high up on the lovely swinging road, in the strong evening sunshine, I saw a bullock wagon moving like a vision, though the clanking of the wagon and the crack of the bullock whip responded close in my ears.

Everything was clear and sun-coloured up there, clear-grey rocks partaking of the sky, tawny grass and scrub, brownish-green spires of cypresses, and then the mist of grey-green olives fuming down to the lake-side. There was no shadow, only clear sun-substance built up to the sky, a bullock wagon moving slowly in the high sunlight, along the uppermost terrace of the military road. It sat in the warm stillness of the transcendent afternoon.

The four o'clock steamer was creeping down the lake from the Austrian end, creeping under the cliffs. Far away, the Verona side, beyond the Island, lay fused in dim gold. The mountain opposite was so still, that my heart seemed to fade in its beating as if it too would be still. All was perfectly still, pure substance. The little steamer on the floor of the world below, the mules down the road cast no shadow. They too were pure sun-substance travelling on the surface of the sun-made world.

A cricket hopped near me. Then I remembered that it was Saturday afternoon, when a strange suspension comes over the world. And then, just below me, I saw two monks walking in their garden between the naked, bony vines, walking in their wintry garden of bony vines and olive trees, their brown cassocks passing between the brown vine-stocks, their heads bare to the sunshine, sometimes a glint of light as their feet strode from under their skirts.

It was so still, everything so perfectly suspended, that I felt them talking. They marched with the peculiar march of monks, a long, loping stride, their heads together, their skirts swaying slowly, two brown monks with hidden hands, sliding under the bony vines and beside the cabbages, their heads always together in hidden converse. It was as if I were attending with my dark soul to their inaudible undertone. All the time I sat still in silence, I was one with them, a partaker, though I could hear no sound of their voices. I went with the long stride of their skirted feet, that slid springless and noiseless from end to end of the garden, and back again. Their hands were kept down at their sides, hidden in the long sleeves, and the skirts of their robes. They did not touch each other, nor gesticulate as they walked. There was no motion save the long, furtive stride and

the heads leaning together. Yet there was an eagerness in their conversation. Almost like shadow-creatures ventured out of their cold, obscure element, they went backwards and forwards in their wintry garden, thinking nobody could see them.

Across, above them, was the faint, rousing dazzle of snow. They never looked up. But the dazzle of snow began to glow as they walked, the wonderful, faint, ethereal flush of the long range of snow in the heavens, at evening, began to kindle. Another world was coming to pass, the cold, rare night. It was dawning in exquisite, icy rose upon the long mountain-summit opposite. The monks walked backwards and forwards, talking, in the first undershadow.

And I noticed that up above the snow, frail in the bluish sky, a frail moon had put forth, like a thin, scalloped film of ice floated out on the slow current of the coming night. And a bell sounded.

And still the monks were pacing backwards and forwards, backwards and forwards, with a strange, neutral regularity.

The shadows were coming across everything, because of the mountains in the west. Already the olive wood where I sat was extinguished. This was the world of the monks, the rim of pallor between night and day. Here they paced, backwards and forwards, backwards and forwards, in the neutral, shadowless light of shadow.

Neither the flare of day nor the completeness of night reached them, they paced the narrow path of the twilight, treading in the neutrality of the law. Neither the blood nor the spirit spoke in them, only the law, the abstraction of the average. The infinite is positive and negative. But the average is only neutral. And the monks trod backward and forward down the line of neutrality.

Meanwhile, on the length of mountain-ridge, the snow grew rosy-incandescent, like heaven breaking into blossom. After all, eternal not-being and eternal being are the same. In the rosy snow that shone in heaven over a darkened earth was the ecstasy of consummation. Night and day are one, light and dark are one, both the same in the origin and in the issue, both the same in the moment, of ecstasy, light fused in darkness and darkness fused in light, as in the rosy snow above the twilight.

But in the monks it was not ecstasy, in them it was neutrality, the under earth. Transcendent, above the shadowed, twilight earth was the rosy snow of ecstasy. But spreading far over us, down below, was the neutrality of the twilight, of the monks. The flesh neutralizing the spirit, the spirit neutralizing the flesh, the law of the average asserted, this was the monks as they paced backward and forward.

The moon climbed higher, away from the snowy, fading ridge, she became gradually herself. Between the roots of the olive tree was a rosy-tipped daisy just

going to sleep. I gathered it and put it among the frail, moony little bunch of primroses, so that its sleep should warm the rest. Also I put in some little periwinkles, that were very blue, reminding me of the eyes of the old woman.

The day was gone, the twilight was gone, and the snow was invisible as I came down to the side of the lake. Only the moon, white and shining, was in the sky, like a woman glorying in her own loveliness as she loiters superbly to the gaze of all the world, looking sometimes through the fringe of dark olive leaves, sometimes looking at her own superb, quivering body, wholly naked in the water of the lake.

My little old woman was gone. She, all day-sunshine, would have none of the moon. Always she must live like a bird, looking down on all the world at once, so that it lay all subsidiary to herself, herself the wakeful consciousness hovering over the world like a hawk, like a sleep of wakefulness. And, like a bird, she went to sleep as the shadows came.

She did not know the yielding up of the senses and the possession of the unknown, through the senses, which happens under a superb moon. The all-glorious sun knows none of these yieldings up. He takes his way. And the daisies at once go to sleep. And the soul of the old spinning-woman also closed up at sunset, the rest was a sleep, a cessation.

It is all so strange and varied: the dark-skinned Italians ecstatic in the night and the moon, the blue-eyed old woman ecstatic in the busy sunshine, the monks in the garden below, who are supposed to unite both, passing only in the neutrality of the average. Where, then, is the meeting-point: where in mankind is the ecstasy of light and dark together, the supreme transcendence of the afterglow, day hovering in the embrace of the coming night like two angels embracing in the heavens, like Eurydice in the arms of Orpheus, or Persephone embraced by Pluto?

Where is the supreme ecstasy in mankind, which makes day a delight and night a delight, purpose an ecstasy and a concourse in ecstasy, and single abandon of the single body and soul also an ecstasy under the moon? Where is the transcendent knowledge in our hearts, uniting sun and darkness, day and night, spirit and senses? Why do we not know that the two in consummation are one; that each is only part; partial and alone for ever; but that the two in consummation are perfect, beyond the range of loneliness or solitude?

2

THE LEMON GARDENS

The padrone came just as we were drinking coffee after dinner. It was two o'clock, because the steamer going down the lake to Desenzano had bustled through the sunshine, and the rocking of the water still made lights that danced

up and down upon the wall among the shadows by the piano.

The signore was very apologetic. I found him bowing in the hall, cap in one hand, a slip of paper in the other, protesting eagerly, in broken French, against disturbing me.

He is a little, shrivelled man, with close-cropped grey hair on his skull, and a protruding jaw, which, with his gesticulations, always makes me think of an ancient, aristocratic monkey. The signore is a gentleman, and the last, shrivelled representative of his race. His only outstanding quality, according to the villagers, is his avarice.

‘Mais — mais, monsieur — je crains que — que — que je vous dérange — ’

He spreads wide his hands and bows, looking up at me with implicit brown eyes, so ageless in his wrinkled, monkey’s face, like onyx. He loves to speak French, because then he feels grand. He has a queer, naïve, ancient passion to be grand. As the remains of an impoverished family, he is not much better than a well-to-do peasant. But the old spirit is eager and pathetic in him.

He loves to speak French to me. He holds his chin and waits, in his anxiety for the phrase to come. Then it stammers forth, a little rush, ending in Italian. But his pride is all on edge: we must continue in French.

The hall is cold, yet he will not come into the large room. This is not a courtesy visit. He is not here in his quality of gentleman. He is only an anxious villager.

‘Voyez, monsieur — cet — cet — qu’est-ce que — qu’est-ce que veut dire cet — cela?’

He shows me the paper. It is an old scrap of print, the picture of an American patent door-spring, with directions: ‘Fasten the spring either end up. Wind it up. Never unwind.’

It is laconic and American. The signore watches me anxiously, waiting, holding his chin. He is afraid he ought to understand my English. I stutter off into French, confounded by the laconic phrases of the directions. Nevertheless, I make it clear what the paper says.

He cannot believe me. It must say something else as well. He has not done anything contrary to these directions. He is most distressed.

‘Mais, monsieur, la porte — la porte — elle ferme pas — elle s’ouvre — ’

He skipped to the door and showed me the whole tragic mystery. The door, it is shut — *ecco!* He releases the catch, and pouf! — she flies open. She flies open. It is quite final.

The brown, expressionless, ageless eyes, that remind me of a monkey’s, or of onyx, wait for me. I feel the responsibility devolve upon me. I am anxious.

‘Allow me,’ I said, ‘to come and look at the door.’

I feel uncomfortably like Sherlock Holmes. The padrone protests — *non, monsieur, non, cela vous dérange* — that he only wanted me to translate the words, he does not want to disturb me. Nevertheless, we go. I feel I have the honour of mechanical England in my hands.

The Casa di Paoli is quite a splendid place. It is large, pink and cream, rising up to a square tower in the centre, throwing off a painted loggia at either extreme of the façade. It stands a little way back from the road, just above the lake, and grass grows on the bay of cobbled pavement in front. When at night the moon shines full on this pale façade, the theatre is far outdone in staginess.

The hall is spacious and beautiful, with great glass doors at either end, through which shine the courtyards where bamboos fray the sunlight and geraniums glare red. The floor is of soft red tiles, oiled and polished like glass, the walls are washed grey-white, the ceiling is painted with pink roses and birds. This is halfway between the outer world and the interior world, it partakes of both.

The other rooms are dark and ugly. There is no mistake about their being interior. They are like furnished vaults. The red-tiled, polished floor in the drawing-room seems cold and clammy, the carved, cold furniture stands in its tomb, the air has been darkened and starved to death, it is perished.

Outside, the sunshine runs like birds singing. Up above, the grey rocks build the sun-substance in heaven, San Tommaso guards the terrace. But inside here is the immemorial shadow.

Again I had to think of the Italian soul, how it is dark, cleaving to the eternal night. It seems to have become so, at the Renaissance, after the Renaissance.

In the Middle Ages Christian Europe seems to have been striving, out of a strong, primitive, animal nature, towards the self-abnegation and the abstraction of Christ. This brought about by itself a great sense of completeness. The two halves were joined by the effort towards the one as yet unrealized. There was a triumphant joy in the Whole.

But the movement all the time was in one direction, towards the elimination of the flesh. Man wanted more and more to become purely free and abstract. Pure freedom was in pure abstraction. The Word was absolute. When man became as the Word, a pure law, then he was free.

But when this conclusion was reached, the movement broke. Already Botticelli painted Aphrodite, queen of the senses, supreme along with Mary, Queen of Heaven. And Michelangelo suddenly turned back on the whole Christian movement, back to the flesh. The flesh was supreme and godlike, in the oneness of the flesh, in the oneness of our physical being, we are one with God, with the Father. God the Father created man in the flesh, in His own image. Michelangelo swung right back to the old Mosaic position. Christ did not exist.

To Michelangelo there was no salvation in the spirit. There was God the Father, the Begetter, the Author of all flesh. And there was the inexorable law of the flesh, the Last Judgement, the fall of the immortal flesh into Hell.

This has been the Italian position ever since. The mind, that is the Light; the senses, they are the Darkness. Aphrodite, the queen of the senses, she, born of the sea-foam, is the luminousness of the gleaming senses, the phosphorescence of the sea, the senses become a conscious aim unto themselves; she is the gleaming darkness, she is the luminous night, she is goddess of destruction, her white, cold fire consumes and does not create.

This is the soul of the Italian since the Renaissance. In the sunshine he basks asleep, gathering up a vintage into his veins which in the night-time he will distil into ecstatic sensual delight, the intense, white-cold ecstasy of darkness and moonlight, the raucous, cat-like, destructive enjoyment, the senses conscious and crying out in their consciousness in the pangs of the enjoyment, which has consumed the southern nation, perhaps all the Latin races, since the Renaissance.

It is a lapse back, back to the original position, the Mosaic position, of the divinity of the flesh, and the absoluteness of its laws. But also there is the Aphrodite-worship. The flesh, the senses, are now self-conscious. They know their aim. Their aim is in supreme sensation. They seek the maximum of sensation. They seek the reduction of the flesh, the flesh reacting upon itself, to a crisis, an ecstasy, a phosphorescent transfiguration in ecstasy.

The mind, all the time, subserves the senses. As in a cat, there is subtlety and beauty and the dignity of the darkness. But the fire is cold, as in the eyes of a cat, it is a green fire. It is fluid, electric. At its maximum it is the white ecstasy of phosphorescence, in the darkness, always amid the darkness, as under the black fur of a cat. Like the feline fire, it is destructive, always consuming and reducing to the ecstasy of sensation, which is the end in itself.

There is the I, always the I. And the mind is submerged, overcome. But the senses are superbly arrogant. The senses are the absolute, the godlike. For I can never have another man's senses. These are me, my senses absolutely me. And all that is can only come to me through my senses. So that all is me, and is administered unto me. The rest, that is not me, is nothing, it is something which is nothing. So the Italian, through centuries, has avoided our Northern purposive industry, because it has seemed to him a form of nothingness.

It is the spirit of the tiger. The tiger is the supreme manifestation of the senses made absolute. This is the

Tiger, tiger burning bright,
In the forests of the night

of Blake. It does indeed burn within the darkness. But the *essential* fate, of the

tiger is cold and white, a white ecstasy. It is seen in the white eyes of the blazing cat. This is the supremacy of the flesh, which devours all, and becomes transfigured into a magnificent brindled flame, a burning bush indeed.

This is one way of transfiguration into the eternal flame, the transfiguration through ecstasy in the flesh. Like the tiger in the night, I devour all flesh, I drink all blood, until this fuel blazes up in me to the consummate fire of the Infinite. In the ecstasy I am Infinite, I become again the great Whole, I am a flame of the One White Flame which is the Infinite, the Eternal, the Originator, the Creator, the Everlasting God. In the sensual ecstasy, having drunk all blood and devoured all flesh, I am become again the eternal Fire, I am infinite.

This is the way of the tiger; the tiger is supreme. His head is flattened as if there were some great weight on the hard skull, pressing, pressing, pressing the mind into a stone, pressing it down under the blood, to serve the blood. It is the subjugate instrument of the blood. The will lies above the loins, as it were at the base of the spinal column, there is the living will, the living mind of the tiger, there in the slender loins. That is the node, there in the spinal cord.

So the Italian, so the soldier. This is the spirit of the soldier. He, too, walks with his consciousness concentrated at the base of the spine, his mind subjugated, submerged. The will of the soldier is the will of the great cats, the will to ecstasy in destruction, in absorbing life into his own life, always his own life supreme, till the ecstasy burst into the white, eternal flame, the Infinite, the Flame of the Infinite. Then he is satisfied, he has been consummated in the Infinite.

This is the true soldier, this is the immortal climax of the senses. This is the acme of the flesh, the one superb tiger who has devoured all living flesh, and now paces backwards and forwards in the cage of its own infinite, glaring with blind, fierce, absorbed eyes at that which is nothingness to it.

The eyes of the tiger cannot see, except with the light from within itself, by the light of its own desire. Its own white, cold light is so fierce that the other warm light of day is outshone, it is not, it does not exist. So the white eyes of the tiger gleam to a point of concentrated vision, upon that which does not exist. Hence its terrifying sightlessness. The something which I know I am is hollow space to its vision, offers no resistance to the tiger's looking. It can only see of me that which it knows I am, a scent, a resistance, a voluptuous solid, a struggling warm violence that it holds overcome, a running of hot blood between its Jaws, a delicious pang of live flesh in the mouth. This it sees. The rest is not.

And what is the rest, that which is-not the tiger, that which the tiger is-not? What is this?

What is that which parted ways with the terrific eagle-like angel of the senses

at the Renaissance? The Italians said, 'We are one in the Father: we will go back.' The Northern races said, 'We are one in Christ: we will go on.'

What *is* the consummation in Christ? Man knows satisfaction when he surpasses all conditions and becomes, to himself, consummate in the Infinite, when he reaches a state of infinity. In the supreme ecstasy of the flesh, the Dionysic ecstasy, he reaches this state. But how does it come to pass in Christ?

It is not the mystic ecstasy. The mystic ecstasy is a special sensual ecstasy, it is the senses satisfying themselves with a self-created object. It is self-projection into the self, the sensuous self satisfied in a projected self.

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

The kingdom of heaven is this Infinite into which we may be consummated, then, if we are poor in spirit or persecuted for righteousness' sake.

Whosoever shall smite thee on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.

Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you.

Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.

To be perfect, to be one with God, to be infinite and eternal, what shall we do? We must turn the other cheek, and love our enemies.

Christ is the lamb which the eagle swoops down upon, the dove taken by the hawk, the deer which the tiger devours.

What then, if a man come to me with a sword, to kill me, and I do not resist him, but suffer his sword and the death from his sword, what am I? Am I greater than he, am I stronger than he? Do I know a consummation in the Infinite, I, the prey, beyond the tiger who devours me? By my non-resistance I have robbed him of his consummation. For a tiger knows no consummation unless he kill a violated and struggling prey. There is no consummation merely for the butcher, nor for a hyena. I can rob the tiger of his ecstasy, his consummation, his very ___my non-resistance. In my non-resistance the tiger is infinitely destroyed.

But I, what am I? 'Be ye therefore perfect.' Wherein am I perfect in this submission? Is there an affirmation, behind my negation, other than the tiger's affirmation of his own glorious infinity?

What is the Oneness to which I subscribe, I who offer no resistance in the flesh?

Have I only the negative ecstasy of being devoured, of becoming thus part of the Lord, the Great Moloch, the superb and terrible God? I have this also, this

subject ecstasy of consummation. But is there nothing else?

The Word of the tiger is: my senses are supremely Me, and my senses are God in me. But Christ said: God is in the others, who are not-me. In all the multitude of the others is God, and this is the great God, greater than the God which is Me. God is that which is Not-Me.

And this is the Christian truth, a truth complementary to the pagan affirmation: 'God is that which is Me.'

God is that which is Not-Me. In realizing the Not-Me I am consummated, I become infinite. In turning the other cheek I submit to God who is greater than I am, other than I am, who is in that which is not me. This is the supreme consummation. To achieve this consummation I love my neighbour as myself. My neighbour is all that is not me. And if I love all this, have I not become one with the Whole, is not my consummation complete, am I not one with God, have I not achieved the Infinite?

After the Renaissance the Northern races continued forward to put into practice this religious belief in the God which is Not-Me. Even the idea of the saving of the soul was really negative: it was a question of escaping damnation. The Puritans made the last great attack on the God who is Me. When they beheaded Charles the First, the king by Divine Right, they destroyed, symbolically, for ever, the supremacy of the Me who am the image of God, the Me of the flesh, of the senses, Me, the tiger burning bright, me the king, the Lord, the aristocrat, me who am divine because I am the body of God.

After the Puritans, we have been gathering data for the God who is not-me. When Pope said 'Know then thyself, presume not God to scan, The proper study of mankind is Man,' he was stating the proposition: A man is right, he is consummated, when he is seeking to know Man, the great abstract; and the method of knowledge is by the analysis, which is the destruction, of the Self. The proposition up to that time was, a man is the epitome of the universe. He has only to express himself, to fulfil his desires, to satisfy his supreme senses.

Now the change has come to pass. The individual man is a limited being, finite in himself. Yet he is capable of apprehending that which is not himself. 'The proper study of mankind is Man.' This is another way of saying, 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.' Which means, a man is consummated in his knowledge of that which is not himself, the abstract Man. Therefore the consummation lies in seeking that other, in knowing that other. Whereas the Stuart proposition was: 'A man is consummated in expressing his own Self.'

The new spirit developed into the empirical and ideal systems of philosophy. Everything that is, is consciousness. And in every man's consciousness, Man is great and illimitable, whilst the individual is small and fragmentary. Therefore

the individual must sink himself in the great whole of Mankind.

This is the spirituality of Shelley, the perfectibility of man. This is the way in which we fulfil the commandment, 'Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.' This is Saint Paul's, 'Now I know in part; but then shall I know even as I am known.'

When a man knows everything and understands everything, then he will be perfect, and life will be blessed. He is capable of knowing everything and understanding everything. Hence he is justified in his hope of infinite freedom and blessedness.

The great inspiration of the new religion was the inspiration of freedom. When I have submerged or distilled away my concrete body and my limited desires, when I am like the skylark dissolved in the sky yet filling heaven and earth with song, then I am perfect, consummated in the Infinite. When I am all that is not-me, then I have perfect liberty, I know no limitation. Only I must eliminate the Self.

It was this religious belief which expressed itself in science. Science was the analysis of the outer self, the elementary substance of the self, the outer world. And the machine is the great reconstructed selfless power. Hence the active worship to which we were given at the end of the last century, the worship of mechanized force.

Still we continue to worship that which is not-me, the Selfless world, though we would fain bring in the Self to help us. We are shouting the Shakespearean advice to warriors: 'Then simulate the action of the tiger.' We are trying to become again the tiger, the supreme, imperial, warlike Self. At the same time our ideal is the selfless world of equity.

We continue to give service to the Selfless God, we worship the great selfless oneness in the spirit, oneness in service of the great humanity, that which is Not-Me. This selfless God is He who works for all alike, without consideration. And His image is the machine which dominates and crows us, we cower before it, we run to serve it. For it works for all humanity alike.

At the same time, we want to be warlike tigers. That is the horror: the confusing of the two ends. We warlike tigers fit ourselves out with machinery, and our blazing tiger wrath is emitted through a machine. It is a horrible thing to see machines hauled about by tigers, at the mercy of tigers, forced to express the tiger. It is a still more horrible thing to see tigers caught up and entangled and torn in machinery. It is horrible, a chaos beyond chaos, an unthinkable hell.

The tiger is not wrong, the machine is not wrong, but we, liars, lip-servers, duplicate fools, we are unforgivably wrong. We say: 'I will be a tiger because I love mankind; out of love for other people, out of selfless service to that which is

not me, I will even become a tiger.' Which is absurd. A tiger devours because it is consummated in devouring, it achieves its absolute self in devouring. It does not devour because its unselfish conscience bids it do so, for the sake of the other deer and doves, or the other tigers.

Having arrived at the one extreme of mechanical selflessness, we immediately embrace the other extreme of the transcendent Self. But we try to be both at once. We do not cease to be the one before we become the other. We do not even play the roles in turn. We want to be the tiger and the deer both in one. Which is just ghastly nothingness. We try to say, 'The tiger is the lamb and the lamb is the tiger.' Which is nil, nihil, nought.

The padrone took me into a small room almost contained in the thickness of the wall. There the Signora's dark eyes glared with surprise and agitation, seeing me intrude. She is younger than the Signore, a mere village tradesman's daughter, and, alas, childless.

It was quite true, the door stood open. Madame put down the screw-driver and drew herself erect. Her eyes were a flame of excitement. This question of a door-spring that made the door fly open when it should make it close roused a vivid spark in her soul. It was she who was wrestling with the angel of mechanism.

She was about forty years old, and flame-like and fiercely sad. I think she did not know she was sad. But her heart was eaten by some impotence in her life.

She subdued her flame of life to the little padrone. He was strange and static, scarcely human, ageless, like a monkey. She supported him with her flame, supported his static, ancient, beautiful form, kept it intact. But she did not believe in him.

Now, the Signora Gemma held her husband together whilst he undid the screw that fixed the spring. If they had been alone, she would have done it, pretending to be under his direction. But since I was there, he did it himself; a grey, shaky, highly-bred little gentleman, standing on a chair with a long screw-driver, whilst his wife stood behind him, her hands half-raised to catch him if he should fall. Yet he was strangely absolute, with a strange, intact force in his breeding.

They had merely adjusted the strong spring to the shut door, and stretched it slightly in fastening it to the door-jamb, so that it drew together the moment the latch was released, and the door flew open.

We soon made it right. There was a moment of anxiety, the screw was fixed. And the door swung to. They were delighted. The Signora Gemma, who roused in me an electric kind of melancholy, clasped her hands together in ecstasy as the door swiftly shut itself.

'*Ecco!*' she cried, in her vibrating, almost warlike woman's voice: '*Ecco!*'

Her eyes were aflame as they looked at the door. She ran forward to try it

herself. She opened the door expectantly, eagerly. Pouf! — it shut with a bang.

‘*Ecco!*’ she cried, her voice quivering like bronze, overwrought but triumphant.

I must try also. I opened the door. Pouf! It shut with a bang. We all exclaimed with joy.

Then the Signor di Paoli turned to me, with a gracious, bland, formal grin. He turned his back slightly on the woman, and stood holding his chin, his strange horse-mouth grinning almost pompously at me. It was an affair of gentlemen. His wife disappeared as if dismissed. Then the padrone broke into cordial motion. We must drink.

He would show me the estate. I had already seen the house. We went out by the glass doors on the left, into the domestic courtyard.

It was lower than the gardens round it, and the sunshine came through the trellised arches on to the flagstones, where the grass grew fine and green in the cracks, and all was deserted and spacious and still. There were one or two orange-tubs in the light.

Then I heard a noise, and there in the corner, among all the pink geraniums and the sunshine, the Signora Gemma sat laughing with a baby. It was a fair, bonny thing of eighteen months. The Signora was concentrated upon the child as he sat, stolid and handsome, in his little white cap, perched on a bench picking at the pink geraniums.

She laughed, bent forward her dark face out of the shadow, swift into a glitter of sunshine near the sunny baby, laughing again excitedly, making mother-noises. The child took no notice of her. She caught him swiftly into the shadow, and they were obscured; her dark head was against the baby’s wool jacket, she was kissing his neck, avidly, under the creeper leaves. The pink geraniums still frilled joyously in the sunshine.

I had forgotten the padrone. Suddenly I turned to him inquiringly.

‘The Signora’s nephew,’ he explained, briefly, curtly, in a small voice. It was as if he were ashamed, or too deeply chagrined.

The woman had seen us watching, so she came across the sunshine with the child, laughing, talking to the baby, not coming out of her own world to us, not acknowledging us, except formally.

The Signor Pietro, queer old horse, began to laugh and neigh at the child, with strange, rancorous envy. The child twisted its face to cry. The Signora caught it away, dancing back a few yards from her old husband.

‘I am a stranger,’ I said to her across the distance. ‘He is afraid of a stranger.’

‘No, no,’ she cried back, her eyes flaring up. ‘It is the man. He always cries at the men.’

She advanced again, laughing and roused, with the child in her arms. Her husband stood as if overcast, obliterated. She and I and the baby, in the sunshine, laughed a moment. Then I heard the neighing, forced laugh of the old man. He would not be left out. He seemed to force himself forward. He was bitter, acrid with chagrin and obliteration, struggling as if to assert his own existence. He was nullified.

The woman also was uncomfortable. I could see she wanted to go away with the child, to enjoy him alone, with palpitating, pained enjoyment. It was her brother's boy. And the old padrone was as if nullified by her ecstasy over the baby. He held his chin, gloomy, fretful, unimportant.

He was annulled. I was startled when I realized it. It was as though his reality were not attested till he had a child. It was as if his *raison d'être* had been to have a son. And he had no children. Therefore he had no *raison d'être*. He was nothing, a shadow that vanishes into nothing. And he was ashamed, consumed by his own nothingness.

I was startled. This, then, is the secret of Italy's attraction for us, this phallic worship. To the Italian the phallus is the symbol of individual creative immortality, to each man his own Godhead. The child is but the evidence of the Godhead.

And this is why the Italian is attractive, supple, and beautiful, because he worships the Godhead in the flesh. We envy him, we feel pale and insignificant beside him. Yet at the same time we feel superior to him, as if he were a child and we adult.

Wherein are we superior? Only because we went beyond the phallus in the search of the Godhead, the creative origin. And we found the physical forces and the secrets of science.

We have exalted Man far above the man who is in each one of us. Our aim is a perfect humanity, a perfect and equable human consciousness, selfless. And we obtain it in the subjection, reduction, analysis, and destruction of the Self. So on we go, active in science and mechanics, and social reform.

But we have exhausted ourselves in the process. We have found great treasures, and we are now impotent to use them. So we have said: 'What good are these treasures, they are vulgar nothings.' We have said: 'Let us go back from this adventuring, let us enjoy our own flesh, like the Italian.' But our habit of life, our very constitution, prevents our being quite like the Italian. The phallus will never serve us as a Godhead, because we do not believe in it: no Northern race does. Therefore, either we set ourselves to serve our children, calling them 'the future', or else we turn perverse and destructive, give ourselves joy in the destruction of the flesh.

The children are not the future. The living truth is the future. Time and people do not make the future. Retrogression is not the future. Fifty million children growing up purposeless, with no purpose save the attainment of their own individual desires, these are not the future, they are only a disintegration of the past. The future is in living, growing truth, in advancing fulfilment.

But it is no good. Whatever we do, it is within the greater will towards self-reduction and a perfect society, analysis on the one hand, and mechanical construction on the other. This will dominates us as a whole, and until the whole breaks down, the will must persist. So that now, continuing in the old, splendid will for a perfect selfless humanity, we have become inhuman and unable to help ourselves, we are but attributes of the great mechanized society we have created on our way to perfection. And this great mechanized society, being selfless, is pitiless. It works on mechanically and destroys us, it is our master and our God.

It is past the time to leave off, to cease entirely from what we are doing, and from what we have been doing for hundreds of years. It is past the time to cease seeking one Infinite, ignoring, striving to eliminate the other. The Infinite is twofold, the Father and the Son, the Dark and the Light, the Senses and the Mind, the Soul and the Spirit, the self and the not-self, the Eagle and the Dove, the Tiger and the Lamb. The consummation of man is twofold, in the Self and in Selflessness. By great retrogression back to the source of darkness in me, the Self, deep in the senses, I arrive at the Original, Creative Infinite. By projection forth from myself, by the elimination of my absolute sensual self, I arrive at the Ultimate Infinite, Oneness in the Spirit. They are two Infinities, twofold approach to God. And man must know both.

But he must never confuse them. They are eternally separate. The lion shall never lie down with the lamb. The lion eternally shall devour the lamb, the lamb eternally shall be devoured. Man knows the great consummation in the flesh, the sensual ecstasy, and that is eternal. Also the spiritual ecstasy of unanimity, that is eternal. But the two are separate and never to be confused. To neutralize the one with the other is unthinkable, an abomination. Confusion is horror and nothingness.

The two Infinities, negative and positive, they are always related, but they are never identical. They are always opposite, but there exists a relation between them. This is the Holy Ghost of the Christian Trinity. And it is this, the relation which is established between the two Infinities, the two natures of God, which we have transgressed, forgotten, sinned against. The Father is the Father, and the Son is the Son. I may know the Son and deny the Father, or know the Father and deny the Son. But that which I may never deny, and which I have denied, is the Holy Ghost which relates the dual Infinities into One Whole, which relates and

keeps distinct the dual natures of God. To say that the two are one, this is the inadmissible lie. The two are related, by the intervention of the Third, into a Oneness.

There are two ways, there is not only One. There are two opposite ways to consummation. But that which relates them, like the base of the triangle, this is the constant, the Absolute, this makes the Ultimate Whole. And in the Holy Spirit I know the Two Ways, the Two Infinities, the Two Consummations. And knowing the Two, I admit the Whole. But excluding One, I exclude the Whole. And confusing the two, I make nullity nihil.

‘*Mais,*’ said the Signore, starting from his scene of ignominy, where his wife played with another man’s child, ‘*mais — voulez-vous vous promener dans mes petites terres?*’

It came out fluently, he was so much roused in self-defence and self-assertion.

We walked under the pergola of bony vine-stocks, secure in the sunshine within the walls, only the long mountain, parallel with us, looking in.

I said how I liked the big vine-garden, I asked when it ended. The pride of the padrone came back with a click. He pointed me to the terrace, to the great shut lemon-houses above. They were all his. But — he shrugged his Italian shoulders — it was nothing, just a little garden, *vous savez, monsieur*. I protested it was beautiful, that I loved it, and that it seemed to me *very large* indeed. He admitted that today, perhaps, it was beautiful.

‘*Perchè — parce que — il fait un tempo — così — très bell’ — très beau, ecco!*’

He alighted on the word *beau* hurriedly, like a bird coming to ground with a little bounce.

The terraces of the garden are held up to the sun, the sun falls full upon them, they are like a vessel slanted up, to catch the superb, heavy light. Within the walls we are remote, perfect, moving in heavy spring sunshine, under the bony avenue of vines. The padrone makes little exclamatory noises that mean nothing, and teaches me the names of vegetables. The land is rich and black.

Opposite us, looking down on our security, is the long, arched mountain of snow. We climbed one flight of steps, and we could see the little villages on the opposite side of the lake. We climbed again, and could see the water rippling.

We came to a great stone building that I had thought was a storehouse, for open-air storage, because the walls are open halfway up, showing the darkness inside and the corner pillar very white and square and distinct in front of it.

Entering carelessly into the dimness, I started, for at my feet was a great floor of water, clear and green in its obscurity, going down between the walls, a reservoir in the gloom. The Signore laughed at my surprise. It was for irrigating

the land, he said. It stank, slightly, with a raw smell; otherwise, I said, what a wonderful bath it would make. The old Signore gave his little neighing laugh at the idea.

Then we climbed into a great loft of leaves, ruddy brown, stored in a great bank under the roof, seeming to give off a little red heat, as they gave off the lovely perfume of the hills. We passed through, and stood at the foot of the lemon-house. The big, blind building rose high in the sunshine before us.

All summer long, upon the mountain slopes steep by the lake, stands the rows of naked pillars rising out of the green foliage like ruins of temples: white, square pillars of masonry, standing forlorn in their colonnades and squares, rising up the mountain-sides here and there, as if they remained from some great race that had once worshipped here. And still, in the winter, some are seen, standing away in lonely places where the sun streams full, grey rows of pillars rising out of a broken wall, tier above tier, naked to the sky, forsaken.

They are the lemon plantations, and the pillars are to support the heavy branches of the trees, but finally to act as scaffolding of the great wooden houses that stand blind and ugly, covering the lemon trees in the winter.

In November, when cold winds came down and snow had fallen on the mountains, from out of the storehouses the men were carrying timber, and we heard the clang of falling planks. Then, as we walked along the military road on the mountain-side, we saw below, on the top of the lemon gardens, long, thin poles laid from pillar to pillar, and we heard the two men talking and singing as they walked across perilously, placing the poles. In their clumsy zoccoli they strode easily across, though they had twenty or thirty feet to fall if they slipped. But the mountain-side, rising steeply, seemed near, and above their heads the rocks glowed high into the sky, so that the sense of elevation must have been taken away. At any rate, they went easily from pillar-summit to pillar-summit, with a great cave of space below. Then again was the rattle and clang of planks being laid in order, ringing from the mountain-side over the blue lake, till a platform of timber, old and brown, projected from the mountain-side, a floor when seen from above, a hanging roof when seen from below. And we, on the road above, saw the men sitting easily on this flimsy hanging platform, hammering the planks. And all day long the sound of hammering echoed among the rocks and olive woods, and came, a faint, quick concussion, to the men on the boats far out. When the roofs were on they put in the fronts, blocked in between the white pillars withhold, dark wood, in roughly made panels. And here and there, at irregular intervals, was a panel of glass, pane overlapping pane in the long strip of narrow window. So that now these enormous, unsightly buildings bulge out on the mountain-sides, rising in two or three receding tiers,

blind, dark, sordid-looking places.

In the morning I often lie in bed and watch the sunrise. The lake lies dim and milky, the mountains are dark blue at the back, while over them the sky gushes and glistens with light. At a certain place on the mountain ridge the light burns gold, seems to fuse a little groove on the hill's rim. It fuses and fuses at this point, till of a sudden it comes, the intense, molten, living light. The mountains melt suddenly, the light steps down, there is a glitter, a spangle, a clutch of spangles, a great unbearable sun-track flashing across the milky lake, and the light falls on my face. Then, looking aside, I hear the little slotting noise which tells me they are opening the lemon gardens, a long panel here and there, a long slot of darkness at irregular intervals between the brown wood and the glass stripes.

'*Voulez-vous*' — the Signore bows me in with outstretched hand — '*voulez-vous entrer, monsieur?*'

I went into the lemon-house, where the poor threes seem to mope in the darkness. It is an immense, dark, cold place. Tall lemon trees, heavy with half-visible fruit, crowd together, and rise in the gloom. They look like ghosts in the darkness of the underworld, stately, and as if in life, but only grand shadows of themselves. And lurking here and there, I see one of the pillars, But he, too, seems a shadow, not one of the dazzling white fellows I knew. Here we are trees, men, pillars, the dark earth, the sad black paths, shut in in this enormous box. It is true, there are long strips of window and slots of space, so that the front is striped, and an occasional beam of light fingers the leaves of an enclosed tree and the sickly round lemons. But it is nevertheless very gloomy.

'But it is much colder in here than outside,' I said.

'Yes,' replied the Signore, 'now. But at night — I *think* — '

I almost wished it were night to try. I wanted to imagine the trees cosy. They seemed now in the underworld. Between the lemon trees, beside the path, were little orange trees, and dozens of oranges hanging like hot coals in the twilight. When I warm my hands at them the Signore breaks me off one twig after another, till I have a bunch of burning oranges among dark leaves, a heavy bouquet. Looking down the Hades of the lemon-house, the many ruddy-clustered oranges beside the path remind me of the lights of a village along the lake at night, while the pale lemons above are the stars. There is a subtle, exquisite scent of lemon flowers. Then I notice a citron. He hangs heavy and bloated upon so small a tree, that he seems a dark green enormity. There is a great host of lemons overhead, half-visible, a swarm of ruddy oranges by the paths, and here and there a fat citron. It is almost like being under the sea.

At the corners of the path were round little patches of ash and stumps of

charred wood, where fires had been kindled inside the house on cold nights. For during the second and third weeks in January the snow came down so low on the mountains that, after climbing for an hour, I found myself in a snow lane, and saw olive orchards on lawns of snow.

The padrone says that all lemons and sweet oranges are grafted on a bitter-orange stock. The plants raised from seed, lemon and sweet orange, fell prey to disease, so the cultivators found it safe only to raise the native bitter orange, and then graft upon it.

And the maestra — she is the schoolmistress, who wears black gloves while she teaches us Italian — says that the lemon was brought by St Francis of Assisi, who came to the Garda here and founded a church and a monastery. Certainly the church of San Francesco is very old and dilapidated, and its cloisters have some beautiful and original carvings of leaves and fruit upon the pillars, which seem to connect San Francesco with the lemon. I imagine him wandering here with a lemon in his pocket. Perhaps he made lemonade in the hot summer. But Bacchus had been before him in the drink trade.

Looking at his lemons, the Signore sighed. I think he hates them. They are leaving him in the lurch. They are sold retail at a halfpenny each all the year round. 'But that is as dear, or dearer, than in England,' I say. 'Ah, but,' says the maestra, 'that is because your lemons are outdoor fruit from Sicily. *Però* — one of our lemons is as good as two from elsewhere.'

It is true these lemons have an exquisite fragrance and perfume, but whether their force as lemons is double that of an ordinary fruit is a question. Oranges are sold at fourpence halfpenny the kilo — it comes about five for twopenny, small ones. The citrons are sold also by weight in Salò for the making of that liqueur known as 'Cedro'. One citron fetches sometimes a shilling or more, but then the demand is necessarily small. So that it is evident, from these figures, the Lago di Garda cannot afford to grow its lemons much longer. The gardens are already many of them in ruins, and still more 'Da Vendere'.

We went out of the shadow of the lemon-house on to the roof of the section below us. When we came to the brink of the roof I sat down. The padrone stood behind me, a shabby, shaky little figure on his roof in the sky, a little figure of dilapidation, dilapidated as the lemon-houses themselves.

We were always level with the mountain-snow opposite. A film of pure blue was on the hills to the right and the left. There had been a wind, but it was still now. The water breathed an iridescent dust on the far shore, where the villages were groups of specks.

On the low level of the world, on the lake, an orange-sailed boat leaned slim to the dark-blue water, which had flecks of foam. A woman went down-hill

quickly, with two goats and a sheep. Among the olives a man was whistling.

‘*Voyez,*’ said the padrone, with distant, perfect melancholy. ‘There was once a lemon garden also there — you see the short pillars, cut off to make a pergola for the vine. Once there were twice as many lemons as now. Now we must have vine instead. From that piece of land I had two hundred lire a year, in lemons. From the vine I have only eighty.’

‘But wine is a valuable crop,’ I said.

‘Ah — *così-così!* For a man who grows much. For me — *poco, poco — peu.*’

Suddenly his face broke into a smile of profound melancholy, almost a grin, like a gargoyle. It was the real Italian melancholy, very deep, static.

‘*Vous voyez, monsieur* — the lemon, it is all the year, all the year. But the vine — one crop — ?’

He lifts his shoulders and spreads his hands with that gesture of finality and fatality, while his face takes the blank, ageless look of misery, like a monkey’s. There is no hope. There is the present. Either that is enough, the present, or there is nothing.

I sat and looked at the lake. It was beautiful as paradise, as the first creation. On the shores were the ruined lemon-pillars standing out in melancholy, the clumsy, enclosed lemon-houses seemed ramshackle, bulging among vine stocks and olive trees. The villages, too, clustered upon their churches, seemed to belong to the past. They seemed to be lingering in bygone centuries.

‘But it is very beautiful,’ I protested. ‘In England — ’

‘Ah, in England,’ exclaimed the padrone, the same ageless, monkey-like grin of fatality, tempered by cunning, coming on his face, ‘in England you have the wealth — *les richesses* — you have the mineral coal and the machines, *vous savez*. Here we have the sun — ’

He lifted his withered hand to the sky, to the wonderful source of that blue day, and he smiled, in histrionic triumph. But his triumph was only histrionic. The machines were more to his soul than the sun. He did not know these mechanisms, their great, human-contrived, inhuman power, and he wanted to know them. As for the sun, that is common property, and no man is distinguished by it. He wanted machines, machine production, money, and human power. He wanted to know the joy of man who has got the earth in his grip, bound it up with railways, burrowed it with iron fingers, subdued it. He wanted this last triumph of the ego, this last reduction. He wanted to go where the English have gone, beyond the Self, into the great inhuman Not Self, to create the great unliving creators, the machines, out of the active forces of nature that existed before flesh.

But he is too old. It remains for the young Italian to embrace his mistress, the

machine.

I sat on the roof of the lemon-house, with the lake below and the snowy mountain opposite, and looked at the ruins on the old, olive-fuming shores, at all the peace of the ancient world still covered in sunshine, and the past seemed to me so lovely that one must look towards it, backwards, only backwards, where there is peace and beauty and no more dissonance.

I thought of England, the great mass of London, and the black, fuming, laborious Midlands and north-country. It seemed horrible. And yet, it was better than the padrone, this old, monkey-like cunning of fatality. It is better to go forward into error than to stay fixed inextricably in the past.

Yet what should become of the world? There was London and the industrial counties spreading like a blackness over all the world, horrible, in the end destructive. And the Garda was so lovely under the sky of sunshine, it was intolerable. For away, beyond, beyond all the snowy Alps, with the iridescence of eternal ice above them, was this England, black and foul and dry, with her soul worn down, almost worn away. And England was conquering the world with her machines and her horrible destruction of natural life. She was conquering the whole world.

And yet, was she not herself finished in this work? She had had enough. She had conquered the natural life to the end: she was replete with the conquest of the outer world, satisfied with the destruction of the Self. She would cease, she would turn round; or else expire.

If she still lived, she would begin to build her knowledge into a great structure of truth. There it lay, vast masses of rough-hewn knowledge, vast masses of machines and appliances, vast masses of ideas and methods, and nothing done with it, only teeming swarms of disintegrated human beings seething and perishing rapidly away amongst it, till it seems as if a world will be left covered with huge ruins, and scored by strange devices of industry, and quite dead, the people disappeared, swallowed up in the last efforts towards a perfect, selfless society.

3

THE THEATRE

During carnival a company is playing in the theatre. On Christmas Day the padrone came in with the key of his box, and would we care to see the drama? The theatre was small, a mere nothing, in fact; a mere affair of peasants, you understand; and the Signor Di Paoli spread his hands and put his head on one side, parrot-wise; but we might find a little diversion — *un peu de divertiment*. With this he handed me the key.

I made suitable acknowledgements, and was really impressed. To be handed

the key of a box at the theatre, so simply and pleasantly, in the large sitting-room looking over the grey lake of Christmas Day; it seemed to me a very graceful event. The key had a chain and a little shield of bronze, on which was beaten out a large figure 8.

So the next day we went to see *I Spettri*, expecting some good, crude melodrama. The theatre is an old church. Since that triumph of the deaf and dumb, the cinematograph, has come to give us the nervous excitement of speed — grimace agitation, and speed, as of flying atoms, chaos — many an old church in Italy has taken a new lease of life.

This cast-off church made a good theatre. I realized how cleverly it had been constructed for the dramatic presentation of religious ceremonies. The east end is round, the walls are windowless, sound is well distributed. Now everything is theatrical, except the stone floor and two pillars at the back of the auditorium, and the slightly ecclesiastical seats below.

There are two tiers of little boxes in the theatre, some forty in all, with fringe and red velvet, and lined with dark red paper, quite like real boxes in a real theatre. And the padrone's is one of the best. It just holds three people.

We paid our threepence entrance fee in the stone hall and went upstairs. I opened the door of Number 8, and we were shut in our little cabin, looking down on the world. Then I found the barber, Luigi, bowing profusely in a box opposite. It was necessary to make bows all round: ah, the chemist, on the upper tier, near the barber; how-do-you-do to the padrona of the hotel, who is our good friend, and who sits, wearing a little beaver shoulder-cape, a few boxes off; very cold salutation to the stout village magistrate with the long brown beard, who leans forward in the box facing the stage, while a grouping of faces look out from behind him; a warm smile to the family of the Signora Gemma, across next to the stage. Then we are settled.

I cannot tell why I hate the village magistrate. He looks like a family portrait by a Flemish artist, he himself weighing down the front of the picture with his portliness and his long brown beard, whilst the faces of his family are arranged in two groups for the background. I think he is angry at our intrusion. He is very republican and self-important. But we eclipse him easily, with the aid of a large black velvet hat, and black furs, and our Sunday clothes.

Downstairs the villagers are crowding, drifting like a heavy current. The women are seated, by church instinct, all together on the left, with perhaps an odd man at the end of a row, beside his wife. On the right, sprawling in the benches, are several groups of bersaglieri, in grey uniforms and slanting cock's-feather hats; then peasants, fishermen, and an odd couple or so of brazen girls taking their places on the men's side.

At the back, lounging against the pillars or standing very dark and sombre, are the more reckless spirits of the village. Their black felt hats are pulled down, their cloaks are thrown over their mouths, they stand very dark and isolated in their moments of stillness, they shout and wave to each other when anything occurs.

The men are clean, their clothes are all clean washed. The rags of the poorest porter are always well washed. But it is Sunday tomorrow, and they are shaved only on a Sunday. So that they have a week's black growth on their chins. But they have dark, soft eyes, unconscious and vulnerable. They move and balance with loose, heedless motion upon their clattering zoccoli, they lounge with wonderful ease against the wall at the back, or against the two pillars, unconscious of the patches on their clothes or of their bare throats, that are knotted perhaps with a scarlet rag. Loose and abandoned, they lounge and talk, or they watch with wistful absorption the play that is going on.

They are strangely isolated in their own atmosphere, and as if revealed. It is as if their vulnerable being was exposed and they have not the wit to cover it. There is a pathos of physical sensibility and mental inadequacy. Their mind is not sufficiently alert to run with their quick, warm senses.

The men keep together, as if to support each other, the women also are together; in a hard, strong herd. It is as if the power, the hardness, the triumph, even in this Italian village, were with the women in their relentless, vindictive unity.

That which drives men and women together, the indomitable necessity, is like a bondage upon the people. They submit as under compulsion, under constraint. They come together mostly in anger and in violence of destructive passion. There is no comradeship between men and women, none whatsoever, but rather a condition of battle, reserve, hostility.

On Sundays the uncomfortable, excited, unwilling youth walks for an hour with his sweetheart, at a little distance from her, on the public highway in the afternoon. This is a concession to the necessity for marriage. There is no real courting, no happiness of being together, only the roused excitement which is based on a fundamental hostility. There is very little flirting, and what there is is of the subtle, cruel kind, like a sex duel. On the whole, the men and women avoid each other, almost shun each other. Husband and wife are brought together in a child, which they both worship. But in each of them there is only the great reverence for the infant, and the reverence for fatherhood or motherhood, as the case may be; there is no spiritual love.

In marriage, husband and wife wage the subtle, satisfying war of sex upon each other. It gives a profound satisfaction, a profound intimacy. But it destroys

all joy, all unanimity in action.

On Sunday afternoons the uncomfortable youth walks by the side of his maiden for an hour in the public highway. Then he escapes; as from a bondage he goes back to his men companions. On Sunday afternoons and evenings the married woman, accompanied by a friend or by a child — she dare not go alone, afraid of the strange, terrible sex-war between her and the drunken man — is seen leading home the wine-drunken, liberated husband. Sometimes she is beaten when she gets home. It is part of the process. But there is no synthetic love between men and women, there is only passion, and passion is fundamental hatred, the act of love is a fight.

The child, the outcome, is divine. Here the union, the oneness, is manifest. Though spirit strove with spirit, in mortal conflict, during the sex-passion, yet the flesh united with flesh in oneness. The phallus is still divine. But the spirit, the mind of man, this has become nothing.

So the women triumph. They sit down below in the theatre, their perfectly dressed hair gleaming, their backs very straight, their heads carried tensely. They are not very noticeable. They seem held in reserve. They are just as tense and stiff as the men are slack and abandoned. Some strange will holds the women taut. They seem like weapons, dangerous. There is nothing charming nor winning about them; at the best a full, prolific maternity, at the worst a yellow poisonous bitterness of the flesh that is like a narcotic. But they are too strong for the men. The male spirit, which would subdue the immediate flesh to some conscious or social purpose, is overthrown. The woman in her maternity is the law-giver, the supreme authority. The authority of the man, in work, in public affairs, is something trivial in comparison. The pathetic ignominy of the village male is complete on Sunday afternoon, on his great day of liberation, when he is accompanied home, drunk but sinister, by the erect, unswerving, slightly cowed woman. His drunken terrorizing is only pitiable, she is so obviously the more constant power.

And this is why the men must go away to America. It is not the money. It is the profound desire to rehabilitate themselves, to recover some dignity as men, as producers, as workers, as creators from the spirit, not only from the flesh. It is a profound desire to get away from women altogether, the terrible subjugation to sex, the phallic worship.

The company of actors in the little theatre was from a small town away on the plain, beyond Brescia. The curtain rose, everybody was still, with that profound, naïve attention which children give. And after a few minutes I realized that *I Spettri* was Ibsen's *Ghosts*. The peasants and fishermen of the Garda, even the rows of ungovernable children, sat absorbed in watching as the Norwegian

drama unfolded itself.

The actors are peasants. The leader is the son of a peasant proprietor. He is qualified as a chemist, but is unsettled, vagrant, prefers play-acting. The Signer Pietro di Paoli shrugs his shoulders and apologizes for their vulgar accent. It is all the same to me. I am trying to get myself to rights with the play, which I have just lately seen in Munich, perfectly produced and detestable.

It was such a change from the hard, ethical, slightly mechanized characters in the German play, which was as perfect an interpretation as I can imagine, to the rather pathetic notion of the Italian peasants, that I had to wait to adjust myself.

The mother was a pleasant, comfortable woman harassed by something, she did not quite know what. The pastor was a ginger-haired caricature imitated from the northern stage, quite a lay figure. The peasants never laughed, they watched solemnly and absorbedly like children. The servant was just a slim, pert, forward hussy, much too flagrant. And then the son, the actor-manager: he was a dark, ruddy man, broad and thick-set, evidently of peasant origin, but with some education now; he was the important figure, the play was his.

And he was strangely disturbing. Dark, ruddy, and powerful, he could not be the blighted son of 'Ghosts', the hectic, unsound, northern issue of a diseased father. His flashy Italian passion for his half-sister was real enough to make one uncomfortable: something he wanted and would have in spite of his own soul, something which fundamentally he did not want.

It was this contradiction within the man that made the play so interesting. A robust, vigorous man of thirty-eight, flaunting and florid as a rather successful Italian can be, there was yet a secret sickness which oppressed him. But it was no taint in the blood, it was rather a kind of debility in the soul. That which he wanted and would have, the sensual excitement, in his soul he did not want it, no, not at all. And yet he must act from his physical desires, his physical will.

His true being, his real self, was impotent. In his soul he was dependent, forlorn. He was childish and dependent on the mother. To hear him say, '*Grazia, mamma!*' would have tormented the mother-soul in any woman living. Such a child crying in the night! And for what?

For he was hot-blooded, healthy, almost in his prime, and free as a man can be in his circumstances. He had his own way, he admitted no thwarting. He governed his circumstances pretty much, coming to our village with his little company, playing the plays he chose himself. And yet, that which he would have he did not vitally want, it was only a sort of inflamed obstinacy that made him so insistent, in the masculine way. He was not going to be governed by women, he was not going to be dictated to in the least by any one. And this because he was beaten by his own flesh.

His real man's soul, the soul that goes forth and builds up a new world out of the void, was ineffectual. It could only revert to the senses. His divinity was the phallic divinity. The other male divinity, which is the spirit that fulfils in the world the new germ of an idea, this was denied and obscured in him, unused. And it was this spirit which cried out helplessly in him through the insistent, inflammable flesh. Even this play-acting was a form of physical gratification for him, it had in it neither real mind nor spirit.

It was so different from Ibsen, and so much more moving. Ibsen is exciting, nervously sensational. But this was really moving, a real crying in the night. One loved the Italian nation, and wanted to help it with all one's soul. But when one sees the perfect Ibsen, how one hates the Norwegian and Swedish nations! They are detestable.

They seem to be fingering with the mind the secret places and sources of the blood, impertinent, irreverent, nasty. There is a certain intolerable nastiness about the real Ibsen: the same thing is in Strindberg and in most of the Norwegian and Swedish writings. It is with them a sort of phallic worship also, but now the worship is mental and perverted: the phallus is the real fetish, but it is the source of uncleanness and corruption and death, it is the Moloch, worshipped in obscenity.

Which is unbearable. The phallus is a symbol of creative divinity. But it represents only part of creative divinity. The Italian has made it represent the whole. Which is now his misery, for he has to destroy his symbol in himself.

Which is why the Italian men have the enthusiasm for war, unashamed. Partly it is the true phallic worship, for the phallic principle is to absorb and dominate all life. But also it is a desire to expose themselves to death, to know death, that death may destroy in them this too strong dominion of the blood, may once more liberate the spirit of outgoing, of uniting, of making order out of chaos, in the outer world, as the flesh makes a new order from chaos in begetting a new life, set them free to know and serve a greater idea.

The peasants below sat and listened intently, like children who hear and do not understand, yet who are spellbound. The children themselves sit spellbound on the benches till the play is over. They do not fidget or lose interest. They watch with wide, absorbed eyes at the mystery, held in thrall by the sound of emotion.

But the villagers do not really care for Ibsen. They let it go. On the feast of Epiphany, as a special treat, was given a poetic drama by D'Annunzio, *La Fiaccola sotto il Moggio* — *The Light under the Bushel*.

It is a foolish romantic play of no real significance. There are several murders and a good deal of artificial horror. But it is all a very nice and romantic piece of make-believe, like a charade.

So the audience loved it. After the performance of *Ghosts* I saw the barber, and he had the curious grey clayey look of an Italian who is cold and depressed. The sterile cold inertia, which the so-called passionate nations know so well, had settled on him, and he went obliterating himself in the street, as if he were cold, dead.

But after the D'Annunzio play he was like a man who has drunk sweet wine and is warm.

'Ah, *bellissimo, bellissimo!*' he said, in tones of intoxicated reverence, when he saw me.

'Better than *I Spettri*?' I said.

He half-raised his hands, as if to imply the fatuity of the question.

'Ah, but — ' he said, 'it was D'Annunzio. The other....'

'That was Ibsen — a great Norwegian,' I said, 'famous all over the world.'

'But you know — D'Annunzio is a poet — oh, beautiful, beautiful!' There was no going beyond this '*bello — bellissimo*'.

It was the language which did it. It was the Italian passion for rhetoric, for the speech which appeals to the senses and makes no demand on the mind. When an Englishman listens to a speech he wants at least to imagine that he understands thoroughly and impersonally what is meant. But an Italian only cares about the emotion. It is the movement, the physical effect of the language upon the blood which gives him supreme satisfaction. His mind is scarcely engaged at all. He is like a child, hearing and feeling without understanding. It is the sensuous gratification he asks for. Which is why D'Annunzio is a god in Italy. He can control the current of the blood with his words, and although much of what he says is bosh, yet his hearer is satisfied, fulfilled.

Carnival ends on the 5th of February, so each Thursday there is a *Serata d'Onore* of one of the actors. The first, and the only one for which prices were raised — to a fourpence entrance fee instead of threepence — was for the leading lady. The play was *The Wife of the Doctor*, a modern piece, sufficiently uninteresting; the farce that followed made me laugh.

Since it was her Evening of Honour, Adelaida was the person to see. She is very popular, though she is no longer young. In fact, she is the mother of the young pert person of *Ghosts*.

Nevertheless, Adelaida, stout and blonde and soft and pathetic, is the real heroine of the theatre, the prima. She is very good at sobbing; and afterwards the men exclaim involuntarily, out of their strong emotion, '*bella, bella!*' The women say nothing. They sit stiffly and dangerously as ever. But, no doubt, they quite agree this is the true picture of ill-used, tear-stained woman, the bearer of many wrongs. Therefore they take unto themselves the homage of the men's

'*bella, bella!*' that follows the sobs: it is due recognition of their hard wrongs: 'the woman pays.' Nevertheless, they despise in their souls the plump, soft Adelaida.

Dear Adelaida, she is irreproachable. In every age, in every clime, she is dear, at any rate to the masculine soul, this soft, tear-blenched, blonde, ill-used thing. She must be ill-used and unfortunate. Dear Gretchen, dear Desdemona, dear Iphigenia, dear Dame aux Camélias, dear Lucy of Lammermoor, dear Mary Magdalene, dear, pathetic, unfortunate soul, in all ages and lands, how we love you. In the theatre she blossoms forth, she is the lily of the stage. Young and inexperienced as I am, I have broken my heart over her several times. I could write a sonnet-sequence to her, yes, the fair, pale, tear-stained thing, white-robed, with her hair down her back; I could call her by a hundred names, in a hundred languages, Melisande, Elizabeth, Juliet, Butterfly, Phèdre, Minnehaha, *etc.* Each new time I hear her voice, with its faint clang of tears, my heart grows big and hot, and my bones melt. I detest her, but it is no good. My heart begins to swell like a bud under the plangent rain.

The last time I saw her was here, on the Garda, at Salò. She was the chalked, thin-armed daughter of Rigoletto. I detested her, her voice had a chalky squeak in it. And yet, by the end, my heart was overripe in my breast, ready to burst with loving affection. I was ready to walk on to the stage, to wipe out the odious, miscreant lover, and to offer her all myself, saying, 'I can see it is real *love* you want, and you shall have it: *I will give it to you.*'

Of course I know the secret of the Gretchen magic; it is all in the 'Save me, Mr Hercules!' phrase. Her shyness, her timidity, her trustfulness, her tears foster my own strength and grandeur. I am the positive half of the universe. But so I am, if it comes to that, just as positive as the other half.

Adelaida is plump, and her voice has just that moist, plangent strength which gives one a real voluptuous thrill. The moment she comes on the stage and looks round — a bit scared — she is *she*, Electra, Isolde, Sieglinde, Marguèrite. She wears a dress of black voile, like the lady who weeps at the trial in the police-court. This is her modern uniform. Her antique garment is of trailing white, with a blonde pigtail and a flower. Realistically, it is black voile and a handkerchief.

Adelaida always has a handkerchief. And still I cannot resist it. I say, 'There's the hanky!' Nevertheless, in two minutes it has worked its way with me. She squeezes it in her poor, plump hand as the tears begin to rise; Fate, or man, is inexorable, so cruel. There is a sob, a cry; she presses the fist and the hanky to her eyes, one eye, then the other. She weeps real tears, tears shaken from the depths of her soft, vulnerable, victimized female self. I cannot stand it. There I sit in the padrone's little red box and stifle my emotion, whilst I repeat in my

heart: 'What a shame, child, what a shame!' She is twice my age, but what is age in such circumstances? 'Your poor little hanky, it's sopping. There, then, don't cry. It'll be all right. *I'll* see you're all right. *All* men are not beasts, you know.' So I cover her protectively in my arms, and soon I shall be kissing her, for comfort, in the heat and prowess of my compassion, kissing her soft, plump cheek and neck closely, bringing my comfort nearer and nearer.

It is a pleasant and exciting role for me to play. Robert Burns did the part to perfection:

O wert thou in the cauld blast
On yonder lea, on yonder lea.

How many times does one recite that to all the Ophelias and Gretchens in the world:

Thy bield should be my bosom.

How one admires one's bosom in that capacity! Looking down at one's shirt-front, one is filled with strength and pride.

Why are the women so bad at playing this part in real life, this Ophelia-Gretchen role? Why are they so unwilling to go mad and die for our sakes? They do it regularly on the stage.

But perhaps, after all, we write the plays. What a villain I am, what a black-browed, passionate, ruthless, masculine villain I am to the leading lady on the stage; and, on the other hand, dear heart, what a hero, what a fount of chivalrous generosity and faith! I am *anything* but a dull and law-abiding citizen. I am a Galahad, full of purity and spirituality, I am the Lancelot of valour and lust; I fold my hands, or I cock my hat in one side, as the case may be: I am *myself*. Only, I am not a respectable citizen, not that, in this hour of my glory and my escape.

Dear Heaven, how Adelaida wept, her voice plashing like violin music, at my ruthless, masculine cruelty. Dear heart, how she sighed to rest on my sheltering bosom! And how I enjoyed my dual nature! How I admired myself!

Adelaida chose *La Moglie del Dottore* for her Evening of Honour. During the following week came a little storm of coloured bills: 'Great Evening of Honour of Enrico Persevalli.'

This is the leader, the actor-manager. What should he choose for his great occasion, this broad, thick-set, ruddy descendant of the peasant proprietors of the plain? No one knew. The title of the play was not revealed.

So we were staying at home, it was cold and wet. But the maestra came inflammably on that Thursday evening, and were we not going to the theatre, to see *Amleto*?

Poor maestra, she is yellow and bitter-skinned, near fifty, but her dark eyes are

still corrosively inflammable. She was engaged to a lieutenant in the cavalry, who got drowned when she was twenty-one. Since then she has hung on the tree unripe, growing yellow and bitter-skinned, never developing.

‘*Amleto!*’ I say. ‘*Non lo conosco.*’

A certain fear comes into her eyes. She is schoolmistress, and has a mortal dread of being wrong.

‘*Si,*’ she cries, wavering, appealing, ‘*una dramma inglese.*’

‘English!’ I repeated.

‘Yes, an English drama.’

‘How do you write it?’

Anxiously, she gets a pencil from her reticule, and, with black-gloved scrupulousness, writes *Amleto*.

‘*Hamlet!*’ I exclaim wonderingly.

‘*Ecco, Amleto!*’ cries the maestra, her eyes aflame with thankful justification.

Then I knew that Signore Enrico Persevali was looking to me for an audience. His Evening of Honour would be a bitter occasion to him if the English were not there to see his performance.

I hurried to get ready, I ran through the rain. I knew he would take it badly that it rained on his Evening of Honour. He counted himself a man who had fate against him.

‘*Sono un disgraziato, io.*’

I was late. The First Act was nearly over. The play was not yet alive, neither in the bosoms of the actors nor in the audience. I closed the door of the box softly, and came forward. The rolling Italian eyes of Hamlet glanced up at me. There came a new impulse over the Court of Denmark.

Enrico looked a sad fool in his melancholy black. The doublet sat close, making him stout and vulgar, the knee-breeches seemed to exaggerate the commonness of his thick, rather short, strutting legs. And he carried a long black rag, as a cloak, for histrionic purposes. And he had on his face a portentous grimace of melancholy and philosophic importance. His was the caricature of Hamlet’s melancholy self-absorption.

I stooped to arrange my footstool and compose my countenance. I was trying not to grin. For the first time, attired in philosophic melancholy of black silk, Enrico looked a boor and a fool. His close-cropped, rather animal head was common above the effeminate doublet, his sturdy, ordinary figure looked absurd in a melancholic droop.

All the actors alike were out of their element. Their Majesties of Denmark were touching. The Queen, burly little peasant woman, was ill at ease in her pink satin. Enrico had had no mercy. He knew she loved to be the scolding servant or

housekeeper, with her head tied up in a handkerchief, shrill and vulgar. Yet here she was pranked out in an expanse of satin, la Regina. Regina, indeed!

She obediently did her best to be important. Indeed, she rather fancied herself; she looked sideways at the audience, self-consciously, quite ready to be accepted as an imposing and noble person, if they would esteem her such. Her voice sounded hoarse and common, but whether it was the pink satin in contrast, or a cold, I do not know. She was almost childishly afraid to move. Before she began a speech she looked down and kicked her skirt viciously, so that she was sure it was under control. Then she let go. She was a burly, downright little body of sixty, one rather expected her to box Hamlet on the ears.

Only she liked being a queen when she sat on the throne. There she perched with great satisfaction, her train splendidly displayed down the steps. She was as proud as a child, and she looked like Queen Victoria of the Jubilee period.

The King, her noble consort, also had new honours thrust upon him, as well as new garments. His body was real enough but it had nothing at all to do with his clothes. They established a separate identity by themselves. But wherever he went, they went with him, to the confusion of everybody.

He was a thin, rather frail-looking peasant, pathetic, and very gentle. There was something pure and fine about him, he was so exceedingly gentle and by natural breeding courteous. But he did not feel kingly, he acted the part with beautiful, simple resignation.

Enrico Persevalli had overshot himself in every direction, but worst of all in his own. He had become a hulking fellow, crawling about with his head ducked between his shoulders, pecking and poking, creeping about after other people, sniffing at them, setting traps for them, absorbed by his own self-important self-consciousness. His legs, in their black knee-breeches, had a crawling, slinking look; he always carried the black rag of a cloak, something for him to twist about as he twisted in his own soul, overwhelmed by a sort of inverted perversity.

I had always felt an aversion from Hamlet: a creeping, unclean thing he seems, on the stage, whether he is Forbes Robertson or anybody else. His nasty poking and sniffing at his mother, his setting traps for the King, his conceited perversion with Ophelia make him always intolerable. The character is repulsive in its conception, based on self-dislike and a spirit of disintegration.

There is, I think, this strain of cold dislike, or self-dislike, through much of the Renaissance art, and through all the later Shakespeare. In Shakespeare it is a kind of corruption in the flesh and a conscious revolt from this. A sense of corruption in the flesh makes Hamlet frenzied, for he will never admit that it is his own flesh. Leonardo da Vinci is the same, but Leonardo loves the corruption maliciously. Michelangelo rejects any feeling of corruption, he stands by the

flesh, the flesh only. It is the corresponding reaction, but in the opposite direction. But that is all four hundred years ago. Enrico Persevali has just reached the position. He *is* Hamlet, and evidently he has great satisfaction in the part. He is the modern Italian, suspicious, isolated, self-nauseated, labouring in a sense of physical corruption. But he will not admit it is in himself. He creeps about in self-conceit, transforming his own self-loathing. With what satisfaction did he reveal corruption — corruption in his neighbours he gloated in — letting his mother know he had discovered her incest, her uncleanness, gloated in torturing the incestuous King. Of all the unclean ones, Hamlet was the uncleanest. But he accused only the others.

Except in the 'great' speeches, and there Enrico was betrayed, Hamlet suffered the extremity of physical self-loathing, loathing of his own flesh. The play is the statement of the most significant philosophic position of the Renaissance. Hamlet is far more even than Orestes, his prototype, a mental creature, anti-physical, anti-sensual. The whole drama is the tragedy of the convulsed reaction of the mind from the flesh, of the spirit from the self, the reaction from the great aristocratic to the great democratic principle.

An ordinary instinctive man, in Hamlet's position, would either have set about murdering his uncle, by reflex action, or else would have gone right away. There would have been no need for Hamlet to murder his mother. It would have been sufficient blood-vengeance if he had killed his uncle. But that is the statement according to the aristocratic principle.

Orestes was in the same position, but the same position two thousand years earlier, with two thousand years of experience wanting. So that the question was not so intricate in him as in Hamlet, he was not nearly so conscious. The whole Greek life was based on the idea of the supremacy of the self, and the self was always male. Orestes was his father's child, he would be the same whatever mother he had. The mother was but the vehicle, the soil in which the paternal seed was planted. When Clytemnestra murdered Agamemnon, it was as if a common individual murdered God, to the Greek.

But Agamemnon, King and Lord, was not infallible. He was fallible. He had sacrificed Iphigenia for the sake of glory in war, for the fulfilment of the superb idea of self, but on the other hand he had made cruel dissension for the sake of the concubines captured in war. The paternal flesh was fallible, ungodlike. It lusted after meaner pursuits than glory, war, and slaying, it was not faithful to the highest idea of the self. Orestes was driven mad by the furies of his mother, because of the justice that they represented. Nevertheless he was in the end exculpated. The third play of the trilogy is almost foolish, with its prating gods. But it means that, according to the Greek conviction, Orestes was right and

Clytemnestra entirely wrong. But for all that, the infallible King, the infallible male Self, is dead in Orestes, killed by the furies of Clytemnestra. He gains his peace of mind after the revulsion from his own physical fallibility, but he will never be an unquestioned lord, as Agamemnon was. Orestes is left at peace, neutralized. He is the beginning of non-aristocratic Christianity.

Hamlet's father, the King, is, like Agamemnon, a warrior-king. But, unlike Agamemnon, he is blameless with regard to Gertrude. Yet Gertrude, like Clytemnestra, is the potential murderer of her husband, as Lady Macbeth is murderess, as the daughters of Lear. The women murder the supreme male, the ideal Self, the King and Father.

This is the tragic position Shakespeare must dwell upon. The woman rejects, repudiates the ideal Self which the male represents to her. The supreme representative, King and Father, is murdered by the Wife and the Daughters.

What is the reason? Hamlet goes mad in a revulsion of rage and nausea. Yet the women-murderers only represent some ultimate judgement in his own soul. At the bottom of his own soul Hamlet has decided that the Self in its supremacy, Father and King, must die. It is a suicidal decision for his involuntary soul to have arrived at. Yet it is inevitable. The great religious, philosophic tide, which has been swelling all through the Middle Ages, had brought him there.

The question, to be or not to be, which Hamlet puts himself, does not mean, to live or not to live. It is not the simple human being who puts himself the question, it is the supreme I, King and Father. To be or not to be King, Father, in the Self supreme? And the decision is, not to be.

It is the inevitable philosophic conclusion of all the Renaissance. The deepest impulse in man, the religious impulse, is the desire to be immortal, or infinite, consummated. And this impulse is satisfied in fulfilment of an idea, a steady progression. In this progression man is satisfied, he seems to have reached his goal, this infinity, this immortality, this eternal being, with every step nearer which he takes.

And so, according to his idea of fulfilment, man establishes the whole order of life. If my fulfilment is the fulfilment and establishment of the unknown divine Self which I am, then I shall proceed in the realizing of the greatest idea of the self, the highest conception of the I, my order of life will be kingly, imperial, aristocratic. The body politic also will culminate in this divinity of the flesh, this body imbued with glory, invested with divine power and might, the King, the Emperor. In the body politic also I shall desire a king, an emperor, a tyrant, glorious, mighty, in whom I see myself consummated and fulfilled. This is inevitable!

But during the Middle Ages, struggling within this pagan, original transport, the transport of the Ego, was a small dissatisfaction, a small contrary desire. Amid the pomp of kings and popes was the Child Jesus and the Madonna. Jesus the King gradually dwindled down. There was Jesus the Child, helpless, at the mercy of all the world. And there was Jesus crucified.

The old transport, the old fulfilment of the Ego, the Davidian ecstasy, the assuming of all power and glory unto the self, the becoming infinite through the absorption of all into the Ego, this gradually became unsatisfactory. This was not the infinite, this was not immortality. This was eternal death, this was damnation.

The monk rose up with his opposite ecstasy, the Christian ecstasy. There was a death to die: the flesh, the self, must die, so that the spirit should rise again immortal, eternal, infinite. I am dead unto myself, but I live in the Infinite. The finite Me is no more, only the Infinite, the Eternal, is.

At the Renaissance this great half-truth overcame the other great half-truth. The Christian Infinite, reached by a process of abnegation, a process of being absorbed, dissolved, diffused into the great Not-Self, supplanted the old pagan Infinite, wherein the self like a root threw out branches and radicles which embraced the whole universe, became the Whole.

There is only one Infinite, the world now cried, there is the great Christian Infinite of renunciation and consummation in the not-self. The other, that old pride, is damnation. The sin of sins is Pride, it is the way to total damnation. Whereas the pagans based their life on pride.

And according to this new Infinite, reached through renunciation and dissolving into the Others, the Neighbour, man must build up his actual form of life. With Savonarola and Martin Luther the living Church actually transformed itself, for the Roman Church was still pagan. Henry VIII simply said: 'There is no Church, there is only the State.' But with Shakespeare the transformation had reached the State also. The King, the Father, the representative of the Consummate Self, the maximum of all life, the symbol of the consummate being, the becoming Supreme, Godlike, Infinite, he must perish and pass away. This Infinite was not infinite, this consummation was not consummated, all this was fallible, false. It was rotten, corrupt. It must go. But Shakespeare was also the thing itself. Hence his horror, his frenzy, his self-loathing.

The King, the Emperor is killed in the soul of man, the old order of life is over, the old tree is dead at the root. So said Shakespeare. It was finally enacted in Cromwell. Charles I took up the old position of kingship by divine right. Like Hamlet's father, he was blameless otherwise. But as representative of the old form of life, which mankind now hated with frenzy, he must be cut down,

removed. It was a symbolic act.

The world, our world of Europe, had now really turned, swung round to a new goal, a new idea, the Infinite reached through the omission of Self. God is all that which is Not-Me. I am consummate when my Self, the resistant solid, is reduced and diffused into all that which is Not-Me: my neighbour, my enemy, the great Otherness. Then I am perfect.

And from this belief the world began gradually to form a new State, a new body politic, in which the Self should be removed. There should be no king, no lords, no aristocrats. The world continued in its religious belief, beyond the French Revolution, beyond the great movement of Shelley and Godwin. There should be no Self. That which was supreme was that which was Not-Me, the other. The governing factor in the State was the idea of the good of others; that is, the Common Good. And the *vital* governing idea in the State has been this idea since Cromwell.

Before Cromwell the idea was 'For the King', because every man saw himself consummated in the King. After Cromwell the idea was 'For the good of my neighbour', or 'For the good of the people', or 'For the good of the whole'. This has been our ruling idea, by which we have more or less lived.

Now this has failed. Now we say that the Christian Infinite is not infinite. We are tempted, like Nietzsche, to return back to the old pagan Infinite, to say that is supreme. Or we are inclined, like the English and the Pragmatist, to say, 'There is no Infinite, there is no Absolute. The only Absolute is expediency, the only reality is sensation and momentariness.' But we may say this, even act on it, *à la Sanine*. But we never believe it.

What is really Absolute is the mystic Reason which connects both Infinities, the Holy Ghost that relates both natures of God. If we now wish to make a living State, we must build it up to the idea of the Holy Spirit, the supreme Relationship. We must say, the pagan Infinite is infinite, the Christian Infinite is infinite: these are our two Consummations, in both of these we are consummated. But that which relates them alone is absolute.

This Absolute of the Holy Ghost we may call Truth or Justice or Right. These are partial names, indefinite and unsatisfactory unless there be kept the knowledge of the two Infinities, pagan and Christian, which they go between. When both are there, they are like a superb bridge, on which one can stand and know the whole world, my world, the two halves of the universe.

'Essere, o non essere, è qui il punto.'

To be or not to be was the question for Hamlet to settle. It is no longer our question, at least, not in the same sense. When it is a question of death, the fashionable young suicide declares that his self-destruction is the final proof of

his own incontrovertible being. And as for not-being in our public life, we have achieved it as much as ever we want to, as much as is necessary. Whilst in private life there is a swing back to paltry selfishness as a creed. And in the war there is the position of neutralization and nothingness. It is a question of knowing how *to be*, and how *not to be*, for we must fulfil both. Enrico Persevalli was detestable with his '*Essere, o non essere*'. He whispered it in a hoarse whisper as if it were some melodramatic murder he was about to commit. As a matter of fact, he knows quite well, and has known all his life, that his pagan Infinite, his transport of the flesh and the supremacy of the male in fatherhood, is all unsatisfactory. All his life he has really cringed before the northern Infinite of the Not-Self, although he has continued in the Italian habit of Self. But it is mere habit, sham.

How can he know anything about being and not-being when he is only a maudlin compromise between them, and all he wants is to be a maudlin compromise? He is neither one nor the other. He has neither being nor riot-being. He is as equivocal as the monks. He was detestable, mouthing Hamlet's sincere words. He has still to let go, to know what not-being is, before he can *be*. Till he has gone through the Christian negation of himself, and has known the Christian consummation, he is a mere amorphous heap.

For the soliloquies of Hamlet are as deep as the soul of man can go, in one direction, and as sincere as the Holy Spirit itself in their essence. But thank heaven, the bog into which Hamlet struggled is almost surpassed.

It is a strange thing, if a man covers his face, and speaks with his eyes blinded, how significant and poignant he becomes. The ghost of this Hamlet was very simple. He was wrapped down to the knees in a great white cloth, and over his face was an open-work woollen shawl. But the naïve blind helplessness and verity of his voice was strangely convincing. He seemed the most real thing in the play. From the knees downward he was Laertes, because he had on Laertes' white trousers and patent leather slippers. Yet he was strangely real, a voice out of the dark.

The Ghost is really one of the play's failures, it is so trivial and unspiritual and vulgar. And it was spoilt for me from the first. When I was a child I went to the twopenny travelling theatre to see *Hamlet*. The Ghost had on a helmet and a breastplate. I sat in pale transport.

'"Amblet, "Amblet, I *am* thy father's ghost.'

Then came a voice from the dark, silent audience, like a cynical knife to my fond soul:

'Why tha arena, I can tell thy voice.'

The peasants loved Ophelia: she was in white with her hair down her back.

Poor thing, she was pathetic, demented. And no wonder, after Hamlet's 'O, that this too, too solid flesh would melt!' What then of her young breasts and her womb? Hamlet with her was a very disagreeable sight. The peasants loved her. There was a hoarse roar, half of indignation, half of roused passion, at the end of her scene.

The graveyard scene, too, was a great success, but I could not bear Hamlet. And the grave-digger in Italian was a mere buffoon. The whole scene was farcical to me because of the Italian, '*Questo cranio, Signore* — 'And Enrico, dainty fellow, took the skull in a corner of his black cloak. As an Italian, he would not willingly touch it. It was unclean. But he looked a fool, hulking himself in his lugubriousness. He was as self-important as D'Annunzio.

The close fell flat. The peasants had applauded the whole graveyard scene wildly. But at the end of all they got up and crowded to the doors, as if to hurry away: this in spite of Enrico's final feat: he fell backwards, smack down three steps of the throne platform, on to the stage. But planks and braced muscle will bounce, and Signer Amleto bounced quite high again.

It was the end of *Amleto*, and I was glad. But I loved the theatre, I loved to look down on the peasants, who were so absorbed. At the end of the scenes the men pushed back their black hats, and rubbed their hair across their brows with a pleased, excited movement. And the women stirred in their seats.

Just one man was with his wife and child, and he was of the same race as my old woman at San Tommaso. He was fair, thin, and clear, abstract, of the mountains. He seemed to have gathered his wife and child together into another, finer atmosphere, like the air of the mountains, and to guard them in it. This is the real Joseph, father of the child. He has a fierce, abstract look, wild and untamed as a hawk, but like a hawk at its own nest, fierce with love. He goes out and buys a tiny bottle of lemonade for a penny, and the mother and child sip it in tiny sips, whilst he bends over, like a hawk arching its wings.

It is the fierce spirit of the Ego come out of the primal infinite, but detached, isolated, an aristocrat. He is not an Italian, dark-blooded. He is fair, keen as steel, with the blood of the mountaineer in him. He is like my old spinning woman. It is curious how, with his wife and child, he makes a little separate world down there in the theatre, like a hawk's nest, high and arid under the gleaming sky.

The Bersaglieri sit close together in groups, so that there is a strange, corporal connexion between them. They have close-cropped, dark, slightly bestial heads, and thick shoulders, and thick brown hands on each other's shoulders. When an act is over they pick up their cherished hats and fling on their cloaks and go into the hall. They are rather rich, the Bersaglieri.

They are like young, half-wild oxen, such strong, sturdy, dark lads, thickly

built and with strange hard heads, like young male caryatides. They keep close together, as if there were some physical instinct connecting them. And they are quite womanless. There is a curious inter-absorption among themselves, a sort of physical trance that holds them all, and puts their minds to sleep. There is a strange, hypnotic unanimity among them as they put on their plumed hats and go out together, always very close, as if their bodies must touch. Then they feel safe and content in this heavy, physical trance. They are in love with one another, the young men love the young men. They shrink from the world beyond, from the outsiders, from all who are not Bersaglieri of their barracks.

One man is a sort of leader. He is very straight and solid, solid like a wall, with a dark, unblemished will. His cock-feathers slither in a profuse, heavy stream from his black oil-cloth hat, almost to his shoulder. He swings round. His feathers slip into a cascade. Then he goes out to the hall, his feather tossing and falling richly. He must be well off. The Bersaglieri buy their own black cock's-plumes, and some pay twenty or thirty francs for the bunch, so the maestra said. The poor ones have only poor, scraggy plumes.

There is something very primitive about these men. They remind me really of Agamemnon's soldiers clustered on the seashore, men, all men, a living, vigorous, physical host of men. But there is a pressure on these Italian soldiers, as if they were men caryatides, with a great weight on their heads, making their brain hard, asleep, stunned. They all look as if their real brain were stunned, as if there were another centre of physical consciousness from which they lived.

Separate from them all is Pietro, the young man who lounges on the wharf to carry things from the steamer. He starts up from sleep like a wild-cat as somebody claps him on the shoulder. It is the start of a man who has many enemies. He is almost an outlaw. Will he ever find himself in prison? He is the *gamin* of the village, well detested.

He is twenty-four years old, thin, dark, handsome, with a cat-like lightness and grace, and a certain repulsive, *gamin* evil in his face. Where everybody is so clean and tidy, he is almost ragged. His week's beard shows very black in his slightly hollow cheeks. He hates the man who has waked him by clapping him on the shoulder.

Pietro is already married, yet he behaves as if he were not. He has been carrying on with a loose woman, the wife of the citron-coloured barber, the Siciliano. Then he seats himself on the women's side of the theatre, behind a young person from Bogliaco, who also has no reputation, and makes her talk to him. He leans forward, resting his arms on the seat before him, stretching his slender, cat-like, flexible loins. The padrona of the hotel hates him — '*ein frecher Kerl*,' she says with contempt, and she looks away. Her eyes hate to see

him.

In the village there is the clerical party, which is the majority; there is the anti-clerical party, and there are the ne'er-do-wells. The clerical people are dark and pious and cold; there is a curious stone-cold, ponderous darkness over them, moral and gloomy. Then the anti-clerical party, with the Syndaco at the head, is bourgeois and respectable as far as the middle-aged people are concerned, banal, respectable, shut off as by a wall from the clerical people. The young anti-clericals are the young bloods of the place, the men who gather every night in the more expensive and less-respectable cafe. These young men are all free-thinkers, great dancers, singers, players of the guitar. They are immoral and slightly cynical. Their leader is the young shopkeeper, who has lived in Vienna, who is a bit of a bounder, with a veneer of sneering irony on an original good nature. He is well-to-do, and gives dances to which only the looser women go, with these reckless young men. He also gets up parties of pleasure, and is chiefly responsible for the coming of the players to the theatre this carnival. These young men are disliked, but they belong to the important class, they are well-to-do, and they have the life of the village in their hands. The clerical peasants are priest-ridden and good, because they are poor and afraid and superstitious. There is, lastly, a sprinkling of loose women, one who keeps the inn where the soldiers drink. These women are a definite set. They know what they are, they pretend nothing else. They are not prostitutes, but just loose women. They keep to their own clique, among men and women, never wanting to compromise anybody else.

And beyond all these there are the Franciscan friars in their brown robes, so shy, so silent, so obliterated, as they stand back in the shop, waiting to buy the bread for the monastery, waiting obscure and neutral, till no one shall be in the shop wanting to be served. The village women speak to them in a curious neutral, official, slightly contemptuous voice. They answer neutral and humble, though distinctly.

At the theatre, now the play is over, the peasants in their black hats and cloaks crowd the hall. Only Pietro, the wharf-lounger, has no cloak, and a bit of a cap on the side of his head instead of a black felt hat. His clothes are thin and loose on his thin, vigorous, cat-like body, and he is cold, but he takes no notice. His hands are always in his pockets, his shoulders slightly raised.

The few women slip away home. In the little theatre bar the well-to-do young atheists are having another drink. Not that they spend much. A tumbler of wine or a glass of vermouth costs a penny. And the wine is horrible new stuff. Yet the little baker, Agostino, sits on a bench with his pale baby on his knee, putting the wine to its lips. And the baby drinks, like a blind fledgeling.

Upstairs, the quality has paid its visits and shaken hands: the Syndaco and the well-to-do half-Austrian owners of the woodyard, the Bertolini, have ostentatiously shown their mutual friendship; our padrone, the Signer Pietro Di Paoli, has visited his relatives the Graziani in the box next the stage and has spent two intervals with us in our box; meanwhile, his two peasants standing down below, pathetic, thin contadini of the old school, like worn stones, have looked up at us as if we are the angels in heaven, with a reverential, devotional eye, they themselves far away below, standing in the bay at the back, below all.

The chemist and the grocer and the schoolmistress pay calls. They have all sat self-consciously posed in the front of their boxes, like framed photographs of themselves. The second grocer and the baker visit each other. The barber looks in on the carpenter, then drops downstairs among the crowd. Class distinctions are cut very fine. As we pass with the padrona of the hotel, who is a Bavarian, we stop to speak to our own padroni, the Di Paoli. They have a warm handshake and effusive polite conversation for us; for Maria Samuelli, a distant bow. We realize our mistake.

The barber — not the Siciliano, but flashy little Luigi with the big tie-ring and the curls — knows all about the theatre. He says that Enrico Persevalli has for his mistress Carina, the servant in *Ghosts*: that the thin, gentle, old-looking king in *Hamlet* is the husband of Adelaida, and Carina is their daughter: that the old, sharp, fat little body of a queen is Adelaida's mother: that they all like Enrico Persevalli, because he is a very clever man: but that the 'Comic', Il Brillante, Francesco, is unsatisfied.

In three performances in Epiphany week, the company took two hundred and sixty-five francs, which was phenomenal. The manager, Enrico Persevalli, and Adelaida pay twenty-four francs for every performance, or every evening on which a performance is given, as rent for the theatre, including light. The company is completely satisfied with its reception on the Lago di Garda.

So it is all over. The Bersaglieri go running all the way home, because it is already past half past ten. The night is very dark. About four miles up the lake the searchlights of the Austrian border are swinging, looking for smugglers. Otherwise the darkness is complete.

4

SAN GAUDENZIO

In the autumn the little rosy cyclamens blossom in the shade of this west side of the lake. They are very cold and fragrant, and their scent seems to belong to Greece, to the Bacchae. They are real flowers of the past. They seem to be blossoming in the landscape of Phaedra and Helen. They bend down, they brood like little chill fires. They are little living myths that I cannot understand.

After the cyclamens the Christmas roses are in bud. It is at this season that the cacchi are ripe on the trees in the garden, whole naked trees full of lustrous, orange-yellow, paradisal fruit, gleaming against the wintry blue sky. The monthly roses still blossom frail and pink, there are still crimson and yellow roses. But the vines are bare and the lemon-houses shut. And then, mid-winter, the lowest buds of the Christmas roses appear under the hedges and rocks and by the streams. They are very lovely, these first large, cold, pure buds, like violets, like magnolias, but cold, lit up with the light from the snow.

The days go by, through the brief silence of winter, when the sunshine is so still and pure, like iced wine, and the dead leaves gleam brown, and water sounds hoarse in the ravines. It is so still and transcendent, the cypress trees poise like flames of forgotten darkness, that should have been blown out at the end of the summer. For as we have candles to light the darkness of night, so the cypresses are candles to keep the darkness aflame in the full sunshine.

Meanwhile, the Christmas roses become many. They rise from their budded, intact humbleness near the ground, they rise up, they throw up their crystal, they become handsome, they are heaps of confident, mysterious whiteness in the shadow of a rocky stream. It is almost uncanny to see them. They are the flowers of darkness, white and wonderful beyond belief.

Then their radiance becomes soiled and brown, they thaw, break, and scatter and vanish away. Already the primroses are coming out, and the almond is in bud. The winter is passing away. On the mountains the fierce snow gleams apricot gold as evening approaches, golden, apricot, but so bright that it is almost frightening. What can be so fiercely gleaming when all is shadowy? It is something inhuman and unmitigated between heaven and earth.

The heavens are strange and proud all the winter, their progress goes on without reference to the dim earth. The dawns come white and translucent, the lake is a moonstone in the dark hills, then across the lake there stretches a vein of fire, then a whole, orange, flashing track over the whiteness. There is the exquisite silent passage of the day, and then at evening the afterglow, a huge incandescence of rose, hanging above and gleaming, as if it were the presence of a host of angels in rapture. It gleams like a rapturous chorus, then passes away, and the stars appear, large and flashing.

Meanwhile, the primroses are dawning on the ground, their light is growing stronger, spreading over the banks and under the bushes. Between the olive roots the violets are out, large, white, grave violets, and less serious blue ones. And looking down the bill, among the grey smoke of olive leaves, pink puffs of smoke are rising up. It is the almond and the apricot trees, it is the Spring.

Soon the primroses are strong on the ground. There is a bank of small, frail

crocuses shooting the lavender into this spring. And then the tussocks and tussocks of primroses are fully out, there is full morning everywhere on the banks and roadsides and stream-sides, and around the olive roots, a morning of primroses underfoot, with an invisible threading of many violets, and then the lovely blue clusters of hepatica, really like pieces of blue sky showing through a clarity of primrose. The few birds are piping thinly and shyly, the streams sing again, there is a strange flowering shrub full of incense, overturned flowers of crimson and gold, like Bohemian glass. Between the olive roots new grass is coming, day is leaping all clear and coloured from the earth, it is full Spring, full first rapture.

Does it pass away, or does it only lose its pristine quality? It deepens and intensifies, like experience. The days seem to be darker and richer, there is a sense of power in the strong air. On the banks by the lake the orchids are out, many, many pale bee-orchids standing clear from the short grass over the lake. And in the hollows are the grape hyacinths, purple as noon, with the heavy, sensual fragrance of noon. They are many-breasted, and full of milk, and ripe, and sun-darkened, like many-breasted Diana.

We could not bear to live down in the village any more, now that the days opened large and spacious and the evenings drew out in sunshine. We could not bear the indoors, when above us the mountains shone in clear air. It was time to go up, to climb with the sun.

So after Easter we went to San Gaudenzio. It was three miles away, up the winding mule-track that climbed higher and higher along the lake. Leaving the last house of the village, the path wound on the steep, cliff-like side of the lake, curving into the hollow where the landslip had tumbled the rocks in chaos, then out again on to the bluff of a headland that hung over the lake.

Thus we came to the tall barred gate of San Gaudenzio, on which was the usual little fire-insurance tablet, and then the advertisements for beer, 'Birra, Verona', which is becoming a more and more popular drink.

Through the gate, inside the high wall, is the little Garden of Eden, a property of three or four acres fairly level upon a headland over the lake. The high wall girds it on the land side, and makes it perfectly secluded. On the lake-side it is bounded by the sudden drops of the land, in sharp banks and terraces, overgrown with ilex and with laurel bushes, down to the brink of the cliff, so that the thicket of the first declivities seems to safeguard the property.

The pink farm-house stands almost in the centre of the little territory, among the olive trees. It is a solid, six-roomed place, about fifty years old, having been rebuilt by Paolo's uncle. Here we came to live for a time with the Fiori, Maria and Paolo, and their three children, Giovanni and Marco and Felicina.

Paolo had inherited, or partly inherited, San Gaudenzio, which had been in his family for generations. He was a peasant of fifty-three, very grey and wrinkled and worn-looking, but at the same time robust, with full strong limbs and a powerful chest. His face was old, but his body was solid and powerful. His eyes were blue like upper ice, beautiful. He had been a fair-haired man, now he was almost white.

He, was strangely like the pictures of peasants in the northern Italian pictures, with the same curious nobility, the same aristocratic, eternal look of motionlessness, something statuesque. His head was hard and fine, the bone finely constructed, though the skin of his face was loose and furrowed with work. His temples had that fine, hard clarity which is seen in Mantegna, an almost jewel-like quality.

We all loved Paolo, he was so finished in his being, detached, with an almost classic simplicity and gentleness, an eternal kind of sureness. There was also something concluded and unalterable about him, something inaccessible.

Maria Fiori was different. She was from the plain, like Enrico Persevali and the Bersagliers from the Venetian district. She reminded me again of oxen, broad-boned and massive in physique, dark-skinned, slow in her soul. But, like the oxen of the plain, she knew her work, she knew the other people engaged in the work. Her intelligence was attentive and purposive. She had been a housekeeper, a servant, in Venice and Verona, before her marriage. She had got the hang of this world of commerce and activity, she wanted to master it. But she was weighted down by her heavy animal blood.

Paolo and she were the opposite sides of the universe, the light and the dark. Yet they lived together now without friction, detached, each subordinated in their common relationship. With regard to Maria, Paolo omitted himself; Maria omitted herself with regard to Paolo. Their souls were silent and detached, completely apart, and silent, quite silent. They shared the physical relationship of marriage as if it were something beyond them, a third thing.

They had suffered very much in the earlier stages of their connexion. Now the storm had gone by, leaving them, as it were, spent. They were both by nature passionate, vehement. But the lines of their passion were opposite. Hers was the primitive, crude, violent flux of the blood, emotional and indiscriminating, but wanting to mix and mingle. His was the hard, clear, invulnerable passion of the bones, finely tempered and unchangeable. She was the flint and he the steel. But in continual striking together they only destroyed each other. The fire was a third thing, belonging to neither of them.

She was still heavy and full of desire. She was much younger than he.

‘How long did you know your Signora before you were married?’ she asked

me.

‘Six weeks,’ I said.

‘*Il Paolo e me, venti giorni, tre settimane,*’ she cried vehemently. Three weeks they had known each other when they married. She still triumphed in the fact. So did Paolo. But it was past, strangely and rather terribly past.

What did they want when they came together, Paolo and she? He was a man over thirty, she was a woman of twenty-three. They were both violent in desire and of strong will. They came together at once, like two wrestlers almost matched in strength. Their meetings must have been splendid. Giovanni, the eldest child, was a tall lad of sixteen, with soft brown hair and grey eyes, and a clarity of brow, and the same calm simplicity of bearing which made Paolo so complete; but the son had at the same time a certain brownness of skin, a heaviness of blood, which he had from his mother. Paolo was so clear and translucent.

In Giovanni the fusion of the parents was perfect, he was a perfect spark from the flint and steel. There was in Paolo a subtle intelligence in feeling, a delicate appreciation of the other person. But the mind was unintelligent, he could not grasp a new order. Maria Fiori was much sharper and more adaptable to the ways of the world. Paolo had an almost glass-like quality, fine and clear and perfectly tempered; but he was also finished and brittle. Maria was much coarser, more vulgar, but also she was more human, more fertile, with crude potentiality. His passion was too fixed in its motion, hers too loose and overwhelming.

But Giovanni was beautiful, gentle, and courtly like Paolo, but warm, like Maria, ready to flush like a girl with anger or confusion. He stood straight and tall, and seemed to look into the far distance with his clear grey eyes. Yet also he could look at one and touch one with his look, he could meet one. Paolo’s blue eyes were like the eyes of the old spinning-woman, clear and blue and belonging to the mountains, their vision seemed to end in space, abstract. They reminded me of the eyes of the eagle, which looks into the sun, and which teaches its young to do the same, although they are unwilling.

Marco, the second son, was thirteen years old. He was his mother’s favourite, Giovanni loved his father best. But Marco was his mother’s son, with the same brown-gold and red complexion, like a pomegranate, and coarse black hair, and brown eyes like pebble, like agate, like an animal’s eyes. He had the same broad, bovine figure, though he was only a boy. But there was some discrepancy in him. He was not unified, he had no identity.

He was strong and full of animal life, but always aimless, as though his wits scarcely controlled him. But he loved his mother with a fundamental, generous,

undistinguishing love. Only he always forgot what he was going to do. He was much more sensitive than Maria, more shy and reluctant. But his shyness, his sensitiveness only made him more aimless and awkward, a tiresome clown, slack and uncontrolled, witless. All day long his mother shouted and shrilled and scolded at him, or hit him angrily. He did not mind, he came up like a cork, warm and roguish and curiously appealing. She loved him with a fierce protective love, grounded on pain. There was such a split, a contrariety in his soul, one part reacting against the other, which landed him always into trouble.

It was when Marco was a baby that Paolo had gone to America. They were poor on San Gaudenzio. There were the few olive trees, the grapes, and the fruit; there was the one cow. But these scarcely made a living. Neither was Maria content with the real peasants' lot any more, polenta at midday and vegetable soup in the evening, and no way out, nothing to look forward to, no future, only this eternal present. She had been in service, and had eaten bread and drunk coffee, and known the flux and variable chance of life. She had departed from the old static conception. She knew what one might be, given a certain chance. The fixture was the thing she militated against. So Paolo went to America, to California, into the gold mines.

Maria wanted the future, the endless possibility of life on earth. She wanted her sons to be freer, to achieve a new plane of living. The peasant's life was a slave's life, she said, railing against the poverty and the drudgery. And it was quite true, Paolo and Giovanni worked twelve and fourteen hours a day at heavy laborious work that would have broken an Englishman. And there was nothing at the end of it. Yet Paolo was even happy so. This was the truth to him.

It was the mother who wanted things different. It was she who railed and railed against the miserable life of the peasants. When we were going to throw to the fowls a dry broken penny roll of white bread, Maria said, with anger and shame and resentment in her voice: 'Give it to Marco, he will eat it. It isn't too dry for him.'

White bread was a treat for them even now, when everybody eats bread. And Maria Fiori hated it, that bread should be a treat to her children, when it was the meanest food of all the rest of the world. She was in opposition to this order. She did not want her sons to be peasants, fixed and static as posts driven in the earth. She wanted them to be in the great flux of life in the midst of all possibilities. So she at length sent Paolo to America to the gold-mines. Meanwhile, she covered the wall of her parlour with picture postcards, to bring the outer world of cities and industries into her house.

Paolo was entirely remote from Maria's world. He had not yet even grasped the fact of money, not thoroughly. He reckoned in land and olive trees. So he

had the old fatalistic attitude to his circumstances, even to his food. The earth was the Lord's and the fulness thereof; also the leanness thereof. Paolo could only do his part and leave the rest. If he ate in plenty, having oil and wine and sausage in the house, and plenty of maize-meal, he was glad with the Lord. If he ate meagrely, of poor polenta, that was fate, it was the skies that ruled these things, and no man ruled the skies. He took his fate as it fell from the skies.

Maria was exorbitant about money. She would charge us all she could for what we had and for what was done for us.

Yet she was not mean in her soul. In her soul she was in a state of anger because of her own closeness. It was a violation to her strong animal nature. Yet her mind had wakened to the value of money. She knew she could alter her position, the position of her children, by virtue of money. She knew it was only money that made the difference between master and servant. And this was all the difference she would acknowledge. So she ruled her life according to money. Her supreme passion was to be mistress rather than servant, her supreme aspiration for her children was that in the end they might be masters and not servants.

Paolo was untouched by all this. For him there was some divinity about a master which even America had not destroyed. If we came in for supper whilst the family was still at table he would have the children at once take their plates to the wall, he would have Maria at once set the table for us, though their own meal were never finished. And this was not servility, it was the dignity of a religious conception. Paolo regarded us as belonging to the Signoria, those who are elect, near to God. And this was part of his religious service. His life was a ritual. It was very beautiful, but it made me unhappy, the purity of his spirit was so sacred and the actual facts seemed such a sacrilege to it. Maria was nearer to the actual truth when she said that money was the only distinction. But Paolo had hold of an eternal truth, where hers was temporal. Only Paolo misapplied this eternal truth. He should not have given Giovanni the inferior status and a fat, mean Italian tradesman the superior. That was false, a real falsity. Maria knew it and hated it. But Paolo could not distinguish between the accident of riches and the aristocracy of the spirit. So Maria rejected him altogether, and went to the other extreme. We were all human beings like herself; naked, there was no distinction between us, no higher nor lower. But we were possessed of more money than she. And she had to steer her course between these two conceptions. The money alone made the real distinction, the separation; the being, the life made the common level.

Paolo had the curious peasant's avarice also, but it was not meanness. It was a sort of religious conservation of his own power, his own self. Fortunately he

could leave all business transactions on our account to Maria, so that his relation with us was purely ritualistic. He would have given me anything, trusting implicitly that I would fulfil my own nature as Signore, one of those more godlike, nearer the light of perfection than himself, a peasant. It was pure bliss to him to bring us the first-fruit of the garden, it was like laying it on an altar.

And his fulfilment was in a fine, subtle, exquisite relationship, not of manners, but subtle interappreciation. He worshipped a finer understanding and a subtler tact. A further fineness and dignity and freedom in bearing was to him an approach towards the divine, so he loved men best of all, they fulfilled his soul. A woman was always a woman, and sex was a low level whereon he did not esteem himself. But a man, a doer, the instrument of God, he was really godlike.

Paolo was a Conservative. For him the world was established and divine in its establishment. His vision grasped a small circle. A finer nature, a higher understanding, took in a greater circle, comprehended the whole. So that when Paolo was in relation to a man of further vision, he himself was extended towards the whole. Thus he was fulfilled. And his initial assumption was that every signore, every gentleman, was a man of further, purer vision than himself. This assumption was false. But Maria's assumption, that no one had a further vision, no one was more elect than herself, that we are all one flesh and blood and being, was even more false. Paolo was mistaken in actual life, but Maria was ultimately mistaken.

Paolo, conservative as he was, believing that a priest must be a priest of God, yet very rarely went to church. And he used the religious oaths that Maria hated, even *Porca-Maria*. He always used oaths, either Bacchus or God or Mary or the Sacrament. Maria was always offended. Yet it was she who, in her soul, jeered at the Church and at religion. She wanted the human society as the absolute, without religious abstractions. So Paolo's oaths enraged her, because of their profanity, she said. But it was really because of their subscribing to another superhuman order. She jeered at the clerical people. She made a loud clamour of derision when the parish priest of the village above went down to the big village on the lake, and across the piazza, the quay, with two pigs in a sack on his shoulder. This was a real picture of the sacred minister to her.

One day, when a storm had blown down an olive tree in front of the house, and Paolo and Giovanni were beginning to cut it up, this same priest of Mugiano came to San Gaudenzio. He was an iron-grey, thin, disreputable-looking priest, very talkative and loud and queer. He seemed like an old ne'er-do-well in priests' black, and he talked loudly, almost to himself, as drunken people do. At once *he* must show the Fiori how to cut up the tree, he must have the axe from Paolo. He shouted to Maria for a glass of wine. She brought it out to him with a

sort of insolent deference, insolent contempt of the man and traditional deference to the cloth. The priest drained the tumblerful of wine at one drink, his thin throat with its Adam's apple working. And he did not pay the penny.

Then he stripped off his cassock and put away his hat, and, a ludicrous figure in ill-fitting black knee-breeches and a not very clean shirt, a red handkerchief round his neck, he proceeded to give great extravagant blows at the tree. He was like a caricature. In the doorway Maria was encouraging him rather jeeringly, whilst she winked at me. Marco was stifling his hysterical amusement in his mother's apron, and prancing with glee. Paolo and Giovanni stood by the fallen tree, very grave and unmoved, inscrutable, abstract. Then the youth came away to the doorway, with a flush mounting on his face and a grimace distorting its youngness. Only Paolo, unmoved and detached, stood by the tree with unchanging, abstract face, very strange, his eyes fixed in the ageless stare which is so characteristic.

Meanwhile the priest swung drunken blows at the tree, his thin buttocks bending in the green-black broadcloth, supported on thin shanks, and thin throat growing dull purple in the red-knotted kerchief. Nevertheless he was doing the job. His face was wet with sweat. He wanted another glass of wine.

He took no notice of us. He was strangely a local, even a mountebank figure, but entirely local, an appurtenance of the district.

It was Maria who jeeringly told us the story of the priest, who shrugged her shoulders to imply that he was a contemptible figure. Paolo sat with the abstract look on his face, as of one who hears and does not hear, is not really concerned. He never opposed or contradicted her, but stayed apart. It was she who was violent and brutal in her ways. But sometimes Paolo went into a rage, and then Maria, everybody, was afraid. It was a white heavy rage, when his blue eyes shone unearthly, and his mouth opened with a curious drawn blindness of the old Furies. There was something of the cruelty of a falling mass of snow, heavy, horrible. Maria drew away, there was a silence. Then the avalanche was finished.

They must have had some cruel fights before they learned to withdraw from each other so completely. They must have begotten Marco in hatred, terrible disintegrated opposition and otherness. And it was after this, after the child of their opposition was born, that Paolo went away to California, leaving his San Gaudenzio, travelling with several companions, like blind beasts, to Havre, and thence to New York, then to California. He stayed five years in the gold-mines, in a wild valley, living with a gang of Italians in a town of corrugated iron.

All the while he had never really left San Gaudenzio. I asked him, 'Used you to think of it, the lake, the Monte Baldo, the laurel trees down the slope?' He tried to see what I wanted to know. Yes, he said — but uncertainly. I could see

that he had never been really homesick. It had been very wretched on the ship going from Havre to New York. That he told me about. And he told me about the gold-mines, the galleries, the valley, the huts in the valley. But he had never really fretted for San Gaudenzio whilst he was in California.

In real truth he was at San Gaudenzio all the time, his fate was riveted there. His going away was an excursion from reality, a kind of sleep-walking. He left his own reality there in the soil above the lake of Garda. That his body was in California, what did it matter? It was merely for a time, and for the sake of his own earth, his land. He would pay off the mortgage. But the gate at home was his gate all the time, his hand was on the latch.

As for Maria, he had felt his duty towards her. She was part of his little territory, the rooted centre of the world. He sent her home the money. But it did not occur to him, in his soul, to miss her. He wanted her to be safe with the children, that was all. In his flesh perhaps he missed the woman. But his spirit was even more completely isolated since marriage. Instead of having united with each other, they had made each other more terribly distinct and separate. He could live alone eternally. It was his condition. His sex was functional, like eating and drinking. To take a woman, a prostitute at the camp, or not to take her, was no more vitally important than to get drunk or not to get drunk of a Sunday. And fairly often on Sunday Paolo got drunk. His world remained unaltered.

But Maria suffered more bitterly. She was a young, powerful, passionate woman, and she was unsatisfied body and soul. Her soul's satisfaction became a bodily unsatisfaction. Her blood was heavy, violent, anarchic, insisting on the equality of the blood in all, and therefore on her own absolute right to satisfaction.

She took a wine licence for San Gaudenzio, and she sold wine. There were many scandals about her. Somehow it did not matter very much, outwardly. The authorities were too divided among themselves to enforce public opinion. Between the clerical party and the radicals and the socialists, what canons were left that were absolute? Besides, these wild villages had always been ungoverned.

Yet Maria suffered. Even she, according to her conviction belonged to Paolo. And she felt betrayed, betrayed and deserted. The iron had gone deep into her soul. Paolo had deserted her, she had been betrayed to other men for five years. There was something cruel and implacable in life. She sat sullen and heavy, for all her quick activity. Her soul was sullen and heavy.

I could never believe Felicina was Paolo's child. She was an unprepossessing little girl, affected, cold, selfish, foolish. Maria and Paolo, with real Italian

greatness, were warm and natural towards the child in her. But they did not love her in their very souls, she was the fruit of ash to them. And this must have been the reason that she was so self-conscious and foolish and affected, small child that she was.

Paolo had come back from America a year before she was born — a year before she was born, Maria insisted. The husband and wife lived together in a relationship of complete negation. In his soul he was sad for her, and in her soul she felt annulled. He sat at evening in the chimney-seat, smoking, always pleasant and cheerful, not for a moment thinking he was unhappy. It had all taken place in his subconsciousness. But his eyebrows and eyelids were lifted in a kind of vacancy, his blue eyes were round and somehow finished, though he was so gentle and vigorous in body. But the very quick of him was killed. He was like a ghost in the house, with his loose throat and powerful limbs, his open, blue extinct eyes, and his musical, slightly husky voice, that seemed to sound out of the past.

And Maria, stout and strong and handsome like a peasant woman, went about as if there were a weight on her, and her voice was high and strident. She, too, was finished in her life. But she remained unbroken, her will was like a hammer that destroys the old form.

Giovanni was patiently labouring to learn a little English. Paolo knew only four or five words, the chief of which were ‘a’right’, ‘boss’, ‘bread’, and ‘day’. The youth had these by heart, and was studying a little more. He was very graceful and lovable, but he found it difficult to learn. A confused light, like hot tears, would come into his eyes when he had again forgotten the phrase. But he carried the paper about with him, and he made steady progress.

He would go to America, he also. Not for anything would he stay in San Gaudenzio. His dream was to be gone. He would come back. The world was not San Gaudenzio to Giovanni.

The old order, the order of Paolo and of Pietro di Paoli, the aristocratic order of the supreme God, God the Father, the Lord, was passing away from the beautiful little territory. The household no longer receives its food, oil and wine and maize, from out of the earth in the motion of fate. The earth is annulled, and money takes its place. The landowner, who is the lieutenant of God and of Fate, like Abraham, he, too, is annulled. There is now the order of the rich, which supersedes the order of the Signoria.

It is passing away from Italy as it has passed from England. The peasant is passing away, the workman is taking his place. The stability is gone. Paolo is a ghost, Maria is the living body. And the new order means sorrow for the Italian more even than it has meant for us. But he will have the new order.

San Gaudenzio is already becoming a thing of the past. Below the house, where the land drops in sharp slips to the sheer cliff's edge, over which it is Maria's constant fear that Felicina will tumble, there are the deserted lemon gardens of the little territory, snug down below. They are invisible till one descends by tiny paths, sheer down into them. And there they stand, the pillars and walls erect, but a dead emptiness prevailing, lemon trees all dead, gone, a few vines in their place. It is only twenty years since the lemon trees finally perished of a disease and were not renewed. But the deserted terrace, shut between great walls, descending in their openness full to the south, to the lake and the mountain opposite, seem more terrible than Pompeii in their silence and utter seclusion. The grape hyacinths flower in the cracks, the lizards run, this strange place hangs suspended and forgotten, forgotten for ever, its erect pillars utterly meaningless.

I used to sit and write in the great loft of the lemon-house, high up, far, far from the ground, the open front giving across the lake and the mountain snow opposite, flush with twilight. The old matting and boards, the old disused implements of lemon culture made shadows in the deserted place. Then there would come the call from the back, away above: '*Venga, venga mangiare.*'

We ate in the kitchen, where the olive and laurel wood burned in the open fireplace. It was always soup in the evening. Then we played games or cards, all playing; or there was singing, with the accordion, and sometimes a rough mountain peasant with a guitar.

But it is all passing away. Giovanni is in America, unless he has come back to the War. He will not want to live in San Gaudenzio when he is a man, he says. He and Marco will not spend their lives wringing a little oil and wine out of the rocky soil, even if they are not killed in the fighting which is going on at the end of the lake. In my loft by the lemon-houses now I should hear the guns. And Giovanni kissed me with a kind of supplication when I went on to the steamer, as if he were beseeching for a soul. His eyes were bright and clear and lit up with courage. He will make a good fight for the new soul he wants — that is, if they do not kill him in this War.

5

THE DANCE

Maria had no real licence for San Gaudenzio, yet the peasants always called for wine. It is easy to arrange in Italy. The penny is paid another time.

The wild old road that skirts the lake-side, scrambling always higher as the precipice becomes steeper, climbing and winding to the villages perched high up, passes under the high boundary-wall of San Gaudenzio, between that and the ruined church. But the road went just as much between the vines and past the

house as outside, under the wall; for the high gates were always open, and men or women and mules come into the property to call at the door of the homestead. There was a loud shout, 'Ah — a — a — ah — Mari — a. O — O — Oh Pa'o!' from outside, another wild, inarticulate cry from within, and one of the Fiori appeared in the doorway to hail the newcomer.

It was usually a man, sometimes a peasant from Mugiano, high up, sometimes a peasant from the wilds of the mountain, a wood-cutter, or a charcoal-burner. He came in and sat in the house-place, his glass of wine in his hand between his knees, or on the floor between his feet, and he talked in a few wild phrases, very shy, like a hawk indoors, and unintelligible in his dialect.

Sometimes we had a dance. Then, for the wine to drink, three men came with mandolines and guitars, and sat in a corner playing their rapid tunes, while all danced on the dusty brick floor of the little parlour. No strange women were invited, only men; the young bloods from the big village on the lake, the wild men from above. They danced the slow, trailing, lilted polka-waltz round and round the small room, the guitars and mandolines twanging rapidly, the dust rising from the soft bricks. There were only the two English women: so men danced with men, as the Italians love to do. They love even better to dance with men, with a dear blood-friend, than with women.

'It's better like this, two men?' Giovanni says to me, his blue eyes hot, his face curiously tender.

The wood-cutters and peasants take off their coats, their throats are bare. They dance with strange intentness, particularly if they have for partner an English Signora. Their feet in thick boots are curiously swift and significant. And it is strange to see the Englishwomen, as they dance with the peasants transfigured with a kind of brilliant surprise. All the while the peasants are very courteous, but quiet. They see the women dilate and flash, they think they have found a footing, they are certain. So the male dancers are quiet, but even grandiloquent, their feet nimble, their bodies wild and confident.

They are at a loss when the two English Signoras move together and laugh excitedly at the end of the dance.

'Isn't it fine?'

'Fine! Their arms are like iron, carrying you round.'

'Yes! Yes! And the muscles on their shoulders! I never knew there were such muscles! I'm almost frightened.'

'But it's fine, isn't it? I'm getting into the dance.'

'Yes — yes — you've only to let them take you.'

Then the glasses are put down, the guitars give their strange, vibrant, almost painful summons, and the dance begins again.

It is a strange dance, strange and lilting, and changing as the music changed. But it had always a kind of leisurely dignity, a trailing kind of polka-waltz, intimate, passionate, yet never hurried, never violent in its passion, always becoming more intense. The women's faces changed to a kind of transported wonder, they were in the very rhythm of delight. From the soft bricks of the floor the red ochre rose in a thin cloud of dust, making hazy the shadowy dancers; the three musicians, in their black hats and their cloaks, sat obscurely in the corner, making a music that came quicker and quicker, making a dance that grew swifter and more intense, more subtle, the men seeming to fly and to implicate other strange inter-rhythmic dance into the women, the women drifting and palpitating as if their souls shook and resounded to a breeze that was subtly rushing upon them, through them; the men worked their feet, their thighs swifter, more vividly, the music came to an almost intolerable climax, there was a moment when the dance passed into a possession, the men caught up the women and swung them from the earth, leapt with them for a second, and then the next phase of the dance had begun, slower again, more subtly interwoven, taking perfect, oh, exquisite delight in every interrelated movement, a rhythm within a rhythm, a subtle approaching and drawing nearer to a climax, nearer, till, oh, there was the surpassing lift and swing of the women, when the woman's body seemed like a boat lifted over the powerful, exquisite wave of the man's body, perfect, for a moment, and then once more the slow, intense, nearer movement of the dance began, always nearer, nearer, always to a more perfect climax.

And the women waited as if in transport for the climax, when they would be flung into a movement surpassing all movement. They were flung, borne away, lifted like a boat on a supreme wave, into the zenith and nave of the heavens, consummate.

Then suddenly the dance crashed to an end, and the dancers stood stranded, lost, bewildered, on a strange shore. The air was full of red dust, half-lit by the lamp on the wall; the players in the corner were putting down their instruments to take up their glasses.

And the dancers sat round the wall, crowding in the little room, faint with the transport of repeated ecstasy. There was a subtle smile on the face of the men, subtle, knowing, so finely sensual that the conscious eyes could scarcely look at it. And the women were dazed, like creatures dazzled by too much light. The light was still on their faces, like a blindness, a reeling, like a transfiguration. The men were bringing wine, on a little tin tray, leaning with their proud, vivid loins, their faces flickering with the same subtle smile. Meanwhile, Maria Fiori was splashing water, much water, on the red floor. There was the smell of water among the glowing, transfigured men and women who sat gleaming in another

world, round the walls.

The peasants have chosen their women. For the dark, handsome Englishwoman, who looks like a slightly malignant Madonna, comes Il Duro; for the '*bella bionda*', the wood-cutter. But the peasants have always to take their turn after the young well-to-do men from the village below.

Nevertheless, they are confident. They cannot understand the middle-class diffidence of the young men who wear collars and ties and finger-rings.

The wood-cutter from the mountain is of medium height, dark, thin, and hard as a hatchet, with eyes that are black like the very flaming thrust of night. He is quite a savage. There is something strange about his dancing, the violent way he works one shoulder. He has a wooden leg, from the knee-joint. Yet he dances well, and is inordinately proud. He is fierce as a bird, and hard with energy as a thunderbolt. He will dance with the blonde signora. But he never speaks. He is like some violent natural phenomenon rather than a person. The woman begins to wilt a little in his possession.

'*È bello — il ballo?*' he asked at length, one direct, flashing question.

'*Si — molto bello,*' cries the woman, glad to have speech again.

The eyes of the wood-cutter flash like actual possession. He seems now to have come into his own. With all his senses, he is dominant, sure.

He is inconceivably vigorous in body, and his dancing is almost perfect, with a little catch in it, owing to his lameness, which brings almost a pure intoxication. Every muscle in his body is supple as steel, supple, as strong as thunder, and yet so quick, so delicately swift, it is almost unbearable. As he draws near to the swing, the climax, the ecstasy, he seems to lie in wait, there is a sense of a great strength crouching ready. Then it rushes forth, liquid, perfect, transcendent, the woman swoons over in the dance, and it goes on, enjoyment, infinite, incalculable enjoyment. He is like a god, a strange natural phenomenon, most intimate and compelling, wonderful.

But he is not a human being. The woman, somewhere shocked in her independent soul, begins to fall away from him. She has another being, which he has not touched, and which she will fall back upon. The dance is over, she will fall back on herself. It is perfect, too perfect.

During the next dance, while she is in the power of the educated Ettore, a perfect and calculated voluptuary, who knows how much he can get out of this Northern woman, and only how much, the wood-cutter stands on the edge of the darkness, in the open doorway, and watches. He is fixed upon her, established, perfect. And all the while she is aware of the insistent hawk-like poisoning of the face of the wood-cutter, poised on the edge of the darkness, in the doorway, in possession, unrelinquishing.

And she is angry. There is something stupid, absurd, in the hard, talon-like eyes watching so fiercely and so confidently in the doorway, sure, unmitigated. Has the creature no sense?

The woman reacts from him. For some time she will take no notice of him. But he waits, fixed. Then she comes near to him, and his will seems to take hold of her. He looks at her with a strange, proud, inhuman confidence, as if his influence with her was already accomplished.

‘*Venga — venga un po’*,’ he says, jerking his head strangely to the darkness.

‘What?’ she replies, and passes shaken and dilated and brilliant, consciously ignoring him, passes away among the others, among those who are safe.

There is food in the kitchen, great hunks of bread, sliced sausage that Maria has made, wine, and a little coffee. But only the quality come to eat. The peasants may not come in. There is eating and drinking in the little house, the guitars are silent. It is eleven o’clock.

Then there is singing, the strange bestial singing of these hills. Sometimes the guitars can play an accompaniment, but usually not. Then the men lift up their heads and send out the high, half-howling music, astounding. The words are in dialect. They argue among themselves for a moment: will the Signoria understand? They sing. The Signoria does not understand in the least. So with a strange, slightly malignant triumph, the men sing all the verses of their song, sitting round the walls of the little parlour. Their throats move, their faces have a slight mocking smile. The boy capers in the doorway like a faun, with glee, his straight black hair falling over his forehead. The elder brother sits straight and flushed, but even his eyes glitter with a kind of yellow light of laughter. Paolo also sits quiet, with the invisible smile on his face.’ Only Maria, large and active, prospering now, keeps collected, ready to order a shrill silence in the same way as she orders the peasants, violently, to keep their places.

The boy comes to me and says:

‘Do you know, Signore, what they are singing?’

‘No,’ I say.

So he capers with furious glee. The men with the watchful eyes, all roused, sit round the wall and sing more distinctly:

*Si verrà la primavera
Fiorann’ le mandoline,
Vienn’ di basso le Trentine
Coi ‘taliani far’ l’amor.*

But the next verses are so improper that I pretend not to understand. The women, with wakened, dilated faces, are listening, listening hard, their two faces beautiful in their attention, as if listening to something magical, a long way off.

And the men sitting round the wall sing more plainly, coming nearer to the correct Italian. The song comes loud and vibrating and maliciously from their reedy throats, it penetrates everybody. The foreign women can understand the sound, they can feel the malicious, suggestive mockery. But they cannot catch the words. The smile becomes more dangerous on the faces of the men.

Then Maria Fiori sees that I have understood, and she cries, in her loud, overriding voice:

'Basta — basta.

The men get up, straighten their bodies with a curious, offering movement. The guitars and mandolines strike the vibrating strings. But the vague Northern reserve has come over the Englishwomen. They dance again, but without the fusion in the dance. They have had enough.

The musicians are thanked, they rise and go into the night. The men pass off in pairs. But the wood-cutter, whose name and whose nickname I could never hear, still hovered on the edge of the darkness.

Then Maria sent him also away, complaining that he was too wild, *proprio selvatico*, and only the 'quality' remained, the well-to-do youths from below. There was a little more coffee, and a talking, a story of a man who had fallen over a declivity in a lonely part going home drunk in the evening, and had lain unbound for eighteen hours. Then a story of a donkey who had kicked a youth in the chest and killed him.

But the women were tired, they would go to bed. Still the two young men would not go away. We all went out to look at the night.

The stars were very bright overhead, the mountain opposite and the mountains behind us faintly outlined themselves on the sky. Below, the lake was a black gulf. A little wind blew cold from the Adige.

In the morning the visitors had gone. They had insisted on staying the night. They had eaten eight eggs each and much bread at one o'clock in the morning. Then they had gone to sleep, lying on the floor in the sitting-room.

In the early sunshine they had drunk coffee and gone down to the village on the lake. Maria was very pleased. She would have made a good deal of money. The young men were rich. Her cupidity seemed like her very blossom.

6

IL DURO

The first time I saw Il Duro was on a sunny day when there came up a party of pleasure-makers to San Gaudenzio. They were three women and three men. The women were in cotton frocks, one a large, dark, florid woman in pink, the other two rather insignificant. The men I scarcely noticed at first, except that two were young and one elderly.

They were a queer party, even on a feast day, coming up purely for pleasure, in the morning, strange, and slightly uncertain, advancing between the vines. They greeted Maria and Paolo in loud, coarse voices. There was something blowsy and uncertain and hesitating about the women in particular, which made one at once notice them.

Then a picnic was arranged for them out of doors, on the grass. They sat just in front of the house, under the olive tree, beyond the well. It should have been pretty, the women in their cotton frocks, and their friends, sitting with wine and food in the spring sunshine. But somehow it was not: it was hard and slightly ugly.

But since they were picnicking out of doors, we must do so too. We were at once envious. But Maria was a little unwilling, and then she set a table for us.

The strange party did not speak to us, they seemed slightly uneasy and angry at our presence. I asked Maria who they were. She lifted her shoulders, and, after a second's cold pause, said they were people from down below, and then, in her rather strident, shrill, slightly bitter, slightly derogatory voice, she added:

‘They are not people for you, signore. You don't know them.’

She spoke slightly angrily and contemptuously of them, rather protectively of me. So that vaguely I gathered that they were not quite ‘respectable’.

Only one man came into the house. He was very handsome, beautiful rather, a man of thirty-two or three, with a clear golden skin, and perfectly turned face, something godlike. But the expression was strange. His hair was jet black and fine and smooth, glossy as a bird's wing, his brows were beautifully drawn, calm above his grey eyes, that had long dark lashes.

His eyes, however, had a sinister light in them, a pale, slightly repelling gleam, very much like a god's pale-gleaming eyes, with the same vivid pallor. And all his face had the slightly malignant, suffering look of a satyr. Yet he was very beautiful.

He walked quickly and surely, with his head rather down, passing from his desire to his object, absorbed, yet curiously indifferent, as if the transit were in a strange world, as if none of what he was doing were worth the while. Yet he did it for his own pleasure, and the light on his face, a pale, strange gleam through his clear skin, remained like a translucent smile, unchanging as time.

He seemed familiar with the household, he came and fetched wine at his will. Maria was angry with him. She railed loudly and violently. He was unchanged. He went out with the wine to the party on the grass. Maria regarded them all with some hostility.

They drank a good deal out there in the sunshine. The women and the older man talked floridly. Il Duro crouched at the feast in his curious fashion — he

had strangely flexible loins, upon which he seemed to crouch forward. But he was separate, like an animal that remains quite single, no matter where it is.

The party remained until about two o'clock. Then, slightly flushed, it moved on in a ragged group up to the village beyond. I do not know if they went to one of the inns of the stony village, or to the large strange house which belonged to the rich young grocer of the village below, a house kept only for feasts and riots, uninhabited for the most part. Maria would tell me nothing about them. Only the young well-to-do grocer, who had lived in Vienna, the Bertolotti, came later in the afternoon inquiring for the party.

And towards sunset I saw the elderly man of the group stumbling home very drunk down the path, after the two women, who had gone on in front. Then Paolo sent Giovanni to see the drunken one safely past the landslip, which was dangerous. Altogether it was an unsatisfactory business, very much like any other such party in any other country.

Then in the evening Il Duro came in. His name is Faustino, but everybody in the village has a nickname, which is almost invariably used. He came in and asked for supper. We had all eaten. So he ate a little food alone at the table, whilst we sat round the fire.

Afterwards we played 'Up, Jenkins'. That was the one game we played with the peasants, except that exciting one of theirs, which consists in shouting in rapid succession your guesses at the number of fingers rapidly spread out and shut into the hands again upon the table.

Il Duro joined in the game. And that was because he had been in America, and now was rich. He felt he could come near to the strange signori. But he was always inscrutable.

It was queer to look at the hands spread on the table: the Englishwomen, having rings on their soft fingers; the large fresh hands of the elder boy, the brown paws of the younger; Paolo's distorted great hard hands of a peasant; and the big, dark brown, animal, shapely hands of Faustino.

He had been in America first for two years and then for five years — seven years altogether — but he only spoke a very little English. He was always with Italians. He had served chiefly in a flag factory, and had had very little to do save to push a trolley with flags from the dyeing-room to the drying-room I believe it was this.

Then he had come home from America with a fair amount of money, he had taken his uncle's garden, had inherited his uncle's little house, and he lived quite alone.

He was rich, Maria said, shouting in her strident voice. He at once disclaimed it, peasant-wise. But before the signori he was glad also to appear rich. He was

mean, that was more, Maria cried, half-teasing, half getting at him.

He attended to his garden, grew vegetables all the year round, lived in his little house, and in spring made good money as a vine-grafter: he was an expert vine-grafter.

After the boys had gone to bed he sat and talked to me. He was curiously attractive and curiously beautiful, but somehow like stone in his clear colouring and his clear-cut face. His temples, with the black hair, were distinct and fine as a work of art.

But always his eyes had this strange, half-diabolic, half-tortured pale gleam, like a goat's, and his mouth was shut almost uglily, his cheeks stern. His moustache was brown, his teeth strong and spaced. The women said it was a pity his moustache was brown.

'*Peccato!* — *sa, per bellezza, i baffi neri — ah-h!*'

Then a long-drawn exclamation of voluptuous appreciation.

'You live quite alone?' I said to him.

He did. And even when he had been ill he was alone. He had been ill two years before. His cheeks seemed to harden like marble and to become pale at the thought. He was afraid, like marble with fear.

'But why,' I said, 'why do you live alone? You are sad — *è triste.*'

He looked at me with his queer, pale eyes. I felt a great static misery in him, something very strange.

'*Triste!*' he repeated, stiffening up, hostile. I could not understand.

'*Vuol' dire che hai l'aria dolorosa,*' cried Maria, like a chorus interpreting. And there was always a sort of loud ring of challenge somewhere in her voice.

'Sad,' I said in English.

'Sad I' he repeated, also in English. And he did not smile or change, only his face seemed to become more stone-like. And he only looked at me, into my eyes, with the long, pale, steady, inscrutable look of a goat, I can only repeat, something stone-like.

'Why,' I said, 'don't you marry? Man doesn't live alone.'

'I don't marry,' he said to me, in his emphatic, deliberate, cold fashion, 'because I've seen too much. *Ho visto troppo.*'

'I don't understand,' I said.

Yet I could feel that Paolo, sitting silent, like a monolith also, in the chimney opening, he understood: Maria also understood.

Il Duro looked again steadily into my eyes.

'*Ho visto troppo,*' he repeated, and the words seemed engraved on stone. 'I've seen too much.'

'But you can marry,' I said, 'however much you have seen, if you have seen

all the world.'

He watched me steadily, like a strange creature looking at me.

'What woman?' he said to me.

'You can find a woman — there are plenty of women,' I said.

'Not for me,' he said. 'I have known too many. I've known too much, I can marry nobody.'

'Do you dislike women?' I said.

'No — quite otherwise. I don't think ill of them.'

'Then why can't you marry? Why must you live alone?'

'Why live with a woman?' he said to me, and he looked mockingly. 'Which woman is it to be?'

'You can find her,' I said. 'There are many women.'

Again he shook his head in the stony, final fashion.

'Not for me. I have known too much.'

'But does that prevent you from marrying?'

He looked at me steadily, finally. And I could see it was impossible for us to understand each other, or for me to understand him. I could not understand the strange white gleam of his eyes, where it came from.

Also I knew he liked me very much, almost loved me, which again was strange and puzzling. It was as if he were a fairy, a faun, and had no soul. But he gave me a feeling of vivid sadness, a sadness that gleamed like phosphorescence. He himself was not sad. There was a completeness about him, about the pallid otherworld he inhabited, which excluded sadness. It was too complete, too final, too defined. There was no yearning, no vague merging off into mistiness.... He was clear and fine as semi-transparent rock, as a substance in moonlight. He seemed like a crystal that has achieved its final shape and has nothing more to achieve.

That night he slept on the floor of the sitting-room. In the morning he was gone. But a week after he came again, to graft the vines.

All the morning and the afternoon he was among the vines, crouching before them, cutting them back with his sharp, bright knife, amazingly swift and sure, like a god. It filled me with a sort of panic to see him crouched flexibly, like some strange animal god, doubled on his haunches, before the young vines, and swiftly, vividly, without thought, cut, cut, cut at the young budding shoots, which fell unheeded on to the earth. Then again he strode with his curious half-goatlike movement across the garden, to prepare the lime.

He mixed the messy stuff, cow-dung and lime and water and earth, carefully with his hands, as if he understood that too. He was not a worker. He was a creature in intimate communion with the sensible world, knowing purely by

touch the limey mess he mixed amongst, knowing as if by relation between that soft matter and the matter of himself.

Then again he strode over the earth, a gleaming piece of earth himself, moving to the young vines. Quickly, with a few clean cuts of the knife, he prepared the new shoot, which he had picked out of a handful which lay beside him on the ground; he went finely to the quick of the plant, inserted the graft, then bound it up, fast, hard.

It was like God grafting the life of man upon the body of the earth, intimately conjuring with his own flesh.

All the while Paolo stood by, somehow excluded from the mystery, talking to me, to Faustino. And Il Duro answered easily, as if his mind were disengaged. It was his senses that were absorbed in the sensible life of the plant, and the lime and the cow-dung he handled.

Watching him, watching his absorbed, bestial, and yet godlike crouching before the plant, as if he were the god of lower life, I somehow understood his isolation, why he did not marry. Pan and the ministers of Pan do not marry, the sylvan gods. They are single and isolated in their being.

It is in the spirit that marriage takes place. In the flesh there is connexion, but only in the spirit is there a new thing created out of two different antithetic things. In the body I am conjoined with the woman. But in the spirit my conjunction with her creates a third thing, an absolute, a Word, which is neither me nor her, nor of me nor of her, but which is absolute.

And Faustino had none of this spirit. In him sensation itself was absolute — not spiritual consummation, but physical sensation. So he could not marry, it was not for him. He belonged to the god Pan, to the absolute of the senses.

All the while his beauty, so perfect and so defined, fascinated me, a strange static perfection about him. But his movements, whilst they fascinated, also repelled. I can always see him crouched before the vines on his haunches, his haunches doubled together in a complete animal unconsciousness, his face seeming in its strange golden pallor and its hardness of line, with the gleaming black of the fine hair on the brow and temples, like something reflective, like the reflecting surface of a stone that gleams out of the depths of night. It was like darkness revealed in its steady, unchanging pallor.

Again he stayed through the evening, having quarrelled once more with the Maria about money. He quarrelled violently, yet coldly. There was something terrifying in it. And as soon as the matter of dispute was settled, all trace of interest or feeling vanished from him.

Yet he liked, above all things, to be near the English signori. They seemed to exercise a sort of magnetic attraction over him. It was something of the purely

physical world, as a magnetized needle swings towards soft iron. He was quite helpless in the relation. Only by mechanical attraction he gravitated into line with us.

But there was nothing between us except our complete difference. It was like night and day flowing together.

7

JOHN

Besides Il Duro, we found another Italian who could speak English, this time quite well. We had walked about four or five miles up the lake, getting higher and higher. Then quite suddenly, on the shoulder of a bluff far up, we came on a village, icy cold, and as if forgotten.

We went into the inn to drink something hot. The fire of olive sticks was burning in the open chimney, one or two men were talking at a table, a young woman with a baby stood by the fire watching something boil in a large pot. Another woman was seen in the house-place beyond.

In the chimney-seats sat a young mule-driver, who had left his two mules at the door of the inn, and opposite him an elderly stout man. They got down and offered us the seats of honour, which we accepted with due courtesy.

The chimneys are like the wide, open chimney-places of old English cottages, but the hearth is raised about a foot and a half or two feet from the floor, so that the fire is almost level with the hands; and those who sit in the chimney-seats are raised above the audience in the room, something like two gods flanking the fire, looking out of the cave of ruddy darkness into the open, lower world of the room.

We asked for coffee with milk and rum. The stout landlord took a seat near us below. The comely young woman with the baby took the tin coffee-pot that stood among the grey ashes, put in fresh coffee among the old bottoms, filled it with water, then pushed it more into the fire.

The landlord turned to us with the usual naïve, curious deference, and the usual question:

‘You are Germans?’

‘English.’

‘Ah — *Ingesi.*’

Then there is a new note of cordiality — or so I always imagine — and the rather rough, cattle-like men who are sitting with their wine round the table look up more amicably. They do not like being intruded upon. Only the landlord is always affable.

‘I have a son who speaks English,’ he says: he is a handsome, courtly old man, of the Falstaff sort.

‘Oh!’

‘He has been in America.’

‘And where is he now?’

‘He is at home. O — Nicoletta, where is the Giovann?’

The comely young woman with the baby came in.

‘He is with the band,’ she said.

The old landlord looked at her with pride.

‘This is my daughter-in-law,’ he said.

She smiled readily to the Signora.

‘And the baby?’ we asked.

‘*Mio figlio*,’ cried the young woman, in the strong, penetrating voice of these women. And she came forward to show the child to the Signora.

It was a bonny baby: the whole company was united in adoration and service of the bambino. There was a moment of suspension, when religious submission seemed to come over the inn-room.

Then the Signora began to talk, and it broke upon the Italian child-reverence.

‘What is he called?’

‘Oscare,’ came the ringing note of pride. And the mother talked to the baby in dialect. All, men and women alike, felt themselves glorified by the presence of the child.

At last the coffee in the tin coffee-pot was boiling and frothing out of spout and lid. The milk in the little copper pan was also hot, among the ashes. So we had our drink at last.

The landlord was anxious for us to see Giovanni, his son. There was a village band performing up the street, in front of the house of a colonel who had come home wounded from Tripoli. Everybody in the village was wildly proud about the colonel and about the brass band, the music of which was execrable.

We just looked into the street. The band of uncouth fellows was playing the same tune over and over again before a desolate, newish house. A crowd of desolate, forgotten villagers stood round in the cold upper air. It seemed altogether that the place was forgotten by God and man.

But the landlord, burly, courteous, handsome, pointed out with a flourish the Giovanni, standing in the band playing a cornet. The band itself consisted only of five men, rather like beggars in the street. But Giovanni was the strangest! He was tall and thin and somewhat German-looking, wearing shabby American clothes and a very high double collar and a small American crush hat. He looked entirely like a ne’er-do-well who plays a violin in the street, dressed in the most down-at-heel, sordid respectability.

‘That is he — you see, Signore — the young one under the balcony.’

The father spoke with love and pride, and the father was a gentleman, like Falstaff, a pure gentleman. The daughter-in-law also peered out to look at Il Giovann', who was evidently a figure of repute, in his sordid, degenerate American respectability. Meanwhile, this figure of repute blew himself red in the face, producing staccato strains on his cornet. And the crowd stood desolate and forsaken in the cold, upper afternoon.

Then there was a sudden rugged 'Evviva, Evviva!' from the people, the band stopped playing, somebody valiantly broke into a line of the song:

Tripoli, sarà italiana,

Sarà italiana al rombo del cannon'.

The colonel had appeared on the balcony, a smallish man, very yellow in the face, with grizzled black hair and very shabby legs. They all seemed so sordidly, hopelessly shabby.

He suddenly began to speak, leaning forward, hot and feverish and yellow, upon the iron rail of the balcony. There was something hot and marshy and sick about him, slightly repulsive, less than human. He told his fellow-villagers how he loved them, how, when he lay uncovered on the sands of Tripoli, week after week, he had known they were watching him from the Alpine height of the village, he could feel that where he was they were all looking. When the Arabs came rushing like things gone mad, and he had received his wound, he had known that in his own village, among his own dear ones, there was recovery. Love would heal the wounds, the home country was a lover who would heal all her sons' wounds with love.

Among the grey desolate crowd were sharp, rending 'Bravos!' — the people were in tears — the landlord at my side was repeating softly, abstractedly: '*Caro — caro — Ettore, caro colonello —*' and when it was finished, and the little colonel with shabby, humiliated legs was gone in, he turned to me and said, with challenge that almost frightened me:

'Un brav' uomo.'

'Bravissimo,' I said.

Then we, too, went indoors.

It was all, somehow, grey and hopeless and acrid, unendurable.

The colonel, poor devil — we knew him afterwards — is now dead. It is strange that he is dead. There is something repulsive to me in the thought of his lying dead: such a humiliating, somehow degraded corpse. Death has no beauty in Italy, unless it be violent. The death of man or woman through sickness is an occasion of horror, repulsive. They belong entirely to life, they are so limited to life, these people.

Soon the Giovanni came home, and took his cornet upstairs. Then he came to

see us. He was an ingenuous youth, sordidly shabby and dirty. His fair hair was long and uneven, his very high starched collar made one aware that his neck and his ears were not clean, his American crimson tie was ugly, his clothes looked as if they had been kicking about on the floor for a year.

Yet his blue eyes were warm and his manner and speech very gentle.

‘You will speak English with us,’ I said.

‘Oh,’ he said, smiling and shaking his head, ‘I could speak English very well. But it is two years that I don’t speak it now, over two years now, so I don’t speak it.’

‘But you speak it very well.’

‘No. It is two years that I have not spoke, not a word — so, you see, I have —

‘You have forgotten it? No, you haven’t. It will quickly come back.’

‘If I hear it — when I go to America — then I shall — I shall — ’

‘You will soon pick it up.’

‘Yes — I shall pick it up.’

The landlord, who had been watching with pride, now went away. The wife also went away, and we were left with the shy, gentle, dirty, and frowsily-dressed Giovanni.

He laughed in his sensitive, quick fashion.

‘The women in America, when they came into the store, they said, “Where is John, where is John?” Yes, they liked me.’

And he laughed again, glancing with vague, warm blue eyes, very shy, very coiled upon himself with sensitiveness.

He had managed a store in America, in a smallish town. I glanced at his reddish, smooth, rather knuckly hands, and thin wrists in the frayed cuff. They were real shopman’s hands.

The landlord brought some special feast-day cake, so overjoyed he was to have his Giovanni speaking English with the Signoria.

When we went away, we asked ‘John’ to come down to our villa to see us. We scarcely expected him to turn up.

Yet one morning he appeared, at about half past nine, just as we were finishing breakfast. It was sunny and warm and beautiful, so we asked him please to come with us picnicking.

He was a queer shoot, again, in his unkempt longish hair and slovenly clothes, a sort of very vulgar down-at-heel American in appearance. And he was transported with shyness. Yet ours was the world he had chosen as his own, so he took his place bravely and simply, a hanger-on.

We climbed up the water-course in the mountain-side, up to a smooth little

lawn under the olive trees, where daisies were flowering and gladioli were in bud. It was a tiny little lawn of grass in a level crevice, and sitting there we had the world below us — the lake, the distant island, the far-off low Verona shore.

Then 'John' began to talk, and he talked continuously, like a foreigner, not saying the things he would have said in Italian, but following the suggestion and scope of his limited English.

In the first place, he loved his father — it was 'my father, my father' always. His father had a little shop as well as the inn in the village above. So John had had some education. He had been sent to Brescia and then to Verona to school, and there had taken his examinations to become a civil engineer. He was clever, and could pass his examinations. But he never finished his course. His mother died, and his father, disconsolate, had wanted him at home. Then he had gone back, when he was sixteen or seventeen, to the village beyond the lake, to be with his father and to look after the shop.

'But didn't you mind giving up all your work?' I said.

He did not quite understand.

'My father wanted me to come back,' he said.

It was evident that Giovanni had had no definite conception of what he was doing or what he wanted to do. His father, wishing to make a gentleman of him, had sent him to school in Verona. By accident he had been moved on into the engineering course. When it all fizzled to an end, and he returned half-baked to the remote, desolate village of the mountain-side, he was not disappointed or chagrined. He had never conceived of a coherent purposive life. Either one stayed in the village, like a lodged stone, or one made random excursions into the world, across the world. It was all aimless and purposeless.

So he had stayed a while with his father, then he had gone, just as aimlessly, with a party of men who were emigrating to America. He had taken some money, had drifted about, living in the most comfortless, wretched fashion, then he had found a place somewhere in Pennsylvania, in a dry goods store. This was when he was seventeen or eighteen years old.

All this seemed to have happened to him without his being very much affected, at least consciously. His nature was simple and self-complete. Yet not so self-complete as that of Il Duro or Paolo. They had passed through the foreign world and been quite untouched. Their souls were static, it was the world that had flowed unstable by.

But John was more sensitive, he had come more into contact with his new surroundings. He had attended night classes almost every evening, and had been taught English like a child. He had loved the American free school, the teachers, the work.

But he had suffered very much in America. With his curious, over-sensitive, wincing laugh, he told us how the boys had followed him and jeered at him, calling after him, 'You damn Dago, you damn Dago.' They had stopped him and his friend in the street and taken away their hats, and spat into them. So that at last he had gone mad. They were youths and men who always tortured him, using bad language which startled us very much as he repeated it, there on the little lawn under the olive trees, above the perfect lake: English obscenities and abuse so coarse and startling that we bit our lips, shocked almost into laughter, whilst John, simple and natural, and somehow, for all his long hair and dirty appearance, flower-like in soul, repeated to us these things which may never be repeated in decent company.

'Oh,' he said, 'at last, I get mad. When they come one day, shouting, "You damn Dago, dirty dog," and will take my hat again, oh, I get mad, and I would kill them, I would kill them, I am so mad. I run to them, and throw one to the floor, and I tread on him while I go upon another, the biggest. Though they hit me and kick me all over, I feel nothing, I am mad. I throw the biggest to the floor, a man; he is older than I am, and I hit him so hard I would kill him. When the others see it they are afraid, they throw stones and hit me on the face. But I don't feel it — I don't know nothing. I hit the man on the floor, I almost kill him. I forget everything except I will kill him — '

'But you didn't?'

'No — I don't know — ' and he laughed his queer, shaken laugh. 'The other man that was with me, my friend, he came to me and we went away. Oh, I was mad. I was completely mad. I would have killed them.'

He was trembling slightly, and his eyes were dilated with a strange greyish-blue fire that was very painful and elemental. He looked beside himself. But he was by no means mad.

We were shaken by the vivid, lambent excitement of the youth, we wished him to forget. We were shocked, too, in our souls to see the pure elemental flame shaken out of his gentle, sensitive nature. By his slight, crinkled laugh we could see how much he had suffered. He had gone out and faced the world, and he had kept his place, stranger and Dago though he was.

'They never came after me no more, not all the while I was there.'

Then he said he became the foreman in the store — at first he was only assistant. It was the best store in the town, and many English ladies came, and some Germans. He liked the English ladies very much: they always wanted him to be in the store. He wore white clothes there, and they would say:

'You look very nice in the white coat, John'; or else:

'Let John come, he can find it'; or else they said:

‘John speaks like a born American.’

This pleased him very much.

In the end, he said, he earned a hundred dollars a month. He lived with the extraordinary frugality of the Italians, and had quite a lot of money.

He was not like Il Duro. Faustino had lived in a state of miserliness almost in America, but then he had had his debauches of shows and wine and carousals. John went chiefly to the schools, in one of which he was even asked to teach Italian. His knowledge of his own language was remarkable and most unusual!

‘But what,’ I asked, ‘brought you back?’

‘It was my father. You see, if I did not come to have my military service, I must stay till I am forty. So I think perhaps my father will be dead, I shall never see him. So I came.’

He had come home when he was twenty to fulfil his military duties. At home he had married. He was very fond of his wife, but he had no conception of love in the old sense. His wife was like the past, to which he was wedded. Out of her he begot his child, as out of the past. But the future was all beyond her, apart from her. He was going away again, now, to America. He had been some nine months at home after his military service was over. He had no more to do. Now he was leaving his wife and child and his father to go to America.

‘But why,’ I said, ‘why? You are not poor, you can manage the shop in your village.’

‘Yes,’ he said. ‘But I will go to America. Perhaps I shall go into the store again, the same.’

‘But is it not just the same as managing the shop at home?’

‘No — no — it is quite different.’

Then he told us how he bought goods in Brescia and in Said for the shop at home, how he had rigged up a funicular with the assistance of the village, an overhead wire by which you could haul the goods up the face of the cliffs right high up, to within a mile of the village. He was very proud of this. And sometimes he himself went down the funicular to the water’s edge, to the boat, when he was in a hurry. This also pleased him.

But he was going to Brescia this day to see about going again to America. Perhaps in another month he would be gone.

It was a great puzzle to me why he would go. He could not say himself. He would stay four or five years, then he would come home again to see his father — and his wife and child.

There was a strange, almost frightening destiny upon him, which seemed to take him away, always away from home, from the past, to that great, raw America. He seemed scarcely like a person with individual choice, more like a

creature under the influence of fate which was disintegrating the old life and precipitating him, a fragment inconclusive, into the new chaos.

He submitted to it all with a perfect unquestioning simplicity, never even knowing that he suffered, that he must suffer disintegration from the old life. He was moved entirely from within, he never questioned his inevitable impulse.

‘They say to me, “Don’t go — don’t go” — ’ he shook his head. ‘But I say I will go.’

And at that it was finished.

So we saw him off at the little quay, going down the lake. He would return at evening, and be pulled up in his funicular basket. And in a month’s time he would be standing on the same lake steamer going to America.

Nothing was more painful than to see him standing there in his degraded, sordid American clothes, on the deck of the steamer, waving us good-bye, belonging in his final desire to our world, the world of consciousness and deliberate action. With his candid, open, unquestioning face, he seemed like a prisoner being conveyed from one form of life to another, or like a soul in trajectory, that has not yet found a resting-place.

What were wife and child to him? — they were the last steps of the past. His father was the continent behind him; his wife and child the foreshore of the past; but his face was set outwards, away from it all — whither, neither he nor anybody knew, but he called it America.

ITALIANS IN EXILE

When I was in Constance the weather was misty and enervating and depressing, it was no pleasure to travel on the big flat desolate lake.

When I went from Constance, it was on a small steamer down the Rhine to Schaffhausen. That was beautiful. Still, the mist hung over the waters, over the wide shallows of the river, and the sun, coming through the morning, made lovely yellow lights beneath the bluish haze, so that it seemed like the beginning of the world. And there was a hawk in the upper air fighting with two crows, or two rooks. Ever they rose higher and higher, the crow flickering above the attacking hawk, the fight going on like some strange symbol in the sky, the Germans on deck watching with pleasure.

Then we passed out of sight between wooded banks and under bridges where quaint villages of old romance piled their red and coloured pointed roofs beside the water, very still, remote, lost in the vagueness of the past. It could not be that they were real. Even when the boat put in to shore, and the customs officials came to look, the village remained remote in the romantic past of High Germany, the Germany of fairy tales and minstrels and craftsmen. The poignancy of the past was almost unbearable, floating there in colour upon the haze of the river.

We went by some swimmers, whose white shadowy bodies trembled near the side of the steamer under water. One man with a round, fair head lifted his face and one arm from the water and shouted a greeting to us, as if he were a Niebelung, saluting with bright arm lifted from the water, his face laughing, the fair moustache hanging over his mouth. Then his white body swirled in the water, and he was gone, swimming with the side stroke.

Schaffhausen the town, half old and bygone, half modern, with breweries and industries, that is not very real. Schaffhausen Falls, with their factory in the midst and their hotel at the bottom, and the general cinematograph effect, they are ugly.

It was afternoon when I set out to walk from the Falls to Italy, across Switzerland. I remember the big, fat, rather gloomy fields of this part of Baden, damp and unliving. I remember I found some apples under a tree in a field near a railway embankment, then some mushrooms, and I ate both. Then I came on to a long, desolate high-road, with dreary, withered trees on either side, and flanked by great fields where groups of men and women were working. They looked at

me as I went by down the long, long road, alone and exposed and out of the world.

I remember nobody came at the border village to examine my pack, I passed through unchallenged. All was quiet and lifeless and hopeless, with big stretches of heavy land.

Till sunset came, very red and purple, and suddenly, from the heavy spacious open land I dropped sharply into the Rhine valley again, suddenly, as if into another glamorous world.

There was the river rushing along between its high, mysterious, romantic banks, which were high as hills, and covered with vine. And there was the village of tall, quaint houses flickering its lights on to the deep-flowing river, and quite silent, save for the rushing of water.

There was a fine covered bridge, very dark. I went to the middle and looked through the opening at the dark water below, at the façade of square lights, the tall village-front towering remote and silent above the river. The hill rose on either side the flood; down here was a small, forgotten, wonderful world that belonged to the date of isolated village communities and wandering minstrels.

So I went back to the inn of The Golden Stag, and, climbing some steps, I made a loud noise. A woman came, and I asked for food. She led me through a room where were enormous barrels, ten feet in diameter, lying fatly on their sides; then through a large stone-clean kitchen, with bright pans, ancient as the Meistersinger; then up some steps and into the long guest-room, where a few tables were laid for supper.

A few people were eating. I asked for Abendessen, and sat by the window looking at the darkness of the river below, the covered bridge, the dark hill opposite, crested with its few lights.

Then I ate a very large quantity of knoedel soup and bread, and drank beer, and was very sleepy. Only one or two village men came in, and these soon went again; the place was dead still. Only at a long table on the opposite side of the room were seated seven or eight men, ragged, disreputable, some impudent — another came in late; the landlady gave them all thick soup with dumplings and bread and meat, serving them in a sort of brief disapprobation. They sat at the long table, eight or nine tramps and beggars and wanderers out of work and they ate with a sort of cheerful callousness and brutality for the most part, and as if ravenously, looking round and grinning sometimes, subdued, cowed, like prisoners, and yet impudent. At the end one shouted to know where he was to sleep. The landlady called to the young serving-woman, and in a classic German severity of disapprobation they were led up the stone stairs to their room. They tramped off in threes and twos, making a bad, mean, humiliated exit. It was not

yet eight o'clock. The landlady sat talking to one bearded man, staid and severe, whilst, with her work on the table, she sewed steadily.

As the beggars and wanderers went slinking out of the room, some called impudently, cheerfully:

'*Nacht, Frau Wirtin — G'Nacht, Wirtin — 'te Nacht, Frau,*' to all of which the hostess answered a stereotyped '*Gute Nacht,*' never turning her head from her sewing, or indicating by the faintest movement that she was addressing the men who were filing raggedly to the doorway.

So the room was empty, save for the landlady and her sewing, the staid, elderly villager to whom she was talking in the unbeautiful dialect, and the young serving-woman who was clearing away the plates and basins of the tramps and beggars.

Then the villager also went.

'*Gute Nacht, Frau Seidl,*' to the landlady; '*Gute Nacht,*' at random, to me.

So I looked at the newspaper. Then I asked the landlady for a cigarette, not knowing how else to begin. So she came to my table, and we talked.

It pleased me to take upon myself a sort of romantic, wandering character; she said my German was '*schön*'; a little goes a long way.

So I asked her who were the men who had sat at the long table. She became rather stiff and curt.

'They are the men looking for work,' she said, as if the subject were disagreeable.

'But why do they come here, so many?' I asked.

Then she told me that they were going out of the country: this was almost the last village of the border: that the relieving officer in each village was empowered to give to every vagrant a ticket entitling the holder to an evening meal, bed, and bread in the morning, at a certain inn. This was the inn for the vagrants coming to this village. The landlady received fourpence per head, I believe it was, for each of these wanderers.

'Little enough,' I said.

'Nothing,' she replied.

She did not like the subject at all. Only her respect for me made her answer.

'*Bettler, Lumpen, und Taugenichtse!*' I said cheerfully.

'And men who are out of work, and are going back to their own parish,' she said stiffly.

So we talked a little, and I too went to bed.

'*Gute Nacht, Frau Wirtin.*'

'*Gute Nacht, mein Herr.*'

So I went up more and more stone stairs, attended by the young woman. It

was a great, lofty, old deserted house, with many drab doors.

At last, in the distant topmost floor, I had my bedroom, with two beds and bare floor and scant furniture. I looked down at the river far below, at the covered bridge, at the far lights on the hill above, opposite. Strange to be here in this lost, forgotten place, sleeping under the roof with tramps and beggars. I debated whether they would steal my boots if I put them out. But I risked it. The door-latch made a loud noise on the deserted landing, everywhere felt abandoned, forgotten. I wondered where the eight tramps and beggars were asleep. There was no way of securing the door. But somehow I felt that, if I were destined to be robbed or murdered, it would not be by tramps and beggars. So I blew out the candle and lay under the big feather bed, listening to the running and whispering of the medieval Rhine.

And when I waked up again it was sunny, it was morning on the hill opposite, though the river deep below ran in shadow.

The tramps and beggars were all gone: they must be cleared out by seven o'clock in the morning. So I had the inn to myself, I, and the landlady, and the serving-woman. Everywhere was very clean, full of the German morning energy and brightness, which is so different from the Latin morning. The Italians are dead and torpid first thing, the Germans are energetic and cheerful.

It was cheerful in the sunny morning, looking down on the swift river, the covered, picturesque bridge, the bank and the hill opposite. Then down the curving road of the facing hill the Swiss cavalry came riding, men in blue uniforms. I went out to watch them. They came thundering romantically through the dark cavern of the roofed-in bridge, and they dismounted at the entrance to the village. There was a fresh morning-cheerful newness everywhere, in the arrival of the troops, in the welcome of the villagers.

The Swiss do not look very military, neither in accoutrement nor bearing. This little squad of cavalry seemed more like a party of common men riding out in some business of their own than like an army. They were very republican and very free. The officer who commanded them was one of themselves, his authority was by consent.

It was all very pleasant and genuine; there was a sense of ease and peacefulness, quite different from the mechanical, slightly sullen manoeuvring of the Germans.

The village baker and his assistant came hot and floury from the bakehouse, bearing between them a great basket of fresh bread. The cavalry were all dismounted by the bridge-head, eating and drinking like business men. Villagers came to greet their friends: one soldier kissed his father, who came wearing a leathern apron. The school bell tang-tang-tanged from above, school children

merged timidly through the grouped horses, up the narrow street, passing unwillingly with their books. The river ran swiftly, the soldiers, very haphazard and slack in uniform, real shack-bags, chewed their bread in large mouthfuls; the young lieutenant, who seemed to be an officer only by consent of the men, stood apart by the bridge-head, gravely. They were all serious and self-contented, very unglamorous. It was like a business excursion on horseback, harmless and uninspiring. The uniforms were almost ludicrous, so ill-fitting and casual.

So I shouldered my own pack and set off, through the bridge over the Rhine, and up the hill opposite.

There is something very dead about this country. I remember I picked apples from the grass by the roadside, and some were very sweet. But for the rest, there was mile after mile of dead, uninspired country — uninspired, so neutral and ordinary that it was almost destructive.

One gets this feeling always in Switzerland, except high up: this feeling of average, of utter soulless ordinariness, something intolerable. Mile after mile, to Zurich, it was just the same. It was just the same in the tram-car going into Zurich; it was just the same in the town, in the shops, in the restaurant. All was the utmost level of ordinariness and well-being, but so ordinary that it was like a blight. All the picturesqueness of the town is nothing, it is like a most ordinary, average, usual person in an old costume. The place was soul-killing.

So after two hours' rest, eating in a restaurant, wandering by the quay and through the market, and sitting on a seat by the lake, I found a steamer that would take me away. That is how I always feel in Switzerland: the only possible living sensation is the sensation of relief in going away, always going away. The horrible average ordinariness of it all, something utterly without flower or soul or transcendence, the horrible vigorous ordinariness, is too much.

So I went on a steamer down the long lake, surrounded by low grey hills. It was Saturday afternoon. A thin rain came on. I thought I would rather be in fiery Hell than in this dead level of average life.

I landed somewhere on the right bank, about three-quarters of the way down the lake. It was almost dark. Yet I must walk away. I climbed a long hill from the lake, came to the crest, looked down the darkness of the valley, and descended into the deep gloom, down into a soulless village.

But it was eight o'clock, and I had had enough. One might as well sleep. I found the Gasthaus zur Post.

It was a small, very rough inn, having only one common room, with bare tables, and a short, stout, grim, rather surly landlady, and a landlord whose hair stood up on end, and who was trembling on the edge of delirium tremens.

They could only give me boiled ham: so I ate boiled ham and drank beer, and

tried to digest the utter cold materialism of Switzerland.

As I sat with my back to the wall, staring blankly at the trembling landlord, who was ready at any moment to foam at the mouth, and at the dour landlady, who was quite capable of keeping him in order, there came in one of those dark, showy Italian girls with a man. She wore a blouse and skirt, and no hat. Her hair was perfectly dressed. It was really Italy. The man was soft, dark, he would get stout later, *trapu*, he would have somewhat the figure of Caruso. But as yet he was soft, sensuous, young, handsome.

They sat at the long side-table with their beer, and created another country at once within the room. Another Italian came, fair and fat and slow, one from the Venetian province; then another, a little thin young man, who might have been a Swiss save for his vivid movement.

This last was the first to speak to the Germans. The others had just said '*Bier.*' But the little newcomer entered into a conversation with the landlady.

At last there were six Italians sitting talking loudly and warmly at the side-table. The slow, cold German-Swiss at the other tables looked at them occasionally. The landlord, with his crazed, stretched eyes, glared at them with hatred. But they fetched their beer from the bar with easy familiarity, and sat at their table, creating a bonfire of life in the callousness of the inn.

At last they finished their beer and trooped off down the passage. The room was painfully empty. I did not know what to do.

Then I heard the landlord yelling and screeching and snarling from the kitchen at the back, for all the world like a mad dog. But the Swiss Saturday evening customers at the other tables smoked on and talked in their ugly dialect, without trouble. Then the landlady came in, and soon after the landlord, he collarless, with his waistcoat unbuttoned, showing his loose throat, and accentuating his round pot-belly. His limbs were thin and feverish, the skin of his face hung loose, his eyes glaring, his hands trembled. Then he sat down to talk to a crony. His terrible appearance was a fiasco; nobody heeded him at all, only the landlady was surly.

From the back came loud noises of pleasure and excitement and banging about. When the room door was opened I could see down the dark passage opposite another lighted door. Then the fat, fair Italian came in for more beer.

'What is all the noise?' I asked the landlady at last.

'It is the Italians,' she said.

'What are they doing?'

'They are doing a play.'

'Where?'

She jerked her head: 'In the room at the back.'

‘Can I go and look at them?’

‘I should think so.’

The landlord glaringly watched me go out. I went down the stone passage and found a great, half-lighted room that might be used to hold meetings, with forms piled at the side. At one end was raised platform or stage. And on this stage was a table and a lamp, and the Italians grouped round the light, gesticulating and laughing. Their beer mugs were on the table and on the floor of the stage; the little sharp youth was intently looking over some papers, the others were bending over the table with him.

They looked up as I entered from the distance, looked at me in the distant twilight of the dusky room, as if I were an intruder, as if I should go away when I had seen them. But I said in German:

‘May I look?’

They were still unwilling to see or to hear me.

‘What do you say?’ the small one asked in reply.

The others stood and watched, slightly at bay, like suspicious animals.

‘If I might come and look,’ I said in German; then, feeling very uncomfortable, in Italian: ‘You are doing a drama, the landlady told me.’

The big empty room was behind me, dark, the little company of Italians stood above me in the light of the lamp which was on the table. They all watched with unseeing, unwilling looks: I was merely an intrusion.

‘We are only learning it,’ said the small youth.

They wanted me to go away. But I wanted to stay.

‘May I listen?’ I said. ‘I don’t want to stay in there.’ And I indicated, with a movement of the head, the inn-room beyond.

‘Yes,’ said the young intelligent man. ‘But we are only reading our parts.’

They had all become more friendly to me, they accepted me.

‘You are a German?’ asked one youth.

‘No — English.’

‘English? But do you live in Switzerland?’

‘No — I am walking to Italy.’

‘On foot?’

They looked with wakened eyes.

‘Yes.’

So I told them about my journey. They were puzzled. They did not quite understand why I wanted to walk. But they were delighted with the idea of going to Lugano and Como and then to Milan.

‘Where do you come from?’ I asked them.

They were all from the villages between Verona and Venice. They had seen

the Garda. I told them of my living there.

‘Those peasants of the mountains,’ they said at once, ‘they are people of little education. Rather wild folk.’

And they spoke with good-humoured contempt.

I thought of Paolo, and Il Duro, and the Signor Pietro, our padrone, and I resented these factory-hands for criticizing them.

So I sat on the edge of the stage whilst they rehearsed their parts. The little thin intelligent fellow, Giuseppino, was the leader. The others read their parts in the laborious, disjointed fashion of the peasant, who can only see one word at a time, and has then to put the words together, afterwards, to make sense. The play was an amateur melodrama, printed in little penny booklets, for carnival production. This was only the second reading they had given it, and the handsome, dark fellow, who was roused and displaying himself before the girl, a hard, erect piece of callousness, laughed and flushed and stumbled, and understood nothing till it was transferred into him direct through Giuseppino. The fat, fair, slow man was more conscientious. He laboured through his part. The other two men were in the background more or less.

The most confidential was the fat, fair, slow man, who was called Alberto. His part was not very important, so he could sit by me and talk to me.

He said they were all workers in the factory — silk, I think it was — in the village. They were a whole colony of Italians, thirty or more families. They had all come at different times.

Giuseppino had been longest in the village. He had come when he was eleven, with his parents, and had attended the Swiss school. So he spoke perfect German. He was a clever man, was married, and had two children.

He himself, Alberto, had been seven years in the valley; the girl, la Maddelena, had been here ten years; the dark man, Alfredo, who was flushed with excitement of her, had been in the village about nine years — he alone of all men was not married.

The others had all married Italian wives, and they lived in the great dwelling whose windows shone yellow by the rattling factory. They lived entirely among themselves; none of them could speak German, more than a few words, except the Giuseppino, who was like a native here.

It was very strange being among these Italians exiled in Switzerland. Alfredo, the dark one, the unmarried, was in the old tradition. Yet even he was curiously subject to a new purpose, as if there were some greater new will that included him, sensuous, mindless as he was. He seemed to give his consent to something beyond himself. In this he was different from Il Duro, in that he had put himself under the control of the outside conception.

It was strange to watch them on the stage, the Italians all lambent, soft, warm, sensuous, yet moving subject round Giuseppino, who was always quiet, always ready, always impersonal. There was a look of purpose, almost of devotion on his face, that singled him out and made him seem the one stable, eternal being among them. They quarrelled, and he let them quarrel up to a certain point; then he called them back. He let them do as they liked so long as they adhered more or less to the central purpose, so long as they got on in some measure with the play.

All the while they were drinking beer and smoking cigarettes. The Alberto was barman: he went out continually with the glasses. The Maddelena had a small glass. In the lamplight of the stage the little party read and smoked and practised, exposed to the empty darkness of the big room. Queer and isolated it seemed, a tiny, pathetic magicland far away from the barrenness of Switzerland. I could believe in the old fairy-tales where, when the rock was opened, a magic underworld was revealed.

The Alfredo, flushed, roused, handsome, but very soft and enveloping in his heat, laughed and threw himself into his pose, laughed foolishly, and then gave himself up to his part. The Alberto, slow and laborious, yet with a spark of vividness and natural intensity flashing through, replied and gesticulated; the Maddelena laid her head on the bosom of Alfredo, the other men started into action, and the play proceeded intently for half an hour.

Quick, vivid, and sharp, the little Giuseppino was always central. But he seemed almost invisible. When I think back, I can scarcely see him, I can only see the others, the lamplight on their faces and on their full gesticulating limbs. I can see — the Maddelena, rather coarse and hard and repellent, declaiming her words in a loud, half-cynical voice, falling on the breast of the Alfredo, who was soft and sensuous, more like a female, flushing, with his mouth getting wet, his eyes moist, as he was roused. I can see the Alberto, slow, laboured, yet with a kind of pristine simplicity in all his movements, that touched his fat commonplaceness with beauty. Then there were the two other men, shy, inflammable, unintelligent, with their sudden Italian rushes of hot feeling. All their faces are distinct in the lamplight, all their bodies are palpable and dramatic.

But the face of the Giuseppino is like a pale luminousness, a sort of gleam among all the ruddy glow, his body is evanescent, like a shadow. And his being seemed to cast its influence over all the others, except perhaps the woman, who was hard and resistant. The other men seemed all overcast, mitigated, in part transfigured by the will of the little leader. But they were very soft stuff, if inflammable.

The young woman of the inn, niece of the landlady, came down and called out across the room.

‘We will go away from here now,’ said the Giuseppino to me. ‘They close at eleven. But we have another inn in the next parish that is open all night. Come with us and drink some wine.’

‘But,’ I said, ‘you would rather be alone.’

No; they pressed me to go, they wanted me to go with them, they were eager, they wanted to entertain me. Alfredo, flushed, wet-mouthed, warm, protested I must drink wine, the real Italian red wine, from their own village at home. They would have no nay.

So I told the landlady. She said I must be back by twelve o’clock.

The night was very dark. Below the road the stream was rushing; there was a great factory on the other side of the water, making faint quivering lights of reflection, and one could see the working of machinery shadowy through the lighted windows. Near by was the tall tenement where the Italians lived.

We went on through the straggling, raw village, deep beside the stream, then over the small bridge, and up the steep hill down which I had come earlier in the evening.

So we arrived at the café. It was so different inside from the German inn, yet it was not like an Italian café either. It was brilliantly lighted, clean, new, and there were red-and-white cloths on the tables. The host was in the room, and his daughter, a beautiful red-haired girl.

Greetings were exchanged with the quick, intimate directness of Italy. But there was another note also, a faint echo of reserve, as though they reserved themselves from the outer world, making a special inner community.

Alfredo was hot: he took off his coat. We all sat freely at a long table, whilst the red-haired girl brought a quart of red wine. At other tables men were playing cards, with the odd Neapolitan cards. They too were talking Italian. It was a warm, ruddy bit of Italy within the cold darkness of Switzerland.

‘When you come to Italy,’ they said to me, ‘salute it from us, salute the sun, and the earth, *l’Italia*.’

So we drank in salute of Italy. They sent their greeting by me.

‘You know in Italy there is the sun, the sun,’ said Alfredo to me, profoundly moved, wet-mouthed, tipsy.

I was reminded of Enrico Persevali and his terrifying cry at the end of *Ghosts*:
‘*Il sole, il sole!*’

So we talked for a while of Italy. They had a pained tenderness for it, sad, reserved.

‘Don’t you want to go back?’ I said, pressing them to tell me definitely.

‘Won’t you go back some time?’

‘Yes,’ they said, ‘we will go back.’

But they spoke reservedly, without freedom. We talked about Italy, about songs, and Carnival; about the food, polenta, and salt. They laughed at my pretending to cut the slabs of polenta with a string: that rejoiced them all: it took them back to the Italian mezzo-giorno, the bells jangling in the campanile, the eating after the heavy work on the land.

But they laughed with the slight pain and contempt and fondness which every man feels towards his past, when he has struggled away from that past, from the conditions which made it.

They loved Italy passionately; but they would not go back. All their blood, all their senses were Italian, needed the Italian sky, the speech, the sensuous life. They could hardly live except through the senses. Their minds were not developed, mentally they were children, lovable, naïve, almost fragile children. But sensually they were men: sensually they were accomplished.

Yet a new tiny flower was struggling to open in them, the flower of a new spirit. The substratum of Italy has always been pagan, sensuous, the most potent symbol the sexual symbol. The child is really a non-Christian symbol: it is the symbol of man’s triumph of eternal life in procreation. The worship of the Cross never really held good in Italy. The Christianity of Northern Europe has never had any place there.

And now, when Northern Europe is turning back on its own Christianity, denying it all, the Italians are struggling with might and main against the sensuous spirit which still dominates them. When Northern Europe, whether it hates Nietzsche or not, is crying out for the Dionysic ecstasy, practising on itself the Dionysic ecstasy, Southern Europe is breaking free from Dionysus, from the triumphal affirmation of life over death, immortality through procreation.

I could see these sons of Italy would never go back. Men like Paolo and Il Duro broke away only to return. The dominance of the old form was too strong for them. Call it love of country or love of the village, campanilismo, or what not, it was the dominance of the old pagan form, the old affirmation of immortality through procreation, as opposed to the Christian affirmation of immortality through self-death and social love.

But ‘John’ and these Italians in Switzerland were a generation younger, and they would not go back, at least not to the old Italy. Suffer as they might, and they did suffer, wincing in every nerve and fibre from the cold material insentience of the northern countries and of America, still they would endure this for the sake of something else they wanted. They would suffer a death in the flesh, as ‘John’ had suffered in fighting the street crowd, as these men suffered

year after year cramped in their black gloomy cold Swiss valley, working in the factory. But there would come a new spirit out of it.

Even Alfredo was submitted to the new process; though he belonged entirely by nature to the sort of *Il Duro*, he was purely sensuous and mindless. But under the influence of Giuseppino he was thrown down, as fallow to the new spirit that would come.

And then, when the others were all partially tipsy, the Giuseppino began to talk to me. In him was a steady flame burning, burning, burning, a flame of the mind, of the spirit, something new and clear, something that held even the soft, sensuous Alfredo in submission, besides all the others, who had some little development of mind.

‘*Sa signore,*’ said the Giuseppino to me, quiet, almost invisible or inaudible, as it seemed, like a spirit addressing me, ‘*l’uomo non ha patria* — a man has no country. What has the Italian Government to do with us. What does a Government mean? It makes us work, it takes part of our wages away from us, it makes us soldiers — and what for? What is government for?’

‘Have you been a soldier?’ I interrupted him.

He had not, none of them had: that was why they could not really go back to Italy. Now this was out; this explained partly their curious reservation in speaking about their beloved country. They had forfeited parents as well as homeland.

‘What does the Government do? It takes taxes; it has an army and police, and it makes roads. But we could do without an army, and we could be our own police, and we could make our own roads. What is this Government? Who wants it? Only those who are unjust, and want to have advantage over somebody else. It is an instrument of injustice and of wrong.

‘Why should we have a Government? Here, in this village, there are thirty families of Italians. There is no government for them, no Italian Government. And we live together better than in Italy. We are richer and freer, we have no policemen, no poor laws. We help each other, and there are no poor.

‘Why are these Governments always doing what we don’t want them to do? We should not be fighting in the Cirenaica if we were all Italians. It is the Government that does it. They talk and talk and do things with us: but we don’t want them.’

The others, tipsy, sat round the table with the terrified gravity of children who are somehow responsible for things they do not understand. They stirred in their seats, turning aside, with gestures almost of pain, of imprisonment. Only Alfredo, laying his hand on mine, was laughing, loosely, floridly. He would upset all the Government with a jerk of his well-built shoulder, and then he

would have a spree — such a spree. He laughed wetly to me.

The Giuseppino waited patiently during this tipsy confidence, but his pale clarity and beauty was something constant star-like in comparison with the flushed, soft handsomeness of the other. He waited patiently, looking at me.

But I did not want him to go on: I did not want to answer. I could feel a new spirit in him, something strange and pure and slightly frightening. He wanted something which was beyond me. And my soul was somewhere in tears, crying helplessly like an infant in the night. I could not respond: I could not answer. He seemed to look at me, me, an Englishman, an educated man, for corroboration. But I could not corroborate him. I knew the purity and new struggling towards birth of a true star-like spirit. But I could not confirm him in his utterance: my soul could not respond. I did not believe in the perfectibility of man. I did not believe in infinite harmony among men. And this was his star, this belief.

It was nearly midnight. A Swiss came in and asked for beer. The Italians gathered round them a curious darkness of reserve. And then I must go.

They shook hands with me warmly, truthfully, putting a sort of implicit belief in me, as representative of some further knowledge. But there was a fixed, calm resolve over the face of the Giuseppino, a sort of steady faith, even in disappointment. He gave me a copy of a little Anarchist paper published in Geneva. *L'Anarchista*, I believe it was called. I glanced at it. It was in Italian, naïve, simple, rather rhetorical. So they were all Anarchists, these Italians.

I ran down the hill in the thick Swiss darkness to the little bridge, and along the uneven cobbled street. I did not want to think, I did not want to know. I wanted to arrest my activity, to keep it confined to the moment, to the adventure.

When I came to the flight of stone steps which led up to the door of the inn, at the side I saw in the darkness two figures. They said a low good night and parted; the girl began to knock at the door, the man disappeared. It was the niece of the landlady parting from her lover.

We waited outside the locked door, at the top of the stone steps, in the darkness of midnight. The stream rustled below. Then came a shouting and an insane snarling within the passage; the bolts were not withdrawn.

‘It is the gentleman, it is the strange gentleman,’ called the girl.

Then came again the furious shouting snarls, and the landlord’s mad voice:

‘Stop out, stop out there. The door won’t be opened again.’

‘The strange gentleman is here,’ repeated the girl.

Then more movement was heard, and the door was suddenly opened, and the landlord rushed out upon us, wielding a broom. It was a strange sight, in the half-lighted passage. I stared blankly in the doorway. The landlord dropped the broom he was waving and collapsed as if by magic, looking at me, though he

continued to mutter madly, unintelligibly. The girl slipped past me, and the landlord snarled. Then he picked up the brush, at the same time crying:

‘You are late, the door was shut, it will not be opened. We shall have the police in the house. We said twelve o’clock; at twelve o’clock the door must be shut, and must not be opened again. If you are late you stay out — ’

So he went snarling, his voice rising higher and higher, away into the kitchen.

‘You are coming to your room?’ the landlady said to me coldly. And she led me upstairs.

The room was over the road, clean, but rather ugly, with a large tin, that had once contained lard or Swiss-milk, to wash in. But the bed was good enough, which was all that mattered.

I heard the landlord yelling, and there was a long and systematic thumping somewhere, thump, thump, thump, and banging. I wondered where it was. I could not locate it at all, because my room lay beyond another large room: I had to go through a large room, by the foot of two beds, to get to my door; so I could not quite tell where anything was.

But I went to sleep whilst I was wondering.

I woke in the morning and washed in the tin. I could see a few people in the street, walking in the Sunday morning leisure. It felt like Sunday in England, and I shrank from it. I could see none of the Italians. The factory stood there, raw and large and sombre, by the stream, and the drab-coloured stone tenements were close by. Otherwise the village was a straggling Swiss street, almost untouched.

The landlord was quiet and reasonable, even friendly, in the morning. He wanted to talk to me: where had I bought my boots, was his first question. I told him in Munich. And how much had they cost? I told him twenty-eight marks. He was much impressed by them: such good boots, of such soft, strong, beautiful leather; he had not seen such boots for a long time.

Then I knew it was he who had cleaned my boots. I could see him fingering them and wondering over them. I rather liked him. I could see he had had imagination once, and a certain fineness of nature. Now he was corrupted with drink, too far gone to be even a human being. I hated the village.

They set bread and butter and a piece of cheese weighing about five pounds, and large, fresh, sweet cakes for breakfast. I ate and was thankful: the food was good.

A couple of village youths came in, in their Sunday clothes. They had the Sunday stiffness. It reminded me of the stiffness and curious self-consciousness that comes over life in England on a Sunday. But the Landlord sat with his waistcoat hanging open over his shirt, pot-bellied, his ruined face leaning

forward, talking, always talking, wanting to know.

So in a few minutes I was out on the road again, thanking God for the blessing of a road that belongs to no man, and travels away from all men.

I did not want to see the Italians. Something had got tied up in me, and I could not bear to see them again. I liked them so much; but, for some reason or other, my mind stopped like clockwork if I wanted to think of them and of what their lives would be, their future. It was as if some curious negative magnetism arrested my mind, prevented it from working, the moment I turned it towards these Italians.

I do not know why it was. But I could never write to them, or think of them, or even read the paper they gave me though it lay in my drawer for months, in Italy, and I often glanced over six lines of it. And often, often my mind went back to the group, the play they were rehearsing, the wine in the pleasant café, and the night. But the moment my memory touched them, my whole soul stopped and was null; I could not go on. Even now I cannot really consider them in thought.

I shrink involuntarily away. I do not know why this is.

THE RETURN JOURNEY

When one walks, one must travel west or south. If one turns northward or eastward it is like walking down a cul-de-sac, to the blind end.

So it has been since the Crusaders came home satiated, and the Renaissance saw the western sky as an archway into the future. So it is still. We must go westwards and southwards.

It is a sad and gloomy thing to travel even from Italy into France. But it is a joyful thing to walk south to Italy, south and west. It is so. And there is a certain exaltation in the thought of going west, even to Cornwall, to Ireland. It is as if the magnetic poles were south-west and north-east, for our spirits, with the south-west, under the sunset, as the positive pole. So whilst I walk through Switzerland, though it is a valley of gloom and depression, a light seems to flash out under every footstep, with the joy of progression.

It was Sunday morning when I left the valley where the Italians lived. I went quickly over the stream, heading for Lucerne. It was a good thing to be out of doors, with one's pack on one's back, climbing uphill. But the trees were thick by the roadside; I was not yet free. It was Sunday morning, very still.

In two hours I was at the top of the hill, looking out over the intervening valley at the long lake of Zurich, spread there beyond with its girdle of low hills, like a relief-map. I could not bear to look at it, it was so small and unreal. I had a feeling as if it were false, a large relief-map that I was looking down upon, and which I wanted to smash. It seemed to intervene between me and some reality. I could not believe that that was the real world. It was a figment, a fabrication, like a dull landscape painted on a wall, to hide the real landscape.

So I went on, over to the other side of the hill, and I looked out again. Again there were the smoky-looking hills and the lake like a piece of looking-glass. But the hills were higher: that big one was the Rigi. I set off down the hill.

There was fat agricultural land and several villages. And church was over. The churchgoers were all coming home: men in black broadcloth and old chimney-pot silk hats, carrying their umbrellas; women in ugly dresses, carrying books and umbrellas. The streets were dotted with these black-clothed men and stiff women, all reduced to a Sunday nullity. I hated it. It reminded me of that which I knew in my boyhood, that stiff, null 'propriety' which used to come over us, like a sort of deliberate and self-inflicted cramp, on Sundays. I hated these elders in black broadcloth, with their neutral faces, going home piously to their Sunday

dinners. I hated the feeling of these villages, comfortable, well-to-do, clean, and proper.

And my boot was chafing two of my toes. That always happens. I had come down to a wide, shallow valley-bed, marshy. So about a mile out of the village I sat down by a stone bridge, by a stream, and tore up my handkerchief, and bound up the toes. And as I sat binding my toes, two of the elders in black, with umbrellas under their arms, approached from the direction of the village.

They made me so furious, I had to hasten to fasten my boot, to hurry on again, before they should come near me. I could not bear the way they walked and talked, so crumpling and material and mealy-mouthed.

Then it did actually begin to rain. I was just going down a short hill. So I sat under a bush and watched the trees drip. I was so glad to be there, homeless, without place or belonging, crouching under the leaves in the copse by the road, that I felt I had, like the meek, inherited the earth. Some men went by, with their coat-collars turned up, and the rain making still blacker their black broadcloth shoulders. They did not see me. I was as safe and separate as a ghost. So I ate the remains of my food that I had bought in Zurich, and waited for the rain.

Later, in the wet Sunday afternoon, I went on to the little lake, past many inert, neutral, material people, down an ugly road where trams ran. The blight of Sunday was almost intolerable near the town.

So on I went, by the side of the steamy, reedy lake, walking the length of it. Then suddenly I went in to a little villa by the water for tea. In Switzerland every house is a villa.

But this villa, was kept by two old ladies and a delicate dog, who must not get his feet wet. I was very happy there. I had good jam and strange honey-cakes for tea, that I liked, and the little old ladies pattered round in a great stir, always whirling like two dry leaves after the restless dog.

‘Why must he not go out?’ I said.

‘Because it is wet,’ they answered, ‘and he coughs and sneezes.’

‘Without a handkerchief, that is not *angenehm*’ I said.

So we became bosom friends.

‘You are Austrian?’ they said to me.

I said I was from Graz; that my father was a doctor in Graz, and that I was walking for my pleasure through the countries of Europe.

I said this because I knew a doctor from Graz who was always wandering about, and because I did not want to be myself, an Englishman, to these two old ladies. I wanted to be something else. So we exchanged confidences.

They told me, in their queer, old, toothless fashion, about their visitors, a man who used to fish all day, every day for three weeks, fish every hour of the day,

though many a day he caught nothing — nothing at all — still he fished from the boat; and so on, such trivialities. Then they told me of a third sister who had died, a third little old lady. One could feel the gap in the house. They cried; and I, being an Austrian from Graz, to my astonishment felt my tears slip over on to the table. I also *was* sorry, and I would have kissed the little old ladies to comfort them.

‘Only in heaven it is warm, and it doesn’t rain, and no one dies,’ I said, looking at the wet leaves.

Then I went away. I would have stayed the night at this house: I wanted to. But I had developed my Austrian character too far.

So I went on to a detestable brutal inn in the town. And the next day I climbed over the back of the detestable Rigi, with its vile hotel, to come to Lucerne. There, on the Rigi, I met a lost young Frenchman who could speak no German, and who said he could not find people to speak French. So we sat on a stone and became close friends, and I promised faithfully to go and visit him in his barracks in Algiers: I was to sail from Naples to Algiers. He wrote me the address on his card, and told me he had friends in the regiment, to whom I should be introduced, and we could have a good time, if I would stay a week or two, down there in Algiers.

How much more real Algiers was than the rock on the Rigi where we sat, or the lake beneath, or the mountains beyond. Algiers is very real, though I have never seen it, and my friend is my friend for ever, though I have lost his card and forgotten his name. He was a Government clerk from Lyons, making this his first foreign tour before he began his military service. He showed me his ‘circular excursion ticket’. Then at last we parted, for he must get to the top of the Rigi, and I must get to the bottom.

Lucerne and its lake were as irritating as ever — like the wrapper round milk chocolate. I could not sleep even one night there: I took the steamer down the lake, to the very last station. There I found a good German inn, and was happy.

There was a tall thin young man, whose face was red and inflamed from the sun. I thought he was a German tourist. He had just come in; and he was eating bread and milk. He and I were alone in the eating-room. He was looking at an illustrated paper.

‘Does the steamer stop here all night?’ I asked him in German, hearing the boat bustling and blowing her steam on the water outside, and glancing round at her lights, red and white, in the pitch darkness.

He only shook his head over his bread and milk, and did not lift his face.

‘Are you English, then?’ I said.

No one but an Englishman would have hidden his face in a bowl of milk, and

have shaken his red ears in such painful confusion.

‘Yes,’ he said, ‘I am.’

And I started almost out of my skin at the unexpected London accent. It was as if one suddenly found oneself in the Tube.

‘So am I,’ I said. ‘Where have you come from?’

Then he began, like a general explaining his plans, to tell me. He had walked round over the Furka Pass, had been on foot four or five days. He had walked tremendously. Knowing no German, and nothing of the mountains, he had set off alone on this tour: he had a fortnight’s holiday. So he had come over the Rhône Glacier across the Furka and down from Andermatt to the Lake. On this last day he had walked about thirty mountain miles.

‘But weren’t you tired?’ I said, aghast.

He was. Under the inflamed redness of his sun-and wind-and snow-burned face he was sick with fatigue. He had done over a hundred miles in the last four days.

‘Did you enjoy it?’ I asked.

‘Oh yes. I wanted to do it all.’ He wanted to do it, and he *had* done it. But God knows what he wanted to do it for. He had now one day at Lucerne, one day at Interlaken and Berne, then London.

I was sorry for him in my soul, he was so cruelly tired, so perishingly victorious.

‘Why did you do so much?’ I said. ‘Why did you come on foot all down the valley when you could have taken the train? Was it worth it?’

‘I think so,’ he said.

Yet he was sick with fatigue and over-exhaustion. His eyes were quite dark, sightless: he seemed to have lost the power of seeing, to be virtually blind. He hung his head forward when he had to write a post card, as if he felt his way. But he turned his post card so that I should not see to whom it was addressed; not that I was interested; only I noticed his little, cautious, English movement of privacy.

‘What time will you be going on?’ I asked.

‘When is the first steamer?’ he said, and he turned out a guide-book with a time-table. He would leave at about seven.

‘But why so early?’ I said to him.

He must be in Lucerne at a certain hour, and at Interlaken in the evening.

‘I suppose you will rest when you get to London?’ I said.

He looked at me quickly, reservedly.

I was drinking beer: I asked him wouldn’t he have something. He thought a moment, then said he would have another glass of hot milk. The landlord came

— 'And bread?' he asked.

The Englishman refused. He could not eat, really. Also he was poor; he had to husband his money. The landlord brought the milk and asked me, when would the gentleman want to go away. So I made arrangements between the landlord and the stranger. But the Englishman was slightly uncomfortable at my intervention. He did not like me to know what he would have for breakfast.

I could feel so well the machine that had him in its grip. He slaved for a year, mechanically, in London, riding in the Tube, working in the office. Then for a fortnight he was let free. So he rushed to Switzerland, with a tour planned out, and with just enough money to see him through, and to buy presents at Interlaken: bits of the edelweiss pottery: I could see him going home with them.

So he arrived, and with amazing, pathetic courage set forth on foot in a strange land, to face strange landlords, with no language but English at his command, and his purse definitely limited. Yet he wanted to go among the mountains, to cross a glacier. So he had walked on and on, like one possessed, ever forward. His name might have been Excelsior, indeed.

But then, when he reached his Furka, only to walk along the ridge and to descend on the same side! My God, it was killing to the soul. And here he was, down again from the mountains, beginning his journey home again: steamer and train and steamer and train and Tube, till he was back in the machine.

It hadn't let him go, and he knew it. Hence his cruel self-torture of fatigue, his cruel exercise of courage. He who hung his head in his milk in torment when I asked him a question in German, what courage had he not needed to take this his very first trip out of England, alone, on foot!

His eyes were dark and deep with unfathomable courage. Yet he was going back in the morning. He was going back. All he had courage for was to go back. He would go back, though he died by inches. Why not? It was killing him, it was like living loaded with irons. But he had the courage to submit, to die that way, since it was the way allotted to him.

The way he sank on the table in exhaustion, drinking his milk, his will, nevertheless, so perfect and unblemished, triumphant, though his body was broken and in anguish, was almost too much to bear. My heart was wrung for my countryman, wrung till it bled.

I could not bear to understand my countryman, a man who worked for his living, as I had worked, as nearly all my countrymen work. He would not give in. On his holiday he would walk, to fulfil his purpose, walk on; no matter how cruel the effort were, he would not rest, he would not relinquish his purpose nor abate his will, not by one jot or tittle. His body must pay whatever his will demanded, though it were torture.

It all seemed to me so foolish. I was almost in tears. He went to bed. I walked by the dark lake, and talked to the girl in the inn. She was a pleasant girl: it was a pleasant inn, a homely place. One could be happy there.

In the morning it was sunny, the lake was blue. By night I should be nearly at the crest of my journey. I was glad.

The Englishman had gone. I looked for his name in the book. It was written in a fair, clerkly hand. He lived at Streatham. Suddenly I hated him. The dogged fool, to keep his nose on the grindstone like that. What was all his courage but the very tip-top of cowardice? What a vile nature — almost Sadish, proud, like the infamous Red Indians, of being able to stand torture.

The landlord came to talk to me. He was fat and comfortable and too respectful. But I had to tell him all the Englishman had done, in the way of a holiday, just to shame his own fat, ponderous, inn-keeper's luxuriousness that was too gross. Then all I got out of his enormous comfortableness was:

‘Yes, that's a very long step to take.’

So I set off myself, up the valley between the close, snow-topped mountains, whose white gleamed above me as I crawled, small as an insect, along the dark, cold valley below.

There had been a cattle fair earlier in the morning, so troops of cattle were roving down the road, some with bells tang-tanging, all with soft faces and startled eyes and a sudden swerving of horns. The grass was very green by the roads and by the streams; the shadows of the mountain slopes were very dark on either hand overhead, and the sky with snowy flanks and tips was high up.

Here, away from the world, the villages were quiet and obscure — left behind. They had the same fascinating atmosphere of being forgotten, left out of the world, that old English villages have. And buying apples and cheese and bread in a little shop that sold everything and smelled of everything, I felt at home again.

But climbing gradually higher, mile after mile, always between the shadows of the high mountains, I was glad I did not live in the Alps. The villages on the slopes, the people there, seemed, as if they *must* gradually, bit by bit, slide down and tumble to the water-course, and be rolled on away, away to the sea. Straggling, haphazard little villages ledged on the slope, high up, beside their wet, green, hanging meadows, with pine trees behind and the valley bottom far below, and rocks right above, on both sides, seemed like little temporary squattings of outcast people. It seemed impossible that they should persist there, with great shadows wielded over them, like a menace, and gleams of brief sunshine, like a window. There was a sense of momentariness and expectation. It seemed as though some dramatic upheaval must take place, the mountains fall

down into their own shadows. The valley beds were like deep graves, the sides of the mountains like the collapsing walls of a grave. The very mountain-tops above, bright with transcendent snow, seemed like death, eternal death.

There, it seemed, in the glamorous snow, was the source of death, which fell down in great waves of shadow and rock, rushing to the level earth. And all the people of the mountains, on the slopes, in the valleys, seemed to live upon this great, rushing wave of death, of breaking-down, of destruction.

The very pure source of breaking-down, decomposition, the very quick of cold death, is the snowy mountain-peak above. There, eternally, goes on the white foregathering of the crystals, out of the deathly cold of the heavens; this is the static nucleus where death meets life in its elementality. And thence, from their white, radiant nucleus of death in life, flows the great flux downwards, towards life and warmth. And we below, we cannot think of the flux upwards, that flows from the needle-point of snow to the unutterable cold and death.

The people under the mountains, they seem to live in the flux of death, the last, strange, overshadowed units of life. Big shadows wave over them, there is the eternal noise of water falling icily downwards from the source of death overhead.

And the people under the shadows, dwelling in the tang of snow and the noise of icy water, seem dark, almost sordid, brutal. There is no flowering or coming to flower, only this persistence, in the ice-touched air, of reproductive life.

But it is difficult to get a sense of a native population. Everywhere are the hotels and the foreigners, the parasitism. Yet there is, unseen, this overshadowed, overhung, sordid mountain population, ledged on the slopes and in the crevices. In the wider valleys there is still a sense of cowering among the people. But they catch a new tone from their contact with the foreigners. And in the towns are nothing but tradespeople.

So I climbed slowly up, for a whole day, first along the highroad, sometimes above and sometimes below the twisting, serpentine railway, then afterwards along a path on the side of the hill — a path that went through the crew-yards of isolated farms and even through the garden of a village priest. The priest was decorating an archway. He stood on a chair in the sunshine, reaching up with a garland, whilst the serving-woman stood below, talking loudly.

The valley here seemed wider, the great flanks of the mountains gave place, the peaks above were further back. So one was happier. I was pleased as I sat by the thin track of single flat stones that dropped swiftly downhill.

At the bottom was a little town with a factory or quarry, or a foundry, some place with long, smoking chimneys; which made me feel quite at home among the mountains.

It is the hideous rawness of the world of men, the horrible, desolating harshness of the advance of the industrial world upon the world of nature, that is so painful. It looks as though the industrial spread of mankind were a sort of dry disintegration advancing and advancing, a process of dry disintegration. If only we could learn to take thought for the whole world instead of for merely tiny bits of it.

I went through the little, hideous, crude factory-settlement in the high valley, where the eternal snows gleamed, past the enormous advertisements for chocolate and hotels, up the last steep slope of the pass to where the tunnel begins. Göschenen, the village at the mouth of the tunnel, is all railway sidings and haphazard villas for tourists, post cards, and touts and weedy carriages; disorder and sterile chaos, high up. How should any one stay there!

I went on up the pass itself. There were various parties of visitors on the roads and tracks, people from towns incongruously walking and driving. It was drawing on to evening. I climbed slowly, between the great cleft in the rock where are the big iron gates, through which the road winds, winds half-way down the narrow gulley of solid, living rock, the very throat of the path, where hangs a tablet in memory of many Russians killed.

Emerging through the dark rocky throat of the pass I came to the upper world, the level upper world. It was evening, livid, cold. On either side spread the sort of moorland of the wide pass-head. I drew near along the highroad, to Andermatt.

Everywhere were soldiers moving about the livid, desolate waste of this upper world. I passed the barracks and the first villas for visitors. Darkness was coming on; the straggling, inconclusive street of Andermatt looked as if it were some accident — houses, hotels, barracks, lodging-places tumbled at random as the caravan of civilization crossed this high, cold, arid bridge of the European world.

I bought two post cards and wrote them out of doors in the cold, livid twilight. Then I asked a soldier where was the post-office. He directed me. It was something like sending post cards from Skegness or Bognor, there in the post-office.

I was trying to make myself agree to stay in Andermatt for the night. But I could not. The whole place was so terribly raw and flat and accidental, as if great pieces of furniture had tumbled out of a pantehnicon and lay discarded by the road. I hovered in the street, in the twilight, trying to make myself stay. I looked at the announcements of lodgings and boarding for visitors. It was no good. I could not go into one of these houses.

So I passed on, through the old, low, broad-eaved houses that cringe down to

the very street, out into the open again. The air was fierce and savage. On one side was a moorland, level; on the other a sweep of naked hill, curved concave, and sprinkled with snow. I could see how wonderful it would all be, under five or six feet of winter snow, skiing and tobogganing at Christmas. But it needed the snow. In the summer there is to be seen nothing but the winter's broken detritus.

The twilight deepened, though there was still the strange, glassy translucency of the snow-lit air. A fragment of moon was in the sky. A carriage-load of French tourists passed me. There was the loud noise of water, as ever, something eternal and maddening in its sound, like the sound of Time itself, rustling and rushing and wavering, but never for a second ceasing. The rushing of Time that continues throughout eternity, this is the sound of the icy streams of Switzerland, something that mocks and destroys our warm being.

So I came, in the early darkness, to the little village with the broken castle that stands for ever frozen at the point where the track parts, one way continuing along the ridge, to the Furka Pass, the other swerving over the hill to the left, over the Gotthardt.

In this village I must stay. I saw a woman looking hastily, furtively from a doorway. I knew she was looking for visitors. I went on up the hilly street. There were only a few wooden houses and a gaily lighted wooden inn, where men were laughing, and strangers, men, standing talking loudly in the doorway.

It was very difficult to go to a house this night. I did not want to approach any of them. I turned back to the house of the peering woman. She had looked hen-like and anxious. She would be glad of a visitor to help her pay her rent.

It was a clean, pleasant wooden house, made to keep out the cold. That seemed its one function: to defend the inmates from the cold. It was furnished like a hut, just tables and chairs and bare wooden walls. One felt very close and secure in the room, as in a hut, shut away from the outer world.

The hen-like woman came.

'Can I have a bed,' I said, 'for the night?'

'*Abendessen, ja!*' she replied. 'Will you have soup and boiled beef and vegetables?'

I said I would, so I sat down to wait, in the utter silence. I could scarcely hear the ice-stream, the silence seemed frozen, the house empty. The woman seemed to be flitting aimlessly, scurriedly, in reflex against the silence. One could almost touch the stillness as one could touch the walls, or the stove, or the table with white American oil-cloth.

Suddenly she appeared again.

'What will you drink?'

She watched my face anxiously, and her voice was pathetic, slightly pleading in its quickness.

‘Wine or beer?’ she said.

I would not trust the coldness of beer.

‘A half of red wine,’ I said.

I knew she was going to keep me an indefinite time.

She appeared with the wine and bread.

‘Would you like omelette after the beef?’ she asked. ‘Omelette with cognac — I can make it *very* good.’

I knew I should be spending too much, but I said yes. After all, why should I not eat, after the long walk?

So she left me again, whilst I sat in the utter isolation and stillness, eating bread and drinking the wine, which was good. And I listened for any sound: only the faint noise of the stream. And I wondered, Why am I here, on this ridge of the Alps, in the lamp-lit, wooden, close-shut room, alone? Why am I here?

Yet somehow I was glad, I was happy even: such splendid silence and coldness and clean isolation. It was something eternal, unbroachable: I was free, in this heavy, ice-cold air, this upper world, alone. London, far away below, beyond, England, Germany, France — they were all so unreal in the night. It was a sort of grief that this continent all beneath was so unreal, false, non-existent in its activity. Out of the silence one looked down on it, and it seemed to have lost all importance, all significance. It was so big, yet it had no significance. The kingdom of the world had no significance: what could one do but wander about?

The woman came with my soup. I asked her, did not many people come in the summer. But she was scared away, she did not answer, she went like a leaf in the wind. However, the soup was good and plentiful.

She was a long time before she came with the next course. Then she put the tray on the table, and looking at me, then looking away, shrinking, she said:

‘You must excuse me if I don’t answer you — I don’t hear well — I am rather deaf.’

I looked at her, and I winced also. She shrank in such simple pain from the fact of her defect. I wondered if she were bullied because of it, or only afraid lest visitors would dislike it.

She put the dishes in order, set me my plate, quickly, nervously, and was gone again, like a scared chicken. Being tired, I wanted to weep over her, the nervous, timid hen, so frightened by her own deafness. The house was silent of her, empty. It was perhaps her deafness which created this empty soundlessness.

When she came with the omelette, I said to her loudly:

‘That was very good, the soup and meat.’ So she quivered nervously, and said,

‘Thank you,’ and I managed to talk to her. She was like most deaf people, in that her terror of not hearing made her six times worse than she actually was.

She spoke with a soft, strange accent, so I thought she was perhaps a foreigner. But when I asked her she misunderstood, and I had not the heart to correct her. I can only remember she said her house was always full in the winter, about Christmas-time. People came for the winter sport. There were two young English ladies who always came to her.

She spoke of them warmly. Then, suddenly afraid, she drifted off again. I ate the omelette with cognac, which was very good, then I looked in the street. It was very dark, with bright stars, and smelled of snow. Two village men went by. I was tired, I did not want to go to the inn.

So I went to bed, in the silent, wooden house. I had a small bedroom, clean and wooden and very cold. Outside, the stream was rushing. I covered myself with a great depth of featherbed, and looked at the stars, and the shadowy upper world, and went to sleep.

In the morning I washed in the ice-cold water, and was glad to set out. An icy mist was over the noisy stream, there were a few meagre, shredded pine-trees. I had breakfast and paid my bill: it was seven francs — more than I could afford; but that did not matter, once I was out in the air.

The sky was blue and perfect, it was a ringing morning, the village was very still. I went up the hill till I came to the signpost. I looked down the direction of the Furka, and thought of my tired Englishman from Streatham, who would be on his way home. Thank God I need not go home: never, perhaps. I turned up the track to the left, to the Gothard.

Standing looking round at the mountain-tops, at the village and the broken castle below me, at the scattered debris of Andermatt on the moor in the distance, I was jumping in my soul with delight. Should one ever go down to the lower world?

Then I saw another figure striding along, a youth with knee-breeches and Alpine hat and braces over his shirt, walking manfully, his coat slung in his rucksack behind. I laughed, and waited. He came my way.

‘Are you going over the Gothard?’ I said.

‘Yes,’ he replied. ‘Are you also?’

‘Yes’ I said. ‘We will go together.’

So we set off, climbing a track up the heathy rocks.

He was a pale, freckled town youth from Basel, seventeen years old. He was a clerk in a baggage-transport firm — Gondrand Frères, I believe. He had a week’s holiday, in which time he was going to make a big circular walk, something like the Englishman’s. But he was accustomed to this mountain

walking: he belonged to a Sportverein. Manfully he marched in his thick hob-nailed boots, earnestly he scrambled up the rocks.

We were in the crest of the pass. Broad snow-patched slopes came down from the pure sky; the defile was full of stones, all bare stones, enormous ones as big as a house, and small ones, pebbles. Through these the road wound in silence, through this upper, transcendent desolation, wherein was only the sound of the stream. Sky and snow-patched slopes, then the stony, rocky bed of the defile, full of morning sunshine: this was all. We were crossing in silence from the northern world to the southern.

But he, Emil, was going to take the train back, through the tunnel, in the evening, to resume his circular walk at Göschenen.

I, however, was going on, over the ridge of the world, from the north into the south. So I was glad.

We climbed up the gradual incline for a long time. The slopes above became lower, they began to recede. The sky was very near, we were walking under the sky.

Then the defile widened out, there was an open place before us, the very top of the pass. Also there were low barracks, and soldiers. We heard firing. Standing still, we saw on the slopes of snow, under the radiant blue heaven, tiny puffs of smoke, then some small black figures crossing the snow patch, then another rattle of rifle-fire, rattling dry and unnatural in the upper, skyey air, between the rocks.

‘*Das ist schön,*’ said my companion, in his simple admiration.

‘*Hübsch,*’ I said.

‘But that would be splendid, to be firing up there, manoeuvring up in the snow.’

And he began to tell me how hard a soldier’s life was, how hard the soldier was drilled.

‘You don’t look forward to it?’ I said.

‘Oh yes, I do. I want to be a soldier, I want to serve my time.’

‘Why?’ I said.

‘For the exercise, the life, the drilling. One becomes strong.’

‘Do all the Swiss want to serve their time in the army?’ I asked.

‘Yes — they all want to. It is good for every man, and it keeps us all together. Besides, it is only for a year. For a year it is very good. The Germans have three years — that is too long, that is bad.’

I told him how the soldiers in Bavaria hated the military service.

‘Yes,’ he said, ‘that is true of Germans. The system is different. Ours is much better; in Switzerland a man enjoys his time as a soldier. I want to go.’

So we watched the black dots of soldiers crawling over the high snow, listened to the unnatural dry rattle of guns, up there.

Then we were aware of somebody whistling, of soldiers yelling down the road. We were to come on, along the level, over the bridge. So we marched quickly forward, away from the slopes, towards the hotel, once a monastery, that stood in the distance. The light was blue and clear on the reedy lakes of this upper place; it was a strange desolation of water and bog and rocks and road, hedged by the snowy slopes round the rim, under the very sky.

The soldier was yelling again. I could not tell what he said.

‘He says if we don’t run we can’t come at all,’ said Emil.

‘I won’t run,’ I said.

So we hurried forwards, over the bridge, where the soldier on guard was standing.

‘Do you want to be shot?’ he said angrily, as we came up.

‘No, thanks,’ I said.

Emil was very serious.

‘How long should we have had to wait if we hadn’t got through now?’ he asked the soldier, when we were safely out of danger.

‘Till one o’clock,’ was the reply.

‘Two hours!’ said Emil, strangely elated. ‘We should have had to wait two hours before we could come on. He was riled that we didn’t run,’ and he laughed with glee.

So we marched over the level to the hotel. We called in for a glass of hot milk. I asked in German. But the maid, a pert hussy, elegant and superior, was French. She served us with great contempt, as two worthless creatures, poverty-stricken. It abashed poor Emil, but we managed to laugh at her. This made her very angry. In the smoking-room she raised up her voice in French:

‘*Du lait chaud pour les chameaux.*’

‘Some hot milk for the camels, she says,’ I translated for Emil. He was covered with confusion and youthful anger.

But I called to her, tapped the table and called:

‘*Mademoiselle!*’

She appeared flouncingly in the doorway.

‘*Encore du lait pour les chameaux,*’ I said.

And she whisked our glasses off the table, and flounced out without a word.

But she would not come in again with the milk. A German girl brought it. We laughed, and she smiled primly.

When we set forth again, Emil rolled up his sleeves and turned back his shirt from his neck and breast, to do the thing thoroughly. Besides, it was midday, and

the sun was hot; and, with his bulky pack on his back, he suggested the camel of the French maid more than ever.

We were on the downward slope. Only a short way from the hotel, and there was the drop, the great cleft in the mountains running down from this shallow pot among the peaks.

The descent on the south side is much more precipitous and wonderful than the ascent from the north. On the south, the rocks are craggy and stupendous; the little river falls headlong down; it is not a stream, it is one broken, panting cascade far away in the gulley below, in the darkness.

But on the slopes the sun pours in, the road winds down with its tail in its mouth, always in endless loops returning on itself. The mules that travel upward seem to be treading in a mill.

Emil took the narrow tracks, and, like the water, we cascaded down, leaping from level to level, leaping, running, leaping, descending headlong, only resting now and again when we came down on to another level of the highroad.

Having begun, we could not help ourselves, we were like two stones bouncing down. Emil was highly elated. He waved his thin, bare, white arms as he leapt, his chest grew pink with the exercise. Now he felt he was doing something that became a member of his Sportverein. Down we went, jumping, running, britching.

It was wonderful on this south side, so sunny, with feathery trees and deep black shadows. It reminded me of Goethe, of the romantic period:

Kennst du das Land, wo die Citronen blühen?

So we went tumbling down into the south, very swiftly, along with the tumbling stream. But it was very tiring. We went at a great pace down the gully, between the sheer rocks. Trees grew in the ledges high over our heads, trees grew down below. And ever we descended.

Till gradually the gully opened, then opened into a wide valley-head, and we saw Airolo away below us, the railway emerging from its hole, the whole valley like a cornucopia full of sunshine.

Poor Emil was tired, more tired than I was. And his big boots had hurt his feet in the descent. So, having come to the open valley-head, we went more gently. He had become rather quiet.

The head of the valley had that half-tamed, ancient aspect that reminded me of the Romans. I could only expect the Roman legions to be encamped down there; and the white goats feeding on the bushes belonged to a Roman camp.

But no, we saw again the barracks of the Swiss soldiery, and again we were in the midst of rifle-fire and manoeuvres. But we went evenly, tired now, and hungry. We had nothing to eat.

It is strange how different the sun-dried, ancient, southern slopes of the world are, from the northern slopes. It is as if the god Pan really had his home among these sun-bleached stones and tough, sun-dark trees. And one knows it all in one's blood, it is pure, sun-dried memory. So I was content, coming down into Airolo.

We found the streets were Italian, the houses sunny outside and dark within, like Italy, there were laurels in the road. Poor Emil was a foreigner all at once. He rolled down his shirt sleeves and fastened his shirt-neck, put on his coat and collar, and became a foreigner in his soul, pale and strange.

I saw a shop with vegetables and grapes, a real Italian shop, a dark cave.

'*Quanto costa l'uva?*' were my first words in the south.

'*Sessanta al chilo,*' said the girl.

And it was as pleasant as a drink of wine, the Italian.

So Emil and I ate the sweet black grapes as we went to the station.

He was very poor. We went into the third-class restaurant at the station. He ordered beer and bread and sausage; I ordered soup and boiled beef and vegetables.

They brought me a great quantity, so, whilst the girl was serving coffee-with-rum to the men at the bar, I took another spoon and knife and fork and plates for Emil, and we had two dinners from my one. When the girl — she was a woman of thirty-five — came back, she looked at us sharply. I smiled at her coaxingly; so she gave a small, kindly smile in reply.

'*Ja, dies ist reizend,*' said Emil, *sotto voce*, exulting. He was very shy. But we were curiously happy, in that railway restaurant.

Then we sat very still, on the platform, and waited for the train. It was like Italy, pleasant and social to wait in the railway station, all the world easy and warm in its activity, with the sun shining.

I decided to take a franc's worth of train-journey. So I chose my station. It was one franc twenty, third class. Then my train came, and Emil and I parted, he waving to me till I was out of sight. I was sorry he had to go back, he did so want to venture forth.

So I slid for a dozen miles or more, sleepily, down the Ticino valley, sitting opposite two fat priests in their feminine black.

When I got out at my station I felt for the first time ill at ease. Why was I getting out at this wayside place, on to the great, raw highroad? I did not know. But I set off walking. It was nearly tea-time.

Nothing in the world is more ghastly than these Italian roads, new, mechanical, belonging to a machine life. The old roads are wonderful, skilfully aiming their way. But these new great roads are desolating, more desolating than

all the ruins in the world.

I walked on and on, down the Ticino valley, towards Bellinzona. The valley was perhaps beautiful: I don't know. I can only remember the road. It was broad and new, and it ran very often beside the railway. It ran also by quarries and by occasional factories, also through villages. And the quality of its sordidness is something that does not bear thinking of, a quality that has entered Italian life now, if it was not there before.

Here and there, where there were quarries or industries, great lodging-houses stood naked by the road, great, grey, desolate places; and squalid children were playing round the steps, and dirty men slouched in. Everything seemed under a weight.

Down the road of the Ticino valley I felt again my terror of this new world which is coming into being on top of us. One always feels it in a suburb, on the edge of a town, where the land is being broken under the advance of houses. But this is nothing, in England, to the terror one feels on the new Italian roads, where these great blind cubes of dwellings rise stark from the destroyed earth, swarming with a sort of verminous life, really verminous, purely destructive.

It seems to happen when the peasant suddenly leaves his home and becomes a workman. Then an entire change comes over everywhere. Life is now a matter of selling oneself to slave-work, building roads or labouring in quarries or mines or on the railways, purposeless, meaningless, really slave-work, each integer doing his mere labour, and all for no purpose, except to have money, and to get away from the old system.

These Italian navvies work all day long, their whole life is engaged in the mere brute labour. And they are the navvies of the world. And whilst they are navvying, they are almost shockingly indifferent to their circumstances, merely callous to the dirt and foulness.

It is as if the whole social form were breaking down, and the human element swarmed within the disintegration, like maggots in cheese. The roads, the railways are built, the mines and quarries are excavated, but the whole organism of life, the social organism, is slowly crumbling and caving in, in a kind of process of dry rot, most terrifying to see. So that it seems as though we should be left at last with a great system of roads and railways and industries, and a world of utter chaos seething upon these fabrications: as if we had created a steel framework, and the whole body of society were crumbling and rotting in between. It is most terrifying to realize; and I have always felt this terror upon a new Italian highroad — more there than anywhere.

The remembrance of the Ticino valley is a sort of nightmare to me. But it was better when at last, in the darkness of night, I got into Bellinzona. In the midst of

the town one felt the old organism still living. It is only at its extremities that it is falling to pieces, as in dry rot.

In the morning, leaving Bellinzona, again I went in terror of the new, evil highroad, with its skirting of huge cubical houses and its seething navy population. Only the peasants driving in with fruit were consoling. But I was afraid of them: the same spirit had set in in them.

I was no longer happy in Switzerland, not even when I was eating great blackberries and looking down at the Lago Maggiore, at Locarno, lying by the lake; the terror of the callous, disintegrating process was too strong in me.

At a little inn a man was very good to me. He went into his garden and fetched me the first grapes and apples and peaches, bringing them in amongst leaves, and heaping them before me. He was Italian-Swiss; he had been in a bank in Bern; now he had retired, had bought his paternal home, and was a free man. He was about fifty years old; he spent all his time in his garden; his daughter attended to the inn.

He talked to me, as long as I stayed, about Italy and Switzerland and work and life. He was retired, he was free. But he was only nominally free. He had only achieved freedom from labour. He knew that the system he had escaped at last, persisted, and would consume his sons and his grandchildren. He himself had more or less escaped back to the old form; but as he came with me on to the hillside, looking down the highroad at Lugano in the distance, he knew that his old order was collapsing by a slow process of disintegration.

Why did he talk to me as if I had any hope, as if I represented any positive truth as against this great negative truth that was advancing up the hillside. Again I was afraid. I hastened down the highroad, past the houses, the grey, raw crystals of corruption.

I saw a girl with handsome bare legs, ankles shining like brass in the sun. She was working in a field, on the edge of a vineyard. I stopped to look at her, suddenly fascinated by her handsome naked flesh that shone like brass.

Then she called out to me, in a jargon I could not understand, something mocking and challenging. And her voice was raucous and challenging; I went on, afraid.

In Lugano I stayed at a German hotel. I remember sitting on a seat in the darkness by the lake, watching the stream of promenaders patrolling the edge of the water, under the trees and the lamps. I can still see many of their faces: English, German, Italian, French. And it seemed here, here in this holiday-place, was the quick of the disintegration, the dry-rot, in this dry, friable flux of people backwards and forwards on the edge of the lake, men and women from the big hotels, in evening dress, curiously sinister, and ordinary visitors, and tourists,

and workmen, youths, men of the town, laughing, jeering. It was curiously and painfully sinister, almost obscene.

I sat a long time among them, thinking of the girl with her limbs of glowing brass. Then at last I went up to the hotel, and sat in the lounge looking at the papers. It was the same here as down below, though not so intense, the feeling of horror.

So I went to bed. The hotel was on the edge of a steep declivity. I wondered why the whole hills did not slide down, in some great natural catastrophe.

In the morning I walked along the side of the Lake of Lugano, to where I could take a steamer to ferry me down to the end. The lake is not beautiful, only picturesque. I liked most to think of the Romans coming to it.

So I steamed down to the lower end of the water. When I landed and went along by a sort of railway I saw a group of men. Suddenly they began to whoop and shout. They were hanging on to an immense pale bullock, which was slung up to be shod; and it was lunging and kicking with terrible energy. It was strange to see that mass of pale, soft-looking flesh working with such violent frenzy, convulsed with violent, active frenzy, whilst men and women hung on to it with ropes, hung on and weighed it down. But again it scattered some of them in its terrible convulsion. Human beings scattered into the road, the whole place was covered with hot dung. And when the bullock began to lunge again, the men set up a howl, half of triumph, half of derision.

I went on, not wanting to see. I went along a very dusty road. But it was not so terrifying, this road. Perhaps it was older.

In dreary little Chiasso I drank coffee, and watched the come and go through the Customs. The Swiss and the Italian Customs officials had their offices within a few yards of each other, and everybody must stop. I went in and showed my rucksack to the Italian, then I mounted a tram, and went to the Lake of Como.

In the tram were dressed-up women, fashionable, but business-like. They had come by train to Chiasso, or else had been shopping in the town.

When we came to the terminus a young miss, dismounting before me, left behind her parasol. I had been conscious of my dusty, grimy appearance as I sat in the tram, I knew they thought me a workman on the roads. However, I forgot that when it was time to dismount.

'*Pardon, Mademoiselle,*' I said to the young miss. She turned and withered me with a rather overdone contempt — '*bourgeoise,*' I said to myself, as I looked at her — '*Vous avez laissé votre parasol.*'

She turned, and with a rapacious movement darted upon her parasol. How her soul was in her possessions! I stood and watched her. Then she went into the road and under the trees, haughty, a demoiselle. She had on white kid boots.

I thought of the Lake of Como what I had thought of Lugano: it must have been wonderful when the Romans came there. Now it is all villas. I think only the sunrise is still wonderful, sometimes.

I took the steamer down to Como, and slept in a vast old stone cavern of an inn, a remarkable place, with rather nice people. In the morning I went out. The peace and the bygone beauty of the cathedral created the glow of the great past. And in the market-place they were selling chestnuts wholesale, great heaps of bright, brown chestnuts, and sacks of chestnuts, and peasants very eager selling and buying. I thought of Como, it must have been wonderful even a hundred years ago. Now it is cosmopolitan, the cathedral is like a relic, a museum object, everywhere stinks of mechanical money-pleasure. I dared not risk walking to Milan: I took a train. And there, in Milan, sitting in the Cathedral Square, on Saturday afternoon, drinking Bitter Campari and watching the swarm of Italian city-men drink and talk vivaciously, I saw that here the life was still vivid, here the process of disintegration was vigorous, and centred in a multiplicity of mechanical activities that engage the human mind as well as the body. But always there was the same purpose stinking in it all, the mechanizing, the perfect mechanizing of human life.

SEA AND SARDINIA



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INTRODUCTION

If I were asked to suggest which books of Lawrence should be read first by someone to whom they were all unknown I think I should suggest *Sons and Lovers*, and *Sea and Sardinia*. These two books, I believe, bring you Lawrence at his most accessible, though some might prefer his poems or essays. At the same time they rather neatly illustrate the two kinds of books into which Lawrence's main writing naturally fits, either the long concentrated book over which he laboured for years as he poured out the experience of years, or the book thrown off in a spurt of inspiration and hardly retouched at all.

Sons and Lovers was created from Lawrence's whole early life and was worked over time and again from 1911 to 1913. The whole action of *Sea and Sardinia* occurred between the 4th and 10th of February, 1921; and the book itself was written in six weeks wholly from memory, without a single note. The book abounds in Lawrence's special quality, namely that he experiences and remembers more vividly than other men and, without any straining, is able to pass on his experiences to others in words so appropriate and felicitous that Lawrence's experiences become the reader's.

Sea and Sardinia, in itself so perfect, came out of a period of wandering and of growing restlessness. The "iniquitous" prosecution of *The Rainbow* in November, 1915, the even more iniquitous expulsion of the Lawrences from Cornwall as suspected spies in October, 1917, convinced him that he had no option but to exile himself. Even that was refused during the war (though he was graded as unfit for military service) and was vexatiously delayed after the war until November, 1919. Of course he wanted to go, he was glad to go. In the spring of 1919 he had told Middleton Murry that the only hope of a new life was out of England. And in January, 1919, when he again renewed his efforts to get out, he had written: "I feel I am shaking myself free to get out of this country, for good and ever". And, in fact, he never did return except for brief visits to his family and one or two old friends.

Although Lawrence had been abroad before, 1920 was really the first year in which he could do a little modest care free travelling without the dire threat of lacking money. His pre-1914 life at Lake Garda and Lerici, even Iris walks in the Tyrol and Switzerland, had always been pinched for money. Between 1914 and 1920 he had been close to deprivation and hunger, and had eked out existence by "precarious borrowings". But as the war receded there came at last a demand for his books, particularly in America. By comparison he was now

rich. His diary jottings show that by May, 1920, he had paid off most of his debts and had a balance of £171. Still, he was cautious, and took his wife and Mary Carman to Malta only after she had offered to pay their expenses. In July Frieda Lawrence went to see her mother and sisters in Germany. Lawrence, “fearfully English” as always, did not care to enter a still hostile country where he might be insulted. For a few weeks he wandered through Italy, visiting and staying with friends, and saw Naples, Rome, Florence, parts of rural Tuscany, Como, and Venice. And after all this expense, when they returned to Taormina at the end of October, he found he still had £164.

Yet, despite his summer wanderings, he had been back only a few weeks when he felt “an absolute necessity to move”. We should remember that his poetical descriptions of Taormina and Etna refer to sunny clays, and that during November and December, 1920, it rained “with such persistence and stupidity that one loses all one’s initiative and remains cut off” There was “lovely weather” on the 1st January, 1921, but on the 20th he was writing that “it thunders and lightnings for twenty-four hours, and hailstorms continually”. In his diary he made the laconic note: “meditate trip to Sardinia”.

Why Sardinia, and in winter? It is very hard to say. In spite of his cockiness and dogmatism Lawrence was secretly much given to moods of self-mistrust and vacillation. He may have chosen Sardinia because he had been tempted in exactly the opposite direction by reading a book about Africa by a learned German who had invented an ancient African civilisation which fascinated Lawrence. Moreover, Lawrence constantly wavered between the needs of his amiable social self and his revulsion from the society in which he found himself involved. He might easily have revolted from the English-speaking inhabitants of Taormina, more especially as he was really preparing himself to leave Europe altogether. A little later, discussing that flight, he wrote his American friend, Brewster: “Dio mio, I am so ridiculous, wavering between east and west”. And this uncertainty and restlessness of early 1921 were symptoms of the greater urge which was to take him round the world of Ceylon, Australia and Mexico.

In *Sea and Sardinia* there is a quite unconscious portrait of the author, that irresistibly charming Lawrence who had the gift of making even the most commonplace things seem wonderful. There was a kind of magic in his company which to a much less extent passed into his written words. If you can respond to that magic you may go happily and interestedly with him through every mile of that journey. The magic perhaps will not reach the highbrow literary person or those who are enslaved by journalism; but there are others. All the time Lawrence is giving out life, giving you the sensation of Iris unique perception of a world which to him was marvellously alive and variously interesting. He cares

nothing about writing for writing's sake, that self-conscious and abject conforming to the artificial tastes of literary sects which is so boring. In his critical vocabulary the most contemptuous of adjectives was "literary".

You will not then be surprised to find that the majestic grandeur of Etna and Calabria and the Ionian Sea serves as a frame for the clerks and other poor workers waiting for the early morning train at Taormina station "like a line of caricatures between oneself and the naked sea". In his zest for life Lawrence enjoyed re-living the railway journey to Palermo and the people he saw in the train and at the station as much as that gorgeous religious procession at Nuoro. The contents and packing of the "kitchenino" are as interesting in their place as the first glimpse of Cagliari and the starry sky over the Mediterranean. And this is not because he was unselective, but because, like Kipling in his very different way, Lawrence saw nothing common in the world, had a wider than ordinary scale of values. He loved the lonely landscapes and picturesque villages and old-world people, but in another way he enjoyed the soup-sucking socialists of Manilas just as much.

Parts of *Sea and Sardinia* appeared in *The Dial* for October and November, 1921. and Lawrence was dismayed and annoyed by the cuts made. "Had *Dial* with scrappy *Sea and Sardinia* — hate it that they mauled it about. A vile Sunday". (30th October, 1921.) It first appeared in book form in the United States, being issued in December, 1921, by Seltzer, with eight coloured illustrations by Jan Juta. Martin Seeker's edition (same illustrations) did not appear until April, 1923. Lawrence's bibliographer says of the Seeker edition, "taken merely as a hook, this is perhaps the most beautiful Lawrence item".

RICHARD ALDINGTON

I. AS FAR AS PALERMO

Comes over one an absolute necessity to move. And what is more, to move in some particular direction. A double necessity then: to get on the move, and to know whither.

Why can't one sit still? Here in Sicily it is so pleasant: the sunny Ionian sea, the changing jewel of Calabria, like a fire-opal moved in the light; Italy and the panorama of Christmas clouds, night with the dog-star laying a long, luminous gleam across the sea, as if baying at us, Orion marching above; how the dog-star Sirius looks at one, looks at one! he is the hound of heaven, green, glamorous and fierce! — and then, oh, regal evening star, hung westward flaring over the jagged dark precipices of tall Sicily: then Etna, that wicked witch, resting her thick white snow under heaven, and slowly, slowly rolling her orange-coloured smoke. They called her the Pillar of Heaven, the Greeks. It seems wrong at first, for she trails up in a long, magical, flexible line from the sea's edge to her blunt cone, and does not seem tall. She seems rather low, under heaven. But as one knows her better, oh, awe and wizardy! Remote under heaven, aloof, so near, yet never with us. The painters try to paint her, and the photographers to photograph her, in vain. Because why? Because the near ridges, with their olives and white houses, these are with us. Because the riverbed, and Naxos under the lemon groves, Greek Naxos deep under dark-leaved, many-fruited lemon groves, Etna's skirts and skirt-bottoms, these still are our world, our own world. Even the high villages among the oaks, on Etna. But Etna herself, Etna of the snow and secret changing winds, she is beyond a crystal wall. When I look at her, low, white, witch-like under heaven, slowly rolling her orange smoke and giving sometimes a breath of rose-red flame, then I must look away from earth, into the ether, into the low empyrean. And there, in that remote region, Etna is alone. If you would see her, you must slowly take off your eyes from the world and go a naked seer to the strange chamber of the empyrean. Pedestal of heaven! The Greeks had a sense of the magic truth of things. Thank goodness one still knows enough about them to find one's kinship at last. There are so many photographs, there are so infinitely many water-colour drawings and oil paintings which purport to render Etna. But pedestal of heaven! You must cross the invisible border. Between the foreground, which is our own, and Etna. pivot of winds in lower heaven, there is a dividing line. You must change your state of mind, A metempsychosis. It is no use thinking you can see and behold Etna and the foreground both at once.

Never. One or the other. Foreground and a transcribed Etna. Or Etna, pedestal of heaven.

Why, then, must one go? Why not stay? Ah. what a mistress, this Etna! with her strange winds prowling round her like Circes panthers, some black, some white. With her strange, remote communications and her terrible dynamic exhalations. She makes men mad. Such terrible vibrations of wicked and beautiful electricity she throws about her, like a deadly net! Nay, sometimes, verily, one can feel a new current of her demon magnetism seize one's living tissue and change the peaceful life of one's active cells. She makes a storm in the living plasm and a new adjustment. And sometimes it is like a madness.

This timeless Grecian Etna, in her lower-heaven loveliness, so lovely, so lovely, what a torturer! Not many men can really stand her, without losing their souls. She is like Circe. Unless a man is very strong she takes his soul away from him and leaves him not a beast, but an elemental creature, intelligent and soulless. Intelligent, almost inspired, and soulless, like the Etna Sicilians, Intelligent daimons, and humanly, according to us, the most stupid people on earth. Ach. horror! How many men, how many races, has Etna put to flight? It was she who broke the quick of the Greek soul. And after the Greeks, she gave the Romans. the Normans, the Arabs, the Spaniards, the French, the Italians, even the English, she gave them all their inspired hour and broke their souls.

Perhaps it is she one must flee from. At any rate, one must go: and at once. After having come back only at the end of October, already one must dash away. And it is only the third of January. And one cannot afford to move. Yet there you are: at the Etna bidding one goes.

Where does one go? There is Girgenti by the south. There is Tunis at hand, Girgenti, and the sulphur spirit and the Greek guarding temples, to make one madder? Never. Neither Syracuse and the madness of its great quarries. Tunis? Africa? Not yet, not yet. Not the Arabs, not yet. Naples, Rome, Florence? No good at all. Where then?

Where then? Spain or Sardinia. Spain or Sardinia. Sardinia, which is like nowhere. Sardinia, which has no history, no date, no race, no offering. Let it be Sardinia. They say neither Romans, nor Phoenicians, Greeks nor Arabs ever subdued Sardinia. It lies outside; outside the circuit of civilisation. Like the Basque lands. Sure enough, it is Italian now, with its railways and its motor-omnibuses. But there is an uncaptured Sardinia still. It lies within the net of this European civilisation, but it isn't landed yet. And the net is getting old and tattered. A good many fish are slipping through the net of the old European civilisation. Like that great whale of Russia. And probably even Sardinia. Sardinia then. Let it be Sardinia.

There is a fortnightly boat sailing from Palermo — next Wednesday, three days ahead. Let us go, then. Away from abhorred Etna, and the Ionian sea, and these great stars in the water, and the almond trees in bud, and the orange trees heavy with red fruit, and these maddening, exasperating, impossible Sicilians, who never knew what truth was and have long lost all notion of what a human being is. A sort of sulphureous demons. *Andiamo!*

But let me confess, in parenthesis, that I am not at all sure whether I don't really prefer these demons to our sanctified humanity.

Why does one create such discomfort for oneself! To have to get up in the middle of the night — half-past one — to go and look at the clock, Of course this fraud of an American watch has stopped, with its impudent phosphorescent face. Half-past one! Half-past one, and a dark January night. Ah, well! Half-past one! And an uneasy sleep till at last it is five o'clock. Then light a candle and get up.

The dreary black morning, the candle-light, the house looking night-dismal. Ah, well, one does all these things for one's pleasure. So light the charcoal fire and put the kettle on. The queen bee shivering round half dressed, fluttering her unhappy candle.

"It's fun," she says, shuddering.

"Great," say I, grim as death.

First fill the thermos with hot tea. Then fry bacon — good English bacon from Malta, a god-send, indeed — and make bacon sandwiches. Make also sandwiches of scrambled eggs. Make also bread and butter. Also a little toast for breakfast — and more tea. But ugh, who wants to eat at this unearthly hour, especially when one is escaping from bewitched Sicily.

Fill the little bag we call the kitchenino. Methylated spirit, a small aluminium saucepan, a spirit-lamp, two spoons, two forks, a knife, two aluminium plates, salt, sugar, tea — what else? The thermos flask, the various sandwiches, four apples, and a little tin of butter. So much for the kitchenino, for myself and the queen bee. Then my knapsack and the q-b's handbag.

Under the lid of the half-cloudy night sky, far away at the rim of the Ionian sea, the first light, like metal fusing. So swallow the cup of tea and the bit of toast. Hastily wash up, so that we can find the house decent when we come back. Shut the door-windows of the upper terrace and go down. Lock the door: the upper half of the house made fast.

The sky and sea are parting like an oyster shell, with a low red gape. Looking across from the veranda at it, one shivers. Not that it is cold. The morning is not at all cold. But the ominousness of it: that long red slit between a dark sky and a dark Ionian sea, terrible old bivalve which has held life between its lips so long.

And here, at this house, we are ledged so awfully above the dawn, naked to it.

Fasten the door-windows of the lower veranda. One won't fasten at all. The summer heat warped it one way, the masses of autumn rain warped it another. Put a chair against it. Lock the last door and hide the key. Sling the knapsack on one's back, take the kitchenino in one's hand and look round. The dawn-red widening, between the purpling sea and the troubled sky. A light in the capucin convent across there. Cocks crowing and the long, howling, hiccupping, melancholy bray of an ass. "All females are dead, all females-och! och! och! — hoooo! Ahaa! — there's one left." So he ends on a moaning grunt of consolation. This is what the Arabs tell us an ass is howling when he brays.

Very dark under the great carob tree as we go down the steps. Dark still the garden. Scent of mimosa, and then of jasmine. The lovely mimosa tree invisible. Dark the stony path. The goat whinnies out of her shed. The broken Roman tomb which lolls right over the garden track does not fall on me as I slip under its massive tilt. Ah, dark garden, dark garden, with your olives and your wine, your medlars and mulberries and many almond trees, your steep terraces ledged high up above the sea, I am leaving you, slinking out. Out between the rosemary hedges, out of the tall gate, on to the cruel steep stony road. So under the dark, big eucalyptus trees, over the stream, and up towards the village. There, I have got so far.

It is full dawn — dawn — not morning, the sun will not have risen. The village is nearly all dark in the red light, and asleep still. No one at the fountain by the capucin gate: too dark still. One man leading a horse round the corner of the Palazzo Corvaia. One or two dark men along the Corso. And so over the brow, down the steep cobble-stone street between the houses, and out to the naked hill front. This is the dawn-coast of Sicily. Nay, the dawn-coast of Europe. Steep, like a vast cliff, dawn-forward. A red dawn, with mingled curdling dark clouds, and some gold. It must be seven o'clock. The station down below, by the sea. And noise of a train. Yes, a train. And we still high on the steep track, winding downwards. But it is the train from Messina to Catania, half an hour before ours, which is from Catania to Messina.

So jolt, and drop, and jolt down the old road that winds on the cliff face. Etna across there is smothered quite low, quite low in a dense puther of ink-black clouds. Playing some devilry in private, no doubt. The dawn is angry red, and yellow above, the sea takes strange colours. I hate the station, pigmy, drawn out there beside the sea. On this steep face, especially in the windless nooks, the almond blossom is already out. In little puffs and specks and stars, it looks very like bits of snow scattered by winter. Bits of snow, bits of blossom, fourth day of the year 1921. Only blossom. And Etna indescribably cloaked and secretive in

her dense black clouds. She has wrapped them quite round her, quite low round her skirts.

At last we are down. We pass the pits where men are burning lime — red-hot, round pits — and are out on the highway. Nothing can be more depressing than an Italian high-road. From Syracuse to Airolo it is the same: horrible, dreary, slummy high-roads the moment you approach a village or any human habitation. Here there is an acrid smell of lemon juice. There is a factory for making citrate. The houses flush on the road, under the great limestone face of the hill, open their slummy doors, and throw out dirty water and coffee dregs. We walk over the dirty water and coffee dregs. Mules rattle past with carts. Other people are going to the station. We pass the Dazio and are there.

Humanity is, externally, too much alike. Internally there are insuperable differences. So one sits and thinks, watching the people on the station: like a line of caricatures between oneself and the naked sea and the uneasy, clouding dawn.

You would look in vain this morning for the swarthy feline southerner of romance. It might, as far as features are concerned, be an early morning crowd waiting for the train on a north London suburb station. As far as features go. For some are fair and some colourless and none racially typical. The only one that is absolutely like a rare caricature is a tan stout elderly fellow with spectacles and a short nose and a bristling moustache, and he is the German of the comic papers of twenty years ago. But he is pure Sicilian.

They are mostly young fellows going up the line to Messina to their job: not artisans, lower middle class. And externally, so like any other clerks and shopmen, only rather more shabby, much less *socially* self-conscious. They are lively, they throw their arms round one another's necks, they all but kiss. One poor chap has had earache, so a black kerchief is tied round his face, and his black hat is perched above, and a comic sight he looks. No one seems to think so, however. Yet they view my arrival with a knapsack on my back with cold disapprobation, as unseemly as if I had arrived riding on a pig. I ought to be in a carriage, and the knapsack ought to be a new suitcase. I know it, but am inflexible.

That is how they are. Each one thinks he is as handsome as Adonis, and as "fetching" as Don Juan. Extraordinary! At the same time, all flesh is grass, and if a few trouser-buttons are missing or if a black hat perches above a thick black muffler and a long excruciated face, it is all in the course of nature. They seize the black-edged one by the arm, and in profound commiseration: "Do you suffer? Are you suffering?" they ask.

And that also is how they are. So terribly physically all over one another. They pour themselves one over the other like so much melted butter over parsnips.

They catch each other under the chin, with a tender caress of the hand, and they smile with sunny melting tenderness into each other's face. Never in the world have I seen such melting gay tenderness as between casual Sicilians on railway platforms, whether they be young lean-cheeked Sicilians or huge stout Sicilians.

There must be something curious about the proximity of a volcano. Naples and Catania alike, the men are hugely fat, with great macaroni paunches, they are expansive and in a perfect drip of casual affection and love. But the Sicilians are even more wildly exuberant and fat and all over one another than the Neapolitans. They never leave off being amorously friendly with almost everybody, emitting a relentless physical familiarity that is quite bewildering to one not brought up near a volcano.

This is more true of the middle classes than of the lower. The working men are perforce thinner and less exuberant. But they hang together in clusters, and can never be physically near enough.

It is only thirty miles to Messina, but the train takes two hours. It winds and hurries and stops beside the lavender grey morning sea. A flock of goats trail over the beach near the lapping wave's edge, dismally. Great wide deserts of stony riverbeds run down to the sea, and men on asses are picking their way across, and women are kneeling by the small stream-channel washing clothes. The lemons hang pale and innumerable in the thick lemon groves. Lemon trees, like Italians, seem to be happiest when they are touching one another all round. Solid forests of not very tall lemon trees lie between the steep mountains and the sea, on the strip of plain. Women, vague in the orchard under-shadow, are picking the lemons, lurking as if in the undersea. There are heaps of pale yellow lemons under the trees. They look like pale, primrose-smouldering fires. Curious how like fires the heaps of lemons look, under the shadow of foliage, seeming to give off a pallid burning amid the suave, naked, greenish trunks. When there comes a cluster of orange trees, the oranges are red like coals among the darker leaves. But lemons, lemons, innumerable, speckled like innumerable tiny stars in the green firmament of leaves. So many lemons! Think of all the lemonade crystals they will be reduced to! Think of America drinking them up next summer.

I always wonder why such vast wide riverbeds of pale boulders come out of the heart of the high-rearing, dramatic stone mountains, a few miles to the sea. A few miles only: and never more than a few threading water-trickles in riverbeds wide enough for the Rhine. But that is how it is. The landscape is ancient, and classic — romantic, as if it had known far-off days and fiercer rivers and more verdure. Steep, craggy, wild, the land goes up to its points and precipices, a tangle of heights. But all jammed on top of one another. And in old landscapes,

as in old people, the flesh wears away, and the bones become prominent. Rock sticks up fantastically. The jungle of peaks in this old Sicily.

The sky is all grey. The Straits are grey. Reggio, just across the water, is white looking, under the great dark toe of Calabria, the toe of Italy. On Aspromonte there is grey cloud. It is going to rain. After such marvellous ringing blue days, it is going to rain. What luck!

Aspromonte! Garibaldi! I could always cover my face when I see it, Aspromonte. I wish Garibaldi had been prouder. Why did he go off so humbly, with his bag of seed-corn and a flea in his ear, when His Majesty King Victor Emmanuel arrived with his little short legs on the scene. Poor Garibaldi! He wanted to be a hero and a dictator of free Sicily. Well, one can't be a dictator and humble at the same time. One must be a hero, which he was, and proud, which he wasn't. Besides people don't nowadays choose proud heroes for governors. Anything but. They prefer constitutional monarchs, who are paid servants and who know it. That is democracy. Democracy admires its own servants and nothing else. And you couldn't make a real servant even of Garibaldi. Only of His Majesty King Victor Emmanuel. So Italy chose Victor Emmanuel, and Garibaldi went off with a corn bag and a whack on the behind like a humble ass.

It is raining — dismally, dismally raining. And this is Messina coming. Oh horrible Messina, earthquake-shattered and renewing your youth like a vast mining settlement, with rows and streets and miles of concrete shanties, squalor and a big street with shops and gaps and broken houses still, just behind the tram-lines, and a dreary squalid earthquake-hopeless port in a lovely harbour. People don't forget and don't recover. The people of Messina seem to be to-day what they were nearly twenty years ago, after the earthquake: people who have had a terrible shock, and for whom all life's institutions are really nothing, neither civilisation nor purposes. The meaning of everything all came down with a smash in that shuddering earthquake, and nothing remains but money and the throes of some sort of sensation. Messina between the volcanoes, Etna and Stromboli, having known the death-agony's terror. I always dread coming near the awful place, yet I have found the people kind, almost feverishly so, as if they knew the awful need for kindness.

Raining, raining hard. Clambering down on to the wet platform and walking across the wet lines to the cover. Many human beings scurrying across the wet lines, among the wet trains, to get out into the ghastly town beyond. Thank heaven one need not go out into the town. Two convicts chained together among the crowd — and two soldiers. The prisoners wear fawny homespun clothes, of cloth such as the peasants weave, with irregularly occurring brown stripes.

Rather nice handmade rough stuff. But linked together, dear God! And those horrid caps on their hairless foreheads. No hair. Probably they are going to a convict station on the Lipari islands. The people take no notice.

No, but convicts are horrible creatures: at least, the old one is, with his long, nasty face: his long, clean-shaven, horrible face, without emotions, or with emotions one cannot follow. Something cold, sightless. A sightless, ugly look. I should loathe to have to touch him. Of the other I am not so sure. He is younger, and with dark eyebrows. But a roundish, softish face, with a sort of leer. No, evil is horrible. I used to think there was no absolute evil. Now I know there is a great deal. So much that it threatens life altogether. That ghastly abstractness of criminals. They don't know any more what other people feel. Yet some horrible force drives them.

It is a great mistake to abolish the death penalty. If I were dictator, I should order the old one to be hung at once. I should have judges with sensitive, living hearts: not abstract intellects. And because the instinctive heart recognised a man as evil, I would have that man destroyed. Quickly. Because good warm life is now in danger.

Standing on Messina station — dreary, dreary hole — and watching the winter rain and seeing the pair of convicts, I must remember again Oscar Wilde on Reading platform, a convict. What a terrible mistake, to let oneself be martyred by a lot of canaille. A man must say his say. But *noli me tangere*.

Curious these people are. Up and down, up and down go a pair of officials. The young one in a black gold-laced cap talks to the elder in a scarlet gold-laced cap. And he walks, the young one, with a mad little hop, and his fingers fly as if he wanted to scatter them to the four winds of heaven, and his words go off like fireworks, with more than Sicilian speed. On and on, up and down, and his eye is dark and excited and unseeing, like the eye of a fleeing rabbit. Strange and beside itself is humanity.

What a lot of officials! You know them by their caps. Elegant tubby little officials in kid-and-patent boots and gold-laced caps, tall long-nosed ones in more gold-laced caps, like angels in and out of the gates of heaven they thread in and out of the various doors. As far as I can see, there are three scarlet station-masters, five black-and-gold substation-masters, and a countless number of principalities and powers in more or less broken boots and official caps. They are like bees round a hive, humming in an important *conversazione*, and occasionally looking at some paper or other, and extracting a little official honey. But the *conversazione* is the affair of affairs. To an Italian official, life seems to be one long and animated conversation — the Italian word is better — interrupted by casual trains and telephones. And besides the angels of heaven's

gates, there are the mere ministers, porters, lamp-cleaners, *etc.* These stand in groups and talk socialism. A lamp-man slashes along, swinging a couple of lamps. Bashes one against a barrow. Smash goes the glass. Looks down as if to say, What do you mean by it? Glances over his shoulder to see if any member of the higher hierarchies is looking. Seven members of higher hierarchies are assiduously not looking. On goes the minister with the lamp, blithely. Another pane or two gone. *Vogue la galère.*

Passengers have gathered again, some in hoods, some in nothing. Youths in thin, paltry clothes stand out in the pouring rain as if they did not know it was raining. One sees their coat-shoulders soaked. And yet they do not trouble to keep under shelter. Two large station dogs run about and trot through the standing trains, just like officials. They climb up the footboard, hop into a train and hop out casually when they feel like it. Two or three port-porters, in canvas hats as big as umbrellas, literally, spreading like huge fins over their shoulders, are looking into more empty trains. More and more people appear. More and more official caps stand about. It rains and rains. The train for Palermo and the train for Syracuse are both an hour late already, coming from the port. Flea-bite. Through these are the great connections from Rome.

Loose locomotives trundle back and forth, vaguely, like black dogs running and turning back. The port is only four minutes' walk. If it were not raining so hard, we would go down, walk along the lines and get into the waiting train down there. Anybody may please himself. There is the funnel of the great unwieldy ferry-object — -she is just edging in. That means the connection from the mainland at last. But it is cold, standing here. We eat a bit of bread and butter from the kitchenino in resignation. After all, what is an hour and a half? It might just as easily be five hours, as it was the last time we came down from Rome. And the wagon-lit, booked to Syracuse, calmly left stranded in the station of Messina, to go no further. All get out and find yourselves rooms for the night in vile Messina. Syracuse or no Syracuse, Malta boat or no Malta boat. We are the *Ferro via dello Stato.*

But there, why grumble. *Noi Italiani siamo così buoni.* Take it from their own mouth.

Ecco! Finalmente! The crowd is quite joyful as the two express trains surge proudly in, after their half-a-mile creep. Plenty of room, for once. Though the carriage floor is a puddle, and the roof leaks. This is second class.

Slowly, with two engines, we grunt and chuff and twist to get over the break-neck heights that shut Messina in from the north coast. The windows are opaque with steam and drops of rain. No matter — tea from the thermos flask, to the great interest of the other two passengers who had nervously contemplated the

unknown object.

“Ha!” says he with joy, seeing the hot tea come out. “It has the appearance of a bomb.”

“Beautiful hot!” says she, with real admiration. All apprehension at once dissipated, peace reigns in the wet, mist-hidden compartment. We run through miles and miles of tunnel. The Italians have made wonderful roads and railways.

If one rubs the window and looks out, lemon groves with many wet-white lemons, earthquake-broken houses, new shanties, a grey weary sea on the right hand, and on the left the dim, grey complications of steep heights from which issue stone riverbeds of inordinate width, and sometimes a road, a man on a mule. Sometimes near at hand, long-haired, melancholy goats leaning sideways like tilted ships under the eaves of some scabby house. They call the house-eaves the dogs’ umbrellas. In town you see the dogs trotting close under the wall out of the wet. Here the goats lean like rock, listing inwards to the plaster wall. Why look out?

Sicilian railways are all single line. Hence, the *coincidenza*. A *coincidenza* is where two trains meet in a loop. You sit in a world of rain and waiting until some silly engine with four trucks puffs alongside. Ecco la *coincidenza*! Then after a brief *conversazione* between the two trains, *diretto* and *merce*, express and goods, the tin horn sounds and away we go, happily, towards the next coincidence. Clerks away ahead joyfully chalk up our hours of lateness on the announcement slate. All adds to the adventurous flavour of the journey, dear heart. We come to a station where we find the other *diretto*, the express from the other direction, awaiting our coincidental arrival. The two trains run alongside one another, like two dogs meeting in the street and snuffing one another. Every official rushes to greet every other official, as if they were all David and Jonathan meeting after a crisis. They rush into each other’s arms and exchange cigarettes. And the trains can’t bear to part. And the station can’t bear to part with us. The officials tease themselves and us with the word *pronto*, meaning ready! Pronto! And again Pronto! And shrill whistles. Anywhere else a train would go off its tormented head. But no! Here only that angel’s trump of an official little horn will do the business. And get them to blow that horn if you can. They can’t bear to part.

Rain, continual rain, a level grey wet sky, a level grey wet sea, a wet and misty train winding round and round the little bays, diving through tunnels. Ghosts of the unpleasant-looking Lipari islands standing a little way out to sea, heaps of shadow deposited like rubbish heaps in the universal greyness.

Enter more passengers. An enormously large woman with an extraordinarily handsome face: an extraordinarily large man, quite young; and a diminutive

servant, a little girl-child of about thirteen, with a beautiful face. — But the Juno — it is she who takes my breath away. She is quite young, in her thirties still. She has that queenly stupid beauty of a classic Hera: a pure brow with level dark brows, large, dark, bridling eyes, a straight nose, a chiselled mouth, an air of remote self-consciousness. She sends one's heart straight back to pagan days. And — and — she is simply enormous, like a house. She wears a black toque with sticking-up wings, and a black rabbit fur spread on her shoulders. She edges her way in carefully: and once seated, is terrified to rise to her feet. She sits with that motionlessness of her type, closed lips, face muted and expressionless. And she expects me to admire her: I can see that. She expects me to pay homage to her beauty: just to that: not homage to herself, but to her as a *bel pezzo*. She casts little aloof glances at me under her eyelids.

It is evident she is a country beauty become a *bourgeoise*. She speaks unwillingly to the other squint-eyed passenger, a young woman who also wears a black rabbit fur, but without pretensions.

The husband of Juno is a fresh-faced bourgeois young fellow, and he also is simply huge. His waistcoat would almost make the overcoat of the fourth passenger, the unshaven companion of the squinting young woman. The young Jupiter wears kid gloves: a significant fact here. He, too, has pretensions. But he is quite affable with the unshaven one, and speaks Italian unaffectedly. Whereas Juno speaks the dialect with affectation.

No one takes any notice of the little maid. She has a gentle, virgin moon-face, and those lovely grey Sicilian eyes that are translucent, and into which the light sinks and becomes black sometimes, sometimes dark blue. She carries the bag and the extra coat of the huge Juno, and sits on the edge of the seat between me and the unshaven, Juno having motioned her there with a regal inclination of the head.

The little maid is rather frightened. Perhaps she is an orphan child — probably. Her nut-brown hair is smoothly parted and done in two pigtales. She wears no hat, as is proper for her class. On her shoulders one of those little knitted grey shoulder-capes that one associates with orphanages. Her stuff dress is dark grey, her boots are strong.

The smooth, moon-like, expressionless virgin face, rather pale and touching, rather frightened, of the girl-child. A perfect face from a mediaeval picture. It moves one strangely Why? It is so unconscious, as we are conscious. Like a little muted animal it sits there in distress. She is going to be sick. She goes into the corridor and is sick — very sick, leaning her head like a sick dog on the window-ledge. Jupiter towers above her — not unkind, and apparently feeling no repugnance. The physical convulsion of the girl does not affect him as it

affects us. He looks on unmoved, merely venturing to remark that she had eaten too much before coming on to the train. An obviously true remark. After which he comes and talks a few commonplaces to me. By and by the girl-child creeps in again and sits on the edge of the seat facing Juno. But no, says Juno, if she is sick she will be sick over me. So Jupiter accommodatingly changes places with the girl-child, who is thus next to me. She sits on the edge of the seat with folded little red hands, her face pale and expressionless. Beautiful the thin line of her nut-brown eyebrows, the dark lashes of the silent, pellucid dark eyes. Silent, motionless, like a sick animal.

But Juno tells her to wipe her splashed boots. The child gropes for a piece of paper. Juno tells her to take her pocket handkerchief. Feebly the sick girl-child wipes her boots, then leans back. But no good. She has to go in the corridor and be sick again.

After a while they all get out. Queer to see people so natural. Neither Juno nor Jupiter is in the least unkind. He even seems kind. But they are just not upset. Not half as upset as we are — the q-b wanting to administer tea, and so on. We should have to hold the child's head. They just quite naturally leave it alone to its convulsions, and are neither distressed nor repelled. It just is so.

Their naturalness seems unnatural to us. Yet I am sure it is best. Sympathy would only complicate matters, and spoil that strange, remote virginal quality. The q-b says it is largely stupidity.

Nobody washes out the corner of the corridor, though we stop at stations long enough, and there are two more hours journey. Train officials go by and stare, passengers step over and stare, new-corners stare and step over. Somebody asks who? Nobody thinks of just throwing a pail of water. Why should he? It is all in the course of nature. — One begins to be a bit chary of this same "nature", in the south.

Enter two fresh passengers: a black-eyed, round-faced, bright-sharp man in corduroys and with a gun, and a long-faced, fresh-coloured man with thick snowy hair, and a new hat and a long black overcoat of smooth black cloth, lined with rather ancient, once expensive fur. He is extremely proud of this long black coat and ancient fur lining. Childishly proud he wraps it again over his knee, and gloats. The beady black eyes of the hunter look round with pleased alertness. He sits facing the one in the overcoat, who looks like the last sprout of some Norman blood. The hunter in corduroys beams abroad, with beady black eyes in a round red face, curious. And the other tucks his fur-lined coat between his legs and gloats to himself: all to himself gloating, and looking as if he were deaf. But no, he's not. He wears muddy high-low boots.

At Termini it is already lamp-light. Business men crowd in. We get five

business men: all stout, respected Palermitans. The one opposite me has whiskers, and a many-coloured, patched travelling rug over his fat knees. Queer how they bring that feeling of physical intimacy with them. You are never surprised if they begin to take off their boots, or their collar-and-tie. The whole world is a sort of bedroom to them. One shrinks, but in vain.

There is some conversation between the black-eyed, beady hunter and the business men. Also the young white-haired one, the aristocrat, tries to stammer out, at great length, a few words. As far as I can gather the young one is mad — or deranged — and the other, the hunter, is his keeper. They are travelling over Europe together. There is some talk of “the Count”. And the hunter says the unfortunate “has had an accident.” But that is a southern gentleness presumably, a form of speech. Anyhow it is queer: and the hunter in his corduroys, with his round, ruddy face and strange black-bright eyes and thin black hair is a puzzle to me, even more than the albino, long-coated, long-faced, fresh-complexioned, queer last remnant of a baron as he is. They are both muddy from the land, and pleased in a little mad way of their own.

But it is half-past six. We are at Palermo, capital of Sicily. The hunter slings his gun over his shoulder, I my knapsack, and in the throng we all disappear, into the Via Maqueda.

Palermo has two great streets, the Via Maqueda, and the Corso, which cross each other at right-angles. The Via Maqueda is narrow, with narrow little pavements, and is always choked with carriages and foot-passengers.

It had ceased raining. But the narrow road was paved with large, convex slabs of hard stone, inexpressibly greasy. To cross the Via Maqueda therefore was a feat. However, once accomplished, it was done. The near end of the street was rather dark, and had mostly vegetable shops. Abundance of vegetables — piles of white-and-green fennel, like celery, and great sheaves of young, purplish, sea-dust-coloured artichokes, nodding their buds, piles of big radishes, scarlet and bluey purple, carrots, long strings of dried figs, mountains of big oranges, scarlet large peppers, a last slice of pumpkin, a great mass of colours and vegetable freshnesses. A mountain of black-purple cauliflowers, like niggers’ heads, and a mountain of snow-white ones next to them. How the dark, greasy, night-stricken street seems to beam with these vegetables, all this fresh delicate flesh of luminous vegetables piled there in the air, and in the recesses of the windowless little caverns of the shops, and gleaming forth on the dark air, under the lamps. The q-b at once wants to buy vegetables. “Look! Look at the snow-white broccoli. Look at the huge finocchi. Why don’t we get them? I must have some. Look at those great clusters of dates — ten francs a kilo, and we pay sixteen. It’s monstrous. Our place is simply monstrous.”

For all that, one doesn't buy vegetables to take to Sardinia.

Cross the Corso at that decorated maelstrom and deathtrap of the Quattro Canti. I, of course, am nearly knocked down and killed. Somebody is nearly knocked down and killed every two minutes. But there — the carriages are light, and the horses curiously aware creatures. They would never tread on one.

The second part of the Via Maqueda is the swell part: silks and plumes, and an infinite number of shirts and ties and cufflinks and mufflers and men's fancies. One realises here that man-drapery and man-underwear are quite as important as woman's, if not more.

I, of course, in a rage. The q-b stares at every rag and stitch, and crosses and re-crosses this infernal dark stream of a Via Maqueda, which, as I have said, is choked solid with strollers and carriages. Be it remembered that I have on my back the brown knapsack, and the q-b carries the kitchenino. This is enough to make a travelling menagerie of us. If I had my shirt sticking out behind, and if the q-b had happened merely to catch up the table-cloth and wrap it round her as she came out, all well and good. But a big brown knapsack! And a basket with thermos flask, etc.! No, one could not expect such things to pass in a southern capital.

But I am case-hardened. And I am sick of shops. True, we have not been in a town for three months. But *can* I care for the innumerable *fantasias* in the drapery line? Every wretched hit of would-be-extra chic is called a fantasia. The word goes lugubriously to my bowels.

Suddenly I am aware of the q-b darting past me like a storm. Suddenly I see her pouncing on three giggling young hussies just in front — the inevitable black velveteen tarn, the inevitable white curly muffler, the inevitable lower-class flappers. "Did you want something? Have you something to say? Is there something that amuses you? Oh-h! You must laugh, must you? Oh — laugh! Oh-h! Why? Why? You ask why? Haven't I heard you! Oh — you spik Ingleesh! You spik Ingleesh! Yes — why! That's why! Yes, that's why."

The three giggling young hussies shrink together as if they would all hide behind one another, after a vain uprearing and a demand why? Madam tells them why. So they uncomfortably squeeze together under the unexpected strokes of the q-b's sledge-hammer Italian and more than sledge-hammer retaliation, there full in the Via Maqueda. They edge round one another, each attempting to get behind the other, away from the looming q-b. I perceive that this rotary motion is equivalent to a standstill, so feel called upon to say something in the manly line.

"Beastly Palermo bad-manners," I say, and throw a nonchalant "Ignoranti" at the end, in a tone of dismissal.

Which does it. Off they go down-stream, still huddling and shrinking like

boats that are taking sails in, and peeping to see if we are coming. Yes, my dears, we are coming.

“Why do you bother?” say I to the q-b, who is towering with rage.

“They’ve followed us the whole length of the street — with their sacco *militare* and their *parlano inglese* and their *you spik Ingleesh*, and their jeering insolence. But the English are fools. They always put up with this Italian impudence.”

Which is perhaps true. — But this knapsack! It might be full of bronze-roaring geese, it would not attract more attention!

However, and however, it is seven o’clock, and the shops are beginning to shut. No more shop-gazing. Only one lovely place: raw ham, boiled ham, chickens in aspic, chicken vol-au-vents, sweet curds, curd cheese, rustic cheese-cake, smoked sausages, beautiful fresh mortadella, huge Mediterranean red lobsters, and those lobsters without claws. “So good! So good!” We stand and cry it aloud.

But this shop too is shutting. I ask a man for the Hotel Pantechnico. And treating me in that gentle, strangely tender southern manner, he takes me and shows me. He makes me feel such a poor, frail, helpless leaf. A foreigner, you know. A bit of an imbecile, poor dear. Hold his hand and show him the way.

To sit in the room of this young American woman, with its blue hangings, and talk and drink tea till midnight! All these naïve Americans — they are a good deal older and shrewder than we, once it nears the point. And they all seem to feel as if the world were coming to an end. And they are so truly generous of their hospitality, in this cold world.

II. THE SEA

The fat old porter knocks. Ah me, once more it is dark. Get up again before dawn. A dark sky outside, cloudy. The thrilling tinkle of innumerable goat-bells as the first flock enters the city, such a rippling sound. Well, it must be morning, even if one shivers at it. And at least it does not rain.

That pale, bluish, theatrical light outside, of the first dawn. And a cold wind. We come on to the wide, desolate quay, the curve of the harbour Panormus. That horrible dawn-pallor of a cold sea out there. And here, port mud, greasy: and fish: and refuse. The American girl is with us, wrapped in her sweater. A coarse, cold, black-slimy world, she seems as if she would melt away before it. But these frail creatures, what a lot they can go through!

Across the great, wide, badly paved, mud-greasy, despairing road of the quay side, and to the sea. There lies our steamer, over there in the dawn-dusk of the basin, half visible. "That one who is smoking her cigarette," says the porter. She looks little, beside the huge *City of Trieste* who is lying up next her.

Our row-boat is hemmed in by many empty boats, huddled to the side of the quay. She works her way out like a sheepdog working his way out of a flock of sheep, or like a boat through pack-ice. We are on the open basin. The rower stands up and pushes the oars from him. He gives a long, melancholy cry to someone on the quay. The water goes chock-chock against the urging bows. The wind is chill. The fantastic peaks behind Palermo show half-ghostly in a half-dark sky. The dawn seems reluctant to come. Our steamer still smokes her cigarette — meaning the funnel-smoke — across there. So, one sits still, and crosses the level space of half-dark water. Masts of sailing-ships, and spars, cluster on the left, on the undarkening sky.

Climb up, climb up, this is our ship. Up we go up the ladder. "Oh, but!" says the American girl. "Isn't she small! Isn't she impossibly small! Oh, my, will you go in such a little thing? Oh, dear! Thirty-two hours in such a little boat? Why no, I wouldn't care for it at all."

A bunch of stewards, cooks, waiters, engineers, pan-cleaners and what-not, mostly in black canvas jackets. Nobody else on the ship. A little black bunch of loutish crew with nothing to do, and we the first passengers served up to be jeered at. There you are, in the grey light.

"Who is going?"

"We two — the signorina is not going."

"Tickets!"

These are casual proletarian manners.

We are taken into the one long room with a long table and many maple-golden doors, alternate panels having a wedgewood blue-and-white picture inserted — a would-be Goddess of white marble on a blue ground, like a health-salts Hygeia advertisement. One of the plain panels opens — our cabin.

“Oh, dear! Why it isn’t as big as a china-closet. However will you get in!” cries the American girl.

“One at a time,” says I.

“But it’s the tiniest place I ever saw.”

It really was tiny. One had to get into a bunk to shut the door. That did not matter to me, I am no Titanic American. I pitched the knapsack on one bunk, the kitchenino on the other, and we shut the door. The cabin disappeared into a maple-wood panel of the long, subterranean state-room.

“Why, is this the only place you’ve got to sit in?” cried the American girl. “But how perfectly awful! No air, and so dark, and smelly. Why I never saw such a boat! Will you really go? Will you really?”

The state-room was truly rather subterranean and stuffy, with nothing but a long table and an uncanny company of screw-pin chairs seated thereat, and no outlet to the air at all, but it was not so bad otherwise, to me who have never been out of Europe. Those maple-wood panels and ebony curves — and those Hygeias! They went all round, even round the curve at the dim, distant end, and back up the near side. Yet how beautiful old, gold-coloured maple-wood is! how very lovely, with the ebony curves of the door arch! There was a wonderful old-fashioned, Victorian glow in it, and a certain splendour. Even one could bear the Hygeias let in under glass — the colour was right, that wedgewood and white, in such lovely gold lustre. There was a certain homely grandeur still in the days when this ship was built: a richness of choice material. And health-salts Hygeias, wedgewood Greek goddesses on advertisement placards! Yet they weren’t advertisements. That was what really worried me. They never had been. Perhaps Weego’s Health Salts stole her later.

We have no coffee — that goes without saying. Nothing doing so early. The crew still stands in a gang, exactly like a gang of louts at a street-corner. And they’ve got the street all to themselves — this ship. We climb to the upper deck.

She is a long, slender, old steamer with one little funnel. And she seems so deserted, now that one can’t see the street-corner gang of the casual crew. They are just below. Our ship is deserted.

The dawn is wanly blueing. The sky is a curdle of cloud, there is a bit of pale gold eastwards, beyond Monte Pellegrino. The wind blows across the harbour. The hills behind Palermo prick up their ears on the sky-line. The city lies unseen,

near us and level. There — a big ship is coming in: the Naples boat.

And the little boats keep putting off from the near quay, and coming to us. We watch. A stout officer, cavalry, in greyey-green, with a big dark-blue cloak lined with scarlet. The scarlet lining keeps flashing. He has a little beard, and his uniform is not quite clean. He has big wooden chests, tied with rope, for luggage. Poor and of no class. Yet that scarlet, splendid lining, and the spurs. It seems a pity they must go second-class. Yet so it is, he goes forward when the dock porter has hoisted those wooden boxes. No fellow-passenger yet.

Boats still keep coming. Ha-ha! Here is the commissariat! Various sides of kid, ready for roasting: various chickens: fennel like celery: wine in a bottiglione: new bread: packages! Hand them up, hand them up. “Good food!” cries the q-b in anticipation.

It must be getting near time to go. Two more passengers — young thick men in black broadcloth standing up in the stern of a little boat, their hands in their pockets, looking a little cold about the chin. Not quite Italian, too sturdy and manly. Sardinians from Cagliari, as a matter of fact.

We go down from the chill upper-deck. It is growing full day. Bits of pale gold are flying among delicate but cold flakes of cloud from the east, over Monte Pellegrino, bits of very new turquoise sky come out. Palermo on the left crouches upon her all-harbour — a little desolate, disorderly, end-of-the-world, end-of-the-sea, along her quay front. Even from here we can see the yellow carts rattling slowly, the mules nodding their high weird plumes of scarlet along the broad weary harbour-side. Oh painted carts of Sicily, with all history on your panels!

Arrives an individual at our side. “The captain fears it will not be possible to start. There is much wind outside. Much wind!”

How they *love* to come up with alarming, disquieting, or annoying news! The joy it gives them. What satisfaction on all the faces: of course all the other loafers are watching us, the street-corner loungers of this deck. But we have been many times bitten.

“Ah, ma!” say I, looking at the sky, “not so much wind as all that.”

An air of quiet, shrugging indifference is most effectual: as if you knew all about it, a good deal more than they knew.

“Ah, si! Molto vento! Molto vento! Outside! Outside!”

With a long face and a dramatic gesture he points out of the harbour, to the grey sea. I too look out of the harbour at the pale line of sea beyond the mole. But I do not trouble to answer, and my eye is calm. So he goes away, only half triumphant.

“Things seem to get worse and worse!” cries the American friend. “What will

you do on such a boat if you have an awful time out in the Mediterranean here? Oh, no — will you risk it, really? Won't you go from Cività Vecchia?"

"How awful it will be!" cries the q-b, looking round the grey harbour, the many masts clustering in the grey sky on the right; the big Naples boat turning her posterior to the quayside a little way off, and cautiously budging backwards: the almost entirely shut-in harbour: the bits of blue and flying white cloud overhead: the little boats like beetles scuttling hither and thither across the basin: the thick crowd on the quay come to meet the Naples boat.

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Time! Time! The American friend must go. She bids us good-bye, more than sympathetically.

"I shall be awfully interested to hear how you get on."

So down the side she goes. The boatman wants twenty francs — wants more — but doesn't get it. He gets ten, which is five too much. And so, sitting rather small and pinched and cold-looking, huddled in her sweater, she bibbles over the ripply water to the distant stone steps. We wave farewell. But other traffic comes between us. And the q-b, feeling nervous, is rather cross because the American friend's ideas of luxury have put us in such a poor light. We feel like the poorest of poor seafaring relations.

Our ship is hooting for all she's worth. An important lastminuter comes surging up. The rope hawsers are being wound clankily in. Seagulls — they are never very many in the Mediterranean — seagulls whirl like a few flakes of snow in the upper chill air. Clouds spin. And without knowing it we are evaporating away from the shore, from our mooring, between the great *City of Trieste* and another big black steamer that lies like a wall. We breathe towards this second black wall of steamer: distinctly. And of course an individual in an official cap is standing on the bottom of our departure ladder just above the water, yelling Barca! Barca! — shouting for a boat. And an old man on the sea stands up to his oars and comes pushing his clumsy boat with gathering speed between us and the other black wall. There he stands away below there, small, firing his clumsy boat along, remote as if in a picture on the dark green water. And our black side insidiously and evilly aspires to the other huge black wall. He rows in the canyon between, and is nearly here.

When lo, the individual on the bottom step turns in the other direction. Another boat from the open basin is sweeping up: it is a race: she is near, she is nearer, she is up. With a curvet the boat from the open rounds up at the ladder. The boat between the gulf backs its oars. The official individual shouts and waves, the old man, backing his oars in the gulf below, yells expostulation, the boat from the open carries off its prey, our ship begins slowly to puddle-puddle-

puddle, working her screw, the man in the gulf of green water rows for his life — we are floating into the open basin.

Slowly, slowly we turn round: and as the ship turns, our hearts turn. Palermo fades from our consciousness: the Naples boat, the disembarking crowds, the rattling carriages to the land — the great *City of Trieste* — all fades from our heart. We see only the open gap of the harbour entrance, and the level, pale-grey void of the sea beyond. There are wisps of gleamy light — out there.

And out there our heart watches — though Palermo is near us, just behind. We look round, and see it all behind us — but already it is gone, gone from our heart. The fresh wind, the gleamy wisps of light, the running, open sea beyond the harbour bars.

And so we steam out. And almost at once the ship begins to take a long, slow, dizzy dip, and a fainting swoon upwards, and a long, slow, dizzy dip, slipping away from beneath one. The q-b turns pale. Up comes the deck in that fainting swoon backwards — then down it fades in that indescribable slither forwards. It is all quite gentle — quite, quite gentle. But oh, so long, and so slow, and so dizzy.

“Rather pleasant!” say I to the q-b.

“Yes. Rather lovely *really*,” she answers wistfully. To tell the truth there is something in the long, slow lift of the ship, and her long, slow slide forwards which makes my heart beat with joy. It is the motion of freedom. To feel her come up — then slide slowly forward, with a sound of the smashing of waters, is like the magic gallop of the sky, the magic gallop of elemental space. That long, slow, waveringly rhythmic rise and fall of the ship, with waters snorting as it were from her nostrils, oh, God, what a joy it is to the wild innermost soul. One is free at last — and tilting in a slow flight of the elements, winging outwards. Oh, God, to be free of all the hemmed-in life — the horror of human tension, the absolute insanity of machine persistence. The agony which a train is to me, really. And the long-drawn-out agony of a life among tense, resistant people on land. And then to feel the long, slow lift and drop of this almost empty ship, as she took the waters. Ah, God, liberty, liberty, elemental liberty. I wished in my soul the voyage might last forever, that the sea had no end, that one might float in this wavering, tremulous, yet long and surging pulsation while ever time lasted: space never exhausted, and no turning back, no looking back, even.

The ship was almost empty — save of course for the street-corner louts who hung about just below, on the deck itself. We stood alone on the weather-faded little promenade deck, which has old oak seats with old, carved little lions at the ends, for arm-rests — and a little cabin mysteriously shut, which much peeping determined as the wireless office and the operator’s little curtained bed-niche.

Cold, fresh wind, a black-blue, translucent, rolling sea on which the wake rose in snapping foam, and Sicily on the left: Monte Pellegrino, a huge, inordinate mass of pinkish rock, hardly crisped with the faintest vegetation, looming up to heaven from the sea. Strangely large in mass and bulk Monte Pellegrino looks: and bare, like a Sahara in heaven: and old-looking. These coasts of Sicily are very imposing, terrific, fortifying the interior. And again one gets the feeling that age has worn them bare: as if old, old civilisations had worn away and exhausted the soil, leaving a terrifying blankness of rock, as at Syracuse in plateaus, and here in great mass.

There seems hardly anyone on board but ourselves: we alone on the little promenade deck. Strangely lonely, floating on a bare old ship past the great bare shores, on a rolling sea, stooping and rising in the wind. The wood of the fittings is all bare and weather-silvered, the cabin, the seats, even the little lions of the seats. The paint wore away long ago: and this timber will never see paint any more. Strange to put one's hand on the old oaken wood, so sea-fibred. Good old delicate-threaded oak: I swear it grew in England. And everything so carefully done, so solidly and everlastingly. I look at the lions, with the perfect-fitting oaken pins through their paws clinching them down, and their little mouths open. They are as solid as they were in Victorian days, as immovable. They will never wear away. What a joy in the careful, thorough, manly, everlasting work put into a ship: at least into this sixty-yearold vessel. Every bit of this old oak wood so sound, so beautiful: and the whole welded together with joints and wooden pins far more beautifully and livingly than iron welds. Rustless, life-born, living-tissued old wood: rustless as flesh is rustless, and happy-seeming as iron never can be. She rides so well, she takes the sea so beautifully, as a matter of course.

Various members of the crew wander past to look at us. This little promenade deck is over the first-class quarters, full in the stern. So we see first one head then another come up the ladder — mostly bare heads: and one figure after another slouches past, smoking a cigarette. All crew. At last the q-b stops one of them — it is what they are all waiting for, an opportunity to talk — and asks if the weird object on the top of Pellegrino is a ruin. Could there be a more touristy question! No, it is the semaphore station. Slap in the eye for the q-b! She doesn't mind, however, and the member of the crew proceeds to converse. He is a weedy, hollow-checked town-product: a Palermitan. He wears faded blue overalls and informs us he is the ship's carpenter: happily unemployed for the rest of his life, apparently, and taking it as rather less than his dues. The ship once did the Naples — Palermo course — a very important course — in the old days of the General Navigation Company. The General Navigation Company sold her for eighty thousand liras years ago, and now she was worth two million.

We pretend to believe: but I make a poor show. I am thoroughly sick to death of the sound of liras. No man can overhear ten words of Italian to-day without two thousand or two million or ten or twenty or two liras flying like venomous mosquitoes round his ears. Liras — liras — liras — nothing else. Romantic, poetic, cypress-and-orange-tree Italy is gone. Remains an Italy smothered in the filthy smother of innumerable lira notes: ragged, unsavoury paper money so thick upon the air that one breathes it like some greasy fog. Behind this greasy fog some people may still see the Italian sun. I find it hard work. Through this murk of liras you peer at Michael Angelo and at Botticelli and the rest, and see them all as through a glass, darkly. For heavy around you is Italy's after-the-war atmosphere, darkly pressing you, squeezing you, milling you into dirty paper notes. King Hany was lucky that they only wanted to coin him into gold. Italy wants to mill you into filthy paper liras.

Another head — and a black alpaca jacket and a serviette this time — to tell us coffee is ready. Not before it is time, too. We go down into the subterranean state-room and sit on the screw-pin chairs, while the ship does the slide-and-slope trot under us, and we drink a couple of cups of coffee and milk, and eat a piece of bread and butter. At least one of the innumerable members of the crew gives me one cup, then casts me off. It is most obviously his intention that I shall get no more: because of course the innumerable members of the crew could all just do with another coffee and milk. However, though the ship heaves and the alpaca coats cluster menacingly in the doorway, I balance my way to the tin buffet and seize the coffee pot and the milk pot, and am quite successful in administering to the q-b and myself. Having restored the said vessels to their tin altar, I resume my spin-chair at the long and desert board. The q-b and I are alone — save that in the distance a very fat back with gold-braid collar sits sideways and a fat hand disposes of various papers — he is part of the one-and-only table, of course. The tall lean alpaca jacket, with a face of yellow stone and a big black moustache, moves from the outer doorway, glowers at our filled cups, and goes to the tin altar and touches the handles of the two vessels: just touches them to an arrangement: as one who should say: These are mine. What dirty foreigner dares help himself!

As quickly as possible we stagger up from the long dungeon where the alpaca jackets are swooping like blue-bottles upon the coffee pots, into the air. There the carpenter is waiting for us, like a spider.

“Isn't the sea a little quieter?” says the q-b wistfully. She is growing paler.

“No, Signora — how should it be?” says the gaunt-faced carpenter. “The wind is waiting for us behind Cape Gallo. You see that cape?” he points to a tall black cliff-front in the sea ahead. “When we get to the cape we get the wind and the

sea. Here — ” he makes a gesture — ”it is moderate.”

“Ugh!” says the q-b, turning paler. “I’m going to lie down.”

She disappears. The carpenter, finding me stony ground, goes forward, and I see him melting into the crowd of the innumerable crew, that hovers on the lower-deck passage by the kitchen and the engines.

The clouds are flying fast overhead: and sharp and isolated come drops of rain, so that one thinks it must be spray. But no, it is a handful of rain. The ship swishes and sinks forward, gives a hollow thudding and rears slowly backward, along this pinkish lofty coast of Sicily that is just retreating into a bay. From the open sea comes the rain, come the long waves.

No shelter. One must go down. The q-b lies quietly in her bunk. The state-room is stale like a passage on the underground railway. No shelter, save near the kitchen and the engines, where there is a hit of warmth. The cook is busy cleaning fish, making the whiting bite their tails venomously at a little board just outside his kitchen-hole. A slow stream of kitchen-filth swilkers back and forth along the ship’s side. A gang of the crew leans near me — a larger gang further down. Heaven knows what they can all be — but they never do anything but stand in gangs and talk and eat and smoke cigarettes. They are mostly young — mostly Palermitan — with a couple of unmistakable Neapolitans, having the peculiar Neapolitan hang-dog good looks, the chiselled cheek, the little black moustache, the large eyes. But they chew with their cheeks bulged out, and laugh with their fine, semi-sarcastic noses. The whole gang looks continually sideways. Nobody ever commands them — there seems to be absolutely no control. Only the fat engineer in grey linen looks as clean and as competent as his own machinery. Queer how machine-control puts the pride and self-respect into a man.

The rain over, I go and squat against the canvas that is spread over the arched skylights on the small promenade deck, sitting on the seat that is fixed to the skylight sides. The wind is cold: there are snatches of sun and spits of rain. The big cape has come and is being left behind: we are heading for a far-off cape like a cloud in the grey air. A dimness comes over one’s mind: a sort of stupefaction owing to the wind and the relentless slither-and-rearing of the ship. Not a sickness, but a sort of dim faintness. So much motion, such moving, powerful air. And withal a constant triumph in the long, slow sea-gallop of the ship.

A great loud bell: midday and the crew going to eat, rushing to eat. After some time we are summoned. “The Signora isn’t eating?” asks the waiter eagerly: hoping she is not. “Yes, she is eating,” say I. I fetch the q-b from her berth. Rather wanly she comes and gets into her spin chair. Bash comes a hung plate of thick, oily, cabbage soup, very full, swilkering over the sides. We do

what we can with it. So does the third passenger: a young woman who never wears a hat, thereby admitting herself as one of “the people”, but who has an expensive complicated dress, nigger-coloured thin silk stockings, and suede high-heeled shoes. She is handsome, sturdy, with large dark eyes and a robust, frank manner: far too robustly downright for Italy. She is from Cagliari — and can’t do much with the cabbage soup: and tells the waiter so, in her deep, hail-fellowwell-met voice. In the doorway hovers a little cloud of alpaca jackets grinning faintly with malignant anticipation of food, hoping, like blow-flies, we shall be too ill to eat. Away goes the soup and appears a massive yellow omelette, like some log of bilious wood. It is hard and heavy, and cooked in the usual rank-tasting olive oil. The young woman doesn’t have much truck with it: neither do we. To the triumph of the blow-flies, who see the yellow monster borne to their altar. After which a long slab of the inevitable meat cut into innumerable slices, tasting of dead nothingness and having a thick sauce of brown neutrality: sufficient for twelve people at least. This, with masses of strong-tasting greenish cauliflower liberally weighted with oil, on a ship that was already heaving its heart out, made up the dinner. Accumulating malevolent triumph among the blow-flies in the passage. So on to a dessert of oranges, pears with wooden hearts and thick yellowish wash-leather flesh, and apples. Then coffee.

And we had sat through it, which is something. The alpaca blue-bottles buzzed over the masses of food that went back on the dishes to the tin altar. Surely it had been made deliberately so that we should not eat it! The Cagliarese young woman talked to us. Yes, she broke into that awful language which the Italians — the quite ordinary ones — call French, and which they insist on speaking for their own glorification: yea, when they get to heaven’s gate they will ask St. Peter for:

“OOon bigliay pour ung — trozzième classe.”

Fortunately or unfortunately her inquisitiveness got the better of her, and she fell into her native Italian. What were we, where did we come from, where were we going, why were we going, had we any children, did we want any, *etc.* After every answer she nodded her head and said Ahu! and watched us with energetic dark eyes. Then she ruminated over our nationalities and said, to the unseeing witnesses: Una bella coppia, a fine couple. As at the moment we felt neither beautiful nor coupled, we only looked greener. The grim man-at-arms coming up to ask us again if we weren’t going to have a little wine, she lapsed into her ten-pounder French, which was most difficult to follow. And she said that on a sea-voyage one must eat, one must eat, if only a little. But — and she lapsed into Italian — one must by no means drink wine — no — no! One didn’t want to,

said I sadly. Whereupon the grim man-at-arms, whom, of course, we had cheated out of the bottle we refused to have opened for us, said with a lost sarcasm that wine made a man of a man, etc., etc. I was too weary of that underground, however. All I knew was that he wanted wine, wine, wine, and we hadn't ordered any. He didn't care for food.

The Cagliarese told us she came now from Naples, and her husband was following in a few days. He was doing business in Naples. I nearly asked if he was a little dog-fish — this being the Italian for profiteer, but refrained in time. So the two ladies retired to lie down, I went and sat under my tarpaulin.

I felt very dim, and only a bit of myself. And I dozed blankly. The afternoon grew more sunny. The ship turned southwards, and with the wind and waves behind, it became much warmer, much smoother. The sun had the lovely strong winey warmth, golden over the dark-blue sea. The old oak-wood looked almost white, the afternoon was sweet upon the sea. And in the sunshine and the swishing of the sea, the speedier running of the empty ship, I slept a warm, sweet hour away, and awoke anew. To see ahead pale, uplooming islands upon the right: the windy Egades: and on the right a mountain or high conical hill, with buildings on the summit: and in front against the sea, still rather far away, buildings rising upon a quay, within a harbour: and a mole, and a castle forward to the sea, all small and far away, like a view. The buildings were square and fine. There was something impressive — magical under the far sunshine and the keen wind, the square and well-proportioned buildings waiting far off, waiting like a lost city in a story, a Rip van Winkle city. I knew it was Trapani, the western port of Sicily, under the western sun.

And the hill near us was Mount Eryx. I had never seen it before. So I had imagined a mountain in the sky. But it was only a hill, with undistinguishable cluster of a village on the summit, where even now cold wisps of vapour caught. They say it is 2,500 feet high. Still it looks only a hill.

But why in the name of heaven should my heart stand still as I watch that hill which rises above the sea? It is the Etna of the west: but only a town-crowned hill. To men it must have had a magic almost greater than Etna's. Watching Africa! Africa, showing her coast on clear days. Africa the dreaded. And the great watch-temple of the summit, world-sacred, world-mystic in the world that was. Venus of the aborigines, older than Greek Aphrodite. Venus of the aborigines, from her watch-temple looking at Africa, beyond the Egatian isles. The world mystery, the smiling Astarte. This, one of the world centres, older than old! and the woman-goddess watching Africa! *Erycina ridens*. Laughing, the woman-goddess, at this centre of an ancient, quite-lost world.

I confess my heart stood still. But is mere historical fact so strong, that what

one learns in bits from books can move one so? Or does the very word call an echo out of the dark blood? It seems so to me. It seems to me from the darkest recesses of my blood comes a terrible echo at the name of Mount Eryx: something quite unaccountable. The name of Athens hardly moves me. At Eryx — my darkness quivers. Eryx, looking west into Africa's sunset. Erycina ridens.

There is a tick-tocking in the little cabin against which I lean. The wireless operator is busy communicating with Trapani, no doubt. He is a fat young man with fairish curly hair and an important bearing. Give a man control of some machine, and at once his air of importance and more-thanhuman dignity develops. One of the unaccountable members of the crew lounges in the little doorway, like a chicken on one foot, having nothing to do. The girl from Cagliari comes up with two young men — also Sardinians by their thick-set, independent look, and the touch of pride in their dark eyes. She has no wraps at all: just her elegant fine-cloth dress, her bare head from which the wisps of hair blow across her brow, and the transparent "nigger" silk stockings. Yet she does not seem cold. She talks with great animation, sitting between the two young men. And she holds the hand of the one in the overcoat affectionately. She is always holding the hand of one or other of the two young men: and wiping wisps of windblown hair from her brow: and talking in her strong, nonchalant voice, rapidly, ceaselessly, with massive energy. Heaven knows if the two young men — they are third class passengers — were previous acquaintances. But they hold her hand like brothers — quite simply and nicely, not at all sticky and libidinous. It all has an air of "Why not?"

She shouts at me as I pass, in her powerful, extraordinary French:

"Madame votre femme, elle est au lit?"

I say she is lying down.

"Ah!" she nods. "Elle a le mal de mer?"

No, she is not sea-sick, just lying down.

The two young men, between whom she is sitting as between two pillows, watch with the curious Sardinian dark eyes that seem alert and show the white all round. They are pleasant — a bit like seals. And they have a numb look for a moment, impressed by this strange language. She proceeds energetically to translate into Sardinian, as I pass on.

We do not seem to be going to Trapani. There lies the town on the left, under the hill, the square buildings that suggest to me the factories of the East India Company shining in the sun along the curious, closed-in harbour, beyond the running, dark-blue sea. We seem to be making for the island bulk of Levanzo. Perhaps we shall steer away to Sardinia without putting in to Trapani.

On and on we run — and always as if we were going to steer between the pale

blue, heaped-up islands, leaving Trapani behind us on our left. The town has been in sight for an hour or more: and still we run out to sea towards Levanzo. And the wireless-operator busily tick-tocks and throbs in his little cabin on this upper deck. Peeping in, one sees his bed and chair behind a curtain, screened off from his little office. And all so tidy and pleased-looking.

From the islands one of the Mediterranean sailing ships is beating her way, across our track, to Trapani. I don't know the name of ships but the carpenter says she is a schooner: he says it with that Italian misgiving which doesn't really know but which can't bear not to know. Anyhow on she comes, with her tall ladder of square sails white in the afternoon light, and her lovely prow, curved in with a perfect hollow, running like a wild animal on a scent across the waters. There — the scent leads her north again. She changes her tack from the harbour mouth, and goes coursing away, passing behind us. Lovely she is, nimble and quick and palpitating, with all her sails white and bright and eager.

We are changing our course. We have all the time been heading for the south of Levanzo. Now I see the island slowly edging back, as if clearing out of the way for us, like a man in the street. The island edges and turns aside: and walks away. And clearly we are making for the harbour mouth. We have all this time been running, out at sea, round the back of the harbour. Now I see the fortress castle, an old thing, out forward to sea: and a little lighthouse and the way in. And beyond, the town-front with great palm trees and other curious dark trees, and behind these the large square buildings of the south rising imposingly, as if severe, big palaces upon the promenade. It all has a stately, southern, imposing appearance, withal remote from our modern centuries: standing back from the tides of our industrial life.

I remember the Crusaders, how they called here so often on their way to the East. And Trapani seems waiting for them still, with its palm trees and its silence, full in the afternoon sun. It has not much to do but wait, apparently.

The q-b emerges into the sun, crying out how lovely! And the sea is quieter: we are already in the lee of the harbour-curve. From the north the many-sailed ship from the islands is running down towards us, with the wind. And away on the south, on the sea-level, numerous short windmills are turning their sails briskly, windmill after windmill, rather stumpy, spinning gaily in the blue, silent afternoon, among the salt-lagoons stretching away towards Marsala. But there is a whole legion of windmills, and Don Quixote would have gone off his head. There they spin, hither and thither, upon the pale-blue sea-levels. And perhaps one catches a glitter of white salt-heaps. For these are the great salt-lagoons which make Trapani rich.

We are entering the harbour-basin, however, past the old castle out on the

spit, past the little lighthouse, then through the entrance, slipping quietly on the now tranquil water. Oh, and how pleasant the fulness of the afternoon sun flooding this round, fast-sleeping harbour, along whose side the tall palms drowse, and whose waters are fast asleep. It seems quite a small, cosy harbour, with the great buildings warm-coloured in the sun behind the dark tree-avenue of the marina. The same silent, sleeping, endlessly sun-warmed stateliness.

In the midst of this tranquillity we slowly turn round upon the shining water, and in a few moments are moored. There are other ships moored away to the right: all asleep, apparently, in the flooding of the afternoon sun. Beyond the harbour entrance runs the great sea and the wind. Here all is still and hot and forgotten.

“Vous descendez en terre?” shouts the young woman, in her energetic French — she leaves off holding the young men’s hands for the moment. We are not quite sure: and we don’t want her to come with us, anyhow, for her French is not our French.

The land sleeps on: nobody takes any notice of us: but just one boat paddles out the dozen yards to our side. We decide to set foot on shore.

One should not, and we knew it. One should never enter into these southern towns that look so nice, so lovely, from the outside. However, we thought we would buy some cakes. So we crossed the avenue which looks so beautiful from the sea, and which, when you get into it, is a cross between an outside place where you throw rubbish and a humpy unmade road in a raw suburb, with a few iron seats, and litter of old straw and rag; Indescribably dreary in itself: yet with noble trees, and lovely sunshine, and the sea and the islands gleaming magic beyond the harbour mouth, and the sun, the eternal sun full focussed. A few mangy, nothing-to-do people stand disconsolately about, in southern fashion, as if they had been left there, waterlogged, by the last flood, and were waiting for the next flood to wash them further. Round the corner along the quay a Norwegian steamer dreams that she is being loaded, in the muddle of the small port.

We looked at the cakes — heavy and wan they appeared to our sea-rolled stomachs. So we strolled into a main street, dark and dank like a sewer. A tram bumped to a standstill, as if now at last was the end of the world. Children coming from school ecstatically ran at our heels, with bated breath, to hear the vocal horrors of our foreign speech. We turned down a dark side alley, about forty paces deep: and were on the northern bay, and on a black stench that seemed like the perpetual sewer, a bank of mud.

So we got to the end of the black main street, and turned in haste to the sun. Ah — in a moment we were in it. There rose the palms, there lay our ship in the

shining, curving basin — and there focussed the sun, so that in a moment we were drunk or dazed by it. Dazed. We sat on an iron seat in the rubbish-desolate, sun-stricken avenue.

A ragged and dirty girl was nursing a fat and moist and immovable baby and tending to a grimy fat infant boy. She stood a yard away and gazed at us as one would gaze at a pig one was going to buy. She came nearer, and examined the q-b. I had my big hat down over my eyes. But no, she had taken her seat at my side, and poked her face right under my hat brim, so that her towzled hair touched me, and I thought she would kiss me. But again no. With her breath on my cheek she only gazed on my face as if it were a wax mystery. I got up hastily.

“Too much for me,” said I to the q-b.

She laughed, and asked what the baby was called. The baby was called Beppina, as most babies are.

Driven forth, we wandered down the desolate avenue of shade and sun towards the ship, and turned once more into the town. We had not been on shore more than ten minutes. This time we went to the right, and found more shops. The streets were dark and sunless and cold. And Trapani seemed to me to sell only two commodities: cured rabbit-skins and cat-skins, and great, hideous, modern bed-spread arrangements of heavy flowered silk and fabulous price. They seem to think nothing of thousands of liras, in Trapani.

But most remarkable was bunny and pussy. Bunny and pussy, flattened out like pressed leaves, dangling in clusters everywhere. Furs! white bunny, black bunny in great abundance, piebald bunny, grey bunny: — then pussy, tabby pussy, and tortoiseshell pussy, but mostly black pussy, in a ghastly semblance of life, all flat, of course. Just single furs. Clusters, bunches, heaps, and dangling arrays of plain-superficies puss and bun-bun! Puss and bun by the dozen and the twenty, like dried leaves, for your choice. If a cat from a ship should chance to find itself in Trapani streets, it would give a mortal yell, and go mad, I am sure.

We strolled for ten more minutes in this narrow, tortuous, unreal town, that seemed to have plenty of flourishing inhabitants, and a fair number of Socialists, if one was to judge by the great scrawlings on the walls: W. LENIN and ABASSO LA BORGHESIA. Don't imagine, by the way, that Lenin is another Wille on the list. The apparent initial stands for Evviva, the double V.

Cakes one dared not buy, after looking at them. But we found macaroon biscuits, and a sort of flat plaster-casts of the Infant Jesus under a dove, of which we bought two. The q-b ate her macaroon biscuits all through the streets, and we went towards the ship. The fat boatman hailed us to take us back. It was just about eight yards of water to row, the ship being moored on the quay: one could

have jumped it. I gave the fat boatman two liras, two francs. He immediately put on the Socialist-workman indignation, and thrust the note back at me. Sixty centimes more! The fee was thirteen sous each way! In Venice or Syracuse it would be two sous. I looked at him and gave him the money and said: "Per Dio, we are in Trapani!" He muttered back something about foreigners. But the hateful, unmanly insolence of these lords of toil, now they have their various "unions" behind them and their "rights" as working men, sends my blood black. They are ordinary men no more: the human, happy Italian is most marvellously vanished. New honours come upon them, *etc.* The dignity of human labour is on its hind legs, busy giving every poor innocent who isn't ready for it a kick in the mouth.

But, once more, in parenthesis, let me remind myself that it is our own English fault. We have slobbered about the nobility of toil, till at last the nobles naturally insist on eating the cake. And more than that, we have set forth, politically, on such a high and Galahad quest of holy liberty, and been caught so shamelessly filling our pockets, that no wonder the naïve and idealistic south turns us down with a bang.

Well, we are back on the ship. And we want tea. On the list by the door it says we are to have coffee, milk and butter at 8.30: luncheon at 11.30: tea, coffee or chocolate at 3.00: and dinner at 6.30. And moreover: "The company will feed the passengers for the normal duration of the voyage only." Very well — very well. Then where is tea? Not any signs! and the alpaca jackets giving us a wide berth. But we find our man, and demand our rights: at least the q-b does.

The tickets from Palermo to Cagliari cost, together, 583 liras. Of this, 250 liras was for the ticket, and 40 liras each for the food. This, for two tickets, would make 580 liras. The odd three for usual stamps. The voyage was supposed to last about thirty or thirty-two hours: from eight of the morning of departure to two or four of the following afternoon. Surely we pay for our tea.

The other passengers have emerged: a large, pale, fat, "handsome" Palermitan who is going to be professor at Cagliari: his large, fat, but high-coloured wife: and three children, a boy of fourteen like a thin, frail, fatherly girl, a little boy in a rabbit-skin overcoat, coming rather unfluffed, and a girl-child on the mother's knee. The one-year-old girl-child being, of course, the only man in the party.

They have all been sick all day, and look washed out. We sympathise. They lament the cruelties of the journey — and *senza servizio! senza servizio!* without any maid servant. The mother asks for coffee, and a cup of milk for the children: then, seeing our tea with lemon, and knowing it by repute, she will have tea. But the rabbit-boy will have coffee — coffee and milk — and nothing else. And an orange. And the baby will have lemon, pieces of lemon. And the fatherly young

“miss” of an adolescent brother laughs indulgently at all the whims of these two young ones: the father laughs and thinks it all adorable and expects us to adore. He is almost too washed-out to attend properly, to give the full body of his attention.

So the mother gets her cup of tea — and puts a piece of lemon in — and then milk on top of that. The rabbit-boy sucks an orange, slobbers in the tea, insists on coffee and milk, tries a piece of lemon, and gets a biscuit. The baby, with weird faces, chews pieces of lemon: and drops them in the family cup: and fishes them out with a little sugar, and dribbles them across the table to her mouth, throws them away and reaches for a new sour piece. They all think it humorous and adorable. Arrives the milk, to be treated as another loving cup, mingled with orange, lemon, sugar, tea, biscuit, chocolate, and cake. Father, mother, and elder brother partake of nothing, they haven't the stomach. But they are charmed, of course, by the pretty pranks and messes of the infants. They have extraordinary amiable patience, and find the young ones a perpetual source of charming amusement. They look at one another, the elder ones, and laugh and comment, while the two young ones mix themselves and the table into a lemon-milk-orange-tea-sugar-biscuit-cake-chocolate mess. This inordinate Italian amiable patience with their young monkeys is astonishing. It makes the monkeys more monkey-like, and self-conscious incredibly, so that a baby has all the tricks of a Babylonian harlot, making eyes and trying new pranks. Till at last one sees the southern Holy Family as an unholy triad of imbecility.

Meanwhile I munched my Infant-Jesus-and-Dove arrangement, which was rather like eating thin glass, so hard and sharp. It was made of almond and white of egg presumably, and was not so bad if you could eat it at all. It was a Christmas relic. — And I watched the Holy Family across the narrow board, and tried not to look all I felt.

Going on deck as soon as possible, we watched the loading of barrels of wine into the hold — a mild and happy-go-lucky process. The ship seemed to be almost as empty of cargo as of passengers. Of the latter, we were apparently twelve adults, all told, and the three children. And as for cargo, there were the wooden chests of the officer, and these fourteen barrels of wine from Trapani. The last were at length settled more or less firm, the owner, or the responsible landsman seeing to it. No one on the ship seemed to be responsible for anything. And four of the innumerable crew were replacing the big planks over the hold. It was curious how forlorn the ship seemed to feel, now she was ready for sea again. Her innumerable crew did not succeed in making her alive. She ran her course like a lost soul across the Mid-Mediterranean.

Outside the harbour the sun was sinking, gorgeous gold and red the sky, and

vast, beyond the darkening islands of the Egades group. Coming as we did from the east side of the island, where dawn beyond the Ionian sea is the day's great and familiar event: so decisive an event, that as the light appears along the sea's rim, so do my eyes invariably open and look at it, and know it is dawn, and as the night-purple is fused back, and a little scarlet thrills towards the zenith, invariably, day by day, I feel I must get up: coming from the east, shut off hermetically from the west by the steep spikes of the mountains at our back, we felt this sunset in the African sea terrible and dramatic. It seemed much more magnificent and tragic than our Ionian dawn, which has always a suggestion of a flower opening. But this great red, trumpet-flaring sunset had something African, half-sinister, upon the sea: and it seemed so far off, in an unknown land. Whereas our Ionian dawn always seems near and familiar and happy.

A different goddess the Eryx Astarte, the woman Ashtaroth, *Erycina ridens* must have been, in her prehistoric dark smiling, watching the fearful sunsets beyond the Egades, from our gold-lighted Apollo of the Ionian east. She is a strange goddess to me, this Erycina Venus, and the west is strange and unfamiliar and a little fearful, be it Africa or be it America.

Slowly at sunset we moved out of the harbour. And almost as we passed the bar, away in front we saw, among the islands, the pricking of a quick pointed light. Looking back, we saw the light at the harbour entrance twitching: and the remote, lost town beginning to glimmer. And night was settling down upon the sea, through the crimsoned purple of the last afterglow.

The islands loomed big as we drew nearer, dark in the thickening darkness. Overhead a magnificent evening-star blazed above the open sea, giving me a pang at the heart, for I was so used to see her hang just above the spikes of the mountains, that I felt she might fall, having the space beneath.

Levanzo and the other large island were quite dark: absolutely dark, save for one beam of a lighthouse low down in the distance. The wind was again strong and cold: the ship had commenced her old slither and heave, slither and heave, which mercifully we had forgotten. Overhead were innumerable great stars active as if they were alive in the sky. I saw Orion high behind us, and the dog-star glaring. And swish! went the sea as we took the waves, then after a long trough, swish! This curious rhythmic swishing and hollow drumming of a steamer at sea has a narcotic, almost maddening effect on the spirit, a long, hissing burst of waters, then the hollow roll, and again the upheaval to a sudden hiss-ss-ss!

A bell had clanged and we knew the crew were once more feeding. At every moment of the day and presumably of the night, feeling was going on — or coffee-drinking.

We were summoned to dinner. Our young woman was already seated: and a fat uniformed mate or purser or official of some sort was finishing off in the distance. The pale professor also appeared: and at a certain distance down the table sat a little hard-headed grey man in a long grey alpaca travelling coat. Appeared the beloved macaroni with tomato sauce: no food for the sea. I put my hopes on the fish. Had I not seen the cook making whiting bite their own tails viciously? — The fish appeared. And what was it? Fried ink-pots. A *calamaio* is an ink-pot: also it is a polyp, a little octopus which, alas, frequents the Mediterranean and squirts ink if offended. This polyp with its tentacles is cut up and fried, and reduced to the consistency of boiled celluloid. It is esteemed a delicacy: but is tougher than indiarubber, gristly through and through.

I have a peculiar aversion to these ink-pots. Once in Liguria we had a boat of our own and paddled with the peasant paddlers. Alessandro caught ink-pots: and like this. He tied up a female by a string in a cave — the string going through a convenient hole in her end. There she lived, like an Amphitrite's wire-haired terrier tied up, till Alessandro went a-fishing. Then he towed her, like a poodle behind. And thus, like a poodly-bitch, she attracted hangers-on in the briny seas. And these poor polyp innamorati were the victims. They were lifted as prey on board, where I looked with horror on their grey, translucent tentacles and large, cold, stony eyes. The she-polyp was towed behind again. But after a few days she died.

And I think, even for creatures so awful-looking, this method is indescribably base, and shows how much lower than an octopus even, is lordly man.

Well, we chewed a few ends of oil-fried ink-pots, and gave it up. The Cagliari girl gave up too: the professor had not even tried. Only the hard-headed grey man in the alpaca coat chewed animatedly, with bouncing jaws. Mountains of calamaio remained for the joyous blue-bottles.

Arrived the inevitable meat — this long piece of completely tasteless undercut in innumerable grey-brown slices. Oh, Italy! The professor fled.

Arrived the wash-leather pears, the apples, the oranges — we saved an apple for a happier hour.

Arrived coffee, and, as a magnificent treat, a few well-known pastries. They all taste wearily alike. The young woman shakes her head. I shake mine, but the q-b, like a child, is pleased. Most pleased of all, however, are the blue-bottles, who dart in a black-alpaca bunch to the tin altar, and there loudly buzz, wildly, above the sallow cakes.

The citron-cheeked, dry one, however, cares darkly nothing for cakes. He comes once more to twit us about wine. So much so that the Cagliari girl orders a glass of Marsala: and I must second her. So there we are, three little glasses of

brown liquid. The Cagliari girl sips hers and suddenly flees. The q-b sips hers with infinite caution, and quietly retires. I finish the q-b's little glass, and my own, and the voracious blow-flies buzz derisively and excited. The yellow-cheeked one has disappeared with the bottle.

From the professorial cabin faint wails, sometimes almost fierce, as one or another is going to be ill. Only a thin door is between this state-room and them. The most down-trodden, frayed ancient rag of a man goes discreetly with basins, trying not to let out glimpses of the awful within. I climb up to look at the vivid, drenching stars, to breathe the cold wind, to see the dark sea sliding. Then I too go to the cabin, and watch the sea run past the porthole for a minute, and insert myself like the meat in a sandwich into the tight lower bunk. Oh, infinitesimal cabin, where we sway like two matches in a match box! Oh, strange, but even yet excellent gallop of a ship at sea.

I slept not so badly through the stifled, rolling night — in fact later on slept soundly. And the day was growing bright when I peered through the porthole, the sea was much smoother. It was a brilliant clear morning. I made haste and washed myself cursorily in the saucer that dribbled into a pail in a corner: there was not space even for one chair, this saucer was by my bunk-head. And I went on deck.

Ah, the lovely morning! Away behind us the sun was just coming above the sea's horizon, and the sky all golden, all a joyous, fire-heated gold, and the sea was glassy bright, the wind gone still, the waves sunk into long, low undulations, the foam of the wake was pale ice-blue in the yellow air. Sweet, sweet wide morning on the sea, with the sun coming, swimming up, and a tall sailing bark, with her flat fore-ladder of sails delicately across the light, and a far-far steamer on the electric vivid morning horizon.

The lovely dawn: the lovely pure, wide morning in the mid-sea, so golden-aired and delighted, with the sea-like sequins shaking, and the sky far, far, far above, unfathomably clear. How glad to be on a ship! What a golden hour for the heart of man! Ah, if one could sail for ever, on a small quiet, lonely ship, from land to land and isle to isle, and saunter through the spaces of this lovely world, always through the spaces of this lovely world. Sweet it would be sometimes to come to the opaque earth, to block oneself against the stiff land, to annul the vibration of one's flight against the inertia of our *terra firma*! but life itself would be in the flight, the tremble of space. Ah, the trembling of never-ended space, as one moves in flight!

Space, and the frail vibration of space, the glad lonely wringing of the heart. Not to be clogged to the land any more. Not to be any more like a donkey with a log on its leg, fastened to weary earth that has no answer now. But to be off.

To find three masculine, world-lost souls, and world-lost saunter, and saunter on along with them, across the dithering space, as long as life lasts! Why come to anchor? There is nothing to anchor for. Land has no answer to the soul any more. It has gone inert. Give me a little ship, kind gods, and three world-lost comrades. Hear me! And let me wander aimless across this vivid oyster world, the world empty of man, where space flies happily.

The lovely, celandine-yellow morning of the open sea, paling towards a rare sweet blue! The sun stood above the horizon, like the great burning stigma of the sacred flower of day. Mediterranean sailing-ships, so mediaeval, hovered on the faint morning wind, as if uncertain which way to go, curious odd-winged insects of the flower. The steamer, hull-down, was sinking towards Spain. Space rang clear about us: the level sea!

Appeared the Cagliari young woman and her two friends. She was looking handsome and restored now the sea was easy. Her two male friends stood touching her, one at either shoulder.

“Bonjour, Monsieur!” she barked across at me. “Vous avez pris le café?”

“Pas encore. Et vous?”

“Non! Madame votre femme...”

She roared like a mastiff dog: and then translated with unction to her two uninitiated friends. How it was they did not understand her French I do not know, it was so like travestied Italian.

I went below to find the q-b.

When we came up, the faint shape of land appeared ahead, more transparent than thin pearl. Already Sardinia. Magic are high lands seen from the sea, when they are far, far off, and ghostly translucent like ice-bergs. This was Sardinia, looming like fascinating shadows in mid-sea. And the sailing-ships, as if cut out of frailest pearl translucency, were wafting away towards Naples. I wanted to count their sails — five square ones which I call the ladder, one above the other — but how many wing-blades? That remained yet to be seen.

Our friend the carpenter spied us out: at least, he was not my friend. He didn't find me *simpatico*, I am sure. But up he came, and proceeded to entertain us with weary banality. Again the young woman called, had we had coffee? We said we were just going down. And then she said that whatever we had to-day we had to pay for: our food ended with the one day. At which the q-b was angry, feeling swindled. But I had known before.

We went down and had our coffee notwithstanding. The young woman came down, and made eyes at one of the alpaca blue-bottles. After which we saw a cup of coffee and milk and two biscuits being taken to her into her cabin, discreetly. When Italians are being discreet and on the sly, the very air about

them becomes tell-tale, and seems to shout with a thousand tongues. So with a thousand invisible tongues clamouring the fact, the young woman had her coffee secretly and gratis, in her cabin.

But the morning was lovely. The q-b and I crept round the bench at the very stern of the ship and sat out of the wind and out of sight, just above the foaming of the wake. Before us was the open morning — and the glisten of our ship's track, like a snail's path, trailing across the sea: straight for a little while, then giving a bend to the left, always a bend towards the left: and coming at us from the pure horizon, like a bright snail-path. Happy it was to sit there in the stillness, with nothing but the humanless sea to shine about us.

But no, we were found out. Arrived the carpenter. "Ah, you have found a fine place!"

"Molto bello!" This from the q-b. I could not bear the irruption.

He proceeded to talk — and as is inevitable, the war. Ah, the war — it was a terrible thing. He had become ill — very ill. Because, you see, not only do you go without proper food, without proper rest and warmth, but, you see, you are in an agony of fear for your life all the time. An agony of fear for your life. And that's what does it. Six months in hospital! The q-b, of course, was sympathetic.

The Sicilians are quite simple about it. They just tell you they were frightened to death, and it made them ill. The q-b, woman-like, loves them for being so simple about it. I feel angry somewhere. For they *expect* a full-blown sympathy. And however the great god Mars may have shrunk and gone wizened in the world, it annoys me to hear him so blasphemed.

Near us the automatic log was spinning, the thin rope trailing behind us in the sea. Erratically it jerked and spun, with spasmodic torsion. He explained that the little screw at the end of the line spun to the speed of travelling. We were going from ten to twelve Italian miles to the hour. Ah, yes, we *could* go twenty. But we went no faster than ten or twelve, to save the coal.

The coal — il carbone! I knew we were in for it. England! Inghilterra she has the coal. And what does she do? She sells it very dear. Particularly to Italy. Italy won the war and now can't even have coal. Because why! The price. The exchange! *il cambio*. Now I am doubly in for it. Two countries had been able to keep their money high — England and America. The English sovereign — la sterlina — and the American dollar — sa, these were money. The English and the Americans flocked to Italy, with their *sterline* and their *dollari*, and they bought what they wanted for nothing, for nothing. Ecco! Whereas we poor Italians — we are in a state of ruination — proper ruination. The allies, etc., etc.

I am so used to it — I am so wearily used to it. I can't walk a stride without having this wretched cambio, the exchange, thrown at my head. And this with an

injured petulant spitefulness which turns my blood. For I assure them, whatever I have in Italy I pay for: and I am not England. I am not the British Isles on two legs.

Germany — La Germania — she did wrong to make the war. But — there you are, that was war. Italy and Germany — l'Italia e la Germania — they had always been friends. In Palermo...

My God, I felt I could not stand it another second. To sit above the foam and have this miserable creature stuffing wads of chewed newspaper into my ear — no, I could not bear it. In Italy, there is no escape. Say two words, and the individual starts chewing old newspaper and stuffing it into you. No escape. You become — if you are English — *l'Inghilterra, il carbone and il cambio*; and as England, coal, and exchange you are treated. It is more than useless to try to be human about it. You are a State usury system, a coal fiend and an exchange thief. Every Englishman has disappeared into this triple abstraction, in the eyes of the Italian, of the proletariat particularly. Try and get them to be human, try and get them to see that you are simply an individual, if you can. After all, I am no more than a single human man wandering my lonely way across these years. But no — to an Italian I am a perfected abstraction, England — coal — exchange. The Germans were once devils for inhuman theoretic abstracting of living beings. But now the Italians beat them. I am a walking column of statistics, which adds up badly for Italy. Only this and nothing more. Which being so I shut my mouth and walk away.

For the moment the carpenter is shaken off. But I am in a rage, fool that I am. It is like being pestered by their mosquitoes. The sailing-ships are near — and I count fifteen sails. Beautiful they look! Yet if I were on board somebody would be chewing newspaper at me, and addressing me as England — coal — exchange.

The mosquito hovers — and hovers. But the stony blank of the side of my cheek keeps him away. Yet he hovers. And the q-b feels sympathetic towards him: quite sympathetic. Because of course he treats her — a *bel pezzo* — as if he would lick her boots.

Meanwhile we eat the apples from yesterday's dessert, and the remains of the q-b's Infant-Jesus-and-dove cake. The land is drawing nearer — we can see the shape of the end promontory and peninsula — and a white speck like a church. The bulk of the land is forlorn and rather shapeless, coming towards us: but attractive.

Looking ahead towards the land gives us away. The mosquito swoops on us. Yes — he is not sure — he thinks the white speck is a church — or a lighthouse. When you pass the cape on the right, and enter the wide bay between Cape

Spartivento and Cape Carbonara, then you have two hours' sail to Cagliari. We shall arrive between two and three o'clock. It is now eleven.

Yes, the sailing-ships are probably going to Naples. There is not much wind for them now. When there is wind they go fast, faster than our steamer. Ah, Naples — bella, bella, eh? A little dirty, say I. But what do you want? says he. A great city! Palermo of course is better.

Ah — the Neapolitan women — he says, à propos or not. They do their hair so fine, so neat and beautiful — but underneath sotto — sotto — they are dirty. This being received in cold silence, he continues: *Noi giriamo il mondo! Noi, chi giriamo, conosciamo il mondo.* We travel about, and we know the world. Who we are, I do not know: his highness the Palermitan carpenter lout, no doubt. But we, who travel, know the world. He is preparing his shot. The Neapolitan women, and the English women, in this are equal: that they are dirty underneath. Underneath, they are dirty. The women of London —

But it is getting too much for me.

“You who look for dirty women,” say I, “find dirty women everywhere.”

He stops short and watches me.

“No! No! You have not understood me. No! I don't mean that. I mean that the Neapolitan women and the English women have dirty underclothing — ”

To which he gets no answer but a cold look and a cold cheek. Whereupon he turns to the q-b, and proceeds to be simpatico. And after a few moments he turns again to me:

“Il signore is offended! He is offended with me.”

But I turn the other way. And at last he clears out: in triumph, I must admit: like a mosquito that has bitten one in the neck. As a matter of fact one should never let these fellows get into conversation nowadays. They are no longer human beings. They hate one's Englishness, and leave out the individual.

We walk forward, towards the fore-deck, where the captain's look-out cabin is. The captain is an elderly man, silent and crushed: with the look of a gentleman. But he looks beaten down. Another, still another member of the tray-carrying department is just creeping up his ladder with a cup of black coffee. Returning, we peep down the skylight into the kitchen. And there we see roast chicken and sausages — roast chicken and sausages! Ah, this is where the sides of kid and the chickens and the good things go: all down the throats of the crew. There is no more food for us, until we land.

We have passed the cape — and the white thing is a lighthouse. And the fattish, handsome professor has come up carrying the little girl-child, while the femaleish elder brother leads the rabbit-fluffy small boy by the hand. So *en famille*: so terribly *en famille*. They deposit themselves near us, and it threatens

another conversation. But not for anything, my dears!

The sailors — not sailors, some of the street-corner loafers, are hoisting the flag, the red-white-and-green Italian tricolour. It floats at the mast-head, and the femaleish brother, in a fine burst of feeling, takes off his funny hat with a flourish and cries:

“Ecco la bandiera italiana!”

Ach, the hateful sentimentalism of these days.

The land passes slowly, very slowly. It is hilly, but barren looking, with a few trees. And it is not spikey and rather splendid, like Sicily. Sicily has style. We keep along the east side of the bay — away in the west is Cape Spartivento. And still no sight of Cagliari.

“Two hours yet!” cries the Cagliari girl. “Two hours before we eat. Ah, when I get on land, what a good meal I shall eat.”

The men haul in the automatic log. The sky is clouding over with that icy curd which comes after midday when the bitter north wind is blowing. It is no longer warm.

Slowly, slowly we creep along the formless shore. An hour passes. We see a little fort ahead, done in enormous black-and-white checks, like a fragment of a gigantic chess-board. It stands at the end of a long spit of land — a long, barish peninsula that has no houses and looks as if it might be golf-links. But it is not golf-links.

And suddenly there is Cagliari: a naked town rising steep, steep, golden-looking, piled naked to the sky from the plain at the head of the formless hollow bay. It is strange and rather wonderful, not a bit like Italy. The city piles up lofty and almost miniature, and makes me think of Jerusalem: without trees, without cover, rising rather bare and proud, remote as if back in history, like a town in a monkish, illuminated missal. One wonders how it ever got there. And it seems like Spain — or Malta: not Italy. It is a steep and lonely city, treeless, as in some old illumination. Yet withal rather jewel-like: like a sudden rose-cut amber jewel naked at the depth of the vast indenture. The air is cold, blowing bleak and bitter, the sky is all curd. And that is Cagliari. It has that curious look, as if it could be seen, but not entered. It is like some vision, some memory, something that has passed away. Impossible that one can actually *walk* in that city: set foot there and eat and laugh there. Ah, no! Yet the ship drifts nearer, nearer, and we are looking for the actual harbour.

The usual sea-front with dark trees for a promenade and palatial buildings behind, but here not so pink and gay, more reticent, more sombre of yellow stone. The harbour itself a little basin of water, into which we are slipping carefully, while three salt-barges laden with salt as white as snow creep round

from the left, drawn by an infinitesimal tug. There are only two other forlorn ships in the basin. It is cold on deck. The ship turns slowly round, and is being hauled to the quay side. I go down for the knapsack, and a fat blue-bottle pounces at me.

“You pay nine francs fifty.”

I pay them, and we get off that ship.

III. CAGLIARI

There is a very little crowd waiting on the quay: mostly men with their hands in their pockets. But, thank heaven, they have a certain aloofness and reserve. They are not like the tourist-parasites of these post-war days, who move to the attack with a terrifying cold vindictiveness the moment one emerges from any vehicle. And some of these men look really poor. There are no poor Italians any more: at least, loafers.

Strange the feeling round the harbour: as if everybody had gone away. Yet there are people about. It is “festa” however, Epiphany. But it is so different from Sicily: none of the suave Greek-Italian charms, none of the airs and graces, none of the glamour. Rather bare, rather stark, rather cold and yellow — somehow like Malta, without Malta’s foreign liveliness. Thank goodness no one wants to carry my knapsack. Thank goodness no one has a fit at the sight of it. Thank heaven no one takes any notice. They stand cold and aloof, and don’t move.

We make our way through the Customs: then through the Dazio, the City Customs-house. Then we are free. We set off up a steep, new, broad road, with little trees on either side. But stone, arid, new, wide stone, yellowish under the cold sky — and abandoned-seeming. Though, of course, there are people about. The north wind blows biting.

We climb a broad flight of steps, always upwards, up the wide, precipitous, dreary boulevard with sprouts of trees. Looking for the hotel, and dying with hunger.

At last we find it, the Scala di Ferre: through a courtyard with green plants. And at last a little man with lank, black hair, like an Esquimo, comes smiling. He is one brand of Sardinian — Esquimo looking. There is no room with two beds: only single rooms. And thus we are led off, if you please, to the “bagnio”: the bathing-establishment wing, on the dank ground floor. Cubicles on either side a stone passage, and in every cubicle a dark stone bath, and a little bed. We can have each a little bath cubicle. If there’s nothing else for it, there isn’t: but it seems dank and cold and horrid, underground. And one thinks of all the unsavoury “assignments” at these old bagnio places. True, at the end of the passage are seated two carabinieri. But whether to ensure respectability or not, heaven knows. We are in the baths, that’s all.

The Esquimo returns after five minutes, however. There is a bedroom in the house. He is pleased, because he didn’t like putting us into the bagnio. Where he

found the bedroom I don't know. But there it was, large, sombre, cold, and over the kitchen fumes of a small inner court like a well. But perfectly clean and all right. And the people seemed warm and good-natured, like human beings. One has got so used to the non-human ancient-souled Sicilians, who are suave and so completely callous.

After a really good meal we went out to see the town. It was after three o'clock and everywhere was shut up like an English Sunday. Cold, stony Cagliari: in summer you must be sizzling hot, Cagliari, like a kiln. The men stood about in groups, but without the intimate Italian watchfulness that never leaves a passer-by alone.

Strange, stony Cagliari. We climbed up a street like a corkscrew stairway. And we saw announcements of a children's fancy-dress ball. Cagliari is very steep. Half-way up there is a strange place called the bastions, a large, level space like a drill-ground with trees, curiously suspended over the town, and sending off a long shoot like a wide viaduct, across above the corkscrew street that comes climbing up. Above this bastion place the town still rises steeply to the Cathedral and the fort. What is so curious is that this terrace or bastion is so large, like some big recreation ground, that it is almost dreary, and one cannot understand its being suspended in midair. Down below is the little circle of the harbour. To the left a low, malarial-looking sea plain, with tufts of palm trees and Arab-looking houses. From this runs out the long spit of land towards that black-and-white watch-fort, the white road trailing forth. On the right, most curiously, a long strange spit of sand runs in a causeway far across the shallows of the bay, with the open sea on one hand, and vast, end-of-the-world lagoons on the other. There are peaky, dark mountains beyond this — just as across the vast bay are gloomy hills. It is a strange, strange landscape: as if here the world left off. The bay is vast in itself; and all these curious things happening at its head: this curious, craggy-studded town, like a great stud of house-covered rock jutting up out of the bay flats: around it on one side the weary, Arab-looking palm-desolated malarial plain, and on the other side great salt lagoons, dead beyond the sand-bar: these backed again by serried, clustered mountains, suddenly, while away beyond the plain, hills rise to sea again. Land and sea both seem to give out, exhausted, at the bay head: the world's end. And into this world's end starts at Cagliari, and on either side, sudden, serpent-crested hills.

But it still reminds me of Malta: lost between Europe and Africa and belonging to nowhere. Belonging to nowhere, never having belonged to anywhere. To Spain and the Arabs and the Phoenicians most. But as if it had never really had a fate. No fate. Left outside of time and history.

The spirit of the place is a strange thing. Our mechanical age tries to override

it. But it does not succeed. In the end the strange, sinister spirit of the place, so diverse and adverse in differing places, will smash our mechanical oneness into smithereens, and all that we think the real thing will go off with a pop, and we shall be left staring.

On the great parapet above the Municipal Hall and above the corkscrew high-street a thick fringe of people is hanging, looking down. We go to look too: and behold, below there is the entrance to the ball. Yes, there is a china shepherdess in pale blue and powdered hair, crook, ribbons, Marie Antoinette satin daintiness and all, slowly and haughtily walking up the road, and gazing superbly round. She is not more than twelve years old, moreover. Two servants accompany her. She gazes supremely from right to left as she goes, mincingly, and I would give her the prize for haughtiness. She is perfect — a little too haughty for Watteau, but “marquise” to a T. The people watch in silence. There is no yelling and screaming and running. They watch in a suitable silence.

Comes a carriage with two fat bay horses slithering, almost swimming up the corkscrew high-street. That in itself is a “tour de force”: for Cagliari doesn’t have carriages. Imagine a street like a corkscrew stair, paved with slippery stone. And imagine two bay horses rowing their way up it: they did not walk a single stride. But they arrived. And there fluttered out three strangely exquisite children, two frail, white satin Pierrots and a white satin Pierrette. They were like fragile winter butterflies with black spots. They had a curious, indefinable remote elegance, something conventional and “fin-de-siècle”. But not our century. The wonderful artificial delicacy of the eighteenth. The boys had big, perfect ruffs round their necks: and behind were slung old, cream-coloured Spanish shawls, for warmth. They were frail as tobacco flowers, and with remote, cold elegance they fluttered by the carriage from which emerged a large black-satin Mama. Fluttering their queer little butterfly feet on the pavement, hovering round the large Mama like three frail-tissued ghosts, they found their way past the solid, seated carabinieri into the hall.

Arrived a primrose-brocade beau, with ruffles, and his hat under his arm: about twelve years old. Walking statelily, without a qualm up the steep twist of the street. Or perhaps so perfect in his self-consciousness that it became an elegant “aplomb” in him. He was a genuine eighteenth-century exquisite, rather stiffer than the French, maybe, but completely in the spirit. Curious, curious children! They had a certain stand-offish superbness, and not a single trace of misgiving. For them, their “noblesse” was indisputable. For the first time in my life I recognised the true cold superbness of the old “noblesse”. They had not a single qualm about their own perfect representing of the higher order of being.

Followed another white satin “marquise”, with a maidservant. They are strong

on the eighteenth century in Cagliari. Perhaps it is the last bright reality to them. The nineteenth hardly counts.

Curious the children in Cagliari. The poor seem thoroughly poor-bare-footed urchins, gay and wild in the narrow dark streets. But the more well-to-do children are so fine: so extraordinarily elegantly dressed. It quite strikes one of a heap. Not so much the grown-ups. The children. All the “chic”, all the fashion, all the originality is expended on the children. And with a great deal of success. Better than Kensington Gardens very often. And they promenade with Papa and Mama with such alert assurance, having quite brought it off, their fashionable get-up. Who would have expected it?

Oh, narrow, dark, and humid streets going up to the Cathedral, like crevices. I narrowly miss a huge pail of slop-water which comes crashing down from heaven. A small boy who was playing in the street, and whose miss is not quite a clean miss, looks up with that naïve, impersonal wonder with which children stare at a star or a lamp-lighter.

The Cathedral must have been a fine old pagan stone fortress once. Now it has come, as it were, through the mincing machine of the ages, and oozed out baroque and sausagey, a bit like the horrible baldachins in St. Peter’s at Rome. None the less it is homely and hole-and-cornery, with a rather ragged high mass trailing across the pavement towards the high altar, since it is almost sunset, and Epiphany. It feels as if one might squat in a corner and play marbles and eat bread and cheese and be at home: a comfortable old-time churchey feel.

There is some striking filet lace on the various altar-cloths. And St. Joseph must be a prime saint. He has an altar and a verse of invocation praying for the dying.

“Oh, St. Joseph, true potential father of Our Lord.” What can it profit a man, I wonder, to be the potential father of anybody! For the rest I am not Baedeker.

The top of Cagliari is the fortress: the old gate, the old ramparts, of honey-combed, fine yellowish sandstone. Up in a great sweep goes the rampart wall, Spanish and splendid, dizzy. And the road creeping down again at the foot, down the back of the hill. There lies the country: that dead plain with its bunch of palms and a fainting sea, and inland again, hills. Cagliari must be on a single, loose, lost bluff of rock.

From the terrace just below the fortress, above the town, not behind it, we stand and look at the sunset. It is all terrible, taking place beyond the knotted, serpent-crested hills that lie, bluey and velvety, beyond the waste lagoons. Dark, sultry, heavy crimson the west is, hanging sinisterly, with those gloomy blue cloud-bars and cloud-banks drawn across. All behind the blue-gloomy peaks stretches the curtain of sinister, smouldering red, and away to the sea. Deep

below lie the seameres. They seem miles and miles, and utterly waste. But the sand-bar crosses like a bridge, and has a road. All the air is dark, a sombre bluish tone. The great west burns inwardly, sullenly, and gives no glow, yet a deep red. It is cold.

We go down the steep streets, smelly, dark, dank, and very cold. No wheeled vehicle can scramble up them, presumably. People live in one room. Men are combing their hair or fastening their collars in the doorways. Evening is here, and it is a feast day.

At the bottom of the street we come to a little bunch of masked youths, one in a long yellow frock and a frilled bonnet, another like an old woman, another in red twill. They are arm in arm and are accosting the passers-by. The q-b gives a cry, and looks for escape. She has a terror of maskers, a terror that comes from childhood. To say the truth, so have I. We hasten invisibly down the far side of the street, and come out under the bastions, Then we go down our own familiar wide, short, cold boulevard to the sea.

At the bottom, again, is a carriage with more maskers. Carnival is beginning. A man dressed as a peasant woman in native costume is clambering with his great wide skirts and wide strides on to the box, and, flourishing his ribboned whip, is addressing a little crowd of listeners. He opens his mouth wide and goes on with a long yelling harangue of taking a drive with his mother — another man in old-woman's gaudy finery and wig who sits already bobbing on the box. The would-be daughter flourishes, yells, and prances up there on the box of the carriage. The crowd listens attentively and mildly smiles. It all seems real to them. The q-b hovers in the distance, half-fascinated, and watches. With a great flourish of whip and legs — showing his frilled drawers — the masker pulls round to drive along the boulevard by the sea — the only place where one can drive.

The big street by the sea is the Via Roma. It has the cafés on one side and across the road the thick tufts of trees intervening between the sea and us. Among these thick tufts of seafront trees the little steam tram, like a little train, bumps to rest, after having wound round the back of the town.

The Via Roma is all social Cagliari. Including the cafés with their outdoor tables on the one side of the road, and the avenue strand on the other, it is very wide, and at evening it contains the whole town. Here, and here alone carriages can spank along, very slowly, officers can ride, and the people can promenade “en masse”.

We were amazed at the sudden crowd we found ourselves amongst — like a short, dense river of people streaming slowly in a mass. There is practically no vehicular traffic — only the steady dense streams of human beings of all sorts,

all on a human footing. It must have been something like this in the streets of imperial Rome, where no chariots might drive and humanity was all on foot.

Little bunches of maskers, and single maskers danced and strutted along in a thick flow under the trees. If you are a mask you don't walk like a human being: you dance and prance along extraordinarily like the life-size marionettes, conducted by wires from above. That is how you go: with that odd jauntiness as if lifted and propelled by wires from the shoulders. In front of me went a charming coloured harlequin, all in diamond-shaped colours, and beautiful as a piece of china. He tripped with the light, fantastic trip, quite alone in the thick crowd, and quite blithe. Came two little children hand in hand in brilliant scarlet and white costumes, sauntering calmly. They did not do the mask trip. After a while a sky-blue girl with a high hat and full skirts, very short, that went flip-flip-flip, as a ballet dancer's, whilst she strutted; after her a Spanish grandee capering like a monkey. They threaded among the slow stream of the crowd. Appeared Dante and Beatrice, in Paradise apparently, all in white sheet-ropes, and with silver wreaths on their heads, arm in arm, and prancing very slowly and majestically, yet with the long lilt as if hitched along by wires from above. They were very good: all the well-known vision come to life, Dante incorporate, and white as a shroud, with his tow-haired, silver-crowned, immortal Beatrice on his arm, strutting the dark avenues. He had the nose and cheek-bones and banded cheek, and the stupid wooden look, and offered a modern criticism on the Inferno.

It had become quite dark, the lamps were lighted. We crossed the road to the Café Roma, and found a table on the pavement among the crowd. In a moment we had our tea. The evening was cold, with ice in the wind. But the crowd surged on, back and forth, back and forth, slowly. At the tables were seated mostly men, taking coffee or vermouth or *aqua vitae*, all familiar and easy, without the modern self-consciousness. There was a certain pleasant, natural robustness of spirit, and something of a feudal free-and-easiness. Then arrived a family, with children, and nurse in her native costume. They all sat at table together, perfectly easy with one another, though the marvellous nurse seemed to be seated below the salt. She was bright as a poppy, in a rose-scarlet dress of fine cloth with a curious little waistcoat of emerald green and purple, and a bodice of soft, homespun linen with great full sleeves. On her head she had a rose-scarlet and white head-dress, and she wore great studs of gold filigree, and similar earrings. The feudal-bourgeois family drank its syrup-drinks and watched the crowd. Most remarkable is the complete absence of self-consciousness. They all have a perfect natural "sangfroid", the nurse in her marvellous native costume is as thoroughly at her ease as if she were in her own village street. She moves and

speaks and calls to a passer-by without the slightest constraint, and much more, without the slightest presumption. She is below the invisible salt, the invisible but insuperable salt. And it strikes me the salt-barrier is a fine thing for both parties; they both remain natural and human on either side of it, instead of becoming devilish, scrambling and pushing at the barricade.

The crowd is across the road, under the trees near the sea. On this side stroll occasional pedestrians. And I see my first peasant in costume. He is an elderly, upright, handsome man, beautiful in the black-and-white costume. He wears the full-sleeved white shirt and the close black bodice of thick, native frieze, cut low. From this sticks out a short kilt or frill, of the same black frieze, a band of which goes between the legs, between the full loose drawers of coarse linen. The drawers are banded below the knee into tight black frieze gaiters. On his head he has the long black stocking cap, hanging down behind. How handsome he is, and so beautifully male! He walks with his hands loose behind his back, slowly, upright, and aloof. The lovely unapproachableness, indomitable. And the flash of the black and white, the slow stride of the full white drawers, the black gaiters and black cuirass with the bolero, then the great white sleeves and white breast again, and once more the black cap — what marvellous massing of the contrast, marvellous, and superb, as on a magpie. — How beautiful maleness is, if it finds its right expression. — And how perfectly ridiculous it is made in modern clothes.

There is another peasant too, a young one with a swift eye and hard cheek and hard, dangerous thighs. He has folded his stocking cap, so that it comes forward to his brow like a phrygian cap. He wears close knee-breeches and close sleeved waistcoat of thick brownish stuff that looks like leather. Over the waistcoat a sort of cuirass of black, rusty sheepskin, the curly wool outside. So he strides, talking to a comrade. How fascinating it is, after the soft Italians, to see these limbs in their close knee-breeches, so definite, so manly, with the old fierceness in them still. One realises, with horror, that the race of men is almost extinct in Europe. Only Christ-like heroes and woman-worshipping Don Juans, and rabid equality-mongrels. The old, hardy, indomitable male is gone. His fierce singleness is quenched. The last sparks are dying out in Sardinia and Spain. Nothing left but the herd-proletariat and the herd-equality mongrelism, and the wistful poisonous self-sacrificial cultured soul. How detestable.

But that curious, flashing, black-and-white costume! I seem to have known it before: to have worn it even: to have dreamed it. To have dreamed it: to have had actual contact with it. It belongs in some way to something in me — to my past, perhaps. I don't know. But the uneasy sense of blood-familiarity haunts me. I know I have known it before. It is something of the same uneasiness I feel

before Mount Eryx: but without the awe this time.

In the morning the sun was shining from a blue, blue sky, but the shadows were deadly cold, and the wind like a flat blade of ice. We went out running to the sun. The hotel could not give us coffee and milk: only a little black coffee. So we descended to the seafront again, to the Via Roma, and to our café. It was Friday: people seemed to be bustling in from the country with huge baskets.

The Café Roma had coffee and milk, but no butter. We sat and watched the movement outside. Tiny Sardinian donkeys, the tiniest things ever seen, trotted their infinitesimal little paws along the road, drawing little wagons like handcarts. Their proportion is so small, that they make a boy walking at their side look like a tall man, while a natural man looks like a Cyclops stalking hugely and cruelly. It is ridiculous for a grown man to have one of these little creatures, hardly bigger than a fly, hauling his load for him. One is pulling a chest of drawers on a cart, and it seems to have a whole house behind it. Nevertheless it plods bravely away beneath the load, a wee thing.

They tell me there used to be flocks of these donkeys, feeding half wild on the wild, moor-like hills of Sardinia. But the war — and also the imbecile wantonness of the war-masters — consumed these flocks too, so that few are left. The same with the cattle. Sardinia, home of cattle, hilly little Argentine of the Mediterranean, is now almost deserted. It is war, say the Italiana. — And also the wanton, imbecile, foul lavishness of the war-masters. It was not alone the war which exhausted the world. It was the deliberate evil wastefulness of the war-makers in their own countries. Italy ruined Italy.

Two peasants in black-and-white are strolling in the sun, flashing. And my dream of last evening was not a dream. And my nostalgia for something I know not what was not an illusion. I feel it again at once, at the sight of the men in frieze and linen, a heart yearning for something I have known, and which I want back again.

It is market day. We turn up the Largo Carlo-Felice, the second wide gap of a street, a vast but very short boulevard, like the end of something. Cagliari is like that: all bits and bobs. And by the side of the pavement are many stalls, stalls selling combs and collar-studs, cheap mirrors, handkerchiefs, shoddy Manchester goods, bed-ticking, boot-paste, poor crockery and so on. But we see also Madame of Cagliari going marketing, with a servant accompanying her, carrying a huge grass-woven basket: or returning from marketing, followed by a small boy supporting one of these huge grass-woven baskets — like huge dishes — on his head, piled with bread, eggs, vegetables, a chicken, and so forth. Therefore we follow Madame going marketing, and find ourselves in the vast market house, and it fairly glows with eggs: eggs in these great round dish-

baskets of golden grass: but eggs in piles, in mounds, in heaps, a Sierra Nevada of eggs, glowing warm white. How they glow! I have never noticed it before. But they give off a warm, pearly effulgence into the air, almost a warmth. A pearly-gold heat seems to come out of them. Myriads of eggs, glowing avenues of eggs.

And they arc marked-60 centimes, 65 centimes. Ah, cries the q-b, I must live in Cagliari — for in Sicily the eggs cost 1.50 each.

This is the meat and poultry and bread market. There are stalls of new, various-shaped bread, brown and bright: there are tiny stalls of marvellous native cakes, which I want to taste, there is a great deal of meat and kid: and there are stalls of cheese, all cheeses, all shapes, all whitenesses, all the cream-colours, on into daffodil yellow. Goat cheese, sheep's cheese, Swiss cheese, Parmegiano, stracchino, caciocavallo, torolone, how many cheeses I don't know the names of! But they cost about the same as in Sicily, eighteen francs, twenty francs, twenty-five francs the kilo. And there is lovely ham — thirty and thirty-five francs the kilo. There is a little fresh butter too — thirty or thirty-two francs the kilo. Most of the butter, however, is tinned in Milan. It costs the same as the fresh. There are splendid piles of salted black olives, and huge bowls of green salted olives. There are chickens and ducks and wild-fowl: at eleven and twelve and fourteen francs a kilo. There is mortadella, the enormous Bologna sausage, thick as a church pillar: 16 francs: and there are various sorts of smaller sausage, salami, to be eaten in slices. A wonderful abundance of food, glowing and shining. We are rather late for fish, especially on Friday. But a barefooted man offers us two weird objects from the Mediterranean, which teems with marine monsters.

The peasant women sit behind their wares, their home-woven linen skirts, hugely full, and of various colours, ballooning round them. The yellow baskets give off a glow of light. There is a sense of profusion once more. But alas no sense of cheapness: save the eggs. Every month, up goes the price of everything.

“I must come and live in Cagliari, to do my shopping here,” says the q-b. “I must have one of those big grass baskets.”

We went down to the little street — but saw more baskets emerging from a broad flight of stone stairs, enclosed. So up we went — and found ourselves in the vegetable market. Here the q-b was happier still. Peasant women, sometimes barefoot, sat in their tight little bodices and voluminous, coloured skirts behind the piles of vegetables, and never have I seen a lovelier show. The intense deep green of spinach seemed to predominate, and out of that came the monuments of curd-white and black-purple cauliflowers: but marvellous cauliflowers, like a flower show, the purple ones intense as great bunches of violets. From this

green, white, and purple massing struck out the vivid rose-scarlet and blue crimson of radishes, large radishes like little turnips in piles. Then the long, slim, grey-purple buds of artichokes, and dangling clusters of dates, and piles of sugar-dusty white figs and sombre-looking black figs, and bright burnt figs: basketfuls and basketfuls of figs. A few baskets of almonds, and many huge walnuts. Basket-pans of native raisins. Scarlet peppers like trumpets: magnificent fennels, so white and big and succulent: baskets of new potatoes: scaly kohlrabi: wild asparagus in bunches, yellow-budding sparacelli: big, clean-fleshed carrots: feathery salads with white hearts: long, brown-purple onions and then, of course pyramids of big oranges, pyramids of pale apples, and baskets of brilliant shiny mandarin, the little tangerine oranges with their green-black leaves. The green and vivid-coloured world of fruit-gleams I have never seen in such splendour as under the market roof at Cagliari: so raw and gorgeous. And all quite cheap, the one remaining cheapness, except potatoes. Potatoes of any sort are 1.40 or 1.50 the kilo.

“Oh!” cried the q-b, “if I don’t live at Cagliari and come and do my shopping here, I shall die with one of my wishes unfulfilled.”

But out of the sun it was cold, nevertheless. We went into the streets to try and get warm. The sun was powerful. But, alas, as in southern towns generally, the streets are sunless as wells.

So the q-b and I creep slowly along the sunny bits, and then perforce are swallowed by shadow. We look at the shops. But there is not much to see. Little frowsy provincial shops, on the whole.

But a fair number of peasants in the streets, and peasant women in rather ordinary costume: tight-bodied, volume-skirted dresses of hand-woven linen or thickish cotton. The prettiest is of dark-blue-and-red, stripes-and-lines, intermingled, so made that the dark-blue gathers round the waist into one colour, the myriad pleats hiding all the rosy red. But when she walks, the full-petticoated peasant woman, then the red goes flash-flash-flash, like a bird showing its colours. Pretty that looks in the sombre street. She has a plain, light bodice with a peak: sometimes a little vest, and great full white sleeves, and usually a handkerchief or shawl loose knotted. It is charming the way they walk, with quick, short steps. When all is said and done, the most attractive costume for women in my eye, is the tight little bodice and the many-pleated skirt, full and vibrating with movement. It has a charm which modern elegance lacks completely — a bird-like play in movement.

They are amusing, these peasant girls and women: so brisk and defiant. They have straight backs like little walls, and decided, well-drawn brows. And they are amusingly on the alert. There is no eastern creeping. Like sharp, brisk birds

they dart along the streets, and you feel they would fetch you a bang over the head as leave as look at you. Tenderness, thank heaven, does not seem to be a Sardinian quality. Italy is so tender — like cooked macaroni — yards and yards of soft tenderness ravelled round everything. Here men don't idealise women, by the look of things. Here they don't make those great leering eyes, the inevitable yours-to-command look of Italian males. When the men from the country look at these women, then it is Mind-yourself, my lady. I should think the grovelling Madonna-worship is not much of a Sardinian feature. These women have to look out for themselves, keep their own backbone stiff and their knuckles hard. Man is going to be male Lord if he can. And woman isn't going to give him too much of his own way either. So there you have it, the fine old martial split between the sexes. It is tonic and splendid, really, after so much sticky intermingling and backboneless Madonna-worship. The Sardinian isn't looking for the "noble woman nobly planned". No, thank you. He wants that young madam over there, a young stiff-necked generation that she is. Far better sport than with the nobly-planned sort: hollow frauds that they are. Better sport too than with a Carmen, who gives herself away too much. In these women there is something shy and defiant and un-get-atable. The defiant, splendid split between the sexes, each absolutely determined to defend his side, her side, from assault. So the meeting has a certain wild, salty savour, each the deadly unknown to the other. And at the same time, each his own, her own native pride and courage, taking the dangerous leap and scrambling back.

Give me the old, salty way of love. How I am nauseated with sentiment and nobility, the macaroni slithery-slobbery mess of modern adorations.

One sees a few fascinating faces in Cagliari: those great dark unlighted eyes. There are fascinating dark eyes in Sicily, bright, big, with an impudent point of light and a curious roll, and long lashes: the eyes of old Greece, surely. But here one sees eyes of soft, blank darkness, all velvet, with no imp looking out of them. And they strike a stranger, older note: before the soul became self-conscious: before the mentality of Greece appeared in the world. Remote, always remote, as if the intelligence lay deep within the cave, and never came forward. One searches into the gloom for one second, while the glance lasts. But without being able to penetrate to the reality. It recedes, like some unknown creature, deeper into its lair. There is a creature, dark and potent. But what?

Sometimes Velasquez, and sometimes Goya gives us a suggestion of these large, dark, unlighted eyes. And they go with fine, fleecy black hair — almost as fine as fur. I have not seen them north of Cagliari.

The q-b spies some of the blue-and-red stripe-and-line cotton stuff of which the peasants make their dress: a large roll in the doorway of a dark shop. In we

go, and begin to feel it. It is just soft, thickish cotton stuff — twelve francs a metre. Like most peasant patterns, it is much more complicated and subtle than it appears: the curious placing of the stripes, the subtle proportion, and a white thread left down one side only of each broad blue block. The stripes, moreover, run *across* the cloth, not lengthwise with it. But the width would be just long enough for a skirt — though the peasant skirts have almost all a band at the bottom with the stripes running round-ways.

The man — he is the Esquimo type, simple, frank and amiable — says the stuff is made in France, and this the first roll since the war. It is the old, old pattern, quite correct — but the material not *quite* so good. The q-b takes enough for a dress.

He shows us also cashmeres, orange, scarlet, sky-blue, royal blue: good, pure-wool cashmeres that were being sent to India, and were captured from a German mercantile submarine. So he says. Fifty francs a metre — very, very wide. But they are too much trouble to carry in a knapsack, though their brilliance fascinates.

So we stroll and look at the shops, at the filigree gold jewellery of the peasants, at a good bookshop. But there is little to see, and therefore the question is, shall we go on? Shall we go forward?

There are two ways of leaving Cagliari for the north: the State railway that runs up the west side of the island and the narrow-gauge secondary railway that pierces the centre. But we are too late for the big trains. So we will go by the secondary railway, wherever it goes.

There is a train at 2.30, and we can get as far as Mandas, some fifty miles in the interior. When we tell the queer little waiter at the hotel, he says he comes from Mandas, and there are two inns. So after lunch — a strictly fish menu — we pay our bill. It comes to sixty odd francs — for three good meals each, with wine, and the night's lodging, this is cheap, as prices now are in Italy.

Pleased with the simple and friendly Scala di Ferre, I shoulder my sack and we walk off to the second station. The sun is shining hot this afternoon — burning hot, by the sea. The road and the buildings look dry and desiccated, the harbour rather weary and end of the world.

There is a great crowd of peasants at the little station. And almost every man has a pair of woven saddle-bags — a great flat strip of coarse-woven wool, with flat pockets at either end, stuffed with purchases. These are almost the only carrying bags. The men sling them over their shoulder, so that one great pocket hangs in front, one behind.

These saddle-bags are most fascinating. They are coarsely woven in bands of raw black-rusty wool, with varying bands of raw white wool or hemp or cotton

— the bands and stripes of varying widths going crosswise. And on the pale bands are woven sometimes flowers in most lovely colours, rose-red and blue and green, peasant patterns — and sometimes fantastic animals, beasts, in dark wool again. So that these striped zebra bags, some wonderful, gay with flowery colours on their stripes, some weird with fantastic, griffin-like animals, are a whole landscape in themselves.

The train has only first and third-class. It costs about thirty francs for the two of us, third-class to Mandas, which is some sixty miles. In we crowd with the joyful saddle-bags, into the wooden carriage with its many seats.

And, wonder of wonders, punctually to the second, off we go, out of Cagliari. En route again.

IV. MANDAS

The coach was fairly full of people, returning from market. On these railways the third-class coaches are not divided into compartments. They are left open, so that one sees everybody, as down a room. The attractive saddlebags, bercole, were disposed anywhere, and the bulk of the people settled down to a lively conversazione. It is much nicest, on the whole, to travel third-class on the railway. There is space, there is air, and it is like being in a lively inn, everybody in good spirits.

At our end was plenty of room. Just across the gangway was an elderly couple, like two children, coming home very happily. He was fat, fat all over, with a white moustache and a little not-unamiable frown. She was a tall lean, brown woman, in a brown full-skirted dress and black apron, with huge pocket. She wore no head covering, and her iron-grey hair was parted smoothly. They were rather pleased and excited being in the train. She took all her money out of her big pocket, and counted it and gave it to him: all the ten lira notes, and the five lira, and the two and the one, peering at the dirty scraps of pink-backed one-lira notes to see if they were good. Then she gave him her half-pennies. And he stowed them away in the trouser pocket, standing up to push them down his fat leg. And then one saw, to one's amazement, that the whole of his shirt-tail was left out behind, like a sort of apron worn backwards. Why — a mystery. He was one of those fat, good-natured, unheeding men with a little masterful frown, such as usually have tall, lean, hard-faced, obedient wives.

They were very happy. With amazement he watched us taking hot tea from the thermos flask. I think he too had suspected it might be a bomb. He had blue eyes and standing-up white eyebrows.

“Beautiful hot!” he said, seeing the tea steam. It is the inevitable exclamation. “Does it do you good?”

“Yes,” said the q-b. “Much good.” And they both nodded complacently. They were going home.

The train was running over the malarial-looking sea-plain — past the down-at-heel palm trees, past the mosque-looking buildings. At a level crossing the woman crossing-keeper darted out vigorously with her red flag. And we rambled into the first village. It was built of sun-dried brick-adobe houses, thick adobe garden-walls, with tile ridges to keep off the rain. In the enclosures were dark orange trees. But the clay-coloured villages, clay-dry, looked foreign: the next thing to mere earth they seem, like fox-holes or coyote colonies.

Looking back, one sees Cagliari bluff on her rock, rather fine, with the thin edge of the sea's blade curving round. It is rather hard to believe in the real sea, on this sort of clay-pale plain.

But soon we begin to climb to the hills. And soon the cultivation begins to be intermittent. Extraordinary how the heathy, moor-like hills come near the sea: extraordinary how scrubby and uninhabited the great spaces of Sardinia are. It is wild, with heath and arbutus scrub and a sort of myrtle, breast-high. Sometimes one sees a few head of cattle. And then again come the greyish arable-patches, where the corn is grown. It is like Cornwall, like the Land's End region. Here and there, in the distance, are peasants working on the lonely landscape. Sometimes it is one man alone in the distance, showing so vividly in his black-and-white costume, small and far-off like a solitary magpie, and curiously distinct. All the strange magic of Sardinia is in this sight. Among the low, moor-like hills, away in a hollow of the wide landscape one solitary figure, small but vivid black-and-white, working alone, as if eternally. There are patches and hollows of grey arable land, good for corn. Sardinia was once a great granary.

Usually, however, the peasants of the South have left off the costume. Usually it is the invisible soldiers' grey-green cloth, the Italian khaki. Wherever you go, wherever you be, you see this khaki, this grey-green war-clothing. How many millions of yards of the thick, excellent, but hateful material the Italian Government must have provided I don't know: but enough to cover Italy with a felt carpet, I should think. It is everywhere. It cases the tiny children in stiff and neutral frocks and coats, it covers their extinguished fathers, and sometimes it even encloses the women in its warmth. It is symbolic of the universal grey mist that has come over men, the extinguishing of all bright individuality, the blotting out of all wild singleness. Oh, democracy! Oh, khaki democracy!

This is very different from Italian landscape. Italy is almost always dramatic, and perhaps invariably romantic. There is drama in the plains of Lombardy and romance in the Venetian lagoons, and sheer scenic excitement in nearly all the hilly parts of the peninsula. Perhaps it is the natural floridity of limestone formations. But Italian landscape is really eighteenth-century landscape, to be represented in that romantic-classic manner which makes everything rather marvellous and very topical: aqueducts, and ruins upon sugar-loaf mountains, and craggy ravines and Wilhelm Meister water-falls: all up and down.

Sardinia is another thing. Much wider, much more ordinary, not up-and-down at all, but running away into the distance. Unremarkable ridges of moor-like hills running away, perhaps to a bunch of dramatic peaks on the south-west. This gives a sense of space, which is so lacking in Italy. Lovely space about one, and travelling distances — nothing finished, nothing final. It is like liberty itself,

after the peaky confinement of Sicily. Room — give me room — give me room for my spirit: and you can have all the toppling crags of romance.

So we ran on through the gold of the afternoon, across a wide, almost Celtic landscape of hills, our little train winding and puffing away very nimbly. Only the heath and scrub, breast-high, man-high, is too big and brigand-like for a Celtic land. The horns of black, wild-looking cattle show sometimes.

After a long pull, we come to a station after a stretch of loneliness. Each time, it looks as if there were nothing beyond — no more habitations. And each time we come to a station.

Most of the people have left the train. And as with men driving in a gig, who get down at every public-house, so the passengers usually alight for an airing at each station. Our old fat friend stands up and tucks his shirt-tail comfortably in his trousers, which trousers all the time make one hold one's breath, for they seem at each very moment to be just dropping right down: and he clammers out, followed by the long, brown stalk of a wife.

So the train sits comfortably for five or ten minutes, in the way the trains have. At last we hear whistles and horns, and Our old fat friend running and clinging like a fat crab to the very end of the train as it sets off. At the same instant a loud shriek and a bunch of shouts from outside. We all jump up. There, down the line, is the long brown stalk of a wife. She had just walked back to a house some hundred yards off, for a few words, and has now seen the train moving.

Now behold her with her hands thrown to heaven, and hear the wild shriek "Madonna!" through all the hubbub. But she picks up her two skirt-knees, and with her thin legs in grey stockings starts with a mad rush after the train. In vain. The train inexorably pursues its course. Prancing, she reaches one end of the platform as we leave the other end. Then she realises it is not going to stop for her. And then, oh horror, her long arms thrown out in wild supplication after the retreating train: then flung aloft to God: then brought down in absolute despair on her head. And this is the last sight we have of her, clutching her poor head in agony and doubling forward. She is left — she is abandoned.

The poor fat husband has been all the time on the little outside platform at the end of the carriage, holding out his hand to her and shouting frenzied scolding to her and frenzied yells for the train to stop. And the train has not stopped. And she is left — left on that God-forsaken station in the waning light.

So, his face all bright, his eyes round and bright as two stars, absolutely transfigured by dismay, chagrin, anger and distress, he comes and sits in his seat, ablaze, stiff, speechless. His face is almost beautiful in its blaze of conflicting emotions. For some time he is as if unconscious in the midst of his feelings. Then anger and resentment crop out of his consternation. He turns with a flash to

the long-nosed, insidious, Phoenician-looking guard. Why couldn't they stop the train for her! And immediately, as if someone had set fire to him, off flares the guard. Heh! — the train can't stop for every person's convenience! The train is a train — the time-table is a time-table. What did the old woman want to take her trips down the line for? Heh! She pays the penalty for her own inconsiderateness. Had she paid for the train — heh? And the fat man all the time firing off his unheeding and unheeded answers. One minute — only one minute — if he, the conductor, had told the driver! if he, the conductor, had shouted! A poor woman! Not another train! What was she going to do! Her ticket? And no money. A poor woman —

There was a train back to Cagliari that night, said the conductor, at which the fat man nearly burst out of his clothing like a bursting seed-pod. He bounced on his seat. What good was that? What good was a train back to Cagliari, when their home was in Snelli! Making matters worse —

So they bounced and jerked and argued at one another, to their hearts' content. Then the conductor retired, smiling subtly, in a way they have. Our fat friend looked at us with hot, angry, ashamed, grieved eyes and said it was a shame. Yes, we chimed, it was a shame. Whereupon a self-important miss who said she came from some Collegio at Cagliari advanced and asked a number of impertinent questions in a tone of pert sympathy. After which our fat friend, left alone, covered his clouded face with his hand, turned his back on the world, and gloomed.

It had all been so dramatic that in spite of ourselves we laughed, even while the q-b shed a few tears.

Well, the journey lasted hours. We came to a station, and the conductor said we must get out: these coaches went no further. Only two coaches would proceed to Mandas. So we climbed out with our traps, and our fat friend with his saddlebag, the picture of misery.

The one coach into which we clambered was rather crowded. The only other coach was most of it first-class. And the rest of the train was freight. We were two insignificant passenger wagons at the end of a long string of freight-vans and trucks.

There was an empty seat, so we sat on it: only to realise after about five minutes, that a thin old woman with two children — her grandchildren — was chuntering her head off because it was her seat — why she had left it she didn't say. And under my legs was her bundle of bread. She nearly went off her head. And over my head, on the little rack, was her bercola, her saddlebag. Fat soldiers laughed at her good-naturedly, but she fluttered and flipped like a tart, featherless old hen. Since she had another seat and was quite comfortable, we

smiled and let her chunter. So she clawed her bread bundle from under my legs, and, clutching it and a fat child, sat tense.

It was getting quite dark. The conductor came and said that there was no more paraffin. If what there was in the lamps gave out, we should have to sit in the dark. There was no more paraffin all along the line. — So he climbed on the seats, and after a long struggle, with various boys striking matches for him, he managed to obtain a light as big as a pea. We sat in this *clair-ohscur*, and looked at the sombre-shadowed faces round us: the fat soldier with a gun, the handsome soldier with huge saddlebags, the weird, dark little man who kept exchanging a baby with a solid woman who had a white cloth tied round her head, a tall peasant-woman in costume, who darted out at a dark station and returned triumphant with a piece of chocolate: a young and interested young man, who told us every station. And the man who spat: there is always one.

Gradually the crowd thinned. At a station we saw our fat friend go by, bitterly, like a betrayed soul, his bulging saddlebag hanging before and after, but no comfort in it now — no comfort. The pea of light from the paraffin lamp grew smaller. We sat in incredible dimness, and the smell of sheeps-wool and peasant, with only our fat and stoic young man to tell us where we were. The other dusky faces began to sink into a dead, gloomy silence. Some took to sleep. And the little train ran on and on, through unknown Sardinian darkness. In despair we drained the last drop of tea and ate the last crusts of bread. We knew we must arrive some time.

It was not much after seven when we came to Mandas. Mandas is a junction where these little trains sit and have a long happy chat after their arduous scramble over the downs. It had taken us somewhere about five hours to do our fifty miles. No wonder then that when the junction at last heaves in sight everybody bursts out of the train like seeds from an exploding pod, and rushes somewhere for something. To the station restaurant, of course. Hence there is a little station restaurant that does a brisk trade, and where one can have a bed.

A quite pleasant woman behind the little bar: a brown woman with brown parted hair and brownish eyes and brownish, tanned complexion and tight brown velveteen bodice. She led us up a narrow winding stone stair, as up a fortress, leading on with her candle, and ushered us into the bedroom. It smelled horrid and sourish, as shut up bedrooms do. We threw open the window. There were big frosty stars snapping ferociously in heaven.

The room contained a huge bed, big enough for eight people, and quite clean. And the table on which stood the candle actually had a cloth. But imagine that cloth! I think it had been originally white: now, however, it was such a web of time-eaten holes and mournful black inkstains and poor dead wine stains that it

was like some 2000 B.C. mummy-cloth. I wonder if it could have been lifted from that table: or if it was mummified on to it! I for one made no attempt to try. But that table-cover impressed me, as showing degrees I had not imagined. — A table-cloth.

We went down the fortress-stair to the eating-room. Here was a long table with soup-plates upside down and a lamp burning an uncanny naked acetylene flame. We sat at the cold table, and the lamp immediately began to wane. The room — in fact the whole of Sardinia — was stone cold, stone, stone cold. Outside the earth was freezing. Inside there was no thought of any sort of warmth: dungeon stone floors, dungeon stone walls and a dead, corpse-like atmosphere, too heavy and icy to move.

The lamp went quite out, and the q-b gave a cry. The brown woman poked her head through a hole in the wall. Beyond her we saw the flames of the cooking, and two devil-figures stirring the pots. The brown woman came and shook the lamp — it was like a stodgy porcelain mantelpiece vase — shook it well and stirred up its innards, and started it going once more. Then she appeared with a bowl of smoking cabbage soup, in which were bits of macaroni: and would we have wine? I shuddered at the thought of death-cold red wine of the country, so asked what else there was. There was malvagia — malvoisie, the same old malmsey that did for the Duke of Clarence. So we had a pint of malvagia, and were comforted. At least we were being so — when the lamp went out again. The brown woman came and shook and smacked it, and started it off again. But as if to say “Shan’t for you,” it whipped out again.

Then came the host with a candle and a pin, a large, genial Sicilian with pendulous moustaches. And he thoroughly pricked the wretch with the pin, shook it, and turned little screws. So up flared the flame. We were a little nervous. He asked us where we came from, *etc.* And suddenly he asked us, with an excited gleam, were we socialists. Aha, he was going to hail us as citizens and comrades. He thought we were a pair of Bolshevik agents: I could see it. And as such he was prepared to embrace us. But no, the q-b disclaimed the honour. I merely smiled and shook my head. It is a pity to rob people of their exciting illusions.

“Ah, there is too much socialism everywhere!” cried the q-b.

“Ma — perhaps, perhaps — ” said the discreet Sicilian. She saw which way the land lay, and added:

“Si vuole un *pochettino* di socialismo: one wants a tiny bit of socialism in the world, a tiny bit. But not much. Not much. At present there is too much.”

Our host, twinkling at this speech which treated of the sacred creed as if it were a pinch of salt in the broth, believing the q-b was throwing dust in his eyes,

and thoroughly intrigued by us as a pair of deep ones, retired. No sooner had he gone than the lamp-flame stood up at its full length, and started to whistle. The q-b drew back. Not satisfied by this, another flame suddenly began to whip round the bottom of the burner, like a lion lashing its tail. Unnerved, we made room: the q-b cried again: in came the host with a subtle smile and a pin and an air of benevolence, and tamed the brute.

What else was there to eat? There was a piece of fried pork for me, and boiled eggs for the q-b. As we were proceeding with these, in came the remainder of the night's entertainment: three station officials, two in scarlet peaked caps, one in a black-and-gold peaked cap. They sat down with a clamour, in their caps, as if there was a sort of invisible screen between us and them. They were young. The blackcap had a lean and sardonic look: one of the red-caps was little and ruddy, very young, with a little moustache: we called him the *maialino*, the gay little black pig, he was so plump and food-nourished and frisky. The third was rather puffy and pale and had spectacles. They all seemed to present us the blank side of their cheek, and to intimate that no, they were not going to take their hats off, even if it were dinner-table and a strange *signora*. And they made rough quips with one another, still as if we were on the other side of the invisible screen.

Determined, however, to remove this invisible screen, I said good-evening, and it was very cold. They muttered good-evening, and yes, it was fresh. An Italian never says it is cold: it is never more than fresco. But this hint that it was cold they took as a hint at their caps, and they became very silent, till the woman came in with the soup-bowl. Then they clamoured at her, particularly the *maialino*, what was there to eat. She told them — beefsteaks of pork. Whereat they pulled faces. Or bits of boiled pork. They sighed, looked gloomy, cheered up, and said beefsteaks, then.

And they fell on their soup. And never, from among the steam, have I heard a more joyful trio of soup-swilkering. They sucked it in from their spoons with long, gusto-rich sucks. The *maialino* was the treble — he trilled his soup into his mouth with a swift, sucking vibration, interrupted by bits of cabbage, which made the lamp start to dither again. Blackcap was the baritone; good, rolling spoon-sucks. And the one in spectacles was the bass: he gave sudden deep gulps. All was led by the long trilling of the *maialino*. Then suddenly, to vary matters, he cocked up his spoon in one hand, chewed a huge mouthful of bread, and swallowed it down with a smack-smack-smack! of his tongue against his palate. As children we used to call this “clapping.”

“Mother, she's clapping!” I would yell with anger, against my sister. The German word is *schmatzen*.

So the *maialino* clapped like a pair of cymbals, while baritone and bass rolled on. Then chimed the swift bright treble.

At this rate, however, the soup did not last long. Arrived the beefsteaks of pork. And now the trio was a trio of castanet smacks and cymbal claps. Triumphantly the *maialino* looked round. He out-smacked all.

The bread of the country is rather coarse and brown, with a hard, hard crust. A large rock of this is perched on every damp serviette. The *maialino* tore his rock asunder, and grumbled at the blackcap, who had got a weird sort of three-cornered loaf-roll of pure white bread — starch white. He was a swell with this white bread.

Suddenly blackcap turned to me. Where had we come from, where were we going, what for? But in laconic, sardonic tone.

“I like Sardinia,” cried the q-b.

“Why?” he asked sarcastically. And she tried to find out.

“Yes, the Sardinians please me more than the Sicilians,” said I.

“Why?” he asked sarcastically.

“They are more open — more honest.” He seemed to turn his nose down.

“The padrone is a Sicilian,” said the *maialino*, stuffing a huge block of bread into his mouth, and rolling his insouciant eyes of a gay, well-fed little black pig towards the background. We weren’t making much headway.

“You’ve seen Cagliari?” the blackcap said to me, like a threat.

“Yes! oh, Cagliari pleases me — Cagliari is beautiful!” cried the q-b, who travels with a vial of melted butter ready for her parsnips.

“Yes — Cagliari is so-so — Cagliari is very fair,” said the blackcap. “*Cagliari è discreta.*” He was evidently proud of it.

“And is Mandas nice?” asked the q-b.

“In what way nice?” they asked, with immense sarcasm. “Is there anything to see?”

“Hens,” said the *maialino* briefly. They all bristled when one asked if Mandas was nice.

“What does one do here?” asked the q-b.

“*Niente!* At Mandas one does *nothing*. At Mandas one goes to bed when it’s dark, like a chicken. At Mandas one walks down the road like a pig that is going nowhere. At Mandas a goat understands more than the inhabitants understand. At Mandas one needs socialism...”

They all cried out at once. Evidently Mandas was more than flesh and blood could bear for another minute to these three conspirators.

“Then you are very bored here?” say I.

“Yes.”

And the quiet intensity of that naked *yes* spoke more than volumes.

“You would like to be in Cagliari?”

“Yes.”

Silence, intense, sardonic silence had intervened. The three looked at one another and made a sour joke about Mandas. Then the blackcap turned to me.

“Can you understand Sardinian?” he said.

“Somewhat. More than Sicilian, anyhow.”

“But Sardinian is more difficult than Sicilian. It is full of words utterly unknown to Italian — ”

“Yes, but,” say I, “it is spoken openly, in plain words, and Sicilian is spoken all stuck together, none of the words there at all.”

He looks at me as if I were an impostor. Yet it is true. I find it quite easy to understand Sardinian. As a matter of fact, it is more a question of human approach than of sound. Sardinian seems open and manly and downright. Sicilian is gluey and evasive, as if the Sicilian didn't want to speak straight to you. As a matter of fact, he doesn't. He is an over-cultured, sensitive ancient soul, and he has so many sides to his mind that he hasn't got any definite one mind at all. He's got a dozen minds, and uneasily he's aware of it, and to commit himself to any one of them is merely playing a trick on himself and his interlocutor. The Sardinian, on the other hand, still seems to have one downright mind. I bump up against a downright, smack-out belief in socialism, for example. The Sicilian is much too old in our culture to swallow socialism whole: much too ancient and rosé not to be sophisticated about any and every belief. He'll go off like a squib: and then he'll smoulder acridly and sceptically even against his own fire. One sympathises with him in retrospect. But in daily life it is unbearable.

“Where do you find such white bread?” say I to the blackcap, because he is proud of it.

“It comes from my home.” And then he asks about the bread of Sicily. Is it any whiter than this — the Mandas rock Yes, it is a little whiter. At which they gloom again. For it is a very sore point, this bread. Bread means a great deal to an Italian: it is verily his staff of life. He practically lives on bread. And instead of going by taste, he now, like all the world, goes by eye. He has got it into his head that bread should be white, so that every time he fancies a darker shade in the loaf a shadow falls on his soul. Nor is he altogether wrong. For although, personally, I don't like white bread any more, yet I do like my brown bread to be made of pure, unmixed flour. The peasants in Sicily, who have kept their own wheat and make their own natural brown bread, ah, it is amazing how fresh and sweet and clean their loaf seems, so perfumed, as home-bread used all to be

before the war. Whereas the bread of the commune, the regulation supply, is hard, and rather coarse and rough, so rough and harsh on the palate. One gets tired to death of it. I suspect myself the maize meal mixed in. But I don't know. And finally the bread varies immensely from town to town, from commune to commune. The so-called just and equal distribution is all my-eye. One place has abundance of good sweet bread, another scrapes along, always stinted, on an allowance of harsh coarse stuff. And the poor suffer bitterly, really, from the bread-stinting, because they depend so on this one food. They say the inequality and the injustice of distribution come from the Camorra — le grande Camorra — which is no more nowadays than a profiteering combine, which the poor hate. But for myself, I don't know. I only know that one town — Venice, for example — seems to have an endless supply of pure bread, of sugar, of tobacco, of salt — while Florence is in one continual ferment of irritation over the stinting of these supplies — which are all Government monopoly, doled out accordingly.

We said good-night to our three railway friends, and went up to bed. We had only been in the room a minute or two, when the brown woman tapped: and if you please, the blackcap had sent us one of his little white loaves. We were really touched. Such delicate little generousities have almost disappeared from the world.

It was a queer little bread — three-cornered, and almost as hard as ship's biscuit, made of starch flour. Not strictly bread at all.

The night was cold, the blankets flat and heavy, but one slept quite well till dawn. At seven o'clock it was a clear, cold morning, the sun was not yet up. Standing at the bedroom window looking out, I could hardly believe my eyes, it was so like England, like Cornwall in the bleak parts, or Derbyshire uplands. There was a little paddock-garden at the back of the station, rather tumble-down, with two sheep in it. There were several forlorn-looking out-buildings, very like Cornwall. And then the wide, forlorn country road stretched away between borders of grass and low, drystone walls, towards a greystone farm with a tuft of trees, and a naked stone village in the distance. The sun came up yellow, the bleak country glimmered bluish and reluctant. The low, green hill-slopes were divided into fields, with low drystone walls and ditches. Here and there a stone barn rose alone, or with a few bare, windy trees attached. Two rough-coated winter horses pastured on the rough grass, a boy came along the naked, wide, grass-bordered high-road with a couple of milk cans, drifting in from nowhere: and it was all Cornwall, or a part of Ireland, that the old nostalgia for the Celtic regions 'began to spring up in me. Ah, those old, drystone walls dividing the fields — pale and granite-blenched! Ah, the dark, sombre grass, the naked sky! the forlorn horses in the wintry morning! Strange is a Celtic landscape, far more

moving, disturbing, than the lovely glamour of Italy and Greece. Before the curtains of history lifted, one feels the world was like this — this Celtic bareness and sombreness and air. But perhaps it is not Celtic at all: Iberian. Nothing is more unsatisfactory than our conception of what is Celtic and what is not Celtic. I believe there never were any Celts, as a race. — As for the Iberians — !

Wonderful to go out on a frozen road, to see the grass in shadow bluish with hoar-frost, to see the grass in the yellow winter-sunrise beams melting and going cold-twinkly. Wonderful the bluish, cold air, and things standing up in cold distance. After two southern winters, with roses blooming all the time, this bleakness and this touch of frost in the ringing morning goes to my soul like an intoxication. I am so glad, on this lonely naked road, I don't know what to do with myself. I walk down in the shallow grassy ditches under the loose stone walls, I walk on the little ridge of grass, the little bank on which the wall is built, I cross the road across the frozen cow-droppings: and it is all so familiar to my *feet*, my very feet in contact, that I am wild as if I had made a discovery. And I realize that I hate limestone, to live on limestone or marble or any of those limey rocks. I hate them. They are dead rocks, they have no life — thrills for the feet. Even sandstone is much better. But granite! Granite is my favourite. It is so live under the feet, it has a deep sparkle of its own. I like its roundnesses — and I hate the jaggy dryness of limestone, that burns in the sun, and withers.

After coming to a deep well in a grassy plot in a wide space of the road, I go back, across the sunny naked upland country, towards the pink station and its out-buildings. An engine is steaming its white clouds in the new light. Away to the left there is even a row of small houses, like a row of railwaymen's dwellings. Strange and familiar sight. And the station precincts are disorderly and rather dilapidated. I think of our Sicilian host.

The brown woman gives us coffee, and very strong, rich goats' milk, and bread. After which the q-b and I set off once more along the road to the village. She, too, is thrilled. She, too, breathes deep. She, too, feels *space* around her, and freedom to move the limbs: such as one does not feel in Italy and Sicily, where all is so classic and fixed.

The village itself is just a long, winding, darkish street, in shadow, of houses and shops and a smithy. It might almost be Cornwall: not quite. Something, I don't know what, suggests the stark burning glare of summer. And then, of course, there is none of the cosiness which climbing roses and lilac trees and cottage shops and haystacks would give to an English scene. This is harder, barer, starker, more dreary. An ancient man in the black-and-white costume conies out of a hovel of a cottage. The butcher carries a huge side of meat. The women peer at us — but more furtive and reticent than the howling stares of

Italy.

So we go on, down the rough-cobbled street through the whole length of the village. And emerging on the other side, past the last cottage, we find ourselves again facing the open country, on the gentle down-slope of the rolling hill. The landscape continues the same: low, rolling upland hills, dim under the yellow sun of the January morning: stone fences, fields, grey-arable land: a man slowly, slowly ploughing with a pony and a dark-red cow: the road trailing empty across the distance: and then, the one violently unfamiliar note, the enclosed cemetery lying outside on the gentle hill-side, closed in all round, very compact, with high walls: and on the inside face of the enclosure wall the marble slabs, like shut drawers of the sepulchres, shining white, the wall being like a chest of drawers, or pigeon holes to hold the dead. Tufts of dark and plummy cypresses rise among the flat graves of the enclosure. In the south, cemeteries are walled off and isolated very tight. The dead, as it were, are kept fast in pound. There is no spreading of graves over the face of the country. They are penned in a tight fold, with cypresses to fatten on the bones. This is the one thoroughly strange note in the landscape. But all-pervading there is a strangeness, that strange feeling as if the *depths* were barren, which comes in the south and the east, sun-stricken. Sun-stricken, and the heart eaten out by the dryness.

“I like it! I like it!” cries the q-b.

“But could you live here?” She would like to say yes, but daren’t.

We stray back. The q-b wants to buy one of those saddlebag arrangements. I say what for? She says to keep things in. Ach! but peeping in the shops, we see one and go in and examine it. It is quite a sound one, properly made: but plain, quite plain. On the white cross-stripes there are no lovely coloured flowers of rose and green and magenta: the three favourite Sardinian colours: nor are there any of the fantastic griffin-like beasts. So it won’t do. How much does it cost? Forty-five francs.

There is nothing to do in Mandas. So we will take the morning train and go to the terminus, to Sorgono. Thus, we shall cross the lower slopes of the great central knot of Sardinia, the mountain knot called Gennargentu. And Sorgono we feel will be lovely.

Back at the station we make tea on the spirit lamp, fill the thermos, pack the knapsack, and the kitchenino, and come out into the sun of the platform. The q-b goes to thank the blackcap for the white bread, whilst I settle the bill and ask for food for the journey. The brown woman fishes out from a huge black pot in the background sundry hunks of coarse boiled pork, and gives me two of these, hot, with bread and salt. This is the luncheon. I pay the bill: which amounts to twenty-four francs, for everything. (One says francs or liras, irrespective, in

Italy.) At that moment arrives the train from Cagliari, and men rush in, roaring for the soup — or rather, for the broth. “Ready, ready!” she cries, going to the black pot.

V. TO SORGONO

he various trains in the junction squatted side by side and had long, long talks before at last we were off. It was wonderful to be running in the bright morning towards the heart of Sardinia, in the little train that seemed so familiar. We were still going third class, rather to the disgust of the railway officials at Mandas.

At first the country was rather open: always the long spurs of hills, steep-sided, but not high. And from our little train we looked across the country, across hill and dale. In the distance was a little town, on a low slope. But for its compact, fortified look it might have been a town on the English downs. A man in the carriage leaned out of the window holding out a white cloth, as a signal to someone in the far off town that he was coming. The wind blew the white cloth, the town in the distance glimmered small and alone in its hollow. And the little train pelted along.

It was rather comical to see it. We were always climbing. And the line curved in great loops. So that as one looked out of the window, time and again one started, seeing a little train running in front of us, in a diverging direction, making big puffs of steam. But lo, it was our own little engine pelting off around a loop away ahead. We were quite a long train, but all trucks in front, only our two passenger coaches hitched on behind. And for this reason our own engine was always running fussily into sight, like some dog scampering in front and swerving about us, while we followed at the tail end of the thin string of trucks.

I was surprised how well the small engine took the continuous steep slopes, how bravely it emerged on the skyline. It is a queer railway. I would like to know who made it. It pelts up hill and down dale and round sudden bends in the most unconcerned fashion, not as proper big railways do, grunting inside deep cuttings and stinking their way through tunnels, but running up the hill like a panting, small dog, and having a look round, and starting off in another direction, whisking us behind unconcernedly. This is much more fun than the tunnel-and-cutting system.

They told me that Sardinia mines her own coal: and quite enough for her own needs: but very soft, not fit for steam-purposes. I saw heaps of it: small, dull, dirty-looking stuff. Truck-loads of it too. And truck-loads of grain.

At every station we were left ignominiously planted, while the little engines — they had gay gold names on their black little bodies — strolled about along the side-lines, and snuffed at the various trucks. There we sat, at every station, while some truck was discarded and some other sorted out like a branded sheep,

from the sidings and hitched on to us. It took a long time, this did.

All the stations so far had had wire netting over the windows. This means malaria-mosquitoes. The malaria climbs very high in Sardinia. The shallow upland valleys, moorland with their intense summer sun and the riverless, boggy behaviour of the water breed the pest inevitably. But not very terribly, as far as one can make out: August and September being the danger months. The natives don't like to admit there is any malaria: a tiny bit, they say, a tiny bit. As soon as you come to the trees there is no more. So they say. For many miles the landscape is moorland and down-like, with no trees. But wait for the trees. Ah, the woods and forests of Gennargentu: the woods and forests higher up: no malaria there!

The little engine whisks up and up, around its loopy curves as if it were going to bite its own tail: we being the tail: then suddenly dives over the skyline out of sight. And the landscape changes. The famous woods begin to appear. At first it is only hazel-thickets, miles of hazel-thickets, all wild, with a few black cattle trying to peep at us out of the green myrtle and arbutus scrub which forms the undergrowth: and a couple of rare, wild peasants peering at the train. They wear the black sheepskin tunic, with the wool outside, and the long stocking caps. Like cattle they too peer out from between deep bushes. The myrtle scrub here rises man-high, and cattle and men are smothered in it. The big hazels rise bare above. It must be difficult getting about in these parts.

Sometimes, in the distance one sees a blackand-white peasant riding lonely across a more open place, a tiny vivid figure. I like so much the proud instinct which makes a living creature distinguish itself from its background. I hate the rabbit khaki protection-colouration. A blackand-white peasant on his pony, only a dot in the distance beyond the foliage, still flashes and dominates the landscape. Ha-ha! proud mankind! There you ride! But alas, most of the men are still khaki-muffled, rabbit-indistinguishable, ignominious. The Italians look curiously rabbit in the grey-green uniform: just as our sand-coloured khaki men look doggy. They seem to scuffle rather abased, ignominious on the earth. Give us back the scarlet and gold, and devil take the hindmost.

The landscape really begins to change. The hillsides tilt sharper and sharper. A man is ploughing with two small red cattle on a craggy, tree-hanging slope as sharp as a roof-side. He stoops at the small wooden plough, and jerks the plough-lines. The oxen lift their noses to heaven, with a strange and beseeching snake-like movement, and taking tiny little steps with their frail feet, move slantingly across the slope-face, between the rocks and tree-roots. Little, frail, jerky steps the bullocks take, and again they put their horns back and lift their muzzles snakily to heaven, as the man pulls the line. And he skids his wooden

plough round another scoop of earth. It is marvellous how they hang upon that steep, craggy slope. An English labourer's eyes would bolt out of his head at the sight.

There is a stream: actually a long tress of a waterfall pouring into a little gorge, and a stream-bed that opens a little, and shows a marvellous cluster of naked poplars away below. They are like ghosts. They have a ghostly, almost phosphorescent luminousness in the shadow of the valley, by the stream of water. If not phosphorescent, then incandescent: a grey, goldish-pale incandescence of naked limbs and myriad cold-glowing twigs, gleaming strangely. If I were a painter would paint them: for they seem to have living, sentient flesh. And the shadow envelops them.

Another naked tree I would paint is the gleaming mauve-silver fig, which burns its cold incandescence, tangled, like some sensitive creature emerged from the rock. A fig tree conie forth in its nudity gleaming over the dark winter-earth is a sight to behold. Like some white, tangled sea anemone. Ah, if it could but answer! or if we had tree-speech!

Yes, the steep valley sides become almost gorges, and there are trees. Not forests such as I had imagined, but scattered, grey, smallish oaks, and some lithe chestnuts. Chestnuts with their long whips, and oaks with their stubby boughs, scattered on steep hillsides where rocks crop out. The train perilously winding round, half way up. Then suddenly bolting over a bridge and into a completely unexpected station. What is more, men crowd in — the station is connected with the main railway by a post motor-omnibus.

An unexpected irruption of men — they may be miners or navvies or land-workers. They all have huge sacks: some lovely saddlebags with rose-coloured flowers across the darkness. One old man is in full blackand-white costume, but very dirty and coming to pieces. The others wear the tight madder-brown breeches and sleeved waistcoats. Some have the sheepskin tunic, and all wear the long stocking cap. And how they smell! of sheepwool and of men and goat. A rank scent fills the carriage.

They talk and are very lively. And they have mediaeval faces, *rusé*, never really abandoning their defences for a moment, as a badger or a pole-cat never abandons its defences. There is none of the brotherliness and civilised simplicity. Each man knows he must guard himself and his own: each man knows the devil is behind the next bush. They have never known the post-Renaissance Jesus. Which is rather an eye-opener.

Not that they are suspicious or uneasy. On the contrary, noisy, assertive, vigorous presences. But with none of that implicit belief that everybody will be and ought to be good to them, which is the mark of our era. They don't expect

people to be good to them: they don't want it. They remind me of half-wild dogs that will love and obey, but which won't be handled. They won't have their heads touched. And they won't be fondled. One can almost hear the half-savage growl.

The long stocking-caps they wear as a sort of crest, as a lizard wears his crest at mating time. They are always moving them, settling them on their heads. One fat fellow, young, with sly brown eyes and a young beard round his face folds his stocking-foot in three, so that it rises over his brow martial and handsome. The old boy brings his stocking-foot over the left ear. A handsome fellow with a jaw of massive teeth pushes his cap back and lets it hang a long way down his back. Then he shifts it forward over his nose, and makes it have two sticking-out points, like fox-ears, above his temples. It is marvellous how much expression these caps can take on. They say that only those born to them can wear them. They seem to be just long bags, nearly a yard long, of black stockinette stuff.

The conductor comes to issue them their tickets. And they all take out rolls of paper money. Even a little mothy rat of a man who sits opposite me has quite a pad of ten-franc notes. Nobody seems short of a hundred francs nowadays: nobody.

They shout and expostulate with the conductor. Full of coarse life they are: but so coarse! The handsome fellow has his sleeved waistcoat open, and his shirt-breast has come unbuttoned. Not looking, it seems as if he wears a black under-vest. Then suddenly, one sees it is his own hair. He is quite black inside his shirt, like a black goat.

But there is a gulf between oneself and them. They have no inkling of our crucifixion, our universal consciousness. Each of them is pivoted and limited to himself, as the wild animals are. They look out, and they see other objects, objects to ridicule or mistrust or to sniff curiously at. But "thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" has never entered their souls at all, not even the thin end of it. They might love their neighbour, with a hot, dark, unquestioning love. But the love would probably leave off abruptly. The fascination of what is beyond them has not seized on them. Their neighbour is a mere external. Their life is centripetal, pivoted inside itself, and does not run out towards others and mankind. One feels for the first time the real old mediaeval life, which is enclosed in itself and has no interest in the world outside.

And so they lie about on the seats, play a game, shout, and sleep, and settle their long stocking-caps: and spit. It is wonderful in them that at this time of day they still wear the long stocking-caps as a part of their inevitable selves. It is a sign of obstinate and powerful tenacity. They are not going to be broken in upon by world-consciousness. They are not going into the world's common clothes.

Coarse, vigorous, determined, they will stick to their own coarse dark stupidity and let the big world find its own way to its own enlightened hell. Their hell is their own hell, they prefer it unenlightened.

And one cannot help wondering whether Sardinia will resist right through. Will the last waves of enlightenment and world-unity break over them and wash away the stocking-caps? Or is the tide of enlightenment and world-unity already receding fast enough?

Certainly a reaction is setting in, away from the old universality, back, away from cosmopolitanism and internationalism. Russia, with her Third International, is at the same time reacting most violently away from all other contact, back, recoiling on herself, into a fierce, unapproachable Russianism. Which motion will conquer? The workman's International, or the centripetal movement into national isolation? Are we going to merge into one grey proletarian homogeneity? — or are we going to swing back into more-or-less isolated, separate, defiant communities?

Probably both. The workman's International movement will finally break the flow towards cosmopolitanism and world-assimilation, and suddenly in a crash the world will fly back into intense separations. The moment has come when America, that extremist in world-assimilation and world-oneness, is reacting into violent egocentricity, a truly Amerindian egocentricity. As sure as fate we are on the brink of American empire.

For myself, I am glad. I am glad that the era of love and oneness is over: hateful homogeneous world-oneness. I am glad that Russia flies back into savage Russianism, Scythism, savagely self-pivoting. I am glad that America is doing the same. I shall be glad when men hate their common, world-alike clothes, when they tear them up and clothe themselves fiercely for distinction, savage distinction, savage distinction against the rest of the creeping world: when America kicks the billy-cock and the collar-and-tie into limbo, and takes to her own national costume: when men fiercely react against looking all alike, and being all alike, and betake themselves into vivid clan or nation-distinctions.

The era of love and oneness is over. The era of world-alike should be at an end. The other tide has set in. Men will set their bonnets at one another now, and fight themselves into separation and sharp distinction. The day of peace and oneness is over, the day of the great fight into multifariousness is at hand. Hasten the day, and save us from proletarian homogeneity and khaki all-alikeness.

I love my indomitable coarse men from mountain Sardinia, for their stocking-caps and their splendid, animal-bright stupidity. If only the last wave of all-alikeness won't wash those superb crests, those caps, away.

We are struggling now among the Gennargentu spurs. There is no single peak

— no Etna of Sardinia. The train, like the plough, balances on the steep, steep sides of the hill-spurs, and winds around and around. Above and below the steep slopes are all bosky. These are the woods of Gennargentu. But they aren't woods in my sense of the word. They are thin sprinkles of oaks and chestnuts and cork-trees over steep hill-slopes. And cork-trees! I see curious slim oaky-looking trees that are stripped quite naked below the boughs, standing brown-ruddy, curiously distinct among the bluey-grey pallor of the others. They remind me, again and again, of glowing, coffee-brown, naked aborigines of the South Seas. They have the naked suavity, skin-bare, and an intense coffee-red colour of unclothed savages. And these are the stripped cork-trees. Some are much stripped, some little. Some have the whole trunk and part of the lower limbs ruddy naked, some only a small part of the trunk.

It is well on in the afternoon. A peasant in black-and-white, and his young, handsome woman in rose-red costume, with gorgeous apron bordered deep with grass-green, and a little, dark-purple waistcoat over her white, full bodice, are sitting behind me talking. The workmen peasants are subsiding into sleep. It is well on in the afternoon, we have long ago eaten the meat. Now we finish the white loaf, the gift, and the tea. Suddenly looking out of the window, we see Gennargentu's mass behind us, a thick snow-deep knot-summit, beautiful beyond the long, steep spurs among which we are engaged. We lose the white mountain mass for half an hour: when suddenly it emerges unexpectedly almost in front, the great, snow-heaved shoulder.

How different it is from Etna, that lonely, self-conscious wonder of Sicily! This is much more human and knowable, with a deep breast and massive limbs, a powerful mountain-body. It is like the peasants.

The stations are far between — an hour from one to another. Ah, how weary one gets of these journeys, they last so long. We look across a valley — a stone's throw. But alas, the little train has no wings, and can't jump. So back turns the line, back and back towards Gennargentu, a long rocky way, till it comes at length to the poor valley-head. This it skirts fussily, and sets off to pelt down on its traces again, gaily. And a man who was looking at us doing our roundabout has climbed down and crossed the valley in five minutes.

The peasants nearly all wear costumes now, even the women in the fields: the little fields in the half-populated valleys. These Gennargentu valleys are all half-populated, more than the moors further south.

It is past three o'clock, and cold where there is no sun. At last only one more station before the terminus. And here the peasants wake up, sling the bulging sacks over their shoulders, and get down. We see Tonara away above. We see our old grimy black-and-white peasant greeted by his two women who have come

to meet him with the pony — daughters, handsome in vivid rose and green costume. Peasants, men in black-and-white, men in madder-brown, with the close breeches on their compact thighs, women in rose-and-white, ponies with saddlebags, all begin to trail up the hill-road in silhouette, very handsome, towards the far-off, perched, sun-bright village of Tonara, a big village, shining like a New Jerusalem.

The train as usual leaves us standing, and shuffles with trucks — water sounds in the valley: there are stacks of cork on the station, and coal. An idiot girl in a great full skirt entirely made of coloured patches mops and mows. Her little waistcoat thing is also incredibly old, and shows faint signs of having once been a lovely purple and black brocade. The valley and steep slopes are open about us. An old shepherd has a lovely flock of delicate merino sheep.

And at last we move. In one hour we shall be there. As we travel among the tree slopes, many brown cork-trees, we come upon a flock of sheep. Two peasants in our carriage looking out, give the most weird, unnatural, high-pitched shrieks, entirely unproduceable by any ordinary being. The sheep know, however, and scatter. And after ten minutes the shrieks start again, for three young cattle. Whether the peasants do it for love, I don't know. But it is the wildest and weirdest inhuman shepherd noise I have ever heard.

It is Saturday afternoon and four o'clock. The country is wild and uninhabited, the train almost empty, yet there is the leaving-off-work feeling in the atmosphere. Oh, twisty, wooded, steep slopes, oh, glimpses of Gennargentu, oh, nigger-stripped cork-trees, oh, smell of peasants, oh, wooden, wearisome railway carriage, we are so sick of you! Nearly seven hours of this journey already: and a distance of sixty miles.

But we are almost there — look, look, Sorgono, nestling beautifully among the wooded slopes in front. Oh, magic little town. Ah, you terminus and ganglion of the inland roads, we hope in you for a pleasant inn and happy company. Perhaps we will stay a day or two at Sorgono.

The train gives a last sigh, and draws to a last standstill in the tiny terminus station. An old fellow fluttering with rags as a hen in the wind flutters, asked me if I wanted the Albergo. the inn. I said yes, and let him take my knapsack. Pretty Sorgono! As we went down the brief muddy lane between hedges, to the village high-road, we seemed almost to have come to some little town in the English West Country, or in Hardy's country. There were glades of stripling oaks and big slopes with oak trees, and on the right a saw-mill buzzing, and on the left the town, white and close, nestling round a baroque church-tower. And the little lane was muddy.

Three minutes brought us to the high-road, and a great, pink-washed building

blank on the road facing the station lane, and labelled in huge letters: RISTORANTE RISVEGLIO: the letter N being printed backwards. *Risveglio* if you please: which means waking up or rousing, like the word *reveille*. Into the doorway of the Risveglio bolted the flutterer. "Half a minute," I said. "Where is the Albergo d'Italia?" I was relying on Baedeker.

"Non c'è più," replied my rag-feather. "There isn't it any more." This answer being very frequent nowadays, is always most disconcerting.

"Well then, what other hotel?"

"There is no other."

Risveglio or nothing. In we go. We pass into a big, dreary bar, where are innumerable bottles behind a tin counter. Flutter-jack yells: and at length appears mine host, a youngish fellow of the Esquimo type, but rather bigger, in a dreary black suit and a cutaway waistcoat suggesting a dinner-waistcoat, and innumerable wine-stains on his shirt front. I instantly hated him for the filthy appearance he made. He wore a battered hat and his face was long unwashed.

Was there a bedroom?

Yes.

And he led the way down the passage, just as dirty as the road outside, up the hollow, wooden stairs also just as clean as the passage, along a hollow, drum-rearing dirty corridor, and into a bedroom. Well, it contained a large bed, thin and flat with a grey-white counterpane, like a large, poor, marble-slabbed tomb in the room's sordid emptiness; one dilapidated chair on which stood the miserablest weed of a candle I have ever seen: a broken wash-saucer in a wire ring: and for the rest, an expanse of wooden floor as dirty-grey-black as it could be, and an expanse of wall charred with the bloody deaths of mosquitoes. The window was about two feet above the level of a sort of stable yard outside, with a fowl-house just by the sash. There, at the window flew lousy feathers and dirty straw, the ground was thick with chicken-droppings. An ass and two oxen comfortably chewed hay in an open shed just across, and plump in the middle of the yard lay a bristly black pig taking the last of the sun. Smells of course were varied.

The knapsack and the kitchenino were dropped on the repulsive floor, which I hated to touch with my boots even. I turned back the sheets and looked at other people's stains.

"There is nothing else?"

"Niente," said he of the lank, low forehead and beastly shirt-breast. And he sullenly departed. I gave the flutterer his tip and he too ducked and fled. Then the queen-bee and I took a few mere sniffs.

"Dirty, disgusting swine!" said I, and I was in a rage.

I could have forgiven him anything, I think, except his horrible shirt-breast, his personal shamelessness.

We strolled round — saw various other bedrooms, some worse, one really better. But this showed signs of being occupied. All the doors were open: the place was quite deserted, and open to the road. The one thing that seemed definite was honesty. It must be a very honest place, for every footed beast, man or animal, could walk in at random and nobody to take the slightest regard.

So we went downstairs. The only other apartment was the open public bar, which seemed like part of the road. A muleteer, leaving his mules at the corner of the Risveglio, was drinking at the counter.

This famous inn was at the end of the village. We strolled along the road between the houses, downhill. A dreary hole! a cold, hopeless, lifeless, Saturday afternoon-weary village, rather sordid, with nothing to say for itself. No real shops at all. A weary-looking church, and a clutch of disconsolate houses. We walked right through the village. In the middle was a sort of open space where stood a great, grey motor-omnibus. And a bus-driver looking rather weary.

Where did the bus go?

It went to join the main railway.

When?

At half-past seven in the morning.

Only then?

Only then.

“Thank God we can get out, anyhow,” said I.

We passed on, and emerged beyond the village, still on the descending great high-road that was mended with loose stones pitched on it. This wasn't good enough. Besides, we were out of the sun, and the place being at a considerable elevation, it was very cold. So we turned back, to climb quickly uphill into the sun.

We went up a little side-turning past a bunch of poor houses towards a steep little lane between banks. And before we knew where we were, we were in the thick of the public lavatory. In these villages, as I knew, there are no sanitary arrangements of any sort whatever. Every villager and villageress just betook himself at need to one of the side-roads. It is the immemorial Italian custom. Why bother about privacy? The most socially-constituted people on earth, they even like to relieve themselves in company.

We found ourselves in the full thick of one of these meeting-places. To get out at any price! So we scrambled up the steep earthen banks to a stubble field above. And by this time I was in a greater rage.

Evening was falling, the sun declining. Below us clustered the Sodom-apple

of this vile village. Around were fair, tree-clad hills and dales, already blueish with the frost-shadows. The air hit cold and strong. In a very little time the sun would be down. We were at an elevation of about 2,500 feet above the sea.

No denying it was beautiful, with the oak-slopes and the wistfulness and the far-off feeling of loneliness and evening. But I was in too great a temper to admit it. We clambered frenziedly to get warm. And the sun immediately went right down, and the ice-heavy blue shadow fell over us all. The village began to send forth blue wood-smoke, and it seemed more than ever like the twilit West Country.

But thank you — we had to get back. And run the gauntlet of that stinking, stinking lane? Never. Towering with fury — quite unreasonable, but there you are — I marched the q-b down a declivity through a wood, over a ploughed field, along a cart-track, and so to the great high-road above the village and above the inn.

It was cold, and evening was falling into dusk. Down the high-road came wild half-ragged men on ponies, in all degrees of costume and not-costume: came four wide-eyed cows stepping downhill round the corner, and three delicate, beautiful merino sheep which stared at us with their prominent, gold-curious eyes: came an ancient, ancient man with a stick: came a stout-chested peasant carrying a long wood-pole: came a straggle of alert and triumphant goats, long-horned, long-haired, jingling their bells. Everybody greeted us hesitatingly. And everything came to a halt at the Risveglio corner, while the men had a nip.

I attacked the spotty-breast again.

Could I have milk?

No. Perhaps in an hour there would be milk. Perhaps not. Was there anything to eat?

No — at half-past seven there would be something to eat. Was there a fire?

No — the man hadn't made a fire.

Nothing to do but to go to that foul bedroom or walk the high-road. We turned up the high-road again. Animals stood about the road in the frost-heavy air, with heads sunk passively, waiting for the men to finish their drinks in the beastly bar — we walked slowly up the hill. In a field on the right a flock of merino sheep moved mistily, uneasily, climbing at the gaps in the broken road bank, and sounding their small fine bells with a frosty ripple of sound. A figure which in the dusk I had really thought was something inanimate broke into movement in the field. It was an old shepherd, very old, in very ragged dirty black-and-white, who had been standing like a stone there in the open field-end for heaven knows how long, utterly motionless, leaning on his stick. Now he broke into a dream-motion and hobbled after the wistful feminine, inquisitive sheep. The red was

fading from the far-off west. At the corner, climbing slowly and wearily, we almost ran into a grey and lonely bull, who came stepping downhill in his measured fashion like some god. He swerved his head and went round us.

We reached a place which we couldn't make out: then saw it was a cork-shed. There were stacks and stacks of cork-bark in the dusk, like crumpled hides.

"Now I'm going back," said the q-b flatly, and she swung round. The last red was smouldering beyond the lost, thin-wooded hills of this interior. A fleece of blue half-luminous smoke floated over the obscure village. The high-way wound downhill at our feet, pale and blue.

And the q-b was angry with me for my fury.

"Why are you so indignant! Anyone would think your moral self had been outraged! Why take it morally? You petrify that man at the inn by the very way you speak to him, such condemnation! Why don't you take it as it comes? It's all life."

But no, my rage is black, black, black. Why, heaven knows. But I think it was because Sorgono had seemed so fascinating to me, when I imagined it beforehand. Oh, so fascinating! if I had expected nothing I should not have been so hit. Blessed is he that expecteth nothing, for he shall not be disappointed.

I cursed the degenerate aborigines, the dirty-breasted host who dared to keep such an inn, the sordid villagers who had the baseness to squat their beastly human nastiness in this upland valley. All my praise of the long stocking-cap — you remember? — vanished from my mouth. I cursed them all, and the q-b for an interfering female...

In the bar a wretched candle was weeping light — uneasy, gloomy men were drinking their Saturday-evening-homecoming dram. Cattle lay down in the road, in the cold air as if hopeless.

Had the milk come?

No.

When would it come?

He didn't know.

Well, what were we to do? Was there no room? Was there nowhere we could sit?

Yes, there was the *stanza* now.

Now! Taking the only weed of a candle, and leaving the drinkers in the dark, he led us down a dark and stumbly earthen passage, over loose stones and an odd plank, as it would seem underground, to the stanza: the room.

The stanza! It was pitch dark — but suddenly I saw a big fire of oak-root, a brilliant flamy, rich fire, and my rage in that second disappeared.

The host, and the candle, forsook us at the door. The stanza would have been

in complete darkness, save for that rushing bouquet of new flames in the chimney, like fresh flowers. By this firelight we saw the room. It was like a dungeon, absolutely empty, with an uneven, earthen floor, quite dry, and high bare walls, gloomy, with a handbreadth of window high up.

There was no furniture at all, save a little wooden bench, a foot high before the fire, and several home-made-looking rush mats rolled up and leaning against the walls. Furthermore a chair before the fire on which hung wet table-napkins. Apart from this, it was a high, dark, naked prison-dungeon.

But it was quite dry, it had an open chimney, and a gorgeous new fire rushing like a waterfall upwards among the craggy stubs of a pile of dry oak roots. I hastily put the chair and the wet corpse-cloths to one side. We sat on the low bench side by side in the dark, in front of this rippling rich fire, in front of the cavern of the open chimney, and we did not care any more about the dungeon and the darkness. Man can live without food, but he can't live without fire. It is an Italian proverb. We had found the fire, like new gold. And we sat in front of it, a little way back, side by side on the low form, our feet on the uneven earthen floor, and felt the flame-light rippling upwards over our faces, as if we were bathing in some gorgeous stream of fieriness. I forgave the dirty-breasted host everything and was as glad as if I had come into a kingdom.

So we sat alone for half an hour smiling into the flames, bathing our faces in the glow. From time to time I was aware of steps in the tunnel-like passage outside, and of presences peering. But no one came. I was aware too of the faint steaming of the beastly table-napkins, the only other occupants of the room.

In dithers a candle, and an elderly, bearded man in gold-coloured corduroys, and an amazing object on a long, long spear. He put the candle on the mantel-ledge, and crouched at the side of the fire, arranging the oak-roots. He peered strangely and fixedly in the fire. And he held up the speared object before our faces.

It was a kid that he had come to roast. But it was a kid opened out, made quite flat, and speared like a flat fan on a long iron stalk. It was a really curious sight. And it must have taken some doing. The whole of the skinned kid was there, the head curled in against a shoulder, the stubby cut ears, the eyes, the teeth, the few hairs of the nostrils: and the feet curled curiously round, like an animal that puts its forepaw over its ducked head: and the hind-legs twisted indescribably up: and all skewered flat-wise upon the long iron rod, so that it was a complete flat pattern. It reminded me intensely of those distorted, slim-limbed, dog-like animals which figure on the old Lombard ornaments, distorted and curiously in-folded upon themselves. Celtic illuminations also have these distorted, involuted creatures.

The old man flourished the flat kid like a bannerette, whilst he arranged the fire. Then, in one side of the fireplace wall he poked the point of the rod. He himself crouched on the hearth-end, in the half-shadow at the other end of the fireplace, holding the further end of the long iron rod. The kid was thus extended before the fire, like a hand-screen. And he could spin it round at will.

But the hole in the masonry of the chimney-piece was not satisfactory. The point of the rod kept slipping, and the kid came down against the fire. He muttered and muttered to himself, and tried again. Then at length he reared up the kid-banner whilst he got large stones from a dark corner. He arranged these stones so that the iron point rested on them. He himself sat away on the opposite side of the fireplace, on the shadowy hearth-end, and with queer, spell-bound black eyes and completely immovable face, he watched the flames and the kid, and held the handle end of the rod.

We asked him if the kid was for the evening meal — and he said it was. It would be good! And he said yes, and looked with chagrin at the bit of ash on the meat, where it had slipped. It is a point of honour that it should never touch the ash. Did they do all their meat this way? He said they did. And wasn't it difficult to put the kid thus on the iron rod? He said it was riot easy, and he eyed the joint closely, and felt one of the forelegs, and muttered that it was not fixed properly.

He spoke with a very soft mutter, hard to catch, and sideways, never to us direct. But his manner was gentle, soft, muttering, reticent, sensitive. He asked us where we came from, and where we were going: always in his soft mutter. And what nation were we, were we French? Then he went on to say there was a war — but he thought it was finished. There was a war because the Austrians wanted to come into Italy again. But the French and the English came to help Italy. A lot of Sardinians had gone to it. But let us hope it is all finished. He thought it was — young men of Sorgono had been killed. He hoped it was finished.

Then he reached for the candle and peered at the kid. It was evident he was the horn roaster. He held the candle and looked for a long time at the sizzling side of the meat, as if he would read portents. Then he held his spit to the fire again. And it was as if time immemorial were toasting itself another meal. I sat holding the candle.

A young woman appeared, hearing voices. Her head was swathed in a shawl, one side of which was brought across, right over the mouth, so that only her two eyes and her nose showed. The q-b thought she must have toothache — but she laughed and said no. As a matter of fact that is the way a head-dress is worn in Sardinia, even by both sexes. It is something like the folding of the Arab's burnoose. The point seems to be that the mouth and chin are thickly covered,

also the ears and brow, leaving only the nose and eyes exposed. They say it keeps off the malaria. The men swathe shawls round their heads in the same way. It seems to me they want to keep their heads warm, dark and hidden: they feel secure inside.

She wore the workaday costume: a full, dark-brown skirt, the full white bodice, and a little waistcoat or corset. This little waistcoat in her case had become no more than a shaped belt, sending up graceful, stiffened points under the breasts, like long leaves standing up. It was pretty — but all dirty. She too was pretty, but with an impudent, not quite pleasant manner. She fiddled with the wet napkins, asked us various questions, and addressed herself rather jerkily to the old man, who answered hardly at all — then she departed again. The women are self-conscious in a rather smirky way, bouncy.

When she was gone I asked the old man if she was his daughter. He said very brusquely, in his soft mutter, No. She came from a village some miles away. He did not belong to the inn. He was, as far as I understood, the postman. But I may have been mistaken about the word.

But he seemed laconic, unwilling to speak about the inn and its keepers. There seemed to be something queer. And again he asked where we were going. He told me there were now two motor-buses: a new one which ran over the mountains to Nuoro. Much better go to Nuoro than to Abbasanta. Nuoro was evidently the town towards which these villages looked, as a sort of capital.

The kid-roasting proceeded very slowly, the meat never being very near the fire. From time to time the roaster arranged the cavern of red-hot roots. Then he threw on more roots. It was very hot. And he turned the long spit, and still I held the candle.

Other people came strolling in, to look at us. But they hovered behind us in the dark, so I could not make out at all clearly, they strolled in the gloom of the dungeon-like room, and watched us. One came forward — a fat, fat young soldier in uniform. I made place for him on the bench — but he put out his hand and disclaimed the attention. Then he went away again.

The old man propped up the roast, and then he too disappeared for a time. The thin candle guttered, the fire was no longer flamy but red. The roaster reappeared with a new, shorter spear, thinner, and a great lump of raw hog-fat spitted on it. This he thrust into the red fire. It sizzled and smoked and spit fat, and I wondered. He told me he wanted it to catch fire. It refused. He groped in the hearth for the bits of twigs with which the fire had been started. These twig-stumps he stuck in the fat, like an orange stuck with cloves, then he held it in the fire again. Now at last it caught, and it was a flaming torch running downwards with a thin shower of flaming fat. And now he was satisfied. He held the fat-

torch with its yellow flares over the browning kid, which he turned horizontal for the occasion. All over the roast fell the flaming drops, till the meat was all shiny and brown. He put it to the fire again, holding the diminishing fat, still burning bluish, over it all the time in the upper air.

While this was in process a man entered with a loud Good-evening. We replied Good-evening — and evidently he caught a strange note. He came and bent down and peered under my hat-brim, then under the q-b's hat-brim; we still wore hats and overcoats, as did everybody. Then he stood up suddenly and touched his cap and said *Scusi* — excuse me. I said *Niente*, which one always says, and he addressed a few jovial words to the crouching roaster: who again would hardly answer him. The omnibus was arrived from Oristano, I made out — with a few passengers.

This man brought with him a new breezy atmosphere, which the roaster did not like. However, I made place on the low bench, and the attention this time was accepted. Sitting down at the extreme end, he came into the light, and I saw a burly man in the prime of life, dressed in dark brown velvet, with a blonde little moustache and twinkling blue eyes and a tipsy look. I thought he might be some local tradesman or farmer. He asked a few questions, in a boisterous familiar fashion, then went out again. He appeared with a small iron spit, a slim rod, in one hand, and in the other hand two joints of kid and a handful of sausages. He stuck his joints on his rod. But our roaster still held the interminable flat kid before the now red, flameless fire. The fat-torch was burnt out, the cinder pushed in the fire. A moment's spurt of flame, then red, intense redness again, and our kid before it like a big, dark hand.

“Eh,” said the newcomer, whom I will call the girovago, “it's done. The kid's done. It's done.”

The roaster slowly shook his head, but did not answer. He sat like time and eternity at the hearth-end, his face flame-flushed, his dark eyes still fire-abstract, still sacredly intent on the roast.

“Na-na-na!” said the girovago. “Let another body see the fire.” And with his pieces of meat awkwardly skewered on his iron stick he tried to poke under the authorised kid and get at the fire. In his soft mutter, the old man bade him wait for the fire till the fire was ready for him. But the girovago poked impudently and good humouredly, and said testily that the authorised kid was done.

“Yes, surely it is done,” said I, for it was already a quarter to eight.

The old roasting priest muttered, and took out his knife from his pocket. He pressed the blade slowly, slowly deep into the meat: as far as a knife will go into a piece of kid. He seemed to be feeling the meat inwardly. And he said it was not done. He shook his head, and remained there like time and eternity at the end of

the rod.

The girovago said *Sangue di Dio*, but couldn't roast his meat! And he tried to poke his skewer near the coals. So doing his pieces fell off into the ashes, and the invisible onlookers behind raised a shout of laughter. However, he raked it out and wiped it with his hand and said No matter, nothing lost.

Then he turned to me and asked the usual whence and whither questions. These answered, he said wasn't I German. I said No, I was English. He looked at me many times, shrewdly, as if he wanted to make out something. Then he asked, where were we domiciled — and I said Sicily. And then very pertinently, why had we come to Sardinia. I said for pleasure, and to see the island.

“Ah, per divertimento!” he repeated, half-musingly, not believing me in the least.

Various men had now come into the room, though they all remained indistinct in the background. The girovago talked and jested abroad in the company, and the half-visible men laughed in a rather hostile manner.

At last the old roaster decided the kid was done. He lifted it from the fire and scrutinised it thoroughly, holding the candle to it, as if it were some wonderful epistle from the flames. To be sure it looked marvellous, and smelled so good: brown and crisp, and hot, and savoury, not burnt in any place whatever. It was eight o'clock.

“It's done! It's done! Go away with it! Go,” said the girovago, pushing the old roaster with his hand. And at last the old man consented to depart, holding the kid like a banner.

“It looks so good!” cried the q-b. “And I am so hungry.”

“Ha-ha! It makes one hungry to see good meat, Signora. Now it is my turn. Heh — Gino — ” the girovago flourished his arm. And a handsome, unwashed man with a black moustache came forward rather sheepishly. He was dressed in soldier's clothes, neutral grey, and was a big, robust, handsome fellow with dark eyes and Mediterranean sheepishness. “Here, take it thou,” said the girovago, pressing the long spit into his hand. “It is thy business, cook the supper, thou art the woman. — But I'll keep the sausages and do them.”

The so-called woman sat at the end of the hearth, where the old roaster had sat, and with his brown, nervous hand piled the remaining coals together. The fire was no longer flamy: and it was sinking. The dark-browed man arranged it so that he could cook the meat. He held the spit negligently over the red mass. A joint fell off. The men laughed. “It's lost nothing,” said the dark-browed man, as the girovago had said before: and he skewered it on again and thrust it to the fire. But meanwhile he was looking up from under his dark lashes at the girovago and at us.

The girovago talked continually. He turned to me, holding the handful of sausages.

“This makes a tasty bit,” he said.

“Oh, yes — good salsiccia,” said I.

“You are eating the kid? You are eating at the inn?” he said. I replied that I was.

“No,” he said. “You stay and eat with me. You eat with me. The sausage is good, the kid will soon be done, the fire is grateful.”

I laughed, not quite understanding him. He was certainly a bit tipsy.

“Signora,” he said, turning to the q-b. She did not like him.

He was impudent, and she shut a deaf ear to him as far as she could.

“Signora,” he said, “do you understand me what I say?”

She replied that she did.

“Signora,” he said, “I sell things to the women. I sell them things.”

“What do you sell?” she asked in astonishment.

“Saints,” he said.

“Saints!” she cried in more astonishment.

“Yes, saints,” he said with tipsy gravity.

She turned in confusion to the company in the background

The fat soldier came forward, he was the chief of the carabinieri.

“Also combs and bits of soap and little mirrors,” he explained sarcastically.

“Saints!” said the girovago once more. “And also ragazzini — also youngsters. Wherever I go there is a little one comes running calling Babbo! Babbo! Daddy! Daddy! Wherever I go — youngsters. And I’m the babbo.”

All this was received with a kind of silent sneer from the invisible assembly in the background. The candle was burning low, the fire was sinking too. In vain the dark-browed man tried to build it up. The q-b became impatient for the food.

She got up wrathfully and stumbled into the dark passage, exclaiming: “Don’t we eat yet?”

“Eh — Patience! Patience, Signora. It takes time in this house,” said the man in the background.

The dark-browed man looked up at the girovago and said:

“Are you going to cook the sausages with your fingers?”

He too was trying to be assertive and jesting, but he was the kind of person no one takes any notice of. The girovago rattled on in dialect, poking fun at us and at our being there in this inn. I did not quite follow.

“Signora!” said the girovago. “Do you understand Sardinian?”

“I understand Italian — and some Sardinian,” she replied rather hotly. “And I know that you are trying to laugh at us — to make fun of us.”

He laughed fatly and comfortably.

“Ah, Signora,” he said. “We have a language that you wouldn’t understand — not one word. Nobody here would understand it but me and him — ” he pointed to the black-browed one. “Everybody would want an interpreter — everybody.”

But he did not say interpreter — he said *interprete*, with the accent on the penultimate, as if it were some sort of priest.

“A what?” said I.

He repeated with tipsy unction, and I saw what he meant. “Why?” said I. “It is a dialect? What is your dialect?”

“My dialect,” he said, “is Sassari. I come from Sassari. If I spoke my dialect they would understand something. But if I speak this language they would want an interpreter.”

“What language is it then?”

He leaned up to me, laughing.

“It is the language we use when the women are buying things and we don’t want them to know what we say: me and him — ”

“Oh,” said I. “I know. We have that language in England. It is called thieves’ Latin — *Latino dei furbi*.”

The men at the back suddenly laughed, glad to turn the joke against the forward girovago. He looked down his nose at me. But seeing I was laughing without malice, he leaned to me and said softly, secretly:

“What is your affair then? What affair is it, yours?”

“How? What?” I exclaimed, not understanding. “*Che genere di affari?* What sort of business?”

“How — *affari?*” said I, still not grasping.

“What do you *sell?*” he said, flatly and rather spitefully. “What goods?”

“I don’t sell anything,” replied I, laughing to think he took us for some sort of strolling quacks or commercial travellers.

“Cloth — or something,” he said cajolingly, slyly, as if to worm my secret out of me.

“But nothing at all. Nothing at all,” said I. “We have come to Sardinia to see the peasant costumes — ” I thought that might sound satisfactory.

“Ah, the costumes!” he said, evidently thinking I was a deep one. And he turned bandying words with his dark-browed mate, who was still poking the meat at the embers and crouching on the hearth. The room was almost quite dark. The mate answered him back, and tried to seem witty too. But the girovago was the commanding personality! rather too much so: too impudent for the q-b, though rather after my own secret heart. The mate was one of those handsome, passive, stupid men.

“Him!” said the girovago, turning suddenly to me and pointing at the mate. “He’s my wife.”

“Your wife!” said I.

“Yes. He’s my wife, because we’re always together.” There had become a sudden dead silence in the background.

In spite of it the mate looked up under his black lashes and said, with a half smile:

“Don’t talk, or I shall give thee a good *bacio* to-night.”

There was an instant’s fatal pause, then the girovago continued:

“To-morrow is festa of Sant’ Antonio at Tonara. To-morrow we are going to Tonara. Where are you going?”

“To Abbasanta,” said I.

“Ah, Abbasanta! You should come to Tonara. At Tonara there is a brisk trade — and there are costumes. You should come to Tonara. Come with him and me to Tonara to-morrow, and we will do business together.”

I laughed, but did not answer.

“Come,” said he. “You will like Tonara! Ah, Tonara is a fine place. There is an inn: you can eat well, sleep well. I tell you, because to you ten francs don’t matter. Isn’t that so? Ten francs don’t matter to you. Well, then come to Tonara. What? What do you say?”

I shook my head and laughed, but did not answer. To tell the truth I should have liked to go to Tonara with him and his mate and do the brisk trade: if only I knew what trade it would be.

“You are sleeping upstairs?” he said to me. I nodded.

“This is my bed,” he said, taking one of the home-made rush mats from against the wall. I did not take him seriously at any point.

“Do they make those in Sorgono?” I said.

“Yes, in Sorgono — they are the beds, you see! And you roll up this end a bit — so! and that is the pillow.” He laid his cheek sideways.

“Not really,” said I.

He came and sat down again next to me, and my attention wandered. The q-b was raging for her dinner. It must be quite half-past eight. The kid, the perfect kid, would be cold and ruined. Both fire and candle were burning low. Someone had been out for a new candle, but there was evidently no means of replenishing the fire. The mate still crouched on the hearth, the dull red fire-glow on his handsome face, patiently trying to roast the kid and poking it against the embers, he had heavy, strong limbs in his khaki clothes, but his hand that held the spit was brown and tender and sensitive, a real Mediterranean hand. The girovago, blonde, round-faced, mature and aggressive with all his liveliness, was more like

a northerner. In the background, were four or five other men, of whom I had distinguished none but a stout soldier, probably chief carabinieri.

Just as the q-b was working up to the rage I had at last calmed down from, appeared the shawl-swathed girl announcing "Pronto!"

"Pronto! Pronto!" said everybody.

"High time, too," said the q-b, springing from the low bench before the fire. "Where do we cat? Is there another room?"

"There is another room, Signora," said the carabinieri.

So we trooped out of the fire-warmed dungeon, leaving the girovago and his mate and two other men, muleteers from the road, behind us. I could see that it irked my girovago to be left behind. He was by far the strongest personality in the place, and he had the keenest intelligence. So he hated having to fall into the background, when he had been dragging all the lime-light on to himself all the evening. To me, too, he was something of a kindred soul that night. But there we are: fate, in the guise of that mysterious division between a respectable life and a scamp's life divided us. There was a gulf between me and him, between my way and his. He was a kindred spirit — but with a hopeless difference. There was something a bit sordid about him — and he knew it. That is why he was always tipsy. Yet I like the lone wolf souls best — better than the sheep. If only they didn't feel mongrel inside themselves. Presumably a scamp is bound to be mongrel. It is a pity the untamable, lone-wolf souls should always become pariahs, almost of choice: mere scamps.

Top and bottom of it is, I regretted my girovago, though I knew it was no good thinking of him. His way was not my way. Yet I regretted him, I did.

We found ourselves in a dining-room with a long white table and inverted soup-plates, tomb-cold, lighted by an acetylene flare. Three men had accompanied us: the carabinieri, a little dark youth with a small black moustache, in a soldier's short, wool-lined great-coat: and a young man who looked tired round his blue eyes, and who wore a dark-blue overcoat, quite smart. The be-shawled damsel came in with the inevitable bowl of minestrone, soup with cabbage and cauliflower and other things. We helped ourselves, and the fat carabinieri started the conversation with the usual questions — and where were we going to-morrow?

I asked about buses. Then the responsible-looking, tired-eyed youth told me he was the bus-driver. He had come from Oristano, on the main line, that day. It is a distance of some forty miles. Next morning he was going on over the mountains to Nuoro — about the same distance again. The youth with the little black moustache and the Greek, large eyes, was his mate, the conductor. This was their run, from Oristano to Nuoro — a course of ninety miles or more. And

every day on, on, on. No wonder he looked nerve-tired. Yet he had that kind of dignity, the wistful seriousness and pride of a man in machine control: the only god-like ones today, those who pull the iron levers and are the gods in the machine.

They repeated what the old roaster said: much nicer for us to go to Nuoro than to Abbasanta. So to Nuoro we decided to go, leaving at half-past nine in the morning.

Every other night the driver and his mate spent in this benighted Risveglio inn. It must have been their bedroom we saw, clean and tidy. I said was the food always so late, was everything always as bad as to-day. Always — if not worse, they said, making light of it, with sarcastic humour against the Risveglio. You spent your whole life at the Risveglio sitting, waiting, and going block-cold: unless you were content to drink *aqua vitae*, like those in there. The driver jerked his head towards the dungeon.

“Who were those in there?” said I.

The one who did all the talking was a mercante, a mercante girovago, a wandering peddler. This was my girovago: a wandering peddler selling saints and youngsters! The other was his mate, who helped carry the pack. They went about together. Oh, my girovago was a known figure all over the country. — And where would they sleep? There, in the room where the fire was dying.

They would unroll the mats and lie with their feet to the hearth. For this they paid threepence, or at most fourpence. And they had the privilege of cooking their own food. The Risveglio supplied them with nothing but the fire, the roof, and the rush mat. — And, of course, the drink. Oh, we need have no sympathy with the girovago and his sort. *They* lacked for nothing. They had everything they wanted: everything: and money in abundance. *They* lived for the *aqua vitae* they drank. That was all they wanted: their continual allowance of *aqua vitae*. And they got it. Ah, they were not cold. If the room became cold during the night: if they had no coverings at all: pah, they waited for morning, and as soon as it was light they drank a large glass of *aqua vitae*. That was their fire, their hearth, and their home: drink. *Aqua vitae* was hearth and home to them.

I was surprised at the contempt, tolerant and yet profound, with which these three men in the dining-room spoke of the others in the *stanza*. How contemptuous, almost bitter, the driver was against alcohol. It was evident he hated it. And though we all had our bottles of dead-cold dark wine, and though we all drank: still, the feeling of the three youths against actual intoxication was deep and hostile, with a certain burning *moral* dislike that is more northern than Italian. And they curled their lip with real dislike of the girovago: his forwardness, his impudent aggressiveness.

As for the inn, yes, it was very bad. It had been quite good under the previous proprietors. But now — they shrugged their shoulders. The dirty-breast and the shawled girl were not the owners. They were merely conductors of the hotel: here a sarcastic curl of the lip. The owner was a man in the village — a young man. A week or two back, at Christmas time, there had been a roomful of men sitting drinking and roistering at this very table. When in had come the proprietor, mad-drunk, swinging a litre bottle round his head and yelling: “Out! Out! Out, all of you! Out, every one of you! I am proprietor here. And when I want to clear my house I clear my house. Every man obeys — who doesn’t obey has his brains knocked out with this bottle. Out, out, I say — Out, everyone!” And the men all cleared out. “But,” said the bus-driver, “I told him that when I had paid for my bed I was going to sleep in it. I was not going to be turned out by him or anybody. And so he came down.”

There was a little silence from everybody after this story. Evidently there was more to it, that we were not to be told. Especially the carabinieri was silent. He was a fat, not very brave fellow, though quite nice.

Ah, but — said the little dark bus-conductor, with his small-featured swarthy Greek face — you must not be angry with them. True the inn was very bad. Very bad — but you must pity them, for they are only ignorant. Poor things, they are *ignoranti*! Why be angry?

The other two men nodded their heads in agreement and repeated *ignoranti*. They are *ignoranti*. It is true. Why be angry?

And here the modern Italian spirit came out: the endless pity for the ignorant. It is only slackness. The pity makes the ignorant more ignorant, and makes the Risveglio daily more impossible. If somebody let a bottle buzz round the ears of the dirty-breast, and whipped the shawl from the head of the pert young madam and sent her flying down the tunnel with a flea in her ear, we might get some attention and they might find a little self-respect. But no: pity them, poor *ignoranti*, while they pull life down and devour it like vermin. Pity them! What they need is not pity but prods: they and all their myriad of likes.

The be-shawled appeared with a dish of kid. Needless to say, the *ignoranti* had kept all the best portions for themselves. What arrived was five pieces of cold roast one for each of us. Mine was a sort of large comb of ribs with a thin web of meat: perhaps an ounce. That was all we got, after watching the whole process. There was moreover a dish of strong boiled cauliflower, which one ate, with the coarse bread, out of sheer hunger. After this a bilious orange. Simply one is not fed nowadays. In the good hotels and in the had, one is given paltry portions of unnourishing food, and one goes unfed.

The bus-driver, the only one with an earnest soul, was talking of the

Sardinians. Ah, the Sardinians! They were hopeless. Why — because they did not know how to strike. They, too, were *ignoranti*. But this form of ignorance he found more annoying. They simply did not know what a strike was. If you offered them one day ten francs a stint — he was speaking now of the miners of the Iglesias region. — No, no, no, they would not take it, they wanted twelve francs. Go to them the next day and offer them four francs for half a stint, and yes, yes, yes, they would take it. And there they were: ignorant — ignorant Sardinians. They absolutely did not know how to strike. He was quite sarcastically hot about it. The whole tone of these three young men was the tone of sceptical irony common to the young people of our day the world over. Only they had — or at least the driver had — some little fervour for his strikes and his socialism. But it was a pathetic fervour: a *pis-aller* fervour.

We talked about the land. The war has practically gutted Sardinia of her cattle: so they said. And now the land is being deserted, the arable land is going back to fallow. Why? Why, says the driver, because the owners of the land won't spend any capital. They have got the capital locked up, and the land is dead. They find it cheaper to let all the arable go back to fallow, and raise a few head of cattle, rather than to pay high wages, grow corn and get small returns.

Yes, and also, chimes in the carabinieri, the peasants don't want to work the land. They hate the land. They'll do anything to get off the land. They want regular wages, short hours, and devil take the rest. So they will go into France as navvies, by the hundred. They flock to Rome, they besiege the Labour bureaus, they will do the artificial Government navvy-work at a miserable five francs a day — a railway shunter having at least eighteen francs a day — anything, anything rather than work the land.

Yes, and what does the Government do? replies the bus-driver. They pull the roads to pieces in order to find work for the unemployed, remaking them, across the campagna. But in Sardinia, where roads and bridges are absolutely wanting, will they do anything? No!

There it is, however. The bus-driver, with dark shadows under his eyes, represents the intelligent portion of the conversation. The carabinieri is soft and will go any way, though always with some interest. The little Greek-looking conductor just does not care.

Enters another belated traveller, and takes a seat at the end of the table. The be-shawled brings him soup and a skinny bit of kid. He eyes this last with contempt, and fetches out of his bag a large hunk of roast pork, and bread, and black olives, thus proceeding to make a proper meal.

We being without cigarettes, the bus-driver and his companion press them on us: their beloved Macedonia cigarettes. The driver says they are *squisitissimi* —

most, most exquisite — so exquisite that all foreigners want them. In truth I believe they are exported to Germany now. And they are quite good, when they really have tobacco in them. Usually they are hollow tubes of paper which just flare away under one's nose and are done.

We decided to have a round drink: they choose the precious *aqua vitae*: the white sort I think. At last it arrives — when the little dark-eyed one has fetched it. And it tastes rather like sweetened petroleum, with a dash of aniseed: filthy. Most Italian liquors are now sweet and filthy.

At length we rise to go to bed. We shall all meet in the morning. And this room is dead cold, with frost outside. Going out we glance into the famous stanza. One figure alone lies stretched on the floor in the almost complete darkness. A few embers still glow. The other men no doubt are in the bar.

Ah, the filthy bedroom. The q-b ties up her head in a large, clean white kerchief, to avoid contact with the unsavoury pillow. It is a cold, hard, flat bed, with two cold, hard, flat blankets. But we are very tired. Just as we are going to sleep, however, weird, high-pitched singing starts below, very uncanny — with a refrain that is a yelp-yelp-yelp! almost like a dog in angry pain. Weird, almost gruesome this singing goes on, first one voice and then another and then a tangle of voices. Again we are roused by the pounding of heavy feet on the corridor outside, which is as hollow and resonant as a drum. And then in the infernal crew-yard outside a cock crows. Throughout the night — yea, through all the black and frosty hours this demoniac bird screams its demon griefs.

However, it is morning. I gingerly wash a bit of myself in the broken basin, and dry that bit on a muslin veil which masquerades upon the chair as a towel. The q-b contents herself with a dry wipe. And we go downstairs in hopes of the last night's milk.

There is no one to be seen. It is a cold, frost-strong, clear morning. There is no one in the bar. We stumble down the dark tunnel passage. The stanza is as if no man had ever set foot in it: very dark, the mats against the wall, the fireplace grey with a handful of long dead ash. Just like a dungeon. The dining-room has the same long table and eternal table-cloth — and our serviettes, still wet, lying where we shovelled them aside. So back again to the bar.

And this time a man is drinking *aqua vitae*, and the dirty-shirt is officiating. He has no hat on: and extraordinary, he has no brow at all: just flat, straight black hair slanting to his eyebrows, no forehead at all.

Is there coffee?

No, there is no coffee.

Why?

Because they can't get sugar.

Ho! laughs the peasant drinking *aqua vitae*. You make coffee with sugar!

Here, say I, they make it with nothing. — Is there milk? No.

No milk at all?

No.

Why not?

Nobody brings it.

Yes, yes — there is milk if they like to get it, puts in the peasant. But they want you to drink *aqua vitae*.

I see myself drinking *aqua vitae*. My yesterday's rage towers up again suddenly, till it quite suffocates me. There is something in this unsavoury, black, wine-dabbled, thick, greasy young man that does for me.

"Why," say I, lapsing into the Italian rhetorical manner, "why do you keep an inn? Why do you write the word *Ristorante* so large, when you have nothing to offer people, and don't intend to have anything. Why do you have the impudence to take in travellers? What does it mean, that this is an inn? What, say, what does it mean? Say then — what does it mean? What does it mean, your *Ristorante Risveglio*, written so large?"

Getting all this out in one breath, my indignation now stifled me. Him of the shirt said nothing at all. The peasant laughed. I demanded the bill. It was twenty-five francs odd. I picked up every farthing of the change.

"Won't you leave any tip at all?" asks the q-b.

"Tip!" say I, speechless.

So we march upstairs and make tea to fill the thermos flask. Then, with sack over my shoulder, I make my way out of the *Risveglio*.

*

It is Sunday morning. The frozen village street is almost empty. We march down to the wider space where the bus stands: I hope they haven't the impudence to call it a *Piazza*.

"Is this the Nuoro bus?" I ask a bunch of urchins.

And even they begin to jeer. But my sudden upstarting flare quenches them at once. One answers yes, and they edge away. I stow the sack and the *kitchenino* in the first-class part. The first-class is in front: we shall see better.

There are men standing about, with their hands in their pockets, — those who are not in costume. Some wear the black-and-white. All wear the stocking-caps. And all have the wide shirt-breasts, white, their waistcoats being just like evening dress waistcoats. Imagine one of these soft white shirt fronts well slobbered, and you have mine host of the *Risveglio*. But these lounging, static, white-breasted men are snowily clean, this being Sunday morning. They smoke their pipes on the frosty air, and are none too friendly.

The bus starts at half-past nine. The campanile is clanging nine. Two or three girls go down the road in their Sunday costume of purplish brown. We go up the road, into the clear, ringing frosty air, to find the lane.

And again, from above, how beautiful it is in the sharp morning! The whole village lies in bluish shadow, the hills with their thin pale oak trees are in bluish shadow still, only in the distance the frost-glowing sun makes a wonderful, jewellike radiance on the pleasant hills, wild and thinly wooded, of this interior region. Real fresh wonder-beauty all around. And such humanity.

Returning to the village we find a little shop and get biscuits and cigarettes. And we find our friends the bus-men. They are shy this morning. They are ready for us when we are ready. So in we get, joyfully, to leave Sorgono.

One thing I say for it, it must be an honest place. For people leave their sacks about without a qualm.

Up we go, up the road. Only to stop, alas, at the Risveglio. The little conductor goes down the lane towards the station. The driver goes and has a little drink with a comrade. There is quite a crowd round the dreary entrances of the inn. And quite a little bunch of people to clamber up into the second class, behind us.

We wait and wait. Then in climbs an old peasant, in full black-and-white costume, smiling in the pleased, naive way of the old. After him climbs a fresh-faced young man with a suit-case.

“Na!” said the young man. “Now you are in the automobile.”

And the old man gazes round with the wondering, vacant, naive smile.

“One is all right here, eh?” the young citizen persists, patronising.

But the old man is too excited to answer. He gazes hither and thither. Then he suddenly remembers he had a parcel, and looks for it in fear. The bright-faced young man picks it from the floor and hands it him. Ah, it is all right.

I see the little conductor in his dashing, sheep-lined, short military overcoat striding briskly down the little lane with the post-bag. The driver climbs to his seat in front of me. He has a muffler round his neck and his hat pulled down to his ears. He pips at the horn, and our old peasant cranes forward to look how he does it.

And so, with a jerk and a spurt, we start uphill.

“Eh — what’s that?” said the peasant, frightened.

“We’re starting,” explained the bright-faced young man. “Starting! Didn’t we start before?”

The bright face laughs pleasedly.

“No,” he said. “Did you think we had been going ever since you got in?”

“Yes,” says the old man, simply, “since the door was shut.” The young citizen

looks at us for our joyful approval.

VI. TO NUORO

These automobiles in Italy are splendid. They take the steep, looping roads so easily, they seem to run so naturally. And this one was comfortable, too.

The roads of Italy always impress me. They run undaunted over the most precipitous regions, and with curious ease. In England almost any such road, among the mountains at least, would be labelled three times dangerous and would be famous throughout the land as an impossible climb. Here it is nothing. Up and down they go, swinging about with complete sangfroid. There seems to have been no effort in their construction. They are so good, naturally, that one hardly notices what splendid gestures they represent. Of course, the surface is now often intolerably bad. And they are most of them roads which, with ten years' neglect, will become ruins. For they are cut through overhanging rock and scooped out of the sides of hills. But I think it is marvellous how the Italians have penetrated all their inaccessible regions, of which they have so many, with great highroads: and how along these highroads the omnibuses now keep up a perfect communication. The precipitous and craggily-involved land is threaded through and through with roads. There seems to be a passion for highroads and for constant communication. In this the Italians have a real Roman instinct, now. For the roads are new.

The railways, too, go piercing through rock for miles and miles, and nobody thinks anything of it. The coast railway of Calabria, down to Reggio, would make us stand on our heads if we had it in England. Here it is a matter of course. In the same way I always have a profound admiration for their driving — whether of a great omnibus or of a motor-car. It all seems so easy, as if the man were part of the car. There is none of that beastly grinding, uneasy feeling one has in the north. A car behaves like a smooth, live thing, sensibly.

All the peasants have a passion for a highroad. They want their land opening out, opening out. They seem to hate the ancient Italian remoteness. They all want to be able to get out at a moment's notice, to get away — quick, quick. A village which is two miles off the highroad, even if it is perched like a hawk's nest on a peak, still chafes and chafes for the great road to come to it, chafes and chafes for the daily motor-bus connection with the railway. There is no placidity, no rest in the heart of the land. There is a fever of restless irritation all the time.

And yet the permanent way of almost every railway is falling into bad disrepair, the roads are shocking. And nothing seems to be done. Is our marvellous, mechanical era going to have so short a bloom? Is the marvellous

openness, the opened-out wonder of the land going to collapse quite soon, and the remote places lapse back into inaccessibility again? Who knows! I rather hope so.

The automobile took us rushing and winding up the hill, sometimes through cold, solid-seeming shadow, sometimes across a patch of sun. There was thin, bright ice in the ruts, and deep grey hoar-frost on the grass. I cannot tell how the sight of the grass and bushes, heavy with frost, and wild — in their own primitive wildness charmed me. The slopes of the steep wild hills came down shaggy and bushy, with a few berries lingering, and the long grass-stalks sere with the frost. Again, the dark valley sank below like a ravine, but shaggy, bosky, unbroken. It came upon me how I loved the sight of the blue-shadowed, tawny-tangled winter with its frosty standstill. The young oaks keep their brown leaves. And doing so, surely they are best with a thin edge of rime.

One begins to realise how old the real Italy is, how man-gripped and how withered. England is far more wild and savage and lonely, in her country parts. Here since endless centuries man has tamed the impossible mountain side into terraces, he has quarried the rock, he has fed his sheep among the thin woods, he has cut his boughs and burnt his charcoal, he has been half domesticated even among the wildest fastnesses. This is what is so attractive about the remote places, the Abruzzi, for example. Life is so primitive, so pagan, so strangely heathen and half-savage. And yet it is human life. And the wildest country is half humanised, half brought under. It is all conscious. Wherever one is in Italy, either one is conscious of the present, or of the mediaeval influences, or of the far, mysterious gods of the early Mediterranean. Wherever one is, the place has its conscious genius. Man has lived there and brought forth his consciousness there and in some way brought that place to consciousness, given it its expression, and, really, finished it. The expression may be Proserpine, or Pan, or even the strange “shrouded gods” of the Etruscans or the Sikels, none the less it is an expression. The land has been humanised, through and through: and we in our own tissue-consciousness bear the results of this humanisation. So that for us to go to Italy and to *penetrate* into Italy is like a most fascinating act of self-discovery — back, back down the old ways of time. Strange and wonderful chords awake in us, and vibrate again after many hundreds of years of complete forgetfulness.

And then — and then — there is a final feeling of sterility. It is all worked out. It is all known: *connu, connu!*

This Sunday morning, seeing the frost among the tangled, still savage bushes of Sardinia, my soul thrilled again. This was not all known. This was not all worked out. Life was not only a process of rediscovering backwards. It is that,

also: and it is that intensely. Italy has given me back I know not what of myself, but a very, very great deal. She has found for me so much that was lost: like a restored Osiris. But this morning in the omnibus I realise that, apart from the great rediscovery backwards, which one must make before one can be whole at all, there is a move forwards. There are unknown, unworked lands where the salt has not lost its savour. But one must have perfected oneself in the great past first.

If one travels one eats. We immediately began to munch biscuits, and the old peasant in his white, baggy breeches and black cuirass, his old face smiling wonderingly under his old stocking-cap, although he was only going to Tonara, some seven or eight miles, began to peel himself a hard-boiled egg, which he got out of his parcel. With calm wastefulness he peeled away the biggest part of the white of the egg with the shell — because it came away so. The citizen of Nuoro, for such the bright-faced young man was, said to him: “But see how you waste it.” — “Ha!” said the old peasant, with a reckless indifferent wave of the hand. What did he care how much he wasted since he was *en voyage* and riding for the first time in his life in an automobile.

The citizen of Nuoro told us he had some sort of business in Sorgono, so he came back and forth constantly. The peasant did some work or other for him — or brought him something down from Tonara. He was a pleasant, bright-eyed young man, and he made nothing of eight hours in a motor-bus.

He told us there was still game among these hills: wild boars which were hunted in big hunts, and many hares. It was a curious and beautiful sight, he said, to see a hare at night fascinated by the flare of the lamps of the automobile, racing ahead with its ears back, always keeping in front, inside the beam, and flying like mad, on and on ahead, till at some hill it gathered speed and melted into the dark.

We descended into a deep narrow valley, to the road-junction and the canteen house, then up again, up and up sharp to Tonara, our village we had seen in the sun yesterday. But we were approaching it from the back. As we swerved into the sunlight, the road took a long curve on to the open ridge between two valleys. And there in front we saw a glitter of scarlet and white. It was in slow motion. It was a far-off procession, scarlet figures of women, and a tall image moving away from us, slowly, in the Sunday morning. It was passing along the level sunlit ridge above a deep, hollow valley. A close procession of women glittering in scarlet, white and black, moving slowly in the distance beneath the grey-yellow buildings of the village on the crest, towards an isolated old church: and all along this narrow upland saddle as on a bridge of sunshine itself.

Were we not going to see any more? The bus turned again and rushed along the now level road and then veered. And there beyond, a little below, we saw the

procession coming. The bus faded to a standstill, and we climbed out. Above us, old and mellowed among the smooth rocks and the bits of flat grass was the church, tanging its bell. Just in front, above were old, half-broken houses of stone. The road came gently winding up to us, from what was evidently two villages ledged one above the other upon the steep summit of the south slope. Far below was the south valley, with a white puff of engine steam.

And slowly chanting in the near distance, curving slowly up to us on the white road between the grass came the procession. The high morning was still. We stood all on this ridge above the world, with the deeps of silence below on the right. And in a strange, brief, staccato monody chanted the men, and in quick, light rustle of women's voices came the responses. Again the men's voices! The white was mostly men, not women. The priest in his robes, his boys near him, was leading the chanting. Immediately behind him came a small cluster of bare-headed, tall, sunburnt men, all in golden-velveteen corduroy, mountain peasants, bowing beneath a great life-size seated image of Saint Anthony of Padua. After these a number of men in the costume, but with the white linen breeches hanging wide and loose almost to the ankles, instead of being tucked into the black gaiters. So they seemed very white beneath the black kilt frill. The black frieze body-vest was cut low, like an evening suit, and the stocking-caps were variously perched. The men chanted in low hollow, melodic tones. Then came the rustling chime of the women. And the procession crept slowly, aimlessly forward in time with the chant. The great image rode rigid, and rather foolish.

After the men was a little gap — and then the brilliant wedge of the women. They were packed two by two, close on each other's heels, chanting inadvertently when their turn came, and all in brilliant, beautiful costume. In front were the little girl-children, two by two, immediately following the tall men in peasant black-and-white. Children demure and conventional, in vermilion, white and green — little girl-children with long skirts of scarlet cloth down to their feet, green-banded near the bottom: with white aprons bordered with vivid green and mingled colour: having little scarlet, purple-bound, open boleros over the full white shirts: and black head-cloths folded across their little chins, just leaving the lips clear, the face framed in black. Wonderful little girl-children, perfect and demure in the stiffish, brilliant costume, with black head-dress! Stiff as Velasquez princesses! The bigger girls followed, and then the mature women, a close procession. The long vermilion skirts with their green bands at the bottom flashed a solid moving mass of colour, softly swinging, and the white aprons with their band of brilliant mingled green seemed to gleam. At the throat the full-bosomed white shirts were fastened with big studs of gold filigree, two linked filigree globes: and the great white sleeves billowed from the

scarlet, purplish-and-green-edged boleros. The faces came nearer to us, framed all round in the dark cloths. All the lips still sang responses, but all the eyes watched us. So the softly-swaying coloured body of the procession came up to us. The poppy-scarlet smooth cloth rocked in fusion, the bands and bars of emerald green seemed to burn across the red and the showy white, the dark eyes peered and stared at us from under the black snood, gazed back at us with raging curiosity, while the lips moved automatically in chant. The bus had run into the inner side of the road, and the procession had to press round it, towards the sky-line, the great valley lying below.

The priest stared, hideous St. Anthony cockled a bit as he passed the butt end of the big grey automobile, the peasant men in gold-coloured corduroy, old, washed soft, were sweating under the load and still singing with opened lips, the loose white breeches of the men waggled as they walked on with their hands behind their backs, turning again, to look at us. The big, hard hands, folded behind black kilt-frill! The women, too, shuffled slowly past, rocking the scarlet and the bars of green, and all twisting as they sang, to look at us still more. And so the procession edged past the bus, and was trailing upwards, curved solid against the sky-line towards the old church. From behind, the geranium scarlet was intense, one saw the careful, curiously cut backs of the shapen boleros, poppy-red, edged with mauve-purple and green, and the white of the shirt just showing at the waist. The full sleeves billowed out, the black head-cloths hung down to a point. The pleated skirts swing slowly, the broad band of green accentuating the motion. Indeed that is what it must be for, this thick, rich band of jewel green, to throw the wonderful horizontal motion back and forth, back and forth, of the suave vermilion, and give that static, Demeter splendour to a peasant motion, so magnificent in colour, geranium and malachite.

All the costumes were not exactly alike. Some had more green, some had less. In some the sleeveless boleros were of a darker red, and some had poorer aprons, without such gorgeous bands at the bottom. And some were evidently old: probably thirty years old: still perfect and in keeping, reserved for Sunday and high holidays. A few were darker, ruddier than the true vermilion. This varying of the tone intensified the beauty of the shuffling woman-host.

When they had filed into the grey, forlorn little church on the ridge-top just above us, the bus started silently to run on to the rest-point below, whilst we climbed back up the little rock-track to the church. When we came to the side-door we found the church quite full. Level with us as we stood in the open side doorway, we saw kneeling on the bare stoneflags the little girl-children, and behind them all the women clustered kneeling upon their aprons, with hands negligently folded, filling the church to the further doorway, where the sun

shone: the bigger west-end doorway. In the shadow of the whitewashed, bare church all these kneeling women with their colour and their black head-cloths looked like some thick bed of flowers, geranium, black-hooded above. They all knelt on the naked, solid stone of the pavement.

There was a space in front of the geranium little girl-children, then the men in corduroys, gold-soft, with dark round heads, kneeling awkwardly in reverence; and then the queer, black cuirasses and full white sleeves of grey-headed peasant men, many bearded. Then just in front of them the priest in his white vestment, standing exposed, and just baldly beginning an address. At the side of the altar was seated large and important the modern, simpering, black-gowned Anthony of Padua, nursing a boy-child. He looked a sort of male Madonna.

“Now,” the priest was saying, “blessed Saint Anthony shows you in what way you can be Christians. It is not enough that you are not Turks. Some think they are Christians because they are not Turks. It is true you are none of you Turks. But you have still to learn how to be good Christians. And this you can learn from our blessed Saint Anthony. Saint Anthony, etc., etc...”

The contrast between Turks and Christians is still forceful in the Mediterranean, where the Mohammedans have left such a mark. But how the word *cristiani*, *cristiani*, spoken with a peculiar priestly unction, gets on my nerves. The voice is barren in its homily. And the women are all intensely watching the q-b and me in the doorway, their folded hands are very negligently held together.

“Come away!” say I. “Come away, and let them listen.”

We left the church crowded with its kneeling host, and dropped down past the broken houses towards the omnibus, which stood on a sort of level out-look place, a levelled terrace with a few trees, standing silent over the valley. It should be picketed with soldiers having arquebuses. And I should have welcomed a few thorough-paced infidels, as a leaven to this dreary Christianity of ours.

But it was a wonderful place. Usually, the life-level is reckoned as sea-level. But here, in the heart of Sardinia, the life-level is high as the golden-lit plateau, and the sea-level is somewhere far away, below, in the gloom, it does not signify. The life-level is high up, high and sun-sweetened and among rocks.

We stood and looked below, at the puff of steam, far down the wooded valley where we had come yesterday. There was an old, low house on this eagle-perching piazza. I would like to live there. The real village — or rather two villages, like an ear-ring and its pendant — lay still beyond, in front, ledging near the summit of the long, long steep wooded slope, that never ended till it ran flush to the depths away below there in shadow.

And yesterday, up this slope the old peasant had come with his two brilliant daughters and the pack-pony.

And somewhere in those ledging, pearly villages in front must be my girovago and his “wife.” I wish I could see their stall and drink aqua vitae with them.

“How beautiful the procession!” says the q-b to the driver. “Ah yes — one of the most beautiful costumes of Sardinia, this of Tonara,” he replied wistfully.

The bus sets off again — minus the old peasant. We retrace our road. A woman is leading a bay pony past the church, striding with long strides, so that her maroon skirt swings like a fan, and hauling the halter rope. Apparently the geranium red costume is Sunday only, the week-day is this maroon, or puce, or madder-brown.

Quickly and easily the bus slips down the hill into the valley. Wild, narrow valleys, with trees, and brown-legged cork-trees. Across the other side a black and white peasant is working alone on a tiny terrace of the hill-side, a small, solitary figure for all the world like a magpie in the distance. These people like being alone — solitary — one sees a single creature so often isolated among the wilds. This is different from Sicily and Italy, where the people simply cannot be alone. They must be in twos and threes.

But it is Sunday morning, and the worker is exceptional. Along the road we pass various pedestrians, men in their black sheepskins, boys in their soldiers’ remains. They are trudging from one village to another, across the wild valleys. And there is a sense of Sunday morning freedom, of roving, as in an English countryside. Only the one old peasant works alone: and a goatherd watching his long-haired, white goats.

Beautiful the goats are: and so swift. They fly like white shadows along the road from us, then dart down-hill. I see one standing on a bough of an oak-tree, right in the tree, an enormous white tree-creature complacently munching up aloft, then rearing on her hind legs, so lengthy, and putting her slim paws far away on an upper, forward branch.

Whenever we come to a village we stop and get down, and our little conductor disappears into the post-office for the postbag. This last is usually a limp affair, containing about three letters. The people crowd round — and many of them in very ragged costume. They look poor, and not attractive: perhaps a bit degenerate. It would seem as if the Italian instinct to get into rapid touch with the world were the healthy instinct after all. For in these isolated villages, which have been since time began far from any life-centre, there is an almost sordid look on the faces of the people. We must remember that the motor-bus is a great innovation. It has been running for five weeks only. I wonder for how many months it will continue.

For I am sure it cannot pay. Our first-class tickets cost, I believe, about twenty-seven francs each. The second-class costs about three-quarters the first. Some parts of the journey we were very few passengers. The distance covered is so great, the population so thin, that even granted the passion for getting out of their own villages, which possesses all people now, still the bus cannot earn much more than an average of two hundred to three hundred francs a day. Which, with two men's wages, and petrol at its enormous price, and the cost of wear-and-tear, cannot possibly pay.

I asked the driver. He did not tell me what his wages were: I did not ask him. But he said the company paid for the keep and lodging for himself and mate at the stopping-places. This being Sunday, fewer people were travelling: a statement hard to believe. Once he had carried fifty people all the way from Tonara to Nuoro. Once! But it was in vain he protested. Ah, well, he said the bus carried the post, and the Government paid a subsidy of so many thousands of lire a year: a goodly number. Apparently then the Government was the loser, as usual. And there are hundreds, if not thousands of these omnibuses running the lonely districts of Italy and Sicily — Sardinia had a network of systems. They are splendid — and they are perhaps an absolute necessity for a nervous, restless population which simply cannot keep still, and which finds some relief in being whirled about even on the *autovie*, as the bus-system is called.

The *autovie* are run by private companies, only subsidised by the Government.

On we rush, through the morning — and at length see a large village, high on the summit beyond, stony on the high upland. But it has a magical look, as these tiny summit-cities have from the distance. They recall to me always my childish visions of Jerusalem, high against the air, and seeming to sparkle, and built in sharp cubes.

It is curious what a difference there is between the high, fresh, proud villages and the valley villages. Those that crown the world have a bright, flashing air, as Tonara had. Those that lie down below, infolded in the shadow, have a gloomy, sordid feeling and a repellent population, like Sorgono and other places at which we had halted. The judgment may be all wrong: but this was the impression I got.

We were now at the highest point of the journey. The men we saw on the road were in their sheepskins, and some were even walking with their faces shawl-muffled. Glancing back, we saw up the valley clefts the snow of Gennargentu once more, a white mantle on broad shoulders, the very core of Sardinia. The bus slid to a standstill in a high valley, beside a stream where the road from Fonni joined ours. There was waiting a youth with a bicycle. I would like to go to Fonni. They say it is the highest village in Sardinia.

In front, on the broad summit, reared the towers of Gavoi. This was the half-way halt, where the buses had their *coincidenza*, and where we would stay for an hour and eat. We wound up and up the looping road, and at last entered the village. Women came to the doors to look. They were wearing the dark madder-brown costume. Men were hastening, smoking their pipes, towards our stopping place.

We saw the other bus — a little crowd of people — and we drew up at last. We were tired and hungry. We were at the door of the inn, and we entered quickly. And in an instant, what a difference! At the clean little bar, men were drinking cheerfully. A side door led into the common room. And how charming it was. In a very wide chimney, white and stone-clean, with a lovely shallow curve above, was burning a fire of long, clean-split faggots, laid horizontally on the dogs. A clean, clear bright fire with odd little chairs in front, very low, for us to sit on. The funny, low little chairs seem a speciality of this region.

The floor of this room was paved with round dark pebbles, beautifully clean. On the walls hung brilliant copper fans, glittering against the whitewash. And under the long, horizontal window that looked on the street was a stone slab with sockets for little charcoal fires. The curve of the chimney arch was wide and shallow, the curve above the window was still wider, and of a similar delicate shallowness, the white roof rose delicately vaulted. With the glitter of copper, the expanse of dark, rose-coloured, pebbled floor, the space, the few low, clean-gleaming faggots, it was really beautiful. We sat and warmed ourselves, welcomed by a plump hostess and a pleasant daughter, both in madder-brown dress and full white shirt. People strayed in and out, through the various doors. The houses are built without any plan at all, the rooms just happening, here or there. A bitch came from an inner darkness and stood looking at the fire, then looked up at me, smiling in her bitch-like, complacent fashion.

But we were dying with hunger. What was there to eat? — and was it nearly ready? There was *cinghiale*, the pleasant, hard-cheeked girl told us, and it was nearly ready. *Cinghiale* being wild boar, we sniffed the air. The girl kept tramping rather fecklessly back and forth, with a plate or a serviette: and at last it was served. We went through the dark inner place, which was apparently the windowless bit left over, inside, when the haphazard rooms were made round about, and thence into a large, bare, darkish pebbled room with a white table and inverted soup-plates. It was deathly cold. The window looked north over the wintry landscape of the highlands, fields, stone walls and rocks. Ah, the cold, motionless air of the room.

But we were quite a party: the second bus-driver and his mate, a bearded traveller on the second bus, with his daughter, ourselves, the bright-faced citizen

from Nuoro, and our driver. Our little dark-eyed conductor did not come. It dawned on me later he could not afford to pay for this meal, which was not included in his wage.

The Nuoro citizen conferred with our driver — who looked tired round the eyes — and made the girl produce a tin of sardines. These were opened at table with a large pocketknife belonging to the second conductor. He was a reckless, odd, hot-foot fellow whom I liked very much. But I was terrified at the way he carved the sardine-box with his jackknife. However, we could eat and drink.

Then came the *brodo*, the broth, in a great bowl. This was boiling hot and very, very strong. It was perfectly plain, strong meat-stock, without vegetables. But how good and invigorating it was, and what an abundance! We drank it down, and ate the good, cold bread.

Then came the boar itself. Alas, it was a bowl of hunks of dark, rather coarse boiled meat, from which the broth had been made. It was quite dry, without fat. I should have been very puzzled to know what meat it was, if I had not been told. Sad that the wild boar should have received so little culinary attention. However we ate the hunks of hot, dry meat with bread, and were glad to get them. They were filling, at least. And there was a bowl of rather bitter green olives for a condiment.

The Nuoro citizen now produced a huge bottle of wine, which he said was *finissimo*, and refused to let us go on with the dark wine on the table, of which every guest was served with a bottle. So we drank up, and were replenished with the redder, lighter, finer Sorgono wine. It was very good.

The second bus-conductor also did not eat the inn meal. He produced a vast piece of bread, good, home-made bread, and at least half of a roast lamb, and a large paper of olives. This lamb he insisted on sending round the table, waving his knife and fork with dramatic gestures at every guest, insisting that every guest should take a hunk. So one by one we all helped ourselves to the extraordinarily good cold roast lamb, and to the olives. Then the bus-conductor fell to as well. There was a mass of meat still left to him.

It is extraordinary how generous and, from the inside, well-bred these men were. To be sure the second conductor waved his knife and fork and made bitter faces if one of us took only a little bit of the lamb. He wanted us to take more. But the *essential* courtesy in all of them was quite perfect, so manly and utterly simple. Just the same with the q-b. They treated her with a sensitive, manly simplicity, which one could not but be thankful for. They made none of the odious politenesses which are so detestable in well-brought-up people. They made no advances and did none of the hateful homage of the adulating male. They were quiet, and kind, and sensitive to the natural flow of life, and quite

without airs. I liked them extremely. Men who can be quietly kind and simple to a woman, without wanting to show off or to make an impression, they are men still. They were neither humble nor conceited. They did not show off. And oh, God, what a blessed relief, to be with people who don't bother to show off. We sat at that table quietly and naturally as if we were by ourselves, and talked or listened to their talk, just as it had happened. When we did not want to talk, they took no notice of us. And that I call good manners. Middle-class, showing off people would have found them uncouth. I found them almost the only really well-bred people I have met. They did not show off in any way at all, not even a show of simplicity. They knew that in the beginning and in the end a man stands alone, his soul is alone in itself, and all attributes are nothing — and this curious final knowledge preserved them in simplicity.

When we had had coffee and were going out, I found our own conductor in a little chair by the fire. He was looking a bit pathetic. I had enough sense to give him a coffee, which brightened him. But it was not till afterwards, putting things together, that I realised he had wanted to be with us all at table, but that his conductor's wages probably did not allow him to spend the money. My bill for the dinner was about fifteen francs for the two of us.

In the bus again, we were quite crowded. A peasant girl in Nuoro costume sat facing me, and a dark-bearded, middle-aged man in a brown velveteen suit was next me and glowering at her. He was evidently her husband. I did not like him: one of the jealous, carping sort. She, in her way, was handsome: but a bit of a devil as well, in all probability. There were two village women become fine, in town dress and black silk scarves over their heads, fancying themselves. Then there was a wild scuffle, and three bouncing village lasses were pushed in, laughing and wild with excitement. There were wild farewells, and the bus rolled out of Gavoi between the desolate mountain fields and the rocks, on a sort of table-land. We rolled on for a mile or so: then stopped, and the excited lasses got down. I gathered they had been given a little ride for a Sunday treat. Delighted they were. And they set off, with other bare-headed women in costume, along a bare path between flat, out-cropping rocks and cold fields.

The girl facing me was a study. She was not more than twenty years old I should say: or was she? Did the delicate and fine complication of lines against her eyes mean thirty-five? But anyhow she was the wife of the velveteen man. He was thick-set and had white hairs in his coarse black beard, and little, irritable brown eyes under his irritable brows. He watched her all the time. Perhaps, she was after all a young, new girl-wife. She sat with that expressionless look of one who is watched and appears not to know it. She had her back to the engine.

She wore her black head-cloth from her brow and her hair was taken tight back from her rather hard, broad, well-shaped forehead. Her dark eyebrows were very finely drawn above her large, dark-grey, pellucid eyes, but they were drawn with a peculiar obstinate and irritating lift. Her nose was straight and small, her mouth well-shut. And her big, rather hostile eyes had a withheld look in them, obstinate. Yet, being newly wed and probably newly awakened, her eyes looked sometimes at me with a provoking look, curious as to what I was in the husband line, challenging rather defiantly with her new secrets, obstinate in opposition to the male authority, and yet intrigued by the very fact that one was man. The velveteen husband — his velveteens too had gone soft and gold-faded, yet somehow they made him look ugly, common — he watched her with his irritable, yellow-brown eyes, and seemed to fume in his stiff beard.

She wore the costume: the full-gathered shirt fastened at the throat with the two gold filigree globes, a little dark, braided, stiff bolero just fastened at the waist, leaving a pretty pattern of white breast, and a dark maroon skirt. As the bus rushed along she turned somewhat pale, with the obstinate pinched look of a woman who is in opposition to her man. At length she flung him a few words which I did not catch — and her forehead seemed to go harder, as she drooped her lashes occasionally over her wide, alert, obstinate, rather treacherous eyes. She must have been a difficult piece of goods to deal with. And she sat with her knees touching mine, rocking against mine as the bus swayed.

We came to a village on the road: the landscape had now become wider, much more open. At the inn door the bus stopped, and the velveteen husband and the girl got down. It was cold — but in a minute I got down too. The bus-conductor came to me and asked anxiously if the q-b were ill. The q-b said no, why? Because there was a signora whom the motion of the bus made ill. This was the girl.

There was a crowd and a great row at this inn. In the second dark room, which was bare of furniture, a man sat in a corner playing an accordion. Men in the close breeches were dancing together. Then they fell to wrestling wildly, crashing about among the others, with shouts and yells. Men in the black-and-white, but untidy, with the wide white drawers left hanging out over the black gaiters, surged here and there. All were rowdy with drink. This again was rather a squalid inn but roaring with violent, crude male life.

The Nuoro citizen said that here was very good wine, and we must try it. I did not want it, but he insisted. So we drank little glasses of merely moderate red wine. The sky had gone all grey with the afternoon curd-clouds. It was very cold and raw. Wine is no joy, cold, dead wine, in such an atmosphere.

The Nuoro citizen insisted on paying. He would let me pay, he said, when he

came to England. In him, and in our bus men, the famous Sardinian hospitality and generosity still lingers.

When the bus ran on again the q-b told the peasant girl who again had the pinched look, to change places with me and sit with her face to the engine. This the young woman did, with that rather hard assurance common to these women. But at the next stop she got down, and made the conductor come with us into the compartment, whilst she sat in front between the driver and the citizen of Nuoro. That was what she wanted all the time. Now she was all right. She had her back to the velveteen husband, she sat close between two strange young men, who were condoling with her. And velveteens eyed her back, and his little eyes went littler and more pin-pointed, and his nose seemed to curl with irritation.

The costumes had changed again. There was again the scarlet, but no green. The green had given place to mauve and rose. The women in one cold, stony, rather humbled broken place were most brilliant. They had the geranium skirts, but their sleeveless boleros were made to curl out strangely from the waist, and they were edged with a puckered rose-pink, a broad edge, with lines of mauve and lavender. As they went up between the houses that were dark and grisly under the blank, cold sky, it is amazing how these women of vermilion and rose-pink seemed to melt into an almost impossible blare of colour. What a risky blend of colours! Yet how superb it could look, that dangerous hard assurance of these women as they strode along so blaring. I would not like to tackle one of them.

Wider and colder the landscape grew. As we topped a hill at the end of a village, we saw a long string of wagons, each with a pair of oxen, and laden with large sacks curving upwards in the cold, pallid Sunday afternoon. Seeing us, the procession came to a standstill at the curve of the road, and the pale oxen, the pale low wagons, the pale full sacks, all in the blenched light, each one headed by a tall man in shirt-sleeves, trailing a static procession on the hill-side, seemed like a vision: like a Dore drawing. The bus slid past, the man holding the wagon-pole, while some oxen stood like rock, some swayed their horns. The q-b asked the velveteener what they were carrying. For a long time he took no notice of the question. Then he volunteered, in a snappy voice, that it was the Government grain being distributed to the communes for bread. On Sunday afternoon too.

Oh, this Government corn! What a problem those sacks represent!

The country became wider as we dropped lower. But it was bleak and treeless once more. Stones cropped up in the wide hollow dales. Men on ponies passed forlorn across the distances. Men with bundles waited at the cross-roads to pick up the bus. We were drawing near to Nuoro. It was past three in the afternoon, cold with a blenched light. The landscape seemed bare and stony, wide, different

from any before.

We came to the valley where the branch-line runs to Nuoro. I saw little pink railway-cabins at once, lonely along the valley bed. Turning sharp to the right, we ran in silence over the moorland-seeming slopes, and saw the town beyond, clustered beyond, a little below, at the end of the long declivity, with sudden mountains rising around it. There it lay, as if at the end of the world, mountains rising sombre behind.

So, we stop at the Dazio, the town's customs hut, and the velvetens has to pay for some meat and cheese he is bringing in. After which we slip into the cold high-street of Nuoro. I am thinking that this is the home of Grazia Deledda, the novelist, and I see a barber's shop. Deledda. And thank heaven we are at the end of the journey. It is past four o'clock.

The bus has stopped quite close to the door of the inn: Star of Italy, was it? In we go at the open door. Nobody about, free access to anywhere and everywhere, as usual: testifying again to Sardinian honesty. We peer through a doorway to the left — through a rough little room: ah, there in a dark, biggish room beyond is a whitehaired old woman with a long, ivory-coloured face standing at a large table ironing. One sees only the large whiteness of the table, and the long pallid face and the querulous pale-blue eyes of the tall old woman as she looks up questioning from the gloom of the inner place.

“Is there a room, Signora?”

She looks at me with a pale, cold blue eye, and shouts into the dark for somebody. Then she advances into the passage and looks us up and down, the q-b and me.

“Are you husband and wife?” she demands, challenges. “Yes, how shouldn't we be?” say I.

A tiny maid, of about thirteen, but sturdy and brisk-looking, has appeared in answer to the shout.

“Take them to number seven,” says the old dame, and she turns back to her gloom, and seizes the flat-iron grimly.

We follow up two flights of cold stone stairs, disheartening narrow staircase with a cold iron rail, and corridors opening off gloomily and rather disorderly. These houses give the effect, inside, of never having been properly finished, as if, long, long ago, the inmates had crowded in, pig-sty fashion, without waiting for anything to be brought into order, and there it had been left, dreary and chaotic.

Thumbelina, the little maid, threw open the door of number seven with *éclat*. And we both exclaimed: “How fine!” It seemed to us palatial. Two good, thick white beds, a table, a chest of drawers, two mats on the tiled floor, and gorgeous

oleographs on the wall — and two good wash-bowls side by side — and all perfectly clean and nice. What were we coming to! We felt we ought to be impressed.

We pulled open the latticed window doors, and looked down on the street: the only street. And it was a river of noisy life. A band was playing, rather terribly, round the corner at the end, and up and down the street jiggled endless numbers of maskers in their carnival costume, with girls and young women strolling arm-in-arm to participate. And how frisky they all were, how bubbly and unself-conscious!

The maskers were nearly all women — the street was full of women: so we thought at first. Then we saw, looking closer, that most of the women were young men, dressed up. All the maskers were young men, and most of these young men, *of course*, were masquerading as women. As a rule they did not wear face-masks, only little dominoes of black cloth or green cloth or white cloth coming down to the mouth. Which is much better. For the old modelled half-masks with the lace frill, the awful proboscis sticking forward white and ghastly like the beaks of corpse-birds — such as the old Venice masks — these I think are simply horrifying. And the more modern “faces” are usually only repulsive. While the simple little pink half-masks with the end of black or green or white cloth, these just form a human disguise.

It was quite a game, sorting out the real women from the false. Some were easy. They had stuffed their bosoms, and stuffed their bustles, and put on hats and very various robes, and they minced along with little jiggling steps, like little dolls that dangle from elastic, and they put their heads on one side and dripped their hands, and danced up to flurry the actual young ladies, and sometimes they received a good clout on the head, when they broke into wild and violent gestures, whereat the *actual* young ladies scuffled wildly.

They were very lively and naïve. But some were more difficult. Every conceivable sort of “woman” was there, broad shouldered and with rather large feet. The most usual was the semi-peasant, with a very full bosom and very full skirt and a very downright bearing. But one was a widow in weeds, drooping on the arm of a robust daughter. And one was an ancient crone in a crochet bed-cover. And one was in an old skirt and blouse and apron, with a broom, wildly sweeping the street from end to end. He was an animated rascal. He swept with very sarcastic assiduity in front of two town-misses in fur coats, who minced very importantly along. He swept their way very humbly, facing them and going backwards, sweeping and bowing, whilst they advanced with their noses in the air. He made his great bow, and they minced past, daughters of dog-fish, pescecane, no doubt. Then he skipped with a bold, gambolling flurry behind them, and

with a perfectly mad frenzy began to sweep after them, as if to sweep their tracks away. He swept so madly and so blindly with his besom that he swept on to their heels and their ankles. They shrieked and glowered round, but the blind sweeper saw them not. He swept and swept and pricked their thin silk ankles. And they, scarlet with indignation and rage, gave hot skips like cats on hot bricks, and fled discomfited forwards. He bowed once more after them, and started mildly and innocently to sweep the street. A pair of lovers of fifty years ago, she in a half crinoline and poke bonnet and veil, hanging on his arm came very coyly past, oh, so simpering, and it took me a long time to be sure that the “girl” was a youth. An old woman in a long nightdress prowled up and down, holding out her candle and peering in the street as if for burglars. She would approach the real young women and put her candle in their faces and peer so hard, as if she suspected them of something. And they blushed and turned their faces away and protested confusedly. This old woman searched so fearfully in the face of one strapping lass in the pink and scarlet costume, who looked for all the world like a bunch of red and rose-pink geraniums with a bit of white — a real peasant lass — that the latter in a panic began to beat him with her fist, furiously, quite aroused. And he made off, running comically in his long white nightdress.

There were some really beautiful dresses of rich old brocade, and some gleaming old shawls, a shimmer of lavender and silver, or of dark, rich shot colours with deep borders of white silver and primrose gold, very lovely. I believe two of them were actual women — but the q-b says no. There was a Victorian gown of thick green silk, with a creamy blotched crossover shawl. About her we both were doubtful. There were two wistful, drooping-lily sisters, all in white, with big feet. And there was a very successful tall miss in a narrow hobble-skirt of black satin and a toque with ospreys. The way she minced and wagged her posterior and went on her toes and peered over her shoulder and kept her elbows in was an admirable caricature. Especially the curious sagging, heaving movement of “bustle” region, a movement very characteristic of modern feminism, was hit off with a bit of male exaggeration which rejoiced me. At first she even took me in.

We stood outside our window, and leaned on the little balcony rail looking down at this flow of life. Directly opposite was the chemist’s house: facing our window the best bedroom of the chemist, with a huge white matrimonial bed and muslin curtains. In the balcony sat the chemist’s daughters, very elegant in high-heeled shoes and black hair done in the fluffy fashion with a big sweep sideways. Oh, very elegant! They eyed us a little and we eyed them. But without interest. The river of life was down below.

It was very cold and the day was declining. We too were cold. We decided to

go into the street and look for the café. In a moment we were out of doors, walking as inconspicuously as possible near the wall. Of course there was no pavement. These maskers were very gentle and whimsical, no touch of brutality at all. Now we were level with them, how odd and funny they were. One youth wore a thin white blouse and a pair of his sister's wide, calico knickers with needlework frills near the ankle, and white stockings. He walked artlessly, and looked almost pretty. Only the q-b winced with pain: not because of the knickers, but because of that awful length, coming well below the knee. Another young man was wound into a sheet, and heaven knows if he could ever get out of it. Another was involved in a complicated entanglement of white crochet antimacassars, very troublesome to contemplate. I did not like him at all, like a fish in a net. But he strode robustly about.

We came to the end of the street, where there is a wide, desolate sort of gap. Here the little band stood braying away, there was a thick crowd of people, and on a slanting place just above, a little circle where youths and men, maskers and one or two girls were dancing, so crowded together and such a small ring that they looked like a jiggly set of upright rollers all turning rickettily against one another. They were doing a sort of intense jiggling waltz. Why do they look so intense? Perhaps because they were so tight all together, like too many fish in a globe slipping through one another.

There was a café in this sort of piazza — not a piazza at all, a formless gap. But young men were drinking little drinks, and I knew it would be hopeless to ask for anything but cold drinks or black coffee: which we did not want. So we continued forwards, up the slope of the village street. These towns soon come to an end. Already we were wandering into the open. On a ledge above, a peasant family was making a huge bonfire, a tower of orange-coloured, rippling flame. Little, impish boys were throwing on more rubbish. Everybody else was in town. Why were these folk at the town-end making this fire alone?

We came to the end of the houses and looked over the road-wall at the hollow, deep, interesting valley below. Away on the other side rose a blue mountain, a steep but stumpy cone. High land reared up, dusky and dark-blue, all around. Somewhere far off the sun was setting with a bit of crimson. It was a wild, unusual landscape, of unusual shape. The hills seemed so untouched, dark-blue, virgin-wild, the hollow cradle of the valley was cultivated like a tapestry away below. And there seemed so little outlying life: nothing. No castles even. In Italy and Sicily castles perching everywhere. In Sardinia none — the remote, ungrappled hills rising darkly, standing outside of life.

As we went back it was growing dark, and the little band was about to leave off its brass noise. But the crowd still surged, the maskers still jiggled and frisked

unweariedly. Oh, the good old energy of the bygone days, before men became so self-conscious. Here it was still on the hop.

We found no café that looked any good. Coming to the inn, we asked if there was a fire anywhere. There wasn't. We went up to our room. The chemist-daughters had lighted up opposite, one saw their bedroom as if it were one's own. In the dusk of the street the maskers were still jigging, all the youths still joyfully being women, but a little more roughly now. Away over the house-tops the purple-red of a dying sunset. And it was very cold.

There was nothing for it but just to lie in bed. The q-b made a little tea on the spirit-lamp, and we sat in bed and sipped it. Then we covered ourselves up and lay still, to get warm. Outside the noise of the street came unabated. It grew quite dark, the lights reflected into the room. There was the sound of an accordion across the hoarseness of the many voices and movements in the street: and then a solid, strong singing of men's voices, singing a soldier song.

“Quando torniamo in casa nostra — ”

We got up to look. Under the small electric lights the narrow, cobbled street was still running with a river of people, but fewer maskers. Two maskers beating loudly at a heavy closed door. They beat and beat. At last the door opens a crack. They rush to try to get in — but in vain. It had shut the moment it saw them, they are foiled, on they go down the street. The town is full of men, many peasants come in from the outlying parts, the black-and-white costume now showing in the streets.

We retire to bed again out of the cold. Comes a knock, and Thumbelina bursts in, in the darkness.

“Siamo qua!” says the q-b.

Thumbelina dashes at the window-doors and shuts them and shuts the casement. Then she dashes to my bedhead and turns on the light, looking down at me as if I were a rabbit in the grass. Then she flings a can of water against the wash-bowls — cold water, icy, alas. After which, small and explosive, she explodes her way out of the room again, and leaves us in the glaring light, having replied that it is now a little after six o'clock, and dinner is half-past seven.

So we lie in bed, warm and in peace, but hungry, waiting for half-past seven.

When the q-b can stand it no more she flounces up, though the clock from the Campanile has struck seven only a few minutes before. Dashing downstairs to reconnoitre, she is back in a breath to say that people are eating their heads off in the long dining-room. In the next breath we are downstairs too.

The room was brightly lighted, and at many white tables sat diners, all men. It was quite city-like. Everyone was in convivial mood. The q-b spied men

opposite having chicken and salad — and she had hopes. But they were brief. When the soup came, the girl announced that there was only bistecca: which meant a bit of fried cow. So it did: a quite, quite small bit of fried beef, a few potatoes and a bit of cauliflower. Really, it was not enough for a child of twelve. But that was the end of it. A few mandarini — tangerine oranges — rolled on a plate for dessert. And there's the long and short of these infernal dinners. Was there any cheese? No, there was no cheese. So we merely masticated bread.

There came in three peasants in the black-and-white costume, and sat at the middle table. They kept on their stocking-caps. And queer they looked, coming in with slow, deliberate tread of these elderly men, and sitting rather remote, with a gap of solitude around them. The peculiar ancient loneliness of the Sardinian hills clings to them, and something stiff, static, pre-world.

All the men at our end of the room were citizens — employees of some sort — and they were all acquaintances. A large dog, very large indeed, with a great muzzle, padded slowly from table to table, and looked at us with big wistful topaz eyes. When the meal was almost over our bus-driver and conductor came in — looking faint with hunger and cold and fatigue. They were quartered at this house. They had eaten nothing since the boar-broth at Gavoi.

In a very short time they were through their portions: and was there nothing else? Nothing! But they were half-starved. They ordered two eggs each, in padella. I ordered coffee — and asked them to come and take it with us, and a brandy. So they came when their eggs were finished.

A diversion was now created at the other side of the room. The red wine, which is good in Sardinia, had been drunk freely. Directly facing us sat a rather stout man with pleasant blue eyes and a nicely shaped head: dressed like any other town man on a Sunday. The dog had waddled up to him and sat down statuesque in front of him. And the fat man, being mellow, began to play with the big, gentle, brindled animal. He took a piece of bread and held it before the dog's nose — and the dog tried to take it. But the man, like a boy now he was ripe with wine, put the mastiff back with a restraining finger, and told him not to snatch. Then he proceeded with a little conversation with the animal. The dog again tried to snatch, gently, and again the man started, saved the bread, and startled the dog, which backed and gave a sharp, sad yelp, as if to say: "Why do you tease me?"

"Now," said the man, "you are not to snatch. Come here. Come here. Vieni qua!" And he held up the piece of bread. The animal came near. "Now," said the man, "I put this bread on your nose, and you don't move, un — Ha!"

The dog had tried to snatch the bread, the man had shouted and jerked it away, the animal had recoiled and given another expostulating yelp.

The game continued. All the room was watching, smiling. The dog did not understand at all. It came forward again, troubled. The man held the bread near its nose, and held up a warning finger. The beast dropped its head mournfully, cocking up its eye at the bread with varied feelings.

“Now — !” said the man, “not until I say three — *Uno — due —* ” the dog could bear it no longer, the man in jerking let go the bread and yelled at the top of his voice — *”e tre!*” The dog gulped the piece of bread with a resigned pleasure, and the man pretended it had all happened properly on the word “three.”

So he started again. “*Vieni qua! Vieni qua!*” The dog, which had backed away with the bread, came hesitating, cringing forward, dropping its hind-quarters in doubt, as dogs do, advancing towards the new nugget of bread. The man preached it a little sermon.

“You sit there and look at this bread. I sit here and look at you, and I hold this bread. And you stop still, and I stop still, while I count three. Now then — uno — ” the dog couldn’t bear these numerals, with their awful slowness. He snatched desperately. The man yelled and lost the bread, the dog, gulping, turned to creep away.

Then it began again.

“Come here! Come here! Didn’t I tell thee I would count three? *Già!* I said I would count three. Not one, but three. And to count three you need three numbers. Ha! Steady! Three numbers. *Uno — due E TRE!*” The last syllables were yelled so that the room rang again. The dog gave a mournful howl of excitement, missed the bread, groped for it, and fled.

The man was red with excitement, his eyes shining. He addressed the company at large. “I had a dog,” he said, “ah, a dog! And I would put a piece of bread on his nose, and say a verse. And he looked at me so!” The man put his face sideways. “And he looked at me so!” He gazed up under his brows. “And he talked to me so — o: *Zieu! Zieu!* — But he never moved. No, he never moved. If he sat with that bread on his nose for half an hour, and if tears ran down his face, he never moved — not till I said *three!* Then — ah!” The man tossed up his face, snapped the air with his mouth, and gulped an imaginary crust. “AH, that dog was trained...” The man of forty shook his head.

“*Vieni qua! Come here! Tweet! Come here!*”

He patted his fat knee, and the dog crept forward. The man held another piece of bread.

“Now,” he said to the dog, “listen! Listen. I am going to tell you something.

‘*Il soldato va alla guerra —* ’

“No — no, not yet. When I say *three!*”

‘Il soldato va alla guerra. Mangia male, dorme in terra — ’

“Listen. Be still. Quiet now. UNO — DUE — E — TRE!”

It came out in one simultaneous yell from the man, the dog in sheer bewilderment opened his jaws and let the bread go down his throat, and wagged his tail in agitated misery.

“Ah,” said the man, “you are learning. Come! Come here! Come! Now then! Now you know. So! So! Look at me so!”

The stout, good-looking man of forty bent forward. His face was flushed, the veins in his neck stood out. He talked to the dog, and imitated the dog. And very well indeed he reproduced something of the big, gentle, wistful subservience of the animal. The dog was his totem — the affectionate, self-mistrustful, warm-hearted hound.

So he started the rigmarole again. We put it into English. “Listen now. Listen! Let me tell it you.

‘So the soldier goes to the war! His food is rotten, he sleeps on the floor —

“Now! Now! No, you are not keeping quiet. Now! Now!

‘Il soldato va alla guerra Mangia male, dorme in terra — ’“

The verses, known to every Italian, were sung out in a singsong fashion. The audience listened as one man — or as one child — the rhyme chiming in every heart. They waited with excitement for the One — Two — and Three! The last two words were always ripped out with a tearing yell. I shall never forget the force of those syllables — E TRE! But the dog made a poor show — he only gobbled the bread and was uneasy.

This game lasted us a full hour: a full hour by the clock sat the whole room in intense silence, watching the man and the dog.

Our friends told us the man was the bus-inspector — their inspector. But they liked him. “Un bray’ uomo! Un bravo uomo! Eh si!” Perhaps they were a little uneasy, seeing him in his cups and hearing him yell so nakedly: AND THREE!

We talked rather sadly, wistfully. Young people, especially nice ones like the driver, are too sad and serious these days. The little conductor made big brown eyes at us, wistful too, and sad we were going.

For in the morning they were driving back again to Sorgono, over the old road, and we were going on, to Terranova, the port. But we promised to come back in the summer, when it was warmer. Then we should all meet again.

“Perhaps you will find us on the same course still. Who knows!” said the driver sadly.

VII. TO TERRANOVA AND THE STEAMER

The morning was very clear and blue. We were up betimes. The old dame of the inn very friendly this morning. We were going already! Oh, but we hadn't stayed long in Nuoro. Didn't we like it?

Yes, we like it. We would come back in the summer when it was warmer.

Ah, yes, she said, artists came in the summer. Yes, she agreed, Nuoro was a nice place — *simpatico, molto simpatico*. And really it is. And really she was an awfully, nice, capable, human old woman: and I had thought her a beldame when I saw her ironing.

She gave us good coffee and milk and bread, and we went out into the town. There was the real Monday morning atmosphere of an old, same-as-ever provincial town: the vacant feeling of work resumed after Sunday, rather reluctantly; nobody buying anything, nobody quite at grips with anything. The doors of the old-fashioned shops stood open: In Nuoro they have hardly reached the stage of window-displays. One must go inside, into the dark caves, to see what the goods are. Near the doorways of the drapers' shops stood rolls of that fine scarlet cloth, for the women's costumes. In a large tailor's window four women sat sewing, tailoring, and looking out of the window with eyes still Sunday-emancipated and mischievous. Detached men, some in the black-and-white, stood at the street corners, as if obstinately avoiding the current of work. Having had a day off, the salt taste of liberty still lingering on their lips, they were not going to be dragged so easily back into harness. I always sympathise with these rather sulky, forlorn males who insist on making another day of it. It shows a spark of spirit, still holding out against our over-harnessed world.

There is nothing to see in Nuoro: which, to tell the truth, is always a relief. Sights are an irritating bore. Thank heaven there isn't a bit of Perugino or anything Pisan in the place: that I know of. Happy is the town that has nothing to show. What a lot of stunts and affectations it saves! Life is then life, not museum-stuffing. One could saunter along the rather inert, narrow, Monday-morning street, and see the women having a bit of a gossip, and see an old crone with a basket of bread on her head, and see the unwilling ones hanging back from work, and the whole current of industry disinclined to flow. Life is life and things are things. I am sick of gaping things, even Peruginos. I have had my thrills from Carpaccio and Botticelli. But now I've had enough. But I can always look at an old, grey-bearded peasant in his earthy white drawers and his black waist-frill, wearing no coat or over-garment, but just crooking along beside his

little ox-wagon. I am sick of “things,” even Perugino.

The sight of the woman with the basket of bread reminded us that we wanted some food. So we searched for bread. None, if you please. It was Monday morning, eaten out. There would be bread at the forno, the oven. Where was the oven? Up the road and down a passage. I thought we should smell it. But no. We wandered back. Our friends had told us to take tickets early, for perhaps the bus would be crowded. So we bought yesterday’s pastry and little cakes, and slices of native sausage. And still no bread. I went and asked our old hostess.

“There is no fresh bread. It hasn’t come in yet,” she said.

“Never mind, give me stale.”

So she went and rummaged in a drawer.

“Oh dear, Oh dear, the women have eaten it all! But perhaps over there — ” she pointed down the street — ”they can give you some.”

They couldn’t.

I paid the bill — about twenty-eight francs, I think — and went out to look for the bus. There it was. In a dark little hole they gave me the long ticket-strips, first-class to Terranova. They cost some seventy francs the two. The q-b was still vainly, aimlessly looking along the street for bread.

“Ready when you are,” said our new driver rather snappily. He was a pale, cross-looking young man with brown eyes and fair “ginger” hair. So in we clambered, waved farewell to our old friends, whose bus was ready to roll away in the opposite direction. As we bumped past the “piazza” I saw Velveteens standing there, isolate, and still, apparently, scowling with unabated irritation.

I am sure he has money: why the first class yesterday, otherwise. And I’m sure she married him because he is a townsman with property.

Out we rolled, on our last Sardinian drive. The morning was of a bell-like beauty, blue and very lovely. Below on the right stretched the concave valley, tapestried with cultivation. Up into the morning light rose the high, humanless hills, with wild, treeless moor-slopes.

But there was no glass in the left window of the coupé, and the wind came howling in, cold enough. I stretched myself on the front seat, the q-b screwed herself into a corner, and we watched the land flash by. How well this new man drove! the long-nosed, freckled one with his gloomy brown eyes. How cleverly he changed gear, so that the automobile mewed and purred comfortably, like a live thing enjoying itself. And how dead he was to the rest of the world, wrapped in his gloom like a young bus-driving Hamlet. His answers to his mates were monosyllabic — or just no answers at all. He was one of those responsible, capable, morose souls, who do their work with silent perfection and look as if they were driving along the brink of doom, say a word to them and they’ll go

over the edge. But gentle *au fond*, of course. Fiction used to be fond of them: a sort of ginger-haired, young, mechanic Mr. Rochester who has even lost the Jane illusion.

Perhaps it was not fair to watch him so closely from behind.

His mate was a bit of a bounder, with one of those rakish military caps whose soft tops cock sideways or backwards. He was in Italian khaki, riding-breeches and puttees. He smoked his cigarette bounderishly: but at the same time, with peculiar gentleness, he handed one to the ginger Hamlet. Hamlet accepted it, and his mate held him a light as the bus swung on. They were like man and wife. The mate was the alert and wide-eyed Jane Eyre whom the ginger Mr. Rochester was not going to spoil in a hurry.

The landscape was different from yesterday's. As we dropped down the shallow, winding road from Nuoro, quite quickly the moors seemed to spread on either side, treeless, bushy, rocky, desert. How hot they must be in summer! One knows from Grazia Deledda's books.

A pony with a low trap was prancing unhappily in the roadside. We slowed down and slid harmlessly past. Then again, on we whizzed down the looped road, which turned back on itself as sharply as a snake that has been wounded. Hamlet darted the bus at the curves; then softly padded round like an angel: then off again for the next parabola.

We came out into wide, rather desolate, moorland valley spaces, with low rocks away to the left, and steep slopes, rocky-bushy, on the right. Sometimes groups of black-and-white men were working in the forlorn distances. A woman in the madder costume led a panniered ass along the wastes. The sun shone magnificently, already it was hotter here. The landscape had quite changed. These slopes looked east and south to the sea, they were sun-wild and sea-wild.

The first stop was where a wild, rough lane came down the hill to our road. At the corner stood a lonely house — and in the roadside the most battered, life-weary old carriage I have ever seen. The jaunty mate sorted out the post — the boy with the tattered-battered brown carriage and brown pony signed the book as we all stood in the roadway. There was a little wait for a man who was fetching up another parcel. The postbag and parcels from the tattered carriage were received and stowed and signed for. We walked up and down in the sun to get warm. The landscape was wild and open round about.

Pip! goes Mr. Rochester, peremptorily, at the horn. Amazing how obediently we scuffle in. Away goes the bus, rushing towards the sea. Already one felt that peculiar glare in the half-way heavens, that intensification of the light in the lower sky, which is caused by the sea to sunward.

Away in front three girls in brown costume are walking along the side of the

white high-road, going with panniers towards a village up a slight incline. They hear us, turn round, and instantly go off their heads, exactly like chickens in the road. They fly towards us, crossing the road, and swifter than any rabbits they scuttle, one after another, into a deep sidetrack, like a deep ditch at right angles to the road. There, as we roll past, they are all crouched, peering out at us fearfully, like creatures from their hole. The bus mate salutes them with a shout, and we roll on towards the village on the low summit.

It is a small, stony, hen-scratched place of poor people. We roll on to a standstill. There is a group of poor people. The women wear the dark-brown costume, and again the bolero has changed shape. It is a rather fantastic low corset, curiously shapen; and originally, apparently, made of wonderful elaborate brocade. But look at it now.

There is an altercation because a man wants to get into the bus with two little black pigs, each of which is wrapped in a little sack, with its face and ears appearing like a flower from a wrapped bouquet. He is told that he must pay the fare for each pig as if it were a Christian. *Cristo del mondo!* A pig, a little pig, and paid for as if it were a Christian. He dangles the pig-bouquets, one from each hand, and the little pigs open their black mouths and squeal with self-conscious appreciation of the excitement they are causing. *Dio benedetto!* it is a chorus. But the bus mate is inexorable. Every animal, even if it were a mouse, must be paid for and have a ticket as if it were a Christian. The pig-master recoils stupefied with indignation, a pig-bouquet under each arm. “How much do you charge for the fleas you carry?” asks a sarcastic youth.

A woman sitting sewing a soldier’s tunic into a little jacket for her urchin, and thus beating the sword into a ploughshare, stitches unconcernedly in the sun. Round-cheeked but rather slatternly damsels giggle. The pig-master, speechless with fury, slings the pig-bouquets, like two bottles one on either side the saddle of the ass whose halter is held by a grinning but also malevolent girl: malevolent against pig-prices, that is. The pigs, looking abroad from their new situation, squeal the eternal pig-protest against an insufferable humanity.

“Andiamo! Andiamo!” says ginger Mr. Rochester in his quiet but intense voice. The bus-mate scrambles up and we charge once more into the strong light to seaward.

In we roll, into Orosei, a dilapidated, sun-smitten, godforsaken little town not far from the sea. We descend in piazza. There is a great, false baroque *façade* to a church, up a wavering vast mass of steps: and at the side a wonderful jumble of roundnesses with a jumble of round tiled roofs, peaked in the centre. It must have been some sort of convent. But it is eminently what they call a “painter’s bit” — that pallid, big baroque face, at the top of the slow incline, and the very

curious dark building at the side of it, with its several dark-tiled round roofs, like pointed hats, at varying altitudes. The whole space has a strange Spanish look, neglected, arid, yet with a bigness and a dilapidated dignity and a stoniness which carry one back to the Middle Ages, when life was violent and Orosei was no doubt a port and a considerable place. Probably it had bishops.

The sun came hot into the wide piazza; with its pallid heavy *façade* up on the stony incline on one side, and arches and a dark great courtyard and outer stairways of some unknown building away on the other, the road entering downhill from the inland, and dropping out below to the sea-marshes, and with the impression that once some single power had had the place in grip, had given this centre an architectural unity and splendour now lost and forgotten. Orosei was truly fascinating.

But the inhabitants were churlish. We went into a sort of bar-place, very primitive, and asked for bread.

“Bread alone?” said the churl.

“If you please.”

“There isn’t any,” he answered.

“Oh — where can we get some then?”

“You can’t get any.”

“Really!”

And we couldn’t. People stood about glum, not friendly.

There was a second great automobile, ready to set off for Tortoli, far to the south, on the east coast. Mandas is the railway junction both for Sorgono and Tortoli. The two buses stood near and communed. We prowled about the dead, almost extinct town — or call it village. Then Mr. Rochester began to pip his horn peremptorily, so we scuffled in.

The post was stowed away. A native in black broadcloth came running and sweating, carrying an ox-blood suitcase, and said we must wait for his brother-in-law, who was a dozen yards away. Ginger Mr. Rochester sat on his driver’s throne and glared in the direction whence the brother-in-law must come. His brow knitted irritably, his long, sharp nose did not promise much patience. He made the horn roar like a sea-cow. But no brother-in-law.

“I’m going to wait no longer,” said he,

“Oh, a minute, a minute! That won’t do us any harm,” expostulated his mate. No answer from the long-faced, long-nosed ginger Hamlet. He sat statuesque, but with black eyes looking daggers down the still void road.

“*Eh va bene*,” he murmured through closed lips, and leaned forward grimly for the starting handle.

“Patience — patience — patience a moment — why — ” cried the mate.

“Per l’amor di Dio!” cried the black broadcloth man, simply sizzling and dancing in anguish on the road, round the suitcase, which stood in the dust. “Don’t go! God’s love, don’t start. He’s got to catch the boat. He’s got to be in Rome to-morrow. He won’t be a second. He’s here, he’s here, he’s here!”

This startled the fate-fixed, sharp-nosed dryer. He released the handle and looked round, with dark and glowering eyes. No one in sight. The few glum natives stood round unmoved. Thunder came into the gloomy dark eyes of the Rochester. Absolutely nobody in sight. Click! went his face into a look of almost seraphic peace, as he pulled off the brakes. We were on an incline, and insidiously, oh, most subtly the great bus started to lean forwards and steal into motion.

“Oh, *ma che!* — what a will you’ve got!” cried the mate, clambering in to the side of the now seraphic-looking Rochester.

“Love of God — God!” yelled the broadcloth, seeing the bus melt forwards and gather momentum. He put his hands up as if to arrest it, and yelled in a wild howl: “O Beppin’! Beppin — O!”

But in vain. Already we had left the little groups of onlookers behind. We were rolling downwards out of the piazza. Broadcloth had seized the bag and was running beside us in agony. Out of the piazza we rolled, Rochester had not put on the engines and we were just simply rolling down the gentle incline by the will of God. Into the dark outlet-street we melted, towards the still invisible sea.

Suddenly a yell — ”OO — ahh!”

“È qua! È qua! È qua! È qua!” gasped broadcloth four times. “He’s here!” And then: “Beppin’ — she’s going, she’s going!”

Beppin’ appeared, a middle-aged man also in black broadcloth, with a very scrubby chin and a bundle, running towards us on fat legs. He was perspiring, but his face was expressionless and innocent-looking. With a sardonic flicker of a grin, half of spite, half of relief, Rochester put on the brakes again, and we stopped in the street. A woman tottered up panting and holding her breast. Now for farewells.

“Andiamo!” said Rochester curtly, looking over his shoulder and making his fine nose curl with malice. And instantly he took off the brakes again. The fat woman shoved Beppin’ in, gasping farewells, the brother-in-law handed in the ox-blood-red suitcase, tottering behind, and the bus surged savagely out of Orosei.

Almost in a moment we had left the town on its slope, and there below us was a river winding through marshy flats to the sea, to where small white surf broke on a flat isolated beach, a quarter of a mile away. The river ran rapidly between

stones and then between belts of high sere reeds, high as a man. These tall reeds advanced almost into the slow, horizontal sea, from which stood up a white glare of light, massive light over the low Mediterranean.

Quickly we came down to the river-level, and rolled over a bridge. Before us, between us and the sea rose another hill, almost like a wall with a flat top, running horizontal, perfectly flat, parallel with the sea edge, a sort of narrow long plateau. For a moment we were in the wide scoop of the river-bed. Orosei stood on the bluff behind us.

Away to the right the flat river marshes with the thick dead reeds met the flat and shining sea, river and sea were one water, the waves rippled tiny and soft-foot into the stream. To the left there was great loveliness. The bed of the river curved upwards and inland, and there was cultivation: but particularly, there were noble almond trees in full blossom. How beautiful they were, their pure, silvery pink gleaming so nobly, like a transfiguration, tall and perfect in that strange cradled river-bed parallel with the sea. Almond trees were in flower beneath grey Orosei, almond trees came near the road, and we could see the hot eyes of the individual blossoms, almond trees stood on the upward slope before us. And they had flowered in such noble beauty there, in that trough where the sun fell magnificent and the sea-glare whitened all the air as with a sort of God-presence, they gleamed in their incandescent sky-rosiness. One could hardly see their iron trunks, in this weird valley.

But already we had crossed, and were charging up the great road that was cut straight, slant-wise along the side of the sea-hill, like a stairway outside the side of a house. So the bus turned southward to run up this stairway slant, to get to the top of the sea's long table-land. So, we emerged: and there was the Mediterranean rippling against the black rocks not so very far away below on our right. For, once on the long table-land the road turned due north, a long white dead-straight road running between strips of moorland, wild and bushy. The sea was in the near distance, blue, blue, and beating with light. It seemed more light than watery. And on the left was the wide trough of the valley, where almond trees like clouds in a wind seemed to poise sky-rosy upon the pale, sun-pale land, and beyond which Orosei clustered its lost grey houses on the bluff. Oh, wonderful Orosei with your almonds and your reedy river, throbbing, throbbing with light and the sea's nearness, and all so lost, in a world long gone by, lingering as legends linger on. It is hard to believe that it is real. It seems so long since life left it and memory transfigured it into pure glamour, lost away like a lost pearl on the east Sardinian coast. Yet there it is, with a few grumpy inhabitants who won't even give you a crust of bread. And probably there is malaria — almost sure. And it would be hell to have to live there for a month.

Yet for a moment, that January morning, how wonderful, oh, the timeless glamour of those Middle Ages when men were lordly and violent and shadowed with death.

“Timor mortis conturbat me.”

The road ran along by the sea, above the sea, swinging gently up and down, and running on to a sea-encroaching hilly promontory in the distance. There were no high lands. The valley was left behind, and moors surrounded us, wild, desolate, uninhabited and uninhabitable moors sweeping up gently on the left, and finishing where the land dropped low and clifflike to the sea on the right. No life was now in sight: even no ship upon the pale blue sea. The great globe of the sky was unblemished and royal in its blueness and its ringing cerulean light. Over the moors a great hawk hovered. Rocks cropped out. It was a savage, dark-bushed, sky-exposed land, forsaken to the sea and the sun.

We were alone in the coupé. The bus-mate had made one or two sets at us, but he rather confused us. He was young — about twenty-two or three. He was quite good-looking, with his rakish military cap and his well-knitted figure in military clothes. But he had dark eyes that seemed to ask too much, and his manner of approach was abrupt, persistent, and disconcerting. Already he had asked us where we were going, where we lived, whence we came, of what nationality we were, and was I a painter. Already he knew so much. Further we rather fought shy of him. We ate those pale Nuoro pastries — they were just flaky pastry, good, but with nothing inside but a breath of air. And we gnawed slices of very highly-flavoured Nuoro sausage. And we drank the tea. And we were very hungry, for it was past noon, and we had eaten as good as nothing. The sun was magnificent in heaven, we rushed at a great, purring speed along that moorland road just above the sea.

And then the bus-mate climbed in to share the coupé with us. He put his dark, beseeching and yet persistent eyes on us, sat plumb in front of us, his knees squared, and began to shout awkward questions in a strong curious voice. Of course it was very difficult to hear, for the great rushing bus made much noise. We had to try to yell in our Italian — and he was as awkward as we were.

However, although it said “Smoking Forbidden” he offered us both cigarettes, and insisted we should smoke with him. Easiest to submit. He tried to point us out features in the landscape; but there were none to point, except that, where the hill ran to sea out of the moor, and formed a cape, he said there was a house away under the cliffs where coastguards lived. Nothing else.

Then, however, he launched. He asked once more was I English and was the q-b German. We said it was so. And then he started the old story. Nations popped up and down again like Punch and Judy. Italy — l’Italia — she had no

quarrel with La Germania — never had had — no — no, good friends the two nations. But once the war was started, Italy had to come in. For why. Germany would beat France, occupy her lands, march down and invade Italy. Best then join the war whilst the enemy was only invading somebody else's territory.

They are perfectly naïve about it. That's what I like. He went on to say that he was a soldier: he had served eight years in the Italian cavalry. Yes, he was a cavalryman, and had been all through the war. But he had not therefore any quarrel with Germany. No — war was war, and it was over. So let it be over.

But France — *ma la Francia!* Here he sat forward on his seat, with his face near ours, and his pleading-dog's eyes suddenly took a look of quite irrational blazing rage. France! There wasn't a man in Italy who wasn't dying to get at the throat of France. France! Let there be war, and every Italian would leap to arms, even the old. Even the old — *anche i vecchi*. Yes, there must be war — with France. It was coming: it was bound to come. Every Italian was waiting for it. Waiting to fly at the French throat. For why? Why? He had served two years on the French front, and he knew why. Ah, the French! For arrogance, for insolence, Dio! — they were not to be borne. The French — they thought themselves lords of the world — *signori del mondo!* Lords of the world, and masters of the world. Yes. They thought themselves no less — and what are they? Monkeys! Monkeys! Not better than monkeys. But let there be war, and Italy would show them. Italy would give them *signori del mondo!* Italy was pining for war — all, all, pining for war. With no one, with no one but France. Ah, with no one — Italy loved everybody else — but France! France!

We let him shout it all out, till he was at the end of it. The passion and energy of him was amazing. He was like one possessed. I could only wonder. And wonder again. For it is curious what fearful passions these pleading, wistful souls fall into when they feel they have been insulted. It was evident he felt he had been insulted, and he went just beside himself. But dear chap, he shouldn't speak so loudly for all Italy — even the old. The bulk of Italian men are only too anxious to beat their bayonets into cigarette-holders, and smoke the cigarette of eternal and everlasting peace, to coincide at all with our friend. Yet there he was — raging at me in the bus as we dashed along the coast.

And then, after a space of silence, he became sad again, wistful, and looked at us once more with those pleading brown eyes, beseeching, beseeching — he knew not what: and I'm sure I didn't know. Perhaps what he really wants is to be back on a horse in a cavalry regiment: even at war.

But no, it comes out, what he thinks he wants.

When are we going to London? And are there many motorcars in England? — many, many? In America too? Do they want men in America? I say no, they

have unemployment out there: they are going to stop immigration in April: or at least cut it down. Why? he asks sharply. Because they have their own unemployment problem. And the q-b quotes how many millions of Europeans want to emigrate to the United States. His eye becomes gloomy. Are all nations of Europe going to be forbidden? he asks. Yes — and already the Italian Government will give no more passports for America — to emigrants. No passports? then you can't go? You can't go, say I.

By this time his hot-souled eagerness and his hot, beseeching eyes have touched the q-b. She asks him what he wants. And from his gloomy face it comes out in a rap. "*Andare fuori dell' Italia.*" To go out of Italy. To go out — away — to go away — to go away. It has become a craving, a neurasthenia with them.

Where is his home? His home is at a village a few miles ahead — here on this coast. We are coming to it soon. There is his home. And a few miles inland from the village he also has a property: he also has land. But he doesn't want to work it. He doesn't want it. In fact he won't bother with it. He hates the land, he detests looking after vines. He can't even bring himself to try any more.

What does he want then?

He wants to leave Italy, to go abroad — as a chauffeur. Again the long beseeching look, as of a distraught, pleading animal. He would prefer to be the chauffeur of a gentleman. But he would drive a bus, he would do anything — in England.

Now he has launched it. Yes, I say, but in England also we have more men than jobs. Still he looks at me with his beseeching eyes — so desperate, too — and so young — and so full of energy — and so longing to *devote* himself — to devote himself: or else to go off in an unreasonable paroxysm against the French. To my horror I feel he is believing in my goodness of heart. And as for motorcars, it is all I can do to own a pair of boots, so how am I to set about employing a *chauffeur*?

We have all gone quiet again. So at last he climbs back and takes his seat with the driver once more. The road is still straight, swinging on through the moorland strip by the sea. And he leans to the silent, nerve-tense Mr. Rochester, pleading again. And at length Mr. Rochester edges aside, and lets him take the driving wheel. And so now we are all in the hands of our friend the bus-mate. He drives — not very well, it is evident he is learning. The bus can't quite keep in the grooves of this wild bare road. And he shuts off when we slip down a hill — and there is a great muddle on the upslope when he tries to change gear. But Mr. Rochester sits squeezed and silently attentive in his corner. He puts out his hand and swings the levers. There is no fear that he will let anything go wrong. I

would trust him to drive me down the bottomless pit and up the other side. But still the beseeching mate holds the steering wheel. And on we rush, rather uncertainly and hesitatingly now. And thus we come to the bottom of a hill where the road gives a sudden curve. My heart rises an inch in my breast. I know he can't do it. And he can't, oh, Lord — but the quiet hand of the freckled Rochester takes the wheel, we swerve on. And the bus-mate gives up, and the nerve-silent driver resumes control.

But the bus-mate now feels at home with us. He clammers back into the coupé, and when it is too painfully noisy to talk, he simply sits and looks at us with brown, pleading eyes. Miles and miles and miles goes this coast road, and never a village. Once or twice a sort of lonely watch-house and soldiers lying about by the road. But never a halt. Everywhere moorland and desert, uninhabited.

And we are faint with fatigue and hunger and this relentless travelling. When, oh, when shall we come to Siniscola, where we are due to eat our midday meal? Oh, yes, says the mate. There is an inn at Siniscola where we can eat what we like. Siniscola — Siniscola! We feel we must get down, we must eat, it is past one o'clock and the glaring light and the rushing loneliness are still about us.

But it is behind the hill in front. We see the hill. Yes. Behind it is Siniscola. And down there on the beach are the Bagni di Siniscola, where many forestieri, strangers, come in the summer. Therefore we set high hopes on Siniscola. From the town to the sea, two miles, the bathers ride on asses. Sweet place. And it is coming near — really near. There are stone-fenced fields — even stretches of moor fenced off. There are vegetables in a little field with a stone wall — there is a strange white track through the moor to a forsaken sea-coast. We are near.

Over the brow of the low hill — and there it is, a grey huddle of a village with two towers. There it is, we are there. Over the cobbles we bump, and pull up at the side of the street. This is Siniscola, and here we eat.

We drop out of the weary bus. The mate asks a man to show us the inn — the man says he won't, muttering. So a boy is deputed — and he consents. This is the welcome.

And I can't say much for Siniscola. It is just a narrow, crude, stony place, hot in the sun, cold in the shade. In a minute or two we were at the inn, where a fat young man was just dismounting from his brown pony and fastening it to a ring beside the door.

The inn did not look promising — the usual cold room opening gloomily on the gloomy street. The usual long table, with this time a foully blotched tablecloth. And two young peasant madams in charge, in the brown costume, rather sordid, and with folded white cloths on their heads. The younger was in

attendance. She was a full-bosomed young hussy, and would be very queenly and cocky. She held her nose in the air, and seemed ready to jibe at any order. It takes one some time to get used to this cocky, assertive behaviour of the young damsels, the who'll-tread-on-the-tail-of-my-skirt bearing of the hussies. But it is partly a sort of crude defensiveness and shyness, partly it is barbaric *méfiance* or mistrust, and partly, without doubt, it is a tradition with Sardinian women that they must hold their own and be ready to hit first. This young sludge-queen was all hit. She flounced her posterior round the table, planking down the lumps of bread on the foul cloth with an air of take-it-as-a-condescension-that-I-wait-on-you, a subdued grin lurking somewhere on her face. It is not meant to be offensive: yet it is so. Truly, it is just uncouthness. But when one is tired and hungry...

We were not the only feeders. There was the man off the pony, and a sort of workman or porter or dazio official with him — and a smart young man: and later our Hamlet driver. Bit by bit the young damsel planked down bread, plates, spoons, glasses, bottles of black wine, whilst we sat at the dirty table in uncouth constraint and looked at the hideous portrait of His reigning Majesty of Italy. And at length came the inevitable soup. And with it the sucking chorus. The little maialino at Mandas had been a good one. But the smart young man in the country beat him. As water clutters and slavers down a choky gutter, so did his soup travel upwards into his mouth with one long sucking stream of noise, intensified as the bits of cabbage, etc., found their way through the orifice.

They did all the talking — the young men. They addressed the sludge-queen curtly and disrespectfully as if to say: “What’s she up to?” Her airs were finely thrown away. Still she showed off. What else was there to eat? There was the meat that had been boiled for the soup. We knew what that meant. I had as lief eat the foot of an old worsted stocking. Nothing else, you sludge queen? No, what do you want anything else for? Beefsteak — what’s the good of asking for beefsteak or any other steak on a Monday. Go to the butcher’s and see for yourself.

The Hamlet, the pony rider, and the porter had the faded and tired chunks of boiled meat. The smart young man ordered eggs in padella — two eggs fried with a little butter. We asked for the same. The smart young man got his first — and of course they were warm and liquid. So he fell upon them with a fork, and once he had got hold of one end of the eggs he just sucked them up in a prolonged and violent suck, like a long thin, ropy drink being sucked upwards from the little pan. It was a genuine exhibition. Then he fell upon the bread with loud chews.

What else was there? A miserable little common orange. So much for the

dinner. Was there cheese? No. But the sludge-queen — they are quite good-natured really — held a conversation in dialect with the young men, which I did not try to follow. Our pensive driver translated that there was cheese, but it wasn't good so they wouldn't offer it us. And the pony man interpolated that they didn't like to offer us anything that was not of the best. He said it in all sincerity — after such a meal. This roused my curiosity, so I asked for the cheese whether or not. And it wasn't so bad after all.

This meal cost fifteen francs, for the pair of us.

We made our way back to the bus, through the uncouth men who stood about. To tell the truth, strangers are not popular nowadays — not anywhere. Everybody has a grudge against them at first sight. This grudge may or may not wear off on acquaintance.

The afternoon had become hot — hot as an English June. And we had various other passengers — for one a dark-eyed, long-nosed priest who showed his teeth when he talked. There was not much room in the coupé, so the goods were stowed upon the little rack.

With the strength of the sun, and the six or seven people in it, the coupé became stifling. The q-b opened her window. But the priest, one of the loud-talking sort, said that a draught was harmful, very harmful, so he put it up again. He was one of the gregarious sort, a loud talker, nervy really, very familiar with all the passengers. And everything did one harm — *_fa male, fa male. A draught fa male, fa molto male. Non è vero?_* this to all the men from Siniscola. And they all said “Yes — yes.”

The bus-mate clambered into the coupé, to take the tickets of the second-class passengers in the rotondo, through the little wicket. There was great squeezing and shouting and reckoning change. And then we stopped at a halt, and he dashed down with the post and the priest got down for a drink with the other men. The Hamlet driver sat stiff in his seat. He pipped the horn. He pipped again, with decision. Men came clambering in. But it looked as if the offensive priest would be left behind. The bus started venomously, the priest came running, his gown flapping, wiping his lips.

He dropped into his seat with a cackling laugh, showing his long teeth. And he said that it was as well to take a drink, to fortify the stomach. To travel with the stomach uneasy did one harm; *fa male, fa male — non è vero?* Chorus of “Yes.”

The bus-mate resumed his taking the tickets through the little wicket, thrusting his rear amongst us. As he stood like this, down fell his sheepskin-lined military overcoat on the q-b's head. He was filled with grief. He folded it and placed it on the seat as a sort of cushion for her, oh, so gently! And how he would love to devote himself to a master and mistress.

He sat beside me, facing the q-b, and offered us an acid-drop. We took the acid-drop. He smiled with zealous yearning at the q-b, and resumed his conversations. Then he offered us cigarettes — insisted on our taking cigarettes.

The priest with the long teeth looked sideways at the q-b, seeing her smoking. Then he fished out a long cigar, bit it, and spat. He was offered a cigarette. — But no, cigarettes were harmful: *fanno male*. The paper was bad for the health: oh, very bad. A pipe or a cigar. So he lit his long cigar and spat large spits on the floor, continually.

Beside me sat a big, bright-eyed, rather good-looking but foolish man. Hearing me speak to the q-b, he said in confidence to the priest: “Here are two Germans — eh? Look at them. The woman smoking. These are a couple of those that were interned here. Sardinia can do without them now.”

Germans in Italy at the outbreak of the war were interned in Sardinia, and as far as one hears, they were left very free and happy, and treated very well, the Sardinians having been generous as all proud people are. But now our bright-eyed fool made a great titter through the bus: quite unaware that we understood. He said nothing offensive: but that sort of tittering exultation of common people who think they have you at a disadvantage annoyed me. However, I kept still to hear what they would say. But it was only trivialities about the Germans having nearly all gone now, their being free to travel, their coming back to Sardinia because they liked it better than Germany. Oh, yes — they all wanted to come back. They all wanted to come back to Sardinia. Oh, yes, they knew where they were well off. They knew their own advantage. Sardinia was this, that, and the other of advantageousness, and the Sardi were decent people. It is just as well to put in a word on one’s own behalf occasionally. As for la Germania — she was down, down: *bassa*. What did one pay for bread in Germany? Five francs a kilo, my boy.

The bus stopped again, and they trooped out into the hot sun. The priest scuffled round the corner this time. Not to go round the corner was no doubt harmful. We waited. A frown came between the bus Hamlet’s brows. He looked nerve-worn and tired. It was about three o’clock. We had to wait for a man from a village, with the post. And he did not appear.

“I am going! I won’t wait,” said the driver.

“Wait — wait a minute,” said the mate, pouring oil. And he went round to look. But suddenly the bus started, with a vicious lurch. The mate came flying and hung on to the foot-board. He had really almost been left. The driver glanced round sardonically to see if he were there. The bus flew on. The mate shook his head in deprecation.

“He’s a bit nervoso, the driver,” said the q-b. “A bit out of temper!”

“Ah, poor chap!” said the good-looking young mate, leaning forward and making such beseeching eyes of hot tolerance. “One has to be sorry for him. Persons like him, they suffer so much from themselves, how should one be angry with them! *Poverino*. We must have sympathy.”

Never was such a language of sympathy as the Italian. *Poverino! Poverino!* They are never happy unless they are sympathising pityingly with somebody. And I rather felt that I was thrown in with the poverini who had to be pitied for being nervosi. Which did not improve my temper.

However, the bus-mate suddenly sat on the opposite seat between the priest and the q-b. He turned over his official note book, and began to write on the back cover very carefully, in the flourishing Italian hand. Then he tore off what he had written, and with a very bright and zealous look he handed me the paper saying: “You will find me a post in England, when you go in the summer! You will find me a place in London as a chauffeur — !”

“If I can,” said I. “But it is not easy.”

He nodded his head at me with the most complete bright confidence, quite sure now that he had settled his case perfectly.

On the paper he had written his name and his address, and if anyone would like him as chauffeur they have only to say so. On the back of the scrap of paper the inevitable goodwill: *Auguri infniti e buon Viaggio*. Infinite good wishes and a good journey.

I folded the paper and put it in my waistcoat pocket, feeling a trifle disconcerted by my new responsibility. He was such a dear fellow and such bright trustful eyes.

This much achieved, there was a moment of silence. And the bus-mate turned to take a ticket of a fat, comfortable man who had got in at the last stop. There was a bit of flying conversation.

“Where are they from?” asked the good-looking stupid man next to me, inclining his head in our direction.

“Londra,” said our friend, with stern satisfaction: and they have said so often to one another that London is the greatest city in the world, that now the very word Londra conveys it all. You should have seen the blank little-boy look come over the face of the big handsome fellow on hearing that we were citizens of the greatest city in the world.

“And they understand Italian?” he asked, rather nipped.

“Sicuro!” said our friend scornfully. “How shouldn’t they?”

“Ah!” My large neighbour left his mouth open for a few moments. And then another sort of smile came on to his face. He began to peep at us sideways from his brown eyes, brightly, and was henceforth itching to get into conversation

with the citizens of the world's mistress-city. His look of semi-impudence was quite gone, replaced by a look of ingratiating admiration.

Now I ask you, is this to be borne? Here I sit, and he talks half-impudently and patronisingly about me. And here I sit, and he is glegging at me as if he saw signs of an aureole under my grey hat. All in ten minutes. And just because, instead of *la Germania* I turn out to be *l'Inghilterra*. I might as well be a place on a map, or a piece of goods with a trade-mark. So little perception of the actual me! so much going by labels! I now could have kicked him harder. I would have liked to say I was ten times German, to see the fool change his smirk again.

The priest now chimed up, that he had been to America. He had been to America and hence he dreaded not the crossing from Terranuova di Sardegna to Civit  Vecchia. For he had crossed the great Atlantic.

Apparently, however, the natives had all heard this song of the raven before, so he spat largely on the floor. Whereupon the new fat neighbour asked him was it true that the Catholic Church was now becoming the one Church in the United States? And the priest said there was no doubt about it.

The hot afternoon wore on. The coast was rather more inhabited, but we saw practically no villages. The view was rather desolate. From time to time we stopped at a sordid-looking canteen house. From time to time we passed natives riding on their ponies, and sometimes there was an equestrian exhibition as the rough, strong little beasts reared and travelled rapidly backwards, away from the horrors of our great automobile. But the male riders sat heavy and unshakeable, with Sardinian male force. Everybody in the bus laughed, and we passed, looking back to see the pony still corkscrewing, but in vain, in the middle of the lonely, grass-bordered high-road.

The bus-mate climbed in and out, coming in to sit near us. He was like a dove which has at last found an olive bough to nest in. And we were the olive bough in this world of waste waters. Alas, I felt a broken reed. But he sat so serenely near us, now, like a dog that has found a master.

The afternoon was declining, the bus pelted on at a great rate. Ahead we saw the big lump of the island of Tavolara, a magnificent mass of rock which fascinated me by its splendid, weighty form. It looks like a headland, for it apparently touches the land. There it rests at the sea's edge, in this lost afternoon world. Strange how this coast-country does not belong to our present-day world. As we rushed along we saw steamers, two steamers, steering south, and one sailing ship coming from Italy. And instantly, the steamers seemed like our own familiar world. But still this coast-country was forsaken, forgotten, not included. It just is not included.

How tired one gets of these long, long rides! It seemed we should never come

up to Tavolara. But we did. We came right near to it, and saw the beach with the waves rippling undisturbed, saw the narrow waters between the rock-lump and the beach. For now the road was down at sea-level. And we are not very far from Terranova. Yet all seemed still forsaken, outside of the world's life.

The sun was going down, very red and strong, away inland. In the bus all were silent, subsiding into the pale travel-sleep. We charged along the flat road, down on a plain now. And dusk was gathering heavily over the land.

We saw the high-road curve flat upon the plain. It was the harbour head. We saw a magic, landlocked harbour, with masts and dark land encircling a glowing basin. We even saw a steamer lying at the end of a long, thin bank of land, in the shallow, shining, wide harbour, as if wrecked there. And this was our steamer. But no, it looked in the powerful glow of the sunset like some lonely steamer laid up in some landlocked bay away at Spitzbergen, towards the North Pole: a solemn, mysterious, blue-landed bay, lost, lost to mankind.

Our bus-mate came and told us we were to sit in the bus till the post-work was done, then we should be driven to the hotel where we could eat, and then he would accompany us on the town omnibus to the boat. We need not be on board till eight o'clock: and now it was something after five. So we sat still while the bus rushed and the road curved and the view of the weird, landlocked harbour changed, though the bare masts of ships in a bunch still pricked the upper glow, and the steamer lay away out, as if wrecked on a sandbank, and dark, mysterious land with bunched hills circled round, dark blue and wintry in a golden after-light, while the great, shallow-seeming bay of water shone like a mirror.

In we charged, past a railway, along the flat darkening road into a flat God-lost town of dark houses, on the marshy bay-head. It felt more like a settlement than a town. But it was Terranova-Pausanias. And after bumping and rattling down a sombre uncouth, barren-seeming street, we came up with a jerk at a doorway — which was the post-office. Urchins, mud-larks, were screaming for the luggage. Everybody got out and set off towards the sea, the urchins carrying luggage. We sat still.

Till I couldn't bear it. I did not want to stay in the automobile another moment, and I did not, I did not want to be accompanied by our new-found friend to the steamer. So I burst out, and the q-b followed. She too was relieved to escape the new attachment, though she had a great *tendre* for him. But in the end one runs away from one's *tendres* much harder and more precipitately than from one's *durs*.

The mud-larking urchins fell upon us. Had we any more luggage — were we going to the steamer? I asked how one went to the steamer — did one walk? I thought perhaps it would be necessary to row out. You go on foot, or in a

carriage, or in an aeroplane, said an impudent brat. How far? Ten minutes. Could one go on board at once? Yes, certainly.

So, in spite of the q-b's protests, I handed the sack to a wicked urchin, to be led. She wanted us to go alone — but I did not know the way, and am wary of stumbling into entanglements in these parts.

I told the bus-Hamlet, who was abstract with nerve fatigue, please to tell his comrade that I would not forget the commission: and I tapped my waitscoat pocket, where the paper lay over my heart. He briefly promised — and we escaped. We escaped any further friendship.

I bade the mud-lark lead me to the telegraph office: which of course was quite remote from the post-office. Shouldering the sack, and clamouring for the kitchenino, which the q-b stuck to, he marched forward. By his height he was ten years old: by his face with its evil mud-lark pallor and good looks, he was forty. He wore a cut-down soldier's tunic which came nearly to his knees, was barefoot, and sprightly with that alert mud-larking quickness which has its advantages.

So we went down a passage and climbed a stair and came to an office where one would expect to register births and deaths. But the urchin said it was the telegraph office. No sign of life. Peering through the wicket I saw a fat individual seated writing in the distance. Feeble lights relieved the big, barren, official spaces — I wonder the fat official wasn't afraid to be up here alone.

He made no move. I banged the shutter and demanded a telegraph blank. His shoulders went up to his ears, and he plainly intimated his attention to let us wait. But I said loudly to the urchin: "Is that the telegraph official?" and the urchin said: "Si signore" — so the fat individual had to come.

After which considerable delay, we set off again. The bus, thank heaven, had gone, the savage dark street was empty of friends. We turned away to the harbour front. It was dark now. I saw a railway near at hand — a bunch of dark masts — the steamer showing a few lights, far down at the tip of a long spit of land, remote in mid-harbour. And so off we went, the barefoot urchin twinkling a few yards ahead, on the road that followed the spit of land. The spit was wide enough to carry this road, and a railway. On the right was a silent house apparently built on piles in the harbour. Away far down in front leaned our glimmering steamer, and a little train was shunting trucks among the low sheds beside it. Night had fallen, and the great stars flashed. Orion was in the air, and his dog-star after him. We followed on down the dark bar between the silent, lustrous water. The harbour was smooth as glass, and gleaming like a mirror. Hills came round encircling it entirely — dark land ridging up and lying away out, even to seaward. One was not sure which was exactly seaward. The dark

encircling of the land seemed stealthy, the hills had a remoteness, guarding the waters in the silence. Perhaps the great mass away beyond was Tavolara again. It seemed like some lumpish berg guarding an arctic, locked-up bay where ships lay dead.

On and on we followed the urchin, till the town was left behind, until it also twinkled a few meagre lights out of its low, confused blackness at the bay-head, across the waters. We had left the ship-masts and the settlement. The urchin padded on, only turning now and again and extending a thin, eager hand towards the kitchenino. Especially when some men were advancing down the railway he wanted it: the q-b's carrying it was a slur on his prowess. So the kitchenino was relinquished, and the lark strode on satisfied.

Till at last we came to the low sheds that squatted between the steamer and the railway-end. The lark led me into one, where a red-cap was writing. The cap let me wait some minutes before informing me that this was the goods office — the ticket office was further on. The lark flew at him and said "Then you've changed it, have you?" And he led me on to another shed, which was just going to shut up. Here they finally had the condescension to give me two tickets — a hundred and fifty francs the two. So we followed the lark who strode like Scipio Africanus up the gangway with the sack.

It was quite a small ship. The steward put me in number one cabin — the q-b in number seven. Each cabin had four berths. Consequently man and woman must separate rigorously on this ship. Here was a blow for the q-b, who knows what Italian female fellow-passengers can be. However, there we were. All the cabins were down below, and all, for some reason, inside — no portholes outside. It was hot and close down below already. I pitched the sack on my berth, and there stood the lark on the red carpet at the door.

I gave him three francs. He looked at it as if it were my death-warrant. He peered at the paper in the light of the lamp. Then he extended his arm with a gesture of superb insolence, flinging me back my gold without a word.

"How!" said I. "Three francs are quite enough."

"Three francs — two kilometers — and three pieces of luggage! No, signore! No! Five francs. Cinque franchi!" And averting his pallid, old mud-larking face, and flinging his hand out at me, he stood the image of indignant repudiation. And truly, he was no taller than my upper waistcoat pocket. The brat! The brat! He was such an actor, and so impudent, that I wavered between wonder and amusement and a great inclination to kick him up the steps. I decided not to waste my energy being angry.

"What a beastly little boy! What a *horrid* little boy! What a horrid little boy! Really — a little thief. A little swindler!" I mused aloud.

“Swindler!” he quavered after me. And he was beaten.

“Swindler” doubled him up: that and the quiet mildness of my tone of invocation. Now he would have gone with his three francs. And now, in final contempt, I gave him the other two.

He disappeared like a streak of lightning up the gangway, terrified lest the steward should come and catch him at his tricks. For later on I saw the steward send other larks flying for demanding more than one-fifty. The brat.

The question was now the cabin: for the q-b simply refused to entertain the idea of sharing a cabin with three Italian women, who would all be sick simply for the fuss of it, though the sea was smooth as glass. We hunted up the steward. He said all the first-class cabins had four berths — the second had three, but much smaller. How that was possible I don’t know. However, if no one came, he would give us a cabin to ourselves.

The ship was clean and civilised, though very poky. And there we were.

We went on deck. Would we eat on board, asked another person. No, we wouldn’t. We went out to a fourth little shed, which was a refreshment stall, and bought bread and sardines and chocolate and apples. Then we went on the upper deck to make our meal. In a sheltered place I lit the spirit lamp, and put on water to boil. The water we had taken from the cabin. Then we sat down alone in the darkness, on a seat which had its back against the deck cabins, now appropriated by the staff. A thin, cold wind was travelling. We wrapped the one plaid round us both and snuggled together, waiting for the tea to boil. I could just see the point of the spirit-flame licking up, from where we sat.

The stars were marvellous in the soundless sky, so big, that one could see them hanging orb-like and alone in their own space, yet all the myriads. Particularly bright the evening-star. And he hung flashing in the lower night with a power that made me hold my breath. Grand and powerful he sent out his flashes, so sparkling that he seemed more intense than any sun or moon. And from the dark, uprising land he sent his way of light to us across the water, a marvellous star-road. So all above us the stars soared and pulsed, over that silent, night-dark, landlocked harbour.

After a long time the water boiled, and we drank our hot tea and ate our sardines and bread and bits of remaining Nuoro sausage, sitting there alone in the intense starry darkness of that upper deck. I said alone: but no, two ghoulish ship’s cats came howling at us for the bits. And even when everything was eaten, and the sardine-tin thrown in the sea, still they circled and prowled and howled.

We sat on, resting under the magnificent deep heavens, wrapped together in the old shepherd’s shawl for which I have blessed so often a Scottish friend, half sheltered from the cold night wind, and recovering somewhat from the sixty

miles bus-ride we had done that day.

As yet there was nobody on the ship — we were the very first, at least in the first-class. Above, all was silent and deserted. Below, all was lit-up and deserted. But it was a little ship, with accommodation for some thirty first-class and forty second-class passengers.

In the low deck forward stood two rows of cattle — eighteen cattle. They stood tied up side by side, and quite motionless, as if stupefied. Only two had lain down. The rest stood motionless, with tails dropped and heads dropped, as if drugged or gone insensible. These cattle on the ship fascinated the q-b. She insisted on going down to them, and examining them minutely. But there they were — stiff almost as Noah's Ark cows. What she could not understand was that they neither cried nor struggled. Motionless — terribly motionless. In her idea cattle are wild and indomitable creatures. She will not realise the horrid strength of passivity and inertia which is almost the preponderant force in domesticated creatures, men and beast alike. There are fowls too in various coops — flappy and agitated these.

At last, at about half past seven the train from the island arrived, and the people surged out in a mass. We stood hanging over the end of the upper deck, looking down. On they poured, in a thick mass, up the gangway, with all conceivable sorts of luggage: bundles, embroidered carry-ails, bags, saddlebags — the q-b lamenting she had not bought one — a sudden surging mass of people and goods. There are soldiers too — but these are lined upon the bit of a quay, to wait.

Our interest is to see whether there will be any more first-class passengers. Coming up the wide board which serves as gangway each individual hands a ticket to the man at the top, and is shooed away to his own region — usually second-class. There are three sorts of tickets — green first-class, white second, and pink third. The second-class passengers go aft, the third-class go forward, along the passage past our cabins, into the steerage. And so we watch and watch the excited people come on board and divide. Nearly all are second-class — and a great many are women. We have seen a few first-class men. But as yet no women. And every hat with ospreys gives the q-b a qualm.

For a long time we are safe. The women flood to the second-class. One who is third, begs and beseeches to go with her friends in the second. I am glad to say without success. And then, alas, an elderly man with a daughter, first-class. They are very respectable and pleasant looking. But the q-b wails: "I'm sure she will be sick."

Towards the end come three convicts, chained together. They wear the brownish striped homespun, and do not look evil. They seem to be laughing

together, not at all in distress. The two young soldiers who guard them, and who have guns, look nervous. So the convicts go forward to the steerage, past our cabins.

At last the soldiers are straightened up, and turned on board. There almost at once they start making a tent: drawing a huge tarpaulin over a cross rope in the mid-deck below us, between the first and second-class regions. The great tarpaulin is pulled down well on either side and fastened down, and it makes a big dark tent. The soldiers creep in and place their bundles.

And now it is the soldiers who fascinate the q-b. She hangs over the bar above, and peers in. The soldiers arrange themselves in two rows. They will sleep with their heads on their bundles on either side of the tent, the two rows of feet coming together inwards. But first they must eat, for it is eight o'clock and more.

Out come their suppers: a whole roast fowl, hunks of kid, legs of lamb, huge breads. The fowl is dismembered with a jackknife in a twinkling, and shared. Everything among the soldiers is shared. There they sit in their pent-house with its open ends, crowded together and happy, chewing with all their might and clapping one another on the shoulder lovingly, and taking swigs at the wine bottles. We envy them their good food.

At last all are on board — the omnibus has driven up from town and gone back. A last young lout dashes up in a carriage and scuffles aboard. The crew begins to run about. The quay-porters have trotted on board with the last bales and packages — all is stowed safely. The steamer hoots and hoots. Two men and a girl kiss their friends all round and get off the ship. The night re-echoes the steamer's hoots. The sheds have gone all dark. Far off the town twinkles very sparsely. All is night-deserted. And so the gangway is hauled up, and the rope hawsers quickly wound in. We are drifting away from the quay side. The few watchers wave their white handkerchiefs, standing diminutive and forlorn on the dark little quay, in the heart of the dark, deserted harbour. One woman cries and waves and weeps. A man makes exaggerated flag-wagging signals with his white hanky, and feels important. We drift — and the engines begin to beat. We are moving in the landlocked harbour.

Everybody watches. The commander and the crew shout orders. And so, very slowly, and without any fuss at all, like a man wheeling a barrow out of a yard gate, we throb very slowly out of the harbour, past one point, then past another, away from the encircling hills, away from the great lump of Tavolara which is to southward, away from the outreaching land to the north, and over the edge of the open sea.

And now to try for a cabin to ourselves. I approach the steward. Yes, he says,

he has it in mind. But there are eighty second-class passengers, in an accommodation space for forty. The transit-controller is now considering it. Most probably he will transfer some second-class women to the vacant first-class cabins. If he does not do so, then the steward will accommodate us.

I know what this means — this equivocation. We decide not to bother any more. So we make a tour of the ship — to look at the soldiers, who have finished eating, sitting yarning to one another, while some are already stretched out in the shadow, for sleep. Then to look at the cattle, which stand rooted to the deck — which is now all messy. To look at the unhappy fowls in their coops. And a peep at the third-class — rather horrifying.

And so to bed. Already the other three berths in my cabin are occupied, the lights are switched off. As I enter I hear one young man tenderly enquiring of the berth below: “Dost thou feel ill?” “Er — not much — not much!” says the other faintly.

Yet the sea is like glass, so smooth.

I am quickly rolled in my lower berth, where I feel the trembling of the machine-impelled ship, and hear the creaking of the berth above me as its occupant rolls over: I listen to the sighs of the others, the wash of dark water. And so, uneasily, rather hot and very airless, uneasy with the machine-throbbing and the sighing of my companions, and with a cock that crows shrilly from one of the coops, imagining the ship’s lights to be dawn, the night goes by. One sleeps — but a bad sleep. If only there were cold air, not this lower-berth, inside cabin airlessness.

VIII. BACK

The sea being steady as a level road, nobody succeeded in being violently sick. My young men rose at dawn — I was not long in following. It was a grey morning on deck, a grey sea, a grey sky, and a grey, spider-cloth, unimportant coast of Italy not far away. The q-b joined me: and quite delighted with her fellow-passenger: such a nice girl, she said! who, when she let down her ordinary-looking brown hair, it reached rippling right to her feet! Voilà! You never know your luck.

The cock that had crowed all night crowed again, hoarsely, with a sore throat. The miserable cattle looked more wearily miserable, but still were motionless, as sponges that grow at the bottom of the sea. The convicts were out for air: grinning. Someone told us they were war-deserters. Considering the light in which these people look on war, desertion seemed to me the only heroism. But the q-b, brought up in a military air, gazed upon them as upon men miraculously alive within the shadow of death. According to her code they had been shot when re-captured. The soldiers had unslung the tarpaulin, their home for the night had melted with the darkness, they were mere fragments of grey transit smoking cigarettes and staring overboard.

We drew near to Cività Vecchia: the old, mediaeval looking port, with its castle, and a round fortress-barracks at the entrance. Soldiers aboard shouted and waved to soldiers on the ramparts. We backed insignificantly into the rather scrubby, insignificant harbour. And in five minutes we were out, and walking along the wide, desolate boulevard to the station. The cab-men looked hard at us: but no doubt owing to the knapsack, took us for poor Germans.

Coffee and milk — and then, only about three-quarters of an hour late, the train from the north. It is the night express from Turin. There was plenty of room — so in we got, followed by half a dozen Sardinians. We found a large, heavy Torinese in the carriage, his eyes dead with fatigue. It seemed quite a new world on the mainland: and at once one breathed again the curious suspense that is in the air. Once more I read the “Corriere della Sera” from end to end. Once more we knew ourselves in the real active world, where the air seems like a lively wine dissolving the pearl of the old order. I hope, dear reader, you like the metaphor. Yet I cannot forbear repeating how strongly one is sensible of the solvent property of the atmosphere, suddenly arriving on the mainland again. And in an hour one changes one’s psyche. The human being is a most curious creature. He thinks he has got one soul, and he has got dozens. I felt my sound

Sardinian soul melting off me, I felt myself evaporating into the real Italian uncertainty and momentaneity. So I perused the “Corriere” whilst the metamorphosis took place. I like Italian newspapers because they say what they mean, and not merely what is most convenient to say. We call it naïveté — I call it manliness. Italian newspapers read as if they were written by men, and not by calculating eunuchs.

The train ran very heavily along the Maremma. It began to rain. Then we stopped at a station where we should not stop — somewhere in the Maremma country, the invisible sea not far off, the low country cultivated and yet forlorn. Oh, how the Turin man sighed, and wearily shifted his feet as the train stood meaningless. There it sat — in the rain. Oh, express!

At last on again, till we were winding through the curious long troughs of the Roman Campagna. There the shepherds minded the sheep: the slender-footed merino sheep. In Sardinia the merinos were very white and glistening, so that one thought of the Scriptural “white as wool.” And the black sheep among the flock were very black. But these Campagna were no longer white, but dingy. And though the wildness of the Campagna is a real wildness still, it is a historic wildness, familiar in its way as a fireside is familiar.

So we approach the hopeless sprawling of modern Rome — over the yellow Tiber, past the famous pyramid tomb, skirting the walls of the city, till at last we plunge in, into the well-known station, out of all the chaos.

We are late. It is a quarter to twelve. And I have to go out and change money, and I hope to find my two friends. — The q-b and I dash down the platform — no friends at the barrier. The station moderately empty. We bolt across to the departure platforms. The Naples train stands ready. In we pitch our bags, ask a naval man not to let anyone steal them, then I fly out into town while the q-b buys food and wine at the buffet.

It no longer rains, and Rome feels as ever — rather holiday-like and not inclined to care about anything. I get a hundred and three lira for each pound note: pocket my money at two minutes past twelve, and bolt back, out of the Piazza delle Terme. Aha, there are the two missing ones, just descending vaguely from a carriage, the one gazing inquiringly through his monocle across the tram-lines, the other very tall and alert and elegant, looking as if he expected us to appear out of the air for his convenience.

Which is exactly what happens. We fly into each other’s arms. “Oh, there you *are*! Where’s the q-b? Why are you here? We’ve been to the arrival platform — no *sign* of you. Of course I only got your wire half an hour ago. We *flew* here. Well, how nice to see you. — Oh, let the man wait. — What, going on at once to Naples? But must you? Oh, but how flighty you are! Birds of passage

veramente! Then let us find the c-b, quick! — And they won't let us on the platform. No, they're not issuing platform tickets to-day. — Oh, merely the guests returning from the Savoy-Bavarian wedding in the north, a few royal Duchesses about. Oh, well, we must try and wangle him."

At the barrier a woman trying in vain to be let on to the station. But what a Roman matron can't do, an elegant young Englishman can. So our two heroes wangle their way in, and fall into the arms of the q-b by the Naples train. Well, now, tell us all about it! So we rush into a four-branched candlestick of conversation. In my ear murmurs he of the monocle about the Sahara — he is back from the Sahara a week ago: the winter sun in the Sahara! He with the smears of paint on his elegant trousers is giving the q-b a sketchy outline of his now *grande passion*. Click goes the exchange, and he of the monocle is detailing to the q-b his trip to Japan, on which he will start in six weeks' time, while he of the paint-smears is expatiating on the thrills of the etching needle, and concocting a plan for a month in Sardinia in May, with me doing the scribbles and he the pictures. What sort of pictures? Out flies the name of Goya. And well now, a general rush into oneness, and won't they come down to Sicily to us for the almond blossom: in about ten days' time. Yes, they will — wire when the almond blossom is just stepping on the stage and making its grand bow, and they will come next day. Somebody has smitten the wheel of a coach two ringing smacks with a hammer. This is a sign to get in. The q-b is terrified the train will slip through her fingers. "I'm frightened, I must get in." — "Very well then! You're sure you have everything you want? Everything? A fiasco of vino? Oh, *two!* All the better! Well then — ten days' time. All right — quite sure — how nice to have seen you, if only a *glimpse*. — Yes, yes, poor q-b! Yes, you're quite safe. Goodbye! Goodbye!"

The door is shut — we are seated — the train moves out of the station. And quickly on this route Rome disappears. We are out on the wintry Campagna, where crops are going. Away on the left we see the Tivoli hills, and think of the summer that is gone, the heat, the fountains of the Villa D'Este. The train rolls heavily over the Campagna, towards the Alban Mounts, homewards.

So we fall on our food, and devour the excellent little beefsteaks and rolls and boiled eggs, apples and oranges and dates, and drink the good red wine, and wildly discuss plans and the latest news, and are altogether thrilled about things. So thrilled that we are well away among the romantic mountains of the south-centre before we realise that there are other passengers besides ourselves in the carriage. Half the journey is over. Why, there is the monastery on its high hill! In a wild moment I suggest we shall get down and spend a night up there at Montecassino, and see the other friend, the monk who knows so much about the

world, being out of it. But the q-b shudders, thinking of the awful winter coldness of that massive stone monastery, which has no spark of heating apparatus. And therefore the plan subsides, and at Cassino station I only get down to procure coffee and sweet cakes. They always have good things to eat at Cassino station: in summer, big fresh ices and fruits and iced water, in winter toothsome sweet cakes which make an awfully good finish to a meal.

I count Cassino halfway to Naples. After Cassino the excitement of being in the north begins quite to evaporate. The southern heaviness descends upon us. Also the sky begins to darken: and the rain falls. I think of the night before us, on the sea again. And I am vaguely troubled lest we may not get a berth. However, we may spend the night in Naples: or even sit on in this train, which goes forward, all through the long, long night, to the Straits of Messina. We must decide as we near Naples.

Half dozing, one becomes aware of the people about one. We are travelling second-class. Opposite is a little, hold-yourown school-mistressy young person in pince-nez. Next her a hollow-cheeked white soldier with ribbons on his breast. Then a fat man in a corner. Then a naval officer of low rank. The naval officer is coming from Fiume, and is dead with sleep and perhaps mortification. D'Annunzio has just given up. Two compartments away we hear soldiers singing, martial still though bruised with fatigue, the D'Annunzio-bragging songs of Fiume. They are soldiers of the D'Annunzio legion. And one of them, I hear the sick soldier saying, is very hot and republican still. Private soldiers are not allowed, with their reduced tickets, to travel on the express trains. But these legionaries are not penniless: they have paid the excess and come along. For the moment they are sent to their homes. And with heads dropping with fatigue, we hear them still defiantly singing down the carriage for D'Annunzio.

A regular officer went along — a captain of the Italian, not the Fiume army. He heard the chants and entered the carriage. The legionaries were quiet, but they lounged and ignored the entry of the officer. “On your feet!” he yelled, Italian fashion. The vehemence did it. Reluctantly as may be, they stood up in the compartment. “Salute!” And though it was bitter, up went their hands in the salute, whilst he stood and watched them. And then, very superb, he sauntered away again. They sat down glowering. Of course they were beaten. Didn't they know it. The men in our carriage smiled curiously: in slow and futile mockery of both parties.

The rain was falling outside, the windows were steamed quite dense, so that we were shut in from the world. Throughout the length of the train, which was not very full, could be felt the exhausted weariness and the dispirited dejection of the poor D'Annunzio legionaries. In the afternoon silence of the mist-

enclosed, half-empty train the snatches of song broke out again, and faded in sheer dispirited fatigue. We ran on blindly and heavily. But one young fellow was not to be abashed. He was well-built, and his thick black hair was brushed up, like a great fluffy crest upon his head. He came slowly and unabated down the corridor, and on every big, mist-opaque pane he scrawled with his finger W D'ANNUNZIO GABRIELE — W D'ANNUNZIO GABRIELE.

The sick soldier laughed thinly, saying to the schoolmistress: “Oh, yes, they are fine chaps. But it was folly. D'Annunzio is a world poet — a world wonder — but Fiume was a mistake you know. And these chaps have got to learn a lesson. They got beyond themselves. Oh, they aren't short of money. D'Annunzio had wagon-loads of money there in Fiume, and he wasn't altogether mean with it.” The schoolmistress, who was one of the sharp ones, gave a little disquisition to show why it was a mistake, and wherein she knew better than the world's poet and wonder.

It always makes me sick to hear people chewing over newspaper pulp.

The sick soldier was not a legionary. He had been wounded through the lung. But it was healed, 'he said. He lifted the flap of his breast pocket, and there hung a little silver medal. It was his wound-medal. He wore it concealed: and over the place of the wound. He and the schoolmistress looked at one another significantly.

Then they talked pensions: and soon were on the old topic. The schoolmistress had her figures pat, as a schoolmistress should. Why, the ticket-collector, the man who punches one's tickets on the train, now had twelve thousand lira a year: twelve thousand bra. Monstrous! Whilst a fully-qualified *professore*, a schoolmaster who had been through all his training and had all his degrees, was given five thousand. Five thousand for a fully qualified *professore*, and twelve thousand for a ticket puncher. The soldier agreed, and quoted other figures. But the railway was the outstanding grievance. Every boy who left school now, said the schoolmistress, wanted to go on the railway. Oh, but — said the soldier — the train-men — !

The naval officer, who collapsed into the most uncanny positions, blind with sleep, got down at Capua to get into a little train that would carry him back to his own station, where our train had not stopped. At Caserta the sick soldier got out. Down the great avenue of trees the rain was falling. A young man entered. Remained also the schoolmistress and the stout man. Knowing we had been listening, the schoolmistress spoke to us about the soldier. Then — she had said she was catching the night boat for Palermo — I asked her if she thought the ship would be very full. Oh, yes, very full, she said. Why, hers was one of the last cabin numbers, and she had got her ticket early that morning. The fat man

now joined in. He too was crossing to Palermo. The ship was sure to be quite full by now. Were we depending on booking berths at the port of Naples? We were. Whereupon he and the schoolmistress shook their heads and said it was more than doubtful — nay, it was as good as impossible. For the boat was the renowned *Città di Trieste*, that floating palace, and such was the fame of her gorgeousness that everybody wanted to travel by her.

“First and second-class alike?” I asked.

“Oh, yes, also first-class,” replied the school-marm rather spitefully. So I knew she had a white ticket — second.

I cursed the *Città di Trieste* and her gorgeousness, and looked down my nose. We had now two alternatives: to spend the night in Naples, or to sit on all through the night and next morning, and arrive home, with heaven’s aid, in the early afternoon. Though these long-distance trains think nothing of six hours late. But we were tired already. What we should be like after another twenty-four hours’ sitting, heaven knows. And yet to struggle for a bed in a Naples hotel this night, in the rain, all the hotels being at present crammed with foreigners, that was no rosy prospect. Oh, dear!

However, I was not going to take their discouragement so easily. One has been had that way before. They love to make the case look desperate.

Were we English? asked the schoolmistress. We were. Ah, a fine thing to be English in Italy now. *Why?* — rather tart from me. Because of the *cambio*, the exchange. You English, with your money exchange, you come here and buy everything for nothing, you take the best of everything, and with your money you pay nothing for it. Whereas we poor Italians we pay heavily for everything at an exaggerated price, and we can have nothing. Ah, it is all very nice to be English in Italy now. You can travel, you go to the hotels, you can see everything and buy everything, and it costs you nothing. What is the exchange to-day? She whipped it out. A hundred and four, twenty.

This she told me to my nose. And the fat man murmured bitterly *già! già!* — ay! ay! Her impertinence and the fat man’s quiet bitterness stirred my bile. Has not this song been sung at me once too often, by these people?

You are mistaken, said I to the schoolmistress. We don’t by any means live in Italy for nothing. Even with the exchange at a hundred and three, we don’t live for nothing. We pay, and pay through the nose, for whatever we have in Italy: and you Italians see that we pay. What! You put all the tariff you do on foreigners, and then say we live here for nothing. I tell you I could live in England just as well, on the same money — perhaps better. Compare the cost of things in England with the cost here in Italy, and even considering the exchange, Italy costs nearly as much as England. Some things are cheaper here — the

railway comes a little cheaper, and is infinitely more miserable. Travelling is usually a misery. But other things, clothes of all sorts, and a good deal of food is even more expensive here than in England, exchange considered.

Oh, yes, she said, England had had to bring her prices down this last fortnight. In her own interests indeed.

“This last fortnight! This last six months,” said I. “Whereas prices rise every single day here.”

Here a word from the quiet young man who had got in at Caserta.

“Yes,” he said, “yes. I say, every nation pays in its own money, no matter what the exchange. And it works out about equal.”

But I felt angry. Am I always to have the exchange flung in my teeth, as if I were a personal thief? But the woman persisted.

“Ah,” she said, “we Italians, we are so nice, we are so good. Noi, siamo cosi buoni. We are so good-natured. But others, they are not buoni, they are not good-natured to us.” And she nodded her head. And truly, I did not feel at all good-natured towards her: which she knew. And as for the Italian good-nature, it forms a sound and unshakable basis nowadays for their extortion and self-justification and spite.

Darkness was falling over the rich flat plains that lie around Naples, over the tall uncanny vines with their brown thongs in the intensely cultivated black earth. It was night by the time we were in that vast and thievish station. About half-past five. We were not very late. Should we sit on in our present carriage, and go down in it to the port, along with the schoolmistress, and risk it? But first look at the coach which was going on to Sicily. So we got down and ran along the train to the Syracuse coach. Hubbub, confusion, a wedge in the corridor, and for sure no room. Certainly no room to lie down a bit. We could not sit tight for twenty-four hours more.

So we decided to go to the port — and to walk. Heaven knows when the railway carriage would be shunted down. Back we went therefore for the sack, and told the schoolmistress our intention.

“You can but try,” she said frostily.

So there we are, with the sack over my shoulder and the kitchenino in the q-b’s hand, bursting out of that thrice-damned and annoying station, and running through the black wet gulf of a Naples night, in a slow rain. Cabmen look at us. But my sack saved me. I am weary of that boa-constrictor, a Naples cabman after dark. By day there is more-or-less a tariff.

It is about a mile from the station to the quay where the ship lies. We make our way through the deep, gulf-like streets, over the slippery black cobbles. The black houses rise massive to a great height on either side, but the streets are not

in this part very narrow. We plunge forwards in the unearthly half-darkness of this great uncontrolled city. There are no lights at all from the buildings — only the small electric lamps of the streets.

So we emerge on the harbour front, and hurry past the great storehouses in the rainy night, to where the actual entrances begin. The tram bangs past us. We scuffle along that pavement-ridge which lies like an isthmus down the vast black quicksands of that harbour road. One feels peril all round. But at length we come to a gate by the harbour railway. No, not that. On to the next iron gate of the railway crossing. And so we run out past the great sheds and the buildings of the port station, till we see a ship rearing in front, and the sea all black. But now where is that little hole where one gets the tickets? We are at the back of everywhere in this desert jungle of the harbour darkness.

A man directs us round the corner — and actually does not demand money. It is the sack again. So — there, I see the knot of men, soldiers chiefly, fighting in a bare room round a tiny wicket. I recognise the place where I have fought before.

So while the q-b stands guard over sack and bag, I plunge into the fray. It literally is a fight. Some thirty men all at once want to get at a tiny wicket in a blank wall. There are no queue-rails, there is no order: just a hole in a blank wall, and thirty fellows, mostly military, pressing at it in a mass. But I have done this before. The way is to insert the thin end of oneself, and without any violence, by deadly pressure and pertinacity come at the goal. One hand must be kept fast over the money pocket, and one must be free to clutch the wicket-side when one gets there. And thus one is ground small in those mills of God, Demos struggling for tickets. It isn't very nice — so close, so incomparably crushed. And never for a second must one be off one's guard for one's watch and money and even hanky. When I first came to Italy after the war I was robbed twice in three weeks, floating round in the sweet old innocent confidence in mankind. Since then I have never ceased to be on my guard. Somehow or other, waking and sleeping one's spirit must be on its guard nowadays. Which is really what I prefer, now I have learnt it. Confidence in the goodness of mankind is a very thin protection indeed. *Integer vitae scelerisque purus* will do nothing for you when it comes to humanity, however efficacious it may be with lions and wolves. Therefore, tight on my guard, like a screw biting into a bit of wood, I bite my way through that knot of fellows, to the wicket, and shout for two first-class. The clerk inside ignores me for some time, serving soldiers. But if you stand like Doomsday you get your way. Two firsts, says the clerk. Husband and wife, say I, in case there is a two-berth cabin. Jokes behind. But I get my tickets. Impossible to put my hand to my pocket. The tickets cost about a hundred and

five francs each. Clutching paper change and the green slips, with a last gasp I get out of the knot. So — we've done it. As I sort my money and stow away, I hear another ask for one first-class. Nothing left, says the clerk. So you see how one must fight.

I must say for these dense and struggling crowds, they are only intense, not violent, and not in the least brutal. I always feel a certain sympathy with the men in them.

Bolt through the pouring rain to the ship. And in two minutes we are aboard. And behold, each of us has a deck cabin, I one to myself, the q-b to herself next door. Palatial — not a cabin at all, but a proper little bedroom with a curtained bed under the porthole windows, a comfortable sofa, chairs, table, carpets, big wash-bowls with silver taps — a whole *de luxe*. I dropped the sack on the sofa with a gasp, drew back the yellow curtains of the bed, looked out of the porthole at the lights of Naples, and sighed with relief. One could wash thoroughly, refreshingly, and change one's linen. Wonderful!

The state-room is like an hotel lounge, many little tables with flowers and periodicals, arm-chairs, warm carpet, bright but soft lights, and people sitting about chatting. A loud group of English people in one corner, very assured, two quiet English ladies: various Italians seeming quite modest. Here one could sit in peace and rest, pretending to look at an illustrated magazine. So we rested. After about an hour there entered a young Englishman and his wife, whom we had seen on our train. So, at last the coach had been shunted down to the port. Where should we have been had we waited!

The waiters began to flap the white table-cloths and spread the tables nearest the walls. Dinner would begin at half-past seven, immediately the boat started. We sat in silence, till eight or nine tables were spread. Then we let the other people take their choice. After which we chose a table by ourselves, neither of us wanting company. So we sat before the plates and the wine bottles and sighed in the hopes of a decent meal. Food by the way is not included in the hundred and five francs.

Alas, we were not to be alone: two young Neapolitans, pleasant, quiet, blond, or semi-blond. They were well-bred, and evidently of northern extraction. Afterwards we found out they were jewellers. But I liked their quiet, gentle manners. The dinner began, and we were through the soup, when up pranced another young fellow, rather strapping and loud, a commercial traveller, for sure. He had those cocky assured manners of one who is not sure of his manners. He had a rather high forehead, and black hair brushed up in a showy wing, and a large ring on his finger. Not that a ring signifies anything. Here most of the men wear several, all massively jewelled. If one believed in all the jewels, why Italy

would be more fabulous than fabled India. But our friend the bouncer was smart, and smelled of cash. Not money, but cash.

I had an inkling of what to expect when he handed the salt and said in English “Salt, thank you.” But I ignored the advance. However, he did not wait long. Through the windows across the room the q-b saw the lights of the harbour slowly moving. “Oh,” she cried, “are we going?” And also in Italian: “Partiamo?” All watched the lights, the bouncer screwing round. He had one of the fine, bouncerish backs.

“Yes,” he said. “We — *going*.”

“Oh,” cried she. “Do you speak English?”

“Ye-es. Some English — I speak.”

As a matter of fact he spoke about forty disconnected words. But his accent was so good for these forty. He did not speak English, he imitated an English voice making sounds. And the effect was startling. He had served on the Italian front with the Scots Guards — so he told us in Italian. He was Milanese. Oh, he had had a time with the Scots Guards. Wheesky — eh? Wheesky.

“Come along *bhoys!*” he shouted.

And it was such a Scotch voice shouting, so loud-mouthed and actual, I nearly went under the table. It struck us both like a blow.

Afterwards he rattled away without misgiving. He was a traveller for a certain type of machine, and was doing Sicily. Shortly he was going to England — and he asked largely about first-class hotels. Then he asked was the q-b French? — Was she Italian? — No, she was German. Ah — German. And immediately out he came with the German word: “Deutsch! Deutsch, eh? From Deutschland. Oh, yes! Deutschland über alles! Ah, I know. No more — what? Deutschland unter alles now? Deutschland unter alles.” And he bounced on his seat with gratification of the words. Of German as of English he knew half a dozen phrases.

“No,” said the q-b, “not Deutschland unter alles. Not for long, anyhow.”

“How? Not for long? You think so? I think so too,” said the hounder. Then in Italian: “La Germania won’t stand under all for long. No, no. At present it is England über alles. *England über alles*. But Germany will rise up again.”

“Of course,” said the q-b. “How shouldn’t she?”

“Ah,” said the bouncer, “while England keeps the money in her pocket, we shall none of us rise up. Italy won the war, and Germany lost it. And Italy and Germany they both are down, and England is up. They both are down, and England is up. England and France. Strange, isn’t it? Ah, the allies What are the allies for? To keep England up, and France halfway, and Germany and Italy down.”

“Ah, they won’t stay down for ever,” said the q-b.

“You think not? Ah! We will see. We will see how England goes on now.”

“England is not going on so marvellously, after all,” say I. “How not? You mean Ireland?”

“No, not only Ireland. Industry altogether. England is as near to ruin as other countries.”

“Ma! With all the money, and we others with no money! How will she be ruined?”

“And what good would it be to you if she were?”

“Oh, well — who knows. If England were ruined — ” a slow smile of anticipation spread over his face. How he would love it — how they would all love it, if England were ruined. That is, the business part of them, perhaps, would not love it. But the human part would. The human part fairly licks its lips at the thought of England’s ruin. The commercial part, however, quite violently disclaims the anticipations of the human part. And there it is. The newspapers chiefly speak with the commercial voice. But individually, when you are got at in a railway carriage or as now on a ship, up speaks the human voice, and you know how they love you. This is no doubt inevitable. When the exchange stands at a hundred and six men go humanly blind, I suppose, however much they may keep the commercial eye open. And having gone humanly blind they bump into one’s human self nastily: a nasty jar. You know then how they hate you. Underneath. they hate us, and as human beings we are objects of envy and malice. They hate us, with envy, and despise us, with jealousy. Which perhaps doesn’t hurt commercially. Humanly it is to me unpleasant.

The dinner was over, and the bounder was lavishing cigarettes — Murattis, if you please. We had all drunk two bottles of wine. Two other commercial travellers had joined the bounder at our table — two smart young fellows, one a bounder and one gentle and nice. Our two jewellers remained quiet, talking their share, but quietly and so sensitively. One could not help liking them. So we were seven people, six men.

“Wheesky! Will you drink wheesky, Mister?” said our original bounder. “Yes, one small Scotch! One Scotch wheesky.” All this in a perfect Scotty voice of a man standing at a bar calling for a drink. It was comical, one could not but laugh: and very impertinent. He called for the waiter, took him by the button-hole, and with a breast-to-breast intimacy asked if there was whisky. The waiter, with the same tone of you-and-I-are-men-who-have-the-same-feelings, said he didn’t think there was whisky, but he would look. Our bounder went round the table inviting us all to whiskies, and pressing on us his expensive English cigarettes with great aplomb.

The whisky came — and five persons partook. It was fiery, oily stuff from heaven knows where. The bouncer rattled away, spouting his bits of English and his four words of German. He was in high feather, wriggling his large haunches on his chair and waving his hands. He had a peculiar manner of wriggling from the bottom of his back, with fussy self-assertiveness. It was my turn to offer whisky.

I was able in a moment's lull to peer through the windows and see the dim lights of Capri — the glimmer of Anacapri up on the black shadow — the lighthouse. We had passed the island. In the midst of the babel I sent out a few thoughts to a few people on the island. Then I had to come back.

The bouncer had once more resumed his theme of l'Inghilterra, l'Italia, la Germania. He swanked England as hard as he could. Of course England was the top dog, and if he could speak some English, if he were talking to English people, and if, as he said, he was going to England in April, why he was so much the more top-doggy than his companions, who could not rise to all these heights. At the same time, my nerves had too much to bear.

Where were we going and where had we been and where did we live? And ah, yes, English people lived in Italy. Thousands, thousands of English people lived in Italy. Yes, it was very nice for them. There used to be many Germans, but now the Germans were down. But the English — what could be better for them than Italy now: they had sun, they had warmth, they had abundance of everything, they had a charming people to deal with, and they had the *cambio*! Ecco! The other commercial travellers agreed. They appealed to the q-b if it was not so. And altogether I had enough of it.

“Oh, yes,” said I, “it's very nice to be in Italy: especially if you are not living in an hotel, and you have to attend to things for yourself. It is very nice to be overcharged every time, and then insulted if you say a word. It's very nice to have the *cambio* thrown in your teeth, if you say two words to any Italian, even a perfect stranger. It's very nice to have waiters and shop-people and railway porters sneering in a bad temper and being insulting in small, mean ways all the time. It's very nice to feel what they all feel against you. And if you understand enough Italian, it's very nice to hear what they say when you've gone by. Oh, very nice. Very nice indeed!”

I suppose the whisky had kindled this outburst in me. They sat dead silent. And then our bouncer began, in his sugary-deprecating voice:

“Why no! Why no! It is not true, signore. No, it is not true. Why, England is the foremost nation in the world — ”

“And you want to pay her out for it.”

“But no, signore. But no. What makes you say so? Why, we Italians are so

good-natured. *Noi Italiani siamo cosi buoni. Siamo cosi buoni.*”

They were the identical words of the schoolmistress.

“Buoni,” said I. “Yes — perhaps. Buoni when it’s not a question of the exchange and of money. But since it is always a question of cambio and soldi now, one is always, in a small way, insulted.”

I suppose it must have been the whisky. Anyhow Italians can never bear hard bitterness. The jewellers looked distressed, the bounders looked down their noses, half exulting even now, and half sheepish, being caught. The third of the *commis voyageurs*, the gentle one, made large eyes and was terrified that he was going to be sick. He represented a certain Italian liqueur, and he modestly asked us to take a glass of it. He went with the waiter to secure the proper brand. So we drank — and it was good. But he, the giver, sat with large and haunted eyes. Then he said he would go to bed. Our boulder gave him various advice regarding seasickness. There was a mild swell on the sea. So he of the liqueur departed.

Our boulder thrummed on the table and hummed something, and asked the q-b if she knew the *Rosencavalier*. He always appealed to her. She said she did. And ah, he was passionately fond of music, said he. Then he warbled in a head voice a bit more. He only knew classical music, said he. And he mewed a bit of Moussorgsky. The q-b said Moussorgsky was her favourite musician, for opera. Ah, cried the boulder, if there were but a piano! — There is a piano, said his mate. — Yes, he replied, but it is locked up. — Then let us get the key, said his mate, with aplomb. The waiters, being men with the same feelings as our two, would give them anything. So the key was forthcoming. We paid our bills — mine about sixty francs. Then we went along the faintly rolling ship, up the curved staircase to the drawing-room. Our boulder unlocked the door of this drawing-room, and switched on the lights.

It was quite a pleasant room, with deep divans upholstered in pale colours, and palm-trees standing behind little tables, and a black upright piano. Our boulder sat on the piano-stool and gave us an exhibition. He splashed out noise on the piano in splashes, like water splashing out of a pail. He lifted his head and shook his black mop of hair, and yelled out some fragments of opera. And he wriggled his large, boulder’s back upon the piano-stool, wriggling upon his well-filled haunches. Evidently he had a great deal of feeling for music: but very little prowess. He yelped it out, and wriggled, and splashed the piano; His friend the other boulder, a quiet one in a pale suit, with stout limbs, older than the wriggler, stood by the piano whilst the young one exhibited. Across the space of carpet sat the two brother jewellers, deep in a divan, their lean, semi-blond faces quite inscrutable. The q-b sat next to me, asking for this and that music,

none of which the wriggler could supply. He knew four scraps, and a few splashes — not more. The elder boulder stood near him quietly comforting, encouraging, and admiring him, as a lover encouraging and admiring his ingenue betrothed. And the q-b sat bright-eyed and excited, admiring that a man could perform so unselfconsciously selfconscious, and give himself away with such generous wriggles. For my part, as you may guess, I did not admire.

I had had enough. Rising, I bowed and marched off. The q-b came after me. Good-night, said I, at the head of the corridor. She turned in, and I went round the ship to look at the dark night of the sea.

Morning came sunny with pieces of cloud: and the Sicilian coast towering pale blue in the distance. How wonderful it must have been to Ulysses to venture into this Mediterranean and open his eyes on all the loveliness of the tall coasts. How marvellous to steal with his ship into these magic harbours. There is something eternally morning-glamorous about these lands as they rise from the sea. And it is always the Odyssey which comes back to one as one looks at them. All the lovely morning-wonder of this world, in Homer's day!

Our boulder was dashing about on deck, in one of those rain-coats gathered in at the waist and ballooning out into skirts below the waist. He greeted me with a cry of "It's a long, long way to Tipperary." "Very long," said I. "Goodbye, Piccadilly — " he continued. "Ciao." said I, as he dashed jauntily down the steps. Soon we saw the others as well. But it was morning, and I simply did not want to speak to them — except just good-day. For my life I couldn't say two more words to any of them this morning: except to ask the mild one if he had been sick. He had not.

So we waited for the great *Città di Trieste* to float her way into Palermo harbour. It looked so near — the town there, the great circle of the port, the mass of the hills crowding round. Panormus, the All-harbour. I wished the bulky steamer would hurry up. For I hated her now. I hated her swankiness, she seemed made for commercial travellers with cash. I hated the big picture that filled one end of the state-room: an elegant and ideal peasant-girl, a sort of Italia, strolling on a lovely and ideal cliff's edge, among myriad blooms, and carrying over her arm, in a most sophisticated fashion, a bough of almond blossom and a sheaf of anemones. I hated the waiters, and the cheap elegance, the common *de luxe*. I disliked the people, who all turned their worst, cash-greasy sides outwards on this ship. Vulgar, vulgar post-war commercialism and dog-fish money-stink. I longed to get off. And the bloated boat edged her way so slowly into the port, and then more slowly still edged round her fat stern. And even then we were kept for fifteen minutes waiting for someone to put up the gangway for the first-class. The second-class, of course, were streaming off and melting like

thawed snow into the crowds of onlookers on the quay, long before we were allowed to come off.

Glad, glad I was to get off that ship: I don't know why, for she was clean and comfortable and the attendants were perfectly civil. Glad, glad I was not to share the deck with any more commercial travellers. Glad I was to be on my own feet, independent. No, I would not take a carriage. I carried my sack on my back to the hotel, looking with a jaundiced eye on the lethargic traffic of the harbour front. It was about nine o'clock.

Later on, when I had slept, I thought as I have thought before, the Italians are not to blame for their spite against us. We, England, have taken upon ourselves for so long the role of leading nation. And if now, in the war or after the war, we have led them all into a real old swinery — which we have, notwithstanding all Entente cant — then they have a legitimate grudge against us. If you take upon yourself to lead, you must expect the mud to be thrown at you if you lead into a nasty morass. Especially if, once in the bog, you think of nothing else but scrambling out over other poor devils' hacks. Pretty behaviour of great nations!

And still, for all that, I must insist that I am a single human being, an individual, not a mere national unit, a mere chip of l'Inghilterra or la Germania. I am not a chip of any nasty old block. I am myself.

In the evening the q-b insisted on going to the marionettes, for which she has a sentimental passion. So the three of us — we were with the American friend once more — chased through dark and tortuous side-streets and markets of Palermo in the night, until at last a friendly man led us to the place. The back streets of Palermo felt friendly, not huge and rather horrible, like Naples near the port.

The theatre was a little hole opening simply off the street. There was no one in the little ticket box, so we walked past the door-screen. A shabby old man with a long fennel-stalk hurried up and made us places on the back benches, and hushed us when we spoke of tickets. The play was in progress. A serpent-dragon was just having a tussle with a knight in brilliant brass armour, and my heart came into my mouth. The audience consisted mostly of boys, gazing with frantic interest on the bright stage. There was a sprinkling of soldiers and elderly men. The place was packed — about fifty souls crowded on narrow little ribbons of benches, so close one behind the other that the end of the man in front of me continually encroached and sat on my knee. I saw on a notice that the price of entry was forty centimes.

We had come in towards the end of the performance, and so sat rather bewildered, unable to follow. The story was the inevitable Paladins of France — one heard the names *Rinaldo!* *Orlando!* again and again. But the story was told

in dialect, hard to follow.

I was charmed by the figures. The scene was very simple, showing the interior of a castle. But the figures, which were about two-thirds of human size, were wonderful in their brilliant, glittering gold armour, and their martial prancing motions. All were knights — even the daughter of the king of Babylon. She was distinguished only by her long hair. All were in the beautiful glittering armour, with helmets and visors that could be let down at will. I am told this armour has been handed down for many generations. It certainly is lovely. One actor alone was not in armour, the wizard Magicce, or Malvigge, the Merlin of the Paladins. He was in a long scarlet robe, edged with fur, and wore a three-cornered scarlet hat.

So we watched the dragon leap and twist and get the knight by the leg: and then perish. We watched the knights burst into the castle. We watched the wonderful armour-clashing embraces of the delivered knights, Orlando and his bosom friend and the little dwarf, clashing their armoured breasts to the breasts of their brothers and deliverers. We watched the would-be tears flow. — And then the statue of the witch suddenly go up in flames, at which a roar of exultation from the boys. Then it was over. The theatre was empty in a moment, but the proprietors and the two men who sat near us would not let us go. We must wait for the next performance.

My neighbour, a fat, jolly man, told me all about it. His neighbour, a handsome tipsy man, kept contradicting and saying it wasn't so. But my fat neighbour winked at me, not to take offence.

This story of the Paladins of France lasted three nights. We had come on the middle night — of course. But no matter — each night was a complete story. I am sorry I have forgotten the names of the knights. But the story was, that Orlando and his friend and the little dwarf, owing to the tricks of that same dwarf, who belonged to the Paladins, had been captured and immured in the enchanted castle of the ghastly old witch who lived on the blood of Christians. It was now the business of Rinaldo and the rest of the Paladins, by the help of Magicce the good wizard, to release their captured brethren from the ghoulis old witch.

So much I made out of the fat man's story, while the theatre was filling. He knew every detail of the whole Paladin cycle. And it is evident the Paladin cycle has lots of yersions. For the handsome tipsy neighbour kept saying he was wrong, he was wrong, and giving different stories, and shouting for a jury to come and say who was right, he or my fat friend. A jury gathered, and a storm began to rise. But the stout proprietor with a fennel-wand came and quenched the noise, telling the handsome tipsy man he knew too much and wasn't asked.

Whereupon the tipsy one sulked.

Ah, said my friend, couldn't I come on Friday. Friday was a great night. On Friday they were giving I Beati Paoli: The Blessed Pauls. He pointed to the walls where were the placards announcing The Blessed Pauls. These Pauls were evidently some awful secret society with masking hoods and daggers and awful eyes looking through the holes. I said were they assassins like the Black Hand. By no means, by no means. The Blessed Pauls were a society for the protection of the poor. Their business was to track down and murder the oppressive rich. Ah, they were a wonderful, a splendid society. Were they, said I, a sort of camorra? Ah, on the contrary — here he lapsed into a tense voice — they hated the camorra. These, the Blest Pauls, were the powerful and terrible enemy of the Grand Camorra. For the Grand Camorra oppresses the poor. And therefore the Pauls track down in secret the leaders of the Grand Camorra, and assassinate them, or bring them to the fearful hooded tribunal which utters the dread verdict of the Beati Paoli. And when once the Beati Paoli have decreed a man's death — all over. Ah, bellissimo, bellissimo! Why don't I come on Friday?

It seems to me a queer moral for the urchins thick-packed and gazing at the drop scene. They are all males: urchins or men. I ask my fat friend why there are no women — no girls. Ah, he says, the theatre is so small. But, I say, if there is room for all the boys and men, there is the same room for girls and women. Oh, no — not in this small theatre. Besides this is nothing for women. Not that there is anything improper, he hastens to add. Not at all. But what should women and girls be doing at the marionette show? It was an affair for males.

I agreed with him really, and was thankful we hadn't a lot of smirking, twitching girls and lasses in the audience. This male audience was so tense and pure in its attention.

But hist! the play is going to begin. A lad is grinding a broken street-piano under the stage. The padrone yells *Silenzio!* with a roar, and reaching over, pokes obstreperous boys with his long fennel-stalk, like a beadle in church. When the curtain rises the piano stops, and there is dead silence. On swings a knight, glittering, marching with that curious hippety lilt, and gazing round with fixed and martial eyes. He begins the prologue, telling us where we are. And dramatically he waves his sword and stamps his foot, and wonderfully sounds his male, martial, rather husky voice. Then the Paladins, his companions who are to accompany him, swing one by one on to the stage, till they are five in all, handsome knights, including the Babylonian Princess and the Knight of Britain. They stand in a handsome, glittering line. And then comes Merlin in his red robe. Merlin has a bright, fair, rather chubby face and blue eyes, and seems to typify the northern intelligence. He now tells them, in many words, how to

proceed and what is to be done.

So then, the glittering knights are ready. Are they ready? Rinaldo flourishes his sword with the wonderful cry “Andiamo!” let us go — and the others respond: “Andiamo.” Splendid word.

The first enemy were the knights of Spain, in red kirtles and half turbans. With these a terrible fight. First of all rushes in the Knight of Britain. He is the boaster, who always in words, does everything. But in fact, poor Knight of Britain, he falls lamed. The four Paladins have stood shoulder to shoulder, glittering, watching the fray. Forth now steps another knight, and the fight recommences. Terrible is the smacking of swords, terrible the gasps from behind the dropped visors. Till at last the Knight of Spain falls — and the Paladin stands with his foot on the dead. Then loud acclamations from the Paladins, and yells of joy from the audience.

“*Silenzio!*” yells the padrone, flourishing the fennel-stalk.

Dead silence, and the story goes on. The Knight of Britain of course claims to have slain the foe: and the audience faintly, jeeringly hisses. “He’s always the boaster, and he never does anything, the Knight of Britain,” whispers my fat friend. He has forgotten my nationality. I wonder if the Knight of Britain is pure tradition, or if a political touch of to-day has crept in.

However, this fray is over — Merlin comes to advise for the next move. And are we ready? We are ready. Andiamo! Again the word is yelled out, and they set off. At first one is all engaged watching the figures: their brilliance, their blank, martial stare, their sudden, angular gestures. There is something extremely suggestive in them. How much better they fit the old legend-tales than living people would do. Nay, if we are going to have human beings on the stage, they should be masked and disguised. For in fact drama is enacted by symbolic creatures formed out of human consciousness: puppets if you like: but not human *individuals*. Our stage is all wrong, so boring in its personality.

Gradually, however, I found that my eyes were of minor importance. Gradually it was the voice that gained hold of the blood. It is a strong, rather husky, male voice that acts direct on the blood, not on the mind. Again the old male Adam began to stir at the roots of my soul. Again the old, first-hand indifference, the rich, untamed male blood rocked down my veins. What does one care? What does one care for precept and mental dictation? Is there not the massive, brilliant, out-flinging recklessness in the male soul, summed up in the sudden word: *Andiamo!* *Andiamo!* Let us go on. *Andiamo!* — let us go hell knows where, but let us go on. The splendid recklessness and passion that knows no precept and no school-teacher, whose very molten spontaneity is its own guide.

I loved the voices of the Paladins — Rinaldo's voice, and Orlando's voice: the voice of men once more, men who are not to be tutored. To be sure there was Merlin making his long speeches in rather a chuntering, prosy tone. But who was he? Was he a Paladin and a splendour? Not he. A long-gowned chunterer. It is the reckless blood which achieves all, the piff-piff-piffing of the mental and moral intelligence is but a subsidiary help, a mere instrument.

The dragon was splendid: I have seen dragons in Wagner, at Covent Garden and at the Prinz-Regenten Theatre in Munich, and they were ridiculous. But this dragon simply frightened me, with his leaping and twisting. And when he seized the knight by the leg, my blood ran cold.

With smoke and sulphur leaps in Beelzebub. But he is merely the servant of the great old witch. He is black and grinning, and he flourishes his posterior and his tail. But he is curiously inefficacious: a sort of lackey of wicked powers.

The old witch with her grey hair and staring eyes succeeds in being ghastly. With just a touch, she would be a tall, benevolent old lady. But listen to her. Hear her horrible female voice with its scraping yells of evil lustfulness. Yes, she fills me with horror. And I am staggered to find how I believe in her as *the* evil principle. Beelzebub, poor devil, is only one of her instruments.

It is her old, horrible, girning female soul which locks up the heroes, and which sends forth the awful and almost omnipotent malevolence. This old, ghastly woman-spirit is the very core of mischief. And I felt my heart getting as hot against her as the hearts of the lads in the audience were. Red, deep hate I felt of that symbolic old ghoulish-female. Poor male Beelzebub is her loutish slave. And it takes all Merlin's bright-faced intelligence, and all the surging hot urgency of the Paladins, to conquer her.

She will never be finally destroyed — she will never finally die, till her statue, which is immured in the vaults of the castle, is burned. Oh, it was a very psycho-analytic performance altogether, and one could give a very good Freudian analysis of it. But behold this image of the witch: this white, submerged *idea* of woman which rules from the deeps of the unconscious. Behold, the reckless, untamable male knights will do for it. As the statue goes up in flame — it is only paper over wires — the audience yells! And yells again. And would God the symbolic act were really achieved. It is only little boys who yell. Men merely smile at the trick. They know well enough the white image endures.

So it is over. The knights look at us once more. Orlando, hero of heroes, has a slight inward cast of the eyes. This gives him that look of almost fierce good-nature which these people adore: the look of a man who does not think, but whose heart is all the time red hot with burning, generous blood-passion. This is what they adore.

So my knights go. They all have wonderful faces, and are so splendidly glittering and male. I am sorry they will be laid in a box now.

There is a great gasp of relief. The piano starts its lame rattle. Somebody looking round laughs. And we all look round. And seated on the top of the ticket office is a fat, solemn urchin of two or three years, hands folded over his stomach, his forehead big and blank, like some queer little Buddha. The audience laughs with that southern sympathy: physical sympathy: that is what they love to feel and to arouse.

But there is a little after-scene: in front of the drop-curtain jerks out a little fat flat caricature of a Neapolitan, and from the opposite side jerks the tall caricature of a Sicilian. They jerk towards one another and bump into one another with a smack. And smack goes the Neapolitan, down on his posterior. And the boys howl with joy. It is the eternal collision between the two peoples, Neapolitan and Sicilian. Now goes on a lot of fooling between the two clowns, in the two dialects. Alas, I can hardly understand anything at all. But it sounds comic, and looks very funny. The Neapolitan of course gets most of the knocks. And there seems to be no indecency at all — unless once. The boys howl and rock with joy, and no one says *Silenzio!*

But it is over. All is over. The theatre empties in a moment. And I shake hands with my fat neighbour, affectionately, and in the right spirit. Truly I loved them all in the theatre: the generous, hot southern blood, so subtle and spontaneous, that asks for blood contact, not for mental communion or spirit sympathy. I was sorry to leave them.

THE END

SKETCHES OF ETRUSCAN PLACES



This collection of travel writing was first published posthumously in 1932. In these essays Lawrence explores the world of the Etruscans and Benito Mussolini's Italy during the late 1920s. In preparing these essays, Lawrence travelled through the countryside of Tuscany with his friend Earl Brewster during the spring of 1927.



Tellaro, a medieval village in the Gulf della Spezia, which Lawrence stayed in at this time

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1 — CERVETERI

The Etruscans, as everyone knows, were the people who occupied the middle of Italy in early Roman days and whom the Romans, in their usual neighbourly fashion, wiped out entirely in order to make room for Rome with a very big R. They couldn't have wiped them all out, there were too many of them. But they did wipe out the Etruscan existence as a nation and a people. However, this seems to be the inevitable result of expansion with a big E, which is the sole *raison d'être* of people like the Romans.

Now, we know nothing about the Etruscans except what we find in their tombs. There are references to them in Latin writers. But of first-hand knowledge we have nothing except what the tombs offer.

So to the tombs we must go: or to the museums containing the things that have been rifled from the tombs.

Myself, the first time I consciously saw Etruscan things, in the museum at Perugia, I was instinctively attracted to them. And it seems to be that way. Either there is instant sympathy, or instant contempt and indifference. Most people despise everything B.C. that isn't Greek, for the good reason that it ought to be Greek if it isn't. So Etruscan things are put down as a feeble Greco-Roman imitation. And a great scientific historian like Mommsen hardly allows that the Etruscans existed at all. Their existence was antipathetic to him. The Prussian in him was enthralled by the Prussian in the all-conquering Romans. So being a great scientific historian, he almost denies the very existence of the Etruscan people. He didn't like the idea of them. That was enough for a great scientific historian.

Besides, the Etruscans were vicious. We know it, because their enemies and exterminators said so. Just as we knew the unspeakable depths of our enemies in the late war. Who isn't vicious to his enemy? To my detractors I am a very effigy of vice. *À la bonne heure!*

However, those pure, clean-living, sweet-souled Romans, who smashed nation after nation and crushed the free soul in people after people, and were ruled by Messalina and Heliogabalus and such-like snowdrops, they said the Etruscans were vicious. *So basta! Quand le maître parle, tout le monde se tait.* The Etruscans were vicious! The only vicious people on the face of the earth presumably. You and I, dear reader, we are two unsullied snowflakes, aren't we? We have every right to judge.

Myself, however, if the Etruscans were vicious, I'm glad they were. To the

Puritan all things are impure, as somebody says. And those naughty neighbours of the Romans at least escaped being Puritans.

But to the tombs, to the tombs! On a sunny April morning we set out for the tombs. From Rome, the eternal city, now in a black bonnet. It was not far to go — about twenty miles over the Campagna towards the sea, on the line to Pisa.

The Campagna, with its great green spread of growing wheat, is almost human again. But still there are damp empty tracts, where now the little narcissus stands in clumps, or covers whole fields. And there are places green and foam-white, all with camomile, on a sunny morning in early April.

We are going to Cerveteri, which was the ancient Caere, or Cere, and which had a Greek name too, Agylla. It was a gay and gaudy Etruscan city when Rome put up her first few hovels: probably. Anyhow, there are tombs' there now.

The inestimable big Italian railway-guide says the station is Palo, and Cerveteri is eight and a half kilometres away: about five miles. But there is a post-omnibus.

We arrive at Palo, a station in nowhere, and ask if there is a bus to Cerveteri. No! An ancient sort of wagon with an ancient white horse stands outside. Where does that go? To Ladispoli. We know we don't want to go to Ladispoli, so we stare at the landscape. Could we get a carriage of any sort? It would be difficult. That is what they always say: difficult! Meaning impossible. At least they won't lift a finger to help. Is there an hotel at Cerveteri? They don't know. They have none of them ever been, though it is only five miles away, and there are tombs. Well, we will leave our two bags at the station. But they cannot accept them. Because they are not locked. But when did a hold-all ever lock? Difficult! Well then, let us leave them, and steal if you want to. Impossible! Such a moral responsibility! Impossible to leave an unlocked small hold-all at the station. So much for the officials!

However, we try the man at the small buffet. He is very laconic, but seems all right. We abandon our things in a corner of the dark little eating-place, and set off on foot. Luckily it is only something after ten in the morning.

A flat, white road with a rather noble avenue of umbrella-pines for the first few hundred yards. A road not far from the sea, a bare, flattish, hot white road with nothing but a tilted oxen-wagon in the distance like a huge snail with four horns. Beside the road the tall asphodel is letting off its spasmodic pink sparks, rather at random, and smelling of cats. Away to the left is the sea, beyond the flat green wheat, the Mediterranean glistening flat and deadish, as it does on the low shores. Ahead are hills, and a ragged bit of a grey village with an ugly big grey building: that is Cerveteri. We trudge on along the dull road. After all, it is only five miles and a bit.

We creep nearer, and climb the ascent. Caere, like most Etruscan cities, lay on the crown of a hill with cliff-like escarpments. Not that this Cerveteri is an Etruscan city. Caere, the Etruscan city, was swallowed by the Romans, and after the fall of the Roman Empire it fell out of existence altogether. But it feebly revived, and today we come to an old Italian village, walled in with grey walls, and having a few new, pink, box-shaped houses and villas outside the walls.

We pass through the gateway, where men are lounging talking and mules are tied up, and in the bits of crooked grey streets look for a place where we can eat. We see the notice, *Vini e Cucina*, Wines and Kitchen; but it is only a deep cavern where mule-drivers are drinking blackish wine.

However, we ask the man who is cleaning the post-omnibus in the street if there is any other place. He says no, so in we go, into the cavern, down a few steps.

Everybody is perfectly friendly. But the food is as usual, meat broth, very weak, with thin macaroni in it: the boiled meat that made the broth: and tripe: also spinach. The broth tastes of nothing, the meat tastes almost of less, the spinach, alas: has been cooked over-in the fat skimmed from the boiled beef. It is a meal — with a piece of so-called sheep's cheese, that is pure salt and rancidity, and probably comes from Sardinia; and wine that tastes like, and probably is, the black wine of Calabria wetted with a good proportion of water. But it is a meal. We will go to the tombs.

Into the cavern swaggers a spurred shepherd wearing goatskin trousers with the long, rusty brown goat's hair hanging shaggy from his legs. He grins and drinks wine, and immediately one sees again the shaggy-legged faun. His face is a faun-face, not deadened by morals. He grins quietly, and talks very subduedly, shyly, to the fellow who draws the wine from the barrels. It is obvious fauns are shy, very shy, especially of moderns like ourselves. He glances at us from a corner of his eye, ducks, wipes his mouth on the back of his hand, and is gone, clambering with his hairy legs on to his lean pony, swirling, and rattling away with a neat little clatter of hoofs, under the ramparts and away to the open. He is the faun escaping again out of the city precincts, far more shy and evanescent than any Christian virgin. You cannot hard-boil him.

It occurs to me how rarely one sees the faun-face now, in Italy, that one used to see so often before the war: the brown, rather still, straight-nosed face with a little black moustache and often a little tuft of black beard; yellow eyes, rather shy, under long lashes, but able to glare with a queer glare, on occasion; and mobile lips that had a queer way of showing the teeth when talking, bright white teeth. It was an old, old type, and rather common in the South. But now you will hardly see one of these men left, with the unconscious, ungrimacing faun-face.

They were all, apparently, killed in the war: they would be sure not to survive such a war. Anyway the last one I know, a handsome fellow of my own age — forty and a bit — is going queer and morose, crushed between war memories, that have revived, and remorseless go-ahead women-folk. Probably when I go South again he will have disappeared. They can't survive, the faun-faced men, with their pure outlines and their strange non-moral calm. Only the deflowered faces survive.

So much for a Maremma shepherd! We went out into the sunny April street of this Cerveteri, Cerevetus, the old Caere. It is a worn-out little knot of streets shut in inside a wall. Rising on the left is the citadel, the acropolis, the high place, that which is the arx in Etruscan cities. But now the high place is forlorn, with a big, weary building like a governor's palace, or a bishop's palace, spreading on the crest behind the castle gate, and a desolate sort of yard tilting below it, surrounded by ragged, ruinous enclosure. It is forlorn beyond words, dead, and still too big for the grey knot of inhabited streets below.

The girl of the cavern, a nice girl but a bad cook, has found us a guide, obviously her brother, to take us to the necropolis. He is a lad of about fourteen, and like everybody in this abandoned place shy and suspicious, holding off. He bids us wait while he runs away somewhere. So we drink coffee in the tiny café outside which the motor-omnibus reposes all day long, till the return of our guide and another little boy, who will come with him and see him through. The two boys cotton together, make a little world secure from us, and move on ahead of us, ignoring us as far as possible. The stranger is always a menace. B. and I are two very quiet-mannered harmless men. But that first boy could not have borne to go alone with us. Not alone! He would have been afraid, as if he were in the dark.

They led us out of the only gate of the old town. Mules and ponies were tied up in the sloping, forlorn place outside, and pack-mules arrived, as in Mexico. We turned away to the left, under the rock cliff from whose summit the so-called palace goes up flush, the windows looking out on to the world. It seems as if the Etruscans may once have cut this low rock-face, and as if the whole crown on which the wall-girt village of Cerveteri now stands may once have been the arx, the ark, the inner citadel and holy place of the city of Caere, or Agylla, the splendid Etruscan city, with its' Greek quarters. There was a whole suburb of Greek colonists, from Ionia, or perhaps from Athens, in busy Caere when Rome was still a rather crude place. About the year 390 B.C. the Gauls came swooping down on Rome. Then the Romans hurried the Vestal Virgins and other women and children away to Caere, and the Etruscans took care of them, in their rich city. Perhaps the refugee Vestals were housed on this rock. And perhaps not. The

site of Caere may not have been exactly here. Certainly it stretched away on this same hilltop, east and south, occupying the whole of the small plateau, some four or five miles round, and spreading a great city thirty times as big as the present Cerveteri. But the Etruscans built everything of wood — houses, temples — all save walls for fortification, great gates, bridges, and drainage works. So that the Etruscan cities vanished as completely as flowers. Only the tombs, the bulbs, were underground. But the Etruscans built their cities, whenever possible, on a long narrow plateau or headland above the surrounding country, and they liked to have a rocky cliff for their base, as in Cerveteri. Round the summit of this cliff, this headland, went the enclosure wall, sometimes miles of the great cincture. And within the walls they liked to have one inner high place, the arx, the citadel. Then outside they liked to have a sharp dip or ravine, with a parallel hill opposite. And on the parallel hill opposite they liked to have their city of the dead, the necropolis. So they could stand on their ramparts and look over the hollow where the stream flowed among its bushes, across from the city of life, gay with its painted houses and temples, to the near-at-hand city of their dear dead, pleasant with its smooth walks and stone symbols, and painted fronts.

So it is at Cerveteri. From the sea-plain — and the sea was probably a mile or two miles nearer in, in Etruscan days — the land leaves the coast in an easy slope to the low-crowned cliffs of the city. But behind, turning out of the gate away from the sea, you pass under the low but sheer cliff of the town, down the stony road to the little ravine, full of bushes.

Down here in the gully, the town — village, rather — has built its wash-house, and the women are quietly washing the linen. They are good-looking women, of the old world, with that very attractive look of noiselessness and inwardness, which women must have had in the past. As if, within the woman, there were again something to seek, that the eye can never search out. Something that can be lost, but can never be found out.

Up the other side of the ravine is a steep, rocky little climb along a sharp path, the two lads scrambling subduedly ahead. We pass a door cut in the rock-face. I peep in to the damp, dark cell of what was apparently once a tomb. But this must have been for unimportant people, a little room in a cliff-face, now all deserted. The great tombs in the Banditaccia are covered with mounds, tumuli. No one looks at these damp little rooms in the low cliff-face, among the bushes. So I scramble on hastily, after the others.

To emerge on to the open, rough, uncultivated plain. It was like Mexico, on a small scale: the open, abandoned plain; in the distance little, pyramid-shaped mountains set down straight upon the level, in the not-far distance; and between, a mounted shepherd galloping round a flock of mixed sheep and goats, looking

very small. It was just like Mexico, only much smaller and more human.

The boys went ahead across the fallow land, where there were many flowers, tiny purple verbena, tiny forget-me-nots, and much wild mignonette, that had a sweet little scent. I asked the boys what they called it. They gave the usual dumb-bell answer: 'It is a flower!' On the heaping banks towards the edge of the ravine the asphodel grew wild and thick, with tall flowers up to my shoulder, pink and rather spasmodic. These asphodels are very noticeable, a great feature in all this coast landscape. I thought the boys surely would have a name for it. But no! Sheepishly they make the same answer: '*È un fiore! Puzza!*' — It is a flower. It stinks! — Both facts being self-evident, there was no contradicting it. Though the smell of the asphodel is not objectionable, to me: and I find the flower, now I know it well, very beautiful, with its way of opening some pale, big, starry pink flowers, and leaving many of its buds shut, with their dark, reddish stripes.

Many people, however, are very disappointed with the Greeks, for having made so much of this flower. It is true, the word 'asphodel' makes one expect some tall and mysterious lily, not this sparky, assertive flower with just a touch of the onion about it. But for me, I don't care for mysterious lilies, not even for that weird shyness the mariposa lily has. And having stood on the rocks in Sicily, with the pink asphodel proudly sticking up like clouds at sea, taller than myself, letting off pink different flowerets with such sharp and vivid *éclat*, and saving up such a store of buds in ear, stripey, I confess I admire the flower. It has a certain reckless glory, such as the Greeks loved.

One man said he thought we were mistaken in calling this the Greek asphodel, as somewhere in Greek the asphodel is called yellow. Therefore, said this scholastic Englishman, the asphodel of the Greeks was probably the single daffodil.

But not it! There is a very nice and silky yellow asphodel on Etna, pure gold. And heaven knows how common the wild daffodil is in Greece. It does not seem a very Mediterranean flower. The narcissus, the polyanthus narcissus, is pure Mediterranean, and Greek. But the daffodil, the Lent lily!

However, trust an Englishman and a modern for wanting to turn the tall, proud, sparky, dare-devil asphodel into the modest daffodil! I believe we don't like the asphodel because we don't like anything proud and sparky. The myrtle opens her blossoms in just the same way as the asphodel, explosively, throwing out the sparks of her stamens. And I believe it was just this that the Greeks *saw*. They were that way themselves.

However, this is all on the way to the tombs: which lie ahead, mushroom-shaped mounds of grass, great mushroom-shaped mounds, along the edge of the

ravine. When I say ravine, don't expect a sort of Grand Canyon. Just a modest, Italian sort of ravine-gully, that you could almost jump down.

When we come near we see the mounds have bases of stone masonry, great girdles of carved and bevelled stone, running round touching the earth in flexible, uneven lines, like the girdles on big, uneasy buoys half sunk in the sea. And they are sunk a bit in the ground. And there is an avenue of mounds, with a sunken path between, parallel to the ravine. This was evidently the grand avenue of the necropolis, like the million-dollar cemetery in New Orleans. *Absit omen!*

Between us and the mounds is a barbed-wire fence. There is a wire gate on which it says you mustn't pick the flowers, whatever that may mean, for there are no flowers. And another notice says, you mustn't tip the guide, as he is gratuitous.

The boys run to the new little concrete house just by, and bring the guide: a youth with red eyes and a bandaged hand. He lost a finger on the railway a month ago. He is shy, and muttering, and neither prepossessing nor cheerful, but he turns out quite decent. He brings keys and an acetylene lamp, and we go through the wire gate into the place of tombs.

There is a queer stillness and a curious peaceful repose about the Etruscan places I have been to, quite different from the weirdness of Celtic places, the slightly repellent feeling of Rome and the old Campagna, and the rather horrible feeling of the great pyramid places in Mexico, Teotihuacan and Cholula, and Mitla in the south; or the amiably idolatrous Buddha places in Ceylon. There is a stillness and a softness in these great grassy mounds with their ancient stone girdles, and down the central walk there lingers still a kind of homeliness and happiness. True, it was a still and sunny afternoon in April, and larks rose from the soft grass of the tombs. But there was a stillness and a soothingness in all the air, in that sunken place, and a feeling that it was good for one's soul to be there.

The same when we went down the few steps, and into the chambers of rock, within the tumulus. There is nothing left. It is like a house that has been swept bare: the inmates have left: now it waits for the next corner. But whoever it is that has departed, they have left a pleasant feeling behind them, warm to the heart, and kindly to the bowels.

They are surprisingly big and handsome, these homes of the dead. Cut out of the living rock, they are just like houses. The roof has a beam cut to imitate the roof-beam of the house. It is a house, a home.

As you enter, there are two small chambers, one to the right, one to the left, antechambers. They say that here the ashes of the slaves were deposited, in urns, upon the great benches of rock. For the slaves were always burned, presumably. Whereas at Cerveteri the masters were laid full-length, sometimes in the great

stone sarcophagi, sometimes in big coffins of terra-cotta, in all their regalia. But most often they were just laid there on the broad rock-bed that goes round the tomb, and is empty now, laid there calmly upon an open bier, not shut in sarcophagi, but sleeping as if in life.

The central chamber is large; perhaps there is a great square column of rock left in the centre, apparently supporting the solid roof as a roof-tree supports the roof of a house. And all round the chamber goes the broad bed of rock, sometimes a double tier, on which the dead were laid, in their coffins, or lying open upon carved litters of stone or wood, a man glittering in golden armour, or a woman in white and crimson robes, with great necklaces round their necks, and rings on their fingers. Here lay the family, the great chiefs and their wives, the Lucumones, and their sons and daughters, many in one tomb.

Beyond again is a rock doorway, rather narrow, and narrowing upwards, like Egypt. The whole thing suggests Egypt: but on the whole, here all is plain, simple, usually with no decoration, and with those easy natural proportions whose beauty one hardly notices, they come so naturally, physically. It is the natural beauty of proportion of the phallic consciousness, contrasted with the more studied or ecstatic proportion of the mental and spiritual Consciousness we are accustomed to.

Through the inner doorway is the last chamber, small and dark and culminative. Facing the door goes the stone bed on which was laid, presumably, the Lucumo and the sacred treasures of the dead, the little bronze ship of death that should bear him over to the other world, the vases of jewels for his arraying, the vases of small dishes, the little bronze statuettes and tools, the weapons, the armour: all the amazing impedimenta of the important dead. Or sometimes in this inner room lay the woman, the great lady, in all her robes, with the mirror in her hand, and her treasures, her jewels and combs and silver boxes of cosmetics, in urns or vases ranged alongside. Splendid was the array they went with, into death.

One of the most important tombs is the tomb of the Tarquins, the family that gave Etruscan kings to early Rome. You go down a flight of steps, and into the underworld home of the Tarchne, as the Etruscans wrote it. In the middle of the great chamber there are two pillars, left from the rock. The walls of the big living-room of the dead Tarquins, if one may put it so, are stuccoed, but there are no paintings. Only there are the writings on the wall, and in the burial niches in the wall above the long double-tier stone bed; little sentences freely written in red paint or black, or scratched in the stucco with the finger, slanting with the real Etruscan carelessness and fullness of life, often running downwards, written from right to left. We can read these debonair inscriptions, that look as if

someone had just chalked them up yesterday without a thought, in the archaic Etruscan letters, quite easily. But when we have read them we don't know what they mean. *Avle — Tarchnas — Larthal — Clan*. That is plain enough. But what does it mean? Nobody knows precisely. Names, family names, family connexions, titles of the dead — we may assume so much. 'Aule, son of Larte Tarchna,' say the scientists, having got so far. But we cannot read one single sentence. The Etruscan language is a mystery. Yet in Caesar's day it was the everyday language of the bulk of the people in central Italy — at least, east-central. And many Romans spoke Etruscan as we speak French. Yet now the language is entirely lost. Destiny is a queer thing.

The tomb called the Grotta Bella is interesting because of the low-relief carvings and stucco reliefs on the pillars and the walls round the burial niches and above the stone death-bed that goes round the tomb. The things represented are mostly warriors' arms and insignia: shields, helmets, corselets, greaves for the legs, swords, spears, shoes, belts, the necklace of the noble: and then the sacred drinking bowl, the sceptre, the dog who is man's guardian even on the death journey, the two lions that stand by the gateway of life or death, the triton, or merman, and the goose, the bird that swims on the waters and thrusts its head deep into the flood of the Beginning and the End. All these are represented on the walls. And all these, no doubt, were laid, the actual objects, or figures to represent them, in this tomb. But now nothing is left. But when we remember the great store of treasure that every notable tomb must have contained: and that every large tumulus covered several tombs: and that in the necropolis of Cerveteri we can still discover hundreds of tombs: and that other tombs exist in great numbers on the other side of the old city, towards the sea; we can have an idea of the vast mass of wealth this city could afford to bury with its dead, in days when Rome had very little gold, and even bronze was precious.

The tombs seem so easy and friendly, cut out of rock underground. One does not feel oppressed, descending into them. It must be partly owing to the peculiar charm of natural proportion which is in all Etruscan things of the unspoilt, unromanized centuries. There is a simplicity, combined with a most peculiar, free-breasted naturalness and spontaneity, in the shapes and movements of the underworld walls and spaces, that at once reassures the spirit. The Greeks sought to make an impression, and Gothic still more seeks to impress the mind. The Etruscans, no. The things they did, in their easy centuries, are as natural and as easy as breathing. They leave the breast breathing freely and pleasantly, with a certain fullness of life. Even the tombs. And that is the true Etruscan quality: ease, naturalness, and an abundance of life, no need to force the mind or the soul in any direction.

And death, to the Etruscan, was a pleasant continuance of life, with jewels and wine and flutes playing for the dance. It was neither an ecstasy of bliss, a heaven, nor a purgatory of torment. It was just a natural continuance of the fullness of life. Everything was in terms of life, of living.

Yet everything Etruscan, save the tombs, has been wiped out. It seems strange. One goes out again into the April sunshine, into the sunken road between the soft, grassy-mounded tombs, and as one passes one glances down the steps at the doorless doorways of tombs. It is so still and pleasant and cheerful. The place is so soothing.

B., who has just come back from India, is so surprised to see the phallic stones by the doors of many tombs. Why, it's like the Shiva lingam at Benares! It's exactly like the lingam stones in the Shiva caves and the Shiva temples!

And that is another curious thing. One can live one's life, and read all the books about India or Etruria, and never read a single word about the thing that impresses one in the very first five minutes, in Benares or in an Etruscan necropolis: that is, the phallic symbol. Here it is, in stone, unmistakable, and everywhere, around these tombs. Here it is, big and little, standing by the doors, or inserted, quite small, into the rock: the phallic stone! Perhaps some tumuli had a great phallic column on the summit: some perhaps by the door. There are still small phallic stones, only seven or eight inches long, inserted in the rock outside the doors: they always seem to have been outside. And these small lingams look as if they were part of the rock. But no, B. lifts one out. It is cut, and is fitted into a socket, previously cemented in. B puts the phallic stone back into its socket, where it was placed, probably, five or six hundred years before Christ was born.

The big phallic stones that, it is said, probably stood on top of the tumuli, are sometimes carved very beautifully, sometimes with inscriptions. The scientists call them *cippus*, *cippi*. But surely the cippus is a truncated column used usually as a gravestone: a column quite squat, often square, having been cut across, truncated, to represent maybe a life cut short. Some of the little phallic stones are like this — truncated. But others are tall, huge and decorated, and with the double cone that is surely phallic. And little inserted phallic stones are not cut short.

By the doorway of some tombs there is a carved stone house, or a stone imitation chest with sloping lids like the two sides of the roof of an oblong house. The guide-boy, who works on the railway and is no profound scholar, mutters that every woman's tomb had one of these stone houses or chests over it — over the doorway, he says — and every man's tomb had one of the phallic stones, or lingams. But since the great tombs were family tombs, perhaps they had both.

The stone house, as the boy calls it, suggests the Noah's Ark without the boat part: the Noah's Ark box we had as children, full of animals. And that is what it is, the Ark, the *arx*, the womb. The womb of all the world, that brought forth all the creatures. The womb, the *arx*, where life retreats in the last refuge. The womb the ark of the covenant, in which lies the mystery of eternal life, the manna and the mysteries. There it is, standing displaced outside the doorway of Etruscan tombs at Cerveteri.

And perhaps in the insistence on these two symbols, in the Etruscan world, we can see the reason for the utter destruction and annihilation of the Etruscan consciousness. The new world wanted to rid itself of these fatal, dominant symbols of the old world, the old physical world. The Etruscan consciousness was rooted quite blithely in these symbols, the phallus and the *arx*. So the whole consciousness, the whole Etruscan pulse and rhythm, must be wiped out.

Now we see again, under the blue heavens where the larks are singing in the hot April sky, why the Romans called the Etruscans vicious. Even in their palmy days the Romans were not exactly saints. But they thought they ought to be. They hated the phallus and the ark, because they wanted empire and dominion and, above all, riches: social gain. You cannot dance gaily to the double flute and at the same time conquer nations or rake in large sums of money. *Delenda est Cartago*. To the greedy man, everybody that is in the way of his greed is vice incarnate.

There are many tombs, though not many of the great mounds are left. Most have been levelled. There are many tombs: some were standing half full of water; some were in process of being excavated, in a kind of quarry-place, though the work for the time was silent and abandoned. Many tombs, many, many, and you must descend to them all, for they are all cut out below the surface of the earth: and where there was a tumulus it was piled above them afterwards, loose earth, within the girdle of stone. Some tumuli have been levelled, yet the whole landscape is lumpy with them. But the tombs remain, here all more or less alike, though some are big and some are small, and some are noble and some are rather mean. But most of them seem to have several chambers, beyond the antechambers. And all these tombs along the dead highway would seem to have been topped, once, by the beautiful roundness of tumuli, the great mounds of fruition, for the dead, with the tall phallic cone rising from the summit.

The necropolis, as far as we are concerned, ends on a waste place of deserted excavations and flood-water. We turn back, to leave the home of dead Etruscans. All the tombs are empty. All have been rifled. The Romans may have respected the dead, for a certain time, while their religion was sufficiently Etruscan to

exert a power over them. But later, when the Romans started collecting Etruscan antiques — as we collect antiques today — there must have been a great sacking of the tombs. Even when all the gold and silver and jewels had been pilfered from the urns — which no doubt happened very soon after the Roman dominion — still the vases and the bronze must have remained in their places. Then the rich Romans began to collect vases, ‘Greek’ vases with the painted scenes. So these were stolen from the tombs. Then the little bronze figures, statuettes, animals, bronze ships, of which the Etruscans put thousands in the tombs, became the rage with the Roman collectors. Some smart Roman gentry would have a thousand or two choice little Etruscan bronzes to boast of. Then Rome fell, and the barbarians pillaged whatever was left. So it went on.

And still some tombs remained virgin, for the earth had washed in and filled the entrance way, covered the stone bases of the mounds; trees, bushes grew over the graves; you had only hilly, humpy, bushy waste country.

Under this the tombs lay silent, either ravaged, or, in a few wonderful cases, still virgin. And still absolutely virgin lay one of the tombs of Cerveteri, alone and apart from the necropolis, buried on the other side of the town, until 1836, when it was discovered: and, of course, denuded. General Galassi and the arch-priest Regolini unearthed it: so it is called the Regolini-Galassi tomb.

It is still interesting: a primitive narrow tomb like a passage, with a partition half-way, and covered with an arched roof, what they call the false arch, which is made by letting the flat horizontal stones of the roof jut out step by step, as they pile upwards, till they almost meet. Then big flat stones are laid as cover, and make the flat top of the almost Gothic arch: an arch built, probably, in the eighth century before Christ.

In the first chamber lay the remains of a warrior, with his bronze armour, beautiful and sensitive as if it had grown in life for the living body, sunk on his dust. In the inner chamber beautiful, frail, pale-gold jewellery lay on the stone bed, earrings where the ears were dust, bracelets in the dust that once was arms, surely of a noble lady, nearly three thousand years ago.

They took away everything. The treasure, so delicate and sensitive and wistful, is mostly in the Gregorian Museum in the Vatican. On two of the little silver vases from the Regolini-Galassi tomb is the scratched inscription — *Mi Larthia*. Almost the first written Etruscan words we know. And what do they mean, anyhow? ‘This is Larthia’ — Larthia being a lady?

Caere, even seven hundred years before Christ, must have been rich and full of luxury, fond of soft gold and of banquets, dancing, and great Greek vases. But you will find none of it now. The tombs are bare: what treasure they yielded up, and even to us Cerveteri has yielded a great deal, is in the museums. If you go

you will see, as I saw, a grey, forlorn little township in tight walls — perhaps having a thousand inhabitants — and some empty burying places.

But when you sit in the post-automobile, to be rattled down to the station, about four o'clock in the sunny afternoon, you will probably see the bus surrounded by a dozen buxom, handsome women, saying good-bye to one of their citizenesses. And in the full, dark, handsome, jovial faces surely you see the lustre still of the life-loving Etruscans! There are some level Greek eyebrows. But surely there are other vivid, warm faces still jovial with Etruscan vitality, beautiful with the mystery of the unrifled ark, ripe with the phallic knowledge and the Etruscan carelessness.

2 — TARQUINIA

In Cerveteri there is nowhere to sleep, so the only thing to do is to go back to Rome, or forwards to Civit  Vecchia. The bus landed us at the station of Palo at about five o'clock: in the midst of nowhere: to meet the Rome train. But we were going on to Tarquinia, not back to Rome, so we must wait two hours, till seven.

In the distance we could see the concrete villas and new houses of what was evidently Ladispoli, a seaside place, some two miles away. So we set off to walk to Ladispoli, on the flat sea-road. On the left, in the wood that forms part of the great park, the nightingales had already begun to whistle, and looking over the wall one could see many little rose-coloured cyclamens glowing on the earth in the evening light.

We walked on, and the Rome train came surging round the bend. It misses Ladispoli, whose two miles of branch line runs only in the hot bathing months. As we neared the first ugly villas on the road the ancient wagonette drawn by the ancient white horse, both looking sun-bitten almost to ghostliness, clattered past. It just beat us.

Ladispoli is one of those ugly little places on the Roman coast, consisting of new concrete villas, new concrete hotels, kiosks and bathing establishments; bareness and nonexistence for ten months in the year, seething solid with fleshy bathers in July and August. Now it was deserted, quite deserted, save for two or three officials and four wild children.

B. and I lay on the grey-black lava sand, by the flat, low sea, over which the sky, grey and shapeless, emitted a flat, wan evening light. Little waves curled green out of the sea's dark greyness, from the curious low flatness of the water. It is a peculiarly forlorn coast, the sea peculiarly flat and sunken, lifeless-looking, the land as if it had given its last gasp, and was now for ever inert.

Yet this is the Tyrrhenian sea of the Etruscans, where their shipping spread sharp sails, and beat the sea with slave-oars, roving in from Greece and Sicily, Sicily of the Greek tyrants; from Cumae, the city of the old Greek colony of Campania, where the province of Naples now is; and from Elba, where the Etruscans mined their iron ore. The Etruscans sailed the seas. They are even said to have come by sea, from Lydia in Asia Minor, at some date far back in the dim mists before the eighth century B.C. But that a whole people, even a whole host, sailed in the tiny ships of those days, all at once, to people a sparsely peopled central Italy, seems hard to imagine. Probably ships did come — even before

Ulysses. Probably men landed on the strange flat coast, and made camps, and then treated with the natives. Whether the newcomers were Lydians or Hittites with hair curled in a roll behind, or men from Mycenae or Crete, who knows. Perhaps men of all these sorts came, in batches. For in Homeric days a restlessness seems to have possessed the Mediterranean basin, and ancient races began shaking ships like seeds over the sea. More people than Greeks, or Hellenes, or Indo-Germanic groups, were on the move.

But whatever little ships were run ashore on the soft, deep, grey-black volcanic sand of this coast, three thousand years ago, and earlier, their mariners certainly did not find those hills inland empty of people. If the Lydians or Hittites pulled up their long little two-eyed ships on to the beach, and made a camp behind a bank, in shelter from the wet strong wind, what natives came down curiously to look at them? For natives there were, of that we may be certain. Even before the fall of Troy, before even Athens was dreamed of, there were natives here. And they had huts on the hills, thatched huts in clumsy groups most probably; with patches of grain, and flocks of goats and probably cattle. Probably it was like coming on an old Irish village, or a village in the Scottish Hebrides in Prince Charlie's day, to come upon a village of these Italian aborigines, by the Tyrrhenian sea, three thousand years ago. But by the time Etruscan history starts in Caere, some eight centuries B.C., there was certainly more than a village on the hill. There was a native city, of that we may be sure; and a busy spinning of linen and beating of gold, long before the Regolini-Galassi tomb was built.

However that may be, somebody came, and somebody was already here: of that we may be certain: and, in the first place, none of them were Greeks or Hellenes. It was the days before Rome rose up: probably when the first corners arrived it was the days even before Homer. The newcomers, whether they were few or many, seem to have come from the east, Asia Minor or Crete or Cyprus. They were, we must feel, of an old, primitive Mediterranean and Asiatic or Aegean stock. The twilight of the beginning of our history was the nightfall of some previous history, which will never be written. Pelasgian is but a shadow-word: But Hittite and Minoan, Lydian, Carian, Etruscan, these words emerge from shadow, and perhaps from one and the same great shadow come the peoples to whom the names belong.

The Etruscan civilization seems a shoot, perhaps the last, from the prehistoric Mediterranean world, and the Etruscans, newcomers and aborigines alike, probably belonged to that ancient world, though they were of different nations and levels of culture. Later, of course, the Greeks exerted a great influence. But that is another matter.

Whatever happened, the newcomers in ancient central Italy found many natives flourishing in possession of the land. These aboriginals, now ridiculously called Villanovans, were neither wiped out nor suppressed. Probably they welcomed the strangers, whose pulse was not hostile to their own. Probably the more highly developed religion of the newcomers was not hostile to the primitive religion of the aborigines: no doubt the two religions had the same root. Probably the aborigines formed willingly a sort of religious aristocracy from the newcomers: the Italians might almost do the same today. And so the Etruscan world arose. But it took centuries to arise. Etruria was not a colony, it was a slowly developed country.

There was never an Etruscan nation: only, in historical times, a great league of tribes or nations using the Etruscan language and the Etruscan script — at least officially — and uniting in their religious feeling and observances. The Etruscan alphabet seems to have been borrowed from the old Greeks, apparently from the Chalcidians of Cumae — the Greek colony just north of where Naples now is. But the Etruscan language is not akin to any of the Greek dialects, nor, apparently, to the Italic. But we don't know. It is probably to a great extent the language of the old aboriginals of southern Etruria, just as the religion is in all probability basically aboriginal, belonging to some vast old religion of the prehistoric world. From the shadow of the prehistoric world emerge dying religions that have not yet invented gods or goddesses, but live by the mystery of the elemental powers in the Universe, the complex vitalities of what we feebly call Nature. And the Etruscan religion was certainly one of these. The gods and goddesses don't seem to have emerged in any sharp definiteness.

But it is not for me to make assertions. Only, that which half emerges from the dim background of time is strangely stirring; and after having read all the learned suggestions, most of them contradicting one another; and then having looked sensitively at the tombs and the Etruscan things that are left, one must accept one's own resultant feeling.

Ships came along this low, inconspicuous sea, coming up from the Near East, we should imagine, even in the days of Solomon — even, maybe, in the days of Abraham. And they kept on coming. As the light of history dawns and brightens, we see them winging along with their white or scarlet sails. Then, as the Greeks came crowding into colonies in Italy, and the Phoenicians began to exploit the western Mediterranean, we begin to hear of the silent Etruscans, and to see them.

Just north of here Caere founded a port called Pyrgi, and we know that the Greek vessels flocked in, with vases and stuffs and colonists coming from Hellas or from Magna Graecia, and that Phoenician ships came rowing sharply, over from Sardinia, up from Carthage, round from Tyre and Sidon; while the

Etruscans had their own fleets, built of timber from the mountains, caulked with pitch from northern Volterra, fitted with sails from Tarquinia, filled with wheat from the bountiful plains, or with the famous Etruscan articles of bronze and iron, which they carried away to Corinth or to Athens or to the ports of Asia Minor. We know of the great and finally disastrous sea-battles with the Phoenicians and the tyrant of Syracuse. And we know that the Etruscans, all except those of Caere, became ruthless pirates, almost like the Moors and the Barbary corsairs later on. This was part of their viciousness, a great annoyance to their loving and harmless neighbours, the law-abiding Romans — who believed in the supreme law of conquest.

However, all this is long ago. The very coast has changed since then. The smitten sea has sunk and fallen back, the weary land has emerged when, apparently, it didn't want to, and the flowers of the coast-line are miserable bathing-places such as Ladispoli and seaside Ostia, desecration put upon desolation, to the triumphant trump of the mosquito.

The wind blew flat and almost chill from the darkening sea, the dead waves lifted small bits of pure green out of the leaden greyness, under the leaden sky. We got up from the dark grey but soft sand, and went back along the road to the station, peered at by the few people and officials who were holding the place together till the next bathers came.

At the station there was general desertedness. But our things still lay untouched in a dark corner of the buffet, and the man gave us a decent little meal of cold meats and wine and oranges. It was already night. The train came rushing in, punctually.

It is an hour or more to Cività Vecchia, which is a port of not much importance, except that from here the regular steamer sails to Sardinia. We gave our things to a friendly old porter, and told him to take us to the nearest hotel. It was night, very dark as we emerged from the station.

And a fellow came furtively shouldering up to me.

'You are foreigners, aren't you?'

'Yes.'

'What nationality?'

'English.'

'You have your permission to reside in Italy — or your passport?'

'My passport I have — what do you want?'

'I want to look at your passport.'

'It's in the valise! And why? Why is this?'

'This is a port, and we must examine the papers of foreigners.'

'And why? Genoa is a port, and no one dreams of asking for papers.'

I was furious. He made no answer. I told the porter to go on to the hotel, and the fellow furtively followed at our side, half-a-pace to the rear, in the mongrel way these spy-louts have.

In the hotel I asked for a room and registered, and then the fellow asked again for my passport. I wanted to know why he demanded it, what he meant by accosting me outside the station as if I was a criminal, what he meant by insulting us with his requests, when in any other town in Italy one went unquestioned — and so forth, in considerable rage.

He did not reply, but obstinately looked as though he would be venomous if he could. He peered at the passport — though I doubt if he could make head or tail of it — asked where we were going, peered at B.'s passport, half excused himself in a whining, disgusting sort of fashion, and disappeared into the night. A real lout.

I was furious. Supposing I had not been carrying my passport — and usually I don't dream of carrying it — what amount of trouble would that lout have made me! Probably I should have spent the night in prison, and been bullied by half a dozen low bullies.

Those poor rats at Ladispoli had seen me and B. go to the sea and sit on the sand for half-an-hour, then go back to the train. And this was enough to rouse their suspicions, I imagine, so they telegraphed to Civit  Vecchia. Why are officials always fools? Even when there is no war on? What could they imagine we were doing?

The hotel manager, propitious, said there was a very interesting museum in Civit  Vecchia, and wouldn't we stay the next day and see it. 'Ah!' I replied. 'But all it contains is Roman stuff, and we don't want to look at that.' It was malice on my part, because the present regime considers itself purely ancient Roman. The man looked at me scared, and I grinned at him. 'But what do they mean,' I said, 'behaving like this to a simple traveller, in a country where foreigners are invited to travel!' 'Ah!' said the porter softly and soothingly. 'It is the Roman province. You will have no more of it when you leave the Provincia di Roma.' And when the Italians give the soft answer to turn away wrath, the wrath somehow turns away.

We walked for an hour in the dull street of Civit  Vecchia. There seemed so much suspicion, one would have thought there were several wars on. The hotel manager asked if we were staying. We said we were leaving by the eight-o'clock train in the morning, for Tarquinia.

And, sure enough, we left by the eight-o'clock train. Tarquinia is only one station from Civit  Vecchia — about twenty minutes over the fiat Maremma country, with the sea on the left, and the green wheat growing luxuriantly, the

asphodel sticking up its spikes.

We soon saw Tarquinia, its towers pricking up like antennae on the side of a low bluff of a hill, some few miles inland from the sea. And this was once the metropolis of Etruria, chief city of the great Etruscan League. But it died like all the other Etruscan cities, and had a more or less medieval rebirth, with a new name. Dante knew it, as it was known for centuries, as Corneto — Corgnetum or Cornetium — and forgotten was its Etruscan past. Then there was a feeble sort of wakening to remembrance a hundred years ago, and the town got Tarquinia tacked on to its Corneto: Corneto-Tarquinia. The Fascist regime, however, glorying in the Italian origins of Italy, has now struck out the Corneto, so the town is once more, simply, Tarquinia. As you come up in the motor-bus from the station you see the great black letters, on a white ground, painted on the wall by the city gateway: *Tarquinia*. So the wheel of revolution turns. There stands the Etruscan word — Latinized Etruscan — beside the medieval gate, put up by the Fascist power to name and unname.

But the Fascists, who consider themselves in all things Roman, Roman of the Caesars, heirs of Empire and world power, are beside the mark restoring the rags of dignity to Etruscan places. For of all the Italian people that ever lived, the Etruscans were surely the least Roman. Just as, of all the people that ever rose up in Italy, the Romans of ancient Rome were surely the most un-Italian, judging from the natives of today.

Tarquinia is only about three miles from the sea. The omnibus soon runs one up, charges through the widened gateway, swirls round in the empty space inside the gateway, and is finished. We descend in the bare place, which seems to expect nothing. On the left is a beautiful stone palazzo — on the right is a café, upon the low ramparts above the gate. The man of the *Dazio*, the town customs, looks to see if anybody has brought food-stuffs into the town — but it is a mere glance. I ask him for the hotel. He says: ‘Do you mean to sleep?’ I say I do. Then he tells a small boy to carry my bag and takes us to Gentile’s.

Nowhere is far off, in these small wall-girdled cities. In the warm April morning the stony little town seems half asleep. As a matter of fact, most of the inhabitants are out in the fields, and won’t come in through the gates again till evening. The slight sense of desertedness is everywhere — even in the inn, when we have climbed up the stairs to it, for the ground floor does not belong. A little lad in long trousers, who would seem to be only twelve years old but who has the air of a mature man, confronts us with his chest out. We ask for rooms. He eyes us, darts away for the key, and leads us off upstairs another flight, shouting to a young girl, who acts as chambermaid, to follow on. He shows us two small rooms, opening off a big, desert sort of general assembly room common in this

kind of inn. 'And you won't be lonely,' he said briskly, 'because you can talk to one another through the wall. *Toh! Lina!*' He lifts his finger and listens. '*Eh!*' comes through the wall, like an echo, with startling nearness and clearness. '*Fai presto!*' says Albertino. '*E pronto!*' comes the voice of Lina. '*Ecco!*' says Albertino to us. 'You hear!' We certainly did. The partition wall must have been butter-muslin. And Albertino was delighted, having reassured us we should not feel lonely nor frightened in the night.

He was, in fact, the most manly and fatherly little hotel manager I have ever known, and he ran the whole place. He was in reality fourteen years old, but stunted. From five in the morning till ten at night he was on the go, never ceasing, and with a queer, abrupt, sideways-darting alacrity that must have wasted a great deal of energy. The father and mother were in the background — quite young and pleasant. But they didn't seem to exert themselves. Albertino did it all. How Dickens would have loved him! But Dickens would not have seen the queer wistfulness, and trustfulness, and courage in the boy. He was absolutely unsuspecting of us strangers. People must be rather human and decent in Tarquinia, even the commercial travellers: who, presumably, are chiefly buyers of agricultural produce, and sellers of agricultural implements and so forth.

We sallied out, back to the space by the gate, and drank coffee at one of the tin tables outside. Beyond the wall there were a few new villas — the land dropped green and quick, to the strip of coast plain and the indistinct, faintly gleaming sea, which seemed somehow not like a sea at all.

I was thinking, if this were still an Etruscan city, there would still be this cleared space just inside the gate. But instead of a rather forlorn vacant lot it would be a sacred clearing, with a little temple to keep it alert.

Myself, I like to think of the little wooden temples of the early Greeks and of the Etruscans: small, dainty, fragile, and evanescent as flowers. We have reached the stage when we are weary of huge stone erections, and we begin to realize that it is better to keep life fluid and changing than to try to hold it fast down in heavy monuments. Burdens on the face of the earth are man's ponderous erections.

The Etruscans made small temples, like little houses with pointed roofs, entirely of wood. But then, outside, they had friezes and cornices and crests of terra-cotta, so that the upper part of the temple would seem almost made of earthenware, terra-cotta plaques fitted neatly, and alive with freely modelled painted figures in relief, gay dancing creatures, rows of ducks, round faces like the sun, and faces grinning and putting out a big tongue, all vivid and fresh and unimposing. The whole thing small and dainty in proportion, and fresh,

somehow charming instead of impressive. There seems to have been in the Etruscan instinct a real desire to preserve the natural humour of life. And that is a task surely more worthy, and even much more difficult in the long run, than conquering the world or sacrificing the self or saving the immortal soul.

Why has mankind had such a craving to be imposed upon? Why this lust after imposing creeds, imposing deeds, imposing buildings, imposing language, imposing works of art? The thing becomes an imposition and a weariness at last. Give us things that are alive and flexible, which won't last too long and become an obstruction and a weariness. Even Michelangelo becomes at last a lump and a burden and a bore. It is so hard to see past him.

Across the space from the café is the Palazzo Vitelleschi, a charming building, now a national museum — so the marble slab says. But the heavy doors are shut. The place opens at ten, a man says. It is nine-thirty. We wander up the steep but not very long street, to the top.

And the top is a fragment of public garden, and a look-out. Two old men are sitting in the sun, under a tree. We walk to the parapet, and suddenly are looking into one of the most delightful landscapes I have ever seen: as it were, into the very virginity of hilly green country. It is all wheat — green and soft and swooping, swooping down and up, and glowing with green newness, and no houses. Down goes the declivity below us, then swerving the curve and up again, to the neighbouring hill that faces in all its greenness and long-running immaculateness. Beyond, the hills ripple away to the mountains, and far in the distance stands a round peak, that seems to have an enchanted city on its summit.

Such a pure, uprising, unsullied country, in the greenness of wheat on an April morning! — and the queer complication of hills! There seems nothing of the modern world here — no houses, no contrivances, only a sort of fair wonder and stillness, an openness which has not been violated.

The hill opposite is like a distinct companion. The near end is quite steep and wild, with evergreen oaks and scrub, and specks of black-and-white cattle on the slopes of common. But the long crest is green again with wheat, running and drooping to the south. And immediately one feels: that hill has a soul, it has a meaning.

Lying thus opposite to Tarquinia's long hill, a companion across a suave little swing of valley, one feels at once that, if this is the hill where the living Tarquinians had their gay wooden houses, then that is the hill where the dead lie buried and quick, as seeds, in their painted houses underground. The two hills are as inseparable as life and death, even now, on the sunny, green-filled April morning with the breeze blowing in from the sea. And the land beyond seems as mysterious and fresh as if it were still the morning of Time.

But B. wants to go back to the Palazzo Vitelleschi: it will be open now. Down the street we go, and sure enough the big doors are open, several officials are in the shadowy courtyard entrance. They salute us in the Fascist manner; *alla romana!* Why don't they discover the Etruscan salute, and salute us *all'etrusca!* But they are perfectly courteous and friendly. We go into the courtyard of the palace.

The museum is exceedingly interesting and delightful, to anyone who is even a bit aware of the Etruscans. It contains a great number of things found at Tarquinia, and important things.

If only we would realize it, and not tear things from their settings. Museums anyhow are wrong. But if one must have museums, let them be small, and above all, let them be local. Splendid as the Etruscan museum is in Florence, how much happier one is in the museum at Tarquinia, where all the things are Tarquinian, and at least have some association with one another, and form some sort of *organic* whole.

In an entrance room from the cortile lie a few of the long sarcophagi in which the nobles were buried. It seems as if the primitive inhabitants of this part of Italy always burned their dead, and then put the ashes in a jar, sometimes covering the jar with the dead man's helmet, sometimes with a shallow dish for a lid, and then laid the urn with its ashes in a little round grave like a little well. This is called the Villanovan way of burial, in the well-tomb.

The newcomers to the country, however, apparently buried their dead whole. Here, at Tarquinia, you may still see the hills where the well-tombs of the aboriginal inhabitants are discovered, with the urns containing the ashes inside. Then come the graves where the dead were buried unburned, graves very much like those of today. But tombs of the same period with cinerary urns are found near to, or in connexion. So that the new people and the old apparently lived side by side in harmony, from very early days, and the two modes of burial continued side by side, for centuries, long before the painted tombs were made.

At Tarquinia, however, the main practice seems to have been, at least from the seventh century on, that the nobles were buried in the great sarcophagi, or laid out on biers, and placed in chamber-tombs, while the slaves apparently were cremated, their ashes laid in urns, and the urns often placed in the family tomb, where the stone coffins of the masters rested. The common people, on the other hand, were apparently sometimes cremated, sometimes buried in graves very much like our graves of today, though the sides were lined with stone. The mass of the common people was mixed in race, and the bulk of them were probably serf-peasants, with many half-free artisans. These must have followed their own desire in the matter of burial: some had graves, many must have been cremated,

their ashes saved in an urn or jar which takes up little room in a poor man's burial-place. Probably even the less important members of the noble families were cremated, and their remains placed in the vases, which became more beautiful as the connexion with Greece grew more extensive.

It is a relief to think that even the slaves — and the luxurious Etruscans had many, in historical times — had their remains decently stored in jars and laid in a sacred place. Apparently the 'vicious Etruscans' had nothing comparable to the vast dead-pits which lay outside Rome, beside the great highway, in which the bodies of slaves were promiscuously flung.

It is all a question of sensitiveness. Brute force and overbearing may make a terrific effect. But in the end, that which lives lives by delicate sensitiveness. If it were a question of brute force, not a single human baby would survive for a fortnight. It is the grass of the field, most frail of all things, that supports all life all the time. But for the green grass, no empire would rise, no man would eat bread: for grain is grass; and Hercules or Napoleon or Henry Ford would alike be denied existence.

Brute force crushes many plants. Yet the plants rise again. The Pyramids will not last a moment compared with the daisy. And before Buddha or Jesus spoke the nightingale sang, and long after the words of Jesus and Buddha are gone into oblivion the nightingale still will sing. Because it is neither preaching nor teaching nor commanding nor urging. It is just singing. And in the beginning was not a Word, but a chirrup.

Because a fool kills a nightingale with a stone, is he therefore greater than the nightingale? Because the Roman took the life out of the Etruscan, was he therefore greater than the Etruscan? Not he! Rome fell, and the Roman phenomenon with it. Italy today is far more Etruscan in its pulse than Roman; and will always be so. The Etruscan element is like the grass of the field and the sprouting of corn, in Italy: it will always be so. Why try to revert to the Latin-Roman mechanism and suppression?

In the open room upon the courtyard of the Palazzo Vitelleschi lie a few sarcophagi of stone, with the effigies carved on top, something as the dead crusaders in English churches. And here, in Tarquinia, the effigies are more like crusaders than usual, for some lie flat on their backs, and have a dog at their feet; whereas usually the carved figure of the dead rears up as if alive, from the lid of the tomb, resting upon one elbow, and gazing out proudly, sternly. If it is a man, his body is exposed to just below the navel, and he holds in his hand the sacred *patera*, or *mundum*, the round saucer with the raised knob in the centre, which represents the round germ of heaven and earth. It stands for the plasm, also, of the living cell, with its nucleus, which is the indivisible God of the beginning,

and which remains alive and unbroken to the end, the eternal quick of all things, which yet divides and sub-divides, so that it becomes the sun of the firmament and the lotus of the waters under the earth, and the rose of all existence upon the earth: and the sun maintains its own quick, unbroken for ever; and there is a living quick of the sea, and of all the waters; and every living created thing has its own unfailing quick. So within each man is the quick of him, when he is a baby, and when he is old, the same quick; some spark, some unborn and undying vivid life-electron. And this is what this symbolized in the *patera*, which may be made to flower like a rose or like the sun, but which remains the same, the germ central within the living plasm.

And this *patera*, this symbol, is almost invariably found in the hand of a dead man. But if the dead is a woman her dress falls in soft gathers from her throat, she wears splendid jewellery, and she holds in her hand not the *mundum*, but the mirror, the box of essence, the pomegranate, some symbols of her reflected nature, or of her woman's quality. But she, too, is given a proud, haughty look, as is the man: for she belongs to the sacred families that rule and that read the signs.

These sarcophagi and effigies here all belong to the centuries of the Etruscan decline, after there had been long intercourse with the Greeks, and perhaps most of them were made after the conquest of Etruria by the Romans. So that we do not look for fresh, spontaneous works of art, any more than we do in modern memorial stones. The funerary arts are always more or less commercial. The rich man orders his sarcophagus while he is still alive, and the monument-carver makes the work more or less elaborate, according to the price. The figure is supposed to be a portrait of the man who orders it, so we see well enough what the later Etruscans look like. In the third and second centuries B.C., at the fag end of their existence as a people, they look very like the Romans of the same day, whose busts we know so well. And often they are given the tiresomely haughty air of people who are no longer rulers indeed, only by virtue of wealth.

Yet, even when the Etruscan art is Romanized and spoilt; there still flickers in it a certain naturalness and feeling. The Etruscan *Lucumones*, or prince-magistrates, were in the first place religious seers, governors in religion, then magistrates, then princes. They were not aristocrats in the Germanic sense, not even patricians in the Roman. They were first and foremost leaders in the sacred mysteries, then magistrates, then men of family and wealth. So there is always a touch of vital life, of life-significance. And you may look through modern funerary sculpture in vain for anything so good even as the Sarcophagus of the Magistrate, with his written scroll spread before him, his strong, alert old face gazing sternly out, the necklace of office round his neck, the ring of rank on his

finger. So he lies, in the museum at Tarquinia. His robe leaves him naked to the hip, and his body lies soft and slack, with the soft effect of relaxed flesh the Etruscan artists render so well, and which is so difficult. On the sculptured side of the sarcophagus the two death-dealers wield the hammer of death, the winged figures wait for the soul, and will not be persuaded away. Beautiful it is, with the easy simplicity of life. But it is late in date. Probably this old Etruscan magistrate is already an official under Roman authority: for he does not hold the sacred *mundum*, the dish, he has only the written scroll, probably of laws. As if he were no longer the religious lord or Lucumo. Though possibly, in this case, the dead man was not one of the Lucumones anyhow.

Upstairs in the museum are many vases, from the ancient crude pottery of the Villanovans to the early black ware decorated in scratches, or undecorated, called *bucchero*, and on to the painted bowls and dishes and amphoras which came from Corinth or Athens, or to those painted pots made by the Etruscans themselves more or less after the Greek patterns. These may or may not be interesting: the Etruscans are not at their best, painting dishes. Yet they must have loved them, in the early days these great jars and bowls, and smaller mixing bowls, and drinking cups and pitchers, and flat winecups formed a valuable part of the household treasure. In very early times the Etruscans must have sailed their ships to Corinth and to Athens, taking perhaps wheat and honey, wax and bronze-ware, iron and gold, and coming back with these precious jars, and stuffs, essences, perfumes, and spice. And jars brought from overseas for the sake of their painted beauty must have been household treasures.

But then the Etruscans made pottery of their own, and by the thousand they imitated the Greek vases. So that there must have been millions of beautiful jars in Etruria. Already in the first century B.C. there was a passion among the Romans for collecting Greek and Etruscan painted jars from the Etruscans, particularly from the Etruscan tombs: jars and the little bronze votive figures and statuettes, the *sigilla Tyrrhena* of the Roman luxury. And when the tombs were first robbed, for gold and silver treasure, hundreds of fine jars must have been thrown over and smashed. Because even now, when a part-rifled tomb is discovered and opened, the fragments of smashed vases lie around.

As it is, however, the museums are full of vases. If one looks for the Greek form of elegance and convention, those elegant still-unravished brides of quietness', one is disappointed. But get over the strange desire we have for elegant convention, and the vases and dishes of the Etruscans, especially many of the black *bucchero* ware, begin to open out like strange flowers, black flowers with all the softness and the rebellion of life against convention, or red-and-black flowers painted with amusing free, bold designs. It is there nearly always

in Etruscan things, the naturalness verging on the commonplace, but usually missing it, and often achieving an originality so free and bold, and so fresh, that we who love convention and things 'reduced to a norm', call it a bastard art; and commonplace.

It is useless to look in Etruscan things for 'uplift'. If you want uplift, go to the Greek and the Gothic. If you want mass, go to the Roman. But if you love the odd spontaneous forms that are never to be standardized, go to the Etruscans. In the fascinating little Palazzo Vitelleschi one could spend many an hour, but for the fact that the very fullness of museums makes one rush through them.

3 — THE PAINTED TOMBS OF TARQUINIA – 1

We arranged for the guide to take us to the painted tombs, which are the real fame of Tarquinia. After lunch we set out, climbing to the top of the town, and passing through the southwest gate, on the level hillcrest. Looking back, the wall of the town, medieval, with a bit of more ancient black wall lower down, stands blank. Just outside the gate are one or two forlorn new houses, then ahead, the long, running tableland of the hill, with the white highway dipping and going on to Viterbo, inland.

‘All this hill in front,’ said the guide, ‘is tombs! All tombs! The city of the dead.’

So! Then this hill is the necropolis hill! The Etruscans never buried their dead within the city walls. And the modern cemetery and the first Etruscan tombs lie almost close up to the present city gate. Therefore, if the ancient city of Tarquinia lay on this hill, it can have occupied no more space, hardly, than the present little town of a few thousand people.

Which seems impossible. Far more probably, the city itself lay on that opposite hill there, which lies splendid and unsullied, running parallel to us.

We walk across the wild bit of hilltop, where the stones crop gut, and the first rock-rose flutters, and the asphodels stick up. This is the necropolis. Once it had many a tumulus, and streets of tombs. Now there is no sign of any tombs: no tumulus, nothing but the rough bare hillcrest, with stones and short grass and flowers, the sea gleaming away to the right, under the sun, and the soft land inland glowing very green and pure.

But we see a little bit of wall, built perhaps to cover a water-trough. Our guide goes straight towards it. He is a fat, good-natured young man, who doesn't look as if he would be interested in tombs. We are mistaken, however. He knows a good deal, and has a quick, sensitive interest, absolutely unobtrusive, and turns out to be as pleasant a companion for such a visit as one could wish to have.

The bit of wall we see is a little hood of masonry with an iron gate, covering a little flight of steps leading down into the ground. One comes upon it all at once, in the rough nothingness of the hillside. The guide kneels down to light his acetylene lamp, and his old terrier lies down resignedly in the sun, in the breeze which rushes persistently from the southwest, over these long, exposed hilltops.

The lamp begins to shine and smell, then to shine without smelling: the guide opens the iron gate, and we descend the steep steps down into the tomb. It seems

a dark little hole underground: a dark little hole, after the sun of the upper world! But the guide's lamp begins to flare up, and we find ourselves in a little chamber in the rock, just a small, bare little cell of a room that some anchorite might have lived in. It is so small and bare and familiar, quite unlike the rather splendid spacious tombs at Cerveteri.

But the lamp flares bright, we get used to the change of light, and see the paintings on the little walls. It is the Tomb of Hunting and Fishing, so called from the pictures on the walls, and it is supposed to date from the sixth century B.C. It is very badly damaged, pieces of the wall have fallen away, damp has eaten into the colours, nothing seems to be left. Yet in the dimness we perceive flights of birds flying through the haze, with the draught of life still in their wings. And as we take heart and look closer we see the little room is frescoed all round with hazy sky and sea, with birds flying and fishes leaping, and little men hunting, fishing, rowing in boats. The lower part of the wall is all a blue-green of sea with a silhouette surface that ripples all round the room. From the sea rises a tall rock, off which a naked man, shadowy but still distinct, is beautifully and cleanly diving into the sea, while a companion climbs up the rock after him, and on the water a boat waits with rested oars in it, three men watching the diver, the middle man standing up naked, holding out his arms. Meanwhile a great dolphin leaps behind the boat, a flight of birds soars upwards to pass the rock, in the clear air. Above all, from the bands of colour that border the wall at the top hang the regular loops of garlands, garlands of flowers and leaves and buds and berries, garlands which belong to maidens and to women, and which represent the flowery circle of the female life and sex. The top border of the wall is formed of horizontal stripes or ribands of colour that go all round the room, red and black and dull gold and blue and primrose, and these are the colours that occur invariably. Men are nearly always painted a darkish red, which is the colour of many Italians when they go naked in the sun, as the Etruscans went. Women are coloured paler, because women did not go naked in the sun.

At the end of the room, where there is a recess in the wall, is painted another rock rising from the sea, and on it a man with a sling is taking aim at the birds which rise scattering this way and that. A boat with a big paddle oar is holding off from the rock, a naked man amidships is giving a queer salute to the slinger, a man kneels over the bows with his back to the others, and is letting down a net. The prow of the boat has a beautifully painted eye, so the vessel shall see where it is going. In Syracuse you will see many a two-eyed boat today come swimming in to quay. One dolphin is diving down into the sea, one is leaping out. The birds fly, and the garlands hang from the border.

It is all small and gay and quick with life, spontaneous as only young life can

be. If only it were not so much damaged, one would be happy, because here is the real Etruscan liveliness and naturalness. It is not impressive or grand. But if you are content with just a sense of the quick ripple of life, then here it is.

The little tomb is empty, save for its shadowy paintings. It had no bed of rock around it: only a deep niche for holding vases, perhaps vases of precious things. The sarcophagus on the floor, perhaps under the slinger on the end wall. And it stood alone, for this is an individual tomb, for one person only, as is usual in the older tombs of this necropolis.

In the gable triangle of the end wall, above the slinger and the boat, the space is filled in with one of the frequent Etruscan banqueting scenes of the dead. The dead man, sadly obliterated, reclines upon his banqueting couch with his fiat wine-dish in his hand, resting on his elbow, and beside him, also half risen, reclines a handsome and jewelled lady in fine robes, apparently resting her left hand upon the naked breast of the man, and in her right holding up to him the garland — the garland of the female festive offering. Behind the man stands a naked slave-boy, perhaps with music, while another naked slave is just filling a wine-jug from a handsome amphora or wine-jar at the side. On the woman's side stands a maiden, apparently playing the flute: for a woman was supposed to play the flute at classic funerals; and beyond sit two maidens with garlands, one turning round to watch the banqueting pair, the other with her back to it all. Beyond the maidens in the corner are more garlands, and two birds, perhaps doves. On the wall behind the head of the banqueting lady is a problematic object, perhaps a bird-cage.

The scene is natural as life, and yet it has a heavy archaic fullness of meaning. It is the death-banquet; and at the same time it is the dead man banqueting in the underworld; for the underworld of the Etruscans was a gay place. While the living feasted out of doors, at the tomb of the dead, the dead himself feasted in like manner, with a lady to offer him garlands and slaves to bring him wine, away in the underworld. For the life on earth was so good, the life below could but be a continuance of it.

This profound belief in life, acceptance of life, seems characteristic of the Etruscans. It is still vivid in the painted tombs. There is a certain dance and glamour in all the movements, even in those of the naked slave men. They are by no means downtrodden menials, let later Romans say what they will. The slaves in the tombs are surging with full life.

We come up the steps into the upper world, the sea-breeze and the sun. The old dog shambles to his feet, the guide blows out his lamp and locks the gate, we set off again, the dog trundling apathetic at his master's heels, the master speaking to him with that soft Italian familiarity which seems so very different

from the spirit of Rome, the strong-willed Latin.

The guide steers across the hilltop, in the clear afternoon sun, towards another little hood of masonry. And one notices there is quite a number of these little gateways, built by the Government to cover the steps that lead down to the separate small tombs. It is utterly unlike Cerveteri, though the two places are not forty miles apart. Here there is no stately tumulus city, with its highroad between the tombs, and inside, rather noble, many-roomed houses of the dead, Here the little one-room tombs seem scattered at random on the hilltop, here and there: though probably, if excavations were fully carried out, here also we should find a regular city of the dead, with its streets and crossways. And probably each tomb had its little tumulus of piled earth, so that even above-ground there were streets of mounds with tomb entrances. But even so, it would be different from Cerveteri, from Caere; the mounds would be so small, the streets surely irregular. Anyhow, today there are scattered little one-room tombs, and we dive down into them just like rabbits popping down a hole. The place is a warren.

It is interesting to find it so different from Cerveteri. The Etruscans carried out perfectly what seems to be the Italian instinct: to have single, independent cities, with a certain surrounding territory, each district speaking its own dialect and feeling at home in its own little capital, yet the whole confederacy of city-states loosely linked together by a common religion and a more-or-less common interest. Even today Lucca is very different from Ferrara, and the language is hardly the same. In ancient Etruria this isolation of cities developing according to their own idiosyncrasy, within the loose union of a so-called nation, must have been complete, The contact between the plebs, the mass of the people, of Caere and Tarquinii must have been almost null. They were, no doubt, foreigners to one another. Only the Lucumones, the ruling sacred magistrates of noble family, the priests and the other nobles, and the merchants, must have kept up an intercommunion, speaking 'correct' Etruscan, while the people, no doubt, spoke dialects varying so widely as to be different languages. To get any idea of the pre-Roman past we must break up the conception of oneness and uniformity, and see an endless confusion of differences.

We are diving down into another tomb, called, says the guide, the Tomb of the Leopards. Every tomb has been given a name, to distinguish it from its neighbours. The Tomb of the Leopards has two spotted leopards in the triangle of the end wall, between the roof-slopes. Hence its name.

The Tomb of the Leopards is a charming, cosy little room, and the paintings on the walls have not been so very much damaged. All the tombs are ruined to some degree by weather and vulgar vandalism, having been left and neglected like common holes, when they had been broken open again and rifled to the last

gasp.

But still the paintings are fresh and alive: the ochre-reds and blacks and blues and blue-greens are curiously alive and harmonious on the creamy yellow walls. Most of the tomb walls have had a thin coat of stucco, but it is of the same paste as the living rock, which is fine and yellow, and weathers to a lovely creamy gold, a beautiful colour for a background.

The walls of this little tomb are a dance of real delight. The room seems inhabited still by Etruscans of the sixth century before Christ, a vivid, life-accepting people, who must have lived with real fullness. On come the dancers and the music-players, moving in a broad frieze towards the front wall of the tomb, the wall facing us as we enter from the dark stairs, and where the banquet is going on in all its glory. Above the banquet, in the gable angle, are the two spotted leopards, heraldically facing each other across a little tree. And the ceiling of rock has chequered slopes of red and black and yellow and blue squares, with a roof-beam painted with coloured circles, dark red and blue and yellow. So that all is colour, and we do not seem to be underground at all, but in some gay chamber of the past.

The dancers on the right wall move with a strange, powerful alertness onwards. The men are dressed only in a loose coloured scarf, or in the gay handsome chlamys draped as a mantle. The *subulo* plays the double flute the Etruscans loved so much, touching the stops with big, exaggerated hands, the man behind him touches the seven-stringed lyre, the man in front turns round and signals with his left hand, holding a big wine-bowl in his right. And so they move on, on their long, sandalled feet, past the little berried olive-trees, swiftly going with their limbs full of life, full of life to the tips.

This sense of vigorous, strong-bodied liveliness is characteristic of the Etruscans, and is somehow beyond art. You cannot think of art, but only of life itself, as if this were the very life of the Etruscans, dancing in their coloured wraps with massive yet exuberant naked limbs, ruddy from the air and the sea-light, dancing and fluting along through the little olive-trees, out in the fresh day.

The end wall has a splendid banqueting scene. The feasters recline upon a checked or tartan couch-cover, on the banqueting couch, and in the open air, for they have little trees behind them. The six feasters are bold and full of life like the dancers, but they are strong, they keep their life so beautifully and richly inside themselves, they are not loose, they don't lose themselves even in their wild moments. They lie in pairs, man and woman, reclining equally on the couch, curiously friendly. The two end women are called *hetaerae*, courtesans; chiefly because they have yellow hair, which seems to have been a favourite feature in a woman of pleasure. The men are dark and ruddy, and naked to the

waist. The women, sketched in on the creamy rock, are fair, and wear thin gowns, with rich mantles round their hips. They have a certain free bold look, and perhaps really are courtesans.

The man at the end is holding up, between thumb and forefinger, an egg, showing it to the yellow-haired woman who reclines next to him, she who is putting out her left hand as if to touch his breast. He, in his right hand, holds a large wine-dish, for the revel.

The next couple, man and fair-haired woman, are looking round and making the salute with the right hand curved over, in the usual Etruscan gesture. It seems as if they too are saluting the mysterious egg held up by the man at the end; who is, no doubt, the man who has died, and whose feast is being celebrated. But in front of the second couple a naked slave with a chaplet on his head is brandishing an empty wine-jug, as if to say he is fetching more wine. Another slave farther down is holding out a curious thing like a little axe, or fan. The last two feasters are rather damaged. One of them is holding up a garland to the other, but not putting it over his head as they still put a garland over your head, in India, to honour you.

Above the banqueters, in the gable angle, the two great spotted male leopards hang out their tongues and face each other heraldically, lifting a paw, on either side of a little tree. They are the leopards or panthers of the underworld Bacchus, guarding the exits and the entrances of the passion of life.

There is a mystery and a portentousness in the simple scenes which go deeper than commonplace life. It seems all so gay and light. Yet there is a certain weight, or depth of significance that goes beyond aesthetic beauty.

If one once starts looking, there is much to see. But if one glances merely, there is nothing but a pathetic little room with unimposing, half-obliterated, scratchy little paintings in tempera.

There are many tombs. When we have seen one, up we go, a little bewildered, into the afternoon sun, across a tract of rough, tormented hill, and down again to the underground, like rabbits in a warren. The hilltop is really a warren of tombs. And gradually the underworld of the Etruscans becomes more real than the above day of the afternoon. One begins to live with the painted dancers and feasters and mourners, and to look eagerly for them.

A very lovely dance tomb is the *Tomba del Triclinio*, or *del Convito*, both of which mean: Tomb of the Feast. In size and shape this is much the same as the other tombs we have seen. It is a little chamber about fifteen feet by eleven, six feet high at the walls, about eight feet at the centre. It is again a tomb for one person, like nearly all the old painted tombs here. So there is no inner furnishing. Only the farther half of the rock-floor, the pale yellow-white rock, is raised two

or three inches, and on one side of this raised part are the four holes where the feet of the sarcophagus stood. For the rest, the tomb has only its painted walls and ceiling.

And how lovely these have been, and still are! The band of dancing figures that go round the room still is bright in colour, fresh, the women in thin spotted dresses of linen muslin and coloured mantles with fine borders, the men merely in a scarf. Wildly the bacchic woman throws back her head and curves out her long, strong fingers, wild and yet contained within herself, while the broad-bodied young man turns round to her, lifting his dancing hand to hers till the thumbs all but touch. They are dancing in the open, past little trees, and birds are running, and a little fox-tailed dog is watching something with the naïve intensity of the young. Wildly and delightedly dances the next woman, every bit of her, in her soft boots and her bordered mantle, with jewels on her arms; till one remembers the old dictum, that every part of the body and of the *anima* shall know religion, and be in touch with the gods. Towards her comes the young man piping on the double flute, and dancing as he comes. He is clothed only in a fine linen scarf with a border, that hangs over his arms, and his strong legs dance of themselves, so full of life. Yet, too, there is a certain solemn intensity in his face, as he turns to the woman beyond him, who stoops in a bow to him as she vibrates her castanets.

She is drawn fair-skinned, as all the women are, and he is of a dark red colour. That is the convention, in the tombs. But it is more than convention. In the early days men smeared themselves with scarlet when they took on their sacred natures. The Red Indians still do it. When they wish to figure in their sacred and portentous selves they smear their bodies all over with red. That must be why they are called Red Indians. In the past, for all serious or solemn occasions, they rubbed red pigment into their skins. And the same today. And today, when they wish to put strength into their vision, and to see true, they smear round their eyes with vermilion, rubbing it into the skin. You may meet them so, in the streets of the American towns.

It is a very old custom. The American Indian will tell you: 'The red paint, it is medicine, make you see!' But he means medicine in a different sense from ours. It is deeper even than magic. Vermilion is the colour of his sacred or potent or god body. Apparently it was so in all the ancient world. Man all scarlet was his bodily godly self. We know the kings of ancient Rome, who were probably Etruscans, appeared in public with their faces painted vermilion with minium. And Ezekiel says (23: 14, 15): 'She saw men pourtrayed upon the wall, the images of the Chaldeans pourtrayed with vermilion...all of them princes to look to, after the manner of the Babylonians of Chaldea, the land of their nativity.'

It is then partly a convention, and partly a symbol, with the Etruscans, to represent their men red in colour, a strong red. Here in the tombs everything is in its sacred or inner-significant aspect. But also the red colour is not so very unnatural. When the Italian today goes almost naked on the beach he becomes of a lovely dark ruddy colour, dark as any Indian. And the Etruscans went a good deal naked. The sun painted them with the sacred minium.

The dancers dance on, the birds run, at the foot of a little tree a rabbit crouches in a bunch, bunched with life. And on the tree hangs a narrow, fringed scarf, like a priest's stole; another symbol.

The end wall has a banqueting scene, rather damaged, but still interesting. We see two separate couches, and a man and a woman on each. The woman this time is dark-haired, so she need not be a courtesan. The Etruscans shared the banqueting bench with their wives; which is more than the Greeks or Romans did, at this period. The classic world thought it indecent for an honest woman to recline as the men did, even at the family table. If the woman appeared at all, she must sit up straight, in a chair.

Here, the women recline calmly with the men, and one shows a bare foot at the end of the dark couch. In front of the *lecti*, the couches, is in each case a little low square table bearing delicate dishes of food for the feasters. But they are not eating. One woman is lifting her hand to her head in a strange salute to the robed piper at the end, the other woman seems with the lifted hand to be saying No! to the charming maid, perhaps a servant, who stands at her side, presumably offering the *alabastron*, or ointment-jar, while the man at the end apparently is holding up an egg. Wreaths hang from the ivy-border above, a boy is bringing a wine-jug, the music goes on, and under the beds a cat is on the prowl, while an alert cock watches him. The silly partridge, however, turns his back, stepping innocently along.

This lovely tomb has a pattern of ivy and ivy berries, the ivy of the underworld Bacchus, along the roof-beam and in a border round the top of the walls. The roof-slopes are chequered in red and black, white, blue, brown, and yellow squares. In the gable angle, instead of the heraldic beasts, two naked men are sitting reaching back to the centre of an ivy-covered altar, arm outstretched across the ivy. But one man is almost obliterated. At the foot of the other man, in the tight angle of the roof, is a pigeon, the bird of the soul that coos out of the unseen.

This tomb has been open since 1830, and is still fresh. It is interesting to see, in Fritz Weege's book, *Etruskische Malerei*, a reproduction of an old water-colour drawing of the dancers on the right wall. It is a good drawing, yet, as one looks closer, it is quite often out, both in line and position. These Etruscan

paintings, not being in our convention, are very difficult to copy. The picture shows my rabbit all spotted, as if it were some queer cat. And it shows a squirrel in the little tree in front of the piper, and flowers, and many details that have now disappeared.

But it is a good drawing, unlike some that Weege reproduces, which are so Flaxmanized and Greekified; and n jade according to what our great-grandfathers thought they *ought* to be, as to be really funny, and a warning for ever against thinking how things *ought* to be, when already they are quite perfectly what they are.

We climb up to the world, and pass for a few minutes through the open day. Then down we go again. In the Tomb of the Bacchanti the colours have almost gone. But still we see, on the end wall, a strange wondering dancer out of the mists of time carrying his zither, and beyond him, beyond the little tree, a man of the dim ancient world, a man with a short beard, strong and mysteriously male, is reaching for a wild archaic maiden who throws up her hands and turns back to him her excited, subtle face. It is wonderful, the strength and mystery of old life that comes out of these faded figures. The Etruscans are still there, upon the wall.

Above the figures, in the gable angle, two spotted deer are prancing heraldically towards one another, on either side the altar, and behind them two dark lions, with pale manes and with tongues hanging out, are putting up a paw to seize them on the haunch. So the old story repeats itself.

From the striped border rude garlands are hanging, and on the roof are little painted stars, or four-petalled flowers. So much has vanished! Yet even in the last breath of colour and form, how much life there is!

In the *Tomba del Morto*, the Tomb of the Dead Man, the banqueting scene is replaced by a scene, apparently, of a dead man on his bed, with a woman leaning gently over to cover his face. It is almost like a banquet scene. But it is so badly damaged! In the gable above, two dark heraldic lions are lifting the paw against two leaping, frightened, backward-looking birds. This is a new variation. On the broken wall are the dancing legs of a man, and there is more life in these Etruscan legs, fragment as they are, than in the whole bodies of men today. Then there is one really impressive dark figure of a naked man who throws up his arms so that his great wine-bowl stands vertical, and with spread hand and closed face gives a strange gesture of finality. He has a chaplet on his head, and a small pointed beard, and lives there shadowy and significant.

Lovely again is the *Tomba delle Leonesse*, the Tomb of the Lionesses. In its gable two spotted lionesses swing their bell-like udders, heraldically facing one another across the altar. Beneath is a great vase, and a flute-player playing to it

on one side, a zither-player on the other, making music to its sacred contents. Then on either side of these goes a narrow frieze of dancers, very strong and lively in their prancing. Under the frieze of dancers is a lotus dado, and below that again, all round the room, the dolphins are leaping, leaping all downwards into the rippling sea, while birds fly between the fishes.

On the right wall reclines a very impressive dark red man wearing a curious cap, or head-dress, that has long tails like long plaits. In his right hand he holds up an egg, and in his left is the shallow wine-bowl of the feast. The scarf or stole of his human office hangs from a tree before him, and the garland of his human delight hangs at his side. He holds up the egg of resurrection, within which the germ sleeps as the soul sleeps in the tomb, before it breaks the shell and emerges again. There is another reclining man, much obliterated, and beside him hangs a garland or chain like the chains of dandelion-stems we used to make as children. And this man has a naked flute-boy, lovely in naked outline, coming towards him.

The *Tomba della Pulcella*, or Tomb of the Maiden, has faded but vigorous figures at the banquet, and very ornate couch-covers in squares and the key-pattern, and very handsome mantles.

The *Tomba dei Vasi Dipinti*, Tomb of the Painted Vases, has great amphorae painted on the side wall, and springing towards them is a weird dancer, the ends of his waist-cloth flying. The amphorae, two of them, have scenes painted on them, which can still be made out. On the end wall is a gentle little banquet scene, the bearded man softly touching the woman with his hand under the chin, a slave-boy standing childishly behind, and an alert dog under the couch. The *kylix*, or wine-bowl, that the man holds is surely the biggest on record; exaggerated, no doubt, to show the very special importance of the feast. Rather gentle and lovely is the way he touches the woman under the chin, with a delicate caress. That again is one of the charms of the Etruscan paintings: they really have the sense of touch; the people and the creatures are all really in touch. It is one of the rarest qualities, in life as well as in art. There is plenty of pawing and laying hold, but no real touch. In pictures especially, the people may be in contact, embracing or laying hands on one another. But there is no soft flow of touch. The touch does not come from the middle of the human being. It is merely a contact of surfaces, and a juxtaposition of objects. This is what makes so many of the great masters boring, in spite of all their clever composition. Here, in this faded Etruscan painting, there is a quiet flow of touch that unites the man and the woman on the couch, the timid boy behind, the dog that lifts his nose, even the very garlands that hang from the wall.

Above the banquet, in the triangle, instead of lions or leopards, we have the

hippocampus, a favourite animal of the Etruscan imagination. It is a horse that ends in a long, flowing fish-tail. Here these two hippocampi face one another prancing their front legs, while their fish-tails flow away into the narrow angle of the roof. They are a favourite symbol of the seaboard Etruscans.

In the *Tomba del Vecchio*, the Tomb of the Old Man, a beautiful woman with her hair dressed backwards into the long cone of the East, so that her head is like a sloping acorn, offers her elegant, twisted garland to the white-bearded old man, who is now beyond garlands. He lifts his left hand up at her, with the rich gesture of these people, that must mean something each time.

Above them, the prancing spotted deer are being seized in the haunch by two lions. And the waves of obliteration, wastage of time and damage of men, are silently passing over all.

So we go on, seeing tomb after tomb, dimness after dimness, divided between the pleasure of finding so much and the disappointment that so little remains. One tomb after another, and nearly everything faded or eaten away, or corroded with alkali, or broken wilfully. Fragments of people at banquets, limbs that dance without dancers, birds that fly in nowhere, lions whose devouring heads are devoured away! Once it was all bright and dancing: the delight of the underworld; honouring the dead with wine, and flutes playing for a dance, and limbs whirling and pressing. And it was deep and sincere honour rendered to the dead and to the mysteries. It is contrary to our ideas; but the ancients had their own philosophy for it. As the pagan old writer says: 'For no part of us nor of our bodies shall be, which doth not feel religion: and let there be no lack of singing for the soul, no lack of leaping and of dancing for the knees and heart; for all these know the gods.'

Which is very evident in the Etruscan dancers. They know the gods in their very finger-tips. The wonderful fragments of limbs and bodies that dance on in a field of obliteration still know the gods, and made it evident to us.

But we can hardly see any more tombs. The upper air seems pallid and bodiless, as we emerge once more, white with the light of the sea and the coming evening. And spent and slow the old dog rises once more to follow after.

We decide that the *Tomba delle Iserizioni*, the Tomb of the Inscriptions, shall be our last for today. It is dim but fascinating, as the lamp flares up, and we see in front of us the end wall, painted with a false door studded with pale studs, as if it led to another chamber beyond; and riding from the left, a trail of shadowy tall horsemen; and running in from the right, a train of wild shadowy dancers wild as demons.

The horsemen are naked on the four naked horses, and they make gestures as they come towards the painted door. The horses are alternately red and black, the

red having blue manes and hoofs, the black, red ones, or white. They are tall archaic horses on slim legs, with necks arched like a curved knife. And they come pinking daintily and superbly along, with their long tails, towards the dark red death-door.

From the left, the stream of dancers leaps wildly, playing music, carrying garlands or wine-jugs, lifting their arms like revellers, lifting their live knees, and signalling with their long hands. Some have little inscriptions written near them: their names.

And above the false door in the angle of the gable is a fine design: two black, wide-mouthed, pale-maned lions seated back to back, their tails rising like curved stems, between them, as they each one lift a black paw against the cringing head of a cowering spotted deer, that winces to the deathblow. Behind each deer is a smaller dark lion, in the acute angle of the roof, coming up to bite the shrinking deer in the haunch, and so give the second death-wound. For the wounds of death are in the neck and in the flank.

At the other end of the tomb are wrestlers and gamesters; but so shadowy now! We cannot see any more, nor look any further in the shadows for the unconquerable life of the Etruscans, whom the Romans called vicious, but whose life, in these tombs, is certainly fresh and cleanly vivid.

The upper air is wide and pale, and somehow void. We cannot see either world any more, the Etruscan underworld nor the common day. Silently, tired, we walk back in the wind to the town, the old dog padding stoically behind. And the guide promises to take us to the other tombs tomorrow.

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There is a haunting quality in the Etruscan representations. Those leopards with their long tongues hanging out: those flowing hippocampi; those cringing spotted deer, struck in flank and neck; they get into the imagination, and will not go out, And we see the wavy edge of the sea, the dolphins curving over, the diver going down clean, the little man climbing up the rock after him so eagerly. Then the men with beards who recline on the banqueting beds: how they hold up the mysterious egg! And the women with the conical head-dress, how strangely they lean forward, with caresses we no longer know! The naked slaves joyfully stoop to the wine-jars. Their nakedness is its own clothing, more easy than drapery. The curves of their limbs show pure pleasure in life, a pleasure that goes deeper still in the limbs of the dancers, in the big, long hands thrown out and dancing to the very ends of the fingers, a dance that surges from within, like a current in the sea. It is as if the current of some strong different life swept through them, different from our shallow current today: as if they drew their vitality from different depths that we are denied.

Yet in a few centuries they lost their vitality. The Romans took the life out of them. It seems as if the power of resistance to life, self-assertion, and overbearing, such as the Romans knew: a power which must needs be moral, or carry morality with it, as a cloak for its inner ugliness: would always succeed in destroying the natural flowering of life. And yet there still are a few wild flowers and creatures.

The natural flowering of life! It is not so easy for human beings as it sounds. Behind all the Etruscan liveliness was a religion of life, which the chief men were seriously responsible for. Behind all the dancing was a vision, and even a science of life, a conception of the universe and man's place in the universe which made men live to the depth of their capacity.

To the Etruscan all was alive; the whole universe lived; and the business of man was himself to live amid it all. He had to draw life into himself, out of the wandering huge vitalities of the world. The cosmos was alive, like a vast creature. The whole thing breathed and stirred. Evaporation went up like breath from the nostrils of a whale, steaming up. The sky received it in its blue bosom, breathed it in and pondered on it and transmuted it, before breathing it out again. Inside the earth were fires like the heat in the hot red liver of a beast. Out of the fissures of the earth came breaths of other breathing, vapours direct from the living physical underearth, exhalations carrying inspiration. The whole thing was alive, and had a great soul, or *anima*: and in spite of one great soul, there were myriad roving, lesser souls: every man, every creature and tree and lake and mountain and stream, was animate, had its own peculiar consciousness. And has it today.

The cosmos was one, and its *anima* was one; but it was made up of creatures. And the greatest creature was earth, with its soul of inner fire. The sun was only a reflection, or off-throw, or brilliant handful, of the great inner fire. But in juxtaposition to earth lay the sea, the waters that moved and pondered and held a deep soul of their own. Earth and waters lay side by side, together, and utterly different.

So it was. The universe, which was a single aliveness with a single soul, instantly changed, the moment you thought of it, and became a dual creature with two souls, fiery and watery, for ever mingling and rushing apart, and held by the great aliveness of the universe in an ultimate equilibrium. But they rushed together and they rushed apart, and immediately they became myriad: volcanoes and seas, then streams and mountains, trees, creatures, men. And everything was dual, or contained its own duality, for ever mingling and rushing apart.

The old idea of the vitality of the universe was evolved long before history begins, and elaborated into a vast religion before we get a glimpse of it. When

history does begin, in China or India, Egypt, Babylonia, even in the Pacific and in aboriginal America, we see evidence of one underlying religious idea: the conception of the vitality of the cosmos, the myriad vitalities in wild confusion, which still is held in some sort of array: and man, amid all the glowing welter, adventuring, struggling, striving for one thing, life, vitality, more vitality: to get into himself more and more of the gleaming vitality of the cosmos. That is the treasure. The active religious idea was that man, by vivid attention and subtlety and exerting all his strength, could draw more life into himself, more life, more and more glistening vitality, till he became shining like the morning, blazing like a god. When he was all himself he painted himself vermilion like the throat of dawn, and was god's body, visibly, red and utterly vivid. So he was a prince, a king, a god, an Etruscan Lucumo; Pharaoh, or Belshazzar, or Ashurbanipal, or Tarquin; in a feebler *decrescendo*, Alexander, or Caesar, or Napoleon.

This was the idea at the back of all the great old civilizations. It was even, half-transmuted, at the back of David's mind, and voiced in the Psalms. But with David the living cosmos became merely a personal god. With the Egyptians and Babylonians and Etruscans, strictly there were no personal gods. There were only idols or symbols. It was the living cosmos itself, dazzlingly and gaspingly complex, which was divine, and which could be contemplated only by the strongest soul, and only at moments. And only the peerless soul could draw into itself some last flame from the quick. Then you had a king-god indeed.

There you have the ancient idea of kings, kings who are gods by vividness, because they have gathered into themselves core after core of vital potency from the universe, till they are clothed in scarlet, they are bodily a piece of the deepest fire. Pharaohs and kings of Nineveh, kings of the East, and Etruscan Lucumones, they are the living clue to the pure fire, to the cosmic vitality. They are the vivid key to life, the vermilion clue to the mystery and the delight of death and life. They, in their own body, unlock the vast treasure-house of the cosmos for their people, and bring out life, and show the way into the dark of death, which is the blue burning of the one fire. They, in their own bodies, are the life-bringers and the death-guides, leading ahead in the dark, and coming out in the day with more than sunlight in their bodies. Can one wonder that such dead are wrapped in gold; or were?

The life-bringers, and the death-guides. But they set guards at the gates both of life and death. They keep the secrets, and safeguard the way. Only a few are initiated into the mystery of the bath of life, and the bath of death: the pool within pool within pool, wherein, when a man is dipped, he becomes darker than blood, with death, and brighter than fire, with life; till at last he is scarlet royal as a piece of living life, pure vermilion.

The people are not initiated into the cosmic ideas, nor into the awakened throb of more vivid consciousness. Try as you may, you can never make the mass of men throb with full awakenedness. They *cannot* be more than a little aware. So you must give them symbols, ritual and gesture, which will fill their bodies with life up to their own full measure. Any more is fatal. And so the actual knowledge must be guarded from them, lest knowing the formulae, without undergoing at all the experience that corresponds, they may become insolent and impious, thinking they have the all, when they have only an empty monkey-chatter. The esoteric knowledge will always be esoteric, since knowledge is an experience, not a formula. But it is foolish to hand out the formulae. A little knowledge is indeed a dangerous thing. No age proves it more than ours. Monkey-chatter is at last the most disastrous of all things.

The clue to the Etruscan life was the Lucumo, the religious prince. Beyond him were the priests and warriors. Then came the people and the slaves. People and warriors and slaves did not think about religion. There would soon have been no religion left. They felt the symbols and danced the sacred dances. For they were always kept *in touch*, physically, with the mysteries. The 'touch' went from the Lucumo down to the merest slave. The blood-stream was unbroken. But 'knowing' belonged to the high-born, the pure-bred.

So, in the tombs we find only the simple, uninitiated vision of the people. There is none of the priest-work of Egypt. The symbols are to the artist just wonderforms, pregnant with emotion and good for decoration. It is so all the way through Etruscan art. The artists evidently were of the people, artisans. Presumably they were of the old Italic stock, and understood nothing of the religion in its intricate form, as it had come in from the East: though doubtless the crude principles of the official religion were the same as those of the primitive religion of the aborigines. The same crude principles ran through the religions of all the barbaric world of that time, Druid or Teutonic or Celtic. But the newcomers in Etruria held secret the science and philosophy of their religion, and gave the people the symbols and the ritual, leaving the artists free to use the symbols as they would; which shows that there was no priest-rule.

Later, when scepticism came over all the civilized world, as it did after Socrates, the Etruscan religion began to die, Greeks and Greek rationalism flooded in, and Greek stories more or less took the place of the old Etruscan symbolic thought. Then again the Etruscan artists, uneducated, used the Greek stories as they had used the Etruscan symbols, quite freely, making them over again just to please themselves.

But one radical thing the Etruscan people never forgot, because it was in their blood as well as in the blood of their masters: and that was the mystery of the

journey out of life, and into death; the death-journey, and the sojourn in the afterlife. The wonder of their soul continued to play round the mystery of this journey and this sojourn.

In the tombs we see it; throes of wonder and vivid feeling throbbing over death. Man moves naked and glowing through the universe. Then comes death: he dives into the sea, he departs into the underworld.

The sea is that vast primordial creature that has a soul also, whose inwardness is womb of all things, out of which all things emerged, and into which they are devoured back. Balancing the sea is the earth of inner fire, of afterlife, and before-life. Beyond the waters and the ultimate fire lay only that oneness of which the people knew nothing: it was a secret the Lucumones kept for themselves, as they kept the symbol of it in their hand.

But the sea the people knew. The dolphin leaps in and out of it suddenly, as a creature that suddenly exists, out of nowhere, He was not: and to! there he is! The dolphin which gives up the sea's rainbows only when he dies. Out he leaps; then, with a head-dive, back again he plunges into the sea. He is so much alive, he is like the phallus carrying the fiery spark of procreation down into the wet darkness of the womb. The diver does the same, carrying like a phallus his small hot spark into the depths of death. And the sea will give up her dead like dolphins that leap out and have the rainbow within them.

But the duck that swims on the water, and lifts his wings, is another matter: the blue duck, or goose, so often represented by the Etruscans. He is the same goose that saved Rome, in the night.

The duck does not live down within the waters as the fish does. The fish is the *anima*, the animate life, the very clue to the vast sea, the watery element of the first submission. For this reason Jesus was represented in the first Christian centuries as a fish, in Italy especially, where the people still thought in the Etruscan symbols. Jesus was the *anima* of the vast, moist ever-yielding element which was the opposite and the counterpart of the red flame the Pharaohs and the kings of the East had sought to invest themselves with.

But the duck has no such subaqueous nature as the fish. It swims upon the waters, and is hot-blooded, belonging to the red flame, of the animal body of life. But it dives under water, and preens itself upon the flood. So it became, to man, the symbol of that part of himself which delights in the waters, and dives in, and rises up and shakes its wings. It is the symbol of a man's own phallus and phallic life. So you see a man holding on his hand the hot, soft, alert duck, offering it to the maiden. So today the Red Indian makes a secret gift to the maiden of a hollow, earthenware duck, in which is a little fire and incense. It is that part of his body and his fiery life that a man can offer to a maid. And it is

that awareness or alertness in him, that other consciousness, that wakes in the night and rouses the city.

But the maid offers the man a garland, the rim of flowers from the edge of the 'pool', which can be placed over the man's head and laid on his shoulders, in symbol that he is invested with the power of the maiden's mystery and different strength, the female power. For whatever is laid over the shoulders is a sign of power added.

Birds fly portentously on the walls of the tombs. The artist must often have seen these priests, the augurs, with their crooked, bird-headed staffs in their hand, out on a high place watching the flight of larks or pigeons across the quarters of the sky. They were reading the signs and the portents, looking for an indication, how they should direct the course of some serious affair. To us it may seem foolish. To them, hot-blooded birds flew through the living universe as feelings and premonitions fly through the breast of a man, or as thoughts fly through the mind. In their flight the suddenly roused birds, or the steady, far-coming birds, moved wrapped in a deeper consciousness, in the complex destiny of all things. And since all things corresponded in the ancient world, and man's bosom mirrored itself in the bosom of the sky, or *vice versa*, the birds were flying to a portentous goal, in the man's breast who watched, as well as flying their own way in the bosom of the sky. If the augur could see the birds flying *in his heart*, then he would know which way destiny too was flying for him.

The science of augury certainly was no exact science. But it was as exact as our sciences of psychology or political economy. And the augurs were as clever as our politicians, who also must practise divination, if ever they are to do anything worth the name. There is no other way when you are dealing with life. And if you live by the cosmos, you look in the cosmos for your clue. If you live by a personal god, you pray to him. If you are rational, you think things over. But it all amounts to the same thing in the end. Prayer, or thought, or studying the stars, or watching the flight of birds,-or studying the entrails of the sacrifice, it is all the same process, ultimately: of divination. All it depends on is the amount of *true*, sincere, religious concentration you can bring to bear on your object. An act of pure attention, if you are capable of it, will bring its own answer. And you choose that object to concentrate upon which will best focus your consciousness. Every real discovery made, every serious and significant decision ever reached, was reached and made by divination. The soul stirs, and makes an act of pure attention, and that is a discovery.

The science of the augur and the haruspex was not so foolish as our modern science of political economy. If the hot liver of the victim cleared the soul of the haruspex, and made him capable of that ultimate inward attention which alone

tells us the last thing we need to know, then why quarrel with the haruspex? To him, the universe was alive, and in quivering *rapport*. To him, the blood was conscious: he thought with his heart. To him, the blood was the red and shining stream of consciousness itself. Hence, to him, the liver, that great organ where the blood struggles and ‘overcomes death’, was an object of profound mystery and significance. It stirred his soul and purified his consciousness; for it was also his victim. So he gazed into the hot liver, that was mapped out in fields and regions like the sky of stars, but these fields and regions were those of the red, shining consciousness that runs through the whole animal creation. And therefore it must contain the answer to his own blood’s question.

It is the same with the study of stars, or the sky of stars. Whatever object will bring the consciousness into a state of pure attention, in a time of perplexity, will also give back an answer to the perplexity. But it is truly a question of *divination*. As soon as there is any pretence of infallibility, and pure scientific calculation, the whole thing becomes a fraud and a jugglery. But the same is true not only of augury and astrology, but also of prayer and of pure reason, and even of the discoveries of the great laws and principles of science. Men juggle with prayer today as once they juggled with augury; and in the same way they are juggling with science. Every great discovery or decision comes by an act of divination. Facts are fitted round afterwards. But all attempt at divination, even prayer and reason and research itself, lapses into jugglery when the heart loses its purity. In the impurity of his heart, Socrates often juggled logic unpleasantly. And no doubt, when scepticism came over the ancient world, the haruspex and the augur became jugglers and pretenders. But for centuries they held real sway. It is amazing to see, in Livy, what a big share they must have had in the building up of the great Rome of the Republic.

Turning from birds to animals, we find in the tombs the continual repetition of lion against deer. As soon as the world was created, according to the ancient idea, it took on duality. All things became dual, not only in the duality of sex, but in the polarity of action. This is the ‘impious pagan duality’. It did not, however, contain the later pious duality of good and evil.

The leopard and the deer, the lion and the bull, the cat and the dove, or the partridge, these are part of the great duality, or polarity of the animal kingdom. But they do not represent good action and evil action. On the contrary, they represent the polarized activity of the divine cosmos, in its animal creation.

The treasure of treasures is the soul, which, in every creature, in every tree or pool, means that mysterious conscious point of balance or equilibrium between the two halves of the duality, the fiery and the watery. This mysterious point clothes itself in vividness after vividness from the right hand, and vividness after

vividness from the left. And in death it does not disappear, but is stored in the egg, or in the jar, or even in the tree which brings forth again.

But the soul itself, the conscious spark of every creature, is not dual; and being the immortal, it is also the altar on which our mortality and our duality is at last sacrificed.

So as the key-picture in the tombs, we have over and over again the heraldic beasts facing one another across the altar, or the tree, or the vase; and the lion is smiting the deer in the hip and the throat. The deer is spotted, for day and night, the lion is dark and light the same.

The deer or lamb or goat or cow is the gentle creature with udder of overflowing milk and fertility; or it is the stag or ram or bull, the great father of the herd, with horns of power set obvious on the brow, and indicating the dangerous aspect of the beasts of fertility. These are the creatures of prolific, boundless procreation, the beasts of peace and increase. So even Jesus is the lamb. And the endless, endless gendering of them: creatures will fill all the earth with cattle till herds rub flanks over all the world, and hardly a tree can rise between.

But this must not be so, since they are only half, even of the animal creation. Balance must be kept. And this is the altar we are all sacrificed upon: it is even death; just as it is our soul and purest treasure.

So, on the other hand from the deer, we have lionesses and leopards. These, too, are male and female. These, too, have udders of milk and nourish young; as the wolf nourished the first Romans: prophetically, as the destroyers of many deer, including the Etruscan. So these fierce ones guard the treasure and the gateway, which the prolific ones would squander or close up with too much gendering. They bite the deer in neck and haunch, where the great blood-streams run.

So the symbolism goes all through the Etruscan tombs. It is very much the symbolism of all the ancient world. But here it is not exact and scientific, as in Egypt. It is simple and rudimentary, and the artist plays with it as a child with fairy stories. Nevertheless, it is the symbolic element which rouses the deeper emotion, and gives the peculiarly satisfying quality to the dancing figures and the creatures. A painter like Sargent, for example, is so clever. But in the end he is utterly uninteresting, a bore. He never has an inkling of his own triviality and silliness. One Etruscan leopard, even one little quail, is worth all the miles of him.

4 — THE PAINTED TOMBS OF TARQUINIA - 2

We sit at the tin tables of the café above the gate watching the peasants coming in the evening from the fields, with their implements and their asses. As they drift in through the gate the man of the Dazio, the town customs, watches them, asks them questions if they carry bundles, prods the pack on the ass, and when a load of brushwood rolls up keeps it halted while he pierces the load with a long steel rod, carefully thrusting to see if he can feel hidden barrels of wine or demijohns of oil, bales of oranges or any other foodstuffs. Because all foodstuffs that come into an Italian town — many other things too, besides comestibles — must pay a duty, in some instances a heavy one.

Probably in Etruscan days the peasants came in very much the same, at evening, to the town. The Etruscans were instinctively citizens. Even the peasants dwelt within walls. And in those days, no doubt, the peasants were serfs very much as they are today in Italy, working the land for no wages, but for a portion of the produce; and working the land intensely, with that careful, almost passionate attention the Italian still gives to the soil; and living in the city, or village, but having straw huts out in the fields, for summer.

But in those days, on a fine evening like this, the men would come in naked, darkly ruddy-coloured from the sun and wind, with strong, insouciant bodies; and the women would drift in, wearing the loose, becoming smock of white or blue linen; and somebody, surely, would be playing on the pipes; and somebody, surely, would be singing, because the Etruscans had a passion for music, and an inner carelessness the modern Italians have lost. The peasants would enter the clear, clean, sacred space inside the gates, and salute the gay-coloured little temple as they passed along the street that rose uphill towards the arx, between rows of low houses with gay-coloured fronts painted or hung with bright terracottas. One can almost hear them still, calling, shouting, piping, singing, driving in the mixed flocks of sheep and goats, that go so silently, and leading the slow, white, ghostlike oxen with the yokes still on their necks.

And surely, in those days, young nobles would come splashing in on horseback, riding with naked limbs on an almost naked horse, carrying probably a spear, and cantering ostentatiously through the throng of red-brown, full-limbed, smooth-skinned peasants. A Lucumo, even, sitting very noble in his chariot driven by an erect charioteer, might be driving in at sundown, halting before the temple to perform the brief ritual of entry into the city. And the crowding populace would wait; for the Lucumo of the old days, glowing ruddy in flesh, his beard stiffly trimmed in the Oriental style, the torque of gold round

his neck, and the mantle or wrap bordered with scarlet falling in full folds, leaving the breast bare, he was divine, sitting on the chair in his chariot in the stillness of power. The people drew strength even from looking at him.

The chariot drew a little forward, from the temple: the Lucumo, sitting erect on his chair in the chariot, and bare-shouldered and bare-breasted, waits for the people. Then the peasants would shrink back in fear. But perhaps some citizen in a white tunic would lift up his arms in salute, and come forward to state his difficulty, or to plead for justice. And the Lucumo, seated silent within another world of power, disciplined to his own responsibility of knowledge for the people, would listen till the end. Then a few words — and the chariot of gilt bronze swirls off up the hill to the house of the chief, the citizens drift on to their houses, the music sounds in the dark streets, torches flicker, the whole place is eating, feasting, and as far as possible having a gay time.

It is different now. The drab peasants, muffled in ugly clothing, straggle in across the waste bit of space, and trail home, songless and meaningless. We have lost the art of living; and in the most important science of all, the science of daily life, the science of behaviour, we are complete ignoramuses. We have psychology instead. Today in Italy, in the hot Italian summer, if a navvy working in the street takes off his shirt to work with free, naked torso, a policeman rushes to him and commands him insultingly into his shirt again. One would think a human being was such a foul indecency altogether that life was feasible only when the indecent thing was as far as possible blotted out. The very exposure of female arms and legs in the street is only done as an insult to the whole human body. ‘Look at that! It doesn’t matter!’

Neither does it! But then, why did the torso of the workman matter?

At the hotel, in the dark emptiness of the place, there are three Japanese staying: little yellow men. They have come to inspect the salt works down on the coast below Tarquinia, so we are told, and they have a Government permit. The salt works, the extracting of salt from the pools shut off from the low sea, are sort of prisons, worked by convict labour. One wonders why Japanese men should want to inspect such places, officially. But we are told that these salt works are ‘very important’.

Albertino is having a very good time with the three Japanese, and seems to be very deep in their confidence, bending over their table, his young brown head among the three black ones, absorbed and on the *qui vive*. He rushes off for their food — then rushes to us to see what we want to eat.

‘What is there?’

‘*Er — c’è —*’ He always begins with wonderful deliberation, as if there was a menu fit for the Tsar. Then he breaks off suddenly, says: ‘I’ll ask the mamma!’

— darts away — returns, and says exactly what we knew he'd say, in a bright voice, as if announcing the New Jerusalem: 'There are eggs — er — and beefsteak — et and there are some little potatoes.' We know the eggs and beefsteak well! However, I decide to have beefsteak once more, with the little potatoes — left over by good fortune from lunch — fried. Off darts Albertino, only to dart back and announce that the potatoes and beefsteak are finished ('by the Chinese,' he whispers), 'but there are frogs.' 'There are what?' '*Le rane*, the frogs!' What sort of frogs?' 'I'll show you!' Off he darts again, returns with a plate containing eight or nine pairs of frogs' naked hind-legs. B. looks the other way and I accept frogs — they look quite good. In the joy of getting the frogs safely to port, Albertino skips, and darts off: to return in a moment with a bottle of beer, and whisper to us all the information about the Chinese, as he calls them. They can't speak a word of Italian. When they want a word they take the little book, French and Italian. *Bread?* — eh? They want bread. Er! — Albertino gives little grunts, like commas and semicolons, which I write as er! Bread they want, eh? — er! — they take the little book — here he takes an imaginary little book, lays it on the tablecloth, wets his finger and turns over the imaginary leaves — *bread!* — er! — p — you look under 'p' — er! — *ecco! pane!* — *pane!* — *si capisce!* — bread! they want bread. Then wine! er! take the little book (he turns over imaginary little leaves with fervour) — er! here you are, *vino!* — *pane, e vino!* So they do! Every word! They looked out name! Er! you! Er! I tell him, *Albertino*. And so the boy continues, till I ask what about *le rane*? Ah! Er! *Le rane!* Off he darts, and swirls back with a plate of fried frogs' legs, in pairs.

He is an amusing and vivacious boy, yet underneath a bit sad and wistful, with all his responsibility. The following day he darted to show us a book of views of Venice, left behind by the Chinese, as he persists in calling them, and asks if I want it. I don't. Then he shows us two Japanese postage stamps, and the address of one of the Japanese gentlemen, written on a bit of paper. The Japanese gentleman and Albertino are to exchange picture postcards. I insist that the Japanese are not Chinese. 'Er!' says Albertino. 'But the Japanese are also Chinese!' I insist that they are not, that they live in a different country. He darts off, and returns with a school atlas. 'Er! China is in Asia! Asia! Asia!' — he turns the leaves. He is really an intelligent boy, and ought to be going to school instead of running an hotel at the tender age of fourteen.

The guide to the tombs, having had to keep watch at the museum all night, wants to get a sleep after dawn, so we are not to start till ten. The town is already empty, the people gone out to the fields. A few men stand about with nothing doing. The city gates are wide open. At night they are closed, so that the *Dazio*

man can sleep: and you can neither get in nor out of the town. We drink still another coffee — Albertino's morning dose was a very poor show.

Then we see the guide, talking to a pale young fellow in old corduroy velveteen knee-breeches and an old hat and thick boots: most obviously German. We go over, make proper salutes, nod to the German boy, who looks as if he'd had vinegar for breakfast — and set off. This morning we are going out a couple miles, to the farthest end of the necropolis. We have still a dozen tombs to look at. In all, there are either twenty-five or twenty-seven painted tombs one can visit.

This morning there is a stiff breeze from the south-west. But it is blowing fresh and clear, not behaving in the ugly way the *libeccio* can behave. We march briskly along the highway, the old dog trundling behind. He loves spending a morning among the tombs. The sea gives off a certain clearness, that makes the atmosphere doubly brilliant and exhilarating, as if we were on a mountain-top. The omnibus rolls by, from Viterbo. In the fields the peasants are working, and the guide occasionally greets the women, who give him a sally back again. The young German tramps firmly on: but his spirit is not as firm as his tread. One doesn't know what to say to him, he vouchsafes nothing, seems as if he didn't want to be spoken to, and yet is probably offended that we don't talk to him. The guide chatters to him in unflinching cheerfulness, in Italian: but after a while drops back with evident relief to the milder company of B., leaving me to the young German, who has certainly swallowed vinegar some time or other.

But I feel with him as with most of the young people of today: he has been sinned against more than he sins. The vinegar was given him to drink. Breaking reluctantly into German, since Italian seems foolish, and he won't come out in English, I find, within the first half-mile, that he is twenty-three (he looks nineteen), has finished his university course, is going to be an archaeologist, is travelling doing archaeology, has been in Sicily and Tunis, whence he has just returned; didn't think much of either place — *mehr Schrei wie Wert*, he jerks out, speaking as if he were throwing his words away like a cigarette-end he was sick of; doesn't think much of any place; doesn't think much of the Etruscans — *nicht viel wert*; doesn't, apparently, think much of me; knows a professor or two whom I have met; knows the tombs of Tarquinia very well, having been here, and stayed here, twice before; doesn't think much of them; is going to Greece; doesn't expect to think much of it; is staying in the other hotel, not Gentile's, because it is still cheaper: is probably staying a fortnight, going to photograph all the tombs, with a big photographic apparatus — has the Government authority, like the Japs — apparently has very little money indeed, marvellously doing everything on nothing — expects to be a famous professor in a science he

doesn't think much of — and I wonder if he always has enough to eat.

He certainly is a fretful and peevish, even if in some ways silent and stoical, young man. *Nicht viel wert!* — not much worth — doesn't amount to anything — seems to be his favourite phrase, as it is the favourite phrase of almost all young people today. Nothings amounts to anything, for the young.

Well, I feel it's not my fault, and try to bear up. But though it is bad enough to have been of the war generation, it must be worse to have grown up just after the war. One can't blame the young, that they don't find that anything amounts to anything. The war cancelled most meanings for — them.

And my young man is not really so bad: he would even rather like to be *made* to believe in something. There is a yearning pathos in him somewhere.

We have passed the modern cemetery, with its white marble headstones, and the arches of a medieval aqueduct mysteriously spanning a dip, and left the highroad, following a path along the long hill-crest, through the green wheat that flutters and ripples in the sea-wind like fine feathers, in the wonderful brilliance of morning. Here and there are tassels of mauve anemones, bits of verbena, many daisies, tufts of camomile. On a rocky mound, which was once a tumulus, the asphodels have the advantage, and send up their spikes on the bright, fresh air, like soldiers clustered on the mount. And we go along this vivid green headland of wheat — which still is rough and uneven, because it was once all tumuli — with our faces to the breeze, the sea-brightness filling the air with exhilaration, and all the country still and silent, and we talk German in the wary way of two dogs sniffing at one another.

Till suddenly we turn off to an almost hidden tomb — the German boy knows the way perfectly. The guide hurries up and lights the acetylene lamp, the dog slowly finds himself a place out of the wind, and flings himself down: and we sink slowly again into the Etruscan world, out of the present world, as we descend underground.

One of the most famous tombs at this far-off end of the necropolis is the Tomb of the Bulls. It contains what the guide calls: *un po' di pornografico!* — but a very little. The German boy shrugs his shoulders as usual: but he informs us that this is one of the oldest tombs of all, and I believe him, for it looks so to me.

It is a little wider than some tombs, the roof has not much pitch, there is a stone bed for sarcophagi along the side walls, and in the end wall are two doorways, cut out of the rock of the end and opening into a second chamber, which seems darker and more dismal. The German boy says this second chamber was cut out later, from the first one. It has no paintings of any importance.

We return to the first chamber, the old one. It is called the Tomb of the Bulls

from the two bulls above the doorways of the end wall, one a man-faced bull charging at the '*po di pornografico*', the other lying down serenely and looking with mysterious eyes into the room, his back turned calmly to the second bit of a picture which the guide says is not '*pornografico*' — 'because it is a woman.' The young German smiles with his sour-water expression.

Everything in this tomb suggests the old East: Cyprus, or the Hittites, or the culture of Minos of Crete. Between the doorways of the end wall is a charming painting of a naked horseman with a spear, on a naked horse, moving towards a charming little palm-tree and a wellhead or fountain-head, on which repose two sculptured, black-faced beasts, lions with queer black faces. From the mouth of the one near the palm-tree water pours down into a sort of altar-bowl, while on the far side a warrior advances, wearing a bronze helmet and shin-greaves, and apparently menacing the horseman with a sword which he brandishes in his left hand, as he steps up on to the base of the wellhead. Both warrior and horseman wear the long, pointed boots of the East: and the palm-tree is not very Italian.

This picture has a curious charm, and is evidently symbolical. I said to the German: 'What do you think it means?' 'Ach, nothing! The man on the horse has come to the drinking-trough to water his horse: no more!' 'And the man with the sword?' 'Oh, he is perhaps his enemy.' 'And the black-faced lions?' 'Ach nothing! Decorations of the fountain.' Below the picture are trees on which hang a garland and a neck-band. The border pattern, instead of the egg and dart, has the sign of Venus, so called, between the darts: a ball surmounted by a little cross. 'And that, is that a symbol?' I asked the German. 'Here no!' he replied abruptly. 'Merely a decoration!' — which is perhaps true. But that the Etruscan artist had no more feeling for it, as a symbol, than a modern house-decorator would have, that we cannot believe.

I gave up for the moment. Above the picture is a sentence lightly written, almost scribbled, in Etruscan. 'Can you read it?' I said to the German boy. He read it off quickly — myself, I should have had to go letter by letter. 'Do you know what it means?' I asked him. He shrugged his shoulders. 'Nobody knows.'

In the shallow angle of the roof the heraldic beasts are curious. The squat centre-piece, the so-called altar, has four rams' heads at the corners. On the right a pale bodied man with a dark face is galloping up with loose rein, on a black horse, followed by a galloping bull. On the left is a bigger figure, a queer galloping lion with his tongue out. But from the lion's shoulders, instead of wings, rises the second neck of a dark-faced, bearded goat: so that the complex animal has a second, backward-leaning neck and head, of a goat, as well as the first maned neck and menacing head of a lion. The tail of the lion ends in a

serpent's head. So this is the proper Chimaera. And galloping after the end of the lion's tail comes a winged female sphinx.

'What is the meaning of this lion with the second head and neck?' I asked the German. He shrugged his shoulders, and said: 'Nothing!' It meant nothing to him, because nothing except the ABC of facts means anything to him. He is a scientist, and when he doesn't want a thing to have a meaning it is, *ipso facto*, meaningless.

But the lion with the goat's head springing backwards from its shoulders must mean something, because there it is, very vivid, in the famous bronze Chimaera of Arezzo, which is in the Florence museum, and which Benvenuto Cellini restored, and which is one of the most fascinating bronzes in the world. There, the bearded goat's head springs twisting backwards from the lion's shoulders, while the right horn of the goat is seized in the mouth of the serpent, which is the tail of the lion whipped forward over his back.

Though this is the correct Chimaera, with the wounds of Bellerophon in hip and neck, still it is not merely a big toy. It has, and was intended to have, an exact esoteric meaning. In fact, Greek myths are only gross representations of certain very clear and very ancient esoteric conceptions, that are much older than the myths: or the Greeks. Myths, and personal gods, are only the decadence of a previous cosmic religion.

The strange potency and beauty of these Etruscan things arise, it seems to me, from the profundity of the symbolic meaning the artist was more or less aware of. The Etruscan religion, surely, was never anthropomorphic: that is, whatever gods it contained were not *beings*, but symbols of elemental powers, just symbols: as was the case earlier in Egypt. The undivided Godhead, if we can call it such, was symbolized by the *mundum*, the plasm-cell with its nucleus: that which is the very beginning; instead of, as with us, by a personal god, a person being the very end of all creation or evolution. So it is all the way through: the Etruscan religion is concerned with all those physical and creative powers and forces which go to the building up and the destroying of the soul: the soul, the personality, being that which gradually is produced out of chaos, like a flower, only to disappear again into chaos, or the underworld. We, on the contrary, say: In the beginning was the Word! — and deny the physical universe true existence. We exist only in the Word, which is beaten out thin to cover, gild, and hide all things.

The human being, to the Etruscan, was a bull or a ram, a lion or a deer, according to his different aspects and potencies. The human being had in his veins the blood of the wings of birds and the venom of serpents. All things emerged from the bloodstream, and the blood-relation, however complex and

contradictory it might become, was never interrupted or forgotten. There were different currents in the bloodstream, and some always clashed: bird and serpent, lion and deer, leopard and lamb. Yet the very clash was a form of unison, as we see in the lion which also has a goat's head.

But the young German will have nothing of this. He is a modern, and the obvious alone has true existence for him. A lion with a goat's head as well as its own head is unthinkable. That which is unthinkable is non-existent, is nothing. So, all the Etruscan symbols are to him non-existent and mere crude incapacity to think. He wastes not a thought on them: they are spawn of mental impotence, hence negligible.

But perhaps also he doesn't want to give himself away, or divulge any secret that is going to make him a famous archaeologist later on. Though I don't think that was it. He was very nice, showing me details, with his flashlight, that I should have overlooked. The white horse, for example, has had its drawing most plainly altered: you can see the old outline of the horse's back legs and breast, and of the foot of the rider, and you can see how considerably the artist changed the drawing, sometimes more than once. He seems to have drawn the whole thing complete, each time, then changed the position, changed the direction, to please his feeling. And as there was no indiarubber to rub out the first attempts, there they are, from at least six hundred years before Christ: the delicate mistakes of an Etruscan who had the instinct of a pure artist in him, as well as the blithe insouciance which makes him leave his alterations for anyone to spy out, if they want to.

The Etruscan artists either drew with the brush or scratched, perhaps, with a nail, the whole outline of their figures on the soft stucco, and then applied their colour *al fresco*. So they had to work quickly. Some of the paintings seemed to me tempera, and in one tomb, I think the Francesco Giustiniani, the painting seemed to be done on the naked, creamy rock. In that case, the blue colour of the man's scarf is marvellously vivid.

The subtlety of Etruscan painting, as of Chinese and Hindu, lies in the wonderfully suggestive *edge* of the figures. It is not outlined. It is not what we call 'drawing'. It is the flowing contour where the body suddenly leaves off, upon the atmosphere. The Etruscan artist seems to have seen living things surging from their own centre to their own surface. And the curving and contour of the silhouette-edge suggests the whole movement of the modelling within. There is actually no modelling. The figures are painted in the fiat. Yet they seem of a full, almost turgid muscularity. It is only when we come to the late Tomb of Typhon that we have the figure *modelled*, Pompeian style, with light and shade.

It must have been a wonderful world, that old world where everything

appeared alive and shining in the dusk of contact with all things, not merely as an isolated individual thing played upon by daylight; where each thing had a clear outline, visually, but in its very clarity was related emotionally or vitally to strange other things, one thing springing from another, things mentally contradictory fusing together emotionally, so that a lion could be at the same moment also a goat, and not a goat. In those days, a man riding on a red horse was not just Jack Smith on his brown nag; it was a suave-skinned creature, with death or life in its face, surging along on a surge of animal power that burned with travel, with the passionate movement of the blood, and which was swirling along on a mysterious course, to some unknown goal, swirling with a weight of its own. Then also, a bull was not merely a stud animal worth so much, due to go to the butcher in a little while. It was a vast wonder-beast, a wellhead of the great, furnace-like passion that makes the worlds roll and the sun surge up, and makes a man surge with procreative force; the bull, the herd-lord, the father of calves and heifers, of cows; the father of milk; he who has the horns of power on his forehead, symbolizing the warlike aspect of the horn of fertility; the bellowing master of force, jealous, horned, charging against opposition. The goat was in the same line, father of milk, but instead of huge force he had cunning, the cunning *consciousness* and self-consciousness of the jealous, hard-headed father of procreation. Whereas the lion was most terrible, yellow and roaring with a blood-drinking energy, again like the sun, but the sun asserting himself in drinking up the life of the earth. For the sun can warm the worlds, like a yellow hen sitting on her eggs.

Or the sun can lick up the life of the world with a hot tongue. The goat says: let me breed for ever, till the world is one reeking goat. But then the lion roars from the other bloodstream, which is also in man, and he lifts his paw to strike, in the passion of the other wisdom.

So all creatures are potential in their own way, a myriad manifold consciousness storming with contradictions and oppositions that are eternal, beyond all mental reconciliation. We can know the living world only symbolically. Yet every consciousness, the rage of the lion, and the venom of the snake, *is*, and therefore is divine. All emerges out of the unbroken circle with its nucleus, the germ, the One, the god, if you like to call it so. And man, with his soul and his personality, emerges in eternal connexion with all the rest. The bloodstream is one, and unbroken, yet storming with oppositions and contradictions.

The ancients saw, consciously, as children now see unconsciously, the everlasting *wonder* in things. In the ancient world the three compelling emotions must have been emotions of wonder, fear, and admiration: admiration in the

Latin sense of the word, as well as our sense; and fear in its largest meaning, including repulsion, dread, and hate: then arose the last, individual emotion of pride. Love is only a subsidiary factor in wonder and admiration.

But it was by seeing all things alert in the throb of interrelated passional significance that the ancients kept the wonder and the delight in life, as well as the dread and the repugnance. They were like children: but they had the force, the power and the sensual *knowledge* of true adults. They had a world of valuable knowledge, which is utterly lost to us. Where they were true adults, we are children; and vice versa.

Even the two bits of '*pornografico*' in the Tomb of the Bull are not two little dirty drawings. Far from it. The German boy felt this, as we did. The drawings have the same naïve wonder in them as the rest, the same archaic innocence, accepting life, knowing all about it, and *feeling* the meaning, which is like a stone fallen into consciousness, sending its rings ebbing out and out, to the extremes. The two little pictures have a symbolic meaning, quite distinct from a *moral* meaning — or an immoral. The words moral and immoral have no force. Some acts — what Dennis would call flagrant obscenity — the man-faced bull accepts calmly lying down; against other acts he charges with lowered horns. It is not judgement. It is the sway of passional action and reaction: the action and reaction of the father of milk.

There are beautiful tombs, in this far-off wheat-covered hill. The Tomb of the Augurs is very impressive. On the end wall is painted a doorway to a tomb, and on either side of it is a man making what is probably the mourning gesture, strange and momentous, one hand to the brow. The two men are mourning at the door of the tomb.

'No!' says the German. The painted door does not represent the door to the tomb, with mourners on either side. It is merely the painted door which later they intended to cut out, to make a second chamber to the tomb. And the men are not mourning.'

'Then what are they doing?'

Shrug!

In the triangle above the painted door two lions, a white-faced one and a dark-faced, have seized a goat or an antelope: the dark-faced lion turns over and bites the side of the goat's neck, the white-faced bites the haunch. Here we have again the two heraldic beasts: but instead of their roaring at the altar, or the tree, they are biting the goat, the father of milk-giving life, in throat and hip.

On the side walls are very fine frescoes of nude wrestlers, and then of a scene which has started a lot of talk about Etruscan cruelty. A man with his head in a sack, wearing only a skin-girdle, is being bitten in the thigh by a fierce dog

which is held, by another man, on a string attached to what is apparently a wooden leash, this wooden handle being fastened to the dog's collar. The man who holds the string wears a peculiar high conical hat, and he stands, big-limbed and excited, striding behind the man with his head in the sack. This victim is by now getting entangled in the string, the long, long cord which holds the dog; but with his left hand he seems to be getting hold of the cord to drag the dog off from his thigh, while in his right hand he holds a huge club, with which to strike the dog when he can get it into striking range.

This picture is supposed to reveal the barbarously cruel sports of the Etruscans. But since the tomb contains an augur, with his curved sceptre, tensely lifting his hand to the dark bird that flies by: and the wrestlers are wrestling over a curious pile of three great bowls; and on the other side of the tomb the man in the conical pointed hat, he who holds the string in the first picture, is now dancing with a peculiar delight, as if rejoicing in victory or liberation: we must surely consider this picture as symbolic, along with all the rest: the fight of the blindfolded man with some raging, attacking element. If it were sport there would be onlookers, as there are at the sports in the Tomb of the Chariots; and here there are none.

However, the scenes portrayed in the tomb are all so real, that it seems they must have taken place in actual life. Perhaps there was some form of test or trial which gave a man a great club, tied his head in a sack, and left him to fight a fierce dog which attacked him, but which was held on a string, and which even had a wooden grip-handle attached to its collar, by which the man might seize it and hold it firm, while he knocked it on the head. The man in the sack has very good chances against the dog. And even granted the thing was done for sport, and not as some sort of trial or test, the cruelty is not excessive, for the man has a very good chance of knocking the dog on the head quite early. Compared with Roman gladiatorial shows, this is almost 'fair play'.

But it must be more than sport. The dancing of the man who held the string is too splendid. And the tomb is, somehow, too intense, too meaningful. And the dog — or wolf or lion — that bites the thigh of the man is too old a symbol. We have it very plainly on the top of the Sarcophagus of the Painted Amazons, in the Florence museum. This sarcophagus comes from Tarquinia — and the end of the lid has a carved naked man, with legs apart, a dog on each side biting him in the thigh. They are the dogs of disease and death, biting at the great arteries of the thigh, where the elementary life surges in a man. The motive is common in ancient symbolism. And the esoteric idea of malevolent influences attacking the great arteries of the thighs was turned in Greece into the myth of Actaeon and his dogs.

Another very fine tomb is the Tomb of the Baron, with its frieze of single figures, dark on a light background going round the walls. There are horses and men, all in dark silhouette, and very fascinating in drawing. These archaic horses are so perfectly satisfying *as* horses: so far more horselike, to the soul, than those of Rosa Bonheur or Rubens or even Velazquez, though he comes nearer to these: so that one asks oneself, what, after all, is the horsiness of a horse? What is it that man sees, when he looks at a horse? — what is it that will never be put into words? For a man who sees, sees not as a camera does when it takes a snapshot, not even as a cinema-camera, taking its succession of instantaneous snaps; but in a curious rolling flood of vision, in which the image itself seethes and rolls; and only the mind *picks out* certain factors which *shall* represent the image seen. That is why a camera is so unsatisfactory: its eye is flat, it is related only to a negative thing inside the box: whereas inside our living box there is a decided positive.

We go from tomb to tomb, down into the dark, up again into the wind and brilliance; and the day rolls by. But we are moving, tomb by tomb, gradually nearer the city. The new cemetery draws near. We have passed the aqueduct, which crosses the dip, then takes an underground channel towards the town. Near the cemetery we descend into a big tomb, the biggest we have yet seen — a great underground cavern with great wide beds for sarcophagi and biers, and in the centre a massive square pillar or shaft on which is painted a Typhon — the seaman with coiled snake-legs, and wings behind his arms, his hands holding up the roof; two Typhons, another on the opposite face of the pillar, almost identical with the first.

In this place, almost at once, the Etruscan charm seems to vanish. The tomb is big, crude, somehow ugly like a cavern. The Typhon, with his reddish flesh and light-and-shade modelling, is clever, and might be modern, done for effect. He is rather Pompeian — and a little like Blake. But he is done from quite a new consciousness, external; the old inwardness has gone. Dennis, who saw him eighty years ago, thinks him far more marvellous than the archaic dancers. But we do not.

There are some curly-wig dolphins sporting over a curly border which, but for experience, we should not know was the sea. And there is a border of 'roses'. really the sacred symbol of the 'one' with its central germ, here for the first time vulgarly used. There is also a fragment of a procession to Hades, which must have been rather fine in the Greco-Roman style. But the true archaic charm is utterly gone. The dancing Etruscan spirit is dead.

This is one of the very latest tombs: said to be of the second century B.C., when the Romans had long been masters of Tarquinia. Veii, the first great

Etruscan city to be captured by Rome, was taken about 388 B.C., and completely destroyed. From then on, Etruria gradually weakened and sank, till the peace of 280 B.C., when we may say the military conquest of Etruria was complete.

So that the tombs suddenly change. Those supposed to be of the fifth century, like the Tomb of the Baron, with the frieze of horses and men, or the Tomb of the Leopards, are still perfectly Etruscan, no matter what touch of the Orient they may have, and perfectly charming. Then suddenly we come to the Tomb of Orcus, or Hell, which is given the fourth century as a date, and here the whole thing utterly changes. You get a great gloomy, clumsy, rambling sort of underworld, damp and horrid, with large but much-damaged pictures on the walls.

These paintings, though they are interesting in their way, and have scribbled Etruscan inscriptions, have suddenly lost all Etruscan charm. They still have a bit of Etruscan freedom, but on the whole they are Greco-Roman, half suggesting Pompeian, half suggesting Roman things. They are more free than the paintings of the little old tombs; at the same time, all the motion is gone; the figures are stuck there without any vital flow between them. There is no touch.

Instead of the wonderful old silhouette forms we have modern 'drawing', often quite good. But to me it is an intense disappointment.

When the Roman took the power from the hands of the Etruscan Lucumones — in the fourth century B.C. — and made them merely Roman magistrates, at the best, the mystery of Etruria died almost at once. In the ancient world of king-gods, governing according to a religious conception, the deposition of the chiefs and the leading priests leaves the country at once voiceless and mindless. So it was in Egypt and Babylonia, in Assyria, in the Aztec and Maya lordships of America. The people are governed by the flower of the race. Pluck the flower and the race is helpless.

The Etruscans were not destroyed. But they lost their being. They had lived, ultimately, by the *subjective* control of the great natural powers. Their subjective power fell before the objective power of the Romans. And almost at once the true race-consciousness finished. The Etruscan knowledge became mere superstition. The Etruscan princes became fat and inert Romans. The Etruscan people became expressionless and meaningless. It happened amazingly quickly, in the third and second centuries B.C.

Yet the Etruscan *blood* continued to beat And Giotto and the early sculptors seem to have been a flowering again of the Etruscan blood, which is always putting forth a flower, and always being trodden down again by some superior 'force'. It is a struggle between the endless patience of life and the endless triumph of force.

There is one other huge late tomb, the Tomb of the Shields, said to be of the third century. It contains many fragmentary paintings. There is a banqueting scene, with a man on the banqueting bench taking the egg from the woman, and she is touching his shoulder. But they might as well be two chairs from a 'suite'. There is nothing between them. And they have those 'important' sort of faces — all on the outside, nothing inside — that are so boring. Yet they are interesting. They might almost be done today, by an ultramodern artist bent on being absolutely childlike and naïve and archaic. But after the real archaic paintings, these are empty. The air is empty. The egg is still held up. But it means no more to that man and woman than the chocolate Easter egg does to us. It has gone cold.

In the Tomb of Orcus begins that representation of the grisly underworld, hell and its horrors, which surely was reflected on to the Etruscans from the grisly Romans. The lovely little tombs of just one small chamber, or perhaps two chambers, of the earlier centuries give way to these great sinister caverns underground, and hell is fitly introduced.

The old religion of the profound attempt of man to harmonize himself with nature, and hold his own and come to flower in the great seething of life, changed with the Greeks and Romans into a desire to resist nature, to produce a mental cunning and a mechanical force that would outwit Nature and chain her down completely, completely, till at last there should be nothing free in nature at all, all should be controlled, domesticated, put to man's meaner uses. Curiously enough, with the idea of the triumph over nature arose the idea of a gloomy Hades, a hell and purgatory. To the peoples of the great natural religions the afterlife was a continuing of the wonder-journey of life. To the peoples of the Idea the afterlife is hell, or purgatory, or nothingness, and paradise is an inadequate fiction. But, naturally enough, historians seized on these essentially non-Etruscan evidences, in the Etruscan late tombs, to build up a picture of a gloomy, hellish, serpent-writhing, vicious Etruscan people who were quite rightly stamped out by the noble Romans. This myth is still not dead. Men *never* want to believe the evidence of their senses. They would far rather go on elaborating some 'classical' author. The whole science of history seems to be the picking of old fables and old lies into fine threads, and weaving them up again. Theopompus collected some scandalous tales, and that is quite enough for historians. It is written down, so that's enough. The evidence of fifty million gay little tombs wouldn't weigh a straw. In the beginning was the Word, indeed! Even the word of a Theopompus!

Perhaps the favourite painting for representing the beauties of the Etruscan tombs is the well-known head of a woman, seen in profile with wheat-ears for a

head-wreath, or fillet. This head comes from the Tomb of Orcus, and is chosen because it is far more Greek-Roman than it is Etruscan. As a matter of fact, it is rather stupid and self-conscious — and modern. But it belongs to the classic Convention, and men can only see according to a Convention. We haven't exactly plucked our eyes out, but we've plucked out three-fourths of their vision.

After the Tomb of the Typhon one has had enough. There is nothing really Etruscan left. It is better to abandon the necropolis altogether, and to remember that almost everything we know of the Etruscans from the classic authors is comparable to the paintings in the late tombs. It refers only to the fallen, Romanized Etruscans of the decadence.

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It is very pleasant to go down from the hill on which the present Tarquinia stands, down into the valley and up to the opposite hill, on which the Etruscan Tarquinii surely stood. There are many flowers, the blue grape-hyacinth and the white, the mauve tassel anemone, and, in a corner of a field of wheat, the big purple anemone, then a patch of the big pale pink anemone with the red, sore centre — the big-petalled sort. It is curious how the anemone varies. Only in this one place in Tarquinia have I found the whity-pink kind, with the dark, sore-red centre. But probably that is just chance.

The town ends really with the wall. At the foot of the wall is wild hillside, and down the slope is only one little farm, with another little house made of straw. The country is clear of houses. The peasants live in the city.

Probably in Etruscan days it was much the same, but there must have been far more people on the land, and probably there were many little straw huts, little temporary houses, among the green corn: and fine roads, such as the Etruscans taught the Romans to build, went between the hills: and the high black walls, with towers, wound along the hill-crest.

The Etruscans, though they grew rich as traders and metal-workers, seem to have lived chiefly by the land. The intense culture of the land by the Italian peasant of today seems like the remains of the Etruscan system. On the other hand, it was Roman, and not Etruscan, to have large villas in the country, with the great compound or factory' for the slaves, who were shut in at night, and in gangs taken out to labour during the day. The huge farms of Sicily and Lombardy and other parts of Italy must be a remains of this Roman system: the big *fattorie*. But one imagines the Etruscans had a different system: that the peasants were serfs rather than slaves: that they had their own small portions of land, which they worked to full pitch, from father to son, giving a portion of the produce to the masters, keeping a portion for themselves. So they were half-free, at least, and had a true life of their own, stimulated by the religious life of their

masters.

The Romans changed it all. They did not like the country. In palmy days they built great villas with barracks for slaves, out in the country. But, even so, it was easier to get rich by commerce or conquest. So the Romans gradually abandoned the land, which fell into neglect and prepared the way for the Dark Ages.

The wind blows stiffer and stiffer from the south-west. There are no trees: but even the bushes bend away from it. And when we get to the crown of the long, lonely hill on which stood the Etruscan Tarquinii we are almost blown from our feet, and have to sit down behind a thicket of bushes, for a moment's shelter: to watch the great black-and-white cattle stepping slowly down to the drinking-place, the young bulls curving and playing. All along the hilltop the green wheat ruffles like soft hair. Away inland the green land looks empty, save for a far-off town perched on a hilltop, like a vision. On the next hill, towards the sea, Tarquinia holds up her square towers, in vain.

And we are sitting on what would be the arx of the vanished city. Somewhere here the augurs held up their curved staffs, and watched the birds move across the quarters of the city. We can do so much even today. But of the city I cannot find even one stone. It is so lonely and open.

One can go back up a different road, and in through another gate of the city of today. We drop quickly down, in the fierce wind, down to calm. The road winds up slowly from the little valley, but we are in shelter from the wind. So, we pass the first wall, through the first medieval gateway. The road winds inside the wall, past the Dazio, but there are no houses. A bunch of men are excitedly playing morra, and the shouts of the numbers come up like explosions, with wild excitement. The men glance at us apprehensively, but laugh as we laugh.

So we pass on through a second frowning gateway, inside the second circle of walls. And still we are not in the town. There is still a third wall, and a third massive gate. And then we are in the old part of the town, where the graceful little palazzos of the Middle Ages are turned into stables and barns, and into houses for poor peasants. In front of the lower storey of one little old palace, now a blacksmith's shop, the smith is shoeing a refractory mule, which kicks and plunges, and brings loud shouts from the inevitable little group of onlookers.

Queer and lonely and slummy the waste corners and narrow streets seem, forlorn, as if belonging to another age. On a beautiful stone balcony a bit of poor washing is drying. The houses seem dark and furtive, people lurking like rats. And then again rises another tall, sharp-edged tower, blank and blind. They have a queer effect on a town, these sharp, rigid, blind, meaningless towers, soaring away with their sharp edges into the sky, for no reason, beyond the house-roofs; and from the far distance, when one sees the little city down far off, suggesting

the factory chimneys of a modern town.

They are the towers which in the first place were built for retreat and defence, when this coast was ravaged by sea-rovers, Norman adventurers, or Barbary pirates that were such a scourge to the Mediterranean. Later, however, the medieval nobles built towers just for pure swank, to see who should have the tallest, till a town like Bologna must have bristled like a porcupine in a rage, or like Pittsburg with chimney-stacks — square ones. Then the law forbade towers — and towers, after having scraped the heavens, began to come down. There are some still, however, in Tarquinia, where age overlaps age.

5 — VULCI

Ancient Etruria consisted of a league, or loose religious Confederacy of twelve cities, each city embracing some miles of country all around, so that we may say there were twelve states, twelve city-states, the famous *dodecapolis* of the ancient world, the Latin *duodecim populi Etruriae*. Of these twelve city-states, Tarquinii was supposed to be the oldest, and the chief. Caere is another city: and not far off, to the north, Vulci.

Vulci is now called Voici — though there is no city, only a hunting ground for treasure in Etruscan tombs. The Etruscan city fell into decay in the decline of the Roman Empire, and either lapsed owing to the malaria which came to fill this region with death, or else was finally wiped out, as Ducati says, by the Saracens. Anyhow there is no life there now.

I asked the German boy about the Etruscan places along the coast: Voici, Vetulonia, Populonia. His answer was always the same: ‘Nothing! Nothing! There is nothing there!’

However, we determined to look at Volci. It lies only about a dozen miles north of Tarquinia. We took the train, one station only, to Montalto di Castro, and were rattled up to the little town on the hill, not far inland. The morning was still fairly early — and Saturday. But the town, or village, on the hill was very quiet and dead-alive. We got down from the bus in a sort of nowhere-seeming little piazza: the town had no centre of life. But there was a café, so in we went, asked for coffee, and where could we get a carriage to take us to Voici.

The man in the little café was yellow and slow, with the slow smile of the peasants. He seemed to have no energy at all: and eyed us lethargically. Probably he had malaria — though the fevers were not troubling him at the time. But it had eaten into his life.

He said, did we want to go to the bridge — the Ponte? I said yes, the *Ponte dell’Abbadia*: because I knew that Voici was near to this famous old bridge of the monastery. I asked him if we could get a light cart to drive us out. He said it

would be difficult. I said, then we could walk: it was only five miles, eight kilometres. Eight kilometres!' he said, in the slow, laconic malarial fashion, looking at me with a glint of ridicule in his black eyes. 'It is at least twelve!'

The book says eight! I insisted stoutly. They always want to make distances twice as long, if you are to hire a carriage. But he watched me slowly, and shook his head. 'Twelve!' he said. Then we must have a carriage,' said I. 'You wouldn't find your way anyhow,' said the man. 'Is there a carriage?' He didn't know. There was one, but it had gone off somewhere this morning, and wouldn't be back till two or three in the afternoon. The usual story.

I insisted, was there no little cart, no *barrocino*, no *carretto*? He slowly shook his head. But I continued to insist, gazing at him fixedly, as if a carriage must be produced. So at last he went out, to look. He came back, after a time, shaking his head. Then he had a colloquy with his wife. Then he went out again, and was gone ten minutes.

A dusty little baker, a small man very full of energy, as little Italians often are, came in and asked for a drink. He sat down a minute and drank his drink, eyeing us from his floury face. Then he got up and left the shop again. In a moment the café man returned, and said that perhaps there was a *carretto*. I asked where it was. He said the man was coming.

The drive to the Ponte was apparently two hours — then the trip would be six hours. We should have to take a little food with us — there was nothing there.

A small-faced, weedy sort of youth appeared in the doorway: also malaria! We could have the *carretto*. 'For how much?' 'Seventy liras!' 'Too much!' said I. 'Far too much! Fifty, or nothing. Take it or leave it, fifty!' The youth in the doorway looked blank. The café man, always with his faint little sardonic smile, told the youth to go and ask. The youth went. We waited. Then the youth came back, to say all right! So! 'How long?' '*Subito!*' *Subito* means immediately, but it is as well to be definite. 'Ten minutes?' said I. 'Perhaps twenty' said the youth. 'Better say twenty' said the café man: who was an honest man, really, and rather pleasant in his silent way.

We went out to buy a little food, and the café man went with us. The shops in the place were just holes. We went to the baker. Outside stood a cart being loaded with bread, by the youth and the small, quicksilver, baker. Inside the shop, we bought a long loaf, and a few bits of sliced sausage, and asked-for cheese. There was no cheese — but they would get us some. We waited an infinite while. I said to the café man, who waited alongside, full of interest: 'Won't the *carretto* be ready?' He turned round and pointed to the tall, randy mare between the shafts of the bread-cart outside. 'That's the horse that will take you. When the bread is delivered, they will hitch her into the *carretto*, and the

youth will drive you.’ There was nothing for it but patience, for the baker’s mare and the baker’s youth were our only hope. The cheese came at last. We wandered out to look for oranges. There was a woman selling them on a low bench beside the road, but B., who was getting impatient, didn’t like the look of them. So we went across to a little hole of a shop where another woman had oranges. They were tiny ones, and B. was rejecting them with impatient scorn. But the woman insisted they were sweet, sweet as apples, and full of juice. We bought four and I bought a *finocchio* for a salad. But she was right. The oranges were exquisite, when we came to eat them, and we wished we had ten.

On the whole, I think the people in Montalto are honest and rather attractive, but most of them slow and silent. It must be the malaria every time.

The café man asked if we would stay the night. We said, was there an inn? He said: ‘Oh yes, several!’ I asked where, and he pointed up the street. ‘But,’ said I, ‘what do you want with several hotels here?’ ‘For the agents who come to buy agricultural produce,’ he said. ‘Montalto is the centre of a great agricultural industry, and many agents come, many!’ However, I decided that, if we could, we would leave in the evening. There was nothing in Montalto to keep us.

At last the *carretto* was ready; a roomy, two-wheeled gig hung rather low. We got in, behind the dark, mulberry mare, and the baker’s youth, who certainly hadn’t washed his face for some days, started us on the trip. He was in an agony of shyness, stupefied.

The town is left behind at once. The green land, squares of leaden-dark olives planted in rows slopes down to the railway line, which runs along the coast parallel with the ancient Via Aurelia. Beyond the railway is the flatness of the coastal strip, and the whitish emptiness of the sea’s edge. It gives a great sense of nothingness, the sea down there.

The mulberry mare, lean and spare, reaches out and makes a good pace. But very soon we leave the road and are on a wide, wide trail of pinkish clayey earth, made up entirely of ruts. In parts the mud is still deep, water stands in the fathomless mud-holes. But fortunately, for a week it hasn’t rained, so the road is passable; most of the ruts are dry, and the wide trail, wide as a desert road which has no confines, is not difficult, only jolty. We run the risk of having our necks jerked out of their sockets by the impatient, long-striding mare.

The boy is getting over his shyness, now he is warmed up to driving, and proves outspoken and straightforward. I said to him: ‘What a good thing the road is dry I’ ‘If it had been fifteen days ago,’ he said, ‘you couldn’t have passed.’ But in the late afternoon, when we were returning on the same road and I said: ‘In bad wet weather we should have to come through here on horseback,’ he replied: ‘Even with the *carretto* you can get through.’ ‘Always ?’ said I.

‘Always’ said he.

And that was how he was. Possibility or impossibility was just a frame of mind with him.

We were on the Maremma, that fiat, wide plain of the coast that has been water-logged for centuries, and one of the most abandoned, wildest parts of Italy. Under the Etruscans; apparently, it was an intensely fertile plain. But the Etruscans seem to have been very clever drainage-engineers; they drained the land so that it was a waving bed of wheat, with their methods of intensive peasant culture. Under the Romans, however, the elaborate system of canals and levels of water fell into decay, and gradually the streams threw their mud along the coast and choked themselves, then soaked into the land and made marshes and vast stagnant shallow pools where the mosquitoes bred like fiends, millions hatching on a warm May day; and with the mosquitoes came the malaria, called the marsh fever in the old days. Already in late Roman times this evil had fallen on the Etruscan plains and on the Campagna of Rome. Then, apparently, the land rose in level, the sea-strip was wider but even more hollow than before, the marshes became deadly, and human life departed or was destroyed, or lingered on here and there.

In Etruscan days, no doubt, large tracts of this coast were covered with pine-forest, as are the slopes of the mountains that rise a few miles inland, and stretches of the coast, still farther north. The pleasant *pineta*, or open, sparse forest of umbrella-pines, once spread on and on, with tall arbutus and heather covering the earth from which the reddish trunks rose singly, as from an endless moor, and tufts of arbutus and broom making thickets. The pine-woods farther north are still delightful, so silent and bosky, with the umbrella roofs.

But the pine will not bear being soaked. So, as the great pools and marshes spread, the trees of Etruscan days fell for ever, and great treeless tracts appeared, covered with an almost impenetrable low jungle of bush and scrub and reeds, spreading for miles, and quite manless. The arbutus, that is always glossy green, and the myrtle, the mastic-tree, heaths, broom, and other spiny, gummy, coarse moorland plants rose up in dense luxuriance, to have their tops bent and whipped off by the ever-whipping winds from the sea, so that there was a low, dark jungle of scrub, less than man-high, stretching in places from the mountains almost to the sea. And here the wild boar roamed in herds; foxes and wolves hunted the rabbits, the hares, the roebuck; the innumerable wild-fowl and the flamingoes walked the sickly, stricken shores of the great pools and the sea.

So the Maremma country lay for centuries, with cleared tracts between, and districts a little elevated, and therefore rich in produce, but for the most part a wilderness, where the herdsmen pastured sheep, if possible, and the buffaloes

roamed unherded. In 1828, however, the Grand-duke Leopold of Tuscany signed the decree for the reclaiming of the Maremma, and lately the Italian Government has achieved splendid results — great tracts of farmland added on to the country's resources, and new farms stuck up.

But still there are large tracts of moorland. We bowled along the grassy ruts, towards the distant mountains, and first all was wheat: then it was moorland, with great, grey-headed carrion-crows floating around in the bareness; then a little thicket of ilex-oak; then another patch of wheat; and then a desolate sort of farmhouse, that somehow reminded one of America, a rather dismal farm on the naked prairie, all alone.

The youth told me he had been for two years *guardiano*, or herdsman, at this place. The large cattle were lingering around the naked house, within the wire enclosure. But there was a notice that the place was shut off, because of foot-and-mouth disease. The driver saluted a dismal woman and two children as he drove by.

We made a good pace. The driver, Luigi, told me his father had been also a *guardiano*, a herdsman, in this district, his five sons following him. The youth would look round, into the distance, with that keen, far-off look of men who have always lived wild and apart, and who are in their own country. He knew every sign. And he was so glad to get out again, out of Montalto.

The father, however, had died, a brother had married and lived in the family house, and Luigi had gone to help the baker in Montalto. But he was not happy: caged. He revived and became alert once more out in the Maremma spaces. He had lived more or less alone all his life — he was only eighteen — and loneliness, space, was precious to him, as it is to a moorland bird.

The great hooded crows floated round, and many big meadow-larks rose up from the moor. Save for this, everything to us was silent. Luigi said that now the hunting season was closed: but still, if he had a gun, he could take a shot at those hooded crows. It was obvious he was accustomed to have a gun in his hand when he was out in the long, hot, malarial days, mounted on a pony, watching the herds of cattle roving on the Maremma. Cattle do not take malaria.

I asked him about game. He said there was much in the foothills there. And he pointed away ahead, to where the mountains began to rise, six or eight miles away. Now so much of the Maremma itself is drained and cleared, the game is in the hills. His father used to accompany the hunters in winter: they still arrive in winter-time, the hunters in their hunting outfit, with dogs, and a great deal of fuss and paraphernalia, from Rome or from Florence. And still they catch the wild boar, the fox, the capriolo: which I suppose means the roedeer rather than the wild goat. But the boar is the *pièce de resistance*. You may see his bristling

carcass in the market-place in Florence, now and again, in winter. But, like every other wild thing on earth, he is becoming scarcer and scarcer. Soon the only animals left will be tame ones: man the tamest and most swarming. Adieu even to Maremma.

There 1' said the boy. There is the bridge of the monastery 1' We looked into the shallow hollow of green land, and could just see a little, black sort of tower by some bushes, in the empty landscape. There was a long, straight ditch or canal, and digging evidently going on. It was the Government irrigation works.

We left the road and went bowling over rough grass, by tracts of poor-looking oats. Luigi said they would cut these oats for fodder. There was a scrap of a herdsman's house, and new wire fences along the embankment of the big irrigation canal. This was new to Luigi. He turned the mare uphill again, towards the house, and asked the urchin where he was to get through the wire fence. The urchin explained — Luigi had it in a moment. He was intelligent as a wild thing, out here in his own spaces.

'Five years ago,' he said, 'there was none of this' — and he pointed around. 'No canal, no fences, no oats, no wheat. It was all *maremma*, moorland, with no life save the hooded crows, the cattle and the herdsmen. Now the cattle are all going — the herds are only remnants. And the ranch-houses are being abandoned.' He pointed away to a large house some miles off, on the nearest hill-foot. 'There, there are no more cattle, no more herdsmen. The steam-plough comes and ploughs the earth, the machinery sows and reaps the wheat and oats, the people of the Maremma, instead of being more, are fewer. The wheat grows by machinery.'

We were on a sort of trail again, bowling down a slight incline towards a bushy hollow and a black old ruin with a tower. Soon we saw that in the hollow was a tree-filled ravine, quite deep. And over the ravine a queer bridge, curving up like a rainbow, and narrow and steep and fortified-seeming. It soared over the ravine in one high curve, the stony path nipped in like a gutter between its broken walls, and charging straight at the black lava front of the ruin opposite, which was once a castle of the frontier. The little river in the gully, the Fiora, formed the boundary between the Papal States and Tuscany, so the castle guarded the bridge.

We wanted to get down, but Luigi made us wait, while he ran ahead to negotiate. He came back, climbed in, and drove up between the walls of the bridge. It was just wide enough for the cart: just. The walls of the bridge seemed to touch us. It was like climbing up a sort of gutter. Far below, way down in a thicket of bushes, the river rushed: the Fiora, a mere torrent or rainstream.

We drove over the bridge, and at the far end the lava wall of the monastery

seemed to shut us back, the mare's nose almost touched it. The road, however, turned to the left under an arched gateway. Luigi edged the mare round cleverly. There was just room to get her round with the *carretto*, out of the mouth of the bridge and under the archway, scraping the wall of the castle.

So! We were through. We drove a few yards past the ruin, and got down on a grassy place over the ravine. It was a wonderfully romantic spot. The ancient bridge, built in the first place by the Etruscans of Vulci, of blocks of black *tufo*, goes up in the air like a black bubble, so round and strange. The little river is in the bushy cleft, a hundred feet below. The bridge is in the sky, like a black bubble, most strange and lonely, with the poignancy of perfect things long forgotten. It has of course, been restored in Roman and medieval days. But essentially it is Etruscan, a beautiful Etruscan movement.

Pressing on to it, on this side, is the black building of the castle, mostly in ruins, with grass growing from the tops of the walls and from the black tower. Like the bridge, it is built of blocks of reddish black, spongy lava-stone, but its blocks are much squarer.

And all around is a peculiar emptiness. The castle is not entirely ruined. It is a sort of peasant farmstead. Luigi knows the people who live there. And across the stream there are patches of oats, and two or three cattle feeding, and two children. But all on this side, towards the mountains, is heathy, waste moorland, over which the trail goes towards the hills, and towards a great house among trees which we had seen from the distance. That is the *Badia*, or monastery, which gave the name to the bridge. But it has long been turned into a villa. The whole of this property belonged to Lucien Bonaparte, Prince of Canino, brother of Napoleon. He lived here after the death of his brother, as an Italian prince. In 1828 some oxen ploughing the land near the castle suddenly went through the surface of the earth, and sank into a tomb, in which were broken vases. This at once led to excavations. It was the time when the 'Grecian urn' was most popular. Lucien Bonaparte had no interest in vases. He hired an overseer to superintend the excavating, giving orders that every painted fragment must be saved, but that coarse ware must be smashed, to prevent the cheapening of the market. So that the work went savagely on, vases and basketfuls of broken pieces were harvested, the coarse, rough black Etruscan ware was smashed to pieces, as it was discovered, the overseer guarding the workmen with his gun over his knees. Dennis saw this still happening in 1846, when Lucien was dead. But the work was still going on, under the Princess's charge. And vainly Dennis asked the overseer to spare him some of the rough black ware. Not one! Smash they went to earth, while the overseer sat with his gun over his knees ready to shoot. But the bits of painted pottery were most skilfully fitted together, by the

Princess's expert workmen, and she would sell some *patera* or *amphora* for a thousand crowns, which had been a handful of potsherds. The tombs were opened, rifled, and then filled in with earth again. All the landed proprietors with property in the neighbourhood carried on excavations, and endless treasure was exhumed. Within two months of the time when he started excavating, Lucien Bonaparte had got more than two thousand Etruscan objects out of tombs occupying a few acres of ground. That the Etruscans should have left fortunes to the Bonapartes seems an irony; but so it was. Vulci had mines indeed: but mostly of painted vases, those 'brides of quietness' which had been only too much ravished. The tombs have little to show now.

We ate our food, the mare cropping the grass. And I wondered, seeing youths on bicycles, four or five, come swooping down the trail across the stream, out of emptiness, dismount and climb the high curve of the bridge, then disappear into the castle. From the mountains a man came riding on an ass: a pleasant young man in corduroy velveteens. He was riding without a saddle. He had a word with Luigi, in the low, secretive tones of the country, and went on towards the bridge. Then across, two men on mules came trotting down to the bridge: and a peasant drove in two bullocks, whose horns pricked the sky from the tall poise of the bridge.

The place seemed very populous for so lonely a spot. And still, all the air was heavy with isolation, suspicion, guardedness. It was like being in the Middle Ages. I asked Luigi to go to the house for some wine. He said he didn't know if he could get it: but he went off, with the semi-barbaric reluctance and fear of approaching a strange place.

After a while he came back, to say the *dispensa* was shut, and he couldn't get any. 'Then,' said I, 'let us go to the tombs! Do you know where they are?' He pointed vaguely into the distance of the moorland, and said they were there, but that we should want candles. The tombs were dark, and no one was there. 'Then let us get candles from the peasants,' I said. He answered again, the *dispensa* was shut, and we couldn't get candles. He seemed uneasy and depressed, as the people always are when there is a little difficulty. They are so afraid and mistrustful of one another.

We walked back to the black ruin, through a dark gateway that had been portcullised, into a half-ruined black courtyard, curiously gloomy. And here seven or eight men were squatting or standing about, their shiny bicycles leaning against the ruined walls. They were queer-looking men, youngish fellows, smallish, unshaven, dirty; not peasants, but workmen of some sort, who looked as if they had been swept together among the rubbish. Luigi was evidently nervous of them: not that they were villains, merely he didn't know them, And

he had one friend among them: a queer young fellow of about twenty, in a close-fitting blue jersey, a black, black beard on his rather delicate but *gamin* face, and an odd sort of smile. This young fellow came roving round us, with a queer, uneasy, half-smiling curiosity. The men all seemed like that, uneasy and as it were outcast, but with an unknown quality too. They were, in reality, the queer, poorest sort of natives of this part of the Maremma.

The courtyard of the castle was black and sinister, yet very interesting in its ruined condition. There were a few forlorn rat-like signs of peasant farming. And an outside staircase, once rather grand, went up to what was now apparently the inhabited quarter, two or three rooms facing the bridge.

The feeling of suspicion and almost of opposition, negative rather than active, was still so strong we went out again and on to the bridge. Luigi, in a dilemma, talked mutteringly to his black-bearded young friend with the bright eyes: all the men seemed to have queer, bright black eyes, with a glint on them such as a mouse's eyes have.

At last I asked him, flatly: 'Who are all those men?' He muttered that they were the workmen and navvies. I was puzzled to know *what* workmen and navvies, in this loneliness. Then he explained they were working on the irrigation works, and had come in to the *dispensa* for their wages and to buy things — it was Saturday afternoon — but that the overseer, who kept the *dispensa*, and who sold wine and necessaries to the workmen, hadn't come yet to open the place, so we couldn't get anything.

At least, Luigi didn't explain all this. But when he said these were the workmen from the irrigation diggings, I understood it all.

By this time, we and our desire for candles had become a feature in the landscape. I said to Luigi, why didn't he ask the *peasants*. He said they hadn't any. Fortunately at that moment an unwashed woman appeared at an upper window in the black wall. I asked her if she couldn't sell us a candle. She retired to think about it — then came back to say, surlily, it would be sixty centimes. I threw her a lira, and she dropped a candle. So!

Then the black-bearded young fellow glintingly said we should want more than one candle. So I asked the woman for another, and threw her fifty centimes — as she was contemplating giving me the change for the lira. She dropped another candle.

B. and I moved towards the *carretto*, with Luigi. But I could see he was still unhappy. 'Do you know where the tombs are?' I asked him. Again he waved vaguely: 'Over there' But he was unhappy. 'Would it be better to take one of those men for a guide?' I said to him. And I got the inevitable answer: 'It is as you think.' 'If *you* don't know the tombs well,' I said to him, 'then find a man to

come with us.' He still hesitated, with that dumb uncertainty of these people. 'Find a man anyhow,' I said, and off he went, feebly.

He came back in relief with the peasant, a short but strong *maremmano* of about forty, unshaven but not unclean. His name was Marco, and he had put on his best jacket to accompany us. He was quiet and determined-seeming — a brownish blond, not one of the queer black natives with the queer round soft contours. His boy of about thirteen came with him, and they two climbed on to the back of the *carretto*.

Marco gave directions, and we bowled down the trail, then away over a slight track, on to the heathy strong moorland. After us came a little black-eyed fellow on a bicycle. We passed on the left a small encampment of temporary huts made of planks, with women coming out to look. By the trail were huge sacks of charcoal, and the black charcoal-burners, just down from the mountains, for the week-end, stood aside to look at us. The asses and mules stood drooping.

This was the winter camp of the charcoal-burners. In a week or so, Marco told me, they would abandon this camp and go up into the mountains, out of reach of the fevers which begin in May. Certainly they looked a vigorous bunch, if a little wild. I asked Marco if there was much fever — meaning malaria. He said: 'Not much,' I asked him if he had had any attacks. He said: 'No, never.' It is true he looked broad and healthy, with a queer, subdued, explosive sort of energy. Yet there was a certain motionless, rather worn look in his face, a certain endurance and sallowness, which seemed like malaria to me. I asked Luigi, our driver, if he had had any fever. At first he too said no. Then he admitted he had had a touch now and then. Which was evident, for his face was small, and yellowish, evidently the thing had eaten into him. Yet he too, like Marco, had a strong, *manly* energy, more than the ordinary Italians. It is evidently the thing, in these parts, to deny that the malaria has ever touched you.

To the left, out of the heath, rose great flattish mounds, great tumuli, bigger than those of Cerveteri. I asked Marco were those the tombs? He said those were the tumuli, Coccumella and Coccumelletta — but that we would go first to the river tombs.

We were descending a rocky slope towards the brink of the ravine, which was full of trees, as ever. Far away, apparently, behind us to the right, stood the lonely black tower of the castle, across the moorland whence we had come. Across the ravine was a long, low hill, grassy and moorland: and farther down the stream were the irrigation works. The country was all empty and abandoned-seeming, yet with that peculiar, almost ominous, poignancy of places where life has once been intense. Where do they say the city of Vulci was?' I asked Marco. He pointed across stream, to the long, low elevation along the opposite side of

the ravine. I guessed it had been there — since the tombs were on this side. But it looked very low and undefended, for an Etruscan site: so open to the world! I supposed it had depended upon its walls, seawards, and the ravine inland. I asked Marco if anything was there; some sign of where the walls had gone round. He said: ‘Nothing’ It has evidently not been a very large city, like Caere and Tarquinia. But it was one of the cities of the League, and very rich indeed, judging from the thousands of painted vases which have been found in the tombs here.

The rocky descent was too uneven. We got out of the cart, and went on foot. Luigi left the mare, and Marco led us on, down to a barb-wire fence. We should never, never have found the place ourselves. Marco expertly held the wire apart, and we scrambled through on to the bushy, rocky side of the ravine. The trees rose from the riverside, some leaves bright green. And we descended a rough path, past the entrance-passage to a tomb most carefully locked with an iron gate, and defended with barbed wire, like a hermit’s cave with the rank vegetation growing up to choke it again.

Winding among rank vegetation and fallen rocks of the face of the ravine, we came to the openings of the tombs, which were cut into the face of the rock, and must have been a fine row once, like a row of rock-houses with a pleasant road outside, along the ravine. But now they are gloomy holes down which one must clamber through the excavated earth. Once inside, with the three candles — for the black-faced youth on the bicycle had brought a stump too — we were in gloomy wolves’ dens of places, with large chambers opening off one another as at Cerveteri, damp beds of rock for the coffins, and huge grisly stone coffins, seven feet long, lying in disorder, among fallen rocks and rubble, in some of them the bones and man-dust still lying dismally. There was nothing to see but these black, damp chambers, sometimes cleared, sometimes with coarse great sarcophagi and broken rubbish and excavation-rubble left behind in the damp-grisly darkness.

Sometimes we had to wriggle into the tombs on our bellies, over the mounds of rubble, going down into holes like rats, while the bats flew blindly in our faces. Once inside, we clambered in the faint darkness over huge pieces of rock and broken stone, from dark chamber to chamber, four or five or even more chambers to a tomb, all cut out of the rock and made to look like houses, with the sloping roof-tilts and the central roof-beam. From these roofs hung clusters of pale brown furry bats, in bunches, like bunches of huge furry hops. One could hardly believe they were alive, till I saw the squat little fellow of the bicycle holding his candle up to one of the bunches, singeing the bats’ hair, burning the torpid creatures, so the skinny wings began to flutter, and half-stupefied, half-

dead bats fell from the clusters of the roof, then groped on the wing and began to fly low, staggering towards the outlet. The dark little fellow took pleasure in burning them. But I stopped him at it, and he was afraid, and left them alone.

He was a queer fellow — quite short, with the fat, soft, round curves, and black hair and sallow face and black bats' eyes of a certain type of this district. He was perhaps twenty years old, and like a queer burrowing dumb animal. He would creep into holes in the queerest way, with his queer, soft, round hind-quarters jutting behind: just like some uncanny animal. And I noticed the backs of his ears were all scaly and raw with sores; whether from dirt or some queer disease, who can say. He seemed healthy and alive enough, otherwise. And he seemed quite unconscious of his sore ears, with an animal unconsciousness.

Marco, who was a much higher type, knew his way about, and led us groping and wriggling and clambering from tomb to tomb, among the darkness and brokenness and bats and damp, then out among the fennel and bushes of the ravine top, then in again into some hole. He showed us a tomb whence only last year they had taken a big stone statue — he showed me where it had stood, there, in the innermost chamber, with its back to the wall. And he told me of all the vases, mostly broken pieces, that he too had lifted from the dirt, on the stone beds.

But now there is nothing, and I was tired of climbing into these gruesome holes, one after another, full of damp and great fallen rocks. Nothing living or beautiful is left behind — nothing. I was glad when we came to the end of the excavated tombs, and saw beyond only the ravine bank grown over with bushes and fennel and great weeds. Probably many a vase and many a stone coffin still lie hidden there — but let them lie.

We went back along the path the way we had come, to climb back to the upper level. As we came to the gangway leading to the locked tomb Marco told me that in here were paintings and some things left behind. Probably it was the famous François tomb with the paintings that are copied in the Vatican museum. It was opened by the excavator François in 1857, and is one of the very, very few painted tombs found at Vulci.

We tried in vain to get in. Short of smashing the lock, it was impossible. Of course, in these expeditions, one should arm oneself with official permits. But it means having officials hanging round.

So we climbed up to the open world, and Luigi made us get into the *carretto*. The mare pulled us jolting across towards the great tumuli, which we wanted to see. They are huge grassy-bushy mounds, like round, low hills. The band of stonework round the base, if it be there, is buried.

Marco led us inside the dense passage of brambles and bushes which leads to

the opening into the tumulus. Already this passage is almost blocked up, overgrown. One has to crawl under the scratching brambles, like a rabbit.

And at last one is in the plain doorway of the tumulus itself. Here, even in 1829, two weird stone sphinxes guarded the entrance. Now there is nothing. And inside the passage or at the angles were lions and griffins on guard. What now shall we find as, we follow the candlelight in the narrow, winding passage? It is like being in a mine, narrow passages winding on and on, from nowhere to nowhere. We had not any great length of candle left: four stumps. Marco left one stump burning at the junction of the passages as a signpost, and on and on we went, from nowhere to nowhere, stooping a little, our hats brushing the clusters of bats that hung from the ceiling as we went on, one after the other, pinned all the time in the narrow stone corridors that never led anywhere or did anything. Sometimes there was a niche in the wall — that was all.

There must, surely, be a central burial chamber, to which the passages finally lead. But we didn't find it. And Marco said there was no such thing — the tumulus was all passages and nothing but passages. But Dennis says that when the tumulus was opened in 1829 there were two small chambers in the heart of the mound, and rising from these, two shafts of masonry which passed up to the apex of the mound, and probably these supported great monuments, probably the phallic cippi. On the floor of the chamber were fragments of bronze and frail gold. But now there is nothing; the centre of the tumulus is no doubt collapsed.

It was like being burrowing inside some ancient pyramid. This was quite unlike any other Etruscan tomb we had seen: and if this tumulus was a tomb, then it must have been a very important person whose coffin formed the nut inside all this shell — a person important as a Pharaoh, surely. The Etruscans were queer people, and this tumulus, with no peripheral tombs, only endless winding passages, must be either a reminiscence of prehistoric days or of Egyptian pyramids.

When we had had enough of running along passages in nowhere we got out, scrambled through the bramble tangle, and were thankful to see clear heaven again. We all piled into the *carretto*, and the mare nobly hauled us up to the trail. The little dark fellow sailed ahead silently, on his bicycle, to open the gate for us. We looked round once more at the vast mound of the Coccumella, which strange dead hands piled in soft earth over two tiny death-chambers, so long ago: and even now it is weirdly conspicuous across the flat Maremma. A strange, strange nut indeed, with a kernel of perpetual mystery! And once it rose suave as a great breast, tipped with the budded monuments of the cippi! It is too problematic. We turn our back on it all as the *carretto* jolts over the tomb-rifled earth. There is something gloomy, if rather wonderful, about Vulci.

The charcoal-burners were preparing to wash their faces for Sunday, in the little camp. The woman stood smiling as we drove by on the moor. 'Oh, how fat thou hast got' Luigi shouted to one plump and smiling woman. 'You haven't though!' she shouted back at him. '*Tu pure no!*'

At the bridge we said good-bye to Marco and his boy, then we pulled over the arch once more. But on the other side Luigi wanted to drink. So he and I scrambled down to the spring, the old, thin-trickling spring, and drank cool water. The river rushed below: the bridge arched its black, soaring rainbow above, and we heard the shouts of mule-drivers driving the mules over the arch.

Once this old bridge carried an aqueduct, and it is curious to see the great stalactitic mass that hangs like a beard down the side facing the mountains. But the aqueduct is gone, the muddy stalactitic mass itself is crumbling. Everything passes!

So we climbed up and into the *carretto*, and away went the mare at a spanking pace. We passed the young man in velveteens, on the donkey — a peasant from the hills, Luigi said he was. And we met horsemen riding towards us, towards the hills, away from Montalto. It was Saturday afternoon, with a bright sea-wind blowing strong over the Maremma, and men travelling away from work, on horseback, on mules, or on asses. And some drove laden donkeys out to the hills.

'It would be a good life,' I said to Luigi, to live here, and have a house on the hills, and a horse to ride, and space: except for the malaria'

Then, having previously confessed to me that the malaria was still pretty bad, though children often escaped it, but grown people rarely; the fever inevitably came to shake them sometimes; that Montalto was more stricken than the open country; and that in the time of rains the roads were impassable — one was cut off — now Luigi changed his tune: said there was almost no fever any more; the roads were always passable; in Montalto people came at bathing season to bathe in the sea, having little cane huts on the coast: the roads were always easily passable, easily! and that you never got fever at all if you were properly fed, and had a bit of meat now and then, and a decent glass of wine. He wanted me so much to come and have some abandoned house in the foothills; and he would look after my horses, and we would go hunting together — even out of season, for there was no one to catch you.

B. dozed lightly while we drove joltingly on. It was a dream too. I would like it well enough — if I were convinced about that malaria. And I would certainly have Luigi to look after the horses. He hasn't a grand appearance, but he is solitary and courageous and surely honest, solitary, and far more manly than the townsmen or the grubbing peasants.

So, we have seen all we could see of Vulci. If we want to see what the

Etruscans buried there we must go to the Vatican, or to the Florence museum, or to the British Museum in London, and see vases and statues, bronzes, sarcophagi and jewels. In the British Museum lie the contents, for the most part, of the famous Tomb of Isis, where lay buried a lady whom Dennis thought was surely Egyptian, judging from her statue, that is stiff and straight, and from the statuette of 'Isis', the six ostrich eggs and other imported things that went to the grave with her: for in death she must be what she was in life, as exactly as possible. This was the Etruscan creed. How the Egyptian lady came to Vulci, and how she came to be buried there along with a lady of ancient Etruria, down in that bit of the Vulci necropolis now called Polledrara, who knows? But all that is left of her is now in the British Museum. Vulci has nothing. Anyhow she was surely not Egyptian at all. Anything of the archaic east Mediterranean seemed to Dennis Egyptian.

So it is. The site of Vulci was lost from Roman times till 1828. Once found, however, the tombs were rapidly gutted by the owners, everything precious was taken away, then the tombs were either closed again or abandoned. All the thousands of vases that the Etruscans gathered so lovingly and laid by their dead, where are they? Many are still in existence. But they are everywhere except at Vulci.

6 — VOLTERRA

Volterra is the most northerly of the great Etruscan cities of the west. It lies back some thirty miles from the sea, on a towering great bluff of rock that gets all the winds and sees all the world, looking out down the valley of the Cecina to the sea, south over vale and high land to the tips of Elba, north to the imminent mountains of Carrara, inward over the wide hills of the Pre-Apennines, to the heart of Tuscany.

You leave the Rome — Pisa train at Cecina, and slowly wind up the valley of the stream of that name, a green, romantic, forgotten sort of valley, in spite of all the come-and-go of ancient Etruscans and Romans, medieval Volterrans and Pisans, and modern traffic. But the traffic is not heavy. Volterra is a sort of inland island, still curiously isolated, and grim.

The small, forlorn little train comes to a stop at the Saline de Volterra, the famous old salt works now belonging to the State, where brine is pumped out of deep wells. What passengers remain in the train are transferred to one old little coach across the platform, and at length this coach starts to creep like a beetle up the slope, up a cog-and-ratchet line, shoved by a small engine behind. Up the steep but round slope among the vineyards and olives you pass almost at walking-pace, and there is not a flower to be seen, only the beans make a whiff of perfume now and then, on the chill air, as you rise and rise, above the valley below, corning level with the high hills to south, and the bluff of rock with its two or' three towers, ahead.

After a certain amount of backing and changing, the fragment of a train eases up at a bit of a cold wayside station, and is finished. The world lies below. You get out, transfer yourself to a small ancient motor-omnibus and are rattled up to the final level of the city, into a cold and gloomy little square, where the hotel is.

The hotel is simple and somewhat rough, but quite friendly, pleasant in its haphazard way. And what is more, it has central heating, and the heat is on, this cold, almost icy, April afternoon. Volterra lies only 1800 feet above the sea, but it is right in the wind, and cold as any Alp.

The day was Sunday, and there was a sense of excitement and fussing, and a bustling in and out of temporarily important persons, and altogether a smell of politics in the air. The waiter brought us tea, of a sort, and I asked him what was doing. He replied that a great banquet was to be given this evening to the new *podestà* who had come from Florence to govern the city, under the new regime. And evidently he felt that this was such a hugely important party' occasion we

poor outsiders were of no account.

It was a cold, grey afternoon, with winds round the hard dark corners of the hard, narrow medieval town, and crowds of black-dressed, rather squat little men and pseudo-elegant young women pushing and loitering in the streets, and altogether that sense of furtive grinning and jeering and threatening which always accompanies a public occasion — a political one especially — in Italy, in the more out-of-the-way centres. It is as if the people, alabaster-workers and a few peasants, were not sure which side they wanted to be on, and therefore were all the more ready to exterminate anyone who was on the other side. This fundamental uneasiness, indecision, is most curious in the Italian soul. It is as if the people could never be wholeheartedly anything: because they can't trust anything. And this inability to trust is at the root of the political extravagance and frenzy. They don't trust themselves, so how can they trust their 'leaders' or their party'?

Volterra, standing sombre and chilly alone on her rock, has always, from Etruscan days on, been grimly jealous of her own independence. Especially she has struggled against the Florentine yoke. So what her actual feelings are, about this new-old sort of village tyrant, the *podestà*, whom she is banqueting this evening, it would be hard, probably, even for the Volterrans themselves to say. Anyhow the cheeky girls salute one with the 'Roman' salute, out of sheer effrontery: a salute which has nothing to do with me, so I don't return it. Politics of all sorts are anathema. But in an Etruscan city which held out so long against Rome I consider the Roman salute unbecoming, and the Roman imperium unmentionable.

It is amusing to see on the walls, too, chalked fiercely up: *Morte a Lenin!* though that poor gentleman has been long enough dead, surely even for a Volterranean to have heard of it. And more amusing still is the legend permanently painted: *Mussolini ha sempre ragione!* Some are born infallible, some achieve infallibility, and some have it thrust upon them.

But it is not for me to put even my little finger in any political pie. I am sure every post-war country has hard enough work to get itself governed, without outsiders interfering or commenting. Let those rule who can rule.

We wander on, a little dismally, looking at the stony stoniness of the medieval town. Perhaps on a warm sunny day it might be pleasant, when shadow was attractive and a breeze welcome. But on a cold, grey, windy afternoon of April, Sunday, always especially dismal, with all the people in the streets, bored and uneasy, and the stone buildings peculiarly sombre and hard and resistant, it is no fun. I don't care about the bleak but truly medieval piazza: I don't care if the Palazzo Pubblico has all sorts of amusing coats of arms on it: I don't care about

the cold cathedral, though it is rather nice really, with a glow of dusky candles and a smell of Sunday incense: I am disappointed in the wooden sculpture of the taking down of Jesus, and the bas-reliefs don't interest me. In short, I am hard to please.

The modern town is not very large. We went down a long, stony street, and out of the Porta dell'Arco, the famous old Etruscan gate. It is a deep old gateway, almost a tunnel, with the outer arch facing the desolate country on the skew, built at an angle to the old road, to catch the approaching enemy on his right side, where the shield did not cover him. Up handsome and round goes the arch, at a good height, and with that peculiar weighty richness of ancient things; and three dark heads, now worn featureless, reach out curiously and inquiringly, one from the keystone of the arch, one from each of the arch bases, to gaze from the city and into the steep hollow of the world beyond.

Strange, dark old Etruscan heads of the city gate, even now they are featureless they still have a peculiar, out-reaching life of their own. Ducati says they represented the heads of slain enemies hung at the city gate. But they don't hang. They stretch with curious eagerness forward. Nonsense about dead heads. They were city deities of some sort.

And the archaeologists say that only the doorposts of the outer arch, and the inner walls, are Etruscan work. The Romans restored the arch, and set the heads back in their old positions. (Unlike the Romans to set anything back in its old position!) While the wall above the arch is merely medieval.

But we'll call it Etruscan still. The roots of the gate, and the dark heads, these they cannot take away from the Etruscans. And the heads are still on the watch.

The land falls away steeply, across the road in front of the arch. The road itself turns east, under the walls of the modern city, above the world: and the sides of the road, as usual outside the gates, are dump-heaps, dump-heaps of plaster and rubble, dump-heaps of the white powder from the alabaster works, the waste edge of the town.

The path turns away from under the city wall, and dips down along the brow of the hill. To the right we can see the tower of the church of Santa Chiara, standing on a little platform of the irregularly-dropping hill. And we are going there. So we dip downwards above a Dantesque, desolate world, down to Santa Chiara, and beyond. Here the path follows the top of what remains of the old Etruscan wall. On the right are little olive-gardens and bits of wheat. Away beyond is the dismal sort of crest of modern Volterra. We walk along, past the few flowers and the thick ivy, and the bushes of broom and marjoram, on what was once the Etruscan wall, far out from the present city wall. On the left the land drops steeply, in uneven and unhappy descents.

The great hilltop or headland on which Etruscan 'Volterra', *Velathri*, *Vlathri*, once stood spreads out jaggedly, with deep-cleft valleys in between, more or less in view, spreading two or three miles away. It is something like a hand, the bluff steep of the palm sweeping in a great curve on the east and south, to seawards, the peninsulas of fingers running jaggedly inland. And the great wall of the Etruscan city swept round the south and eastern bluff, on the crest of steeps and cliffs, turned north and crossed the first finger, or peninsula, then started up hill and down dale over the fingers and into the declivities, a wild and fierce sort of way, hemming in the great crest. The modern town occupies merely the highest bit of the Etruscan city site.

The walls themselves are not much to look at, when you climb down. They are only fragments, now, huge fragments of embankment, rather than wall, built of uncemented square masonry, in the grim, sad sort of stone. One only feels, for some reason, depressed. And it is pleasant to look at the lover and his lass going along the top of the ramparts, which are now olive-orchards, away from the town. At least they are alive and cheerful and quick.

On from Santa Chiara the road takes us through the grim and depressing little suburb-hamlet of San Giusto, a black street that emerges upon the waste open place where the church of San Giusto rises like a huge and astonishing barn. It is so tall, the interior should be impressive. But no! It is merely nothing. The architects have achieved nothing, with all that tallness. The children play around with loud yells and ferocity. It is Sunday evening, near sundown, and cold.

Beyond this monument of Christian dreariness we come to the Etruscan walls again, and what was evidently once an Etruscan gate: a dip in the wall-bank, with the groove of an old road running to it.

Here we sit on the ancient heaps of masonry and look into weird yawning gulfs, like vast quarries. The swallows, turning their blue backs, skim away from the ancient lips and over the really dizzy depths, in the yellow light of evening, catching the upward gusts of wind, and flickering aside like lost fragments of life, truly frightening above those ghastly hollows. The lower depths are dark grey, ashy in colour, and in part wet, and the whole things looks new, as if it were some enormous quarry all slipping down.

This place is called *Le Balze* — the cliffs. Apparently the waters which fall on the heights of Volterra collect in part underneath the deep hill and wear away at some places the lower strata, so that the earth falls in immense collapses. Across the gulf, away from the town, stands a big, old, picturesque, isolated building, the *Badia* or Monastery of the Camaldolesi, sad-looking, destined at last to be devoured by *Le Balze*, its old walls already splitting and yielding.

From time to time, going up to the town homewards, we come to the edge of

the walls and look out into the vast glow of gold, which is sunset, marvellous, the steep ravines sinking in darkness, the farther valley silently, greenly gold, with hills breathing luminously up, passing out into the pure, sheer gold gleams of the far-off sea, in which a shadow, perhaps an island, moves like a mote of life. And like great guardians the Carrara mountains jut forward, naked in the pure light like flesh, with their crests portentous: so that they seem to be advancing on us: while all the vast concavity of the west roars with gold liquescency, as if the last hour had come, and the gods were smelting us all back into yellow transmuted oneness.

But nothing is being transmuted. We turn our faces, a little frightened, from the vast blaze of gold, and in the dark, hard streets the town band is just chirping up, brassily out of tune as usual, and the populace, with some maidens in white, are streaming in crowds towards the piazza. And, like the band, the populace also is out of tune, buzzing with the inevitable suppressed jeering. But they are going to form a procession.

When we come to the square in front of the hotel, and look out from the edge into the hollow world of the west, the light is sunk red, redness gleams up from the far-off sea below, pure and fierce, and the hollow places in between are dark. Over all the world is a low red glint. But only the town, with its narrow streets and electric light, is impervious.

The banquet, apparently, was not till nine o'clock, and all was hubbub. B. and I dined alone soon after seven, like two orphans whom the waiters managed to remember in between whiles. They were so thrilled getting all the glasses and goblets and decanters, hundreds of them, it seemed, out of the big chiffonnier-cupboard that occupied the back of the dining-room, and whirling them away, stacks of glittering glass, to the banquet-room: while out-of-work young men would poke their heads in through the doorway, black hats on, overcoats hung over one shoulder, and gaze with bright inquiry through the room, as though they expected to see Lazarus risen, and not seeing him, would depart again to the nowhere whence they came. A banquet is a banquet, even if it is given to the devil himself; and the *podestà* may be an angel of light.

Outside was cold and dark. In the distance the town band tooted spasmodically, as if it were short-winded this chilly Sunday evening. And we, not bidden to the feast, went to bed. To be awakened occasionally by sudden and roaring noises — perhaps applause — and the loud and unmistakable howling of a child, well after midnight.

Morning was cold and grey again, with a chilly and forbidding country yawning and gaping and lapsing away beneath us. The sea was invisible. We walked the narrow cold streets, whose high, cold, dark stone walls seemed

almost to press together, and we looked in at the alabaster workshops, where workmen, in Monday-morning gloom and half awakedness, were turning the soft alabaster, or cutting it out, or polishing it.

Everybody knows Volterra marble — so called — nowadays, because of the translucent bowls of it which hang under the electric lights, as shades, in half the hotels of the world. It is nearly as transparent as alum, and nearly as soft. They peel it ti down as if it were soap, and tint it pink or amber or blue, and turn it into all those things one does not want: tinted alabaster lampshades, light-bowls, statues, tinted or untinted, vases, bowls with doves on the rim, or vine-leaves, and similar curios. The trade seems to be going strong. Perhaps it is the electric-light demand: perhaps there is a revival of interest in ‘statuary’. Anyhow there is no love lost between a Volterranean alabaster worker and the lump of pale Volterranean earth he turns into marketable form. Alas for the goddess of sculptured form, she has gone from here also.

But it is the old alabaster jars we want to see, not the new. As we hurry down the stony street the rain, icy cold, begins to fall. We flee through the glass doors of the museum, which has just opened, and which seems as if the alabaster inside had to be kept at a low temperature, for the place is dead-cold as a refrigerator.

Cold, silent, empty, unhappy the museum seems. But at last an old and dazed man arrives, in uniform, and asks quite scared what we want. ‘Why, to see the museum!’ ‘Ah! Ah! Ah si — si!’ It just dawns upon him that the museum is there to be looked at. ‘Ah si, si, Signori!’

We pay our tickets, and start in. It is really a very attractive and pleasant museum, but we had struck such a bitter cold April morning, with icy rain falling in the courtyard, that I felt as near to being in the tomb as I have ever done. Yet very soon, in the rooms with all those hundreds of little sarcophagi, ash-coffins, or urns, as they are called, the strength of the old life began to warm one up.

Urn is not a good word, because it suggests, to me at least, a vase, an amphora, a round and shapely jar: perhaps through association with Keats’ *Ode to a Grecian Urn* — which vessel no doubt wasn’t an urn at all, but a wine-jar — and with the ‘tea-urn’ of children’s parties. These Volterranean urns, though correctly enough used for storing the ashes of the dead, are not round, they are not jars, they are small alabaster sarcophagi. And they are a peculiarity of Volterra. Probably because the Volterraneans had the alabaster to hand.

Anyhow here you have them in hundreds, and they are curiously alive and attractive. They are not considered very highly as ‘art’. One of the latest Italian writers on Etruscan things, Ducati, says: ‘If they have small interest from the artistic point of view, they are extremely valuable for the scenes they represent, either mythological or relative to the beliefs in the after-life.’

George Dennis, however, though he too does not find much ‘art’ in Etruscan things, says of the Volterranean ash-chests: ‘The touches of Nature on these Etruscan urns, so simply but eloquently expressed, must appeal to the sympathies of all — they are chords to which every heart must respond; and I envy not the man who can walk through this museum unmoved, without feeling a tear rise in his eye’

*And recognizing ever and anon
The breeze of Nature stirring in his soul.*

The breeze of Nature no longer shakes dewdrops from our eyes, at least so readily, but Dennis is more alive than Ducati to that which is alive. What men mean nowadays by ‘art’ it would be hard to say. Even Dennis said that the Etruscans never approached the pure, the sublime, the perfect beauty which Flaxman reached. Today, this makes us laugh: the Greekified illustrator of Pope’s *Homer*! But the same instinct lies at the back of our idea of ‘art’ still. Art is still to us something which has been well cooked — like a plate of spaghetti. An ear of wheat is not yet ‘art’. Wait, wait till it has been turned into pure, into perfect macaroni.

For me, I get more real pleasure out of these Volterranean ash-chests than out of — I had almost said, the Parthenon frieze. One wearies of the aesthetic quality — a quality which takes the edge off everything, and makes it seem ‘boiled down’. A great deal of pure Greek beauty has this boiled-down effect. It is too much cooked in the artistic consciousness.

In Dennis’s day a broken Greek or Greekish amphora would fetch thousands of crowns in the market, if it was the right ‘period’, *etc.* These Volterranean urns fetched hardly anything. Which is a mercy, or they would be scattered to the ends of the earth.

As it is, they are fascinating, like an open book of life, and one has no sense of weariness with them, though there are so many. They warm one up, like being in the midst of life.

The downstairs rooms of ash-chests contain those urns representing ‘Etruscan’ subjects: those of sea-monsters, the seaman with fishtail, and with wings, the sea-woman the same: or the man with serpent-legs, and wings, or the woman the same. It was Etruscan to give these creatures wings, not Greek.

If we remember that in the old world the centre of all power was at the depths of the earth, and at the depths of the sea, while the sun was only a moving subsidiary body: and that the serpent represented the vivid powers of the inner earth, not only such powers as volcanic and earthquake, but the quick powers that run up the roots of plants and establish the great body of the tree, the tree of life, and run up the feet and legs of man, to establish the heart: while the fish was

the symbol of the depths of the waters, whence even light is born: we shall see the ancient power these symbols had over the imagination of the Volterrans. They were a people faced with the sea, and living in a volcanic country.

Then the powers of the earth and the powers of the sea take life as they give life. They have their terrific as well as their prolific aspect.

Someone says the wings of the water-deities represent evaporation towards the sun, and the curving tails of the dolphin represent torrents. This is part of the great and controlling ancient idea of the come-and-go of the life-powers, the surging up, in a flutter of leaves and a radiation of wings, and the surging back, in torrents and waves and the eternal downpour of death.

Other common symbolic animals' in Volterra are the beaked griffins, the creatures of the powers that tear asunder and, at the same time, are guardians of the treasure. They are lion and eagle combined, of the sky and of the earth with caverns. They do not allow the treasure of life, the gold, which we should perhaps translate as consciousness, to be stolen by thieves of life. They are guardians of the treasure: and then, they are the tearers asunder of those who must depart from life.

It is these creatures, creatures of the elements, which carry men away into death, over the border between the elements. So is the dolphin, sometimes; and so the hippocampus, the sea-horse; and so the centaur.

The horse is always the symbol of the strong animal life of man: and sometimes he rises, a sea-horse, from the ocean: and sometimes he is a land creature, and half-man. And so he occurs on the tombs, as the passion in man returning into the sea, the soul retreating into the death-world at the depths of the waters: or sometimes he is a centaur, sometimes a female centaur, sometimes clothed in a lion-skin, to show his dread aspect, bearing the soul back, away, off into the other-world.

It would be very interesting to know if there were a definite connexion between the scene on the ash-chest and the dead whose ashes it contained. When the fishtailed sea-god entangles a man to bear him off, does it mean drowning at sea? And when a man is caught in the writhing serpent-legs of the Medusa, or of the winged snake-power, does it mean a fall to earth; a death from the earth, in some manner; as a fall, or the dropping of a rock, or the bite of a snake? And the soul carried off by a winged centaur: is it a man dead of some passion that carried him away?

But more interesting even than the symbolic scenes are those scenes from actual life, such as boar-hunts, circus-games, processions, departures in covered wagons, ships sailing away, city gates being stormed, sacrifice being performed, girls with open scrolls, as if reading at school; many banquets with man and

woman on the banqueting couch, and slaves playing music, and children around: then so many really tender farewell scenes, the dead saying good-bye to his wife, as he goes on the journey, or as the chariot bears him off, or the horse waits; then the soul alone, with the death-dealing spirits standing by with their hammers that gave the blow. It is as Dennis says, the breeze of Nature stirs one's soul. I asked the gentle old man if he knew anything about the urns. But no! no! He knew nothing at all. He had only just come. He counted for nothing. So he protested. He was one of those gentle, shy Italians too diffident even to look at the chests he was guarding. But when I told him what I thought some of the scenes meant he was fascinated like a child, full of wonder, almost breathless. And I thought again, how much more Etruscan than Roman the Italian of today is: sensitive, diffident, craving really for symbols and mysteries, able to be delighted with true delight over small things, violent in spasms, and altogether without sternness or natural will-to-power. The will-to-power is a secondary thing in an Italian, reflected on to him from the Germanic races that have almost engulfed him.

The boar-hunt is still a favourite Italian sport, the grandest sport of Italy. And the Etruscans must have loved it, for they represent it again and again, on the tombs. It is difficult to know what exactly the boar symbolized to them. He occupies often the centre of the scene, where the one who dies should be: and where the bull of sacrifice is. And often he is attacked, not by men, but by young winged boys, or by spirits. The dogs climb in the trees around him, the double axe is swinging to come down on him, he lifts up his tusks in a fierce wild pathos. The archaeologists say that it is Meleager and the boar of Calydon, or Hercules and the fierce brute of Erymanthus. But this is not enough. It is a symbolic scene: and it seems as if the boar were himself the victim this time, the wild, fierce fatherly life hunted down by dogs and adversaries. For it is obviously the boar who must die: he is not, like the lions and griffins, the attacker. He is the father of life running free in the forest, and he must die. They say too he represents winter: when the feasts for the dead were held. But on the very oldest archaic vases the lion and the boar are facing each other, again and again, in symbolic opposition.

Fascinating are the scenes of departures, journeyings in covered wagons drawn by two or more horses, accompanied by driver on foot and friend on horseback, and dogs, and met by other horsemen coming down the road. Under the arched tarpaulin tilt of the wagon reclines a man, or a woman, or a whole family: and all moves forward along the highway with wonderful slow surge. And the wagon, as far as I saw, is always drawn by horses, not by oxen.

This is surely the journey of the soul. It is said to represent even the funeral procession, the ash-chest being borne away to the cemetery, to be laid in the

tomb. But the *memory* in the scene seems much deeper than that. It gives so strongly the feeling of a people who have trekked in wagons, like the Boers, or the Mormons, from one land to another.

They say these covered-wagon journeys are peculiar to Volterra, found represented in no other Etruscan places. Altogether the feeling of the Volterranean scenes is peculiar. There is a great sense of *journeying*: as of a people which remembers its migrations, by sea as well as land. And there is a curious restlessness, unlike the dancing surety of southern Etruria: a touch of the Gothic.

In the upstairs rooms there are many more ash-chests, but mostly representing Greek subjects: so called. Helen and the Dioscuri, Pelops, Minotaur, Jason, Medea fleeing from Corinth, Oedipus, and the Sphinx, Ulysses and the Sirens, Eteocles and Polynices, Centaurs and Lapithae, the Sacrifice of Iphigenia — all are there, just recognizable. There are so many Greek subjects that one archaeologist suggested that these urns must have been made by a Greek colony planted there in Volterra after the Roman conquest.

One might almost as well say that *Timon of Athens* was written by a Greek colonist planted in England after the overthrow of the Catholic Church. These 'Greek' ash-chests are about as Grecian as *Timon of Athens* is. The Greeks would have done them so much better'.

No, the 'Greek' scenes are innumerable, but it is only just recognizable what they mean. Whoever carved these chests knew very little of the fables they were handling: and fables they were, to the Etruscan artificers of that day, as they would be to the Italians of this. The story was just used as a peg upon which the native Volterranean hung his fancy, as the Elizabethans used Greek stories for their poems. Perhaps also the alabaster cutters were working from old models, or the memory of them. Anyhow, the scenes show nothing of Hellas.

Most curious these 'classic' subjects: so unclassic! To me they hint at the Gothic which lay unborn in the future, far more than at the Hellenistic past of the Volterranean Etruscan. For, of course, all these alabaster urns are considered late in period, after the fourth century B.C. The Christian sarcophagi of the fifth century A.D. seem much more nearly kin to these ash-chests of Volterra than do contemporary Roman chests: as if Christianity really rose, in Italy, out of Etruscan soil, rather than out of Greco-Roman. And the first glimmering of that early, glad sort of Christian art, the free touch of Gothic within the classic, seems evident in the Etruscan scenes. The Greek and Roman 'boiled' sort of form gives way to a raggedness of edge and a certain wildness of light and shade which promises the later Gothic, but which is still held down by the heavy mysticism from the East.

Very early Volterranean urns were probably plain stone or terra-cotta. But no

doubt Volterra was a city long before the Etruscans penetrated into it, and probably it never changed character profoundly. To the end, the Volterrans burned their dead: there are practically no long sarcophagi of Lucumones. And here most of all one feels that the *people* of Volterra, or Velathri, were not Oriental, not the same as those who made most show at Tarquinii. This was surely another tribe, wilder, cruder, and far less influenced by the old Aegean influences. In Caere and Tarquinii the aborigines were deeply overlaid by incoming influences from the East. Here not! Here the wild and untamable Ligurian was neighbour, and perhaps kin, and the town of wind and stone kept, and still keeps, its northern quality.

So there the ash-chests are, an open book for anyone to read who will, according to his own fancy. They are not more than two feet long, or thereabouts, so the figure on the lid is queer and stunted. The classic Greek or Asiatic could not have borne that. It is a sign of barbarism in itself. Here the northern spirit was too strong for the Hellenic or Oriental or ancient Mediterranean instinct. The Lucumo and his lady had to submit to being stunted, in their death-effigy. The head is nearly life-size. The body is squashed small.

But there it is, a portrait-effigy. Very often, the lid and the chest don't seem to belong together at all. It is suggested that the lid was made during the lifetime of the subject, with an attempt at real portraiture: while the chest was bought ready-made, and apart. It may be so. Perhaps in Etruscan days there were the alabaster workshops as there are today, only with rows of ash-chests portraying all the vivid scenes we still can see: and perhaps you chose the one you wished your ashes to lie in. But more probably, the workshops were there, the carved ash-chests were there, but you did not select your own chest, since you did not know what death you would die. Probably you only had your portrait carved on the lid, and left the rest to the survivors.

So maybe, and most probably, the mourning relatives hurriedly *ordered* the lid with the portrait-bust, after the death of the near one, and then chose the most appropriate ash-chest. Be it as it may, the two parts are often oddly assorted: and so they were found with the ashes inside them.

But we must believe that the figure on the lid, grotesquely shortened, is an attempt at a portrait. There is none of the distinction of the southern Etruscan figures. The heads are given the 'imperious' tilt of the Lucumones, but here it becomes almost grotesque. The dead nobleman may be wearing the necklace of office and holding the sacred patera or libation-dish in his hand; but he will not, in the southern way, be represented ritualistically as naked to below the navel; his shirt will come to his neck: and he may just as well be holding the tipping wine-cup in his hand as the sacred patera; he may even have a wine-jug in his

other hand, in full carousal. Altogether the peculiar 'sacredness', the inveterate symbolism of the southern Etruscans, is here gone. The religious power is broken.

It is very evident in the ladies: and so many of the figures are ladies. They are decked up in all their splendour, but the mystical formality is lacking. They hold in their hands wine-cups or fans or mirrors, pomegranates or perfume-boxes, or the queer little books which perhaps were the wax tablets for writing upon. They may even have the old sexual and death symbol of the pine-cone. But the *power* of the symbol has almost vanished. The Gothic actuality and idealism begins to supplant the profound *physical* religion of the southern Etruscans, the true ancient world.

In the museum there are jars and bits of bronze, and the pateras with the hollow knob in the middle. You may put your two middle fingers in the patera, and hold it ready to make the last libation of life, the first libation of death, in the correct Etruscan fashion. But you will not, as so many of the men on these ash-chests do, hold the symbolic dish upside down, with the two fingers thrust into the mundus'. The torch upside down means the flame has gone below, to the underworld. But the patera upside down is somehow shocking. One feels the Volterrans, or men of Velathri, were slack in the ancient mysteries.

At last the rain stopped crashing down icily in the silent inner courtyard; at last there was a ray of sun. And we had seen all we could look at for one day. So we went out, to try to get warmed by a kinder heaven.

There are one or two tombs still open, especially two outside the Porta a Selci. But I believe, not having seen them, they are of small importance. Nearly all the tombs that have been opened in Volterra, their contents removed, have been filled in again, so as not to lose two yards of the precious cultivable land of the peasants. There were many tumuli: but most of them are levelled. And under some were curious round tombs built of unsquared stones, unlike anything in southern Etruria. But then, Volterra is altogether unlike southern Etruria.

One tomb has been removed bodily to the garden of the archaeological museum in Florence: at least its contents have. There it is built up again as it was when discovered in Volterra in 1861, and all the ash-chests are said to be replaced as they stood originally. It is called the Inghirami Tomb, from the famous Volterranean archaeologist Inghirami.

A few steps lead down into the one circular chamber of the tomb, which is supported in the centre by a square pillar, apparently supposed to be left in the rock. On the low stone bed that encircles the tomb stand the ash-chests, a double row of them, in a great ring encircling the shadow.

The tomb belongs all to one family, and there must be sixty ash-chests, of

alabaster, carved with the well-known scenes. So that if this tomb is really arranged as it was originally, and the ash-chests progress from the oldest to the latest counter-clockwise, as is said, one ought to be able to see certainly a century or two of development in the Volterrann urns.

But one is filled with doubt and misgiving. Why, oh why, wasn't the tomb left intact as it was found, where it was found? The garden of the Florence museum is vastly instructive, if you want object-lessons about the Etruscans. But who wants object-lessons about vanished races? What one wants is a contact. The Etruscans are not a theory or a thesis. If they are anything, they are an *experience*.

And the experience is always spoilt. Museums, museums, museums, object-lessons rigged out to illustrate the unsound theories of archaeologists, crazy attempts to coordinate and get into a fixed order that which has no fixed order and will not be coordinated! It is sickening! Why must all experience be systematized? Why must even the vanished Etruscans be reduced to a system? They never will be. You break all the eggs, and produce an omelette which is neither Etruscan nor Roman nor Italic nor Hittite, nor anything else, but just a systematized mess. Why can't incompatible things be left incompatible? If you make an omelette out of a hen's egg, a plover's, and an ostrich's, you won't have a grand amalgam or unification of hen and plover and ostrich into something we may call 'K oviparity'. You'll have that formless object, an omelette.

So it is here. If you try to make a grand amalgam of Cerveteri and Tarquinia, Vulci, Vetulonia, Volterra, Chiusi, Veii, then you won't get the essential *Etruscan* as a result, but a cooked-up mess which has no life-meaning at all. A museum is not a first-hand contact: it is an illustrated lecture. And what one wants is the actual vital touch. I don't want to be 'instructed'; nor do many other people.

They could take the more homeless objects for the museums, and still leave those that *have* a place in their own place: the Inghirami Tomb here at Volterra.

But it is useless. We walk up the hill and out of the Florence gate, into the shelter under the walls of the huge medieval castle which is now a State prison. There is a promenade below the ponderous walls, and a scrap of sun, and shelter from the biting wind. A few citizens are promenading even now. And beyond, the bare green country rises up in waves and sharp points, but it is like looking at the choppy sea from the brow of a tall ship; here in Volterra we ride above all.

And behind us, in the bleak fortress, are the prisoners. There is a man, an old man now, who has written an opera inside those walls. He had a passion for the piano: and for thirty years his wife nagged him when he played. So one day he silently and suddenly killed her. So, the nagging of thirty years silenced, he got

thirty years of prison, and *still* is not allowed to play the piano. It is curious.

There were also two men who escaped. Silently and secretly they carved marvellous likenesses of themselves out of the huge loaves of hard bread the prisoners get. Hair and all, they made their own effigies lifelike. Then they laid them in the bed, so that when the warder's light flashed on them he should say to himself: 'There they lie sleeping, the dogs!'

And so they worked, and they got away. It cost the governor, who loved his household of malefactors, his job. He was kicked out. It is curious. He should have been rewarded, for having such clever children, sculptors in bread.

THE END



Plate 1. Cerveteri. Entrance to the Chamber Tombs.



Plate 2. Cerveteri. Tomb of the Sarcophagi.

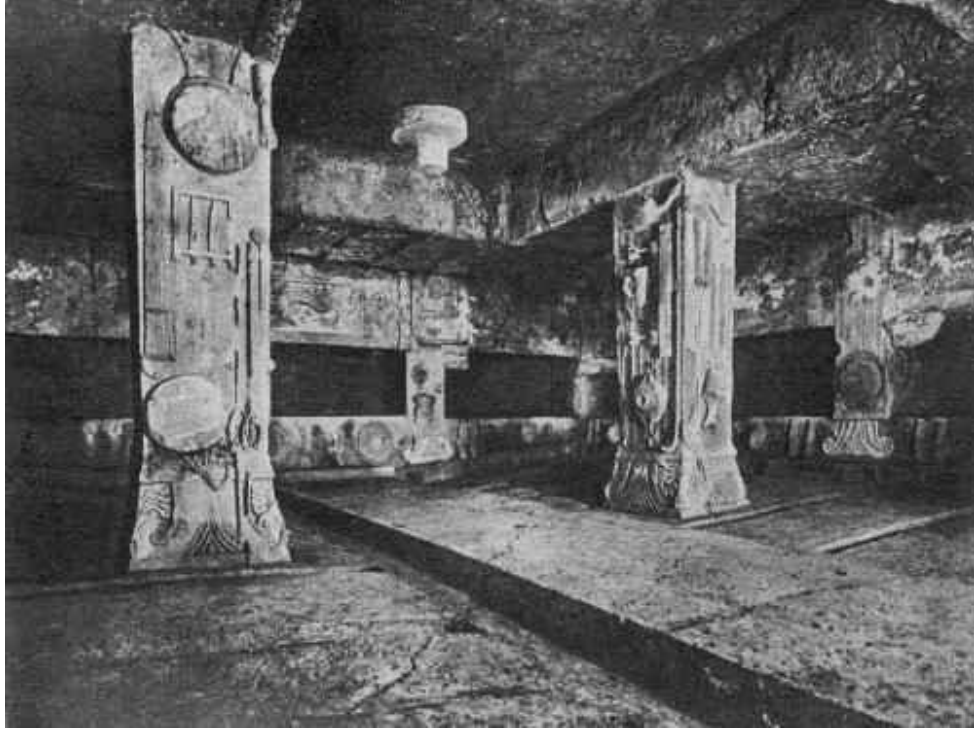


Plate 3. Cerveteri. Tomb of the Stuccos, or the Grotta Bella.



Place 4. Cerveteri. Terra-cotta Heads on Sarcophagus now in the Villa Giulia Museum, Rome.



Place 5. Cerveteri. The Regolini-Galassi Tomb.



Plate 6. Tarquinia. Greek Vases with Eye-Pattern and Head of Bacchus.

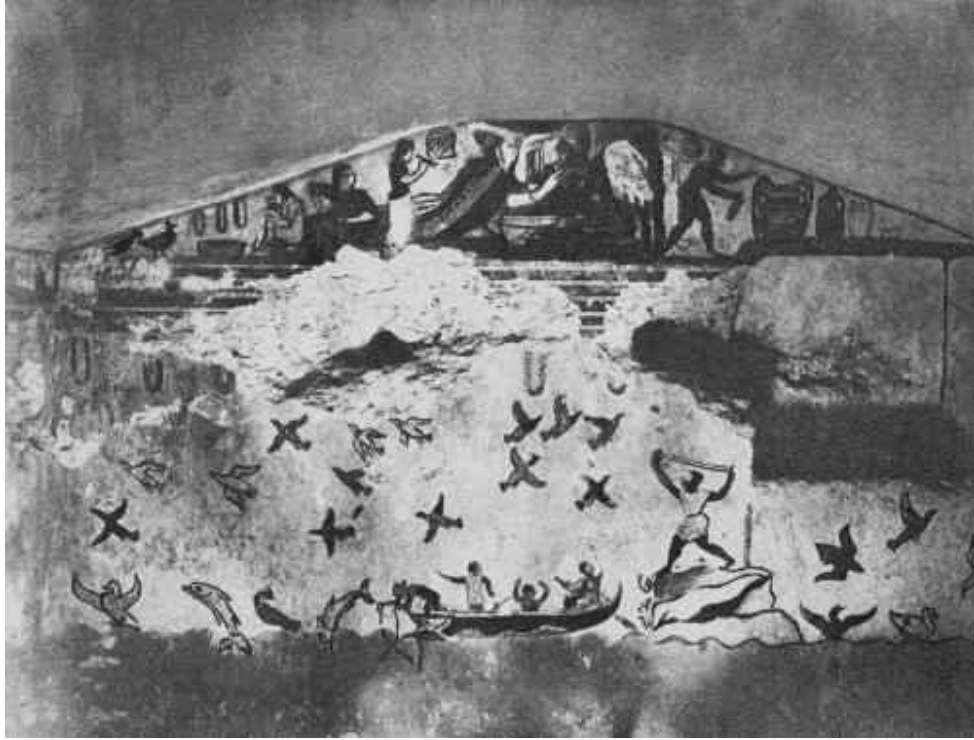


Plate 7. Tarquinia. Tomb of Hunting and Fishing.



Plate 8. Tarquinia. Tomb of the Leopards.



Plate 9. Tarquinia. Tomb of the Leopards.



Plate 10. Tarquinia. Tomb of the Feast.



Plate 11. Tarquinia. Tomb of the Lionesses.

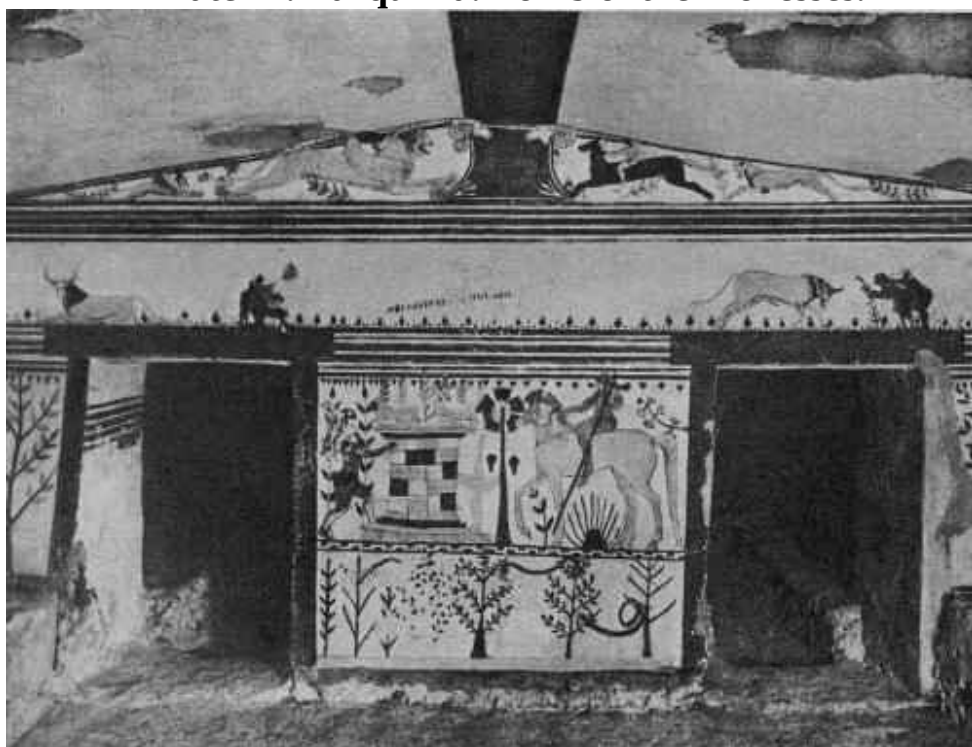


Plate 12. Tarquinia. Tomb of the Bulls.



Plate 13. Tarquinia. Tomb of the Baron.



Plate 14. Volterra. Porta dell' Arco.



Plate 15. Volterra. Ash-chest showing the Boar-hunt.



Plate 16. Volterra. Ash-chest showing Acteon and the Dogs.

MORNINGS IN MEXICO



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1 - CORASMIN AND THE PARROTS

One says Mexico: one means, after all, one little town away South in the Republic: and in this little town, one rather crumbly adobe house built round two sides of a garden *patio*: and of this house, one spot on the deep, shady veranda facing inwards to the trees, where there are an onyx table and three rocking-chairs and one little wooden chair, a pot with carnations, and a person with a pen. We talk so grandly, in capital letters, about Morning in Mexico. All it amounts to is one little individual looking at a bit of sky and trees, then looking down at the page of his exercise book.

It is a pity we don't always remember this. When books come out with grand titles, like *The Future of America*, or *The European Situation*, it's a pity we don't immediately visualize a thin or a fat person, in a chair or in bed, dictating to a bob-haired stenographer or making little marks on paper with a fountain pen.

Still, it is morning, and it is Mexico. The sun shines. But then, during the winter, it always shines. It is pleasant to sit out of doors and write, just fresh enough and just warm enough. But then it is Christmas next week, so it ought to be just right.

There is a little smell of carnations, because they are the nearest thing. And there is a resinous smell of ocote wood, and a smell of coffee, and a faint smell of leaves, and of Morning, and even of Mexico. Because when all is said and done, Mexico has a faint, physical scent of her own, as each human being has. And this is a curious, inexplicable scent, in which there are resin and perspiration and sunburned earth and urine among other things.

And cocks are still crowing. The little mill where the natives have their own corn ground is puffing rather languidly. And because some women are talking in the entrance-way, the two tame parrots in the trees have started to whistle.

The parrots, even when I don't listen to them, have an extraordinary effect on me. They make my diaphragm convulse with little laughs, almost mechanically. They are a quite commonplace pair of green birds, with bits of bluey red, and round, disillusioned eyes, and heavy, overhanging noses. But they listen intently. And they reproduce. The pair whistle now like Rosalino, who is sweeping the *patio* with a twig broom; and yet it is so unlike him, to be whistling full vent, when any of us is around, that one looks at him to see. And the moment one sees him, with his black head bent rather drooping and hidden as he sweeps, one

laughs.

The parrots whistle exactly like Rosalino, only a little more so. And this little-more-so is extremely sardonically funny. With their sad old long-jowled faces and their flat disillusioned eyes, they reproduce Rosalino and a little-more-so without moving a muscle. And Rosalino, sweeping the *patio* with his twig broom, scraping and tittering leaves into little heaps, covers himself more and more with the cloud of his own obscurity. He doesn't rebel. He is powerless. Up goes the wild, sliding Indian whistle into the morning, very powerful, with an immense energy seeming to drive behind it. And always, always a little more than life-like.

Then they break off into a cackling chatter, and one knows they are shifting their clumsy legs, perhaps hanging on with their beaks and clutching with their cold, slow claws, to climb to a higher bough, like rather raggedy green buds climbing to the sun. And suddenly the penetrating, demonish mocking voices:

'Perro! Oh, Perro! Perr-rro! Oh, Perr-rro! Perro!'

They are imitating somebody calling the dog. *Perro* means dog. But that any creature should be able to pour such a suave, prussic-acid sarcasm over the voice of a human being calling a dog, is incredible. One's diaphragm chuckles involuntarily. And one thinks: *Is it possible?* Is it possible that we are so absolutely, so innocently, so *ab ovo* ridiculous?

And not only is it possible, it is patent. We cover our heads in confusion.

Now they are yapping like a dog: exactly like Corasmin. Corasmin is a little fat, curly white dog who was lying in the sun a minute ago, and has now come into the veranda shade, walking with slow resignation, to lie against the wall near-by my chair. 'Yap-yap-yap! Wouf! Wouf! Yapyapyapyap!' go the parrots, exactly like Corasmin when some stranger comes into the *zaguán*, Corasmin and a little-more-so.

With a grin on my face I look down at Corasmin. And with a silent, abashed resignation in his yellow eyes, Corasmin looks up at me, with a touch of reproach. His little white nose is sharp, and under his eyes there are dark marks, as under the eyes of one who has known much trouble. All day he does nothing but walk resignedly out of the sun, when the sun gets too hot, and out of the shade, when the shade gets too cool. And bite ineffectually in the region of his fleas.

Poor old Corasmin: he is only about six, but resigned, unspeakably resigned. Only not humble. He does not kiss the rod. He rises in spirit above it, letting his body lie.

'Perro! Oh, Perr-rro! Perr-rro! Perr-rr-rro!!' shriek the parrots, with that strange penetrating, antediluvian malevolence that seems to make even the trees

prick their ears. It is a sound that penetrates one straight at the diaphragm, belonging to the ages before brains were invented. And Corasmin pushes his sharp little nose into his bushy tail, closes his eyes because I am grinning, feigns to sleep and then, in an orgasm of self-consciousness, starts up to bite in the region of his fleas.

‘Perr-rrro! Perr-rrro!’ And then a restrained, withheld sort of yapping. The fiendish rolling of the Spanish ‘r’, malevolence rippling out of all the vanished spiteful aeons. And following it, the small, little-curly-dog sort of yapping. They can make their voices so devilishly small and futile, like a little curly dog. And follow it up with that ringing malevolence that swoops up the ladders of the sunbeams right to the stars, rolling the Spanish ‘r’.

Corasmin slowly walks away from the veranda, his head drooped, and flings himself down in the sun. No! He gets up again, in an agony of self-control, and scratches the earth loose a little, to soften his lie. Then flings himself down again.

Invictus! The still-unconquered Corasmin! The sad little white curly pendulum oscillating ever slower between the shadow and the sun.

In the fell clutch of circumstance I have not winced nor cried aloud, Under the bludgeonings of chance My head is bloody, but unbowed.

But that is human bombast, and a little too ridiculous even for Corasmin. Poor old Corasmin’s clear yellow eyes! He is going to be master of his own soul, under all the vitriol those parrots pour over him. But he’s not going to throw out his chest in a real lust of self-pity. That belongs to the next cycle of evolution.

I wait for the day when the parrots will start throwing English at us, in the pit of our stomachs. They cock their heads and listen to our gabble. But so far they haven’t got it. It puzzles them. Castilian, and Corasmin, and Rosalino come more natural.

Myself, I don’t believe in evolution, like a long string hooked on to a First Cause, and being slowly twisted in unbroken continuity through the ages. I prefer to believe in what the Aztecs called Suns: that is, Worlds successively created and destroyed. The sun itself convulses, and the worlds go out like so many candles when somebody coughs in the middle of them. Then subtly, mysteriously, the sun convulses again, and a new set of worlds begins to flicker alight.

This pleases my fancy better than the long and weary twisting of the rope of Time and Evolution, hitched on to the revolving hook of a First Cause. I like to think of the whole show going bust, *bang!* — and nothing but bits of chaos flying about. Then out of the dark, new little twinklings reviving from nowhere, nohow.

I like to think of the world going pop! when the lizards had grown too unwieldy, and it was time they were taken down a peg or two. Then the little humming birds beginning to spark in the darkness, and a whole succession of birds shaking themselves clean of the dark matrix, flamingoes rising upon one leg like dawn commencing, parrots shrieking about at midday, *almost* able to talk, then peacocks unfolding at evening like the night with stars. And apart from these little pure birds, a lot of unwieldy skinny-necked monsters bigger than crocodiles, barging through the mosses; till it was time to put a stop to them. When someone mysteriously touched the button, and the sun went bang, with smithereens of birds bursting in all directions. On a few parrots' eggs and peacocks' eggs and eggs of flamingoes smuggling in some safe nook, to hatch on the next Day, when the animals arose.

Up reared the elephant, and shook the mud off his back. The birds watched him in sheer stupefaction. What? *What in heaven's name is this wingless, beakless old perambulator?*

No good, oh birds! Curly, little white Corasmin ran yapping out of the undergrowth, the new undergrowth, till parrots, going white at the gills, flew off into the ancientest recesses. Then the terrific neighing of the wild horse was heard in the twilight for the first time, and the bellowing of lions through the night.

And the birds were sad. What is this? they said. A whole vast gamut of new noises. A universe of new voices.

Then the birds under the leaves hung their heads and were dumb. No good our making a sound, they said. We are superseded.

The great big, booming, half-naked birds were blown to smithereens. Only the real little feathery individuals hatched out again and remained. This was a consolation. The larks and warblers cheered up, and began to say their little say, out of the old 'Sun', to the new sun. But the peacock, and the turkey, and the raven, and the parrot above all, they could not get over it. Because, in the old days of the Sun of Birds, they had been the big guns. The parrot had been the old boss of the flock. He was so clever.

Now he was, so to speak, up a tree. Nor dare he come down, because of the toddling little curly white Corasmin, and such-like, down below. He felt absolutely bitter. That wingless, beakless, featherless, curly, misshapen bird's nest of a Corasmin had usurped the face of the earth, waddling about, whereas his Grace, the heavy-nosed old Duke of a parrot, was forced to sit out of reach up a tree, dispossessed.

So, like the riff-raff up in the gallery at the theatre, aloft in the Paradiso of the vanished Sun, he began to whistle and jeer. 'Yap-yap!' said his new little

lordship of a Corasmin. ‘Ye Gods!’ cried the parrot. ‘Hear him forsooth! *Yap-yap!* he says! Could anything be more imbecile? *Yap-yap!* Oh, Sun of the Birds, hark at that! *Yap-yap-yap!* Perro! *Perro! Perr-rro!* Oh, *Perr-rr-rro!*’

The parrot had found his cue. Stiff-nosed, heavy-nosed old duke of the birds, he wasn’t going to give in and sing a new song, like those fool brown thrushes and nightingales. Let, them twitter and warble. The parrot was a gentleman of the old school. He was going to jeer now! Like an ineffectual old aristocrat.

‘*Oh, Perr-rro! Perr-rro-o-o-!*’

The Aztecs say there have been four Suns and ours is the fifth. The first Sun, a tiger, or a jaguar, a night-spotted monster of rage, rose out of nowhere and swallowed it, with all its huge, mercifully forgotten insects along with it. The second Sun blew up in a great wind: that was when the big lizards must have collapsed. The third Sun burst in water, and drowned all the animals that were considered unnecessary, together with the first attempts at animal men.

Out of the floods rose our own Sun, and little naked man. ‘Hello!’ said the old elephant. ‘What’s that noise?’ And he pricked his ears, listening to a new voice on the face of the earth. The sound of man, and *words* for the first time. Terrible, unheard-of sound. The elephant dropped his tail and ran into the deep jungle, and there stood looking down his nose.

But little white curly Corasmin was fascinated. ‘*Come on! Perro! Perro!*’ called the naked two-legged one. And Corasmin, fascinated, said to himself: ‘Can’t stand out against that name. Shall have to go!’ so off he trotted, at the heels of the naked one. Then came the horse, then the elephant, spell-bound at being given a name. The other animals ran for their lives and stood quaking.

In the dust, however, the snake, the oldest dethroned king of all, bit his tail once more and said to himself: ‘*Here’s another! No end to these new lords of creation! But I’ll bruise his heel! Just as I swallow the eggs of the parrot, and lick to the little Corasmin pups.*’

And in the branches, the parrot said to himself: ‘*Hello! What’s this new sort of half-bird? Why, he’s got Corasmin trotting at his heels! Must be a new sort of boss! Let’s listen to him, and see if I can’t take him off.*’

Perr-rro! Perr-rr-rro-oo! Oh, Perro!

The parrot had hit it.

And the monkey, cleverest of creatures, cried with rage when he heard men speaking. ‘*Oh, why couldn’t I do it!*’ he chattered. But no good, he belonged to the old Sun. So he sat and gibbered across the invisible gulf in time, which is the ‘other dimension’ that clever people gas about: calling it ‘fourth dimension’, as if you could measure it with a foot-rule, the same as the obedient other three dimensions.

If you come to think of it, when you look at the monkey, you are looking straight into the other dimension. He's got length and breadth and height all right, and he's in the same universe of Space and Time as you are. But there's another dimension. He's different, There's no rope of evolution linking him to you, like a navel string. No! Between you and him there's a cataclysm and another dimension. It's no good. You can't link him up. Never will. It's the other dimension.

He mocks at you and gibes at you and imitates you.

Sometimes he is even more *like* you than you are yourself. It's funny, and you laugh just a bit on wrong your face. It's the other dimension.

He stands in one Sun, you in another. He whisks his tail in one Day, you scratch your head in another. He jeers at you, and is afraid of you. You laugh at him and are frightened of him.

What's the length and the breadth, what's the height and the depths between you and me? says monkey.

You get out a tape-measure, and he flies into an obscene mockery of you.

It's the other dimension, put the tape-measure away, it won't serve.

'Perro! Oh, Perr-rro!' shrieks the parrot.

Corasmin looks up at me, as much as to say:

'It's the other dimension. There's no help for it. Let us agree about it.'

And I look down into his yellow eyes, and say:

'You're quite right, Corasmin, it's the other dimension. You and I, we admit it. But the parrot won't, and the monkey won't, and the crocodile won't, neither the earwig. They all wind themselves up and wriggle inside the cage of the other dimension, hating it. And those that have voices jeer, and those that have mouths bite, and the insects that haven't even mouths, they turn up their tails and nip with them, or sting, Just behaving according to their own dimension: which, for me, is the other dimension.'

And Corasmin wags his tail mildly, and looks at me with real wisdom in his eyes. He and I, we understand each other in the wisdom of the other dimension.

But the flat, saucer-eyed parrot won't have it. Just won't have it.

'Oh, Perro! Perr-rro! Perr-rro-o-o-o! Yap-yap-yap!'

And Rosalino, the Indian *mozo*, looks up at me with his eyes veiled by their own blackness. We won't have it either: he is hiding and repudiating. Between us also is the gulf of the other dimension, and he wants to bridge it with the foot-rule of the three-dimensional space. He knows it can't be done. So do I. Each of us knows the other knows.

But he can imitate me, even more than life-like. As the parrot can him. And I have to laugh at his *me*, a bit on the wrong side of my face, as he has to grin on

the wrong side of his face when I catch his eye as the parrot is whistling *him*,
With a grin, with a laugh we pay tribute to the other dimension. But Corasmin is
wiser. In his clear, yellow eyes is the self-possession of full admission.

The Aztecs said this world, our Sun, would blow up from inside, in
earthquakes. Then what will come, in the other dimension, when we are
superseded?

2 - WALK TO HUAYAPA

Curious is the psychology of Sunday. Humanity enjoying itself is on the whole a dreary spectacle, and holidays are more disheartening than drudgery. One makes up one's mind: On Sundays and on *fiestas* I will stay at home, in the hermitage of the *patio*, with the parrots and Corasmin and the reddening coffee-berries. I will avoid the sight of people enjoying themselves' — or try to, without much success.

Then comes Sunday morning, with the peculiar looseness of its sunshine. And even if you keep mum, the better-half says: Let's go somewhere.

But, thank God, in Mexico at least one can't set off in the 'machine'. It is a question of a meagre horse and a wooden saddle; on a donkey; or what we called, as children, 'Shanks' pony' — the shanks referring discourteously to one's own legs.

We will go out of the town. Rosalino, we are going for a walk to San Felipe de las Aguas. Do you want to go, and carry the basket?'

'Come no, Señor?'

It is Rosalino's inevitable answer, as inevitable as the parrot's 'Perro?' 'Come no, Señor?' — 'How not, Señor?'

The *Norte*, the north-wind, was blowing last night, rattling the worm-chewed window-frames.

'Rosalino, I am afraid you will be cold in the night.'

'Come no, Señor?'

'Would you like a blanket?'

'Come no, Señor?'

'With this you will be warm?'

'Come no, Señor?'

But the morning is perfect; in a moment we are clear out of the town. Most towns in Mexico, saving the capital, end in themselves, at once. As if they had been lowered from heaven in a napkin, and deposited, rather foreign, upon the wild plain. So we walk round the wall of the church and the huge old monastery enclosure that is now barracks for the scrap-heap soldiery, and at once there are the hills.

'I will lift up my eyes unto the hills, whence cometh my strength.' At least one can always do *that*, in Mexico. In a stride, the town passes away. Before us lies the gleaming, pinkish-ochre of the valley flat, wild and exalted with sunshine. On the left, quite near, bank the stiffly pleated mountains, all the foot-hills, that

press savannah-coloured into the savannah of the valley. The mountains are clothed smokily with pine, *ocote*, and, like a woman in a gauze *rebozo*, they rear in a rich blue fume that is almost cornflower-blue in the clefts. It is their characteristic that they are darkest blue at the top. Like some splendid lizard with a wavering, royal-blue crest down the ridge of his back, and pale belly, and soft, pinky-fawn claws, no the plain.

Between the pallor of the claws, a dark spot of trees, and white dots of a church with twin towers. Further away, along the foot-hills, a few scattered trees, white dot and stroke of a hacienda, and a green, green square of sugar-cane. Further off still, at the mouth of a cleft of a canyon, a dense little green patch of trees, and two spots of proud church.

‘Rosalino, which is San Felipe?’

‘*Quien sabe, Señor?*’ says Rosalino, looking at the villages; beyond the sun of the savannah with black, visionless eyes. In his voice is the inevitable flat resonance of aloofness, touched with resignation, as if to say: It is not becoming to a man to know these things. — Among the Indians it is not becoming to know anything, not even one’s own name.

Rosalino is a mountain boy, an Indian from a village two days’ walk away. But he has been two years in the little city, and has learnt his modicum of Spanish.

‘Have you never been to any of these villages?’

‘No, *Señor*, I never went.’

‘Didn’t you want to?’

‘*Come no, Señor?*’

The Americans would call him a dumb-bell.

We decide for the farthest speck of a village in a dark spot of trees. It lies so magical, alone, tilted in the fawn-pink slope, again as if the dark-green napkin with a few white tiny buildings had been lowered from heaven and left, there at the foot of the mountains, with the deep groove of a canyon slanting in behind. So alone and, as it were, detached from the world in which it lies, a spot.

Nowhere more than in Mexico does human life become isolated, external to its surroundings, and cut off tinily from the environment. Even as you come across the plain to a big city like Guadalajara, and see the twin towers of the cathedral peering around in loneliness like two lost birds side by side on a moor, lifting their white heads to look around in the wilderness, your heart gives a clutch, feeling the pathos, the isolated tininess of human effort. As for building a church with one tower only, it is unthinkable. There must be two towers, to keep each other company in this wilderness world.

The morning is still early, the brilliant sun does not burn too much. Tomorrow

is the shortest day. The savannah valley is shadeless, spotted only with the thorny ravel of mesquite bushes. Down the trail that has worn grooves in the turf — the rock is near the surface — occasional donkeys with a blue-hooded woman perched on top come tripping in silence, twinkling, a shadow. Just occasional women taking a few vegetables to market. Practically no men. It is Sunday.

Rosalino, prancing behind with the basket, plucks up his courage to speak to one of the women passing on a donkey. 'Is that San Felipe where we are going?' — 'No, that is not San Felipe.' — 'What, then, is it called?' — 'It is called Huayapa.' — 'Which, then, is San Felipe?' — 'That one' — and she points to her right.

They have spoken to each other in half-audible, crushed tones, as they always do, the woman on the donkey and the woman with her on foot swerving away from the basket-carrying Rosalino. They all swerve away from us, as if we were potential bold brigands. It really gets one's pecker up. The presence of the *Señora* only half reassures them. For the *Señora*, in a plain hat of bluey-green woven grass, and a dress of white cotton with black squares on it, is almost a monster of unusualness. *Prophet art thou, bird, or devil?* the women seem to say, as they look at her with keen black eyes. I think they choose to decide she is more of the last.

The women look at the woman, the men look at the man. And always with that same suspicious, inquiring, wondering look, the same with which Edgar Allan Poe must have looked at his momentous raven:

'Prophet art thou, bird, or devil?'

Devil, then, to please you! one longs to answer, in a tone of *Nevermore*.

Ten o'clock, and the sun getting hot. Not a spot of shade, apparently, from here to Huayapa. The blue getting thinner on the mountains, and an indiscernible vagueness, of too much light, descending on the plain.

The road suddenly dips into a little crack, where runs a creek. This again is characteristic of these parts of America. Water keeps out of sight. Even the biggest rivers, even the tiny brooks. You look across a plain on which the light sinks down, and you think: Dry! Dry! Absolutely dry! You travel along, and suddenly come to a crack in the earth, and a little stream is running in a little walled-in valley bed, where is a half-yard of green turf, and bushes, the *palo-blanco* with leaves, and with big white flowers like pure white, crumpled cambric. Or you may come to a river a thousand feet below, sheer below you. But not in this valley. Only the stream.

'Shade!' says the *Señora*, subsiding under a steep bank.

'*Mucho calor!*' says Rosalino, taking off his extra-jaunty straw hat, and subsiding with the basket.

Down the slope are coming two women on donkeys. Seeing the terrible array of three people sitting under a bank, they pull up.

‘Adios!’ I say, with firm resonance.

‘Adios!’ says the *Señora*, with diffidence.

‘Adios!’ says the reticent Rosalino, his voice the shadow of ours.

‘Adios! Adios! Adios!’ say the women, in suppressed voices, swerving, neutral, past us on their self-contained, sway-eared asses.

When they have passed, Rosalino looks at me to see if I shall laugh. I give a little grin, and he gives me back a great explosive grin, throwing back his head in silence, opening his wide mouth and showing his soft pink tongue, looking along his cheeks with his saurian black eyes, in an access of *farouche* derision.

A great hawk, like an eagle, with white bars at the end of its wings, sweeps low over us, looking for snakes. One can hear the hiss of its pinions.

‘*Gabilán,*’ says Rosalino.

‘What is it called in the *idioma*?’

‘*Psia!*’ — He makes the consonants explode and hiss.

‘Ah!’ says the *Señora*. ‘One hears it in the wings. *Psia!*’

‘Yes,’ says Rosalino, with black eyes of incomprehension.

Down the creek, two native boys, little herdsmen, are bathing, stooping with knees together and throwing water over themselves, rising, gleaming dark coffee-red in the sun, wetly. They are very dark, and their wet heads are so black, they seem to give off a bluish light, like dark electricity.

The great cattle they are tending slowly plunge through the bushes, coming up-stream. At the place where the path fords the stream, a great ox stoops to drink. Comes a cow after him, and a calf, and a young bull. They all drink a little at the stream, their noses delicately touching the water. And then the young bull, horns abranch, stares fixedly, with some of the same Indian wonder-and-suspicion stare, at us sitting under the bank.

Up jumps the *Señora*, proceeds uphill, trying to save her dignity. The bull, slowly leaning into motion, moves across-stream like a ship unmoored. The bathing lad on the bank is hastily fastening his calico pantaloons round his ruddy-dark waist. The Indians have a certain rich physique, even this lad. He comes running short-step down the bank, uttering a birdlike whoop, his dark hair gleaming bluish. Stooping for a moment to select a stone, he runs athwart the hull, and aims the stone sideways at him. There is a thud, the ponderous, adventurous young animal swerves docilely round towards the stream. ‘*Becerro!*’ cries the boy, in his birdlike, piping tone, selecting a stone to throw at the calf.

We proceed in the blazing sun up the slope. There is a white line at the foot of

the trees. It looks like water running white over a weir. The supply of the town water comes this way. Perhaps this is a reservoir. A sheet of water! How lovely it would be, in this country, if there was a sheet of water with a stream running out of it! And those dense trees of Huayapa behind.

‘What is that white, Rosalino? Is it water?’

‘*El Blanco? Si, aqua, Señora,*’ says that dumb-bell.

Probably, if the *Señora* had said: Is it milk? he would have replied in exactly the same way: *Si es leche, Señora!* — Yes, it’s milk.

Hot, silent, walking only amidst a weight of light, out of which one hardly sees, we climb the spurs towards the dark trees. And as we draw nearer, the white slowly resolves into a broken, whitewashed wall.

‘Oh!’ exclaims the *Señora*, in real disappointment. ‘It isn’t water! it’s a wall!’

‘*Si, Señora. Es panteón.*’ (They call a cemetery a *panteón*, down here.)

‘It is a cemetery,’ announces Rosalino, with a certain ponderous, pleased assurance, and without afterthought. But when I suddenly laugh at the absurdity, he also gives a sudden broken yelp of laughter. — They laugh as if it were against their will, as if it hurt them, giving themselves away.

It was nearing midday. At last we got into a shady lane, in which were puddles of escaped irrigation-water. The ragged semi-squalor of a half-tropical lane, with naked trees sprouting into spiky scarlet flowers, and bushes with biggish yellow flowers, sitting rather wearily on their stems, led to the village.

We were entering Huayapa. *Ia Calle de las Minas*, said an old notice. *Ia Calle de las Minas*, said a new, brand-new notice, as if in confirmation. *First Street of the Mines*. And every street had the same old and brand-new notice: 1st Street of the Magnolia: 4th Street of Enriquez Gonzalez: very fine!

But the First Street of the Mines was just a track between the stiff living fence of organ cactus, with poinsettia trees holding up scarlet mops of flowers, and mango trees, tall and black, stonily drooping the strings of unripe fruit. The Street of the Magnolia was a rocky stream-gutter, disappearing to nowhere from nowhere, between cactus and bushes. The Street of the Vasquez was a stony stream-bed, emerging out of tall, wildly tall reeds.

Not a soul anywhere. Through the fences, half deserted gardens of trees and banana plants, each enclosure with a half-hidden hut of black adobe bricks crowned with a few old tiles for a roof, and perhaps a new wing made of twigs. Everything hidden, secret, silent. A sense of darkness among the silent mango trees, a sense of lurking, of unwillingness. Then actually some half-bold curs barking at us across the stile of one garden, a forked bough over which one must step to enter the chicken-bitten enclosure. And actually a man crossing the proudly labelled: Fifth Street of the Independence.

If there were no churches to mark a point in these villages, there would be nowhere at all to make for. The sense of nowhere is intense, between the dumb and repellent living fence of cactus. But the Spaniards, in the midst of these black, mud-brick huts, have inevitably reared the white twin-towered magnificence of a big and lonely, hopeless church; and where there is a church there will be a *plaza*. And a *plaza* is a *zócalo*, a hub. Even though the wheel does not go round, a hub is still a hub. Like the old Forum.

So we stray diffidently on, in the maze of streets which are only straight tracks between cactuses, till we see Reforma, and at the end of *Reforma*, the great church.

In front of the church is a rocky *plaza* leaking with grass, with water rushing into two big, oblong stone basins. The great church stands rather ragged, in a dense forlornness, for all the world like some big white human being, in rags, held captive in a world of ants.

On the uphill side of the *plaza*, a long low white building with a shed in front, and under the shed crowding, all the short-statured men of the *pueblo*, in their white cotton clothes and big hats. They are listening to something: but the silence is heavy, furtive, secretive. They stir like white-clad insects.

Rosalino looks sideways at them, and sheers away. Even we lower our voices to ask what is going on. Rosalino replies, *sotto voce*, that they are making *asuntos*. But what business? we insist. The dark faces of the little men under the big hats look round at us suspiciously, like dark gaps in the atmosphere. Our alien presence in this vacuous village, is like the sound of a drum in a churchyard. Rosalino mumbles unintelligibly. We stray across the forlorn yard into the church.

Thursday was the day of the Virgin of the Soledad, so the church is littered with flowers, sprays of wild yellow flowers trailing on the floor. There is a great Gulliver's Travels fresco picture of an angel having a joy-ride on the back of a Goliath. On the left, near the altar steps, is seated a life-size Christ — undersized; seated upon a little table, wearing a pair of woman's frilled knickers, a little mantle of purple silk dangling from His back, and His face bent forward gazing fatuously at His naked knee, which emerges from the needlework frill of the drawers. Across from Him a living woman is half-hidden behind a buttress, mending something, sewing.

We sit silent, motionless, in the whitewashed church ornamented with royal blue and bits of gilt. A barefoot Indian with a high-domed head comes in and kneels with his legs close together, his back stiff, at once very humble and resistant. His cotton jacket and trousers are long-unwashed rag, the colour of dry earth, and torn, so that one sees smooth pieces of brown thigh, and brown back.

He kneels in a sort of intense fervour for a minute, then gets up and childishly, almost idiotically, begins to take the pieces of candle from the candlesticks. He is the Verger.

Outside, the gang of men is still pressing under the shed. We insist on knowing what is going on. Rosalino, looking sideways at them, plucks up courage to say plainly that the two men at the table are canvassing for votes: for the Government, for the State, for a new governor, whatever it may be. Votes! Votes! Votes! The farce of it! Already on the wall of the low building, on which one sees, in blue letters, the word *Justizia*, there are pasted the late political posters, with the loud announcement: Vote For This Mark (+). Or another: Vote For This Mark (-).

My dear fellow, this is when democracy becomes real fun. You vote for one red ring inside another red ring and you get a Julio Echegaray. You vote for a blue dot inside a blue ring, and you get a Socrate Ezequiel Tos. Heaven knows what you get for the two little red circles on top of one another. Suppose we vote, and try. There's all sorts in the lucky bag. There might come a name like Peregrino Zenon Cocotilla.

Independence I Government by the People, of the People, for the People! We all live in the Calle de la Reforma, in Mexico.

On the bottom of the *plaza* is a shop. We want some fruit. '*Hay frutas? Oranges or bananas?*' — '*No, Señor.*' — '*No fruits?*' — '*No hay!*' — '*Can I buy a cup?*' — '*No hay.*' — '*Can I buy a jicara, a gourd-shell that we might drink from?*' '*No hay.*'

No hay means *there isn't any*, and it's the most regular sound made by the dumb-bells of the land.

'What is there, then?' A sickly grin. There are, as a matter of fact, candles, soap, dead and withered chiles, a few dried grasshoppers, dust, and stark, bare wooden pigeon-holes. Nothing, nothing, nothing. Next-door is another little hole of a shop. *Hay frutas? — No hay. — Qué hay? — Hay tepache!*

'*Para borracharse,*' says Rosalino, with a great grin.

Tepache is a fermented drink of pineapple rinds and brown sugar: to get drunk on, as Rosalino says. But mildly drunk. There is probably *mescal* too, to get brutally drunk on.

The village is exhausted in resource. But we insist on fruit. Where, *where* can I buy oranges and bananas? I see oranges on the trees, I see banana plants.

'Up there!' The woman waves with her hand as if she were cutting the air upwards.

'That way?'

'Yes.'

We go up the Street of Independence. They have got rid of us from the *plaza*.
Another black hut with a yard, and orange-trees beyond.

‘*Hay frutas?*’

‘*No hay.*’

‘Not an orange, nor a banana?’

‘*No hay.*’

We go on. *She* has got rid of us. We descend the black rocky steps to the stream, and up the other side, past the high reeds. There is a yard with heaps of maize in a shed, and tethered bullocks: and a bare-bosom, black-browed girl.

‘*Hay frutas?*’

‘*No hay.*’

‘But Yes I There are oranges — there!’

She turns and looks at the oranges on the trees at the back, and imbecilely answers:

‘*No hay.*’

It is a choice between killing her and hurrying away.

We hear a drum and a whistle. It is down a rocky black track that calls itself The Street of Benito Juarez: the same old gent who stands for all this obvious Reform, and Vote for (o).

A yard with shade round. Women kneading the maize dough, *masa*, for *tortillas*. A man lounging. And a little boy beating a kettledrum sideways, and a big man playing a little reedy wooden whistle, rapidly, endlessly, disguising the tune of *La Cucuracha*. They won’t play a tune unless they can render it almost unrecognizable.

‘*Hay frutas?*’

‘*No hay.*’

‘Then what is happening here?’

A sheepish look, and no answer.

‘Why are you playing music?’

‘It is a *fiesta*.’

My God, a feast! That weary *masa*, a millstone in the belly. And for the rest, the blank, heavy, dark-grey barrenness, like an adobe brick. The drum-boy rolls his big Indian eyes at us, and beats on, though filled with consternation. The flute man glances, is half appalled and half resentful, so he blows harder. The lounging man comes and mutters to Rosalino, and Rosalino mutters back, four words.

Four words in the *idioma*, the Zapotec language. We retire, pushed silently away.

‘What language do they speak here, Rosalino?’

‘*The idioma.*’

‘You understand them? It is Zapoteca, same as your language?’

‘Yes, *Señor.*’

‘Then why do you always speak in Spanish to them?’

‘Because they don’t speak the *idioma* of my village.’

He means, presumably, that there are dialect differences. Anyhow, he asserts his bit of Spanish, and says *Hay frutas?*

It was like a *posada*. It was like the Holy Virgin on Christmas Eve, wandering from door to door looking for a lodging in which to bear her child: Is there a room here? *No hay!*

The same with us. *Hay frutas? No hay!* We went down every straight ant-run of that blessed village. But at last we pinned a good-natured woman. ‘Now tell us, *where* can we buy oranges? We see them on the trees. We want them to eat.

‘Go,’ she said, to Valentino Ruiz. He has oranges. Yes, he has oranges, and he sells them.’ And she cut the air upwards with her hand.

From black hut to black hut went we, till at last we got to the house of Valentino Ruiz. And to I it was the yard with the *fiesta*. The lounging man was peeping out of the gateless gateway, as we came, at us.

It is the same place!’ cried Rosalino, with a laugh of bashful agony.

But we don’t belong to the ruling race for nothing. Into the yard we march.

‘Is this the house of Valentino Ruiz? *Hay naranjas?* Are there oranges?’

We had wandered so long, and asked so often, that the *masa* was made into *tortillas*, the *tortillas* were baked, and a group of people were sitting in a ring on the ground, eating them. It was the *fiesta*.

At my question up jumped a youngish man, and a woman as if they had been sitting on a scorpion each.

‘Oh, *Señor,*’ said the woman, there are few oranges, and they are not ripe, as the *Señor* would want them. But pass this way.’

We pass up to the garden, past the pink roses, to a little orange-tree, with a few yellowish-green oranges.

You see; they are not ripe as you will want them,’ says the youngish man.

‘They will do.’ Tropical oranges are always green. These, we found later, were almost insipidly sweet.

Even then, I can only get three of the big, thick-skinned, greenish oranges. But I spy sweet limes, and insist on having five or six of these.

He charges me three cents apiece for the oranges: the market price is two for five cents: and one cent each for the *limas*.

‘In my village,’ mutters Rosalino when we get away, ‘oranges are five for one cent.’

Never mind! It is one o'clock. Let us get out of the village, where the water will be safe, and eat lunch.

In the *plaza*, the men are just dispersing, one gang coming down the hill. They watch us as if we were a coyote, a *zopilote*, and a white she-bear walking together in the street.

'*Adios!*'

'*Adios!*' comes the low roll of reply, like a roll of cannon shot.

The water rushes downhill in a stone gutter beside the road. We climb up the hill, up the Street of the Camomile, alongside the rushing water. At one point it crosses the road unchannelled, and we wade through it. It is the village drinking supply.

At the juncture of the roads, where the water crosses, another silent white gang of men. Again: *Adios!* and again the low, musical, deep volley of *Adios!*

Up, up wearily. We must get above the village to be able to drink the water without developing typhoid.

At last, the last house, the naked hills. We follow the water across a dry maize-field, then up along a bank. Below is a quite deep gully. Across is an orchard, and some women with baskets of fruit.

'*Hay frutas?*' calls Rosalino, in a half-voice. He is getting bold.

'*Hay,*' says an old woman, in the curious half-voice. 'But not ripe.'

Shall we go clown into the gully into the shade? No; someone is bathing among the reeds below, and the aqueduct water rushes along in the gutter here above. On, on, till we spy a wild guava tree over the channel of water. At last we can sit down and eat and drink, on a bank of dry grass, under the wild guava tree.

We put the bottle of lemonade in the aqueduct to cool. I scoop out a big half-orange, the thick rind of which makes a cup.

'Look, Rosalino! The cup!'

'*La taza!*' he cries, soft-tongued, with a bark of laughter and delight.

And one drinks the soft, rather lifeless, warmish Mexican water. But it is pure.

Over the brink of the water-channel is the gully, and a noise — chock, chock! I go to look. It is a woman, naked to the hips, standing washing her other garments upon a stone. She has a beautiful full back, of a deep orange colour, and her wet hair is divided and piled. In the water a few yards up-stream two men are sitting naked, their brown-orange giving off a glow in the shadow, also washing their clothes. Their wet hair seems to steam blue-blackness. Just above them is a sort of bridge, where the water divides, the channel-water taken from the little river, and led along the top of the bank.

We sit under the wild guava tree in silence, and eat. The old woman of the fruit, with naked breast and coffee-brown naked arms, her under-garment

fastened on one shoulder, round her waist an old striped *sarape* for a skirt, and on her head a blue *rebozo* piled against the sun, comes marching down the aqueduct with black bare feet, holding three or four *chirimoyas* to her bosom. *Chirimoyas* are green custard-apples.

She lectures us, in slow, heavy Spanish:

‘This water, here, is for drinking. The other, below, is for washing. This, you drink, and you don’t wash in it. The other, you wash in, and you don’t drink it.’ And she looked inquisitively at the bottle of lemonade, cooling.

‘Very good. We understand.’

Then she gave us the *chirimoyas*. I asked her to change the *peso*: I had no change.

‘No, *Señor*,’ she said. ‘No, *Señor*. You don’t pay me. I bring you these, and may you eat well. But the *chirimoyas* are not ripe: in two or three days they will be ripe. Now, they are not. In two or three days they will be. Now, they are not.

You can’t eat them yet. But I make a gift of them to you, and may you eat well. Farewell. Remain with God.’

She marched impatiently off along the aqueduct.

Rosalino waited to catch my eye. Then he opened his mouth and showed his pink tongue and swelled out his throat like a cobra, in a silent laugh after the old woman.

‘But,’ he said in a low tone, ‘the *chirimoyas* are not good ones.’

And again he swelled in the silent, delighted, derisive laugh.

He was right. When we came to eat them, three days later, the custard-apples all had worms in them, and hardly any white meat.

‘The old woman of Huayapa,’ said Rosalino, reminiscent.

However, she had got her bottle. When we had drunk the lemonade, we sent Rosalino to give her the empty wine-bottle, and she made him another sententious little speech. But to her the bottle was a treasure.

And I, going round the little hummock behind the wild guava tree to throw away the papers of the picnic, came upon a golden-brown young man with his shirt just coming down over his head, but over no more of him. Hastily retreating, I thought again what beautiful, suave, rich skins these people have; a sort of richness of the flesh. It goes, perhaps, with the complete absence of what we call ‘spirit’.

We lay still for a time, looking at the tiny guavas and the perfect, soft, high blue sky overhead, where the hawks and the ragged-winged *zopilotes* sway and diminish. A long, hot way home. But *mañana es otro día*. Tomorrow is another day. And even the next five minutes are far enough away, in Mexico, on a Sunday afternoon.

3 - THE MOZO

Rosalino really goes with the house, though he has been in service here only two months. When we went to look at the place, we saw him lurking in the *patio*, and glancing furtively under his brows. He is not one of the erect, bantam little Indians that stare with a black, incomprehensible, but somewhat defiant stare. It may be Rosalino has a distant strain of other Indian blood, not Zapotec. Or it may be he is only a bit different. The difference lies in a certain sensitiveness and aloneness, as if he were a mother's boy. The way he drops his head and looks sideways under his black lashes, apprehensive, apprehending, feeling his way, as it were. Not the bold male glare of most of the Indians, who seem as if they had never, never had mothers at all.

The Aztec gods and goddesses are, as far as we have known anything about them, an unlovely and unlovable lot. In their myths there is no grace or charm, no poetry. Only this perpetual grudge, grudge, grudging, one god grudging another, the gods grudging men their existence, and men grudging the animals. The goddess of love is a goddess of dirt and prostitution, a dirt-eater, a horror, without a touch of tenderness. If the god wants to make love to her, she has to sprawl down in front of him, blatant and accessible.

And then, after all, when she conceives and brings forth, what is it she produces? What is the infant-god she tenderly bears? Guess, all ye people, joyful and triumphant!

You never could.

It is a stone knife.

It is a razor-edged knife of blackish-green flint, the knife of all knives, the veritable Paraclete of knives. It is the sacrificial knife with which the priest makes a gash in his victim's breast, before he tears out the heart, to hold it smoking to the sun.

And the Sun, the Sun behind the sun, is supposed to suck the smoking heart greedily with insatiable appetite.

This, then, is a pretty Christmas Eve. Lo, the goddess is gone to bed, to bring forth her child. Lo! ye people, await the birth of the saviour, the wife of a god is about to become a mother.

Tarumm-tarah! Tarumm-tarah! blow the trumpets. The child is born. Unto us a son is given. Bring him forth, lay him on a tender cushion. Show him, then, to all the people. See! See! See him upon the cushion, tenderly new-born and

reposing! Ah, *qué bonito!* Oh, what a nice, blackish, smooth, keen stone knife!

And to this day, most of the Mexican Indian women seem to bring forth stone knives. Look at them, these sons of incomprehensible mothers, with their black eyes like flints, and their stiff little bodies as taut and as keen as knives of obsidian. Take care they don't rip you up.

Our Rosalino is an exception. He drops his shoulders just a little. He is a bit bigger, also, than the average Indian down here. He must be about five feet four inches. And he hasn't got the big, obsidian, glaring eyes. His eyes are smaller, blacker, like the quick black eyes of the lizard. They don't look at one with the obsidian stare. They are just a bit aware that there is another being, unknown, at the other end of the glance. Hence he drops his head with a little apprehension, screening himself as if he were vulnerable.

Usually, these people have no correspondence with one at all. To them a white man or white woman is a sort of phenomenon; just as a monkey is a sort of phenomenon; something to watch, and wonder at, and laugh at, but not to be taken on one's own plane.

Now the white man is a sort of extraordinary white monkey that, by cunning, has learnt lots of semi-magical secrets of the universe, and made himself boss of the show. Imagine a race of big white monkeys got up in fantastic clothes, and able to kill a man by hissing at him; able to leap through the air in great hops, covering a mile in each leap; able to transmit his thoughts by a moment's effort of concentration to some great white monkey or monkeyess, a thousand miles away: and you have, from our point of view, something of the picture that the Indian has of us.

The white monkey has curious tricks. He knows, for example, the time. Now to a Mexican, and an Indian, time is a vague, foggy reality. There are only three times: *en la mañana*, *en la tarde*, *en la noche*, in the morning, in the afternoon, in the night. There is even no midday, and no evening.

But to the white monkey, horrible to relate, there are exact spots of time, such as five o'clock, half past nine. The day is a horrible puzzle of exact spots of time.

The same with distance: horrible invisible distances called two miles, ten miles. To the Indians, there is near and far, and very near and very far. There is two days or one day. But two miles are as good as twenty to him, for he goes entirely by his feeling. If a certain two miles feels far to him, then it *is* far, it is *muy lejos!* But if a certain twenty miles *feels* near and familiar, then it is not far. Oh, no, it is just a little distance. And he will let you set off in the evening, for night to overtake you in the wilderness, without a qualm. It is not far.

But the white man has a horrible, truly horrible, monkey-like passion for

invisible exactitudes. *Mañana*, to the native, may mean tomorrow, three days hence, six months hence, and never. There are no fixed points in life, save birth, and death, and the *fiestas*. The fixed points of birth and death evaporate spontaneously into vagueness. And the priests fix the *fiestas*. From time immemorial priests have fixed the *fiestas*, the festivals of the gods, and men have had no more to do with time. What should men have to do with time?

The same with money. These *centavos* and these *pesos*, what do they mean, after all? Little discs that have no charm. The natives insist on reckoning in invisible coins, coins that don't exist here, like *reales* or *pesetas*. If you buy two eggs for a *real*, you have to pay twelve and a half *centavos*. Since also half a *centavo* doesn't exist, you or the vendor forfeit the non-existent.

The same with honesty, the *meum* and the *tuum*. The white man has a horrible way of remembering, even to a *centavo*, even to a thimbleful of *mescal*. Horrible! The Indian, it seems to me, is not naturally dishonest. He is not naturally avaricious, has not even any innate cupidity. In this he is unlike the old people of the Mediterranean, to whom possessions have a mystic meaning, and a silver coin a mystic white halo, a *lueur* of magic.

To the real Mexican, no! He doesn't care. He doesn't even *like* keeping money. His deep instinct is to spend it at once, so that he needn't have it. He doesn't really want to keep anything, not even his wife and children. Nothing that he has to be responsible for. Strip, strip, strip away the past and the future, leave the naked moment of the present disentangled. Strip away memory, strip away forethought and care; leave the moment, stark and sharp and without consciousness, like the obsidian knife. The before and the after are the stuff of consciousness. The instant moment is for ever keen with a razor-edge of oblivion, like the knife of sacrifice.

But the great white monkey has got hold of the keys of the world, and the black-eyed Mexican has to serve the great white monkey, in order to live. He has to learn the tricks of the white monkey-show: time of the day, coin of money, machines that start at a second, work that is meaningless and yet is paid for with exactitude, in exact coin. A whole existence of monkey-tricks and monkey-virtues. The strange monkey-virtue of charity, the white monkeys nosing round to *help*, to *save!* Could any trick be more unnatural? Yet it is one of the tricks of the great white monkey.

If an Indian is poor, he says to another: I have no food; give me to eat. Then the other hands the hungry one a couple of *tortillas*. That is natural. But when the white monkey comes round, they peer at the house, at the woman, at the children. They say: Your child is sick. *Si, Señor*. What have you done for it — *Nothing*. *What is to be done?* — You must make a poultice. I will show you

how.

Well, it was very amusing, this making hot dough to dab on the baby. Like plastering a house with mud. But why do it twice? Twice is not amusing. The child will die. Well, then, it will be in Paradise. How nice for it! That's just what God wants of it, that it shall be a cheerful little angel among the roses of Paradise. What could be better?

How tedious of the white monkey coming with the trick of salvation, to rub oil on the baby, and put poultices on it, and make you give it medicine in a spoon at morning, noon, and night. Why morning and noon and night? Why not just anytime, anywhen? It will die tomorrow if you don't do these things today! But tomorrow is another day, and it is not dead now, so if it dies at another time, it must be because the other times are out of hand.

Oh, the tedious, exacting white monkeys, with their yesterdays and todays and tomorrows! Tomorrow is always another day, and yesterday is part of the encircling never. Why think outside the moment? And inside the moment one does not think. So why pretend to think? It is one of the white-monkey-tricks. He is a clever monkey. But he is ugly, and he has nasty, white flesh. We are not ugly, with screwed-up faces, and we have good warm-brown flesh. If we have to work for the white monkey, we don't care. His tricks are half-amusing. And one may as well amuse oneself that way as any other. So long as one is amused.

So long as the devil does not rouse in us, seeing the white monkeys for ever mechanically bossing, with their incessant tick-tack of work. Seeing them get the work out of us, the sweat, the money, and then taking the very land from us, the very oil and metal out of our soil.

They do it! They do it all the time. Because they can't help it. Because grasshoppers can but hop, and ants can carry little sticks, and white monkeys can go tick-tack, tick-tack, do this, do that, time to work, time to eat, time to drink, time to sleep, time to walk, time to ride, time to wash, time to look dirty, tick-tack, tick-tack, time, time, time! time! Oh, cut off his nose and make him swallow it.

For the *moment* is as changeless as an obsidian knife, and the heart of the Indian is keen as the moment that divides past from future, and sacrifices them both.

To Rosalino, too, the white monkey-tricks are amusing. He is ready to work for the white monkeys, to learn some of their tricks, their monkey-speech of Spanish, their tick-tack ways. He works for four *pesos* a month, and his food: a few *tortillas*. Four *pesos* are two American dollars: about nine shillings. He owns two cotton shirts, two pairs of calico pantaloons, two blouses, one of pink cotton, one of darkish flannelette, and a pair of sandals. Also, his straw hat that

he has curled up to look very jaunty, and a rather old, factory-made, rather cheap shawl, or plaid rug with fringe. *Et praeterea nihil.*

His duty is to rise in the morning and sweep the street in front of the house, and water it. Then he sweeps and waters the broad, brick-tiled verandas, and flicks the chairs with a sort of duster made of fluffy reeds. After which he walks behind the cook — she is very superior, had a Spanish grandfather, and Rosalino must address her as *Señora* — carrying the basket to market. Returned from the market, he sweeps the whole of the *patio*, gathers up the leaves and refuse, fills the pannier-basket, hitches it up on to his shoulders, and holds it by a band across his forehead, and thus, a beast of burden, goes out to deposit the garbage at the side of one of the little roads leading out of the city. Every little road leaves the town between heaps of garbage, an avenue of garbage blistering in the sun.

Returning, Rosalino waters the whole of the garden and sprinkles the whole of the *patio*. This takes most of the morning. In the afternoon, he sits without much to do. If the wind has blown or the day is hot, he starts again at about three o'clock, sweeping up leaves, and sprinkling everywhere with an old watering-can.

Then he retreats to the entrance-way, the *zaguán*, which, with its big doors and its cobbled track, is big enough to admit an ox-wagon. The *zaguán* is his home: just the doorway. In one corner is a low wooden bench about four feet long and eighteen inches wide. On this he screws up and sleeps, in his clothes as he is, wrapped in the old *sarape*.

But this is anticipating. In the obscurity of the *zaguán* he sits and pores, pores, pores over a school-book, learning to read and write. He can read a bit, and write a bit. He filled a large sheet of foolscap with writing: quite nice. But I found out that what he had written was a Spanish poem, a love-poem, with *no puedo olvidar* and *voy a cortar* — the rose, of course. He had written the thing straight ahead, without verse-lines or capitals or punctuation at all, just a vast string of words, a whole foolscap sheet full. When I read a few lines aloud, he writhed and laughed in an agony of confused feelings. And of what he had written he understood a small, small amount, parrot-wise, from the top of his head. Actually, it meant just words, sound, noise, to him: noise called *Castellano*, Castilian. Exactly like a parrot.

From seven to eight he goes to the night-school, to cover a bit more of the foolscap. He has been going for two years. If he goes two years more he will perhaps really be able to read and write six intelligible sentences: but only Spanish, which is as foreign to him as Hindustani would be to an English farm-boy. Then if he can speak his quantum of Spanish, and read it and write it to a

very uncertain extent, he will return to his village two days' journey on foot into the hills, and then, in time, he may even rise to be an *alcalde*, or headman of the village, responsible to the Government. If he were *alcalde* he would get a little salary. But far more important to him is the glory: being able to boss.

He has a *paisano*, a fellow-countryman, to sleep with him in the *zaguán*, to guard the doors. Whoever gets into the house or *patio* must get through these big doors. There is no other entrance, not even a needle's eye. The windows to the street are heavily barred. Each house is its own small fortress. Ours is a double square, the trees and flowers in the first square, with the two wings of the house. And in the second *patio*, the chickens, pigeons, guinea-pigs, and the big heavy earthenware dish or tub, called an *apaxtle*, in which all the servants can bathe themselves, like chickens in a saucer.

By half past nine at night Rosalino is lying on his little bench, screwed up, wrapped in his shawl, his sandals, called *huaraches*, on the floor. Usually he takes off his *huaraches* when he goes to bed. That is all his preparation. In another corner, wrapped up, head and all, like a mummy in his thin old blanket, the *paisano*, another lad of about twenty, lies asleep on the cold stones. And at an altitude of five thousand feet, the nights can be cold.

Usually everybody is in by half past nine in our very quiet house. If not, you may thunder at the big doors. It is hard to wake Rosalino. You have to go close to him, and call. That will wake him. But don't touch him. That would startle him terribly. No one is touched unawares, except to be robbed or murdered.

'Rosalino! *están tocando!*' — 'Rosalino! they are knocking!'

At last there starts up a strange, glaring, utterly lost Rosalino. Perhaps he just has enough wit to pull the door-catch. One wonders where he was, and what he was, in his sleep, he starts up so strange and wild and lost.

The first time he had anything to do for me was when the van was come to carry the bit of furniture to the house. There was Aurelio, the dwarf *mozo* of our friends and Rosalino, and the man who drove the wagon. But there *should* have been also a *cargador* — a porter. 'Help them,' said I to Rosalino. 'You give a hand to help.' But he winced away, muttering, '*No quiero!* — I don't want to.'

The fellow, I thought to myself, is a fool. He thinks it's not his job, and perhaps he is afraid of smashing the furniture. Nothing to be done but to leave him alone.

We settled in, and Rosalino seemed to like doing things for us. He liked learning his monkey-tricks from the white monkeys. And since we started feeding him from our own meals, and for the first time in his life he had real soups, meat-stews, or a fried egg, he loved to do things in the kitchen. He would come with sparkling black eyes: '*Hé comido el caldo. Gracias!*' (I have eaten the

soup. Thank you.')

 — And he would give a strange, excited little yelp of a laugh.

Came the day when we walked to Huayapa, on the Sunday, and he was very thrilled. But at night, in the evening when we got home, he lay mute on his bench — not that he was really tired. The Indian gloom, which settles on them like a black marsh-fog, had settled on him. He did not bring in the water — let me carry it by myself.

Monday morning, the same black, reptilian gloom, and a sense of hatred. He hated us. This was a bit flabbergasting, because he had been so thrilled and happy the day before. But the revulsion had come. He didn't forgive himself for having felt free and happy with us. He had eaten what we had eaten, hard-boiled eggs and sardine sandwiches and cheese; he had drunk out of the orange-peel *taza*, which delighted him so much. He had had a bottle of *gaseosa*, fizz, with us, on the way home, in San Felipe.

And now, the reaction. The flint knife. He had been happy, *therefore* we were scheming to take another advantage of him. We had some devilish white monkey-trick up our sleeve; we wanted to get at his *soul*, no doubt, and do it the white monkey's damage. We wanted to get at his heart, did we? But his heart was an obsidian knife.

He hated us, and gave off a black steam of hate, that filled the *patio* and made one feel sick. He did not come to the kitchen, he did not carry the water. Leave him alone.

At lunch-time on Monday he said he wanted to leave. Why? He said he wanted to go back to his village.

Very well. He was to wait just a few days, till another *mozo* was found.

At this a glance of pure, reptilian hate from his black eyes.

He sat motionless on his bench all the afternoon, in the Indian stupor of gloom and profound hate. In the evening, he cheered up a little and said he would stay on, at least till Easter.

Tuesday morning. More stupor and gloom and hate. He wanted to go back to his village at once. All right! No one wanted to keep him against his will. Another *mozo* would be found at once.

He went off in the numb stupor of gloom and hate, a very potent hate that could affect one in the pit of one's stomach with nausea.

Tuesday afternoon, and he thought he would stay.

Wednesday morning, and he wanted to go.

Very good. Inquiries made; another *mozo* was coming on Friday morning. It was settled.

Thursday was *fiesta*. Wednesday, therefore, we would go to market, the Nina

— that is the mistress — myself, and Rosalino with the basket. He loved to go to market with the *patrones*. We would give him money and send him off to bargain for oranges, *pitahayas*, potatoes, eggs, a chicken, and so forth. This he simply loved to do. It put him into a temper to see us buying without bargaining, and paying ghastly prices.

He bargained away, silent almost, muttering darkly. It took him a long time, but he had far greater success than even Natividad, the cook. And he came back in triumph, with much stuff and little money spent.

So again that afternoon, he was staying on. The spell was wearing off.

The Indians of the hills have a heavy, intense sort of attachment to their villages; Rosalino had not been out of the little city for two years. Suddenly finding himself in Huayapa, a real Indian hill-village, the black Indian gloom of nostalgia must have made a crack in his spirits. But he had been perfectly cheerful — perhaps too cheerful — till we got home.

Again, the Señorita had taken a photograph of him. They are all crazy to have their photographs taken. I had given him an envelope and a stamp, to send a photograph to his mother. Because in his village he had a widow mother, a brother, and a married sister. The family owned a bit of land, with orange-trees. The best oranges come from the hills, where it is cooler. Seeing the photographs, the mother, who had completely forgotten her son, as far as any keen remembering goes, suddenly, like a cracker going off inside her, wanted him: at that very moment. So she sent an urgent message.

But already it was Wednesday afternoon. Arrived a little fellow in white clothes, smiling hard. It was the brother from the hills. Now, we thought, Rosalino will have someone to walk back with. On Friday, after the *fiesta*, he would go.

Thursday, he escorted us with the basket to the *fiesta*. He bargained for flowers, and for a *sarape* which he didn't get, for a carved *jicara* which he did get, and for a number of toys. He and the Nina and the Señorita ate a great wafer of a pancake with sweet stuff on it. The basket grew heavy. The brother appeared, to carry the hen and the extra things. Bliss.

He was perfectly happy again. He didn't want to go on Friday; he didn't want to go at all. He wanted to stay with us and come with us to England when we went home.

So, another trip to the friend, the Mexican, who had found us the other *mozo*. Now to put off the other boy again: but then, they are like that.

And the Mexican, who had known Rosalino when he first came down from the hills and could speak no Spanish, told us another thing about him.

In the last revolution — a year ago — the revolutionaries of the winning side

wanted more soldiers from the hills. The *alcalde* of the hill-village was told to pick out young men and send them down to the barracks in the city. Rosalino was among the chosen.

But Rosalino refused, said again *No quiero!* He is one of those, like myself, who have a horror of serving in a mass of men, or even of being mixed up with a mass of men. He obstinately refused, Whereupon the recruiting soldiers beat him with the butts of their rifles till he lay unconscious, apparently dead.

Then, because they wanted him at once, and he would now be no good for some time, with his injured back, they left him, to get the revolution over without him.

This explains his fear of furniture-carrying, and his fear of being 'caught'.

Yet that little Aurelio, the friend's *mozo*, who is not above four feet six in height, a tiny fellow, fared even worse. He, too, is from the hills. In this village, a cousin of his gave some information to the *losing* side in the revolution. The cousin wisely disappeared.

But in the city, the winning side seized Aurelio, since he was the *cousin* of the delinquent. In spite of the fact that he was the faithful *mozo* of a foreign resident, he was flung into prison. Prisoners in prison are not fed. Either friends or relatives bring them food, or they go very, very thin. Aurelio had a married sister in town, but *she* was afraid to go to the prison lest she and her husband should be seized. The master, then, sent his new *mozo* twice a day to the prison with a basket; the huge, huge prison, for this little town of a few thousands.

Meanwhile the master struggled and struggled with the 'authorities' — friends of the people — for Aurelio's release. Nothing to be done.

One day the new *mozo* arrived at the prison with the basket, to find no Aurelio. A friendly soldier gave the message Aurelio had left. '*Adios a mi patrón. Me llevan.*' Oh, fatal words: '*Me llevan.*' — They are taking me off. The master rushed to the train: it had gone, with the dwarf, plucky little *mozo*, into the void.

Months later, Aurelio reappeared. He was in rags, haggard, and his dark throat was swollen up to the ears. He had been taken off, two hundred miles into Vera Cruz State. He had been hung up by the neck, with a fixed knot, and left hanging for hours. Why? To make the cousin come and save his relative: put his own neck into a running noose. To make the absolutely innocent fellow confess: what? Everybody knew he was innocent. At any rate, to teach everybody better next time. Oh, brotherly teaching!

Aurelio escaped, and took to the mountains. Sturdy little dwarf of a fellow, he made his way back, begging *tortillas* at the villages, and arrived, haggard, with a great swollen neck, to find his master waiting, and another 'party' in power.

More friends of the people.

Tomorrow is another day. The master nursed Aurelio well, and Aurelio is a strong, if tiny, fellow, with big, brilliant black eyes that for the moment will trust a foreigner, but none of his own people. A dwarf in stature, but perfectly made, and very strong. And very intelligent, far more quick and intelligent than Rosalino.

Is it any wonder that Aurelio and Rosalino, when they see the soldiers with guns on their shoulders marching towards the prison with some blanched prisoner between them — and one sees it every few days — stand and gaze in a blank kind of horror, and look at the *patrón*, to see if there is any refuge?

Not to be *caught!* Not to be *caught!* It must have been the prevailing motive of Indian-Mexico life since long before Montezuma marched his prisoners to sacrifice.

4 - MARKET DAY

This is the last Saturday before Christmas. The next year will be momentous, one feels. This year is nearly gone. Dawn was windy, shaking the leaves, and the rising sun shone under a gap of yellow cloud. But at once it touched the yellow flowers that rise above the *patio* wall, and the swaying, glowing magenta of the bougainvillea, and the fierce red outbursts of the poinsettia. The poinsettia is very splendid, the flowers very big, and of a sure stainless red. They call them Noche Buenas, flowers of Christmas Eve. These tufts throw out their scarlet sharply, like red birds ruffling in the wind of dawn as if going to bathe, all their feathers alert. This for Christmas, instead of holly-berries. Christmas seems to need a red herald.

The yucca is tall, higher than the house. It is, too, in flower, hanging an arm's-length of soft creamy bells, like a yard-long grape-cluster of foam. And the waxy bells break on their stems in the wind, fall noiselessly from the long creamy bunch, that hardly sways.

The coffee-berries are turning red. The hibiscus flowers, rose-coloured, sway at the tips of the thin branches, in rosettes of soft red.

In the second *patio*, there is a tall tree of the flimsy acacia sort. Above itself it puts up whitish fingers of flowers, naked on the blue sky. And in the wind these fingers of flowers in the bare blue sky, sway, sway with the reeling, roundward motion of tree-tips in a wind.

A restless morning, with clouds lower down, moving also with a larger roundward motion. Everything moving. Best to go out in motion too, the slow roundward motion like the hawks.

Everything seems slowly to circle and hover towards a central point, the clouds, the mountains round the valley, the dust that rises, the big, beautiful, white-barred hawks, *gabilanes*, and even the snow-white flakes of flowers upon the dim *palo-blanco* tree. Even the organ cactus, rising in stock-straight clumps, and the candelabrum cactus, seem to be slowly wheeling and pivoting upon a centre, close upon it.

Strange that we should think in straight lines, when there are none, and talk of straight courses, when every course, sooner or later, is seen to be making the sweep round, swooping upon the centre. When space is curved, and the cosmos is sphere within sphere, and the way from any point to any other point is round the bend of the inevitable, that turns as the tips of the broad wings of the hawk turn upwards, leaning upon the air like the invisible half of the ellipse. If I have a

way to go, it will be round the swoop of a bend impinging centripetal towards the centre. The straight course is hacked out in wounds, against the will of the world.

Yet the dust advances like a ghost along the road, down the valley plain. The dry turf of the valley-bed gleams like soft skin, sunlit and pinkish ochre, spreading wide between the mountains that seem to emit their own darkness, a dark-blue vapour translucent, sombring them from the humped crests downwards. The many-pleated, noiseless mountains of Mexico.

And away on the footslope lie the white specks of Huayapa, among its lake of trees. It is Saturday, and the white dots of men are threading down the trail over the bare humps to the plain, following the dark twinkle-movement of asses, the dark nodding of the woman's head as she rides between the baskets. Saturday and market-day, and morning, so the white specks of men, like sea-gulls on plough-land, come ebbing like sparks from the *palo-blanco*, over the fawn undulating of the valley slope.

They are dressed in snow-white cotton, and they lift their knees in the Indian trot, following the ass where the woman sits perched between the huge baskets, her child tight in the *rebozo*, at the brown breast. And girls in long, full, soiled cotton skirts running, trotting, ebbing along after the twinkle-movement of the ass. Down they come in families, in clusters, in solitary ones, threading with ebbing, running, barefoot movement noiseless towards the town, that blows the bubbles of its church-domes above the stagnant green of trees, away under the opposite fawn-skin hills.

But down the valley middle comes the big road, almost straight. You will know it by the tall walking of the dust, that hastens also towards the town, overtaking, overpassing everybody. Overpassing all the dark little figures and the white specks that thread tinily, in a sort of underworld, to the town.

From the valley villages and from the mountains the peasants and the Indians are coming in with supplies, the road is like a pilgrimage, with the dust in greatest haste, dashing for town. Dark-eared asses and running men, running women, running girls, running lads, twinkling donkeys ambling on fine little feet, under twin baskets with tomatoes and gourds, twin great nets of bubble-shaped jars, twin bundles of neat-cut faggots of wood, neat as bunches of cigarettes, and twin net-sacks of charcoal. Donkeys, mules, on they come, pannier baskets making a rhythm under the perched woman, great bundles bouncing against the sides of the slim-footed animals. A baby donkey trotting naked after its piled-up dam, a white, sandal-footed man following with the silent Indian haste, and a girl running again on light feet.

Onwards, on a strange current of haste. And slowly rowing among the, foot-

travel, the ox-wagons rolling solid wheels below the high net of the body. Slow oxen, with heads pressed down nosing to the earth, swaying, swaying their great horns as a snake sways itself, the shovel-shaped collar of solid wood pressing down on their necks like a scoop. On, on between the burnt-up turf and the solid, monumental green of the organ cactus. Past the rocks and the floating *palo-blanco* flowers, past the towled dust of the mesquite bushes. While the dust once more, in a greater haste than anyone, comes tall and rapid down the road, overpowering and obscuring all the little people, as in a cataclysm.

They are mostly small people, of the Zapotec race: small men with lifted chests and quick, lifted knees, advancing with heavy energy in the midst of dust. And quiet, small, round-headed women running barefoot, tightening their blue *rebozos* round their shoulders, so often with a baby in the fold. The white cotton clothes of the men so white that their faces are invisible places of darkness under their big hats. Clothed darkness, faces of night, quickly, silently, with inexhaustible energy advancing to the town.

And many of the *serranos*, the Indians from the hills, wearing their little conical black felt hats, seem capped with night, above the straight white shoulders. Some have come far, walking all yesterday in their little black hats and black-sheathed sandals. Tomorrow they will walk back. And their eyes will be just the same, black and bright and wild, in the dark faces. They have no goal, any more than the hawks in the air, and no course to run, any more than the clouds.

The market is a huge roofed-in place. Most extraordinary is the noise that comes out, as you pass along the adjacent street. It is a huge noise, yet you may never notice it. It sounds as if all the ghosts in the world were talking to one another, in ghost-voices, within the darkness of the market structure. It is a noise something like rain, or banana leaves in a wind. The market, full of Indians, dark-faced, silent-footed, hush-spoken, but pressing in in countless numbers. The queer hissing murmurs of the Zapotec *idioma*, among the sounds of Spanish, the quiet, aside, voices of the Mixtecas.

To buy and to sell, but above all, to commingle. In the old world, men make themselves two great excuses for coming together to a centre, and commingling freely in a mixed, unsuspecting host. Market and religion. These alone bring men, unarmed, together since time began. A little load of firewood, a woven blanket, a few eggs and tomatoes are excuse enough for men, women, and children to cross the foot-weary miles of valley and mountain. To buy, to sell, to barter, to exchange. To exchange, above all things, human contact.

That is why they like you to bargain, even if it's only the difference of a *centavo*. Round the centre of the covered market where there is a basin of water,

are the flowers: red, white, pink roses in heaps, many-coloured little carnations, poppies, bits of larkspur, lemon and orange marigolds, buds of madonna lilies, pansies, a few forget-me-nots. They don't bring the tropical flowers. Only the lilies come wild from the hills, and the mauve red orchids.

'How much this bunch of cherry-pie heliotrope?' 'Fifteen *centavos*.'

'Ten.'

'Fifteen.'

You put back the cherry-pie, and depart. But the woman is quite content. The contact, so short even, brisked her up. 'Pinks?'

'The red one, Señorita? Thirty *centavos*.'

'No. I don't want red ones. The mixed.'

'Ah!' The woman seizes a handful of little carnations of all colours, carefully puts them together. 'Look, Señorita! No more?'

'No, no more. How much?'

'The same. Thirty *centavos*.'

'It is much.'

'No, Señorita, it is not much. Look at this little bunch. It is eight *centavos*.' — Displays a scrappy little bunch. Come then, twenty-five.'

'No! Twenty-two.'

'Look!' She gathers up three or four more flowers, and claps them to the bunch. 'Two *reales*, Señorita.'

It is a bargain. Off you go with multicoloured pinks, and the woman has had one more moment of contact, with a stranger, a perfect stranger. An intermingling of voices, a threading together of different wills. It is life. The *centavos* are an excuse.

The stalls go off in straight lines, to the right, brilliant vegetables, to the left, bread and sweet buns. Away at the one end, cheese, butter, eggs, chicken, turkeys, meat. At the other, the native-woven blankets and *rebozos*, skirts, shirts, handkerchiefs. Down the far-side, sandals and leather things.

The *sarape* men spy you, and whistle to you like ferocious birds, and call 'Señor! Señor! Look!' Then with violence one flings open a dazzling blanket, while another whistles more ear-piercingly still, to make you look at *his* blanket. It is the veritable den of lions and tigers, that spot where the *sarape* men have their blankets piled on the ground. You shake your head, and flee.

To find yourself in the leather avenue.

'Señor! Señora Look! *Huaraches*! Very fine, very finely made! Look, Señor!'

The fat leather man jumps up and holds a pair of sandals at one's breast. They are of narrow woven strips of leather, in the newest Paris style, but a style ancient to these natives. You take them in your hand, and look at them

quizzically, while the fat wife of the *huarache* man reiterates, 'Very fine work. Very fine. Much work!'

Leather men usually seem to have their wives with them. 'How much?'

'Twenty *reales*.'

'Twenty!' — in a voice of surprise and pained indignation. 'How much do you give?'

You refuse to answer. Instead you put the *huaraches* to your nose. The *huarache* man looks at his wife, and they laugh aloud.

'They smell,' you say.

'No, *Señor*, they don't smell!' — and the two go off into fits of laughter.

'Yes, they smell. It is not American leather.'

'Yes, *Señor*, it is American leather. They don't smell, *Señor*. No, they don't smell.' He coaxes you till you wouldn't believe your own nose.

'Yes, they smell.'

'How much do you give?'

'Nothing, because they smell.'

And you give another sniff, though it is painfully unnecessary. And in spite of your refusal to bid, the man and wife go into fits of laughter to see you painfully sniffing.

You lay down the sandals and shake your head.

'How much do you offer?' reiterates the man, gaily.

You shake your head mournfully, and move away. The leather man and his wife look at one another and go off into another fit of laughter, because you smelt the *huaraches*, and said they stank.

They did. The natives use human excrement for tanning leather. When Bernal Diaz came with Cortés to the great marketplace of Mexico City, in Montezuma's day, he saw the little pots of human excrement in rows for sale, and the leather-makers going round sniffing to see which was the best, before they paid for it. It staggered even a fifteenth-century Spaniard. Yet my leather man and his wife think it screamingly funny that I smell the *huaraches* before buying them. Everything has its own smell, and the natural smell of *huaraches* is what it is. You might as well quarrel with an onion for smelling like an onion.

The great press of the quiet natives, some of them bright and clean, many in old rags, the brown flesh showing through the rents in the dirty cotton. Many wild hillmen, in their little hats of conical black felt, with their wild, staring eyes. And as they cluster round the hat-stall, in a long, long suspense of indecision before they can commit themselves, trying on a new hat, their black hair gleams blue-black, and falls thick and rich over their foreheads, like gleaming bluey-black feathers.

And one is reminded again of the blue-haired Buddha, with the lotus at his navel.

But already the fleas are travelling under one's clothing.

Market lasts all day. The native inns are great dreary yards with little sheds, and little rooms around. Some men and families who have come from far, will sleep in one or other of the little stall-like rooms. Many will sleep on the stones, on the earth, round the market, anywhere. But the asses are there by the hundred, crowded in the inn-yards, drooping their ears with the eternal patience of the beast that knows better than any other beast that every road curves round to the same centre of rest, and hither and thither means nothing.

And towards nightfall the dusty road will be thronged with shadowy people and unladen asses and new-laden mules, urging silently into the country again, their backs to the town, glad to get away from the town, to see the cactus and the pleated hills, and the trees that mean a village. In some village they will lie under a tree, or under a wall, and sleep. Then the next day, home.

It is fulfilled, what they came to market for. They have sold and bought. But more than that, they have had their moment of contact and centripetal flow. They have been part of a great stream of men flowing to a centre, to the vortex of the marketplace. And here they have felt life concentrate upon them, they have been jammed between the soft hot bodies of strange men come from afar, they have had the sound of strangers' voices in their ears, they have asked and been answered in unaccustomed ways.

There is no goal, and no abiding-place, and nothing is fixed, not even the cathedral towers. The cathedral towers are slowly leaning, seeking the curve of return. As the natives curved in a strong swirl, towards the vortex of the market. Then on a strong swerve of repulsion, curved out and away again, into space.

Nothing but the touch, the spark of contact. That, no more. That, which is most elusive, still the only treasure. Come, and gone, and yet the clue itself.

True, folded up in the handkerchief inside the shirt, are the copper *centavos*, and maybe a few silver *pesos*. But these too will disappear as the stars disappear at daybreak, as they are meant to disappear. Everything is meant to disappear. Every curve plunges into the vortex and is lost, re-emerges with a certain relief and takes to the open, and there is lost again.

Only that which is utterly intangible, matters. The contact, the spark of exchange. That which can never be fastened upon, for ever gone, for ever coming, never to be detained: the spark of contact.

Like the evening star, when it is neither night nor day. Like the evening star, between the sun and the moon, and swayed by neither of them. The flashing intermediary, the evening star that is seen only at the dividing of the day and

night, but then is more wonderful than either.

5 - INDIANS AND ENTERTAINMENT

We go to the theatre to be entertained. It may be *The Potters*, it may be *Max Reinhardt*, *King Lear*, or *Electra*. All entertainment.

We want to be taken out of ourselves. Or not entirely that. We want to become spectators at our own show. We lean down from the plush seats like little gods in a democratic heaven, and see ourselves away below there, on the world of the stage, in a brilliant artificial sunlight, behaving comically absurdly, like Pa Potter, yet getting away with it, or behaving tragically absurdly, like King Lear, and not getting away with it: rather proud of not getting away with it.

We see ourselves: we survey ourselves: we laugh at ourselves: we weep over ourselves: we are the gods above of our own destinies. Which is very entertaining.

The secret of it all, is that we detach ourselves from the painful and always sordid trammels of actual existence, and become creatures of memory and of spirit-like consciousness. We are the gods and there's the machine, down below us. Down below, on the stage, our mechanical or earth-bound self stutters or raves, Pa Potter or King Lear. But however Potterish or Learian we may be, while we sit aloft in plush seats we are creatures of pure consciousness, pure spirit, surveying those selves of clay who are so absurd or so tragic, below.

Even a little girl trailing a long skirt and playing at being Mrs Paradiso next door, is enjoying the same sensation. From her childish little consciousness she is making Mrs Paradiso, creating her according to her own fancy. It is the little individual consciousness lording it, for the moment, over the actually tiresome and inflexible world of actuality. Mrs Paradiso in the flesh is a thing to fear. But if I can play at being Mrs Paradiso, why, then I am a little Lord Almighty, and Mrs Paradiso is but a creation from my consciousness:

The audience in the theatre is a little democracy of the ideal consciousness. They all sit there, gods of the ideal mind, and survey with laughter or tears the realm of actuality.

Which is very soothing and satisfying so long as you believe that the ideal mind is the actual arbiter. So long as you instinctively feel that there is some supreme, universal Ideal Consciousness swaying all destiny.

When you begin to have misgivings, you sit rather uneasily on your plush seat.

Nobody really believes that destiny is an accident. The very fact that day keeps on following night, and summer winter, establishes the belief in universal

law, and from this to a belief in some great hidden mind in the universe is an inevitable step for us.

A few people, the so-called advanced, have grown uneasy in their bones about the Universal Mind. But the mass are absolutely convinced. And every member of the mass is absolutely convinced that he is part and parcel of this Universal Mind. Hence his joy at the theatre. His even greater joy at the cinematograph.

In the moving pictures he has detached himself even further from the solid stuff of earth. There, the people are truly shadows: the shadow-pictures are thinkings of his mind. They live in the rapid and kaleidoscopic realm of the abstract. And the individual watching the shadow-spectacle sits a very god, in an orgy of abstraction, actually dissolved into delighted, watchful spirit. And if his best girl sits beside him, she vibrates in the same ether, and triumphs in the same orgy of abstraction. No wonder this passion of dramatic abstraction becomes a lust.

That is our idea of entertainment.

You come to the Indian and ask him about his. He hasn't got one.

The Indians dance around the drum, singing. They have their great spectacular dances, Eagle dance, Corn dance. They have the dancing, singing procession between the fires at Christmas. They have their sacred races, down the long track.

White people always, or nearly always, write sentimentally about the Indians. Even a man like Adolf Bandelier. He was not a sentimental man. On the contrary. Yet the sentimentality creeps in, when he writes about the thing he knows best, the Indian.

So it is with all of them, anthropologists and myth-transcribers and all. There is that creeping note of sentimentality through it all, which makes one shrug one's shoulders and wish the Indians to hell, along with a lot of other bunk.

You've got to de-bunk the Indians, as you've got to debunk the Cowboy. When you've debunked the Cowboy, there's not much left. But the Indian bunk is not the Indian's invention. It is ours.

It is almost impossible for the white people to approach the Indian without either sentimentality or dislike. The common healthy vulgar white usually feels a certain native dislike of these drumming aboriginals. The highbrow invariably lapses into sentimentalism like the smell of bad eggs.

Why? — Both the reactions are due to the same feeling in the white man. The Indian is not in line with us. He's not coming our way. His whole being is going a different way from ours. And the minute you set eyes on him you know it.

And then, there's only two things you can do. You can detest the insidious devil for having an utterly different way from our own great way. Or you can

perform the mental trick, and fool yourself and others into believing that the befeathered and bedaubed darling is nearer to the true ideal gods than we are.

This last is just bunk, and a lie. But it saves our appearances. The former feeling, of instinctive but tolerant repulsion, the feeling of most ordinary farmers and ranchers and mere individuals in the west, is quite natural, it is only honesty to admit it.

The Indian way of consciousness is different from and fatal to our way of consciousness. Our way of consciousness is different from and fatal to the Indian. The two ways, the two streams are never to be united. They are not even to be reconciled. There is no bridge, no canal of connexion.

The sooner we realize, and accept, this, the better, and leave off trying, with fulsome sentimentalism, to render the Indian in our own terms.

The acceptance of the great paradox of human consciousness is the first step to a new accomplishment.

The consciousness of one branch of humanity is the annihilation of the consciousness of another branch. That is, the life of the Indian, his stream of conscious being, is just death to the white man. And we can understand the consciousness of the Indian only in terms of the death of our consciousness.

And let not this be turned into another sentimentalism. Because the same paradox exists between the consciousness of white men and Hindoos or Polynesians or Bantu. It is the eternal paradox of human consciousness. To pretend that all is one stream is to cause chaos and nullity. To pretend to express one stream in terms of another, so as to identify the two, is false and sentimental. The only thing you can do is to have a little Ghost inside you which sees both ways, or even many ways. But a man cannot *belong* to both ways, or to many ways. One man can belong to one great way of consciousness only. He may even change from one way to another. But he cannot go both ways at once. Can't be done.

So that, to understand the Indian conception of entertainment, we have to destroy our own conception.

Perhaps the commonest entertainment among the Indians is singing round the drum, at evening, when the day is over. European peasants will sit round the fire' and sing. But they sing ballads or lyrics, tales about individuals or individual, personal experience. And each individual identifies the emotion of the song with his own emotion.

Or the wild fishermen of the Outer Hebrides will sing in their intense, concentrated way, by the fire. And again, usually, the songs have words. Yet sometimes not. Sometimes the song has merely sounds, and a marvellous melody. It is the seal drifting in to shore on the wave, or the seal-woman, singing

low and secret, departing back from the shores of men, through the surf, back to the realm of the outer beasts that rock on the waters and stare through glistening, vivid, mindless eyes.

This is approaching the Indian song. But even this is pictorial, conceptual far beyond the Indian point. The Hebridean still sees himself human, and *outside* the great naturalistic influences, which are the dramatic circumstances of his life.

The Indian, singing, sings without words or vision. Face lifted and sightless, eyes half closed and visionless, mouth open and speechless, the sounds arise in his chest, from the consciousness in the abdomen. He will tell you it is a song of a man coming home from the bear-hunt: or a song to make rain: or a song to make the corn grow: or even, quite modern, the song of the church bell on Sunday morning.

But the man coming home from the bear-hunt is any man, all men, the bear is any bear, every bear, all bear. There is no individual, isolated experience. It is the hunting, tired, triumphant demon of manhood which has won against the squint-eyed demon of all bears. The, experience is generic, non-individual. It is an experience of the human bloodstream, not of the mind or spirit. Hence the subtle incessant, insistent rhythm of the drum, which is pulsed like the heart, and soulless, and unescapable. Hence the strange blind unanimity of the Indian men's voices. The experience is one experience, tribal, of the bloodstream. Hence, to our ears, the absence of melody. Melody is individualized emotion, just as orchestral music is the harmonizing again of many separate, individual emotions or experiences. But the real Indian song is non-individual, and without melody. Strange, clapping, crowing, gurgling sounds, in an unseizable subtle rhythm, the rhythm of the heart in her throes: from a parted entranced mouth, from a chest powerful and free, from an-abdomen where the great bloodstream surges in the dark, and surges in its own generic experiences.

This may mean nothing to you. To the ordinary white ear, the Indian's singing is a rather disagreeable howling of dogs to a tom-tom. But if it rouses no other sensation, it rouses a touch of fear amid hostility. Whatever the spirit of man may be, the blood is basic.

Or take the song to make the corn grow. The dark faces stoop forward, in a strange race darkness. The eyelashes droop a little in the dark, ageless, vulnerable faces. The drum is a heart beating with insistent thuds. And the spirits of the men go out on the ether, vibrating in waves from the hot, dark, intentional blood, seeking the creative presence that hovers for ever in the ether, seeking the identification, following on down the mysterious rhythms of the creative pulse, on and on into the germinating quick of the maize that lies under the ground, there, with the throbbing, pulsing, clapping rhythm that comes from the dark,

creative blood in man, to stimulate the tremulous, pulsating protoplasm in the seed-germ, till it throws forth its rhythms of creative energy into rising blades of leaf and stem.

Or take the round dances, round the drum. These may or may not have a name. The dance, anyhow, is primarily a song. All the men sing in unison, as they move with the soft, yet heavy bird-tread which is the whole of the dance. There is no drama. With bodies bent a little forward, shoulders and breasts loose and heavy, feet powerful but soft, the men tread the rhythm into the centre of the earth. The drums keep up the pulsating heart-beat. The men sing in unison, though some will be silent for moments, or even minutes. And for hours, hours it goes on: the round dance.

It has no name. It has no words. It means nothing at all. There is no spectacle, no spectator.

Yet perhaps it is the most stirring sight in the world, in the dark, near the fire, with the drums going, the pine-trees standing still, the everlasting darkness, and the strange lifting and dropping, surging, crowing, gurgling, aah — h — h — ing! of the male voices.

What are they doing? Who knows? But perhaps they are giving themselves again to the pulsing, incalculable fall of the blood, which for ever seeks to fall to the centre of the earth, while the heart like a planet pulsating in an orbit, keeps up the strange, lonely circulating of the separate human existence.

But what we seek, passively, in sleep, they perhaps seek actively, in the round dance. It is the homeward pulling of the blood, as the feet fall in the soft, heavy rhythm, endlessly. It is the dark blood falling back from the mind, from sight and speech and knowing, back to the great central source where is rest and unspeakable renewal. We whites, creatures of spirit, look upon sleep and see only the dreams that lie as debris of the day, mere bits of wreckage from day-consciousness. We never realize the strange falling back of the dark blood into the downward rhythm, the rhythm of pure forgetting and pure renewal.

Or take the little dances round the fire, the mime dances, when two men put on the eagle feathers and take the shield on their arm, and dance the pantomime of a fight, a spear dance. The rhythm is the same, really, the drums keep up the heart-pulsation, the feet the peculiar bird-tread, the soft, heavy, birdlike step that treads as it were towards the centre of the earth. But there is also the subtle leaping towards each other of the two shield-sheltered naked ones, feathered with the power of an eagle. The leaping together, the coming close, the circling, wary, stealthy avoidance and retreat, always on the same rhythm of drum-beats, the same regular, heavy-soft tread of moccasined feet. It is the dance of the naked blood-being, defending his own isolation in the rhythm of the universe.

Not skill nor prowess, not heroism. Not man to man. The creature of the isolated, circulating bloodstream dancing in the peril of his own isolation, in the overweening of his own singleness. The glory in power of the man of single existence. The peril of the man whose heart is suspended, like a single red star, in a great and complex universe, following its own lone course round the invisible sun of our own being, amid the strange wandering array of other hearts.

The other men look on. They may or may not sing. And they see themselves in the power and peril of the lonely heart, the creature of the isolated blood-circuit. They see also, subsidiary, the skill, the agility, the swiftness, the daunting onrush that make the warrior. It is practice as well as mystery.

Or take the big, spectacular dances, like the deer dance, the corn dance. The deer dance in the New Year. The people crowded on the roofs of the pueblo: women, children, old men, watching. The two lines of men, hunters, facing one another. And away at the stream which comes running swiftly from among the cotton-wood trees, the watchers, watching eagerly. At last, over the log bridge, two maidens leading the animals: two maidens in their black shawls and wide white deer-skin top-boots, dancing with a slow, delicate-footed rhythm, facing out, then facing in, and shaking their gourd rattles delicately, marking the rhythm as the drums mark it. Following the maidens, all the animals: men in two columns, and each man an animal, leaning forward each on two slim sticks which are his forelegs, with the deer-skin over him, the antlers branching from his head: or the buffalo hide, from whose shaggy mane his bent head peers out: or a black bear, or a wolf. There they come, the two long lines of wild animals: deer, buffalo, bear, wolf, coyote, and at the back, even tiny boys, as foxes, all stepping on those soft, pointed toes, and moving in slow silence under the winter sun, following the slow, swinging progress of the dancing maidens.

Everything is very soft, subtle, delicate. There is none of the hardness of representation. They are not representing something, not even playing. It is a soft, subtle *being* something.

Yet at the same time it is a game, and a very dramatic naïve spectacle. The old men trot softly alongside, laughing, showing all their wrinkles. But they are experiencing a delicate, wild inward delight, participating in the natural mysteries. They tease the little boys under the fox-skins, and the boys, peeping with their round black eyes, are shy and confused. Yet they keep on in the procession, solemnly, as it moves between the ranks of the wild hunters. And all eyes are round with wonder, and the mystery of participation. Amused, too, on the merely human side of themselves. The gay touch of amusement in buffoonery does not in the least detract from the delicate, pulsing wonder of solemnity, which comes from participating in the ceremony itself.

There you have it all, the pantomime, the buffoonery, the human comicalness. But at the same time, quivering bright and wide-eyed in unchangeable delight of solemnity, you have the participating in a natural wonder. The mystery of the wild creatures led from their fastnesses, their wintry retreats and holes in the ground, docilely fascinated by the delicacy and the commanding wistfulness of the maidens who went out to seek them, to seek food in the winter, and who draw after them, in a following, the wild, the timid, the rapacious animals, following in gentle wonder of bewitchment, right into the haunts of men, right into the camp and up to the hunters. The two long lines of wild animals delicately and slowly stepping behind the slow gyration of the two dark-fringed maidens, who shake their gourd rattles in a delicate, quick, three-pulsed rhythm, and never change their wide dark eyes, under the dark fringe. It is the celebration of another triumph, the triumph of the magical wistfulness of women, the wonderful power of her seeking, her yearning, which can draw forth even the bear from his den.

Drama, we are told, has developed out of these ceremonial Glances. Greek drama arose this way.

But from the Indian's ceremonial dance to the Greek's early religious ceremony is still a long step. The Greeks usually had some specified deity, some particular god to whom the ceremony was offered. And this god is the witness, the essential audience of the play. The ceremony is *performed* for the gratification of the god. And here you have the beginning of the theatre, with players and audience.

With the Indians it is different, There is strictly no god. The Indian does not consider himself as created, and therefore external to God, or the creature of God. To the Indian there is no conception of a defined God. Creation is a great flood, for ever flowing, in lovely and terrible waves. In everything, the shimmer of creation, and never the finality of the created. Never the distinction between God and God's creation, or between Spirit and Matter. Everything, everything is the wonderful shimmer of creation, it may be a deadly shimmer like lightning or the anger in the little eyes of the bear, it may be the beautiful shimmer of the moving deer, or the pine-boughs softly swaying under snow. Creation contains the unspeakably terrifying enemy, the unspeakably lovely friend, as the maiden who brings us our food in dead of winter, by her passion of tender wistfulness. Yet even this tender wistfulness is the fearful danger of the wild creatures, deer and bear and buffalo, which find their death in it.

There is, in our sense of the word, no God. But all is godly. There is no Great Mind directing the universe. Yet the mystery of creation, the wonder and fascination of creation shimmers in every leaf and stone, in every thorn and bud,

in the fangs of the rattlesnake, and in the soft eyes of a fawn. Things utterly opposite are still pure wonder of creation, the yell of the mountain-lion, and the breeze in the aspen leaves. The Apache warrior in his war-paint, shrieking the war-cry and cutting the throats of old women, still he is part of the mystery of creation. He is godly as the growing corn. And the mystery of creation makes us sharpen the knives and point the arrows in utmost determination against him. It must be so. It is part of the wonder. And to every part of the wonder we must answer in kind.

The Indians accept Jesus on the Cross amid all the rest of the wonders. The presence of Jesus on the Cross, or the pitiful Mary Mother, does not in the least prevent the strange intensity of the wardance. The brave comes home with a scalp. In the morning he goes to Mass. Two mysteries! The soul of man is the theatre in which every mystery is enacted. Jesus, Mary, the snake-dance, red blood on the knife: it is all the rippling of this untellable flood of creation, which, in a narrow sense, we call Nature.

There is no division between actor and audience. It is all one.

There is no God looking on. The only god there is, is involved all the time in the dramatic wonder and inconsistency of creation. God is immersed, as it were, in creation, not to be separated or distinguished. There can be no Ideal God.

And here finally you see the difference between Indian entertainment and even the earliest form of Greek drama. Right at the beginning of Old World dramatic presentation there was the onlooker, if only in the shape of the God Himself, or the Goddess Herself, to whom the dramatic offering was made. And this God or Goddess resolves, at last, into a Mind occupied by some particular thought or idea. And in the long course of evolution, we ourselves become the gods of our own drama. The spectacle is offered to us. And we sit aloft, enthroned in the Mind, dominated by some one exclusive idea, and we judge the show.

There is absolutely none of this in the Indian dance. There is no God. There is no Onlooker. There is no Mind. There is no dominant idea. And finally, there is no judgement: absolutely no judgement.

The Indian is completely embedded in the wonder of his own drama. It is a drama that has no beginning and no end, it is all-inclusive. It can't be judged, because there is nothing outside it, to judge it.

The mind is there merely as a servant, to keep a man pure and true to the mystery, which is always present. The mind bows down before the creative mystery, even of the atrocious Apache warrior. It judges, not the good and the bad, but the lie and the true. The Apache warrior in all his atrocity, is true to his own creative mystery. And as such, he must be fought. But he cannot be called a

lie on the face of the earth. Hence he cannot be classed among the abominations, the cowards, and the liars: those who betray the wonder.

The Indian, so long as he is pure, has only two great negative commandments.

Thou shalt not lie.

Thou shalt not be a coward.

Positively, his one commandment is:

Thou shalt acknowledge the wonder.

Evil lies in lying and in cowardice. Wickedness lies in witchcraft; that is, in seeking to prostitute the creative wonder to the individual mind and will, the individual conceit.

And virtue? Virtue lies in the heroic response to the creative wonder, the utmost response. In the man, it is a valiant putting forth of all his strength to meet and to run forward with the wonder. In woman it is the putting forth of all herself in a delicate, marvellous sensitiveness, which draws forth the wonder to herself, and draws the man to the wonder in her, as it drew even the wild animals from the lair of winter.

You see this so plainly in the Indian races. Naked and daubed with clay to hide the nakedness, and to take the anointment of the earth; stuck over with bits of fluff of eagle's down, to be anointed with the power of the air, the youths and men whirl down the racing track, in relays. They are not racing to win a race. They are not racing for a prize. They are not racing to show their prowess.

They are putting forth all their might, all their strength, in a tension that is half anguish, half ecstasy, in the effort to gather into their souls more and more of the creative fire, the creative energy which shall carry their tribe through the year, through the vicissitudes of the months, on, on, in the unending race of humanity along the track of trackless creation. It is the heroic effort, the sacred heroic effort which men must make and must keep on making. As if hurled from a catapult the Indian youth throws himself along the course, working his body strangely incomprehensibly. And when his turn comes again, he hurls himself forward with greater intensity, to greater speed, driving himself, as it were, into the heart of the fire. And the old men along the track encourage him, urge him with their green twigs, laughingly, mockingly, teasingly, but at the same time with an exquisite pure anxiety and concern.

And he walks away at last, his chest lifting and falling heavily, a strange look in his eyes, having run with the changeless god who will give us nothing unless we overtake him.

6 - DANCE OF THE SPROUTING CORN

Pale, dry, baked earth, that blows into dust of fine sand. Low hills of baked pale earth, sinking heavily, and speckled sparsely with dark dots of cedar bushes. A river on the plain of drought, just a cleft of dark, reddish-brown water, almost a flood. And over all, the blue, uneasy, alkaline sky.

A pale, uneven, parched world, where a motor-car rocks and lurches and churns in sand. A world pallid with dryness, inhuman with a faint taste of alkali. Like driving in the bed of a great sea that dried up unthinkable ages ago, and now is drier than any other dryness, yet still reminiscent of the bottom of the sea, sandhills sinking, and straight, cracked mesas, like cracks in the dry-mud bottom of the sea.

So, the mud church standing discreetly outside, just outside the pueblo, not to see too much. And on its façade of mud, under the timbered mud-eaves, two speckled horses rampant, painted by the Indians, a red piebald and a black one.

Swish! Over the logs of the ditch-bridge, where brown water is flowing full. There below is the pueblo, dried mud like mud-pie houses, all squatting in a jumble, prepared to crumble into dust and be invisible, dust to dust returning, earth to earth.

That they don't crumble is the mystery. That these little squarish mud-heaps endure for centuries after centuries, while Greek marble tumbles asunder, and cathedrals totter, is the wonder. But then, the naked human hand with a bit of new soft mud is quicker than time, and defies the centuries.

Roughly the low, square, mud-pie houses make a wide street where all is naked earth save a doorway or a window with a pale-blue sash. At the end of the street, turn again into a parallel wide, dry street. And there, in the dry, oblong aridity, there tosses a small forest that is alive: and thud — thud — thud goes the drum, and the deep sound of men singing is like the deep souging of the wind, in the depths of a wood.

You realize that you had heard the drum from the distance, also the deep, distant roar and boom of the singing, but that you had not heeded, as you don't heed the wind.

It all tosses like young, agile trees in a wind. This is the dance of the sprouting corn, and everybody holds a little, beating branch of green pine. Thud — thud — thud — thud — thud! goes the drum, heavily the men hop and hop and hop, sway, sway, sway, sway go the little branches of green pine. It tosses like a little forest, and the deep sound of men's singing is like the booming and tearing of a

wind deep inside a forest. They are dancing the Spring Corn Dance.

This is the Wednesday after Easter, after Christ Risen and the corn germinated. They dance on Monday and on Tuesday. Wednesday is the third and last dance of this green resurrection.

You realize the long line of dancers, and a solid cluster of men singing near the drum. You realize the intermittent black-and-white fantasy of the hopping Koshare, the jesters, the Delight-Makers. You become aware of the ripple of bells on the knee-garters of the dancers, a continual pulsing ripple of little bells; and of the sudden wild, whooping yells from near the drum. Then you become aware of the seed-like shudder of the gourd-rattles, as the dance changes, and the slaying of the tufts of green pine-twigs stuck behind the arms of all the dancing men, in the broad green arm-bands.

Gradually come through to you the black, stable solidity of the dancing women, who poise like solid shadow, one woman behind each rippling, leaping male. The long, silky black hair of the women streaming down their backs, and the equally long, streaming, gleaming hair of the males, loose over broad, naked, orange-brown shoulders.

Then the faces, the impassive, rather fat, golden-brown faces of the women, with eyes cast down, crowned above with the green *tableta*, like a flat tiara. Something strange and noble about the impassive, barefoot women in the short black cassocks, as they subtly tread the dance, scarcely moving, and yet edging rhythmically along, swaying from each hand the green spray of pine-twigs out — out — out, to the thud of the drum, immediately behind the leaping fox-skin of the men dancers. And all the emerald-green, painted *tabletas*, the flat wooden tiaras shaped like a castle gateway, rise steady and noble from the soft, slightly bowed heads of the women, held by a band under the chin. All the *tabletas* down the line, emerald green, almost steady, while the bright black heads of the men leap softly up and down, between.

Bit by bit you take it in. You cannot get a whole impression, save of some sort of wood tossing, a little forest of trees in motion, with gleaming black hair and gold-ruddy breasts that somehow do not destroy the illusion of forest.

When you look at the women, you forget the men. The bare-armed, bare-legged, barefoot women with streaming hair and lofty green tiaras, impassive, downward-looking faces, twigs swaying outwards from subtle, rhythmic wrists; women clad in the black, prehistoric short gown fastened over one shoulder, leaving the other shoulder bare, and showing at the arm-place a bit of pink or white undershirt; belted also round the waist with a woven woollen sash, scarlet and green on the hand-woven black cassock. The noble, slightly submissive bending of the tiara-ed head. The subtle measure of the hare, breathing, bird-like

feet, that are flat, and seem to cleave to earth softly, and softly lift away. The continuous outward swaying of the pine-sprays.

But when you look at the men, you forget the women. The men are naked to the waist, and ruddy-golden, and in the rhythmic hopping leap of the dance their breasts shake downwards, as the strong, heavy body comes down, down, down, down, in the downward plunge of the dance. The black hair streams loose and living down their backs, the black brows are level, the black eyes look out unchanging from under the silky lashes. They are handsome, and absorbed with a deep rhythmic absorption, which still leaves them awake and aware. Down, down, down they drop, on the heavy, ceaseless leap of the dance, and the great necklaces of shell-cores spring on the naked breasts, the neck-shell flaps up and down, the short white kilt of woven stuff, with the heavy woollen embroidery, green and red and black, opens and shuts slightly to the strong lifting of the knees: the heavy whitish cords that hang from the kilt-band at the side sway and coil for ever down the side of the right leg, down to the ankle, the bells on the red-woven garters under the knees ripple without end, and the feet, in buckskin boots furred round the ankle with a beautiful band of skunk fur, black with a white tip, come down with a lovely, heavy, soft precision, first one, then the other, dropping always plumb to earth. Slightly bending forward, a black gourd rattle in the right hand, a small green bough in the left, the dancer dances the eternal drooping leap, that brings his life down, down, down, down from the mind, down from the broad, beautiful shaking breast, down to the powerful pivot of the knees, then to the ankles, and plunges deep from the ball of the foot into the earth, towards the earth's red centre, where these men belong, as is signified by the red earth with which they are smeared.

And meanwhile, the shell-cores from the Pacific sway up and down, ceaselessly on their breasts.

Mindless, without effort, under the hot sun, unceasing, yet never perspiring nor even breathing heavily, they dance on and on. Mindless, yet still listening, observing. They hear the deep, surging singing of the bunch of old men, like a great wind soughing. They hear the cries and yells of the man waving his bough by the drum. They catch the word of the song, and at a moment, shudder the black rattles, wheel, and the line breaks, women from men, they thread across to a new formation. And as the men wheel round, their black hair gleams and shakes, and the long fox-skin sways, like a tail. And always, when they form into line again, it is a beautiful long straight line, flexible as life, but straight as rain.

The men round the drum are old, or elderly. They are all in a bunch, and they wear day dress, loose cotton drawers, pink or white cotton shirt, hair tied up behind with the red cords, and banded round the head with a strip of pink rag, or

white rag, or blue. There they are, solid like a cluster of bees, their black heads with the pink rag circles all close together, swaying their pine-twigs with rhythmic, wind-swept hands, dancing slightly, mostly on the right foot, ceaselessly, and singing, their black bright eyes absorbed, their dark lips pushed out, while the deep strong sound rushes like wind, and the unknown words form themselves in the dark.

Suddenly the solitary man pounding the drum swings his drum round, and begins to pound on the other end, on a higher note, pang — pang — pang! instead of the previous brumm! brumm! brumm! of the bass note. The watchful man next the drummer yells and waves lightly, dancing on bird-feet. The Koshare make strange, eloquent gestures to the sky.

And again the gleaming bronze-and-dark men dancing in the rows shudder their rattles, break the rhythm, change into a queer, beautiful two-step, the long lines suddenly curl into rings, four rings of dancers, the leaping, gleaming-seeming men between the solid, subtle, submissive blackness of the women who are crowned with emerald-green tiaras, all going subtly round in rings. Then slowly they change again, and form a star. Then again, unmingling, they come back into rows.

And all the while, all the while the naked Koshare are threading about. Of bronze-and-dark men-dancers there are some forty-two, each with a dark, crowned woman attending him like a shadow. The old men, the bunch of singers in shirts and tied-up black hair, are about sixty in number, or sixty-four. The Koshare are about twenty-four.

They are slim and naked, daubed with black and white earth, their hair daubed white and gathered upwards to a great knot on top of the head, whence springs a tuft of corn-husks, dry corn-leaves. Though they wear nothing but a little black square cloth, front and back, at their middle, they do not seem naked, for some are white with black spots, like a leopard, and some have broad black lines or zigzags on their smeared bodies, and all their faces are blackened with triangle or lines till they look like weird masks. Meanwhile their hair, gathered straight up and daubed white and sticking up from the top of the head with corn-husks, completes the fantasy. They are anything but natural. Like blackened ghosts of a dead corn-cob, tufted at the top.

And all the time, running like queer spotted dogs, they weave nakedly, through the unheeding dance, comical, weird, dancing the dance-step naked and fine, prancing through the lines, up and down the lines, and making fine gestures with their flexible hands, calling something down from the sky, calling something up from the earth, and dancing forward all the time. Suddenly as they catch a word from the singers, name of a star, of a wind, a name for the sun, for

a cloud, their hands soar up and gather in the air, soar down with a slow motion. And again, as they catch a word that means earth, earth deeps, water within the earth, or red-earth-quickenings, the hands flutter softly down, and draw up the water, draw up the earth-quickenings, earth to sky, sky to earth, influences above to influences below, to meet in the germ-quick of corn, where life is.

And as they dance, the Koshare watch the dancing men. And if a fox-skin is coming loose at the belt, they fasten it as the man dances, or they stoop and tie another man's shoe. For the dancer must not hesitate to the end.

And then, after some forty minutes, the drum stops. Slowly the dancers file into one line, woman behind man, and move away, threading towards their kiva, with no sound but the tinkle of knee-bells in the silence.

But at the same moment the thud of an unseen drum, from beyond, the souging of deep song approaching from the unseen. It is the other half, the other half of the tribe coming to continue the dance. They appear round the kiva — one Koshare and one dancer leading the rows, the old men all abreast, singing already in a great strong burst.

So, from ten o'clock in the morning till about four in the afternoon, first one-half then the other. Till at last, as the day wanes, the two halves meet, and the two singings like two great winds surge one past the other, and the thicket of the dance becomes a real forest. It is the close of the third day.

Afterwards, the men and women crowd on the roofs of the two low round towers, the kivas, while the Koshare run round jesting and miming, and taking big offerings from the women, loaves of bread and cakes of blue-maize meal. Women come carrying big baskets of bread and guayava, on two hands, an offering.

And the mystery of germination, not procreation, but *putting forth*, resurrection, life springing within the seed, is accomplished. The sky has its fire, its waters, its stars, its wandering electricity, its winds, its fingers of cold. The earth has its reddened body, its invisible hot heart, its inner waters and many juices and unaccountable stuffs. Between them all, the little seed: and also man, like a seed that is busy and aware. And from the heights and from the depths man, the caller, calls: man, the knower, brings down the influences and brings up the influences, with his knowledge: man, so vulnerable, so subject, and yet even in his vulnerability and subjection, a master, commands the invisible influences and is obeyed. Commands in that song, in that rhythmic energy of dance, in that still-submissive mockery of the Koshare. And he accomplishes his end, as master. He partakes in the springing of the corn, in the rising and budding and Baring of the corn. And when he eats his bread at last, he recovers all he once sent forth, and partakes again of the energies he called to the corn, from out of

the wide universe.

7 - THE HOPI SNAKE DANCE

The Hopi country is in Arizona, next the Navajo country, and some seventy miles north of the Santa Fé railroad. The Hopis are Pueblo Indians, village Indians, so their reservation is not large. It consists of a square track of greyish, unappetizing desert, out of which rise three tall arid mesas, broken off in ragged pallid rock. On the top of the mesas perch the ragged, broken, greyish pueblos, identical with the mesas on which they stand.

The nearest village, Walpi, stands in half-ruin high, high on a narrow rock-top where no leaf of life ever was tender. It is all grey, utterly grey, utterly pallid stone and dust, and very narrow. Below it all the stark light of the dry Arizona sun.

Walpi is called the 'first mesa'. And it is at the far edge of Walpi you see the withered beaks and claws and bones of sacrificed eagles, in a rock-cleft under the sky. They sacrifice an eagle each year, on the brink, by rolling him out and crushing him so as to shed no blood. Then they drop his remains down the dry cleft in the promontory's farthest grey tip.

The trail winds on, utterly bumpy and horrible, for thirty miles, past the second mesa, where Chimopova is, on to the third mesa. And on the Sunday afternoon of 17th August black automobile after automobile lurched and crawled across the grey desert, where low, grey, sage-scrub was coming to pallid yellow. Black hood followed crawling after black hood, like a funeral cortège. The motor-cars, with all the tourists wending their way to the third and farthest mesa, thirty miles across this dismal desert where an odd water-windmill spun, and odd patches of corn blew in the strong desert wind, like dark-green women with fringed shawls blowing and fluttering, not far from the foot of the great, grey, up-piled mesa.

The snake dance (I am told) is held once a year, on each of the three mesas in succession. This year of grace 1924 it was to be held in Hotevilla, the last village on the farthest western tip of the third mesa.

On and on bumped the cars. The lonely second mesa lay in the distance. On and on, to the ragged ghost of the third mesa.

The third mesa has two main villages, Oraibi, which is on the near edge, and Hotevilla, on the far. Up scrambles the car, on all its four legs, like a black-beetle straddling past the school-house and store down below, up the bare rock and over the changeless boulders, with a surge and a sickening lurch to the sky-brim, where stands the rather foolish church. Just beyond, dry, grey, ruined, and

apparently abandoned, Oraibi, its few ragged stone huts. All these cars come all this way, and apparently nobody at home.

You climb still, up the shoulder of rock, a few more miles, across the lofty, wind-swept mesa, and so you come to Hotevilla, where the dance is, and where already hundreds of motor-cars are herded in an official camping-ground, among the piñon bushes.

Hotevilla is a tiny little village of grey little houses, raggedly built with undressed stone and mud around a little oblong *plaza*, and partly in ruins. One of the chief two-storey houses on the small square is a ruin, with big square window-holes.

It is a parched, grey country of snakes and eagles, pitched up against the sky. And a few dark-faced, short, thickly built Indians have their few peach trees among the sand, their beans and squashes on the naked sand under the sky, their springs of brackish water.

Three thousand people came to see the little snake dance this year, over miles of desert and bumps. Three thousand, of all sorts, cultured people from New York, Californians, onward-pressing tourists, cowboys, Navajo Indians, even Negroes; fathers, mothers, children, of all ages, colours, sizes of stoutness, dimensions of curiosity.

What had they come for? Mostly to see men hold *live rattlesnakes* in their mouths. '*I never did see a rattlesnake and I'm crazy to see one!*' cried a girl with bobbed hair.

There you have it. People trail hundreds of miles, avidly, to see this circus-performance of men handling live rattlesnakes that may bite them any minute — even do bite them. Some show, that!

There is the other aspect, of the ritual dance. One may look on from the angle of culture, as one looks on while Anna Pavlova dances with the Russian Ballet.

Or there is still another point of view, the religious. Before the snake dance begins, on the Monday, and the spectators are packed thick on the ground round the square, and in the window-holes, and on all the roofs, all sorts of people greedy with curiosity, a little speech is made to them all, asking the audience to be silent and respectful, as this is a sacred religious ceremonial of the Hopi Indians, and not a public entertainment. Therefore, please, no clapping or cheering or applause, but remember you are, as it were, in a church.

The audience accepts the implied rebuke in good faith, and looks round with a grin at the 'church'. But it is a good-humoured, very decent crowd, ready to respect any sort of feelings. And the Indian with his 'religion' is a sort of public pet.

From the cultured point of view, the Hopi snake dance is almost nothing, not

much more than a circus turn, or the games that children play in the street. It has none of the impressive beauty of the Corn Dance at Santo Domingo, for example. The big pueblos of Zuni, Santo Domingo, Taos have a cultured instinct which is not revealed in the Hopi snake dance. This last is uncouth rather than beautiful, and rather uncouth in its touch of horror. Hence the thrill, and the crowd.

As a cultured spectacle, it is a circus turn: men actually dancing round with snakes, poisonous snakes, dangling from their mouths.

And as a religious ceremonial: well, you can either be politely tolerant like the crowd to the Hopis; or you must have some spark of understanding of the sort of religion implied.

‘Oh, the Indians,’ I heard a woman say, they believe we are all brothers, the snakes are the Indians’ brothers, and the Indians are the snakes’ brothers. The Indians would never hurt the snakes, they won’t hurt any animal. So the snakes won’t bite the Indians. They are all brothers, and none of them hurt anybody.’

This sounds very nice, only more Hindoo than Hopi. The dance itself does not convey much sense of fraternal communion. It is not in the least like St Francis preaching to the birds.

The animistic religion, as we call it, is not the religion of the Spirit. A religion of spirits, yes. But not of Spirit. There is no One Spirit. There is no One God. There is no Creator. There is strictly no God at all: because all is alive. In our conception of religion there exists God and His Creation: two things. We are creatures of God, therefore we pray to God as the Father, the Saviour, the Maker.

But strictly, in the religion of aboriginal America, there is no Father, and no Maker. There is the great living source of life: say the Sun of existence: to which you can no more pray than you can pray to Electricity. And emerging from this Sun are the great potencies, the invincible influences which make shine and warmth and rain. From these great interrelated potencies of rain and heat and thunder emerge the seeds of life itself, corn, and creatures like snakes. And beyond these, men, persons. But all emerge separately. There is no oneness, no sympathetic identifying oneself with the rest. The law of isolation is heavy on every creature.

Now the Sun, the rain, the shine, the thunder, they are alive. But they are not persons or people. They are alive. They are manifestations of living activity. But they are not personal Gods.

Everything lives. Thunder lives, and rain lives, and sunshine lives. But not in the personal sense.

How is man to get himself into relation with the vast living convulsions of rain and thunder and sun, which are conscious and alive and potent, but like vastest

of beasts, inscrutable and incomprehensible. How is man to get himself into relation with these, the vastest of cosmic beasts?

It is the problem of the ages of man. Our religion says the cosmos is Matter, to be conquered by the Spirit of Man. The yogi, the fakir, the saint try conquest by abnegation and by psychic powers. The real conquest of the cosmos is made by science.

The American-Indian sees no division into Spirit and Matter, God and not-God. Everything is alive, though not personally so. Thunder is neither Thor nor Zeus. Thunder is the vast living thunder asserting itself like some incomprehensible monster, or some huge reptile-bird of the pristine cosmos.

How to conquer the dragon-mouthed thunder! How to capture the feathered rain!

We make reservoirs, and irrigation ditches and artesian wells. We make lightning conductors, and build vast electric plants. We say it is a matter of science, energy, force.

But the Indian says No! It all lives. We must approach it fairly, with profound respect, but also with desperate courage. Because man must conquer the cosmic monsters of living thunder and live rain. The rain that slides down from its source, and ebbs back subtly, with a strange energy generated between its coming and going, an energy which, even to our science, is of life: this, man has to conquer. The serpent-striped, feathery Rain.

We made the conquest by dams and reservoirs and windmills. The Indian, like the old Egyptian, seeks to make the conquest from the mystic will within him, pitted against the Cosmic Dragon.

We must remember, to the animistic vision there is no perfect God behind us, who created us from his knowledge, and foreordained all things. No such God. Behind lies only the terrific, terrible, crude Source, the mystic Sun, the well-head of all things. From this mystic Sun emanate the Dragons, Rain, Wind, Thunder Shine, Light. The Potencies of Powers. These bring forth Earth, then reptiles, birds, and fishes.

The Potencies are not Gods. They are Dragons. The Sun of Creation itself is a dragon most terrible, vast, and most powerful, yet even so, less in being than we. The only gods on earth are men. For gods, like man, do not exist beforehand. They are created and evolved gradually, with aeons of effort, out of the fire and smelting of life. They are the highest thing created, smelted between the furnace of the Life-Sun, and beaten on the anvil of the rain, with hammers or thunder and bellows of rushing wind. The cosmos is a great furnace, a dragon's den, where the heroes and demi-gods, men, forge themselves into being. It is a vast and violent matrix, where souls form like diamonds in earth, under extreme

pressure.

So that gods are the outcome, not the origin. And the best gods that have resulted, so far, are men. But gods frail as flowers; which have also the godliness of things that have won perfection out of the terrific dragon-clutch of the cosmos. Men are frail as flowers. Man is as a flower, rain can kill him or succour him, heat can flick him with a bright tail, and destroy him: or, on the other hand, it can softly call him into existence, out of the egg of chaos. Man is delicate as a flower, godly beyond flowers, and his lordship is a ticklish business.

He has to conquer, and hold his own, and again conquer all the time. Conquer the powers of the cosmos. To us, science is our religion of conquest. Hence through science, we are the conquerors and resultant gods of our earth. But to the Indian, the so-called mechanical processes do not exist. All lives. And the conquest is made by the means of the living will.

This is the religion of all aboriginal America. Peruvian, Aztec, Athabaskan: perhaps the aboriginal religion of all the world. In Mexico, men fell into horror of the crude, pristine gods, the dragons. But to the pueblo Indian, the most terrible dragon is still somewhat gentle-hearted.

This brings us back to the Hopi. He has the hardest task, the stubbornest destiny. Some inward fate drove him to the top of these parched mesas, all rocks and eagles, sand and snakes, and wind and sun and alkali. These he had to conquer. Not merely, as we should put it, the natural conditions of the place. But the mysterious life-spirit that reigned there. The eagle and the snake.

It is a destiny as well as another. The destiny of the animistic soul of man, instead of our destiny of Mind and Spirit. We have undertaken the scientific conquest of forces, of natural conditions. It has been comparatively easy, and we are victors. Look at our black motor-cars like beetles working up the rock-face at Oraibi. Look at our three thousand tourists gathered to gaze at the twenty lonely men who dance in the tribe's snake dance!

The Hopi sought the conquest by means of the mystic, living will that is in man, pitted against the living will of the dragon-cosmos. The Egyptians long ago made a partial conquest by the same means. We have made a partial conquest by other means. Our corn doesn't fail us: we have no seven years' famine, and apparently need never have. But the other thing fails us, the strange inward sun of life; the pellucid monster of the rain never shows us his stripes. To us, heaven switches on daylight, or turns on the shower-bath. We little gods are gods of the machine only. It is our highest. Our cosmos is a great *ennui*. And we die of *ennui*. A subtle dragon stings us in the midst of plenty. *Quos vult perdere Deus, dementat prius*.

On the Sunday evening is a first little dance in the plaza at Hotevilla, called

the Antelope dance. There is the hot, sandy, oblong little place, with a tuft of green cotton-wood boughs stuck like a plume at the south end, and on the floor at the foot of the green, a little lid of a trap-door. They say the snakes are under there.

They say that the twelve officiating men of the snake clan of the tribe have for nine days been hunting snakes in the rocks. They have been performing the mysteries for nine days, in the kiva, and for two days they have fasted completely. All these days they have tended the snakes, washed them with repeated lustrations, soothed them, and exchanged spirits with them. The spirit of man soothing and seeking and making interchange with the spirits of the snakes. For the snakes are more rudimentary, nearer to the great convulsive powers. Nearer to the nameless Sun, more knowing in the slanting tracks of the rain, the pattering of the invisible feet of the rain-monster from the sky. The snakes are man's next emissaries to the rain-gods. The snakes lie nearer to the source of potency, the dark, lurking, intense sun at the centre of the earth. For to the cultured animist, and the pueblo Indian is such, the earth's dark centre holds its dark sun, our source of isolated being, round which our world coils its folds like a great snake. The snake is nearer the dark sun, and cunning of it.

They say — people say — that rattlesnakes are not travellers. They haunt the same spots on earth, and die there. It is said also that the snake priest (so-called) of the Hopi probably capture the same snakes year after year.

Be that as it may. At sundown before the real dance, there is the little dance called the Antelope Dance. We stand and wait on a house-roof. Behind us is tethered an eagle; rather dishevelled he sits on the coping, and looks at us in unutterable resentment. See him, and see how much 'brotherhood' the Indian feels with animals — at best the silent tolerance that acknowledges dangerous difference. We wait without event. There are no drums, no announcements. Suddenly into the *plaza*, with rude, intense movements, hurried a little file of men. They are smeared all with grey and black, and are naked save for little kilts embroidered like the sacred dance-kilts in other pueblos, red and green and black on a white fibre-cloth. The fox-skins hangs behind. The feet of the dancers are pure ash-grey. Their hair is long.

The first is a heavy old man with heavy, long, wild grey hair and heavy fringe. He plods intensely forward in the silence, followed in a sort of circle by the other grey-smeared, longhaired, naked, concentrated men. The oldest men are first: the last is a short-haired boy of fourteen or fifteen. There are only eight men — the so-called antelope priests. They pace round in a circle, rudely, absorbedly, till the first heavy, intense old man with his massive grey hair flowing, comes to the lid on the ground, near the tuft of kiva-boughs. He rapidly shakes from the

hollow of his right hand a little white meal on the lid, stamps heavily, with naked right foot, on the meal, so the wood resounds, and paces heavily forward. Each man, to the boy, shakes meal, stamps, paces absorbedly on in the circle, comes to the lid again, shakes meal, stamps, paces absorbedly on, comes a third time to the lid, or trap-door, and this time spits on the lid, stamps, and goes on. And this time the eight men file away behind the lid, between it and the tuft of green boughs. And there they stand in a line, their backs to the kivatuft of green; silent, absorbed, bowing a little to the ground.

Suddenly paces with rude haste another file of men. They are naked, and smeared with red 'medicine', with big black lozenges of smeared paint on their backs. Their wild heavy hair hangs loose, the old, heavy, grey-haired men go first, then the middle-aged, then the young men, then last, two short-haired, slim boys, schoolboys. The hair of the young men, growing after school, is bobbed round.

The grown men are all heavily built, rather short, with heavy but shapely flesh, and rather straight sides. They have not the archaic slim waists of the Taos Indians. They have archaic squareness, and a sensuous heaviness. Their very hair is black, massive, heavy. These are the so-called snake-priests, men of the snake clan. And tonight they are eleven in number.

They pace rapidly round, with that heavy wild silence of concentration characteristic of them, and cast meal and stamp upon the lid, cast meal and stamp in the second round, come round and spit and stamp in the third. For to the savage, the animist, to spit may be a kind of blessing, a communion, a sort of embrace.

The eleven snake-priests form silently in a row, facing the eight grey smeared antelope-priests across the little lid, and bowing forward a little, to earth. Then the antelope-priests, bending forward, begin a low, sombre chant, or call, that sounds wordless, only a deep, low-toned, secret Ay-a! Ay-a! Ay-a! And they bend from right to left, giving two shakes to the little, flat, white rattle in their left hand, at each shake, and stamping the right foot in heavy rhythm. In their right hand, that held the meal, is grasped a little skin bag, perhaps also containing meal.

They lean from right to left, two seed-like shakes of the rattle each time and the heavy rhythmic stamp of the foot, and the low, sombre, secretive chant-call each time. It is a strange low sound, such as we never hear, and it reveals how deep, how deep the men are in the mystery they are practising, how sunk deep below our world, to the world of snakes, and dark ways in the earth, where the roots of corn, and where the little rivers of unchannelled, uncreated life-passion run like dark, trickling lightning, to the roots of the corn and to the feet and loins

of men, from the earth's innermost dark sun. They are calling in the deep, almost silent snake-language, to the snakes and the rays of dark emission from the earth's inward 'Sun'.

At this moment, a silence falls on the whole crowd of listeners. It is that famous darkness and silence of Egypt, the touch of the other mystery. The deep concentration of the 'priests' conquers for a few seconds our white-faced flippancy, and we hear only the deep Hah-hà! Hah-ha! speaking to snakes and the earth's inner core.

This lasts a minute or two. Then the antelope-priests stand bowed and still, and the snake-priests take up the swaying and the deep chant, that sometimes is so low, it is like a mutter underground, inaudible. The rhythm is crude, the swaying unison is all uneven. Culturally, there is nothing. If it were not for that mystic, dark-sacred concentration.

Several times in turn, the two rows of daubed, longhaired, insunk men facing one another take up the swaying and the chant. Then that too is finished. There is a break in the formation. A young snake-priest takes up something that may be a corn-cob — perhaps an antelope-priest hands it to him — and comes forward, with an old, heavy, but still shapely snake-priest behind him dusting his shoulders with the feathers, eagle-feathers presumably, which are the Indians' hollow prayersticks. With the heavy, stamping hop they move round in the previous circle, the young priest holding the cob curiously, and the old priest prancing strangely at the young priest's hack, in a sort of incantation, and brushing the heavy young shoulders delicately with the prayer-feathers. It is the God-vibration that enters us from behind, and is transmitted to the hands, from the hands to the corn-cob. Several young priests emerge, with the bowed heads and the cob in their hands and the heavy older priests hanging over them behind. They tread round the rough curve and come back to the kiva, take perhaps another cob, and tread round again.

That is all. In ten or fifteen minutes it is over. The two files file rapidly and silently away. A brief, primitive performance.

The crowd disperses. They were not many people. There were no venomous snakes on exhibition, so the mass had nothing to come for. And therefore the curious immersed intensity of the priests was able to conquer the white crowd.

By afternoon of the next day the three thousand people had massed in the little *plaza*, secured themselves places on the roof and in the window-spaces, everywhere, till the small pueblo seemed built of people instead of stones. All sorts of people, hundreds and hundreds of white women, all in breeches like half-men, hundreds and hundreds of men who had been driving motor-cars, then many Navajos, the women in their full, long skirts and tight velvet bodices, the

men rather lanky, long-waisted, real nomads. In the hot sun and the wind which blows the sand every day, every day in volumes round the corners, the three thousand tourists sat for hours, waiting for the show. The Indian policeman cleared the central oblong, in front of the kiva. The front rows of onlookers sat thick on the ground. And at last, rather early, because of the masses awaiting them, suddenly, silently, in the same rude haste, the antelope-priests filed absorbedly in, and made the rounds over the lid, as before. Today, the eight antelope-priests were very grey. Their feet ashed pure grey, like suède soft boots: and their lower jaw was pure suède grey, while the rest of their face was blackish. With that pale-grey jaw, they looked like corpse-faces with swathing-bands. And all their bodies ash-grey smeared, with smears of black, and a black cloth today at the loins.

They made their rounds, and took their silent position behind the lid, with backs to the green tuft: an unearthly grey row of men with little skin bags in their hands. They were the lords of shadow, the intermediate twilight, the place of afterlife and before-life, where house the winds of change. Lords of the mysterious, fleeting power of change.

Suddenly, with abrupt silence, in paced the snake-priests, headed by the same heavy man with solid grey hair like iron. Today they were twelve men, from the old one, down to the slight, short-haired, erect boy of fourteen. Twelve men, two for each of the six worlds, or quarters: east, north, south, west, above, and below. And today they were in a queer ecstasy. Their faces were black, showing the whites of the eyes. And they wore small black loin-aprons. They were the hot living men of the darkness, lords of the earth's inner rays, the black sun of the earth's vital core, from which dart the speckled snakes, like beams.

Round they went, in rapid, uneven, silent absorption, the three rounds. Then in a row they faced the eight ash-grey men, across the lid. All kept their heads bowed towards earth, except the young boys.

Then, in the intense, secret, muttering chant the grey men began their leaning from right to left, shaking the hand, one-two, one-two, and bowing the body each time from right to left, left to right, above the lid in the ground, under which were the snakes. And their low, deep, mysterious voices spoke to the spirits under the earth, not to men above the earth.

But the crowd was on tenterhooks for the snakes, and could hardly wait for the mummery to cease. There was an atmosphere of inattention and impatience. But the chant and the swaying passed from the grey men to the black-faced men, and back again, several times.

This was finished. The formation of the lines broke up. There was a slight crowding to the centre, round the lid. The old antelope-priest (so called) was

stooping. And before the crowd could realize anything else a young priest emerged, bowing reverently, with the neck of a pale, delicate rattlesnake held between his teeth, the little, naïve, bird-like head of the rattlesnake quite still, near the black cheek, and the long, pale, yellowish, spangled body of the snake dangling like some thick, beautiful cord. On passed the black-faced young priest, with the wondering snake dangling from his mouth, pacing in the original circle, while behind him, leaping almost on his shoulders, was the oldest heavy priest, dusting the young man's shoulders with the feather-prayer-sticks, in an intense, earnest anxiety of concentration such as I have only seen in the old Indian men during a religious dance.

Came another young black-faced man out of the confusion, with another snake dangling and writhing a little from his mouth, and an elder priest dusting him from behind with the feathers: and then another, and another: till it was all confusion, probably, of six, and then four young priests with snakes dangling from their mouths, going round, apparently, three times in the circle. At the end of the third round the young priest stooped and delicately laid his snake on the earth, waving him away, away, as it were, into the world. He must not wriggle back to the kiva bush.

And after wondering a moment, the pale, delicate snake steered away with a rattlesnake's beautiful movement, rippling and looping, with the small, sensitive head lifted like antennae, across the sand to the massed audience squatting solid on the ground around. Like soft, watery lightning went the wondering snake at the crowd. As he came nearer, the people began to shrink aside, half-mesmerized. But they betrayed no exaggerated fear. And as the little snake drew very near, up rushed one of the two black-faced young priests who held the snake-stick, poised a moment over the snake, in the prayer-concentration of reverence which is at the same time conquest, and snatched the pale, long creature delicately from the ground, waving him in a swoop over the heads of the seated crowd, then delicately smoothing down the length of the snake with his left hand, stroking and smoothing and soothing the long, pale, bird-like thing; and returning with it to the kiva, handed it to one of the grey-jawed antelope-priests.

Meanwhile, all the time, the other young priests were emerging with a snake dangling from their mouths. The boy had finished his rounds. He launched his rattlesnake on the ground, like a ship, and like a ship away it steered. In a moment, after it went one of those two black-faced priests who carried snake-sticks and were the snake-catchers. As it neared the crowd, very close, he caught it up and waved it dramatically, his eyes glaring strangely out of his black face. And in the interim that youngest boy had been given a long, handsome bull-

snake, by the priest at the hole under the kiva boughs. The bull-snake is not poisonous. It is a constrictor. This one was six feet long, with a sumptuous pattern. It waved its pale belly, and pulled its neck out of the boy's mouth. With two hands he put it back. It pulled itself once more free. Again he got it back, and managed to hold it. And then as he went round in his looping circle, it coiled its handsome folds twice round his knee. He stooped, quietly, and as quietly as if he were untying his garter, he unloosed the folds. And all the time, an old priest was intently brushing the boy's thin straight shoulders with the feathers. And all the time, the snakes seemed strangely gentle, naïve, wondering and almost willing, almost in harmony with the man. Which of course was the sacred aim. While the boy's expression remained quite still and simple, as it were candid, in a candour where he and the snake should be in unison. The only dancers who showed signs of being wrought-up were the two young snake-catchers, and one of these, particularly, seemed in a state of actor-like uplift, rather ostentatious. But the old priests had that immersed, religious intentness which is like a spell, something from another world.

The young boy launched his bull-snake. It wanted to go back to the kiva. The snake-catcher drove it gently forward. Away it went, towards the crowd, and at the last minute was caught up into the air. Then this snake was handed to an old man sitting on the ground in the audience, in the front row. He was an old Hopi of the Snake clan.

Snake after snake had been carried round in the circles, dangling by the neck from the mouths of one young priest or another, and writhing and swaying slowly, with the small, delicate snake-head held as if wondering and listening. There had been some very large rattlesnakes, unusually large, two or three handsome bull-snakes, and some racers, whipsnakes. All had been launched, after their circuits in the mouth, all had been caught up by the young priests with the snake-sticks, one or two had been handed to old-snake clan men in the audience, who sat holding them in their arms as men hold a kitten. The most of the snakes, however, had been handed to the grey antelope-men who stood in the row with their backs to the kiva bush. Till some of these ash-smearred men held armfuls of snakes, hanging over their arms like wet washing. Some of the snakes twisted and knotted round one another, showing pale bellies.

Yet most of them hung very still and docile. Docile, almost sympathetic, so that one was struck only by their clean, slim length of snake nudity, their beauty, like soft, quiescent lightning. They were so clean, because they had been washed and anointed and lustrated by the priests, in the days they had been in the kiva.

At last all the snakes had been mouth-carried in the circuits, and had made their little outrunning excursion to the crowd, and had been handed back to the

priests in the rear. And now the Indian policemen, Hopi and Navajo, began to clear away the crowd that sat on the ground, five or six rows deep, around the small *plaza*. The snakes were all going to be set free on the ground. We must clear away.

We recoiled to the farther end of the *plaza*. There, two Hopi women were scattering white corn-meal on the sandy ground. And thither came the two snake-catchers, almost at once, with their arms full of snakes. And before we who stood had realized it, the snakes were all writhing and squirming on the ground, in the white dust of meal, a couple of yards from our feet. Then immediately, before they could writhe clear of each other and steer away, they were gently, swiftly snatched up again, and with their arms full of snakes, the two young priests went running out of the *plaza*.

We followed slowly, wondering, towards the western, or north-western edge of the mesa. There the mesa dropped steeply, and a broad trail wound down to the vast hollow of desert brimmed up with strong evening light, up out of which jutted a perspective of sharp rock and further mesas and distant sharp mountains: the great, hollow, rock-wilderness space of that part of Arizona, submerged in light.

Away down the trail, small, dark, naked, rapid figures with arms held close, went the two young men, running swiftly down to the hollow level, and diminishing, running across the hollow towards more stark rocks of the other side. Two small, rapid, intent, dwindling little human figures. The tiny, dark sparks of men. Such specks of gods.

They disappeared, no bigger than stones, behind rocks in shadow. They had gone, it was said, to lay down the snakes before a rock called the snake-shrine, and let them all go free. Free to carry the message and thanks to the dragon-gods who can give and withhold. To carry the human spirit, the human breath, the human prayer, the human gratitude, the human command which had been breathed upon them in the mouths of the priests, transferred into them from those feather-prayersticks which the old wise men swept upon the shoulders of the young, snake-bearing men, to carry this back, into the vaster, dimmer, inchoate regions where the monsters of rain and wind alternated in beneficence and wrath. Carry the human prayer and will-power into the holes of the winds, down into the octopus heart of the rain-source. Carry the corn-meal which the women had scattered, back to that terrific, dread, and causeful dark sun which is at the earth's core, that which sends us corn out of the earth's nearness, sends us food or death, according to our strength of vital purpose, our power of sensitive will, our courage.

It is a battle, a wrestling all the time. The Sun, the nameless Sun, source of all

things, which we call sun because the other name is too fearful, this, this vast dark protoplasmic sun from which issues all that feeds our life, this original One is all the time willing and unwilling. Systole, diastole, it pulses its willingness and its unwillingness that we should live and move on, from being to being, manhood to further manhood. Man, small, vulnerable man, the farthest adventurer from the dark heart of the first of suns, into the cosmos of creation. Man, the last god won into existence. And all the time, he is sustained and threatened, menaced and sustained from the Source, the innermost sun-dragon. And all the time, he must submit and he must conquer. Submit to the strange beneficence from the Source, whose ways are past finding out. And conquer the strange malevolence of the Source, which is past comprehension also.

For the great dragons from which we draw our vitality are all the time willing and unwilling that we should have being. Hence only the heroes snatch manhood, little by little, from the strange den of the Cosmos.

Man, little man, with his consciousness and his will, must both submit to the great origin-powers of his life, and conquer them. Conquered by man who has overcome his fears, the snakes must go back into the earth with his messages of tenderness, of request, and of power. They go back as rays of love to the dark heart of the first of suns. But they go back also as arrows shot clean by man's sapience and courage, into the resistant, malevolent heart of the earth's oldest, stubborn core. In the core of the first of suns, whence man draws his vitality, lies poison as bitter as the rattlesnake's. This poison man must overcome, he must be master of its issue. Because from the first of suns come travelling the rays that make men strong and glad and gods who can range between the known and the unknown. Rays that quiver out of the earth as serpents do, naked with vitality. But each ray charged with poison for the unwary, the irreverent, and the cowardly. Awareness, wariness, is the first virtue in primitive man's morality. And his awareness must travel back and forth, back and forth, from the darkest origins out to the brightest edifices of creation.

And amid all its crudity, and the sensationalism which comes chiefly out of the crowd's desire for thrills, one cannot help pausing in reverence before the delicate, anointed bravery of the snake-priests (so called), with the snakes.

They say the Hopis have a marvellous secret cure for snakebites. They say the bitten are given an emetic drink, after the dance, by the old women, and that they must lie on the edge of the cliff and vomit, vomit, vomit. I saw none of this. The two snake-men who ran down into the shadow came soon running up again, running all the while, and steering off at a tangent, ran up the mesa once more, but beyond a deep, impassable cleft. And there, when they had come up to our level, we saw them across the cleft distance washing, brown and naked, in a

pool; washing off the paint, the medicine, the ecstasy, to come back into daily life and eat food. Because for two days they had eaten nothing, it was said. And for nine days they had been immersed in the mystery of snakes, and fasting in some measure.

Men who have lived many years among the Indians say they do not believe the Hopi have any secret cure. Sometimes priests do die of bites, it is said. But a rattlesnake secretes his poison slowly. Each time he strikes he loses his venom, until if he strikes several times, he has very little wherewithal to poison a man. Not enough, not half enough to kill. His glands must be very full charged with poison, as they are when he merges from winter-sleep, before he can kill a man outright. And even then, he must strike near some artery.

Therefore, during the nine days of the kiva, when the snakes are bathed and lustrated, perhaps they strike their poison away into some inanimate object. And surely they are soothed and calmed with such things as the priests, after centuries of experience, know how to administer to them.

We dam the Nile and take the railway across America. The Hopi smooths the rattlesnake and carries him in his mouth, to send him back into the dark places of the earth, an emissary to the inner powers.

To each sort of man his own achievement, his own victory, his own conquest. To the Hopi, the origins are dark and dual, cruelty is coiled in the very beginnings of all things, and circle after circle creation emerges towards a flickering, revealed Godhead. With Man as the godhead so far achieved, waveringly and for ever incomplete, in this world.

To us and to the Orientals, the Godhead was perfect to start with, and man makes but a mechanical excursion into a created and ordained universe, an excursion of mechanical achievement, and of yearning for the return to the perfect Godhead of the beginning.

To us, God was in the beginning, Paradise and the Golden Age have been long lost, and all we can do is to win back.

To the Hopi, God is not yet, and the Golden Age lies far ahead. Out of the dragon's den of the cosmos, we have wrested only the beginnings of our being, the rudiments of our Godhead.

Between the two visions lies the gulf of mutual negations. But ours was the quickest way, so we are conquerors for the moment.

The American aborigines are radically, innately religious. The fabric of their life is religion. But their religion is animistic, their sources are dark and impersonal, their conflict with their 'gods' is slow, and unceasing.

This is true of the settled pueblo Indian and the wandering Navajo, the ancient Maya, and the surviving Aztec. They are all involved at every moment, in their

old, struggling religion.

Until they break in a kind of hopelessness under our cheerful, triumphant success. Which is what is rapidly happening. The young Indians who have been to school for many years are losing their religion, becoming discontented, bored, and rootless. An Indian with his own religion inside him cannot be bored. The flow of the mystery is too intense all the time, too intense, even, for him to adjust himself to circumstances from the darkest origins out to the brightest edifices of creation.

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Soon after the dance is over, the Navajo begin to ride down the Western trail, into the light. Their women, with velvet bodices and full, full skirts, silver and turquoise tinkling thick on their breasts, sit back on their horses and ride down the steep slope, looking wonderingly around from their pleasant, broad, nomadic, Mongolian faces. And the men, long, loose, thin, long-waisted, with tall hats on their brows and low-sunk silver belts on their hips, come down to water their horses at the spring. We say they look wild. But they have the remoteness of their religion, their animistic vision, in their eyes, they can't see as we see. And they cannot accept us. They stare at us as the coyotes stare at us: the gulf of mutual negation between us.

So in groups, in pairs, singly, they ride silently down into the lower strata of

light, the aboriginal Americans riding into their shut-in reservations. While the white Americans hurry back to their motor-cars, and soon the air buzzes with starting engines, like the biggest of rattlesnakes buzzing.

8 - A LITTLE MOONSHINE WITH LEMON

‘Ye Gods, he doth bestride the narrow world
Like a Colossus...!’

There is a bright moon, so that even the vines make a shadow, and the Mediterranean has a broad white shimmer between its dimness. By the shore, the lights of the old houses twinkle quietly, and out of the wall of the headland advances the glare of a locomotive’s lamps. It is a feast day, St Catherine’s Day, and the men are all sitting round the little tables, down below, drinking wine or vermouth.

And what about the ranch, the little ranch in New Mexico? The time is different there: but I too have drunk my glass to St Catherine, so I can’t be bothered to reckon. I consider that there, too, the moon is in the south-east, standing, as it were, over Santa Fé, beyond the bend of those mountains of Picoris.

Sono io! say the Italians. I am I! Which sounds simpler than it is.

Because which I am I, after all, now that I have drunk a glass also to St Catherine, and the moon shines over the sea, and my thoughts, just because they are fleetingly occupied by the moon on the Mediterranean, and ringing with the last farewell: *Dunque, Signore! di nuovo!* — must needs follow the moon-track south-west, to the great South-west, where the ranch is.

They say: *in vino veritas*. Bah! They say so much! But in the wine of St Catherine, my little ranch, and the three horses down among the timber. Or if it has snowed, the horses are gone away, and it is snow, and the moon shines on the alfalfa slope, between the pines, and the cabins are blind. There is nobody there. Everything shut up. Only the big pine tree in front of the house, standing still and unconcerned, alive.

Perhaps when I have a *Weh* at all, my *Heimweh* is for the tree in front of the house, the overshadowing tree whose green top one never looks at. But on the trunk one hangs the various odds and ends of iron things. It is so near. One goes out of the door, and the tree-trunk is there, like a guardian angel.

The tree-trunk, and the long work table, and the fence! Then beyond, since it is night, and the moon shines, for me at least, away beyond is a light, at Taos, or at Ranchos de Taos. Here, the castle of Noli is on the western skyline. But there, no doubt it has snowed, since even here the wind is cold. There it has snowed, and the nearly full moon blazes wolf-like, as here it never blazes; risen like a were-wolf over the mountains. So there is a faint hoar shagginess of pine trees,

away at the foot of the alfalfa field, and a grey gleam of snow in the night, on the level desert, and a ruddy point of human light, in Ranchos de Taos.

And beyond, you see them even if you don't see them, the circling mountains, since there is a moon.

So, one hurries indoors, and throws more logs on the fire.

One doesn't either. One hears Giovanni calling from below, to say good-night! He is going down to the village for a spell. *Vado giù Signor Lorenzo! Buona notte!*

And the Mediterranean whispers in the distance, a sound like in a shell. And save that somebody is whistling, the night is very bright and still. The Mediterranean, so eternally young, the very symbol of youth! And Italy, so reputedly old, yet for ever so child-like and naïve! Never, never for a moment able to comprehend the wonderful, hoary age of America, the continent of the afterwards.

I wonder if I am here, or if I am just going to bed at the ranch. Perhaps looking in Montgomery Ward's catalogue for something for Christmas, and drinking moonshine and hot water, since it is cold. Go out and look if the chickens are shut up warm: if the horses are in sight: if Susan, the black cow, has gone to her nest among the trees, for the night. Cows don't eat much at night. But Susan will wander in the moon. The moon makes her uneasy. And the horses stamp around the cabins.

In a cold like this, the stars snap like distant coyotes, beyond the moon. And you'll see the shadow of actual coyotes, going across the alfalfa field. And the pine trees make little noises, sudden and stealthy, as if they were walking about. And the place heaves with ghosts. That place, the ranch, heaves with ghosts. But when one has got used to one's own home-ghosts, be they never so many, and so potent, they are like one's own family, but nearer than the blood. It is the ghosts one misses most, the ghosts there, of the Rocky Mountains, that never go beyond the timber and that linger, like the animals, round the water-spring. I know them, they know me: we go well together. But they reproach me for going away. They are resentful too.

Perhaps the snow is in tufts on the greasewood bushes. Perhaps the blue jay falls in a blue metallic cloud out of the pine trees in front of the house, at dawn, in the terrific cold, when the dangerous light comes watchful over the mountains, and touches the desert far-off, far-off, beyond the Rio Grande.

And I, I give it up. There is a choice of vermouth, Marsala, red wine or white. At the ranch, tonight, because it is cold, I should have moonshine, not very good moonshine, but still warming: with hot water and lemon, and sugar, and a bit of cinnamon from one of those little red Schilling's tins. And I should light my

little stove in the bedroom, and let it roar a bit, sucking the wind. Then dark to bed, with all the ghosts of the ranch cosily round me, and sleep till the very coldness of my emerged nose wakes me. Waking, I shall look at once through the glass panels of the bedroom door, and see the trunk of the great pine tree, like a person on guard, and a low star just coming over the mountain, very brilliant, like someone swinging an electric lantern.

Si vedrà la primavera.

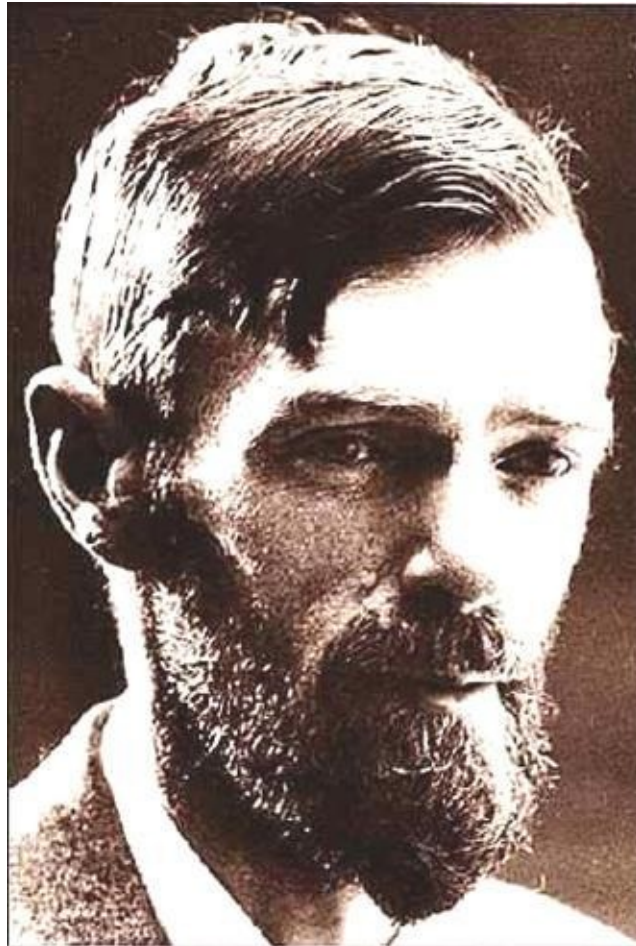
Fiorann' i mandorlini —

Ah, well, let it be vermouth, since there's no moonshine with lemon and cinnamon. Supposing I called Giovanni, and told him I wanted:

'Un poco di chiar' di luna, con canella e limone...'

THE END

The Poetry Collections



D .H. LAWRENCE’S POETRY: A BRIEF INTRODUCTION



Though famous for his ground-breaking novels, D. H. Lawrence was also a very accomplished poet, having written over 800 verses during his relatively short life. His first poems were written in 1904, appearing in Ford Madox Ford’s new literary venture *The English Review*. His early poems clearly place Lawrence in the school of Georgian poets, a group not only named after the reigning monarch but also in reference to the romantic poets of the previous Georgian period, whose work they so admired. These early poems employed well-worn poetic tropes and deliberately archaic language, many displaying what John Ruskin referred to as ‘the pathetic fallacy’ — the tendency to ascribe human emotions to animals and even inanimate objects.

Lawrence’s poetry was to take a dramatic change following the First World War. His poems now adopted a free verse style, influenced by Walt Whitman. Lawrence set forth his manifesto for much of his later verse in the introduction to *New Poems*, where he explains:

“We can get rid of the stereotyped movements and the old hackneyed associations of sound or sense. We can break down those artificial conduits and canals through which we do so love to force our utterance. We can break the stiff neck of habit...But we cannot positively prescribe any motion, any rhythm.”

Lawrence’s most celebrated poems are those that depict nature, such as the verses found in *Birds Beasts and Flowers and Tortoises. Snake*, one of his most frequently anthologised works, presents man’s modern distance from nature — a recurring theme of Lawrence’s later poetry — whilst deftly hinting at religious themes.

Although Lawrence’s later works were clearly composed in the modernist tradition, they often differed greatly to other modernist writers, which were tended to be austere in their approach, with every word being carefully worked upon in a meticulous fashion. Yet Lawrence strongly believed that all poems should be personal sentiments and that spontaneity was vital for any successful work. He titled one of his later collections of poems *Pansies*, partly to embody the simple and ephemeral nature of the verses.

Although the poet lived most of the last ten years of his life abroad, his

thoughts were often on his homeland of England. Published in 1930, just eleven days after Lawrence's death, his last complete collection *Nettles* offered a series of bitter, 'nettling' and wry attacks on the moral climate of England, which he had felt bound to escape earlier in his life. Following his death, two notebooks of Lawrence's unprinted verse were posthumously published as *Last Poems* and *More Pansies*, containing two of his most famous poems about death, *Bavarian Gentians* and *The Ship of Death*, confirming the remarkable insight he had as not only a novelist, but as a poet of the highest order.

*"Oh build your ship of death. Oh build it!
for you will need it.
For the voyage of oblivion awaits you."*

The Ship of Death, 1930

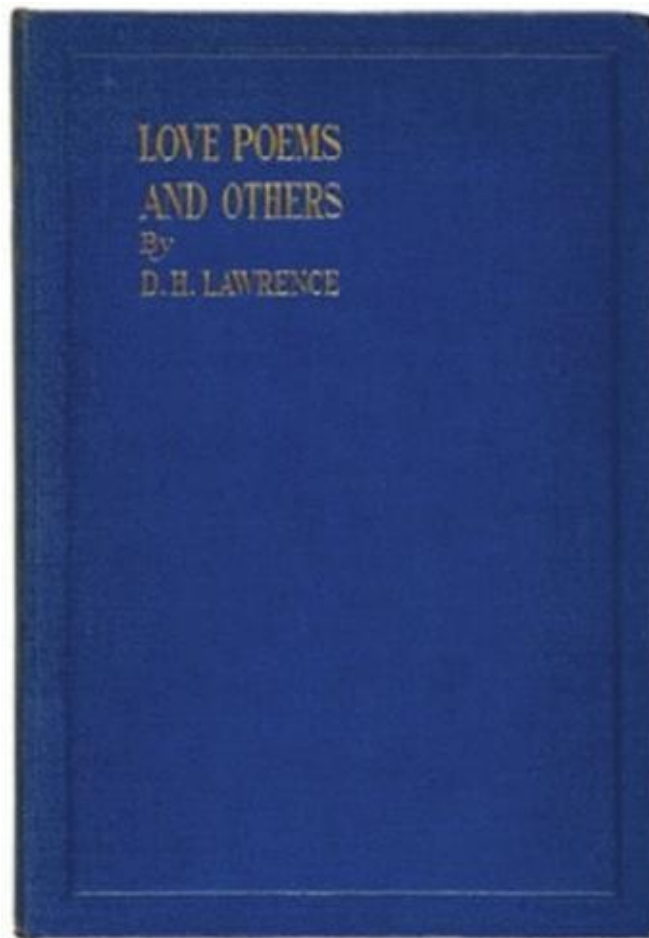
LOVE POEMS AND OTHERS



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The first edition

WEDDING MORN

The morning breaks like a pomegranate
In a shining crack of red,
Ah, when tomorrow the dawn comes late
Whitening across the bed,
It will find me watching at the marriage gate
And waiting while light is shed
On him who is sleeping satiate,
With a sunk, abandoned head.

And when the dawn comes creeping in,
Cautiously I shall raise
Myself to watch the morning win
My first of days,
As it shows him sleeping a sleep he got
Of me, as under my gaze,
He grows distinct, and I see his hot
Face freed of the wavering blaze.

Then I shall know which image of God
My man is made toward,
And I shall know my bitter rod
Or my rich reward.
And I shall know the stamp and worth
Of the coin I've accepted as mine,
Shall see an image of heaven or of earth
On his minted metal shine.

Yea and I long to see him sleep
In my power utterly,
I long to know what I have to keep,
I long to see
My love, that spinning coin, laid still
And plain at the side of me,
For me to count — for I know he will
Greatly enrichen me.

And then he will be mine, he will lie
In my power utterly,
Opening his value plain to my eye
He will sleep of me.
He will lie negligent, resign
His all to me, and I
Shall watch the dawn light up for me
This sleeping wealth of mine.

And I shall watch the wan light shine
On his sleep that is filled of me,
On his brow where the wisps of fond hair twine
So truthfully,
On his lips where the light breaths come and go
Naïve and winsomely,
On his limbs that I shall weep to know
Lie under my mastery.

KISSES IN THE TRAIN

I saw the midlands
Revolve through her hair;
The fields of autumn
Stretching bare,
And sheep on the pasture
Tossed back in a scare.

And still as ever
The world went round,
My mouth on her pulsing
Neck was found,
And my breast to her beating
Breast was bound.

But my heart at the centre
Of all, in a swoond
Was still as a pivot,
As all the ground
On its prowling orbit
Shifted round.

And still in my nostrils
The scent of her flesh,
And still my wet mouth
Sought her afresh;
And still one pulse
Through the world did thresh.

And the world all whirling
Around in joy
Like the dance of a dervish
Did destroy
My sense — and my reason
Spun like a toy.

But firm at the centre
My heart was found;
Her own to my perfect
Heart-beat bound,
Like a magnet's keeper
Closing the round.

CRUELTY AND LOVE

What large, dark hands are those at the window
Lifted, grasping the golden light
Which weaves its way through the creeper leaves
 To my heart's delight?

Ah, only the leaves! But in the west,
In the west I see a redness come
Over the evening's burning breast —
 — 'Tis the wound of love goes home!

The woodbine creeps abroad
Calling low to her lover:
The sun-lit flirt who all the day
Has poised above her lips in play
And stolen kisses, shallow and gay
Of pollen, now has gone away
 — She woos the moth with her sweet, low word,
And when above her his broad wings hover
Then her bright breast she will uncover
And yield her honey-drop to her lover.

Into the yellow, evening glow
Saunters a man from the farm below,
Leans, and looks in at the low-built shed
Where hangs the swallow's marriage bed.
The bird lies warm against the wall.
She glances quick her startled eyes
Towards him, then she turns away
Her small head, making warm display
Of red upon the throat. His terrors sway
Her out of the nest's warm, busy ball,
Whose plaintive cry is heard as she flies
In one blue stoop from out the sties
Into the evening's empty hall.

Oh, water-hen, beside the rushes
Hide your quaint, unfading blushes,
Still your quick tail, and lie as dead,
Till the distance folds over his ominous tread.

The rabbit presses back her ears,
Turns back her liquid, anguished eyes
And crouches low: then with wild spring
Spurts from the terror of his oncoming
To be choked back, the wire ring
Her frantic effort throttling:
Piteous brown ball of quivering fears!

Ah soon in his large, hard hands she dies,
And swings all loose to the swing of his walk.
Yet calm and kindly are his eyes
And ready to open in brown surprise
Should I not answer to his talk
Or should he my tears surmise.

I hear his hand on the latch, and rise from my chair
Watching the door open: he flashes bare
His strong teeth in a smile, and flashes his eyes
In a smile like triumph upon me; then careless-wise
He flings the rabbit soft on the table board
And comes towards me: ah, the uplifted sword
Of his hand against my bosom, and oh, the broad
Blade of his hand that raises my face to applaud
His coming: he raises up my face to him
And caresses my mouth with his fingers, which still smell grim
Of the rabbit's fur! God, I am caught in a snare!
I know not what fine wire is round my throat,
I only know I let him finger there
My pulse of life, letting him nose like a stoat
Who sniffs with joy before he drinks the blood:

And down his mouth comes to my mouth, and down
His dark bright eyes descend like a fiery hood
Upon my mind: his mouth meets mine, and a flood
Of sweet fire sweeps across me, so I drown
Within him, die, and find death good.

CHERRY ROBBERS

Under the long, dark boughs, like jewels red
In the hair of an Eastern girl
Shine strings of crimson cherries, as if had bled
Blood-drops beneath each curl.

Under the glistening cherries, with folded wings
Three dead birds lie:
Pale-breasted throats and a blackbird, robberlings
Stained with red dye.

Under the haystack a girl stands laughing at me,
With cherries hung round her ears —
Offering me her scarlet fruit: I will see
If she has any tears.

LILIES IN THE FIRE

I

Ah, you stack of white lilies, all white and gold,
A am adrift as a sunbeam, and without form
Or having, save I light on you to warm
Your pallor into radiance, flush your cold

White beauty into incandescence: you
Are not a stack of white lilies tonight, but a white
And clustered star transfigured by me tonight,
And lighting these ruddy leaves like a star dropped through

The slender bare arms of the branches, your tire-maidens
Who lift swart arms to fend me off; but I come
Like a wind of fire upon you, like to some
Stray whitebeam who on you his fire unladens.

And you are a glistening toadstool shining here
Among the crumpled beech-leaves phosphorescent,
My stack of white lilies burning incandescent
Of me, a soft white star among the leaves, my dear.

II

Is it with pain, my dear, that you shudder so?
Is it because I have hurt you with pain, my dear?

Did I shiver? — Nay, truly I did not know —
A dewdrop may-be splashed on my face down here.

Why even now you speak through close-shut teeth,
I have been too much for you — Ah, I remember!

The ground is a little chilly underneath
The leaves — and, dear, you consume me all to an ember.

You hold yourself all hard as if my kisses
Hurt as I gave them — you put me away —

Ah never I put you away: yet each kiss hisses
Hot as a drop of fire wastes me away.

III

I am ashamed, you wanted me not tonight —
Nay, it is always so, you sigh with me.
Your radiance dims when I draw too near, and my free
Fire enters your petals like death, you wilt dead white.

Ah, I do know, and I am deep ashamed;
You love me while I hover tenderly
Like clinging sunbeams kissing you: but see
When I close in fire upon you, and you are flamed

With the swiftest fire of my love, you are destroyed.
'Tis a degradation deep to me, that my best
Soul's whitest lightning which should bright attest
God stepping down to earth in one white stride,

Means only to you a clogged, numb burden of flesh
Heavy to bear, even heavy to uprear
Again from earth, like lilies wilted and sere
Flagged on the floor, that before stood up so fresh.

COLDNESS IN LOVE

And you remember, in the afternoon
The sea and the sky went grey, as if there had sunk
A flocculent dust on the floor of the world: the festoon
Of the sky sagged dusty as spider cloth,
And coldness clogged the sea, till it ceased to croon.

A dank, sickening scent came up from the grime
Of weed that blackened the shore, so that I recoiled
Feeling the raw cold dun me: and all the time
You leapt about on the slippery rocks, and threw
The words that rang with a brassy, shallow chime.

And all day long that raw and ancient cold
Deadened me through, till the grey downs darkened to sleep.
Then I longed for you with your mantle of love to fold
Me over, and drive from out of my body the deep
Cold that had sunk to my soul, and there kept hold.

But still to me all evening long you were cold,
And I was numb with a bitter, deathly ache;
Till old days drew me back into their fold,
And dim sheep crowded me warm with companionship,
And old ghosts clustered me close, and sleep was cajoled.

I slept till dawn at the window blew in like dust,
Like the linty, raw-cold dust disturbed from the floor
Of a disused room: a grey pale light like must
That settled upon my face and hands till it seemed
To flourish there, as pale mould blooms on a crust.

Then I rose in fear, needing you fearfully,
For I thought you were warm as a sudden jet of blood.
I thought I could plunge in your spurting hotness, and be

Clean of the cold and the must. — With my hand on the latch
I heard you in your sleep speak strangely to me.

And I dared not enter, feeling suddenly dismayed.
So I went and washed my deadened flesh in the sea
And came back tingling clean, but worn and frayed
With cold, like the shell of the moon: and strange it seems
That my love has dawned in rose again, like the love of a maid.

END OF ANOTHER HOME

When shall I see the half-moon sink again
Behind the black sycamore at the end of the garden?
When will the scent of the dim white phlox
Creep up the wall to me, and in at my open window?
Why is it, the long, slow stroke of the midnight bell
(Will it never finish the twelve?)
Falls again and again on my heart with a heavy reproach?
The moon-mist is over the village, out of the mist speaks the bell,
And all the little roofs of the village bow low, pitiful, beseeching, resigned.
—Speak, you my home! what is it I don't do well?
Ah home, suddenly I love you
As I hear the sharp clean trot of a pony down the road,
Succeeding sharp little sounds dropping into silence
Clear upon the long-drawn hoarseness of a train across the valley.
The light has gone out, from under my mother's door.
That she should love me so!—
She, so lonely, greying now!
And I leaving her,
Bent on my pursuits!
Love is the great Asker.
The sun and the rain do not ask the secret
Of the time when the grain struggles down in the dark.
The moon walks her lonely way without anguish,
Because no-one grieves over her departure.
Forever, ever by my shoulder pitiful love will linger,
Crouching as little houses crouch under the mist when I turn.
Forever, out of the mist, the church lifts up a reproachful finger
Pointing my eyes in wretched defiance where love hides her face to mourn.
Oh! but the rain creeps down to wet the grain
That struggles alone in the dark,
And asking nothing, patiently steals back again!
The moon sets forth o' nights
To walk the lonely, dusky heights
Serenely, with steps unswerving;

Pursued by no sigh of bereavement,
No tears of love unnerving
Her constant tread
While ever at my side,
Frail and sad, with grey, bowed head,
The beggar-woman, the yearning-eyed
Inexorable love goes lagging.
The wild young heifer, glancing distraught,
With a strange new knocking of life at her side
Runs seeking a loneliness.
The little grain draws down the earth, to hide.
Nay, even the slumberous egg, as it labours under the shell
Patiently to divide and self-divide,
Asks to be hidden, and wishes nothing to tell.
But when I draw the scanty cloak of silence over my eyes
Piteous love comes peering under the hood;
Touches the clasp with trembling fingers, and tries
To put her ear to the painful sob of my blood;
While her tears soak through to my breast,
Where they burn and cauterize.
The moon lies back and reddens.
In the valley a corncrake calls
Monotonously,
With a plaintive, unalterable voice, that deadens
My confident activity;
With a hoarse, insistent request that falls
Unweariedly, unweariedly,
Asking something more of me,
Yet more of me.

REMINDER

Do you remember
How night after night swept level and low
Overhead, at home, and had not one star,
Nor one narrow gate for the moon to go
Forth to her field of November.

And you remember,
How towards the north a red blot on the sky
Burns like a blotch of anxiety
Over the forges, and small flames ply
Like ghosts the shadow of the ember.

Those were the days
When it was awful autumn to me,
When only there glowed on the dark of the sky
The red reflection of her agony,
My beloved smelting down in the blaze

Of death — my dearest
Love who had borne, and was now leaving me.
And I at the foot of her cross did suffer
My own gethsemane.

So I came to you,
And twice, after great kisses, I saw
The rim of the moon divinely rise
And strive to detach herself from the raw
Blackened edge of the skies.

Strive to escape;
With her whiteness revealing my sunken world
Tall and loftily shadowed. But the moon
Never magnolia-like unfurled

Her white, her lamp-like shape.

for you told me no,
And bade me not to ask for the dour
Communion, offering — “a better thing.”
So I lay on your breast for an obscure hour
Feeling your fingers go

Like a rhythmic breeze
Over my hair, and tracing my brows,
Till I knew you not from a little wind:
— I wonder now if God allows
Us only one moment of his keys.

If only then
You could have unlocked the moon on the night,
And I baptized myself in the light
Of your love; we both have entered then the white
Pure passion, and never again.

I wonder if only
You had taken me then, how different
Life would have been: should I have spent
Myself in waste, and you have bent
Your pride, through being lonely?

BEI HENNEF

The little river twittering in the twilight,
The wan, wondering look of the pale sky,
This is almost bliss.

And everything shut up and gone to sleep,
All the troubles and anxieties and pain
Gone under the twilight.

Only the twilight now, and the soft "Sh!" of the river
That will last for ever.

And at last I know my love for you is here;
I can see it all, it is whole like the twilight,
It is large, so large, I could not see it before,
Because of the little lights and flickers and interruptions,
Troubles, anxieties and pains.

You are the call and I am the answer,
You are the wish, and I the fulfilment,
You are the night, and I the day.
What else - it is perfect enough.
It is perfectly complete,
You and I,
What more — ?

Strange, how we suffer in spite of this.

LIGHTNING

I felt the lurch and halt of her heart
Next my breast, where my own heart was beating;
And I laughed to feel it plunge and bound,
And strange in my blood-swept ears was the sound
Of the words I kept repeating,
Repeating with tightened arms, and the hot blood's blindfold art.

Her breath flew warm against my neck,
Warm as a flame in the close night air;
And the sense of her clinging flesh was sweet
Where her arms and my neck's blood-surge could meet.
Holding her thus, did I care
That the black night hid her from me, blotted out every speck?

I leaned me forward to find her lips,
And claim her utterly in a kiss,
When the lightning flew across her face,
And I saw her for the flaring space
Of a second, afraid of the clips
Of my arms, inert with dread, wilted in fear of my kiss.

A moment, like a wavering spark,
Her face lay there before my breast,
Pale love lost in a snow of fear,
And guarded by a glittering tear,
And lips apart with dumb cries;
A moment, and she was taken again in the merciful dark.

I heard the thunder, and felt the rain,
And my arms fell loose, and I was dumb.
Almost I hated her, she was so good.
Hated myself, and the place, and my blood,
Which burned with rage, as I bade her come
Home, away home, ere the lightning floated forth again.

SONG-DAY IN AUTUMN

When the autumn roses
Are heavy with dew,
Before the mist discloses
The leaf's brown hue,
You would, among the laughing hills
Of yesterday
Walk innocent in the daffodils,
Coiffing up your auburn hair
In a puritan fillet, a chaste white snare
To catch and keep me with you there
So far away.

When from the autumn roses
Trickles the dew,
When the blue mist uncloses
And the sun looks through,
You from those startled hills
Come away,
Out of the withering daffodils;
Thoughtful, and half afraid,
Plaiting a heavy, auburn braid
And coiling it round the wise brows of a maid
Who was scared in her play.

When in the autumn roses
Creeps a bee,
And a trembling flower encloses
His ecstasy,
You from your lonely walk
Turn away,
And leaning to me like a flower on its stalk,
Wait among the beeches
For your late bee who beseeches
To creep through your loosened hair till he reaches,

Your heart of dismay.

AWARE

Slowly the moon is rising out of the ruddy haze,
Divesting herself of her golden shift, and so
Emerging white and exquisite; and I in amaze
See in the sky before me, a woman I did not know
I loved, but there she goes and her beauty hurts my heart;
I follow her down the night, begging her not to depart.

A PANG OF REMINISCENCE

High and smaller goes the moon, she is small and very far from me,
Wistful and candid, watching me wistfully, and I see
Trembling blue in her pallor a tear that surely I have seen before,
A tear which I had hoped that even hell held not again in store.

A WHITE BLOSSOM

A tiny moon as white and small as a single jasmine flower
Leans all alone above my window, on night's wintry bower,
Liquid as lime-tree blossom, soft as brilliant water or rain
She shines, the one white love of my youth, which all sin cannot stain.

RED MOON-RISE

The train in running across the weald has fallen into a steadier stroke
So even, it beats like silence, and sky and earth in one unbroke
Embrace of darkness lie around, and crushed between them all the loose
And littered lettering of leaves and hills and houses closed, and we can use
The open book of landscape no more, for the covers of darkness have shut upon
Its written pages, and sky and earth and all between are closed in one.

And we are smothered between the darkness, we close our eyes and say "Hush!"
we try
To escape in sleep the terror of this immense deep darkness, and we lie
Wrapped up for sleep. And then, dear God, from out of the twofold darkness, red
As if from the womb the moon arises, as if the twin-walled darkness had bled
In one great spasm of birth and given us this new, red moon-rise
Which lies on the knees of the darkness bloody, and makes us hide our eyes.

The train beats frantic in haste, and struggles away
From this ruddy terror of birth that has slid down
From out of the loins of night to flame our way
With fear; but God, I am glad, so glad that I drown
My terror with joy of confirmation, for now
Lies God all red before me, and I am glad,
As the Magi were when they saw the rosy brow
Of the Infant bless their constant folly which had
Brought them thither to God: for now I know
That the Womb is a great red passion whence rises all
The shapeliness that decks us here-below:
Yea like the fire that boils within this ball
Of earth, and quickens all herself with flowers,
God burns within the stiffened clay of us;
And every flash of thought that we and ours
Send up to heaven, and every movement, does
Fly like a spark from this God-fire of passion;
And pain of birth, and joy of begetting,
And sweat of labour, and the meanest fashion

Of fretting or of gladness, but the jetting
Of a trail of the great fire against the sky
Where we can see it, a jet from the innermost fire:
And even in the watery shells that lie
Alive within the oozy under-mire,
A grain of this same fire I can descry.

And then within the screaming birds that fly
Across the lightning when the storm leaps higher;
And then the swirling, flaming folk that try
To come like fire-flames at their fierce desire,
They are as earth's dread, spurting flames that ply
Awhile and gush forth death and their expire.
And though it be love's wet blue eyes that cry
To hot love to relinquish its desire,
Still in their depths I see the same red spark
As rose tonight upon us from the dark.

RETURN

Now I am come again, you who have so desired
My coming, why do you look away from me?
Why does your cheek burn against me — have I inspired
Such anger as sets your mouth unwontedly?

Ah, here I sit while you break the music beneath
Your bow; for broken it is, and hurting to hear:
Cease then from music — does anguish of absence bequeath
Me only aloofness when I would draw near?

THE APPEAL

You, Helen, who see the stars
As mistletoe berries burning in a black tree,
You surely, seeing I am a bowl of kisses,
Should put your mouth to mine and drink of me.

Helen, you let my kisses steam
Wasteful into the night's black nostrils; drink
Me up I pray; oh you who are Night's Bacchante,
How can you from my bowl of kisses shrink!

REPULSED

The last, silk-floating thought has gone from the dandelion stem,
And the flesh of the stalk holds up for nothing a blank diadem.
The night's flood-winds have lifted my last desire from me,
And my hollow flesh stands up in the night abandonedly.

As I stand on this hill, with the whitening cave of the city beyond,
Helen, I am despoiled of my pride, and my soul turns fond:
Overhead the nightly heavens like an open, immense eye.

Like a cat's distended pupil sparkles with sudden stars,
As with thoughts that flash and crackle in uncouth malignancy
They glitter at me, and I fear the fierce snapping of night's thought-stars.

Beyond me, up the darkness, goes the gush of the lights of two towns,
As the breath which rushes upwards from the nostrils of an immense
Life crouched across the globe, ready, if need be, to pounce
Across the space upon heaven's high hostile eminence.

All round me, but far away, the night's twin consciousness roars
With sounds that endlessly swell and sink like the storm of thought in the brain.
Lifting and falling like slow breaths taken, pulsing like oars

Immense that beat the blood of the night down its vein.
The night is immense and awful, Helen, and I am insect small
In the fur of this hill, clung on to the fur of shaggy, black heather.

A palpitant speck in the fur of the night, and afraid of all,
Seeing the world and the sky like creatures hostile together.

And I in the fur of the world, and you a pale fleck from the sky,
How we hate each other to-night, hate, you and I,

As the world of activity hates the dream that goes on on high,
As a man hates the dreaming woman he loves, but who will not reply.

DREAM-CONFUSED

Is that the moon
At the window so big and red?
No-one in the room?
No-one near the bed?

Listen, her shoon
Palpitating down the stair!
- Or a best of wings at the window there?

A moment ago
She kissed me warm on the mouth;
The very moon in the south
Is warm with a ruddy glow;
The moon, from far abysses
Signalling those two kisses.

And now the moon
Goes clouded, having misunderstood.
And slowly back in my blood
My kisses are sinking, soon
To be under the flood.

We misunderstood!

COROT

The trees rise tall and taller, lifted
On a subtle rush of cool grey flame
That issuing out of the dawn has sifted
The spirit from each leaf's frame.

For the trailing, leisurely rapture of life
Drifts dimly forward, easily hidden
By bright leaves uttered aloud, and strife
Of shapes in the grey mist hidden.

The grey, phosphorescent, pellucid advance
Of the luminous purpose of God, shines out
Where the lofty trees athwart stream chance
To shake flakes of its shadow about.

The subtle, steady rush of the whole
Grey foam-mist of advancing God,
As He silently sweeps to His somewhere, his goal,
Is heard in the grass of the sod.

Is heard in the windless whisper of leaves
In the silent labours of men in the fields.
In the downward dropping of flimsy sheaves
Of cloud the rain skies yield.

In the tapping haste of a fallen leaf.
In the flapping of red-roof smoke, and the small
Foot-stepping tap of men beneath
These trees so huge and tall,

For what can all sharp-rimmed substance but catch

In a backward ripple, God's purpose, reveal
For a moment His mighty direction, snatch
A spark beneath His wheel.

Since God sweeps onward dim and vast,
Creating the channelled vein of Man
And Leaf for His passage. His shadow is cast
On all for us to scan.

Ah listen, for Silence is not lonely:
Imitate the magnificent trees
That speak no word of their rapture, but only
Breathe largely the luminous breeze.

MORNING WORK

A GANG of labourers on the piled wet timber
That shines blood-red beside the railway siding
Seem to be making out of the blue of the morning
Something faery and fine, the shuttles sliding,

The red-gold spools of their hands and faces shuttling
Hither and thither across the morn's crystalline frame
Of blue: trolls at the cave of ringing cerulean mining,
And laughing with work, living their work like a game.

TRANSFORMATIONS

I

The Town

Oh you stiff shapes, swift transformation seethes
About you: only last night you were
A Sodom smouldering in the dense, soiled air;
To-day a thicket of sunshine with blue smoke-wreaths.

To-morrow swimming in evening's vague, dim vapour
Like a weeded city in shadow under the sea,
Beneath an ocean of shimmering light you will be:
Then a group of toadstools waiting the moon's white taper.

And when I awake in the morning, after rain,
To find the new houses a cluster of lilies glittering
In scarlet, alive with the birds' bright twittering,
I'll say your bond of ugliness is vain.

II

The Earth

Oh Earth, you spinning clod of earth.
And then you lamp, you lemon-coloured beauty;
Oh Earth, you rotten apple rolling downward,
Then brilliant Earth, from the burr of night in beauty
As a jewel-brown horse-chestnut newly issued: —
You are all these, and strange, it is my duty
To take you all, sordid or radiant tissue.

III

Men

Oh labourers, oh shuttles across the blue frame of morning,
You feet of the rainbow balancing the sky!
Oh you who flash your arms like rockets to heaven,
Who in lassitude lean as yachts on the sea-wind lie!
You who in crowds are rhododendrons in blossom,
Who stand alone in pride like lighted lamps;
Who grappling down with work or hate or passion.
Take strange lithe form of a beast that sweats and ramps:
You who are twisted in grief like crumpled beech-leaves,
Who curl in sleep like kittens, who kiss as a swarm
Of clustered, vibrating bees; who fall to earth
At last like a bean-pod: what are you, oh multiform?

RENAISSANCE

We have bit no forbidden apple,
Eve and I,
Yet the splashes of day and night
Falling round us no longer dapple
The same Eden with purple and white.

This is our own still valley
Our Eden, our home,
But day shows it vivid with feeling
And the pallor of night does not tally
With dark sleep that once covered its ceiling.

My little red heifer, to-night I looked in her eyes,
— She will calve to-morrow:
Last night when I went with the lantern, the sow was grabbing her litter

With red, snarling jaws: and I heard the cries
Of the new-born, and after that, the old owl, then the bats that flutter.

And I woke to the sound of the wood-pigeons, and lay and listened,
Till I could borrow
A few quick beats of a wood-pigeon's heart, and when
I did rise

The morning sun on the shaken iris glistened,
And I saw that home, this valley, was wider than
Paradise,

I learned it all from my Eve
This warm, dumb wisdom.
She's a finer instructress than years;
She has taught my heart-strings to weave

Through the web of all laughter and tears.

And now I see the valley
Fleshed all like me
With feelings that change and quiver:
And all things seem to tally

With something in me,
Something of which she's the giver.

DOG-TIRED

If she would come to me here
Now the sunken swaths
Are glittering paths
To the sun, and the swallows cut clear
Into the setting sun! if she came to me here!

If she would come to me now,
Before the last-mown harebells are dead;
While that vetch-clump still burns red!
Before all the bats have dropped from the bough
To cool in the night; if she came to me now!

The horses are untackled, the chattering machine
Is still at last. If she would come
We could gather up the dry hay from
The hill-brow, and lie quite still, till the green
Sky ceased to quiver, and lost its active sheen.

I should like to drop
On the hay, with my head on her knee,
And lie dead still, while she
Breathed quiet above me; and the crop
Of stars grew silently.

I should like to lie still
As if I was dead; but feeling
Her hand go stealing
Over my face and my head, until
This ache was shed.

MICHAEL-ANGELO

God shook thy roundness in His finger's cup,
He sunk His hands in firmness down thy sides,
And drew the circle of His grasp, O Man,
Along thy limbs delighted, thine, His bride's.

And so thou wert God-shapen: His finger
Curved thy mouth for thee, and His strong shoulder
Planted thee upright: art not proud to see
In the curve of thine exquisite form the joy of the Moulder?

He took a handful of light and rolled a ball,
Compressed it till its beam grew wondrous dark,
Then gave thee thy dark eyes, O Man, that all
He made had doorway to thee through that spark.

God, lonely, put down His mouth in a kiss of creation.
He kissed thee, O Man, in a passion of love, and left
The vivid life of His love in thy mouth and thy nostrils;
Keep then the kiss from the adulteress' theft.

DIALECT POEMS

VIOLETS

Sister, tha knows while we was on the planks
Aside o' th' grave, while th' coffin wor lyin' yet

On th' yaller clay, an' th' white flowers top of it
Tryin' to keep off 'n him a bit o' th' wet,

An' parson makin' haste, an' a' the black
Huddlin' close together a cause o' th' rain,

Did t' 'appen ter notice a bit of a lass away back
By a head-stun, sobbin' an' sobbin' again?

— How should I be lookin' round

An' me standin' on the plank
Beside the open ground,

Where our Ted 'ud soon be sank?

Yi, an' 'im that young,
Snapped sudden out of all
His wickedness, among

Pals worse n'r ony name as you could call.

Let be that; there's some o' th' bad as we
Like better nor all your good, an' 'e was one.

— An' cos I liked him best, yi, bett'r nor thee,
I canna bide to think where he is gone.

Ah know tha liked 'im bett'r nor me. But let

Me tell thee about this lass. When you had gone

Ah stopped behind on t' pad i' th' drippin wet
An' watched what 'er 'ad on.

Tha should ha' seed her slive up when we'd gone,
Tha should ha' seed her kneel an' look in

At th' sloppy wet grave — an' 'er little neck shone
That white, an' 'er shook that much, I'd like to begin

Scraightin' my-sen as well. 'En undid her black
Jacket at th' bosom, an' took from out of it

Over a double 'andful of violets, all in a pack
Ravelled blue and white — warm, for a bit

O' th' smell come waftin' to me. 'Er put 'er face
Right intil 'em and scraighted out again,

Then after a bit 'er dropped 'em down that place,
An' I come away, because o' the teemin' rain.

WHETHER OR NOT

I

Dunna thee tell me its his'n, mother,

Dunna thee, dunna thee.

— Oh ay! he'll be comin' to tell thee his-sen

Wench, wanna he?

Tha doesna mean to say to me, mother,

He's gone wi that —

— My gel, owt'U do for a man i' the dark,

Tha's got it flat.

But 'er's old, mother, 'er's twenty year

Older nor him —

— Ay, an' yaller as a crowflower, an' yet i' the dark

Er'd do for Tim.

Tha niver believes it, mother, does ter?

It's somebody's lies.

— Ax him thy-sen wench — a widder's lodger;

It's no surprise.

II

A widow of forty-five
With a bitter, swarthy skin,
To ha' 'ticed a lad o' twenty-five
An' 'im to have been took in!

A widow of forty-five

As has sludged like a horse all her life,

Till 'er's tough as whit-leather, to slive

Atween a lad an' 'is wife!

A widow of forty-five,
A tough old otchel wi' long

Witch teeth, an' 'er black hawk-eyes as I've
Mistrusted all along!

An' me as 'as kep my-sen
Shut like a daisy bud,
Clean an' new an' nice, so's when
He wed he'd ha'e summat good!

An' 'im as nice an' fresh
As any man i' the force,

To ha'e gone an' given his white young flesh

To a woman that coarse!

III

You're stout to brave this snow, Miss Stainwright,

Are you makin' Brinsley way?
— I'm off up th' line to Underwood

Wi' a dress as is wanted to-day.

Oh are you goin' to Underwood?

'Appen then you've 'eered?
— What's that as 'appen I've 'eered-on, Missis,

Speak up, you nedna be feared.

Why, your young man an' Widow Naylor,

Her as he lodges wi',
They say he's got her wi' childt; but there.

It's nothing to do wi' me.

Though if it's true they'll turn him out
O' th' p'lice force, without fail;

An' if it's not true, I'd back my life
They'll listen to her tale.

Well, I'm believin' no tale, Missis,

I'm seein' for my-sen;
An' when I know for sure, Missis,

I'll talk then.

IV

Nay robin red-breast, tha nedna

Sit noddin' thy head at me;
My breast's as red as thine, I reckon,

Flayed red, if tha could but see.

Nay, you blessed pee-whips,

You nedna screet at me!
I'm screetin' my-sen, but are-na goin'

To let iv'rybody see.

Tha art smock-ravelled, bunny,

Larropin' neck an' crop
r th' snow: but I's warrant thee, bunny,

Fm further ower th' top.

V

Now sithee theer at th' railroad crossin'
Warmin' his-sen at the stool o' fire
Under the tank as fills the ingines.
If there isn't my dearly-beloved liar!

My constable wi' 'is buttoned breast

As stout as the truth, my sirs! — An' 'is face

As bold as a robin! It's much he cares
For this nice old shame and disgrace.

Oh but he drops his flag when 'e sees me,
Yes, an' 'is face goes white ... oh yes
Tha can stare at me wi' thy fierce blue eyes,
But tha doesna stare me out, I guess!

VI

Whatever brings thee out so far
In a' this depth o' snow?
— I'm takin' 'ome a weddin' dress

If tha maun know.

Why, is there a weddin' at Underwood,

As tha ne'd trudge up here?
— It's Widow Naylor's weddin'-dress,

An' 'er's wantin it, I hear.

'^r doesna want no weddin-dress ...

What — but what dost mean?
— Doesn't ter know what I mean, Tim? — Yi,

Tha must' a' been hard to wean!

Tha'rt a good-un at suckin-in yet, Timmy;

But tell me, isn't it true
As 'er'll be wantin' my weddin' dress

In a week or two?

Tha's no occasions ter ha'e me on

Lizzie — what's done is done!
— Done, I should think so — Done! But might

I ask when tha begun?
It's thee as 'as done it as much as me,

Lizzie, I tell thee that.
— “ Me gotten a childt to thy landlady — ! “

Tha's gotten thy answer pat,

As tha allers hast — but let me tell thee
Hasna ter sent me whoam, when I

Was a'most burstin' mad o' my-sen
An' walkin' in agony;

After thy kisses, Lizzie, after

Tha's lain right up to me Lizzie, an' melted
Into me, melted into me, Lizzie,

Till I was verily swelted.

An' if my landlady seed me like it.

An' if 'er clawkin', tiger's eyes
Went through me just as the light went out

Is it any cause for surprise?

No cause for surprise at all, my lad,

After lickin' and snuffin' at me, tha could

Turn thy mouth on a woman like her —
Did ter find her good?

Ay, I did, but afterwards

I should like to ha' killed her!
— Afterwards! — an' after how long

Wor it tha'd liked to 'a killed her?

Say no more, Liz, dunna thee,

I might lose my-sen.
— I'll only say good-bye to thee, Timothy,

An' gi'e her thee back again,

I'll ta'e thy word ' Good-bye,' Liz,
But I shonna marry her,

I shonna for nobody. — It is
Very nice on you, Sir.

The childt maun ta'e its luck, it maun,
An' she maun ta'e her luck,

For I tell ye I shonna marry her —
What her's got, her took.

That's spoken like a man, Timmy,
That's spoken like a man . . .

“He up an' fired off his pistol
An' then away he ran.”

I damn well shanna marry 'er,

So chew at it no more,
Or I'll chuck the flamin' lot of you —

— You nedn't have swore.

VII

That's his collar round the candle-stick
An' that's the dark blue tie I bought 'im,
An' these is the woman's kids he's so fond on,
An' 'ere comes the cat that caught 'im.

I dunno where his eyes was — a gret
Round-shouldered hag! My sirs, to think
Of him stoopin' to her! You'd wonder he could
I expect you know who I am, Mrs Nay lor!

— Whoyerare? — yis, you're Lizzie Stainwright.
'An' 'appen you might guess what I've come for?

— 'Appen I mightn't, appen I might.

You knowed as I was courtin' Tim Merfin.

— Yis, I knowed 'e wor courtin' thee.
An' yet you've been carryin on wi' him.

— Ay, an' 'im wi' me.

Well, now you've got to pay for it,

— An' if I han, what's that to thee?
For 'e isn't goin' to marry you.

— Is it a toss-up 'twixt thee an' me.-^

It's no toss-up 'twixt thee an' me.

— Then what art colleyfoglin' for?
I'm not havin' your orts an' slarts.

— Which on us said you wor?

I want you to know 'e's non marryin you.

— Tha wants 'im thy-sen too bad.
Though I'll see as 'e pays you, an' comes to the scratch.

— Tha'rt for doin' a lot wi' th' lad.

VIII

To think I should ha'e to haffle an' caffle
Wi' a woman, an' pay 'er a price

For lettin' me marry the lad as I thought
To marry wi' cabs an' rice.
But we'll go unbeknown to the registrar,

An' give 'er what money there is,
For I won't be beholden to such as her

For anythink of his.

IX

Take off thy duty stripes, Tim,

An' come wi' me in here,
Ta'e off thy p'lice-man's helmet

An' look me clear.
I wish tha hadna done it, Tim,

I do, an' that I do!
For whenever I look thee i' th' face, I s'll see
Her face too.

I wish tha could wesh 'er off'n thee.
For I used to think that thy
Face was the finest thing that iver

Met my eye. ...

X

Twenty pound o' thy own tha hast, and fifty pound ha'e I,
Thine shall go to pay the woman, an' wi' my bit we'll buy
All as we shall want for furniture when tha leaves this place,
An' we'll be married at th' registrar — now lift thy face.

Lift thy face an' look at me, man, up an' look at me:
Sorry I am for this business, an' sorry if I ha'e driven thee
To such a thing: but it's a poor tale, that I'm bound to say,
Before I can ta'e thee I've got a widow of forty-five to pay.

Dunnat thee think but what I love thee — I love thee well,
But 'deed an' I wish as this tale o' thine wor niver my tale to tell;
Deed an' I wish as I could stood at the altar wi' thee an' been proud o' thee,

That I could ha' been first woman to thee, as thou'rt first man to me.

But we maun ma'e the best on't — I'll rear thy childt if 'er'll yield it to me.
An' then wi' that twenty pound we gi'e 'er I s'd think 'er wanna be
So very much worsen off than 'er wor before — An' now look up
An' answer me — for I've said my say, an' there's no more sorrow to sup.

Yi, tha'rt a man, tha'rt a fine big man, but niver a baby had eyes
As sulky an' ormin' as thine. Hast owt to say otherwise
From what I've arranged wi' thee? Eh man, what a stubborn jackass thou art.
Kiss me then — there! — ne'er mind if I scaight — I wor fond o' thee,
Sweetheart.

A COLLIER'S WIFE

Somebody's knocking at the door

Mother, come down and see.

— I's think it's nobbut a beggar,

Say, I'm busy.

It's not a beggar, mother, — hark

How hard he knocks . . .

— Eh, tha'rt a mard-'arsed kid,

'E'll gi'e thee socks!

Shout an' ax what 'e wants,

I canna come down.

— 'E says " Is it Arthur HolHday's? "

Say " Yes," tha clown.

'E says, " Tell your mother as 'er mester's

Got hurt i' th' pit."

What — oh my sirs, 'e never says that,

That's niver it.

Come out o' the way an' let me see,

Eh, there's no peace I
An' stop thy scraightin', childt,

Do shut thy face.

“Your mester's 'ad an accident,

An' they're ta'ein 'im i' th' ambulance
To Nottingham,” — Eh dear o' me

If 'e's not a man for mischance!

Wheers he hurt this time, lad?

— I dunna know,
They on'y towd me it wor bad —

It would be so!

Eh, what a man! — an' that cobbly road,
They'll jolt him a'most to death,

I'm sure he's in for some trouble

Nigh every time he takes breath.

Out o' my way, childt — dear o* me, wheer

Have I put his clean stockings and shirt;

Goodness knows if they'll be able
To take off his pit dirt.

An' what a moan he'll make — there niver

Was such a man for a fuss
If anything ailed him — at any rate

I shan't have him to nuss.

I do hope it's not very bad!

Eh, what a shame it seems
As some should ha'e hardly a smite o' trouble

An' others has reams.

It's a shame as 'e should be knocked about

Like this, I'm sure it is!
He's had twenty accidents, if he's had one;

Owt bad, an' it's his.

There's one thing, we '11 have peace for a bit,
Thank Heaven for a peaceful house;

An' there's compensation, sin' it's accident,
An' club money — I nedn't grouse.

An' a fork an' a spoon he'll want, an' what else;

I s'll never catch that train —
What a trapse it is if a man gets hurt —

I s'd think he'll get right again.

THE DRAINED CUP

The snow is witherin' off n th' gress

Love, should I tell thee summat?
The snow is witherin' offn th' gress
An' a thick mist sucks at the clots o' snow,
An' the moon above in a weddin' dress
Goes fogged an' slow —

Love, should I tell thee summat?

Tha's been snowed up i' this cottage wi' me.

Nay, I'm tellin' thee summat. —
Tha's bin snowed up i' this cottage wi' me
While th' clocks has a' run down an' stopped
An' the short days withering silently
Unbeknown have dropped.

— Yea, but I'm tellin' thee summat.

How many days dost think has gone? —

Now I'm tellin' thee summat.
How many days dost think has gone?
How many days has the candle-light shone
On us as tha got more white an' wan?
— Seven days, or none —

Am I not tellin' thee summat?

Tha come to bid farewell to me —

Tha'rt frit o' summat.
To kiss me and shed a tear wi' me,
Then off and away wi' the weddin' ring
For the girl who was grander, and better than me
For marrying —

Tha'rt frit o' summat?
I durstna kiss thee tha trembles so,

Tha'rt frit o' summat.
Tha arena very flig to go,
'Appen the mist from the thawin' snow
Daunts thee — it isna for love, I know,
That tha'rt loath to go.

— Dear o' me, say summat.

Maun tha cling to the wa' as tha goes.

So bad as that?
Tha'lt niver get into thy weddin clothes
At that rate — eh, theer goes thy hat;
Ne'er mind, good-bye lad, now I lose
My joy, God knows,

— An' worse nor that.

The road goes under the apple tree;

Look, for I'm showin' thee summat.
An' if it worn't for the mist, tha'd see
The great black wood on all sides o' thee

Wi' the little pads going cunningly
To ravel thee.

So listen, I'm tellin' thee summat.

When tha comes to the beechen avenue,

I'm warnin' thee o' summat.
Mind tha shall keep inwards, a few
Steps to the right, for the gravel pits
Are steep an' deep wi' watter, an' you
Are scarce o' your wits.

Remember, I've warned thee o' summat.
An' mind when crossin' the planken bridge,

Again I warn ye o' summat.
Ye slip not on the slippery ridge
Of the thawin' snow, or it'll be
A long put-back to your gran' marridge,
I'm tellin' ye.

Nay, are ter scared o' summat?

In kep the thick black curtains drawn,

Am I not tellin' thee summat?
Against the knockin' of sevenfold dawn,
An' red-tipped candles from morn to morn
Have dipped an' danced upon thy brawn
Till thou art worn —

Oh, I have cost thee summat.

Look in the mirror an' see thy-sen,

— What, I am showin' thee summat.
Wasted an' wan tha sees thy-sen.
An' thy hand that holds the mirror shakes
Till tha drops the glass and tha shudders when
Thy luck breaks.

Sure, tha'rt afraid o' summat.

Frail thou art, my saucy man,

— Listen, I'm tellin' thee summat.

Tottering and tired thou art, my man,

Tha came to say good-bye to me.

An' tha's done it so well, that now I can

Part wn' thee.

— Master, I'm givin' thee summat.

THE SCHOOLMASTER

I

A SNOWY DAY IN SCHOOL

All the slow school hours, round the irregular hum of
the class,

Have pressed immeasurable spaces of hoarse silence
Muffling my mind, as snow muffles the sounds that pass
Down the soiled street. We have pattered the lessons
ceaselessly —

But the faces of the boys, in the brooding, yellow light
Have shone for me like a crowded constellation of stars.
Like full-blown flowers dimly shaking at the night,
Like floating froth on an ebbing shore in the moon.

Out of each star, dark, strange beams that disquiet:
In the open depths of each flower, dark restless drops:
Twin bubbles, shadow-full of mystery and challenge in
the foam's whispering riot:
— How can I answer the challenge of so many eyes!

The thick snow is crumpled on the roof, it plunges down

Awfully. Must I call back those hundred eyes? — A voice

Wakes from the hum, faltering about a noun —

My question! My God, I must break from this hoarse silence

That rustles beyond the stars to me. — There,
I have startled a hundred eyes, and I must look
Them an answer back. It is more than I can bear.

The snow descends as if the dull sky shook
In flakes of shadow down; and through the gap
Between the ruddy schools sweeps one black rook.

The rough snowball in the playground stands huge and still
With fair flakes settling down on it. — Beyond, the town
Is lost in the shadowed silence the skies distil.

And all things are possessed by silence, and they can brood
Wrapped up in the sky's dim space of hoarse silence
Earnestly — and oh for me this class is a bitter rood.

II

THE BEST OF SCHOOL

The blinds are drawn because of the sun,
And the boys and the room in a colourless gloom
Of under-water float: bright ripples run
Across the walls as the blinds are blown
To let the sunlight in; and I,
As I sit on the beach of the class alone.
Watch the boys in their summer blouses,
As they write, their round heads busily bowed:
And one after another rouses
And lifts his face and looks at me,
And my eyes meet his very quietly,
Then he turns again to his work, with glee.
With glee he turns, with a little glad
Ecstasy of work he turns from me.
An ecstasy surely sweet to be had.

And very sweet while the sunlight waves
In the fresh of the morning, it is to be
A teacher of these young boys, my slaves
Only as swallows are slaves to the eaves
They build upon, as mice are slaves
To the man who threshes and sows the sheaves.

Oh, sweet it is
To feel the lads' looks light on me.
Then back in a swift, bright flutter to work,
As birds who are stealing turn and flee.

Touch after touch I feel on me
As their eyes glance at me for the grain
Of rigour they taste delightedly.

And all the class.
As tendrils reached out yearningly
Slowly rotate till they touch the tree
That they cleave unto, that they leap along
Up to their lives — so they to me.

So do they cleave and cling to me,
So I lead them up, so do they twine
Me up, caress and clothe with free
Fine foliage of lives this life of mine;
The lowest stem of this life of mine,
The old hard stem of my life
That bears aloft towards rarer skies
My top of life, that buds on high
Amid the high wind's enterprise.

They all do clothe my ungrowing life
With a rich, a thrilled young clasp of life;
A clutch of attachment, like parenthood,
Mounts up to my heart, and I find it good.

And I lift my head upon the troubled tangled world, and though the pain
Of living my life were doubled, I still have this to comfort and sustain,
I have such swarming sense of lives at the base of me, such sense of lives

Clustering upon me, reaching up, as each after the other strives
To follow my life aloft to the fine wild air of life and the storm of thought,
And though I scarcely see the boys, or know that they are there, distraught
As I am with living my life in earnestness, still progressively and alone,
Though they cling, forgotten the most part, not companions, scarcely known
To me — yet still because of the sense of their closeness clinging densely to me.
And slowly fingering up my stem and following all tinily
The way that I have gone and now am leading, they are dear to me.

They keep me assured, and when my soul feels lonely.
All mistrustful of thrusting its shoots where only

I alone am living, then it keeps
Me comforted to feel the warmth that creeps

Up dimly from their striving; it heartens my strife:
And when my heart is chill with loneliness,
Then comforts it the creeping tenderness
Of all the strays of life that climb my life.
III

AFTERNOON IN SCHOOL

THE LAST LESSON

When will the bell ring, and end this weariness?
How long have they tugged the leash, and strained apart
My pack of unruly hounds: I cannot start
Them again on a quarry of knowledge they hate to hunt,
I can haul them and urge them no more.
No more can I endure to bear the brunt
Of the books that lie out on the desks: a full three score
Of several insults of blotted pages and scrawl
Of slovenly work that they have offered me.
I am sick, and tired more than any thrall
Upon the woodstacks working weariedly.

And shall I take
The last dear fuel and heap it on my soul
Till I rouse my will like a fire to consume
Their dross of indifference, and burn the scroll
Of their insults in punishment? — I will not!
I will not waste myself to embers for them,
Not all for them shall the fires of my life be hot,
For myself a heap of ashes of weariness, till sleep
Shall have raked the embers clear: I will keep
Some of my strength for myself, for if I should sell
It all for them, I should hate them —

— I will sit and wait for the bell.

AMORES



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Lawrence, 1906, whilst working as a school teacher

TEASE

I WILL give you all my keys,
You shall be my châtelaine,
You shall enter as you please,
As you please shall go again.

When I hear you jingling through
All the chambers of my soul,
How I sit and laugh at you
In your vain housekeeping rôle.

Jealous of the smallest cover,
Angry at the simplest door;
Well, you anxious, inquisitive lover,
Are you pleased with what's in store?

You have fingered all my treasures,
Have you not, most curiously,
Handled all my tools and measures
And masculine machinery?

Over every single beauty
You have had your little rapture;
You have slain, as was your duty,
Every sin-mouse you could capture.

Still you are not satisfied,
Still you tremble faint reproach;
Challenge me I keep aside
Secrets that you may not broach.

Maybe yes, and maybe no,
Maybe there *are* secret places,
Altars barbarous below,

Elsewhere halls of high disgraces.

Maybe yes, and maybe no,
You may have it as you please,
Since I choose to keep you so,
Suppliant on your curious knees.

THE WILD COMMON

THE quick sparks on the gorse bushes are leaping,
Little jets of sunlight-texture imitating flame;
Above them, exultant, the pee-wits are sweeping:
They are lords of the desolate wastes of sadness
 their screamings proclaim.

Rabbits, handfuls of brown earth, lie Low-rounded on the mournful grass they
have bitten down to the quick. Are they asleep? — Are they alive? — Now see,
when I Move my arms the hill bursts and heaves under their spurting kick.

The common flaunts bravely; but below, from the rushes Crowds of glittering
king-cups surge to challenge the blossoming bushes; There the lazy streamlet
pushes Its curious course mildly; here it wakes again, leaps, laughs, and gushes.

Into a deep pond, an old sheep-dip, Dark, overgrown with willows, cool, with
the brook ebbing through so slow, Naked on the steep, soft lip Of the bank I
stand watching my own white shadow quivering to and fro.

What if the gorse flowers shrivelled and kissing were lost? Without the pulsing
waters, where were the marigolds and the songs of the brook? If my veins and
my breasts with love embossed Withered, my insolent soul would be gone like
flowers that the hot wind took.

So my soul like a passionate woman turns,
Filled with remorseful terror to the man she scorned,
 and her love
For myself in my own eyes' laughter burns,
Runs ecstatic over the pliant folds rippling down to
 my belly from the breast-lights above.

Over my sunlit skin the warm, clinging air, Rich with the songs of seven larks
singing at once, goes kissing me glad. And the soul of the wind and my blood
compare Their wandering happiness, and the wind, wasted in liberty, drifts on

and is sad.

Oh but the water loves me and folds me, Plays with me, sways me, lifts me and
sinks me as though it were living blood, Blood of a heaving woman who holds
me, Owing my supple body a rare glad thing, supremely good.

STUDY

SOMEWHERE the long mellow note of the blackbird
Quickens the unclasping hands of hazel,
Somewhere the wind-flowers fling their heads back,
Stirred by an impetuous wind. Some ways'll
All be sweet with white and blue violet.

(Hush now, hush. Where am I? — Biuret —)

On the green wood's edge a shy girl hovers
From out of the hazel-screen on to the grass,
Where wheeling and screaming the petulant plovers
Wave frightened. Who comes? A labourer, alas!
Oh the sunset swims in her eyes' swift pool.

(Work, work, you fool — !)

Somewhere the lamp hanging low from the ceiling
Lights the soft hair of a girl as she reads,
And the red firelight steadily wheeling
Weaves the hard hands of my friend in sleep.
And the white dog snuffs the warmth, appealing
For the man to heed lest the girl shall weep.

*(Tears and dreams for them; for me
Bitter science — the exams. are near.
I wish I bore it more patiently.
I wish you did not wait, my dear,
For me to come: since work I must:
Though it's all the same when we are dead. —
I wish I was only a bust,
All head.)*

DISCORD IN CHILDHOOD

OUTSIDE the house an ash-tree hung its terrible
whips,
And at night when the wind arose, the lash of the tree
Shrieked and slashed the wind, as a ship's
Weird rigging in a storm shrieks hideously.

Within the house two voices arose in anger, a slender
lash
Whistling delirious rage, and the dreadful sound
Of a thick lash booming and bruising, until it
drowned
The other voice in a silence of blood, 'neath the noise
of the ash.

VIRGIN YOUTH

Now and again
All my body springs alive,
And the life that is polarised in my eyes,
That quivers between my eyes and mouth,
Flies like a wild thing across my body,
Leaving my eyes half-empty, and clamorous,
Filling my still breasts with a flush and a flame,
Gathering the soft ripples below my breasts
Into urgent, passionate waves,
And my soft, slumbering belly
Quivering awake with one impulse of desire,
Gathers itself fiercely together;
And my docile, fluent arms
Knotting themselves with wild strength
To clasp what they have never clasped.
Then I tremble, and go trembling
Under the wild, strange tyranny of my body,
Till it has spent itself,
And the relentless nodality of my eyes reasserts itself,
Till the bursten flood of life ebbs back to my eyes,
Back from my beautiful, lonely body
Tired and unsatisfied.

MONOLOGUE OF A MOTHER

THIS is the last of all, this is the last!
I must hold my hands, and turn my face to the fire,
I must watch my dead days fusing together in dross,
Shape after shape, and scene after scene from my past
Fusing to one dead mass in the sinking fire
Where the ash on the dying coals grows swiftly, like
heavy moss.

Strange he is, my son, whom I have awaited like a
lover,
Strange to me like a captive in a foreign country,
haunting
The confines and gazing out on the land where the
wind is free;
White and gaunt, with wistful eyes that hover
Always on the distance, as if his soul were chaunting
The monotonous weird of departure away from me.

Like a strange white bird blown out of the frozen
seas,
Like a bird from the far north blown with a broken
wing
Into our sooty garden, he drags and beats
From place to place perpetually, seeking release
From me, from the hand of my love which creeps up,
needing
His happiness, whilst he in displeasure retreats.

I must look away from him, for my faded eyes
Like a cringing dog at his heels offend him now,
Like a toothless hound pursuing him with my will,
Till he chafes at my crouching persistence, and a
sharp spark flies
In my soul from under the sudden frown of his brow,

As he blenches and turns away, and my heart stands
still.

This is the last, it will not be any more.
All my life I have borne the burden of myself,
All the long years of sitting in my husband's house,
Never have I said to myself as he closed the door:
“Now I am caught! — You are hopelessly lost, O
Self,
You are frightened with joy, my heart, like a
frightened mouse.”

Three times have I offered myself, three times rejected.
It will not be any more. No more, my son, my son!
Never to know the glad freedom of obedience, since
long ago
The angel of childhood kissed me and went. I expected
Another would take me, — and now, my son, O my son,
I must sit awhile and wait, and never know
The loss of myself, till death comes, who cannot fail.

Death, in whose service is nothing of gladness, takes
me;
For the lips and the eyes of God are behind a veil.
And the thought of the lipless voice of the Father
shakes me
With fear, and fills my eyes with the tears of desire,
And my heart rebels with anguish as night draws
nigher,

IN A BOAT

SEE the stars, love,
In the water much clearer and brighter
Than those above us, and whiter,
Like nenuphars.

Star-shadows shine, love,
How many stars in your bowl?
How many shadows in your soul,
Only mine, love, mine?

When I move the oars, love,
See how the stars are tossed,
Distorted, the brightest lost.
— So that bright one of yours, love.

The poor waters spill
The stars, waters broken, forsaken.
— The heavens are not shaken, you say, love,
Its stars stand still.

There, did you see
That spark fly up at us; even
Stars are not safe in heaven.
— What of yours, then, love, yours?

What then, love, if soon
Your light be tossed over a wave?
Will you count the darkness a grave,
And swoon, love, swoon?

WEEK-NIGHT SERVICE

THE five old bells
Are hurrying and eagerly calling,
Imploring, protesting
They know, but clamorously falling
Into gabbling incoherence, never resting,
Like spattering showers from a bursten sky-rocket
dropping
In splashes of sound, endlessly, never stopping.

The silver moon
That somebody has spun so high
To settle the question, yes or no, has caught
In the net of the night's balloon,
And sits with a smooth bland smile up there in
the sky
Smiling at naught,
Unless the winking star that keeps her company
Makes little jests at the bells' insanity,
As if *he* knew aught!

The patient Night
Sits indifferent, hugged in her rags,
She neither knows nor cares
Why the old church sobs and brags;
The light distresses her eyes, and tears
Her old blue cloak, as she crouches and covers her
face,
Smiling, perhaps, if we knew it, at the bells' loud
clattering disgrace.

The wise old trees
Drop their leaves with a faint, sharp hiss of contempt,
While a car at the end of the street goes by with a
laugh;

As by degrees
The poor bells cease, and the Night is exempt,
And the stars can chaff
The ironic moon at their ease, while the dim old
church
Is peopled with shadows and sounds and ghosts that
lurch
In its cenotaph.

IRONY

ALWAYS, sweetheart,
Carry into your room the blossoming boughs of
 cherry,
Almond and apple and pear diffuse with light, that
 very
Soon strews itself on the floor; and keep the radiance
 of spring
Fresh quivering; keep the sunny-swift March-days
 waiting
In a little throng at your door, and admit the one
 who is plaiting
Her hair for womanhood, and play awhile with her,
 then bid her depart.

A come and go of March-day loves
Through the flower-vine, trailing screen;
 A fluttering in of doves.
Then a launch abroad of shrinking doves
Over the waste where no hope is seen
Of open hands:
 Dance in and out
Small-bosomed girls of the spring of love,
With a bubble of laughter, and shrilly shout
Of mirth; then the dripping of tears on your
 glove.

DREAMS OLD AND NASCENT

OLD

I HAVE opened the window to warm my hands on the
sill

Where the sunlight soaks in the stone: the afternoon
Is full of dreams, my love, the boys are all still
In a wistful dream of Lorna Doone.

The clink of the shunting engines is sharp and fine,
Like savage music striking far off, and there
On the great, uplifted blue palace, lights stir and
shine
Where the glass is domed in the blue, soft air.

There lies the world, my darling, full of wonder and
wistfulness and strange
Recognition and greetings of half-acquaint things, as
I greet the cloud
Of blue palace aloft there, among misty indefinite
dreams that range
At the back of my life's horizon, where the dreamings
of past lives crowd.

Over the nearness of Norwood Hill, through the
mellow veil
Of the afternoon glows to me the old romance of
David and Dora,
With the old, sweet, soothing tears, and laughter
that shakes the sail
Of the ship of the soul over seas where dreamed
dreams lure the unocéaned explorer.

All the bygone, hushèd years
Streaming back where the mist distils
Into forgetfulness: soft-sailing waters where fears
No longer shake, where the silk sail fills

With an unfelt breeze that ebbs over the seas, where
the storm
Of living has passed, on and on
Through the coloured iridescence that swims in the
warm
Wake of the tumult now spent and gone,
Drifts my boat, wistfully lapsing after
The mists of vanishing tears and the echo of laughter.

DREAMS OLD AND NASCENT

NASCENT

MY world is a painted fresco, where coloured shapes
Of old, ineffectual lives linger blurred and warm;
An endless tapestry the past has woven drapes
The halls of my life, compelling my soul to conform.

The surface of dreams is broken,
The picture of the past is shaken and scattered.
Fluent, active figures of men pass along the railway,
and I am woken
From the dreams that the distance flattered.

Along the railway, active figures of men.
They have a secret that stirs in their limbs as they
move
Out of the distance, nearer, commanding my dreamy
world.

Here in the subtle, rounded flesh Beats the active ecstasy. In the sudden lifting
my eyes, it is clearer, The fascination of the quick, restless Creator moving
through the mesh Of men, vibrating in ecstasy through the rounded flesh.

Oh my boys, bending over your books,
In you is trembling and fusing
The creation of a new-patterned dream, dream of a
generation:
And I watch to see the Creator, the power that
patterns the dream.

The old dreams are beautiful, beloved, soft-toned,
and sure,
But the dream-stuff is molten and moving mysteriously,
Alluring my eyes; for I, am I not also dream-stuff,
Am I not quickening, diffusing myself in the pattern,

shaping and shapen?

Here in my class is the answer for the great yearning: Eyes where I can watch the swim of old dreams reflected on the molten metal of dreams, Watch the stir which is rhythmic and moves them all as a heart-beat moves the blood, Here in the swelling flesh the great activity working, Visible there in the change of eyes and the mobile features.

Oh the great mystery and fascination of the unseen Shaper, The power of the melting, fusing Force — heat, light, all in one, Everything great and mysterious in one, swelling and shaping the dream in the flesh, As it swells and shapes a bud into blossom.

Oh the terrible ecstasy of the consciousness that I
am life!
Oh the miracle of the whole, the widespread, labouring
concentration
Swelling mankind like one bud to bring forth the
fruit of a dream,
Oh the terror of lifting the innermost I out of the
sweep of the impulse of life,
And watching the great Thing labouring through the
whole round flesh of the world;
And striving to catch a glimpse of the shape of the
coming dream,
As it quickens within the labouring, white-hot metal,
Catch the scent and the colour of the coming dream,
Then to fall back exhausted into the unconscious,
molten life!

A WINTER'S TALE

YESTERDAY the fields were only grey with scattered
snow,
And now the longest grass-leaves hardly emerge;
Yet her deep footsteps mark the snow, and go
On towards the pines at the hills' white verge.

I cannot see her, since the mist's white scarf
Obscures the dark wood and the dull orange sky;
But she's waiting, I know, impatient and cold, half
Sobs struggling into her frosty sigh.

Why does she come so promptly, when she must
know
That she's only the nearer to the inevitable farewell;
The hill is steep, on the snow my steps are slow —
Why does she come, when she knows what I have to
tell?

EPILOGUE

PATIENCE, little Heart.
One day a heavy, June-hot woman
Will enter and shut the door to stay.

And when your stifling heart would summon
Cool, lonely night, her roused breasts will keep the
 night at bay,
Sitting in your room like two tiger-lilies
Flaming on after sunset,
Destroying the cool, lonely night with the glow of
 their hot twilight;
There in the morning, still, while the fierce strange
 scent comes yet
Stronger, hot and red; till you thirst for the
 daffodillies
With an anguished, husky thirst that you cannot
 assuage,
When the daffodillies are dead, and a woman of the
 dog-days holds you in gage.
Patience, little Heart.

A BABY RUNNING BAREFOOT

WHEN the bare feet of the baby beat across the grass
The little white feet nod like white flowers in the
wind,
They poise and run like ripples lapping across the
water;
And the sight of their white play among the grass
Is like a little robin's song, winsome,
Or as two white butterflies settle in the cup of one
flower
For a moment, then away with a flutter of wings.

I long for the baby to wander hither to me
Like a wind-shadow wandering over the water,
So that she can stand on my knee
With her little bare feet in my hands,
Cool like syringa buds,
Firm and silken like pink young peony flowers.

DISCIPLINE

IT is stormy, and raindrops cling like silver bees to
the pane,
The thin sycamores in the playground are swinging
with flattened leaves;
The heads of the boys move dimly through a yellow
gloom that stains
The class; over them all the dark net of my discipline
weaves.

It is no good, dear, gentleness and forbearance, I
endured too long.
I have pushed my hands in the dark soil, under the
flower of my soul
And the gentle leaves, and have felt where the roots
are strong
Fixed in the darkness, grappling for the deep soil's
little control.

And there is the dark, my darling, where the roots
are entangled and fight
Each one for its hold on the oblivious darkness, I
know that there
In the night where we first have being, before we rise
on the light,
We are not brothers, my darling, we fight and we
do not spare.

And in the original dark the roots cannot keep,
cannot know
Any communion whatever, but they bind themselves
on to the dark,
And drawing the darkness together, crush from it a
twilight, a slow
Burning that breaks at last into leaves and a flower's

bright spark.

I came to the boys with love, my dear, but they
turned on me;
I came with gentleness, with my heart 'twixt my
hands like a bowl,
Like a loving-cup, like a grail, but they spilt it
triumphantly
And tried to break the vessel, and to violate my
soul.

But what have I to do with the boys, deep down in
my soul, my love?
I throw from out of the darkness my self like a flower
into sight,
Like a flower from out of the night-time, I lift my
face, and those
Who will may warm their hands at me, comfort this
night.

But whosoever would pluck apart my flowering shall
burn their hands,
So flowers are tender folk, and roots can only hide,
Yet my flowerings of love are a fire, and the scarlet
brands
Of my love are roses to look at, but flames to chide.

But comfort me, my love, now the fires are low,
Now I am broken to earth like a winter destroyed,
and all
Myself but a knowledge of roots, of roots in the dark
that throw
A net on the undersoil, which lies passive beneath
their thrall.

But comfort me, for henceforth my love is yours
alone,

To you alone will I offer the bowl, to you will I give
My essence only, but love me, and I will atone
To you for my general loving, atone as long as I live.

SCENT OF IRISES

A FAINT, sickening scent of irises
Persists all morning. Here in a jar on the table
A fine proud spike of purple irises
Rising above the class-room litter, makes me unable
To see the class's lifted and bended faces
Save in a broken pattern, amid purple and gold and
sable.

I can smell the gorgeous bog-end, in its breathless
Dazzle of may-blobs, when the marigold glare overcast
you
With fire on your cheeks and your brow and your
chin as you dipped
Your face in the marigold bunch, to touch and contrast
you,
Your own dark mouth with the bridal faint lady-smocks,
Dissolved on the golden sorcery you should not
outlast.

You amid the bog-end's yellow incantation,
You sitting in the cowslips of the meadow above,
Me, your shadow on the bog-flame, flowery may-blobs,
Me full length in the cowslips, muttering you love;
You, your soul like a lady-smock, lost, evanescent,
You with your face all rich, like the sheen of a
dove.

You are always asking, do I remember, remember
The butter-cup bog-end where the flowers rose up
And kindled you over deep with a cast of gold?
You ask again, do the healing days close up
The open darkness which then drew us in,
The dark which then drank up our brimming cup.

You upon the dry, dead beech-leaves, in the fire of
night
Burnt like a sacrifice; you invisible;
Only the fire of darkness, and the scent of you!
— And yes, thank God, it still is possible
The healing days shall close the darkness up
Wherein we fainted like a smoke or dew.

Like vapour, dew, or poison. Now, thank God,
The fire of night is gone, and your face is ash
Indistinguishable on the grey, chill day;
The night has burnt us out, at last the good
Dark fire burns on untroubled, without clash
Of you upon the dead leaves saying me Yea.

THE PROPHET

AH, my darling, when over the purple horizon shall
loom
The shrouded mother of a new idea, men hide their
faces,
Cry out and fend her off, as she seeks her procreant
groom,
Wounding themselves against her, denying her
fecund embraces.

LAST WORDS TO MIRIAM

YOURS is the shame and sorrow
But the disgrace is mine;
Your love was dark and thorough,
Mine was the love of the sun for a flower
He creates with his shine.

I was diligent to explore you,
Blossom you stalk by stalk,
Till my fire of creation bore you
Shrivelling down in the final dour
Anguish — then I suffered a balk.

I knew your pain, and it broke
My fine, craftsman's nerve;
Your body quailed at my stroke,
And my courage failed to give you the last
Fine torture you did deserve.

You are shapely, you are adorned,
But opaque and dull in the flesh,
Who, had I but pierced with the thorned
Fire-threshing anguish, were fused and cast
In a lovely illumined mesh.

Like a painted window: the best
Suffering burnt through your flesh,
Undrossed it and left it blest
With a quivering sweet wisdom of grace: but
now
Who shall take you afresh?

Now who will burn you free
From your body's terrors and dross,

Since the fire has failed in me?
What man will stoop in your flesh to plough
The shrieking cross?

A mute, nearly beautiful thing
Is your face, that fills me with shame
As I see it hardening,
Warping the perfect image of God,
And darkening my eternal fame.

MYSTERY

Now I am all
One bowl of kisses,
Such as the tall
Slim votaresses
Of Egypt filled
For a God's excesses.

I lift to you
My bowl of kisses,
And through the temple's
Blue recesses
Cry out to you
In wild caresses.

And to my lips'
Bright crimson rim
The passion slips,
And down my slim
White body drips
The shining hymn.

And still before
The altar I
Exult the bowl
Brimful, and cry
To you to stoop
And drink, Most High.

Oh drink me up
That I may be
Within your cup
Like a mystery,
Like wine that is still
In ecstasy.

Glimmering still
In ecstasy,
Commingled wines
Of you and me
In one fulfil
The mystery.

PATIENCE

A WIND comes from the north
Blowing little flocks of birds
Like spray across the town,
And a train, roaring forth,
Rushes stampeding down
With cries and flying curds
Of steam, out of the darkening north.

Whither I turn and set
Like a needle steadfastly,
Waiting ever to get
The news that she is free;
But ever fixed, as yet,
To the lode of her agony.

BALLAD OF ANOTHER OPHELIA

OH the green glimmer of apples in the orchard,
Lamps in a wash of rain!
Oh the wet walk of my brown hen through the stack-yard,
Oh tears on the window pane!

Nothing now will ripen the bright green apples,
Full of disappointment and of rain,
Brackish they will taste, of tears, when the yellow
 dapples
Of autumn tell the withered tale again.

All round the yard it is cluck, my brown hen,
Cluck, and the rain-wet wings,
Cluck, my marigold bird, and again
Cluck for your yellow darlings.

For the grey rat found the gold thirteen
Huddled away in the dark,
Flutter for a moment, oh the beast is quick and
 keen,
Extinct one yellow-fluffy spark.

Once I had a lover bright like running water,
Once his face was laughing like the sky;
Open like the sky looking down in all its laughter
On the buttercups, and the buttercups was I.

What, then, is there hidden in the skirts of all the
 blossom?
What is peeping from your wings, oh mother
 hen?
'Tis the sun who asks the question, in a lovely haste
 for wisdom;

What a lovely haste for wisdom is in men!

Yea, but it is cruel when undressed is all the blossom,
And her shift is lying white upon the floor,
That a grey one, like a shadow, like a rat, a thief, a
rain-storm,
Creeps upon her then and gathers in his store.

Oh the grey garner that is full of half-grown apples,
Oh the golden sparkles laid extinct!
And oh, behind the cloud-sheaves, like yellow autumn
dapples,
Did you see the wicked sun that winked!

RESTLESSNESS

AT the open door of the room I stand and look at
the night,
Hold my hand to catch the raindrops, that slant into
sight,
Arriving grey from the darkness above suddenly into
the light of the room.
I will escape from the hollow room, the box of light,
And be out in the bewildering darkness, which is
always fecund, which might
Mate my hungry soul with a germ of its womb.

I will go out to the night, as a man goes down to the
shore
To draw his net through the surfs thin line, at the
dawn before
The sun warms the sea, little, lonely and sad, sifting
the sobbing tide.
I will sift the surf that edges the night, with my net,
the four
Strands of my eyes and my lips and my hands and my
feet, sifting the store
Of flotsam until my soul is tired or satisfied.

I will catch in my eyes' quick net
The faces of all the women as they go past,
Bend over them with my soul, to cherish the wet
Cheeks and wet hair a moment, saying: "Is it
you?"
Looking earnestly under the dark umbrellas, held
fast
Against the wind; and if, where the lamplight
blew
Its rainy swill about us, she answered me
With a laugh and a merry wildness that it was she

Who was seeking me, and had found me at last to
free
Me now from the stunting bonds of my chastity,
How glad I should be!

Moving along in the mysterious ebb of the night
Pass the men whose eyes are
shut like anemones in a dark pool; Why don't they open with vision and speak to
me, what have they in sight? Why do I wander aimless among them, desirous
fool?

I can always linger over the huddled books on the
stalls,
Always gladden my amorous fingers with the touch
of their leaves,
Always kneel in courtship to the shelves in the
doorways, where falls
The shadow, always offer myself to one mistress,
who always receives.

But oh, it is not enough, it is all no good.
There is something I want to feel in my running
blood,
Something I want to touch; I must hold my face to
the rain,
I must hold my face to the wind, and let it explain
Me its life as it hurries in secret.
I will trail my hands again through the drenched,
cold leaves
Till my hands are full of the chillness and touch of
leaves,
Till at length they induce me to sleep, and to forget.

A BABY ASLEEP AFTER PAIN

As a drenched, drowned bee
Hangs numb and heavy from a bending flower,
So clings to me
My baby, her brown hair brushed with wet tears
And laid against her cheek;
Her soft white legs hanging heavily over my arm
Swinging heavily to my movement as I walk.
My sleeping baby hangs upon my life,
Like a burden she hangs on me.
She has always seemed so light,
But now she is wet with tears and numb with pain
Even her floating hair sinks heavily,
Reaching downwards;
As the wings of a drenched, drowned bee
Are a heaviness, and a weariness.

ANXIETY

THE hoar-frost crumbles in the sun,
The crisping steam of a train
Melts in the air, while two black birds
Sweep past the window again.

Along the vacant road, a red
Bicycle approaches; I wait
In a thaw of anxiety, for the boy
To leap down at our gate.

He has passed us by; but is it
Relief that starts in my breast?
Or a deeper bruise of knowing that still
She has no rest.

THE PUNISHER

I HAVE fetched the tears up out of the little wells,
Scooped them up with small, iron words,
Dripping over the runnels.

The harsh, cold wind of my words drove on, and still
I watched the tears on the guilty cheek of the boys
Glitter and spill.

Cringing Pity, and Love, white-handed, came
Hovering about the Judgment which stood in my
eyes,
Whirling a flame.

.....

The tears are dry, and the cheeks' young fruits are
fresh
With laughter, and clear the exonerated eyes, since
pain
Beat through the flesh.

The Angel of Judgment has departed again to the
Nearness.
Desolate I am as a church whose lights are put out.
And night enters in dreariness.

The fire rose up in the bush and blazed apace,
The thorn-leaves crackled and twisted and sweated in
anguish;
Then God left the place.

Like a flower that the frost has hugged and let go,
my head
Is heavy, and my heart beats slowly, laboriously,
My strength is shed.

THE END

IF I could have put you in my heart,
If but I could have wrapped you in myself,
How glad I should have been!
And now the chart
Of memory unrolls again to me
The course of our journey here, before we had to
part.

And oh, that you had never, never been
Some of your selves, my love, that some
Of your several faces I had never seen!
And still they come before me, and they go,
And I cry aloud in the moments that intervene.

And oh, my love, as I rock for you to-night,
And have not any longer any hope
To heal the suffering, or make requite
For all your life of asking and despair,
I own that some of me is dead to-night.

THE BRIDE

MY love looks like a girl to-night,
But she is old.
The plaits that lie along her pillow
Are not gold,
But threaded with filigree,
And uncanny cold.

She looks like a young maiden, since her brow
Is smooth and fair,
Her cheeks are very smooth, her eyes are closed,
She sleeps a rare
Still winsome sleep, so still, and so composed.

Nay, but she sleeps like a bride, and dreams her
dreams
Of perfect things.
She lies at last, the darling, in the shape of her dream,
And her dead mouth sings
By its shape, like the thrushes in clear evenings.

THE VIRGIN MOTHER

MY little love, my darling,
You were a doorway to me;
You let me out of the confines
Into this strange countrie,
Where people are crowded like thistles,
Yet are shapely and comely to see.

My little love, my dearest
Twice have you issued me,
Once from your womb, sweet mother,
Once from myself, to be
Free of all hearts, my darling,
Of each heart's home-life free.

And so, my love, my mother,
I shall always be true to you;
Twice I am born, my dearest,
To life, and to death, in you;
And this is the life hereafter
Wherein I am true.

I kiss you good-bye, my darling,
Our ways are different now;
You are a seed in the night-time,
I am a man, to plough
The difficult glebe of the future
For God to endow.

I kiss you good-bye, my dearest,
It is finished between us here.
Oh, if I were calm as you are,
Sweet and still on your bier!
God, if I had not to leave you
Alone, my dear!

Let the last word be uttered,
Oh grant the farewell is said!
Spare me the strength to leave you
Now you are dead.
I must go, but my soul lies helpless
Beside your bed.

AT THE WINDOW

THE pine-trees bend to listen to the autumn wind
as it mutters
Something which sets the black poplars ashake with
hysterical laughter;
While slowly the house of day is closing its eastern
shutters.

Further down the valley the clustered tombstones
recede,
Winding about their dimness the mist's grey
cerements, after
The street lamps in the darkness have suddenly
started to bleed.

The leaves fly over the window and utter a word as
they pass
To the face that leans from the darkness, intent, with
two dark-filled eyes
That watch for ever earnestly from behind the window
glass.

DRUNK

Too far away, oh love, I know,
To save me from this haunted road,
Whose lofty roses break and blow
On a night-sky bent with a load

Of lights: each solitary rose,
Each arc-lamp golden does expose
Ghost beyond ghost of a blossom, shows
Night bleached with a thousand snows.

Of hawthorn and of lilac trees,
White lilac; shows discoloured night
Dripping with all the golden lees
Laburnum gives back to light

And shows the red of hawthorn set
On high to the purple heaven of night,
Like flags in bleached blood newly wet,
Blood shed in the noiseless fight.

Of life for love and love for life,
Of hunger for a little food,
Of kissing, lost for want of a wife
Long ago, long ago wooed.

.....

Too far away you are, my love,
To steady my brain in this phantom show
That passes the nightly road above
And returns again below.

The enormous cliff of horse-chestnut trees
Has poised on each of its ledges
An erect small girl looking down at me;

White-night-gowned little chits I see,
And they peep at me over the edges
Of the leaves as though they would leap, should
I call
Them down to my arms;
“But, child, you’re too small for me, too small
Your little charms.”

White little sheaves of night-gowned maids,
Some other will thresh you out!
And I see leaning from the shades
A lilac like a lady there, who braids
Her white mantilla about
Her face, and forward leans to catch the sight
Of a man’s face,
Gracefully sighing through the white
Flowery mantilla of lace.

And another lilac in purple veiled
Discreetly, all recklessly calls
In a low, shocking perfume, to know who has hailed
Her forth from the night: my strength has failed
In her voice, my weak heart falls:
Oh, and see the laburnum shimmering
Her draperies down,
As if she would slip the gold, and glimmering
White, stand naked of gown.

.....

The pageant of flowery trees above
The street pale-passionate goes,
And back again down the pavement, Love
In a lesser pageant flows.

Two and two are the folk that walk,

They pass in a half embrace
Of linkèd bodies, and they talk
With dark face leaning to face.

Come then, my love, come as you will
Along this haunted road,
Be whom you will, my darling, I shall
Keep with you the troth I trowed.

SORROW

WHY does the thin grey strand
Floating up from the forgotten
Cigarette between my fingers,
Why does it trouble me?

Ah, you will understand;
When I carried my mother downstairs,
A few times only, at the beginning
Of her soft-foot malady,

I should find, for a reprimand
To my gaiety, a few long grey hairs
On the breast of my coat; and one by one
I let them float up the dark chimney.

DOLOR OF AUTUMN

THE acrid scents of autumn,
Reminiscent of slinking beasts, make me fear
Everything, tear-trembling stars of autumn
And the snore of the night in my ear.

For suddenly, flush-fallen,
All my life, in a rush
Of shedding away, has left me
Naked, exposed on the bush.

I, on the bush of the globe,
Like a newly-naked berry, shrink
Disclosed: but I also am prowling
As well in the scents that slink

Abroad: I in this naked berry
Of flesh that stands dismayed on the bush;
And I in the stealthy, brindled odours
Prowling about the lush

And acrid night of autumn;
My soul, along with the rout,
Rank and treacherous, prowling,
Disseminated out.

For the night, with a great breath intaken,
Has taken my spirit outside
Me, till I reel with disseminated consciousness,
Like a man who has died.

At the same time I stand exposed
Here on the bush of the globe,
A newly-naked berry of flesh

For the stars to probe.

THE INHERITANCE

SINCE you did depart
Out of my reach, my darling,
Into the hidden,
I see each shadow start
With recognition, and I
Am wonder-ridden.

I am dazed with the farewell,
But I scarcely feel your loss.
You left me a gift
Of tongues, so the shadows tell
Me things, and silences toss
Me their drift.

You sent me a cloven fire
Out of death, and it burns in the draught
Of the breathing hosts,
Kindles the darkening pyre
For the sorrowful, till strange brands waft
Like candid ghosts.

Form after form, in the streets
Waves like a ghost along,
Kindled to me;
The star above the house-top greets
Me every eve with a long
Song fierily.

All day long, the town
Glimmers with subtle ghosts
Going up and down
In a common, prison-like dress;
But their daunted looking flickers
To me, and I answer, Yes!

So I am not lonely nor sad
Although bereaved of you,
My little love.
I move among a kinsfolk clad
With words, but the dream shows through
As they move.

SILENCE

SINCE I lost you I am silence-haunted,
Sounds wave their little wings
A moment, then in weariness settle
On the flood that soundless swings.

Whether the people in the street
Like pattering ripples go by,
Or whether the theatre sighs and sighs
With a loud, hoarse sigh:

Or the wind shakes a ravel of light
Over the dead-black river,
Or night's last echoing
Makes the daybreak shiver:

I feel the silence waiting
To take them all up again
In its vast completeness, enfolding
The sound of men.

LISTENING

I LISTEN to the stillness of you,
My dear, among it all;
I feel your silence touch my words as I talk,
And take them in thrall.

My words fly off a forge
The length of a spark;
I see the night-sky easily sip them
Up in the dark.

The lark sings loud and glad,
Yet I am not loth
That silence should take the song and the bird
And lose them both.

A train goes roaring south,
The steam-flag flying;
I see the stealthy shadow of silence
Alongside going.

And off the forge of the world,
Whirling in the draught of life,
Go sparks of myriad people, filling
The night with strife.

Yet they never change the darkness
Or blench it with noise;
Alone on the perfect silence
The stars are buoys.

BROODING GRIEF

A YELLOW leaf from the darkness
Hops like a frog before me.
Why should I start and stand still?

I was watching the woman that bore me
Stretched in the brindled darkness
Of the sick-room, rigid with will
To die: and the quick leaf tore me
Back to this rainy swill
Of leaves and lamps and traffic mingled before me.

LOTUS HURT BY THE COLD

How many times, like lotus lilies risen
Upon the surface of a river, there
Have risen floating on my blood the rare
Soft glimmers of my hope escaped from prison.

So I am clothed all over with the light
And sensitive beautiful blossoming of passion;
Till naked for her in the finest fashion
The flowers of all my mud swim into sight.

And then I offer all myself unto
This woman who likes to love me: but she turns
A look of hate upon the flower that burns
To break and pour her out its precious dew.

And slowly all the blossom shuts in pain,
And all the lotus buds of love sink over
To die unopened: when my moon-faced lover,
Kind on the weight of suffering, smiles again.

MALADE

THE sick grapes on the chair by the bed lie prone;
at the window
The tassel of the blind swings gently, tapping the
pane,
As a little wind comes in.
The room is the hollow rind of a fruit, a gourd
Scooped out and dry, where a spider,
Folded in its legs as in a bed,
Lies on the dust, watching where is nothing to see
but twilight and walls.

And if the day outside were mine! What is the day
But a grey cave, with great grey spider-cloths
hanging
Low from the roof, and the wet dust falling softly
from them
Over the wet dark rocks, the houses, and over
The spiders with white faces, that scuttle on the
floor of the cave!
I am choking with creeping, grey confinedness.

But somewhere birds, beside a lake of light, spread
wings
Larger than the largest fans, and rise in a stream
upwards
And upwards on the sunlight that rains invisible,
So that the birds are like one wafted feather,
Small and ecstatic suspended over a vast spread
country.

LIAISON

A BIG bud of moon hangs out of the twilight,
Star-spiders spinning their thread
Hang high suspended, withouten respite
Watching us overhead.

Come then under the trees, where the leaf-cloths
Curtain us in so dark
That here we're safe from even the ermin-moth's
Flitting remark.

Here in this swarthy, secret tent,
Where black boughs flap the ground,
You shall draw the thorn from my discontent,
Surgeon me sound.

This rare, rich night! For in here
Under the yew-tree tent
The darkness is loveliest where I could sear
You like frankincense into scent.

Here not even the stars can spy us,
Not even the white moths write
With their little pale signs on the wall, to try us
And set us affright.

Kiss but then the dust from off my lips,
But draw the turgid pain
From my breast to your bosom, eclipse
My soul again.

Waste me not, I beg you, waste
Not the inner night:
Taste, oh taste and let me taste

The core of delight.

TROTH WITH THE DEAD

THE moon is broken in twain, and half a moon
Before me lies on the still, pale floor of the sky;
The other half of the broken coin of troth
Is buried away in the dark, where the still dead lie.
They buried her half in the grave when they laid her
 away;
I had pushed it gently in among the thick of her hair
Where it gathered towards the plait, on that very
 last day;
And like a moon in secret it is shining there.

My half shines in the sky, for a general sign
Of the troth with the dead I pledged myself to keep;
Turning its broken edge to the dark, it shines indeed
Like the sign of a lover who turns to the dark of
 sleep.
Against my heart the inviolate sleep breaks still
In darkened waves whose breaking echoes o'er
The wondering world of my wakeful day, till I'm
 lost
In the midst of the places I knew so well before.

DISSOLUTE

MANY years have I still to burn, detained
Like a candle flame on this body; but I enshrine
A darkness within me, a presence which sleeps
 contained
In my flame of living, her soul enfolded in mine.

And through these years, while I burn on the fuel of
 life,
What matter the stuff I lick up in my living flame,
Seeing I keep in the fire-core, inviolate,
A night where she dreams my dreams for me, ever
 the same.

SUBMERGENCE

WHEN along the pavement,
Palpitating flames of life,
People flicker round me,
I forget my bereavement,
The gap in the great constellation,
The place where a star used to be.

Nay, though the pole-star
Is blown out like a candle,
And all the heavens are wandering in disarray,
Yet when pleiads of people are
Deployed around me, and I see
The street's long outstretched Milky Way,

When people flicker down the pavement,
I forget my bereavement.

THE ENKINDLED SPRING

THIS spring as it comes bursts up in bonfires green,
Wild puffing of emerald trees, and flame-filled bushes,
Thorn-blossom lifting in wreaths of smoke between
Where the wood fumes up and the watery, flickering
ruses.

I am amazed at this spring, this conflagration
Of green fires lit on the soil of the earth, this blaze
Of growing, and sparks that puff in wild gyration,
Faces of people streaming across my gaze.

And I, what fountain of fire am I among
This leaping combustion of spring? My spirit is
tossed
About like a shadow buffeted in the throng
Of flames, a shadow that's gone astray, and is lost.

REPROACH

HAD I but known yesterday,
Helen, you could discharge the ache
 Out of the cloud;
Had I known yesterday you could take
The turgid electric ache away,
 Drink it up with your proud
White body, as lovely white lightning
Is drunk from an agonised sky by the earth,
I might have hated you, Helen.

But since my limbs gushed full of fire,
Since from out of my blood and bone
 Poured a heavy flame
To you, earth of my atmosphere, stone
Of my steel, lovely white flint of desire,
 You have no name.
Earth of my swaying atmosphere,
Substance of my inconstant breath,
I cannot but cleave to you.

Since you have drunken up the drear
Painful electric storm, and death
 Is washed from the blue
Of my eyes, I see you beautiful.
You are strong and passive and beautiful,
I come like winds that uncertain hover;
 But you
Are the earth I hover over.

THE HANDS OF THE BETROTHED

HER tawny eyes are onyx of thoughtlessness,
Hardened they are like gems in ancient modesty;
Yea, and her mouth's prudent and crude caress
Means even less than her many words to me.

Though her kiss betrays me also this, this only
Consolation, that in her lips her blood at climax
clips
Two wild, dumb paws in anguish on the lonely
Fruit of my heart, ere down, rebuked, it slips.

I know from her hardened lips that still her heart is
Hungry for me, yet if I put my hand in her breast
She puts me away, like a saleswoman whose mart is
Endangered by the pilferer on his quest.

But her hands are still the woman, the large, strong
hands
Heavier than mine, yet like leverets caught in
steel
When I hold them; my still soul understands
Their dumb confession of what her sort must feel.

For never her hands come nigh me but they lift
Like heavy birds from the morning stubble, to
settle
Upon me like sleeping birds, like birds that shift
Uneasily in their sleep, disturbing my mettle.

How caressingly she lays her hand on my knee,
How strangely she tries to disown it, as it sinks
In my flesh and bone and forages into me,
How it stirs like a subtle stoat, whatever she

thinks!

And often I see her clench her fingers tight
And thrust her fists suppressed in the folds of her
skirt;
And sometimes, how she grasps her arms with her
bright
Big hands, as if surely her arms did hurt.

And I have seen her stand all unaware
Pressing her spread hands over her breasts, as she
Would crush their mounds on her heart, to kill in
there
The pain that is her simple ache for me.

Her strong hands take my part, the part of a man
To her; she crushes them into her bosom deep
Where I should lie, and with her own strong
span
Closes her arms, that should fold me in sleep.

Ah, and she puts her hands upon the wall,
Presses them there, and kisses her bright hands,
Then lets her black hair loose, the darkness fall
About her from her maiden-folded bands.

And sits in her own dark night of her bitter hair
Dreaming — God knows of what, for to me she's
the same
Betrothed young lady who loves me, and takes care
Of her womanly virtue and of my good name.

EXCURSION

I WONDER, can the night go by;
Can this shot arrow of travel fly
Shaft-golden with light, sheer into the sky
 Of a dawned to-morrow,
Without ever sleep delivering us
From each other, or loosing the dolorous
 Unfruitful sorrow!

What is it then that you can see
That at the window endlessly
You watch the red sparks whirl and flee
 And the night look through?
Your presence peering lonelily there
Oppresses me so, I can hardly bear
 To share the train with you.

You hurt my heart-beats' privacy;
I wish I could put you away from me;
I suffocate in this intimacy,
 For all that I love you;
How I have longed for this night in the train,
Yet now every fibre of me cries in pain
 To God to remove you.

But surely my soul's best dream is still
That one night pouring down shall swill
Us away in an utter sleep, until
 We are one, smooth-rounded.
Yet closely bitten in to me
Is this armour of stiff reluctancy
 That keeps me impounded.

So, dear love, when another night
Pours on us, lift your fingers white

And strip me naked, touch me light,
Light, light all over.
For I ache most earnestly for your touch,
Yet I cannot move, however much
I would be your lover.

Night after night with a blemish of day
Unblown and unblossomed has withered away;
Come another night, come a new night, say
Will you pluck me apart?
Will you open the amorous, aching bud
Of my body, and loose the burning flood
That would leap to you from my heart?

PERFIDY

HOLLOW rang the house when I knocked on the door,
And I lingered on the threshold with my hand
Upraised to knock and knock once more:
Listening for the sound of her feet across the floor,
Hollow re-echoed my heart.

The low-hung lamps stretched down the road
With shadows drifting underneath,
With a music of soft, melodious feet
Quickening my hope as I hastened to meet
The low-hung light of her eyes.

The golden lamps down the street went out,
The last car trailed the night behind;
And I in the darkness wandered about
With a flutter of hope and of dark-shut doubt
In the dying lamp of my love.

Two brown ponies trotting slowly
Stopped at a dim-lit trough to drink:
The dark van drummed down the distance slowly;
While the city stars so dim and holy
Drew nearer to search through the streets.

A hastening car swept shameful past,
I saw her hid in the shadow,
I saw her step to the curb, and fast
Run to the silent door, where last
I had stood with my hand uplifted.
She clung to the door in her haste to enter,
Entered, and quickly cast
It shut behind her, leaving the street aghast.

A SPIRITUAL WOMAN

CLOSE your eyes, my love, let me make you blind;
 They have taught you to see
Only a mean arithmetic on the face of things,
A cunning algebra in the faces of men,
 And God like geometry
Completing his circles, and working cleverly.

I'll kiss you over the eyes till I kiss you blind;
 If I can — if any one could.
Then perhaps in the dark you'll have got what you
 want to find.
You've discovered so many bits, with your clever
 eyes,
 And I'm a kaleidoscope
That you shake and shake, and yet it won't come to
 your mind.
Now stop carping at me. — But God, how I hate you!
 Do you fear I shall swindle you?
Do you think if you take me as I am, that that will
 abate you
Somehow? — so sad, so intrinsic, so spiritual, yet so
 cautious, you
Must have me all in your will and your consciousness —
 I hate you.

MATING

ROUND clouds roll in the arms of the wind,
The round earth rolls in a clasp of blue sky,
And see, where the budding hazels are thinned,
 The wild anemones lie
In undulating shivers beneath the wind.

Over the blue of the waters ply
White ducks, a living flotilla of cloud;
And, look you, floating just thereby,
 The blue-gleamed drake stems proud
Like Abraham, whose seed should multiply.

In the lustrous gleam of the water, there
Scramble seven toads across the silk, obscure leaves,
Seven toads that meet in the dusk to share
 The darkness that interweaves
The sky and earth and water and live things everywhere.

Look now, through the woods where the beech-green
 spurts
Like a storm of emerald snow, look, see
 A great bay stallion dances, skirts
 The bushes sumptuously,
Going outward now in the spring to his brief deserts.

Ah love, with your rich, warm face aglow,
What sudden expectation opens you
 So wide as you watch the catkins blow
 Their dust from the birch on the blue
Lift of the pulsing wind — ah, tell me you know!

Ah, surely! Ah, sure from the golden sun
A quickening, masculine gleam floats in to all

Us creatures, people and flowers undone,
Lying open under his thrall,
As he begets the year in us. What, then, would you
shun?

Why, I should think that from the earth there fly
Fine thrills to the neighbour stars, fine yellow beams
Thrown lustily off from our full-blown, high
Bursting globe of dreams,
To quicken the spheres that are virgin still in the sky.

Do you not hear each morsel thrill
With joy at travelling to plant itself within
The expectant one, therein to instil
New rapture, new shape to win,
From the thick of life wake up another will?

Surely, and if that I would spill
The vivid, ah, the fiery surplus of life,
From off my brimming measure, to fill
You, and flush you rife
With increase, do you call it evil, and always evil?

A LOVE SONG

REJECT me not if I should say to you
I do forget the sounding of your voice,
I do forget your eyes that searching through
The mists perceive our marriage, and rejoice.

Yet, when the apple-blossom opens wide
Under the pallid moonlight's fingering,
I see your blanched face at my breast, and hide
My eyes from diligent work, malingering.

Ah, then, upon my bedroom I do draw
The blind to hide the garden, where the moon
Enjoys the open blossoms as they straw
Their beauty for his taking, boon for boon.

And I do lift my aching arms to you,
And I do lift my anguished, avid breast,
And I do weep for very pain of you,
And fling myself at the doors of sleep, for rest.

And I do toss through the troubled night for you,
Dreaming your yielded mouth is given to mine,
Feeling your strong breast carry me on into
The peace where sleep is stronger even than wine.

BROTHER AND SISTER

THE shorn moon trembling indistinct on her path,
Frail as a scar upon the pale blue sky,
Draws towards the downward slope; some sorrow
 hath
Worn her down to the quick, so she faintly fares
Along her foot-searched way without knowing why
She creeps persistent down the sky's long stairs.

Some say they see, though I have never seen,
The dead moon heaped within the new moon's arms;
For surely the fragile, fine young thing had been
Too heavily burdened to mount the heavens so.
But my heart stands still, as a new, strong dread
 alarms
Me; might a young girl be heaped with such shadow
 of woe?

Since Death from the mother moon has pared us
 down to the quick,
And cast us forth like shorn, thin moons, to travel
An uncharted way among the myriad thick
Strewn stars of silent people, and luminous litter
Of lives which sorrows like mischievous dark mice
 chavel
To nought, diminishing each star's glitter,

Since Death has delivered us utterly, naked and
 white,
Since the month of childhood is over, and we stand
 alone,
Since the beloved, faded moon that set us alight
Is delivered from us and pays no heed though we
 moan
In sorrow, since we stand in bewilderment, strange

And fearful to sally forth down the sky's long range.

We may not cry to her still to sustain us here,
We may not hold her shadow back from the dark.
Oh, let us here forget, let us take the sheer
Unknown that lies before us, bearing the ark
Of the covenant onwards where she cannot go.
Let us rise and leave her now, she will never know.

AFTER MANY DAYS

I WONDER if with you, as it is with me,
If under your slipping words, that easily flow
About you as a garment, easily,
Your violent heart beats to and fro!

Long have I waited, never once confessed,
Even to myself, how bitter the separation;
Now, being come again, how make the best
Reparation?

If I could cast this clothing off from me,
If I could lift my naked self to you,
Or if only you would repulse me, a wound would be
Good; it would let the ache come through.

But that you hold me still so kindly cold
Aloof my flaming heart will not allow;
Yea, but I loathe you that you should withhold
Your pleasure now.

BLUE

THE earth again like a ship steams out of the dark
sea over
The edge of the blue, and the sun stands up to see
us glide
Slowly into another day; slowly the rover
Vessel of darkness takes the rising tide.

I, on the deck, am startled by this dawn confronting
Me who am issued amazed from the darkness,
stripped
And quailing here in the sunshine, delivered from
haunting
The night unsounded whereon our days are shipped.

Feeling myself undawning, the day's light playing
upon me,
I who am substance of shadow, I all compact
Of the stuff of the night, finding myself all wrongly
Among the crowds of things in the sunshine jostled
and racked.

I with the night on my lips, I sigh with the silence
of death;
And what do I care though the very stones should
cry me unreal, though the clouds
Shine in conceit of substance upon me, who am less
than the rain.
Do I not know the darkness within them? What
are they but shrouds?

The clouds go down the sky with a wealthy ease
Casting a shadow of scorn upon me for my share in
death; but I
Hold my own in the midst of them, darkling, defy

The whole of the day to extinguish the shadow I lift
on the breeze.

Yea, though the very clouds have vantage over
me,
Enjoying their glancing flight, though my love is
dead,
I still am not homeless here, I've a tent by day
Of darkness where she sleeps on her perfect bed.

And I know the host, the minute sparkling of darkness Which vibrates untouched
and virile through the grandeur of night, But which, when dawn crows
challenge, assaulting the vivid motes Of living darkness, bursts fretfully, and is
bright:

Runs like a fretted arc-lamp into light,
Stirred by conflict to shining, which else
Were dark and whole with the night.

Runs to a fret of speed like a racing wheel,
Which else were aslumber along with the whole
Of the dark, swinging rhythmic instead of a-reel.

Is chafed to anger, bursts into rage like thunder;
Which else were a silent grasp that held the
heavens
Arrested, beating thick with wonder.

Leaps like a fountain of blue sparks leaping
In a jet from out of obscurity,
Which erst was darkness sleeping.

Runs into streams of bright blue drops,
Water and stones and stars, and myriads
Of twin-blue eyes, and crops

Of floury grain, and all the hosts of day,
All lovely hosts of ripples caused by fretting
The Darkness into play.

SNAP-DRAGON

SHE bade me follow to her garden, where
The mellow sunlight stood as in a cup
Between the old grey walls; I did not dare
To raise my face, I did not dare look up,
Lest her bright eyes like sparrows should fly in
My windows of discovery, and shrill "Sin."

So with a downcast mien and laughing voice
I followed, followed the swing of her white dress
That rocked in a lilt along: I watched the poise
Of her feet as they flew for a space, then paused to
press
The grass deep down with the royal burden of her:
And gladly I'd offered my breast to the tread of her.

"I like to see," she said, and she crouched her down,
She sunk into my sight like a settling bird;
And her bosom couched in the confines of her gown
Like heavy birds at rest there, softly stirred
By her measured breaths: "I like to see," said she,
"The snap-dragon put out his tongue at me."

She laughed, she reached her hand out to the flower,
Closing its crimson throat. My own throat in her
power
Strangled, my heart swelled up so full
As if it would burst its wine-skin in my throat,
Choke me in my own crimson. I watched her pull
The gorge of the gaping flower, till the blood did
float

Over my eyes, and I was blind —
Her large brown hand stretched over
The windows of my mind;

And there in the dark I did discover
Things I was out to find:
My Grail, a brown bowl twined
With swollen veins that met in the wrist,
Under whose brown the amethyst
I longed to taste. I longed to turn
My heart's red measure in her cup,
I longed to feel my hot blood burn
With the amethyst in her cup.

Then suddenly she looked up,
And I was blind in a tawny-gold day,
Till she took her eyes away.
So she came down from above
And emptied my heart of love.
So I held my heart aloft
To the cuckoo that hung like a dove,
And she settled soft

It seemed that I and the morning world
Were pressed cup-shape to take this reiver
Bird who was weary to have furled
Her wings in us,
As we were weary to receive her.

This bird, this rich,
Sumptuous central grain,
This mutable witch,
This one refrain,
This laugh in the fight,
This clot of night,
This core of delight.

She spoke, and I closed my eyes
To shut hallucinations out.
I echoed with surprise
Hearing my mere lips shout

The answer they did devise.

Again I saw a brown bird hover
Over the flowers at my feet;
I felt a brown bird hover
Over my heart, and sweet
Its shadow lay on my heart.
I thought I saw on the clover
A brown bee pulling apart
The closed flesh of the clover
And burrowing in its heart.

She moved her hand, and again
I felt the brown bird cover
My heart; and then
The bird came down on my heart,
As on a nest the rover
Cuckoo comes, and shoves over
The brim each careful part
Of love, takes possession, and settles her down,
With her wings and her feathers to drown
The nest in a heat of love.

She turned her flushed face to me for the glint
Of a moment. "See," she laughed, "if you also
Can make them yawn." I put my hand to the dint
In the flower's throat, and the flower gaped wide
with woe.

She watched, she went of a sudden intensely still,
She watched my hand, to see what I would fulfil.

I pressed the wretched, throttled flower between
My fingers, till its head lay back, its fangs
Poised at her. Like a weapon my hand was white
and keen,
And I held the choked flower-serpent in its pangs
Of mordant anguish, till she ceased to laugh,

Until her pride's flag, smitten, cleaved down to the
staff.

She hid her face, she murmured between her lips
The low word "Don't." I let the flower fall,
But held my hand afloat towards the slips
Of blossom she fingered, and my fingers all
Put forth to her: she did not move, nor I,
For my hand like a snake watched hers, that could
not fly.

Then I laughed in the dark of my heart, I did exult
Like a sudden chuckling of music. I bade her eyes
Meet mine, I opened her helpless eyes to consult
Their fear, their shame, their joy that underlies
Defeat in such a battle. In the dark of her eyes
My heart was fierce to make her laughter rise.

Till her dark deeps shook with convulsive thrills, and
the dark
Of her spirit wavered like water thrilled with light;
And my heart leaped up in longing to plunge its stark
Fervour within the pool of her twilight,
Within her spacious soul, to grope in delight.

And I do not care, though the large hands of revenge
Shall get my throat at last, shall get it soon,
If the joy that they are searching to avenge
Have risen red on my night as a harvest moon,
Which even death can only put out for me;
And death, I know, is better than not-to-be.

A PASSING BELL

MOURNFULLY to and fro, to and fro the trees are
waving;
What did you say, my dear?
The rain-bruised leaves are suddenly shaken, as a
child
Asleep still shakes in the clutch of a sob —
Yes, my love, I hear.

One lonely bell, one only, the storm-tossed afternoon
is braving,
Why not let it ring?
The roses lean down when they hear it, the tender,
mild
Flowers of the bleeding-heart fall to the throb —
It is such a little thing!

A wet bird walks on the lawn, call to the boy to come
and look,
Yes, it is over now.
Call to him out of the silence, call him to see
The starling shaking its head as it walks in the
grass —
Ah, who knows how?

He cannot see it, I can never show it him, how it
shook —
Don't disturb him, darling.
— Its head as it walked: I can never call him to me,
Never, he is not, whatever shall come to pass.
No, look at the wet starling.

IN TROUBLE AND SHAME

I LOOK at the swaling sunset
And wish I could go also
Through the red doors beyond the black-purple bar.

I wish that I could go
Through the red doors where I could put off
My shame like shoes in the porch,
My pain like garments,
And leave my flesh discarded lying
Like luggage of some departed traveller
Gone one knows not where.

Then I would turn round,
And seeing my cast-off body lying like lumber,
I would laugh with joy.

ELEGY

SINCE I lost you, my darling, the sky has come near, And I am of it, the small sharp stars are quite near, The white moon going among them like a white bird among snow-berries, And the sound of her gently rustling in heaven like a bird I hear.

And I am willing to come to you now, my dear,
As a pigeon lets itself off from a cathedral dome
To be lost in the haze of the sky, I would like to
 come,
And be lost out of sight with you, and be gone like
 foam.

For I am tired, my dear, and if I could lift my feet,
My tenacious feet from off the dome of the earth
To fall like a breath within the breathing wind
Where you are lost, what rest, my love, what rest!

GREY EVENING

WHEN you went, how was it you carried with you
My missal book of fine, flamboyant hours?
My book of turrets and of red-thorn bowers,
And skies of gold, and ladies in bright tissue?

Now underneath a blue-grey twilight, heaped
Beyond the withering snow of the shorn fields
Stands rubble of stunted houses; all is reaped
And garnered that the golden daylight yields.

Dim lamps like yellow poppies glimmer among
The shadowy stubble of the under-dusk,
As farther off the scythe of night is swung,
And little stars come rolling from their husk.

And all the earth is gone into a dust
Of greyness mingled with a fume of gold,
Covered with aged lichens, pale with must,
And all the sky has withered and gone cold.

And so I sit and scan the book of grey,
Feeling the shadows like a blind man reading,
All fearful lest I find the last words bleeding
With wounds of sunset and the dying day.

FIRELIGHT AND NIGHTFALL

THE darkness steals the forms of all the queens,
But oh, the palms of his two black hands are red,
Inflamed with binding up the sheaves of dead
Hours that were once all glory and all queens.

And I remember all the sunny hours
Of queens in hyacinth and skies of gold,
And morning singing where the woods are scrolled
And diapered above the chaunting flowers.

Here lamps are white like snowdrops in the grass;
The town is like a churchyard, all so still
And grey now night is here; nor will
Another torn red sunset come to pass.

THE MYSTIC BLUE

OUT of the darkness, fretted sometimes in its sleeping,
Jets of sparks in fountains of blue come leaping
To sight, revealing a secret, numberless secrets keeping.

Sometimes the darkness trapped within a wheel
Runs into speed like a dream, the blue of the steel
Showing the rocking darkness now a-reel.

And out of the invisible, streams of bright blue drops
Rain from the showery heavens, and bright blue
 crops
Surge from the under-dark to their ladder-tops.

And all the manifold blue and joyous eyes,
The rainbow arching over in the skies,
New sparks of wonder opening in surprise.

All these pure things come foam and spray of the sea
Of Darkness abundant, which shaken mysteriously,
Breaks into dazzle of living, as dolphins that leap
 from the sea
Of midnight shake it to fire, so the secret of death
 we see.

LOOK! WE HAVE COME THROUGH!



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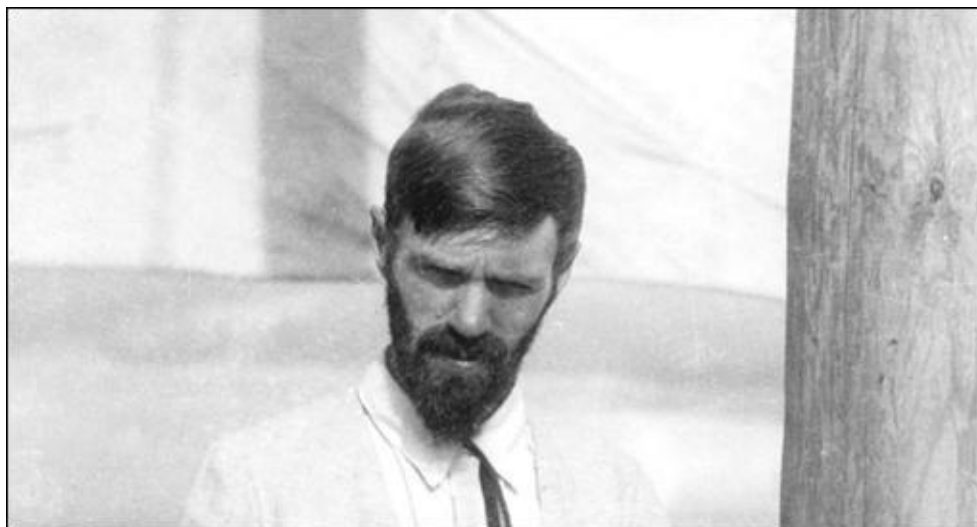
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Lawrence, c.1922

ARGUMENT

After much struggling and loss in love and in the world of man, the protagonist throws in his lot with a woman who is already married. Together they go into another country, she perforce leaving her children behind. The conflict of love and hate goes on between the man and the woman, and between these two and the world around them, till it reaches some sort of conclusion, they transcend into some condition of blessedness

MOONRISE

AND who has seen the moon, who has not seen
Her rise from out the chamber of the deep,
Flushed and grand and naked, as from the chamber
Of finished bridegroom, seen her rise and throw
Confession of delight upon the wave,
Littering the waves with her own superscription
Of bliss, till all her lambent beauty shakes towards us
Spread out and known at last, and we are sure
That beauty is a thing beyond the grave,
That perfect, bright experience never falls
To nothingness, and time will dim the moon
Sooner than our full consummation here
In this odd life will tarnish or pass away.

ELEGY

THE sun immense and rosy
Must have sunk and become extinct
The night you closed your eyes for ever against me.

Grey days, and wan, dree dawnings
Since then, with fritter of flowers- —
Day wearies me with its ostentation and fawnings.

Still, you left me the nights,
The great dark glittery window,
The bubble hemming this empty existence with lights.

Still in the vast hollow
Like a breath in a bubble spinning
Brushing the stars, goes my soul, that skims the
bounds like a swallow!

I can look through
The film of the bubble night, to where you are.
Through the film I can almost touch you.

EASTWOOD

NONENTITY

THE stars that open and shut
Fall on my shallow breast
Like stars on a pool.

The soft wind, blowing cool
Laps little crest after crest
Of ripples across my breast.

And dark grass under my feet
Seems to dabble in me
Like grass in a brook.

Oh, and it is sweet
To be all these things, not to be
Any more myself.

For look,
I am weary of myself!

MARTYR À LA MODE

AH God, life, law, so many names you keep,
You great, you patient Effort, and you Sleep
That does inform this various dream of living,
You sleep stretched out for ever, ever giving
Us out as dreams, you august Sleep
Coursed round by rhythmic movement of all time,

The constellations, your great heart, the sun
Fierily pulsing, unable to refrain;
Since you, vast, outstretched, wordless Sleep
Permit of no beyond, ah you, whose dreams
We are, and body of sleep, let it never be said
I quailed at my appointed function, turned poltroon

For when at night, from out the full surcharge
Of a day's experience, sleep does slowly draw
The harvest, the spent action to itself;
Leaves me unburdened to begin again;
At night, I say, when I am gone in sleep,
Does my slow heart rebel, do my dead hands
Complain of what the day has had them do?

Never let it be said I was poltroon
At this my task of living, this my dream,
This me which rises from the dark of sleep
In white flesh robed to drape another dream,
As lightning comes all white and trembling
From out the cloud of sleep, looks round about
One moment, sees, and swift its dream is over,
In one rich drip it sinks to another sleep,
And sleep thereby is one more dream enriched.

If so the Vast, the God, the Sleep that still grows richer
Have said that I, this mote in the body of sleep

Must in my transiency pass all through pain,
Must be a dream of grief, must like a crude
Dull meteorite flash only into light
When tearing through the anguish of this life,
Still in full flight extinct, shall I then turn
Poltroon, and beg the silent, outspread God
To alter my one speck of doom, when round me burns
The whole great conflagration of all life,
Lapped like a body close upon a sleep,
Hiding and covering in the eternal Sleep
Within the immense and toilsome life-time, heaved
With ache of dreams that body forth the Sleep?

Shall I, less than the least red grain of flesh
Within my body, cry out to the dreaming soul
That slowly labours in a vast travail,
To halt the heart, divert the streaming flow
That carries moons along, and spare the stress
That crushes me to an unseen atom of fire?

When pain and all
And grief are but the same last wonder, Sleep
Rising to dream in me a small keen dream
Of sudden anguish, sudden over and spent- —

CROYDON

DON JUAN

IT is Isis the mystery
Must be in love with me.

Here this round ball of earth
Where all the mountains sit
Solemn in groups,
And the bright rivers flit
Round them for girth.

Here the trees and troops
Darken the shining grass,
And many people pass
Plundered from heaven,
Many bright people pass,
Plunder from heaven.

What of the mistresses
What the beloved seven?
— They were but witnesses,
I was just driven.

Where is there peace for me?
Isis the mystery
Must be in love with me.

THE SEA

You, you are all unloving, loveless, you;
Restless and lonely, shaken by your own moods,
You are celibate and single, scorning a comrade even,
Threshing your own passions with no woman for
the threshing-floor,
Finishing your dreams for your own sake only,
Playing your great game around the world, alone,
Without playmate, or helpmate, having no one to cherish,
No one to comfort, and refusing any comforter.

Not like the earth, the spouse all full of increase
Moiled over with the rearing of her many-mouthed young;
You are single, you are fruitless, phosphorescent,
cold and callous,
Naked of worship, of love or of adornment,
Scorning the panacea even of labour,
Sworn to a high and splendid purposelessness
Of brooding and delighting in the secret of life's goings,
Sea, only you are free, sophisticated.

You who toil not, you who spin not,
Surely but for you and your like, toiling
Were not worth while, nor spinning worth the effort!

You who take the moon as in a sieve, and sift
Her flake by flake and spread her meaning out;
You who roll the stars like jewels in your palm,
So that they seem to utter themselves aloud;
You who steep from out the days their colour,
Reveal the universal tint that dyes
Their web; who shadow the sun's great gestures
and expressions
So that he seems a stranger in his passing;
Who voice the dumb night fittingly;

Sea, you shadow of all things, now mock us to
death with your shadowing.

BOURNEMOUTH

HYMN TO PRIAPUS

MY love lies underground
With her face upturned to mine,
And her mouth unclosed in a last long kiss
That ended her life and mine.

I dance at the Christmas party
Under the mistletoe
Along with a ripe, slack country lass
Jostling to and fro.

The big, soft country lass,
Like a loose sheaf of wheat
Slipped through my arms on the threshing floor
At my feet.

The warm, soft country lass,
Sweet as an armful of wheat
At threshing-time broken, was broken
For me, and ah, it was sweet!

Now I am going home
Fulfilled and alone,
I see the great Orion standing
Looking down.

He's the star of my first beloved
Love-making.
The witness of all that bitter-sweet
Heart-aching.

Now he sees this as well,
This last commission.
Nor do I get any look

Of admonition.

He can add the reckoning up
I suppose, between now and then,
Having walked himself in the thorny, difficult
Ways of men.

He has done as I have done
No doubt:
Remembered and forgotten
Turn and about.

My love lies underground
With her face upturned to mine,
And her mouth unclosed in the last long kiss
That ended her life and mine.

She fares in the stark immortal
Fields of death;
I in these goodly, frozen
Fields beneath.

Something in me remembers
And will not forget.
The stream of my life in the darkness
Deathward set!

And something in me has forgotten,
Has ceased to care.
Desire comes up, and contentment
Is debonair.

I, who am worn and careful,
How much do I care?
How is it I grin then, and chuckle
Over despair?

Grief, grief, I suppose and sufficient
Grief makes us free
To be faithless and faithful together
As we have to be.

BALLAD OF A WILFUL WOMAN

FIRST PART

UPON her plodding palfrey
With a heavy child at her breast
And Joseph holding the bridle
They mount to the last hill-crest.

Dissatisfied and weary
She sees the blade of the sea
Dividing earth and heaven
In a glitter of ecstasy.

Sudden a dark-faced stranger
With his back to the sun, holds out
His arms; so she lights from her palfrey
And turns her round about.

She has given the child to Joseph,
Gone down to the flashing shore;
And Joseph, shading his eyes with his hand,
Stands watching evermore.

SECOND PART

THE sea in the stones is singing,
A woman binds her hair
With yellow, frail sea-poppies,
That shine as her fingers stir.

While a naked man comes swiftly
Like a spurt of white foam rent
From the crest of a falling breaker,
Over the poppies sent.

He puts his surf-wet fingers
Over her startled eyes,
And asks if she sees the land, the land,
The land of her glad surmise.

THIRD PART

AGAIN in her blue, blue mantle
Riding at Joseph's side,
She says, "I went to Cythera,
And woe betide!"

Her heart is a swinging cradle
That holds the perfect child,
But the shade on her forehead ill becomes
A mother mild.

So on with the slow, mean journey
In the pride of humility;
Till they halt at a cliff on the edge of the land
Over a sullen sea.

While Joseph pitches the sleep-tent
She goes far down to the shore
To where a man in a heaving boat
Waits with a lifted oar.

FOURTH PART

THEY dwelt in a huge, hoarse sea-cave
And looked far down the dark
Where an archway torn and glittering
Shone like a huge sea-spark.

He said: "Do you see the spirits
Crowding the bright doorway?"
He said: "Do you hear them whispering?"
He said: "Do you catch what they say?"

FIFTH PART

THEN Joseph, grey with waiting,
His dark eyes full of pain,
Heard: "I have been to Patmos;
Give me the child again."

Now on with the hopeless journey
Looking bleak ahead she rode,
And the man and the child of no more account
Than the earth the palfrey trode.

Till a beggar spoke to Joseph,
But looked into her eyes;
So she turned, and said to her husband:
"I give, whoever denies."

SIXTH PART

SHE gave on the open heather
Beneath bare judgment stars,
And she dreamed of her children and Joseph,
And the isles, and her men, and her scars.

And she woke to distil the berries
The beggar had gathered at night,
Whence he drew the curious liquors
He held in delight.

He gave her no crown of flowers,
No child and no palfrey slow,
Only led her through harsh, hard places
Where strange winds blow.

She follows his restless wanderings
Till night when, by the fire's red stain,
Her face is bent in the bitter steam
That comes from the flowers of pain.

Then merciless and ruthless
He takes the flame-wild drops
To the town, and tries to sell them
With the market-crops.

So she follows the cruel journey
That ends not anywhere,
And dreams, as she stirs the mixing-pot,
She is brewing hope from despair.

TRIER

FIRST MORNING

THE night was a failure
but why not — ?

In the darkness
with the pale dawn seething at the window
through the black frame
I could not be free,
not free myself from the past, those others- —
and our love was a confusion,
there was a horror,
you recoiled away from me.

Now, in the morning
As we sit in the sunshine on the seat by the little shrine,
And look at the mountain-walls,
Walls of blue shadow,
And see so near at our feet in the meadow
Myriads of dandelion pappus
Bubbles ravelled in the dark green grass
Held still beneath the sunshine- —

It is enough, you are near- —
The mountains are balanced,
The dandelion seeds stay half-submerged in the grass;
You and I together
We hold them proud and blithe
On our love.
They stand upright on our love,
Everything starts from us,
We are the source.

BEUERBERG

AND OH — THAT THE MAN I AM MIGHT CEASE TO BE- —

No, now I wish the sunshine would stop,
and the white shining houses, and the gay red
flowers on the balconies
and the bluish mountains beyond, would be crushed out
between two valves of darkness;
the darkness falling, the darkness rising, with
muffled sound
obliterating everything.

I wish that whatever props up the walls of light
would fall, and darkness would come hurling
heavily down,
and it would be thick black dark for ever.
Not sleep, which is grey with dreams,
nor death, which quivers with birth,
but heavy, sealing darkness, silence, all immovable.

What is sleep?
It goes over me, like a shadow over a hill,
but it does not alter me, nor help me.
And death would ache still, I am sure;
it would be lambent, uneasy.
I wish it would be completely dark everywhere,
inside me, and out, heavily dark utterly.

WOLFRATSHAUSEN

SHE LOOKS BACK

THE pale bubbles
The lovely pale-gold bubbles of the globe-flowers
In a great swarm clotted and single
Went rolling in the dusk towards the river
To where the sunset hung its wan gold cloths;
And you stood alone, watching them go,
And that mother-love like a demon drew you
from me
Towards England.

Along the road, after nightfall,
Along the glamorous birch-tree avenue
Across the river levels
We went in silence, and you staring to England.

So then there shone within the jungle darkness
Of the long, lush under-grass, a glow-worm's sudden
Green lantern of pure light, a little, intense, fusing triumph,
White and haloed with fire-mist, down in the
tangled darkness.

Then you put your hand in mine again, kissed me,
and we struggled to be together.
And the little electric flashes went with us, in the grass,
Tiny lighthouses, little souls of lanterns, courage
burst into an explosion of green light
Everywhere down in the grass, where darkness was
ravelled in darkness.

Still, the kiss was a touch of bitterness on my mouth
Like salt, burning in.
And my hand withered in your hand.
For you were straining with a wild heart, back,
back again,

Back to those children you had left behind, to all
the æons of the past.
And I was here in the under-dusk of the Isar.

At home, we leaned in the bedroom window
Of the old Bavarian Gasthaus,
And the frogs in the pool beyond thrilled with
exuberance,
Like a boiling pot the pond crackled with happiness,
Like a rattle a child spins round for joy, the night rattled
With the extravagance of the frogs,
And you leaned your cheek on mine,
And I suffered it, wanting to sympathise.

At last, as you stood, your white gown falling from
your breasts,
You looked into my eyes, and said: "But this is
joy!"
I acquiesced again.
But the shadow of lying was in your eyes,
The mother in you, fierce as a murderess, glaring
to England,
Yearning towards England, towards your young children,
Insisting upon your motherhood, devastating.

Still, the joy was there also, you spoke truly,
The joy was not to be driven off so easily;
Stronger than fear or destructive mother-love, it
stood flickering;
The frogs helped also, whirring away.
Yet how I have learned to know that look in your eyes
Of horrid sorrow!
How I know that glitter of salt, dry, sterile,
sharp, corrosive salt!
Not tears, but white sharp brine
Making hideous your eyes.

I have seen it, felt it in my mouth, my throat, my
chest, my belly,
Burning of powerful salt, burning, eating through
my defenceless nakedness.
I have been thrust into white, sharp crystals,
Writhing, twisting, superpenetrated.

Ah, Lot's Wife, Lot's Wife!
The pillar of salt, the whirling, horrible column
of salt, like a waterspout
That has enveloped me!
Snow of salt, white, burning, eating salt
In which I have writhed.

Lot's Wife! — Not Wife, but Mother.
I have learned to curse your motherhood,
You pillar of salt accursed.
I have cursed motherhood because of you,
Accursed, base motherhood!

I long for the time to come, when the curse against
you will have gone out of my heart.
But it has not gone yet.
Nevertheless, once, the frogs, the globe-flowers of
Bavaria, the glow-worms
Gave me sweet lymph against the salt-burns,
There is a kindness in the very rain.

Therefore, even in the hour of my deepest, pas —
sionate malediction
I try to remember it is also well between us.
That you are with me in the end.
That you never look quite back; nine-tenths, ah, more
You look round over your shoulder;
But never quite back.

Nevertheless the curse against you is still in my heart

Like a deep, deep burn.
The curse against all mothers.
All mothers who fortify themselves in motherhood,
devastating the vision.
They are accursed, and the curse is not taken off
It burns within me like a deep, old burn,
And oh, I wish it was better.

BEUERBERG

ON THE BALCONY

IN front of the sombre mountains, a faint, lost
ribbon of rainbow;
And between us and it, the thunder;
And down below in the green wheat, the labourers
Stand like dark stumps, still in the green wheat.

You are near to me, and your naked feet in their sandals,
And through the scent of the balcony's naked timber
I distinguish the scent of your hair: so now the limber
Lightning falls from heaven.

A down the pale-green glacier river floats
A dark boat through the gloom — and whither?
The thunder roars. But still we have each other!
The naked lightnings in the heavens dither
And disappear — what have we but each other?
The boat has gone.

ICKING

FROHNLEICHNAM

You have come your way, I have come my way;
You have stepped across your people, carelessly,
hurting them all;
I have stepped across my people, and hurt them
in spite of my care.

But steadily, surely, and notwithstanding
We have come our ways and met at last
Here in this upper room.

Here the balcony
Overhangs the street where the bullock-wagons slowly
Go by with their loads of green and silver birch-trees
For the feast of Corpus Christi.

Here from the balcony
We look over the growing wheat, where the jade —
green river
Goes between the pine-woods,
Over and beyond to where the many mountains
Stand in their blueness, flashing with snow and the morning.

I have done; a quiver of exultation goes through
me, like the first
Breeze of the morning through a narrow white birch.
You glow at last like the mountain tops when they catch
Day and make magic in heaven.

At last I can throw away world without end, and
meet you
Unsheathed and naked and narrow and white;
At last you can throw immortality off, and I see you
Glistening with all the moment and all your beauty.

Shameless and callous I love you;
Out of indifference I love you;
Out of mockery we dance together,
Out of the sunshine into the shadow,
Passing across the shadow into the sunlight,
Out of sunlight to shadow.

As we dance
Your eyes take all of me in as a communication;
As we dance
I see you, ah, in full!
Only to dance together in triumph of being together
Two white ones, sharp, vindicated,
Shining and touching,
Is heaven of our own, sheer with repudiation.

IN THE DARK

A BLOTCH of pallor stirs beneath the high
Square picture-dusk, the window of dark sky.

A sound subdued in the darkness: tears!
As if a bird in difficulty up the valley steers.

“Why have you gone to the window? Why don’t
you sleep?
How you have wakened me! But why, why do
you weep?”

“I am afraid of you, I am afraid, afraid!
There is something in you destroys me — !”

“You have dreamed and are not awake, come here
to me.”
“No, I have wakened. It is you, you are cruel to
me!”

“My dear!” — “Yes, yes, you are cruel to me. You cast
A shadow over my breasts that will kill me at last.”

“Come!” — “No, I’m a thing of life. I give
You armfuls of sunshine, and you won’t let me live.”

“Nay, I’m too sleepy!” — “Ah, you are horrible;
You stand before me like ghosts, like a darkness
upright.”

“I!” — “How can you treat me so, and love me?
My feet have no hold, you take the sky from above me.”

“My dear, the night is soft and eternal, no doubt
You love it!” — “It is dark, it kills me, I am put out.”

“My dear, when you cross the street in the sun —
shine, surely
Your own small night goes with you. Why treat
it so poorly?”

“No, no, I dance in the sun, I’m a thing of life — “
“Even then it is dark behind you. Turn round,
my wife.”

“No, how cruel you are, you people the sunshine
With shadows!” — “With yours I people the
sunshine, yours and mine — “

“In the darkness we all are gone, we are gone
with the trees
And the restless river; — we are lost and gone
with all these.”

“But I am myself, I have nothing to do with these.”
“Come back to bed, let us sleep on our mysteries.

“Come to me here, and lay your body by mine,
And I will be all the shadow, you the shine.

“Come, you are cold, the night has frightened you.
Hark at the river! It pants as it hurries through

“The pine-woods. How I love them so, in their
mystery of not-to-be.”
“ — But let me be myself, not a river or a tree.”

“Kiss me! How cold you are! — Your little breasts

Are bubbles of ice. Kiss me! — You know how
it rests

“One to be quenched, to be given up, to be gone
in the dark;
To be blown out, to let night dowse the spark.

“But never mind, my love. Nothing matters,
save sleep;
Save you, and me, and sleep; all the rest will
keep.”

MUTILATION

A THICK mist-sheet lies over the broken wheat.
I walk up to my neck in mist, holding my mouth up.
Across there, a discoloured moon burns itself out.

I hold the night in horror;
I dare not turn round.

To-night I have left her alone.
They would have it I have left her for ever.

Oh my God, how it aches
Where she is cut off from me!

Perhaps she will go back to England.
Perhaps she will go back,
Perhaps we are parted for ever.

If I go on walking through the whole breadth of
Germany
I come to the North Sea, or the Baltic.

Over there is Russia — Austria, Switzerland, France,
in a circle!
I here in the undermist on the Bavarian road.

It aches in me.
What is England or France, far off,
But a name she might take?
I don't mind this continent stretching, the sea far away;
It aches in me for her
Like the agony of limbs cut off and aching;
Not even longing,

It is only agony.

A cripple!
Oh God, to be mutilated!
To be a cripple!

And if I never see her again?

I think, if they told me so
I could convulse the heavens with my horror.
I think I could alter the frame of things in my agony.
I think I could break the System with my heart.
I think, in my convulsion, the skies would break.

She too suffers.
But who could compel her, if she chose me against
them all?
She has not chosen me finally, she suspends her choice.
Night folk, Tuatha De Danaan, dark Gods, govern
her sleep,
Magnificent ghosts of the darkness, carry off her
decision in sleep,
Leave her no choice, make her lapse me-ward,
make her,
Oh Gods of the living Darkness, powers of Night.

WOLFRATSHAUSEN

HUMILIATION

I HAVE been so innerly proud, and so long alone,
Do not leave me, or I shall break.
Do not leave me.

What should I do if you were gone again
So soon?
What should I look for?
Where should I go?
What should I be, I myself,
“I”?
What would it mean, this
I?

Do not leave me.

What should I think of death?
If I died, it would not be you:
It would be simply the same
Lack of you.
The same want, life or death,
Unfulfilment,
The same insanity of space
You not there for me.

Think, I daren't die
For fear of the lack in death.
And I daren't live.

Unless there were a morphine or a drug.

I would bear the pain.
But always, strong, unremitting
It would make me not me.

The thing with my body that would go on living
Would not be me.
Neither life nor death could help.

Think, I couldn't look towards death
Nor towards the future:
Only not look.
Only myself
Stand still and bind and blind myself.

God, that I have no choice!
That my own fulfilment is up against me
Timelessly!
The burden of self-accomplishment!
The charge of fulfilment!
And God, that she is necessary!
Necessary, and I have no choice!

Do not leave me.

A YOUNG WIFE

THE pain of loving you
Is almost more than I can bear.

I walk in fear of you.
The darkness starts up where
You stand, and the night comes through
Your eyes when you look at me.

Ah never before did I see
The shadows that live in the sun!

Now every tall glad tree
Turns round its back to the sun
And looks down on the ground, to see
The shadow it used to shun.

At the foot of each glowing thing
A night lies looking up.

Oh, and I want to sing
And dance, but I can't lift up
My eyes from the shadows: dark
They lie spilt round the cup.

What is it? — Hark
The faint fine seethe in the air!

Like the seething sound in a shell!
It is death still seething where
The wild-flower shakes its bell
And the sky lark twinkles blue- —

The pain of loving you
Is almost more than I can bear.

GREEN

THE dawn was apple-green,
The sky was green wine held up in the sun,
The moon was a golden petal between.

She opened her eyes, and green
They shone, clear like flowers undone
For the first time, now for the first time seen.

ICKING

RIVER ROSES

BY the Isar, in the twilight
We were wandering and singing,
By the Isar, in the evening
We climbed the huntsman's ladder and sat swinging
In the fir-tree overlooking the marshes,
While river met with river, and the ringing
Of their pale-green glacier water filled the evening.

By the Isar, in the twilight
We found the dark wild roses
Hanging red at the river; and simmering
Frogs were singing, and over the river closes
Was savour of ice and of roses; and glimmering
Fear was abroad. We whispered: "No one
knows us.
Let it be as the snake disposes
Here in this simmering marsh."

KLOSTER SCHAEFTLARN

GLOIRE DE DIJON

WHEN she rises in the morning
I linger to watch her;
She spreads the bath-cloth underneath the window
And the sunbeams catch her
Glistening white on the shoulders,
While down her sides the mellow
Golden shadow glows as
She stoops to the sponge, and her swung breasts
Sway like full-blown yellow
Gloire de Dijon roses.

She drips herself with water, and her shoulders
Glisten as silver, they crumple up
Like wet and falling roses, and I listen
For the sluicing of their rain-dishevelled petals.
In the window full of sunlight
Concentrates her golden shadow
Fold on fold, until it glows as
Mellow as the glory roses.

ICKING

ROSES ON THE BREAKFAST TABLE

JUST a few of the roses we gathered from the Isar
Are fallen, and their mauve-red petals on the cloth
Float like boats on a river, while other
Roses are ready to fall, reluctant and loth.

She laughs at me across the table, saying
I am beautiful. I look at the rumpled young roses
And suddenly realise, in them as in me,
How lovely the present is that this day discloses.

I AM LIKE A ROSE

I AM myself at last; now I achieve
My very self. I, with the wonder mellow,
Full of fine warmth, I issue forth in clear
And single me, perfected from my fellow.

Here I am all myself. No rose-bush heaving
Its limpid sap to culmination, has brought
Itself more sheer and naked out of the green
In stark-clear roses, than I to myself am brought.

ROSE OF ALL THE WORLD

I AM here myself; as though this heave of effort
At starting other life, fulfilled my own:
Rose-leaves that whirl in colour round a core
Of seed-specks kindled lately and softly blown

By all the blood of the rose-bush into being- —
Strange, that the urgent will in me, to set
My mouth on hers in kisses, and so softly
To bring together two strange sparks, beget

Another life from our lives, so should send
The innermost fire of my own dim soul out-spinning
And whirling in blossom of flame and being upon me!
That my completion of manhood should be the beginning

Another life from mine! For so it looks.
The seed is purpose, blossom accident.
The seed is all in all, the blossom lent
To crown the triumph of this new descent.

Is that it, woman? Does it strike you so?
The Great Breath blowing a tiny seed of fire
Fans out your petals for excess of flame,
Till all your being smokes with fine desire?

Or are we kindled, you and I, to be
One rose of wonderment upon the tree
Of perfect life, and is our possible seed
But the residuum of the ecstasy?

How will you have it? — the rose is all in all,
Or the ripe rose-fruits of the luscious fall?
The sharp begetting, or the child begot?

Our consummation matters, or does it not?

To me it seems the seed is just left over
From the red rose-flowers' fiery transience;
Just orts and slarts; berries that smoulder in the bush
Which burnt just now with marvellous immanence.

Blossom, my darling, blossom, be a rose
Of roses unhidden and purposeless; a rose
For rosiness only, without an ulterior motive;
For me it is more than enough if the flower un-close.

A YOUTH MOWING

THERE are four men mowing down by the Isar;
I can hear the swish of the scythe-strokes, four
Sharp breaths taken: yea, and I
Am sorry for what's in store.

The first man out of the four that's mowing
Is mine, I claim him once and for all;
Though it's sorry I am, on his young feet, knowing
None of the trouble he's led to stall.

As he sees me bringing the dinner, he lifts
His head as proud as a deer that looks
Shoulder-deep out of the corn; and wipes
His scythe-blade bright, unhooks

The scythe-stone and over the stubble to me.
Lad, thou hast gotten a child in me,
Laddie, a man thou'lt ha'e to be,
Yea, though I'm sorry for thee.

QUITE FORSAKEN

WHAT pain, to wake and miss you!
To wake with a tightened heart,
And mouth reaching forward to kiss you!

This then at last is the dawn, and the bell
Clanging at the farm! Such bewilderment
Comes with the sight of the room, I cannot tell.

It is raining. Down the half-obscure road
Four labourers pass with their scythes
Dejectedly; — a huntsman goes by with his load:

A gun, and a bunched-up deer, its four little feet
Clustered dead. — And this is the dawn
For which I wanted the night to retreat!

FORSAKEN AND FORLORN

THE house is silent, it is late at night, I am alone.
From the balcony
I can hear the Isar moan,
Can see the white
Rift of the river eerily, between the pines, under
a sky of stone.

Some fireflies drift through the middle air
Tinily.
I wonder where
Ends this darkness that annihilates me.

FIREFLIES IN THE CORN

She speaks.

Look at the little darlings in the corn!
The rye is taller than you, who think yourself
So high and mighty: look how the heads are borne
Dark and proud on the sky, like a number of knights
Passing with spears and pennants and manly scorn.

Knights indeed! — much knight I know will ride
With his head held high-serene against the sky!
Limping and following rather at my side
Moaning for me to love him! — Oh darling rye
How I adore you for your simple pride!

And the dear, dear fireflies wafting in between
And over the swaying corn-stalks, just above
All the dark-feathered helmets, like little green
Stars come low and wandering here for love
Of these dark knights, shedding their delicate sheen!

I thank you I do, you happy creatures, you dears
Riding the air, and carrying all the time
Your little lanterns behind you! Ah, it cheers
My soul to see you settling and trying to climb
The corn-stalks, tipping with fire the spears.

All over the dim corn's motion, against the blue
Dark sky of night, a wandering glitter, a swarm
Of questing brilliant souls going out with their true
Proud knights to battle! Sweet, how I warm
My poor, my perished soul with the sight of you!

A DOE AT EVENING

As I went through the marshes
a doe sprang out of the corn
and flashed up the hill-side
leaving her fawn.

On the sky-line
she moved round to watch,
she pricked a fine black blotch
on the sky.

I looked at her
and felt her watching;
I became a strange being.
Still, I had my right to be there with her,

Her nimble shadow trotting
along the sky-line, she
put back her fine, level-balanced head.
And I knew her.

Ah yes, being male, is not my head hard-balanced, antlered?
Are not my haunches light?
Has she not fled on the same wind with me?
Does not my fear cover her fear?

IRSCHENHAUSEN

SONG OF A MAN WHO IS NOT LOVED

THE space of the world is immense, before me and
around me;

If I turn quickly, I am terrified, feeling space
surround me;

Like a man in a boat on very clear, deep water,
space frightens and confounds me.

I see myself isolated in the universe, and wonder
What effect I can have. My hands wave under
The heavens like specks of dust that are floating asunder.

I hold myself up, and feel a big wind blowing
Me like a gadfly into the dusk, without my know-ing
Whither or why or even how I am going.

So much there is outside me, so infinitely
Small am I, what matter if minutely
I beat my way, to be lost immediately?

How shall I flatter myself that I can do
Anything in such immensity? I am too
Little to count in the wind that drifts me through.

GLASHÜTTE

SINNERS

THE big mountains sit still in the afternoon light
Shadows in their lap;
The bees roll round in the wild-thyme with de-light.

We sitting here among the cranberries
So still in the gap
Of rock, distilling our memories

Are sinners! Strange! The bee that blunders
Against me goes off with a laugh.
A squirrel cocks his head on the fence, and wonders

What about sin? — For, it seems
The mountains have
No shadow of us on their snowy forehead of dreams

As they ought to have. They rise above us
Dreaming
For ever. One even might think that they love us.

Little red cranberries cheek to cheek,
Two great dragon-flies wrestling;
You, with your forehead nestling
Against me, and bright peak shining to peak- —

There's a love-song for you! — Ah, if only
There were no teeming
Swarms of mankind in the world, and we were
less lonely!

MAYRHOFEN

MISERY

OUT of this oubliette between the mountains
five valleys go, five passes like gates;
three of them black in shadow, two of them bright
with distant sunshine;
and sunshine fills one high valley bed,
green grass shining, and little white houses
like quartz crystals,
little, but distinct a way off.

Why don't I go?
Why do I crawl about this pot, this oubliette, stupidly?
Why don't I go?

But where?
If I come to a pine-wood, I can't say
Now I am arrived!
What are so many straight trees to me!

STERZING

SUNDAY AFTERNOON IN ITALY

THE man and the maid go side by side
With an interval of space between;
And his hands are awkward and want to hide,
She braves it out since she must be seen.

When some one passes he drops his head
Shading his face in his black felt hat,
While the hard girl hardens; nothing is said,
There is nothing to wonder or cavil at.

Alone on the open road again
With the mountain snows across the lake
Flushing the afternoon, they are uncomfortable,
The loneliness daunts them, their stiff throats ache.

And he sighs with relief when she parts from him;
Her proud head held in its black silk scarf
Gone under the archway, home, he can join
The men that lounge in a group on the wharf.

His evening is a flame of wine
Among the eager, cordial men.
And she with her women hot and hard
Moves at her ease again.

She is marked, she is singled out
For the fire:
The brand is upon him, look — you,
Of desire.

They are chosen, ah, they are fated
For the fight!
Champion her, all you women! Men, menfolk

Hold him your light!

Nourish her, train her, harden her

Women all!

Fold him, be good to him, cherish him

Men, ere he fall.

Women, another champion!

This, men, is yours!

Wreath and enlap and anoint them

Behind separate doors.

GARGNANO

WINTER DAWN

GREEN star Sirius
Dribbling over the lake;
The stars have gone so far on their road,
Yet we're awake!

Without a sound
The new young year comes in
And is half-way over the lake.
We must begin

Again. This love so full
Of hate has hurt us so,
We lie side by side
Moored — but no,

Let me get up
And wash quite clean
Of this hate.- —
So green

The great star goes!
I am washed quite clean,
Quite clean of it all.
But e'en

So cold, so cold and clean
Now the hate is gone!
It is all no good,
I am chilled to the bone

Now the hate is gone;
There is nothing left;
I am pure like bone,

Of all feeling bereft.

A BAD BEGINNING

THE yellow sun steps over the mountain-top
And falters a few short steps across the lake- —
Are you awake?

See, glittering on the milk-blue, morning lake
They are laying the golden racing-track of the sun;
The day has begun.

The sun is in my eyes, I must get up.
I want to go, there's a gold road blazes before
My breast — which is so sore.

What? — your throat is bruised, bruised with my kisses?
Ah, but if I am cruel what then are you?
I am bruised right through.

What if I love you! — This misery
Of your dissatisfaction and misprision
Stupefies me.

Ah yes, your open arms! Ah yes, ah yes,
You would take me to your breast! — But no,
You should come to mine,
It were better so.

Here I am — get up and come to me!
Not as a visitor either, nor a sweet
And winsome child of innocence; nor
As an insolent mistress telling my pulse's beat.

Come to me like a woman coming home
To the man who is her husband, all the rest

Subordinate to this, that he and she
Are joined together for ever, as is best.

Behind me on the lake I hear the steamer drum-ming
From Austria. There lies the world, and here
Am I. Which way are you coming?

WHY DOES SHE WEEP?

HUSH then
why do you cry?
It's you and me
the same as before.

If you hear a rustle
it's only a rabbit
gone back to his hole
in a bustle.

If something stirs in the branches
overhead, it will be a squirrel moving
uneasily, disturbed by the stress
of our loving.

Why should you cry then?
Are you afraid of God
in the dark?

I'm not afraid of God.
Let him come forth.
If he is hiding in the cover
let him come forth.

Now in the cool of the day
it is we who walk in the trees
and call to God "Where art thou?"
And it is he who hides.

Why do you cry?
My heart is bitter.
Let God come forth to justify
himself now.

Why do you cry?
Is it Wehmut, ist dir weh?
Weep then, yea
for the abomination of our old righteousness,

We have done wrong
many times;
but this time we begin to do right.

Weep then, weep
for the abomination of our past righteousness.
God will keep
hidden, he won't come forth.

GIORNO DEI MORTI

ALONG the avenue of cypresses
All in their scarlet cloaks, and surplices
Of linen go the chanting choristers,
The priests in gold and black, the villagers. . . .

And all along the path to the cemetery
The round dark heads of men crowd silently,
And black-scarved faces of women-folk, wistfully
Watch at the banner of death, and the mystery.

And at the foot of a grave a father stands
With sunken head, and forgotten, folded hands;
And at the foot of a grave a mother kneels
With pale shut face, nor either hears nor feels

The coming of the chanting choristers
Between the avenue of cypresses,
The silence of the many villagers,
The candle-flames beside the surplices.

ALL SOULS

THEY are chanting now the service of All the Dead
And the village folk outside in the burying ground
Listen — except those who strive with their dead,
Reaching out in anguish, yet unable quite to
touch them:

Those villagers isolated at the grave
Where the candles burn in the daylight, and the
painted wreaths
Are propped on end, there, where the mystery starts.

The naked candles burn on every grave.
On your grave, in England, the weeds grow.

But I am your naked candle burning,
And that is not your grave, in England,
The world is your grave.
And my naked body standing on your grave
Upright towards heaven is burning off to you
Its flame of life, now and always, till the end.

It is my offering to you; every day is All Souls'
Day.

I forget you, have forgotten you.
I am busy only at my burning,
I am busy only at my life.
But my feet are on your grave, planted.
And when I lift my face, it is a flame that goes up
To the other world, where you are now.
But I am not concerned with you.
I have forgotten you.

I am a naked candle burning on your grave.

LADY WIFE

AH yes, I know you well, a sojourner
At the hearth;
I know right well the marriage ring you wear,
And what it's worth.

The angels came to Abraham, and they stayed
In his house awhile;
So you to mine, I imagine; yes, happily
Condescend to be vile.

I see you all the time, you bird-blithe, lovely
Angel in disguise.
I see right well how I ought to be grateful,
Smitten with reverent surprise.

Listen, I have no use
For so rare a visit;
Mine is a common devil's
Requisite.

Rise up and go, I have no use for you
And your blithe, glad mien.
No angels here, for me no goddesses,
Nor any Queen.

Put ashes on your head, put sackcloth on
And learn to serve.
You have fed me with your sweetness, now I am sick,
As I deserve.

Queens, ladies, angels, women rare,
I have had enough.
Put sackcloth on, be crowned with powdery ash,

Be common stuff.

And serve now woman, serve, as a woman should,
Implicitly.
Since I must serve and struggle with the imminent
Mystery.

Serve then, I tell you, add your strength to mine
Take on this doom.
What are you by yourself, do you think, and what
The mere fruit of your womb?

What is the fruit of your womb then, you mother,
you queen,
When it falls to the ground?
Is it more than the apples of Sodom you scorn so,
the men
Who abound?

Bring forth the sons of your womb then, and put them
Into the fire
Of Sodom that covers the earth; bring them forth
From the womb of your precious desire.

You woman most holy, you mother, you being beyond
Question or diminution,
Add yourself up, and your seed, to the nought
Of your last solution.

BOTH SIDES OF THE MEDAL

AND because you love me
think you do not hate me?
Ha, since you love me
to ecstasy
it follows you hate me to ecstasy.

Because when you hear me
go down the road outside the house
you must come to the window to watch me go,
do you think it is pure worship?

Because, when I sit in the room,
here, in my own house,
and you want to enlarge yourself with this friend of mine,
such a friend as he is,
yet you cannot get beyond your awareness of me
you are held back by my being in the same world
with you,
do you think it is bliss alone?
sheer harmony?

No doubt if I were dead, you must
reach into death after me,
but would not your hate reach even more madly
than your love?
your impassioned, unfinished hate?

Since you have a passion for me,
as I for you,
does not that passion stand in your way like a
Balaam's ass?
and am I not Balaam's ass
golden-mouthed occasionally?
But mostly, do you not detest my bray?

Since you are confined in the orbit of me
do you not loathe the confinement?
Is not even the beauty and peace of an orbit
an intolerable prison to you,
as it is to everybody?

But we will learn to submit
each of us to the balanced, eternal orbit
wherein we circle on our fate
in strange conjunction.

What is chaos, my love?
It is not freedom.
A disarray of falling stars coming to nought.

LOGGERHEADS

PLEASE yourself how you have it.
Take my words, and fling
Them down on the counter roundly;
See if they ring.

Sift my looks and expressions,
And see what proportion there is
Of sand in my doubtful sugar
Of verities.

Have a real stock-taking
Of my manly breast;
Find out if I'm sound or bankrupt,
Or a poor thing at best.

For I am quite indifferent
To your dubious state,
As to whether you've found a fortune
In me, or a flea-bitten fate.

Make a good investigation
Of all that is there,
And then, if it's worth it, be grateful- —
If not then despair.

If despair is our portion
Then let us despair.
Let us make for the weeping willow.
I don't care.

DECEMBER NIGHT

TAKE off your cloak and your hat
And your shoes, and draw up at my hearth
Where never woman sat.

I have made the fire up bright;
Let us leave the rest in the dark
And sit by firelight.

The wine is warm in the hearth;
The flickers come and go.
I will warm your feet with kisses
Until they glow.

NEW YEAR'S EVE

THERE are only two things now,
The great black night scooped out
And this fire-glow.

This fire-glow, the core,
And we the two ripe pips
That are held in store.

Listen, the darkness rings
As it circulates round our fire.
Take off your things.

Your shoulders, your bruised throat
Your breasts, your nakedness!
This fiery coat!

As the darkness flickers and dips,
As the firelight falls and leaps
From your feet to your lips!

NEW YEAR'S NIGHT

Now you are mine, to-night at last I say it;
You're a dove I have bought for sacrifice,
And to-night I slay it.

Here in my arms my naked sacrifice!
Death, do you hear, in my arms I am bringing
My offering, bought at great price.

She's a silvery dove worth more than all I've got.
Now I offer her up to the ancient, inexorable God,
Who knows me not.

Look, she's a wonderful dove, without blemish or spot!
I sacrifice all in her, my last of the world,
Pride, strength, all the lot.

All, all on the altar! And death swooping down
Like a falcon. 'Tis God has taken the victim;
I have won my renown.

VALENTINE'S NIGHT

You shadow and flame,
You interchange,
You death in the game!

Now I gather you up,
Now I put you back
Like a poppy in its cup.

And so, you are a maid
Again, my darling, but new,
Unafraid.

My love, my blossom, a child
Almost! The flower in the bud
Again, undefiled.

And yet, a woman, knowing
All, good, evil, both
In one blossom blowing.

BIRTH NIGHT

THIS fireglow is a red womb
In the night, where you're folded up
On your doom.

And the ugly, brutal years
Are dissolving out of you,
And the stagnant tears.

I the great vein that leads
From the night to the source of you,
Which the sweet blood feeds.

New phase in the germ of you;
New sunny streams of blood
Washing you through.

You are born again of me.
I, Adam, from the veins of me
The Eve that is to be.

What has been long ago
Grows dimmer, we both forget,
We no longer know.

You are lovely, your face is soft
Like a flower in bud
On a mountain croft.

This is Noël for me.
To-night is a woman born
Of the man in me.

RABBIT SNARED IN THE NIGHT

WHY do you spurt and sprattle
like that, bunny?
Why should I want to throttle
you, bunny?

Yes, bunch yourself between
my knees and lie still.
Lie on me with a hot, plumb, live weight,
heavy as a stone, passive,
yet hot, waiting.

What are you waiting for?
What are you waiting for?
What is the hot, plumb weight of your desire on me?
You have a hot, unthinkable desire of me, bunny.

What is that spark
glittering at me on the unutterable darkness
of your eye, bunny?
The finest splinter of a spark
that you throw off, straight on the tinder of my nerves!

It sets up a strange fire,
a soft, most unwarrantable burning
a bale-fire mounting, mounting up in me.

'Tis not of me, bunny.
It was you engendered it,
with that fine, demoniacal spark
you jetted off your eye at me.

I did not want it,
this furnace, this draught-maddened fire

which mounts up my arms
making them swell with turgid, ungovernable strength.

'Twas not *I* that wished it,
that my fingers should turn into these flames
avid and terrible
that they are at this moment.

It must have been *your* inbreathing, gaping desire
that drew this red gush in me;
I must be reciprocating *your* vacuous, hideous passion.

It must be the want in you
that has drawn this terrible draught of white fire
up my veins as up a chimney.

It must be you who desire
this intermingling of the black and monstrous
fingers of Moloch
in the blood-jets of your throat.

Come, you shall have your desire,
since already I am implicated with you
in your strange lust.

PARADISE RE-ENTERED

THROUGH the strait gate of passion,
Between the bickering fire
Where flames of fierce love tremble
On the body of fierce desire:

To the intoxication,
The mind, fused down like a bead,
Flees in its agitation
The flames' stiff speed:

At last to calm incandescence,
Burned clean by remorseless hate,
Now, at the day's renascence
We approach the gate.

Now, from the darkened spaces
Of fear, and of frightened faces,
Death, in our awful embraces
Approached and passed by;

We near the flame-burnt porches
Where the brands of the angels, like torches
Whirl, — in these perilous marches
Pausing to sigh;

We look back on the withering roses,
The stars, in their sun-dimmed closes,
Where 'twas given us to repose us
Sure on our sanctity;

Beautiful, candid lovers,
Burnt out of our earthy covers,
We might have nestled like plovers

In the fields of eternity.

There, sure in sinless being,
All-seen, and then all-seeing,
In us life unto death agreeing,
We might have lain.

But we storm the angel-guarded
Gates of the long-discarded,
Garden, which God has hoarded
Against our pain.

The Lord of Hosts, and the Devil
Are left on Eternity's level
Field, and as victors we travel
To Eden home.

Back beyond good and evil
Return we. Eve dishevel
Your hair for the bliss-drenched revel
On our primal loam.

SPRING MORNING

AH, through the open door
Is there an almond tree
Aflame with blossom!
— Let us fight no more.

Among the pink and blue
Of the sky and the almond flowers
A sparrow flutters.
— We have come through,

It is really spring! — See,
When he thinks himself alone
How he bullies the flowers.
— Ah, you and me

How happy we'll be! — See him
He clouts the tufts of flowers
In his impudence.
— But, did you dream

It would be so bitter? Never mind
It is finished, the spring is here.
And we're going to be summer-happy
And summer-kind.

We have died, we have slain and been slain,
We are not our old selves any more.
I feel new and eager
To start again.

It is gorgeous to live and forget.
And to feel quite new.
See the bird in the flowers? — he's making

A rare to-do!

He thinks the whole blue sky
Is much less than the bit of blue egg
He's got in his nest — we'll be happy
You and I, I and you.

With nothing to fight any more- —
In each other, at least.
See, how gorgeous the world is
Outside the door!

SAN GAUDENZIO

WEDLOCK

I

COME, my little one, closer up against me,
Creep right up, with your round head pushed in
my breast.

How I love all of you! Do you feel me wrap you
Up with myself and my warmth, like a flame
round the wick?

And how I am not at all, except a flame that
mounts off you.
Where I touch you, I flame into being; — but is it
me, or you?

That round head pushed in my chest, like a nut
in its socket,
And I the swift bracts that sheathe it: those
breasts, those thighs and knees,

Those shoulders so warm and smooth: I feel
that I
Am a sunlight upon them, that shines them into being.

But how lovely to be you! Creep closer in, that
I am more.
I spread over you! How lovely, your round head,
your arms,

Your breasts, your knees and feet! I feel that we
Are a bonfire of oneness, me flame flung leaping

round you,
You the core of the fire, crept into me.

II

AND oh, my little one, you whom I enfold,
How quaveringly I depend on you, to keep me alive,
Like a flame on a wick!

I, the man who enfolds you and holds you close,
How my soul cleaves to your bosom as I clasp you,
The very quick of my being!

Suppose you didn't want me! I should sink down
Like a light that has no sustenance
And sinks low.

Cherish me, my tiny one, cherish me who enfold you.
Nourish me, and endue me, I am only of you,
I am your issue.

How full and big like a robust, happy flame
When I enfold you, and you creep into me,
And my life is fierce at its quick
Where it comes off you!

III

MY little one, my big one,
My bird, my brown sparrow in my breast.
My squirrel clutching in to me;
My pigeon, my little one, so warm

So close, breathing so still.

My little one, my big one,
I, who am so fierce and strong, enfolding you,
If you start away from my breast, and leave me,
How suddenly I shall go down into nothing
Like a flame that falls of a sudden.

And you will be before me, tall and towering,
And I shall be wavering uncertain
Like a sunken flame that grasps for support.

IV

BUT now I am full and strong and certain
With you there firm at the core of me
Keeping me.

How sure I feel, how warm and strong and happy
For the future! How sure the future is within me;
I am like a seed with a perfect flower enclosed.

I wonder what it will be,
What will come forth of us.
What flower, my love?

No matter, I am so happy,
I feel like a firm, rich, healthy root,
Rejoicing in what is to come.

How I depend on you utterly
My little one, my big one!
How everything that will be, will not be of me,
Nor of either of us,

But of both of us.

V

AND think, there will something come forth from us.
We two, folded so small together,
There will something come forth from us.
Children, acts, utterance
Perhaps only happiness.

Perhaps only happiness will come forth from us.
Old sorrow, and new happiness.
Only that one newness.

But that is all I want.
And I am sure of that.
We are sure of that.

VI

AND yet all the while you are you, you are not me.
And I am I, I am never you.
How awfully distinct and far off from each other's
being we are!

Yet I am glad.
I am so glad there is always you beyond my scope,
Something that stands over,
Something I shall never be,
That I shall always wonder over, and wait for,
Look for like the breath of life as long as I live,
Still waiting for you, however old you are, and I am,

I shall always wonder over you, and look for you.

And you will always be with me.
I shall never cease to be filled with newness,
Having you near me.

HISTORY

THE listless beauty of the hour
When snow fell on the apple trees
And the wood-ash gathered in the fire
And we faced our first miseries.

Then the sweeping sunshine of noon
When the mountains like chariot cars
Were ranked to blue battle — and you and I
Counted our scars.

And then in a strange, grey hour
We lay mouth to mouth, with your face
Under mine like a star on the lake,
And I covered the earth, and all space.

The silent, drifting hours
Of morn after morn
And night drifting up to the night
Yet no pathway worn.

Your life, and mine, my love
Passing on and on, the hate
Fusing closer and closer with love
Till at length they mate.

THE CEARNE

SONG OF A MAN WHO HAS COME THROUGH

NOT I, not I, but the wind that blows through me!
A fine wind is blowing the new direction of Time.
If only I let it bear me, carry me, if only it carry me!
If only I am sensitive, subtle, oh, delicate, a
winged gift!
If only, most lovely of all, I yield myself and am borrowed
By the fine, fine wind that takes its course through
the chaos of the world
Like a fine, an exquisite chisel, a wedge-blade inserted;
If only I am keen and hard like the sheer tip of a wedge
Driven by invisible blows,
The rock will split, we shall come at the wonder,
we shall find the Hesperides.

Oh, for the wonder that bubbles into my soul,
I would be a good fountain, a good well-head,
Would blur no whisper, spoil no expression.

What is the knocking?
What is the knocking at the door in the night?
It is somebody wants to do us harm.

No, no, it is the three strange angels.
Admit them, admit them.

ONE WOMAN TO ALL WOMEN

I DON'T care whether I am beautiful to you
You other women.
Nothing of me that you see is my own;
A man balances, bone unto bone
Balances, everything thrown
In the scale, you other women.

You may look and say to yourselves, I do
Not show like the rest.
My face may not please you, nor my stature; yet
if you knew
How happy I am, how my heart in the wind rings true
Like a bell that is chiming, each stroke as a stroke
falls due,
You other women:

You would draw your mirror towards you, you
would wish
To be different.
There's the beauty you cannot see, myself and him
Balanced in glorious equilibrium,
The swinging beauty of equilibrium,
You other women.

There's this other beauty, the way of the stars
You straggling women.
If you knew how I swerve in peace, in the equi-poise
With the man, if you knew how my flesh enjoys
The swinging bliss no shattering ever destroys
You other women:

You would envy me, you would think me wonder-ful
Beyond compare;
You would weep to be lapsing on such harmony

As carries me, you would wonder aloud that he
Who is so strange should correspond with me
Everywhere.

You see he is different, he is dangerous,
Without pity or love.
And yet how his separate being liberates me
And gives me peace! You cannot see
How the stars are moving in surety
Exquisite, high above.

We move without knowing, we sleep, and we
travel on,
You other women.
And this is beauty to me, to be lifted and gone
In a motion human inhuman, two and one
Encompassed, and many reduced to none,
You other women.

KENSINGTON

PEOPLE

THE great gold apples of night
Hang from the street's long bough
Dripping their light
On the faces that drift below,
On the faces that drift and blow
Down the night-time, out of sight
In the wind's sad sough.

The ripeness of these apples of night
Distilling over me
Makes sickening the white
Ghost-flux of faces that hie
Them endlessly, endlessly by
Without meaning or reason why
They ever should be.

STREET LAMPS

GOLD, with an innermost speck
Of silver, singing afloat
Beneath the night,
Like balls of thistle-down
Wandering up and down
Over the whispering town
Seeking where to alight!

Slowly, above the street
Above the ebb of feet
Drifting in flight;
Still, in the purple distance
The gold of their strange persistence
As they cross and part and meet
And pass out of sight!

The seed-ball of the sun
Is broken at last, and done
Is the orb of day.
Now to the separate ends
Seed after day-seed wends
A separate way.

No sun will ever rise
Again on the wonted skies
In the midst of the spheres.
The globe of the day, over-ripe,
Is shattered at last beneath the stripe
Of the wind, and its oneness veers
Out myriad-wise.

Seed after seed after seed
Drifts over the town, in its need
To sink and have done;

To settle at last in the dark,
To bury its weary spark
Where the end is begun.

Darkness, and depth of sleep,
Nothing to know or to weep
Where the seed sinks in
To the earth of the under-night
Where all is silent, quite
Still, and the darkneses steep
Out all the sin.

SHE SAID AS WELL TO ME

SHE said as well to me: “Why are you ashamed?
That little bit of your chest that shows between
the gap of your shirt, why cover it up?
Why shouldn’t your legs and your good strong thighs
be rough and hairy? — I’m glad they are like that.
You are shy, you silly, you silly shy thing.
Men are the shyest creatures, they never will come
out of their covers. Like any snake
slipping into its bed of dead leaves, you hurry into
your clothes.
And I love you so! Straight and clean and all of a
piece is the body of a man,
such an instrument, a spade, like a spear, or an oar,
such a joy to me — “
So she laid her hands and pressed them down my sides,
so that I began to wonder over myself, and what I was.

She said to me: “What an instrument, your body!
single and perfectly distinct from everything else!
What a tool in the hands of the Lord!
Only God could have brought it to its shape.
It feels as if his handgrasp, wearing you
had polished you and hollowed you,
hollowed this groove in your sides, grasped you
under the breasts
and brought you to the very quick of your form,
subtler than an old, soft-worn fiddle-bow.

“When I was a child, I loved my father’s riding-whip
that he used so often.
I loved to handle it, it seemed like a near part of him.
So I did his pens, and the jasper seal on his desk.
Something seemed to surge through me when I
touched them.

“So it is with you, but here
The joy I feel!
God knows what I feel, but it is joy!
Look, you are clean and fine and singled out!
I admire you so, you are beautiful: this clean
sweep of your sides, this firmness, this hard mould!
I would die rather than have it injured with one scar.
I wish I could grip you like the fist of the Lord,
and have you — “

So she said, and I wondered,
feeling trammelled and hurt.
It did not make me free.

Now I say to her: “No tool, no instrument, no
God!
Don’t touch me and appreciate me.
It is an infamy.
You would think twice before you touched a
weasel on a fence
as it lifts its straight white throat.
Your hand would not be so flig and easy.
Nor the adder we saw asleep with her head on her shoulder,
curled up in the sunshine like a princess;
when she lifted her head in delicate, startled wonder
you did not stretch forward to caress her
though she looked rarely beautiful
and a miracle as she glided delicately away, with
such dignity.
And the young bull in the field, with his wrinkled,
sad face,
you are afraid if he rises to his feet,
though he is all wistful and pathetic, like a mono —
lith, arrested, static.

“Is there nothing in me to make you hesitate?

I tell you there is all these.

And why should you overlook them in me? — “

NEW HEAVEN AND EARTH

I

AND so I cross into another world
shyly and in homage linger for an invitation
from this unknown that I would trespass on.

I am very glad, and all alone in the world,
all alone, and very glad, in a new world
where I am disembarked at last.

I could cry with joy, because I am in the new world,
just ventured in.
I could cry with joy, and quite freely, there is
nobody to know.

And whosoever the unknown people of this un —
known world may be
they will never understand my weeping for joy
to be adventuring among them
because it will still be a gesture of the old world I
am making
which they will not understand, because it is
quite, quite foreign to them.

II

I WAS so weary of the world
I was so sick of it
everything was tainted with myself,

skies, trees, flowers, birds, water,
people, houses, streets, vehicles, machines,
nations, armies, war, peace-talking,
work, recreation, governing, anarchy,
it was all tainted with myself, I knew it all to start with
because it was all myself.

When I gathered flowers, I knew it was myself
plucking my own flowering.
When I went in a train, I knew it was myself
travelling by my own invention.
When I heard the cannon of the war, I listened
with my own ears to my own destruction.
When I saw the torn dead, I knew it was my own
torn dead body.
It was all me, I had done it all in my own flesh.

III

I SHALL never forget the maniacal horror of it all
in the end
when everything was me, I knew it all already, I
anticipated it all in my soul
because I was the author and the result
I was the God and the creation at once;
creator, I looked at my creation;
created, I looked at myself, the creator:
it was a maniacal horror in the end.

I was a lover, I kissed the woman I loved,
and God of horror, I was kissing also myself.
I was a father and a begetter of children,
and oh, oh horror, I was begetting and conceiving
in my own body.

IV

AT last came death, sufficiency of death,
and that at last relieved me, I died.
I buried my beloved; it was good, I buried
myself and was gone.
War came, and every hand raised to murder;
very good, very good, every hand raised to murder!
Very good, very good, I am a murderer!
It is good, I can murder and murder, and see
them fall
the mutilated, horror-struck youths, a multitude
one on another, and then in clusters together
smashed, all oozing with blood, and burned in heaps
going up in a foetid smoke to get rid of them
the murdered bodies of youths and men in heaps
and heaps and heaps and horrible reeking heaps
till it is almost enough, till I am reduced perhaps;
thousands and thousands of gaping, hideous foul dead
that are youths and men and me
being burned with oil, and consumed in corrupt
thick smoke, that rolls
and taints and blackens the sky, till at last it is
dark, dark as night, or death, or hell
and I am dead, and trodden to nought in the
smoke-sodden tomb;
dead and trodden to nought in the sour black earth
of the tomb; dead and trodden to nought, trodden
to nought.

V

GOD, but it is good to have died and been trodden out
trodden to nought in sour, dead earth

quite to nought
absolutely to nothing nothing
nothing nothing.

For when it is quite, quite nothing, then it is
everything.

When I am trodden quite out, quite, quite out
every vestige gone, then I am here
risen, and setting my foot on another world
risen, accomplishing a resurrection
risen, not born again, but risen, body the same as before,
new beyond knowledge of newness, alive beyond life
proud beyond inkling or furthest conception of pride
living where life was never yet dreamed of, nor
hinted at
here, in the other world, still terrestrial
myself, the same as before, yet unaccountably new.

VI

I, IN the sour black tomb, trodden to absolute death
I put out my hand in the night, one night, and my hand
touched that which was verily not me
verily it was not me.

Where I had been was a sudden blaze
a sudden flaring blaze!

So I put my hand out further, a little further
and I felt that which was not I,
it verily was not I
it was the unknown.

Ha, I was a blaze leaping up!
I was a tiger bursting into sunlight.
I was greedy, I was mad for the unknown.
I, new-risen, resurrected, starved from the tomb

starved from a life of devouring always myself
now here was I, new-awakened, with my hand
stretching out
and touching the unknown, the real unknown,
the unknown unknown.

My God, but I can only say
I touch, I feel the unknown!
I am the first comer!
Cortes, Pizarro, Columbus, Cabot, they are noth —
ing, nothing!
I am the first comer!
I am the discoverer!
I have found the other world!

The unknown, the unknown!
I am thrown upon the shore.
I am covering myself with the sand.
I am filling my mouth with the earth.
I am burrowing my body into the soil.
The unknown, the new world!

VII

IT was the flank of my wife
I touched with my hand, I clutched with my hand
rising, new-awakened from the tomb!
It was the flank of my wife
whom I married years ago
at whose side I have lain for over a thousand nights
and all that previous while, she was I, she
was I;
I touched her, it was I who touched and I who was touched.

Yet rising from the tomb, from the black oblivion

stretching out my hand, my hand flung like a
drowned man's hand on a rock,
I touched her flank and knew I was carried by the
current in death
over to the new world, and was climbing out on
the shore,
risen, not to the old world, the old, changeless I,
the old life,
wakened not to the old knowledge
but to a new earth, a new I, a new knowledge, a
new world of time.

Ah no, I cannot tell you what it is, the new world
I cannot tell you the mad, astounded rapture of
its discovery.
I shall be mad with delight before I have done,
and whosoever comes after will find me in the
new world
a madman in rapture.

VIII

GREEN streams that flow from the innermost
continent of the new world,
what are they?
Green and illumined and travelling for ever
dissolved with the mystery of the innermost heart
of the continent
mystery beyond knowledge or endurance, so sump-tuous
out of the well-heads of the new world.- —
The other, she too has strange green eyes!
White sands and fruits unknown and perfumes
that never
can blow across the dark seas to our usual world!
And land that beats with a pulse!
And valleys that draw close in love!

And strange ways where I fall into oblivion of
uttermost living!- —

Also she who is the other has strange-mounded
breasts and strange sheer slopes, and white levels.

Sightless and strong oblivion in utter life takes
possession of me!

The unknown, strong current of life supreme
drowns me and sweeps me away and holds me down
to the sources of mystery, in the depths,
extinguishes there my risen resurrected life
and kindles it further at the core of utter mystery.

GREATHAM

ELYSIUM

I HAVE found a place of loneliness
Lonelier than Lyonesse
Lovelier than Paradise;

Full of sweet stillness
That no noise can transgress
Never a lamp distress.

The full moon sank in state.
I saw her stand and wait
For her watchers to shut the gate.

Then I found myself in a wonderland
All of shadow and of bland
Silence hard to understand.

I waited therefore; then I knew
The presence of the flowers that grew
Noiseless, their wonder noiseless blew.

And flashing kingfishers that flew
In sightless beauty, and the few
Shadows the passing wild-beast threw.

And Eve approaching over the ground
Unheard and subtle, never a sound
To let me know that I was found.

Invisible the hands of Eve
Upon me travelling to reeve
Me from the matrix, to relieve

Me from the rest! Ah terribly
Between the body of life and me
Her hands slid in and set me free.

Ah, with a fearful, strange detection
She found the source of my subjection
To the All, and severed the connection.

Delivered helpless and amazed
From the womb of the All, I am waiting, dazed
For memory to be erased.

Then I shall know the Elysium
That lies outside the monstrous womb
Of time from out of which I come.

MANIFESTO

I

A WOMAN has given me strength and affluence.
Admitted!

All the rocking wheat of Canada, ripening now,
has not so much of strength as the body of one woman
sweet in ear, nor so much to give
though it feed nations.

Hunger is the very Satan.
The fear of hunger is Moloch, Belial, the horrible
God.
It is a fearful thing to be dominated by the fear of hunger.

Not bread alone, not the belly nor the thirsty throat.
I have never yet been smitten through the belly,
with the lack of bread,
no, nor even milk and honey.

The fear of the want of these things seems to be
quite left out of me.
For so much, I thank the good generations of mankind.

II

AND the sweet, constant, balanced heat
of the suave sensitive body, the hunger for this
has never seized me and terrified me.

Here again, man has been good in his legacy to us,
in these two primary instances.

III

THEN the dumb, aching, bitter, helpless need,
the pining to be initiated,
to have access to the knowledge that the great dead
have opened up for us, to know, to satisfy
the great and dominant hunger of the mind;
man's sweetest harvest of the centuries, sweet,
printed books,
bright, glancing, exquisite corn of many a stubborn
glebe in the upturned darkness;
I thank mankind with passionate heart
that I just escaped the hunger for these,
that they were given when I needed them,
because I am the son of man.

I have eaten, and drunk, and warmed and clothed
my body,
I have been taught the language of understanding,
I have chosen among the bright and marvellous books,
like any prince, such stores of the world's supply
were open to me, in the wisdom and goodness of man.
So far, so good.
Wise, good provision that makes the heart swell
with love!

IV

BUT then came another hunger
very deep, and ravening;

the very body's body crying out
with a hunger more frightening, more profound
than stomach or throat or even the mind;
redder than death, more clamorous.

The hunger for the woman. Alas,
it is so deep a Moloch, ruthless and strong,
'tis like the unutterable name of the dread Lord,
not to be spoken aloud.
Yet there it is, the hunger which comes upon us,
which we must learn to satisfy with pure, real satisfaction;
or perish, there is no alternative.

I thought it was woman, indiscriminate woman,
mere female adjunct of what I was.
Ah, that was torment hard enough
and a thing to be afraid of,
a threatening, torturing, phallic Moloch.

A woman fed that hunger in me at last.
What many women cannot give, one woman can;
so I have known it.

She stood before me like riches that were mine.
Even then, in the dark, I was tortured, ravening, unfree,
Ashamed, and shameful, and vicious.
A man is so terrified of strong hunger;
and this terror is the root of all cruelty.
She loved me, and stood before me, looking to me.
How could I look, when I was mad? I looked
sideways, furtively,
being mad with voracious desire.

V

THIS comes right at last.
When a man is rich, he loses at last the hunger fear.
I lost at last the fierceness that fears it will starve.
I could put my face at last between her breasts
and know that they were given for ever
that I should never starve
never perish;
I had eaten of the bread that satisfies
and my body's body was appeased,
there was peace and richness,
fulfilment.

Let them praise desire who will,
but only fulfilment will do,
real fulfilment, nothing short.
It is our ratification
our heaven, as a matter of fact.
Immortality, the heaven, is only a projection of
this strange but actual fulfilment,
here in the flesh.

So, another hunger was supplied,
and for this I have to thank one woman,
not mankind, for mankind would have prevented me;
but one woman,
and these are my red-letter thanksgivings.

VI

To be, or not to be, is still the question.
This ache for being is the ultimate hunger.
And for myself, I can say "almost, almost, oh,
very nearly."
Yet something remains.
Something shall not always remain.

For the main already is fulfilment.

What remains in me, is to be known even as I know.
I know her now: or perhaps, I know my own
limitation against her.

Plunging as I have done, over, over the brink
I have dropped at last headlong into nought,
plunging upon sheer hard extinction;
I have come, as it were, not to know,
died, as it were; ceased from knowing; surpassed myself.
What can I say more, except that I know what it is
to surpass myself?

It is a kind of death which is not death.
It is going a little beyond the bounds.
How can one speak, where there is a dumbness on
one's mouth?
I suppose, ultimately she is all beyond me,
she is all not-me, ultimately.
It is that that one comes to.
A curious agony, and a relief, when I touch that
which is not me in any sense,
it wounds me to death with my own not-being;
definite, inviolable limitation,
and something beyond, quite beyond, if you
understand what that means.
It is the major part of being, this having surpassed oneself,
this having touched the edge of the beyond, and
perished, yet not perished.

VII

I WANT her though, to take the same from me.
She touches me as if I were herself, her own.

She has not realized yet, that fearful thing, that
I am the other,
she thinks we are all of one piece.
It is painfully untrue.

I want her to touch me at last, ah, on the root and
quickness of my darkness
and perish on me, as I have perished on her.

Then, we shall be two and distinct, we shall have
each our separate being.
And that will be pure existence, real liberty.
Till then, we are confused, a mixture, unresolved,
unextricated one from the other.
It is in pure, unutterable resolvedness, distinction
of being, that one is free,
not in mixing, merging, not in similarity.
When she has put her hand on my secret, darkest
sources, the darkest outgoings,
when it has struck home to her, like a death, “this
is him!”
she has no part in it, no part whatever,
it is the terrible *other*,
when she knows the fearful *other flesh*, ah, dark —
ness unfathomable and fearful, contiguous and concrete,
when she is slain against me, and lies in a heap
like one outside the house,
when she passes away as I have passed away
being pressed up against the *other*,
then I shall be glad, I shall not be confused with her,
I shall be cleared, distinct, single as if burnished
in silver,
having no adherence, no adhesion anywhere,
one clear, burnished, isolated being, unique,
and she also, pure, isolated, complete,
two of us, unutterably distinguished, and in
unutterable conjunction.

Then we shall be free, freer than angels, ah, perfect.

VIII

AFTER that, there will only remain that all men
detach themselves and become unique,
that we are all detached, moving in freedom more
than the angels,
conditioned only by our own pure single being,
having no laws but the laws of our own being.

Every human being will then be like a flower,
untrammelled.
Every movement will be direct.
Only to be will be such delight, we cover our faces
when we think of it
lest our faces betray us to some untimely fiend.

Every man himself, and therefore, a surpassing
singleness of mankind.
The blazing tiger will spring upon the deer, un-dimmed,
the hen will nestle over her chickens,
we shall love, we shall hate,
but it will be like music, sheer utterance,
issuing straight out of the unknown,
the lightning and the rainbow appearing in us
unbidden, unchecked,
like ambassadors.

We shall not look before and after.
We shall *be, now*.
We shall know in full.
We, the mystic NOW.

ZENNOR

AUTUMN RAIN

THE plane leaves
fall black and wet
on the lawn;

The cloud sheaves
in heaven's fields set
droop and are drawn

in falling seeds of rain;
the seed of heaven
on my face

falling — I hear again
like echoes even
that softly pace

Heaven's muffled floor,
the winds that tread
out all the grain

of tears, the store harvested
in the sheaves of pain

caught up aloft:
the sheaves of dead
men that are slain

now winnowed soft
on the floor of heaven;
manna invisible

of all the pain

here to us given;
finely divisible
falling as rain.

FROST FLOWERS

IT is not long since, here among all these folk
in London, I should have held myself
of no account whatever,
but should have stood aside and made them way
thinking that they, perhaps,
had more right than I — for who was I?

Now I see them just the same, and watch them.
But of what account do I hold them?

Especially the young women. I look at them
as they dart and flash
before the shops, like wagtails on the edge of a pool.

If I pass them close, or any man,
like sharp, slim wagtails they flash a little aside
pretending to avoid us; yet all the time
calculating.

They think that we adore them — alas, would it
were true!

Probably they think all men adore them,
howsoever they pass by.

What is it, that, from their faces fresh as spring,
such fair, fresh, alert, first-flower faces,
like lavender crocuses, snowdrops, like Roman hyacinths,
scyllas and yellow-haired hellebore, jonquils, dim anemones,
even the sulphur auriculas,
flowers that come first from the darkness, and feel
cold to the touch,
flowers scentless or pungent, ammoniacal almost;

what is it, that, from the faces of the fair young women
comes like a pungent scent, a vibration beneath
that startles me, alarms me, stirs up a repulsion?

They are the issue of acrid winter, these first —
flower young women;
their scent is lacerating and repellant,
it smells of burning snow, of hot-ache,
of earth, winter-pressed, strangled in corruption;
it is the scent of the fiery-cold dregs of corruption,
when destruction soaks through the mortified,
decomposing earth,
and the last fires of dissolution burn in the bosom
of the ground.

They are the flowers of ice-vivid mortification,
thaw-cold, ice-corrupt blossoms,
with a loveliness I loathe;
for what kind of ice-rotten, hot-aching heart
must they need to root in!

CRAVING FOR SPRING

I WISH it were spring in the world.

Let it be spring!
Come, bubbling, surging tide of sap!
Come, rush of creation!
Come, life! surge through this mass of mortification!
Come, sweep away these exquisite, ghastly first-flowers,
which are rather last-flowers!
Come, thaw down their cool portentousness,
dissolve them:
snowdrops, straight, death-veined exhalations of
white and purple crocuses,
flowers of the penumbra, issue of corruption,
nourished in mortification,
jets of exquisite finality;
Come, spring, make havoc of them!

I trample on the snowdrops, it gives me pleasure
to tread down the jonquils,
to destroy the chill Lent lilies;
for I am sick of them, their faint-bloodedness,
slow-blooded, icy-fleshed, portentous.

I want the fine, kindling wine-sap of spring,
gold, and of inconceivably fine, quintessential
brightness,
rare almost as beams, yet overwhelmingly potent,
strong like the greatest force of world-balancing.

This is the same that picks up the harvest of wheat
and rocks it, tons of grain, on the ripening wind;
the same that dangles the globe-shaped pleiads of fruit
temptingly in mid-air, between a playful thumb and finger;
oh, and suddenly, from out of nowhere, whirls

the pear-bloom,
upon us, and apple-and almond-and apricot —
and quince-blossom,
storms and cumulus clouds of all imaginable blossom
about our bewildered faces,
though we do not worship.

I wish it were spring
cunningly blowing on the fallen sparks, odds and
ends of the old, scattered fire,
and kindling shapely little conflagrations
curious long-legged foals, and wide-eared calves,
and naked sparrow-bubs.

I wish that spring
would start the thundering traffic of feet
new feet on the earth, beating with impatience.

I wish it were spring, thundering
delicate, tender spring.
I wish these brittle, frost-lovely flowers of pas —
sionate, mysterious corruption
were not yet to come still more from the still —
flickering discontent.

Oh, in the spring, the bluebell bows him down for
very exuberance,
exulting with secret warm excess,
bowed down with his inner magnificence!

Oh, yes, the gush of spring is strong enough
to toss the globe of earth like a ball on a water-jet
dancing sportfully;
as you see a tiny celluloid ball tossing on a squint
of water
for men to shoot at, penny-a-time, in a booth at a fair.

The gush of spring is strong enough
to play with the globe of earth like a ball on a fountain;
At the same time it opens the tiny hands of the hazel
with such infinite patience.

The power of the rising, golden, all-creative sap
could take the earth
and heave it off among the stars, into the in-visible;
the same sets the throstle at sunset on a bough
singing against the blackbird;
comes out in the hesitating tremor of the primrose,
and betrays its candour in the round white straw —
berry flower,
is dignified in the foxglove, like a Red-Indian brave.

Ah come, come quickly, spring!
Come and lift us towards our culmination, we myriads;
we who have never flowered, like patient cactuses.
Come and lift us to our end, to blossom, bring us
to our summer
we who are winter-weary in the winter of the world.
Come making the chaffinch nests hollow and cosy,
come and soften the willow buds till they are
puffed and furred,
then blow them over with gold.
Come and cajole the gawky colt's-foot flowers.

Come quickly, and vindicate us
against too much death.
Come quickly, and stir the rotten globe of the
world from within,
burst it with germination, with world anew.
Come now, to us, your adherents, who cannot
flower from the ice.
All the world gleams with the lilies of Death the
Unconquerable,
but come, give us our turn.

Enough of the virgins and lilies, of passionate,
suffocating perfume of corruption,
no more narcissus perfume, lily harlots, the blades
of sensation
piercing the flesh to blossom of death.
Have done, have done with this shuddering,
delicious business
of thrilling ruin in the flesh, of pungent passion,
of rare, death-edged ecstasy.
Give us our turn, give us a chance, let our hour strike,
O soon, soon!

Let the darkness turn violet with rich dawn.
Let the darkness be warmed, warmed through to a
ruddy violet,
incipient purpling towards summer in the world
of the heart of man.

Are the violets already here!
Show me! I tremble so much to hear it, that even now
on the threshold of spring, I fear I shall die.
Show me the violets that are out.

Oh, if it be true, and the living darkness of the
blood of man is purpling with violets,
if the violets are coming out from under the rack
of men, winter-rotten and fallen
we shall have spring.
Pray not to die on this Pisgah blossoming with violets.
Pray to live through.

If you catch a whiff of violets from the darkness of
the shadow of man
it will be spring in the world,
it will be spring in the world of the living;
wonderment organising itself, heralding itself with
the violets,

stirring of new seasons.

Ah, do not let me die on the brink of such
anticipation!

Worse, let me not deceive myself.

ZENNOR

NEW POEMS



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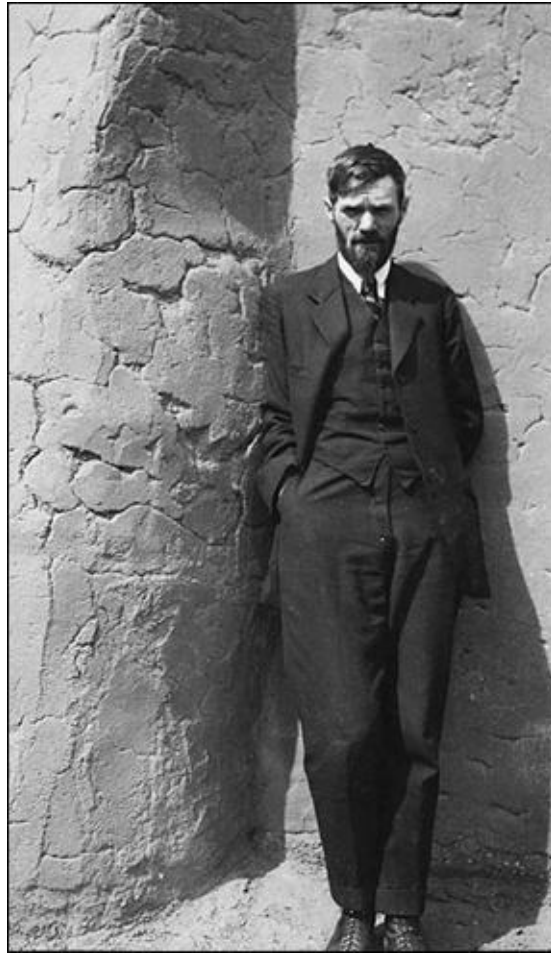
HEIMWEH

DEBACLE

NARCISSUS

AUTUMN SUNSHINE

ON THAT DAY



Lawrence in Mexico, close to the time of publication

APPREHENSION

AND all hours long, the town
Roars like a beast in a cave
That is wounded there
And like to drown;
While days rush, wave after wave
On its lair.

An invisible woe unseals
The flood, so it passes beyond
All bounds: the great old city
Recumbent roars as it feels
The foamy paw of the pond
Reach from immensity.

But all that it can do
Now, as the tide rises,
Is to listen and hear the grim
Waves crash like thunder through
The splintered streets, hear noises
Roll hollow in the interim.

COMING AWAKE

WHEN I woke, the lake-lights were quivering on the
wall,
The sunshine swam in a shoal across and across,
And a hairy, big bee hung over the primulas
In the window, his body black fur, and the sound
of him cross.

There was something I ought to remember: and yet I did not remember. Why
should I? The run-ning lights And the airy primulas, oblivious Of the impending
bee — they were fair enough sights.

FROM A COLLEGE WINDOW

THE glimmer of the limes, sun-heavy, sleeping,
Goes trembling past me up the College wall.
Below, the lawn, in soft blue shade is keeping,
The daisy-froth quiescent, softly in thrall.

Beyond the leaves that overhang the street,
Along the flagged, clean pavement summer-white,
Passes the world with shadows at their feet
Going left and right.

Remote, although I hear the beggar's cough,
See the woman's twinkling fingers tend him a
coin,
I sit absolved, assured I am better off
Beyond a world I never want to join.

FLAPPER

LOVE has crept out of her sealéd heart
As a field-bee, black and amber,
Breaks from the winter-cell, to clamber
Up the warm grass where the sunbeams start.

Mischief has come in her dawning eyes,
And a glint of coloured iris brings
Such as lies along the folded wings
Of the bee before he flies.

Who, with a ruffling, careful breath,
Has opened the wings of the wild young sprite?
Has fluttered her spirit to stumbling flight
In her eyes, as a young bee stumbleth?

Love makes the burden of her voice.
The hum of his heavy, staggering wings
Sets quivering with wisdom the common
things
That she says, and her words rejoice.

BIRDCAGE WALK

WHEN the wind blows her veil
And uncovers her laughter
I cease, I turn pale.
When the wind blows her veil
From the woes I bewail
Of love and hereafter:
When the wind blows her veil
I cease, I turn pale.

LETTER FROM TOWN: THE ALMOND TREE

YOU promised to send me some violets. Did you
forget?
White ones and blue ones from under the orchard
hedge?
Sweet dark purple, and white ones mixed for a
pledge
Of our early love that hardly has opened yet.

Here there's an almond tree — you have never seen
Such a one in the north — it flowers on the street,
and I stand
Every day by the fence to look up for the flowers
that expand
At rest in the blue, and wonder at what they mean.

Under the almond tree, the happy lands
Provence, Japan, and Italy repose,
And passing feet are chatter and clapping of
those
Who play around us, country girls clapping their
hands.

You, my love, the foremost, in a flowered gown,
All your unbearable tenderness, you with the
laughter
Startled upon your eyes now so wide with here —
after,
You with loose hands of abandonment hanging
down.

FLAT SUBURBS, S.W., IN THE MORNING

THE new red houses spring like plants
In level rows
Of reddish herbage that bristles and slants
Its square shadows.

The pink young houses show one side bright
Flatly assuming the sun,
And one side shadow, half in sight,
Half-hiding the pavement-run;

Where hastening creatures pass intent
On their level way,
Threading like ants that can never relent
And have nothing to say.

Bare stems of street-lamps stiffly stand
At random, desolate twigs,
To testify to a blight on the land
That has stripped their sprigs.

THIEF IN THE NIGHT

LAST night a thief came to me
And struck at me with something dark.
I cried, but no one could hear me,
I lay dumb and stark.

When I awoke this morning
I could find no trace;
Perhaps 'twas a dream of warning,
For I've lost my peace.

LETTER FROM TOWN: ON A GREY EVENING IN MARCH

THE clouds are pushing in grey reluctance slowly
northward to you,
While north of them all, at the farthest ends,
stands one bright-bosomed, aglance
With fire as it guards the wild north cloud-coasts,
red-fire seas running through
The rocks where ravens flying to windward melt
as a well-shot lance.

You should be out by the orchard, where violets
secretly darken the earth,
Or there in the woods of the twilight, with
northern wind-flowers shaken astir.
Think of me here in the library, trying and trying
a song that is worth
Tears and swords to my heart, arrows no armour
will turn or deter.

You tell me the lambs have come, they lie like
daisies white in the grass
Of the dark-green hills; new calves in shed;
peewits turn after the plough —
It is well for you. For me the navvies work in the
road where I pass
And I want to smite in anger the barren rock of
each waterless brow.

Like the sough of a wind that is caught up high in
the mesh of the budding trees,
A sudden car goes sweeping past, and I strain my
soul to hear
The voice of the furtive triumphant engine as it

rushes past like a breeze,
To hear on its mocking triumphance unwitting
the after-echo of fear.

SUBURBS ON A HAZY DAY

O STIFFLY shapen houses that change not,
What conjuror's cloth was thrown across you,
and raised
To show you thus transfigured, changed,
Your stuff all gone, your menace almost rased?

Such resolute shapes, so harshly set
In hollow blocks and cubes deformed, and heaped
In void and null profusion, how is this?
In what strong *aqua regia* now are you steeped?

That you lose the brick-stuff out of you
And hover like a presentment, fading faint
And vanquished, evaporate away
To leave but only the merest possible taint!

HYDE PARK AT NIGHT, BEFORE THE WAR

Clerks.

WE have shut the doors behind us, and the velvet
flowers of night
Lean about us scattering their pollen grains of
golden light.

Now at last we lift our faces, and our faces come
aflower
To the night that takes us willing, liberates us to the
hour.

Now at last the ink and dudgeon passes from our
fervent eyes
And out of the chambered weariness wanders a
spirit abroad on its enterprise.

Not too near and not too far
Out of the stress of the crowd
Music screams as elephants scream
When they lift their trunks and scream aloud
For joy of the night when masters are
Asleep and adream.

So here I hide in the Shalimar
With a wanton princess slender and proud,
And we swoon with kisses, swoon till we seem
Two streaming peacocks gone in a cloud
Of golden dust, with star after star
On our stream.

GIPSY

I, THE man with the red scarf,
Will give thee what I have, this last week's earn —
ings.
Take them, and buy thee a silver ring
And wed me, to ease my yearnings.

For the rest, when thou art wedded
I'll wet my brow for thee
With sweat, I'll enter a house for thy sake,
Thou shalt shut doors on me.

TWO-FOLD

How gorgeous that shock of red lilies, and larkspur
cleaving
All with a flash of blue! — when will she be leaving
Her room, where the night still hangs like a half —
folded bat,
And passion unbearable seethes in the darkness, like
must in a vat.

UNDER THE OAK

You, if you were sensible,
When I tell you the stars flash signals, each one
dreadful,
You would not turn and answer me
“The night is wonderful.”

Even you, if you knew
How this darkness soaks me through and through,
and infuses
Unholy fear in my vapour, you would pause to dis —
tinguish
What hurts, from what amuses.

For I tell you
Beneath this powerful tree, my whole soul's fluid
Oozes away from me as a sacrifice steam
At the knife of a Druid.

Again I tell you, I bleed, I am bound with withies,
My life runs out.
I tell you my blood runs out on the floor of this oak,
Gout upon gout.

Above me springs the blood-born mistletoe
In the shady smoke.
But who are you, twittering to and fro
Beneath the oak?

What thing better are you, what worse?
What have you to do with the mysteries
Of this ancient place, of my ancient curse?
What place have you in my histories?

SIGH NO MORE

THE cuckoo and the coo-dove's ceaseless calling,
 Calling,
Of a meaningless monotony is palling
All my morning's pleasure in the sun-fleck-scattered
 wood.
May-blossom and blue bird's-eye flowers falling,
 Falling
In a litter through the elm-tree shade are scrawling
Messages of true-love down the dust of the high —
 road.
I do not like to hear the gentle grieving,
 Grieving
Of the she-dove in the blossom, still believing
Love will yet again return to her and make all good.

When I know that there must ever be deceiving,
 Deceiving
Of the mournful constant heart, that while she's
 weaving
Her woes, her lover woos and sings within another
 wood.

Oh, boisterous the cuckoo shouts, forestalling,
 Stalling
A progress down the intricate enthralling
By-paths where the wanton-headed flowers doff
 their hood.

And like a laughter leads me onward, heaving,
 Heaving
A sigh among the shadows, thus retrieving
A decent short regret for that which once was very
 good.

LOVE STORM

MANY roses in the wind
Are tapping at the window-sash.
A hawk is in the sky; his wings
Slowly begin to plash.

The roses with the west wind rapping
Are torn away, and a splash
Of red goes down the billowing air.

Still hangs the hawk, with the whole sky moving
Past him — only a wing-beat proving
The will that holds him there.

The daisies in the grass are bending,
The hawk has dropped, the wind is spending
All the roses, and unending
Rustle of leaves washes out the rending
Cry of a bird.

A red rose goes on the wind. — Ascending
The hawk his wind-swept way is wending
Easily down the sky. The daisies, sending
Strange white signals, seem intending
To show the place whence the scream was heard.

But, oh, my heart, what birds are piping!
A silver wind is hastily wiping
The face of the youngest rose.

And oh, my heart, cease apprehending!
The hawk is gone, a rose is tapping
The window-sash as the west-wind blows.

Knock, knock, 'tis no more than a red rose rapping,
And fear is a splash of wings.
What, then, if a scarlet rose goes flapping
Down the bright-grey ruin of things!

PARLIAMENT HILL IN THE EVENING

THE houses fade in a melt of mist
Blotching the thick, soiled air
With reddish places that still resist
The Night's slow care.

The hopeless, wintry twilight fades,
The city corrodes out of sight
As the body corrodes when death invades
That citadel of delight.

Now verdigris smoulderings softly spread
Through the shroud of the town, as slow
Night-lights hither and thither shed
Their ghastly glow.

PICCADILLY CIRCUS AT NIGHT

Street-Walkers.

WHEN into the night the yellow light is roused like
dust above the towns,
Or like a mist the moon has kissed from off a pool in
the midst of the downs,

Our faces flower for a little hour pale and uncertain
along the street,
Daisies that waken all mistaken white-spread in ex —
pectancy to meet

The luminous mist which the poor things wist was
dawn arriving across the sky,
When dawn is far behind the star the dust-lit town
has driven so high.

All the birds are folded in a silent ball of sleep,
All the flowers are faded from the asphalt isle in
the sea,
Only we hard-faced creatures go round and round,
and keep
The shores of this innermost ocean alive and
illusory.

Wanton sparrows that twittered when morning
looked in at their eyes
And the Cyprian's pavement-roses are gone, and
now it is we
Flowers of illusion who shine in our gauds, make a
Paradise
On the shores of this ceaseless ocean, gay birds of
the town-dark sea.

TARANTELLA

SAD as he sits on the white sea-stone
And the suave sea chuckles, and turns to the moon,
And the moon significant smiles at the cliffs and
the boulders.
He sits like a shade by the flood alone
While I dance a tarantella on the rocks, and the
croon
Of my mockery mocks at him over the waves'
bright shoulders.

What can I do but dance alone,
Dance to the sliding sea and the moon,
For the moon on my breast and the air on my limbs
and the foam on my feet?
For surely this earnest man has none
Of the night in his soul, and none of the tune
Of the waters within him; only the world's old
wisdom to bleat.

I wish a wild sea-fellow would come down the
glittering shingle,
A soulless neckar, with winking seas in his eyes
And falling waves in his arms, and the lost soul's kiss
On his lips: I long to be soulless, I tingle
To touch the sea in the last surprise
Of fiery coldness, to be gone in a lost soul's bliss.

IN CHURCH

IN the choir the boys are singing the hymn.
The morning light on their lips
Moves in silver-moist flashes, in musical trim.

Sudden outside the high window, one crow
Hangs in the air
And lights on a withered oak-tree's top of woe.

One bird, one blot, folded and still at the top
Of the withered tree! — in the grail
Of crystal heaven falls one full black drop.

Like a soft full drop of darkness it seems to sway
In the tender wine
Of our Sabbath, suffusing our sacred day.

PIANO

Softly, in the dusk, a woman is singing to me;
Taking me back down the vista of years, till I see
A child sitting under the piano, in the boom of the
tingling strings
And pressing the small, poised feet of a mother who
smiles as she sings.

In spite of myself, the insidious mastery of song
Betrays me back, till the heart of me weeps to belong
To the old Sunday evenings at home, with winter
outside
And hymns in the cosy parlour, the tinkling piano
our guide.

So now it is vain for the singer to burst into clamour
With the great black piano appassionato. The
glamour
Of childish days is upon me, my manhood is cast
Down in the flood of remembrance, I weep like a
child for the past.

EMBANKMENT AT NIGHT, BEFORE THE WAR

Charity.

BY the river
In the black wet night as the furtive rain slinks
down,
Dropping and starting from sleep
Alone on a seat
A woman crouches.

I must go back to her.

I want to give her
Some money. Her hand slips out of the breast of
her gown
Asleep. My fingers creep
Carefully over the sweet
Thumb-mound, into the palm's deep pouches.

So, the gift!

God, how she starts!
And looks at me, and looks in the palm of her hand!
And again at me!
I turn and run
Down the Embankment, run for my life.

But why? — why?

Because of my heart's
Beating like sobs, I come to myself, and stand
In the street spilled over splendidly
With wet, flat lights. What I've done

I know not, my soul is in strife.

The touch was on the quick. I want to forget.

PHANTASMAGORIA

RIGID sleeps the house in darkness, I alone
Like a thing unwarrantable cross the hall
And climb the stairs to find the group of doors
Standing angel-stern and tall.

I want my own room's shelter. But what is this
Throng of startled beings suddenly thrown
In confusion against my entry? Is it only the trees'
Large shadows from the outside street lamp blown?

Phantom to phantom leaning; strange women weep
Aloud, suddenly on my mind
Startling a fear unspeakable, as the shuddering wind
Breaks and sobs in the blind.

So like to women, tall strange women weeping!
Why continually do they cross the bed?
Why does my soul contract with unnatural fear?
I am listening! Is anything said?

Ever the long black figures swoop by the bed;
They seem to be beckoning, rushing away, and
beckoning.
Whither then, whither, what is it, say
What is the reckoning.

Tall black Bacchae of midnight, why then, why
Do you rush to assail me?
Do I intrude on your rites nocturnal?
What should it avail me?

Is there some great Iacchos of these slopes
Suburban dismal?

Have I profaned some female mystery, orgies
Black and phantasmal?

NEXT MORNING

How have I wandered here to this vaulted room
In the house of life? — the floor was ruffled with gold
Last evening, and she who was softly in bloom,
Glimmered as flowers that in perfume at twilight
unfold

For the flush of the night; whereas now the gloom
Of every dirty, must-besprinkled mould,
And damp old web of misery's heirloom
Deadens this day's grey-dropping arras-fold.

And what is this that floats on the undermist
Of the mirror towards the dusty grate, as if feeling
Unsightly its way to the warmth? — this thing with
a list
To the left? this ghost like a candle sweating?

Pale-blurred, with two round black drops, as if it
missed
Itself among everything else, here hungrily stealing
Upon me! — my own reflection! — explicit gist
Of my presence there in the mirror that leans from
the ceiling!

Then will somebody square this shade with the
being I know
I was last night, when my soul rang clear as a bell
And happy as rain in summer? Why should it be
so?
What is there gone against me, why am I in hell?

PALIMPSEST OF TWILIGHT

DARKNESS comes out of the earth
And swallows dip into the pallor of the west;
From the hay comes the clamour of children's
 mirth;
Wanes the old palimpsest.

The night-stock oozes scent,
And a moon-blue moth goes fluttering by:
All that the worldly day has meant
 Wastes like a lie.

The children have forsaken their play;
A single star in a veil of light
Glimmers: litter of day
 Is gone from sight.

EMBANKMENT AT NIGHT, BEFORE THE WAR

Outcasts.

THE night rain, dripping unseen,
Comes endlessly kissing my face and my hands.

The river, slipping between
Lamps, is rayed with golden bands
Half way down its heaving sides;
Revealed where it hides.

Under the bridge
Great electric cars
Sing through, and each with a floor-light racing
 along at its side.
Far off, oh, midge after midge
Drifts over the gulf that bars
The night with silence, crossing the lamp-touched
 tide.

At Charing Cross, here, beneath the bridge
Sleep in a row the outcasts,
Packed in a line with their heads against the wall.
Their feet, in a broken ridge
Stretch out on the way, and a lout casts
A look as he stands on the edge of this naked stall.

Beasts that sleep will cover
Their faces in their flank; so these
Have huddled rags or limbs on the naked sleep.
Save, as the tram-cars hover
Past with the noise of a breeze
And gleam as of sunshine crossing the low black heap,

Two naked faces are seen
Bare and asleep,
Two pale clots swept and swept by the light of the
cars.
Foam-clots showing between
The long, low tidal-heap,
The mud-weed opening two pale, shadowless stars.

Over the pallor of only two faces
Passes the gallivant beam of the trams;
Shows in only two sad places
The white bare bone of our shams.

A little, bearded man, pale, peaked in sleeping,
With a face like a chickweed flower.
And a heavy woman, sleeping still keeping
Callous and dour.

Over the pallor of only two places
Tossed on the low, black, ruffled heap
Passes the light of the tram as it races
Out of the deep.

Eloquent limbs
In disarray
Sleep-suave limbs of a youth with long, smooth
thighs
Hutched up for warmth; the muddy rims
Of trousers fray
On the thin bare shins of a man who uneasily lies.

The balls of five red toes
As red and dirty, bare
Young birds forsaken and left in a nest of mud —
Newspaper sheets enclose
Some limbs like parcels, and tear
When the sleeper stirs or turns on the ebb of the

flood —

One heaped mound
Of a woman's knees
As she thrusts them upward under the ruffled skirt —
And a curious dearth of sound
In the presence of these
Wastrels that sleep on the flagstones without any
hurt.

Over two shadowless, shameless faces
Stark on the heap
Travels the light as it tilts in its paces
Gone in one leap.

At the feet of the sleepers, watching,
Stand those that wait
For a place to lie down; and still as they stand,
they sleep,
Wearily catching
The flood's slow gait
Like men who are drowned, but float erect in the
deep.

Oh, the singing mansions,
Golden-lighted tall
Trams that pass, blown ruddily down the night!
The bridge on its stanchions
Stoops like a pall
To this human blight.

On the outer pavement, slowly,
Theatre people pass,
Holding aloft their umbrellas that flash and are
bright
Like flowers of infernal moly
Over nocturnal grass

Wetly bobbing and drifting away on our sight.

And still by the rotten
Row of shattered feet,
Outcasts keep guard.
Forgotten,
Forgetting, till fate shall delete
One from the ward.

The factories on the Surrey side
Are beautifully laid in black on a gold-grey sky.
The river's invisible tide
Threads and thrills like ore that is wealth to the eye.

And great gold midges
Cross the chasm
At the bridges
Above intertwined plasm.

WINTER IN THE BOULEVARD

THE frost has settled down upon the trees
And ruthlessly strangled off the fantasies
Of leaves that have gone unnoticed, swept like old
Romantic stories now no more to be told.

The trees down the boulevard stand naked in
thought,
Their abundant summery wordage silenced, caught
In the grim undertow; naked the trees confront
Implacable winter's long, cross-questioning brunt.

Has some hand balanced more leaves in the depths
of the twigs?
Some dim little efforts placed in the threads of the
birch? —
It is only the sparrows, like dead black leaves on
the sprigs,
Sitting huddled against the cerulean, one flesh with
their perch.

The clear, cold sky coldly bethinks itself.
Like vivid thought the air spins bright, and all
Trees, birds, and earth, arrested in the after-thought
Awaiting the sentence out from the welkin brought.

SCHOOL ON THE OUTSKIRTS

How different, in the middle of snows, the great
school rises red!

A red rock silent and shadowless, clung round
with clusters of shouting lads,
Some few dark-cleaving the doorway, souls that
cling as the souls of the dead
In stupor persist at the gates of life, obstinate
dark monads.

This new red rock in a waste of white rises against
the day
With shelter now, and with blandishment, since
the winds have had their way
And laid the desert horrific of silence and snow on
the world of mankind,
School now is the rock in this weary land the winter
burns and makes blind.

SICKNESS

WAVING slowly before me, pushed into the dark,
Unseen my hands explore the silence, drawing the
bark
Of my body slowly behind.

Nothing to meet my fingers but the fleece of night
Invisible blinding my face and my eyes! What if
in their flight
My hands should touch the door!

What if I suddenly stumble, and push the door
Open, and a great grey dawn swirls over my feet,
before
I can draw back!

What if unwitting I set the door of eternity wide
And am swept away in the horrible dawn, am gone
down the tide
Of eternal hereafter!

Catch my hands, my darling, between your breasts.
Take them away from their venture, before fate
wrests
The meaning out of them.

EVERLASTING FLOWERS

WHO do you think stands watching
The snow-tops shining rosy
In heaven, now that the darkness
Takes all but the tallest posy?

Who then sees the two-winged
Boat down there, all alone
And asleep on the snow's last shadow,
Like a moth on a stone?

The olive-leaves, light as gad-flies,
Have all gone dark, gone black.
And now in the dark my soul to you
Turns back.

To you, my little darling,
To you, out of Italy.
For what is loveliness, my love,
Save you have it with me!

So, there's an oxen wagon
Comes darkly into sight:
A man with a lantern, swinging
A little light.

What does he see, my darling
Here by the darkened lake?
Here, in the sloping shadow
The mountains make?

He says not a word, but passes,
Staring at what he sees.
What ghost of us both do you think he saw

Under the olive trees?

All the things that are lovely —
The things you never knew —
I wanted to gather them one by one
And bring them to you.

But never now, my darling
Can I gather the mountain-tips
From the twilight like half-shut lilies
To hold to your lips.

And never the two-winged vessel
That sleeps below on the lake
Can I catch like a moth between my hands
For you to take.

But hush, I am not regretting:
It is far more perfect now.
I'll whisper the ghostly truth to the world
And tell them how

I know you here in the darkness,
How you sit in the throne of my eyes
At peace, and look out of the windows
In glad surprise.

THE NORTH COUNTRY

IN another country, black poplars shake them —
selves over a pond,
And rooks and the rising smoke-waves scatter and
wheel from the works beyond;
The air is dark with north and with sulphur, the
grass is a darker green,
And people darkly invested with purple move
palpable through the scene.

Soundlessly down across the counties, out of the
resonant gloom
That wraps the north in stupor and purple travels
the deep, slow boom
Of the man-life north-imprisoned, shut in the hum
of the purpled steel
As it spins to sleep on its motion, drugged dense in
the sleep of the wheel.

Out of the sleep, from the gloom of motion, sound —
lessly, somnambule
Moans and booms the soul of a people imprisoned,
asleep in the rule
Of the strong machine that runs mesmeric, booming
the spell of its word
Upon them and moving them helpless, mechanic,
their will to its will deferred.

Yet all the while comes the droning inaudible, out
of the violet air,
The moaning of sleep-bound beings in travail that
toil and are will-less there
In the spell-bound north, convulsive now with a
dream near morning, strong
With violent achings heaving to burst the sleep

that is now not long.

BITTERNESS OF DEATH

I

AH, stern, cold man,
How can you lie so relentless hard
While I wash you with weeping water!
Do you set your face against the daughter
Of life? Can you never discard
Your curt pride's ban?

You masquerader!
How can you shame to act this part
Of unswerving indifference to me?
You want at last, ah me!
To break my heart
Evader!

You know your mouth
Was always sooner to soften
Even than your eyes.
Now shut it lies
Relentless, however often
I kiss it in drouth.

It has no breath
Nor any relaxing. Where,
Where are you, what have you done?
What is this mouth of stone?
How did you dare
Take cover in death!

II

Once you could see,
The white moon show like a breast revealed
By the slipping shawl of stars.
Could see the small stars tremble
As the heart beneath did wield
Systole, diastole.

All the lovely macrocosm
Was woman once to you,
Bride to your groom.
No tree in bloom
But it leaned you a new
White bosom.

And always and ever
Soft as a summering tree
Unfolds from the sky, for your good,
Unfolded womanhood;
Shedding you down as a tree
Sheds its flowers on a river.

I saw your brows
Set like rocks beside a sea of gloom,
And I shed my very soul down into your
thought;
Like flowers I fell, to be caught
On the comforted pool, like bloom
That leaves the boughs.

III

Oh, masquerader,
With a hard face white-enamelled,

What are you now?
Do you care no longer how
My heart is trammelled,
Evader?

Is this you, after all,
Metallic, obdurate
With bowels of steel?
Did you *never* feel? —
Cold, insensate,
Mechanical!

Ah, no! — you multiform,
You that I loved, you wonderful,
You who darkened and shone,
You were many men in one;
But never this null
This never-warm!

Is this the sum of you?
Is it all nought?
Cold, metal-cold?
Are you all told
Here, iron-wrought?
Is *this* what's become of you?

SEVEN SEALS

SINCE this is the last night I keep you home,
Come, I will consecrate you for the journey.

Rather I had you would not go. Nay come,
I will not again reproach you. Lie back
And let me love you a long time ere you go.
For you are sullen-hearted still, and lack
The will to love me. But even so
I will set a seal upon you from my lip,
Will set a guard of honour at each door,
Seal up each channel out of which might slip
Your love for me.

I kiss your mouth. Ah, love,
Could I but seal its ruddy, shining spring
Of passion, parch it up, destroy, remove
Its softly-stirring crimson welling-up
Of kisses! Oh, help me, God! Here at the source
I'd lie for ever drinking and drawing in
Your fountains, as heaven drinks from out their
course
The floods.

I close your ears with kisses
And seal your nostrils; and round your neck you'll
wear —
Nay, let me work — a delicate chain of kisses.
Like beads they go around, and not one misses
To touch its fellow on either side.

And there
Full mid-between the champaign of your breast
I place a great and burning seal of love
Like a dark rose, a mystery of rest

On the slow bubbling of your rhythmic heart.

Nay, I persist, and very faith shall keep
You integral to me. Each door, each mystic port
Of egress from you I will seal and steep
In perfect chrisms.

Now it is done. The mort
Will sound in heaven before it is undone.

But let me finish what I have begun
And shirt you now invulnerable in the mail
Of iron kisses, kisses linked like steel.
Put greaves upon your thighs and knees, and frail
Webbing of steel on your feet. So you shall feel
Ensheathed invulnerable with me, with seven
Great seals upon your outgoings, and woven
Chain of my mystic will wrapped perfectly
Upon you, wrapped in indomitable me.

READING A LETTER

SHE sits on the recreation ground
Under an oak whose yellow buds dot the pale
blue sky.
The young grass twinkles in the wind, and the sound
Of the wind in the knotted buds in a canopy.

So sitting under the knotted canopy
Of the wind, she is lifted and carried away as in
a balloon
Across the insensible void, till she stoops to see
The sandy desert beneath her, the dreary platoon.

She knows the waste all dry beneath her, in one
place
Stirring with earth-coloured life, ever turning and
stirring.
But never the motion has a human face
Nor sound, save intermittent machinery whirring.

And so again, on the recreation ground
She alights a stranger, wondering, unused to the
scene;
Suffering at sight of the children playing around,
Hurt at the chalk-coloured tulips, and the even —
ing-green.

TWENTY YEARS AGO

ROUND the house were lilacs and strawberries
And foal-foots spangling the paths,
And far away on the sand-hills, dewberries
Caught dust from the sea's long swaths.

Up the wolds the woods were walking,
And nuts fell out of their hair.
At the gate the nets hung, balking
The star-lit rush of a hare.

In the autumn fields, the stubble
Tinkled the music of gleaning.
At a mother's knees, the trouble
Lost all its meaning.

Yea, what good beginnings
To this sad end!
Have we had our innings?
God forfend!

INTIME

RETURNING, I find her just the same,
At just the same old delicate game.

Still she says: “Nay, loose no flame
To lick me up and do me harm!
Be all yourself! — for oh, the charm
Of your heart of fire in which I look!
Oh, better there than in any book
Glow and enact the dramas and dreams
I love for ever! — there it seems
You are lovelier than life itself, till desire
Comes licking through the bars of your lips
And over my face the stray fire slips,
Leaving a burn and an ugly smart
That will have the oil of illusion. Oh, heart
Of fire and beauty, loose no more
Your reptile flames of lust; ah, store
Your passion in the basket of your soul,
Be all yourself, one bonny, burning coal
That stays with steady joy of its own fire.
But do not seek to take me by desire.
Oh, do not seek to thrust on me your fire!
For in the firing all my porcelain
Of flesh does crackle and shiver and break in pain,
My ivory and marble black with stain,
My veil of sensitive mystery rent in twain,
My altars sullied, I, bereft, remain
A priestess execrable, taken in vain — “

So the refrain
Sings itself over, and so the game
Re-starts itself wherein I am kept
Like a glowing brazier faintly blue of flame
So that the delicate love-adept

Can warm her hands and invite her soul,
Sprinkling incense and salt of words
And kisses pale, and sipping the toll
Of incense-smoke that rises like birds.

Yet I've forgotten in playing this game,
Things I have known that shall have no name;
Forgetting the place from which I came
I watch her ward away the flame,
Yet warm herself at the fire — then blame
Me that I flicker in the basket;
Me that I glow not with content
To have my substance so subtly spent;
Me that I interrupt her game.
I ought to be proud that she should ask it
Of me to be her fire-opal — .

It is well
Since I am here for so short a spell
Not to interrupt her? — Why should I
Break in by making any reply!

TWO WIVES

I

INTO the shadow-white chamber silts the white
Flux of another dawn. The wind that all night
Long has waited restless, suddenly wafts
A whirl like snow from the plum-trees and the pear,
Till petals heaped between the window-shafts
 In a drift die there.

A nurse in white, at the dawning, flower-foamed
 pane
Draws down the blinds, whose shadows scarcely
 stain
The white rugs on the floor, nor the silent bed
That rides the room like a frozen berg, its crest
Finally ridged with the austere line of the dead
 Stretched out at rest.

Less than a year the fourfold feet had pressed
The peaceful floor, when fell the sword on their rest.
Yet soon, too soon, she had him home again
With wounds between them, and suffering like a
 guest
That will not go. Now suddenly going, the pain
 Leaves an empty breast.

II

A tall woman, with her long white gown aflow
As she strode her limbs amongst it, once more

She hastened towards the room. Did she know
As she listened in silence outside the silent door?
Entering, she saw him in outline, raised on a pyre
Awaiting the fire.

Upraised on the bed, with feet erect as a bow,
Like the prow of a boat, his head laid back like the
stern
Of a ship that stands in a shadowy sea of snow
With frozen rigging, she saw him; she drooped like
a fern
Refolding, she slipped to the floor as a ghost-white
peony slips
When the thread clips.

Soft she lay as a shed flower fallen, nor heard
The ominous entry, nor saw the other love,
The dark, the grave-eyed mistress who thus dared
At such an hour to lay her claim, above
A stricken wife, so sunk in oblivion, bowed
With misery, no more proud.

III

The stranger's hair was shorn like a lad's dark poll
And pale her ivory face: her eyes would fail
In silence when she looked: for all the whole
Darkness of failure was in them, without avail.
Dark in indomitable failure, she who had lost
Now claimed the host,

She softly passed the sorrowful flower shed
In blonde and white on the floor, nor even turned
Her head aside, but straight towards the bed
Moved with slow feet, and her eyes' flame steadily

burned.
She looked at him as he lay with banded cheek,
And she started to speak

Softly: "I knew it would come to this," she said,
"I knew that some day, soon, I should find you thus.
So I did not fight you. You went your way instead
Of coming mine — and of the two of us
I died the first, I, in the after-life
Am now your wife."

IV

"'Twas I whose fingers did draw up the young
Plant of your body: to me you looked e'er sprung
The secret of the moon within your eyes!
My mouth you met before your fine red mouth
Was set to song — and never your song denies
My love, till you went south."

"'Twas I who placed the bloom of manhood on
Your youthful smoothness: I fleeced where fleece
was none
Your fervent limbs with flickers and tendrils of new
Knowledge; I set your heart to its stronger beat;
I put my strength upon you, and I threw
My life at your feet."

"But I whom the years had reared to be your bride,
Who for years was sun for your shivering, shade for
your sweat,
Who for one strange year was as a bride to you — you
set me aside
With all the old, sweet things of our youth; — and
never yet

Have I ceased to grieve that I was not great enough
To defeat your baser stuff.”

V

“But you are given back again to me
Who have kept intact for you your virginity.
Who for the rest of life walk out of care,
Indifferent here of myself, since I am gone
Where you are gone, and you and I out there
Walk now as one.”

“Your widow am I, and only I. I dream
God bows his head and grants me this supreme
Pure look of your last dead face, whence now is gone
The mobility, the panther’s gambolling,
And all your being is given to me, so none
Can mock my struggling.”

“And now at last I kiss your perfect face,
Perfecting now our unfinished, first embrace.
Your young hushed look that then saw God ablaze
In every bush, is given you back, and we
Are met at length to finish our rest of days
In a unity.”

HEIMWEH

FAR-OFF the lily-statues stand white-ranked in the
garden at home.

Would God they were shattered quickly, the cattle
would tread them out in the loam.

I wish the elder trees in flower could suddenly heave,
and burst

The walls of the house, and nettles puff out from
the hearth at which I was nursed.

It stands so still in the hush composed of trees and
inviolate peace,

The home of my fathers, the place that is mine, my
fate and my old increase.

And now that the skies are falling, the world is
spouting in fountains of dirt,

I would give my soul for the homestead to fall with
me, go with me, both in one hurt.

DEBACLE

THE trees in trouble because of autumn,
And scarlet berries falling from the bush,
And all the myriad houseless seeds
Loosing hold in the wind's insistent push

Moan softly with autumnal parturition,
Poor, obscure fruits extruded out of light
Into the world of shadow, carried down
Between the bitter knees of the after-night.

Bushed in an uncouth ardour, coiled at core
With a knot of life that only bliss can unravel,
Fall all the fruits most bitterly into earth
Bitterly into corrosion bitterly travel.

What is it internecine that is locked,
By very fierceness into a quiescence
Within the rage? We shall not know till it burst
Out of corrosion into new florescence.

Nay, but how tortured is the frightful seed
The spark intense within it, all without
Mordant corrosion gnashing and champing hard
For ruin on the naked small redoubt.

Bitter, to fold the issue, and make no sally;
To have the mystery, but not go forth;
To bear, but retaliate nothing, given to save
The spark in storms of corrosion, as seeds from
the north.

The sharper, more horrid the pressure, the harder
the heart

That saves the blue grain of eternal fire
Within its quick, committed to hold and wait
And suffer unheeding, only forbidden to expire.

NARCISSUS

WHERE the minnows trace
A glinting web quick hid in the gloom of the brook,
When I think of the place
And remember the small lad lying intent to look
Through the shadowy face
At the little fish thread-threading the watery nook —

It seems to me
The woman you are should be nixie, there is a pool
Where we ought to be.
You undine-clear and pearly, soullessly cool
And waterly
The pool for my limbs to fathom, my soul's last
school.

Narcissus
Ventured so long ago in the deeps of reflection.
Illyssus
Broke the bounds and beyond! — Dim recollection
Of fishes
Soundlessly moving in heaven's other direction!

Be
Undine towards the waters, moving back;
For me
A pool! Put off the soul you've got, oh lack
Your human self immortal; take the watery track.

AUTUMN SUNSHINE

THE sun sets out the autumn crocuses
And fills them up a pouring measure
Of death-producing wine, till treasure
Runs waste down their chalices.

All, all Persephone's pale cups of mould
Are on the board, are over-filled;
The portion to the gods is spilled;
Now, mortals all, take hold!

The time is now, the wine-cup full and full
Of lambent heaven, a pledging-cup;
Let now all mortal men take up
The drink, and a long, strong pull.

Out of the hell-queen's cup, the heaven's pale wine —
Drink then, invisible heroes, drink.
Lips to the vessels, never shrink,
Throats to the heavens incline.

And take within the wine the god's great oath
By heaven and earth and hellish stream
To break this sick and nauseous dream
We writhe and lust in, both.

Swear, in the pale wine poured from the cups of the
queen
Of hell, to wake and be free
From this nightmare we writhe in,
Break out of this foul has-been.

ON THAT DAY

ON that day
I shall put roses on roses, and cover your grave
With multitude of white roses: and since you were
 brave
One bright red ray.

So people, passing under
The ash-trees of the valley-road, will raise
Their eyes and look at the grave on the hill, in
 wonder,
Wondering mount, and put the flowers asunder

To see whose praise
Is blazoned here so white and so bloodily red.
Then they will say: “‘Tis long since she is dead,
 Who has remembered her after many days?”

And standing there
They will consider how you went your ways
Unnoticed among them, a still queen lost in the
 maze
Of this earthly affair.

A queen, they'll say,
Has slept unnoticed on a forgotten hill.
Sleeps on unknown, unnoticed there, until
 Dawns my insurgent day.

BAY: A BOOK OF POEMS



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GUARDS!

A Review in Hyde Park 1913.
The Crowd Watches.

WHERE the trees rise like cliffs, proud and
blue-tinted in the distance,
Between the cliffs of the trees, on the grey —
green park
Rests a still line of soldiers, red motionless range of
guards
Smouldering with darkened busbies beneath the bay —
onets' slant rain.

Colossal in nearness a blue police sits still on his horse
Guarding the path; his hand relaxed at his thigh,
And skyward his face is immobile, eyelids aslant
In tedium, and mouth relaxed as if smiling — ineffable
tedium!

So! So! Gaily a general canters across the space,
With white plumes blinking under the evening grey
sky.
And suddenly, as if the ground moved
The red range heaves in slow, magnetic reply.

EVOLUTIONS OF SOLDIERS

The red range heaves and compulsory sways, ah see!
in the flush of a march
Softly-impulsive advancing as water towards a weir
from the arch
Of shadow emerging as blood emerges from inward
shades of our night
Encroaching towards a crisis, a meeting, a spasm and
throb of delight.

The wave of soldiers, the coming wave, the throbbing
red breast of approach
Upon us; dark eyes as here beneath the busbies glit —
tering, dark threats that broach
Our beached vessel; darkened rencontre inhuman, and
closed warm lips, and dark
Mouth-hair of soldiers passing above us, over the wreck
of our bark.

And so, it is ebb-time, they turn, the eyes beneath the
busbies are gone.
But the blood has suspended its timbre, the heart from
out of oblivion
Knows but the retreat of the burning shoulders, the
red-swift waves of the sweet
Fire horizontal declining and ebbing, the twilit ebb of
retreat.

THE LITTLE TOWN AT EVENING

THE chime of the bells, and the church clock
striking eight
Solemnly and distinctly cries down the babel
of children still playing in the hay.
The church draws nearer upon us, gentle and great
In shadow, covering us up with her grey.

Like drowsy children the houses fall asleep
Under the fleece of shadow, as in between
Tall and dark the church moves, anxious to keep
Their sleeping, cover them soft unseen.

Hardly a murmur comes from the sleeping brood,
I wish the church had covered me up with the rest
In the home-place. Why is it she should exclude
Me so distinctly from sleeping with those I love best?

LAST HOURS

THE cool of an oak's unchequered shade
Falls on me as I lie in deep grass
Which rushes upward, blade beyond blade,
While higher the darting grass-flowers pass
Piercing the blue with their crocketed spires
And waving flags, and the ragged fires
Of the sorrel's cresset — a green, brave town
Vegetable, new in renown.

Over the tree's edge, as over a mountain
Surges the white of the moon,
A cloud comes up like the surge of a fountain,
Pressing round and low at first, but soon
Heaving and piling a round white dome.
How lovely it is to be at home
Like an insect in the grass
Letting life pass.

There's a scent of clover crept through my hair
From the full resource of some purple dome
Where that lumbering bee, who can hardly bear
His burden above me, never has clomb.
But not even the scent of insouciant flowers
Makes pause the hours.

Down the valley roars a townward train.
I hear it through the grass
Dragging the links of my shortening chain
Southwards, alas!

TOWN

LONDON

Used to wear her lights splendidly,
Flinging her shawl-fringe over the River,
Tassels in abandon.

And up in the sky
A two-eyed clock, like an owl
Solemnly used to approve, chime, chiming,
Approval, goggle-eyed fowl.

There are no gleams on the River,
No goggling clock;
No sound from St. Stephen's;
No lamp-fringed frock.

Instead,
Darkness, and skin-wrapped
Fleet, hurrying limbs,
Soft-footed dead.

London
Original, wolf-wrapped
In pelts of wolves, all her luminous
Garments gone.

London, with hair
Like a forest darkness, like a marsh
Of rushes, ere the Romans
Broke in her lair.

It is well
That London, lair of sudden
Male and female darknesses

Has broken her spell.

AFTER THE OPERA

DOWN the stone stairs
Girls with their large eyes wide with tragedy
Lift looks of shocked and momentous emotion
up at me.
And I smile.

Ladies
Stepping like birds with their bright and pointed feet
Peer anxiously forth, as if for a boat to carry them out
of the wreckage,
And among the wreck of the theatre crowd
I stand and smile.

They take tragedy so becomingly.
Which pleases me.

But when I meet the weary eyes
The reddened aching eyes of the bar-man with thin
arms,
I am glad to go back to where I came from.

GOING BACK

THE NIGHT turns slowly round,
Swift trains go by in a rush of light;
Slow trains steal past.
This train beats anxiously, outward bound.

But I am not here.
I am away, beyond the scope of this turning;
There, where the pivot is, the axis
Of all this gear.

I, who sit in tears,
I, whose heart is torn with parting;
Who cannot bear to think back to the departure
platform;
My spirit hears

Voices of men
Sound of artillery, aeroplanes, presences,
And more than all, the dead-sure silence,
The pivot again.

There, at the axis
Pain, or love, or grief
Sleep on speed; in dead certainty;
Pure relief.

There, at the pivot
Time sleeps again.
No has-been, no here-after; only the perfected
Silence of men.

ON THE MARCH

WE are out on the open road.
Through the low west window a cold light
flows
On the floor where never my numb feet trode
Before; onward the strange road goes.

Soon the spaces of the western sky
With shutters of sombre cloud will close.
But we'll still be together, this road and I,
Together, wherever the long road goes.

The wind chases by us, and over the corn
Pale shadows flee from us as if from their foes.
Like a snake we thresh on the long, forlorn
Land, as onward the long road goes.

From the sky, the low, tired moon fades out;
Through the poplars the night-wind blows;
Pale, sleepy phantoms are tossed about
As the wind asks whither the wan road goes.

Away in the distance wakes a lamp.
Inscrutable small lights glitter in rows.
But they come no nearer, and still we tramp
Onward, wherever the strange road goes.

Beat after beat falls sombre and dull.
The wind is unchanging, not one of us knows
What will be in the final lull
When we find the place where this dead road goes.

For something must come, since we pass and pass
Along in the coiled, convulsive throes

Of this marching, along with the invisible grass
That goes wherever this old road goes.

Perhaps we shall come to oblivion.
Perhaps we shall march till our tired toes
Tread over the edge of the pit, and we're gone
Down the endless slope where the last road goes.

If so, let us forge ahead, straight on
If we're going to sleep the sleep with those
That fall forever, knowing none
Of this land whereon the wrong road goes.

BOMBARDMENT

THE TOWN has opened to the sun.
Like a flat red lily with a million petals
She unfolds, she comes undone.

A sharp sky brushes upon
The myriad glittering chimney-tips
As she gently exhales to the sun.

Hurrying creatures run
Down the labyrinth of the sinister flower.
What is it they shun?

A dark bird falls from the sun.
It curves in a rush to the heart of the vast
Flower: the day has begun.

WINTER-LULL

Because of the silent snow, we are all hushed
 Into awe.
No sound of guns, nor overhead no rushed
 Vibration to draw
Our attention out of the void wherein we are crushed.

A crow floats past on level wings
 Noiselessly.
Uninterrupted silence swings
 Invisibly, inaudibly
To and fro in our misgivings.

We do not look at each other, we hide
 Our daunted eyes.
White earth, and ruins, ourselves, and nothing beside.
 It all belies
Our existence; we wait, and are still denied.

We are folded together, men and the snowy ground
 Into nullity.
There is silence, only the silence, never a sound
 Nor a verity
To assist us; disastrously silence-bound!

THE ATTACK

WHEN we came out of the wood
Was a great light!
The night uprisen stood
In white.

I wondered, I looked around
It was so fair. The bright
Stubble upon the ground
Shone white

Like any field of snow;
Yet warm the chase
Of faint night-breaths did go
Across my face!

White-bodied and warm the night was,
Sweet-scented to hold in my throat.
White and alight the night was.
A pale stroke smote

The pulse through the whole bland being
Which was This and me;
A pulse that still went fleeing,
Yet did not flee.

After the terrible rage, the death,
This wonder stood glistening?
All shapes of wonder, with suspended breath,
Arrested listening

In ecstatic reverie.
The whole, white Night! —
With wonder, every black tree

Blossomed outright.

I saw the transfiguration
And the present Host.
Transubstantiation
Of the Luminous Ghost.

OBSEQUIAL ODE

SURELY you've trodden straight
To the very door!
Surely you took your fate
Faultlessly. Now it's too late
To say more.

It is evident you were right,
That man has a course to go
A voyage to sail beyond the charted seas.
You have passed from out of sight
And my questions blow
Back from the straight horizon that ends all one sees.

Now like a vessel in port
You unlade your riches unto death,
And glad are the eager dead to receive you there.
Let the dead sort
Your cargo out, breath from breath
Let them disencumber your bounty, let them all share.

I imagine dead hands are brighter,
Their fingers in sunset shine
With jewels of passion once broken through you as a
prism
Breaks light into jewels; and dead breasts whiter
For your wrath; and yes, I opine
They anoint their brows with your blood, as a perfect
chrism.

On your body, the beaten anvil,
Was hammered out
That moon-like sword the ascendant dead unsheathe
Against us; sword that no man will
Put to rout;

Sword that severs the question from us who breathe.

Surely you've trodden straight
To the very door.
You have surely achieved your fate;
And the perfect dead are elate
To have won once more.

Now to the dead you are giving
Your last allegiance.
But what of us who are living
And fearful yet of believing
In your pitiless legions.

SHADES

SHALL I tell you, then, how it is? —
There came a cloven gleam
Like a tongue of darkened flame
To flicker in me.

And so I seem
To have you still the same
In one world with me.

In the flicker of a flower,
In a worm that is blind, yet strives,
In a mouse that pauses to listen

Glimmers our
Shadow; yet it deprives
Them none of their glisten.

In every shaken morsel
I see our shadow tremble
As if it rippled from out of us hand in hand.

As if it were part and parcel,
One shadow, and we need not dissemble
Our darkness: do you understand?

For I have told you plainly how it is.

BREAD UPON THE WATERS.

SO you are lost to me!
Ah you, you ear of corn straight lying,
What food is this for the darkly flying
Fowls of the Afterwards!

White bread afloat on the waters,
Cast out by the hand that scatters
Food untowards,

Will you come back when the tide turns?
After many days? My heart yearns
To know.

Will you return after many days
To say your say as a traveller says,
More marvel than woe?

Drift then, for the sightless birds
And the fish in shadow-waved herds
To approach you.

Drift then, bread cast out;
Drift, lest I fall in doubt,
And reproach you.

For you are lost to me!

RUINATION

THE sun is bleeding its fires upon the mist
That huddles in grey heaps coiling and holding
back.

Like cliffs abutting in shadow a drear grey sea
Some street-ends thrust forward their stack.

On the misty waste-lands, away from the flushing grey
Of the morning the elms are loftily dimmed, and tall
As if moving in air towards us, tall angels
Of darkness advancing steadily over us all.

RONDEAU OF A CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTOR.

THE hours have tumbled their leaden, mono —
tonous sands

And piled them up in a dull grey heap in the
West.

I carry my patience sullenly through the waste lands;
To-morrow will pour them all back, the dull hours I
detest.

I force my cart through the sodden filth that is pressed
Into ooze, and the sombre dirt spouts up at my hands
As I make my way in twilight now to rest.
The hours have tumbled their leaden, monotonous
sands.

A twisted thorn-tree still in the evening stands
Defending the memory of leaves and the happy round
nest.

But mud has flooded the homes of these weary lands
And piled them up in a dull grey heap in the West.

All day has the clank of iron on iron distressed
The nerve-bare place. Now a little silence expands
And a gasp of relief. But the soul is still compressed:
I carry my patience sullenly through the waste lands.

The hours have ceased to fall, and a star commands
Shadows to cover our stricken manhood, and blest
Sleep to make us forget: but he understands:
To-morrow will pour them all back, the dull hours
I detest.

TOMMIES IN THE TRAIN

THE SUN SHINES,
The coltsfoot flowers along the railway banks
Shine like flat coin which Jove in thanks
Strews each side the lines.

A steeple
In purple elms, daffodils
Sparkle beneath; luminous hills
Beyond — and no people.

England, Oh Danaë
To this spring of cosmic gold
That falls on your lap of mould!
What then are we?

What are we
Clay-coloured, who roll in fatigue
As the train falls league by league
From our destiny?

A hand is over my face,
A cold hand. I peep between the fingers
To watch the world that lingers
Behind, yet keeps pace.

Always there, as I peep
Between the fingers that cover my face!
Which then is it that falls from its place
And rolls down the steep?

Is it the train
That falls like meteorite
Backward into space, to alight

Never again?

Or is it the illusory world
That falls from reality
As we look? Or are we
Like a thunderbolt hurled?

One or another
Is lost, since we fall apart
Endlessly, in one motion depart
From each other.

WAR-BABY

THE CHILD like mustard-seed
Rolls out of the husk of death
 Into the woman's fertile, fathomless lap.

Look, it has taken root!
See how it flourisheth.
 See how it rises with magical, rosy sap!

As for our faith, it was there
When we did not know, did not care;
 It fell from our husk like a little, hasty seed.

Sing, it is all we need.
Sing, for the little weed
 Will flourish its branches in heaven when we
 slumber beneath.

NOSTALGIA

THE WANING MOON looks upward; this
grey night
Slopes round the heavens in one smooth curve
Of easy sailing; odd red wicks serve
To show where the ships at sea move out of sight.

The place is palpable me, for here I was born
Of this self-same darkness. Yet the shadowy house
below
Is out of bounds, and only the old ghosts know
I have come, I feel them whimper in welcome, and
mourn.

My father suddenly died in the harvesting corn
And the place is no longer ours. Watching, I hear
No sound from the strangers, the place is dark, and fear
Opens my eyes till the roots of my vision seems torn.

Can I go no nearer, never towards the door?
The ghosts and I we mourn together, and shrink
In the shadow of the cart-shed. Must we hover on
the brink
Forever, and never enter the homestead any more?

Is it irrevocable? Can I really not go
Through the open yard-way? Can I not go past the
sheds
And through to the mowie? — Only the dead in their
beds
Can know the fearful anguish that this is so.

I kiss the stones, I kiss the moss on the wall,
And wish I could pass impregnate into the place.

I wish I could take it all in a last embrace.

I wish with my breast I here could annihilate it all.

BIRDS BEASTS AND FLOWERS



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Poems by D. H. Lawrence

Birds, Beasts
and Flowers

1 9 2 3

The first edition

FRUITS

POMEGRANATE

YOU tell me I am wrong.
Who are you, who is anybody to tell me I am wrong?
I am not wrong.

In Syracuse, rock left bare by the viciousness of Greek
women.
No doubt you have forgotten the pomegranate-trees in
flower,
Oh so red, and such a lot of them.

Whereas at Venice
Abhorrent, green, slippery city
Whose Doges were old, and had ancient eyes,
In the dense foliage of the inner garden
Pomegranates like bright green stone,
And barbed, barbed with a crown.
Oh, crown of spiked green metal
Actually growing!

Now in Tuscany,
Pomegranates to warm, your hands at;
And crowns, kingly, generous, tilting crowns
Over the left eyebrow.

And, if you dare, the fissure!

Do you mean to tell me you will see no fissure?
Do you prefer to look on the plain side?

For all that, the setting suns are open.
The end cracks open with the beginning:
Rosy, tender, glittering within the fissure.

Do you mean to tell me there should be no fissure?
No glittering, compact drops of dawn?
Do you mean it is wrong, the gold-filmed skin, integument,
shown ruptured?

For my part, I prefer my heart to be broken.
It is so lovely, dawn-kaleidoscopic within the crack.

San Gervasio in Tuscany.

PEACH

WOULD you like to throw a stone at me?
Here, take all that's left of my peach.

Blood-red, deep;
Heaven knows how it came to pass.
Somebody's pound of flesh rendered up.

Wrinkled with secrets?
And hard with the intention to keep them.

Why, from silvery peach-bloom,
From that shallow-silvery wine-glass on a short stem
This rolling, dropping, heavy globule?

I am thinking, of course, of the peach before I ate it.

Why so velvety, why so voluptuous heavy?
Why hanging with such inordinate weight?
Why so indented?

Why the groove?
Why the lovely, bivalve roundnesses?
Why the ripple down the sphere?
Why the suggestion of incision?

Why was not my peach round and finished like a billiard
ball?
It would have been if man had made it.
Though I've eaten it now.

But it wasn't round and finished like a billiard ball.
And because I say so, you would like to throw something

at me.

Here, you can have my peach stone.

San Gervasio.

MEDLARS AND SORB-APPLES

I LOVE you, rotten,
Delicious rottenness.

I love to suck you out from your skins
So brown and soft and coming suave,
So morbid, as the Italians say.

What a rare, powerful, reminiscent flavour
Comes out of your falling through the stages of decay:
Stream within stream.

Something of the same flavour as Syracusan muscat wine
Or vulgar Marsala.

Though even the word Marsala will smack of preciousity
Soon in the pussy-foot West.

What is it?
What is it, in the grape turning raisin,
In the medlar, in the sorb-apple.
Wineskins of brown morbidity,
Autumnal excrementa;
What is it that reminds us of white gods?

Gods nude as blanched nut-kernels.
Strangely, half-sinisterly flesh-fragrant
As if with sweat,
And drenched with mystery.

Sorb-apples, medlars with dead crowns.

I say, wonderful are the hellish experiences

Orphic, delicate
Dionysos of the Underworld.

A kiss, and a vivid spasm of farewell, a moment's orgasm
of rupture.
Then along the damp road alone, till the next turning.
And there, a new partner, a new parting, a new unfusing
into twain,
A new gasp of further isolation,
A new intoxication of loneliness, among decaying, frost-cold
leaves.

Going down the strange lanes of hell, more and more
intensely alone,
The fibres of the heart parting one after the other
And yet the soul continuing, naked-footed, ever more vividly
embodied
Like a flame blown whiter and whiter
In a deeper and deeper darkness
Ever more exquisite, distilled in separation.

So, in the strange retorts of medlars and sorb-apples
The distilled essence of hell.
The exquisite odour of leave-taking.
Jamque vale!
Orpheus, and the winding, leaf-clogged, silent lanes of hell.

Each soul departing with its own isolation,
Strangest of all strange companions,
And best.

Medlars, sorb-apples
More than sweet
Flux of autumn
Sucked out of your empty bladders
And sipped down, perhaps, with a sip of Marsala
So that the rambling, sky-dropped grape can add its

music to yours,
Orphic farewell, and farewell, and farewell
And the *ego sum* of Dionysos
The *sono io* of perfect drunkenness
Intoxication of final loneliness.

San Gervasio.

FIGS

THE proper way to eat a fig, in society,
Is to split it in four, holding it by the stump,
And open it, so that it is a glittering, rosy, moist, honied,
heavy-petalled four-petalled flower.

Then you throw away the skin
Which is just like a four-sepalled calyx,
After you have taken off the blossom with your lips.

But the vulgar way
Is just to put your mouth to the crack, and take out the
flesh in one bite.

Every fruit has its secret.

The fig is a very secretive fruit.
As you see it standing growing, you feel at once it is symbolic:
And it seems male.
But when you come to know it better, you agree with the
Romans, it is female.

The Italians vulgarly say, it stands for the female part; the
fig-fruit:
The fissure, the yoni,
The wonderful moist conductivity towards the centre.

Involved,
Inturned,
The flowering all inward and womb-fibrilled;
And but one orifice.

The fig, the horse-shoe, the squash-blossom.

Symbols.

There was a flower that flowered inward, womb-ward;
Now there is a fruit like a ripe womb.

It was always a secret.
That's how it should be, the female should always be
secret.

There never was any standing aloft and unfolded on a
bough
Like other flowers, in a revelation of petals;
Silver-pink peach, venetian green glass of medlars and sorb —
apples,
Shallow wine-cups on short, bulging stems
Openly pledging heaven:
Here's to the thorn in the flower! Here is to Utterance!
The brave, adventurous rosaceae.

Folded upon itself, and secret unutterable,
And milky-sapped, sap that curdles milk and makes *ricotta*,
Sap that smells strange on your fingers, that even goats won't
taste it;
Folded upon itself, enclosed like any Mohammedan woman.
Its nakedness all within-walls, its flowering forever unseen.
One small way of access only, and this close-curtained from
the light;
Fig, fruit of the female mystery, covert and inward,
Mediterranean fruit, with your covert nakedness,
Where everything happens invisible, flowering and fertilisa —
tion, and fruiting
In the inwardness of your you, that eye will never see
Till it's finished, and you're over-ripe, and you burst to give
up your ghost.

Till the drop of ripeness exudes,
And the year is over.

And then the fig has kept her secret long enough.
So it explodes, and you see through the fissure the scarlet.
And the fig is finished, the year is over.

That's how the fig dies, showing her crimson through the
purple slit
Like a wound, the exposure of her secret, on the open day.
Like a prostitute, the bursten fig, making a show of her
secret.

That's how women die too.

The year is fallen over-ripe.
The year of our women.
The year of our women is fallen over-ripe.
The secret is laid bare.
And rottenness soon sets in.
The year of our women is fallen over-ripe.

When Eve once knew *in her mind* that she was naked
She quickly sewed fig-leaves, and sewed the same for the
man.
She'd been naked all her days before,
But till then, till that apple of knowledge, she hadn't had
the fact on her mind.

She got the fact on her mind, and (quickly sewed fig-leaves.
And women have been sewing ever since.
But now they stitch to adorn the bursten fig, not to cover it.
They have their nakedness more than ever on their mind,
And they won't let us forget it.

Now, the secret
Becomes an affirmation through moist, scarlet lips
That laugh at the Lord's indignation.

*What then, good Lord! cry the women.
We have kept our secret long enough.
We are a ripe fig.
Let us burst into affirmation.*

They forget, ripe figs won't keep.
Ripe figs won't keep.

Honey-white figs of the north, black figs with scarlet inside,
of the south.
Ripe figs won't keep, won't keep in any clime.
What then, when women the world over have all bursten into
affirmation?
And bursten figs won't keep?

San Gervasio.

GRAPES

SO many fruits come from roses
From the rose of all roses
From the unfolded rose
Rose of all the world.

Admit that apples and strawberries and peaches and pears
and blackberries
Are all Rosaceae,
Issue of the explicit rose,
The open-countenanced, skyward-smiling rose.

What then of the vine?
Oh, what of the tendrilled vine?

Ours is the universe of the unfolded rose,
The explicit,
The candid revelation.

But long ago, oh, long ago
Before the rose began to simper supreme,
Before the rose of all roses, rose of all the world, was even
in bud,
Before the glaciers were gathered up in a bunch out of the
unsettled seas and winds,
Or else before they had been let down again, in Noah's flood,
There was another world, a dusky, flowerless, tendrilled
world
And creatures webbed and marshy,
And on the margin, men soft-footed and pristine,
Still, and sensitive, and active,
Audile, tactile sensitiveness as of a tendril which orientates
and reaches out,
Reaching out and grasping by an instinct more delicate than
the moon's as she feels for the tides.

Of which world, the vine was the invisible rose,
Before petals spread, before colour made its disturbance,
before eyes saw too much.

In a green, muddy, web-foot, unutterably songless world
The vine was rose of all roses.

There were no poppies or carnations,
Hardly a greenish lily, watery faint.
Green, dim, invisible flourishing of vines
Royally gesticulate.

Look now even now, how it keeps its power of invisibility!
Look how black, how blue-black, how globed in Egyptian
darkness
Dropping among his leaves, hangs the dark grape!
See him there, the swart, so palpably invisible:
Whom shall we ask about him?

The negro might know a little.
When the vine was rose, Gods were dark-skinned.
Bacchus is a dream's dream.
Once God was all negroid, as now he is fair.
But it's so long ago, the ancient Bushman has forgotten more
utterly than we, who have never known.

For we are on the brink of re-remembrance.
Which, I suppose, is why America has gone dry.
Our pale day is sinking into twilight,
And if we sip the wine, we find dreams coming upon us
Out of the imminent night.
Nay, we find ourselves crossing the fern-scented frontiers
Of the world before the floods, where man was dark and evasive
And the tiny vine-flower rose of all roses, perfumed,
And all in naked communion communicating as now our

clothed vision can never communicate.
Vistas, down dark avenues
As we sip the wine.

The grape is swart, the avenues dusky and tendrilled, subtly
prehensile.
But we, as we start awake, clutch at our vistas democratic,
boulevards, tram-cars, policemen.
Give us our own back
Let us go to the soda-fountain, to get sober.

Soberness, sobriety.
It is like the agonised perverseness of a child heavy with
sleep, yet fighting, fighting to keep awake;
Soberness, sobriety, with heavy eyes propped open.

Dusky are the avenues of wine,
And we must cross the frontiers, though we will not,
Of the lost, fern-scented world:
Take the fern-seed on our lips,
Close the eyes, and go
Down the tendrilled avenues of wine and the otherworld.

San Gervasio.

THE REVOLUTIONARY

LOOK at them standing there in authority
The pale-faces,
As if it could have any effect any more.

Pale-face authority,
Caryatids,
Pillars of white bronze standing rigid, lest the skies fall.

What a job they've got to keep it up.
Their poor, idealist foreheads naked capitals
To the entablature of clouded heaven.

When the skies are going to fall, fall they will
In a great chute and rush of debacle downwards.

Oh and I wish the high and super-gothic heavens would
come down now,
The heavens above, that we yearn to and aspire to.

I do not yearn, nor aspire, for I am a blind Samson.
And what is daylight to me that I should look skyward?
Only I grope among you, pale-faces, caryatids, as among a
forest of pillars that hold up the dome of high ideal
heaven
Which is my prison,
And all these human pillars of loftiness, going stiff, metallic —
stunned with the weight of their responsibility
I stumble against them.
Stumbling-blocks, painful ones.

To keep on holding up this ideal civilisation
Must be excruciating: unless you stiffen into metal,
when it is easier to stand stock rigid than to move.

This is why I tug at them, individually, with my arm
 round their waist
The human pillars.
They are not stronger than I am, blind Samson.
The house sways.

I shall be so glad when it comes down.
I am so tired of the limitations of their Infinite.
I am so sick of the pretensions of the Spirit.
I am so weary of pale-face importance.

Am I not blind, at the round-turning mill?
Then why should I fear their pale faces?
Or love the effulgence of their holy light,
The sun of their righteousness?

To me, all faces are dark,
All lips are dusky and valved.

Save your lips, O pale-faces,
Which are slips of metal,
Like slits in an automatic-machine, you columns of give —
 and-take.

To me, the earth rolls ponderously, superbly
Coming my way without forethought or afterthought.
To me, men's footfalls fall with a dull, soft rumble,
 ominous and lovely,
Coming my way.

But not your footfalls, pale-faces,
They are a clicketing of bits of disjointed metal
Working in motion.

To me, men are palpable, invisible nearnesses in the dark

Sending out magnetic vibrations of warning, pitch-dark throbs
of invitation.

But you, pale-faces,
You are painful, harsh-surfaced pillars that give off nothing
except rigidity,
And I jut against you if I try to move, for you are every —
where, and I am blind,
Sightless among all your visuality,
You staring caryatids.

See if I don't bring you down, and all your high opinion
And all your ponderous roofed-in erection of right and wrong
Your particular heavens,
With a smash.

See if your skies aren't falling!
And my head, at least, is thick enough to stand it, the smash.

See if I don't move under a dark and nude, vast heaven
When your world is in ruins, under your fallen skies.
Caryatids, pale-faces.
See if I am not Lord of the dark and moving hosts
Before I die.

Florence.

THE EVENING LAND

OH America
The sun sets in you.
Are you the grave of our day?

Shall I come to you, the open tomb of my race?

I would come, if I felt my hour had struck.
I would rather you came to me.

For that matter
Mahomet never went to any mountain
Save it had first approached him and cajoled his soul.

You have cajoled the souls of millions of us
America,
Why won't you cajole my soul?
I wish you would.

I confess I am afraid of you.

The catastrophe of your exaggerate love,
You who never find yourself in love
But only lose yourself further, decomposing.

You who never recover from out of the orgasm of loving
Your pristine, isolate integrity, lost aeons ago.
Your singleness within the universe.

You who in loving break down
And break further and further down
Your bounds of isolation,
But who never rise, resurrected, from this grave of mingling,

In a new proud singleness, America.

Your more-than-European idealism,
Like a be-aureoled bleached skeleton hovering
Its cage-ribs in the social heaven, beneficent.

And then your single resurrection
Into machine-uprisen perfect man.

Even the winged skeleton of your bleached ideal
Is not so frightening as that clean smooth
Automaton of your uprisen self,
Machine American.

Do you wonder that I am afraid to come
And answer the first machine-cut question from the lips of
your iron men?
Put the first cents into metallic fingers of your officers
And sit beside the steel-straight arms of your fair women
American?

This may be a withering tree, this Europe,
But here, even a customs-official is still vulnerable.

I am so terrified, America,
Of the iron click of your human contact.
And after this
The winding-sheet of your self-less ideal love.
Boundless love
Like a poison gas.

Does no one realise that love should be intense, individual,
Not boundless.
This boundless love is like the bad smell
Of something gone wrong in the middle.
All this philanthropy and benevolence on other people's

behalf
Just a bad smell.

Yet, America,
Your elvishness.
Your New England uncanniness,
Your western brutal faery quality.

My soul is half-cajoled, half-cajoled.

Something in you which carries me beyond
Yankee, Yankee,
What we call human.
Carries me where I want to be carried . . .
Or don't I?

What does it matter
What we call human, and what we don't call human?
The rose would smell as sweet.
And to be limited by a mere word is to be less than a
hopping flea, which hops over such an obstruction at
first jump.

Your horrible, skeleton, aureoled ideal.
Your weird bright motor-productive mechanism,
Two spectres.

But moreover
A dark, unfathomed will, that is not un-Jewish;
A set, stoic endurance, non-European;
An ultimate desperateness, un-African;
A deliberate generosity, non-Oriental.

The strange, unaccustomed geste of your demonish
New World nature
Glimpsed now and then.

Nobody knows you.
You don't know yourself.
And I, who am half in love with you,
What am I in love with?
My own imaginings?

Say it is not so.

Say, through the branches
America, America
Of all your machines,
Say, in the deep sockets of your idealistic skull,
Dark, aboriginal eyes
Stoic, able to wait through ages
Glancing.

Say, in the sound of all your machines
And white words, white-wash American,
Deep pulsing of a strange heart
New throb, like a stirring under the false dawn that
precedes the real.

Nascent American
Demonish, lurking among the undergrowth
Of many-stemmed machines and chimneys that smoke
like pine-trees.

Dark, elvish,
Modern, unissued, uncanny America,
Your nascent demon people
Lurking among the deeps of your industrial thicket
Allure me till I am beside myself,
A nympholepht.

“These States!” as Whitman said,

Whatever he meant.

Baden-Baden.

PEACE

PEACE is written on the doorstep
In lava.

Peace, black peace congealed.
My heart will know no peace
Till the hill bursts.

Brilliant, intolerable lava
Brilliant as a powerful burning-glass
Walking like a royal snake down the mountain to —
wards the sea.

Forests, cities, bridges
Gone again in the bright trail of lava.
Naxos thousands of feet below the olive-roots,
And now the olive leaves thousands of feet below the
lava fire.

Peace congealed in black lava on the doorstep.
Within, white-hot lava, never at peace
Till it burst forth blinding, withering the earth;
To set again into rock
Grey-black rock.

Call it Peace?

Taormina.

TREES

CYPRESSES

TUSCAN cypresses,
What is it?

Folded in like a dark thought
For which the language is lost,
Tuscan cypresses,
Is there a great secret?
Are our words no good?

The undeliverable secret,
Dead with a dead race and a dead speech, and yet
Darkly monumental in you,
Etruscan cypresses.

Ah, how I admire your fidelity,
Dark cypresses,

Is it the secret of the long-nosed Etruscans?
The long-nosed, sensitive-footed, subtly-smiling
Etruscans,
Who made so little noise outside the cypress groves?

Among the sinuous, flame-tall cypresses
That swayed their length of darkness all around
Etruscan-dusky, wavering men of old Etruria:
Naked except for fanciful long shoes,
Going with insidious, half-smiling quietness
And some of Africa's imperturbable sang-froid
About a forgotten business.

What business, then?
Nay, tongues are dead, and words are hollow as hollow
seed-pods,

Having shed their sound and finished all their echoing
Etruscan syllables,
That had the telling.

Yet more I see you darkly concentrate,
Tuscan cypresses,
On one old thought:
On one old slim imperishable thought, while you remain
Etruscan cypresses;
Dusky, slim marrow-thought of slender, flickering men of
Etruria,
Whom Rome called vicious.

Vicious, dark cypresses:
Vicious, you supple, brooding, softly-swaying pillars of dark
flame.
Monumental to a dead, dead race
Embalmed in you!

Were they then vicious, the slender, tender-footed,
Long-nosed men of Etruria?
Or was their way only evasive and different, dark, like cypress —
trees in a wind?

They are dead, with all their vices,
And all that is left
Is the shadowy monomania of some cypresses
And tombs.

The smile, the subtle Etruscan smile still lurking
Within the tombs,
Etruscan cypresses.
He laughs longest who laughs last;
Nay, Leonardo only bungled the pure Etruscan smile.

What would I not give

To bring back the rare and orchid-like
Evil-yclept Etruscan?

For as to the evil
We have only Roman word for it,
Which I, being a little weary of Roman virtue,
Don't hang much weight on.

For oh, I know, in the dust where we have buried
The silenced races and all their abominations,
We have buried so much of the delicate magic of life.

There in the deeps
That churn the frankincense and ooze the myrrh,
Cypress shadowy,
Such an aroma of lost human life!

They say the fit survive,
But I invoke the spirits of the lost.
Those that have not survived, the darkly lost.
To bring their meaning back into life again.
Which they have taken away
And wrapt inviolable in soft cypress-trees,
Etruscan cypresses.

Evil, what is evil?
There is only one evil, to deny life
As Rome denied Etruria
And mechanical America Montezuma still.

Fiesole.

BARE FIG-TREES

FIG-TREES, weird fig-trees
Made of thick smooth silver,
Made of sweet, untarnished silver in the sea-southern air —
I say untarnished, but I mean opaque —
Thick, smooth-fleshed silver, dull only as human limbs are
dull
With the life-lustre,
Nude with the dim light of full, healthy life
That is always half-dark,
And suave like passion-flower petals,
Like passion-flowers,
With the half-secret gleam of a passion-flower hanging from
the rock.
Great, complicated, nude fig-tree, stemless flower-mesh,
Flowerily naked in flesh, and giving off hues of life.

Rather like an octopus, but strange and sweet-myriad-limbed
octopus;
Like a nude, like a rock-living, sweet-fleshed sea-anemone,
Flourishing from the rock in a mysterious arrogance.

Let me sit down beneath the many-branching candelabrum
That lives upon this rock
And laugh at Time, and laugh at dull Eternity,
And make a joke of stale Infinity,
Within the flesh-scent of this wicked tree,
That has kept so many secrets up its sleeve,
And has been laughing through so many ages
At man and his uncomfortablenesses,
And his attempt to assure himself that what is so is not so,
Up its sleeve.

Let me sit down beneath this many-branching candelabrum,
The Jewish seven-branched, tallow-stinking candlestick

kicked over the cliff
And all its tallow righteousness got rid of,
And let me notice it behave itself.

And watch it putting forth each time to heaven,
Each time straight to heaven,
With marvellous naked assurance each single twig,
Each one setting off straight to the sky
As if it were the leader, the main-stem, the forerunner,
Intent to hold the candle of the sun upon its socket-tip,
It alone.

Every young twig
No sooner issued sideways from the thigh of his predecessor
Than off he starts without a qualm
To hold the one and only lighted candle of the sun in his
socket-tip.
He casually gives birth to another young bud from his thigh,
Which at once sets off to be the one and only,
And hold the lighted candle of the sun.

Oh many-branching candelabrum, oh strange up-starting fig —
tree,
Oh weird Demos, where every twig is the arch twig,
Each imperiously over-equal to each, equality over-reaching
itself
Like the snakes on Medusa's head,
Oh naked fig-tree!

Still, no doubt every one of you can be the sun-socket as
well as every other of you.
Demos, Demos, Demos!
Demon, too,
Wicked fig-tree, equality puzzle, with your self-conscious
secret fruits.

Taormina.

BARE ALMOND-TREES

WET almond-trees, in the rain,
Like iron sticking grimly out of earth;
Black almond trunks, in the rain,
Like iron implements twisted, hideous, out of the earth,
Out of the deep, soft fledge of Sicilian winter-green,
Earth-grass uneatable,
Almond trunks curving blackly, iron-dark, climbing the
slopes.

Almond-tree, beneath the terrace rail,
Black, rusted, iron trunk,
You have welded your thin stems finer,
Like steel, like sensitive steel in the air,
Grey, lavender, sensitive steel, curving thinly and brittly up
in a parabola.

What are you doing in the December rain?
Have you a strange electric sensitiveness in your steel tips?
Do you feel the air for electric influences
Like some strange magnetic apparatus?
Do you take in messages, in some strange code,
From heaven's wolfish, wandering electricity, that prowls so
constantly round Etna?
Do you take the whisper of sulphur from the air?
Do you hear the chemical accents of the sun?
Do you telephone the roar of the waters over the earth?
And from all this, do you make calculations?

Sicily, December's Sicily in a mass of rain
With iron branching blackly, rusted like old, twisted
implements
And brandishing and stooping over earth's wintry fledge,
climbing the slopes
Of uneatable soft green!

Taormina.

TROPIC

SUN, dark sun
Sun of black void heat
Sun of the torrid mid-day's horrific darkness.

Behold my hair twisting and going black.
Behold my eyes turn tawny yellow
Negroid;
See the milk of northern spume
Coagulating and going black in my veins
Aromatic as frankincense.

Columns dark and soft
Sunblack men
Soft shafts, sunbreathing mouths
Eyes of yellow, golden sand
As frictional, as perilous, explosive as brimstone.

Rock, waves of dark heat;
Waves of dark heat, rock, sway upwards
Waver perpendicular.

What is the horizontal rolling of water
Compared to the flood of black heat that rolls upward
past my eyes?

Taormina.

SOUTHERN NIGHT

COME up, thou red thing.
Come up, and be called a moon.

The mosquitoes are biting to-night
Like memories.

Memories, northern memories,
Bitter-stinging white world that bore us
Subsiding into this night.

Call it moonrise
This red anathema?

Rise, thou red thing,
Unfold slowly upwards, blood-dark;
Burst the night's membrane of tranquil stars
Finally.

Maculate
The red Macula.

Taormina.

FLOWERS

ALMOND BLOSSOM

EVEN iron can put forth,
Even iron.

This is the iron age,
But let us take heart
Seeing iron break and bud,
Seeing rusty iron puff with clouds of blossom.

The almond-tree,
December's bare iron hooks sticking out of earth.

The almond-tree,
That knows the deadliest poison, like a snake
In supreme bitterness.

Upon the iron, and upon the steel,
Odd flakes as if of snow, odd bits of snow,
Odd crumbs of melting snow.

But you mistake, it is not from the sky;
From out the iron, and from out the steel,
Flying not down from heaven, but storming up,
Strange storming up from the dense under-earth
Along the iron, to the living steel
In rose-hot tips, and flakes of rose-pale snow
Setting supreme annunciation to the world.

Nay, what a heart of delicate super-faith,
Iron-breaking,
The rusty swords of almond-trees.

Trees suffer, like races, down the long ages.

They wander and are exiled, they live in exile through long
ages
Like drawn blades never sheathed, hacked and gone black,
The alien trees in alien lands: and yet
The heart of blossom,
The unquenchable heart of blossom!

Look at the many-cicatrised frail vine, none more scarred
and frail.
Yet see him fling himself abroad in fresh abandon
From the small wound-stump.

Even the wilful, obstinate, gummy fig-tree
Can be kept down, but he'll burst like a polyp into prolixity.

And the almond-tree, in exile, in the iron age!

This is the ancient southern earth whence the vases were
baked, amphoras, craters, cantharus, oenochoe, and open —
hearted cylix.
Bristling now with the iron of almond-trees

Iron, but unforgotten,
Iron, dawn-hearted,
Ever-beating dawn-heart, enveloped in iron against the exile,
against the ages.

See it come forth in blossom
From the snow-remembering heart
In long-nighted January,
In the long dark nights of the evening star, and Sirius, and
the Etna snow-wind through the long night.

Sweating his drops of blood through the long-nighted
Gethsemane
Into blossom, into pride, into honey-triumph, into most

exquisite splendour.
Oh, give me the tree of life in blossom
And the Cross sprouting its superb and fearless flowers!

Something must be reassuring to the almond, in the
evening star, and the snow-wind, and the long, long,
nights,
Some memory of far, sun-gentler lands,
So that the faith in his heart smiles again
And his blood ripples with that untellable delight of once —
more-vindicated faith,
And the Gethsemane blood at the iron pores unfolds,
unfolds,
Pearls itself into tenderness of bud
And in a great and sacred forthcoming steps forth, steps out
in one stride
A naked tree of blossom, like a bridegroom bathing in dew,
divested of cover,
Frail-naked, utterly uncovered
To the green night-baying of the dog-star, Etna's snow-edged
wind
And January's loud-seeming sun.

Think of it, from the iron fastness
Suddenly to dare to come out naked, in perfection of blossom,
beyond the sword-rust.
Think, to stand there in full-unfolded nudity, smiling,
With all the snow-wind, and the sun-glare, and the dog-star
baying epithalamion.

Oh, honey-bodied beautiful one,
Come forth from iron,
Red your heart is.
Fragile-tender, fragile-tender life-body,
More fearless than iron all the time,
And so much prouder, so disdainful of reluctances.

In the distance like hoar-frost, like silvery ghosts communing
on a green hill,
Hoar-frost-like and mysterious.

In the garden raying out
With a body like spray, dawn-tender, and looking
about
With such insuperable, subtly-smiling assurance,
Sword-blade-born.

Unpromised,
No bounds being set.
Flaked out and come unpromised,
The tree being life-divine,
Fearing nothing, life-blissful at the core
Within iron and earth.

Knots of pink, fish-silvery
In heaven, in blue, blue heaven,
Soundless, bliss-full, wide-rayed, honey-bodied,
Red at the core,
Red at the core,
Knotted in heaven upon the fine light.

Open,
Open,
Five times wide open,
Six times wide open,
And given, and perfect;
And red at the core with the last sore-heartedness,
Sore-hearted-looking.

Fontana Vecchia.

PURPLE ANEMONES

*WHO gave us flowers?
Heaven? The white God?*

Nonsense!
Up out of hell,
From Hades;
Infernal Dis!

*Jesus the god of flowers — — — ?
Not he.
Or sun-bright Apollo, him so musical?
Him neither.*

*Who then?
Say who.
Say it — and it is Pluto,
Dis,
The dark one,
Proserpine's master.*

Who contradicts — — — ?

When she broke forth from below,
Flowers came, hell-hounds on her heels.
Dis, the dark, the jealous god, the husband,
Flower-sumptuous-blooded.

*Go then, he said.
And in Sicily, on the meadows of Enna,
She thought she had left him;
Hut opened around her purple anemones,
Caverns,
Little hells of colour, caves of darkness,*

Hell, risen in pursuit of her; royal, sumptuous
Pit-falls.

All at her feet
Hell opening;
At her white ankles
Hell rearing its husband-splendid, serpent heads,
Hell-purple, to get at her —
Why did he let her go?
So he could track her down again, white victim.

Ah mastery!
Hell's husband-blossoms
Out on earth again.

Look out, Persephone!
You, Madame Ceres, mind yourself, the enemy is upon you.
About your feet spontaneous aconite,
Hell-glamorous, and purple husband-tyranny
Enveloping your late-enfranchised plains.

You thought your daughter had escaped?
No more stockings to darn for the flower-roots, down in
hell?
But ah my dear!

Aha, the stripe-cheeked whelps, whippet-slim crocuses,
At 'em, boys, at 'em!
Ho golden-spaniel, sweet alert narcissus,
Smell 'em, smell 'em out!

Those two enfranchised women.

Somebody is coming!
Oho there!

Dark blue anemones!
Hell is up!
Hell on earth, and Dis within the depths!

Run, Persephone, he is after you already.

Why did he let her go?
To track her down;
All the sport of summer and spring, and flowers snap —
ping at her ankles and catching her by the hair!
Poor Persephone and her rights for women.

*Husband-snared hell-queen,
It is spring.*

It is spring,
And pomp of husband-strategy on earth.

*Ceres, kiss your girl, you think you've got her back.
The bit of husband-tilth she is,
Persephone!*

Poor mothers-in-law!
They are always sold.

It is spring.

Taormina.

SICILIAN CYCLAMENS

WHEN he pushed his bush of black hair off his brow:
When she lifted her mop from her eyes, and screwed it in a
knob behind
— O act of fearful temerity!
When they felt their foreheads bare, naked to heaven, their
eyes revealed:
When they felt the light of heaven brandished like a knife
at their defenceless eyes,
And the sea like a blade at their face,
Mediterranean savages:
When they came out, face-revealed, under heaven, from the
shaggy undergrowth of their own hair
For the first time,
They saw tiny rose cyclamens between their toes,
growing
Where the slow toads sat brooding on the past.

Slow toads, and cyclamen leaves
Stickily glistening with eternal shadow
Keeping to earth.
Cyclamen leaves
Toad-filmy, earth-iridescent
Beautiful
Frost-filigreed
Spumed with mud
Snail-nacreous
Low down.

The shaking aspect of the sea
And man's defenceless bare face
And cyclamens putting their ears back.

Long, pensive, slim-muzzled greyhound buds
Dreamy, not yet present,

Drawn out of earth
At his toes.

Dawn-rose
Sub-delighted, stone-engendered
Cyclamens, young cyclamens
Arching
Waking, pricking their ears
Like delicate very-young greyhound bitches
Half-yawning at the open, inexperienced
Vista of day,
Folding back their soundless petalled ears.

Greyhound bitches
Sending their rosy muzzled pensive down,
And breathing soft, unwilling to wake to the new day
Yet sub-delighted.

Ah Mediterranean morning, when our world began!
Far-off Mediterranean mornings,
Pelagic faces uncovered,
And unbudding cyclamens.

The hare suddenly goes uphill
Laying back her long ears with unwinking bliss.

And up the pallid, sea-blenched Mediterranean stone-slopes
Rose cyclamen, ecstatic fore-runner!
Cyclamens, ruddy-muzzled cyclamens
In little bunches like bunches of wild hares
Muzzles together, ears-aprnick
Whispering witchcraft
Like women at a well, the dawn-fountain.

Greece, and the world's morning
Where all the Parthenon marbles still fostered the roots of

the cyclamen.
Violets
Pagan, rosy-muzzled violets
Autumnal
Dawn-pink,
Dawn-pale
Among squat toad-leaves sprinkling the unborn
Erechtheion marbles.

Taormina.

HIBISCUS AND SALVIA FLOWERS

Hark! Hark!
The dogs do bark!
It's the socialists come to town,
None in rags and none in tags,
Swaggering up and down.

Sunday morning,
And from the Sicilian townlets skirting Etna
The socialists have gathered upon us, to look at us.

How shall we know them when we see them?
How shall we know them now they've come?

Not by their rags and not by their tags,
Nor by any distinctive gown;
The same unremarkable Sunday suit
And hats cocked up and down.

Yet there they are, youths, loutishly
Strolling in gangs and staring along the Corso
With the gang-stare
And a half-threatening envy
At every *forestière*,
Every lordly tuppenny foreigner from the hotels,
fattening on the exchange.

Hark! Hark!
The dogs do bark!
It's the socialists in the town.

Sans rags, sans tags,
Sans beards, sans bags,
Sans any distinction at all except loutish commonness.

How do we know then, that they are they?

Bolshevists.

Leninists.

Communists.

Socialists.

-Ists! -Ists!

Alas, salvia and hibiscus flowers.

Salvia and hibiscus flowers.

Listen again.

Salvia and hibiscus flowers.

Is it not so?

Salvia and hibiscus flowers.

Hark! Hark!

The dogs do hark!

Salvia and hibiscus flowers.

Who smeared their doors with blood?

Who on their breasts

Put salvias and hibiscus?

Rosy, rosy scarlet,

And flame-rage, golden-throated

Bloom along the Corso on the living, perambulating bush.

Who said they might assume these blossoms?

What god did they consult?

Rose-red, princess hibiscus, rolling her pointed Chinese
petals!

Azalea and camellia, single peony

And pomegranate bloom and scarlet mallow-flower

And all the eastern, exquisite royal plants

That noble blood has brought us down the ages!
Gently nurtured, frail and splendid
Hibiscus flower —
Alas, the Sunday coats of Sicilian bolshevists!

Pure blood, and noble blood, in the fine and rose-red veins;
Small, interspersed with jewels of white gold
Frail-filigreed among the rest;
Rose of the oldest races of princesses, Polynesian
Hibiscus.

Eve, in her happy moments,
Put hibiscus in her hair,
Before she humbled herself, and knocked her knees with
repentance.

Sicilian bolshevists,
With hibiscus flowers in the buttonholes of your Sunday suits,
Come now, speaking of rights, what right have you to this
flower?

The exquisite and ageless aristocracy
Of a peerless soul,
Blessed are the pure in heart and the fathomless in bright
pride;
The loveliness that knows *noblesse oblige*;
The native royalty of red hibiscus flowers;
The exquisite assertion of new delicate life
Risen from the roots:
Is this how you'll have it, red-decked socialists,
Hibiscus-breasted?

If it be so, I fly to join you,
And if it be not so, brutes to pull down hibiscus flowers!

Or salvia!

Or dragon-mouthed salvia with gold throat of wrath!
Flame-flushed, enraged, splendid salvia,
Cock-crested, crowing your orange scarlet like a tocsin
Along the Corso all this Sunday morning.

Is your wrath red as salvias.

You socialists?

You with your grudging, envious, furtive rage,
In Sunday suits and yellow boots along the Corso.
You look well with your salvia flowers, I must say.
Warrior-like, dawn-cock's-comb flaring flower
Shouting forth flame to set the world on fire,
The dust-heap of man's filthy world on fire,
And burn it down, the gluttoned, stuffy world,
And feed the young new fields of life with ash,
With ash I say,
Bolshevists,
Your ashes even, my friends,
Among much other ash.

If there were salvia-savage bolshevists
To burn the world back to manure-good ash.
Wouldn't I stick the salvia in my coat!
But these themselves must burn, these louts!

The dragon-faced,
The anger-reddened, golden-throated salvia
With its long antennae of rage put out
Upon the frightened air.
Ugh, how I love its fangs of perfect rage
That gnash the air;
The molten gold of its intolerable rage
Hot in the throat.

I long to be a bolshevist
And set the stinking rubbish-heap of this foul world
Afire at a myriad scarlet points,

A bolshevist, a salvia-face
To lick the world with flame that licks it clean.

I long to see its chock-full crowdedness
And gluttoned squirming populousness on fire
Like a field of filthy weeds
Burnt back to ash,
And then to see the new, real souls sprout up.

Not this vast rotting cabbage patch we call the world;
But from the ash-scarred fallow
New wild souls.

Nettles, and a rose sprout,
Hibiscus, and mere grass,
Salvia still in a rage
And almond honey-still,
And fig-wort stinking for the carrion wasp;
All the lot of them, and let them fight it out.

But not a trace of foul equality,
Nor sound of still more foul human perfection.
You need not clear the world like a cabbage patch for me;
Leave me my nettles,
Let me fight the wicked, obstreperous weeds myself, and put
 them in their place,
Severely in their place.
I don't at all want to annihilate them,
I like a row with them.
But I won't be put on a cabbage-idealistic level of equality
 with them.

What rot, to see the cabbage and hibiscus-tree
As equals!
What rot, to say the louts along the Corso
In Sunday suits and yellow shoes
Are my equals!

I am their superior, saluting the hibiscus flower, not them.
The same I say to the profiteers from the hotels, the money —
fat-ones,
Profiteers here being called dog-fish, stinking dog-fish,
sharks.
The same I say to the pale and elegant persons.
Pale-face authorities loitering tepidly:
That I salute the red hibiscus flowers
And send mankind to its inferior blazes.
Mankind's inferior blazes,
And these along with it, all the inferior lot —
These bolshevists,
These dog-fish,
These precious and ideal ones,
All rubbish ready for fire.

And I salute hibiscus and the salvia flower
Upon the breasts of loutish bolshevists,
Damned loutish bolshevists,
Who perhaps will do the business after all,
In the long run, in spite of themselves.

Meanwhile, alas
For me no fellow-men,
No salvia-frenzied comrades, antennae
Of yellow-red, outreaching, living wrath
Upon the smouldering air,
And throat of brimstone-molten angry gold.
Red, angry men are a race extinct, alas!

Never
To be a bolshevist
With a hibiscus flower behind my ear
In sign of life, of lovely, dangerous life
And passionate disquality of men;
In sign of dauntless, silent violets,
And impudent nettles grabbing the under-earth,

And cabbages born to be cut and eat,
And salvia fierce to crow and shout for fight,
And rosy-red hibiscus wincingly
Unfolding all her coiled and lovely self
In a doubtful world.

Never, bolshevistically
To be able to stand for all these!
Alas, alas, I have got to leave it all
To the youths in Sunday suits and yellow shoes
Who have pulled down the salvia flowers
And rosy delicate hibiscus flowers
And everything else to their disgusting level,
Never, of course, to put anything up again.

But yet
If they pull all the world down,
The process will amount to the same in the end.
Instead of flame and flame-clean ash
Slow watery rotting back to level muck
And final humus.
Whence the re-start.

And still I cannot bear it
That they take hibiscus and the salvia flower.

Taormina.

THE EVANGELISTIC BEASTS

ST MATTHEW

THEY are not all beasts.
One is a man, for example, and one is a bird.

I, Matthew, am a man.

“And I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me” —

That is Jesus.
But then Jesus was not quite a man.
He was the Son of Man
Filius Meus, O remorseless logic
Out of His own mouth.

I, Matthew, being a man
Cannot be lifted up, the Paraclete
To draw all men unto me,
Seeing I am on a par with all men.

I, on the other hand,
Am drawn to the Uplifted, as all men are drawn,
To the Son of Man
Filius Meus.

Wilt thou lift me up, Son of Man?
How my heart beats!
I am man.

I am man, and therefore my heart beats, and throws
the dark blood from side to side
All the time I am lifted up.

Yes, even during my uplifting.

And if it ceased?

If it ceased, I should be no longer man

As I am, if my heart in uplifting ceased to beat, to toss the
dark blood from side to side, causing my myriad secret
streams.

After the cessation

I might be a soul in bliss, an angel, approximating to the
Uplifted;

But that is another matter;

I am Matthew, the man,

And I am not that other angelic matter.

So I will be lifted up, Saviour,

But put me down again in time, Master,

Before my heart stops beating, and I become what I am not.

Put me down again on the earth, Jesus, on the brown soil

Where flowers sprout in the acrid humus, and fade into
humus again.

Where beasts drop their unlicked young, and pasture, and
drop their droppings among the turf.

Where the adder darts horizontal.

Down on the damp, unceasing ground, where my feet belong

And even my heart, Lord, forever, after all uplifting:

The crumbling, damp, fresh land, life horizontal and ceaseless.

Matthew I am, the man.

And I take the wings of the morning, to Thee, Crucified,
Glorified.

But while flowers club their petals at evening

And rabbits make pills among the short grass

And long snakes quickly glide into the dark hole in the
wall, hearing man approach,

I must be put down, Lord, in the afternoon,

And at evening I must leave off my wings of the spirit

As I leave off my braces

And I must resume my nakedness like a fish, sinking down
the dark reversion of night
Like a fish seeking the bottom, Jesus,
ICTHUS
Face downwards
Veering slowly
Down between the steep slopes of darkness, fucus-dark,
seaweed-fringed valleys of the waters under the sea
Over the edge of the soundless cataract
Into the fathomless, bottomless pit
Where my soul falls in the last throes of bottomless convulsion,
and is fallen
Utterly beyond Thee, Dove of the Spirit;
Beyond everything, except itself.

Nay, Son of Man, I have been lifted up.
To Thee I rose like a rocket ending in mid-heaven.
But even Thou, Son of Man, canst not quaff out the dregs
of terrestrial manhood!
They fall back from Thee.

They fall back, and like a dripping of quicksilver taking the
downward track.
Break into drops, burn into drops of blood, and dropping,
dropping take wing
Membraned, blood-veined wings.

On fans of unsuspected tissue, like bats
They thread and thrill and flicker ever downward
To the dark zenith of Thine antipodes
Jesus Uplifted.

Bat-winged heart of man
Reversed flame
Shuddering a strange way down the bottomless pit
To the great depths of its reversed zenith.

Afterwards, afterwards
Morning comes, and I shake the dews of night from the
wings of my spirit
And mount like a lark, Beloved.

But remember, Saviour,
That my heart which like a lark at heaven's gate singing,
 hovers morning-bright to Thee,
Throws still the dark blood back and forth
In the avenues where the bat hangs sleeping, upside-down
And to me undeniable, Jesus.

Listen, Paraclete.
I can no more deny the bat-wings of my fathom-flickering
 spirit of darkness
Than the wings of the Morning and Thee, Thou Glorified.

I am Matthew, the Man:
It is understood.
And Thou art Jesus, Son of Man
Drawing all men unto Thee, but bound to release them
 when the hour strikes.

I have been, and I have returned.
I have mounted up on the wings of the morning, and I
 have dredged down to the zenith's reversal.
Which is my way, being man.
Gods may stay in mid-heaven, the Son of Man has climbed
 to the Whitsun zenith,
But I, Matthew, being a man
Am a traveller back and forth.
So be it.

ST MARK

THERE was a lion in Judah
Which whelped, and was Mark.

But winged.
A lion with wings.
At least at Venice.
Even as late as Daniele Manin.

Why should he have wings?
Is he to be a bird also?
Or a spirit?
Or a winged thought?
Or a soaring consciousness?

Evidently he is all that
The lion of the spirit.

Ah, Lamb of God
Would a wingless lion lie down before Thee, as this
winged lion lies?

The lion of the spirit.

Once he lay in the mouth of a cave
And sunned his whiskers,
And lashed his tail slowly, slowly
Thinking of voluptuousness
Even of blood.

But later, in the sun of the afternoon
Having tasted all there was to taste, and having slept his fill
He fell to frowning, as he lay with his head on his paws

And the sun coming in through the narrowest fibril of a
slit in his eyes.

So, nine-tenths asleep, motionless, bored, and statically
angry.

He saw in a shaft of light a lamb on a pinnacle, balancing a
flag on its paw.

And he was thoroughly startled.

Going out to investigate

He found the lamb beyond him, on the inaccessible pinnacle
of light.

So he put his paw to his nose, and pondered.

“Guard my sheep,” came the silvery voice from the
pinnacle,

“And I will give thee the wings of the morning.”

So the lion of the senses thought it was worth it.

Hence he became a curly sheep-dog with dangerous pro —
pensities

As Carpaccio will tell you:

Ramping round, guarding the flock of mankind,

Sharpening his teeth on the wolves,

Ramping up through the air like a kestrel

And lashing his tail above the world

And enjoying the sensation of heaven and righteousness and
voluptuous wrath.

There is a new sweetness in his voluptuously licking his paw
Now that it is a weapon of heaven.

There is a new ecstasy in his roar of desirous love

Now that it sounds self-conscious through the unlimited sky.

He is well aware of himself

And he cherishes voluptuous delights, and thinks about
them

And ceases to be a blood-thirsty king of beasts

And becomes the faithful sheep-dog of the Shepherd, think —
ing of his voluptuous pleasures of chasing the sheep to
the fold

And increasing the flock, and perhaps giving a real nip here
and there, a real pinch, but always well meant.

And somewhere there is a lioness
The she-mate.
Whelps play between the paws of the lion
The she-mate purrs
Their castle is impregnable, their cave,
The sun comes in their lair, they are well-off
A well-to-do family.

Then the proud lion stalks abroad, alone
And roars to announce himself to the wolves
And also to encourage the red-cross Lamb
And also to ensure a goodly increase in the world.

Look at him, with his paw on the world
At Venice and elsewhere.
Going blind at last.

ST LUKE

A WALL, a bastion,
A living forehead with its slow whorl of hair
And a bull's large, sombre, glancing eye
And glistening, adhesive muzzle
With cavernous nostrils where the winds run hot
Snorting defiance
Or greedily snuffling behind the cows.

Horns
The golden horns of power,
Power to kill, power to create
Such as Moses had, and God,
Head-power.

Shall great wings flame from his shoulder-sockets
Assyrian-wise?
It would be no wonder.

Knowing the thunder of his heart
The massive thunder of his dew-lapped chest
Deep and reverberating,
It would be no wonder if great wings, like flame, fanned
out from the furnace-cracks of his shoulder-sockets.

Thud! Thud! Thud!
And the roar of black bull's blood in the mighty passages of
his chest.

Ah, the dewlap swings pendulous with excess.
The great, roaring weight above
Like a furnace dripping a molten drip.

The urge, the massive, burning ache

Of the bull's breast.
The open furnace-doors of his nostrils.

For what does he ache, and groan?

In his breast a wall?

Nay, once it was also a fortress wall, and the weight of a
vast battery.
But now it is a burning hearthstone only,
Massive old altar of his own burnt offering.

It was always an altar of burnt offering
His own black blood poured out like a sheet of flame over
his fecundating herd
As he gave himself forth.

But also it was a fiery fortress frowning shaggily on the world
And announcing battle ready.

Since the Lamb bewitched him with that red-struck flag
His fortress is dismantled
His fires of wrath are banked down
His horns turn away from the enemy.

He serves the Son of Man.

And hear him bellow, after many years, the bull that serves
the Son of Man.
Moaning, booing, roaring hollow
Constrained to pour forth all his fire down the narrow sluice
of procreation
Through such narrow loins, too narrow.

Is he not over-charged by the dammed-up pressure of his

own massive black blood
Luke, the Bull, the father of substance, the Providence Bull,
after two thousand years?
Is he not over-full of offering, a vast, vast offer of himself
Which must be poured through so small a vent?

Too small a vent.

Let him remember his horns, then.
Seal up his forehead once more to a bastion,
Let it know nothing.
Let him charge like a mighty catapult on the red-cross flag,
let him roar out challenge on the world
And throwing himself upon it, throw off the madness of his
blood.
Let it be war.

And so it is war.
The bull of the proletariat has got his head down.

ST JOHN

JOHN, oh John,
Thou honourable bird
Sun-peering eagle.

Taking a bird's-eye view
Even of Calvary and Resurrection
Not to speak of Babylon's whoredom.

High over the mild effulgence of the dove
Hung all the time, did we but know it, the all-knowing
shadow
Of John's great gold-barred eagle.

John knew all about it
Even the very beginning.

"In the beginning was the Word
And the Word was God
And the Word was with God."

Having been to school
John knew the whole proposition.
As for innocent Jesus
He was one of Nature's phenomena, no doubt.

Oh that mind-soaring eagle of an Evangelist
Staring creation out of countenance
And telling it off
As an eagle staring down on the Sun!

The Logos, the Logos!
"In the beginning was the Word."

Is there not a great Mind pre-ordaining?
Does not a supreme Intellect ideally procreate the Universe?
Is not each soul a vivid thought in the great consciousness
stream of God?

Put salt on his tail
The sly bird of John.

Proud intellect, high-soaring Mind
Like a king eagle, bird of the most High, sweeping the
round of heaven
And casting the cycles of creation
On two wings, like a pair of compasses;
Jesus' pale and lambent dove, cooing in the lower boughs
On sufferance.

In the beginning was the Word, of course.
And the word was the first offspring of the almighty Johannine
mind,
Chick of the intellectual eagle.

Yet put salt on the tail of the Johannine bird
Put salt on its tail
John's eagle.

Shoo it down out of the empyrean
Of the all-seeing, all-fore-ordaining ideal.
Make it roost on bird-spattered, rocky Patmos
And let it moult there, among the stones of the bitter sea.

For the almighty eagle of the fore-ordaining Mind
Is looking rather shabby and island-bound these days:
Moulting, and rather naked about the rump, and down in
the beak,
Rather dirty, on dung-whitened Patmos.

From which we are led to assume
That the old bird is weary, and almost willing
That a new chick should chip the extensive shell
Of the mundane egg.

The poor old golden eagle of the creative spirit
Moulting and moping and waiting, willing at last
For the fire to burn it up, feathers and all
So that a new conception of the beginning and end
Can rise from the ashes.

Ah Phoenix, Phoenix
John's Eagle!
You are only known to us now as the badge of an insurance
Company.

Phoenix, Phoenix
The nest is in flames
Feathers are singeing.
Ash flutters flocculent, like down on a blue, wan fledgeling.

San Gervasio.

CREATURES

THE MOSQUITO

WHEN did you start your tricks
Monsieur?

What do you stand on such high legs for?
Why this length of shredded shank
You exaltation?

Is it so that you shall lift your centre of gravity upwards
And weigh no more than air as you alight upon me,
Stand upon me weightless, you phantom?

I heard a woman call you the Winged Victory
In sluggish Venice.
You turn your head towards your tail, and smile.

How can you put so much devilry
Into that translucent phantom shred
Of a frail corpus?

Queer, with your thin wings and your streaming legs
How you sail like a heron, or a dull clot of air,
A nothingness.

Yet what an aura surrounds you;
Your evil little aura, prowling, and casting a numbness on
my mind.

That is your trick, your bit of filthy magic:
Invisibility, and the anaesthetic power
To deaden my attention in your direction.

But I know your game now, streaky sorcerer.

Queer, how you stalk and prowl the air
In circles and evasions, enveloping me,
Ghoul on wings
Winged Victory.

Settle, and stand on long thin shanks
Eyeing me sideways, and cunningly conscious that I am aware,
You speck.

I hate the way you lurch off sideways into air
Having read my thoughts against you.

Come then, let us play at unawares,
And see who wins in this sly game of bluff.
Man or mosquito.

You don't know that I exist, and I don't know that you exist.
Now then!

It is your trump
It is your hateful little trump
You pointed fiend.
Which shakes my sudden blood to hatred of you:
It is your small, high, hateful bugle in my ear.

Why do you do it?
Surely it is bad policy.

They say you can't help it.

If that is so, then I believe a little in Providence pro —
tecting the innocent.
But it sounds so amazingly like a slogan
A yell of triumph as you snatch my scalp.

Blood, red blood
Super-magical
Forbidden liquor.

I behold you stand
For a second enspasmed in oblivion,
Obscenely ecstasied
Sucking live blood
My blood.

Such silence, such suspended transport.
Such gorging,
Such obscenity of trespass.

You stagger
As well as you may.
Only your accursed hairy frailty
Your own imponderable weightlessness
Saves you, wafts you away on the very draught my
 anger makes in its snatching.

Away with a paeon of derision
You winged blood-drop.

Can I not overtake you?
Are you one too many for me
Winged Victory?
Am I not mosquito enough to out-mosquito you?

Queer, what a big stain my sucked blood makes
Beside the infinitesimal faint smear of you!
Queer, what a dim dark smudge you have disappeared into!

Siracusa.

FISH

FISH, oh Fish,
So little matters!

Whether the waters rise and cover the earth
Or whether the waters wilt in the hollow places,
All one to you.

Aqueous, subaqueous,
Submerged
And wave-thrilled.

As the waters roll
Roll you.
The waters wash,
You wash in oneness
And never emerge.

Never know.
Never grasp.

Your life a sluice of sensation along your sides,
A flush at the flails of your fins, down the whorl of your
tail.
And water wetly on fire in the grates of your gills;
Fixed water-eyes.

Even snakes lie together.

But oh, fish, that rock in water,
You lie only with the waters;
One touch.

No fingers, no hands and feet, no lips;
No tender muzzles,
No wistful bellies,
No loins of desire,
None.

You and the naked element,
Sway-wave.
Curvetting bits of tin in the evening light.

Who is it ejects his sperm to the naked flood?
In the wave-mother?
Who swims enwombed?
Who lies with the waters of his silent passion, womb —
element?
— Fish in the waters under the earth.

What price *his* bread upon the waters?

Himself all silvery himself
In the element
No more.

Nothing more.

Himself,
And the element.
Food, of course!
Water-eager eyes,
Mouth-gate open
And strong spine urging, driving;
And desirous belly gulping.

Fear also!
He knows fear!
Water-eyes craning,

A rush that almost screams,
Almost fish-voice
As the pike comes. . . .
Then gay fear, that turns the tail sprightly, from a shadow.

Food, and fear, and joie de vivre,
Without love.

The other way about:
Joie de vivre, and fear, and food,
All without love.

Quelle joie de vivre
Dans l'eau!
Slowly to gape through the waters.
Alone with the element;
To sink, and rise, and go to sleep with the waters;
To speak endless inaudible wavelets into the wave;
To breathe from the flood at the gills,
Fish-blood slowly running next to the flood, extracting fish —
fire;
To have the element under one, like a lover;
And to spring away with a curvetting click in the air,
Provocative.
Dropping back with a slap on the face of the flood.
And merging oneself!

To be a fish!

So utterly without misgiving
To be a fish
In the waters.

Loveless, and so lively!
Born before God was love,
Or life knew loving.

Beautifully beforehand with it all.

Admitted, they swarm in companies,
Fishes.

They drive in shoals.

But soundless, and out of contact.

They exchange no word, no spasm, not even anger.

Not one touch.

Many suspended together, forever apart,

Each one alone with the waters, upon one wave with the rest.

A magnetism in the water between them only.

I saw a water-serpent swim across the Anapo,

And I said to my heart, *look, look at him!*

With his head up, steering like a bird!

He's a rare one, but he belongs . . .

But sitting in a boat on the Zeller lake

And watching the fishes in the breathing waters

Lift and swim and go their way —

I said to my heart, *who are these?*

And my heart couldn't own them. . . .

A slim young pike with smart fins

And grey-striped suit, a young cub of a pike

Slouching along away below, half out of sight,

Like a lout on an obscure pavement. . . .

Aha, there's somebody in the know!

But watching closer

That motionless deadly motion,

That unnatural barrel body, that long ghoul nose, . . .

I left off hailing him.

I had made a mistake, I didn't know him,
This grey, monotonous soul in the water,
This intense individual in shadow,
Fish-alive.

I didn't know his God,
I didn't know his God.

Which is perhaps the last admission that life has to wring
out of us.

I saw, dimly,
Once a big pike rush,
And small fish fly like splinters.
And I said to my heart, *there are limits*
To you, my heart;
And to the one God.
Fish are beyond me.

Other Gods
Beyond my range . . . gods beyond my God. . .

They are beyond me, are fishes.
I stand at the pale of my being
And look beyond, and see
Fish, in the outerwards,
As one stands on a bank and looks in.

I have waited with a long rod
And suddenly pulled a gold-and-greenish, lucent fish from
below,
And had him fly like a halo round my head,
Lunging in the air on the line.

Unhooked his gorging, water-horny mouth.

And seen his horror-tilted eye,
His red-gold, water-precious, mirror-flat bright eye;
And felt him beat in my hand, with his mucous, leaping
life-throb.

And my heart accused itself
Thinking: *I am not the measure of creation.*
This is beyond me, this fish.
His God stands outside my God.

And the gold-and-green pure lacquer-mucus comes off in my
hand,
And the red-gold mirror-eye stares and dies,
And the water-suave contour dims.

But not before I have had to know
He was born in front of my sunrise.
Before my day.

He outstarts me.
And I, a many-fingered horror of daylight to him,
Have made him die.

Fishes,
With their gold, red eyes, and green-pure gleam, and
under-gold,
And their pre-world loneliness,
And more-than-lovelessness.
And white meat;
They move in other circles.

Outsiders.
Water-wayfarers.
Things of one element.
Aqueous,
Each by itself.

Cats, and the Neapolitans,
Sulphur sun-beasts,
Thirst for fish as for more-than-water;
Water-alive
To quench their over-sulphureous lusts.

But I, I only wonder
And don't know.
I don't know fishes.

In the beginning
Jesus was called The Fish. . . .
And in the end.

Zell-am-See.

BAT

AT evening, sitting on this terrace,
When the sun from the west, beyond Pisa, beyond the
mountains of Carrara
Departs, and the world is taken by surprise . . .

When the tired flower of Florence is in gloom beneath the
glowing
Brown hills surrounding . . .

When under the arches of the Ponte Vecchio
A green light enters against stream, flush from the west,
Against the current of obscure Arno . . .

Look up, and you see things flying
Between the day and the night;
Swallows with spools of dark thread sewing the shadows
together.

A circle swoop, and a quick parabola under the bridge arches
Where light pushes through;
A sudden turning upon itself of a thing in the air.
A dip to the water.

And you think:
“The swallows are flying so late!”

Swallows?

Dark air-life looping
Yet missing the pure loop . . .
A twitch, a twitter, an elastic shudder in flight
And serrated wings against the sky.

Like a glove, a black glove thrown up at the light,
And falling back.

Never swallows!

Bats!

The swallows are gone.

At a wavering instant the swallows gave way to bats

By the Ponte Vecchio . . .

Changing guard.

Bats, and an uneasy creeping in one's scalp

As the bats swoop overhead!

Flying madly.

Pipistrello!

Black piper on an infinitesimal pipe.

Little lumps that fly in air and have voices indefinite, wildj'
vindictive;

Wings like bits of umbrella.

Bats!

Creatures that hang themselves up like an old rag, to
sleep;

And disgustingly upside down.

Hanging upside down like rows of disgusting old rags

And grinning in their sleep.

Bats!

Not for me!

MAN AND BAT

WHEN I went into my room, at mid-morning,
Say ten o'clock . . .
My room, a crash-box over that great stone rattle
The Via de' Bardi. . .

When I went into my room at mid-morning
Why? . . . a bird!

A bird
Flying round the room in insane circles.

In insane circles!
. . . A bat!

A disgusting bat
At mid-morning! . . .

Out! Go out!

Round and round and round
With a twitchy, nervous, intolerable flight,
And a neurasthenic lunge,
And an impure frenzy;
A bat, big as a swallow.

Out, out of my room!

The Venetian shutters I push wide
To the free, calm upper air;
Loop back the curtains. . . .

Now out, out from my room!

So to drive him out, flicking with my white handkerchief:

Go!

But he will not.

Round and round and round

In an impure haste,

Fumbling, a beast in air,

And stumbling, lunging and touching the walls, the bell —
wires

About my room!

Always refusing to go out into the air

Above that crash-gulf of the Via de' Bardi,

Yet blind with frenzy, with cluttered fear.

At last he swerved into the window bay,

But blew back, as if an incoming wind blew him in again.

A strong intrushing wind.

And round and round and round!

Blundering more insane, and leaping, in throbs, to clutch at
a corner,

At a wire, at a bell-rope:

On and on, watched relentless by me, round and round in
my room,

Round and round and dithering with tiredness and haste and
increasing delirium

Flicker-splashing round my room.

I would not let him rest;

Not one instant cleave, cling like a blot with his breast to
the wall

In an obscure corner.

Not an instant!

I flicked him on,
Trying to drive him through the window.

Again he swerved into the window bay
And I ran forward, to frighten him forth.
But he rose, and from a terror worse than me he flew past me
Back into my room, and round, round, round in my room
Clutch, cleave, stagger,
Dropping about the air
Getting tired.

Something seemed to blow him back from the window
Every time he swerved at it;
Back on a strange parabola, then round, round, dizzy in my
room.

He *could* not go out,
I also realised. . . .
It was the light of day which he could not enter.
Any more than I could enter the white-hot door of a blast —
furnace.

He could not plunge into the daylight that streamed at the
window.
It was asking too much of his nature.

Worse even than the hideous terror of me with my hand —
kerchief
Saying: *Out, go out!* . . .
Was the horror of white daylight in the window!

So I switched on the electric light, thinking: *Now*
The outside will seem brown. . . .

But no.

The outside did not seem brown.
And he did not mind the yellow electric light.

Silent!
He was having a silent rest.
But never!
Not in my room.

Round and round and round
Near the ceiling as if in a web,
Staggering;
Plunging, falling out of the web,
Broken in heaviness,
Lunging blindly,
Heavier;
And clutching, clutching for one second's pause,
Always, as if for one drop of rest,
One little drop.

And I!
Never, I say. . . .
Go out!

Flying slower,
Seeming to stumble, to fall in air.
Blind-weary.

Yet never able to pass the whiteness of light into
freedom . . .
A bird would have dashed through, come what might.

Fall, sink, lurch, and round and round
Flicker, flicker-heavy;
Even wings heavy:
And cleave in a high corner for a second, like a clot, also a
prayer.

*But no.
Out, you beast.*

Till he fell in a corner, palpitating, spent.
And there, a clot, he squatted and looked at me.
With sticking-out, bead-berry eyes, black,
And improper derisive ears,
And shut wings,
And brown, furry body.

Brown, nut-brown, fine fur!
But it might as well have been hair on a spider; thing
With long, black-paper ears.

So, a dilemma!
He squatted there like something unclean.

No, he must not squat, nor hang, obscene, in my room!

Yet nothing on earth will give him courage to pass the
sweet fire of day.

What then?
Hit him and kill him and throw him away?

Nay,
I didn't create him.
Let the God that created him be responsible for his death . . .
Only, in the bright day, I will not have this clot in my room.

Let the God who is maker of bats watch with them in their
unclean corners. . . .
I admit a God in every crevice.
But not bats in my room;

Nor the God of bats, while the sun shines.

So out, out you brute! . . .

And he lunged, flight-heavy, away from me, sideways, *a sghembo!*

And round and round and round my room, a clot with wings,
Impure even in weariness.

Wings dark skinny and flapping the air.

Lost their flicker.

Spent.

He fell again with a little thud

Near the curtain on the floor.

And there lay.

Ah death, death

You are no solution!

Bats must be bats.

Only life has a way out.

And the human soul is fated to wide-eyed responsibility

In life.

So I picked him up in a flannel jacket,

Well covered, lest he should bite me.

For I would have had to kill him if he'd bitten me, the
impure one. . . .

And he hardly stirred in my hand, muffled up.

Hastily, I shook him out of the window.

And away he went!

Fear craven in his tail.

Great haste, and straight, almost bird straight above the Via
de' Bardi.

Above that crash-gulf of exploding whips,
Towards the Borgo San Jacopo.

And now, at evening, as he flickers over the river
Dipping with petty triumphant flight, and tittering over the
sun's departure,

I believe he chirps, pipistrello, seeing me here on this
terrace writing:

There he sits, the long loud one!

But I am greater than he . . .

I escaped him. . . .

Florence.

REPTILES

SNAKE

A SNAKE came to my water-trough
On a hot, hot day, and I in pyjamas for the heat,
To drink there.

In the deep, strange-scented shade of the great dark carob —
tree
I came down the steps with my pitcher
And must wait, must stand and wait, for there he was at the
trough before me.

He reached down from a fissure in the earth-wall in the gloom
And trailed his yellow-brown slackness soft-bellied down,
over the edge of the stone trough
And rested his throat upon the stone bottom,
And where the water had dripped from the tap, in a small
clearness,
He sipped with his straight mouth,
Softly drank through his straight gums, into his slack long
body,
Silently.

Someone was before me at my water-trough,
And I, like a second comer, waiting.

He lifted his head from his drinking, as cattle do,
And looked at me vaguely, as drinking cattle do,
And flickered his two-forked tongue from his lips, and mused
a moment,
And stooped and drank a little more,
Being earth-brown, earth-golden from the burning bowels of
the earth
On the day of Sicilian July, with Etna smoking.

The voice of my education said to me
He must be killed,
For in Sicily the black, black snakes are innocent, the gold
are venomous.

And voices in me said, If you were a man
You would take a stick and break him now, and finish
him off.

But must I confess how I liked him,
How glad I was he had come like a guest in quiet, to drink
at my water-trough
And depart peaceful, pacified, and thankless,
Into the burning bowels of this earth?

Was it cowardice, that I dared not kill him?
Was it perversity, that I longed to talk to him?
Was it humility, to feel so honoured?
I felt so honoured.

And yet those voices:
If you were not afraid, you would kill him!

And truly I was afraid, I was most afraid.
But even so, honoured still more
That he should seek my hospitality
From out the dark door of the secret earth.

He drank enough
And lifted his head, dreamily, as one who has drunken,
And flickered his tongue like a forked night on the air, so
black,
Seeming to lick his lips,
And looked around like a god, unseeing, into the air,
And slowly turned his head.
And slowly, very slowly, as if thrice adream,

Proceeded to draw his slow length curving round
And climb again the broken bank of my wall-face.

And as he put his head into that dreadful hole,
And as he slowly drew up, snake-easing his shoulders, and
entered farther,
A sort of horror, a sort of protest against his withdrawing
into that horrid black hole,
Deliberately going into the blackness, and slowly drawing
himself after,
Overcame me now his back was turned.

I looked round, I put down my pitcher,
I picked up a clumsy log
And threw it at the water-trough with a clatter.

I think it did not hit him,
But suddenly that part of him that was left behind convulsed
in undignified haste,
Writhed like lightning, and was gone
Into the black hole, the earth-lipped fissure in the wall —
front,
At which, in the intense still noon, I stared with fascination.

And immediately I regretted it.
I thought how paltry, how vulgar, what a mean act!
I despised myself and the voices of my accursed human
education.

And I thought of the albatross,
And I wished he would come back, my snake.

For he seemed to me again like a king,
Like a king in exile, uncrowned in the underworld,
Now due to be crowned again.

And so, I missed my chance with one of the lords
Of life.
And I have something to expiate;
A pettiness.

Taormina.

BABY TORTOISE

YOU know what it is to be born alone,
Baby tortoise!

The first day to heave your feet little by little from the
shell,
Not yet awake,
And remain lapsed on earth,
Not quite alive.

A tiny, fragile, half-animate bean.

To open your tiny beak-mouth, that looks as if it would
never open,
Like some iron door;
To lift the upper hawk-beak from the lower base
And reach your skinny little neck
And take your first bite at some dim bit of herbage,
Alone, small insect,
Tiny bright-eye,
Slow one.

To take your first solitary bite
And move on your slow, solitary hunt.
Your bright, dark little eye,
Your eye of a dark disturbed night,
Under its slow lid, tiny baby tortoise,
So indomitable.
No one ever heard you complain.

You draw your head forward, slowly, from your little wimple
And set forward, slow-dragging, on your four-pinned toes,
Rowing slowly forward.
Whither away, small bird?

Rather like a baby working its limbs,
Except that you make slow, ageless progress
And a baby makes none.

The touch of sun excites you,
And the long ages, and the lingering chill
Make you pause to yawn,
Opening your impervious mouth,
Suddenly beak-shaped, and very wide, like some suddenly
gaping pincers;
Soft red tongue, and hard thin gums,
Then close the wedge of your little mountain front,
Your face, baby tortoise.

Do you wonder at the world, as slowly you turn your head
in its wimple
And look with laconic, black eyes?
Or is sleep coming over you again,
The non-life?

You are so hard to wake.

Are you able to wonder?
Or is it just your indomitable will and pride of the first life
Looking round
And slowly pitching itself against the inertia
Which had seemed invincible?

The vast inanimate,
And the fine brilliance of your so tiny eye,
Challenger.

Nay, tiny shell-bird,
What a huge vast inanimate it is, that you must row against,
What an incalculable inertia.

Challenger,
Little Ulysses, fore-runner,
No bigger than my thumb-nail,
Buon viaggio.

All animate creation on your shoulder,
Set forth, little Titan, under your battle-shield.

The ponderous, preponderate,
Inanimate universe;
And you are slowly moving, pioneer, you alone.

How vivid your travelling seems now, in the troubled sun —
shine.
Stoic, Ulyssean atom;
Suddenly hasty, reckless, on high toes.

Voiceless little bird,
Resting your head half out of your wimple
In the slow dignity of your eternal pause.
Alone, with no sense of being alone,
And hence six times more solitary;
Fulfilled of the slow passion of pitching through immemorial
ages
Your little round house in the midst of chaos.

Over the garden earth,
Small bird,
Over the edge of all things.

Traveller,
With your tail tucked a little on one side
Like a gentleman in a long-skirted coat.

All life carried on your shoulder,

Invincible fore-runner.

TORTOISE SHELL

THE Cross, the Cross
Goes deeper in than we know,
Deeper into life;
Right into the marrow
And through the bone.

Along the back of the baby tortoise
The scales are locked in an arch like a bridge,
Scale-lapping, like a lobster's sections
Or a bee's.

Then crossways down his sides
Tiger-stripes and wasp-bands.

Five, and five again, and five again,
And round the edges twenty-five little ones,
The sections of the baby tortoise shell.

Four, and a keystone;
Four, and a keystone;
Four, and a keystone;
Then twenty-four, and a tiny little keystone.

It needed Pythagoras to see life playing with counters on the
living back
Of the baby tortoise;
Life establishing the first eternal mathematical tablet,
Not in stone, like the Judean Lord, or bronze, but in life —
clouded, life-rosy tortoise shell.

The first little mathematical gentleman
Stepping, wee mite, in his loose trousers
Under all the eternal dome of mathematical law.

Fives, and tens,
Threes and fours and twelves,
All the volte face of decimals,
The whirligig of dozens and the pinnacle of seven.

Turn him on his back,
The kicking little beetle,
And there again, on his shell-tender, earth-touching belly,
The long cleavage of division, upright of the eternal cross
And on either side count five,
On each side, two above, on each side, two below
The dark bar horizontal.

The Cross!
It goes right through him, the sprottling insect,
Through his cross-wise cloven psyche,
Through his five-fold complex-nature.

So turn him over on his toes again;
Four pin-point toes, and a problematical thumb-piece,
Four rowing limbs, and one wedge-balancing head,
Four and one makes five, which is the clue to all
mathematics.

The Lord wrote it all down on the little slate
Of the baby tortoise.
Outward and visible indication of the plan within,
The complex, manifold involvedness of an individual creature
Plotted out
On this small bird, this rudiment,
This little dome, this pediment
Of all creation,
This slow one.

TORTOISE FAMILY CONNECTIONS

ON he goes, the little one,
Bud of the universe,
Pediment of life.

Setting off somewhere, apparently.
Whither away, brisk egg?

His mother deposited him on the soil as if he were no more
than droppings.
And now he scuffles tinily past her as if she were an old
rusty tin.

A mere obstacle,
He veers round the slow great mound of her —
Tortoises always foresee obstacles.

It is no use my saying to him in an emotional voice:
“This is your Mother, she laid you when you were an egg.”

He does not even trouble to answer: “Woman, what have I
to do with thee?”
He wearily looks the other way,
And she even more wearily looks another way still,
Each with the utmost apathy,
Incognisant,
Unaware,
Nothing.

As for papa,
He snaps when I offer him his offspring,
Just as he snaps when I poke a bit of stick at him,
Because he is irascible this morning, an irascible tortoise
Being touched with love, and devoid of fatherliness.

Father and mother,
And three little brothers,
And all rambling aimless, like little perambulating pebbles
scattered in the garden.
Not knowing each other from bits of earth or old tins.

Except that papa and mama are old acquaintances, of course,
Though family feeling there is none, not even the beginnings.

Fatherless, motherless, brotherless, sisterless
Little tortoise.

Row on then, small pebble,
Over the clods of the autumn, wind-chilled sunshine,
Young gaiety.

Does he look for a companion?

No, no, don't think it.
He doesn't know he is alone;
Isolation is his birthright,
This atom.

To row forward, and reach himself tall on spiny toes,
To travel, to burrow into a little loose earth, afraid of the
night,
To crop a little substance,
To move, and to be quite sure that he is moving:
Basta!
To be a tortoise!
Think of it, in a garden of inert clods
A brisk, brindled little tortoise, all to himself —
Croesus!

In a garden of pebbles and insects

To roam, and feel the slow heart beat
Tortoise-wise, the first bell sounding
From the warm blood, in the dark-creation morning.

Moving, and being himself,
Slow, and unquestioned,
And inordinately there, O stoic!
Wandering in the slow triumph of his own existence,
Ringing the soundless bell of his presence in chaos,
And biting the frail grass arrogantly,
Decidedly arrogantly.

LUI ET ELLE

SHE is large and matronly
And rather dirty,
A little sardonic-looking, as if domesticity had driven her
to it.

Though what she does, except lay four eggs at random in
the garden once a year
And put up with her husband,
I don't know.

She likes to eat.
She hurries up, striding reared on long uncanny legs,
When food is going.
Oh yes, she can make haste when she likes.

She snaps the soft bread from my hand in great mouthfuls,
Opening her rather pretty wedge of an iron, pristine face
Into an enormously wide-beaked mouth
Like sudden curved scissors,
And gulping at more than she can swallow, and working
her thick, soft tongue,
And having the bread hanging over her chin.

O Mistress, Mistress,
Reptile mistress,
Your eye is very dark, very bright,
And it never softens
Although you watch.

She knows,
She knows well enough to come for food,
Yet she sees me not;
Her bright eye sees, but not me, not anything,

Sightful, sightless, seeing and visionless,
Reptile mistress.

Taking bread in her curved, gaping, toothless mouth,
She has no qualm when she catches my finger in her steel
overlapping gums,
But she hangs on, and my shout and my shrinking are
nothing to her.
She does not even know she is nipping me with her curved
beak.
Snake-like she draws at my finger, while I drag it in horror
away.

Mistress, reptile mistress,
You are almost too large, I am almost frightened.

He is much smaller,
Dapper beside her,
And ridiculously small.

Her laconic eye has an earthy, materialistic look,
His, poor darling, is almost fiery.

His wimple, his blunt-prowed face,
His low forehead, his skinny neck, his long, scaled, striving
legs,
So striving, striving,
Are all more delicate than she,
And he has a cruel scar on his shell.

Poor darling, biting at her feet,
Running beside her like a dog, biting her earthy, splay feet,
Nipping her ankles,
Which she drags apathetic away, though without retreating
into her shell.

Agelessly silent,
And with a grim, reptile determination.
Cold, voiceless age-after-age behind him, serpents' long
obstinacy
Of horizontal persistence.

Little old man
Scuffling beside her, bending down, catching his opportunity,
Parting his steel-trap face, so suddenly, and seizing her scaly
ankle,
And hanging grimly on,
Letting go at last as she drags away,
And closing his steel-trap face.

His steel-trap, stoic, ageless, handsome face.
Alas, what a fool he looks in this scuffle.

And how he feels it!
The lonely rambler, the stoic, dignified stalker through
chaos,
The immune, the animate,
Enveloped in isolation,
Forerunner.
Now look at him!

Alas, the spear is through the side of his isolation.
His adolescence saw him crucified into sex,
Doomed, in the long crucifixion of desire, to seek his con —
summation beyond himself.
Divided into passionate duality,
He, so finished and immune, now broken into desirous
fragmentariness,
Doomed to make an intolerable fool of himself
In his effort toward completion again.

Poor little earthy house-inhabiting Osiris,
The mysterious bull tore him at adolescence into pieces,

And he must struggle after reconstruction, ignominiously.

And so behold him following the tail
Of that mud-hovel of his slowly rambling spouse,
Like some unhappy bull at the tail of a cow,
But with more than bovine, grim, earth-dank persistence.

Suddenly seizing the ugly ankle as she stretches out to walk,
Roaming over the sods,
Or, if it happen to show, at her pointed, heavy tail
Beneath the low-dropping back-board of her shell.

Their two shells like domed boats bumping,
Hers huge, his small;
Their splay feet rambling and rowing like paddles,
And stumbling mixed up in one another,
In the race of love —
Two tortoises,
She huge, he small.

She seems earthily apathetic,
And he has a reptile's awful persistence.

I heard a woman pitying her, pitying the Mère Tortue.
While I, I pity Monsieur.
“He pesters her and torments her,” said the woman.
How much more is he pestered and tormented, say I.

What can he do?
He is dumb, he is visionless,
Conceptionless.
His black, sad-lidded eye sees but beholds not
As her earthen mound moves on,
But he catches the folds of vulnerable, leathery skin,
Nail-studded, that shake beneath her shell,
And drags at these with his beak.

Drags and drags and bites,
While she pulls herself free, and rows her dull mound along.

TORTOISE GALLANTRY

MAKING his advances
He does not look at her, nor sniff at her,
No, not even sniff at her, his nose is blank.

Only he senses the vulnerable folds of skin
That work beneath her while she sprawls along
In her ungainly pace,
Her folds of skin that work and row
Beneath the earth-soiled hovel in which she moves.

And so he strains beneath her housey walls
And catches her trouser-legs in his beak
Suddenly, or her skinny limb,
And strange and grimly drags at her
Like a dog,
Only agelessly silent, with a reptile's awful persistency

Grim, gruesome gallantry, to which he is doomed.
Dragged out of an eternity of silent isolation
And doomed to partiality, partial being,
Ache, and want of being.
Want,
Self-exposure, hard humiliation, need to add himself on to her

Born to walk alone,
Fore-runner,
Now suddenly distracted into this mazy side-track,
This awkward, harrowing pursuit,
This grim necessity from within.

Does she know
As she moves eternally slowly away?
Or is he driven against her with a bang, like a bird flying in

the dark against a window,
All knowledgeable?

The awful concussion,
And the still more awful need to persist, to follow, follow,
continue,

Driven, after aeons of pristine, fore-god-like singleness and
oneness,
At the end of some mysterious, red-hot iron,
Driven away from himself into her tracks,
Forced to crash against her.

Stiff, gallant, irascible, crook-legged reptile,
Little gentleman,
Sorry plight,
We ought to look the other way.

Save that, having come with you so far,
We will go on to the end.

TORTOISE SHOUT

I THOUGHT he was dumb,
I said he was dumb,
Yet I've heard him cry.

First faint scream,
Out of life's unfathomable dawn,
Far off, so far, like a madness, under the horizon's dawning rim,
Far, far off, far scream.

Tortoise in extremis.

Why were we crucified into sex?
Why were we not left rounded off, and finished in ourselves,
As we began,
As he certainly began, so perfectly alone?

A far, was-it-audible scream,
Or did it sound on the plasm direct?

Worse than the cry of the new-born,
A scream,
A yell,
A shout,
A paeon,
A death-agony,
A birth-cry,
A submission,
All tiny, tiny, far away, reptile under the first dawn.

War-cry, triumph, acute delight, death-scream reptilian,
Why was the veil torn?
The silken shriek of the soul's torn membrane?
The male soul's membrane

Torn with a shriek half music, half horror.

Crucifixion.

Male tortoise, cleaving behind the hovel-wall of that dense
female,

Mounted and tense, spread-eagle, out-reaching out of the
shell

In tortoise-nakedness,

Long neck, and long vulnerable limbs extruded, spread-eagle
over her house-roof,

And the deep, secret, all-penetrating tail curved beneath
her walls.

Reaching and gripping tense, more reaching anguish in
uttermost tension

Till suddenly, in the spasm of coition, tugging like a jerking
leap, and oh!

Opening its clenched face from his outstretched neck

And giving that fragile yell, that scream,

Super-audible,

From his pink, cleft, old-man's mouth,

Giving up the ghost,

Or screaming in Pentecost, receiving the ghost.

His scream, and his moment's subsidence,

The moment of eternal silence,

Yet unreleased, and after the moment, the sudden, startling
jerk of coition, and at once

The inexpressible faint yell —

And so on, till the last plasm of my body was melted
back

To the primeval rudiments of life, and the secret.

So he tugs, and screams

Time after time that frail, torn scream

After each jerk, the longish interval,

The tortoise eternity,

Age-long, reptilian persistence,

Heart-throb, slow heart-throb, persistent for the next
spasm.

I remember, when I was a boy,
I heard the scream of a frog, which was caught with his foot
in the mouth of an up-starting snake;
I remember when I first heard bull-frogs break into sound
in the spring;
I remember hearing a wild goose out of the throat of night
Cry loudly, beyond the lake of waters;
I remember the first time, out of a bush in the darkness,
a nightingale's piercing cries and gurgles startled the
depths of my soul;
I remember the scream of a rabbit as I went through a wood
at midnight;
I remember the heifer in her heat, blorting and blorting
through the hours, persistent and irrepressible;
I remember my first terror hearing the howl of weird,
amorous cats;
I remember the scream of a terrified, injured horse, the
sheet-lightning,
And running away from the sound of a woman in labour,
something like an owl whooping,
And listening inwardly to the first bleat of a lamb,
The first wail of an infant,
And my mother singing to herself,
And the first tenor singing of the passionate throat of a
young collier, who has long since drunk himself to
death,
The first elements of foreign speech
On wild dark lips.

And more than all these,
And less than all these.
This last,
Strange, faint coition yell
Of the male tortoise at extremity,
Tiny from under the very edge of the farthest far-off horizon

of life.

The cross,
The wheel on which our silence first is broken,
Sex, which breaks up our integrity, our single inviolability,
our deep silence
Tearing a cry from us.

Sex, which breaks us into voice, sets us calling across the
deeps, calling, calling for the complement,
Singing, and calling, and singing again, being answered,
having found.

Torn, to become whole again, after long seeking for what
is lost,
The same cry from the tortoise as from Christ, the Osiris-cry
of abandonment,
That which is whole, torn asunder,
That which is in part, finding its whole again throughout the
universe.

BIRDS

TURKEY-COCK

YOU ruffled black blossom,
You glossy dark wind.

Your sort of gorgeousness,
Dark and lustrous
And skinny repulsive
And poppy-glossy,
Is the gorgeousness that evokes my most puzzled admiration.

Your aboriginality
Deep, unexplained,
Like a Red Indian darkly unfinished and aloof,
Seems like the black and glossy seeds of countless
centuries.

Your wattles are the colour of steel-slag which has been
red-hot
And is going cold,
Cooling to a powdery, pale-oxydised sky-blue.

Why do you have wattles, and a naked, wattled head?
Why do you arch your naked-set eye with a more-than —
comprehensible arrogance?

The vulture is bald, so is the condor, obscenely,
But only you have thrown this amazing mantilla of oxydised
sky-blue
And hot red over you.

This queer dross shawl of blue and vermilion,
Whereas the peacock has a diadem.

I wonder why.

Perhaps it is a sort of uncanny decoration, a veil of loose skin.

Perhaps it is your assertion, in all this ostentation, of raw contradictoriness.

Your wattles drip down like a shawl to your breast
And the point of your mantilla drops across your nose, un —
pleasantly.

Or perhaps it is something unfinished

A bit of slag still adhering, after your firing in the furnace
of creation.

Or perhaps there is something in your wattles of a bull's
dew-lap

Which slips down like a pendulum to balance the throbbing
mass of a generous breast,

The over-drip of a great passion hanging in the balance.

Only yours would be a raw, unsmelted passion, that will not
quite fuse from the dross.

You contract yourself,

You arch yourself as an archer's bow

Which quivers indrawn as you clench your spine

Until your veiled head almost touches backward

To the root-rising of your erected tail.

And one intense and backward-curving frisson

Seizes you as you clench yourself together

Like some fierce magnet bringing its poles together.

Burning, pale positive pole of your wattled head!

And from the darkness of that opposite one

The upstart of your round-barred, sun-round tail!

Whilst between the two, along the tense arch of your

back
Blows the magnetic current in fierce blasts,
Ruffling black, shining feathers like lifted mail,
Shuddering storm wind, or a water rushing through.

Your brittle, super-sensual arrogance
Tosses the crape of red across your brow and down your
breast
As you draw yourself upon yourself in insistence.

It is a declaration of such tension in will
As time has not dared to avouch, nor eternity been able to
unbend
Do what it may.
A raw American will, that has never been tempered by
life;
You brittle, will-tense bird with a foolish eye.

The peacock lifts his rods of bronze
And struts blue-brilliant out of the far East.
Rut watch a turkey prancing low on earth
Drumming his vaulted wings, as savages drum
Their rhythms on long-drawn, hollow, sinister drums.
The ponderous, sombre sound of the great drum of Huichi —
lobos
In pyramid Mexico, during sacrifice.

Drum, and the turkey onrush
Sudden, demonic dauntlessness, full abreast,
All the bronze gloss of all his myriad petals
Each one apart and instant.
Delicate frail crescent of the gentle outline of white
At each feather-tip
So delicate;
Yet the bronze wind-well suddenly clashing
And the eye over-weening into madness.

Turkey-cock, turkey-cock
Are you the bird of the next dawn?

Has the peacock had his day, does he call in vain, screecher,
for the sun to rise?
The eagle, the dove, and the barnyard rooster, do they call
in vain, trying to wake the morrow?
And do you await us, wattled father, Westward?
Will your yell do it?

Take up the trail of the vanished American
Where it disappeared at the foot of the crucifix.
Take up the primordial Indian obstinacy,
The more than human, dense insistence of will,
And disdain, and blankness, and onrush, and prise open the
new day with them?

The East a dead letter, and Europe moribund. . . . Is that so?
And those sombre, dead, feather-lustrous Aztecs, Amer —
indians,
In all the sinister splendour of their red blood sacrifices,
Do they stand under the dawn, half-godly, half-demon,
awaiting the cry of the turkey-cock?

Or must you go through the fire once more, till you're
smelted pure,
Slag-wattled turkey-cock,
Dross-jabot?

Fiesole.

HUMMING-BIRD

I CAN imagine, in some otherworld
Primeval-dumb, far back
In that most awful stillness, that only gasped and hummed,
Humming-birds raced down the avenues.

Before anything had a soul,
While life was a heave of Matter, half inanimate,
This little bit chipped off in brilliance
And went whizzing through the slow, vast, succulent stems.

I believe there were no flowers, then
In the world where the humming-bird flashed ahead of
creation.
I believe he pierced the slow vegetable veins with his long
beak.

Probably he was big
As mosses, and little lizards, they say were once big.
Probably he was a jabbing, terrifying monster.

We look at him through the wrong end of the long telescope
of Time,
Luckily for us.

Española.

EAGLE IN NEW MEXICO

TOWARDS the sun, towards the south-west
A scorched breast.
A scorched breast, breasting the sun like an answer,
Like a retort.

An eagle at the top of a low cedar-bush
On the sage-ash desert
Reflecting the scorch of the sun from his breast;
Eagle, with the sickle dripping darkly above.

Erect, scorched-pallid out of the hair of the cedar,
Erect, with the god-thrust entering him from below,
Eagle gloved in feathers
In scorched white feathers
In burnt dark feathers
In feathers still fire-rusted;
Sickle-overswept, sickle dripping over and above.

Sun-breaster,
Staring two ways at once, to right and left;
Masked-one
Dark-visaged
Sickle-masked
With iron between your two eyes;
You feather-gloved
To the feet;
Foot-fierce;
Erect one;
The god-thrust entering you steadily from below.

You never look at the sun with your two eyes.
Only the inner eye of your scorched broad breast
Looks straight at the sun.

You are dark
Except scorch-pale-breasted;
And dark cleaves down and weapon-hard downward curving
At your scorched breast,
Like a sword of Damocles,
Beaked eagle.

You've dipped it in blood so many times
That dark face-weapon, to temper it well,
Blood-thirsty bird.

Why do you front the sun so obstinately,
American eagle?
As if you owed him an old old grudge, great sun: or an old,
old allegiance.

When you pick the red smoky heart from a rabbit or a light —
blooded bird
Do you lift it to the sun, as the Aztec priests used to lift
red hearts of men?

Does the sun need steam of blood do you think
In America, still,
Old eagle?

Does the sun in New Mexico sail like a fiery bird of prey in
the sky
Hovering?

Does he shriek for blood?
Does he fan great wings above the prairie, like a hovering,
blood-thirsty bird?

And are you his priest, big eagle
Whom the Indians aspire to?
Is there a bond of bloodshed between you?

Is your continent cold from the ice-age still, that the sun is
so angry?

Is the blood of your continent somewhat reptilian still,
That the sun should be greedy for it?

I don't yield to you, big, jowl-faced eagle.
Nor you nor your blood-thirsty sun
That sucks up blood
Leaving a nervous people.

Fly off, big bird with a big black back,
Fly slowly away, with a rust of fire in your tail,
Dark as you are on your dark side, eagle of heaven.

Even the sun in heaven can be curbed and chastened at last
By the life in the hearts of men.
And you, great bird, sun-starrer, heavy black beak
Can be put out of office as sacrifice bringer.

Taos.

THE BLUE JAY

The blue jay with a crest on his head
Comes round the cabin in the snow.
He runs in the snow like a bit of blue metal,
Turning his back on everything.

From the pine-tree that towers and hisses like a pillar of
shaggy cloud
Immense above the cabin
Comes a strident laugh as we approach, this little black dog
and I.
So halts the little black bitch on four spread paws in the snow
And looks up inquiringly into the pillar of cloud,
With a tinge of misgiving.
Ca-a-a! comes the scrape of ridicule out of the tree.

What voice of the Lord is that, from the tree of smoke?

Oh Bibbles, little black bitch in the snow,
With a pinch of snow in the groove of your silly snub nose.
What do you look at me for?
What do you look at me for, with such misgiving?

It's the blue jay laughing at us.
It's the blue jay jeering at us, Bibs.

Every day since the snow is here
The blue jay paces round the cabin, very busy, picking up
bits,
Turning his back on us all,
And bobbing his thick dark crest about the snow, as if
darkly saying:
I ignore those folk who look out.

You acid-blue metallic bird,
You thick bird with a strong crest
Who are you?
Whose boss are you, with all your bully way?
You copper-sulphate blue-bird!

Lobo.

ANIMALS

THE ASS

THE long-drawn bray of the ass
In the Sicilian twilight —

All mares are dead!
All mares are dead!
Oh-h!
Oh-h-h!
Oh-h-h-h-h — h!!
I can't bear it, I can't bear it,
I can't!
Oh, I can't!
Oh —
There's one left!
There's one left!
One!
There's one . . . left. . . .

So ending on a grunt of agonised relief.

This is the authentic Arabic interpretation of the braying
of the ass.
And Arabs should know.

And yet, as his brass-resonant howling yell resounds
through the Sicilian twilight
I am not sure —

His big, furry head.
His big, regretful eyes,
His diminished, drooping hindquarters,
His small toes.

Such a dear!

Such an ass!
With such a knot inside him!
He regrets something that he remembers.
That's obvious.

The Steppes of Tartary,
And the wind in his teeth for a bit,
And noli me tangere.

Ah then, when he tore the wind with his teeth,
And trod wolves underfoot,
And over-rode his mares as if he were savagely leaping an
obstacle, to set his teeth in the sun. . . .

Somehow, alas, he fell in love,
And was sold into slavery.

He fell into the rut of love,
Poor ass, like man, always in a rut,
The pair of them alike in that.

All his soul in his gallant member
And his head gone heavy with the knowledge of desire
And humiliation.

The ass was the first of all animals to fall finally into love,
From obstacle-leaping pride,
Mare obstacle,
Into love, mare-goal, and the knowledge of love.

Hence Jesus rode him in the Triumphant Entry.
Hence his beautiful eyes.
Hence his ponderous head, brooding over desire, and down —
fall, Jesus, and a pack-saddle,
Hence he uncovers his big ass-teeth and howls in that agony
that is half-insatiable desire and half-unquenchable

humiliation.
Hence the black cross on his shoulders.

The Arabs were only half right, though they hinted the
whole;
Everlasting lament in everlasting desire.

See him standing with his head down, near the Porta
Cappuccini,
Asinello,
Somaro;
With the half-veiled, beautiful eyes, and the pensive face
not asleep,
Motionless, like a bit of rock.

Has he seen the Gorgon's head, and turned to stone?
Alas, Love did it.
Now he's a jackass, a pack-ass, a donkey, somaro, burro,
with a boss piling loads on his back.
Tied by the nose at the Porta Cappuccini.
And tied in a knot, inside, dead-licked between two
desires:
To overleap like a male all mares as obstacles
In a leap at the sun;
And to leap in one last heart-bursting leap like a male at
the goal of a mare,
And there end.
Well, you can't have it both roads.

Hee! Hee! Ehee! Ehow! Ehaw!! Oh! Oh! Oh-h-h!!
The wave of agony bursts in the stone that he was,
Bares his long ass's teeth, flattens his long ass's ears,
straightens his donkey neck.
And howls his pandemonium on the indignant air.

Yes, it's a quandary.
Jesus rode on him, the first burden on the first beast of

burden.
Love on a submissive ass.
So the tale began.

But the ass never forgets.

The horse, being nothing but a nag, will forget.
And men, being mostly geldings and knacker-boned hacks,
have almost all forgot.
But the ass is a primal creature, and never forgets.

The Steppes of Tartary,
And Jesus on a meek ass-colt: mares: Mary escaping to
Egypt: Joseph's cudgel.

Hee! Hee! Ehee! Ehow — ow!-ow!-aw!-aw!-aw!
All mares are dead!
Or else I am dead!
One of us, or the pair of us,
I don't know — ow! — ow!
Which!
Not sure-ure-ure
Quite which!
Which!

Taormina.

HE-GOAT

SEE his black nose snubbed back, pressed over like a whale's
blow-holes,
As if his nostrils were going to curve back to the root of
his tail.

As he charges slow among the herd
And rows among the females like a ship pertinaciously,
Heavy with a rancid cargo, through the lesser ships —
Old father
Sniffing forever ahead of him, at the rear of the goats, that
they lift the little door,
And rowing on, unarrived, no matter how often he enter:
Like a big ship pushing her bowsprit over the little ships
Then swerving and steering afresh
And never, never arriving at journey's end, at the rear of the
female ships.

Yellow eyes incomprehensible with thin slits
To round-eyed us.

Yet if you had whorled horns of bronze in a frontal dark wall
At the end of a back-bone ridge, like a straight sierra
roquena,
And nerves urging forward to the wall, you'd have eyes like
his,
Especially if, being given a needle's eye of egress elsewhere
You tried to look back to it, and couldn't.

Sometimes he turns with a start, to fight, to challenge, to
suddenly butt.
And then you see the God that he is, in a cloud of black
hair
And storm-lightning-slitted eye.
Splendidly planting his feet, one rocky foot striking the

ground with a sudden rock-hammer announcement.

I am here!

And suddenly lowering his head, the whorls of bone and of
horn

Slowly revolving towards unexploded explosion,
As from the stem of his bristling, lightning-conductor
tail

In a rush up the shrieking duct of his vertebral way
Runs a rage drawn in from the other divinely through
him

Towards a shock and a crash and a smiting of horns
ahead.

That is a grand old lust of his, to gather the great
Rage of the sullen-stagnating atmosphere of goats
And bring it hurtling to a head, with crash of horns against
the horns

Of the opposite enemy goat,
Thus hammering the mettle of goats into proof, and smiting
out

The godhead of goats from the shock.
Things of iron are beaten on the anvil,
And he-goat is anvil to he-goat, and hammer to he-goat
In the business of beating the mettle of goats to a god —
head.

But they've taken his enemy from him
And left him only his libidinousness,
His nostrils turning back, to sniff at even himself
And his slitted eyes seeking the needle's eye,
His own, unthreaded, forever.

So it is, when they take the enemy from us,
And we can't fight.

He is not fatherly, like the bull, massive Providence of hot

blood;
The goat is an egoist, aware of himself, devilish aware of
himself,
And full of malice prepense, and overweening, determined
to stand on the highest peak
Like the devil, and look on the world as his own.

And as for love:
With a needle of long red flint he stabs in the dark
At the living rock he is up against;
While she with her goaty mouth stands smiling the while as
he strikes, since sure
He will never quite strike home, on the target-quick, for her
quick
Is just beyond range of the arrow he shoots
From his leap at the zenith in her, so it falls just short of the
mark, far enough.
It is over before it is finished.
She, smiling with goaty munch-mouth, Mona Lisa, arranges
it so.

Orgasm after orgasm after orgasm
And he smells so rank and his nose goes back,
And never an enemy brow-metalled to thresh it out with in
the open field;
Never a mountain peak, to be king of the castle.
Only those eternal females to overleap and surpass, and
never succeed.

The involved voluptuousness of the soft-footed cat
Who is like a fur folding a fur,
The cat who laps blood, and knows
The soft welling of blood invincible even beyond bone or
metal of bone.

The soft, the secret, the unfathomable blood
The cat has lapped

And known it subtler than frisson-shaken nerves,
Stronger than multiplicity of bone on bone
And darker than even the arrows of violentest will
Can pierce, for that is where will gives out, like a sinking
stone that can sink no further.

But he-goat,
Black procreant male of the selfish will and libidinous desire,
God in black cloud with curving horns of bronze,
Find an enemy, Egoist, and clash the cymbals in face-to-face
defiance,
And let the lightning out of your smothered dusk.

Forget the female herd for a bit,
And fight to be boss of the world.
Fight, old Satan with a selfish will, fight for your selfish will;
Fight to be the devil on the tip of the peak
Overlooking the world for his own.

But bah, how can he, poor domesticated beast!

Taormina.

SHE GOAT

GOATS go past the back of the house like dry leaves in the
dawn,
And up the hill like a river, if you watch.

At dusk they patter back like a bough being dragged on the
ground,
Raising dusk and acidity of goats, and bleating.

Our old goat we tie up at night in the shed at the back of
the broken Greek tomb in the garden,
And when the herd goes by at dawn she begins to bleat for
me to come down and untie her.

Merr — err — err! Merr — er — errr! Mer! Mé!
Wait, wait a bit, I'll come when I've lit the fire.
Merrr!
Exactly.
Mé! Mer! Merrrrrrr!!!
Tace, tu, crapa, bestia!
Merr — ererrr — ererrrr! Merrrr!

She is such an alert listener, with her ears wide, to know
am I coming!
Such a canny listener, from a distance, looking upwards,
lending first one ear, then another.

There she is, perched on her manger, looking over the
boards into the day
Like a belle at her window.

And immediately she sees me she blinks, stares, doesn't
know me, turns her head and ignores me vulgarly with
a wooden blank on her face.

What do I care for her, the ugly female, standing up there
with her long tangled sides like an old rug thrown
over a fence.
But she puts her nose down shrewdly enough when the knot
is untied,
And jumps staccato to earth, a sharp, dry jump, still ignor —
ing me,
Pretending to look round the stall.

Come on, you, crapa! I'm not your servant!

She turns her head away with an obtuse, female sort of
deafness, bête.
And then invariably she crouches her rear and makes
water.
That being her way of answer, if I speak to her. — Self —
conscious!
Le bestie non parlano, poverine!

She was bought at Giardini fair, on the sands, for six
hundred lire.

An obstinate old witch, almost jerking the rope from my
hands to eat the acanthus, or bite at the almond buds,
and make me wait.
Yet the moment I hate her she trips mild and smug like a
woman going to mass.
The moment I really detest her.

Queer it is, suddenly, in the garden
To catch sight of her standing like some huge, ghoulish
grey bird in the air, on the bough of the leaning
almond-tree,
Straight as a board on the bough, looking down like
some hairy horrid God the Father in a William Blake

imagination.

Come down, crapa, out of that almond tree!

Instead of which she strangely rears on her perch in the
air, vast beast.

And strangely paws the air, delicate,
And reaches her black-striped face up like a snake, far up,
Subtly, to the twigs overhead, far up, vast beast,
And snaps them sharp, with a little twist of her anaconda
head;

All her great hairy-shaggy belly open against the morning.

At seasons she curls back her tail like a green leaf in the fire,
Or like a lifted hand, hailing at her wrong end.

And having exposed the pink place of her nakedness, fixedly,
She trots on blithe toes,
And if you look at her, she looks back with a cold, sardonic
stare.

Sardonic, sardonyx, rock of cold fire.

See me? She says, That's me!

That's her.

Then she leaps the rocks like a quick rock.

Her back-bone sharp as a rock,
Sheer will.

Along which ridge of libidinous magnetism

Defiant, curling the leaf of her tail as if she were curling
her lip behind her at all life.

Libidinous desire runs back and forth, asserting itself in that
little lifted bare hand.

Yet she has such adorable spurty kids, like spurts of black
ink.

And in a month again is as if she had never had them.

And when the billy goat mounts her
She is brittle as brimstone.
While his slitted eyes squint back to the roots of his ears.

Taormina.

ELEPHANT

YOU go down shade to the river, where naked men sit on
flat brown rocks, to watch the ferry, in the sun;
And you cross the ferry with the naked people, go up the
tropical lane
Through the palm-trees and past hollow paddy-fields where
naked men are threshing rice
And the monolithic water-buffaloes, like old, muddy stones
with hair on them, are being idle;
And through the shadow of bread-fruit trees, with their dark
green, glossy, fanged leaves
Very handsome, and some pure yellow fanged leaves;
Out into the open, where the path runs on the top of a dyke
between paddy-fields:
And there, of course, you meet a huge and mud-grey
elephant advancing his frontal bone, his trunk curled
round a log of wood:
So you step down the bank, to make way.

Shuffle, shuffle, and his little wicked eye has seen you as he
advances above you,
The slow beast curiously spreading his round feet for the
dust.
And the slim naked man slips down, and the beast deposits
the lump of wood, carefully.
The keeper hooks the vast knee, the creature salaams.

White man, you are saluted.
Pay a few cents.

But the best is the Pera-hera, at midnight, under the tropical
stars,
With a pale little wisp of a Prince of Wales, diffident, up in
a small pagoda on the temple side
And white people in evening dress buzzing and crowding the

stand upon the grass below and opposite:
And at last the Pera-hera procession, flambeaux aloft in the
tropical night, of blazing cocoa-nut,
Naked dark men beneath,
And the huge frontal of three great elephants stepping forth
to the tom-tom's beat, in the torch-light,
Slowly sailing in gorgeous apparel through the flame-light,
in front of a towering, grimacing white image of wood.

The elephant bells striking slow, tong-tong, tong-tong,
To music and queer chanting
Enormous shadow-processions filing on in the flare of fire
In the fume of cocoa-nut oil, in the sweating tropical night,
In the noise of the tom-toms and singers;
Elephants after elephants curl their trunks, vast shadows,
and some cry out
As they approach and salaam, under the dripping fire of the
torches
That pale fragment of a Prince up there, whose motto is
Ich dien.

Pale, dispirited Prince, with his chin on his hands, his nerves
tired out,
Watching and hardly seeing the trunk-curl approach and
clumsy, knee-lifting salaam
Of the hugest, oldest of beasts in the night and the fire-flare
below.

He is royalty, pale and dejected fragment up aloft.
And down below huge homage of shadowy beasts; bare —
foot and trunk-lipped in the night.

Chieftains, three of them abreast, on foot
Strut like peg-tops, wound around with hundreds of yards
of fine linen.
They glimmer with tissue of gold, and golden threads on a
jacket of velvet,

And their faces are dark, and fat, and important.

They are royalty, dark-faced royalty, showing the conscious
whites of their eyes
And stepping in homage, stubborn, to that nervous pale lad
up there.

More elephants, tong, tong-tong, loom up,
Huge, more tassels swinging, more dripping fire of new
cocoa-nut cressets
High, high flambeaux, smoking of the east;
And scarlet hot embers of torches knocked out of the sockets
among bare feet of elephants and men on the path in
the dark.
And devil dancers luminous with sweat, dancing on to the
shudder of drums.
Tom-toms, weird music of the devil, voices of men from the
jungle singing;
Endless, under the Prince.

Towards the tail of the everlasting procession
In the long hot night, mere dancers from insignificant
villages,
And smaller, more frightened elephants.

Men-peasants from jungle villages dancing and running with
sweat and laughing,
Naked dark men with ornaments on, on their naked arms
and their naked breasts, the grooved loins
Gleaming like metal with running sweat as they suddenly
turn, feet apart,
And dance, and dance, forever dance, with breath half
sobbing in dark, sweat-shining breasts,
And lustrous great tropical eyes unveiled now, gleaming a
kind of laugh,
A naked, gleaming dark laugh, like a secret out in the dark,
And flare of a tropical energy, tireless, afire in the dark, slim

limbs and breasts,
Perpetual, fire-laughing motion, among the slow shuffle
Of elephants.
The hot dark blood of itself a-laughing, wet, half-devilish,
men all motion
Approaching under that small pavilion, and tropical eyes
dilated look up
Inevitably look up
To the Prince
To that tired remnant of royalty up there
Whose motto is *Ich dien*.

As if the homage of the kindled blood of the east
Went up in wavelets to him, from the breasts and eyes of
jungle torch-men,
And he couldn't take it.

What would they do, those jungle men running with sweat,
with the strange dark laugh in their eyes, glancing up,
And the sparse-haired elephants slowly following,
If they knew that his motto was *Ich dien*?
And that he meant it.

They begin to understand
The rickshaw boys begin to understand
And then the devil comes into their faces,
But a different sort, a cold, rebellious, jeering devil.

In elephants and the east are two devils, in all men maybe.
The mystery of the dark mountain of blood, reeking in
homage, in lust, in rage,
And passive with everlasting patience,
Then the little, cunning pig-devil of the elephant's lurking
eyes, the unbeliever.

We dodged, when the Pera-hera was finished, under the
hanging, hairy pigs' tails

And the flat, flaccid mountains of the elephants' standing
haunches,
Vast-blooded beasts,
Myself so little dodging rather scared against the eternal
wrinkled pillars of their legs, as they were being dis —
mantled;
Then I knew they were dejected, having come to hear the
repeated
Royal summons: *Dien! Ihr!*
Serve!
Serve, vast mountainous blood, in submission and splendour, serve
royalty.
Instead of which, the silent, fatal emission from that pale,
shattered boy up there:
Ich dien.

That's why the night fell in frustration.
That's why, as the elephants ponderously, with unseemingly
swiftness, galloped uphill in the night, going back to
the jungle villages,
As the elephant bells sounded tong-tong-tong, bell of the
temple of blood in the night, swift-striking,
And the crowd like a field of rice in the dark gave way like
liquid to the dark
Looming gallop of the beasts,
It was as if the great bare bulks of elephants in the obscure
light went over the hill-brow swiftly, with their tails
between their legs, in haste to get away,
Their bells sounding frustrate and sinister.

And all the dark-faced, cotton-wrapped people, more
numerous and whispering than grains of rice in a rice —
field at night,
All the dark-faced, cotton-wrapped people, a countless host
on the shores of the lake, like thick wild rice by the
water's edge,
Waiting for the fireworks of the after-show,
As the rockets went up, and the glare passed over countless

faces, dark as black rice growing,
Showing a glint of teeth, and glancing tropical eyes aroused
in the night,
There was the faintest twist of mockery in every face, across
the hiss of wonders as the rocket burst
High, high up, in flakes, shimmering flakes of blue fire,
above the palm-trees of the islet in the lake,
O faces upturned to the glare, O tropical wonder, wonder,
a miracle in heaven!
And the shadow of a jeer, of underneath disappointment, as
the rocket-coruscation died, and shadow was the same
as before.

They were foiled, the myriad whispering dark-faced cotton —
wrapped people.
They had come to see royalty,
To bow before royalty, in the land of elephants, bow deep,
bow deep.
Bow deep, for it's good as a draught of cool water to bow
very, very low to the royal.

And all there was to bow to, a weary, diffident boy whose
motto is *Ich dien*.
I serve! I serve! in all the weary iron of his mien — *'Tis I who
serve!*
Drudge to the public.

I wish they had given the three feathers to me;
That I had been he in the pavilion, as in a pepper-box aloft
and alone
To stand and hold feathers, three feathers above the world,
And say to them: *Dien! Ihr! Dient!*
Omnes, vos omnes, servite.
Serve me, I am meet to be served.
Being royal of the gods.

And to the elephants:

*First great beasts of the earth
A prince has come back to you,
Blood-mountains.
Crook the knee and be glad.*

Kandy.

KANGAROO

IN the northern hemisphere
Life seems to leap at the air, or skim under the wind
Like stags on rocky ground, or pawing horses, or springy
scut-tailed rabbits.

Or else rush horizontal to charge at the sky's horizon,
Like bulls or bisons or wild pigs.

Or slip like water slippery towards its ends,
As foxes, stoats, and wolves, and prairie dogs.

Only mice, and moles, and rats, and badgers, and beavers,
and perhaps bears
Seem belly-plumbed to the earth's mid-navel.
Or frogs that when they leap come flop, and flop to the
centre of the earth.

But the yellow antipodal Kangaroo, when she sits up,
Who can unseat her, like a liquid drop that is heavy, and
just touches earth.

The downward drip.
The down-urge.
So much denser than cold-blooded frogs.

Delicate mother Kangaroo
Sitting up there rabbit-wise, but huge, plumb-weighted,
And lifting her beautiful slender face, oh! so much more
gently and finely lined than a rabbit's, or than a hare's,
Lifting her face to nibble at a round white peppermint drop,
which she loves, sensitive mother Kangaroo.

Her sensitive, long, pure-bred face.
Her full antipodal eyes, so dark,
So big and quiet and remote, having watched so many empty
dawns in silent Australia.

Her little loose hands, and drooping Victorian shoulders.
And then her great weight below the waist, her vast pale belly
With a thin young yellow little paw hanging out, and
straggle of a long thin ear, like ribbon,
Like a funny trimming to the middle of her belly, thin little
dangle of an immature paw, and one thin ear.

Her belly, her big haunches
And in addition, the great muscular python-stretch of
her tail.

There, she shan't have any more peppermint drops.
So she wistfully, sensitively sniffs the air, and then turns,
goes off in slow sad leaps

On the long flat skis of her legs,
Steered and propelled by that steel-strong snake of a tail.

Stops again, half turns, inquisitive to look back.
While something stirs quickly in her belly, and a lean little
face comes out, as from a window,
Peaked and a bit dismayed,
Only to disappear again quickly away from the sight of the
world, to snuggle down in the warmth,
Leaving the trail of a different paw hanging out.

Still she watches with eternal, cocked wistfulness!
How full her eyes are, like the full, fathomless, shining eyes
of an Australian black-boy
Who has been lost so many centuries on the margins of
existence!

She watches with insatiable wistfulness.
Untold centuries of watching for something to come,
For a new signal from life, in that silent lost land of the
South.

Where nothing bites but insects and snakes and the sun,
small life.
Where no bull roared, no cow ever lowed, no stag cried, no
leopard screeched, no lion coughed, no dog barked,
But all was silent save for parrots occasionally, in the
haunted blue bush.

Wistfully watching, with wonderful liquid eyes.
And all her weight, all her blood, dripping sack-wise down
towards the earth's centre,
And the live little one taking in its paw at the door of her
belly.

Leap then, and come down on the line that draws to the
earth's deep, heavy centre.

Sydney.

BIBBLES

BIBBLES

Little black dog in New Mexico,
Little black snub-nosed bitch with a shoved-out jaw
And a wrinkled reproachful look;
Little black female pup, sort of French bull, they say,
With bits of brindle coming through, like rust, to show
 you're not pure;
Not pure, Bibbles,
Bubsey, bat-eared dog;
Not black enough!

First live thing I've "owned" since the lop-eared rabbits
 when I was a lad,
And those over-prolific white mice, and Adolf, and Rex
 whom I didn't own.
And even now, Bibbles, little Ma'am, it's you who appro —
 priated me, not I you.
As Benjamin Franklin appropriated Providence to his
 purposes.

Oh Bibbles, black little bitch
I'd never have let you appropriate me, had I known.
I never dreamed, till now, of the awful time the Lord must
 have, "owning" humanity.
Especially democratic live-by-love humanity.

Oh Bibbles, oh Pips, oh Pipsey
You little black love-bird!

Don't you love everybody!
Just everybody.
You love 'em all.
Believe in the One Identity, don't you,
You little Walt-Whitmanesque bitch?

First time I lost you in Taos plaza,
And found you after endless chasing,
Came upon you prancing round the corner in exuberant,
bibbling affection
After the black-green skirts of a yellow-green old Mexican
woman
Who hated you, and kept looking round at you and cursing
you in a mutter,
While you pranced and bounced with love of her, you
indiscriminating animal,
All your wrinkled *miserere* Chinese black little face
beaming
And your black little body bouncing and wriggling
With indiscriminate love, Bibbles;
I had a moment's pure detestation of you.

As I rushed like an idiot round the corner after you
Yelling: *Pips! Pips! Bibbles!*

I've had moments of hatred of you since,
Loving everybody!
"To you, whoever you are, with endless embrace!" —
That's you, Pipey,
With your imbecile bit of a tail in a love-flutter.
You omnipip.

Not that you're merely a softy, oh dear me no.
You know which side your bread is buttered.
You don't care a rap for anybody.
But you love lying warm between warm human thighs,
indiscriminate,
And you love to make somebody love you, indiscriminate,
You love to lap up affection, to wallow in it,
And then turn tail to the next comer, for a new dollop.

And start prancing and licking and cuddling again, indis —

criminate.

Oh yes, I know your little game.

Yet you're so nice,
So quick, like a little black dragon.
So fierce, when the coyotes howl, barking like a whole
 little lion, and rumbling,
And starting forward in the dusk, with your little black fur
 all bristling like plush
Against those coyotes, who would swallow you like an oyster.

And in the morning, when the bedroom door is opened,
Rushing in like a little black whirlwind, leaping straight as
 an arrow on the bed at the pillow
And turning the day suddenly into a black tornado of
 joie de vivre, Chinese dragon.

So funny
Lobbing wildly through deep snow like a rabbit,
Hurling like a black ball through the snow,
Champing it, tossing a mouthful,
Little black spot in the landscape!

So absurd
Pelting behind on the dusty trail when the horse sets off
 home at a gallop:
Left in the dust behind like a dust-ball tearing along
Coming up on fierce little legs, tearing fast to catch up, a
 real little dust-pig, ears almost blown away,
And black eyes bulging bright in a dust-mask
Chinese-dragon-wrinkled, with a pink mouth grinning, under
 jaw shoved out
And white teeth showing in your dragon-grin as you race,
 you split-face,
Like a trundling projectile swiftly whirling up,
Cocking your eyes at me as you come alongside, to see if

I'm I on the horse,
And panting with that split grin,
All your game little body dust-smooth like a little pig,
poor Pips.

Plenty of game old spirit in you, Bibbles.
Plenty of game old spunk, little bitch.

How you hate being brushed with the boot-brush, to brush
all that dust out of your wrinkled face.
Don't you?
How you hate being made to look undignified. Ma'am;
How you hate being laughed at, Miss Superb!

Blackberry face!

Plenty of conceit in you.
Unblemished belief in your own perfection
And utter lovableness, you ugly-mug;
Chinese puzzle-face,
Wrinkled underhung physiog that looks as if it had done
with everything,
Through with everything.

Instead of which you sit there and roll your head like a
canary
And show a tiny bunch of white teeth in your underhung
blackness,
Self-conscious little bitch,
Aiming again at being loved.

Let the merest scallywag come to the door and you leap
your very dearest-love at him,
As if now, at last, here was the one you *finally* loved,
Finally loved;
And even the dirtiest scallywag is taken in,

Thinking: *This dog sure has taken a fancy to me.*

You miserable little bitch of love-tricks,
I know your game.

Me or the Mexican who comes to chop wood
All the same,
All humanity is jam to you.

Everybody so dear, and yourself so ultra-beloved
That you have to run out at last and eat filth,
Gobble up filth, you horror, swallow utter abomination and
fresh-dropped dung.

You stinker.
You worse than a carrion-crow.
Reeking dung-mouth.
You love-bird.

Reject nothing, sings Walt Whitman.
So you, you go out at last and eat the unmentionable,
In your appetite for affection.

And then you run in to vomit it in my house!
I get my love back.
And I have to clean up after you, filth which even blind
Nature rejects
From the pit of your stomach;
But you, you snout-face, you reject nothing, you merge so
much in love
You must eat even that.

Then when I dust you a bit with a juniper twig
You run straight away to live with somebody else,
Fawn before them, and love them as if they were the ones
you had *really* loved all along.

And they're taken in.
They feel quite tender over you, till you play the same trick
on them, dirty bitch.

Fidelity! Loyalty! Attachment!
Oh, these are abstractions to your nasty little belly.
You must always be a-waggle with LOVE.
Such a waggle of love you can hardly distinguish one human
from another.
You love one after another, on one condition, that each
one loves you most.
Democratic little bull-bitch, dirt-eating little swine.

But now, my lass, you've got your Nemesis on your track,
Now you've come sex-alive, and the great ranch-dogs are all
after you.
They're after what they can get, and don't you turn tail!
You loved 'em all so much before, didn't you, loved 'em
indiscriminate.
You don't love 'em now.
They want something of you, so you squeak and come
pelting indoors.

Come pelting to me, now the other folk have found you out,
and the dogs are after you.
Oh yes, you're found out. I heard them kick you out of the
ranch house.
Get out, you little, soft fool!!

And didn't you turn your eyes up at me then?
And didn't you cringe on the floor like any inkspot!
And crawl away like a black snail!
And doesn't everybody loathe you then!
And aren't your feelings violated, you high bred little love —
bitch!

For you're sensitive,

In many ways very finely bred.
But bred in conceit that the world is all for love
Of you, my bitch: till you get so far you eat filth.
Fool, in spite of your pretty ways, and quaint, know all,
 wrinkled old aunty's face.

So now, what with great Airedale dogs,
And a kick or two,
And a few vomiting bouts,
And a juniper switch,
You look at me for discrimination, don't you?
Look up at me with misgiving in your bulging eyes,
And fear in the smoky whites of your eyes, you nigger;
And you're puzzled,
You think you'd better mind your P's and Q's for a bit.
Your sensitive love-pride being all hurt.

All right, my little bitch.
You learn loyalty rather than loving,
And I'll protect you.

Lobo.

MOUNTAIN LION

CLIMBING through the January snow, into the Lobo canyon
Dark grow the spruce-trees, blue is the balsam, water sounds
still unfrozen, and the trail is still evident.

Men!
Two men!
Men! The only animal in the world to fear!

They hesitate.
We hesitate.
They have a gun.
We have no gun.

Then we all advance, to meet.

Two Mexicans, strangers, emerging out of the dark and snow
and inwardness of the Lobo valley.
What are they doing here on this vanishing trail?

What is he carrying?
Something yellow.
A deer?

Qué tiene, amigo?
León —

He smiles, foolishly, as if he were caught doing wrong.
And we smile, foolishly, as if we didn't know.
He is quite gentle and dark-faced.

It is a mountain lion,
A long, long slim cat, yellow like a lioness.

Dead.

He trapped her this morning, he says, smiling foolishly.

Lift up her face,
Her round, bright face, bright as frost.
Her round, fine-fashioned head, with two dead ears;
And stripes in the brilliant frost of her face, sharp, fine
 dark rays,
Dark, keen, fine rays in the brilliant frost of her face.
Beautiful dead eyes.

Hermoso es!

They go out towards the open;
We go on into the gloom of Lobo.
And above the trees I found her lair,
A hole in the blood-orange brilliant rocks that stick up, a
 little cave.
And bones, and twigs, and a perilous ascent.

So, she will never leap up that way again, with the yellow
 flash of a mountain lion's long shoot!
And her bright striped frost face will never watch any more,
 out of the shadow of the cave in the blood-orange
 rock,
Above the trees of the Lobo dark valley-mouth!

Instead, I look out.
And out to the dim of the desert, like a dream, never real;
To the snow of the Sangre de Cristo mountains, the ice of
 the mountains of Picoris,
And near across at the opposite steep of snow, green trees
 motionless standing in snow, like a Christmas toy.

And I think in this empty world there was room for me

and a mountain lion.
And I think in the world beyond, how easily we might
spare a million or two of humans
And never miss them.
Yet what a gap in the world, the missing white frost face
of that slim yellow mountain lion!

Lobo.

THE RED WOLF

OVER the heart of the west, the Taos desert
Circles an eagle,
And it's dark between me and him.

The sun, as he waits a moment, huge and liquid
Standing without feet on the rim of the far-off mesa
Says: *Look for a last long time then! Look! Look well! I
am going.*
So he pauses and is beholden, and straightway is gone.

And the Indian, in a white sheet
Wrapped to the eyes, the sheet bound close on his brows,
Stands saying: *See, I'm invisible!
Behold how you can't behold me!
The invisible in its shroud!*

Now that the sun has gone, and the aspen leaves
And the cotton-wood leaves are fallen, as good as fallen,
And the ponies are in corral,
And it's night.

Why, more has gone than all these;
And something has come.
A red wolf stands on the shadow's dark red rim.

Day has gone to dust on the sage-grey desert
Like a white Christus fallen to dust from a cross;
To dust, to ash, on the twilit floor of the desert.

And a black crucifix like a dead tree spreading wings;
Maybe a black eagle with its wings out
Left lonely in the night
In a sort of worship.

And coming down upon us, out of the dark concave
Of the eagle's wings,
And the coffin-like slit where the Indians' eyes are,
And the absence of cotton-wood leaves, or of aspen,
Even the absence of dark-crossed donkeys:
Come tall old demons, smiling
The Indian smile,
Saying: *How do you do, you pale-face?*

I am very well, old demon.
How are you?

*Call me Harry if you will,
Call me Old Harry says he.
Or the abbreviation of Nicolas,
Nick. Old Nick, maybe.*

Well, you're a dark old demon,
And I'm a pale-face like a homeless dog
That has followed the sun from the dawn through the east
Trotting east and east and east till the sun himself went home,
And left me homeless here in the dark at your door.
How do you think we'll get on,
Old demon, you and I?

*You and I, you pale-face,
Pale-face you and I
Don't get on.*

Mightn't we try?

*Where's your God, you white one?
Where's your white God?*

He fell to dust as the twilight fell,

Was fume as I trod
The last step out of the east.

*Then you're a lost white dog of a pale-face,
And the day's now dead. . . .*

Touch me carefully, old father,
My beard is red.

*Thin red wolf of a pale-face,
Thin red wolf, go home.*

I have no home, old father,
That's why I come.

We take no hungry stray from the pale-face . . .

Father, you are not asked.
I am come. I am here. The red-dawn-wolf
Sniffs round your place.
Lifts up his voice and howls to the walls of the pueblo,
Announcing he's here.

*The dogs of the dark pueblo
Have long fangs . . .*

Has the red wolf trotted east and east and east
From the far, far other end of the day
To fear a few fangs?

Across the pueblo river
That dark old demon and I
Thus say a few words to each other

And wolf, he calls me, and red.

I call him no names.
He says, however, he is Star-Road.
I say, he can go back the same gait.

As for me . . .
Since I trotted at the tail of the sun as far as ever the
creature went west,
And lost him here,
I'm going to sit down on my tail right here
And wait for him to come back with a new story.
I'm the red wolf, says the dark old father.
All right, the red dawn wolf I am.

Taos.

GHOSTS

MEN IN NEW MEXICO

*MOUNTAINS blanket-wrapped
Round a white hearth of desert —*

*While the sun goes round
And round and round the desert,
The mountains never get up and walk about.
They can't, they can't wake.*

*They camped and went to sleep
In the last twilight
Of Indian gods;
And they can't wake.*

*Indians dance and run and stamp —
No good.
White men make gold-mines and the mountains unmake them
In their sleep.*

*The Indians laugh in their sleep
From fear,
Like a man when he sleeps and his sleep is over, and he
can't wake up,
And he lies like a log and screams and his scream is silent
Because his body can't wake up;
So he laughs from fear, pure fear, in the grip of the sleep.*

*A dark membrane over the will, holding a man down
Even when the mind has flickered awake;
A membrane of sleep, like a black blanket.*

*We walk in our sleep, in this land,
Somnambulist wide-eyed afraid.*

*We scream for someone to wake us
And our scream is soundless in the paralysis of sleep,
And we know it.*

*The Penitentes lash themselves till they run with blood
In their efforts to come awake for one moment;
To tear the membrane of this sleep . . .
No good.*

*The Indians thought the white man would awake them . . .
And instead, the white men scramble asleep in the mountains,
And ride on horseback asleep forever through the desert,
And shoot one another, amazed and mad with somnambulism,
Thinking death will awaken something . . .
No good.*

*Born with a caul,
A black membrane over the face,
And unable to tear it,
Though the mind is awake.*

*Mountains blanket-wrapped
Round the ash-white hearth of the desert;
And though the sun leaps like a thing unleashed in the sky
They can't get up, they are under the blanket.*

Taos.

AUTUMN AT TAOS

OVER the rounded sides of the Rockies, the aspens of autumn,
The aspens of autumn,
Like yellow hair of a tigress brindled with pins.

Down on my hearth-rug of desert, sage of the mesa,
An ash-grey pelt
Of wolf all hairy and level, a wolf's wild pelt.

Trot-trot to the mottled foot-hills, cedar-mottled and piñon;
Did you ever see an otter?
Silvery-sided, fish-fanged, fierce-faced whiskered, mottled.

When I trot my little pony through the aspen-trees of the
canyon,
Behold me trotting at ease betwixt the slopes of the golden
Great and glistening-feathered legs of the hawk of Horus;
The golden hawk of Horus
Astride above me.

But under the pines
I go slowly
As under the hairy belly of a great black bear.

Glad to emerge and look back
On the yellow, pointed aspen-trees laid one on another like
Feathers,
Feather over feather on the breast of the great and golden
Hawk as I say of Horus.

Pleased to be out in the sage and the pine fish-dotted foot —
hills,
Past the otter's whiskers,
On to the fur of the wolf-pelt that strews the plain.

And then to look back to the rounded sides of the squatting
Rockies,
Tigress brindled with aspen
Jaguar-splashed, puma-yellow, leopard-livid slopes of America.

Make big eyes, little pony
At all these skins of wild beasts;
They won't hurt you.

Fangs and claws and talons and beaks and hawk-eyes
Are nerveless just now.
So be easy.

Taos.

SPIRITS SUMMONED WEST

ENGLAND seems full of graves to me,
Full of graves.

Women I loved and cherished, like my mother;
Yet I had to tell them to die.

England seems covered with graves to me.
Women's graves.

Women who were gentle
And who loved me
And whom I loved
And told to die.

Women with the beautiful eyes of the old days,
Belief in love, and sorrow of such belief.
*"Hush, my love, then, hush.
Hush, and die, my dear!"*

Women of the older generation, who knew
The full doom of loving and not being able to take back.
Who understood at last what it was to be told to die.

Now that the graves are made, and covered;
Now that in England pansies and such-like grow on the
 graves of women;
Now that in England is silence, where before was a moving
 of soft-skirted women,
Women with eyes that were gentle in olden belief in
 love;
Now then that all their yearning is hushed, and covered
 over with earth.

England seems like one grave to me.

And I, I sit on this high American desert
With dark-wrapped Rocky Mountains motionless squatting
around in a ring,
Remembering I told them to die, to sink into the grave in
England,
The gentle-kneed women.

So now I whisper: *Come away,*
Come away from the place of graves, come west,
Women,
Women whom I loved and told to die.

Come back to me now,
Now the divided yearning is over;
Now you are husbandless indeed, no more husband to cherish like
a child
And wrestle tvith for the prize of perfect love.
No more children to launch in a world you mistrust.
Now you need know in part
No longer, or carry the burden of a man on your heart,
Or the burden of Man writ large.

Now you are disemburdened of Man and a man
Come back to me.
Now you are free of the toils of a would-be-perfect love
Come to me and be still.

Come back then, you who were wives and mothers
And always virgins
Overlooked.

Come back then, mother, my love, whom I told to die.
It was only I who saw the virgin you
That had no home.

The overlooked virgin,
My love.

You overlooked her too.

Now that the grave is made of mother and wife,
Now that the grave is made and lidded over with turf.

*Come, delicate, overlooked virgin, come back to me
And be still,
Be glad.*

I didn't tell you to die, for nothing.
I wanted the virgin you to be home at last
In my heart.

Inside my innermost heart,
Where the virgin in woman comes home to a man.

The homeless virgin
Who never in all her life could find the way home
To that difficult innermost place in a man.

*Now come west, come home,
Women I've loved for gentleness,
For the virginal you.
Find the way now that you never could find in life,
So I told you to die.*

Virginal first and last
Is woman.
*Now at this last, my love, my many a love,
You whom I loved for gentleness,
Come home to me.*

They are many, and I loved them, shall always love them,
And they know it,
The virgins.
And my heart is glad to have them at last.

Now that the wife and mother and mistress is buried in earth,
In English earth,
Come home to me, my love, my loves, my many loves,
Come west to me.

For virgins are not exclusive of virgins
As wives are of wives;
And motherhood is jealous,
But in virginity jealousy does not enter.

Taos.

THE AMERICAN EAGLE

THE dove of Liberty sat on an egg
And hatched another eagle.

But didn't disown the bird.

Down with all eagles! cooed the Dove.
And down all eagles began to flutter, reeling from their
perches:
Eagles with two heads, eagles with one, presently eagles
with none
Fell from the hooks and were dead.

Till the American Eagle was the only eagle left in the world.

Then it began to fidget, shifting from one leg to the other,
Trying to look like a pelican,
And plucking out of his plumage a few loose feathers to
feather the nests of all
The new naked little republics come into the world.

But the feathers were, comparatively, a mere flea-bite.
And the bub-eagle that Liberty had hatched was growing a
startling big bird
On the roof of the world;
A bit awkward, and with a funny squawk in his voice,
His mother Liberty trying always to teach him to coo
And him always ending with a yawp
Coo! Coo! Coo! Coo-ark! Coo-ark! Quark!! Quark!!
YAWP!!!

So he clears his throat, the young Cock-eagle!

Now if the lilies of France lick Solomon in all his glory;
And the leopard cannot change his spots;
Nor the British lion his appetite;
Neither can a young Cock-eagle sit simpering
With an olive-sprig in his mouth.

It's not his nature.

The big bird of the Amerindian being the eagle,
Red Men still stick themselves over with bits of his fluff,
And feel absolutely IT.

So better make up your mind, American Eagle,
Whether you're a sucking dove, *Roo — coo — ooo! Quark!*
Yawp!!
Or a pelican
Handing out a few loose golden breast-feathers, at moulting
time;
Or a sort of prosperity-gander
Fathering endless ten-dollar golden eggs.

Or whether it actually is an eagle you are,
With a Roman nose
And claws not made to shake hands with,
And a Me-Almighty eye.

The new Proud Republic
Based on the mystery of pride.
Overweening men, full of power of life, commanding a
teeming obedience.

Eagle of the Rockies, bird of men that are masters,
Lifting the rabbit-blood of the myriads up into something
splendid,
Leaving a few bones;
Opening great wings in the face of the sheep-faced ewe

Who is losing her lamb,
Drinking a little blood, and loosing another royalty unto the
world.

Is that you, American Eagle?

Or are you the goose that lays the golden egg?
Which is just a stone to anyone asking for meat.
And are you going to go on for ever
Laying that golden egg,
That addled golden egg?

IMAGIST POETRY



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BALLAD OF ANOTHER OPHELIA

Oh, the green glimmer of apples in the orchard,
Lamps in a wash of rain,
Oh, the wet walk of my brown hen through the stackyard,
Oh, tears on the window pane!

Nothing now will ripen the bright green apples,
Full of disappointment and of rain,
Brackish they will taste, of tears, when the yellow dapples
Of Autumn tell the withered tale again.

All round the yard it is cluck, my brown hen,
Cluck, and the rain-wet wings,
Cluck, my marigold bird, and again
Cluck for your yellow darlings.

For the grey rat found the gold thirteen
Huddled away in the dark,
Flutter for a moment, oh the beast is quick and keen,
Extinct one yellow-fluffy spark.

....

Once I had a lover bright like running water,
Once his face was laughing like the sky;
Open like the sky looking down in all its laughter
On the buttercups — and buttercups was I.

What then is there hidden in the skirts of all the blossom,
What is peeping from your wings, oh mother hen?
'T is the sun who asks the question, in a lovely haste for wisdom —
What a lovely haste for wisdom is in men?

Yea, but it is cruel when undressed is all the blossom,
And her shift is lying white upon the floor,
That a grey one, like a shadow, like a rat, a thief, a rain-storm
Creeps upon her then and gathers in his store.

Oh, the grey garner that is full of half-grown apples,
Oh, the golden sparkles laid extinct — !
And oh, behind the cloud sheaves, like yellow autumn dapples,
Did you see the wicked sun that winked?

ILLCIT

In front of the sombre mountains, a faint, lost ribbon of rainbow,
And between us and it, the thunder;
And down below, in the green wheat, the labourers
Stand like dark stumps, still in the green wheat.

You are near to me, and your naked feet in their sandals,
And through the scent of the balcony's naked timber
I distinguish the scent of your hair; so now the limber
Lightning falls from heaven.

A down the pale-green, glacier-river floats
A dark boat through the gloom — and whither?
The thunder roars. But still we have each other.
The naked lightnings in the heaven dither
And disappear. What have we but each other?
The boat has gone.

FIREFLIES IN THE CORN

A Woman taunts her Lover
Look at the little darlings in the corn!
The rye is taller than you, who think yourself
So high and mighty: look how its heads are borne
Dark and proud in the sky, like a number of knights
Passing with spears and pennants and manly scorn.

And always likely! — Oh, if I could ride
With my head held high-serene against the sky
Do you think I'd have a creature like you at my side
With your gloom and your doubt that you love me? O darling rye,
How I adore you for your simple pride!

And those bright fireflies wafting in between
And over the swaying cornstalks, just above
All their dark-feathered helmets, like little green
Stars come low and wandering here for love
Of this dark earth, and wandering all serene — !

How I adore you, you happy things, you dears
Riding the air and carrying all the time
Your little lanterns behind you: it cheers
My heart to see you settling and trying to climb
The cornstalks, tipping with fire their spears.

All over the corn's dim motion, against the blue
Dark sky of night, the wandering glitter, the swarm
Of questing brilliant things: — you joy, you true
Spirit of careless joy: ah, how I warm
My poor and perished soul at the joy of you!

The Man answers and she mocks
You're a fool, woman. I love you and you know I do!

— Lord, take his love away, it makes him whine.
And I give you everything that you want me to.
— Lord, dear Lord, do you think he ever can shine?

A WOMAN AND HER DEAD HUSBAND

Ah, stern cold man,
How can you lie so relentless hard
While I wash you with weeping water!
Ah, face, carved hard and cold,
You have been like this, on your guard
Against me, since death began.

You masquerader!
How can you shame to act this part
Of unswerving indifference to me?
It is not you; why disguise yourself
Against me, to break my heart,
You evader?

You've a warm mouth,
A good warm mouth always sooner to soften
Even than your sudden eyes.
Ah cruel, to keep your mouth
Relentless, however often
I kiss it in drouth.

You are not he.
Who are you, lying in his place on the bed
And rigid and indifferent to me?
His mouth, though he laughed or sulked
Was always warm and red
And good to me.

And his eyes could see
The white moon hang like a breast revealed
By the slipping shawl of stars,
Could see the small stars tremble
As the heart beneath did wield
Systole, diastole.

And he showed it me
So, when he made his love to me;
And his brows like rocks on the sea jut out,
And his eyes were deep like the sea
With shadow, and he looked at me,
Till I sank in him like the sea,
Awfully.

Oh, he was multiform —
Which then was he among the manifold?
The gay, the sorrowful, the seer?
I have loved a rich race of men in one —
— But not this, this never-warm
Metal-cold — !

Ah, masquerader!
With your steel face white-enamelled
Were you he, after all, and I never
Saw you or felt you in kissing?
— Yet sometimes my heart was trammelled
With fear, evader!

You will not stir,
Nor hear me, not a sound.
— Then it was you —
And all this time you were
Like this when I lived with you.
It is not true,
I am frightened, I am frightened of you
And of everything.
O God! — God too
Has deceived me in everything,
In everything.

THE MOWERS

There's four men mowing down by the river;
I can hear the sound of the scythe strokes, four
Sharp breaths swishing: — yea, but I
Am sorry for what's i' store.

The first man out o' the four that's mowin'
Is mine: I mun claim him once for all:
— But I'm sorry for him, on his young feet, knowin'
None o' the trouble he's led to stall.

As he sees me bringin' the dinner, he lifts
His head as proud as a deer that looks
Shoulder-deep out o' th' corn: and wipes
His scythe blade bright, unhooks

His scythe stone, an' over the grass to me!
— Lad, tha 's gotten a chilt in me,
An' a man an' a father tha 'lt ha'e to be,
My young slim lad, an' I'm sorry for thee.

SCENT OF IRISES

A faint, sickening scent of irises
Persists all morning. Here in a jar on the table
A fine proud spike of purple irises
Rising above the class-room litter, makes me unable
To see the class's lifted and bended faces
Save in a broken pattern, amid purple and gold and sable.

I can smell the gorgeous bog-end, in its breathless
Dazzle of may-blobs, when the marigold glare overcast
You with fire on your brow and your cheeks and your chin as you dipped
Your face in your marigold bunch, to touch and contrast
Your own dark mouth with the bridal faint lady-smocks
Dissolved in the golden sorcery you should not outlast.

You amid the bog-end's yellow incantation,
You sitting in the cowslips of the meadows above,
— Me, your shadow on the bog-flame, flowery may-blobs,
Me full length in the cowslips, muttering you love —
You, your soul like a lady-smock, lost, evanescent,
You, with your face all rich, like the sheen on a dove — !

You are always asking, do I remember, remember
The buttercup bog-end where the flowers rose up
And kindled you over deep with a coat of gold?
You ask again, do the healing days close up
The open darkness which then drew us in,
The dark that swallows all, and nought throws up.

You upon the dry, dead beech-leaves, in the fire of night
Burnt like a sacrifice; — you invisible —
Only the fire of darkness, and the scent of you!
— And yes, thank God, it still is possible
The healing days shall close the darkness up
Wherein I breathed you like a smoke or dew.

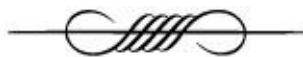
Like vapour, dew, or poison. Now, thank God,
The golden fire has gone, and your face is ash
Indistinguishable in the grey, chill day,
The night has burnt you out, at last the good
Dark fire burns on untroubled without clash
Of you upon the dead leaves saying me yea.

GREEN

The sky was apple-green,
The sky was green wine held up in the sun,
The moon was a golden petal between.

She opened her eyes, and green
They shone, clear like flowers undone,
For the first time, now for the first time seen.

PANSIES



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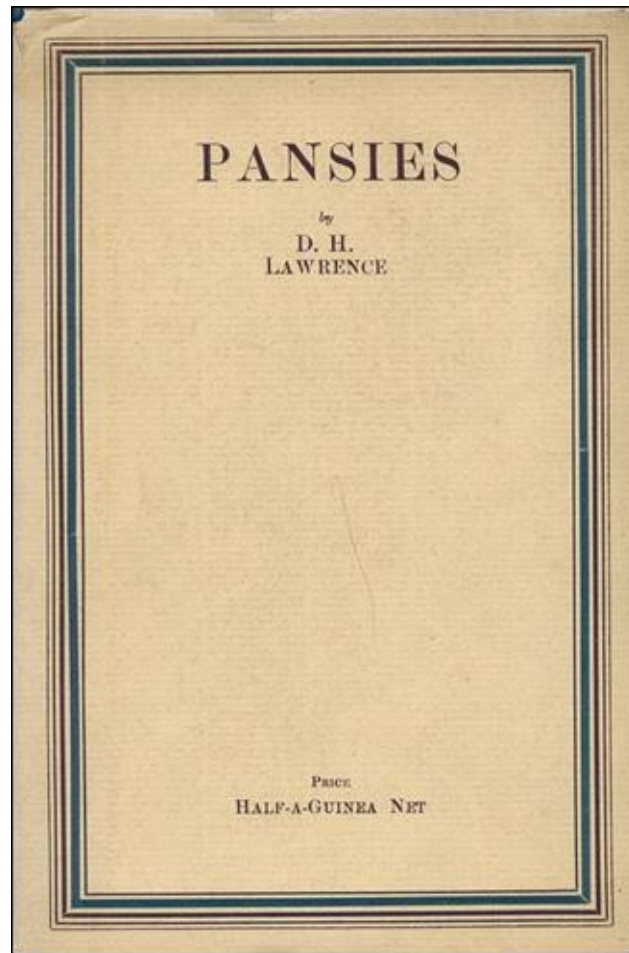
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Demon Justice
Be a Demon!
The Jeune Fille
Trust



The first edition

Our Day is Over

Our day is over, night comes up
shadows steal out of the earth.

Shadows, shadows
wash over our knees and splash between our thighs,
our day is done;
we wade, we wade, we stagger, darkness rushes between our stones,
we shall drown.

Our day is over
night comes up.

Hark in the Dusk!

Hark! in the dusk
voices, gurgling like water
wreath strong weed round the knees, as the darkness
lifts us off our feet.

As the current
thrusts warm through the loins, so the little one
wildly floats, swirls,
and the flood strikes the belly, and we are gone.

Elephants in the Circus

Elephants in the circus
have aeons of weariness round their eyes.
Yet they sit up
and show vast bellies to the children.

Elephants Plodding

Plod! Plod!

And what ages of time
the worn arches of their spines support!

On the Drum

The huge old female on the drum
shuffles gingerly round
and smiles; the vastness of her elephant antiquity
is amused.

Two Performing Elephants

He stands with his forefeet on the drum
and the other, the old one, the pallid hoary female
must creep her great bulk beneath the bridge of him.

On her knees, in utmost caution
all agog, and curling up her trunk
she edges through without upsetting him.
Triumph! the ancient, pig-tailed monster!

When her trick is to climb over him
with what shadow-like slow carefulness
she skims him, sensitive
as shadows from the ages gone and perished
in touching him, and planting her round feet.

While the wispy, modem children, half-afraid
watch silent. The looming of the hoary, far-gone ages
is too much for them.

Twilight

Twilight
thick underdusk
and a hidden voice like water clucking
callously continuous.
While darkness submerges the stones
and splashes warm between the buttocks.

Cups

Cups, let them be dark
like globules of night about to splash.
I want to drink out of dark cups that drip down on their feet.

Bowls

Take away all this crystal and silver
and give me soft-skinned wood
that lives erect through long nights, physically
to put to my lips.

You

You, you don't know me.
When have your knees ever nipped me
like fire-tongs a live coal
for a minute?

After Dark

Can you, after dark, become a darkie?

Could one, at night, run up against the standing flesh of you
with a shock, as against the blackness of a negro,
and catch flesh like the night in one's arms.

Destiny

O — destiny, destiny,
do you exist, and can a man touch her hand?

O — destiny
if I could see your hand, and it were thumbs down,
I would be willing to give way, like the pterodactyl,
and accept obliteration.
I would not even ask to leave a fossil claw extant,
nor a thumb mark like a clue,
I would be willing to vanish completely, completely.

But if it is thumbs up, and mankind must go on being mankind,
then I am willing to fight, I will roll my sleeves up and start in.

Only, O destiny
I wish you'd show your hand.

To Let Go or to Hold On — ?

Shall we let go,
and allow the soul to find its level
downwards, ebbing downwards, ebbing downwards to the flood?
till the head floats tilted like a bottle forward tilted
on the sea, with no message in it; and the body is submerged
heavy and swaying like a whale recovering
from wounds, below the deep black wave?
like a whale recovering its velocity and strength
under the cold black wave.

Or else, or else
shall a man brace himself up
and lift his face and set his breast
and go forth to change the world?
gather his will and his energy together
and fling himself in effort after effort
upon the world, to bring a change to pass?
Tell me first, O tell me,
will the dark flood of our day's annihilation
swim deeper, deeper, till it leaves no peak emerging?

Shall we be lost, all of us
and gone like weed, like weed, like eggs of fishes,
like sperm of whales, like germs of the great dead past
into which the creative future shall blow strange, unknown forms?

Are we nothing, already, but the lapsing of a great dead past?

Is the best that we are but sperm, loose sperm, like the sperm of fishes
that drifts upon time and chaos, till some unknown future takes it up
and is fecund with a new Day of new creatures? different from us.

Or is our shattered Argosy, our leaking ark
at this moment scraping tardy Ararat?
Have we got to get down and clear away the debris
of a swamped civilisation, and start a new world for man
that will blossom forth the whole of human nature?

Must we hold on, hold on
and go ahead with what is human nature
and make a new job of the human world?

Or can we let it go?
O, can we let it go,
and leave it to some nature that is more than human
to use the sperm of what's worth while in us
and thus eliminate us?
Is the time come for humans
now to begin to disappear,
leaving it to the vast revolutions of creative chaos
to bring forth creatures that are an improvement on humans,
as the horse was an improvement on the ichthyosaurus?

Must we hold on?
Or can we now let go?

Or is it even possible we must do both?

How Beastly the Bourgeois is

How beastly the bourgeois is
especially the male of the species —

Presentable, eminently presentable —
shall I make you a present of him?

Isn't he handsome? Isn't he healthy? Isn't he a fine specimen?
Doesn't he look the fresh clean Englishman, outside?
Isn't it God's own image? tramping his thirty miles a day
after partridges, or a little rubber ball?
wouldn't you like to be like that, well off, and quite the thing?

Oh, but wait!
Let him meet a new emotion, let him be faced with another
man's need,
let him come home to a bit of moral difficulty, let life face him
with a new demand on his understanding
and then watch him go soggy, like a wet meringue.

Watch him turn into a mess, either a fool or a bully.

Just watch the display of him, confronted with a new demand
on his intelligence,
a new life-demand.

How beastly the bourgeois is
especially the male of the species —

Nicely groomed, like a mushroom
standing there so sleek and erect and eyeable —
and like a fungus, living on the remains of bygone life

sucking his life out of the dead leaves of greater life than his own.

And even so, he's stale, he's been there too long.
Touch him, and you'll find he's all gone inside
Just like an old mushroom, all wormy inside, and hollow
under a smooth skin and an upright appearance.

Full of seething, wormy, hollow feelings
rather nasty —
How beastly the bourgeois is!

Standing in their thousands, these appearances, in damp
England
what a pity they can't all be kicked over
like sickening toadstools, and left to melt back, swiftly
into the soil of England.

Worm Either Way

If you live along with all the other people
and are just like them and conform, and are nice
you're just a worm —

and if you live with all the other people
and you don't like them and won't be like them and won't
conform
then you're just the worm that has turned,
in either case, a worm.

The conforming worm stays just inside the skin
respectably unseen, and cheerfully gnaws away at the heart of
life,
making it all rotten inside.

The unconforming worm - that is, the worm that has turned —
gnaws just the same, gnawing the substance out of life,
but he insists on gnawing a little hole in the social epidermis
and poking his head out and waving himself
and saying: Look at me, I am not respectable,
I do all the things the bourgeois daren't do,
I booze and fornicate and use foul language and despise your
honest man —

But why should the worm that has turned protest so much?
The bonnie, bonnie bourgeois goes a-whoring up back streets
just the same.

The busy, busy bourgeois pinks his language just as pink
if not pinker
and in private boasts his exploits even louder, if you ask me,
than the other.
While as to honesty, Oh, look where the money lies!

So I can't see where the worm that has turned puts anything
over
the worm that is too cunning to turn.

On the contrary, he merely gives himself away.
The turned worm shouts: I bravely booze!
The other says: What? cat-piss?
The turned worm boasts: I copulate!
the unturned says: You look it.

You're a d — b — b — p — bb — , says the worm that's turned.
Quite! says the other. Cuckoo!

Leda

Come not with kisses
not with caresses
of hands and lips and murmurings;
come with a hiss of wings
and sea-touch tip of a beak
and treading of wet, webbed, wave-working feet
into the marsh-soft belly.

Natural Complexion

But, you see, said the handsome young man with the chamois gloves
to the woman rather older than himself,
if you don't use rouge and a lipstick, in Paris,
they'll take you for a woman of the people.

So spoke the British gentleman
pulling on his chamois gloves
and using his most melodious would-be-Oxford voice.
And the woman said: Dear me!
how rough that would be on you, darling!
Only, if you insist on pulling on those chamois gloves
I swear I'll pull off my knickers, right in the Rue de la Paix.

The Oxford Voice

When you hear it languishing
and hooing and cooing and sidling through the front teeth,
the Oxford voice
or worse still
the would-be-Oxford voice
you don't even laugh any more, you can't.
For every blooming bird is an Oxford cuckoo nowadays,
you can't sit on a bus nor in the tube
but it breathes gently and languishingly in the back of your neck.

And oh, so seductively superior, so seductively
self-effacingly
deprecatingly
superior. —

We wouldn't insist on it for a moment
but we are
we are
you admit we are
superior. —

To be Superior

How nice it is to be superior!
Because really, it's not use pretending, one is superior, isn't one?
I mean people like you and me. —

Quite! I quite agree.
The trouble is, everybody thinks they're just as superior
as we are; just as superior. —

That's what's so boring! people are so boring.
But they can't really think it, do you think?
At the bottom, they must *know* we are really superior, don't you think?
don't you think, *really*, they *know* we're their superiors? —

I couldn't say.
I've never got to the bottom of superiority.
I should like to.

True Democracy

I — wish I was a gentleman
as full of wet as a watering-can
to pee in the eye of a policeman —

But my dear fellow, my dear fellow
can it be that you still don't know
that every man, whether high or low
is a gentleman if he thinks himself so? —

He is an' all, you bet'e is!
I — bet I am. - You can'old yer phiz
abaht it. - Yes, I'm a gent, an' Liz
'ere, she's a lidy, aren't yer, old quizz? —

Of course, I'm a lidy, what d'yer think?
You mind who yer sayin' isn't lidies!
All the Hinglish is gentlemen and lidies,
like the King an' Queen, though they're up just a wink. —

— Of course you are, but let me say
I'm American from New Orleans,
and in my country, just over the way,
we are *all* kings and queens! —

Swan

Far-off
at the core of space
at the quick of time
beats
and goes still
the great swan upon the waters of all endings
the swan within vast chaos, within the electron.

For us
no longer he swims calmly
nor clacks the forces furrowing a great gay trail,
of happy energy,
nor is he nesting passive upon the atoms,
nor flying north desolative icewards
to the sleep of ice,
nor feeding in the marshes,
nor honking horn-like into the twilight. —

But he stoops, now
in the dark
upon us;
he is treading our women
and we men are put out
as the vast white bird
furrows our featherless women
with unknown shocks
and stamps his black marsh-feet on their white and
marshy flesh.

Give Us Gods

Give us gods, Oh give them us!
Give us gods.
We are so tired of men
and motor-power. —

But not gods grey-bearded and dictatorial,
nor yet that pale young man afraid of fatherhood
shelving substance on to the woman, Madonna mia! shabby virgin!
nor gusty Jove, with his eye on immortal tarts,
nor even the musical, suave young fellow
wooing boys and beauty.

Give us gods
give us something else —

Beyond the great bull that bellowed through space, and got his
throat cut.
Beyond even that eagle, that phoenix, hanging over the gold egg of
all things,
further still, before the curled horns of the ram stepped forth
or the stout swart beetle rolled the globe of dung in which man
should hatch,
or even the sly gold serpent fatherly lifted his head off the earth to
think —
Give us gods before these —
Thou shalt have other gods before these.

Where the waters end in marshes
swims the wild swan
sweeps the high goose above the mists
honking in the gloom the honk of procreation from such throats.

Mists

where the electron behaves and misbehaves as it will,
where the forces tie themselves up into knots of atoms
and come untied;

mists

of mistiness complicated into knots and clots that barge about
and bump on one another and explode into more mist, or don't
mist of energy most scientific —

But give us gods!

Look then

where the father of all things swims in a mist of atoms
electrons and energies, quantum and relativities
mists, wreathing mists,
like a wild swan, or a goose, whose honk goes through my bladder.

And in the dark unscientific I feel the drum-winds of his wings
and the drip of his cold, webbed feet, mud-black
brush over my face as he goes
to seek the women in the dark, our women, our weird women
whom he treads
with dreams and thrusts that make them cry in their sleep.

Gods, do you ask for gods?

Where there is woman there is swan.

Do you think, scientific man, you'll be father of your own babies?

Don't imagine it.

There'll be babies bom that are cygnets, O my soul!

young wild swans!

And babies of women will come out young wild geese, O my heart!

the geese that saved Rome, and will lose London.

Won't It be Strange — ?

Won't it be strange, when the nurse brings the new-born infant
to the proud father, and shows its little, webbed greenish feet

made to smite the waters behind it?
or the round, wild vivid eye of a wild-goose staring
out of fathomless skies and seas?
or when it utters that undaunted little bird-cry
of one who will settle on icebergs, and honk across the Nile? —

And when the father says: This is none of mine!
Woman, where got you this little beast? —
will there be a whistle of wings in the air, and an icy draught?
will the singing of swans, high up, high up, invisible
break the drums of his ears
and leave him forever listening for the answer?

Spiral Flame

There have been so many gods
that now there are none.
When the One God made a monopoly of it
He wore us out, so now we are godless and unbelieving.

Yet, O my young men, there is a vivifier.
There is that which makes us eager.
While we are eager, we think nothing of it.
Sum, ergo non cogito.
But when our eagerness leaves us, we are godless and full of
thought.

We have worn out the gods, and they us.
That pale one, filled with renunciation and pain and white love
has worn us weary of renunciation and love and even pain.
That strong one, ruling the universe with a rod of iron
has sickened us thoroughly with rods of iron and rulers and
strong men.

The All-wise has tired us of wisdom.
The weeping mother of god, inconsolable over her son
makes us prefer to be womanless, rather than be wept over.
And that poor makeshift, Aphrodite emerging in a bathing suit
from our modem seaside foam
has successfully killed all desire in us whatsoever.

Yet, O my young men, there is a vivifier.
There is a swan-like flame that curls round the centre of space
and flutters at the core of the atom,
there is a spiral flame-tip that can lick our little atoms into fusion
so we roar up like bonfires of vitality
and fuse in a broad hard flame of many men in a oneness.

O — pillars of flame by night, O my young men
spinning and dancing like flamy fire-sprouts in the dark ahead of
the multitude!

O — ruddy god in our veins, O fiery god in our genitals!
O — rippling hard fire of courage, O fusing of hot trust
when the fire reaches us, O my young men!

And the same flame that fills us with life, it will dance and bum
the house down
all the fittings and elaborate furnishings
and all the people that go with the fittings and the furnishings,
the upholstered dead that sit in deep armchairs.

Let the Dead Bury Their Dead

Let the dead go bury their dead
don't help them.

Let the dead look after the dead
leave them to one another,
don't serve them.

The dead in their nasty dead hands
have heaps of money,
don't take it.

The dead in their seething minds
have phosphorescent teeming white words
of putrescent wisdom and sapience that subtly stinks;
don't ever believe them.

The dead are in myriads, they seem mighty.
They make trains chuff, motor-cars titter, ships lurch,
mills grind on and on,
and keep you in millions at the mills, sightless pale slaves,
pretending these are the mills of God.

It is the great lie of the dead.
The mills of industry are not the mills of God.
And the mills of God grind otherwise, with the winds of life for
the mill-stones.
Trust the mills of God, though they grind exceedingly small.
But as for the mills of men
don't be harnessed to them.

The dead give ships and engines, cinema, radio and
gramophone,

they send aeroplanes across the sky,
and they say: Now, behold, you are living the great life!
While you listen in, while you watch the film, while you drive
the car,
While you read about the airship crossing the wild Atlantic
behold, you are living the great life, the stupendous life!

As you know, it is a complete lie.
You are all going dead and corpse-pale
listening in to the lie.
Spit it out.

O — cease to listen to the living dead
they are only greedy for your life!
O — cease to labour for the gold-toothed dead,
they are so greedy, yet so helpless if not worked for,
Don't ever be kind to the smiling, tooth-mouthed dead
don't ever be kind to the dead
it is pandering to corpses,
the repulsive, living fat dead.

Bury a man gently if he has lain down and died.
But with the walking and talking and conventionally
persuasive dead
with bank accounts and insurance policies
don't sympathise, or you taint the unborn babes.

When Wilt Thou Teach the People — ?

When wilt thou teach the people
God of justice, to save themselves — ?
They have been saved so often
and sold.

O — God of justice, send no more saviours
of the people!

When a saviour has saved a people
they find he has sold them to his father.
They say: We are saved but we are starving.
He says: The sooner will you eat imaginary cake in the
mansions of my father.
They say: Can't we have a loaf of common bread?
He says: No, you must go to heaven, and eat the most
marvellous cake. —

Or Napoleon says: Since I have saved you from the ci-devants,
you are my property, be prepared to die for me, and to work for
me. —

Or later republicans say: You are saved,
therefore you are savings, our capital
with which we shall do big business. —

Or Lenin says: You are saved, but you are saved wholesale.
You are no longer men, that is bourgeois;
you are items in the soviet state,
and each item will get its ration,
but it is the soviet state alone which counts
the items are of small importance,
the state having saved them all. —

And so it goes on, with the saving of the people.
God of justice, when wilt thou teach them to save themselves?

A Living

A man should never earn his living
if he earns his life he'll be lovely.

A bird picks up its seeds or little snails
between heedless earth and heaven
in heedlessness.

But, the plucky little sport, it gives to life
song, and chirruping, gay feathers, fluff-shadowed warmth
and all the unspeakable charm of birds hopping and fluttering
and being birds.
And we, we get it all from them for nothing.

When I Went to the Film

When I went to the film, and saw all the black-and-white
feelings that nobody felt,
and heard the audience sighing and sobbing with all the
emotions they none of them felt,
and saw them cuddling with rising passions they none of them
for a moment felt,
and caught them moaning from close-up kisses, black-and —
white kisses that could not be felt,
it was like being in heaven, which I am sure has a white

atmosphere
upon which shadows of people, pure personalities
are cast in black and white, and move
in flat ecstasy, supremely unfelt,
and heavenly.

When I Went to the Circus

When I went to the circus that had pitched on the waste lot
it was full of uneasy people
frightened of the bare earth and the temporary canvas
and the smell of horses and other beasts
instead of merely the smell of man.

Monkeys rode rather grey and wizened
on curly plump piebald ponies
and the children uttered a little cry —
and dogs jumped through hoops and turned somersaults
and then the geese scuttled in in a little flock
and round the ring they went to the sound of the whip
then doubled, and back, with a funny up-flutter of wings
and the children suddenly shouted out.

Then came the hush again, like a hush of fear.

The tight-rope lady, pink and blonde and nude-looking with a few
gold spangles
footed cautiously out on the rope, turned prettily, spun round
bowed, and lifted her foot in her hand, smiled, swung her parasol
to another balance, tripped round, poised, and slowly sank
her handsome thighs down, down, till she slept her splendid body
on the rope.
When she rose, tilting her parasol, and smiled at the cautious
people
they cheered, but nervously.

The trapeze man, slim and beautiful and like a fish in the air
swung great curves through the upper space, and came down
like a star.
— And the people applauded, with hollow, frightened applause.

The elephants, huge and grey, loomed their curved bulk through
the dusk
and sat up, taking strange postures, showing the pink soles of
their feet
and curling their precious live trunks like ammonites
and moving always with soft slow precision
as when a great ship moves to anchor.
The people watched and wondered, and seemed to resent the
mystery that lies in beasts.

Horses, gay horses, swirling round and plaiting
in a long line, their heads laid over each other's necks;
they were happy, they enjoyed it;
all the creatures seemed to enjoy the game
in the circus, with their circus people.

But the audience, compelled to wonder
compelled to admire the bright rhythms of moving bodies
flesh flamey and a little heroic, even in a tumbling clown,
they were not really happy.
There was no gushing response, as there is at the film.

When modern people see the carnal body dauntless and
flickering gay

playing among the elements neatly, beyond competition
and displaying no personality,
modern people are depressed.

Modern people feel themselves at a disadvantage.
They know they have no bodies that could play among the
elements.
They have only their personalities, that are best seen flat, on the
film,
flat personalities in two dimensions, imponderable and touchless.

And they grudge the circus people the swooping gay weight of limbs
that flower in mere movement,

and they grudge them the immediate, physical understanding they
have with their circus beasts,
and they grudge them their circus life altogether.

Yet the strange, almost frightened shout of delight that comes now
and then from the children
shows that the children vaguely know how cheated they are of
their birthright
in the bright wild circus flesh.

The Noble Englishman

I know a noble Englishman
who is sure he is a gentleman,
that sort —

This moderately young gentleman
is very normal, as becomes an Englishman,
rather proud of being a bit of a Don Juan
you know —

But one of his beloveds, looking a little peaked
towards the end of her particular affair with him
said: Ronald, you know, is like most Englishmen,
by instinct he's a sodomist
but he's frightened to know it
so he takes it out on women.
Oh come! said I. That Don Juan of a Ronald! —
Exactly, she said. Don Juan was another of them, in love with
himself
and taking it out on women. —
Even that isn't sodomitical, said I.
But if a man is in love with himself, isn't that the meanest form
of homosexuality? she said.

You've no idea, when men are in love with themselves, how they
wreak all their spite on women,
pretending to love them.
Ronald, she resumed, doesn't like women, just acutely dislikes
them.
He might possibly like men, if he weren't too frightened and
egoistic.
So he very cleverly tortures women, with his sort of love.
He's instinctively frightfully clever.
He can be so gentle, so gentle
so delicate in his love-making.

Even now, the thought of it bewilders me: such gentleness!
Yet I know he does it deliberately, as cautiously and deliberately
as when he shaves himself.
Then more than that, he makes a woman feel he is *serv*ing her
really living in her service, and serving her
as no man ever served before.

And then, suddenly, when she's feeling all lovely about it
suddenly the ground goes from under her feet, and she clutches
in mid-air,
but horrible, as if your heart would wrench out; —
while he stands aside watching with a superior little grin
like some malicious indecent little boy.
— No, don't talk to me about the love of Englishmen!

Things Men Have Made

Things men have made with wakened hands, and put soft life into
are awake through years with transferred touch, and go on glowing
for long years.

And for this reason, some old things are lovely
warm still with the life of forgotten men who made them.

Things Made by Iron

Things made by iron and handled by steel
are bom dead, they are shrouds, they soak life out of us.

Till after a long time, when they are old and have steeped in our life
they begin to be soothed and soothing; then we throw them away.

New Houses, New Clothes

New houses, new furniture, new streets, new clothes, new sheets
everything new and machine-made sucks life out of us
and makes us cold, makes us lifeless
the more we have.

Whatever Man Makes

Whatever man makes and makes it live
lives because of the life put into it.

A yard of India muslin is alive with Hindu life.

And a Navajo woman, weaving her rug in the pattern of her dream
must run the pattern out in a little break at the end
so that her soul can come out, back to her.

But in the odd pattern, like snake-marks on the sand
it leaves its trail.

We are Transmitters

As we live, we are transmitters of life.
And when we fail to transmit life, life fails to flow through us.

That is part of the mystery of sex, it is a flow onwards.
Sexless people transmit nothing.

And if, as we work, we can transmit life into our work,
life, still more life, rushes into us to compensate, to be ready
and we ripple with life through the days.

Even if it is a woman making an apple dumpling, or a man a stool,
if life goes into the pudding, good is the pudding
good is the stool,
content is the woman, with fresh life rippling in her,
content is the man.

Give, and it shall be given unto you
is still the truth about life.
But giving life is not so easy.
It doesn't mean handing it out to some mean fool, or letting the
living dead eat you up.
It means kindling the life-quality where it was not,
even if it's only in the whiteness of a washed pocket-handkerchief.

Let Us be Men

For God's sake, let us be men
not monkeys minding machines
or sitting with our tails curled
while the machine amuses us, the radio or film or
gramophone.

Monkeys with a bland grin on our faces. —

All That We Have is Life

All that we have, while we live, is life;
And if you don't live during your life, you are a piece of dung.

And work is life, and life is lived in work
unless you're a wage-slave.
While a wage-slave works, he leaves life aside
and stands there a piece of dung.

Men should refuse to be lifelessly at work.
Men should refuse to be heaps of wage-earning dung.
Men should refuse to work at all, as wage-slaves.
Men should demand to work for themselves, of themselves, and
put their life in it.

For if a man has no life in his work, he is mostly a heap of dung.

Work

There is no point in work
unless it absorbs you
like an absorbing game.

If it doesn't absorb you
if it's never any fun,
don't do it.

When a man goes out into his work
he is alive like a tree in spring
he is living, not merely working.

When the Hindus weave thin wool into long, long lengths of
stuff
with their thin dark hands and their wide dark eyes and their
still souls absorbed
they are like slender trees putting forth leaves, a long white web
of living leaf,
the tissue they weave,
and they clothe themselves in white as a tree clothes itself
in its own foliage.
As with cloth, so with houses, ships, shoes, wagons or cups or
loaves
men might put them forth as a snail its shell, as a bird that
leans
its breast against its nest, to make it round,
as the turnip models his round root, as the bush makes flowers
and gooseberries,
putting them forth, not manufacturing them,
and cities might be as once they were, bowers grown out from
the busy bodies of people.

And so it will be again, men will smash the machines.

At last, for the sake of clothing himself in his own leaf-like cloth
tissued from his life,
and dwelling in his own bowery house, like a beaver's nibbled
mansion
and drinking from cups that came off his fingers like flowers off
their five-fold stem,
he will cancel the machines we have got.

Why — ?

Why have money?

why have a financial system to strangle us all in its octopus arms?

why have industry?

why have the industrial system?

why have machines, that we only have to serve?

why have a soviet, that only wants to screw us all in as parts of the machine?

why have working classes at all, as if men were only embodied jobs?

why not have men as men, and the work as merely part of the game of life?

True, we've got all these things

industrial and financial systems, machines and soviets, working classes.

But why go on having them, if they belittle us?

Why should we be belittled any longer?

Moon Memory

When the moon falls on a man's blood
white and slippery, as on the black water in a port
shaking asunder, and flicking at his ribs —

then the noisy, dirty day-world
exists no more, nor ever truly existed;
but instead
this wet white gleam
twitches, and ebbs hitting, washing inwardly, silverily against
his ribs,
on his soul that is dark ocean within him.

And under the flicking of the white whiplash of the moon
sea-beasts immersed lean sideways and flash bright
in pure brilliance of anger, sea-immersed anger
at the thrashy, motor-driven transit of dirty day
that has left scum on the sea, even in the night.

What is He?

What is he?

— A man, of course.

Yes, but what does he do?

— He lives and is a man.

Oh, quite! But he must work. He must have a job of some sort.

-Why?

Because obviously he's not one of the leisured classes.

— I don't know. He has lots of leisure. And he makes quite beautiful chairs. —

There you are then! He's a cabinet maker.

— No, no!

Anyhow a carpenter and joiner.

— Not at all.

But you said so.

— What did I say?

That he made chairs, and was a joiner and carpenter.

— I said he made chairs, but I did not say he was a carpenter.

All right then, he's just an amateur.

— Perhaps! Would you say a thrush was a professional flautist or just an amateur? —

I'd say it was just a bird

— And I say he is just a man.

All right! You always did quibble.

O! Start a Revolution

O! start a revolution, somebody!
not to get the money
but to lose it all for ever.

O! start a revolution, somebody!
not to install the working classes
but to abolish the working classes for ever
and have a world of men.

There is Rain in Me

There is rain in me,
running down, running down, trickling
away from memory.

There is ocean in me,
swaying, swaying, O so deep
so fathomlessly black
and spurting suddenly up, snow-white, like snow-leopards
rearing
high and clawing with rage at the cliffs of the soul
then disappearing back with a hiss
of eternal salt rage; angry is old ocean within a man.

Desire Goes Down into the Sea

I — have no desire any more
towards woman or man, bird, beast or creature or thing.
All day long I feel the tide rocking, rocking

though it strikes no shore
in me.

Only mid-ocean —

The Sea, the Sea

The sea dissolves so much
and the moon makes away with so much more than we know —

Once the moon comes down
and the sea gets hold of us
cities dissolve like rock-salt
and the sugar melts out of life
iron washes away like an old blood-stain
gold goes out into a green shadow
money makes even no sediment
and only the heart
glitters in salty triumph
over all it has known, that has gone now into salty nothingness.

Old Song

The day is ending, the night descending
the heart is frozen, the spirit dead;
but the moon is wending her way, attending
to other things that are not yet said.

Good Husbands Make Unhappy Wives

Good husbands make unhappy wives
so do bad husbands, just as often;
but the unhappiness of a wife with a good husband
is much more devastating
than the unhappiness of a wife with a bad husband.

November by the Sea

Now in November nearer comes the sun
down the abandoned heaven.

As the dark closes round him, he draws nearer
as if for our company.

At the base of the lower brain
the sun in me declines to his winter solstice
and darts a few gold rays
back to the old year's sun across the sea.

A few gold rays thickening down to red
as the sun of my soul is setting
setting fierce and undaunted, wintry
but setting, setting behind the sounding sea between my ribs.

The wide sea wins, and the dark,
winter, and the great day-sun, and the sun in my soul
sinks, sinks to setting and the winter solstice
downward, they race in decline
my sun, and the great gold sun.

Fight! O My Young Men

Fight! don't you feel you're fading
into slow death?
Fight then, poor duffers degrading
your very breath.

Open your half-dead eyes
you half-alive young,
look round and realise
the muck from which you've sprung.

The money-muck, you simple flowers
of your forefathers' muck-heap;
and the money-muck-worms, the extant powers
that have got you in keep.

Old money-worms, young money-worms
money-worm professors
spinning a glamour round money, and clergymen
lifting a bank-book to bless us!

In the odour of lucrative sanctity
stand they - and god, how they stink!
Rise then, my young men, rise at them!
Or if you can't rise, just think —

Think of the world that you're stifling in,
think what a world it might be!
Think of the rubbish you're trifling in
with enfeebled vitality!

And then, if you amount to a hill o' beans

start in and bust it all;
money, hypocrisy, greed, machines
that have ground you so small.

Women Want Fighters for Their Lovers

Women don't want wistful
mushy pathetic young men
struggling in doubtful embraces
then trying again.

Mushy and treacherous, tiny
Peterlets, Georgelets, Hamlets
Tomlets, Dicklets, Harrylets, whiney
Jimlets and self-sorry Samlets.

Women are sick of consoling
inconsolable youth, dead-beat;
pouring comfort and condoling
down the sink of the male conceit.

Woman want fighters, fighters
and the fighting cock.
Can't you give it them, blighters!

The fighting cock, the fighting cock —
have you got one, little blighters?
Let it crow then, like one o'clock!

It's Either You Fight Or You Die

It's either you fight or you die
young gents, you've got no option.
No good asking the reason why
it's either to fight or you die
die, die, lily-liveredly die
or fight and make the splinters fly
bust up the holy apple-pie
you've got no option.

Don't say you can't, start in and try;
give great hypocrisy the lie
and tackle the blowsy big blow-fly
of money; do it or die!
You've got no option.

Don'ts

Fight your little fight, my boy
fight and be a man.
Don't be a good little, good little boy
being as good as you can
and agreeing with all the mealy-mouthed, mealy-mouthed
truths that the sly trot out
to protect themselves and their greedy-mouthed, greedy-mouthed
cowardice, every lout.

Don't live up to the dear little girl who costs
you your manhood, and makes you pay.
Nor the dear old mater who so proudly boasts
that you'll make your way.

Don't earn golden opinions, opinions golden,
or at least worth Treasury notes,
from all sorts of men; don't be beholden
to the herd inside the pen.

Don't long to have dear little, dear little boys
whom you'll have to educate
to earn their living; nor yet girls, sweet joys
who will find it so hard to mate.

Nor a dear little home, with its cost, its cost
that you have to pay,
earning your living while your life is lost
and dull death comes in a day.

Don't be sucked in by the su-superior,

don't swallow the culture bait,
don't drink, don't drink and get beerier and beerier,
do learn to discriminate.

Do hold yourself together, and fight
with a hit-hit here and a hit-hit there,
and a comfortable feeling at night
that you've let in a little air.

A little fresh air in the money sty,
knocked a little hole in the holy prison,
done your little bit, made your own little try
that the risen Christ should *be* risen.

The Risen Lord

The risen lord, the risen lord
has risen in the flesh,
and treads the earth to feel the soil
though his feet are still nesh.

The risen lord, the risen lord
has opened his eyes afresh,
and sees strange looks on the faces of men
all held in leash.

And he says: I never have seen them before,
these people of flesh;
these are no spirits caught and sore
in the physical mesh.

They are substance itself, that flows in thick
flame of flesh forever travelling
like the flame of a candle, slow and quick
fluttering and softly unravelling.

It moves, it ripples, and all the time
it changes, and with it change
moods, thoughts, desires, and deeds that chime
with the rippling fleshly change.

I — never saw them, how they must soften
themselves with oil, and lard
their guts with a certain fat, and often
laugh, and laugh hard.

If they didn't, if they did not soften
themselves with oil, and lard
their guts with a certain fat, and often
laugh, and laugh hard
they would not be men, and they must be men,
they are their own flesh. - I lay
in the tomb and was not; I have risen again
to look the other way.

Lo! I am flesh, and the blood that races
is me in the narrows of my wrists.
Lo, I see fear in the twisted faces
of men, they clench fear in their fists!

Lo! on the other side the grave
I — have conquered the fear of death,
but the fear of life is still here; I am brave
yet I fear my own breath.

Now I must conquer the fear of life,
the knock of the blood in my wrists,
the breath that rushes through my nose, the strife
of desires in the loins' dark twists,

What do you want, wild loins? and what
do you want, warm heart? and what
wide eyes and wondering spirit? - not
death, no death for your lot!

They ask, and they must be answered; they
are, and they shall be, to the end.
Lo! there is woman, and her way is a strange way,
I — must follow also her trend.

I died, and death is neuter; it speaks not, it gives
no answer; man rises again
with mouth and loins and needs, he lives
again man among men.

So it is, so it will be, for ever and ever.
And still the great needs of men
will clamour forth from the flesh, and never
can denial deny them again.

The Secret Waters

What was lost is found
what was wounded is sound,
the key of life on the body of men
unlocks the fountains of peace again.

The fountains of peace, the fountains of peace
well softly up for a new increase,
but they bubble under the heavy wall
of this house of life that encloses us all.

They bubble under the heavy wall
that was once a house, and is now a prison,
and never a one among us all
knows that the waters have risen.

None of us knows, O none of us knows
the welling of peace when it rises and flows
in secret under the sickening wall
of the prison of man that encloses us all.

And we shall not know, we shall not know
till the secret water overflow
and loosen the brick and the hard cement
of the walls within which our lives are spent.

Till the walls begin to loosen and crack,
to gape and our house is going to wrack
and ruin above us, and the crash of release
is death to us all, in the marshes of peace.

Obscenity

The body of itself is clean, but the caged mind
is a sewer inside, it pollutes, O it pollutes
the guts and the stones and the womb, rots them down, leaves a
rind
of maquillage⁵³ and pose and malice that would shame the brutes.

Beware! O My Dear Young Men

Beware, O my dear young men, of going rotten.

It's so easy to follow suit;
people in their thirties, and the older ones, have gotten
bad inside, like fruit
that nobody eats and nobody wants, so it rots, but is not forgotten.

Rotten inside, they are, and seething
with small obscenities;
and they whisper it out, and they titter it out, breathing
among soft amenities,
a vapour of rottenness out of their mouths, like sewer-stench
wreathing.

And it's funny, my dear young men, that you in your twenties
should love the sewer scent
of obscenity, and lift your noses where the vent is
and run towards it, bent
on smelling it all, before your bit of vitality spent is.

For obscenity, after all, my dear young men
is only mental dirt,
the dirty mind like a urinal again
or a dung squirt;
and I thought you wanted life and experience, dear young men!

All this obscenity is just mental, mental, mental,
it's the village-idiot mind
playing with muck; and I thought you young gents experimental
were out to find
new life for yourselves and your women, complementary.

But if obscene village idiots you want to be, then be it.
But don't imagine you'll get

satisfactory experience from it; can't you see it?

the idiot with his chin all wet

goggling obscenities! If that's you and your fate, why then, dree it.

Sex Isn't Sin

Sex isn't sin, ah no! sex isn't sin,
nor is it dirty, not until the dirty mind pokes in.

We shall do as we like, sin is obsolete, the young assert.
Sin is obsolete, sin is obsolete, but not so dirt.

And sex, alas, gets dirtier and dirtier, worked from the mind.
Sex gets dirtier and dirtier, the more it is fooled with, we find.

And dirt, if it isn't sin, is worse, so there you are!
Why don't you know what's what, young people? seems to me you're
far
duller than your grandmothers. But leave that aside.
Let's be honest at last about sex, or show at least that we've tried.

Sex isn't sin, it's a delicate flow between women and men,
and the sin is to damage the flow, force it up or dirty it or suppress it
again.

Sex isn't something you've got to play with; sex is *you*.
It's the flow of your life, it's your moving self, and you are due
to be true to the nature of it, its reserve, its sensitive pride
that it always has to begin with, and by which you ought to abide.

Know yourself, O know yourself, that you are mortal; and know.
the sensitive delicacy of your sex, in its ebbing to and fro,
and the mortal reserve of your sex, as it stays in your depths below.

And don't, with the nasty, prying mind, drag it out from its deeps
and finger it and force it, and shatter the rhythm it keeps
when it's left alone, as it stirs and rouses and sleeps.

O — know yourself, O know your sex! You must know, there is no
escape.

You must know sex in order to save it, your deepest self, from the rape
of the itching mind and the mental self, with its pruriency always
agape.

Sex and Trust

If you want to have sex, you've got to trust
at the core of your heart, the other creature.
The other creature, the other creature
not merely the personal upstart;
but the creature there, that has come to meet you;
trust it you must, you must
or the experience amounts to nothing,
mere evacuation lust.

The Gazelle Calf

The gazelle calf, O my children
goes behind its mother across the desert
goes behind its mother on blithe bare foot
requiring no shoes, O my children!

The Elephant is Slow to Mate

The elephant, the huge old beast,
is slow to mate;
he finds a female, they show no haste
they wait
for the sympathy in their vast shy hearts
slowly, slowly to rouse
as they loiter along the river-beds
and drink and browse
and dash in a panic through the brake
of forest with the herd,
and sleep in massive silence, and wake
together without a word.

So slowly the great hot elephant hearts
grow full of desire,
and the great beasts mate in secret at last,
hiding their fire.
Oldest they are and the wisest of beasts
so they know at last
how to wait for the loneliest of feasts
for the full repast.

They do not snatch, they do not tear;
their massive blood
moves as the moon-tides, near, more near
till they touch in flood.

Little Fish

The tiny fish enjoy themselves
in the sea.

Quick little splinters of life,
their little lives are fun to them
in the sea.

The Mosquito Knows

The mosquito knows full well, small as he is
he's a beast of prey.
But after all
he only takes his bellyful,
he doesn't put my blood in the bank.

Self-Pity

I — never saw a wild thing
sorry for itself.

A small bird will drop frozen dead from a bough
without ever having felt sorry for itself.

New Moon

The new moon, of no importance
lingers behind as the yellow sun glares and is gone beyond
the sea's edge;
earth smokes blue;
the new moon, in cool height above the blushes,
brings a fresh fragrance of heaven to our senses.

Spray

It is a wonder foam is so beautiful.
A wave bursts in anger on a rock, broken up
in wild white sibilant spray
and falls back, drawing in its breath with rage,
with frustration how beautiful!

Seaweed

Sea-weed sways and sways and swirls
as if swaying were its form of stillness;
and if it flushes against fierce rock
it slips over it as shadows do, without hurting itself.

My Enemy

If it is a question of him or me
then down with him!

If he is not with me but against me,
if his presence and his breath are poison to me,
then, if he comes near me
down with him.

Down with him
to the pit of annihilation.
But if he stays far from me, and does not touch me,
he is no longer my concern, he ceases to be my enemy.

Touch

Since we have become so cerebral
we can't bear to touch or be touched.

Since we are so cerebral
we are humanly out of touch.

And so we must remain.
For if, cerebrally, we force ourselves into touch, into contact
physical and fleshly,
we violate ourselves,
we become vicious.

Noli Me Tangere

Noli me tangere, touch me not!
O you creatures of mind, don't touch me!
O you with mental fingers, O never put your hand on me!
O you with mental bodies, stay a little distance from me!

And let us, if you will, talk and mingle
in mental contact, gay and sad.
But only that.
O don't confuse
the body into it, let us stay apart.

Great is my need to be chaste
and apart, in this cerebral age.
Great is my need to be untouched
untouched.
Noli me tangere!

Chastity

Chastity, beloved chastity
O beloved chastity
how infinitely dear to me
chastity, beloved chastity!
That my body need not be
fingered by the mind,
or prostituted by the dree
contact of cerebral flesh —

O leave me clean from mental fingering
from the cold copulation of the will,
from all the white, self-conscious lechery
the modem mind calls love!

From all the mental poetry
of deliberate love-making,
from all the false felicity
of deliberately taking
the body of another unto mine,
O God deliver me!
leave me alone, let me be!
Chastity, dearer far to me
than any contact that can be
in this mind-mischievous age!

Let Us Talk, Let Us Laugh

Let us talk, let us laugh, let us tell
all kinds of things to one another;
men and women, let us be
gay and amusing together, and free
from airs and from false modesty.

But at the same time, don't let's think,
that this quite real intimacy
of talk and thought and me-and-thee
means anything further and physical.

Nay, on the very contrary
all this talking intimacy
is only real and right if we
keep ourselves separate physically
and quite apart.
To proceed from mental intimacy
to physical, is just messy,
and really, a nasty violation,
and the ruin of any decent relation
between us —

Touch Comes

Touch comes when the white mind sleeps
and only then.

Touch comes slowly, if ever; it seeps
slowly up in the blood of men
and women.

Soft slow sympathy
of the blood in me, of the blood in thee
rises and flushes insidiously
over the conscious personality
of each of us, and covers us
with a soft one warmth, and a generous
kindled togetherness, so we go
into each other as tides flow
under a moon they do not know.

Personalities exist apart;
and personal intimacy has no heart.
Touch is of the blood
uncontaminated, the unmental flood.

When again in us
the soft blood softly flows together
towards touch, then this delirious
day of the mental welter and blether
will be passing away, we shall cease to fuss.

Leave Sex Alone

Leave sex alone, leave sex alone, let it die right away,
let it die right away, till it rises of itself again.

Meanwhile, if we must, let us think about it, and talk about it
straight to the very end,
since the need is on us.
But while we think of it, and while we talk of it
let us leave it alone, physically, keep apart.
For while we have sex in the mind, we truly have none in the
body.

Sex is a state of grace
and you'll have to wait.
You'll even have to repent.
And in some strange and silent way
you'll have to pray to the far-off gods
to grant it you.

At present sex is the mind's preoccupation,
and in the body we can only mentally fornicate.
Today, we've got no sex.
We have only cerebral excitations.

The mind will have to glut itself,
and the ego will have to burst like the swollen frog,
and then perhaps we shall know true sex, in ourselves.

The Mess of Love

We've made a great mess of love
since we made an ideal of it.

The moment I swear to love a woman, a certain woman, all my life
that moment I begin to hate her.

The moment I even say to a woman: I love you! —
my love dies down considerably.

The moment love is an understood thing between us, we are sure
of it,
it's a cold egg, it isn't love any more.

Love is like a flower, it must flower and fade;
if it doesn't fade, it is not a flower,
it's either an artificial rag blossom, or an immortelle, for the
cemetery.

The moment the mind interferes with love, or the will fixes on it,
or the personality assumes it as an attribute, or the ego takes
possession of it
it is not love any more, it's just a mess.
And we've made a great mess of love, mind-perverted, will —
perverted, ego-perverted love.

Climb Down, O Lordly Mind

Climb down, O lordly mind!

O — eagle of the mind, alas, you are more like a buzzard.

Come down now, from your pre-eminence, O mind, O lofty spirit!

Your hour has struck

your unique day is over.

Absolutism is finished, in the human consciousness too.

A man is many things, he is not only a mind.

But in his consciousness, he is two-fold at least;

he is cerebral, intellectual, mental, spiritual,

but also he is instinctive, intuitive, and in touch.

The mind that needs to know all things

must needs at last come to know its own limits,

even its own nullity, beyond a certain point.

Know thyself, and that thou art mortal,

and therefore, that thou art forever unknowable;

the mind can never reach thee.

Thou art like the moon,

and the white mind shines on one side of thee

but the other side is dark forever,

and the dark moon draws the tides also.

Thou art like the day

but thou art also like the night,

and thy darkness is forever invisible,

for the strongest light throws also the darkest shadow.

The blood knows in darkness, and forever dark,
in touch, by intuition, instinctively,
The blood also knows religiously,
and of this, the mind is incapable,
The mind is non-religious.

To my dark heart, gods *are*.
In my dark heart, love is and is not.
But to my white mind
gods and love alike are but an idea
a kind of fiction.

Man is an alternating consciousness.
Man is an alternating consciousness.

Only that exists which exists in my own consciousness.
Cogito, ergo sum.
Only that exists which exists dynamically and unmentalised, in
my blood.
Non cogito, ergo sum.
I am, I do not think I am.

Ego-Bound

As a plant becomes pot-bound
man becomes ego-bound
enclosed in his own limited mental consciousness.

Then he can't feel any more
or love, or rejoice or even grieve any more,
he is ego-bound,
pot-bound
in the pot of his own conceit
and he can only slowly die.

Unless he is a sturdy plant.
Then he can burst the pot,
shell off his ego
and get his roots in earth again,
raw earth.

Jealousy

The jealousy of an ego-bound woman
is hideous and fearful,
it is so much stronger than her love could ever be.

The jealousy of an ego-bound woman
is a fearful thing to behold.
The ego revealed in all its monstrous inhumanity.

Ego-Bound Women

Ego-bound women are often lesbian,
perhaps always.

Perhaps the ego-bound can only love their own kind,
if they can love at all.

And of all passions
the lesbian passion is the most appalling,

a frenzy of tortured possession
and a million frenzies of tortured jealousy.

Possessive, possessive, possessive!
gentle woman gone mad
with possessive vindictiveness.

But the real fault lies in the ego-bound condition of
mankind
Individuals must go mad.

Fidelity

Fidelity and love are two different things, like a flower and a gem.
And love, like a flower, will fade, will change into something else
or it would not be flowery.

O — flowers they fade because they are moving swiftly; a little torrent of life
leaps up to the summit of the stem, gleams, turns over round the bend
of the parabola of curved flight,
sinks, and is gone, like a comet curving into the invisible.

O — flowers, they are all the time travelling
like comets, and they come into our ken
for a day, for two days, and withdraw, slowly vanish again.

And we, we must take them on the wing, and let them go.
Embalmed flowers are not flowers, immortelles are not flowers;
flowers are just a motion, a swift motion, a coloured gesture;
that is their loveliness. And that is love.

But a gem is different. It lasts so much longer than we do
so much much much much longer
that it seems to last for ever.

Yet we know it is flowing away
as flowers are, and we are, only slower.
The wonderful slow flowing of the sapphire!

All flows, and every flow is related to every other flow.
Flowers and sapphires and us, diversely streaming.

In the old days, when sapphires were breathed upon and brought forth
during the wild orgasms of chaos
time was much slower, when the rocks came forth.
It took aeons to make a sapphire, aeons for it to pass away.

And a flower it takes a summer.

And man and woman are like the earth, that brings forth flowers
in summer, and love, but underneath is rock.
Older than flowers, older than ferns, older than foraminiferae, older than plasm
altogether is the soul of a man underneath.

And when, throughout all the wild orgasms of love
slowly a gem forms, in the ancient, once-more-molten rocks
of two human hearts, two ancient rocks, a man's heart and a woman's,
that is the crystal of peace, the slow hard jewel of trust,
the sapphire of fidelity.
The gem of mutual peace emerging from the wild chaos of love.

Know Deeply, Know Thyself More Deeply

Go deeper than love, for the soul has greater depths,
love is like the grass, but the heart is deep wild rock,
molten, yet dense and permanent.

Go down to your deep old heart, woman, and lose sight of yourself.
And lose sight of me, the me whom you turbulently loved.

Let us lose sight of ourselves, and break the mirrors.
For the fierce curve of our lives is moving again to the depths
out of sight, in the deep dark living heart.

But say, in the dark wild metal of your heart
is there a gem, which came into being between us?
is there a sapphire of mutual trust, a blue spark?
Is there a ruby of fused being, mine and yours, an inward glint?

If there is not, O then leave me, go away.
For I cannot be bullied back into the appearances of love,
any more than August can be bullied to look like March.

Love out of season, especially at the end of the season,
is merely ridiculous.
If you insist on it, I insist on departure.

Have you no deep old heart of wild womanhood,
self-forgetful and gemmed with experience,
and swinging in a strange unison of power
with the heart of the man you are supposed to have loved?

If you have not, go away.

If you can only sit with a mirror in your hand, an ageing woman
posing on and on as a lover,
in love with a self that now is shallow and withered,
your own self - that has passed like a last summer's flower —
then go away —

I — do not want a woman whom age cannot wither.
She is a made-up lie, a dyed immortelle
of infinite staleness.

All I Ask

All I ask of a woman is that she shall feel gently towards me
when my heart feels kindly towards her,
and there shall be the soft, soft tremor as of unheard bells
between us.

It is all I ask.

I — am so tired of violent women lashing out and insisting
on being loved, when there is no love in them.

The Universe Flows

The universe flows in infinite wild streams, related
in rhythms too big and too small for us to know,
since man is just middling, and his comprehension just middling.

If once, for a second, the universe ceased to flow
of course it would cease to exist.
The thought is unthinkable, anyhow.

Only man tries not to flow,
repeats himself over and over in mechanical monotony of conceit
and hence is a mess.

If only Cleopatra had left off being so Cleopatra-ish
— she was it too long —
if only she had gone down to a deeper self in herself
as time went on,

Anthony might have made a splendid thing of the East,
she might have saved herself the asp
and him from sticking himself like a pig
and us from the dreary inheritance of Roman stupidity.

Underneath

Below what we think we are
we are something else,
we are almost anything.

Below the grass and trees
and streets and houses and even seas
is rock; and below the rock, the rock
is we know not what,
the hot wild core of the earth, heavier than we can even imagine.

Pivotal core of the soul, heavier than iron
so ponderously central;
heavier and hotter than anything known;

and also alone. —
And yet
reeling with connection
spinning with the heaviness of balance
and flowing invisibly, gasping
towards the breathing stars and the central of all sunninesses.

The earth leans its weight on the sun, and the sun on the sun of
suns.

Back and forth goes the balance and the electric breath.

The soul of man also leans in the unconscious inclination we call
religion
towards the sun of suns, and back and forth goes the breath
of incipient energetic life.

Out of the soul's middle to the middle-most sun, way-off, or in every atom.

The Primal Passions

If you will go down into yourself, under your surface personality
you will find you have a great desire to drink life direct
from the source, not out of bottles and bottled personal vessels.

What the old people call immediate contact with God.
That strange essential communication of life
not bottled in human bottles.

What even the wild witchcraft of the past was seeking
before it degenerated.

Life from the source, unadulterated
with the human taint.

Contact with the sun of suns
that shines somewhere in the atom, somewhere pivots the curved space,
and cares not a straw for the put-up human figments.
Communion with the Godhead, they used to say in the past.
But even that is human-tainted now,
tainted with the ego and the personality.

To feel a fine, fine breeze blowing through the navel and the knees
and have a cool sense of truth, inhuman truth at last
softly fluttering the senses, in the exquisite orgasm of coition
with the godhead of energy that cannot tell lies.

The cool, cool truth of pure vitality
pouring into the veins from the direct contact with the source.
Uncontaminated by even the beginnings of a lie.
The soul's first passion is for sheer life

entering in shocks of truth, unfouled by lies.

And the soul's next passion is to reflect
and then turn round and embrace the extant body of life
with the thrusting embrace of new justice, new justice
between men and men, men and women, and earth and stars and
suns.

The passion of justice being profound and subtle
and changing in a flow as all passions change.

But the passion of justice is a primal embrace
between man and all his known universe.

And the passion of truth is the embrace between man and his god
in the sheer coition of the life-flow, stark and unlying.

Escape

When we get out of the glass bottles of our own ego,
and when we escape like squirrels from turning in the cages of our
personality
and get into the forest again,
we shall shiver with cold and fright
but things will happen to us
so that we don't know ourselves.

Cool, unlying life will rush in,
and passion will make our bodies taut with power,
we shall stamp our feet with new power
and old things will fall down,
we shall laugh, and institutions will curl up like burnt paper.

The Root of Our Evil

The root of our present evil is that we buy and sell.
Ultimately, we are all busy buying and selling one another.

It began with Judas, and goes on in the wage-system.
Men sell themselves for a wage, and employers look out for a
bargain.
And employers are bought by financiers, and financiers are sold to
the devil.

— Get thou behind me, Satan! —
That was just what Satan wanted to do,
for then nobody would have their eye on him.

And Jesus never looked round.
That is the great reproach we have against him.
He was frightened to look round
and see Satan bargaining the world away
and men, and the bread of men
behind his back
with satanically inspired financiers.

If Jesus had kept a sharp eye on Satan,
and refused to let so many things happen behind his back
we shouldn't be where we are now.

Come, Satan, don't go dodging behind my back any longer.
If you've got the goods, come forward, boy, and let's see'em.
I'm perfectly willing to strike a decent bargain.
But I'm not having any dodging going on behind my back.

What we want is some sort of communism

not based on wages, nor profits, nor any sort of buying and selling
but on a religion of life.

The Ignoble Procession

When I see the ignoble procession
streaming forth from little doorways
citywards, in little rivers that swell to a great stream,
of men in bowler hats, hurrying
and a mingling of wallet-carrying women
hurrying, hurrying, legs going quick, quick, quick
in ignoble haste, for fear of being late —
I am filled with humiliation.

Their haste
is so
humiliating.

No Joy in Life

Never, my young men,
you who complain you know no joy in your lives,
never will you know any joy in your lives
till you ask for lightning instead of love
till you pray for the right gods, for the thunderbolt instead of pity
till you look to the right man, to put you into touch.

Then you will hit the Flat-iron Building and flatten it out.
Then you will shatter the Bank.
Then you will settle the hash of Business finally.

Wild Things in Captivity

Wild things in captivity
while they keep their own wild purity
won't breed, they mope, they die.

All men are in captivity,
active with captive activity,
and the best won't breed, though they don't know why.

The great cage of our domesticity
kills sex in a man, the simplicity
of desire is distorted and twisted awry.

And so with bitter perversity
gritting against the great adversity,
the young ones copulate, hate it, and want to cry.

Sex is a state of grace.
In a cage it can't take place.
Break the cage, then, start in and try.

Mournful Young Man

Mournful young man in your twenties
who think the only way out of your mournfulness is
through a woman,
yet you fail to find the woman, when there are so many
women about.

Why don't you realise
that you're not desirable?
that no woman will ever desire you, as you are,
except, of course, for secondary motives.

The women are in the cage as much as you are.
They look at you, they see a caged monkey.
How do you expect them ever to desire you?
Anyhow they never will, except for secondary motives,
or except you change.

There is No Way Out

There is no way out, we are all caged monkeys
blue-arsed with the money-bruise
and wearing our seats out sitting on money.

There is no way out, the cage has no door, it's rusted solid.

If you copulate with the finest woman on earth
there's no relief, only a moment's sullen respite.

You're a caged monkey again in five minutes.
Therefore be prepared to tackle the cage.

Money-Madness

Money is our madness, our vast collective madness.

And, of course, if the multitude is mad
the individual carries his own grain of insanity around with him.

I doubt if any man living hands out a pound note without a pang;
and a real tremor, if he hands out a ten-pound note.

We quail, money makes us quail.
It has got us down, we grovel before it in strange terror.
And no wonder, for money has a fearful cruel power among men.

But it is not money we are so terrified of,
it is the collective money-madness of mankind.
For mankind says with one voice: How much is he worth?
Has he no money? Then let him eat dirt, and go cold.

And if I have no money, they will give me a little bread
so I do not die,
but they will make me eat dirt with it.
I shall have to eat dirt, I shall have to eat dirt
if I have no money.

It is that that I am frightened of.
And that fear can become a delirium.
It is fear of my money-mad fellow-men.

We must have some money
to save us from eating dirt.

Bread should be free,
shelter should be free,
fire should be free,
to all and anybody, all and anybody, all over the world.

We must regain our sanity about money
before we start killing one another about it.
It's one thing or the other.

Kill Money

Kill money, put money out of existence.
It is a perverted instinct, a hidden thought
which rots the brain, the blood, the bones, the stones, the soul.

Make up your mind about it:
that society must establish itself upon a different principle
from the one we've got now.

We must have the courage of mutual trust.
We must have the modesty of simple living.
And the individual must have his house, food and fire all free
like a bird.

Men Are Not Bad

Men are not bad, when they are free.

Prison makes men bad, and the money compulsion makes men bad.

If men were free from the terror of earning a living
there would be abundance in the world
and men would work gaily.

Nottingham's New University

In Nottingham, that dismal town
where I went to school and college,
they've built a new university
for a new dispensation of knowledge.

Built it most grand and cakeily
out of the noble loot
derived from shrewd cash-chemistry
by good Sir Jesse Boot.

Little I thought, when I was a lad
and turned my modest penny
over on Boot's Cash Chemist's counter,
that Jesse, by turning many

millions of similar honest pence
over, would make a pile
that would rise at last and blossom out
in grand and cakey style

into a university
where smart men would dispense
doses of smart cash-chemistry
in language of common-sense!

That future Nottingham lads would be
cash-chemically B.Sc.
that Nottingham lights would rise and say:
— By Boots I am M.A.

From this I learn, though I knew it before,
that culture has her roots

in the deep dung of cash, and lore
is a last offshoot of Boots.

I am in a Novel

I read a novel by a friend of mine
in which one of the characters was me,
the novel it sure was mighty fine
but the funniest thing that could be

was me, or what was supposed for me,
for I had to recognise
a few of the touches, like a low-born jake,
but the rest was a real surprise.

Well damn my eyes! I said to myself.
Well damn my little eyes!
If this is what Archibald thinks I am
he sure thinks a lot of lies.

Well think o' that now, think o' that!
That's what he sees in me!
I'm about as much like a Persian cat,
or a dog with a harrowing flea.

My Lord! a man's friends' ideas of him
would stock a menagerie
with a marvellous outfit! How did Archie see
such a funny pup in me?

No! Mr Lawrence!

No, Mr Lawrence, it's not like that!
I don't mind telling you
I know a thing or two about love,
perhaps more than you do.

And what I know is that you make it
too nice, too beautiful.
It's not like that, you know; you fake it.
It's really rather dull.

Red-Herring

My father was a working man
and a collier was he,
at six in the morning they turned him down
and they turned him up for tea

My mother was
a superior soul
a superior soul was she,
cut out to play a superior role
in the god-damn bourgeoisie.

We children were the in-betweens
little nondescripts were we,
indoors we called each other *you*,
outside, it was *tha* and *thee*.

But time has fled, our parents are dead
we've risen in the world all three;
but still we are in-betweens, we tread
between the devil and the deep sad sea.

I am a member of the bourgeoisie
and a servant-maid brings me my tea —
But I'm always longing for someone to say
'ark'ere, lad! atween thee an' me

they're a' a b — d — lot o' — s,
an' I reckon it's nowt but right
we should start an' kick their — ses for'em
an' tell'em to — .

Our Moral Age

Of course, if you make naughtiness nasty,
spicily nasty, of course,
then it's quite all right; we understand
life's voice, even when she's hoarse.

But when you go and make naughtiness nice
there's no excuse;
if such things were nice, and we needn't think twice,
what would be the use?

My Naughty Book

They say I wrote a naughty book
With perfectly awful things in it,
putting in all the impossible words
like b — and f — and sh —

Most of my friends were deeply hurt
and haven't forgiven me yet;
I'd loaded the camel's back before
with dirt they couldn't forget.

And now, no really, the final straw
was words like sh — and f — !
I heard the camel's back go crack
beneath the weight of muck.

Then out of nowhere rushed John Bull,
that mildewed pup, good doggie!
squeakily bellowing for all he was worth,
and slavering wet and soggy.

He couldn't bite'em, he was much too old,
but he made a pool of dribblings;
so while the other one heaved her sides,
with moans and hollow bibblings,

he did his best, the good old dog,
to support her, the hysterical camel,
and everyone listened and loved it, the
ridiculous bimmel-bammel.

But still, one has no right to take
the old dog's greenest bones

that he's buried now for centuries
beneath England's garden stones.

And, of course, one has no right to lay
such words to the camel's charge,
when she prefers to have them left
in the WC writ large.

Poor homely words. I must give you back
to the camel and the dog,
for her to mumble and him to crack
in secret, great golliwog!

And hereby I apologise
to all my foes and friends
for using words they privately keep
for their own immortal ends.

And henceforth I will never use
more than the chaste, short dash;
so do forgive me! I sprinkle my hair
with grey, repentant ash.

The Little Wowser

There is a little wowser
John Thomas by name,
and for every bloomin', mortal thing
that little blighter's to blame.

It was 'im as made the first mistake
of putting us in the world,
forcin' us out of the unawake,
an' makin' us come uncurled.

And then when you're gettin' nicely on
an' life seems to begin,
that little bleeder comes bustin' in
with: Hello boy! what about sin?

An' then he leads you by the nose
after a lot o' women
as strips you stark as a monkey nut
an' leaves you never a trimmin'.

An' then somebody has ter marry you
to put him through 'is paces;
then when John Thomas don't worry you,
it's your wife, wi' her airs an' graces.

I think of all the little brutes
as ever was invented
that little cod's the holy worst.
I've chucked him, I've repented.

The Young and Their Moral Guardians

O — the stale old dogs who pretend to guard
the morals of the masses,
how smelly they make the great back-yard,
wetting after everyone that passes.

If a man goes by who doesn't give
a damn for their dirty kennels,
how they rush out and want to rive
him to pieces, the good-hearted spaniels!

And the young, the modem and jaunty young,
how scared they all are, even now
of the yellow dogs, how they slink away
in silence from the great bow-wow!

When a low bull-mongrel starts declaiming,
there's not a young man in the whole
of England with the guts to turn round on him, aiming
a good kick at his dirty old hole.

When I Read Shakespeare

When I read Shakespeare I am struck with wonder
that such trivial people should muse and thunder
in such lovely language.

Lear, the old buffer, you wonder his daughters
didn't treat him rougher,
the old chough, the old chuffer!

And Hamlet, how boring, how boring to live with,
so mean and self-conscious, blowing and snoring
his wonderful speeches, full of other folk's whoring!

And Macbeth and his Lady, who should have been choring,
such suburban ambition, so messily goring
old Duncan with daggers!

How boring, how small Shakespeare's people are!
Yet the language so lovely! like the dyes from gas-tar.

Salt of the Earth

Slowly the salt of the earth becomes salt of the sea.
Slowly the raindrops of appreciation
carry the salt of the earth, the wisdom of wise men, the gifts of
the great
down to the ocean of the afterwards, where it remains as brine
in which to pickle the younger generations
who would be so much better without pickling.

Slowly the salt of the earth becomes salt of the sea.

Fresh Water

They say it is very difficult
to distil sea-water into sweet.

Perhaps that's why it is so difficult
to get a refreshing drink out of old wisdom,
old truth, old teaching of any sort.

Peace and War

People always make war when they say they love peace.
The loud love of peace makes one quiver more than any battle cry.
Why should one love peace? it is so obviously vile to make war.

Loud peace propaganda makes war seem imminent.
It is a form of war, even, self-assertion and being wise for other
people.

Let people be wise for themselves. And anyhow
nobody can be wise except on rare occasions, like getting married
or dying.

It's bad taste to be wise all the time, like being at a perpetual funeral.
For everyday use, give me somebody whimsical, with not too much
purpose in life,
then we shan't have war, and we needn't talk about peace.

Many Mansions

When a bird flips his tail in getting his balance on a tree
he feels much gayer than if somebody had left him a fortune
or than if he'd just built himself a nest with a bathroom —
Why can't people be gay like that?

Glory

Glory is of the sun, too, and the sun of suns,
and down the shafts of his splendid pinions
run tiny rivers of peace.

Most of his time, the tiger pads and slouches in a burning peace.

And the small hawk high up turns round on the slow pivot of peace.

Peace comes from behind the sun, with the peregrine falcon, and
the owl.

Yet all these drink blood.

Woe

Woe, woe to the world!
For we're all self-consciously aware of ourselves
yet not sufficiently conscious to be able to forget ourselves
and be whimsically at home in ourselves.

So everybody makes an assertion of himself,
and every self-assertion clashes on every other.

Attila

I would call Attila, on his little horse
a man of peace.

For after all, he helped to smash a lot of old Roman lies,
the lies, the treachery, the slippery cultured squalor of that
sneaking court of Ravenna.

And after all, lying and base hypocrisy and treachery
are much more hellishly peaceless than a little straightforward
bloodshed
which may occasionally be a preliminary to the peace that
passes understanding.

So that I would call Attila, on his little horse
a man of peace.

What Would You Fight For?

I am not sure I would always fight for my life.
Life might not be worth fighting for.

I am not sure I would always fight for my wife.
A wife isn't always worth fighting for.

Nor my children, nor my country, nor my fellow men.
It all depends whether I found them worth fighting for.

The only thing men invariably fight for
is their money. But I doubt if I'd fight for mine, anyhow, not to
shed a lot of blood over it.

Yet one thing I do fight for, tooth and nail, all the time.
And that is my bit of inward peace, where I am at one with myself.

And I must say, I am often worsted.

Choice

I would rather sit still in a state of peace on a stone than ride in the motor-car of a multi-millionaire and feel the peacelessness of the multi-millionaire poisoning me.

Riches

When I wish I was rich, then I know I am ill.
Because, to tell the truth, I have enough as I am.
So when I catch myself thinking: Ah, if I was rich!
I say to myself: Hello! I'm not well. My vitality is low.

Poverty

The only people I ever heard talk about My Lady Poverty were rich people, or people who imagined themselves rich. St Francis himself was a rich and spoiled young man.

Being bom among the working people
I know that poverty is a hard old hag,
and a monster, when you're pinched for actual necessities.
And whoever says she isn't, is a liar.

I don't want to be poor, it means I am pinched.
But neither do I want to be rich.
When I look at this pine tree near the sea,
that grows out of rock, and plumes forth, plumes forth,
I see it has a natural abundance.

With its roots it has a grand grip on its daily bread,
and its plumes look like green cups held up to sun and air
and full of wine.

I want to be like that, to have a natural abundance
and plume forth, and be splendid.

Noble

I know I am noble with the nobility of the sun.

A certain peace, a certain grace.

I would say the same if I were a chaffinch or a tree.

Wealth

Peace I have from the core of the atom, from the core of space,
and grace, if I don't lose it, from the same place.
And I look shabby, yet my roots go beyond my knowing,
deep beyond the world of man.
And where my little leaves flutter highest
there are no people, nor ever will be.

Yet my roots are in a woman too.
And my leaves are green with the breath of human experience.

Tolerance

One can be tolerant with a bore
and suffer fools, though not gladly
— why should a man pretend to be glad about his sufferings?

But it is hard to be tolerant with the smarties,
or to put up with the clever mess-makers,
or to endure the jazzy person;
one can't stand peaceless people any more.

Comari

I would like a few men to be at peace with.
Not friends, necessarily, they talk so much.
Nor yet comrades, for I don't belong to any cause.
Nor yet 'brothers', it's so conceited.
Nor pals, they're such a nuisance.
But men to be at peace with.

Sick

I am sick, because I have given myself away.
I have given myself to the people when they came
so cultured, even bringing little gifts,
so they pecked a shred of my life, and flew off with a croak
of sneaking exultance.
So now I have lost too much, and am sick.

I am trying now to learn never
to give of my life to the dead,
never, not the tiniest shred.

Dead People

When people are dead and peaceless
they hate life, they only like carrion.

When people are dead and peaceless
they hate happiness in others
with thin, screaming hatred,
as the vulture that screams high up, almost inaudible,
hovering to peck out the eyes of the still-living creature.

Cerebral Emotions

I am sick of people's cerebral emotions
that are bom in their minds and forced down by the will
on to their poor, deranged bodies.

People feeling things they intend to feel, they mean to feel,
they will feel,
just because they don't feel them.

For, of course, if you really feel something
you don't have to assert that you feel it.

Wellsian Futures

When men are made in bottles
and emerge as squeaky globules with no bodies to speak of,
and therefore nothing to have feelings with,

they will still squeak intensely about their feelings
and be prepared to kill you if you say they've got none.

To Women, as Far as I'm Concerned

The feelings I don't have I don't have.

The feelings I don't have I won't say I have.

The feelings you say you have, you don't have.

The feelings you would like us both to have, we neither of us have.

The feelings people ought to have, they never have.

If people say they've got feelings, you may be pretty sure they haven't got them.

So if you want either of us to feel anything at all you'd better abandon all idea of feelings altogether.

Blank

At present I am a blank, and I admit it.
In feeling I am just a blank.
My mind is fairly nimble, and is not blank.
My body likes its dinner and the warm sun, but otherwise is blank.

My soul is almost blank, my spirits quite.
I have a certain amount of money, so my anxieties are blank.

And I can't do anything about it, even there I am blank.
So I am just going to go on being a blank, till something nudges
me from within,
and makes me know I am not blank any longer.

Elderly Discontented Women

Elderly discontented women ask for intimate companionship,
by which they mean more talk, talk, talk
especially about themselves and their own feelings.

Elderly discontented women are so full of themselves
they have high blood pressure and almost burst.

It is as if modern women had all got themselves on the brain
and that sent the blood rushing to the surface of the body
and driving them around in frenzied energy

stampeding over everybody,
while their hearts become absolutely empty,
and their voices are like screwdrivers
as they try to screw everybody else down with their will.

Old People

Nowadays everybody wants to be young,
so much so, that even the young are old with the effort of being
young.

As for those over fifty, either they rush forward in self-assertion
fearful to behold,
or they bear everybody a grim and grisly grudge
because of their own fifty or sixty or seventy or eighty summers.

As if it's my fault that the old girl is seventy-seven!

The Grudge of the Old

The old ones want to be young, and they aren't young,
and it rankles, they ache when they see the young,
and they can't help wanting to spite it on them venomously.

The old ones say to themselves: We are not going to be old,
we are not going to make way, we are not going to die,
we are going to stay on and on and on and on
and make the young look after us
till they are old. We are stronger than the young.

We have more energy, and our grip on life is harder.
Let us triumph, and let the young be listless
with their puny youth.
We are younger even now than the young, we can put their youth
in the shade.

And it is true.
And they do it.
And so it goes on.

Beautiful Old Age

It ought to be lovely to be old
to be full of the peace that comes of experience
and wrinkled ripe fulfilment.

The wrinkled smile of completeness that follows a life
lived undaunted and unsoured with accepted lies.
If people lived without accepting lies
they would ripen like apples, and be scented like pippins
in their old age.

Soothing, old people should be, like apples
when one is tired of love.
Fragrant like yellowing leaves, and dim with the soft
stillness and satisfaction of autumn.

And a girl should say:
It must be wonderful to live and grow old.
Look at my mother, how rich and still she is!

And a young man should think: By Jove,
my father has faced all weathers, but it's been a life!

Courage

What makes people unsatisfied
is that they accept lies.

If people had courage, and refused lies
and found out what they really felt and really meant
and acted on it,

they would distil the essential oil out of every experience
and like hazel nuts in autumn, at last
be sweet and sound.

And the young among the old
would be as in the hazel woods of September
nutting, gathering nuts of ripe experience.

As it is, all that the old can offer
is sour, bitter fruit, cankered by lies.

Desire is Dead

Desire may be dead
and still a man can be
a meeting place for sun and rain,
wonder outwaiting pain
as in a wintry tree.

When the Ripe Fruit Falls

When the ripe fruit falls
its sweetness distils and trickles away into the veins of the earth.

When fulfilled people die
the essential oil of their experience enters
the veins of living space, and adds a glisten
to the atom, to the body of immortal chaos.

For space is alive
and it stirs like a swan
whose feathers glisten
silky with oil of distilled experience.

Elemental

Why don't people leave off being lovable
or thinking they are lovable, or wanting to be lovable,
and be a bit elemental instead?

Since man is made up of the elements
fire, and rain, and air, and live loam
and none of these is lovable
but elemental,
man is lop-sided on the side of the angels.

I wish men would get back their balance among the elements
and be a bit more fiery, as incapable of telling lies
as fire is.

I wish they'd be true to their own variation, as water is,
which goes through all the stages of steam and stream and ice
without losing its head.

I am sick of lovable people,
somehow they are a lie.

Fire

Fire is dearer to us than love or food,
hot, hurrying, yet it bums if you touch it.

What we ought to do
is not to add our love together, or our goodwill, or any of that,
for we're sure to bring in a lot of lies,
but our fire, our elemental fire
so that it rushes up in a huge blaze like a phallus into hollow space
and fecundates the zenith and the nadir
and sends off millions of sparks of new atoms
and singes us, and bums the house down.

I Wish I Knew a Woman

I wish I knew a woman
who was like a red fire on the hearth
glowing after the day's restless draughts.

So that one could draw near her
in the red stillness of the dusk
and really take delight in her

without having to make the polite effort of loving her
or the mental effort of making her acquaintance.
Without having to take a chill, talking to her.

Talk

I wish people, when you sit near them
wouldn't think it necessary to make conversation
and send thin draughts of words
blowing down your neck and your ears
and giving you a cold in your inside.

The Effort of Love

I am worn out
with the effort of trying to love people
and not succeeding.

Now I've made up my mind
I love nobody, I am going to love nobody,
I'm not going to tell any lies about it
and it's final.

If there's a man here and there, or a woman
whom I can really like,
that's quite enough for me.

And if by a miracle a woman happened to come along
who wanted the cockles of my heart
I'd rejoice over the woman and the wanted cockles of my heart
so long as it didn't all fizzle out in talk.

Can't he Borne

Any woman who says to me
— Do you really love me? —
earns my undying detestation.

Man Reaches a Point

I cannot help but be alone
for desire has died in me, silence has grown,
and nothing now reaches out to draw
other flesh to my own.

Grasshopper is a Burden

Desire has failed, desire has failed
and the critical grasshopper
has come down on the hearth in a burden of locusts
and stripped it bare.

Bas ta!

When a man can love no more
and feel no more
and desire has failed
and the heart is numb,

then all he can do
is to say: It is so!
I've got to put up with it
and wait.

This is a pause, how long a pause I know not,
in my very being.

Tragedy

Tragedy seems to me a loud noise
louder than is seemly.

Tragedy looks to me like man
in love with his own defeat.
Which is only a sloppy way of being in love with yourself.
I can't very much care about the woes and tragedies
of Lear and Macbeth and Hamlet and Timon:
they cared so excessively themselves.

And when I think of the great tragedy of our material-mechanical
civilisation
crushing out the natural human life
then sometimes I feel defeated; and then again I know
my shabby little defeat would do neither me any good
nor anybody else.

After All the Tragedies are Over

After all the tragedies are over and worn out
and a man can no longer feel heroic about being a Hamlet —
When love is gone, and desire is dead, and tragedy has left the heart
then grief and pain go too, withdrawing
from the heart and leaving strange cold stretches of sand.

So a man no longer knows his own heart;
he might say into the twilight: What is it?
I am here, yet my heart is bare and utterly empty.
I have passed from existence, I feel nothing any more.
I am a nonentity.

Yet, when the time has come to be nothing, how good it is to be nothing!
a waste expanse of nothing, like wide foreshores where not a
ripple is left
and the sea is lost
in the lapse of the lowest of tides.

Ah, when I have seen myself left by life, left nothing!
Yet even waste, grey foreshores, sand, and sorry, far-out clay
are sea-bed still, through their hour of bare denuding.
It is the moon that turns the tides.
The beaches can do nothing about it.

Nullus

I know I am nothing.
Life has gone away, below my low-water mark.

I am aware I feel nothing, even at dawn.
The dawn comes up with a glitter and a blueness, and I say: How
lovely!
But I am a liar, I feel no loveliness, it is a mental remark, a cliché.

My whole consciousness is cliché
and I am null;
I exist as an organism
and a nullus.

But I can do nothing about it
except admit it and leave it to the moon.

There are said to be creative pauses,
pauses that are almost death, empty and dead as death, almost.

And in these awful pauses the evolutionary change takes place.
Perhaps it is so.
The tragedy is over, it has ceased to be tragic, the last pause is
upon us.

Pause, brethren, pause!

Dies Irae

Even the old emotions are finished,
we have worn them out.
And desire is dead.
And the end of all things is inside us.

Our epoch is over,
a cycle of evolution is finished,
our activity has lost its meaning,
we are ghosts, we are seed;
for our Word is dead
and we know not how to live wordless.
We live in a vast house
full of inordinate activities,
and the noise, and the stench, and the dreariness and lack of meaning
madden us, but we don't know what to do.

All we can know, at this moment
is the fulfilment of nothingness.

Lo, I am nothing!
It is a consummation devoutly to be wished
in this world of mechanical self-assertion.

Dies Illa

Dies irae, dies illa
solvet saeculum in favilla —
Day of wrath, O day of warning!
Flame devours the world.

It does, even if we don't see it.

For there are all sorts of flames:
slow, creeping cold ones
that bum inwardly
like flickering cancers.

And the slow cold flames
may bum for long years
before they've eaten through the joists and the girders
and the house comes down, with a subsiding crash.

Stop It

The one thing the old will never understand
is that you can't prevent change.

All flows, and even the old are rapidly flowing away.

And the young are flowing in the throes of a great alteration.

The Death of Our Era

Our era is dying
yet who has killed it?
Have we, who are it?

In the middle of voluted space
its knell has struck.
And in the middle of every atom, which is the same thing,
a tiny bell of conclusion has sounded.

The curfew of our great day
the passing-bell of our way of knowing
the knell of our bald-headed consciousness
the tocsin of this our civilisation.

Who struck the bell?
Who rang the knell?
Not I, not you,
yet all of us.

At the core of space the final knell
Of our era has struck, and it chimes
in terrible rippling circles between the stars
till it reaches us, and its vibrations shatter us
each time they touch us.

And they keep on coming, with greater force
striking us, the vibrations of our finish.

And all that we can do
is to die the amazing death

with every stroke, and go on
till we are blank.

And yet, as we die, why should not our vast mechanised day die with us
so that when we are reborn, we can be bom into a fresh world?
For the new word is Resurrection.

The New Word

Shall I tell you again the new word
the new word of the unborn day?
It is Resurrection.
The resurrection of the flesh.

For our flesh is dead
only egoistically we assert ourselves.

And the new word means nothing to us,
it is such an old word,
till we admit how dead we are,
till we actually feel as blank as we really are.

Sun in Me

A sun will rise in me
I shall slowly resurrect
already the whiteness of false dawn is on my inner ocean.

A sun in me.

And a sun in heaven.

And beyond that, the immense sun behind the sun,
the sun of immense distances, that fold themselves together
within the genitals of living space.

And further, the sun within the atom
which is god in the atom.

Be Still!

The only thing to be done now,
now that the waves of our undoing have begun to strike on us,
is to contain ourselves.

To keep still, and let the wreckage of ourselves go,
let everything go, as the wave smashes us,
yet keep still, and hold
the tiny grain of something that no wave can wash away,
not even the most massive wave of destiny.

Among all the smashed debris of myself
keep quiet, and wait.
For the word is Resurrection.
And even the sea of seas will have to give up its dead.

At Last

When things get very bad, they pass beyond tragedy.
And then the only thing we can do is to keep quite still
and guard the last treasure of the soul, our sanity.

Since, poor individuals that we are,
if we lose our sanity
we lose that which keeps us individual
distinct from chaos.

In death, the atom takes us up
and the suns.

But if we lose our sanity
nothing and nobody in the whole vast realm of space
wants us, or can have anything to do with us.

We can but howl the lugubrious howl of idiots,
the howl of the utterly lost
howling their nowhere-ness.

Nemesis

The nemesis that awaits our civilisation
is social insanity
which in the end is always homicidal.
Sanity means the wholeness of the consciousness.
And our society is only part conscious, like an idiot.

If we do not rapidly open all the doors of consciousness
and freshen the putrid little space in which we are cribbed
the sky-blue walls of our unventilated heaven
will be bright red with blood.

The Optimist

The optimist builds himself safe inside a cell
and paints the inside walls sky-blue
and blocks up the door
and says he's in heaven.

The Third Thing

Water is H₂O, hydrogen two parts, oxygen one,
but there is also a third thing, that makes it water
and nobody knows what that is.

The atom locks up two energies
but it is a third thing present which makes it an atom.

The Sane Universe

One might talk of the sanity of the atom
the sanity of space
the sanity of the electron
the sanity of water —

For it is all alive
and has something comparable to that which we call sanity in
ourselves.
The only oneness is the oneness of sanity.

Fear of Society is the Root of All Evil

Today, the social consciousness is mutilated
so everything is insane;
success is insane, and failure is insane,
chastity is insane, and debauchery is insane,
money is insane, and poverty is insane.

A fearful thing is the mutilated social consciousness.

God

Where sanity is
there God is.

And the sane can still recognise sanity
so they can still recognise God.

Sane and Insane

The puritan is insane
and the profligate is insane
and they divide the world.

The wealthy are insane
and the poverty-stricken are insane
and the world is going to pieces between them.

The puritan is afraid
and the profligate is afraid.

The wealthy are afraid
and the poverty-stricken are afraid.

They are afraid with horrible and opposing fears
which threaten to tear the world in two, between them.

A Sane Revolution

If you make a revolution, make it for fun,
don't make it in ghastly seriousness,
don't do it in deadly earnest,
do it for fun.

Don't do it because you hate people
do it just to spit in their eye.

Don't do it for the money,
do it and be damned to the money.

Don't do it for equality,
do it because we've got too much equality
and it would be fun to upset the apple-cart
and see which way the apples would go a-rolling.

Don't do it, anyhow, for international Labour.
Do it so that we can all of us be little aristocracies on our own
and kick our heels like jolly escaped asses.

Don't do it, anyhow, for international Labour.
Labour is the one thing a man has too much of.
Let's abolish Labour, let's have done with labouring!
Work can be fun, and men can enjoy it; then it's not labour.

Let's have it so! Let's make a revolution for fun!

Always This Paying

Nothing is really any fun today,
because you've always got to pay for everything.
And whatever costs you money, money, money, is really no fun.

That's why women aren't much fun. You're always having to pay
for them.

Or else, poor things, they're having to pay for themselves,
which is perhaps worse.

Why isn't anything free, why is it always pay, pay, pay?

A man can't get any fun out of wife, sweetheart or tart
because of the beastly expense.

Why don't we do something about the money system?

Poor Young Things

The young today are bom prisoners,
poor things, and they know it.

Bom in a universal workhouse,
and they feel it.

Inheriting a sort of confinement
work, and prisoners' routine
and prisoners' flat, ineffectual pastime.

A Played-Out Game

Success is a played-out game, success, success!
because what have you got when you've got it?

The young aren't vitally interested in it any more.
Only third-rate swabs are pushing to get on, nowadays.

Getting the better of other people! Who cares? —
Getting the better of them! - Which better, what better, anyhow?

Our poor old daddies *got on*,
and then could never get off again.

If only we could make life a bit more just
so that we could all get along gaily
instead of getting on and not being able to get off again.

Triumph

It seems to me that for five thousand years at least
men have been wanting to triumph, triumph, triumph
triumph over their fellow men, triumph over obstacles, triumph
over evil,
till now the very word is nauseating, we can't hear it any more.

If we looked in our hearts, we should see
we loathe the thought of any sort of triumph,
we are sick of it.

The Combative Spirit

As a matter of fact, we are better than we know.

We trail behind us an endless tradition of combat, triumph, conquest
and we feel we've got to keep it up, keep on combating, triumphing,
conquering.

When as a matter of fact, the thought of this endless imbecile struggle
of combat

kills us, we are sick of it, to die.

We are fed up with combat,

we feel that if the whole combative, competitive system doesn't soon
go bust,
we shall.

We want a new world of wild peace, where living is free.

Not this hyena tame peace where no man dare tell another he's a thief

and yet every man is driven into robbing every other man;

this pretty peace where every man has to fight, and fight foul

to get a living, in the dastardly mean combat

we call free competition and individual enterprise and equal
opportunity.

Why should we have to fight for a living?

Living should be as free to a man as to a bird,

though most birds have to pay, with their lives, where men are.

Why should we brace ourselves up with mean emulation?

If we brace ourselves up, it should be for something we want to do
and we feel is worth doing.

The efforts of men, like the efforts of birds in spring,

would be lovely if they rose from the man himself, spontaneous

pure impulse to make something, to put something forth.

Even if it was only a tin pan.

I see the tin-man, the tinker, sitting day after day on the beach

mending and tinning the pans of all the village

and happy as a wagtail by a pool,

the same with the fishermen sitting darning their nets,

happy as perhaps kings used to be, but certainly aren't.
Work is the clue to a man's life.
But it must be free work, not done just for money, but for fun.

Why should we compete with one another?
As a matter of fact, when the tinker looks so happy tinkering
I immediately want to go and do something jolly too.
One free, cheerful activity stimulates another.
Men are not really mean.
Men are made mean, by fear, and a system of grab.

The young know these things quite well.
Why don't they prepare to act on them?
Then they'd be happy. For we are all so much better than the
system allows us to be.

Wages

The wages of work is cash.

The wages of cash is want more cash.

The wages of want more cash is vicious competition.

The wages of vicious competition is - the world we live in.

The work-cash-want circle is the vicious circle
that ever turned men into fiends.

Earning a wage is a prison occupation
and a wage-earner is a sort of gaol-bird.

Earning a salary is a prison overseer's job
a gaoler instead of a gaol-bird.

Living on our income is strolling grandly outside the prison
in terror lest you have to go in. And since the work-prison covers
almost every scrap of the living earth, you stroll up and down
on a narrow beat, about the same as a prisoner taking exercise.

This is called universal freedom.

Young Fathers

Young men, having no real joy in life and no hope in the future,
how can they commit the indecency of begetting children
without first begetting a new hope for the children to grow up to?

But then, you need only look at the modem perambulator
to see that a child, as soon as it is bom,
is put by its parents into its coffin.

A Tale Told by an Idiot

Modem life is a tale told by an idiot;
flat-chested, crop-headed, chemicalised women, of indeterminate sex,
and wimbly-wambly young men, of sex still more indeterminate,
and hygienic babies in huge hulks of coffin-like perambulators —

The great social idiot, it must be confessed,
tells dull, meaningless, disgusting tales
and repeats himself like the flushing of a WC.

Being Alive

The only reason for living is being fully alive;
and you can't be fully alive if you are crashed by secret fear,
and bullied with the threat: Get money or eat dirt! —
and forced to do a thousand mean things meaner than your nature,
and forced to clutch on to possessions in the hope they'll make you
feel safe,
and forced to watch everyone that comes near you, lest they've come
to do you down.

Without a bit of common trust in one another, we can't live.
In the end we go insane.
It is the penalty of fear and meanness, being meaner than our
natures are.
To be alive, you've got to feel a generous flow,
and under a competitive system, that is impossible, really.

The world is waiting for a new great movement of generosity,
or for a great wave of death.

We must change the system, and make living free to all men,
or we must see men die, and then die ourselves.

Self-Protection

When science starts to be interpretive
it is more unscientific even than mysticism.

To make self-preservation and self-protection the first law of
existence
is about as scientific as making suicide the first law of
existence,
and amounts to very much the same thing.

A nightingale singing at the top of his voice
is neither hiding himself nor preserving himself nor propagating
his species;
he is giving himself away in every sense of the word
and obviously, it is the culminating point of his existence.

A tiger is striped and golden for his own glory.
He would certainly be much more invisible if he were grey-green.

And I don't suppose the ichthyosaurus sparkled like the
humming-bird,
no doubt he was khaki-coloured with muddy protective coloration,
so why didn't he survive?

As a matter of fact, the only creatures that seem to survive
are those that give themselves away in flash and sparkle
and gay flicker of joyful life;
those that go glittering abroad
with a bit of splendour.

Even mice play quite beautifully at shadows,
and some of them are brilliantly piebald.

I expect the dodo looked like a clod,
a drab and dingy bird.

A Man

All I care about in a man
is that unbroken spark in him
where he is himself
undauntedly.

And all I want is to see the spark flicker
vivid and clean.

But our civilisation, alas,
with lust crushes out the spark
and leaves men living clay.

Because when the spark is crushed in a man
he can't help being a slave, a wage-slave,
a money-slave.

Lizard

A lizard ran out on a rock and looked up, listening
no doubt to the sounding of the spheres.
And what a dandy fellow! the right toss of a chin for you
and swirl of a tail!

If men were as much men as lizards are lizards
they'd be worth looking at.

Relativity

I like relativity and quantum theories
because I don't understand them
and they make me feel as if space shifted about like a swan that
can't settle,
refusing to sit still and be measured;
and as if the atom were an impulsive thing
always changing its mind.

Space

Space, of course, is alive
that's why it moves about;
and that's what makes it eternally spacious and unstuffy.

And somewhere it has a wild heart
that sends pulses even through me;
and I call it the sun;
and I feel aristocratic, noble, when I feel a pulse go through me
from the wild heart of space, that I call the sun of suns.

Sun-Men

Men should group themselves into a new order
of sun-men.

Each one turning his breast straight to the sun of suns
in the centre of all things,
and from his own little inward sun
nodding to the great one.

And receiving from the great one
his strength and his promptings,
and refusing the pettifogging promptings of human
weakness.

And walking each in his own sun-glory
with bright legs and uncringing buttocks.

Sun-Women

How strange it would be if some women came forward and said:
We are sun-women!
We belong neither to men nor our children nor even ourselves
but to the sun.

And how delicious it is to feel sunshine upon one!
And how delicious to open like a marigold
when a man comes looking down upon one
with sun in his face, so that a woman cannot but open
like a marigold to the sun,
and thrill with glittering rays.

Democracy

I am a democrat in so far as I love the free sun in men
and an aristocrat in so far as I detest narrow-gutted, possessive
persons.

I love the sun in any man
when I see it between his brows
clear, and fearless, even if tiny.

But when I see these great successful men
so hideous and corpse-like, utterly sunless
like gross successful slaves grossly waddling,
then I am more than radical, I want to work a guillotine.

And when I see working men
pale and mean and insect-like, scuttling along
and living like lice on poor money
and never looking up,
then I wish, like Tiberius, the multitude had only one head
so that I could lop it off.

I feel that when people have gone utterly sunless
they shouldn't exist.

Aristocracy of the Sun

To be an aristocrat of the sun
you don't need one single social inferior to exalt you;
You draw your nobility direct from the sun
let other people be what they like.

I am that I am
from the sun,
and people are not my measure.

Perhaps, if we started right, all the children could grow up sunny
and sun-aristocrats.
We need have no dead people, money-slaves, and social worms.

Conscience

Conscience
is sun-awareness
and our deep instinct
not to go against the sun.

The Middle Classes

The middle classes
are sunless.

They have only two measures:
mankind and money,
they have utterly no reference to the sun.

As soon as you let people be your measure
you are middle-class and essentially non-existent.

Because, if the middle classes had no poorer people to be superior to
they would themselves at once collapse into lower classness.

And if they had no upper classes either to be inferior to,
they'd become nothing.
For their middleness is only an unreality separating two realities.
No sun, no earth,
nothing that transcends the bourgeois middlingness,
the middle classes are more meaningless
than paper money when the bank is broke.

Immorality

It is only immoral
to be dead-alive
sun-extinct
and busy putting out the sun
in other people.

Censors

Censors are dead people
set up to judge between life and death.

For no live, sunny man would be a censor,
he'd just laugh.

But censors, being dead men,
have a stem eye on life.

— That thing's alive! It's dangerous. Make away with it! —
And when the execution is performed
you hear the stertorous, self-righteous heavy breathing of the
dead men,
the censors, breathing with relief.

Man's Image

What a pity, when a man looks at himself in a glass
he doesn't bark at himself like a dog does,
or fluff up in indignant fury, like a cat!

What a pity he sees himself so wonderful,
a little lower than the angels!
and so interesting!

Immoral Man

Man is immoral because he has got a mind
and can't get used to the fact.

The deep instincts, when left alone, are quite moral,
and clear intuition is more than moral,
it really makes us men.

Why don't we learn to tame the mind
instead of the passions and the instincts and feelings?
It is the mind which is uncouth and overweening
and ruins our complex harmony.

Cowards

In all creation, only man cowers and is afraid of life.
Only man is terrified of his own possible splendour and delight.
Only is man agonised in front of the necessity to be something
 better than he is,
poor mental worm.

Though maybe the mammoth got too big in tusk and teeth,
and the extinct giant elk too big in antlers,
out of fear of the unknown enemy;
so perhaps they too died out from fear,
as man is likely to do.

Think -!

Imagine what it must have been to have existence
in the wild days when life was sliding whirlwinds, blue-hot weights,
in the days called chaos, which left us rocks, and gems!

Think that the sapphire is only alumina, like kitchen pans
crushed utterly, and breathed through and through
with fiery weight and wild life, and coming out
clear and eternally blue!

Peacock

Think how a peacock in a forest of high trees
shimmers in a stream of blueness and long-tressed magnificence!
And women even cut their shimmery hair!

Paltry-Looking People

And think how the nightingale, who is so shy,
makes of himself a belfry of throbbing sound!
While people mince mean words through their teeth.

And think how wild animals trot with splendour
till man destroys them!
how vividly they make their assertion of life!

But how paltry, mingy and dingy and squalid people look
in their rag garments scuttling through the streets,
or sitting stuck like automata in automobiles!

Tarts

I suppose tarts are called tarts because they're tart,
meaning sour, make you pull a face after.

And I suppose most girls are a bit tarty today,
so that's why so many young men have long faces.

The father eats the pear, and the son's teeth are set on edge.

Latter-Day Sinners

The worst of the younger generation, those Latter-Day sinners, is that they calmly assert: We only thrill to perversity, murder, suicide, rape — bragging a little, really, and at the same time expect to go on calmly eating good dinners for the next fifty years. They say: *Après moi le déluge!* and calmly expect that the deluge will never be turned on them, only *after* them.

*Post me, nihil!*⁶¹ - But perhaps, my dears, nihil will come along and hit you on the head.

Why should the deluge wait while these young gentry go on eating good dinners for fifty more long years?

Why should our Latter-Day sinners expect such a long smooth run for their very paltry little bit of money?

If you are expecting a Second Advent in the shape of a deluge you mustn't expect it also to wait for your convenience.

What Matters

As one of our brightest young intellectuals said to me:
It's not so much what we think,
or even what we like or dislike, or approve or disapprove that
matters so very much.

What matters is what we thrill to.
We are ultimately determined by what we thrill to.
And, of course, thrilling is like loving, you have no choice about it.

Pondering this new truth of the sensational young, I said
But what do you thrill to? Do you know?
I suppose, as a matter of fact, it's getting a little difficult,
he replied, to thrill to anything.

A thrill rather easily exhausts itself - take even the war,
and look at the sodomitical and lesbian stuff - wearing rather thin.
Beauty, of course! Beauty is still a delicious escape.

And the pure intellect gives one a last, masturbating sense of
excited freedom!
But, of course, one knows that both beauty and pure intellect are
only escapes,
mild forms of cocaine; they're not life, exactly.
No, when it comes to thrills, there are really very few.
Judging from the fiction it is possible to read, I should say rape
was rather thrilling
or being raped, either way, so long as it was consciously done,
and slightly subtle.
Yes, if it's a keen match, rape is rather thrilling.
And then perhaps murder. That is to say
quite cold-blooded, intellectual murder, with a sufficient cool
motive

and a complete absence of consequence to the murderer.

I — should say that was rather thrilling,
rather thrilling to contemplate.

After that, of course, there's suicide - certain aspects perhaps,

Yes, I should say the contemplation of clever suicide *is* rather
thrilling,
so long as the thing is done neatly, and the world is left looking
very fooled.

Quite thrilling, I should say, at least to contemplate.
For the rest - no! I should say life held very few further thrilling
possibilities.
So one of the brightest young intellectuals put it to me.
And I had to give him credit for his rather exhibitionist honesty.

And in the intervals of their thrills, I suppose
they must go on
they must go on scratching the eczema of their mental itch
with fingernails of septic criticising.

Fate and the Younger Generation

It is strange to think of the Annas, the Vronskys, the Pierres,
all the Tolstoyan lot
wiped out.

And the Alyoshas and Dmitris and Myshkins and
Stavrogins, the Dostoevsky lot
all wiped out.
And the Tchekov wimbly-wambly wet-legs all wiped out.

Gone! Dead, or wandering in exile with their feathers
plucked,
anyhow, gone from what they were, entirely.

Will the Proustian lot go next?
And then our English imitation intelligentsia?
Is it the *Quos vult perdere Deus* business?

Anyhow the Tolstoyan lot simply asked for extinction:
Eat me up, dear peasant! - So the peasant ate him.
And the Dostoevsky lot wallowed in the thought:
Let me sin my way to Jesus! So they sinned themselves off
the face of the earth.
And the Tchekov lot: I'm too weak and lovable to live! So
they went.
Now the Proustian lot: Dear darling death, let me wriggle
my way towards you
like the worm I am! So he wriggled and got there.

Finally our little lot: I don't want to die, but by Jingo if I do!
— Well, it won't matter so very much, either!

As for Me, I'm a Patriot

Whatever else they say of me
they'll never be able to say
I was one of the little blighters
who so brilliantly betray
the tough old England that made us
and in them is rotting away.

I'd betray the middle classes
and money and industry
and the intellectual asses
and cash Christianity.

but not the England that made me
the stuff of a man,
the old England that doesn't upbraid me,
nor put me under a ban.

The Rose of England

Oh the rose of England is a single rose
and damasked red and white!

But roses, if they're fed too much,
change from being single and become gradually double,
and that's what's happened to the English rose.

The wild rose in a sheltered garden
when it need struggle no more
softly blows out its thin little male stamens
into broad sweet petals,
and through the centuries goes on and on
puffing its little male stamens out into sterile petal flames
till at last it's a full, full rose, and has no male dust any more,
it propagates no more.

So it is with Englishmen.
They are all double roses
and their true maleness is gone.
Oh the rose of England is a single rose
and needs to be raised from seed.

England in 1929

England was always a country of men
and had a brave destiny, even when she went wrong.

Now it's a country of frightened old mongrels
snapping out of fear,
and young wash-outs pretending to be in love with death
yet living on the fat of the land;

so, of course, the nation is swollen with insoluble problems
and like to become incurably diseased inside.

Liberty's Old Story

Men fight for liberty, and win it with hard knocks.
Their children, brought up easy, let it slip away again, poor fools.
And their grandchildren are once more slaves.

New Brooms

New brooms sweep clean
but they often raise such a dust in the sweeping
that they choke the sweeper.

Police Spies

Start a system of official spying
and you've introduced anarchy into your country.

Now It's Happened

One cannot now help thinking
how much better it would have been
If Vronsky and Anna Karenin
had stood up for themselves, and seen
Russia across her crisis,
instead of leaving it to Lenin.

The big, flamboyant Russia
might have been saved, if a pair
of rebels like Anna and Vronsky
had blasted the sickly air
of Dostoevsky and Tchekov,
and spy-government everywhere.

But Tolstoi was a traitor
to the Russia that needed him most,
the clumsy, bewildered Russia
so worried by the Holy Ghost.
He shifted his job on to the peasants
and landed them all on toast.

Dostoevsky, the Judas,
with his sham Christianity
epileptically ruined
the last bit of sanity
left in the hefty bodies
of the Russian nobility.

So our goody-good men betray us
and our sainty-saints let us down,
and a sickly people will slay us
if we touch the sob-stuff crown

of such martyrs; while Marxian tenets
naturally take hold of the town.

Too much of the humble Willy wet-leg
and the holy can't-help-it touch,
till you've ruined a nation's fibre
and they loathe all feeling as such,
and want to be cold and devilish hard
like machines - and you can't wonder much —

Energetic Women

Why are women so energetic?
prancing their knees under their tiny skirts
like war-horses; or war-ponies at least?

Why are they so centrifugal?
Why are they so bursting, flinging themselves about?
Why, as they grow older, do they suffer from blood pressure?

Why are they never happy to be still?
Why did they cut off their long hair
which they could comb by the hour in luxurious quiet?

I suppose when the men all started being Willy wet-legs
they felt it was no longer any use being a linger-longer Lucy.

Film Passion

If all those females who so passionately loved
the film face of Rudolf Valentino
had had to take him for one night only, in the flesh,
how they'd have hated him!

Hated him just because he was a man
and flesh of a man.
For the luscious filmy imagination loathes the male substance
with deadly loathing.

All the women who adored the shadow of the man on the
screen
helped to kill him in the flesh.
Such adoration pierces the loins and perishes the man
worse than the evil eye.

Female Coercion

If men only fought outwards into the world
women might be devoted and gentle.
The fight's got to go in some direction.

But when men turn Willy wet-legs
women start in to make changes;
only instead of changing things that might be changed
they want to change the man himself
and turn the poor silk glove into a lusty sow's ear.

And the poor Willy wet-legs, the soft silk gloves,
how they hate the women's efforts to turn them
into sow's ears!

The modem Circe-dom!

Volcanic Venus

What has happened in the world?
the women are like little volcanoes
all more or less in eruption.

It is very unnerving, moving in a world of smouldering volcanoes.
It is rather agitating, sleeping with a little Vesuvius.
And exhausting, penetrating the lava-crater of a tiny Ixtaccihuatl
and never knowing when you'll provoke an earthquake.

What Does She Want?

What does she want, volcanic Venus, as she goes fuming round?
What does she want?
She says she wants a lover, but don't you believe her.
She's seething like a volcano, and volcanoes don't want lovers.

Besides, she's had twenty lovers, only to find she didn't really
want them.

So why should I, or you, be the twenty-first?
How are we going to appease her, maiden and mother
now a volcano of rage?
I tell you, the penis won't do it.
She bites him in the neck and passes on.

Wonderful Spiritual Women

The wonderful thoughtful women who make such good
companions to a man are only sitting tight on the craters of their volcano
and spreading their skirts.

Or like the woman who sat down on a sleeping mastodon
thinking he was a little hill, and she murmured such beautiful
things
the men stood around like crocuses agape in the sun.

Then suddenly the mastodon rose with the wonderful lady
and trampled all the listeners to a smush.

Poor Bit of a Wench!

Will no one say hush! to thee
poor lass, poor bit of a wench?
Will never a man say: Come, my pigeon,
come an' be still wi' me, my own bit of a wench!

And would you peck out his eyes if he did?

What Ails Thee?

What ails thee then, woman, what ails thee?
doesn't ter know?
If tha canna say't, come then an' scaight it out on my bosom!
Eh - Men doesna ha'e bosoms?'appen not, on'y tha knows what
I mean.
Come then, tha can scaight it out on my shirt-front
an' tha'lt feel better.

- in the first place, I don't scaight.
And if I did, I certainly couldn't *scaight it out*.
And if I could, the last place I should choose
would be your shirt-front
or your manly bosom either.
So leave off trying putting the Robbie Bums touch over me
and kindly hand me the cigarettes
if you haven't smoked them all,
which you're much more likely to do
than to shelter anybody from the cau-auld blast.

It's No Good!

It's no good, the women are in eruption
and those that have been good so far
now begin to steam ominously,
and if they're over forty-five, hurl great stones into the air
which are very likely to hit you on the head as you sit
on the very slopes of the matrimonial mountain
where you've sat peacefully all these years.

Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord,
but the women are my favourite vessels of wrath.

Don't Look at Me!

My dears, don't look at me, I am merely terrified of you.
I don't know what you want, but I certainly haven't got it to
give you.

No, my poor little penis would be of no use to you
dear ladies, none whatsoever.
It's something else you are after, if you could but formulate it.

As for bearing my children - why there
I wouldn't insult you with the suggestion.

The son of man goes forth to war
no more, he sends his daughter
collecting foreskins.

But I consider I was sufficiently circumcised long ago.

My dears, if you want the skies to fall
they are established on the many pillars of the phallus,
so perhaps you'll do it.

Ships in Bottles

O — ship in a bottle
with masts erect and spars all set and sails spread
how you remind me of my London friends,
O — ships in bottles!

Little fleets
that put to sea on certain evenings,
frigates, barks and pinnaces, yawls
all beautifully rigged and bottled up
that put to sea and sink Armadas
in a pub parlour, in literary London, on certain evenings.

O — small flotilla of sorry souls
sail on, over perilous seas of thought,
cast your little anchors in ports of eternity,
then weigh, and out to the infinities,
skirting the poles of being and of not-being.

Ah, in that parlour of the London pub
what dangers, ah, what dangers!
Caught between great icebergs of doubt
they are all but crushed
little ships.

Nipped upon the frozen floods of philosophic despair
high and dry.
Reeling in the black end of all beliefs
they sink.

Yet there they are, there they are,

little ships
safe inside their bottles!

Whelmed in profundities of profound conversation,
lost between great waves of ultimate ideas
they are - why there they are,
safe inside their bottles!
Safer than in the arms of Jesus!
Oh, safer than anything else is a well-corked, glassy ego,
and sounder than all insurance is a shiny mental conceit!

Sail, little ships in your glass bottles,
safe from every contact,
safe from all experience,
safe, above all, from life!

And let the nodding tempests of verbosity
weekly or twice-weekly whistle round your bottles.
Spread your small sails immune, little ships!
The storm is words, the bottles never break.

Know Thyself, and That Thou Art Mortal

If you want to know yourself
you've got to keep up with yourself.
Your self moves on, and is not today what it was yesterday;
and you've got to run, to keep up with it.

But sometimes we run ahead too fast
running after a figment of ourselves.
And that's what we've done today.

We think we're such clever little johnnies
with our sharp little eyes and our high-power machines
which get us ahead so much faster than our feet could ever carry us.

When, alas, it's only part of our clever little self that gets ahead!
Something is left behind, lost and howling, and we know it.

Ah, clever Odysseus, who outwitted the cyclop
and blinded him in his one big eye,
put out a light of consciousness and left a blinded brute.

Clever little ants in spectacles, we are,
performing our antics.

But what we also are, and we need to know it,
is blinded brutes of cyclops, with our cyclopean eye put out.

And we still bleed, and we grope and roar;
for spectacles and bulging clever ant-eyes are no good to the cyclop,
he wants his one great wondering eye, the eye of instinct and intuition.

As little social ants perhaps we function all right.
But, oh, our human lives, the lunging blind cyclops we are!
hitting ourselves against unseen rock, crashing our head against the
roof
of the ancient cave, smashing into one another,
tearing each other's feelings, trampling each other's tenderest

emotions to mud
and never knowing what we are doing, roaring blind with pain and
dismay.
Ah, cyclops, the little ant-men can never enlighten you
with their bulging policeman's-lamp eyes.
You need your own great wondering eye that flashes with instinct
and gleams on the world with the warm dark vision of intuition!

Even our brilliantest young intellectuals
are also poor blind cyclops, moaning
with all the hurt to their instinctive and emotional selves,
over their mutilated intuitive eye.

What is Man Without an Income?

What is man without an income?

— Well, let him get on the dole!

Dole, dole, dole,
hole, hole, hole,
soul, soul, soul —

What is man without an income?

Answer without a rigmarole.

On the dole, dole, dole,
he's a hole, hole, hole,
in the nation's pocket.

— Now then, you leave a man's misfortunes alone!

He's got a soul, soul, soul
but the coal, coal, coal
on the whole, whole, whole
doesn't pay,
so the dole, dole, dole's
the only way.

And on the dole, dole, dole,
a man's a hole, hole, hole
in the nation's pocket,
and his soul, soul, soul
won't stop a hole, hole, hole
though his ashes might.

Immortal Caesar dead and turned to clay

would stop a hole to keep the wind away.

But a man without a job
isn't even as good as a gob
of clay.

Body and soul
he's just a hole
down which the nation's resources roll
away.

Canvassing for the Election

— Excuse me, but are you a superior person?

— I beg your pardon?

— Oh, I'm sure you'll understand. We're making a census of all the really patriotic people - the right sort of people, you know - of course, you understand what I mean - so *would* you mind giving me your word? — and signing here, please - that you *are* a superior person - that's all we need to know —

— Really, I don't know what you take me for!

— Yes, I know! It's too bad! Of course, it's perfectly superfluous to ask, but the League insists. Thank you so much! No, sign here, please, and there I countersign. That's right! Yes, that's all! - I *declare I am a superior person*. - Yes, exactly! and here I countersign your declaration. It's so simple, and really, it's *all* we need to know about anybody. And do you know, I've never been denied a signature! We English *are* a solid people, after all. This proves it. Quite! Thank you so much! We're getting on simply splendidly - and it *is* a comfort, isn't it? —

Altercation

Now, look here,
if you were really superior,
really superior,
you'd have money, and you know it!

Well, what abaht it?

What about it?
what about it?
why isn't it obvious?
Here you are, with no money,
and here am I, paying income tax and god-knows-what
taxes
just to support you and find you money,
and you stand there and expect me to treat you like an
equal! —
Whereas, let me tell you, if you *were* my equal
you'd *have* money, you'd *have* it, enough to support your
self, anyhow —
And there you stand with *nothing*, and expect me to hand
it you out
as if it were your dues, and I didn't count at all —

All right, guv'nor! What abaht it?

Do you mean to say what about it?
My God, it takes some beating!
If you were a *man*, and up to my mark, you'd *have* money
— can't you see it?
You're my inferior, that's what you are, you're my inferior.
And do you think it's my business to be handing out

money to a lot of inferior swipe?

Eh? Answer me that!
Right ch' are, boss! An' what abaht it?
Finding Your Level
Down, down, down!
There must be a nadir somewhere
of superiority.

Down, and still
the superior persons, though somewhat inferior,
are still superior.

They are still superior, so there must be something they are
superior to.
There must be a bed-rock somewhere, of people who are not
superior,
one must come down to *terra firma* somewhere!

Or must one simply say:
All my inferiors are very superior.

There has been great progress
in superiority.

Fortunately though, some superior persons are still superior
to the quite superior persons who are not so superior as they are.

May I ask if you are *really* superior
or if you only look it so wonderfully?
Because we English *do* appreciate a *real* gentleman, or a *real* lady;
but appearances *are* deceptive nowadays, aren't they?

And if you only *look* so distinguished and superior
when really you are slightly inferior,
like a shop-lady or a lady-secretary,

you mustn't expect, my dear, to get away with it.
There's a list kept of the truly superior
and if you're not on the list, why there you are, my dear,
you're off it.

There are great numbers of quite superior persons who are not on
the list,
poor things - but we can't help that, can we!
We must draw a line somewhere
or we should never know when we were crossing the equator.
*What is man, that thou art mindful of him,
or the son of man, that thou pitiest him?
for thou hast made him a little lower than the angels
who are very superior people,
Oh very!*

Climbing Up

When you climb up to the middle classes
you leave a lot behind you,
you leave a lot, you've lost a lot
and you've nobody to remind you
of all the things they squeezed out of you
when they took you and refined you.

When they took you and refined you
they squeezed out most of your guts;
they took away your good old stones
and gave you a couple of nuts;
and they taught you to speak King's English
and butter your slippery butts.

Oh, you've got to be like a monkey
if you climb up the tree!
You've no more use for the solid earth
and the lad you used to be.
You sit in the boughs and gibber
with superiority.

They all gibber and gibber and chatter,
and never a word they say
comes really out of their guts, lad,
they make it up halfway;
they make it up, and it's always the same,
if it's serious or if it's play.

You think they're the same as you are
and then you'll find they're not,
and they never were nor would be,
not one of the whole job lot.

And you have to act up like they do
or they think you're off your dot.

There isn't a man among'em,
not one; they all seemed to me
like monkeys or angels or something, in a limited
liability company;
like a limited liability company
they are, all limited liability.

What they're limited to or liable
to, I could never make out.
But they're all alike, an' it makes you
want to get up an' shout
an' blast'em forever; but they'd only
think you a lower-class lout.

I tell you, something's been done to'em,
to the pullets up above;
there's not a cock bird among'em
though they're always on about love,
an' you could no more get'em a move on,
no! no matter how you may shove!

To Clarinda

Thank you, dear Clarinda,
for helping with Lady C,
It was you who gave her her first kiss
and told her not to be
afraid of the world, but to sally forth
and trip it for all she was worth.

So out she came, and she said she was Jane,
and you clapped your hands, and said: Say it again!
And you cried: 'Ooray! Play up, John Thomas!
Let's have no full stops, let's just manage with commas! —

And the white snow glistened, the white world was gay
up there at that height in the Diablerets.
And we slid, and you ski'd, and we came in to tea
and we talked and we roared and you typed Lady C.

And how jolly it was with us up in the snow
with the crest of the dirty drab world down below!

And how bitter it is to come down
to the dirty drab world,
and slowly feel yourself drown
in its mud, and its talk, slowly swirled
to the depths, to the depths
of London town!

Conundrums

Tell me a word
that you've often heard,
yet it makes you squint
if you see it in print!

Tell me a thing
that you've often seen,
yet if put in a book
it makes you turn green!

Tell me a thing
that you often do,
which described in a story
shocks you through and through!

Tell me what's wrong
with words or with you
that you don't mind the thing
yet the name is taboo.

A Rise in the World

I rose up in the world, 'Ooray!
rose very high, for me.
An earl once asked me down to stay
and a duchess once came to tea.

I didn't stay very long with the earl
and the duchess has done with me.
But still, I rose quite high in the world,
don't you think? - or don't you agree?

But now I am slithering down again
down the trunk of the slippery tree;
I find I'd rather get back to earth,
where I belong, you see.

Up there I didn't like it,
chattering, though not with glee,
the whole of the time, and nothing
mattering - at least, not to me.

God, let me get down to earth again
away from the upper ten
million - for there's millions of 'em
up there - but not any men.

Up He Goes!

Up I rose, my lads, an' I heard yer
sayin': Up he goes!

Up like a bloomin' little Excelsior
In his Sunday clothes!

Up he goes, up the bloomin' ladder
about to the giddy top!
Who'd ever have thought it of that lad, a
pasty little snot! —
Never you mind, my lads, I left you
a long, long way behind.
You'll none of you rise in the world like I did;
an' if you did, you'd find

it damn well wasn't worth it,
goin' up an' bein' refined;
it was nowt but a dirty sell, that's all,
a *damn fraud*, underlined.

They're not any better than we are
the upper classes - they're worse.
Such bloomin' fat-arsed dool-owls,
they aren't even fit to curse!

There isn't a damn thing in'em,
they're as empty as empty tins;
they haven't the spunk of a battle-twig,
an' all they can think of is sins.

No, there's nowt in the upper classes

as far as I can find;
a worse lot of jujubey asses
than the lot I left behind.

They'll never do a thing, boys,
they can't, they're simply fused.
So if any of you's live wires, with wits
to use, they'd better be used.

It there's anything got to be done, why
get up an' do it yourselves!
Though God knows if you're any better,
sittin' there in rows on your shelves!

An' if you're not any better,
if you've none of you got more spunk
than they've got in the upper classes,
why, let's all do a bunk.
We're not fit for the earth we live on,
we're not fit for the air we breathe.
We'd better get out, an' make way for
the babes just beginning to teethe.

The Saddest Day

'We climbed the steep ascent to heaven
Through peril, toil and pain.
O — God, to us may strength be given
to scramble back again.'

O — I was bom low and inferior
but shining up beyond
I saw the whole superior
world shine as the promised land.

So up I started climbing
to join the host on high,
but when at last I got there
I had to sit down and cry.

For it wasn't a bit superior,
it was only affected and mean;
though the house had a fine interior
the people were never in.

I mean, they were never entirely
there when you talked to them;
away in some private cupboard
some small voice went: *Ahem!*

Ahem! they went. *This fellow
is a little too open for me;
with such people one has to be careful,
though, of course, we won't let him see! —*

And they thought you couldn't hear them
privately coughing: *Ahem!*

And they thought you couldn't see them
cautiously swallowing their phlegm!
But of course I always heard them,
and every time the same.
They all of them always kept up their sleeve
their class-superior claim.

Some narrow-gutted superiority,
and trying to make you agree,
which, for myself, I couldn't,
it was all cat-piss to me.

And so there came the saddest day
when I had to tell myself plain;
the upper classes are just a fraud,
you'd better get down again.

Prestige

I never met a single
middle-class person whose
nerves didn't tighten against me
as if they'd got something to lose.

Though what it was, you can ask me;
some mysterious sort of prestige
that was nothing to me; though they always
seemed to think I was laying it siege.

It was something I never could fathom,
that mysterious prestige which they all
seemed to think they'd got, like a halo
around them, an invisible wall.

If *you* were willing to see it
they were only too eager to grant
you a similar glory, since you'd risen
to their levels, my holy aunt!

But never, no never, could I see it,
and so I could never feel
the proper unctious about it,
and it worried me a good deal.
For years and years it bothered me
that I couldn't feel one of them,
till at last I saw the reason:
they were just a bloody sham.

As far as any superiority

or halo or prestige went
they were just a bloody collective fraud,
that was what their *ahem!* meant.

Their superiority was meanness,
they were cunning about the goods
and sly with a lot of after-thought,
and they put it over us, the duds!

And I'd let myself be swindled,
half believing'em, till one day
I suddenly said: I've finished!
My God, let me get away!

Have Done with It

Once and for all, have done with it,
all the silly bunk
of upper-class superiority; that superior
stuff is just holy skunk.

Just you walk around them
and look at the fat-arsed lot
and tell me how they can put it across,
this superior rot!

All these gracious ladies,
graciously bowing down
from their pedestals! Holy Moses,
they've done you brown!

And all the sacred gentry,
so responsible and good,
feeling so *kind* towards you
and suckin' your blood!
My! the bloomin' pompoms!
Even as trimmings they're stale.
Still, if you don't want to bother,
I don't care myself a whale.

Henriette

O — Henriette
I remember yet
how cross you were
over Lady C,
how you hated her
and detested me.

Yet now you see
you don't mind a bit.
You've got used to it,
and you feel more free.

And now you know
how good we were
up there in the snow
with Lady C,
though you hated her
at the first go.

Yet now you can see
how she set us free
to laugh, and to be
more spontaneous, and we
were happy, weren't we,
up there in the snow
with the world below!

So now, when you say
your prayers at night
you must sometimes pray:

Dear Lord of delight,
may I be Jane
tonight, profane
but sweet in your sight,
though last night I was Mary —

You said I might,
dear Lord of right,
be so contrary.
So may I be Jane
tonight and refrain
from being Mary? —

Vitality

Alas, my poor young men,
do you lack vitality?

Has the shell grown too heavy for the tortoise?
Does he just squirm?

Is the frame of things too heavy
for poor young wretched men?

Do they jazz and jump and wriggle
and rush about in machines
and listen to bodiless noises
and cling to their thin young women
as to the last straw

just in desperation,
because their spirit can't move?
Because their hope is pinned down by the system
and can't even flutter?

Well, well-, if it is so it is so;
but remember, the undaunted gods
give vitality still to the dauntless.

And sometimes they give it as love,
ah love, sweet love, not so easy!
But sometimes they give it as lightning.

And it's no good wailing for love
if they only offer you lightning.

And it's no good mooning for sloppy ease
when they're holding out the thunderbolt
for you to take.

You might as well take the lightning
for once, and feel it go through you.
You might as well accept the thunderbolt
and prepare for storms.

You'll not get vitality any other way.

Willy Wet-Legs

I can't stand Willy wet-leg,
can't stand him at any price.
He's resigned, and when you hit him
he lets you hit him twice.

Maybe

Ah well, ah well, maybe
the young have learned some sense.
They ought at last to see through the game,
they've sat long enough on the fence.

Maybe their little bottoms
will get tired and sore at last
of sitting there on the fence, and letting
their good youth go to waste.

Maybe a sense of destiny
will rise in them one day,
maybe they'll realise it's time
they slipped into the fray.

Maybe they're getting tired
of sitting on the fence;
it dawns on them that the whole damn swindle
is played at their expense.

Stand Up!

Stand up, but not for Jesus!
It's a little late for that.
Stand up for justice and a jolly life,
I'll hold your hat.

Stand up, stand up for justice,
ye swindled little blokes!
Stand up and do some punching,
give'em a few hard pokes.

Stand up for jolly justice,
you haven't got much to lose:
a job you don't like, and a scanty chance
for a dreary little booze.

Stand up for something different,
and have a little fun
fighting for something worth fighting for
before you've done.

Stand up for a new arrangement,
for a chance of life all round,
for freedom, and the fun of living
bust in, and hold the ground!

Demon Justice

If you want justice
let it be demon justice
that puts salt on the tails
of the goody good.

For the sins of omission,
for leaving things out,
not even a suspicion
of John Thomas about —
not even an inkling
that Lady Jane
is quietly twinkling
up the lane —

not even a hint
that a pretty bottom
has a gay little glint
quite apart from Sodom —

that you and I
were both begotten
when our parents felt spry
beneath the cotton —

that the face is not only
the mind's index,
but also the comely
shy flower of sex —

that a woman is always
a gate to the flood,
that a man is forever
a column of blood —

for these most vital
things omitted,
now make requital
and get acquitted.

Now bend you down
to demon justice,
and take sixty slashes
across your rusties.

Then with a sore
arse perhaps you'll remember
not quite to ignore
the jolly little member.

Be a Demon!

Oh be a demon
outside all class!
If you're a woman
or even an ass
still be a demon
beyond the mass.

Somewhere inside you
lives your own little fiend,
and woe betide you
if he feels demeaned,
better do him justice,
keep his path well cleaned.

When you've been being
too human, too long,
and your demon starts lashing out
going it strong,
don't get too frightened,
it's you who've been wrong.

You're not altogether
such a human bird,
you're as mixed as the weather,
not just a good turd,
so shut up pie-jaw blether,
let your demon be heard.

Don't look for a saviour,
you've had some, you know!
Drop your sloppy behaviour
and start in to show

your demon rump twinkling
with a hie! hop below!

If, poor little bleeder,
you still feel you must follow
some wonderful leader
now the old ones ring hollow,
then follow your demon
and hark to his *holloa!*

The Jeune Fille

Oh the innocent girl
in her maiden teens
knows perfectly well
what everything means.

If she didn't, she oughter;
it's a silly shame
to pretend that your daughter
is a blank at the game.

Anyhow she despises
your fool pretence
that she's just a sheep
and can't see through the fence.

Oh every lass
should hear all the rough words
and laugh, let them pass;
and be used to the turds

as well as the grass;
and know that she's got
in herself a small treasure
that may yet give a lot

of genuine pleasure
to a decent man;
and beware and take care
of it while she can.

If she never knows
what is her treasure,

she grows and throws
it away, and you measure

the folly of that
from her subsequent woes.
Oh the innocent maid,
when she knows what's what
from the top of her head
to the tips of her toes
is more innocent far
than the blank-it-out girl

who gets into the car
and just fills you with hell.

Trust

Oh we've got to trust
one another again
in some essentials.

Not the narrow little
bargaining trust
that says: I'm for you
if you'll be for me.

But a bigger trust,
a trust of the sun
that does not bother
about moth and rust,
and we see it shining
in one another.

Oh don't you trust me,
don't burden me
with your life and affairs; don't thrust me
into your cares.

But I think you may trust
the sun in me
that glows with just
as much glow as you see
in me, and no more.

But if it warms
your heart's quick core
why then trust it, it forms
one faithfulness more.

And be, oh be
a sun to me,
not a weary, insistent
personality

but a sun that shines
and goes dark, but shines
again and entwines
with the sunshine in me

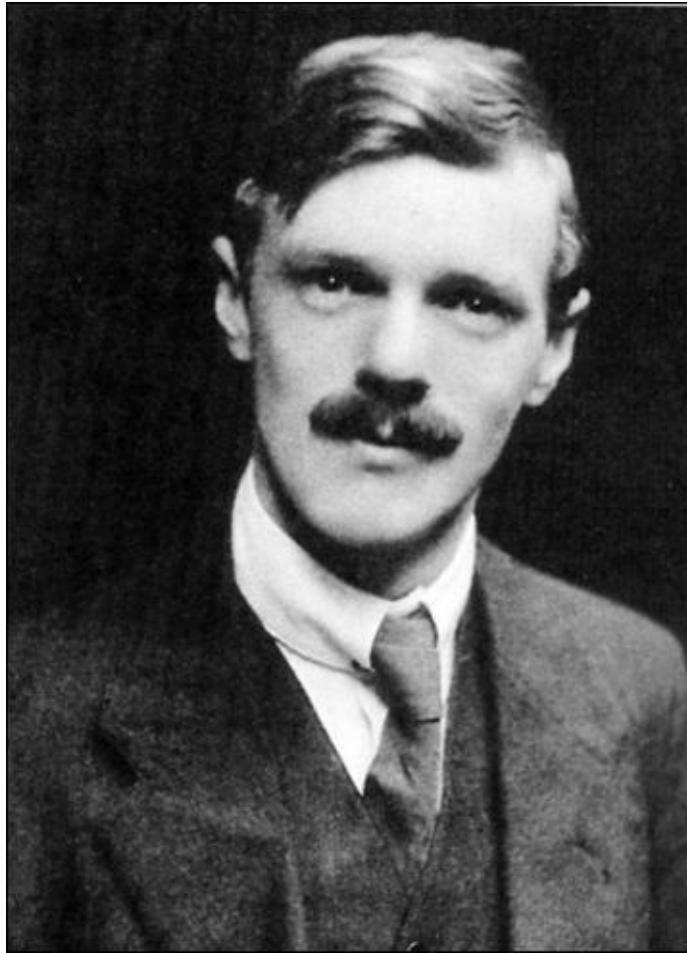
till we both of us
are more glorious
and more sunny.

NETTLES



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Lawrence, c. 1920

A Rose is not a Cabbage

And still, in spite of all they do, I love the rose of England,
but the cabbages of England leave me cold.

Oh the cabbages of England leave me cold
even though they grow on genuine English mould,
with their caterpillars, and the care with which they fold
nothingness, pale nothingness in their hearts.

Now that the winter of our discontent
is settled on the land, roses are scarce in England, very scarce,
there are none any more.

But look at the cabbages, Oh count them by the score!
Oh aren't they green. Oh haven't we, haven't we spent
a lot of money rearing them -!

Yet the cabbages of England leave me cold
no matter of what sort the cabbage be.

The Man in the Street

I met him in the street
I said: How do you do? —
He said: And who are you
when we meet? —

I sadly went my way
feeling anything but gay,
yet once more I met a man and had to stay —
May I greet — ?

He cut me very dead,
but then he turned and said:
I see you're off your head
thus to greet
in the street
a member of the British Public: don't you see
the policeman on his beat?
Well, he's there protecting me! —

But! said I,
but why — ?

And they ran me in, to teach me why.

Britannia's Baby

Oh Britannia's got a baby, a baby, a baby,
Britannia's got a baby, and she got it by and by.

It's called the British Public, the Public, the Public,
It's called the British Public, including you and I.

It's such a bonny baby, a baby, a baby,
It's such a bonny baby, we daren't let it cry.

So we've got a lot of nurses, of nurses, of nurses,
to feed the bonny baby, and keep its tara dry.

Eat your pap, little man, like a man!
Drink its minky-winky, then, like a man!

Does it want to go to bye-bye! there then, take its little dummy,
take its dummy, go to bye-bye like a man, little man!

Drop of whiskey in its minky? well it shall, yes it shall
if it's good, if it's going to be a *good* little man.
Want to go a little tattah? so it shall, of course it shall
go a banging little tattah with its Auntie
if it's good!
If it's good today, and tomorrow-day as well,
then when Sunday comes, it shall go a tattah with its Auntie
in a motor, in a pap-pap pap-pap motor, little man!
Oh isn't it a lucky little man!
to have whiskey in its minky
and to go a banging tattah with its Auntie
who loves her little man,

such a dear, kind Auntie, isn't she, to a lucky little man -!

For Oh, the British Public, the Public, the Public,
For Oh, the British Public is a lucky little man!

Change of Government

We've got a change of government
if you know what I mean.
Auntie Maud has come to keep house
instead of Aunt Gwendoline.

They say that Auntie Maud, you know,
is rather common; she's not
so well brought up as Aunt Gwendoline is,
so perhaps she'll be more on the spot.

That's what we hope: we hope she'll be
a better manager; for Oh dear me
Aunt Gwen was a poor one! but Aunt Maud, you see,
was brought up poor, so she'll *have* to be

more careful. Though if she's not
won't it be awful! what shall we do?
Aunt Libby's really a feeble lot,
and I simply daren't think of Aunt Lou!

I've never seen her, but they say
she's a holy terror: she takes your best frock
and *all* your best things, and just gives them away
to the char, who's as good as you are, any day.

And she makes you go to work, even if
you've got money of your own.
And she shuts you in the cellar for the least little tiff,
and just loves to hear you sob and groan.

Oh I do hope Aunt Maud will manage all right!

Because they say, if she doesn't
Aunt Louie is almost bound to come
with all our horrible cousins

that we've never seen, coming stamping and swearing
and painting the woodwork red
just to show how dangerous they are!
Oh, Aunt Louie's the one *I* dread.

The British Workman and the Government

Hold my hand, Auntie, Auntie,
Auntie, hold my hand!
I feel I'm going to be naughty, Auntie
and you don't seem to understand.

Hold my hand and love me, Auntie,
love your little boy!
We want to be loved, especially, Auntie,
us whom you can't employ.

Idle we stand at the kerb-edge, Auntie,
dangling our useless hands.
But we don't mind so much if you love us, and we feel
that Auntie understands.

But wages go down, and really, Auntie,
we get a pretty thin time.
But so long as we know that Auntie loves us
we'll try to act up sublime.

Hold my hand, Auntie, Auntie,
Auntie, hold my hand!
Perhaps I'm going to be naughty, Auntie,
and you don't seem to understand.

Clydesider

If Maudie doesn't love us
then why should we be good?
Why shouldn't we steal the jam in the cupboard
and all the dainty food

as we never get a taste of! - really
it ought all to be Jock's and mine.
Maudie is nought but the housekeeper
and she kens it fine.

So if Maudie doesn't suit us
she's got to pack and go.
We're getting to be big lads now, an' soon
we can run our own show.

Flapper Vote

We voted'em in, and we'll vote'em out!
We'll show'em a thing or two, never you doubt.

Lizzie and Lucy and me and Flossie
we'll show these old uncles who's going to be bossy!

Now then, Prime Minister, hold on a bit!
Remember who voted you into your seat!

But for Lizzie and Lucy and Flossie and me
you all of you know where you'd jolly well be.

But me and Lucy and Flossie and Lizzie
we thought we'd elect you to keep you all busy.

So be a nice uncle, be good to us girls;
just vote us some pin-money, to encourage our curls!

And Lizzie and me and Flossie and Lucy,
we'll back you up, uncle! We're young, and we're juicy! —

Songs I Learnt at School

I — NEPTUNE'S LITTLE AFFAIR WITH FREEDOM

Father Neptune one day to Freedom did say:
If ever I lived upon dry-y land,
The spot I should hit on would be little Britain —
Said Freedom: Why that's my own I-land! —

*'Oh what a bright little I-land!
A right little, tight little I-land!
Seek all the world round there's none can be found
So happy as our little I-land!'*

So Father Neptune walked up the shore
bright and naked aft and fore
as he's always been, since the Flood and before.

And instantly rose a great uproar
of Freedom shrieking till her throat was sore:
Arrest him, he's indecent, he's obscene what's more! —

Policemen and the British nation
threw themselves on him in indignation
with handcuffs, and took him to the police-station.

The sea-god said, in consternation:
But I came at Freedom's invitation! —
So then they charged him with defamation.

And all the sea-nymphs out at sea
rocked on the waves and sang lustily
thinking old Neptune was off on a spree

with giddy Freedom in the land of the Free:

*'Oh what a bright little I-land!
A right little, tight little I-land! -'*
II — MY NATIVE LAND

First verse:

Of every land or east or west
I — love my native land the best, *etc. etc.*

Second verse:

Of every tongue or east or west
I — love my native tongue the best
Though not so smoothly spoken
Nor woven with Italian art
Yet when it speaks from heart to heart
The spell is never broken
The-e spell is-s never bro-o-ken!

Oh a man may travel both east and west
and still speak his native language the best.

But don't try it on, Oh never start
this business of speaking from heart to heart
in mother English, or you're in the cart.

For our honest and healthy English tongue
is apt to prove a great deal too strong

for our dainty, our delicate English ears.
Oh touch the harp, touch the harp gently, my dears!
We English are so sensitive, much more than appears. —

Oh don't for an instant ever dream
of speaking plain English to an Englishman; you'll seem

to him worse than a bolshevist Jew, or an utter
outsider sprung up from some horrible gutter.

Oh mince your words, and mince them well
if you don't want to break the sweet English spell.

For we English are really a race apart,
superior to everyone else: so don't start

being crude and straightforward, you'll only prove
you're a rank outsider of the fifth remove.

III — THE BRITISH BOY

First verse:

Oh I'm a British bo-oy, Sir,
A joy to-o tell it you.
God make me of it worthy
Life's toilsome journey through!
And when to man's estate I grow
My British blood the world shall know,
For I'm a British bo-oy, Sir,
A joy to-o tell it you! —

And so to man's estate he grew
and his British blood the world it knew.

And the world it didn't give a hoot
if his blood was British or Timbuctoot.

But with that British blood of his
he painted some pictures, real beauties

he thought them, so he sent them home

to Britain, where his blood came from.

But Britannia turned pale, and began to faint.
— Destroy, she moaned, these horrors in paint! —

He answered: Dear Britannia, why?
I'm your British boy, and I did but try -!

If my pictures are nude, so once were you,
and you will be again, therefore why look blue! —

Britannia hid behind her shield
lest her heel of Achilles should be revealed,

and she said: Don't dare, you wretch, to be lewd!
I never was nor will be nude! —

And she jabbed her British trident clean
through the poor boy's pictures: You see what I mean! —
But the British boy he turned and fled
for the trident was levelled at his head.

Henceforth he'll keep clear of her toasting-fork.
Pleasing Britannia is no light work.

13,000 People

Thirteen thousand people came to see
my pictures, eager as the honey bee

for the flowers; and I'll tell you what —
all eyes sought the same old spot

in every picture, every time,
and gazed and gloated without rhyme

or reason, where the leaf should be,
the fig-leaf that was not, woe is me!

And they blushed, they giggled, they sniggered, they leered,
or they boiled and they fumed, in fury they sneered

and said: Oh boy! I tell you what,
look at that one there, that's pretty hot! —

And they stared and they stared, the half-witted lot,
at the spot where the fig-leaf just was not!

But why, I ask you? Oh tell me why?
Aren't they made quite the same, then, as you and I?

Can it be they've been trimmed, so they've never seen
the innocent member that a fig-leaf will screen?

What's the matter with them? aren't they women and men?
or is something missing? or what's wrong with them then?

that they stared and leered at the single spot
where a fig-leaf might have been, and was not.

I — thought it was a commonplace
that a man or a woman in a state of grace,

in puris naturalibus,⁷⁰ don't you see,
had normal pudenda, like you and me.

But it can't be so, for they behaved
like lunatics looking, they bubbled and raved
or gloated or peeped at the simple spot
where a fig-leaf might have been, but was not.

I — tell you, there must be something wrong
with my fellow-countrymen; or else I don't belong.

Innocent England

Oh what a pity, Oh! don't you agree,
that figs aren't found in the land of the free!

Fig trees don't grow in my native land;
there's never a fig-leaf near at hand

when you want one; so I did without;
and that is what the row's about.

Virginal, pure policemen came
and hid their faces for very shame

while they carried the shameless things away
to gaol, to be hid from the light of day.

And Mr Mead, that old, old lily,
said: 'Gross! coarse! hideous!' - and I, like a silly,

thought he meant the faces of the police-court officials,
and how right he was, and I signed my initials

to confirm what he said; but alas, he meant
my pictures, and on the proceedings went.

The upshot was, my pictures must bum
that English artists might finally learn

when they painted a nude, to put a *cache sexe* on,
a cache sexe, a cache sexe, or else begone!

A fig-leaf; or, if you cannot find it,

a wreath of mist, with nothing behind it.
A wreath of mist is the usual thing
in the north, to hide where the turtles sing.

Though they never sing, they never sing,
don't you dare to suggest such a thing

or Mr Mead will be after you.
— But what a pity I never knew

A wreath of English mist would do
as a cache sexe! I'd have put a whole fog.

But once and forever barks the old dog,
so my pictures are in prison, instead of in the Zoo.

Give Me a Sponge

Give me a sponge and some clear, clean water
and leave me alone awhile
with my thirteen sorry pictures that have just been rescued
from durance vile.

Leave me alone now, for my soul is burning
as it feels the slimy taint
of all those nasty police-eyes like snail-tracks smearing
the gentle souls that figure in the paint.

Ah, my nice pictures, they are fouled, they are dirtied
not by time, but by unclean breath and eyes
of all the sordid people that have stared at them uncleanly
looking dirt on them, and breathing on them lies.

Ah my nice pictures, let me sponge you very gently
to sponge away the slime
that ancient eyes have left on you, where obscene eyes have
crawled
leaving nasty films upon you every time.

Ah the clean waters of the sky, ah! can you wash
away the evil starings and the breath
of the foul ones from my pictures? Oh purify
them now from all this touch of tainted death!

Puss-Puss!

- Oh, Auntie, isn't he a beauty! And is he a gendeman or a lady?
- Neither, my dear! I had him fixed. It saves him from so many undesirable associations.

London Mercury

Oh when Mercury came to London
they 'had him fixed'.
It saves him from so many undesirable associations.

And now all the Aunties like him so much
because, you see, he is 'neither, my dear!'

My Little Critics

My little critics must all have been brought up by their Aunties
who petted them, and had them fixed
to save them from undesirable associations.

It must be so. Otherwise
the sight of an ordinary Tom wouldn't send them into such silly
hysterics,
my little critics, dear, safe little pets.

Editorial Office

Applicant for post as literary critic: Here are my credentials, Sir! —

Editor: Er - quite. But - er - biologically! Have you been fixed? —
arrangé - you understand what I mean?

Applicant: I'm afraid I don't.

Editor: (sternly) Have you been made safe for the great British
Public? Has everything objectionable been removed from you?

Applicant: In what way, quite?

Editor: By surgical operation. Did your parents have you sterilised?

Applicant: I don't think so, Sir. I'm afraid not.

Editor: Good morning! Don't trouble to call again. We have the
welfare of the British Public at heart.

The Great Newspaper Editor to his Subordinate

Mr Smith, Mr Smith,
haven't I told you to take the pith
and marrow and substance out of all
the articles passing beneath your scrawl?

And now look here what you've gone and done!
You've told them that life isn't really much fun,
when you know that they've got to think that they're happy,
as happy as happy, Oh, so happy, you sappy.

Think of the effect on Miss Harrison
when she reads that her life isn't really much fun.
She'll take off her specs, and she'll put down the paper
as if it was giving off poison vapour.

And she'll avoid it; she'll go and order
The Morning Smile, sure that it will afford her
comfort and cheer, sure that it will tell her
she's a marv'lous, delicious, high-spirited feller.

You must chop up each article, make it pappy
and easy to swallow; always tell them they're happy,
suggest that they're spicy, yet how *pure* they are,
and what a sense of true humour they've got, ha-ha!

Mr Smith, Mr Smith,
have you still to learn that pith
and marrow and substance are sure to be
indigestible to Miss Ponsonby!

Mr Smith, Mr Smith,
if you stay in my office, you've got to be kith
and kin with Miss Jupson, whose guts are narrow
and can't pass such things as substance and marrow.

Mr Smith, Mr Smith,
consider Miss Wilks, or depart forthwith.
For the British Public, once more be it said,
is summed up in a nice, narrow-gutted old maid.

Modern Prayer

Almighty Mammon, make me rich!
Make me rich quickly, with never a hitch
in my fine prosperity! Kick those in the ditch
who hinder me, Mammon, great son of a bitch!

Cry of the Masses

Give us back, Oh give us back
Our bodies before we die!

Trot, trot, trot, corpse-body, to work.
Chew, chew, chew, corpse-body, at the meal.
Sit, sit, sit, corpse-body, in the car.
Stare, stare, stare, corpse-body, at the film.
Listen, listen, listen, corpse-body, to the wireless.
Talk, talk, talk, corpse-body, newspaper talk.
Sleep, sleep, sleep, corpse-body, factory-hand sleep.
Die, die, die, corpse-body, doesn't matter!

Must we die, must we die
bodiless, as we lived?
Corpse-anatomies with ready-made sensations!
Corpse-anatomies, that can work.
Work, work, work,
rattle, rattle, rattle,
sit, sit, sit,
finished, finished, finished —

Ah no, Ah no! before we finally die
or see ourselves as we are, and go mad,
give us back our bodies, for a day, for a single day,
to stamp the earth and feel the wind, like wakeful men again.

Oh, even to know the last wild wincing of despair,
aware at last that our manhood is utterly lost,
give us back our bodies for one day.

What Have They Done to You?

What have they done to you, men of the masses
creeping back and forth to work?

What have they done to you, the saviours of the people?
Oh what have they saved you from?

Alas, they have saved you from yourself,
from your own body, saved you from living your own life.

And given you this jig-jig-jig
tick-tick-ticking of machines,
this life which is no-man's-life.

Oh a no-man's-life in a no-man's-land
this is what they've given you
in place of your own life.

The People

Ah the people, the people!
surely they are flesh of my flesh!

When, in the streets of the working quarters,
they stream past, stream past, going to work;

then, when I see the iron hooked in their faces,
their poor, their fearful faces,

then I scream in my soul, for I know I cannot
cut the iron hook out of their faces, that makes them so drawn,
nor cut the invisible wires of steel that pull them

back and forth to work,
back and forth, to work

like fearful and corpse-like fishes hooked and being played
by some malignant fisherman on an unseen, safe shore
where he does not choose to land them yet, hooked fishes of
the factory world.

The Factory Cities

Oh, over the factory cities there seems to hover a doom
so dark, so dark, the mind is lost in it.

Ah, the industrial masses, with the iron hook through their gills,
when the evil angler has played them long enough,
another little run for their money, a few more turns of the reel
fixing the hook more tightly, getting it more firmly in —

Ah, when he begins to draw the line in tight, to land his fish,
the industrial masses - Ah, what will happen, what will happen?

Hark! the strange noise of millions of fish in panic,
in panic, in rebellion, slithering millions of fish
whistling and seething and pulling the angler down into boiling
black death!

Leaves of Grass, Flowers of Grass

Leaves of grass, what about leaves of grass?
Grass blossoms, grass has flowers, flowers of grass,
dusty pollen of grass, tall grass in its midsummer maleness,
hay-seed and tiny grain of grass, graminiferae
not far from the lily, the considerable lily;

even the blue-grass blossoms;
even the bison knew it;
even the stupidest farmer gathers his hay in bloom, in blossom
just before it seeds.

Only the best matters; even the cow knows it;
grass in blossom, blossoming grass, risen to its height and its
natural pride
in its own splendour and its own feathery maleness
the grass, the grass.

Leaves of grass, what are leaves of grass, when at its best grass
blossoms?

Magnificent Democracy

Oh, when the grass flowers, the grass
how aristocratic it is!
Cock's-foot, fox-tail, fescue and tottering-grass,
see them wave, see them wave, plumes
prouder than the Black Prince,
flowers of grass, fine men.

Oh, I am a democrat
of the grass in blossom,
a blooming aristocrat all round.

LAST POEMS



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Lawrence with Willard Johnson and Witter Bynner, Santa Fe, New Mexico, 1922

THE GREEKS ARE COMING

LITTLE islands out at sea, on the horizon
keep suddenly showing a whiteness, a flash and a furl, a hail
of something coming, ships a-sail from over the rim of the sea.
And every time, it is ships, it is ships
it is ships of Cnossos coming, out of the morning and the sea,
it is Aegean ships, and men with archaic pointed beards
coming out of the Eastern end.
But it is far-off foam.

And an ocean liner, going east, like a small beetle walking the edge
is leaving a long thread of dark smoke
like a bad smell.

THE ARGONAUTS

THEY are not dead, they are not dead!
Now that the sun, like a lion, licks his paws
and goes slowly down the hill:
now that the moon, who remembers, and only cares
that we should be lovely in the flesh, with bright, crescent feet,
pauses near the crest of the hill, climbing slowly, like a queen
looking down on the lion as he retreats.

Now the sea is the Argonauts' sea, and in the dawn
Odysseus calls the commands, as he steers past those foamy islands
wait, wait, don't bring the coffee yet, nor the pain grille.
The dawn is not off the sea, and Odysseus' ships
have not yet passed the islands, I must watch them still.

MIDDLE OF THE WORLD

THIS sea will never die, neither will it ever grow old
nor cease to be blue, nor in the dawn
cease to lift up its hills
and let the slim black ship of Dionysos come sailing in
with grape-vines up the mast, and dolphins leaping.

What do I care if the smoking ships
of the P. & O. and the Orient Line and all the other stinkers
cross like clock-work the Minoan distance!

They only cross, the distance never changes.
And now that the moon who gives men glistening bodies
is in her exaltation, and can look down on the sun
I see descending from the ships at dawn
slim naked men from Gnosso, smiling the archaic smile
of those that will without fail come back again,
and kindling little fires upon the shores
and crouching, and speaking the music of lost languages.

And the Minoan Gods, and the Gods of Tiryns
are heard softly laughing and chatting, as ever;
and Dionysos, young, and a stranger
leans listening on the gate, in all respect.

FOR THE HEROES ARE DIPPED IN SCARLET

BEFORE Plato told the great lie of ideals
men slimly went like fishes, and didn't care.
They had long hair, like Samson,
and clean as arrows they sped at the mark
when the bow-cord twanged.

They knew it was no use knowing
their own nothingness:
for they were not nothing.
So now they come back! Hark!
Hark! the low and shattering laughter of bearded men
with the slim waists of warriors, and the long feet
of moon-lit dancers.

Oh, and their faces scarlet, like the dolphin's blood!
Lo! the loveliest is red all over, rippling vermilion
as he ripples upwards!
laughing in his black beard!

They are dancing! they return, as they went, dancing!
For the thing that is done without the glowing as of vermilion,
were best not done at all.
How glistening red they are!

DEMIURGE

THEY say that reality exists only in the spirit
that corporal existence is a kind of death
that pure being is bodiless
that the idea of the form precedes the form substantial.

But what nonsense it is!
as if any Mind could have imagined a lobster
dozing the under-deeps, then reaching out a savage and iron claw!

Even the mind of God can only imagine
those things that have become themselves:
bodies and presences, here and now, creatures with a foothold
in creation
even if it is only a lobster on tiptoe.

Religion knows better than philosophy
Religion knows that Jesus never was Jesus
till he was born from a womb, and ate soup and bread
and grew up, and became, in the wonder of creation, Jesus,
with a body and with needs, and a lovely spirit.

THE WORK OF CREATION

THE mystery of creation is the divine urge of creation,
but it is a great strange urge, it is not a Mind.

Even an artist knows that his work was never in his mind,
he could never have thought it before it happened.

A strange ache possessed him, and he entered the struggle,
and out of the struggle with his material, in the spell of the urge
his work took place, it came to pass, it stood up and saluted
his mind.

God is a great urge, wonderful, mysterious, magnificent
but he knows nothing beforehand.

His urge takes shape in flesh, and lo!

it is creation! God looks himself on it in wonder, for the first time.

Lo! there is a creature, formed! How strange!

Let me think about it! Let me form an idea!

RED GERANIUM AND GODLY MIGNONETTE

IMAGINE that any mind ever thought a red geranium!
As if the redness of a red geranium could be anything but a
sensual experience
and as if sensual experience could take place before there were
any senses.
We know that even God could not imagine the redness of a
red geranium
nor the smell of mignonette
when geraniums were not, and mignonette neither.
And even when they were, even God would have to have a nose
to smell at the mignonette.
You can't imagine the Holy Ghost sniffing at cherry-pie heliotrope.
Or the Most High, during the coal age, cudgelling his mighty brains
even if he had any brains: straining his mighty mind
to think, among the moss and mud of lizards and mastodons
to think out, in the abstract, when all was twilit green and muddy:
“ Now there shall be tum-tiddly-um, and tum-tiddly um,
hey-presto! scarlet geranium! “

We know it couldn't be done.
But imagine, among the mud and the mastodons
god sighing and yearning with tremendous creative yearning,
in that dark green mess
oh, for some other beauty, some other beauty
that blossomed at last, red geranium, and mignonette.

BODILESS GOD

EVERYTHING that has beauty has a body, and is a body;
everything that has being has being in the flesh:
and dreams are only drawn from the bodies that are.

And God?

Unless God has a body, how can he have a voice
and emotions, and desires, and strength, glory or honour?
For God, even the rarest God, is supposed to love us
and wish us to be this that and the other.
And he is supposed to be mighty and glorious.

THE BODY OF GOD

GOD is the great urge that has not yet found a body
but urges towards incarnation with the great creative urge.

And becomes at last a clove carnation: lo! that is god!
and becomes at last Helen, or Ninon: any lovely and generous woman
at her best and her most beautiful, being god, made manifest,
any clear and fearless man being god, very god.

There is no god
apart from poppies and the flying fish,
men singing songs, and women brushing their hair in the sun.
The lovely things are god that has come to pass, like Jesus came.
The rest, the undiscoverable, is the demiurge.

THE RAINBOW

EVEN the rainbow has a body
made of the drizzling rain
and is an architecture of glistening atoms
built up, built up
yet you can't lay your hand on it,
nay, nor even your mind.

MAXIMUS

GOD is older than the sun and moon
and the eye cannot behold him
nor voice describe him.

But a naked man, a stranger, leaned on the gate
with his cloak over his arm, waiting to be asked in.
So I called him: Come in, if you will! —
He came in slowly, and sat down by the hearth.
I said to him: And what is your name? —
He looked at me without answer, but such a loveliness
entered me, I smiled to myself, saying: He is God!
So he said: Hermes!
God is older than the sun and moon
and the eye cannot behold him
nor the voice describe him:
and still, this is the God Hermes, sitting by my hearth.

THE MAN OF TYRE

THE man of Tyre went down to the sea
pondering, for he was a Greek, that God is one and all alone
and ever more shall be so.

And a woman who had been washing clothes in the pool of rock
where a stream came down to the gravel of the sea and sank in,
who had spread white washing on the gravel banked above the bay,
who had lain her shift on the shore, on the shingle slope,
who had waded to the pale green sea of evening, out to a shoal,
pouring sea-water over herself
now turned, and came slowly back, with her back to the evening sky.

Oh lovely, lovely with the dark hair piled up, as she went deeper,
deeper down the channel, then rose shallower, shallower,
with the full thighs slowly lifting of the wader wading shore-wards
and the shoulders pallid with light from the silent sky behind
both breasts dim and mysterious, with the glamorous kindness
of twilight between them
and the dim notch of black maidenhair like an indicator,
giving a message to the man —

So in the cane-brake he clasped his hands in delight
that could only be god-given, and murmured:
Lo! God is one god! But here in the twilight
godly and lovely comes Aphrodite out of the sea
towards me!

THEY SAY THE SEA IS LOVELESS

THEY say the sea is loveless, that in the sea
love cannot live, but only bare, salt splinters
of loveless life.

But from the sea
the dolphins leap round Dionysos' ship
whose masts have purple vines,
and up they come with the purple dark of rainbows
and flip! they go! with the nose-dive of sheer delight;
and the sea is making love to Dionysos
in the bouncing of these small and happy whales.

WHALES WEEP NOT!

THEY say the sea is cold, but the sea contains
the hottest blood of all, and the wildest, the most urgent.
All the whales in the wider deeps, hot are they, as they urge
on and on, and dive beneath the icebergs.
The right whales, the sperm-whales, the hammer-heads, the killers
there they blow, there they blow, hot wild white breath out of
the sea!
And they rock, and they rock, through the sensual ageless ages
on the depths of the seven seas,
and through the salt they reel with drunk delight
and in the tropics tremble they with love
and roll with massive, strong desire, like gods.
Then the great bull lies up against his bride
in the blue deep of the sea
as mountain pressing on mountain, in the zest of life:
and out of the inward roaring of the inner red ocean of whale blood
the long tip reaches strong, intense, like the maelstrom-tip, and
comes to rest
in the clasp and the soft, wild clutch of a she-whale's fathomless body.

And over the bridge of the whale's strong phallus, linking the
wonder of whales
the burning archangels under the sea keep passing, back and forth,
keep passing archangels of bliss
from him to her, from her to him, great Cherubim
that wait on whales in mid-ocean, suspended in the waves of
the sea
great heaven of whales in the waters, old hierarchies.
And enormous mother whales lie dreaming suckling their whale —
tender young
and dreaming with strange whale eyes wide open in the waters
of the beginning and the end.

And bull-whales gather their women and whale-calves in a ring

when danger threatens, on the surface of the ceaseless flood
and range themselves like great fierce Seraphim facing the threat
encircling their huddled monsters of love,
and all this happiness in the sea, in the salt
where God is also love, but without words:
and Aphrodite is the wife of whales
most happy, happy she!
and Venus among the fishes skips and is a she-dolphin
she is the gay, delighted porpoise sporting with love and the sea
she is the female tunny-fish, round and happy among the males
and dense with happy blood, dark rainbow bliss in the sea.

INVOCATION TO THE MOON

You beauty, O you beauty
you glistening garmentless beauty!
great lady, great glorious lady
greatest of ladies
crownless and jewelless and garmentless
because naked you are more wonderful than anything we can stroke.

Be good to me, lady, great lady of the nearest
heavenly mansion, and last!
Now I am at your gate, you beauty, you lady of all nakedness!
Now I must enter your mansion, and beg your gift
Moon, O Moon, great lady of the heavenly few.

Far and forgotten is the Villa of Venus the glowing
and behind me now in the gulfs of space lies the golden house
of the sun,
and six have given me gifts, and kissed me god-speed
kisses of four great lords, beautiful, as they held me to their
bosom in farewell,
and kiss of the far-off lingering lady who looks over the distant
fence of the twilight,
and one warm kind kiss of the lion with golden paws.
Now, lady of the Moon, now open the gate of your silvery house
and let me come past the silver bells of your flowers and the cockle-shells
into your house, garmentless lady of the last great gift:
who will give me back my lost limbs
and my lost white fearless breast
and set me again on moon-remembering feet
a healed, whole man, O Moon!

Lady, lady of the last house down the long, long street of the stars
be good to me now, as I beg you, as you've always been good
to men
who begged of you and gave you homage

and watched for your glistening feet down the garden path!

BUTTERFLY

BUTTERFLY, the wind blows sea-ward, strong beyond the garden wall!

Butterfly, why do you settle on my shoe, and sip the dirt on my shoe,

Lifting your veined wings, lifting them? big white butterfly!

Already it is October, and the wind blows strong to the sea from the hills where the snow must have fallen, the wind is polished with snow.

Here in the garden, with red geraniums, it is warm, it is warm but the wind blows strong to sea-ward, white butterfly, content on my shoe!

Will you go, will you go from my warm house?

Will you climb on your big soft wings, black-dotted, as up an invisible rainbow, an arch

till the wind slides you sheer from the arch-crest

and in a strange level fluttering you go out to sea-ward, white speck!

Farewell, farewell, lost soul!

you have melted in the crystalline distance, it is enough! I saw you vanish into air.

BAVARIAN GENTIANS

NOT every man has gentians in his house
in Soft September, at slow, Sad Michaelmas.
Bavarian gentians, big and dark, only dark
darkening the day-time torch-like with the smoking blueness
of Pluto's gloom,
ribbed and torch-like, with their blaze of darkness spread blue
down flattening into points, flattened under the sweep of
white day
torch-flower of the blue-smoking darkness, Pluto's dark-blue daze,
black lamps from the halls of Dio, burning dark blue,
giving off darkness, blue darkness, as Demeter's pale lamps
give off light,
lead me then, lead me the way.

Reach me a gentian, give me a torch
let me guide myself with the blue, forked torch of this flower
down the darker and darker stairs, where blue is darkened on blueness.
even where Persephone goes, just now, from the frosted
September
to the sightless realm where darkness is awake upon the dark
and Persephone herself is but a voice
or a darkness invisible enfolded in the deeper dark
of the arms Plutonic, and pierced with the passion of dense gloom,
among the splendour of torches of darkness, shedding darkness
on the lost bride and her groom.

LUCIFER

ANGELS are bright still, though the brightest fell.
But tell me, tell me, how do you know
he lost any of his brightness in the falling?
In the dark-blue depths, under layers and layers of darkness
I see him more like the ruby, a gleam from within
of his own magnificence
coming like the ruby in the invisible dark, glowing
with his own annunciation, towards us.

THE BREATH OF LIFE

THE breath of life is in the sharp winds of change
mingled with the breath of destruction.
But if you want to breathe deep, sumptuous life
breathe all alone, in silence, in the dark,
and see nothing.

SILENCE

COME, holy Silence, come
great bride of all creation.

Come, holy Silence! reach, reach
from the presence of God, and envelop us.

Let the sea heave no more in sound,
hold the stars still, lest we hear the heavens dimly ring with
their commotion!
fold up all sounds.

Lo! the laugh of God!
Lo! the laugh of the creator!
Lo! the last of the seven great laughs of God!
Lo! the last of the seven great laughs of creation!

Huge, huge roll the peals of the thundrous laugh
huge, huger, huger and huger pealing
till they mount and fill and all is fulfilled of God's last and
greatest laugh
till all is soundless and senseless, a tremendous body of silence
enveloping even the edges of the thought-waves
enveloping even me, who hear no more,
who am embedded in a shell of silence,
of silence, lovely silence
of endless and living silence
of holy silence
the silence of the last of the seven great laughs of God.

Ah! the holy silence — it is meet!
It is very fitting! there is nought beside!
For now we are passing through the gate, stilly,
in the sacred silence of gates

in the silence of passing through doors,
in the great hush of going from this into that,
in the suspension of wholeness, in the moment of division
within the whole!

Lift up your heads, O ye Gates!
for the silence of the last great thundrous laugh
screens us purely, and we can slip through.

THE HANDS OF GOD

IT is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.
But it is a much more fearful thing to fall out of them.
Did Lucifer fall through knowledge?
oh then, pity him, pity him that plunge!

Save me, O God, from falling into the ungodly knowledge
of myself as I am without God.
Let me never know, O God
let me never know what I am or should be
when I have fallen out of your hands, the hands of the living
God.

That awful and sickening endless sinking, sinking
through the slow, corruptive levels of disintegrative knowledge
when the self has fallen from the hands of God
and sinks, seething and sinking, corrupt
and sinking still, in depth after depth of disintegrative con-sciousness
sinking in the endless undoing, the awful katabolism into the abyss!
even of the soul, fallen from the hands of God!

Save me from that, O God!
Let me never know myself apart from the living God!

PAX

ALL that matters is to be at one with the living God
to be a creature in the house of the God of Life.

Like a cat asleep on a chair
at peace, in peace
and at one with the master of the house, with the mistress,
at home, at home in the house of the living,
sleeping on the hearth, and yawning before the fire.

Sleeping on the hearth of the living world
yawning at home before the fire of life
feeling the presence of the living God
like a great reassurance
a deep calm in the heart
a presence
as of the master sitting at the board
in his own and greater being,
in the house of life.

ABYSMAL IMMORTALITY

IT is not easy to fall out of the hands of the living God
They are so large, and they cradle so much of a man.
It is a long time before a man can get himself away.
Even through the greatest blasphemies, the hands of the
living God still continue to cradle him.

And still through knowledge and will, he can break away
man can break away, and fall from the hands of God
into himself alone, down the godless plunge of the abyss,
a god-lost creature turning upon himself
in the long, long fall, revolving upon himself
in the endless writhe of the last, the last self-knowledge
which he can never reach till he touch the bottom of the abyss
which he can never touch, for the abyss is bottomless.

And there is nothing else, throughout time and eternity
but the abyss, which is bottomless,
and the fall to extinction, which can never come,
for the abyss is bottomless,
and the turning down plunge of writhing of self-knowledge, self-analysis
which goes further and further, and yet never finds an end
for there is no end,
it is the abyss of the immortality
of those that have fallen from God.

ONLY MAN

ONLY man can fall from God

Only man.

No animal, no beast nor creeping thing

no cobra nor hyaena nor scorpion nor hideous white ant

can slip entirely through the fingers of the hands of god

into the abyss of self-knowledge,

knowledge of the self-apart-from-god.

For the knowledge of the self-apart-from-God

is an abyss down which the soul can slip

writhing and twisting in all the revolutions

of the unfinished plunge

of self-awareness, now apart from God, falling

fathomless, fathomless, self-consciousness wriggling

writhing deeper and deeper in all the minutiae of self-knowledge

downwards, exhaustive,

yet never, never coming to the bottom, for there is no bottom

zigzagging down like the fizzle from a finished rocket

the frizzling falling fire that cannot go out, dropping wearily,

neither can it reach the depth

for the depth is bottomless,

so it wriggles its way even further down, further down

at last in sheer horror of not being able to leave off

knowing itself, knowing itself apart from God, falling.

RETURN OF RETURNS

GOME in a week
Yes, yes, in the seven-day-week!
for how can I count in your three times three
of the sea-blown week of nine.
Come then, as I say, in a week,
when the planets have given seven nods

“ It shall be! It shall be! “ assented seven times
by the great seven, by Helios the brightest
and by Artemis the whitest
by Hermes and Aphrodite, flashing white glittering words,
by Ares and Kronos and Zeus,
the seven great ones, who must all say yes.

When the moon from out of the darkness
has come like a thread, like a door just opening
opening, till the round white doorway of delight
is half open.

Come then!
Then, when the door is half open.
In a week!
The ancient river week, the old one.
Come then!

STOIC

GROAN then, groan.

For the sun is dead, and all that is in heaven
is the pyre of blazing gas.

And the moon that went
so queenly, shaking her glistening beams
is dead too, a dead orb wheeled once a month round the park.

And the five others, the travellers
they are all dead!

In the hearse of night you see their tarnished coffins
travelling, travelling still, still travelling
to the end, for they are not yet buried.

Groan then, groan!

Groan then, for even the maiden earth
is dead, we run wheels across her corpse.

Oh groan
groan with mighty groans!

But for all that, and all that

“ in the centre of your being, groan not.”

In the centre of your being, groan not, do not groan.

For perhaps the greatest of all illusions
is this illusion of the death of the undying.

IN THE CITIES

IN the cities
there is even no more any weather
the weather in town is always benzine, or else petrol fumes
lubricating oil, exhaust gas.

As over some dense marsh, the fumes
thicken, miasma, the fumes of the automobile
densely thicken in the cities.

In ancient Rome, down the thronged streets
no wheels might run, no insolent chariots.
Only the footsteps, footsteps
of people
and the gentle trotting of the litter-bearers.
In Minos, in Mycenae
in all the cities with lion gates
the dead threaded the air, lingering
lingering in the earth's shadow
and leaning towards the old hearth.

In London, New York, Paris
in the bursten cities
the dead tread heavily through the muddy air
through the mire of fumes
heavily, stepping weary on our hearts.

LORD'S PRAYER

FOR thine is the kingdom
the power, and the glory.
Hallowed be thy name, then
Thou who art nameless.

Give me, Oh give me
besides my daily bread
my kingdom, my power, and my glory.

All things that turn to thee
have their kingdom, their power, and their glory.
Like the kingdom of the nightingale at twilight
whose power and glory I have often heard and felt.

Like the kingdom of the fox in the dark
yapping in his power and his glory
which is death to the goose.
Like the power and the glory of the goose in the mist
hawking over the lake.

And I, a naked man, calling
calling to thee for my mana,
my kingdom, my power, and my glory.

MANA OF THE SEA

Do you see the sea, breaking itself to bits against the islands
yet remaining unbroken, the level great sea?

Have I caught from it
the tide in my arms
that runs down to the shallows of my wrists, and breaks
abroad in my hands, like waves among the rocks of substance?

Do the rollers of the sea
roll down my thighs
and over the submerged islets of my knees
with power, sea-power sea-power
to break against the ground
in the flat, recurrent breakers of my two feet?

And is my body ocean, ocean
whose power runs to the shores along my arms
and breaks in the foamy hands, whose power rolls out
to the white-treading waves of two salt feet?

I am the sea, I am the sea!

SALT

SALT is scorched water that the sun has scorched
into substance and flaky whiteness
in the eternal opposition
between the two great ones, Fire, and the Wet.

THE FOUR

To our senses, the elements are four
and have ever been, and will ever be
for they are the elements of life, of poetry, and of perception
the four Great Ones, the Four Roots, the First Four
of Fire and the Wet, Earth and the wide Air of the world.

To find the other many elements, you must go to the laboratory
and hunt them down.
But the four we have always with us, they are our world.
Or rather, they have us with them.

THE BOUNDARY STONE

So, salt is the boundary mark between Fire that burns, and the Wet.

It is the white stone of limits, the term, the landmark between the two great and moving Ones, Fire and the yielding Wet.

It is set up as a boundary, and blood and sweat are marked out with the boundary of salt, between Fire and the Wet.

SPILLING THE SALT

DON'T spill the salt, for it is the landmark,
and cursed be he that removeth his neighbour's landmark.

And the watchers, the dividers, those swift ones with dark
sharp wings
and keen eyes, they will hover, they will come between you,
between you and your purpose like a knife's edge shadow
cutting you off from your joy.
For the unseen witnesses are the angels of creation
but also the sunderers, the angels with black, sharp wing-tips.

WALK WARILY

WALK warily, walk warily, be careful what you say:
because now the Sunderers are hovering round,
the Dividers are close upon us, dogging our every breath
and watching our every step.
and beating their great wings in our panting faces.

The angels are standing back, the angels of the Kiss.
they wait, they give way now
to the Sunderers, to the swift ones
the ones with the sharp black wings
and the shudder of electric anger
and the drumming of pinions of thunder
and hands like salt
and the sudden dripping down of the knife-edge cleavage of the lightning
cleaving, cleaving.

Lo, we are in the midst of the sunderers
the cleavers, that cleave us forever apart from one another,
and separate heart from heart, and cut away all caresses
with the white triumphance of lightning and electric delight,
the Dividers, the Thunderers, the Swift Ones, blind with speed
who put salt in our mouths
and currents of excitement in our limbs
and hotness, and then more crusted brine in our hearts.

It is the day of the Sunderers
and the angels are standing back.

MYSTIC

THEY call all experience of the senses mystic, when the experience is considered.

So an apple becomes mystic when I taste in it the summer and the snows, the wild welter of earth and the insistence of the sun.

All of which things I can surely taste in a good apple.

Though some apples taste preponderantly of water, wet and sour and some of too much sun, brackish sweet like lagoon-water, that has been too much sunned.

If I say I taste these things in an apple, I am called mystic, which means a liar.

The only way to eat an apple is to hog it down like a pig and taste nothing that is real.

But if I eat an apple, I like to eat it with all my senses awake. Hogging it down like a pig I call the feeding of corpses.

ANAXAGORAS

WHEN Anaxagoras says: Even the snow is black!
he is taken by the scientists very seriously
because he is enunciating a “ principle,” a “ law “
that all things are mixed, and therefore the purest white snow
has in it an element of blackness.

That they call science, and reality.
I call it mental conceit and mystification
and nonsense, for pure snow is white to us
white and white and only white
with a lovely bloom of whiteness upon white
in which the soul delights and the senses
have an experience of bliss.

And life is for delight, and for bliss
and dread, and the dark, rolling ominousness of doom
then the bright dawning of delight again
from off the sheer white snow, or the poised moon.

And in the shadow of the sun the snow is blue, so blue-aloof
with a hint of the frozen bells of the scylla flower
but never the ghost of a glimpse of Anaxagoras' funeral black.

KISSING AND HORRID STRIFE

I HAVE been defeated and dragged down by pain
and worsted by the evil world-soul of to-day.
But still I know that life is for delight
and for bliss
as now when the tiny wavelets of the sea
tip the morning light on edge, and spill it with delight
to show how inexhaustible it is.

And life is for delight, and bliss
like now where the white sun kisses the sea
and plays with the wavelets like a panther playing with its
cuffing them with soft paws,
and blows that are caresses,
kisses of the soft-balled paws, where the talons are.

And life is for dread,
for doom that darkens, and the Sunderers
that sunder us from each other
that strip us and destroy us and break us down
as the tall fox-gloves and the mulleins and mallows
are torn down by dismembering autumn
till not a vestige is left, and bleak winter has no trace
of any such flowers;
and yet the roots below the blackness are intact:
the Thunderers and the Sunderers have their term
their limit, their thus far and no further.

Life is for kissing and for horrid strife.
Life is for the angels and the Sunderers
Life is for the daimons and the demons
those that put honey on our Hps, and those that put salt.

But life is not
for the dead vanity of knowing better, nor the blank

cold superiority, nor silly
conceit of being immune,
nor puerility of contradictions
like saying snow is black, or desire is evil.

Life is for kissing and for horrid strife,
the angels and the Sunderers.
And perhaps in unknown Death we perhaps shall know
Oneness and poised immunity.
But why then should we die while we can live?
And while we live
the kissing and communing cannot cease
nor yet the striving and the horrid strife.

WHEN SATAN FELL

WHEN Satan fell, he only fell
because the Lord Almighty rose a bit too high,
a bit beyond himself.

So Satan only fell to keep a balance.
“ Are you so lofty, O my God?
Are you so pure and lofty, up aloft?
Then I will fall, and plant the paths to hell
with vines and poppies and fig-trees
so that lost souls may eat grapes
and the moist fig
and put scarlet buds in their hair on the way to hell,
on the way to dark perdition.”

And hell and heaven are the scales of the balance of life
which swing against each other.

DOORS

BUT evil is a third thing.
No, not the ithyphallic demons
not even the double Phallus of the devil himself
with his key to the two dark doors
is evil.

Life has its palace of blue day aloft
and its halls of the great dark below,
and there are the bright doors where souls go gaily in:
and there are the dark doors where souls pass silently
holding their breath, naked and darkly alone
entering into the other communion.

There is a double sacredness of doors.
Some you may sing through, and all men hear,
but others, the dark doors, oh hush! hush!
let nobody be about! slip in! go all unseen.
But evil, evil is another thing! in another place!

EVIL IS HOMELESS

EVIL has no home,
only evil has no home,
not even the home of demoniacal hell.
Hell is the home of souls lost in darkness,
even as heaven is the home of souls lost in light.
And like Persephone, or Attis
there are souls that are at home in both homes.
Not like grey Dante, colour-blind
to the scarlet and purple flowers at the doors of hell.

But evil
evil has no dwelling-place
the grey vulture, the grey hyaena, corpse-eaters
they dwell in the outskirts of nowhere
where the grey twilight of evil sets in.

And men that sit in machines
among spinning wheels, in an apotheosis of wheels
sit in the grey mist of movement which moves not
and going which goes not
and doing which does not
and being which is not:
that is, they sit and are evil, in evil,
grey evil, which has no path, and shows neither light nor dark
and has no home, no home anywhere.

WHAT THEN IS EVIL?

OH, in the world of the flesh of man
iron gives the deadly wound
and the wheel starts the principle of all evil.
Oh, in the world of things
the wheel is the first principle of evil.
But in the world of the soul of man
there, and there alone lies the pivot of pure evil
only in the soul of man, when it pivots upon the ego.

When the mind makes a wheel which turns on the hub of the ego
and the will, the living dynamo, gives the motion and the speed
and the wheel of the conscious self spins on in absolution, absolute
absolute, absolved from the sun and the earth and the moon,
absolute consciousness, absolved from strife and kisses
absolute self-awareness, absolved from the meddling of creation
absolute freedom, absolved from the great necessities of being
then we see evil, pure evil
and we see it only in man
and in his machines.

THE EVIL WORLD-SOUL

OH, there is evil, there is an evil world-soul.
But it is the soul of man only, and his machines
which has brought to pass the fearful thing called evil,
hyaenas only hint at it.

Do not think that a machine is without a soul.
Every wheel on its hub has a soul, evil,
it is part of the evil world-soul, spinning.

And every man who has become a detached and self-activated ego
is evil, evil, part of the evil world-soul
which wishes to blaspheme the world into greyness,
into evil neutrality, into mechanism.
The Robot is the unit of evil.
And the symbol of the Robot is the wheel revolving.

THE WANDERING COSMOS

OH, do not tell me the heavens as well are a wheel.
For every revolution of the earth around the sun
is a footstep onwards, onwards, we know not whither
and we do not care,
but a step onwards in untraveled space,
for the earth, like the sun, is a wanderer.
Their going round each time is a step
onwards, we know not whither,
but onwards, onwards, for the heavens are wandering
the moon and the earth, the sun, Saturn and Betelgeuse, Vega
and Sirius and Altair
they wander their strange and different ways in heaven
past Venus and Uranus and the signs.

For life is a wandering, we know not whither, but going.

Only the wheel goes round, but it never wanders.
It stays on its hub.

DEATH IS NOT EVIL, EVIL IS MECHANICAL

ONLY the human being, absolved from kissing and strife
goes on and on and on, without wandering
fixed upon the hub of the ego
going, yet never wandering, fixed, yet in motion,
the kind of hell that is real, grey and awful
sinless and stainless going round and round
the kind of hell grey Dante never saw
but of which he had a bit inside him.

Know thyself, and that thou art mortal.
But know thyself, denying that thou art mortal:
a thing of kisses and strife
a lit-up shaft of rain
a calling column of blood
a rose tree bronzey with thorns
a mixture of yea and nay
a rainbow of love and hate
a wind that blows back and forth
a creature of conflict, like a cataract:
know thyself, in denial of all these things.

And thou shalt begin to spin round on the hub of the obscene ego
a grey void thing that goes without wandering
a machine that in itself is nothing
a centre of the evil world.

STRIFE

WHEN strife is a thing of two
each knows the other in struggle
and the conflict is a communion
a twoness.

But when strife is a thing of one
a single ego striving for its own ends
and beating down resistances
then strife is evil, because it is not strife.

THE LATE WAR

THE War was not strife
it was murder
each side trying to murder the other side evilly.

MURDER

KILLING is not evil.

A man may be my enemy to the death,
and that is passion and communion.

But murder is always evil
being an act of one
perpetrated upon the other
without cognisance or communion.

MURDEROUS WEAPONS

So guns and strong explosives
are evil, evil
they let death upon unseen men
in sheer murder.

And most murderous of all devices
are poison gases and air-bombs
refinements of evil.

DEPARTURE

Now some men must get up and depart
from evil, or all is lost.
The evil will in many evil men
makes an evil world-soul, which purposes
to reduce the world to grey ash.
Wheels are evil
and machines are evil
and the will to make money is evil.

All forms of abstraction are evil:
finance is a great evil abstraction
science has now become an evil abstraction
education is an evil abstraction.
Jazz and film and wireless
are all evil abstractions from life.

And politics, now, are an evil abstraction from life.

Evil is upon us and has got hold of us.
Men must depart from it, or all is lost.
We must make an isle impregnable
against evil.

THE SHIP OF DEATH

I

Now it is autumn and the falling fruit
and the long journey towards oblivion.
The apples falling like great drops of dew —
to bruise themselves an exit from themselves.
And it is time to go, to bid farewell
to one's own self, and find an exit
from the fallen self.

II

Have you built your ship of death, O have you?
O build your ship of death, for you will need it.
The grim frost is at hand, when the apples will fall
thick, almost thundrous, on the hardened earth.

And death is on the air like a smell of ashes!
Ah! can't you smell it?
And in the bruised body, the frightened soul
finds itself shrinking, wincing from the cold
that blows upon it through the orifices.

III

And can a man his own quietus make
with a bare bodkin?
With daggers, bodkins, bullets, man can make
a bruise or break of exit for his life;
but is that a quietus, O tell me, is it quietus?
Surely not so! for how could murder, even self-murder
ever a quietus make?

IV

O let us talk of quiet that we know,
that we can know, the deep and lovely quiet
of a strong heart at peace!

How can we this, our own quietus, make?

V

Build then the ship of death, for you must take
the longest journey, to oblivion.

And die the death, the long and painful death
that lies between the old self and the new.
Already our bodies are fallen, bruised, badly bruised,
already our souls are oozing through the exit
of the cruel bruise.
Already the dark and endless ocean of the end
is washing in through the breaches of our wounds,
already the flood is upon us.
Oh build your ship of death, your little ark
and furnish it with food, with little cakes, and wine
for the dark flight down oblivion.

VI

Piecemeal the body dies, and the timid soul
has her footing washed away, as the dark flood rises.
We are dying, we are dying, we are all of us dying
and nothing will stay the death-flood rising within us
and soon it will rise on the world, on the outside world.
We are dying, we are dying, piecemeal our bodies are dying
and our strength leaves us,
and our soul cowers naked in the dark rain over the flood,
cowering in the last branches of the tree of our life.

VII

We are dying, we are dying, so all we can do
is now to be willing to die, and to build the ship
of death to carry the soul on the longest journey.

A little ship, with oars and food
and little dishes, and all accoutrements
fitting and ready for the departing soul.

Now launch the small ship, now as the body dies
and life departs, launch out, the fragile soul
in the fragile ship of courage, the ark of faith
with its store of food and little cooking pans
and change of clothes,
upon the flood's black waste
upon the waters of the end
upon the sea of death, where still we sail
darkly, for we cannot steer, and have no port.

There is no port, there is nowhere to go
only the deepening blackness darkening still
blacker upon the soundless, ungurgling flood
darkness at one with darkness, up and down
and sideways utterly dark, so there is no direction any more
and the little ship is there; yet she is gone.
She is not seen, for there is nothing to see her by.
She is gone! gone! and yet
somewhere she is there.
Nowhere!

VIII

And everything is gone, the body is gone
completely under, gone, entirely gone.
The upper darkness is heavy as the lower,
between them the little ship
is gone
It is the end, it is oblivion.

IX

And yet out of eternity a thread
separates itself on the blackness,
a horizontal thread
that fumes a little with pallor upon the dark.
Is it illusion? or does the pallor fume
A little higher?
Ah wait, wait, for there's the dawn,

the cruel dawn of coming back to life
out of oblivion

Wait, wait, the little ship
drifting, beneath the deathly ashy grey
of a flood-dawn.

Wait, wait! even so, a flush of yellow
and strangely, O chilled wan soul, a flush of rose.
A flush of rose, and the whole thing starts again.

X

The flood subsides, and the body, like a worn sea-shell
emerges strange and lovely.

And the little ship wings home, faltering and lapsing
on the pink flood,
and the frail soul steps out, into the house again
filling the heart with peace.

Swings the heart renewed with peace
even of oblivion.

Oh build your ship of death. Oh build it!
for you will need it.

For the voyage of oblivion awaits you.

DIFFICULT DEATH

IT is not easy to die, O it is not easy
to die the death.

For death comes when he will
not when we will him.
And we can be dying, dying, dying
and longing utterly to die
yet death will not come.

So build your ship of death, and let the soul drift
to dark oblivion.
Maybe life is still our portion
after the bitter passage of oblivion.

ALL SOULS' DAY

BE careful, then, and be gentle about death.
For it is hard to die, it is difficult to go through
the door, even when it opens.

And the poor dead, when they have left the walled
and silvery city of the now hopeless body
where are they to go, Oh where are they to go?

They linger in the shadow of the earth.
The earth's long conical shadow is full of souls
that cannot find the way across the sea of change.

Be kind, Oh be kind to your dead
and give them a little encouragement
and help them to build their little ship of death
For the soul has a long, long journey after death
to the sweet home of pure oblivion.
Each needs a little ship, a little ship
and the proper store of meal for the longest journey.
Oh, from out of your heart
provide for your dead once more, equip them
like departing mariners, lovingly.

THE HOUSELESS DEAD

On pity the dead that are dead, but cannot take
the journey, still they moan and beat
against the silvery adamant walls of life's exclusive city.

Oh pity the dead that were ousted out of life
all unequipped to take the long, long voyage.
Gaunt, gaunt they crowd the grey mud-beaches of shadow
that intervene between the final sea
and the white shores of life.

The poor gaunt dead that cannot die
into the distance with receding oars,
but must roam like outcast dogs on the margins of life!
Oh think of them, and encourage them to build
the bark of their deliverance from the dilemma
of non-existence to far oblivion.

BEWARE THE UNHAPPY DEAD!

BEWARE the unhappy dead thrust out of life
unready, unprepared, unwilling, unable
to continue on the longest journey.
Oh, now as November draws near
the grey, grey reaches of earth's shadow,
the long mean marginal stretches of our existence
are crowded with lost souls, the uneasy dead
that cannot embark on the slinking sea beyond.

Oh, now they moan and throng in anger, and press back
through breaches in the walls of this our by-no-means im —
pregnable existence
seeking their old haunts with cold ghostly rage
old haunts, old habitats, old hearths,
old places of sweet life from which they are thrust out
and can but haunt in disembodied rage.

Oh, but beware, beware the angry dead.
Who knows, who knows how much our modern woe
is due to the angry unappeased dead
that were thrust out of life, and now come back at us
malignant, malignant, for we will not succour them.
Oh, on this day for the dead, now November is here
set a place for the dead, with a cushion and soft seat
and put a plate, and put a wine-glass out
and serve the best of food, the fondest wine
for your dead, your unseen dead, and with your hearts
speak with them and give them peace and do them honour.

Or else beware their angry presence, now
within your walls, within your very heart.
Oh, they can lay you waste, the angry dead.
Perhaps even now you are suffering from the havoc they make
unknown within your breast and your deadened loins.

AFTER ALL SAINTS' DAY

WRAPPED in the dark-red mantle of warm memories
the little, slender soul sits swiftly down, and takes the oars
and draws away, away, towards dark depths
wafting with warm love from still-living hearts
breathing on his small frail sail, and helping him on
to the fathomless deeps ahead, far, far from the grey shores
of marginal existence.

SONG OF DEATH

SING the song of death, O sing it!
for without the song of death, the song of life
becomes pointless and silly.

Sing then the song of death, and the longest journey
and what the soul takes with him, and what he leaves behind,
and how he enters fold after fold of deepening darkness
for the cosmos even in death is like a dark whorled shell
whose whorls fold round to the core of soundless silence and
pivotal oblivion
where the soul comes at last, and has utter peace.

Sing then the core of dark and absolute
oblivion where the soul at last is lost
in utter peace.
Sing the song of death, O sing it!

THE END, THE BEGINNING

IF there were not an utter and absolute dark
of silence and sheer oblivion
at the core of everything,
how terrible the sun would be,
how ghastly it would be to strike a match, and make a light.

But the very sun himself is pivoted
upon a core of pure oblivion,
so is a candle, even as a match.

And if there were not an absolute, utter forgetting
and a ceasing to know, a perfect ceasing to know
and a silent, sheer cessation of all awareness
how terrible life would be!
how terrible it would be to think and know, to have con-sciousness!
But dipped, once dipped in dark oblivion
the soul has peace, inward and lovely peace.

SLEEP

SLEEP is the shadow of death, but not only that.
Sleep is a hint of lovely oblivion.
When I am gone, completely lapsed and gone
and healed from all this ache of being.

SLEEP AND WAKING

IN sleep I am not, I am gone
I am given up.
And nothing in the world is lovelier than sleep,
dark, dreamless sleep, in deep oblivion!
Nothing in life is quite so good as this.

Yet there is waking from the soundest sleep,
waking, and waking new.
Did you sleep well?
Ah yes, the sleep of God!
The world is created afresh.

FATIGUE

MY soul has had a long, hard day
she is tired,
she is seeking her oblivion.

O, and in the world
there is no place for the soul to find her oblivion
the after darkness of her peace,
for man has killed the silence of the earth
and ravished all the peaceful oblivious places
where the angels used to alight.

FORGET

To be able to forget is to be able to yield
to God who dwells in deep oblivion.
Only in sheer oblivion are we with God.
For when we know in full, we have left off knowing.

KNOW-ALL

MAN knows nothing
till he knows how not-to-know.

And the greatest of teachers will tell you:
The end of all knowledge is oblivion
sweet, dark oblivion, when I cease
even from myself, and am consummated.

TABERNACLE

COME, let us build a temple to oblivion
with seven veils, and an innermost
Holy of Holies of sheer oblivion.
And there oblivion dwells, and the silent soul
may sink into god at last, having passed the veils.
But any one who shall ascribe attributes to god or oblivion
let him be cast out, for blasphemy.
For god is a deeper forgetting far than sleep
and all description is a blasphemy.

TEMPLES

OH, what we want on earth
is centres here and there of silence and forgetting
where we may cease from knowing, and, as far as we know,
may cease from being
in the sweet wholeness of oblivion.

SHADOWS

AND if to-night my soul may find her peace
in sleep, and sink in good oblivion,
and in the morning wake like a new-opened flower
then I have been dipped again in God, and new-created.
And if, as weeks go round, in the dark of the moon
my spirit darkens and goes out, and soft strange gloom
pervades my movements and my thoughts and words
then I shall know that I am walking still
with God, we are close together now the moon's in shadow.
And if, as autumn deepens and darkens
I feel the pain of falling leaves, and stems that break in storms
and trouble and dissolution and distress
and then the softness of deep shadows folding, folding
around my soul and spirit, around my lips
so sweet, like a swoon, or more like the drowse of a low, sad song
singing darker than the nightingale, on, on to the solstice
and the silence of short days, the silence of the year, the shadow,
then I shall know that my life is moving still
with the dark earth, and drenched
with the deep oblivion of earth's lapse and renewal.

And if, in the changing phases of man's life
I fall in sickness and in misery
my wrists seem broken and my heart seems dead
and strength is gone, and my life
is only the leavings of a life:
and still, among it all, snatches of lovely oblivion, and snatches
of renewal
odd, wintry flowers upon the withered stem, yet new, strange flowers
such as my life has not brought forth before, new blossoms
of me.

then I must know that still
I am in the hands of the unknown God,

he is breaking me down to his own oblivion
to send me forth on a new morning, a new man.

CHANGE

Do you think it is easy to change?

Ah, it is very hard to change and be different.

It means passing through the waters of oblivion.

PHOENIX

ARE you willing to be sponged out, erased, cancelled,
made nothing?

Are you willing to be made nothing?
dipped into oblivion?

If not, you will never really change.

The phoenix renews her youth
only when she is burnt, burnt alive, burnt down
to hot and flocculent ash.

Then the small stirring of a new small bub in the nest
with strands of down like floating ash

Shows that she is renewing her youth like the eagle
Immortal bird.

MORE PANSIES



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IMAGE-MAKING LOVE

AND now
the best of all
is to be alone, to possess one's soul in silence.
Nakedly to be alone, unseen
is better than anything else in the world,
a relief like death.

Always
at the core of me
burns the small flame of anger, gnawing
from trespassed contacts, from red-hot finger bruises, on my
inward flesh.
Always
in the eyes of those who loved me
I have seen at last the image of him they loved
and took for me
mistook for me.

And always
it was a simulacrum, something
like me, and like a gibe at me.
So now I want, above all things
to preserve my nakedness
from the gibe of image-making love.

PEOPLE

I LIKE people quite well
at a little distance.
I like to see them passing and passing
and going their own way,
especially if I see their aloneness alive in them.

Yet I don't want them to come near.
If they will only leave me alone
I can still have the illusion that there is room enough in the world.

DESIRE

AH, in the past, towards rare individuals
I have felt the pull of desire:
Oh come, come nearer, come into touch!
Come physically nearer, be flesh to my flesh —
But say little, oh say little,
and afterwards, leave me alone.
Keep your aloneness, leave me my aloneness,
I used to say this, in the past, but now no more.
It has always been a failure
They have always insisted on love
and on talking about it
and on the me-and-thee and what we meant to each other.
So now I have no desire any more
Except to be left, in the last resort, alone, quite alone.

TO A CERTAIN FRIEND

You are so interested in yourself
that you bore me
thoroughly, I am unable to feel any interest in your interesting self.

THE EMOTIONAL FRIEND

HE said to me: You don't trust me!

I said: Oh yes I do!

I know you won't pick my pocket,

I know you'll be very kind to me.

But it was not enough, he looked at me almost with hate.

And I failed entirely to see what he meant —

Since there was no circumstance requiring trust between i

CORRESPONDENCE IN AFTER YEARS

A MAN wrote to me: We missed it, you and I.
We were meant to mean a great deal to one another;
but we missed it.
And I could only reply:
A miss is as good as a mile mister!

THE EGOISTS

THE only question to ask to-day, about man or woman
is: Has she chipped the shell of her own ego?
Has he chipped the shell of his own ego?
They are all perambulating eggs
going: “ Squeak! Squeak! I am all things unto myself,
yet I can’t be alone, I want somebody to keep me warm.”

CHIMAERA

MOST people, to-day, are chimaera chimerical:
just fantasies of self-importance
their own self-importance
and sphinxes of self-consciousness.

ULTIMATE REALITY

A YOUNG man said to me:

I am interested in the problem of reality.

I said: Really!

Then I saw him turn to glance, surreptitiously,
in the big mirror, at his own fascinating shadow.

SPHINX

BUT why do I feel so strangely about you?
said the lovely young lady, half wistful, half menacing.
I took to my heels and ran
before she could set the claws of her self-conscious questioning in me
or tear me with the fangs of disappointment
because I could not answer the riddle of her own self-importance.

INTIMATES

Don't you care for my love? she said bitterly.
I handed her the mirror, and said:
Please address these questions to the proper person!
Please make all requests to headquarters!
In all matters of emotional importance
please approach the supreme authority direct!
So I handed her the mirror.

And she would have broken it over my head,
but she caught sight of her own reflection
and that held her spell-bound for two seconds
while I fled.

TRUE LOVE AT LAST

THE handsome and self-absorbed young man
looked at the lovely and self-absorbed girl.

The lovely and self-absorbed girl
looked back at the handsome and self-absorbed young man
and thrilled.

And in that thrill he felt:
Her self-absorption is even as strong as mine.
I must see if I can't break through it
and absorb her in me.

And in that thrill she felt:
His self-absorption is even stronger than mine!
What fun, stronger than mine!
I must see if I can't absorb this Samson of self-absorption.

So they simply adored one another
and in the end they were both nervous wrecks, because
in self-absorption and self-interest they were equally matched.

ANDRAITX — POMEGRANATE FLOWERS

IT is June, it is June
the pomegranates are in flower,
the peasants are bending cutting the bearded wheat.

The pomegranates are in flower
beside the high road, past the deathly dust,
and even the sea is silent in the sun.

Short gasps of flame in the green of night, way off
the pomegranates are in flower,
small sharp red fires in the night of leaves.
And noon is suddenly dark, is lustrous, is silent and dark
men are unseen, beneath the shading hats;
only, from out the foliage of the secret loins
red flamelets here and there reveal
a man, a woman there.

I DARE DO ALL

“ I DARE do all that may become a man.”
But tell me, oh tell me, what is becoming to a man!
Tell me first what I am,
that I may know what is unbecoming to me.

BATTLE OF LIFE

Is life strife, is it the long combat?

yes, it is true. I fight all the time.

I am forced to.

Yet I am not interested in fight, in strife, in combat,

I am only involved.

THERE ARE TOO MANY PEOPLE

THERE are too many people on earth
insipid, unsalted, rabbit, endlessly hopping.
They nibble the face of the earth to a desert.

THE HEART OF MAN

THERE is the other universe, of the heart of man
that we know nothing of. that we dare not explore.

A strange grey distance separates
our pale mind still from the pulsing continent
of the heart of man.

Fore-runners have barely landed on the shore
and no man knows, no woman knows
the mystery of the interior
when darker still than Congo or Amazon
flow the heart's rivers of fulness, desire and distress.

MORAL CLOTHING

WHEN I am clothed I am a moral man,
and unclothed, the word has no meaning for me.
When I put on my coat, my coat has pockets
and in the pockets are things I require,
so I wish no man to pick my pocket
and I will pick the pocket of no man.

A man's business is one of his pockets, his bank account too
his credit, his name, his wife even may be just another of his pockets.
And I loathe the thought of being a pilferer
a pick-pocket,
That is why business seems to me despicable,
and most love-affairs, just sneak-thief pocket-picking
of dressed-up people.

When I stand in my shirt I have no pockets
therefore no morality of pockets;
but still my nakedness is clothed with responsibility
towards those near and dear to me, my very next of kin.
I am not yet alone.
Only when I am stripped stark naked I am alone
and without morals, and without immorality.
The invisible gods have no moral truck with us.

And if stark naked I approach a fellow-man or fellow-woman
they must be naked too,
and none of us must expect morality of each other:
I am that I am, take it or leave it.
Offer me nothing but that which you are, stark and strange.
Let there be no accommodation at this issue.

BEHAVIOUR

IT is well to be disciplined in all the social usages
and to have manners for all occasions
as we have clothes.

It is absurd for me to display my naked soul at the tea-table.

If we are properly clothed and disciplined in the dining-room
or the street
then the private intimacy of friendship will be real and precious
and our naked contact will be rare and vivid and tremendous.

But when everybody goes round with soul half-bared, or quite
in promiscuous intimate appeal
then friendship is impossible
and naked embrace an anti-climax, humiliating and ridiculous.

THE HOSTILE SUN

SOMETIMES the sun turns hostile to men
when the daytime consciousness has got overweening
when thoughts are stiff, like old leaves
and ideas are hard, like acorns ready to fall.

Then the sun turns hostile to us
and bites at our throats and chests
as he bites at the stems of leaves in autumn, to make them fall.

Then we suffer, and though the sun bronzes us
we feel him strangling even more the issues of our soul
for he is hostile to all the old leafy foliage of our thoughts
and the old upward flowing of our sap, the pressure of our
upward flow of feeling
is against him.

Then only under the moon, cool and unconcerned
calm with the calm of scimitars and brilliant reaping hooks
sweeping the curve of space and moving the silence
we have peace.

THE CHURCH

IF I was a member of the Church of Rome

I should advocate reform:

the marriage of priests

the priests to wear rose-colour or magenta in the streets

to teach the Resurrection in the flesh

to start the year on Easter Sunday

to add the mystery of Joy-in-Resurrection to the Mass

to inculcate the new conception of the Risen Man.

THE PROTESTANT CHURCHES

THE Protestant Churches have had their day
and served their great purpose.
They knew the useful Godhead of Providence.

But now we have to go back to the Creative Godhead
which overshadows the other
and which we have lost.

LONELINESS

I NEVER know what people mean when they complain of loneliness. To be alone is one of life's greatest delights, thinking one's own thoughts, doing one's own little jobs, seeing the world beyond and feeling oneself uninterrupted in the rooted connection with the centre of all things.

THE UPROOTED

PEOPLE who complain of loneliness must have lost something,
lost some living connection with the cosmos, out of themselves,
lost their life-flow
like a plant whose roots are cut.

And they are crying like plants whose roots are cut.

But the presence of other people will not give them new rooted connection
it will only make them forget.

The thing to do is in solitude slowly and painfully put forth
new roots
into the unknown, and take root by oneself.

DELIGHT OF BEING ALONE

I KNOW no greater delight than the sheer delight of being alone.
It makes me realise the delicious pleasure of the moon

that she has in travelling by herself: throughout time,
or the splendid growing of an ash-tree
alone, on a hill-side in the north, humming in the wind.

REFUSED FRIENDSHIP

HE said to me: Your life will be so much the poorer
since you refuse my friendship.
But I, honestly, don't know what he means.
I can't see that I refuse anything.
I like him. What else is there?

FUTURE RELATIONSHIPS

THE world is moving, moving still, towards further democracy.
But not a democracy of idea or ideal, nor of property, nor
even of the emotion of brotherhood.
But a democracy of men, a democracy of touch.

FUTURE RELIGION

THE future of religion is in the mystery of touch.

The mind is touchless, so is the will, so is the spirit.

First come the death, then the pure aloneness, which is permanent
then the resurrection into touch.

FUTURE STATES

ONCE men touch one another, then the modern industrial form of machine civilisation will melt away and universalism and cosmopolitanism will cease

the great movement of centralising into oneness will stop and there will be a vivid recoil into separateness many vivid small states, like a kaleidoscope, all colours and all the differences given expression.

FUTURE WAR

AFTER our industrial civilisation has broken, and the civilisation of touch has begun war will cease, there will be no more wars.

The heart of man, in so far as it is budding, is budding warless and budding towards infinite variety, variegation and where there is infinite variety, there is no interest in war. Oneness makes war, and the obsession of oneness.

SIGNS OF THE TIMES

IF you want to get a glimpse of future possibilities
look at the young men under thirty.

Those that are fresh and alive are the same in every country,
a certain carelessness, a certain tenderness, a certain instinctive contempt
for old values and old people:

a certain warlessness even moneylessness,
a waiting for the proper touch, not for any word or deed.

INITIATION DEGREES

No man, unless he has died, and learned to be alone
will ever come into touch.

UNHAPPY SOULS

THE unhappy souls are those that can't die and become silent but must ever struggle on to assert themselves.

FULL LIFE

A MAN can't fully live unless he dies and ceases to care
ceases to care.

PEOPLE WHO CARE

PEOPLE who care, who care, who care
and who dare not die for fear they should be nothing at all
probably are nothing at all.

NON-EXISTENCE

WE don't exist unless we are deeply and sensually in touch with that which can be touched but not known.

ALL-KNOWING

ALL that we know is nothing, we are merely crammed waste —
paper baskets
unless we are in touch with that which laughs at all our knowing.

SALVATION

THE only salvation is to realise that we know nothing about it
and there is nothing to save
and nothing to do
and effort is the ruin of all things.

Then, if we realise that we never were lost, we realise we
couldn't be saved.

For you can't save that which was never lost
at the worst, you can only save it up
and once you realise that you never were lost
you realise the fatuity of saving up against possible loss.
The one thing easiest to lose is savings.

OLD ARCHANGELS

AND so the official archangels
Orthodox Michael, and that whispering Gabriel
have had their term of office, they must go.
It is Lucifer's turn, the turn of the Son of the Morning
to sway the earth of men
the Morning Star.

LUCIFER

ANGELS are bright still, though the brightest fell.
But tell me, tell me, how do you know
that he lost any of his brightness in falling?
He only fell out of your ken, you orthodox angels,
you dull angels, tarnished with centuries of conventionality.

THE MILL OF GOD

WHY seek to alter people, why not leave them alone?
The mills of God will grind them small, anyhow, there is escape.
The heavens are the nether mill-stone and our heavy earth
rolls round and round, grinding exceeding small.

MULTITUDES

THE multitudes are like droppings of birds, like dung of sea —
fowl that have flown away,
Oh they are grist for the mills of God, their bones ground down
to fertilise the roots of unknown men who are still to come
in fresh fields.

FALLEN LEAVES

THERE is the organic connection, like leaves that belong to a tree and there is the mechanical connection, like leaves that are cast to the earth.

Winds of heaven fan the leaves of the tree like flames and tunes, but winds of heaven are mills of God to the fallen leaves grinding them small to humus, on earth's nether mill-stone.

THE DIFFERENCE

PEOPLE are like leaves, fluttering and gay on the bush of the globe,
or they are like leaves, rustling thick, in crowds on the floor of
the earth.

And the thick, fallen crowds crackle and crumble under the
milling of the winds,
the winds of change that will not be still
the breath of life.

But the living leaves in the breath of the wind are more lively
they glisten and shake.

THE BREATH OF LIFE

THE breath of life and the sharp winds of change are the same thing.
But people who are fallen from the organic connection with the cosmos
feel the winds of change grind them down.

VENGEANCE IS MINE

VENGEANCE is mine, saith the Lord, I will repay.
And the stiff-necked people, and the self-willed people, and
self-important ones, the self-righteous, self-absorbed
all of them who wind their energy round the idea of themselves
and so strangle off their connection with the ceaseless tree of life,
and fall into sharp, self-centred self-assertion, sharp or soft,
they fall victim at once to the Vengeance of the unforgiving god
as their nerves are stretched till they twangle and snap
and irritation seethes secretly through their guts, as their tissue disintegrates
and flames of katabolistic energy alternate
with ashes of utter boredom, ennui, and disgust.

It is the Vengeance of the Lord, long and unremitting
till the soul of the stiff-necked is ground to dust, to fertilising meal
with which to manure afresh the roots of the tree of life.
And so the Lord of Vengeance pays back, repays life
for the defection of the self-centred ones.

ASTRONOMICAL CHANGES

DAWN is NO longer in the house of the Fish
Pisces, oh Fish, Jesus of the watery way,
your two thousand years are up.

And the foot of the Cross no longer is planted in the place of
the birth of the Sun.
The whole great heavens have shifted over, and slowly pushed aside
the Cross, the Virgin, Pisces, the Sacred Fish
that casts its sperm upon the waters, and knows no intercourse;
pushed them all aside, discarded them, make way now for
something else.

Even the Pole itself has departed now from the Pole Star
and pivots on the invisible,
while the Pole Star lies aside, like an old axle taken from the wheel.

FATALITY

No one, not even God, can put back a leaf on to a tree
once it has fallen off.

And no one, not God nor Christ nor any other
can put back a human life into connection with the living cosmos
once the connection has been broken
and the person has become finally self-centred.

Death alone, through the long process of disintegration
can melt the detached life back
through the dark Hades at the roots of the tree
into the circulating sap, once more, of the tree of life.

FREE WILL

THE human will is free, ultimately, to choose one of two things:
either to stay connected with the tree of life, and submit
the human will to the flush of the vaster impulsion of the tree;
or else to sever the connection, to become self-centred, self-willed self-motived
and subject, really, to the draught of every motor-car or the
kicking tread of every passer-by.

IN A SPANISH TRAM-CAR

SHE fanned herself with a violet fan
and looked sulky, under the thick straight brows.

The wisp of modern black mantilla
made her half Madonna, half Astarte.
Suddenly her yellow-brown eyes looked with a flare into mine;
— we could sin together! —

The spark fell and kindled instantly on my blood,
then died out almost as swiftly.

She can keep her sin
She can sin with some thick-set Spaniard.
Sin doesn't interest me.

SPANISH PRIVILEGE

THE inward cocky assertiveness of the Spaniard seems to say:
God is supreme,
but He can't stop me from sinning against Him if I want to,
and when I want to, I'm going to;
though you bloody outsiders had better not try it on.
So they go on sinning, though sin is obsolete,
and nobody but themselves is interested.

AT THE BANK IN SPAIN

EVEN the old priest, in his long black robe and silvery hair
came to the counter with his hat off, humble at the shrine,
and was immensely flattered when one of the fat little clerks
of the bank
shook hands with him.

THE SPANISH WIFE

WHEN I saw her straying a little dazed through her untidy house
I realised the secret joy her young Spanish husband had
in frustrating her, just inwardly frustrating her,
this foreign woman of the wealthy north.

THE PAINTER'S WIFE

SHE was tangled up in her own self-conceit, a woman,
and her passion could only flare through the meshes
towards other women, in communion;
the presence of a man made her recoil
and burn blue and cold, like the flame in a miner's lamp
when the after-damp is around it.
Yet she seemed to know nothing about it
and devoted herself to her husband
and made him paint her nude, time after time,

and each time it came out the same, a horrible sexless, lifeless abstraction
of the female form, technically "beautiful," actually a white
machine drawing, more null than death.
And she was so pleased with it, she thought one day it would
be recognised as "great."
And he thought so too.
Nobody else did.

MODERN PROBLEMS

THE worst of it is

When a woman can only love, flamily, those of her own sex
she has a secret, almost ecstatised hatred of maleness in any man
that she exudes like pearly white poison gas,
and men often succumb like white mice in a laboratory,
around her,
specimens to be anatomised.

DOMINANT WOMAN

DOMINANT women are as a rule so subtly and fiendishly domineering that the young of their own sex revolt against them at last, and turn once more to men to save them, Perseus, St George from the dragon of the modern female.

MEN AND WOMEN

ALL this talk of equality between the sexes is merely an expression of sex-hate.

Men and women should learn tenderness to each other and to leave one another alone.

THE SCIENTIFIC DOCTOR

WHEN I went to the scientific doctor
I realised what a lust there was in him to wreak his so-called
science on me
and reduce me to the level of a thing.
So I said: Good-morning! and left him.

HEALING

I AM not a mechanism, an assembly of various sections.

And it is not because the mechanism is working wrongly, that
I am ill.

I am ill because of wounds to the soul, to the deep emotional self
and the wounds to the soul take a long, long time, only time
can help

and patience, and a certain difficult repentance

long, difficult repentance, realisation of life's mistake, and the
freeing oneself

from the endless repetition of the mistake

which mankind at large has chosen to sanctify.

EN MASSE

TO-DAY, society has sanctified
the sin against the Holy Ghost,
and all are encouraged into the sin
so that all may be lost together, en masse, the great word of
our civilisation.

GOD AND THE HOLY GHOST

THERE is no sinning against God, what does God care about sin!
But there is sinning against the Holy Ghost, since the Holy
Ghost is with us
in the flesh, is part of our consciousness.

The Holy Ghost is the deepest part of our own consciousness
wherein we know ourself for what we are
and know our dependence on the creative beyond.

So if we go counter to our own deepest consciousness
naturally we destroy the most essential self in us,
and once done, there is no remedy, no salvation for this,
nonentity is our portion.

HUMILITY

NOWADAYS, to talk of humility is a sin against the Holy Ghost

It is a sneaking evasion of the responsibility of our own consciousness.

PROPER PRIDE

EVERYTHING that lives has its own proper pride
as a columbine flower has, or even a starling walking and
looking around.

And the base things like hyaenas or bed-bugs have least pride
of being,

they are humble with a creeping humility, being parasites or
carrion creatures.

HUMILITY MONGERS

WHEN I hear a man spouting about humility to-day
I know he is either a bed-bug, battenning on sleeping people
or a hyaena, eating corpses.

TENDER REVERENCE

To be humble before other men is degrading, I am humble
before no man
and I want no man to be humble before me.
But when I see the life-spirit fluttering and struggling in a man
I want to show always the human tender reverence.

ABSOLUTE REVERENCE

I FEEL absolute reverence to nobody and to nothing human
neither to persons nor things nor ideas, ideals nor religions nor institutions,
to these things I feel only respect, and a tinge of reverence
when I see the fluttering of pure life in them.

But to something unseen, unknown, creative
from which I feel I am a derivative
I feel absolute reverence. Say no more!

BELIEF

FOREVER nameless
Forever unknown
Forever unconceived
Forever unrepresented
yet forever felt in the soul.

BELLS

THE Mohammedans say that the sound of bells especially big ones, is obscene.

That hard clapper striking in a hard mouth and resounding after with a long hiss of insistence is obscene.

Yet bells call the Christians to God especially clapper bells, hard tongues wagging in hard mouths, metal hitting on metal, to enforce our attention, and bring us to God.

The soft thudding of drums of finger or fist or soft-skinned sticks upon the stretched membrane of sound sends summons in the old hollows of the sun. And the accumulated splashing of a gong where tissue plunges into bronze with wide wild circles of sound and leaves off, belongs to the bamboo thicket, and the drake in the air flying past.

And the sound of a blast through the sea-curved core of a shell when a black priest blows on a conch, and the dawn cry from a minaret, God is great, and the calling of the old Red Indian high on the pueblo roof whose voice flies on, calling like a swan singing between the sun and the marsh, on and on, like a dark-faced bird singing alone singing to the men below, the fellow-tribesmen who go by without pausing, soft-foot, without listening, yet they hear: there are other ways of summons, crying: Listen! Listen! Come near!

THE TRIUMPH OF THE MACHINE

THEY talk of the triumph of the machine,
but the machine will never triumph.

Out of the thousands and thousands of centuries of man
the unrolling of ferns, white tongues of the acanthus lapping
at the sun,
for one sad century
machines have triumphed, rolled us hither and thither,
shaking the lark's nest till the eggs have broken.

Shaken the marshes till the geese have gone
and the wild swans flown away singing the swan-song of us.

Hard, hard on the earth the machines are rolling,
but through some hearts they will never roll.

The lark nests in his heart
and the white swan swims in the marshes of his loins,
and through the wide prairies of his breast a young bull herds
the cows,
lambs frisk among the daisies of his brain.

And at last
all these creatures that cannot die, driven back
into the uttermost corners of the soul
will send up the wild cry of despair.

The trilling lark in a wild despair will trill down from the sky,
the swan will beat the waters in rage, white rage of an enraged swan,
even the lambs will stretch forth their necks like serpents,
like snakes of hate, against the man in the machine:
even the shaking white poplar will dazzle like splinters of glass
against him.

And against this inward revolt of the native creatures of the soul
mechanical man, in triumph seated upon the seat of his machine
will be powerless, for no engine can reach into the marshes
and depths of a man.

So mechanical man in triumph seated upon the seat of his machine
will be driven mad from himself, and sightless, and on that day
the machines will turn to run into one another
traffic will tangle up in a long-drawn-out crash of collision
and engines will rush at the solid houses, the edifice of our life
will rock in the shock of the mad machine, and the house will
come down.

Then, far beyond the ruin, in the far, in the ultimate, remote places
the swan will lift up again his flattened, smitten head
and look round, and rise, and on the great vaults of his wings
will sweep round and up to greet the sun with a silky glitter
of a new day
and the lark will follow trilling, angerless again,
and the lambs will bite off the heads of the daisies for friskiness.
But over the middle of the earth will be the smoky ruin of iron
the triumph of the machine.

FORTE DEI MARMI

THE evening sulks along the shore, the reddening sun
reddens still more on the blatant bodies of these all-but-naked,
sea-bathing city people.

Let me tell you that the sun is alive, and can be angry,
and the sea is alive, and can sulk,
and the air is alive, and can deny us as a woman can.

But the blatant bathers don't know, they know nothing;
the vibration of the motor-car has bruised their insensitive bottoms
into rubber-like deadness, Dunlop inflated unconcern.

SEA-BATHERS

OH the handsome bluey-brown bodies, they might just as well
be gutta percha,
and the reddened limbs red indiarubber tubing, inflated,
and the half-hidden private parts just a little brass tap, rubinetto,
turned on for different purposes.

They call it health, it looks like nullity.
Only here and there a pair of eyes, haunted, looks out as if asking:
where then is life?

TALK OF LOYALTY

I HAVE noticed that people who talk a lot about loyalty are always themselves by nature disloyal and they fear the come-back.

TALK OF FAITH

AND people who talk about faith
usually want to force somebody to agree with them,
as if there was safety in numbers, even for faith.

AMO SACRUM VULGUS

OH I am of the people!
the people, the people!
Oh I am of the people
and proud of my descent.

And the people always love me,
they love me, they love me,
the people always love me,
in spite of my ascent.

You must admit I've risen
I've risen, I've risen,
you must admit I've risen
above the common run.

The middle classes hate it,
they hate it, they hate it
the middle classes hate it
and want to put me down.

But the people always love me
they love me, they love me,
the people always love me
because I've risen clean.

Therefore I know the people
the people, the people
are still in bud, and eager
to flower free of fear.

And so I sing a democracy
a democracy, a democracy
that puts forth its own aristocracy

like bearded wheat in ear.

Oh golden fields of people
of people, of people,
oh golden field of people
all moving into flowers.

No longer at the mercy
the mercy, the mercy
of middle-class mowing-machines, and
the middle-class money power.

BOREDOM, ENNUI, DEPRESSION

AND boredom, ennui, depression
are long slow vibrations of pain
that possess the whole body
and cannot be localised.

THE DEADLY VICTORIAN

WE hate the Victorians so much
because we are the third and fourth generation
expiating their sins
in the excruciating torment of hopelessness, helplessness, listlessness,
because they were such base and sordid optimists
successfully castrating the body politic,
and we are the gelded third and fourth generation.

WHAT ARE THE WILD WAVES SAYING?

WHAT are the wild waves saying
sister the whole day long?

It seems to me they are saying:
How disgusting, how infinitely sordid this humanity is
that dabbles its body in me
and daubs the sand with its flesh
in myriads, under the hot and hostile sun!
and so drearily “ enjoys itself! “
What are the wild waves saying.

WELCOME DEATH

How welcome death would be
if first a man could have his full revenge
on our castrated society.

DARK SATANIC MILLS

THE dark, satanic mills of Blake
how much darker and more satanic they are now!
But oh, the streams that stream white-faced, in and out
in and out when the hooter hoots, white-faced, with a dreadful gush
of multitudinous ignominy,
what shall we think of these?
They are millions to my one!

They are millions to my one! But oh
what have they done to you, white-faced millions
mewed and mangled in the mills of man?
What have they done to you, what have they done to you,
what is this awful aspect of man?

Oh Jesus, didn't you see, when you talked of service
this would be the result!

When you said: Retro me, Satan!
this is what you gave him leave to do
behind your back!

And now, the iron has entered into the soul
and the machine has entangled the brain, and got it fast,
and steel has twisted the loins of man, electricity has exploded
the heart
and out of the lips of people just strange mechanical noises in
place of speech.

What is man, that thou art no longer mindful of him!
and the son of man, that thou pitiest him not?
Are these no longer men, these millions, millions?
What are they then?

WE DIE TOGETHER

OH, when I think of the industrial millions, when I see some
of them,
a weight comes over me heavier than leaden linings of coffins
and I almost cease to exist, weighed down to extinction
and sunk into depression that almost blots me out.

Then I say to myself: Am I also dead? is that the truth?
Then I know
that with so many dead men in mills
I too am almost dead.
I know the unliving factory-hand, living-dead millions
is unliving me, living-dead me,
I, with them, am living dead, mechanical enslaved at the machine.

And enshrouded in the vast corpse of the industrial millions
embedded in them, I look out on the sunshine of the South.

And though the pomegranate has red flowers outside the window
and oleander is hot with perfume under the afternoon sun
and I am “ II Signore “ and they love me here,
yet I am a mill-hand in Leeds
and the death of the Black Country is upon me
and I am wrapped in the lead of a coffin-lining, the living death
of my fellow-men.

WHAT HAVE THEY DONE TO YOU?

WHAT have they done to you, men of the masses, creeping
back and forth to work?

What have they done to you, the saviours of the people, oh
what have they saved you from, while they pocketed the money?

Alas, they have saved you from yourself, from your own frail dangers
and devoured you with the machine, the vast maw of iron.

They saved you from squalid cottages and poverty of hand to mouth
and embedded you in the workmen's dwellings, where your
wage is the dole of work, and the dole is your wage of nullity.

They took away, oh they took away your man's native instincts
and intuitions
and gave a board-school education, newspapers, and cinema.
They stole your body from you, and left you an animated carcass
to work with, and nothing else:
unless goggling eyes, to goggle at the film
and a board-school brain, stuffed up with the ha'penny press.
Your instincts gone, your intuition gone, your passion dead
Oh carcass with a board-school mind and a ha'penny newspaper intelligence,
what have they done to you, what have they done to you,
oh what have they done to you?

Oh look at my fellow-men, oh look at them
the masses! Oh, what has been done to them?

WHAT IS A MAN TO DO?

OH, when the world is hopeless
what is a man to do?
When the vast masses of men have been caught by the machine
into the industrial dance of the living death, the jiggling of
wage-paid work,
and fed on condition they dance this dance of corpses driven
by steam.

When year by year, year in, year out, in millions, in increasing millions
they dance, dance, dance this dry industrial jig of the corpses
entangled in iron
and there's no escape, for the iron goes through their genitals,
brains, and souls
then what is a single man to do?

For mankind is a single corpus, we are all one flesh
even with the industrial masses, and the greedy middle mass.

Is it hopeless, hopeless, hopeless?
has the iron got them fast?
are their hearts the hub of the wheel?
the millions, millions of my fellow-men!

Then must a single man die with them, in the clutch of iron?
Or must he try to amputate himself from the iron-entangled
body of mankind
and risk bleeding to death, but perhaps escape into some
unpopular place
and leave the fearful Laocoon of his fellow-man entangled in iron
to its fearful fate.

CITY-LIFE

WHEN I am in a great city, I know that I despair.
I know there is no hope for us, death waits, it is useless to care.
For oh the poor people, that are flesh of my flesh,
I, that am flesh of their flesh,
when I see the iron hooked into their faces
their poor, their fearful faces
I scream in my soul, for I know I cannot
take the iron hook out of their faces, that makes them so drawn,
nor cut the invisible wires of steel that pull them
back and forth, to work,
back and forth to work,
like fearful and corpse-like fishes hooked and being played
by some malignant fisherman on an unseen shore
where he does not choose to land them yet, hooked fishes of
the factory world.

THIRTEEN PICTURES

O MY Thirteen pictures are in prison!

O O somebody bail them out!

I I don't know what they've done poor things, but justice has
arisen

in the shape of half-a-dozen stout

policemen and arrested them, and hauled them off to gaol.

O my Boccaccio, O how goes your pretty tale

locked up in a dungeon cell

with Eve and the Amazon, the Lizard and the frail

Renascence, all sent to hell

at the whim of six policemen and a magistrate whose stale
sensibilities hate everything that's well.

AUTO-DA-FE

HELP! Help! they want to burn my pictures,
they want to make an auto-da-fe!
They want to make an act of faith, and burn my pretty pictures.
They've seized and carried them away!

Help! Help! I am calling in English
is the language dead and empty of reply!
The Unholy Inquisition has arrested all my pictures,
a magistrate, and six fat smaller fry.

Six fat smaller bobbies are the inquisitors minor
who've decided that Boccaccio must burn.
But the Grand Inquisitor is a stale magistrate
in Marlborough Road, and it is now his turn.

Oh he has put his pince-nez on, and stoutly has stepped down
to the police-station cell
where my darling pictures, prisoners, await his deadly frown
and his grand-inquisitorial knell.

Oh he knows all about it, he casts a yellow eye
on the gardener whose shirt's blown back:
Burn that! — he sees Eve running from the likes of him: I
order you, destroy the whole vile pack. —
All my pretty pictures huddled in the dark awaiting
their doom at the hands of Mr Meade.
But the day they burn my pictures they burn the rose of
England
and fertilise the weeds on every mead.
Help! Oh help! they want to burn my pictures
we've got the Inquisition back
with a set of cankered magistrates and busy-busy bobbies.
Look out, my lad, you've got 'em on your track.

SHOWS

TO-DAY, if a man does something pretentious and deliberate
let him show it to the crowd, probably they will applaud
and anyhow they can't do any hurt.

But if he produces something beautiful, with the frail beauty
of life

let him hide it away, so it can go on blossoming.

If he show it, the eyes and the breath of the crowd
will defile it, and spoil its beauty.

Even the very flowers, in the shops or parks
are deflowered by being looked at by so many unclean eyes.

ROSE AND CABBAGE

AND still I look for the man who will dare to be
roses of England
wild roses of England
men who are wild roses of England
with metal thorns, beware!
but still more brave and still more rare
the courage of rosiness in a cabbage world
fragrance of roses in a stale stink of lies
rose-leaves to bewilder the clever fools
and rose-briars to strangle the machine.

THE GULF

Now again and now for ever breaks the great illusion
of human oneness.

Sons of earth, sons of fire, sons of air and water
sons of the living elements, sons of the unthinking gods,
women, women the same.

And then the hordes of the spawn of the machine
the hordes of the ego-centric, the robots.

For listen! the ego-centric self is the same as the machine
the ego running in its own complex and disconnected notion
using all life only as power, as an engine uses steam or gas
powers to repeat its own ego-centric motions
this is the machine incarnate:

and the robot is the machine incarnate

and the slave is the machine incarnate

and the hopeless inferior, he is the machine incarnate

an engine of flesh, useless unless he is a tool
of other men.

The great industrialists know it.

Mr Ford knows it.

The brain of the machine knows the limbs and trunk of the machine.

But oh, men, men still unmechanised,

sons of the elements and the unspeaking gods

sons of the wind and rain, sons of the fire and rock

what are you going to do, entangled among all the engines

Behold the gulf, impassable

between machine-spawn, myriads

mechanical and intellectual,

and the sons of men, with the wind and the fire of life

in their faces, and motion never mechanical in their limbs.

THE CROSS

BEHOLD your Cross, Christians!
With the upright division into sex
men on this side, women on that side
without any division into inferiority and superiority
only differences,
divided in the mystic, tangible and intangible difference.
And then, truth much more bitter to accept,
the horizontal division of mankind
into that which is below the level, and that which is above. .
That which is truly man, and that which is robot,
the ego-bound.
On this cross of division, division into sex
division into slave and freeman
Christ, the human consciousness
was crucified
to set all men free
to make all men noble
to wipe away the mystic barriers of sex.

In vain, in vain, in vain, oh vastly in vain
this horrific crucifixion.
Now risen Man and risen lord
risen from the dead, after this crucifixion
must learn the supreme lesson —

That sex is an eternal upright division, before which we must bow
and live in the acceptance of it,
it can never be wiped out;
the gods that made us are greater than our consciousness
and we, we are mostly unexplored hinterland
and our consciousness is a spot of light in a great but living darkness.

And then, risen, we must learn the most cruel lesson
of the horizontal division of mankind

the eternal division between the base and the beautiful.
The base, those that are below the bar of the cross
the small ones, ego-bound, little machines running in an
enclosed circle of self
the inferiors.

The inferiors, the inferiors, there they are, in hordes.
And they will destroy all, unless they are made to submit
and to serve that which is flamey or pure and watery or swift
wind or sound ringing rock

that which is elemental and of the substantial gods in man.
Mankind is lost and lost forever
unless men swiftly divide again, and the base are thrust down
into service, like the roots of trees.

For to-day, the base, the robots sit on the thrones of the world
in all the high places, and they are masters of industry
and rulers of millions of robots, being robots themselves, the same
only the brainy sort:
But brainy robot, or aesthetic robot, or merely muscular or
mechanical robot
it is all the same
less than real men, inferiors, inferiors.

How then are the few men, men of the wind and rain
men of the fire and rock, how are they going to come forth
from the robot mass of rich and poor, mechanical ego-bound myriads?
Life will find a way.
Life always finds a way.
Only. Oh man, stare, stare into the gulf
between you and the robot-hordes, misnamed your fellow-men.

FELLOW-MEN

A FEW are my fellow-men
a few, only a few:
the mass are not.
The mass are not my fellow-men
I repudiate them as such.
Let them serve.

THE SIGHT OF GOD

MEN are not alike in the sight of God

Oh no, oh no!

Men are anything but alike in the sight of God.

In the sight of God and the unknown gods

most men don't matter at all, any more than ants matter to men:

only the few, the very few, matter in the sight of God, and the

living substantial gods.

SOULS TO SAVE

You tell me every man has a soul to save?

I tell you, not one man in a thousand has even a soul to lose.

The automat has no soul to lose

so it can't have one to save.

WHEN MOST MEN DIE

WHEN most men die, to-day,
when most women die
it is merely a machine breaks down
and can't be mended.

HOLD BACK!

OH men, living men, vivid men, ocean and fire
don't give any more life to the machines!

Draw it away, draw it away, for these horrible machine-people
can't live any more, except for a spell, when the living cease
to accept them as brothers
and give them life.

Machines of iron must be tended by hands of flesh
and robots must have encouragement from men of the vivid life
or they break down.

Oh men of life and of living
withdraw, withdraw your flow
from the grinning and insatiable robots.

IMPULSE

You can count on anything, but you can't count on impulse.
You can't even count on the mechanical impulse for money
and motor-cars
which rules the robot-classes and the robot-masses, now.

Once disillusion falls on living men, and they feel the illusion
ebb away
the illusion of mankind, the illusion of a hopeful future for
these masses and classes of men
once disillusion falls on living men, and illusion of brotherhood
and hope bleeds right away,

Then, then comes the great moment of choice.
Oh, life is nothing if not choice.
And that which is choice alone matters.

In the moment of choice, the soul rolls back
away from the robot-classes and the robot-masses
and withdraws itself, and recognises a flower, or the morning-star
but utterly fails to recognise any more the grey rat-hordes of
classes and masses.
And then, when the soul of living men repudiates them
then at once the impulse of the greedy classes and masses
breaks down.
and a chaos of impulse supervenes
in which is heard the crashing splinter of machines
and the dull breaking of bones.

For the robot classes and masses are only kept sane
by the kindness of living women and men.

Now living women and men are threatened with extinction
and the time has come to cease to be kind any more

to the robot classes and masses.

Oh, if the huge tree dies
save some shoots, some lovely flowering shoots
to graft on another tree.

Trees raised from seed have wild and bitter fruits
they need grafting:
and even the loveliest flowers, you must graft them on a new stock.

MEN LIKE GODS

MEN wanted to be like gods
so they became like machines
and now even they're not satisfied.

MEN AND MACHINES

MAN invented the machine
and now the machine has invented man.
God the Father is a dynamo
and God the Son a talking radio
and God the Holy Ghost is gas that keeps it all going.
And men have perforce to be little dynamos
and little talking radios
and the human spirit is so much gas, to keep it all going.
Man invented the machine
so now the machine has invented man.

MASSES AND CLASSES

THERE are masses, and there are classes
but the machine it is that has invented them both.

The classes are so superior
because they are the brains of the machine.
And the masses are also superior
because they are the arms and legs of the machine.

An old Frenchman uttered the truism:
God cannot do without me!
Certainly the god in the machine cannot!
It has all the time to be soothed and consoled by the hands
of life.

GIVE US THE THEBAID

MODERN society is a mill
that grinds life very small.
The upper millstone of the robot-classes,
the lower millstone of the robot-masses,
and between them, the last living human beings
being ground exceeding small.

Turn away, O turn away, man of flesh!
Slip out, O slip out from between the millstones
extract and extricate yourself
and hide in your own wild Thebaid.
Then let the millstones grind, for they cannot stop grinding,
so let them grind
without grist.
Let them grind on one another, upper-class robot weight upon
lower-class robot weight
till they grow hot, and burst, as even stone can explode.

SIDE-STEP, O SONS OF MEN!

SONS of men, from the wombs of wistful women,
not piston-mechanical-begotten,
sons of men, with the wondering eyes of life
hark! hark! step aside silently and swiftly.
The machine has got you, is turning you round and round
and confusing you, and feeding itself on your life.
Softly, subtly, secretly, in soul first, then in spirit, then in body
slip aside, slip out
from the entanglement of the giggling machine
that sprawls across the earth in iron imbecility.
Softly, subtly, secretly, saying nothing
step aside, step out of it, it is eating you up,
O step aside, with decision, sons of men, with decision.

ON AND ON AND ON

THE machine will run on and on and on —
then let it!
Oh, never fight the machine,
nor its mechanised robots, robot classes and masses!
Lift never a finger against them, that they can see,
Let them run on and on and on —
It is their heaven and their doom.

OH WONDERFUL MACHINE!

OH wonderful machine, so self-sufficient, so sufficient unto yourself!
You who have no feeling of the moon as she changes her quarters!
You who don't hear the sea's uneasiness!
You to whom the sun is merely something that makes the
thermometer rise!
Oh wonderful machine, you are man's idea of godliness,
you who feel nothing, who know nothing, who run on absolved
from any other connection!
Oh you godly and smooth machine, spinning on in your own
Nirvana,
turning the blue wheels of your own heaven
almighty machine
how is it you have to be looked after by some knock-kneed wretch
at two pounds a week?

Oh great god of the machine
what lousy archangels and angels you have to surround yourself with!
And you can't possibly do without them!

BUT I SAY UNTO YOU: LOVE ONE ANOTHER

OH I have loved my fellow-men —
and lived to learn they are neither fellow nor men
but machine-robots.

Oh I have loved the working class
where I was born,
and lived to see them spawn into machine-robots
in the hot-beds of the board-schools and the film.

Oh how I loved the thought of thoughtful people
gentle and refined,
and lived to find out
that their last thought was money
and their last refinement bluff, a hate disguised,
and one trapped one's fingers in their brassy, polished works!

LOVE THY NEIGHBOUR

I LOVE my neighbour but
are these things my neighbours?
these two-legged things that walk and talk
and eat and cachinnate, and even seem to smile,
seem to smile, ye gods!
Am I told that these things are my neighbours?
All I can say is Nay! nay! nay! nay!

AS THYSELF!

SUPPOSING I say: dogs are my neighbours
I will love dogs as myself!

Then gradually I approximate to the dogs,
wriggle and wag and slaver, and get the mentality of a dog!
This I call a shocking humiliation.

The same with my robot neighbours.
If I try loving them, I fall into their robot jig-jig-jig
their robot cachinnation comes rattling out of my throat —
and I had better even have approximated to the dog.

Who then, O Jesus, is my neighbour?
If you point me to that fat money-smelling man in a motor-car,
or that hard-boiled young woman beside him
I shall have to refuse entirely to accept either of them.

My neighbour is not the man in the street, and never was:
he jigs along in the imbecile cruelty of the machine
and is implacable.

My neighbour, O my neighbour!
Occasionally I see him, silent, a little wondering
with his ears pricked and his body wincing
threading his way among the robot machine-people.
O O my neighbour
sometimes I see her, like a flower, nodding her way and shrinking
from the robot contact on every hand!
How can that be my neighbour
which I shrink from!

LONELY, LONESOME, LONEY — O!

WHEN I hear somebody complain of being lonely
or, in American, lonesome
I really wonder and wonder what they mean.

Do they mean they are a great deal alone?

But what is lovelier than to be alone?
escaping the petrol fumes of human conversation
and the exhaust-smell of people
and be alone!

Be alone, and feel the trees silently growing.
Be alone, and see the moonlight outside, white and busy and silent.
Be quite alone, and feel the living cosmos softly rocking
soothing and restoring and healing.
Soothed, restored and healed
when I am alone with the silent great cosmos
and there is no grating of people with their presences gnawing
at the stillness of the air.

TREES IN THE GARDEN

AH in the thunder air
how still the trees are!

And the lime-tree, lovely and tall, every leaf silent
hardly loses even a last breath of perfume.

And the ghostly, creamy coloured little tree of leaves
white, ivory white among the rambling greens
how evanescent, variegated elder, she hesitates on the green grass
as if, in another moment, she would disappear
with all her grace of foam!

And the larch that is only a column, it goes up too tall to see:
and the balsam-pines that are blue with the grey-blue blueness
of things from the sea,
and the young copper beech, its leaves red-rose at the ends
how still they are together, they stand so still
in the thunder air, all strangers to one another
as the green grass glows upwards, strangers in the garden.
Lichtentnl.

STORM IN THE BLACK FOREST

Now it is almost night, from the bronzey soft sky
jugfull after jugfull of pure white liquid fire, bright white
tipples over and spills down,
and is gone
and gold-bronze flutters beat through the thick upper air.
And as the electric liquid pours out, sometimes
a still brighter white snake wriggles among it, spilled
and tumbling wriggling down the sky:
and then the heavens cackle with uncouth sounds.
And the rain won't come, the rain refuses to come!
This is the electricity that man is supposed to have mastered
chained, subjugated to his use!
supposed to!

REVOLUTION AS SUCH!

CURIOUSLY enough, actual revolutions are made by robots,
living people never make revolutions,
they can't, life means too much to them.

ROBOT FEELINGS

IT is curious, too, that though the modern man in the street
is a robot, and incapable of love
he is capable of an endless, grinding, nihilistic hate:
that is the only strong feeling he is capable of;
and therein lies the danger of robot-democracy and all the
men in the street,
they move in a great grind of hate, slowly but inevitably.

REAL DEMOCRACY

IF the robot can recognise the clean flame of life
in men who have never fallen in life
then he repents, and his will breaks, and a great love of life
brings him to his knees, in homage and pure passion of service.
Then he receives the kiss of reconciliation
and ceases to be a robot, and becomes a servant of life
serving with delight and with reverence those men whose flame
of life undimmed delights him, so even he is lit up.

ROBOT-DEMOCRACY

IN a robot-democracy, nobody is willing to serve
even work is unwilling, the worker is unwilling, unwilling.
The great grind of unwillingness, the slow undergrind of hate
and democracy is ground into dust
then the mill-stones burst with the internal heat of their own friction.

WORSHIP

ALL men are worshippers
unless they have fallen, and become robots.

All men worship the wonder of life
until they collapse into egoism, the mechanical, self-centred
system of the robot.

But even in pristine men, there is the difference:
some men can see life clean and flickering all around,
and some can only see what they are shown.
Some men look straight into the eyes of the gods
and some men can see no gods, they only know
the gods are there because of the gleam on the faces of the
men who see.

Most men, even unfallen, can only live
by the transmitted gleam from the faces of vivider men
who look into the eyes of the gods.
And worship is the joy of the gleam from the eyes of the gods,
and the robot is denial of the same,
even the denial that there is any gleam.

CLASSES

THERE are two classes of men;
those that look into the eyes of the gods, and these are few,
and those that look into the eyes of the few other men
to see the gleam of the gods there, reflected in the human eyes.

All other class is artificial.

There is, however, the vast third homogeneous amorphous
class of anarchy
the robots, those who deny the gleam.

DEMOCRACY IS SERVICE

DEMOCRACY is service, but not the service of demos.

Democracy is demos serving life

and demos serves life as it gleams on the face of the few,

and the few look into the eyes of the gods, and serve the sheer gods.

FALSE DEMOCRACY AND REAL

IF man only looks to man, and no one sees beyond
then all is lost, the robot supervenes.

The few must look into the eyes of the gods, and obey the look
in the eyes of the gods:

and the many must obey the few that look into the eyes of the gods;
and the stream is towards the gods, not backwards, towards man.

SERVICE

AH yes, men must learn to serve
not for money, but for life.

Ah yes, men must learn to obey
not a boss, but the gleam of life on the face of a man
who has looked into the eyes of the gods.

Man is only perfectly human
when he looks beyond humanity.

WHAT ARE THE GODS?

WHAT are the gods, then, what are the gods?

The gods are nameless and imageless
yet looking in a great full lime-tree of summer
I suddenly saw deep into the eyes of gods:
it is enough.

THE GODS! THE GODS!

PEOPLE were bathing and posturing themselves on the beach
and all was dreary, great robot limbs, robot breasts
robot voices, robot even the gay umbrellas.
But a woman, shy and alone, was washing herself under a tap
and the glimmer of the presence of the gods was like lilies,
and like water-lilies.

NAME THE GODS!

I REFUSE to name the gods, because they have no name.
I refuse to describe the gods, because they have no form nor
shape nor substance.

Ah, but the simple ask for images!
Then for a time at least, they must do without.

But all the time I see the gods:
the man who is moving the tall white corn,
suddenly, it curves, as it yields, the white wheat
and sinks down with a swift rustle, and a strange, falling flatness,
ah! the gods, the swaying body of god!
ah the fallen stillness of god, autumnus, and it is only July
the pale-gold flesh of Priapus dropping asleep.

THERE ARE NO GODS

THERE are no gods, and you can please yourself
have a game of tennis, go out in the car, do some shopping,
sit and talk, talk, talk
with a cigarette browning your fingers.
There are no gods, and you can please yourself —
go and please yourself —

But leave me alone, leave me alone, to myself!
and then in the room, whose is the presence
that makes the air so still and lovely to me?

Who is it that softly touches the sides of my breast
and touches me over the heart
so that my heart beats soothed, soothed, soothed and at peace?

Who is it smooths the bed-sheets like the cool
smooth ocean when the fishes rest on edge
in their own dream?

Who is it that clasps and kneads my naked feet, till they unfold,
till all is well, till all is utterly well? the lotus-lilies of the feet!

I tell you, it is no woman, it is no man, for I am alone.
And I fall asleep with the gods, the gods
that are not, or that are
according to the soul's desire,
like a pool into which we plunge, or do not plunge.

FOOD OF THE NORTH

THE food of the north tastes too much of the fat of the pig
fat of the pig!

Take me south again, to the olive trees
and oil me with the lymph of the silvery trees
oil me with the lymph of trees
not with the fat of the pig.

RETORT TO WHITMAN

AND whoever walks a mile full of false sympathy
walks to the funeral of the whole human race.

RETORT TO JESUS

AND whoever forces himself to love anybody
begets a murderer in his own body.

THE DEEPEST SENSUALITY

THE profoundest of all sensualities
is the sense of truth
and the next deepest sensual experience
is the sense of justice.

SENSE OF TRUTH

You must fuse mind and wit with all the senses
before you can feel truth.
And if you can't feel truth you can't have any other
satisfactory sensual experience.

SATISFACTION

THE profound sensual experience of truth: Yea, this alone satisfies us, in the end.

VIBRATION OF JUSTICE

THE profound and thrilling vibration of justice, sense of ultimate justice makes the heart suddenly quiver with love.

LIES

LIES are not a question of false fact
but of false feeling and perverted justice.

POISON

WHAT has killed mankind — for the bulk of mankind is dead —
is lies:
the nasty lying pretence of seeming to feel what we don't feel.

COMMANDMENTS

WHEN Jesus commanded us to love our neighbour
he forced us to live a great lie, or to disobey:
for we can't love anybody, neighbour or no neighbour, to order,
and faked love has rotted our marrow.

EMOTIONAL LIES

You hear a woman say: I love my husband dearly —
and you look in her eyes and see it is a lie.
Even it is a trick: but she is not ashamed.

LAUGHTER

LISTEN to people laughing
and you will hear what liars they are
or cowards.

DRAWING-ROOM

You sit talking in all earnestness to a woman,
hearing her talk, that is:
and you know all the while
that every syllable, every accent, every intonation and every
cadence is a lie:
yet you go on talking, in all earnestness.

CABBAGE-ROSES

You may smell the breath of the gods in the common roses,
and feel the splendour of the gods go through you, even as you
see the green-fly on the stems,
in the summer morning:
or you may not.

If you don't then don't pretend you do —
but if you don't you are suffering from an amnesia
of the senses:
you are like to die of malnutrition of the senses:
and your sensual atrophy
will at last send you insane.

COLD BLOOD

IN cold blood, I cannot feel goddesses in the summer evening
trafficking mysteriously through the air.
But what right has my blood to be cold
before I am dead?
If I cut my finger, my blood is hot, not cold.

And even in cold blood I know this:
I am more alive, more aware and more wise
when my blood is kindled:
and when, in the summer evening
I feel goddesses trafficking mysteriously through the air.

SUNSET

THERE is a band of dull gold in the west, and say what you like
again and again some god of evening leans out of it
and shares being with me, silkily
all of twilight.

LISTEN TO THE BAND!

THERE is a band playing in the early night,
but it is only unhappy men making a noise
to drown their inner cacophony: and ours.

A little moon, quite still, leans and sings to herself
through the night
and the music of men is like a mouse gnawing,
gnawing in a wooden trap, trapped in.

THE HUMAN FACE

HARDLY ever, now, has a human face
the baffling light or the strange still gleam of the gods
within it, upon it.

Even from the face of the children, now,
that spangled glisten is gone, that at-oneness without after-thought,
and they are bridled with cunning, and bitted
with knowledge of things that shall never be admitted,
even the fact of birth: even little children.

Holbein and Titian and Tintoret could never paint faces, now:
because those faces were windows to the strange horizons, even
Henry VIII.;
whereas faces now are only human grimaces,
with eyes like the interiors of stuffy rooms, furnished.

PORTRAITS

PORTRAITS are now supremely uninteresting
because all the faces contain sets of emotional and mental furniture
all more or less alike,
as all drawing-rooms are, arranged!

FURNITURE

SOME women live for the idiotic furniture of their houses,
some men live for the conceited furniture of their minds,
some only live for their emotional furnishing — —
and it all amounts to the same thing, furniture,
usually in “ suites.”

CHILDREN SINGING IN SCHOOL

CLASS-CHILDREN are singing in school
and what an awful concatenation of sounds it is!
They have no song in their souls, none in their spirits,
none in their little throats or class-room bodies
only they are made to utter these cog-wheel sounds
which are meant to be the old folk-song: Strawberry Fair!

KEEP IT UP

PEOPLE go on singing when they have no song in them.

People go on talking when they have nothing to say.

People go on walking when they have nowhere to go.

People keep it up, because they daren't stop.

So here we go round the mulberry bush,

mulberry bush, mulberry bush!

Here we go round the mulberry bush

never having seen a mulberry bush in our lives.

RACE AND BATTLE

TH E race is not to the swift
but to those that can sit still
and let the waves go over them.
The battle is not to the strong
but to the frail, who know best
how to efface themselves
to save the streaked pansy of the heart from being trampled
to mud.

NOTHING TO SAVE

THERE is nothing to save, now all is lost,
but a tiny core of stillness in the heart
like the eye of a violet.

BRITISH SINCERITY

THEY tell me that these British moral birds
all the great jixery up in the fixery
are “ perfectly sincere “
and “ perfectly honest.”

If it is perfectly sincere to deny your own make-up
and perfectly honest to pretend to be unbegotten
may I ask you then, where insincerity and dishonesty begin.

The jixery perhaps never picked a man’s pocket
but my god, they sneak-thiefed his very genitals away from him:
going a bit further than his pocket, what?

And the poor man never knew he was jixed,
fixed, jixed, fixed!
He feels for his purse, and finds it there, and says
Oh my jixer, my fixer
oh he’s an honest man! anyhow!

Is British hypocrisy a form of softening of the brain?
Or what is it that my nation is suffering from?

THE ENGLISH ARE SO NICE!

THE English are so nice
so awfully nice
they are the nicest people in the world.
And what's more, they're very nice about being nice
about your being nice as well!
If you're not nice they soon make you feel it.

Americans and French and Germans and so on
they're all very well
but they're not really nice, you know.
They're not nice in our sense of the word, are they now?

That's why one doesn't have to take them seriously.
We must be nice to them, of course,
of course, naturally.
But it doesn't really matter what you say to them,
they don't really understand
you can just say anything to them:
be nice, you know, just nice
but you must never take them seriously, they wouldn't understand,
just be nice, you know! oh, fairly nice,
not too nice of course, they take advantage
but nice enough, just nice enough
to let them feel they're not quite as nice as they might be.

THE HILLS

I LIFT up mine eyes unto the hills
and there they are, but no strength comes from them to me.
Only from darkness
and ceasing to see
strength comes.

TOURISTS

THERE is nothing to look at any more,
everything has been seen to death.

SEEKERS

OH seekers, when you leave off seeking
you will realise there was never anything to seek
You were only seeking to lose something,
not to find something,
when you went forth so vigorously in search.

SEARCH FOR LOVE

THOSE that go searching for love
only make manifest their own lovelessness,
and the loveless never find love,
only the loving find love,
and they never have to seek for it.

SEARCH FOR TRUTH

SEARCH for nothing any more, nothing
except truth.

Be very still, and try and get at the truth.

And the first question to ask yourself is:

How great a liar am I?

LIES ABOUT LOVE

WE are all liars, because
the truth of yesterday becomes a lie to-morrow,
whereas letters are fixed,
and we live by the letter of truth.

The love I feel for my friend, this year,
is different from the love I felt last year.
If it were not so, it would be a lie.
Yet we re-iterate love! love!
as if it were coin with a fixed value
instead of a flower that dies, and opens a different bud.

TRAVEL IS OVER

I HAVE travelled, and looked at the world, and loved it.
Now I don't want to look at the world any more,
there seems nothing there.
In not-looking, and in not-seeing
comes a new strength
and undeniable new gods share their life with us, when we
cease to see.

OLD MEN

WHOM the gods love, die young.
How the gods must hate most of the old, old men to-day,
the rancid old men that don't die
because the gods don't want them
won't have them
leave them to stale on earth.
Old people fixed in a rancid resistance
to life, fixed to the letter of the law.
The gods, who are life, and the fluidity of living change
leave the old ones fixed to their ugly, cogged self-will
which turns on and on, the same, and is hell on earth.

DEATH

DEATH is no escape, ah no! only a doorway to the inevitable.
That's why the dogged, resistant old ones dare not die
dare not die! — they daren't go through the door.

They dare not die, because they know
in death they cannot anymore escape
the retribution for their obstinacy.
Old men, old obstinate men and women
dare not die, because in death
their hardened souls are washed with fire, and washed and seared
till they are softened back to life-stuff again, against which
they hardened themselves.

BOURGEOIS AND BOLSHEVIST

THE bourgeois produces the bolshevist, inevitably
as every half-truth at length produces the contradiction of itself
in the opposite half-truth.

PROPERTY AND NO-PROPERTY

THE bourgeois asserts that he owns his property by divine right,
and the bolshevist asserts that by human right no man shall
own property
and between the two blades of this pair of shears, property
and no-property
we shall all be cut to bits.

COWARDICE AND IMPUDENCE

BOURGEOIS cowardice produces bolshevist impudence
in direct ratio.

As the bourgeois gets secretly more cowardly, knowing he is in
the wrong

the bolshevist gets openly more impudent, also knowing he
is in the wrong.

And between the cowardice and impudence of this pair who
are in the wrong,

this pair of property mongrels
the world will be torn in two.

LORD TENNYSON AND LORD MELCHETT

“ DOST tha hear my horse’s feet, as he canters away?
Property! Property! Property! tha’s what they seems to
say! “

Do you hear my Rolls Royce purr, as it glides away?
— I lick the cream off property! that’s what it seems to say!

CHOICE OF EVILS

IF I have to choose between the bourgeois and the bolshevist
I choose the bourgeois
he will interfere with me less.

But in choosing the bourgeois, one brings to pass
only more inevitably, the bolshevist
Since the bourgeois is the direct cause of the bolshevist,
as a half-lie causes the immediate contradiction of the half-lie.

HARD-BOILED CONSERVATIVES

O YOU hard-boiled conservatives, and you soft-boiled liberals
don't you see how you make bolshevism inevitable?

SOLOMON'S BABY

PROPERTY is now Solomon's baby
and whoever gets it, it'll be a dead baby
a corpse, even of property.

THE PROPERTY QUESTION

IN settling the property question between them,
bourgeois and bolshevist,
they'll merely destroy all property and a great many people
like the two lions who devoured one another, and left the tail —
tufts wagging.

Let's hope there'll be more sense in the tail-tufts
than there was in the lions.

THE WAY OUT

THE only way to settle the property question
is to cease to be interested in it; to be so interested in some —
thing else
that the property problem solves itself by the way.

ST GEORGE AND THE DRAGON

THE more you tackle the property dragon
the more deadly and dangerous it becomes.
Whereas if you ride away and become deeply concerned in
something else
the old dragon will dwindle down to the size of a stray cat, neglected,
whom some recalcitrant old maid will adopt, as a hobby.
It is all a question of being profoundly interested in property,
or not.
And quite a lot of people are not.
But they let themselves be overwhelmed by those that are.

THE HALF-BIJND

THE bourgeois and the bolshevist are both blind
hence the ridiculous way they rush in where angels fear to tread.
They can't see it.

But among the bourgeois and the bolshevist bounders
one notices men here and there, going hesitatingly, faltering
with the pathos of those who can see, but whose sight is dim.
And these, the minority of men who can still see the light of life
give way all the time before the mechanical rushing of the
ugly stone-blind ones.

MINORITIES IN DANGER

Now above all is the time for the minorities of men,
those who are neither bourgeois nor bolshevist, but true life,
to gather and fortify themselves, in every class, in every
country, in every race.

Instead of which, the minorities that still see the gleams of life
submit abjectly to the blind mechanical traffic-streams of those horrors
the stone-blind bourgeois, and the stone-blind bolshevist,
and pander to them.

IF YOU ARE A MAN

IF you are a man, and believe in the destiny of mankind
then say to yourself: we will cease to care
about property and money and mechanical devices,
and open our consciousness to the deep, mysterious life
that we are now cut off from.

The machine shall be abolished from the earth again;
it is a mistake that mankind has made;
money shall cease to be, and property shall cease to perplex
and we will find the way to immediate contact with life
and with one another.
To know the moon as we have never known
yet she is knowable.
To know a man as we have never known
a man, as never yet a man was knowable, yet still shall be.

TERRA INCOGNITA

THERE are vast realms of consciousness still undreamed of
vast ranges of experience, like the humming of unseen harps,
we know nothing of, within us.

Oh when man escaped from the barbed-wire entanglement
of his own ideas and his own mechanical devices
there is a marvellous rich world of contact and sheer fluid beauty
and fearless face-to-face awareness of now-naked life
and me, and you, and other men and women
and grapes, and ghouls, and ghosts and green moonlight
and ruddy-orange limbs stirring the limbo
of the unknown air, and eyes so soft
softer than the space between the stars,
and all things, and nothing, and being and not-being
alternately palpitant,
when at last we escape the barbed-wire enclosure
of Know Thyself, knowing we can never know,
we can but touch, and wonder, and ponder, and make our effort
and dangle in a last fastidious fine delight
as the fuchsia does, dangling her reckless drop
of purple after so much putting forth
and slow mounting marvel of a little tree.

CLIMBING DOWN

THEY are afraid of climbing down from this idiotic tin-pot
heaven of ours
because they don't know what they'll find when they do get down.

They needn't bother, most of them will never get down at all,
they've got to stay up.
And those that do descend have got to suffer a sense-change
into something new and strange.

Become aware as leaves are aware
and fine as flowers are fine
and fierce as fire is fierce
and subtle, silvery, tinkling and rippling
as rain-water
and still a man,
but a man re-born from the rigidity of fixed ideas
resurrected from the death of mechanical motion and emotion.

ONLY THE BEST MATTERS

ONLY the best matters, in man especially.

True, you can't produce the best without attending to the whole
but that which is secondary is only important
in so far as it goes to the bringing forth of the best.

TO PINO

O PINO

What a bean-o!
when we printed Lady C.!
Little Giuntina
couldn't have been a
better little bee!
When you told him
perhaps they'd scold him
for printing those naughty words

All he could say:
“ But we do it every day!
like the pigeons and the other little birds! “
And dear old lady Jean
“ I don't know what you mean
by publishing such a book.”

We're all in it, all my family
me and Ekkerhart and Somers and Pamelie —
you're no better than a crook — ! “

“Wait, dear Lady Jean, wait a minute!
What makes you think that you're all in it?
Did you ever open the book?
Is Ekke Sir Clifford? it's really funny!
And you, dear Lady Jean, are you Connie?
Do open the book and look! — “
But off she went, being really rattled
and there's a battle that's still to be battled
along with the others! what luck!

BROADCASTING TO THE G. B. P.

“ HUSHABY baby, on a tree top
when the wind blows, the cradle shall rock,
when the bough breaks “
Stop that at once!
You’ll give the Great British Public a nervous shock!

“Goosey goosey gander
whither do you wander
upstairs, downstairs
in my lady’s “
Stop! where’s your education?
Don’t you know that’s obscene?
Remember the British Public!

“ Baa-baa black sheep
have you any wool?
yes sir! yes sir!
three bags full!
One for the master, and one for the dame,
and one for the little boy that lives down the “
No!

You’d better omit that, too communistic!
Remember the state of mind of the British Public.

“Pussy-cat pussy-cat where have you been?
I’ve been up to London to see the fine queen!
Pussy-cat pussy-cat what did you there?
I frightened a little mouse — — “
Thank you! thank you
There are no mice in our Royal Palaces. Omit it!

WE CANT BE TOO CAREFUL

WE can't be too careful
about the British Public.
It gets bigger and bigger
and its perambulator has to get bigger and bigger
and its dummy-teat has to be made bigger and bigger and bigger
and the job of changing its diapers gets bigger and bigger and
bigger and bigger
and the sound of its howling gets bigger and bigger and bigger
and bigger and bigger
and the feed of pap that we nurses and guardian angels of
the press have to deal out to it
gets bigger and bigger and bigger and bigger and bigger and bigger
yet its belly-ache seems to get bigger too
and soon even god won't be big enough to handle that infant.

GLIMPSES

WHAT'S the good of a man
unless there's the glimpse of a god in him?
And what's the good of a woman
unless she's a glimpse of a goddess of some sort?

ALL SORTS OF GODS

THERE'S all sorts of gods, all sorts and every sort,
and every god that humanity has ever known is still a god to-day
the African queer ones and Scandinavians' queer ones,
the Greek beautiful ones, the Phoenician ugly ones, the Aztec
hideous ones
goddesses of love, goddesses of dirt, excrement-eaters or lily virgins
Jesus, Buddha, Jehovah and Ra, Egypt and Babylon
all the gods, and you see them all if you look, alive and moving to-day,
and alive and moving to-morrow, many to-morrows, as yesterdays.

Where do you see them, you say?
You see them in glimpses, in the faces and forms of people,
in glimpses.
When men and women, when lads and girls are not thinking,
when they are pure, which means when they are quite clean
from self-consciousness
either in anger or tenderness, or desire or sadness or wonder
or mere stillness
you may see glimpses of the gods in them.

FOR A MOMENT

FOR a moment, at evening, tired, as he stepped off the tram-car,
— the young tram-conductor in a blue uniform, to himself
forgotten, —
and lifted his face up, with blue eyes looking at the electric
rod which he was going to turn round,
for a moment, pure in the yellow evening light, he was
Hyacinthus.

In the green garden darkened the shadow of coming rain
and a girl ran swiftly, laughing breathless, taking in her white washing
in rapid armfuls from the line, tossing in the basket,
and so rapidly, and so flashing, fleeing before the rain
for a moment she was Io, Io, who fled from Zeus, or the Danae.

When I was waiting and not thinking, sitting at a table on the
hotel terrace
I saw suddenly coming towards me, lit up and uplifted with pleasure
advancing with the slow-swiftness of a ship backing her white
sails into port
the woman who looks for me in the world
and for the moment she was Isis, gleaming, having found her
Osiris.

For a moment, as he looked at me through his spectacles
pondering, yet eager, the broad and thick-set Italian who
works in with me,
for a moment he was the Centaur, the wise yet horse-hoofed
Centaur
in whom I can trust.

GOETHE AND POSE

WHEN Goethe becomes an Apollo, he becomes a plaster cast.
When people pose as gods, they are Crystal Palace statues,
Made of cement poured into a mould, around iron sticks.

MEN LIKE GODS

WHEN men think they are like gods
they are usually much less than men
being conceited fools.

THOUGHT

THOUGHT, I love thought.

But not the jaggling and twisting of already existent ideas

I despise that self-important game.

Thought is the welling up of unknown life into consciousness

Thought is the testing of statements on the touchstone of the conscience

Thought is gazing on to the face of life, and reading what can
be read,

Thought is pondering over experience, and coming to con-clusion.

Thought is not a trick, or an exercise, or a set of dodges

Thought is a man in his wholeness wholly attending.

BE IT SO

O, IF a flame is in you, be it so!

When your flame flickers up, and flickers forth in sheer purity
for a moment free from all conceit of yourself, and all after-thought
you are for that moment one of the gods, Jesus or Fafnir or
Priapus or Siva.

CONCEIT

IT is conceit that kills us
and makes us cowards instead of gods.
Under the great Command: Know thyself, and that thou art mortal!
we have become fatally self-conscious, fatally self-important,
fatally entangled in the Laocoon coils of our conceit.

Now we have to admit we can't know ourselves, we can only
know about ourselves.
And I am not interested to know about myself any more
I only entangle myself in the knowing.

Now let me be myself,
now let me be myself, and flicker forth
now let me be myself, in the being, one of the gods.

MAN IS MORE THAN HOMO SAPIENS

MAN is not quite a man
unless he has his pure moments, when he is surpassing.
I saw an angry Italian seize an irritating little official by the throat
and all but squeeze the life out of him:
and Jesus himself could not have denied that at that moment
the angry man
was a god, in godliness pure as Christ, beautiful
but perhaps Ashtaroth, perhaps Siva, perhaps Huitzilopochtli
with the dark and gleaming beauty of the messageless gods.

SELF-CONSCIOUS PEOPLE

O ARE you tangled up in yourself
poor little man, poor little man!

Is she tangled up in herself then
poor woman, poor woman!

But beware!

They are like cats with unclean claws, tangled up in nets,
and if you try to get them out
they will tear you terribly, and give you blood-poisoning.

TWO WAYS OF LIVING AND DYING

WHILE people live the life
they are open to the restless skies, and streams flow in and out
darkly from the fecund cosmos, from the angry red sun, from
the moon
up from the bounding earth, strange pregnant streams, in and
out of the flesh,
and man is an iridescent fountain, rising up to flower
for a moment godly, like Baal or Krishna, or Adonis, or Balder,
or Lucifer.

But when people are only self-conscious and self-willed
they cannot die, their corpse still runs on,
while nothing comes from the open heaven, from earth, from
the sun and moon
to them, nothing, nothing;
only the mechanical power of self-directed energy
drives them on and on, like machines,
on and on, and their triumph in mere motion
full of friction, full of grinding, full of danger to the gentle passengers
of growing life,
but on and on, on and on, till the friction wears them out
and the machine begins to wobble
and with hideous shrieks of steely rage and frustration
the worn-out machine at last breaks down:
it is finished, its race is over.

So self-willed, self-centred, self-conscious people die
the death of nothingness, worn-out machines, kaput!
But when living people die in the ripeness of their time
terrible and strange the god lies on the bed, -wistful, coldly wonderful,
beyond us, now beyond, departing with that purity
that flickered forth in the best hours of life,
when the man was himself, so a god in his singleness,
and the woman was herself, never to be duplicated, a goddess there

gleaming her hour in life as she now gleams in death
and departing inviolate, nothing can lay hand on her,
she who at her best hours was herself, warm, flickering, herself,
therefore a goddess,
and who now draws slowly away, cold, the wistful goddess receding.

SO LET ME LIVE

So let me live that I may die
eagerly passing over from the entanglement of life
to the adventure of death, in eagerness
turning to death as I turn to beauty
to the breath, that is, of new beauty unfolding in death.

GLADNESS OF DEATH

OH death
about you I know nothing, nothing —
about the afterwards
as a matter of fact, we know nothing.

yet of death, oh death
also I know so much about you
the knowledge is within me, without being a matter of fact.

And so I know
after the painful, painful experience of dying
there comes an after-gladness, a strange joy
in a great adventure
oh the great adventure of death, where Thomas Cook cannot
guide us.

I have always wanted to be as the flowers are
so unhampered in their living and dying,
and in death I believe I shall be as the flowers are.
I shall blossom like a dark pansy, and be delighted
there among the dark sun-rays of death.
I can feel myself unfolding in the dark sunshine of death
to something flowery and fulfilled, and with a strange sweet perfume.
Men prevent one another from being men
but in the great spaces of death
the winds of the afterwards kiss us into blossom of manhood.

HUMANITY NEEDS PRUNING

HUMANITY needs pruning

It is like a vast great tree with a great lot of sterile, dead.

rotting wood

and an amount of fungoid and parasitic growth.

The tree of humanity needs pruning, badly,

it needs thoroughly pruning, not as in the late war, blasting

with unintelligent and evil destruction

but pruning, severely, intelligently and ruthlessly pruning.

The tree of human existence needs badly pruning

or the whole tree may fall rotten.

SELF-SACRIFICE

SELF-SACRIFICE, after all, is a wrong and mistaken idea.
It cannot be anything but wrong to sacrifice
good, healthy, natural feelings, instincts, passions or desires,
just as it cannot be anything but wrong to cut the throats
of doves for Venus, or steers for Hermes,
if it is merely Venus or Hermes you are thinking of.
Venus would rather have live doves than dead, if you want to
make an offering.
If you want to make her an offering, let the doves fly from
her altar.
But what we may sacrifice, if we call it sacrifice, from the self,
are all the obstructions to life, self-importance, self-conceit,
egoistic self-will,
or all the ugly old possessions that make up the impediments
of life,
ugly old furniture, ugly old books, ugly old buildings, ugly old
“ art,”
anything that belongs to us, and is ugly and an impediment
to the free motion of life
sacrifice that to the bright gods, and satisfy the destructive instinct.

SHEDDING OF BLOOD

“ WITHOUT shedding of blood there is no remission of sin.”

What does it mean?

Does it mean that life which has gone ugly and unliving is sin and the blood of it must be spilt?

O spill the blood, not of your firstling lamb, without spot or blemish,
but kill the scabbed and ugly lamb, that spreads contagion.
O slay, not the bright proud life that is in you, that can be happy,
but the craven, the cowardly, the creeping you, that can only
be unhappy, kill it, the unliving thing.

O sacrifice, not that which is noble and generous and
spontaneous in humanity
but that which is mean and base and squalid and degenerate,
destroy it, shed its unclean blood, kill it, put it out of existence.
O shed the unclean, mean, cowardly, greedy, egoistic, de —
generate blood
and let mankind make new blood, fresh and bright.

THE OLD IDEA OF SACRIFICE

THE old idea of sacrifice was this:
that blood of the lower life must be shed
for the feeding and strengthening of the handsomer, fuller life.

O when the old world sacrificed a ram
it was to the gods who make us splendid
and it was for a feast, a feast of meat, for men and maids
on a day of splendour, for the further splendour of being men.

It was the eating up of little lives,
even doves, even small birds
into the dance and splendour of a bigger life.

There is no such thing as sin.
There is only life and anti-life.

And sacrifice is the law of life which enacts
that little lives must be eaten up into the dance and splendour
of bigger lives, with due reverence and acknowledgement.

SELF-SACRIFICE

SELF-SACRIFICE is perhaps the vilest deed a man can do.

The self that we are, at its best, is all that we are
is the very individual flame of life itself
which is the man's pure self.

And to sacrifice that, to anything or anybody whatsoever
is the vilest cowardice and treachery.

Yet a woman can add her flame to a man's
or a man can add his flame to the flame of another man
as a gift of gladness, seeing the glamour of life go up
swifter and higher and brighter, for the yielding and the
adding together.

I HEARD A LITTLE CHICKEN CHIRP

I HEARD a little chicken chirp:
My name is Thomas, Thomas Earp!
And I can neither paint nor write
I only can set other people right.
All people that can write or paint
do tremble under my complaint.
For I am a chicken, and I can chirp,
and my name is Thomas, Thomas Earp.

CROSS, COARSE, HIDEOUS

(Police description of my pictures.)

LATELY I saw a sight most quaint:
London's lily-like policemen faint
in virgin outrage as they viewed
the nudity of a Lawrence nude!

MR SQUIRE

Dearly-beloved Mr Squire
so long as you lead the gawky choir
of critical cherubs that chirrup and pipe
in the weekly press their self-satisfied swipe.
Oh London's Mercury, Sunday-School Squire
so long as you tune your turn-turn lyre
with its tinkle-winkle and tweedle-dee
to the lesser fry in the hierarchy.

So long will they lift their impertinent voices
and chirrup their almost indecent noises
almost as empty as belching or hiccup
in grand chorale to your monthly kick-up.

So now we beg you, Mr Squire
do now once forever, retire
and leave the critical piggy-wiggies.

LET THERE BE LIGHT!

IF ever there was a beginning
there was no god in it
there was no Verb
no Voice
no Word.

There was nothing to say:

Let there be light!

All that story of Mr God switching on day
is just conceit.

Just man's conceit!

— Who made the Sun?

— My child, I cannot tell a lie,

I made it!

George Washington's Grandpapa!

All we can honestly imagine in the beginning
is the incomprehensible plasm of life, of creation struggling
and becoming light.

GOD IS BORN

THE history of the cosmos
is the history of the struggle of becoming.
When the dim flux of unformed life
struggled, convulsed back and forth upon itself,
and broke at last into light and dark
came into existence as light,
came into existence as cold shadow —
then every atom of the cosmos trembled with delight.
Behold, God is born!
He is bright light!
He is pitch dark and cold!

And in the great struggle of intangible chaos
when, at a certain point, a drop of water began to downwards
and a breath of vapour began to wreathe up
Lo again the shudder of bliss through all the atoms!
Oh, God is born!
Behold, he is born wet!
Look, He hath movement upward! He spirals!

And so, in the great aeons of accomplishment and debacle
from time to time the wild crying of every electron:
Lo! God is born.
When sapphires cooled out of molten chaos:
See, God is born! He is blue, he is deep blue, he is for ever blue!

When gold lay shining threading the cooled-off rock:
God is born! God is born! bright yellow and ductile He is born.

When the little eggy amoeba emerged out of foam and nowhere
then all the electrons held their breath:
Ach! Ach! Now indeed God is born! He twinkles within.

When from a world of mosses and of ferns
at last the narcissus lifted a tuft of five-point stars
and dangled them in the atmosphere,
then every molecule of creation jumped and clapped its hands:
God is born! God is born perfumed and dangling and with a
little cup!

Throughout the aeons, as the lizard swirls his tail finer than water,
as the peacock turns to the sun, and could not be more splendid,
as the leopard smites the small calf with a spangled paw, perfect,
the universe trembles: God is born! God is here!

And when at last man stood on two legs and wondered,
then there was a hush of suspense at the core of every electron:
Behold, now very God is born!
God Himself is born!
And so we see, God is not
until he is born.

And also we see
there is no end to the birth of God.

THE WHITE HORSE

THE youth walks up to the white horse, to put its halter on
and the horse looks at him in silence.
They are so silent they are in another world.

FLOWERS AND MEN

FLOWERS achieve their own floweriness and it is a miracle.
Men don't achieve their own manhood, alas, oh alas! alas!

All I want of you, men and women,
all I want of you
is that you shall achieve your beauty
as the flowers do.

Oh leave off saying I want you to be savages.
Tell me, is the gentian savage, at the top of its coarse stem?
Oh what in you can answer to this blueness?
... as the gentian and the daffodil. . . .
Tell me! tell me! is there in you a beauty to compare
to the honeysuckle at evening now
pouring out his breath.

PRAYER

GIVE me the moon at my feet
Put my feet upon the crescent, like a Lord!
O let my ankles be bathed in moonlight, that I may go
sure and moon-shod, cool and bright-footed
towards my goal.

For the sun is hostile, now
his face is like the red lion,

SHIP OF DEATH

I SING of autumn and the falling fruit
and the long journey towards oblivion.

The apples falling like great drops of dew
to bruise themselves an exit from themselves.

Have you built your ship of death, oh, have you?
Build then your ship of death, for you will need it!

Can man his own quietus make
with a bare bodkin?

With daggers, bodkins, bullets, man can make
a bruise or break of exit for his life
but is that a quietus, oh tell me, is it quietus?

Quietus is the goal of the long journey
the longest journey towards oblivion.
Slips out the soul, invisible one, wrapped still
in the white shirt of the mind's experiences
and folded in the dark-red, unseen
mantle of the body's still mortal memories.

Frightened and alone, the soul slips out of the house
or is pushed out
to find himself on the crowded, arid margins of existence.

Oh, it is not so easy, I tell you it is not so easy
to set softly forth on the longest journey, the longest journey.

It is easy to be pushed out of the silvery city of the body
through any breach in the wall,

thrust out on to the grey grey beaches of shadow
the long marginal stretches of existence, crowded with lost souls
that intervene between our tower and the shaking sea of the beyond.

Oh build your ship of death, oh build it in time
and build it lovingly, and put it between the hands of your soul.

Once outside the gate of the walled silvery life of days
once outside, upon the grey marsh beaches, where lost souls moan
in millions, unable to depart
having no boat to launch upon the shaken, soundless
deepest and longest of seas,
once outside the gate
what will you do, if you have no ship of the soul?

Oh pity the dead that are dead, but cannot take
the journey, still they moan and beat
against the silvery adamant walls of this our exclusive existence.
They moan and beat, they gnash, they rage
they fall upon the new outcoming souls with rage
and they send arrows of anger, bullets and bombs of frustration
over the adamant walls of this, our by-no-means impregnable existence.

Pity, oh pity the poor dead that are only ousted from life
and crowd there on the grey mud beaches of the margins
gaunt and horrible
waiting, waiting till at last the ancient boatman with the
common barge
shall take them aboard, towards the great goal of oblivion.

Pity the poor gaunt dead that cannot die
into the distance with receding oars
but must roam like outcast dogs on the margins of life,
and think of them, and with the soul's deep sigh
waft nearer to them the bark of delivery.

But for myself, but for my soul, dear soul
let me build a little ship with oars and food
and little dishes, and all accoutrements
dainty and ready for the departing soul.

And put it between the hands of the trembling soul.
So that when the hour comes, and the last door closes behind him
he shall slip down the shores invisible
between the half-visible hordes
to where the furthest and the longest sea
touches the margins of our life's existence
with wincing unwilling waves.

And launching there his little ship,
wrapped in the dark-red mantle of the body's memories
the little, slender soul sits swiftly down, and takes the oars
and draws away, away, away, towards the dark depths

fathomless deep ahead, far, far from the grey shores
that fringe with shadow all this world's existence.

Over the sea, over the farthest sea
on the longest journey
past the jutting rocks of shadow
past the lurking, octopus arms of agonised memory
past the strange whirlpools of remembered greed
through the dead weed of a life-time's falsity,
slow, slow my soul, in his little ship
on the most soundless of all seas
taking the longest journey.

Pulling the long oars of a life-time's courage
drinking the confident water from the little jug
and eating the brave bread of a wholesome knowledge
row, little soul, row on
on the longest journey, towards the greatest goal

Neither straight nor crooked, neither here nor there
but shadows folded on deeper shadows
and deeper, to a core of sheer oblivion
like the convolutions of shadow-shell
or deeper, like the foldings and involvings of a womb.

Drift on, drift on, my soul, towards the most pure
most dark oblivion.
And at the penultimate porches, the dark-red mantle
of the body's memories slips and is absorbed
into the shell-like, womb-like convoluted shadow.

And round the great final bend of unbroken dark
the skirt of the spirit's experience has melted away
the oars have gone from the boat, and the little dishes
gone, gone, and the boat dissolves like pearl
as the soul at last slips perfect into the goal, the core
of sheer oblivion and of utter peace,
the womb of silence in the living night.

Ah peace, ah lovely peace, most lovely lapsing
of this my soul into the plasm of peace.

Oh lovely last, last lapse of death, into pure oblivion
at the end of the longest journey
peace, complete peace!
But can it be that also it is procreation?

Oh build your ship of death
oh build it!
Oh, nothing matters but the longest journey.

MS." B."

THE SHIP OF DEATH

HAVE you built your ship of death, oh have you?
Oh build your ship of death, for you will need it.
Now in the twilight, sit by the invisible sea
Of peace, and build your little ship
Of death, that will carry the soul
On its last journey, on and on, so still
So beautiful, over the last of seas.
When the day comes, that will come.
Oh think of it in the twilight peacefully!
The last day, and the setting forth
On the longest journey, over the hidden sea
To the last wonder of oblivion.
Oblivion, the last wonder!
When we have trusted ourselves entirely
To the unknown, and are taken up
Out of our little ships of death
Into pure oblivion.
Oh build your ship of death, be building it now
With dim, calm thoughts and quiet hands
Putting its timbers together in the dusk,
Rigging its mast with the silent, invisible sail
That will spread in death to the breeze
Of the kindness of the cosmos, that will waft
The little ship with its soul to the wonder-goal.
Ah, if you want to live in peace on the face of the earth
Then build your ship of death, in readiness
For the longest journey, over the last of seas.
Lawrence's Typescript.

SONG OF DEATH

SING the song of death, oh sing it!

For without the song of death, the song of life
becomes pointless and silly.

Sing then the song of death, and the longest journey
and what the soul carries with him, and what he leaves behind
and how he finds the darkness that enfolds him into utter peace
at last, at last, beyond innumerable seas.

MS." B."

GLORY OF DARKNESS

Ink version:

BLUE and dark
Bavarian gentians, tall ones
make a dark blue gloom
in the sunny room
They have added blueness to blueness, until
it is dark: beauty
blue joy of my soul
Bavarian gentians
your dark blue gloom is so noble!
How deep I have gone
dark gentians
since I embarked on your dark blue fringes
how deep, how deep, how happy!
What a journey for my soul
in the dark blue gloom
of gentians here in the sunny room!

Pencil version:

...

it is dark
and the door is open
to the depths

It is so blue, it is so dark
in the dark doorway
and the way is open
to Hades.

Oh, I know.

Persephone has just gone back
down the thickening thickening gloom
of dark blue gentians to Pluto
to her bridegroom in the dark

and all the dead
and all the dark great ones of the underworld
down there, down there
down the blue depths of mountain gentian flowers
cold cold
down the dark blue path

What a dark blue gloom
of gentians here in the sunny room!

MS. "B".

BAVARIAN GENTIANS

NOT every man has gentians in his house
In soft September, at slow, sad Michaelmas.
Bavarian gentians, tall and dark, but dark
Darkening the day-time torch-like with the smoking blueness
of Pluto's gloom,
Ribbed hellish flowers erect, with their blaze of darkness
spread blue
Blown into points, by the heavy white draught of the day.

Torch-flowers of the blue-smoking darkness, Pluto's dark blue blaze
Black lamps from the halls of Dio, smoking dark blue
Giving off darkness, blue darkness, upon Demeter's yellow-pale day

Reach me a gentian, give me a torch!
Let me guide myself with the blue, forked torch of a flower
Down the darker and darker stairs, where blue is darkened on blueness
Down the way Persephone goes, just now, in first-frosted
September
To the sightless realm where darkness is married to dark
And Persephone herself is but a voice, as a bride
A gloom invisible enfolded in the deeper dark
Of the arms of Pluto as he ravishes her once again
And pierces her once more with his passion of the utter dark.

Among the splendour of black-blue torches, shedding fathom —
less darkness on the nuptials.

Give me a flower on a tall stem, and three dark flames,
For I will go to the wedding, and be wedding-guest
At the marriage of the living dark.

MS. "A."

The Poems



Lawrence's Ranch in Taos, New Mexico, where he spent his last years

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The Non-Fiction



Lawrence with Aldous Huxley, 1922

A STUDY OF THOMAS HARDY



This literary critical work was written in the early months of World War I, and was originally intended to be a short analysis of Hardy's characters, but developed into a major statement of Lawrence's philosophy of art. The introduction to this work shows its relation to Lawrence's final rewriting of *The Rainbow* and its place among his continual attempts to express his philosophy in a definitive form.



Thomas Hardy, the famous novelist and poet, whose natural depiction in style greatly inspired Lawrence

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CHAPTER I

Of Poppies and Phoenixes and the Beginning of the Argument

Man has made such a mighty struggle to feel at home on the face of the earth, without even yet succeeding. Ever since he first discovered himself exposed naked betwixt sky and land, belonging to neither, he has gone on fighting for more food, more clothing, more shelter; and though he has roofed-in the world with houses and though the ground has heaved up massive abundance and excess of nutriment to his hand, still he cannot be appeased, satisfied. He goes on and on. In his anxiety he has evolved nations and tremendous governments to protect his person and his property; his strenuous purpose, unremitting, has brought to pass the whole frantic turmoil of modern industry, that he may have enough, enough to eat and wear, that he may be safe. Even his religion has for the systole of its heart-beat, propitiation of the Unknown God who controls death and the sources of nourishment.

But for the diastole of the heart-beat, there is something more, something else, thank heaven, than this unappeased rage of self-preservation. Even the passion to be rich is not merely the greedy wish to be secure within triple walls of brass, along with a huge barn of plenty. And the history of mankind is not altogether the history of an effort at self-preservation which has at length become over blown and extravagant.

Working in contradiction to the will of self-preservation, from the very first man wasted himself begetting children, colouring himself and dancing and howling, and sticking feathers in his hair, in scratching pictures on the walls of his cave, and making graven images of his unutterable feelings. So he went on wildly and with gorgeousness taking no thought for the morrow, but, at evening, considering the ruddy lily.

In his sleep, however, it must have come to him early that the lily is a wise and housewifely flower, considerate of herself, laying up secretly her little storehouse and barn, well under the ground, well tucked with supplies. And this providence on the part of the lily, man laid to heart. He went out anxiously at dawn to kill the largest mammoth, so that he should have a huge hill of meat, that he could never eat his way through.

And the old man at the door of the cave, afraid of the coming winter with its

scant supplies, watching the young man go forth, told impressive tales to the children of the ant and the grasshopper; and praised the thrift and husbandry of that little red squirrel, and drew a moral from the gaudy, fleeting poppy.

“Don’t, my dear children,” continued the ancient paleolithic man as he sat at the door of his cave, “don’t behave like that reckless, shameless scarlet flower. Ah, my dears, you little know the amount of labour, the careful architecture, all the chemistry, the weaving and the casting of energy, the business of day after day and night after night, yon gaudy wreck has squandered. Pfff! — and it is gone, and the place thereof shall know it no more. Now, my dear children, don’t be like that.”

Nevertheless, the old man watched the last poppy coming out, the red flame licking into sight; watched the blaze at the top clinging around a little tender d-j^t, and he wept, thinking of his youth. Till the red flag fell before him, lay in rags on the earth. Then he did not know whether to pay homage to the void, or to preach.

So he compromised, and made a story about a phoenix. “Yes, my dears, in the waste desert, I know the green and graceful tree where the phoenix has her nest. And there I have seen the eternal phoenix escape away into flame, leaving life behind in her ashes. Suddenly she went up in to red flame, and was gone, leaving life to rise from her ashes.”

“And did it?”

“Oh, yes, it rose up.”

“What did it do then?”

“It grew up, and burst into flame again.”

And the flame was all the story and all triumph. The old man knew this. It was this he praised, in his innermost heart, the red outburst at the top of the poppy that had no fear of winter. Even the latent seeds were secondary, within the fire. No red; and there was just a herb, without name or sign of poppy. But he had seen the flower in all its evanescence and its being.

When his educated grandson told him that the red was there to bring the bees and the flies, he knew well enough that more bees and flies and wasps would come to a sticky smear round his grandson’s mouth, than to yards of poppy-red.

Therefore his grandson began to talk about the excess which al ways accompanies reproduction. And the old man died during this talk, and was put away. But his soul was uneasy, and came back from the shades to have the last word, muttering inaudibly in the cave door, “If there is always excess accompanying reproduction, how can you call it excess? When your mother makes a pie, and has too much paste, then that is excess. So she carves a paste rose with her surplus, and sticks it on the top of the pie. That is the flowering of

the excess. And children, if they are young enough, clap their hands at this blossom of pastry. And if the pie bloom not too often with the rose of excess, they eat the paste blossom-shaped lump with reverence. But soon they become sophisticated, and know that the rose is no rose, but only excess, surplus, a counterfeit, a lump, unedifying and unattractive, and they say, 'No, thank you, mother; no rose.'

"Wherefore, if you mean to tell me that the red of my shed poppy was no more than the rose of the paste on the pie, you are a fool. You mean to say that young blood had more stuff than he knew what to do with. He knocked his structure of leaves and stalks together, hammered the poppy-knob safe on top, sieved and bolted the essential seeds, shut them up tight, and then said 'Ah!' And whilst he was dusting his hands, he saw a lot of poppy-stuff to spare. 'Must do something with it — must do something with it — mustn't be wasted!' So he just rolled it out into red flakes, and dabbed it round the knobby seed-box, and said, 'There, the simple creature will take it in, and I've got rid of it.'

"My dear child, that is the history of the poppy and of the excess which accompanied his reproduction, is it? That's all you can say of him, when he makes his red splash in the world? — that he had a bit left over from his pie with the five-and-twenty blackbirds in, so he put a red frill round? My child, it is good you are young, for you are a fool."

So the shade of the ancient man passed back again, to foregather with all the shades. And it shook its head as it went, muttering, "Conceit, conceit of self-preservation and of race-preservation, conceit!" But he had seen the heart of his grandson, with the wasteful red peeping out, like a poppy-bud. So he chuckled.

Why, when we are away for our holidays, do we exclaim with rapture, "What a splendid field of poppies!" — or "Isn't the poppy sweet, a red dot among the camomile flowers!" — only to go back on it all, and when the troubles come in, and we walk forth in heaviness, taking ourselves seriously, later on, to cry, in a harsh and bitter voice: "Ah, the gaudy treason of those red weeds in the corn!" — or when children come up with nosegays, "Nasty red flowers, poison, darling, make baby go to sleep," or when we see the scarlet flutter in the wind: "Vanity and flaunting vanity," and with gusto watch the red bits disappear into nothingness, saying: "It is well such scarlet vanity is cast to nought."

Why are we so rarely away on our holidays? Why do we persist in taking ourselves seriously, in counting our money and our goods and our virtues? We are down in the end. We rot and crumble away. And that without ever bursting the bud, the tight economical bud of caution and thrift and self-preservation.

The phoenix grows up to maturity and fulness of wisdom, it attains to fatness and wealth and all things desirable, only to burst into flame and expire in ash.

And the flame and the ash are the be-all and the end-all, and the fatness and wisdom and wealth are but the fuel spent. It is a wasteful ordering of things, indeed, to be sure: but so it is, and what must be must be.

But we are very cunning. If we cannot carry our goods and our fatness, at least our goodness can be stored up like coin. And if we are not sure of the credit of the bank, we form ourselves into an unlimited liability company to run the future. We must have an obvious eternal deposit in which to bank our effort. And because the red of the poppy and the fire of the phoenix are contributed to no store, but are spent with the day and disappear, we talk of vanity and foolish mortality.

The phoenix goes gadding off into flame and leaves the future behind, unprovided for, in its ashes. There is no prodigal poppy left to return home in repentance, after the red is squandered in a day. Vanity, and vanity, and pathetic transience of mortality. All that is left us to call eternal is the tick-tack of birth and death, monotonous as time. The vain blaze flapped away into space and is gone, and what is left but the tick-tack of time, of birth and death?

But I will chase that flamy phoenix that gadded off into nothingness. Whoop and halloo and away we go into nothingness, in hot pursuit. Say, where are the flowers of yester-year? *Ou sont les neiges d'antan?* Where's Hippolyta, where's Thai's, each one loveliest among women? Who knows? Where are the snows of yester-year?

That is all very well, but they must be somewhere. They may not be in any bank or deposit, but they are not lost for ever. The virtue of them is still blowing about in nothingness and in somethingness. I cannot walk up and say, "How do you do, Dido?" as *Aeneas* did in the shades. But Dido — Dido! — the robin cocks a scornful tail and goes off, disgusted with the noise. You might as well look for your own soul as to look for Dido. "*Didon dina dit-on du dos d'un dodu dindon,*" comes rapidly into my mind, and a few frayed scraps of *Virgil*, and a vision of fair, round, half-globe breasts and blue eyes with tears in them; and a tightness comes into my heart: all forces rushing into me through my consciousness. But what of Dido my unconsciousness has, I could not tell you. Something, I am sure, and something that has come to me without my knowledge, something that flew away in the flames long ago, something that flew away from that pillar of fire, which was her body, day after day whilst she lived, flocking into nothingness to make a difference there. The reckoning of her money and her mortal assets may be discoverable in print. But what she is in the roomy space of somethingness, called nothingness, is all that matters to me.

She is something, I declare, even if she were utterly forgotten. How could any new thing be born unless it had a new nothingness to breathe? A new creature

breathing old air, or even renewed air: it is terrible to think of. A new creature must have new air, absolutely brand-new air to breathe. Otherwise there is no new creature, and birth and death are a tick-tack.

What was Dido was new, absolutely new. It had never been before, and in Dido it was. In its own degree, the prickly sow-thistle I have just pulled up is, for the first time in all time. It is itself, a new thing. And most vividly it is itself in its yellow little disc of a flower: most vividly. In its flower it is. In its flower it issues something to the world that never was issued before. Its like has been before, its exact equivalent never. And this richness of new being is richest in the flowering yellow disc of my plant.

What then of this excess that accompanies reproduction? The excess is the thing itself at its maximum of being. If it had stopped short of this excess, it would not have been at all. If this excess were missing, darkness would cover the face of the earth. In this excess, the plant is transfigured into flower, it achieves at last itself. The aim, the culmination of all is the red of the poppy, this flame of the phoenix, this extravagant being of Dido, even her so-called waste.

But no, we dare not. We dare not fulfil the last part of our programme. We linger into inactivity at the vegetable, self-preserving stage. As if we preserved ourselves merely for the sake of remaining as we are. Yet there we remain, like the regulation cabbage, hidebound, a bunch of leaves that may not go any farther for fear of losing a market value. A cabbage seen straddling up into weakly fiery flower is a piteous, almost an indecent sight to us. Better be a weed, and noxious. So we remain tight shut, a bunch of leaves, full of greenness and substance.

But the rising flower thrusts and pushes at the heart of us, strives and wrestles, while the static will holds us immovable. And neither will relent. But the flower, if it cannot beat its way through into being, will thrash destruction about itself. So the bound-up cabbage is beaten rotten at the heart.

Yet we call the poppy “vanity” and we write it down a weed. It is humiliating to think that, when we are taking ourselves seriously, we are considering our own self-preservation, or the greater scheme for the preservation of mankind. What is it that really matters? For the poppy, that the poppy disclose its red: for the cabbage, that it run up into weakly fiery flower: for Dido, that she be Dido, that she become herself, and die as fate will have it. Seed and fruit and produce, these are only a minor aim: children and good works are a minor aim. Work, in its ordinary meaning, and all effort for the public good, these are labour of self-preservation, they are only means to the end. The final aim is the flower, the fluttering, singing nucleus which is a bird in spring, the magical spurt of being which is a hare all explosive with fulness of self, in the moonlight; the real

passage of a man down the road, no sham, no shadow, no counterfeit, whose eyes shine blue with his own reality, as he moves amongst things free as they are, a being; the flitting under the lamp of a woman incontrovertible, distinct from everything and from everybody, as one who is herself, of whom Christ said, "to them that have shall be given."

The final aim of every living thing, creature, or being is the full achievement of itself. This accomplished, it will produce what it will produce, it will bear the fruit of its nature. Not the fruit, however, but the flower is the culmination and climax, the degree to be striven for. Not the work I shall produce, but the real Me I shall achieve, that is the consideration; of the complete Me will come the complete fruit of me, the work, the children.

And I know that the common wild poppy has achieved so far its complete poppy-self, unquestionable. It has uncovered its red. Its light, its self, has risen and shone out, has run on the winds for a moment. It is splendid. The world is a world because of the poppy's red. Otherwise it would be a lump of clay. And I am I as well, since the disclosure. What it is, I breathe it and snuff it up, it is about me and upon me and of me. And I can tell that I do not know it all yet. There is more to disclose. What more, I do not know. I tremble at the inchoate infinity of life when I think of that which the poppy has to reveal, and has not as yet had time to bring forth. I make a jest of it. I say to the flower, "Come, you've played that red card long enough. Let's see what else you have got up your sleeve." But I am premature and impertinent. My impertinence makes me ashamed. He has not played his red card long enough to have outsatisfied me.

Yet we must always hold that life is the great struggle for self-preservation,- that this struggle for the means of life is the essence and whole of life. As if it would be anything so futile, so ingestive. Yet we ding-dong at it, always hammering out the same phrase, about the struggle for existence, the right to work, the right to the vote, the right to this and the right to that, all in the struggle for existence, as if any external power could give us the right to ourselves. That we have within ourselves. And if we have it not, then the remainder that we do possess will be taken away from us. "To them that have shall be given, and from them that have not shall be taken away even that which they have."

CHAPTER II

Still Introductory: About Women's Suffrage, and Laws, and the War, and the Poor, with Some Fanciful Moralizing

It is so sad that the earnest people of today serve at the old, second-rate altar of self-preservation. The woman-suffragists, who are certainly the bravest, and, in the old sense, most heroic party amongst us, even they are content to fight the old battles on the old ground, to fight an old system of self-preservation to obtain a more advanced system of preservation. The vote is only a means, they admit. A means to what? A means to making better laws, laws which shall protect the unprotected girl from a vicious male, which shall protect the sweated woman-labourer from the unscrupulous greed of the capitalist, which shall protect the interest of women in the State. And surely this is worthy and admirable.

Yet it is like protecting the well-being of a cabbage in the cabbage-patch, while the cabbage is rotting at the heart for lack of power to run out into blossom. Could you make any law in any land, empowering the poppy to flower? You might make a law refusing it liberty to bloom. But that is another thing. Could any law put into being something which did not before exist? It could not. Law can only modify the conditions, for better or worse, of that which already exists.

But law is a very, very clumsy and mechanical instrument, and we people are very, very delicate and subtle beings. Therefore I only ask that the law shall leave me alone as much as possible. I insist that no law shall have immediate power over me, either for my good or for my ill. And I would wish that many laws be unmade, and no more laws made. Let there be a parliament of men and women for the careful and gradual unmaking of laws.

If it were for this purpose that women wanted the vote, I should be glad, and the opposition would be vital and intense, instead of just flippantly or exasperatedly static. Because then the woman's movement would be a living human movement. But even so, the claiming of a vote for the purpose of unmaking the laws would be rather like taking a malady in order to achieve a cure.

The women, however, want the vote in order to make more laws. That is the most lamentable and pathetic fact. They will take this clumsy machinery to make

right the body politic. And, pray, what is the sickness of the body politic? Is it that some men are sex-mad or sex-degraded, and that some, or many, employers are money-degraded? And if so, will you, by making laws for putting in prison the sex-degraded, and putting out of power the money-degraded, thereby make whole and clean the State? Wherever you put them, will not the degradation exist, and continue? And is the State, then, merely an instrument for weeding the public of destructive members? And is this, then, the crying necessity for more thorough weeding?

Whence does the degradation or perversion arise? Is there any great sickness in the body politic? Then where and what is it? Am I, or your suffragist woman, or your voting man, sex-whole and money-healthy, are we sound human beings? Have we achieved to true individuality and to a sufficient completeness in ourselves? Because, if not — then, physician, heal thyself.

That is no taunt, but the finest and most damning criticism ever passed: “Physician, heal thyself.” No amount of pity can blind us to the inexorable reality of the challenge.

Where is the source of all money-sickness, and the origin of all sex-perversion? That is the question to answer. And no cause shall come to life unless it contain an answer to this question. Laws, and all State machinery, these only regulate the sick, separate the sick and the whole, clumsily, oh, so clumsily that it is worse than futile. Who is there who searches out the origin of the sickness, with a hope to quench the malady at its source?

It lies in the heart of man, and not in the conditions — that is obvious, yet always forgotten. It is not a malaria which blows in through the window and attacks us when we are healthy. We are each one of us a swamp, we are like the hide-bound cabbage going rotten at the heart. And for the same reason that, instead of producing our flower, instead of continuing our activity, satisfying our true desire, climbing and clambering till, like the poppy, we lean on the sill of all the unknown, and run our flag out there in the colour and shine of being, having surpassed that which has been before, we hang back, we dare not even peep forth, but, safely shut up in bud, safely and darkly and snugly enclosed, like the regulation cabbage, we remain secure till our hearts go rotten, saying all the while how safe we are.

No wonder there is a war. No wonder there is a great waste and squandering of life. Anything, anything to prove that we are not altogether sealed in our own self-preservation as dying chrysalides. Better the light be blown out, wilfully, recklessly, in the wildest wind, than remain secure under the bushel, saved from every draught.

So we go to war to show that we can throw our lives away. Indeed, they have

become of so little value to us. We cannot live, we cannot be. Then let us tip-cat with death, let us rush, throwing our lives away. Then, at any rate, we shall have a sensation — and “perhaps,” after all, the value of life is in death.

What does the law matter? What does money, power, or public approval matter? All that matters is that each human being shall be in his own fulness. If something obstruct us, we break it or put it aside, as the shoots of the trees break even through the London pavements. That is, if life is strong enough in us. If not, we are glad to fight with death. Does not the war show us how little, under all our carefulness, we count human life and human suffering, how little we value ourselves at bottom, how we hate our own security? We have many hospitals and many laws and charities for the poor. And at the same time, we send ourselves to be killed and torn and tortured, we spread grief and desolation, and then, only then, we are somewhat satisfied. For have we not proved that we can transcend our own self-preservation, that we do not care so much for ourselves, after all? Indeed, we almost hate ourselves.

Indeed, well may we talk about a just and righteous war against Germany, but against ourselves also, our own self-love and caution. It is no war for the freedom of man from militarism or the Prussian yoke; it is a war for freedom of the bonds of our own cowardice and sluggish greed of security and well-being; it is a fight to regain ourselves out of the grip of our own caution.

Tell me no more we care about human life and suffering. We are, every one of us, revelling at this moment in the squandering of human life as if it were something we needed. And it is shameful. And all because that, to live, we are afraid to [risk] ourselves. We can only die.

Let there be an end, then, of all this welter of pity, which is only self-pity reflected onto some obvious surface. And let there be an end of this German hatred. We ought to be grateful to Germany that she still has the power to burst the bound hide of the cabbage. Where do I meet a man or a woman who does not draw deep and thorough satisfaction from this war? Because of pure shame that we should have seemed such poltroons living safe and atrophied, not daring to take one step to life. And this is the only good that can result from the “world disaster”: that we realize once more that self-preservation is not the final goal of life; that we realize that we can still squander life and property and inflict suffering wholesale. That will free us, perhaps, from the bushel we cower under, from the paucity of our lives, from the cowardice that will not let us be, which will only let us exist in security, unflowering, unreal, fat, under the cosy jam-pot of the State, under the shelter of the social frame.

And we must be prepared to fight, after the war, a renewed rage of activity for greater self-preservation, a renewed outcry for a stronger bushel to shelter our

light. We must also undertake the incubus of crippled souls that will come home, and of crippled souls that will be left behind: men in whom the violence of war shall have shaken the life-flow and broken or perverted the course; women who will cease to live henceforth, yet will remain existing in the land, fixed at some lower point of fear or brutality.

Yet if we are left maimed and halt, if you die or I die, it will not matter, so long as there is alive in the land some new sense of what is and what is not, some new courage to let go the securities, and to be, to risk ourselves in a forward venture of life, as we are willing to risk ourselves in a rush of death.

Nothing will matter so long as life shall sprout up again strong after this winter of cowardice and well-being, sprout into the unknown. Let us only have had enough of pity: pity that stands before the glass and weeps for ever over the sight of its own tears. This is what we have made of Christ's Commandment: "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" — a mirror for the tears of self-pity. How do we love our neighbour? By taking to heart his poverty, his small wage, and the attendant evils thereof. And is that how we love our neighbour as ourselves? Do I, then, think of myself as a moneyed thing enjoying advantages, or a non-moneyed thing suffering from disadvantages? Evidently I do. Then why the tears? They must rise from the inborn knowledge that neither money or non-money, advantages or disadvantages, matter supremely: what matters is the light under the bushel, the flower fighting under the safeguard of the leaves. I am weeping over my denied self. And I am very sorry for myself, held in the grip of some stronger force. Where can I find an image of myself? Ah, in the poor, in my poor neighbour labouring in the grip of an unjust system of capitalism. Let me look at him, let my heart be wrung, let me give myself to his service. Poor fellow, poor image, he is so badly off. Alas and alas, I do love my neighbour as myself: I am as anxious about his pecuniary welfare as I am about myself. I am so sorry for him, the poor X. He is a man like me. So I lie to myself and to him. For I do not care about him and his poverty: I care about my own unsatisfied soul. But I sidetrack to him, my poor neighbour, to vent on him my self-pity.

It is as if a poppy, when he is grown taller than his neighbours, but has not come to flower, should look down and, because he can get no further, say: "Alas, for those poor dwindlers down there: they don't get half as much rain as I do." He grows no more, and his non-growing makes him sad, and he tries to crouch down so as not to be any taller than his neighbour, thinking his sorrow is for his neighbour; and his neighbour struggles weakly into flower, after his fight for the sunshine. But the rich young poppy crouches, gazing down, nor even once lifts up his head to blossom. He is so afraid of giving himself forth, he cannot move on to expose his new nakedness, up there to confront the horrific space of the

void, he is afraid of giving himself away to the unknown. He stays within his shell.

Which is the parable of the rich poppy. The truth about him is, * See note?9, p.?66.

he grows as fast as he can, though he devours no man's substance, because he has neither storehouse nor barn to devour them with, and neither a poppy nor a man can devour much through his own mouth. He grows as fast as he can, and from his innermost self he shuttles the red fire out, bit by bit, a little further, till he has brought it together and up to bud. There he hangs his head, hesitates, halts, reflects a moment, shrinking from the great climax when he lets off his fire. He ought to perceive now his neighbours, and to stand arrested, crying, "Alas, those poor dwindlers!" But his fire breaks out of him, and he lifts his head, slowly, subtly, tense in an ecstasy of fear overwhelmed by joy, submits to the issuing of his flame and his fire, and there it hangs at the brink of the void, scarlet and radiant for a little while, immanent on the unknown, a signal, an outpost, an advance-guard, a forlorn, splendid flag quivering from the brink of the unfathomed void, into which it flutters silently, satisfied, whilst a little ash, a little dusty seed remains behind on the solid ledge of earth.

And the day is richer for a poppy, the flame of another phoenix is filled in to the universe, something is, which was not.

That is the whole point: something is which was not. And I wish it were true of us. I wish we were all like kindled bonfires on the edge of space, marking out the advance-posts. What is the aim of self-preservation, but to carry us right out to the firing-line; there, what is is in contact with what is not. If many lives be lost by the way, it cannot be helped, nor if much suffering be entailed. I do not go out to war in the intention of avoiding all danger or discomfort: I go to fight for myself. Every step I move forward into being brings a newer, juster proportion into the world, gives me less need of storehouse and barn, allows me to leave all, and to take what I want by the way, sure that it will always be there; allows me in the end to fly the flag of myself, at the extreme tip of life.

He who would save his life must lose it. But why should he go on and waste it? Certainly let him cast it upon the waters. Whence and how and whither it will return is no matter, in terms of values. But like a poppy that has come to bud, when he reaches the shore, when he has traversed his known and come to the beach to meet the unknown, he must strip himself naked and plunge in, and pass out: if he dare. And the rest of his life he will be a stirring at the unknown, cast out upon the waters. But if he dare not plunge in, if he dare not take off his clothes and give himself naked to the flood, then let him prowl in rotten safety, weeping for pity of those he imagines worse off than himself. He dare not weep

aloud for his own cowardice. And weep he must. So he will find him objects of pity.

CHAPTER III

Containing Six Novels and the Real Tragedy This is supposed to be a book about the people in Thomas Hardy's novels. But if one wrote everything they give rise to, it would fill the Judgment Book.

One thing about them is that none of the heroes and heroines care very much for money, or immediate self-preservation, and all of them are struggling hard to come into being. What exactly the struggle into being consists in, is the question. But most obviously, from the Wessex novels, the first and chiefest factor is the struggle into love and the struggle with love: by love, meaning the love of a man for a woman and a woman for a man. The via media to being, for man or woman, is love, and love alone. Having achieved and accomplished love, then the man passes into the unknown. He has become himself, his tale is told. Of anything that is complete there is no more tale to tell. The tale is about becoming complete, or about the failure to become complete.

It is urged against Thomas Hardy's characters that they do unreasonable things — quite, quite unreasonable things. They are always going off unexpectedly and doing something that nobody would do. That is quite true, and the charge is amusing. These people of Wessex are always bursting suddenly out of bud and taking a wild flight into flower, always shooting suddenly out of a tight convention, a tight, hide-bound cabbage state into something quite madly personal. It would be amusing to count the number of special marriage licenses taken out in Hardy's books. Nowhere, except perhaps in *Jude*, is there the slightest development of personal action in the characters: it is all explosive. *Jude*, however, does see more or less what he is doing, and acts from choice. He is more consecutive. The rest explode out of the convention. They are people each with a real, vital, potential self, even the apparently wishy-washy- heroines of the earlier books, and this self suddenly bursts the shell of manner and convention and commonplace opinion, and acts independently, absurdly, without mental knowledge or acquiescence.

And from such an outburst the tragedy usually develops. For there does exist, after all, the great self-preservation scheme, and in it we must all live. Now to live in it after bursting out of it was the problem these Wessex people found themselves faced with. And they never solved the problem, none of them except the comically, insufficiently treated Ethelberta.

This because they must subscribe to the system in themselves. From the more immediate claims of self-preservation they could free themselves: from money, from ambition for social success. None of the heroes or heroines of Hardy cared much for these things. But there is the greater idea of self-preservation, which is formulated in the State, in the whole modelling of the community. And from this idea, the heroes and heroines of Wessex, like the heroes and heroines of almost anywhere else, could not free themselves. In the long run, the State, the Community, the established form of life remained, remained intact and impregnable, the individual, trying to break forth from it, died of fear, of exhaustion, or of exposure to attacks from all sides, like men who have left the walled city to live outside in the precarious open,

This is the tragedy of Hardy, always the same: the tragedy of those who, more or less pioneers, have died in the wilderness, whither they had escaped for free action, after having left the walled security, and the comparative imprisonment, of the established convention. This is the theme of novel after novel: remain quite within the convention, and you are good, safe, and happy in the long run, though you never have the vivid pang of sympathy on your side: or, on the other hand, be passionate, individual, wilful, you will find the security of the convention a walled prison, you will escape, and you will die, either of your own lack of strength to bear the isolation and the exposure, or by direct revenge from the community, or from both. This is the tragedy, and only this: it is nothing more metaphysical than the division of a man against himself in such a way: first, that he is a member of the community, and must, upon his honour, in no way move to disintegrate the community, either in its moral or its practical form; second, that the convention of the community is a prison to his natural, individual desire, a desire that compels him, whether he feel justified or not, to break the bounds of the community, lands him outside the pale, there to stand alone, and say: "I was right, my desire was real and inevitable; if I was to be myself I must fulfil it, convention or no convention," or else,

there to stand alone, doubting, and saying: "Was I right, was I wrong? If I was wrong, oh, let me die!" — in which case he courts death.

The growth and the development of this tragedy, the deeper and deeper realization of this division and this problem, the coming towards some conclusion, is the one theme of the Wessex novels.

And therefore the books must be taken chronologically, to reveal the development and to advance towards the conclusion.

1. Desperate Remedies.

Springrove, the dull hero, fast within convention, dare not tell Cytherea that he is already engaged, and thus prepares the complication. Manston, represented as

fleshily passionate, breaks the convention and commits murder, which is very extreme, under compulsion of his desire for Cytherea. He is aided by the darkly passionate, lawless Miss Aldclyffe. He and Miss Aldclyffe meet death, and Springrove and Cytherea are united to happiness and success.

2. Under the Greenwood Tree.

After a brief excursion from the beaten track in the pursuit of social ambition and satisfaction of the imagination, figured by the Clergyman, Fancy, the little school-mistress, returns to Dick, renounces imagination, and settles down to steady, solid, physically satisfactory married life, and all is as it should be. But Fancy will carry in her heart all her life many unopened buds that will die unflowered; and Dick will probably have a bad time of it.

3. A Pair of Blue Eyes.

Elfride breaks down in her attempt to jump the first little hedge of convention, when she comes back after running away with Stephen. She cannot stand even a little alone. Knight, his conventional ideas backed up by selfish instinct, cannot endure Elfride when he thinks she is not virgin, though now she loves him beyond bounds. She submits to him, and owns the conventional idea entirely right, even whilst she is innocent. An aristocrat walks off with her whilst the two men hesitate, and she, poor innocent victim of passion not vital enough to overthrow the most banal conventional ideas, lies in a bright coffin, while the three confirmed lovers mourn, and say how great the tragedy is.

4. Far from the Madding Crowd.

The unruly Bathsheba, though almost pledged to Farmer Boldwood, a ravingly passionate, middle-aged bachelor pretendant, who has suddenly started in mad pursuit of some unreal conception of woman, personified in Bathsheba, lightly runs off and marries Sergeant Troy, an illegitimate aristocrat, unscrupulous and yet sensitive in taking his pleasures. She loves Troy, he does not love her. All the time she is loved faithfully and persistently by the good Gabriel, who is like a dog that watches the bone and bides the time. Sergeant Troy treats Bathsheba badly, never loves her, though he is the only man in the book who knows anything about her. Her pride helps her to recover. Troy is killed by Boldwood; exit the unscrupulous, but discriminative, almost cynical young soldier and the mad, middle-aged pursuer of the Fata Morgana; enter the good, steady Gabriel, who marries Bathsheba because he will make her a good husband, and the flower of imaginative first love is dead for her with Troy's scorn of her.

5. The Hand of Ethelberta.

Ethelberta, a woman of character and of brilliant parts, sets out in pursuit of social success, finds that Julius, the only man she is inclined to love, is too small for her, hands him over to the good little Picotee, and she herself, sacrificing

almost cynically what is called her heart, marries the old scoundrelly Lord Mountclerc, runs him and his estates and governs well, a sound, strong pillar of established society, now she has nipped off the bud of her heart. Moral: it is easier for the butler's daughter to marry a lord than to find a husband with her love, if she be an exceptional woman.

The Hand of Ethelberta is the one almost cynical comedy. It marks the zenith of a certain feeling in the Wessex novels, the zenith of the feeling that the best thing to do is to kick out the craving for "Love" and substitute commonsense, leaving sentiment to the minor characters.

This novel is a shrug of the shoulders, and a last taunt to hope, it is the end of the happy endings, except where sanity and a little cynicism again appear in The Trumpet Major, to bless where they despise. It is the hard, resistant, ironical announcement of personal failure, resistant and half-grinning. It gives way to violent, angry passions and real tragedy, real killing of beloved people, self-killing. Till now, only Elfrida among the beloved, has been killed; the good men have always come out on top.

6. The Return of the Native.

This is the first tragic and important novel. Eustacia, dark, wild, passionate, quite conscious of her desires and inheriting no tradition which would make her ashamed of them, since she is of a novelistic Italian birth, loves, first, the unstable Wildeve, who does not satisfy her, then casts him aside for the newly returned Clym,

whom she marries. What does she want? She does not know, but it is evidently some form of self-realization; she wants to be herself, to attain herself. But she does not know how, by what means, so romantic imagination says, Paris and the beau monde. As if that would have stayed her dissatisfaction.

Clym has found out the vanity of Paris and the beau monde. What, then, does he want? He does not know; his imagination tells him he wants to serve the moral system of the community, since the material system is despicable. He wants to teach little Egdon boys in school. There is as much vanity in this, easily, as in Eustacia's Paris. For what is the moral system but the ratified form of the material system? What is Clym's altruism but a deep, very subtle cowardice, that makes him shirk his own being whilst apparently acting nobly; which makes him choose to improve mankind rather than to struggle at the quick of himself into being. He is not able to undertake his own soul, so he will take a commission for society to enlighten the souls of others. It is a subtle equivocation. Thus both Eustacia and he sidetrack from themselves, and each leaves the other unconvinced, unsatisfied, unrealized. Eustacia, because she moves outside the convention, must die; Clym, because he identified himself

with the community, is transferred from Paris to preaching. He had never become an integral man, because when faced with the demand to produce himself, he remained under cover of the community and excused by his altruism.

His remorse over his mother is adulterated with sentiment; it is exaggerated by the push of tradition behind it. Even in this he does not ring true. He is always according to pattern, producing his feelings more or less on demand, according to the accepted standard. Practically never is he able to act or even feel in his original self; he is always according to the convention. His punishment is his final loss of all his original self: he is left preaching, out of sheer emptiness.

Thomasin and Venn have nothing in them turbulent enough to push them to the bounds of the convention. There is always room for them inside. They are genuine people, and they get the prize within the walls.

Wildeve, shifty and unhappy, attracted always from outside and never driven from within, can neither stand with nor without the established system. He cares nothing for it, because he is unstable, has no positive being. He is an eternal assumption.

The other victim, Clym's mother, is the crashing-down of one of the old, rigid pillars of the system. The pressure on her is too great. She is weakened from the inside also, for her nature is non-conventional; it cannot own the bounds.

So, in this book, all the exceptional people, those with strong feelings and unusual characters, are reduced; only those remain who are steady and genuine, if commonplace. Let a man will for himself, and he is destroyed. He must will according to the established system.

The real sense of tragedy is got from the setting. What is the great, tragic power in the book? It is Egdon Heath. And who are the real spirits of the Heath? First, Eustacia, then Clym's mother, then Wildeve. The natives have little or nothing in common with the place.

What is the real stuff of tragedy in the book? It is the Heath. It is the primitive, primal earth, where the instinctive life heaves up. There, in the deep, rude stirring of the instincts, there was the reality that worked the tragedy. Close to the body of things, there can be heard the stir that makes us and destroys us. The heath heaved with raw instinct. Egdon, whose dark soil was strong and crude and organic as the body of a beast. Out of the body of this crude earth are born Eustacia, Wildeve, Mistress Yeobrigln, Clym, and all the others. They are one year's accidental crop. What matters if some are drowned or dead, and others preaching or married: what matter, any more than the withering heath, the reddening berries, the seedy furze, and the dead fern of one autumn of Egdon? The Heath persists. Its body is strong and fecund, it will bear many more crops beside this. Here is the sombre, latent power that will go on producing, no matter

what happens to the product. Here is the deep, black source from whence all these little contents of lives are drawn. And the contents of the small lives are spilled and wasted. There is savage satisfaction in it: for so much more remains to come, such a black, powerful fecundity is working there that what does it matter?

Three people die and are taken back into the Heath; they mingle their strong earth again with its powerful soil, having been broken off at their stem. It is very good. Not Egdon is futile, sending forth life on the powerful heave of passion. It cannot be futile, for it is eternal. What is futile is the purpose of man.

Man has a purpose which he has divorced from the passionate purpose that issued him out of the earth into being. The Heath threw forth its shaggy heather and furze and fern, clean into being. It threw forth Eustacia and Wildeve and Mistress Yeobright and Clym, but to what purpose? Eustacia thought she wanted the hats and bonnets of Paris. Perhaps she was right. The heavy, strong soil of Egdon, breeding original native beings, is under Paris as well as under Wessex, and Eustacia sought herself in the gay city. She thought life there, in Paris, would be tropical, and all her energy and passion out of Egdon would there come into handsome flower. And if Paris real had been Paris as she imagined it, no doubt she was right, and her instinct was soundly expressed. But Paris real was not Eustacia's imagined Paris. Where was her imagined Paris, the place where her powerful nature could come to blossom? Beside some strong-passioned, unconfined man, her mate.

Which mate Clym might have been. He was born out of passionate Egdon to live as a passionate being whose strong feelings moved him ever further into being. But quite early his life became narrowed down to a small purpose: he must of necessity go into business, and submit his whole being, body and soul as well as mind, to the business and to the greater system it represented. His feelings, that should have produced the man, were suppressed and contained, he worked according to a system imposed from without. The dark struggle of Egdon, a struggle into being as the furze struggles into flower, went on in him, but could not burst the enclosure of the idea, the system which contained him. Impotent to be, he must transform himself, and live in an abstraction, in a generalization, he must identify himself with the system. He must live as Man or Humanity, or as the Community, or as Society, or as Civilization. "An inner strenuousness was preying on his outer symmetry, and they rated his look as singular. . . . His countenance was overlaid with legible meanings. Without being thought-wom, he yet had certain marks derived from a perception of his surroundings, such as are not infrequently found on man at the end of the four or five years of endeavour which follow the close of placid pupillage. He already

showed that thought is a disease of the flesh, and indirectly bore evidence that ideal physical beauty is incompatible with emotional development and a full recognition of the coil of things. Mental luminousness must be fed with the oil of life, even if there is already a physical seed for it; and the pitiful sight of two demands on one supply was just showing itself here.”

But did the face of Clym show that thought is a disease of flesh, or merely that in his case a disease, an un-ease, of flesh produced thought? One does not catch thought like a fever: one produces it. If it be in any way a disease of flesh, it is rather the rash that indicates the disease than the disease itself. The “inner strenuousness”

of Clym’s nature was not fighting against his physical symmetry, but against the limits imposed on his physical movement. By nature, as a passionate, violent product of Egdon, he should have loved and suffered in flesh and in soul from love, long before this age. He should have lived and moved and had his being, whereas he had only his business, and afterwards his inactivity. His years of pupilage were past, “he was one of whom something original was expected,” yet he continued in pupilage. For he produced nothing original in being or in act, and certainly no original thought. None of his ideas were original. Even he himself was not original. He was over-taught, had become an echo. His life had been arrested, and his activity turned into repetition. Far from being emotionally developed, he was emotionally undeveloped, almost entirely. Only his mental faculties were developed. And, hid, his emotions were obliged to work according to the label he put upon them: a ready-made label.

Yet he remained for all that an original, the force of life was in him, however much he frustrated and suppressed its natural movement. “As is usual with bright natures, the deity that lies ignominiously chained within an ephemeral human carcass shone out of him like a ray.” But was the deity chained within his ephemeral human carcass, or within his limited human consciousness? Was it his blood, which rose dark and potent out of Egdon, which hampered and confined the deity, or was it his mind, that house built of extraneous knowledge and guarded by his will, which formed the prison?

He came back to Egdon — what for? To re-unite himself with the strong, free flow of life that rose out of Egdon as from a source? No — “to preach to the Egdon eremites that they might rise to a serene comprehensiveness without going through the process of enriching themselves.” As if the Egdon eremites had not already far more serene comprehensiveness than ever he had himself, rooted as they were in the soil of all things, and living from the root! What did it matter how they enriched themselves, so long as they kept this strong, deep root in the primal soil, so long as their instincts moved out to action and to

expression? The system was big enough for them, and had no power over their instincts. They should have taught him rather than he them.

And Egdon made him marry Eustacia. Here was action and life, here was a move into being on his part. But as soon as he got her, she became an idea to him, she had to fit in his system of ideas. According to his way of living, he knew her already, she was labelled and classed and fixed down. He had got into this way of living, and he could not get out of it. He had identified himself with the system, and he could not extricate himself. He did not know that Eustacia had her being beyond his. He did not know that she existed untouched by his system and his mind, where no system had sway and where no consciousness had risen to the surface. He did not know that she was Egdon, the powerful, eternal origin seething with production. He thought he knew. Egdon to him was the tract of common land, producing familiar rough herbage, and having some few unenlightened inhabitants. So he skated over heaven and hell, and having made a map of the surface, thought he knew all. But underneath and among his mapped world, the eternal powerful fecundity worked on heedless of him and his arrogance. His preaching, his superficiality made no difference. What did it matter if he had calculated a moral chart from the surface of life? Could that affect life, any more than a chart of the heavens affects the stars, affects the whole stellar universe which exists beyond our knowledge? Could the sound of his words affect the working of the body of Egdon, where in the unfathomable womb was begot and conceived all that would ever come forth? Did not his own heart beat far removed and immune from his thinking and talking? Had he been able to put even his own heart's mysterious resonance upon his map, from which he charted the course of lives in his moral system? And how much more completely, then, had he left out, in utter ignorance, the dark, powerful source whence all things rise into being, whence they will always continue to rise, to struggle forward to further being? A little of the static surface he could see, and map out. Then he thought his map was the thing itself. How blind he was, how utterly blind to the tremendous movement carrying and producing the surface. He did not know that the greater part of every life is underground, like roots in the dark in contact with the beyond. He preached, thinking lives could be moved like hen-houses from here to there. His blindness indeed brought on the calamity. But what matter if Eustacia or Wildeve or Mrs. Yeobright died: what matter if he himself became a mere rattle of repetitive words — what did it matter? It was regrettable; no more. Egdon, the primal impulsive body, would go on producing all that was to be produced, eternally, though the will of man should destroy the blossom yet in bud, over and over again. At last he must learn what it is to be at one, in his mind and will, with the primal impulses that rise in

him. Till then.

let him perish or preach. The great reality on which the little tragedies enact themselves cannot be detracted from. The will and words which militate against it are the only vanity.

This is a constant revelation in Hardy's novels: that there exists a great background, vital and vivid, which matters more than the people who move upon it. Against the background of dark, passionate Egdon, of the leafy, sappy passion and sentiment of the woodlands, of the unfathomed stars, is drawn the lesser scheme of lives: *The Return of the Native*, *The Woodlanders*, or *Two on a Tower*. Upon the vast, incomprehensible pattern of some primal morality greater than ever the human mind can grasp, is drawn the little, pathetic pattern of man's moral life and struggle, pathetic, almost ridiculous. The little fold of law and order, the little walled city within which man has to defend himself from the waste enormity of nature, becomes always too small, and the pioneers venturing out with the code of the walled city upon them, die in the bonds of that code, free and yet unfree, preaching the walled city and looking to the waste.

This is the wonder of Hardy's novels, and gives them their beauty. The vast, unexplored morality of life itself, what we call the immorality of nature, surrounds us in its eternal incomprehensibility, and in its midst goes on the little human morality play, with its queer frame of morality and its mechanized movement; seriously, portentously, till some one of the protagonists chances to look out of the charmed circle, weary of the stage, to look into the wilderness raging round. Then he is lost, his little drama falls to pieces, or becomes mere repetition, but the stupendous theatre outside goes on enacting its own incomprehensible drama, untouched. There is this quality in almost all Hardy's work, and this is the magnificent irony it all contains, the challenge, the contempt. Not the deliberate ironies, little tales of widows or widowers, contain the irony of human life as we live it in our self-aggrandized gravity, but the big novels, *The Return of the Native*, and the others.

And this is the quality Hardy shares with the great writers, Shakespeare or Sophocles or Tolstoi, this setting behind the small action of his protagonists the terrific action of unfathomed nature; setting a smaller system of morality, the one grasped and formulated by the human consciousness within the vast, uncomprehended and incomprehensible morality of nature or of life itself, surpassing human consciousness. The difference is, that whereas in Shakespeare or Sophocles the greater, uncomprehended morality, or fate, is actively transgressed and gives active punishment, in Hardy and Tolstoi the lesser, human morality, the mechanical system is actively transgressed, and holds, and punishes the protagonist, whilst the greater morality is only passively, negatively

transgressed, it is represented merely as being present in background, in scenery, not taking any active part, having no direct connexion with the protagonist. Oedipus, Hamlet, Macbeth set themselves up against, or find themselves set up against, the unfathomed moral forces of nature, and out of this unfathomed force comes their death. Whereas Anna Karenina, Eustacia, Tess, Sue, and Jude find themselves up against the established system of human government and morality, they cannot detach themselves, and are brought down. Their real tragedy is that they are unfaithful to the greater unwritten morality, which would have bidden Anna Karenina be patient and wait until she, by virtue of greater right, could take what she needed from society; would have bidden Vronsky detach himself from the system, become an individual, creating a new colony of morality with Anna; would have bidden Eustacia fight Clym for his own soul, and Tess take and claim her Angel, since she had the greater light; would have bidden Jude and Sue endure for very honour's sake, since one must bide by the best that one has known, and not succumb to the lesser good.

Had Oedipus, Hamlet, Macbeth been weaker, less full of real, potent life, they would have made no tragedy; they would have comprehended and contrived some arrangement of their affairs, sheltering in the human morality from the great stress and attack of the unknown morality. But being, as they are, men to the fullest capacity, when they find themselves, daggers drawn, with the very forces of life itself, they can only fight till they themselves are killed, since the morality of life, the greater morality, is eternally unalterable and invincible. It can be dodged for some time, but not opposed. On the other hand, Anna, Eustacia, Tess or Sue — what was there in their position that was necessarily tragic? Necessarily painful it was, but they were not at war with God, only with Society. Yet they were all cowed by the mere judgment of man upon them, and all the while by their own souls they were right. And the judgment of men killed them, not the judgment of their own souls or the judgment of Eternal God.

Which is the weakness of modern tragedy, where transgression against the social code is made to bring destruction, as though the social code worked our irrevocable fate. Like Clym, the map appears to us more real than the land. Shortsighted almost to blindness, we pore over the chart, map out journeys, and confirm them: and we cannot see life itself giving us the lie the whole time.

CHAPTER IV

An Attack on Work and the Money Appetite and on the State

There is always excess, the biologists say, a brimming-over. For they have made the measure, and the supply must be made to fit. They have charted the course, and if at the end of it there is a jump beyond the bounds into nothingness: well, there is always excess, for they have charted the journey aright.

There is always excess, a brimming-over. At spring-time a bird brims over with blue and yellow, a glow-worm brims over with a drop of green moonshine, a lark flies up like heady wine, with song, an errand-boy whistles down the road, and scents brim over the measure of the flower. Then we say, It is spring.

When is a glow-worm a glow-worm? When she's got a light on her tail. What is she when she hasn't got a light on her tail? Then she's a mere worm, an insect.

When is a man a man? When he is alight with life. Call it excess? If it is missing, there is no man, only a creature, a clod, undistinguished.

With man it is always spring — or it may be; with him every day is a blossoming day, if he will. He is a plant eternally in flower, he is an animal eternally in rut, he is a bird eternally in song. He has his excess constantly on his hands, almost every day. It is not with him a case of seasons, spring and autumn and winter. And happy man if his excess come out in blue and gold and singing, if it be not like the paste rose on the pie, a burden, at last a very sickness.

The wild creatures are like fountains whose sources gather their waters until spring-time, when they leap their highest. But man is a fountain that is always playing, leaping, ebbing, sinking, and springing up. It is not for him to gather his waters till spring-time, when his fountain, rising higher, can at last flow out flower-wise in mid-air, teeming awhile with excess, before it falls spent again.

His rhythm is not so simple. A pleasant little stream of life is a bud at autumn and winter, fluttering in flocks over the stubble, the fallow, rustling along. Till spring, when many waters rush in to the sources, and each bird is a fountain playing.

Man, fortunate or unfortunate, is rarely like an autumn bird, to enjoy his pleasant stream of life flowing at ease. Some men are like that, fortunate and delightful. But those men or women will not read this book. Why should they?

The sources of man's life are over-full, they receive more than they give out. And why? Because a man is a well-head built over a strong, perennial spring and enclosing it in, a well-head whence the water may be drawn at will, and under which the water may be held back indefinitely. Sometimes, and in certain ways, according to certain rules, the source may bubble and spring out, but only at certain times, always under control. And the fountain cannot always bide for the permission, the suppressed waters strain at the well-head, and hence so much sadness without cause. Weltschmerz and other unrealized pains, where the source presses for utterance.

And how is it given utterance? In sheer play of being free? That cannot be. It shall be given utterance in work, the conscious mind has unanimously decreed. And the door is held holy. My life is to be utilized for work, first and foremost — and this in spite of Mary of Bethany.

Only, or very largely, in the work I do, must I live, must my life take movement. And why do I work? To eat — is the original answer. When I have earned enough to eat, what then? Work for more, to provide for the future. And when I have provided for the future? Work for more to provide for the poor. And when I have worked to provide for the poor, what then? Keep on working, the poor are never provided for, the poor have ye always with you.

That is the best that man has been able to do.

But what a ghastly programme! I do not want to work. You must, comes the answer. But nobody wants to work, originally. Yet everybody works, because he must — it is repeated. And what when he is not working? Let him rest and amuse himself, and get ready for tomorrow morning.

Oh, my God, work is the great body of life, and sleep and amusement like two wings, bent only to carry it along. Is this, then, all?

And Carlyle gets up and says, It is all, and mankind goes on in grim, serious approval, more than acquiescent, approving, thinking itself religiously right.

But let us pull the tail out of the mouth of this serpent. Eternity is not a process of eternal self-inglutination. We must work to eat, and eat to work — that is how it is given out. But the real problem is quite different. "We must work to eat, and eat to — what?" Don't say "work," it is so unoriginal.

In Nottingham we boys began learning German by learning proverbs. "Mann muss essen um zu leben, aber Mann muss nicht leben um zu essen," was the first. "One must eat to live, but one must not live to eat." A good German proverb according to the lesson-book. Starting a step further back, it might be written, "One must work to eat, but one must not eat to work." Surely that is just, because the second proverb says, "One must eat to live."

"One must work to eat, and eat to live," is the result.

Take this vague and almost uninterpretable word “living.” To how great a degree are “to work” and “to live” synonymous? That is the question to answer, when the highest flight that our thought can take, for the sake of living, is to say that we must return to the medieval system of handicrafts, and that each man must become a labouring artist, producing a complete article.

Work is, simply, the activity necessary for the production of a sufficient supply of food and shelter: nothing more holy than that. It is the producing of the means of self-preservation. Therefore it is obvious that it is not the be-all and the end-all of existence. We work to provide means of subsistence, and when we have made provision, we proceed to live. But all work is only the making provision for that which is to follow.

It may be argued that work has a fuller meaning, that man lives most intensely when he works. That may be, for some few men, for some few artists whose lives are otherwise empty. But for the mass, for the 99.9 per cent of mankind, work is a form of non-living, of non-existence, of submergence.

It is necessary to produce food and clothing. Then, under necessity, the thing must be done as quickly as possible. Is not the highest recommendation for a labourer the fact that he is quick? And how does any man become quick, save through finding the shortest way to his end, and by repeating one set of actions? A man who can repeat certain movements accurately is an expert, if his movements are those which produce the required result.

And these movements are the calculative or scientific movements of a machine. When a man is working perfectly, he is the perfect machine. Aware of certain forces, he moves accurately along the line of their resultant. The perfect machine does the same.

All work is like this, the approximation to a perfect mechanism more or less intricate and adjustable. The doctor, the teacher, the lawyer, just as much as the farm labourer or the mechanic, when working most perfectly, is working with the utmost of mechanical, scientific precision, along a line calculated from known fact, calculated instantaneously.

In this work, man has a certain definite, keen satisfaction. When he is utterly impersonal, when he is merely the mode where certain mechanical forces meet to find their resultant, then a man is something perfect, the perfect instrument, the perfect machine.

It is a state which, in his own line, every man strives and longs for. It is a state which satisfies his moral craving, almost the deepest craving within him. It is a state when he lies in line with the great force of gravity, partakes perfectly of its subtlest movement and motion, even to psychic vibration.

But it is a state which every man hopes for release from. The dream of every

man is that in the end he shall have to work no more. The joy of every man is, when he is released from his labour, having done his share for the time being.

What does he want to be released from, and what does he want to be released unto? A man is not a machine: when he has finished work, he is not motionless, inert. He begins a new activity. And what?

It seems to me as if a man, in his normal state, were like a palpitating leading-shoot of life, where the unknown, all unresolved, beats and pulses, containing the quick of all experience, as yet un-revealed, not singled out. But when he thinks, when he moves, he is retracing some proved experience. He is as the leading-shoot which, for the moment, remembers only that which is behind, the fixed wood, the cells conducting towards their undifferentiated tissue of life. He moves as it were in the trunk of the tree, in the channels long since built, where the sap must flow as in a canal. He takes knowledge of all this past experience upon which the new tip rides quivering, he becomes again the old life, which has built itself out in the fixed tissue, he lies in line with the old movement, unconscious of where it breaks, at the growing plasm, into something new, unknown. He is happy, all is known, all is finite, all is established, and knowledge can be perfect here in the trunk of the tree, which life built up and climbed beyond.

Such is a man at work, safe within the proven, deposited experience, thrilling as he traverses the fixed channels and courses of life; he is only matter of some of the open ways which life laid down for its own passage; he has only made himself one with what has been, travelling the old, fixed courses, through which life still passes, but which are not in themselves living.

And in the end, this is always a prison to him, this proven, deposited experience which he must explore, this past of life. For is he not in himself a growing tip, is not his own body a quivering plasm of what will be, and has never yet been? Is not his own soul a fighting-line, where what is and what will be separates itself off from what has been? Is not this his purest joy of movement, the indistinguishable, complex movement of being? And is not this his deepest desire, to be himself, to be this quivering bud of growing tissue which he is? He may find knowledge by retracing the old courses, he may satisfy his moral sense by working within the known, certain of what he is doing. But for real, utter satisfaction, he must give himself up to complete quivering uncertainty, to sentient non-knowledge.

And this is why man is always crying out for freedom, to be free. He wants to be free to be himself. For this reason he has always made a heaven where no work need be done, where to be is all, where to be comprises all that has been done, is perfect knowledge, and where that which will be done is so swift as to

be a sleep, a Nirvana, an absorption.

So there is this deepest craving of all, to be free from the necessity to work. It is obvious in all mankind. "Must I become one with the old, habitual movements?" says man. "I must, to satisfy myself that the new is new and the old is old, that all is one like a tree, though I am no more than the tiniest cell in the tree." So he becomes one with the old, habitual movement: he is the perfect machine, the perfect instrument: he works. But, satisfied for the time being of that which has been and remains now finite, he wearies for his own limitless being, for the unresolved, quivering, infinitely complex and indefinite movement of new living, he wants to be free.

And ever, as his knowledge of what is past becomes greater, he wants more and more liberty to be himself. There is the necessity for self-preservation, the necessity to submerge himself in the utter mechanical movement. But why so much: why repeat so often the mechanical movement? Let me not have so much of this work to do, let me not be consumed overmuch in my own self-preservation, let me not be imprisoned in this proven, finite experience all my days.

This has been the cry of humanity since the world began. This is the glamour of kings, the glamour of men who had opportunity to be, who were not under compulsion to do, to serve. This is why kings were chosen heroes, because they were the beings, the producers of new life, not servants of necessity, repeating old experience.

And humanity has laboured to make work shorter, so we may all be kings. True, we have the necessity to work, more or less, according as we are near the growing tip, or further away. Some men are far from the growing tip. They have little for growth in them, only the power for repeating old movement. They will always find their own level. But let those that have life, live.

So there has been produced machinery, to take the place of the human machine. And the inventor of the labour-saving machine has been hailed as a public benefactor, and we have rejoiced over his discovery. Now there is a railing against the machine, as if it were an evil thing. And the thinkers talk about the return to the medieval system of handicrafts. Which is absurd.

As I look round this room, at the bed, at the counterpane, at the books and chairs and the little bottles, and think that machines made them, I am glad. I am very glad of the bedstead, of the white enamelled iron with brass rail. As it stands, I rejoice over its essential simplicity. I would not wish it different. Its lines are straight and parallel, or at right angles, giving a sense of static motionless-ness. Only that which is necessary is there, whittled down to the minimum. There is nothing to hurt me or to hinder me; my wish for something to

serve my purpose is perfectly fulfilled.

Which is what a machine can do. It can provide me with the perfect mechanical instrument, a thing mathematically and scientifically correct. Which is what I want. I like the books, on the whole, I can scarcely imagine them more convenient to me, I like the common green-glass smelling-salts, and the machine-turned feet of the common chest of drawers. I hate the machine-carving on a chair, and the stamped pattern on a rug. But I have no business to ask a machine to make beautiful things for me. I can ask it for perfect accommodating utensils or articles of use, and I shall get them.

Wherefore I do honour to the machine and to its inventor. It will produce what we want, and save us the necessity of much labour. Which is what it was invented for.

But to what pitiable misuse is it put! Do we use the machine to produce goods for our need, or is it used as a muck-rake for raking together heaps of money? Why, when man, in his godly effort, has produced a means to freedom, do we make it a means to more slavery?

Why? — because the heart of man is crude and greedy. Why is a labourer willing to work ten hours a day for a mere pittance? Because he is serving a system for the enrichment of the individual, a system to which he subscribes, because he might himself be that individual, and, since his one ideal is to be rich, he owes his allegiance to the system established for the raking of riches into heaps, a system that satisfies his imagination. Why try to alter the present industrial system on behalf of the working-man, when his imagination is satisfied only by such a system?

The poor man and the rich, they are the head and tail of the same penny. Stand them naked side by side, and which is better than the other? The rich man, probably, for he is likely to be the sadder and the wiser.

The universal ideal, the one conscious ideal of the poor people, is riches. The only hope lies in those people, who, in fact or imagination, have experienced wealth, and have appetites accordingly.

It is not true, that, before we can get over our absorbing passion to be rich, we must each one of us know wealth. There are sufficient people with sound imagination and normal appetite to put away the whole money tyranny of England today.

There is no evil in money. If there were a million pounds under my bed, and I did not know of it, it would make no difference to me. If there were a million pounds under my bed, and I did know of it, it would make a difference, perhaps, to the form of my life, but to the living me, and to my individual purpose, it could make no difference, since I depend neither on riches nor on poverty for my

being.

Neither poverty nor riches obsesses me. I would not be like a begging friar to forswear all owing and having. For I would not admit myself so weak that either I must abstain totally from wealth, or succumb to the passion for possessions.

Have I not a normal money appetite, as I have a normal appetite for food? Do I want to kill a hundred bison, to satisfy the imaginative need of my stomach, as the Red Indian did? Then why should I want a thousand pounds, when ten are enough? "Thy eyes are bigger than thy belly," says the mother of the child who takes more than he can eat. "Your pocket is bigger than your breeches," one could say to a man greedy to get rich.

It is only greediness. But it is very wearisome. There are plenty of people who are not greedy, who have normal money appetites. They need a certain amount, and they know they need it. It is no honour to be a pauper. It is only decent that every man should have enough and a little to spare, and every self-respecting man will see he gets it. But why can't we really grow up, and become adult with regard to money as with regard to food? Why can't we know when we have enough, as we know when we have had enough to eat?

We could, of course, if we had any real sense of values. It is all very well to leave, as Christianity tries to leave, the dinner to be devoured by the glutton, whilst the Christian draws off in disgust, and fasts. But we each have our place at the board, as we well know, and it is indecent to withdraw before the glutton, leaving the earth to be devoured.

Can we not stay at the board? We must eat to live. And living is not simply not-dying. It is the only real thing, it is the aim and end of all life. Work is only a means to subsistence. The work done, the living earned, how then to go on to enjoy it, to fulfil it, that is the question. How shall a man live? What do we mean by living?

Let every man answer for himself. We only know, we want the freedom to live, the freedom of leisure and means. But there are ample means, there is half an eternity of pure leisure for mankind to take, if he would, if he did not think, at the back of his mind, that riches are the means of freedom. Riches would be the means of freedom, if there were no poor, if there were equal riches everywhere. Till then, riches and poverty alike are bonds and prisons, for every man must live in the ring of his own defences, to defend his property. And this ring is the surest of prisons.

So cannot we see, rich and poor alike, how we have circumscribed, hampered, imprisoned ourselves within the limits of our poor-and-rich system, till our life is utterly pot-bound? It is not that some of us want more money and some of us less. It is that our money is like walls between us, we are immured in gold, and

we die of starvation or etiolation.

A plant has strength to burst its pot. The shoots of London trees have force to burst through the London pavements. Is there not life enough in us to break out of this system? Let every man take his own, and go his own way, regardless of system and State, when his hour comes. Which is greater, the State or myself? Myself, unquestionably, since the State is only an arrangement made for my convenience. If it is not convenient for me, I must depart from it. There is no need to break laws. The only need is to be a law unto oneself.

And if sufficient people came out of the walled defences, and pitched in the open, then very soon the walled city would be a mere dependent on the free tents of the wilderness. Why should we care about bursting the city walls? We can walk through the gates into the open world. Those State educations with their ideals, their armaments of aggression and defence, what are they to me? They must fight out their own fates. As for me, I would say to every decent man whose heart is straining at the enclosure, "Come away from the crowd and the community, come away and be separate in your own soul, and live. Your business is to produce your own real life, no matter what the nations do. The nations are made up of individual men, each man will know at length that he must single himself out, nor remain any longer embedded in the matrix of his nation, or community, or class. Our time has come; let us draw apart. Let the physician heal himself."

And outside, what will it matter save that a man is a man, is himself? If he must work, let him work a few hours a day, a very few, whether it be at wheeling bricks, or shovelling coal into a furnace, or tending a machine. Let him do his work, according to his kind, for some three or four hours a day. That will produce supplies in ample sufficiency. Then let him have twenty hours for being himself, for producing himself.

CHAPTER V

Work and the Angel and the Unbegotten Hero

It is an inherent passion, this will to work, it is a craving to produce, to create, to be as God. Man turns his back on the unknown, on that which is yet to be, he turns his face towards that which has been, and he sees, he rediscovers, he becomes again that which has been before. But this time he is conscious, he knows what he is doing. He can at will reproduce the movement life made in its initial passage, the movement life still makes, and will continue to make, as a habit, the movement already made so unthinkably often that rather than a movement it has become a state, a condition of all life: it has become matter, or the force of gravity, or cohesion, or heat, or light. These old, old habits of life man rejoices to rediscover »n all their detail.

Long, long ago life first rolled itself into seed, and fell to earth, and covered itself up with soil, slowly. And long, long ago man discovered the process, joyfully, and, in this wise as God, repeated it. He found out how soil is shifted. Proud as a needy God, he dug the ground, and threw the little, silent fragments of life under the dust. And was he not doing what life itself had initiated, was he not, in this particular, even greater than life, more definite?

Still further back, in an unthinkable period long before chaos, life formed the habit we call gravitation. This was almost before any differentiation, before all those later, lesser habits, which we call matter or such a thing as centrifugal force, were formed.* It was a habit of the great mass of life, not of any part in particular. Therefore it took man's consciousness much longer to apprehend, and even now we have only some indications of it, from various parts. But we rejoice in that which we know. Long, long ago, one surface of matter learned to roll on a rolling motion across another surface, as the tide rolls up the land. And long ago man saw this motion, and learned a secret, and made the wheel, and rejoiced.

So, facing both ways, like Janus, face forward, in the quivering, glimmering fringe of the unresolved, facing the unknown, and looking backward over the vast rolling tract of life which follows and represents the initial movement, man is given up to his dual business, of being, in blindness and wonder and pure godliness, the living stuff of life itself, unrevealed; and of knowing, with unwearying labour and unceasing success, the manner of that which has been, which is revealed.

And work is the repetition of some one of those rediscovered movements, the enacting of some part imitated from life, the attaining of a similar result as life attained. And this, even if it be only shovelling coal onto a fire, or hammering nails into a shoe-sole, or making accounts in ledgers, is what work is, and in this lies the initial satisfaction of labour. The motive of labour, that of obtaining wages, is only the overcoming of inertia. It is not the real driving force. When necessity alone compels man, from moment to moment, to work, then man rebels and dies. The driving force is the pleasure in doing something, the living will to work.

And man must always struggle against the necessity to work, though the necessity to work is one of the inevitable conditions of man's existence. And no man can continue in any piece of work, out of sheer necessity, devoid of any essential pleasure in that work.

It seems as if the great aim and purpose in human life were to * See note 20, p. 66.

bring all life into the human consciousness. And this is the final meaning of work: the extension of human consciousness. The lesser meaning of work is the achieving of self-preservation. From this lesser, immediate necessity man always struggles to be free. From the other, greater necessity, of extending the human consciousness, man does not struggle to be free.

And to the immediate necessity for self-preservation man must concede, but always having in mind the other, greater necessity, to which he would hasten.

But the bringing of life into human consciousness is not an aim in itself, it is only a necessary condition of the progress of life itself. Man is himself the vivid body of life, rolling glimmering against the void. In his fullest living he does not know what he does, his mind, his consciousness, unacquaint, hovers behind, full of extraneous gleams and glances, and altogether devoid of knowledge. Altogether devoid of knowledge and conscious motive is he when he is heaving into uncreated space, when he is actually living, becoming himself.

And yet, that he may go on, may proceed with his living, it is necessary that his mind, his consciousness, should extend behind him. The mind itself is one of life's later-developed habits. To know is a force, like any other force. Knowledge is only one of the conditions of this force, as combustion is one of the conditions of heat. To will is only a manifestation of the same force, as expansion may be a manifestation of heat. And this knowing is now an inevitable habit of life's, developed late; it is a force active in the immediate rear of life, and the greater its activity, the greater the forward, unknown movement ahead of it.

It seems as though one of the conditions of life is, that life shall continually

and progressively differentiate itself, almost as though this differentiation were a Purpose. Life starts crude and unspecified, a great Mass. And it proceeds to evolve out of that mass ever more distinct and definite particular forms, an ever-multiplying number of separate species and orders, as if it were working always to the production of the infinite number of perfect individuals, the individual so thorough that he should have nothing in common with any other individual. It is as if all coagulation must be loosened, as if the elements must work themselves free and pure from the compound.

Man's consciousness, that is, his mind, his knowledge, is his greater manifestation of individuality. With his consciousness he can perceive and know that which is not himself. The further he goes, the more extended his consciousness, the more he realizes the things that are not himself. Everything he perceives, everything he knows, everything he feels, is something extraneous to him, is not himself, and his perception of it is like a cell-wall, or more, a real space separating him. I see a flower, because it is not me. I know a melody, because it is not me. I feel cold, because it is not me. I feel joy when I kiss, because it is not me, the kiss, but rather one of the bounds or limits where I end. But the kiss is a closer division of me from the mass than a sense of cold or heat. It whittles the more keenly naked from the gross.

And the more that I am driven from admixture, the more I am singled out into utter individuality, the more this intrinsic me rejoices. For I am as yet a gross impurity, I partake of everything. I am still rudimentary, part of a great, unquicken lump.

In the origin, life must have been uniform, a great, unmoved, utterly homogeneous infinity, a great not-being, at once a positive and negative infinity: the whole universe, the whole infinity, one motionless homogeneity, a something, a nothing. And yet it can never have been utterly homogeneous: mathematically, yes; actually, no. There must always have been some reaction, infinitesimally faint, stirring somehow through the vast, homogeneous inertia.

And since the beginning, the reaction has become extended and intensified; what was one great mass of individual constituency has stirred and resolved itself into many smaller, characteristic parts; what was an utter, infinite neutrality, has become evolved into still rudimentary, but positive, orders and species. So on and on till we get to naked jelly, and from naked jelly to enclosed and separated jelly, from homogeneous tissue to organic tissue, on and on, from invertebrates to mammals, from mammals to man, from man to tribesman, from tribesman to me: and on and on, till, in the future, wonderful, distinct individuals, like angels, move about, each one being himself, perfect as a complete melody or a pure colour.

Now one craves that his life should be more individual, that I and you and my neighbour should each be distinct in clarity from each other, perfectly distinct from the general mass. Then it would be a melody if I walked down the road; if I stood with my neighbour, it would be a pure harmony.

Could I, then, being my perfect self, be selfish? A selfish person is an impure person, one who wants that which is not himself. Selfishness implies admixture, grossness, unclarity of being. How can I,

a pure person incapable of being anything but myself, detract from my neighbour? That which is mine is singled out to me from the mass, and to each man is left his own. And what can any man want for, except that which is his own, if he be himself? If he have that which is not his own, it is a burden, he is not himself. And how can I help my neighbour except by being utterly myself? That gives him into himself: which is the greatest gift a man can receive.

And necessarily accompanying this more perfect being of myself is the more extended knowledge of that which is not myself. That is, the finer, more distinct the individual, the more finely and distinctly is he aware of all other individuality. It needs a delicate, pure soul to distinguish between the souls of others; it needs a thing which is purely itself to see other things in their purity or their impurity.

Yet in life, so often, one feels that a man, who is, by nature, intrinsically an individual, is by practice and knowledge an impurity, almost a nonentity. To each individuality belongs, by nature, its own knowledge. It would seem as if each soul, detaching itself from the mass, the matrix, should achieve its own knowledge. Yet this is not so. Many a soul which we feel should have detached itself and become distinct, remains embedded, and struggles with knowledge that does not pertain to it. It reached a point of distinctness and a degree of personal knowledge, and then became confused, lost itself.

And then, it sought for its whole being in work. By re-enacting some old movement of life's, a struggling soul seeks to detach itself, to become pure. By gathering all the knowledge possible, it seeks to receive the stimulus which shall help it to continue to distinguish itself.

"Ye must be born again," it is said to us. Once we are born, detached from the flesh and blood of our parents, issued separate, as distinct creatures. And later on, the incomplete germ which is a young soul must be fertilized, the parent womb which encloses the incomplete individuality must conceive, and we must be brought forth to ourselves, distinct. This is at the age of twenty or thirty.

And we, who imagine we live by knowledge, imagine that the impetus for our second birth must come from knowledge, that the germ, the sperm impulse, can come out of some utterance only. So, when I am young, at eighteen, twenty,

twenty-three, when the anguish of desire comes upon me, as I lie in the womb of my times, to receive the quickening, the impetus, I send forth all my calls and call hither and thither, asking for the Word, the Word which is the spermatozoon which shall come and fertilize me and set me free. And it may be the word, the idea exists which shall bring me forth, give me birth. But it may also be that the word, the idea, has never yet been uttered.

Shall I, then, be able, with all the knowledge in the world, to produce my being, if the knowledge be not extant? I shall not.

And yet we believe that only the Uttered Word can come into us and give us the impetus to our second birth. Give us a religion, give us something to believe in, cries the unsatisfied soul embedded in the womb of our times. Speak the quickening word, it cries, that will deliver us into our own being.

So it searches out the Spoken Word, and finds it, or finds it not. Possibly it is not yet uttered. But all that will be uttered lies potent in life. The fools do not know this. They think the fruit of knowledge is found only in shops. They will go anywhere to find it, save to the Tree. For the Tree is so obvious, and seems so played out.

Therefore the unsatisfied soul remains unsatisfied, and chooses Work, maybe Good Works, for its incomplete action. It thinks that in work it has being, in knowledge it has gained its distinct self.

Whereas all amount of clumsy distinguishing ourselves from other things will not make us thus become ourselves, and all amount of repeating even the most complex motions of life will not produce one new motion.

We start the wrong way round: thinking, by learning what we are not, to know what we as individuals are: whereas the whole of the human consciousness contains, as we know, not a tithe of what is, and therefore it is hopeless to proceed by a method of elimination; and thinking, by discovering the motion life has made, to be able therefrom to produce the motion it will make: whereas we know that, in life, the new motion is not the resultant of the old, but something quite new, quite other, according to our perception.

So we struggle mechanically, unformed, unbegotten, unborn, repeating some old process of life, unable to become ourselves, unable to produce anything new.

Looking over the Hardy novels, it is interesting to see which of the heroes one would call a distinct individuality, more or less achieved, which an unaccomplished potential individuality, and which an impure, unindividualized life embedded in the matrix, either achieving its own lower degree of distinction, or not achieving it.

In Desperate Remedies there are scarcely any people at all, particularly when the plot is working. The tiresome part about Hardy is that, so often, he will

neither write a morality play nor a novel. The people of the first book, as far as the plot is concerned, are not people: they are the heroine, faultless and white; the hero, with a small spot on his whiteness; the villainess, red and black, but more red than black; the villain, black and red; the Murderer, aided by the Adulteress, obtains power over the Virgin, who, rescued at the last moment by the Virgin Knight, evades the evil clutch. Then the Murderer, overtaken by vengeance, is put to death, whilst Divine Justice descends upon the Adulteress. Then the Virgin unites with the Virgin Knight, and receives Divine Blessing.

That is a morality play, and if the morality were vigorous and original, all well and good. But, between-whiles, we see that the Virgin is being played by a nice, rather ordinary girl.

In *The Laodicean*, there is all the way through a predilection d'artiste for the aristocrat, and all the way through a moral condemnation of him, a substituting the middle or lower-class personage with bourgeois virtues into his place. This was the root of Hardy's pessimism. Not until he comes to *Tess* and *Jude* does he ever sympathize with the aristocrat — unless it be in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, and then he sympathizes only to slay. He always, always represents them the same, as having some vital weakness, some radical ineffectuality. From first to last it is the same.

Miss Aldclyffe and Manston, Elfride and the sickly lord she married, Troy and Farmer Boldwood, Eustacia Vye and Wildeve, de Stancy in *The Laodicean*, Lady Constantine in *Two on a Tower*, the Mayor of Casterbridge and Lucetta, Mrs. Charmond and Dr. Fitzpiers in *The Woodlanders*, *Tess* and Alec d'Urberville, and, though different, *Jude*. There is also the blond, passionate, yielding man: Sergeant Troy, Wildeve, and, in spirit, *Jude*.

These are all, in their way, the aristocrat-characters of Hardy. They must every one die, every single one.

Why has Hardy this predilection d'artiste for the aristocrat, and why, at the same time, this moral antagonism to him?

It is fairly obvious in *The Laodicean*, a book where, the spirit being small, the complaint is narrow. The heroine, the daughter a famous railway engineer, lives in the castle of the old de Stancys. She sighs, wishing she were of the de Stancy line: the tombs and portraits have a spell over her. "But," says the hero to her, have you forgotten your father's line of ancestry: Archimedes, New-comen, Watt, Tylford, Stephenson?" — "But I have a predilection d'artiste for ancestors of the other sort," sighs Paula. And the hero despairs of impressing her with the list of his architect ancestors: Phidias, Ictinus and Callicrates, Chersiphron, Vitruvius, Wilars of Cambray, William of Wykeham. He deplores her marked preference for an "animal pedigree."

But what is this “animal pedigree”? If a family pedigree of her ancestors, working-men and burghers, had been kept, Paula would not have gloried in it, animal though it were. Hers was a predilection d’artiste.

And this because the aristocrat alone has occupied a position where he could afford to be, to be himself, to create himself, to live as himself. That is his eternal fascination. This is why the preference for him is a predilection d’artiste. The preference for the architect line would be a predilection de savant, the preference for the engineer pedigree would be a predilection d’economiste.

The predilection d’artiste — Hardy has it strongly, and it is rooted deeply in every imaginative human being. The glory of mankind has been to produce lives, to produce vivid, independent, individual men, not buildings or engineering works or even art, not even the public good. The glory of mankind is not in a host of secure, comfortable, law-abiding citizens, but in the few more fine, clear lives, beings, individuals, distinct, detached, single as may be from the public.

And these the artist of all time has chosen. Why, then, must the aristocrat always be condemned to death, in Hardy? Has the community come to consciousness in him, as in the French Revolutionaries, determined to destroy all that is not the average? Certainly in the Wessex novels, all but the average people die. But why? Is there the germ of death in these more single, distinguished people, or has the artist himself a bourgeois taint, a jealous vindictive-ness that will now take revenge, now that the community, the average, has gained power over the aristocrat, the exception?

It is evident that both is true. Starting with the bourgeois morality, Hardy makes every exceptional person a villain, all exceptional or strong individual traits he holds up as weaknesses or wicked faults. So in *Desperate Remedies*, *Under the Greenwood Tree*, *Far from the Madding Crowd*, *The Hand of Ethelberta*, *The Return of the Native* (but in *The Trumpet-Major* there is an ironical dig in the ribs to this civic communal morality), *The Laodicean*, *Two on a Tower*, *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, and *Tess*, in steadily weakening degree. The blackest villain is Manston, the next, perhaps, Troy, the next Eustacia, and Wildeve, always becoming less villainous and more human. The first show of real sympathy, nearly conquering the bourgeois or commune morality, is for Eustacia, whilst the dark villain is becoming merely a weak, pitiable person in *Dr. Fitzpiers*. In *The Mayor of Casterbridge* the dark villain is already almost the hero. There is a lapse in the maudlin, weak but not wicked *Dr. Fitzpiers*, duly condemned, Alec d’Urberville is not unlikable, and Jude is a complete tragic hero, at once the old Virgin Knight and Dark Villain. The condemnation gradually shifts over from the dark villain to the blond bourgeois virgin hero, from Alec d’Urberville to Angel Clare, till in *Jude* they are united and loved,

though the preponderance is of a dark villain, now dark, beloved, passionate hero. The condemnation shifts over at last from the dark villain to the white virgin, the bourgeois in soul: from Arabella to Sue. Infinitely more subtle and sad is the condemnation at the end, but there it is: the virgin knight is hated with intensity, yet still loved; the white virgin, the beloved, is the arch-sinner against life at last, and the last note of hatred is against her.

It is a complete and devastating shift-over, it is a complete volte-face of moralities. Black does not become white, but it takes white's place as good; white remains white, but it is found bad. The old, communal morality is like a leprosy, a white sickness: the old, antisocial, individualist morality is alone on the side of life and health.

But yet, the aristocrat must die, all the way through: even Jude. Was the germ of death in him at the start? Or was he merely at odds with his times, the times of the Average in triumph? Would Manston, Troy, Farmer Boldwood, Eustacia, de Stancy, Henchard, Alec d'Urberville, Jude have been real heroes in heroic times, without tragedy? It seems as if Manston, Boldwood, Eustacia, Henchard, Alec d'Urberville, and almost Jude, might have been. In an heroic age they might have lived and more or less triumphed. But Troy, Wildeve, de Stancy, Fitzpiers, and Jude have something fatal in them. There is a rottenness at the core of them. The failure, the misfortune, or the tragedy, whichever it may be, was inherent in them: as it was in Elfride, Lady Constantine, Marty South in *The Woodlanders*, and Tess. They have all passionate natures, and in them all failure is inherent.

So that we have, of men, the noble Lord in *A Pair of Blue Eyes*,

Sergeant Troy, Wildeve, de Stancy, Fitzpiers, and Jude, all passionate, aristocratic males, doomed by their very being, to tragedy, or to misfortune in the end.

Of the same class among women are Elfride, Lady Constantine, Marty South, and Tess, all aristocratic, passionate, yet necessarily unfortunate females.

We have also, of men, Manston, Farmer Boldwood, Henchard, Alec d'Urberville, and perhaps Jude, all passionate, aristocratic males, who fell before the weight of the average, the lawful crowd, but who, in more primitive times, would have formed romantic rather than tragic figures.

Of women in the same class are Miss Aldclyffe, Eustacia, Lucetta, Mrs. Chaimond.

The third class, of bourgeois or average hero, whose purpose is to live and have his being in the community, contains the successful hero of *Desperate Remedies*, the unsuccessful but not very much injured two heroes of *A Pair of Blue Eyes*, the successful Gabriel Oak, the unsuccessful, left-preaching Clym, the unsuccessful but not very much injured astronomer of *Two on a Tower*, the

successful Scotchman of Casterbridge, the unsuccessful and expired Giles Winter-borne of *The Woodlanders*, the arch-type, Angel Clare, and perhaps a little of Jude.

The companion women to these men are: the heroine of *Desperate Remedies*, Bathsheba, Thomasin, Paula, Henchard's daughter, Grace in *The Woodlanders*, and Sue.

This, then, is the moral conclusion drawn from the novels:

j. The physical individual is in the end an inferior thing which must fall before the community: Manston, Henchard, *etc.*

2. The physical and spiritual individualist is a fine thing which must fall because of its own isolation, because it is a sport, not in the true line of life: Jude, Tess, Lady Constantine.

3. The physical individualist and spiritual bourgeois or communist is a thing, finally, of ugly, undeveloped, non-distinguished or perverted physical instinct, and must fall physically. Sue, Angel Clare, Clym, Knight. It remains, however, fitted into the community.

4. The undistinguished, bourgeois or average being with average or civic virtues usually succeeds in the end. If he fails, he is left practically uninjured. If he expires during probation, he has flowers on his grave.

By individualist is meant, not a selfish or greedy person, anxious to satisfy appetites, but a man of distinct being, who must act in his own particular way to fulfil his own individual nature. He is a man who, being beyond the average, chooses to rule his own life to his own completion, and as such is an aristocrat.

The artist always has a predilection for him. But Hardy, like Tolstoi, is forced in the issue always to stand with the community in condemnation of the aristocrat. He cannot help himself, but must stand with the average against the exception, he must, in his ultimate judgment, represent the interests of humanity, or the community as a whole, and rule out the individual interest.

To do this, however, he must go against himself. His private sympathy is always with the individual against the community: as is the case with the artist. Therefore he will create a more or less blameless individual and, making him seek his own fulfilment, his highest aim, will show him destroyed by the community, or by that in himself which represents the community, or by some close embodiment of the civic idea. Hence the pessimism. To do this, however, he must select his individual with a definite weakness, a certain coldness of temper, inelastic, a certain inevitable and unconquerable adhesion to the community.

This is obvious in Troy, Clym, Tess, and Jude. They have naturally distinct individuality but, as it were, a weak life-flow, so that they cannot break away

from the old adhesion, they cannot separate themselves from the mass which bore them, they cannot detach themselves from the common. Therefore they are pathetic rather than tragic figures. They have not the necessary strength: the question of their unfortunate end is begged in the beginning.

Whereas Oedipus or Agamemnon or Clytemnestra or Orestes, or Macbeth or Hamlet or Lear, these are destroyed by their own conflicting passions. Out of greed for adventure, a desire to be off, Agamemnon sacrifices Iphigenia: moreover he has his love-affairs outside Troy: and this brings on him death from the mother of his daughter, and from his pledged wife. Which is the working of the natural law. Hamlet, a later Orestes, is commanded by the Erinyes of his father to kill his mother and his uncle*: but his maternal filial feeling tears him. It is almost the same tragedy as Orestes, without any goddess or god to grant peace.

In these plays, conventional morality is transcended. The action is between the great, single, individual forces in the nature of Man, not between the dictates of the community and the original passion. The Commandment says: "Thou shalt not kill." But doubtless Mac- * See note 21, p. 67.

beth had killed many a man who was in his way. Certainly Hamlet suffered no qualms about killing the old man behind the curtain. Why should he:1 But when Macbeth killed Duncan, he divided himself in twain, into two hostile parts. It was all in his own soul and blood: it was nothing outside himself: as it was, really, with Clym, Troy, Tess, Jude. Troy would probably have been faithful to his little unfortunate person, had she been a lady, and had he not felt himself cut off from society in his very being, whilst all the time he cleaved to it. Tess allowed herself to be condemned, and asked for punishment from Angel Clare. Why? She had done nothing particularly, or at least irrevocably, unnatural, were her life young and strong. But she sided with the community's condemnation of her. And almost the bitterest, most pathetic, deepest part of Jude's misfortune was his failure to obtain admission to Oxford, his failure to gain his place and standing in the world's knowledge, in the world's work.

There is a lack of sternness, there is a hesitating betwixt life and public opinion, which diminishes the Wessex novels from the rank of pure tragedy. It is not so much the eternal, immutable laws of being which are transgressed, it is not that vital life-forces are set in conflict with each other, bringing almost inevitable tragedy-yet not necessarily death, as we see in the most splendid Aeschylus. It is, in Wessex, that the individual succumbs to what is in its shallowest, public opinion, in its deepest, the human compact by which we live together, to form a community.

CHAPTER VI

The Axle and the Wheel of Eternity

It is agreed, then, that we will do a little work — two or three hours a day — labouring for the community, to produce the ample necessities of life. Then we will be free.

Free for what? The terror of the ordinary man is lest leisure should come upon him. His eternal, divine instinct is to free himself from the labour of providing what we call the necessities of life, in the common sense. And his personal horror is of finding himself with nothing to do.

What does a flower do? It provides itself with the necessities of life, it propagates itself in its seeds, and it has its fling all in one. Out from the crest and summit comes the fiery self, the flower, gorgeously.

This is the fall into the future, like a waterfall that tumbles over the edge of the known world into the unknown. The little, individualized river of life issues out of its source, its little seed, its wellhead, flows on and on, making its course as it goes, establishing a bed of green tissue and stalks, flows on, and draws near the edge where all things disappear. Then the stream divides. Part hangs back, recovers itself, and lies quiescent, in seed. The rest flows over, the rest dips into the unknown, and is gone.

The same with man. He has to build his own tissue and form, serving the community for the means wherewithal, and then he comes to the climax. And at the climax, simultaneously, he begins to roll to the edge of the unknown, and, in the same moment, lays down his seed for security's sake. That is the secret of life: it contains the lesser motions in the greater. In love, a man, a woman, flows on to the very furthest edge of known feeling, being, and out beyond the furthest edge: and taking the superb and supreme risk, deposits a security of life in the womb.

Am I here to deposit security, continuance of life in the flesh? Or is that only a minor function in me? Is it not merely a preservative measure, procreation? It is the same for me as for any man or woman. That she bear children is not a woman's significance. But that she bear herself, that is her supreme and risky fate: that she drive on to the edge of the unknown, and beyond. She may leave children behind, for security. It is arranged so.

It is so arranged that the very act which carries us out into the unknown shall

probably deposit seed for security to be left behind. But the act, called the sexual act, is not for the depositing of the seed. It is for leaping off into the unknown, as from a cliff's edge, like Sappho into the sea.

It is so plain in my plant, the poppy. Out of the living river, a fine silver stream detaches itself, and flows through a green bed which it makes for itself. It flows on and on, till it reaches the crest beyond which is ethereal space. Then, in tiny, concentrated pools, a little hangs back, in reservoirs that shall later seal themselves up as quick hut silent sources. But the whole, almost the whole, splashes splendidly over, is seen in red just as it drips into darkness, and disappears.

So with a man in the act of love. A little of him, a very little, flows into the tiny quick pool to start another source. But the whole spills over in waste to the beyond.

And only at high flood should the little hollows fill to make a new source. Only when the whole rises to pour in a great wave over the edge of all that has been, should the little seed-wells run full. In the woman lie the reservoirs. And when there comes the flood-tide, then the dual stream of woman and man, as the whole two waves meet and break to foam, bursting into the unknown, these wells and fountain heads are filled.

Thus man and woman pass beyond this Has-Been and this is when the two waves meet in flood and heave over and out of Time, leaving their dole to Time deposited. It is for this man needs liberty, and to prepare him for this he must use his leisure.

Always so that the wave of his being shall meet the other wave, that the two shall make flood which shall flow beyond the face of the earth, must a man live. Always the dual wave. Where does my poppy spill over in red, but there where the two streams have flowed and clasped together, where the pollen stream clashes into the pistil stream, where the male clashes into the female, and the two heave out in utterance. There, in the seethe of male and female, seeds are filled as the flood rises to pour out in a red fall. There, only there, where the male seethes against the female, comes the transcendent flame and the filling of seeds.

In plants where the male stream and the female stream flow separately, as in dog's mercury or in the oak tree, where is the flame? It is not. But in my poppy, where at the summit the two streams, which till now have run deviously, scattered down many ways, at length flow concentrated together, and the pure male stream meets the pure female stream in a heave and an overflowing: there, there is the flower indeed.

And this is happiness: that my poppy gather his material and build his tissue till he has led the stream of life in him on and on to the end, to the whirlpool at

the summit, where the male seethes and whirls in incredible speed upon the pivot of the female, where the two are one, as axle and wheel are one, and the motions travel out to infinity. There, where he is a complete full stream, travelling with and upon the other complete female stream, the twain make a flood over the face of all the earth, which shall pass away from the earth. And since I am a man with a body of flesh, I shall contain the seed to make sure this continuing of life in this body of flesh, I shall contain the seed for the woman of flesh in whom to beg<jt my children.

But this is an incorporate need: it is really no separate or distinct need. The clear, full, inevitable need in me is that I, the male, meet the female stream which shall carry mine so that the two run to fullest flood, to furthest motion. It is no primary need of the begetting of children. It is the arriving at my highest mark of activity, of being; it is her arrival at her intensest self.

Why do we consider the male stream and the female stream as being only in the flesh? It is something other than physical. The physical, what we call in its narrowest meaning, the sex, is only a definite indication of the great male and female duality and unity. It is that part which is settled into an almost mechanized system of detaining some of the life which otherwise sweeps on and is lost in the full adventure.

There is female apart from Woman, as we know, and male apart from Man. There is male and female in my poppy plant, and this is neither man nor woman. It is part of the great twin river, eternally each branch resistant to the other, eternally running each to meet the other.

It may be said that male and female are terms relative only to physical sex. But this is the consistent indication of the greater meaning. Do we for a moment believe that a man is a man and a woman a woman, merely according to, and for the purpose of, the begetting of children? If there were organic reproduction of children, would there be no distinction between man and woman? Should we all be asexual?

We know that our view is partial. Man is man, and woman is woman, whether no children be born any more for ever. As long as time lasts, man is man. In eternity, where infinite motion becomes rest, the two may be one. But until eternity man is man. Until eternity, there shall be this separateness, this interaction of man upon woman, male upon female, this suffering, this delight, this imperfection. In eternity, maybe, the action may be perfect. In infinity, the spinning of the wheel upon the hub may be a friction-less whole, complete, an unbroken sleep that is infinite, motion that is utter rest, a duality that is sheerly one.

But except in infinity, everything of life is male or female, distinct. But the

consciousness, that is of both: and the flower, that is of both. Every impulse that stirs in life, every single impulse, is either male or female, distinct, except the being of the complete flower, of the complete consciousness, which is two in one, fused. These are infinite and eternal. The consciousness, what we call the truth, is eternal, beyond change or motion, beyond time or limit.

But that which is not conscious, which is Time, and Life, that is our field.

CHAPTER VII

Of Being and Not-Being

In life, then, no new thing has ever arisen, or can arise, save out of the impulse of the male upon the female, the female upon the male. The interaction of the male and female spirit begot the wheel, the plough, and the first utterance that was made on the face of the earth.

As in my flower, the pistil, female, is the centre and swivel, the stamens, male, are close-clasping the hub, and the blossom is the great motion outwards into the unknown, so in a man's life, the female is the swivel and centre on which he turns closely, producing his movement. And the female to a man is the obvious form, a woman. And normally, the centre, the turning pivot, of a man's life is his sex-life, the centre and swivel of his being is the sexual act. Upon this turns the whole rest of his life, from this emanates every motion he betrays. And that this should be so, every man makes his effort. The supreme effort each man makes, for himself, is the effort to clasp as a hub the woman who shall be the axle, compelling him to true motion, without aberration. The supreme desire of every man is for mating with a woman, such that the sexual act be the closest, most concentrated motion in his life, closest upon the axle, the prime movement of himself, of which all the rest of his motion is a continuance in the same kind. And the vital desire of every woman is that she shall be clasped as axle to the hub of the man, that his motion shall portray her motionlessness, convey her static being into movement, complete and radiating out into infinity, starting from her stable eternity, and reaching eternity again, after having covered the whole of time.

This is complete movement: man upon woman, woman within man. This is the desire, the achieving of which, frictionless, is impossible, yet for which every man will try, with greater or less intensity, achieving more or less success.

This is the desire of every man, that his movement, the manner of his walk, and the supremest effort of his mind, shall be the pulsation outwards from stimulus received in the sex, in the sexual act, that the woman of his body shall be the begetter of his whole life, that she, in her female spirit, shall beget in him his idea, his motion, himself. When a man shall look at the work of his hands, that has succeeded, and shall know that it was begotten in him by the woman of his body, then he shall know what fundamental happiness is. Just as when a

woman shall look at her child, that was begotten in her by the man of her spirit, she shall know what it is to be happy, fundamentally. But when a woman looks at her children that were begotten in her by a strange man, not the man of her spirit, she must know what it is to be happy with anguish, and to love with pain. So with a man who looks at his work which was not begotten in him by the woman of his body. He rejoices, troubles, and suffers an agony like death which contains resurrection.

For while, ideally, the soul of the woman possesses the soul of the man, procreates it and makes it big with new idea, motion, in the sexual act, yet, most commonly, it is not so. Usually, sex is only functional, a matter of relief or sensation, equivalent to eating or drinking or passing of excrement.

Then, if a man must produce work, he must produce it to some other than the woman of his body: as, in the same case, if a woman produce children, it must be to some other than the man of her desire.

In this case, a man must seek elsewhere than in woman for the female to possess his soul, to fertilize him and make him try with increase. And the female exists in much more than his woman. And the finding of it for himself gives a man his vision, his God.

And since no man and no woman can get a perfect mate, nor obtain complete satisfaction at all times, each man according to his need must have a God, an idea, that shall compel him to the movement of his own being. And then, when he lies with his woman, the man may concurrently be with God, and so get increase of his soul. Or he may have communion with his God apart and averse from the woman.

Every man seeks in woman for that which is stable, eternal. And if, under his motion, this break down in her, in the particular woman, so that she be no axle for his hub, but be driven away from herself, then he must seek elsewhere for his stability, for the centre to himself.

Then either he must seek another woman, or he must seek to make conscious his desire to find a symbol, to create and define in his consciousness the object of his desire, so that he may have it at will, for his own complete satisfaction.

In doing this latter, he seeks with his desire the female elsewhere than in the particular woman. Since everything that is, is either male or female or both, whether it be clouds or sunshine or hills or trees or a fallen feather from a bird, therefore in other things and in such things man seeks for his complement. And he must at last always call God the unutterable and the inexpressible, the unknowable, because it is his unrealized complement.

But all gods have some attributes in common. They are the unexpressed Absolute: eternal, infinite, unchanging. Eternal, Infinite, Unchanging: the High

God of all Humanity is this.

Yet man, the male, is essentially a thing of movement and time and change. Until he is stirred into thought, he is complete in movement and change. But once he thinks, he must have the Absolute, the Eternal, Infinite, Unchanging.

And Man is stirred into thought by dissatisfaction, or unsatisfaction, as heat is born of friction. Consciousness is the same effort in male and female to obtain perfect frictionless interaction, perfect as Nirvana. It is the reflex both of male and female from defect in their dual motion. Being reflex from the dual motion, consciousness contains the two in one, and is therefore in itself Absolute.

And desire is the admitting of deficiency. And the embodiment of the object of desire reveals the original defect or the defaulture. So that the attributes of God will reveal that which man lacked and yearned for in his living. And these attributes are always, in their essence, Eternality, Infinity, Immutability.

And these are the qualities man feels in woman, as a principle. Let a man walk alone on the face of the earth, and he feels himself like a loose speck blown at random. Let him have a woman to whom he belongs, and he will feel as though he had a wall to back up against; even though the woman be mentally a fool. No man can endure the sense of space, of chaos, on four sides of himself. It drives him mad. He must be able to put his back to the wall. And this wall is his woman.

From her he has a sense of stability. She supplies him with the feeling of Immutability, Permanence, Eternality. He himself is a raging activity, change potent within change. He dare not even conceive of himself, save when he is sure of the woman permanent beneath him, beside him. He dare not leap into the unknown save from the sure stability of the unyielding female. Like a wheel, if he turn without an axle, his motion is wandering neutrality.

So always, the fear of a man is that he shall find no axle for his motion, that no woman can centralize his activity. And always, the fear of a woman is that she can find no hub for her stability, no man to convey into motion her full stability. Either the particular woman breaks down before the stress of the man, becomes erratic herself, no stay, no centre; or else the man is insufficiently active to carry out the static principle of his female, of his woman.

So life consists in the dual form of the Will-to-Motion and the Will-to-Inertia, and everything we see and know and are is the resultant of these two Wills. But the One Will, of which they are dual forms, that is as yet unthinkable.

And according as the Will-to-Motion predominates in race, or the Will-to-Inertia, so must that race's conception of the One Will enlarge the attributes which are lacking or deficient in the race.

Since there is never to be found a perfect balance or accord of the two Wills,

but always one triumphs over the other, in life, according to our knowledge, so must the human effort be always to recover balance, to symbolize and so to possess that which is missing. Which is the religious effort of Man.

There seems to be a fundamental, insuperable division, difference, between man's artistic effort and his religious effort. The two efforts are mixed with each other, as they are revealed, but all the while they remain two, not one, all the while they are separate, single, never compounded.

The religious effort is to conceive, to symbolize that which the human soul, or the soul of the race, lacks, that which it is not, and which it requires, yearns for. It is the portrayal of that complement to the race-life which is known only as a desire: it is the symbolizing of a great desire, the statement of the desire in terms which have no meaning apart from the desire.

Whereas the artistic effort is the effort of utterance, the supreme effort of expressing knowledge, that which has been for once, that which was enacted, where the two wills met and intersected and left their result, complete for the moment. The artistic effort is the portraying of a moment of union between the two wills, according to knowledge. The religious effort is the portrayal or symbolizing of the eternal union of the two wills, according to aspiration. But in this eternal union, the features of one or the other Will are always salient.

The dual Will we call the Will-to-Motion and the Will-to-Inertia. These cause the whole of life, from the ebb and flow of a wave, to the stable equilibrium of the whole universe, from birth and being and knowledge to death and decay and forgetfulness. And the Will-to-Motion we call the male will or spirit, the Will-to-Inertia the female. This will to inertia is not negative, and the other positive. Rather, according to some conception, is Motion negative and Inertia, the static, geometric idea, positive. That is according to the point of view.

According to the race-conception of God, we can see whether in that race the male or the female element triumphs, becomes predominant.

But it must first be seen that the division into male and female is arbitrary, for the purpose of thought. The rapid motion of the rim of a wheel is the same as the perfect rest at the centre of the wheel. How can one divide them? Motion and rest are the same, when seen completely. Motion is only true of things outside oneself. When I am in a moving train, strictly, the land moves under me, I and the train are still. If I were both land and train, if f were large enough, there would be no motion. And if I were very very small, every fibre of the train would be in motion for me, the point of rest would be infinitely reduced.

How can one say, there is motion and rest? If all things move together in one infinite motion, that is rest. Rest and motion are only two degrees of motion, or two degrees of rest. Infinite motion and infinite rest are the same thing. It is

obvious. Since, if motion were infinite, there would be no standing-ground from which to regard it as motion. And the same with rest.

It is easier to conceive that there is no such thing as rest. For a thing to us at rest is only a thing travelling at our own rate of motion: from another point of view, it is a thing moving at the lowest rate of motion we can recognize. But this table on which I write, which I call at rest, I know is really in motion.

So there is no such thing as rest. There is only infinite motion. But infinite motion must contain every degree of rest. So that motion and rest are the same thing. Rest is the lowest speed of motion which I recognize under normal conditions.

So how can one speak of a Will-to-Motion or a Will-to-Inertia, when there is no such thing as rest or motion? And yet, starting from any given degree of motion, and travelling forward in ever-increasing degree, one comes to a state of speed which covers the whole of space instantaneously, and is therefore rest, utter rest. *nd starting from the same speed and reducing the motion infinitely, one reaches the same condition of utter rest. And the direction or method of approach to this infinite rest is different to our conception. And only travelling upon the slower, does the swifter reach the infinite rest of inertia: which is the same as the infinite rest of speed, the two things having united to surpass our comprehension.

So we may speak of Male and Female, of the Will-to-Motion and of the Will-to-Inertia. And so, looking at a race, we can say whether the Will-to-Inertia or the Will-to-Motion has gained the ascendancy, and in which direction this race tends to disappear.

For it is as if life were a double cycle, of men and women, facing opposite ways, travelling opposite ways, revolving upon each other, man reaching forward with outstretched hand, woman reaching forward with outstretched hand, and neither able to move till their hands have grasped each other, when they draw towards each other from opposite directions, draw nearer and nearer, each travelling in his separate cycle, till the two are abreast, and side by side, until even they pass on again, away from each other, travelling their opposite ways to the same infinite goal.

Each travelling to the same goal of infinity, but entering it from the opposite ends of space. And man, remembering what lies behind him, how the hands met and grasped and tore apart, utters his tragic art. Then moreover, facing the other way into the unknown, conscious of the tug of the goal at his heart, he hails the woman coming from the place whither he is travelling, searches in her for signs, and makes his God from the suggestion he receives, -as she advances.

Then she draws near, and he is full of delight. She is so close, that they touch,

and then there is a joyful utterance of religious art. They are torn apart, and he gives the cry of tragedy, and goes on remembering, till the dance slows down and breaks, and there is only a crowd.

It is as if this cycle dance where the female makes the chain with the male becomes ever wider, ever more extended, and the further they get from the source, from the infinity, the more distinct and 'ndividual do the dancers become. At first they are only figures. In the Jewish cycle, David, with his hand stretched forth, cannot recognize the woman, the female. He can only recognize some likeness himself. For both he and she have not danced very far from the source and origin where they were both one. Though she is in the gross utterly other than he, yet she is not very distinct from him And he hails her Father, Almighty, God, Beloved, Strength, hails her in his own image. And with hand outstretched, fearful and passionate, he reaches to her. But it is Solomon who touches her hand with rapture and joy, and cries out his gladness in the Song of Songs. Who is the Shulamite but God come close, for a moment, into physical contact? The Song may be a drama: it is still religious art. It is the development of the Psalms. It is utterly different from the Book of Job, which is remembrance.

Always the threefold utterance: the declaring of the God seen approaching, the rapture of contact, the anguished joy of remembrance, when the meeting has passed into separation. Such is religion, religious art, and tragic art.

But the chain is not broken by the letting-go of hands. It is broken by the overbearing of one cycle by the other. David, when he lay with a woman, lay also with God; Solomon, when he lay with a woman, knew God and possessed Him and was possessed by Him. For in Solomon and in the Woman, the male clasped hands with the female.

But in the terrible moment when they should break free again, the male in the Jew was too weak, the female overbore him. He remained in the grip of the female. The force of inertia overpowered him, and he remained remembering. But very true had been David's vision, and very real Solomon's contact. So that the living thing was conserved, kept always alive and powerful, but restrained, restricted, partial.

For centuries, the Jew knew God as David had perceived Him, as Solomon had known Him. It was the God of the body, the rudimentary God of physical laws and physical functions. The Jew lived on in physical contact with God. Each of his physical functions he shared with God; he kept his body always like the body of a bride ready to serve the bridegroom. He had become the servant of his God, the female, passive. The female in him predominated, held him passive, set utter bounds to his movement, to his roving, kept his mind as a slave to guard

intact the state of sensation wherein he found himself. Which persisted century after century, the secret, scrupulous voluptuousness of the Jew, become almost self-voluptuousness, engaged in the consciousness of his own physique, or in the extracted existence of his own physique. His own physique included the woman, naturally, since the man's body included the woman's, the woman's the man's. His religion had become a physical morality, deep and fundamental, but entirely of one sort. Its jiving element was this scrupulous physical voluptuousness, wonderful and satisfying in a large measure.

The conscious element was a resistance to the male or active principle. Being female, occupied in self-feeling, in realization of the age, in submission to sensation, the Jewish temper was antagonistic to the active male principle, which would deny the age and refuse sensation, seeking ever to make transformation, desiring to be an instrument of change, to register relationships. So this race recognized only male sins: it conceived only sins of commission, sins of change, of transformation. In the whole of the Ten Commandments, it is the female who speaks. It is natural to the male to make the male God a God of benevolence and mercy, susceptible to pity. Such is the male conception of God. It was the female spirit which conceived the saying: "For I, the Lord thy God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquities of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me, and showing mercy unto thousands of them that love me."

It was a female conception. For is not man the child of woman? Does she not see in him her body, even more vividly than in her own? Man is more her body to her even than her own body. For the whole of flesh is hers. Woman knows that she is the fountain of all flesh. And her pride is that the body of man is of her issue. She can see the man as the One Being, for she knows he is of her issue.

It were a male conception to see God with a manifold Being, even though He be One God. For man is ever keenly aware of the multiplicity of things, and their diversity. But woman, issuing from the other end of infinity, coming forth as the flesh, manifest in sensation, is obsessed by the oneness of things, the One Being, undifferentiated. Man, on the other hand, coming forth as the desire to single out one thing from another, to reduce each thing to its intrinsic self by process of elimination, cannot but be possessed by the infinite diversity and contrariety in life, by a passionate sense of isolation, and a poignant yearning to be at one.

That is the fundamental of female conception: that there is but One Being: this Being necessarily female. Whereas man conceives a manifold Being, the supreme of which is male. And owing to the complete Monism of the female, which is essentially static, self-sufficient, the expression of God has been left

always to the male, so that the supreme God is forever He.

Nevertheless, in the God of the Ancient Jew, the female has triumphed. That which was born of Woman, that is indeed the God of the Old Testament. So utterly is he born of Woman that he scarcely needs to consider Woman: she is there unuttered.

And the Jewish race, continued in this Monism, stable, circumscribed, utterly unadventurous, utterly self-preservative, yet very deeply living, until the present century.

But Christ rose from the suppressed male spirit of Judea, and uttered a new commandment: Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. He repudiated Woman: "Who is my mother?" He lived the male life utterly apart from woman.

"Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" — that is the great utterance against Monism, and the compromise with Monism. It does not say "Thou shalt love thy neighbour because he is thyself," as the ancient Jew would have said. It commands "Thou shalt recognize thy neighbour's distinction from thyself, and allow his separate being, because he also is of God, even though he be almost a contradiction to thyself."

Such is the cry of anguish of Christianity: that man is separate from his brother, separate, maybe, even, in his measure, inimical to him. This the Jew had to learn. The old Jewish creed of identity, that Eve was identical with Adam, and all men children of one single parent, and therefore, in the absolute, identical, this must be destroyed.

Cunning and according to female suggestion is the story of the Creation: that Eve was born from the single body of Adam, without intervention of sex, both issuing from one flesh, as a child at birth seems to issue from one flesh of its mother. And the birth of Jesus is the retaliation to this: a child is born, not to the flesh, but to the spirit: and you, Woman, shall conceive, not to the body, but to the Word. "In the beginning was the Word," says the New Testament.

The great assertion of the Male was the New Testament, and, in its beauty, the Union of Male and Female. Christ was born of Woman, begotten by the Holy Spirit. This was why Christ should be called the Son of Man. For He was born of Woman. He was born to the Spirit, the Word, the Man, the Male.

And the assertion entailed the sacrifice of the Son of Woman. The body of Christ must be destroyed, that of Him which was Woman must be put to death, to testify that He was Spirit, that He was Male, that He was Man, without any womanly part.

So the other great camp was made. In the creation, Man was driven forth from Paradise to labour for his body and for the woman. All was lost for the knowledge of the flesh. Out of the innocence and Nirvana of Paradise came,

with the Fall, the consciousness of the flesh, the body of man and woman came into very being.

This was the first great movement of Man: the movement into the conscious possession of a body. And this consciousness of the body came through woman. And this knowledge, this possession, this enjoyment, was jealously guarded. In spite of all criticism and attack, Job remained true to this knowledge, to the utter belief in his body, in the God of his body. Though the Woman herself turned tempter, he remained true to it.

The senses, sensation, sensuousness, these things which are incontrovertibly Me, these are my God, these belong to God, said Job. And he persisted, and he was right. They issue from God on the female side.

But Christ came with His contradiction: That which is Not-Me, that is God. All is God, except that which I know immediately as Myself. First I must lose Myself, then I find God. Ye must be born again.

Unto what must man be born again? Unto knowledge of his own separate existence, as in Woman he is conscious of his own incorporate existence. Man must be born unto knowledge of his own distinct identity, as in woman he was born to knowledge of his identification with the Whole. Man must be born to the knowledge, that in the whole being he is nothing, as he was born to know that in the whole being he was all. He must be born to the knowledge that other things exist beside himself, and utterly apart from all, and before he can exist himself as a separate identity, he must allow and recognize their distinct existence. Whereas previously, on the more female Jewish side, it had been said: "All that exists is as Me. We are all one family, out of one God, having one being."

With Christ ended the Monism of the Jew. God, the One God, became a Trinity, threefold. He was the Father, the All-containing; He was the Son, the Word, the Changer, the Separator; and He was the Spirit, the Comforter, the Reconciliator between the Two.

And according to its conditions, Christianity has, since Christ, worshipped the Father or the Son, the one more than the other. Out of an over-female race came the male utterance of Christ. Throughout Europe, the suppressed, inadequate male desire, both in men and women, stretched to the idea of Christ, as a woman should stretch out her hands to a man. But Greece, in whom the female was overridden and neglected, became silent. So through the Middle Ages went on in Europe this fight against the body, against the senses, against this continual triumph of the senses. The worship of Europe, predominantly female, all through the medieval period, was to the male, to the incorporeal Christ, as a bridegroom, whilst the art produced was the collective, stupendous, emotional gesture of the Cathedrals, where a blind, collective impulse rose into concrete form. It was the

profound, sensuous desire and gratitude which produced an art of architecture, whose essence is in utter stability, of movement resolved and centralized, of absolute movement, that has no relationship with any other form, that admits the existence of no other form, but is conclusive, propounding in its sum the One Being of All.

There was, however, in the Cathedrals, already the denial of the Monism which the Whole uttered. All the little figures, the gargoyles, the imps, the human faces, whilst subordinated within the Great Conclusion of the Whole, still, from their obscurity, jeered their mockery of the Absolute, and declared for multiplicity, polygeny. But all medieval art has the static, architectural, absolute quality, in the main, even whilst in detail it is differentiated and distinct. Such is Diirer, for example. When his art succeeds, it conveys the sense of Absolute Movement, movement proper only to the given form, and not relative to other movements. It portrays the Object, with its Movement content, and not the movement which contains in one of its moments the Object.

It is only when the Greek stimulus is received, with its addition of male influence, its addition of relative movement, its revelation of movement driving the object, the highest revelation which had yet been made, that medieval art became complete Renaissance art, that there was the union and fusion of the male and female spirits, creating a perfect expression for the time being.

During the medieval times, the God had been Christ on the Cross, the Body Crucified, the flesh destroyed, the Virgin Chastity combating Desire. Such had been the God of the Aspiration. But the God of Knowledge, of that which they acknowledged as themselves, had been the Father, the God of the Ancient Jew.

But now, with the Renaissance, the God of Aspiration became in accord with the God of Knowledge, and there was a great outburst of joy, and the theme was not Christ Crucified, but Christ born of Woman, the Infant Saviour and the Virgin; or of the Annunciation, the Spirit embracing the flesh in pure embrace.

This was the perfect union of male and female, in this the hands met and clasped, and never was such a manifestation of Joy. This Joy reached its highest utterance perhaps in Botticelli, as in his Nativity of the Saviour, in our National Gallery. Still there is the architectural composition, but what an outburst of movement from the source of motion. The Infant Christ is a centre, a radiating spark of movement, the Virgin is bowed in Absolute Movement, the earthly father, Joseph, is folded up, like a clod or a boulder, obliterated, whilst the Angels fly round in ecstasy, embracing and linking hands.

The bodily father is almost obliterated. As balance to the Virgin Mother he is there, presented, but silenced, only the movement of his loin conveyed. He is not the male. The male is the radiant infant, over which the mother leans. They two

are the ecstatic centre, the complete origin, the force which is both centrifugal and centripetal.

This is the joyous utterance of the Renaissance, to which we listen for ever. Perhaps there is a melancholy in Botticelli, a pain of Woman mated to the Spirit, a nakedness of the Aphrodite issued exposed to the clear elements, to the fleshlessness of the male. But still it is joy transparent over pain. It is the utterance of complete, perfect religious art, unwilling, perhaps, when the true male and the female meet. In the Song of Solomon, the female was preponderant, the male was impure, not single. But here the heart is satisfied for the moment, there is a moment of perfect being.

And it seems to be so in other religions: the most perfect moment centres round the mother and the male child, whilst the physical male is deified separately, as a bull, perhaps.

After Botticelli came Correggio. In him the development from gesture to articulate expression was continued, unconsciously, the movement from the symbolic to the representation went on in him, from the object to the animate creature. The Virgin and Child are no longer symbolic, in Correggio: they no longer belong to religious art, but are distinctly secular. The effort is to render the living person, the individual perceived, and not the great aspiration, or an idea. Art now passes from the naive, intuitive stage to the state of knowledge. The female impulse, to feel and to live in feeling, is now embraced by the male impulse — to know, and almost carried off by knowledge. But not yet. Still Correggio is unconscious, in his art; he is in that state of elation which represents the marriage of male and female, with the pride of the male perhaps predominant. In the Madonna with the Basket, of the National Gallery, the Madonna is most thoroughly a wife, the child is most triumphantly a man's child. The Father is the origin. He is seen labouring in the distance, the true support of this mother and child. There is no Virgin worship, none of the mystery of woman. The artist has reached to a sufficiency of knowledge. He knows his woman. What he is now concerned with is not her great female mystery, but her individual character. The picture has become almost lyrical — it is the woman as known by the man, it is the woman as he has experienced her. But still she is also unknown, also she is the mystery. But Correggio's chief business is to portray the woman of his own experience and knowledge, rather than the woman of his aspiration and fear. The artist is now concerned with his own experience rather than with his own desire. The female is now more or less within the power and reach of the male. But still she is there, to centralize and control his movement, still the two react and are not resolved. But for the man, the woman is henceforth part of a stream of movement, she is herself a stream of movement, carried along

with himself. He sees everything as motion, retarded perhaps by the flesh, or by the stable being of this life in the body. But still man is held and pivoted by the object, even if he tend to wear down the pivot to a nothingness.

Thus Correggio leads on to the whole of modern art, where the male still wrestles with the female, in unconscious struggle, but where he gains ever gradually over her, reducing her to nothing. Ever there is more and more vibration, movement, and less and less stability, centralization. Ever man is more and more occupied with his own experience, with his own overpowering of resistance, ever less and less aware of any resistance in the object, less and less aware of any stability, less and less aware of anything unknown, more and more preoccupied with that which he knows, till his knowledge tends to become an abstraction, because it is limited by no unknown.

It is the contradiction of Diirer, as the Parthenon Frieze was the contradiction of Babylon and Egypt. To Diirer woman did not exist; even as to a child at the breast, woman does not exist separately. She is the overwhelming condition of life. She was to Diirer that which possessed him, and not that which he possessed. Her being overpowered him, he could only see in her terms, in terms of stability and of stable, incontrovertible being. He is overpowered by the vast assurance at whose breasts he is suckled, and, as if astounded, he grasps at the unknown. He knows that he rests within some great stability, and, marvelling at his own power for movement, touches the objects of this stability, becomes familiar with them. It is a question of the starting-point. Diirer starts with a sense of that which he does not know and would discover; Correggio with the sense of that which he has known, and would re-create.

And in the Renaissance, after Botticelli, the motion begins to divide in these two directions. The hands no longer clasp in perfect union, but one clasp overbears the other. Botticelli develops to Correggio and to Andrea del Sarto, develops forward to Rembrandt, and Rembrandt to the Impressionists, to the male extreme of motion. But Botticelli, on the other hand, becomes Raphael, Raphael and Michelangelo.

In Raphael we see the stable, architectural developing out further, and becoming the geometric: the denial or refusal of all movement. In the Madonna degli Ansdei the child is drooping, the mother stereotyped, the picture geometric, static, abstract. When there is any union of male and female, there is no goal of abstraction: the abstract is used in place, as a means of a real union. The goal of the male impulse is the announcement of motion, endless motion, endless diversity, endless change. The goal of the female impulse is the announcement of infinite oneness, of infinite stability. When the two are working in combination, as they must in life, there is, as it were, a dual motion,

centrifugal for the male, fleeing abroad, away from the centre, outward to infinite vibration, and centripetal for the female, fleeing in to the eternal centre of rest. A combination of the two movements produces a sum of motion and stability at once, satisfying. But in life there tends always to be more of one than the other. The Cathedrals, Fra Angelico, frighten us or [bore] us with their final annunciation of centrality and stability. We want to escape. The influence is too female for us.

In Botticelli, the architecture remains, but there is the wonderful movement outwards, the joyous, if still clumsy, escape from the centre. His religious pictures tend to be stereotyped, resigned. The Primavera herself is static, melancholy, a stability become almost a negation. It is as if the female, instead of being the great, unknown Positive, towards which all must flow, became the great Negative, the centre which denied all motion. And the Aphrodite stands there not as a force, to draw all things unto her, but as the naked, almost unwilling pivot, as the keystone which endured all thrust and remained static. But still there is the joy, the great motion around her, sky and sea, all the elements and living, joyful forces.

Raphael, however, seeks and finds nothing there. He goes to the centre to ask: "What is this mystery we are all pivoted upon?" To Fra Angelico it was the unknown Omnipotent. It was a goal, to which man travelled inevitably. It was the desired, the end of the long horizontal journey. But to Raphael it was the negation. Still he is a seeker, an aspirant, still his art is religious art. But the Virgin, the essential female, was to him a negation, a neutrality. Such must have been his vivid experience. But still he seeks her. Still he desires the stability, the positive keystone which grasps the arch together, not the negative keystone neutralizing the thrust, itself a neutrality. And reacting upon his own desire, the male reacting upon itself, he creates the Abstraction, the geometric conception of life. The fundament of all is the geometry of all. Which is the Plato conception. And the desire is to formulate the complete geometry.

So Raphael, knowing that his desire reaches out beyond the range of possible experience, sensible that he will not find satisfaction in any one woman, sensible that the female impulse does not, or cannot unite in him with the male impulse sufficiently to create a stability, an eternal moment of truth for him, of realization, closes his eyes and his mind upon experience, and abstracting himself, reacting upon himself, produces the geometric conception of the fundamental truth, departs from religion, from any God idea, and becomes philosophic.

Raphael is the real end of Renaissance in Italy; almost he is the real end of Italy, as Plato was the real end of Greece. When the God-idea passes into the

philosophic or geometric idea, then there is a sign that the male impulse has thrown the female impulse, and has recoiled upon itself, has become abstract, asexual.

Michelangelo, however, too physically passionate, containing too much of the female in his body ever to reach the geometric abstraction, unable to abstract himself, and at the same time, like Raphael, unable to find any woman who in her being should resist him and reserve still some unknown from him, strives to obtain his own physical satisfaction in his art. He is obsessed by the desire of the body. And he must react upon himself to produce his own bodily satisfaction, aware that he can never obtain it through woman. He must seek the moment, the consummation, the keystone, the pivot, in his own flesh. For his own body is both male and female.

Raphael and Michelangelo are men of different nature placed in the same position and resolving the same question in their several ways. Socrates and Plato are a parallel pair, and, in another degree, Tolstoi and Turgeniev, and, perhaps, St. Paul and St. John the Evangelist, and) perhaps, Shakespeare and Shelley.

The body it is which attaches us directly to the female. Sex, as we call it, is only the point where the dual stream begins to divide, where it is nearly together, almost one. An infant is of no very determinate sex: that is, it is of both. Only at adolescence is there a real differentiation, the one is singled out to predominate. In what we call happy natures, in the lazy, contented people, there is a fairly equable balance of sex. There is sufficient of the female in the body of such a man as to leave him fairly free. He does not suffer the torture of desire of a more male being. It is obvious even from the physique of such a man that in him there is a proper proportion between male and female, so that he can be easy, balanced, and without excess. The Greek sculptors of the "best" period, Phidias and then Sophocles, Alcibiades, then Horace, must have been fairly well-balanced men, not passionate to any excess, tending to voluptuousness rather than to passion. So also Victor Hugo and Schiller and Tennyson. The real voluptuary is a man who is female as well as male, and who lives according to the female side of his nature, like Lord Byron.

The pure male is himself almost an abstraction, almost bodiless, like Shelley or Edmund Spenser. But, as we know humanity, this condition comes of an omission of some vital part. In the ordinary sense, Shelley never lived. He transcended life. But we do not want to transcend life, since we are of life.

Why should Shelley say of the skylark:

"Hail to thee, blithe Spirit! — bird thou never wert! — "? Why should he insist on the bodilessness of beauty, when we cannot know of any save

embodied beauty? Who would wish that the skylark were not a bird, but a spirit? If the whistling skylark were a spirit, then we should all wish to be spirits. Which were impious and flippant.

I can think of no being in the world so transcendently male as Shelley. He is phenomenal. The rest of us have bodies which contain the male and the female. If we were so singled out as Shelley, we should not belong to life, as he did not belong to life. But it were impious to wish to be like the angels. So long as mankind exists it must exist in the body, and so long must each body pertain both to the male and the female.

In the degree of pure maleness below Shelley are Plato and Raphael and Wordsworth, then Goethe and Milton and Dante, then Michelangelo, then Shakespeare, then Tolstoi, then St. Paul.

A man who is well balanced between male and female, in his own nature, is, as a rule, happy, easy to mate, easy to satisfy, and content to exist. It is only a disproportion, or a dissatisfaction, which makes the man struggle into articulation. And the articulation is of two sorts, the cry of desire or the cry of realization, the cry of satisfaction, the effort to prolong the sense of satisfaction, to prolong the moment of consummation.

A bird in spring sings with the dawn, ringing out from the moment of consummation in wider and wider circles. Diirer, Fra Angelico, Botticelli, all sing of the moment of consummation, some of them still marvelling and lost in the wonder at the other being, Botticelli poignant with distinct memory. Raphael too sings of the moment of consummation. But he was not lost in the moment, only sufficiently lost to know what it was. In the moment, he was not completely consummated. He must strive to complete his satisfaction from himself. So, whilst making his great acknowledgment to the Woman, he must add to her to make her whole, he must give her his completion. So he rings her round with pure geometry, till she becomes herself almost of the geometric figure, an abstraction. The picture becomes a great ellipse crossed by a dark column. This is the Madonna degli Ansidei. The Madonna herself is almost insignificant. She and the child are contained within the shaft thrust across the ellipse.

This column must always stand for the male aspiration, the arch or ellipse for the female completeness containing this aspiration. And the whole picture is a geometric symbol of the consummation of life.

What we call the Truth is, in actual experience, that momentary state when in living the union between the male and the female is consummated. This consummation may be also physical, between the male body and the female body. But it may be only spiritual, between the male and female spirit.

And the symbol by which Raphael expresses this moment of consummation is

by a dark, strong shaft or column leaping up into, and almost transgressing a faint, radiant, inclusive ellipse.

To express the same moment Botticelli uses no symbol, but builds up a complicated system of circles, of movements wheeling in their horizontal plane about their fixed centres, the whole builded up dome-shape, and then the dome surpassed by another singing cycle in the open air above.

This is Botticelli always: different cycles of joy, different moments of embrace, different forms of dancing round, all contained in one picture, without solution. He has not solved it yet.

And Raphael, in reaching the pure symbolic solution, has surpassed art and become almost mathematics. Since the business of art is never to solve, but only to declare.

There is no such thing as solution. Nietzsche talks about the Ewige Wiederkehr. It is like Botticelli singing cycles. But each cycle is different. There is no real recurrence.

And to single out one cycle, one moment, and to exclude from this moment all context, and to make this moment timeless, this is what Raphael does, and what Plato does. So that their absolute Truth, their geometric Truth, is only true in timelessness.

Michelangelo, on the other hand, seeks for no absolute Truth. His desire is to realize in his body, in his feeling, the moment-consummation which is for Man the perfect truth-experience. But he knows of no embrace. For him, personally, woman does not exist. For Botticelli she existed as the Virgin-Mother, and as the Primavera, and as Aphrodite. She existed as the pure origin of life on the female side, as the bringer of light and delight, and as the passionately Desired of every man, as the Known and Unknown in one: to Raphael she existed either as a minor part of his experience, having nothing to do with his aspiration, or else his aspiration merely used her as a statement included within the Great Abstraction.

To Michelangelo the female scarcely existed outside his own physique. There he knew of her and knew the desire of her. But Raphael, in his passion to be self-complete, roused his desire for consummation to a white-hot pitch, so that he became incandescent, reacting on himself, consuming his own flesh and his own bodily life, to reach the pitch of perfect abstraction, the resisting body holding back the raging stream of outward force, till the two formed a stable incandescence, a luminous geometric conception of permanence and inviolability. Meanwhile his body burned away, overpowered, in this state of incandescence.

Michelangelo's will was different. The body in him, that which knew of the female and therefore was the female, was stronger and more insistent. His desire

for consummation was desire for the satisfying moment when the male and female spirits touch in closest embrace, vivifying each other, not one destroying the other, but still are two. He knew that for Man consummation is a temporal state. The pure male spirit must ever conceive of timelessness, the pure female of the moment. And Michelangelo, more mixed than Raphael, must always rage within the limits of time and of temporal forms. So he reacted upon himself, sought the female in himself, aggrandized it, and so reached a wonderful momentary stability of flesh exaggerated till it became tenuous, but filled and balanced by the outward-pressing force. And he reached his consummation in that way, reached the perfect moment, when he realized and revealed his figures in all their marvellous equilibrium. The Jewish tradition, with its great physical God, source of male and female, attracted him. By turning towards the female goal, of utter stability and permanence in Time, he arrived at his consummation. But only by reacting on himself, by withdrawing his own mobility. Thus he made his great figures, the Moses, static and looming, announcing, like the Jewish God, the magnificence and eternity of the physical law; the David, young, but with too much body for a young figure, the physique exaggerated, the clear, outward-leaping, essential spirit of the young man smothered over, the real maleness cloaked, so that the statue is almost a falsity. Then the slaves, heaving in body, fastened in bondage that refuses them movement; the motionless Madonna, no Virgin but Woman in the flesh, not the pure female conception, but the spouse of man, the mother of bodily children. The men are not male, nor the women female, to any degree.

The Adam can scarcely stir into life. That large body of almost transparent, tenuous texture is not established enough for motion. It is not that it is too ponderous: it is too unsubstantial, unreal. It is not motion, life, he craves, but body. Give him but a firm, concentrated physique. That is the cry of all Michelangelo's pictures.

But, powerful male as he was, he satisfies his desire by insisting upon and exaggerating the body in him, he reaches the point of consummation in the most marvellous equilibrium which his figures show. To attain this equilibrium he must exaggerate and exaggerate and exaggerate the flesh, make it ever more tenuous, keeping it really in true ratio. And then comes the moment, the perfect stable poise, the perfect balance between object and movement, the perfect combination of male and female in one figure.

It is wonderful, and peaceful, this equilibrium, once reached. But it is reached through anguish and self-battle and self-repression, therefore it is sad. Always, Michelangelo's* pictures are full of joy, * Surely, Raphael's (editor's note).

of self-acceptance and self-proclamation. Michelangelo fought and arrested

the mobile male in him; Raphael was proud in the male he was, and gave himself utter liberty, at the female expense.

And it seems as though Italy had ever since the Renaissance been possessed by the Raphaellesque conception of the ultimate geometric basis of life, the geometric essentiality of all things. There is in the Italian, at the very bottom of all, the fundamental, geometric conception of absolute static combination. There is the shaft enclosed in the ellipse, as a permanent symbol. There exists no shaft, no ellipse separately, but only the whole complete thing; there is neither male nor female, but an absolute interlocking of the two in one, an absolute combination, so that each is gone in the complete identity. There is only the geometric abstraction of the moment of consummation, a moment made timeless. And this conception of a long, clinched, timeless embrace, this overwhelming conception of timeless consummation, of which there is no beginning nor end, from which there is no escape, has arrested the Italian race for three centuries. It is the source of its indifference and its fatalism and its positive abandon, and of its utter incapacity to be sceptical, in the Russian sense.

This conception contains also, naturally, as part of the same idea, Aphrodite-worship and Phallic-worship. But these are subordinate, and belong to a sort of initiatory period. The real conception, for the individual, is marriage, inviolable marriage, which always was and always has been, no matter what apparent aberrations there may or may not be. And the manifestation of divinity is the child. In marriage, in utter, interlocked marriage, man and woman cease to be two beings and become one, one and one only, not two in one as with us, but absolute One, a geometric absolute, timeless, the Absolute, the Divine. And the child, as issue of this divine and timeless state, is hailed with love and joy.

But the Italian is now beginning to withdraw from his clinched and timeless embrace, from his geometric abstraction, into the northern conception of himself and the woman as two separate identities, which meet, combine, but always must withdraw again.

So that the Futurist Boccioni now makes his sculpture, *Development of a Bottle through Space*, try to express the withdrawal, and at the same time he must adhere to the conception of this same interlocked state of marriage between centripetal and centrifugal forces, the geometric abstraction of the bottle. But he can neither do one thing nor the other. He wants to re-state the real abstraction.

And at the same time he has an unsatisfied desire to satisfy. He must insist on the centrifugal force, and so destroy at once his abstraction. He must insist on the male spirit of motion outwards, because, during three static centuries, there has necessarily come to pass a preponderance of the female in the race, so that the Italian is rather more female than male now, as is the whole Latin race rather

voluptuous than passionate, too much aware of their utter locked-ness male with female, and too hopeless, as males, to act, to be passionate. So that when I look at Boccioni's sculpture, and see him trying to state the timeless abstract being of a bottle, the pure geometric abstraction of the bottle, I am fascinated. But then, when I see him driven by his desire for the male complement into portraying motion, simple motion, trying to give expression to the bottle in terms of mechanics, I am confused. It is for science to explain the bottle in terms of force and motion. Geometry, pure mathematics, is very near to art, and the vivid attempt to render the bottle as a pure geometric abstraction might give rise to a work of art, because of the resistance of the medium, the stone. But a representation in stone of the lines of force which create that state of rest called a bottle, that is a model in mechanics.

And the two representations require two different states of mind in the appreciator, so that the result is almost nothingness, mere confusion. And the portraying of a state of mind is impossible. There can only be made scientific diagrams of states of mind. A state of mind is a resultant between an attack and a resistance. And how can one produce a resultant without first causing the collision of the originating forces?

The attitude of the Futurists is the scientific attitude, as the attitude of Italy is mainly scientific. It is the forgetting of the old, perfect Abstraction, it is the departure of the male from the female, it is the act of withdrawal: the denying of consummation and the starting afresh, the learning of the alphabet.

CHAPTER VIII

The Light of the World

The climax that was reached in Italy with Raphael has never been reached in like manner in England. There has never been,

in England, the great embrace, the surprising consummation, which Botticelli recorded and which Raphael fixed in a perfect Abstraction.

Correggio, Andrea del Sarto, both men of less force than those other supreme three, continued the direct line of development, turning no curve. They still found women whom they could not exhaust: in them, the male still reacted upon the incontrovertible female. But ever there was a tendency to greater movement, to a closer characterization, a tendency to individualize the human being, and to represent him as being embedded in some common, divine matrix.

Till after the Renaissance, supreme God had always been God the Father. The Church moved and had its being in Almighty God, Christ was only the distant, incandescent gleam towards which humanity aspired, but which it did not know.

Raphael and Michelangelo were both servants of the Father, of the Eternal Law, of the Prime Being. Raphael, faced with the question of Not-Being, when it was forced upon him that he would never accomplish his own being in the flesh, that he would never know completeness, the momentary consummation, in the body, accomplished the Geometrical Abstraction, which is the abstraction from the Law, which is the Father.

There was, however, Christ's great assertion of Not-Being, of No-Consummation, of life after death, to reckon with. It was after the Renaissance, Christianity began to exist. It had not existed before.

In God the Father we are all one body, one flesh. But in Christ we abjure the flesh, there is no flesh. A man must lose his life to save it. All the natural desires of the body, these a man must be able to deny, before he can live. And then, when he lives, he shall live in the knowledge that he is himself, so that he can always say: "I am I."

In the Father we are one flesh, in Christ we are crucified, and rise again, and are One with Him in Spirit. It is the difference between Law and Love. Each man shall live according to the Law, which changeth not, says the old religion. Each man shall live according to Love, which shall save us from death and from the Law, says the new religion.

But what is Love? What is the deepest desire Man has yet known? It is always for this consummation, this momentary contact or union of male with female, of spirit with spirit and flesh with flesh, when each is complete in itself and rejoices in its own being, when each is in himself or in herself complete and single and essential. And love is the great aspiration towards this complete consummation and this joy; it is the aspiration of each man that all men, that all life, shall know it and rejoice. Since, until all men shall know it, no man shall fully know it. Since, by the Law, we are all one flesh. So that Love is only a closer vision of the Law, a more comprehensive interpretation: "Think not I come to destroy the Law, or the Prophets: I come not to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the Law, till all be fulfilled."

In Christ I must save my soul through love, I must lose my life, and thereby find it. The Law bids me preserve my life to the Glory of God. But Love bids me lose my life to the Glory of God. In Christ, when I shall have overcome every desire I know in myself, so that I adhere to nothing, but am loosed and set free and single, then, being without fear, and having nothing that I can lose, I shall know what I am, I, transcendent, intrinsic, eternal.

The Christian commandment: "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" is a more indirect and moving, a more emotional form of the Greek commandment "Know thyself." This is what Christianity says, indirectly: "Know thyself, and each man shall thereby know himself."

Now in the Law, no man shall know himself, save in the Law. And the Law is the immediate law of the body. And the necessity of each man to know himself, to achieve his own consummation, shall be satisfied and fulfilled in the body. God, Almighty God, is the father, and in fatherhood man draws nearest to him. In the act of love, in the act of begetting, Man is with God and of God. Such is the Law. And there shall be no other God devised. That is the great obstructive commandment.

This is the old religious leap down, absolutely, even if not in direct statement. It is the Law. But through Christ it was at last declared that in the physical act of love, in the begetting of children, man does not necessarily know himself, nor become Godlike, nor satisfy his deep, innate desire to BE. The physical act of love may be a complete disappointment, a nothing, and fatherhood may be the least significant attribute to a man. And physical love may fail utterly, may prove a sterility, a nothingness. Is a man then duped, and is his deepest desire a joke played on him?

There is a law, beyond the known law, there is a new Commandment. There is love. A man shall find his consummation the crucifixion of the body and the

resurrection of the spirit.

Christ, the Bridegroom, or the Bride, as may be, awaits the desiring soul that shall seek Him, and in Him shall all men find their consummation, after their new birth. It is the New Law; the old Law is revoked.

“This is my Body, take, and eat,” says Christ, in the Communion, the ritual representing the Consummation. “Come unto Me all ye that labour and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.”

For each man there is the bride, for each woman the bridegroom, for all, the Mystic Marriage. It is the New Law. In the mystic embrace of Christ each man shall find fulfilment and relief, each man shall become himself, a male individual, tried, proved, completed, and satisfied. In the mystic embrace of Christ each man shall say, “I am myself, and Christ is Christ”; each woman shall be proud and satisfied, saying, “It is enough.”

So, by the New Law, man shall satisfy this his deepest desire. “In the body ye must die, even as I died, on the cross,” says Christ, “that ye may have everlasting life.” But this is a real contradiction of the Old Law, which says, “In the life of the body we are one with the Father.” The Old Law bids us live: it is the old, original commandment, that we shall live in the Law, and not die. So that the new Christian preaching of Christ Crucified is indeed against the Law. “And when ye are dead in the body, ye shall be one with the spirit, ye shall know the Bride, and be consummate in Her Embrace, in the Spirit,” continues the Christian Commandment.

It is a larger interpretation of the Law, but, also, it is a breach of the Law. For by the Law, Man shall in no wise injure or deny or desecrate his living body of flesh, which is of the Father. Therefore, though Christ gave the Holy Ghost, the Comforter; though He bowed before the Father; though He said that no man should be forgiven the denial of the Holy Spirit, the Reconciler between the Father and the Son; yet did the Son deny the Father, must he deny the Father?

“Ye are my Spirit, in the Spirit ye know Me, and in marriage of the Spirit I am fulfilled of you,” said the Son.

And it is the Unforgivable Sin to declare that these two are contradictions one of the other, though contradictions they are. Between them is linked the Holy Spirit, as a reconciliation, and whoso shall speak hurtfully against the Holy Spirit shall find no forgiveness.

So Christ, up in arms against the Father, exculpated Himself and bowed to the Father. Yet man must insist either on one or on the other: either he must adhere to the Son or to the Father. And since the Renaissance, disappointed in the flesh, the northern races have sought the consummation through Love; and they have denied the Father.

The greatest and deepest human desire, for consummation, for Self-Knowledge, has sought a different satisfaction. In Love, in the act of love, that which is mixed in me becomes pure, that which is female in me is given to the female, that which is male in her draws into me, I am complete, I am pure male, she is pure female; we rejoice in contact perfect and naked and clear, singled out unto ourselves, and given the surpassing freedom. No longer we see through a glass, darkly. For she is she, and I am I, and, clasped together with her, I know how perfectly she is not me, how perfectly I am not her, how utterly we are two, the light and the darkness, and how infinitely and eternally not-to-be-comprehended by either of us is the surpassing One we make. Yet of this One, this incomprehensible, we have an inkling that satisfies us.

And through Christ Jesus, I know that I shall find my Bride, when I have overcome the impurity of the flesh. When the flesh in me is put away, I shall embrace the Bride, and I shall know as I am known.

But why the Schism? Why shall the Father say “Thou shalt have no other God before Me”? Why is the Lord our God a jealous God? Why, when the body fails me, must I still adhere to the Law, and give it praise as the perfect Abstraction, like Raphael, announce it as the Absolute? Why must I be imprisoned within the flesh, like Michelangelo, till I must stop the voice of my crying out, and be satisfied with a little where I wanted completeness?

And why, on the other hand, must I lose my life to save it? Why must I die, before I can be born again? Can I not be born again, save out of my own ashes, save in resurrection from the dead? Why must I deny the Father, to love the Son? Why are they not One God to me, as we always protest they are?

It is time that the schism ended, that man ceased to oppose the Father to the Son, the Son to the Father. It is time that the Protestant Church, the Church of the Son, should be one again with the Roman Catholic Church, the Church of the Father. It is time that man shall cease, first to live in the flesh, with joy, and then, unsatisfied, to renounce and to mortify the flesh, declaring that the Spirit alone exists, that Christ He is God.

If a man find incomplete satisfaction in the body, why therefore shall he renounce the body and say it is of the devil? And why, at the start, shall a man say, “The body, that is all, and the consummation, that is complete in the flesh, for me.”

Must it always be that a man set out with a worship of passion and a blindness to love, and that he end with a stern commandment to love and a renunciation of passion?

Does not a youth now know that he desires the body as the via media, that consummation is consummation of body and spirit, both?

How can a man say, "I am this body," when he will desire beyond the body tomorrow? And how can a man say, "I am this spirit," when his own mouth gives lie to the words it forms?

Why is a race, like the Italian race, fundamentally melancholy, save that it has circumscribed its consummation within the body? And the Jewish race, for the same reason, has become now almost hollow, with a pit of emptiness and misery in their eyes.

And why is the English race neutral, indifferent, like a thing that eschews life, save that it has said so insistently: "I am this spirit. This body, it is not me, it is unworthy"? The body at last begins to wilt and become corrupt. But before it submits, half the life of the English race must be a lie. The life of the body, denied by the professed adherence to the spirit, must be something disowned, corrupt, ugly.

Why should the worship of the Son entail the denial of the Father?

Since the Renaissance, northern humanity has sought for consummation in the spirit, it has sought for the female apart from woman. "I am I, and the Spirit is the Spirit; in the Spirit I am myself," and this has been the utterance of our art since Raphael.

There has been the ever-developing dissolution of form, the dissolving of the solid body within the spirit. He began to break the clear outline of the object, to seek for further marriage, not only between body and body, not the perfect, stable union of body with body, not the utter completeness and accomplishment of architectural form, with its recurrent cycles, but the marriage between body and spirit, or between spirit and spirit.

It is no longer the Catholic exultation "God is God," but the Christian annunciation, "Light is come into the world." No longer has a man only to obey, but he has to die and be born again; he has to close his eyes upon his own immediate desires, and in the darkness receive the perfect light. He has to know himself in the spirit, he has to follow Christ to the Cross, and rise again in the light of the life.

And, in this light of life, he will see his Bride, he will embrace his complement and his fulfilment, and achieve his consummation. "It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh forgetteth nothing; the words I speak unto you, they are the spirit, and they are life."

And though in the Gospel, according to John particularly, Jesus constantly asserts that the Father has sent Him, and that He is of the Father, yet there is always the spirit of antagonism to the Father.

"And it came to pass, as He spake these things, a certain woman of the company lifted up her voice and said unto Him: 'Blessed is the womb that bare

thee, and the paps thou hast sucked.’

“But He said, Yea, rather, blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it.”

And the woman who heard this knew that she was denied of the honour of her womb, and that the blessing of her breasts was taken away.

Again He said: “And there be those that were born eunuchs, and there be those that were made eunuchs by men, and there be eunuchs which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven’s sake. He that is able to receive it, let him receive it.” But before the Father a eunuch is blemished, even a childless man is without honour.

So that the spirit of Jesus is antagonistic to the spirit of the Father. And St. John enhances this antagonism. But in St. John there is the constant insistence on the Oneness of Father and Son, and on the Holy Spirit.

Since the Renaissance there has been the striving for the Light, and the escape from the Flesh, from the Body, the Object. And sometimes there has been the antagonism to the Father, sometimes reconciliation with Him. In painting, the Spirit, the Word, the Love, all that was represented by John, has appeared as light. Light is the constant symbol of Christ in the New Testament. It is light, actual sunlight or the luminous quality of day, which has infused more and more into the defined body, fusing away the outline, absolving the concrete reality, making a marriage, an embrace between the two things, light and object.

In Rembrandt there is the first great evidence of this, the new exposition of the commandment “Know thyself.” It is more than the “Hail, holy Light!” of Milton. It is the declaration that light is our medium of existence, that where the light falls upon our darkness, there we are: that I am but the point where light and darkness meet and break upon one another.

There is now a new conception of life, an utterly new conception, of duality, of two-fold existence, light and darkness, object and spirit two-fold, and almost inimical.

The old desire, for movement about a centre of rest, for stability, is gone, and in its place rises the desire for pure ambience, pure spirit of change, free from all laws and conditions of being.

Henceforward there are two things, and not one. But there is journeying towards the one thing again. There is no longer the One God Who contains us all, and in Whom we live and move and have our being, and to Whom belongs each one of our movements. I am no longer a child of the Father, brother of all men. I am no longer part of the great body of God, as all men are part of it. I am no longer consummate in the body of God, identified with it and divine in the act of marriage.

The conception has utterly changed. There is the Spirit, and there is Myself. I exist in contact with the Spirit, but I am not the Spirit. I am other, I am Myself. Now I am become a man, I am no more a child of the Father. I am a man. And there are many men. And the Father has lost his importance. We are multiple, manifold men, we own only one Hope, one Desire, one Bride, one Spirit.

At last man insists upon his own separate Self, insists that he has a distinct, unconquerable being which stands apart even from Spirit, which exists other than the Spirit, and which seeks marriage with the Spirit.

And he must study himself and marvel over himself in the light of the Spirit, he must become lyrical: but he must glorify the Spirit, above all. Since that is the Bride. So Rembrandt paints his own portrait again and again, sees it again and again within the light.

He has no hatred of the flesh. That he was not completed in the flesh, even in the marriage of the body, is inevitable. But he is married in the flesh, and his wife is with him in the body, he loves his body, which she gave him complete, and he loves her body, which is not himself, but which he has known. He has known and rejoiced in the earthly bride, he will adhere to her always. But there is the Spirit beyond her: there is his desire which transcends her, there is the Bride still he craves for and courts. And he knows, this is the Spirit, it is not the body. And he paints it as the light. And he paints himself within the light. For he has a deep desire to know himself in the embrace of the spirit. For he does not know himself, he is never consummated.

In the Old Law, fulfilled in him, he is not appeased, he must transcend the Law. The Woman is embraced, caught up, and carried forward, the male spirit, passing on half satisfied, must seek a new bride, a further consummation. For there is no bride on earth for him.

To Diirer, the whole earth was as a bride, unknown and unaccomplished, offering satisfaction to him. And he sought out the earth endlessly, as a man seeks to know a bride who surpasses him. It was all: the Bride.

But to Rembrandt the bride was not to be found, he must react upon himself, he must seek in himself for his own consummation. There was the Light, the Spirit, the Bridegroom. But when Rembrandt sought the complete Bride, sought for his own consummation, he knew it was not to be found, he knew she did not exist in the concrete. He knew, as Michelangelo knew, that there was not on the earth a woman to satisfy him, to be his mate. He must seek for the Bride beyond the physical woman; he must seek for the great female principle in an abstraction.

But the abstraction was not the geometric abstraction, created from knowledge, a state of Absolute Remembering, making Absolute of the

Consummation which had been, as in Raphael. It was the desired Unknown, the goodly Unknown, the Spirit, the Light. And with this Light Rembrandt must seek even the marriage of the body. Everything he did approximates to the Consummation, but never can realize it. He paints always faith, belief, hope; never Raphael's terrible, dead certainty.

To Diirer, every moment of his existence was occupied. He existed within the embrace of the Bride, which embrace he could never fathom nor exhaust.

Raphael knew and outraged the Bride, but he harked back, obsessed by the consummation which had been.

To Rembrandt, woman was only the first acquaintance with the Bride. Of woman he obtained and expected no complete satisfaction. He knew he must go on, beyond the woman. But though the flesh could not find its consummation, still he did not deny the flesh. He was an artist, and in his art no artist ever could blaspheme the Holy Spirit, the Reconciler. Only a dogmatist could do that. Rembrandt did not deny the flesh, as so many artists try to do. He went on from her to the fuller knowledge of the Bride, in true progression. Which makes the wonderful beauty of Rembrandt.

But, like Michelangelo, owning the flesh, and a northern Christian being bent on personal salvation, personal consummation in the flesh, such as a Christian feels with us when he receives the Sacrament and hears the words "This is My Body, take, and eat," Rembrandt craved to marry the flesh and the Spirit, to achieve consummation in the flesh through marriage with the Spirit.

Which is the great northern confusion. For the flesh is of the flesh, and the Spirit of the Spirit, and they are two, even as the Father and the Son are two, and not One.

Raphael conceived the two as One, thereby revoking Time. Michelangelo would have created the bridal Flesh, to satisfy himself. Rembrandt would have married his own flesh to the Spirit, taken the consummate Kiss of the Light upon his fleshly face.

Which is a confusion. For the Father cannot know the Son, nor the Son the Father. So, in Rembrandt, the marriage is always imperfect, the embrace is never close nor consummate, as it is in Botticelli or in Raphael, or in Michelangelo. There is an eternal non-marriage betwixt flesh and spirit. They are two; they are never Two-in-One. So that in Rembrandt there is never complete marriage betwixt the Light and the Body. They are contiguous, never.

This has been the confusion and the error of the northern countries, but particularly of Germany, this desire to have the spirit mate with the flesh, the flesh with the spirit. Spirit can mate with spirit, and flesh with flesh, and the two matings can take place separately, flesh with flesh, or spirit with spirit. But to try

to mate flesh with spirit makes confusion.

The bride I mate with my body may or may not be the Bride in whom I find my consummation. It may be that, at times, the great female principle does not abide abundantly in woman: that, at certain periods, woman, in the body, is not the supreme representative of the Bride. It may be the Bride is hidden from Man, as the Light, or as the Darkness, which he can never know in the flesh.

It may be, in the same way, that the great male principle is only weakly evidenced in man during certain periods, that the Bridegroom be hidden away from woman, for a century or centuries, and that she can only find Him as the voice, or the Wind. So I think it was with her during the medieval period; that the greatest women of the period knew that the Bridegroom did not exist for them in the body, but as the Christ, the Spirit.

And, in times of the absence of the bridegroom from the body, then woman in the body must either die in the body, or, mating in the body, she must mate with the Bridegroom in the Spirit, in a separate marriage. She cannot mate her body with the Spirit, nor mate her spirit with the Body. That is confusion. Let her mate the man in body, and her spirit with the Spirit, in a separate marriage. But let her not try to mate her spirit with the body of the man, that does not mate her Spirit.

The effort to mate spirit with body, body with spirit, is the crying confusion and pain of our times.

Rembrandt made the first effort. But art has developed to a clarity since then. It reached its climax in our own Turner. He did not seek to mate body with spirit. He mated his body easily, he did not deny it. But what he sought was the mating of the Spirit. Ever, he sought the consummation in the Spirit, and he reached it at last. Ever, he sought the Light, to make the light transfuse the body, till the body was carried away, a mere bloodstain, became a ruddy stain of red sunlight within white sunlight. This was perfect consummation in Turner, when, the body gone, the ruddy light meets the crystal light in a perfect fusion, the utter dawn, the utter golden sunset, the extreme of all life, where all is One, One-Being, a perfect glowing Oneness.

Like Raphael, it becomes an abstraction. But this, in Turner, is the abstraction from the spiritual marriage and consummation, the final transcending of all the Law, the achieving of what is to us almost a nullity. If Turner had ever painted his last picture, it would have been a white, incandescent surface, the same whiteness when he finished as when he began, proceeding from nullity to nullity, through all the range of colour.

Turner is perfect. Such a picture as his Norham Castle, Sunrise, where only the faintest shadow of life stains the light, is the last word that can be uttered,..before the blazing and timeless silence.

He sought, and he found, perfect marriage in the spirit. It was apart from woman. His Bride was the Light. Or he was the bride himself, and the Light — the Bridegroom. Be that as it may, he became one and consummate with the Light, and gave us the consummate revelation.

Corot, also, nearer to the Latin tradition of utter consummation in the body, made a wonderful marriage in the spirit between light and darkness, just tintured with life. But he contained more of the two consummations together, the marriage in the body, represented in geometric form, and the marriage in the spirit, represented by shimmering transfusion and infusion of light through darkness.

But Turner is the crisis in this effort: he achieves pure light, pure and singing. In him the consummation is perfect, the perfect marriage in the spirit.

In the body his marriage was other. He never attempted to mingle the two. The marriage in the body, with the woman, was apart from, completed away from the marriage in the Spirit, with the Bride, the Light.

But I cannot look at a later Turner picture without abstracting myself, without denying that I have limbs, knees and thighs and breast. If I look at the Norham Castle, and remember my own knees and my own breast, then the picture is a nothing to me. I must not know. And if I look at Raphael's Madonna degli Ansdei, I am cut off from my future, from aspiration. The gate is shut upon me, I can go no further. The thought of Turner's Sunrise becomes magic and fascinating, it gives the lie to this completed symbol. I know I am the other thing as well.

So that, whenever art or any expression becomes perfect, it becomes a lie. For it is only perfect by reason of abstraction from that context by which and in which it exists as truth.

So Turner is a lie, and Raphael is a lie, and the marriage in the spirit is a lie, and the marriage in the body is a lie, each is a lie without the other. Since each excludes the other in these instances, they are both lies. If they were brought together, and reconciled, then there were a jubilee. But where is the Holy Spirit that shall reconcile Raphael and Turner?

There must be marriage of body in body, and of spirit in spirit, and Two-in-One. And the marriage in the body must not deny the marriage in the spirit, for that is blasphemy against the Holy Ghost; and the marriage in the spirit shall not deny the marriage in the body, for that is blasphemy against the Holy Ghost. But the two must be for ever reconciled, even if they must exist on occasions apart one from the other.

For in Botticelli the dual marriage is perfect, or almost perfect, body and spirit reconciled, or almost reconciled, in a perfect dual consummation. And in all art

there is testimony to the wonderful dual marriage, the true consummation. But in Raphael, the marriage in the spirit is left out so much that it is almost denied, so that the picture is almost a lie, almost a blasphemy. And in Turner, the marriage in the body is almost denied in the same way, so that his picture is almost a blasphemy. But neither in Raphael nor in Turner is the denial positive: it is only an over-affirmation of the one at the expense of the other.

But in some men, in some small men, like bishops, the denial of marriage in the body is positive and blasphemous, a sin against the Holy Ghost. And in some men, like Prussian army officers, the denial of marriage in the spirit is an equal blasphemy. But which of the two is a greater sinner, working better for the destruction of his fellow-man, that is for the One God to judge.

CHAPTER IX

A Nos Moutons

Most fascinating in all artists is this antinomy between Law and Love, between the Flesh and the Spirit, between the Father and the Son.

For the moralist it is easy. He can insist on that aspect of the Law or Love which is in the immediate line of development for his age, and he can sternly and severely exclude or suppress all the rest.

So that all morality is of temporary value, useful to its times. But Art must give a deeper satisfaction. It must give fair play all round.

Yet every work of art adheres to some system of morality. But if it be really a work of art, it must contain the essential criticism on the morality to which it adheres. And hence the antinomy, hence the conflict necessary to every tragic conception.

The degree to which the system of morality, or the metaphysic, of any work of art is submitted to criticism within the work of art makes the lasting value and satisfaction of that work. Aeschylus, having caught the oriental idea of Love, correcting the tremendous Greek conception of the Law with this new idea, produces the intoxicating satisfaction of the Orestean trilogy. The Law, and Love, they are here the Two-in-One in all their magnificence. But Euripides, with his aspiration towards Love, Love the supreme, and his almost hatred of the Law, Law the Triumphant but Base Closer of Doom, is less satisfactory, because of the very fact that he holds Love always Supreme, and yet must endure the chagrin of seeing Love perpetually transgressed and overthrown. So he makes his tragedy: the higher thing eternally pulled down by the lower. And this unfairness in the use of terms, higher and lower, but above all, the unfairness of showing Love always violated and suffering, never supreme and triumphant, makes us disbelieve Euripides in the end. For we have to bring in pity, we must admit that Love is at a fundamental disadvantage before the Law, and cannot therefore ever hold its own. Which is weak philosophy.

If Aeschylus has a metaphysic to his art, this metaphysic is that Love and Law are Two, eternally in conflict, and eternally being reconciled. This is the tragic significance of Aeschylus.

But the metaphysic of Euripides is that the Law and Love are two eternally in conflict, and unequally matched, so that Love must always be borne down. In

Love a man shall only suffer. There is also a Reconciliation, otherwise Euripides were not so great. But there is always the unfair matching, this disposition insisted on, which at last leaves one cold and unbelieving.

The moments of pure satisfaction come in the choruses, in the pure lyrics, when Love is put into true relations with the Law, apart from knowledge, transcending knowledge, transcending the metaphysic, where the aspiration to Love meets the acknowledgment of the Law in a consummate marriage, for the moment.

Where Euripides adheres to his metaphysic, he is unsatisfactory. Where he transcends his metaphysic, he gives that supreme equilibrium wherein we know satisfaction.

The adherence to a metaphysic does not necessarily give artistic form. Indeed the over-strong adherence to a metaphysic usually destroys any possibility of artistic form. Artistic form is a revelation of the two principles of Love and the Law in a state of conflict and yet reconciled: pure motion struggling against and yet reconciled with the Spirit: active force meeting and overcoming and yet not overcoming inertia. It is the conjunction of the two which makes form. And since the two must always meet under fresh conditions, form must always be different. Each work of art has its own form, which has no relation to any other form. When a young painter studies an old master, he studies, not the form, that is an abstraction which does not exist: he studies maybe the method of the old great artist: but he studies chiefly to understand how the old great artist suffered in himself the conflict of Love and Law, and brought them to a reconciliation. Apart from artistic method, it is not Art that the young man is studying, but the State of Soul of the great old artist, so that he, the young artist, may understand his own soul and gain a reconciliation between the aspiration and the resistant.

It is most wonderful in poetry, this sense of conflict contained within a reconciliation:

Hail to thee, blithe Spirit!

Bird thou never wert, That from Heaven, or near it,

Pourest thy full heart In profuse strains of unpremeditated art.

Shelley wishes to say, the skylark is a pure, untrammelled spirit, a pure motion. But the very "Bird thou never wert" admits that the skylark is in very fact a bird, a concrete, momentary thing. If the line ran, "Bird thou never art," that would spoil it all. Shelley wishes to say, the song is poured out of heaven: but "or near it," he admits. There is the perfect relation between heaven and earth. And the last line is the tumbling sound of a lark's singing, the real Two-in-One.

The very adherence to rhyme and regular rhythm is a concession to the Law, a

concession to the body, to the being and requirements of the body. They are an admission of the living, positive inertia which is the other half of life, other than the pure will to motion. In this consummation, they are the resistance and response of the Bride in the arms of the Bridegroom. And according as the Bride and Bridegroom come closer together, so is the response and resistance more fine, indistinguishable, so much the more, in this act of consummation, is the movement that of Two-in-One, indistinguishable each from the other, and not the movement of two brought together clumsily.

So that in Swinburne, where almost all is concession to the body, so that the poetry becomes almost a sensation and not an experience or a consummation, justifying Spinoza's "Amor est titillatio, con-comitante idea causae externae," we find continual adherence to the body, to the Rose, to the Flesh, the physical in everything, in the sea, in the marshes; there is an overbalance in the favour of Supreme Law; Love is not Love, but passion, part of the Law; there is no Love, there is only Supreme Law. And the poet sings the Supreme Law to gain rebalance in himself, for he hovers always on the edge of death, of Not-Being, he is always out of reach of the Law, bodiless, in the faintness of Love that has triumphed and denied the Law, in the dread of an over-developed, over-sensitive soul which exists always on the point of dissolution from the body.

But he is not divided against himself. It is the novelists and dramatists who have the hardest task in reconciling their metaphysic, their theory of being and knowing, with their living sense of being. Because a novel is a microcosm, and because man in viewing the universe must view it in the light of a theory, therefore every novel must have the background or the structural skeleton of some theory of being, some metaphysic. But the metaphysic must always subserve the artistic purpose beyond the artist's conscious aim. Otherwise the novel becomes a treatise.

And the danger is, that a man shall make himself a metaphysic to excuse or cover his own faults or failure. Indeed, a sense of fault or failure is the usual cause of a man's making himself a metaphysic, to justify himself.

Then, having made himself a metaphysic of self-justification, or a metaphysic of self-denial, the novelist proceeds to apply the world to this, instead of applying this to the world.

Tolstoi is a flagrant example of this. Probably because of profligacy in his youth, because he had disgusted himself in his own flesh, by excess or by prostitution, therefore Tolstoi, in his metaphysic, renounced the flesh altogether, later on, when he had tried and had failed to achieve complete marriage in the flesh. But above all things, Tolstoi was a child of the Law, he belonged to the Father. He had a marvellous sensuous understanding, and very little clarity of

mind.

So that, in his metaphysic, he had to deny himself, his own being, in order to escape his own disgust of what he had done to himself, and to escape admission of his own failure.

Which made all the later part of his life a crying falsity and shame. Reading the reminiscences of Tolstoi, one can only feel shame at the way Tolstoi denied all that was great in him, with vehement cowardice. He degraded himself infinitely, he perjured himself far more than did Peter when he denied Christ. Peter repented. But Tolstoi denied the Father, and propagated a great system of his recusancy, elaborating his own weakness, blaspheming his own strength. "What difficulty is there in writing about how an officer fell in love with a married woman?" he used to say of his Anna Karenina; "there's no difficulty in it, and, above all, no good in it."

Because he was mouthpiece to the Father in uttering the law of passion, he said there was no difficulty in it, because it came naturally to him. Christ might just as easily have said, there was no difficulty in the Parable of the Sower, and no good in it, either, because it flowed out of him without effort.

And Thomas Hardy's metaphysic is something like Tolstoi's. "There is no reconciliation between Love and the Law," says Hardy. "The spirit of Love must always succumb before the blind, stupid, but overwhelming power of the Law."

Already as early as *The Return of the Native* he has come to this theory, in order to explain his own sense of failure. But before that time, from the very start, he has had an overweening theoretic antagonism to the Law. "That which is physical, of the body, is weak, despicable, bad," he said at the very start. He represented his fleshy heroes as villains, but ver7 weak and maundering villains. At its worst, the Law is a weak, craven sensuality: at its best, it is a passive inertia. It is the gap in the armour, it is the hole in the foundation.

Such a metaphysic is almost silly. If it were not that man is much stronger in feeling than in thought, the Wessex novels would be sheer rubbish, as they are already in parts. *The Well-Beloved* is sheer rubbish, fatuity, as is a good deal of *The Dynasts* conception.

But it is not as a metaphysician that one must consider Hardy. He makes a poor show there. For nothing in his work is so pitiable as his clumsy efforts to push events into line with his theory of being, and to make calamity fall on those who represent the principle of Love. He does it exceedingly badly, and owing to this effort his form is execrable in the extreme.

His feeling, his instinct, his sensuous understanding is, however, apart from his metaphysic, very great and deep, deeper than that, perhaps, of any other English novelist. Putting aside his metaphysic, which must always obtrude when

he thinks of people, and turning to the earth, to landscape, then he is true to himself.

Always he must start from the earth, from the great source of the Law, and his people move in his landscape almost insignificantly, somewhat like tame animals wandering in the wild. The earth is the manifestation of the Father, of the Creator, Who made us in the Law. God still speaks aloud in His Works, as to Job, so to Hardy, surpassing human conception and the human law. "Dost thou know the balancings of the clouds, the wondrous works of him which is perfect in knowledge? How thy garments are warm, when he quiet-eth the earth by the south wind? Hast thou with him spread out the sky, which is strong?"

This is the true attitude of Hardy — "With God is terrible majesty." The theory of knowledge, the metaphysic of the man, is much smaller than the man himself. So with Tolstoi.

"Knowest thou the time when the wild goats of the rock bring forth? Or canst thou mark when the hinds do calve? Canst thou number the months that they fulfil? Or knowest thou the time when they bring forth? They bow themselves, they bring forth their young ones, they cast out their sorrows. Their young ones are good in liking, they grow up with corn; they go forth, and return not unto them."

There is a good deal of this in Hardy. But in Hardy there is more than the concept of Job, protesting his integrity. Job says in the end: "Therefore have I uttered that I understood not; things too wonderful for me, which I knew not.

"I have heard of thee by hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth thee.

"Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes."

But Jude ends where Job began, cursing the day and the services of his birth, and in so much cursing the act of the Lord, "Who made him in the womb."

It is the same cry all through Hardy, this curse upon the birth in the flesh, and this unconscious adherence to the flesh. The instincts, the bodily passions are strong and sudden in all Hardy's men. They are too strong and sudden. They fling Jude into the arms of Arabella, years after he has known Sue, and against his own will.

For every man comprises male and female in his being, the male always struggling for predominance. A woman likewise consists in male and female, with female predominant.

And a man who is strongly male tends to deny, to refute the female in him. A real "man" takes no heed for his body, which is the more female part of him. He considers himself only as an instrument, to be used in the service of some idea.

The true female, on the other hand, will eternally hold herself superior to any idea, will hold full life in the body to be the real happiness. The male exists in

doing, the female in being. The male lives in the satisfaction of some purpose achieved, the female in the satisfaction of some purpose contained.

In Aeschylus, in the Eumenides, there is Apollo, Loxias, the Sun God, the prophet, the male: there are the Erinyes, daughters of primeval Mother Night, representing here the female risen in retribution for some crime against the flesh; and there is Pallas, unbegotten daughter of Zeus, who is as the Holy Spirit in the Christian religion, the spirit of wisdom.

Orestes is bidden by the male god, Apollo, to avenge the murder of his father, Agamemnon, by his mother: that is, the male, murdered by the female, must be avenged by the male. But Orestes is child of his mother. He is in himself female. So that in himself the conscience, the madness, the violated part of his own self, his own body, drives him to the Furies. On the male side, he is right; on the female, wrong. But peace is given at last by Pallas, the Arbitrator, the spirit of wisdom.

And although Aeschylus in his consciousness makes the Furies hideous, and Apollo supreme, yet, in his own self and in very fact, he makes the Furies wonderful and noble, with their tremendous hymns, and makes Apollo a trivial, sixth-form braggart and ranter. Clytemnestra also, wherever she appears, is wonderful and noble. Her sin is the sin of pride: she was the first to be injured. Agamemnon is a feeble thing beside her.

So Aeschylus adheres still to the Law, to Right, to the Creator who created man in His Own Image, and in His Law. What he has learned of Love, he does not yet quite believe.

Hardy has the same belief in the Law, but in concept of his own understanding, which cannot understand the Law, he says that the Law is nothing, a blind confusion.

And in concept of understanding, he deprecates and destroys both women and men who would represent the old primeval Law, the great Law of the Womb, the primeval Female principle. The Female shall not exist. Where it appears, it is a criminal tendency, to be stamped out.

This in Manston, Troy, Boldwood, Eustacia, Wildeve, Henchard, Tess, Jude, everybody. The women approved of are not Female in any real sense. They are passive subjects to the male, the re-echo from the male. As in the Christian religion, the Virgin worship is no real Female worship, but worship of the Female as she is passive and subjected to the male. Hence the sadness of Botticelli's Virgins.

Thus Tess sets out, not as any positive thing, containing all purpose, but as the acquiescent complement to the male. The female in her has become inert. Then Alec d'Urberville comes along, and possesses her. From the man who takes her

Tess expects her own consummation, the singling out of herself, the addition of the male complement. She is of an old line, and has the aristocratic quality of respect for the other being. She does not see the other person as an extension of herself, existing in a universe of which she is the centre and pivot. She knows that other people are outside her. Therein she is an aristocrat. And out of this attitude to the other person came her passivity. It is not the same as the passive quality in the other little heroines, such as the girl in *The Woodlanders*, who is passive because she is small.

Tess is passive out of self-acceptance, a true aristocratic quality, amounting almost to self-indifference. She knows she is herself in-controvertibly, and she knows that other people are not herself. This is a very rare quality, even in a woman. And in a civilization so unequal, it is almost a weakness.

Tess never tries to alter or to change anybody, neither to alter nor to change nor to divert. What another person decides, that is his decision. She respects utterly the other's right to be. She is herself always.

But the others do not respect her right to be. Alec d'Urberville sees her as the embodied fulfilment of his own desire: something, that is, belonging to him. She cannot, in his conception, exist apart from him nor have any being apart from his being. For she is the embodiment of his desire.

This is very natural and common in men, this attitude to the world. But in Alec d'Urberville it applies only to the woman of his desire. He cares only for her. Such a man adheres to the female like a parasite.

It is a male quality to resolve a purpose to its fulfilment. It is the male quality, to seek the motive power in the female, and to convey this to a fulfilment; to receive some impulse into his senses, and to transmit it into expression.

Alec d'Urberville does not do this. He is male enough, in his way; but only physically male. He is constitutionally an enemy of the principle of self-subordination, which principle is inherent in every man. It is this principle which makes a man, a true male, see his job through, at no matter what cost. A man is strictly only himself when he is fulfilling some purpose he has conceived: so that the principle is not of self-subordination, but of continuity, of development. Only when insisted on, as in Christianity, does it become self-sacrifice. And this resistance to self-sacrifice on Alec d'Urberville's part does not make him an individualist, an egoist, but rather a non-individual, an incomplete, almost a fragmentary thing.

There seems to be in d'Urberville an inherent antagonism to any progression in himself. Yet he seeks with all his power for the source of stimulus in woman. He takes the deep impulse from the female. In this he is exceptional. No ordinary man could really have betrayed Tess. Even if she had had an illegitimate child to

another man, to Angel Clare, for example, it would not have shattered her as did her connexion with Alec d'Urberville. For Alec d'Urberville could reach some of the real sources of the female in a woman, and draw from them. Troy could also do this. And, as a woman instinctively knows, such men are rare. Therefore they have a power over a woman. They draw from the depth of her being.

And what they draw, they betray. With a natural male, what he draws from the source of the female, the impulse he receives from the source he transmits through his own being into utterance, motion, action, expression. But Troy and Alec d'Urberville, what they received they knew only as gratification in the senses; some perverse will prevented them from submitting to it, from becoming instrumental to it.

Which was why Tess was shattered by Alec d'Urberville, and why she murdered him in the end. The murder is badly done, altogether the book is botched, owing to the way of thinking in the author, owing to the weak yet obstinate theory of being. Nevertheless, the murder is true, the whole book is true, in its conception.

Angel Clare has the very opposite qualities to those of Alec d'Urberville. To the latter, the female in himself is the only part of himself he will acknowledge: the body, the senses, that which he shares with the female, which the female shares with him. To Angel Clare, the female in himself is detestable, the body, the senses, that which he will share with a woman, is held degraded. What he wants really is to receive the female impulse other than through the body. But his thinking has made him criticize Christianity, his deeper instinct has forbidden him to deny his body any further, a deadlock in his own being, which denies him any purpose, so that he must take to hand, labour out of sheer impotence to resolve himself, drives him unwillingly to woman. But he must see her only as the Female Principle, he cannot bear to see her as the Woman in the Body. Her he thinks degraded. To marry her, to have a physical marriage with her, he must overcome all his ascetic revulsion, he must, in his own mind, put off his own divinity, his pure maleness, his singleness, his pure completeness, and descend to the heated welter of the flesh. It is objectionable to him. Yet his body, his life, is too strong for him.

Who is he, that he shall be pure male, and deny the existence of the female? This is the question the Creator asks of him. Is then the male the exclusive whole of life? — is he even the higher or supreme part of life? Angel Clare thinks so: as Christ thought.

Yet it is not so, as even Angel Clare must find out. Life, that is Two-in-One, Male and Female. Nor is either part greater than the other.

It is not Angel Clare's fault that he cannot come to Tess when he finds that she

has, in his words, been defiled. It is the result of generations of ultra-Christian training, which had left in him an inherent aversion to the female, and to all in himself which pertained to the female. What he, in his Christian sense, conceived of as Woman, was only the servant and attendant and administering spirit to the male. He had no idea that there was such a thing as positive Woman, as the Female, another great living Principle counterbalancing his own male principle. He conceived of the world as consisting of the One, the Male Principle.

Which conception was already gendered in Botticelli, whence the melancholy of the Virgin. Which conception reached its fullest in Turner's pictures, which were utterly bodiless; and also in the great scientists or thinkers of the last generation, even Darwin and Spencer and Huxley. For these last conceived of evolution, of one spirit or principle starting at the far end of time, and lonelinessly traversing Time. But there is not one principle, there are two, travelling always to meet, each step of each one lessening the distance between the two of them. And Space, which so frightened Herbert Spencer, is as a Bride to us. And the cry of Man does not ring out into the Void. It rings out to Woman, whom we know not.

This Tess knew, unconsciously. An aristocrat she was, developed through generations to the belief in her own self-establishment. She could help, but she could not be helped. She could give, but she could not receive. She could attend to the wants of the other person, but no other person, save another aristocrat — and there is scarcely-such a thing as another aristocrat — could attend to her wants, her deepest wants.

So it is the aristocrat alone who has any real and vital sense of “the neighbour,” of the other person; who has the habit of submerging himself, putting himself entirely away before the other person: because he expects to receive nothing from the other person. So that now he has lost much of his initiative force, and exists almost isolated, detached, and without the surging ego of the ordinary man, because he has controlled his nature according to the other man, to exclude him.

And Tess, despising herself in the flesh, despising the deep Female she was, because Alec d'Urberville had betrayed her very source loved Angel Clare, who also despised and hated the flesh. She did not hate d'Urberville. What a man did, he did, and if he did it to her, it was her look-out. She did not conceive of him as having any human duty towards her.

The same with Angel Clare as with Alec d'Urberville. She was very grateful to him for saving her from her despair of contamination, and from her bewildered isolation. But when he accused her, she could not plead or answer.

For she had no right to his goodness. She stood alone.

The female was strong in her. She was herself. But she was out of place, utterly out of her element and her times. Hence her utter bewilderment. This is the reason why she was so overcome. She was outworn from the start, in her spirit. For it is only by receiving from all our fellows that we are kept fresh and vital. Tess was herself, female, intrinsically a woman.

The female in her was indomitable, unchangeable, she was utterly constant to herself. But she was, by long breeding, intact from mankind. Though Alec d'Urberville was of no kin to her, yet, in the book, he has always a quality of kinship. It was as if only a kinsman, an aristocrat, could approach her. And this to her undoing. Angel Clare would never have reached her. She would have abandoned herself to him, but he would never have reached her. It needed a physical aristocrat. She would have lived with her husband, Clare, in a state of abandon to him, like a coma. Alec d'Urberville forced her to realize him, and to realize herself. He came close to her, as Clare could never have done. So she murdered him. For she was herself.

And just as the aristocratic principle had isolated Tess, it had isolated Alec d'Urberville. For though Hardy consciously made the young betrayer a plebeian and an impostor, unconsciously, with the supreme justice of the artist, he made him the same as de Stancy, a true aristocrat, or as Fitzpiers, or Troy. He did not give him the tiredness, the touch of exhaustion necessary, in Hardy's mind, to an aristocrat. But he gave him the intrinsic qualities.

With the men as with the women of old descent: they have nothing to do with mankind in general, they are exceedingly personal.

For many generations they have been accustomed to regard their own desires as their own supreme laws. They have not been bound by the conventional morality: this they have transcended, being a code unto themselves. The other person has been always present to their imagination, in the spectacular sense. He has always existed to them. But he has always existed as something other than themselves.

Hence the inevitable isolation, detachment of the aristocrat. His one aim, during centuries, has been to keep himself detached. At last he finds himself, by his very nature, cut off.

Then either he must go his own way, or he must struggle towards reunion with the mass of mankind. Either he must be an incomplete individualist, like de Stancy, or like the famous Russian nobles, he must become a wild humanitarian and reformer.

For as all the governing power has gradually been taken from the nobleman, and as, by tradition, by inherent inclination, he does not occupy himself with

profession other than government, how shall he use that power which is in him and which comes into him?

He is, by virtue of breed and long training, a perfect instrument. He knows, as every pure-bred thing knows, that his root and source is in his female. He seeks the motive power in the woman. And, having taken it, has nothing to do with it, can find, in this democratic, plebeian age, no means by which to transfer it into action, expression, utterance. So there is a continual gnawing of dissatisfaction, a constant seeking of another woman, still another woman. For each time the impulse comes fresh, everything seems all right.

It may be, also, that in the aristocrat a certain weariness makes him purposeless, vicious, like a form of death. But that is not necessary. One feels that in Manston, and Troy, and Fitzpiers, and Alec d'Urberville, there is good stuff gone wrong. Just as in Angel Clare, there is good stuff gone wrong in the other direction.

There can never be one extreme of wrong, without the other extreme. If there had never been the extravagant Puritan idea, that the Female Principle was to be denied, cast out by man from his soul, that only the Male Principle, of Abstraction, of Good, of Public Good, of the Community, embodied in "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself," really existed, there would never have been produced the extreme Cavalier type, which says that only the Female Principle endures in man, that all the Abstraction, the Good, the Public Elevation, the Community, was a grovelling cowardice, and that man lived by enjoyment, through his senses, enjoyment which ended in his senses. Or perhaps better, if the extreme Cavalier type had never been produced, we should not have had the Puritan, the extreme correction.

The one extreme produces the other. It is inevitable for Angel Clare and for Alec d'Urberville mutually to destroy the woman they both loved. Each does her the extreme of wrong, so she is destroyed.

The book is handled with very uncertain skill, botched and bungled. But it contains the elements of the greatest tragedy: Alec d'Urberville, who has killed the male in himself, as Clytemnestra symbolically for Orestes killed Agamemnon; Angel Clare, who has killed the female in himself, as Orestes killed Clytemnestra: and Tess, the Woman, the Life, destroyed by a mechanical fate, in the communal law.

There is no reconciliation. Tess, Angel Clare, Alec d'Urberville, they are all as good as dead. For Angel Clare, though still apparently alive, is in reality no more than a mouth, a piece of paper, like Clym left preaching.

There is no reconciliation, only death. And so Hardy really states his case, which is not his consciously stated metaphysic, by any means, but a statement

how man has gone wrong and brought death on himself: how man has violated the Law, how he has supererogated himself, gone so far in his male conceit as to supersede the Creator, and win death as a reward. Indeed, the works of supererogation of our male assiduity help us to a better salvation.

Jude is only Tess turned round about. Instead of the heroine containing the two principles, male and female, at strife within her one being, it is Jude who contains them both, whilst the two women with him take the place of the two men to Tess. Arabella is Alec d'Urberville, Sue is Angel Clare. These represent the same pair of principles.

But, first, let it be said again that Hardy is a bad artist. Because he must condemn Alec d'Urberville, according to his own personal creed, therefore he shows him a vulgar intriguer of coarse lasses, and as ridiculous convert to evangelism. But Alec d'Urberville, by the artist's account, is neither of these. It is, in actual life, a rare man who seeks and seeks among women for one of such character and intrinsic female being as Tess. The ordinary sensualist avoids such characters. They implicate him too deeply. An ordinary sensualist would have been much too common, much too afraid, to turn to Tess. In a way, d'Urberville was her mate. And his subsequent passion for her is in its way noble enough. But whatever his passion, as a male, he must be a betrayer, even if he had been the most faithful husband on earth. He betrayed the female in a woman, by taking her, and by responding with no male impulse from himself. He roused her, but never satisfied her. He could never satisfy her. It was like a soul-disease in him: he was, in the strict though not the technical sense, impotent. But he must have wanted, later on, not to be so. But he could not help himself. He was spiritually impotent in love.

Arabella was the same. She, like d'Urberville, was converted by an evangelical preacher. It is significant in both of them. They were not just shallow, as Hardy would have made them out.

He is, however, more contemptuous in his personal attitude to the woman than to the man. "He insists that she is a pig-killer's daughter; he insists that she drag Jude into pig-killing; he lays stress on her false tail of hair. That is not the point at all. This is only Hardy's bad art. He himself, as an artist, manages in the whole picture of Arabella almost to make insignificant in her these pigsticking, false-hair crudities. But he must have his personal revenge on her for her coarseness, which offends him, because he is something of an Angel Clare.

The pigsticking and so forth are not so important in the real picture. As for the false tail of hair, few women dared have been so open and natural about it. Few women, indeed, dared have made Jude marry them. It may have been a case with Arabella of "fools rush in." But she was not such a fool. And her motives are

explained in the book. Life is not, in the actual, such a simple affair of getting a fellow and getting married. It is, even for Arabella, an affair on which she places her all. No barmaid marries anybody, the first man she can lay hands on. She cannot. It must be a personal thing to her. And no ordinary woman would want Jude. Moreover, no ordinary woman could have laid her hands on Jude.

It is an absurd fallacy this, that a small man wants a woman bigger and finer than he is himself. A man is as big as his real desires. Let a man, seeing with his eyes a woman of force and being, want her for his own, then that man is intrinsically an equal of that woman. And the same with a woman.

A coarse, shallow woman does not want to marry a sensitive, deep-feeling man. She feels no desire for him, she is not drawn to him, but repelled, knowing he will contemn her. She wants a man to correspond to herself: that is, if she is a young woman looking for a mate, as Arabella was.

What an old, jaded, yet still unsatisfied woman or man wants is another matter. Yet not even one of these will take a young creature of real character, superior in force. Instinct and fear prevent it.

Arabella was under all her disguise of pig-fat and false hair, and vulgar speech, in character somewhat an aristocrat. She was, like Eustacia, amazingly lawless, even splendidly so. She believed in herself and she was not altered by any outside opinion of herself. Her fault was pride. She thought herself the centre of life, that all which existed belonged to her in so far as she wanted it.

In this she was something like Job. His attitude was "I am strong and rich, and, also, I am a good man." He gave out of his own sense of bounty, and felt no indebtedness. Arabella was almost the same. She felt also strong and abundant, arrogant in her hold on life. She needed a complement; and the nearest thing to her satisfaction was Jude. For as she, intrinsically, was a strong female, by far overpowering her Annies and her friends, so was he a strong male.

The difference between them was not so much a difference of quality, or degree, as a difference of form. Jude, like Tess, wanted full consummation. Arabella, like Alec d'Urberville, had that in her which resisted full consummation, wanted only to enjoy herself in contact with the male. She would have no transmission.

There are two attitudes to love. A man in love with a woman says either: "I, the man, the male, am the supreme, I am the one, and the woman is administered unto me, and this is her highest function, to be administered unto me." This was the conscious attitude of the Greeks. But their unconscious attitude was the reverse: they were in truth afraid of the female principle, their vaunt was empty, they went in deep, inner dread of her. So did the Jews, so do the Italians. But after the Renaissance, there was a change. Then began conscious Woman-

reverence, and a lack of instinctive reverence, rather only an instinctive pity. It is according to the balance between the Male and Female principles.

The other attitude of a man in love, besides this of “she is administered unto my maleness,” is, “She is the unknown, the undiscovered, into which I plunge to discovery, losing myself.”

And what we call real love has always this latter attitude.

The first attitude, which belongs to passion, makes a man feel proud, splendid. It is a powerful stimulant to him, the female administered to him. He feels full of blood, he walks the earth like a Lord. And it is to this state Nietzsche aspires in his *Wille zur Macht*. It is this the passionate nations crave.

And under all this there is, naturally, the sense of fear, transition, and the sadness of mortality. For, the female being herself an independent force, may she not withdraw, and leave a man empty, like ash, as one sees a Jew or an Italian so often?

This first attitude, too, of male pride receiving the female administration may, and often does, contain the corresponding intense fear and reverence of the female, as of the unknown. So that, starting from the male assertion, there came in the old days the full consummation; as often there comes the full consummation now.

But not always. The man may retain all the while the sense of himself, the primary male, receiving gratification. This constant reaction upon himself at length dulls his senses and his sensibility, and makes him mechanical, automatic. He grows gradually incapable of receiving any gratification from the female, and becomes a *roué*, only automatically alive, and frantic with the knowledge thereof.

It is the tendency of the Parisian — or has been — to take this attitude to love, and to intercourse. The woman knows herself all the while as the primary female receiving administration of the male. So she becomes hard and external, and inwardly jaded, tired out. It is the tendency of English women to take this attitude also. And it is this attitude of love, more than anything else, which devitalizes a race, and makes it barren.

It is an attitude natural enough to start with. Every young man must think that it is the highest honour he can do to a woman, to receive from her her female administration to his male being, whilst he meanwhile gives her the gratification of himself. But intimacy usually corrects this, love, or use, or marriage: a married man ceases to think of himself as the primary male: hence often his dullness. Unfortunately, he also fails in many cases to realize the gladness of a man in contact with the unknown in the female, which gives him a sense of richness and oneness with all life, as if, by being part of life, he were infinitely

rich. Which is different from the sense of power, of dominating life. The Wille zur Macht is a spurious feeling.

For a man who dares to look upon, and to venture within the unknown of the female, losing himself, like a man who gives himself to the sea, or a man who enters a primeval, virgin forest, feels,

when he returns, the utmost gladness of singing. This is certainly the gladness of a male bird in his singing, the amazing joy of return from the adventure into the unknown, rich with addition to his soul, rich with the knowledge of the utterly illimitable depth and breadth of the unknown; the ever-yielding extent of the unacquired, the unattained; the inexhaustible riches lain under unknown skies over unknown seas, all the magnificence that is, and yet which is unknown to any of us. And the knowledge of the reality with which it awaits me, the male, the knowledge of the calling and struggling of all the unknown, illimitable Female towards me, unembraced as yet, towards those men who will endlessly follow me, who will endlessly struggle after me, beyond me, further into this calling, unrealized vastness, nearer to the outstretched, eager, advancing unknown in the woman.

It is for this sense of All the magnificence that is unknown to me, of All that which stretches forth arms and breast to the Inexhaustible Embrace of all the ages, towards me, whose arms are outstretched, for this moment's embrace which gives me the inkling of the Inexhaustible Embrace that every man must and does yearn. And whether he be a roue, and vicious, or young and virgin, this is the bottom of every man's desire, for the embrace, for the advancing into the unknown, for the landing on the shore of the undiscovered half of the world, where the wealth of the female lies before us.

What is true of men is so of women. If we turn our faces west, towards nightfall and the unknown within the dark embrace of a wife, they turn their faces east, towards the sunrise and the brilliant, bewildering, active embrace of a husband. And as we are dazed with the unknown in her, so is she dazed with the unknown in us. It is so. And we throw up our joy to heaven like towers and spires and fountains and leaping flowers, so glad we are.

But always, we are divided within ourselves. Is it not that I am wonderful? Is it not a gratification for me when a stranger shall land on my shores and enjoy what he finds there? Shall I not also enjoy it? Shall I not enjoy the strange motion of the stranger, like a pleasant sensation of silk and warmth against me, stirring unknown fibres? Shall I not take this enjoyment without venturing out in dangerous waters, losing myself, perhaps destroying myself seeking the unknown? Shall I not stay at home, and by feeling the swift, soft airs blow out of the unknown upon my body, shall I not have rich pleasure of myself?

And, because they were afraid of the unknown, and because they wanted to retain the full-veined gratification of self-pleasure, men have kept their women tightly in bondage. But when the men were no longer afraid of the unknown, when they deemed it exhausted, they said, "There are no women; there are only daughters of men" — as we say now, as the Greeks tried to say. Hence the "Virgin" conception of woman, the passionless, passive conception, progressing from Fielding's Amelia to Dickens's Agnes, and on to Hardy's Sue.

Whereas Arabella in *Jude the Obscure* has what one might call the selfish instinct for love, Jude himself has the other, the unselfish. She sees in him a male who can gratify her. She takes him, and is gratified by him. Which makes a man of him. He becomes a grown, independent man in the arms of Arabella, conscious of having met, and satisfied, the female demand in him. This makes a man of any youth. He is proven unto himself as a male being, initiated into the freedom of life.

But Arabella refused his purpose. She refused to combine with him in one purpose. Just like Alec d'Urberville, she had from the outset an antagonism to the submission to any change in herself, to any development. She had the will to remain where she was, static, and to receive and exhaust all impulse she received from the male, in her senses. Whereas in a normal woman, impulse received from the male drives her on to a sense of joy and wonder and glad freedom in touch with the unknown of which she is made aware, so that she exists on the edge of the unknown half in rapture. Which is the state the writers wish to portray in "Amelia" and "Agnes," but particularly in the former; which Reynolds wishes to portray in his pictures of women.

To all this Arabella was antagonistic. It seems like a perversion in her, as if she played havoc with the stuff she was made of, as Alec d'Urberville did. Nevertheless she remained always unswervable female, she never truckled to the male idea, but was self-responsible, without fear. It is easier to imagine such a woman, out of one's desires, than to find her in real life. For, where a half-criminal type, a reckless, dare-devil type resembling her, may be found on the outskirts of society, yet these are not Arabella. Which criminal type, or reckless, low woman, would want to marry Jude? Arabella wanted Jude. And it is evident she was not too coarse for him, since she made no show of refinement from the first. The female in her, reckless and unconstrained, was strong enough to draw him after her, as her male, right to the end. Which other woman could have done this? At least let acknowledgment be made to her great female force of character. Her coarseness seems to me exaggerated to make the moralist's case good against her.

Jude could never hate her. She did a great deal for the true making of him, for

making him a grown man. She gave him to himself.

And there was danger at the outset that he should never become a man, but that he should remain incorporeal, smothered out under his idea of learning. He was somewhat in Angel Clare's position. Not that generations of particular training had made him almost rigid and paralysed to the female: but that his whole passion was concentrated away from woman to reinforce in him the male impulse towards extending the consciousness. His family was a difficult family to marry. And this because, whilst the men were physically vital, with a passion towards the female from which no moral training had restrained them, like a plant tied to a stick and diverted, they had at the same time an inherent complete contempt of the female, valuing only that which was male. So that they were strongly divided against themselves, with no external hold, such as a moral system, to grip to.

It would have been possible for Jude, monkish, passionate, medieval, belonging to woman yet striving away from her, refusing to know her, to have gone on denying one side of his nature, adhering to his idea of learning, till he had stultified the physical impulse of his being and perverted it entirely. Arabella brought him to himself, gave him himself, made him free, sound as a physical male.

That she would not, or could not, combine her life with him for the fulfilment of a purpose was their misfortune. But at any rate, his purpose of becoming an Oxford don was a cut-and-dried purpose which had no connexion with his living body, and for which probably no woman could have united with him.

No doubt Arabella hated his books, and hated his whole attitude to study. What had he, a passionate, emotional nature, to do with learning for learning's sake, with mere academics? Any woman must know it was ridiculous. But he persisted with the tenacity of all perverseness. And she, in this something of an aristocrat, like Tess, feeling that she had no right to him, no right to receive anything from him, except his sex, in which she felt she gave and did not receive, for she conceived of herself as the primary female, as that which, in taking the male, conferred on him his greatest boon, she left him alone. Her attitude was, that he would find all he desired in coming to her. She was occupied with herself. It was not that she wanted him. She wanted to have the sensation of herself in contact with him. His being she refused. She allowed only her own being.

Therefore she scarcely troubled him, when he earned little money and took no notice of her. He did not refuse to take notice of her because he hated her, or was deceived by her, or disappointed in her. He was not. He refused to consider her seriously because he adhered with all his pertinacity to the idea of study, from

which he excluded her.

Which she saw and knew, and allowed. She would not force him to notice her, or to consider her seriously. She would compel him to nothing. She had had a certain satisfaction of him, which would be no more if she stayed for ever. For she was non-developing. When she knew him in her senses she knew the end of him, as far as she was concerned. That was all.

So she just went her way. He did not blame her. He scarcely missed her. He returned to his books.

Really, he had lost nothing by his marriage with Arabella: neither innocence nor belief nor hope. He had indeed gained his manhood. She left him the stronger and completer.

And now he would concentrate all on his male idea, of arresting himself, of becoming himself a non-developing quality, an academic mechanism. That was his obsession. That was his craving: to have nothing to do with his own life. This was the same as Tess when she turned to Angel Clare. She wanted life merely in the secondary, outside form, in the consciousness.

It was another form of the disease, or decay of old family, which possessed Alec d'Urberville; a different form, but closely related. D'Urberville wanted to arrest all his activity in his senses. Jude Fawley wanted to arrest all his activity in his mind. Each of them wanted to become an impersonal force working automatically. Each of them wanted to deny, or escape the responsibility and trouble of living as a complete person, a full individual.

And neither was able to bring it off. Jude's real desire was, not to live in the body. He wanted to exist only in his mentality. He was as if bored, or blase, in the body, just like Tess. This seems to be the result of coming of an old family, that had been long conscious, long self-conscious, specialized, separate, exhausted.

This drove him to Sue. She was his kinswoman, as d'Urberville was kinsman to Tess. She was like himself in her being and her desire. Like Jude, she wanted to live partially, in the consciousness, in the mind only. She wanted no experience in the senses, she wished only to know.

She belonged, with Tess, to the old woman-type of witch or prophetess, which adhered to the male principle, and destroyed the female. But in the true prophetess, in Cassandra, for example, the denial of the female cost a strong and almost maddening [effort]. But in Sue it was done before she was born.

She was born with the vital female atrophied in her: she was almost male. Her will was male. It was wrong for Jude to take her physically, it was a violation of her. She was not the virgin type, but the witch type, which has no sex. Why should she be forced into intercourse that was not natural to her?

It was not natural for her to have children. It is inevitable that her children die. It is not natural for Tess nor for Angel Clare to have children, nor for Arabella nor for Alec d'Urberville. Because none of these wished to give of themselves to the lover, none of them wished to mate: they only wanted their own experience. For Jude alone it was natural to have children, and this in spite of himself.

Sue wished to identify herself utterly with the male principle. That which was female in her she wanted to consume within the male force, to consume it in the fire of understanding, of giving utterance. Whereas an ordinary woman knows that she contains all understanding, that she is the unutterable which man must for ever continue to try to utter, Sue felt that all must be uttered, must be given to the male, that, in truth, only Male existed, that everything was the Word, and the Word was everything.

Sue is the production of the long selection by man of the woman in whom the female is subordinated to the male principle. A long line of Amelias and Agneses, those women who submitted to the man-idea, flattered the man, and bored him, the Gretchens and the Turgeniev heroines, those who have betrayed the female and who therefore only seem to exist to be betrayed by their men, these have produced at length a Sue, the pure thing. And as soon as she is produced she is execrated.

What Cassandra and Aspasia became to the Greeks, Sue has become to the northern civilization. But the Greeks never pitied Woman. They did not show her that highest impertinence — not even Euripides.

But Sue is scarcely a woman at all, though she is feminine enough.

Cassandra submitted to Apollo, and gave him the Word of affiance, brought forth prophecy to him, not children. She received the embrace of the spirit, He breathed His Grace upon her: and she conceived and brought forth a prophecy. It was still a marriage. Not the marriage of the Virgin with the Spirit, but the marriage of the female spirit with the male spirit, bodiless.

With Sue, however, the marriage was no marriage, but a submission, a service, a slavery. Her female spirit did not wed with the male spirit: she could not prophesy. Her spirit submitted to the male spirit, owned the priority of the male spirit, wished to become the male spirit. That which was female in her, resistant, gave her only her critical faculty. When she sought out the physical quality in the Greeks, that was her effort to make even the unknowable physique a part of knowledge, to contain the body within the mind.

One of the supremest products of our civilization is Sue, and a product that well frightens us. It is quite natural that, with all her mental alertness, she married Phillotson without ever considering the physical quality of marriage. Deep instinct made her avoid the consideration. And the duality of her nature

made her extremely liable to self-destruction. The suppressed, atrophied female in her, like a potent fury, was always there, suggesting to her to make the fatal mistake. She contained always the rarest, most deadly anarchy in her own being.

It needed that she should have some place in society where the clarity of her mental being, which was in itself a form of death, could shine out without attracting any desire for her body. She needed a refinement on Angel Clare. For she herself was a more specialized, more highly civilized product on the female side, than Angel Clare on the male. Yet the atrophied female in her would still want the bodily male.

She attracted to herself Jude. His experience with Arabella had for the time being diverted his attention altogether from the female. His attitude was that of service to the pure male spirit. But the physical male in him, that which knew and belonged to the female, was potent, and roused the female in Sue as much as she wanted it roused, so much that it was a stimulant to her, making her mind the brighter.

It was a cruelly difficult position. She must, by the constitution of her nature, remain quite physically intact, for the female was atrophied in her, to the enlargement of the male activity. Yet she wanted some quickening for this atrophied female. She wanted even kisses.

That the new rousing might give her a sense of life. But she could only live in the mind.

Then, where could she find a man who would be able to feed her with his male vitality, through kisses, proximity, without demanding the female return? For she was such that she could only receive quickening from a strong male, for she was herself no small thing. Could she then find a man, a strong, passionate male, who would devote himself entirely to the production of the mind in her, to the production of male activity, or of female activity critical to the male?

She could only receive the highest stimulus, which she must inevitably seek, from a man who put her in constant jeopardy. Her essentiality rested upon her remaining intact. Any suggestion of the physical was utter confusion to her. Her principle was the ultra-Christian principle — of living entirely according to the Spirit, to the One, male spirit, which knows, and utters, and shines, but exists beyond feeling, beyond joy or sorrow, or pain, exists only in Knowing. In tune with this, she was herself. Let her, however, be turned under the influence of the other dark, silent, strong principle, of the female, and she would break like a fine instrument under discord.

Yet, to live at all in tune with the male spirit, she must receive the male stimulus from a man. Otherwise she was as an instrument without a player. She must feel the hands of a man upon her, she must be infused with his male

vitality, or she was not alive.

Here then was her difficulty: to find a man whose vitality could infuse her and make her live, and who would not, at the same time, demand of her a return, the return of the female impulse into him. What man could receive this drainage, receiving nothing back again? He must either die, or revolt.

One man had died. She knew it well enough. She knew her own fatality. She knew she drained the vital, male stimulus out of a man, producing in him only knowledge of the mind, only mental clarity: which man must always strive to attain, but which is not life in him, rather the product of life.

Just as Alec d'Urberville, on the other hand, drained the female vitality out of a woman, and gave her only sensation, only experience in the senses, a sense of herself, nothing to the soul or spirit, thereby exhausting her.

Now Jude, after Arabella, and following his own *idee fixe*, [wanted] this mental clarity, this knowing, above all. What he contained in himself, of male and female impulse, he wanted to bring forth to draw into his mind, to resolve into understanding, as a lant resolves that which it contains into flower.

This Sue could do for him. By creating a vacuum, she could cause the vivid flow which clarified him. By rousing him, by drawing from him his turgid vitality, made thick and heavy and physical with Arabella, she could bring into consciousness that which he contained. For he was heavy and full of unrealized life, clogged with untransmuted knowledge, with accretion of his senses. His whole life had been till now an indrawing, ingestion. Arabella had been a vital experience for him, received into his blood. And how was he to bring out all this fulness into knowledge or utterance? For all the time he was being roused to new physical desire, new life-experience, new sense-enrichening, and he could not perform his male function of transmitting this into expression, or action. The particular form his flowering should take, he could not find. So he hunted and studied, to find the call, the appeal which should call out of him that which was in him.

And great was his transport when the appeal came from Sue. She wanted, at first, only his words. That of him which could come to her through speech, through his consciousness, her mind, like a bottomless gulf, cried out for. She wanted satisfaction through the mind, and cried out for him to satisfy her through the mind.

Great, then, was his joy at giving himself out to her. He gave, for it was more blessed to give than to receive. He gave, and she received some satisfaction. But where she was not satisfied, there he must try still to satisfy her. He struggled to bring it all forth. She was, as himself, asking himself what he was. And he strove to answer, in a transport.

And he answered in a great measure. He singled himself out from the old matrix of the accepted idea, he produced an individual flower of his own.

It was for this he loved Sue. She did for him quickly what he would have done for himself slowly, through study. By patient, diligent study, he would have used up the surplus of that turgid energy in him, and would, by long contact with old truth, have arrived at the form of truth which was in him. What he indeed wanted to get from study was, not a store of learning, nor the vanity of education, a sort of superiority of educational wealth, though this also gave him pleasure. He wanted, through familiarity with the true thinkers and poets, particularly with the classic and theological thinkers, because of their comparative sensuousness, to find conscious expression for that which he held in his blood. And to do this, it was necessary for him to resolve and to reduce his blood, to overcome the female sensuousness in himself, to transmute his sensuous being into another state, a state of clarity, of consciousness. Slowly, laboriously, struggling with the Greek and the Latin, he would have burned down his thick blood as fuel, and have come to the true light of himself.

This Sue did for him. In marriage, each party fulfils a dual function with regard to the other:., exhaustive and enriching. The female at the same time exhausts and invigorates the male, the male at the same time exhausts and invigorates the female. The exhaustion and invigoration are both temporary and relative. The male, making the effort to penetrate into the female, exhausts himself and invigorates her. But that which, at the end, he discovers and carries off from her, some seed of being, enriches him and exhausts her. Arabella, in taking Jude, accepted very little from him. She absorbed very little of his strength and vitality into herself. For she only wanted to be aware of herself in contact with him, she did not want him to penetrate into her very being, till he moved her to her very depths, till she loosened to him some of her very self for his enriching. She was intrinsically impotent, as was Alec d'Urberville.

So that in her Jude went very little further in Knowledge, or in Self-Knowledge. He took only the first steps: of knowing himself sexually, as a sexual male. That is only the first, the first necessary, but rudimentary, step.

When he came to Sue, he found her physically impotent, but spiritually potent. That was what he wanted. Of Knowledge in the blood he had a rich enough store: more than he knew what to do with. He wished for the further step, of reduction, of essentializing into Knowledge. Which Sue gave to him.

So that his experience with Arabella, plus his first experience of trembling intimacy and incandescent realization with Sue made one complete marriage: that is, the two women added together made One Bride.

When Jude had exhausted his surplus self, in spiritual intimacy with Sue,

when he had gained through her all the wonderful understanding she could evoke in him, when he was clarified to himself, then his marriage with Sue was over. Jude's marriage with Sue was over before he knew her physically. She had, physically, nothing to give him.

Which, in her deepest instinct, she knew. She made no mistake in marrying Phillotson. She acted according to the pure logic of her nature. Phillotson was a man who wanted no marriage whatsoever with the female. Sexually, he wanted her as an instrument through which he obtained relief, and some gratification: but, really, relief. Spiritually, he wanted her as a thing to be wondered over and delighted in, but quite separately from himself. He knew quite well he could never marry her. He was a human being as near to mechanical function as a human being can be. The whole process of digestion, masticating, swallowing, digesting, excretion, is a sort of super-mechanical process. And Phillotson was like this. He was an organ, a function-fulfilling organ, he had no separate existence. He could not create a single new movement or thought or expression. Everything he did was a repetition of what had been. All his study was a study of what had been. It was a mechanical, functional process. He was a true, if small, form of the Savant. He could understand only the functional laws of living, but these he understood honestly. He was true to himself, he was not overcome by any cant or sentimentalizing. So that in this he was splendid. But it is a cruel thing for a complete, or a spiritual, individuality to be submitted to a functional organism.

The Widow Edlin said that there are some men no woman of any feeling could touch, and Phillotson was one of them. If the Widow knew this, why was Sue's instinct so short?

But Mrs. Edlin was a full human being, creating life in a new form through her personality. She must have known Sue's deficiency. It was natural for Sue to read and to turn again to:

Thou hast conquered, O pale Galilean!

The world has grown grey from Thy breath.

In her the pale Galilean had indeed triumphed. Her body was as insentient as hoarfrost. She knew well enough that she was not alive in the ordinary human sense. She did not, like an ordinary woman, receive all she knew through her senses, her instincts, but through her consciousness. The pale Galilean had a pure disciple in her: in her He was fulfilled. For the senses, the body, did not exist in her; she existed as a consciousness. And this is so much so, that she was almost an Apostate. She turned to look at Venus and Apollo. As if she could know either Venus or Apollo, save as ideas. Nor Venus nor Aphrodite had anything to do with her, but only Pallas and Christ.

She was unhappy every moment of her life, poor Sue, with the knowledge of her own non-existence within life. She felt all the time the ghastly sickness of dissolution upon her, she was as a void unto herself.

So she married Phillotson, the only man she could, in reality, marry. To him she could be a wife: she could give him the sexual relief he wanted of her, and supply him with the transcendence which was a pleasure to him; it was hers to seal him with the seal which made an honourable human being of him. For he felt, deep within himself, something a reptile feels. And she was his guarantee, his crown.

Why does a snake horrify us, or even a newt? Why was Phillotson like a newt? What is it, in our life or in our feeling, to which a newt corresponds? Is it that life has the two sides, of growth and of decay, symbolized most acutely in our bodies by the semen and the excreta? Is it that the newt, the reptile, belong to the putrescent activity of life; the bird, the fish to the growth activity? Is it that the newt and the reptile are suggested to us through those sensations connected with excretion? And was Phillotson more or less connected with the decay activity of life? Was it his function to reorganize the life-excreta of the ages? At any rate, one can honour him, for he was true to himself.

Sue married Phillotson according to her true instinct. But being almost pure Christian, in the sense of having no physical life, she had turned to the Greeks, and with her mind was an Aphrodite-worshipper. In craving for the highest form of that which she lacked, she worshipped Aphrodite. There are two sets of Aphrodite-worshippers: daughters of Aphrodite and the almost neutral daughters of Mary of Bethany. Sue was, oh, cruelly far from being a daughter of Aphrodite. She was the furthest alien from Aphrodite. She might excuse herself through her Venus Urania — but it was hopeless.

Therefore, when she left Phillotson, in whose marriage she consummated her own crucifixion, to go to Jude, she was deserting the God of her being for the God of her hopeless want. How much could she become a living, physical woman? But she would get away from Phillotson.

She went to Jude to continue the spiritual marriage, bodiless. That was all very well, if he had been satisfied. If he had been satisfied, they might have lived in this spiritual intimacy, without physical contact, for the rest of their lives, so strong was her true instinct for herself.

He, however, was not satisfied. He reached the point where he was clarified, where he had reduced from his blood into his consciousness all that was un-compounded before. He had become himself as far as he could, he had fulfilled himself. All that he had gathered in his youth, all that he had gathered from Arabella, was assimilated now, fused and transformed into one clear Jude.

Now he wants that which is necessary for him if he is to go on. He wants, at its lowest, the physical, sexual relief. For continually balked sexual desire, or necessity, makes a man unable to live freely, scotches him, stultifies him. And where a man is roused to the fullest pitch, as Jude was roused by Sue, then the principal connexion becomes a necessity, if only for relief. Anything else is a violation.

Sue ran away to escape physical connexion with Phillotson, only to find herself in the arms of Jude. But Jude wanted of her more than Phillotson wanted. This was what terrified her to the bottom of her nature. Whereas Phillotson always only wanted sexual relief of her, Jude wanted the consummation of marriage. He wanted that deepest experience, that penetrating far into the unknown and undiscovered which lies in the body and blood of man and woman, during life. He wanted to receive from her the quickening, the primitive seed and impulse which should start him to a new birth. And for this he must go back deep into the primal, unshown, unknown life of the blood, the thick source-stream of life in her.

And she was terrified lest he should find her out, that it was wanting in her. This was her deepest dread, to see him inevitably disappointed in her. She could not bear to be put into the balance, wherein she knew she would be found wanting.

For she knew in herself that she was cut off from the source and origin of life. For her, the way back was lost irrevocably. And when Jude came to her, wanting to retrace with her the course right back to the springs and the welling-out, she was more afraid than of death. For she could not. She was like a flower broken off from the tree, that lives a while in water, and even puts forth. So Sue lived sustained and nourished by the rarefied life of books and art, and by the inflow from the man. But, owing to centuries and centuries of weaning away from the body of life, centuries of insisting upon the supremacy and bodilessness of Love, centuries of striving to escape the conditions of being and of striving to attain the condition of Knowledge, centuries of pure Christianity, she had gone too far. She had climbed and climbed to be near the stars. And now, at last, on the topmost pinnacle, exposed to all the horrors and the magnificence of space, she could not go back. Her strength had fallen from her. Up at that great height, with scarcely any foothold, but only space, space all round her, rising up to her from beneath, she was like a thing suspended, supported almost at the point of extinction by the density of the medium. Her body was lost to her, fallen away, gone. She existed there as a point of consciousness, no more, like one swooned at a great height, held up at the tip of a fine pinnacle that drove upwards into nothingness.

Jude rose to that height with her. But he did not die as she died. Beneath him the foothold was more, he did not swoon. There came a time when he wanted to go back, down to earth. But she was fastened like Andromeda.

Perhaps; if Jude had not known Arabella, Sue might have persuaded him that he too was bodiless, only a point of consciousness. But she was too late; another had been before her and given her the lie.

Arabella was never so jealous of Sue as Sue of Arabella. How shall the saint that tips the pinnacle, Saint Simon Stylites thrust on the highest needle that pricks the heavens, be envied by the man who walks the horizontal earth? But Sue was cruelly anguished with jealousy of Arabella. It was only this, this knowledge that Jude wanted Arabella, which made Sue give him access to her own body.

When she did that, she died. The Sue that had been till then, the glimmering, pale, star-like Sue, died and was revoked on the night when Arabella called at their house at Aldbrickham, and Jude went out in his slippers to look for her, and did not find her, but came back to Sue, who in her anguish gave him then the access to her body. Till that day, Sue had been, in her will and in her very self, true to one motion, to Love, to Knowledge, to the Light, to the upward motion. Phillotson had not altered this. When she had suffered him, she had said: "He does not touch me; I am beyond him."

But now she must give her body to Jude. At that moment her light began to go out, all she had lived for and by began to turn into a falseness, Sue began to nullify herself.

She could never become physical. She could never return down to earth. But there, lying bound at the pinnacle-tip, she had to pretend she was lying on the horizontal earth, prostrate with a man.

It was a profanation and a pollution, worse than the pollution of Cassandra or of the Vestals. Sue had her own form: to break this form was to destroy her. Her destruction began only when she said to Jude, "I give in."

As for Jude, he dragged his body after his consciousness. His instinct could never have made him actually desire physical connexion with Sue. He was roused by an appeal made through his consciousness. This appeal automatically roused his senses. His consciousness desired Sue. So his senses were forced to follow his consciousness.

But he must have felt, in knowing her, the frisson of sacrilege, something like the Frenchman who lay with a corpse. Her body, the body of a Vestal, was swooned into that state of bloodless ecstasy wherein it was dead to the senses. Or it was the body of an insane woman, whose senses are directed from the disordered mind, whose mind is not subjected to the senses.

But Jude was physically undeveloped. Altogether he was medieval. His senses were vigorous but not delicate. He never realized what it meant to him, his taking Sue. He thought he was satisfied.

But if it was death to her, or profanation, or pollution, or breaking, it was unnatural to him, blasphemy. How could he, a living, loving man, warm and productive, take with his body the moonlit cold body of a woman who did not live to him, and did not want him? It was monstrous, and it sent him mad.

She knew it was wrong, she knew it should never be. But what else could she do? Jude loved her now with his will. To have left him to Arabella would have been to destroy him. To have shared him with Arabella would have been possible to Sue, but impossible to him, for he had the strong, purist idea that a man's body should follow and be subordinate to his spirit, his senses should be subordinate to and subsequent to his mind. Which idea is utterly false.

So Jude and Sue are damned, partly by their very being, but chiefly by their incapacity to accept the conditions of their own and each other's being. If Jude could have known that he did not want Sue physically, and then have made his choice, they might not have wasted their lives. But he could not know.

If he could have known, after a while, after he had taken her many times, that it was wrong, still they might have made a life. He must have known that, after taking Sue, he was depressed as she was depressed. He must have known worse than that. He must have felt the devastating sense of the unlivingness of life, things must have ceased to exist for him, when he rose from taking Sue, and he must have felt that he walked in a ghastly blank, confronted just by space, void.

But he would acknowledge nothing of what he felt. He must feel according to his idea and his will. Nevertheless, they were too truthful ever to marry. A man as real and personal as Jude cannot, from his deeper religious sense, marry a woman unless indeed he can marry her, unless with her he can find or approach the real consummation of marriage. And Sue and Jude could not lie to themselves, in their last and deepest feelings. They knew it was no marriage; they knew it was wrong, all along; they knew they were sinning against life, in forcing a physical marriage between themselves.

How many people, man and woman, live together, in England, and have children, and are never, never asked whether they have been through the marriage ceremony together? Why then should Jude and Sue have been brought to task? Only because of their own uneasy sense of wrong, of sin, which they communicated to other people. And this wrong or sin was not against the community, but against their own being, against life. Which is why they were, the pair of them, instinctively disliked.

They never knew happiness, actual, sure-footed happiness, not for a moment.

That was incompatible with Sue's nature. But what they knew was a very delightful but poignant and unhealthy condition of lightened consciousness. They reacted on each other to stimulate the consciousness. So that, when they went to the flower-show, her sense of the roses, and Jude's sense of the roses, would be most, most poignant. There is always this pathos, this poignancy, this trembling on the verge of pain and tears, in their happiness.

"Happy?" he murmured. She nodded.

The roses, how the roses glowed for them! The flowers had more being than either he or she. But as their ecstasy over things sank a little, they felt, the pair of them, as if they themselves were wanting in real body, as if they were too unsubstantial, too thin and evanescent in substance, as if the other solid people might jostle right through them, two wandering shades as they were.

This they felt themselves. Hence their uncertainty in contact with other people, hence their abnormal sensitiveness. But they had their own form of happiness, nevertheless, this trembling on the verge of ecstasy, when, the senses strongly roused to the service of the consciousness, the things they contemplated took flaming being, became flaming symbols of their own emotions to them.

So that the real marriage of Jude and Sue was in the roses. Then, in the third state, in the spirit, these two beings met upon the roses and in the roses were symbolized in consummation. The rose is the symbol of marriage-consummation in its beauty. To them it is more than a symbol, it is a fact, a flaming experience.

They went home tremblingly glad. And then the horror when, because of Jude's dissatisfaction, he must take Sue sexually. The flaming experience became a falsity, or an ignis fatuus leading them on.

They exhausted their lives, he in the consciousness, she in the body. She was glad to have children, to prove she was a woman. But in her it was a perversity to wish to prove she was a woman. She was no woman. And her children, the proof thereof, vanished like hoarfrost from her.

It was not the stone-masonry that exhausted him and weakened him and made him ill. It was this continuous feeding of his consciousness from his senses, this continuous state of incandescence of the consciousness, when his body, his vital tissues, the very protoplasm in him, was being slowly consumed away. For he had no life in the body. Every time he went to Sue, physically, his inner experience must have been a shock back from life and from the form of outgoing, like that of a man who lies with a corpse. He had no life in the senses: he had no inflow from the source to make up for the enormous wastage. So he gradually became exhausted, burned more and more away, till he was frail as an ember.

And she, her body also suffered. But it was in the mind that she had had her

being, and it was in the mind she paid her price. She tried and tried to receive and to satisfy Jude physically. She bore him children, she gave herself to the life of the body.

But as she was formed she was formed, and there was no altering it. She needed all the life that belonged to her, and more, for the supplying of her mind, since such a mind as hers is found only, healthily, in a person of powerful vitality. For the mind, in a common person, is created out of the surplus vitality, or out of the re-remainder after all the sensuous life has been fulfilled.

She needed all the life that belonged to her, for her mind. It was her form. To disturb that arrangement was to make her into somebody else, not herself. Therefore, when she became a physical wife and a mother, she forswore her own being. She abjured her own mind, she denied it, took her faith, her belief, her very living away from it.

It is most probable she lived chiefly in her children. They were her guarantee as a physical woman, the being to which she now laid claim. She had forsaken the ideal of an independent mind.

She would love her children with anguish, afraid always for their safety, never certain of their stable existence, never assured of their real reality. When they were out of her sight, she would be uneasy, uneasy almost as if they did not exist. There would be a gnawing at her till they came back. She would not be satisfied till she had them crushed on her breast. And even then, she would not be sure, she would not be sure. She could not be sure, in life, of anything. She could only be sure, in the old days, of what she saw with her mind. Of that she was absolutely sure.

Meanwhile Jude became exhausted in vitality, bewildered, aimless, lost, pathetically nonproductive.

Again one can see what instinct, what feeling it was which made Arabella's boy bring about the death of the children and of himself. He, sensitive, so bodiless, so selfless as to be a sort of automaton, is very badly suggested, exaggerated, but one can see what is meant. And he feels, as any child will feel, as many children feel today, that they are really anachronisms, accidents, fatal accidents, unreal, false notes in their mothers' lives, that, according to her, they have no being: that, if they have being, then she has not. So he takes away all the children.

And then Sue ceases to be: she strikes the line through her own existence, cancels herself. There exists no more Sue Fawley. She cancels herself. She wishes to cease to exist, as a person, she wishes to be absorbed away, so that she is no longer self-responsible.

For she denied and forsook and broke her own real form, her own

independent, cool-lighted mind-life. And now her children are not only dead, but self-slain, those pledges of the physical life for which she abandoned the other.

She has a passion to expiate, to expiate, to expiate. Her children should never have been born: her instinct always knew this. Now their dead bodies drive her mad with a sense of blasphemy. And she blasphemed the Holy Spirit, which told her she is guilty of their birth and their death, of the horrible nothing which they are. She is even guilty of their little, palpitating sufferings and joys of mortal life, now made nothing. She cannot bear it — who could? And she wants to expiate, doubly expiate. Her mind, which she set up in her conceit, and then forswore, she must stamp it out of existence, as one stamps out fire. She would never again think or decide for herself. The world, the past, should have written every decision for her. The last act of her intellect was the utter renunciation of her w mind and the embracing of utter orthodoxy, where every belief, every thought, every decision was made ready for her, so that she did not exist self-responsible. And then her loathed body, which had committed the crime of bearing dead children, which had come to life only to spread nihilism like a pestilence, that too should be scourged out of existence. She chose the bitterest penalty in going back to Phillotson.

There was no more Sue. Body, soul, and spirit, she annihilated herself. All that remained of her was the will by which she annihilated herself. That remained fixed, a locked centre of self-hatred, life-hatred so utter that it had no hope of death. It knew that life is life, and there is no death for life.

Jude was too exhausted himself to save her. He says of her she was not worth a man's love. But that was not the point. It was not a question of her worth. It was a question of her being. If he had said she was not capable of receiving a man's love as he wished to bestow it, he might have spoken nearer the truth. But she practically told him this. She made it plain to him what she wanted, what she could take. But he overrode her. She tried hard to abide by her own form. But he forced her. He had no case against her, unless she made the great appeal for him, that he should flow to her, whilst at the same time she could not take him completely, body and spirit both.

She asked for what he could not give — what perhaps no man can give: passionate love without physical desire. She had no blame for him: she had no love for him. Self-love triumphed in her when she first knew him. She almost deliberately asked for more, far more, than she intended to give. Self-hatred triumphed in the end. So it had to be.

As for Jude, he had been dying slowly, but much quicker than she, since the first night she took him. It was best to get it done quickly in the end.

And this tragedy is the result of over-development of one principle of human

life at the expense of the other; an overbalancing; a laying of all the stress on the Male, the Love, the Spirit, the Mind, the Consciousness; a denying, a blaspheming against the Female, the Law, the Soul, the Senses, the Feelings. But she is developed to the very extreme, she scarcely lives in the body at all. Being of the feminine gender, she is yet no woman at all, nor male; she is almost neuter. He is nearer the balance, nearer the centre, nearer the wholeness. But the whole human effort, towards pure life in the spirit, towards becoming pure Sue, drags him along; he identifies himself with this effort, destroys himself and her in his adherence to this identification.

But why, in casting off one or another form of religion, has man ceased to be religious altogether? Why will he not recognize Sue and Jude, as Cassandra was recognized long ago, and Achilles, and the Vestals, and the nuns, and the monks? Why must being be denied altogether?

Sue had a being, special and beautiful. Why must not Jude recognize it in all its speciality? Why must man be so utterly irreverent, that he approaches each being as if it were no-being? Why must it be assumed that Sue is an “ordinary” woman — as if such a thing existed? Why must she feel ashamed if she is specialized? And why must Jude, owing to the conception he is brought up in, force her to act as if she were his “ordinary” abstraction, a woman?

She was not a woman. She was Sue Bridehead, something very particular. Why was there no place for her? Cassandra had the Temple of Apollo. Why are we so foul that we have no reverence for that which we are and for that which is amongst us? If we had reverence for our life, our life would take at once religious form. But as it is, in our filthy irreverence, it remains a disgusting slough, where each one of us goes so thoroughly disguised in dirt that we are all alike and indistinguishable.

If we had reverence for what we are, our life would take real form, and Sue would have a place, as Cassandra had a place; she would have a place which does not yet exist, because we are all so vulgar, we have nothing.

CHAPTER X

It seems as if the history of humanity were divided into two epochs: the Epoch of the Law and the Epoch of Love. It seems as though humanity, during the time of its activity on earth, has made two great efforts: the effort to appreciate the Law and the effort to overcome the Law in Love. And in both efforts it has succeeded, it has reached and proved the Two Complementary Absolutes, the Absolute of the Father, of the Law, of Nature, and the Absolute of the Son, of Love, of Knowledge. What remains is to reconcile the two.

In the beginning, Man said: "What am I, and whence is this world around me, and why is it as it is?" Then he proceeded to explore and to personify and to deify the Natural Law, which he called Father. And having reached the point where he conceived of the Natural Law in its purity, he had finished his journey, and was arrested.

But he found that he could not remain at rest. He must still go on. Then there was to discover by what principle he must proceed further than the Law. And he received an inkling of Love. All over the world the same, the second great epoch started with the incipient conception of Love, and continued until the principle of Love was conceived in all its purity. Then man was again at an end, in a cul-de-sac.

The Law it is by which we exist. It was the Father, the Law-Maker, Who said: "Let there be Light": it was He Who breathed life into the handful of dust and made man. "Thus have I made man, in mine own image. I have ordered his outgoing and his incoming, and have cast the fine whereby he shall walk." So said the Father. And man went out and came in according to the ordering of the Lord; he walked by the line of the Lord and did not deviate. Till the path was worn barren, and man knew all the way, and the end seemed to have drawn nigh.

Then he said: "I will leave the path. I will go out as the Lord hath not ordained, and come in when my hour is fulfilled. For it is written, a man shall eat and drink with the Lord: but I will neither eat nor drink, I will go hungry, yet I will not die. It is written, a man shall take himself a wife and beget him seed unto the glory of God. But I will not take me a wife, nor beget seed, but I will know no woman. Yet will I not die. And it is written, a man shall save his body from harm, and preserve his flesh from hurt, for he is made in the image and likeness of the Father. But I will deliver up my body to hurt, and give my flesh unto the dust, yet will I not die, but live. For man does not live by bread alone,

nor by the common law of the Father. Beyond this common law, I am I. When my body is destroyed and my bones have perished, then I am I. Yes, not until my body is consumed and my bones have mingled with the dust, not until then am I whole, not until then do I live. But I die in Christ, and rise again. And when I am risen again, I live in the spirit. Neither hunger nor cold can lay hold on me, nor desire lay hands on me. When I am risen again, then I shall know. Then I shall live in the ineffable bliss of knowledge. When the sun goes forth in the morning, I shall know the glory of God, who passes the sun from His left hand to His right, in the peace of His Understanding. As the night comes in her divers shadows, I know the peace that passeth all understanding. For God knoweth. Neither, does He Will nor Command nor desire nor act, but exists perfect in the peace of knowledge.”

If a man must live still and act in the body, then let his action be to the recognizing of the life in other bodies. Each man is to himself the Natural Law. He can only conceive of the Natural Law as he knows it in himself. The hardest thing for any man to do is for him to recognize and to know that the natural law of his neighbour is other than, and maybe even hostile to, his own natural law, and yet is true. This hard lesson Christ tried to instil in the doctrine of the other cheek. Orestes could not conceive that it was the natural law of Clytemnestra’s nature that she should murder Agamemnon for sacrificing her daughter, and for leaving herself abandoned in the pride of her womanhood, unmated because he wanted the pleasure of war, and for his unfaithfulness to her with other women; Clytemnestra could not understand that Orestes should want to kill her for fulfilling the law of her own nature. The law of the mother’s nature was other than the law of the son’s nature. This they could neither of them see: hence the killing. This Christianity would teach them: to recognize and to admit the law of the other person, outside and different from the law of one’s own being. It is the hardest lesson of love. And the lesson of love learnt, there must be learned the next lesson, of reconciliation between different, maybe hostile, things. That is the final lesson. Christianity ends in submission, in recognizing and submitting to the law of the other person. “Thou shalt love thy enemy.”

Therefore, since by the law man must act or move, let his motion be the utterance of the God of Peace, of the perfect, unutterable Peace of Knowledge.

And man has striven this way, to utter the Universal Peace of God. And, striving on, he has passed beyond the limits of utterance, and has reached once more the silence of the beginning.

After Sue, after Dostoevsky’s *Idiot*, after Turner’s latest pictures, after the symbolist poetry of Mallarmé and the others, after the music of Debussy, there is no further possible utterance of the peace that passeth all understanding, the

peace of God which is Perfect Knowledge. There is only silence beyond this.

Just as after Plato, after Dante, after Raphael, there was no further utterance of the Absoluteness of the Law, of the Immutability of the Divine Conception.

So that, as the great pause came over Greece, and over Italy, after the Renaissance, when the Law had been uttered in its absoluteness, there comes over us now, over England and Russia and France, the pause of finality, now we have seen the purity of Knowledge, the great, white, uninterrupted Light, infinite and eternal.

But that is not the end. The two great conceptions, of Law and of Knowledge or Love, are not diverse and accidental, but complementary. They are, in a way, contradictions each of the other. But they are complementary. They are the Fixed Absolute, the Geometric Absolute, and they are the radiant Absolute, the Unthinkable Absolute of pure, free motion. They are the perfect Stability, and they are the perfect Mobility. They are the fixed condition of our being, and they are the transcendent condition of knowledge in us. They are our Soul, and our Spirit, they are our Feelings, and our Mind. They are our Body and our Brain. They are Two-in-One.

And everything that has ever been produced has been produced by the combined activity of the two, in humanity, by the combined activity of soul and spirit. When the two are acting together, then Life is produced, then Life, or Utterance, Something, is created. And nothing is or can be created save by combined effort of the two principles, Law and Love.

All through the medieval times, Law and Love were striving together to give the perfect expression to the Law, to arrive at the perfect conception of the Law. All through the rise of the Greek nation, to its culmination, the Law and Love were working in that nation to attain the perfect expression of the Law. They were driven by the Unknown Desire, the Holy Spirit, the Unknown and Unexpressed. But the Holy Spirit is the Reconciler and the Originator. Him we do not know.

The greatest of all Utterance of the Law has given expression to the Law as it is in relation to Love, both ruled by the Holy Spirit. Such is the Book of Job, such Aeschylus in the Trilogy, such, more or less, is Dante, such is Botticelli. Those who gave expression to the Law after these suppressed the contact, and achieved an abstraction. Plato, Raphael.

The greatest utterance of Love has given expression to Love as it is in relation to the Law: so Rembrandt, Shakespeare, Shelley, Wordsworth, Goethe, Tolstoi. But beyond these there have been Turner, who suppressed the context of the Law; also there have been Dostoievsky, Hardy, Flaubert. These have shown Love in conflict with the Law, and only Death the resultant, no Reconciliation.

So that humanity does not continue for long to accept the conclusions of these writers, nor even of Euripides and Shakespeare always. These great tragic writers endure by reason of the truth of the conflict they describe, because of its completeness, Law, Love, and Reconciliation, all active. But with regard to their conclusions, they leave the soul finally unsatisfied, unbelieving.

Now the aim of man remains to recognize and seek out the Holy Spirit, the Reconciler, the Originator, He who drives the twin principles of Law and of Love across the ages.

Now it remains for us to know the Law and to know the Love, and further to seek out the Reconciliation. It is time for us to build our temples to the Holy Spirit, and to raise our altars to the Holy Ghost, the Supreme, Who is beyond us but is with us.

We know of the Law, and we know of Love, and to that little we know of each of these we have given our full expression. But have not completed one perfect utterance, not one. Small as is the circle of our knowledge, we are not able to cast it complete. In Aeschylus's Eumenides, Apollo is foolish, Athena mechanical. In Shakespeare's Hamlet the conclusion is all foolish. If we had conceived each -party in his proper force, if Apollo had been equally potent with the Furies and no Pallas had appeared to settle the question merely by dropping a pebble, how would Aeschylus have solved his riddle? He could not work out the solution he knew must come, so he forced it.

And so it has always been, always: either a wrong conclusion, or one forced by the artist, as if he put his thumb in the scale to equalize a balance which he could not make level. Now it remains for us to seek the true balance, to give each party, Apollo and the Furies, Love and the Law, his due, and so to seek the Reconciler.

Now the principle of the Law is found strongest in Woman, and the principle of Love in Man. In every creature, the mobility, the law of change, is found exemplified in the male; the stability, the conservatism is found in the female. In woman man finds his root and establishment. In man woman finds her exfoliation and florescence. The woman grows downwards, like a root, towards the centre and the darkness and the origin. The man grows upwards, like the stalk, towards discovery and light and utterance.

Man and Woman are, roughly, the embodiment of Love and the Law: they are the two complementary parts. In the body they are most alike, in genitals they are almost one. Starting from the connexion, almost unification, of the genitals, and travelling towards the feelings and the mind, there becomes ever a greater difference and a finer distinction between the two, male and female, till at last, at the other closing in the circle, in pure utterance, the two are really one again, so

that any pure utterance is a perfect unity, the two as one, united by the Holy Spirit.

We start from one side or the other, from the female side or the male, but what we want is always the perfect union of the two. That is the Law of the Holy Spirit, the law of Consummate Marriage. That every living thing seeks, individually and collectively. Every man starts with his deepest desire, a desire for consummation of marriage between himself and the female, a desire for completeness, that completeness of being which will give completeness of satisfaction and completeness of utterance. No man can as yet find perfect consummation of marriage between himself and the Bride, be the bride either Woman or an Idea, but he can approximate to it, and every generation can get a little nearer.

But it needs that a man shall first know in reverence and submit to the Natural Law of his own individual being: that he shall also know that he is but contained within the great Natural Law, that he is but a Child of God, and not God himself: that he shall then poignantly and personally recognize that the law of another man's nature is different from the law of his own nature, that it may be even hostile to him, and yet is part of the great Law of God, to be admitted: this is the Christian action of "loving thy neighbour," and of dying to be born again: lastly, that a man shall know that between his law and the law of his neighbour there is an affinity, that all is contained in one, through the Holy Spirit.

It needs that a man shall know the natural law of his own being, then that he shall seek out the law of the-female, with which to join himself as complement. He must know that he is half, and the woman is the other half: that they are two, but that they are two-in-one.

He must with reverence submit to the law of himself: and he must with suffering and joy know and submit to the law of the woman: and he must know that they two together are one within the Great Law, reconciled within the Great Peace. Out of this final knowledge shall come his supreme art. There shall be the art which recognizes and utters his own law; there shall be the art which recognizes his own and also the law of the woman, his neighbour, utters the glad embraces and the struggle between them, and the submission of one; there shall be the art which knows the struggle between the two conflicting laws, and knows the final reconciliation, where both are equal, two in one, complete. This is the supreme art, which yet remains to be done. Some men have attempted it, and left us the results of efforts. But it remains to be fully done.

But when the two clasp hands, a moment, male and female, clasp hands and are one, the poppy, the gay poppy flies into flower again; and when the two fling their arms about each other, the moonlight runs and dashes against the shadow;

and when the two toss back their hair, all the larks break out singing; and when they kiss on the mouth, a lovely human utterance is heard again-and so it is.

MOVEMENTS IN EUROPEAN HISTORY



This school textbook was originally published by Oxford University Press in 1921. At the time Lawrence was facing financial difficulties and he wrote this non-fiction work to secure much needed funds. The first edition was published under the pseudonym Lawrence H. Davison, because fictional works such as *The Rainbow* had been prosecuted for eroticism.



Davidson Road School, Croydon, where Lawrence worked as an energetic and innovative teacher

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Introduction

At the present moment, history must either be graphic or scientific. The old bad history is abolished. The old bad history consisted of a register of facts. It drew up a chart of human events, as one might draw up a chart of the currants in a plum-pudding, merely because they happen promiscuously to be there. No more of this.

The new history is different. It is, we repeat, either graphic or scientific. Graphic history consists of stories about men and women who appear in the old records, stories as vivid and as personal as may be. And this is very nice for little children: the only trouble being that with so much personal element there can be very little historic. No doubt the great people of the past were personages, and quite as personal as we are. Unfortunately, nothing is more difficult than to re-create the personal reality of a bygone age. Personality is local and temporal. Each age has its own. And each age proceeds to interpret every other age in terms of the current personality. So that Shakespeare's Caesar is an Elizabethan, and Bernard Shaw's is a Victorian, and neither of them is Caesar. The personal Caesar we shall never know. But there is some eternal, impersonal Caesar whom we can know, historically. And for this reason, let us beware of too much of the personal element, even for little children. It tends to shut out the strange, vast, terrifying reality of the past, even as the charming cosiness of a garden shuts out the great terror and wonder of the world. And even for tiny children, if we proceed to speak at all of the past, we must not shut out the space and fear and greatness. We must not make it too personal and familiar. We must leave in the impersonal, terrific element, the sense of the unknown, even as it is left in Red Riding Hood or any true nursery tale. It is wrong to envelop our children in so much cosiness and familiar circumstance. It is wrong to feed their souls on so many personal tit-bits. It is an insult to the past, which was not personal as we are personal, and it is a ridiculous exaggeration of the present. We are not the consummation of all life and time. Yet we put our sentiments and our personal feelings upon Caesar, as if Caesar were no more than a dummy figure whom we have to dress up to our own personal mode. Then we call it history — graphic history.

No wonder the scientific school protests. But if graphic history is all heart, scientific history is all head. Having picked out all the currants and raisins of events for our little children, we go to the university and proceed to masticate the dough. We must analyse the mixture and determine the ingredients. Each fact

must be established, and put into relation with every other fact. This is the business of scientific history: the forging of a great chain of logically sequential events, cause and effect demonstrated down the whole range of time. Now this is all very well, if we will remember that we are not discovering any sequence of events, we are only abstracting. The logical sequence does not exist until we have made it, and then it exists as a new piece of furniture of the human, mind.

The present small book is intended for adolescents, for those who have had almost enough of stories and anecdotes and personalities, and who have not yet reached the stage of intellectual pride in abstraction.

It is an attempt to give some impression of the great, surging movements which rose in the hearts of men in Europe, sweeping human beings together into one great concerted action, or sweeping them apart for ever on the tides of opposition. These are movements which have no deducible origin. They have no reasonable cause, though they are so great that we must call them impersonal.

There is no earthly reason for such a vast madness as that of the Crusades. Given every circumstance of the year 800 A.D. in Europe, could the First and Second Crusades be deduced? Logical sequence does not exist until it is abstracted by the human mind. In the same way, there is no more reason for the Renaissance than there is reason for the singing of a blackbird. A rook is a black bird which makes a nest in spring. And yet it does not sing.

And so, we must not be so assured when we regard the historic faculty as a faculty for the ascertaining and verifying of facts, and the ascribing of certain sequence and order to such facts. This is only the hack-work of history — science, it may be. But history proper is a true art, not fictional, but nakedly veracious.

Inside the hearts, or souls, of men in Europe there has happened at times some strange surging, some welling-up of unknown powers. These powers that well up inside the hearts of men, these are the fountains and origins of human history. And the welling-up has no ascribable cause. It is naked cause itself.

Thus the Crusades, or the Renaissance, these are great motions from within the soul of mankind. They are the sheer utterance of life itself, the logic only appearing afterwards. Logic cannot hold good beforehand, even in the inorganic world. Earthquakes are disasters from without. They should be predictable. Yet no one can predict them, because the mysterious and untellable motion within the hearts of men is in some way related to the motion within the earth, so that even earthquakes are unaccountably related to man's psychic being, and dependent upon it.

Therefore this little history is an attempt to count some of the great pulsations that have shaken the hearts of men in Europe, and made their history. Events are

details swirling in the strange stream. Great motions surge up, men sweep away upon a tide. Some are flung back. The same passional motive that carried the north of Europe into Protestantism caused the Spaniards to flood to America and to react in the Inquisition. It is all beyond reasonable cause and effect, though these may be deduced later. It is all outside personality, though it makes personality. It is greater than any one man, though in individual men the power is at its greatest.

We cannot say, for example, that the Reformation arose because the Pope sold Indulgences. It arose because a new craving awoke in the hearts of men, a craving which expressed itself later as a passion for immediate, individual relationship of a man with God. There is no reason why such a passion, such a craving should arise. All that the reason can do, in discovering the logical consequence of such passion and its effects, afterwards, is to realise that life was so, mysteriously, creatively, and beyond cavil.

All that real history can do is to note with wonder and reverence the tides which have surged out from the innermost heart of man, watch the incalculable flood and ebb of such tides. Afterwards, there is a deducible sequence. Beforehand there is none.

Life makes its own great gestures, of which men are the substance. History repeats the gesture, so we live it once more, and are fulfilled in the past. Whoever misses his education in history misses his fulfilment in the past.

Chapter I. Rome

The date of the founding of the city of Rome is given as 753 B.C. But at that time Rome could scarcely have been more than a savage little village of shepherds or herdsmen. None the less, it was a village of brave, active men, and it grew gradually into a town, fortified in the seven hills by the bank of the Tiber. Surrounding it were hostile races, hostile cities bigger than itself. But the Romans knew how to stick to one another, and they made headway. Gradually Rome became the leader of the towns and peoples in the wide plain of Latium, which surrounded her. She was head of the Latin League.

After the year 500 B.C. we can be fairly certain of Roman history. At that time Rome was a republic. It had now no king, and no nobles, dukes or counts or lords, as we know them. Yet it was divided into two classes, the upper and lower — patrician who were rich and proud, and plebeian who were poor. These two classes held great meetings, to decide what was to be done, and to choose leaders. The chief men in Rome were the two consuls, who were elected in the council of the people, to hold office for one year only.

So we see in the beginning the difference between the Romans and the people of Britain and Gaul. The Britons and the Gauls were subject to chieftains, who said ‘ Come,’ and the people came; ‘ Go,’ and they went. But in Rome each citizen was free to come and go as he pleased. Only he must abide by the laws that he himself had helped to make. To be a Roman citizen, in the days of the real greatness of Rome, was to be a proud, free man, subject to no master, a fearless supporter of the laws of freedom.

By the year 275 B.C. Rome was mistress of Italy, south of the Po. The peninsula of Italy lies in the centre of the Mediterranean; the city of Rome lies in the centre of the peninsula; and the Mediterranean, as its very name says, was the centre of the world at that time. So that Rome held a great position of advantage: she was the very centre and hub of the world of that day. And soon the whole world turned upon that hub.

Gradually Rome extended her dominion. In 242 B.C. she took Sicily, her first overseas possession. Then she defeated Carthage in North Africa; then Macedonia, in the Balkan Peninsula; then Greece, then Spain, and so on, till all the lands of the Mediterranean were under her power. In the year 61 B.C. Pompey the Great returned from the East. He had been as far as the Euphrates, had defeated the Persian Mithridates, who fled to the Crimea, and Syria was

added to Rome. In the year 58 B.C. Julius Caesar marched north to Gaul, and across from Gaul he came to Britain. By Gaul we mean the land now occupied by France, stretching from the Mediterranean to the Rhine.

We see the empire spreading west, south, east, and north, under the Roman armies. The empire was won by the armies, and it must be kept by the armies. The wonderful thing is that it was kept, and governed from the one central city of Rome, by the great citizens of Rome.

The Roman Empire is the most wonderful the world has ever known: not because of its size, but because of its strange unity and singleness. The world will surely never again see such a wonder. And the Romans achieved this by their power for holding together and working together in one purpose; they kept their empire by making roads immediately, and by establishing permanent military and civil colonies; they maintained their greatness because of their natural love of justice. There was at the bottom of every Roman heart a passion for simple, actual truth: even the trial of Jesus shows us this. They loved to feel they rested upon the plain truth of facts. Individually, they might be vain and unscrupulous. But in their social acts, in that which concerned justice and the freedom of a man, they had always this strange and beautiful craving for fairness between man and man, for justice between a man and the State, for the whole truth in any question under dispute. Even whilst the emperors and governors were the most cruel or foolish of men, still, as a rule, they could see what was true or right, though they did not choose to act upon it.

But an empire which is established on military power must at length be governed by one man, even as an army must be under the supreme command of one general: for a military empire is in truth a great army. The Romans struggled to keep their freedom, the splendid freedom of a Roman citizen, a civilian. But as the empire extended, more and more men had been admitted to the citizenship, men of every nation and country. St. Paul, as we know, was a Roman citizen. How could these millions of citizens meet in council to decide questions of peace or war, and to elect their great consuls? And therefore, since men had not discovered how to choose their own representative by vote, the bulk of the citizens were not represented: they were dumb, they had no say.

Thus the army had to take control, and the greatest men were the generals of the army. Pompey and Julius Caesar, two of the world's greatest soldiers, were both consuls, prime ministers of the empire. The masters of the army became masters of the civil life as well. But in the year 50 B.C. the armies of the empire had two masters, Pompey in the east, Caesar in the west. The two fought for supremacy, and Caesar defeated Pompey, who was murdered in Egypt, to which land he had fled. Caesar was now alone master of the world. He was made

absolute ruler of the empire. He sat in the senate on a golden throne, wearing the purple mantle of a general in his triumph. But the Romans would not have him named king. They hated the very thought of a king who would rule them. So Caesar took the title of Imperator — Emperor — which meant at that time master of the army.

Still the great Romans were angry. They did not want such an overlord. Even though they loved the great Julius, they could not bear that he should have permanent power over them, and over all free Romans. Rome must be governed by her citizens. Therefore, on the Ides of March, 44 B.C., the first and greatest citizens of Rome, led by Caius Cassius and Marcus Junius Brutus, murdered Caesar in the senate, by his golden throne.

It was terrible to good men like Brutus to have a share in such a thing. They did it for the freedom of their country. Yet they utterly failed. The young Caesar Octavianus became master of the world in the year 31 B.C., after defeating Mark Antony and Cleopatra in the battle of Actium. Octavian was the adopted son of Julius Caesar, and his full name was Caius Julius Caesar Octavianus. Later on he added the name of Augustus, by which he is now known. The period of the rule of Augustus is the greatest in Roman history — the Augustan age. During this age lived the greatest Roman writers and thinkers, the empire was prosperous and splendid. In the time of Augustus, also, Christ was born.

And Augustus had some of the beauty and noble gentleness of Christ. He was not like Julius Caesar, chiefly a fighter, a commander whom nothing could resist. He loved peace, and the happiness of the people. He carefully settled the government of the great empire. But, while he said that he restored the Republic, it turned out, as a matter of fact, that he had inaugurated that imperial form of government which was the first cause of the downfall of the empire. The rule of the one man made the rest of the citizens indifferent, irresponsible. They had no share in the empire; the Caesars and emperors swallowed up everything. So the citizens and great men began to care about their own little lives and nothing else. It is a free, proud people which keeps a nation alive. So that when the Romans ceased to feel themselves free and responsible, Rome became as it were flabby, a huge but flabby power.

Augustus died in the year 14 A.D. He had never heard of Jesus, who was one day to be executed in a distant province as an insignificant agitator and disturber of the peace. After Augustus come a string of Caesars famous for their extravagance and wickedness, which was not so terrible after all. When these Caesars came to the throne they took the name of Augustus, which thus became a title even higher than that of Emperor, for Augustus had had himself placed among the gods. Jupiter, Juno, Venus, Mars, Mercury, Augustus, all these gods

had their temples and altars.

Augustus was followed by Tiberius, who first began to tyrannise over the Romans. He is supposed to have been very cruel. But the Romans themselves fawned before him, and betrayed one another to him. ‘ Oh! how anxious these people are to be slaves! ’ Tiberius said bitterly. He died in 37 A.D. After him came the mad Caligula, who wanted to have the statue of himself, as a god, put into the temple of Jerusalem and worshipped there. He hated the tiresome, turbulent, rather cowardly people of Rome, and said: ‘ I wish they had only one head, so that I could cut it off at a blow.’ He was himself, however, soon murdered by an officer of the Praetorian Guard. In the year 54 Nero became emperor. He loved splendour, and built a gorgeous palace called the Golden House, where he gave astonishing feasts. Every one has heard the story that Rome, the enormous city, was set on fire at his bidding, so that he could enjoy, from his high grounds, a wonderful sight. Watching the sea of flames, which lasted for five or six days, he is said to have danced and sung with extravagant pleasure. Later the burnt quarters were built up again, and Nero said he found Rome a city of brick and wood, and left it a city of marble. At last his wild acts caused the leaders of the army to rise against him. He fled to a country house, and there he begged his faithful servant to kill him: which the man did, in grief and obedience. This was in the year 68.

It was no wonder these men were, or became, a little mad, for they were masters of a whole world, and they had the whole world at their feet, and all Rome cringing and squirming before them. We must remember Tiberius’ saying: ‘ Oh! how anxious these men are to be slaves!’ It was the greatest citizens of Rome itself that sent the emperors mad with pride and extravagance, by utterly sinking their lives down to the will of the master.

After Nero emperors were chosen and destroyed again in quick succession. From the year 14, when Augustus died, to the year 96, in which Domitian was murdered, ten emperors rose and fell. In Domitian’s time the conquest of Britain was accomplished, but the emperor was a base man, and he destroyed the great general Agricola out of jealousy.

Nero was the last of the true imperial line. After him, the succession depended not on birth but on chance, and the choice of the army. A victorious general, a notable citizen, might suddenly be raised to the throne. Later, even the sons of slaves or peasants or barbarians from Arabia or Hungary, were lifted up and invested with the imperial purple.

In the chaos and turmoil of the empire after Augustus, there was one splendid century, from 96 to 180, when Trajan, Hadrian, Antoninus Pius, and Marcus Aurelius were emperors. This is called ‘ the Age of the Antonines.’ One great

and noble ruler followed another, in succession. Within the empire there was peace and solid prosperity. The frontiers were established, the colonies grew rich and secure. Antoninus built the wall across Scotland, from Glasgow to Edinburgh. This was the northern boundary of the empire. And from this wall the Roman roads ran, with the single intervention of the Channel, straight and perfect to the other end of the empire, in Arabia or Mesopotamia. There were post-houses and milestones all the way; and the Romans kept the account of the miles: from the wall of Antoninus to York, 222 Roman miles; from York to London 227; to Sandwich 67; crossing to Boulogne 45; to Rheims 174; to Lyons 330; Milan 324; Rome 426; Brindisi 360; the crossing to Dyracchium, or Durazzo, 40; Byzantium 711; Anayra 283; Tarsus 301; Antioch 141; Tyre 252; Jerusalem 168. This makes 4080 Roman miles, which is 3740 English miles. So the Romans kept their itinerary.

This great empire remained solid owing to the excellence of the armies and of the magistrates. But it was too big. Once it was really established, it was bound to fall to pieces. And it fell naturally into two halves.

The old half of the empire was in Syria, Greece, North Africa; the new half was Gaul, Spain, Britain, and the countries of the Danube. The armies and the colonists of the empire of the west, Gaul, Britain, Spain, lived in northern countries, wild, cold in winter, peopled by fierce barbarians. But the colonists and armies of the eastern empire lived under burning suns, in ancient cities, older by far than Rome, and among a people delicate and luxurious. The great towns of the east, Smyrna, Ephesus, Antioch, were full of marble palaces and lovely temples whilst yet Rome was a rude little town. Alexandria in Egypt and Carthage in North Africa knew all the richness and delights of the Greeks and Phoenicians. And thus the millions of Romans in the East, living in a land of luxury and fruit, corn, pomegranates, dates, apricots, loved to be lazy, to dress in delicate clothes, to bathe and rub themselves with oil, to go to the theatre or the circus often, almost every day, to talk and feast and idle their lives away.

In the North it was different. There, men must watch and act. In the North there were fine Roman towns — Marseilles, Lyons, Treves, Vienna, York — many lovely cities. But here men could not idle their lives away. Here there was not any wine and oil, save what was carried from afar off. And here were the great fierce races of Germans near at hand, to keep one on the alert, or the savage Caledonians. Here the Roman legions had to contend with the bravest barbarians and the bitterest cold. They were not like the softer armies of the East, who fought the Persians in well-known, civilised warfare, under hot skies.

Thus, gradually, there came a silent falling asunder in the empire. After the year 180 a series of worthless emperors came to the throne. Rome itself became

a centre of shame and degradation. The great armies were hardly ever in Italy. They were needed in Gaul, in Syria, in Africa. The generals and the veterans away on the frontiers came to despise the noisy, foolish citizens of Rome, and the Eternal City, Rome herself, Mistress of the World, became an object of contempt. She kept her useless emperors and courtiers, her useless, extravagant mass of inhabitants. But the real government, the real power, was always in the hands of the great, far-off, permanent armies, in Gaul, in the East, on the Danube, or in Britain.

Chapter II. Constantinople

As the years went on, the civilian citizens of Rome became weaker and more worthless. They were rich enough, but they had no spirit, no passion; they only considered their little pleasures and gratifications. The real Rome was in the great military camps on the Rhine and the Danube, and in the East.

A new phase began when, in 284, Diocletian, the general of the armies of the Danube, was chosen emperor by his soldiers. He came from poor people: perhaps his parents were slaves. But he was a great man. He found the empire too loose and rambling to be governed by one man, so he chose his own chief general Maximian, to share the honours of the empire with him. The fierce but brave Maximian was raised to the purple, and hailed as Caesar and Augustus along with Diocletian. He was the son of peasants, in Hungary. He was, however, a good leader, and he remained true to Diocletian.

But still the command was inefficient. The two emperors with their armies could not keep watch close enough over Europe and Asia. So they decided to make two new Caesars, and they chose the generals Constantius and Galerius. Constantius and Galerius were Caesars, but not emperors fully. They were not hailed Augustus. Diocletian and Maximian alone held this supreme title. But the four Caesars governed among them the four quarters of the empire.

The great Diocletian, the chief Augustus, kept for himself Asia Minor and Egypt, Greece, and the land we now call Turkey — the lovely, rich old dominions. Maximian Augustus had Italy and North Africa. Galerius was stationed to defend the Danube, and to govern the Balkan Peninsula; whilst Constantius Caesar had Gaul, Spain, Britain, defending the Rhine and the wall of Scotland.

So we see the choice of the greatest emperors leans to the old world — the rich, lovely East, the hot Africa, the proud old Greece and Italy. The subordinate Caesars are given the northern regions, the savage lands.

When Diocletian and Maximian abdicated in 305, Galerius and Constantius, the two Caesars, took the title of Augustus. Galerius became emperor in the East. He was a violent, ambitious, unfriendly man. Constantius, more gentle and more loved, kept command in the West, in Gaul and Britain.

Constantius had a son Constantine, the great Constantine, whom we like to claim as British-born. The mother of Constantine, Helena, is said to have been the daughter of a British chieftain, whom Constantius married when he was a

young officer in Britain. So it is said that the famous Constantine was born in Britain. But it is more probable that Helena was the daughter of an innkeeper, and that her son was born somewhere near the Danube. However that may be, Helena was looked upon as a woman of humble origin. When Constantius was raised to the rank of Caesar, it was necessary for him to have a noble wife, and a Roman. So Helena was divorced. Constantine, her son, was at that time eighteen years old. He shared his mother's disgrace and downfall, and instead of finding himself the honoured son of the Caesar, he was left in a poor rank in the army of Galerius, in the East.

He was, however, brave and clever and lovable. In appearance he was tall, dignified, handsome, and pleasant. The soldiers loved him, and he soon rose to be a leading officer.

Galerius, knowing his right of birth, was jealous of him from the first. Seeing how the soldiers loved the young officer, and respected him in spite of all, Galerius was afraid of him as a dangerous rival. So the Emperor kept the young man in his own grasp in the East, ready to destroy him if anything, happened.

Constantius, the Augustus in Gaul, was anxious for his son, kept so far off in the power of a rival. He sent message after message to Galerius, asking that Constantine might come to Gaul to visit his father. At last Galerius had to comply, for he was afraid of the armies.

Constantine was at this time in Nicomedia, just in Asia Minor, attending Galerius in the palace there. As soon as the young man received permission to go to Gaul, he made swift preparations. He left Nicomedia secretly the same night, and galloped along the road, from post-house to post-house, to the Bosphorus. There he was rowed over into Europe, and taking horse at the post again in Byzantium, he galloped northwards, travelling swiftly every day, taking a new horse at the post-house when the one he rode was tired, and thus journeying too quickly for any officer of Galerius to overtake him.

The emperor of the northern half of the empire was at Boulogne, ready to embark for an expedition against the Caledonians of Scotland. The troops of Gaul shouted with pleasure when Constantine galloped up and kissed his father.

Father and son passed into Britain, and the Caledonians were soon quieted. But it was the last expedition of Constantius. He died at York, begging his son to take care of the empire, and of the little children, his half-brothers and sisters.

The troops lamented their emperor, and felt the same dismay that troops always experience when they are left without a leader. The flower of the armies of Gaul had followed Constantius into Britain. They began to shout for Constantine.

But Constantine carefully kept himself out of sight of the troops, lest they

should suddenly hail him Caesar Augustus, and should force him to take the purple. He must be careful, for if anything unusual happened, the Emperor Galerius would denounce him as a rebel and a usurper, and rouse all the armies against him.

The officers, however, were all friends to Constantine. They addressed the legions, asking them, would they tamely wait till some stranger was sent by Galerius from the east, to take command, or would they choose the honour of placing at their head the son of their late beloved emperor. The troops as one man chose Constantine. He, however, still delayed, till he had written a letter telling Galerius the whole state of affairs. And then, at York, Constantine was clothed with the purple robe of the Augustus, and with the purple buskins. This sacred purple of the Romans was what we should call deep, rich crimson, it was not violet. No man might wear it but Caesar.

Galerius was furious when he heard what had happened, for he wanted to be sole emperor. But he was afraid of the northern army. He sent his royal messenger to Constantine, with an imperial mandate, allowing the young man to take command of the troops of Gaul, but forbidding him to take the title of Caesar.

To this Constantine and his soldiers would not agree. War followed. Different Caesars were raised up by different armies, till at one time six emperors were reigning in the empire, of whom Constantine and Galerius were only two. However, Constantine marched with a small but experienced army over the Alps, and defeated a great host in North Italy. He had now the chance of marching on Rome. The Aemilian and Flaminian roads stretched before him, from Milan running south. But he had not yet defeated all his enemies.

At last, the armies in Italy were all broken. In 312 Constantine came to Rome, the great mother-city, and was hailed as emperor. To make friends for himself, he wisely pronounced an act of oblivion, stating that all the deeds of enmity committed by the Romans against him in the past should be considered as forgotten, buried in oblivion. This reassured many frightened people, who fully expected to lose their lives for having sided against the conqueror, and it brought many to his side. He then destroyed the Praetorian Camp, the stronghold of hostile and insolent Roman guards. He also issued an edict of religious toleration, in 313, which allowed all Romans to worship as they pleased. This was a great boon to the trembling Christians.

There were still hostile armies, however. It was necessary to march against the troops of Licinius, on the Danube, then down from the Danube to the Bosphorus. There Constantine besieged the gate-town of Byzantium, a strong fortification. Licinius fled into Asia. Constantine pursued him, defeated him, and at last

executed him in Nicomedia.

Thus, in 325, Constantine became master of the world. In the same year he issued letters exhorting his subjects to accept Christianity. But he allowed freedom of worship to all.

Constantine felt himself to be not only the master of the empire, but the founder of a new era: which, indeed, he was. With Constantine the old pagan Rome comes to an end. A new world was to begin, and Constantine wished to give it its new centre. He disliked Rome, the old, terrible mistress of the past. She was too much stained with blood and violence. The Capitol, the very centre of the old world, was crowned with the temples of the old gods, and these old gods could not soon be forgotten. Their spirit filled the old city. Then, too, there had been so much strife, so much violence, so much cruelty and splendour in the Eternal City by the Tiber, the City on the Seven Hills.

The later emperors nearly all disliked Rome. They were strangers, born far off. They depended on far-off armies. They found the Romans conceited and impudent and troublesome. Diocletian would not live in the capital. He preferred even Milan. And he loved Nicomedia, just in Asia. He retired away into Dalmatia, near the further coasts of the Adriatic, to die.

Constantine determined to build a new capital, so that he need not trouble about Rome any more. He wanted a city of his own, where a new life should begin, more peaceful, more congenial, less masterful. So he cast round in his mind for a site. It delighted him to think of raising his own new bright city. He knew the empire from end to end. And he chose Byzantium, at the gate of Europe and Asia, on the Bosphorus.

Constantine said that when he was besieging Byzantium, in the war against Licinius, he had dreamed a curious dream. An old woman came to him and stood by his side. He turned and looked at her, wondering who she was, when suddenly, under his gaze, she was transformed into a young, lovely girl, and he found himself placing the tiara of royalty on her head.

This dream he took to be a sign that the old Greek fortress-town of Byzantium should become a lovely and imperial city at his hands. He told the dream to his attendants. And he went out on the hills to look.

He looked towards Asia, and saw himself almost surrounded by waters. In front of him, looking east, the land narrowed to a blunt point, past which ran the swift blue waters of the Bosphorus, pouring rapidly through winding straits from the Black Sea into the Sea of Marmora, towards the Mediterranean. On his right-hand side, southwards, lay the waters of the Sea of Marmora, then called the Propontis, washing the sunny foot of the land; and on his left-hand side, a mile or two away, like a wide river, curved the beautiful inlet from the Bosphorus,

now called the Golden Horn, the harbour to the town, shining and clear, receiving a little river from the hills. In the harbour lay the winged ships, near the steep walls of the fortified Byzantium. And far off to the south he could see broad, dark, and white, and ruddy sails winging away to the Isles of Greece, across the space of the Propontis, whilst down the blue, winding waters in front of him to the north, came ships from the Black Sea, with corn from the Danube.

Behind him lay Europe, unseen. At his feet lay the hills and orchards and field patches, surrounding the little fortress-town, that held the ships to its side. Everywhere temples and shrines rose from the trees by the sea. And across, shining gold in the afternoon light, were the slopes of Asia, the pillared temples among the trees, the white, glittering walls of the opposite port, the white roads winding away among the olive-trees and vineyards, and past the corn of the valleys, on towards Nicomedia, to Ephesus, to Antioch, to Jerusalem. That was the East, where Jesus was born, the East, that loves to be still and dreamy, dreaming of the past. There was a grey dimness of olive trees, and a glitter of white and pink villas, a golden soil, faint tufts of palm-trees, dark groves of orange and lemon and myrtle.

Here Constantine determined to build his city, the centre of the new world, looking to Asia. He was getting old. This was the year 326, and he was born in 272. He had spent his life in the camp, and in moving from province to province. Now he would make a new centre for a new world, and have peace.

Constantine appointed a day for tracing the boundaries of the city. On two sides were the arms of the sea, enclosing the wide, blunt angle of the land. Clothed in the purple, with a lance in his hand, and at the head of a glittering throng, Constantine set out to trace the third side, the base of this wide triangle. He moved slowly forward, drawing the line with his lance. Attendants followed, surveyors, taking accurate mark. Then came the great throng of courtiers and people and soldiers, for it was high holiday. On and on went Constantine, past fields and orchards and vineyards, olive woods, and groves of laurel and pine, over little brooks and up the hillside. The people followed slowly, amazed at the immense space Constantine was enclosing. They murmured among themselves, and at last one ventured to remark that already the Emperor had enclosed more space than was necessary for the most ample city. 'I shall go on,' replied Constantine, 'till He, the invisible Guide, who marches before me, thinks proper to stop.' Thus he continued towards the sea again, enclosing five hills within his line.

And now, immediately, the great work began. Millions of slaves were at work. In the little isle of Proconessus blocks of white marble stood by the shore, the boats deep in the water with their heavy white cargo steered away to the Golden

Horn, to the quays of the town, whilst from the North came the timber boats of the Black Sea. There was a great smoke of kilns burning lime for the mortar, and a great sound of thousands of slaves digging, carrying, levelling. Surveyors and architects moved here and there, the builders worked quickly, served by slaves. And the Emperor, in person, wearing his imperial cloak of deep crimson, went to the harbour to see the ships unlade, thousands of men heaving and hauling, or to the hills to see the foundations dug, or to the level places to see the first streets laid out, or to the river to see the aqueduct begun, or to the outskirts to see the deep foss dug out for the city walls. Ship after ship came from Africa with corn, from the isles with grapes and cattle, from Asia with fruits and oil. There were great kitchens, great meals of thousands of busy, excited workmen and women.

The great walls, with their gates, began slowly to rise. On the second hill, where Constantine had pitched his tent outside Byzantium, in the siege, there the chief Forum or market-place was laid out, a vast oval. He longed to see the two great arches, at the opposite ends of the oval space, rise up and be finished in their magnificence, to see the lovely pillared porticoes complete round about the open, elliptical market-place. Then came slow wagons toiling with mysterious heavy objects carefully packed and wrapped in cloths. These were unpacked, and proved to be lovely statues, brought from old Greece or from Asia to set in the porticoes. But most wonderful of all, a sight that thrilled Constantine, was the scaffolding in the centre of this great, grand, elliptical space. There the poles and pulleys rose to a great height, there were masses of slaves and oxen and ropes. And at last, when all the scaffolding was taken away, there stood a huge and lofty naked column, of marble and porphyry, rising a hundred and twenty feet from the ground, and bearing aloft the colossal bronze statue of Apollo, magnificent work of the old, dead masters of Greece.

So the town grew — great circuses, churches, baths, and palaces, marble and sumptuous. Streets were made, with big buildings where the poor would live, each family in one or two rooms. There were open places with fountains, and beautiful gardens with palm-trees, and fine streets leading down to the sea. Unfortunately, such quick building was not very sound, and in a few years' time several palaces began to fall. But still, it all seemed splendid.

Then, as things began to be ready, Constantine invited rich Roman senators and citizens from the cities of Europe and Asia and Africa, to come and take up their abode in the new palaces. They had to come, at the Emperor's bidding. They arrived by sea and land, huge trains of slaves and servants, ox-wagons, mules and horses laden with goods. Soon the town was full. The narrow streets were thronged with crowds of people, carriages, horses, mules, litters — there was hardly room to pass. Constantine gave away great quantities of food —

African corn and Syrian oil and wine. There was a great profusion and plenty. There were splendid processions, and displays in the circus and theatre. Thousands of people enjoyed the pleasure of a new home, in a new, sunny, lovely climate by the sea, the beginning of a new life.

This removal of the centre of the civilised world, from West to East, from Rome to Constantinople, took place about the year 334. It was the end of the old Rome, and the beginning of Europe. The Byzantine Empire belongs to the East rather than to Europe. Constantinople looks to Asia. Europe was left alone, confused, violent, turbulent, disordered, to face the darkness of her Middle Ages. The real light of culture and civilisation was withdrawn, lapsing back to the East. The West would have to struggle through a long obscure twilight, into her own day, the day of modern Europe.

Rome, the city, lost her power. Later she became the home of the popes, but her empire was really over. Till after the conquest of the Goths there continued a shaky Roman Empire of the West. But it was an empire which could only tumble into nothingness.

The Byzantine Empire continued in Constantinople, however, right into the fifteenth century. It is curious that, though it was a purely Christian state, yet Constantine had really established an oriental form of government. The Emperor was a Christian, yet he accounted himself divine, and supreme above all men. He was as absolute as any Persian tyrant, for he was beyond all laws and all criticism. The people, the state, were at his mercy. And so they continued for a thousand years. This was the way of life the Byzantines preferred. It was a curious form of oriental Christianity, all the pride and glory centring in one man, himself a servant of Jesus. This eastern form of Christianity spread to Russia, where the orthodox Church is the Greek Church. The Greek Church is the Church of Constantinople, for very soon Greek was the language of Constantinople, of emperors and people alike. And this Greek Church keeps much of the mystery of eastern religion, it seems to teach that strange, passionate humility which makes a people prostrate itself before an emperor as before a beautiful god, so that millions willingly leave their lives in the hands of one man. Contrasting with this, there is a savage ferocity which hates the thing or being it has so humbly adored.

So the empire of Constantinople, called the Byzantine Empire, continued for a thousand years after the death of Constantine the Great. Its people were alternately humble to baseness, and inhumanly ferocious, until they were finally destroyed by the Turks in 1453.

Chapter III. Christianity

The Greeks and Romans were pagans. They had many gods — gods of war, of harvest, of health, of marriage, of family, of the hearth and threshold, of the grove and fount and the sea. Everything that was wonderful or important or special had its presiding deity. The mystery of the passion of war was represented in the god Mars, the mystery of the deep, active sea was embodied in the god Neptune. To all the great gods temples were built, beautiful buildings of marble, with pillared fronts, and interiors decorated with carving and with statues, with gold and silver and ivory. There was always the altar, where the fire burned, and sacrifice was offered. Often there was a figure or statue of the god of the temple, sometimes exposed, sometimes veiled. The hill of temples in Rome was the Capitol. Here, on the Capitoline Hill, was the temple of Capitoline Jove, the greatest of the Roman gods. But the lesser gods had simple shrines, perhaps just a niche in the rock by a stream, or a plain altar among the trees of a grove.

There were really no settled priests in the pagan world. Some influential man in the neighbourhood was given the charge of a temple or sacred building, which he often had to take care of at his own expense. He had also to perform the sacred rites, as we nowadays get an important personage to perform the rite of laying a foundation-stone. Some very rich man was usually given the responsibility for the great games — which often cost him large sums of money — so there was no sacred profession, no special beings were set apart, like our clergy. All were men alike, none was more sacred than another. The richest and most important man in any district usually was responsible for the temple, that was all. There were certain servants of the temple, who attended to funerals and so on. But these were not priests — they were just servants of a different sort.

Thus there was no preaching, no praying, no talk about sin or salvation, no service at all. The people just came to the temple by themselves; or on special days they came to see the rites performed, the sacrifices offered, the acts of the ritual gone through. After the sacrifice the officiating priests — priests for the moment — might sprinkle the crowds with water, or the blood of the offerings, as a sign of purification. And then there was usually dancing and festivity, or perhaps public mourning. On feast days the people were crowned with flowers, or with leaves, or with ears of corn, according to the god of the day. People just cast a few grains of incense on the fire, in token of offering. And on certain days

they made gay processions, the dancers going in front, dancing for the gods. And of course the great games were an offering to the gods also; there was a special ritual sacrifice and special songs were sung. But it was all part of the active, actual, everyday, normal life — not something apart. In the country the peasant people loved to take flowers, or a little cake, or a gift, to the shrine of some nymph by the fountain, to the god Pan among the trees, to Priapus in the orchard, to some fauns or nymphs in a cave. There would perhaps be a statue of Pan, with a stone altar; perhaps only an altar; perhaps a mere stone; or simply a tree or grove or spring of water; and offerings would be hung on the trees or laid on the rocks around. But there was no priest. It simply pleased the people to visit these little sacred places, and sometimes to make processions through the fields, the women carrying garlands and corn, one leading the kid that would be sacrificed, the boys playing on flutes or whistles, and dancing in front. Then when they came to the sacred place they imagined a god or nymph was hidden there, inside the trees or deep in the running spring. So they offered gifts and made little songs or speeches or dances to the hidden deity.

Since everything that was wonderful had its god, the Greeks and Romans were not jealous of strange gods. Rather they were anxious to sacrifice on the altars of strange gods also, for this would bring an added blessing. They would leave out no deity if they could help it. St. Paul tells how he saw an altar in Athens inscribed to the Unknown God. This was so that no god, lacking an altar, should in anger take revenge on the remiss men of the town. The Romans did not hate the Ephesian Diana, the Asiatic many-breasted mother, or the bull-slaying Persian sun god. They even welcomed them to Rome, these strange deities, and built them new temples.

But, if they freely respected all gods, they expected the same free reverence for their own shrines from all strangers. If the Romans exterminated the Druids of Gaul, it was because the Druids were a curious, special priesthood, who inflamed the people to rebellion, not because of their worship. The Romans, indeed, never understood the worship of the Druids, which was a worship of the mysterious tree of life, the dark, inhuman mysteries of the beginning of creation. The Romans could only understand human things. They could not comprehend the Druid inhuman creed, and they were filled with vague horror. They disliked the secret, powerful priests, who had such power over the people. In their own pagan world it was different. If there were priests in Egypt or Syria, they were no longer very important. There was an amiable equality between diverse gods. Only the Druids were a hostile priesthood. And only the God of the Jews was a jealous God. Only the Jews showed their hatred and horror of the free-and-easy pagan worship. Augustus very politely gave orders and gifts to have sacrifices

made in the temple of Jerusalem to Jehovah, that Jehovah might not forget him, Augustus Caesar. This was very flattering to the Jews, to think that the Roman emperor acknowledged their God. None the less they scorned even Augustus for worshipping his own great Jove on the Capitol of Rome. They thought even Augustus an abomination, an idolater, one not fit to live in the sight of Jehovah. Continually, when in Palestine the Romans celebrated the festivals of their own gods, the Jews, looking on with black hatred and horror, could not refrain from breaking out into fury, trying to stone to death these hated idolaters and their idols. It inflamed the Jews to such fury, to see the temples and shrines of the strange gods in their land, and to see the Roman processions, with their flute-playing and their garlands and their dancers and their dressing-up, moving in the streets of Jerusalem, that they rose again and again, great crowds of Jews killing the surprised Romans, and breaking the altars. When Caligula tried to put his statue in the Temple of Jerusalem, the Jews turned as one man, and it was taken away by the wise Roman governors. But while ever there were idols in Zion, no Jew could rest, insurrections were continual.

The Romans at first were puzzled. Why should not all gods be polite and respectful to one another, as civilised men are polite and respectful to each other, they wondered? But at length they were irritated, and finally infuriated against these uncouth, jealous, vindictive Jews, who were so unreasonable in their hatred. Why should this stubborn and fanatic people disturb the world with their hatred? the Romans asked themselves.

At last there was a general rising, and the Roman government had to fight for its own existence in the land of Israel. When Vespasian was emperor, Titus, his son, besieged Jerusalem. The rebellious Jews made the most obstinate resistance. The Romans, however, took the town and killed the people in front of them. The streets were heaped with dead Jews. But the last defenders were still at bay, in the Temple precincts. After terrible fighting, the defenders saw that the Holy of Holies must be taken. So the Jews themselves set fire to the great Temple, to prevent its falling into the hands of the enemy, and heaps of the faithful defenders preferred to die in the flames, rather than by the swords of the Romans. The Temple burned furiously, a great conflagration. Yet the Romans got much treasure, and holy relics like the Ark, the seven-branched candlesticks, the sacred vessels. And these they took to Rome to adorn the triumph of Titus. Away there in Rome the citizens were not much impressed by these most holy relics of the Jews. But they had satisfaction in seeing them, for already the Jews were beginning to be detested, because of their fanatical pride, the pride of the Chosen People.

The burning of the Temple took place in the year 70 A.D., forty years or so

after the death of Christ. There were at this time already many Christians, most of whom, naturally, were Jews of Jerusalem. They were called Nazarenes. They did not cease from their old religion when they accepted Christ. They still went to the Temple, and took their children as Jesus was taken, to be circumcised; went, as Joseph and Mary went, to the holy feast of the Passover; they observed the Jewish Sabbath, and the Jewish rites, eating no unclean meat, such as we now eat. They were Jews who believed also in Jesus.

These Nazarenes founded the first Christian congregation, which is called the Church of Jerusalem. Their first fifteen bishops were circumcised Jews. Thus the Romans, who did not care about details of religious belief, knew no difference between Christians and Jews, in Jerusalem. At the same time, in the great cities Antioch and Ephesus in Syria, Alexandria in Egypt, Corinth in Greece, even in Rome, Christianity was quietly spreading among Gentiles who did not keep the feast of the Passover, or any of the Jewish observances. So that already, before the fall of Jerusalem, there were two kinds of Christians: Nazarenes, or judaizing Christians, and gentile Christians. There was the Nazarene Church of Jerusalem, and there were the gentile Churches of Antioch, Ephesus, and so on.

When the Temple was destroyed, and Jerusalem ruined, the poor Nazarenes were desolate. They retired away beyond Jordan to the little town of Pella, and there they remained, lonely and disconsolate. But still they could make many comforting visits to the Holy City, returning at the appointed times. For they had a passion for their old observances, their old solemn feasts. They longed for the day when the Temple would be re-built, and Jerusalem restored as it was before. They were still the chosen people, more important than any one in the world, according to their own idea; and now most important even among Jews, since they had their Messiah.

Again, however, in the time of the Emperor Hadrian, about fifty years after the fall of Jerusalem, the Jews rose once more in a terrible rebellion, all over Palestine. A new town had been re-built in place of the destroyed Jerusalem. The Romans gave it the new name of Aelia Capitolina. And on Mount Moriah they erected a temple to the Roman Jupiter. This last offence caused the last, fatal insurrection of all the Jews.

Hadrian was merciless this time. His soldiers fought, and spared none. They took towns and villages, and reduced them to ashes. It is said that about 600,000 Jews were destroyed, and a thousand towns and villages. For now the Roman hatred of Jews was confirmed.

Hadrian built up Jerusalem this time as a purely Roman city. The very name of Jerusalem was abolished, and that of Aelia put in its place — just as St. Petersburg has become Petrograd. Moreover, no Jew was allowed even to

approach within sight of the town. Hadrian's soldiers kept strict watch, and any native found creeping back to the passionately-loved hills of the Holy City, now crowned with Roman temples, was either hanged or crucified or otherwise severely punished.

So, the Jewish nation was broken and scattered — and for ever; thrown out into the world, where for more than a thousand years it still refused to mix with the world.

The Nazarenes at Pella were heart-broken by this new disaster. They felt they were not Jews in religion. Yet they must suffer. They at last took the only wise course. They chose a Latin bishop, Marcus, a Gentile. And Marcus gradually persuaded the congregation to renounce the Mosaic law. This they did, reluctantly. But once it was done, they were free from the taint of Judaism. They appealed to the Romans, saying that they were not Jews at all any more, but Gentile Christians. And finally, the Romans allowed them to return to Aelia. For it was recognised that a Jew was not a Jew because of his nation, but because of his religion. Nationality or citizenship or race made a Greek or a Roman or a Gaul. But religion made a Jew. So that when the Nazarenes abandoned the Judaic religion, they ceased to be Jews. In a little while they were permitted to restore the old-time name to Jerusalem. But the Temple was no more re-built, Zion which kept the Feast of the Passover did not exist any more. And bitterly did the true Jews now hate the Christian Jews, traitors to the old faith.

Thus Christianity became a Gentile religion. It spread rapidly in the Roman Empire. Almost everybody in the Eastern Empire spoke Greek, many spoke Latin also: in the West Latin was spoken. Preachers and teachers went everywhere, speaking Greek in Asia, Latin in Italy, and telling that there was but one God, whose Son was Jesus; telling that through love men should have everlasting life, in immortal happiness. They had to go quietly, secretly, for they had many enemies, the bitterest being Jews. But they found many hearers; particularly many Roman soldiers and officers listened closely. For soldiers have time to think.

Now, in a world weary of strife and excitement, and clogged with slavery, the thought of peace and innocent love, and of a life of still, gentle, everlasting happiness, was most beautiful. So many people in the world of that day were weary of the continual fighting, the continual excitement of wild combats in the circuses, wild or pompous displays, and the stifling physical luxury of the daily warm baths, the daily feasts, or long evening banquets which lasted from afternoon till sleeping-time, a long meal of talking and eating and drinking wine, and telling stories or reciting poems. For the well-to-do people it was a life all of one sort, stifling. And for the slaves it was a life of ignominy. On both hands,

men were tired.

What could a slave want more than to be told that in the sight of God all men were equal, were brothers: and that all those who believed in Jesus would spend eternity with the Son of God, in continual happiness? And what could the tired, satiated soldiers and citizens of Rome want more than to realise that this fighting, this feasting, this excitement, this continual warm luxury of baths, was nothing but a clog on the spirit: that the spirit of Jesus did away with all this barrenness, and left men free from bodily necessities, unhampered as the angels or the beams of the sun, eternal as these?

Gradually, these beliefs became enlarged. The Christian Romans turned with dislike from the theatres and circuses and baths. They disliked physical luxury, all the pleasures of the body became hateful to them, for they had had too much of such gratification. Their spirits wanted to be free, infinite, their bodies were a drag and a burden. So they kept strictly away from the temples, the feasts, the games; they were quiet and inspired with holy, spiritual desires. They began to dream of the Second Coming of Christ, which was prophesied, and regarded as near at hand. Christ would come soon, and destroy the kingdom of the world, and make the kingdom of bliss on earth. The Judgment Day was near at hand, and after that, the Millennium, the era of bliss, when men would walk the shining streets of the new city, here on earth, at peace and in shining concord with all men. Every one would be good and pure. When these happy days should come, there would be no more luxurious feeding and drinking and dressing, and no fighting and no hard work. All would wear pure white, none would need more than a little pure food and drink, there would be no rich, no poor, no hungry people and none greedy. There would be sufficient of all things for all, and men and women, shining and beautiful in their clean clothes, would walk the streets of the New Jerusalem, the New Rome, bright as flowers, blissful in the bliss of love, speaking gently, and coming to the throne of Jesus to sit near Him. For Jesus would reign like a Caesar, all majesty and love.

All Christians believed in this Millennium — but for the slaves it was pure transportation. Then, they too would walk the streets of gold, and sit with the King of Kings: they too would wear pure white robes, and Jesus would love them even more than the rest, because they had been despised and oppressed on earth.

It was calculated when the Second Coming would take place. The Six Days of Creation, when God made the world, were taken to mean six thousand years. On the seventh day the Lord rested — and He blessed that day. Therefore when the seventh thousand of years should approach, the Lord would look at His works, judge them, and prepare for the Millennium of rest and blessedness. Now the

primitive Church at Antioch calculated that from the days of Adam to their own day, that is, to the year 100 or 150 A.D., would be just 6000 years. Therefore the Second Coming must be at hand. Jesus Himself had spoken of it, St. Paul had warned them.

These early Christians went in daily expectation of the terrible event. They had been told that famine and earthquake would precede the Second Advent, and that fire would fall from heaven. Famine and pestilence came, as well as earthquakes. In Vespasian's reign a great fire, that raged for three days, again gutted a large part of Rome. And then, in the year 79 came the terrible eruption of Vesuvius which buried Pompeii, Herculaneum and Stabiae in a rain of fire and lava and ash. Clearly these were the signs of the Second Coming, when Christ would judge the world.

The Christians trembled, and purified themselves. Their lives were rigidly holy. As darkness fell, at evening, they quivered, thinking that perhaps that night the heavens would break, and Christ with His angels and prophets would appear, summoning all men alike to His footstool. The slaves, as they silently submitted to their masters, and the poor men, as they saw the Roman ladies borne through the streets in golden litters, thought to themselves: ' Ah, if they but knew, these proud and vainglorious Romans! If they but knew the sword that even now is unsheathed in the sky, ready to strike! If they could know, how, in a short time, a short time now, they will be cast down into eternal punishment. Their Rome will be wiped out, and I shall be walking the bright streets of glass in the New Jerusalem, the New Rome, with the Saviour, the King of Kings. He who is greater than any Caesar is coming down upon Rome — ah, if they knew this, they would change their behaviour. They would cease to command so proudly, they would get down from their litters . . . '

The Romans could feel some secret working against them. They could feel, as it were, a silent threat in these people who were so quiet and humble and mysterious. They tried to fathom the mystery, but could not. For the Romans knew nothing about Christians, they thought them just a sect of the detested Jews.

It is surprising how little the Romans knew about the new religion. A famous man, named Pliny, was sent to be governor of Bithynia in the year 111. There, some men were brought before him, charged with the crime of being Christians. But Pliny knew nothing about the sect nor the crime. He had heard the name of Christians merely — but what were they? And how was he to proceed against criminals whose crime he did not in the least understand?

He made a careful examination of the Christians, and sent to his friend and master, the Emperor Trajan, a curious account of the new sect. Pliny was in

some ways very favourable to the Christians. He disliked, with true Roman fairness, to prosecute people whose guilt he could not perceive. Yet he lamented that the temples in Bithynia were almost deserted, and that the sacred victims, birds, kids, found hardly any purchasers, and that even the ignorant country people were infected with the new superstition. Bithynia was the province just across from Constantinople, in Asia, along the shores of the Black Sea. It is evident there were more Christians there than in Rome.

Now Pliny was a great and famous man, and a lawyer. He must have known about the trials of all the criminals in Rome. He must have known the proceedings of all the more important cases. Yet it is quite evident he knew nothing of Christianity when he went to Bithynia, and that he had before him no laws, and no previous cases against Christians, to guide him. He was quite at a loss. And he showed no dislike of the new people: it only troubled him that they refused to be Romans as well as Christians.

This shows us that the educated Romans were ignorant of what the Christians were; that there cannot have been any real legal prosecution; and that the Church in Rome either was not very large, or was very secret, or did not extend into the upper classes, at the end of the first century. We are forced to think that the early Christians, from the days of Paul, were very secret, like a secret society, very cautious in revealing their mysteries: particularly that mystery of the Second Coming.

The Romans must have heard, of the Christians, because of the famous prosecution under Nero, in the year 64.

Now just at the time that Pliny went to Bithynia, Tacitus the Roman was writing his famous history. This was some forty years after the fire of Rome, which, as we know, Nero is suspected of causing, in order to enjoy the spectacle. Tacitus writes that 'Nero wanted to find some people on whom to lay the blame of this great fire: ' Consequently, to get rid of the report, Nero fastened the guilt on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the common people. Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus, and a most mischievous superstition, thus checked for a moment, again broke out, not only in Judaea, but even in Rome, where all things hideous and shameful from every part of the world find their centre and become popular. Accordingly, an arrest was first made of all who pleaded guilty; then, upon their information, an immense multitude was convicted, not so much of the crime of firing the city, as of hatred against mankind. Mockery of every sort was added to their deaths. Covered with the skins of beasts, they were torn by dogs, and perished; or they were nailed on crosses; or they were doomed to the flames, and

burnt, to serve as a nightly illumination, when daylight had expired.

‘ Nero offered his garden for the spectacle, while he mingled with the people in the dress of a charioteer, or stood aloft on a car. The guilt of the Christians deserved, indeed, the most extreme punishment, but there arose a feeling of compassion in the people; for it was not, as it seemed, for the public good that they were sacrificed, but to glut one man’s cruelty.’

This is all Tacitus says about the Christians: and it is probably all he knew. Pliny seems to have known no more. Yet why should Nero suddenly have fallen on these obscure people? We cannot say. Only we do know that the Christians were confused with the Jews; that the Romans truly believed the Jews hated mankind; and that Nero hated the Jews. But Poppaea, Nero’s favourite wife, was a Jewess, and his favourite player was a Jew. And the Jews have always been accused of betraying the Christians, when they themselves were in danger. For of all their enemies, the Jews hated the Christians most. So perhaps it was suggested to Nero that certain persons, Christians, were the vilest and most evil of all Jewish sectaries.

However that may be, it is certain that a terrible fate befell these poor Christians. But we may be almost as certain that the persecution was as short as it was sharp and sudden. Nero had probably forgotten in a month’s time that there were such people as Christians.

We see, however, both from Tacitus and Pliny, that there was current a vague but deep hatred of the Christians. Why should Tacitus think that the guilt of the poor creatures deserved the most extreme punishment? What was the guilt? All he says, is that they are convicted of hating mankind.

Now we can understand how the Romans came to imagine that the Christians hated mankind. In the first place, they considered the Christians were simply a set of Jews, and the Jews, the Chosen People, really did hate or despise all who were not of their own race. And then the Romans believed, above all, in the social, public life — men living usefully and openly together; and the Christians shunned the social and public life of the Roman world. The Roman was interested most of all in the State, in the affairs of the empire. The Christians turned darkly away from such affairs, and would have nothing to do with them. They were a secret people. They held their meetings at night, in underground places. But this was probably because the poorer Christians, such as slaves, were only free at night; and also because the congregations could not meet without being disturbed, save in some remote place, such as the catacombs.

The Romans detested secrecy, and at once suspected evil. No matter how a Rorftan came unawares on these Christian meetings, he could never find an idol or a statue, no sign of a god, no sacred ornaments, no ritual going on, no altar

with its fire, no sacrificial objects. The places of worship were bare. And therefore, said the Romans, the Christians must be devilishly cunning. They hid all their objects of worship. They had horrible secret rites. The tale went round, how a convert when he joined the Christian community was taken into a dark room, and given a knife, and made to strike: and how, under the heap of flour which he struck, was a hidden babe, on whose blood he was made to swear to keep secrets — and so on. These are tales which men always make up out of darkness and ignorance.

The vulgar populace of Rome hated the Christians, because they could feel the strange exulting secret of the Second Coming burning in Christian breasts. They hated them also because this secret people would not mix in with the rest. But the Christians could not mix in with the rest. Religion in those days was not a private matter that concerned a man's private soul only. It was part of every act of public life. If a man went out to dinner, he must spill wine to the gods, and call on the deities of the house, and the deities of hospitality, to witness his service and his thanks. If a family moved to a new house, the house must be devoted to the family gods, and blessed, with a whole festival and a sacred ritual. At a wedding, a funeral, a christening, the gods were supposed to be present, men made sacrifice and wore special emblems. On certain days, all doorways must be decked with laurel, men must all wear crowns of leaves. On other days, processions with dancing passed through the streets. The great games were dedicated to the gods. Men attended the altars beforehand, brought offerings or threw sweet incense on the fire, and were sprinkled with holy water or blood of victims.

From all these things the Christians kept gloomily apart, afraid to offend their own God. They could not go to the houses of their pagan friends and relatives, nor to a wedding or funeral, nor to any festival, nor to the games. They could hardly walk in the streets without being required to pay some attention to some pagan god, throw incense on some altar. They kept gloomily and unsociably apart, they looked upon the great show of Roman daily life with dark eyes of reproach and foreboding. This gradually infuriated the sociable Romans, who lived all their life out of doors, in the porticoes of the Forum, in the baths, in the streets — or, at evening, sociably reclining round the table.

Yet the Christians were bound to keep apart. They had a curious belief that the Roman gods were really powerful demons. When Lucifer, or Satan, the bright angel, rebelled against God, and was cast out with all his rebellious host, he fell down to earth and to hell. But he had the power of appearing in disguise to the souls of men. Thus it was the great angelic demon, Lucifer, who appeared to the Greeks or Romans as the great god, the Jupiter or Jove of the Capitol. Jupiter

was not a mere nothing. He was Satan himself, terribly powerful, whom the Romans worshipped. And it was Satan, under the name of Jupiter, who had given the Romans their terrible, but evil power over the world. And Satan possessed the soul of every Roman who worshipped him, or who worshipped any other of the great powerful demons, under any name — Venus, or Mars, or Neptune, or Pan, or Priapus.

So the Christians believed. And they were terribly afraid of putting their souls into the power of these living demons, the pagan gods. Men used to swear then, more solemnly than they swear now, by the name of Jupiter, or Jove. If a Christian caught himself saying, in the common fashion, ‘ By Jove!’ then he must stop himself, and pray to Jesus to save him from this same terrible Jove. The Romans said, ‘ Jupiter bless you ‘ quite commonly. But if a pagan said it to a Christian friend, the Christian must lift his hand to ward off the evil influence, and protest that Jupiter was not God.

Thus naturally there grew up in Rome a great dislike of these quiet, silent Christians, with their distant manners and humble bearing and their patient looks of reproach, and their air of secret power. And the Christians became more secret. They had various signs, amongst themselves, whereby they knew one another. If a Christian were talking with another Roman, of whom he was not sure, he might carelessly, as if unheeding, draw the shape of a fish in the dust with his toe. Then he would wait to see if the other noticed. If not, the Christian would smear out the sign. For the fish was the symbol of Jesus.

Secrecy grew on the one hand, hatred on the other. It was the vulgar crowds who hated the Christians most. And the greatest troubles came when the greatest crowds gathered together. If the Christians were timid, they trembled as the days of the great games approached. If they were fervent and fanatic, they looked forward to a chance of martyrdom. For on these days the great mob of citizens, after serving at the altars, and being inflamed with wine, would remember the silent mystery and threat of the absent Christians. For the Christians taught that men should turn away from the world, particularly the world of Rome; and this maddened the Romans. If there had been a flood, or an earthquake, or la famine some one would suggest that the Christians had caused it by their secret magic. Then up would go the great howl of a mob, a vast herd of vulgar people — ‘ The Christians — the Christians — to the lions with the evil-working Christians!’ In this torrent of vulgar frenzy the governors were helpless, and many Christians were martyred.

The Roman government almost always tried to be just. But even the magistrates disliked the Christians, not for their crimes, but for their opposition to the government. The will of the father was sacred in Rome — all authority

was established upon it. But if a father bade a Christian son or daughter attend any pagan festival, the youth or maiden quietly refused, which horrified the Romans. If a master bade his Christian slave attend him to the temple, the slave refused. The Christians would take no part in the government whatsoever. Even the soldiers threw away their arms, even officers threw away their swords and helmets, and loudly declared they would serve no pagan master whose soul was destined for hell, but only Christ the Lord. Such soldiers were promptly tried by martial law, and executed — as they would be to-day. But the pagan Romans were shocked. The magistrates felt that a great secret body of people was working to undermine the State altogether, and bring it down in ruin. They felt the danger. And, of course, it was a real danger. For surely it was the Christian religion finally which brought down the great pagan world into nothingness.

Still the magistrates and governors wanted to be fair. It was the people themselves who were violent and base' — the great mob. When Pliny asked the Emperor Trajan how he should proceed, Trajan made these two wise conditions concerning the prosecution of Christians: first, that there should be no search or inquiry made about any citizen, to find out whether he were guilty of the crime of Christianity; and secondly, any person who accused another man of this crime falsely, should pay a heavy forfeit. So that, as far as the government went, the Christians were fairly safe. And again, the magistrates did not want to punish. They admitted that the lives of Christians were blameless, as far as could be proved. Later, they admired the charity of the sect, their care of the poor and helpless. They only wanted the Christians not to persevere in opposing the great Roman State. If they could only persuade a Christian prisoner to cast a few grains of incense on the altar of one of the gods, as a sign of respect for the old gods, and for the great State these gods represented, then the magistrates dismissed the accused man with praise. But alas! the Christians often preferred martyrdom — nay, they even claimed the honour of martyrdom, which would raise them up to be saints in glory. And this astonished and repelled the pagan magistrates, who could not understand, and who detested, such an attitude.

As the Christian Church grew in numbers and power, the Roman government felt the danger more, and became more strict. At first, each congregation of Christians humbly and quietly elected from their own community a minister, or presbyter, to lead them and guide them. Then, as congregations grew larger and more numerous, there must be some authority to keep them all together. So the worshippers elected from among the presbyters a wise, capable leader, called an episcopal presbyter, which really means an inspector. These inspectors held meetings among themselves, settling all disputes among congregations, and governing all equally. But then it was necessary to have a head even of these

meetings of inspectors. So at last they decided to choose one of the oldest and wisest of the episcopal presbyters, and make him the episcopal leader or governor, for life. And thus bishops first came into being, governing the communities of Christians.

But for more than a hundred years the Christian communities were mildly and wisely governed by the humble bishops, who accounted themselves just simple Christians, with special duties to perform. They settled all troubles, and they wrote famous letters, like those of St. Paul, to the Christian groups in other great cities, Alexandria, Corinth, Antioch. So the whole Christian community kept closely in touch, and was really strong, however it was hidden and obscured under the brilliant Roman Empire.

By the end of the second century there was a large community in Italy called the Church in Italy, another in Syria, another in Africa, another in Greece. These great provinces each had its own Church, or community of Christians. It was arranged that the episcopal presbyters should meet regularly in the chief town of the province — Rome, Corinth, Antioch, as it might be — and hold councils. These councils were called synods. And at these councils the laws of the Church, called canons, were drawn up, saying how a presbyter should be elected, and how a bishop; how the Church service should be conducted, what the priest or minister should do, and what the congregation should do; also exactly what they should believe; also how the large sums of money given to the Church by the Christians should be used.

At first each town or community in Italy sent its bishop to Rome, to the synod, and all bishops were equal. But again it was inevitable that there should be one among them who stood first. And it was inevitable that this should be the bishop of the chief city, the metropolis. It came to pass that the metropolitan bishop — that is, in Italy, the bishop of the Christians in Rome; in Egypt, the bishop of the Alexandrian Christians — should be the leading Christian in the whole province. And soon, instead of advising and entreating his brother bishops, his brother Christians, the metropolitan bishop began to command them, to instruct them what they should do. He became a dictator, with a great deal of power and pride.

The Churches of the different provinces kept closely together, under the ban of the Roman Empire. But they disputed which was the leading Church. And again Rome claimed the lead. She claimed two apostles — St. Peter and St. Paul, both martyred in Rome. No other city could claim more than one. And on the merits of St. Peter the Romans established their Church, using the phrase from the Bible — 'Thou art Peter, and on this rock I will build my church' — as their justification. Rome claimed the lead. Her primate, or metropolitan, was the first of the bishops. The episcopal office, the established office of the bishop, had

made each bishop equal. But now the primates or metropolitans rose above the simple bishops, and the Primate of Rome rose above the metropolitans. This took place about the end of the third century. Gradually the metropolitans became powerful as princes, and the Primate of Rome, the Father, or Papa, Pope, in time came to be almost as powerful as an emperor — indeed, at certain periods much more powerful. So there came into being an established priesthood or clergy, such as the Roman and Greek world had not known; an order of men set apart in life, having a separate, if very great power in their hands, the so-called spiritual power, or power of the Church.

Even as early as 260, Paul of Samosata, metropolitan of Antioch, aroused the indignation of the East by his rich living, palaces, slaves, splendour — his haughty pride, and his scandalous deeds. So soon was the simple, humble Christian Church changed. And as early as the third century terrible disputes tore the Churches of the East and West, Rome and Antioch. This was concerning the time when Easter should be celebrated.

Following these came worse conflicts, quarrels as to matters of fact, and as to the meaning of the Trinity. The early history of the Church, particularly in Africa and the East, is horrible with warfare and massacres between contending parties of Christians. Certainly the Christians destroyed each other in far greater numbers, and with much more terrible ferocity, than they were ever destroyed in the pagan persecutions.

Yet as the Church grew richer and stronger, the Roman government grew more strict, more frightened, more vindictive, and the Roman mob more violent. In the time of the Emperor Maximian, who was a savage soldier, and half a barbarian, there was a horrible massacre of Christians — 236 A.D. Just before this, however, under the reign of Severus, the Christians had been allowed to build their own public churches, and Christian bishops, for the first time, had attended at the Roman court. But in 249 began such a fierce persecution, that the Christians could not for two years elect a bishop of Rome, after Fabianus their primate had been martyred in 250. The emperors were now awaking to understand the strength and power of Christianity, so that either they hated the religion violently, and persecuted the Christians, or they were attracted, and definitely friendly.

In the time of Diocletian began the great persecution which the Church has called the Era of Martyrs. Yet for eighteen years that famous emperor reigned in the spirit of mildest and most liberal religious toleration. It was Maximian and Galerius who really instituted the persecution. They were soldiers and originally ignorant peasants. They became generals and emperors at a time when Christian soldiers began publicly to throw away their arms, and declare for Christ and

martyrdom. Maximian and Galerius naturally were mad with fury. Then Diocletian became terrified. He saw the power of the new sect: he knew that the Christians of that day claimed supernatural power to perform miracles. He believed they actually did perform the stupendous miracles they claimed. It terrified him. He called it magic, evil. And severe persecution began, about the year 300.

All the property of the Church was to be taken away; all the Christian writings over all the Roman world were to be delivered up, seized, and publicly burned; churches were to be levelled with the ground. When the edict was published in Nicomedia, a Christian at once tore it down, shouting his scorn of such tyrants. He was roasted over a slow fire. This was in 303. Within ten days' time, Diocletian's bed-chamber in Nicomedia was twice in flames. The mind of the Emperor was filled with a terrified horror of such people. Every mode of torture was put into practice to discover which of the Christians had committed the deed. Nothing could be extorted.

Even Galerius fled from Nicomedia. There was general terrible persecution.

But almost immediately Diocletian abdicated from the throne, weary of governing. Constantius and Galerius followed: Constantius always a friend of the Christians. And in 313, as we know, Constantine issued his edict of toleration. The favoured church in Constantinople was the Christian Church. Constantine was baptized just before he died.

Christianity had triumphed. For two short years, however, there was a relapse. The wise, clever, sad Julian the Apostate reigned in Constantinople from 361 to 363. He passionately wanted to restore paganism. He detested Christianity, though he was too humane to be a persecutor like Galerius. He was pierced with an arrow in the Persian war, and, dying, he is said to have grasped a handful of blood that flowed from the wound in his breast, and tossed it up to heaven, crying: 'Thou hast conquered, Galilean!' Julian is the last great pagan.

In 394 Christianity was established as the only religion of the empire. In Constantinople the Church sank before the power of the Emperor. In Rome the empire collapsed, and the curious, unstable power of the popes began. Everywhere the pagan religion was prohibited. But still in country places the simple people took offerings to the hidden shrines, groves, and springs.

The Christian Church now had two centres — Rome and Constantinople. In Constantinople was the Greek church, which had no images, only flat, quaint pictures of the Mother of Jesus: the priests of the Greek church also must marry, and wear a beard; the ruler or chief of the church was called the Patriarch. The Patriarch never acquired in Constantinople such power as the popes acquired in Rome.

As the empire collapsed in Rome and Italy, the Christians became more unsettled. There were fierce conflicts between the parties in Rome, Alexandria, Constantinople, Antioch. But gradually the great religion of the new era established itself. Rome governed the Christians of Europe and North Africa, Constantinople was head of the Church in the East until the Mohammedans arose to break her power.

Chapter IV. The Germans

In Roman days the civilised world was exposed to great inrushes of wild, savage, or barbarian life. Floods of fierce, unknown people would suddenly pour in torrent over the settled, cultivated lands of the Mediterranean. They came from two directions, north and north-east. In the due east, Persia and India were civilised and settled. In the south, the ancient civilisations of Egypt and North Africa gave no signs of new life, and the negroes from beyond the Soudan never seem to have ventured from Africa. But north of Italy were vast, unknown lands, and away to the north-east, beyond the Danube, lay all the immense, terrifying wilderness of Tartary.

The first invasions the Romans had to suffer were from the Cimbri, who crossed the Alps from Gaul. Julius Caesar, however, conquered and subdued Gaul. And now the empire found its northern limit.

Two great reservoirs of human life lay beyond the Roman power. The greatest of these was Tartary, or Scythia, that immense region stretching from the Crimea to China, where dwelt innumerable hordes of dark, wild, horse-riding Asiatics. But the nearer reservoir was the Baltic Sea, which cradled the Germanic races.

The Romans of Latium were short, dark men of the wine-loving lands. Their great strength lay in their courage, and in their power of faithfulness, their intelligent, disciplined acting together for one united purpose. They conquered practically the whole civilised world of their day, and they seemed to have, as the Englishmen of this period, a constitution that would stand any climate, whether it was snowy Scotland or the burning sands of the East.

But the Romans never conquered Germany, their power never stretched far beyond the Rhine. The great Teutonic race seemed the indomitable opposite of the Romans. These short, energetic, dark-eyed men looked with astonishment at the huge, naked fair limbs of the men from the northern forests, at fresh, fierce faces with their blue eyes, and at the yellow hair — or the hair dyed bright red. These almost naked, big, white-skinned men lay and lounged about in an abandoned indolence, when no warfare was at hand: whereas the Romans were always spruce and aware of their conduct. So the latter looked with surprise and disgust at the sight of the great fair warriors lying about in the dirt, their limbs all soiled, their minds utterly indifferent and negligent. But still more impressed were the legions of Rome when these same huge, indolent warriors in warfare hurled forward like a great massive storm, flinging themselves with all their

weight upon the wall of Roman iron, the locked shields, the swords and spears.

In the reign of Augustus the Romans suffered some terrible losses in the dark forests of Germany. But in the next reign the great general Germanicus inflicted severe defeats on the Germans. So the warfare went on, incessantly almost, for five hundred years. When it came to a battle, the Romans, with their iron-clad bodies and their perfect discipline, nearly always defeated the great naked hosts of Germans, destroying the barbarians in numbers. But when it came to following up these barbarians, through swamps and dark forests, to their homes, their camps, then the Romans were at a disadvantage. Brave as they were, the veterans were filled with mysterious fear when they found themselves in the dark., cold gloom of Germany, the northern savage land. They felt they had gone beyond their natural limits. So the Roman power never really extended across the Rhine.

The two opposite races of Europe had now met. The dark-eyed, swarthy, wine-loving men from the sunny lands met with the fierce, blue-eyed men, and the two could never understand one another, never meet and mix. It is as if the white-skinned men of the Germanic races were born from the northern sea, the heavy waters, the white snow, the yellow wintry sun, the perfect beautiful blue of ice. They had the fierceness and strength of the northern oceans, the keenness of ice. And thus they resisted the Romans, children of the sun.

The Romans first knew of Germany as the land whence the amber came: for in Rome amber was much esteemed. And as merchants are often the first explorers, so it was probably Roman and Phoenician traders who first penetrated the savage regions of Germany, even to the grey, forbidding shores of the Baltic, where amber was found in the greatest quantities. For amber is the fossilised resin of huge pine-trees that perished in one of the world's previous days. These traders no doubt gave presents to the wild Germans, of small bronze or iron ware — and then, if they returned alive, they came back rich men, having pieces of amber that would sell for a fortune in the markets of Rome. And they came back with strange stories of the unknown dark lands of the north.

By Germany, in that time, was meant all the land north of the Rhine. How far it stretched no one knew. But the Romans knew of a far-off northern sea, with great islands — beyond which lay the everlasting ice. Probably the northern sea was the Baltic, and the huge islands the Scandinavian Peninsula, and Jutland.

In the north of Germany were huge flat lands, often wet, swampy, impassable, through which wandered the great rivers Rhine or Rhenus Flux, Weser or Visurgis, and Elbe or Albis. To the south, however, the whole country was covered by a vast forest of dark fir and pine trees, tracts of which still remain. This Hercynian forest created the greatest impression on the Roman imagination.

No one knew how far it stretched. German-natives who had travelled through it had gone on for sixty days without coming to the end of it. In the illimitable shadow the pine-trunks rose up bare, the ground was brown with pine-needles, there was no undergrowth. A great silence pervaded everywhere, not broken by the dense whisper of the wind above. Between these shadowy trunks flitted deer, reindeer with branching horns ran in groups, or the great elk, with his massive antlers, stood darkly alone and pawed the ground, before he trotted away into the deepening shadow of trunks. In places fir-trees, like enormous Christmas-trees, stood packed close together, their dark green foliage impenetrable. Then the pines would begin again. Or there were beeches in great groves, and elder-bushes here and there: or again a stream or pond, where many bushes grew green and flowery, or big, heathy, half-open stretches covered with heather and whortleberries or cranberries. Across these spaces flew the wild swans, and the fierce, wild bull stood up to his knees in the swamp. Then the forest closed round again, the never-ending dark fir-trees, where the tusked wild boar ran rooting and bristling in the semi-darkness under the shadows, ready to fight for his life with the grey, shadowy wolves which would sometimes encircle him.

Winter came early. In October the first snow began to sprinkle down. And then for months the unending forests lay under snow, branches tore and cracked, reindeer pawed the snow to come at the moss or herbage, wolves ran in packs threading their way between the trunks, and the great bear lay curled up asleep in his hole. Meanwhile the perishing German natives would creep forth to hunt, braving the cold with their half-covered limbs.

It seems that the climate of North Europe was colder then than now. In those days great armies of Romans marched across the frozen Rhine, rolling their ponderous baggage-wagons on the ice. This could never happen now, the river does not freeze to this extent. The reindeer, also, which roamed the northern swamps and the Hercynian forests, now cannot live even round the southern Baltic. He must go much farther north, or he dies of warmth. Again, we are told that the wine of the Romans froze into lumps in the German camps. Now, in these very regions the vine grows. Perhaps the clearing of swamps and forests has made the difference, perhaps there is a change in the world.

In their camps along the Rhine the Roman soldiers, surrounded by the frozen, cracking darkness, told terrible stories of the land confronting them, stories of wolves, and growling bears, and the sudden, ferocious bull; stories of lurking, deadly Germans; stories of horrible sacrifices in groves dark as night; stories of demons that howled through the trees in the blackness, of wolves that turned into ghastly, blood-drinking women — and so on. So that tales of the black Hercynian forest thrilled the ears of the Romans, far off in Rome, in Antioch.

The burning deserts of the East and the semi-tropical jungles did not impress the Roman imagination as did this northern forest.

Throughout the wild, icy Germany lived many separate tribes of Germans, some in the plains to the north, some among the hills, some deep in the forests. But wherever they were, they did not live in towns or close-clustered villages. The primitive German did not love his neighbours. He liked to have a space around himself. And therefore, between the tribes were wide border-lands of waste, dreary desert, swamps, or hills, or impenetrable forest, utterly uninhabited. So the tribes felt the pride of their own isolation.

And even individuals felt the same need for space or distance. When a German was going to build a house, he looked round for some pleasant spot, by a stream or spring — for he loved running water — or in a corner of a heath, or in a dry meadow among the swamps, and here, quite alone, he fixed his dwelling. With the help of his servants or slaves, and his women-folk, he made a round timber hut of poles driven into the ground, thatching this with straw or reeds, leaving a hole in the roof for the escape of the smoke. Here he lived with his family and his servants, until one wished to marry. Then the serf or slave would build a hut for himself at some little distance from his master. In the hut the man lay, in chilly weather when there was no fighting to be done, stretched out on the earth by the hearth; children rolled naked in the dirt, serfs' and masters' children all together, indistinguishable; the woman prepared food or spun flax, or idled likewise. When they were warm the men and young people went quite naked; the women had a long linen chemise that left the arms and breast bare. In colder weather all had a cloak, fastened with a pin or a thorn, leaving the rest of the body uncovered. But in very cold weather they wrapped cloths or skins around their limbs, binding them close with long crossed straps. The wealthiest often were clothed in linen trousers, wrapped close to their limbs with straps or coloured bands and tied close round the waist with another band, over a close shirt. The Germans, unlike the Romans, never wore long, loose robes, but liked a clothing that followed the form of the body. The women wore their hair long. In some tribes, the man must leave his hair and beard uncut, till he had slain his first foe, when he cut short his hair and shaved his beard. Some warriors kept a long, loose tail of hair, which they dyed red; some coiled their long hair carefully in a knot at the back of the head. Some were proud of their appearance, having beautifully sewn cloaks and garments of soft fur, soft fox-furs bordered by the spotted otter, or by ermine, white shirts with purple border-edges, and linen cloaks with colours. Some also plastered their houses with bright earths or colours in decoration.

Their wealth consisted in small, ugly cattle, horses, slaves, weapons.

Weapons, slaves, horses: these were the dearest possessions, and they were bequeathed by a father, not to his eldest son, but to the bravest.

Slavery, however, was not in Germany what it was in Rome. In Germany a slave was a captive from another tribe, taken in war — or the child of such captives. But he was a free man living his own independent life, not a piece of human cattle, owned body and soul, as in Rome. A slave in Germany had his own house and family, his own possessions, he lived his own life. Merely he must do some work for his owner, pay some tribute of cheese or meat or leather, tend the cattle, and fight when called upon. Indeed he was more like a peasant than a slave.

Life was very careless. In summer the cattle roamed about feeding in the marshes or on the forest edge, and little patches of barley were grown. Then the people had meat, rough cheese, and a porridge of barley, and berries — there was no bread. The chief food was meat. In a bad winter, however, many cattle died of starvation, there was no corn, the people suffered. Then the warriors hunted, or lay inert by the hearth, drinking barley beer while it lasted, or gambling with one another in the chief's house, or lying motionless in a sort of despair. The poor often dug out underground dwellings where they could huddle in winter for warmth, lying long days without moving, when cold and starvation was upon them. But the wiser and richer made suitable provision of meat and barley, and could keep warm and merry in their houses.

The German love of freedom and separateness would not endure either service or control. What chiefs they had were war-leaders, chosen from among the bravest warriors. In times of peace the people did as they liked. They only had councils to decide what was to be done on some important occasion. To the council came the warriors, fully armed. They sat in a circle in the open air, drinking from wooden pots filled with beer, and listening to the chief, or the old wise man, or the priest, who was speaking in the centre. When the speech was warlike and fierce, they clashed their spears on their shields in approval. When it was peace-provoking, cowardly as they termed it, a low, harsh ‘burr ...’ of displeasure went round the circle. And so they settled the questions of war and peace, life and death.

War was the great business, fame the chief reward. The warriors cared little for possessions. They wanted to own famous weapons, good horses, a few slaves: for the rest, they kept hold on nothing. The land belonged to everybody and nobody, it was shared afresh every year. Agriculture was scorned. Fighting was the business of life: after that, hunting: after that, feasting and drinking and hearing songs of bravery. Nothing else mattered. Life was not made for producing. It was made for fierce contest and struggle of destruction, the glory

of the struggle of opposition.

The women were the same as the men. Marriage was sacred, and the woman was deeply respected, even revered. But she, too, cared only for the glory won in battle. The greatest warrior, the man who had killed most enemies in battle, he was the greatest man, and to him the women looked with the greatest admiration or respect.

The warriors were by turns lazy and violent. Half their time they would be by the hearth in the huts, or on the grass out of doors, drinking their beer till they were drunk, or gambling together, or feasting, eating huge masses of meat in the wooden hall of the chief man, or watching the naked youths dance amid sharp spears, swift and agile in the dangerous play. And then, at length, suddenly sick or surfeited of this stupid business, they would leap up, sound the horn, and dash out to the hunt of bears, boars, or deer; or better still, they would gather for war.

Above all things, they loved fighting. They were wild with joy when the signal came, and they could gather together to go to war with some other tribe, or some other race, or with the Romans. Then, naked, or wearing little cloaks, and carrying the precious shield and spear, they marched through the forest tracks, or over the plains or hills. Their shields of wood or osier were painted bright in different colours, and were the most treasured possessions. If a warrior lost his shield he was disgraced for ever. He had far better lose his life. Spears also were valuable. Iron was scarce, and therefore a narrow, sharp spear-head was a thing to treasure.

Sometimes a number of warriors rode on their rough horses, to form the cavalry; and if the journey was a long one, the wives with their children followed behind, to attend to their husbands. For the women were trained to be as brave and fierce as their warriors. Honour was everything; and honour in a man meant having killed the greatest number of enemies. To be brave, to be feared as a terrible fighter, to have honourable wounds, this was the best a man could hope for. Nothing else really counted. The bravest and fiercest and most cunning in war were chosen chiefs, the young men served their chief with their lives. If he died they were all killed fighting round him. If he survived they went with him to his house, and feasted with him.

When they drew near the enemy they formed their battle-array. In front were all the picked youth of all the nation. These would fight on foot along with the cavalry. The army began to sound its battle chant, a loud, harsh kind of song, droning and rising to a loud roar. The warriors would put their concave shields to their mouths, to make the sound reverberate more fully. And then, with a great cry, suddenly they would fling their spears with wild force on the enemy, hurling themselves forward. The naked youths of the front were swift as the horses; they

leapt and swerved like the wind, darting and stabbing with their spears, and sheltering themselves with their shields, ever surging after the wild, fearless leader. But it is terrible to think what must have happened as they hurled their naked bodies against the iron wall of Roman shields, and their spears against the iron helmets and cuirasses of the legions. The wonder is that they achieved as much success as they did, through their fearless, terrible daring, and their onrush like the wind.

Feeling themselves repulsed, they would flee as swiftly as they advanced, only to form again, and whirl once more wildly to the attack. If they broke, however, and came running towards the women and followers in the rear, then the German wives would bare their bosoms and ask for death rather than disgrace. They would drive their husbands back to the battle, and even fight fiercely along with the men. When it was over, wives and mothers would command their husbands to show their wounds. And the women rejoiced when they had to dress many honourable wounds on the bodies of their fighters; they mourned if their sons were unscathed.

These battles would sometimes follow one another in swift succession, and the losses were enormous. How could they be otherwise. The naked dead piled the fields. But there was little lamentation. It was honour, after all, to die fighting. The men were silent, thinking of the slain; the women wailed the death-song. But they did not forget. In the long nights of winter, as they lay round the hearth, the men spoke with praise and regret of the brave dead.

Returning from battle to their homes, the council would give cattle, horses, and land, or slaves, to the chief who was bravest in the war. He, in his turn, would give the blood-stained spear to his bravest young man, to another a horse, or the clasp of a cloak. And the young warriors lived and ate at the chief's large hut, sleeping on the floor of his hall. This was all their reward, all their earning. For there was no money or riches. The days lapsed into sloth after war, for warriors never worked. They fought, hunted, and feasted: it was for slaves, old people, women, or weak men to labour, tilling the soil, tending cattle, growing flax, making linen, preparing skins, food, fodder, and fire-wood. The brave told tales of battle, or listened to a bard who could sing the stories of heroes. And they drank till they fell all drunk, and woke to drink again, to gamble, to sing, to hear stories, to watch the dance.

Gambling was the greatest vice — that and drunkenness. Men whose lives are not given to some form of production or creation must for ever live by risk, the chance of loss and danger. When the joy of war is taken from them, and they have no more the keen stimulant of the risk of losing their own lives, of taking another life, then they must fight the peaceful contest in gambling, risking their

all for a chance of taking all. This is the passion of a non-producing, eternally-opposing people. And the German warriors in their peace days would gamble away house, horses, weapons, slaves, wife, children, clothes, then an arm, then a leg, till they had gambled everything, including their whole person, into slavery. And then they would serve as slaves, until perhaps the chance of war gave them freedom and property again.

Of the religion of the ancient Germans we do not know much. We know that they worshipped chiefly in dark groves, where on their rude altars they sacrificed victims, horses, and even men. Then they nailed the skulls of men and the hideous skulls of horses to the sacred trees. This was part of that great pre-historic tree-worship which seems to have been universal over Europe and even America, before our history begins. The dark, groves with their blood-stained altars terrified and horrified the Romans, whether they found them near the Mediterranean, near Marseilles, or in Spain, Britain, or Germany.

The tree-worship, the worship of the Tree of Life seems always to have entailed human sacrifice. Life is the fruit of that Tree. But the Tree is dark and terrible, it demands life back again. With its branches spread it becomes a Cross. And in our hymns, even to-day, we speak of Jesus ‘ hung on the Tree.’

The tree-worship was perhaps the central worship. But there were other gods, gods of thunder, of the sun, of fertility — and to these temples were erected. In the North the great goddess of birth and production had her temple on an isle in the Baltic. This great mother is like the gentle cow which supports our life. Even the Mother of Jesus had with her in the stable the cows of peace and plenty, when Jesus was born. So every year the mysterious ‘ Mother,’ an idol mysteriously veiled, was taken from her temple in the North, and, placed on a wagon drawn by cows, was led in slow procession sacredly through the land. And whilst this mysterious idol was moving in its procession, a holy peace must be kept throughout Germany, no man’s hand must be lifted in violence, under pain of terrible penalty. So religion even then provided the breathing space of peace in the years of incessant fighting. Without such provision, men must have exterminated themselves.

It was the blue-eyed Teutons of the North, for ever unshaken in their opposition to the Roman spirit, who at last broke the empire. They were the great external opposing force. But when once Rome was broken, the German races mingled and mixed with the dark-eyed races, and it is from this intermingling of the two opposite spirits, two different and opposite streams of blood, that modern Europe has arisen. The fusion of the two opposites brought us the greatness of modern days: just as the hostility of the two brings disaster, now as in the old past.

Chapter V. The Goths and Vandals

The great Germanic races were restless. Having no real purpose in their lives, only to fight and oppose one another, they became tired of home and needed adventure. Also, although the land was large, yet a few people occupied a big space, so that as the population grew there was not room.

Therefore from the dim lands of the northern seas, and from those vast regions far beyond the Elbe, from time to time came sudden overflowings of blue-eyed people pouring towards the Mediterranean like floods from a melting winter. The first hosts crossed the Rhine into Gaul. As early as 105 B.C. the Romans were startled and terrified by the appearance of hosts of fair-skinned barbarians, warriors with shields and spears, with clumsy wagons drawn by oxen, and accompanied by women and children. This was the first host of emigrants. They must have come from Germany. They threatened Italy, inflicted a terrible defeat on the Roman armies, then turned aside and wandered across France to Spain, then back again to the Rhone, slowly and uneasily migrating for several years before they were finally defeated and destroyed by the Roman Marius. These were the famous Cimbri.

After this Rome had only to repel invasions from Gaul, and when Gaul was finally conquered in 51 B.C., the Romans effectively barred the incursion of the Germans by placing a line of invincible forts along the Rhine, and keeping a great army there stationed. This outlet therefore was closed up to the Teutons. But behind the marshes and forests the nations were stirring. Out of the Baltic and from the northern sea-board sailed the long sharp ships of the first Northmen, rowing away to the Mediterranean to plunder, to fight. Some of these blue-eyed Northmen stayed in the Mediterranean lands.

But away in the North the Teutons were seething restlessly. They could not take ship in any great numbers. Yet they must burst out. The Rhine and the Rhine frontiers were held fast. The sea lay to the west, northwards lay ice. The only way they could move was eastwards, behind Germany, as it were, traversing South Russia and approaching that other, opposite water, the Black Sea.

We do not know exactly what happened. We only know that in the middle of the second century great peoples or tribes called the Goths and Vandals were living in North Germany. The Goths were established to the east, about the mouth of the Vistula and the Gulf of Danzig, and eastward of them again, still on

the Baltic, lay the Sclavonic or Celtic tribe of the Venedi or Wends. More westward in Germany, about the mouth of the Oder and south of the peninsula of Jutland, lay the Vandals, a nation of many tribes. West of these again lay the Langobardi, a famous tribe living on the lower Elbe, on the North Sea.

Some great impulse must have started these nations moving slowly eastwards, to Russia, then to the Black Sea, then southwards towards Constantinople and southeast towards Rome; for each of the nations successively broke across the Danube into Roman territory, and came down to Italy. First came the Goths, then the Vandals, and lastly, the Langobardi.

First, we must consider the first-comers, the Goths. We know that in the year 150 or thereabouts they were still living in Germany. About the year 220 A.D. they appear by the Black Sea, harassing the Roman frontier-province of Dacia. Dacia lay between the Danube and the Dniester, where Roumania is now.

In the seventy years intervening between these two dates, the Gothic nations must have moved across South Russia and Poland, following the course of the rivers, travelling very slowly in migration, and carrying with them great numbers of men from tribes that lay in their way, such as the Venedi. The Ukraine was a rich fertile land supporting fine cattle and abounding in honey: for these were the wealth of a barbarous land, cattle and bees — milk and honey — and later, corn. This land the Goths must have enjoyed: yet they scorned the pastoral life; they moved on in their wild poverty in search of adventure and war and plunder. So they came to the rich Roman colony of Dacia. There they turned south, crossed the Dniester, and plundered south to the Danube.

After a time they crossed the Danube into the peaceful Roman provinces, plundering and laying waste the land. They took and sacked the great city of Philippopolis, massacring the inhabitants. In this fatal year of 251 A.D. the Roman Emperor Decius marched against them with the flower of the Roman armies. In the great fight the Goths were victorious, Decius was killed, and his body must have been trampled down in the bog, for it was never recovered.

After this the Romans gave the barbarians great gifts, persuading them to retreat beyond the Danube. Then the Danube was fortified as the Rhine was fortified, and the Goths found themselves checked. They settled in the lands we now call Roumania and South Russia. But they must have adventure. They made themselves great flat-bottomed boats and sailed off on the Black Sea wildly southwards, through the Bosphorus into the Mediterranean. There they plundered and burned. On one expedition they sacked Athens. But in 269 the plundering hosts were terribly defeated. The fleet, was destroyed, there was great slaughter. Then pestilence fell on the Gothic hosts and wiped them out. Of those that remained the women were sold into slavery, the young men were

enrolled into the Roman army. The rest of the barbaric nation agreed to remain beyond the Danube.

They remained quiet for fifty years. When they broke out again it was in the great Constantine's reign. He marched against them and punished them severely, in 322. After this the Goths turned against their savage neighbours in the west. These were the Sarmatians, whom we now call Cossacks. The Sarmatians were big, fair like the Teutons, but they had the manners of Asiatic Tartars. They wore loose robes of skins, lived in tents, spent their lives on horseback, and fought with long lances. A fierce wild tribe, with their shaggy beards and their skin dresses, and their strange speech, they were barbarians even to the Goths, and horrible to the Romans.

The Sarmatians lived in the plains of Hungary. They appealed to Constantine. Constantine came with his army and gave the Goths such a severe lesson, and yet such a just peace, that the Gothic nation held the name of Constantine in great reverence, respecting for his sake even the noble emperor's weak descendants in the years to come.

Constantine, as we know, shifted the capital of the empire from Rome to Constantinople. The empire had now two centres. Soon it had two separate emperors, an emperor of the East, and an emperor of the West. And then there was a ruinous division between the two halves.

Just as Rome was destroying herself internally, a sinister event took place outside. The year 375 is marked as an epoch in the world's history, for it was the year in which the Huns, coming out of the vast unknown Asia, crossed the Volga on their way to Europe.

The Gothic nation was more or less settled to the north of the Danube. It comprised two great tribes, the Ostrogoths or East Goths, and the Visigoths or West Goths. The ancient king of all the Goths, Hermanric, was an Ostrogoth. He was a famous king, and the Gothic nation was developing and becoming civilised.

Suddenly, as a volcano bursts and the lava pours down on a doomed people, the Huns burst out of Asia and came down in their black myriads upon the Goths. The Huns were hideous little people on horseback, savage, terribly fierce, and numerous like clouds of locusts. Hermanric tried to oppose them. He was killed, and the defeated Ostrogoths submitted to their hideous little enemies. The bulk of the Gothic nation, however, including nearly all the Visigoths, fled in supreme terror to the Danube, to escape the diabolic myriads, of the enemy, who seemed to them more like baboons than men.

At the Danube the Romans were on the watch. The terrified Goths stretched out their hands and cried and implored to be allowed to cross. But the officers

must wait for the imperial permission. At last came the fatal mandate: the Goths were to be brought over.

The river was a mile wide at the place where the Goths encamped, opposite a Roman camp, and it was rushing rapidly in flood. The large boats came over, but as they returned heavily laden they became unmanageable. Many were swept away, and great numbers of unfortunate families of Goths perished shrieking in the water. As the boatmen became more skilled, however, vessel after vessel crossed and returned with its load of human life. The Goths left on shore clamoured and cried. Sentries were posted to keep a watch to the north, the fires were kept burning at night. And meanwhile the great boats came and went without interruption, all through the day, and through the night, lighted over the black dark river in the night-time by great fires on opposite shores, by torches and fire-baskets fixed to the ships. The Goths, with women and children, stood packed in a solid mass, motionless in fear as the boat rocked and swung over the flood. Then they landed in safety on the southern shore. Day after day, night after night the transport continued, and still a crowd surged at the landing-place on the north shore. At last, however, it was nearly over. The warriors came down, the Gothic sentries left their posts, to be rowed across. The left bank seemed clear.

And now the Romans found themselves with vast hosts of refugees, covering the countryside in a thick, helpless encampment. There was no food, or not enough, and no shelter. The Goths began to starve, for the country could not support such a terrific influx. Starvation was worse than fear of the Huns, loud murmurs arose, then fights; the Roman garrison and populace were in danger of being overwhelmed.

At this juncture appeared on the left bank the king of the Ostrogoths, with the remainder of his people, imploring to be allowed to cross. The Romans were obdurate. They would not add to the danger and confusion of their own awful condition, overwhelmed as they were in a sea of homeless, ravenous refugees, great, powerful, wild people. The Ostrogoths in terror searched along the banks, and at last found a place where they could contrive to cross without Roman help.

Then terrible times followed. Famine came, women and children died of starvation, men like great gaunt wolves roamed seeking food. Romans were massacred for their supplies. The Goths spread out, hungrily devouring the land. The Romans tried to prevent them. And then war began.

The Goths united under the brave Fritigern. In 377 a great but indecisive battle left the plain of Salices white with the big bones of the Goths, the smaller, finer bones of the Romans. In 378 the Goths swept down the Balkan Peninsula to Hadrianople, not far from Constantinople itself. They were met by the Roman

armies under the brave Emperor Valens. But the huge Goths in the frenzy of desperation swept yelling on the Roman ranks, the legions broke, the Emperor was wounded. He escaped, but whilst his wounds were being dressed in a cottage the shouting Goths surrounded the house. Unable to burst in the door, they shot burning arrows into the thatched roof: the house was soon in flames, consuming its inmates. Only one soldier dropped from a window to carry the awful news to Constantinople. Two-thirds of the Roman army was destroyed, and the empire received the first of her death-blows.

The Goths retreated from Hadrianople. Their hosts rolled slowly towards Constantinople, and from the hills of the suburbs the barbarians from the north looked in wonder on the lovely shining city girdled by the blue sea beyond them. Then they turned north, laden with plunder.

Terror and hatred of the Gothic name now filled all Roman hearts. Since Constantine there had been some friendliness between the two nations; the Goths had been rapidly learning some of the arts of civilisation from the Romans, the Romans had been pleased to teach the great northern strangers. Consequently in the cities of Asia were very many Gothic youths, being brought up by the Romans and taught the Roman way of life. Now, in their terror and horror of the Goths, the Romans of the east made a plan. On a certain day, in all the eastern cities the Gothic youths of fourteen, sixteen, twenty years of age, tall, beautiful young men, educated, speaking Greek or Latin, and looking upon their Roman friends as brothers, were gathered together in the market-places as if for some game or show. Suddenly they were all slaughtered, every one, all in one day.

This made the breach between the two nations irreparable. But the Goths were never capable of long, disciplined efforts. They became weary, and then they abandoned all their plans. So, after the death of Fritigern, the armies crumbled away. Then the wise Emperor Theodosius made friends with the Gothic leaders, and persuaded the nation to settle in peace in the Balkan Peninsula. And in Constantinople, and in the Emperor's wonderful palace the barbarian chiefs were received and entertained as friends, till they became used to splendours and to civilisation, and lost some of their warlike passion.

But peace was only temporary. In 395, a few weeks after Theodosius was dead, the Gothic nations were again in arms. Seeking fresh fields of plunder, the chieftain Alaric led his bands into Greece and ruined the land. During this successful expedition he was raised on a shield in front of the ranks and hailed by the warriors 'Alaric, King of the Visigoths.' Thus the nation again united under one leader, and this one of the boldest and most artful of men.

Rome was now in a state of weak, helpless terror. Alaric saw that it was time to strike. In his panic the emperor of the west, Honorius, gave orders for the

calling home of the frontier legions, from Britain, from the Rhine. The fortresses of the Rhine, that had been held fast for hundreds of years, were abandoned to the natives and to decay, whilst the legions marched across Gaul to Italy. On the great wall from the Forth to the Clyde the Roman sentries took their last look at the misty Highland hills to the north, then descended the towers to mount no more. The wall was left to the fury of the Caledonians. And slowly, not very surely, the legions converged towards Rome.

In the year 400 Alaric invaded Italy. With his swift army, which was becoming accustomed to Roman lands, he swept past Verona towards Milan, where the Emperor Honorius lay terror-stricken. Honorius fled, pursued by Gothic cavalry. He would have been taken but for the advance of the Roman armies from the south, led by the great general Stilicho.

Stilicho himself was a Vandal by birth. But he had been brought up by the Romans, and was faithful to them. He was a splendid general. He wished to take the enemy at a disadvantage. Since their contact with the Romans of the east, the Goths had become Christians. The barbarian army under Alaric rested near Turin, piously to observe the most sacred days of Easter. Though a Christian himself, leading Christian armies, yet Stilicho decided to take advantage of this circumstance. He fell on the Goths whilst they were celebrating their most holy festival. The Goths were taken by surprise, though they soon recovered. They fought bravely, but were terribly defeated. This battle of Pollentia is famous as the great defeat of the Goths, the saving of Italy.

Alaric managed to escape into the Alps. He came down with another army, and was again defeated by Stilicho, and with difficulty extricated himself and retreated beyond the Adriatic. Italy breathed free again.

But now it seemed as if all Germany was breaking loose and pouring down on Italy. Clouds of Germans had been moving from the Baltic to the upper Danube, whence they were urged forward by the pressure of the Huns from behind. In 405 they broke through the Alps into Italy. Stilicho marched north and again won a great victory. Twelve thousand of the defeated Germans, who were of the tribes of Vandals, Burgundians, Suevi, took service with Rome, and Stilicho was again hailed ‘ Deliverer of Italy.’ The rest of the barbarians were driven back into Gaul.

In 407, on the last dark day of the year, hosts of Germans marched over the Rhine, on the ice, into Gaul. They were never driven back again — the Roman frontier was broken for ever. The barriers between savage and civilised Europe were destroyed. The Roman frontiers along the Rhine had enjoyed a long peace. The land was beautiful with villas and gardens and exquisite Roman cities; a fair, cultivated landscape stretched away into Gaul.

Suddenly, the peaceful inhabitants, who had been used to ride and hunt in Germany, safe even in the Hercynian woods, and who were accustomed to see the tall Germans in the market-places and circuses of the Roman frontier towns, peaceful purchasers and sightseers, now, without warning, saw flames arise and spears flashing. The colonists were massacred, the land was blackened, the barbarians overran Gaul. It was in this year that the legions still in Britain revolted against the Roman rule, and declared themselves independent.

The Romans were not satisfied with trouble. In 408, for mere reasons of court jealousy and intrigue, they basely beheaded their great general Stilicho. The Roman court had established itself among the impassable marshes of Ravenna, on the Adriatic. There they felt secure in themselves, so they did not care what became of Italy. Honorius trembled and exulted. He agreed to the execution of Stilicho.

Alaric heard of the shameful death of his great rival. Then cunningly, smiling to himself, he began to negotiate with the foolish Honorius, thus keeping Ravenna quiet, whilst with his Gothic armies he marched past, down the Flaminian Way, straight to Rome. On he went, till he passed the stately arches, and pitched his camp under the walls of the great city. This was in 408. For six hundred and nineteen years, since the invasion of the Cimbri and Teutons, barbarians from the same lands the Goths came from, Rome had been inviolate. Now it was reduced by famine. But Alaric was a Christian, and declared himself no enemy of the sacred city. He demanded a ransom of all the gold and silver and costly furniture in Rome, and a surrender of all the German slaves. ‘What have you left us?’ asked the trembling Romans. ‘Your lives,’ said the contemptuous Visigoth. And he marched quietly away.

In 409 Alaric again besieged Rome. The Emperor Honorius and his court were still enjoying themselves in safety behind the marshes of Ravenna. Alaric sent bishops of the Italian towns into Rome, offering peace. But Rome would not accept Alaric as an ally. Still he did not attack the town, but marched down to the Port of Rome, and held up the food ships till Rome herself submitted.

Yet still the stupid Honorius would not come to terms with Alaric. Instead he actually sent a rival barbarian chieftain with an army against the great Goth. The third time, Rome paid for the cowardice of Ravenna. In the year 410 Alaric appeared in wrath before the city. At the hour of midnight the Salarian Gate was treacherously opened, and the fury of the tribes of Germany and Russia and Asia, Teutons and Celts and Slavs and Tartars, poured through the ancient, inviolate streets. Alaric, a Christian himself, exhorted his Christian Goths to spare life, but to seize treasure. This they no doubt did. But there was no controlling the fierce Slavonic Alani and Sarmatians, the bloodthirsty Huns, the

still heathen Germans who found themselves in the vast, medley army. Terrible slaughter took place in the streets, in the houses, even in the churches. Rome had fallen, her pride was gone for ever.

For six days the barbarian armies occupied Rome. Then they proceeded to ravage Italy. After this they scattered, to enjoy their spoil. The rich Romans were dead. In their lovely villas by the sea the Germans sprawled their huge limbs, lying drinking, gambling, singing, feasting, as at home. But now they lay on warm, marble terraces, stretched on silken cushions, looking out past the orange and almond trees to the blue waves of the Mediterranean. Beautiful delicate slaves attended the huge warriors, bringing wine cooled with snow, and rare food, and exquisite sweetmeats made of honey, and apricots, and oranges, and raisins, also beautiful bunches of grapes, and peaches each one laid sweet and downy on its own leaf. There the savage heroes shouted and sang, telling stories of the far-off grey Baltic, or of the bleak steppes of Russia.

But Alaric died in 410, when he was preparing to cross to Sicily. He was only 34 years of age. It is said that the river Busento was turned aside by the Goths, and that Alaric with all his arms and treasure was buried in the river bed. The river was then brought back to its own course, so that it rolled its waves above the great Visigoth. And then the workmen and slaves were all killed, the secret kept for ever.

The Goths began to sicken with diseases in Italy. Ataulf, their new chief, made peace with Honorius and later married Placidia, the Emperor's sister. Then he led his hosts out of Italy, leaving the land at peace. He moved into Gaul, and then he decided to cross the Pyrenees.

The legions of Spain, like the legions of Britain, had revolted from their Roman allegiance, and in 407 they had invited into their lands the wild barbarians who had crossed the Rhine into Gaul. Of these the Vandals were the chief tribe. They were a much more ferocious, destructive race than the Goths, so that we still speak of an act of wilful destruction as an act of vandalism. Spain, a lovely and highly civilised Roman province, was lost when her treacherous legions invited the Vandals over the Pyrenees.

In 415, however, Ataulf, the successor of Alaric, being now friendly to Rome, determined to march with his Visigoths over the Pyrenees and dispossess the destructive Vandals. This he did, defeated the barbarians, and established his kingdom in North Spain, his capital in Barcelona. And thus began the Visigoth rule in Spain. The Visigoths in Spain became the nobility and freemen of Spain, as did the Normans in England, the natives forming the lower classes. Later the Moors came and overthrew the Visigoth rule, but after some hundreds of years the Moors were driven out, and the proud Spaniards, in whose veins runs the

Gothic blood of Alaric, resumed their sway over the Peninsula.

Whilst the Visigoths settled themselves in North Spain, the Vandals still held the south. In 428 the Roman governor of North Africa rebelled against Rome. He sent across the Straits of Gibraltar and asked the fierce Vandals to come to his help. The Vandals, who were ready shipbuilders, saw their chance. Under their king, Genseric, they sailed across to the lovely and rich North African provinces, once the granary of Rome. Genseric was a terrible, inhuman leader. The Vandals fell upon the sunny African cities like a cloud of death. Soon they had dispossessed the Romans, and then was established a powerful, sea-faring kingdom of Vandals in the lands we now call Tripoli, having the capital in Carthage, one of the ancient great cities of the world. This Vandal empire in Africa was not destroyed till 534.

Meanwhile Europe was in chaos. African Vandals ravaged the sea, Vandals landed in Italy and again sacked Rome, in 455. In Gaul the Visigoths under Theodoric had established a kingdom in the south of France, in the fair land known as Aquitaine. There they settled down to peace and prosperity, spreading their kingdom over Northern Spain, and ruling a splendid Visigoth realm. They were already Christians.

The Burgundians, another German tribe, settled down peacefully in the fertile fields on the Rhone, the Jura, and by the upper waters of the Rhine. They too became Christians. The Franks, also German, settled in the north of Gaul, around the Scheldt and Somme and the Moselle.

In 490 another Theodoric, the Ostrogoth, founded the Ostrogothic kingdom in Italy, and the Roman empire in the West disappeared. The empire in the East still persisted, governed from Constantinople. But it was hopelessly weak. About 510 the emperor of Constantinople invited the help of the Langobardi. This brought down the ferocious tribe of Lombards into Southern Europe, where their descendants still remain.

These are the real Dark Ages, when Europe was a welter of fighting barbarians. The splendour and peace of the Roman Empire utterly disappeared, Italy was almost depopulated by war and pestilence. The earth fell back into its wild state; a traveller in the once smiling, wonderful Italian country might have imagined himself in a savage land, save for the ruins and presence of Roman buildings, Roman roads.

Still the tide of barbarians flowed over the Danube. But it was no longer German, but Slavonic or Asiatic. The warlike Bulgarians came down upon the Balkan Peninsula, followed by Slavonic tribes, tall, fair, like Germans, but having Asiatic dress and manners, and a Slavonic speech.

So, as the great empire dwindled to the confines of Constantinople, the rest of

Europe was flooded with barbarians from Germany, Russia, and Asia. These barbarians settled down at last, and, mingling or not mingling with the natives of the lands they occupied, formed the base of the great modern nations: English, French, Spanish, Lombard, Swiss, Bulgarian, and so on. All these are formed from a wild mixture of races, in which, except perhaps in the case of the Slavs, the Germanic element was dominant during the Dark Ages.

Chapter VI. The Huns

The great flood of Germanic barbarians that broke over Europe in the decline of the Roman Empire changed for ever the disposition of Europe, and even changed or modified the very races of the different countries. Where the Germans stayed, they settled, and out of their rooting in the new lands rose in time the perfected civilisations of our history. Thus in England the Saxons, Danes, and Normans were all of Germanic blood, and the fusion of these tribes with the native Briton has resulted in our modern English race. In the south of France the Visigoth kingdom of Aquitaine soon developed into civilisation. Aquitaine was perhaps the most cultured land in Europe in the time of Richard Coeur de Lion. Spain had two distinct developments: in the north the Gothic, and in the south the Arabic or Moorish. In the end the Gothic triumphed and dominated Spain. In Italy we have the Langobardi in Lombardy, the Veneti in Venice, and later, the Northmen in Sicily and Naples. These are the races which, fused with the native Italian, brought Italy to her second and greatest flowering, in the fifteenth century. France had the more peaceful German Burgundian settled along the Rhone and the Jura, bringing the land into beautiful cultivation, whilst in the north the fiercer Franks, who gave their name to the whole country, occupied the land from the Rhine to the Loire.

Thus we see that from the distribution of German tribes among native nations, in the fourth, fifth, sixth centuries — even on to the eleventh — the modern nations of Europe have arisen. There is one great barbarian race, however, which we have not considered, and this is the race whose name rang terror through the whole ancient world. We have said that the year 375 is marked as an epoch in the world's history, by the crossing of the Huns over the Volga. More startling than the name of Goth or Vandal is the name of Hun. Yet the Hunnish force was only the black hammer which smashed up the already broken Roman world; it did nothing towards building up a new world. The Germanic races entered in and formed the basis of a new Europe. The Hunnish force rolled away like a thunder-cloud that has burst and struck the land.

Beyond the Volga lie the vast tracts of Middle Asia, still hardly known to us. In Roman days this enormous region was one dim shadow, whose fringes alone were known. Out of this enormous unknown, from time to time there issued black clouds of human beings, savage and horrible. The black cloud burst on Europe, first on Russia, then on the Germanic lands beyond the Danube and the

Vistula. And every time the black swarm broke out of the east, the white clouds of German and Slavonic barbarians came rolling over Europe to the south. And thus we say the Huns destroyed the Roman world, by displacing the German and Slavonic races and impelling them southwards.

For thousands of years the Huns must have roamed between China and the Volga, and between the Arctic regions and Persia, in that immeasurable basin of dreary land called Tartary or Scythia. They were of Tartar or Mongolian race, dark yellow in colour, Asiatic. The distinguishing marks of the Tartars were that they lived in tents, roaming from place to place: that they tilled no ground: that they lived on horseback: that they had no beards, and wore loose garments.

The Huns, however, were the most terrible of all Tartars. They lived together in families or clans. These families had, in course of time, grown enormous. Thousands of individuals kept together in one moving host, called a horde. When they pitched their round, black tents, made of horsehair cloth stretched over a frame shaped like a bee-hive, or like a barrel, then the plain would be blackened for miles around with the vast encampment. Their cattle and horses were guarded in innumerable herds. They fed on the dreary plains surrounding the camp. Then, when all the grass was eaten, there would be a loud, buzzing activity, as of a world of bees. The black tents disappeared, wagons were harnessed, men on horseback were darting here and there over the plain like clouds of flies, and the great swarm moved on, on into the vast unknown, over the horizon.

The darting, horse-riding Hunnish men were dreaded on both sides of the world. Long before they troubled Europe, they had brought ruin on the beautiful, civilised empire of China. Twice they conquered the great, cultivated lands of China, and had to be paid off with enormous tribute. They even demanded every year a band of the fairest maidens of China: for the Tartar women were hideous and savage. Thus we have still a poem written by an unhappy Chinese princess who was given to a Tartar chief as tribute. She weeps and complains that she, who had been brought up so delicate, silken and flowery in the fair palace of her father in China, should be condemned to be carried off into far exile by a savage Tartar, mingled with his gruesome wives, her only food raw meat, her only drink sour milk, her only palace a tent of woven horsehair, and her only music the shrill noise of Tartar speech. If she could but be a bird, she cries, and fly back to her dear home in China! But no doubt the poor princess perished among the savages, carried hither and thither with the herds in Central Asia.

About the year 300 B.C. the Chinese began to build that wonder of the world, the Great Wall of China, to keep back these Tartars. But continually the pitiless Huns broke through, carrying devastation and slaughter into the gentle lands. At

last, however, in the course of centuries, the Chinese strengthened themselves against this hated foe. They drilled and perfected their armies, and steeled their courage, till at last, about the year 300 A.D., six hundred years after the commencement of the Great Wall, the Chinese armies began to inflict crushing defeat upon the Tartars and Huns. The victory was carried away into Tartary, and far in the wastes, far beyond the Wall the proud Chinese armies erected their trophies of triumph, carven pillars which still exist, with their record of battles won.

It was after this date that the Huns turned west. Gradually those that refused to submit to Chinese rule gathered and roved west, band after band. The first hordes approached Europe. They defeated the fierce Slavonic Alani who dwelt along the Volga. In 375 the hordes crossed the Volga on rafts and flat boats. And then we know how they swept down on the Goths near the Danube, and on the Germanic tribes by the Baltic. On their hideous, swift little horses the Huns overran the land in an incredibly short time.

The Hunnish men were dreadful to look at. They lived on their horses, ate, drank, and even slept on horseback. Whether they gathered their assemblies, or whether they traded in a market-place, they were always seated on their savage little steeds. Mounted, they fought at a distance with bows and arrows and spears, or close at hand, fiercely wheeling and flying on horseback, with swords.

When a Hun did dismount and stand on the earth, he was very ugly. Bow-legged, he waddled as he walked. He was little, short in build, but very broad and powerful. His head was big and like an animal's, with coarse, straight black hair. Tiny black eyes sparkled deep in the flesh of the flat face, the great wide mouth opened and shut. There was no beard, only a few bristles here and there; for the practice of cutting their faces whilst young prevented the hair from growing.

These untamable people were like animals. They were very swift and sudden in their movements, and the first hordes seem to have been almost without human feelings. When they came down on the Goths they slaughtered indiscriminately, opening their wide mouths and slashing and slaying anything that was alive and was not Hunnish. They spoke with shrill, high voices, calling shrilly, using strange, savage gestures. And when they had finished killing, they collected all the booty they wanted, for they were very greedy, and then they set fire to all that would burn, and that they did not want.

No wonder the fleeing Goths were horrified. They felt that behind these fearful faces there was no human spirit. They felt that no human speech could reach these creatures. The Hunnish speech seemed like the shrill, neighing communication of animals. And the Huns were avaricious as demons.

The Christian Romans said that the Huns were not human. They were born of evil spirits who mated with witches in the dreary deserts of Asia.

Human or not, the Romans soon had to reckon with the Huns. The main body of the horde moved slowly. The women were in the great clumsy wagons, that were drawn by five or six yoke of oxen. There were huge wagon-loads of plunder, besides prisoners, slaves, who were on foot. Then there were the herds of cattle. So that the main tribe advanced at a slow pace.

The warriors were just as swift as the horde was slow. No one knew where they would turn up next. They carried no baggage. For food, they cut some slices of raw meat, and these, placed like a saddle, cooked a little between the heat of the horse's body and the warrior's thigh. This made strong, savage food. Beyond this, the horsemen carried little balls of hard curd cheese, which they broke, dissolved in water, and so ate. They could live for many days on this poor sustenance, if they found no other food.

Bands of Huns crossed the Danube and ravaged the land. Then they joined the Gothic and Vandal hosts against the common enemy Rome. At the taking of Rome by Alaric many Huns were present — indeed they formed part of almost every barbarian army. They despised the Romans, particularly the Byzantines. They would not deign to speak Greek. But both Goths and Huns were proud when they learned to speak the military Latin.

Whilst these bands roved, the bulk of the Hunnish nation stayed beyond the Danube. They occupied the great open plains of the land that is still theirs — or still bears their name — Hungary, the land of the Huns. There they roved and hunted, and in time they built large villages of wooden huts, where they dwelt more permanently, although still they would leave the village empty at times, and set off wandering.

Gradually, however, they learned from the Goths and the Romans. The Huns were quick and intelligent in their way; they very quickly picked up Latin, and learned Roman methods of life. But they kept their own habits. They loved money. They would go to the Roman markets over the Danube to sell cattle, cheese, hides, horsehair, and to buy Roman goods. But they liked to sell more than they bought.

The Huns made themselves masters of the upper Danube. At places were stationed their great flat boats and their canoes made of hollowed tree-trunks. From time to time a chieftain would ride up with his bands and his wagons, out of Europe, bringing all his plunder. Then would be great excitement in the Hunnish villages. The Hun would bring with him fair women from Germany or Italy, as many as possible. Some of these he would keep for himself, some he would sell among his neighbours. Then he would bring fine cattle, fine furniture,

gold, treasures of Roman villas, fruits, fine food, casks of wine. There would take place a great feasting and drinking. For the Huns also loved to get drunk at times. In Tartary they made a strong drink called koumiss, from fermented mare's milk. But when they tasted wine, they liked this better, even as the Germans did not care for their own beer when they could get the wines of Italy.

So the Hunnish villages grew rich, and a little civilised. The Huns were not so terrible at home. They treated the slaves and the captured women kindly, if roughly. The men were not cruel, save only in the wild flare of war, when they killed and burned everything before them, as in an intoxication.

The nation was wild and lawless in itself, subject to no rule, but only willing to be led by a military leader or king. In the early fifth century the Hunnish king Rugilas sent his ambassadors or message-bearers both to the courts of Constantinople and of Ravenna. The Byzantine emperor paid a yearly tribute of 350 pounds weight of gold to the king of the Huns occupying the lands of the Danube and the river Theiss, allowing him also the title of Roman general. The Huns despised the Byzantines deeply. When Rugulas died in 433, his nephews Attila and Bleda immediately demanded an increased tribute, and the surrender of the Hunnish emigrants who had taken refuge in Constantinople. The Byzantines gave up the Huns, who were immediately crucified by their fellow-countrymen, for going to dwell in peace with the despised Romans of the East.

Attila is the greatest of the Huns. He was a squat, broad-backed man with a large head and a flat face. But his little eyes sparkled with tremendous passions, his body had great nervous energy. A haughty little creature, he had a prancing way of walking, and he rolled his eyes fiercely, filling the onlookers with terror, and enjoying the terror he inspired.

But he was exceedingly clever as well as powerful. He murdered his brother Bleda, and in 445 founded the great Hunnish kingdom that stretched from the Volga to the Danube. He had a fine wooden palace in Hungary, in the midst of a wooden town. His palace was clean, it had carven pillars and fair halls, with apartments for his many wives.

Attila is perhaps the greatest barbarian conqueror that ever lived. His people loved him, worshipped him as a great magician. 'Attila, my Attila,' sang the warriors.

Attila first turned east. He subdued Russia, Germany, even Scandinavia — the very lands that Rome could never subdue. He spread east and came into contact with China, offering an alliance on equal terms with the emperor of that realm.

In 450, however, Attila set out from his wooden palace on the upper Danube. Genseric, the ferocious Vandal of Africa, had asked him to attack the Romans of Italy from the north. The Franks of Gaul had invited his aid. And, rapacious Hun

that he was, he had heard from the Hunnish armies who had been fighting in Gaul how rich that land was. Therefore he took his dreaded title, ' Attila, the Scourge of God,' and moved with his bands across the lands we now call Austria, Bavaria, Switzerland, to the Rhine. There he summoned all the chiefs of Russia and Germany to his army.

Over the Rhine came thousands and thousands of the mixed host. Swift as clouds the hordes of Hunnish cavalry swept forward and ravaged Gaul. That rich and beautiful land thrilled with horror. Peasants in the country, people in the towns working peacefully and going their way looked up and saw horsemen appearing over the brow of the hill. In a few moments the forerunners became a dark swarm. Like a wind they came down. The towns might hastily shut their gates and hold out for a time. The trembling inhabitants looked over the walls and saw the host encamped. Then slowly over the hill-brow came the heavy wagons.

In a sudden unexpected rush the Huns would be on the town. Grinning with war-excitement, the little men swarmed and slashed, killing every inhabitant in their glee of slaughter. They found priests and bishops hastily baptizing the infants, lest death should overtake the un-christened babies and their helpless souls be lost. This sight made the savage little Huns grin wider. Swiftly the priests and bishops were cut down, the babies tossed on spears. For the sight of the ceremonies of the Christian religion irritated the Huns extremely. Then the town was thoroughly pillaged, food and wine consumed. After the revel, when all was stripped, the retreating Huns fired the towns, and far-off Gauls knew by the redness of the sky what was happening. Cities burned to a blackened ruin, for even the stone buildings were usually supported by beams and pillars of timber; the poorer quarters were of wood.

Such was the fate of beautiful Roman cities like Metz and Treves, and many others. The Huns advanced into Gaul, leaving the earth like a cinder behind them, strewn with the charred remains of men and women. It was said that wherever the horse of Attila set his foot, there the grass never grew again.

As the Huns attacked the sacred city of Orleans, they were threatened by the approach of the Romans, led by the famous general Aetius, who was himself a Tartar from Asia, and the Visigoths of Aquitaine led by the aged Theodoric. Attila moved off. He kept to the open country, for he had a horror of being shut up in a town. Slowly, retiring with his wagons, he was followed by the Romans and the Visigoths, to whose aid came the Burgundians from the Rhone, and the Franks under Merwig. So Attila retreated beyond the Seine. He wanted to find a plain where he could spread out his vast host.

At last, on the plain of Chalons, on the Marne, the two huge armies came

together. On the one hand was Attila, with Huns, Goths, Burgundians, Saxons, Franks, Slavs, a countless host; on the other Aetius and Theodoric, with a vast army of Romans, Goths, Burgundians, Franks, Huns, bands from almost every tribe. It seemed as if one half of the barbaric world was camped against the other half.

There was one hill commanding the plain. Aetius, with his Roman Gauls, and Thorismond, son of Theodoric, with his Goths, seized this position. And then, in the afternoon, the battle began. There was no plan. The two hosts just rushed at one another, and unspeakable hand-to-hand murder went on for hours, among masses and masses of different men. At last the Visigoths decided the day. They drove back the Ostrogoths, who were on Attila's side, and attacked the startled Huns themselves on the flank. The Huns swerved in confusion, broke, and rushed to shelter behind their wall of chariots and wagons. The Goths also desisted. But the roaring bloody carnage went on, till night fell, and men could see to fight and kill no more.

In the morning there was a great scene in both camps. The Goths could not find their king. It was decided he must be slain, and at last his body was found under a heap of dead. With wild cries of lamentation, and clashing of shields, they raised up Thorismond upon the shield, and proclaimed him king. Meanwhile Attila with his Huns was entrenched behind his wagons. Most of his army was gone. It is said he made himself ready for death: he had piled up a huge funeral pyre of saddles. If the Romans attacked his camp he would mount it and be consumed in the roaring flames.

But Aetius with the Gallo-Romans was too exhausted to attack. He waited. Attila also waited. The days passed in suspense. At last suddenly Attila broke up his camp, and retreated east. Aetius followed. Attila moved northwards and re-crossed the Rhine. Gaul breathed free, and Europe was saved. For if, in 451, Attila had won this great battle of Chalons, on the Catalaunian plain beside the Marne, Europe would have fallen under Tartar sway, or at least would have suffered most terribly from the 'Scourge of God.'

It is sad that the great generals of that day were so shamefully treated. We know of the execution of the great Vandal Stilicho in 408. Now Aetius, the one man who could support the tottering world, was foully murdered by the hand of the emperor Valentinian himself; whilst the young Thorismond was slain by his own brothers.

Attila was not finished. He was angry at his defeat, and very much irritated by Rome. The barbarian king was exceedingly proud. He considered himself superior to any monarch or emperor in the world. Therefore he ought to number the highest princess in the world among his already numerous wives. Therefore

he demanded the hand of the Princess Honoria, sister of Valentinian. Honoria herself, being unhappy and foolish, had sent a ring to Attila, asking him to espouse her. The Romans were horrified beyond measure. Honoria was closely imprisoned. Attila's demand was coldly refused.

The matter rankled in the mind of the Hun. He had already many wives, but he wanted to add to them this princess of ancient and haughty Rome. In 452 he marched down from his wooden capital, through the eastern Alps, towards the Adriatic Sea. At the head of the Adriatic stood a noble city, Aquileia, mistress of that sea, and the key to Italy by the eastern route.

In all his offended spite Attila fell upon Aquileia, and took it. Though it was a great and rich city, he destroyed it so savagely, so utterly, that thirty years later, men standing on the site of the town had to look hard to make out the ruins. The surrounding country was a neglected desert. Those people from Aquileia and the villages who had time to escape fled in terror deep into the marshes and islands of the shallow sea, made wretched huts, and miserably subsisted on fish and shell-fish. And this was the very beginning of that which later on became the world-famous city of Venice, built in the sea.

Attila marched on into the plains of the Po. Vicenza, Verona, Bergamo ran with blood and were stripped by the greedy, insatiable Huns. Milan and Pavia submitted without resistance. The whole of the north was Attila's. Milan was a royal city, a favourite with the later emperors. Attila took up his abode in the imperial palace.

In the palace was a large picture painted on the wall. It represented the Roman emperor sitting on his throne, whilst all the other kings, mostly barbarians, kneeled before him and offered the bags containing tribute. This Attila would not allow. He sent for the court painter and bade him change the figures. When this was done, Attila was seen sitting upon the throne, with all the kings, including the Roman emperor, kneeling before him, bringing their tribute. 'That is nearer the truth,' said Attila, as indeed it was.

Attila remained in Milan, Italy trembled helpless. At last, after much fear and despair, the Romans sent a solemn embassy, which fell prostrate at the feet of Attila. They offered, in the name of the Emperor and of Rome, all their treasures, if the king of the Huns would spare Italy from further attack.

Attila considered. He had been for some time in the sunny land. His men were spread about, feasting, drinking, living lives they were not accustomed to, and which were not natural to them. Disease and pestilence had broken out; the Huns were dying like flies. He must take them back into the cold, fresh air of the north.

Therefore he accepted great treasures, and withdrew, threatening horrible

revenge if the Princess Honoria were not sent to him. He slowly crossed Italy and entered the Alps, threading his way northwards towards the headwaters of the Danube, making for his capital in Hungary. All submitted to him on the way.

As he passed he saw a princess of a barbarian tribe, and was pleased by her. So he took her with him. Crossing the Danube, he reached his palace, if we may call it such.

There he made a great feast, a bridal feast for his new bride, whom he married that day in Hunnish fashion, and a feast to celebrate his return in triumph.

The eating, the drinking, the singing, the praise were tremendous. At length all retired for the night. In the morning, it seemed the king lay very late. This was not his custom. The attendants began to listen. They could hear no sound. At last they knocked, and called to their king, but received no answer. Then they broke open the door.

They saw the bride, crouching trembling in a corner beside the bed, covering herself in a veil, speechless. On the bed lay Attila, in a pool of blood. His powerful blood had been too much for his veins. In the night he had burst an artery, and was dead.

This was in 453. The supreme power of the Huns passed with Attila, the Scourge of God — Attila, my Attila! None the Less the nation remained a danger to Europe. Still the clouds of little horsemen swept down on the settled lands. They came from Hungary and Austria, and followed the line of the Danube, bursting down on Bavaria, on Suabia, Germany, and France. This continued even till the tenth century. But the attacks became smaller and less perilous.

The Huns themselves were conquered time after time by fresh Asiatic tribes. First came the Tartar Avars, at the end of the sixth century. They established themselves in Hungary, and were overthrown by Charlemagne. Then came the Magyars, another Tartar nation, who settled in Hungary about the year 900. We speak of the Hungarians of to-day as Magyars, for they use the Magyar language, though their race is mixed. After the Magyars other Tartars and Mongols have conquered Hungary, last of all the Turks. But since the Huns this land has been occupied by Asiatics. Before the Huns it was Slavonic.

Chapter VII. Gaul

Gadhel was an ancient mythical hero of prehistoric Europe, about whom we know little save that he gave his name to a great race of people, the Gadhels or Gaels.

There are Gaels to-day in Great Britain. Their language, the Gaelic, is spoken in Scotland, Ireland, Wales, and Brittany. It was once the language of all France. France, Britain, Ireland, in the days before the Romans, were occupied by one great race, the Gaels, whom we call Celts.

The Romans knew the Gaels or Celts quite early, for this race occupied parts of North Italy and made invasions to the south. About 388 B.C. the small struggling city of Rome was sacked by a Gallic host, and for two hundred years after this it was all the growing republic could do to make headway northwards. However, before Caesar's time the Gauls of North Italy and of the Marseilles district had been subdued and Romanised.

The Romans could not pronounce the word Gael, so they made it Gallus. Gallus is not pleasant to an English tongue, so we turn it into Gaul. The land of the Gauls was named Gallia by the Romans. This is the great country occupied to-day by France, and stretching to the Rhine.

The Gauls or Celts were not savages. From very early times they had taken some part in the glowing life of the Mediterranean. In the south of Gaul was the great port of Massilia, now called Marseilles. Massilia was founded six hundred years before Christ, by settlers from the Eastern Mediterranean. It soon rose to importance, and became the rival of the superb Carthage, that wonderful city of the Phoenicians in North Africa, opposite the toe of Sicily. Massilia at length surpassed Tyre and Sidon and Carthage, and was itself surpassed only by the newer great city of Alexandria.

A great bustle of trade was carried on in Massilia long before Julius Caesar was born to change the world. Merchants arrived from Egypt, Greece, Syria, Africa, and Rome, disembarked on the quays, and loading their goods on horseback — wine, iron goods, weapons, armour, spices, clothing — passed through the land of Gaul. Since Gaul was in constant communication with Britain, no doubt these merchants crossed into our island with their goods, though not many would find their way so far. In return, Gaul exported to Rome and Africa her woollen robes, her fine cured hams, her mountain cheeses, her great dogs. So that the land of Gaul, though wild and disorderly and barbaric, was by no means

savage or primitive.

The Gauls south of the Seine were middle-sized men, taller than the short Romans. They had long fair hair, blue eyes, ruddy, round, blunt faces. Their heads, too, were round, bullet-shaped. They wore linen clothes, close breeches and a close tunic. The Gauls were famous for their breeches, which were disgraceful to Roman eyes.

North of the Seine dwelt the Belgae, another race of Gauls or Celts. They differed from their southern neighbours only in their stature, for they were taller, in the long shape of their heads, and in their fiercer, more stubborn tempers. Perhaps in the Celtic blood of the Belgae was mingled a stream of German blood, for the Rhine made no unsurpassable barrier between Belgae and Germans.

It is supposed that the Gauls had been in earlier days much more powerful and civilised than they were when Caesar advanced upon them. We know from the Celtic legends, and the legends of King Arthur, that once they had fine companies of knights, all equal like a brotherhood, sitting at a round table. In those days the Celtic freemen were under no man's heel, they feared none, unless it were the Druids. The Druids were the religious body. They were three classes: the Ouadd or sacrificing priest, who performed sacrifices and did the lowest priestly work; then the bards who, filled with holy inspiration, sang the glowing chants and records which moved the souls of the knights and listeners in the banqueting halls; then the holy Druid himself, who dwelt in the dim groves of the forest, and was rarely seen by the world. In the shadow of his oak retreat the Druid lived like a hermit, meditating on the sacred mysteries, trying to find out the will of that great God called the Terrible, the Unknown. In these dark groves he gave education to the young men of good birth. From him they learned the long poems or psalms or legends in which all the knowledge of the Celtic race was embodied. And then at times the Druid came forth, when some awful sacrifice was to be performed, perhaps in the great stone circles like Stonehenge, or in the oak groves. Again he was seen on the most solemn day when the mistletoe was cut. Only the Druid himself might approach the sacred mistletoe. At due time he advanced from the solemn procession, having purified himself, fasted, and prayed. The great oak-tree rose before him, the terrible Tree sacred to the One Supreme God. On the oak, between the clefts, grew the golden bough, the delicate fountain, the holy mistletoe. In deep reverence before the awful tree, the Druid trembled with mystery as he reached to cut the golden bough, the mistletoe, the golden child of the Almighty Tree, the fair Son of the terrible Father.

Thus we see that the centre of the ancient life of the Celts was the Druid. It

was he who knew all that there was to be known: he knew of the sun and the stars, and their motions, of the seasons and their changes; he knew of the processes of birth and the mysteries of death; and also he was acquainted with the chief knights in the land, and fully informed concerning the dangerous enemies without. It was he who prophesied, counselled, sent forth orders, suggested war and plans of battle, and controlled justice, and made condemnation. Indeed, from his dark secret retreats the Druid governed the Celtic world: for the priests were all united under the Arch-Druid. The knights and chiefs or kings whom the knights elected from among themselves revered the Druid, obeyed him implicitly, and dreaded above all things the terrible threat of excommunication. And since the bards sang in the halls of the knights, and sang as they were informed by the Druid, so the mind of the knight was formed under the influence of the mystic priest, even without his knowing it.

When Julius Caesar came to Gaul, however, this unity of priestly and knightly order was dying out. Druids were losing their strong influence, becoming more worldly and shallow, the knights became greedy and conceited, the freemen became servile followers. Scorning the priests, the knights seized power and made themselves absolute kings. Some chiefs ruled over villages or little towns placed for safety on a hill, beside a river, or behind a marsh; other chiefs were masters of quite large towns, where were many low, wooden halls, dark, with heavy pillars of wood inside, and also streets of round wattle huts with their large, pointed, thatched roofs. In the larger towns lived merchants and weavers, as well as numerous slaves and hangers-on of the chiefs, soldiers, and peasant freemen. The Gaul was not like the German: he hated to be alone. His huts clustered close together. But he lived a dirty, irregular life, careless of everything except his own quarrels and those of his clan. For if he could not live alone, he could not live in company, since his life was consumed in brawls and jealousies.

Each knight, if possible, had a little town to himself and his clan: for like the Tartars, the Celts lived in families or clans. At this town watchmen were always on the look-out, for every clan quarrelled with every other, and the chiefs were like strutting cocks crowing out challenges and flying in each other's faces. Outside the town were the fields where the slaves and freemen worked in a halfhearted fashion, for they thought it more manly to crow challenge and fight and steal. Round the huts lay half-naked children, rolling in the dirt, and ragged, unkempt women peered out suspiciously. Pigs grunted around, a goat was tied to a pole. Inside the hall, not far off, a knight sat at table with dozens of his retainers, listening to his own praises sung to the sound of the harp by a degenerate bard, whilst all his company of clansmen shouted applause and

flattery. Then they would come outside and do noisy military exercises.

Notwithstanding their squalor and their quarrelsome, impoverished lives the Gauls were very fond of fine clothing, and of a bragging, swaggering appearance. It was they who invented gaudy tartans — and imitation silver. A chief often used up the substance of his clan in buying grand showy armour of silver and gold, fine horses, silver chariots. For some of the bigger chiefs were rich, they were masters of large clans, they received the tribute of innumerable people, and gathered wealth from their towns. It was the chief business of these lords to be proud and splendid. They provided for their knights, watched the honour of their clan, saw that none of the clansmen actually starved, that is, if food were to be had, and led the clan to battle with neighbours. In time of peace, however, it was the pride of these chieftains to dash along in a silver chariot drawn by fiery horses, and driven by a handsome charioteer, whilst the lord himself stood upright and motionless with his weapons, glittering in splendid armour, his plumes and his coloured cloak flying, thrilling the crowd like a god. Slaves ran beside him or behind him, ragged freemen hailed him as he passed. It was a glitter of arrogance and bravery, and a humbling of all people for their glorification in one man. Of course it was the people who chose this.

The Druids meanwhile still occupied the groves. But these gaudy chiefs took hardly any notice of them, and the Druids took care not to offend the chiefs. The bards had become mere hangers-on in the halls of the knights, singing shameful flattery. The nation was broken up into innumerable quarrelsome clans, each seeking its own glorification; the mass of the people among themselves were squalid, spiteful, enslaved. In some large clans, however, the Druids maintained their power, and these clans were the hardest to beat.

Britain was accounted the home of the Druids. There the luxury and folly of the knights was held in check, there the Druid still governed. No doubt Britain knew all about the doings of the Romans in Gaul; the Druids had prepared for the coming of Caesar. Merchants and priests sailed back and forth across the English Channel. But the two nations of Britain and Gaul no longer held together.

Caesar was made proconsul of Gaul in 58 B.C., and he remained so until 49 B.C. At this time the Romans held sway over south-east Gaul, the Germans over the north. Caesar marched from Rome to Geneva in eight days to stop the advance of the Celtic Helvetians into Gaul. He broke the Rhone bridge, and held them back. Having subdued the Helvetians, he turned north. There the German chieftain Ariovistus was defeated, and the flow of Germans into Gaul was stopped. Next year Caesar marched against the Belgae. The tribe called the Remi, out of jealousy of the other tribes, opened the gates of their capital,

Rheims, to the Romans, and so Caesar had a stronghold in the north. It was always so. By using one tribe of jealous Celts against another, the Roman won his victories. They could never have been won if the Gauls had but united.

In 55 B.C. Caesar came to Britain, to sever the connection between the two countries, and smite a blow at the holy land of the Gauls, for Britain was the home of the Gallic faith. Next year he came again, received the pretended submission of Cassivelaunus, and returned with a few pearls and slaves. But he really did nothing in Britain: it was beyond him.

This attack on their holy land roused all the defeated Gauls into revolt. There was at last a union among them — but too late. Summoned by the Druids, they met in lonely places at night, to form their plans. The Romans were afraid. In 53 B.C. Caesar gathered a great army of ten legions, and ravaged the lands of the north.

Then came forward the last and greatest of the Gallic chieftains, Vercingetorix. He fought bravely, and won a splendid victory over Caesar. This was the only real defeat Caesar suffered. And shortly he had his revenge. Vercingetorix was beaten and the Gallic spirit broken in a battle near Dijon.

Vercingetorix with his small force was encircled by the legions in the hills of Central France. Sorely besieged, he sent out the Gallic cavalry to rouse the land. The summons was answered. Gauls from all parts marched to the relief of the brave leader. But the relieving army was driven back, and Vercingetorix withdrew into his besieged town.

He knew the case was now hopeless. Calling his starving, faithful bands together, he told them he would save them. Then he bade his attendants dress him in his most splendid armour and apparel. Meanwhile, in the opposite camp Caesar was sitting in high tribunal amongst his officers. Suddenly there was shouting, a commotion. A chieftain in splendid glittering armour, with plumes waving from his helmet, bracelets of gold on his arms, his horse shining with silver and coloured cloths, galloped into his presence. He leaped from his horse. It was seen he was a Gaul, for he wore the close tartan breeches no Roman would put on. The guards stood round him. He flung himself at Caesar's feet, crying out that he yielded. It was Vercingetorix yielding himself up to save his beleaguered men.

Caesar attacked him with bitter words, bade the lictors seize him. Vercingetorix was sent to Rome to be paraded in Caesar's triumph; then he was kept for six years in prison, fretting his noble soul; then at last beheaded.

By 51 B.C. all Gaul was at Caesar's feet. At once the attitude of the conqueror changed. He really liked the dashing, swaggering Gauls. He enrolled a Gallic legion, the Alauda or Larks. He repressed the Druids, and forbade human

sacrifices. He tried to make the people freer, lightening the tribute.

And thus began the great change. The Gauls admired their conquerors immensely, they thought the Romans wonderful. So they began to imitate them. Quick and changeable by nature, the Gallic chiefs or knights, wherever they came into contact with the newcomers, quickly picked up some Latin speech, some Roman manners. Of this they were very proud. The Gallic soldiers and freemen imitated their chiefs.

It is said that in Gaul Caesar fought against three million people: one million perished; one million were enslaved; one million remained free. So a million slaves had new masters. For the rest, most of the chieftains swore submission to Rome, and were left in possession of their houses, with what slaves or clansmen remained to them. Then life began again. The race quickly increased, for the Gauls were a fruitful people.

The south-eastern part of the country, the old ' Province,' was already Roman and civilised. Many of the people wore Roman dress and spoke Latin. For many generations ships arriving in Massilia had brought goods and men from Tyre, Carthage, Athens, the greatest sea-cities of the old world. These had brought the arts of Greece and Syria to the south of Gaul, so that the fair cities there, Massilia, Narbonne, Toulouse, Arles, were already educated and cultured whilst the north of Gaul lay semi-barbaric, and Paris did not exist.

It was not till the days of Augustus, however, that the ' Province' took the lead in Gaul, for Caesar quarrelled with the Provincials. Augustus wanted to make the Gauls forget their old race, their old religion, and imagine themselves Roman. He removed the Druids, and tried to draw away the clans from their allegiance to the patriotic chiefs. Many chieftains were invited to Italy. Where there was an ancient Gallic town, sacred in the native eyes, Augustus caused the old influence to be broken by establishing a new city in the neighbourhood. So Lyons was founded on the Rhone a few miles away from the old Gallic town of Vienne, and soon people ceased to look to Vienne as their centre. The centrality was transferred to Lyons. When a new city was not established, the old town was given a new name, just as Jerusalem was changed to Aelia. Then the whole country was divided into four provinces, and the provinces arranged to cut across the old race distinctions. Thus the Belgae were not all together in one province. Some were in Belgica, some were in the province of Lyons.

Augustus built the Roman capital of Gaul central between the four provinces. He wished to turn the country into a great Roman state, with a Roman capital. Architects and surveyors studied the land, and a little village on the Rhone was taken as the site. Innumerable slaves and workmen were set to work. In fifteen years' time the splendid capital stood proudly where the village had been; the

great city of Lyons had risen. Craftsmen, scholars, merchants, lawyers, patricians had been invited from Italy, throngs of Romans laughed in the broad streets. There was a great market-place, and a mint for making the Gallic money, a splendid central temple of Gaul, built just where the Saône joins the Rhone, and dedicated to Augustus and Roma; besides this, shops, booksellers' shops, schools of rhetoric and eloquence, villas, workrooms. From far around the Gauls came to the great market, or to the theatres or the schools; boats sailed up and down the Rhone; Gallic chieftains who were rich enough built themselves villas in the town; Gallic chariots drove through the streets noisily, their owners proud to be in this fine place.

In the great temple stood the altar of Augustus, surrounded by sixty-four statues representing the Gallic counties or cantons. A second altar belonged to the goddess of Rome. Every year delegates came from each 'city' or canton to Lyons. They solemnly celebrated the sacrifice in honour of the Emperor and the goddess, and afterwards they met as a kind of national council or parliament, to discuss the government of the country.

Lyons was also the centre of the great road system. Coming from Italy, the Roman road led over the Alps straight into its market-place. From Switzerland or Helvetia came the road through Geneva to Lyons. And then out of the market-place led the four great Augustan roads of Gaul. The first ran north, through Metz, Treves, to Coblenz on the Rhine; the second went sheer north-west to Boulogne, and this was the road to Britain; the third went due west to the Bay of Biscay; the fourth ran south to Massilia (Marseilles) and Narbonne, on the Mediterranean.

On these roads stood the new Roman cities of Gaul, and from city to city passed constant traffic: the legions marching to the Rhine or to Britain, followed by the baggage-wagons; Gallic nobles glittering along in their chariots; slaves or messengers trotting steadily; colonists marching or riding wearily out of Italy, making for a new home in Gaul; merchants with strings of pack-horses, workmen with packs, slaves with burdens, strangers from Germany, Britain, Africa, Asia, all met and exchanged greetings on these firm roads. The common language was the vulgar Latin, which everybody learned to speak more or less.

Thus the land became completely Romanised. In place of their wooden halls the Gallic chiefs and the rich freemen built villas such as the Romans had erected for themselves in the countryside. The villas were beautiful open houses of stone or brick, one storey high, with terraces and sometimes a low square tower. High walls ran round the courtyard and gardens. At the back were stables and barracks for the slaves, as well as granaries, barns, cattle-sheds. All around stretched the cultivated lands, smiling and fruitful. This land was tilled by gangs

of slaves, who went out in the morning with an overseer and worked till evening, then returned to their quarters, where they were locked up at night.

But still the Gallic freemen lived in their own villages, worked their own land, or wove wool. They were still numerous, although the villas and richer houses seemed to cover a great deal of the country. The rich Gauls began to leave off the native ' breeks,' and wore the Roman toga, speaking only Latin, or a provincial dialect of Latin. Many of the common people also used this provincial Latin. Districts were ruled by Roman governors, magistrates administered the Roman law. All seemed fair and Roman. But in the more remote districts the Gallic peasants still clung together in elans, and held fast to the memory of the Druids. Only the old Province, or Provence as we call it, became more Italian than Italy herself. There great Roman buildings arose; the land was cultivated in the Italian manner; the landscape, the very people looked Italian. Things Gallic were scorned and almost forgotten. Massilia proudly held her Greek schools, a true cosmopolitan city of the old world, a centre of Greek learning.

All this splendid settlement and governing of Gaul cost money. Taxation was very heavy. Even from the first the peasant freemen and artisans groaned. Taxation was always the curse of Gaul. But as time went on, and the vicious emperors allowed the taxes to be farmed out, selling the privilege of collecting taxes to the highest bidder, then the exactions became impossible, and risings took place. Save for this the land knew many happy years; Gaul was one of the most smiling provinces of the empire till the end of the second century after Christ.

Trouble was bound to come. As the Gauls were absorbed by Rome, the Germans were roused to opposition. In 214 the Allemanni, a group of German tribes, made themselves troublesome in the north-east. In 241 great hosts of Franks began to enter Gaul, passing through the whole length of the land to ravage Spain. Many Germans settled in the north as peasants. Gaul lay between Italy and Germany, between the hammer and the anvil. When Germany was weak, Rome came down on Gaul. As Rome weakened, the Germans smote the Gallic land, broke the nation to atoms.

Meanwhile, as the barbarians stirred in the north, Christianity began to work in the south. Christians came from the east, from Greece, Antioch, Joppa, sailing to Massilia and up the Rhone to Lyons. In these days Greek was the universal language of the east. It was St. Paul's language. Small communities of Greek-speaking Christians grew up in Gaul. The new gospel spread. And then in 244 the Church in Rome sent forth a Latin mission. This had great success. The Gauls were already accustomed, from Druid worship, to revere One Supreme God. They could not take the dozens of Roman deities seriously. Now came

Christianity, which seemed much more natural to them. They embraced it readily, especially in the towns.

Seven bishops came from Rome to Gaul. They would not touch at Massilia, for that great city adhered too firmly to the old culture. They landed at Narbo, and spread into Central Gaul, establishing the gospel there. In 251 Dionysius with eleven brethren settled at Lutetia (Paris), and founded the Church of Northern France. From this time Christianity spread swiftly. Before a hundred years were past all Gaul was Christian. Indeed Gaul, not Italy, led the way in the new religion.

In the happy days of the empire, all citizens were free and equal, Romans and Gauls, rich and poor alike. They all were safe from oppression, they all had justice at the hands of the good magistrates. But as the empire at Rome grew rotten, freedom disappeared. Men were all scheming and contriving for money and power. In this scheming the poor were at the mercy of the more cunning upper classes, those with money to begin with. And thus taxes were imposed beyond reason, poor freemen were taxed and fined and conscripted till they were driven to despair. No one was safe but the rich and cunning. The wretched freemen saw the slaves of the wealthy remain safe and sound, whilst they themselves were seized for horrible foreign wars, or starved to death when the tax-gatherers had taken all they owned. It was better to be the slave of a rich man, than to be free and at the mercy of every greedy bully, count or duke or official. For the rich men protected themselves and their possessions either by bribes or by armed force or by obtaining a share in the government. So in despair one after another of the freemen went and surrendered himself and his family into slavery, under some rich chieftain or Roman, some greedy, unscrupulous person of wealth. Then he could no longer be seized and sent off to war, or seized and tortured to pay taxes.

This cruel business went on till more than three-quarters of the people in Gaul were mere slaves, three-quarters of the human life of the country mere property of weak, vain, foolish nobles. These nobles all kept bands of vicious soldiers, besides those kept by the vile government in Gaul. These soldiers devoured and destroyed substance. So the land was sinking to degradation. The splendid central power of Rome was gone; Gaul was far weaker than in old Gallic days, and yet richer, fatter, more supine, a prostrate land.

‘Where the carcase is, the eagles will be.’ For years the lands of the Gallic freemen had been passing into desolation, for years the German peasants had been filtering in, settling on the deserted fields. Now the German eagles began to hover over helpless Gaul. On the last night of the year 406 myriads of Vandals, Huns, Goths, Alans crossed the Rhine and poured over Gaul. We know how the

cities suffered. Whilst things were so bad, from time to time the miserable peasants rose in terrible murderous uprisings, slaying and burning devilishly, then starving and dying themselves, then sinking back to a condition worse than before.

In 412 the Visigoths, already half Roman in their ways, came and occupied the southern region. They merely took half the forest land and gardens, two-thirds of all the cultivated lands, and worked these mostly with the Gauls or Provincials already established there. The big, good-natured Burgundians did the same on the Rhone. So that the Visigoths and Burgundians were really a blessing to south and east Gaul. They saved the land from enemies, they destroyed nothing, they were amiable masters and neighbours, they left the natives working as before, and only took a good portion of the produce.

Then in 451 came Attila with the Huns. Attila was defeated at Chalons, but Gaul was ruined. The north was gutted, and Theodoric was dead. After the death of their king the Goths broke into horrible civil war. Peace was restored for a time, but by the end of the century their land too was destroyed, smashed up. Everywhere, in Burgundy the same, there was murderous fighting, destruction, desolation. The whole country was swamped in ruin. 'The ocean sweeping over it could not have added to the desolation.' Cattle had been killed or driven off, man exterminated; fields returned into heath-land and forest; wolves and bears lurked in the ruined streets of Roman cities. Gaul was a desert of desolation. Italy was not much better. The weakness of the Romans and the ferocity of the barbarians had gutted civilised Europe.

Through all this only the light of Christianity flickered. Dukes, counts, governors, these annihilated one another. The government was wiped out. All was howling, weltering insecurity. Only the Christian bishops and clergy kept their souls clear and their minds strong. In the spoiled cities the bishops took authority, to prevent the whole place turning into a den of thieves and murderers, wolves and bears. The Roman law-courts, called basilicas, became Christian churches, and in these buildings the clergy exhorted and commanded the demoralised people. Even Attila had been forced to reverence one bishop, Lupus, Bishop of Troyes, for the fierce Hun found this Christian leader such a noble, commanding presence, unafraid.

Rome was ended, Gaul was left a waste, stranded region, with only the Christian bishops keeping their heads erect in the wreckage. New power must come from somewhere, new life, new force, new strength to build up another Gaul. And where was the force to come from? Not from the south, for the south was spent. The bishops quite rightly looked to the north. They looked carefully to the most powerful of the tribes of northern Germans. These tribes were the

Franks. The bishops had now to look to the Franks as masters or servants. They must depend on the fierce but manly barbarians of the north, and forget the corrupt, foolish Romans.

Chapter VIII. The Franks and Charlemagne

In the darkest ages of the fifth and sixth centuries Christianity alone kept hope alive. In the terrible welter and insecurity of Gaul, some men were weary to death of fighting, robbing, burning, thieving, snatching; they wanted peace and the stillness of the soul above all things. Then the monastic life suggested itself. Men seeking the life of the mind and spirit gathered together in the religious houses, or monasteries, where, shut off from the howling desert world, they could think, and write, and pray, and hope. They worked in their fields and kept some spots on the earth sunny and clear. They went among the people, helping, encouraging, teaching, keeping the soul alive and preventing men from sinking back into brutish emptiness. Their lives were a continued protest against the degraded, hopeless slavery of Roman Gaul. Man cannot live without hope, and it was the monks and priests who kept the hope alive in the countryside, the bishops and clergy who fed it in the towns.

At the same time the people mingled all kinds of superstitions with the Christian beliefs. If they had worshipped some strange pagan goddess at a well, a goddess to whom they brought flowers, then they put a statue of the Virgin Mary in place of the idol of the goddess, and it was Mary who performed miracles with the water, and whose voice was heard at night from the bubbling of the spring, and to whom flowers or even other sacrifices were offered. Many sacred trees of the Druids were cut down. But at other times a crucifix was nailed to a bough, and Jesus became the Son of the mystic Tree; or else a little chapel or shrine was built in the shade of the oak, and here the gifts to the terrible deity of the Druids were hung up in offering to the new God, the new golden bough, the golden Jesus. So the mistletoe was sacred to Jesus. And even now it is the symbol of the kiss of love and increase in our Christmas festivities. So the old and new religions mingled in the Gallic Christianity, the two spirits became one, Jesus is the fruit of the Tree.

Even this measure of peace was to be disturbed again. In the south the Visigothic and the Burgundian kingdoms were Christian, but they belonged to the eastern Christianity, not the Roman. In the north the German Franks were still pagan. The Franks had long been friends and allies of the Roman people. As allies of the Romans for many years they defended the left bank of the Rhine. As Roman power faded away, they came to possess these lands of the left side of the Rhine. These were the first Frankish lands, and always the centre of the

Frankish people, the territories we now call Alsace, Lorraine, Luxemburg, Belgium. For the Franks did not like emigrating far from the Rhine.

The Franks were not a single tribe, but probably a confederacy of Germans from many tribes. Frank means a man armed with a franciscus, or axe: a German axe-fighter. They were a loose, brave, barbarous, pagan people, hardly united at all. One of their tribes to the north was the Salian. They were settled by the marshy Rhine mouths. The Salians were very brave, and had caused endless trouble by their ceaseless raids into Northern Gaul. They became the most important of the Franks. Their chiefs were the Merwings, one of the most considerable families in all the confederation. We know that a Merwig or Merwing led the Franks against Attila, and watched that king from the north, until he crossed the Rhine.

In the year 481 a boy of fifteen, Clovis, became heir to the kingship of the Salian Franks. His tribe was small, counting four thousand fighting men, but very brave, sprung from those Batavian Germans whom the Romans respected so deeply. Clovis was faithfully followed, and made headway. By the time he was twenty he was head of a large army of Franks, his own Salians forming the core of the fighting force.

At Soissons the shadow of the Roman name was kept up in the court of Syagrius. All Gaul was in the hands of barbarians, except Armorica (Brittany), and the land stretching from Brittany to the Frankish borders. Armorica was a free Gallic republic. Syagrius, in the Roman name, ruled over the broad district between the Loire and the Meuse, the district of which Paris is the real centre, but which Syagrius feebly governed from Soissons. He administered justice between the Germans and the Gauls, and hoped one day to gather all the north into a kingdom.

This was not destined to take place. In 486 the young Frank Clovis fell upon Syagrius. Syagrius fled south for his life, to Toulouse, the capital of the young Visigothic king Alaric. Clovis sent messengers and warriors down to the Mediterranean, to Alaric in Toulouse, demanding the surrender of Syagrius. Alaric, not seeing what a deadly neighbour he was bringing himself, delivered up Syagrius, who was promptly slain by Clovis.

The Franks now occupied the territories of the unfortunate Syagrius, and Clovis was possessed of a large district, bounded by the Rhine on the north, the Loire on the south, Burgundy on the east, and Armorica on the west. Gaul was now swallowed up by barbarians, the Gallo-Romans had no land of their own. Only Armorica, a corner, remained free.

The Roman Church of Gaul was established in the north, in the territories of Syagrius. Rheims was the most famous bishopric. The bishops had now a new

power to encounter; the Franks were upon them. The Franks were pagan, but then the bishops always had hopes of the wild, uncivilised Germanic tribes, for if they could convert them, they would have great influence over them. So the great desire of the Gallic bishops was to convert the Franks. If they could convert them they could use them, and establish the power of the Gallic Church upon them.

Remigius, Bishop of Rheims, was an astute man. Whilst Clovis was still very young, he had been very friendly to him. The friendship continued, but still Remigius dared not press the young pagan to desert his old faith. At last Clovis, having become more powerful, wished to marry, and to marry a princess. Remigius no doubt artfully suggested the fair Clotilde, a Christian of the Roman Church, and niece to the king of Burgundy. So Clovis married Clotilde.

Remigius had taught Clotilde carefully. He knew the Germans were always very soft and pliant towards their young wives. He knew also that women in his time depended on Christianity for their freedom and equality, for all pagans kept their wives in the background. If Clotilde had a Christian husband she would be a free Christian woman. If not, she would be an obscure pagan wife. It was no wonder that women were the most ardent missionaries in private life, in the first days.

But Clovis was still only a petty prince among the Franks. In 496 the Allemanni, the All-men, the famous German confederacy who had their home about the headwaters of the Rhine, pushed towards Gaul, and pressed on the Franks in Alsace. The Franks of the south called on the Franks of the north. Clovis came down with his Salian army. A great battle took place between the united Franks and the Allemanni. The battle was going against the Franks. In his wild excitement, feeling that he was losing, in the midst of battle Clovis thought of his queen at home. Without knowing what he was doing, he cried out as he fought that if the God of his Clotilde would grant him victory, he would accept her faith. So he swept on in a new rush, the tide of battle turned, the Allemanni were utterly routed.

In their joy nearly all the tribes in the confederation of Franks submitted to the overlordship of Clovis, and he had a great people under him. Now came the time to fulfil his vow. But in his cool mind he was unwilling to do so. He hesitated. Clotilde and Remigius persuaded and persuaded him. At last he consented. He was baptized in Rheims Cathedral, with three thousand of his warriors, whom he had commanded or exhorted to accept the new faith along with him. Remigius, or St. Remy as we now call him, was delighted. He performed the ceremony with all possible splendour, and it seemed to the barbarians as if they were entering heaven itself.

The bishops now handed over the relics of the old Roman legions, their standards and trophies, to Clovis, and Clovis became master of Northern Gaul, save only for Armorica. He was a Christian of the true Latin or Roman Church, as were all the Gallic clergy. But the Burgundians and the Goths were heretic Arians, belonging to the eastern form of Christianity. So the bishops hated them.

Clovis was the drawn sword of the bishops. First he attacked the Burgundians, and defeated their king Gondebald in 500. Then he ravaged Provence, the old Roman province just round Marseilles, and gave it to a friend, Theodoric the Ostrogoth. Then he looked at the great kingdom of the Goths, stretching away from the south to the Bay of Biscay and the Loire, a rich land.

‘It much displeases me,’ said Clovis in 507, ‘that the Goths, being Arians, should own a part of Gaul. Let us go and, God helping, seize their land.’ So they swooped down, the Frankish hosts on the Visigoths. Clovis met Alaric in single combat. Alaric was slain, his army routed. The Franks began to ravage the country. Theodoric the Ostrogoth came against his former friend, and saved just a strip of the Visigothic kingdom along the Mediterranean round Narbonne to the Pyrenees. This the Visigoths kept for three centuries longer. It was called Septimania.

The Franks treated the Visigothic land shamefully, and then, when weary of it, retired north, carrying off rich spoil and countless captives. The Gallo-Romans of Aquitaine, amazed at their orthodox friends from the north, conceived a hatred against them that lasted for hundreds of years, a hatred far surpassing anything they ever felt for their more humane conquerors the Goths.

Meanwhile the Emperor of the East had sent an embassy to Clovis, bearing orders to confer the title of Consul Romanus on the barbarian. Clovis was pleased. With great pomp he celebrated the investiture. In the cathedral of Tours, Martin, Bishop of Tours, invested the Frankish chieftain with the purple tunic and mantle, and with a diadem. So Clovis rode through the streets, amid the acclamations of the people. He was a Roman Consul, as Julius Caesar had been before him. The Gallo-Romans were much moved, for they ever looked back to their days of Roman greatness.

Clovis was now raised above any other Germanic chief or king. He tried to establish himself more securely by killing off any head of a tribe he could lay his hands on. One after another he murdered them, and made himself king of their tribes. At last all the Meroving chiefs had perished, Clovis’ own relations, and he was sole head of the Franks, acknowledged by all.

‘Woe is me!’ he said at last, ‘for I am left as a sojourner in the midst of strangers. I have now no kinsman to help me, if misfortune comes.’ But he said this like a cunning fox, hoping to draw forward any man who pretended to

belong to his royal house. If any had come forward, Clovis would at once have dispatched him. But there was none to come.

Clovis and his Franks were no governors. They could not rule a country. They could only spoil it. The Gallic bishops clustered round his throne flattering him and cunningly using him. The Franks paid to their bishops all the reverential homage they had yielded to their mysterious pagan priests in the past. Clovis loaded the Church with gifts and lands, till it was said the Gallo-Romans recovered through their clergy what they lost through the wars. For the clergy and bishops were all Gallo-Romans. No Frank would dream of taking holy orders. A Frank would live by his sword. So the Gallo-Romans had the Church of Gaul entirely in their own hands, and in this indirect way they governed their own country. For bishops advised and instructed the Frankish princes.

So, in the towns, and on the great Church estates all over the country the Gallic bishops erected their palaces. Just as counts and dukes had had the cities in their power in late Roman days, so the bishops had them now. The bishops were the sole riders, magistrates, protectors of the towns. They were the established landed aristocracy. They really had the warlike, barbarian kings in their power. They became a proud, worldly, domineering race, most unchristian.

Clovis died in 511, and the territories in Gaul were roughly divided among his three sons. The settlement of the land went on slowly, for the Franks were very German in feeling; they kept returning to their old homes by the Rhine, and new bodies of Franks continually passed into Gaul.

When the Franks did settle it was in a very irregular manner. They avoided towns, for they disliked being crowded and shut up. The Gallo-Romans had the cities to themselves. The Franks dispersed themselves in little knots or groups in the countryside, each group almost separate and independent of all the others. The kings had great territories. On these lands they owned certain manor-houses, and with his whole court the king rode from one big farm to another. When he had exhausted the hunting and the provision of one manor or villa, he and his following mounted horse and rode away to camp in another. They caroused, gambled and hunted all day long, when no fighting was to be done. They also practised military sports, that kept them busy.

The king as we know gave large tracts of land to the bishops and to the Church. He also granted fiefs or estates to his friends, the warriors who fought with him, or the men whom he liked. The greater chiefs, however, who had followed the king independently, took greater lands for themselves, and assumed full, free power over it. So that after Clovis' time we have the kings moving about to their various houses on their own territories, to hunt and sport; we have the more independent chiefs living with their own following on other territories;

and we have the smaller estates which the king had given to his friends, and which he might any time take back again.

The Franks, indeed all the Germans, did not attach themselves to land. They counted the man everything, the land nothing. The Frankish king would not deign to call himself king of France or Francia. He was a king of men, king of the Franks. The land was only the hunting-ground and the provision-field of men.

So the king paid not the slightest heed to the cultivation of his territories. On the land which he reserved as his own, the Gallo-Romans were living and working. Most of these were left as they were, and only compelled to give tribute, to provide the king with all he wanted. It was the same on the territories of the great chiefs. Many of the Gallo-Roman gentlemen and freemen remained as they were, in their villas or huts, but they had to give tribute to the Frankish chieftain, yield up corn and cattle and service at his demand. Real tribute meant personal service, labour in the fields of the overlord. When a Frank was given a farm or manor of his own, if it were not occupied he took possession. If it were occupied he got rid of the occupant, installed himself, and worked the land with his captives or slaves. This Frank, having received his land from the king as reward for fighting services, was still a king's man. He must fight for the king. But he paid no tribute, unless it were in certain provisions. He was almost independent. Only the great independent chiefs held their lands without paying any tribute at all. The commoner Franks who came into Gaul took their share of what they could get — captives, cattle, goods, money. With these they sheltered themselves under a great chieftain, and either asked him to give them a farm, for which they would pay tribute, or else some post in his household. Some of them sank very low, became mere servants or serfs; some remained free farmers.

The Franks kept the land in some sort of order, by the help of the clergy. Councils were held from time to time. There were courts of justice in each district, presided over by a count, whom the king appointed. But as a rule each great landlord made his men bring their disputes before him, and he settled all matters, with the help of his clerk or priest. The chiefs took no notice of the king's court. Life was wild and disorderly. A good deal of land fell out of cultivation.

The Gallo-Romans were really better off under the Franks than under the later Roman government. The Franks never extorted exorbitant, ruinous taxes. They depended on free gifts. Again, the Germans had always a higher sense of individual freedom than the southerners. They never had personal slaves. They disliked slaves in their household, they could not endure the personal service of slaves. The sight of fields being worked by gangs of men under an overseer was

displeasing to them. Already, when the Roman power broke down, the Gallo-Roinans had begun to be afraid of their slave-gangs. Already much land was divided into plots, with cottages or huts.

Now the old Roman villa with its splendours and its barracks for slaves disappeared. The manor-house took its place, with a dove-cot, a church near by, and then the cluster of huts where the labourers lived. The land round about the manor-house belonged to the lord of the manor. Beyond this, the estate was broken up into little plots, and each plot was worked by a freeman or a slave, or even by a poor Frank. So we see that the condition of the slave was much improved, he had his own house for himself and his family, and his own possessions, few as they were, and his own life to himself. But the condition of the freeman sank. Just like a slave, the freeman had to go to work in his master's fields. For the master or lord kept no labourers. The broad lands round the manor were tilled by the men who lived in the village. Before they touched their own fields they must all, slave, freeman and poor Frank alike, put in so many days of work on the master's estate. When the manor lands were finished, then the serf might begin on his own.

Still, each man had a soul of his own. The priests were all Gallo-Romans, as were most of the workers on the land. They helped their fellow-countrymen where they could. The Franks were careless task-masters. All went well in years of plenty. In times of bad harvest, many serfs with their families starved to death.

Thus the Gauls possessed their own land again, they had their own huts, each a piece of his mother-earth. But they were serfs. And they were to remain so for hundreds of years. The spirit of German independence and individual liberty had combined with the old Roman ideal of social unity, and the first signs of real European life appeared. But it was all crude and low.

The division of the country among the three sons of Clovis was a misfortune, for these three quarrelled. The Frankish kings even strove to keep up the war-spirit, for they despised a settled life as being fit only for women and churchmen. With their long yellow hair and their fierce ways, these kings were either warrior chiefs or nothing. So the fierce and endless fighting went on, trampling the face of Gaul, which might else have been a pleasant land again. For a hundred years the weary wreckage continued, whilst the Gallo-Romans laboured and the priests and bishops tried to keep some order. But the bishops were almost as bad as the nobles, so greedy for land, so arrogant, so fierce and eager to make war.

In 628 the good king Dagobert became king of all Gaul, and pacified the land. When he died the old turmoil went on. The king of the north-east, Neustria, fought the king of the north-west, Austrasia. Further south, kings went for

nothing, the nobles smashed at one another in endless fray. The land was weary and war-tattered.

In these days the first rude castles were built. The pleasant country houses and villas and open manors that remained from Gallo-Roman days were no use. The Frankish nobles built themselves strongholds with thick walls and unbreakable towers, dark, ugly dens with no windows and no warmth, bitter cold and unhealthy to live in, but secure. Most of the old pleasant houses were destroyed. New ugly buildings frowned from some strong position, huts clustered at their base or by the road not far off.

Churches also were built, and fine abbeys, in a new style, in which the Roman manner was modified by the German spirit. Everywhere the German spirit was pervading old forms, to give birth to a new world. More monasteries arose, refuge for war-wearv mortals. But these had to be built strong as fortresses, since bishops and abbots fought as ferociously as dukes and counts.

In G87 Pippin of Heristal won the battle of Testry, over the western Franks, the Neustrians, and became chief of all the Frankish nation. He was a good fighter, and wise. He favoured the monks against the too-greedy and impudent bishops, and he proceeded to pacify the land. But no sooner was internal fighting hushed, than external enemies appeared. First the ferocious, pagan Saxons broke over the Rhine. Then the Mohammedans appeared.

The Franks were still German in speech, German in spirit and in manners. Indeed, from the banks of the Rhine to the Seine the land was rather West Germany than Northern France. The Gallo-Romans of the south hated the northerners. But the worst enemies of the Franks were no longer the Visigoth of the south or the Burgundian of the east, but the wild Saxon of the north, and the Mohammedan from Spain.

Again Gaul was between two fires. No sooner were the Saxons driven over the Rhine than the Mohammedans appeared over the Pyrenees. By 718 the Arabs or Moors had finally defeated the Visigoths in Spain. Then the dark armies poured into Southern Gaul. They defeated the Visigoths there, sacked Bordeaux, marched on Tours.

Charles Martel, chief of all the Franks, came down to Aquitaine against the great Arab general Abd-el-Rahman. Behind Abd-el-Rahman the Arabs were drawn up on their swift and beautiful horses, glittering with armour of fine, thin steel, their faces dark and fierce, their dark beards flowing. They were a great, beautiful host. Behind Charles Martel stood the ranks of tall, blond Franks, Germans, armed with their huge battle-axes. The dark sons of Arabia and Africa faced the young power of Europe. The long and bloody battle of Tours was fought between the two. But the light Arabs with their scimitars could not stand

against the whirling battle-axes of the Franks. There was monstrous slaughter, and the Arabs fell back towards the south. But they were not driven out of France. For years they held the south of Aquitaine and Septimania, along the Mediterranean.

In 768 Charles, afterwards called Charlemagne, became king of the Franks. Charlemagne is one of the most famous figures in all history. He was a true Frankish-German, tall, with beautiful bright hair and fresh colouring. German was his native tongue, German the language of his household. But he spoke Latin, and understood Greek. He wore the Frankish dress: that is, a linen shirt and drawers next his skin; above these, a tunic with a silken hem, and breeches of the same stuff as the tunic; then he wrapped his knees and legs down to the ankles with strips of linen; in winter he had a loose overcoat of fur, ermine or otter, short but warm; and over this he wore a coloured Frankish cloak, and slung across him by a gold or silver belt, a scabbarded sword. He hated foreign dress. He lived and ate among the Franks just as one of themselves, without show.

Yet he was one of the greatest of men. As a fighter and vast conqueror he is to be compared only with Alexander, Caesar, or Napoleon. He fought against twelve nations, and spread his great empire from the Elbe to the Pyrenees, and away south down Italy as far as Rome. The great Haroun el Raschid, greatest of the Arab Caliphs, wished to be the friend of so splendid a conqueror, though he despised all other Europeans.

But Charlemagne was great in many ways. He was learned, and did all he could for education in Francia. He built many fine buildings, bridges, roads. He tried to encourage agriculture, and prevent famine. He was much beloved by all his subjects; and he seemed to stand alone in the world in his greatness. Only the great Haroun el Raschid could compare with him, of all men living at that day.

Amid the squalor of misery and discord in Italy in the Dark Ages, the popes, bishops of Rome, gradually rose to power. The Pope was head of the Church, and in every land the Church was growing stronger and stronger. Kings depended on bishops, and were afraid of them. The Frankish kings, wisely, had been friends of the popes.

In 799, however, the Roman citizens rose against Pope Leo III., and would have destroyed him for his many crimes. Leo had already shown himself submissive to the Frankish king. Now he fled to Charles. The king received him gladly, and they agreed to give one another kindness for kindness. Charles with his armies restored the Pope to Rome. In return, whilst he was celebrating mass at the Vatican on Christmas Day of the year 800, Pope Leo suddenly stepped forward, poured a vial of oil over Charles's head, and crowned him with a golden crown. All the greatest Franks and Romans were present. No doubt they

knew what was to happen, for immediately they cried aloud: 'Hail, Charles Augustus, crowned of God, great and peaceful Emperor of the Romans! Long life and victory!'

Thus once more a great leader was hailed as Augustus in Rome. The empire of the West had vanished. There was nothing truly Roman left. And yet, in Rome itself, a Christian priest crowned a German soldier, and gave him the title that Nero and Hadrian had borne. This strange event shows what power Rome still had over the minds of men. This was really the beginning, also, of the Holy Roman Empire, which lasted almost to our own day.

Charles was now the Emperor Charles the Great. He ruled as emperor over a great part of Europe. And the rest of his reign passed fairly quietly. He had to go out against the Northmen or Danes, who were ravaging North Germany. He repressed them so strongly that the Danes were forced to depend more on their ships, and thus began their invasions of Britain, France, and the Mediterranean lands.

The Emperor tried hard to settle his land of France peacefully and well. Every town had its two governors, the bishop and the count, whilst through the country were sent commissioners, before whom all wrong could be laid. They judged even the counts. Charlemagne made himself head of the Church, to keep the bishops in check.

But it was not much use. The poorer freemen were at the mercy of the greedy, fighting chieftains and bishops. The poorer Franks, who had come to Gaul as free warriors, and who had remained proud and independent, having free farms or small estates of their own, now sank again. Many were killed in the wars. Those remaining were threatened all the time by rich landowners. So they put themselves under the protection of some lord, and paid tribute of service. The same was the case with Gallic freemen. They all became bond, sinking down towards serfdom. This process seemed inevitable in the Dark Ages. It seemed as if the mass of men must be serfs or slaves, at the mercy of the few. In Charlemagne's day nine-tenths of the people of Gaul were serfs, one-tenth only were free, and many of these were priests and monks. When Charles gave the learned Englishman Alcuin the present of an estate, we learn that 20,000 serfs went with the land, and were included in the gift. Yet this was not a large estate. So low was the value of men.

The serfs on the estates of churchmen and on the king's own land were not so badly off. They were not badly treated, some even came to hold property and to be deemed worthy to be warriors. In years of plenty they were content. But agriculture was very badly managed, and some years there was terrible scarcity. In 805 and 806 thousands of serfs with their families just starved to death.

During times like these, many men begged to be admitted into monasteries, to become monks: so many, indeed, that the king had to forbid further admissions.

We are bound to feel that these Gallo-Romans, ancestors of the modern French, were during this period spiritless, made for slavery. The Franks never levied armies from the Gallic people — evidently considering them unfit for military purposes. Charlemagne struggled to improve the condition of the great servile masses of these serfs or villeins. But they were too apathetic, and the Franks were too contemptuous of them altogether to trouble about them. The Gallo-Romans dragged on their degraded existence, caring nothing for freedom, filled with strange and sometimes horrible superstitions, loving to make pilgrimages to shrines, neglecting all work, desiring to inflict strange penances on themselves, and performing mysterious rites before trees and groves and springs, using charms and practising magic, and willing to commit strange crimes.

Charlemagne died in 814, and was buried in his own town of Aix-la-Chapelle. His great empire soon fell to pieces, the old darkness sank over the lands. Great lords warred on one another, the lesser lords were killed off. The descendants of Charlemagne, emperors they called themselves, tried to reign. But they were weak and effortless.

Gradually the Franks dropped their German speech. The bishops and clergy, the teachers, the instructors, were all Gallo-Romans, and spoke a sort of Latin. It was easier for the Franks to learn the Gallic language, the ‘ Romana Rustica ‘ as it was called, the Rustic Latin, than for the Gauls to learn the difficult German. At one time all intelligent Franks spoke both languages. Then gradually the German was forgotten; by 850 or 900 the Romance language was the language of the Franks in Gaul, as well as of the Gallo-Romans.

As kings grew weaker, dukes and counts grew stronger, till they were really independent lords of their own great lands. Great dukes of Gothia, Gascony, Burgundy, Brittany, Aquitaine, counts of Toulouse, Flanders, Vermandois — these were stronger than any poor Caroling king, in their own regions. Thus the Feudal System begins. In the ninth century the terrible Northmen began to invade France, and the dukes and lords began to build the huge feudal castles against them. In the tenth century the Northmen settled along the Seine. Their land became Normandy: there was a new duke, Duke of Normandy: and soon the Normans were speaking French, they were more French than the Frenchmen. Yet they were pure Germans by blood, Danes.

An adventurer, Robert the Strong, became Duke of France, that is of the small middle region round Paris. In 987 the Carolingian line died out and Hugh Capet, Duke of France, was proclaimed King of France: that is, he was mere war-leader

or war-lord of all the dukes and counts, who remained independent as before. And so now at last, with Hugh Capet, the real kingdom of France begins, separate from Germany altogether, separate from Italy and Rome, the French lords having one head, one leader.

Chapter IX. The Popes and the Emperors

At first, as we know, the popes were only bishops of Rome, without any power in the world, save over their clergy and congregations. But as the Christian Church grew, and Christians became numerous, the bishop became master of the considerable moneys of the Church, and of the increasing property in land and goods. So that soon he was important in Rome, having great authority over the people in the city.

After the departure of the emperors from Rome, the bishops were left supreme in the capital. They claimed that they were the successors of St. Peter, and that Jesus had put the government of the souls of men into the hands of Peter: therefore they, the bishops of Rome, were governors of the spiritual life of Christians. And as the spiritual life is much higher than the temporal life, so the governors of the spiritual realm are much greater than the governors of the world: thus the Bishop of the Christians, the Papa, or Pope, as he came to be called, was much higher in authority than an emperor. So the Pope Leo preached in 446, and so the Pope Gelasius plainly wrote to the Emperor Anastasius at Constantinople, in 494.

In the time of Gregory the Great, 590-604, the Roman world in Italy was already in ruins, and the Christian Church was the only organised power. In Italy, in Sicily, even in farther provinces, the Church had acquired rich lands, looked after by deacons or subdeacons, and ruled by bishops. But as yet the bishops were ministers of peace. The rents and produce of the Church estates were brought to the mouth of the Tiber, and on the four great sacred festivals, the Pope divided their quarterly allowance to the clergy, to his domestics, to the monasteries, the churches, the places of burial, the alms-houses, and the hospitals of Rome and of the diocese of Rome. On the first day of the month he distributed to the poor, according to season, their allowance of corn, wine, cheese, oil, vegetables, fish, cloth, and money, and such was the misery of Italy at that time that many nobles were glad to accept the Pope's bounty, for they had nothing left of their own. The sick, the helpless, pilgrims, and strangers were relieved every hour, and Gregory was not in vain called the Father of his Country. For he had to stand alone against the terrible attacks of the Lombards on Rome, reasoning with them and persuading them. Besides all this, he sent out missionaries, and England was converted by his means.

But as the years went on, the civil life of Italy grew more chaotic. The city of

Rome had no defences, and no real government. The senators and chief citizens elected the Pope, and when they were displeased with him, murdered him or drove him out or forced him to his knees. The country round Rome was turned into wilderness.

The Church of Constantinople, moreover, now called the Greek Church, was very antagonistic to the Roman Church. The Patriarch of Constantinople proudly called himself the Universal Bishop, and tried to make the Bishop of Rome submit to his authority, which the popes of Rome refused to do. At the same time the emperors at Constantinople still claimed to rule over Italy, incapable as they often were. About 730 the Emperor in Constantinople began a great quarrel with the Italian Church, about the use of images. The Roman Christians loved their statues of the Mother of Jesus, and the Infant, their statues of Jesus, and their Crucifixes. The Byzantine rulers wanted these images abolished and destroyed. There was a tremendous struggle again between East and West, religious this time. The bishops of Rome stuck to their images, crucifixes and shrines, and the western Christians loved them for it. So the Roman Church triumphed, the Byzantines were driven back, to spread their Greek Church up the Black Sea to Russia, leaving Western Europe alone.

The popes became more popular, the bishops grew stronger. But the times were wretched, there was no security anywhere. The rich bishops in Gaul, ruling like princes, often forgot or ignored the distracted popes at Rome. Then the Mohammedan power rose up. It had begun its first attacks on Eastern Christendom in 630, and it spread victorious along the Mediterranean. Christians must fight Moslems, and the Pope, the great head of Christendom, must stand clear to his people. Again, the Frankish princes, Charles Martel, Pippin, Charlemagne, found that they needed some support, some stay in the disordered world. They made themselves firm friends with the tempest-tossed popes of Rome, and the popes helped the princes in return to the kingly and the imperial crown. So the popes became established as powerful heads of Christendom.

After Charlemagne, however, the Frankish Empire went to pieces, and the Frankish emperors dwindled and became more foolish and feeble till they ended in the insane Charles the Fat, and then the imperial name more or less died out. France became a welter of princes and dukes. The remains of Charlemagne's empire continued in the dukedoms of Germany, Franconia, and Lorraine.

The disappearance of the Carolings, as the House of Charlemagne was called, had a disastrous effect on Italy, where the Frankish emperors had ruled and kept some sort of connection with the Pope. Popes were set up and thrown down by the robber knights of the Campagna, who called themselves senators or consuls, till the power of the papacy even came into the hands of loose women, and popes

were the creatures of rich, reckless mistresses.

Germany at this time consisted of six great duchies:

Saxony, Franconia, Thuringia, Suabia, Bavaria and Lorraine. These duchies were practically independent, but they recognised a king. The House of Charlemagne had come to an end. There was no heir to the old Frankish name. In 919, at an assembly of the Saxon and Francon-ian peoples, Henry, Duke of Saxony, was chosen King of the Germans. He is usually called Henry the Fowler. He was a strong, active man. He fought against the Norman Vikings, and against the Slavonic peoples who threatened Germany in the east, but chiefly against the wild Huns and Magyars who came up from the Middle Danube, invading Europe about this time. Henry the Fowler won the allegiance of the other great dukes of Germany, so that when he died they elected his son Otto, king. Otto fought against the Slavonic Prussians, pushed his power over the Elbe, and established the great bishopric of Magdeburg as a strong centre in the east. He also established border-governments called Palatinates and Marks. In 955 he inflicted a crushing defeat on the Magyars, so that they retreated to Hungary, where they live to this day.

Otto was never safe from the great dukes of Germany, who were jealous of him. So he made friends with the bishops. The bishops of Germany were far from Rome. They were the only educated people in the land. They were rich and powerful as princes. So into their hands Otto put the administration of the land, and the great bishops of Cologne, Mainz, Worms, Magdeburg were now collecting taxes, holding law-courts, and organising armies in Germany, whilst the dukes fought and plundered and made havoc.

But Italy has always had a fatal fascination for the Germans, ever since the first barbarians came against Rome. Otto could not bear to think of the degradation and shame of the popes. He depended on the bishops of Germany. And how could any bishops be respected if their chief, the Holy Father, were a creature of shame?

Moreover the powerful Archbishop of Mainz already refused to serve Otto very willingly. So the king thought that if he marched into Italy and set the Pope straight there, he should be master of his clergy at home.

He came down over the Alps and easily mastered North Italy. He occupied Rome, and rescued the Pope John from his enemies. In 962, Otto was crowned Emperor of Rome, by the grace of God and the Pope. And so the Holy Roman Empire was really established. It became one of the greatest institutions of the Middle Ages. And so also began the most important relationship between Pope and Emperor. Henceforth the German kings were filled with the fatal passion to rule in Italy, to stretch a great empire from the Baltic over the Alps to the

extremes of Sicily and Calabria. And this was never possible, for the peoples of Italy and Germany are so vitally different. If Rome could not rule Germany, how could Germany rule Rome? Yet the two extreme nations of Europe never ceased to be fascinated the one by the other, pitched against one another.

Another sign of the fascination which Italy exerted over the Germanic mind is seen in the conquest of Sicily and South Italy by the Normans. We know that the Normans from Norway and Denmark, fierce Vikings, raided Europe and England in the time of Charlemagne. We know that they settled in the Seine valley, and established the Dukedom of Normandy, soon becoming more French than the French. We know that from Normandy they conquered England in 1066. In 1040 a little band of Normans were fighting as free lances in the south of Italy. In Normandy, in the castle of Hauteville, was a Norman knight named Tancred, who had twelve sons. These sons must ride to seek their fortune. Some came south to Calabria. One of these sons was called Robert, Robert Guiscard, or Wiscard, Wiseacre. He was a tall, splendid Viking with long, flaxen beard flying, and blue eyes sparking fire. He joined his countrymen in the south, where the Greeks from Constantinople were fighting the Pope. Ultimately the Pope made Robert Guiscard Duke of Apulia and Calabria, and of such lands in Sicily and Italy as he could win from the perfidious Greeks. This was in 1060, six years before the Conquest of England. And this was the beginning of the famous Norman kingdom of Sicily and Naples, which lasted so long, and was such a power in the Mediterranean and such a thorn in the side of the popes. Normans emigrated in great numbers, in their ships, like Vikings of old, and settled in Sicily under Robert. So that once more the North settles and possesses the South.

On the one side the Pope had the Normans for neighbours. To the north of him lay Tuscany, and beyond that the great towns of Lombardy, just rising to new independence and new strength — Milan, Bologna, Florence, Verona, Pisa, Genoa.

In 1073 Hildebrand, a monk, was raised to the papal throne, becoming Gregory VII. He was a small man, but impressive. The people loved him, the monks and many of the bishops and nobles were on his side. And he was determined to be the chief power in Christendom. ‘The Roman Pontiff is unique in the world. He alone can depose or reconcile bishops. He can be judged by no one. The Roman Church never has been deceived and never can be deceived. The Roman Pontiff has the right to depose emperors. Human pride has created the power of the kings, God’s mercy has created the power of the bishops. The Pope is the master of emperors.’ This is Hildebrand’s declaration.

There was bound to be trouble between him and the Emperor. Henry iv. was a clever emperor. It was his custom, and the custom of the nobles, to create

bishops in Germany, giving them the ring and crozier as symbols of their office. This distinctly meant that the bishops were to obey the Emperor first, and the Pope afterwards. To this Hildebrand could never agree.

In 1075 Hildebrand declared that ‘ If any emperor, king, duke, marquis or count, or any lay person or power has the presumption to grant investiture, let him know that he is excommunicated.’ So the Pope announced his intention to take away from the Emperor the bishops, on whom the Emperor depended for the administering of his kingdom. Henry soon answered.

‘ Henry, King, not through usurpation but through the holy ordination of God, to Hildebrand, at present not Pope but false monk — descend and relinquish the chair which thou hast usurped. Let another ascend the throne of Saint Peter, who shall not practise violence under the cloak of religion, but shall teach the sound doctrine of Saint Peter. I, Henry, King by the Grace of God, do say to thee descend, descend, to be damned throughout all ages.’

The Pope’s reply begins: ‘ O Saint Peter, chief of the apostles, incline to us, I beg, thy holy ears and hear me, thy servant, whom thou hast nourished from infancy and whom until this day thou hast freed from the hand of the wicked who have hated and do hate me,’ . . . and it ends, ‘ I absolve all Christians from the bonds of the oath which they have made to Henry, the Emperor, and I forbid any one to serve him as king. And since he has scorned to obey as a Christian, and has not returned to God whom he deserted, I bind him with the chain of anathema.’

Nearly all Italy came to the side of the Pope, the Normans, Matilda of Tuscany, and the great Lombard towns. Hildebrand made friends even in Henry’s Germany. Henry had to struggle against his own nobles. In a council or diet of the empire of Germany, in 1077, they spoke against him to his face, hoping that the Pope would come to Augsburg, to attend the next diet, and depose Henry from the throne.

The Emperor thought he had better make himself safe. He crossed the Alps in winter-time. Hildebrand was residing at the castle of Canossa, guest of Matilda of Tuscany. Canossa is on the northern slopes of the Apennines. The weather was cold, snow lay on the ground. The Emperor sent messengers, asking to be allowed to present himself before the Pope, to sue for pardon. Hildebrand refused. On three consecutive days the Emperor came humbly to the door of the castle, barefooted and penitent in the snow, and three times Hildebrand had him driven away. But at last Matilda persuaded the Pope to receive the Emperor. Henry was admitted. He threw himself at the feet of Hildebrand, was raised and pardoned. ‘ Conquered by the persistency of his compunction and by the constant supplications of all those who were present, we loosed the chain of the

anathema and at length received him into the favour of communion, and into the life of the holy mother Church.' So says Hildebrand, Pope Gregory vn.

But Henry was not as humble as he seemed. He had saved himself in Germany by this submission. He went home, gathered his power, and again defied the Pope. He was again deposed. Then Henry in his turn declared Hildebrand to be no longer pope, and bestowed the title on a German bishop. Then he marched with a great German army over the mountains and passes of the Tyrol, entering Italy by way of Verona. He advanced to the walls of Rome, but owing to malaria in his army was forced to retire. But three years later, in 1084, he was again before the gates of Rome. He took the city, and besieged the Pope in the castle of St. Angelo. Hildebrand appealed wildly to Robert Guiscard and the Normans. Robert, who did not want an emperor in Rome, hastily advanced from besieging Durazzo on the Adriatic, and saved the Pope. But the German host of the Emperor plundered Rome as it had never before been plundered, neither by the Goths under Alaric nor by the Vandals under Genseric.

For bringing this upon them, the Roman people turned with hate on their Pope, so he departed, and shortly died in Salerno. ' I have loved righteousness and hated iniquity,' he said, ' and therefore I die in exile.'

Henry iv. died in 1106, but the struggle went on. In the Concordat of Worms, 1122, it was agreed that the election of the bishops should be left in the hands of the Church, that the ring and the crozier should be bestowed by the Pope. But the Emperor or his representative was to be present at all elections, and disputed elections were to be referred to him. All bishops, moreover, were to do homage to the Emperor for the lands they held in his dominions. This left the Emperor, in Germany at least, lord of his bishops still.

This, however, was not an end to the struggle between Pope and Emperor. The Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire claimed, by his very title, a sort of universal sovereignty. And the Pope claimed the highest authority of all. So how could these opposite claims be settled by settling this investiture of bishops? And yet the early emperors were good Catholics, they loved the popes, in their way; and the popes respected the greatness of the emperors. It was again the great power of Germany balancing the power of Rome. But this time it was not nation against nation, but the spiritual power against the military. Hildebrand had united his Church over the whole of Europe, as if it were one great monastery which he governed. The clergy owed their allegiance to God and the Pope, nothing to the Emperor, the kings or barons. All over Europe one language, Latin, was spoken by the clergy, one doctrine taught. At the same time the church lands were wide and rich as the lands of the empire, though the estates of the Church were scattered over every country. It was Hildebrand's idea to use

kings and their soldiers, all the kings of Europe, as servants of the Church. It was Henry's idea to make the clergy serve the interests of the empire.

We must not imagine that Germany was a kingdom such as we understand kingdoms. It was a confederacy of great independent dukedoms. When one king died, the next was chosen by the great dukes, from among themselves. And just as the king was chiefly a duke, so the emperor was, in the first place, duke of his own lands, then elected king of Germany, then crowned emperor by the Pope. Germany was growing. Austria was the great Mark or border province to the east, Brandenburg to the north. New dukes, margraves and counts arose, new electors.

In 1152 Frederick, called Barbarossa, or Red Beard, was elected King of Germany and then crowned Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire. He was, in the first place, Duke of Franconia and Suabia: that is of South Germany, from the Lake of Constance northwards to Lorraine. He was Frederick Hohenstaufen, of the Castle of Wibelin, in Suabia. His House was called the Hohenstaufen, his faction was called the Ghibelin by the Italians, who could not pronounce Wibelin. Another great man in Germany at this time was Henry the Lion, Duke of Saxony. He came of the Bavarian House of Welf, called Guelph by the Italians. Frederick and Henry represent the two great factions of Guelph and Ghibelin, which fought one another for so many hundreds of years in Germany and Italy.

Frederick, when he became emperor, knew he must keep Henry the Lion friendly, otherwise this fierce duke would cause a revolution in Germany. So he gave him the dukedom of Bavaria, and Henry remained true to the cause of the Emperor. To the north Saxony was shut off from the Baltic. Henry, who was powerful and practically an independent king, seized Bremen from its owners, the military archbishops, and secured Lubeck from Adolph of Holstein. In these and other cities of the Baltic seaboard he started the great Baltic trade, with Denmark, Sweden, Norway, and even England. The land edging the Baltic was marshy: he invited hosts of settlers from Flanders and Holland, and set them to work draining and clearing the land, for farming. Then he united with the king of Denmark and smashed the Slavonic pirates who preyed on the Baltic trade. Wherever he could he ousted the Slavs from North Germany. When he could not oust them, he converted them to Christianity, sending the monks to preach to them. Thus the Slavs in Prussia and Mecklenburg and Pomerania became subject. He captured the Holy Isle of Rugen, which was the centre of the mysterious Slavonic worship, and destroyed its most sacred temple. Then he created bishoprics in his new towns, Schwerin, Mecklenburg, Oldenburg, etc., and the bishops were fighting vassals of his. Thus he had a vast kingdom in

Germany, many towns he owned, active in trade, and an important sea-power. But the people hated him, because he trampled over them brutally. He became so proud, that when the Emperor Frederick called to him for help, he calmly refused to send any men to Italy, in answer to the summons. But in 1181 he had to submit to the Emperor, because the other dukes and counts went against him.

In Germany Frederick Barbarossa tried to make some order. The dukes and counts and nobles were always fighting among themselves. Along the Rhine, that great river of commerce, and along the chief roads rose impregnable castles of robber knights who preyed upon the surrounding country. He issued a General Peace Constitution, establishing agreements among neighbouring lords to keep the peace. He cleared away many robber knights, he encouraged trade, he held great Diets or Councils to establish laws. The country became more prosperous, education began to spread, poets sprang up, and the new songs and ballads were sung, in the German tongue, from one end of the land to the other. Then Frederick, who had gathered large estates for himself, had his son crowned King of Rome, so that the empire should pass from father to son, and not be subject to election.

None the less, Barbarossa could not stay in Germany, he must try to rule Italy. Over the Alps he went, with his train of attendants and soldiers, and in 1154 descended with his numerous host in Lombardy. He still imagined himself ruler of the great Roman Empire of Hadrian or Diocletian. Frederick was crowned in Rome by Adrian iv., once called Nicolas Breakspear, the English Pope. All was very fine and splendid. But before Frederick left Italy, Pope and Emperor had definitely quarrelled, over the question of precedence. Would Frederick hold the bridle of the Pope's horse? Barbarossa said no, for he was greatest. The Pope claimed supremacy for himself. The old quarrel at once began.

Adrian died, and the Pope Alexander m. was set up. Alexander had insulted the Emperor. Therefore Barbarossa refused to acknowledge him, and set up Victor iv., the anti-Pope. War followed. The Pope Alexander was chased about Italy by the armies of Frederick. But the great Lombard cities stood solid against the Emperor. He besieged Milan for three years, till it yielded to starvation. Then he razed it to the ground, in 1162. He drove Alexander into France, after which he himself departed for Germany. Alexander at once returned to Rome, Milan was rebuilt, and in 1166 Frederick was once more forced to march down with a great army to Italy.

Again he drove the Pope from the Holy City. Alexander fled to the Normans of Sicily. But a terrible pestilence broke out in the German armies, as so often happened, and thousands of the soldiers fell into the grave. Frederick returned to Germany, forced to leave Italy to herself, for the cities of the Lombard league

were too strong against him.

The famous cities built the strong fortress, called Alessandria, in honour of their Pope, south-west of Milan, to protect that city. In 1174 Barbarossa came to subdue Alessandria. The siege went on till 1175. Then relieving armies came. It was at this time that Frederick sent to Germany, to Henry the Lion, for help, which Henry refused.

Frederick decided to march on Milan. The cities of the League determined to stop him. They went swiftly against him, and met him at Legnano in 1176. A picked body of the soldiers of the League, called the Company of Death, surrounded the wagon on which their standard stood, determined to fight to the last gasp rather than give in to this emperor from the north. Frederick nearly succeeded in cutting his way through to the wagon, but he was unhorsed, and all the efforts of his German knights were powerless. He was badly defeated, and fled, almost alone, to his faithful town of Pavia.

This is the famous battle of Legnano, when we see towns, and townspeople, not dukes or counts, coming forth to fight for their freedom and their rights.

In July 1177, exactly a century since Henry iv. had humbled himself at Canossa before Hildebrand, Frederick threw himself at the feet of Alexander, in St. Mark's, Venice, in a solemn ceremony of reconciliation. At Venice the Emperor gave up all claim to the patrimony and temporal power of St. Peter. In 1183, in his final treaty of Constance, with the Lombard League, he gave up his claim to rule Lombardy, and the cities were allowed to govern themselves.

But again, the Emperor was not as humble as he seemed. The Lombard cities quarrelled among themselves, and he soon obtained power among them. In 1186 he married his son Henry to Constance, heiress of the Norman kingdom of Sicily. Now, with the strong kingdom of Sicily and Naples added on to the empire, the Pope was caught on the flank. This is a new turn in the contest.

In 1189 the old Emperor set off on a crusade to Palestine. Next year he was drowned whilst bathing in a river in Asia Minor. Thus ended one of the greatest and most energetic Germans.

Henry vi., Barbarossa's son, made terrible work in South Italy. He died, however, in 1197, leaving a baby son to succeed him. In 1198 Innocent III., the great pope of the Middle Ages, was elected to the papacy. Innocent was of a noble Italian family, and a lawyer. He believed, like Hildebrand, that the papacy should exercise a spiritual rule over all Europe. But he saw that to have spiritual rule, the Church must have power, and to have power she must have a kingdom of her own, a real kingdom, with its centre and capital at Rome. So he set himself to work to put kings and princes in their places, and virtually to rule all Europe as if it were one big country. He was a wise and good man. He did not

like the cruelties and extravagance of war. He wanted to establish a good, moral rule. And he failed, as Hildebrand had failed; because in the end it is impossible to rule mankind, at least in any great region, without the sword.

In the turmoil that followed Henry vi.'s death, Innocent tried to interfere. He had interfered in England, trying to force on the chapters the bishops he had elected himself — as in the case of Stephen Langton. He had brought King John to his knees, and exacted much tribute from England. All the time he wanted to uphold the cause of the righteous and the poor, and yet he only succeeded in rousing the deepest antagonism in the people. It was the same in Germany. There the bishops and archbishops were powerful great princes, very German in their ways, very lordly and worldly in their living, caring for their own bishopric and their own German power, but very little for far-off Rome. They were the most un-Roman and independent of all the clergy. The Pope wanted to correct this, to make them more humble and Christianlike. They stood against him with all their might, and all the Germans, clergy, princes, poor alike detested the Pope for his interfering. The songs and ballads of the time curse the name of Innocent, and call the Pope a stirrer-up of strife and hate, a devil seeking his own power. Yet he only wanted to do what was right, strictly, according to the Catholic conception.

Innocent did great work. He tried to enforce a cosmopolitan authority over Europe, when people wanted to act separately and nationally. But he tried all the time to make nations and princes wiser, more just, better in their dealings. His great Lateran Council of 1215, which was attended by 400 bishops, 800 abbots, and ambassadors from every great power, was one of the most splendid councils Europe has ever seen. It reformed the Church, and brought in new church laws, or canons, all wise and broad, forbidding, for example, the cruel trials by ordeal, or by duel, substituting methods of true justice.

But in the young Frederick was growing up one who would bring both papacy and empire to the brink of destruction. Frederick was only three years old when his father, Henry vi., died. The little boy remained with his mother, Constance, in Sicily or South Italy, under the protection of the Pope. He was red-haired, a real Hohenstaufen, but rather small and puny looking. He had for his tutor Honorius, who became Pope later on.

Frederick was perhaps the cleverest man of the Middle Ages. He was King of Sicily and Naples from the time he was four years old, and had all advantages. At court he usually spoke the Romance language, a kind of early Italian or French. He loved the minstrels and jongleurs who made poetry and sang to the harp, the troubadours. So when he was quite young he too learned to sing and make poems; and he was a good poet. Italian was his native language. At the

Sicilian court too were Moors or Arabs. The Moors had established powerful kingdoms in Spain and Sicily. They were on the whole more educated, more civilised than the Europeans. They were the best mathematicians, astronomers, physicians, and botanists in the world, besides that they had a beautiful literature and architecture. Sicily of that day was a wonderful island, the meeting-place of East and West, the flower of civilisation. And of all this Frederick had full advantage. He studied philosophy and religion, and understood more than the popes. He wrote a book on hawking, which remained for centuries the best book on the subject. He made a collection of wild animals at Palermo, established a school of medicine at Salerno, and founded the university of Naples. He was perhaps the most cultured man in Europe, but Italian, hardly a German any more. His contemporaries called him the Wonder of the World.

In his ambition, and his war-like activity, he was like Napoleon. Napoleon too was born on an Italian island, and was emperor of a strange people. But Frederick had not the stubborn heart and fixed purpose of Napoleon, though he had a much more brilliant personality.

Frederick's mother died in 1198, when he was still a baby, and she left him under the guardianship of Pope Innocent III. In 1211, a group of princes in Germany, the King of Bohemia, the Duke of Austria, the Duke of Bavaria, and others, hating the Guelphs, elected the boy Frederick, who was away in Sicily, King of Germany. In 1212, Frederick, being only fifteen years old, made a bold dash into Germany, and soon raised a great following against the Guelph Emperor Otto. In 1214 he got the upper hand; Otto iv. was defeated, Frederick was solemnly crowned emperor in the portico of Charlemagne's basilica at Aix-la-Chapelle. Soon after he departed to Italy again, and only paid two more visits to Germany, in 1235 and in 1236. They were not very important. Frederick was a thorough Italian, though German by blood.

Innocent III. had helped Frederick against Otto iv., hoping to get a humble, dependent emperor. There was peace between the two till Innocent died, in 1216. After Innocent came Honorius III., who had been Frederick's tutor. He was a mild, learned man, and the two remained friendly. In 1220 Frederick was crowned emperor at Rome, and for once the Romans did not raise the disturbance they usually made at the crowning of the hated foreign emperors. Innocent's desire had been that the northern empire and the kingdom of Sicily should not be joined, under the Emperor, for if they were the Papacy would be placed between them as between the two blades of a pair of scissors. Unfortunately Honorius agreed that Frederick should unite both domains. Now the Papacy was in the Emperor's fist.

The popes were very anxious to make Crusades, and Frederick was urged to

go. For a long time he refused, and was threatened with excommunication. He thought Crusades foolish. But Honorius died in 1227, and Gregory, who was Pope after him, drove Frederick II. into setting sail from Brindisi. After a day or two at sea the Emperor fell ill, and returned. He was promptly excommunicated. 'Very well,' thought Frederick, 'I will now go to Palestine.' In 1228 he was already in the Holy Land. The Pope, who saw Frederick's mocking cleverness, excommunicated him again. It was no good. Frederick turned to the world, and said — 'You see I am the champion of Christendom.' And all Europe applauded him. The people of Rome rose and drove out Gregory. The Emperor was delighted. He did not care a straw about Palestine and the Holy Places, but he had made his point.

Then, in Palestine, instead of wasting time fighting and squabbling, having a strong force at his back he made a treaty with the Sultan of Cairo, by which Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Nazareth, were yielded to the Christians, and all necessary means of communication with the coast. A campaign could not possibly have done so well. But the Pope was furious, and would have nothing to do with the success of an excommunicated man, declaring the whole treaty void. Frederick calmly had himself crowned King of Jerusalem, taking the crown himself from the altar, since no priest dared touch it. Then he wrote a friendly letter to the Pope, and Gregory was forced to agree to what had been done.

While Frederick was away, the Pope had stirred up Italy, and undone all the good work in Sicily. But in 1230 the two made friends, and the Emperor was relieved of the excommunication. Then Frederick set to work. He loved his Sicilian kingdom, and determined to make it a model to the world. He established a pure autocracy, almost a tyranny, and set up a rigid system of government. But it was all excellent, for it kept the peace and the land prospered marvellously. The court was brilliant and intellectual; science, education, building flourished; no country was in such an admirable state. All this Frederick was able to build up upon the work of the great Normans who had preceded him.

Then he turned to Italy. He fought the strong cities of the League, capturing them one after the other. In 1237 he won a brilliant victory over Milan, thus wiping out his father's disgrace at Legnano. By 1239 he had Italy in his hands, and began to organise it. Out of his Sicilian Court of Justice he made an Imperial Court for all Italy, and began to rule this southern empire, having crushed in Germany a revolt headed by his own son Henry, whom he imprisoned for life.

But there was bound to be perpetual war now, between the Emperor and the Pope, for the latter saw his kingdom, the States of the Church, encircled and ground down in the Italian grip of Frederick. In 1239 the Emperor was again excommunicated, and there began the final contest between the Papacy and the

Hohenstaufen Empire.

‘ I will tear the mask from the face of this wolfish tyrant, and force him to lay aside worldly affairs and earthly pomp, and to tread in the holy footsteps of Christ,’ wrote Frederick of the Pope. The Pope replied that Frederick was a heretic, that he disbelieved in the immortality of the soul, that he spoke of Moses, Abraham, and Christ as the three great impostors.

The struggle was now to the death. Both sides tried to draw all Europe into the conflict. The Pope tried to turn Germany against its emperor, and failed. He summoned a great number of cardinals and bishops from every land, to make a universal solemn condemnation of Frederick. But Frederick was lucky enough to capture the twenty-two Genoese vessels that were conveying these prelates to the Tiber mouth, and he chuckled and kept them prisoners. All over Italy friars and wandering preachers went about stirring up the people against the infidel Emperor.

In 1241 Gregory died. Innocent iv. was elected. Some attempt was made at reconciliation, but it failed. Innocent iv. extorted money from the Church in every land, to keep up this vast struggle. In 1244 the Pope fled to Genoa, and cried to the world that he was a martyr to the violence of the evil Frederick. In 1245 he went to Lyons, called a great Council, declared the Emperor excommunicated and dethroned, deposed. He stirred up Germany, and had an anti-emperor elected, Henry Raspe. Then he declared a holy Crusade against the infidel Frederick. Innocent iv. determined to exterminate the House of Hohenstaufen, which had determined to exterminate the power of the Papacy. Frederick was declared to be a Pharaoh, a Herod, a Nero, who must be destroyed in Christ’s name.

The Emperor quickly replied. ‘ I hold my crown,’ he said, ‘ from God alone; neither the Pope, nor the Council of Lyons, nor the devil shall rend it from me.’ Then he went on: ‘ Shall the pride of a man of low birth degrade the Emperor, who has no superior nor equal on earth? ‘

Italy now became the scene of a hideous conflict. In the north, Eccelin da Romano, Frederick’s lieutenant, carried on a ruthless war which has given him a terrible name in history. Frederick was active in the south. But in 1247 Parma deserted to the Pope. Frederick hurried to recover it. He settled down to a siege, and built the city of Vittoria as a base of antagonism. But the Parmesans, after a long siege, made a sudden sortie, burnt Vittoria, utterly routed the Emperor, capturing even his crown. It was the death-blow to Frederick’s cause. He became more wild, suspicious of his nearest friends: a raving red beast, they called him. He was mad to destroy the Papacy. Like Napoleon in later days, he said how happy Asia was, that she need fear no intrigues of popes. He almost declared

himself another Prophet of God, like Mahomet. He wanted the divine honours of the Augustan emperors of old to be paid to his person. He proclaimed his own birthplace in Sicily sacred, and said that his great councillor Peter de la Vigne was the Peter, the Rock, on whom the Imperial Church was to be founded.

But all this was the frenzy of failure and mortal hatred of popes. In 1249 his Legate Enzo was defeated and imprisoned by the Bolognese. Frederick hurried north to relieve him. But on December 13, 1250, Frederick died, and the last hope of Hohenstaufen dominion in Italy vanished. Manfred, the Emperor's illegitimate son, fought bravely on, more or less holding Italy for twelve years, till he was slain in battle in 1266. Frederick's son Conrad had become emperor in Germany on his father's death, but he too speedily died, in 1254, leaving a little son Conradin. Conradin, who was a brave, capable youth, marched into Italy in 1268, two years after Manfred's death. He was defeated and captured and beheaded by the help of the French, and so ended the ' viper brood ' of Hohenstaufen, as the Pope and the French called them.

The Pope would seem to be victorious. But in fact the papal power was shattered. From this time it fell into the hands of the French, who rose up as the greatest nation. There was no central papal power in Europe any more. For many years the popes lived at Avignon in South France, while little emperors rose and fell in Germany, unimportant. Nations, states, cities now became separate and strong; the great oneness of the power of the Church was gone. So we approach the divided Europe of later days, leaving the Christendom of the Middle Ages.

Chapter X. The Crusades

In the early Middle Ages Europe was one great realm as it has never been since. It was not strictly Europe, but Christendom. There were so many little states that they did not matter. A man counted himself first a Christian, then a Norman or a Saxon, and after that a Frenchman or an Englishman as might be.

The mass of the people were serfs, labouring on the land, without effort to change. They were full of strange fear, a fear of death, and of a curious excitement, expecting something wonderful to happen. The dark forests, the cold winters with flashing northern lights, the storms, the sudden plagues, the famines, the wild beasts, the seething of a changing world, all helped to fill men in those days with a dread of life, and a vision of something more beautiful, delightful, or more marvellous, more exciting. The clergy came and taught them of the life after death, Heaven which was so lovely to a sordid, wretched, frightened serf, and Hell which was so awful. In those days men believed passionately in Heaven and the angels, they longed for the grandeur of the angelic city, the living in the brightness, speaking beautifully with the noble and splendid angels, wearing delicate white clothes and looking on the face of God. They believed just as strongly in the Devil. Angels hovered among them as they toiled in fields or forests, devils tempted them from the bushes or out of the darkness of night, monstrous and wonderful things were semi-hidden everywhere.

It was the great Church which offered the supernatural terrors and beauty and hope and marvels to men whose soiled, heavy, imprisoned lives were not satisfying to them. Still, in places, peasants worshipped the dreadful old gods of fear, sacrificing to trees and springs of water. But after so much fighting and gruesomeness, in the midst of so much hopelessness, the thought of Almighty Jesus and of Heaven was almost unspeakably wonderful to men. At the same time, they still loved their own wild, fierce, brutal ways. So that with one half of themselves they turned with ecstasy to the teachers of Heaven and love, the priests of the Church. With the other half, they still wanted the satisfaction of violence and lust, the bloody excitement of fighting and killing, and superstitious sacrifice.

There were only two great powers above the people — the barons and the clergy. The barons, seated in their castles, meant serfdom and war and the excitement of adventure. The clergy, with their Christian teaching, meant

mystery, submissiveness, and humble labour, with the great glamour of an after-life beyond.

But to make war costs money, and the barons were always short of money. So we have the Jewish moneylender, a very important figure in those days, when moneylending was forbidden to Christians. And besides the moneylender the merchant rose up in the towns, under the protection of the barons. For the merchants paid heavily for the barons' shelter and protection.

Lastly, among the clergy themselves, were the monks. The people of that day had two kinds of heroes: first, the great fighter who made himself renowned on earth; secondly, the great saint, who would have power in heaven. Men who were soldiers would suddenly put off their armour to enter a monastery, to find the eternal salvation. And men who were soldiers mocked at the folded hands and bowed, shaven heads of the monks, who, they said, were neither men, women, nor good cattle. Then again, in time of danger, monks would put on armour under their habits, and sally forth to fight, ferocious as any men-at-arms. Thus all Europe swayed between two passions — the passion of fighting and violence, and the passion for blissful holiness.

So we have the life: fierce castles on the rocks, great monasteries by the streams and ponds: and between the two, the villages of miserable huts, with a parish priest and perhaps a church or chapel, and a people full of fear, misery, superstition, delight, and excitement.

It was necessary for the Church to become more powerful, for the Church was the great civilising influence, teaching men the arts of peace and production. And yet in the hearts of men was an absolute necessity for fighting and adventure. How were the two to go together? The Church would have to satisfy the fighting instinct in her people, otherwise she would never hold them, would never succeed in quieting them and bringing them to order.

Mahomet had begun to preach in Arabia in 609. His followers had soon grown powerful, had overrun Asia Minor and were attacking Constantinople. They, of course, seized Jerusalem and the holy places in the far East. Now the Christians had made pilgrimages to Jerusalem from early times. This making of pilgrimages was a pagan custom. The old Greeks would travel far to a sacred shrine or temple where they wished to make a vow or a supplication. So the Christians went to Jerusalem.

After the Arabs took the Holy Land, they still allowed the Christian Patriarch to hold the Holy Sepulchre. For the Arabs allowed that Jesus was a prophet, but a much smaller prophet than Mahomet. So vast numbers of people came from Europe to Jerusalem, each one paying a certain fee which enriched the Mohammedans. They came in comparative safety, particularly in Charlemagne's

days, for Charlemagne was a friend of the great Caliph or Prince Haroun al Raschid; moreover as yet the Mohammedans felt no holy hatred of Christianity. Every spring whole caravans of Christians, princes, bishops, poor people, travelled across Europe and Asia to Jerusalem.

But in the year 1000 the Turks began to move out of Asia against the Arab Mohammedans. About 1070 they captured Asia Minor, and Jerusalem fell into their hands. The Turks became Mohammedans, but they by no means treated the Christians as the more civilised wise caliphs had done. They fell upon the Christian caravans, robbed and tormented them. Every step was danger and misery. At last some wretched pilgrims returned wasted and spent, to tell of their sufferings at the hands of the Turks. Great numbers never returned at all.

About 1090 a hermit of France, called Peter, reached Constantinople on his return from the Sepulchre. He was a battered pilgrim, a monk. He had been a gentleman. He and the Patriarch of Constantinople wept together over the sufferings and shame of the Christians, whose most holy places must lie in the hands of cruel heathens. The Patriarch could get no help from the weak, vicious emperors of Constantinople.

‘ I will rouse the martial nations of Europe in your behalf,’ cried Peter. The astonished Patriarch gave him letters of credit, and Peter hastened west. He kissed the feet of the Pope in Rome, and proclaimed his mission. He was a mad fanatic, but wonderful as a preacher and an inspirer of the people. Pope Urban II. saw that it would be wise to let him rouse Christendom to one great united act, and he gave Peter his blessing, and encouraged him to proclaim the deliverance of the Holy Land.

Peter the Hermit was a small, insignificant-looking man, but his soul flamed, his eyes were flashing, he was wonderful in exhortation. Riding on an ass, he carried a heavy crucifix before him. His head and feet were bare, he wore a coarse dark garment, his body was thin and worn with fasting and vehemence. And so he traversed Italy, then France, then Germany, preaching to great crowds in the churches, in market-places, by the roadside, telling the sufferings of the pilgrims, wailing the shame to Jesus that the sacred Sepulchre was defiled by the Turks, calling to Christ and the Mother of God, as if he saw them in the air above him, weeping and crying to them to be with this people, to lighten their steps. He went into cottages, or castles, or palaces alike, and whether it was a poor man eating his grey porridge, or a baron before his venison and wine, he cried on the inmates of the house to gird their loins and prepare for the holy expedition. And peasant or baron, farmer or bishop, they all listened alike, and groaned and wept as if they saw Jesus in trouble, and vowed themselves to this service of the dear God. For in those days men felt Jesus as if He were suffering

and beautiful amongst them, they defended Him as if He were a delicate, most wonderful heart's-brother. And all men shared this feeling — serfs, barons, kings, bishops: when it came to the wonderful, sweet, delicate Jesus and His tender Mother, all hearts burned alike, all men were filled with one great hot yearning. And this passion for Jesus united men and made them one, across all the difference of serfdom and tyranny. They were united in one passion, slave and lord alike, their hearts beat the same. It has never been so again, since the strange passionate days of the early Middle Ages.

Pope Gregory VII., the great Hildebrand, had already begun to arm Europe against the Mohammedans: but it was Urban the Second who was the great maker of the movement. He called a council of two hundred bishops of Italy, France, Burgundy, Suabia, and Bavaria; four thousand of the clergy, and thirty thousand of the laity attended the vast meeting, which was held on the plain outside Placentia. The ambassadors from Constantinople told the sad tale of the East, the shame that lay on Bethlehem and Calvary, the tale of the misery and suffering of the eastern Christians, till this vast assembly, thousands of men, burst into tears and wept. The most eager declared their willingness to march at once to rescue God and His servants. But Pope Urban knew that a short delay would gather greater hosts and stir the feeling deeper. Meanwhile in every parish the clergy preached the mission. Another great meeting was arranged at Clermont, in Aquitaine. When Urban mounted the high scaffold in the market-place, masses of people had gathered to hear him. And as he spoke and urged and persuaded them, suddenly one great cry went up from the hosts. *Deus vult! Deus vult!* cried the clergy, in pure Latin. *Diex el volt! Diex el volt!* cried the poorer people from the north. *Deus lo volt! Deus lo volt!* cried the people from the south. But it was all one cry, and had one meaning — 'God wills it! God wishes it!'

'It is indeed the will of God,' replied the Pope; 'and let this memorable word, surely inspired by the Holy Ghost, be ever your battle cry, you champions of Christ. Christ's cross is the symbol of your salvation — wear it, a red, a bloody cross, on breast or shoulder, as an eternal mark of your irrevocable pledge.'

The greatest excitement spread over Europe. People were mad to release the holy places of the Saviour, to succour God and to behold the towers of Jerusalem the Golden, to know the wonders of Jordan, to touch the olive-trees for themselves, where Jesus had wept, to see His lilies. All Europe also had heard of the marvellous palaces of the caliphs, of the gold and jasper and emeralds of the magical Arabians, of sweet groves of cinnamon, and of the lovely dark-eyed women of the East. So adventurous souls were fired. They wanted to capture these marvellous palaces, to seize these jewels and this gold, to taste the spices,

to know the soft-eyed women. Sure of great treasure from the East, as well as of everlasting glory in heaven, princes mortgaged their estates, barons their castles, peasants sold their cattle and implements. Horses and armour and weapons became enormously expensive, cows, land, furniture very cheap. Every man except merchants, clergy, Jews, wanted to go. Every man must provide himself with staff, and wallet for food. Each must sew on the shoulder of his garment the red cross. The rich sewed scarlet silk with gold thread and gems, the poor stitched on coarse red flannel. Some men branded their naked shoulders with hot irons.

The 15th August, 1096, was fixed for the day of departure. But early in the spring sixty thousand people of the poorer classes, men, women, youths, girls, were gathered in the east of France and in Lorraine, clamouring to be led by Peter the Hermit, at once to set off. In front eight horsemen led fifteen thousand foot pilgrims. The others followed in vast detachments. Behind these again came fifteen thousand German peasants, led by the monk Godescal. And away behind these came many thousands of the worst, most villainous people in Europe, hanging round for robbery and crime. All thoughtful men knew that such an expedition was wickedly foolish. Some counts and gentlemen, with three thousand horse, attended the multitude for its salvation. But in the very front of the mad host were carried a goose and a goat, emblems which were supposed to be possessed with the Holy Spirit. So the mad, raging, shameless mob trailed across Europe.

Peter led the way along the Moselle and Rhine. The first thing to do was to massacre the Jews. At Verdun, Treves, Metz, Spire, Worms, many thousands of these unhappy people were slaughtered and pillaged for having crucified Jesus. In these great border towns the Jews had prosperous trading quarters. These were wiped out. So the terrible hosts moved on, devouring the land, to the Danube. There they had to turn south, through Hungary and Bulgaria, making for Constantinople. The Hungarians, Huns and Magyars had not much food, save their herds, for still they grew little corn, and depended on milk and flesh. Therefore in the vast reedy plains there was small supply for the hosts. The Crusaders demanded provisions, seized the scanty stocks, and speedily devoured them. The Hungarians, newly Christianised but still pagan by blood, in anger mounted their swift little horses, and led by their king darted round the moving hosts, showering them with arrows. The Bulgarians also attacked the vast mob. There was some ugly murdering and fighting. About a third of the defenceless Crusaders, with Peter the Hermit, escaped to the mountains of Thrace. The rest perished, strewing their bones down the Balkan Peninsula.

The forces of the Greek emperor led the refugees to Constantinople, and

settled them there to await their real leaders, the more noble Crusaders. But the mob of pilgrims so shamelessly robbed and broke into the houses of Constantinople, that Alexius the Emperor tempted them over to the Asiatic side of the Bosphorus. There, like a herd of savages, they rushed towards the Turks who occupied the way to Palestine. The Sultan tempted them on. In a plain of Nicaea they were overwhelmed by Turkish arrows, and a pyramid of bones stood to show to the later Crusaders, the nobler and more regular host, the place of this defeat. Three hundred thousand of this first mob had perished before the true Crusaders were ready to start: and nothing at all had been done against the Turk.

The band of the true Crusaders contained many great lords. Godfrey of Bouillon, Duke of Lorraine, was one of the greatest: then came Hugh, Count of Vermandois; Robert, Duke of Normandy, brother of William Rufus — he had pawned Normandy for about £25,000, in order to be able to go; Robert, Count of Flanders; Stephen, Count of Chartres; these four were the chief leaders of the Norman, British, and North French pilgrims: the Southern French were led by the Bishop of Puy and Raymond, Duke of Toulouse; Bohemond, son of Robert Guiscard, led ten thousand horse and twenty thousand foot from South Italy, his nephew Tancred being his partner, a very famous and perfect knight; there were innumerable other nobles, too many to mention. The wives and sisters of the gentry wished to go with them. They converted their possessions into bars of gold and silver, and, mounted on horseback, gathered together. Princes and barons took with them hounds and hawks to amuse their leisure. The hosts were too many to go together, they would never find food, so they agreed to take separate routes, and meet near Constantinople.

Godfrey of Bouillon, Duke of Lorraine, with his Germans and North French, came by the Danube and down Bulgaria to Constantinople. Having listened to the account of the crimes and the miseries of his forerunners, Godfrey made a treaty of peace with the King of the Hungarians. He arrived in the eastern capital without any bloodshed. Raymond of Toulouse with his Provengals came by Turin and Venice, round the head of the Adriatic, and down through Dalmatia, forty days' wretched march through perpetual fog and half-hostile mountain natives, having little food to eat and no peace, till he too arrived at Constantinople. The Normans, French, and British under Robert of Normandy and Hugh of Vermandois marched splendidly over the Alps, along the Roman roads to Rome, feasted and welcomed in all the Italian towns. Their ranks were thinned by desertion, for the northerners could not withstand the temptation of remaining in the beautiful Italian cities. After a great display in Rome, this host passed on to Brindisi, where it had to wait till spring for a crossing, and did not

reach Constantinople till the early summer of 1097.

Meanwhile the fourth host, the Normans of Sicily with the South Italians, under Bohemond and Tancred, kept near the sea, for they were a well-armed host and well attended with ships. The inhabitants of these old lands were Greek subjects of the Emperor, but they did not like this crusading invasion. Bohemond was fierce. He stormed the castles that interfered with his progress, and pillaged the lands of such offenders.

Poor Alexius, who had pleaded for help from the Roman Christendom against the Turks, now had tidings of the approach of host after host of terrible and ruinous friends who devoured the land. Twenty-four knights in golden armour rode in advance into Constantinople to announce the coming of Hugh of Vermandois, commanding the Emperor to revere the general of the Latin Christians, the brother of the King of Kings, Philip of France. Alexius was astonished and indignant at this announcement, for to his imagination the King of France was a barbarian, not much more important to him than an African chief to us. He waited. There was no preventing the advancing armed bands of northerners from ravaging the lovely Greek estates. Proud and insolent arrived Count Hugh, so unbearable that at last the Emperor had him imprisoned, before his forces had come up. Godfrey of Bouillon, the best and strongest leader, came down after his wretched, weary journey through the Balkan Peninsula to hear such news. He was very angry, and fell on the suburbs of the glittering city of Constantinople. Poor Alexius was at his wits' end, finding the Christians far worse than the Turks. He was accused by the Crusaders of intending to starve and drown their hosts.

But peace was made, and at last the Emperor persuaded Godfrey to allow his army to be conveyed over to the Asiatic side of the Bosphorus. This was done, and the ships immediately returned to Constantinople, so that no Crusaders could come back. Then the army of Hugh was transported. As fast as one army arrived, the Emperor had it conveyed across, so that it should never join forces with the next comers in the great capital. He dreaded lest they should seize and sack the finest and wealthiest city in the world, his beloved Constantinople. The leaders remained his guests in Constantinople, while their armies or hosts were on the Asiatic side of the water.

One after the other, the great princes were presented at court. Bohemond and Raymond of Toulouse on their arrival urged Godfrey to unite with them and attack Constantinople. Godfrey refused. He had come as a Crusader — not as a marauder. So the poor Emperor trusted to Godfrey, even adopting him as his son. And in this way relations were more or less friendly with the Greek court, Alexius doing his best to conciliate the fierce chiefs. Bohemond, whom the

Greeks dreaded, was lodged in a splendid palace, and served like an emperor. One day, as he passed through a gallery, a door left carelessly open showed an interior where gold and silver, gems, silk, and curious furniture were piled in disorder in great heaps. 'What conquests,' said greedy Norman Bohemond, 'might not be achieved by the possession of such a treasure.' 'It is yours,' said the Greek attendant. And Bohemond was greedy-spirited enough to accept it, and the Greeks now felt he had submitted to them. Robert of Normandy, Stephen of Chartres, Raymond of Toulouse, one after another they bowed before the pompous and resplendent throne of the Byzantines.

They all marvelled at the splendours of the court of Constantinople, looking with wonder on such things as they, from their rough northern castles, could not even imagine. They were like the barbarians at Rome. But they hated having to do homage to the eastern Emperor. It was necessary, for they could not cross the Bosphorus without his ships, and they needed his support and guidance through Asia Minor, where his empire extended. So they bowed the knee before him as he sat on his high golden throne. But they hoped in their hearts that, when once in Asia, they could turn their swords against him.

Anna Comnena, daughter of the Emperor, a young, clever princess, wrote her memoirs in which we may still read her account of the visit of these Crusaders to her father's capital. She did not like the counts and nobles of the north. She thought them the merest barbarians, insolent, overbearing, vulgar, gaping greedily at the treasures of the palace. Their rude manners disgusted the delicate little lady, their very names, so uncouth, offended her Greek tongue. Some, she allows, were handsome, but all were uncivilised. She liked Raymond of Toulouse best, and hated Bohemond of Sicily. And she writes as if all these great chiefs of the north were but paid soldiers whom her father had hired.

But she is thankful when at last they are all transported over the Bosphorus, for she is staggered by their numbers. All Europe was loosened from its foundation, she says, and hurled against Asia. More than the stars in heaven or the sands of the shore these people came, and they passed like devouring locusts.

Indeed the hosts were countless. Most came from France, but all countries sent their bands. Even there were naked savages from Ireland and Scotland, for it was forbidden to prevent even the poorest Christian from making this holy excursion. It is impossible to say how many died of disease in the hot southern countries, how many perished from thirst and hunger in Syria. For the Greeks in the provinces of Asia Minor were unfriendly, the thoughtless masses devoured their provisions at once, and famine set in. It is said in their anguish of hunger they even roasted and ate their prisoners. Spies who found their way into Bohemond's kitchen were shown human bodies, bodies of Turks or Saracens,

turning on the spit. But this was probably a trick of Bohemond's to make his name more feared. All the while the enemy hung round, cutting off all stragglers, making sudden attacks on unready bands. All the while the European soldiery had to protect the unarmed masses.

The great hosts divided. Nicaea, the Sultan's capital near the sea of Marmora, was besieged and at last taken. Another party moved on. When they were far from the sea and fainting with heat they were attacked by the Turkish host, swift darting horsemen loosing their arrows. Bohemond, Tancred, and Robert of Normandy held the fight, and just as all seemed lost, the rest of the sacred army, under Godfrey and Raymond, sixty thousand horse, came up from Nicaea, and a great battle was fought. Four thousand Christians were pierced with Turkish arrows. But as evening approached the swiftness of Asiatic horsemen yielded to the slow but invincible iron strength of the Franks, and Soliman's forces were routed, his camp with all its treasures seized.

Both the Turks and the northerners felt supreme contempt for the unwarlike Greeks and the soft people of Asia Minor. But in each other they met a worthy adversary. Now at last the Turks learned to respect the invincible slow power of the Franks, for as such they named all the Crusaders, since indeed the greater part of the knights were of Germanic, Norman or Frankish origin. And at last the Crusaders found themselves faced with dauntless, skilful soldiers in the Turks.

The Crusaders crossed Lower Asia, through a land deserted and wasted by the retreating enemy. In the desert places they suffered from thirst, and gave silver for a draught of water. When they came to a river, low in its banks, multitudes rushed, pressing each other, treading each other to death down the steep slopes, pushing many victims into the water. Then they wearily climbed the steep, slippery sides of Mount Taurus. Godfrey of Bouillon had been torn by a bear, and was carried in a litter. Raymond of Toulouse was borne along, grievously sick. Winter was coining on.

In October 1097 they began the great siege of Antioch. Though all scattered bands were called in, still the Crusaders were not sufficiently numerous to surround the city, which still retained much of its Roman greatness. They knew they could not take the walls by force. They knew they could not starve the town into submission. February arrived, 1098, and no progress had been made. The Crusaders were dying off by the thousand. They were utterly starving.

It was agreed that whichever chief captured the city should possess it. Bohemond was most ambitious, he madly desired the prize, for it was a very great one. He defeated an attacking force of the Moslems. Then he sought all manner of means of success. The native population of Antioch was Christian, had been Christian since Roman days. These native Christians had had the

Mohammedan religion forced on them, but were ready to turn Christian again as soon as possible. Bohemond contrived that one of them, a Syrian renegade who commanded three towers, should admit him and his bands into the city. Early one June night scaling-ladders were thrown down from the walls, Bohemond and Duke Robert, with their armies rushed silently up, assembled, and seized the town. In the morning the Crusaders saw Bohemond's flag flying over the city. The poor perishing Crusaders felt they were saved.

But Antioch was a trap. The citadel still held out, and there was seen arriving a huge army under the Emir Kerboga, multitudes of dark warriors advancing over the plains. The Christians felt that they were lost. Famine or slaughter seemed the only alternative. Many fled from the city in despair. The rest of the Crusaders shut the gates and manned the walls, prepared to stand siege and starve.

Then a miracle happened. Peter Bartholomew, a cunning Provençal priest, announced that the Holy Lance which pierced the side of Jesus on the Cross had been buried under the altar of St. Peter's church in Antioch. St. Andrew had thrice appeared to him in a dream, and commanded him to bring forth the relic. In great excitement the digging commenced. The lance was found. Bohemond's party plainly declared that it had been hidden there for the purpose by the priest and the Provençals. But this had no effect on the great body of the Crusaders. They believed.

Five-and-twenty days the Christians besieged in the city had spent on the verge of destruction, for the emir camped against them offered only the choice of slavery or death.

They were but a handful now compared with the hosts that had set out. There in the far East they prepared to lay their bones. But on the twenty-fifth day the lance was discovered — a Saracen lance-head. Wrapped in a veil of silk and gold it was held up to the Crusaders. A great shout of inflamed joy and hope went up from the whole city. Prayers were offered. Then the soldiers were sent to their quarters, bidden to eat the last of their food freely, and to give all provender to the horses, and to be ready at dawn.

By the first light of day the men assembled. When all were ready the gates were thrown open, the battle array marched forth and was marshalled on the plain outside. A procession of monks chanted the psalm: ' Let the Lord arise, and let His enemies be scattered.' And then the Christian Crusaders, mad with religious excitement, broke on the startled Turks. A tremendous victory was won. It is said that the enemy's army had six hundred thousand men. This vast, clumsy host was broken, it fled in panic. Great treasures were captured. It seemed indeed a miracle. No wonder that the Crusaders believed they had seen

angels and martyrs of God come down and fight with them, flashing and glistening in their midst, angels with bright swords thrusting and slaying the dusky Turks.

For the Crusaders were now much diminished. Thousands had died of pestilence and famine during this dreadful siege. In October 1097, sixty thousand crusading horse had been reviewed before the city: in June 1098 but two thousand remained, and scarce two hundred could be mustered for battle. Godfrey of Bouillon, Bohemond, and Tancred had alone kept heart. Yet even Godfrey had had to borrow a horse for the day of battle. He owned none, and could buy none.

The victory won, Bohemond demanded the city as his own. Raymond said it belonged to the Greek Emperor from whom it had been captured by the Turks. But Bohemond insisted, and he had his way. He remained in his city, or county — for he would claim the surrounding land — with a small force of soldiers. The rest rode on towards Jerusalem, a much diminished host, following the coast southwards. Hugh of Vermandois and Stephen of Chartres had already turned back home to Europe. They had had enough.

When the Crusaders came to the seaport of Tripoli, however, not very far from Damascus, Raymond halted and settled down with his forces. It was a pleasant land. He wanted to found a state for himself, a rival to Antioch. Baldwin, brother of Godfrey, had established himself in Edessa. So little did these great leaders care any more for the crusade, so greedy were they for land. They felt they were out on a great colonising adventure, that the East should be made a sort of European colony, themselves as rulers.

The remaining Crusaders, weary of all this, now demanded to be led straight to Jerusalem. They had heard of the decline of the Turkish Empire which they were invading. The Arabs had for thirty years been ousted from Asia Minor by the Turks. Therefore the Caliph of Egypt now watched with joy the crumbling of the power of the Turkish sultans. He wanted his own lands back. While the Crusaders were in Syria he sent his Arab armies against the Turks of Jerusalem, and captured the Holy City. The town was now held, not very strongly, by the Fatimite Arabs from Egypt. The Court of Cairo, after the capture of Antioch, sent ambassadors with robes of silk, and precious vases, and purses of gold and silver to Godfrey and Bohemond, explaining that Jerusalem belonged by right to the Arabs, and that a treaty should be arranged such as had held good in Charlemagne's days, whereby pilgrims might visit the holy places, by paying tribute.

But Godfrey would have none of this. He proudly declared that Christians would ask no permission to visit Jerusalem, and that it was only by a timely

surrender of the city that the Caliph could avert an immediate attack. Yet the winter wasted away. Weary to death, the Crusaders scattered to enjoy themselves in the sweet, luxurious cities of Syria. They were well supplied with food, the emirs paid rich tribute to them. For the Turks were disunited and weakened, they gave presents to their enemies so that they need not fight them.

At last, almost a small band now, led by Godfrey, the Crusaders marched from Caesarea, and in June 1099 they saw Jerusalem on her hills. Then the travel-worn heroes cried aloud, and wept hot tears, seeing the Holy City they had suffered so much to win, the city of God.

Godfrey planted his standard on the first swell of Mount Calvary; to the left lay Tancred and Duke Robert; Count Raymond, who had come along, pitched his quarters between the Citadel and Mount Sion. On the fifth day, they made a tremendous assault, but were driven back by the skilful Arabs with much slaughter and shame. So they had to sit down to a siege. They suffered again bitterly from lack of food and water, but chiefly for want of water, for the hills of Jerusalem are dry and stony. And they could find no timber to make the engines of assault.

At last, however, the movable towers were constructed. These high wooden towers were wheeled close to the walls, and from their summits the crusading soldiers fired arrows down upon the defenders of the ramparts, driving them off. Then a wooden drawbridge was lowered from the high wooden turret of the siege-engine, on to the wall, and on a Friday, July 15, 1099, at three o'clock in the afternoon, Godfrey of Bouillon stood victorious on the walls of Jerusalem. And thus, four hundred and sixty years after the great Arab Omar had captured the city, was Jerusalem set free once more from the Mohammedan yoke.

A terrible massacre took place. Tancred alone showed some pity. For three days the Crusaders savagely slaughtered the Moslems, men, women, and children. It is said the Christians waded up to their ankles in blood. The Jews were burnt in their synagogue. Seventy thousand Mohammedans were put to the sword. After a week or two the infection of masses of dead bodies produced a pestilence.

Bareheaded and barefoot, in a humble posture, when the city was quieted the conquerors ascended the hill of Calvary walking in slow procession, to the loud singing of anthems by the priests. They kissed the stone which had covered the grave of Jesus, weeping burning tears of joy and penitence.

Godfrey of Bouillon became ruler of Jerusalem, with the title of Defender of the Holy Sepulchre. In Europe, Pope Urban had died eight days after the capture of the city. He never heard of the event. So ended the First Crusade, wonderful as the first act of united Christendom, the first great movement of waking

Europe.

Godfrey's successor, Baldwin, became King of Jerusalem. Far away there in the East grew up a number of Latin states. Bohemond, followed by Tancred, governed Antioch as if he were king there, Raymond ruled Tripoli in Asia. The Military Orders rose up, and commanded the cities and seaports of Acre, Tyre, Jaffa, Ascalon.

The Military Orders were associations of sacred knights. The first, the Hospitallers, had been begun to maintain a hospital in Jerusalem and to protect pilgrims. The second, the Templars, which afterwards became so very powerful, was begun in 1119, when a band of eight knights united to defend the Temple and the way to Jerusalem. The knights were fighting monks, monk-knights who had sworn to dedicate their lives to conquering the enemies of God. They were to remain chaste and celibate, they had rules of prayer like monks. All over Christendom they had houses, monasteries almost, where men entered and vowed their lives to God, and, after a certain probation, were clothed in the armour with the sacred red cross on the breast, and sent forth in the service of Christ.

Thus from 1100 to 1200 A.D. a steady stream of powerful warriors flowed out to the East, to guard the holy places and defend the Latin states.

It was partly owing to these Latin states of the East that the great eastern trade of Venice and Genoa and Sicily grew so rich and important. From the Syrian sea-coast, through the Middle Ages ship after ship sailed away for the European ports of Venice, Pisa, Genoa, laden with oriental produce; whilst ship after ship spread her sails from Europe carrying goods to Tripoli, Tyre, Acre, Jaffa, Antioch. For in these eastern cities dwelt European knights and nobles and peoples, settled there and ruling the land and enjoying life, like the English now in India. These Franks, as the Moslems called them, lived and jostled and fought and traded in the East for nearly two hundred years, conquerors possessing the land. Fleets of ships sailed straight for their ports from the ports of Italy, and thus Constantinople, which had been the great port, the only port of the East, gradually declined, being left aside.

There were many crusades, but none like the first. Never again did the same passion sweep Europe. In 1101 a vast host set out to rescue Bohemond, who had been captured by the Turks, and deprived of his Frankish principality of Antioch. This crusade intended also to take Bagdad. But it failed in every respect.

About 1127 the Turkish House of Seljuk, which had been crumbling when it was attacked by the first Crusaders, yielded in the East to the succeeding House of Zenghi. In 1144 Zenghi attacked the Christians of the East, and his rising power threatened the Holy Land. A new crusade was preached by St. Bernard,

Abbot of Clairvaux in France, one of the greatest monks the world has seen. Louis VII. of France and the Emperor Conrad III. set off in 1147. They reached Damascus, which the Turks held, and attacked it, but were driven off. This crusade also utterly failed.

In 1187 Jerusalem fell again. The great Sultan Saladin had added Egypt to his Asiatic possessions. He fell on Syria and defeated the Christians. Just as the first Crusaders, in wild religious enthusiasm, had conquered Palestine owing to the indifference and careless weakness of the Mohammedans, so the fiery, enthusiastic Mohammedans now reconquered it, with all the enthusiasm of a holy war, from the indifferent, careless Franks, who were selfish, stupid, and quarrelsome out there in the East.

A third crusade was organised to save the Holy City. Frederick Barbarossa set out, but was drowned in 1189, and only a remnant of his army reached Antioch. Richard of England, called Coeur de Lion, and Philip Augustus of France, were under vow to go. They set off in 1190. Richard went by sea, wintering in Sicily. In the spring he set out for Acre, conquering Cyprus by the way. The Christians had been besieging Acre for two years, when the French and English fleets sailed up.

Richard was a great leader, a great man: not an Englishman, for he could never speak English: a Frenchman, an Aquitanian, writing and singing his poems in the language of Southern France: a tall, rash man, fair, handsome, brave, a great leader, a terror to the Turks. But he and Philip could never agree. In 1191 Richard took Acre. Philip, declaring his health was broken, returned to France.

Acre had capitulated to Richard, and he held two thousand captives as hostage, till the ransom should be paid according to Saladin's promises. Saladin failed to pay, Richard massacred the hostages, and marched to Ascalon. But as he moved into the interior, away from his ships and supplies, he became helpless in a barren land, he could do nothing, masterly leader though he was. He pressed on. In the spring of 1192 he was within sight of Jerusalem. His comrades went up the hill to see in the distance the towers of the city. But Richard would not go up, he would not look. For he knew he could get no farther. He returned to the coast in great bitterness.

He gave Cyprus to Guy, King of Jerusalem. Guy reconquered Acre, but Jerusalem was lost to Christendom.

In 1202 another crusade, a Crusade of Barons, set out. It was to go by sea this time, sailing from Venice. In 1203 the fleet reached Constantinople. The Venetians had a quarrel with the Byzantines, and had come on purpose to take the city. The Crusaders besieged Constantinople. This wonderful city, so long

inviolable, fell after thirteen days' siege, and the Venetians and the Crusaders remained in occupation pretending it was too late to proceed east. The Byzantines murdered their emperor, and turning against the Latins, drove them out. In 1204 the city was again taken by the Venetians and the Crusaders, assaulted, stormed, taken, sacked and gutted. Innumerable treasures were destroyed, innumerable lovely statues from old Greece melted down to make bronze money. Then, imitating Godfrey or Bohemond or Guy in the far East, Baldwin of Flanders made himself Emperor of Constantinople, Boniface of Montferrat became King of Thessalonica, other counts and barons became lords of the Morea, of Attica, Boeotia, and parts of Asia Minor. There was a Duke of Athens and a Prince of Achaia — all barons from Italy or the North, most of them Germanic nobles. But Venice was the great gainer. Venice now became mistress of the eastern seas, which Constantinople had been for hundreds of years.

This crusade, called the Fourth, was just a splendid, if rather unholy adventure: a marauding conquest and annexation of the near East, Eastern Europe, by barons from the West and North.

In 1228, as we know, Frederick h. marched to Palestine and made a satisfactory treaty with the Sultan of Cairo, obtaining Jerusalem, Bethlehem, and Nazareth — the three places of pilgrimage. He crowned himself King of Jerusalem. But this was no conquest. It was not even real possession, but rather an occupation by permission.

In 1244 Jerusalem was again lost, and the Latin kingdom of the East was practically destroyed altogether. Louis ix. of France led an expedition in 1248 against the Sultan of Egypt. He took Damietta, and advanced into the Delta of the Nile. The Saracens attacked his army, Louis was captured, and his host surrendered. With the exception of the king and the chief lords, the army was massacred to a man. A great sum was paid for Louis' ransom, Damietta given up. Then the king went to the Holy Land, trying to strengthen the few remaining Christian positions there, and performing pious works. He returned to France after three years, having done nothing and lost an army.

These crusades to the East were as ruinous for France as the excursions of the German emperors to Italy. But men had to fight somewhere, and perhaps it was better to fight the Moslem abroad than the Christian at home. After the Crusades, Europe never acted again in union. Men ceased to be Christians first and foremost. Nationality now began to count.

Chapter XI. Italy after the Hohenstaufens

The great struggle between Pope and Emperor ended with the Hohenstaufens. The two great powers left each other so weak that kings, nations, cities, small republics rose to independence, raising their heads from the ruin of the great ones. The popes no longer hoped to govern Europe from Rome; their large idea collapsed or dwindled. The emperors no longer hoped to rule Italy and the popes, and thus sway Europe. They came to depend on their own hereditary dominions, just as the popes became merely Italian, less and less European.

The greatest emperors of the Hohenstaufen family were the two Fredericks, Frederick Barbarossa, the great fighter, and Frederick the Second, called in his young days the Wonder of the World, and towards the end of his life, when the hatred between him and the Pope's party became so deadly, called the Beast of Europe.

The Hohenstaufens came from the old castle of Wibelin in Germany. They had a great rival family in Germany, called the House of Welf. When the popes fought so terribly with Barbarossa and Frederick II., they made friends with the rivals of the Hohenstaufens in Germany. While ever the fighting went on, the dukes of the House of Welf sent down to Italy many knights and fierce soldiers to help the popes, so that Italy was full of fierce Germans, who could speak no Italian. These ferocious German soldiers would seize an Italian peasant, and demand: 'Which are you, Welf or Wibelin?' This meant, are you of the Pope's party, or of the Emperor's?

The poor peasant must decide. He came to know the words Welf and Wibelin, to his sorrow. But he could not pronounce them. He said Guelph and Ghibelin. Every man in Italy must be either a Guelph or a Ghibelin.

The Guelphs were staunch for the popes. But when Frederick II. died, the Ghibelins were much weakened. The brave Manfred, illegitimate son of Frederick, assumed the crown of Sicily and Naples, Frederick's fairest kingdom. Pope Urban at once declared Manfred an usurper. The Ghibelins, Manfred's party, seized power in Rome, and drove out Urban. Urban was a Frenchman, son of a cobbler of Troves, for in those days a man might rise to the highest position from the very lowest, if he entered the Church. The Pope now badly needed help. He turned to his native France, and asked Charles of Anjou to come and take the crown of Sicily from the usurper Manfred. Charles was brother to the saintly, crusading Louis ix. of France.

Manfred was excommunicated; and now began the disastrous occupation of Italy by the French. For hundreds of years the Germans of the Empire had swamped Italy: now it was the turn of the French, the great kingly power, to occupy and destroy that land.

Frederick II. and Manfred were so Italian that they seemed natives of Italy. The French were detestable foreigners. So that those who loved Italy as a whole, who wanted Italy to be settled in peace, a united country, these men were Ghibelins. But those who wanted their own separate little independence, and hated the thought of a united Italy, these were on the Pope's side. Independent, jealous cities were with the Pope, the south of Italy and some northern princes were with Manfred.

Charles of Anjou marched south with his army of French, Swiss, and Lombard Italians. In 1266 Manfred, with an army of dark southerners, and Saracens, Moors from Sicily, marched north and met him. In the hot battle Manfred was slain, his army defeated. He was one of the bravest heroes, and the most gracious man of his day. But since he was excommunicated, Anjou would not even allow him a sacred burial, but had him put in a pit by the roadside, at the head of the bridge of Benevento. Great shame was cried on this. Even the soldiers in Charles's own army put each one a stone in his pouch, and as they inarched past the pit, to cross the bridge, each threw his stone upon the grave, so that a large memorial mound was raised. This made the new Pope, Clement iv., very angry. He had the body dug out and buried in an unknown spot in the wastes. So far did the hatred of the popes pursue the Hohenstaufen blood.

In 1268 the last young Hohenstaufen, Conradin, was beheaded. Charles of Anjou now took possession of Sicily and Naples, occupying his new kingdom with his brutal French soldiers. This beautiful garden of Europe, this sunny, exquisite, most civilised realm, with its prosperous people and its gay, fair cities, its great schools, its famous universities where Saracen physicians taught their skill to all Europe, was now to be wasted by callous French troops.

Charles, a bullying prince, keeping fast friends with the Pope, tried to spread his power over Italy as Frederick II. had done. His Provençal nobles and governors, however, were cruel and rapacious, despising the Italians and tormenting them. Even Clement had to remonstrate with these evil men.

But a revenge was preparing. The South hated the French occupation. Sicily made ready for rebellion. On Easter Tuesday, 1282, the people of Palermo had gone out of the city to a church in the meadows some half-mile away. There they danced and made festival. A party of French horse came up, and the foreign soldiers, dismounting, crowded forward to get their share in the sport. They knocked aside the Sicilian young men, -and took hold of the young women to

dance with them. One man insulted a bride, who was wearing her crown. The bridegroom, whom the French soldier had knocked away, rushed forward in fury and stabbed the offender. Immediately a cry went up 'Death to the French.' The stored-up hate and rage of the last ten years was let loose. The Sicilians sprang like wild cats at the soldiers, and knifed them all. Not one Frenchman was left alive. Then the holiday-makers looked at the corpses lying among the sunny flowers.

The news spread like wildfire in Palermo. Immediately the Sicilians rushed from their houses, gathered, and flew with their knives upon the French. Before evening, two thousand of the detested foreigners were killed, and their bodies flung into a pit outside the city.

This event was called the Sicilian Vespers. It caused the wildest excitement in Europe. Sicily rose and cast out the French. A Spanish prince of Aragon was invited to take the crown. Meanwhile the House of Anjou still held Naples and the mainland. So began the utter ruin of the fair southern civilisation of Sicily and Naples.

But as the south died, sank down towards squalor, the north of Italy rose towards brilliance. With the French the Guelphs had triumphed. The Pope was the chief power in Italy, though his power was very limited. The cities and dukedoms of the north had now a chance to do as they liked.

We know that after the Roman power had been destroyed and Italy made a desert waste in the fifth and sixth centuries, the surviving Italian nobles and patricians were terribly impoverished.' They left their estates and their open villas in the country and retired with some following into the walled cities, where they might keep their lives if not their fortunes. The country was left to roving bands of marauders and barbarians. The cities shut their gates tight and defended themselves.

In these isolated cities the noblemen were no longer lords, they were only burghers or citizens with the rest, for their estates were lost. Still, they were looked up to.

A city must be governed. So the citizens chose these gentlemen to be their magistrates, and to sit in the Commune or Council. And thus in the howling desert of Italy these walled cities stood like islands, with some law and order, and some busy work, and some prosperity flourishing within their safe confines. These little detached cities were alone, they governed themselves, they managed their own affairs.

Various trades were started within the various towns, and these prospered. Many of the noble families had saved some wealth. With this they set up industries, like weaving or tanning or glass-making, and so they became rich

commercial citizens, leaders in the municipality, carrying on busy trade between towns in the intervals of quiet.

Now these cities, safe and busy and independent within their walls, were very proud, and clung fast to their own separate independence. They were never safe, however, from attack. They might be besieged, taken, and sacked at any moment. Their corn and wine land outside the walls might be devastated. So some citizens thought that if they swore allegiance to the Emperor, they might remain free, and just by paying tribute or giving military help, they might have peace and all cities might be kept at rest. For the growing towns were very jealous of one another, they made murderous attacks on one another. They were never safe from each other.

Those citizens who felt that all might be united in prosperity by swearing allegiance to one strong emperor, who as overlord would protect all without interfering in the private government of any, these were the Ghibelin party in the towns. Those who did not want to be united with anybody in any way were the Guelphs. They stuck to the Pope, because they knew he could never really master them. So that the two parties or factions, Guelph and Ghibelin, divided all Italy, particularly the north. Some of the great families in Rome, Florence, Milan, Parma, were Guelph, some were Ghibelin, and the fights of these families and their followers sometimes made the streets of their towns run blood.

But the cities were staunch for independence. They had their own armies, their own standards, their own battle-cry. It was the cities of the Lombard League that defeated Barbarossa. And when Manfred sent an army against Florence, the great Guelph city of Tuscany, the Florentines marched out, surrounding their famous caroccio. The caroccio was a strange chariot or ark on wheels, bearing the standard, and representing the city. It was surrounded by a picked company of citizens, called the Company of Death. Before the caroccio was surrendered each of these citizens would be dead. Manfred's army, however, for the first time in history captured the caroccio of Florence. The lovely Tuscan city was in the hands of the enemy Ghilbelins. Fortunately it was not, as was usually the case, sacked and destroyed. And soon after the death of Manfred it was free again in its own separation and fierce independence.

Florence was a fine city, well developed under her famous citizens. In 1266 the trades and traders of the town united themselves in seven great guilds or Arti. Each guild governed its own trade and its own workers. The rules were strict, and no man was allowed to break them. The heads of the guilds were rich, famous citizens, and as a rule members of the Commune or Council which governed the city. So now we have new republics born, governed by a number of rich and influential citizens, depending almost entirely on trade.

One of the great guilds of Florence was the Calimala, or Cloth-dressers' Guild. From England, France, Flanders, cloth was sent to Florence to be dressed and dyed. It came in ships up the Arno, or on the backs of pack-mules, large bales of dirty, greyish, greasy stuff. In the hands of the Florentines it went through many processes, and was sent out again smooth and supple, dyed in lovely tints.

The secrets of the processes were preserved by the Calimala from all the world.

Every roll of cloth was stamped with the mark of the Guild, and this was guarantee enough. There would be no false statement of length or breadth, no flaw in the pieces, the dyes would be fast. If one of the workers or packers attempted fraud or even slovenliness, he was fined. If he did not pay the fine he was expelled by the consuls of the Guild. And then, no more work for him in Florence.

The Guild became rich. It had strong protectors. In all the great cities of Europe Calimala consuls were established, to guard the rights of their merchants, and to control the trade of finished cloth: for everywhere, in all countries, men wanted the cloth dressed by the Florentine Guild.

The great citizens, heads of the Guild, became important as princes. Their consuls were received like ambassadors. Kings treated with the rich citizens, asking for loans of money or guarantees of security. And thus the Florentine merchants were in a position to control peace and war, for they might grant the loan by means of which the war could be carried on, or they might refuse it. Kings were almost at their mercy, for the prosecution of war is dependent on the proceeds of the arts of peace. So trade dealt its first great blow against kings and barons. And so the great banking interest began to show its power in the world.

At home, the merchants lived in a stately manner. They built noble palaces. And yet, in Florence at least, they were careful not to pretend to be princes. They were friendly and familiar with the citizens. All the splendour they made they professed to make for the city, not for their own persons. And the citizens were glad. They were passionately proud of their city. They wished their greatest burghers to have the handsomest palaces in the world, the finest fame. For the city — all was for the fame of the city.

And thus arose the perfect palaces of Florence, Venice Genoa, the wonderful cathedrals of Rome and Milan and Pisa. These lovely buildings must be perfected with sculpture, statues, and frescoes on the walls. And so began that marvellous time of Italian painting, when the finest pictures in the world were produced. Then men felt their hearts bursting with splendour. Poets wrote great poems, famous for ever: the people gaily sang the songs and poems of their city,

filling the streets with liveliness. The populace were proud of all glorious and lovely things that arose around them, proud of the pictures, the poems, the brilliant learning of the universities, the noble statues and buildings. It was not that they wanted possessions for themselves. Their delight was in knowing that splendid creations were brought forth within their cities. If this were so, the citizens were glad to be poor and see others rich. They knew that they themselves could not produce the beauties and the glories, however rich they might be.

Florence was a Guelph city. Yet it had a large Ghibelin party, many of its famous citizens were Ghibelins, who wished a strong emperor might come to take the allegiance of all cities and make the land whole. In Florence the two factions quarrelled and fought bitterly, each exiling the leading opponents when opportunity arrived. But this struggle only strengthened the nerves and tempers of the Florentines.

In 1284 Florence, but particularly the Guelph party, had a great rejoicing over another's misfortune. At the mouth of the Arno lay the city of Pisa, the great mediaeval seaport. All the sea-trade of Florence must pass through the fingers of Pisa. And Pisa was a staunch Ghibelin city; she made Florence feel the penalty. Therefore loud was the rejoicing in Florence when news came that Pisa had met her great sea-rival Genoa in battle on the waves, and that the Pisan fleet was terribly beaten, many ships sunk or taken, most of her best sailors gone for ever.

Pisa never recovered. She had had a great trade with the Crusaders' cities in the East — Tyre, Jaffa, Acre j the Levant trade, it was called. She had rivalled Genoa and Venice as the greatest sea-force in the Mediterranean. She had rivalled Florence as a land power in Italy. And now she fell, never to rise again. To-day Pisa is a half-dead city, beautiful, rather forlorn, with her great cathedral, and the baptistery and the leaning tower, so silent and gold-coloured on the grassy square in a corner of the town, showing the glory of the Middle Ages, while the little tram-cars run to their terminus within the enclosure. But Florence, when Pisa fell, became the undoubted centre of all that great stream of traffic that flowed in those days along the Arno Valley — Florence, the queen of Tuscany, the flower of Italy.

Meanwhile the outer world was not quiet. The last of her great popes was to bring down the Church of Rome to ignominy. We know of three most famous popes: first, Gregory I., called Gregory the Great, who from 590 to 604 saved Rome and succoured the people in the distress of barbarian invasions, and who sent forth missionaries to Britain; then Hildebrand, called Gregory VII., who conceived the great idea that the Pope should rule Europe, who brought the Emperor Henry iv. to his knees at Canossa and who died sorrowful; and then the

great Innocent III., who from 1198 to 1216 ruled the papacy in her most magnificent days, from his seat in Rome dictating like a president of the European states all that should be done by the rulers of Christendom. This was in the days when Barbarossa was dead, and when Frederick II. was still too young to reign. And even then Innocent had to scheme hard to keep his authority, and too often he sadly failed. Luckily he died before he saw the sad havoc his young charge Frederick would make with the papacy.

Now, in 1294 Boniface VIII. was elected Supreme Pontiff. He was a fine-looking, handsome man, of good Italian family, skilled in law, clever, confident, and arrogant. He thought he could do as Innocent had done, in the days before the terrible Frederick. Therefore he began to interfere in Europe. But he had not any longer just one single opponent to face, in the person of the Emperor. He had all the young nations, with their kings just growing strong.

Men were becoming less interested in heaven, and much less afraid of hell. Kings did not mind a great deal if the Pope threatened to excommunicate them and condemn their souls to eternal torture. They wanted to establish themselves and their own kingdoms on earth, and were not to be interfered with by threats from a pope.

So Boniface's efforts at commanding kings led to disaster. These were as tired of supreme spiritual rule as they were of supreme imperial rule. Nations and cities wanted to act for themselves, without interference of any so-called higher power. When Boniface bade Prince Frederick of Aragon to leave Sicily, after the Sicilian Vespers, Frederick refused. When the Pope excommunicated the prince, the Spaniard ignored the event, and had himself crowned in Palermo. When Boniface issued a Bull preventing kings or princes from levying taxes on the clergy and on the lands of the Church, the Archbishop of Canterbury obediently forbade the English priests and bishops to pay their taxes to the tax-gatherers of Edward I. Edward I. immediately outlawed all his clergy, and the clergy, afraid, paid their taxes but called them voluntary gifts.

France, however, was the great kingly power of the Middle Ages, and it was with France that the real tussle took place. Philip iv. of France, in defiance of the Pope's Bull, forbade any money to go out of France to the papal revenues. The quarrel became most bitter. Philip taxed his French clergy heavily. His bishops complained. The Pope stepped in to defend them. But Philip seized the papal legate and put him in prison, charged him with treason for having spoken words against the king. Then the Pope's next Bull — called the Greater Bull — was publicly burned by the hangman in Paris. Immediately 166 movements in European history after this Philip was defeated by the Flemings at Courtrai, and people said it was a judgment on him. The Pope made friends with the Emperor

Albert, and Albert made public declaration that he received his power at the hands of the Pope. This was a triumph for Boniface. In return Philip summoned the French Council, called the Estates General, and Boniface was accused of heresy, wizardry, and foul crime. Then Philip announced that he could no longer regard Boniface as Pope, and appealed to a General Council of the Church. At last, in September 1303, Boniface excommunicated Philip. He released all the subjects of the French king from their allegiance, and put that monarch outside the pale of Christianity.

It was now the time for the last blow. Philip sent his general, William of Nogaret, and the Roman noble Sciarra Colonna to Tuscany, well supplied with money, to raise forces against the Pope. It happened that Boniface, who was now an old man, had retired to his little native town of Anagni, to escape the summer heats of Rome. On September 8 cries and clatter of hoofs were heard in the sleepy little town of Anagni. The inhabitants looked out in astonishment. It was William of Nogaret and Sciarra Colonna, who had entered the gates with three hundred men, and ensigns and standards of the King of France flying gaily as they shouted ‘ Death to Pope Boniface! Long live the King of France! ‘

The townsfolk gaped in amazement and did not stir. The band of troops clattered up to the sunny papal palace. There were no soldiers to defend it; Pope and cardinals were helpless. The cardinals gave themselves up for lost. But the Pope was a brave man. ‘ Since,’ he said, ‘ like Jesus Christ, I am willing to be taken, and needs must die by treachery, at least let me die as Pope.’ He bade his attendants robe him in the mantle of St. Peter, with the crown of Constantine on his head, and the keys and cross in his hand; he seated himself on the papal chair.

He sat whilst Nogaret thundered at the doors. He sat as he heard the iron-mailed feet tread the corridors. Then the French and Italian enemy came into presence. Boniface sat unmoving. He was old, stout, but still a handsome figure. Nogaret demanded that he should at once abdicate from the papacy. He constantly refused. He was seized, dragged from the throne, taken prisoner, and threatened with instant death if he did not at once agree to abdicate. Still he refused. So he was kept confined until he should submit.

On the third day the people of Anagni, ashamed at last of this treatment of their old, proud Pope, rose and drove forth the mere handful of the enemy. Boniface was free, but the shock had been too great for a man of seventy-nine. Escorted by the Orsini family, who were bitter enemies of the rival Roman House of Colonna, Boniface returned to Rome and entered it amidst the cheers of the people. But his time was nearly over. It is said his mind gave way, and that he gnawed at himself as if he were mad. In three weeks he died — the last

great pope of the Middle Ages had passed away. The papacy never again rose to European power. Monarchy was now triumphant, kings were the greatest men in the world.

The next important pope was elected in France. He was Bertrand de Goth, Archbishop of Bordeaux, which city then belonged to England. But Bertrand was a Frenchman, and unwilling in any way to offend the French king. He did not depart for Rome, as every pope had done. New cardinals were created, all Frenchmen, and the papal court was set up in the Archbishop's palace in Bordeaux.

In 1309, however, the Pope and his cardinals removed to Avignon, an old town in Provence, on the Rhone. There the papal court would still remain under the protection of the French king. Once again Provence knew the gay splendours it had seen in Roman days, when it was the brilliant Province. The town was ancient, sunny, delightful, full of memories of the great past. It had an excellent climate, much better than that of Rome, and the townsfolk were quiet and pleasant, not like the turbulent citizens of Rome, who were constantly rising in dangerous rage against their popes. The valley of the Rhone was delightful, beautiful to look at, pleasant to ride through, excellent for sport. It was full of the memories of old Roman greatness, but memories all mellow and sweet, not bloody.

The popes now became like the Gallic bishops in the Frankish days. They did not trouble deeply about anything. In their great palace on the Rhone they spent days of festival, they took their pleasure on the river and in the shady woods. The cardinals established themselves in palaces in the city, and the old streets were brilliant with gay processions as these prelates, vivid in their scarlet, rode laughingly towards the Pope's palace, followed by a retinue of gentlemen and ladies. Now for the first time ladies were invited to the papal feasts. Poets sang to the harp, fools and buffoons made merriment, the wine circulated, the handsome halls rang with mirth. Then musicians struck up for the glittering dance. But in time the Avignon popes suffered from lack of money, for the revenues did not come in to the papal treasury in France as they had in Rome.

For seventy years, from 1305 to 1376, the popes resided in France. This period is called the Babylonish Captivity, when the Church was supposed to be in captivity in France as the Jews had been captive in Babylon. But though France was the greatest power in Europe at that time, before the great struggle of the Hundred Years War, yet the popes were not altogether slavish, not really under the thumb of the French King. None the less the reverence for the papacy withered in all countries in Europe during the Captivity. Men began even to despise the great head of the Church, whom before they had regarded as being

very near to God Himself, very powerful.

Chapter XII. The End of the Age of Faith

Just as men grew restless under supreme authority of an emperor, so they rebelled against the authority of the Pope. The popes wished to keep supreme religious command over all Christians. The only way to do this was to make the people believe that the Pope stood much nearer to God than they did, and that he received holy secrets and commands straight from heaven. To keep up this belief, there must be much mystery and strangeness in religion. It would not do for people to know everything. The priests must keep the great secrets, they must stand between God and the masses. And this was the way in which the Catholic Church ruled Christendom. The Bible was a mysterious holy book which the common people never saw, and which they could never read if they did see it, for it was written in Latin. Sometimes the priests read them little pieces: about the heavens opening, or about the stones rolling back from the Sepulchre as Jesus rose from the dead. And it seemed terrible and wonderful. It seemed to the people as if the priests knew great, deep mysteries, of which only a fragment was revealed to ordinary men. The ordinary Christians read nothing and knew nothing by themselves. Everything was told to them by the priests. And so, as when we tell tales to children, they heard vivid and marvellous stories of miracles and wonders, terrible accounts of the devil and the horrors of hell, lovely descriptions of heaven. All was real and actual to them. They really believed that devils lurked in houses, or possessed the souls of neighbours or friends.

They really believed that the priests and saints could speak to these devils. They could almost see the devils cringing as a priest approached making the sign of the cross, they could almost hear the imps whimpering with pain if they were touched with a drop of holy water. As nowadays children sometimes believe in fairies, and imagine they see them, so in the early days all men and women really believed in devils and angels. And if the ordinary priest, with his mysterious knowledge and his magical Latin, had such power over devils, how much more had the Pope? The Pope was master of Satan himself. Archangels talked with the Pope. He was lord of Christendom, he held the keys of heaven and hell. If the Pope excommunicated a man, that man was condemned to burn for ever in fire and brimstone, tortured by legions of imps. So all men believed quite simply. Hence the great power of the popes. And hence we call the Middle Ages the Age of Faith.

After the Age of Faith dawned the Age of Reason. Very early, students and thoughtful priests began to study the New Testament. They found nothing about the grandeur of a pope or the rich splendour of bishops, nothing about the power of priests. They only saw the plain lesson, that Christians must give their goods to the poor, think nothing of the pleasures of the body, and everything of saving the soul.

Before 1200 some people in the south of France, that old, cultured land, got hold of a translation of the Bible, and began to form their own opinion from it. They believed in poverty, they would not marry, they fasted and denied the body. The rich luxury of the bishops was denounced.

These new people were called ‘ the Poor Men of Lyons.’ The Pope saw that if such sects increased the whole power of the Church would collapse. So the Poor Men of Lyons were bitterly persecuted. A crusade was preached against them, by the Pope’s orders. In 1209 Simon de Montfort, Earl of Leicester, set out against them. The ‘ Poor Men ‘

were massacred in hundreds, the old towns of the Languedoc destroyed. Only Toulouse, the old Gothic capital, at this time headquarters of the new people, held out against the besieging armies, and Simon de Montfort was killed by a stone thrown from an engine which was worked by women on the walls of the city.

After this crusade the Court of the Inquisition was established, to examine and punish men guilty of heresy — that is, guilty of false beliefs. In 1233 the learned Spanish monks of the new order of Dominicans were made Papal Inquisitors, the Court of Inquisition was in their hands. They punished witches, wizards, heretics, burning them at the stake. For the Ages of Faith were ages also of deplorable cruelty.

At the same time another great religious movement began. St. Francis of Assisi, a young Italian of well-to-do family, frail in health but passionate in soul, suddenly realised in his own way what the Christian life meant. He gave away all his goods, and said he would own nothing. He declared he was wedded to Our Lady Poverty. He was very happy in his new discovery. Whilst Italy was torn between struggling emperor and pope, Francis went about joyously telling all men how sweet and delightful it was to live for love alone, to own nothing, to be defenceless and helpless, but always to love and to help and to rejoice, looking forward to the life with Jesus.

Many men were attracted by St. Francis’ way of life. They left everything and came with him, as the disciples had followed Christ. Then St. Clare, who loved Francis, gathered the women about her. And soon there were many Franciscans, men and women.

Pope Innocent III., the greatest of all the popes, had, like his predecessors, preached the Crusade in which the Poor Men of Lyons were massacred. But Innocent loved Francis, and gave him the right to establish the great Franciscan Order, that order of wandering friars afterwards so famous in Europe, and such a great help to the Church.

The Franciscans were not like other monks. They did not shut themselves up. Their duty was to wander the earth, teaching, helping, loving all men — possessing nothing themselves, and giving love to all men. The older monks were dark, loveless men, who never looked at the earth. The great St. Bernard once sailed down the beautiful Lake of Lucerne without even glancing around him, his mind was so bent on his own affairs. But Francis taught differently. He loved the sky and the grass and all living things. He once stood and preached a sweet sermon to the birds that fluttered round him, calling them, ‘ my little sisters, the birds.’

The Dominicans also wandered about teaching. But they were learned monks, and they taught strict morality and obedience. The Franciscans taught joyousness and sweet love. They taught hope. They told men that the reign of love was at hand.

All over Europe began a great ferment in the souls of men, towards the end of the thirteenth century. The fearful struggles of the emperors were over, the crusades were more or less finished. A strangeness seemed to hang in the air. Men felt that something was going to happen. There was a feeling of fear, of calamity; and at the same time a feeling of frightened hope or expectation. Something terrible and wonderful was going to take place. The little poems of the Middle Ages constantly chime — ‘ The fear of death oppresses me.’

Out of the ruin and chaos which followed the death of Innocent III. and Frederick II., strange thoughts arose. Men came forward declaring themselves prophets. They told curious and terrible things, and people were filled with dread. In 1251 a book was published called ‘ Introduction to the Everlasting Gospel,’ supposed to contain the teaching of a famous seer or prophet, the Abbot Joachim, who had died at Naples in 1202. In this book it said that Judaism was the revelation of the Father: Christianity was the revelation of the Son: now men must prepare for the revelation of the Holy Ghost.

Wild ideas spread everywhere. Men began to expect the reign of the Holy Ghost. They said that before Jesus was born the Father had reigned: after this, until their own day, the Son had reigned; now the Holy Ghost would reign. In the Everlasting Gospel it was stated that when the Holy Ghost began to reign the papacy and the priesthood would cease to exist. There would be no more Church to govern the souls of men. So the popes condemned the Everlasting Gospel as

wicked, heretical, false doctrine. None the less it had a great power over the minds of men.

In 1260 Gerard Sagarelli, a workman of Parma, sat in the market-place of his town and flung away all he had among the crowd. Then he stripped himself naked, had himself wrapped in swaddling bands and laid in a cradle. After this he declared himself born again, an apostle sent from God. He started a new Order, the Order of Apostles. He went about, wild and strange, preaching mad doctrines. People flocked to him from North Italy. But he was burned in Parma as a heretic, in 1300, by the Dominican Inquisition.

One of his disciples was called Dolcino of Novara. He said men should hold no earthly possession, no earthly connection. Wife should leave husband, a father should leave his children, nothing human should stand in the way of the perfect union of the soul with the Holy Ghost. These men prayed no more to Jesus. They felt the Holy Ghost coming upon them, filling them with strange bliss, and with sheer perfection.

Several thousands of people retired to a lovely valley in the Alps, the Val di Sesia, in Piedmont. There they lived half naked, fasting, praying, hoping for the Holy Ghost to come upon them, prophesying and seeing visions when they felt themselves at last filled with the Spirit. They did no work, but depended on the frightened, awe-stricken peasants to bring them food. This manner of life sent many demented, and they were all beside themselves.

In 1305 they were excommunicated and threatened with the Inquisition. The governor of the nearest town, and the Bishop of Vercelli, with armed forces marched against them. These apostles of the Holy Ghost, mad with unnatural excitement, retired to a steep hill. There with frenzy they hurled and rolled stones and masses of rock upon the attacking force, holding them back. Then they fled up steep precipices, where armies could not follow them.

They were now really mad, no longer human beings. No peasants would come near them with food, they were always starving. They came down on villages and lonely houses, robbing, plundering, devouring food like wild beasts. Their eyes glared with strange light. If any one opposed them, they rushed with terrifying looks and stabbed him and slashed him with knives. Then they disappeared again up the secret paths of their precipices, gathering together to call on the Holy Ghost to fill them with power and fury.

At last in 1307 their fastness on Mount Zerbal was stormed. The apostles with their wild, waving hair and mad eyes were slaughtered or scattered, some were captured. Women were there, shrieking and fighting like wolves: for each apostle had a chosen heavenly sister. Both the apostle Dolcino and his heavenly sister were taken. The woman was slowly burned before Dolcino's eyes, and

then his flesh was torn bit by bit with red-hot pincers. But he never murmured.

After the Apostles, a great sect formed after the Franciscan idea, called the Fraticelli, was pursued and destroyed by the Church.

In 1320 the shepherds and peasantry of France were strangely stirred. At first little groups of ignorant peasants were remarked wandering barefoot and begging.

No one took much notice. Then the groups became more numerous. Every day bands of barefooted men were passing through the streets of towns and villages, crying aloud for alms and gifts, and declaring that they were going to win back the Holy Places. Then swarms filled the land. No one knew what inspired them, nor whence they came. Band after band gradually flocked together, all possessed as it seemed by the same madness. The educated people looked on in terror as these ragged crowds drew together, masses of ignorant people who had left all work, abandoned everything, and were moving they knew not whither. They were named the Pastoureaux, or Shepherds.

The swarms grew into a great army. They turned to Paris, and by their very masses burst into the city. Then they went through the streets, breaking down the doors of prisons, breaking into houses and shops, taking what they wanted. After this, moved by some herd instinct, they departed southwards, towards Palestine, they said.

As they went they massacred all Jews they came across, recognising them by their distinctive dress. They broke into the castles of nobles, into rich houses, into the houses of priests and bishops, taking whatever they wanted, and saying it was for a holy mission. More bands joined them from every side. The great, blind, dirty host rolled down the valley of the Rhone.

But when they came to the coast they were stopped from entering Italy by the governor of Carcassonne. The Pastoureaux turned and began to spread over the countryside, and over low, swampy districts. They were in such masses that no one dared attack them. Watchful armies waited to prevent their streaming forth. As the weeks went by starvation and exposure brought on deadly fevers. The sickening Pastoureaux died like flies.

At last so many had died that the armies dared attack them. They were slaughtered and captured and subdued, and then the remainder were taken back to work.

This rising of the Pastoureaux was something like the risings of the Gallo-Roman slaves and peasants in the day? before the Franks, and similar to other terrible peasant risings which have taken place in France. It seems as if the French poor were liable to these attacks of unaccountable uneasiness.

All these later movements and madneses, however, took place whilst the

popes were in Avignon, during the period called the Babylonish Captivity. Men hoped for better things when the papal court returned to Rome.

But it was not to be so. Gregory xi. returned to Rome in 1376. When he died in 1378, the populace of Rome cried loudly for an Italian pope, so a Neapolitan archbishop became Urban vi. Urban was severe, strict, and conscientious. He was very stern with the dissolute cardinals. Therefore many, and the French cardinals in particular, began to cry out against this Italian pope, and to declare he was not properly elected. They went so far, that in September 1378 the French cardinals elected Robert of Geneva to be Clement VII.

Thus there were two popes. Urban held his court at Rome, Clement at Avignon. There were two sets of cardinals, two governments for one church. This divided all Europe. And this division is called The Great Schism.

Each pope called on all nations to obey him. France, Scotland, Castile, Aragon, Naples, followed the French pope; England, Germany, Scandinavia, Poland and Portugal followed the Italian pope. Then began a great commotion. Both popes loudly declared themselves to be the one and only pope. Then they began to revile each other in letters and public proclamations. Then they excommunicated each other. And at last it went so far, that each preached a crusade against the other. The priests of one half of Christendom preached a crusade against the priests of the other half.

Such a situation was madness. The crusade was never begun, for neither pope had any money. Each court incurred the usual expenses, with not half the income to meet these expenses. So both the popes tried squeezing the countries that remained faithful to them. But none of the countries was willing to be squeezed. There was no money for the popes.

They had recourse to other methods. The sale of indulgences began. On little scraps of parchment were written pardons for such and such sins. Priests and friars filled their wallets with these scraps of parchment, which were sent by pack-load to every bishopric, and set off to preach indulgences. Standing in some open place, or even in a church, they would preach to men and women how the Pope had power to pardon all sins: how he had written out on parchment such pardons; and now all good Christians were called upon to purchase a pardon which would wipe out for ever from the Judgment Book any sin that had been committed. Small sins cost small sums, greater sins cost greater sums.

When Urban died a new Italian pope was elected, Boniface ix. When Clement died, a Spaniard, Peter de Luna, was elected Benedict XIII. But France did not like a Spanish pope at Avignon, so he was blockaded in his palace by Marshal Boucicault and starved into surrender. He was kept in prison for five years by the French before he escaped.

The Schism was now becoming a real nuisance. All churchmen wished to end it. A great Council of the Church was called at Pisa in 1409, and though it decided nothing, yet now a new ecclesiastical power arose, a power greater than the Pope himself. This was the council of all great churchmen, called the Great Council. The Great Council claimed the power even to depose a pope. It was therefore much dreaded by the later popes, who were kept a little in check by their fear.

Meanwhile new heresies had arisen. About 1380 John Wycliffe translated the Bible into English and began to teach the real meaning of the Scriptures. He denounced the wickedness of the clergy and attacked the authority of the Pope. Many followers came to him, and they got the name of Lollards. But the Lollards were moving spirits in Wat Tyler's rebellion, so the English Government began to attack them. Wycliffe's bones were burned at Lutterworth, in Leicestershire, in 1428, and his ashes scattered on the river, so that the spirit of such a heretic should never find its body at the Resurrection.

His teachings, however, spread to the Continent. Thousands of English students went to France to hear the great teacher Abelard. Many wandered on from monastery to monastery, university to university. So they carried the Lollard or Wycliffe writings with them, and the new doctrines spread.

One of the greatest disciples of Wycliffe was the Bohemian, John Huss. Huss was the son of prosperous peasants, who had given him a good education. He entered the Church, became a priest. But he was very clever. He took his Master of Arts degree in 1396, and became a teacher in the university and a preacher in his town. Soon he was the most honoured teacher in the university and the most famous preacher in Prague. The chapel where he preached was called Bethlehem. There the people flocked to hear him, for he was a passionate, brave man. He told his people that Christ was the Head of the Church, not the Pope, and that it was Christ's teaching they must follow. He also told them that the sale of indulgences was a scandalous money-making trick. But this was not enough to make him a heretic. However, the bishops were furious.

At this time Europe was making a determined effort to end the Schism. The two popes had now become three, Gregory XII., Benedict XIII., and Pope John XXIII. The Emperor Sigismund demanded that another General Council should be called. The free imperial city of Constance was chosen for the meeting-place.

In October 1414 the members of the Council began to arrive. The beautiful little city that stands where the Rhine runs out through low banks from Lake Constance had never seen anything so brilliant as this gathering. Pope John opened the Council in November. But it was not till Christmas Eve that Sigismund arrived. His boats, flickering with gay lights, came sailing across the

lake in the wintry darkness. At two hours after midnight the Emperor with his brilliant retinue landed at Constance, and marched to the palace, torches flaming everywhere. On Christmas day Pope John preached in the cathedral to a vast number of townsfolk, nobles, doctors, cardinals, whilst the Emperor read the lessons from the Gospel — ‘ There went out a decree from Caesar Augustus — ’

The Council met for three purposes: to end the Schism, to reform abuses in the Church, to extirpate heresy. For the last purpose, John Huss was summoned to Constance. He received his summons when he was in Prague, and his heart sank. He felt he would never return. His people clamoured round him, saying he should not go. But then the Emperor Sigismund promised a safe-conduct. So Huss began to put his affairs in order. He still felt he would not return.

At last he set off across South Germany, and arrived in Constance. He had received the Emperor’s safe-conduct, but was none the less kept fast in prison. In the spring he was brought out for trial for heresy.

They could prove nothing against him. But they wanted to make him say he had erred, and he refused, for he felt he had done only what was right. And so they condemned him to be burned. On 6 July 1415 the noble-minded Huss was burned in the market-place of Constance. The Emperor Sigismund stood looking on, remarking that the safe-conduct which he had given held good only for the journey, he had not meant it to protect the heretic from just condemnation in Constance.

Next year, in May 1416, they burned Jerome of Prague, the follower of Huss, also in Constance. An eye-witness writes: ‘ Both met their death with a constant mind, and hastened to the fire as if invited to a feast, uttering no sound that could reveal their agony. When they began to burn they sang a hymn, which the flame and the crackling of the fire could scarcely prevent.’

The Council sat on. It kept Pope John prisoner, then charged him with many crimes. He was deposed from the papacy, and ended his days peacefully as a cardinal. The old Pope Gregory XII. resigned, and died in 1417. But the Spaniard, Benedict XIII., refused all persuasion. He insisted that he was still Pope, and fortified himself in his rock-fortress on his own estate. The Council, however, declared he was no longer Pope, and men decided to take no further notice of him. At last, in 1417, the Roman nobleman, Cardinal Colonna, was elected Pope, and became Martin v.

Thus the Schism was ended. But the power of the popes was also finished. They were no longer absolute — they might be deposed by a General Council. They no longer claimed universal power over Europe, but remained in Italy, and took part in Italian politics rather than in European.

The Bohemians, however, were up in arms after the burning of Huss. The

Czechs determined not to submit to Sigismund, who had burned their leader so treacherously. Armed with their deadly scythes, or ' flails,' and led by the famous blind general, Ziska, they rose in a revolt which shook Europe. Crusades were preached against them. Henry, Bishop of Winchester, came to take part in the Holy War against the Hussites. For years the fighting went on. Through long practice the peasants became very fierce and expert. They were hard, vindictive veterans. They could give twenty or thirty strokes with their terrible flail in a minute, and each stroke was enough to cut a man down. They hated the Emperor's men and the Pope's men with a perfect hatred, branding their prisoners with a cross upon the forehead. Then the imperialists took to branding a cup on the forehead of any captured Hussite, because the Bohemians demanded to drink of the sacramental wine at the Communion Supper, whereas the Catholics allowed only the bread to the communicant.

Ziska died in 1424. In 1431 Sigismund invaded Bohemia with a great army, but was defeated because his German peasant soldiery sympathised with the Hussites and would not fight for him. So the war dragged on, till at last the Pope invited the Bohemians to send representatives to the Council of Basle, to patch things up. This was done, and in 1434 Sigismund was accepted King of Bohemia, and the Hussites received liberty of worship. They alone, of all the catholic nations, were allowed to partake of the sacred wine, as well as of the wafer, at Communion. It was the first victory against the Church.

In Italy the popes had lost their sacred power. When Urban vi. sent two legates to excommunicate the Tyrant Bernabd Visconti at Milan, Bernab6 received the legates and rode with them to the bridge over the river Naviglio. There he took out the papal Bulls of Excommunication, and looking at the legates, asked them whether they preferred to eat or to drink. The legates turned pale, for the river was rushing swiftly below. They looked at the dangerous flood, and at the tough parchment of the papal Bulls. Then they said faintly they preferred to eat. And Bernabd made them eat the Bulls they had brought. What did he care for excommunication!

The Church was not reformed. Popes and cardinals were more rich, lavish, and openly wicked than ever they had been. Reformers rose up in Italy, preaching a purer life. The greatest of these preachers was Savonarola. In 1490 Lorenzo the Magnificent, hearing of the fame of this preaching friar, invited him to Florence to add to the renown of the city. Savonarola came. He was a swarthy, narrow-browed, hulking friar, haggard with fasting so that his great bones showed and his dark eyes burned. His voice was weak, and his movements were clumsy and ugly.

Yet he had a truly magnetic power over the people. They thronged in crowds

to hear him. He preached in San Marco in Florence and then in the Duomo, the domed cathedral. He wished to purify the land from the flaunting gay wickedness he saw around him. Using strange, gruesome language, he pictured the horrors that would come on Italy as a judgment for her lusts and vices, all the ghastly plagues and burnings and death. He harshly denounced from his pulpit the Pope, the clergy, and even his patron Lorenzo di Medici.

Lorenzo had a gay and beautiful court in Florence, thronged with the most exceptional people. The Italians of the later Renaissance, having studied Latin and Greek, were fascinated with the beautiful old pagan myths, they became indifferent or careless of Christianity and its severe teaching. They loved beautiful, rich things, and delicious pleasures. Beauty, pleasure, knowledge, skill, these were their aim. So Savonarola, who wished all men to go in sackcloth and ashes, for fear of hell, abused the witty Lorenzo, and tried to work up the citizens against their tyrant, to restore the liberty of Florence. When Lorenzo was dying, in 1492, Savonarola was his confessor. The dark, fanatic monk bent over the dark, subtle Lorenzo, who was so wise in the wisdom of the world and the ages. Lorenzo confessed his sins and affirmed his ‘ perfect faith.’

‘ Wilt thou restore Florence to liberty, and to the enjoyment of her popular government as a free commonwealth? ‘ sternly said the fanatic friar. Lorenzo turned his dying face away, as if weary at this question, and said no more.

In 1494 Charles VIII. of France invaded Italy and the Medici fled from Florence. Savonarola had been prophesying that tyrants would flee before a deliverer. The people went wild, thinking the prophecy had come true. Savonarola, who was now Prior of the Dominican House of San Marco, swayed all Florence. The city was completely under his spell now the Medici were gone.

A strange change took place. After all the games and sports and carnivals of the Medici days, men became desperately religious. The city looked suddenly grey, for none wore bright clothes any more. Bands of men went about wringing their hands, lamenting their sins, and destroying sinful objects. Bands of children clothed in white patrolled the streets singing hymns, entering the palaces and smashing those statues they thought were immoral, slashing up the lovely pictures. These holy children assumed authority over the citizens, and none dared oppose them. For the followers of Savonarola, called the Weepers or Snivellers, were masters of the town.

Then Jesus Christ was proclaimed King of Florence, and the citizens went round crying loudly ‘ Viva Cristo! Viva Cristo! ‘ — Long live Christ! When carnival came, the time for wild festivity, a great Bonfire of Vanities was arranged. Savonarola’s followers, the Weepers, marched in solemn procession through the streets, and the Innocents, the children, made their rounds of

inspection. People brought their silks and ornaments, their books of stories such as the Decameron, and their books of profane poetry, their fans, perfumes, mirrors, statues, statuettes, the classic books supposed to be immoral, and some priceless pictures. Sandro Botticelli, an old, lame man now, threw on the heap in the public square many of his drawings and paintings — and then, to loud chanting, the whole pile of worldly treasures was burned, many exquisite things that could never be replaced.

Meanwhile Savonarola's preaching became more and more wild, the city was going mad in intense religious excitement. Savonarola prophesied in the pulpit, a worn, hectic, strange figure. He listened to an epileptic monk in his convent, asking the poor epileptic, whom he supposed to be inspired, for advice. And then he told the people the real reign of Christ was at hand, that angels came down and told him so.

Alexander vi., the great but wicked Borgia pope, tried to lure Savonarola to Rome. He did not succeed, so he suspended the friar from preaching. Savonarola was silent for a time, but in 1496 he preached his Lent sermons, denouncing the wickedness of the Pope and clergy, threatening an end, and promising strange, stupendous miracles. The end of the world was near, the Saviour was to come to Florence. The Florentines were beside themselves with excitement, though sane men did not like this return to the dreadful superstitions of the early Middle Ages. The governors of the city, seeing their town out of hand and beside itself, turned against the fanatic friar. Taking advantage of this, the Pope excommunicated Savonarola, in 1497. For six months the friar ceased to preach, remaining in his convent. On Christmas Day he Celebrated Mass in San Marco, and in February preached once more. The populace were drunk with frenzied excitement. The Signory, that is, the Gonfaloniere of Justice and the Council of Eight Priors, suspended Savonarola from preaching.

Savonarola now wrote letters to the sovereigns of Europe, calling for a general council. In Florence he had continually spoken of miracles that were to come. His opponents, even his followers, demanded the miracle. A Franciscan monk offered to pass through flames, if Savonarola would do the same. Savonarola was still sensible enough to see that this was tempting Providence. But he had gone too far. His friends wildly believed in his power to perform a miracle: his enemies urged him to try. He agreed.

Tremendous preparations were made, the stacks ready to be ignited for the passage through the fire were built in the great square. On April 7, 1498, thousands of people assembled in the early morning, waiting to see the miracle. The nobles and rich had platforms and reserved places. Slowly, towards midday, the Franciscans approached from one direction, the Dominicans with Savonarola

from another. The masses could hardly contain themselves.

They were going to see a miracle, a miracle like those recorded in the New Testament.

But then started a long quibbling. The Dominicans raised objections, saying the Franciscan monk's clothing had been charmed by magic against fire, and he must change everything. This was done, and then the Franciscans began to raise objections, saying that Savonarola should not carry the Host in his hand as he passed through the fire, as this would be burning the body of the Lord. Savonarola would not agree. The argument went on before the wildly excited mob. The city authorities prepared to stop the ordeal. Then the bright sky clouded, thunder was heard, and a heavy shower fell, soaking the piles of wood. All was abandoned for the day.

The mob were furious. Next day they attacked San Marco. Savonarola and his two chief supporters, Fra Domenico and Fra Silvestro, the epileptic, were arrested. At the Pope's command Savonarola, worn with excitement, fasting, anxiety, and frenzy, was tortured to make him confess his errors. Perhaps he cried out in his agony that he was no true prophet: how shall we know what he confessed in the secret torture-chamber? He and his two followers were declared heretics and schismatics, traitors to the state, and condemned to execution.

Three high gibbets were erected in the great square. 'From the Church militant and triumphant I separate thee,' said the Bishop of Vasona as he unfrocked Savonarola. 'From the Church militant, yes; from the Church triumphant, no; that is not yours to do,' answered the doomed Prior of San Marco's.

So the three were hanged on the high gibbets, and fires were lighted under the bodies, as they hung in chains, to consume them. The people in the square, looking on the three crosses, were reminded of Calvary. But they did nothing to save their prophet. They hated him now.

Savonarola had tried to reform the abuses and wickedness of the Church, and to make life pure and moral, but he had gone the wrong way about it. Instead of making men understand with all their soul and with all their mind what they were doing, and what was good to do, he had gone back to the old methods. He talked as if he knew magical secrets, as if he had magical powers. He made the people believe he could open heaven and earth. He filled them with a wicked madness of destruction, and an ugly lust for exciting events. He set them craving for supernatural powers and supernatural scenes. They ceased to be human men and women. Under the spell of Savonarola they were like frenzied demons. Truth, beauty, happiness, wisdom, these meant nothing to such fanatics. They wanted magical violence and wonderful horrors. They were greedy for pains and

penalties and severities, instead of for pleasures and delights such as the Borgia pope lusted for.

And so Savonarola's great movement was felt only as a shock, horrifying Italy and yet further weakening the old order. Savonarola, the last, almost degenerate representative of the Dark Age of Faith, perished and was detested and despised as a fraud.

Chapter XIII. The Renaissance

Perhaps the most wonderful century in all our Europe's two thousand years is the fifteenth century. Then lived the greatest painters, great poets, great architects, sculptors, scientists and men of learning, such as had not been seen before. Then men were alert and keen, full of enthusiasm, full of imagination, full of life.

This splendid century was most glorious in Italy. But the beginnings of the glory lay in the two centuries preceding. Already in 1250 the noble citizens of Florence were resplendent in their palaces, the guilds were formed, the city was alert and alive, ready for great things. In 1265 was born the first world-famous Florentine, Dante Alighieri.

He was the son of a well-to-do citizen, and he was given the best education the times afforded. In those days the schools were all attached to monasteries. Even in the universities monks were the chief teachers. For in the peace and seclusion of their monastic fortresses the monks had been able for hundreds of years to study all the existing books. In the monastery libraries the books of Europe, all written by hand upon parchment, were carefully stored. Seated in silence at their benches, the monks slowly and beautifully copied the old books, all in the Latin tongue, making new, clean volumes, often beautifully decorated in colours. And as they copied they studied. Then the most learned would teach daily in the school within the peaceful bounds of the monastery, or they would go forth, to lecture in a university, or to teach groups of young people in some palace, or to be the tutors in some rich family.

Dante was first taught by a priest, then he went to one of the schools, then to various masters who instructed him in various subjects. All the time, till he was thirty-five he stayed in Florence, never departing to a university. This was unusual in those days. In the Middle Ages, when a man had heard the teachers and doctors of his own university, say of Oxford, he set off on foot or on horseback, wearing the grey robe of a student, and travelling peacefully along the wild roads, to another university. So many Englishmen came from the north to Oxford, and from Oxford, after their term, set off southwards for France and Italy. Everybody knew a student by his dress, and respected him for his learning. If he came to a monastery, he would at once be admitted as a guest. Then he would spend a few days in seclusion, discussing learned subjects with the abbot and the more book-loving brothers, would study some book in the library, and

then, perhaps having written a Latin poem in praise of the monastery, he would take the road again, and travel till he came to the famous University of Paris, where he would settle down to hear the great teachers. Then on from Paris he would go, down to Italy, walking slowly or riding towards the great universities of Bologna, Padua, Salerno. He needed very little money indeed. Some he could earn by writing letters or doing other clerical work. When he came to a university he was sure of a welcome.

Europe then was not like Europe now. If a man were a Christian, all countries were his, for everywhere was the one Church of which he was a son. If he were at all educated, he spoke Latin, and Latin was the speech of all churchmen, of all Europeans of any standing. What did it matter if a man were English or French or Spanish? He was a European, a member of Christendom. He travelled along the roads where all travelled, and on the full high-road every European was at home. People took no notice of foreigners and foreign tongues, for the civilised countries were always full of outlandish troops, and priests might belong to any nation. So the student leaving Italy would calmly take the great north road, to come home through the Alps to Germany, walking often on foot without any fears. He would make his way to the great monastery of St. Gall, near the Lake of Constance, and there call his greeting to the gate-keeper. Nobody asked if he were English or Irish or German or Italian. He spoke in Latin to the monks and was received as one of themselves. Then in the evening they would gossip and talk. So we know many English and Irish, Spanish and Italian came to St. Gall. Some, even wild Irish, stayed and became monks, some became even parish priests to the German peasants. So there was a great, quiet interchange going on all the time; Europe was one realm of the Church as it has never been since the fifteenth century, when national boundaries began to make fixed barriers.

Learning was a hard, dry business in the Middle Ages. The four great subjects were theology, astronomy, arithmetic and history. All teaching, of course, went on in Latin. The mediaeval schoolmasters divided true learning into two branches: the Trivium or threefold, which consisted of grammar, dialectic or argument, and rhetoric or eloquent speech; then the Quadrivium or fourfold, which consisted of arithmetic, geometry, music, and astronomy. Many a poor student wept over the clumsy difficulties of the Quadrivium, many a man cracked his brains trying to master the Trivium.

Dante, however, without a great deal of help from masters, became deeply learned in all the seven branches of mediaeval science. Alone in his room in Florence he read what books he could buy or borrow. Admitted to the libraries of the city, he studied all that was to be known. He was very happy studying and learning and thinking. It made him feel rich at heart, and cheerful.

He loved to meet with friends or learned monks, to hold deep converse by the hour. This was one of the delights of the Middle Ages, this meeting for serious, enthusiastic talk.

The family of Dante belonged to the Guelph party, and during all his youth the poet was mixed up in the serious party strife of Florence. In 1289 the Ghibelins collected from all the Tuscan cities and met the Florentine Guelphs in the battle of Campaldino. Dante, who was twenty-four years of age at the time, is said to have taken part in the battle. The Guelphs were victorious, and the Ghibelins never lifted their heads again in Florence. This victory over the united troops of the Tuscan cities made Florence finally the Queen of Tuscany.

Whilst he was a young man Dante must have met or known the beautiful Beatrice. We do not know if he ever spoke to her. But all through his after-life he made beautiful her memory. His first poem, the 'Vita Nuova' or New Life, tells the delicate, touching story of his love. But Dante married and lived happily enough with his family. It was not so much the person, the actual individual, that he loved in Beatrice; it was his own vision. Beatrice was like a vision to him of the life that might come, when men were pure and spiritual, loving their women with purified love. She was a vision or illusion of the more spiritual, more passionless days to come, even the later days which Europe has known and which Dante would never know. If he had married her, she could not have remained a vision to him. And it was the fair ideal he needed, not the actual woman. So that what he calls his grief, in the loss of Beatrice, is really his wistful joy.

Dante was a member of one of the great guilds, the Guild of Doctors. In 1300 he was one of the Chiefs or Priors of this guild. There were seven guilds: the Judges and notaries, the Calimala, the Money Changers, the Woollen Manufacturers, the Doctors and Druggists, the Silkweavers and Mercers, the Skinners and Furriers. The Priors were elected for a period of two months' time, during which period they were practically governors of the city.

There was, as usual, bitter party struggle. Dante and the Priors exiled a struggling faction. The more aristocratic exiles appealed to Pope Boniface VIII. Boniface invited the French into Tuscany. In 1301 Charles of Valois entered Florence. In January 1302 Dante left his beloved native city, exiled for ever.

He was now a wanderer, but never homeless. He was a learned, cultured man, and such a man was at home everywhere in Europe at that day. Sympathetic nobles invited him to their homes. They gave him little simple rooms within the thick walls of their great castles, and as he wrote he would look out of his loop-hole window at the wild hills or at the river. Thus he composed his long poem called the 'Divine Comedy,' one of the world's greatest works. From his writing

in his lonely rooms he would go down the cold, massive stone stairway to the hall where the family dined, and there he would sit in conversation with the lords and clergy, an honoured if penniless guest. He knew the bitterness of dependence, but still we must believe he was happy, composing his work in peace and having converse with generous men. Particularly he liked to stay in the castle of his friend Can Grande della Scala, at Verona.

At times, also, he departed to the universities, where he was warmly welcomed. There, at Bologna, Padua, Paris, perhaps even at Oxford, Dante heard the doctors, and himself opened a lecture-room, where he lectured in his own way. By this means, no doubt, he obtained some money for his maintenance, from the fees of those men who attended his lectures and could afford to pay.

Dante spent the last three years of his life at Ravenna, that old city, half Italian, half Byzantine, where the last emperors had sheltered themselves behind the marshes when the barbarians invaded Italy. In Ravenna Dante lived with his two sons and his daughter, all guests of his good friend, the nobleman Guido da Polenta. They looked out over the wild, flat country, the old marshes; they went down to the Adriatic sea-shore; they visited the great churches. And in 1321 Dante died, and was buried in the Lady Chapel of the Franciscan Church.

Dante belonged to the close of the great mediaeval period, called the Age of Faith. His chief work, the 'Divine Comedy,' tells of his visionary visit to Hell, where the violent, passionate men of the old world of pride and lust are kept in torment; then on to Purgatory, where there is hope; then at last he is conducted by Beatrice into Paradise. It is the vision of the passing away of the old, proud, arrogant violence of the barbaric world, into the hopeful culture such as the Romans knew, on to the spiritual peace and equality of a new Christian world. This new Christian world was beyond Dante's grasp. Paradise is much less vivid to him than the Inferno. What he knew best was the tumultuous, violent passion of the past, that which was punished in Hell. The spiritual happiness is not his. He belongs to the old world.

The next great man of letters was Petrarch. He too was the son of a Florentine, but he was born in 1304 at Arczzo, to which city his father had retired when exiled from Florence by the same decree which exiled Dante. Petrarch also loved study. He was brought up by his mother for some years on a small estate which she owned, upon the Arno near Florence: then the family moved to Pisa; and then Petrarch's father went with his wife and children to Avignon, where, being a lawyer, he no doubt found plenty to do in connection with the papal court.

When he was fifteen years old, the young Petrarch was sent from Avignon to the University of Montpellier, a university most famous in the Middle Ages for law and medicine. There he was to study law. But instead, he got hold of the old

books of Rome; the writers of the Augustan Age fascinated him. Instead of studying law he pored, fascinated, over the magnificent pagan poems of Virgil, or over the pagan treatises of Cicero. These books seemed to him so grand, so full of beautiful images and rich, deep thoughts that they moved him far more than any Christian works could do. For in those days the books of our civilisation were not written, and science had barely awakened.

From Montpellier he went to Bologna. Still he did not get on with law. He began to collect old Latin manuscripts, reading with fascination the pagan writers of great Rome. His father came to visit him at Bologna, and saw that he made little progress in law. Then he examined his son's small but very dear library of old manuscripts, realised that this was what hindered him in law, and straightway had a fire made in the courtyard, where the old books were cast on the flames. The young man wept so bitterly when his father cast on the fire the beloved volumes of Cicero and Virgil that the stern old lawyer fished them out before they had caught.

It was no use going on with law. Yet the young man loved study so much. So he took Holy Orders, became a priest. Then he was happy. He had many dear friends, both in the Church and without. He kept these friends all his life, and it was his joy to meet with them, talk and ride and exchange ideas. He set them all busy hunting the old manuscripts of pagan Rome, and many treasures they saved for us. Petrarch set off from Avignon in 1333, to travel in North Europe. He spent some time in Paris, then went on to Ghent, Lige, and to the great bishop-city of Cologne. He loved meeting many men and having exquisite discourse. But the great adventure was in hunting for old, unknown Latin manuscripts.

He spent a good deal of his life at Avignon, and although he abuses the sinfulness of the papal court, without doubt he was happy in the old town — or near to it. For he moved about ten miles away from the too-lively city of the popes. He took a little house at Vaucluse, with hills and meadows round about, a small river near by. Here he made lovely gardens, sunny and still and rich with foliage and flowers, where he used to study. Often he wandered alone among the hills. For at this time men's eyes began to open to the beauty of landscape and wild nature, which had not been noticed before. His friends came out to drink wine with him and talk of the wonders with which life was filled, wonderful books that they had found, beautiful old Roman ideas which now for the first time dawned on their minds.

In Avignon Petrarch met the famous Laura, the woman whom he loved, and to whom he wrote his famous poems, sonnets which taught even Shakespeare the arts of poetry. Laura was married and had many children. Petrarch was a priest. And therefore the love was once more visionary and ideal. Laura was no doubt

more real to Petrarch than Beatrice to Dante. Still she was a spirit, a visionary being rather than a woman of flesh and blood. Laura died of the Black Death, the Great Pestilence, in 1348.

Much of Petrarch's work, his world-stirring letters, his treatises, his poems, was written in Latin for the learned only. But the poems to Laura were written in pure Italian. Dante's great poem, Petrarch's poems, these were the beginning of real modern literature. The friends of Petrarch scolded him for wasting his time, writing in trivial Italian. But now we forget all his Latin effusions, and read only the despised Italian, most beautiful and most real.

From Avignon Petrarch went in 1341 to King Robert's court at Naples. He was received with welcome. Already his inspired letters and his poetry were making him a name in all Europe. In 1341 he was crowned with the poet's laurel wreath by the Senate, on the Capitol of Rome. Kings knew of him and admired him. He had a passionate love for Italy, and his burning letters to sovereigns and rulers helped to decide the course of history. He longed for the union of Italy — just as Dante did. But Petrarch stands at the beginning of the modern world, whilst Dante stood at the shadowy end of the old.

Petrarch died in 1374, at his house among the Euganean Hills near Padua, in his own country. He bequeathed his precious library to Venice.

The third great Italian writer of this time was Boccaccio. He was Petrarch's good friend. Boccaccio was also a Florentine, born in 1313. His father was a merchant of Florence. At the age of twenty the young Boccaccio was sent to assist in the counting-house of a merchant in Naples, in order to gain experience in commerce.

But Naples at that time was a bright city. The French House of Anjou still ruled the Neapolitan kingdom. King Robert kept a brilliant, gay little court, almost reminding one of old Hohenstaufen days. The young Boccaccio was introduced to this gay court. Being of a lively, pleasant disposition, he was very happy. For he was also rich, kind, of good Florentine birth, and a true scholar. So King Robert held him an ornament to his court, and Boccaccio was often employed as a diplomatist, transacting affairs of state for Florence.

Boccaccio remained a rich merchant, but he never ceased to love learning and poetry above all things. In Naples he met the lady whom he in his turn made famous, the bright Fiammetta. Like Dante and Petrarch, Boccaccio could not marry the woman he loved, for she was already married. But he did not complain. Many a happy time they had, hunting in the country, or dancing at court; or, at some lovely villa among the hills, reading together; or telling tales under the trees with a company of bright and beautiful men and women; or listening to the singing of poems, or playing games on the grass: all rich and rare

and bright women and men, delighting in life.

In 1350 Boccaccio returned to Florence, just after the Great Plague. There he wrote the hundred Italian tales, called the Decameron. The introduction to the Decameron gives a terrible description of the plague in Florence, from which the ladies and gallants withdraw to a secluded villa in the country. But the tales which these ladies and men are supposed to tell are mostly gay and amusing, sometimes sad, touching, but never tragic.

These hundred little novels of the Decameron form the most famous work of Boccaccio. They are written in pleasant, simple Italian which we can read to-day without much difficulty. It is said that these stories gave the form to modern Italian. Certainly they seem much nearer to us than the dark, difficult old Italian of Dante, or the more learned old Italian of Petrarch.

But Boccaccio, like Petrarch, was scolded for not writing always in good solid Latin. The native dialects, as the European tongues were then called, were despised by the learned. And Boccaccio was very learned — his big palace in Florence was thronged with scholars, poets, ladies, gay as well as clever. Boccaccio must have been a delightful man to know: so fine in himself, yet so kind and generous and patient, more lovable than the austere Dante or the scholarly Petrarch.

At this time the Greeks from Constantinople were beginning to visit the new cities of Europe. Constantinople shrank and sank lower, but Venice, Florence, Rome, Milan, were becoming every year more brilliant. At that time very few people in Europe, save in the east, knew anything about Greek. Petrarch had heard all about Homer and Plato, but he could never read them in the original. He bitterly wanted to know Greek. But no one could teach it him, and there were no books to learn it from. The wonderful Greek language was shut off from Europeans. ‘I have a Homer,’ said Petrarch. ‘But Homer is dumb to me, or I am deaf to him.’

But now Greek professors began to appear in Italian towns. One of the first that came to Florence was invited to Boccaccio’s house, and maintained there. Boccaccio learned Greek, and established a Greek chair in the university of Florence. And to the ungrateful, fretful, spiteful Byzantine who came and went and was never satisfied, the kind-hearted Florentine was always gentle and generous, never heeding the petty treacheries of the stranger, never denying him a home. For to have learned Greek was like wealth to Boccaccio. To be able to read Homer, Plato, Herodotus, this was to have a new world opened to one, a new world of the past rich with thoughts.

In these days great visions opened. First the grand Past offered to man visions, beautiful adventures, marvellous thoughts. It was as if the soul and mind had

been shut up in a box, in the old narrow way of dogmatic faith, and now was set free into all the air and space and splendour of free, pure thought and deep understanding. No wonder men were excited and glad, no wonder they set off in search of new worlds, new lands on earth. So, secondly, the great sailors crossed the sea, America was discovered, and Southern Africa. Here was a whole world of the future opening ahead, a whole grand world of the past opening behind.

No wonder the period is called the Renaissance, or rebirth. During the dark, violent Middle Ages man was alive, but blind and voracious. In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, however, he awoke. The human spirit was then like a butterfly which bursts from the chrysalis into the air. A whole new world lies about it. The narrow, devouring little world of the caterpillar has disappeared, all heaven and all earth flash around.

With the Renaissance the new way of life comes into being. Men do not live just to fight and conquer and capture possessions. They live now in the joy of producing, the joy of making things. So Europe begins to weave and work, instead of fighting or fasting or making crusades. Then the goods produced must be exchanged. Commerce needs good safe roads, safe seas. Peace begins to win her great victories over war.

By the Renaissance we do not mean just the Revival of Learning. We mean a whole new way of life. Men shake themselves ever more and more free. The greatest institutions, Empire and Papacy, are broken; men are freed from the enclosure of these vast forms. Then kings rise up, to hold millions of people in their hands. But as kings are rising, so is commerce. Kings are really war-lords, war-leaders. Commerce needs no king. Thus the power of kings declines as the power of commerce increases. And yet there is something even more powerful than commerce, or industry.

At the Rebirth, great kings, dukes, tyrants shine splendid where emperors and popes have fallen. Popes are no more than dukes, tyrants like the rulers of other Italian towns. But side by side with kings and dukes commerce and industry are slowly, almost invisibly rising, at last to overshadow all kingly rule. And against the slowly rising flood of commerce moves the almost invisible power of learning, wisdom, understanding. Emperors have reigned, and popes; kings, tyrants, dukes have had their turn; commerce has taken full power in the world. There still remains the last reign of wisdom, of pure understanding, the reign which we have never seen in the world, but which we must see.

Florence in Boccaccio's day had probably not more than 100,000 inhabitants. London had only 50,000. But the great cloth industry of Florence brought in more than a million florins a year. It was very difficult in those days for Florence to make her payments in other countries to pay for wool in England, or

undressed cloth in Flanders. For money was continually changing, and what was valuable one year might become worthless the next. In early days rich Jews had kept moneys of all kinds. Florence would pay her coin to a rich Jew, and he would pay her debt in England, with English coin out of his treasury. But he charged heavily for the transaction. Then the agents of the Pope, secretaries of bishops and cardinals, had been empowered to carry money from one State to another, and this enriched the papal revenue.

But now rich Florentine merchants established in their counting-houses a department for exchange of moneys. They received coin of all kinds from every country. So they could pay a bill for a man in any country, and charge for doing so. Then they would receive bills of promise instead of coin for payment. Trusting to these bills they would settle accounts for a merchant, and wait until he paid the cash later on. For this delay they charged him a certain percentage. So money was made to breed money. Then the banking merchants began to lend cash to princes or States, large sums, from which they drew good interest. And so the great banking system of the modern world began.

Of course there was risk in this. When in 1339 Edward hi. of England repudiated his debts, there was great distress in Florence, for he owed that city great sums. Many merchants became bankrupt and penniless, and Florence cursed England. In 1318 came the Great Plague, when night and day the inhabitants of Florence died in the streets. Many citizens fled, the city was deserted, work at a standstill. But the plague passed, people returned, in a few years' time all was busy as before.

The control of the city was changing hands. The new banking merchants had been insignificant citizens. Now, they became very rich indeed. Meanwhile the old noble merchants, who had been the governing class in the city, began to wane and sink in importance. For they kept up the old system, and so were outstripped by the new men. These new families became very powerful and famous. The chief of the Florentines were the Medici, the Strozzi, the Albizzi, all bankers, not productive manufacturers or merchants.

The Medici became world-famous. They were not a noble family by origin, only well-to-do citizens. But as their wealth increased their importance grew in Florence. In 1421 Giovanni de' Medici became Gonfaloniere of the city. The Gonfaloniere was the prime citizen, the leader of the Priors of the Guild, the president of the Councils of the State.

Though the great cities of Italy were established upon peace and commerce, they were by no means peaceful. They were liable at all times to attack. And they were ready in their jealousy to fight a rival city. Now any State which must needs act quickly, either in the defensive or offensive, must be under the

supreme control of one man: since many minds, though they may be sure, are usually slow. Therefore the chief citizen in Florence was really in supreme command of the State, at least during the city's great days. And a citizen in supreme command was named, after the Greek style, a tyrant. But a tyrant is not in this sense a bully. He is merely a supreme commander of a civilian State, a president who has an almost absolute authority.

So the Medici became tyrants of Florence. They had to defend and fight for their city. But in the fourteenth century a new way of fighting had sprung up. The Florentines were busy, they did not want to be soldiering. Therefore with their power of money they hired special trained bands of soldiers. These condottieri, or Hired Ones, were soldiers of every nation, united under some clever captain. The greatest of these captains was Sir John Hawkwood, who commanded the famous White Company in Italy.

He was the son of a tanner in Essex. He served in the armies of Edward III., fought no doubt at Crecy and Poitiers, and was knighted. When France and England signed the Peace of Bretigny in 1360, Sir John Hawkwood turned to Italy, hoping for more fighting in that divided land.

The roving bands of soldiers united under him. He trained them perfectly. New methods of fighting were coming into fashion; war was re-born, as well as peace.

Edward III. had created the professional soldier. Instead of madly hurling themselves at one another, as in the old days, armies now entered into careful and skilful campaign.

Sir John Hawkwood was perhaps the most skilful campaigner of his day. With his White Company he sought always to out-manoeuvre the enemy, not to destroy him. He did not want to lose his own carefully trained professionals. So in the wars of the condottieri not many men were killed, though cities triumphed or were defeated.

When the condottieri hired themselves out, they were perfectly faithful to their pledge. But immediately the campaign was over, the connection was finished, they might hire themselves to any other bidder. In 1363 Hawkwood with his company fought for Montferrat against Milan; in 1364 for Pisa against Florence; in 1368 he was fighting for the Visconti, Lord of Milan; in 1373 he was engaged by the Pope against this same Visconti. After this he was chiefly engaged by the Florentines, who appreciated him greatly. He was a kindly, human soldier, who loved the skill and science of the fight. In 1392 he led the Florentine forces and defeated the Visconti, although he had married a daughter of Bernabo Visconti, Tyrant of Milan. He spent the remainder of his life in a beautiful villa outside Florence, and his children were Italian nobles. He died in 1394, and the citizens

gave him a splendid funeral.

So the tyrants of the Italian cities fought against one another, without shedding the blood of their citizens. The Visconti, Tyrants of Milan, were cruel and vindictive, though they built some lovely edifices, and under their rule the great cathedral of Milan was begun. But the Medici, the merchant bankers who became Tyrants of Florence, excelled all in peace and in cunning diplomacy.

The first great Medici was Cosimo, who in practice ruled the city till he died in 1464. He was splendid as a king. He kept a gay court, and spent great sums in beautifying the city. He built the Medici Palace, and chiefly assisted the architect Brunelleschi to raise the dome of the cathedral of Florence, one of the first and most famous domes of Europe. Perfect painters, whose works have rejoiced all men in all lands, worked for Cosimo, poets and musicians thronged the courts.

But in 1478 rich citizens, with the connivance of the Pope, conspired to murder the Medici and the Priors. The two young Medici, Giuliano and Lorenzo, were attacked in the cathedral. Giuliano was stabbed, Lorenzo escaped. The populace, who at this time loved the Medici, rose in anger, crying *Palle! Palle! Palle!* For the arms of the banker Medici were three red balls, three red palle.

Lorenzo de' Medici then became Tyrant of Florence. He is called the Magnificent, Lorenzo il Magnifico. He was one of the most splendid men in the Renaissance. Frail in health and ugly to look at, he was yet delightful, witty and gay, yet learned, a lover of poetry and all the arts, yet a clever ruler. He was very, simple in his manner, and kept no pomp and ceremony. He always said he was but a citizen, no noble, no aristocrat, even if he were first citizen. So he tried in his manner and appearance to be like one of the people themselves.

The citizens loved him for it. And so, because he was loved, he had supreme power, far more perfect in its way than any papal or Visconti power. He kept a most gay and splendid court — which the Florentines loved. They were delighted by Lorenzo's splendours and gaieties. But at the same time the Magnificent left us treasures for which we cannot praise him enough, the clever Tyrant. There are pictures which might not have been produced if he had not splendidly commissioned and supported the painters, lovely works such as those of Botticelli, besides the sculptures, poems, songs, and beautiful architecture of other men.

The three greatest painters of the day were Leonardo da Vinci, Michael Angelo, and Raphael. Leonardo and Michael Angelo were both Florentines. In 1447 the Sforza, a son of a condottieri captain, became Duke and Tyrant of Milan. His son, called Il Moro, or the Moor, because he was so dark, invited Leonardo da Vinci to the extravagant court of Milan. He gave Leonardo a house and an irregular supply of money, and in Milan the great painter produced his

famous pictures. Still we can see the large wall-painting called ‘ The Last Supper,’ though it is in a dilapidated condition. Leonardo was a tall, handsome, fair man. He loved science, and perfected the science of painting. But he loved all scientific pursuits. Above all he longed to fly. For years he worked with his smith at marvellous great wings which he hoped would carry him. His failure to fly was a great sorrow to him. But Ludovico Sforza, the Duke, remained his friend till the French invasion.

Michael Angelo was a little younger than Leonardo, but his morose nature was jealous of the elder man. Michael Angelo’s greatest work was done for the Pope — the marvellous frescoes in the Sistine Chapel of the Vatican.

Raphael was the youngest of the painters, and the darling of all. He worked incessantly for the Pope, and beautified the Vatican superbly. He was rich as a lord with the proceeds of his painting, and was followed by a gay retinue through the streets of Rome, like any prince. But he remained kind and lovable, and was much mourned when he died in 1520, at the age of thirty-seven.

Whilst Italy and Rome were glittering with creative activity, the last vestige of the old Roman Empire disappeared. Constantinople, which had remained the beautiful home of the eastern emperors since Constantine’s day, was taken by the Turks in 1453. The Empire in the East vanished utterly. The Turks took possession of the home of Constantine, the first Christian city fell into Mohammedan hands, the first great Christian cathedral, the Hagia Sophia or Church of St. Sophia, became a mosque of Mohammedan worship.

But the Turks and Mohammedanism had reached their western limit. In the north the Spaniards roused the old Gothic spirit, and drove out the Moors. Since the eighth century the Moors had held a great part of Spain. There they had a beautiful, fertile civilisation. The Moors alone had kept science alive during the Middle Ages; they were the great teachers of botany, medicine, geography, mathematics. In Spain their palaces were graceful and delicate, their gardens lovely; they had a flourishing trade in silk, a busy, refined population. But in 1492 their last stronghold, Granada, fell, and all Spain was in the hands of the Spaniards.

So the great century came to an end. The west coast of Africa had been discovered and opened; the Grand Canary and the Azores were settled; the Cape of Good Hope was discovered. In 1492 Columbus discovered America, in 1497 Vasco da Gama rounded the Cape of Good Hope and came upon India. He landed in Calicut in 1498. The sea-way to the East was opened.

Thus the world opened out to man. And even at the same time the heavens were explored. Copernicus, the great astronomer, was born in 1473. Before his day men believed, according to Ptolemy’s system, that our earth was the centre

of the universe, and that man was at the centre of creation. Round the earth were the seven spheres, or globes of crystal atmosphere, one inside the other, each one containing a planet, and all revolving in different directions. So the planets were supposed to be carried on their different paths. Outside of all was a great outer sphere containing all the stars like many bright specks in a glass globe. This great outer sphere set all the others moving, and in their diverse turning they made a fine universal music called the music of the spheres.

Copernicus after thirty-six years of study proved that the theory of the moving spheres was wrong. He showed that the earth moves in a path round the sun. This roused a great storm of wrath, for it put the Church out of her proud, central position. If our earth were not the centre of the universe, then man, instead of believing himself undisputed lord of creation, must humble himself and allow that there may be other worlds with other lords. So the great mediaeval pride of man received its great blow.

After Copernicus, Tycho Brahe, who was born in 1546, built the first observatory for accurately studying the heavens. He also constructed the sextant and quadrant, which have been of such invaluable service to mankind.

In 1564 was born the great Galileo, 'the Italian star-wright.' He invented the telescope, and proclaimed the new theories and discoveries of the heavens to mankind, for which he was imprisoned by the Pope, who found it necessary that the earth should remain the centre of the universe. With Galileo modern astronomy began.

Chapter XIV. The Reformation

It was the north, the northern Teutonic race that had defied the Caesars of Old Rome, which was now finally to break the power of the Roman Papacy. The Germanic temperament all through our course of history has reacted against the old social forms, gradually breaking them down and making room for a wider individual liberty. From the south come the impulses that unite men into a oneness: from the north come the strong passions which break up the oneness and shatter the world, but which make in the long run for a freer, more open way of life.

The great men of the New Learning were northerners. It was in the north that men began to use their reason fearlessly in all matters that interested them. It was in the north that the great men passionately desired to be free to understand all that their souls were troubled with.

The first of the northern teachers before the Reformation was the German, John Reuchlin. He studied Hebrew so that he could get at the true meaning of the Old Testament. He tried hard to save the Jewish writings from the flames of the Inquisitors. For he wanted to show the natural, human side of the Old Testament. The priests of the Church had hidden the Bible from the people and had tried to make everything out of Scripture seem marvellous and supernatural and awful. The men of the New Learning wanted to see things naturally, in the light of the true human understanding. For this reason they were called humanists, because the human understanding was to them the measure of truth and reality. They did not wish to believe in abnormal or monstrous things, just because men had always believed in these monstrosities. They did not want to consider life awful and supernatural. They wished to see everything in the human light, the light of the deep, real human intelligence, which is the best that man is capable of. Another early German reformer and scholar was Ulrich von Hutten, called the Stormy Petrel of the Reformation, for he was very fiery and passionate. These Germans were very eager to slay old lies, old untruths, to expose old impostures, to destroy the old imposed authority of the Church.

The Oxford reformers were different. They loved the new learning, but they did not want to break with Rome. They wanted more purity in the Church, but peace, not schism. John Colet, son of the Lord Mayor of London, came back from the study of Greek in Italy, in the year 1496. He began to lecture on the Epistles of St. Paul. The New Testament, as we know, exists in its earliest form

in Greek. So Colet was able to read the real words, and to connect them with the history of the times, and to understand St. Paul's relations to the great Greek thinkers and to the Roman governors of his own day. So the Epistles became human documents, not just mysterious religious utterances. They belonged to the real history of mankind, to the history of pagan Rome as well as to Christendom.

Colet became Dean of St. Paul's, and used his father's fortune to found St. Paul's School, in 1510. His advice to his students was: 'Keep to the Bible and the Apostles' Creed, and let Churchmen, if they like, dispute about the rest.' Colet had great influence in Oxford, over Sir Thomas More, Grocyn, Linacre, and the great Erasmus — also over Tyndale and Latimer.

Of all the humanists Erasmus of Rotterdam was the most famous. He was called 'the Man by Himself.' He was recognised on both sides of the Alps as the literary chief of Europe, somewhat as Petrarch had been two hundred years before. Forced into a monastery in Holland when he was young, Erasmus escaped to the university of Paris, and afterwards to Oxford. He was feeble in health, but he became the greatest scholar of his time, and popes, princes, statesmen and doctors bowed before him.

In his Handbook for the Christian Soldier, published in 1503, he showed that each individual was directly responsible to God, apart from any priestly intermediary. We see the old Teutonic independence breaking out here. But his greatest work was the fresh translation of the New Testament. He printed the original Greek and his own accurate Latin translation in columns side by side. This appeared in 1516. It rapidly travelled all over Europe, and opened men's eyes for the first time to the real story of Christ and the Apostles. In this true Gospel men could find nothing about a pope or cardinals or any Church of Rome. This did more than anything to prepare the way for the actual Reformation.

Erasmus himself was a scholar, not a fighter. He did not want to quarrel with popes or with princes. He did not want to alter the standing institutions. He just let men see for themselves.

Martin Luther scorned him, thinking him timid. But then Luther was a fighter rather than a deep, subtle thinker. Luther was the sturdy son of a peasant, born in Germany in 1483. In 1501 he entered the University of Erfurt, then most famous for its humanistic studies. In 1505 he took his Master of Arts degree, and then suddenly entered a monastery, much to his father's disappointment. But though Luther was robust and cheerful by nature, he had many dark hours of struggle with Satan, when the Evil One seemed actually to grip him round the body.

In the time of his monastic life he was a pale, haggard young man, with little joy in life, filled with dread of God, and with anguish on account of sin. But at

last peace came to him. One day, reading the Epistle to the Romans, the meaning of the text: ‘ The just shall live by faith,’

entered his heart. He knew now why all his confessions and penances had been in vain. He must have perfect faith in the close fellowship of God with himself. He felt that God was with him, and he was filled with joy.

Now the Middle Ages have been called the Age of Faith. But their faith is different. They had a blind belief in the awful and unlimited power of God, and also in a wonderful divine magic which could suddenly set a man amidst the splendour of heaven. But they had no faith in their own being. They had no faith in the pure love that exists between a man and his God, a relationship so near and personal that it is unspeakable. Of this the Middle Ages conceived nothing. They knew nothing of the personal relation between a man and his God, and the faith in this relation. Their faith was all in the magic powers of God, impersonal, superhuman, marvellous. Martin Luther was the first to make religion truly human and near. And when the pure, unspeakable union was established between God and a man’s own heart, how could anything or anybody, pope or priest, interfere with it? The new way of religion was an unspeakable joy to men, and a most wonderful rich freedom. The heart was free to be alone with God.

In 1508 Luther was sent as teacher to the new University of Wittenberg, and in 1511 he went on a mission to Rome. Rome was still the centre of the world to him. The first sight of the city filled him with ecstasy. ‘ I greet thee, thou Holy Rome, thrice holy from the blood of martyrs,’ he cried. But he felt very differently when he stayed in the town. Then he saw all the luxury, splendour, and injustice of the Papal Court. He saw how proud the bishops and cardinals were, how they scorned such a nobody as he was. He felt they all held him beneath notice, in Rome. Only God would remember him. In his poor lodging, moreover, he heard many bitter complaints of men who had waited in vain for justice and a hearing at the court, and of men who were spoiled, broken in life by the cruel arrogance of prelates and pope. While all the gorgeous feasting and shows went on, he thought of those who were ruined, whose grievances were hopeless. He turned to the God whose voice spoke to his own heart, and wondered what all this pomp had to do with Him. And he repeated to himself many times, ‘ The just shall live by faith.’ Perhaps some of the old faith lingered in Rome, but there was none of the new.

Luther returned rather bitterly to Germany. But he was happy in Wittenberg, especially after he became Professor of Theology and had his own house with his own students. He also was a great preacher, powerful and moving, in his own German tongue.

In 1517 John Tetzel, a Dominican monk, was sent through Central Germany

with an indulgence proclaimed by the Medici Pope, Leo x. People were to buy these little sin-pardon tickets, and the proceeds of the sale were supposed to go to the building of the great St. Peter's Cathedral in Rome, which was then in course of erection. But indulgences were already a scandal in North Europe. Erasmus had written against them. Frederick the Wise, Elector of Saxony, forbade Tetzel to enter his dominions. The monk was, however, often enough on the border.

On October 31, 1517, Martin Luther nailed to the door of the Church of Wittenberg an invitation to all to debate with him, either by speech or writing, the question of indulgences. Luther also nailed up his famous ninety-five heads of argument against indulgences, in which he argued that the Pope could not pardon sin, only God could do that: that men who repented could not have any need of an indulgence-ticket, and that men who did not repent could not profit, by such a device — and so on.

The ninety-five arguments were printed and spread quickly over Western Europe. All men read them. The German princes were sympathetic, for they had never liked the interference of the papal court. On the other side many faithful churchmen attacked Luther for daring to disapprove of the Pope and to deny the papal authority. A controversy raged. The Pope did not appear to care much. What he did mind, said the Reformers, was that hardly any indulgences were sold.

Luther was summoned to meet the papal legate, Cardinal Cajetan, at the Diet of Augsburg, in October 1518. He went, well prepared to argue the point. The legate refused to hear any argument, and demanded him instantly to take back all he had written. Luther refused, and returned to Wittenberg. Immediately he published an account, telling people exactly what had happened. Throughout all his strife with the papacy he told the world plainly what took place, so that, step by step, the German people followed the situation. Thus there was no sudden flare of enthusiasm as with Savonarola. The Reformation developed gradually and surely in people's minds and hearts, a real conviction, a genuine understanding.

Frederick of Saxony, Luther's prince, was all the way true to the reformer. Leo x. sent a golden rose, perfumed and consecrated, to the Elector, to win his friendship and to get him to bring Luther to write a letter of submission. Luther promised. But then the renowned Professor Eck invited Luther to Leipsic, to a dispute. The famous Leipsic Disputation began on June 27, 1519. Eck wanted to trick Luther into making some statement that would prove him a heretic, so that he might be burned as Huss and Jerome had been. And he succeeded. For when he pressed Luther about the teachings of Huss, Luther plainly said that he could

not consider all the teachings of this great man to be false. Now the Church had declared they were. So here was Luther committed, as good as a heretic.

Luther went home pondering what he did believe. And he realised that in truth his beliefs were not really the same as those of the Church. He immediately began to write sermons and treatises, and to publish them, showing people exactly what he believed in his soul. Men read them with eagerness, and Luther was joined by Ulrich von Hutten and by the delicate, cultured young scholar, Philip Melanchthon, who was a much finer scholar than Luther, but who served the strong and undaunted nature of the greater man lovingly and faithfully.

In 1520 the Pope excommunicated Luther. The Elector Frederick refused to have the Bull of Excommunication published in his dominions. On December 10, 1520, in the open space outside the walls of Wittenberg, Luther, in presence of professors, students, and citizens, openly burned the Bull. Thus Luther had cut himself off from the Church.

The Emperor Charles v. had been crowned at Aix-la- Chapelle, in 1520. In 1521 he summoned his first Diet or Council to meet at Worms. Charles was a young, serious man. He hated heretical monks. At the same time he saw that the Church needed reforming, and he did not like powerful popes. Luther might be of some use against the Pope, who was a dangerous rival to the Emperor in Italy.

Luther was summoned to Worms, and a safe-conduct was sent. It was like Huss setting off for Constance. ' My dear brother,' he said to Philip Melanchthon, ' if I do not come back, if my enemies put me to death, you will go on teaching and standing fast to the truth; if you live my death will matter little.' So he set off, knowing he went probably to meet his death.

On the afternoon of April 17, Luther appeared before the Diet of Worms. He was shown a pile of his own books on a table, and asked if he was prepared to acknowledge the authorship of these works, and to recant his heresies. To the first question he answered yes, to the second, that he needed time. He was given one day. The next day he made his famous speech, before emperor, cardinals, princes, bishops. He said he would recant nothing unless it was proved by the Scriptures to be wrong. ' Here I stand,' he said, ' I cannot do otherwise. God help me. Amen.'

The Emperor and his Spaniards did not like the speech, but the Germans were deeply impressed. They were furious when it was suggested that the safe-conduct should be rescinded, and would not hear of proceeding against Luther as the Council of Constance had proceeded against Huss. On April 27, Luther left Worms with a safe-conduct lasting for twenty days more. At the end of twenty days he was to be seized and burned as a heretic. The German lords had secured him so much safety from the venomous Spaniards and Italians.

On the return journey, Luther's travelling-wagon was attacked and captured and he was carried off, no one knew whither. Wildest rumours flew about. But as a matter of fact his own prince had carried him off to safety, in hiding, in the Castle of Wartburg. Gradually this leaked out.

The imperial ban, called the Edict of Worms, was published on May 25, not until the Elector Frederick had left the city. It declared that the heretic's life was forfeited and ordered all his writings to be burned. After May 14, none were to give him food or shelter, under pain of severe punishment. But the Elector held him in safe keeping, and was not daunted.

While Luther lay hidden in the Wartburg, his teachings became more and more popular, partly because of the excitement of his defiance and disappearance. Monks, priests, and even bishops in Germany began to preach his doctrines. Men declared he had written what they were all thinking. Artists drew pictures to illustrate his works, authors wrote about them. Meantime he was busy at his great work of translating the Bible into German, a magnificent work, one of the proud possessions of Germany to-day, as our English translation is a proud possession to us.

At the same time false, or at least rash prophets rose up from among his own following, men who preached a crusade against monasteries, against pictures and images in churches, seeking to do away with all places of education as well as with places of amusement. Already the movement was beginning to run wild. Luther hastened home from his hiding-place to stop it. On eight successive days he preached to the people, with great earnestness and wisdom, till they recognised their true leader, and abandoned the rash new prophets. For Luther appealed to their deep understanding, the mind and heart as well, not to their excitable passions.

Luther might now have been seized. But the authorities were afraid to enforce the Edict, for fear of civil war. The German rulers told the Pope this when he demanded Luther's instant seizure. So the reformer was safe and free still. In 1524 the Diet of Nuremberg promised to execute the Edict of Worms 'as well as they were able, and as far as was possible.'

There came a reaction against the Reformers, for the new movement was spreading too fast. Duke George of Saxony, the Archduke Ferdinand of Austria, the Duke of Bavaria and the Elector of Brandenburg, urged on by the Pope's legate, met at Ratisbon and decided to take measures to suppress the Lutheran movement. Thus threatened, the reform princes were forced to make a union. Frederick, Elector of Saxony, Philip of Hesse, the Margrave of Brandenburg, and Albert of Brandenburg, head of the Teutonic Knights, joined with the free cities on the Lutheran side. So the two great parties were divided. It was a sad

event to Luther, for above all things he did not want war.

Charles was at war with the Pope, so could not take action, and matters stood as they were. After much thought the Diet of Spires decided in 1526 that the Word of God should be preached without disturbance, and that, for the time being, each State should so live, rule, and conduct itself as it hoped to answer for its conduct to God and the Emperor. Thus princes became more independent, and the principle was established: To each State its own religion. Then the Lutheran States and cities began to organise their church and public worship to suit their own beliefs. The services were read in German, Luther's bible and hymns were used, monasteries were suppressed, their buildings used as churches or schools, while monks and nuns were allowed to remain as school-teachers. Then the great blow came, when the Lutherans declared that monks and nuns were allowed to marry, and when Luther, throwing off his vow of chastity, was publicly wedded to Catherine Bora, a former nun.

This put all Europe into a raging ferment. When the Emperor made peace with the Pope, the Diet of Spires of 1529 reversed the decision of 1526. The Lutheran party at once drew up the formal 'Protest' against the reversion, and henceforth all people of the reformed faith were called 'Protesters' or 'Protestants.'

In 1530 Charles opened the Diet of Augsburg and asked the Protestants to give to him, their emperor, a written account of all their opinions and difficulties. They therefore drew up the famous Confession of Augsburg, written chiefly by Melanchthon. Luther, still an outlaw, was not present at Augsburg, for he would have been seized. He suffered greatly lest Melanchthon, who was gentle and submissive, should yield too far in his desire to be at one and at peace with the great old Church. Melanchthon, however, kept true to the new faith, and the Protestants would not yield to the Emperor's pressure, so no agreement was come to. The Diet then declared that if the Protestants had not decided to return to the Catholic Church by April 30, 1531, they were to be put down by force.

Then the Protestants had to gather themselves. They met at Schmalkalde, and in spite of Luther's strong feeling against the use of force, they decided to arm themselves in readiness. At this moment, however, the invasions of the Turks in Hungary and Austria, and many other complications in Spain and Italy prevented the Emperor from dealing with the Protestants. For twelve years he had not a leisure moment to bestow on the Reformers, who thus had time to grow very strong in Germany.

Having his hands full, moreover, and detesting as well the Pope and the papal power, Charles preferred to hope for an agreement with his Germans. He was not anxious for war.

So affairs drifted on, till Luther died in 1546. He had lived happily with his

family in Wittenberg, and peace had been kept. He saw the new faith spread far and gone deep. Protestantism was already deep in the hearts of the people by the time Luther died. The Reformation was truly a people's movement, and Luther was a great leader of the people. He spoke straight out to every individual man and woman, poor or rich alike. He taught every one to find peace in his own heart. No man was to look outside himself for a master. The master, God, was in his own heart.

This made men free to think and act and live. There was no priest or bishop to overawe and threaten. Quite sure of the presence of God in his heart, a man can never be overawed nor put down. He will bring forth what he believes is true in the sight of his own God, he will live according to his own single faith. And this is very different from living according to the blind faith which is accepted merely on authority.

Protestantism, however, was not yet safe or easy. The very year Luther died, the Emperor began the war in Germany. Charles v. was a Hapsburg. This house has produced many emperors, but very few great men. The Hapsburgs rose to power through marrying princesses and acquiring territory. Charles v. was lord of Austria, Germany, the Netherlands, Spain, and part of Italy. He had been brought up in Flanders, in a court under Spanish influence, for his mother, Joanna, was the daughter of Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain. When he inherited his Austrian dominions he handed them over to his brother Ferdinand. He cared for Spain most of all; that was his kingdom which he loved.

He was far more Spanish than German. His court was filled with Spaniards, and he was followed by great Spanish armies: for in that day the Spanish infantry was counted invincible. So this Spaniard with his cruel Spanish armies came to possess Germany, to put down the Protestants. In 1547 he defeated the Protestant forces of the Schmalkaldic League.

It was easier, however, to win a battle with his Spaniards than to change the hearts of men. The Germans refused to give up their faith. The Emperor tried to force them into submission with his armies. The German people became so filled with hatred of the vindictive, ruinous, Spanish soldiery, the German princes came so to detest the Spanish emperor and the interfering Italian pope, that all Germans alike united with the Protestants against the imperial forces.

The German princes rose against the Emperor in 1552. Charles escaped over the Brenner Pass into Italy. He made his brother Ferdinand permanent Archduke of Austria, whilst he himself attended to his southern dominions. So Ferdinand of Austria gradually assumed the imperial authority in Germany. He was much more Germanic in sympathy. The Religious Peace of Augsburg was signed in 1555, and the Lutheran Church was legally recognised. Cities and States were

free to choose their own form of worship, and in Catholic States Protestants were to be tolerated. But the rulers of all countries still had the power to persecute their subjects, Catholic or Protestant as might be.

So the great Mediaeval Church System was broken through, and North Europe started on her modern career of freedom and independence of belief. The Hapsburg emperors remained Catholic, but were usually tolerant by nature. Lutheran Germany went her own way, Bavaria and Catholic Germany dropped a little behind.

And so we see, step by step, great powers are broken down, and step by step individual men and women advance into freedom, freedom to believe as their soul prompts them, freedom to think as their mind sees well, freedom to act as their heart desires: beautiful, flexible freedom of human men and women.

Chapter XV. The Grand Monarch

The early history of France is a history of battles and wars, a history of the struggles of the French king with his great barons, with the English, and with the emperors. Hugh Capet was the first real king of France — the Franks had been kings of the Frankish people. Hugh Capet became Duke of France in 956, and was elected King of France in 987; and was war-lord of the central region round Paris.

In Hugh Capet's time Gaul could still be divided roughly into three great divisions. From the Rhine running east and south was the great belt of territory, Eastern France, which was sometimes called Lotharingia. It was the strange strip of land which had fallen to the share of Lothaire, one of the three grandsons of Charlemagne. In Lotharingia lay Luxemburg, Lorraine (which is Lotharingia proper), Lesser Burgundy, Aries, and Provence. In this long region the people were chiefly of true German origin, they spoke the Frankish or Allemannish or Burgundian languages, all German, and they despised the people to the west, particularly those of the great central province, calling them effeminate Galli, or Walli as they pronounced it.

The central region, France proper, occupied Champagne, Normandy, and Anjou on the Loire. The chief towns were Paris, Rheims, Orleans. In this region lived the Normans, and the people who called themselves Francingenae or French. These French were a mixed race of Franks and Gallo-Romans. They spoke the Northern French called the Langue d'Oil. And these were the people governed by the Capetian kings of France.

South of the Loire lay the great province of Aquitaine, Gascony lay on the Bay of Biscay and next the Pyrenees, whilst towards the Mediterranean spread the broad county of Toulouse. Aquitaine, Gascony, and Toulouse occupied the old Visigothic kingdom in Gaul. Here the people were much more Roman, much older in civilisation than in France proper. They spoke the delightful old Romance language, called the Langue d'Oc. Hence all this region was often called Languedoc. The Langue d'Oc was the sweet old speech of poets and minstrels, the language of our own Richard Coeur de Lion. Just as the Germanic Lotharingians despised the Francingenae or French, so the French of the Capetian Court despised the southerners, despised particularly the bishops of Aquitaine and Toulouse, calling them women and corrupt weaklings, because they were delicate in dress and speech and manner.

So we see that France was not just one State, it was a collection of States with a little kingdom in the middle. The great dukes of Brittany and Normandy, and the counts of Vermandois and Flanders in the north were independent princes, as were the dukes of Aquitaine and Gascony and Burgundy, the counts of Toulouse and Anjou, towards the south and east. In England the king soon mastered his great barons, and a law was established for the whole land. But for centuries the French king struggled with the great lords of Aquitaine, Burgundy, Brittany, Flanders; and there was no real France, no realm governed by one whole Law until after the Reformation. If the King of France was the chief man among all these lords and princes, it is only that he was principal war-lord.

By 1328 the kings of France had come to rule the greater part of the lands we now call France. All Lotharingia, that great eastern belt stretching up from Marseilles to Antwerp, belonged to the Germanic Empire; England held Aquitaine and Gascony in the south-west; Brittany and the diminished Duchy of Burgundy and the County of Flanders were still free from the French rule. And then the terrible Hundred Years War broke out. The French kings must fight his vassal, the English king. In 1453, when the English were driven out, the French kings ruled all France, save Brittany and the Burgundian possessions, Flanders and the Duchy of Burgundy. But Luxemburg and Lorraine lay outside France altogether.

Through all these centuries there had been one continual struggle in France. Until the Hundred Years War the French lords had lived in their castles and ruled their territories very much as they pleased, caring only for their own splendours as knights, triumphs in the fights of chivalry, and their glittering showy festivals. They were very much like the Gallic chieftains at the coming of the Romans, except that they lived in feudal castles, not in wooden halls, and fought in heavy armour on horseback, instead of in chariots. The mass of the people were peasants, serfs, nearly slaves, just as before, trampled down to the greatest misery when the Hundred Years War began. Then in 1358 broke out the fearful peasant rising called the Jacquerie. Nobles and rich people were massacred. The burghers or citizens joined with the peasants, all nobles and knights united against the people. It is said that twenty thousand peasants were slain between the Seine and Marne alone: and in those days the population of Europe was small.

By the close of the Hundred Years War, however, all Europe was changing. France found she must have regular soldiers to defeat the regular soldiers of Edward in. The knights of chivalry, with their feudal armies, were a failure. And to support regular armies there must be regular production at home, there must be supplies raised and money found. Thus industry, agriculture, and commerce

became the first interest of man. War merely depended on the great productive activities of a nation. And so gradually the States became occupied with industry and commerce, the force of the new Europe grew quietly strong in France as in Italy. The nobles and princes were all-powerful apparently; but underneath their martial power merchants, manufacturers, artisans, peasants, a great silent host of producers, were gradually, unnoticeably becoming important.

The Reformation spread from Germany and Switzerland into France. But there it only touched the middle classes. The great nobles would have nothing to do with the teachings of Luther or Calvin, and the mass of the peasants cared not at all for independent religion. They clung to the strange, superstitious Gallic Catholicism. Only the burghers, merchants, lesser nobility, men who were struggling for independence, listened to the new teachings, and were converted. It was not till later that noblemen joined them. These Calvinistic Protestants of France were called Huguenots.

When Protestantism was really established in Northern Europe, the south turned against it in fury. Italy, and particularly Spain, was filled with tremendous hatred of the new religion. The Spanish Inquisition became the terror of Europe, and did cruel work in the Spanish Netherlands. This passion of hatred of the Protestants, which caused the movement called the Counter-Reformation, spread now into France. Some great nobles sided with the Huguenots, some were against them. Such a state was bound to be. France lies mid-way between the north and the south of Europe: she is the centre where the passions of the two halves fuse. So now half the great nobles, headed by the Guise family, were violent Catholics, Spanish in sympathy, whilst the other half were staunch for the Huguenots.

So the religious war in France became a devastating civil war. Nobles fought nobles with intense fury. It was the old battle: the northern Germanic influence fighting the southern Latin influence in the Gallic race. In this last great fight many nobles fell, many ruined themselves, much wealth and power passed into the hands of merchants and smaller gentry. When Henry of Navarre won the Battle of Ivry in 1590 the war was ended. Henry iv. was really Protestant in sympathy. The Huguenots were allowed a fair amount of religious freedom, and they established their headquarters in the great fortress-town of La Rochelle.

Henry iv. was an important king. He ruled whilst Elizabeth and James i. were on the throne of England. He began at last to get France ordered, settled, and prosperous. For this purpose he had to depend a good deal on merchants, rich citizens, and the gentry. For the great nobles still imagined they were the King's equals; they laughed with him and chaffed him and showed him they did not intend him to imagine himself their superior. But Henry was of a generous

nature. He cared nothing for their pretensions, but went his own way, straightforward and plain in manner and dress, not caring for show, but getting his own way all the same, doing very much as he liked, and improving the land. In the richness of the middle classes lay the power of the King, and the consequent weakening of the great nobles. Henry iv. did all he could to encourage merchants and manufacturers. He had the land drained and cultivated. He helped on colonisation, assisting Champlain to found Quebec in 1608, extending his dominions. If he was going to be really powerful, he must be more than a mere war-lord, high chieftain of the chieftains, as the Frankish kings had been. He must destroy the chieftains who were more or less his equals, and rule in the name of the people — that is, of the well-to-do merchants and citizens. He must be very much like a Tyrant of an Italian city, ruling his country for the sake of the prosperity of the numerous merchants and smaller gentry and manufacturers, those who supported the body of the nation. Great nobles must go. A king must have no equals. He must have only subjects. But they must be willing subjects. A king was now no longer a war-lord. He was head of a great productive community.

Henry iv. was murdered in 1610. His son Louis XIII. was an infant, and therefore Maria de' Medici, mother of the baby King, became regent, assisted by various advisers. There was a good deal of confusion. At last, in 1624, Richelieu, the Cardinal-Duke, became adviser of the boy King and of the Queen Mother.

Richelieu was a wonderful man, with a terribly strong will, and a great, subtle intellect. He saw what he had to do. And he soon had complete influence over the young Louis and the Queen Mother. Richelieu's work was to continue what Henry of Navarre had begun: that is, to make the King supreme in France, and to weaken all the great nobles; to encourage prosperity in the country; and to keep in check the great Spanish-German power of the Hapsburgs. His work, really, was to convert France into a land of productive unity, to destroy the old war-spirit.

The first thing, however, was to reduce the Huguenots, who had become almost a little nation in themselves. The Cardinal-Duke himself besieged the great stronghold of La Rochelle. The city yielded to starvation. Richelieu made peace with the Huguenots, and gave them a good deal of liberty. He was not at all their religious enemy. He only wanted to make them submissive to the royal power.

The nobles hated the great Cardinal. They plotted against him continually, and he had many seized and beheaded or kept in the Bastille. He forbade all war between nobles, and even duelling, that last remnant of private warfare between gentlemen, was suppressed. Many of the enormous castles which were scattered

over France were blown up by gunpowder at the Cardinal's orders, and the unruly nobles deprived for ever of their strongholds.

Then the government of provinces was taken away from the great lords. Noblemen now became merely courtiers. The land was governed by a little body of men, chosen by the King himself, or the King's ministers, and called the King's Council. The King's Council appointed governors called Intendants. These Intendants were usually rich citizens or smaller gentry, and these now ruled in the provinces. They bore the titles of Superintendents of Finance and Superintendents of Police. It was they who, as royal officers, raised armies and taxes in their provinces, and superintended the courts of justice.

And so the machinery of monarchy was established. It was the supreme rule of a king, by means of rich and submissive merchants, burghers, cultivators. The King was Tyrant, or Absolute Citizen, rather than First Chieftain. The difference between France and England was that the French allowed their king to be a real Tyrant, whilst the English beheaded Charles i. and forced the succeeding kings to be mere presidents of the rich men.

Richelieu died in 1642, Louis XIII. in 1643. Louis xiv. at this time was only five years old. The new minister was Cardinal Mazarin, a subtle Italian, a pupil of Richelieu.

During Mazarin's rule the Parlement of Paris became insubordinate. The Parlement of Paris was not a parliament in our sense of the word, but a court of justice which had this further right of registering the edicts or orders of the King. If the Parlement refused to register the King's orders, then these orders could not be carried out. At the very time the English Parliament was becoming so bold, the Parlement of Paris took bold steps. It refused to register the edicts of finance for 1648, demanded the reduction of taxes, and the abolition of imprisonment by royal warrant without trial.

The royal soldiers seized the leaders of the Parlement. But then came the news of the execution of Charles I. in England, and the French Court was afraid. Mazarin gave way for a moment. But only for a moment. He summoned forces under the great Prince Conde, the most famous general of the day. Paris was blockaded. The nobles would not stir to help the rich burghers and lawyers of the Parlement: and thus Parlement was almost wiped out., defeated completely.

Then the nobles rose against the royal minister. Conde was arrested in time, but the nobles were in great force. Mazarin had to flee. But he soon returned. With all his skill he gathered the royal forces. The last great struggle between the French Crown and the French nobility took place. The nobles were defeated in 1652, aristocracy was broken for ever. King and merchants ruled France. The Parlement of Paris was forbidden to interfere in public affairs. The system of

Richelieu was complete, the monarchic power was perfected. But a monarch was now supreme head of a civil, producing people, his realm was no longer martial.

Mazarin died in 1661. France was now already the greatest, most solid power in Europe. The young King Louis xiv. was determined to govern. His Court was astonished when he told them he would be his own first minister. But he kept his word.

Louis xiv. is perhaps the most splendid example of modern monarchy. The French, like the old Gauls, have always loved splendour, magnificence, and showy power: they admired great and resplendent chieftains. Their greatest and most resplendent countryman was the Grand Monarch. Louis was tall and handsome, with those fine manners of his nation, and with a majestic yet graceful, courtly bearing that all men admired. He was patient in his attention, and did not give way to anger. But he was extremely vain; he loved to be flattered and could not bear to be advised.

Like Charles i. of England, he believed himself king by divine right. He was responsible to God for his kingdom, and to God only. 'I am the State,' is supposed to have been his maxim- — 'L'Etat, c'est moi.' He ruled through the King's Council, and the smaller councils chosen from this. Louis selected the men for his Councils from the middle class, his great inferiors, not from the aristocracy, who were most nearly his equals. 'I wanted to let the public know,' he wrote, 'by the rank from which I chose my ministers, that I had no intention of sharing power with them.' He looked down on them all, they all had to flatter him continually. And they all admired him immensely, loved to admire him, in the true Gallic spirit.

The great nobles now became courtiers. Disliking the memories of insurrectionary Paris, Louis established his Court twelve miles out, at the city of Versailles, where he built an enormous and gorgeous palace. This was erected between 1676 and 1688, chiefly by the royal architect Mansart. The Court occupied it in 1682. When completed it could house 10,000 persons.

The naturally barren soil was enriched, an aqueduct brought water which was led into lakes and canals, whilst skilful landscape gardeners transformed the wilderness into a succession of lovely, broad, terraced gardens, in succeeding levels, with wide alleys and paths of geometrical form. Trees were clipped into shape — cubes, balls, peacocks — fountains rose out of marble basins where statues seemed to play with the water, flowers were grouped in masses. Beyond the gardens were cool forest glades and open spaces, with grottoes, caves, small lodges — all artificial.

Here in Versailles Louis xiv. kept his vast and splendid Court, a whole army of people living in extravagance and luxury. The highest men in the land

struggled with each other as to who should hold the King's boots, or present him with a napkin. In the royal presence the King's own brother might only sit on a low stool placed behind the King's chair. The rest stood. Then there were dances, banquets, endless shows and pageants of great gorgeous-ness.

Many brilliant painters, sculptors, architects, were kept busy at Versailles. Louis was very friendly to all artists and works of art. During this time lived the greatest French writers — Corneille, Racine, Moliere, the dramatists; Descartes and Pascal, the philosophers; Bossuet and Fenelon, the religious writers. The plays of Moliere were performed at Court, and the King was a personal friend of the author. This was the greatest day of France. Yet all the time the King's police superintended all the productions of literature, there was no freedom of speech.

At the same time, in Louis' reign, two of France's greatest generals were at the height of their powers: the impetuous Prince of Conde, and the great strategist, the Marquis of Turenne. In Europe were no generals like these, whilst Vauban, the famous military engineer, so fortified the frontiers of the kingdom that they became almost impenetrable.

In civil life, Colbert, the minister who had the management of finance, was one of the most capable and remarkable men France has produced. He was of middle-class origin, and not handsome in appearance, but his energy and activity were enormous. He relentlessly punished fraud in the government, and thus greatly reduced the burden of taxation, while the King's income was greater than before. He introduced workmen from England, Holland, and Italy, to start factories for stocking-making, weaving, lace-making, glass-making, and he protected his new industries by a high tariff. He established companies to trade with the Baltic, the Mediterranean, the East, and with America, in rivalry of England and Holland. He made splendid roads and famous canals, and he urged on the building of ships. If Louis ruled in splendour, it was the burgher Colbert who ruled for prosperity. War became an expensive luxury, not a life-activity.

Thus, at the beginning of Louis xiv.'s reign, France was the first country in Europe, the richest, most splendid, and the best governed. For if Louis was absolute he was just, and no nobleman went unpunished if he broke the laws, any more than if he were a commoner. At the same time the King appointed great ministers like Colbert for the well-being of the land. The people were very proud of their King and their country; the government was immensely popular. France was now a new splendour, a State such as had not been seen before.

Yet the long reign of Louis xiv. ended in disaster and unpopularity. Any proud monarch must make war, and extend his dominion; otherwise he feels he has not asserted himself. So first Louis claimed the Netherlands from Spain. After a

hundred and fifty years of power and richness, Spain was already crumbling to go to pieces. She could not resist the superb armies of the Grand Monarch.

But then, fearing the aggressions of Louis, England, Holland, and Sweden joined in with Spain, and Louis gave way. Then came war with Holland. William of Orange, who became William III. of England, was called in by the Dutch to take charge. He cut the dykes, made alliance with Spain, Brandenburg, and then England. Charles II. of England had pledged himself to help Louis, but the English people forced him to change sides. Yet France added to her territories. In 1684 Louis forced the Diet of Ratisbon to allow him to annex large portions of Alsace and Lorraine, though Germany was very angry. But Europe was war-weary, and France was master.

In 1688 came the English Revolution, when James II. fled and was received by Louis at the palace of St. Germain, near Paris. So great was the fear of France in Europe, that William of Orange succeeded in allying all the great powers against her; first England joined with Holland and the Emperor, then Brandenburg and Spain came in, then even Sweden and Denmark. Yet the war was dull, like a great siege, the allies trying to break the frontiers of France, so splendidly fortified by Vauban. France won practically every battle she engaged in, and took every place she besieged, and yet, at the end of nine years she had spent such vast sums of money and was so hard pressed financially, that Louis had to sign the Peace of Ryswick in 1697, yielding some of his advantages, and allowing William III. to remain on the throne of England. This last was much against the will of Louis, who hated Protestants and was cousin of James II.

The last great war was the War of the Spanish Succession.

The crown of Spain was left to Louis' grandson, Philip. Louis now considered Spain and France as one great realm. England, Holland, the Empire, and the Electorate of Brandenburg, which last took in 1700 the title of Kingdom of Prussia, at once formed an alliance in opposition. France seemed very strong, with her fine armies and organisation. But Spain had sunk into such a low, confused condition, that she was like a dead body bound to the living body of France.

The war raged in the Netherlands, in Italy, in Milan, and in Spain. Then for a while the French Protestants of the Cevennes rose in fierce insurrection against their Catholic oppressors. In 1704 Marlborough and Prince Eugene inflicted one of the most crushing defeats, at Blenheim, that France has ever suffered. The tide of war flowed wholly against Louis. Gibraltar fell into the hands of the English. When at last peace was made at Utrecht in 1713 France was terribly exhausted, financially almost ruined, and quite cast down from her pre-eminence in Europe. The French people now began to turn against the Crown. Fenelon declared that

Louis in his absolutist policy ‘ had impoverished France, and that he had built his throne on the ruin of all classes in the State.’

Louis was now a very old man. He had come to the throne in 1643, when he was only five years of age. His reign had seen Charles I. executed in England, had seen the end of the Commonwealth, the death of Charles II., the flight of James II., the reign and death of William III., and the death of Queen Anne. And now, disaster overtook him at home. His son died, then his grandson, and then even his great-grandson, who was in direct line of succession. The only heir was now a child of two years. If he were to die, there would be dreadful confusion. Striving to settle the regency for the succession, the old king died, in 1715.

And so we see the old order of mediaeval Europe is at last changed. Supreme emperors and popes have fallen, nations have arisen. But the life of a nation no longer consists in war and power. Its real purpose is in its productive work. War becomes a recognised evil instead of a highly esteemed way to glory. The pride and danger of peace takes the place of the pride of war. Money begins to arrogate the privileges of birth.

Chapter XVI. The French Revolution

When the Grand Monarch died in 1715 France was already very badly impoverished, far more by wars than by any extravagance of the court of Versailles. Louis spent great sums on his splendid palaces and magnificent way of life. But this would not have ruined France. Reckless war destroyed the prosperity of the country, and after that, careless management.

A strong monarchy has two purposes: first, to increase the prosperity of the nation, to make manufacturers and cultivators richer, so that there is plenty of work and sufficient wages for the poor; and secondly, to satisfy the pride and stiffen the sinews of the nation by active war. The king is the war-lord, it is he who leads on in pride and glory; whilst in Louis' time the minister Colbert attended to the productive prosperity of the nation.

It is a difficult matter to balance a kingdom between material prosperity and strenuous war and glory. The pursuit of glory is an expensive business; but if a people seeks nothing but commercial or material success, then the nation becomes spiritless and fat. Louis xiv. and Louis xv. became too conceited, they forgot that they were enthroned upon the nation's prosperity. This is the secret of the Grand Monarch's failure in his old age. All the glory centred in the King. Louis xv. was so vain that he felt himself to be the very Sun of France. No matter what happened, so long as kingly glory shone out the court and government were satisfied. But to keep this glory shining the country had to sweat out its very blood. The blazing sun of France blazed too brightly. The monarchy was a sunflower which exhausted its own leaves and stem and root, and so fell.

During the reign of Louis xv. the debt of France increased enormously. In 1723 the old Cardinal Fleury became minister, and managed well, keeping good financial understanding with Walpole in England. War broke out, and France gained Lorraine. But it was the last real gain of the monarchy.

The War of the Austrian Succession set Europe in arms. The reign of commerce was at hand. The nations of Europe were like business houses, all in competition. All nations were determined that no one nation should become strong enough to command more than its due share of trade and production. This led to a very shaky balance of power. France and Prussia went against England and Austria.

Prussia was the new state in Europe, and Frederick the Great was Europe's

finest war-leader. Both Prussia and France did well in the war. France defeated the English heavily at Fontenoy, in 1745. And yet her government was so weak, that when the Peace of Aix-la-Chapelle came in 1748, France had to let go all she had conquered. The nerve was gone out of the government.

The colonial jealousy of France and England brought on the Seven Years War. This time Prussia went with England, against France and Austria. The mismanagement in France was terrible. Armies were not properly equipped, never ready at the right time; they did not know what to do when they were ready. Unhappy France under her sinking seemed as if she could find not one good statesman, not one capable general. All was mediocre and muddled, whereas Prussia had the brilliant Frederick in command, and England had her great minister Pitt. Canada was utterly lost to France, and India as good as lost. In Europe the French Army was hopelessly beaten by Frederick at Rossbach, in 1757. When the Peace of Paris was signed in 1763 France was stripped and ashamed.

All this time the gaudy King Louis xv. went on in his foolish splendours and dissipation. He knew what was happening, but he flicked his jewelled fingers, and said with a smile, 'After me, the Deluge.' He knew the flood of ruin was at hand. But he gaily did not care, so long as it did not rise until he was departed.

The French Parlement, or corporation of hereditary lawyers, now began to raise its head. It forced Louis to suppress the intriguing Jesuits in France, in 1764. Then it quarrelled with him about his edicts of taxation. He was vexed. One day the famous Madame du Barry, who was the King's mistress for the time being, determined to move her foolish royal lover. She was sitting with him in one of the gorgeous rooms in Versailles. On the wall hung a fine portrait of Charles I. of England, related to the French through his Queen, Henrietta Maria. 'Do you see him?' said Du Barry, pointing to the sad, handsome face of Charles. 'Your Parlement will have your head off too.' So the woman made the King very angry against his interfering lawyers. He arrested the most important members of the court, exiled them, and banished the Parlement for ever.

Louis xv. died at last in 1774, after a long reign during which the court had glittered, chiefly with women, and the nation had sunk into shame and poverty. Louis xvi. was different. Kind, good-natured, moral, and filled with the best intentions, he would have liked to govern the nation for prosperity. But it was too late. The good king must suffer for the extravagant. Moreover, Louis xvi. was a little stupid, and his wife, the Austrian Marie Antoinette, was both clever and proud. If Louis xv. had been managed by his mistresses, Louis xvi. was a good deal under the influence of his wife. And the indirect rule of women was bad for France. The King of France was the most absolute monarch in Europe, to

be compared only with the Sultan of Turkey. And in France as in Turkey, women or woman ruled the King more often than not, and the nation went to pieces.

Although the nobles were not much more than brilliant butterflies at court, on their own estates they had a good deal of power. They and the clergy paid no taxes — or very little — and yet they were the rich, great landowners. Towns also, because of merchants, were lightly taxed. It was the peasants, those vast numbers of peasants of Gaul, who, because they could not resist, were forced to pay for everything.

The nobles and great landowners divided their land into small lots, little separate farms. Thus little holdings descended from father to son, in the same family of peasants. The peasant paid a half or a third of his produce, corn, wine, cattle, to the lord of the manor, and did certain forced work, as of old. There were no big farms, except, perhaps, the manor farm itself, attached to the chateau. The Englishman, Arthur Young, who travelled in France just before the Revolution, said that this dividing the land into so many little farms, little fields, was wasteful, and led to bad farming.

Many little farmers owned their own farms. But even these were not free. They had to do certain service for the overlord; they must give him a certain number of chickens or sheep, or have their corn ground at his mill, or their grapes crushed in his wine-press, and pay his charges. Then the clouds of pigeons and other game could feed on the crops; rabbits, hares, deer might eat the young corn; and the poor peasant was not allowed to shoot one pigeon nor one rabbit, and he could claim no compensation from the nobleman. All this was very irritating.

The chief tax was the Taille, a tax on houses and land-property of the unprivileged. As soon as a house was repaired and smartened up, or as soon as the land was in good condition, the commissioner came round and raised the tax. But the grand chateaux and parks belonging to the lord paid no taxes, they were in splendid repair, whilst the villages became squalid, the land was left poverty-stricken on purpose, in order to warrant a low taxation. The people hated the Taille. The next was the Gabelle, the salt tax. The State sold all salt, the price was fixed, and every individual, man, woman, and child was forced to buy a certain amount of salt each year. The third tax was the Corvec. Men were summoned to perform a certain amount of forced labour on government roads, or government buildings, for which they were not paid. It is estimated that in some districts the French peasant paid fifty-five per cent, of all he earned to the government: that is, if he managed to earn thirty shillings a week for himself and his family, he had to pay fifteen and sixpence to the tax collector. Meanwhile the

nobles were squandering their thousands at Versailles, and paying nothing.

Therefore the peasants were very angry. The parish priests sympathised with them, though the bishops were with the Crown, just as in the old days. And yet the French peasants were perhaps better off than those of Poland, or Spain, or South Germany, and they had far more liberty. But France was alive and angry, these other States were passive, sluggish. It was not so much the suffering that roused France to her Revolution, though there was much suffering, inevitably. It was rather the angry spirit of men who have had a splendid past, which has collapsed, and who now want a future of their own. It was the anger of men who feel that their lives have been used to support folly and extravagance.

The old ways were coming to an end. In every country men were thinking new thoughts, demanding more freedom. In Germany, England, France, and America great writers began to speak out, giving their new ideas. There was a great reaction against glorious kings, a great dislike of the powers that be. Greatness was out of fashion. The educated men looked back to Greece and Rome, the republics of the past. They detested empire and personal authority, and despised the Middle Ages, the Age of Faith. They began to question religion altogether: they would have no authority, neither divine nor human, imposed on them. They wanted to act just according to their own reason; they wanted two and two to make four exactly.

In Luther's time, men were passionately interested in religious writings. But never perhaps have new books had such a great influence as they had in the middle and later eighteenth century. It has been called the Age of Reason, the very opposite of the Age of Faith. Voltaire (1694-1778) particularly hated the compulsory belief in religion. He said a man should believe what seemed to him sensible, he should not be forced to swallow extraordinary facts just because the Church bade him do so. Montesquieu (1689-1755), in his great book *The Spirit of Laws*, showed how he thought a government should be constituted. He had a great admiration for the English institutions, and when the Americans came to form a government for themselves, they learned much from his book. The man who had most influence, however, was Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778). He believed in a return to nature, and in an innocent enjoyment of everything in nature. He passionately preached the rights of man. His little book, *The Social Contract*, has been called the Bible of the Revolution. It begins: 'Man is born free, but we find him everywhere in chains.' It then goes on to say that governments should be made by the people, for themselves, that there is no divine right of kings, and that contracts with monarchs are not binding. The people should have a right to overthrow any government they do not agree with; and then, when they have really set up a government of their own, it should be

all-powerful. This book had a tremendous effect. Thousands of people could reel off from it passages which they had got by heart almost unawares.

Louis xvi., the last king of the Ancient Regime, as it is called, really sympathised to some extent with those new ideas. He wanted to make things better in France. So he appointed a good minister, Turgot. But the butterfly court intrigued against Turgot, and the King had to dismiss him.

In 1773 the colonists of North America, after the affair called the Boston Tea Party, declared a cessation of commercial intercourse with England. In 1775 the first blood was shed at Lexington; and in July 4, 1776, the American Declaration of Independence was signed, which was the beginning of a new world.

France watched all this closely. She herself had been driven from America by the English. So the French Crown readily gave help to the Americans. Benjamin Franklin was honourably received at court, and treated with great consideration and respect for years, whilst he resided in France negotiating large sums of money which were paid to him by Louis xvi.'s minister to help the new states in their young independence. Since this time America has always felt a great friendliness towards France, who helped her in her first days against England.

But the French people, though they gloried in their triumph over the English in the war, were still more excited by the founding of the far-off new republic. It was an act which struck their imagination and kindled the desire of their hearts. They thought it marvellous to have no kings, for men to be their own rulers.

Although the war was successful, it was costly, and France could not afford it. The minister Necker decided as the minister Turgot had decided, that the privileged classes, nobles and clergy and wealthy burghers, must be taxed. The whole court turned against him, and in 1784 he retired before a storm of opposition.

The King had now to borrow money at a ruinous interest, to carry on the government. Then he tried to impose taxes on all classes, by issuing royal edicts. It was what the other kings had done. But the Parlement of Paris, which he had revived conscientiously when he came to the throne, immediately opposed him, and the masses of the people were with the Parlement. There was now a weak king and a strong, hostile nation. A general cry arose, that the Estates General, the genuine old French parliament, must be summoned, and all classes represented in that real parliament. But the Estates General had not met for a hundred and seventy years, and nobody was very clear as to how it should meet and what it should do if it did meet. Yet the French nation was bent on having a parliament which they themselves had chosen.

So Louis agreed to summon the Estates General, and he restored Necker. The King was now very popular, the crowds sang his praises. But there was

immediate squabbling. The people claimed to have as many representatives in their Commons as the nobles and clergy had in both their upper chambers put together: for the Estates General had three chambers for the three classes. The “nobles opposed this. The King, on Necker’s advice, decided for the people. There was a further rage of controversy, as to how the votes should be counted. If the chambers voted separately, and every question was decided by a majority of chambers, then nobles with clergy could easily outvote the people all the time: whilst if individual votes were counted the people, sure of some support from the clergy, would inevitably carry the day.

The three chambers, or Three Estates, as they were called, could come to no agreement. Petitions and clamours came in from all over France, to the Third Estate, urging the Commons to make a constitution for France, a set of laws binding on king and people alike. Many of the clergy declared themselves in favour of this: they were ready to go over and take their seats with the Commons in the Third Estate. So in June 1789, the Commons took upon themselves the name of the National Assembly, and proceeded to make a constitution for France, whether the privileged classes agreed or not.

This was one Estate claiming to act for the whole nation, the populace acting for king and nobles and asking for no consent. The Crown could not allow it. The Court raged and argued. Louis went down to the House of Representatives to make his intentions clear. He wished everything for the best: he promised many reforms: but he said the Estates General must consist of the three chambers. Then Mirabeau, the great orator and statesman, rose against the King. Mirabeau was a nobleman, but he had joined the Commons and sat in the Third Estate. He declared that the three-chamber model gave power to the privileged classes, and that the Commons were determined to resist it. The National Assembly, of one House, must represent the nation, the mass of the people, not just the nobles and clergy.

Now the King must either fight or give way. He was too kind-hearted to call in troops to crush the rebellion in the Lower House. In spite of the bold words he had spoken before the National Assembly, he had to give way. He must have money to carry on the government, and he could not have money unless the people would grant it him; for he was too weak to force it from them, as his predecessors had done. Therefore at last he asked the nobles and clergy to go over and join the Commons. Many had already done so: many more obeyed. At last, at the end of all the turmoil, all the twelve hundred representatives of France — or at least as many of them as chose to stay in the Assembly — were assembled in one room, and proceeded to draw up a constitution. In the count of votes, the people now had inevitably a fixed majority.

Louis saw that he had ruined the power of the Crown. He did not intend to yield altogether so easily. His courtiers clamoured for him to call up the armies. At last he consented. Necker, whom the people liked, was dismissed. Domineering nobles were gathered round the King. A great movement of troops was ordered, many regiments were to concentrate on Paris.

When the news of this reached Paris, the city went mad with excitement and wrath. The National Assembly sat at Versailles, twelve miles away. But in Paris were the famous, fiery mob-orators and politicians like Marat and Camille Desmoulins. Meetings were held everywhere, loud cries went up, great crowds gathered and swayed and shouted, the whole city was in the streets. Soldiers quartered in Paris went over to the people.

Suddenly the cry went up, 'To the Bastille.' The Bastille was the famous fortress-prison, a great frowning impregnable place of power belonging to the Crown. It was not any more of any great importance. But the people detested it for what it had been, they hated its very name. The vast masses of the people surged forward.

The Bastille could have resisted for ever, if it had been provisioned. It could have dominated and overawed Paris. But the garrison was half-mutinous. The commander did not know what to do. He was told that the King had surrendered himself to the people. So, in the afternoon, he agreed to yield up the vast fortress if his life and the lives of the garrison should be spared. The promise was given by the leaders of the crowd. But as the commandant and his men were being conducted safely off, the crowd broke through the guard and cruelly murdered them. Then the mob surged delirious through the terrible fortress-prison, liberating the few prisoners and looking with fury and hatred on the dungeons where kings had thrown their victims.

The King and Court were thoroughly frightened. Louis at once dismissed the unpopular nobles from his Council, and recalled Necker. Now the people demanded that the King should come to Paris. He, however, refused to leave the great palace of Versailles. On October 5, a great crowd of fierce and hungry women, who had met to make a demonstration against the shortage of food, surged out on to the Versailles road, and swept like a flood towards the palace. The King heard the strange tumult, and went to the window. There he saw fierce masses of terrible women, some bearing arms, mixed with men also bearing arms. They cried fiercely for bread, and demanded that the King should come with them back to Paris. He returned a doubtful answer. The mob stayed muttering in the park and grounds all night. In the morning they swept up like a sea against the palace, broke in, and surged through the splendid corridors. The life of the King and Queen was in danger, when Lafayette arrived with the

National Guard, stalwart Swiss mercenaries, and held back the mob. Lafayette, however, brought a request from the town council of Paris, that the King should take up his residence in the city. Unwillingly, and with foreboding, Louis had to give way. On the afternoon of October 6, the royal party set out, with its guards, towards the Tuileries. The crowds surged and muttered. But they did not really hate the King even now. They hated the Queen more.

The National Assembly, which now called itself the 'Constituent Assembly,' proceeded to form a new constitution, very much on the English model, taking the power from the Crown and putting it into the hands of the citizens. 'All sovereignty rests with the people,' they said. They also reorganised the Church, taking authority away from both the Pope and the King, and putting it in the hands of the voters. The Pope issued a Bull of Condemnation against this new order, and excommunicated all those who had helped in it. The King, however, was forced to sign the whole order, though he was most un-happy and uneasy, particularly at the religious changes. He hoped secretly to get a chance soon to undo all this wicked work, for such it seemed to him.

The people suspected his intentions. Orators and newspapers charged him with being the enemy of the Revolution. In the wine-shops his name was loudly execrated, insults against him and the Queen were scrawled large on the walls. Louis longed to flee. Marie Antoinette urged him to it. At last, on a night in June 1791, the royal pair escaped in disguise in their coach through the barriers of Paris, and galloped on towards the north-east, to the troops that were stationed near Flanders. Louis thought he would place himself under the protection of his troops. Many miles were travelled, and they approached the frontier. And then, as they drew near to safety, the royal fugitives were detected and escorted back to Paris, real prisoners now.

The Assembly determined to suspend the King from his functions until they had finally drawn up the Constitution. This Constitution he would be asked to sign. If he signed it, well and good. If he refused, he would be considered to have abdicated. But the masses were already raging for the King's deposition, and for the declaration of a republic. A vast crowd met. It was dispersed by the National Guard. But there was great resentment, then resistance, then furious, frenzied fighting and crushing, and many people, men and women, were killed. This put the rest of the citizens of Paris into greater fury.

In September 1791 the Constitution was at last finished. Louis was to be king without any power of making or altering laws: he was to occupy something of the same position in the Government as the English king occupies. Louis formally accepted this Constitution, and promised to rule by it. Many now thought the great aim was achieved, and France would enjoy a free, national

government such as Britain enjoyed, a time of prosperity and liberty.

But it did not turn out so. The King did not really abide by the new system. The Queen openly hated it and scorned it all, for she was proud to the backbone. And the people were worked up, their passions were roused, they had not had enough. They wanted to make a clean sweep.

At this time, Austria, Prussia, and Russia were seizing portions of Poland, dividing the country among themselves. They were too busy to interfere in France. But when the French declared that feudalism, with the paying of tithes and taxes to the overlord, was abolished, then the neighbouring countries began to look round; for many of the tithes and taxes of the French frontiers went to German princes, or to the emperor. All Europe began to think the French Revolution was going too far, that it would upset order everywhere.

The French were quite indignant when they were asked to pay compensation for the tithes and taxes they repudiated. They had a grievance of their own. Many nobles, the King's brothers among them, had crossed the frontiers since the Revolution began, and, establishing themselves in Treves or by the Rhine, had proceeded to drill troops and prepare armies, loudly declaring their intention of marching on the revolutionaries and chastising them severely.

Therefore the French people, very touchy, were all up in arms against their old enemy, the Emperor, who was supposed to be sheltering these runaway, menacing nobles. On either hand the war fever spread. The French people clamoured for war against Austria. Louis was quite willing, for he thought this might be a way out for him. Only the extreme revolutionaries, those who wanted a republic at once, were firmly against it. This party was called the Jacobins, because they belonged to an advanced revolutionary club which met in a building that once belonged to the Jacobin friars. The Jacobin leaders, Marat, Robespierre, Danton, declared that no good could come of a European war, at the moment where they found themselves. Yet the people wanted it. War was declared against the Emperor Leopold in April 1792.

The war began with great enthusiasm on the part of the French. But the first campaign in Belgium was a failure. The public now turned on the King. The Queen was an Austrian. They declared that Louis had been in sympathy with the enemy, and had betrayed his own nation.

The Jacobins then formed a conspiracy. Danton, a barrister, was the leader. Troops that arrived in Paris from the frontier were secretly won over by the conspirators. Suddenly, on August 10, 1792, the Jacobin force made an attack upon the palace. The King was warned just in time. He fled with his family. But the palace was stormed, the Swiss guards who so faithfully defended it were cut down. The victorious insurgents crowded to the Assembly Room, and demanded

that the King should be deposed.

The Assembly could not help itself. Louis was declared deposed: he was no longer king. The people were called to vote for a new Assembly. Each man was to have his vote. The Assembly should be called the Convention, and this should decide the destiny of the new republic of France.

This was the beginning of the end. France was now without a government. Who would lead, what would happen? People held their breath and trembled. The strong power in Paris was the Municipal Council, called the Commune. The extremist, Marat, was the leader of the Commune. He wanted the revolution to be very thorough, for there was a great, burning bitterness in him against the privileged classes.

The Commune declared that conspiracies were being formed to overthrow the new government. Paris must be searched for arms and traitors. By the end of August, the prisons were crammed with men who had been arrested because they were suspected of being friendly to the King. A tribunal was set up. Ordinary offenders, thieves, or scoundrels were sent back to prison. But men suspected of being friendly to the monarchy were thrust out of the doors and massacred in the street by the bloodthirsty, howling mob. This went on for three, even for five days, and more than a thousand people were butchered. Marat said it was the vengeance of a wrathful people on those who for centuries had ill-treated and trodden them down. But it was in part, at least, a deliberate plan carried out by the Commune.

Meanwhile the revolutionary forces under Dumouriez had inflicted a defeat at Valmy on the Prussians, and the advance of the enemy on Paris had been checked.

The Convention, elected by the men of the nation, met in September. It declared France a republic, and summoned King Louis to trial. He was found a traitor, and guillotined in January 1793.

Now began the Reign of Terror. The Jacobins were certainly a minority, yet they were in power. Civil wars broke out. In La Vendee, a district of Western France, peasants rose in arms because the Republic tried to conscript them into the army, and because they wished to defend the Church. In Lyons and Toulon were dangerous movements. The execution of the King had made enemies of Britain, Holland, and Spain. In 1793 France had to face a coalition of all the great states of Europe, except Russia. The French armies were defeated, and the collapse of the Republic seemed imminent.

Yet the Jacobins were determined to stand against everything. They knew that the majority, even in France, were against them. They were a small body. They must either fall, or deal a great blow at their opponents, that would strike terror

into them and cow them for the time being.

They formed the Committee of Public Safety, led first by Danton, then afterwards by Robespierre. This Committee overruled every other authority. It at once set itself to raise troops and organise campaigns on the different fronts of battle.

And then, in Paris, it set up the Revolutionary Tribunal. Men and women were seized, who were suspected of having any connection with the aristocracy or any sympathy with the old system. The Queen was sent to the guillotine, more and more people followed her. It seemed as if the Jacobins got greedier for blood, the more they shed. Victims were condemned in batches. Even good republicans, even the very leaders who had started the Revolution, but who were now not red enough, were seized, condemned, and sent to the guillotine. For the extreme revolutionaries were frightened too. They felt all Europe was against them. They felt that even at home great numbers of the people were ready to betray the Revolution. Unless they struck first, and struck hard, and struck deep, they and all they stood for would be wiped out, the old would come back, all would be again as bad or worse than if they had never existed.

Then the Jacobins divided among themselves. Danton wished to be more merciful, and to limit the foreign wars. Hebert and Chaumette wanted to go further, to utmost extremes, to destroy every trace of the old way. They swept away the calendar, and called the year 1792 the Year One. They christened the months with new names. They made a week of ten days, and introduced the decimal system. They declared Christianity abolished, and the worship of Reason substituted for it.

But the third or middle party, led by Robespierre, ultimately triumphed. He drew the energetic revolutionaries of Paris, men and women, to his side, and obtained control of the fierce armed forces of the streets. He triumphed over his rivals. Danton and the others went to the guillotine. The Terror went on. Robespierre wanted to be supreme dictator, and to bring this about he condemned his victims by batches to death. He knew he could not last. Terror in his own heart urged him to inflict, or to try to inflict more terror on the hearts of the populace. In July 1791 men rose and denounced him in the Convention. He tried to gather his followers together, to fight for his position. But his adherents fell away. He was declared an outlaw, seized at last, and executed without any form of trial. The Terror came to an end.

King, Queen, nobles, gentry, all were gone. Republican leaders were gone too. The bloodstained crowds remained. Louis xv.'s Deluge had indeed come.

While all this was going on in Paris, the rest of France was more or less terrorised. First the provinces had to watch the foreign war, where so many of

their men were enrolled and fighting. The enemy were penetrating into France, from the north, from the east, from the south. Every one felt unsafe, everything was in danger. Very bitter insurrections broke out, there was civil war against the hated rule of the Jacobins. The armies sent against the foreign enemies were disheartened and defeated. Things looked very black in 1793.

But the Jacobin leaders were swift and relentless. They crushed the rebels in France and punished them with great cruelty, using the fierce revolutionary troops against them. They appointed new, determined officers to the army, and infused into the men a great passion for the Revolution, a great hatred of foreign emperors and kings who were out to destroy the newly-risen people of France. As the Jacobins were relentless in Paris, against those who might bring back the hated old system of monarchy, the soldiers in the far fields became relentless against the foreigners who would crush the new rule of the people. The tide of war turned. The enemy was rolled back beyond the frontiers, and by the time Robespierre fell, France was almost free.

Men now began to recover their senses. The Terror was over, the hated Jacobins were gone, the people were masters and they seemed secure. What next? First, there was hostile Europe hemming France in. The French people recovered all their jauntiness. Let France expand, they cried, to her natural boundaries, of the Rhine, the Pyrenees, and the Alps. The Gallic vanity called loudly for the restoration of France to the limits of old Gaul. At the beginning, the Revolution had declared that it did not want to make conquests or acquire territories; it wanted to live at peace with all men. Now, quite the opposite, it defiantly announced itself at war with its neighbours, and proceeded to extend its dominions at the cost of all.

But at home, people wanted to solidify the country and appease many enemies by making a moderate Constitution. The present governing power was the Convention. It had the armies under its control. Men were now tired of the Convention. They wanted something quite new, an arrangement whereby perhaps there would be more balance of power, where the old Convention would not be so autocratic: for the Convention and the Committee of Public Safety had been far more deadly and overbearing than the old Kings' Councils. But Convention decided that the first assemblies of the new Constitution should consist of two-thirds of its own members. There was an uproar. Convention was not going to be bullied any more by the mob. It called out its soldiers, under their young officer, Napoleon Bonaparte. When the masses attacked the Convention they were driven off with artillery.

Convention now came to an end, in October 1795, and the new assemblies met. People were tired of political troubles at home. They saw, or felt that

nothing could be gained by altering the government every year. So they turned round, they looked outwards at the surrounding world. Their hearts fired up. All their enthusiasm they put behind their soldiers in the field. The old regime was smashed in France. Now they were ready to destroy it in all the world.

The victories of the revolutionary armies had caused Prussia to withdraw from the war, yielding to France territories on the left bank of the Rhine, and obtaining promise that Prussia should be regarded as the chief power in North Germany, and should not be attacked. Spain also came out of the war. This left France to face Britain and Austria only.

Austria was the immediate enemy. She was to be attacked by one army in Italy, whilst two others marched towards Vienna. Napoleon had command of the Italian army. The Italians themselves loathed the Austrian rule, so they welcomed his advance against their masters. France watched, electrified. They saw the brilliant way in which Napoleon defeated and broke the Austrians in Italy. Austria made peace in 1797, and this left France with only one enemy, Britain.

The next step was a strange one. The Directors in Paris ordered Napoleon to undertake the invasion of Egypt. He reached Egypt safely, and then his position was endangered by Nelson's victory of the Nile. At the same time Napoleon heard that there was a new coalition of powers in Europe, against the French. He determined to return. Russia had joined Austria in the attack on the Republic. He hastened back. His Italian campaign had made him the hero of France. Everybody believed he could bring peace and order to the land. He was expected with excitement, the coming great man.

Meanwhile the executive government called the Directory, composed of five Directors, were muddling things at home. When Napoleon arrived in Paris many leaders and politicians came to him complaining bitterly of this. He listened to these unsatisfied republicans. They asked him to be the leader, to take control of the government. He was such a hero among the people that they thought this could be done without any more fighting in Paris. But the muddling Directors and assemblies refused to come out of office. Napoleon had command of the troops of Paris. He just marched down to the Assembly Rooms and scattered the obstinate legislators. Then there was nothing to oppose him.

After this, for twenty years the history of France is a history of Napoleon Bonaparte. He was a wonderful military genius, but he was also a brilliant ruler in peace time. He knew that if the government rested with the mass of the people, it would be a disastrous mob rule where everything was pulled down as soon as it was put up. So he most carefully arranged a government which depended upon the richer, more stable, property-owning, privileged classes. And

yet he ruled in the name of the people.

Again we see the Tyrant rising up. Napoleon became an almost absolute sovereign, much as Louis xiv. had been. But Napoleon ruled in the name of the people, according to the agreement of the people. Though he was supreme, he was supreme because the people willed it, not because he had been appointed by God. Louis xiv. claimed to be king by divine right: the people had nothing to do with it. Napoleon was emperor by the will of the people, although, for form's sake, he crowned himself in presence of the Pope.

God-made kings and nobles were destroyed in France for ever. The new ones would be man-made. This was the great change. The actual government rested in the hands of the educated, well-to-do citizen classes, very much as it had done in Louis xiv.'s time. The poor were not in any very different position. Money ruled instead of birth, that was all. A man who had no money found himself pretty much where he was before, though some of the annoyances were removed, and he was free from the insult of God-made inferiority. In the new system, any man who might become rich might become a ruler. So a modern commercial or industrial state, be it kingdom or republic, was established.

The difference lies in this, that if a man had ability to make money, he might ultimately govern the republic. Henceforth there was to be no superiority of one man over another: only the superiority of the money-maker. Prosperity was the only clue to life.

Chapter XVII. Prussia

The changes of the Reformation and the difficulty of settling the disputes brought about by the new order led to one of the most disastrous wars that Europe has ever seen, the fatal Thirty Years War. This fearful war between the Protestant princes of the north and the Catholic forces of the imperialists ravished and utterly ruined Germany.

In 1650 Germany was almost a deserted land, the remaining peasants were almost driven to savagery. Hardly any traffic passed along the desolate roads. In the country the people clustered in dilapidated, obscure hovels, rough, brutalised, demoralised. In the towns civilisation was almost at a standstill. By the sword, by famine, by plague, in this horrible war ten million people had perished, leaving only about five millions in the great land of Germany. The population of Berlin fell from 24,000 to 6,000, a mere village. In Hesse, 300 villages, 17 towns, 47 castles were burned out; in Wurtemberg, 3,600 dwellings; and these were comparatively small states. Of all countries, only Ireland after the reign of Elizabeth and the wars of Cromwell has ever been reduced to such a ghastly state. It was this destruction of Germany which left France free to become so powerful and dominant under Louis xiv., and which finished the mediaeval spirit in Europe.

Germany was left divided into innumerable parts. There were reckoned 343 sovereign states in the country; 158 were under lords and princes, 123 were under bishops, 63 were imperial cities, but all were separate and practically self-governing. The confusion was incredible. The imperial power had almost vanished. The emperors, the Hapsburgs, had to confine their attention to their remaining dominions of Austria-Hungary and North Italy. The rest were gone. Switzerland and the United Netherlands became independent, France had gained Alsace and the three bishoprics of Metz, Toule, and Verdun.

Out of all this chaos the state of Prussia rose. It is Prussia which has led and made Germany. But modern Prussia is a new thing. The core of the state is Brandenburg, the great Mark or frontier-province established in the tenth century to keep off the Slavs to the east. Brandenburg lay between the Elbe and the Oder. Beyond the Oder lay heathen Prussia, Prussia proper, inhabited by pagan Slavs. When the crusades to the Holy Land began to wane, the great Crusading Order of the Teutonic Knights turned to preach to their neighbours, the heathen Prussians beyond the Mark of Brandenburg. Thus the Slavs of Prussia became

Christian and Germanised, the Teutonic Knights held the eastern frontier against the wild peoples of Russia.

In 1415 Frederick of Hohenzollern, one of the Emperor's counts, was made Elector of Brandenburg by Sigismund, for Frederick had been a staunch friend to Sigismund all through the stormy times of the Council of Constance, when popes were deposed and Huss was burned. The Hohenzollerns had been minor princes, imperial counts of Nuremberg. Barbarossa long ago had said that he saw the day when the Hohenzollerns would displace the Hohenstaufens, his own imperial house. But the Hohenstaufens were gone before the Hohenzollerns rose to power. Barbarossa overlooked the Hapsburgs, that family which produced so few great men, yet which ruled for so many centuries over such large territories.

When the Hohenzollerns came to Brandenburg they were isolated between Hanover and Bremen on the west, and the Prussian lands of the Teutonic Knights which lay to the east. The knights were doing badly. They were defeated by the Poles, and Poland seized a great strip of territory, called West Prussia, intervening between Brandenburg and Prussia proper, and stretching to the sea at Danzig. So that Brandenburg's new neighbour was Poland; Prussia was cut off to the east.

The Teutonic Order needed a new chief. Albert of Hohenzollern was chosen Grand Master in 1511. He was a cousin of the Hohenzollerns across in Brandenburg. He wanted to establish a realm for himself. Wisely, he calculated that if he became Protestant, then, after the Reformation was secure his family might really establish itself as dukes of Prussia. This actually came to pass. The Albertian Hohenzollerns ruled Prussia.

But this line died out, and the cousin Hohenzollerns of Brandenburg became heirs to Prussia. John Siismund of Hohenzollern, Elector of Brandenburg, became now also Duke of Prussia in 1618. But his two countries or lands did not touch: the Polish province of West Prussia lay between them. After this the Hohenzollerns inherited Cleves and Berg, away on the Rhine. So now they ruled three separate territories in North Germany.

During the Thirty Years War George William, Elector of Brandenburg, played a very poor part. He did not want to take either side, so the Electorate was ravaged by both parties, and suffered horribly. But in 1610 the strong ruler Frederick William came to power. He was called the Great Elector. At the Peace of Westphalia he compelled the parties to yield Magdeburg and East Pomerania to Brandenburg. Pomerania lay just between Brandenburg and the sea, Magdeburg lay to the south. So Frederick William stretched his central territory to the Baltic, and had a sea-board, and advanced his frontier southwards towards Saxony.

The Great Elector wanted to raise his estate from the position of shame into which it had fallen in the Thirty Years War. He made himself master in his own lands, suppressed the estates or parliaments of Brandenburg, East Prussia, and Cleves, and thus obtained clear, single control. This made for unity and success. Then he strengthened his armies and defeated the Poles, making them promise not to attack East Prussia. This was a great step. Next he defeated the French and Swedes when they advanced into Brandenburg, beat them in a fierce battle. For this remarkable victory he received the title of the Great Elector.

He now turned his attention to the commercial prosperity of his realm. He had canals constructed, and encouraged trade along the still waters. His final step for the promotion of industry was taken when, in 1685, he gave houses and many privileges in Berlin and the country round to the Huguenots who were fleeing from the persecutions of the ageing, short-sighted Grand Monarch of France. After the settlement of these Huguenots, Berlin, the central city of Brandenburg, began her course of industrial greatness, while the agriculture in the provinces round was immensely improved by these more civilised new-comers. Thus a new source of riches and strength to the State was established.

Frederick William was succeeded in 1688 by his son, the Elector Frederick II., a pompous and foolish man. At this time kings were being made. The Elector of Hanover was to be King of England, the Elector of Saxony was King of Poland, the Duke of Holstein was King of Denmark. Brandenburg might easily hope for the same title. When the nations began to unite against Louis XIV., after that old monarch claimed Spain for his grandson Philip, the Emperor Leopold thought Brandenburg would make a splendid ally against France. Brandenburg asked for the kingly title. The Emperor agreed, so long as the Elector Frederick should not take his title from any of the territory of the Empire. Now Brandenburg was supposed to be subject to the empire, whilst Prussia was not. So that the Elector Frederick II. of Brandenburg, instead of becoming King of Brandenburg, became King Frederick I. of Prussia. He died shortly after achieving this new dignity. His soldiers had fought well at Blenheim, and kept up the new Prussian reputation.

Frederick I., was succeeded in 1713 by Frederick William I., his son. Frederick William I. of Prussia is one of the strangest men. He utterly despised his father's vanity and pomp of ceremony, and at once dismissed all the showy ministers. Then he turned to his kingdom. 'We remain King and Master,' he wrote, 'and we do what we like.' He appointed royal officials, paid them badly, watched them strictly, and punished them harshly if they were guilty of the least offence. His lands were poor in comparison with those of France or Britain or Bavaria. He was bent on making them produce as much as they could, and in

getting out of them all the taxes possible, without damaging the rate of production. His rage against any form of financial dishonesty among his officials was beyond bounds terrible.

His other mania was the production of a perfect" army. When he came to the throne in 1713 the army numbered 38,000 men; by 1739 it had more than 83,000, and this was peace strength. The great France had 160,000 soldiers, and Austria about 100,000. But these were first-rate powers, Prussia was as yet insignificant. And then Frederick William, who was rather a drill-sergeant than a king, clothed, armed and disciplined his forces to a rare pitch of perfection. He made a regiment of giant grenadiers, ransacked the lands for them, and he went almost mad in his admiration of this corps. Yet he was no soldier, and did no fighting. He is the insane royal drill-sergeant.

He had a son Frederick. Frederick William was a coarse, foul-mouthed, uneducated bully, drinking, feeding, smoking, yelling, and domineering. The son was just the opposite, delicate and sensitive, cultured, almost French in his education, loving books and painting and philosophy. The father tormented and tortured his son incredibly, loathed him, calling him a weakling and a ninny and a paltry knave. The young Frederick escaped from court at last, for his father had always taunted him to this. He was caught, brought back, and condemned to death by his father. The violent king raved, and would have shot his son at once. The nobles would not permit it. So, grudgingly, Frederick William spared the life of the young man, whom he almost longed to annihilate. Instead he executed the Crown Prince's dear friend, and brutally punished others of his son's companions.

The young prince yielded, since there was nothing else to do. Like his friend Voltaire, the famous French writer, he was a sceptic in matters of religion: with a bitter heart he professed the religious opinions his father forced on him: he took a wife he neither loved nor wanted, at his father's command: and he obediently began the dreary hack-work of administration to which he was driven.

All the while, the young Frederick was a far finer, more intellectual, and even a much stronger man, in his soul and his will, than the bullying Frederick William his father. But by the time the prince came to the throne, in 1740, the sweetness of his nature was spoiled, his soul embittered. He did not believe in kindness any more. He saw that force, and force alone, triumphed: it was no use a man's being sensitive and wise: he must merely be unbreakably strong.

So the new King Frederick II. came to the throne of Prussia. He became one of the most famous men of the modern world, Frederick the Great, one of the makers of Europe.

At the very beginning of his reign Frederick invaded Silesia, which stretchcd

south of Brandenburg, and belonged to Austria. The War of the Austrian Succession followed, when Prussia and France fought Austria and Britain. When peace was made in 1748 Prussia kept the large territory of Silesia, though France, who had beaten Britain at Fontenoy, had to give up everything.

Soon war began again. This time it was Britain and Prussia against France and Austria, in the Seven Years War. In this war the great Pitt, Earl of Chatham, arose in England, and Britain secured Canada and India from France. But Prussia suffered terribly, almost as badly as in the Thirty Years War. Frederick had to face the much improved armies of Austria in the south, and the strength of France on the west, whilst Elizabeth, Czarina of Russia, joined Austria and attacked him in the east. Against these three, the greatest powers in Europe, Frederick had no ally but Britain, and Britain was a naval power, she could not at first help him on land.

Frederick showed himself one of the finest soldiers the world has known, a master of campaign and of battle attack. In 1757 he won the great victory of Leuthen, by his quite new methods of attack; and in the same year he defeated the French so easily, by his skilful handling of his troops in the battle of Rossbach, that the enemy was not only beaten but put to shame. Napoleon afterwards said that the battle of Rossbach was the beginning of the French Revolution. He meant that an absolute monarch could only keep firm on his throne by winning military victories, and that if his armies suffered such humiliating defeats, as did those of Louis xv. at Rossbach, then his people were bound to turn against him. Pitt also proved a great ally to Frederick, unexpectedly sending him over many troops from England. For Pitt was a great war-master.

In spite of everything, in spite of all his patient endurance and skill, Frederick was heavily beaten by the Russians in 1759. In 1760 Russians and Austrians entered Berlin. In 1761 the whole of Prussian territory was in the hands of the enemy. The splendid troops with which Frederick had set out were for the most part killed or taken prisoners. His money was exhausted. And then, worst of all, George III. in England caused Pitt to resign, and the one ally became useless. Prussia now seemed destined to disappear again, divided between the Empire and Russia. Frederick, in his bitter despair, even thought of suicide.

Then suddenly he was saved by the death of the Czarina Elizabeth, who hated him determinedly. Her weak-minded nephew Peter III. worshipped Frederick, calling him 'my king, my master.' Russia at once made alliance with Prussia, and the whole situation changed. But this only lasted for four months, when poor Peter III. was overthrown and put to death by his own wife, the Czarina Catherine II. She at once withdrew from the alliance with Frederick. But Prussia

was saved, Austria ousted. The powers were exhausted by the struggle. In 1763 the Peace of Paris was made, and Frederick still kept Silesia, which Austria so badly wanted back.

Prussia was now the wonder of Europe. A new kingdom of the second rate, she had maintained herself against the three greatest powers. Frederick's system of government, his management of the war, were looked upon with admiration and amazement. Even the neighbours he had beaten began to imitate him.

In the eighteenth century most of the countries of Europe became stronger, more united, more prosperous and developed in every way, through the concentration of the power into the hands of the Crown, which ruled wisely and well. This period is called the age of the Enlightened Despot. Austria, Russia, Denmark, Sweden and Prussia are examples of the great advance made by countries whose monarchs united the scattered powers of their realm into one wise, strong control. But Prussia is the finest example, and she is the very opposite of the Grand Monarchy of France. Frederick's court was simple and natural, there was no show, no pomp. It is said that once, when Frederick the Great walked out in Berlin, he saw on a wall a big placard, or cartoon, abusing him, calling him a bad king and an absurd man. 'Hang it higher,' said Frederick, 'so that the people can see it.'

He built up his State again from the foundations. When he was young he had studied the philosophers of France. When he was older he profited by these studies. He at once abolished torture, and established complete religious freedom in his country. He took great care of education, as most Prussian rulers have done. He was very anxious to repair slowly the terrible ravages of the war, so that his people should not suffer more than was necessary. Supervising in agriculture and commerce, he gradually made the country once more prosperous and happy. All the power was in his hands, and as he used it to the best advantage, nothing could have been better for his land and his people. No popular government could have built up Prussia as her early kings built it up.

Though Frederick fought in no more important wars after 1763, he gained great and valuable territories. The old kingdom of Poland was a large country, stretching from the Baltic straight across what is now Russia, to the Black Sea. But because the kings had so little power in Poland, because the numerous nobles remained independent and vain and quarrelsome, the kingdom inevitably fell to pieces. The people could not unite around one central figure, the monarch. Therefore they were powerless against the neighbouring states. In 1772 Frederick suggested that Russia, Austria and Prussia should divide the helpless, useless state of Poland between them. Russia took a great stretch of land, which is now South Russia; Austria took Galicia, and Prussia took that section called

West Prussia, which ran along the Vistula to the Gulf of Danzig, cutting off Brandenburg from Prussia proper, or East Prussia. When Frederick annexed the Polish territory, the kingdom of Prussia naturally became one united solid state, stretching from Memel in the north of the Gulf of Danzig down to the river Elbe in one unbroken sweep. The people were German or German speaking, naturally near to one another, uniting naturally. When Frederick died in 1786 his kingdom was the envy of all Germany.

Particularly the Hapsburgs envied the growing, solid power of the Hohenzollerns. The Hapsburgs were still emperors of the Holy Roman Empire. But their lands were their own hereditary dominions: and here they were (1) Archdukes of Austria proper, which was Germanic and Catholic; (2) Kings of Hungary, where the Magyars were constantly claiming independence; (3) Kings and overlords of Bohemia and Moravia, where the Czechs and Slavs were chiefly Protestants; (4) Overlords of North Italy, where the people were utter foreigners to the Austrian Hapsburgs; (5) Overlords of the Austrian Netherlands (Belgium), where the people were Catholic, but either French-speaking or Flemish. Joseph II. of Austria, who succeeded Maria Theresa in 1765, hated, admired, and deeply envied Frederick the Great. He wanted to imitate him, and unite his power. But how could the Hapsburgs unite their dominions, scattered as they were across Europe; still more, how could they hope to unite German Austrians, Magyar Hungarians, Slavonic Czechs, Belgians, Flemings and Italians into one people or one nation? It was quite impossible.

It was revolution which brought the next great changes in Germany and Austria. Northern Europe was at first busy attending to Poland. That diminished country had made some progress, and King Stanislas II. really brought in a good constitution in 1790. But the neighbours of Poland, particularly Russia, did not intend the country to revive. They invaded Poland in 1792. Russia seized large territories, Prussia added to her dominions, to make them more compact. Poland was in a state of insurrection. Russia ordered her to disband her armies. The people now rose in rebellion, under the hero Kosciusko. This is called the Polish Revolution, and North Europe watched it even more closely, at first, than the French Revolution. Russia, Prussia and Austria turned against Kosciusko.

He was bound in the end to be defeated. In 1795 the third and last partition of Poland took place. Russia, Prussia and Austria all took their shares, and all promised that the name of Poland should never appear again on the map of Europe.

But by this time the armies of the French Revolution were becoming dangerous. In 1802 Napoleon had himself declared First Consul for life. This was a clear step towards supreme power. On August 4, 1804, the Emperor of the

Holy Roman Empire, Francis II., proclaimed himself Francis I. Hereditary Emperor of Austria. At the same time Napoleon had asked the people of France to vote whether he himself should assume the royal title. They voted that he should, by three million votes against two thousand nine hundred. On December 2, 1804, Napoleon crowned himself Emperor of the French, in the presence of Pope Pius VII. So new titles came into being.

The Treaty of Luneville in 1801 carried the French frontier to the left bank of the Rhine. Various princes were thus disposed of. It was agreed that they should have compensation elsewhere. The Imperial Diet of the Holy Roman Empire met at Ratisbon to settle the matter. France dictated in the business, and France worked against Austria. One hundred and twelve states were suppressed. Prussia was the chief gainer — she acquired three bishoprics. The political structure of Germany was much simplified from the form in which the Treaty of Westphalia had left it in 1658.

In 1805 a new coalition was formed between Britain, Russia and Austria. Prussia selfishly insisted on remaining neutral. On December 2, 1805, Russians and Austrians were utterly defeated at Austerlitz. Napoleon occupied Vienna. In the peace that followed Prussia gave up Cleves and Anspach, but gained the great possession of Hanover. Napoleon forced the newly created kings of Bavaria and Wurtemberg, with thirteen other princes, to form a federation accepting the French Emperor, binding themselves to support him with their armies, and to separate themselves from all other Germanic bodies. Later other kingdoms, Saxony and Westphalia, were added, and the Confederation included the region between the Rhine and the Elbe, and held its Diet at Frankfort. Then Napoleon summoned Francis II. to lay down the title of Holy Roman Emperor. Francis yielded. On August 6, 1806, the abdication was made, and on that day the Holy Roman Empire ceased to exist. Francis II. remained Emperor Francis I. of Austria. German independence was for the moment quite under the heel of the little Emperor of the French. But Prussia was as yet intact, though Britain had declared war on her, demanding Hanover, which belonged to the English Crown.

Prussia had not fought with France since 1795. She had been handled very carefully by French diplomacy. Now, however, her turn came. Her armies were dissatisfied, remembering the glories of Frederick the Great, and counting their neutrality a dishonour. And although Prussia had gained Hanover as the price of her peace, Napoleon was secretly offering this state to Britain again.

Frederick William therefore declared war on France, on October 1, 1806. Within a fortnight, Napoleon was upon him. On October 10, the Prussians lost the battle of Saalfeld, on October 14 they were disastrously defeated at Jena. The Prussian fortresses were occupied. On October 24 Napoleon was at Potsdam.

Two days after he visited the tomb of Frederick the Great, took possession of the sword and the Order of the Black Eagle which had belonged to the heroic king, and sent them as trophies to Paris. He remained in Berlin for a month, and issued against Britain the famous Berlin Decrees on November 26.

This six weeks' conquest of Prussia staggered Europe. Napoleon seemed a miracle. Prussia had collapsed like a house of cards. Only in the north-east the King kept up a fierce resistance, relying on the Russians. But in June 1807 the Prussian and Russian armies were murderously broken by Napoleon at Friedland. Prussia and Russia then accepted the Peace of Tilsit, which marked the summit of Napoleon's career. At this moment he seemed superhuman, almost a god. The Czar Alexander made an alliance with him against Britain. Russia lost nothing, but Prussia was heavily crushed. Large Prussian territories were taken away, and given to the King of Saxony. Napoleon made his brother, Jerome Bonaparte, King of Westphalia. Prussia was compelled to join in the blockade of Britain, to admit French garrisons in all her fortresses, to pay a huge indemnity, and to reduce her army to a very small standing. The kingdom was almost wiped out.

After the Peace of Tilsit, however, Napoleon's fortune declined. He was not successful in his naval conflict with Britain, nor in his Peninsular War, and then he made his utterly disastrous invasion of Russia.

Meanwhile there was a new brave spirit roused in Prussia. Germany was under the heel of Napoleon. Now, with great heroism Prussia began to set her government in order, reorganise her armies, and in a new spirit to prepare for better days. Under the minister Stein serfdom was abolished, the peasants were given a direct interest in the State, whilst conscription, which was already applied to the peasants, was applied just the same to the upper classes. This patient working for improvement and strength, even whilst the French troops were in their garrisons, shows the deep courage of the Prussians.

As the French army, after the catastrophe of the advance to Moscow, began the retreat into Germany, the Prussian armies began to join the Russians. In January 1813 the Prussian king left Berlin for Breslau, and issued the appeal for liberty. The whole German nation rose. English money supplied them with food and clothing, otherwise they could not have stirred. But again Napoleon, gathering a huge army, defeated the Germans at Lutzen and occupied Dresden. Crossing the Elbe, he once more defeated Blucher and the Prussians, and then he made an armistice with them.

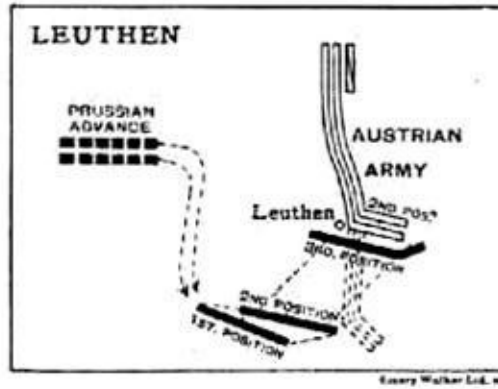
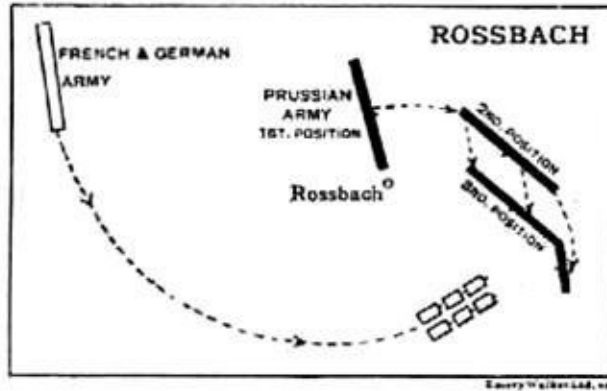
All the while Britain spent her money freely in helping Prussia and Russia, and in keeping them in the Coalition, into which she persuaded Austria to enter. When, in a few weeks, the armistice ended, Napoleon found himself in Dresden

confronted by a world in arms. He won the last great battle of Dresden, driving back the Russians and Prussians after two days' fighting. This was in August 1813.

The end was near. Instead of pursuing the enemy into Bohemia, Napoleon had set his mind on marching to Berlin. It was a mistake. The allies gathered their forces. They were 300,000 men against Napoleon's 180,000 when the two armies met in October. The Battle of Leipsic, or the Battle of the Nations, as it was called, was really a week's campaign, and it resulted in the complete overthrow of the French. Napoleon retired sullenly towards Paris. The allied armies pressed after him. Napoleon was forced to surrender. He abdicated in 1814, and retired to Elba.

The Battle of Leipsic completely destroyed Napoleon's work in Germany. The great Confederation of the Rhine, made of German princes bound to support Napoleon, was dissolved. The princes recovered their territories, the fortresses of the Elbe were regained. Blucher, the Prussian general, marching with the allied armies after Napoleon into France, won victories that led to the surrender of the Emperor of the French.

After the Hundred Days, Wellington with Blucher's assistance finally defeated the French at Waterloo, and Europe saw the last of Napoleon. Europe now wanted peace. When the allied statesmen met at the Congress of Vienna, they had the whole of Europe to settle. One of the most difficult problems was Germany. France went back to her frontiers of 1792. The old, decrepit Holy Roman Empire was not restored. Thirty-nine sovereign princes and free cities were recognised in Germany — the three hundred and fifty of the Peace of Westphalia thus reduced to about a tenth of the number. These thirty-nine states were joined into a perpetual 'German Confederation,' of which the president was Austria, whilst Prussia was by far the most powerful, and next to Prussia, Bavaria, which was Catholic, and had long been a favoured ally of Napoleon.



'Frederick, a master of campaign and of battle attack'

See p. 258

Chapter XVIII. Italy

After the Renaissance, when the great towns fell from their splendour and independence and came again largely under foreign rule, Italy dropped behind the progress movement of the North. Armies came and went, dukes and emperors appeared and disappeared, kings passed by, German, French, Spanish tongues sounded in authority through the land. And under all this the Italians remained provincial and local, ignorant, apart from the changing world. Catholic in spirit, attached by warm blood-passion to their native place, they kept to that which was sure, the fellowship of their own townsmen, the abiding rock of the Catholic Church. In the towns they governed their own affairs under alien masters, they felt safe and sure in their own piazza, the open square where the church stood, where the priest passed and gave a sense of permanency, where nobles rode gaily through. Their own affairs, their own passions, these alone interested them. And the peasant in the country woke to the clanging of bells: at noon the bells rang sharp across the field to bid him rest awhile and eat: he waited for the bells to call him home at dusk. The church gave him the day and marked it out for him: the priest gave him peace after confession; and a little wine, a little excited talk with his neighbours, with singing and merrymaking at the church feasts, filled his life well enough. Why should he bother about what was beyond? He clung sensitively to his own place, his own village fellows, his own priest, the sound of the sacred, sudden bells from the campanile.

So the years passed, while the North, England, Germany, France were struggling with kings and parliaments and commerce. The Italians let those rule who must rule; those think and struggle who must. For their part, they had enough with their own private troubles and passions and intrigues. Out of the bitter Beyond came armies of Germans, French, Spaniards, and into the bitter Beyond they disappeared again. Or else they did not disappear, but remained like a necessary evil.

In the eighteenth century Spanish power practically 'came to an end in Italy. Austrian possession was confined to the North. The various states of the peninsula were fairly prosperous, poorest in the South; and on the whole, the people were as free as elsewhere in Europe, save Britain. Those in one state did not bother about those in another state. The subjects of the Pope felt they had no more connection with the subjects of Piedmont in Turin than with the subjects of France in Paris. There was no Italy — only a bunch of states with their peoples

and their petty princes or their great princes, the luxurious, refined, profligate courts, the indifferent rule. Feudal conditions still existed, almost mediaeval serfdom, and in parts the peasants were bitterly poor. But men were men, and on the whole, rich and poor alike, they were perhaps more human in Italy than in the progressive countries.

Into all this Napoleon Bonaparte burst roughly, in his campaigns of 1796 and 1801. He defeated Austria, he brought the peninsula to his feet, and let in a blast of fresh air from the North which startled the soft Italians. He made Italy a kingdom of his own, took all the power from princes and Pope, set Murat, his general, on the throne of Bourbon Naples, and established a French republican government. Feudalism was abolished, and men were made free to rise in the world, instead of being tied down to one condition. The land system was revolutionised, the peasants given their share. Monasteries were suppressed to help to pay the great national debt. Primary schools were established all over Lombardy and Naples, and priests were put into the background.

So, quite suddenly, Italy came into the grasp of the modern world. And quite quickly, men began to appreciate the change. They breathed a new air, they felt more alive, new doors seemed opened. Italian soldiers brought back a proud name for bravery from Napoleon's great victories. And Napoleon, who hated Austria and the Pope, encouraged Italians in all parts to be Italian, not to think of themselves as Papal or Austrian or Neapolitan subjects. New ideas spread: ideas of equality and liberty and free thought. The old monotony was gone, the old submissiveness interrupted. Doctors, lawyers, middle-class citizens were given a share in state government. The power of princes was shaken for ever, and the ten states into which the peninsula had been divided suddenly had disappeared. Italy was all suddenly united.

But it was too sudden. There were new grievances. More than 60,000 Italians fell in Spain and Russia, conscripted by Napoleon for a quarrel that was none of theirs. Taxation became very heavy. Napoleon insulted the Pope and angered Italian instincts. After the Russian campaign French rule became hateful in the peninsula, particularly in the dark-minded South.

Waterloo made an end of Napoleon's Italy. Down in the South, the brave Murat was chased away, and finally killed. With British help, the ignominious Bourbons returned to the kingdom of the Two Sicilies, as Naples with South Italy and Sicily was called. At the dividing up of Europe, the Pope added to his papal states the Romagna and the Marches, the large and valuable province along the Adriatic, whose towns are Bologna, Ravenna, Ancona; Austria recovered Lombardy, and was given Venice and the Venetian territory, which before had been a republic; in the North, the one strong Italian power of

Piedmont, ruled by the House of Savoy, called Kings of Sardinia, held its own against Austria and added to itself the Riviera territory and Genoa, so that the Genoese republic disappeared, like the Venetian; Austrian Leopold returned to the independent Grand-Duchy of Tuscany, where he ruled, however, with Tuscan ministers; Duke Francis, another Austrian prince, ruled in Modena; Napoleon's Austrian wife, Maria Louisa, became Duchess of Parma and ruled kindly enough; while a princess of a Spanish house had the little duchy of Lucca.

So there was a great return of princes and rulers back to their states, whilst republics vanished, after the Congress of Vienna. In Italy, as in Spain and in Germany, the people wildly and joyfully welcomed back their old masters. Even the vile Ferdinand of Naples met with the same reception as some of the better princes of the North, and was hailed as if he were a god. Whereas Murat had been a much finer man.

Safe on their thrones once more, these princes set about to pull to pieces the work of the hated Bonaparte. The world must go back, back. But some of Napoleon's reforms were too obvious to be done away with. Yet the spirit was killed even when the letter remained. Life was driven back. And soon Italians were thinking with wonder and admiration of the great days of Napoleonic government and Murat's kingdom. Feudal privileges, monasteries, government by priests, courts of clerical justice — all the old abuses were restored. Only in Piedmont the people stubbornly but passively resisted the pushing back of life, and before long certain of the ministers of Napoleonic days were in office under the King of Sardinia.

In Lombardy and Venetia the famous Austrian Minister, Metternich, had promised a rule 'conforming to Italian character and custom.' Bitter was the chagrin when the people saw Austrian law introduced, conscription enforced, and Austrians and Tyrolese seizing all the higher posts of civil government. The emperor let it be known that he 'wanted not learned men, but loyal subjects.' Austrian soldiers in their white coats were everywhere in the North — Venice, Milan, Verona — brutal and insolent with the populace, despising the Italians as a race.

In Tuscany the Tuscan statesmen held their own, Archduke Leopold was kind and stupid. Florence grudgingly restored some of the monastic possessions, and, following Lombardy, determinedly shut out the sly, retrogressive, intriguing, masterful Jesuits.

Rome and the papal states returned to old clerical rule, depending on spies and police and cunning and cruelty; and the Jesuits, with their determination not to let men escape their clutches, soon had their net over the Romagna, and over brave Bologna and Ravenna, the two fierce cities.

But it was too late to set the tide right back to the old Catholic submissiveness and mindlessness and the feudal rule. The army had become infected with democratic notions, the people were touched by the spirit of liberty, and educated men of the middle classes, longing for their day to come, watched the movements of the British and French Parliaments, of the Greek hetsera, and followed the pamphlets and writings published by leaders of freedom in the foreign countries.

And thus, in the South, the first quick result appeared. In the South the Freemasons had for a long time been a strong secret society, binding men together apart from Church and State. A number of the better-class Freemasons, hating the Bonapartist rule, took to the mountains. There they formed a new society, calling themselves the Carbonari. The Carbonari were a mysterious society, with the same rules, very nearly, and the same ritual as the Freemasons, vowed to purity and a good life like the Freemason, worshipping the Divine Order in the universe, expressing themselves in profound religious phraseology and occult symbolism, having a Crucifix in every lodge, and calling Jesus the ‘first victim of tyrants,’ yet amounting in actuality to no more than a political society of republican tendency. What their actual ideas were they kept secret among the higher members of the cult, the initiated. Certainly one of their aims was to have power, unlimited power. But they only taught the rank and file vaguely to worship liberty and resist tyrants.

Great numbers flocked to join the society, and soon anybody was admitted. There was a secrecy, a mystery, a semi-religious, semi-worldly mysticism about it all which fascinated the South. The old dark religious impulse was now grafted on to a political purpose.

And in this way the movement for liberty began in Italy. Now, when so much is accomplished and achieved, we cannot help regretting that ever the deep religious spirit in man tacked itself on to politics. Politics, even liberty from a foreign master, is not a religious affair. Man fights for his liberty as a wolf fights for its liberty, because he wants to go his own way. And politics, at last, works out to nothing more than a mere arranging of the material conditions of life. It is not a religious activity. It is a sort of great commissariat organisation among men: nothing godly. You can't save mankind by politics. Liberty isn't salvation. We must have liberty. But having liberty, we have only got food to eat, clothes to wear, roads to walk on, and language to fill our mouths with. And still we have not even touched the inward satisfaction which the deep spirit demands.

Be that as it may, the liberty movement in Italy started, and ended, as a dual thing: a deep, religious passion, and a clever material scheming. It was both things, and the two things are really contradictory. And so, all the way, we feel a

certain dividedness, a breach in our sympathy.

The Carbonari movement, being a secret society, naturally started in the South. But it spread to the North, where men naturally think and act more openly. The Austrians ruled well enough in Lombardy. Steamboats and spinning-jennies were being introduced. Milan was to be lighted by gas. Milan was the go-ahead city. The Carbonari were active there. They even started a newspaper of their own. But Austrian governors, smelling powder, snuffed out the flame.

Encouraged by the sudden bloodless revolution in Spain, a revolt broke out all at once in the Neapolitan kingdom in 1820. King Ferdinand was forced to promise a constitution, and put Carbonari liberals into power. Then Sicily, which loathed Naples, broke into insurrection, with wild mob atrocities. Europe was scared. Metternich sent an Austrian army southwards. It was met by the new militia and army of the liberals, which was broken. Austrians entered Naples, and Ferdinand sat tighter on his unscrupulous throne.

Three days after the Neapolitan Revolution was defeated, Piedmont rose. The Piedmontese wanted a constitution, and a war with Austria. For they hated the Austrians, 'the white leeches,' as they called the white-coat soldiers. The revolution had effect at first. The King abdicated. A charter was granted. And then it all fizzled out, the old regime seized power again.

In Modena Duke Francis had to crush an incipient revolt. In the ever-stirring Romagna, in the pine forest round Ravenna a brigade of Carbonari called the American Hunters drilled and prepared to rise, while Lord Byron, hand in glove with them at Ravenna, had his house filled with arms in readiness for the rising. It failed to come off, however.

Now the whole country lay prostrate under its tyrants. Metternich indeed tried to prevent persecution and the exasperation of Italy. But Emperor Francis played with his victims cruelly, and we have only to read Silvio Pellico's *My Prisons* to know what the leaders suffered.

Francis of Modena wreaked a savage vengeance. Ferdinand of Naples evaded Metternich's order against persecution, public whippings shocked Naples, liberals were proscribed and fled to the hills, armed bands wandered about, assassinations and reprisals took place. Ferdinand was a superstitious brute, and when he died in 1825 men hated the Bourbon name.

Exiles from Italy were scattered throughout England, France, and Spain. Santa Rosa, one of the heroes, taught languages in Nottingham. Piedmont pursued her liberals with as much vigour as did Austria or Naples.

So, in 1821, the Italian question began to trouble Europe, and the Carbonari made their first great failure. After this, repression was the order in all Italian

states. Men were not to think. Above all, they were not to read seditious literature. The censorship on speech and books was more than severe.

Naples had its martyrs and its saints of liberty, men of high birth and understanding who rotted in horrible prisons, yet who would utter no word against their oppressors: pure spirit of love, that is all love, and chooses never to fight. In the South exists the old oriental spirit, all the old abandon to an impulse. The North is more qualified. If the first strange spirit of abandon came from the South, all the fight came from the North.

Piedmont was the one true Italian state, politically. Not that it was Italian by race. The nobles prided themselves on their old Provençal blood, the races at the foot of the Alps claimed to be old Celts, and there was considerable German infusion. The language was not Italian even. But Piedmont had a spirit of independence which finally gathered Italy together.

The Counts of Savoy, lords of a few Burgundian fiefs, had for centuries been wedged in between the power of France and Austria. Fighters, and masters of a mountain people, they had sold their help first to one side then to another, usually coming out with the winners. And so, bit by bit, they added to their territories, first on one side then on the other. Wary and sly, they were always good at a bargain. And thus they became Kings of Sardinia, and ruled after Waterloo from Nice to Lake Maggiore, and southwards to the Apennines. Turin was the capital, a dull, unintellectual, provincial sort of town, with a people who spoke a half-comprehensible dialect, who despised books or art, scorned the Italians to the South, were cunning at getting their own advantage, and looked upon the King as a sort of military father. In some respects, Piedmont resembled Prussia. Trade and commerce were encouraged after 1821, silk and wine and oil flourished, Genoa was a busy port. Piedmont knew how to look after himself.

The people, as in Prussia, were cowed and docile under their Savoy masters. But, subalpine, they were kept trained as soldiers, in all the manly fighting virtues so uncommon in Italy. The hate of Austria in Lombardy, and the uneasy fear of France in their rear alone made them Italian by policy.

But in Piedmont were born the four great heroes of the Risorgimento, as the uprising of Italy is called. In 1805 was born in Genoa a certain Giuseppe Mazzini, a doctor's son. Two years later, not far away along the coast, at Nice, was born another Giuseppe, Giuseppe Garibaldi, son of a small sea captain. Mazzini, a thoughtful, quiet, solitary nature, played among the narrow alleys of the port of Genoa. Garibaldi, a robust fellow, led his companions in exploits by the sea.

Both grew up Piedmontese subjects. Mazzini read and brooded and thought, yearning over Italy, and hard against autocrats. He saw the failure of Carbonari

revolutions, and his more northern soul resolved itself. His writings, full of passion on behalf of the oppressed, had a hard hostility to tyranny which the South could never show. He was determined that the meek should inherit the earth — in Italy at least — and he had all the indomitable persistence of the meek. His words and his spirit flew through the peninsula, as the Carbonari spirit had flown. But Mazzini's was no secret doctrine. Mystery and secret power, dear to southern hearts, were left out. All was plain and open and ideal, purely ideal. Once more politics and liberty became a religion, a self-sacrificing religion of abstract ideals.

Round Mazzini's writings gradually gathered the Young Italy party, vowed to unite Italy into one free republic. The second important Carbonari risings took place in Central Italy in 1831. Young Louis Napoleon, nephew of the great Napoleon, having joined the Carbonari, breathed fire against the Pope in Rome. At the same time Mazzini published his Young Italy Manifesto. A real Italy was to be founded on independence, unity, and liberty. Austria must go, autocrats must be deposed, the various small states must be united in one, under a democratic government. Here was a definite programme, no Carbonarist vagueness any more. It seemed like an absurd dream at the time, none the less.

The risings had a brief success, then failed. Rigorous repression followed, for there had been a scare. The brave Menotti was hanged. Mazzini found himself in prison, and then exiled from Piedmont. He took himself to Marseilles, busily continuing his work, issuing pamphlets and addresses which were secretly circulated, at the peril of those who touched them.

Meanwhile Garibaldi, a young sea captain, carrying on his life rather aimlessly, met in the Black Sea in 1833 a certain Cuneo, a patriot. Cuneo told Garibaldi all about Young Italy, and a light seemed to enter the young captain's soul. 'Columbus,' he said, 'was not as happy at discovering America as I was when I found a man actually engaged in the redemption of our country.' Garibaldi's passion was now fixed. The new pseudo-religion had fired his soul. Returning home, he went to Mazzini at Marseilles, and joined the Young Italy Society, under the brotherhood name of Borel. The two young men enhanced the enthusiasm in each other.

Piedmont was harshly anti-liberal at this time, so the Young Italy workers turned their activity against their oppressor. Conspiracies in 1833 were followed by torture and executions. Garibaldi and Mazzini tried to raise an insurrection: failed, and fled. On reaching Marseilles, Garibaldi saw his name for the first time in print — in the newspaper, announcing that the Piedmont Government at Turin had condemned him to death.

For a time Garibaldi went to South America, lived a free life on the pampas,

fought for the republics and became famous as a guerrilla chief out there. Mazzini kept his fame alive in Italy, and the national feeling fanned gradually up.

The year 1848 was the meteor year of revolution on the continent of Europe. As before, the fire appeared first in the South — in Sicily. It spread up the mainland. Ferdinand I. of Naples was forced to grant a constitution. On January 27 he rode through the streets of his capital swearing fidelity to the statute, and being hailed as the darling of the people. On February 8 Charles Albert of Piedmont promised a charter. On February 11 the Grand Duke of Tuscany granted a constitution. The Pope granted a charter to Rome.

In the North the flame flew fiercer. Bohemia and Hungary under Kossuth rose against Austria, demanding independence. The Viennese were even turning upon their adored Hapsburgs. Berlin was barricaded, the Prussian king was yielding.

The French Revolution of 1848 changed the face of European diplomacy. Again France was a republic, the Bourbon power expelled for ever. Again the Napoleonic tradition revived the terror of Europe.

Italy was trembling with rage against her tyrants, Piedmont expelled the Jesuits, the Fathers fled for the time from Naples, the Roman crowd demanded the expulsion of the order from their city. In vain the Jesuits hoisted the red-white-and-green tricolour which the Young Italy had chosen as the flag of Italy United. In vain the Pope tried to protect these creatures and their agents. The College of Jesuits had to be closed.

On March 17 the news of the Hungarian revolt and the Insurrection of Vienna reached Milan, where the Austrians with their white-coat soldiers swaggered in the Lombard capital. All at once arose a tremendous insurrection of almost unarmed citizens. The veteran old tyrant, General Radetzky, had 20,000 Austrian and Hungarian troops with him in the city. But such was the passion and determination of the citizens, that after five days of the most intense and awful struggle in streets and squares, Radetzky was forced to evacuate the vast castle, and retreat from the victorious city. The young hero, Manara, remained leader of a dazed populace.

The news of the famous Five Days of Milan thrilled every Italian nerve. Venice rang the tocsin from St. Mark's, hoisted the red-white-and-green tricolour from the two immense flag-poles in front of the cathedral, and cut the cords so that the Austrians could not get the colours down. Venetian citizens too were beyond themselves. In an almost inspired hour Manin got rid of the Austrians, garrison and all, out of Venice. There was a rising everywhere against the hated white-coats, till at last nothing Austrian remained in Italy but the Quadrilateral, and Radetzky slowly dragging his way there over the Lombard

roads, with his army.

The feeling against Austria was intense. Austrian rule in Lombardy-Venetia was probably the best in Italy, the most free, the most prosperous. But it was foreign, and it was powerful, and men were beginning to feel they would die rather than live under foreign domination. And, moreover, the Austrian white-coats had all the northern and Hungarian Magyar insolence, all the northern contempt for the southern Italian race.

Charles Albert of Piedmont now declared war on Austria, wrapped himself in the tricolour and offered his help, in the name of God and the Pope, to the peoples of Lombardy and Venetia. But when kings fight against emperors in the name of the people, crowns are bound to tumble. So Charles Albert went very half-heartedly. He was not at all fond of that red-white-and-green tricolour. He knew the Young Italy wanted a republic. They might use him, Charles Albert, King of Sardinia, military lord of Piedmont, as a leader, and then drag his throne from underneath him when he was going to sit down again. Emperors are not such enemies to a king as republican peoples are. So he went half-heartedly, whilst Radetzky had time to reach the famous Quadrilateral, the four massive forts of Verona, Mantua, Peschiera, and Legnano that guard the entrance of the ancient imperial road where it debouches from the Brenner Pass on to the Italian plain. The Quadrilateral formed the four great Austrian gateposts in Italy.

Meanwhile volunteers flocked from Naples, Tuscany, Modena to the Piedmontese standard. The white cross of Savoy waved beside the tricolour. Now it waves in the centre of the tricolour.

Garibaldi arrived from Monte Video and offered his sword to Charles Albert, and was refused. He took service with the provisional government of Milan.

Meanwhile news flew in from outside. The French Republic stood firm. The hated Metternich had fallen. Viennese students were driving the Imperial Court from Vienna (May 17). Hungary and Bohemia had won a short-lived triumph; the German National Assembly was meeting on May 18. Never had the cause of liberty looked so flourishing in Europe. Yet the unhappy Charles Albert hesitated and floundered, could not gather his resolution.

So Radetzky marched out against him from Verona and defeated the Italian army cruelly at Custozza on July 25. Blunders of king and generals lost the battle, notwithstanding the magnificent courage of the troops. The royal forces were driven back into Milan. The frantic people, beside themselves, besieged the unhappy Charles Albert in the Greppi Palace. ‘ Ah, what a day, what a day! ‘ he said, wringing his hands. On August 5 he was forced to yield Milan back to the Austrians, for there was no food. He agreed to an armistice.

So Austria recovered all in Lombardy, and prepared to besiege Manin in

Venice. Men were beside themselves with anger against Charles Albert. He had saved his crown and betrayed the people, they said. Mazzini and Garibaldi hoisted a republican banner, 'Dio e Popolo,' 'God and the People.'

And thus the defeated Italians hated Austria all the more.

The next events took place in Rome, in this wild year of '48. Garibaldi had moved into the Romagna to gather to himself the fierce spirits that still held out as Carbonarists against the spying priests and the Pope's vicious, secret, police-cruel rule. Bologna and Ravenna were centres of revolt then as they are centres of rebellious Socialism now. So from the Romagnese Garibaldi formed his first legion to fight for free Italy.

Whilst in the Romagna he heard the startling news that Rossi, the Pope's minister, was murdered by the democrat agents in Rome. The people of Rome were enraged because the Pope had refused to have any fighting against Austria, had even issued his censure against Catholics who took part in the struggle. Roused by liberal street orators, inflamed after the murder of Rossi, the angry Romans marched to demonstrate against their Sacred Master before his palace of the Quirinal on November 16, firing on his Swiss guard, and behaving very much as the crowd had behaved outside the Tuileries on June 2, 1792. But Pope Pio Nono, Pius ix., did not stand it out as Louis xvi. had done. On November 24 he fled, disguised as a simple monk, across the Neapolitan border to his friend King Ferdinand, called Bomba, because he had bombarded his own subjects in Messina.

When the Romans learned that their Pope had gone they felt as if the sun had fallen out of heaven. They were all uneasy, and did not know what to do. Republican feeling gradually became stronger, and in February 1849 the Roman Republic was proclaimed. Mazzini arrived in March, and was received rather timidly as Rome's last and greatest citizen.

Meanwhile in the North Charles Albert, a haunted man, in bitterness 'eating Austria in his bread' broke off the armistice, marched over the Lombard border, and was defeated by Radetzky on March 23 at Novara. Heartbroken, having in vain sought death in the battle, he abdicated, rode away in disguise, and died in a few months' time in a Portuguese convent. Victor Emmanuel, his son, came to the throne, and confirmed the liberal charter.

Hearing of Novara, the Roman Republic immediately formed a Triumvirate or Rule of Three Men — Mazzini, Saffi, Armellini. Mazzini had much the same powers that Napoleon had when First Consul. But Mazzini tried to rule Rome according to the ideal of abstract righteousness, in purity, forgiveness, gentleness, and complete liberty. That was his will. Such a rule was successful enough in many ways, the city was quiet and good. But it is no use turning the

other cheek when men come with cannon. Rome, the Roman Republic, must fight for its existence. And there was no money, no military equipment, no powerful authority.

Garibaldi, with his wild-looking legion, had ridden into Rome, received with suspicion at first, afterwards with enthusiasm. Those were wonderful days in Rome, when men were inspired to be good, freed from real authority, exalted by the unchangeable idealist simplicity of the first citizen, Mazzini. Picturesque troops bivouacked in the convent yards and the squares, everybody talked in excitement.

But it could not continue. Interference was bound to come. It came from the new French Republic. The French had chosen the young Louis Napoleon for their president. And though Louis Napoleon had been an old Carbonaro, he now depended on the strong Catholic party in France to keep him in his conspicuous position. Also he was posing as the saviour of Europe against Socialism. Hence he must rescue the Holy Father, and nip the Roman Republic in the bud. Troops were dispatched under General Oudinot.

Garibaldi was recalled into Rome from keeping his eye on the Pope. In his red shirt he was seen galloping through the city streets, preparing defences. The citizens digged and slaved at the entrenchments, fearless and full of inspiration for the moment. The French were driven off from the first attack on the city, with shame, and Louis Napoleon had a blot to wipe off the French military honour.

More forces were sent from France. Rome, isolated, fell. On July 2 Garibaldi marched out at night, slipped past the French, and escaped into the mountains. Finally he escaped to Piedmont, was moved on, and at last went to America, where he worked as a journeyman candle-maker, then as a sea captain, then a farmer. Mazzini wandered about the streets of Rome for a few days, and the French dared not touch him, for fear of the people. Then he, too, fled, made his way to England, his home by choice. 'Italy is my country, but England is my home, if I have any,' he said. He worked and waited, sending out his threads of conspiracy from London.

The Pope came back, all the old secrecy and spying, police terror, prisons, and galleys. The papal government was as ruinous to land and people as it well could be.

Meanwhile a new phase was starting. Victor Emmanuel, a plucky little king, was on the throne in Turin. Count Cavour, his minister, was as clever a statesman as Europe has seen. Profoundly intelligent politically, a man of understanding and of liberal tendency, of great subtlety and of slippery obstinacy, Cavour was determined to have his own way, to make an united Italy

by uniting all under the House of Savoy. It was his great scheme, and he carried it out. On the one side we have the political-religious passion of the idealists like Mazzini and Garibaldi, on the other the vigorous, scheming determination to make a big united power out of a small, divided power, the determination which filled the breasts of Victor Emmanuel and of Cavour. Piedmont should become Italy.

Europe at that time was wobbling about in the nervous balance of power. Britain was rather afraid of France: France was jealous of Austria, and was keeping her eye on Prussia: Prussia was looking askance first at Russia, then at Austria, then at France. Everybody was wanting to keep his own end up, and afraid lest anybody else should get his end up too high. So it was a game of beggar-my-neighbour. Piedmont, sharp as usual, made a great win in the South, Prussia in the North. Little Piedmont stroked and soothed the mane of the variable Louis Napoleon, become Napoleon III., Lion of Europe for the moment. Little Piedmont had a big bone to pick with Austria. Cavour looked imploringly to Britain, whose mighty navy patrolled the seas, to throw the shadow of her liberal wing over him.

Now Cavour wanted a war with Austria, and he wanted Napoleon III. to help him, for he was not half strong enough alone. But the big powers did not want war: they were afraid of that shaky balance of power. So it was a great day for Cavour when he had cajoled Napoleon into friendship and taunted unwary Austria into an attack on Piedmont in April 1859. Napoleon marched over the Alps, joined the Piedmontese, won the battle of Magenta in Lombardy, and after this, with Victor Emmanuel, the bigger battle of Solferino: where the dear emperor wept, seeing the carnage. Now Napoleon felt he had done enough. Half a loaf must be better than no bread for Piedmont. He made peace with the Austrians — who had evacuated Milan and Lombardy — and retired into the Quadrilateral.

During the struggle the smaller states of Italy seized their opportunity. Austrian armies once withdrawn from their cities and borders, Tuscany, Romagna, and Modena suddenly declared themselves free Italian republics, and drove out their rulers. But then came the news of Napoleon's Peace Treaty at Villafranca. Piedmont was to have Lombardy, but Austria was to keep her hold on Venetia, and the old rulers were to go back into the other states. Cavour cried with rage and disappointment, threw up his post and went to sulk in Geneva, when he heard the news. But Victor Emmanuel had nothing to do but sign. Piedmont was only the mountain cat between the two lions.

At this moment came Britain's turn. 'The policy of Her Majesty's Government,' declared Lord John Russell, 'is not to interfere at all, but to let the

Italian people settle their own affairs.' Which was as good as saying that the policy of Her Majesty's Government was to oppose any one else's interfering in the affairs of the Italian people. Italian people meant, not Piedmont, but the new republics. And so the old rulers did not come back. Tuscany, Modena, and the Romagna united as the free Italian States of Central Italy, soon asking to be united with Piedmont, for safety's sake, since Piedmont was the fighting power and Austria kept Venetia. But Piedmont was not so badly off after all.

The eyes of Europe were also on Naples. Mr. Gladstone had been in the southern city in 1850, for his daughter's health. He had seen the horrors of King Bomba's vile rule, his injustice, and his ghastly prisons for political offenders. All these horrors Mr. Gladstone told to the world in his Letters to Lord Aberdeen, in 1851. Naples became the disgraced state in the eyes of Europe, the pariah among the kingdoms.

In January 1860 Cavour came back into office in Turin. Tuscany, Modena, and the Romagna were annexed to Turin, and Savoy, with Nice and the strip of the present French Riviera, was ceded to Napoleon. Piedmont gave an acre and got a mile. But Britain was displeased at France's increase, and Garibaldi enraged at the loss of his home-place, Nice. Victor Emmanuel had forfeited his ancestral territory of Savoy. But it was a sprat compared to the mackerel he was catching.

What was the next step? There remained Venice, the Pope, and Naples — or the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, to be exact. Venice was too far off for the moment, a second attack on Austria not possible. Quite impossible also to attack the Holy Father in the papal states, because he was still under Napoleon's wing, and the French troops were guarding him safely. What about the Bourbon in Naples?

Cavour dared not send an army to the South, because Napoleon would not have it, Austria would not have it, the Pope would not have it, and Britain would not quite consent. It would look too much like grabbing. Only, if the Southerners would rise in revolt, then the Italian people would be deciding their own affairs, according to Lord John, and Piedmont could help them in the decision. At least she could send volunteers, who would count as Italian people. Piedmont as a state dared not interfere.

Cavour worked and worked for a Neapolitan revolution: without result. But there was trouble in Sicily. The Sicilians invited Garibaldi: Cavour dared not send Garibaldi openly. He let the lion-faced general know that whatever was done, Piedmont could not have any part in it — for fear of offending the other powers. None the less Garibaldi gathered his famous Thousand from the northern cities, took two steamers from Genoa port, and sailed for Sicily. The

troops embarked on the night of May 5, 1860. Cavour knew. But he kept his public eye shut, and pretended he did not know at all.

This was Italy's great year. And perhaps the wonderful adventure of Garibaldi and the Thousand in Sicily is the most moving event of the year. With a thousand untrained volunteers armed with wretched old muskets, and dressed in the civilian clothes in which they had left their offices, their studios, their workbenches, the general captured a great island and expelled a great army of regular troops, complete with arms and ammunition. On the morning of June 7, 1860, the British admiral and his captains watched from their ships two long columns of red-and-blue Neapolitan soldiers file along the esplanade of Palermo, past the ragged red-shirted officers of the remnant of the ragged Thousand; twenty thousand regulars with all their equipment capitulating and evacuating the capital, leaving the island in the hands of the few hundred worn men of Garibaldi. In amusement and contempt the British watched this spectacle from the bay. Bomba had said of his soldiers, 'You may drill them as you like, they will run away just the same.'

And it seemed like it. Yet the troops were not really such cowards. There was room rather for wonder than contempt. Whom the gods wish to destroy they first make mad, said the Romans. And so it was with the Neapolitans — they acted as if they were mad. But in truth they were sensitive Southerners. Somewhere in their souls they felt that life was against them, their position was hopeless, obsolete. Bewildered, therefore, they were huddled about in masses like sheep, their will and their integrity gone.

Europe was amazed, shocked, and delighted as may be, when the news of the fall of Palermo ran through the world. Now Cavour was free to act. Now the Italian people of Lord John's declaration had started their own affair in the South, and Piedmont could come in. Cavour sent 20,000 volunteers to Garibaldi.

Followed the next great adventure, Garibaldi crossing the Straits of Messina, dodging the enemy's fleet, defeating one army after another as by magic, driving the huddled thousands northwards to Naples. On the night of September 6 the young King Francis of Naples, son of Bomba, and his Queen fled by ship from their capital to Gaeta. Their admiral signalled to his fleet to follow. The fleet did not move, but remained lying in Naples bay. When next day Garibaldi arrived, and the city received him with frenzy of joy, the Neapolitan fleet came over to him and the Italian cause. Garibaldi handed the fleet to Victor Emmanuel, to the command of the Piedmontese Admiral Persano.

Cavour was delighted but uneasy. Garibaldi was too wonderful, too successful, too much beloved. He might want after all to establish himself as Dictator of a new Italy, work into the hands of the republican Mazzinians. This

would not suit Cavour and Victor Emmanuel at all.

Meanwhile Garibaldi was in a fever to march on Rome, the capital, the heart of Italy. But the Neapolitan troops would not desert to his side. They retired northwards towards their king, and blocked the way effectively at Capua, at the river Volturno. The great Vauban had fortified Capua. The royal soldiers were determined. They had their king amongst them, and would stand by him. Garibaldi and his red-shirts and his volunteers from the North could do nothing but face the enemy. It was a deadlock. Out of her half million inhabitants Naples sent eighty to help Garibaldi. His dream of a united Italian people, inspired with one free spirit, was broken for ever. The South could never be as the North.

All this was lucky for Cavour. The Pope was the one enemy left, and fortunately Garibaldi could not get at him. Whom the gods wish to destroy they first make mad. It was the Pope's turn. And so Pio Nono proceeded in pure madness to offend and insult Napoleon III. and to cast slights on the French honour. Napoleon was the one protector of the Papacy, and Pius ix. insisted on regarding him as a wolf and kingdom-breaker, a vile Bonapartist. So that when Cavour cajoled Napoleon to allow an invasion of the papal states, Napoleon consented, so long as Rome itself was not attacked. 'And be quick,' said the Emperor of the French.

Cavour was quick. He had Austria to fear. And Austria had to fear Cavour's plots with Kossuth and the Hungarians. Flying in the face of all the powers except Britain, Cavour marched the Piedmontese troops across the Papal frontier on September 11. They were to take Ancona, the port on the Adriatic at which Austria usually entered Central Italy.

On September 16 the Piedmontese met the Pope's army of Crusaders — Italian, French, Austrian, Swiss, Belgian, Irish — at Castelfidardo, near Loreto. The papal forces were scattered. Ten days later the Piedmontese captured Ancona. Austria could not move. The Pope was confined to Rome and his small province around Rome.

Meanwhile Garibaldi was fixed in the South before Capua, craving to get to Rome. On October 1 the Neapolitan Royalist troops marched out against him, over the Volturno. After twelve hours of tremendous fighting, Garibaldi beat back the enemy. They retired into Capua, and the position was unchanged. The Bourbon army still held up Garibaldi.

Cavour must now be quick. Italy was in his grasp. The white cross of Savoy was to stand in the centre of the tricolour. He persuaded Garibaldi, for the sake of Italy, to invite Victor Emmanuel and the troops of Ancona to join him in Naples. It meant yielding all to the King; but the Italian people wanted it. They wanted a king. 'Victor Emmanuel should be our Garibaldi,' they began to say.

A plebiscite was taken in Naples and Sicily. Should Naples and Sicily be annexed to Piedmont, or not? The result was, on the mainland 1,302,064 votes for, 10,312 against annexation: Sicily, 432,053 for, 667 against. That was an end of Dictators or Mazzini republics: even of Garibaldi.

On October 26 Garibaldi advanced to meet the King, across the Volturno. Victor Emmanuel was a little, strutting man with huge moustaches. Garibaldi had a lion face — stupid, Mazzini called it — and a blond beard, his head bound in a silk kerchief, southern fashion, under his hat. He wore his red shirt.

‘ I greet the first King of Italy,’ he cried, saluting Victor Emmanuel, and hinting that he not only greeted but created the first King of Italy.

‘ How are you, dear Garibaldi? ‘

‘ Well, your Majesty. And you? ‘

‘ First class.’

The two shook hands. But they no longer loved each other.

The King treated the Garibaldini shabbily enough, though he was ready to give money and such stuff, which they did not want. ‘ I am squeezed like an orange and thrown into a corner,’ said Garibaldi. The King said he did not want the Garibaldi volunteers in the army; they were to be disbanded.

So, in pouring rain, Garibaldi and Victor Emmanuel rode into Naples side by side, both in bad tempers. They got on each other’s nerves, but the loudest cheering was for Garibaldi, which annoyed Victor Emmanuel.

Next day, rather wistful, Garibaldi left for his little island farm on Caprera, a poor man, choosing to be poor. The King and his party were not sorry he was gone. After all, such a man was a threat to their class privileges, by his very existence, and a thorn in the flesh of royal importance.

Francis of Naples was besieged in Gaeta, and yielded at last on February 13, 1861, to the Piedmontese. The Citadel of Messina capitulated in March, and Bourbon power was extinct.

Italy was now united, she entered the ranks of the great states of Europe, under her king, Victor Emmanuel. Probably it was best: certainly it was safest so. An Italian republic would hardly have held together, and would certainly never have been safe from the lions of the day.

Cavour died in 1861, a great loss to the young kingdom. His last cry was for a free Church in a free State. His last words: ‘ Italy is made, all is safe.’

But the Pope was in Rome, a serpent in the heart of the kingdom. Francis of Naples was with him, encouraging brigandage in the South. Austria still held Venetia and the Trentino. It was no rosy task, ruling Italy.

The great craving was to take Rome, without incurring war with the great Catholic powers, particularly France. In 1862 Garibaldi and his volunteers

landed again in the extreme South, to march on the Eternal City. But the King's government forbade it. Victor Emmanuel's troops met the Garibaldians on Aspromonte, down in the toe of Italy, and fired on the men. Garibaldi was wounded in the foot. But he had set his face against civil war. He would not fire back, but withdrew.

In 1866 Italy joined Prussia against Austria, and though she failed before the Quadrilateral, she received Venice when Prussia made peace after her great victory of Koniggrätz.

Remained now only Rome. Italy needed Rome. Milan, Turin, Florence quarrelled as to which should be capital of the kingdom, there was great jealousy among the old states. Italy must have Rome. But France and the Catholic powers forbade it.

In 1867 Garibaldi again set out, invaded the papal territory with a motley band of volunteers. But he had lost his cunning. He seemed like a shorn Samson since he yielded to Victor Emmanuel; he could do nothing. He was repulsed. Then new French troops arrived, and at the miserable village of Mentana, twenty miles from Rome, on the Campagna, the Garibaldians were utterly routed. Many fled, many were mown down mercilessly by the French from behind the walls. It was a bitter event, a cruel blow to Italian prestige, a painful memory for ever — Mentana.

Italy must wait for Rome until 1870, when French troops were withdrawn on the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War. On September 20, 1870, three weeks after Sedan, Victor Emmanuel's Bersaglieri entered Rome by the breach near the Porta Pia, and the Temporal Power fell. The Royal Court came and occupied the Quirinal, the Pope retired and shut himself up in the Vatican, after pronouncing the Greater Excommunication against those who deposed him.

And so Italy was made — modern Italy. Fretfulness, irritation, and nothing in life except money: this is what the religious fervour of Garibaldians and Mazzinians works out to — in united, free Italy as in other united, free countries. No wonder liberty so often turns to ashes in the mouth, after being so fair a fruit to contemplate. Man needs more than liberty.

Chapter XIX. The Unification of Germany

It was after the fall of Napoleon that nations really came to consciousness. In the beginning of Europe, there were many tribes, races, peoples, but no nations owning state property, and no kings as we have them now, representing state interest. Rome was a state of citizens, a republic of free men, when she first began to conquer. In Gaul, in Britain, in Germany, chieftains were chosen as leaders from among the warriors of the tribe. There was no kingship which descended from father to son.

But if men must fight their way forward, they must have a leader whom all obey. And if, after a state or a tribe has made conquests, unity is to be kept, if the people are to be united into one active power, then the leader must not only be absolute, he must be permanent. So we have the great emperors leading Rome, we have hereditary kings at the heads of the tribes.

Still there are no nations, in the modern sense. The whole history of Europe is a history of the breaking down of great institutions to make way for smaller, more numerous, more individual powers. So the greatest of all institutions, the Roman Empire, disappeared utterly. Then arose the Holy Roman Empire, which reached its height in Barbarossa and Frederick II., and disappeared with Napoleon. The Papacy ran parallel with the Holy Roman Empire; but with Victor Emmanuel the popes were driven inside the narrow bounds of the Vatican.

Under Rome, vast numbers of men were slaves. Under the popes, men believed darkly what they were bidden, books and free knowledge were hidden away. Kings arose when emperors and popes declined. But kings are really war-lords, war-chieftains. A king was originally the great overlord of the barons: the people were merely serfs, half slaves. Kings and barons existed as proud fighting-powers; realms consist in the glamour and glory of conflict.

The great change comes when the peoples cease to be unified for fighting purposes, and unite for production. There are two great passions that rule mankind — the passion of pride and power and conquest, and the passion of peace and production. The Renaissance was the time when the desire for peace and production triumphed over the desire for war and conquest.

After the Renaissance, kingdoms were productive in the first place, and in the second place, they were fighting powers. Kings were still war-leaders; but they must also lead in prosperity. Kings who ignored the national prosperity were

beheaded. The passion for peace and production triumphed over the desire for war. Kings must be no longer proud. The greatest man is he who causes the greatest production of necessary substance — the greatest merchant, the greatest owner of industry. The time comes when the leaders of industry, the rich men of the middle class really rule, as they do in Britain to-day, and in the great republics.

Nations, in the modern sense, arise when mankind chooses peace and production rather than war and glory. After the Renaissance and the Reformation, nations like England became conscious of their true purpose. The English people realised that their glory was in a life lived in unison and peaceful freedom, not in triumph over others. They wanted to be free from kingly power. They wanted to sum up to one vast, productive nation, not to a resplendent monarch.

And so the idea works itself out: it is the producer who matters, only the producer. Pride is nothing, glory is nothing, only production is important. And the producers in the last instance are the workers themselves. The people now move towards power, as in extreme democracies. Europe is again moving towards a oneness. Nations are once more tending to merge into one vast European state, a vast European rule of the people. Long ago, Europe was one vast realm ruled by a gorgeous emperor in Rome. Now the circle has almost been completed again. Europe seems to move towards unification, towards the institution of one vast state ruled by the infinite numbers of the people — the producers, the proletariat, the workmen.

The national spirit brings us to this, which is ultimately the international or universal spirit. Nations, however, must, in the first instance, be pivoted upon a central power, a king. After the king has served his day, he disappears.

‘Nation awakens by nation, King by king disappears.’

The great Germanic race had never since the Middle Ages had its one king, it had never become a nation. Itself the mother of nations, it was the last to come to national unity. It could only be united under a firm ruler.

The struggle for leadership was between Austria and Prussia. When in 1848 the republicans of France once more drove out their king, Louis Philippe, all Europe was stirred by a revolutionary feeling. France declared a republic, only to elect as president Louis Napoleon, son of Louis Bonaparte, whom the great Napoleon had made King of Holland. In 1852 Louis Napoleon asked the French nation to vote whether he should take the imperial title or not. By 7,800,000 votes to 233,000 they chose that he should. So the Emperor Napoleon III came to the throne of France, where he sat rather insecurely.

The year 1848 saw the Austrian Empire on the brink of dissolution. Bohemia,

Hungary and North Italy all rose to shake off her foreign sway. Yet chiefly through the activities of the great Austrian minister Metternich, who hated popular governments, Austria kept together.

She had hardly time to notice, at first, what was happening in Germany. There the states loudly demanded independence. The Confederation had been dominated by Austria. With surprising ease they called their own parliament together at Frankfort, in 1848. For a long time they could come to no decision, because they did not want to exclude Austria. Austria proper was German, but the millions of non-German subjects in her empire would swamp the Germans. It was decided to leave Austria out of the new state of Germany, and to face her opposition. A new empire of Germany was to be established, with an emperor entitled Emperor of the Germans. In March 1849, it was decided to offer the new title and office to Frederick William iv. of Prussia.

Prussia herself was struggling with a revolution. In Berlin the people had risen against the power of the Crown. Therefore the King would have nothing to do with offers made by revolutionary parliaments. He refused the imperial crown. And almost at once the whole movement for a united Germany dwindled down and collapsed, and Germany went on as before, with her thirty-nine independent and separate states.

The people's party in Prussia demanded a parliament of their own. The King declared: 'According to the law of God and the country, the Crown must reign according to its free decision and not according to the will of majorities.' Berlin rose in fierce revolution, the King had to escape. The streets were barricaded, hot fighting took place. The King gave way. He declared that Prussia was henceforth to be absorbed in Germany, and he allowed the National Assembly to meet, to form a new constitution.

But when Austria crushed her revolution in Vienna, Frederick William roused again and struck in Berlin.

The Assembly had begun to wrangle. He ordered it to dissolve. It refused. The military marched down and dispersed it. Then, in December 1848, the King gave a constitution framed by himself, and the power of the Crown was safe.

So it was that three months after, he refused the imperial crown of Germany, which the revolutionary parliament of Frankfort offered to him, calling it a crown of mud and wood. But he invited the various German governments to Berlin, with a view to forming a real federal constitution. Austria and Bavaria declined to come, Saxony and Hanover soon retired. In the end a federal constitution was drawn up for North Germany, headed by Prussia, and including about twenty-eight states.

Austria, always afraid and jealous of Prussia, immediately made a southern

federation, with headquarters at Frankfort. It was a question whether Prussia or Austria would lead Germany. A quarrel arose. The Prussian king and ministers were timid, Austria was quick, energetic. She demanded the immediate dissolution of the northern federation, under threat of instant war. Prussia cast away all thoughts of resistance, and surrendered at Olmiitz. Austria was still triumphant, dominant in Germany. Frederick William's bold words ended in smoke.

In 1861 King William I. came to the throne of Prussia. During the Berlin revolution he had fled to England, for the people hated him as a tyrant. But he did not like English ideas of government. He was a soldier by nature. 'I am the first king,' he said, 'to mount the throne since it has been supported by modern institutions, but I do not forget that the crown has come to me from God alone.' And he prepared to assert the royal power in all its force.

For many years Prussia had been unconsciously leading the way towards union. Every little province and department had its own gate across its own frontier, with customsofficers waiting for every traveller, every wagon either coming or going, to charge a certain percentage on the goods. This very much hampered, and often prevented the selling of commodities from town to town, village to village. So that trade was clogged, industry half strangled, and smuggling was universal. Prussia had gradually done away with all her internal customs barriers. From end to end of Prussian dominions, goods were freely exchanged, there was complete internal free trade. The duty was reduced also on goods which were being brought into the kingdom. But on goods which were being carried across the Prussian territories, say from Denmark to Saxony, a heavy duty was charged. So Prussia stimulated her own trade, and made a profit out of that of others.

The southern states soon saw what an advantage this was. Bavaria and Wurtemberg joined and formed a southern union of free trade, another union was formed between central states. But the advantage of free trade within the German lands was too great to be overlooked. South Germany joined the Prussian union of customs-duties in 1834, Central Germany entered in 1854, and soon the whole of the German states were united in one free-trading combine, Austria only being excluded.

Trade, commerce, is really the basis of union between different states which come together. But the Prussians knew that to keep such a union firm, a perfect army was needed. They steadily proceeded to realise the ideas of the reformers who, after the disaster of October 1806, had worked for the overthrow of Napoleon. William I. of Prussia had three remarkably great ministers, Bismarck, Moltke, and Roon. Roon was the war-minister. It was he who established the

modern German army. Universal military service for three years was enforced on all classes, with a further obligation to serve in the reserve, the Landwehr, for four years. New weapons, especially the needle-gun, were introduced, and new, scientific methods of drill and tactics studied. It was a preparation such as Frederick William I. had made a hundred and fifty years before.

But in Prussia the same struggle between king and parliament went on, as elsewhere. In 1861 the progressive party had a large majority in the representative house of the Assembly. They demanded that obligatory military service should be reduced to two years; that the upper house, corresponding to our House of Lords, but much more powerful, should be reformed; and that the ministers who really governed the country, such as the Chancellor, who may be called the Prime Minister, and the War Minister, and the Foreign Minister, should be responsible to the National Assembly, not to the King. The progressive party demanded reforms according to the British model. The King refused. The Assembly then in 1862 refused to vote the money for the army. There was a deadlock. The King could do nothing. In his anger, he even thought of abdicating.

Then appeared the powerful figure of Bismarck. Bismarck was a North German nobleman. He had been a member of the National Assembly during the period of the 1848 revolution. He had strongly opposed the merging of Prussia into Germany. 'Prussians we are, and Prussians we will remain,' he said. In all the diplomatic missions, he had held firm as iron against Austrian demands.

Bismarck was chosen chancellor in 1862. He promised the King he would never yield. He did not believe in votes, in government by the people and their representatives. 'The decision on these principles,' he said, 'will not come by parliamentary debate, and not by majorities of votes. Sooner or later the God who directs the battle will cast his iron dice.'

The old struggle was repeated. Just as Charles I. and Wentworth faced the Long Parliament, just as Louis XVI. and his ministers faced the Estates General, so William I. of Prussia and Bismarck faced the representatives of the people. According to the evidence of history, they were bound to be defeated.

But the defeat was not yet. It was a maxim of those days that an absolute monarchy depended on successful wars — which means, that a nation in its pride of kingship only lives by triumphing over its neighbour. Failure in foreign wars brought down the crown of France, and helped to bring down the crown of England. In the pride of its heart, every nation desires to triumph over its neighbours. But pride of heart and the desire for triumph exhaust themselves, it seems. And then in their hearts peoples and nations only wish for ease and prosperity, they have no use for wars. And when they have no use for wars, they

have no use for absolute kings with their ministers. Nothing further matters but the dead level of material prosperity.

Bismarck and William I. were successful in war, so they carried Germany with them. First came a great insurrection of the Poles against Russia. The Progressives or Liberals in Germany all wanted to help the Poles. But Bismarck need not ask the people nor the parliament what side he should take. He assisted the Russians in suppressing the rising. He next refused even to hear Austria, when she came forward proposing a new union of Germany. Then the duchies of Schleswig and Holstein, which lay between Denmark and Prussia, were left without an heir. Denmark, Prussia and Austria all claimed the provinces. Austria and Prussia soon defeated Denmark, who received no help from the other powers.

Austria had now decided that the Duke of Augusten-berg should receive the duchies, for he had the strongest claim. Bismarck intended no such thing. The King of Prussia would have been glad of a peaceful settlement. Bismarck was determined on war. And now at last the two great Germanic powers were to decide which was to lead.

At this time, Cavour and Garibaldi, helped by the French under Napoleon III., had freed Italy, all except Venice and Rome. Venetia remained in Austrian hands, the Pope held out in Rome. Victor Emmanuel was the first King of Italy. Bismarck now cleverly made an alliance with the new King of Italy, and promised that Prussia should make no peace with Austria until Venice was surrendered to Italy. So Victor Emmanuel sent the Italian armies against Austria, Garibaldi fighting in the Tyrol. The Italians were badly beaten, and things would have looked very black for them, save for the interference of Prussia.

In Germany things went differently. The war was the first sign to Europe of a new power risen in their midst, using methods hitherto unknown. The whole campaign had been elaborately worked out by the Army Council, before the war began. Moltke, the great general, sat in Berlin and directed the movements of the campaign by telegraph, receiving telegrams all the time. When a decisive blow was to be struck, a swift express-train conveyed him to the front. After the battle he returned to Berlin.

This was something new in warfare: and it was speedily effective. The Hanoverians were overthrown at Langensalza, in June 1866, as they were trying to make their way to join the Austrians. In July the Austrians, after a hard and doubtful struggle, were defeated at Koniggratz in Bohemia. It was one of the shortest wars, but one of the most significant.

Bismarck now showed himself a great statesman. Those states of the north that had opposed Prussia — Schleswig, Holstein, Hanover, Hesse, Cassel —

were annexed to Prussia, so that her lands now practically covered North Germany. The southern states, Bavaria, Baden, Wurtemberg, were treated very delicately, for Bismarck did not want to make enemies of them. He knew they would immediately join France against him if he did. For Napoleon in. also had the idea that he could only keep his throne in France by winning victories abroad, as his great predecessor had done, and therefore he also was on tenterhooks to declare war somewhere.

Now Bismarck founded the North German Federation, which was the beginning of the German Empire of our day. Bismarck did not follow the British model. He did not like the liberal middle classes of Germany, the tradespeople and manufacturers who were so powerful in Britain. He preferred even the work-people. So he made way for socialism.

The head of the Federation was the Federal Council, composed of envoys, not elected, but chosen from the various governments of the different states., This council brought in all bills, and controlled the administration of the law. Next was the Reichstag, the House of Commons, elected by manhood suffrage, and not by property qualification. Thus it was the people's house. It was not like the British House of Commons, a chamber of rich men. The Reichstag passed or rejected the bills of the Federal Council, and it controlled finance. But it did not govern. The ministers governed. And the ministers were quite independent of the Reichstag. They represented the Crown, and they alone decided what course should be taken. Reichstag and people's representatives could not interfere. They only voted money and accepted or rejected the new bills which the Council offered.

The chief of the ministers was the Chancellor. He was a far more powerful person than the British Prime Minister. The British Prime Minister must answer to Parliament for all he does, and Parliament means the nation. The German Chancellor — and Bismarck was the first German Chancellor — answered only to the King. So his power was immense. It was his success in war which saved him, and made him a popular hero. Prussia was still a fighting state, not a commercial state.

Napoleon III. in France was a despot, but very popular, for he conciliated the people all the time. He was a good deal like an Italian Tyrant in the Renaissance. France flourished under him, and Paris became the beautiful modern city it is now. Trade prospered, France was a commercial nation. But Napoleon in. had a fixed idea that it was necessary ' to gratify the military and domineering instincts of France.' He had very successfully interfered in Italy, and brought France out of her wars with much satisfaction and pride to himself and the people. He had acquired Nice and Savoy, and Europe had become quite alarmed, imagining him

a dangerous aggressor like Napoleon I.

But after 1860 the French emperor's foreign policy was a failure, and the people, particularly the commercial and moneyed classes, began to turn against him. They were wearying of their unnecessary war-lord. He attempted to make Maximilian of Austria, Emperor of Mexico. The whole affair was a tragic fiasco, and France lost vast sums of money. Napoleon in. felt very uncertain on his throne.

Yet, on June 30, 1870, when the people of France were asked to vote whether a new, republican constitution should be introduced, or whether they should stand by the Emperor, 9,000,000 votes against 1,500,000 decided for him. Everything seemed most satisfactory. ' On whichever side we look there is an absence of troublesome questions; never has the maintenance of the peace of Europe been better assured.' Fifteen days later war was declared against Prussia. In two months the second empire of France collapsed and disappeared.

We cannot say exactly why the great Franco-Prussian War of 1870 broke out. Neither France nor Germany desired war: only Bismarck wanted it. There had been a revolution in Spain. The Queen, Isabella, had fled to France. Leopold of Hohenzollern, a Roman Catholic, a distant relative of William I., was proposed for the throne of Spain. Napoleon in. protested. William listened to Napoleon's remonstrance, and Leopold's name was withdrawn. Then Napoleon thought he would show his power a little further. He sent an ambassador to William of Prussia, asking him to promise to oppose Leopold, even should that prince again be suggested for the throne of Spain. William said he could not promise so much, but that he disapproved of Leopold as a candidate for the Spanish throne. All passed quietly and pleasantly.

Bismarck was bitterly disappointed. He had hoped for a quarrel. He wanted war. He even thought of resigning his post. But then, it seems, he so modified the message he had received from the King, and published it in such a form as to make it appear that the Prussian king had been insulted by Napoleon, and had broken off all communications with France. A loud shout for war went up in Germany, and quite as loud a shout in France.

The French were very jaunty and confident of victory. But the German preparations were perfect, while France was in disorder. Half a million German soldiers poured over the French frontier. A marvellously rapid campaign followed. MacMahon was defeated at Worth with great loss to the French. Then Marshal Bazaine's army was defeated and shut up in Metz. Then the emperor and MacMahon decided to retreat on Paris, to fight under the city fortresses. The Empress Eugenie telegraphed that a retreat would bring about a fall of the dynasty. The army changed its direction and marched against the enemy, hoping

to relieve Metz. It was caught by the German army at Sedan, on September 1, 1870, and after losing 17,000 men Napoleon surrendered with 85,000.

At this disastrous news the empire was at once abolished in Paris, and a republic declared. Jules Favre was the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Gambetta was President. The new republic might now have had peace, if she would consent to surrender Strassburg and Metz. She proudly answered that she would not surrender an inch of French soil. So the war went on. The German armies gathered round Paris and the long siege began. No help came. On December 28, the bombardment of the city, which had been deferred so long, commenced. But it was Bismarck's plan to reduce the 2,000,000 inhabitants by speedy starvation. 'Let them stew in their own juice,' he said.

Wildly excited over these triumphs, the people of Germany united and offered the crown of the German Empire to William, whilst he was with the armies besieging Paris. A deputation waited on him on December 18, 1870, asking him to receive the new dignity. He accepted, and the new state was to come into being on January 1. On January 18, while Paris was still holding out, William I. was crowned emperor at Versailles, twelve miles away from the besieged city. In the great hall of mirrors, where the splendours of Louis xiv. had dazzled the world, the German officers and princes met in uniform, a throng of powerful men. With tremendous shouts they hailed the grey-haired King emperor, the German Emperor, Bismarck and Moltke standing by his side, flashing aloft their swords and shouting with fierce joy.

The bombardment of Paris continued till January 28, when an armistice was signed and the city surrendered. The Prussians then occupied the city. And now came another revolution among the French themselves. A National Assembly had been called at Versailles to settle the new republican constitution. Meanwhile Paris was revolution-mad. Socialism, communism, anarchism were preached frantically. Paris proclaimed 'the Commune,' declaring she would go her own way, have her own government, regardless of the rest of France. For the people of Paris were republican, and they feared the monarchist tendency of the Assembly of Versailles. The Assembly decided that the Parisians must be subdued. The French leader Thiers, with the French armies which had returned from the war, now marched on Paris, Frenchmen attacking Frenchmen with utmost ferocity, French armies marching on the capital of France. The German troops, not yet withdrawn, looked on whilst the ghastly fighting between the two French parties took place. At last MacMahon became master of the city. The Communists were destroyed, 17,000 were executed, the Socialists entirely stamped out.

In such a way began the Third French Republic, which is the Republic of to-

day. And at such a moment the German Empire began. In 1877 Bismarck wished to resign, worn out by his labours. To this the Emperor would not listen, for the state rested on the shoulders of the Iron Chancellor.

William I. died in 1888. His son Frederick, who was married to the daughter of Queen Victoria, died after a reign of ninety-nine days. The Emperor William II. then succeeded. He was twenty-nine years old. The young emperor was far more positive and dictatorial than William I. He did not agree with Bismarck. The old chancellor resigned in 1890, virtually dismissed.

After this, the German Empire and the Kingdom of Prussia were reckoned the most powerful states organisations in Europe. They did their best to resist the growth of Socialism. And yet labour organisation and socialist influence were perhaps stronger among the German people than anywhere. The state was keenly divided against itself. Germany was the last great military power left in Europe, excepting only Russia. And yet, in Germany as in Russia, the working people were most united, most ready to strike against war-lords and military dominion.

It seems as if North Europe, Germany and Russia, were never to take the course which France and Britain and America have taken. These latter three great states broke the monarchic power and established a rule of rich citizens, merchants, and promoters of industry, the rule of the middle classes. But Germany and Russia step from one extreme to the other from absolute monarchy such as Britain never knew, straight to the other extreme of government, government by the masses of the proletariat, strange, and as it seems, without true purpose: the masses of the working people governing themselves they know not why, except that they wish to destroy all authority, and to enjoy all an equal prosperity.

So the cycle of European history completes itself, phase by phase, from imperial Rome, through the mediaeval empire and papacy to the kings of the Renaissance period, on to the great commercial nations, the government by the industrial and commercial middle classes, and so to that last rule, that last oneness of the labouring people. So Europe moves from oneness to oneness, from the imperial unity to the unity of the labouring classes, from the beginning to the end.

But we must never forget that mankind lives by a twofold motive: the motive of peace and increase, and the motive of contest and martial triumph. As soon as the appetite for martial adventure and triumph in conflict is satisfied, the appetite for peace and increase manifests itself, and vice versa. It seems a law of life. Therefore a great united Europe of productive working-people, all materially equal, will never be able to continue and remain firm unless it unites also round one great chosen figure, some hero who can lead a great war, as well as

administer a wide peace. It all depends on the will of the people. But the will of the people must concentrate in one figure, who is also supreme over the will of the people. He must be chosen, but at the same time responsible to God alone. Here is a problem of which a stormy future will have to evolve the solution.

Epilogue

The War, called now the Great War, came in 1914, and smashed the growing tip of European civilisation. Mankind is like a huge old tree: there are deep roots that go down to the earth's centre, and there is the massive stem of primitive culture, where all men are very much alike. All men, black, white, yellow, cover their nakedness and build themselves shelters, make fires and cook food, have laws of marriage and of family, care for their wives and their children, and have stores of wisdom and ancient lore, rules of morality and behaviour. All men are alike in these fundamentals: even the crudest black Australian aborigines. We should say, that in its roots and its massive trunk, the tree of mankind is undivided. Mankind is one great race, in its fundamentals always the same. Whereas the gulf that divides man from the animals is so great, that we can see no connection. We can no longer believe that man has descended from monkeys. Man has descended from man.

The difference between the most civilised man and the lowest savage with a black face and a flat nose is as nothing compared to the difference between that same stunted, ugly savage and the highest ape. The pigmy naked Bushman and the highly educated white man, once they meet and are acquainted, know each other man for man. The savage soon knows if I am a 'good' man: that is, if I am decent and brave and kindly. And if I am foolish, or affected, or even snobbish, the crude savage soon learns to despise me. He may be in awe of my white man's powers:

my gun, my power to write letters, or to send telegrams, or to build railways. But if I am a poor specimen of a man, inwardly, even if I have a big strong body, the savage will soon know, and he will despise me, sneer at me, and play tricks on me. To be brave, to keep one's word, to be generous, the savage recognises these as the first qualities in a man quite as quickly, or perhaps more quickly, than we white people do. It is manhood. And manhood is the same in all men, and the chief part of all men. Cleverness educated skill come far behind.

Man recognises man as his own sort, and manhood is manhood to the pigmy black as to the educated white, the heroic qualities are the same.

But man and monkey look at one another across a great and silent gulf, never to be crossed. The savage shakes hands with me, and each of us knows we are of one ancient blood-stream. But if I attempt to shake hands with a j monkey or an ape — it is a gesture only of mockery. We cannot really meet in touch.

In its root and trunk, Mankind is one. But then the differences begin. The great tree of man branches out into different races: huge branches, reaching far out in different directions. And each branch has its own growing tip.

So the races of mankind have grown in their different directions; the Egyptians and the Chinese, the Hindu and the Assyrians, the Aztecs and the Peruvians, the negroes and the Polynesians, the Mediterranean peoples that include Greece and Rome and Carthage, then the Germanic and Slavic races, and the modern Europeans: all huge branches on the one tree of mankind.

Every branch has its own direction and its own growing tip. One branch cannot take the place of any other branch. Each must go its own way, and bear its own flowers and fruits. For each branch is, as it were, differently grafted by a different spirit and idea, which becomes its own spirit and idea. My manhood is the same as the manhood of a Chinaman. But in spirit and idea we two are different and shall be different forever, as apple-blossom will forever be different from irises.

And each branch has its own growing tip. In every race, the growing tip is the living idea, which must never cease to change and develop. Once the living idea, the forward-reaching consciousness of any race dies and goes hard and dry, the vast branch of that race dies upon the tree of mankind, withers, goes dry rotten, and at length falls and disappears. As the great Egyptians and Babylonians have fallen and disappeared.

But as every branch of mankind has its own growing tip, so the whole tree of Man has one supreme travelling apex, one culminating growing tip. If this dies, the whole tree perishes. Or else, from some side socket, a new leading bud appears. Then the whole direction of the tree's growth changes, the movement onward takes a new line.

For a thousand years, surely, we may say that Europe has been the growing tip on the tree of mankind. Man must change. Either he must grow, or he must die. Like a tree. There is no tree in the world which is the same this year as it was last. Either it has grown a bit or died a bit. And the same is true of every man, of every race, and of all mankind itself. Either it has grown a bit or died a bit.

But a man doesn't grow just because he gets fatter. He may be getting fatter, but the spirit inside him may be flagging and dying. The same with a race or a nation. Populations may be increasing rapidly. But the spirit inside the people may at the same time be failing, and then, sooner or later, there will come a crash. Babylon, the great city, once increased by thousands every year. Now there is not a man left.

From time to time the tree of mankind begins to fail, it runs to wood, and its fruit grows more and more paltry. Then it must be pruned, and grafted with a

new idea.

For a thousand years Europe has led the world, and grown apace. But our spirit and our manhood begin to weaken. Our idea and our ideal begin to peter out.

So the War came, and blew away forever our leading tip our growing tip. Now we are directionless.

Our great idea, during the last hundred years, has been the idea of Progress. We must all make progress. Every nation must make its own great strides of progress.

But again, it is like the tree. Each branch starts in its own separate direction. But if any branch spreads too hugely, it will spread above its neighbour, and cut off the light from that neighbour. And any branch that must grow in its neighbour's shadow must slowly and surely die.

And this is progress.

We believed also in free competition, and we said that, as many young trees must grow together in a plantation if they are to grow straight and tall, so must men compete with one another in every way, freely. Every man must be free to compete with every other man, and there must be equality of opportunity.

Since the War these words make us feel sick, they have I proved such a swindle. But it is actually true that a plantation of young trees should be thick, the trees growing close upon one another, so that their struggle with one another for the light may send them upwards and keep them straight and erect. All very good for a plantation of young trees, with lots of space. Which is what Europe was, a hundred years ago.

But what of those young trees a hundred years later? They are just choking one another. Some manage to struggle above their neighbours, and there, once having got up into the air, they flourish fast. And the faster they flourish, the more they cut off the light from their neighbours below them. And the more the neighbours lose the light, the more they dwindle and expire.

Nothing is more depressing, in this respect, than a virgin forest. There are giants, and there are great growing youngsters. But at the same time there is a tangle and a misery of dwindling, thin trees which can hardly hold up, and which drop out their thin scratchy branches with dead brown tips; while on the ground a depth of fallen trees lies rotting.

The same applies among the nations. At first, plenty of room for all, and competition is the best thing possible, and equality of opportunity is the ideal. Liberty, Equality, Fraternity. Then some nations forge ahead, and get a stranglehold upon the natural resources around them. Still there must be progress, expansion, progress, expansion, free competition. All very well. But

you can't progress upwards if another great tree has risen and sent out branches above you. You can't expand if your neighbour takes up all the room. You can't compete once your 'brother' has got a stranglehold on you.

Then you've either got to give in, and gradually, gradually have the light of day taken from you. Or you have to fight.

Sooner or later war is bound to come. If we continue in our ideal of Liberty, Equality, Fraternity; liberty for every man and every nation to get as much as he can for himself, equality of opportunity for every sharp and unscrupulous man or nation to get the better of the more honest or less shrewd man or nation, then there is bound to come more war, many more wars.

We all know it. We none of us believe in our ideals any more. Our ideal, our leading ideas, our growing tip were shot away in the Great War.

Till the Great War, we believed in Liberty, Equality, Fraternity and in the Voice of the People. The best men and women believed that the poorer classes were simple and honourable, and that when the Voice of the People was heard, it would speak simple, but wise and decent things, free from the falsities of the educated upper classes.

Came the War. And what then? What sort of sound did the Voice of the People make?

Before we answer, let us realise at once that the Voice of the People can never actually be heard. If every man got up to say his say in his own voice, there would come a great hoarse hollow bellowing of utter confusion. A number of people is heard, and can only be heard, intelligibly, through' a spokesman.

So that if we want to hear the Voice of the People, we must listen to the spokesmen of the People. And by the People we mean the vast majority, people of every class. Each class has its wiser minority, with its particular spokesmen. But the vast majority rules in a time of crisis, and puts its spokesmen emphatically forward, as the mass takes fright.

And look at these spokesmen, in every nation. Listen to them. The two great voices in England, during the thick of the War were those of Mr. Lloyd George and Mr. Horatio Bottomley. These two spoke the Voice of the People: in trumpet blasts. They said what the vast majority were choking to say. They said it all enormously, endlessly, and with complete success.

There is hardly an Englishman living who can bear to remember the voices of these two gentlemen when they were uplifted in full blast. Or, if he remembers, can remember without shame.

Why? — Because they said things that were not true, and because they urged us to actions that were meaner, smaller, baser, crueller than our own deep feelings.

And this was the Voice of the People. Let us hope never to hear it again in full blast, the Voice of the Herd.

Every man has two selves among his manifold Self. He has a herd-self, which is vulgar, common, ugly, like the voice of the man in the crowd. And he has a better self, which is quiet, and slow, and which is most of the time puzzled. From his better self, he is almost dumb. From his herd-self, he shouts and yells and rants.

So in the middle of the War, we heard the Voice of the People bullying us. What became of Liberty? No man had any. Every able-bodied man was turned into a mere thing, without a soul of his own. The Voice of the People said the War required it. So every man was turned into an automaton, and the man who has been turned into a mere thing, without a soul of his own, is not going to believe in Liberty again, in a hurry, or to want to listen to the Voice of the People any more.

And Equality? What became of that? When any honest man was spied upon and thrown at the mercy of some ranting 'patriotic' bully to be insulted and maltreated.

And Fraternity, when men were inventing more and more fiendish devices to destroy and cripple one another. Equality of opportunity to throw poison in other men's faces. Free competition in injuring one another, body and soul.

No, the old ideal, the old leading tip was shot to smithereens, and we have got no new one. Nothing really to believe in. Only now, having lost our belief, we know inwardly that it would have been better to lose a war. Men cannot live long without a belief.

Comes 'after the War'. The world after the War.

We thought the old times were coming back. They can never come. We know now that each one of us had something shot out of him. So we have to adjust ourselves to a new world.

Came 'after the War'. England, changed inside, did not change outwardly very much. But other countries did. Russia had made one of the greatest changes in history: her Tzar and her nobles gone, her rich people dead or fled, her learned men and professors begging in the streets, only the working classes and the common soldiers left in full possession.

This was the Voice of the People with a vengeance. And Soviets, councils of workmen, ruling the country.

After all, I, who am not a workman, why should I be bullied by workmen? Because bullying is what it amounts to.

The popular philosophy of today, in every country, is the pragmatic philosophy. Which means the philosophy of 'Common sense'. They ask the

question: Is it common sense, that a rather foolish Romanov Tzar, with a few unscrupulous nobility, should hold life and death power over millions of poor people? Answer: No! Result: A revolution.

Or another question. Is it common sense that a few men just because their father or grandfather were clever men or clever rogues, should own huge properties and compel thousands of poor men to work for a miserable wage? Answer: No! Result: more revolution.

So we go on, with the philosophy of common sense.

But what it works out to, in the end, is that every man is just 'rationed' for the rest of his life. Every family is rationed, for food, clothing, and even house-room. That is what common sense works out to.

For rationing is common sense. But do we like it? Did we like it during the War? We didn't. We hated it.

And since we all suffer with our teeth, wouldn't it be common sense to have all our teeth pulled out at the age of sixteen, and false ones supplied? It might be common sense, but we just refuse to do it.

Pragmatism means that a thing is only good if it is common sense, if it works. It says that, just as an engine needs oiling and stoking, so people need food and clothing and housing, *etc.* Therefore, let everybody be given enough. That is, let everybody be rationed.

It may be lovely common sense, but what's the good, when we detest it? There must be something inside us which plumps for uncommon sense. We can't help ourselves. In the long run, we always decide from our uncommon sense, and not from our 'common'. We begin to hate everything 'common', including the so-called common sense.

Man has got to be wise. And to be wise you must have far more than common sense. It is bad to have greedy, cruel people called 'nobles' allowed to bully simple men. It is bad to have people squandering money and taking on airs, while good men can't find even work to do. It is very bad.

But it. is also very bad for everybody to be 'rationed' for life, and spied upon by a 'police of the people'.

What sort of sense are we going to use about it? Common sense says that we are all little engines that must be stoked and watered and housed, so that we can do our share of the work and get our ration of amusement or enjoyment. And this sort of common sense points to communism, sovietism.

At the same time, something inside us hates being rationed, hates being treated as a little engine and made to do our engine's share of work. We would almost rather die.

This is our position after the War.

Immediately after the War, socialism seemed to be the inevitable next step. Russia had taken the step. And Italy, another imaginative country, was on the verge of taking it.

Now socialism, like most things, has various sides to it. But socialism proper is the expression of two great desires in men: the first, the generous desire that all men shall eat well and sleep well and fare well all their lives: but second, the much more dangerous desire, that all existing masters shall be overthrown, and that men shall be 'free', which means, there shall be no authority over the people. That is socialism.

1. A desire for the welfare of all people.

2. A hatred of all masters and of all authority, a hatred of all 'superiors'. Some socialists are full of hatred, and some are full of sincere desire for human welfare.

Now take Italy in 1919 and 1920 and 1921. She was rapidly running to socialism. Myself, personally, I believe that a good form of socialism, if it could be brought about, would be the best form of government. But let us come down to experience.

In Italy, in Florence, there was the same lingering ease and goodwill in 1919 as before the War. By 1920 prices had gone up three times, and socialism was rampant. Now we began to be bullied in every way. Servants were rude, cabmen insulted one and demanded treble fare, railway porters demanded large sums for carrying a bag from the train to the street, and threatened to attack one if the money were not paid. The train would suddenly come to a standstill in the heat of the open country: the drivers had gone on, strike for a couple of hours. Trains would arrive two hours four hours, and going from Rome to Sicily I have been twelve hours late. If in the country you asked at a cottage for a drink of wine, worth a penny, the peasant would demand a shilling, and insult you if he did not get it.

This was all pure bullying. And this was socialism. True it was the bad side of socialism, the hatred of 'superiors' or people with money or education or authority. But socialism it was.

Such socialism made itself enemies. And moreover, it could not trust itself. In an old civilised country like Italy, it was bound to cave in.

In the summer of 1920 I went north, and Florence was in a state of continual socialistic riot: sudden shots, sudden stones smashing into the restaurants where one was drinking coffee, all the shops suddenly barred and closed. When I came back there was a great procession of Fascisti and banners: Long Live the King. When I went to Naples, to the big main post office to send a telegram, there were white notices pasted over the doorways: 'We, the mutilated soldiers, have turned

out all the young women employed in this office, and have taken their place. No woman clerk or operator shall enter this office etc.' — But the mutilated soldiers did not know how to send telegrams. So I had to look for a little side street office.

This was the beginning of Fascism. It was an anti-socialist movement started by the returned soldiers in the name of Law and Order. And suddenly, it gained possession of Italy. Now the cabs had a fixed charge, a fixed charge for railway porters was placarded in the railway stations, and trains began to run punctually. But also, in Fiesole near Florence the Fascisti suddenly banged at the door of the mayor of the village, in the night when all were in bed.

The mayor was forced to get up and open the door. The Fascisti seized him, stood him against the wall of his house, and shot him under the eyes of his wife and children, who were in their night dresses. Why? Because he was a socialist.

That is Fascism and Law and Order. Only another kind of bullying.

Now one must have Law and Order, because lawlessness and disorder in our great communities is hell. We must have authority, and there must be power. But there must not be bullying, nor the worship of mere Force. A certain group of men in Italy intend to force their will on all other men. Earlier, socialists tried to force their will. In Russia, the Communists succeed in forcing their will.

The forcing of one man's will over another man is bullying. We know what it is, we experienced it during the War. It is a bad, degrading thing. It degrades both the bully and those who are bullied.

Yet there must be power. Power there must be. Because, if there is not power there will be force.

What is the difference, among human beings, between power and force. A man invested with power has a profound responsibility. Force is irresponsible, unless controlled by the higher power.

The men in power, in England today, are the Members of Parliament and, chiefly, the Cabinet Ministers. The Force of the country is in the police and the army. But both the police and the army are only tools and instruments in the hands of the higher power, invested in Parliament.

In the old days, heaven was supposed to have given the gift of power to some few noble families. The family specially endowed with power from God was royal. A king was not a mere bully and tyrant. His kingship was not a matter of vanity and conceit. He really felt that heaven had made him responsible for a whole nation. It was a sacred charge. And many kings really did try to answer to God for their deeds as representatives of the nation, just as fathers answer for their families. But then heaven, or nature, has really made a father responsible for his young family. Whereas, once the royal family was established, nature had

no more part in making a king. An individual became a king automatically, because he was born of a certain family. And these automatic hereditary kings could at last act as ignobly, towards their nation, as the ex-Kaiser Wilhelm of Germany has now acted.

Therefore in the cry for Liberty, men have refused to recognise any gift of power from heaven. Power, nowadays, is supposed to lie in the hands of the 'majority', the vast mass of the people. And these people by electing a man to be their responsible leader, can confer power on him. It is just the reverse of the old idea. In the royal days, God was a God of Power. He gave some of his power to the King. And the King revealed it to the humble mass of the nation. Today we say that power lies only in the great collective Will of the People, and they hand on this power to a group of men who are thus placed in power, but who are responsible to the People all the time.

Which is better? a royal king who is automatically royal by birth, and who is responsible to God alone? Or a vast mass of people electing a group of men to assume responsibility, and by the mere fact of election, automatically investing these men with power?

What is automatic, in human affairs, is bad. And power, true natural power, does come from God. That is, it is either born inside a man, or nothing can give it him. The son of a great king and hero may be a poor weakling: that we well know. But also, the man elected by fifty million people to be their leader may just as well be a poor weakling. The fact that fifty million people say he is great, will not make him great. You will never get great men by election, unless people are seeking after greatness. If the majority are, as today, seeking some special material advantage, like the raising of wages or the reduction of taxes, then they will elect some tool for their own purposes, and a mere tool he will be, without a spark of true power.

So that we see, democracy, government by popular election of representatives, becomes even more dismal than government by kings. Kings are at least supposed to be descendants of heroes, and they at least keep up a bluff of royalty and nobleness: as the late Kaiser did so successfully. But our Prime Ministers are forced, obviously, to be the servants of a huge discontented mob, who all want more money and less work. Till democracy becomes a thing of shame.

And meanwhile, there is one mysterious Force which is under no control. A mysterious force, like a great Secret Society spreading through all nations and controlled by no nation. This is the Force of Finance. A few hundred men on the face of the earth, with huge sums of money behind them, exert their wills and minds in order that money shall and must go on producing money, no matter what lives or loss of honour it may cost. Here is a great irresponsible Force

which has escaped from the control of true human power, and which is likely to work enormous evil.

Now we begin to understand the old motto, *Noblesse Oblige*. *Noblesse* means, having the gift of power, the natural or sacred power. And having such power obliges a man to act with fearlessness and generosity, responsible for his acts to God. A noble is one who may be known before all men.

And even the automatic, hereditary nobility were born with this advantage: because of their birth they were expected to be brave, generous, and according to their station, wise. What a man is expected to be he will more or less try to be. So that in hereditary nobility there were great advantages. But even there all is decayed. A nobleman by birth is no longer expected to be braver than other men, an example to men. He is only expected to be conceited or snobbish.

Then aristocracy becomes so hollow, mere snobbish conceit and bluff, as in the ex-Kaiser's case, then it has to be swept away.

This does not automatically sweep away all aristocracy.! There is an aristocracy inside the souls of some men, and that you can never sweep away. And *Noblesse Oblige* will ring out as a challenge for ever.

Which brings us back to common sense. Hereditary nobility is not common sense, and it is a fiasco. Democracy and government by Parliament is, in a way, good common sense: letting the mass of the people indicate what they want, and providing the chance to get it. But when what they want is never anything but more wages and less taxes, then common sense begins to stink in our nostrils.

Some men must be noble, or life is an ash-heap. There is natural nobility, given by God or the Unknown, and far beyond common sense. And towards this natural nobility we must live.

The simple man, whose best self, his noble self, is nearly all the time puzzled, dumb, and helpless, has still the power to recognise the man in whom the noble self is powerful and articulate. To this man he must pledge himself. That is the only way. To act according to the spark of nobility we have in us, not according to our greediness and our cowardice, our hard selves.

The hereditary aristocratic class has fallen into disuse. And democracy means the electing of tools to serve the fears and the material desires of the masses. *Noblesse n'oblige plus*.

This is really the worst that can happen to mankind, when *Noblesse n'oblige plus*. Goodness and badness there is bound to be. But a spark of nobility redeems everything.

For this reason we cannot help preferring Tzarist Russia to Soviet Russia. The tsar's Russia, with all the crimes laid at its door, and with all its ignoble nobles, had at least some lingering appearance of the old inspiration of *noblesse oblige*.

Russia's was always a wild strange noblesse. But it had its splendours and its consolations.

Whereas about Soviet Russia we can only feel that Malice Oblige or Misere Oblige. And one cannot live all the time towards poorness or common sense. It wastes the spirit out of a man. We must live with some natural pulsing nobleness.

And again, one feels that Soviet Russia is probably only the temporary grave of the old, not-quite-real Tsarist Russia. In this grave the great nation must stay, for the three days. Then there will be a resurrection towards a new nobility, the true or natural nobility of the people.

This is our job, then, our uncommon sense: to recognize the spark of nobleness inside us, and let it make us. To recognize the spark of nobleness in one another, and add our sparks together to a flame. And to recognize the men who have stars, not mere sparks of nobility in their souls, and to choose these for leaders. We can choose for nobleness and we can choose bassesse. We chose Mr. Bottomley for bassesse, lowness, commonness. Nations are slowly strangeling one another in 'competition'. The cancer of finance spreads through the body of mankind. Individuals are diseased with the same disease. To get money, and to spend money, nothing else remains. And with it goes all the strangling, and the bullying, and the degradation, the sense of humiliation and worthlessness of life, which is the bitterest of all.

There is nothing to be done, en masse. But every youth, every girl can make the great historical change inside himself and herself, to care supremely for nothing but the spark of nobleness that is in him and in her, and to follow only the leader who is a star of the new, natural noblesse.

PSYCHOANALYSIS AND THE UNCONSCIOUS



Written during Lawrence's most productive period in 1921, this literary treatise is a response to a psychoanalytic criticism of *Sons and Lovers*.



Lawrence and his wife in 1921

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HUMAN RELATIONS AND THE UNCONSCIOUS

CHAPTER I

PSYCHOANALYSIS VS. MORALITY

Psychoanalysis has sprung many surprises on us, performed more than one volte face before our indignant eyes. No sooner had we got used to the psychiatric quack who vehemently demonstrated the serpent of sex coiled round the root of all our actions, no sooner had we begun to feel honestly uneasy about our lurking complexes, than lo and behold the psychoanalytic gentleman reappeared on the stage with a theory of pure psychology. The medical faculty, which was on hot bricks over the therapeutic innovations, heaved a sigh of relief as it watched the ground warming under the feet of the professional psychologists.

This, however, was not the end. The ears of the ethnologist began to tingle, the philosopher felt his gorge rise, and at last the moralist knew he must rush in. By this time psychoanalysis had become a public danger. The mob was on the alert. The Oedipus complex was a household word, the incest motive a commonplace of tea-table chat. Amateur analyses became the vogue. "Wait till you've been analyzed," said one man to another, with varying intonation. A sinister look came into the eyes of the initiates — the famous, or infamous, Freud look. You could recognize it everywhere, wherever you went.

Psychoanalysts know what the end will be. They have crept in among us as healers and physicians; growing bolder, they have asserted their authority as scientists; two more minutes and they will appear as apostles. Have we not seen and heard the ex cathedra Jung? And does it need a prophet to discern that Freud is on the brink of a Weltanschauung — or at least a Menschanschauung, which is a much more risky affair? What detains him? Two things. First and foremost, the moral issue. And next, but more vital, he can't get down to the rock on which he must build his church.

Let us look to ourselves. This new doctrine — it will be called no less — has been subtly and insidiously suggested to us, gradually inoculated into us. It is true that doctors are the priests, nay worse, the medicine-men of our decadent society. Psychoanalysis has made the most of the opportunity.

First and foremost the issue is a moral issue. It is not here a matter of reform, new moral values. It is the life or death of all morality. The leaders among the psychoanalysts know what they have in hand. Probably most of their followers are ignorant, and therefore pseudo-innocent. But it all amounts to the same thing.

Psychoanalysis is out, under a therapeutic disguise, to do away entirely with the moral faculty in man. Let us fling the challenge, and then we can take sides in all fairness.

The psychoanalytic leaders know what they are about, and shrewdly keep quiet, going gently. Yet, however gently they go, they set the moral stones rolling. At every step the most innocent and unsuspecting analyst starts a little landslide. The old world is yielding under us. Without any direct attack, it comes loose under the march of the psychoanalyst, and we hear the dull rumble of the incipient avalanche. We are in for a debacle.

But at least let us know what we are in for. If we are to rear a serpent against ourselves, let us at least refuse to nurse it in our temples or to call it the cock of Esculapius. It is time the white garb of the therapeutic cant was stripped off the psychoanalyst. And now that we feel the strange crackling and convulsion in our moral foundations, let us at least look at the house which we are bringing down over our heads so blithely.

Long ago we watched in frightened anticipation when Freud set out on his adventure into the hinterland of human consciousness. He was seeking for the unknown sources of the mysterious stream of consciousness. Immortal phrase of the immortal James! Oh stream of hell which undermined my adolescence! The stream of consciousness! I felt it streaming through my brain, in at one ear and out at the other. And again I was sure it went round in my cranium, like Homer's Ocean, encircling my established mind. And sometimes I felt it must bubble up in the cerebellum and wind its way through all the convolutions of the true brain. Horrid stream! Whence did it come, and whither was it bound? The stream of consciousness!

And so, who could remain unmoved when Freud seemed suddenly to plunge towards the origins? Suddenly he stepped out of the conscious into the unconscious, out of the everywhere into the nowhere, like some supreme explorer. He walks straight through the wall of sleep, and we hear him rumbling in the cavern of dreams. The impenetrable is not impenetrable, unconsciousness is not nothingness. It is sleep, that wall of darkness which limits our day. Walk bang into the wall, and behold the wall isn't there. It is the vast darkness of a cavern's mouth, the cavern of anterior darkness whence issues the stream of consciousness.

With dilated hearts we watched Freud disappearing into the cavern of darkness, which is sleep and unconsciousness to us, darkness which issues in the foam of all our day's consciousness. He was making for the origins. We watched his ideal candle flutter and go small. Then we waited, as men do wait, always expecting the wonder of wonders. He came back with dreams to sell.

But sweet heaven, what merchandise! What dreams, dear heart! What was there in the cave? Alas that we ever looked! Nothing but a huge slimy serpent of sex, and heaps of excrement, and a myriad repulsive little horrors spawned between sex and excrement.

Is it true? Does the great unknown of sleep contain nothing else? No lovely spirits in the anterior regions of our being? None! Imagine the unspeakable horror of the repressions Freud brought home to us. Gagged, bound, maniacal repressions, sexual complexes, faecal inhibitions, dream-monsters. We tried to repudiate them. But no, they were there, demonstrable. These were the horrid things that ate our souls and caused our helpless neuroses.

We had felt that perhaps we were wrong inside, but we had never imagined it so bad. However, in the name of healing and medicine we prepared to accept it all. If it was all just a result of illness, we were prepared to go through with it. The analyst promised us that the tangle of complexes would be unravelled, the obsessions would evaporate, the monstrosities would dissolve, sublimate, when brought into the light of day. Once all the dream-horrors were translated into full consciousness, they would sublimate into — well,

we don't quite know what. But anyhow, they would sublimate. Such is the charm of a new phrase that we accepted this sublimation process without further question. If our complexes were going to sublimate once they were surgically exposed to full mental consciousness, why, best perform the operation.

Thus analysis set off gaily on its therapeutic course. But like Hippolytus, we ran too near the sea's edge. After all, if complexes exist only as abnormalities which can be removed, psychoanalysis has not far to go. Our own horses ran away with us. We began to realize that complexes were not just abnormalities. They were part of the stock-in-trade of the normal unconscious. The only abnormality, so far, lies in bringing them into consciousness.

This creates a new issue. Psychoanalysis, the moment it begins to demonstrate the nature of the unconscious, is assuming the role of psychology. Thus the new science of psychology proceeds to inform us that our complexes are not just mere interlockings in the mechanism of the psyche, as was taught by one of the first and most brilliant of the analysts, a man now forgotten. He fully realized that even the psyche itself depends on a certain organic, mechanistic activity, even as life depends on the mechanistic organism of the body. The mechanism of the psyche could have its hitches, certain parts could stop working, even as the parts of the body can stop their functioning. This arrest in some part of the functioning psyche gave rise to a complex, even as the stopping of one little cog-wheel in a machine will arrest a whole section of that machine. This was the origin of the complex-theory, purely mechanistic. Now the analyst found that a

complex did not necessarily vanish when brought into consciousness. Why should it? Hence he decided that it did not arise from the stoppage of any little wheel. For it refused to disappear, no matter how many psychic wheels were started. Finally, then, a complex could not be regarded as the result of an inhibition.

Here is the new problem. If a complex is not caused by the inhibition of some so-called normal sex-impulse, what on earth is it caused by? It obviously refuses to sublimate — or to come undone when exposed and prodded. It refuses to answer to the promptings of normal sex-impulse. You can remove all possible inhibitions of the normal sex desire, and still you cannot remove the complex. All you have done is to make conscious a desire which previously was unconscious.

This is the moral dilemma of psychoanalysis. The analyst set out to cure neurotic humanity by removing the cause of the neurosis.

He finds that the cause of neurosis lies in some unadmitted sex desire. After all he has said about inhibition of normal sex, he is brought at last to realize that at the root of almost every neurosis lies some incest-craving, and that this incest-craving is not the result of inhibition of normal sex-craving. Now see the dilemma — it is a fearful one. If the incest-craving is not the outcome of any inhibition of normal desire, if it actually exists and refuses to give way before any criticism, what then? What remains but to accept it as part of the normal sex-manifestation?

Here is an issue which analysis is perfectly willing to face. Among themselves the analysts are bound to accept the incest-craving as part of the normal sexuality of man, normal, but suppressed, because of moral and perhaps biological fear. Once, however, you accept the incest-craving as part of the normal sexuality of man, you must remove all repression of incest itself. In fact, you must admit incest as you now admit sexual marriage, as a duty even. Since at last it works out that neurosis is not the result of inhibition of so-called normal sex, but of inhibition of incest-craving. Any inhibition must be wrong, since inevitably in the end it causes neurosis and insanity. Therefore the inhibition of incest-craving is wrong, and this wrong is the cause of practically all modern neurosis and insanity.

Psychoanalysis will never openly state this conclusion. But it is to this conclusion that every analyst must, willy-nilly, consciously or unconsciously, bring his patient.

Trigant Burrow says that Freud's unconscious does but represent our conception of conscious sexual life as this latter exists in a state of repression. Thus Freud's unconscious amounts practically to no more than our re pressed

incest impulses. Again, Burrow says that it is knowledge of sex that constitutes sin, and not sex itself. It is when the mind turns to consider and know the great affective-passional functions and emotions that sin enters. Adam and Eve fell, not because they had sex, or even because they committed the sexual act, but because they became aware of their sex and of the possibility of the act. When sex became to them a mental object — that is, when they discovered that they could deliberately enter upon and enjoy and even provoke sexual activity in themselves, then they were cursed and cast out of Eden. Then man became self-responsible; he entered on his own career.

Both these assertions by Burrow seem to us brilliantly true. But must we inevitably draw the conclusion psychoanalysis draws? Because we discover in the unconscious the repressed body of our incest-craving, and because the recognition of desire, the making a mental objective of a certain desire causes the introduction of the sin motive, the desire in itself being beyond criticism or moral judgment, must we therefore accept the incest-craving as part of our natural desire and proceed to put it into practice, as being at any rate a lesser evil than neurosis and insanity?

It is a question. One thing, however, psychoanalysis all along the line fails to determine, and that is the nature of the pristine unconscious in man. The incest-craving is or is not inherent in the pristine psyche. When Adam and Eve became aware of sex in themselves, they became aware of that which was pristine in them, and which preceded all knowing. But when the analyst discovers the incest motive in the unconscious, surely he is only discovering a term of humanity's repressed idea of sex. It is not even suppressed sex-consciousness, but repressed. That is, it is nothing pristine and anterior to mentality. It is in itself the mind's ulterior motive. That is, the incest-craving is propagated in the pristine unconscious by the mind itself, even though unconsciously. The mind acts as incubus and procreator of its own horrors, deliberately unconsciously. And the incest motive is in its origin not a pristine impulse, but a logical extension of the existent idea of sex and love. The mind, that is, transfers the idea of incest into the affective-passional psyche, and keeps it there as a repressed motive.

This is as yet a mere assertion. It cannot be made good until we determine the nature of the true, pristine unconscious, in which all our genuine impulse arises — a very different affair from that sack of horrors which psychoanalysts would have us believe is source of motivity. The Freudian unconscious is the cellar in which the mind keeps its own bastard spawn. The true unconscious is the well-head, the fountain of real motivity. The sex of which Adam and Eve became conscious derived from the very God who bade them be not conscious of it — it was not spawn produced by secondary propagation from the mental

consciousness itself.

CHAPTER II

THE INCEST MOTIVE AND IDEALISM

It is obvious we cannot recover our moral footing until we can in some way determine the true nature of the unconscious. The word unconscious itself is a mere definition by negation and has no positive meaning. Freud no doubt prefers it for this reason. He rejects subconscious and preconscious, because both these would imply a sort of nascent consciousness, the shadowy half-consciousness which precedes mental realization. And by his unconscious he intends no such thing. He wishes rather to convey, we imagine, that which recoils from consciousness, that which reacts in the psyche away from mental consciousness.

His unconscious is, we take it, that part of the human consciousness which, though mental, ideal in its nature, yet is unwilling to expose itself to full recognition, and so recoils back into the affective regions and acts there as a secret agent, unconfessed, unadmitted, potent, and usually destructive. The whole body of our repressions makes up our unconscious.

The question lies here: whether a repression is a primal impulse which has been deterred from fulfilment, or whether it is an idea which is refused enactment. Is a repression a repressed passional impulse, or is it an idea which we suppress and refuse to put into practice — nay, which we even refuse to own at all, a disowned, outlawed idea, which exists rebelliously outside the pale?

Man can inhibit the true passional impulses and so produce a derangement in the psyche. This is a truism nowadays, and we are grateful to psychoanalysis for helping to make it so. But man can do more than this. Finding himself in a sort of emotional cul de sac, he can proceed to deduce from his given emotional and passional premises conclusions which are not emotional or passional at all, but just logical, abstract, ideal. That is, a man finds it impossible to realize himself in marriage. He recognizes the fact that his emotional, even passional, regard for his mother is deeper than it ever could be for a wife. This makes him unhappy, for he knows that passional communion is not complete unless it be also sexual. He has a body of sexual passion which he cannot transfer to a wife. He has a profound love for his mother. Shut in between walls of tortured and increasing passion, he must find some escape or fall down the pit of insanity and death. What is the only possible escape? To seek in the arms of the mother the refuge which offers nowhere else. And so the incest-motive is born. All the labored

explanations of the psychoanalysts are unnecessary. The incest motive is a logical deduction of the human reason, which has recourse to this last extremity, to save itself. Why is the human reason in peril? That is another story. At the moment we are merely considering the origin of the incest motive.

The logical conclusion of incest is, of course, a profound decision in the human soul, a decision affecting the deepest passional centers. It rouses the deepest instinctive opposition. And therefore it must be kept secret until this opposition is either worn away or persuaded away. Hence the repression and ultimate disclosure.

Now here we see the secret working of the process of idealism. By idealism we understand the motivizing of the great affective sources by means of ideas mentally derived. As for example the incest motive, which is first and foremost a logical deduction made by the human reason, even if unconsciously made, and secondly is introduced into the affective, passional sphere, where it now proceeds to serve as a principle for action.

This motivizing of the passional sphere from the ideal is the final peril of human consciousness. It is the death of all spontaneous, creative life, and the substituting of the mechanical principle.

It is obvious that the ideal becomes a mechanical principle, if it be applied to the affective soul as a fixed motive. An ideal established in control of the passional soul is no more and no less than a supreme machine-principle. And a machine, as we know, is the active unit of the material world. Thus we see how it is that in the end pure idealism is identical with pure materialism, and the most completely identical. The ideal is but the god in the machine — the little, fixed, machine principle which works the human psyche automatically.

We are now in the last stages of idealism. And psychoanalysis alone has the courage necessary to conduct us through these last stages. The identity of love with sex, the single necessity for fulfilment through love, these are our fixed ideals. We must fulfil these ideals in their extremity. And this brings us finally to incest, even incest-worship. We have no option, whilst our ideals stand.

Why? Because incest is the logical conclusion of our ideals, when these ideals have to be carried into passional effect. And idealism has no escape from logic. And once he has built himself in the shape of any ideal,

man will go to any logical length rather than abandon his ideal corpus. Nay, some great cataclysm has to throw him down and destroy the whole fabric of his life before the motor-principle of his dominant ideal is destroyed. Hence psychoanalysis as the advance-guard of science, the evangel of the last ideal liberty. For of course there is a great fascination in a completely effected

idealism. Man is then undisputed master of his own fate, and captain of his own soul. But better say engine-driver, for in truth he is no more than the little god in the machine, this master of fate. He has invented his own automatic principles, and he works himself according to them, like any little mechanic inside the works.

But ideal or not, we are all of us between the pit and the pendulum, or the walls of red-hot metal, as may be. If we refuse the Freudian pis-aller as a means of escape, we have still to find some way out. For there we are, all of us, trapped in a corner where we cannot, and simply do not know how to fulfil our own natures, passionately. We don't know in which way fulfilment lies. If psychoanalysis discovers incest, small blame to it.

Yet we do know this much: that the pushing of the ideal to any further lengths will not avail us anything. We have actually to go back to our own unconscious. But not to the unconscious which is the inverted reflection of our ideal consciousness. We must discover, if we can, the true unconscious, where our life bubbles up in us, prior to any mentality. The first bubbling life in us, which is innocent of any mental alteration, this is the unconscious. It is pristine, not in any way ideal. It is the spontaneous origin from which it behooves us to live.

What then is the true unconscious? It is not a shadow cast from the mind. It is the spontaneous life-motive in every organism. Where does it begin? It begins where life begins. But that is too vague. It is no use talking about life and the unconscious in bulk. You can talk about electricity, because electricity is a homogeneous force, conceivable apart from any incorporation. But life is inconceivable as a general thing. It exists only in living creatures. So that life begins, now as always, in an individual living creature. In the beginning of the individual living creature is the beginning of life, every time and always, and life has no beginning apart from this. Any attempt at a further generalization takes us merely beyond the consideration of life into the region of mechanical homogeneous force. This is shown in the cosmologies of eastern religions.

The beginning of life is in the beginning of the first individual creature. You may call the naked, unicellular bit of plasm the first individual, if you like. Mentally, as far as thinkable simplicity goes, it is the first. So that we may say that life begins in the first naked unicellular organism. And where life begins the unconscious also begins. But mark, the first naked unicellular organism is an individual. It is a specific individual, not a mathematical unit, like a unit of force.

Where the individual begins, life begins. The two are inseparable, life and individuality. And also, where the individual begins, the unconscious, which is the specific life-motive, also begins. We are trying to trace the unconscious to its source. And we find that this source, in all the higher organisms, is the first

ovule cell from which an individual organism arises. At the moment of conception, when a procreative male nucleus fuses with the nucleus of the female germ, at that moment does a new unit of life, of consciousness, arise in the universe. Is it not obvious? The unconscious has no other source than this, this first fused nucleus of the ovule.

Useless to talk about the unconscious as if it were a homogeneous force like electricity. You can only deal with the unconscious when you realize that in every individual organism an individual nature, an individual consciousness, is spontaneously created at the moment of conception. We say created. And by created we mean spontaneously appearing in the universe, out of nothing. *Ex nihilo nihil fit*. It is true that an individual is also generated. By the fusion of two nuclei, male and female, we understand the process of generation. And from the process of generation we may justly look for a new unit, according to the law of cause and effect. As a natural or automatic result of the process of generation we may look for a new unit of existence. But the nature of this new unit must derive from the natures of the parents, also by law. And this we deny. We deny that the nature of any new creature derives from the natures of its parents. The nature of the infant does not follow from the natures of its parents. The nature of the infant is not just a new permutation-and-combination of elements contained in the natures of the parents. There is in the nature of the infant that which is utterly unknown in the natures of the parents, something which could never be derived from the natures of all the existent individuals or previous individuals. There is in the nature of the infant something entirely new, underived, underivable, something which is, and which will forever remain, causeless. And this something is the unanalyzable, indefinable reality of individuality. Every time at the moment of conception of every higher organism an individual nature incomprehensibly arises in the universe, out of nowhere. Granted the whole cause-and-effect process of generation and evolution, still the individual is not explained. The individual unit of consciousness and being which arises at the conception of every higher organism arises by pure creation, by a process not susceptible to understanding, a process which takes place outside the field of mental comprehension, where mentality, which is definitely limited, cannot and does not exist.

This causeless created nature of the individual being is the same as the old mystery of the divine nature of the soul. Religion was right and science is wrong. Every individual creature has a soul, a specific individual nature the origin of which cannot be found in any cause-and-effect process whatever. Cause-and-effect will not explain even the individuality of a single dandelion. There is no assignable cause, and no logical reason, for individuality. On the contrary,

individuality appears in defiance of all scientific law, in defiance even of reason.

Having established so much, we can really approach the unconscious. By the unconscious we wish to indicate that essential unique nature of every individual creature, which is, by its very nature, unanalyzable, undefinable, inconceivable. It cannot be conceived, it can only be experienced, in every single instance. And being inconceivable, we will call it the unconscious. As a matter of fact, soul would be a better word. By the unconscious we do mean the soul. But the word soul has been vitiated by the idealistic use, until nowadays it means only that which a man conceives him self to be. And that which a man conceives himself to be is something far different from his true unconscious. So we must relinquish the ideal word soul.

If, however, the unconscious is inconceivable, how do we know it at all? We know it by direct experience. All the best part of knowledge is inconceivable. We know the sun. But we cannot conceive the sun, unless we are willing to accept some theory of burn-ingases, some cause-and-effect nonsense. And even if we do have a mental conception of the sun as a sphere of blazing gas — which it certainly isn't — we are just as far from knowing what blaze is. Knowledge is always a matter of whole experience, what St. Paul calls knowing in full, and never a matter of mental conception merely. This is indeed the point of all full knowledge: that it is contained mainly within the unconscious, its mental or conscious reference being only a sort of extract or shadow.

It is necessary for us to know the unconscious, or we cannot live, just as it is necessary for us to know the sun. But we need not explain the unconscious, any more than we need explain the sun. We can't do either, anyway. We know the sun by beholding him and watching his motions and feeling his changing power. The same with the unconscious. We watch it in all its manifestations, its unfolding incarnations. We watch it in all its processes and its unaccountable evolutions, and these we register.

For though the unconscious is the creative element, and though, like the soul, it is beyond all law of cause and effect in its totality, yet in its processes of self-realization it follows the laws of cause and effect. The processes of cause and effect are indeed part of the work ing out of this incomprehensible self-realization of the individual unconscious. The great laws of the universe are no more than the fixed habits of the living unconscious.

What we must needs do is to try to trace still further the habits of the true unconscious, and by mental recognition of these habits break the limits which we have imposed on the movement of the unconscious. For the whole point about the true unconscious is that it is all the time moving forward, beyond the range of its own fixed laws or habits. It is no good trying to superimpose an ideal

nature upon the unconscious. We have to try to recognize the true nature and then leave the unconscious itself to prompt new movement and new being — the creative progress.

What we are suffering from now is the restriction of the unconscious within certain ideal limits. The more we force the ideal the more we rupture the true movement. Once we can admit the known, but incomprehensible, presence of the integral unconscious; once we can trace it home in ourselves and follow its first revealed movements; once we know how it habitually unfolds itself; once we can scientifically determine its laws and processes in ourselves: then at last we can begin to live from the spontaneous initial prompting, instead of from the dead machine-principles of ideas and ideals. There is a whole science of the creative unconscious, the unconscious in its law-abiding activities. And of this science we do not even know the first term. Yes, when we know that the unconscious appears by creation, as a new individual reality in every newly-fertilized germ-cell, then we know the very first item of the new science. But it needs a super-scientific grace before we can admit this first new item of knowledge. It means that science abandons its intellectualist position and embraces the old religious faculty. But it does not thereby become less scientific, it only becomes at last complete in knowledge.

CHAPTER III

THE BIRTH OF CONSCIOUSNESS

It is useless to try to determine what is consciousness or what is knowledge. Who cares anyhow, since we know without definitions. But what we fail to know, yet what we must know, is the nature of the pristine consciousness which lies integral and progressive within every functioning organism. The brain is the seat of the ideal consciousness. And ideal consciousness is only the dead end of consciousness, the spun silk. The vast bulk of consciousness is non-cerebral. It is the sap of our life, of all life.

We are forced to attribute to a star-fish, or to a nettle, its own peculiar and integral con-

sciousness. This throws us at once out of the ideal castle of the brain into the flux of sap-consciousness. But let us not jump too far in one bound. Let us refrain from taking a sheer leap down the abyss of consciousness, down to the invertebrates and the protococci. Let us cautiously scramble down the human declivities. Or rather let us try to start somewhere near the foot of the calvary of human consciousness. Let us consider the child in the womb. Is the foetus conscious? It must be, since it carries on an independent and progressive self-development. This consciousness obviously cannot be ideal, cannot be cerebral, since it precedes any vestige of cerebration. And yet it is an integral, individual consciousness, having its own single purpose and progression. Where can it be centered, how can it operate, before even nerves are formed? For it does steadily and persistently operate,

even spinning the nerves and brain as a web for its own motion, like some subtle spider.

What is the spinning spider of the first human consciousness — or rather, where is the center at which this consciousness lies and spins? Since there must be a center of consciousness in the tiny foetus, it must have been there from the very beginning. There it must have been, in the first fused nucleus of the ovule. And if we could but watch this prime nucleus, we should no doubt realize that throughout all the long and incalculable history of the individual it still remains central and prime, the source and clue of the living unconscious, the origin. As in the first moment of conception, so to the end of life in the individual, the first nucleus remains the creative-productive center, the quick, both of consciousness

and of organic development.

And where in the developed foetus shall we look for this creative-productive quick? Shall we expect it in the brain or in the heart? Surely our own subjective wisdom tells us, what science can verify, that it lies beneath the navel of the folded foetus. Surely that prime center, which is the very first nucleus of the fertilized ovule, lies situated beneath the navel of all womb-born creatures. There, from the beginning, it lay in its mysterious relation to the outer, active universe. There it lay, perfectly associated with the parent body. There it acted on its own peculiar independence, drawing the whole stream of creative blood upon itself, and, spinning within the parental blood-stream, slowly creating or bodying forth its own incarnate amplification. All the time between the quick of life in the foetus and the great outer universe there exists a perfect correspondence, upon which correspondence the astrologers based their science in the days before mental consciousness had arrogated all knowledge unto itself.

The foetus is not personally conscious. But then what is personality if not ideal in its origin? The foetus is, however, radically, individually conscious. From the active quick, the nuclear center, it remains single and integral in its activity. At this center it distinguishes itself utterly from the surrounding universe, whereby both are modified. From this center the whole individual arises, and upon this center the whole universe, by implication, impinges. For the fixed and stable universe of law and matter, even the whole cosmos, would wear out and disintegrate if it did not rest and find renewal in the quick center of creative life in individual creatures.

And since this center has absolute location in the first fertilized nucleus, it must have location still in the developed foetus, and in the mature man. And where is this location in the unborn infant? Beneath the burning influx of the navel. Where is it in the adult man? Still beneath the navel. As primal affective center it lies within the solar plexus of the nervous system.

We do not pretend to use technical language. But surely our meaning is plain even to correct scientists, when we assert that in all mammals the center of primal, constructive consciousness and activity lies in the middle front of the abdomen, beneath the navel, in the great nerve center called the solar plexus. How do we know? We feel it, as we feel hunger or love or hate. Once we know what we are, science can proceed to analyze our knowledge, demonstrate its truth or its untruth.

We all of us know what it is to handle a new born, or at least a quite young infant. We know what it is to lay the hand on the round little abdomen, the round, pulpy little head. We know where is life, where is pulp. We have seen blind puppies, blind kittens crawling. They give strange little cries. Whence

these cries? Are they mental exclamations? As in a ventriloquist, they come from the stomach. There lies the wakeful center. There speaks the first consciousness, the audible unconscious', in the squeak of these infantile things, which is so curiously and indescribably moving, reacting direct upon the great abdominal center, the preconscious mind in man.

There at the navel, the first rupture has taken place, the first break in continuity. There is the scar of dehiscence, scar at once of our pain and splendor of individuality. Here is the mark of our isolation in the uni verse, stigma and seal of our free, perfect singleness. Hence the lotus of the navel. Hence the mystic contemplation of the navel. It is the upper mind losing itself in the lower first-mind, that which is last in consciousness reverting to that which is first.

A mother will realize better than a philosopher. She knows the rupture which has finally separated her child into its own single, free existence. She knows the strange, sensitive rose of the navel: how it quivers conscious; all its pain, its want for the old connection; all its joy and chuckling exultation in sheer organic singleness and individual liberty.

The powerful, active psychic center in a new child is the great solar plexus of the sympathetic system. From this center the child is drawn to the mother again, crying, to heal the new wound, to re-establish the old oneness.

This center directs the little mouth which, blind and anticipatory, seeks the breast. How could it find the breast, blind and mindless little mouth? But it needs no eyes nor mind. From the great first-mind of the abdomen it moves direct, with an anterior knowledge almost like magnetic propulsion, as if the little mouth were drawn or propelled to the maternal breast by vital magnetism, whose center of directive control lies in the solar plexus.

In a measure, this taking of the breast reinstates the old connection with the parent body. It is a strange sinking back to the old unison, the old organic continuum — a recovery of the pre-natal state. But at the same time it is a deep, avid gratification in drinking-in the sustenance of a new individuality. It is a deep gratification in the exertion of a new, voluntary power. The child acts now separately from its own individual center and exerts still a control over the adjacent universe, the parent body.

So the warm life-stream passes again from the parent into the aching abdomen of the severed child. Life cannot progress without these ruptures, severances, cataclysms; pain is a living reality, not merely a deathly. Why haven't we the courage for life-pains? If we could depart from our old tenets of the mind, if we could fathom our own unconscious sapience, we should find we have courage and to spare. We are too mentally domesticated.

The great magnetic or dynamic center of first-consciousness acts powerfully at

the solar plexus. Here the child knows beyond all knowledge. It does not see with the eyes, it cannot perceive, much less conceive. Nothing can it apprehend; the eyes are a strange plas-mic, nascent darkness. Yet from the belly it knows, with a directness of knowledge that frightens us and may even seem abhorrent. The mother, also, from the bowels knows her child — as she can never, never know it from the head. There is no thought nor speech, only direct, ventral gurglings and cooings. From the passional nerve-center of the solar plexus in the mother passes direct, unspeakable effluence and intercommunication, sheer effluent contact with the palpitating nerve-center in the belly of the child. Knowledge, unspeakable knowledge interchanged, which must be diluted by eternities of materialization before they can come to expression.

It is like a lovely, suave, fluid, creative electricity that flows in a circuit between the great nerve-centers in mother and child. The electricity of the universe is a sundering force. But this lovely polarized vitalism is creative. It passes in a circuit between the two poles of the passional unconscious in the two now separated beings. It establishes in each that first primal consciousness which is the sacred, all-containing head-stream of all our consciousness.

But this is not all. The flux between mother and child is not all sweet unison. There is as well the continually widening gap. A wonderful rich communion, and at the same time a continually increasing cleavage. If only we could realize that all through life these are the two synchronizing activities of love, of creativity. For the end, the goal, is the perfecting of each single individuality, unique in itself — which cannot take place without a perfected harmony between the beloved, a harmony which depends on the at-last-clarified singleness of each being, a singleness equilibrated, polarized in one by the counter-posing singleness of the other.

So the child. In its wonderful unison with the mother it is at the same time extricating itself into single, separate, independent existence. The one process, of unison, cannot go on without the other process, of purified severance. At first the child cleaves back to the old source. It clings and adheres. The sympathetic center of unification, or at least unison, alone seems awake. The child wails with the strange desolation of severance, wails for the old connection. With joy and peace it returns to the breast, almost as to the womb.

But not quite. Even in sucking it discovers its new identity and power. Its own new, separate power. It draws itself back suddenly; it waits. It has heard something? No. But another center has flashed awake. The child stiffens itself and holds back. What is it, wind? Stomach-ache? Not at all. Listen to some of the screams. The ears can hear deeper than eyes can see. The first scream of the ego. The scream of asserted isolation. The scream of revolt from connection, the

revolt from union. There is a violent anti-maternal motion, anti-everything. There is a refractory, bad-tempered negation of everything, a hurricane of temper. What then? After such tremendous unison as the womb implies, no wonder there are storms of rage and separation. The child is screaming itself rid of the old womb, kicking itself in a blind paroxysm into freedom, into separate, negative independence.

So be it, there must be paroxysms, since there must be independence. Then the mother gets angry too. It affects her, though perhaps not as badly as it affects outsiders. Nothing acts more direct on the great primal nerve-centers than the screaming of an infant, this blind screaming negation of connections. It is the friction of irritation itself. Everybody is implicated, just as they would be if the air were surcharged with electricity. The mother is perhaps less affected because she understands primarily, or because she is polarized directly with the child. Yet she, too, must be angry, in her measure, inevitably.

It is a blind, almost mechanistic effort on the part of the new organism to extricate itself from cohesion with the circumambient universe. It applies direct to the mother. But it affects everybody. The great centers of response vibrate with a maddening, sometimes unbearable friction. What centers? Not the great sympathetic plexus this time, but its corresponding voluntary ganglion. The' great ganglion of the spinal system, the lumbar ganglion, negatively polarizes the solar plexus in the primal psychic activity of a human individual. When a child screams with temper, it sends out from the lumbar ganglion violent waves of frictional repudiation, extraordinary. The little back has an amazing power once it stiffens itself. In the lumbar ganglion the unconscious now vibrates tremendously in the activity of sundering, separation. Mother and child, polarized, are primarily affected. Often the mother is so sure of her possession of the child that she is almost unmoved. But the child continues, till the frictional response is roused in the mother, her anger rises, there is a flash, an outburst like lightning. And then the storm subsides. The pure act of sundering is effected. Each being is clarified further into its own single, individual self, further perfected, separated.

Hence a duality, now, in primal consciousness in the infant. The warm rosy abdomen, tender with chuckling unison, and the little back strengthening itself. The child kicks away, into independence. It stiffens its spine in the strength of its own private and separate, inviolable existence. It will admit now of no trespass. It is awake now in a new pride, a new self-assertion. The sense of antagonistic freedom is aroused. Clumsy old adhesions must be ruthlessly fused. And so, from the lumbar ganglion the fiery-tempered infant asserts its new, blind will.

And as the child fights the mother fights. Sometimes she fights to keep her

refractory child, and sometimes she fights to kick him off, as a mare kicks off her too-babyish foal. It is the great voluntary center of the unconscious flashing into action. Flashing from the deep lumbar ganglion in the mother to the newly-awakened, corresponding center in the child goes the swift negative current, setting each of them asunder in clean individuality. So long as the force meets its polarized response all is well. When a force flashes and has no response, there is devastation. How weary in the back is the nursing mother whose great center of repudiation is suppressed or weak; how a child droops if only the sympathetic unison is established.

So, the polarity of the dynamic consciousness, from the very start of life! Direct flowing and flashing of two consciousness-streams, active in the bringing forth of an individual being. The sweet commingling, the sharp clash of opposition. And no possibility of creative development without this polarity, this dual circuit of direct, spontaneous, honest interchange. No hope of life apart from this. The primal unconscious pulsing in its circuits between two beings: love and wrath, cleaving and repulsion, inglutination and excrementation. What is the good of inventing "ideal" behavior? How order the path of the unconscious? For let us now realize that we cannot,

even with the best intentions, proceed to order the path of our own unconscious without vitally deranging the life-flow of those connected with us. If you disturb the current at one pole, it must be disturbed at the other. Here is a new moral aspect to life.

CHAPTER IV

THE CHILD AND HIS MOTHER

IN asserting that the seat of consciousness in a young infant is in the abdomen, we do not pretend to suggest that all the other conscious-centers are utterly dormant. Once a child is born, the whole nervous and cerebral system comes awake, even the brain's memories begin to glimmer, recognition and cognition soon begin to take place. But the spontaneous control and all the prime developing activity derive from the great affective centers of the abdomen. In the solar plexus is the first great fountain and issue of infantile consciousness. There, beneath the navel, lies the active human first-mind, the prime unconscious. From the moment of conception, when the first nucleus is formed, to the moment of death, when this same nucleus breaks again, the first great active center of human consciousness lies in the solar plexus.

The movement of development in any creature is, however, towards a florescent individuality. The ample, mature, unfolded individual stands perfect, perfect in himself, but also perfect in his harmonious relation to those nearest him and to all the universe. Whilst only the one great center of consciousness is awake, in the abdomen, the infant has no separate existence, his whole nature is contained in the conjunction with the parent. As soon as the complementary negative pole arouses the voluntary center of the lumbar ganglion, there is at once a retraction into independence and an assertion of singleness. The back strengthens itself.

But still the circuit of polarity, dual as it is, positive and negative from the positive-sympathetic and the negative-voluntary poles, still depends on the duality of two beings — it is still extra-individual. Each individual is vitally dependent on the other, for the life circuit.

Let us consider for a moment the kind of consciousness manifested at the two great primary centers. At the solar plexus the new psyche acts in a mode of attractive vitalism, drawing its objective unto itself as by vital magnetism. Here it drinks in, as it were, the contiguous universe, as during the womb-period it drank from the living continuum of the mother. It is darkly self-centered, exultant and positive in its own existence. It is all-in-all to itself, its own great subject. It knows no objective. It only knows its own vital potency, which potency draws the external object unto itself, subjectively, as the blood-stream was drawn into the foetus, by subjective attraction. Here the psyche is to itself

the All. Blindly self-positive.

This is the first mode of consciousness for every living thing — fascinating in all young things. The second half of the same mode commences as soon as direct activity sets up in the lumbar ganglion. Then the psyche recoils upon itself, in its first reaction against continuity with the outer universe. It recoils even against its own mode of assimilatory unison. Even it must break off, interrupt the great psychic-assimilation process which goes on at the sympathetic center. It must recoil clean upon itself, break loose from any attachment whatsoever. And then it must try its power, often playfully.

This reaction is still subjective. When a child stiffens and draws away, when it screams with pure temper, it takes no note of that from which it recoils. It has no objective consciousness of that from which it reacts, the mother principally. It is like a swimmer endlessly kicking the water away behind him, with strong legs vividly active from the spinal ganglia. Like a man in a boat pushing off from the shore, it merely thrusts away, in order to ride free, ever more free. It is a purely subjective motion, in the negative direction.

After our long training in objectivation, and our epoch of worship of the objective mode, it is perhaps difficult for us to realize the strong, blind power of the unconscious on its first plane of activity. It is something quite different from what we call egoism — which is really mentally derived — for the ego is merely the sum-total of what we conceive ourselves to be. The powerful pristine subjectivity of the unconscious on its first plane is, on the other hand, the root of all our consciousness and being, darkly tenacious. Here we are grounded, say what we may. And if we break the spell of this first subjective mode, we break our own main root and live rootless, shiftless, groundless.

So that the powerful subjectivity of the unconscious, where the self is all-in-all unto itself, active in strong desirous psychic assimilation or in direct repudiation of the contiguous universe; this first plane of psychic activity, polarized in the solar plexus and the lumbar ganglion of each individual but established in a circuit with the corresponding poles of another individual: this is the first scope of life and being for every human individual, and is beyond question. But we must again remark that the whole circuit is established between two individuals — that neither is a free thing-unto-itself — and that the very fact of established polarity between the two maintains that correspondence between the individual entity and the external universe which is the clue to all growth and development. The pure subjectivity of the first plane of consciousness is no more selfish than the pure objectivity of any other plane. How can it be? How can any form of pure, balanced polarity between two vital individuals be in any sense selfish on the part of one individual? We have got our moral values all wrong.

Save for healthy instinct, the moralistic human race would have exterminated itself long ago. And yet man must be moral, at the very root moral. The essence of morality is the basic desire to preserve the perfect correspondence between the self and the object, to have no trespass and no breach of integrity, nor yet any refaulture in the vitalistic interchange.

As yet we see the unconscious active on one plane only and entirely dependent on two individuals. But immediately following the establishment of the circuit of the powerful, subjective, abdominal plane comes the quivering of the whole system into a new degree of consciousness. And two great upper centers are awake.

The diaphragm really divides the human body, psychically as well as organically. The two centers beneath the diaphragm are centers of dark subjectivity, centripetal, assimilative. Once these are established, in the thorax the two first centers of objective consciousness become active, with ever-increasing intensity. The great thoracic sympathetic plexus rouses like a sun in the breast, the thoracic ganglion fills the shoulders with strength. There are now two planes of primary consciousness — the first, the lower, the subjective unconscious, active beneath the diaphragm, and the second upper, objective plane, active above the diaphragm, in the breast.

Let us realize that the subjective and objective of the unconscious are not the same as the subjective and the objective of the mind. Here we have no concepts to deal with, no static objects in the shape of ideas. We have none of that tiresome business of establishing the relation between the mind and its own ideal object, or the discriminating between the ideal thing-in-itself and the mind of which it is the content. We are spared that hateful thing-in-itself, the idea, which is at once so all-important and so nothing. We are on straightforward solid ground; there is no abstraction.

The unconscious subjectivity is, in its positive manifestation, a great imbibing, and in its negative, a definite blind rejection. What we call an unconscious rejection. This subjectivity embraces alike creative emotion and physical function. It includes alike the sweet and untellable communion of love between the mother and child, the irrational reaction into separation between the two, and also the physical functioning of sucking and urination. Psychic and physical development run parallel, though they are forever distinct. The child sucking, the child urinating, this is the child acting from the great subjective centers, positive and negative. When the child sucks, there is a sympathetic circuit between it and the mother, in which the sympathetic plexus in the mother acts as negative or submissive pole to the corresponding plexus in the child. In urination there is a corresponding circuit in the voluntary centers, so that a mother seems gratified,

and is gratified, inevitably, by the excremental functioning of her child. She experiences a true polar reaction.

Child and mother have, in the first place, no objective consciousness of each other, and certainly no idea of each other. Each is a blind desideratum to the other. The strong love between them is effectual in the great abdominal centers, where all love, real love, is primarily based. Of that reflected or moon-love, derived from the head, that spurious form of love which predominates to-day, we do not speak here. It has its root in the idea: the beloved is a mental objective, endlessly appreciated, criticized, scrutinized, exhausted. This has nothing to do with the active unconscious.

Having realized that the unconscious sparkles, vibrates, travels in a strong subjective stream from the abdominal centers, connecting the child directly with the mother at corresponding poles of vitalism, we realize that the unconscious contains nothing ideal,

nothing in the least conceptual, and hence nothing in the least personal, since personality, like the ego, belongs to the conscious or mental-subjective self. So the first analyses are, or should be, so impersonal that the so-called human relations are not involved. The first relationship is neither personal nor biological — a fact which psychoanalysis has not succeeded in grasping.

For example. A child screams with terror at the touch of fur; another child loves the touch of fur, and purrs with pleasure. How now? Is it a complex? Did the father have a beard?

It is possible. But all-too-human. The physical result of rubbing fur is to set up a certain amount of frictional electricity. Frictional electricity is one of the sundering forces. It corresponds to the voluntary forces exerted at the lower spinal ganglia, the forces of anger and retraction into independence and power. An over-sympathetic child will scream with fear at the touch of fur; a refractory child will purr with pleasure. It is a reaction which involves even deeper things than sex — the primal constitution of the elementary psyche. A sympathetically overbalanced child has a horror of the electric-frictional force such as is emitted from the fur of a black cat, creature of rapacity. The same delights a fierce-willed child.

But we must admit at the same time that from earliest days a child is subject to the definite conscious psychic influences of its surroundings and will react almost automatically to a conscious-passional suggestion from the mother. In this way personal sex is prematurely evoked, and real complexes are set up. But these derive not from the spontaneous unconscious. They are in a way dictated from the deliberate, mental consciousness, even if involuntarily. Again they are a result of mental subjectivity, self-consciousness — so different from the primal

subjectivity of the unconscious.

To return, however, to the pure unconscious. When the upper centers flash awake, a whole new field of consciousness and spontaneous activity is opened out. The great sympathetic plexus of the breast is the heart's mind. This thoracic plexus corresponds directly in the upper man to the solar plexus in the lower. But it is a correspondence in creative opposition. From the sympathetic center of the breast as from a window the unconscious goes forth seeking its object, to dwell upon it. When a child leans its breast against its mother it becomes filled with a primal awareness of her — not of itself desiring her or partaking of her — but of her as she is in her self. This is the first great acquisition of primal objective knowledge, the objective content of the unconscious. Such knowledge we call the treasure of the heart. When the ancients located the first seat of consciousness in the heart, they were neither misguided nor playing with metaphor. For by consciousness they meant, as usual, objective consciousness only. And from the cardiac plexus goes forth that strange effluence of the self which seeks and dwells upon the beloved, lovingly roving like the fingers of an infant or a blind man over the face of the treasured object, gathering her mould into itself and transferring her mould forever into its own deep unconscious psyche. This is the first acquiring of objective knowledge, sightless, unspeakably direct. It is a dwelling of the child's unconscious within the form of the mother, the gathering of a pure, eternal impression. So the soul stores itself with dynamic treasures; it verily builds its own tissue of such treasure, the tissue of the developing body, each cell stored with creative dynamic content. ^

The breasts themselves are as two eyes. We do not know how much the nipples of the breast, both in man and woman, serve primarily as poles of vital conscious effluence and connection. We do not know how the nipples of the breast are as fountains leaping into the universe, or as little lamps irradiating the contiguous world, to the soul in quest.

But certainly from the passional conscious-center of the breast goes forth the first joyous discovery of the beloved, the first objective discovery of the contiguous universe, the first ministration of the self to that which is beyond the self. So, functionally, the mother ministers with the milk of her breast. But this is a yielding to the great lower plexus, the basic solar plexus. It is the breast as part also of the alimentary system — a special thing.

In sucking the hands also come awake. It is strange to notice the pictures by the old masters of the Madonna and Child. Sometimes the strange round belly of the Infant seems the predominant mystery-center, and sometimes from the tiny breast it is as if a delicate light glowed, the light of love. As if the breast should illumine the outer world in its seeking administering love. As if the breast of the

Infant glimmered its light of discovery on the adoring Mother, and she bowed, submissive to the revelation.

The little hands and arms wave, circulate, trying to touch, to grasp, to know. To grasp in caress, not to receive. To grasp in order to identify themselves with the cherished discovery, to realize the beloved. To cherish, to realize the beloved. To administer the outward-seeking self to the beloved. We give this the exclusive name of love. But it is indeed only the one direction of love, the outgoing from the lovely center of the breast — the nipple seeking, the hands delicately, caressively exploring, the eyes at last waking to perception. The eyes, the hands, these wake and are alert from the center of the breast. But the ears and feet move from the deep lower centers — the recipient ears, imbibing vibrations, the feet which press the resistant earth, controlled from the powerful lower ganglia of the spine. And thus great scope of activity opens, in the hands that wave and explore, the eyes that try to perceive, the legs, the little knees that thrust, thrust away, the small feet that curl and twinkle upon themselves, ready for the obstinate earth.

And so, also a wholeness is established within the individual. The two fields of consciousness, the first upper and the first lower, are based upon a correspondence of polarity. The first great complex circuit is now set up within the individual, between the upper and lower centers. The individual consciousness has now its own integral independent existence and activity, apart from external connection. It has its right to be alone.

CHAPTER V

THE LOVER AND THE BELOVED

Consciousness develops on successive planes. On each plane there is the dual polarity, positive and negative, of the sympathetic and voluntary nerve centers. The first plane is established between the poles of the sympathetic solar plexus and the voluntary lumbar ganglion. This is the active first plane of the subjective unconscious, from which the whole of consciousness arises.

Immediately, succeeding the first plane of subjective dynamic consciousness arises the corresponding first plane of objective consciousness, the objective unconscious, polarized in the cardiac plexus and the thoracic ganglion, in the breast. There is a perfect cor-

respondence in difference between the first abdominal and the first thoracic planes. These two planes polarize each other in a fourfold polarity, which makes the first great field of individual, self-dependent consciousness.

Each pole of the active unconscious manifests a specific activity and gives rise to a specific kind of dynamic or creative consciousness. On each plane, the negative voluntary pole complements the positive sympathetic pole, and yet the consciousness originating from the complementary poles is not merely negative versus positive, it is categorically different, opposite. Each is pure and perfect in itself.

But the moment we enter the two planes of corresponding consciousness, lower and upper, we find a whole new range of complements. The upper, dynamic-objective plane is complementary to the lower, dynamic-subjective.

The mystery of creative opposition exists all the time between the two planes, and this unison in opposition between the two planes forms the first whole field of consciousness. Within the individual the polarity is fourfold. In a relation between two individuals the polarity is already eightfold.

Now before we can have any sort of scientific, comprehensive psychology we shall have to establish the nature of the consciousness at each of the dynamic poles — the nature of the consciousness, the direction of the dynamic-vital flow, the resultant physical-organic development and activity. This we must do before we can even begin to consider a genuine system of education. Education now is widely at sea. Having ceased to steer by the pole-star of the mind, having ceased to aim at the cramming of the intellect, it veers hither and thither hopelessly and absurdly. Education can never become a serious science until the human psyche

is properly understood. And the human psyche cannot begin to be understood until we enter the dark continent of the unconscious. Having begun to explore the unconscious, we find we must go from center to center, chakra to chakra, to use an old esoteric word. We must patiently determine the psychic manifestation at each center, and moreover, as we go, we must discover the psychic results of the interaction, the polarized interaction between the dynamic centers both within and without the individual.

Here is a real job for the scientist, a job which eternity will never see finished though even to-morrow may see it well begun. It is a job which will at last free us from the most hateful of all shackles, the shackles of ideas and ideals. It is a great task of the liberators, those who work forever for the liberation of the free spontaneous psyche, the effective soul.

In these few chapters we hope to hint at the establishment of the first field of the unconscious — at the nature of the consciousness manifested at each pole — and at the already complex range of dynamic polarity between the various poles. So far we have given the merest suggestion of the nature of the first plane of the unconscious and have attempted the opening of the second or upper plane. We profess no scientific exactitude, particularly in terminology. We merely wish intelligibly to open a way.

To balance the solar plexus wakes the great plexus of the breast. In our era this plexus is the great planet of our psychic universe. In the previous sympathetic era the flower of the universal blossomed in the navel. But since Egypt the sun of creative activity beams from the breast, the heart of the supreme Man. This is to us the source of light — the loving heart, the Sacred Heart. Against this we contrast the devouring darkness of the lower man, the devouring whirlpool beneath the navel. Even theosophists don't realize that the universal lotus really blossoms in the abdomen — that our lower man, our dark, devouring whirlpool, was once the creative source, in human estimation.

But in calling the heart the sun, the source of light, we are biologically correct even. For the roots of vision are in the cardiac plexus. But if we were to consider the heart itself, not its great nerve plexus, we should have to go further than the nervous system. If we had to consider the whole lambent blood-stream, we should have to descend too deep for our unpractised minds. Suffice it here to hint that the solar plexus is the first and main clue to the great alimentary-sexual activity in man, an activity at once functional and creatively emotional, whilst the cardiac plexus is first and main clue to the respiratory system and the active-productive manifestations. The mouth and nostrils are gates to each great center, upper and lower — even the breasts have this duality. Yet the clue to respiration and hand activity and vision is in the breast, while the clue to alimentation and

passion and sex is in the lower centers. The duality goes so far and is so profound. And the polarity! The great organs, as well as the lymphatic glands, depend each on its own specific center of the unconscious; each is derived from a specific dynamic conscious-clue, what we might almost call a soul-cell. The inherent unconscious, or soul, is the first nucleus subdivided, and from its own subdivisions produced, from its own still-creative constellated nuclei, the organs, glands, nerve-

centers of the human organism. This is our answer to materialism and idealism alike. The nuclear unconscious brought forth organs and consciousness alike. And the great nuclei of the unconscious still lie active in the great living nerve-centers, which nerve centers, from the original solar-plexus to the conclusive brain, form one great chain of dual polarity and amplified consciousness.

All this is a mere incoherent stammering, broken first-words. To return to the direct path of our progress. It is not merely a metaphor, to call the cardiac plexus the sun, the Light. It is metaphor in the first place, because the conscious effluence which proceeds from this first upper center in the breast goes forth and plays upon its external object, as phosphorescent waves might break upon a ship and reveal its form. The transferring of the objective knowledge to the psyche is almost the same as vision. It is root-vision. It happens before the eyes open. It is the first tremendous mode of apprehension, still dark, but moving towards light. It is the eye in the breast. Psychically, it is basic objective apprehension. Dynamically, it is love, devotional, administering love.

Now we make already a discrimination between the two natures, even of this first upper consciousness. First from the breast flows the devotional, self-outpouring of love, love which gives its all to the beloved. And back again returns to the ingathered objective consciousness, the first objective content of the psyche.

This argues the dual polarity. From the positive pole of the cardiac plexus flows out that effluence which we call selfless love. It is really self-devoting love, not selfless. This is the one form of love we recognize. But from the strong ganglion of the shoulders proceeds the negative circuit, which searches and explores the beloved, bringing back pure objective apprehension, not critical, in the mental sense, and yet passionately discriminative.

Let us discriminate between the two upper poles. From the sympathetic heart goes forth pure administering, like sunbeams. But from the strong thoracic center of the shoulders is exerted a strong rejective force, a force which, pressing upon the object of attention, in the mode of separation, succeeds in transferring to itself the impression of the object to which it has attended. This is the other half of devotional love — perfect knowledge of the beloved.

Now this knowledge in itself argues a contradistinction between the lover and the beloved. It is the very mould of the contradistinction. It is the impress upon the lover of that which was separate from him, resistant to him, in the beloved. Objective knowledge is always of this kind — a knowledge based on unchangeable difference, a knowledge truly of the gulf that lies between the two beings nearest to each other.

In two kinds, then, consists the activity of the unconscious on the first upper plane. Primal is the blissful sense of ineffable transfusion with the beloved, which we call love, and of which our era has perhaps enjoyed the full. It is a mode of creative consciousness essentially objective, but yet it preserves no object in the memory, even the dynamic memory. It is a great objective flux, a streaming forth of the self in blissful departure, like sunbeams streaming.

If this activity alone worked, then the self would utterly depart from its own integrity; it would pass out and merge with the beloved — which passing out and merging is the goal of enthusiasts. But living beings are kept integral by the activity of the great negative pole. From the thoracic ganglion also the unconscious goes forth in its quest of the beloved. But what does it go to seek? Real objective knowledge. It goes to find out the wonders which itself does not contain and to transfer these wonders, as by impress, into itself. It goes out to determine the limits of its own existence also.

This is the second half of the activity of upper or selfless or spiritual love. There is a tremendous great joy in exploring and discovering the beloved. For what is the beloved? She is that which I myself am not Knowing the breach between us, the unclose-able gulf, I in the same breath realize her features. In the first mode of the upper consciousness there is perfect surpassing of all sense of division between the self and the beloved. In the second mode the very discovery of the features of the beloved contains the full realization of the irreparable, or unsurpassable, gulf. This is objective knowledge, as distinct from objective emotion. It contains always the element of self-amplification, as if the self were amplified by knowledge in the beloved. It should also contain the knowledge of the limits of the self.

So it is with the Infant. Curious indeed is the look on the face of the Holy Child, in Leonardo's pictures, in Botticelli's, even in the beautiful Filippo Lippi. It is the Mother who crosses her hands on her breast, in supreme acquiescence, recipient; it is the Child who gazes, with a kind of objective, strangely discerning, deep apprehension of her, startling to northern eyes. It is a gaze by no means of innocence, but of profound, pre-visual discerning. So plainly is the child looking across the gulf and fixing the gulf by very intentness of pre-visual apprehension, that instinctively the ordinary northerner finds Him antipathetic. It

seems almost a cruel objectivity.

Perhaps between lovers, in the objective way of love, either the voluntary separative mode predominates, or the sympathetic mode of communion — one or the other. In the north we have worshipped the latter mode. But in the south it is different; the objective sapient manner of love seems more natural. Moreover in the face of the Infant lingers nearly always the dark look of the pristine mode of consciousness, the powerful self-centering subjective mode, established in the lower body — the so-called sensual mode.

But take our own children. A small infant, as soon as it really begins to direct its attention. How often it seems to be gazing across a strange distance at the mother; what a curious look is on its face, as if the mother were an object set across a far gulf, distinct however, discernible, even obtrusive in her need to be apprehended. A mother will chase away this look with kisses. But she cannot chase away the inevitable effluence of separatist, objective* apprehension. She herself sometimes will fall into a half-trance, and the child on her lap will resolve itself into a strange and separate object. She does not criticize or analyze him. She does not even perceive him. But as if rapt, she apprehends him lying there, an unfathomable and inscrutable objective, outside herself, never to be grasped or included in herself. She seizes as it were a sudden and final, objective impression of him. And the conclusive sensation is one of finality. Something final has happened to her. She has the strange sensation of unalterable certainty, a sensation at once profoundly gratifying and rather ap palling. She possesses something, a certain entity of primal, pre-conscious knowledge. Let the child be what he may, her knowledge of him is her own, forever and final. It gives her a sense of wealth in possession, and of power. It gives her a sense also of fatality. From the very satisfaction of the objective finality derives the sense of fatality. It is a knowledge of the other being, but a knowledge which contains at the same time a final assurance of the eternal and insuperable gulf which lies between beings — the isolation of the self first.

Thus the first plane of the upper consciousness — the outgoing, the sheer and unspeakable bliss of the sense of union, communion, at-one- ness with the beloved — and then the complementary objective realization of the beloved, the realization of that which is apart, different. This realization is like riches to the ob jective consciousness. It is, as it were, the adding of another self to the own self, through the mode of apprehension. Through the mode of dynamic objective apprehension, which in our day we have gradually come to call imagination, a man may in his time add on to himself the whole of the universe, by increasing pristine realization of the universal. This in mysticism is called the progress to infinity — that is, in the modern, truly male mysticism. The older female

mysticism means something different by the infinite.

But anyhow there it is. The attaining to the Infinite, about which the mystics have rhapsodized, is a definite process in the developing unconscious, but a process in the development only of the objective-apprehensive centers — an exclusive process, naturally.

A soul cannot come into its own through that love alone which is unison. If it stress the one mode, the sympathetic mode, beyond a certain point, it breaks its own integrity, and corruption sets in in the living organism. On both planes of love, upper and lower, the two modes must act complementary to one another, the sympathetic and the separatist. It is the absolute failure to see this, that has torn the modern world into two halves, the one half warring for the voluntary, objective, separatist control, the other for the pure sympathetic. The individual psyche divided against itself divides the world against itself, and an unthinkable progress of calamity ensues unless there be a reconciliation.

The goal of life is the coming to perfection of each single individual. This cannot take place without the tremendous interchange of love from all the four great poles of the first, basic field of consciousness. There must be the twofold passionate flux of sympathetic love, subjective-abdominal and objective-devotional, both. And there must be the twofold passional circuit of separatist realization, the lower, vital self-realization, and the upper, intense realization of the other, a realization which includes a recognition of abysmal otherness. To stress any one mode, any one interchange, is to hinder all, and to cause corruption in the end. The human psyche must have strength and pride to accept the whole fourfold nature of its own creative activity.

CHAPTER VI

HUMAN RELATIONS AND THE UNCONSCIOUS

The aim of this little book is merely to establish the smallest foothold in the swamp of vagueness which now goes by the name of the unconscious. At last we form some sort of notion what the unconscious actually is. It is that active spontaneity which rouses in each individual organism at the moment of fusion of the parent nuclei, and which, in polarized connection with the external universe, gradually evolves or elaborates its own individual psyche and corpus, bringing both mind and body forth from itself. Thus it would seem that the term unconscious is only another word for life. But life is a general force, whereas the unconscious is essentially single and unique in each individual organism; it is the active, self-evolving soul bringing forth its own incarnation and self-manifestation. Which incarnation and self-manifestation seems to be the whole goal of the unconscious soul: the whole goal of life. Thus it is that the unconscious brings forth not only consciousness, but tissue and organs also. And all the time the working of each organ depends on the primary spontaneous-conscious center of which it is the issue — if you like, the soul-center. And consciousness is like a web woven finally in the mind from the various silken strands spun forth from the primal center of the unconscious.

But the unconscious is never an abstraction, never to be abstracted. It is never an ideal entity. It is always concrete. In the very first instance, it is the glinting nucleus of the ovule. And proceeding from this, it is the chain or constellation of nuclei which derive directly from this first spark. And further still it is the great nerve-centers of the human body, in which the primal and pristine nuclei still act direct. The nuclei are centers of spontaneous consciousness. It seems as if their bright grain were germ-consciousness, consciousness germinating forever. If that is a mystery, it is not my fault. Certainly it is not mysticism. It is obvious, demonstrable scientific fact, to be verified under the microscope and within the human psyche, subjectively and objectively, both. Of course, the subjective verification is what men kick at. Thin-minded idealists cannot bear any appeal to their bowels of comprehension.

We can quite tangibly deal with the human unconscious. We trace its source and centers in the great ganglia and nodes of the nervous system. We establish the nature of the spontaneous consciousness at each of these centers; we determine the polarity and the direction of the polarized flow. And from this we

know the motion and individual manifestation of the psyche itself; we also know the motion and rhythm of the great organs of the body. For at every point psyche and functions are so nearly identified that only by holding our breath can we realize their duality in identification — a polarized duality once more. But here is no place to enter the great investigation of the duality and polarization of the vital-creative activity and the mechanico-material activity. The two are two in one, a polarized quality. They are unthinkably different.

On the first field of human conscious — the first plane of the unconscious — we locate four great spontaneous centers, two below the diaphragm, two above. These four centers control the four greatest organs. And they give rise to the whole basis of human consciousness. Functional and psychic at once, this is their first polar duality.

But the polarity is further. The horizontal division of the diaphragm divides man forever into his individual duality, the duality of the upper and lower man, the two great bodies of upper and lower consciousness and function. This is the horizontal line.

The vertical division between the voluntary and the sympathetic systems, the line of division between the spinal system and the great plexus-system of the front of the human body, forms the second distinction into duality. It is the great difference between the soft, recipient front of the body and the wall of the back. The front of the body is the live end of the magnet. The back is the closed opposition. And again there are two parallel streams of function and consciousness, vertically separate now. This is the vertical line of division. And the horizontal line and the vertical line form the cross of all existence and being. And even this is not mysticism — no more than the ancient symbols used in botany or biology.

On the first field of human consciousness, which is the basis of life and consciousness, are the four first poles of spontaneity. These have their fourfold polarity within the individual, again figured by the cross. But the individual is never purely a thing-by-himself. He cannot exist save in polarized relation to the external universe, a relation both functional and psychic-dynamic. Development takes place only from the polarized circuits of the dynamic unconscious, and these circuits must be both individual and extra-individual. There must be the circuit of which the complementary pole is external to the individual.

That is, in the first place there must be the other individual. There must be a polarized connection with the other individual — or even other individuals. On the first field there are four poles in each individual. So that the first, the basic field of extra-individual consciousness contains eight poles — an eightfold polarity, a fourfold circuit. It may be that between two individuals, even mother

and child, the polarity may be established only fourfold, a dual circuit. It may be that one circuit of spontaneous consciousness may never be fully established. This means, for a child, a certain deficiency in development, a psychic inadequacy.

So we are again face to face with the basic problem of human conduct. No human being can develop save through the polarized connection with other beings. This circuit of polarized unison precedes all mind and all knowing. It is anterior to and ascendant over the human will. And yet the mind and the will can both interfere with the dynamic circuit, an idea, like a stone wedged in a delicate machine, can arrest one whole process of psychic interaction and spontaneous growth.

How then? Man doth not live by bread alone. It is time we made haste to settle the bread question, which after all is only the A B C of social economies, and proceeded to devote our attention to this much more profound and vital question: how to establish and maintain the circuit of vital polarity from which the psyche actually develops, as the body develops from the circuit of alimentation and respiration. We have reached the stage where we can settle the alimentation and respiration problems almost off-hand. But woe betide us, the unspeakable agony we suffer from the failure to establish and maintain the vital circuits between ourselves and the effectual correspondent, the other human being, other human beings, and all the extraneous universe. The tortures of psychic starvation which civilized people proceed to suffer, once they have solved for themselves the bread-and-butter problem of alimentation, will not bear thought. Delicate, creative desire, sending forth its fine vibrations in search of the true pole of magnetic rest in another human being or beings, how it is thwarted, insulated by a whole set of India-rubber ideas and ideals and conventions, till every form of perversion and death-desire sets in! How can we escape neuroses? Psychoanalysis won't tell us. But a mere shadow of understanding of the true unconscious will give us the hint.

The amazingly difficult and vital business of human relationship has been almost laugh ably underestimated in our epoch. All this nonsense about love and unselfishness, more crude and repugnant than savage fetish-worship. Love is a thing to be learned, through centuries of patient effort. It is a difficult, complex maintenance of individual integrity throughout the incalculable processes of inter-human-polarity. Even on the first great plane of consciousness, four prime poles in each individual, four powerful circuits possible between two individuals, and each of the four circuits to be established to perfection and yet maintained in pure equilibrium with all the others. Who can do it? Nobody. Yet we have all got to do it, or else suffer ascetic tortures of starvation and privation

or of distortion and overstrain and slow collapse into corruption. The whole of life is one long, blind effort at an established polarity with the outer universe, human and non-human; and the whole of modern life is a shrieking failure. It is our own fault.

The actual evolution of the individual psyche is a result of the interaction between the individual and the outer universe. Which means that just as a child in the womb grows as a result of the parental blood-stream which nourishes the vital quick of the foetus, so does every man and woman grow and develop as a result of the polarized flux between the spontaneous self and some other self or selves. It is the circuit of vital flux between itself and another being or beings which brings about the development and evolution of every individual psyche and physique. This is a law of life and creation, from which we cannot escape. Ascetics and voluptuaries both try to dodge this main condition, and both succeed perhaps for a generation. But after two generations all collapses. Man doth not live by bread alone. He lives even more essentially from the nourishing creative flow between himself and another or others.

This is the reality of the extra-individual circuits of polarity, those established between two or more individuals. But a corresponding reality is that of the internal, purely individual polarity — the polarity within a man himself of his upper and lower consciousness, and his own voluntary and sympathetic modes. Here is a fourfold interaction within the self. And from this fourfold reaction within the self results that final manifestation which we know as mind, mental consciousness.

The brain is, if we may use the word, the terminal instrument of the dynamic consciousness. It transmutes what is a creative flux into a certain fixed cypher. It prints off, like a telegraph instrument, the glyphs and graphic representations which we call percepts, concepts, ideas. It produces a new reality — the ideal. The idea is another static entity, another unit of the mechanical-active and materio-static universe. It is thrown off from life, as leaves are shed from a tree, or as feathers fall from a bird. Ideas are the dry, unliving, inscutient plumage which intervenes between us and the circumambient universe, forming at once an insulator and an instrument for the subduing of the universe. The mind is the instrument of instruments; it is not a creative reality.

Once the mind is awake, being in itself a finality, it feels very assured. “The word became flesh, and began to put on airs,” says Norman Douglas wittily. It is exactly what happens. Mentality, being automatic in its principle like the machine, begins to assume life. It begins to affect life, to pretend to make and unmake life. “In the beginning was the Word.” This is the presumptuous masquerading of the mind. The Word cannot be the beginning of life. It is the

end of life, that which falls shed. The mind is the dead end of life. But it has all the mechanical force of the non-vital universe. It is a great dynamo of super-mechanical force. Given the will as accomplice, it can even arrogate its machine-motions and automatizations over the whole of life, till every tree becomes a clipped tea-pot and every man a useful mechanism. So we see the brain, like a great dynamo and accumulator, accumulating mechanical force and presuming to apply this mechanical force-control to the living unconscious, subjecting everything spontaneous to certain machine-principles called ideals or ideas.

And the human will assists in this humiliating and sterilizing process. We don't know what the human will is. But we do know that it is a certain faculty belonging to every living organism, the faculty for self-determination. It is a strange faculty of the soul itself, for its own direction. The will is indeed the faculty which every individual possesses from the very moment of conception, for exerting a certain control over the vital and automatic processes of his own evolution. It does not depend originally on mind. Originally it is a purely spontaneous control-factor of the living unconscious. It seems as if, primarily, the will and the conscience were identical, in the pre-mental state. It seems as if the will were given as a great balancing faculty, the faculty whereby automatization is prevented in the evolving psyche. The spontaneous will reacts at once against the exaggeration of any one particular circuit of polarity. Any vital circuit — a fact known to psychoanalysis. And against this automatism, this degradation from

the spontaneous-vital reality into the mechanic-material reality, the human soul must always struggle. And the will is the power which the unique self possesses to right itself from automatism.

Sometimes, however, the free psyche really collapses, and the will identifies itself with an automatic circuit. Then a complex is set up, a paranoia. Then incipient madness sets in. If the identification continues, the derangement becomes serious. There may come sudden jolts of dislocation of the whole psychic flow, like epilepsy. Or there may come any of the known forms of primary madness.

The second danger is that the will shall identify itself with the mind and become an instrument of the mind. The same process of automatism sets up, only now it is slower. The mind proceeds to assume control over every organic-psychic circuit. The spontaneous flux is destroyed, and a certain automatic circuit substituted. Now an automatic establishment of the psyche must, like the building of a machine, proceed according to some definite fixed scheme, based upon certain fixed principles. And it is here that ideals and ideas enter. They are the machine-plan and the machine-principles of an automatized psyche.

So, humanity proceeds to derange itself, to automatize itself from the mental consciousness. It is a process of derangement, just as the fixing of the will upon any other primary process is a derangement. It is a long, slow development in madness. Quite justly do the advanced Russian and French writers acclaim madness as a great goal. It is the genuine goal of self-automatism, mental-conscious supremacy.

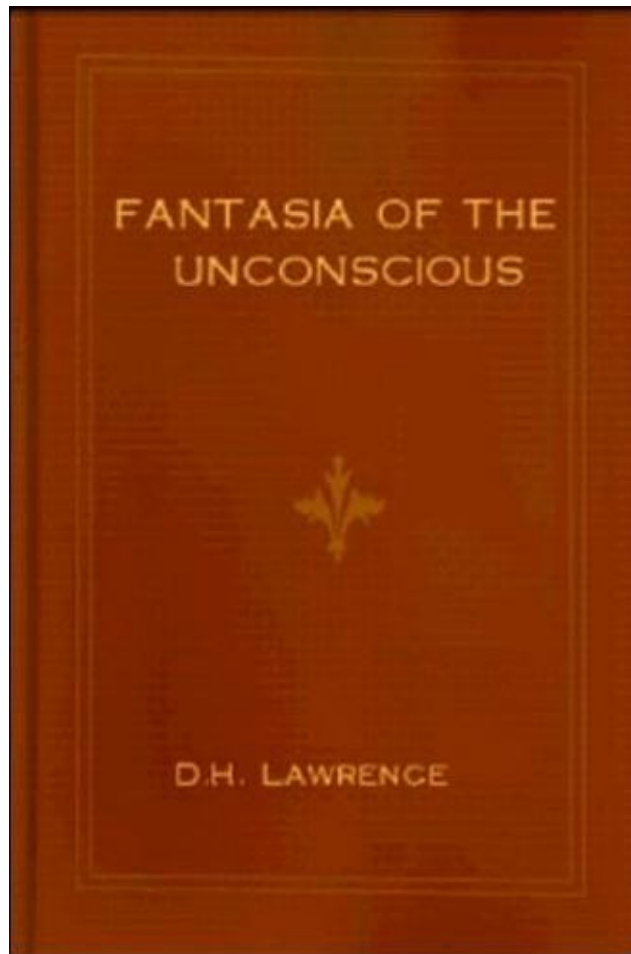
True, we must all develop into mental consciousness. But mental-consciousness is not a goal; it is a cul-de-sac. It provides us only with endless appliances which we can use for the all-too-difficult business of coming to our spontaneous-creative fullness of being. It provides us with means to adjust ourselves to the external universe. It gives us further means for subduing the external, materio-mechanical universe to our great end of creative life. And it gives us plain indications of how to avoid falling into automatism, hints for the applying of the will, the loosening of false, automatic fixations, the brave adherence to a profound soul-impulse. This is the use of the mind — a great indicator and instrument. The mind as author and director of life is anathema.

So, the few things we have to say about the unconscious end for the moment. There is almost nothing said. Yet it is a beginning. Still remain to be revealed the other great centers of the unconscious. We know four: two pairs. In all there are seven planes. That is, there are six dual centers of spontaneous polarity, and then the final one. That is, the great upper and lower consciousness is only just broached — the further heights and depths are not even hinted at. Nay, in public it would hardly be allowed us to hint at them. There is so much to know, and every step of the progress in knowledge is a death to the human idealism which governs us now so ruthlessly and vilely. It must die, and we will break free. But what tyranny is so hideous as that of an automatically ideal humanity?

FANTASIA OF THE UNCONSCIOUS



Written in Lawrence's most productive period in 1922, *Fantasia of the Unconscious* is a response to psychoanalytic criticism of his novel *Sons and Lovers*. The essays develop his ideas about the upbringing and education of children, about marriage, and about social and even political action. Lawrence described them as 'this pseudo-philosophy of mine which was deduced from the novels and poems, not the reverse. The absolute need one has for some sort of satisfactory mental attitude towards oneself and things in general makes one try to abstract some definite conclusions from one's experiences as a writer and as a man'. These conclusions form an illuminating guide to his works.



The first edition

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FORWARD

The present book is a continuation from “Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious.” The generality of readers had better just leave it alone. The generality of critics likewise. I really don’t want to convince anybody. It is quite in opposition to my whole nature. I don’t intend my books for the generality of readers. I count it a mistake of our mistaken democracy, that every man who can read print is allowed to believe that he can read all that is printed. I count it a misfortune that serious books are exposed in the public market, like slaves exposed naked for sale. But there we are, since we live in an age of mistaken democracy, we must go through with it.

I warn the generality of readers, that this present book will seem to them only a rather more revolting mass of wordy nonsense than the last. I would warn the generality of critics to throw it in the waste paper basket without more ado.

As for the limited few, in whom one must per[viii] force find an answerer, I may as well say straight off that I stick to the solar plexus. That statement alone, I hope, will thin their numbers considerably.

Finally, to the remnants of a remainder, in order to apologize for the sudden lurch into cosmology, or cosmogony, in this book, I wish to say that the whole thing hangs inevitably together. I am not a scientist. I am an amateur of amateurs. As one of my critics said, you either believe or you don’t.

I am not a proper archæologist nor an anthropologist nor an ethnologist. I am no “scholar” of any sort. But I am very grateful to scholars for their sound work. I have found hints, suggestions for what I say here in all kinds of scholarly books, from the Yoga and Plato and St. John the Evangel and the early Greek philosophers like Herakleitos down to Fraser and his “Golden Bough,” and even Freud and Frobenius. Even then I only remember hints — and I proceed by intuition. This leaves you quite free to dismiss the whole wordy mass of revolting nonsense, without a qualm.

Only let me say, that to my mind there is a great field of science which is as yet quite closed to us. I refer to the science which proceeds in [ix] terms of life and is established on data of living experience and of sure intuition. Call it subjective science if you like. Our objective science of modern knowledge concerns itself only with phenomena, and with phenomena as regarded in their cause-and-effect relationship. I have nothing to say against our science. It is perfect as far as it goes. But to regard it as exhausting the whole scope of human possibility in knowledge seems to me just puerile. Our science is a science of the

dead world. Even biology never considers life, but only mechanistic functioning and apparatus of life.

I honestly think that the great pagan world of which Egypt and Greece were the last living terms, the great pagan world which preceded our own era once, had a vast and perhaps perfect science of its own, a science in terms of life. In our era this science crumbled into magic and charlatanry. But even wisdom crumbles.

I believe that this great science previous to ours and quite different in constitution and nature from our science once was universal, established all over the then-existing globe. I believe it was esoteric, invested in a large priesthood. Just as mathematics and mechanics and physics are defined and expounded in the same [x] way in the universities of China or Bolivia or London or Moscow to-day, so, it seems to me, in the great world previous to ours a great science and cosmology were taught esoterically in all countries of the globe, Asia, Polynesia, America, Atlantis and Europe. Belt's suggestion of the geographical nature of this previous world seems to me most interesting. In the period which geologists call the Glacial Period, the waters of the earth must have been gathered up in a vast body on the higher places of our globe, vast worlds of ice. And the sea-beds of to-day must have been comparatively dry. So that the Azores rose up mountainous from the plain of Atlantis, where the Atlantic now washes, and the Easter Isles and the Marquesas and the rest rose lofty from the marvelous great continent of the Pacific.

In that world men lived and taught and knew, and were in one complete correspondence over all the earth. Men wandered back and forth from Atlantis to the Polynesian Continent as men now sail from Europe to America. The interchange was complete, and knowledge, science was universal over the earth, cosmopolitan as it is to-day.

Then came the melting of the glaciers, and [xi] the world flood. The refugees from the drowned continents fled to the high places of America, Europe, Asia, and the Pacific Isles. And some degenerated naturally into cave men, neolithic and paleolithic creatures, and some retained their marvelous innate beauty and life-perfection, as the South Sea Islanders, and some wandered savage in Africa, and some, like Druids or Etruscans or Chaldeans or Amerindians or Chinese, refused to forget, but taught the old wisdom, only in its half-forgotten, symbolic forms. More or less forgotten, as knowledge: remembered as ritual, gesture, and myth-story.

And so, the intense potency of symbols is part at least memory. And so it is that all the great symbols and myths which dominate the world when our history first begins, are very much the same in every country and every people, the great

myths all relate to one another. And so it is that these myths now begin to hypnotize us again, our own impulse towards our own scientific way of understanding being almost spent. And so, besides myths, we find the same mathematic figures, cosmic graphs which remain among the aboriginal peoples in all continents, mystic figures and signs whose true cosmic or scientific significance is lost, yet which continue [xii] in use for purposes of conjuring or divining.

If my reader finds this bosh and abracadabra, all right for him. Only I have no more regard for his little crowings on his own little dunghill. Myself, I am not so sure that I am one of the one-and-onlies. I like the wide world of centuries and vast ages — mammoth worlds beyond our day, and mankind so wonderful in his distances, his history that has no beginning yet always the pomp and the magnificence of human splendor unfolding through the earth's changing periods. Floods and fire and convulsions and ice-arrest intervene between the great glamorous civilizations of mankind. But nothing will ever quench humanity and the human potentiality to evolve something magnificent out of a renewed chaos.

I do not believe in evolution, but in the strangeness and rainbow-change of ever-renewed creative civilizations.

So much, then, for my claim to remarkable discoveries. I believe I am only trying to stammer out the first terms of a forgotten knowledge. But I have no desire to revive dead kings, or dead sages. It is not for me to arrange fossils, and decipher hieroglyphic phrases. I couldn't do it if I wanted to. But then I can do some [xiii] thing else. The soul must take the hint from the relics our scientists have so marvelously gathered out of the forgotten past, and from the hint develop a new living utterance. The spark is from dead wisdom, but the fire is life.

And as an example — a very simple one — of how a scientist of the most innocent modern sort may hint at truths which, when stated, he would laugh at as fantastic nonsense, let us quote a word from the already old-fashioned "Golden Bough." "It must have appeared to the ancient Aryan that the sun was periodically recruited from the fire which resided in the sacred oak."

Exactly. The fire which resided in the Tree of Life. That is, life itself. So we must read: "It must have appeared to the ancient Aryan that the sun was periodically recruited from life." — Which is what the early Greek philosophers were always saying. And which still seems to me the real truth, the clue to the cosmos. Instead of life being drawn from the sun, it is the emanation from life itself, that is, from all the living plants and creatures which nourish the sun.

Of course, my dear critic, the ancient Aryans were just doddering — the old duffers: or babbling, the babes. But as for me, I have some [xiv] respect for my

ancestors, and believe they had more up their sleeve than just the marvel of the unborn me.

One last weary little word. This pseudo-philosophy of mine — "pollyanalytics," as one of my respected critics might say — is deduced from the novels and poems, not the reverse. The novels and poems come unwatched out of one's pen. And then the absolute need which one has for some sort of satisfactory mental attitude towards oneself and things in general makes one try to abstract some definite conclusions from one's experiences as a writer and as a man. The novels and poems are pure passionate experience. These "pollyanalytics" are inferences made afterwards, from the experience.

And finally, it seems to me that even art is utterly dependent on philosophy: or if you prefer it, on a metaphysic. The metaphysic or philosophy may not be anywhere very accurately stated and may be quite unconscious, in the artist, yet it is a metaphysic that governs men at the time, and is by all men more or less comprehended, and lived. Men live and see according to some gradually developing and gradually withering vision. This vision exists also as a dynamic idea or metaphysic — exists first as [xv] such. Then it is unfolded into life and art. Our vision, our belief, our metaphysic is wearing woefully thin, and the art is wearing absolutely threadbare. We have no future; neither for our hopes nor our aims nor our art. It has all gone gray and opaque.

We've got to rip the old veil of a vision across, and find what the heart really believes in, after all: and what the heart really wants, for the next future. And we've got to put it down in terms of belief and of knowledge. And then go forward again, to the fulfillment in life and art.

Rip the veil of the old vision across, and walk through the rent. And if I try to do this — well, why not? If I try to write down what I see — why not? If a publisher likes to print the book — all right. And if anybody wants to read it, let him. But why anybody should read one single word if he doesn't want to, I don't see. Unless of course he is a critic who needs to scribble a dollar's worth of words, no matter how.

Taormina

October 8, 1921

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Let us start by making a little apology to Psychoanalysis. It wasn't fair to jeer at the psychoanalytic unconscious; or perhaps it *was* fair to jeer at the psychoanalytic unconscious, which is truly a negative quantity and an unpleasant menagerie. What was really not fair was to jeer at Psychoanalysis as if Freud had invented and described nothing but an unconscious, in all his theory.

The unconscious is not, of course, the clue to the Freudian theory. The real clue is sex. A sexual motive is to be attributed to all human activity.

Now this is going too far. We are bound to admit that an element of sex enters into all human activity. But so does an element of greed, and of many other things. We are bound to admit that into all human relationships, particularly adult human relationships, a large element of sex enters. We are thankful that Freud has insisted on this. We are thankful that Freud pulled us somewhat to earth, out of all our clouds of superfineness. What Freud says is always *partly* true. And half a loaf is better than no bread.

But really, there is the other half of the loaf. All is *not* sex. And a sexual motive is *not* to be attributed to all human activities. We know it, without need to argue.

Sex surely has a specific meaning. Sex means the being divided into male and female; and the magnetic desire or impulse which puts male apart from female, in a negative or sundering magnetism, but which also draws male and female together in a long and infinitely varied approach towards the critical act of coition. Sex without the consummating act of coition is never quite sex, in human relationships: just as a eunuch is never quite a man. That is to say, the act of coition is the essential clue to sex.

Now does all life work up to the one consummating act of coition? In one direction, it does, and it would be better if psychoanalysis plainly said so. In one direction, all life works up to the one supreme moment of coition. Let us all admit it, sincerely.

But we are not confined to one direction only, or to one exclusive consummation. Was the building of the cathedrals a working up towards the act of coition? Was the dynamic impulse sexual? No. The sexual element was

present, and important. But not predominant. The same in the building of the Panama Canal. The sexual impulse, in its widest form, was a very great impulse towards the building of the Panama Canal. But there was something else, of even higher importance, and greater dynamic power.

And what is this other, greater impulse? It is the desire of the human male to build a world: not “to build a world for you, dear”; but to build up out of his own self and his own belief and his own effort something wonderful. Not merely something useful. Something wonderful. Even the Panama Canal would never have been built *simply* to let ships through. It is the pure disinterested craving of the human male to make something wonderful, out of his own head and his own self, and his own soul’s faith and delight, which starts everything going. This is the prime motivity. And the motivity of sex is subsidiary to this: often directly antagonistic.

That is, the essentially religious or creative motive is the first motive for all human activity. The sexual motive comes second. And there is a great conflict between the interests of the two, at all times.

What we want to do, is to trace the creative or religious motive to its source in the human being, keeping in mind always the near relationship between the religious motive and the sexual. The two great impulses are like man and wife, or father and son. It is no use putting one under the feet of the other.

The great desire to-day is to deny the religious impulse altogether, or else to assert its absolute alienity from the sexual impulse. The orthodox religious world says fugh! to sex. Whereupon we thank Freud for giving them tit for tat. But the orthodox scientific world says fie! to the religious impulse. The scientist wants to discover a cause for everything. And there is no cause for the religious impulse. Freud is with the scientists. Jung dodges from his university gown into a priest’s surplice till we don’t know where we are. We prefer Freud’s *Sex* to Jung’s *Libido* or Bergson’s *Elan Vital*. Sex has at least *some* definite reference, though when Freud makes sex accountable for everything he as good as makes it accountable for nothing.

We refuse any *Cause*, whether it be Sex or Libido or Elan Vital or ether or unit of force or *perpetuum mobile* or anything else. But also we feel that we cannot, like Moses, perish on the top of our present ideal Pisgah, or take the next step into thin air. There we are, at the top of our Pisgah of ideals, crying *Excelsior* and trying to clamber up into the clouds: that is, if we are idealists with the religious impulse rampant in our breasts. If we are scientists we practice aeroplane flying or eugenics or disarmament or something equally absurd.

The promised land, if it be anywhere, lies away beneath our feet. No more prancing upwards. No more uplift. No more little Excelsiors crying world-

brotherhood and international love and Leagues of Nations. Idealism and materialism amount to the same thing on top of Pisgah, and the space is *very* crowded. We're all cornered on our mountain top, climbing up one another and standing on one another's faces in our scream of Excelsior.

To your tents, O Israel! Brethren, let us go down. We will descend. The way to our precious Canaan lies obviously downhill. An end of uplift. Downhill to the land of milk and honey. The blood will soon be flowing faster than either, but we can't help that. We can't help it if Canaan has blood in its veins, instead of pure milk and honey.

If it is a question of origins, the origin is always the same, whatever we say about it. So is the cause. Let that be a comfort to us. If we want to talk about God, well, we can please ourselves. God has been talked about quite a lot, and He doesn't seem to mind. Why we should take it so personally is a problem. Likewise if we wish to have a tea party with the atom, let us: or with the wriggling little unit of energy, or the ether, or the Libido, or the Elan Vital, or any other Cause. Only don't let us have sex for tea. We've all got too much of it under the table; and really, for my part, I prefer to keep mine there, no matter what the Freudians say about me.

But it is tiring to go to any more tea parties with the Origin, or the Cause, or even the Lord. Let us pronounce the mystic Om, from the pit of the stomach, and proceed.

There's not a shadow of doubt about it, the First Cause is just unknowable to us, and we'd be sorry if it wasn't. Whether it's God or the Atom. All I say is Om!

The first business of every faith is to declare its ignorance. I don't know where I come from — nor where I exit to. I don't know the origins of life nor the goal of death. I don't know how the two parent cells which are my biological origin became the me which I am. I don't in the least know what those two parent cells were. The chemical analysis is just a farce, and my father and mother were just vehicles. And yet, I must say, since I've got to know about the two cells, I'm glad I do know.

The Moses of Science and the Aaron of Idealism have got the whole bunch of us here on top of Pisgah. It's a tight squeeze, and we'll be falling very, very foul of one another in five minutes, unless some of us climb down. But before leaving our eminence let us have a look round, and get our bearings.

They say that way lies the New Jerusalem of universal love: and over there the happy valley of indulgent Pragmatism: and there, quite near, is the chirpy land of the Vitalists: and in those dark groves the home of successful Analysis,

surnamed Psycho: and over those blue hills the Supermen are prancing about, though you can't see them. And there is Besantheim, and there is Eddyhowe, and there, on that queer little tableland, is Wilsonia, and just round the corner is Rabindranathopolis....

But Lord, I can't see anything. Help me, heaven, to a telescope, for I see blank nothing.

I'm not going to try any more. I'm going to sit down on my posterior and sluther full speed down this Pisgah, even if it cost me my trouser seat. So ho! — away we go.

In the beginning — there never was any beginning, but let it pass. We've got to make a start somehow. In the very beginning of all things, time and space and cosmos and being, in the beginning of all these was a little living creature. But I don't know even if it was little. In the beginning was a living creature, its plasm quivering and its life-pulse throbbing. This little creature died, as little creatures always do. But not before it had had young ones. When the daddy creature died, it fell to pieces. And that was the beginning of the cosmos. Its little body fell down to a speck of dust, which the young ones clung to because they must cling to something. Its little breath flew asunder, the hotness and brightness of the little beast — I beg your pardon, I mean the radiant energy from the corpse flew away to the right hand, and seemed to shine warm in the air, while the clammy energy from the body flew away to the left hand, and seemed dark and cold. And so, the first little master was dead and done for, and instead of his little living body there was a speck of dust in the middle, which became the earth, and on the right hand was a brightness which became the sun, rampaging with all the energy that had come out of the dead little master, and on the left hand a darkness which felt like an unrisen moon. And that was how the Lord created the world. Except that I know nothing about the Lord, so I shouldn't mention it.

But I forgot the soul of the little master. It probably did a bit of flying as well — and then came back to the young ones. It seems most natural that way.

Which is my account of the Creation. And I mean by it, that Life is not and never was anything but living creatures. That's what life is and will be just living creatures, no matter how large you make the capital L. Out of living creatures the material cosmos was made: out of the death of living creatures, when their little living bodies fell dead and fell asunder into all sorts of matter and forces and energies, sun, moons, stars and worlds. So you got the universe. Where you got the living creature from, that first one, don't ask me. He was just there. But he was a little person with a soul of his own. He wasn't Life with a capital L.

If you don't believe me, then don't. I'll even give you a little song to sing.

“If it be not true to me What care I how true it be . . .”

That's the kind of man I really like, chirping his insouciance. And I chirp back:

"Though it be not true to thee It's gay and gospel truth to me. . ."

The living live, and then die. They pass away, as we know, to dust and to oxygen and nitrogen and so on. But what we don't know, and what we might perhaps know a little more, is how they pass away direct into life itself — that is, direct into the living. That is, how many dead souls fly over our untidiness like swallows and build under the eaves of the living. How many dead souls, like swallows, twitter and breed thoughts and instincts under the thatch of my hair and the eaves of my forehead, I don't know. But I believe a good many. And I hope they have a good time. And I hope not too many are bats.

I am sorry to say I believe in the souls of the dead. I am almost ashamed to say, that I believe the souls of the dead in some way reënter and pervade the souls of the living: so that life is always the life of living creatures, and death is always our affair. This bit, I admit, is bordering on mysticism. I'm sorry, because I don't like mysticism. It has no trousers and no trousers seat: *n'a pas de quoi*. And I should feel so uncomfortable if I put my hand behind me and felt an absolute blank.

Meanwhile a long, thin, brown caterpillar keeps on pretending to be a dead thin beech-twigg, on a little bough at my feet. He had got his hind feet and his fore feet on the twig, and his body looped up like an arch in the air between, when a fly walked up the twig and began to mount the arch of the imitator, not having the least idea that it was on a gentleman's coat-tails. The caterpillar shook his stern, and the fly made off as if it had seen a ghost. The dead twig and the live twig now remain equally motionless, enjoying their different ways. And when, with this very pencil, I push the head of the caterpillar off from the twig, he remains on his tail, arched forward in air, and oscillating unhappily, like some tiny pendulum ticking. Ticking, ticking in mid-air, arched away from his planted tail. Till at last, after a long minute and a half, he touches the twig again, and subsides into twigginess. The only thing is, the dead beech-twigg can't pretend to be a wagging caterpillar. Yet how the two commune! However — we have our exits and our entrances, and one man in his time plays many parts. More than he dreams of, poor darling. And I am entirely at a loss for a moral!

Well, then, we are born. I suppose that's a safe statement. And we become at once conscious, if we weren't so before. *Nem con*. And our little baby body is a little functioning organism, a little developing machine or instrument or organ, and our little baby mind begins to stir with all our wonderful psychical beginnings. And so we are in bud.

But it won't do. It is too much of a Pisgah sight. We overlook too much.

Descendez, cher Moïse. Vous voyez trop loin. You see too far all at once, dear Moses. Too much of a bird's-eye view across the Promised Land to the shore. Come down, and walk across, old fellow. And you won't see all that milk and honey and grapes the size of duck's eggs. All the dear little budding infant with its tender virginal mind and various clouds of glory instead of a napkin. Not at all, my dear chap. No such luck of a promised land.

Climb down, Pisgah, and go to Jericho. *Allons*, there is no road yet, but we are all Aarons with rods of our own.

CHAPTER II

THE HOLY FAMILY

We are all very pleased with Mr. Einstein for knocking that eternal axis out of the universe. The universe isn't a spinning wheel. It is a cloud of bees flying and veering round. Thank goodness for that, for we were getting drunk on the spinning wheel.

So that now the universe has escaped from the pin which was pushed through it, like an impaled fly vainly buzzing: now that the multiple universe flies its own complicated course quite free, and hasn't got any hub, we can hope also to escape.

We won't be pinned down, either. We have no one law that governs us. For me there is only one law: *I am I*. And that isn't a law, it's just a remark. One is one, but one is not all alone. There are other stars buzzing in the center of their own isolation. And there is no straight path between them. There is no straight path between you and me, dear reader, so don't blame me if my words fly like dust into your eyes and grit between your teeth, instead of like music into your ears. I am I, but also you are you, and we are in sad need of a theory of human relativity. We need it much more than the universe does. The stars know how to prowl round one another without much damage done. But you and I, dear reader, in the first conviction that you are me and that I am you, owing to the oneness of mankind, why, we are always falling foul of one another, and chewing each other's fur.

You are *not* me, dear reader, so make no pretensions to it. Don't get alarmed if *I* say things. It isn't your sacred mouth which is opening and shutting. As for the profanation of your sacred ears, just apply a little theory of relativity, and realize that what I say is not what you hear, but something uttered in the midst of my isolation, and arriving strangely changed and travel-worn down the long curve of your own individual circumambient atmosphere. I may say Bob, but heaven alone knows what the goose hears. And you may be sure that a red rag is, to a bull, something far more mysterious and complicated than a socialist's necktie.

So I hope now I have put you in your place, dear reader. Sit you like Watts' Hope on your own little blue globe, and I'll sit on mine, and we won't bump into one another if we can help it. You can twang your old hopeful lyre. It may be music to you, so I don't blame you. It is a terrible wowing in my ears. But that

may be something in my individual atmosphere; some strange deflection as your music crosses the space between us. Certainly I never hear the concert of World Regeneration and Hope Revived Again without getting a sort of lock-jaw, my teeth go so keen on edge from the twanging harmony. Still, the world-regenerators may *really* be quite excellent performers on their own jews'-harps. Blame the edginess of my teeth.

Now I am going to launch words into space so mind your cosmic eye.

As I said in my small but naturally immortal book, "Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious," there's more in it than meets the eye. There's more in you, dear reader, than meets the eye. What, don't you believe it? Do you think you're as obvious as a poached egg on a piece of toast, like the poor lunatic? Not a bit of it, dear reader. You've got a solar plexus, and a lumbar ganglion not far from your liver, and I'm going to tell everybody. Nothing brings a man home to himself like telling everybody. And I *will* drive you home to yourself, do you hear? You've been poaching in my private atmospheric grounds long enough, identifying yourself with me and me with everybody. A nice row there'd be in heaven if Aldebaran caught Sirius by the tail and said, "Look here, you're not to look so green, you damm dog-star! It's an offense against star-regulations."

Which reminds me that the Arabs say the shooting stars, meteorites, are starry stones which the angels fling at the poaching demons whom they catch sight of prowling too near the palisades of heaven. I must say I like Arab angels. My heaven would coruscate like a catherine wheel, with white-hot star-stones. Away, you dog, you prowling cur. — Got him under the left ear-hole, Gabriel — ! See him, see him, Michael? That hopeful blue devil! Land him one! Biff on your bottom, you hoper.

But I wish the Arabs wouldn't entice me, or you, dear reader, provoke me to this. I feel with you, dear reader, as I do with a deaf-man when he pushes his vulcanite ear, his listening machine, towards my mouth. I want to shout down the telephone ear-hole all kinds of improper things, to see what effect they will have on the stupid dear face at the end of the coil of wire. After all, words must be very different after they've trickled round and round a long wire coil. Whatever becomes of them! And I, who am a bit deaf myself, and may in the end have a deaf-machine to poke at my friends, it ill becomes me to be so unkind, yet that's how I feel. So there we are.

Help me to be serious, dear reader.

In that little book, "Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious," I tried rather wistfully to convince you, dear reader, that you had a solar plexus and a lumbar ganglion and a few other things. I don't know why I took the trouble. If a fellow doesn't believe he's got a nose, the best way to convince him is gently to waft a

little pepper into his nostrils. And there was I painting my own nose purple, and wistfully inviting you to look and believe. No more, though.

You've got first and foremost a solar plexus, dear reader; and the solar plexus is a great nerve center which lies behind your stomach. I can't be accused of impropriety or untruth, because any book of science or medicine which deals with the nerve-system of the human body will show it to you quite plainly. So don't wriggle or try to look spiritual. Because, willy-nilly, you've got a solar plexus, dear reader, among other things. I'm writing a good sound science book, which there's no gainsaying.

Now, your solar plexus, most gentle of readers, is where you are you. It is your first and greatest and deepest center of consciousness. If you want to know *how* conscious and *when* conscious, I must refer you to that little book, "Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious."

At your solar plexus you are primarily conscious: there, behind you stomach. There you have the profound and pristine conscious awareness that you are you. Don't say you haven't. I know you have. You might as well try to deny the nose on your face. There is your first and deepest seat of awareness. There you are triumphantly aware of your own individual existence in the universe. Absolutely there is the keep and central stronghold of your triumphantly-conscious self. There you *are*, and you know it. So stick out your tummy gaily, my dear, with a *Me voilà*. With a *Here I am!* With an *Ecco mi!* With a *Da bin ich!* There you are, dearie.

But not only a triumphant awareness that *There you are*. An exultant awareness also that outside this quiet gate, this navel, lies a whole universe on which you can lay tribute. Aha — at birth you closed the central gate for ever. Too dangerous to leave it open. Too near the quick. But there are other gates. There are eyes and mouths and ears and nostrils, besides the two lower gates of the passionate body, and the closed but not locked gates of the breasts. Many gates. And besides the actual gates, the marvelous wireless communication between the great center and the surrounding or contiguous world.

Authorized science tells you that this first great plexus, this all-potent nerve-center of consciousness and dynamic life-activity is a sympathetic center. From the solar plexus as from your castle-keep you look around and see the fair lands smiling, the corn and fruit and cattle of your increase, the cottages of your dependents and the halls of your beloveds. From the solar plexus you know that all the world is yours, and all is goodly.

This is the great center, where in the womb, your life first sparkled in individuality. This is the center that drew the gestating maternal blood-stream upon you, in the nine-months lurking, drew it on you for your increase. This is

the center whence the navel-string broke, but where the invisible string of dynamic consciousness, like a dark electric current connecting you with the rest of life, will never break until you die and depart from corporate individuality.

They say, by the way, that doctors now perform a little operation on the born baby, so that no more navel shows. No more belly-buttons, dear reader! Lucky I caught you this generation, before the doctors had saved your appearances. Yet, *caro mio*, whether it shows or not, there you once had immediate connection with the maternal blood-stream. And, because the male nucleus which derived from the father still lies sparkling and potent within the solar plexus, therefore that great nerve-center of you, still has immediate knowledge of your father, a subtler but still vital connection. We call it the tie of blood. So be it. It is a tie of blood. But much more definite than we imagine. For true it is that the one bright male germ which went to your begetting was drawn from the blood of the father. And true it is that that same bright male germ lies unquenched and unquenchable at the center of you, within the famous solar plexus. And furthermore true is it that this unquenched father-spark within you sends forth vibrations and dark currents of vital activity all the time; connecting direct with your father. You will never be able to get away from it while you live.

The connection with the mother may be more obvious. Is there not your ostensible navel, where the rupture between you and her took place? But because the mother-child relation is more plausible and flagrant, is that any reason for supposing it deeper, more vital, more intrinsic? Not a bit. Because if the large parent mother-germ still lives and acts vividly and mysteriously in the great fused nucleus of your solar plexus, does the smaller, brilliant male-spark that derived from your father act any less vividly? By no means. It is different — it is less ostensible. It may be even in magnitude smaller. But it may be even more vivid, even more intrinsic. So beware how you deny the father-quick of yourself. You may be denying the most intrinsic quick of all.

In the same way it follows that, since brothers and sisters have the same father and mother, therefore in every brother and sister there is a direct communication such as can never happen between strangers. The parent nuclei do not die within the new nucleus. They remain there, marvelous naked sparkling dynamic life-centers, nodes, well-heads of vivid life itself. Therefore in every individual the parent nuclei live, and give direction connection, blood connection we call it, with the rest of the family. It is blood connection. For the fecundating nuclei are the very spark-essence of the blood. And while life lives the parent nuclei maintain their own centrality and dynamic effectiveness within the solar plexus of the child. So that every individual has mother and father both sparkling within himself.

But this is rather a preliminary truth than an intrinsic truth. The intrinsic truth of every individual is the new unit of unique individuality which emanates from the fusion of the parent nuclei. This is the incalculable and intangible Holy Ghost each time — each individual his own Holy Ghost. When, at the moment of conception, the two parent nuclei fuse to form a new unit of life, then takes place the great mystery of creation. A new individual appears — not the result of the fusion merely. Something more. The quality of individuality cannot be derived. The new individual, in his singleness of self, is a perfectly new whole. He is not a permutation and combination of old elements, transferred through the parents. No, he is something underived and utterly unprecedented, unique, a new soul.

This quality of pure individuality is, however, only the one supreme quality. It consummates all other qualities, but does not consume them. All the others are there, all the time. And only at his maximum does an individual surpass all his derivative elements, and become purely himself. And most people never get there. In his own pure individuality a man surpasses his father and mother, and is utterly unknown to them. “Woman, what have I to do with thee?” But this does not alter the fact that within him lives the mother-quick and the father-quick, and that though in his wholeness he is rapt away beyond the old mother-father connections, they are still there within him, consummated but not consumed. Nor does it alter the fact that very few people surpass their parents nowadays, and attain any individuality beyond them. Most men are half-born slaves: the little soul they are born with just atrophies, and merely the organism emanates, the new self, the new soul, the new swells into manhood, like big potatoes.

So there we are. But considering man at his best, he is at the start faced with the great problem. At the very start he has to undertake his tripartite being, the mother within him, the father within him, and the Holy Ghost, the self which he is supposed to consummate, and which mostly he doesn't.

And there it is, a hard physiological fact. At the moment of our conception, the father nucleus fuses with the mother nucleus, and the wonder emanates, the new self, the new soul, the new individual cell. But in the new individual cell the father-germ and the mother-germ do not relinquish their identity. There they remain still, incorporated and never extinguished. And so, the blood-stream of race is one stream, for ever. But the moment the mystery of pure individual newness ceased to be enacted and fulfilled, the blood-stream would dry up and be finished. Mankind would die out.

Let us go back then to the solar plexus. There sparkle the included mother-germ and father-germ, giving us direct, immediate blood-bonds, family connection. The connection is as direct and as subtle as between the Marconi

stations, two great wireless stations. A family, if you like, is a group of wireless stations, all adjusted to the same, or very much the same vibration. All the time they quiver with the interchange, there is one long endless flow of vitalistic communication between members of one family, a long, strange *rapport*, a sort of life-unison. It is a ripple of life through many bodies as through one body. But all the time there is the jolt, the rupture of individualism, the individual asserting himself beyond all ties or claims. The highest goal for every man is the goal of pure individual being. But it is a goal you cannot reach by the mere rupture of all ties. A child isn't born by being torn from the womb. When it is born by natural process that is rupture enough. But even then the ties are not broken. They are only subtilized.

From the solar plexus first of all pass the great vitalistic communications between child and parents, the first interplay of primal, pre-mental knowledge and sympathy. It is a great subtle interplay, and from this interplay the child is built up, body and psyche. Impelled from the primal conscious center in the abdomen, the child seeks the mother, seeks the breast, opens a blind mouth and gropes for the nipple. Not mentally directed and yet certainly directed. Directed from the dark pre-mind center of the solar plexus. From this center the child seeks, the mother knows. Hence the true mindlessness of the pristine, healthy mother. She does not need to think, mentally to know. She knows so profoundly and actively at the great abdominal life-center.

But if the child thus seeks the mother, does it then know the mother alone? To an infant the mother is the whole universe. Yet the child needs more than the mother. It needs as well the presence of men, the vibration from the present body of the man. There may not be any actual, palpable connection. But from the great voluntary center in the man pass unknowable communications and unreliable nourishment of the stream of manly blood, rays which we cannot see, and which so far we have refused to know, but none the less essential, quickening dark rays which pass from the great dark abdominal life-center in the father to the corresponding center in the child. And these rays, these vibrations, are not like the mother-vibrations. Far, far from it. They do not need the actual contact, the handling and the caressing. On the contrary, the true male instinct is to avoid physical contact with a baby. It may not need even actual presence. But present or absent, there should be between the baby and the father that strange, intangible communication, that strange pull and circuit such as the magnetic pole exercises upon a needle, a vitalistic pull and flow which lays all the life-plasm of the baby into the line of vital quickening, strength, knowing. And any lack of this vital circuit, this vital interchange between father and child, man and child, means an inevitable impoverishment to the infant.

The child exists in the interplay of two great life-waves, the womanly and the male. In appearance, the mother is everything. In truth, the father has actively very little part. It does not matter much if he hardly sees his child. Yet see it he should, sometimes, and touch it sometimes, and renew with it the connection, the life-circuit, not allow it to lapse, and so vitally starve his child.

But remember, dear reader, please, that there is not the slightest need for you to believe me, or even read me. Remember, it's just your own affair. Don't implicate me.

CHAPTER III

PLEXUSES, PLANES AND SO ON

The primal consciousness in man is pre-mental, and has nothing to do with cognition. It is the same as in the animals. And this pre-mental consciousness remains as long as we live the powerful root and body of our consciousness. The mind is but the last flower, the *cul de sac*.

The first seat of our primal consciousnesses the solar plexus, the great nerve-center situated behind the stomach. From this center we are first dynamically conscious. For the primal consciousness is always dynamic, and never, like mental consciousness, static. Thought, let us say what we will about its magic powers, is instrumental only, the soul's finest instrument for the business of living. Thought is just a means to action and living. But life and action take rise actually at the great centers of dynamic consciousness.

The solar plexus, the greatest and most important center of our dynamic consciousness, is a sympathetic center. At this main center of your first-mind we know as we can never mentally know. Primarily we know, each man, each living creature knows, profoundly and satisfactorily and without question, that *I am I*. This root of all knowledge and being is established in the solar plexus; it is dynamic, pre-mental knowledge, such as cannot be transferred into thought. Do not ask me to transfer the pre-mental dynamic knowledge into thought. It cannot be done. The knowledge that *I am I* can never be thought: only known.

This being the very first term of our life-knowledge, a knowledge established physically and psychically the moment the two parent nuclei fused, at the moment of the conception, it remains integral as a piece of knowledge in every subsequent nucleus derived from this one original. But yet the original nucleus, formed from the two parent nuclei at our conception, remains always primal and central, and is always the original fount and home of the first and supreme knowledge that *I am I*. This original nucleus is embodied in the solar plexus.

But the original nucleus divides. The first division, as science knows, is a division of recoil. From the perfect oneing of the two parent nuclei in the egg-cell results a recoil or new assertion. That which was perfect *one* now divides again, and in the recoil becomes again two.

This second nucleus, the nucleus born of recoil, is the nuclear origin of all the great nuclei of the voluntary system, which are the nuclei of assertive

individualism. And it remains central in the adult human body as it was in the egg-cell. In the adult human body the first nucleus of independence, first-born from the great original nucleus of our conception, lies always established in the lumbar ganglion. Here we have our positive center of independence, in a multifarious universe.

At the solar plexus, the dynamic knowledge is this, that *I am I*. The solar plexus is the center of all the sympathetic system. The great prime knowledge is sympathetic in nature. I am I, in vital centrality. I am I, the vital center of all things. I am I, the clew to the whole. All is one with me. It is the one identity.

But at the lumbar ganglion, which is the center of separate identity, the knowledge is of a different mode, though the term is the same. At the lumbar ganglion I know that I am I, in distinction from a whole universe, which is not as I am. This is the first tremendous flash of knowledge of singleness and separate identity. I am I, not because I am at one with all the universe, but because I am other than all the universe. It is my distinction from all the rest of things which makes me myself. Because I am set utterly apart and distinguished from all that is the rest of the universe, therefore *I am I*. And this root of our knowledge in separateness lies rooted all the time in the lumbar ganglion. It is the second term of our dynamic psychic existence.

It is from the great sympathetic center of the solar plexus that the child rejoices in the mother and in its own blissful centrality, its unison with the as yet unknown universe. Look at the pictures of Madonna and Child, and you will even *see* it. It is from this center that it draws all things unto itself, winningly, drawing love for the soul, and actively drawing in milk. The same center controls the great intake of love and of milk, of psychic and of physical nourishment.

And it is from the great voluntary center of the lumbar ganglion that the child asserts its distinction from the mother, the single identity of its own existence, and its power over its surroundings. From this center issues the violent little pride and lustiness which kicks with glee, or crows with tiny exultance in its own being, or which claws the breast with a savage little rapacity, and an incipient masterfulness of which every mother is aware. This incipient mastery, this sheer joy of a young thing in its own single existence, the marvelous playfulness of early youth, and the roguish mockery of the mother's love, as well as the bursts of temper and rage, all belong to infancy. And all this flashes spontaneously, *must* flash spontaneously from the first great center of independence, the powerful lumbar ganglion, great dynamic center of all the voluntary system, of all the spirit of pride and joy in independent existence. And it is from this center too that the milk is urged away down the infant bowels,

urged away towards excretion. The motion is the same, but here it applies to the material, not to the vital relation. It is from the lumbar ganglion that the dynamic vibrations are emitted which thrill from the stomach and bowels, and promote the excremental function of digestion. It is the solar plexus which controls the assimilatory function in digestion.

So, in the first division of the egg-cell is set up the first plane of psychic and physical life, remaining radically the same throughout the whole existence of the individual. The two original nuclei of the egg-cell remain the same two original nuclei within the corpus of the adult individual. Their psychic and their physical dynamic is the same in the solar plexus and lumbar ganglion as in the two nuclei of the egg-cell. The first great division in the egg remains always the same, the unchanging great division in the psychic and the physical structure; the unchanging great division in knowledge and function. It is a division into polarized duality, psychical and physical, of the human being. It is the great vertical division of the egg-cell, and of the nature of man.

Then, this division having taken place, there is a new thrill of conjunction or collision between the divided nuclei, and at once the second birth takes place. The two nuclei now split horizontally. There is a horizontal division across the whole egg-cell, and the nuclei are now four, two above, and two below. But those below retain their original nature, those above are new in nature. And those above correspond again to those below.

In the developed child, the great horizontal division of the egg-cell, resulting in four nuclei, this remains the same. The horizontal division-wall is the diaphragm. The two upper nuclei are the two great nerve-centers, the cardiac plexus and the thoracic ganglion. We have again a sympathetic center primal in activity and knowledge, and a corresponding voluntary center. In the center of the breast, the cardiac plexus acts as the great sympathetic mode of new dynamic activity, new dynamic consciousness. And near the spine, by the wall of the shoulders, the thoracic ganglion acts as the powerful voluntary center of separateness and power, in the same vertical line as the lumbar ganglion, but horizontally so different.

Now we must change our whole feeling. We must put off the deep way of understanding which belongs to the lower body of our nature, and transfer ourselves into the upper plane, where being and functioning are different.

At the cardiac plexus, there in the center of the breast, we have now a new great sun of knowledge and being. Here there is no more of self. Here there is no longer the dark, exultant knowledge that *I am I*. A change has come. Here I know no more of myself. Here I am not. Here I only know the delightful revelation that you are you. The wonder is no longer within me, my own dark,

centrifugal, exultant self. The wonder is without me. The wonder is outside me. And I can no longer exult and know myself the dark, central sun of the universe. Now I look with wonder, with tenderness, with joyful yearning towards that which is outside me, beyond me, not me. Behold, that which was once negative has now become the only positive. The other being is now the great positive reality, I myself am as nothing. Positivity has changed places.

If we want to see the portrayed look, then we must turn to the North, to the fair, wondering, blue-eyed infants of the Northern masters. They seem so frail, so innocent and wondering, touching outwards to the mystery. They are not the same as the Southern child, nor the opposite. Their whole life mystery is different. Instead of consummating all things within themselves, as the dark little Southern infants do, the Northern Jesus-children reach out delicate little hands of wondering innocence towards delicate, flower-reverential mothers. Compare a Botticelli Madonna, with all her wounded and abnegating sensuality, with a Hans Memling Madonna, whose soul is pure and only reverential. Beyond me is the mystery and the glory, says the Northern mother: let me have no self, let me only seek that which is all-pure, all-wonderful. But the Southern mother says: This is mine, this is mine, this is my child, my wonder, my master, my lord, my scourge, my own.

From the cardiac plexus the child goes forth in bliss. It seeks the revelation of the unknown. It wonderingly seeks the mother. It opens its small hands and spreads its small fingers to touch her. And bliss, bliss, bliss, it meets the wonder in mid-air and in mid-space it finds the loveliness of the mother's face. It opens and shuts its little fingers with bliss, it laughs the wonderful, selfless laugh of pure baby-bliss, in the first ecstasy of finding all its treasure, groping upon it and finding it in the dark. It opens wide, child-wide eyes to see, to see. But it cannot see. It is puzzled, it wrinkles its face. But when the mother puts her face quite near, and laughs and coos, then the baby trembles with an ecstasy of love. The glamour, the wonder, the treasure beyond. The great uplift of rapture. All this surges from that first center of the breast, the sun of the breast, the cardiac plexus.

And from the same center acts the great function of the heart and breath. Ah, the aspiration, the aspiration, like a hope, like a yearning constant and unending with which we take in breath. When we breathe, when we take in breath, it is not as when we take in food. When we breathe in we aspire, we yearn towards the heaven of air and light. And when the heart dilates to draw in the stream of dark blood, it opens its arms as to a beloved. It dilates with reverent joy, as a host opening his doors to an honored guest, whom he delights to serve: opening his doors to the wonder which comes to him from beyond, and without which he

were nothing.

So it is that our heart dilates, our lungs expand. They are bidden by that great and mysterious impulse from the cardiac plexus, which bids them seek the mystery and the fulfillment of the beyond. They seek the beyond, the air of the sky, the hot blood from the dark under-world. And so we live.

And then, they relax, they contract. They are driven by the opposite motion from the powerful voluntary center of the thoracic ganglion.. That which was drawn in, was invited, is now relinquished, allowed to go forth, negatively. Not positively dismissed, but relinquished.

There is a wonderful complementary duality between the voluntary and the sympathetic activity on the same plane. But between the two planes, upper and lower, there is a further dualism, still more startling, perhaps. Between the dark, glowing first term of knowledge at the solar plexus: *I am I, all is one in me*; and the first term of volitional knowledge: *I am myself, and these others are not as I am*; — there is a world of difference. But when the world changes again, and on the upper plane we realize the wonder of other things, the difference is almost shattering. The thoracic ganglion is a ganglion of power. When the child in its delicate bliss seeks the mother and finds her and is added on to her, then it fulfills itself in the great upper sympathetic mode. But then it relinquishes her. It ceases to be aware of her. And if she tries to force its love to play upon her again, like light revealing her to herself, then the child turns away. Or it will lie, and look at her with the strange, odd, curious look of knowledge, like a little imp who is spying her out. This is the curious look that many mothers cannot bear. Involuntarily it arouses a sort of hate in them — the look of scrutinizing curiosity, apart, and as it were studying, balancing them up. Yet it is a look which comes into every child's eyes. It is the reaction of the great voluntary plexus between the shoulders. The mother is suddenly set apart, as an object of curiosity, coldly, sometimes dreamily, sometimes puzzled, sometimes mockingly observed.

Again, if a mother neglect her child, it cries, it weeps for her love and attention. Its pitiful lament is one of the forms of compulsion from the upper center. This insistence on pity, on love, is quite different from the rageous weeping, which is compulsion from the lower center, below the diaphragm. Again, some children just drop everything they can lay hands on over the edge of their crib, or their table. They drop everything out of sight. And then they look up with a curious look of negative triumph. This is again a form of recoil from the upper center, the obliteration of the thing which is outside. And here a child is acting quite differently from the child who joyously *smashes*. The desire to smash comes from the lower centers.

We can quite well recognize the will exerted from the lower center. We call it headstrong temper and masterfulness. But the peculiar will of the upper center — the sort of nervous, critical objectivity, the deliberate forcing of sympathy, the play upon pity and tenderness, the plaintive bullying of love, or the benevolent bullying of love — these we don't care to recognize. They are the extravagance of spiritual *will*. But in its true harmony the thoracic ganglion is a center of happier activity: of real, eager curiosity, of the delightful desire to pick things to pieces, and the desire to put them together again, the desire to "find out," and the desire to invent: all this arises on the upper plane, at the volitional center of the thoracic ganglion.

CHAPTER IV

TREES AND BABIES AND PAPAS AND MAMAS

Oh, damn the miserable baby with its complicated ping-pong table of an unconscious. I'm sure, dear reader, you'd rather have to listen to the brat howling in its crib than to me expounding its plexuses. As for "mixing those babies up," I'd mix him up like a shot if I'd anything to mix him with. Unfortunately he's my own anatomical specimen of a pickled rabbit, so there's nothing to be done with the bits.

But he gets on my nerves. I come out solemnly with a pencil and an exercise book, and take my seat in all gravity at the foot of a large fir-tree, and wait for thoughts to come, gnawing like a squirrel on a nut. But the nut's hollow.

I think there are too many trees. They seem to crowd round and stare at me, and I feel as if they nudged one another when I'm not looking. I can *feel* them standing there. And they won't let me get on about the baby this morning. Just their cussedness. I felt they encouraged me like a harem of wonderful silent wives, yesterday.

It is half rainy too — the wood so damp and still and so secret, in the remote morning air. Morning, with rain in the sky, and the forest subtly brooding, and me feeling no bigger than a pea-bug between the roots of my fir. The trees seem so much bigger than me, so much stronger in life, prowling silent around. I seem to feel them moving and thinking and prowling, and they overwhelm me. Ah, well, the only thing is to give way to them.

It is the edge of the Black Forest — sometimes the Rhine far off, on its Rhine plain, like a bit of magnesium ribbon. But not to-day. To-day only trees, and leaves, and vegetable presences. Huge straight fir-trees, and big beech-trees sending rivers of roots into the ground. And cuckoos, like noise falling in drops off the leaves. And me, a fool, sitting by a grassy wood-road with a pencil and a book, hoping to write more about that baby.

Never mind. I listen again for noises, and I smell the damp moss. The looming trees, so straight. And I listen for their silence. Big, tall-bodied trees, with a certain magnificent cruelty about them. Or barbarity. I don't know why I should say cruelty. Their magnificent, strong, round bodies! It almost seems I can hear the slow, powerful sap drumming in their trunks. Great full-blooded trees, with strange tree-blood in them, soundlessly drumming.

Trees that have no hands and faces, no eyes. Yet the powerful sap-scented blood roaring up the great columns. A vast individual life, and an overshadowing will. The will of a tree. Something that frightens you.

Suppose you want to look a tree in the face? You can't. It hasn't got a face. You look at the strong body of a trunk: you look above you into the matted body-hair of twigs and boughs: you see the soft green tips. But there are no eyes to look into, you can't meet its gaze. You keep on looking at it in part and parcel.

It's no good looking at a tree, to know it. The only thing is to sit among the roots and nestle against its strong trunk, and not bother. That's how I write all about these planes and plexuses, between the toes of a tree, forgetting myself against the great ankle of the trunk. And then, as a rule, as a squirrel is stroked into its wickedness by the faceless magic of a tree, so am I usually stroked into forgetfulness, and into scribbling this book. My tree-book, really.

I come so well to understand tree-worship. All the old Aryans worshiped the tree. My ancestors. The tree of life. The tree of knowledge. Well, one is bound to sprout out some time or other, chip of the old Aryan block. I can so well understand tree-worship. And fear the deepest motive.

Naturally. This marvelous vast individual without a face, without lips or eyes or heart. This towering creature that never had a face. Here am I between his toes like a pea-bug, and him noiselessly over-reaching me. And I feel his great blood-jet surging. And he has no eyes. But he turns two ways. He thrusts himself tremendously down to the middle earth, where dead men sink in darkness, in the damp, dense under-soil, and he turns himself about in high air. Whereas we have eyes on one side of our head only, and only grow upwards.

Plunging himself down into the black humus, with a root's gushing zest, where we can only rot dead; and his tips in high air, where we can only look up to. So vast and powerful and exultant in his two directions. And all the time, he has no face, no thought: only a huge, savage, thoughtless soul. Where does he even keep his soul? — Where does anybody?

A huge, plunging, tremendous soul. I would like to be a tree for a while. The great lust of roots. Root-lust. And no mind at all. He towers, and I sit and feel safe. I like to feel him towering round me. I used to be afraid. I used to fear their lust, their rushing black lust. But now I like it, I worship it. I always felt them huge primeval enemies. But now they are my only shelter and strength. I lose myself among the trees. I am so glad to be with them in their silent, intent passion, and their great lust. They feed my soul. But I can understand that Jesus was crucified on a tree.

And I can so well understand the Romans, their terror of the bristling Hercynian wood. Yet when you look from a height down upon the rolling of the

forest — this Black Forest — it is as suave as a rolling, oily sea. Inside only, it bristles horrific. And it terrified the Romans.

The Romans! They too seem very near. Nearer than Hindenburg or Foch or even Napoleon. When I look across the Rhine plain, it is Rome, and the legionaries of the Rhine that my soul notices. It must have been wonderful to come from South Italy to the shores of this sea-like forest: this dark, moist forest, with its enormously powerful intensity of tree life. Now I know, coming myself from rock-dry Sicily, open to the day.

The Romans and the Greeks found everything human. Everything had a face, and a human voice. Men spoke, and their fountains piped an answer.

But when the legions crossed the Rhine they found a vast impenetrable life which had no voice. They met the faceless silence of the Black Forest. This huge, huge wood did not answer when they called. Its silence was too crude and massive. And the soldiers shrank: shrank before the trees that had no faces, and no answer. A vast array of non-human life, darkly self-sufficient, and bristling with indomitable energy. The Hercynian wood, not to be fathomed. The enormous power of these collective trees, stronger in their somber life even than Rome.

No wonder the soldiers were terrified. No wonder they thrilled with horror when, deep in the woods, they found the skulls and trophies of their dead comrades upon the trees. The trees had devoured them: silently, in mouthfuls, and left the white bones. Bones of the mindful Romans — and savage, preconscious trees, indomitable. The true German has something of the sap of trees in his veins even now: and a sort of pristine savageness, like trees, helpless, but most powerful, under all his mentality. He is a tree-soul, and his gods are not human. His instinct still is to nail skulls and trophies to the sacred tree, deep in the forest. The tree of life and death, tree of good and evil, tree of abstraction and of immense, mindless life; tree of everything except the spirit, spirituality.

But after bone-dry Sicily, and after the gibbering of myriad people all rattling their personalities, I am glad to be with the profound indifference of faceless trees. Their rudimentariness cannot know why we care for the things we care for. They have no faces, no minds and bowels: only deep, lustful roots stretching in earth, and vast, lissome life in air, and primeval individuality. You can sacrifice the whole of your spirituality on their altar still. You can nail your skull on their limbs. They have no skulls, no minds nor faces, they can't make eyes of love at you. Their vast life dispenses with all this. But they will live you down.

The normal life of one of these big trees is about a hundred years. So the Herr Baron told me.

One of the few places that my soul will haunt, when I am dead, will be this.

Among the trees here near Ebersteinburg, where I have been alone and written this book. I can't leave these trees. They have taken some of my soul.

Excuse my digression, gentle reader. At first I left it out, thinking we might not see wood for trees. But it doesn't much matter what we see. It's nice just to look round, anywhere.

So there are two planes of being and consciousness and two modes of relation and of function. We will call the lower plane the sensual, the upper the spiritual. The terms may be unwise, but we can think of no other.

Please read that again, dear reader; you'll be a bit dazzled, coming out of the wood.

It is obvious that from the time a child is born, or conceived, it has a permanent relation with the outer universe, relation in the two modes, not one mode only. There are two ways of love, two ways of activity and independence. And there needs some sort of equilibrium between the two modes. In the same way, in physical function there is eating and drinking, and excrementation, on the lower plane and respiration and heartbeat on the upper plane.

Now the equilibrium to be established is fourfold. There must be a true equilibrium between what we eat and what we reject again by excretion: likewise between the systole and diastole of the heart, the inspiration and expiration of our breathing. Suffice to say the equilibrium is never quite perfect. Most people are either too fat or too thin, too hot or too cold, too slow or too quick. There is no such thing as an *actual* norm, a living norm. A norm is merely an abstraction, not a reality.

The same on the psychical plane. We either love too much, or impose our will too much, are too spiritual or too sensual. There is not and cannot be any actual norm of human conduct. All depends, first, on the unknown inward need within the very nuclear centers of the individual himself, and secondly on his circumstance. Some men *must* be too spiritual, some *must* be too sensual. Some *must* be too sympathetic, and some *must* be too proud. We have no desire to say what men *ought* to be. We only wish to say there are all kinds of ways of being, and there is no such thing as human perfection. No man can be anything more than just himself, in genuine living relation to all his surroundings. But that which *I* am, when I am myself, will certainly be anathema to those who hate individual integrity, and want to swarm. And that which I, being myself, am in myself, may make the hair bristle with rage on a man who is also himself, but very different from me. Then let it bristle. And if mine bristle back again, then let us, if we must, fly at one another like two enraged men. It is how it should be. We've got to learn to live from the center of our own responsibility only, and let

other people do the same.

To return to the child, however, and his development on his two planes of consciousness. There is all the time a direct dynamic connection between child and mother, child and father also, from the start. It is a connection on two planes, the upper and lower. From the lower sympathetic center the profound intake of love or vibration from the living co-respondent outside. From the upper sympathetic center the outgoing of devotion and the passionate vibration of *given* love, given attention. The two sympathetic centers are always, or should always be, counterbalanced by their corresponding voluntary centers. From the great voluntary ganglion of the lower plane, the child is self-willed, independent, and masterful.

In the activity of this center a boy refuses to be kissed and pawed about, maintaining his proud independence like a little wild animal. From this center he likes to command and to receive obedience. From this center likewise he may be destructive and defiant and reckless, determined to have his own way at any cost.

From this center, too, he learns to use his legs. The motion of walking, like the motion of breathing, is twofold. First, a sympathetic cleaving to the earth with the foot: then the voluntary rejection, the spurning, the kicking away, the exultance in power and freedom.

From the upper voluntary center the child watches persistently, wilfully, for the attention of the mother: to be taken notice of, to be caressed, in short to exist in and through the mother's attention. From this center, too, he coldly refuses to notice the mother, when she insists on too much attention. This cold refusal is different from the active rejection of the lower center. It is passive, but cold and negative. It is the great force of our day. From the ganglion of the shoulders, also, the child breathes and his heart beats. From the same center he learns the first use of his arms. In the gesture of sympathy, from the upper plane, he embraces his mother with his arms. In the motion of curiosity, or interest, which derives from the thoracic ganglion, he spreads his fingers, touches, feels, explores. In the motion of rejection he drops an undesired object deliberately out of sight.

And then, when the four centers of what we call the first *field* of consciousness are fully active, then it is that the eyes begin to gather their sight, the mouth to speak, the ears to awake to their intelligent hearings; all as a result of the great fourfold activity of the first dynamic field of consciousness. And then also, as a result, the mind awakens to its impressions and to its incipient control. For at first the control is non-mental, even non-cerebral. The brain acts only as a sort of switchboard.

The business of the father, in all this incipient child-development, is to stand outside as a final authority and make the necessary adjustments. Where there is too much sympathy, then the great voluntary centers of the spine are weak, the child tends to be delicate. Then the father by instinct supplies the roughness, the sternness which stiffens in the child the centers of resistance and independence, right from the very earliest days. Often, for a mere infant, it is the father's fierce or stern presence, the vibration of his voice, which starts the frictional and independent activity of the great voluntary ganglion and gives the first impulse to the independence which later on is life itself.

But on the other hand, the father, from his distance, supports, protects, nourishes his child, and it is ultimately on the remote but powerful father-love that the infant rests, in a rest which is beyond mother-love. For in the male the dominant centers are naturally the volitional centers, centers of responsibility, authority, and care.

It is the father's business, again, to maintain some sort of equilibrium between the two modes of love in his infant. A mother may wish to bring up her child from the lovely upper centers only, from the centers of the breast, in the mode of what we call pure or spiritual love. Then the child will be all gentle, all tender and tender-radiant, always enfolded with gentleness and forbearance, always shielded from grossness or pain or roughness. Now the father's instinct is to be rough and crude, good-naturedly brutal with the child, calling the deeper centers, the sensual centers, into play. "What do you want? My watch? Well, you can't have it, do you see, because it's mine." Not a lot of explanations of the "You see, darling." No such nonsense. — Or if a child wails unnecessarily for its mother, the father must be the check. "Stop your noise, you little brat! What ails you, you whiner?" And if children be too sensitive, too sympathetic, then it will do the child no harm if the father occasionally throws the cat out of the window, or kicks the dog, or raises a storm in the house. Storms there must be. And if the child is old enough and robust enough, it can occasionally have its bottom soundly spanked — by the father, if the mother refuses to perform that most necessary duty. For a child's bottom is made occasionally to be spanked. The vibration of the spanking acts direct upon the spinal nerve-system, there is a direct reciprocity and reaction, the spanker transfers his wrath to the great will-centers in the child, and these will-centers react intensely, are vivified and educated.

On the other hand, given a mother who is too generally hard or indifferent, then it rests with the father to provide the delicate sympathy and the refined discipline. Then the father must show the tender sensitiveness of the upper mode. The sad thing to-day is that so few mothers have any deep bowels of love

— or even the breast of love. What they have is the benevolent spiritual will, the will of the upper self. But the will is not love. And benevolence in a parent is a poison. It is bullying. In these circumstances the father must give delicate adjustment, and, above all, some warm, native love from the richer sensual self.

The question of corporal punishment is important. It is no use roughly smacking a shrinking, sensitive child. And yet, if a child is too shrinking, too sensitive, it may do it a world of good cheerfully to spank its posterior. Not brutally, not cruelly, but with real sound, good-natured exasperation. And let the adult take the full responsibility, half humorously, without apology or explanation. Let us avoid self-justification at all costs. Real corporal punishments apply to the sensual plane. The refined punishments of the spiritual mode are usually much more indecent and dangerous than a good smack. The pained but resigned disapprobation of a mother is usually a very bad thing, much worse than the father's shouts of rage. And sendings to bed, and no dessert for a week, and so on, are crueller and meaner than a bang on the head. When a parent gives his boy a beating, there is a living passionate interchange. But in these refined punishments, the parent suffers nothing and the child is deadened. The bullying of the refined, benevolent spiritual will is simply vitriol to the soul. Yet parents administer it with all the righteousness of virtue and good intention, sparing themselves perfectly.

The point is here. If a child makes you so that you really want to spank it soundly, then soundly spank the brat. But know all the time *what* you are doing, and always be responsible for your anger. Never be ashamed of it, and never surpass it. The flashing interchange of anger between parent and child is part of the responsible relationship, necessary to growth. Again, if a child offends you deeply, so that you really can't communicate with it any more, then, while the hurt is deep, switch off your connection from the child, cut off your correspondence, your vital communion, and be alone. But never persist in such a state beyond the time when your deep hurt dies down. The only rule is, do what you *really*, impulsively, wish to do. But always act on your own responsibility sincerely. And have the courage of your own strong emotion. They enrich the child's soul.

For a child's primary education depends almost entirely on its relation to its parents, brothers, and sisters. Between mother and child, father and child, the law is this: I, the mother, am myself alone: the child is itself alone. But there exists between us a vital dynamic relation, for which I, being the conscious one, am basically responsible. So, as far as possible, there must be in me no departure from myself, lest I injure the preconscious dynamic relation. I must absolutely act according to my own true spontaneous feeling. But, moreover, I must also

have wisdom for myself and for my child. Always, always the deep wisdom of responsibility. And always a brave responsibility for the soul's own spontaneity. Love — what is love? We'd better get a new idea. Love is, in all, generous impulse — even a good spanking. But wisdom is something else, a deep collectedness in the soul, a deep abiding by my own integral being, which makes me responsible, not for the child, but for my certain duties towards the child, and for maintaining the dynamic flow between the child and myself as genuine as possible: that is to say, not perverted by ideals or by my *will*.

Most fatal, most hateful of all things is bullying. But what is bullying? It is a desire to superimpose my own will upon another person. Sensual bullying of course is fairly easily detected. What is more dangerous is ideal bullying. Bullying people into what is ideally good for them. I embrace for example an ideal, and I seek to enact this ideal in the person of another. This is ideal bullying. A mother says that life should be all love, all delicacy and forbearance and gentleness. And she proceeds to spin a hateful sticky web of permanent forbearance, gentleness, hushedness around her naturally passionate and hasty child. This so foils the child as to make him half imbecile or criminal. I may have ideals if I like — even of love and forbearance and meekness. But I have no right to ask another to have these ideals. And to impose *any ideals* upon a child as it grows is almost criminal. It results in impoverishment and distortion and subsequent deficiency. In our day, most dangerous is the love and benevolence ideal. It results in neurasthenia, which is largely a dislocation or collapse of the great voluntary centers, a derangement of the will. It is in us an insistence upon the one life-mode only, the spiritual mode. It is a suppression of the great lower centers, and a living a sort of half-life, almost entirely from the upper centers. Thence, since we live terribly and exhaustively from the upper centers, there is a tendency now towards pthisis and neurasthenia of the heart. The great sympathetic center of the breast becomes exhausted, the lungs, burnt by the over-insistence of one way of life, become diseased, the heart, strained in one mode of dilation, retaliates. The powerful lower centers are no longer fully active, particularly the great lumbar ganglion, which is the clue to our sensual passionate pride and independence, this ganglion is atrophied by suppression. And it is this ganglion which holds the spine erect. So, weak-chested, round-shouldered, we stoop hollowly forward on ourselves. It is the result of the all-famous love and charity ideal, an ideal now quite dead in its sympathetic activity, but still fixed and determined in its voluntary action.

Let us beware and beware, and beware of having a high ideal for ourselves. But particularly let us beware of having an ideal for our children. So doing, we damn them. All we can have is wisdom. And wisdom is not a theory, it is a state

of soul. It is the state wherein we know our wholeness and the complicate, manifold nature of our being. It is the state wherein we know the great relations which exist between us and our near ones. And it is the state which accepts full responsibility, first for our own souls, and then for the living dynamic relations wherein we have our being. It is no use expecting the other person to know. Each must know for himself. But nowadays men have even a stunt of pretending that children and idiots alone know best. This is a pretty piece of sophistry, and criminal cowardice, trying to dodge the life-responsibility which no man or woman can dodge without disaster.

The only thing is to be direct. If a child has to swallow castor-oil, then say: "Child, you've got to swallow this castor-oil. It is necessary for your inside. I say so because it is true. So open your mouth." Why try coaxing and logic and tricks with children? Children are more sagacious than we are. They twig soon enough if there is a flaw in our own intention and our own true spontaneity. And they play up to our bit of falsity till there is hell to pay.

"You love mother, don't you, dear?" — Just a piece of indecent trickery of the spiritual will. The great emotions like love are unspoken. Speaking them is a sign of an indecent bullying will.

"Poor pussy! You must love poor pussy!"

What cant! What sickening cant! An appeal to love based on false pity. That's the way to inculcate a filthy pharisaic conceit into a child. — If the child ill-treats the cat, say:

"Stop mauling that cat. It's got its own life to live, so let it live it." Then if the brat persists, give tit for tat.

"What, you pull the cat's tail! Then I'll pull your nose, to see how you like it." And give his nose a proper hard pinch.

Children *must* pull the cat's tail a little. Children *must* steal the sugar sometimes. They *must* occasionally spoil just the things one doesn't want them to spoil. And they *must* occasionally tell stories — tell a lie. Circumstances and life are such that we must all sometimes tell a lie: just as we wear trousers, because we don't choose that everybody shall see our nakedness. Morality is a delicate act of adjustment on the soul's part, not a rule or a prescription. Beyond a certain point the child *shall* not pull the cat's tail, *or* steal the sugar, *or* spoil the furniture, *or* tell lies. But I'm afraid you can't fix this certain soul's humor. And so it must. If at a sudden point you fly into a temper and thoroughly beat the boy for hardly touching the cat — well, that's life. All you've got to say to him is: "There, that'll serve you for all the times you *have* pulled her tail and hurt her." And he will feel outraged, and so will you. But what does it matter? Children have an infinite understanding of the soul's passionate variabilities, and

forgive even a real injustice, if it was *spontaneous* and not intentional. They know we aren't perfect. What they don't forgive us is if we pretend we are: or if we *bully*.

CHAPTER V

THE FIVE SENSES

Science is wretched in its treatment of the human body as a sort of complex mechanism made up of numerous little machines working automatically in a rather unsatisfactory relation to one another. The body is the total machine; the various organs are the included machines; and the whole thing, given a start at birth, or at conception, trundles on by itself. The only god in the machine, the human will or intelligence, is absolutely at the mercy of the machine.

Such is the orthodox view. Soul, when it is allowed an existence at all, sits somewhat vaguely within the machine, never defined. If anything goes wrong with the machine, why, the soul is forgotten instantly. We summon the arch-mechanic of our day, the medicine-man. And a marvelous earnest fraud he is, doing his best. He is really wonderful as a mechanic of the human system. But the life within us fails more and more, while we marvelously tinker at the engines. Doctors are not to blame.

It is obvious that, even considering the human body as a very delicate and complex machine, you cannot keep such a machine running for one day without most exact central control. Still more is it impossible to consider the automatic evolution of such a machine. When did any machine, even a single spinning-wheel, automatically evolve itself? There was a god in the machine before the machine existed.

So there we are with the human body. There must have been, and must be a central god in the machine of each animate corpus. The little soul of the beetle makes the beetle toddle. The little soul of the *homo sapiens* sets him on his two feet. Don't ask me to define the soul. You might as well ask a bicycle to define the young damsel who so whimsically and so god-like pedals her way along the highroad. A young lady skeltering off on her bicycle to meet her young man — why, what could the bicycle make of such a mystery, if you explained it till doomsday. Yet the bicycle wouldn't be spinning from Streatham to Croydon by itself.

So we may as well settle down to the little god in the machine. We may as well call it the individual soul, and leave it there. It's as far as the bicycle would ever get, if it had to define Mademoiselle. But be sure the bicycle would not deny the existence of the young miss who seats herself in the saddle. Not like us,

who try to pretend there is no one in the saddle. Why even the sun would no more spin without a rider than would a cycle-pedal. But, since we have innumerable planets to reckon with, in the spinning we must not begin to define the rider in terms of our own exclusive planet. Nevertheless, rider there is: even a rider of the many-wheeled universe.

But let us leave the universe alone. It is too big a bauble for me. — *Revenons.* — At the start of me there is me. There is a mysterious little entity which is my individual self, the god who builds the machine and then makes his gay excursion of seventy years within it. Now we are talking at the moment about the machine. For the moment we are the bicycle, and not the feather-brained cyclist. So that all we can do is to define the cyclist in terms of ourself. A bicycle could say: Here, upon my leather saddle, rests a strange and animated force, which I call the force of gravity, as being the one great force which controls my universe. And yet, on second thoughts, I must modify myself. This great force of gravity is not *always* in the saddle. Sometimes it just is not there — and I lean strangely against a wall. I have been even known to turn upside down, with my wheels in the air; spun by the same mysterious Miss. So that I must introduce a theory of Relativity. However, mostly, when I am awake and alive, she is in the saddle; or *it* is in the saddle, the mysterious force. And when it is in the saddle, then two subsidiary forces plunge and claw upon my two pedals, plunge and claw with inestimable power. And at the same time, a kind and mysterious force sways my head-stock, sways most incalculably, and governs my whole motion. This force is not a driving force, but a subtle directing force, beneath whose grip my bright steel body is flexible as a dipping highroad. Then let me not forget the sudden clutch of arrest upon my hurrying wheels. Oh, this is pain to me! While I am rushing forward, surpassing myself in an *élan vital*, suddenly the awful check grips my back wheel, or my front wheel, or both. Suddenly there is a fearful arrest. My soul rushes on before my body, I feel myself strained, torn back. My fibers groan. Then perhaps the tension relaxes.

So the bicycle will continue to babble about itself. And it will inevitably wind up with a philosophy. “Oh, if only the great and divine force rested for ever upon my saddle, and if only the mysterious will which sways my steering gear remained in place for ever: then my pedals would revolve of themselves, and never cease, and no hideous brake should tear the perpetuity of my motions. Then, oh then I should be immortal. I should leap through the world for ever, and spin to infinity, till I was identified with the dizzy and timeless cycle-race of the stars and the great sun....”

Poor old bicycle. The very thought is enough to start a philanthropic society for the prevention of cruelty to bicycles.

Well, then, our human body is the bicycle. And our individual and incomprehensible self is the rider thereof. And seeing that the universe is another bicycle riding full tilt, we are bound to suppose a rider for that also. But we needn't say what sort of rider. When I see a cockroach scuttling across the floor and turning up its tail I stand affronted, and think: A rum sort of rider *you* must have. You've no business to have such a rider, do you hear? — And when I hear the monotonous and plaintive cuckoo in the June woods, I think: Who the devil made *that* clock? — And when I see a politician making a fiery speech on a platform, and the crowd gawping, I think: Lord, save me — they've all got riders. But Holy Moses! you could never guess what was coming. — And so I shouldn't like, myself, to start guessing about the rider of the universe. I am all too flummoxed by the masquerade in the tourney round about me.

We ourselves then: wisdom, like charity, begins at home. We've each of us got a rider in the saddle: an individual soul. Mostly it can't ride, and can't steer, so mankind is like squadrons of bicycles running amok. We should every one fall off if we didn't ride so thick that we hold each other up. Horrid nightmare!

As for myself, I have a horror of riding *en bloc*. So I grind away uphill, and sweat my guts out, as they say.

Well, well — my body is my bicycle: the whole middle of me is the saddle where sits the rider of my soul. And my front wheel is the cardiac plane, and my back wheel is the solar plexus. And the brakes are the voluntary ganglia. And the steering gear is my head. And the right and left pedals are the right and left dynamics of the body, in some way corresponding to the sympathetic and voluntary division.

So that now I know more or less how my rider rides me, and from what centers controls me. That is, I know the points of vital contact between my rider and my machine: between my invisible and my visible self. I don't attempt to say what is my rider. A bicycle might as well try to define its young Miss by wriggling its handle-bars and ringing its bell.

However, having more or less determined the four primary motions, we can see the further unfolding. In a child, the solar plexus and the cardiac plexus, with corresponding voluntary ganglia, are awake and active. From these centers develop the great functions of the body.

As we have seen, it is the solar plexus, with the lumbar ganglion, which controls the great dynamic system, the functioning of the liver and the kidneys. Any excess in the sympathetic dynamism tends to accelerate the action of the liver, to cause fever and constipation. Any collapse of the sympathetic dynamism causes anæmia. The sudden stimulating of the voluntary center may cause diarrhœa, and so on. But all this depends so completely on the polarized

flow between the individual and the correspondent, between the child and mother, child and father, child and sisters or brothers or teacher, or circumambient universe, that it is impossible to lay down laws, unless we state particulars. Nevertheless, the whole of the great organs of the lower body are controlled from the two lower centers, and these organs work well or ill according as there is a true dynamic *psychic* activity at the two primary centers of consciousness. By a *true* dynamic psychic activity we mean an activity which is true to the individual himself, to his own peculiar soul-nature. And a dynamic psychic activity means a dynamic polarity between the individual himself and other individuals concerned in his living; or between him and his immediate surroundings, human, physical, geographical.

On the upper plane, the lungs and heart are controlled from the cardiac plane and the thoracic ganglion. Any excess in the sympathetic mode from the upper centers tends to burn the lungs with oxygen, weaken them with stress, and cause consumption. So it is just criminal to make a child too loving. No child should be induced to love too much. It means derangement and death at last.

But beyond the primary physiological function — and it is the business of doctors to discover the relation between the functioning of the primary organs and the dynamic psychic activity at the four primary consciousness-centers, — beyond these physical functions, there are the activities which are half-psychic, half-functional. Such as the five senses.

Of the five senses, four have their functioning in the face-region. The fifth, the sense of touch, is distributed all over the body. But all have their roots in the four great primary centers of consciousness. From the constellation of your nerve-nodes, from the great field of your poles, the nerves run out in every direction, ending on the surface of the body. Inwardly this is an inextricable ramification and communication.

And yet the body is planned out in areas, there is a definite area-control from the four centers. On the back the sense of touch is not acute. There the voluntary centers act in resistance. But in the front of the body, the breast is one great field of sympathetic touch, the belly is another. On these two fields the stimulus of touch is quite different, has a quite different psychic quality and psychic result. The breast-touch is the fine alertness of quivering curiosity, the belly-touch is a deep thrill of delight and avidity. Correspondingly, the hands and arms are instruments of superb delicate curiosity, and deliberate execution. Through the elbows and the wrists flows the dynamic psychic current, and a dislocation in the current between two individuals will cause a feeling of dislocation at the wrists and elbows. On the lower plane, the legs and feet are instruments of unfathomable gratifications and repudiations. The thighs, the knees, the feet are

intensely alive with love-desire, darkly and superbly drinking in the love-contact, blindly. Or they are the great centers of resistance, kicking, repudiating. Sudden flushing of great general sympathetic desire will make a man feel weak at the knees. Hatred will harden the tension of the knees like steel, and grip the feet like talons. Thus the fields of touch are four, two sympathetic fields in front of the body from the throat to the feet, two resistant fields behind from the neck to the heels.

There are two fields of touch, however, where the distribution is not so simple: the face and the buttocks. Neither in the face nor in the buttocks is there one single mode of sense communication.

The face is of course the great window of the self, the great opening of the self upon the world, the great gateway. The lower body has its own gates of exit. But the bulk of our communication with all the outer universe goes on through the face.

And every one of the windows or gates of the face has its direct communication with each of the four great centers of the first field of consciousness. Take the mouth, with the sense of taste. The mouth is primarily the gate of the two chief sensual centers. It is the gateway to the belly and the loins. Through the mouth we eat and we drink. In the mouth we have the sense of taste. At the lips, too, we kiss. And the kiss of the mouth is the first sensual connection.

In the mouth also are the teeth. And the teeth are the instruments of our sensual will. The growth of the teeth is controlled entirely from the two great sensual centers below the diaphragm. But almost entirely from the one center, the voluntary center. The growth and the life of the teeth depend almost entirely on the lumbar ganglion. During the growth of the teeth the sympathetic mode is held in abeyance. There is a sort of arrest. There is pain, there is diarrhoea, there is misery for the baby.

And we, in our age, have no rest with our teeth. Our mouths are too small. For many ages we have been suppressing the avid, negroid, sensual will. We have been converting ourselves into ideal creatures, all spiritually conscious, and active dynamically only on one plane, the upper, spiritual plane. Our mouth has contracted, our teeth have become soft and un-quickenened. Where in us are the sharp and vivid teeth of the wolf, keen to defend and devour? If we had them more, we should be happier. Where are the white negroid teeth? Where? In our little pinched mouths they have no room. We are sympathy-rotten, and spirit-rotten, and idea-rotten. We have forfeited our flashing sensual power. And we have false teeth in our mouths. In the same way the lips of our sensual desire go thinner and more meaningless, in the compression of our upper will and our

idea-driven impulse. Let us break the conscious, self-conscious love-ideal, and we shall grow strong, resistant teeth once more, and the teething of our young will not be the hell it is.

Teething is strictly the period when the voluntary center of the lower plane first comes into full activity, and takes for a time the precedence.

So, the mouth is the great sensual gate to the lower body. But let us not forget it is also a gate by which we breathe, the gate through which we speak and go impalpably forth to our object, the gate at which we can kiss the pinched, delicate, spiritual kiss. Therefore, although the main sensual gate of entrance to the lower body, it has its reference also to the upper body.

Taste, the sense of taste, is an intake of a pure communication between us and a body from the outside world. It contains the element of touch, and in this it refers to the cardiac plexus. But taste, *quâ* taste, refers purely to the solar plexus.

And then smell. The nostrils are the great gate from the wide atmosphere of heaven to the lungs. The extreme sigh of yearning we catch through the mouth. But the delicate nose advances always into the air, our palpable communicator with the infinite air. Thus it has its first delicate root in the cardiac plexus, the root of its intake. And the root of the delicate-proud exhalation, rejection, is in the thoracic ganglion. But the nostrils have their other function of smell. Here the delicate nerve-ends run direct from the lower centers, from the solar plexus and the lumbar ganglion, or even deeper. There is the refined sensual intake when a scent is sweet. There is the sensual repudiation when a scent is unsavoury. And just as the fullness of the lips and the shape of the mouth depend on the development from the lower or the upper centers, the sensual or the spiritual, so does the shape of the nose depend on the direct control of the deepest centers of consciousness. A perfect nose is perhaps the result of a balance in the four modes. But what is a perfect nose! — We only know that a short snub nose goes with an over-sympathetic nature, not proud enough; while a long nose derives from the center of the upper will, the thoracic ganglion, our great center of curiosity, and benevolent or objective control. A thick, squat nose is the sensual-sympathetic nose, and the high, arched nose the sensual voluntary nose, having the curve of repudiation, as when we turn up our nose from a bad smell, but also the proud curve of haughtiness and subjective authority. The nose is one of the greatest indicators of character. That is to say, it almost inevitably indicates the mode of predominant dynamic consciousness in the individual, the predominant primary center from which he lives. — When savages rub noses instead of kissing, they are exchanging a more sensitive and a deeper sensual salute than our lip-touch.

The eyes are the third great gateway of the psyche. Here the soul goes in and

out of the body, as a bird flying forth and coming home. But the root of conscious vision is almost entirely in the breast. When I go forth from my own eyes, in delight to dwell upon the world which is beyond me, outside me, then I go forth from wide open windows, through which shows the full and living lambent darkness of my present inward self. I go forth, and I leave the lovely open darkness of my sentient self revealed; when I go forth in the wonder of vision to dwell upon the beloved, or upon the wonder of the world, I go from the center of the glad breast, through the eyes, and who will may look into the full soft darkness of me, rich with my undiscovered presence. But if I am displeased, then hard and cold my self stands in my eyes, and refuses any communication, any sympathy, but merely stares outwards. It is the motion of cold objectivity from the thoracic ganglion. Or, from the same center of will, cold but intense my eyes may watch with curiosity, as a cat watches a fly. It may be into my curiosity will creep an element of warm gladness in the wonder which I am beholding outside myself. Or it may be that my curiosity will be purely and simply the cold, almost cruel curiosity of the upper will, directed from the ganglion of the shoulders: such as is the acute attention of an experimental scientist.

The eyes have, however, their sensual root as well. But this is hard to transfer into language, as all *our* vision, our modern Northern vision is in the upper mode of actual seeing.

There is a sensual way of beholding. There is the dark, desirous look of a savage who apprehends only that which has direct reference to himself, that which stirs a certain dark yearning within his lower self. Then his eye is fathomless blackness. But there is the dark eye which glances with a certain fire, and has no depth. There is a keen quick vision which watches, which beholds, but which never yields to the object outside: as a cat watching its prey. The dark glancing look which knows the *strangeness*, the danger of its object, the need to overcome the object. The eye which is not wide open to study, to *learn*, but which powerfully, proudly or cautiously glances, and knows the terror or the pure desirability of *strangeness* in the object it beholds. The savage is all in all in himself. That which he sees outside he hardly notices, or, he sees as something odd, something automatically desirable, something lustfully desirable, or something dangerous. What we call vision, that he has not.

We must compare the look in a horse's eye with the look in a cow's. The eye of the cow is soft, velvety, receptive. She stands and gazes with the strangest intent curiosity. She goes forth from herself in wonder. The root of her vision is in her yearning breast. The same one hears when she moos. The same massive weight of passion is in a bull's breast; the passion to go forth from himself. His strength is in his breast, his weapons are on his head. The wonder is always

outside him.

But the horse's eye is bright and glancing. His curiosity is cautious, full of terror, or else aggressive and frightening for the object. The root of his vision is in his belly, in the solar plexus. And he fights with his teeth, and his heels, the sensual weapons.

Both these animals, however, are established in the sympathetic mode. The life mode in both is sensitively sympathetic, or preponderantly sympathetic. Those animals which like cats, wolves, tigers, hawks, chiefly live from the great voluntary centers, these animals are, in our sense of the word, almost visionless. Sight in them is sharpened or narrowed down to a point: the object of prey. It is exclusive. They see no more than this. And thus they see unthinkably far, unthinkably keenly.

Most animals, however, smell what they see: vision is not very highly developed. They know better by the more direct contact of scent.

And vision in us becomes faulty because we proceed too much in one mode. We see too much, we attend too much. The dark, glancing sightlessness of the intent savage, the narrowed vision of the cat, the single point of vision of the hawk — these we do not know any more. We live far too much from the sympathetic centers, without the balance from the voluntary mode. And we live far, far too much from the *upper* sympathetic center and voluntary center, in an endless objective curiosity. Sight is the least sensual of all the senses. And we strain ourselves to see, see, see — everything, everything through the eye, in one mode of objective curiosity. There is nothing inside us, we stare endlessly at the outside. So our eyes begin to fail; to retaliate on us. We go short-sighted, almost in self-protection.

Hearing the last, and perhaps the deepest of the senses. And here there is no choice. In every other faculty we have the power of rejection. We have a choice of vision. We can, if we choose, see in the terms of the wonderful beyond, the world of light into which we go forth in joy to lose ourselves in it. Or we can see, as the Egyptians saw, in the terms of their own dark souls: seeing the strangeness of the creature outside, the gulf between it and them, but finally, its existence in terms of themselves. They saw according to their own unchangeable idea, subjectively, they did not go forth from themselves to seek the wonder outside.

Those are the two chief ways of sympathetic vision. We call our way the objective, the Egyptian the subjective. But objective and subjective are words that depend absolutely on your starting point. Spiritual and sensual are much more descriptive terms.

But there are, of course, also the two ways of volitional vision. We can see

with the endless modern critical sight, analytic, and at last deliberately ugly. Or we can see as the hawk sees the one concentrated spot where beats the life-heart of our prey.

In the four modes of sight we have some choice. We have some choice to refuse tastes or smells or touch. In hearing we have the minimum of choice. Sound acts direct upon the great affective centers. We may voluntarily quicken our hearing, or make it dull. But we have really no choice of what we hear. Our will is eliminated. Sound acts direct, almost automatically, upon the affective centers. And we have no power of going forth from the ear. We are always and only recipient.

Nevertheless, sound acts upon us in various ways, according to the four primary poles of consciousness. The singing of birds acts almost entirely upon the centers of the breast. Birds, which live by flight, impelled from the strong conscious-activity of the breast and shoulders, have become for us symbols of the spirit, the upper mode of consciousness. Their legs have become idle, almost insentient twigs. Only the tail flirts from the center of the sensual will.

But their singing acts direct upon the upper, or spiritual centers in us. So does almost all our music, which is all Christian in tendency. But modern music is analytical, critical, and it has discovered the power of ugliness. Like our martial music, it is of the upper plane, like our martial songs, our fifes and our brass-bands. These act direct upon the thoracic ganglion. Time was, however, when music acted upon the sensual centers direct. We hear it still in savage music, and in the roll of drums, and in the roaring of lions, and in the howling of cats. And in some voices still we hear the deeper resonance of the sensual mode of consciousness. But the tendency is for everything to be brought on to the upper plane, whilst the lower plane is just worked automatically from the upper.

CHAPTER VI

FIRST GLIMMERINGS OF MIND

We can now see what is the true goal of education for a child. It is the full and harmonious development of the four primary modes of consciousness, always with regard to the individual nature of the child.

The goal is *not* ideal. The aim is *not* mental consciousness. We want *effectual* human beings, not conscious ones. The final aim is not *to know*, but *to be*. There never was a more risky motto than that: *Know thyself*. You've got to know yourself as far as possible. But not just for the sake of knowing. You've got to know yourself so that you can at last *be* yourself. "Be yourself" is the last motto.

The whole field of dynamic and effectual consciousness is *always* pre-mental, non-mental. Not even the most knowing man that ever lived would know how he would be feeling next week; whether some new and utterly shattering impulse would have arisen in him and laid his nicely-conceived self in ruins. It is the impulse we have to live by, not the ideals or the idea. But we have to know ourselves pretty thoroughly before we can break the automatism of ideals and conventions. The savage in a state of nature is one of the most conventional of creatures. So is a child. Only through fine delicate knowledge can we recognize and release our impulses. Now our whole aim has been to force each individual to a maximum of mental control, and mental consciousness. Our poor little plans of children are put into horrible forcing-beds, called schools, and the young idea is there forced to shoot. It shoots, poor thing, like a potato in a warm cellar. One mass of pallid sickly ideas and ideals. And no root, no life. The ideas shoot, hard enough, in our sad offspring, but they shoot at the expense of life itself. Never was such a mistake. Mental consciousness is a purely individual affair. Some men are born to be highly and delicately conscious. But for the vast majority, much mental consciousness is simply a catastrophe, a blight. It just stops their living.

Our business, at the present, is to prevent at all cost the young idea from shooting. The ideal mind, the brain, has become the vampire of modern life, sucking up the blood and the life. There is hardly an original thought or original utterance possible to us. All is sickly repetition of stale, stale ideas.

Let all schools be closed at once. Keep only a few technical training establishments, nothing more. Let humanity lie fallow, for two generations at

least. Let no child learn to read, unless it learns by itself, out of its own individual persistent desire.

That is my serious admonition, gentle reader. But I am not so flighty as to imagine you will pay any heed. But if I thought you would, I should feel my hope surge up. And if you *don't* pay any heed, calamity will at length shut your schools for you, sure enough.

The process of transfer from the primary consciousness to recognized mental consciousness is a mystery like every other transfer. Yet it follows its own laws. And here we begin to approach the confines of orthodox psychology, upon which we have no desire to trespass. But this we *can* say. The degree of transfer from primary to mental consciousness varies with every individual. But in most individuals the natural degree is very low.

The process of transfer from primary consciousness is called sublimation, the sublimating of the potential body of knowledge with the definite reality of the idea. And with this process we have identified all education. The very derivation of the Latin word *education* shows us. Of course it should mean the leading forth of each nature to its fullness. But with us, fools that we are, it is the leading forth of the primary consciousness, the potential or dynamic consciousness, into mental consciousness, which is finite and static. Now before we set out so gayly to lead our children *en bloc* out of the dynamic into the static way of consciousness, let us consider a moment what we are doing.

A child in the womb can have no *idea* of the mother. I think orthodox psychology will allow us so much. And yet the child in the womb must be dynamically conscious of the mother. Otherwise how could it maintain a definite and progressively developing relation to her?

This consciousness, however, is utterly non-ideal, non-mental, purely dynamic, a matter of dynamic polarized intercourse of vital vibrations, as an exchange of wireless messages which are never translated from the pulse-rhythm into speech, because they have no need to be. It is a dynamic polarized intercourse between the great primary nuclei in the foetus and the corresponding nuclei in the dynamic maternal psyche.

This form of consciousness is established at conception, and continues long after birth. Nay, it continues all life long. But the particular interchange of dynamic consciousness between mother and child suffers no interruption at birth. It continues almost the same. The child has no conception whatsoever of the mother. It cannot see her, for its eye has no focus. It can hear her, because hearing needs no transmission into concept, but it has no oral notion of sounds. It knows her. But only by a form of vital dynamic correspondence, a sort of magnetic interchange. The idea does not intervene at all.

Gradually, however, the dark shadow of our object begins to loom in the formless mind of the infant. The idea of the mother is, as it were, gradually photographed on the cerebral plasm. It begins with the faintest shadow — but the figure is gradually developed through years of experience. It is never quite completed.

How does the figure of the mother gradually develop as a *conception* in the child mind? It develops as the result of the positive and negative reaction from the primary centers of consciousness. From the first great center of sympathy the child is drawn to a lovely oneing with the mother. From the first great center of will comes the independent self-assertion which locates the mother as something outside, something objective. And as a result of this twofold notion, a twofold increase in the child. First, the dynamic establishment of the individual consciousness in the infant: and then the first shadow of a mental conception of the mother, in the infant brain. The development of the *original* mind in every child and every man always and only follows from the dual fulfillment in the dynamic consciousness.

But mark further. Each time, after the fourfold interchange between two dynamic polarized lives, there results a development in the individuality and a sublimation into consciousness, both simultaneously in each party: *and this dual development causes at once a diminution in the dynamic polarity between the two parties*. That is, as its individuality and its mental concept of the mother develop in the child, there is a corresponding *waning* of the dynamic relation between the child and the mother. And this is the natural progression of all love. As we have said before, the accomplishment of individuality never finally exhausts the dynamic flow between parents and child. In the same way, a child can never have a finite conception of either of its parents. It can have a very much more finite, finished conception of its aunts or its friends. The portrait of the parent can never be quite completed in the mind of the son or daughter. As long as time lasts it must be left unfinished.

Nevertheless, the inevitable photography of time upon the mental plasm does print at last a very substantial portrait of the parent, a very well-filled concept in the child mind. And the nearer a conception comes towards finality, the nearer does the dynamic relation, out of which this concept has arisen, draw to a close. To know, is to lose. When I have a finished mental concept of a beloved, or a friend, then the love and the friendship is dead. It falls to the level of an acquaintance. As soon as I have a finished mental conception, a full idea even of myself, then dynamically I am dead. To know is to die.

But knowledge and death are part of our natural development. Only, of course, most things can never be known by us in full. Which means we do never

absolutely die, even to our parents. So that Jesus' question to His mother, "Woman, what have I to do with thee!" — while expressing a major truth, still has an exaggerated sound, which comes from its denial of the minor truth.

This progression from dynamic relationship towards a finished individuality and a finished mental concept is carried on from the four great primary centers through the correspondence medium of all the senses and sensibilities. First of all, the child knows the mother only through touch — perfect and immediate contact. And yet, from the moment of conception, the egg-cell repudiated complete adhesion and even communication, and asserted its individual integrity. The child in the womb, perfect a contact though it may have with the mother, is all the time also dynamically polarized against this contact. From the first moment, this relation in touch has a dual polarity, and, no doubt, a dual mode. It is a fourfold interchange of consciousness, the moment the egg-cell has made its two spontaneous divisions.

As soon as the child is born, there is a real severance. The contact of touch is interrupted, it now becomes occasional only. True, the dynamic flow between mother and child is not severed when simple physical contact is missing. Though mother and child may not touch, still the dynamic flow continues between them. The mother knows her child, feels her bowels and her breast drawn to it, even if it be a hundred miles away. But if the severance continue long, the dynamic flow begins to die, both in mother and child. It wanes fairly quickly — and perhaps can never be fully revived. The dynamic relation between parent and child may fairly easily fall into quiescence, a static condition.

For a full dynamic relationship it is necessary that there be actual contact. The nerves run from the four primary dynamos, and end with live ends all over the body. And it is necessary to bring the live ends of the nerves of the child into contact with the live ends of corresponding nerves in the mother, so that a pure circuit is established. Wherever a pure circuit is established, there occurs a pure development in the individual creation, and this is inevitably accompanied by sensation; and sensation is the first term of mental knowledge.

So, from the field of the breast and arms, the upper circuit, and from the field of the knees and feet and belly, the lower circuit.

And then, the moment a child is born, the face is alive. And the face communicates direct with both planes of primary consciousness. The moment a child is born, it begins to grope for the breast. And suddenly a new great circuit is established, the four poles all working at once, as the child sucks. There is the profound desirousness of the lower center of sympathy, and the superior avidity of the center of will, and at the same time, the cleaving yearning to the nipple, and the tiny curiosity of lips and gums. The nipple of the mother's breast is one

of the great gates of the body, hence of the living psyche. In the nipple terminate vivid nerves which flash their very powerful vibrations through the mouth of the child and deep into its four great poles of being and knowing. Even the nipples of the man are gateways to the great dynamic flow: still gateways.

Touch, taste, and smell are now active in the baby. And these senses, so-called, are strictly sensations. They are the first term of the child's mental knowledge. And on these three *cerebral* reactions the foundation of the future mind is laid.

The moment there is a perfect polarized circuit between the first four poles of dynamic consciousness, at that moment does the mind, the terminal station, flash into cognition. The first cognition is merely sensation: sensation and the remembrance of sensation being the first element in all knowing and in all conception.

The circuit of touch, taste, and smell must be well established, before the eyes begin actually to see. All mental knowledge is built up of sensation and of memory. It is the continually recurring sensation of the touch of the mother which forms the basis of the first conception of the mother. After that, the gradually discriminated taste of the mother, and scent of the mother. Till gradually sight and hearing develop and largely usurp the first three senses, as medium of correspondence and of knowledge.

And while, of course, the sensational *knowledge* is being secreted in the brain, in some much more mysterious way the living individuality of the child is being developed in the four first nuclei, the four great nerve-centers of the primary field of consciousness and being.

As time goes on, the child learns to see the mother. At first he sees her face as a blur, and though he knows her, knows her by a direct glow of communication, as if her face were a warm glowing life-lamp which rejoiced him. But gradually, as the circuit of touch, taste, and smell become powerfully established; gradually, as the individual develops in the child, and so retreats towards isolation; gradually, as the child stands more immune from the mother, the circuit of correspondence extends, and the eyes now communicate across space, the ears begin to discriminate sounds. Last of all develops discriminate hearing.

Now gradually the picture of the mother is transferred to the child's mind, and the sound of the first baby-words is imprinted. And as the child learns to discriminate visually, objectively, between the mother and the nurse, he learns to choose, and becomes individually free. And still, the dynamic correspondence is not finished. It only changes its circuit.

While the brain is registering sensations, the four dynamic centers are coming into perfect relation. Or rather, as we see, the reverse is the case. As the dynamic

centers come into perfect relation, the mind registers and remembers sensations, and begins consciously to know. But the great field of activity is still and always the dynamic field. When a child learns to walk, it learns almost entirely from the solar plexus and the lumbar ganglion, the cardiac plexus and the thoracic ganglion balancing the upper body.

There is a perfected circuit of polarity. The two lower centers are the positive, the two upper the negative poles. And so the child strikes out with his feet for the earth, presses, and strikes away again from the earth, the two upper centers meanwhile corresponding implicitly in the balance of the upper body. It is a chain of spontaneous activity in the four primary centers, establishing a circuit through the whole body. But the positive poles are the lower centers. And the brain has probably nothing at all to do with it. Even the *desire* to walk is not born in the brain, but in the primary nuclei.

The same with the use of the hands and arms. It means the establishment of a pure circuit between the four centers, the two upper poles now being the positive, the lower the negative poles, and the hands the live end of the wire. Again the brain is not concerned. Probably, even in the first deliberate grasping of an object, the brain is not concerned. Not until there is an element of recognition and sensation-memory.

All our primal activity originates and circulates purely in the four great nerve centers. All our active desire, our genuine impulse, our love, our hope, our yearning, everything originates mysteriously at these four great centers or well-heads of our existence: everything vital and dynamic. The mind can only register that which results from the emanation of the dynamic impulse and the collision or communion of this impulse with its object.

So now we see that we can never know ourselves. Knowledge is to consciousness what the signpost is to the traveler: just an indication of the way which has been traveled before. Knowledge is not even in direct proportion to being. There may be great knowledge of chemistry in a man who is a rather poor *being*: and those who *know*, even in wisdom like Solomon, are often at the end of the matter of living, not at the beginning. As a matter of fact, David did the living, the dynamic achievement. To Solomon was left the consummation and the finish, and the dying down.

Yet we *must* know, if only in order to learn not to know. The supreme lesson of human consciousness is to learn how *not to know*. That is, how not to *interfere*. That is, how to live dynamically, from the great Source, and not statically, like machines driven by ideas and principles from the head, or automatically, from one fixed desire. At last, knowledge must be put into its true place in the living activity of man. And we must know deeply, in order even to

do that.

So a new conception of the meaning of education.

Education means leading out the individual nature in each man and woman to its true fullness. You can't do that by stimulating the mind. To pump education into the mind is fatal. That which sublimates from the dynamic consciousness into the mental consciousness has alone any value. This, in most individuals, is very little indeed. So that most individuals, under a wise government, would be most carefully protected from all vicious attempts to inject extraneous ideas into them. Every extraneous idea, which has no inherent root in the dynamic consciousness, is as dangerous as a nail driven into a young tree. For the mass of people, knowledge *must* be symbolical, mythical, dynamic. This means, you must have a higher, responsible, conscious class: and then in varying degrees the lower classes, varying in their degree of consciousness. Symbols must be true from top to bottom. But the interpretation of the symbols must rest, degree after degree, in the higher, responsible, conscious classes. To *those who cannot divest* themselves again of mental consciousness and definite ideas, mentality and ideas are death, nails through their hands and feet.

CHAPTER VII

FIRST STEPS IN EDUCATION

The first process of education is obviously not a mental process. When a mother talks to a baby, she is not encouraging its little mind to think. When she is coaxing her child to walk, she is not making a theoretic exposition of the science of equilibration. She crouches before the child, at a little distance, and spreads her hands. "Come, baby — come to mother. Come! Baby, walk! Yes, walk! Walk to mother! Come along. A little walk to its mother. Come! Come then! Why yes, a pretty baby! Oh, he can toddle! Yes — yes — No, don't be frightened, a dear. No — Come to mother — " and she catches his little pinafore by the tip — and the infant lurches forward. "There! There! A beautiful walk! A beautiful walker, yes! Walked all the way to mother, baby did. Yes, he did — "

Now who will tell me that this talk has any rhyme or reason? Not a spark of reason. Yet a real rhyme: or rhythm, much more important. The song and the urge of the mother's voice plays direct on the affective centers of the child, a wonderful stimulus and tuition. The words hardly matter. True, this constant repetition in the end forms a mental association. At the moment they have no mental significance at all for the baby. But they ring with a strange palpitating music in his fluttering soul, and lift him into motion.

And this is the way to educate children: the instinctive way of mothers. There should be no effort made to teach children to think, to have ideas. Only to lift them and urge them into dynamic activity. The voice of dynamic sound, not the words of understanding. Damn understanding. Gestures, and touch, and expression of the face, not theory. Never have ideas about children — and never have ideas *for* them.

If we are going to teach children we must teach them first to move. And not by rule or mental dictation. Horror! But by playing and teasing and anger, and amusement. A child must learn to move blithe and free and proud. It must learn the fullness of spontaneous motion. And this it can only learn by continuous reaction from all the centers, through all the emotions. A child must learn to contain itself. It must learn to sit still if need be. Part of the first phase of education is the learning to stay still and be physically self-contained. Then a child must learn to be alone, and to adventure alone, and to play alone. Any peevish clinging should be quite roughly rebuffed. From the very first day, throw

a child back on its own resources — even a little cruelly sometimes. But don't neglect it, don't have a negative attitude to it. Play with it, tease it and roll it over as a dog her puppy, mock it when it is too timorous, laugh at it, scold it when it really bothers you — for a child must learn not to bother another person — and when it makes you genuinely angry, spank it soundly. But always remember that it is a single little soul by itself; and that the responsibility for the wise, warm relationship is yours, the adult's.

Then always watch its deportment. Above all things encourage a straight backbone and proud shoulders. Above all things despise a slovenly movement, an ugly bearing and unpleasing manner. And make a mock of petulance and of too much timidity.

We are imbeciles to start bothering about love and so forth in a child. Forget utterly that there is such a thing as emotional reciprocity. But never forget your own honor as an adult individual towards a small individual. It is a question of honor, not of love.

A tree grows straight when it has deep roots and is not too stifled. Love is a spontaneous thing, coming out of the spontaneous effectual soul. As a deliberate principle it is an unmitigated evil. Also morality which is based on ideas, or on an ideal, is an unmitigated evil. A child which is proud and free in its movements, in all its deportment, will be quite as moral as need be. Honor is an instinct, a superb instinct which should be kept keenly alive. Immorality, vice, crime, these come from a suppression or a collapse at one or other of the great primary centers. If one of these centers fails to maintain its true polarity, then there is a physical or psychic derangement, or both. And viciousness or crime are the result of a derangement in the primary system. Pure morality is only an instinctive adjustment which the soul makes in every circumstance, adjusting one thing to another livingly, delicately, sensitively. There can be no law. Therefore, at every cost and charge keep the first four centers alive and alert, active, and vivid in reaction. And then you need fear no perversion. What we have done, in our era, is, first, we have tried as far as possible to suppress or subordinate the two sensual centers. We have so unduly insisted on and exaggerated the upper spiritual or selfless mode — the living in the other person and through the other person — that we have caused already a dangerous over-balance in the natural psyche.

To correct this we go one worse, and try to rule ourselves more and more by the old ideas of sympathy and benevolence. We think that love and benevolence will cure anything. Whereas love and benevolence are our poison, poison to the giver, and still more poison to the receiver. Poison only because there is practically *no* spontaneous love left in the world. It is all *will*, the fatal love-will

and insatiable morbid curiosity. The pure sympathetic mode of love long ago broke down. There is now only deadly, exaggerated volition.

This is also why general education should be suppressed as soon as possible. We have fallen into a state of fixed, deadly will. Everything we do and say to our children in school tends simply to fix in them the same deadly will, under the pretence of pure love. Our idealism is the clue to our fixed will. Love, beauty, benevolence, progress, these are the words we use. But the principle we evoke is a principle of barren, sanctified compulsion of all life. We want to put all life under compulsion. "How to outwit the nerves," for example. — And therefore, to save the children as far as possible, elementary education should be stopped at once.

No child should be sent to any sort of public institution before the age of ten years. If I could but advise, I would advise that this notice should be sent through the length and breadth of the land.

"Parents, the State can no longer be responsible for the mind and character of your children. From the first day of the coming year, all schools will be closed for an indefinite period. Fathers, see that your boys are trained to be men. Mothers, see that your daughters are trained to be women.

"All schools will shortly be converted either into public workshops or into gymnasia. No child will be admitted into the workshops under ten years of age. Active training in primitive modes of fighting and gymnastics will be compulsory for all boys over ten years of age.

"All girls over ten years of age must attend at one domestic workshop. All girls over ten years of age may, in addition, attend at one workshop of skilled labor, or of technical industry, or of art. Admission for three months' probation.

"All boys over ten years of age must attend at one workshop of domestic crafts, and at one workshop of skilled labor, or of technical industry, or of art. A boy may choose, with his parents' consent, his school of labor, or technical industry or art, but the directors reserve the right to transfer him to a more suitable department, if necessary, after a three months' probation.

"It is the intention of this State to form a body of active, energetic citizens. The danger of a helpless, presumptuous, newspaper-reading population is universally recognized.

"All elementary education is left in the hands of the parents, save such as is necessary to the different branches of industry.

"Schools of mental culture are free to all individuals over fourteen years of age.

"Universities are free to all who obtain the first culture degree."

The fact is, our process of universal education is to-day so uncouth, so

psychologically barbaric, that it is the most terrible menace to the existence of our race. We seize hold of our children, and by parrot-compulsion we force into them a set of mental tricks. By unnatural and unhealthy compulsion we force them into a certain amount of cerebral activity. And then, after a few years, with a certain number of windmills in their heads, we turn them loose, like so many inferior Don Quixotes, to make a mess of life. All that they have learnt in their heads has no reference at all to their dynamic souls. The windmills spin and spin in a wind of words, Dulcinea del Toboso beckons round every corner, and our nation of inferior Quixotes jumps on and off tram-cars, trains, bicycles, motor-cars, buses, in one mad chase of the divine Dulcinea, who is all the time chewing chocolates and feeling very, very bored. It is no use telling the poor devils to stop. They read in the newspapers about more Dulcineas and more chivalry due to them and more horrid persons who injure the fair fame of these bored females. And round they skelter, after their own tails. That is, when they are not forced to grind out their lives for a wage. Though work is the only thing that prevents our masses from going quite mad.

To tell the truth, ideas are the most dangerous germs mankind has ever been injected with. They are introduced into the brain by injection, in schools and by means of newspapers, and then we are done for.

An idea which is merely introduced into the brain, and started spinning there like some outrageous insect, is the cause of all our misery to-day. Instead of living from the spontaneous centers, we live from the head. We chew, chew, chew at some theory, some idea. We grind, grind, grind in our mental consciousness, till we are beside ourselves. Our primary affective centers, our centers of spontaneous being, are so utterly ground round and automatized that they squeak in all stages of disharmony and incipient collapse. We are a people — and not we alone — of idiots, imbeciles and epileptics, and we don't even know we are raving.

And all is due, directly and solely, to that hateful germ we call the Ideal. The Ideal is *always* evil, no matter what ideal it be. No idea should ever be raised to a governing throne.

This does not mean that man should immediately cut off his head and try to develop a pair of eyes in his breasts. But it does mean this: that an idea is just the final concrete or registered result of living dynamic interchange and reactions: that no idea is ever perfectly expressed until its dynamic cause is finished; and that to continue to put into dynamic effect an already perfected idea means the nullification of all living activity, the substitution of mechanism, and all the resultant horrors of *ennui*, ecstasy, neurasthenia, and a collapsing psyche.

The whole tree of our idea of life and living is dead. Then let us leave off

hanging ourselves and our children from its branches like medlars.

The idea, the actual idea, must rise ever fresh, ever displaced, like the leaves of a tree, from out of the quickness of the sap, and according to the forever incalculable effluence of the great dynamic centers of life. The tree of life is a gay kind of tree that is forever dropping its leaves and budding out afresh, quite different ones. If the last lot were thistle leaves, the next lot may be vine. You never can tell with the Tree of Life.

So we come back to that precious child who costs us such a lot of ink. By what right, I ask you, are we going to inject into him our own disease-germs of ideas and infallible motives? By the right of the diseased, who want to infect everybody.

There are *few, few people* in whom the living impulse and reaction develops and sublimates into mental consciousness. There are all kinds of trees in the forest. But few of them indeed bear the apples of knowledge. The modern world insists, however, that every individual shall bear the apples of knowledge. So we go through the forest of mankind, cut back every tree, and try to graft it into an apple-tree. A nice wood of monsters we make by so doing.

It is not the *nature* of most men to know and to understand and to reason very far. Therefore, why should they make a pretense of it? It is the nature of some few men to reason, then let them reason. Those whose nature it is to be rational will instinctively ask why and wherefore, and wrestle with themselves for an answer. But why every Tom, Dick and Harry should have the why and wherefore of the universe rammed into him, and should be allowed to draw the conclusion hence that he is the ideal person and responsible for the universe, I don't know. It is a lie anyway — for neither the whys nor the wherefores are his own, and he is but a parrot with his nut of a universe.

Why should we cram the mind of a child with facts that have nothing to do with his own experiences, and have no relation to his own dynamic activity? Let us realize that every extraneous idea effectually introduced into a man's mind is a direct obstruction of his dynamic activity. Every idea which is introduced from outside into a man's mind, and which does not correspond to his own dynamic nature, is a fatal stumbling-block for that man: is a cause of arrest for his true individual activity, and a derangement to his psychic being.

For instance, if I teach a man the idea that all men are equal. Now this idea has no foundation in experience, but is logically deduced from certain ethical or philosophic principles. But there is a disease of idealism in the world, and we all are born with it. Particularly teachers are born with it. So they seize on the idea of equality, and proceed to instil it. With what result? Your man is no longer a man, living his own life from his own spontaneous centers. He is a theoretic

imbecile trying to frustrate and dislocate all life.

It is the death of all life to force a pure *idea* into practice. Life must be lived from the deep, self-responsible spontaneous centers of every individual, in a vital, *non-ideal* circuit of dynamic relation between individuals. The passions or desires which are thought-born are deadly. Any particular mode of passion or desire which receives an exclusive ideal sanction at once becomes poisonous.

If this is true for men, it is much more true for women. Teach a woman to act from an idea, and you destroy her womanhood for ever. Make a woman self-conscious, and her soul is barren as a sandbag. Why were we driven out of Paradise? Why did we fall into this gnawing disease of unappeasable dissatisfaction? Not because we sinned. Ah, no. All the animals in Paradise enjoyed the sensual passion of coition. Not because we sinned. But because we got our sex into our head.

When Eve ate that particular apple, she became aware of her own womanhood, mentally. And mentally she began to experiment with it. She has been experimenting ever since. So has man. To the rage and horror of both of them.

These sexual experiments are really anathema. But once a woman is sexually self-conscious, what is she to do? There it is, she is born with the disease of her own self-consciousness, as was her mother before her. She is bound to experiment and try one idea after another, in the long run always to her own misery. She is bound to have fixed one, and then another idea of herself, herself as woman. First she is the noble spouse of a not-quite-sonoble male: then a *Mater Dolorosa*: then a ministering Angel: then a competent social unit, a Member of Parliament or a Lady Doctor or a platform speaker: and all the while, as a side show, she is the Isolde of some Tristan, or the Guinevere of some Lancelot, or the Fata Morgana of all men — in her own idea. She can't stop having an idea of herself. She can't get herself out of her own head. And there she is, functioning away from her own head and her own consciousness of herself and her own automatic self-will, till the whole man and woman game has become just a hell, and men with any backbone would rather kill themselves than go on with it — or kill somebody else.

Yet we are going to inculcate more and more self-consciousness, teach every little Mary to be more and more a nice little Mary out of her own head, and every little Joseph to theorize himself up to the scratch.

And the point lies here. There will *have* to come an end. Every race which has become self-conscious and idea-bound in the past has perished. And then it has all started afresh, in a different way, with another race. And man has never learnt any better. We are really far, far more life-stupid than the dead Greeks or the lost

Etruscans. Our day is pretty short, and closing fast. We can pass, and another race can follow later.

But there is another alternative. We still have in us the power to discriminate between our own idealism, our own self-conscious will, and that other reality, our own true spontaneous self. Certainly we are so overloaded and diseased with ideas that we can't get well in a minute. But we can set our faces stubbornly against the disease, once we recognize it. The disease of love, the disease of "spirit," the disease of niceness and benevolence and feeling good on our own behalf and good on somebody else's behalf. Pah, it is all a gangrene. We can retreat upon the proud, isolate self, and remain there alone, like lepers, till we are cured of this ghastly white disease of self-conscious idealism.

And we really can make a move on our children's behalf. We really can refrain from thrusting our children any more into those hot-beds of the self-conscious disease, schools. We really can prevent their eating much more of the tissues of leprosy, newspapers and books. For a time, there should be no compulsory teaching to read and write at all. *The great mass of humanity should never learn to read and write — never.*

And instead of this gnawing, gnawing disease of mental consciousness and awful, unhealthy craving for stimulus and for action, we must substitute genuine action. The war was really not a bad beginning. But we went out under the banners of idealism, and now the men are home again, the virus is more active than ever, rotting their very souls.

The mass of the people will never *mentally understand*. But they will soon instinctively fall into line.

Let us substitute action, all kinds of action, for the mass of people, in place of mental activity. Even twelve hours' work a day is better than a newspaper at four in the afternoon and a grievance for the rest of the evening. But particularly let us take care of the children. At all cost, try to prevent a girl's mind from dwelling on herself, Make her act, work, play: assume a rule over her girlhood. Let her learn the domestic arts in their perfection. Let us even artificially set her to spin and weave. Anything to keep her busy, to prevent her reading and becoming self-conscious. Let us awake as soon as possible to the repulsive machine quality of machine-made things. They smell of death. And let us insist that the home is sacred, the hearth, and the very things of the home. Then keep the girls apart from any familiarity or being "pals" with the boys. The nice clean intimacy which we now so admire between the sexes is sterilizing. It makes neuters. Later on, no deep, magical sex-life is possible.

The same with the boys. First and foremost establish a rule over them, a proud, harsh, manly rule. Make them *know* that at every moment they are in the

shadow of a proud, strong, adult authority. Let them be soldiers, but as individuals not machine units. There are wars in the future, great wars, which not machines will finally decide, but the free, indomitable life spirit. No more wars under the banners of the ideal, and in the spirit of sacrifice. But wars in the strength of individual men. And then, pure individualistic training to fight, and preparation for a whole new way of life, a new society. Put money into its place, and science and industry. The leaders must stand for life, and they must not ask the simple followers to point out the direction. When the leaders assume responsibility they relieve the followers forever of the burden of finding a way. Relieved of this hateful incubus of responsibility for general affairs, the populace can again become free and happy and spontaneous, leaving matters to their superiors. No newspapers — the mass of the people never learning to read. The evolving once more of the great spontaneous gestures of life.

We can't go on as we are. Poor, nerve-worn creatures, fretting our lives away and hating to die because we have never lived. The secret is, to commit into the hands of the sacred few the responsibility which now lies like torture on the mass. Let the few, the leaders, be increasingly responsible for the whole. And let the mass be free: free, save for the choice of leaders.

Leaders — this is what mankind is craving for.

But men must be prepared to obey, body and soul, once they have chosen the leader. And let them choose the leader for life's sake only.

Begin then — there is a beginning.

CHAPTER VIII

EDUCATION AND SEX IN MAN, WOMAN AND CHILD

The one thing we have to avoid, then, even while we carry on our own old process of education, is this development of the powers of so-called self-expression in a child. Let us beware of artificially stimulating his self-consciousness and his so-called imagination. All that we do is to pervert the child into a ghastly state of self-consciousness, making him affectedly try to show off as we wish him to show off. The moment the least little trace of self-consciousness enters in a child, good-bye to everything except falsity.

Much better just pound away at the ABC and simple arithmetic and so on. The modern methods do make children sharp, give them a sort of slick finesse, but it is the beginning of the mischief. It ends in the great “unrest” of a nervous, hysterical proletariat. Begin to teach a child of five to “understand.” To understand the sun and moon and daisy and the secrets of procreation, bless your soul. Understanding all the way. — And when the child is twenty he’ll have a hysterical understanding of his own invented grievance, and there’s an end of him. Understanding is the devil.

A child mustn’t understand things. He must have them his own way. His vision isn’t ours. When a boy of eight sees a horse, he doesn’t see the correct biological object we intend him to see. He sees a big living presence of no particular shape with hair dangling from its neck and four legs. If he puts two eyes in the profile, he is quite right. Because he does *not* see with optical, photographic vision. The image on his retina is *not* the image of his consciousness. The image on his retina just does not go into him. His unconsciousness is filled with a strong, dark, vague prescience of a powerful presence, a two-eyed, four-legged, long-maned presence looming imminent.

And to *force* the boy to see a correct one-eyed horse-profile is just like pasting a placard in front of his vision. It simply kills his inward seeing. We don’t *want* him to see a proper horse. The child is *not* a little camera. He is a small vital organism which has direct dynamic *rappport* with the objects of the outer universe. He perceives from his breast and his abdomen, with deep-sunken realism, the elemental nature of the creature. So that to this day a Noah’s Ark tree is more real than a Corot tree or a Constable tree: and a flat Noah’s Ark cow

has a deeper vital reality than even a Cuyp cow.

The mode of vision is not one and final. The mode of vision is manifold. And the optical image is a mere vibrating blur to a child — and, indeed, to a passionate adult. In this vibrating blur the soul sees its own true correspondent. It sees, in a cow, horns and squareness, and a long tail. It sees, for a horse, a mane, and a long face, round nose, and four legs. And in each case a darkly vital presence. Now horns and squareness and a long thin ox-tail, these are the fearful and wonderful elements of the cow-form, which the dynamic soul perfectly perceives. The ideal-image is just outside nature, for a child — something false. In a picture, a child wants elemental recognition, and not correctness or expression, or least of all, what we call understanding. The child distorts inevitably and dynamically. But the dynamic abstraction is more than mental. If a huge eye sits in the middle of the cheek, in a child's drawing, this shows that the deep dynamic consciousness of the eye, its relative exaggeration, is the life-truth, even if it is a scientific falsehood.

On the other hand, what on earth is the good of saying to a child, "The world is a flattened sphere, like an orange." It is simply pernicious. You had much better say the world is a poached egg in a frying pan. *That* might have some dynamic meaning. The only thing about the flattened orange is that the child just sees this orange disporting itself in blue air, and never bothers to associate it with the earth he treads on. And yet it would be so much better for the mass of mankind if they never heard of the flattened sphere. They should never be told that the earth is round. It only makes everything unreal to them. They are balked in their impression of the flat good earth, they can't get over this sphere business, they live in a fog of abstraction, and nothing is anything. Save for purposes of abstraction, the earth is a great plain, with hills and valleys. Why force abstractions and kill the reality, when there's no need?

As for children, will we never realize that their abstractions are never based on observations, but on subjective exaggerations? If there is an eye in the face, the face is all eye. It is the child soul which cannot get over the mystery of the eye. If there is a tree in a landscape, the landscape is all tree. Always this partial focus. The attempt to make a child focus for a whole view — which is really a generalization and an adult abstraction — is simply wicked. Yet the first thing we do is to set a child making relief-maps in clay, for example: of his own district. Imbecility! He has not even the faintest impression of the total hill on which his home stands. A steepness going up to a door — and front garden railings — and perhaps windows. That's the lot.

The top and bottom of it is, that it is a crime to teach a child anything at all, school-wise. It is just evil to collect children together and teach them through the

head. It causes absolute starvation in the dynamic centers, and sterile substitute of brain knowledge is all the gain. The children of the middle classes are so vitally impoverished, that the miracle is they continue to exist at all. The children of the lower classes do better, because they escape into the streets. But even the children of the proletariat are now infected.

And, of course, as my critics point out, under all the school-smarm and newspaper-cant, man is to-day as savage as a cannibal, and more dangerous. The living dynamic self is denaturalized instead of being educated.

We talk about education — leading forth the natural intelligence of a child. But ours is just the opposite of leading forth. It is a ramming in of brain facts through the head, and a consequent distortion, suffocation, and starvation of the primary centers of consciousness. A nice day of reckoning we've got in front of us.

Let us lead forth, by all means. But let us not have mental knowledge before us as the goal of the leading. Much less let us make of it a vicious circle in which we lead the unhappy child-mind, like a cow in a ring at a fair. We don't want to educate children so that they may understand. Understanding is a fallacy and a vice in most people. I don't even want my child to know, much less to understand. *I* don't want my child to know that five fives are twenty-five, any more than I want my child to wear my hat or my boots. I *don't* want my child to *know*. If he wants five fives let him count them on his fingers. As for his little mind, give it a rest, and let his dynamic self be alert. He will ask "why" often enough. But he more often asks why the sun shines, or why men have mustaches, or why grass is green, than anything sensible. Most of a child's questions are, and should be, unanswerable. They are not questions at all. They are exclamations of wonder, they are *remarks* half-sceptically addressed. When a child says, "Why is grass green?" he half implies. "Is it really green, or is it just taking me in?" And we solemnly begin to prate about chlorophyll. Oh, imbeciles, idiots, inexcusable owls!

The whole of a child's development goes on from the great dynamic centers, and is basically non-mental. To introduce mental activity is to arrest the dynamic activity, and stultify true dynamic development. By the age of twenty-one our young people are helpless, hopeless, selfless, floundering mental entities, with nothing in front of them, because they have been starved from the roots, systematically, for twenty-one years, and fed through the head. They have had all their mental excitements, sex and everything, all through the head, and when it comes to the actual thing, why, there's nothing in it. *Blasé*. The affective centers have been exhausted from the head.

Before the age of fourteen, children should be taught only to move, to act, to

do. And they should be taught as little as possible even of this. Adults simply cannot and do not know any more what the mode of childish intelligence is. Adults *always* interfere. They *always* force the adult mental mode. Therefore children must be preserved from adult instructions.

Make a child work — yes. Make it do little jobs. Keep a fine and delicate and fierce discipline, so that the little jobs are performed as perfectly as is consistent with the child's nature. Make the child alert, proud, and becoming in its movements. Make it know very definitely that it shall not and must not trespass on other people's privacy or patience. Teach it songs, tell it tales. But *never* instruct it school-wise. And mostly, leave it alone, send it away to be with other children and to get in and out of mischief, and in and out of danger. Forget your child altogether as much as possible.

All this is the active and strenuous business of parents, and must not be shelved off on to strangers. It is the business of parents *mentally* to forget but dynamically never to forsake their children.

It is no use expecting parents to know *why* schools are closed, and *why* they, the parents, must be quite responsible for their own children during the first ten years. If it is quite useless to expect parents to understand a theory of relativity, much less will they understand the development of the dynamic consciousness. But why should they understand? It is the business of very few to understand and for the mass, it is their business to believe and not to bother, but to be honorable and humanly to fulfill their human responsibilities. To give active obedience to their leaders, and to possess their own souls in natural pride.

Some must understand why a child is not to be mentally educated. Some must have a faint inkling of the processes of consciousness during the first fourteen years. Some must know what a child beholds, when it looks at a horse, and what it means when it says, "Why is grass green?" The answer to this question, by the way, is "Because it is."

The interplay of the four dynamic centers follows no one conceivable law. Mental activity continues according to a law of co-relation. But there is no logical or rational co-relation in the dynamic consciousness. It pulses on inconsequential, and it would be impossible to determine any sequence. Out of the very lack of sequence in dynamic consciousness does the individual himself develop. The dynamic abstraction of a child's precepts follows no mental law, and even no law which can ever be mentally propounded. And this is why it is utterly pernicious to set a child making a clay relief-map of its own district, or to ask a child to draw conclusions from given observations. Dynamically, a child draws no conclusions. All things still remain dynamically possible. A conclusion drawn is a nail in the coffin of a child's developing being. Let a child make a

clay landscape, if it likes. But entirely according to its own fancy, and without conclusions drawn. Only, let the landscape be vividly made — always the discipline of the soul's full attention. "Oh, but where are the factory chimneys?" — or else — "Why have you left out the gas-works?" or "Do you call that sloppy thing a church?" The particular focus should be vivid, and the record in some way true. The soul must give earnest attention, that is all.

And so actively disciplined, the child develops for the first ten years. We need not be afraid of letting children see the passions and reactions of adult life. Only we must not strain the *sympathies* of a child, in *any* direction, particularly the direction of love and pity. Nor must we introduce the fallacy of right and wrong. Spontaneous distaste should take the place of right and wrong. And least of all must there be a cry: "You see, dear, you don't understand. When you are older — " A child's sagacity is better than an adult understanding, anyhow.

Of course it is ten times criminal to tell young children facts about sex, or to implicate them in adult relationships. A child has a strong evanescent sex consciousness. It instinctively writes impossible words on back walls. But this is not a fully conscious mental act. It is a kind of dream act — quite natural. The child's curious, shadowy, indecent sex-knowledge is quite in the course of nature. And does nobody any harm at all. Adults had far better not notice it. But if a child sees a cockerel tread a hen, or two dogs coupling, well and good. It *should* see these things. Only, without comment. Let nothing be exaggeratedly hidden. By instinct, let us preserve the decent privacies. But if a child occasionally sees its parent nude, taking a bath, all the better. Or even sitting in the W. C. Exaggerated secrecy is bad. But indecent exposure is also very bad. But worst of all is dragging in the *mental* consciousness of these shadowy dynamic realities.

In the same way, to talk to a child about an adult is vile. Let adults keep their adult feelings and communications for people of their own age. But if a child sees its parents violently quarrel, all the better. There must be storms. And a child's dynamic understanding is far deeper and more penetrating than our sophisticated interpretation. But *never* make a child a party to adult affairs. Never drag the child in. Refuse its sympathy on such occasions. Always treat it as if it had *no* business to hear, even if it is present and *must* hear. Truly, it has no business mentally to hear. And the dynamic soul will always weigh things up and dispose of them properly, if there be no interference of adult comment or adult desire for sympathy. It is despicable for any one parent to accept a child's sympathy against the other parent. And the one who *received* the sympathy is always more contemptible than the one who is hated.

Of course so many children are born to-day unnaturally mentally awake and

alive to adult affairs, that there is nothing left but to tell them everything, crudely: or else, much better, to say: "Ah, get out, you know too much, you make me sick."

To return to the question of sex. A child is born sexed. A child is either male or female, in the whole of its psyche and physique is either male or female. Every single living cell is either male or female, and will remain either male or female as long as life lasts. And every single cell in every male child is male, and every cell in every female child is female. The talk about a third sex, or about the indeterminate sex, is just to pervert the issue.

Biologically, it is true, the rudimentary formation of both sexes is found in every individual. That doesn't mean that every individual is a bit of both, or either, *ad lib*. After a sufficient period of idealism, men become hopelessly self-conscious. That is, the great affective centers no longer act spontaneously, but always wait for control from the head. This always breeds a great fluster in the psyche, and the poor self-conscious individual cannot help posing and posturing. Our ideal has taught us to be gentle and wistful: rather girlish and yielding, and *very* yielding in our sympathies. In fact, many young men feel so very like what they imagine a girl must feel, that hence they draw the conclusion that they must have a large share of female sex inside them. False conclusion.

These girlish men have often, to-day, the finest maleness, once it is put to the test. How is it then that they feel, and look, so girlish? It is largely a question of the direction of the polarized flow. Our ideal has taught us to be so loving and so submissive and so yielding in our sympathy, that the mode has become automatic in many men. Now in what we will call the "natural" mode, man has his positivity in the volitional centers, and women in the sympathetic. In fulfilling the Christian love ideal, however, men have reversed this. Man has assumed the gentle, all-sympathetic rôle, and woman has become the energetic party, with the authority in her hands. The male is the sensitive, sympathetic nature, the woman the active, effective, authoritative. So that the male acts as the passive, or recipient pole of attraction, the female as the active, positive, exertive pole, in human relations. Which is a reversal of the old flow. The woman is now the initiator, man the responder. They seem to play each other's parts. But man is purely male, playing woman's part, and woman is purely female, however manly. The gulf between Heliogabalus, or the most womanly man on earth, and the most manly woman, is just the same as ever: just the same old gulf between the sexes. The man is male, the woman is female. Only they are playing one another's parts, as they must at certain periods. The dynamic polarity has swung around.

If we look a little closer, we can define this positive and negative business

better. As a matter of fact, positive and negative, passive and active cuts both ways. If the man, as thinker and doer, is active, or positive, and the woman negative, then, on the other hand, as the initiator of emotion, of feeling, and of sympathetic understanding the woman is positive, the man negative. The man may be the initiator in action, but the woman is initiator in emotion. The man has the initiative as far as voluntary activity goes, and the woman the initiative as far as sympathetic activity goes. In love, it is the woman naturally who loves, the man who is loved. In love, woman is the positive, man the negative. It is woman who asks, in love, and man who answers. In life, the reverse is the case. In knowing and in doing, man is positive and woman negative: man initiates, and woman lives up to it.

Naturally this nicely arranged order of things may be reversed. Action and utterance, which are male, are polarized against feeling, emotion, which are female. And which is positive, which negative? Was man, the eternal protagonist, born of woman, from her womb of fathomless emotion? Or was woman, with her deep womb of emotion, born from the rib of active man, the first created? Man, the doer, the knower, the original in *being*, is he lord of life? Or is woman, the great Mother, who bore us from the womb of love, is she the supreme Goddess?

This is the question of all time. And as long as man and woman endure, so will the answer be given, first one way, then the other. Man, as the utterer, usually claims that Eve was created out of his spare rib: from the field of the creative, upper dynamic consciousness, that is. But woman, as soon as she gets a word in, points to the fact that man inevitably, poor darling, is the issue of his mother's womb. So the battle rages.

But some men always agree with the woman. Some men always yield to woman the creative positivity. And in certain periods, such as the present, the majority of men concur in regarding woman as the source of life, the first term in creation: woman, the mother, the prime being.

And then, the whole polarity shifts over. Man still remains the doer and thinker. But he is so only in the service of emotional and procreative woman. His highest moment is now the emotional moment when he gives himself up to the woman, when he forms the perfect answer for her great emotional and procreative asking. All his thinking, all his activity in the world only contributes to this great moment, when he is fulfilled in the emotional passion of the woman, the birth of rebirth, as Whitman calls it. In his consummation in the emotional passion of a woman, man is reborn, which is quite true.

And there is the point at which we all now stick. Life, thought, and activity, all are devoted truly to the great end of Woman, wife and mother.

Man has now entered on to his negative mode. Now, his consummation is in feeling, not in action. Now, his activity is all of the domestic order and all his thought goes to proving that nothing matters except that birth shall continue and woman shall rock in the nest of this globe like a bird who covers her eggs in some tall tree. Man is the fetcher, the carrier, the sacrifice, the crucified, and the reborn of woman.

This being so, the whole tendency of his nature changes. Instead of being assertive and rather insentient, he becomes wavering and sensitive. He begins to have as many feelings — nay, more than a woman. His heroism is all in altruistic endurance. He worships pity and tenderness and weakness, even in himself. In short, he takes on very largely the original rôle of woman. Woman meanwhile becomes the fearless, inwardly relentless, determined positive party. She grips the responsibility. The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world. Nay, she makes man discover that cradles should not be rocked, in order that her hands may be left free. She is now a queen of the earth, and inwardly a fearsome tyrant. She keeps pity and tenderness emblazoned on her banners. But God help the man whom she pities. Ultimately she tears him to bits.

Therefore we see the reversal of the old poles. Man becomes the emotional party, woman the positive and active. Man begins to show strong signs of the peculiarly strong passive sex desire, the desire to be taken, which is considered characteristic of woman. Man begins to have all the feelings of woman — or all the feelings which he attributed to woman. He becomes more feminine than woman ever was, and worships his own femininity, calling it the highest. In short, he begins to exhibit all signs of sexual complexity. He begins to imagine he really is half female. And certainly woman seems very male. So the hermaphrodite fallacy revives again.

But it is all a fallacy. Man, in the midst of all his effeminacy, is still male and nothing but male. And woman, though she harangue in Parliament or patrol the streets with a helmet on her head, is still completely female. They are only playing each other's rôles, because the poles have swung into reversion. The compass is reversed. But that doesn't mean that the north pole has become the south pole, or that each is a bit of both.

Of course a woman should stick to her own natural emotional positivity. But then man must stick to his own positivity of *being*, of action, *disinterested*, *non-domestic*, *male* action, which is not devoted to the increase of the female. Once man vacates his camp of sincere, passionate positivity in disinterested being, his supreme responsibility to fulfill his own profoundest impulses, with reference to none but God or his own soul, not taking woman into count at all, in this primary responsibility to his own deepest soul; once man vacates this strong citadel of his

own genuine, not spurious, divinity; then in comes woman, picks up the scepter and begins to conduct a rag-time band.

Man remains man, however he may put on wistfulness and tenderness like petticoats, and sensibilities like pearl ornaments. Your sensitive little big-eyed boy, so much more gentle and loving than his harder sister, is male for all that, believe me. Perhaps evilly male, so mothers may learn to their cost: and wives still more.

Of course there should be a great balance between the sexes. Man, in the daytime, must follow his own soul's greatest impulse, and give himself to life-work and risk himself to death. It is not woman who claims the highest in man. It is a man's own religious soul that drives him on beyond woman, to his supreme activity. For his highest, man is responsible to God alone. He may not pause to remember that he has a life to lose, or a wife and children to leave. He must carry forward the banner of life, though seven worlds perish, with all the wives and mothers and children in them. Hence Jesus, "Woman, what have I to do with thee?" Every man that lives has to say it again to his wife or mother, once he has any work or mission in hand, that comes from his soul.

But again, no man is a blooming marvel for twenty-four hours a day. Jesus or Napoleon or any other of them ought to have been man enough to be able to come home at tea-time and put his slippers on and sit under the spell of his wife. For there you are, the woman has her world, her positivity: the world of love, of emotion, of sympathy. And it behooves every man in his hour to take off his shoes and relax and give himself up to his woman and her world. Not to give up his purpose. But to give up himself for a time to her who is his mate. — And so it is one detests the clock-work Kant, and the petit-bourgeois Napoleon divorcing his Josephine for a Hapsburg — or even Jesus, with his "Woman, what have I to do with thee?" — He might have added "just now." — They were all failures.

CHAPTER IX

THE BIRTH OF SEX

The last chapter was a chapter of semi-digression. We now return to the straight course. Is the straightness none too evident? Ah well, it's a matter of relativity. A child is born with one sex only, and remains always single in his sex. There is no intermingling, only a great change of rôles is possible. But man in the female rôle is still male.

Sex — that is to say, maleness and femaleness — is present from the moment of birth, and in every act or deed of every child. But sex in the real sense of dynamic sexual relationship, this does not exist in a child, and cannot exist until puberty and after. True, children have a sort of sex consciousness. Little boys and little girls may even commit indecencies together. And still it is nothing vital. It is a sort of shadow activity, a sort of dream-activity. It has no very profound effect.

But still, boys and girls should be kept apart as much as possible, that they may have some sort of respect and fear for the gulf that lies between them in nature, and for the great strangeness which each has to offer the other, finally. We are all wrong when we say there is no vital difference between the sexes. There is every difference. Every bit, every cell in a boy is male, every cell is female in a woman, and must remain so. Women can never feel or know as men do. And in the reverse men can never feel and know, dynamically, as women do. Man, acting in the passive or feminine polarity, is still man, and he doesn't have one single unmanly feeling. And women, when they speak and write, utter not one single word that men have not taught them. Men learn their feelings from women, women learn their mental consciousness from men. And so it will ever be. Meanwhile, women live forever by feeling, and men live forever from an inherent sense of *purpose*. Feeling is an end in itself. This is unspeakable truth to a woman, and never true for one minute to a man. When man, in the Epicurean spirit, embraces feeling, he makes himself a martyr to it — like Maupassant or Oscar Wilde. Woman will *never* understand the depth of the spirit of purpose in man, his deeper spirit. And man will never understand the sacredness of feeling to woman. Each will play at the other's game, but they will remain apart.

The whole mode, the whole everything is really different in man and woman. Therefore we should keep boys and girls apart, that they are pure and virgin in

themselves. On mixing with one another, in becoming familiar, in being “pals,” they lose their own male and female integrity. And they lose the treasure of the future, the vital sex polarity, the dynamic magic of life. For the magic and the dynamism rests on *otherness*.

For actual sex is a vital polarity. And a polarity which rouses into action, as we know, at puberty.

And how? As we know, a child lives from the great field of dynamic consciousness established between the four poles of the dynamic psyche, two great poles of sympathy, two great poles of will. The solar plexus and the lumbar ganglion, great nerve-centers below the diaphragm, act as the dynamic origin of all consciousness in man, and are immediately polarized by the other two nerve-centers, the cardiac plexus and the thoracic ganglion above the diaphragm. At these four poles the whole flow, both within the individual and from without him, of dynamic consciousness and dynamic creative relationship is centered. These four first poles constitute the first field of dynamic consciousness for the first twelve or fourteen years of the life of every child.

And then a change takes place. It takes place slowly, gradually and inevitably, utterly beyond our provision or control. The living soul is unfolding itself in another great metamorphosis.

What happens, in the biological psyche, is that deeper centers of consciousness and function come awake. Deep in the lower body the great sympathetic center, the hypogastric plexus has been acting all the time in a kind of dream-automatism, balanced by its corresponding voluntary center, the sacral ganglion. At the age of twelve these two centers begin slowly to rumble awake, with a deep reverberant force that changes the whole constitution of the life of the individual.

And as these two centers, the sympathetic center of the deeper abdomen, and the voluntary center of the loins, gradually sparkle into wakeful, *conscious* activity, their corresponding poles are roused in the upper body. In the region of the throat and neck, the so-called cervical plexuses and the cervical ganglia dawn into activity.

We have now another field of dawning dynamic consciousness, that will extend far beyond the first. And now various things happen to us. First of all actual sex establishes its strange and troublesome presence within us. This is the massive wakening of the lower body. And then, in the upper body, the breasts of a woman begin to develop, her throat changes its form. And in the man, the voice breaks, the beard begins to grow round the lips and on to the throat. There are the obvious physiological changes resulting from the gradual bursting into free activity of the hypogastric plexus and the sacral ganglion, in the lower body,

and of the cervical plexuses and ganglia of the neck, in the upper body.

Why the growth of hair should start at the lower and upper sympathetic regions we cannot say. Perhaps for protection. Perhaps to preserve these powerful yet supersensitive nodes from the inclemency of changes in temperature, which might cause a derangement. Perhaps for the sake of protective warning, as hair warns when it is touched. Perhaps for a screen against various dynamic vibrations, and as a receiver of other suited dynamic vibrations. It may be that even the hair of the head acts as a sensitive vibration-medium for conveying currents of physical and vitalistic activity to and from the brain. And perhaps from the centers of intense vital surcharge hair springs as a sort of annunciation or declaration, like a crest of life-assertion. Perhaps all these things, and perhaps others.

But with the bursting awake of the four new poles of dynamic consciousness and being, change takes place in everything, the features now begin to take individual form, the limbs develop out of the soft round matrix of child-form, the body resolves itself into distinctions. A strange creative change in being has taken place. The child before puberty is quite another thing from the child after puberty. Strange indeed is this new birth, this rising from the sea of childhood into a new being. It is a resurrection which we fear.

And now, a new world, a new heaven and a new earth. Now new relationships are formed, the old ones retire from their prominence. Now mother and father inevitably give way before masters and mistresses, brothers and sisters yield to friends. This is the period of *Schwärmerei*, of young adoration and of real initial friendships. A child before puberty has playmates. After puberty he has friends and enemies.

A whole new field of passional relationship. And the old bonds relaxing, the old love retreating. The father and mother bonds now relax, though they never break. The family love wanes, though it never dies.

It is the hour of the stranger. Let the stranger now enter the soul.

And it is the first hour of true individuality, the first hour of genuine, responsible solitariness. A child knows the abyss of forlornness. But an adolescent alone knows the strange pain of growing into his own isolation of individuality.

All this change is an agony and a bliss. It is a cataclysm and a new world. It is our most serious hour, perhaps. And yet we cannot be responsible for it.

Now sex comes into active being. Until puberty, sex is submerged, nascent, incipient only. After puberty, it is a tremendous factor.

What is sex, really? We can never say, satisfactorily. But we know so much: we know that it is a dynamic polarity between human beings, and a circuit of

force *always* flowing. The psychoanalyst is right so far. There can be no vivid relation between two adult individuals which does not consist in a dynamic polarized flow of vitalistic force or magnetism or electricity, call it what you will, between these two people. Yet is this dynamic flow inevitably sexual in nature?

This is the moot point for psychoanalysis. But let us look at sex, in its obvious manifestation. The *sexual* relation between man and woman consummates in the act of coition. Now what is the act of coition? We know its functional purpose of procreation. But, after all our experience and all our poetry and novels we know that the procreative purpose of sex is, to the individual man and woman, just a side-show. To the individual, the act of coition is a great psychic experience, a vital experience of tremendous importance. On this vital individual experience the life and very being of the individual largely depends.

But what is the experience? Untellable. Only, we know something. We know that in the act of coition the *blood* of the individual man, acutely surcharged with intense vital electricity — we know no word, so say “electricity,” by analogy — rises to a culmination, in a tremendous magnetic urge towards the magnetic blood of the female. The whole of the living blood in the two individuals forms a field of intense, polarized magnetic attraction. So, the two poles must be brought into contact. In the act of coition, the two seas of blood in the two individuals, rocking and surging towards contact, as near as possible, clash into a oneness. A great flash of interchange occurs, like an electric spark when two currents meet or like lightning out of the densely surcharged clouds. There is a lightning flash which passes through the blood of both individuals, there is a thunder of sensation which rolls in diminishing crashes down the nerves of each — and then the tension passes.

The two individuals are separate again. But are they as they were before? Is the air the same after a thunder-storm as before? No. The air is as it were new, fresh, tingling with newness. So is the blood of man and woman after successful coition. After a false coition, like prostitution, there is not newness but a certain disintegration.

But after coition, the actual chemical constitution of the blood is so changed, that usually sleep intervenes, to allow the time for chemical, biological readjustment through the whole system.

So, the blood is changed and renewed, refreshed, almost recreated, like the atmosphere after thunder. Out of the newness of the living blood pass the new strange waves which beat upon the great dynamic centers of the nerves: primarily upon the hypogastric plexus and the sacral ganglion. From these centers rise new impulses, new vision, new being, rising like Aphrodite from the

foam of the new tide of blood. And so individual life goes on.

Perhaps, then, we will allow ourselves to say what, in psychic individual reality, is the act of coition. It is the bringing together of the surcharged electric blood of the male with the polarized electric blood of the female, with the result of a tremendous flashing interchange, which alters the constitution of the blood, and the very quality of *being*, in both.

And this, surely, is sex. But is this the whole of sex? That is the question.

After coition, we say the blood is renewed. We say that from the new, finely sparkling blood new thrills pass into the great affective centers of the lower body, new thrills of feeling, of impulse, of energy. — And what about these new thrills?

Now, a new story. The new thrills are passed on to the great upper centers of the dynamic body. The individual polarity now changes, within the individual system. The upper centers, cardiac plexus and cervical plexuses, thoracic ganglion and cervical ganglia now assume positivity. These, the upper polarized centers, have now the positive rôle to play, the solar and the hypogastric plexuses, the lumbar and the sacral ganglia, these have the submissive, negative rôle for the time being.

And what then? What now, that the upper centers are finely active in positivity? Now it is a different story. Now there is new vision in the eyes, new hearing in the ears, new voice in the throat and speech on the lips. Now the new song rises, the brain tingles to new thought, the heart craves for new activity.

The heart craves for new activity. For new *collective* activity. That is, for a new polarized connection with other beings, other men.

Is this new craving for polarized communion with others, this craving for a new unison, is it sexual, like the original craving for the woman? Not at all. The whole polarity is different. Now, the positive poles are the poles of the breast and shoulders and throat, the poles of activity and full consciousness. Men, being themselves made new after the act of coition, wish to make the world new. A new, passionate polarity springs up between men who are bent on the same activity, the polarity between man and woman sinks to passivity. It is now daytime, and time to forget sex, time to be busy making a new world.

Is this new polarity, this new circuit of passion between comrades and co-workers, is this also sexual? It is a vivid circuit of polarized passion. Is it hence sex?

It is not. Because what are the poles of positive connection? — the upper, busy poles. What is the dynamic contact? — a unison in spirit, in understanding, and a pure commingling in one great *work*. A mingling of the individual passion into one great *purpose*. Now this is also a grand consummation for men, this

mingling of many with one great impassioned purpose. But is this sex? Knowing what sex is, can we call this other also sex? We cannot.

This meeting of many in one great passionate purpose is not sex, and should never be confused with sex. It is a great motion in the opposite direction. And I am sure that the ultimate, greatest desire in men is this desire for great *purposive* activity. When man loses his deep sense of purposive, creative activity, he feels lost, and is lost. When he makes the sexual consummation the supreme consummation, even in his *secret* soul, he falls into the beginnings of despair. When he makes woman, or the woman and child the great center of life and of life-significance, he falls into the beginnings of despair.

Man must bravely stand by his own soul, his own responsibility as the creative vanguard of life. And he must also have the courage to go home to his woman and become a perfect answer to her deep sexual call. But he must never confuse his two issues. Primarily and supremely man is *always* the pioneer of life, adventuring onward into the unknown, alone with his own temerarious, dauntless soul. Woman for him exists only in the twilight, by the camp fire, when day has departed. Evening and the night are hers.

The psychoanalysts, driving us back to the sexual consummation always, do us infinite damage.

We have to break away, back to the great unison of manhood in some passionate *purpose*. Now this is not like sex. Sex is always individual. A man has his own sex: nobody else's. And sexually he goes as a single individual; he can mingle only singly. So that to make sex a general affair is just a perversion and a lie. You can't get people and talk to them about their sex, as if it were a common interest.

We have got to get back to the great purpose of manhood, a passionate unison in actively making a world. This is a real commingling of many. And in such a commingling we forfeit the individual. In the commingling of sex we are alone with *one* partner. It is an individual affair, there is no superior or inferior. But in the commingling of a passionate purpose, each individual sacredly abandons his individual. In the living faith of his soul, he surrenders his individuality to the great urge which is upon him. He may have to surrender his name, his fame, his fortune, his life, everything. But once a man, in the integrity of his own individual soul, *believes*, he surrenders his own individuality to his belief, and becomes one of a united body. He knows what he does. He makes the surrender honorably, in agreement with his own soul's deepest desire. But he surrenders, and remains responsible for the purity of his surrender.

But what if he believes that his sexual consummation is his supreme consummation? Then he serves the great purpose to which he pledges himself

only as long as it pleases him. After which he turns it down, and goes back to sex. With sex as the one accepted prime motive, the world drifts into despair and anarchy.

Of all countries, America has most to fear from anarchy, even from one single moment's lapse into anarchy. The old nations are *organically* fixed into classes, but America not. You can shake Europe to atoms. And yet peasants fall back to peasantry, artisans to industrial labor, upper classes to their control — inevitably. But can you say the same of America?

America must not lapse for one single moment into anarchy. It would be the end of her. She must drift no nearer to anarchy. She is near enough.

Well, then, Americans must make a choice. It is a choice between belief in man's creative, spontaneous soul, and man's automatic power of production and reproduction. It is a choice between serving *man*, or woman. It is a choice between yielding the soul to a leader, leaders, or yielding only to the woman, wife, mistress, or mother.

The great collective passion of belief which brings men together, comrades and co-workers, passionately obeying their soul-chosen leader or leaders, this is not a sex passion. Not in any sense. Sex holds any *two* people together, but it tends to disintegrate society, unless it is subordinated to the great dominating male passion of collective *purpose*.

But when the sex passion submits to the great purposive passion, then you have fulness. And no great purposive passion can endure long unless it is established upon the fulfillment in the vast majority of individuals of the true sexual passion. No great motive or ideal or social principle can endure for any length of time unless based upon the sexual fulfillment of the vast majority of individuals concerned.

It cuts both ways. Assert sex as the predominant fulfillment, and you get the collapse of living purpose in man. You get anarchy. Assert *purposiveness* as the one supreme and pure activity of life, and you drift into barren sterility, like our business life of to-day, and our political life. You become sterile, you make anarchy inevitable. And so there you are. You have got to base your great purposive activity upon the intense sexual fulfillment of all your individuals. That was how Egypt endured. But you have got to keep your sexual fulfillment even then subordinate, just subordinate to the great passion of purpose: subordinate by a hair's breadth only: but still, by that hair's breadth, subordinate.

Perhaps we can see now a little better — to go back to the child — where Freud is wrong in attributing a sexual motive to all human activity. It is obvious there is no real sexual motive in a child, for example. The great sexual centers are not even awake. True, even in a child of three, rudimentary sex throws

strange shadows on the wall, in its approach from the distance. But these are only an uneasy intrusion from the as-yet-uncreated, unready biological centers. The great sexual centers of the hypogastric plexus, and the immensely powerful sacral ganglion are slowly prepared, developed in a kind of prenatal gestation during childhood before puberty. But even an unborn child kicks in the womb. So do the great sex-centers give occasional blind kicks in a child. It is part of the phenomenon of childhood. But we must be most careful not to charge these rather unpleasant apparitions or phenomena against the individual boy or girl. We must be *very* careful not to drag the matter into mental consciousness. Shoo it away. Reprimand it with a pah! and a faugh! and a bit of contempt. But do not get into any heat or any fear. Do not startle a passional attention. Drive the whole thing away like the shadow it is, and be *very* careful not to drive it into the consciousness. Be very careful to plant no seed of burning shame or horror. Throw over it merely the cold water of contemptuous indifference, dismissal.

After puberty, a child may as well be told the simple and necessary facts of sex. As things stand, the parent may as well do it. But briefly, coldly, and with as cold a dismissal as possible. — "Look here, you're not a child any more; you know it, don't you? You're going to be a man. And you know what that means. It means you're going to marry a woman later on, and get children. You know it, and I know it. But in the meantime, leave yourself alone. I know you'll have a lot of bother with yourself, and your feelings. I know what is happening to you. And I know you get excited about it. But you needn't. Other men have all gone through it. So don't you go creeping off by yourself and doing things on the sly. It won't do you any good. — I know what you'll do, because we've all been through it. I know the thing will keep coming on you at night. But remember that I know. Remember. And remember that I want you to leave yourself alone. I know what it is, I tell you. I've been through it all myself. You've got to go through these years, before you find a woman you want to marry, and whom you can marry. I went through them myself, and got myself worked up a good deal more than was good for me. — Try to contain yourself. Always try to contain yourself, and be a man. That's the only thing. Always try and be manly, and quiet in yourself. Remember I know what it is. I've been the same, in the same state that you are in. And probably I've behaved more foolishly and perniciously than ever you will. So come to me if anything *really* bothers you. And don't feel sly and secret. I do know just what you've got and what you haven't. I've been as bad and perhaps worse than you. And the only thing I want of you is to be manly. Try and be manly, and quiet in yourself."

That is about as much as a father can say to a boy, at puberty. You have to be *very* careful what you do: especially if you are a parent. To translate sex into

mental ideas is vile, to make a scientific fact of it is death.

As a matter of fact there should be some sort of initiation into true adult consciousness. Boys should be taken away from their mothers and sisters as much as possible at adolescence. They should be given into some real manly charge. And there should be some actual initiation into sex life. Perhaps like the savages, who make the boy die again, symbolically, and pull him forth through some narrow aperture, to be born again, and make him suffer and endure terrible hardships, to make a great dynamic effect on the consciousness, a terrible dynamic sense of change in the very being. In short, a long, violent initiation, from which the lad emerges emaciated, but cut off forever from childhood, entered into the serious, responsible pale of manhood. And with his whole consciousness convulsed by a great change, as his dynamic psyche actually is convulsed. — And something in the same way, to initiate girls into womanhood.

There should be the intense dynamic reaction: the physical suffering and the physical realization sinking deep into the soul, changing the soul for ever. Sex should come upon us as a terrible thing of suffering and privilege and mystery: a mysterious metamorphosis come upon us, and a new terrible power given us, and a new responsibility. Telling? — What's the good of telling? — The mystery, the terror, and the tremendous power of sex should never be explained away. The mass of mankind should *never* be acquainted with the scientific biological facts of sex: *never*. The mystery must remain in its dark secrecy, and its dark, powerful dynamism. The reality of sex lies in the great dynamic convulsions in the soul. And as such it should be realized, a great creative-convulsive seizure upon the soul. — To make it a matter of test-tube mixtures, chemical demonstrations and trashy lock-and-key symbols is just blasting. Even more sickening is the line: “You see, dear, one day you'll love a man as I love Daddy, more than anything else in the *whole* world. And then, dear, I hope you'll marry him. Because if you do you'll be happy, and I want you to be happy, my love. And so I hope you'll marry the man you really love (kisses the child). — And then, darling, there will come a lot of things you know nothing about now. You'll want to have a dear little baby, won't you, darling? Your own dear little baby. And your husband's as well. Because it'll be his, too. You know that, don't you, dear? It will be born from both of you. And you don't know how, do you? Well, it will come from right inside you, dear, out of your own inside. You came out of mother's inside, etc., etc.”

But I suppose there's really nothing else to be done, given the world and society as we've got them now. The mother is doing her best.

But it is all wrong. It is wrong to make sex appear as if it were part of the dear-darling-love smarm: the spiritual love. It is even worse to take the scientific

test-tube line. It all kills the great effective dynamism of life, and substitutes the mere ash of mental ideas and tricks.

The scientific fact of sex is no more sex than a skeleton is a man. Yet you'd think twice before you stock a skeleton in front of a lad and said, "You see, my boy, this is what you are when you come to know yourself." — And the ideal, lovey-dovey "explanation" of sex as something wonderful and extra lovey-dovey, a bill-and-coo process of obtaining a sweet little baby — or else "God made us so that we must do this, to bring another dear little baby to life" — well, it just makes one sick. It is disastrous to the deep sexual life. But perhaps that is what we want.

When humanity comes to its senses it will realize what a fearful Sodom apple our understanding is. What terrible mouths and stomachs full of bitter ash we've all got. And then we shall take away "knowledge" and "understanding," and lock them up along with the rest of poisons, to be administered in small doses only by competent people.

We have almost poisoned the mass of humanity to death with *understanding*. The period of actual death and race-extirpation is not far off. We could have produced the same barrenness and frenzy of nothingness in people, perhaps, by dinning it into them that every man is just a charnel-house skeleton of unclean bones. Our "understanding," our science and idealism have produced in people the same strange frenzy of self-repulsion as if they saw their own skulls each time they looked in the mirror. A man is a thing of scientific cause-and-effect and biological process, draped in an ideal, is he? No wonder he sees the skeleton grinning through the flesh.

Our leaders have not loved men: they have loved ideas, and have been willing to sacrifice passionate men on the altars of the blood-drinking, ever-ash-thirsty ideal. Has President Wilson, or Karl Marx, or Bernard Shaw ever felt one hot blood-pulse of love for the working man, the half-conscious, deluded working man? Never. Each of these leaders has wanted to abstract him away from his own blood and being, into some foul Methuselah or abstraction of a man.

And me? There is no danger of the working man ever reading my books, so I shan't hurt him that way. But oh, I would like to save him alive, in his living, spontaneous, original being. I can't help it. It is my passionate instinct.

I would like him to give me back the responsibility for general affairs, a responsibility which he can't acquit, and which saps his life. I would like him to give me back the responsibility for the future. I would like him to give me back the responsibility for thought, for direction. I wish we could take hope and belief together. I would undertake my share of the responsibility, if he gave me his belief.

I would like him to give me back books and newspapers and theories. And I would like to give him back, in return, his old insouciance, and rich, original spontaneity and fullness of life.

CHAPTER X

PARENT LOVE

In the serious hour of puberty, the individual passes into his second phase of accomplishment. But there cannot be a perfect transition unless all the activity is in full play in all the first four poles of the psyche. Childhood is a chrysalis from which each must extricate himself. And the struggling youth or maid cannot emerge unless by the energy of all powers; he can never emerge if the whole mass of the world and the tradition of love hold him back.

Now we come to the greater peril of our particular form of idealism. It is the idealism of love and of the spirit: the idealism of yearning, outgoing love, of pure sympathetic communion and “understanding.” And this idealism recognizes as the highest earthly love, the love of mother and child.

And what does this mean? It means, for every delicately brought up child, indeed for all the children who matter, a steady and persistent pressure upon the upper sympathetic centers, and a steady and persistent starving of the lower centers, particularly the great voluntary center of the lower body. The center of sensual, manly independence, of exultation in the sturdy, defiant self, willfulness and masterfulness and pride, this center is steadily suppressed. The warm, swift, sensual self is steadily and persistently denied, damped, weakened, throughout all the period of childhood. And by sensual we do not mean greedy or ugly, we mean the deeper, more impulsive reckless nature. Life must be always refined and superior. Love and happiness must be the watchword. The willful, critical element of the spiritual mode is never absent, the silent, if forbearing disapproval and distaste is always ready. Vile bullying forbearance.

With what result? The center of upper sympathy is abnormally, inflamedly excited; and the centers of will are so deranged that they operate in jerks and spasms. The true polarity of the sympathetic-voluntary system within the child is so disturbed as to be almost deranged. Then we have an exaggerated sensitiveness alternating with a sort of helpless fury: and we have delicate frail children with nerves or with strange whims. And we have the strange cold obstinacy of the spiritual will, cold as hell, fixed in a child.

Then one parent, usually the mother, is the object of blind devotion, whilst the other parent, usually the father, is an object of resistance. The child is taught, however, that both parents should be loved, and only loved: and that love,

gentleness, pity, charity, and all “higher” emotions, these alone are genuine feelings, all the rest are false, to be rejected.

With what result? The upper centers are developed to a degree of unnatural acuteness and reaction — or again they fall numbed and barren. And then between parents and children a painfully false relation grows up: a relation as of two adults, either of two pure lovers, or of two love-appearing people who are really trying to bully one another. Instead of leaving the child with its own limited but deep and incomprehensible feelings, the parent, hopelessly involved in the sympathetic mode of selfless love, and spiritual love-will, stimulates the child into a consciousness which does not belong to it, on the one plane, and robs it of its own spontaneous consciousness and freedom on the other plane.

And this is the fatality. Long before puberty, by an exaggeration and an intensity of spiritual love from the parents, the second centers of sympathy are artificially aroused into response. And there is an irreparable disaster. Instead of seeing as a child should see, through a glass, darkly, the child now opens premature eyes of sympathetic cognition. Instead of knowing in part, as it should know, it begins, at a fearfully small age, to know in full. The cervical plexuses and the cervical ganglia, which should only begin to awake after adolescence, these centers of the higher dynamic sympathy and cognition, are both artificially stimulated, by the adult personal love-emotion and love-will into response, in a quite young child, sometimes even in an infant. This is a holy obscenity.

Our particular mode of idealism causes us to suppress as far as possible the sensual centers, to make them negative. The whole of the activity is concentrated, as far as possible, in the upper or spiritual centers, the centers of the breast and throat, which we will call the centers of dynamic cognition, in contrast to the centers of sensual comprehension below the diaphragm.

And then a child arrives at puberty, with its upper nature already roused into precocious action. The child nowadays is almost invariably precocious in “understanding.” In the north, spiritually precocious, so that by the time it arrives at adolescence it already has experienced the extended sympathetic reactions which should have lain utterly dark. And it has experienced these extended reactions with whom? With the parent or parents.

Which is man devouring his own offspring. For to the parents belongs, once and for all, the dynamic reaction on the first plane of consciousness only, the reaction and relationship at the first four poles of dynamic consciousness. When the second, the farther plane of consciousness rouses into action, the relationship is with strangers. All human instinct and all ethnology will prove this to us. What sex-instinct there is in a child is always *adverse* to the parents.

But also, the parents are all too quick. They all proceed to swallow their

children before the children can get out of their clutches. And even if parents do send away their children at the age of puberty — to school or elsewhere — it is not much good. The mischief has been done before. For the first twelve years the parents and the whole community forcibly insist on the child's living from the upper centers only, and particularly the upper sympathetic centers, without the balance of the warm, deep sensual self. Parents and community alike insist on rousing an adult sympathetic response, and a mental answer in the child-schools, Sunday-schools, books, home-influence — all works in this one pernicious way. But it is the home, the parents, that work most effectively and intensely. There is the most intimate mesh of love, love-bullying, and “understanding” in which a child is entangled.

So that a child arrives at the age of puberty already stripped of its childhood's darkness, bound, and delivered over. Instead of waking now to a whole new field of consciousness, a whole vast and wonderful new dynamic impulse towards new connections, it finds itself fatally bound. Puberty accomplishes itself. The hour of sex strikes. But there is your child, bound, helpless. You have already aroused in it the dynamic response to your own insatiable love-will. You have already established between your child and yourself the dynamic relation in the further plane of consciousness. You have got your child as sure as if you had woven its flesh again with your own. You have done what it is vicious for any parent to do: you have established between your child and yourself the bond of adult love: the love of man for man, woman for woman, or man for woman. All your tenderness, your cherishing will not excuse you. It only deepens your guilt. You have established between your child and yourself the bond of further sympathy. I do not speak of sex. I speak of pure sympathy, sacred love. The parents establish between themselves and their child the bond of the higher love, the further spiritual love, the sympathy of the adult soul.

And this is fatal. It is a sort of incest. It is a dynamic *spiritual* incest, more dangerous than sensual incest, because it is more intangible and less instinctively repugnant. But let psychoanalysis fall into what discredit it may, it has done us this great service of proving to us that the intense upper sympathy, indeed the dynamic relation either of love-will or love-sympathy, between parent and child, upon the upper plane, inevitably involves us in a conclusion of incest.

For although it is our aim to establish a purely spiritual dynamic relation on the upper plane only, yet, because of the inevitable polarity of the human psychic system, we shall arouse at the same time a dynamic sensual activity on the lower plane, the deeper sensual plane. We may be as pure as angels, and yet, being human, this will and must inevitably happen. When Mrs. Ruskin said that John Ruskin should have married his mother she spoke the truth. He *was* married

to his mother. For in spite of all our intention, all our creed, all our purity, all our desire and all our will, once we arouse the dynamic relation in the upper, higher plane of love, we inevitably evoke a dynamic consciousness on the lower, deeper plane of sensual love. And then what?

Of course, parents can reply that their love, however intense, is pure, and has absolutely no sensual element. Maybe — and maybe not. But admit that it is so. It does not help. The intense excitement of the upper centers of sympathy willy-nilly arouses the lower centers. It arouses them to activity, even if it denies them any expression or any polarized connection. Our psyche is so framed that activity aroused on one plane provokes activity on the corresponding plane, automatically. So the intense *pure* love-relation between parent and child inevitably arouses the lower centers in the child, the centers of sex. Now the deeper sensual centers, once aroused, should find response from the sensual body of some other, some friend or lover. The response is impossible between parent and child. Myself, I believe that biologically there is radical sex-aversion between parent and child, at the deeper sensual centers. The sensual circuit *cannot* adjust itself spontaneously between the two.

So what have you? Child and parent intensely linked in adult love-sympathy and love-will, on the upper plane, and in the child, the deeper sensual centers aroused, but finding no correspondent, no objective, no polarized connection with another person. There they are, the powerful centers of sex, acting spasmodically, without balance. They must be polarized somehow. So they are polarized to the active upper centers within the child, and you get an introvert.

This is how introversion begins. The lower sexual centers are aroused. They find no sympathy, no connection, no response from outside, no expression. They are dynamically polarized by the upper centers within the individual. That is, the whole of the sexual or deeper sensual flow goes on upwards in the individual, to his own upper, from his own lower centers. The upper centers hold the lower in positive polarity. The flow goes on upwards. There *must* be some reaction. And so you get, first and foremost, self-consciousness, an intense consciousness in the upper self of the lower self. This is the first disaster. Then you get the upper body exploiting the lower body. You get the hands exploiting the sensual body, in feeling, fingering, and in masturbation. You get a pornographic longing with regard to the self. You get the obscene post cards which most youths possess. You get the absolute lust for dirty stories, which so many men have. And you get various mild sex perversions, such as masturbation, and so on.

What does all this mean? It means that the activity of the lower psyche and lower body is polarized by the upper body. Eyes and ears want to gather sexual activity and knowledge. The mind becomes full of sex: and always, in an

introvert, of his *own* sex. If we examine the apparent extroverts, like the flaunting Italian, we shall see the same thing. It is his own sex which obsesses him.

And to-day what have we but this? Almost inevitably we find in a child now an intense, precocious, secret sexual preoccupation. The upper self is rabidly engaged in exploiting the lower self. A child and its own roused, inflamed sex, its own shame and masturbation, its own cruel, secret sexual excitement and sex *curiosity*, this is the greatest tragedy of our day. The child does not so much want to *act* as to *know*. The thought of actual sex connection is usually repulsive. There is an aversion from the normal coition act. But the craving to feel, to see, to taste, to *know*, mentally in the head, this is insatiable. Anything, so that the sensation and experience shall come through the *upper* channels. This is the secret of our introversion and our perversion to-day. Anything rather than spontaneous direct action from the sensual self. Anything rather than the merely normal passion. Introduce any trick, any idea, any mental element you can into sex, but make it an affair of the upper consciousness, the mind and eyes and mouth and fingers. This is our vice, our dirt, our disease.

And the adult, and the ideal are to blame. But the tragedy of our children, in their inflamed, solitary sexual excitement, distresses us beyond any blame.

It is time to drop the word love, and more than time to drop the ideal of love. Every frenzied individual is told to find fulfillment in love. So he tries. Whereas, there is no fulfillment in love. Half of our fulfillment comes *through* love, through strong, sensual love. But the central fulfillment, for a man, is that he possess his own soul in strength within him, deep and alone. The deep, rich aloneness, reached and perfected through love. And the passing beyond any further *quest* of love.

This central fullness of self-possession is our goal, if goal there be any. But there are two great *ways* of fulfillment. The first, the way of fulfillment through complete love, complete, passionate, deep love. And the second, the greater, the fulfillment through the accomplishment of religious purpose, the soul's earnest purpose. We work the love way falsely, from the upper self, and work it to death. The second way, of active unison in strong purpose, and in faith, this we only sneer at.

But to return to the child and the parent. The coming to the fulfillment of single aloneness, through love, is made impossible for us by the ideal, the monomania of more love. At the very *âge dangereuse*, when a woman should be accomplishing her own fulfillment into maturity and rich quiescence, she turns rabidly to seek a new lover. At the very crucial time when she should be coming to a state of pure equilibrium and rest with her husband, she turns rabidly against

rest or peace or equilibrium or husband in any shape or form, and demands more love, more love, a new sort of lover, one who will “understand” her. And as often as not she turns to her son.

It is true, a woman reaches her goal of fulfillment through feeling. But through being “understood” she reaches nowhere, unless the lover understands what a vice it is for a woman to get herself and her sex into her head. A woman reaches her fulfillment through love, deep sensual love, and exquisite sensitive communion. But once she reaches the point of fulfillment, she should not break off to ask for more excitements. She should take the beauty of maturity and peace and quiet faithfulness upon her.

This she won’t do, however, unless the man, her husband, goes on beyond her. When a man approaches the beginning of maturity and the fulfillment of his individual self, about the age of thirty-five, then is not his time to come to rest. On the contrary. Deeply fulfilled through marriage, and at one with his own soul, he must now undertake the responsibility for the next step into the future. He must now give himself perfectly to some further purpose, some passionate purposive activity. Till a man makes the great resolution of aloneness and singleness of being, till he takes upon himself the silence and central appeasedness of maturity; and *then, after this*, assumes a sacred responsibility for the next purposive step into the future, there is no rest. The great resolution of aloneness and appeasedness, and the further deep assumption of responsibility in purpose — this is necessary to every parent, every father, every husband, at a certain point. If the resolution is never made, the responsibility never embraced, then the love-craving will run on into frenzy, and lay waste to the family. In the woman particularly the love-craving will run on to frenzy and disaster.

Seeking, seeking the fulfillment in the deep passional self; diseased with self-consciousness and sex in the head, foiled by the very loving weakness of the husband who has not the courage to withdraw into his own stillness and singleness, and put the wife under the spell of his fulfilled decision; the unhappy woman beats about for her insatiable satisfaction, seeking whom she may devour. And usually, she turns to her child. Here she provokes what she wants. Here, in her own son who belongs to her, she seems to find the last perfect response for which she is craving. He is a medium to her, she provokes from him her own answer. So she throws herself into a last great love for her son, a final and fatal devotion, that which would have been the richness and strength of her husband and is poison to her boy. The husband, irresolute, never accepting his own higher responsibility, bows and accepts. And the fatal round of introversion and “complex” starts once more. If man will never accept his own ultimate being, his final aloneness, and his last responsibility for life, then he must expect

woman to dash from disaster to disaster, rootless and uncontrolled.

“On revient toujours à son premier amour.” It sounds like a cynicism to-day. As if we really meant: *“On ne revient jamais à son premier amour.”* But as a matter of fact, a man never leaves his first love, once the love is established. He may leave his first attempt at love. Once a man establishes a full dynamic communication at the deeper and the higher centers, with a woman, this can never be broken. But sex in the head breaks down, and half circuits break down. Once the full circuit is established, however, this can never break down.

Nowadays, alas, we start off self-conscious, with sex in the head. We find a woman who is the same. We marry because we are “pals.” The sex is a rather nasty fiasco. We keep up a pretense of “pals” — and nice love. Sex spins wilder in the head than ever. There is either a family of children whom the dissatisfied parents can devote themselves to, thereby perverting the miserable little creatures: or else there is a divorce. And at the great dynamic centers nothing has happened at all. Blank nothing. There has been no vital interchange at all in the whole of this beautiful marriage affair.

Establish between yourself and another individual a dynamic connection at only *two* of the four further poles, and you will have the devil of a job to break the connection. Especially if it be the first connection you have made. Especially if the other individual be the first in the field.

This is the case of the parents. Parents are first in the field of the child’s further consciousness. They are criminal trespassers in that field. But that makes no matter. They are first in the field. They establish a dynamic connection between the two upper centers, the centers of the throat, the centers of the higher dynamic sympathy and cognition. They establish this circuit. And break it if you can. Very often not even death can break it.

And as we see, the establishment of the upper love-and-cognition circuit inevitably provokes the lower sex-sensual centers into action, even though there be no correspondence on the sensual plane between the two individuals concerned. Then see what happens. If you want to see the real desirable wife-spirit, look at a mother with her boy of eighteen. How she serves him, how she stimulates him, how her true female self is his, is wife-submissive to him as never, never it could be to a husband. This is the quiescent, flowering love of a mature woman. It is the very flower of a woman’s love: sexually asking nothing, asking nothing of the beloved, save that he shall be himself, and that for his living he shall accept the gift of her love. This is the perfect flower of married love, which a husband should put in his cap as he goes forward into the future in his supreme activity. For the husband, it is a great pledge, and a blossom. For the son also it seems wonderful. The woman now feels for the first time as a true

wife might feel. And her feeling is towards her son.

Or, instead of mother and son, read father and daughter.

And then what? The son gets on swimmingly for a time, till he is faced with the actual fact of sex necessity. He gleefully inherits his adolescence and the world at large, without an obstacle in his way, mother-supported, mother-loved. Everything comes to him in glamour, he feels he sees wondrous much, understands a whole heaven, mother-stimulated. Think of the power which a mature woman thus infuses into her boy. He flares up like a flame in oxygen. No wonder they say geniuses mostly have great mothers. They mostly have sad fates.

And then? — and then, with this glamorous youth? What is he actually to do with his sensual, sexual self? Bury it? Or make an effort with a stranger? For he is taught, even by his mother, that his manhood must not forego sex. Yet he is linked up in ideal love already, the best he will ever know.

No woman will give to a stranger that which she gives to her son, her father or her brother: that beautiful and glamorous submission which is truly the wife-submission. To a stranger, a husband, a woman insists on being queen, goddess, mistress, the positive, the adored, the first and foremost and the one and only. This she will not ask from her near blood-kin. Of her blood-kin, there is always one she will love devotedly.

And so, the charming young girl who adores her father, or one of her brothers, is sought in marriage by the attractive young man who loves his mother devotedly. And a pretty business the marriage is. We can't think of it. Of course they may be good pals. It's the only thing left.

And there we are. The game is spoilt before it is begun. Within the circle of the family, owing to our creed of insatiable love, intense adult sympathies are provoked in quite young children. In Italy, the Italian stimulates adult sex-consciousness and sex-sympathy in his child, almost deliberately. But with us, it is usually spiritual sympathy and spiritual criticism. The adult experiences are provoked, the adult devotional sympathies are linked up, prematurely, as far as the child is concerned. We have the heart-wringing spectacle of intense parent-child love, a love intense as the love of man and woman, but not sexual; or else the great brother-sister devotion. And thus, the great love-experience which should lie in the future is forestalled. Within the family, the love-bond forms quickly, without the shocks and ruptures inevitable between strangers. And so, it is easiest, intensest — and seems the best. It seems the highest. You will not easily get a man to believe that his carnal love for the woman he has made his wife is as high a love as that he felt for his mother or sister.

The cream is licked off from life before the boy or the girl is twenty.

Afterwards — repetition, disillusion, and barrenness.

And the cause? — always the same. That parents will not make the great resolution to come to rest within themselves, to possess their own souls in quiet and fullness. The man has not the courage to withdraw at last into his own soul's stillness and aloneness, and *then*, passionately and faithfully, to strive for the living future. The woman has not the courage to give up her hopeless insistence on love and her endless demand for love, demand of being loved. She has not the greatness of soul to relinquish her own self-assertion, and believe in the man who believes in himself and in his own soul's efforts: — if there *are* any such men nowadays, which is very doubtful.

Alas, alas, the future! Your son, who has tasted the real beauty of wife-response in his mother or sister. Your daughter, who adores her brother, and who marries some woman's son. They are so charming to look at, such a lovely couple. And at first it is all such a good game, such good sport. Then each one begins to fret for the beauty of the lost, non-sexual, partial relationship. The sexual part of marriage has proved so — so empty. While that other loveliest thing — the poignant touch of devotion felt for mother or father or brother — why, this is missing altogether. The best is missing. The rest isn't worth much. Ah well, such is life. Settle down to it, and bring up the children carefully to more of the same. — The future! — You've had all your good days by the time you're twenty.

And, I ask you, what good will psychoanalysis do you in this state of affairs? Introduce an extra sex-motive to excite you for a bit and make you feel how thrillingly immoral things really are. And then — it all goes flat again. Father complex, mother complex, incest dreams: pah, when we've had the little excitement out of them we shall forget them as we have forgotten so many other catch-words. And we shall be just where we were before: unless we are worse, with *more* sex in the head, and more introversion, only more brazen.

CHAPTER XI

THE VICIOUS CIRCLE

Here is a very vicious circle. And how to get out of it? In the first place, we have to break the love-ideal, once and for all. Love, as we see, is not the only dynamic. Taking love in its greatest sense, and making it embrace every form of sympathy, every flow from the great sympathetic centers of the human body, still it is not the whole of the dynamic flow, it is only the one-half. There is always the other voluntary flow to reckon with, the intense motion of independence and singleness of self, the pride of isolation, and the profound fulfillment through power.

The very first thing of all to be recognized is the danger of idealism. It is the one besetting sin of the human race. It means the fall into automatism, mechanism, and nullity.

We know that life issues spontaneously at the great nodes of the psyche, the great nerve-centers. At first these are four only: then, after puberty, they become eight: later there may still be an extension of the dynamic consciousness, a further polarization. But eight is enough at the moment.

First at four, and then at eight dynamic centers of the human body, the human nervous system, life starts spontaneously into being. The soul bursts day by day into fresh impulses, fresh desire, fresh purpose, at these our polar centers. And from these dynamic generative centers issue the vital currents which put us into connection with our object. We have really no will and no choice, in the first place. It is our soul which acts within us, day by day unfolding us according to our own nature.

From the objective circuits and from the subjective circuits which establish and fulfill themselves at the first four centers of consciousness we derive our first being, our child-being, and also our first mind, our child-mind. By the objective circuits we mean those circuits which are established between the self and some external object: mother, father, sister, cat, dog, bird, or even tree or plant, or even further still, some particular place, some particular inanimate object, a knife or a chair or a cap or a doll or a wooden horse. For we must insist that every object which really enters effectively into our lives does so by direct connection. If I love my mother, it is because there is established between me and her a direct, powerful circuit of vital magnetism, call it what you will, but a

direct flow of dynamic *vital* interchange and intercourse. I will not call this vital flow a *force*, because it depends on the incomprehensible initiative and control of the individual soul or self. Force is that which is directed only from some universal will or law. Life is *always* individual, and therefore never controlled by one law, one God. And therefore, since the living really sway the universe, even if unknowingly; therefore there is no one universal law, even for the physical forces. Because we insist that even the sun depends, for its heartbeat, its respiration, its pivotal motion, on the beating hearts of men and beast, on the dynamic of the soul-impulse in individual creatures. It is from the aggregate heartbeat of living individuals, of we know not how many or what sort of worlds, that the sun rests stable.

Which may be dismissed as metaphysics, although it is quite as valid or even as demonstrable as Newton's Law of Gravitation, which law still remains a law, even if not quite so absolute as heretofore.

But this is a digression. The argument is, that between an individual and any external object with which he has an affective connection, there exists a definite vital flow, as definite and concrete as the electric current whose polarized circuit sets our tram-cars running and our lamps shining, or our Marconi wires vibrating. Whether this object be human, or animal, or plant, or quite inanimate, there is still a circuit. My dog, my canary has a polarized connection with me. Nay, the very cells in the ash-tree I loved as a child had a dynamic vibratory connection with the nuclei in my own centers of primary consciousness. And further still, the boots I have worn are so saturated with my own magnetism, my own vital activity, that if anyone else wear them I feel it is a trespass, almost as if another man used my hand to knock away a fly. I doubt very much if a blood-hound, when it takes a scent, *smells*, in our sense of the word. It receives at the infinitely sensitive telegraphic center of the dog's nostrils the vital vibration which remains in the inanimate object from the individual with whom the object was associated. I should like to know if a dog would trace a pair of quite new shoes which had merely been dragged at the end of a string. That is, does he follow the smell of the leather itself, or the vibration track of the individual whose vitality is communicated to the leather?

So, there is a definite vibratory rapport between a man and his surroundings, once he definitely gets into contact with these surroundings. Any particular locality, any house which has been lived in has a vibration, a transferred vitality of its own. This is either sympathetic or antipathetic to the succeeding individual in varying degree. But certain it is that the inhabitants who live at the foot of Etna will always have a certain pitch of life-vibration, antagonistic to the pitch of vibration even of a Palermitan, in some measure. And old houses are saturated

with human presence, at last to a degree of indecency, unbearable. And tradition, in its most elemental sense, means the continuing of the same peculiar pitch of vital vibration.

Such is the objective dynamic flow between the psychic poles of the individual and the substance of the external object, animate or inanimate. The subjective dynamic flow is established between the four primary poles within the individual. Every dynamic connection begins from one or the other of the sympathetic centers: is, or should be, almost immediately polarized from the corresponding voluntary center. Then a complete flow is set up, in one plane. But this always rouses the activity on the other, corresponding plane, more or less intense. There is a whole field of consciousness established, with positive polarity of the first plane, negative polarity of the second. Which being so, a whole fourfold field of dynamic consciousness now working within the individual, direct cognition takes place. The mind begins to know, and to strive to know.

The business of the mind is first and foremost the pure joy of knowing and comprehending the pure joy of consciousness. The second business is to act as medium, as interpreter, as agent between the individual and his object. The mind should *not* act as a director or controller of the spontaneous centers. These the soul alone must control: the soul being that forever unknowable reality which causes us to rise into being. There is continual conflict between the soul, which is for ever sending forth incalculable impulses, and the psyche, which is conservative, and wishes to persist in its old motions, and the mind, which wishes to have “freedom,” that is spasmodic, idea-driven control. Mind, and conservative psyche, and the incalculable soul, these three are a trinity of powers in every human being. But there is something even beyond these. It is the individual in his pure singleness, in his totality of consciousness, in his oneness of being: the Holy Ghost which is with us after our Pentecost, and which we may not deny. When I say to myself: “I am wrong,” knowing with sudden insight that I *am* wrong, then this is the whole self speaking, the Holy Ghost. It is no piece of mental inference. It is not just the soul sending forth a flash. It is my whole being speaking in one voice, soul and mind and psyche transfigured into oneness. This voice of my being I may *never* deny. When at last, in all my storms, my whole self speaks, then there is a pause. The soul collects itself into pure silence and isolation — perhaps after much pain. The mind suspends its knowledge, and waits. The psyche becomes strangely still. And then, after the pause, there is fresh beginning, a new life adjustment. Conscience is the being’s consciousness, when the individual is conscious *in toto*, when he knows in full. It is something which includes and which far surpasses mental consciousness. Every man must

live as far as he can by his own soul's conscience. But not according to any ideal. To submit the conscience to a creed, or an idea, or a tradition, or even an impulse, is our ruin.

To make the mind the absolute ruler is as good as making a Cook's tourist-interpreter a king and a god, because he can speak several languages, and make an Arab understand that an Englishman wants fish for supper. And to make an ideal a ruling principle is about as stupid as if a bunch of travelers should never cease giving each other and their dragoman sixpence, because the dragoman's main idea of virtue is the virtue of sixpence-giving. In the same way, we *know* we cannot live purely by impulse. Neither can we live solely by tradition. We must live by all three, ideal, impulse, and tradition, each in its hour. But the real guide is the pure conscience, the voice of the self in its wholeness, the Holy Ghost.

We have fallen now into the mistake of idealism. Man always falls into one of the three mistakes. In China, it is tradition. And in the South Seas, it seems to have been impulse. Ours is idealism. Each of the three modes is a true life-mode. But any one, alone or dominant, brings us to destruction. We must depend on the wholeness of our being, ultimately only on that, which is our Holy Ghost within us. Whereas, in an ideal of love and benevolence, we have tried to automatize ourselves into little love-engines always stoked with the sorrows or beauties of other people, so that we can get up steam of charity or righteous wrath. A great trick is to pour on the fire the oil of our indignation at somebody else's wickedness, and then, when we've got up steam like hell, back the engine and run bish! smash! against the belly of the offender. Because he said he didn't want to love any more, we hate him for evermore, and try to run over him, every bit of him, with our love-tanks. And all the time we yell at him: "Will you deny love, you villain? Will you?" And by the time he faintly squeaks, "I want to be loved! I want to be loved!" we have got so used to running over him with our love-tanks that we don't feel in a hurry to leave off.

"Sois mon frère, ou je te tue." "Sois mon frère, ou je me tue."

There are the two parrot-threats of love, on which our loving centuries have run as on a pair of railway-lines. Excuse me if I want to get out of the train. Excuse me if I can't get up any love-steam any more. My boilers are burst.

We have made a mistake, laying down love like the permanent way of a great emotional transport system. There we are, however, running on wheels on the lines of our love. And of course we have only two directions, forwards and backwards. "Onward, Christian soldiers, towards the great terminus where bottles of sterilized milk for the babies are delivered at the bedroom windows by noiseless aeroplanes each morn, where the science of dentistry is so perfect that

teeth are planted in a man's mouth without his knowing it, where twilight sleep is so delicious that every woman longs for her next confinement, and where nobody ever has to do anything except turn a handle now and then in a spirit of universal love — ” That is the forward direction of the English-speaking race. The Germans unwisely backed their engine. “We have a city of light. But instead of lying ahead it lies direct behind us. So reverse engines. Reverse engines, and away, away to our city, where the sterilized milk is delivered by noiseless aeroplanes, *at the very precise minute when our great doctors of the Fatherland have diagnosed that it is good for you:* where the teeth are not only so painlessly planted that they grow like living rock, but where their composition is such that the friction of eating stimulates the cells of the jaw-bone and develops the *superman strength of will which makes us gods:* and where not only is twilight sleep serene, but into the sleeper are inculcated the most useful and instructive dreams, calculated to perfect the character of the young citizen at this crucial period, and to enlighten permanently the mind of the happy mother, with regard to her new duties towards her child and towards our great Fatherland — ”

Here you see we are, on the railway, with New Jerusalem ahead, and New Jerusalem away behind us. But of course it was very wrong of the Germans to reverse their engines, and cause one long collision all along the line. Why should we go *their* way to the New Jerusalem, when of course they might so easily have kept on going our way. And now there's wreckage all along the line! But clear the way is our motto — or make the Germans clear it. Because get on we will.

Meanwhile we sit rather in the cold, waiting for the train to get a start. People keep on signaling with green lights and red lights. And it's all very bewildering.

As for me, I'm off. I'm damned if I'll be shunted along any more. And I'm thrice damned if I'll go another yard towards that sterilized New Jerusalem, either forwards or backwards. New Jerusalem may rot, if it waits for me. I'm not going.

So good-by! There we leave humanity, encamped in an appalling mess beside the railway-smash of love, sitting down, however, and having not a bad time, some of 'em, feeding themselves fat on the plunder: others, further down the line, with mouths green from eating grass. But all grossly, stupidly, automatically gabbling about getting the love-service running again, the trains booked for the New Jerusalem well on the way once more. And occasionally a good engine gives a screech of love, and something seems to be about to happen. And sometimes there is enough steam to set the indignation-whistles whistling. But never any more will there be enough love-steam to get the system properly running. It is done.

Good-by, then! You may have laid your line from one end to the other of the

infinite. But still there's plenty of hinterland. I'll go. Good-by. Ach, it will be so nice to be alone: not to hear you, not to see you, not to smell you, humanity. I wish you no ill, but wisdom. Good-by!

To be alone with one's own soul. Not to be alone without my own soul, mind you. But to be alone with one's own soul! This, and the joy of it, is the real goal of love. My own soul, and myself. Not my ego, my conceit of myself. But my very soul. To be at one in my own self. Not to be questing any more. Not to be yearning, seeking, hoping, desiring, aspiring. But to pause, and be alone.

And to have one's own "gentle spouse" by one's side, of course, to dig one in the ribs occasionally. Because really, being alone in peace means being two people together. Two people who can be silent together, and not conscious of one another outwardly. Me in my silence, she in hers, and the balance, the equilibrium, the pure circuit between us. With occasional lapses of course: digs in the ribs if one gets too vague or self-sufficient.

They say it is better to travel than to arrive. It's not been my experience, at least. The journey of love has been rather a lacerating, if well-worth-it, journey. But to come at last to a nice place under the trees, with your "amiable spouse" who has at last learned to hold her tongue and not to bother about rights and wrongs: her own particularly. And then to pitch a camp, and cook your rabbit, and eat him: and to possess your own soul in silence, and to feel all the clamor lapse. That is the best I know.

I think it is terrible to be young. The ecstasies and agonies of love, the agonies and ecstasies of fear and doubt and drop-by-drop fulfillment, realization. The awful process of human relationships, love and marital relationships especially. Because we all make a very, very bad start to-day, with our idea of love in our head, and our sex in our head as well. All the fight till one is bled of one's self-consciousness and sex-in-the-head. All the bitterness of the conflict with this devil of an amiable spouse, who has got herself so stuck in her own head. It is terrible to be young. — But one fights one's way through it, till one is cleaned: the self-consciousness and sex-idea burned out of one, cauterized out bit by bit, and the self whole again, and at last free.

The best thing I have known is the stillness of accomplished marriage, when one possesses one's own soul in silence, side by side with the amiable spouse, and has left off craving and raving and being only half one's self. But I must say, I know a great deal more about the craving and raving and sore ribs, than about the accomplishment. And I must confess that I feel this self-same "accomplishment" of the fulfilled being is only a preparation for new responsibilities ahead, new unison in effort and conflict, the effort to make, with other men, a little new way into the future, and to break through the hedge of the

many.

But — to your tents, my Israel. And to that precious baby you've left slumbering there. What I meant to say was, in each phase of life you have a great circuit of human relationship to establish and fulfill. In childhood, it is the circuit of family love, established at the first four consciousness centers, and gradually fulfilling itself, completing itself. At adolescence, the first circuit of family love should be completed, dynamically finished. And then, it falls into quiescence. After puberty, family love should fall quiescent in a child. The love never breaks. It continues static and basic, the basis of the emotional psyche, the foundation of the self. It is like the moon when the moon at last subsides into her eternal orbit, round the earth. She travels in her orbit so inevitably that she forgets, and becomes unaware. She only knits her brows over the earth's greater aberrations in space.

The circuit of parental love, once fulfilled, is not done away with, but only established into silence. The child is then free to establish the new connections, in which he surpasses his parents. And let us repeat, parents should never try to establish adult relations, of sympathy or interest or anything else, between themselves and their children. The attempt to do so only deranges the deep primary circuit which is the dynamic basis of our living. It is a clambering upwards only by means of a broken foundation. Parents should remain parents, children children, for ever, and the great gulf preserved between the two. Honor thy father and thy mother should always be a leading commandment. But this can only take place when father and mother keep their true parental distances, dignity, reserve, and limitation. As soon as father and mother try to become the *friends* and *companions* of their children, they break the root of life, they rupture the deepest dynamic circuit of living, they derange the whole flow of life for themselves and their children.

For let us reiterate and reiterate: you cannot mingle and confuse the various modes of dynamic love. If you try, you produce horrors. You cannot plant the heart below the diaphragm or put an ocular eye in the navel. No more can you transfer parent love into friend love or adult love. Parent love is established at the great primary centers, where man is father and child, playmate and brother, but where he *cannot* be comrade or lover. Comrade and lover, this is the dynamic activity of the further centers, the second four centers. And these second four centers must be active in the parent, their intense circuit established even if not fulfilled, long before the child is born. The circuit of friendship, of personal companionship, of sexual love must needs be established before the child is begotten, or at least before it attains to adolescence. These circuits of the extended field are already fully established in the parent before the centers of

correspondence in the child are even formed. When therefore the four great centers of the extended consciousness arouses in a child, at adolescence, they must needs seek a strange complement, a foreign conjunction.

Not only is this the case, but the actual dynamic impulse of the new life which rouses at puberty is *alien* to the original dynamic flow. The new wave-length by no means corresponds. The new vibration by no means harmonizes. Force the two together, and you cause a terrible frictional excitement and jarring. It is this instinctive recognition of the different dynamic vibrations from different centers, in different modes, and in different directions of positive and negative, which lies at the base of savage taboo. After puberty, members of one family should be taboo to one another. There should be the most definite limits to the degree of contact. And mothers-in-law should be taboo to their daughters' husbands, and fathers-in-law to their sons' wives. We must again begin to learn the great laws of the first dynamic life-circuits. These laws we now make havoc of, and consequently we make havoc of our own soul, psyche, mind and health.

This book is written primarily concerning the child's consciousness. It is not intended to enter the field of the post-puberty consciousness. But yet, the dynamic relation of the child is established so directly with the physical and psychical soul of the parent, that to get any inkling of dynamic child-consciousness we must understand something of parent-consciousness.

We assert that the parent-child love-mode excludes the possibility of the man-and-woman, or friend-and-friend love mode. We assert that the polarity of the first four poles is inconsistent with the polarity of the second four poles. Nay, between the two great fields is a certain dynamic opposition, resistance, even antipathy. So that in the natural course of life there is no possibility of confusing parent love and adult love.

But we are mental creatures, and with the explosive and mechanistic aid of ideas we can pervert the whole psyche. Only, however, in a destructive degree, not in a positive or constructive.

Let us return then. In the ordinary course of development, by the time that the child is born and grown to puberty the whole dynamic soul of the mother is engaged: first, with the children, and second, on the further, higher plane, with the husband, and with her own friends. So that when the child reaches adolescence it must inevitably cast abroad for connection.

But now let us remember the actual state of affairs to-day, when the poles are reversed between the sexes. The woman is now the responsible party, the law-giver, the culture-bearer. She is the conscious guide and director of the man. She bears his soul between her two hands. And her sex is just a function or an instrument of power. This being so, the man is really the servant and the fount of

emotion, love and otherwise.

Which is all very well, while the fun lasts. But like all perverted processes, it is exhaustive, and like the fun wears out. Leaving an exhaustion, and an irritation. Each looks on the other as a perverter of life. Almost invariably a married woman, as she passes the age of thirty, conceives a dislike, or a contempt of her husband, or a pity which is too near contempt. Particularly if he be a good husband, a true modern. And he, for his part, though just as jarred inside himself, resents only the fact that he is not loved as he ought to be.

Then starts a new game. The woman, even the most virtuous, looks abroad for new sympathy. She will have a new man-friend, if nothing more. But as a rule she has got something more. She has got her children.

A relation between mother and child to-day is practically *never* parental. It is personal — which means, it is critical and deliberate, and adult in provocation. The mother, in her new rôle of idealist and life-manager never, practically for one single moment, gives her child the unthinking response from the deep dynamic centers. No, she gives it what is good for it. She shoves milk in its mouth as the clock strikes, she shoves it to sleep when the milk is swallowed, and she shoves it ideally through baths and massage, promenades and practice, till the little organism develops like a mushroom to stand on its own feet. Then she continues her ideal shoving of it through all the stages of an ideal upbringing, she loves it as a chemist loves his test-tubes in which he analyzes his salts. The poor little object is his mother's ideal. But of her head she dictates his providential days, and by the force of her deliberate mentally-directed love-will she pushes him up into boyhood. The poor little devil never knows one moment when he is not encompassed by the beautiful, benevolent, idealistic, Botticelli-pure, and finally obscene love-will of the mother. Never, never one mouthful does he drink of the milk of human kindness: always the sterilized milk of human benevolence. There is no mother's milk to-day, save in tigers' udders, and in the udders of sea-whales. Our children drink a decoction of ideal love, at the breast.

Never for one moment, poor baby, the deep warm stream of love from the mother's bowels to his bowels. Never for one moment the dark proud recoil into rest, the soul's separation into deep, rich independence. Never this lovely rich forgetfulness, as a cat trots off and utterly forgets her kittens, utterly, richly forgets them, till suddenly, click, the dynamic circuit reverses itself in her, and she remembers, and rages round in a frenzy, shouting for her young.

Our miserable infants never know this joy and richness and pang of real maternal warmth. Our wonderful mothers never let us out of their minds for one single moment. Not for a second do they allow us to escape from their ideal

benevolence. Not one single breath does a baby draw, free from the imposition of the pure, unselfish, Botticelli-holy, detestable *love-will* of the mother. Always the *will*, the will, the love-will, the ideal will, directed from the ideal mind. Always this stone, this scorpion of maternal nourishment. Always this infernal self-conscious Madonna starving our living guts and bullying us to death with her love.

We have made the idea supplant both impulse and tradition. We have no spark of wholeness. And we live by an evil love-will. Alas, the great spontaneous mode is abrogated. There is no lovely great flux of vital sympathy, no rich rejoicing of pride into isolation and independence. There is no reverence for great traditions of parenthood. No, there is substitute for everything — life-substitute — just as we have butter-substitute, and meat-substitute, and sugar-substitute, and leather-substitute, and silk-substitute, so we have life-substitute. We have beastly benevolence, and foul good-will, and stinking charity, and poisonous ideals.

The poor modern brat, shoved horribly into life by an effort of will, and shoved up towards manhood by every appliance that can be applied to it, especially the appliance of the maternal will, it is really too pathetic to contemplate. The only thing that prevents us wringing our hands is the remembrance that the little devil will grow up and beget other similar little devils of his own, to invent more aeroplanes and hospitals and germ-killers and food-substitutes and poison gases. The problem of the future is a question of the strongest poison-gas. Which is certainly a very sure way out of our vicious circle.

There is no way out of a vicious circle, of course, except breaking the circle. And since the mother-child relationship is to-day the viciousest of circles, what are we to do? Just wait for the results of the poison-gas competition presumably.

Oh, ideal humanity, how detestable and despicable you are! And how you deserve your own poison-gases! How you deserve to perish in your own stink.

It is no use contemplating the development of the modern child, born out of the mental-conscious love-will, born to be another unit of self-conscious love-will: an ideal-born beastly little entity with a devil's own will of its own, benevolent, of course, and a Satan's own seraphic self-consciousness, like a beastly Botticelli brat.

Once we really consider this modern process of life and the love-will, we could throw the pen away, and spit, and say three cheers for the inventors of poison-gas. Is there not an American who is supposed to have invented a breath of heaven whereby, drop one pop-cornful in Hampstead, one in Brixton, one in East Ham, and one in Islington, and London is a Pompeii in five minutes! Or

was the American only bragging? Because anyhow, whom has he experimented on? I read it in the newspaper, though. London a Pompeii in five minutes. Makes the gods look silly!

CHAPTER XII

LITANY OF EXHORTATIONS

I thought I'd better turn over a new leaf, and start a new chapter. The intention of the last chapter was to find a way out of the vicious circle. And it ended in poison-gas.

Yes, dear reader, so it did. But you've not silenced me yet, for all that.

We're in a nasty mess. We're in a vicious circle. And we're making a careful study of poison-gases. The secret of Greek fire was lost long ago, when the world left off being wonderful and ideal. Now it is wonderful and ideal again, much wonderfuller and *much* more ideal. So we ought to do something rare in the way of poison-gas. London a Pompeii in five minutes! How to outdo Vesuvius! — title of a new book by American authors.

There is only one single other thing to do. And it's more difficult than poison-gas. It is to leave off loving. It is to leave off benevolencing and having a good will. It is to cease utterly. Just leave off. Oh, parents, see that your children get their dinners and clean sheets, but don't love them. Don't love them one single grain, and don't let anybody else love them. Give them their dinners and leave them alone. You've already loved them to perdition. Now leave them alone, to find their own way out.

Wives, don't love your husbands any more: even if they cry for it, the great babies! Sing: "I've had enough of that old sauce." And leave off loving them or caring for them one single bit. Don't even hate them or dislike them. Don't have any stew with them at all. Just boil the eggs and fill the salt-cellars and be quite nice, and in your own soul, be alone and be still. Be alone, and be still, preserving all the human decencies, and abandoning the indecency of desires and benevolencies and devotions, those beastly poison-gas apples of the Sodom vine of the love-will.

Wives, don't love your husbands nor your children nor anybody. Sit still, and say Hush! And while you shake the duster out of the drawing-room window, say to yourself — "In the sweetness of solitude." And when your husband comes in and says he's afraid he's got a cold and is going to have double pneumonia, say quietly "surely not." And if he wants the ammoniated quinine, give it him if he can't get it for himself. But don't let him drive you out of your solitude, your singleness within yourself. And if your little boy falls down the steps and makes

his mouth bleed, nurse and comfort him, but say to yourself, even while you tremble with the shock: "Alone. Alone. Be alone, my soul." And if the servant smashes three electric-light bulbs in three minutes, say to her: "How very inconsiderate and careless of you!" But say to yourself: "Don't hear it, my soul. Don't take fright at the pop of a light-bulb."

Husbands, don't love your wives any more. If they flirt with men younger or older than yourselves, let your blood not stir. If you can go away, go away. But if you must stay and see her, then say to her, "I would rather you didn't flirt in my presence, Eleanora." Then, when she goes red and loosens torrents of indignation, don't answer any more. And when she floods into tears, say quietly in your own self, "My soul is my own"; and go away, be alone as much as possible. And when she works herself up, and says she must have love or she will die, then say: "Not my love, however." And to all her threats, her tears, her entreaties, her reproaches, her cajolements, her winsomenesses, answer nothing, but say to yourself: "Shall I be implicated in this display of the love-will? Shall I be blasted by this false lightning?" And though you tremble in every fiber, and feel sick, vomit-sick with the scene, still contain yourself, and say, "My soul is my own. It shall not be violated." And learn, learn, learn the one and only lesson worth learning at last. Learn to walk in the sweetness of the possession of your own soul. And whether your wife weeps as she takes off her amber beads at night, or whether your neighbor in the train sits in your coat bottoms, or whether your superior in the office makes supercilious remarks, or your inferior is familiar and impudent; or whether you read in the newspaper that Lloyd George is performing another iniquity, or the Germans plotting another plot, say to yourself: "My soul is my own. My soul is with myself, and beyond implication." And wait, quietly, in possession of your own soul, till you meet another man who has made the choice, and kept it. Then you will know him by the look on his face: half a dangerous look, a look of Cain, and half a look of gathered beauty. Then you two will make the nucleus of a new society — Ooray! Bis! Bis!!

But if you should never meet such a man: and if your wife should torture you every day with her love-will: and even if she should force herself into a consumption, like Catherine Linton in "Wuthering Heights," owing to her obstinate and determined love-will (which is quite another matter than love): and if you see the world inventing poison-gas and falling into its poisoned grave: never give in, but be alone, and utterly alone with your own soul, in the stillness and sweet possession of your own soul. And don't even be angry. And *never* be sad. Why should you? It's not your affair.

But if your wife should accomplish for herself the sweetness of her own soul's

possession, then gently, delicately let the new mode assert itself, the new mode of relation between you, with something of spontaneous paradise in it, the apple of knowledge at last digested. But, my word, what belly-aches meanwhile. That apple is harder to digest than a lead gun-cartridge.

CHAPTER XIII

COSMOLOGICAL

Well, dear reader, Chapter XII was short, and I hope you found it sweet. But remember, this is an essay on Child Consciousness, not a tract on Salvation. It isn't my fault that I am led at moments into exhortation.

Well, then, what about it? One fact now seems very clear — at any rate to me. We've got to pause. We haven't got to gird our loins with a new frenzy and our larynxes with a new Glory Song. Not a bit of it. Before you dash off to put salt on the tail of a new religion or of a new Leader of Men, dear reader, sit down quietly and pull yourself together. Say to yourself: "Come now, what is it all about?" And you'll realize, dear reader, that you're all in a fluster, inwardly. Then say to yourself: "Why am I in such a fluster?" And you'll see you've no reason at all to be so: except that it's rather exciting to be in a fluster, and it may seem rather stale eggs to be in no fluster at all about anything. And yet, dear little reader, once you consider it quietly, it's so much nicer *not* to be in a fluster. It's so much nicer not to feel one's deeper innards storming like the Bay of Biscay. It is so much better to get up and say to the waters of one's own troubled spirit: Peace, be still ...! And they will be still ... perhaps.

And then one realizes that all the wild storms of anxiety and frenzy were only so much breaking of eggs. It isn't our business to live anybody's life, or to die anybody's death, except our own. Nor to save anybody's soul, nor to put anybody in the right; nor yet in the wrong, which is more the point to-day. But to be still, and to ignore the false fine frenzy of the seething world. To turn away, now, each one into the stillness and solitude of his own soul. And there to remain in the quiet with the Holy Ghost which is to each man his own true soul.

This is the way out of the vicious circle. Not to rush round on the periphery, like a rabbit in a ring, trying to break through. But to retreat to the very center, and there to be filled with a new strange stability, polarized in unfathomable richness with the center of centers. We are so silly, trying to invent devices and machines for flying off from the surface of the earth. Instead of realizing that for us the deep satisfaction lies not in escaping, but in getting into the perfect circuit of the earth's terrestrial magnetism. Not in breaking away. What is the good of trying to break away from one's own? What is the good of a tree desiring to fly like a bird in the sky, when a bird is rooted in the earth as surely as a tree is?

Nay, the bird is only the topmost leaf of the tree, fluttering in the high air, but attached as close to the tree as any other leaf. Mr. Einstein's Theory of Relativity does not supersede the Newtonian Law of Gravitation or of Inertia. It only says, "Beware! The Law of Inertia is not the simple ideal proposition you would like to make of it. It is a vast complexity. Gravitation is not one elemental uncouth force. It is a strange, infinitely complex, subtle aggregate of forces." And yet, however much it may waggle, a stone does fall to earth if you drop it.

We should like, vulgarly, to rejoice and say that the new Theory of Relativity releases us from the old obligation of centrality. It does no such thing. It only makes the old centrality much more strange, subtle, complex, and vital. It only robs us of the nice old ideal simplicity. Which ideal simplicity and logicalness has become such a fish-bone stuck in our throats.

The universe is once more in the mental melting-pot. And you can melt it down as long as you like, and mutter all the jargon and abracadabra, *aldeboronti fosco fornio* of science that mental monkey-tricks can teach you, you won't get anything in the end but a formula and a lie. The atom? Why, the moment you discover the atom it will explode under your nose. The moment you discover the ether it will evaporate. The moment you get down to the real basis of anything, it will dissolve into a thousand problematic constituents. And the more problems you solve, the more will spring up with their fingers at their nose, making a fool of you.

There is only one clue to the universe. And that is the individual soul within the individual being. That outer universe of suns and moons and atoms is a secondary affair. It is the death-result of living individuals. There is a great polarity in life itself. Life itself is dual. And the duality is life and death. And death is not just shadow or mystery. It is the negative reality of life. It is what we call Matter and Force, among other things.

Life is individual, always was individual and always will be. Life consists of living individuals, and always did so consist, in the beginning of everything. There never was any universe, any cosmos, of which the first reality was anything but living, incorporate individuals. I don't say the individuals were exactly like you and me. And they were never wildly different.

And therefore it is time for the idealist and the scientist — they are one and the same, really — to stop his monkey-jargon about the atom and the origin of life and the mechanical clue to the universe. There isn't any such thing. I might as well say: "Then they took the cart, and rubbed it all over with grease. Then they sprayed it with white wine, and spun round the right wheel five hundred revolutions to the minute and the left wheel, in the opposite direction, seven hundred and seventy-seven revolutions to the minute. Then a burning torch was

applied to each axle. And lo, the footboard of the cart began to swell, and suddenly as the cart groaned and writhed, the horse was born, and lay panting between the shafts.” The whole scientific theory of the universe is not worth such a tale: that the cart conceived and gave birth to the horse.

I do not believe one-fifth of what science can tell me about the sun. I do not believe for one second that the moon is a dead world splashed off from our globe. I do not believe that the stars came flying off from the sun like drops of water when you spin your wet hanky. I have believed it for twenty years, because it seemed so ideally plausible. Now I don't accept any ideal plausibilities at all. I look at the moon and the stars, and I know I don't believe anything that I am told about them. Except that I like their names, Aldebaran and Cassiopeia, and so on.

I have tried, and even brought myself to believe in a clue to the outer universe. And in the process I have swallowed such a lot of jargon that I would rather listen now to a negro witch-doctor than to Science. There is nothing in the world that is true except empiric discoveries which work in actual appliances. I know that the sun is hot. But I won't be told that the sun is a ball of blazing gas which spins round and fizzes. No, thank you.

At length, for *my* part, I know that life, and life only is the clue to the universe. And that the living individual is the clue to life. And that it always was so, and always will be so.

When the living individual dies, then is the realm of death established. Then you get Matter and Elements and atoms and forces and sun and moon and earth and stars and so forth. In short, the outer universe, the Cosmos. The Cosmos is nothing but the aggregate of the dead bodies and dead energies of bygone individuals. The dead bodies decompose as we know into earth, air, and water, heat and radiant energy and free electricity and innumerable other scientific facts. The dead souls likewise decompose — or else they don't decompose. But if they *do* decompose, then it is not into any elements of Matter and physical energy. They decompose into some psychic reality, and into some potential will. They reënter into the living psyche of living individuals. The living soul partakes of the dead souls, as the living breast partakes of the outer air, and the blood partakes of the sun. The soul, the individuality, never resolves itself through death into physical constituents. The dead soul remains always soul, and always retains its individual quality. And it does not disappear, but reënters into the soul of the living, of some living individual or individuals. And there it continues its part in life, as a death-witness and a life-agent. But it does not, ordinarily, have any separate existence there, but is incorporate in the living individual soul. But in some extraordinary cases, the dead soul may really act separately in a living

individual.

How this all is, and what are the laws of the relation between life and death, the living and the dead, I don't know. But that this relation exists, and exists in a manner as I describe it, for my own part I know. And I am fully aware that once we direct our living attention this way, instead of to the absurdity of the atom, then we have a whole *living* universe of knowledge before us. The universe of life and death, of which we, whose business it is to live and to die, know nothing. Whilst concerning the universe of Force and Matter we pile up theories and make staggering and disastrous discoveries of machinery and poison-gas, all of which we were much better without.

It is life we have to live by, not machines and ideals. And life means nothing else, even, but the spontaneous living soul which is our central reality. The spontaneous, living, individual soul, this is the clue, and the only clue. All the rest is derived.

How it is contrived that the individual soul in the living sways the very sun in its centrality, I do not know. But it is so. It is the peculiar dynamic polarity of the living soul in every weed or bug or beast, each one separately and individually polarized with the great returning pole of the sun, that maintains the sun alive. For I take it that the sun is the great sympathetic center of our inanimate universe. I take it that the sun breathes in the effluence of all that fades and dies. Across space fly the innumerable vibrations which are the basis of all matter. They fly, breathed out from the dying and the dead, from all that which is passing away, even in the living. These vibrations, these elements pass away across space, and are breathed back again. The sun itself is invisible as the soul. The sun itself is the soul of the inanimate universe, the aggregate clue to the substantial death, if we may call it so. The sun is the great active pole of the sympathetic death-activity. To the sun fly the vibrations or the molecules in the great sympathy-mode of death, and in the sun they are renewed, they turn again as the great gift back again from the sympathetic death-center towards life, towards the living. But it is not even the dead which *really* sustain the sun. It is the dynamic relation between the solar plexus of individuals and the sun's core, a perfect circuit. The sun is materially composed of all the effluence of the dead. But the *quick* of the sun is polarized with the living, the sun's quick is polarized in dynamic relation with the quick of life in all living things, that is, with the solar plexus in mankind. A direct dynamic connection between my solar plexus and the sun.

Likewise, as the sun is the great fiery, vivifying pole of the inanimate universe, the moon is the other pole, cold and keen and vivifying, corresponding in some way to a *voluntary* pole. We live between the polarized circuit of sun

and moon. And the moon is polarized with the lumbar ganglion, primarily, in man. Sun and moon are dynamically polarized to our actual tissue, they affect this tissue all the time.

The moon is, as it were, the pole of our particular terrestrial *volition*, in the universe. What holds the earth swinging in space is first, the great dynamic attraction to the sun, and then counterposing assertion of independence, singleness, which is polarized in the moon. The moon is the clue to our earth's individual identity, in the wide universe.

The moon is an immense magnetic center. It is quite wrong to say she is a dead snowy world with craters and so on. I should say she is composed of some very intense element, like phosphorus or radium, some element or elements which have very powerful chemical and kinetic activity, and magnetic activity, affecting us through space.

It is not the sun which we see in heaven. It is the rushing thither and the rushing thence of the vibrations expelled by death from the body of life, and returned back again to the body of life. Possibly even a dead soul makes its journey to the sun and back, before we receive it again in our breast. Just as the breath we breathe out flies to the sun and back, before we breathe it in again. And as the water that evaporates rises right to the sun, and returns here. What we see is the great golden rushing thither, from the death exhalation, towards the sun, as a great cloud of bees flying to swarm upon the invisible queen, circling round, and loosing again. This is what we see of the sun. The center is invisible for ever.

And of the moon the same. The moon has her back to us for ever. Not her face, as we like to think. The moon also pulls the water, as the sun does. But not in evaporation. The moon pulls by the magnetic force we call gravitation. Gravitation not being quite such a Newtonian simple apple as we are accustomed to find it, we are perhaps farther off from understanding the tides of the ocean than we were before the fruit of the tree fell to Sir Isaac's head. It is certainly not simple little-things tumble-towards-big-things gravitation. In the moon's pull there is peculiar, quite special force exerted over those water-born substances, phosphorus, salt, and lime. The dynamic energy of salt water is something quite different from that of fresh water. And it is this dynamic energy which the sea gives off, and which connects it with the moon. And the moon is some strange coagulation of substance such as salt, phosphorus, soda. It certainly isn't a snowy cold world, like a world of our own gone cold. Nonsense. It is a globe of dynamic substance like radium or phosphorus, coagulated upon a certain vivid pole of energy, which pole of energy is directly polarized with our earth, in opposition with the sun.

The moon is born from the death of individuals. All things, in their oneness, their unification into the pure, universal oneness, evaporate and fly like an imitation breath towards the sun. Even the crumbling rocks breathe themselves off in this rocky death, to the sun of heaven, during the day.

But at the same time, during the night they breathe themselves off to the moon. If we come to think of it, light and dark are a question both of the third body, the intervening body, what we will call, by stretching a point, the individual. As we all know, apart from the existence of molecules of individual matter, there is neither light nor dark. A universe utterly without matter, we don't know whether it is light or dark. Even the pure space between the sun and moon, the blue space, we don't know whether, in itself, it is light or dark. We can say it is light, we can say it is dark. But light and dark are terms which apply only to ourselves, the third, the intermediate, the substantial, the individual.

If we come to think of it, light and dark only mean whether we have our face or our back towards the sun. If we have our face to the sun, then we establish the circuit of cosmic or universal or material or infinite sympathy. These four adjectives, cosmic, universal, material, and infinite are almost interchangeable, and apply, as we see, to that realm of the non-individual existence which we call the realm of the substantial death. It is the universe which has resulted from the death of individuals. And to this universe alone belongs the quality of infinity: to the universe of death. Living individuals have no infinity save in this relation to the total death-substance and death-being, the summed-up cosmos.

Light and dark, these great wonders, are relative to us alone. These are two vast poles of the cosmic energy and of material existence. These are the vast poles of cosmic sympathy, which we call the sun, and the other white pole of cosmic volition, which we call the moon. To the sun belong the great forces of heat and radiant energy, to the moon belong the great forces of magnetism and electricity, radium-energy, and so on. The sun is not, in any sense, a material body. It is an invariable intense pole of cosmic energy, and what we see are the particles of our terrestrial decomposition flying thither and returning, as fine grains of iron would fly to an intense magnet, or better, as the draught in a room veers towards the fire, attracted infallibly, as a moth towards a candle. The moth is drawn to the candle as the draught is drawn to the fire, in the absolute spell of the material polarity of fire. And air escapes again, hot and different, from the fire. So is the sun.

Fire, we say, is combustion. It is marvelous how science proceeds like witchcraft and alchemy, by means of an abracadabra which has no earthly sense. Pray, what is combustion? You can try and answer scientifically, till you are black in the face. All you can say is that it is *that which happens* when matter is

raised to a certain temperature — and so forth and so forth. You might as well say, a word is that which happens when I open my mouth and squeeze my larynx and make various tricks with my throat muscles. All these explanations are so senseless. They describe the apparatus, and think they have described the event.

Fire may be accompanied by combustion, but combustion is not necessarily accompanied by fire. All A is B, but all B is not A. And therefore fire, no matter how you jiggle, is not identical with combustion. Fire. FIRE. I insist on the absolute word. You may say that fire is a sum of various phenomena. I say it isn't. You might as well tell me a fly is a sum of wings and six legs and two bulging eyes. It is the fly which has the wings and legs, and not the legs and wings which somehow nab the fly into the middle of themselves. A fly is not a sum of various things. A fly is a fly, and the items of the sum are still fly.

So with fire. Fire is an absolute unity in itself. It is a dynamic polar principle. Establish a certain polarity between the moon-principle and the sun-principle, between the positive and negative, or sympathetic and volitional dynamism in any piece of matter, and you have fire, you have the sun-phenomenon. It is the sudden flare into the one mode, the sun mode, the material sympathetic mode. Correspondingly, establish an opposite polarity between the sun-principle and the water-principle, and you have decomposition into water, or towards watery dissolution.

There are two sheer dynamic principles in our universe, the sun-principle and the moon-principle. And these principles are known to us in immediate contact as fire and water. The sun is not fire. But the principle of fire is the sun-principle. That is, fire is the sudden swoop towards the sun, of matter which is suddenly sun-polarized. Fire is the sudden sun-assertion, the release towards the one pole only. It is the sudden revelation of the cosmic One Polarity, One Identity.

But there is another pole. There is the moon. And there is another absolute and visible principle, the principle of water. The moon is not water. But it is the soul of water, the invisible clue to all the waters.

So that we begin to realize our visible universe as a vast dual polarity between sun and moon. Two vast poles in space, invisible in themselves, but visible owing to the circuit which swoops between them, round them, the circuit of the universe, established at the cosmic poles of the sun and moon. This then is the infinite, the positive infinite of the positive pole, the sun-pole, negative infinite of the negative pole, the moon-pole. And between the two infinities all existence takes place.

But wait. Existence is truly a matter of propagation between the two infinities. But it needs a third presence. Sun-principle and moon-principle, embracing

through the æons, could never by themselves propagate one molecule of matter. The hailstone needs a grain of dust for its core. So does the universe. Midway between the two cosmic infinities lies the third, which is more than infinite. This is the Holy Ghost Life, individual life.

It is so easy to imagine that between them, the two infinities of the cosmos propagated life. But one single moment of pause and silence, one single moment of gathering the whole soul into knowledge, will tell us that it is a falsity. It was the living individual soul which, dying, flung into space the two wings of the infinite, the two poles of the sun and the moon. The sun and the moon are the two eternal death-results of the death of individuals. Matter, all matter, is the Life-born. And what we know as inert matter, this is only the result of death in individuals, it is the dead bodies of individuals decomposed and resmelted between the hammer and anvil, fire and sand of the sun and the moon. When time began, the first individual died, the poles of the sun and moon were flung into space, and between the two, in a strange chaos and battle, the dead body was torn and melted and smelted, and rolled beneath the feet of the living. So the world was formed, always under the feet of the living.

And so we have a clue to gravitation. We, mankind, are all one family. In our individual bodies burns the positive quick of all things. But beneath our feet, in our own earth, lies the intense center of our human, individual death, our grave. The earth has one center, to which we are all polarized. The circuit of our life is balanced on the living soul within us, as the positive center, and on the earth's dark center, the center of our abiding and eternal and substantial death, our great negative center, away below. This is the circuit of our immediate individual existence. We stand upon our own grave, with our death fire, the sun, on our right hand, and our death-damp, the moon, on our left.

The earth's center is no accident. It is the great individual pole of us who die. It is the center of the first dead body. It is the first germ-cell of death, which germ-cell threw out the great nuclei of the sun and the moon. To this center of our earth we, as humans, are eternally polarized, as are our trees. Inevitably, we fall to earth. And the clue of us sinks to the earth's center, the clue of our death, of our *weight*. And the earth flings us out as wings to the sun and moon: or as the death-germ dividing into two nuclei. So from the earth our radiance is flung to the sun, our marsh-fire to the moon, when we die.

We fall into the earth. But our rising was not from the earth. We rose from the earthless quick, the unfading life. And earth, sun, and moon are born only of our death. But it is only their polarized dynamic connection with us who live which sustains them all in their place and maintains them all in their own activities. The inanimate universe rests absolutely on the life-circuit of living creatures, is built

upon the arch which spans the duality of living beings.

CHAPTER XIV

SLEEP AND DREAMS

This is going rather far, for a book — nay, a booklet — on the child consciousness. But it can't be helped. Child-consciousness it is. And we have to roll away the stone of a scientific cosmos from the tomb-mouth of that imprisoned consciousness.

Now, dear reader, let us see where we are. First of all, we are ourselves — which is the refrain of all my chants. We are ourselves. We are living individuals. And as living individuals we are the one, pure clue to our own cosmos. To which cosmos living individuals *have always* been the clue, since time began, and *will always* be the clue, while time lasts.

I know it is not so fireworky as the sudden evolving of life, somewhere, somewhen and somehow, out of force and matter with a pop. But that pop never popped, dear reader. The boot was on the other leg. And I wish I could mix a few more metaphors, like pops and legs and boots, just to annoy you.

Life never evolved, or evoluted, out of force and matter, dear reader. There is no such thing as evolution, anyhow. There is only development. Man was man in the very first plasm-speck which was his own individual origin, and is still his own individual origin. As for the origin, I don't know much about it. I only know there is but one origin, and that is the individual soul. The individual soul originated everything, and has itself no origin. So that time is a matter of living experience, nothing else, and eternity is just a mental trick. Of course every living speck, amoeba or newt, has its own individual soul.

And we sit on our own globe, dear reader, here individually located. Our own individual being is our own single reality. But the single reality of the individual being is dynamically and directly polarized to the earth's center, which is the aggregate negative center of all terrestrial existence. In short, the center which in life we thrust away from, and towards which we fall, in death. For, our individual existence being positive, we must have a negative pole to thrust away from. And when our positive individual existence breaks, and we fall into death, our wonderful individual gravitation-center succumbs to the earth's gravitation-center.

So there we are, individuals, single, life-born, life-living, yet all the while poised and polarized to the aggregate center of our substantial death, our earth's

quick, powerful center-clue.

There may be other individuals, alive, and having other worlds under their feet, polarized to their own globe's center. But the very sacredness of my own individuality prevents my pronouncing about them, lest I, in attributing qualities to them, transgress against the pure individuality which is theirs, beyond me.

If, however, there be truly other people, with their own world under their feet, then I think it is fair to say that we all have our infinite identity in the sun. That in the rush and swirl of death we pass through fiery ways to the same sun. And from the sun, can the spores of souls pass to the various worlds? And to the worlds of the cosmos seed across space, through the wild beams of the sun? Is there seed of Mars in my veins? And is astrology not altogether nonsense?

But if the sun is the center of our infinite oneing in death with all the other after-death souls of the cosmos: and in that great central station of travel, the sun, we meet and mingle and change trains for the stars: then ought we to assume that the moon is likewise a meeting-place of dead souls? The moon surely is a meeting-place of cold, dead, angry souls. But from our own globe only.

The moon is the center of our terrestrial individuality in the cosmos. She is the declaration of our existence in separateness. Save for the intense white recoil of the moon, the earth would stagger towards the sun. The moon holds us to our own cosmic individuality, as a world individual in space. She is the fierce center of retraction, of frictional withdrawal into separateness. She it is who sullenly stands with her back to us, and refuses to meet and mingle. She it is who burns white with the intense friction of her withdrawal into separation, that cold, proud white fire of furious, almost malignant apartness, the struggle into fierce, frictional separation. Her white fire is the frictional fire of the last strange, intense watery matter, as this matter fights its way out of combination and out of combustion with the sun-stuff. To the pure polarity of the moon fly the essential waters of our universe. Which essential waters, at the moon's clue, are only an intense invisible energy, a polarity of the moon.

There are only three great energies in the universal life, which is always individual and which yet sways all the physical forces as well as the vital energy; and then the two great dynamisms of the sun and the moon. To the dynamism of the sun belong heat, expansion-force, and all that range. To the dynamism of the moon the *essential* watery forces: not just gravitation, but electricity, magnetism, radium-energy, and so on.

The moon likewise is the pole of our night activities, as the sun is the pole of our day activities. Remember that the sun and moon are but great self-abandons which individual life has thrown out, to the right hand and to the left. When

individual life dies, it flings itself on the right hand to the sun, on the left hand to the moon, in the dual polarity, and sinks to earth. When any man dies, his soul divides in death; as in life, in the first germ, it was united from two germs. It divides into two dark germs, flung asunder: the sun-germ and the moon-germ. Then the material body sinks to earth. And so we have the cosmic universe such as we know it.

What is the exact relationship between us and the death-realm of the afterwards we shall never know. But this relation is none the less active every moment of our lives. There is a pure polarity between life and death, between the living and the dead, between each living individual and the outer cosmos. Between each living individual and the earth's center passes a never-ceasing circuit of magnetism. It is a circuit which in man travels up the right side, and down the left side of the body, to the earth's center. It never ceases. But while we are awake it is entirely under the control and spell of the total consciousness, the individual consciousness, the soul, or self. When we sleep, however, then this individual consciousness of the soul is suspended for the time, and we lie completely within the circuit of the earth's magnetism, or gravitation, or both: the circuit of the earth's centrality. It is this circuit which is busy in all our tissue removing or arranging the dead body of our past day. For each time we lie down to sleep we have within us a body of death which dies with the day that is spent. And this body of death is removed or laid in line by the activities of the earth-circuit, the great active death-circuit, while we sleep.

As we sleep the current sweeps its own way through us, as the streets of a city are swept and flushed at night. It sweeps through our nerves and our blood, sweeping away the ash of our day's spent consciousness towards one form or other of excretion. This earth-current actively sweeping through us is really the death-activity busy in the service of life. It behooves us to know nothing of it. And as it sweeps it stimulates in the primary centers of consciousness vibrations which flash images upon the mind. Usually, in deep sleep, these images pass unrecorded; but as we pass towards the twilight of dawn and wakefulness, we begin to retain some impression, some record of the dream-images. Usually also the images that are accidentally swept into the mind in sleep are as disconnected and as unmeaning as the pieces of paper which the street cleaners sweep into a bin from the city gutters at night. We should not think of taking all these papers, piecing them together, and making a marvelous book of them, prophetic of the future and pregnant with the past. We should not do so, although every rag of printed paper swept from the gutter would have some connection with the past day's event. But its significance, the significance of the words printed upon it is so small, that we relegate it into the limbo of the accidental and meaningless.

There is no vital connection between the many torn bits of paper — only an accidental connection. Each bit of paper has reference to some actual event: a bus-ticket, an envelope, a tract, a pastry-shop bag, a newspaper, a hand-bill. But take them all together, bus-ticket, torn envelope, tract, paper-bag, piece of newspaper and hand-bill, and they have no individual sequence, they belong more to the mechanical arrangements than to the vital consequence of our existence. And the same with most dreams. They are the heterogeneous odds and ends of images swept together accidentally by the besom of the night-current, and it is beneath our dignity to attach any real importance to them. It is always beneath our dignity to go degrading the integrity of the individual soul by cringing and scraping among the rag-tag of accident and of the inferior, mechanic coincidence and automatic event. Only those events are significant which derive from or apply to the soul in its full integrity. To go kow-towing before the facts of change, as gamblers and fortune-readers and fatalists do, is merely a perverting of the soul's proud integral priority, a rearing up of idiotic idols and fetishes.

Most dreams are purely insignificant, and it is the sign of a weak and paltry nature to pay any attention to them whatever. Only occasionally they matter. And this is only when something *threatens* us from the outer mechanical, or accidental *death-world*. When anything threatens us from the world of death, then a dream may become so vivid that it arouses the actual soul. And when a dream is so intense that it arouses the soul — then we must attend to it.

But we may have the most appalling nightmare because we eat pancakes for supper. Here again, we are threatened with an arrest of the mechanical flow of the system. This arrest becomes so serious that it affects the great organs of the heart and lungs, and these organs affect the primary conscious-centers.

Now we shall see that this is the direct reverse of real living consciousness. In living consciousness the primary affective centers control the great organs. But when sleep is on us, the reverse takes place. The great organs, being obstructed in their spontaneous-automatism, at last with violence arouse the active conscious-centers. And these flash images to the brain.

These nightmare images are very frequently purely mechanical: as of falling terribly downwards, or being enclosed in vaults. And such images are pure physical transcripts. The image of falling, of flying, of trying to run and not being able to lift the feet, of having to creep through terribly small passages, these are direct transcripts from the physical phenomena of circulation and digestion. It is the directly transcribed image of the heart which, impeded in its action by the gases of indigestion, is switched out of its established circuit of earth-polarity, and is as if suspended over a void, or plunging into a void: step by

step, falling downstairs, maybe, according to the strangulation of the heart beats. The same paralytic inability to lift the feet when one needs to run, in a dream, comes directly from the same impeded action of the heart, which is thrown off its balance by some material obstruction. Now the heart swings left and right in the pure circuit of the earth's polarity. Hinder this swing, force the heart over to the left, by inflation of gas from the stomach or by dead pressure upon the blood and nerves from any obstruction, and you get the sensation of being unable to lift the feet from earth: a gasping sensation. Or force the heart to over-balance towards the right, and you get the sensation of flying or of falling. The heart telegraphs its distress to the mind, and wakes us. The wakeful soul at once begins to deal with the obstruction, which was too much for the mechanical night-circuits. The same holds good of dreams of imprisonment, or of creeping through narrow passages. They are direct transfers from the squeezing of the blood through constricted arteries or heart chambers.

Most dreams are stimulated from the blood into the nerves and the nerve-centers. And the heart is the transmission station. For the blood has a unity and a consciousness of its own. It has a deeper, elemental consciousness of the mechanical or material world. In the blood we have the body of our most elemental consciousness, our almost material consciousness. And during sleep this material consciousness transfers itself into the nerves and to the brain. The transfer in wakefulness results in a feeling of pain or discomfort — as when we have indigestion, which is pure blood-discomfort. But in sleep the transfer is made through the dream-images which are mechanical phenomena like mirages.

Nightmares which have purely mechanical images may terrify us, give us a great shock, but the shock does not enter our souls. We are surprised, in the morning, to find that the bristling horror of the night seems now just nothing — dwindled to nothing. And this is because what was a purely material obstruction in the physical flow, temporary only, is indeed a nothingness to the living, integral soul. We are subject to such accidents — if we will eat pancakes for supper. And that is the end of it.

But there are other dreams which linger and haunt the soul. These are true soul-dreams. As we know, life consists of reactions and interrelations from the great centers of primary consciousness. I may start a chain of connection from one center, which inevitably stimulates into activity the corresponding center. For example, I may develop a profound and passionate love for my mother, in my days of adolescence. This starts, willy-nilly, the whole activity of adult love at the lower centers. But admission is made only of the upper, spiritual love, the love dynamically polarized at the upper centers. Nevertheless, whether the admission is made or not, once establish the circuit in the upper or spiritual

centers of adult love, and you will get a corresponding activity in the lower, passionate centers of adult love.

The activity at the lower center, however, is denied in the daytime. There is a repression. Then the friction of the night-flow liberates the repressed psychic activity explosively. And then the image of the mother figures in passionate, disturbing, soul-rending dreams.

The Freudians point to this as evidence of a repressed incest desire. The Freudians are too simple. It is *always* wrong to accept a dream-meaning at its face value. Sleep is the time when we are given over to the automatic processes of the inanimate universe. Let us not forget this. Dreams are automatic in their nature. The psyche possesses remarkably few dynamic images. In the case of the boy who dreams of his mother, we have the aroused but unattached sex plunging in sleep, causing a sort of obstruction. We have the image of the mother, the dynamic emotional image. And the automatism of the dream-process immediately unites the sex-sensation to the great stock image, and produces an incest dream. But does this prove a repressed incest desire? On the contrary.

The truth is, every man has, the moment he awakes, a hatred of his dream, and a great desire to be free of the dream, free of the persistent mother-image or sister-image of the dream. It is a ghoul, it haunts his dreams, this image, with its hateful conclusions. And yet he cannot get free. As long as a man lives he may, in his dreams of passion or conflict, be haunted by the mother-image or sister-image, even when he knows that the cause of the disturbing dream is the wife. But even though the actual subject of the dream is the wife, still, over and over again, for years, the dream-process will persist in substituting the mother-image. It haunts and terrifies a man.

Why does the dream-process act so? For two reasons. First, the reason of simple automatic continuance. The mother-image was the first great emotional image to be introduced in the psyche. The dream-process mechanically reproduces its stock image the moment the intense sympathy-emotion is aroused. Again, the mother-image refers only to the upper plane. But the dream-process is mechanical in its logic. Because the mother-image refers to the great dynamic stress of the upper plane, therefore it refers to the great dynamic stress of the lower. This is a piece of sheer automatic logic. The living soul is *not* automatic, and automatic logic does not apply to it.

But for our second reason for the image. In becoming the object of great emotional stress for her son, the mother also becomes an object of poignancy, of anguish, of arrest, to her son. She arrests him from finding his proper fulfillment on the sensual plane. Now it is almost always the object of arrest which becomes impressed, as it were, upon the psyche. A man very rarely has an image of a

person with whom he is livingly, vitally connected. He only has dream-images of the persons who, in some way, *oppose* his life-flow and his soul's freedom, and so become impressed upon his plasm as objects of resistance. Once a man is dynamically caught on the upper plane by mother or sister, then the dream-image of mother or sister will persist until the dynamic *rapport* between himself and his mother or sister is finally broken. And the dream-image from the upper plane will be automatically applied to the disturbance of the lower plane.

Because — and this is very important — the dream-process *loves* its own automatism. It would force everything to an automatic-logical conclusion in the psyche. But the living, wakeful psyche is so flexible and sensitive, it has a horror of automatism. While the soul really lives, its deepest dread is perhaps the dread of automatism. For automatism in life is a forestalling of the death process.

The living soul has its great fear. The living soul *fears* the automatically logical conclusion of incest. Hence the sleep-process invariably draws this conclusion. The dream-process, fiendishly, plays a triumph of automatism over us. But the dream-conclusion is almost invariably just the *reverse* of the soul's desire, in any distress-dream. Popular dream-telling understood this, and pronounced that you must read dreams backwards. Dream of a wedding, and it means a funeral. Wish your friend well, and fear his death, and you will dream of his funeral. Every desire has its corresponding fear that the desire shall not be fulfilled. It is *fear* which forms an arrest-point in the psyche, hence an image. So the dream automatically produces the fear-image as the desire-image. If you secretly wished your enemy dead, and feared he might flourish, the dream would present you with his wedding.

Of course this rule of inversion is too simple to hold good in all cases. Yet it is one of the most general rules for dreams, and applies most often to desire-and-fear dreams of a psychic nature.

So that an incest-dream would not prove an incest-desire in the living psyche. Rather the contrary, a living fear of the automatic conclusion: the soul's just dread of automatism. And though this may sound like casuistry, I believe it does explain a good deal of the dream-trick. — That which is lovely to the automatic process is hateful to the spontaneous soul. The wakeful living soul fears automatism as it fears death: death being automatic.

It seems to me these are the first two dream-principles, and the two most important: the principle of automatism and the principle of inversion. They will not resolve everything for us, but they will help a great deal. We have to be *very* wary of giving way to dreams. It is really a sin against ourselves to prostitute the living spontaneous soul to the tyranny of dreams, or of chance, or fortune or luck, or any of the processes of the automatic sphere.

Then consider other dynamic dreams. First, the dream-image generally. Any *significant* dream-image is usually an image or a symbol of some arrest or scotch in the living spontaneous psyche. There is another principle. But if the image is a symbol, then the only safe way to explain the symbol is to proceed from the quality of emotion connected with the symbol.

For example, a man has a persistent passionate fear-dream about horses. He suddenly finds himself among great, physical horses, which may suddenly go wild. Their great bodies surge madly round him, they rear above him, threatening to destroy him. At any minute he may be trampled down.

Now a psychoanalyst will probably tell you off-hand that this is a father-complex dream. Certain symbols seem to be put into complex catalogues. But it is all too arbitrary.

Examining the emotional reference we find that the feeling is sensual, there is a great impression of the powerful, almost beautiful physical bodies of the horses, the nearness, the rounded haunches, the rearing. Is the dynamic passion in a horse the danger-passion? It is a great sensual reaction at the sacral ganglion, a reaction of intense, sensual, dominant volition. The horse which rears and kicks and neighs madly acts from the intensely powerful sacral ganglion. But this intense activity from the sacral ganglion is male: the sacral ganglion is at its highest intensity in the male. So that the horse-dream refers to some arrest in the deepest sensual activity in the male. The horse is presented as an object of terror, which means that to the man's automatic dream-soul, which loves automatism, the great sensual male activity is the greatest menace. The automatic pseudo-soul, which has got the sensual nature repressed, would like to keep it repressed. Whereas the greatest desire of the living spontaneous soul is that this very male sensual nature, represented as a menace, shall be actually accomplished in life. The spontaneous self is secretly yearning for the liberation and fulfillment of the deepest and most powerful sensual nature. There may be an element of father-complex. The horse may also refer to the powerful sensual being in the father. The dream may mean a love of the dreamer for the sensual male who is his father. But it has nothing to do with *incest*. The love is probably a just love.

The bull-dream is a curious reversal. In the bull the centers of power are in the breast and shoulders. The horns of the head are symbols of this vast power in the upper self. The woman's fear of the bull is a great terror of the dynamic *upper* centers in man. The bull's horns, instead of being phallic, represent the enormous potency of the upper centers. A woman whose most positive dynamism is in the breast and shoulders is fascinated by the bull. Her dream-fear of the bull and his horns which may run into her may be reversed to a

significance of desire for connection, not from the centers of the lower, sensual self, but from the intense physical centers of the upper body: the phallus polarized from the upper centers, and directed towards the great breast center of the woman. Her wakeful fear is terror of the great breast-and-shoulder, *upper* rage and power of man, which may pierce her defenseless lower self. The terror and the desire are near together — and go with an admiration of the slender, abstracted bull loins.

Other dream-fears, or strong dream-impressions, may be almost imageless. They may be a great terror, for example, of a purely geometric figure — a figure from pure geometry, or an example of pure mathematics. Or they may have no image, but only a sensation of smell, or of color, or of sound.

These are the dream-fears of the soul which is falling out of human integrity into the purely mechanical mode. If we idealize ourselves sufficiently, the spontaneous centers do at last work only, or almost only, in the mechanical mode. They have no dynamic relation with another being. They cannot have. Their whole power of dynamic relationship is quenched. They act now in reference purely to the mechanical world, of force and matter, sensation and law. So that in dream-activity sensation or abstraction, abstract law or calculation occurs as the predominant or exclusive image. In the dream there may be a sensation of admiration or delight. The waking sensation is fear. Because the soul fears above all things its fall from individual integrity into the mechanic activity of the outer world, which is the automatic death-world.

And this is our danger to-day. We tend, through deliberate idealism or deliberate material purpose, to destroy the soul in its first nature of spontaneous, integral being, and to substitute the second nature, the automatic nature of the mechanical universe. For this purpose we stay up late at night, and we rise late in the morning.

To stay up late into the night is always bad. Let us be as ideal as we may, when the sun goes down the natural mode of life changes in us. The mind changes its activity. As the soul gradually goes passive, before yielding up its sway, the mind falls into its second phase of activity. It collects the results of the spent day into consciousness, lays down the honey of quiet thought, or the bitter-sweet honey of the gathered flower. It is the consciousness of that which is past. Evening is our time to read history and tragedy and romance — all of which are the utterance of that which is past, that which is over, that which is finished, is concluded: either sweetly concluded, or bitterly. Evening is the time for this.

But evening is the time also for revelry, for drink, for passion. Alcohol enters the blood and acts as the sun's rays act. It inflames into life, it liberates into energy and consciousness. But by a process of combustion. That life of the day

which we have not lived, by means of sun-born alcohol we can now flare into sensation, consciousness, energy and passion, and live it out. It is a liberation from the laws of idealism, a release from the restriction of control and fear. It is the blood bursting into consciousness. But naturally the course of the liberated consciousness may be in either direction: sharper mental action, greater fervor of spiritual emotion, or deeper sensuality. Nowadays the last is becoming much more unusual.

The active mind-consciousness of the night is a form of retrospection, or else it is a form of impulsive exclamation, direct from the blood, and unbalanced. Because the active physical consciousness of the night is the blood-consciousness, the most elemental form of consciousness. Vision is perhaps our highest form of *dynamic* upper consciousness. But our deepest lower consciousness is blood-consciousness.

And the dynamic lower centers are swayed from the blood. When the blood rouses into its night intensity, it naturally kindles first the lowest dynamic centers. It transfers its voice and its fire to the great hypogastric plexus, which governs, with the help of the sacral ganglion, the flow of urine through us, but which also voices the deep swaying of the blood in sex passion. Sex is our deepest form of consciousness. It is utterly non-ideal, non-mental. It is pure blood-consciousness. It is the basic consciousness of the blood, the nearest thing in us to pure material consciousness. It is the consciousness of the night, when the soul is *almost* asleep.

The blood-consciousness is the first and last knowledge of the living soul: the depths. It is the soul acting in part only, speaking with its first hoarse half-voice. And blood-consciousness cannot operate purely until the soul has put off all its manifold degrees and forms of upper consciousness. As the self falls back into quiescence, it draws itself from the brain, from the great nerve-centers, into the blood, where at last it will sleep. But as it draws and folds itself livingly in the blood, at the dark and powerful hour, it sends out its great call. For even the blood is alone and in part, and needs an answer. Like the waters of the Red Sea, the blood is divided in a dual polarity between the sexes. As the night falls and the consciousness sinks deeper, suddenly the blood is heard hoarsely calling. Suddenly the deep centers of the sexual consciousness rouse to their spontaneous activity. Suddenly there is a deep circuit established between me and the woman. Suddenly the sea of blood which is me heaves and rushes towards the sea of blood which is her. There is a moment of pure frictional crisis and contact of blood. And then all the blood in me ebbs back into its ways, transmuted, changed. And this is the profound basis of my renewal, my deep blood renewal.

And this has nothing to do with pretty faces or white skin or rosy breasts or

any of the rest of the trappings of sexual love. These trappings belong to the day. Neither eyes nor hands nor mouth have anything to do with the final massive and dark collision of the blood in the sex crisis, when the strange flash of electric transmutation passes through the blood of the man and the blood of the woman. They fall apart and sleep in their transmutation.

But even in its profoundest, and most elemental movements, the soul is still individual. Even in its most material consciousness, it is still integral and individual. You would think the great blood-stream of mankind was one and homogeneous. And it is indeed more nearly one, more near to homogeneity than anything else within us. The blood-stream of mankind is almost homogeneous.

But it isn't homogeneous. In the first place, it is dual in a perfect dark dynamic polarity, the sexual polarity. No getting away from the fact that the blood of woman is dynamically polarized in opposition, or in difference to the blood of man. The crisis of their contact in sex connection is the moment of establishment of a new flashing circuit throughout the whole sea: the dark, burning red waters of our under-world rocking in a new dynamic rhythm in each of us. And then in the second place, the blood of an individual is his *own* blood. That is, it is individual. And though we have a potential dynamic sexual connection, we men, with almost every woman, yet the great outstanding fact of the individuality even of the blood makes us need a corresponding individuality in the woman we are to embrace. The more individual the man or woman, the more unsatisfactory is a non-individual connection: promiscuity. The more individual, the more does our blood cry out for its own specific answer, an individual woman, blood-polarized with us.

We have made the mistake of idealism again. We have thought that the woman who thinks and talks as we do will be the blood-answer. And we force it to be so. To our disaster. The woman who thinks and talks as we do is almost sure to have no dynamic blood-polarity with us. The dynamic blood-polarity would make her different from me, and not like me in her thought mode. Blood-sympathy is so much deeper than thought-mode, that it may result in very different expression, verbally.

We have made the mistake of turning life inside out: of dragging the day-self into the night, and spreading the night-self over into the day. We have made love and sex a matter of seeing and hearing and of day-conscious manipulation. We have made men and women come together on the grounds of this superficial likeness and commonalty — their mental, and upper sympathetic consciousness. And so we have forced the blood to submission. Which means we force it into disintegration.

We have too much light in the night, and too much sleep in the day. It is an

evil thing for us to prolong as we do the mental, visual, ideal consciousness far into the night when the hour has come for this upper consciousness to fade, for the blood alone to know and to act. By provoking the reaction of the great blood-stress, the sex-reaction, from the upper, outer mental consciousness and mental lasciviousness of conscious purpose, we thereby destroy the very blood in our bodies. We prevent it from having its own dynamic sway. We prevent it from coming to its own dynamic crisis and connection, from finding its own fundamental being. No matter how we work our sex, from the upper or outer consciousness, we don't achieve anything but the falsification and impoverishment of our own blood-life. We have no choice. Either we must withdraw from interference, or slowly deteriorate.

We have made a corresponding mistake in sleeping on into the day. Once the sun rises our constitution changes. Once the sun is well up our sleep — supposing our life fairly normal — is no longer truly sleep. When the sun comes up the centers of active dynamic upper consciousness begin to wake. The blood changes its vibration and even its chemical constitution. And then we too ought to wake. We do ourselves great damage by sleeping too long into the day. The half-hour's sleep after midday meal is a readjustment. But the long hours of morning sleep are just a damage. We submit our now active centers of upper consciousness to the dominion of the blood-automatic flow. We chain ourselves down in our morning sleep. We transmute the morning's blood-strength into false dreams and into an ever-increasing force of inertia. And naturally, in the same line of inertia we persist from bad to worse.

With the result that our chained-down, active nerve-centers are half-shattered before we arise. We never become newly day-conscious, because we have subjected our powerful centers of day-consciousness to be trampled and wasted into dreams and inertia by the heavy flow of the blood-automatism in the morning sleeps. Then we arise with a feeling of the monotony and automatism of life. There is no good, glad refreshing. We feel tired to start with. And so we protract our day-consciousness on into the night, when we *do* at last begin to come awake, and we tell ourselves we must sleep, sleep, sleep in the morning and the daytime. It is better to sleep only six hours than to prolong sleep on and on when the sun has risen. Every man and woman should be forced out of bed soon after the sun has risen: particularly the nervous ones. And forced into physical activity. Soon after dawn the vast majority of people should be hard at work. If not, they will soon be nervously diseased.

CHAPTER XV

THE LOWER SELF

So it comes about that the moon is the planet of our nights, as the sun of our days. And this is not just accidental, or even mechanical. The influence of the moon upon the tides and upon us is not just an accident in phenomena. It is the result of the creation of the universe by life itself. It was life itself which threw the moon apart on the one hand, the sun on the other. And it is life itself which keeps the dynamic-vital relation constant between the moon and the living individuals of the globe. The moon is as dependent upon the life of individuals, for her continued existence, as each single individual is dependent upon the moon.

The same with the sun. The sun sets and has his perfect polarity in the life-circuit established between him and all living individuals. Break that circuit, and the sun breaks. Without man, beasts, butterflies, trees, toads, the sun would gutter out like a spent lamp. It is the life-emission from individuals which feeds his burning and establishes his sun-heart in its powerful equilibrium.

The same with the moon. She lives from us, primarily, and we from her. Everything is a question of relativity. Not only is every force relative to other force or forces, but every existence is relative to other existences. Not only does the life of man depend on man, beast, and herb, but on the sun and moon, and the stars. And in another manner, the existence of the moon depends absolutely on the life of herb, beast, and man. The existence of the moon depends upon the life of individuals, that which alone is original. Without the life of individuals the moon would fall asunder. And the moon particularly, because she is polarized dynamically to this, our own earth. We do not know what far-off life breathes between the stars and the sun. But our life alone supports the moon. Just as the moon is the pole of our single terrestrial individuality.

Therefore we must know that between the moon and each individual being exists a vital dynamic flow. The life of individuals depends directly upon the moon, just as the moon depends directly upon the life of individuals.

But in what way does the life of individuals depend directly upon the moon?

The moon is the mother of darkness. She is the clue to the active darkness. And we, below the waist, we have our being in darkness. Below the waist we are sightless. When, in the daytime, our life is polarized upwards, towards the open,

sun-wakened eyes and the mind which sees in vision, then the powerful dynamic centers of the lower body act in subservience, in their negative polarity. And then we flow upwards, we go forth seeking the universe, in vision, speech, and thought — we go forth to see all things, to hear all things, to know all things by acquaintance and by knowledge. One flood of dynamic flow are we, upwards polarized, in our tallness and our wide-eyed spirit seeking to bring all the universe into the range of our conscious individuality, and eager always to make new worlds, out of this old world, to bud new green tips on the tree of life. Just as a tree would die if it were not making new green tips upon all its vast old world of a body, so the whole universe would perish if man and beast and herb were not always putting forth a newness: the toad taking a vivid color, spreading his hands a little more gently, developing a more rusé intelligence, the birds adding a new note to their speech and song, a new sharp swerve to their flight, a new nicety to their nests; and man, making new worlds, new civilizations. If it were not for this striving into new creation on the part of living individuals, the universe would go dead, gradually, gradually and fall asunder. Like a tree that ceases to put forth new green tips, and to advance out a little further.

But each new tip arises out of the apparent death of the old, the preceding one. Old leaves have got to fall, old forms must die. And if men must at certain periods fall into death in millions, why, so must the leaves fall every single autumn. And dead leaves make good mold. And so dead men. Even dead men's souls.

So if death has to be the goal for a great number, then let it be so. If America must invent this poison-gas, let her. When death is our goal of goals we shall invent the means of death, let our professions of benevolence be what they will.

But this time, it seems to me, we have consciously and responsibly to carry ourselves through the winter-period, the period of death and denudation: that is, some of us have, some *nation* even must. For there are not now, as in the Roman times, any great reservoirs of energetic barbaric life. Goths, Gauls, Germans, Slavs, Tartars. The world is very full of people, but all fixed in civilizations of their own, and they all have all our vices, all our mechanisms, and all our means of destruction. This time, the leading civilization cannot die out as Greece, Rome, Persia died. It must suffer a great collapse, maybe. But it must carry through all the collapse the living clue to the next civilization. It's no good thinking we can leave it to China or Japan or India or Africa — any of the great swarms.

And here we are, we don't look much like carrying through to a new era. What have we got that will carry through? The latest craze is Mr. Einstein's

Relativity Theory. Curious that everybody catches fire at the word Relativity. There must be something in the mere suggestion, which we have been waiting for. But what? As far as I can see, Relativity means, for the common amateur mind, that there is no one absolute force in the physical universe, to which all other forces may be referred. There is no one single absolute central principle governing the world. The great cosmic forces or mechanical principles can only be known in their relation to one another, and can only exist in their relation to one another. But, says Einstein, this relation between the mechanical forces is constant, and may be expressed by a mathematical formula: which mathematical formula may be used to equate all mechanical forces of the universe.

I hope that is not scientifically all wrong. It is what I understand of the Einstein theory. What I doubt is the equation formula. It seems to me, also, that the velocity of light through space is the *deus ex machina* in Einstein's physics. Somebody will some day put salt on the tail of light as it travels through space, and then its simple velocity will split up into something complex, and the Relativity formula will fall to bits. — But I am a confirmed outsider, so I'll hold my tongue.

All I know is that people have got the word Relativity into their heads, and catch-words always refer to some latent idea or conception in the popular mind. It has taken a Jew to knock the last center-pin out of our ideally spinning universe. The Jewish intelligence for centuries has been picking holes in our ideal system — scientific and sociological. Very good thing for us. Now Mr. Einstein, we are glad to say, has pulled out the very axle pin. At least that is how the vulgar mind understands it. The equation formula doesn't count. — So now, the universe, according to the popular mind, can wobble about without being pinned down. — Really, an anarchical conclusion. But the Jewish mind insidiously drives us to anarchical conclusions. We are glad to be driven from false, automatic fixities, anyhow. And once we are driven right on to nihilism we may find a way through.

So, there is nothing absolute left in the universe. Nothing. Lord Haldane says pure knowledge is absolute. As far as it goes, no doubt. But pure knowledge is only such a tiny bit of the universe, and always relative to the thing known and to the knower.

I feel inclined to Relativity myself. I think there is no one absolute principle in the universe. I think everything is relative. But I also feel, most strongly, that in itself each individual living creature is absolute: in its own being. And that all things in the universe are just relative to the individual living creature. And that individual living creatures are relative to each other.

And what about a goal? There is no final goal. But every step taken has its

own little relative goal. So what about the next step?

Well, first and foremost, that every individual creature shall come to its own particular and individual fullness of being. — Very nice, very pretty — but *how*? Well, through a living dynamic relation to other creatures. — Very nice again, pretty little adjectives. But what *sort* of a living dynamic relation? — Well, *not* the relation of love, that's one thing, nor of brotherhood, nor equality. The next relation has got to be a relationship of men towards men in a spirit of unfathomable trust and responsibility, service and leadership, obedience and pure authority. Men have got to choose their leaders, and obey them to the death. And it must be a system of culminating aristocracy, society tapering like a pyramid to the supreme leader.

All of which sounds very distasteful at the moment. But upon all the vital lessons we have learned during our era of love and spirit and democracy we can found our new order.

We wanted to be all of a piece. And we couldn't bring it off. Because we just *aren't* all of a piece. We wanted first to have nothing but nice daytime selves, awfully nice and kind and refined. But it didn't work. Because whether we want it or not, we've got night-time selves. And the most spiritual woman ever born or made has to perform her natural functions just like anybody else. We must *always* keep in line with this fact.

Well, then, we have night-time selves. And the night-self is the very basis of the dynamic self. The blood-consciousness and the blood-passion is the very source and origin of us. Not that we can *stay* at the source. Nor even make a *goal* of the source, as Freud does. The business of living is to travel away from the source. But you must start every single day fresh from the source. You must rise every day afresh out of the dark sea of the blood.

When you go to sleep at night, you have to say: "Here dies the man I am and know myself to be." And when you rise in the morning you have to say: "Here rises an unknown quantity which is still myself."

The self which rises naked every morning out of the dark sleep of the passionate, hoarsely-calling blood: this is the unit for the next society. And the polarizing of the passionate blood in the individual towards life, and towards leader, this must be the dynamic of the next civilization. The intense, passionate yearning of the soul towards the soul of a stronger, greater individual, and the passionate blood-belief in the fulfillment of this yearning will give men the next motive for life.

We have to sink back into the darkness and the elemental consciousness of the blood. And from this rise again. But there is no rising until the bath of darkness and extinction is accomplished.

As social units, as civilized men we have to do what we do as physical organisms. Every day, the sun sets from the sky, and darkness falls, and every day, when this happens, the tide of life turns in us. Instead of flowing upwards and outwards towards mental consciousness and activity, it turns back, to flow downwards. Downwards towards the digestion processes, downwards further to the great sexual conjunctions, downwards to sleep.

This is the soul now retreating, back from the outer life of day, back to the origins. And so, it stays its hour at the first great sensual stations, the solar plexus and the lumbar ganglion. But the tide ebbs on, down to the immense, almost inhuman passionate darkness of sex, the strange and moon-like intensity of the hypogastric plexus and the sacral ganglion, then deep, deeper, past the last great station of the darkest psyche, down to the earth's center. Then we sleep.

And the moon is the tide-turner. The moon is the great cosmic pole which calls us back, back out of our day-self, back through the moonlit darknesses of the sensual planes, to sleep. It is the moon that sways the blood, and sways us back into the extinction of the blood. — And as the soul retreats back into the sea of its own darkness, the mind, stage by stage, enjoys the mental consciousness that belongs to this retreat back into the sensual deeps; and then it goes extinguished. There is sleep.

And so we resolve back towards our elementals. We dissolve back, out of the upper consciousness, out of mind and sight and speech, back, down into the deep and massive, swaying consciousness of the dark, living blood. At the last hour of sex I am no more than a powerful wave of mounting blood. Which seeks to surge and join with the answering sea in the other individual. When the sea of individual blood which I am at that hour heaves and finds its pure contact with the sea of individual blood which is the woman at that hour, then each of us enters into the wholeness of our deeper infinitude, our profound fullness of being, in the ocean of our oneness and our consciousness.

This is under the spell of the moon, of sea-born Aphrodite, mother and bitter goddess. For I am carried away from my sunny day-self into this other tremendous self, where knowledge will not save me, but where I must obey as the sea obeys the tides. Yet however much I go, I know that I am all the while myself, in my going.

This then is the duality of my day and my night being: a duality so bitter to an adolescent. For the adolescent thinks with shame and terror of his night. He would wish to have no night-self. But it is Moloch, and he cannot escape it.

The tree is born of its roots and its leaves. And we of our days and our nights. Without the night-consummation we are trees without roots.

And the night-consummation takes place under the spell of the moon. It is one

pure motion of meeting and oneing. But even so, it is a circuit, not a straight line. One pure motion of meeting and oneing, until the flash breaks forth, when the two are one. And this, this flashing moment of the ignition of two seas of blood, this is the moment of begetting. But the begetting of a child is less than the begetting of the man and the woman. Woman is begotten of man at that moment, into her greater self: and man is begotten of woman. This is the main. And that which cannot be fulfilled, perfected in the two individuals, that which cannot take fire into individual life, this trickles down and is the seed of a new life, destined ultimately to fulfill that which the parents could not fulfill. So it is for ever.

Sex then is a polarization of the individual blood in man towards the individual blood in woman. It is more, also. But in its prime functional reality it is this. And sex union means bringing into connection the dynamic poles of sex in man and woman.

In sex we have our basic, most elemental being. Here we have our most elemental contact. It is from the hypogastric plexus and the sacral ganglion that the dark forces of manhood and womanhood sparkle. From the dark plexus of sympathy run out the acute, intense sympathetic vibrations direct to the corresponding pole. Or so it should be, in genuine passionate love. There is no mental interference. There is even no interference of the upper centers. Love is supposed to be blind. Though modern love wears strong spectacles.

But love is really blind. Without sight or scent or hearing the powerful magnetic current vibrates from the hypogastric plexus in the female, vibrating on to the air like some intense wireless message. And there is immediate response from the sacral ganglion in some male. And then sight and day-consciousness begin to fade. In the lower animals apparently any male can receive the vibration of any female: and if need be, even across long distances of space. But the higher the development the more individual the attunement. Every wireless station can only receive those messages which are in its own vibration key. So with sex in specialized individuals. From the powerful dynamic center the female sends out her dark summons, the intense dark vibration of sex. And according to her nature, she receives her responses from the males. The male enters the magnetic field of the female. He vibrates helplessly in response. There is established at once a dynamic circuit, more or less powerful. It would seem as if, while ever life remains free and wild and independent, the sex-circuit, while it lasts, is omnipotent. There is one electric flow which encompasses one male and one female, or one male and one particular group of females all polarized in the same key of vibration.

This circuit of vital sex magnetism, at first loose and wide, gradually closes

and becomes more powerful, contracts and grows more intense, until the two individuals arrive into contact. And even then the pulse and flow of attraction and recoil varies. In free wild life, each touch brings about an intense recoil, and each recoil causes an intense sympathetic attraction. So goes on the strange battle of desire, until the consummation is reached.

It is the precise parallel of what happens in a thunder-storm, when the dynamic forces of the moon and the sun come into collision. The result is threefold: first, the electric flash, then the birth of pure water, new water.

So it is in sex relation. There is a threefold result. First, the flash of pure sensation and of real electricity. Then there is the birth of an entirely new state of blood in each partner. And then there is the liberation.

But the main thing, as in the thunder-storm, is the absolute renewal of the atmosphere: in this case, the blood. It would no doubt be found that the electro-dynamic condition of the white and red corpuscles of the blood was quite different after sex union, and that the chemical composition of the fluid of the blood was quite changed.

And in this renewal lies the great magic of sex. The life of an individual goes on apparently the same from day to day. But as a matter of fact there is an inevitable electric accumulation in the nerves and the blood, an accumulation which weighs there and broods there with intolerable pressure. And the only possible means of relief and renewal is in pure passional interchange. There is and must be a pure passional interchange from the upper self, as when men unite in some great creative or religious or constructive activity, or as when they fight each other to the death. The great goal of creative or constructive activity, or of heroic victory in fight, *must* always be the goal of the daytime self. But the very possibility of such a goal arises out of the vivid dynamism of the conscious blood. And the blood in an individual finds its great renewal in a perfected sex circuit.

A perfected sex circuit and a successful sex union. And there can be no successful sex union unless the greater hope of purposive, constructive activity fires the soul of the man all the time: or the hope of passionate, purposive *destructive* activity: the two amount religiously to the same thing, within the individual. Sex as an end in itself is a disaster: a vice. But an ideal purpose which has no roots in the deep sea of passionate sex is a greater disaster still. And now we have only these two things: sex as a fatal goal, which is the essential theme of modern tragedy: or ideal purpose as a deadly parasite. Sex passion as a goal in itself always leads to tragedy. There must be the great purposive inspiration always present. But the automatic ideal-purpose is not even a tragedy, it is a slow humiliation and sterility.

The great thing is to keep the sexes pure. And by pure we don't mean an ideal sterile innocence and similarity between boy and girl. We mean pure maleness in a man, pure femaleness in a woman. Woman is really polarized downwards, towards the center of the earth. Her deep positivity is in the downward flow, the moon-pull. And man is polarized upwards, towards the sun and the day's activity. Women and men are dynamically different, in everything. Even in the mind, where we seem to meet, we are really utter strangers. We may speak the same verbal language, men and women: as Turk and German might both speak Latin. But *whatever* a man says, his meaning is something quite different and changed when it passes through a woman's ears. And though you reverse the sexual polarity, the flow between the sexes, still the difference is the same. The *apparent* mutual understanding, in companionship between a man and a woman, is always an illusion, and always breaks down in the end.

Woman can polarize her consciousness upwards. She can obtain a hand even over her sex receptivity. She can divert even the electric spasm of coition into her upper consciousness: it was the trick which the snake and the apple between them taught her. The snake, whose consciousness is *only* dynamic, and non-cerebral. The snake, who has no mental life, but only an intensely vivid dynamic mind, he envied the human race its mental consciousness. And he knew, this intensely wise snake, that the one way to make humanity pay more than the price of mental consciousness was to pervert woman into mentality: to stimulate her into the upper flow of consciousness.

For the true polarity of consciousness in woman is downwards. Her deepest consciousness is in the loins and belly. Even when perverted, it is so. The great flow of female consciousness is downwards, down to the weight of the loins and round the circuit of the feet. Pervert this, and make a false flow upwards, to the breast and head, and you get a race of "intelligent" women, delightful companions, tricky courtesans, clever prostitutes, noble idealists, devoted friends, interesting mistresses, efficient workers, brilliant managers, women as good as men at all the manly tricks: and better, because they are so very headlong once they go in for men's tricks. But then, after a while, pop it all goes. The moment woman has got man's ideals and tricks drilled into her, the moment she is competent in the manly world — there's an end of it. She's had enough. She's had more than enough. She hates the thing she has embraced. She becomes absolutely perverse, and her one end is to prostitute herself and her ideals to sex. Which is her business at the present moment.

We bruise the serpent's head: his flat and brainless head. But his revenge of bruising our heel is a good one. The heels, through which the powerful downward circuit flows: these are bruised in us, numbed with a horrible neurotic

numbness. The dark strong flow that polarizes us to the earth's center is hampered, broken. We become flimsy fungoid beings, with no roots and no hold in the earth, like mushrooms. The serpent has bruised our heel till we limp. The lame gods, the enslaved gods, the toiling limpers moaning for the woman. You don't find the sun and moon playing at pals in the sky. Their beams cross the great gulf which is between them.

So with man and woman. They must stand clear again. They must fight their way out of their self-consciousness: there is nothing else. Or, rather, each must fight the other out of self-consciousness. Instead of this leprous forbearance which we are taught to practice in our intimate relationships, there should be the most intense open antagonism. If your wife flirts with other men, and you don't like it, say so before them all, before wife and man and all, say you won't have it. If she seems to you false, in any circumstance, tell her so, angrily, furiously, and stop her. Never mind about being justified. If you hate anything she does, turn on her in a fury. Harry her, and make her life a hell, so long as the real hot rage is in you. Don't silently hate her, or silently forbear. It is such a dirty trick, so mean and ungenerous. If you feel a burning rage, turn on her and give it to her, and *never* repent. It'll probably hurt you much more than it hurts her. But never repent for your real hot rages, whether they're "justifiable" or not. If you care one sweet straw for the woman, and if she makes you that you can't bear any more, give it to her, and if your heart weeps tears of blood afterwards, tell her you're thankful she's got it for once, and you wish she had it worse.

The same with wives and their husbands. If a woman's husband gets on her nerves, she should fly at him. If she thinks him too sweet and smarmy with other people, she should let him have it to his nose, straight out. She should lead him a dog's life, and never swallow her bile.

With wife or husband, you should never swallow your bile. It makes you go all wrong inside. Always let fly, tooth and nail, and never repent, no matter what sort of a figure you make.

We have a vice of love, of softness and sweetness and smarminess and intimacy and promiscuous kindness and all that sort of thing. We think it's so awfully nice of us to be like that, in ourselves. But in our wives or our husbands it gets on our nerves horribly. Yet we think it oughtn't to, so we swallow our spleen.

We shouldn't. When Jesus said "if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out," he was beside the point. The eye doesn't really offend us. We are rather fond of our own squint eye. It only offends the person who cares for us. And it's up to this person to pluck it out.

This holds particularly good of the love and intimacy vice. It'll never offend

us in ourselves. While it will be gall and wormwood to our wife or husband. And it is on this promiscuous love and intimacy and kindness and sweetness, all a vice, that our self-consciousness really rests. If we are battered out of this, we shall be battered out of self-consciousness.

And so, men, drive your wives, beat them out of their self-consciousness and their soft smarminess and good, lovely idea of themselves. Absolutely tear their lovely opinion of themselves to tatters, and make them look a holy ridiculous sight in their own eyes. Wives, do the same to your husbands.

But fight for your life, men. Fight your wife out of her own self-conscious preoccupation with herself. Batter her out of it till she's stunned. Drive her back into her own true mode. Rip all her nice superimposed modern-woman and wonderful-creature garb off her. Reduce her once more to a naked Eve, and send the apple flying.

Make her yield to her own real unconscious self, and absolutely stamp on the self that she's got in her head. Drive her forcibly back, back into her own true unconscious.

And then you've got a harder thing still to do. Stop her from looking on you as her "lover." Cure her of that, if you haven't cured her before. Put the fear of the Lord into her that way. And make her know she's got to believe in you again, and in the deep purpose you stand for. But before you can do that, you've got to *stand* for some deep purpose. It's no good faking one up. You won't take a woman in, not really. Even when she *chooses* to be taken in, for prettiness' sake, it won't do you any good.

But combat her. Combat her in her sexual pertinacity, and in her secret glory or arrogance in the sexual goal. Combat her in her cock-sure belief that she "knows" and that she is "right." Take it all out of her. Make her yield once more to the male leadership: if you've got anywhere to lead to. If you haven't, best leave the woman alone; she has *one* goal of her own, anyhow, and it's better than your nullity and emptiness.

You've got to take a new resolution into your soul, and break off from the old way. You've got to know that you're a man, and being a man means you must go on alone, ahead of the woman, to break a way through the old world into the new. And you've got to be alone. And you've got to start off ahead. And if you don't know which direction to take, look round for the man your heart will point out to you. And follow — and never look back. Because if Lot's wife, looking back, was turned to a pillar of salt, these miserable men, for ever looking back to their women for guidance, they are miserable pillars of half-rotten tears.

You'll have to fight to make a woman believe in you as a real man, a real pioneer. No man is a man unless to his woman he is a pioneer. You'll have to

fight still harder to make her yield her goal to yours: her night goal to your day goal. The moon, the planet of women, sways us back from our day-self, sways us back from our real social unison, sways us back, like a retreating tide, in a friction of criticism and separation and social disintegration. That is woman's inevitable mode, let her words be what they will. Her goal is the deep, sensual individualism of secrecy and night-exclusiveness, hostile, with guarded doors. And you'll have to fight very hard to make a woman yield her goal to yours, to make her, in her own soul, *believe* in your goal as the goal beyond, in her goal as the way by which you go. She'll never believe until you have your soul filled with a profound and absolutely inalterable purpose, that will yield to nothing, least of all to her. She'll never believe until, in your soul, you are cut off and gone ahead, into the dark.

She may of course already love you, and love you for yourself. But the love will be a nest of scorpions unless it is overshadowed by a little fear or awe of your further purpose, a living *belief* in your going beyond her, into futurity.

But when once a woman *does* believe in her man, in the pioneer which he is, the pioneer who goes on ahead beyond her, into the darkness in front, and who may be lost to her for ever in this darkness; when once she knows the pain and beauty of this belief, knows that the loneliness of waiting and following is inevitable, that it must be so; ah, then, how wonderful it is! How wonderful it is to come back to her, at evening, as she sits half in fear and waits! How good it is to come home to her! How good it is then when the night falls! How richly the evening passes! And then, for her, at last, all that she has lost during the day to have it again between her arms, all that she has missed, to have it poured out for her, and a richness and a wonder she had never expected. It is her hour, her goal. That's what it is to have a wife.

Ah, how good it is to come home to your wife when she *believes* in you and submits to your purpose that is beyond her. Then, how wonderful this nightfall is! How rich you feel, tired, with all the burden of the day in your veins, turning home! Then you too turn to your other goal: to the splendor of darkness between her arms. And you know the goal is there for you: how rich that feeling is. And you feel an unfathomable gratitude to the woman who loves you and believes in your purpose and receives you into the magnificent dark gratification of her embrace. That's what it is to have a wife.

But no man ever had a wife unless he served a great predominant purpose. Otherwise, he has a lover, a mistress. No matter how much she may be married to him, unless his days have a living purpose, constructive or destructive, but a purpose beyond her and all she stands for; unless his days have this purpose, and his soul is really committed to his purpose, she will not be a wife, she will be

only a mistress and he will be her lover.

If the man has no purpose for his days, then to the woman alone remains the goal of her nights: the great sex goal. And this goal is no goal, but always cries for the something beyond: for the rising in the morning and the going forth beyond, the man disappearing ahead into the distance of futurity, that which his purpose stands for, the future. The sex goal needs, absolutely needs, this further departure. And if there *be* no further departure, no great way of belief on ahead: and if sex is the starting point and the goal as well: then sex becomes like the bottomless pit, insatiable. It demands at last the departure into death, the only available beyond. Like Carmen, or like Anna Karenina. When sex is the starting point and the returning point both, then the only issue is death. Which is plain as a pike-staff in “Carmen” or “Anna Karenina,” and is the theme of almost *all* modern tragedy. Our one hackneyed, hackneyed theme. Ecstasies and agonies of love, and final passion of death. Death is the only pure, beautiful conclusion of a great passion. Lovers, pure lovers should say “Let it be so.”

And one is always tempted to say “Let it be so.” But no, let it be not so. Only I say this, let it be a great passion and then death, rather than a false or faked purpose. Tolstoi said “No” to the passion and the death conclusion. And then drew into the dreary issue of a false conclusion. His books were better than his life. Better the woman’s goal, sex and death, than some *false* goal of man’s.

Better Anna Karenina and Vronsky a thousand times than Natasha and that porpoise of a Pierre. This pretty, slightly sordid couple tried so hard to kid themselves that the porpoise Pierre was puffing with great purpose. Better Vronsky than Tolstoi himself, in my mind. Better Vronsky’s final statement: “As a soldier I am still some good. As a man I am a ruin” — better that than Tolstoi and Tolstoi-ism and that beastly peasant blouse the old man wore.

Better passion and death than any more of these “isms.” No more of the old purpose done up in aspic. Better passion and death.

But still — we *might* live, mightn’t we?

For heaven’s sake answer plainly “No,” if you feel like it. No good temporizing.

EPILOGUE

“Tutti i salmi finiscono in gloria.”

All the psalms wind up with the Gloria. — ”As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, World without end. Amen.”

Well, then, Amen.

I hope you say Amen! along with me, dear little reader: if there be any dear little reader who has got so far. If not, I say Amen! all by myself. — But don't you think the show is all over. I've got another volume up my sleeve, and after a year or two years, when I have shaken it down my sleeve, I shall bring it and lay it at the foot of your Liberty statue, oh Columbia, as I do this one.

I suppose Columbia means the States. — ”Hail Columbia!” — I suppose, etymologically, it is a nest of turtle-doves, Lat. *columba*, a dove. Coo me softly, then, Columbia; don't roar me like the sucking doves of the critics of my “Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious.”

And when I lay this little book at the foot of the Liberty statue, that brawny lady is not to look down her nose and bawl: “Do you see any green in my eye?” Of course I don't, dear lady. I only see the reflection of that torch — or is it a carrot? — which you are holding up to light the way into New York harbor. Well, many an ass has strayed across the uneasy paddock of the Atlantic, to nibble your carrot, dear lady. And I must say, you can keep on slicing off nice little carrot-slices of guineas and doubloons for an extraordinarily inexhaustible long time. And innumerable asses can collect themselves nice little heaps of golden carrot-slices, and then lift up their heads and brag over them with fairly pan-demoniac yells of gratification. Of course I don't see any green in your eye, dear Libertas, unless it is the smallest glint from the carrot-tips. The gleam in your eye is golden, oh Columbia!

Nevertheless, and in spite of all this, up trots this here little ass and makes you a nice present of this pretty book. You needn't sniff, and glance at your carrot-sceptre, lady Liberty. You needn't throw down the thinnest carrot-paring you can pare off, and then say: “Why should I pay for this tripe, this wordy mass of rather revolting nonsense!” You can't pay for it, darling. If I didn't make you a present of it you could never buy it. So don't shake your carrot-sceptre and feel supercilious. Here's a gift for you, Missis. You can look in its mouth, too. Mind it doesn't bite you. — No, you needn't bother to put your carrot behind your back, nobody wants to snatch it.

How do you do, Columbia! Look, I brought you a posy: this nice little posy of

words and wisdom which I made for you in the woods of Ebersteinburg, on the borders of the Black Forest, near Baden Baden, in Germany, in this summer of scanty grace but nice weather. I made it specially for you — Whitman, for whom I have an immense regard, says “These States.” I suppose I ought to say: “Those States.” If the publisher would let me, I’d dedicate this book to you, to “Those States.” Because I wrote this book entirely for you, Columbia. You may not take it as a compliment. You may even smell a tiny bit of Schwarzwald sap in it, and be finally disgusted. I admit that trees ought to think twice before they flourish in such a disgraced place as the Fatherland. “*Chi va coi zoppi, all’ anno zoppica.*” But you’ve not only to gather ye rosebuds while ye may, but *where* ye may. And so, as I said before, the Black Forest, *etc.*

I know, Columbia, dear Libertas, you’ll take my posy and put your carrot aside for a minute, and smile, and say: “I’m sure, Mr. Lawrence, it is a *long* time since I had such a perfectly beautiful bunch of ideas brought me.” And I shall blush and look sheepish and say: “So glad you think so. I believe you’ll find they’ll keep fresh quite a long time, if you put them in water.” Whereupon you, Columbia, with real American gallantry: “Oh, they’ll keep for *ever*, Mr. Lawrence. They *couldn’t* be so cruel as to go and die, such perfectly lovely-colored ideas. Lovely! Thank you ever, ever so much.”

Just think of it, Columbia, how pleased we shall be with one another: and how much nicer it will be than if you snorted “High-falutin’ Nonsense” — or “Wordy mass of repulsive rubbish.”

When they were busy making Italy, and were just going to put it in the oven to bake: that is, when Garibaldi and Vittorio Emmanuele had won their victories at Caserta, Naples prepared to give them a triumphant entry. So there sat the little king in his carriage: he had short legs and huge swagger mustaches and a very big bump of philoprogeniture. The town was all done up, in spite of the rain. And down either side of the wide street were hasty statues of large, well-fleshed ladies, each one holding up a fore-finger. We don’t know what the king thought. But the staff held their breath. The king’s appetite for strapping ladies was more than notorious, and naturally it looked as if Naples had done it on purpose.

As a matter of fact, the fore-finger meant *Italia Una!* “Italy shall be one.” Ask Don Sturzo.

Now you see how risky statues are. How many nice little asses and poets trot over the Atlantic and catch sight of Liberty holding up this carrot of desire at arm’s length, and fairly hear her say, as one does to one’s pug dog, with a lump of sugar: “Beg! Beg!” — and “Jump! Jump, then!” And each little ass and poodle begins to beg and to jump, and there’s a rare game round about Liberty, zap, zap, zapperty-zap!

Do lower the carrot, gentle Liberty, and let us talk nicely and sensibly. I don't like you as a *carotaia*, precious.

Talking about the moon, it is thrilling to read the announcements of Professor Pickering of Harvard, that it's almost a dead cert that there's life on our satellite. It is almost as certain that there's life on the moon as it is certain there is life on Mars. The professor bases his assertions on photographs — hundreds of photographs — of a crater with a circumference of thirty-seven miles. I'm not satisfied. I demand to know the yards, feet and inches. You don't come it over me with the triteness of these round numbers.

“Hundreds of photographic reproductions have proved irrefutably the springing up at dawn, with an unbelievable rapidity, of vast fields of foliage which come into blossom just as rapidly (sic!) and which disappear in a maximum period of eleven days.” — Again I'm not satisfied. I want to know if they're cabbages, cress, mustard, or marigolds or dandelions or daisies. Fields of foliage, mark you. And *blossom!* Come now, if you can get so far, Professor Pickering, you might have a shrewd guess as to whether the blossoms are good to eat, or if they're purely for ornament.

I am only waiting at last for an aeroplane to land on one of these fields of foliage and find a donkey grazing peacefully. Hee-haw!

“The plates moreover show that great blizzards, snow-storms, and volcanic eruptions are also frequent.” So no doubt the blossoms are edelweiss.

“We find,” says the professor, “a living world at our very doors where life in some respects resembles that of Mars.” All I can say is: “Pray come in, Mr. Moony. And how is your cousin Signor Martian?”

Now I'm sure Professor Pickering's photographs and observations are really wonderful. But his *explanations!* Come now, Columbia, where is your High-falutin' Nonsense trumpet? Vast fields of foliage which spring up at dawn (!!!) and come into blossom just as quickly (!!!!) are rather too flowery even for my flowery soul. But there, truth is stranger than fiction.

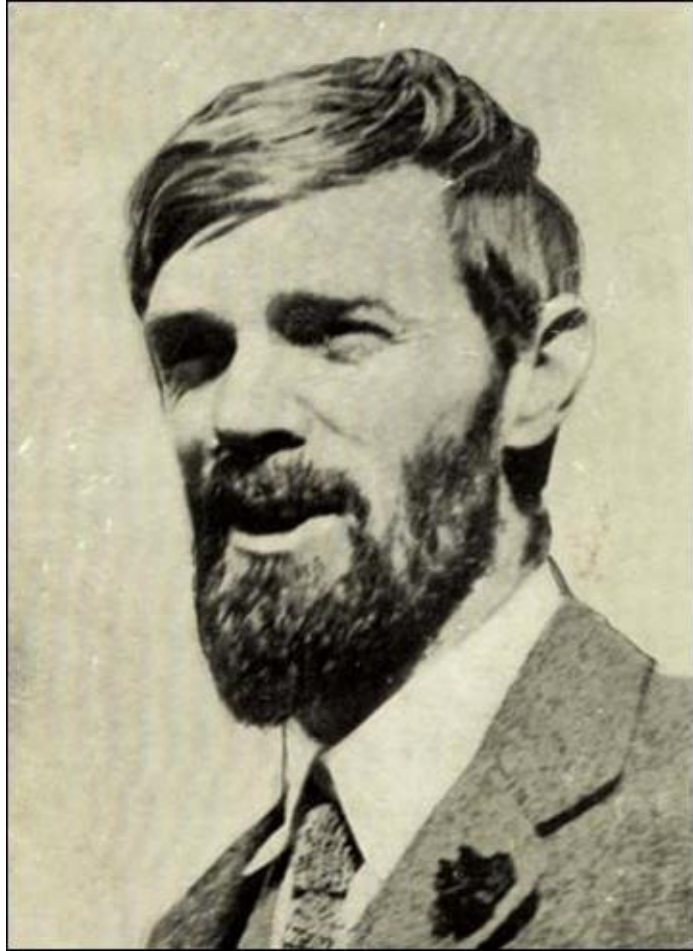
I'll bet my moon against the Professor's, anyhow.

So long, Columbia. *A riverderci.*

STUDIES IN CLASSIC AMERICAN LITERATURE



This collection of literary essays was first published in book form in 1923. Lawrence's work is startling, even revolutionary, for several reasons. The prose style is extremely informal, yet filled with penetrating psychological and moral insights. The themes running through Lawrence's criticism are his concern with the primacy of the individual spirit and his belief in the importance of love, for better or for worse, as a force in human affairs.



Lawrence, 1923

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CHAPTER 1

The Spirit of Place

WE like to think of the old-fashioned American classics as children's books. Just childishness, on our part. The old American art-speech contains an alien quality, which belongs to the American continent and to nowhere else. But, of course, so long as we insist on reading the books as children's tales, we miss all that.

One wonders what the proper high-brow Romans of the third and fourth or later centuries read into the strange utterances of Lucretius or Apuleius or Tertullian, Augustine or Athanasius. The uncanny voice of Iberian Spain, the weirdness of old Carthage, the passion of Libya and North Africa; you may bet the proper old Romans never heard these at all. They read old Latin inference over the top of it, as we read old European inference over the top of Poe or Hawthorne.

It is hard to hear a new voice, as hard as it is to listen to an unknown language. We just don't listen. There is a new voice in the old American classics. The world has declined to hear it, and has babbled about children's stories.

Why ? — Out of fear. The world fears a new experience more than it fears anything. Because a new experience displaces so many old experiences. And it is like trying to use muscles that have perhaps never been used, or that have been going stiff for ages. It hurts horribly.

The world doesn't fear a new idea. It can pigeon-hole any idea. But it can't pigeon-hole a real new experience. It can only dodge. The world is a great dodger, and the Americans the greatest. Because they dodge their own very selves.

There is a new feeling in the old American books, far more than there is in the modern American books, which are pretty empty of any feeling, and proud of it. There is a 'different' feeling in the old American classics. It is the shifting over from the old psyche to something new, a displacement. And displacements hurt. This hurts. So we try to tie it up, like a cut finger. Put a rag round it.

It is a cut too. Cutting away the old emotions and consciousness. Don't ask what is left.

Art-speech is the only truth. An artist is usually a damned liar, but his art, if it be art, will tell you the truth of his day. And that is all that matters. Away with eternal truth. Truth lives from day to day, and the marvellous Plato of yesterday is chiefly bosh today.

The old American artists were hopeless liars. But they were artists, in spite of themselves. Which is more than you can say of most living practitioners.

And you can please yourself, when you read *The Scarlet Letter*, whether you accept what that sugary, blue-eyed little darling of a Hawthorne has to say for himself, false as all darlings are, or whether you read the impeccable truth of his art-speech.

The curious thing about art-speech is that it prevaricates so terribly, I mean it tells such lies. I suppose because we always all the time tell ourselves lies. And out of a pattern of lies art weaves the truth. Like Dostoevsky posing as a sort of Jesus, but most truthfully revealing himself all the while as a little horror.

Truly art is a sort of subterfuge. But thank God for it, we can see through the subterfuge if we choose. Art has two great functions. First, it provides an emotional experience. And then, if we have the courage of our own feelings, it becomes a mine of practical truth. We have had the feelings *ad nauseam*. But we've never dared dig the actual truth out of them, the truth that concerns us, whether it concerns our grandchildren or not.

The artist usually sets out - or used to - to point a moral and adorn a tale. The tale, however, points the other way, as a rule. Two blankly opposing morals, the artist's and the tale's. Never trust the artist. Trust the tale. The proper function of a critic is to save the tale from the artist who created it.

Now we know our business in these studies; saving the American tale from the American artist.

Let us look at this American artist first. How did he ever get to America, to start with? Why isn't he a European still, like his father before him?

Now listen to me, don't listen to him. He'll tell you the lie you expect. Which is partly your fault for expecting it.

He didn't come in search of freedom of worship. England had more freedom of worship in the year 1700 than America had. Won by Englishmen who wanted freedom, and so stopped at home and fought for it. And got it. Freedom of worship? Read the history of New England during the first century of its existence.

Freedom anyhow? The land of the free! This the land of the free! Why, if I say anything that displeases them, the free mob will lynch me, and that's my freedom. Free? Why, I have never been in any country where the individual has such an abject fear of his fellow countrymen. Because, as I say, they are free to lynch the moment he shows he is not one of them.

No, no, if you're so fond of the truth about Queen Victoria, try a little about yourself.

Those Pilgrim Fathers and their successors never came here for freedom of

worship. What did they set up when they got here? Freedom, would you call it?

They didn't come for freedom. Or if they did, they sadly went back on themselves.

All right then, what did they come for? For lots of reasons. Perhaps least of all in search of freedom of any sort: positive freedom, that is.

They came largely to get *away* - that most simple of motives. To get away. Away from what? In the long run, away from themselves. Away from everything. That's why most people have come to America, and still do come. To get away from everything they are and have been.

'Henceforth be masterless.'

Which is all very well, but it isn't freedom. Rather the reverse. A hopeless sort of constraint. It is never freedom till you find something you really *positively want to be*. And people in America have always been shouting about the things they are *not*. Unless, of course, they are millionaires, made or in the making.

And after all there is a positive side to the movement. All that vast flood of human life that has flowed over the Atlantic in ships from Europe to America has not flowed over simply on a tide of revulsion from Europe and from the confinements of the European ways of life. This revulsion was, and still is, I believe, the prime motive in emigration. But there was some cause, even for the revulsion.

It seems as if at times man had a frenzy for getting away from any control of any sort. In Europe the old Christianity was the real master. The Church and the true aristocracy bore the responsibility for the working out of the Christian ideals: a little irregularly, maybe, but responsible nevertheless.

Mastery, kingship, fatherhood had their power destroyed at the time of the Renaissance.

And it was precisely at this moment that the great drift over the Atlantic started. What were men drifting away from? The old authority of Europe? Were they breaking the bonds of authority, and escaping to a new more absolute unrestrained-ness? Maybe. But there was more to it.

Liberty is all very well, but men cannot live without masters. There is always a master. And men either live in glad obedience to the master they believe in, or they live in a frictional opposition to the master they wish to undermine. In America this frictional opposition has been the vital factor. It has given the Yankee his kick. Only the continual influx of more servile Europeans has provided America with an obedient labouring class. The true obedience never outlasting the first generation.

But there sits the old master, over in Europe. Like a parent. Somewhere deep in every American heart lies a rebellion against the old parenthood of Europe.

Yet no American feels he has completely escaped its mastery. Hence the slow, smouldering patience of American opposition. The slow, smouldering corrosive obedience to the old master Europe, the unwilling subject, the unremitting opposition.

Whatever else you are, be masterless.

Ca Ca Caliban

Get a new master, be a new man.

Escaped slaves, we might say, people the republics of Liberia or Haiti. Liberia enough! Are we to look at America in the same way? A vast republic of escaped slaves. When you consider the hordes from eastern Europe, you might well say it: a vast republic of escaped slaves. But one dare not say this of the Pilgrim Fathers, and the great old body of idealist Americans, the modern Americans tortured with thought. A vast republic of escaped slaves. Look out, America! And a minority of earnest, self-tortured people.

The masterless.

Ca Ca Caliban

Get a new master, be a new man.

What did the Pilgrim Fathers come for, then, when they came so gruesomely over the black sea? Oh, it was in a black spirit. A black revulsion from Europe, from the old authority of Europe, from kings and bishops and popes. And more. When you look into it, more. They were black, masterful men, they wanted something else. No kings, no bishops maybe. Even no God Almighty. But also, no more of this new 'humanity' which followed the Renaissance. None of this new liberty which was to be so pretty in Europe. Something grimmer, by no means free-and-easy.

America has never been easy, and is not easy today. Americans have always been at a certain tension. Their liberty is a thing of sheer will, sheer tension: a liberty of THOU SHALT NOT. And it has been so from the first. The land of THOU SHALT NOT. Only the first commandment is: THOU SHALT NOT PRESUME TO BE A MASTER. Hence democracy.

'We are the masterless.' That is what the American Eagle shrieks. It's a Hen-Eagle.

The Spaniards refused the post-Renaissance liberty of Europe. And the Spaniards filled most of America. The Yankees, too, refused, refused the post-Renaissance humanism of Europe. First and foremost, they hated masters. But under that, they hated the flowing ease of humour in Europe. At the bottom of the American soul was always a dark suspense, at the bottom of the Spanish-

American soul the same. And this dark suspense hated and hates the old European spontaneity, watches it collapse with satisfaction.

Every continent has its own great spirit of place. Every people is polarized in some particular locality, which is home, the homeland. Different places on the face of the earth have different vital effluence, different vibration, different chemical exhalation, different polarity with different stars: call it what you like. But the spirit of place is a great reality. The Nile valley produced not only the corn, but the terrific religions of Egypt. China produces the Chinese, and will go on doing so. The Chinese in San Francisco will in time cease to be Chinese, for America is a great melting pot.

There was a tremendous polarity in Italy, in the city of Rome. And this seems to have died. For even places die. The Island of Great Britain had a wonderful terrestrial magnetism or polarity of its own, which made the British people. For the moment, this polarity seems to be breaking. Can England die? And what if England dies ?

Men are less free than they imagine; ah, far less free. The freest are perhaps least free.

Men are free when they are in a living homeland, not when they are straying and breaking away. Men are free when they are obeying some deep, inward voice of religious belief. Obeying from within. Men are free when they belong to a living, Organic, *believing* community, active in fulfilling some unfulfilled, perhaps unrealized purpose. Not when they are escaping to some wild west. The most unfree souls go west, and shout of freedom. Men are freest when they are most unconscious of freedom. The shout is a rattling of chains, always was.

Men are not free when they are doing just what they like. The moment you can do just what you like, there is nothing you care about doing. Men are only free when they are doing what the deepest self likes.

And there is getting down to the deepest self! It takes some diving.

Because the deepest self is way down, and the conscious self is an obstinate monkey. But of one thing we may be sure. If one wants to be free, one has to give up the illusion of doing what one likes, and seek what IT wishes done.

But before you can do what IT likes, you must first break the spell of the old mastery, the old IT.

Perhaps at the Renaissance, when kingship and fatherhood fell, Europe drifted into a very dangerous half-truth: of liberty and equality. Perhaps the men who went to America felt this, and so repudiated the old world together. Went one better than Europe. Liberty in America has meant so far the breaking away from *all* dominion. The true liberty will only begin when Americans discover IT, and proceed possibly to fulfil IT. IT being the deepest *whole* self of man, the self in

its wholeness, not idealistic halfness.

That's why the Pilgrim Fathers came to America, then; and that's why we come. Driven by IT. We cannot see that invisible winds carry us, as they carry swarms of locusts, that invisible magnetism brings us as it brings the migrating birds to their unforeknown goal. But it is so. We are not the marvellous choosers and deciders we think we are. IT chooses for us, and decides for us. Unless, of course, we are just escaped slaves, vulgarly cocksure of our ready-made destiny. But if we are living people, in touch with the source, IT drives us and decides us. We are free only so long as we obey. When we run counter, and think we will do as we like, we just flee around like Orestes pursued by the Eumenides.

And still, when the great day begins, when Americans have at last discovered America and their own wholeness, still there will be the vast number of escaped slaves to reckon with, those who have no cocksure, ready-made destinies.

Which will win in America, the escaped slaves, or the new whole men?

The real American day hasn't begun yet. Or at least, not yet sunrise. So far it has been the false dawn. That is, in the progressive American consciousness there has been the one dominant desire, to do away with the old thing. Do away with masters, exalt the will of the people. The will of the people being nothing but a figment, the exalting doesn't count for much. So, in the name of the will of the people, get rid of masters. When you have got rid of masters, you are left with this mere phrase of the will of the people. Then you pause and bethink yourself, and try to recover your own wholeness.

So much for the conscious American motive, and for democracy over here. Democracy in America is just the tool with which the old master of Europe, the European spirit, is undermined. Europe destroyed, potentially, American democracy will evaporate. America will begin.

American consciousness has so far been a false dawn. The negative ideal of democracy. But underneath, and contrary to this open ideal, the first hints and revelations of IT. IT, the American whole soul.

You have got to pull the democratic and idealistic clothes off American utterance, and see what you can of the dusky body of IT underneath.

'Henceforth be masterless.'

Henceforth be mastered.

CHAPTER 2

Benjamin Franklin

THE Perfectibility of Man! Ah heaven, what a dreary theme! The perfectibility of the Ford car! The perfectibility of which man? I am many men. Which of them are you going to perfect? I am not a mechanical contrivance.

Education! Which of the various me's do you propose to educate, and which do you propose to suppress?

Anyhow, I defy you. I defy you, oh society, to educate me or to suppress me, according to your dummy standards.

The ideal man! And which is he, if you please? Benjamin Franklin or Abraham Lincoln? The ideal man! Roosevelt or Porfirio Díaz?

There are other men in me, besides this patient ass who sits here in a tweed jacket. What am I doing, playing the patient ass in a tweed jacket? Who am I talking to? Who are you, at the other end of this patience?

Who are you? How many selves have you? And which of these selves do you want to be?

Is Yale College going to educate the self that is in the dark of you, or Harvard College?

The ideal self! Oh, but I have a strange and fugitive self shut out and howling like a wolf or a coyote under the ideal windows. See his red eyes in the dark? This is the self who is coming into his own.

The perfectibility of man, dear God! When every man as long as he remains alive is in himself a multitude of conflicting men. Which of these do you choose to perfect, at the expense of every other?

Old Daddy Franklin will tell you. He'll rig him up for you, the pattern American. Oh, Franklin was the first downright American. He knew what he was about, the sharp little man. He set up the first dummy American.

At the beginning of his career this cunning little Benjamin drew up for himself a creed that should 'satisfy the professors of every religion, but shock none'.

Now wasn't that a real American thing to do?

'That there is One God, who made all things.'

(But Benjamin made Him.)

'That He governs the world by His Providence.'

(Benjamin knowing all about Providence.)

‘ That He ought to be worshipped with adoration, prayer, and thanks-giving.’
(Which cost nothing.)

‘But-’ But me no buts, Benjamin, saith the Lord.

‘But that the most acceptable service of God is doing good to men.’
(God having no choice in the matter.)

‘ That the soul is immortal.’

(You’ll see why, in the next clause.)

‘And that God will certainly reward virtue and punish vice, either here or hereafter.’

Now if Mr Andrew Carnegie, or any other millionaire, had wished to invent a God to suit his ends, he could not have done better. Benjamin did it for him in the eighteenth century. God is the supreme servant of men who want to get on, to *produce*. Providence. The provider. The heavenly storekeeper. The everlasting Wanamaker.

And this is all the God the grandsons of the Pilgrim Fathers had left. Aloft on a pillar of dollars.

‘ That the soul is immortal.’

The trite way Benjamin says it!

But man has a soul, though you can’t locate it either in his purse or his pocket-book or his heart or his stomach or his head. The *wholeness* of a man is his soul. Not merely that nice little comfortable bit which Benjamin marks out.

It’s a queer thing is a man’s soul. It is the whole of him. Which means it is the unknown him, as well as the known. It seems to me just funny, professors and Benjamins fixing the functions of the soul. Why, the soul of man is a vast forest, and all Benjamin intended was a neat back garden. And we’ve all got to fit into his kitchen garden scheme of things. Hail Columbia !

The soul of man is a dark forest. The Hercynian Wood that scared the Romans so, and out of which came the white-skinned hordes of the next civilization.

Who knows what will come out of the soul of man? The soul of man is a dark vast forest, with wild life in it. Think of Benjamin fencing it off!

Oh, but Benjamin fenced a little tract that he called the soul of man, and proceeded to get it into cultivation. Providence, forsooth! And they think that bit of barbed wire is going to keep us in pound for ever? More fools they.

This is Benjamin’s barbed wire fence. He made himself a list of virtues, which he trotted inside like a grey nag in a paddock.

1. TEMPERANCE

Eat not to fulness; drink not to elevation.

2. SILENCE

Speak not but what may benefit others or yourself; avoid trifling conversation

3. ORDER

Let all your things have their places; let each part of your business have its time.

4. RESOLUTION

Resolve to perform what you ought; perform without fail what you resolve.

5. FRUGALITY

Make no expense but to do good to others or yourself i.e., waste nothing.

6. INDUSTRY

Lose no time, be always employed in something useful; cut off all unnecessary action.

7. SINCERITY

Use no hurtful deceit; think innocently and justly, and, if you speak, speak accordingly.

8. JUSTICE

Wrong none by doing injuries, or omitting the benefits that are your duty.

9. MODERATION

Avoid extremes, forbear resenting injuries as much as you think they deserve.

10. CLEANLINESS

Tolerate no uncleanness in body, clothes, or habitation.

11. TRANQUILLITY

Be not disturbed at trifles, or at accidents common or unavoidable.

12. CHASTITY

Rarely use venery but for health and offspring, never to dulness, weakness, or the injury of your own or another's peace or reputation.

13. HUMILITY

Imitate Jesus and Socrates.

A Quaker friend told Franklin that he, Benjamin, was generally considered proud, so Benjamin put in the Humility touch as an afterthought. The amusing part is the sort of humility it displays. 'Imitate Jesus and Socrates,' and mind you don't outshine either of these two. One can just imagine Socrates and Alcibiades roaring in their cups over Philadelphian Benjamin, and Jesus looking at him a little puzzled, and murmuring: 'Aren't you wise in your own conceit, Ben?'

Henceforth be masterless,' retorts Ben. 'Be ye each one his own master unto himself, and don't let even the Lord put His spoke in.' 'Each man his own master' is but a puffing up of masterlessness.

Well, the first of Americans practiced this enticing list with assiduity, setting a national example. He had the virtues in columns, and gave himself good and bad marks according as he thought his behaviour deserved. Pity these conduct charts are lost to us. He only remarks that Order was his stumbling block. He could not learn to be neat and tidy.

Isn't it nice to have nothing worse to confess ?

He was a little model, was Benjamin. Doctor Franklin. Snuff-coloured little

man! Immortal soul and all!

The immortal soul part was a sort of cheap insurance policy.

Benjamin had no concern, really, with the immortal soul. He was too busy with social man.

(1) He swept and lighted the streets of young Philadelphia.

(2) He invented electrical appliances.

(3) He was the centre of a moralizing club in Philadelphia, and he wrote the moral humorisms of Poor Richard.

(4) He was a member of all the important councils of Philadelphia, and then of the American colonies.

(5) He won the cause of American Independence at the French Court, and was the economic father of the United States.

Now what more can you want of a man? And yet he is *infra dig.*, even in Philadelphia.

I admire him. I admire his sturdy courage first of all, then his sagacity, then his glimpsing into the thunders of electricity, then his common-sense humour. All the qualities of a great man, and never more than a great citizen. Middle-sized, sturdy, snuff-coloured Doctor Franklin, one of the soundest citizens that ever trod or 'used venery'.

I do not like him.

And, by the way, I always thought books of Venery were about hunting deer.

There is a certain earnest naiveté, about him. Like a child. And like a little old man. He has again become as a little child, always as wise as his grandfather, or wiser.

Perhaps, as I say, the most complete citizen that ever 'used venery'.

Printer, philosopher, scientist, author and patriot, impeccable husband and citizen, why isn't he an archetype?

Pioneer, Oh Pioneers! Benjamin was one of the greatest pioneers of the United States. Yet we just can't do with him.

What's wrong with him then? Or what's wrong with us?

I can remember, when I was a little boy, my father used to buy a scrubby yearly almanac with the sun and moon and stars on the cover. And it used to prophesy bloodshed and famine. But also crammed in corners it had little anecdotes and humorisms, with a moral tag. And I used to have my little priggish laugh at the woman who counted her chickens before they were hatched and so forth, and I was convinced that honesty was the best policy, also a little priggishly. The author of these bits was Poor Richard, and Poor Richard was Benjamin Franklin, writing in Philadelphia well over a hundred years before.

And probably I haven't got over those Poor Richard `tags yet. I rankle still

with them. They are thorns in young flesh.

Because, although I still believe that honesty is the best policy, I dislike policy altogether; though it is just as well not to count your chickens before they are hatched, it's still more hateful to count them with gloating when they are hatched. It has taken me many years and countless smarts to get out of that barbed wire moral enclosure that Poor Richard rigged up. Here am I now in tatters and scratched to ribbons, sitting in the middle of Benjamin's America looking at the barbed wire, and the fat sheep crawling under the fence to get fat outside, and the watch-dogs yelling at the gate lest by chance anyone should get out by the proper exit. Oh America! Oh Benjamin! And I just utter a long loud curse against Benjamin and the American corral.

Moral America! Most moral Benjamin. Sound, satisfied Ben!

He had to go to the frontiers of his State to settle some disturbance among the Indians. On this occasion he writes:

We found that they had made a great bonfire in the middle of the square; they were all drunk, men and women quarrelling and fighting. Their dark-coloured bodies, half-naked, seen only by the gloomy light of the bonfire, running after and beating one another with fire-brands, accompanied by their horrid yellings, formed a scene the most resembling our ideas of hell that could be well imagined. There was no appeasing the tumult, and we retired to our lodging. At midnight a number of them came thundering at our door, demanding more rum, of which we took no notice.

The next day, sensible they had misbehaved in giving us that disturbance, they sent three of their counsellors to make their apology. The orator acknowledged the fault, but laid it upon the rum, and then endeavoured to excuse the rum by saying: 'The Great Spirit, who made all things, made everything for some use; and whatever he designed anything for, that use it should always be put to. Now, when he had made the rum, he said: " Let this be for the Indians to get drunk with." And it must be so.'

And, indeed, if it be the design of Providence to extirpate these savages in order to make room for the cultivators of the earth, it seems not improbable that rum may be the appointed means. It has already annihilated all the tribes who formerly inhabited all the seacoast . . .

This, from the good doctor with such suave complacency, is a little disenchanting. Almost too good to be true.

But there you are! The barbed wire fence. 'Extirpate these savages in order to make room for the cultivators of the earth.' Oh, Benjamin Franklin! He even '

used vengery' as a cultivator of seed.

Cultivate the earth, ye gods! The Indians did that, as much as they needed. And they left off there. Who built Chicago? Who cultivated the earth until it spawned Pittsburgh, Pa?

The moral issue! Just look at it! Cultivation included. If it's a mere choice of Kultur or cultivation, I give it up.

Which brings us right back to our question, what's wrong with Benjamin, that we can't stand him? Or else, what's wrong with us, that we kind fault with such a paragon?

Man is a moral animal. All right. I am a moral animal. And I'm going to remain such. I'm not going to be turned into a virtuous little automaton as Benjamin would have me. 'This is good, that is bad. Turn the little handle and let the good tap flow,' saith Benjamin, and all America with him. 'But first of all extirpate those savages who are always turning on the bad tap.'

I am a moral animal. But I am not a moral machine. I don't work with a little set of handles or levers. The Temperance-silence-order-resolution-frugality-industry-sincerity - justice-moderation-cleanliness-tranquillity-chastity-humility keyboard is not going to get me going. I'm really not just an automatic piano with a moral Benjamin getting tunes out of me.

Here's my creed, against Benjamin's. This is what I believe:

'That I am I.'

'That my soul is a dark forest.'

'That my known self will never be more than a little clearing in the forest.'

'That gods, strange gods, come forth from the forest into the clearing of my known self, and then go back.'

'That I must have the courage to let them come and go.'

'That I will never let mankind put anything over me, but that I will try always to recognize and submit to the gods in me and the gods in other men and women.'

There is my creed. He who runs may read. He who prefers to crawl, or to go by gasoline, can call it rot.

Then for a 'list'. It is rather fun to play at Benjamin.

1. TEMPERANCE

Eat and carouse with Bacchus, or munch dry bread with Jesus, but don't sit down without one of the gods.

2. SILENCE

Be still when you have nothing to say; when genuine passion moves you, say what you've got to say, and say it hot.

3. ORDER

Know that you are responsible to the gods inside you and to the men in whom the gods are manifest. Recognize your superiors and your inferiors, according to the gods. This is the root of all order.

4. RESOLUTION

Resolve to abide by your own deepest promptings, and to sacrifice the smaller thing to the greater. Kill when you must, and be killed the same: the *must* coming from the gods inside you, or from the men in whom you recognize the Holy Ghost.

5. FRUGALITY

Demand nothing; accept what you see fit. Don't waste your pride or squander your emotion.

6. INDUSTRY

Lose no time with ideals; serve the Holy Ghost; never serve mankind.

7. SINCERITY

To be sincere is to remember that I am I, and that the other man is not me.

8. JUSTICE

The only justice is to follow the sincere intuition of the soul, angry or gentle. Anger is just, and pity is just, but judgement is never just.

9. MODERATION

Beware of absolutes. There are many gods.

10. CLEANLINESS

Don't be too clean. It impoverishes the blood.

11. TRANQUILITY

The soul has many motions, many gods come and go. Try and find your deepest issue, in every confusion, and abide by that. Obey the man in whom you recognize the Holy Ghost; command when your honour comes to command.

12. CHASTITY

Never 'use' venery at all. Follow your passionate impulse, if it be answered in the other being; but never have any motive in mind, neither offspring nor health nor even pleasure, nor even service. Only know that 'venery' is of the great gods. An offering-up of yourself to the very great gods, the dark ones, and nothing else.

13. HUMILITY

See all men and women according to the Holy Ghost that is within them. Never yield before the barren.

There's my list. I have been trying dimly to realize it for a long time, and only America and old Benjamin have at last goaded me into trying to formulate it. ,

And now I, at least, know why I can't stand Benjamin. He tries to take away my wholeness and my dark forest, my freedom. For how can any man be free, without an illimitable background? And Benjamin tries to shove me into a barbed wire paddock and make me grow potatoes or Chicagos.

And how can I be free, without gods that come and go? But Benjamin won't let anything exist except my useful fellow men, and I'm sick of them; as for his Godhead, his Providence, He is Head of nothing except a vast heavenly store

that keeps every imaginable line of goods, from victrolas to cat-o'-nine tails.

And how can any man be free without a soul of his own, that he believes in and won't sell at any price? But Benjamin doesn't let me have a soul of my own. He says I am nothing but a servant of mankind - galley-slave I call it - and if I don't get my wages here below - that is, if Mr Pierpont Morgan or Mr Nosey Hebrew or the grand United States Government, the great US, US or SOMEOFUS, manages to scoop in my bit, along with their lump - why, never mind, I shall get my wages **HEREAFTER**.

Oh Benjamin! Oh Binjum! You do NOT suck me in any longer.

And why, oh why should the snuff-coloured little trap have wanted to take us all in? Why did he do it?

Out of sheer human cussedness, in the first place. We do all like to get things inside a barbed wire corral. Especially our fellow men. We love to round them up inside the barbed wire enclosure of **FREEDOM**, and make 'em work. '*Work, you free jewel, WORK!*' shouts the liberator, cracking his whip. Benjamin, I will not work. I do not choose to be a free democrat. I am absolutely a servant of my own Holy Ghost.

Sheer cussedness! But there was as well the salt of a subtler purpose. Benjamin was just in his eyeholes - to use an English vulgarism, meaning he was just delighted - when he was at Paris judiciously milking money out of the French monarchy for the overthrow of all monarchy. If you want to ride your horse to somewhere you must put a bit in his mouth. And Benjamin wanted to ride his horse so that it would upset the whole apple-cart of the old masters. He wanted the whole European apple-cart upset. So he had to put a strong bit in the mouth of his ass.

'Henceforth be masterless.'

That is, he had to break in the human ass completely, so that much more might be broken, in the long run. For the moment it was the British Government that had to have a hole knocked in it. The first real hole it ever had: the breach of the American rebellion.

Benjamin, in his sagacity, knew that the breaking of the old world was a long process. In the depths of his own underconsciousness he hated England, he hated Europe, he hated the whole corpus of the European being. He wanted to be American. But you can't change your nature and mode of consciousness like changing your shoes. It is a gradual shedding. Years must go by, and centuries must elapse before you have finished. Like a son escaping from the domination of his parents. The escape is not just one rupture. It is a long and half-secret process.

So with the American. He was a European when he first went over the

Atlantic. He is in the main a recreant European still. From Benjamin Franklin to Woodrow Wilson may be a long stride, but it is a stride along the same road. There is no new road. The same old road, become dreary and futile. Theoretic and materialistic.

Why then did Benjamin set up this dummy of a perfect citizen as a pattern to America ? Of course, he did it in perfect good faith, as far as he knew. He thought it simply was the true ideal. But what we *think* we do is not very important. We never really know what we are doing. Either we are materialistic instruments, like Benjamin, or we move in the gesture of creation, from our deepest self, usually unconscious. We are only the actors, we are never wholly the authors of our own deeds or works. IT is the author, the unknown inside us or outside us. The best we can do is to try to hold ourselves in unison with the deeps which are inside us. And the worst we can do is to try to have things our own way, when we run counter to IT, and in the long run get our knuckles rapped for our presumption.

So Benjamin contriving money out of the Court of France. He was contriving the first steps of the overthrow of all Europe, France included. You can never have a new thing without breaking an old. Europe happens to be the old thing. America, unless the people in America assert themselves too much in opposition to the inner gods, should be the new thing. The new thing is the death of the old. But you can't cut the throat of an epoch. You've got to steal the life from it through several centuries.

And Benjamin worked for this both directly and indirectly. Directly, at the Court of France, making a small but very dangerous hole in the side of England, through which hole Europe has by now almost bled to death. And indirectly in Philadelphia, setting up this unlovely, snuff-coloured little ideal, or automaton, of a pattern American. The pattern American, this dry, moral, utilitarian little democrat, has done more to ruin the old Europe than any Russian nihilist. He has done it by slow attrition, like a son who has stayed at home and obeyed his parents, all the while silently hating their authority, and silently, in his soul, destroying not only their authority but their whole existence. For the American spiritually stayed at home in Europe. The spiritual home of America was, and still is, Europe. This is the galling bondage, in spite of several billions of heaped-up gold. Your heaps of gold are only so many muck-heaps, America, and will remain so till you become a reality to yourselves.

All this Americanizing and mechanizing has been for the purpose of overthrowing the past. And now look at America, tangled in her own barbed wire, and mastered by her own machines. Absolutely got down by her own barbed wire of shalt-nots, and shut up fast in her own 'productive' machines like

millions of squirrels running in millions of cages. It is just a farce.

Now is your chance, Europe. Now let Hell loose and get your own back, and paddle your own canoe on a new sea, while clever America lies on her muck-heaps of gold, strangled in her own barbed wire of shalt-not ideals and shalt-not moralisms. While she goes out to work like millions of squirrels in millions of cages. Production!

Let Hell loose, and get your own back, Europe!

CHAPTER 3

Hector St John de Crevecoeur

CREVECUEUR was born in France, at Caen, in the year 1735. As a boy he was sent over to England and received part of his education there. He went to Canada as a young man, served for a time with Montcalm in the war against the English, and later passed over into the United States, to become an exuberant American. He married a New England girl, and settled on the frontier. During the period of his 'cultivating the earth' he wrote the *Letters from an American Farmer*, which enjoyed great vogue in their day, in England especially, among the new reformers like Godwin and Tom Paine.

But Crevecoeur was not a mere cultivator of the earth. That was his best stunt, shall we say. He himself was more concerned with a perfect society and his own manipulation thereof, than with growing carrots. Behold him, then, trotting off import-antly and idealistically to France, leaving his farm in the wilds to be burnt by the Indians, and his wife to shift as best she might. This was during the American War of Independence, when the Noble Red Man took to behaving like his own old self. On his return to America, the American Farmer entered into public affairs and into commerce. Again tripping to France, he enjoyed himself as a litt,rateur Child-of-Nature-sweet-and-pure, was a friend of old Benjamin Franklin in Paris, and quite a favourite with Jean Jacques Rousseau's Madame d'Houdetot, that literary soul.

Hazlitt, Godwin, Shelley, Coleridge, the English romanticists, were, of course, thrilled by the *Letters from an American Farmer*. A new world, a world of the Noble Savage and Pristine Nature and Paradisal Simplicity and all that gorgeousness that flows out of the unsullied fount of the ink-bottle. Lucky Coleridge, who got no farther than Bristol. Some of us have gone all the way.

I think this wild and noble America is the thing that I have pined for most ever since I read Fenimore Cooper, as a boy. Now I've got it.

Franklin is the real practical prototype of the American. Crevecoeur is the emotional. To the European, the American is first and foremost a dollar-fiend. We tend to forget the emotional heritage of Hector St John de Crevecoeur. We tend to disbelieve, for example, in Woodrow Wilson's wrung heart and wet hanky. Yet surely these are real enough. Aren't they?

It wasn't to be expected that the dry little snuff-coloured Doctor should have it all his own way. The new Americans might use venery for health or offspring,

and their time for cultivating potatoes and Chicagoes, but they had got some sap in their veins after all. They had got to get a bit of luscious emotion somewhere.

NATURE.

I wish I could write it larger than that.

NATURE.

Benjamin overlooked NATURE. But the French Crevecoeur spotted it long before Thoreau and Emerson worked it up. Absolutely the safest thing to get your emotional reactions over is NATURE.

Crevecoeur's *Letters* are written in a spirit of touching simplicity, almost better than Chateaubriand. You'd think neither of them would ever know how many beans make five. This American Farmer tells of the joys of creating a home in the wilderness, and of cultivating the virgin soil. Poor virgin, prostituted from the very start.

The Farmer had an Amiable Spouse and an Infant Son, his progeny. He took the Infant Son - who enjoys no other name than this -

What is thy name ?

I have no name.

I am the Infant Son -

to the fields with him, and seated the same I. S. on the shafts of the plough whilst he, the American Farmer, ploughed the potato patch. He also, the A. F., helped his Neighbours, whom no doubt he loved as himself, to build a barn, and they laboured together in the Innocent Simplicity of one of Nature's Communities. Meanwhile the Amiable Spouse, who likewise in Blakean simplicity has No Name, cooked the dough-nuts or the pie, though these are not mentioned. No doubt she was a deep-breasted daughter of America, though she may equally well have been a flat-bosomed Methodist. She would have been an Amiable Spouse in either case, and the American Farmer asked no more. I don't know whether her name was Lizzie or Ahoolibah, and probably Crevecoeur didn't. Spouse was enough for him. 'Spouse, hand me the carving knife.'

The Infant Son developed into Healthy Offspring as more appeared: no doubt Crevecoeur had used venery as directed. And so these Children of Nature toiled in the Wilds at Simple Toil with a little Honest Sweat now and then. You have the complete picture, dear reader. The American Farmer made his own Family Picture, and it is still on view. Of course the Amiable Spouse put on her best apron to be *Im Bild*, for all the world to see and admire.

I used to admire my head off: before I tiptoed into the Wilds and saw the shacks of the Homesteaders. Particularly the Amiable Spouse, poor thing. No wonder *she* never sang the song of Simple Toil in the Innocent Wilds. Poor haggard drudge, like a ghost wailing in the wilderness, nine times out of ten.

Hector St John, you have lied to me. You lied even more scurrilously to yourself. Hector St John, you are an emotional liar.

Jean Jacques, Bernardin de St Pierre, Chateaubriand, exquisite François Le Vaillant, you lying little lot, with your Nature-Sweet-and-Pure! Marie Antoinette got her head off for playing dairy-maid, and nobody even dusted the seats of your pants, till now, for all the lies you put over us.

But Crevecoeur was an artist as well as a liar, otherwise we would not have bothered with him. He wanted to put NATURE in his pocket, as Benjamin put the Human Being. Between them, they wanted the whole scheme of things in their pockets, and the things themselves as well. Once you've got the scheme of things in your pocket, you can do as you like with it, even make money out of it, if you can't find in your heart to destroy it, as was your first intention. So H. St J. de C. tried to put Nature-Sweet-and-Pure in his pocket. But nature wasn't having any, she poked her head out and baa-ed.

This Nature-sweet-and-pure business is only another effort at intellectualizing. Just an attempt to make all nature succumb to a few laws of the human mind. The sweet-and-pure sort of laws. Nature seemed to be behaving quite nicely, for a while. She has left off.

That's why you get the purest intellectuals in a Garden Suburb or a Brook Farm experiment. You bet, Robinson Crusoe was a high-brow of high-brows.

You can idealize or intellectualize. Or, on the contrary, you can let the dark soul in you see for itself. An artist usually intellectualizes on top, and his dark under-consciousness goes on contradicting him beneath. This is almost laughably the case with most American artists. Crevecoeur is the first example. He is something of an artist, Franklin isn't anything.

Crevecoeur the idealist puts over us a lot of stuff about nature and the noble savage and the innocence of toil, etc., etc. Blarney! But Crevecoeur the artist gives us glimpses of actual nature, not writ large.

Curious that his vision sees only the lowest forms of natural life. Insects, snakes and birds he glimpses in their own mystery, their own pristine being. And straightway gives the lie to Innocent Nature.

'I am astonished to see,' he writes quite early in the *Letters*, 'that nothing exists but what has its enemy, one species pursue and live upon the other: unfortunately our king-birds are the destroyers of those industrious insects [the bees]; but on the other hand, these birds preserve our fields from the depredation of crows, which they pursue on the wing with great vigilance and astonishing dexterity.'

This is a sad blow to the sweet-and-pureness of Nature. But it is the voice of the artist in contrast to the voice of the ideal turtle. It is the rudimentary

American vision. The glimpsing of the king-birds in winged hostility and pride is no doubt the aboriginal Indian vision carrying over. The Eagle symbol in human consciousness. Dark, swinging wings of hawk-beaked destiny, that one cannot help but feel, beating here above the wild centre of America. You look round in vain for the 'One being Who made all things, and governs the world by His Providence'.

'One species pursue and live upon another.'

Reconcile the two statements if you like. But, in America, act on Crèvecoeur's observation.

The horse, however, says Hector, is the friend of man, and man is the friend of the horse. But then we leave the horse no choice. And I don't see much *friend*, exactly, in my sly old Indian pony, though he is quite a decent old bird.

Man, too, says Hector, is the friend of man. Whereupon the Indians burnt his farm; so he refrains from mentioning it in the *Letters*, for fear of invalidating his premises.

Some great hornets have fixed their nest on the ceiling of the living-room of the American Farmer, and these tiger-striped animals fly round the heads of the Healthy Offspring and the Amiable Spouse, to the gratification of the American Farmer. He liked their buzz and their tiger waspishness. Also, on the utilitarian plane, they kept the house free of flies. So Hector says. Therefore Benjamin would have approved. But of the feelings of the Amiable S., on this matter, we are not told, and after all, it was she who had to make the jam.

Another anecdote. Swallows built their nest on the veranda of the American Farm. Wrens took a fancy to the nest of the swallows. They pugnaciously (I like the word pugnaciously, it is so American) attacked the harbingers of spring, and drove them away from their nice adobe nest. The swallows returned upon opportunity. But the wrens, coming home, violently drove them forth again. Which continued until the gentle swallows patiently set about to build another nest, while the wrens sat in triumph in the usurped home. The American Farmer watched this contest with delight, and no doubt loudly applauded those little rascals of wrens. For in the Land of the Free, the greatest delight of every man is in getting the better of the other man.

Crèvecoeur says he shot a king-bird that had been devouring his bees. He opened the craw and took out a vast number of bees, which little democrats, after they had lain a minute or two stunned, in the sun roused, revived, preened their wings and walked off debonair, like Jonah up the seashore; or like true Yanks escaped from the craw of the king-bird of Europe.

I don't care whether it's true or not. I like the picture, and see in it a parable of the American resurrection.

The humming-bird.

Its bill is as long and as sharp as a coarse sewing-needle; like the bee, nature has taught it to kind out in the calyx of flowers and blossoms those mellifluous particles that can serve it for sufficient food; and yet it seems to leave them untouched, undeprived of anything that our eyes can possibly distinguish. Where it feeds it appears as if immovable, though continually on the wing; and sometimes, from what motives I know not, it will tear and lacerate flowers into a hundred pieces; for, strange to tell, they are the most irascible of the feathered tribe. Where do passions find room in so diminutive a body ? They often fight with the fury of lions, until one of the combatants falls a sacrifice and dies. When fatigued, it has often perched within a few feet of me, and on such favourable opportunities I have surveyed it with the most minute attention. Its little eyes appear like diamonds, reflecting light on every side; most elegantly finished in all parts, it is a miniature work of our great parent, who seems to have formed it smallest, and at the same time the most beautiful, of the winged species.

A regular little Tartar, too. Lions no bigger than inkspots ! I have read about humming-birds elsewhere, in Bates and W. H. Hudson, for example. But it is left to the American Farmer to show me the real little raging lion. Birds are evidently no angels in America, or to the true American. He sees how they start and flash their wings like little devils, and stab each other with egoistic sharp bills. But he sees also the reserved, tender shyness of the wild creature, upon occasion. Quails in winter, for instance.

Often, in the angles of the fences, where the motion of the wind prevents the snow from settling, I carry them both chaff and grain the one to feed them the other to prevent their tender feet from freezing fast to the earth, as I have frequently observed them to do.

This is beautiful, and blood-knowledge. Crèvecoeur knows the touch of birds' feet, as if they had stood with their vibrating, sharp, cold-cleaving balance, naked footed on his naked hand. It is a beautiful, barbaric tenderness of the blood. He doesn't after all turn them into 'little sisters of the air', like St Francis, or start preaching to them. He knows them as strange, shy, hot-blooded concentrations of bird-presence.

The *Letter* about snakes and humming-birds is a fine essay, in its primal, dark veracity. The description of the fight between two snakes, a great water-snake and a large black serpent, follows the description of the humming-bird:

Strange was this to behold; two great snakes strongly adhering to the ground,

mutually fastened together by means of the writhings which lashed them to each other, and stretched at their full length they pulled, but pulled in vain, and in the moments of greatest exertions that part of their bodies which was entwined seemed extremely small, while the rest appeared inflated, and now and then convulsed with strong undulations, rapidly following each other. Their eyes seemed on fire, and ready to start out of their heads; at one time the conflict seemed decided; the water-snake bent itself into two great folds, and by that operation rendered the other more than commonly outstretched. The next minute the new struggles of the black one gained an unexpected superiority, it acquired two great folds likewise, which necessarily extended the body of its adversary in proportion as it had contracted its own.

This fight, which Crèvecoeur describes to a finish, he calls a sight 'uncommon and beautiful'. He forgets the sweet-and-pureness of Nature, and is for the time a sheer ophiolater, and his chapter is as handsome a piece of ophiolatry, perhaps, as that coiled Aztec rattlesnake carved in stone.

And yet the real Crèvecoeur is, in the issue, neither farmer, nor child of Nature, nor ophiolater. He goes back to France, and figures in the literary salons, and is a friend of Rousseau's Madame d'Houdetot. Also he is a good business man, and arranges a line of shipping between France and America. It all ends in materialism, really. But the *Letters* tell us nothing about this.

We are left to imagine him retiring in grief to dwell with his Red Brothers under the wigwams. For the War of Independence has broken out, and the Indians are armed by the adversaries; they do dreadful work on the frontiers. While Crèvecoeur is away in France his farm is destroyed, his family rendered homeless. So that the last letter laments bitterly over the war, and man's folly and inhumanity to man.

But Crèvecoeur ends his lament on a note of resolution. With his amiable spouse, and his healthy offspring, now rising in stature, he will leave the civilized coasts, where man is sophisticated, and therefore inclined to be vile, and he will go to live with the Children of Nature, the Red Men, under the wigwam. No doubt, in actual life, Crèvecoeur made some distinction between the Indians who drank rum ... la Franklin, and who burnt homesteads and massacred families, and those Indians, the noble Children of Nature, who peopled his own predetermined fancy. Whatever he did in actual life, in his innermost self he would not give up this self-made world, where the natural man was an object of undefiled brotherliness. Touchingly and vividly he describes his tented home near the Indian village, how he breaks the aboriginal earth to produce a little maize, while his wife weaves within the wigwam. And his imaginary efforts to save his tender offspring from the brutishness of unchristian

darkness are touching and puzzling, for how can Nature, so sweet and pure under the greenwood tree, how can it have any contaminating effect ?

But it is all a swindle. Crèvecoeur was off to France in high-heeled shoes and embroidered waistcoat, to pose as a literary man, and to prosper in the world. We, however, must perforce follow him into the backwoods, where the simple natural life shall be perfected, near the tented village of the Red Man.

He wanted, of course, to imagine the dark, savage way of life, to get it all off pat in his head. He wanted to know as the Indians and savages know, darkly, and in terms of otherness. He was simply crazy, as the Americans say, for this. Crazy enough! For at the same time he was absolutely determined that Nature is sweet and pure, that all men are brothers, and equal, and that they love one another like so many cooing doves. He was determined to have life according to his own prescription. Therefore, he wisely kept away from any too close contact with Nature, and took refuge in commerce and the material world. But yet, he was determined to know the savage way of life, to his own *mind's* satisfaction. So he just faked us the last *Letters*. A sort of wish-fulfilment.

For the animals and savages are isolate, each one in its own pristine self. The animal lifts its head, sniffs, and knows within the dark, passionate belly. It knows at once, in dark mindless-ness. And at once it flees in immediate recoil or it crouches predatory, in the mysterious storm of exultant anticipation of seizing a victim; or it lowers its head in blank indifference again; or it advances in the insatiable wild curiosity, insatiable passion to approach that which is unspeakably strange and incalculable; or it draws near in the slow trust of wild, sensual love.

Crèvecoeur wanted this kind of knowledge. But comfortably, in his head, along with his other ideas and ideals. He didn't go too near the wigwam. Because he must have suspected that the moment he saw as the savages saw, all his fraternity and equality would go up in smoke, and his ideal world of pure sweet goodness along with it. And still worse than this, he would have to give up his own will, which insists that the world is so, because it would be nicest if it were so. Therefore he trotted back to France in high-heeled shoes, and imagined America in Paris.

He wanted his ideal state. At the same time he wanted to know the other state, the dark, savage mind. He wanted both.

Can't be done, Hector. The one is the death of the other.

Best turn to commerce, where you may get things your own way.

He hates the dark, pre-mental life, really. He hates the true sensual mystery. But he wants to 'know'. To KNOW. Oh, insatiable American curiosity!

He's a liar.

But if he won't risk knowing in flesh and blood, he'll risk all the imagination you like.

It is amusing to see him staying away and calculating the dangers of the step which he takes so luxuriously, in his fancy, alone. He tickles his palate with a taste of true wildness, as men are so fond nowadays of tickling their palates with a taste of imaginary wickedness - just self-provoked.

'I must tell you,' he says, 'that there is something in the proximity of the woods which is very singular. It is with men as it is with the plants and animals that grow and live in the forests; they are entirely different from those that live in the plains. I will candidly tell you all my thoughts, but you are not to expect that I shall advance any reasons. By living in or near the woods, their actions are regulated by the wildness of the neighbourhood. The deer often come to eat their grain, the wolves to destroy their sheep, the bears to kill their hogs, the foxes to catch their poultry. This surrounding hostility immediately puts the gun into their hands; they watch these animals, they kill some; and thus by defending their property they soon become professed hunters; this is the progress; once hunters, farewell to the plough. The chase renders them ferocious, gloomy, and unsociable; a hunter wants no neighbour, he rather hates them, because he dreads the competition. ... Eating of wild meat, whatever you may think, tends to alter their temper....'

Crevecoeur, of course, had never intended to return as a *hunter* to the bosom of Nature, only as a husbandman. The hunter is a killer. The husbandman, on the other hand, brings about the birth and increase. But even the husbandman strains in dark mastery over the unwilling earth and beast; he struggles to win forth substance, he must master the soil and the strong cattle, he must have the heavy blood-knowledge, and the slow, but deep, mastery. There is no equality or selfless humility. The toiling blood swamps the idea, inevitably. For this reason the most idealist nations invent most machines. America simply teems with mechanical inventions, because nobody in America ever wants to *do* anything. They are idealists. Let a machine do the doing.

Again, Crevecoeur dwells on the 'apprehension lest my younger children should be caught by that singular charm, so dangerous at their tender years' - meaning the charm of savage life. So he goes on: 'By what power does it come to pass that children who have been adopted when young among these people [the Indians] can never be prevailed upon to readopt European manners? Many an anxious parent I have seen last war who, at the return of the peace, went to the Indian villages where they knew their children had been carried in captivity, when to their inexpressible sorrow they found them so perfectly Indianized that many knew them no longer, and those whose more advanced ages permitted

them to recollect their fathers and mothers, absolutely refused to follow them, and ran to their adopted parents to protect them against the effusions of love their unhappy real parents lavished on them! Incredible as this may appear, I have heard it asserted in a thousand instances, among persons of credit.'

There must be in their (the Indians') social bond something singularly captivating, and far superior to anything to be boasted of among us; for thousands of Europeans are Indians, and we have no examples of even one of those Aborigines having from choice be-come Europeans ...

Our cat and another, Hector.

I like the picture of thousands of obdurate offspring, with faces averted from their natural white father and mother, turning resolutely to the Indians of their adoption.

I have seen some Indians whom you really couldn't tell from white men. And I have never seen a white man who looked really like an Indian. So Hector is again a liar.

But Crèvecoeur wanted to be an *intellectual* savage, like a great many more we have met. Sweet children of Nature. Savage and bloodthirsty children of Nature.

White Americans do try hard to intellectualize themselves. Especially white women Americans. And the latest stunt is this 'savage' stunt again.

White savages, with motor-cars, telephones, incomes and ideals! Savages fast inside the machine; yet savage enough, ye gods!

CHAPTER 4

Fenimore Cooper's White Novels

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN had a specious little equation in providential mathematics:

Rum + Savage = 0.

Awfully nice! You might add up the universe to nought, if you kept on.

Rum plus Savage may equal a dead savage. But is a dead savage nought? Can you make a land virgin by killing off its aborigines ?

The Aztec is gone, and the Incas. The Red Indian, the Esquimo, the Patagonian are reduced to negligible numbers.

Ou sont les neiges d'antan?

My dear, wherever they are, they will come down again next winter, sure as houses.

Not that the Red Indian will ever possess the broad lands of America. At least I presume not. But his ghost will.

The Red Man died hating the white man. What remnant of him lives, lives hating the white man. Go near the Indians, and you just feel it. As far as we are concerned, the Red Man is subtly and unremittingly diabolic. Even when he doesn't know it. He is dispossessed in life, and unforgiving. He doesn't believe in us and our civilization, and so is our mystic enemy, for we push him off the face of the earth.

Belief is a mysterious thing. It is the only healer of the soul's wounds. There is no belief in the world.

The Red Man is dead, disbelieving in us. He is dead and unappeased. Do not imagine him happy in his Happy Hunting Ground. No. Only those that die in belief die happy. Those that are pushed out of life in chagrin come back unappeased, for revenge.

A curious thing about the Spirit of Place is the fact that no place exerts its full influence upon a new-comer until the old inhabitant is dead or absorbed. So America. While the Red Indian existed in fairly large numbers, the new colonials were in a great measure immune from the daimon, or demon, of America. The moment the last nuclei of Red life break up in America, then the white men will have to reckon with the full force of the demon of the continent. At present the demon of the place and the unappeased ghosts of the dead Indians act within the unconscious or under-conscious soul of the white American, causing the great

American grouch, the Orestes-like frenzy of restlessness in the Yankee soul, the inner malaise which amounts almost to madness, sometimes. The Mexican is macabre and disintegrated in his own way. Up till now, the unexpressed spirit of America has worked covertly in the American, the white American soul. But within the present generation the surviving Red Indians are due to merge in the great white swamp. Then the Daimon of America will work overtly, and we shall see real changes.

There has been all the time, in the white American soul, a dual feeling about the Indian. First was Franklin's feeling, that a wise Providence no doubt intended the extirpation of these savages. Then came Crèvecoeur's contradictory feeling about the noble Red Man and the innocent life of the wig-wam. Now we hate to subscribe to Benjamin's belief in a Providence that wisely extirpates the Indian to make room for 'cultivators of the soil'. In Crèvecoeur we meet a sentimental desire for the glorification of the savages. Absolutely sentimental. Hector pops over to Paris to enthuse about the wigwam.

The desire to extirpate the Indian. And the contradictory desire to glorify him. Both are rampant still, today.

The bulk of the white people who live in contact with the Indian today would like to see this Red brother exterminated; not only for the sake of grabbing his land, but because of the silent, invisible, but deadly hostility between the spirit of the two races. The minority of whites intellectualize the Red Man and laud him to the skies. But this minority of whites is mostly a high-brow minority with a big grouch against its own whiteness. So there you are.

I doubt if there is possible any real reconciliation, in the flesh, between the white and the red. For instance, a Red Indian girl who is servant in the white man's home, if she is treated with natural consideration, will probably serve well, even happily. She is happy with the new power over the white woman's kitchen. The white world makes her feel prouder, so long as she is free to go back to her own people at the given times. But she is happy because she is playing at being a white woman. There are other Indian women who would never serve the white people, and who would rather die than have a white man for a lover.

In either case, there is no reconciliation. There is no mystic conjunction between the spirit of the two races. The Indian girl who happily serves white people leaves out her own race-consideration, for the time being.

Supposing a white man goes out hunting in the mountains with an Indian. The two will probably get on like brothers. But let the same white man go alone with two Indians, and there will start a most subtle persecution of the unsuspecting white. If they, the Indians, discover that he has a natural fear of steep places,

then over every precipice in the country will the trail lead. And so on. Malice! That is the basic feeling in the Indian heart, towards the white. It may even be purely unconscious.

Supposing an Indian loves a white woman, and lives with her. He will probably be very proud of it, for he will be a big man among his own people, especially if the white mistress has money. He will never get over the feeling of pride at dining in a white dining-room and smoking in a white drawing-room. But at the same time he will subtly jeer at his white mistress, try to destroy her white pride. He will submit to her, if he is forced to, with a kind of false, unwilling childishness, and even love her with the same childlike gentleness, sometimes beautiful. But at the bottom of his heart he is gibing, gibing, gibing at her. Not only is it the sex resistance, but the race resistance as well.

There seems to be no reconciliation in the flesh. That leaves us only expiation, and then reconciliation in the soul. Some strange atonement: expiation and oneing.

Fenimore Cooper has probably done more than any writer to present the Red Man to the white man. But Cooper's presentment is indeed a wish-fulfilment. That is why Fenimore is such a success still.

Modern critics begrudge Cooper his success. I think I resent it a little myself. This popular wish-fulfilment stuff makes it so hard for the real thing to come through, later.

Cooper was a rich American of good family. His father founded Cooperstown, by Lake Champlain. And Fenimore was a gentleman of culture. No denying it.

It is amazing how cultured these Americans of the first half of the eighteenth century were. Most intensely so. Austin Dobson and Andrew Lang are flea-bites in comparison. Volumes of very *raffine* light verse and finely drawn familiar literature will prove it to anyone who cares to commit himself to these elderly books. The English and French writers of the same period were clumsy and hoydenish, judged by the same standards.

Truly, European decadence was anticipated in America; and American influence passed over to Europe, was assimilated there, and then returned to this land of innocence as something purplish in its modernity and a little wicked. So absurd things are.

Cooper quotes a Frenchman, who says, '*L'Am,rique est pourrie avant d'etre mure.*' And there is a great deal in it. America was not taught by France - by Baudelaire, for example. Baudelaire learned his lesson from America.

Cooper's novels fall into two classes: his white novels, such as *Homeward Bound*, *Eve Effingham*, *The Spy*, *The Pilot*, and then the *Leatherstocking Series*. Let us look at the white novels first.

The Effinghams are three extremely refined, genteel Americans who are 'Homeward Bound' from England to the States. Their party consists of father, daughter, and uncle, and faithful nurse. The daughter has just finished her education in Europe. She has, indeed, skimmed the cream off Europe. England, France, Italy, and Germany have nothing more to teach her. She is bright and charming, admirable creature; a real modern heroine; intrepid, calm, and self-collected, yet admirably impulsive, always in perfectly good taste; clever and assured in her speech, like a man, but withal charmingly deferential and modest before the stronger sex. It is the perfection of the ideal female. We have learned to shudder at her, but Cooper still admired.

On board is the other type of American, the parvenu, the demagogue, who has 'done' Europe and put it in his breeches pocket, in a month. Oh, Septimus Dodge, if a European had drawn you, that European would never have been forgiven by America. But an American drew you, so Americans wisely ignore you.

Septimus is the American self-made man. God had no hand in his make-up. He made himself. He has been to Europe, no doubt seen everything, including the Venus de Milo. 'What, is *that* the Venus de Milo?' And he turns his back on the lady. He's seen her. He's got her. She's a fish he has hooked, and he's off to America with her, leaving the scum of a statue standing in the Louvre.

That is one American way of Vandalism. The original Vandals would have given the complacent dame a knock with a battle-axe, and ended her. The insatiable American looks at her. 'Is *that* the Venus de Milo? - come on!' And the Venus de Milo stands there like a naked slave in a market-place, whom someone has spat on. Spat on!

I have often thought, hearing American tourists in Europe - in the Bargello in Florence, for example, or in the Piazza di San Marco in Venice - exclaiming, 'Isn't that just too cun-ning!' or else, 'Aren't you perfectly crazy about Saint Mark's! Don't you think those cupolas are like the loveliest *turnips* upside down, you know' - as if the beautiful things of Europe were just having their guts pulled out by these American admirers. They admire so wholesale. Sometimes they even seem to grovel. But the golden cupolas of St Mark's in Venice are turnips upside down in a stale stew, after enough American tourists have looked at them. Turnips upside down in a stale stew. Poor Europe!

And there you are. When a few German bombs fell upon Rheims Cathedral up went a howl of execration. But there are more ways than one of vandalism. I should think the American admiration of five-minutes tourists has done more to kill the sacredness of old European beauty and aspiration than multi-tudes of bombs would have done.

But there you are. Europe has got to fall, and peace hath her victories.

Behold then Mr Septimus Dodge returning to Dodge-town victorious. Not crowned with laurel, it is true, but wreathed in lists of things he has seen and sucked dry. Seen and sucked dry, you know: Venus de Milo, the Rhine or the Coliseum: swallowed like so many clams, and left the shells.

Now the aristocratic Effinghams, Homeward Bound from Europe to America, are at the mercy of Mr Dodge: Septimus. He is their compatriot, so they may not disown him. Had they been English, of course, they would never once have let themselves become aware of his existence. But no. They are American democrats, and therefore, if Mr Dodge marches up and says: 'Mr Effingham ? Pleased to meet you, Mr Effingham' - why, then Mr Effingham is *forced* to reply: 'Pleased to meet you, Mr Dodge.' If he didn't he would have the terrible hounds of democracy on his heels and at his throat, the moment he landed in the Land of the Free. An Englishman is free to continue unaware of the existence of a fellowcountryman, if the looks of that fellowcountryman are distasteful. But every American citizen is free to force his presence upon you, no matter how unwilling you may be.

Freedom !

The Effinghams detest Mr Dodge. They abhor him. They loathe and despise him. They have an unmitigated contempt for him. Everything he is, says, and does, seems to them too vulgar, too despicable. Yet they are forced to answer, when he presents himself: 'Pleased to meet you, Mr Dodge.'

Freedom ! Mr Dodge, of Dodge-town, alternately fawns and intrudes, cringes and bullies. And the Effinghams, terribly 'superior' in a land of equality, writhe helpless. They would fain snub Septimus out of existence. But Septimus is not to be snubbed. As a true democrat, he is unsnubbable. As a true democrat, he has right on his side. And right is might.

Right is might. It is the old struggle for power.

Septimus, as a true democrat, is the equal of any man. As a true democrat with a full pocket, he is, by the amount that fills his pocket, so much the superior of the democrats with empty pockets. Because, though all men are born equal and die equal, you will not get anybody to admit that ten dollars equal ten thousand dollars. No, no, there's a difference there, however far you may push equality.

Septimus has the Effinghams on the hip. He has them fast, and they will not escape. What tortures await them at home, in the Land of the Free, at the hands of the hideously affable Dodge, we do not care to disclose. What was the persecution of a haughty Lord or a marauding Baron or an inquisitorial Abbot compared to the persecution of a million Dodges ? The proud Effinghams are like men buried naked to the chin in ant-heaps, to be bitten into extinction by a

myriad ants. Stoically, as good democrats and idealists, they writhe and endure, without making too much moan.

They writhe and endure. There is no escape. Not from that time to this. No escape. They writhed on the horns of the Dodge dilemma.

Since then Ford has gone one worse.

Through these white novels of Cooper runs this acid of ant-bites, the formic acid of democratic poisoning. The Effinghams feel superior. Cooper felt superior. Mrs Cooper felt superior too. And bitten.

For they were democrats. They didn't believe in kings, or lords, or masters, or real superiority of any sort. Before God, of course. In the sight of God, of course, all men were equal. This they believed. And therefore, though they felt terribly superior to Mr Dodge, yet, since they were his equals in the sight of God, they could not feel free to say to him: 'Mr Dodge, please go to the devil.' They had to say: 'Pleased to meet you.'

What a lie to tell! Democratic lies.

What a dilemma! To feel so superior. To *know* you are superior. And yet to believe that, in the sight of God, you are equal. Can't help yourself.

Why couldn't they let the Lord Almighty look after the equality, since it seems to happen specifically in His sight, and stick themselves to their own superiority. Why couldn't they?

Somehow they daren't.

They were Americans, idealists. How dare they balance a mere intense feeling against an IDEA and an IDEAL?

Ideally - i.e., in the sight of God, Mr Dodge was their equal.

What a low opinion they held of the Almighty's faculty for discrimination.

But it was so. The IDEAL of EQUALITY.

Pleased to meet you, Mr Dodge.

We are equal in the sight of God, of course. But er -

Very glad to meet you, Miss Effingham. Did you say - *er*? Well now, I think my bank balance will bear it.

Poor Eve Effingham.

Eve! Think of it. Eve! And birds of paradise. And apples.

And Mr Dodge.

This is where apples of knowledge get you, Miss Eve. You should leave 'em alone.

'Mr Dodge, you are a hopeless and insufferable inferior.'

Why couldn't she say it? She felt it. And she was a heroine.

Alas, she was an American heroine. She was an EDUCATED WOMAN. She KNEW all about IDEALS. She swallowed the IDEAL of EQUALITY with her

first mouthful of KNOWLEDGE. Alas for her and that apple of Sodom that looked so rosy. Alas for all her knowing.

Mr Dodge (in check knickerbockers): Well, feeling a little uncomfortable below the belt, are you, Miss Effingham?

Miss Effingham (with difficulty withdrawing her gaze from the INFINITE OCEAN): Good morning, Mr Dodge. I was admiring the dark blue distance.

Mr Dodge: Say, couldn't you admire something a bit nearer ?

Think how easy it would have been for her to say 'Go away!' or 'Leave me, varlet!' - or 'Hence, base-born knave!' Or just to turn her back on him.

But then he would simply have marched round to the other side of her.

Was she his superior, or wasn't she?

Why surely, intrinsically, she *was*. Intrinsically Fenimore Cooper was the superior of the Dodges of his day. He felt it. But he felt he ought not to feel it. And he never had it out with himself.

That is why one rather gets impatient with him. He feels he is superior, and feels he ought *not* to feel so, and is therefore rather snobbish, and at the same time a little apologetic. Which is surely tiresome.

If a man feels superior, he should have it out with himself. 'Do I feel superior because I *am* superior? Or is it just the snobbishness of class, or education, or money?'

Class, education, money won't make a man superior. But if he's just *born* superior, in himself, there it is. Why deny it ?

It is a nasty sight to see the Effinghams putting themselves at the mercy of a Dodge, just because of a mere idea or ideal. Fools. They ruin more than they know. Because at the same time they are snobbish.

Septimus at the Court of King Arthur.

Septimus: Hello, Arthur! Pleased to meet you. By the way, what's all that great long sword about?

Arthur: This is Excalibur, the sword of my knighthood and my kingship.

Septimus: That so! We're all equal in the sight of God, you know, Arthur.

Arthur: Yes.

Septimus: Then I guess it's about time I had that yard-and- a-half of Excalibur to play with. Don't you think so ? We're equal in the sight of God, and you've had it for quite a while.

Arthur: Yes, I agree. (Hands him Excalibur.)

Septimus (prodding Arthur with Excalibur): Say, Art, which is your fifth rib ?

Superiority is a sword. Hand it over to Septimus, and you'll get it back between your ribs. - The whole moral of democracy.

But there you are. Eve Effingham had pinned herself down on the *Contrat*

Social, and she was prouder of that pin through her body than of any mortal thing else. Her IDEAL. Her IDEAL of DEMOCRACY.

When America set out to destroy Kings and Lords and Masters, and the whole paraphernalia of European superiority, it pushed a pin right through its own body, and on that pin it still flaps and buzzes and twists in misery. The pin of democratic equality. Freedom.

There'll never be any life in America till you pull the pin out and admit natural inequality. Natural superiority, natural inferiority. Till such time, Americans just buzz round like various sorts of propellers, pinned down by their freedom and equality.

That's why these white novels of Fenimore Cooper are only historically and sardonically interesting. The people are all pinned down by some social pin, and buzzing away in social importance or friction, round and round on the pin. Never real human beings. Always things pinned down, choosing to be pinned down, transfixed by the idea or ideal of equality and democracy, on which they turn loudly and importantly, like propellers propelling. These States. Humanly, it is boring. As a historic phenomenon, it is amazing, ludicrous, and irritating.

If you don't pull the pin out in time, you'll never be able to pull it out. You must turn on it for ever, or bleed to death.

Naked to the waist was I
And deep within my breast did lie,
Though no man any blood could spy,
The truncheon of a spear -

It is already too late?

Oh God, the democratic pin!

Freedom, Equality, Equal Opportunity, Education, Rights of Man.

The pin! The pin!

Well, there buzzes Eve Effingham, snobbishly impaled. She is a perfect American heroine, and I'm sure she wore the first smartly-tailored 'suit' that ever woman wore. I'm sure she spoke several languages. I'm sure she was hopelessly competent. I'm sure she 'adored' her husband, and spent masses of his money, and divorced him because he didn't understand LOVE.

American women in their perfect 'suits'. American men in their perfect coats and skirts!

I feel I'm the superior of most men I meet. Not in birth, because I never had a great-grandfather. Not in money, because I've got none. Not in education, because I'm merely scrappy. And certainly not in beauty or in manly strength.

Well, what then?

Just in myself.

When I'm challenged, I do feel myself superior to most of the men I meet.
Just a natural superiority.

But not till there enters an element of challenge.

When I meet another man, and he is just himself - even if he is an ignorant Mexican pitted with small-pox - then there is no question between us of superiority or inferiority. He is a man and I am a man. We are ourselves. There is no question between us.

But let a question arise, let there be a challenge, and then I feel he should do reverence to the gods in me, because they are more than the gods in him. And he should give reverence to the very me, because it is more at one with the gods than is his very self.

If this is conceit, I am sorry. But it's the gods in me that matter. And in other men.

As for me, I am so glad to salute the brave, reckless gods in another man. So glad to meet a man who will abide by his very self.

Ideas! Ideals! All this paper between us. What a weariness.

If only people would meet in their very selves, without wanting to put some idea over one another, or some ideal.

Damn all ideas and all ideals. Damn all the false stress, and the pins.

I am I. Here am I. Where are you ?

Ah, there you are! Now, damn the consequences, we have met.

That's my idea of democracy, if you can call it an idea.

CHAPTER 5

Fenimore Cooper's Leatherstocking Novels

IN his Leatherstocking books, Fenimore is off on another track. He is no longer concerned with social white Americans that buzz with pins through them, buzz loudly against every mortal thing except the pin itself. The pin of the Great Ideal.

One gets irritated with Cooper because he never for once snarls at the Great Ideal Pin which transfixes him. No, indeed. Rather he tries to push it through the very heart of the Continent.

But I have loved the Leatherstocking books so dearly. Wish-fulfilment!

Anyhow, one is not supposed to take LOVE seriously, in these books. Eve Effingham, impaled on the social pin, conscious all the time of her own ego and of nothing else, suddenly fluttering in throes of love: no, it makes me sick. LOVE is never LOVE until it has a pin pushed through it and becomes an IDEAL. The ego, turning on a pin, is wildly IN LOVE, always. Because that's the thing to be.

Cooper was a GENTLEMAN, in the worst sense of the word. In the Nineteenth Century sense of the word. A correct, clock-work man.

Not altogether, of course.

The great national Grouch was grinding inside him. Probably he called it COSMIC URGE. Americans usually do: in capital letters.

Best stick to National Grouch. The great American grouch.

Cooper had it, gentleman that he was. That is why he flitted round Europe so uneasily. Of course, in Europe he could be, and was, a gentleman to his heart's content.

'In short,' he says in one of his letters, 'we were at table two counts, one monsignore, an English Lord, an Ambassa-dor, and my humble self.'

Were we reallyl

How nice it must have been to know that one self, at least, was humble.

And he felt the democratic American tomahawk wheeling over his uncomfortable scalp all the time.

The great American grouch.

Two monsters loomed on Cooper's horizon.

MRS COOPER MY WORK

MY WORK MY WIFE

MY WIFE MY WORK

THE DEAR CHILDREN

MY WORK !!!

There you have the essential keyboard of Cooper's soul.

If there is one thing that annoys me more than a business man and his BUSINESS, it is an artist, a writer, painter, musician, and MY WORK. When an artist says MY WORK, the flesh goes tired on my bones. When he says MY WIFE, I want to hit him.

Cooper grizzled about his work. Oh, heaven, he cared so much whether it was good or bad, and what the French thought, and what Mr Snippy Knowall said, and how Mrs Cooper took it. The pin, the pin!

But he was truly an artist: then an American: then a gentleman.

And the grouch grouched inside him, through all.

They seem to have been specially fertile in imagining themselves 'under the wigwam', do these Americans, just when their knees were comfortably under the mahogany, in Paris, along with the knees of

4 Counts

2 Cardinals

1 Milord

5 Cocottes

1 Humble self

You bet, though, that when the cocottes were being raffled off, Fenimore went home to his WIFE.

Wish Fulfilment Actuality

THE WIGWAM vs MY HOTEL

CHINGACHGOOK vs MY WIFE

NATTY BUMPPPO vs MY HUMBLE SELF

Fenimore, lying in his Louis Quatorze hotel in Paris, passionately musing about Natty Bumppo and the pathless forest, and mixing his imagination with the Cupids and Butterflies on the painted ceiling, while Mrs Cooper was struggling with her latest gown in the next room, and the d,jeuner was with the Countess at eleven . .

Men live by lies.

In actuality, Fenimore loved the genteel continent of Europe, and waited gasping for the newspapers to praise his WORK.

In another actuality he loved the tomahawking continent of America, and imagined himself Natty Bumppo.

His actual desire was to be: *Monsieur Fenimore Cooper, le grand ecrivain americain.*

His innermost wish was to be: Natty Bumppo.

Now Natty and Fenimore, arm-in-arm, are an odd couple.

You can see Fenimore: blue coat, silver buttons, silver-and- diamond buckle shoes, ruffles.

You see Natty Bumppo: a grizzled, uncouth old renegade, with gaps in his old teeth and a drop on the end of his nose.

But Natty was Fenimore's great wish: his wish-fulfilment.

'It was a matter of course,' says Mrs Cooper, 'that he should dwell on the better traits of the picture rather than on the coarser and more revolting, though more common points. Like West, he could see Apollo in the young Mohawk.'

The coarser and more revolting, though more common points.

You see now why he depended so absolutely on MY WIFE. She had to look things in the face for him. The coarser and more revolting, and certainly more common points, she had to see.

He himself did so love seeing pretty-pretty, with the thrill of a red scalp now and then.

Fenimore, in his imagination, wanted to be Natty Bumppo, who, I am sure,

belched after he had eaten his dinner. At the same time Mr Cooper was nothing if not a gentleman. So he decided to stay in France and have it all his own way.

In France, Natty would not belch after eating, and Chingachgook could be all the Apollo he liked.

As if ever any Indian was like Apollo. The Indians, with their curious female quality, their archaic figures, with high shoulders and deep, archaic waists, like a sort of woman! And their natural devilishness, their natural insidiousness.

But men see what they want to see: especially if they look from a long distance, across the ocean, for example.

Yet the Leatherstocking books are lovely. Lovely half-lies.

They form a sort of American Odyssey, with Natty Bumppo for Odysseus.

Only, in the original Odyssey, there is plenty of devil, Circes and swine and all. And Ithacus is devil enough to out-wit the devils. But Natty is a saint with a gun, and the Indians are gentlemen through and through, though they may take an occasional scalp.

There are five Leatherstocking novels: a decrescendo of reality, and a crescendo of beauty.

1. *Pioneers*: A raw frontier-village on Lake Champlain, at the end of the eighteenth century. Must be a picture of Cooper's home, as he knew it when a boy. A very lovely book. Natty Bumppo an old man, an old hunter half civilized.

2. *The Last of the Mohicans*: A historical fight between the British and the French, with Indians on both sides, at a Fort by Lake Champlain. Romantic flight of the British general's two daughters, conducted by the scout, Natty, who is in the prime of life; romantic death of the last of the Delawares.

3. *The Prairie*: A wagon of some huge, sinister Kentuckians trekking west into the unbroken prairie. Prairie Indians, and Natty, an old, old man; he dies seated on a chair on the Rocky Mountains, looking east.

4. *The Pathfinder*: The Great Lakes. Natty, a man of about thirty-five, makes an abortive proposal to a bouncing damsel, daughter of the Sergeant at the Fort.

5. *Deerslayer*: Natty and Hurry Harry, both quite young, are hunting in the virgin wild. They meet two white women. Lake Champlain again.

These are the five Leatherstocking books: Natty Bumppo being Leatherstocking, Pathfinder, Deerslayer, according to his ages.

Now let me put aside my impatience at the unreality of this vision, and accept it as a wish-fulfilment vision, a kind of yearning myth. Because it seems to me that the things in Cooper that make one so savage, when one compares them with actuality, are perhaps, when one considers them as presentations of a deep subjective desire, real in their way, and almost prophetic.

The passionate love for America, for the soil of America, for example. As I

say, it is perhaps easier to love America passionately, when you look at it through the wrong end of the telescope, across all the Atlantic water, as Cooper did so often, than when you are right there. When you are actually *in* America, America hurts, because it has a powerful disintegrative influence upon the white psyche. It is full of grinning, unappeased aboriginal demons, too, ghosts, and it persecutes the white men, like some Eumenides, until the white men give up their absolute whiteness. America is tense with latent violence and resistance. The very common sense of white Americans has a tinge of helplessness in it, and deep fear of what might be if they were not common-sensical.

Yet one day the demons of America must be placated, the ghosts must be appeased, the Spirit of Place atoned for. Then the true passionate love for American Soil will appear. As yet, there is too much menace in the landscape.

But probably, one day America will be as beautiful in actuality as it is in Cooper. Not yet, however. When the factories have fallen down again.

And again, this perpetual blood-brother theme of the Leatherstocking novels, Natty and Chingachgook, the Great Serpent. At present it is a sheer myth. The Red Man and the White Man are not blood-brothers: even when they are most friendly. When they are most friendly, it is as a rule the one betraying his race-spirit to the other. In the white man - rather high-brow - who 'loves' the Indian, one feels the white man betraying his own race. There is something unproud, underhand in it. Renegade. The same with the Americanized Indian who believes absolutely in the white mode. It is a betrayal. Renegade again.

In the actual flesh, it seems to me the white man and the red man cause a feeling of oppression, the one to the other, no matter what the good will. The red life flows in a different direction from the white life. You can't make two streams that flow in opposite directions meet and mingle sooth-ingly.

Certainly, if Cooper had had to spend his whole life in the backwoods, side by side with a Noble Red Brother, he would have screamed with the oppression of suffocation. He had to have Mrs Cooper, a straight strong pillar of society, to hang on to. And he had to have the culture of France to turn back to, or he would just have been stifled. The Noble Red Brother would have smothered him and driven him mad.

So that the Natty and Chingachgook myth must remain a myth. It is wish-fulfilment, an evasion of actuality. As we have said before, the folds of the Great Serpent would have been heavy, very heavy, too heavy, on any white man. Unless the white man were a true renegade, hating himself and his own race-spirit, as sometimes happens.

It seems there can be no fusion in the flesh. But the spirit can change. The white man's spirit can never become as the red man's spirit. It doesn't want to.

But it can cease to be the opposite and the negative of the red man's spirit. It can open out a new great area of consciousness, in which there is room for the red spirit too.

To open out a new wide area of consciousness means to slough the old consciousness. The old consciousness has become a tight-fitting prison to us, in which we are going rotten.

You can't have a new, easy skin before you have sloughed the old, tight skin.

You can't.

And you just can't, so you may as well leave off pretending.

Now the essential history of the people of the United States seems to me just this: At the Renaissance the old consciousness was becoming a little tight. Europe sloughed her last skin, and started a new, final phase.

But some Europeans recoiled from the last final phase. They wouldn't enter the *cul de sac* of post-Renaissance, 'liberal' Europe. They came to America.

They came to America for two reasons:

(1) To slough the old European consciousness completely.

(2) To grow a new skin underneath, a new form. This second is a hidden process.

The two processes go on, of course, simultaneously. The slow forming of the new skin underneath is the slow sloughing of the old skin. And sometimes this immortal serpent feels very happy, feeling a new golden glow of a strangely-patterned skin envelop him: and sometimes he feels very sick, as if his very entrails were being torn out of him, as he wrenches once more at his old skin, to get out of it.

Out! Out! he cries, in all kinds of euphemisms.

He's got to have his new skin on him before ever he can get out.

And he's got to get out before his new skin can ever be his own skin.

So there he is, a torn divided monster.

The true American, who writhes and writhes like a snake that is long in sloughing.

Sometimes snakes can't slough. They can't burst their old skin. Then they go sick and die inside the old skin, and nobody ever sees the new pattern.

It needs a real desperate recklessness to burst your old skin at last. You simply don't care what happens to you, if you rip yourself in two, so long as you do get out.

It also needs a real belief in the new skin. Otherwise you are likely never to make the effort. Then you gradually sicken and go rotten and die in the old skin.

Now Fenimore stayed very safe inside the old skin: a gentleman, almost a European, as proper as proper can be. And, safe inside the odd skin, he imagined

the gorgeous American pattern of a new skin.

He hated democracy. So he evaded it, and had a nice dream of something beyond democracy. But he belonged to democracy all the while.

Evasion! - Yet even that doesn't make the dream worthless.

Democracy in America was never the same as Liberty in Europe. In Europe Liberty was a great life-throb. But in America Democracy was always something anti-life. The greatest democrats, like Abraham Lincoln, had always a sacrificial, self-murdering note in their voices. American Democracy was a form of self-murder, always. Or of murdering somebody else.

Necessarily. It was a *pis aller*. It was the *pis aller* to European Liberty. It was a cruel form of sloughing. Men murdered themselves into this democracy. Democracy is the utter hardening of the old skin, the old form, the old psyche. It hardens till it is tight and fixed and inorganic. Then it *must burst, like a chrysalis shell. And out must come the soft grub, or the soft damp butterfly of the American-at-last.*

America has gone the pis aller of her democracy. Now she must slough even that, chiefly that, indeed. What did Cooper dream beyond democracy? Why, in his immortal friendship of Chingachgook and Natty Bumppo he dreamed the nucleus of a new society. That is, he dreamed a new human relationship. A stark, stripped human relationship of two men, deeper than the deeps of sex. Deeper than property, deeper than fatherhood, deeper than marriage, deeper than love. So deep that it is loveless. The stark, loveless, wordless unison of two men who have come to the bottom of themselves. This is the new nucleus of a new society, the clue to a new world-epoch. It asks for a great and cruel sloughing first of all. Then it finds a great release into a new world, a new moral, a new landscape.

Natty and the Great Serpent are neither equals nor un-equals. Each obeys the other when the moment arrives. And each is stark and dumb in the other's presence, starkly himself without illusion created. Each is just the crude pillar of a man, the crude living column of his own manhood. And each knows the godhead of this crude column of manhood. A new relationship.

The Leatherstocking novels create the myth of this new relation. And they go backwards, from old age to golden youth. That is the true myth of America. She starts old, old, wrinkled and writhing in an old skin. And there is a gradual sloughing of the old skin, towards a new youth. It is the myth of America.

You start with actuality. Pioneers is no doubt Cooperstown when Cooperstown was in the stage of inception: a village of one wild street of log cabins under the forest hills by Lake Champlain: a village of crude, wild frontiersmen, reacting against civilization.

Towards this frontier-village in the winter time, a negro slave drives a sledge

through the mountains, over deep snow. In the sledge sits a fair damsel, Miss Temple, with her handsome pioneer father, Judge Temple. They hear a shot in the trees. It is the old hunter and backwoodsman, Natty Bumppo, long and lean and uncouth, with a long rifle and gaps in his teeth.

Judge Temple, is 'squire' of the village, and he has a ridiculous, commodious 'hall' for his residence. It is still the old English form. Miss Temple is a pattern young lady, like Eve Effingham: in fact, she gets a young and very genteel but impoverished Effingham for a husband. The old world holding its own on the edge of the wild. A bit tiresomely too, with rather more prunes and prisms than one can digest. Too romantic.

Against the 'hall' and the gentry, the real frontiers-folk, the rebels. The two groups meet at the village inn, and at the frozen church, and at the Christmas sports, and on the ice of the lake, and at the great pigeon shoot. It is a beautiful, resplendent picture of life. Fenimore puts in only the glamour.

Perhaps my taste is childish, but these scenes in *Pioneers* seem to me marvellously beautiful. The raw village street, with woodfires blinking through the unglazed window-chinks, on a winter's night. The inn, with the rough woodsman and the drunken Indian John; the church, with the snowy congregation crowding to the fire. Then the lavish abundance of Christmas cheer, and turkey-shooting in the snow. Spring coming, forests all green, maple sugar taken from the trees: and clouds of pigeons flying from the south, myriads of pigeons shot in heaps; and night-fishing on the teeming, virgin lake; and deer-hunting.

Pictures! Some of the loveliest, most glamorous pictures in all literature.

Alas, without the cruel iron of reality. It is all real enough. Except that one realizes that Fenimore was writing from a safe distance, where he would idealize and have his wish-fulfilment.

Because, when one comes to America, one finds that there is always a certain slightly devilish resistance in the American landscape, and a certain slightly bitter resistance in the white man's heart. Hawthorne gives this. But Cooper glosses it over.

The American landscape has never been at one with the white man. Never. And white men have probably never felt so bitter anywhere, as here in America, where the very landscape, in its very beauty, seems a bit devilish and grinning, opposed to us.

Cooper, however, glosses over this resistance, which in actuality can never quite be glossed over. He wants the landscape to be at one with him. So he goes away to Europe and sees it as such. It is a sort of vision.

And, nevertheless, the oneing will surely take place - some day. The myth is the story of Natty. The old, lean hunter and backwoodsman lives with his friend,

the gray-haired Indian John, an old Delaware chief, in a hut within reach of the village. The Delaware is christianized and bears the Christian name of John. He is tribeless and lost. He humiliates his grey hairs in drunkenness, and dies, thankful to be dead, in a forest fire, passing back to the fire whence he derived.

And this is Chingachgook, the splendid Great Serpent of the later novels.

No doubt Cooper, as a boy, knew both Natty and the Indian John. No doubt they fired his imagination even then. When he is a man, crystallized in society and sheltering behind the safe pillar of Mrs Cooper, these two old fellows become a myth to his soul. He traces himself to a new youth in them.

As for the story: Judge Temple has just been instrumental in passing the wise game laws. But Natty has lived by his gun all his life in the wild woods, and simply childishly cannot understand how he can be poaching on the Judge's land among the pine trees. He shoots a deer in the close season. The Judge is all sympathy, but the law must be enforced. Bewildered Natty, an old man of seventy, is put in stocks and in prison. They release him as soon as possible. But the thing was done.

The letter killeth.

Natty's last connection with his own race is broken. John, the Indian, is dead. The old hunter disappears, lonely and severed, into the forest, away, away from his race.

In the new epoch that is coming, there will be no letter of the law.

Chronologically, The Last of the Mohicans follows Pioneers. But in the myth, The Prairie comes next.

Cooper of course knew his own America. He travelled west and saw the prairies, and camped with the Indians of the prairie

The Prairie, like Pioneers, bears a good deal the stamp of actuality. It is a strange, splendid book, full of sense of doom. The figures of the great Kentuckian men, with their wolf-women, loom colossal on the vast prairie, as they camp with their wagons. These are different pioneers from Judge Temple. Lurid, brutal, tinged with the sinisterness of crime; these are the gaunt white men who push west, push on and on against the natural opposition of the continent. On towards a doom. Great wings of vengeful doom seem spread over the west, grim against the intruder. You feel them again in Frank Norris's novel, The Octopus. While in the West of Bret Harte there is a very devil in the air, and beneath him are sentimental self-conscious people being wicked and goody by evasion.

In The Prairie there is a shadow of violence and dark cruelty flickering in the air. It is the aboriginal demon hovering over the core of the continent. It hovers still, and the dread is still there.

Into such a prairie enters the huge figure of Ishmael, ponderous, pariah-like Ishmael and his huge sons and his were-wolf wife. With their wagons they roll on from the frontiers of Kentucky, like Cyclops into the savage wilderness. Day after day they seem to force their way into oblivion. But their force of penetration ebbs. They are brought to a stop. They recoil in the throes of murder and entrench themselves in isolation on a hillock in the midst of the prairie. There they hold out like demi-gods against the elements and the subtle Indian.

The pioneering brute invasion of the West, crime-tinged! And into this setting, as a sort of minister of peace, enters the old hunter Natty, and his suave, horse-riding Sioux Indians. But he seems like a shadow.

The hills rise softly west, to the Rockies. There seems a new peace: or is it only suspense, abstraction, waiting? Is it only a sort of beyond ?

Natty lives in these hills, in a village of the suave, horse-riding Sioux. They revere him as an old wise father.

In these hills he dies, sitting in his chair and looking far east, to the forest and great sweet waters, whence he came. He dies gently, in physical peace with the land and the Indians. He is an old, old man.

Cooper could see no further than the foothills where Natty died, beyond the prairie.

The other novels bring us back east.

The Last of the Mohicans is divided between real historical narrative and true 'romance'. For myself, I prefer the romance. It has a myth meaning, whereas the narrative is chiefly record.

For the first time we get actual women: the dark, handsome Cora and her frail sister, the White Lily. The good old division, the dark sensual woman and the clinging, submissive little blonde, who is so 'pure'.

These sisters are fugitives through the forest, under the protection of a Major Heyward, a young American officer and Englishman. He is just a 'white' man, very good and brave and generous, etc., but limited, most definitely borne. He would probably love Cora, if he dared, but he finds it safer to adore the clinging White Lily of a younger sister.

This trio is escorted by Natty, now Leatherstocking, a hunter and scout in the prime of life, accompanied by his inseparable friend Chingachgook, and the Delaware's beautiful son - Adonis rather than Apollo - Uncas, The last of the Mohicans.

There is also a 'wicked' Indian, Magua, handsome and injured incarnation of evil.

Cora is the scarlet flower of womanhood, fierce, passionate offspring of some mysterious union between the British officer and a Creole woman in the West

Indies. Cora loves Uncas, Uncas loves Cora. But Magua also desires Cora, violently desires her. A lurid little circle of sensual fire. So Fenimore kills them all off, Cora, Uncas, and Magua, and leaves the White Lily to carry on the race. She will breed plenty of white children to Major Heyward. These tiresome 'lilies that fester', of our day.

Evidently Cooper - or the artist in him - has decided that there can be no blood-mixing of the two races, white and red. He kills 'em off.

Beyond all this heart-beating stand the figures of Natty and Chingachgook: two childless, womanless men, of opposite races. They are the abiding thing. Each of them is alone, and final in his race. And they stand side by side, stark, abstract, beyond emotion, yet eternally together. All the other loves seem frivolous. This is the new great thing, the clue, the inception of a new humanity.

And Natty, what sort of a white man is he? Why, he is a man with a gun. He is a killer, a slayer. Patient and gentle as he is, he is a slayer. Self-effacing, self-forgetting, still he is a killer.

Twice, in the book, he brings an enemy down hurtling in death through the air, downwards. Once it is the beautiful, wicked Magua - shot from a height, and hurtling down ghastly through space, into death.

This is Natty, the white forerunner. A killer. As in Deerslayer, he shoots the bird that flies in the high, high sky so that the bird falls out of the invisible into the visible, dead, he symbolizes himself. He will bring the bird of the spirit out of the high air. He is the stoic American killer of the old great life. But he kills, as he says, only to live.

Pathfinder takes us to the Great Lakes, and the glamour and beauty of sailing the great sweet waters. Natty is now called Pathfinder. He is about thirty-five years old, and he falls in love. The damsel is Mabel Dunham, daughter of Sergeant Dunham of the Fort garrison. She is blonde and in all things admirable. No doubt Mrs Cooper was very much like Mabel.

And Pathfinder doesn't marry her. She won't have him. She wisely prefers a more comfortable Jasper. So Natty goes off to grouch, and to end by thanking his stars. When he had got right dear, and sat by the campfire with Chingachgook, in the forest, didn't he just thank his stars ! A lucky escape!

Men of an uncertain age are liable to these infatuations. They aren't always lucky enough to be rejected.

Whatever would poor Mabel have done, had she been Mrs Bumpo ?

Natty had no business marrying. His mission was elsewhere.

The most fascinating Leatherstocking book is the last, Deerslayer. Natty is now a fresh youth, called Deerslayer. But the kind of silent prim youth who is never quite young, but reserves himself for different things.

It is a gem of a book. Or a bit of perfect paste. And myself, like a bit of perfect paste in a perfect setting, so long as I am not fooled by presence of reality. And the setting of Deerslayer could not be more exquisite. Lake Champlain again.

Of course it never rains: it is never cold and muddy and dreary: no one has wet feet or toothache: no one ever feels filthy, when they can't wash for a week. God knows what the women would really have looked like, for they fled through the wilds without soap, comb, or towel. They breakfasted off a chunk of meat, or nothing, lunched the same and supped the same.

Yet at every moment they are elegant, perfect ladies, in correct toilet.

Which isn't quite fair. You need only go camping for a week, and you'll see.

But it is a myth, not a realistic tale. Read it as a lovely myth. Lake Glimmerglass.

Deerslayer, the youth with the long rifle, is found in the woods with a big, handsome, blonde-bearded backwoodsman called Hurry Harry. Deerslayer seems to have been born under a hemlock tree out of a pine-cone: a young man of the woods. He is silent, simple, philosophic, moralistic, and an unerring shot. His simplicity is the simplicity of age rather than of youth. He is race-old. All his reactions and impulses are fixed, static. Almost he is sexless, so race-old. Yet intelligent, hardy, dauntless.

Hurry Harry is a big blusterer, just the opposite of Deerslayer. Deerslayer keeps the centre of his own consciousness steady and unperturbed. Hurry Harry is one of those floundering people who bluster from one emotion to another, very self-conscious, without any centre to them.

These two young men are making their way to a lovely, smallish lake, Lake Glimmerglass. On this water the Hutter family has established itself. Old Hutter, it is suggested, has a criminal, coarse, buccaneering past, and is a sort of fugitive from justice. But he is a good enough father to his two grown-up girls. The family lives in a log hut 'castle', built on piles in the water, and the old man has also constructed an 'ark', a sort of house-boat, in which he can take his daughters when he goes on his rounds to trap the beaver.

The two girls are the inevitable dark and light. Judith, dark, fearless, passionate, a little lurid with sin, is the scarlet-and- black blossom. Hetty, the younger, blonde, frail and innocent, is the white lily again. But alas, the lily has begun to fester. She is slightly imbecile.

The two hunters arrive at the lake among the woods just as war has been declared. The Hutters are unaware of the fact. And hostile Indians are on the lake already. So, the story of thrills and perils.

Thomas Hardy's inevitable division of women into dark and fair, sinful and innocent, sensual and pure, is Cooper's division too. It is indicative of the desire

in the man. He wants sensuality and sin, and he wants purity and 'innocence'. If the innocence goes a little rotten, slightly imbecile, bad luck!

Hurry Harry, of course, like a handsome impetuous meat fly, at once wants Judith, the lurid poppy-blossom. Judith rejects him with scorn.

Judith, the sensual woman, at once wants the quiet, reserved, unmastered Deerslayer. She wants to master him. And Deerslayer is half tempted, but never more than half. He is not going to be mastered. A philosophic old soul, he does not give much for the temptations of sex. Probably he dies virgin.

And he is right of it. Rather than be dragged into a false heat of deliberate sensuality, he will remain alone. His soul is alone, for ever alone. So he will preserve his integrity, and remain alone in the flesh. It is a stoicism which is honest and fearless, and from which Deerslayer never lapses, except when, approaching middle age, he proposes to the buxom Mabel.

He lets his consciousness penetrate in loneliness into the new continent. His contacts are not human. He wrestles with the spirits of the forest and the American wild, as a hermit wrestles with God and Satan. His one meeting is with Chingachgook, and this meeting is silent, reserved, across an unpassable distance.

Hetty, the White Lily, being imbecile, although full of vaporous religion and the dear, good God, 'who governs all things by his providence', is hopelessly infatuated with Hurry Harry. Being innocence gone imbecile, like Dostoevsky's Idiot, she longs to give herself to the handsome meat-fly. Of course he doesn't want her.

And so nothing happens: in that direction. Deerslayer goes off to meet Chingachgook, and help him woo an Indian maid. Vicarious.

It is the miserable story of the collapse of the white psyche. The white man's mind and soul are divided between these two things: innocence and lust, the Spirit and Sensuality. Sensuality always carries a stigma, and is therefore more deeply desired, or lusted after. But spirituality alone gives the sense of uplift, exaltation, and 'winged life', with the inevitable reaction into sin and spite. So the white man is divided against himself. He plays off one side of himself against the other side, till it is really a tale told by an idiot, and nauseating.

Against this, one is forced to admire the stark, enduring figure of Deerslayer. He is neither spiritual nor sensual. He is a moralizer, but he always tries to moralize from actual experience, not from theory. He says: 'Hurt nothing unless you're forced to.' Yet he gets his deepest thrill of gratification, perhaps, when he puts a bullet through the heart of a beautiful buck, as it stoops to drink at the lake. Or when he brings the invisible bird fluttering down in death, out of the high blue. 'Hurt nothing unless you're forced to.' And yet he lives by death,

by killing the wild things of the air and earth.

It's not good enough.

But you have there the myth of the essential white America. All the other stuff, the love, the democracy, the floundering into lust, is a sort of by-play. The essential American soul is hard, isolate, stoic, and a killer. It has never yet melted.

Of course, the soul often breaks down into disintegration, and you have lurid sin and Judith, imbecile innocence lusting, in Hetty, and bluster, bragging, and self-conscious strength, in Harry. But there are the disintegration products.

What true myth concerns itself with is not the disintegration product. True myth concerns itself centrally with the onward adventure of the integral soul. And this, for America, is Deerslayer. A man who turns his back on white society. A man who keeps his moral integrity hard and intact. An isolate, almost selfless, stoic, enduring man, who lives by death, by killing, but who is pure white.

This is the very intrinsic — most American. He is at the core of all the other flux and fluff. And when this man breaks from his static isolation, and makes a new move, then look out, something will be happening.

CHAPTER 6

Edgar Allan Poe

POE has no truck with Indians or Nature. He makes no bones about Red Brothers and Wigwams.

He is absolutely concerned with the disintegration-processes of his own psyche. As we have said, the rhythm of American art-activity is dual.

(1) A disintegrating and sloughing of the old consciousness.

(2) The forming of a new consciousness underneath.

Fenimore Cooper has the two vibrations going on together. Poe has only one, only the disintegrative vibration. This makes him almost more a scientist than an artist.

Moralists have always wondered helplessly why Poe's 'morbid' tales need have been written. They need to be written because old things need to die and disintegrate, because the old write psyche has to be gradually broken down before anything else can come to pass.

Man must be stripped even of himself. And it is a painful, sometimes a ghastly process.

Poe had a pretty bitter doom. Doomed to seethe down his soul in a great continuous convulsion of disintegration, and doomed to register the process. And then doomed to be abused for it, when he had performed some of the bitterest tasks of human experience, that can be asked of a man. Necessary tasks, too. For the human soul must suffer its own disintegration, *consciously*, if ever it is to survive.

But Poe is rather a scientist than an artist. He is reducing his own self as a scientist reduces a salt in a crucible. It is an almost chemical analysis of the soul and consciousness. Whereas in true art there is always the double rhythm of creating and destroying.

This is why Poe calls his things 'tales'. They are a concatenation of cause and effect.

His best pieces, however, are not tales. They are more. They are ghastly stories of the human soul in its disruptive throes.

Moreover, they are 'love' stories.

Ligeia and *The Fall of the House of Usher* are really love stories.

Love is the mysterious vital attraction which draws things together, closer, closer together. For this reason sex is the actual crisis of love. For in sex the two

blood-systems, in the male and female, concentrate and come into contact, the merest film intervening. Yet if the intervening film breaks down, it is death.

So there you are. There is a limit to everything. There is a limit to love.

The central law of all organic life is that each organism is intrinsically isolate and single in itself.

The moment its isolation breaks down, and there comes an actual mixing and confusion, death sets in.

This is true of every individual organism, from man to amoeba.

But the secondary law of all organic life is that each organism only lives through contact with other matter, assimilation, and contact with other life, which means assimilation of new vibrations, non-material. Each individual organism is vivified by intimate contact with fellow organisms: up to a certain point.

So man. He breathes the air into him, he swallows food and water. But more than this. He takes into him the life of his fellow men, with whom he comes into contact, and he gives back life to them. This contact draws nearer and nearer, as the intimacy increases. When it is a whole contact, we call it love. Men live by food, but die if they eat too much. Men live by love, but die, or cause death, if they love too much.

There are two loves: sacred and profane, spiritual and sensual.

In sensual love, it is the two blood-systems, the man's and the woman's, which sweep up into pure contact, and almost fuse. Almost mingle. Never quite. There is always the finest imaginable wall between the two blood-waves, through which pass unknown vibrations, forces, but through which the blood itself must never break, or it means bleeding.

In spiritual love, the contact is purely nervous. The nerves in the lovers are set vibrating in unison like two instruments. The pitch can rise higher and higher. But carry this too far, and the nerves begin to break, to bleed, as it were, and a form of death sets in.

The trouble about man is that he insists on being master of his own fate, and he insists on oneness. For instance, having discovered the ecstasy of spiritual love, he insists that he shall have this all the time, and nothing but this, for this is life. It is what he calls 'heightening' life. He wants his nerves to be set vibrating in the intense and exhilarating unison with the nerves of another being, and by this means he acquires an ecstasy of vision, he finds himself in glowing unison with all the universe.

But as a matter of fact this glowing unison is only a temporary thing, because the first law of life is that each organism is isolate in itself, it must return to its own isolation.

Yet man has tried the glow of unison, called love, and he likes it. It gives him his highest gratification. He wants it. He wants it all the time. He wants it and he will have it. He doesn't want to return to his own isolation. Or if he must, it is only as a prowling beast returns to its lair to rest and set out again.

This brings us to Edgar Allan Poe. The clue to him lies in the motto he chose for *Ligeia*, a quotation from the mystic Joseph Glanvill:

And the will therein lieth, which dieth not. Who knoweth the mysteries of the will, with its vigour? For God is but a great will pervading all things by nature of its intentness Man doth not yield himself to the angels, nor unto death utterly, save only through the weakness of his feeble will.

It is a profound saying: and a deadly one.

Because if God is a great will, then the universe is but an instrument.

I don't know what God is. But He is not simply a will. That is too simple. Too anthropomorphic. Because a man wants his own will, and nothing but his will, he needn't say that God is the same will, magnified *ad infinitum*.

For me, there may be one God, but He is nameless and unknowable.

For me, there are also many gods, that come into me and leave me again. And they have very various wills, I must say.

But the point is Poe.

Poe had experienced the ecstasies of extreme spiritual love. And he wanted those ecstasies and nothing but those ecstasies. He wanted that great gratification, the sense of flowing, the sense of unison, the sense of heightening of life. He had experienced this gratification. He was told on every hand that this ecstasy of spiritual, nervous love was the greatest thing in life, was life itself. And he had tried it for himself, he knew that for him it *was* life itself. So he wanted it. And he *would have* it. He set up his will against the whole of the limitations of nature.

This is a brave man, acting on his own belief, and his own experience. But it is also an arrogant man, and a fool.

Poe was going to get the ecstasy and the heightening, cost what it might. He went on in a frenzy, as characteristic American women nowadays go on in a frenzy, after the very same thing: the heightening, the flow, the ecstasy. Poe tried alcohol, and any drug he could lay his hand on. He also tried any human being he could lay his hands on.

His grand attempt and achievement was with his wife; his cousin, a girl with a singing voice. With her he went in for the intensest flow, the heightening, the prismatic shades of ecstasy. It was the intensest nervous vibration of unison, pressed higher and higher in pitch, till the blood-vessels of the girl broke, and the blood began to flow out loose. It was love. If you call it love.

Love can be terribly obscene.

It is love that causes the neuroticism of the day. It is love that is the prime cause of tuberculosis.

The nerves that vibrate most intensely in spiritual unisons are the sympathetic ganglia of the breast, of the throat, and the hind brain. Drive this vibration over-intensely, and you weaken the sympathetic tissues of the chest - the lungs - or of the throat, or of the lower brain, and the tubercles are given a ripe held.

But Poe drove the vibrations beyond any human pitch of endurance.

Being his cousin, she was more easily keyed to him.

Ligeia is the chief story. Ligeia! A mental-derived name. To him the woman, his wife, was not Lucy. She was Ligeia. No doubt she even preferred it thus.

Ligeia is Poe's love-story, and its very fantasy makes it more truly his own story.

It is a tale of love pushed over a verge. And love pushed to extremes in a battle of wills between the lovers.

Love is become a battle of wills.

Which shall first destroy the other, of the lovers? Which can hold out longest, against the other?

Ligeia is still the old-fashioned woman. Her will is still to submit. She wills to submit to the vampire of her husband's consciousness. Even death.

'In stature she was tall, somewhat slender, and, in her latter days, even emaciated. I would in vain attempt to portray the majesty, the quiet ease, of her demeanour or the incomprehensible lightness and elasticity of her footfall... I was never made aware of her entrance into my closed study, save by the dear music of her low sweet voice, as she placed her marble hand upon my shoulder.'

Poe has been so praised for his style. But it seems to me a meretricious affair. 'Her marble hand' and 'the elasticity of her footfall' seem more like chair-springs and mantel-pieces than a human creature. She never was quite a human creature to him. She was an instrument from which he got his extremes of sensation. His *machine a plaisir*, as somebody says.

All Poe's style, moreover, has this mechanical quality, as his poetry has a mechanical rhythm. He never sees anything in terms of life, almost always in terms of matter, jewels, marble, etc., - or in terms of force, scientific. And his cadences are all managed mechanically. This is what is called 'having a style'.

What he wants to do with Ligeia is to analyse her, till he knows all her component parts, till he has got her all in his consciousness. She is some strange chemical salt which he must analyse out in the test-tubes of his brain, and then - when he's finished the analysis - *E finita la commedia!*

But she won't be quite analysed out. There is something, something he can't

get. Writing of her eyes, he says: 'They were, I must believe, far larger than the ordinary eyes of our own race' - as if anybody would want eyes 'far larger' than other folks'. 'They were even fuller than the fullest of the gazelle eyes of the tribe of the valley of Nourjahad' - which is blarney. 'The hue of the orbs was the most brilliant of black and, far over them, hung jetty lashes of great length' - suggests a whip-lash. 'The brows, slightly irregular in outline, had the same tint. The "strangeness", however, which I found in the eyes, was of a nature distinct from the formation, or the colour or the brilliancy of the features, and must, after all, be referred to the expression.' - Sounds like an anatomist anatomizing a cat -

Ah, word of no meaning! behind whose vast latitude of mere sound we entrench our ignorance of so much of the spiritual. The expression of the eyes of Ligeia! How for long hours have I pondered upon it! How have I, through the whole of a midsummer night, struggled to fathom it! What was it - that something more profound than the well of Democritus - which lay far within the pupils of my beloved! What was it? I was possessed with a passion to discover ..

It is easy to see why each man kills the thing he loves. To *know* a living thing is to kill it. You have to kill a thing to know it satisfactorily. For this reason, the desirous consciousness, the SPIRIT, is a vampire.

One should be sufficiently intelligent and interested to know a good deal *about* any person one comes into close contact with. *About* her. Or *about* him.

But to try to *know* any living being is to try to suck the life out of that being.

Above all things, with the woman one loves. Every sacred instinct teaches one that one must leave her unknown. You know your woman darkly, in the blood. To try to *know* her mentally is to try to kill her. Beware, oh woman, of the man who wants to *find out what you are*. And, oh men, beware a thousand times more of the woman who wants to *know* you or *get* you, what you are.

It is the temptation of a vampire fiend, is this knowledge.

Man does so horribly want to master the secret of life and of individuality *with his mind*. It is like the analysis of protoplasm. You can only analyse dead protoplasm, and know its constituents. It is a death-process.

Keep KNOWLEDGE for the world of matter, force, and function. It has got nothing to do with being.

But Poe wanted to know - wanted to know what was the strangeness in the eyes of Ligeia. She might have told him it was horror at his probing, horror at being vamped by his consciousness.

But she wanted to be vamped. She wanted to be probed by his consciousness, to be KNOWN. She paid for wanting it, too.

Nowadays it is usually the man who wants to be vamped, to be KNOWN.

Edgar Allan probed and probed. So often he seemed on the verge. But she went over the verge of death before he came over the verge of knowledge. And it is always so.

He decided, therefore, that the clue to the strangeness lay in the mystery of will. 'And the will therein lieth, which dieth not . . .'

Ligeia had a 'gigantic volition'. ... 'An intensity in thought, action, or speech was possibly, in her, a result, or at least an index' (he really meant indication) 'of that gigantic volition which, during our long intercourse, failed to give other and more immediate evidence of its existence.'

I should have thought her long submission to him was chief and ample 'other evidence'.

'Of all the women whom I have ever known, she, the outwardly calm, the ever-placid Ligeia, was the most violently a prey to the tumultuous vultures of stern passion. And of such passion I could form no estimate, save by the miraculous expansion of those eyes which at once so delighted and appalled me - by the almost magical melody, modulation distinctness, and placidity of her very low voice - and by the fierce energy (rendered doubly effective by contrast with her manner of utterance) of the wild words which she habitually uttered.'

Poor Poe, he had caught a bird of the same feather as himself. One of those terrible cravers, who crave the further sensation. Crave to madness or death. 'Vultures of stern passion' indeed! Condors.

But having recognized that the clue was in her gigantic volition, he should have realized that the process of this loving, this craving, this knowing, was a struggle of wills. But Ligeia, true to the great tradition and mode of womanly love, by her will kept herself submissive, recipient. She is the passive body who is explored and analysed into death. And yet, at times, her great female will must have revolted. 'Vultures of stern passion!' With a convulsion of desire she desired his further probing and exploring. To any lengths. But then, 'tumultuous vultures of stern passion'. She had to fight with herself.

But Ligeia wanted to go on and on with the craving, with the love, with the sensation, with the probing, with the knowing, on and on to the end.

There is no end. There is only the rupture of death. That's where men, and women, are 'had'. Man is always sold, in his search for final KNOWLEDGE.

That she loved me I should not have doubted; and I might have been easily aware that, in a bosom such as hers, love would have reigned no ordinary passion. But in death only was I fully impressed with the strength of her affection. For long hours, detaining my hand, would she pour out before me the overflowing of a heart whose more than passionate devotion amounted to idolatry.

(Oh, the indecency of all this endless intimate talk!)

How had I deserved to be so blessed by such confessions? (Another man would have felt himself cursed.) How had I deserved to be so cursed with the removal of my beloved in the hour of her making them? But upon this subject I cannot bear to dilate. Let me say only that in Ligeia's more than womanly abandonment to a love, alas! all unmerited, all unworthily bestowed, I at length recognized the principle of her longing, with so wildly earnest a desire, for the life which was now fleeing so rapidly away. It is this wild longing - it is this eager vehemence of desire for life - but for life, that I have no power to portray, no utterance capable of expressing.

Well, that is ghastly enough, in all conscience.

'And from them that have not shall be taken away even that which they have.'

'To him that hath life shall be given life, and from him that hath not life shall be taken away even that life which he hath.'

Or her either.

These terribly conscious birds, like Poe and his Ligeia, deny the very life that is in them; they want to turn it all into talk, into *knowing*. And so life, which will *not* be known, leaves them.

But poor Ligeia, how could she help it? It was her doom. All the centuries of the SPIRIT, all the years of American rebellion against the Holy Ghost, had done it to her.

She dies, when she would rather do anything than die. And when she dies the clue, which he only lived to grasp, dies with her.

Foiled!

Foiled!

No wonder she shrieks with her last breath.

On the last day Ligeia dictates to her husband a poem. As poems go, it is rather false, meretricious. But put yourself in Ligeia's place, and it is real enough, and ghastly beyond bearing.

Out - out are all the lights - out all!

And over each quivering form

The curtain, a funeral pall,

Comes down with the rush of a storm,

While the angels, all pallid and wan,

Uprising, unveiling, affirm?

That the play is the tragedy, 'Man',

And its hero, the Conqueror Worm.

Which is the American equivalent for a William Blake poem. For Blake, too, was one of these ghastly, obscene 'Knowers'.

“O God!” half shrieked Ligeia, leaping to her feet and extending her arms aloft with a spasmodic movement, as I made an end of these lines - “O God! O Divine Father! shall these things be undeviatingly so? Shall this conqueror be not once conquered? Are we not part and parcel in Thee? Who - who knoweth the mysteries of the will with its vigour? Man cloth not yield him to the angels, *nor unto death utterly*, save only through the weakness of his feeble will.”“

So Ligeia dies. And yields to death at least partly. *Anche troppo*.

As for her cry to God - has not God said that those who sin against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven?

And the Holy Ghost is within us. It is the thing that prompts us to be real, not to push our own cravings too far, not to submit to stunts and high-falutin, above all, not to be too egoistic and wilful in our conscious self, but to change as the spirit inside us bids us change, and leave off when it bids us leave off, and laugh when we must laugh, particularly at ourselves, for in deadly earnestness there is always something a bit ridiculous. The Holy Ghost bids us never be too deadly in our earnestness, always to laugh in time, at ourselves and everything. Particularly at our sublimities. Everything has its hour of ridicule - everything.

Now Poe and Ligeia, alas, couldn't laugh. They were frenziedly earnest. And frenziedly they pushed on this vibration of consciousness and unison in consciousness. They sinned against the Holy Ghost that bids us all laugh and forget, bids us know our own limits. And they weren't forgiven.

Ligeia needn't blame God. She had only her own will, her 'gigantic volition' to thank, lusting after more consciousness, more beastly KNOWING.

Ligeia dies. The husband goes to England, vulgarly buys or rents a gloomy, grand old abbey, puts it into some sort of repair, and furnishes it with exotic, mysterious, theatrical splendour. Never anything open and real. This theatrical 'volition' of his. The bad taste of sensationalism.

Then he marries the fair-haired, blue-eyed Lady Rowena Trevanion, of Tremaine. That is, she would be a sort of Saxon-Cornish blue-blood damsel. Poor Poe!

In halls such as these - in a bridal chamber such as this - I passed with the Lady of Tremaine, the unhallowed hours of the first month of our marriage - passed them with but little disquietude. That my wife dreaded the fierce moodiness of my temper - that she shunned me and loved me but little - I could not help perceiving but it gave me rather pleasure than otherwise. loathed her with a hatred belonging more to demon than to man. My memory flew back (oh, with what intensity of regret!) to Ligeia, the beloved, the august, the beautiful, the entombed. I revelled in recollections of her purity . . . *etc*.

Now the vampire lust is consciously such.

In the second month of the marriage the Lady Rowena fell ill. It is the shadow of Ligeia hangs over her. It is the ghostly Ligeia who pours poison into Rowena's cup. It is the spirit of Ligeia, leagued with the spirit of the husband, that now lusts in the slow destruction of Rowena. The two vampires dead wife and living husband.

For Ligeia has not yielded unto death utterly. Her taxed, frustrated will comes back in vindictiveness. She could not have her way in life. So she, too, will find victims in life. And the husband, all the time, only uses Rowena as a living body on which to wreak his vengeance for his being thwarted with Ligeia. Thwarted from the final KNOWING her.

And at last from the corpse of Rowena, Ligeia rises. Out of her death, through the door of a corpse they have destroyed between them, reappears Ligeia, still trying to have her will, to have more love and knowledge, the final gratification which is never final, with her husband.

For it is true, as William James and Conan Doyle and the rest allow, that a spirit can persist in the after-death. Persist by its own volition. But usually, the evil persistence of a thwarted will, returning for vengeance on life. Lemures, vampires.

It is a ghastly story of the assertion of the human will, the will-to-love and the will-to-consciousness, asserted against death itself. The pride of human conceit in KNOWLEDGE.

There are terrible spirits, ghosts, in the air of America.

Eleanora, the next story, is a fantasy revealing the sensational delights of the man in his early marriage with the young and tender bride. They dwelt, he, his cousin and her mother, in the sequestered Valley of Many-coloured Grass, the valley of prismatic sensation, where everything seems spectrum-coloured. They looked down at their *own images* in the River of Silence, and drew the god Eros from that wave: out of their own self-consciousness, that is. This is a description of the life of introspection and of the love which is begotten by the self in the self, the self-made love. The trees are like serpents worshipping the sun. That is, they represent the phallic passion in its poisonous or mental activity. Everything runs to consciousness: serpents worshipping the sun. The embrace of love, which should bring darkness and oblivion, would with these lovers be a daytime thing bringing more heightened consciousness, visions, spectrum-visions, prismatic. The evil thing that daytime love-making is, and all sex-palaver.

In *Berenice* the man must go down to the sepulchre of his beloved and pull out her thirty-two small white teeth, which he carries in a box with him. It is repulsive and gloating. The teeth are the instruments of biting, of resistance, of antagonism. They often become symbols of opposition, little instruments or

entities of crushing and destroying. Hence the dragon's teeth in the myth. Hence the man in *Berenice* must take possession of the irreducible part of his mistress. 'Toutes ses dents etaient des idees,' he says. Then they are little fixed ideas of mordant hate, of which he possesses himself

The other great story linking up with this group is *The Fall of the House of Usher*. Here the love is between brother and sister. When the self is broken, and the mystery of the recognition of *otherness* fails, then the longing for identification with the beloved becomes a lust. And it is this longing for identification, utter merging, which is at the base of the incest problem. In psychoanalysis almost every trouble in the psyche is traced to an incest-desire. But it won't do. Incest-desire is only one of the modes by which men strive to get their gratification of the intensest vibration of the spiritual nerves without any resistance. In the family, the natural vibration is most nearly in unison. With a stranger there is greater resistance. Incest is the getting of gratification and the avoiding of resistance.

The root of all evil is that we all want this spiritual gratification, this flow, this apparent heightening of life, this knowledge, this valley of many-coloured grass, even grass and light prismatically decomposed, giving ecstasy. We want all this *without resistance*. We want it continually. And this is the root of all evil in us.

We ought to pray to be resisted, and resisted to the bitter end. We ought to decide to have done at last with craving.

The motto to *The Fall of the House of Usher* is a couple of lines from Beranger.

Son coeur est un luth suspendu:

Sitot qu'on le touche il resonance.

We have all the trappings of Poe's rather overdone, vulgar fantasy. 'I reined my horse to the precipitous brink of a black and lurid tarn that lay in unruffled lustre by the dwelling, and gazed down - but with a shudder even more thrilling than before - upon the remodelled and inverted images of the grey sedge, and the ghastly tree-stems, and the vacant and eye-like windows.' The House of Usher, both dwelling and family, was very old. Minute fungi overspread the exterior of the house, hanging in festoons from the eaves. Gothic archways a valet of stealthy step, sombre tapestries, ebon black floors a profusion of tattered and antique furniture, feeble gleams of encrimsoned light through latticed panes. and over all 'an air of stern, deep, and irredeemable gloom' - this makes up the interior.

The inmates of the house, Roderick and Madeline Usher, are the last remnants of their incomparably ancient and decayed race. Roderick has the same large,

luminous eye, the same slightly arched nose of delicate Hebrew model, as characterized Ligeia. He is ill with the nervous malady of his family. It is he whose nerves are so strung that they vibrate to the unknown quiverings of the ether. He, too, has lost his self, his living soul, and become a sensitized instrument of the external influences; his nerves are verily like an aeolian harp which must vibrate. He lives in 'some struggle with the grim phantasm, Fear,' for he is only the physical, post-mortem reality of a living being.

It is a question how much, once the true centrality of the self is broken, the instrumental consciousness of man can register. When man becomes selfless, wafting instrumental like a harp in an open window, how much can his elemental consciousness express? The blood as it runs has its own sympathies and responses to the material world, quite apart from seeing. And the nerves we know vibrate all the while to unseen presences, unseen forces. So Roderick Usher quivers on the edge of material existence.

It is this mechanical consciousness which gives 'the fervid facility of his impromptus'. It is the same thing that gives Poe his extraordinary facility in versification. The absence of real central or impulsive being in himself leaves him inordinately, mechanically sensitive to sounds and effects, associations of sounds, associations of rhyme, for example - mechanical, facile, having no root in any passion. It is all a secondary, meretricious process. So we get Roderick Usher's poem, *The Haunted Palace*, with its swift yet mechanical subtleties of rhyme and rhythm, its vulgarity of epithet. It is all a sort of dream-process, where the association between parts is mechanical, accidental as far as passional meaning goes.

Usher thought that all vegetable things had sentience. Surely all material things have a *form* of sentience, even the inorganic: surely they all exist in some subtle and complicated tension of vibration which makes them sensitive to external influence and causes them to have an influence on other external objects, irrespective of contact. It is of this vibration or inorganic consciousness that Poe is master: the sleep-consciousness. Thus Roderick Usher was convinced that his whole surroundings, the stones of the house, the fungi, the water in the tarn, the very reflected image of the whole, was woven into a physical oneness with the family, condensed, as it were, into one atmosphere - the special atmosphere in which alone the Ushers could live. And it was this atmosphere which had moulded the destinies of his family.

But while ever the soul remains alive, it is the moulder and not the moulded. It is the souls of living men that subtly impregnate stones, houses, mountains, continents, and give these their subtlest form. People only become subject to stones after having lost their integral souls.

In the human realm, Roderick had one connection: his sister Madeline. She, too, was dying of a mysterious disorder, nervous, cataleptic. The brother and sister loved each other passionately and exclusively. They were twins, almost identical in looks. It was the same absorbing love between them, this process of unison in nerve-vibration, resulting in more and more extreme exaltation and a sort of consciousness, and a gradual break-down into death. The exquisitely sensitive Roger, vibrating without resistance with his sister Madeline, more and more exquisitely, and gradually devouring her, sucking her life like a vampire in his anguish of extreme love. And she asking to be sucked.

Madeline died and was carried down by her brother into the deep vaults of the house. But she was not dead. Her brother roamed about in incipient madness - a madness of unspeakable terror and guilt. After eight days they were suddenly startled by a clash of metal, then a distinct, hollow metallic, and clangorous, yet apparently muffled, reverberation. Then Roderick Usher, gibbering, began to express himself: '*We have put her living in the tomb!* Said I not that my senses were acute? I *no* tell you that I heard her first feeble movements in the hollow coffin. I heard them - many, many days ago - yet I dared not - *I dared not speak.*'

It is the same old theme of 'each man kills the thing he loves'. He knew his love had killed her. He knew she died at last, like Ligeia, unwilling and unappeased. So, she rose again upon him.

But then without those doors there *did* stand the lofty and enshrouded figure of the lady Madeline of Usher. There was blood upon her white robes, and the evidence of some bitter struggle upon every portion of her emaciated frame. For a moment she remained trembling and reeling to and fro upon the threshold, then, with a low moaning cry, fell heavily inward upon the person of her brother, and in her violent and now final death-agonies bore him to the floor a corpse, and a victim to the terrors he had anticipated.

It is lurid and melodramatic, but it is true. It is a ghastly psychological truth of what happens in the last stages of this beloved love, which cannot be separate, cannot be isolate, cannot listen in isolation to the isolate Holy Ghost. For it is the Holy Ghost we must live by. The next era is the era of the Holy Ghost. And the Holy Ghost speaks individually inside each individual: always, for ever a ghost. There is no manifestation to the general world. Each isolate individual listening in isolation to the Holy Ghost within him.

The Ushers, brother and sister, betrayed the Holy Ghost in themselves. They would love, love, without resistance. They would love, they would merge, they would be as one thing. So they dragged each other down into death. For the Holy Ghost says you must not be as one thing with another being. Each must abide by

itself, and correspond only within certain limits.

The best tales all have the same burden. Hate is as inordinate as love, and as slowly consuming, as secret, as underground, as subtle. All this underground vault business in Poe only symbolizes that which takes place *beneath* the consciousness. On top, all is fair-spoken. Beneath, there is awful murderous extremity of burying alive. Fortunato, in *The Cask of Amontillado*, is buried alive out of perfect hatred, as the lady Madeline of Usher is buried alive out of love. The lust of hate is the inordinate desire to consume and unspeakably possess the soul of the hated one, just as the lust of love is the desire to possess, or to be possessed by, the beloved, utterly. But in either case the result is the dissolution of both souls, each losing itself in transgressing its own bounds.

The lust of Montresor is to devour utterly the soul of Fortunato. It would be no use killing him outright. If a man is killed outright his soul remains integral, free to return into the bosom of some beloved, where it can enact itself. In walling-up his enemy in the vault, Montresor seeks to bring about the indescribable capitulation of the man's soul, so that he, the victor, can possess himself of the very being of the vanquished. Perhaps this can actually be done. Perhaps, in the attempt, the victor breaks the bonds of his own identity, and collapses into nothingness, or into the infinite. Becomes a monster.

What holds good for inordinate hate holds good for inordinate love. The motto, *Nemo me impune lacessit*, might just as well be *Nemo me impune amat*.

In *William Wilson* we are given a rather unsubtle account of the attempt of a man to kill his own soul. William Wilson the mechanical, lustful ego succeeds in killing William Wilson the living self. The lustful ego lives on, gradually reducing itself towards the dust of the infinite.

In the *Murders in the Rue Morgue* and *The Gold Bug* we have those mechanical tales where the interest lies in the following out of a subtle chain of cause and effect. The interest is scientific rather than artistic, a study in psychologic reactions.

The fascination of murder itself is curious. Murder is not just killing. Murder is a lust to get at the very quick of life itself, and kill it - hence the stealth and the frequent morbid dismemberment of the corpse, the attempt to get at the very quick of the murdered being, to kind the quick and to possess it. It is curious that the two men fascinated by the art of murder, though in different ways, should have been De Quincey and Poe, men so different in way of life, yet perhaps not so widely different in nature. In each of them is traceable that strange lust for extreme love and extreme hate, possession by mystic violence of the other soul, or violent deathly surrender of the soul in the self: an absence of manly virtue, which stands alone and accepts limits.

Inquisition and torture are akin to murder: the same lust. It is a combat between inquisitor and victim as to whether the inquisitor shall get at the quick of life itself, and pierce it. Pierce the very quick of the soul. The evil will of man tries to do this. The brave soul of man refuses to have the life-quick pierced in him. It is strange: but just as the thwarted will can persist evilly, after death, so can the brave spirit preserve, even through torture and death, the quick of life and truth. Nowadays society is evil. It finds subtle ways of torture, to destroy the life-quick, to get at the life-quick in a man. Every possible form. And still a man can hold out, if he can laugh and listen to the Holy Ghost. - But society is evil, evil, and love is evil. And evil breeds evil, more and more.

So the mystery goes on. La Bruyere says that all our human unhappiness *viennent de ne pouvoir etre seuls*. As long as man lives he will be subject to the yearning of love or the burning of hate, which is only inverted love.

But he is subject to something more than this. If we do not live to eat, we do not live to love either.

We live to stand alone, and listen to the Holy Ghost. The Holy Ghost, who is inside us, and who is many gods. Many gods come and go, some say one thing and some say another, and we have to obey the God of the innermost hour. It is the multiplicity of gods within us make up the Holy Ghost.

But Poe knew only love, love, love, intense vibrations and heightened consciousness. Drugs, women, self-destruction, but anyhow the prismatic ecstasy of heightened consciousness and sense of love, of flow. The human soul in him was beside itself. But it was not lost. He told us plainly how it was, so that we should know.

He was an adventurer into vaults and cellars and horrible underground passages of the human soul. He sounded the horror and the warning of his own doom.

Doomed he was. He died wanting more love, and love killed him. A ghastly disease, love. Poe telling us of his disease: trying even to make his disease fair and attractive. Even succeeding.

Which is the inevitable falseness, duplicity of art, American art in particular.

CHAPTER 7

Nathaniel Hawthorne and The Scarlet Letter

NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE writes romance.

And what's romance? Usually, a nice little tale where you have everything As You Like It, where rain never wets your jacket and gnats never bite your nose and it's always daisy-time. *As You Like It* and *Forest Lovers*, etc. *Morte D'Arthur*.

Hawthorne obviously isn't this kind of romanticist: though nobody has muddy boots in *The Scarlet Letter*, either.

But there is more to it. *The Scarlet Letter* isn't a pleasant, pretty romance. It is a sort of parable, an earthly story with a hellish meaning.

All the time there is this split in the American art and art-consciousness. On the top it is as nice as pie, goody-goody and lovey-dovey. Like Hawthorne being such a blue-eyed darling, in life, and Longfellow and the rest such sucking-doves. Hawthorne's wife said she 'never saw him in time', which doesn't mean she saw him too late. But always in the 'frail effulgence of eternity'.

Serpents they were. Look at the inner meaning of their art and see what demons they were.

You *must* look through the surface of American art, and see the inner diabolism of the symbolic meaning. Otherwise it is all mere childishness.

That blue-eyed darling Nathaniel knew disagreeable things in his inner soul. He was careful to send them out in disguise.

Always the same. The deliberate consciousness of Americans so fair and smooth-spoken, and the under-consciousness so devilish. *Destroy! destroy! destroy!* hums the under-consciousness. *Love and produce! Love and produce!* cackles the upper consciousness. And the world hears only the Love-and-produce cackle. Refuses to hear the hum of destruction underneath. Until such time as it will *have* to hear.

The American has got to destroy. It is his destiny. It is his destiny to destroy the whole corpus of the white psyche, the white consciousness. And he's got to do it secretly. As the growing of a dragon-fly inside a chrysalis or cocoon destroys the larva grub, secretly.

Though many a dragon-fly never gets out of the chrysalis case: dies inside. As America might.

So the secret chrysalis of *The Scarlet Letter*, diabolically destroying the old

psyche inside.

Be good! Be good! warbles Nathaniel. *Be good, and never sin! Be sure your sins will find you out..*

So convincingly that his wife never saw him 'as in time'.

Then listen to the diabolic undertone of *The Scarlet Letter*.

Man ate of the tree of knowledge, and became ashamed of himself.

Do you imagine Adam had never lived with Eve before that apple episode? Yes, he had. As a wild animal with his mate.

It didn't become 'sin' till the knowledge-poison entered. That apple of Sodom.

We are divided in ourselves, against ourselves. And that is the meaning of the cross symbol.

In the first place, Adam knew Eve as a wild animal knows its mate, momentarily, but vitally, in blood-knowledge. Blood-knowledge, not mind-knowledge. Blood-knowledge, that seems utterly to forget, but doesn't. Blood-knowledge, instinct, intuition, all the vast vital flux of knowing that goes on in the dark, antecedent to the mind.

Then came that beastly apple, and the other sort of knowledge started.

Adam began to look at himself. 'My hat!' he said. 'What's this ? My Lord ! What the deuce ! - And Eve ! I wonder about Eve.'

Thus starts KNOWING. Which shortly runs to UNDERSTANDING, when the devil gets his own.

When Adam went and took Eve, *after* the apple, he didn't do any more than he had done many a time before, in act. But in consciousness he did something very different. So did Eve. Each of them kept an eye on what they were doing, they watched what was happening to them. They wanted to KNOW. And that was the birth of sin. Not *doing* it, but KNOWING about it. Before the apple, they had shut their eyes and their minds had gone dark. Now, they peeped and pried and imagined. They watched themselves. And they felt uncomfortable after. They felt self-conscious. So they said, 'The act is sin. Let's hide. We've sinned.'

No wonder the Lord kicked them out of the Garden. Dirty hypocrites.

The sin was the self-watching, self-consciousness. The sin, and the doom. Dirty understanding.

Nowadays men do hate the idea of dualism. It's no good, dual we are. The cross. If we accept the symbol, then, virtually, we accept the fact. We are divided against ourselves.

For instance, the blood *hates* being KNOWN. Hence the profound instinct of privacy.

And on the other hand, the mind and the spiritual consciousness of man

simply *hates* the dark potency of blood-acts: hates the genuine dark sensual orgasms, which do, for the time being, actually obliterate the mind and the spiritual consciousness, plunge them in a suffocating flood of darkness.

You can't get away from this.

Blood-consciousness overwhelms, obliterates, and annuls mind-consciousness.

Mind-consciousness extinguishes blood-consciousness, and consumes the blood.

We are all of us conscious in both ways. And the two ways are antagonistic in us.

They will always remain so.

That is our cross.

The antagonism is so obvious, and so far-reaching, that it extends to the smallest thing. The cultured, highly-conscious person of today *loathes* any form of physical, 'menial' work: such as washing dishes or sweeping a floor or chopping wood. This menial work is an insult to the spirit. 'When I see men carrying heavy loads, doing brutal work, it always makes me want to cry,' said a beautiful, cultured woman to me.

'When you say that, it makes me want to beat you,' said I, in reply. 'When I see you with your beautiful head pondering heavy thoughts, I just want to hit you. It outrages me.'

My father hated books, hated the sight of anyone reading or writing.

My mother hated the thought that any of her sons should be condemned to manual labour. Her sons must have something higher than that.

She won. But she died first.

He laughs longest who laughs last.

There is a basic hostility in all of us between the physical and the mental, the blood and the spirit. The mind is 'ashamed' of the blood. And the blood is destroyed by the mind, actually. Hence pale-faces.

At present the mind-consciousness and the so-called spirit triumphs. In America supremely. In America, nobody does anything from the blood. Always from the nerves, if not from the mind. The blood is chemically reduced by the nerves, in American activity.

When an Italian labourer labours, his mind and nerves sleep, his blood acts ponderously.

Americans, when they are *doing* things, never seem really to be doing them. They are 'busy about' it. They are always busy 'about' something. But truly *immersed* in *doing* something, with the deep blood-consciousness active, that they never are.

They *admire* the blood-conscious spontaneity. And they want to get it in their heads. 'Live from the body,' they shriek. It is their last mental shriek. *Coordinate*.

It is a further attempt still to rationalize the body and blood. 'Think about such and such a muscle,' they say, 'and relax there.'

And every time you 'conquer' the body with the mind (you can say 'heel' it, if you like) you cause a deeper, more dangerous complex or tension somewhere else.

Ghastly Americans, with their blood no longer blood. A yellow spiritual fluid.
The Fall.

There have been lots of Falls.

We *fell* into *knowledge* when Eve bit the apple. Self-conscious knowledge. For the first time the mind put up a flight against the blood. Wanting to UNDERSTAND. That is to intellectualize the blood.

The blood must be *shed*, says Jesus.

Shed on the cross of our own divided psyche.

Shed the blood, and you become mind-conscious. Eat the body and drink the blood, self-cannibalizing, and you become extremely conscious, like Americans and some Hindus. Devour yourself, and God knows what a lot you'll know, what a lot you'll be conscious of.

Mind you don't choke yourself.

For a long time men *believed* that they could be perfected through the mind, through the spirit. They believed, passionately. They had their ecstasy in pure consciousness. They *believed* in purity, chastity, and the wings of the spirit.

America soon plucked the bird of the spirit. America soon killed the *belief* in the spirit. But not the practice. The practice continued with a sarcastic vehemence. America, with a perfect inner contempt for the spirit and the consciousness of man, practices the same spirituality and universal love and KNOWING all the time, incessantly, like a drug habit. And inwardly gives not a fig for it. Only for the *sensation*. The pretty-pretty *sensation* of love, loving all the world. And the nice fluttering aeroplane *sensation* of knowing, knowing, knowing. Then the prettiest of all sensations, the sensation of UNDERSTANDING. Oh, what a lot they understand, the darlings! So good at the trick, they are. Just a trick of self-conceit.

The Scarlet Letter gives the show away.

You have your pure-pure young parson Dimmesdale.

You have the beautiful Puritan Hester at his feet.

And the first thing she does is to seduce him.

And the first thing he does is to be seduced.

And the second thing they do is to hug their sin in secret, and gloat over it, and try to understand.

Which is the myth of New England.

Deerslayer refused to be seduced by Judith Hutter. At least the Sodom apple of sin didn't fetch him

But Dimmesdale was seduced gloatingly. Oh, luscious Sin!

He was such a pure young man.

That he had to make a fool of purity.

The American psyche.

Of course, the best part of the game lay in keeping up pure appearances.

The greatest triumph a woman can have, especially an American woman, is the triumph of seducing a man: especially if he is pure.

And he gets the greatest thrill of all, in falling. - 'Seduce me, Mrs Hercules.'

And the pair of them share the subtlest delight in keeping up pure appearances, when everybody knows all the while. But the power of pure appearances is something to exult in. All America gives in to it. *Look pure!*

To seduce a man. To have everybody know. To keep up appearances of purity. Pure!

This is the great triumph of woman.

A. The Scarlet Letter. Adulteress! The great Alpha. Alpha! Adulteress! The new Adam and Adama! American!

A. Adulteress! Stitched with gold thread, glittering upon the bosom. The proudest insignia.

Put her upon the scaffold and worship her there. Worship her there. The Woman, the Magna Mater. A. Adulteress! Abel!

Abel! Abel! Abel! Admirable!

It becomes a farce.

The fiery heart. A. Mary of the Bleeding Heart. Mater Adolerata! A. Capital A. Adulteress. Glittering with gold thread. Abel! Adultery. Admirable!

It is, perhaps, the most colossal satire ever penned. *The Scarlet Letter*. And by a blue-eyed darling of a Nathaniel.

Not Bumppo, however.

The human spirit, fixed in a lie, adhering to a lie, giving itself perpetually the lie.

All begins with A.

Adulteress. Alpha Abel, Adam. A. America.

The Scarlet Letter.

'Had there been a Papist among the crowd of Puritans, he might have seen in this beautiful woman, so picturesque in her attire and mien, and with the infant at

her bosom, an object to remind him of the image of Divine Maternity, which so many illustrious painters have vied with one another to represent; something which should remind him, indeed, but only by contrast, of that sacred image of sinless Motherhood, whose infant was to redeem the world.'

Whose infant was to redeem the world indeed! It will be a startling redemption the world will get from the American infant.

Here was a taint of deepest sin in the most sacred quality of human life, working such effect that the world was only the darker for this woman's beauty, and more lost for the infant she had borne.

Just listen to the darling. Isn't he a master of apology?

Of symbols, too.

His pious blame is a chuckle of praise all the while.

Oh, Hester, you are a demon. A man must be pure, just so that you can seduce him to a fall. Because the greatest thrill in life is to bring down the Sacred Saint with a flop into the mud. Then when you've brought him down humbly wipe off the mud with your hair, another Magdalen. And then go home and dance a witch's jig of triumph, and stitch yourself a Scarlet Letter with gold thread, as duchesses used to stitch themselves coronets. And then stand meek on the scaffold and fool the world. Who will all be envying you your sin, and beating you because you've stolen an advantage over them.

Hester Prynne is the great nemesis of woman. She is the KNOWING Ligeia risen diabolic from the grave. Having her own back. UNDERSTANDING.

This time it is Mr Dimmesdale who dies. She lives on and is Abel.

His spiritual love was a lie. And prostituting the woman to his spiritual love, as popular clergymen do, in his preachings and loftiness, was a tall white lie. Which came flop.

We are so pure in spirit. Hi-tiddly-i-ty!

Till she tickled him in the right place, and he fell.

Flop.

Flop goes spiritual love.

But keep up the game. Keep up appearances. Pure are the pure. To the pure all things, *etc.*

Look out, Mister, for the Female Devotee. Whatever you do, don't let her start tickling you. She knows your weak spot. Mind your Purity.

When Hester Prynne seduced Arthur Dimmesdale it was the beginning of the end. But from the beginning of the end to the end of the end is a hundred years or two.

Mr Dimmesdale also wasn't at the end of his resources. Previously, he had lived by governing his body, ruling it, in the interests of his spirit. Now he has a

good time all by himself torturing his body, whipping it, piercing it with thorns, macerating himself. It's a form of masturbation. He wants to get a mental grip on his body. And since he can't quite manage it with the mind, witness his fall - he will give it what for, with whips. His will shall lash his body. And he enjoys his pains. Wallows in them. To the pure all things are pure.

It is the old self-mutilation process, gone rotten. The mind wanting to get its teeth in the blood and flesh. The ego exulting in the tortures of the mutinous flesh. I, the ego, I *will* triumph over my own flesh. Lash! Lash! I am a grand free spirit. *Lash!* I am the master of my soul! *Lash! Lash!* I am the captain of my soul. *Lash!* Hurray! 'In the fell clutch of circum-stance,' etc., etc.

Good-bye Arthur. He depended on women for his Spiritual Devotees, spiritual brides. So, the woman just touched him in his weak spot, his Achilles Heel of the flesh. Look out for the spiritual bride. She's after the weak spot.

It is the battle of wills.

'For the will therein lieth, which dieth not -'

The Scarlet Woman becomes a Sister of Mercy. Didn't she just, in the late war. Oh, Prophet Nathaniel!

Hester urges Dimmesdale to go away with her, to a new country, to a new life. He isn't having any.

He knows there is no new country, no new life on the globe today. It is the same old thing, in different degrees, every-where. *Plus ca change, plus c'est la meme chose*. Hester thinks, with Dimmesdale for her husband, and Pearl for her child, in Australia, maybe, she'd have been perfect.

But she wouldn't. Dimmesdale had already fallen from his integrity as a minister of the Gospel of the Spirit. He had lost his manliness. He didn't see the point of just leaving himself between the hands of a woman and going away to a 'new country', to be her thing entirely. She'd only have despised him more, as every woman despises a man who has 'fallen' to her; despises him with her tenderest lust.

He stood for nothing any more. So let him stay where he was and dree out his weird.

She had dished him and his spirituality, so he hated her. As Angel Clare was dished, and hated Tess. As Jude in the end hated Sue: or should have done. The women make fools of them, the spiritual men. And when, as men, they've gone flop in their spirituality, they can't pick themselves up whole any more. So they just crawl, and die detesting the female, or the females, who made them fall.

The saintly minister gets a bit of his own back, at the last minute, by making public confession from the very scaffold where he was exposed. Then he dodges into death. But he's had a bit of his own back, on everybody.

‘Shall we not meet again?’ whispered she, bending her face down close to him. ‘Shall we not spend our immortal life together ? Surely, surely, we have ransomed one another with all this woe! Thou lookest far into eternity with those bright dying eyes. Tell me what thou seest !’

‘Hush, Hester - hush,’ said he, with tremulous solemnity. ‘The law we broke! - the sin here so awfully revealed! Let these alone be in thy thoughts. I fear! I fear!’

So he dies, throwing the ‘sin’ in her teeth, and escaping into death.

The law we broke, indeed. You bet!

Whose law!

But it is truly a law, that man must either stick to the belief he has grounded himself on, and obey the laws of that belief, or he must admit the belief itself to be inadequate, and prepare himself for a new thing.

There was no change in belief, either in Hester or in Dimmesdale or in Hawthorne or in America. The same old treacherous belief, which was really cunning disbelief, in the Spirit, in Purity, in Selfless Love, and in Pure Consciousness. They would go on following this belief, for the sake of the sensation of it. But they would make a fool of it all the time. Like Woodrow Wilson, and the rest of modern Believers. The rest of modern Saviours.

If you meet a Saviour, today, be sure he is trying to make an innermost fool of you. Especially if the saviour be an UNDERSTANDING WOMAN, offering her love.

Hester lives on, pious as pie, being a public nurse. She becomes at last an acknowledged saint, Abel of the Scarlet Letter.

She would, being a woman. She has had her triumph over the individual man, so she quite loves subscribing to the whole spiritual life of society. She will make herself as false as hell, for society’s sake, once she’s had her real triumph over Saint Arthur.

Blossoms out into a Sister-of-Mercy Saint.

But it’s a long time before she really takes anybody in. People kept on thinking her a witch, which she was.

As a matter of fact, unless a woman is held, by man, safe within the bounds of belief, she becomes inevitably a destructive force. She can’t help herself. A woman is almost always vulnerable to pity. She can’t bear to see anything physical hurt. But let a woman loose from the bounds and restraints of man’s fierce belief, in his gods and in himself, and she becomes a gentle devil. She becomes subtly diabolic. The colossal evil of the united spirit of Woman. WOMAN, German woman or American woman, or every other sort of woman, in the last war, was something frightening. As every man knows.

Woman becomes a helpless, would-be-loving demon. She is helpless. Her very love is subtle poison.

Unless a man believes in himself and his gods, *genuinely*: unless he fiercely obeys his own Holy Ghost; his woman will destroy him. Woman is the nemesis of doubting man. She can't help it.

And with Hester, after Ligeia, woman becomes a nemesis to man. She bolsters him up from the outside, she destroys him from the inside. And he dies hating her, as Dimmesdale did.

Dimmesdale's spirituality had gone on too long, too far. It had become a false thing. He found his nemesis in woman. And he was done for.

Woman is a strange and rather terrible phenomenon, to man. When the subconscious soul of woman recoils from its creative union with man, it becomes a destructive force. It exerts, willy-nilly, an invisible destructive influence. The woman herself may be as nice as milk, to all appearance, like Ligeia. But she is sending out waves of silent destruction of the faltering spirit in men, all the same. She doesn't know it. She can't even help it. But she does it. The devil is in her.

The very women who are most busy saving the bodies of men, and saving the children: these women-doctors, these nurses, these educationalists, these public-spirited women these female saviours: they are all, from the inside, sending out waves of destructive malevolence which eat out the inner life of a man, like a cancer. It is so, it will be so, till men realize it and react to save themselves.

God won't save us. The women are so devilish godly. Men must save themselves in this strait, and by no sugary means either.

A woman can use her sex in sheer malevolence and poison, while she is *behaving* as meek and good as gold. Dear darling, she is really snow-white in her blamelessness. And all the while she is using her sex as a she-devil, for the endless hurt of her man. She doesn't know it. She will never believe it if you tell her. And if you give her a slap in the face for her fiendishness, she will rush to the first magistrate, in indigna-tion. She is so *absolutey* blameless, the she-devil, the dear, dutiful creature.

Give her the great slap, just the same, just when she is being most angelic. Just when she is bearing her cross most meekly.

Oh, woman out of bounds is a devil. But it is man's fault. Woman never *asked*, in the first place, to be cast out of her bit of an Eden of belief and trust. It is man's business to bear the responsibility of belief. If he becomes a spiritual fornicator and liar, like Ligeia's husband and Arthur Dimmesdale, how *can* a woman believe in him ? Belief doesn't go by choice. And if a woman doesn't believe in a *man*, she believes, essentially, in nothing. She becomes, willy-nilly,

a devil.

A devil she is, and a devil she will be. And most men will succumb to her devilishness.

Hester Prynne was a devil. Even when she was so meekly going round as a sick-nurse. Poor Hester. Part of her wanted to be saved from her own devilishness. And another part wanted to go on and on in devilishness, for revenge. Revenge! REVENGE! It is this that fills the unconscious spirit of woman today. Revenge against man, and against the spirit of man which has betrayed her into unbelief. Even when she is most sweet and a salvationist, she is her most devilish, is woman. She gives her man the sugar-plum of her own submissive sweetness. And when he's taken this sugar-plum in his mouth, a scorpion comes out of it. After he's taken this Eve to his bosom, oh, so loving, she destroys him inch by inch. Woman and her revenge! She will have it, and go on having it, for decades and decades, unless she's stopped. And to stop her you've got to believe in yourself and your gods, your own Holy Ghost, Sir Man; and then you've got to fight her, and never give in. She's a devil. But in the long run she is conquerable. And just a tiny bit of her wants to be conquered. You've got to fight three-quarters of her, in absolute hell, to get at the final quarter of her that wants a release, at last, from the hell of her own revenge. But it's a long last. And not yet.

'She had in her nature a rich, voluptuous, oriental characteristic - a taste for the gorgeously beautiful.' This is Hester. This is American. But she repressed her nature in the above direction. She would not even allow herself the luxury of labouring at fine, delicate stitching. Only she dressed her little sin-child Pearl vividly, and the scarlet letter was gorgeously embroidered. Her Hecate and Astarte insignia.

'A voluptuous, oriental characteristic -' That lies waiting in American women. It is probable that the Mormons are the forerunners of the coming real America. It is probable that men will have more than one wife, in the coming America. That you will have again a half-oriental womanhood, and a polygamy.

The grey nurse, Hester. The Hecate, the hell-cat. The slowly-evolving voluptuous female of the new era, with a whole new submissiveness to the dark, phallic principle.

But it takes time. Generation after generation of nurses and political women and salvationists. And in the end, the dark erection of the images of sex-worship once more, and the newly submissive women. That kind of depth. Deep women in that respect. When we have at last broken this insanity of mental-spiritual consciousness. And the women *choose* to experience again the great submission.

'The poor, whom she sought out to be the objects of her bounty, often reviled

the hand that was stretched to succour them.'

Naturally. The poor hate a salvationist. They smell the devil underneath.

'She was patient - a martyr indeed - but she forebore to pray for her enemies, lest, in spite of her forgiving aspirations, the words of the blessing should stubbornly twist themselves into a curse.'

So much honesty, at least. No wonder the old witch-lady Mistress Hibbins claimed her for another witch.

'She grew to have a dread of children; for they had imbibed from their parents a vague idea of something horrible in this dreary woman gliding silently through the town, with never any companion but only one child.'

'A vague idea!' Can't you see her 'gliding silently'? It's not a question of a vague idea imbibed, but a definite feeling directly received.

But sometimes, once in many days, or perchance in many months, she felt an eye - a human eye - upon the ignominious brand, that seemed to give a momentary relief, as if half her agony were shared. The next instant, back it all rushed again, with a still deeper throb of pain; for in that brief interval she had sinned again. Had Hester sinned alone ?

Of course not. As for sinning again, she would go on all her life silently, changelessly 'sinning'. She never repented. Not she. Why should she? She had brought down Arthur Dimmesdale, that too-too snow-white bird, and that was her life-work.

As for sinning again when she met two dark eyes in a crowd, why, of course. Somebody who understood as she understood.

I always remember meeting the eyes of a gipsy woman, for one moment, in a crowd, in England. She knew, and I knew. What did we know! I was not able to make out. But we knew.

Probably the same fathomless hate of this spiritual conscious society in which the outcast woman and I both roamed like meek-looking wolves. Tame wolves waiting to shake off their tameness. Never able to.

And again, that 'voluptuous, oriental' characteristic that knows the mystery of the ithyphallic gods. She would not betray the ithyphallic gods to this white, leprous-white society of 'lovers'. Neither will I, if I can help it. These leprous-white, seducing, spiritual women, who 'understand' so much. One has been too often seduced, and 'understood'. 'I can read him like a book,' said my first lover of me. The book is in several volumes, dear. And more and more comes back to me the gulf of dark hate and *other* understanding, in the eyes of the gipsy woman. So different from the hateful white light of understanding which floats like scum on the eyes of white, oh, so white English and American women, with their understanding voices and their deep, sad words, and their profound, *good*

spirits. Pfui!

Hester was scared only of one result of her sin: Pearl. Pearl, the scarlet letter incarnate. The little girl. When women bear children, they produce either devils or sons with gods in them. And it is an evolutionary process. The devil in Hester produced a purer devil in Pearl. And the devil in Pearl will produce - she married an Italian Count - a piece of purer devilishness still.

And so from hour to hour we ripe and ripe.

And then from hour to hour we rot and rot.

There was that in the child 'which often impelled Hester to ask in bitterness of heart, whether it were for good or ill that the poor little creature had been born at all'.

For ill, Hester. But don't worry. Ill is as necessary as good. Malevolence is as necessary as benevolence. If you have brought forth, spawned, a young malevolence, be sure there is a rampant falseness in the world against which this malevolence must be turned. Falseness has to be bitten and bitten, till it is bitten to death. Hence Pearl.

Pearl. Her own mother compares her to the demon of plague, or scarlet fever, in her red dress. But then, plague is necessary to destroy a rotten false humanity.

Pearl, the devilish girl-child, who can be so tender and loving and *understanding*, and then, when she has understood, will give you a hit across the mouth, and turn on you with a grin of sheer diabolic jeering.

Serves you right, you shouldn't be *understood*. That is your vice. You shouldn't want to be loved, and then you'd not get hit across the mouth. Pearl will love you: marvellously. And she'll hit you across the mouth: oh, so neatly. And serves you right.

Pearl is perhaps the most modern child in all literature.

Old-fashioned Nathaniel, with his little-boy charm, he'll tell you what's what. But he'll cover it with smarm.

Hester simply *hates* her child, from one part of herself. And from another, she cherishes her child as her one precious treasure. For Pearl is the continuing of her female revenge on life. But female revenge hits both ways. Hits back at its own mother. The female revenge in Pearl hits back at Hester, the mother, and Hester is simply livid with fury and 'sadness', which is rather amusing.

The child could not be made amenable to rules. In giving her existence a great law had been broken; and the result was a being whose elements were perhaps beautiful and brilliant, but all in dis-order, or with an order peculiar to themselves, amidst which the point of variety and arrangement was difficult or impossible to discover.

Of course, the order is peculiar to themselves. But the point of variety is this:

‘Draw out the loving, sweet soul, draw it out with marvellous understanding; and then spit in its eye.’

Hester, of course, didn’t at all like it when her sweet child drew out her motherly soul, with yearning and deep understanding: and then spit in the motherly eye, with a grin. But it was a process the mother had started.

Pearl had a peculiar look in her eyes: ‘a look so intelligent yet so inexplicable, so perverse, sometimes so malicious, but generally accompanied by a wild flow of spirits, that Hester could not help questioning at such moments whether Pearl was a human child.’

A little demon! But her mother, and the saintly Dimmesdale, had borne her. And Pearl, by the very openness of her perversity, was more straightforward than her parents. She flatly refuses any Heavenly Father, seeing the earthly one such a fraud. And she has the pietistic Dimmesdale on toast, spits right in his eye: in both his eyes.

Poor, brave, tormented little soul, always in a state of recoil, she’ll be a devil to men when she grows up. But the men deserve it. If they’ll let themselves be ‘drawn’, by her loving understanding, they deserve that she shall slap them across the mouth the moment they *are* drawn. The chickens! Drawn and trussed.

Poor little phenomenon of a modern child, she’ll grow up into the devil of a modern woman. The nemesis of weak-kneed modern men, craving to be love-drawn.

The third person in the diabolic trinity, or triangle, of the Scarlet Letter, is Hester’s first husband, Roger Chillingworth. He is an old Elizabethan physician, with a grey beard and a long-furred coat and a twisted shoulder. Another healer. But something of an alchemist, a magician. He is a magician on the verge of modern science, like Francis Bacon.

Roger Chillingworth is of the old order of intellect, in direct line from the medieval Roger Bacon alchemists. He has an old, intellectual belief in the dark sciences, the flemetic philosophies. He is no Christian, no selfless aspirer. He is not an aspirer. He is the old authoritarian in man. The old male authority. But without passional belief. Only intellectual belief in himself and his male authority.

Shakespeare’s whole tragic wail is because of the downfall of the true male authority, the ithyphallic authority and masterhood. It fell with Elizabeth. It was trodden underfoot with Victoria.

But Chillingworth keeps on the *intellectual* tradition. He hates the new spiritual aspirers, like Dimmesdale, with a black, crippled hate. He is the old male authority, in intellectual tradition.

You can’t keep a wife by force of an intellectual tradition. So Hester took to

seducing Dimmesdale.

Yet her only marriage, and her last oath, is with the old Roger. He and she are accomplices in pulling down the spiritual saint.

‘Why dost thou smile so at me -’ she says to her old, vengeful husband. ‘Art thou not like the Black Man that haunts the forest around us? Hast thou not enticed me into a bond which will prove the ruin of my soul?’

‘Not thy soul!’ he answered with another smile. ‘No, not thy soul!’

It is the soul of the pure preacher, that false thing, which they are after. And the crippled physician - this other healer - blackly vengeful in his old, distorted male authority, and the ‘loving’ woman, they bring down the saint between them.

A black and complementary hatred, akin to love, is what Chillingworth feels for the young, saintly parson. And Dimmesdale responds, in a hideous kind of love. Slowly the saint’s life is poisoned. But the black old physician smiles, and tries to keep him alive. Dimmesdale goes in for self-torture, self-lashing his own white, thin, spiritual saviour’s body. The dark Chillingworth listens outside the door and laughs, and prepares another medicine, so that the game can go on longer. And the saint’s very soul goes rotten. Which is the supreme triumph. Yet he keeps up appearances still.

The black, vengeful soul of the crippled, masterful male, still dark in his authority: and the white ghastliness of the fallen saint! The two halves of manhood mutually destroying one another.

Dimmesdale has a ‘coup’ in the very end. He gives the whole show away by confessing publicly on the scaffold, and dodging into death, leaving Hester dished, and Roger as it were, doubly cuckolded. It is a neat last revenge.

Down comes the curtain, as in *Ligeia*’s poem.

But the child Pearl will be on in the next act, with her Italian Count and a new brood of vipers. And Hester greyly Abelling, in the shadows, after her rebelling.

It is a marvellous allegory. It is to me one of the greatest allegories in all literature. *The Scarlet Letter*. Its marvellous under-meaning! And its perfect duplicity.

The absolute duplicity of that blue-eyed *Wunderkind* of a Nathaniel. The American wonder-child, with his magical allegorical insight.

But even wonder-children have to grow up in a generation or two.

And even SIN becomes stale.

CHAPTER 8

Hawthorne's Blithedale Romance

NO OTHER book of Nathaniel Hawthorne is so deep, so dual, and so complete as *The Scarlet Letter*: this great allegory of the triumph of sin.

Sin is a queer thing. It isn't the breaking of divine commandments. It is the breaking of one's own integrity.

For instance, the sin in Hester and Arthur Dimmesdale's case was a sin because they did what they *thought*? it *wrong* to do. If they had really *wanted* to be lovers, and if they had had the honest courage of their own passion, there would have been no sin, even had the desire been only momentary.

But if there had been no sin, they would have lost half the fun, or more, of the game.

It was this very doing of the thing that *they themselves* believed to be wrong, that constituted the chief harm of the act. Man invents sin, in order to enjoy the feeling of being naughty. Also, in order to shift the responsibility for his own acts. A Divine Father tells him what to do. And man is naughty and doesn't obey. And then shiveringly, ignoble man lets down his pants for a flogging.

If the Divine Father doesn't bring on the flogging, in this life, then Sinful Man shiveringly awaits his whipping in the afterlife.

Bah, the Divine Father, like so many other Crowned Heads, has abdicated his authority. Man can sin as much as he likes.

There is only one penalty: the loss of his own integrity. Man should *never* do the thing he believes to be wrong. Because if he does, he loses his own singleness, wholeness, natural honour.

If you want to do a thing, you've either got to believe, sincerely, that its your true nature to do this thing - or else you've got to let it alone.

Believe in your own Holy Ghost. Or else, if you doubt, abstain.

A thing that you sincerely believe in cannot be wrong, because belief does not come at will. It comes only from the Holy Ghost within. Therefore a thing you truly believe in, cannot be wrong.

But there is such a thing as spurious belief. There is such a thing as *evil* belief: a belief that one *cannot do wrong*. There is also such a thing as a half-spurious belief. And this is rottenest of all. The devil lurking behind the cross.

So there you are. Between genuine belief, and spurious belief, and half-genuine belief, you're as likely as not to be in a pickle. And the half-genuine

belief is much the dirtiest, and most deceptive thing in life.

Hester and Dimmesdale believed in the Divine Father, and almost gloatingly sinned against Him. The Allegory of Sin.

Pearl no longer believes in the Divine Father. She says so. She has no Divine Father. Disowns Papa both big and little.

So she can't sin against him.

What will she do, then, if she's got no god to sin against? Why, of course, she'll not be able to sin at all. She'll go her own way gaily, and do as she likes, and she'll say, afterwards, when she's made a mess: 'Yes, I did it. But I acted for the best, and therefore I am blameless. It's the other person's fault. Or else it's Its fault.'

She will be blameless, will Pearl, come what may.

And the world is simply a string of Pearls today. And America is a whole rope of these absolutely immaculate Pearls, who can't sin, let them do what they may, because they've no god to sin against. Mere men, one after another. Men with no ghost to their name.

Pearls!

Oh, the irony, the bitter, bitter irony of the name! Oh Nathaniel, you great man! Oh, America, you Pearl, you Pearl without a blemish!

How *can* Pearl have a blemish, when there's no one but herself to judge Herself? Of course she'll be immaculate, even if, like Cleopatra, she drowns a lover a night in her dirty Nile. The Nilus Flux of her love.

Candida!

By Hawthorne's day it was already Pearl. Before swine, of course. There never yet was a Pearl that wasn't cast before swine.

It's part of her game, part of her pearl-dom.

Because when Circe lies with a man, *he's* a swine after it, if he wasn't one before. Not *she*. Circe is the great white impeccable Pearl.

And yet, oh, Pearl, there's a Nemesis even for you.

There's a Doom, Pearl.

Doom! What a beautiful northern word. Doom.

The doom of the Pearl.

Who will write that Allegory?

Here's what the Doom is, anyhow.

When you don't have a Divine Father to sin against; and when you don't sin against the Son; which the Pearls don't, because they all are very strong on LOVE, stronger on LOVE than on anything: then there's nothing left for you to sin against except the Holy Ghost.

Now, Pearl, come, let's drop you in the vinegar.

And it's a ticklish thing sinning against the Holy Ghost. *'It shall not be forgiven him.'*

Didn't I tell you there was Doom?

It shall not be forgiven her.

The Father forgives: the Son forgives: but the Holy Ghost does *not* forgive. So take that.

The Holy Ghost doesn't forgive because the Holy Ghost is within you. The Holy Ghost *is* you: your very You. So if, in your conceit of your ego, you make a break in your own YOU, in your own integrity, how can you be forgiven? You might as well make a rip in your own bowels. You *know* if you rip your own bowels they will go rotten and *you* will go rotten. And there's an end of you, in the body.

The same if you make a breach with your own Holy Ghost. You go soul-rotten. Like the Pearls.

These dear Pearls, they do anything they like, and remain pure. Oh, purity!

But they can't stop themselves from going rotten inside. Rotten Pearls, fair outside. Their *souls* smell, because their souls are putrefying inside them.

The sin against the Holy Ghost.

And gradually, from within outwards, they rot. Some form of dementia. A thing disintegrating. A decomposing psyche. Dementia.

Quos vult perdere Deus, dementat prius.

Watch these Pearls, these Pearls of modern women. Particularly American women. Battening on love. And fluttering in the first batlike throes of dementia.

You *can* have your cake and eat it. But my God, it will go rotten inside you.

Hawthorne's other books are nothing compared to *The Scarlet Letter*.

But there are good parables, and wonderful dark glimpses of early Puritan America, in *Twice Told Tales*.

The House of the Seven Gables has 'atmosphere'. The passing of the old order of the proud, bearded, black-browed Father: an order which is slowly ousted from life, and lingeringly haunts the old dark places. But comes a new generation to sweep out even the ghosts, with these new vacuum cleaners. No ghost could stand up against a vacuum cleaner.

The new generation is having no ghosts or cobwebs. It is setting up in the photography line, and is just going to make a sound financial thing out of it. For this purpose all old hates and old glooms, that belong to the antique order of Haughty Fathers, all these are swept up in the vacuum cleaner, and the vendetta-born young couple effect a perfect understanding under the black cloth of a camera and prosperity. *Vivat Industria!*

Oh, Nathaniel, you savage ironist! Ugh, how you'd have *hated* it if you'd had

nothing but the prosperous 'dear' young couple to write about! If you'd lived to the day when America was nothing but a Main Street.

The Dark Old Fathers.

The Beloved Wishy-Washy Sons.

The Photography Business.

???

Hawthorne came nearest to actuality in the *Blithedale Romance*. This novel is a sort of picture of the notorious Brook Farm experiment. There the famous idealists and transcendentalists of America met to till the soil and hew the timber in the sweat of their own brows, thinking high thoughts the while, and breathing an atmosphere of communal love, and tingling in tune with the Oversoul, like so many strings of a super-celestial harp. An old twang of the Crevecoeur instrument.

Of course they fell out like cats and dogs. Couldn't stand one another. And all the music they made was the music of their quarrelling.

You *can't* idealize hard work. Which is why America invents so many machines and contrivances of all sort: so that they need do no physical work.

And that's why the idealists left off brookfarming, and took to bookfarming.

You *can't* idealize the essential brute blood-activity, the brute blood desires, the basic, sardonic blood-knowledge.

That you *can't* idealize.

And you can't eliminate it.

So there's the end of ideal man.

Man is made up of a dual consciousness, of which the two halves are most of the time in opposition to one another - and will be so as long as time lasts.

You've got to learn to change from one consciousness to the other, turn and about. Not to try to make either absolute, or dominant. The Holy Ghost tells you the how and when.

Never did Nathaniel feel himself more spectral - of course he went brookfarming - than when he was winding the horn in the morning to summon the transcendental labourers to their tasks, or than when marching off with a hoe ideally to hoe the turnips, 'Never did I feel more spectral,' says Nathaniel.

Never did I feel such a fool, would have been more to the point.

Farcical fools, trying to idealize labour. You'll never succeed in idealizing hard work. Before you can dig mother earth you've got to take off your ideal jacket. The harder a man works, at brute labour, the thinner becomes his idealism, the darker his mind. And the harder a man works, at mental labour, at

idealism, at transcendental occupations, the thinner becomes his blood, and the more brittle his nerves.

Oh, the brittle-nerved brookfarmers!

You've got to be able to do both: the mental work, and the brute work. But be prepared to step from one pair of shoes into another. Don't try and make it all one pair of shoes.

The attempt to idealize the blood!

Nathaniel knew he was a fool, attempting it.

He went home to his amiable spouse and his sanctum sanctorum of a study.

Nathaniel!

But the *Blithedale Romance*. It has a beautiful, wintry-evening farm-kitchen sort of opening.

Dramatis Personae:

1. *I.* The narrator: whom we will call Nathaniel. A wisp of a sensitive, withal deep, literary young man no longer so very young.

2. *Zenobia*: a dark, proudly voluptuous clever woman with a tropical flower in her hair. Said to be sketched from Margaret Fuller, in whom Hawthorne saw some 'evil nature'. Nathaniel was more aware of Zenobia's voluptuousness than of her 'mind'.

3. *Hollingsworth*: a black-bearded blacksmith with a deep-voiced lust for saving criminals. Wants to build a great Home for these unfortunates.

4. *Priscilla*: a sort of White Lily, a clinging little mediumistic sempstress who has been made use of in public seances. A sort of prostitute soul.

5. *Zenobia's Husband*: an unpleasant decayed person with magnetic powers and teeth full of gold - or set in gold. It is he who has given public spiritualist demonstrations, with Priscilla for the medium. He is of the dark, sensual, decayed-handsome sort, and comes in unexpectedly by the back door.

PLOT I. - I, Nathaniel, at once catch cold, and have to be put to bed. Am nursed with inordinate tenderness by the blacksmith, whose great hands are gentler than a woman's, *etc.*

The two men love one another with a love surpassing the love of women, so long as the healing-and-salvation business lasts. When Nathaniel wants to get well and have a soul of his own, he turns with hate to the black-bearded, booming salvationist, Hephaestos of the underworld. Hates him, for tyrannous monomania.

PLOT II. - Zenobia, that clever lustrous woman, is fascinated by the criminal-saving blacksmith, and would have him at any price. Meanwhile she has the subtlest current of understanding with the frail but deep Nathaniel. And she takes the White Lily half-pityingly, half contemptuously under a rich and glossy dark

wing.

PLOT III. - The blacksmith is after Zenobia, to get her money for his criminal asylum: of which, of course, he will be the first inmate.

PLOT IV. - Nathaniel also feels his mouth watering for the dark-luscious Zenobia.

PLOT V. - The White Lily, Priscilla, vaporously festering, turns out to be the famous Veiled Lady of public spiritualist shows: she whom the undesirable Husband, called the Professor, has used as a medium. Also she is Zenobia's half-sister.

Debacle

Nobody wants Zenobia in the end. She goes off without her flower. The blacksmith marries Priscilla. Nathaniel dribblingly confesses that he, too, has loved Prissy all the while. Boo-hoo!

Conclusion

A few years after, Nathaniel meets the blacksmith in a country lane near a humble cottage, leaning totteringly on the arm of the frail but fervent Priscilla. Gone are all dreams of asylums, and the saviour of criminals can't even save himself from his own Veiled Lady.

There you have a nice little bunch of idealists, transcendentalists, brookfarmers, and disintegrated gentry. All going slightly rotten.

Two Pearls: a white Pearl and a black Pearl: the latter more expensive, lurid with money.

The white Pearl, the little medium, Priscilla, the imitation pearl, has truly some 'supernormal' powers. She could drain the blacksmith of his blackness and his smith-strength.

Priscilla, the little psychic prostitute. The degenerate descendant of Ligeia. The absolutely yielding, 'loving' woman, who abandons herself utterly to her lover. Or even to a gold-toothed 'professor' of spiritualism.

Is it all bunkum, this spiritualism? Is it just rot, this Veiled Lady ?

Not quite. Apart even from telepathy, the apparatus of human consciousness is the most wonderful message-receiver in existence. Beats a wireless station to nothing.

Put Prissy under the tablecloth then. Miaowl

What happens? Prissy under the tablecloth, like a canary when you cover his cage, goes into a 'sleep', a trance.

A trance, not a sleep. A trance means that all her *individual* personal intelligence goes to sleep, like a hen with her head under her wing. But the *apparatus* of consciousness remains working. Without a soul in it.

And what can this apparatus of consciousness do, when it works? Why, surely

something. A wireless apparatus goes tick-tick-tick, taking down messages. So does your human apparatus. All kinds of messages. Only the soul, or the under-consciousness, deals with these messages in the dark, in the under-conscious. Which is the natural course of events.

But what sorts of messages ? All sorts. Vibrations from the stars, vibrations from unknown magnetos, vibrations from unknown people, unknown passions. The human apparatus receives them all and they are all dealt with in the under-conscious.

There are also vibrations of thought, many, many. Necessary to get the two human instruments in key.

There may even be vibrations of ghosts in the air. Ghosts being dead *wills*, mind you, not dead souls. The soul has nothing to do with these dodges.

But some unit of force may persist for a time, after the death of an individual - some associations of vibrations may linger like little clouds in the etheric atmosphere after the death of a human being, or an animal. And these little clots of vibration may transfer themselves to the conscious-apparatus of the medium. So that the dead son of a disconsolate widow may send a message to his mourning mother to tell her that he owes Bill Jackson seven dollars: or that Uncle Sam's will is in the back of the bureau: and cheer up, Mother, I'm all right.

There is never much worth in these 'messages', because they are never more than fragmentary items of dead, disintegrated consciousness. And the medium has, and always will have, a hopeless job, trying to disentangle the muddle of messages.

Again, coming events *may* cast their shadow before. The oracle may receive on her conscious-apparatus material vibrations to say that the next great war will break out in 1925. And in so far as the realm of cause-and-effect is master of the living soul, in so far as events are mechanically maturing, the forecast may be true.

But the living souls of men may upset the mechanical march of events at any moment.

Rien de certain.

Vibrations of subtlest matter. Concatenations of vibrations and shocks! Spiritualism.

And what then? It is all just materialistic, and a good deal is, and always will be, charlatanry.

Because the real human soul, the Holy Ghost, has its own deep prescience, which will not be put into figures, but flows on dark, a stream of prescience.

And the real human soul is too proud, and too sincere in its belief in the Holy

Ghost that is within, to stoop to the practices of these spiritualist and other psychic tricks of material vibrations.

Because the first part of reverence is the acceptance of the fact that the Holy Ghost will never materialize: will never be anything but a ghost.

And the second part of reverence is the watchful observance of the motions, the comings and goings within us, of the Holy Ghost, and of the many gods that make up the Holy Ghost.

The Father had his day, and fell.

The Son has had his day, and fell.

It is the day of the Holy Ghost.

But when souls fall corrupt, into disintegration, they have no more day. They have sinned against the Holy Ghost.

These people in *Blithedale Romance* have sinned against the Holy Ghost, and corruption has set in.

All, perhaps, except the I, Nathaniel. He is still a sad, integral consciousness.

But not excepting Zenobia. The Black Pearl is rotting down. Fast. The cleverer she is, the faster she rots.

And they are all disintegrating, so they take to psychic tricks. It is a certain sign of the disintegration of the psyche in a man, and much more so in a woman, when she takes to spiritualism, and table-rapping, and occult messages, or witchcraft and supernatural powers of that sort. When men want to be supernatural, be sure that something has gone wrong in their natural stuff. More so, even, with a woman.

And yet the soul has its own profound subtleties of knowing. And the blood has its strange omniscience.

But this isn't impudent and materialistic, like spiritualism and magic and all that range of pretentious supernaturalism.

CHAPTER 9

Dana's Two Years Before The Mast

You can't idealize brute labour. That is to say, you can't idealize brute labour, without coming undone, as an idealist.

The soil! The great ideal of the soil. Novels like Thomas Hardy's and pictures like the Frenchman Millet's. The soil. What happens when you idealize the soil, the mother-earth, and really go back to it? Then with overwhelming conviction it is borne in upon you, as it was upon Thomas Hardy, that the whole scheme of things is against you. The whole massive rolling of natural fate is coming down on you like a slow glacier, to crush you to extinction. As an idealist.

Thomas Hardy's pessimism is an absolutely true finding. It is the absolutely true statement of the idealist's last realization, as he wrestles with the bitter soil of beloved mother-earth. He loves her, loves her, loves her. And she just entangles and crushes him like a slow Laocoon snake. The idealist must perish, says mother-earth. Then let him perish.

The great imaginative love of the soil itself! Tolstoy had it, and Thomas Hardy. And both are driven to a kind of fanatic denial of life, as a result.

You can't idealize mother-earth. You can try. You can even succeed. But succeeding, you succumb. She will have no pure idealist sons. None.

If you are a child of mother-earth, you must learn to discard your ideal self, in season, as you discard your clothes at night.

Americans have never loved the soil of America as Europeans have loved the soil of Europe. America has never been a blood-home-land. Only an ideal home-land. The home-land of the idea, of the *spirit*. And of the pocket. Not of the blood.

That has yet to come, when the idea and the spirit have collapsed from their false tyranny.

Europe has been loved with a blood love. That has made it beautiful.

In America, you have Fenimore Cooper's beautiful landscape: but that is wish-fulfilment, done from a distance. And you have Thoreau in Concord. But Thoreau sort of isolated his own bit of locality and put it under a lens, to examine it. He almost anatomized it, with his admiration.

America isn't a blood-home-land. For every American, the blood-home-land is Europe. The spirit-home-land is America.

Transcendentalism. Transcend this home-land business, exalt the idea of

These States till you have made it a universal idea, says the true American. The oversoul is a world-soul, not a local thing.

So, in the next great move of imaginative conquest, Americans turned to the sea. Not to the land. Earth is too specific, too particular. Besides, the blood of white men is wine of no American soil. No, no.

But the blood of all men is ocean-born. We have our material universality, our blood-oneness, in the sea. The salt water.

You can't idealize the soil. But you've got to try. And trying, you reap a great imaginative reward. And the greatest reward is failure. To know you have failed, that you must fail. That is the greatest comfort of all, at last.

Tolstoi failed with the soil: Thomas Hardy too: and Gio-vanni Verga; the three greatest.

The further extreme, the greatest mother, is the sea. Love the great mother of the sea, the Magna Mater. And see how bitter it is. And see how you must fail to win her to your ideal: forever fail. Absolutely fail.

Swinburne tried in England. But the Americans made the greatest trial. The most vivid failure.

At a certain point, human life becomes uninteresting to men. What then? They turn to some universal.

The greatest material mother of us all is the sea.

Dana's eyes failed him when he was studying at Harvard. And suddenly, he turned to the sea, the naked Mother. He went to sea as a common sailor before the mast.

You can't idealize brute labour. Yet you can. You can go through with brute labour, and *know* what it means. You can even meet and match the sea, and KNOW her.

This is what Dana wanted: a naked fighting experience with the sea.

KNOW THYSELF. That means, know the earth that is in your blood. Know the sea that is in your blood. The great elementals.

But we must repeat: KNOWING and BEING are opposite, antagonistic states. The more you know, exactly, the less you *are*. The more you *are*, in being, the less you know.

This is the great cross of man, his dualism. The blood-self, and the nerve-brain self.

Knowing, then, is the slow death of being. Man has his epochs of being, his epochs of knowing. It will always be a great oscillation. The goal is to know how not-to- know.

Dana took another great step in knowing: knowing the mother sea. But it was a step also in his own undoing. It was a new phase of dissolution of his own

being. Afterwards, he would be a less human thing. He would be a knower: but more near to mechanism than before. That is our cross, our doom.

And so he writes, in his first days at sea, in winter, on the Atlantic:

Nothing will compare with the *early breaking of the day* upon the wide ocean. There is something in the first grey streaks stretching along the eastern horizon, and throwing an indistinct light upon the face of the deep, which creates . . . a feeling of loneliness, of dread, and of melancholy foreboding, which nothing else in nature can give.

So he ventures wakeful and alone into the great naked watery universe of the end of life, the twilight place where integral being lapses, and warm life begins to give out. It is man moving on into the face of death, the great adventure, the great undoing, the strange extension of the consciousness. The same in his vision of the albatross. 'But one of the finest sights that I have ever seen was an albatross asleep upon the water, during a calm off Cape Horn, when a heavy sea was running. There being no breeze, the surface of the water was unbroken, but a long, heavy swell was rolling, and we saw the fellow, all white, directly ahead of us, asleep upon the waves, with his head under his wing; now rising on the top of a huge billow, and then falling slowly until he was lost in the hollow between. He was undisturbed for some time, until the noise of our bows, gradually approaching, roused him, when, lifting his head, he stared upon us for a moment, and then spread his wide wings, and took his flight.'

We must give Dana credit for a profound mystic vision. The best Americans are mystics by instinct. Simple and bare as his narrative is, it is deep with profound emotion and stark comprehension. He sees the last light-loving incarnation of life exposed upon the eternal waters: a speck, solitary upon the verge of the two naked principles, aerial and watery. And his own soul is as the soul of the albatross.

It is a storm-bird. And so is Dana. He has gone down to fight with the sea. It is a metaphysical, actual struggle of an integral soul with the vast, non-living, yet potent element. Dana never forgets, never ceases to watch. If Hawthorne was a spectre on the land, how much more is Dana a spectre at sea. But he must watch, he must know, he must conquer the sea in his consciousness. This is the poignant difference between him and the common sailor. The common sailor lapses from consciousness, becomes elemental like a seal, a creature. Tiny and alone, Dana watches the great seas mount round his own small body. If he is swept away, some other man will have to take up what he has begun. For the sea must be mastered by the human consciousness, in the great height of the human soul for mastery over life and death, in KNOWLEDGE. It is the last bitter necessity of the Tree. The Cross. Impartial, Dana beholds himself among the elements, calm

and fatal. His style is great and hopeless, the style of a perfect tragic recorder.

Between five and six the cry of 'All starboardlines ahoy!' summoned our watch on deck, and immediately all hands were called. A great cloud of a dark slate-colour was driving on us from the south-west; and we did our best to take in sail before we were in the midst of it. We had got the light-sails furled, the courses hauled up, and the top-sail reef-tackles hauled out, and were just mounting the forerigging when the storm struck us. In an instant the sea, which had been comparatively quiet, was running higher and higher; and it became almost as dark as night. The hail and sleet were harder than I had yet felt them, seeming almost to pin us down to the rigging.

It is in the dispassionate statement of plain material facts that Dana achieves his greatness. Dana writes from the remoter, non-emotional centres of being - not from the passional emotional selœ

So the ship battles on, round Cape Horn, then into quieter seas. The island of Juan Fernandez, Crusoe's island, rises like a dream from the sea, like a green cloud, and like a ghost Dana watches it, feeling only a faint, ghostly pang of regret for the life that was.

But the strain of the long sea-voyage begins to tell. The sea is a great disintegrative force. Its tonic quality is its disintegrative quality. It burns down the tissue, liberates energy. And after a long time, this burning-down is destructive. The psyche becomes destroyed, irritable, frayed, almost dehumanized.

So there is trouble on board the ship, irritating discontent, friction unbearable, and at last a flogging. This flogging rouses Dana for the first and last time to human and ideal passion.

Sam by this time was seized up - that is, placed against the shrouds, with his wrists made fast to the shrouds, his jacket off, and his back exposed. The captain stood on the break of the deck, a few feet from him, and a little raised, so as to have a good swing at him, and held in his hand the bight of a thick, strong rope. The officers stood round, and the crew grouped together in the waist. All these preparations made me feel sick and almost faint, angry and excited as I was. A man - a human being made in God's likeness - fastened up and flogged like a beast! The first and almost uncontrollable impulse was resistance. But what was to be done? - The time for it had gone by -

So Mr Dana couldn't act. He could only lean over the side of the ship and spew.

Whatever made him vomit?

Why shall man not be whipped?

As long as man has a bottom, he must surely be whipped. It is as if the Lord

intended it so.

Why? For lots of reasons.

Man doth not live by bread alone, to absorb it and to evacuate it.

What is the breath of life ? My dear, it is the strange current of interchange that flows between men and men, and men and women, and men and things. A constant current of interflow, a constant vibrating interchange. That is the breath of life.

And this interflow, this electric vibration is polarized. There is a positive and a negative polarity. This is a law of life, of vitalism.

Only ideas are final, finite, static, and single.

All life-interchange is a polarized communication. A circuit.

There are lots of circuits. Male and female, for example, and master and servant. The idea, the IDEA, that fixed gorgon monster, and the IDEAL, that great stationary engine, these two gods-of-the-machine have been busy destroying all *natural* reciprocity and *natural* circuits, for centuries. IDEAS have played the very old Harry with sex relationship, that is, with the great circuit of man and woman. Turned the thing into a wheel on which the human being in both is broken. And the IDEAL has mangled the blood-reciprocity of master and servant into an abstract horror.

Master and servant - or master and man relationship is, essentially, a polarized flow, like love. It is a circuit of vitalism which flows between master and man and forms a very precious nourishment to each, and keeps both in a state of subtle, quivering, vital equilibrium. Deny it as you like, it is so. But once you *abstract* both master and man, and make them both serve an *idea*: production, wage, efficiency, and so on: so that each looks on himself as an instrument performing a certain repeated evolution, then you have changed the vital, quivering circuit of master and man into a mechanical machine unison. Just another way of life: or anti-life.

You could never quite do this on a sailing ship. A master had to be master, or it was hell. That is, there had to be this strange interflow of master-and-man, the strange reciprocity of comand and obedience.

The reciprocity of command and obedience is a state of unstable vital equilibrium. Everything vital, or natural, is unstable, thank God.

The ship had been at sea many weeks. A great strain on master and men. An increasing callous indiflerence in the men, an increasing irritability in the master.

And then what?

A storm.

Don't expect me to say why storms must be. They just are. Storms in the air, storms in the water, storms of thunder, storms of anger. Storms just are.

Storms are a sort of violent readjustment in some polarized flow. You have a polarized circuit, a circuit of unstable equilibrium. The instability increases till there is a crash. Everything seems to break down. Thunder roars, lightning flashes. The master roars, the whip whizzes. The sky sends down sweet rain. The ship knows a new strange stillness, a readjustment, a refinding of equilibrium.

Ask the Lord Almighty why it is so. I don't know. I know it is so.

But flogging? Why flogging? Why not use reason or take away jam for tea?

Why not? Why not ask the thunder please to abstain from this physical violence of crashing and thumping, please to swale away like thawing snow.

Sometimes the thunder *does* swale away like thawing snow, and then you hate it. Muggy, sluggish, inert, dreary sky.

Flogging.

You have a Sam, a fat slow fellow, who has got slower and more slovenly as the weeks wear on. You have a master who has grown more irritable in his authority. Till Sam becomes simply wallowing in his slackness, makes your gorge rise. And the master is on red hot iron.

Now these two men, Captain and Sam, are there in a very unsteady equilibrium of command and obedience. A polarized flow. Definitely polarized.

The poles of will are the great ganglia of the voluntary nerve system, located beside the spinal column, in the back. From the poles of will in the backbone of the Captain, to the ganglia of will in the back of the sloucher Sam, runs a frazzled, jagged current, a staggering circuit of vital electricity. This circuit gets one jolt too many, and there is an explosion.

'Tie up that lousy swine!' roars the enraged Captain.

And whack! whack! down on the bare back of that sloucher Sam comes the cat.

What does it do? By Jove, it goes like ice-cold water into his spine. Down those lashes runs the current of the Captain's rage, right into the blood and into the toneless ganglia of Sam's voluntary system. Crash! Crash! runs the lightning flame, right into the cores of the living nerves.

And the living nerves respond. They start to vibrate. They brace up. The blood begins to go quicker. The nerves begin to recover their vividness. It is their tonic. The man Sam has a new clear day of intelligence, and a smarty back. The Captain has a new relief, a new ease in his authority, and a sore heart.

There is a new equilibrium, and a fresh start. The *physical* intelligence of a Sam is restored, the turgidity is relieved from the veins of the Captain.

It is a natural form of human coition, interchange.

It is good for Sam to be flogged. It is good, on this occasion, for the Captain to have Sam flogged. I say so. Because they were both in that physical condition.

Spare the rod and spoil the *physical* child.

Use the rod and spoil the *ideal* child.

There you are.

Dana, as an idealist, refusing the blood-contact of life, leaned over the side of the ship powerless, and vomited: or wanted to. His solar plexus was getting a bit of its own back. To him, Sam was an 'ideal' being, who should have been approached through the mind, the reason, and the spirit. That lump of a Sam!

But there was another idealist on board, the seaman John, a Swede. He wasn't named John for nothing, this Jack-tar of the Logos. John felt himself called upon to play Mediator, Interceder, Saviour, on this occasion. The popular Paraclete.

'Why are you whipping this man, sir?'

But the Captain had got his dander up. He wasn't going to have his natural passion judged and interfered with by these long-nosed salvationists Johannuses. So he had nosy John hauled up and whipped as well.

For which I am very glad.

Alas, however, the Captain got the worst of it in the end. He smirks longest who smirks last. The Captain wasn't wary enough. Natural anger, natural passion has its unremitting enemy in the idealist. And the ship was already tainted with idealism. A good deal more so, apparently, than Herman Melville's ships were.

Which reminds us that Melville was once going to be flogged. In *White Jacket*. And he, too, would have taken it as the last insult.

In my opinion there are worse insults than floggings. I would rather be flogged than have most people 'like' me.

Melville too had an Interceder: a quiet, self-respecting man, not a saviour. The man spoke in the name of Justice. Melville was to be unjustly whipped. The man spoke honestly and quietly. Not in any salvationist spirit. And the whipping did not take place.

Justice is a great and manly thing. Saviourism is a despicable thing.

Sam was justly whipped. It was a passional justice. But Melville's whipping would have been a cold, disciplinary injustice. A foul thing. Mechanical *justice* even is a foul thing. For true justice makes the heart's fibres quiver. You can't be cold in a matter of real justice.

Already in those days it was no fun to be a captain. You had to learn already to abstract yourself into a machine-part, exerting machine-control. And it is a good deal bitterer to exert machine-control, selfless, ideal control, than it is to have to obey, mechanically. Because the idealists who mechanically obey almost always hate the *man* who must give the orders. Their idealism rarely allows them to exonerate the man for the office.

Dana's captain was one of the real old-fashioned sort. He gave himself away terribly. He should have been more wary, knowing he confronted a shipful of enemies and at least two cold and deadly idealists, who hated all 'masters' on principle.

As he went on, his passion increased, and he danced about the deck, calling out as he swung the rope, 'If you want to know what I flog you for, I'll tell you. It's because I like to do it! - Because I like to do it! - It suits me. That's what I do it for!'

The man writhed under the pain. My blood ran cold, I could look on no longer. Disgusted, sick and horror-stricken, I turned away and leaned over the rail and looked down in the water. A few rapid thoughts of my own situation, and of the prospect of future revenge, crossed my mind, but the falling of the blows, and the cries of the man called me back at once. At length they ceased, and, turning round, I found that the Mate, at a signal from the captain, had cut him down.

After all, it was not so terrible. The captain evidently did not exceed the ordinary measure. Sam got no more than he asked for. It was a natural event. All would have been well, save for the *moral* verdict. And this came from theoretic idealists like Dana and the seaman John, rather than from the sailors themselves. The sailors understood spontaneous *passional* morality, not the artificial ethical. They respected the violent readjustments of the naked force, in man as in nature.

The flogging was seldom, if ever, alluded to by us in the fore-castle. If any one was inclined to talk about it, the others, with a delicacy which I hardly expected to find among them, always stop-ped him, or turned the subject.

Two men had been flogged: the second and the elder, John, for interfering and asking the captain why he flogged Sam. It is while flogging John that the captain shouts, 'If you want to know what I flog you for, I'll tell you -'

'But the behaviour of the two men who were flogged,' Dana continues, toward one another, showed a delicacy and a sense of honour which would have been worthy of admiration in the highest walks of life. Sam knew that the other had suffered solely on his account, and in all his complaints he said that if he alone had been flogged it would have been nothing, but that he never could see that man without thinking what had been the means of bringing that disgrace upon him; and John never, by word or deed, let anything escape him to remind the other that it was by interfering to save his shipmate that he had suffered.

As a matter of fact, it was John who ought to have been ashamed for bringing confusion and false feeling into a clear issue. Conventional morality apart, John is the reprehensible party, not Sam or the captain. The case was one of *passional* readjustment, nothing abnormal. And who was the sententious Johannus, that he should interfere in this? And if Mr Dana had a weak stomach as well as weak

eyes, let him have it. But let this pair of idealists abstain from making all the other men feel uncomfortable and fuzzy about a thing they would have left to its natural course, if they had been allowed. No, your Johannuses and your Danas have to be creating 'public opinion', and mugging up the life-issues with their sententiousness. O idealism!

The vessel arrives at the Pacific coast, and the swell of the rollers falls in our blood - the weary coast stretches wonderful, on the brink of the unknown.

Not a human being but ourselves for miles - the steep hill rising like a wall, and cutting us off from all the world - but the 'world of waters' I separated myself from the rest, and sat down on a rock, just where the sea ran in and formed a fine spouting-horn. Compared with the dull, plain sand-beach of the rest of the coast, this grandeur was as refreshing as a great rock in a weary land. It was almost the first time I had been positively alone.... My better nature returned strong upon me. I experienced a glow of pleasure at finding that what of poetry and romance I had ever had in me had not been entirely deadened in the laborious life I had been lately leading. Nearly an hour did I sit, almost lost in the luxury of this entire new scene of the play in which I was acting, when I was aroused by the distant shouts of my companions.

So Dana sits and Hamletizes by the Pacific - chief actor in the play of his own existence. But in him, self-consciousness is almost nearing the mark of scientific indifference to self.

He gives us a pretty picture of the then wild, unknown bay of San Francisco. - 'The tide leaving us, we came to anchor near the mouth of the bay, under a high and beautifully sloping hill, upon which herds of hundreds of red deer and the stag with his high-branching antlers were bounding about, looking at us for a moment, and then starting off affrighted at the noises we made for the purpose of seeing the variety of their beautiful attitudes and motions -'

Think of it now, and the Presidio! The idiotic guns.

Two moments of strong human emotion Dana experiences: one moment of strong but impotent hate for the captain, one strong impulse of pitying love for the Kanaka boy, Hope - a beautiful South Sea Islander sick of a white man's disease, phthisis or syphilis. Of him Dana writes -

but the other, who was my friend, and Aikane - Hope - was the most dreadful object I had ever seen in my life; his hands looking like claws, a dreadful cough, which seemed to rack his whole shattered system; a hollow, whispering voice, and an entire in-ability to move himself. There he lay, upon a mat on the ground, which was the only floor of the oven, with no medicine, no comforts, and no one to care for or help him but a few Kanakas, who were willing enough, but could do nothing. The sight of him made me sick and faint. Poor fellow! During the

four months that I lived upon the beach we were continually together, both in work and in our excursions in the woods and upon the water. I really felt a strong affection for him, and preferred him to any of my own countrymen there. When I came into the oven he looked at me, held out his hand and said in a low voice, but with a delightful smile, 'Aloha, Aikane! Aloha nui!' I comforted him as well as I could, and promised to ask the captain to help him from the medicine chest.

We have felt the pulse of hate for the captain - now the pulse of Saviour-like love for the bright-eyed man of the Pacific, a real child of the ocean, full of the mystery-being of that great sea. Hope is for a moment to Dana what Chingachgook is to Cooper - the heart's brother, the answerer. But only for an ephemeral moment. And even then his love was largely pity, tinged with philanthropy. The inevitable saviourism. The ideal being.

Dana was mad to leave the California coast, to be back in the civilized east. Yet he feels the poignancy of departure when at last the ship draws off. The Pacific is his glamour-world: the eastern States his world of actuality, scientific, materially real. He is a servant of civilization, an idealist, a democrat, a hater of masters, a KNOWER. Conscious and self-conscious, without ever forgetting.

When all sail had been set and the decks cleared up, the *California* was a speck in the horizon. and the coast lay like a low cloud along the north-east. At sunset they were both out of sight, and we were once more upon the ocean, where sky and water meet.

The description of the voyage home is wonderful. It is as if the sea rose up to prevent the escape of this subtle explorer. Dana seems to pass into another world, another life, not of this earth. There is first the sense of apprehension, then the passing right into the black deeps. Then the waters almost swallow him up, with his triumphant consciousness.

The days became shorter and shorter, the sun running lower in its course each day, and giving less and less heat, and the nights so cold as to prevent our sleeping on deck; the Magellan Clouds in sight of a clear night; the skies looking cold and angry; and at times a long, heavy, ugly sea, setting in from the Southward, told us what we were coming to.

They were approaching Cape Horn, in the southern winter, passing into the strange, dread regions of the violent waters.

And there lay, floating in the ocean, several miles off, an immense irregular mass, its top and points covered with snow, its centre a deep indigo. This was an iceberg, and of the largest size. As far as the eye could reach, the sea in every direction was of a deep;blue colour, the waves running high and fresh, and sparkling in the light; and in the midst lay this immense mountain-island, its

cavities and valleys thrown into deep shade, and its points and pinnacles glittering in the sun. But no description can give any idea of the strangeness, splendour, and, really, the sublimity of the sight. Its great size - for it must have been two or three miles in circumference, and several hundred feet in height; its slow motion, as its base rose and sank in the water and its points nodded against the clouds; the high dashing of the waves upon it, which, breaking high with foam, lined its base with a white crust; and the thundering sound of the cracking of the mass, and the breaking and tumbling down of huge pieces; together with its nearness and approach, which added a slight element of fear - all combined to give it the character of true sublimity -

But as the ship ran further and further into trouble, Dana became ill. First it is a slight toothache. Ice and exposure cause the pains to take hold of all his head and face. And then the face so swelled, that he could not open his mouth to eat, and was in danger of lock-jaw. In this state he was forced to keep his bunk for three or four days.

At the end of the third day, the ice was very thick; a complete fogbank covered the ship. It blew a tremendous gale from the east ward, with sleet and snow, and there was every promise of a dangerous and fatiguing night. At dark, the captain called the hands aft, and told them that not a man was to leave the deck that night; that the ship was in the greatest danger; any cake of ice might knock a hole in her, or she might run on an island and go to pieces. The look-outs were then set and every man was put in his station. When I heard what was the state of things, I began to put on my things, to stand it out with the rest of them, when the mate came below, and looking at my face ordered me back to my berth, saying if we went down we should all go down together, but if I went on deck I might lay myself up for life. In obedience to the mate's orders, I went back to my berth; but a more miserable night I never wish to spend.

It is the story of a man pitted in conflict against the sea, the vast, almost omnipotent element. In contest with this cosmic enemy, man finds his further ratification, his further ideal vindication. He comes out victorious, but not till the sea has tortured his living, integral body, and made him pay something for his triumph in consciousness.

The horrific struggle round Cape Horn, homewards, is the crisis of the Dana history. It is an entry into chaos, a heaven of sleet and black ice-rain, a sea of ice and iron-like water. Man fights the element in all its roused, mystic hostility to conscious life. This fight is the inward crisis and triumph of Dana's soul. He goes through it all consciously, enduring, knowing. It is not a mere overcoming of obstacles. It is a pitting of the deliberate consciousness against all the roused, hostile, anti-life water of the Pole.

After this fight, Dana has achieved his success. He knows. He knows what the sea is. He knows what the Cape Horn is. He knows what work is, work before the mast. He knows, he knows a great deal. He has carried his consciousness open-eyed through it all. He has won through. The ideal being.

And from his book, we know too. He has lived this great experience for us; we owe him homage.

The ship passes through the strait, strikes the polar death-mystery, and turns northward, home. She seems to fly with new strong plumage, free. 'Every rope-yarn seemed stretched to the utmost, and every thread of the canvas; and with this sail added to her the ship sprang through the water like a thing possessed. The sail being nearly all forward, it lifted her out of the water, and she seemed actually to jump from sea to sea.'

Beautifully the sailing-ship nodalizes the forces of sea and wind, converting them to her purpose. There is no violation, as in a steam-ship, only a winged centrality. It is this perfect adjusting of ourselves to the elements, the perfect equipoise between them and us, which gives us a great part of our life joy. The more we intervene machinery between us and the naked forces the more we numb and atrophy our own senses. Every time we turn on a tap to have water, every time we turn a handle to have a fire or light, we deny ourselves and annul our being. The great elements, the earth, air, fire, water, are there like some great mistress whom we woo and struggle with, whom we heave and wrestle with. And all our appliances do but deny us these fine embraces, take the miracle of life away from us. The machine is the great neuter. It is the eunuch of eunuchs. In the end it emasculates us all. When we balance the sticks and kindle a fire, we partake of the mysteries. But when we turn on an electric tap there is, as it were, a wad between us and the dynamic universe. We do not know what we lose by all our labour-saving appliances. Of the two evils it would be much the lesser to lose all machinery, every bit, rather than to have, as we have, hopelessly too much.

When we study the pagan gods, we find they have now one meaning, now another. Now they belong to the creative essence, and now to the material-dynamic world. First they have one aspect, then another. The greatest god has both aspects. First he is the source of life. Then he is mystic dynamic lord of the elemental physical forces. So Zeus is Father, and Thunderer.

Nations that worship the material-dynamic world, as all nations do in their decadence, seem to come inevitably to worship the Thunderer. He is Ammon, Zeus, Wotan and Thor, Shango of the West Africans. As the creator of man himself, the Father is greatest in the creative world, the Thunderer is greatest in the material world. He is the god of force and of earthly blessing, the god of the

bolt and of sweet rain.

So that electricity seems to be the first intrinsic principle among the Forces. It has a mystic power of readjustment. It seems to be the overlord of the two naked elements, fire and water, capable of mysteriously enchainning them, and of mysteriously sundering them from their connections. When the two great elements become hopelessly clogged, entangled, the sword of the lightning can separate them. The crash of thunder is really not the clapping together of waves of air. Thunder is the noise of the explosion which takes place when the waters are loosed from the elemental fire, when old vapours are suddenly decomposed in the upper air by the electric force. Then fire flies fluid, and the waters roll off in purity. It is the liberation of the elements from hopeless conjunction. Thunder, the electric force, is the counterpart in the material-dynamic world of the life-force, the creative mystery, itself, in the creative world.

Dana gives a wonderful description of a tropical thunderstorm.

When our watch came on deck at twelve o'clock it was as black as Erebus; not a breath stirring; the sails hung heavy and motionless from the yards; and the perfect stillness, and the darkness, which was almost palpable, were truly appalling. Not a word was spoken, but everyone stood as though waiting for something to happen. In a few minutes the mate came forward, and in a low tone which was almost a whisper, gave the command to haul down the jib. When we got down we found all hands looking aloft, and then, directly over where we had been standing, upon the main top-gallant mast-head, was a ball of light, which the sailors name a corposant (*corpus sancti*). They were all watching it carefully, for sailors have a notion that if the corposant rises in the rigging, it is a sign of fair weather; but if it comes lower down, there will be a storm. Unfortunately, as an omen, it came down and showed itself on the top-gallant yard-arm.

In a few minutes it disappeared and showed itself again on the fore top-gallant yard, and, after playing about for some time, disappeared again, when the man on the fore-castle pointed to it upon the flying-jib-boom-end. But our attention was drawn from watching this by the falling of some drops of rain. In a few minutes low growling thunder was heard, and some random flashes of lightning came from the south-west. Every sail was taken in but the top-sail. A few puffs lifted the top-sails, but they fell again to the mast, and all was as still as ever. A minute more, and a terrific flash and peal broke simultaneously upon us, and a cloud appeared to open directly over our heads and let down the water in one body like a falling ocean. We stood motionless and almost stupefied, yet nothing had been struck. Peal after peal rattled over our heads with a sound which actually seemed to stop the breath in the body. The violent fall of the rain lasted but a few minutes, and was succeeded by occasional drops and showers; but the

lightning continued incessant for several hours, breaking the midnight darkness with irregular and blinding flashes.

During all this time hardly a word was spoken, no bell was struck, and the wheel was silently relieved. The rain fell at intervals in heavy showers, and we stood drenched through, and blinded by the flashes, which broke the Egyptian darkness with a brightness which seemed almost malignant, while the thunder rolled in peals, the concussion of which appeared to shake the very ocean. A ship is not often injured by lightning, for the electricity is separated by the great number of points she presents, and the quality of iron which she has scattered in various parts. The electric fluid ran over our anchors, top sail-sheets and ties; yet no harm was done to us. We went below at four o'clock, leaving things in the same state.

Dana is wonderful at relating these mechanical, or dynamic-physical events. He could not tell about the being of men: only about the forces. He gives another curious instance of the process of recreation, as it takes place within the very corpuscles of the blood. It is *salt* this time which arrests the life-activity, causing a static arrest in Matter, after a certain sundering of water from the Ere of the warm-substantial body.

The scurvy had begun to show itself on board. One man had it so badly as to be disabled and off duty; and the English lad, Ben, was in a dreadful state, and was gradually growing worse. His legs swelled and pained him so that he could not walk; his flesh lost its elasticity, so that if it were pressed in, it would not return to its shape; and his gums swelled until he could not open his mouth. His breath, too, became very offensive; he lost all strength and spirit; could eat nothing; grew worse every day; and, in fact, unless something was done for him, would be a dead man in a week at the rate at which he was sinking. The medicines were all gone, or nearly all gone; and if we had had a chest-full, they would have been of no use; for nothing but fresh provisions and terra firma has any effect upon the scurvy.

However, a boat-load of potatoes and onions was obtained from a passing ship. These the men ate raw.

The freshness and crispness of the raw onion, with the earthy state, give it a great relish to one who has been a long time on salt provisions. We were perfectly ravenous after them. We ate them at every meal, by the dozen; and filled our pockets with them, to eat on the watch on deck. The chief use, however, of the fresh provisions was for the men with the scurvy. One was able to eat and he soon brought himself to by gnawing upon raw potatoes, but the other, by this time, was hardly able to open his mouth; and the cook took the potatoes raw, pounded them in a mortar, and gave him the juice to suck. The

strong earthy taste and smell of this extract of the raw potatoes at first produced a shuddering through his whole frame, and after drinking it, an acute pain, which ran through all parts of his body; but knowing by this that it was taking strong hold, he persevered, drinking a spoonful every hour or so, until, by the effect of this drink, and of his own restored hope, he became so well as to be able to move about, and open his mouth enough to eat the raw potatoes and onions pounded into a soft pulp. This course soon restored his appetite and strength, and ten days after we spoke the *Solon*, so rapid was his recovery that, from lying helpless and almost hopeless in his berth, he was at the mast-head, furling a royal.

This is the strange result of the disintegrating effect of the sea, and of salt food. We are all sea born, science tells us. The moon, and the sea, and salt, and phosphorus, and us: it is a long chain of connection. And then the earth: mother-earth. Dana talks of the relish which the *earthy* taste of the onion gives. The taste of created juice, the living milk of Gea. And limes, which taste of the sun.

How much stranger is the interplay of *life* among the elements, than any chemical interplay among the elements themselves. Life - and salt - and phosphorus - and the sea - and the moon. Life - and sulphur - and carbon - and volcanoes - and the sun. The way up, and the way down. The strange ways of life.

But Dana went home, to be a lawyer, and a rather dull and distinguished citizen. He was once almost an ambassador. And pre-eminently respectable.

He had been. He KNEW. He had even told us. It is a great achievement.

And then what? - Why, nothing. The old vulgar humdrum. That's the worst of knowledge. It leaves one only the more lifeless. Dana lived his bit in two years, and knew, and drummed out the rest. Dreary lawyer's years, afterwards.

We know enough. We know too much. We know nothing.

Let us smash something. Ourselves included. But the machine above all.

Dana's small book is a very great book: contains a great extreme of knowledge, knowledge of the great element.

And after all, we have to know all before we can know that knowing is nothing.

Imaginatively, we have to know all: even the elemental waters. And know and know on, until knowledge suddenly shrivels and we know that forever we don't know.

Then there is a sort of peace, and we can start afresh, knowing we don't know.

CHAPTER 10

Herman Melville's Typee and Omoo

THE greatest seer and poet of the sea for me is Melville. His vision is more real than Swinburne's, because he doesn't personify the sea, and far sounder than Joseph Conrad's, because Melville doesn't sentimentalize the ocean and the sea's unfortunates. Snivel in a wet hanky like Lord Jim.

Melville has the strange, uncanny magic of sea-creatures, and some of their repulsiveness. He isn't quite a land animal. There is something slithery about him. Something always half-seas-over. In his life they said he was mad - or crazy. He was neither mad nor crazy. But he was over the border. He was half a water animal, like those terrible yellow-bearded Vikings who broke out of the waves in beaked ships.

He was a modern Viking. There is something curious about real blue-eyed people. They are never quite human, in the good classic sense, human as brown-eyed people are human: the human of the living humus. About a real blue-eyed person there is usually something abstract, elemental. Brown-eyed people are, as it were, like the earth, which is tissue of bygone life, organic, compound. In blue eyes there is sun and rain and abstract, uncreate element, water, ice, air, space, but not humanity. Brown-eyed people are people of the old, old world: *Allzu menschlich*. Blue-eyed people tend to be too keen and abstract.

Melville is like a Viking going home to the sea, encumbered with age and memories, and a sort of accomplished despair, almost madness. For he cannot accept humanity. He can't belong to humanity. Cannot.

The great Northern cycle of which he is the returning unit has almost completed its round, accomplished itself. Balder the beautiful is mystically dead, and by this time he stinketh. Forget-me-nots and sea-poppies fall into water. The man who came from the sea to live among men can stand it no longer. He hears the horror of the cracked church bell, and goes back down the shore, back into the ocean again, home, into the salt water. Human life won't do. He turns back to the elements. And all the vast sun-and-wheat consciousness of his day he plunges back into the deeps, burying the flame in the deep, self-conscious and deliberate. As blue flax and sea-poppies fall into the waters and give back their created sun-stuff to the dissolution of the flood.

The sea-born people, who can meet and mingle no longer: who turn away from life, to the abstract, to the elements: the sea receives her own.

Let life come asunder, they say. Let water conceive no more with fire. Let mating finish. Let the elements leave off kissing, and turn their backs on one another. Let the merman turn away from his human wife and children, let the seal-woman forget the world of men, remembering only the waters.

So they go down to the sea, the sea-born people. The Vikings are wandering again. Homes are broken up. Cross the seas, cross the seas, urges the heart. Leave love and home. Leave love and home. Love and home are a deadly illusion. Woman, what have I to do with thee? It is finished. *Consummatum est*. The crucifixion into humanity is over. Let us go back to the fierce, uncanny elements: the corrosive vast sea. Or Fire.

Basta! It is enough. It is enough of life. Let us have the vast elements. Let us get out of this loathsome complication of living humanly with humans. Let the sea wash us clean of the leprosy of our humanity and humanness.

Melville was a northerner, sea-born. So the sea claimed him. We are most of us, who use the English language, water-people, sea-derived.

Melville went back to the oldest of all the oceans, to the Pacific. *Der Grosse oder Stille Ozean*.

Without doubt the Pacific Ocean is aeons older than the Atlantic or the Indian Oceans. When we say older, we mean it has not come to any modern consciousness. Strange convulsions have convulsed the Atlantic and Mediterranean peoples into phase after phase of consciousness, while the Pacific and the Pacific peoples have slept. To sleep is to dream: you can't stay unconscious. And, oh heaven, for how many thousands of years has the true Pacific been dreaming, turning over in its sleep and dreaming again: idylls: nightmares.

The Maoris, the Tongans, the Marquesans, the Fijians, the Polynesians: holy God, how long have they been turning over in the same sleep, with varying dreams? Perhaps, to a sensitive imagination, those islands in the middle of the Pacific are the most unbearable places on earth. It simply stops the heart, to be translated there, unknown ages back, back into that life, that pulse, that rhythm. The scientists say the South Sea Islanders belong to the Stone Age. It seems absurd to class people according to their implements. And yet there is something in it. The heart of the Pacific is still the Stone Age; in spite of steamers. The heart of the Pacific seems like a vast vacuum, in which, mirage-like, continues the life of myriads of ages back. It is a phantom-persistence of human beings who should have died, by our chronology, in the Stone Age. It is a phantom, illusion-like trick of reality: the glamorous South Seas.

Even Japan and China have been turning over in their sleep for countless centuries. Their blood is the old blood, their tissue the old soft tissue. Their busy

day was myriads of years ago, when the world was a softer place, more moisture in the air, more warm mud on the face of the earth, and the lotus was always in flower. The great bygone world, before Egypt. And Japan and China have been turning over in their sleep, while we have 'advanced'. And now they are starting up into nightmare.

The world isn't what it seems.

The Pacific Ocean holds the dream of immemorial centuries. It is the great blue twilight of the vastest of all evenings perhaps of the most wonderful of all dawns. Who knows?

It must once have been a vast basin of soft, lotus-warm civilization, the Pacific. Never was such a huge man-day swung down into slow disintegration as here. And now the waters are blue and ghostly with the end of immemorial peoples. And phantom-like the islands rise out of it, illusions of the glamorous Stone Age.

To this phantom Melville returned. Back, back, away from life. Never man instinctively hated human life, our human life, as we have it, more than Melville did. And never was a man so passionately filled with the sense of vastness and mystery of life which is non-human. He was mad to look over our horizons. Anywhere, anywhere out of *our* world. To get away. To get away, out!

To get away, out of our life. To cross a horizon into another life. No matter what life, so long as it is another life.

Away, away from humanity. To the sea. The naked salt, elemental sea. To go to sea, to escape humanity.

The human heart gets into a frenzy at last, in its desire to dehumanize itself.

So he finds himself in the middle of the Pacific. Truly over a horizon. In another world. In another epoch. Back, far back, in the days of palm trees and lizards and stone implements. The sunny Stone Age.

Samoa, Tahiti, Raratonga, Nukuheva: the very names are a sleep and a forgetting. The sleep-forgotten past magnificence of human history. 'Trailing clouds of glory.'

Melville hated the world: was born hating it. But he was looking for heaven. That is, choosingly. Choosingly, he was looking for paradise. Unchoosingly, he was mad with hatred of the world.

Well, the world is hateful. It is as hateful as Melville found it. He was not wrong in hating the world. *Delenda est Chicago*. He hated it to a pitch of madness, and not without reason.

But it's no good *persisting* in looking for paradise 'regained'.

Melville at his best invariably wrote from a sort of dreamself, so that events which he relates as actual fact have indeed a far deeper reference to his own

soul, his own inner life.

So in *Typee* when he tells of his entry into the valley of the dread cannibals of Nukuheva. Down this narrow, steep, horrible dark gorge he slides and struggles as we struggle in a dream, or in the act of birth, to emerge in the green Eden of the Golden Age, the valley of the cannibal savages. This is a bit of birth-myth, or re-birth myth, on Melville's part - unconscious, no doubt, because his running under-consciousness was always mystical and symbolical. He wasn't aware that he was being mystical.

There he is then, in *Typee*, among the dreaded cannibal savages. And they are gentle and generous with him, and he is truly in a sort of Eden.

Here at last is Rousseau's Child of Nature and Chateaubriand's Noble Savage called upon and found at home. Yes, Melville loves his savage hosts. He finds them gentle, laughing lambs compared to the ravening wolves of his white brothers, left behind in America and on an American whaleship.

The ugliest beast on earth is the white man, says Melville.

In short, Herman found in *Typee* the paradise he was looking for. It is true, the Marquesans were 'immoral', but he rather liked that. Morality was too white a trick to take him in. Then again, they were cannibals. And it filled him with horror even to think of this. But the savages were very private and even fiercely reserved in their cannibalism, and he might have spared himself his shudder. No doubt he had partaken of the Christian Sacraments many a time. 'This is my body, take and eat. This is my blood. Drink it in remembrance of me.' And if the savages liked to partake of their sacrament without raising the transubstantiation quibble, and if they liked to say, directly: 'This is thy body, which I take from thee and eat. This is thy blood, which I sip in annihilation of thee', why surely their sacred ceremony was as awe-inspiring as the one Jesus substituted. But Herman chose to be horrified. I confess, I am not horrified; though, of course, I am not on the spot. But the savage sacrament seems to me more valid than the Christian: less side-tracking about it. Thirdly, he was shocked by their wild methods of warfare. He died before the great European war, so his shock was comfortable.

Three little quibbles: morality, cannibal sacrament, and stone axes. You must have a fly even in Paradisal ointment. And the first was a ladybird.

But paradise. He insists on it. Paradise. He could even go stark naked, as before the Apple episode. And his Fayaway, a laughing little Eve, naked with him, and hankering after no apple of knowledge, so long as he would just love her when he felt like it. Plenty to eat, needing no clothes to wear, sunny, happy people, sweet water to swim in: everything a man can want. Then why wasn't he happy along with the savages ?

Because he wasn't.

He grizzled in secret, and wanted to escape.

He even pined for Home and Mother, the two things he had run away from as far as ships would carry him. HOME and MOTHER. The two things that were his damnation.

There on the island, where the golden-green great palmtrees chinked in the sun, and the elegant reed houses let the sea-breeze through, and people went naked and laughed a great deal, and Fayaway put flowers in his hair for him - great red hibiscus flowers, and frangipani - O God, why wasn't he happy? Why wasn't he?

Because he wasn't.

Well, it's hard to make a man happy.

But I should not have been happy either. One's soul seems under a vacuum, in the South Seas.

The truth of the matter is, one cannot go back. Some men can: renegade. But Melville couldn't go back: and Gauguin couldn't really go back: and I know now that I could never go back. Back towards the past, savage life. One cannot go back. It is one's destiny inside one.

There are these peoples, these 'savages'. One does not despise them. One does not feel superior. But there is a gulf. There is a gulf in time and being. I cannot commingle my being with theirs.

There they are, these South Sea Islanders, beautiful big men with their golden limbs and their laughing, graceful laziness. And they will call you brother, choose you as a brother. But why cannot one truly be brother?

There is an invisible hand grasps my heart and prevents it opening too much to these strangers. They are beautiful, they are like children, they are generous: but they are more than this. They are far off, and in their eyes is an easy darkness of the soft, uncreate past. In a way, they are uncreate. Far be it from me to assume any 'white' superiority. But they are savages. They are gentle and laughing and physically very handsome. But it seems to me, that in living so far, through all our bitter centuries of civilization, we have still been living onwards, forwards. God knows it looks like a *cul de sac* now. But turn to the first negro, and then listen to your own soul. And your own soul will tell you that however false and foul our forms and systems are now, still, through the many centuries since Egypt, we have been living and struggling forwards along some road that is no road, and yet is a great life-development. We have struggled on, and on we must still go. We may have to smash things. Then let us smash. And our road may have to take a great swerve, that seems a retrogression.

But we can't go back. Whatever else the South Sea Islander is, he is centuries

and centuries behind us in the life-struggle, the consciousness-struggle, the struggle of the soul into fullness. There is his woman, with her knotted hair and her dark, inchoate, slightly sardonic eyes. I like her, she is nice. But I would never want to touch her. I could not go back on myself so far. Back to their uncreate condition.

She has soft warm flesh, like warm mud. Nearer the reptile, the Saurian age. *Noli me tangere.*

We can't go back. We can't go back to the savages: not a stride. We can be in sympathy with them. We can take a great curve in their direction, onwards. But we cannot turn the current of our life backwards, back towards their soft warm twilight and uncreate mud. Not for a moment. If we do it for a moment, it makes us sick.

We can only do it when we are renegade. The renegade hates life itself. He wants the death of life. So these many 'reformers' and 'idealists' who glorify the savages in America. They are death-birds, life-haters. Renegades.

We can't go back, and Melville couldn't. Much as he hated the civilized humanity he knew. He couldn't go back to the savages; he wanted to, he tried to, and he couldn't.

Because, in the first place, it made him sick; it made him physically ill. He had something wrong with his leg, and this would not heal. It got worse and worse, during his four months on the island. When he escaped, he was in a deplorable condition - sick and miserable, ill, very ill.

Paradise!

But there you are. Try to go back to the savages, and you feel as if your very soul was decomposing inside you. That is what you feel in the South Seas, anyhow: as if your soul was decomposing inside you. And with any savages the same, if you try to go their way, take their current of sympathy.

Yet, as I say, we must make a great swerve in our onward-going life-course now, to gather up again the savage mysteries. But this does not mean going back on ourselves.

Going back to the savages made Melville sicker than any-thing. It made him feel as if he were decomposing. Worse even than Home and Mother.

And that is what really happens. If you prostitute your psyche by returning to the savages, you gradually go to pieces. Before you can go back, you *have* to decompose. And a white man decomposing is a ghastly sight. Even Melville in Typee.

We have to go on, on, on, even if we must smash a way ahead.

So Melville escaped, and threw a boat-hook full in the throat of one of his dearest savage friends, and sank him, because that savage was swimming in

pursuit. That's how he felt about the savages when they wanted to detain him. He'd have murdered them one and all, vividly, rather than be kept from escaping. Away from them - he must get away from them - at any price.

And once he has escaped, immediately he begins to sigh and pine for the 'Paradise' - Home and Mother being at the other end even of a whaling voyage.

When he really was Home with Mother, he found it Purgatory. But Typee must have been even worse than Purgatory, a soft hell, judging from the murderous frenzy which possessed him to escape.

But once aboard the whaler that carried him off from Nukuheva, he looked back and sighed for the Paradise he had just escaped from in such a fever.

Poor Melville! He was determined Paradise existed. So he was always in Purgatory.

He was born for Purgatory. Some souls are purgatorial by destiny.

The very freedom of his Typee was a torture to him. Its ease was slowly horrible to him. This time he was the fly in the odorous tropical ointment.

He needed to fight. It was no good to him, the relaxation of the non-moral tropics. He didn't really want Eden. He wanted to fight. Like every American. To fight. But with weapons of the spirit, not the flesh.

That was the top and bottom of it. His soul was in revolt, writhing for ever in revolt. When he had something definite to rebel against - like the bad conditions on a whaling ship - then he was much happier in his miseries. The mills of God were grinding inside him, and they needed something to grind on.

When they could grind on the injustice and folly of missionaries, or of brutal sea-captains, or of governments, he was easier. The mills of God were grinding inside him.

They are grinding inside every American. And they grind exceedingly small.

Why? Heaven knows. But we've got to grind down our old forms, our old selves, grind them very very small, to nothingness. Whether a new somethingness will ever start, who knows? Meanwhile the mills of God grind on, in American Melville, and it was himself he ground small: himself and his wife, when he was married. For the present, the South Seas.

He escapes on to the craziest, most impossible of whaling ships. Lucky for us Melville makes it fantastic. It must have been pretty sordid.

And anyhow, on the crazy *Julia*, his leg, that would never heal in the paradise of Typee, began quickly to get well. His life was falling into its normal pulse. The drain back into past centuries was over.

Yet, oh, as he sails away from Nukuheva, on the voyage that will ultimately take him to America, oh, the acute and intolerable nostalgia he feels for the island he has left.

The past, the Golden Age of the past - what a nostalgia we all feel for it. Yet we don't want it when we get it. Try the South Seas.

Melville had to fight, fight against the existing world, against his own very self. Only he would never quite put the knife in the heart of his paradisaical ideal. Somehow, somewhere, somewhen, love should be a fulfillment, and life should be a thing of bliss. That was his fixed ideal. *Fata Morgana*.

That was the pin he tortured himself on, like a pinned-down butterfly.

Love is never a fulfillment. Life is never a thing of continuous bliss. There is no paradise. Fight and laugh and feel bitter and feel bliss: and fight again. Fight, fight. That is life.

Why pin ourselves down on a paradisaical ideal? It is only ourselves we torture.

Melville did have one great experience, getting away from humanity: the experience of the sea.

The South Sea Islands were not his great experience. They were a glamorous world outside New England. Outside. But it was the sea that was both outside and inside: the universal experience.

The book that follows on from *Typee* is *Omoo*.

Omoo is a fascinating book; picaresque, rascally, roving. Melville, as a bit of a beachcomber. The crazy ship *Julia* sails to Tahiti, and the mutinous crew are put ashore. Put in the Tahitian prison. It is good reading.

Perhaps Melville is at his best, his happiest, in *Omoo*. For once he is really reckless. For once he takes life as it comes. For once he is the gallant rascally epicurean, eating the world like a snipe, dirt and all baked into one *bonne bouche*.

For once he is really careless, roving with that scamp, Doctor Long Ghost. For once he is careless of his actions, careless of his morals, careless of his ideals: ironic, as the epicurean must be. The deep irony of your real scamp: your real epicurean of the moment.

But it was under the influence of the Long Doctor. This long and bony Scotsman was not a mere ne'er-do-well. He was a man of humorous desperation, throwing his life ironically away. Not a mere loose-kneed loafer, such as the South Seas seem to attract.

That is good about Melville: he never repents. Whatever he did, in *Typee* or in Doctor Long Ghost's wicked society, he never repented. If he ate his snipe, dirt and all, and enjoyed it at the time, he didn't have bilious bouts afterwards, which is good.

But it wasn't enough. The Long Doctor was really knocking about in a sort of despair. He let his ship drift rudderless.

Melville couldn't do this. For a time, yes. For a time, in this Long Doctor's

company, he was rudderless and reckless. Good as an experience. But a man who will not abandon himself to despair or indifference cannot keep it up.

Melville would never abandon himself either to despair or indifference. He always cared. He always cared enough to hate Missionaries, and to be touched by a real act of kindness. He always cared.

When he saw a white man really 'gone savage', a white man with a blue shark tattooed over his brow, gone over to the savages, then Herman's whole being revolted. He couldn't bear it. He could not bear a renegade.

He enlisted at last on an American man-of-war. You have the record in *White Jacket*. He was back in civilization, but still at sea. He was in America, yet loose in the seas. Good regular days, after Doctor Long Ghost and the *Julia*.

As a matter of fact, a long thin chain was round Melville's ankle at the time, binding him to America, to civilization, to democracy, to the ideal world. It was a long chain, and it never broke. It pulled him back.

By the time he was twenty-five his wild oats were sown; his reckless wanderings were over. At the age of twenty-five he came back to Home and Mother, to fight it out at close quarters. For you can't fight it out by running away. When you have run a long way from Home and Mother, then you realize that the earth is round, and if you keep on running you'll be back on the same old doorstep - like a fatality.

Melville came home to face out the long rest of his life. He married and had an ecstasy of a courtship and fifty years of disillusion.

He had just furnished his home with disillusion. No more Typees. No more paradises. No more Fayaways. A mother: a gorgon. A home: a torture box. A wife: a thing with clay feet. Life: a sort of disgrace. Fame: another disgrace, being patronized by common snobs who just know how to read.

The whole shameful business just making a man writhe.

Melville writhed for eighty years.

In his soul he was proud and savage.

But in his mind and will he wanted the perfect fulfilment of love; he wanted the lovey-doveyness of perfect mutual understanding.

A proud savage-soured man doesn't really want any perfect lovey-dovey fulfilment in love: no such nonsense. A mountain lion doesn't mate with a Persian cat; and when a grizzly bear roars after a mate, it is a she-grizzly he roars after - not after a silky sheep.

But Melville stuck to his ideal. He wrote *Pierre* to show that the more you try to be good the more you make a mess of things: that following righteousness is just disastrous. The better you are, the worse things turn out with you. The better you try to be, the bigger mess you make. Your very striving after righteousness

only causes your own slow degeneration.

Well, it is true. No men are so evil today as the idealists, and no women half so evil as your earnest woman, who feels herself a power for good. It is inevitable. After a certain point, the ideal goes dead and rotten. The old pure ideal becomes in itself an impure thing of evil. Charity becomes pernicious, the spirit itself becomes foul. The meek are evil. The pure in heart have base, subtle revulsions: like Dostoevsky's Idiot. The whole Sermon on the Mount becomes a litany of white vice.

What then?

It's our own fault. It was *we* who set up the ideals. And if we are such fools, that we aren't able to kick over our ideals in time, the worse for us.

Look at Melville's eighty long years of writhing. And to the end he writhed on the ideal pin.

From the 'perfect woman lover' he passed on to the 'perfect friend'. He looked and looked for the perfect man friend.

Couldn't find him.

Marriage was a ghastly disillusion to him, because he looked for perfect marriage.

Friendship never even made a real start in him - save perhaps his half-sentimental love for Jack Chase, in *White Jacket*.

Yet to the end he pined for this: a perfect relationship; perfect mating; perfect mutual understanding. A perfect friend.

Right to the end he could never accept the fact that *perfect* relationships cannot be. Each soul is alone, and the aloneness of each soul is a double barrier to perfect relationship between two beings.

Each soul *should* be alone. And in the end the desire for a 'perfect relationship' is just a vicious, unmanly craving. '*Tous nos malheurs viennent de ne pouvoir etre seuls.*'

Melville, however, refused to draw his conclusion. *Life* was wrong, he said. He refused Life. But he stuck to his ideal of perfect relationship, possible perfect love. The world *ought* to be a harmonious loving place. And it *can't* be. So life itself is wrong.

It is silly arguing. Because, after all, only temporary man sets up the 'oughts'.

The world ought *not* to be a harmonious loving place. It ought to be a place of fierce discord and intermittent harmonies: which it is.

Love ought *not* to be perfect. It ought to have perfect moments, and wildnesses of thorn bushes - which it has.

A 'perfect' relationship ought *not* to be possible. Every relationship should have its absolute limits, its absolute reserves, essential to the singleness of the

soul in each person. A truly perfect relationship is one in which each party leaves great tracts unknown in the other party.

No two persons can meet at more than a few points, consciously. If two people can just be together fairly often, so that the presence of each is a sort of balance to the other, that is the basis of perfect relationship. There must be true separatenesses as well.

Melville was, at the core, a mystic and an idealist.

Perhaps, so am I.

And he stuck to his ideal guns.

I abandon mine.

He was a mystic who raved because the old ideal guns shot havoc. The guns of the 'noble spirit'. Of 'ideal love'.

I say, let the old guns rot.

Get new ones, and shoot straight.

CHAPTER 11

Herman Melville's Moby Dick

MOBY DICK, *or the White Whale*.

A hunt. The last great hunt.

For what ?

For Moby Dick, the huge white sperm whale: who is old, hoary, monstrous, and swims alone; who is unspeakably terrible in his wrath, having so often been attacked; and snow-white.

Of course he is a symbol.

Of what ?

I doubt if even Melville knew exactly. That's the best of it.

He is warm-blooded, he is lovable. He is lonely Leviathan, not a Hobbes sort. Or is he ?

But he is warm-blooded and lovable. The South Sea Islanders, and Polynesians, and Malays, who worship shark, or crocodile, or weave endless frigate-bird distortions, why did they never worship the whale? So big!

Because the whale is not wicked. He doesn't bite. And their gods had to bite.

He's not a dragon. He is Leviathan. He never coils like the Chinese dragon of the sun. He's not a serpent of the waters. He is warm-blooded, a mammal. And hunted, hunted down.

It is a great book.

At first you are put off by the style. It reads like journalism. It seems spurious. You feel Melville is trying to put something over you. It won't do.

And Melville really is a bit sententious: aware of himself, self-conscious, putting something over even himself. But then it's not easy to get into the swing of a piece of deep mysticism when you just set out with a story.

Nobody can be more clownish, more clumsy and sententiously in bad taste, than Herman Melville, even in a great book like *Moby Dick*. He preaches and holds forth because he's not sure of himself. And he holds forth, often, so amateurishly.

The artist was so *much* greater than the man. The man is rather a tiresome New Englander of the ethical mystical-transcendentalist sort: Emerson, Longfellow, Hawthorne, *etc.* So unrelieved, the solemn ass even in humour. So hopelessly *au grand serieux*, you feel like saying: Good God, what does it matter? If life is a tragedy, or a farce, or a disaster, or anything else, what do I

care! Let life be what it likes. Give me a drink, that's what I want just now.

For my part, life is so many things I don't care what it is. It's not my affair to sum it up. Just now it's a cup of tea. This morning it was wormwood and gall. Hand me the sugar.

One wearies of the *grand serieux*. There's something false about it. And that's Melville. Oh dear, when the solemn ass brays! brays! brays!

But he was a deep, great artist, even if he was rather a sententious man. He was a real American in that he always felt his audience in front of him. But when he ceases to be American, when he forgets all audience, and gives us his sheer apprehension of the world, then he is wonderful, his book commands a stillness in the soul, an awe.

In his 'human' self, Melville is almost dead. That is, he hardly reacts to human contacts any more; or only ideally: or just for a moment. His human-emotional self is almost played out. He is abstract, self-analytical and abstracted. And he is more spell-bound by the strange slidings and collidings of Matter than by the things men do. In this he is like Dana. It is the material elements he really has to do with. His drama is with them. He was a futurist long before futurism found paint. The sheer naked slidings of the elements. And the human soul experiencing it all. So often, it is almost over the border: psychiatry. Almost spurious. Yet so great.

It is the same old thing as in all Americans. They keep their old-fashioned ideal frock-coat on, and an old-fashioned silk hat, while they do the most impossible things. There you are: you see Melville hugged in bed by a huge tattooed South Sea Islander, and solemnly offering burnt offering to this savage's little idol, and his ideal frock-coat just hides his shirt-tails and prevents us from seeing his bare posterior as he salaams, while his ethical silk hat sits correctly over his brow the while. That is so typically American: doing the most impossible things without taking off their spiritual get-up. Their ideals are like armour which has rusted in, and will never more come off. And meanwhile in Melville his bodily knowledge moves naked, a living quick among the stark elements. For with sheer physical vibrational sensitiveness, like a marvellous wireless-station, he registers the effects of the outer world. And he records also, almost beyond pain or pleasure, the extreme transitions of the isolated, far-driven soul, the soul which is now alone, without any real human contact.

The first days in New Bedford introduce the only human being who really enters into the book, namely, Ishmael, the 'I' of the book. And then the moment's heart's-brother, Queequeg, the tattooed, powerful South Sea harpooner, whom Melville loves as Dana loves 'Hope'. The advent of Ishmael's bedmate is amusing and unforgettable. But later the two swear 'marriage', in the

language of the savages. For Queequeg has opened again the flood-gates of love and human connection in Ishmael.

As I sat there in that now lonely room, the fire burning low, in that mild stage when, after its first intensity has warmed the air, it then only glows to be looked at; the evening shades and phantoms gathering round the casements, and peering in upon us silent, solitary twain: I began to be sensible of strange feelings. I felt a melting in me. No more my splintered heart and maddened hand were turned against the wofhish world. This soothing savage had redeemed it. There he sat, his very indifference speaking a nature in which there lurked no civilized hypocrisies and bland deceits. Wild he was; a very sight of sights to see; yet I began to feel myself mysteriously drawn towards him.

So they smoked together, and are clasped in each other's arms. The friendship is finally sealed when Ishmael offers sacrifice to Queequeg's little idol, Gogo.

I was a good Christian, born and bred in the bosom of the infallible Presbyterian Church. How then could I unite with the idolater in worshipping his piece of wood? But what is worship? - to do the will of God - that is worship. And what is the will of God? - to do to my fellow man what I would have my fellow man do to me - *that* is the will of God.

- Which sounds like Benjamin Franklin, and is hopelessly bad theology. But it is real American logic.

Now Queequeg is my fellow man. And what do I wish that this Queequeg would do to me? Why, unite with me in my particular Presbyterian form of worship. Consequently, I must unite with him; ergo I must turn idolater. So I kindled the shavings; helped prop up the innocent little idol; offered him burnt biscuit with Queequeg; salaamed before him twice or thrice; kissed his nose; and that done, we undressed and went to bed, at peace with our own consciences and all the world. But we did not go to sleep without some little chat. How it is I know not, but there is no place like bed for confidential disclosures between friends. Man and wife, they say, open the very bottom of their souls to each other and some old couples often lie and chat over old times till nearly morning. Thus, then, lay I and Queequeg - a cosy, loving pair -

You would think this relation with Queequeg meant something to Ishmael. But no. Queequeg is forgotten like yesterday's newspaper. Human things are only momentary excitements or amusements to the American Ishmael. Ishmael, the hunted. But much more Ishmael the hunter. What's a Queequeg? What's a wife? The white whale must be hunted down. Queequeg must be just 'KNOWN', then dropped into oblivion.

And what in the name of fortune is the white whale?

Elsewhere Ishmael says he loved Queequeg's eyes: 'large, deep eyes, fiery

black and bold'. No doubt like Poe, he wanted to get the 'clue' to them. That was all.

The two men go over from New Bedford to Nantucket, and there sign on to the Quaker whaling ship, the *Pequod*. It is all strangely fantastic, phantasmagoric. The voyage of the soul. Yet curiously a real whaling voyage, too. We pass on into the midst of the sea with this strange ship and its incredible crew. The Argonauts were mild lambs in comparison. And Ulysses went *defeating* the Circes and overcoming the wicked hussies of the isles. But the *Pequod's* crew is a collection of maniacs fanatically hunting down a lonely, harmless white whale.

As a soul history, it makes one angry. As a sea yarn, it is marvellous: there is always something a bit over the mark, in sea yarns. Should be. Then again the masking up of actual seaman's experience with sonorous mysticism sometimes gets on one's nerves. And again, as a revelation of destiny the book is too deep even for sorrow. Profound beyond feeling.

You are some time before you are allowed to see the captain, Ahab: the mysterious Quaker. Oh, it is a God-fearing Quaker ship.

Ahab, the captain. The captain of the soul.

I am the master of my fate,

I am the captain of my soul!

Ahab!

'Oh, captain, my captain, our fearful trip is done.'

The gaunt Ahab, Quaker, mysterious person, only shows himself after some days at sea. There's a secret about him! What ?

Oh, he's a portentous person. He stumps about on an ivory stump, made from sea-ivory. Moby Dick, the great white whale, tore off Ahab's leg at the knee, when Ahab was attacking him.

Quite right, too. Should have torn off both his legs, and a bit more besides.

But Ahab doesn't think so. Ahab is now a monomaniac. Moby Dick is his monomania. Moby Dick must DIE, or Ahab can't live any longer. Ahab is atheist by this.

All right.

This *Pequod*, ship of the American soul, has three mates.

1. Starbuck: Quaker, Nantucketer, a good responsible man of reason, forethought, intrepidity, what is called a dependable man. At the bottom, *afraid*.

2. Stubb: 'Fearless as fire, and as mechanical.' Insists on being reckless and jolly on every occasion. Must be afraid too, really.

3. Flask: Stubborn, obstinate, without imagination. To him 'the wondrous

whale was but a species of magnified mouse or water-rat -'

There you have them: a maniac captain and his three mates, three splendid seamen, admirable whalemens, first-class men at their job.

America!

It is rather like Mr Wilson and his admirable, 'efficient' crew, at the Peace Conference. Except that none of the Pequodders took their wives along.

A maniac captain of the soul, and three eminently practical mates.

America!

Then such a crew. Renegades, castaways, cannibals: Ishmael, Quakers.

America!

Three giant harpooners to spear the great white whale.

1. Queequeg, the South Sea Islander, all tattooed, big and powerful.
2. Tashtego, the Red Indian of the sea-coast, where the Indian meets the sea.
3. Daggoo, the huge black negro.

There you have them, three savage races, under the American flag, the maniac captain, with their great keen harpoons, ready to spear the white whale.

And only after many days at sea does Ahab's own boat-crew appear on deck. Strange, silent, secret, black-garbed Malays, fire worshipping Parsees. These are to man Ahab's boat, when it leaps in pursuit of that whale.

What do you think of the ship *Pequod*, the ship of the soul of an American?

Many races, many peoples, many nations, under the Stars and Stripes. Beaten with many stripes.

Seeing stars sometimes.

And in a mad ship, under a mad captain, in a mad, fanatic's hunt.

For what?

For Moby Dick, the great white whale.

But splendidly handled. Three splendid mates. The whole thing practical, eminently practical in its working. American industry!

And all this practicality in the service of a mad, mad chase.

Melville manages to keep it a real whaling ship, on a real cruise, in spite of all fanatics. A wonderful, wonderful voyage. And a beauty that is so surpassing only because of the author's awful floundering in mystical waters. He wanted to get metaphysically deep. And he got deeper than metaphysics. It is a surpassingly beautiful book, with an awful meaning, and bad jolts.

It is interesting to compare Melville with Dana, about the albatross - Melville a bit sententious.

I remember the first albatross I ever saw. It was during a pro-boged gale in waters hard upon the Antarctic seas. From my fore-noon watch below I ascended to the overcrowded deck, and there lashed upon the main hatches, I saw a regal

feathered thing of unspotted whiteness, and with a hooked Roman bill sublime. At intervals it arched forth its vast, archangel wings - wondrous throbbings and flutterings shook it. Though bodily unharmed, it uttered cries, as some King's ghost in supernatural distress. Through its inexpressible strange eyes methought I peeped to secrets not below the heavens - the white thing was so white, its wings so wide, and in those for ever exiled waters, I had lost the miserable warping memories of traditions and of towns. I assert then, that in the wondrous bodily whiteness of the bird chiefly lurks the secret of the spell -

Melville's albatross is a prisoner, caught by a bait on a hook.

Well, I have seen an albatross, too: following us in waters hard upon the Antarctic, too, south of Australia. And in the Southern winter. And the ship, a P. and O. boat, nearly empty. And the lascar crew shivering.

The bird with its long, long wings following, then leaving us. No one knows till they have tried, how lost, how lonely those Southern waters are. And glimpses of the Australian coast.

It makes one feel that our day is only a day. That in the dark of the night ahead other days stir fecund, when we have lapsed from existence.

Who knows how utterly we shall lapse.

But Melville keeps up his disquisition about 'whiteness'. I The great abstract fascinated him. The abstract where we end, and cease to be. White or black. Our white, abstract end!

Then again it is lovely to be at sea on the *Pequod*, with never a grain of earth to us.

It was a cloudy, sultry afternoon; the seamen were lazily lounging about the decks, or vacantly gazing over into the lead-coloured waters. Queequeg and I were mildly employed weaving what is called a sword-mat, for an additional lashing to our boat. So still and subdued, and yet somehow prelude was all the scene, and such an incantation of reverie lurked in the air that each silent sailor seemed resolved into his own invisible self -

In the midst of this prelude silence came the first cry: 'There she blows! there! there! there! She blows!' And then comes the first chase, a marvellous piece of true sea-writing, the sea, and sheer sea-beings on the chase, sea-creatures chased. There is scarcely a taint of earth - pure sea-motion.

'Give way, men,' whispered Starbuck, drawing still further aft the sheet of his sail; 'there is time to kill a fish yet before the squall comes. There's white water again! - Close to! - Spring!' Soon after, two cries in quick succession on each side of us denoted that the other boats had got fast; but hardly were they overheard, when with a lightning-like hurtling whisper Starbuck said: 'Stand up!' and Queequeg, harpoon in hand, sprang to his feet. - Though not one of the

oarsmen was then facing the life and death peril so close to them ahead, yet, their eyes on the intense countenance of the mate in the stern of the boat, they knew that the imminent instant had come; they heard, too, an enormous wallowing sound, as of fifty elephants stirring in their litter. Meanwhile the boat was still booming through the mist, the waves curbing and hissing around us like the erected crests of enraged serpents.

‘That’s his hump. *There! There*, give it to him!’ whispered Starbuck. - A short rushing sound leapt out of the boat; it was the darted iron of Queequeg. Then all in one welded motion came a push from astern, while forward the boat seemed striking on a ledge; the sail collapsed and exploded; a gush of scalding vapour shot up near by; something rolled and tumbled like an earthquake beneath us. The whole crew were half suffocated as they were tossed helter-skelter into the white curling cream of the squall. Squall, whale, and harpoon had all blended together; and the whale, merely grazed by the iron, escaped -

Melville is a master of violent, chaotic physical motion; he can keep up a whole wild chase without a flaw. He is as perfect at creating stillness. The ship is cruising on the Carrol Ground, south of St Helena. -

It was while gliding through these latter waters that one serene and moonlight night, when all the waves rolled by like scrolls of silver; and by their soft, suffusing seethings, made what seemed a silvery silence, not a solitude; on such a silent night a silvery jet was seen far in advance of the white bubbles at the bow -

Then there is the description of brit.

Steering northeastward from the Crozetts we fell in with vast meadows of brit, the minute, yellow substance upon which the Right Whale largely feeds. For leagues and leagues it undulated round us, so that we seemed to be sailing through boundless herds of ripe and golden wheat. On the second day, numbers of Right Whales were seen, who, secure from the attack of a Sperm Whaler like the *Pequod*, with open jaws sluggishly swam through the brit, which, adhering to the fringing fibres of that wondrous Venetian blind in their mouths, was in that manner separated from the water that escaped at the lip. As moving mowers who, side by side, slowly and seethingly advance their scythes through the long wet grass of the marshy meads; even so these monsters swam, making a strange grassy, cutting sound; and leaving behind them endless swaths of blue on the yellow sea. But it was only the sound they made as they parted the brit which at all reminded one of mowers. Seen from the mastheads, especially when they paused and were stationary for a while, their vast black forms looked more like lifeless masses of rock than anything else -

This beautiful passage brings us to the apparition of the squid.

Slowly wading through the meadows of brit, the *Pequod* still held her way northeastward towards the island of Java; a gentle air impelling her keel, so that in the surrounding serenity her three tall, tapering masts mildly waved to that languid breeze, as three-mild palms on a plain. And still, at wide intervals, in the silvery night, that lonely alluring jet would be seen.

But one transparent-blue morning, when a stillness almost preternatural spread over the sea, however unattended with any stagnant calm; when the long burnished sunblade on the waters seemed a golden finger laid across them, enjoining secrecy; when all the slippered waves whispered together as they softly ran on; in this profound hush of the visible sphere a strange spectre was seen by Daggoo from the main-mast head.

In the distance, a great white mass lazily rose, and rising higher and higher, and disentangling itself from the azure, at last gleamed before our prow like a snow-slide new slid from the hills. Thus glistening for a moment, as slowly it subsided, and sank. Then once more arose, and silently gleamed. It seemed not a whale; and yet, is this Moby Dick? thought Daggoo -

The boats were lowered and pulled to the scene.

In the same spot where it sank, once more it slowly rose. Almost forgetting for the moment all thoughts of Moby Dick, we now gazed at the most wondrous phenomenon which the secret seas have hitherto revealed to mankind. A vast pulpy mass, furlongs in length and breadth, of a glancing cream-colour, lay floating on the water, innumerable long arms radiating from its centre, and curling and twisting like a nest of anacondas, as if blindly to clutch at any hapless object within reach. No perceptible face or front did it have; no conceivable token of either sensation or instinct; but undulated there on the billows an unearthly, formless, chance-like apparition of life. And with a low sucking it slowly disappeared again.

The following chapters, with their account of whale hunts, the killing, the stripping, the cutting up, are magnificent records of actual happening. Then comes the queer tale of the meeting of the *Jeroboam*, a whaler met at sea, all of whose men were under the domination of a religious maniac, one of the ship's hands. There are detailed descriptions of the actual taking of the sperm oil from a whale's head. Dilating on the smallness of the brain of a sperm whale, Melville significantly remarks - 'for I believe that much of man's character will be found betokened in his backbone. I would rather feel your spine than your skull, whoever you are-' And of the whale, he adds:

'For, viewed in this light, the wonderful comparative smallness of his brain proper is more than compensated by the wonderful comparative magnitude of his spinal cord.'

In among the rush of terrible awful hunts, come touches of pure beauty.

As the three boats lay there on that gently rolling sea, gazing down into its eternal blue noon; and as not a single groan or cry of any sort, nay not so much as a ripple or a thought, came up from its depths, what landsman would have thought that beneath all that silence and placidity the utmost monster of the seas was writhing and wrenching in agony!

Perhaps the most stupendous chapter is the one called *The Grand Armada*, at the beginning of Volume III. The *Pequod* was drawing through the Sunda Straits towards Java when she came upon a vast host of sperm whales.

Broad on both bows, at a distance of two or three miles, and forming a great semicircle embracing one-half of the level horizon, a continuous chain of whale-jets were up-playing and sparkling in the noonday air.

Chasing this great herd, past the Straits of Sunda, themselves chased by Javan pirates, the whalers race on. Then the boats are lowered. At last that curious state of inert irresolution came over the whales, when they were, as the seamen say, galled. Instead of forging ahead in huge martial array they swam violently hither and thither, a surging sea of whales, no longer moving on. Starbuck's boat, made fast to a whale, is towed in amongst this howling Leviathan chaos. In mad career it cockles through the boiling surge of monsters, till it is brought into a clear lagoon in the very centre of the vast, mad, terrified herd. There a sleek, pure calm reigns. There the females swam in peace, and the young whales came snuffing tamely at the boat, like dogs. And there the astonished seamen watched the love-making of these amazing monsters, mammals, now in rut far down in the sea -

But far beneath this wondrous world upon the surface, another and still stranger world met our eyes, as we gazed over the side. For, suspended in these watery vaults, floated the forms of the nursing mothers of the whales, and those that by their enormous girth seemed shortly to become mothers. The lake, as I have hinted, was to a considerable depth exceedingly transparent; and as human infants while sucking will calmly and fixedly gaze away from the breast, as if leading two different lives at a time; and while yet drawing moral nourishment, be still spiritually feasting upon some unearthly reminiscence, even so did the young of these whales seem looking up towards us, but not at us, as if we were but a bit of gulf-weed in their newborn sight. Floating on their sides, the mothers also seemed quietly eyeing us. - Some of the subtlest secrets of the seas seemed divulged to us in this enchanted pond. We saw young Leviathan amours in the deep. And thus, though surrounded by circle upon circle of consternation and affrights, did these inscrutable creatures at the centre freely and fearlessly indulge in all peaceful concernments; yea, serenely revelled in dalliance and

delight -

There is something really overwhelming in these whalehunts, almost superhuman or inhuman, bigger than life, more terrific than human activity. The same with the chapter on ambergris: it is so curious, so real, yet so unearthly. And again in the chapter called *The Cassock* - surely the oldest piece of phallicism in all the world's literature.

After this comes the amazing account of the Try-works, when the ship is turned into the sooty, oily factory in mid-ocean, and the oil is extracted from the blubber. In the night of the red furnace burning on deck, at sea, Melville has his startling experience of reversion. He is at the helm, but has turned to watch the fire: when suddenly he feels the ship rushing backward from him, in mystic reversion -

Uppermost was the impression, that whatever swift, rushing thing I stood on was not so much bound to any haven ahead, as rushing from all havens astern. A stark bewildering feeling, as of death, came over me. Convulsively my hands grasped the tiller, but with the crazy conceit that the tiller was, somehow, in some enchanted way, inverted. My God! What is the matter with me, I thought!

This dream-experience is a real soul-experience. He ends with an injunction to all men, not to gaze on the red fire when its redness makes all things look ghastly. It seems to him that his gazing on fire has evoked this horror of reversion, undoing.

Perhaps it had. He was water-born.

After some unhealthy work on the ship, Queequeg caught a fever and was like to die.

How he wasted and wasted in those few, long-lingering days, till there seemed but little left of him but his frame and tattooing. But as all else in him thinned, and his cheek-bones grew sharper, his eyes, nevertheless, seemed growing fuller and fuller; they took on a strangeness of lustre; and mildly but deeply looked out at you there from his sickness, a wondrous testimony to that immortal health in him which could not die, or be weakened. And like circles on the water, which as they grow fainter, expand; so his eyes seemed rounding and rounding, like the circles of Eternity. An awe that cannot be named would steal over you as you sat by the side of this waning savage -

But Queequeg did not die - and the *Pequod* emerges from the Eastern Straits, into the full Pacific. 'To any meditative Magian rover, this serene Pacific once beheld, must ever after be the sea of his adoption. It rolls the midmost waters of the world -'

In this Pacific the fights go on:

It was far down the afternoon, and when all the spearings of the crimson fight

were done, and floating in the lovely sunset sea and sky, sun and whale both stilly died together; then such a sweetness and such a plaintiveness, such inwreathing orisons curled up in that rosy air, that it almost seemed as if far over from the deep green convent valleys of the Manila isles, the Spanish land-breeze had gone to sea, freighted with these vesper hymns. Soothed again, but only soothed to deeper gloom, Ahab, who had sternal off from the whale, sat intently watching his final wanings from the now tranquil boat. For that strange spectacle, observable in all sperm whales dying - the turning of the head sunwards, and so expiring - that strange spectacle, beheld of such a placid evening, somehow to Ahab conveyed wondrousness unknown before. 'He turns and turns him to it; how slowly, but how steadfastly, his homage-rendering and invoking brow, with his last dying motions. He too worships fire . . .'

So Ahab soliloquizes: and so the warm-blooded whale turns for the last time to the sun, which begot him in the waters.

But as we see in the next chapter, it is the Thunder-fire which Ahab really worships: that living sundering fire of which he bears the brand, from head to foot; it is storm, the electric storm of the *Pequod*, when the corposants burn in high, tapering flames of supernatural pallor upon the masthead, and when the compass is reversed. After this all is fatality. Life itself seems mystically reversed. In these hunters of Moby Dick there is nothing but madness and possession. The captain, Ahab, moves hand in hand with the poor imbecile negro boy, Pip, who has been so cruelly demented, left swimming alone in the vast sea. It is the imbecile child of the sun hand in hand with the northern monomaniac, captain and master.

The voyage surges on. They meet one ship, then another. It is all ordinary day-routine, and yet all is a tension of pure madness and horror, the approaching horror of the last fight.

Hither and thither, on high, glided the snow-white wings of small unspecked birds; these were the gentle thoughts of the feminine air; but to and fro in the deeps, far down in the bottomless blue, rushed mighty leviathans, sword-fish and sharks, and these were the strong, troubled, murderous thinkings of the masculine sea -

On this day Ahab confesses his weariness, the weariness of his burden. 'But do I look very old, so very, very old, Starbuck? I feel deadly faint, and bowed, and humped, as though I were Adam staggering beneath the piled centuries since Paradise -' It is the Gethsemane of Ahab, before the last fight: the Gethsemane of the human soul seeking the last self-conquest, the last attainment of extended consciousness - infinite consciousness.

At last they sight the whale. Ahab sees him from his hoisted perch at the

masthead - 'From this height the whale was now seen some mile or so ahead, at every roll of the sea revealing his high, sparkling hump, and regularly jetting his silent spout into the air.'

The boats are lowered, to draw near the white whale.

At length the breathless hunter came so nigh his seemingly unsuspectful prey that his entire dazzling hump was distinctly visible, sliding along the sea as if an isolated thing, and continually set in a revolving ring of finest, fleecy, greenish foam. He saw the vast involved wrinkles of the slightly projecting head, beyond. Before it, far out on the soft, Turkish rugged waters, went the glistening white shadow from his broad milky forehead, a musical rippling playfully accompanying the shade; and behind, the blue waters interchangeably flowed over the moving valley of his steady wake; and on either side bright bubbles arose and danced by his side. But these were broken again by the light toes of hundreds of gay fowl softly feathering the sea, alternate with their fitful flight; and like to some flagstaff rising from the pointed hull of an argosy, the tall but shattered pole of a recent lance projected from the white whale's back; and at intervals one of the clouds of soft-toed fowls hovering, and to and fro shimmering like a canopy over the fish, silently perched and rocked on this pole, the long tail-feathers streaming like pennons.

A gentle joyousness - a mighty mildness of repose in swiftness, invested the gliding whale

The fight with the whale is too wonderful and too awful, to be quoted apart from the book. It lasted three days. The fearful sight, on the third day, of the torn body of the Parsee harpooner, lost on the previous day, now seen lashed on to the flanks of the white whale by the tangle of harpoon lines, has a mystic dream-horror. The awful and infuriated whale turns upon the ship, symbol of this civilized world of ours. He smites her with a fearful shock. And a few minutes later, from the last of the fighting whale-boats comes the cry:

'The ship! Great God, where is the ship?' Soon they, through dim bewildering mediums, saw her sidelong fading phantom, as in the gaseous Fata Morgana; only the uppermost masts out of the water; while fixed by infatuation, or fidelity, or fate, to their once lofty perches, the pagan harpooners still maintained their sinking look-outs on the sea. And now concentric circles seized the lone boat itself, and all its crew, and each floating oar, and every lance-pole, and spinning, animate and inanimate, all round and round in one vortex, carried the smallest chip of the *Pequod* out of sight -

The bird of heaven, the eagle, St John's bird, the Red Indian bird, the American, goes down with the ship, nailed by Tashtego's hammer, the hammer of the American Indian. The eagle of the spirit. Sunk!

Now small fowls flew screaming over the yet yawning gulf; a sullen white surf beat against its steep sides; then all collapsed; and the great shroud of the sea rolled on as it rolled five thousand years ago.

So ends one of the strangest and most wonderful books in the world, closing up its mystery and its tortured symbolism. It is an epic of the sea such as no man has equalled; and it is a book of esoteric symbolism of profound significance, and of considerable tiresomeness.

But it is a great book, a very great book, the greatest book of the sea ever written. It moves awe in the soul.

The terrible fatality.

Fatality.

Doom.

Doom! Doom! Doom! Something seems to whisper it in the very dark trees of America. Doom!

Doom of what?

Doom of our white day. We are doomed, doomed. And the doom is in America. The doom of our white day.

Ah, well, if my day is doomed, and I am doomed with my day, it is something greater than I which dooms me, so I accept my doom as a sign of the greatness which is more than I am.

Melville knew. He knew his race was doomed. His white soul, doomed. His great white epoch doomed. Himself, doomed. The idealist, doomed: The spirit, doomed.

The reversion. 'Not so much bound to any haven ahead, as rushing from all havens astern.'

That great horror of ours! It is our civilization rushing from all havens astern.

The last ghastly hunt. The White Whale.

What then is Moby Dick? He is the deepest blood-being of the white race; he is our deepest blood-nature.

And he is hunted, hunted, hunted by the maniacal fanaticism of our white mental consciousness. We want to hunt him down. To subject him to our will. And in this maniacal conscious hunt of ourselves we get dark races and pale to help us, red, yellow, and black, east and west, Quaker and fireworshipper, we get them all to help us in this ghastly maniacal hunt which is our doom and our suicide.

The last phallic being of the white man. Hunted into the death of upper consciousness and the ideal will. Our blood-self subjected to our will. Our blood-consciousness sapped by a parasitic mental or ideal consciousness.

Hot blooded sea-born Moby Dick. Hunted maniacs of the idea.

Oh God, oh God, what next, when the *Pequod* has sunk?

She sank in the war, and we are all flotsam.

Now what next?

Who knows ? *Quien sabe? Quien sabe, senior?*

Neither Spanish nor Saxon America has any answer.

The *Pequod* went down. And the *Pequod* was the ship of the white American soul. She sank, taking with her negro and Indian and Polynesian, Asiatic and Quaker and good, business-like Yankees and Ishmael: she sank all the lot of them.

Boom! as Vachel Lindsay would say.

To use the words of Jesus, IT IS FINISHED.

Consummatum est! But *Moby Dick* was first published in 1851. If the Great White Whale sank the ship of the Great White Soul in 1851, what's been happening ever since?

Post-mortem effects, presumably.

Because, in the first centuries, Jesus was Cetus, the Whale. And the Christians were the little fishes. Jesus, the Redeemer, was Cetus, Leviathan. And all the Christians all his little fishes.

CHAPTER 12

Whitman

POST-MORTEM effects?

But what of Walt Whitman?

The 'good grey poet'.

Was he a ghost, with all his physicality?

The good grey poet.

Post-mortem effects. Ghosts.

A certain ghoulish insistency. A certain horrible pottage of human parts. A certain stridency and portentousness. A luridness about his beatitudes.

DEMOCRACY! THESE STATES! EIDOLONS! LOVERS, ENDLESS LOVERS!

ONE IDENTITY!

ONE IDENTITY!

I AM HE THAT ACHES WITH AMOROUS LOVE.

Do you believe me, when I say post-mortem effects ?

When the *Pequod* went down, she left many a rank and dirty steamboat still fussing in the seas. The *Pequod* sinks with all her souls, but their bodies rise again to man innumerable tramp steamers, and ocean-crossing liners. Corpses.

What we mean is that people may go on, keep on, and rush on, without souls. They have their ego and their will, that is enough to keep them going.

So that you see, the sinking of the *Pequod* was only a metaphysical tragedy after all. The world goes on just the same. The ship of the *soul* is sunk. But the machine-manipulating body works just the same: digests, chews gum, admires Botticelli and aches with amorous love.

I AM HE THAT ACHES WITH AMOROUS LOVE.

What do you make of that? I AM HE THAT ACHES. First generalization. First uncomfortable universalization. WITH AMOROUS LOVE! Oh, God! Better a bellyache. A bellyache is at least specific. But the ACHE OF AMOROUS LOVE!

Think of having that under your skin. All that!

I AM HE THAT ACHES WITH AMOROUS LOVE.

Walter, leave off. You are not HE. You are just a limited Walter. And your ache doesn't include all Amorous Love, by any means. If you ache you only ache with a small bit of amorous love, and there's so much more stays outside

the cover of your ache, that you might be a bit milder about it.

I AM HE THAT ACHES WITH AMOROUS LOVE.

CHUFF! CHUFF! CHUFF!

CHU-CHU-CHU-CHU-CHUFF!

Reminds one of a steam-engine. A locomotive. They're the only things that seem to me to ache with amorous love. All that steam inside them. Forty million foot-pounds pressure. The ache of AMOROUS LOVE. Steam-pressure. CHUFF!

An ordinary man aches with love for Belinda, or his Native Land, or the Ocean, or the Stars, or the Oversoul: if he feels that an ache is in the fashion.

It takes a steam-engine to ache with AMOROUS LOVE. All of it.

Walt was really too superhuman. The danger of the superman is that he is mechanical.

They talk of his 'splendid animality'. Well, he'd got it on the brain, if that's the place for animality.

I am he that aches with amorous love:

Does the earth gravitate, does not all matter, aching, attract all matter ?

So the body of me to all I meet or know.

What can be more mechanical ? The difference between life and matter is that life, living things, living creatures, have the instinct of turning right away from some matter, and of bliss-fully ignoring the bulk of most matter, and of turning towards only some certain bits of specially selected matter. As for living creatures all helplessly hurtling together into one great snowball, why, most very living creatures spend the greater part of their time getting out of the sight, smell or sound of the rest of living creatures. Even bees only cluster on their own queen. And that is sickening enough. Fancy all white humanity clustering on one another like a lump of bees.

No, Walt, you give yourself away. Matter *does* gravitate helplessly. But men are tricky-tricksy, and they shy all sorts of ways.

Matter gravitates because it *is* helpless and mechanical.

And if you gravitate the same, if the body of you gravitates to all you meet or know, why, something must have gone . seriously wrong with you. You must have broken your mainspring.

You must have fallen also into mechanization.

Your Moby Dick must be really dead. That lonely phallic monster of the individual you. Dead mentalized.

I only know that my body doesn't by any means gravitate to all I meet or know, I find I can shake hands with a few people. But most I wouldn't touch with a long prop.

Your mainspring is broken, Walt Whitman. The mainspring of your own individuality. And so you run down with a great whirr, merging with everything.

You have killed your isolate Moby Dick. You have mentalized your deep sensual body, and that's the death of it.

I am everything and everything is me and so we're all One in One Identity, like the Mundane Egg, which has been addled quite a while.

'Whoever you are, to endless announcements-'

'And of these one and all I weave the song of myself.'

Do you ? Well then, it just shows you haven't *got* any self. It's a mush, not a woven thing. A hotch-potch, not a tissue. Your self.

Oh, Walter, Walter, what have you done with it ? What have you done with yourself? With your own individual self? For it sounds as if it had all leaked out of you, leaked into the universe.

Post-mortem effects. The individuality had leaked out of him.

No, no, don't lay this down to poetry. These are post- mortem effects. And Walt's great poems are really huge fat tomb-plants, great rank graveyard growths.

All that false exuberance. All those lists of things boiled in one pudding-cloth!
No, no!

I don't want all those things inside me, thank you.

'I reject nothing,' says Walt.

If that is so, one might be a pipe open at both ends, so everything runs through.

Post-mortem effects.

'I embrace ALL,' says Whitman. 'I weave all things into myself.'

Do you really! There can't be much left of *you* when you've done. When you've cooked the awful pudding of One Identity.

'And whoever walks a furlong without sympathy walks to his own funeral dressed in his own shroud.'

Take off your hat then, my funeral procession of one is passing.

This awful Whitman. This post-mortem poet. This poet with the private soul leaking out of him all the time. All his privacy leaking out in a sort of dribble, oozing into the universe.

Walt becomes in his own person the whole world, the whole universe, the whole eternity of time, as far as his rather sketchy knowledge of history will carry him, that is. Because to *be* a thing he had to know it. In order to assume the identity of a thing he had to know that thing. He was not able to assume one identity with Charlie Chaplin, for example, because Walt didn't know Charlie. What a pity! He'd have done poems, paces and what not, Chants, Songs of

Cinematernity.

‘Oh, Charlie, my Charlie, another film is done-

As soon as Walt *knew* a thing, he assumed a One Identity with it. If he knew that an Eskimo sat in a kyak, immediately there was Walt being little and yellow and greasy, sitting in a kyak.

Now will you tell me exactly what a kyak is ?

Who is he that demands petty definition? Let him behold me *sitting in a kyak*.

I behold no such thing. I behold a rather fat old man full of a rather senile, self-conscious sensuosity.

DEMOCRACY. EN MASSE. ONE IDENTITY.

The universe is short, adds up to ONE.

ONE.

I.

Which is Walt.

His poems *Democracy*, *En Masse*, *One Identity*, they are long sums in additions and multiplication, of which the answer is invariably M Y S E L F.

He reaches the state of ALLNESS.

And what then? It’s all empty. Just an empty Allness. An addled egg.

Walt wasn’t an Eskimo. A little, yellow, sly, cunning, greasy little Eskimo. And when Walt blandly assumed Allness, including Eskimeness, unto himself, he was just sucking the wind out of a blown egg-shell, no more. Eskimos are not minor little Wals. They are something that I am not, I know that. Outside the egg of my Allness chuckles the greasy little Eskimo. Outside the egg of Whitman’s Allness too.

But Walt wouldn’t have it. He was everything and everything was in him. He drove an automobile with a very fierce headlight, along the track of a fixed idea, through the dark-ness of this world. And he saw everything that way. Just as a motorist does in the night.

I, who happen to be asleep under the bushes in the dark, hoping a snake won’t crawl into my neck; I, seeing Walt go by in his great fierce poetic machine, think to myself: What a funny world that fellow sees!

ONE DIRECTION! toots Walt in the car, whizzing along it.

Whereas there are myriads of ways in the dark, not to mention trackless wildernesses, as anyone will know who cares to come off the road - even the Open Road.

ONE DIRECTION! whoops America, and sets off also in an automobile.

ALLNESS! shrieks Walt at a cross-road, going whizz over an unwary Red Indian.

ONE IDENTITY! chants democratic En Masse, pelting behind in motor-cars,

oblivious of the corpses under the wheels.

God save me, I feel like creeping down a rabbit-hole, to get away from all these automobiles rushing down the ONE IDENTITY track to the goal of ALLNESS.

A woman waits for me-

He might as well have said: 'The femaleness waits for my maleness.' Oh, beautiful generalization and abstraction! Oh, biological function.

'Athletic mothers of these States -' Muscles and wombs. They needn't have had faces at all.

As I see myself reflected in Nature,
As I see through a mist, One with inexpressible completeness, sanity, beauty,
See the bent head, and arms folded over the breast, the Female I see.
Everything was female to him: even himself. Nature just one great function.

This is the nucleus - after the child is born of woman, man is born of woman,
This is the bath of birth, the merge of small and large, and the outlet again -

'The Female I see -'

If I'd been one of his women, I'd have given him Female, with a flea in his ear.

Always wanting to merge himself into the womb of something or other.

'The Female I see -'

Anything, so long as he could merge himself.

Just a horror. A sort of white flux.

Post-mortem effects.

He found, as all men find, that you can't really merge in a woman, though you may go a long way. You can't manage the last bit. So you have to give it up, and try elsewhere if you *insist* on merging.

In *Calamus* he changes his tune. He doesn't shout and thump and exult any more. He begins to hesitate, reluctant, wistful.

The strange calamus has its pink-tinged root by the pond, and it sends up its leaves of comradeship, comrades from one root, without the intervention of woman, the female.

So he sings of the mystery of manly love, the love of comrades. Over and over he says the same thing: the new world will be built on the love of comrades, the new great dynamic of life will be manly love. Out of this manly love will come the inspiration for the future.

Will it though ? Will it ?

Comradeship ! Comrades ! This is to be the new Democracy of Comrades.
This is the new cohering principle in the world: Comradeship.

Is it ? Are you sure ?

It is the cohering principle of true soldiery, we are told in *Drum Taps*. It is the cohering principle in the new unison for creative activity. And it is extreme and alone, touching the confines of death. Something terrible to bear, terrible to be responsible for. Even Walt Whitman felt it. The soul's last and most poignant responsibility, the responsibility of comradeship, of manly love.

Yet you are beautiful to me, you faint-tinged roots, you make me think of death.

Death is beautiful from you (what indeed is finally beautiful except death and love ?)

I think it is not for life I am chanting here my chant of lovers, I think it must be for death,

For how calm, how solemn it grows to ascend to the atmosphere of lovers,

Death or life, I am then indifferent, my soul declines to prefer

(I am not sure but the high soul of lovers welcomes death most)

Indeed, O death, I think now these leaves mean precisely the same as you mean

This is strange, from the exultant Walt.

Death!

Death is now his chant! Death!

Merging! And Death! Which is the final merge.

The great merge into the womb. Woman.

And after that, the merge of comrades: man-for-man love.

And almost immediately with this, death, the final merge of death.

There you have the progression of merging. For the great mergers, woman at last becomes inadequate. For those who love to extremes. Woman is inadequate for the last merging. So the next step is the merging of man-for-man love. And this is on the brink of death. It slides over into death.

David and Jonathan. And the death of Jonathan.

It always slides into death.

The love of comrades.

Merging.

So that if the new Democracy is to be based on the love of comrades, it will be based on death too. It will slip so soon into death.

The last merging. The last Democracy. The last love. The love of comrades.

Fatality. And fatality.

Whitman would not have been the great poet he is if he had not taken the last steps and looked over into death. Death, the last merging, that was the goal of his manhood.

To the mergers, there remains the brief love of comrades, and then Death.

Whereto answering, the sea
Delaying not, hurrying not
Whispered me through the night, very plainly before daybreak,
Lisp'd to me the low and delicious word death.
And again death, death, death, death.
Hissing melodions, neither like the bird nor like my arous'd child's heart,
But edging neat as privately for me rustling at my feet,
Creeping thence steadily up to my ears and laving me softly all over,
Death, death, death, death, death-

Whitman is a very great poet, of the end of life. A very great post-mortem poet, of the transitions of the soul as it loses its integrity. The poet of the soul's last shout and shriek, on the confines of death. *Après moi le deluge*.

But we have all got to die, and disintegrate.

We have got to die in life, too, and disintegrate while we live.

But even then the goal is not death.

Something else will come.

Out of the cradle endlessly rocking.

We've got to die first, anyhow. And disintegrate while we still live.

Only we know this much: Death is not the *goal*. And Love, and merging, are now only part of the death process. Comradeship - part of the death-process. Democracy - part of the death-process. The new Democracy - the brink of death. One Identity - death itself.

We have died, and we are still disintegrating.

But IT IS FINISHED.

Consummatum est.

Whitman, the great poet, has meant so much to me. Whitman, the one man breaking a way ahead. Whitman, the one pioneer. And only Whitman. No English pioneers, no French. No European pioneer-poets. In Europe the would-be pioneers are mere innovators. The same in America. Ahead of Whitman, nothing. Ahead of all poets, pioneering into the wilderness of unopened life, Whitman. Beyond him, none. His wide, strange camp at the end of the great high-road. And lots of new little poets camping on Whitman's camping ground now. But none going really beyond. Because Whitman's camp is at the end of the road, and on the edge of a great precipice. Over the precipice, blue distances, and the blue hollow of the future. But there is no way down. It is a dead end.

Pisagh. Pisgah sights. And Death. Whitman like a strange, modern, American Moses. Fearfully mistaken. And yet the great leader.

The essential function of art is moral. Not aesthetic, not decorative, not pastime and recreation. But moral. The essential function of art is moral.

But a passionate, implicit morality, not didactic. A morality which changes the blood, rather than the mind. Changes the blood first. The mind follows later, in the wake.

Now Whitman was a great moralist. He was a great leader. He was a great changer of the blood in the veins of men.

Surely it is especially true of American art, that it is all essentially moral. Hawthorne, Poe, Longfellow, Emerson, Melville: it is the moral issue which engages them. They all feel uneasy about the old morality. Sensuously, passionately, they all attack the old morality. But they know nothing better, mentally. Therefore they give tight mental allegiance to a morality which all their passion goes to destroy. Hence the duplicity which is the fatal flaw in them, most fatal in the most perfect American work of art, *The Scarlet Letter*. Tight mental allegiance given to a morality which the passional self repudiates.

Whitman was the first to break the mental allegiance. He was the first to smash the old moral conception that the soul of man is something 'superior' and 'above' the flesh. Even Emerson still maintained this tiresome 'superiority' of the soul. Even Melville could not get over it. Whitman was the first heroic seer to seize the soul by the scruff of her neck and plant her down among the potsherds.

'There ! ' he said to the soul. 'Stay there!'

Stay there. Stay in the flesh. Stay in the limbs and lips and in the belly. Stay in the breast and womb. Stay there, Oh, Soul, where you belong.

Stay in the dark limbs of negroes. Stay in the body of the prostitute. Stay in the sick flesh of the syphilitic. Stay in the marsh where the calamus grows. Stay there, Soul, where you belong.

The Open Road. The great home of the Soul is the open road. Not heaven, not paradise. Not 'above'. Not even 'within'. The soul is neither 'above' nor 'within'. It is a wayfarer down the open road.

Not by meditating. Not by fasting. Not by exploring heaven after heaven, inwardly, in the manner of the great mystics. Not by exaltation. Not by ecstasy. Not by any of these ways does the soul come into her own.

Only by taking the open road.

Not through charity. Not through sacrifice. Not even through love. Not through good works. Not through these does the soul accomplish herself.

Only through the journey down the open road.

The journey itself, down the open road. Exposed to full contact. On two slow feet. Meeting whatever comes down the open road. In company with those that drift in the same measure along the same way. Towards no goal. Always the open road.

Having no known direction even. Only the soul remaining true to herself in her going.

Meeting all the other wayfarers along the road. And how? How meet them, and how pass ? With sympathy, says Whitman. Sympathy. He does not say love. He says sympathy. Feeling with. Feel with them as they feel with themselves. Catching the vibration of their soul and flesh as we pass.

It is a new great doctrine. A doctrine of life. A new great morality. A morality of actual living, not of salvation. Europe has never got beyond the morality of salvation. America to this day is deathly sick with saviourism. But Whitman, the greatest and the first and the only American teacher, was no Saviour. His morality was no morality of salvation. His was a morality of the soul living her life, not saving herself. Accepting the contact with other souls along the open way, as they lived their lives. Never trying to save them. As lief try to arrest them and throw them in gaol. The soul living her life along the incarnate mystery of the open road.

This was Whitman. And the true rhythm of the American continent speaking out in him. He is the first white aboriginal.

‘In my Father’s house are many mansions.’

‘No,’ said Whitman. ‘Keep out of mansions. A mansion may be heaven on earth, but you might as well be dead. Strictly avoid mansions. The soul is herself when she is going on foot down the open road.’

It is the American heroic message. The soul is not to pile up defences round herself. She is not to withdraw and seek her heavens inwardly, in mystical ecstasies. She is not to cry to some God beyond, for salvation. She is to go down the open road, as the road opens, into the unknown, keeping company with those whose soul draws them near to her, accomplishing nothing save the journey, and the works incident to the journey, in the long life-travel into the unknown, the soul in her subtle sympathies accomplishing herself by the way.

This is Whitman’s essential message. The heroic message of the American future. It is the inspiration of thousands of Americans today, the best souls of today, men and women. And it is a message that only in America can be fully under-stood, finally accepted.

Then Whitman’s mistake. The mistake of his interpretation of his watchword: Sympathy. The mystery of SYMPATHY. He still confounded it with Jesus’ LOVE, and with Paul’s CHARITY. Whitman, like all the rest of us, was at the end of the great emotional highway of Love. And because he couldn’t help himself, he carried on his Open Road as a prolongation of the emotional highway of Love, beyond Calvary. The highway of Love ends at the foot of the Cross. There is no beyond. It was a hopeless attempt to prolong the highway of

love.

He didn't follow his Sympathy. Try as he might, he kept on automatically interpreting it as Love, as Charity. Merging!

This merging, *en masse*, One Identity, Myself monomania was a carry-over from the old Love idea. It was carrying the idea of Love to its logical physical conclusion. Like Flaubert and the leper. The decree of unqualified Charity, as the soul's one means of salvation, still in force.

Now Whitman wanted his soul to save itself; *he* didn't want to save it. Therefore he did not need the great Christian receipt for saving the soul. He needed to supersede the Christian Charity, the Christian Love, within himself, in order to give his Soul her last freedom. The high-road of Love is no Open Road. It is a narrow, tight way, where the soul walks hemmed in between compulsions.

Whitman wanted to take his Soul down the open road. And he failed in so far as he failed to get out of the old rut of Salvation. He forced his Soul to the edge of a cliff, and he looked down into death. And there he camped, powerless. He had carried out his Sympathy as an extension of Love and Charity. And it had brought him almost to madness and soul-death. It gave him his forced, unhealthy, post-mortem quality.

His message was really the opposite of Henley's rant:

I am the master of my fate,

I am the captain of my soul.

Whitman's essential message was the Open Road. The leaving of the soul free unto herself, the leaving of his fate to her and to the loom of the open road. Which is the bravest doctrine man has ever proposed to himself.

Alas, he didn't quite carry it out. He couldn't quite break the old maddening bond of the love-compulsion; he couldn't quite get out of the rut of the charity habit - for Love and Charity have degenerated now into habit: a bad habit.

Whitman said Sympathy. If only he had stuck to it! Because Sympathy means feeling with, not feeling for. He kept on having a passionate feeling *for* the negro slave, or the prostitute, or the syphilitic - which is merging. A sinking of Walt Whitman's soul in the souls of these others.

He wasn't keeping to his open road. He was forcing his soul down an old rut. He wasn't leaving her free. He was forcing her into other people's circumstances.

Supposing he had felt true sympathy with the negro slave? He would have felt *with* the negro slave. Sympathy - compassion - which is partaking of the passion which was in the soul of the negro slave.

What was the feeling in the negro's soul ?

‘Ah, I am a slave! Ah, it is bad to be a slave! I must free myself. My soul will die unless she frees herself. My soul says I must free myself.’

Whitman came along, and saw the slave, and said to himself: ‘That negro slave is a man like myself. We share the same identity. And he is bleeding with wounds. Oh, oh, is it not myself who am also bleeding with wounds?’

This was not *sympathy*. It was merging and self-sacrifice. ‘Bear ye one another’s burdens’; ‘Love thy neighbor as thyself’: ‘Whatsoever ye do unto him, ye do unto me.’

If Whitman had truly *sympathized*, he would have said: ‘That negro slave suffers from slavery. He wants to free himself. His soul wants to free him. He has wounds, but they are the price of freedom. The soul has a long journey from slavery to freedom. If I can help him I will: I will not take over his wounds and his slavery to myself. But I will help him fight the power that enslaves him when he wants to be free, if he wants my help, since I see in his face that he needs to be free. But even when he is free, his soul has many journeys down the open road, before it is a free soul.’

And of the prostitute Whitman would have said:

‘Look at that prostitute! Her nature has turned evil under her mental lust for prostitution. She has lost her soul. She knows it herself. She likes to make men lose their souls. If she tried to make me lose my soul, I would kill her. I wish she may die.’

But of another prostitute he would have said:

‘Look! She is fascinated by the Priapic mysteries. Look, she will soon be worn to death by the Priapic usage. It is the way of her soul. She wishes it so.’

Of the syphilitic he would say:

‘Look! She wants to infect all men with syphilis. We ought to kill her.’

And of still another syphilitic:

‘Look! She has a horror of her syphilis. If she looks my way I will help her to get cured.’

This is sympathy. The soul judging for herself, and preserving her own integrity.

But when, in Flaubert, the man takes the leper to his naked body; when Bubi de Montparnasse takes the girl because he knows she’s got syphilis; when Whitman embraces an evil prostitute: that is not sympathy. The evil prostitute has no desire to be embraced with love; so if you sympathize with her, you won’t try to embrace her with love. The leper loathes his leprosy, so if you sympathize with him, you’ll loathe it too. The evil woman who wishes to infect all men with her syphilis hates you if you haven’t got syphilis. If you sympathize you’ll feel her hatred, and you’ll hate too, you’ll hate her. Her feeling is hate,

and you'll share it. Only your soul will choose the direction of its own hatred.

The soul is a very perfect judge of her own motions, if your mind doesn't dictate to her. Because the mind says Charity! Charity! you don't have to force your soul into kissing lepers or embracing syphilitics. Your lips are the lips of your soul, your body is the body of your soul; your own single, individual soul. That is Whitman's message. And your soul hates syphilis and leprosy. Because it is a soul, it hates these things, which are against the soul. And therefore to force the body of your soul into contact with uncleanness is a great violation of your soul. The soul wishes to keep clean and whole. The soul's deepest will is to preserve its own integrity, against the mind and the whole mass of disintegrating forces.

Soul sympathizes with soul. And that which tries to kill my soul, my soul hates. My soul and my body are one. Soul and body wish to keep clean and whole. Only the mind is capable of great perversion. Only the mind tries to drive my soul and body into uncleanness and unwholesomeness.

What my soul loves, I love.

What my soul hates, I hate.

When my soul is stirred with compassion, I am compassionate.

What my soul turns away from, I turn away from.

That is the *true* interpretation of Whitman's creed: the true revelation of his Sympathy.

And my soul takes the open road. She meets the souls that are passing, she goes along with the souls that are going her way. And for one and all, she has sympathy. The sympathy of love, the sympathy of hate, the sympathy of simple proximity; all the subtle sympathizings of the incalculable soul, from the bitterest hate to passionate love.

It is not I who guide my soul to heaven. It is I who am guided by my own soul along the open road, where all men tread. Therefore, I must accept her deep motions of love, or hate, or compassion, or dislike, or indifference. And I must go where she takes me, for my feet and my lips and my body are my soul. It is I who must submit to her.

This is Whitman's message of American democracy.

The true democracy, where soul meets soul, in the open road. Democracy. American democracy where all journey down the open road, and where a soul is known at once in its going. Not by its clothes or appearance. Whitman did away with that. Not by its family name. Not even by its reputation. Whitman and Melville both discounted that. Not by a progression of piety, or by works of Charity. Not by works at all. Not by anything, but just itself. The soul passing unenhanced, passing on foot and being no more than itself. And recognized, and

passed by or greeted according to the soul's dictate. If it be a great soul, it will be worshipped in the road.

The love of man and woman: a recognition of souls, and a communion of worship. The love of comrades: a recognition of souls, and a communion of worship. Democracy: a recognition of souls, all down the open road, and a great soul seen in its greatness, as it travels on foot among the rest, down the common way of the living. A glad recognition of souls, and a gladder worship of great and greater souls, because they are the only riches.

Love, and Merging, brought Whitman to the Edge of Death! Death! Death!

But the exultance of his message still remains. Purified of MERGING, purified of MYSELF, the exultant message of American Democracy, of souls in the Open Road, full of glad recognition, full of fierce readiness, full of the joy of worship, when one soul sees a greater soul

The only riches, the great souls.

REFLECTIONS ON THE DEATH OF A PORCUPINE AND OTHER ESSAYS



This collection of essays was first published in 1925 and contains works written from 1915–1925. The essays range from short pieces like *Love* and *Life* to the lengthy and hard-hitting *Education of the People*, whilst spanning diverse themes such as religion, politics, eroticism and literature.

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REFLECTIONS ON THE DEATH OF A PORCUPINE

ARISTOCRACY

THE CROWN

NOTE TO THE CROWN

The Crown was written in 1915, when the war was already twelve months old, and had gone pretty deep. John Middleton Murry said to me: "Let us do something."

*The doing consisted in starting a tiny monthly paper, which blurry called *The Signature*, and in having weekly meetings somewhere in London — I have now no idea where it was — up a narrow stair-case over a green-grocer's shop: or a cobbler's shop. The only thing that made any impression on me was the room over the shop, in some old Dickensey part of London, and the old man downstairs.*

We scrubbed the room and colour-washed the walls and got a long table and some Windsor chairs from the Caledonian market. And we used to make a good warm fire: it was dark autumn, in that unknown bit of London. Then on Thursday nights we had meetings of about a dozen people. We talked, but there was absolutely nothing in it. And the meetings didn't last two months.

*The *Signature* was printed by some little Jewish printer away in the east end. We sold it by subscription, half-a-crown for six copies. I don't know how many subscriptions there were: perhaps fifty. The helpless little brown magazine appeared three times, then we dropped it. The last three of the *Crown* essays were never printed.*

To me the venture meant nothing real: a little escapade. I can't believe in "doing things" like that. In a great issue like the war, there was nothing to be "done", in Murry's sense. There is still nothing to be "done". Probably not for many, many years will men start to "do" something. And even then, only after they have changed gradually, and deeply.

I knew then, and I know now, it is no use trying to do anything — I speak only for my self — publicly. It is no use trying merely to modify present forms. The whole great form of our era will have to go. And nothing will really send it down but the new shoots of life springing up and slowly bursting the foundations. And one can do nothing, but fight tooth and nail to defend the new shoots of life from being crushed out, and let them grow. We can't make life. We can but fight for the life that grows in us.

So that, personally, little magazines mean nothing to me: nor groups, nor parties of people. I have no hankering after quick response, nor the effusive,

semi-intimate back-chat of literary communion. So it was ridiculous to offer The Crown in a little six-penny pamphlet. I always felt ashamed, at the thought of the few who sent their half-crowns. Happily they were few; and they could read Murry. If one publishes in the ordinary way, people are not asked for their sixpences.

I alter The Crown only a very little. It says what I still believe. But it's no use for a five minutes' lunch.

I. THE LION AND THE UNICORN WERE FIGHTING FOR THE CROWN

WHAT is it then, that they want, that they are forever rampant and unsatisfied, the king of beasts and the defender of virgins? What is this Crown that hovers between them, unattainable? Does either of them ever hope to get it?

But think of the king of beasts lying serene with the crown on his head! Instantly the unicorn prances from every heart. And at the thought of the lord of chastity with the crown ledged above his golden horn, lying in virgin lustre of sanctity, the lion springs out of his lair in every soul, roaring after his prey.

It is a strange and painful position, the king of beasts and the beast of purity, rampant for ever on either side of the crown. Is it to be so for ever?

Who says lion? — who says unicorn? A lion, a lion!! Hi, a unicorn! Now they are at it, they have forgotten all about the crown. It is a greater thing to have an enemy than to have an object. The lion and the unicorn were fighting, it is no question any more of the crown. We know this, because when the lion beat the unicorn, he did not take the crown and put it on his head, and say, “Now Mr. Purity, I’m king”. He drove the unicorn out of town, expelled him, obliterated him, expurgated him from the memory, exiled him from the kingdom. Instantly the town was all lion, there was no unicorn at all, no scent nor flavour of unicorn.

“Unicorn!” they said in the city. “That is a mythological beast that never existed.”

There was no question any more of rivalry. The unicorn was erased from the annals of fact.

Why did the lion fight the unicorn? Why did the unicorn fight the lion? Why must the one obliterate the other? Was it the *raison d’etre* of each of them, to obliterate the other?

But think, if the lion really destroyed, killed the unicorn: not merely drove him out of town, but annihilated him! Would not the lion at once expire, as if he had created a vacuum around himself? Is not the unicorn necessary to the very existence of the lion, is not each opposite kept in stable equilibrium by the opposition of the other.

This is a terrible position: to have for a *raison d’etre* a purpose which, if once fulfilled, would of necessity entail the cessation from existence of both

opponents. They would both cease to be, if either of them really won in the fight which is their sole reason for existing. This is a troublesome thought.

It makes us at once examine our own hearts. What do we find there? — a want, a need, a crying out, a divine discontent. Is it the lion, is it the unicorn? — one, or both? But certainly there is this crying aloud, this infant crying in the night, born into a blind want.

What do we find at the core of our hearts? — a want, a void, a hollow want. It is the lion that must needs fight the unicorn, the unicorn that must needs fight the lion. Supposing the lion refuses the obligation of his being, and says, “I won’t fight, I’ll just lie down. I’ll be a lion couchant.”

What *then* is the lion? A void, a hollow ache, a want. “What am I?” says the lion, as he lies with his head between his paws, or walks by the river feeding on raspberries, peacefully, like a unicorn. “I am a hollow void, my roaring is the resonance of a hollow drum, my strength is the power of the vacuum, drawing all things within itself.”

Then he groans with horrible self-consciousness. After all, there is nothing for it but to set upon the unicorn, and so forget, forget, obtain the precious self-oblivion.

Thus are we, then, rounded upon a void, a hollow want, like the lion. And this want makes us draw all things into ourselves, to fill up the void. But it is a bottomless pit, this void. If ever it were filled, there would be a great cessation from being, of the whole universe.

Thus we portray ourselves in the field of the royal arms. The whole history is the fight, the whole *raison d’être*. For the whole field is occupied by the lion and the unicorn. These alone are the living occupants of the immortal and mortal field.

We have forgotten the Crown, which is the keystone of the fight. We are like the lion and the unicorn, we go on fighting underneath the Crown, entirely oblivious of its supremacy.

It is modest common sense for us to acknowledge, all of us, nowadays, that we are built round a void and hollow want which, if satisfied, would imply our collapse, our utter ceasing to be. Therefore we regard our craving with complacence, we feel the great aching of the Want, and we say, with conviction, “I know I exist, I know I am I, because I feel the divine discontent which is personal to me, and eternal, and present always in me.”

That is because we are incomplete, we stand upon one side of the shield, or on the other. On the one side we are in darkness, our eyes gleam phosphorescent like cat’s eyes. And with these phosphorescent gleaming eyes we look across at the opposite pure beast, and we say, “Yes, I am a lion, my *raison d’être* is to

devour that unicorn, I am moulded upon an eternal void, a Want.” Gleaming bright, we see ourselves reflected upon the surface of the darkness and we say: “I am the pure unicorn, it is for me to oppose and resist for ever that avid lion. If he ceased to exist, I should be supreme and unique and perfect. Therefore I will destroy him.”

But the lion will not be destroyed. If he were, if he were swallowed into the belly of the unicorn, the unicorn would fly asunder into chaos.

This is like being a creature who walks by night, who says: ‘Men see by darkness, and in the darkness they have their being.’ Or like a creature that walks by day, and says: “Men live by the light.”

We are enveloped in the darkness, like the lion: or like the unicorn, enveloped in the light.

For the womb is full of darkness, and also flooded with the strange white light of eternity. And we, the peoples of the world, we are enclosed within the womb of our era, we are there begotten and conceived, but not brought forth.

A myriad, myriad people, we roam in the belly of our era, seeking, seeking, wanting. And we seek and want deliverance. But we say we want to overcome the lion that shares with us this universal womb, the walls of which are shut, and have no window to inform us that we are in prison. We roam within the vast walls of the womb, unnourished now, because the time of our deliverance is ripe, even overpast, and the body of our era is lean and withered because of us, withered and inflexible.

We roam unnourished, moulded each of us around a core of want, a void. We stand in the darkness of the womb and we say: “Behold, there is the light, the white light of eternity, which we want.” And we make war upon the lion of darkness, annihilate him, so that we may be free in the eternal light. Or else, suddenly, we admit ourselves the lion, and we rush rampant on the unicorn of chastity.

We stand in the light of Virginity, in the wholeness of our unbroached immortality, and we say: “Lo the darkness surrounds us, to envelop us. Let us resist the powers of darkness.” Then like the bright and virgin unicorn we make war upon the ravening lion. Or we cry: “Ours is the strength and glory of the Creator, who precedes Creation, and all is unto us.” So we open a ravening mouth, to swallow back all time has brought forth.

And there is no rest, no cessation from the conflict. For we are two opposites which exist by virtue of our inter-opposition. Remove the opposition and there is collapse, a sudden crumbling into universal nothingness.

The darkness, this has nourished us. The darkness, this is a vast infinite, an origin, a Source. The Beginning, this is the great sphere of darkness, the womb

wherein the universe is begotten.

But this universal, infinite darkness conceives of its own opposite. If there is universal, infinite darkness, then there is universal, infinite light, for there cannot exist a specific infinite save by virtue of the opposite and equivalent specific infinite. So that if there be universal, infinite darkness in the beginning, there must be universal, infinite light in the end. And these are two relative halves.

Into the womb of the primary darkness enters the ray of ultimate light, and time is begotten, conceived, there is the beginning of the end. We are the beginning of the end. And there, within the womb, we ripen upon the beginning, till we become aware of the end.

We are fruit, we are an integral part of the tree. Till the time comes for us to fall, and we hang in suspense, realising that we are an integral part of the vast beyond, which stretches under us and grasps us even before we drop into it.

We are the beginning, which has conceived us within its womb of darkness, and nourished us to the fulness of our growth. This is ours that we adhere to. This is our God, Jehovah, Zeus, the Father of Heaven, this that has conceived and created us, in the beginning, and brought us the fulness of our strength.

And when we have come to the fulness of our strength, like lions which have been fed till they are full grown, then the strange necessity comes upon us, we must travel away, roam like falling fruit, fall from the initial darkness of the tree, of the cave which has reared us, into the eternal light of germination and begetting, the eternal light, shedding our darkness like the fruit that rots on the ground.

We travel across between the two great opposites of the Beginning and the End, the eternal night and everlasting day, and the transit is a stride taken, the night gives us up for the day to receive us. And what are we between the two?

But before the transit is accomplished, whilst we are yet like fruit heavy and ripe on the trees, we realise the delirious freedom of the end, the goal, and we cry: "Behold, I, who am here within the darkness, I am the light! I am the light, I am Unicorn, the beam of chastity. Behold, the beam of Virginitly gleams within my loins, in this circumambient darkness. Behold, I am not the Beginning, I am the End. The End is universal light, the achieving again of infinite unblemished being, the infinite oneness of the Light, the escape from the infinite not-being of the darkness."

All the time, these cries take place within the womb, these are the myriad unborn uttering themselves as they come towards maturity, cry after cry as the darkness develops itself over the sea of Light, and flesh is born, and limbs; cry after cry as the light develops within the darkness, and mind is born, and the consciousness of that which is outside my own flesh and limbs, and the desire

for everlasting life grows more insistent.

These are the cries of the two adversaries, the two opposites.

First of all the flesh develops in splendour and glory out of the prolific darkness, begotten by the light it develops to a great triumph, till it dances naked in glory of itself, before the Ark, naked in glory of itself in the procession of heroes travelling towards the wise goddess, the white light, the Mind, the light which the vessel of living darkness has caught and captured within itself, and holds in triumph. The flesh of darkness triumphant circles round the treasure of light which it has enveloped, which it calls Mind, and this is the ecstasy, the dance before the Ark, the Bacchic delirium.

And then, within the womb, the light grows stronger and finds voice, it cries out: "Behold, I am free, I am not enveloped within this darkness. Behold, I am the everlasting light, the Eternity that stretches forward for ever, utterly the opposite of that darkness which departs backward, backward for ever. Come over to me, to the light, to the light that streams into the glorious eternity. For now the darkness is revoked for ever.

It is the voice of the unicorn crying in the wilderness, it is the Son of Man. And behold, in the fight, the unicorn beats the lion, and drives him out of town.

But all of this is within the Womb. The darkness builds up the warm shadow of the flesh in splendour and triumph, enclosing the light. This is the zenith of David and Solomon, and of Assyria and Egypt. Then the light, wrestling within the vessel, throws up a white gleam of universal love, which is St. Francis of Assisi, and Shelley.

Then each has reached its maximum of self-assertion. The flesh is made perfect within the womb, the spirit is at last made perfect also, within the womb. They are equally perfect, equally supreme, the one adhering to the infinite darkness of the beginning, the other adhering to the infinite light of the end.

Yet, within the womb, they are eternally opposite. Darkness stands over against light, light stands over against dark. The lion is reared against the unicorn, the unicorn is reared against the lion. One says, "Behold, the darkness which gave us birth is eternal and infinite: this we belong to." The other says, "We are of the Light, which is everlasting and infinite."

And there is no reconciliation, save in negation. From the present, the stream flows in opposite directions, back to the past, on to the future. There are two goals, at opposite ends of time. There is the vast original dark out of which Creation issued, there is the Eternal light into which all mortality passes. And both are equally infinite, both are equally the goal, and both equally the beginning.

And we, fully equipped in flesh and spirit, fully built up of darkness, perfectly

composed out of light, what are we but light and shadow lying together in opposition, or lion and unicorn fighting, the one to vanquish the other. This is our eternal life, in these two eternities which nullify each other. And we, between them both, what are we but nullity?

And this is because we see in part, always in part. We are enclosed within the womb, we are the seed from the loins of the eternal light, or we are the darkness which is enveloped by the body of the past, by our era.

Unless the sun were enveloped in the body of darkness, would a cast shadow run with me as I walk? Unless the night lay within the embrace of light, would the fish gleam phosphorescent in the sea, would the light break out of the black coals of the hearth, would the electricity gleam out of itself, suddenly declaring an opposite being?

Love and power, light and darkness, these are the temporary conquest of the one infinite by the other. In love, the Christian love, the End asserts itself supreme: in power, in strength like the lion's the Beginning re-establishes itself unique. But when the opposition is complete on either side, then there is perfection. It is the perfect opposition of dark and light that brindles the tiger with gold flame and dark flame. It is the surcharge of darkness that opens the ravening mouth of the tiger, and drives his eyes to points of phosphorescence. It is the perfect balance of light and darkness that flickers in the stepping of a deer. But it is the conquered darkness that flares and palpitates in her eyes.

There are the two eternities fighting the fight of Creation, the light projecting itself into the darkness, the darkness enveloping herself within the embrace of light. And then there is the consummation of each in the other, the consummation of light in darkness and darkness in light, which is absolute: our bodies cast up like foam of two meeting waves, but foam which is absolute, complete, beyond the limitation of either infinity, consummate over both eternities. The direct opposites of the Beginning and the End, by their very directness, imply their own supreme relation. And this supreme relation is made absolute in the clash and the foam of the meeting waves. And the clash and the foam are the Crown, the Absolute.

The lion and the unicorn are not fighting for the Crown. They are fighting beneath it. And the Crown is upon their fight. If they made friends and lay down side by side, the Crown would fall on them both and kill them. If the lion really beat the unicorn, then the Crown pressing on the head of the king of beasts alone would destroy him. Which it has done and is doing. As it is destroying the unicorn who has achieved supremacy in another field.

So that now, in Europe, both the lion and the unicorn are gone mad, each with a crown tumbled on his bound-in head. And without rhyme or reason they tear

themselves and each other, and the fight is no fight, it is a frenzy of blind things dashing themselves and each other to pieces.

Now the unicorn of virtue and virgin spontaneity has got the Crown slipped over the eyes, like a circle of utter light, and has gone mad with the extremity of light: whilst the lion of power and splendour, its own Crown of supreme night settled down upon it, roars in an agony of imprisoned darkness.

Now within the withered body of our era, within the husk of the past, the seed of light has come to supreme self-consciousness and has gone mad with the flare of eternal light in its eyes, whilst the fruit of darkness, unable to fall from the tree, has turned round towards the tree and is become mad, clinging faster upon the utter night whence it should have dropped away long ago.

For the stiffened, exhausted, inflexible loins of our era are too dry to give us forth in labour, the tree is withered, we are pent in, fastened, and now have turned round, some to the source of darkness, some to the source of light, and gone mad, purely given up to frenzy. For the dark has travelled to the light, and the light towards the dark. But when they reached the bound, neither could leap forth. The fruit could not fall from the tree, the lion just full grown could not get out of the cave, the unicorn could not enter the illimitable forest, the lily could not leap out of the darkness of her bulb straight into the sun. What then? The road was stopped. Whither then? Backward, back to the known eternity. There was a great, horrible huddle backwards. The process of birth had been arrested, the inflexible, withered loins of the mother-era were too old and set, the past was taut around us all. Then began chaos, the going asunder, the beginning of nothingness. Then we leaped back, by reflex from the bound and limit, back upon ourselves into madness.

There is a dark beyond the darkness of the womb, there is a light beyond the light of knowledge. There is the darkness of all the heavens for the seed of man to invest, and the light of all the heavens for the womb to receive. But we don't know it. How can the unborn within the womb know of the heavens outside; how can they?

How can they know of the tides beyond? On the one hand murmurs the utter, infinite sea of darkness, full of unconceived creation: on the other the infinite light stirs with eternal procreation. They are two seas which eternally attract and oppose each other, two tides which eternally advance to repel each other, which foam upon one another, as the ocean foams on the land, and the land rushes down into the sea.

And we, in the great movement, are begotten, conceived and brought forth, like the waves which meet and clash and burst up into foam, sending the foam like light, like shadow, into the zenith of the absolute, beyond the grasp of either

eternity.

We are the foam and the foreshore, that which, between the oceans, is not, but that which supersedes the oceans in utter reality, and gleams in absolute Eternity.

The Beginning is-not, nor the eternity which lies behind us, save in part. Partial also is the eternity which lies in front. But that which is not partial, but whole, that which is not relative, but absolute, is the clash of the two into one, the foam of being thrown up into consummation.

It is the music which comes when the cymbals clash one upon the other: this is absolute and timeless. The cymbals swing back in one or the other direction of time, towards one or the other relative eternity. But absolute, timeless, beyond time or eternity, beyond space or infinity, is the music that was the consummation of the two cymbals in opposition.

It is that which comes when night clashes on day, the rainbow, the yellow and rose and blue and purple of dawn and sunset, which leaps out of the breaking of light upon darkness, of darkness upon light, absolute beyond day or night; the rainbow, the iridescence, which is darkness at once and light, the two-in-one; the crown that binds them both.

It is the lovely body of foam that walks for ever between the two seas, perfect and consummate, the revealed consummation, the oneness that has taken being out of the two.

We say the foam is evanescent, the wind passes over it and it is gone — he who would save his life must lose it.

But if indeed the foam were-not, if the two seas fell apart, if the sea fell departed from the land, and the land from the sea, if the two halves, day and night, were ripped asunder, without attraction or opposition, what then? Then there would be between them nothingness, utter nothingness. Which is meaningless.

So that the foam and the iridescence, the music that comes from the cymbals, all formed things that come from perfect union in opposition, all beauty and all truth and being, all perfection, these are the be-all and the end-all, absolute, timeless, beyond time or eternity, beyond the Limit or the Infinite.

This lovely body of foam, this iris between the two floods, this music between the cymbals, this truth between the surge of facts, this supreme reason between conflicting desires, this holy spirit between the opposite divinities, this is the Absolute made visible between the two Infinities, the Timelessness into which are assumed the two Eternities.

It is wrong to try to make the lion lie down with the lamb. This is the supreme sin, the unforgivable blasphemy of which Christ spoke. This is the creating of nothingness, the bringing about, or the striving to bring about the nihil which is

pure meaninglessness.

The great darkness of the lion must gather into itself the little, feeble darkness of the lamb. The great light of the lamb must absorb elsewhere, in the whole world, the small, weak light of the lion. The lamb indeed will inherit the world, rather than the lion. It is the triumph of the meek, but the meek, like the merciless, shall perish in their own triumph. Anything that *triumphs*, perishes. The consummation comes from perfect relatedness. To this a man may *win*. But he who triumphs, perishes.

The crown is upon the perfect balance of the fight, it is not the fruit of either victory. The crown is not prize of either combatant. It is the *raison d'être* of both. It is the absolute within the fight.

And those alone are evil, who say, "The lion shall lie down with the lamb, the eagle shall mate with the dove, the lion shall munch in the stable of the unicorn." For they blaspheme against the *raison d'être* of all life, they try to destroy the essential, intrinsic nature of God.

But it is the fight of opposites which is holy. The fight of like things is evil. For if a thing turn round upon itself in blind frenzy of destruction, this is to say: "The lamb shall roar like the lion, the dove strike down her prey like the eagle, and the unicorn shall devour the innocent virgin in her path". Which is precisely the equivalent blasphemy to the blasphemy of universal meekness, or peace.

And this, this last, is our blasphemy of the war. We would have the lamb roar like the lion, all doves turn into eagles.

II. THE LION BEAT THE UNICORN AND DROVE HIM OUT OF TOWN

LIFE is a travelling to the edge of knowledge, then a leap taken. We cannot know beforehand. We are driven from behind, always as over the edge of the precipice. It is a leap taken, into the beyond, as a lark leaps into the sky, a fragment of earth which travels to be fused out, sublimated, in the shining of the heavens.

But it is not death. Death is neither here nor there. Death is a temporal, relative fact. In the absolute, it means nothing. The lark falls from the sky and goes running back to her nest. This is the ebb of the wave. The wave of earth flung up in spray, a lark, a cloud of larks, against the white wave of the sun. The spray of earth and the foam of heaven are one, consummated, a rainbow mid-way, a song. The larks return to earth, the rays go back to heaven. But these are only the shuttles that weave the iris, the song, midway, in absoluteness, timelessness.

Out of the dark, original flame issues a tiny green flicker, a weed coming alive. On the edge of the bright, ultimate, spiritual flame of the heavens is revealed a fragment of iris, a touch of green, a weed coming into being. The two flames surge and intermingle, casting up a crest of leaves and stems, their battlefield, their meeting-ground, their marriage bed, the embrace becomes closer, more unthinkably vivid, it leaps to climax, the battle grows fiercer, fiercer, intolerably, till there is the swoon, the climax, the consummation, the little yellow disk gleams absolute between heaven and earth, radiant of both eternities, framed in the two infinities. Which is a weed, a sow-thistle bursting into blossom. And we, the foreshore in whom the waves of dark and light are unequally seething, we can see this perfection, this absolute, as time opens to disclose it for a moment, like the Dove that hovered incandescent from heaven, before it is closed again in utter timelessness.

“But the wind passeth over it and is gone.”

The wind passes over it and we are gone. It is time which blows in like a wind, closing up the clouds again upon the perfect gleam. It is the wind of time, out of either eternity, a wind which has a source and an issue, which swirls past the light of this absolute, like waves past a lighted buoy. For the light is not temporal nor eternal, but absolute. And we, who are temporal and eternal, at moments only we cease from our temporality. In these, our moments, we see the sow-thistle gleaming, light within darkness, darkness within light, consummated,

we are with the song and the iris.

And then it is we, not the iris, not the song, who are blown away. We are blown for a moment against the yellow light of the window, the flower, then on again into the dark turmoil.

We have made a mistake. We are like travellers travelling in a train, who watch the country pass by and pass away; all of us who watch the sun setting, sliding down into extinction, we are mistaken. It is not the country which passes by and fades, it is not the sun which sinks to oblivion. Neither is it the flower that withers, nor the song that dies out.

It is we who are carried past in the seethe of mortality. The flower is timeless and beyond condition. It is we who are swept on in the condition of time. So we shall be swept as long as time lasts. Death is part of the story. But we have being also in timelessness, we shall become again absolute, as we have been absolute, as we are absolute.

We know that we are purely absolute. We know in the last issue we are absolved from all opposition. We know that in the process of life we are purely relative. But timelessness is our fate, and time is subordinate to our fate. But time is eternal.

And the life of man is like a flower that comes into blossom and passes away. In the beginning, the light touches the darkness, the darkness touches the light, and the two embrace. They embrace in opposition, only in their desire is their unanimity. There are two separate statements, the dark wants the light, and the light wants the dark. But these two statements are contained within the one: "They want each other." And this is the condition of absoluteness, this condition of their wanting each other, that which makes light and dark consummate even in opposition. The interrelation between them, this is constant and absolute, let it be called love or power or what it may. It is all the things that it can be called.

In the beginning, light touches darkness and darkness touches light. Then life has begun. The light enfolds and implicates and involves the dark, the dark receives and interpenetrates the light, they come nearer, they are more finely combined, till they burst into the crisis of oneness, the blossom, the utter being, the transcendent and timeless flame of the iris.

Then time passes on. Out of the swoon the waves ebb back, dark towards the dark, light towards the light. They ebb back and away, the leaves return unto the darkness of the earth, the quivering glimmer of substance returns into the light, the green of the last wavering iris disappears, the waves ebb apart, further, further, further.

Yet they never separate. The whole flood recedes, the tides are going to separate. And they separate entirely, save for one enfolded ripple, the tiny, silent,

scarce-visible enfolded pools of the seeds. These lie potent, the meeting-ground, the well-head wherein the tides will surge again, when the turn comes.

This is the life of man. In him too the tide sweeps together towards the utter consummation, the consummation with the darkness, the consummation with the light, flesh and spirit, one culminating crisis, when man passes into timelessness and absoluteness.

The residue of imperfect fusion and unfulfilled desire remains, the child, the well-head where the tides will flow in again, the seed. The absolute relation is never fully revealed. It leaps to its maximum of revelation in the flower, the mature life. But some of it rolls aside, lies potent in the enfolded seed. My desire is fulfilled, I, as individual am become timeless and absolute, perfect. But the whole desire of which I am part remains yet to be consummated. In me the two waves clash to perfect consummation. But immediately upon the clash come the next waves of the tide rippling in, the ripples, forerunners, which tinily meet and enfold each other, the seed, the unborn child. For we are all waves of the tide. But the tide contains all the waves.

It may happen that waves which meet and mingle come to no consummation, only a confusion and a swirl and a falling away again. These are the myriad lives of human beings which pass in confusion of nothingness, the uncreated lives. There are myriads of human lives that are not absolute nor timeless, myriads that just waver and toss temporarily, never become more than relative, never come into being. They have no being, no immortality. There are myriads of plants that never come to flower, but which perish away for ever, always separated in the fringe of time, never united, never consummated, never brought forth.

I know I am compound of two waves, I, who am temporal and mortal. When I am timeless and absolute, all duality has vanished. But whilst I am temporal and mortal, I am framed in the struggle and embrace of the two opposite waves of darkness and of light.

There is the wave of light in me which seeks the darkness, which has for its goal the Source and the Beginning, for its God the Almighty Creator to Whom is all power and glory. Thither the light of the seed of man struggles and aspires, into the infinite darkness, the womb of all creation.

What way is it that leads me on to the Source, to the Beginning? It is the way of the blood, the way of power. Down the road of the blood, further and further into the darkness, I come to the Almighty God Who was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be. I come to the Source of Power. I am received back into the utter darkness of the Creator, I am once again with Him.

This is a consummation, a becoming eternal. This is an arrival into eternity. But eternity is only relative.

I can become one with God, consummated into eternity, by taking the road down the senses into the utter darkness of power, till I am one with the darkness of initial power, beyond knowledge of any opposite.

It is thus, seeking consummation in the utter darkness, that I come to the woman in desire. She is the doorway, she is the gate to the dark eternity of power, the creator's power. When I put my hand on her, my heart beats with a passion of fear and ecstasy, for I touch my own passing away, my own ceasing-to-be, I apprehend my own consummation in a darkness which obliterates me in its infinity. My veins rock as if they were being destroyed, the blood takes fire on the edge of oblivion, and beats backward and forward. I resist, yet I am compelled; the woman resists, yet she is compelled. And we are the relative parts dominated by the strange compulsion of the absolute.

Gradually my veins relax their gates, gradually the rocking blood goes forward, quivers on the edge of oblivion, then yields itself up, passes into the borderland of oblivion. Oh, and then I would die, I would quickly die, to have all power, all life at once, to come instantly to pure, eternal oblivion, the source of life. But patience is fierce at the bottom of me; fierce, indomitable, abiding patience. So my blood goes forth in shock after shock of delirious passing-away, in shock after shock entering into consummation, till my soul is slipping its moorings, my mind, my will fuses down, I melt out and am gone into the eternal darkness, the primal creative darkness reigns, and I am not, and at last *I am*.

Shock after shock of ecstasy and the anguish of ecstasy, death after death of trespass into the unknown, till I fall down into the flame, I lapse into the intolerable flame, a pallid shadow I am transfused into the flux of unendurable darkness, and am gone. No spark nor vestige remains within the supreme dark flow of the flame, I am contributed again to the immortal source. I am with the dark Almighty of the beginning.

Till, new-created, I am thrown forth again on the shore of creation, warm and lustrous, goodly, new born from the darkness out of which all time has issued.

And then, new-born on the knees of darkness, new-issued from the womb of creation, I open my eyes to the light and know the goal, the end, the light which stands over the end of the journey, the everlasting day, the oneness of the spirit.

The new journey, the new life has begun, the travelling to the opposite eternity, to the infinite light of the Spirit, the consummation in the Spirit.

My source and issue is in two eternities, I am founded in the two infinities . . . But absolute is the rainbow that goes between; the iris of my very being.

It may be, however, that the seed of light never propagates within the darkness, that the light in me is sterile, that I am never re-born within the womb, the Source, to be issued towards the opposite eternity.

It may be there is a great inequality, disproportion, within me, that I am nearly all darkness, like the night, with a few glimmers of cold light, moonlight, like the tiger with white eyes of reflected light brindled in the flame of darkness. Then I shall return again and again to the womb of darkness, avid, never satisfied, my spirit will fall unfertile into the womb, will never be conceived there, never brought forth. I shall know the one consummation, the one direction only, into the darkness. It will be with me for ever the almost, almost, almost, of satisfaction, of fulfilment. I shall know the one eternity, the one infinite, the one immortality, I shall have partial being; but never the whole, never the full. There is an infinite which does not know me. I am always relative, always partial, always, in the last issue, unconsummated.

The barren womb can never be satisfied, if the quick of darkness be sterile within it. But neither can the unfertile loins be satisfied, if the seed of light, of the spirit, be dead within them. They will return again and again and again to the womb of darkness, asking, asking, and never satisfied.

Then the unconsummated soul, unsatisfied, uncreated in part, will seek to make itself whole by bringing the whole world under its own order, will seek to make itself absolute and timeless by devouring its opposite. Adhering to the one eternity of darkness, it will seek to devour the eternity of light. Realising the one infinite of the Source, it will endeavour to absorb into its oneness the opposite infinite of the Goal. This is the infinite with its tail in its mouth.

Consummated in one infinite, and one alone, this soul will assert the oneness of all things, that all things are one in the One Infinite of the Darkness, of the Source. One is one and all alone and ever more shall be so. This is the cry of the Soul consummated in one eternity only.

There is one eternity, one infinite, one God. "Thou shalt have no other god before me."

But why this Commandment, unless there were in truth another god, at least the equal of Jehovah?

Consummated in the darkness only, having not enough strength in the light, the partial soul cries out in a convulsion of insistence that the darkness alone is infinite and eternal, that all light is from the small, contained sources, the lamps lighted at will by the desire of the Creator, the sun, the moon and stars. These are the lamps and candles of the Almighty, which He blows out at will. These are little portions of special darkness, darkness transfigured, these lights.

There is one God, one Creator, one Almighty; there is one infinite and one eternity, it is the infinite and the eternity of the Source. There is One Way: it is the Way of the Law. There is one Life, the Life of Creation, there is one Goal, the Beginning, there is one immortality, the immortality of the great I Am. All is

God, the One God. Those who deny this are to be stamped out, tortured, tortured for ever.

It is possible then to deny it?

Having declared the One God, then the partial soul, fulfilled of the darkness only, proceeds to establish this God on earth, to devour and obliterate all else.

Rising from the darkness of consummation in the flesh, with the woman, it seeks to establish its kingdom over all the world. It strides forth, the lord, the master, strong for mastery. It will dominate all, all, it will bring all under the rules of itself, of the One, the Darkness lighted with the lamps of its own choice.

This is the heroic tyrant, the fabulous king-warrior, like Sardanapulus or Caesar, like Saul even. These warrior kings seek to pass beyond all related-ness, to become absolute in might and power. And they fall inevitably. Their Judas is a David, a Brutus: the individual who knows something of both flames, but commits himself to neither. He holds himself, in his own ego, superior either to the creative dark power-flame, or the conscious love-flame. And so, he is the small man slaying the great. He is virtuous egoistic Brutus, or David: David slaying the preposterous Goliath, overthrowing the heroic Saul, taking Bathsheba and sending Uriah to death: David dancing naked before the Ark, asserting the oneness, his own oneness, the one infinity, *himself*, the egoistic God, I AM. And David never went in unto Michal any more, because she jeered at him. So that she was barren all her life.

But it was David who really was barren. Michal, when she mocked, mocked the sterility of David. For the spirit in him was blasted with infertility; he could not become born again, he could not be conceived in the spirit. Michal, the womb of profound darkness, could not conceive to the overweak seed of David's spirit. David's seed was too impure, too feeble in sheer spirit, too egoistic, it bred and begot preponderant egoists. The flood of vanity set in after David, the lamps and candles began to gutter.

Power is sheer flame, and spirit is sheer flame, and between them is the clue of the Holy Ghost. But David put a false clue between them: the clue of his own ego, cunning and *triumphant*.

It is infertility of spirit which sends man raging to the woman, and sends him raging awayagain, unsatisfied. It is not the woman's barrenness: it is his own. It is sterility in himself which makes a Don Juan.

And the course of the barren spirit is dogmatically to assert One God, One Way, One Glory, one exclusive salvation. And this One God is indeed God, this one Way is the way, but it is the way of egoism, and the One God is the reflection, inevitably, of the worshipper's ego.

This is the sham Crown, which the victorious lion and the victorious unicorn

alike puts on his own head. When either *triumphs*, the true crown disappears, and the triumphant puts a false crown on his own head: the crown of sterile egoism. The true Crown is above the fight itself, and above the embrace itself, not upon the brow of either fighter or lover. Or, if you like, in the true fight it shines equally upon the brow of the defeated and the winner. For sometimes, it is blessed to be beaten in a He who triumphs, perishes. As Caesar perished, and Napoleon. In the fight they were wonderful, and the power was with them. But when they would be supreme, sheer triumphers, exalted in their own ego, then they fell. Triumph is a false absolution, the winner salutes his enemy, and the light of victory is on *both* their brows, since both are consummated.

In the same way, Jesus triumphant perished. Any individual who will triumph, in love or in war, perishes. There is no triumph. There is but consummation in either case.

So Shelley also perishes. He wants to be love triumphant, as Napoleon wanted to be power triumphant. Both fell.

In both, there is the spuriousness of the *ego* trying to seize the Crown that belongs only to the consummation.

In the Roman “Triumph” itself lay the source of Rome’s downfall. And in the arrogance of England’s dispensation of Liberty in the world lies the downfall of England. When Liberty triumphs, as in Russia, where then is the British Empire? Where then is the British Lion, crowned *Fidei Defensor*, Defender of the Faith of Liberty and Love? When liberty needs no more defending, then the protective lion had better look out.

Take care of asserting any absolute, either of power or love, of empire or democracy. The moment power *triumphs*, it becomes spurious with sheer egoism, like Caesar and Napoleon. And the moment democracy triumphs, it too becomes hideous with egoism, like Russia now.

Either lion or unicorn, triumphant, turns into a sheer beast of prey. Foe it has none: only prey — or victims.

So we have seen in the world, every time that power has triumphed: every time the lion and the eagle have jammed the crown down on their heads. Now it will be given us to see democracy triumphant, the unicorn and the dove seizing the crown, and on the instant turning into beasts of prey.

The true crown is upon the consummation itself, not upon the triumph of one over another, neither in love nor in power. The ego is the false absolute. And the ego crowned with the crown is the monster and the tyrant, whether it represent one man, an Emperor, or a whole mass of people, a Demos. A million egos summed up under a crown are not *better* than one individual crowned ego. They are a million times worse.

III. THE FLUX OF CORRUPTION

THE tiger blazed transcendent into immortal darkness. The unique phoenix of the desert grew up to maturity and wisdom. Sitting upon her tree, she was the only one of her kind in all creation, supreme, the zenith, the perfect aristocrat. She attained to perfection, eagle-like she rose in her nest and lifted her wings, surpassing the zenith of mortality; so she was translated into the flame of eternity, she became one with the fiery Origin.

It was not for her to sit tight, and assert her own tight ego. She was gone as she came.

In the nest was a little ash, a little flocculent grey dust wavering upon a blue-red, dying coal. The red coal stirred and gathered strength, gradually it grew white with heat, it shot forth sharp gold flames. It was the young phoenix within the nest, with curved beak growing hard and crystal, like a scimitar, and talons hardening into pure jewels.

Wherein, however, is the immortality, in the constant occupation of the nest, the widow's cruse, or in the surpassing of the phoenix? She goes gadding off into flame, into her consummation. In the flame she is timeless. But the ash within the nest lies in the restless hollow of time, shaken on the tall tree of the desert. It will rise to the same consummation, become absolute in flame.

In a low, shady bush, far off, on the other side of the world, where the rains are cold and the mists wrap the leaves in a chillness, the ring-dove presses low on the bough, while her mate sends forth the last ru-cuooo of peace. The mist darkens and ebbs-in in waves, the trees are melted away, all things pass into a universal oneness, with the last re-echoing dove, peace, all pure peace, ebbing in softer, softer waves to a universal stillness.

The dark blue tranquillity is universal and infinite, the doves are asleep in the sleeping boughs, all fruits are fallen and are silent and cold, all the leaves melt away into pure mist of darkness.

It is strange, that away on the other side of the world, the tiger gleams through the hot-purple darkness, and where the dawn comes crimson, the phoenix lifts her wings in a yawn like an over-sumptuous eagle, and passes into flame above the golden palpable fire of the desert.

Here are the opposing hosts of angels, the ruddy choirs, the upright, rushing flames, the lofty Cherubim that palpitate about the Presence, the Source; and then the tall, still angels soft and pearly as mist, who await round the Goal, the

attendants that hover on the edge of the last Assumption.

And from the seed two travellers set forth, in opposite directions, the one concentrating towards the upper, ruddy, blazing sun, the zenith, the creative fire; the other towards the blue, cold silence, dividing itself and ever dividing itself till it is infinite in the universal darkness.

And at the summit, the zenith, there is a flash, a flame, as the traveller enters into infinite, there is a red splash as the poppy leaps into the upper, fiery eternity. And far below there is unthinkable silence as the roots ramify and divide and pass into the oneness of unutterable silence.

The flame is gone, the flower has leapt away, the fruit ripens and falls. Then dark ebbs back to dark, and light to light, hot to hot, and cold to cold. This is death and decay and corruption. And the worm, the maggot, these are the ministers of separation, these are the tiny clashing ripples that still ebb together, when the chief tide has set back, to flow utterly apart.

This is the terror and wonder of dark returning to dark, and of light returning to light, the two departing back to their Sources. This we cannot bear to think of. It is the temporal flux of corruption, as the flux together was the temporal flux of creation. The flux is temporal. It is only the perfect meeting, the perfect interpenetration into oneness, the kiss, the blow, the two-in-one, that is timeless and absolute.

And dark is not willing to return to dark till it has known the light, nor light to light till it has known the dark, till the two have been consummated into oneness. But the act of death may itself be a consummation, and life may be a state of negation.

It may be that our state of life is itself a denial of the consummation, a prevention, a negation; that this life is our nullification, our not-being.

It may be that the flower is held from the search of the light, and the roots from the dark, like a plant that is pot-bound. It may be that, as in the autumnal cabbage, the light and the dark are made prisoners in us, their opposition is overcome, the ultimate moving has ceased. We have forgotten our goal and our end. We have enclosed ourselves in our exfoliation, there are many little channels that run out into the sand.

This is evil, when that which is temporal and relative asserts itself eternal and absolute. This I, which I am, has no being save in timelessness. In my consummation, when that which came from the Beginning and that which came from the End are transfused into oneness, then I come into being, I have existence. Till then I am only a part of nature; I am not.

But as part of nature, as part of the flux, I have my instrumental identity, my inferior I, myself-conscious ego.

If I say that *I am*, this is false and evil. I am not. Among us all, how many have being? — too few. Our ready-made individuality, our identity is no more than an accidental cohesion in the flux of time. The cohesion will break down and utterly cease to be. The atoms will return into the flux of the universe. And that unit of cohesion which I was will vanish utterly. Matter is indestructible, spirit is indestructible. This of us remains, in any case, general in the flux. But the soul that has not come into being has no being for ever. The soul does not come into being at birth. The soul comes into being in the midst of life, just as the phoenix in her maturity becomes immortal in flame. That is not her perishing: it is her becoming absolute: a blossom of fire. If she did not pass into flame, *she* would never really exist. It is by her translation into fire that she is the phoenix. Otherwise she were only a bird, a transitory cohesion in the flux.

It is absurd to talk about all men being immortal, all having souls. Very few men have being at all. They perish utterly, as individuals. Their endurance afterwards is the endurance of Matter within the flux, non-individual: and spirit within the flux. Most men are just transitory natural phenomena. Whether they live or die does not matter: except in so far as every failure in the part is a failure in the whole. Their death is of no more matter than the cutting of a cabbage in the garden, an act utterly apart from grace.

They assert themselves as important, as absolute mortals. They are just liars. When one cuts a fat autumnal cabbage, one cuts off a lie, to boil it down in the pot.

They are all just fat lies, these people, these many people, these mortals. They are innumerable cabbages in the regulated cabbage plot. And our great men are no more than Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch.

The cabbage is a nice fat lie. That is why we eat it. It is the business of the truthful to eat up the lies. A fatted cow is a lie, and a fat pig is a lie, and a fatted sheep is a lie, just the same: these sacrificial beasts, these lambs and calves, become fat lies when they are merely protected and fed full.

The cabbage is a lie because it asserts itself as a permanency, in the state wherein it finds itself. In the swirl of the Beginning and the End, stalk and leaves take place. But the stalk and leaves are only the swirl of the waves. Yet they say, they are absolute, they have achieved a permanent form. It is a lie. Their universal absolute is only the far-off dawning of the truth, the false dawn which in itself is nothing, nothing except in relation to that which comes after.

But they say, “We are the consummation and the reality, we are the fulfilment.” This is pure amorphousness. Each one becomes a single, separate entity, a single separate nullity. Having started along the way to eternity, they say, “We are there, we have arrived,” and they enclose themselves in the nullity

of the falsehood.

And this is the state of man, when he falls into self-sufficiency, and asserts that his self-conscious ego is It. He falls into the condition of fine cabbages.

Then they are wealthy and fat. They go no further, so they become wealthy. All that great force which would carry them naked over the edge of time, into timelessness, into being, they convert into fatness, into having. And they are full of self-satisfaction. Having no being, they assert their artificial completeness, and the life within them becomes a will-to-have; which is the expression of the will-to-persist, in the temporary unit. Selfishness is the subjugating of all things to a false entity, and riches is the great flux over the edge of the bottomless pit, the falsity, the nullity. For where is the rich man who is not the very bottomless pit? Travel nearer, nearer, nearer to him, and one comes to the gap, the hole, the abyss where his soul should be. He is not. And to stop up his hollowness, he drags all things unto himself.

And what are we all, all of us, collectively, even the poorest, now, in this age? We are only potentially rich men. We are all alike. The distinction between rich and poor is purely accidental. Rich and poor alike are only, each one, a pit-head surrounding the bottomless pit. But the rich man, by pouring vast quantities of matter down his void, gives himself a more pleasant illusion of fulfilment than the poor man can get: that is all. Yet we would give our lives, every one of us, for this illusion.

There are no rich or poor, there are no masses and middle classes and aristocrats. There are myriads of framed gaps, people, and a few timeless fountains, men and women. That is all.

Myriads of framed gaps! Myriads of little egos, all wearing the crown of life! Myriads of little Humpty-Dumpties, self-satisfied emptinesses, all about to have a great fall.

The current ideal is to be a gap with a great heap of matter around it, which can be sent clattering down. The most sacred thing is to give all your having so that it can be put on the heaps that surround all the other bottomless pits. If you give away all your having, even your life, then, you are a bottomless pit with no sides to it. Which is infinite. So that to become infinite, give away all your having, even to your life. So that you will achieve immortality yourself. Like the heroes of the war, you will become the bottomless pit itself; but more than this, you will be contributing to the public good, you will be one of those who make blessed history: which means, you will be heaping goods upon the dwindling heaps of superfluity that surrounds these bottomless lives of the myriad people. If we poor can each of us hire a servant, then the servant will be like a stone tumbling always ahead of us down the bottomless pit. Which creates an almost

perfect illusion of having a solid earth beneath us.

Long ago we agreed that we had fulfilled all purpose and that our only business was to look after other people. We said; "It is marvellous, we are really complete." If the regulation cabbage, hidebound and solid, could walk about on his stalk, he would be very much as we are. He would think of himself as we think of ourselves, he would talk, as we talk, of the public good.

But inside him, proper and fine, the heart would be knocking and urgent, the heart of the cabbage. Of course for a long time he would not hear it. His good, enveloping green leaves outside, the heap round the hole, would have closed upon him very early, like Wordsworth's "Shades of the prison house," very close and complete and gratifying.

But the heart would beat within him, beat and beat, grow louder and louder, till it was threshing the whole of his inside rotten, threshing him hollow, till his inside began to devour his consciousness.

Then he would say: 'I must do something.' Looking round he would see little dwindly cabbages struggling in the patch, and would say: "So much injustice, so much suffering and poverty in the world, it cannot be." Then he would set forth to make dwindly cabbages into proper, fine cabbages. So he would be a reformer.

He would kick, kick, kick against the conditions which make some cabbages poor and dwindly, most cabbages poorer and more dwindly than himself. He would but be kicking against the pricks.

But it is very profitable to kick against the pricks. It gives one a sensation, and saves one the necessity of bursting. If our reformers had not had the prickly wrongs of the poor to kick, so that they hurt their toe quite sorely, they might long ago have burst outwards from the enclosed form in which we have kept secure.

Let no one suffer, they have said. No mouse shall be caught by a cat, no mouse. It is a transgression. Every mouse shall become a pet, and every cat shall lap milk in peace, from the saucer of utter benevolence.

This is the millennium, the golden age that is to be, when all shall be domesticated, and the lion and the leopard and the hawk shall come to our door to lap milk and to peck the crumbs, and no sound shall be heard but the lowing of fat cows and the baa-ing of fat sheep.

This is the Green Age that is to be, the age of the perfect cabbage. This was our hope and our fulfilment, for this, in this hope, we lived and we died.

So the virtuous, public-spirited ones have suffered bitterly from the aspect of their myriad more-or-less blighted neighbors, whom they love as themselves. They have lived and died to right the wrong conditions of social injustice.

Meanwhile the threshing has continued at the core of us, till our entrails are threshed rotten. We are a wincing mass of self-consciousness and corruption, within our plausible rind. The most unselfish, the most humanitarian of us all, he is the hollowest and fullest of rottenness. The more rotten we become, the more insistent and insane becomes our desire to ameliorate the conditions of our poorer, and maybe healthier neighbours.

Fools, vile fools! Why cannot we acknowledge and admit the horrible pulse and thresh of corruption within us. What is this self-consciousness that palpitates within us like a disease? What is it that threshes and threshes within us, drives us mad if we see a cat catch a sparrow?

We dare not know. Oh, we are convulsed with shame long before we come to the point. It is indecent beyond endurance to think of it.

Yet here let it be told. It was the living desire for immortality, for being, which urged us ceaselessly.

It was the bud within the cabbage, threshing, threshing, threshing. And now, oh our convulsion of shame, when we must know this! We would rather die.

Yet it shall be made known. It was the struggling of the light and darkness within us, towards consummation, towards absoluteness, towards flowering. Oh, we shriek with anger of shame as the truth comes out: that the cabbage is rotten within because it wanted to straddle up into weakly fiery flower, wanted to straddle forth in a spire of ragged, yellow, inconsequential blossom.

Oh God, it is unendurable, this revelation, this disclosure, it is not to be borne. Our souls perish in an agony of self-conscious shame, we will not have it.

Yet had we listened, the hidebound cabbage might have burst, might have opened apart, for a venturing forth of the tender, timid, ridiculous cluster of aspirations, that issue in little yellow tips of flame, the flowers naked in eternity, naked above the staring unborn crowd of amorphous entities, the cabbages: the myriad egos.

But the crowd of assertive egos, of tough entities, they were too strong, too many. Quickly they extinguished any shoot of tender immortality from among them, violently they adhered to the null rind and to the thresh of rottenness within.

Still the living desire beat and threshed at the heart of us, relentlessly. And still the fixed will of the temporal form we have so far attained, the static, mid-way form, triumphed in assertion.

Still the false I, the ego, held down the real, unborn I, which is a blossom with all a blossom's fragility.

Yet constantly the rising flower pushed and thrust at the belly and heart of us, thrashed and beat relentlessly. If it could not beat its way through into being, it

must thrash us hollow. Let it do so then, we said. This also we enjoy, this being threshed rotten inside. This is sensationalism, reduction of the complex tissue back through rottenness to its elements. And this sensationalism, this reduction back, has become our very life, our only form of life at all. We enjoy it, it is our lust.

It became at last a collective activity, a war, when, within the great rind of virtue we thresh destruction further and further, till our whole civilization is like a great rind full of corruption, of breaking down, a mere shell threatened with collapse upon itself.

And the road of corruption leads back to one eternity. The activity of utter going apart has, in eternity, a result equivalent to the result of utter coming together. The tiger rises supreme, the last brindled flame upon the darkness; the deer melts away, a blood-stained shadow received into the utter pallor of light; each having leapt forward into eternity, at opposite extremes. Within the closed shell of the Christian conception, we lapse Utterly back, through reduction, back to the Beginning. It is the triumph of death, of decomposition.

And the process is that of the serpent lying prone in the cold, watery fire of corruption, flickering with the flowing-apart of the two streams. His belly is white with the light flowing forth from him, his back is dark and brindled where the darkness returns to the Source. He is the ridge where the two floods flow apart. So in the orange-speckled belly of the newt, the light is taking leave of the darkness, and returning to the light; the imperious, demon-like crest is the flowing home of the darkness. He is the god within the flux of corruption, from him proceeds the great retrogression back to the Beginning and back to the End. These are our gods.

There are elsewhere the golden angels of the Kiss, the golden, fiery angels of strife, those that have being when we come together, as opposites, as complements coming to consummation. There is delight and triumph elsewhere, these angels sound their loud trumpets. Then men are like brands that have burst spontaneously into flame, the phoenix, the tiger, the glistening dove, the white-burning unicorn.

But here are only the angels that cleave asunder, terrible and invincible. With cold, irresistible hands they put us apart, they send like unto like, darkness unto darkness. They thrust the seas backward from embrace, backward from the locked strife. They set the cold phosphorescent flame of light flowing back to the light, and cold heavy darkness flowing back to the darkness. They are the absolute angels of corruption, they are the snake, the newt, the water-lily, as reflected from below.

I cease to be, my darkness lapses into utter, stone darkness, my light into a

light that is keen and cold as frost.

This goes on within the rind. But the rind remains permanent, falsely absolute, my false absolute self, my self-conscious ego. Till the work of corruption is finished; then the rind also, the public form, the civilization, the established consciousness of mankind disappears as well in the mouth of the worm, taken unutterably asunder by the hands of the angels of separation. It ceases to be, all the civilization and all the consciousness, it passes utterly away, a temporary cohesion in the flux. It was this, this rind, this persistent temporary cohesion, that was evil, this alone was evil. And it destroys us all before itself is destroyed.

IV. WITHIN THE SEPULCHRE

WITHIN the womb of the established past, the light has entered the darkness, the future is conceived. It is conceived, the beginning of the end has taken place. Light is within the grip of darkness, darkness within the embrace of light, the Beginning and the End are closed upon one another.

They come nearer and nearer, till the oneness is full grown within the womb of the past, within the belly of Time, it must move out, must be brought forth, into timelessness.

But something withholds it. The pregnancy is accomplished, the hour of labour has come. Yet the labour does not begin. The loins of the past are withered, the young unborn is shut in.

All the time, within the womb, light has been travelling to the dark, the interfusion of the two into a oneness has continued. Now that it is fulfilled, it meets with some arrest. It is the dry walls of the womb which cannot relax.

There is a struggle. Then the darkness, having overcome the light, reaching the dead null wall of the womb, reacts into self-consciousness, and recoils upon itself. At the same time the light has surpassed its limit, become conscious, and starts in reflex to recoil upon itself. Thus the false I comes into being: the I which thinks itself supreme and infinite, and which is, in fact, a sick foetus shut up in the walls of an unrelaxed womb.

Here, at this moment when the birth pangs should begin, when the great opposition between the old and the young should take place, when the young should beat back the old body that surrounds it, and the old womb and loins should expel the young body, there is a deadlock. The two cannot fight apart. The walls of the old body are inflexible and insensible, the unborn does not know that there can be any travelling forth. It conceives itself as the whole universe, surrounded by dark nullity. It does not know that it is in prison. It believes itself to have filled up the whole of the universe, right to the extremes where is nothing but blank nullity.

It is tremendously conceited. It can only react upon itself. And the reaction can only take the form of self-consciousness. For the self is everything, universal, the surrounding womb is just the outer darkness in which that which *is*, exists. Therefore there remains either to die, to pass into the outer darkness, or to enter into self-knowledge.

So the unborn recoils upon itself, dark upon dark, light upon light. This is the

horror of corruption begun already within the unborn, already dissolution and corruption set in before birth. And this is the triumph of the ego.

Mortality has usurped the Crown. The unborn, reacting upon the null walls of the womb, assumes that it has reached the limit of all space and all being. It concludes that its self is fulfilled, that all consummation is achieved. It takes for certain that itself has filled the whole of space and the whole of time.

And this is the glory of the ego.

There is no more fight to be fought, there is no more to be sought and embraced. All is fought and overcome, all is embraced and contained. It is all concluded, there is nothing remaining but the outer nothingness, the only activity is the reaction against the outer nothingness, into the achieved being of the self, all else is fulfilled and concluded. To die is merely to assume nothingness. The limit of all life is reached.

And this is the apotheosis of the ego.

So there is the great turning round upon the self, dark upon dark, light upon light, the flux of separation, corruption within the unborn. The tides which are set towards each other swirl back as from a promontory which intervenes. There has been no consummation. There can be no consummation. The only thing is to return, to go back — that which came from the Beginning to go back to the Beginning, that which came from the End to return to the End. In the return lies the fulfilment.

And this is the unconscious undoing of the ego.

That which we *are* is absolute. There is no adding to it, no superseding this accomplished self. It is final and universal. All that remains is thoroughly to explore it.

That is, to analyse it. Analysis presupposes a corpse.

It is at this crisis in the human history that tragic art appears again, that art becomes the only absolute, the only watchword among the people. This achieved self, which we are, is absolute and universal. There is nothing beyond. All that remains is to state this self, and the reactions upon this self, perfectly. And the perfect statement presumes to be art. It is aestheticism.

At this crisis there is a great cry of loneliness. Every man conceives himself as a complete unit surrounded by nullity. And he cannot bear it. Yet his pride is in this also. The greatest conceit of all is the cry of loneliness.

At this crisis, emotion turns into sentiment, and sentimentalism takes the place of feeling. The ego has no feeling, it has only sentiments. And the myriad egos sway in tides of sentimentalism.

But the *tacit* utterance of every man, when this state is reached, is “*Après moi le Deluge.*” And when the deluge begins to set in, there is profound secret

satisfaction on every hand. For the ego in a man secretly hates every other ego. In a democracy where every little ego is crowned with the false crown of its own supremacy, every other ego is a false usurper, and nothing more. We can only tolerate those whose crowns are not yet manufactured, because they can't *afford* it.

And again, the supreme little ego in man hates an unconquered universe. We shall never rest till we have heaped tin cans on the North Pole and the South Pole, and put up barb-wire fences on the moon. Barb-wire fences are our sign of conquest. We have wreathed the world with them. The back of creation is broken. We have killed the mysteries and devoured the secrets. It all lies now within our skin, within the ego of humanity.

So circumscribed within the outer nullity, we give ourselves up to the flux of death, to analysis, to introspection, to mechanical war and destruction, to humanitarian absorption in the body politic, the poor, the birth-rate, the mortality of infants, like a man absorbed in his own flesh and members, looking for ever at himself. It is the continued activity of disintegration — disintegration, separating, setting apart, investigation, research, the resolution back to the original void.

All this goes on within the glassy, insentient, insensible envelope of nullity. And within this envelope, like the glassy insects within their rind, we imagine we fill the whole cosmos, that we contain within ourselves the whole of time, which shall tick forth from us as from a clock, now everlastingly.

We are capable of nothing but reduction within the envelope. Our every activity is the activity of disintegration, of corruption, of dissolution, whether it be our scientific research, our social activity — (the social activity is largely concerned with reducing all the parts contained within the envelope to an equality, so that there shall be no unequal pressure, tending to rupture the envelope, which is divine) — our art, or our anti-social activity, sensuality, sensationalism, crime, war. Everything alike contributes to the flux of death, to corruption, and liberates the static data of the consciousness.

Whatever single act is performed by any man now, in this condition, it is an act of reduction, disintegration. The scientist in his laboratory, the artist in his study, the statesman, the artisan, the sensualist obtaining keen gratification, every one of these is reducing down that which is himself to its simpler elements, reducing the compound back to its parts. It is the pure process of corruption in all of us. The activity of death is the only activity. It is like the decay of our flesh, and every new step in decay liberates a sensation, keen, momentarily gratifying, or a conscious knowledge of the parts that made a whole; knowledge equally gratifying.

It is like Dmitri Karamazov, who seeks and experiences sensation after sensation, reduction after reduction, till finally he is stripped utterly naked before the police, and the quick of him perishes. There is no more any physical or integral Dmitri Karamazov. That which is in the hospital, afterwards, is a conglomeration of qualities, strictly an idiot, a nullity.

And Dostoevsky has shown us perfectly the utter subjection of all human life to the flux of corruption. That is his theme, the theme of reduction through sensation after sensation, consciousness after consciousness, until nullity is reached, all complexity is broken down, an individual becomes an amorphous heap of elements, qualities.

There are the two types, the dark Dmitri Karamazov, or Rogozhin; and the Myshkin on the other hand. Dmitri Karamazov and Rogozhin will each of them plunge the flesh within the reducing agent, the Within the flesh, add to the sensual experience, and Progress towards utter dark disintegration, to nullity Myshkin on the other hand will react upon the achieved consciousness or personality or ego of every one he meets, disintegrate this consciousness, this ego, and his own as well, obtaining the knowledge of the factors that made up the complexity of the consciousness, the ego, in the woman and in himself, reduce further and further back, till himself is a babbling idiot, a vessel full of disintegrated parts, and the woman is reduced to a nullity.

This is real death. The actual physical fact of death is part of the life-stream. It is an incidental point when the flux of light and dark has flowed sufficiently apart for the conjunction, which we call life, to disappear.

We live with the pure flux of death, it is part of us all the time. But our blossoming is transcendent, beyond death and life.

Only when we fall into egoism do we lose all chance of blossoming, and then the flux of corruption is the breath of our existence. From top to bottom, in the whole nation, we are engaged, fundamentally engaged in the process of reduction and dissolution. Our reward is sensational gratification in the flesh, or sensational gratification within the mind, the utter gratification we experience when we can pull apart the whole into its factors. This is the reward in scientific and introspective knowledge, this is the reward in the pleasure of cheap sensuality.

In each case, the experience remains as it were absolute. It is the statement of what is, or what was. And a statement of what *is*, is the absolute footstep in the progress backward towards the starting place, it is the *undoing* of a complete unit into the factors which previously went to making its oneness. It is the reduction of the iris back into its component waves.

There was the bliss when the iris came into being. There is now the bliss when

the iris passes out of being, and the whole is torn apart. The secret of the whole is never captured. Certain data are captured. The secret escapes down the sensual, or the sensational, or intellectual, thrill of pleasure.

So there goes on reduction after reduction within the shell. And we, who find our utmost gratification in this process of reduction, this flux of corruption, this retrogression of death, we will preserve with might and main the glassy envelope, the insect rind, the tight-shut shell of the cabbage, the withered, null walls of the womb. For by virtue of this null envelope alone do we proceed uninterrupted in this process of gratifying reduction.

And this is utter evil, this secret, silent worship of the null envelope that preserves us intact for our gratification with the flux of corruption.

Intact within the null envelope, which we have come to worship as the preserver of this our life-activity of reduction, we re-act back upon what we are. We do not seek any more the consummation of union. We seek the consummation of reduction.

When a man seeks a woman in love, or in positive desire, he seeks a union, he seeks a consummation of himself with that which is not himself, light with dark, dark with light.

But within the glassy, null envelope of the enclosure, no union is sought, no union is possible; after a certain point, only reduction. Ego reacts upon ego only in friction. There are small egos, many small people, who have not reached the limit of the confines which we worship. They may still have small consummation in union. But all those who are strong and have travelled far have met and reacted from the nullity.

And then, when a man seeks a woman, he seeks not a consummation in union, but a frictional reduction. He seeks to plunge his compound flesh into the cold acid that will reduce him, in supreme sensual experience, down to his parts. This is Rogozhin seeking Nastasia Filippovna, Dmitri his Grushenka, or D'Annunzio in *Fuoco* seeking his Foscarina. This is more or less what happens when a soldier, maddened with, lust of pure destructiveness, violently rapes the woman of his captivity. It is that he may destroy another being by the very act which is called the act of creation, or procreation. In the brute soldier it is cruelty-lust: as it was in the Red Indian.

But when we come to civilized man, it is not so simple. His cruelty-lust is directed almost as much against himself as against his victim. He is destroying, reducing, breaking down that of himself which is within the envelope. He is immersing himself within a keen, fierce, terrible reducing agent. This is true of the hero in Edgar Allan Poe's tales, *Ligeia*, or the *Fall of the House of Usher*. The man seeks his own sensational reduction, but he disintegrates the woman

even more, in the name of love. In the name of love, what horrors men perpetrate, and are applauded!

It is only in supreme crises that man reaches the supreme pitch of annihilation. The difference, however, is only a difference in degree, not in kind. The bank-clerk performs in a mild degree what Poe performed intensely and deathlily.

These are the men in whom the development is rather low, whose souls are coarsely compounded, so that the reduction is coarse, a sort of activity of coarse hate.

But the men of finer sensibility and finer development, sensuous or conscious, they must proceed more gradually and subtly and finely in the process of reduction. It is necessary for a finely compounded nature to reduce itself more finely, to know the subtle gratification of its own reduction.

A subtle nature like Myshkin's would find no pleasure of reduction in connection with Grushenka, scarcely any with Nastasia. He must proceed more delicately. He must give up his soul to the reduction. It is his mind, his conscious self he wants to reduce. He wants to dissolve it back. He wants to become infantile, like a child, to reduce and resolve back all the complexity of his consciousness, to the rudimentary condition of childhood. That is his ideal.

So he seeks mental contacts, mental reactions. It is in his mental or conscious contacts that he seeks to obtain the gratification of self-reduction. He reaches his crisis in his monologue of self-analysis, self-dissolution, in the drawing-room scene where he falls in a fit.

And of course, all this reducing activity is draped in alluring sentimentalism. The most evil things in the world, today, are to be found under the chiffon folds of sentimentalism. Sentimentality is the garment of our vice. It covers viciousness as inevitably as greenness covers a bog.

With all our talk of advance, progress, we are all the time working backwards. Our heroines become younger and younger. In the movies, the heroine is becoming more and more childish, and touched with infantile idiocy. We cannot bear honest maturity. We want to reduce ourselves back, back to the *corruptive* state of childishness.

Now it is all very well for a child to be a child. But for a grown person to be slimily, pornographi-cally reaching out for child-gratifications, is disgusting. The same with the prevalent love of boys. It is the desire to be reduced back, reduced back, in our accomplished ego: always within the unshattered rind of our completeness and complacency, to go backwards, in sentimentalised disintegration, to the states of childhood.

And no matter *what* happens to us, now, we sentimentalise it and use it as a means of sensational reduction. Even the great war does not alter our civilization

one iota, in its total nature. The form, the whole form, remains intact. Only inside the complete envelope we writhe with sensational experiences of death, hurt, horror, reduction.

The goodness of anything depends on the direction in which it is moving. Childhood, like a bud, striving and growing and struggling towards blossoming full maturity, is surely beautiful. But childhood as a *goal*, for which grown people aim: childishness futile and sentimental, for which men and women lust, and which always retreats when grasped, like the *ignis fatuus* of a poisonous marsh of corruption: this is disgusting.

While we live, we are balanced between the flux of life and the flux of death. All the while our bodies are being composed and decomposed. But while every man fully lives, all the time the two streams keep fusing into the third reality, of real creation.

Every new gesture, every fresh smile of a child is a new emergence into creative being: a glimpse of the Holy Ghost.

But when grown people start grimacing with childishness, or lusting after child-gratifications, it is corruption pure and simple.

And the still clear look on an old face, and the stillness of old, withered hands, which have gathered the long repose of autumn, this is the purity of the two streams consummated, and the bloom, like autumn crocuses, of age.

But the painted, silly child-face that old women make nowadays: or the harpy's face that many have, lusting for the sensations of youth: the hard, voracious, selfish faces of old men, seeking their own ends, devouring the shoots of young life: this is vile.

While we live, we are balanced between the flux of life and the flux of death. But the real clue is the Holy Ghost, that moves us on into the state of blossoming. And each year the blossoming is different: from the delicate blue speedwells of childhood to the equally delicate, frail farewell flowers of old age: through all the poppies and sunflowers: year after year of difference.

While we live, we change, and our flowering is a constant change.

But once we fall into the state of egoism, we cannot change. The ego, the self-conscious ego remains fixed, a final envelope around us. And we are then safe inside the mundane egg of our own self-consciousness and self-esteem.

Safe we arc! Safe as houses! Shut up like unborn chickens that cannot break the shell of the egg. That's how safe we are! And as we can't be born, we can only rot. That's how safe we are!

Safe within the everlasting walls of the egg-shell we have not the courage, nor the energy, to crack, we fall, like the shut-up chicken, into a pure flux of corruption, and the worms are our angels.

And mankind falls into the state of innumerable little worms bred within the unbroken shell: all clamoring for food, food, food, all feeding on the dead body of creation, all crying peace! peace! universal peace! brotherhood of man! Everything must be “universal”, to the conquering worm. It is only *life* which is different.

V. THE NUPTIALS OF DEATH AND THE ATTENDANT VULTURE

To THOSE who are in prison, whose being is prisoner within the walls of unliving fact, there are only two forms of triumph: the triumph of inertia, or the triumph of the Will. There is no flowering possible. And the experience *en route* to either triumph, is the experience of sensationalism.

Stone walls need not a prison make: that is, not an *absolute* prison. If the great sun has shone into a man's soul, even prison-walls cannot blot it out. Yet prison-walls, unless they be a temporary shelter are deadly things.

So, if we are imprisoned within walls of accomplished fact, experience, or knowledge, we are prisoned indeed. The living sun is shut out finally. A false sun, like a lamp, shines.

All absolutes are prison-walls. These "laws" which science has invented, like conservation of energy, indestructibility of matter, gravitation, the will-to-live, survival of the fittest: and even these absolute facts, like — the earth goes round the sun, or the doubtful atoms, electrons, or ether — they are all prison-walls, unless we realise that we don't know what they mean. We don't know what we mean, ultimately, by *conservation*, or *indestructibility*. Our atoms, electrons, ether, are caps that fit exceeding badly. And our will-to-live contains a germ of suicide, and our survival-of-the-fittest the germ of degeneracy. As for the earth going round the sun: it goes round as the blood goes round my body, absolutely mysteriously, with the rapidity and hesitation of life.

But the human ego, in its pettifogging arrogance, sets up these things for you as absolutes, and unless you kick hard and kick in time, they are your prison walls forever. Your spirit will be like a dead bee in a cell.

Once you are in prison, you have no experience left, save the experience of reduction, destruction going on inwardly. Your sentimentalism is only the smell of your own rottenness.

This reduction within the self is sensationalism. And sensationalism, of course, is progressive. You can't have your cake and eat it. To get a sensation, you eat your cake. That is, to get a sensation, you reduce down some part of your complex psyche, physical and psychic. You get a flash, as when you strike a match. But a match once struck can never be struck again. It is finished — sensationalism is an exhaustive process.

The resolving down is progressive. It can apparently go on *ad infinitum*. But

in infinity it means what we call utter death, utter nothingness, opposites released from opposition, and from conjunction, till there *is* nothing left at all, only nullity itself.

Sensationalism progresses in the individual. This is the doom of it. This is the doom of egoistic sex. Egoistic sex-excitement means the reacting of the sexes against one another in a purely reducing activity. The reduction progresses. When I have finally reduced one complexity, one unit, I must proceed to the next, the lower. It is the progressive activity of dissolution within the soul.

And the climax of this progression is in perversity, degradation and death. But only the very powerful and energetic ego can go through all the phases of its own violent reduction. The ordinary crude soul, after having enjoyed the brief reduction in the sex, is finished there, blase, empty. And alcohol is slow and crude, and opium is only for the imaginative, the somewhat spiritual nature. Then remain the opium-drugs, for a finisher, a last reducer.

There remains only the reduction of the contact with death. So that as the sex is exhausted, gradually, a keener desire, the desire for the touch of death follows on, in an intense nature. Then come the fatal drugs. Or else those equally fatal wars and revolutions which really create nothing at all, but destroy, and leave emptiness.

When a man is cleaving like a fly with spread arms upon the face of a rock, with infinite space beneath him, and he feels his foothold going, and he cries out to the men on the rope, and falls away, dangling into endless space, jerked back by the thin rope, then he perishes, he is fused in the reducing flame of death. He knows another keen anguish of reduction. What matters to that man, afterwards? Does any of the complex life of the world below matter? None. All that is left is the triumph of his will in having gone so far and recovered. And all that lies ahead is another risk, another slip, another agony of the fall, or a demonish triumph of the will. And the *final* consummation of such a man is the last fall of all, the few horrible seconds whilst he drops, like a meteorite, to extinction. This is his final and utter satisfaction, the smash of extinction at the bottom.

But even this man is not a pure egoist. This man still has his soul open to the mystery of the mountains, he still feels the passion of the *contact* with death.

If he wins, however, in the contest: if his will triumphs in the test: then there is danger of his falling into final egoism, the more-or-less inert complacency of a self-satisfied old man.

The soul is still alive, while it has passion: any sort of passion, even for the brush with death, or for the final and utter reduction. And in the brush with death it may be released again into positive life. A man may be sufficiently released by a fall on the rope and the dangling for a few minutes of agony, in space. That

may finally reduce his soul to its elements, set it free and child-like, and break-down that egoistic entity which has developed upon it from the past. The near touch of death may be a release into life; if only it will break the egoistic will, and release that other flow.

But if a man, having fallen very near to death, gets up at length and says: “I did it! It’s my triumph! I beat the mountains that time!” — then, of course, his ego has only pulled itself in triumph out of the menace, and the individual will go on more egoistic and barrenly complacent.

If a man says: “I fell! But the unseen goodness helped me, when I struggled for life, and so I was saved” — then this man will go on in life unimprisoned, the channels of his heart open, and passion still flowing through him.

But if the brush with death only gave the brilliant sensational thrill of fear, followed immediately, by the *gamin* exultance: “Yah! I got myself out all right!” — then the ego continues intact, having enjoyed the sensation, and remaining vulgarly triumphant in the power of the Will. And it will continue inert and complacent till the next thrill.

So it is with war. Whoever goes to war in his own might alone, will even if he come out victorious, come out barren: a barren triumpher, whose strength is in inertia. A man must do his own utmost: but even then, the final stroke will be delivered, or the final strength will be given from the unseen, and the man must feel it. If he doesn’t feel it, he will be an inert victor, or equally inert vanquished, complacent and sterile in either case.

There must be a certain faith. And that means, an ultimate reliance on that which is beyond our will, and not contained in our ego.

We have gone to war. For a hundred years we have been piling up safety upon safety, we have grown enormously within the shell of our civilization, we have rounded off our own ego and grown almost complacent about our own triumphs of will. Till we come to a point where sex seems exhausted, and passion falls flat. When even criticism and analysis now only fatigue the mind and weary the soul.

Then we gradually, gradually formulate the desire: Oh, give us the brush with death, and let us see if we can win out all right!

We go into a war like this in order to get once more the final reduction under the touch of death. That the death is so inhuman, cold, mechanical, sordid, the giving of the body to the grip of cold, stagnant mud and stagnant water, whilst one awaits for some falling death, the knowledge of the gas clouds that may lacerate and reduce the lungs to a heaving mass, this, this sort of self-inflicted Sadism, brings almost a final satisfaction to our civilized and still passionate men.

Almost! And when it is over, and we have won out, shall we be released into a new lease of life? Or shall we only extend our dreary lease of egoism and complacency? Shall we know the barren triumph of the will? — or the equally barren triumph inertia, helplessness, barren irresponsibility.

And still, as far as there is any passion in the war, it is a passion for the embrace with death. The desire to deal death and to take death. The enemy is the bride, whose body we will reduce with rapture of agony and wounds. We are the bridegroom, engaged with him in the long, voluptuous embrace, the giving of agony, the rising and rising of the slow unwilling transport of misery, the soaking-in of day after day of wet mud, in penetration of the heavy, sordid, unendurable cold, on and on to the climax, the laceration of the blade, like a frost through the tissue, blasting it.

This is the desire and the consummation, this is the war. But at length, we shall be satisfied, at length we shall have consummation. Then the war will end. And what then?

It is not really a question of victories or defeats. It is a question of fulfilment, and release from the old prison-house of a dead form. The war is one bout in the terrific, horrible labour, our civilization laboring in child-birth, and unable to bring forth.

How will it end? Will there be a release, a relaxation of the horrible walls, and a real issuing, a birth?

Or will it end in nothing, all the agony going to stiffen the old form deader, to enclose the unborn more helplessly and drearily.

It may easily be. For behind us all, in the war, stand the old and the elderly, complacent with egoism, bent on maintaining the old form. Oh, they are the monkey grinning with anxiety and anticipation, behind us, waiting for the burnt young cat to pull the chestnut out of the fire. And in the end, they will thrill with the triumph of their egoistic will, and harden harder still with vulture-like inertia, rapacious inertia.

In sex, we have plunged the quick of creation deep into the cold flux of reduction, corruption, till the quick is extinguished. In war we have plunged the whole quick of the living, sentient body into a cold, cold flux. Much has died and much will die. But if the whole quick dies, and there remain only the material, mechanical unquickened tissue, acting at the bidding of the mechanical will, and the sterile ego triumphant, then it is a poor tale, a barrenly poor tale.

I have seen a soldier at the seaside who was maimed. One leg was only a small stump, with the trouser folded back on it. He was a handsome man of about thirty, finely built. His face was sun-browned, and extraordinarily beautiful, still, with a strange placidity, something like perfection, abstract,

complete. He had known his consummation. It seemed he could never desire corruption or reduction again, he had had his satisfaction of death. He was become almost impersonal, a simple abstraction, all his personality loosed and undone. He was now like a babe just born, new to begin life. Yet in a sense, still-born. The newness and candour, like a flower just unloosed, was something strange and rare in him. Yet unloosed, curiously, into the light of death.

So he came forward down the pier, in the sunshine, slowly on his crutches. Behind, the sea was milk-white and vague, as if full of ghosts, and silent, except when a long white wave plunged to silence out of the smooth, milky silence of the sea, coming from very far out of the ghostly stillness.

The maimed soldier, strong and handsome, with some of the frail candour of a newly-wakened child in his face, came slowly down the pier on his crutches, looking at everybody who looked at him. He was naive like a child, wondering. The people stared at him with a sort of fascination. So he was rather vain, rather proud, like a vain child.

He did not know he was maimed, it had not entered his consciousness. His soul, so clean and new and fine, could not conceive of such a thing. He was rather vain and slightly ostentatious, not as a man with a wound, a trophy, more as a child who is conspicuous among envious elders.

The women particularly were fascinated. They could not look away from him. The strange abstraction of horror and death was so perfect in his face, like the horror of birth on a new-born infant, that they were almost hysterical. They gravitated towards him, helplessly, they could not move away from him.

They wanted him, they wanted him so badly, that they were almost beside themselves. They wanted his consummation, his perfect completeness in horror and death. They too wanted the consummation. They followed him, they made excuses to talk to him. And he, strange, abstract, glowing still from the consummation of destruction and pain and horror, like a bridegroom just come from the bride, seemed to glow before the women, to give off a strange, unearthly radiance, which was like an embrace, a most poignant embrace to their souls.

But still his eyes were looking, looking, looking for someone who was not eager for him, to know him, to devour him, like women round a perfect child. He had not realized yet what all the attention meant, which he received. He was so strong in his new birth.

And he was looking for his own kind, for the living, the new-born, round about. But he was surrounded by greedy, voracious people, like birds seeking the death in him, pecking at the death in him.

It was horrible, rather sinister, the women round the man, there on the pier

stretched from the still, sunny land over the white sea, noiseless and inhuman.

The spirit of destruction is divine, when it breaks the ego and opens the soul to the wide heavens. In corruption there is divinity. Aphrodite is, on one side, the great goddess of destruction in sex, Dionysus in the spirit. Moloch and some gods of Egypt are gods also of the knowledge of death. In the soft and shiny voluptuousness of decay, in the marshy chill heat of reptiles, there is the sign of the Godhead. It is the activity of departure. And departure is the opposite equivalent of coming together; decay, corruption, destruction, breaking down is the opposite equivalent of creation. In infinite going-apart there is revealed again the pure absolute, the absolute relation: this time truly as a Ghost: the ghost of what was.

We who live, we can only live or die. And when, like the maimed soldier on the pier with the white sea behind, when we have come right back into life, and the wonder of death fades off our faces again, what then?

Shall we go on with wide, careless eyes and the faint astonished smile waiting all our lives for the accomplished death? Waiting for death finally? And continuing the sensational reduction process? Or shall we fade into a dry empty egoism? Which will the maimed soldier do? He cannot remain as he is, clear and peaceful.

Are we really doomed, and smiling with the wonder of doom?

Even if we are, we need not say: "It is finished." It is never finished. That is one time when Jesus spoke a fatal half-truth, in his *Consummatum Est!* Death consummates nothing. It can but abruptly close the individual life. But Life itself, and even the forms men have given it, will persist and persist. There is no consummation into death. Death leaves still further deaths.

Leonardo knew this: he knew the strange endlessness of the flux of corruption. It is Mona Lisa's ironic smile. Even Michael Angelo knew it. It is in his *Leda and the Swan*. For the swan is one of the symbols of divine corruption with its reptile feet buried in the ooze and mud, its voluptuous form yielding and embracing the ooze of water, its beauty white and cold and terrifying, like the dead beauty of the moon, like the water-lily, the sacred lotus, its neck and head like the snake, it is for us a flame of the cold white fire of flux, the phosphorescence of corruption, the salt, cold burning of the sea which corrodes all it touches, coldly reduces every sun-built form to ash, to the original elements. This is the beauty of the swan, the lotus, the snake, this cold white salty fire of infinite reduction. And there was some suggestion of this in the Christ of the early Christians, the Christ who was the Fish.

So that, when Leonardo and Michael Angelo represent Leda in the embrace of the swan, they are painting mankind in the clasp of the divine flux of corruption,

the singing death. Mankind *turned back*, to cold, bygone consummations.

When the swan first rose out of the marshes, it was a glory of creation. But when we turn back, to seek its consummation again, it is a fearful flower of corruption.

And corruption, like growth, is only divine when it is pure, when all is given up to it. If it be experienced as a controlled activity within an intact whole, this is vile. When the cabbage flourishes round a hollow rottenness, this is vile. When corruption goes on within the living womb, this is unthinkable. The chicken dead in the egg is an abomination. We cannot subject a divine process to a static will, not without blasphemy and loathsomeness. The static will must be subject to the process of reduction, also. For the pure absolute, the Holy Ghost, lies also in the relationship which is made manifest by the departure, the departure *ad infinitum*, of the opposing elements.

Corruption will at last break down for us the deadened forms, and release us into the infinity. But the static ego, with its will-to-persist, neutralises both life and death, and utterly defies the Holy Ghost. The unpardonable sin!

It is possible for this static will, this vile rind of nothingness, to triumph for a long while over the divine relation in the flux, to assert an absolute nullity of static form.

This we do who preserve intact our complete null concept of life, as an envelope around this flux of destruction, the war. The whole concept and form of life remains absolute and static, around the gigantic but contained seething of the fight. It is the rottenness seething within the cabbage, corruption within the old, fixed body. The cabbage does not relax, the body is not broken open. The reduction is sealed and contained.

That is our attitude now. It is the attitude of the women who flutter round and peck at death in us. This is the carrion process set in, the process of obscenity, the baboon, the vulture in us.

In so far as we fight to remain ideally intact, in so far as we seek to give and to have the experience of death, so that we may remain unchanged in our whole conscious form, may preserve the static entity of our conception, around the fight, we are obscene. We are like vultures and obscene insects.

We may give ourselves utterly to destruction. Then our conscious forms are destroyed along with us, and something new must arise. But we may not have corruption within ourselves as sensationalism, our skin and outer form intact. To destroy life for the preserving of a static, rigid form, a shell, a glassy envelope, this is the lugubrious activity of the men who fight to save democracy and to end all fighting. The fight itself is divine, the relation betrayed in the fight is absolute. But the glassy envelope of the established concept is only a foul

nullity.

Destruction and Creation are the two relative absolutes between the opposing infinities. Life is in both. Life may even, for a while be almost entirely in one, or almost entirely in the other. The end of either oneness is death. For life is really in the two, the absolute is the pure relation, which is both.

If we have our fill of destruction, then we shall turn again to creation. We shall need to live again, and live hard, for once our great civilized form is broken, and we are at last born into the open sky, we shall have a whole new universe to grow up into, and to find relations with. The future will open its delicate, dawning asons in front of us, unfathomable.

But let us watch that we do not preserve an enveloping falsity around our destructive activity, some nullity of virtue and self-righteousness, some conceit of the "general good" and the salvation of the world by bringing it all within our own conceived whole form. This is the utter lie and obscenity. The ego, like Humpty Dumpty, sitting for ever on the wall.

The vulture was once, perhaps, an eagle. It became a supreme strong bird, almost like the phoenix. But at a certain point, it said: "I am It." And then it proceeded to preserve its own static form crystal about the flux of corruption, fixed, absolute as a crystal, about the horrible seethe of corruption. Then the eagle became a vulture.

And the dog, through cowardice, arrested itself at a certain point and became domestic, or a hysena, preserving a glassy, fixed form about a voracious seethe of corruption.

And the baboon, almost a man, or almost a high beast, arrested himself and became obscene, a grey, hoary rind closed upon an activity of strong corruption.

And the louse, in its little glassy envelope, brings everything into the corrupting pot of its little belly.

And these are all perfectly-arrested egoists, asserting themselves static and foul, triumphant in inertia and in will.

Let us watch that we do not turn either into carrion or into carrion eaters. Let us watch that we do not become, in the vulgar triumph of our will, and the obscene inertia of our ego, vultures who feed on putrescence. The lust for death, for pain, for torture, is even then better than this fatal triumph of inertia and the egoistic will. Anything is better than that. The Red Indians, full of Sadism and self-torture and death, destroyed themselves. But the eagle, when it gets stuck and can know no more blossoming turns into a vulture with a naked head, and becomes carrion-foul.

There must always be some balance between the passion for destruction and the passion for creation, in every living activity; for in the race to destruction we

can utterly destroy the vital quick of our being, leave us amorphous, undistinguished, vegetable; and in the race for creation we can lose ourselves in mere production, and pile ourselves over with dead null monstrosities of obsolete form. All birth comes with the reduction of old tissue. But the reduction is not the birth. That is the fallacy of all of us, who represent the old tissue now. In this fallacy we go careering down the slope in our voluptuousness of death and horror, careering into oblivion, like Hippolytus trammelled up and borne away in the traces of his maddened horses.

Who says that the spirit of destruction will outrun itself? Not till the driver be annihilated. Then the destructive career will run itself out.

And then what?

But neither destruction nor production is, in itself, evil. The danger lies in the fall into egoism, which neutralises both. When destruction and production alike are mechanical, meaningless.

The race of destruction may outrun itself. But still the form may remain intact, the old imprisoning laws. Only those who have not travelled to the confines will be left, the mean, the average, the laborers, the slaves: all of them little crowned egos.

Still the ancient mummy will have the people within its belly. There they will be slaves: not to the enemy, but to themselves, the concept established about them: being slaves, they will be happy enclosed within the tomb-like belly of a concept, like goldfish in a bowl, which think themselves the centre of the universe.

This is like the vultures of the mountains. They have kept the form and height of eagles. But their souls have turned into the souls of slaves and carrion eaters. Their size, their strength, their supremacy of the mountains, remains intact. But they have become carrion eaters.

This is the tomb, the whited sepulchre, this very form, this liberty, this ideal for which we are fighting. The Germans are fighting for another sepulchre. Theirs is the sepulchre of the Eagle become vulture, ours is the sepulchre of the lion become dog: soon to become hyxna.

But we would have our own sepulchre, in which we shall dwell secure when the rage of destruction is over. Let it be the sepulchre of the dog or the vulture, the sepulchre of democracy or aristocracy, what does it matter! Inside it, the worms will jig the same jazzy dances, and heave and struggle to get hold of vast and vaster stores of carrion, or its equivalent, gold.

The carrion birds, aristocrats, sit up high and remote, on the sterile rocks of the old absolute, their obscene heads gripped hard and small, like knots of stone clenched upon themselves for ever. The carrion dogs and hyxnas of the old, arid,

democratic absolute, prowl among the bare stones of the common earth, in numbers, their loins cringing, their heads sharpened to stone.

Those who will hold power, afterwards, they will sit on their rocks and heights of unutterable morality, which have become foul through the course of ages, like vultures upon the unchangeable mountain-tops. The fixed, existing form will persist forever beneath them, about them, they will have become the spirit incarnate of the fixed form of life. They will eat carrion, having become a static hunger for keen putrescence. This alone will support the incarnation of hoary fixity which they are. And beside the carrion they will fight the multitudes of hoary, obscene dogs, which also persist. It is the mortal form become null and fixed and enduring, glassy, horrible, beyond life and death, beyond consummation, the awful, stony nullity. It is timeless, almost as the rainbow.

But it is not utterly timeless. It is only unthinkably slow, static in its passing away, perpetuated.

Its very aspect of timelessness is a fraud.

What is evil? — not death, nor the blood-devouring Moloch, but this spirit of perpetuation and apparent timelessness, this obscenity which holds the great carrion birds, and the carrion dogs. The tiger, the hawk, the weasel, are beautiful things to me; and as they strike the dove and the hare, that is the will of God, it is a consummation, a bringing together of two extremes, a making perfect one from the duality.

But the baboon, and the hyasna, the vulture, the condor, and the carrion crow, these fill me with fear and horror. These are the highly developed life-forms, now arrested, petrified, frozen, falsely, timeless. The baboon was almost as man, the hyasna as the lion: the vulture and the condor are greater than the eagle, the carrion crow is stronger than the hawk. And these obscene beasts are not ashamed. They are stark and static, they are not mixed. Their will is hoary, ageless. Before us, the Egyptians have known them and worshipped them.

The baboon, with his intelligence and his unthinkable loins, the cunning hyasna with his cringing, stricken loins, these are the static form of one achieved ego, the egoistic Christian, the democratic, the unselfish. The vulture, with her naked neck and naked, small stony head, this is the static form of the other achieved ego, the eagle, the Self, aristocratic, lordly, pagan.

It is unthinkable and unendurable. Yet we are drawn more and more in this direction. After the supreme intelligence, the baboon, after the supreme pride, the vulture. The millionaire: the international financier: the bankers of this world. The baboons, the hyasnas, the vultures.

The snake is the spirit of the great corruptive principle, the festering cold of the marsh. This is how he seems, as we look back. We revolt from him, but we

share the same life and tide of life as he. He struggles as we struggle, he enjoys the sun, he comes to the water to drink, he curls up, hides himself to sleep. And under the low skies of the far past aons, he emerged a king out of chaos, a long beam of new life. But the vulture looms out in sleep like a rock, invincible within the hoary, static form, invincible against the flux of both eternities.

One day there was a loud, terrible scream from the garden, tearing the soul. Oh, and it was a snake lying on the warm garden bed, and in his teeth the leg of a frog, a frog spread out, screaming with horror. We ran near. The snake glanced at us sharply, holding fast to the frog, trying to get further hold. In so trying, it let the frog escape, which leaped convulsed, away. Then the snake slid noiselessly under cover, sullenly, never looking at us again.

We were all white with fear. But why? In the world of twilight as in the world of light, one beast shall devour another. The world of corruption has I its stages, where the lower shall devour the higher, *I ad infinitum*.

So a snake, also, devours the fascinated bird, the little, static bird with its tiny skull. Yet is there no great reptile that shall swallow the vulture?

As yet, the vulture is beyond life or change. It stands hard, immune within the principle of corruption, and the principle of creation, unbreakable. It is kept static by the fire of putrescence, which makes the void within balance the void without. It is a changeless tomb wherein the latter stages of corruption take place, counteracting perfectly the action of life. Life devours death to keep the static nullity of the form.

So the ragged, grey-and-black vulture sits hulked, motionless, like a hoary, foul piece of living rock, its naked head and neck sunk in, only the curved beak protruding, the naked eyelids lowered. Motionless, beyond life, it sits on the sterile heights.

It does not sleep, it stays utterly static. When it spreads its great wings and floats down the air, still it is static, still this is the sleep, a dream-floating. When it rips up carrion and swallows it, it is still the same dream-motion, static, beyond the inglutina-tion. The naked, obscene head is always fast locked, like stone.

It is this naked, obscene head of a bird, sleep-locked, a petrified knot of sleep, that I cannot bear to think of. When I think of it, neither live nor die, I am petrified into foulness. The knot of volition, the will knotted upon a perpetuated moment, will not now be unloosed for ever. It will remain hoary, unchanging, timeless. Till it disappears, suddenly. Amid all the flux of time, of the two eternities, this head remains unbroken in a cold, rivetted sleep. But one day it will be broken.

I am set utterly against this small, naked, stone-clinched head, it is a foul

vision I want to wipe away. But I am set utterly also against the loathsome, cringing, imprisoned loins of the hyasna, that cringe down the hind legs of the beast with their static weight. Again the static will has knotted into rivetted, endless nullity, but here upon the loins. In the vulture, the head is turned to stone, the fire is in the talons and the beak. In the hoary, glassy hyaena, the loins are turned to stone, heavy, sinking down to earth, almost dragged along, the fire is in the white eyes, and in the fangs. The hy«ena can scarcely see and hear the living world; it draws back on to the stony fixity of its own loins, draws back upon its own nullity, sightless save for carrion. The vulture can neither see nor hear the living world, it is one supreme glance, the glance in search of carrion, its own absolute quenching, beyond which is nothing.

This is the end, and beyond the end. This is beyond the beginning and the end. Here the beginning and the end are revoked. The vulture, revoking the end, the end petrified upon the beginning, is a nullity. The hyasna, the beginning petrified beneath the end, is a nullity. This is beyond the beginning and the end, this is aristocracy gone beyond aristocracy, the I gone beyond the I; the other is democracy gone beyond democracy, the not-me surpassed upon itself.

This is the changelessness of the kingdoms of the earth, null, unthinkable.

This is the last state into which man may fall, in the triumph of will and the triumph of inertia, the state of the animated sepulchre.

VI. TO BE, AND TO BE DIFFERENT

BEHIND me there is time stretching back for ever, on to the unthinkable beginnings, infinitely. And this is eternity. Ahead of me, where I do not know, there is time stretching on infinitely, to eternity. These are the two eternities.

We cannot say, they are one and the same. They are two and utterly different. If I look at the eternity ahead, my back is towards the other eternity, this latter is forgotten, it is not. Which is the Christian attitude. If I look at the eternity behind, back to the source, then there is for me one eternity, one only. And this is the pagan eternity, the eternity of Pan. This is the eternity some of us are veering round to, in private life, during the past few years.

The two eternities are *not* one eternity. It is only by denying the very meaning of speech itself, that we can argue them into oneness. They are two, relative to one another.

They are only *one* in their mutual relation, which relation is timeless and absolute. The eternities are temporal and relative. But their relation is constant, absolute without mitigation.

The motion of the eternities is dual: they flow together, and they flow apart, they flow for ever towards union, they start back forever in opposition, to flow for ever back to the issue, back into the unthinkable future, back into the unthinkable past.

We have known both directions. The Pagan, aristocratic, lordly, sensuous, has declared the Eternity of the Origin, the Christian, humble, spiritual, unselfish, democratic, has declared the Eternity of the Issue, the End. We have heard both declarations, we have seen each great ideal fulfilled, as far as is possible, at this time, on earth. And now we say: 'There is no eternity, there is no infinite, there is no God, there is no immortality.'

And all the time we know we are cutting off our nose to spite our face. Without God, without some sort of immortality, not necessarily life-everlasting, but without *something* absolute, we are nothing. Yet now, in our spitefulness of self-frustration, we would rather be nothing than listen to our own being.

God is not the one infinite, nor the other, our immortality is not in the original eternity, neither in the ultimate eternity. God is the utter relation between the two eternities, He is in the flowing together and the flowing apart.

This utter relation is timeless, absolute and perfect. It is in the Beginning and the End, just the same. Whether it be revealed or not, it is the same. It is the

Unrevealed God: what Jesus called the Holy Ghost.

My immortality is not from the beginning, in my endless ancestry. Nor is it on ahead in life everlasting. My life comes to me from the great Creator, the Beginner. And my spirit runs towards the Comforter, the Goal far ahead. But I, what am I between?

These two halves I always am. But I am never *my-self* until they are consummated into a spark of oneness, the gleam of the Holy Ghost. And in this spark is my immortality, my non-mortal being, that which is not swept away down either direction of time.

I am not immortal till I have achieved immortality. And immortality is not a question of time, of everlasting life. It is a question of consummate being. Most men die and perish away, unconsummated, unachieved. It is not easy to achieve immortality, to win a consummate being. It is supremely difficult. It means undaunted suffering and undaunted enjoyment, both. And when a man has reached his ultimate of enjoyment and his ultimate of suffering, *both*, then he knows the two eternities, then he is made absolute, like the iris, created out of the two. Then he is immortal. It is not a question of time. It is a question of being. It is not a question of submission, submitting to the divine grace: it is a question of submitting to the divine grace, in suffering and self-obliteration, and it is a question of conquering by divine grace, as the tiger leaps on the trembling deer, in utter satisfaction of the Self, in complete fulfilment of desire. The fulfilment is dual. And having known the dual fulfilment, then within the fulfilled soul is established the divine relation, the Holy Spirit dwells there, the soul has achieved immortality, it has attained to absolute being.

So the body of man is begotten and born in an ecstasy of delight and of suffering. It is a flame kindled between the opposing confluent elements of the air. It is the battle-ground and marriage-bed of the two invisible hosts. It flames up to its full strength, and is consummate, perfect, absolute, the human body. It is a revelation of God, it is the foam-burst of the two waves, it is the iris of the two eternities. It is a flame, flapping and travelling in the winds of mortality.

Then the pressure of the dark and the light relaxes, the flame sinks. We watch the slow departure, till only the wick glows. Then there is the dead body, cold, rigid, perfect in its absolute form, the revelation of the consummation of the flux, a perfect jet of foam that has fallen and is vanishing away. The two waves are fast going asunder, the snow-wreath melts, corruption's quick fire is burning in the achieved revelation.

We cannot bear it, that the body should decay. We cover it up, we cannot bear it. It is the revelation of God, it is the most holy of all revealed things. And it melts into slow putrescence.

We cannot bear it. We wish above all to preserve this achieved and perfect form, this revelation of God. And despair comes over us when it passes away. “*Sic transit,*” we say, in agony.

The perfect form was not achieved in time, but in timelessness. It does not belong to today or tomorrow, or to eternity. It just *is*.

It is we who pass away, we and the whole flux of the two eternities, these pass. This is the eternal flux. But the God-quick, which is the constant within the flux, this is neither temporal nor eternal, it is truly timeless. And this perfect body was a revelation of the timeless God, timeless as He. If we, in our mortality are temporal, if we are part of the flux of the eternities then we swirl away in our living flux, the flesh decomposes and is lost.

But all the time, whether in the glad warm confluence of creation or in the cold flowing-apart of corruption, the same quick remains absolute and timeless, the revelation is in God, timeless. This alone of mortality does not belong to the passing away, this consummation, this revelation of God within the body, or within the soul. This revelation of God *is* God. But we who live, we are of the flux, we belong to the two eternities.

Only perpetuation is a sin. The perfect relation is perfect. But it is therefore timeless. And we must not think to tie a knot in Time, and thus to make the consummation temporal or eternal. The consummation is timeless, and we belong to Time, in our process of living.

Only Matter is a very slow flux, the waves ebbing slowly apart. So we engrave the beloved image on the slow, slow wave. We have the image in marble, or in pictured colour.

This is art, this transferring to a slow flux the form that was attained at the maximum of confluence between the two quick waves. This is art, the revelation of a pure, an absolute relation between the two eternities.

Matter is a slow, big wave flowing back to the Origin. And Spirit is a SLOW, infinite wave flowing back to the Goal, the ultimate Future. On the slow wave of matter and spirit, on marble or bronze or colour or air, and on the consciousness, we imprint a perfect revelation, and this is art: whether it reveal the relation in creation or in corruption, it is the same, it is a revelation of God: whether it be Piero della Francesca or Leonardo da Vinci, the *gargon qui pisse* or Phidias, or Christ or Rabelais. Because the revelation is imprinted on stone or granite, on the slow, last-receding wave, therefore it remains with us for a long, long time, like the sculptures of Egypt. But it is all the time slowly passing away, unhindered, in its own time.

It passes away, but it is not in any sense lost. Our souls are established upon all the revelations, upon all the timeless achieved relationships, as the seed

contains a convoluted memory of all the revelation in the plant it represents. The flower is the burning of God in the bush: the flame of the Holy Ghost: the actual Presence of accomplished oneness, accomplished out of twoness. The true God is *created* every time a pure relationship, or a consummation out of twoness into oneness takes place. So that the poppy flower is God come red out of the poppy-plant. And a man, if he win to a sheer fusion in himself of all the manifold creation, a pure relation, a sheer gleam of oneness out of manyness, then this man is God created where before God was uncreate. He is the Holy Ghost in tissue of flame and flesh, whereas before, the Holy Ghost was but Ghost. It is true of a man as it is true of a dandelion or of a tiger or of a dove. Each creature, by some mystery, achieved a consummation in itself of all the wandering sky and sinking earth, and leaped into the other kingdom, where flowers are, of the gleaming Ghost. So it is for ever. The two waves of Time flow in from the eternities, towards a meeting, a consummation. And the meeting, the consummation, is heaven, is absolute. All the while, as long as time lasts, the shock of the two waves passed into oneness, there is a new heaven. All the while, heaven is created from the flux of time, the galaxies between the night. And we too may be heavenly bodies, however we swirl back in the flux. When we have surged into being, when we have caught fire with friction, we are the immortals of heaven, the invisible stars that make the galaxy of night, no matter how the skies are tossed about. We can forget, but we cannot cease to be. Life nor death makes any difference, once we *are*.

For ever the kingdom of Heaven is established more perfectly, more beautifully, between the flux of the two eternities.

One by one, in our consummation, we pass, a new star, into the galaxy that arches between the nightfall and the dawn, one by one, like the bushes in the desert, we take fire with God, and burn timelessly: and within the flame is heaven that has come to pass. Every flower that comes out, every bird that sings, every hawk that drops like a blade on her prey, every tiger flashing his paws, every serpent hissing out poison, every dove bubbling in the leaves, this is timeless heaven established from the flood, in this we have our form and our being. Every night new Heaven may ripple into being, every era a new Cycle of God may take place.

But it is all timeless. The error of errors is to try to keep heaven fixed and rocking like a boat anchored within the flux of time. Then there is sure to be shipwreck: "*Die Wellen verscklingen am Ende Schiffer und Kabn.*" From the flux of time Heaven takes place in timelessness. The flux must go on.

This is sin, this tying the knot in Time, this anchoring the ark of eternal truth upon the waters. There is no ark, there is no eternal system, there is no rock of

eternal truth. In Time and in Eternity all is flux. Only in the other dimension, which is not the time-space dimension, is there Heaven. We can no more *stay* in this heaven, than the flower can stay on its stem. We come and go.

So the body that came into being and walked transfigured in heavenliness must lie down and fuse away in the slow fire of corruption. Time swirls away, out of sight of the heavenliness. Heaven is not here nor there nor anywhere. Heaven is in the other dimension. In the young, in the unborn, this kingdom of Heaven which was revealed and has passed away, is established; of this Heaven the young and the unborn have their being. And if in us the Heaven be not revealed, if there be no transfiguration, no consummation, then the infants cry in the night, in want, void, strong want.

This is evil, this desire for constancy, for fixity in the temporal world. This is the denial of the absolute good, the revocation of the Kingdom of Heaven.

We cannot know God, in terms of the permanent, temporal world; we cannot. We can only know the *revelation* of God in the physical world. And the revelation of God is God. But it vanishes as the rainbow. The revelation is a condition in the whole flux of time. When this condition has passed away, the revelation is no more revealed. It has gone. And then God is gone, except to memory, a remembering of a critical moment within the flux. But there is no revelation of God in memory. Memory is not truth. Memory is persistence, perpetuation of a momentary cohesion in the flux. God is gone, until next time. But the next time will come. And then again we shall *see* God, and once more, it will be different. It is always different.

And we are all, now, living on the stale memory of a revelation of God. Which is purely a repetitive and temporal thing. But it contains us, it is our prison.

Whereas, there is nothing for a man to do but to behold God, and to become God. It is no good living on memory. When the flower opens, see him, don't remember him. When the sun shines, be him, and then cease again.

So we seek war, death, to kill this memory within us. We hate this imprisoning memory so much, we will kill the whole world rather than remain in prison to it. But why do we not create a new revelation of God, instead of seeking merely the destruction of the old revelations? We do this, because we are cowards. We say "The great revelation cannot be destroyed, but I, who am a failure, I can be destroyed". So we destroy the individual stones rather than decide to pull down the whole edifice. The edifice must stand, but the individual bricks must sacrifice themselves. So carefully we remove single lives from the edifice, and we destroy these single lives, carefully supporting the edifice in the weakened place.

And the soldier says: "I die for my God and my Country". When, as a matter

of fact, in his death his God and his country are so much destroyed.

But we must always lie, always convert our action to a lie. We know that we are living in a state of falsity, that all our social and religious form is dead, a crystallised lie. Yet we say: "We will die for our social and religious form".

In truth, we proceed to die because the whole frame of our life is a falsity, and we know that, if we die sufficiently, the whole frame and form and edifice will collapse upon itself. But it were much better to pull it down and have a great clear space, than to have it collapse on top of us. For we shall be like Samson, buried among the ruins.

And moreover, if we are like Samson, trying to pull the temple down, we must remember that the next generation will be none the less slaves, sightless, in Gaza, at the mill. And they will be by no means eager to commit suicide by bringing more temple beams down with a bang on their heads. They will say: "It is a very nice temple, quite weather-tight. What's wrong with it?" They will be near enough to extinction to be very canny and cautious about imperilling themselves.

No, if we are to break through, it must be in the strength of life bubbling inside us. The chicken does not break the shell out of animosity against the shell. It bursts out in its blind desire to move under a greater heavens.

And so must we. We must burst out, and move under a greater heavens. As the chicken bursts out, and has a whole new universe to get into relationship with.

Our universe is not much more than a mannerism with us now. If we break through, we shall find, that man is not man, as he seems to be, nor woman woman. The present seeming is a ridiculous travesty. And even the sun is not the sun as it appears to be. It is something tingling with magnificence.

And then starts the one glorious activity of man: the getting himself into a new relationship with a new heaven and a new earth. Oh, if we knew, the earth is everything and the sun is everything that we have missed knowing. But if we persist in our attitude of parasites on the body of earth and sun,

THE NOVEL

SOMEBODY says the novel is doomed. Somebody else says it is the green bay tree getting greener. Everybody says something, so why shouldn't I! Mr. Santayana sees the modern novel expiring because it is getting so thin; which means, Mr. Santayana is bored.

I am rather bored myself. It becomes harder and harder to read the *whole* of any modern novel. One reads a bit, and knows the rest; or else one doesn't want to know any more.

This is sad. But again, I don't think it's the novel's fault. Rather the novelists'.

You can put anything you like in a novel. So why do people *always* go on putting the same thing? Why is the *vol au vent* always chicken! Chicken *vol au vents* may be the rage. But who sickens first shouts first for something else.

The novel is a great discovery: far greater than Galileo's telescope or somebody else's wireless. The novel is the highest form of human expression so far attained. Why? Because it is so incapable of the absolute.

In a novel, everything is relative to everything else, if that novel is art at all. There may be didactic bits, but they aren't the novel. And the author may have a didactic "purpose" up his sleeve. Indeed most great novelists have, as Tolstoi had his Christian-socialism, and Hardy his pessimism, and Flaubert his intellectual desperation. But even a didactic purpose so wicked as Tolstoi's or Flaubert's cannot put to death the novel.

You can tell me, Flaubert had a "philosophy", not a "purpose". But what is a novelist's philosophy but a purpose on a rather higher level? And since every novelist who amounts to anything has a philosophy — even Balzac — any novel of importance has a purpose. If only the "purpose" be large enough, and not at outs with the passional inspiration.

Vronsky sinned, did he? But also the sinning was a consummation devoutly to be wished. The novel makes that obvious: in spite of old Leo Tolstoi. And the would-be-pious Prince in *Insurrection* is a muff, with his piety that nobody wants or believes in.

There you have the greatness of the novel itself. It won't *let* you tell didactic lies, and put them over. Nobody in the world is anything but delighted when Vronsky gets Anna Karenina. Then what about the sin? — Why, when you look at it, all the tragedy comes from Vronsky's and Anna's fear of *society*. The

monster was social, not phallic at all. They couldn't live in the pride of their sincere passion, and spit in Mother Grundy's eye. And that, that cowardice, was the real "sin". The novel makes it obvious, and knocks all old Leo's teeth out. "As an officer I am still useful. But as a man, I am a ruin," says Vronsky — or words to that effect. Well what a skunk, collapsing as a man and a male, and remaining merely as a social instrument; an "officer", God love us! — merely because people at the opera turn backs on him! As if people's backs weren't preferable to their faces, anyhow!

And old Leo tries to make out, it was all because of the phallic sin. Old liar! Because where would any of Leo's books be, without the phallic splendour? And then to blame the column of blood, which really gave him all his life riches! The Judas! Cringe to a mangy, bloodless Society, and try to dress up that dirty old Mother Grundy in a new bonnet and face-powder of Christian-Socialism. Brothers indeed! Sons of a castrated Father!

The novel itself gives Vronsky a kick in the behind, and knocks old Leo's teeth out, and leaves us to learn.

It is such a bore that nearly all great novelists have a didactic purpose, otherwise a philosophy, directly opposite to their passional inspiration. In their passional inspiration, they are all phallic worshippers. From Balzac to Hardy, it is so. Nay, from Apuleius to E. M. Forster. Yet all of them, when it comes to their philosophy, or what they think-they- are, they are all crucified Jesuses. What a bore! And what a burden for the novel to carry!

But the novel has carried it. Several thousands of thousands of lamentable crucifixions of self-heroes and self-heroines. Even the silly duplicity of *Resurrection*, and the wickeder duplicity of *Salamambo*, with that flayed phallic Matho, tortured upon the Cross of a gilt Princess.

You can't fool the novel. Even with man crucified upon a woman: his "dear cross". The novel will show you how dear she was: dear at any price. And it will leave you with a bad taste of disgust against these heroes who *turn* their women into a "dear cross", and *ask* for their own crucifixion.

You can fool pretty nearly every other medium. You can make a poem pietistic, and still it will be a poem. You can write *Hamlet* in drama: if you wrote him in a novel, he'd be half comic, or a trifle suspicious: a suspicious character, like Dostoevsky's Idiot. Somehow, you sweep the ground a bit too clear in the poem or the drama, and you let the human Word fly a bit too freely. Now in a novel there's always a tom-cat, a black tom-cat that pounces on the white dove of the Word, if the dove doesn't watch it; and there is a banana-skin to trip on; and you know there is a water-closet on the premises. All these things help to keep the balance.

If, in Plato's *Dialogues*, somebody had suddenly stood on his head and given smooth Plato a kick in the wind, and set the whole school in an uproar, then Plato would have been put into a much truer relation to the universe. Or if, in the midst of the *Timaeus*, Plato had only paused to say: "And now, my dear Cleon — (or whoever it was) — I have a bellyache, and must retreat to the privy: this too is part of the Eternal Idea of man", then we never need have fallen so low as Freud.

And if, when Jesus told the rich man to take all he had and give it to the poor, the rich man had replied: "*All right, old sport! You are poor, aren't you? Come on, I'll give you a fortune. Come on!*" Then a great deal of snivelling and mistakenness would have been spared us all, and we might never have produced a Marx and a Lenin. If only Jesus had *accepted* the fortune!

Yes, it's a pity of pities that Mathew, Mark, Luke, and John didn't write straight novels. They did write nove.'s; but a bit crooked. The *Evangelis* are wonderful novels, by authors "with a purpose. "Pity there' s so much Sermon-on-the-Mounting.

"Mathew, Mark, Luke, and John Went to bed with their breeches on!" — as every child knows. Ah, if only they'd taken them off!

Greater novels, to my mind, are the books of the Old Testament, Genesis, Exodus, Samuel, Kings, by authors whose purpose was so big, it didn't quarrel with their passionate inspiration. The purpose and the inspiration were almost one. Why, in the name of everything bad, the two ever should have got separated, is a mystery! But in the modern novel they are hopelessly divorced. When there *is* any inspiration there, to be divorced from.

This, then, is what is the matter with the modern novel. The modern novelist is possessed, hag-ridden, by such a stale old "purpose", or idea-of-himself, that his inspiration succumbs. Of course he denies having any didactic purpose at all: because a purpose is supposed to be like catarrh, something to be ashamed of. But he's got it. They've all got it: the same snivelling purpose.

They're all little Jesuses in their own eyes, and their "purpose" is to prove it. Oh Lord! — *Lord Jim! Sylvestre Bonnard! If Winter Comes! Main Street! Ulysses! Pan!* They are all pathetic or sympathetic or antipathetic little Jesuses *accomplis* or *manquis*. And there is a heroine who is always "pure", usually, nowadays, on the muck-heap! Like the Green Hatted Woman. She is all the time at the feet of Jesus, though her behaviour there may be misleading. Heaven knows what the Saviour really makes of it: whether she' s a Green Hat or a Constant Nymph (eighteen months of constancy, and her heart failed), or any of the rest of 'em. They are all, heroes and heroines, novelists and she-novelists, little Jesuses or Jesusesses. They may be wallowing in the mire: but then didn't

Jesus harrow Hell! *A la bonne heure!*

Oh, they are all novelists with an idea of themselves! Which is a “purpose”, with a vengeance! For what a weary, false, sickening idea it is nowadays! The novel gives them a way. They can’t fool the novel.

Now really, it’s time we left *off* insulting the novel any further. If your purpose is to prove your own Jesus qualifications, and the thin stream of your inspiration is “sin”, then dry up, for the interest is dead. *Life as it is!* What’s the good of pretending that the lives of a set of tuppenny Green Hats and Constant Nymphs is Life-as-it-is, when the novel itself proves that all it amounts to is life as it is isn’t life, but a sort of everlasting and intricate and boring habit: of Jesus peccant and *Jesusa peccante*.

These wearisome sickening little personal novels! After all, they aren’t novels at all. In every great novel, who is the hero all the time? Not any of the characters, but some unnamed and nameless flame behind them all. Just as God is the pivotal interest in the books of the *Old Testament*. But just a trifle too intimate, too *frere et cochon*, there. In the great novel, the felt but unknown flame stands behind all the characters, and in their words and gestures there is a flicker of the presence. If you are *too personal, too human*, the flicker fades out, leaving you with something awfully lifelike, and as lifeless as most people are.

We have to choose between the quick and the dead. The quick is God-flame, in everything. And the dead is dead. In this room where I write, there is a little table that is dead: it doesn’t even weakly exist. And there is a ridiculous little iron stove, which for some unknown reason is quick. And there is an iron wardrobe trunk, which for some still more mysterious reason is quick. And there are several books, whose mere corpus is dead, utterly dead and non-existent. And there is a sleeping cat, very quick. And a glass lamp, that, alas, is dead.

What makes the difference? *Quien sabe!* But difference there is. And I *know* it.

And the sum and source of all quickness, we will call God. And the sum and total of all deadness we may call human.

And if one tries to find out, wherein the quickness of the quick lies, it is in a certain weird relationship between that which is quick and — I don’t know; perhaps all the rest of things. It seems to consist in an odd sort of fluid, changing, grotesque or beautiful relatedness. That silly iron stove somehow *belongs*.

Whereas this thin-shanked table doesn’t belong. It is a mere disconnected lump, like a cut-off finger.

And now we see the great, great merits of the novel. It can’t exist without being “quick”. The ordinary unquick novel, even if it be a best seller, disappears

into absolute nothingness, the dead burying their dead with surprising speed. For even the dead like to be tickled. But the next minute, they've forgotten both the tickling and the tickler.

Secondly, the novel contains no didactic absolute. All that is quick, and all that is said and done by the quick, is, in some way godly. So that Vronsky's taking Anna Karenina we must count godly, since it is quick. And that Prince in *Resurrection*, following the convict girl, we must count dead. The convict train is quick and alive. But that would-be-expiatory Prince is as dead as lumber.

The novel itself lays down these laws for us, and we spend our time evading them. The man in the novel must be "quick". And this means one thing, among a host of unknown meaning: it means he must have a quick relatedness to all the other things in the novel: snow, bed-bugs, sunshine, the phallus, trains, silk-hats, cats, sorrow, people, food, diphtheria, fuchsias, stars, ideas, God, tooth-paste, lightning, and toilet-paper. He must be in quick relation to all these things. What he says and does must be relative to them all.

And this is why Pierre, for example, in *War and Peace*, is more dull and less quick than Prince Andre. Pierre is quite nicely related to ideas, tooth-paste, God, people, foods, trains, silk-hats, sorrow, diphtheria, stars. But his relation to snow and sunshine, cats, lightning and the phallus, fuchsias and toilet-paper, is sluggish and mussy. He's not quick enough.

The really quick, Tolstoi loved to kill them off or muss them over. Like a true Bolshevik. One can't help feeling Natasha is rather mussy and unfresh, married to that Pierre.

Pierre was what we call, "so human". Which means, "so limited". Men clotting together into social masses in order to limit their individual liabilities: this is humanity. And this is Pierre. And this is Tolstoi, the philosopher with a very nauseating Christian-brotherhood idea of himself. Why limit man to a Christian-brotherhood? I myself, I could belong to the sweetest Christian-brotherhood one day, and ride after Attila with a raw beefsteak for my saddle-cloth, to see the red cock crow in flame over all Christendom, next day.

And that is man! That, really, was Tolstoi. That, even, was Lenin, God in the machine of Christian-brotherhood, that hashes men up into social sausage-meat.

Damn all absolutes. Oh damn, damn, damn all absolutes! I tell you, no absolute is going to make the lion lie down with the lamb: unless, like the limerick, the lamb is inside.

"They returned from the ride
With lamb Leo inside
And a smile on the face of
the tiger!

Sing fol-di-lol-lol!

Fol-di-lol-lol!
Fol-di-lol-ol-di-lol-olly!”

For man, there is neither absolute nor absolution. Such things should be left to monsters like the right-angled triangle, which does only exist in the ideal consciousness. A man can't have a square on his hypotenuse, let him try as he may.

Ay! Ay! Ay! — Man handing out absolutes to man, as if we were all books of geometry with axioms, postulates and definitions in front. God with a pair of compasses! Moses with a set square! Man a geometric bifurcation, not even a radish!

Holy Moses!

“Honour thy father and thy mother!” That's awfully cute! But supposing they are not honorable? How then, Moses?

Voice of thunder from Sinai: *“Pretend to honour them!”*

“Love thy neighbour as thyself.”

Alas, my neighbour happens to be mean and detestable.

Voice of the lambent Dove, cooing: *Put it over him, that you love him.*”

Talk about the cunning of serpents! I never saw even a serpent kissing his instinctive enemy.

Pfui! I wouldn't blacken my mouth, kissing my neighbour, who, I repeat, to me is mean and detestable.

Dove, go home!

The Goat and Compasses, indeed!

Everything is relative. Every Commandment that ever issued out of the mouth of God or man, is strictly relative: adhering to the particular time, place and circumstance.

And this is the beauty of the novel; everything is true in its own relationship, and no further.

For the relatedness and interrelatedness of all things flows and changes and trembles like a stream, and like a fish in the stream the characters in the novel swim and drift and float and turn belly-up when they're dead.

So, if a character in a novel wants two wives — or three — or thirty: well, that is true of that man, at that time, in that circumstance. It may be true of other men, elsewhere and elsewhen. But to infer that all men at all times want two, three, or thirty wives; or that the novelist himself is advocating furious polygamy; is just imbecility.

It has been just as imbecile to infer that, because Dante worshipped a remote Beatrice, every man, all men, should go worshipping remote Beatrices.

And that wouldn't have been so bad, if Dante had put the thing in its true light. Why do we slur over the actual fact that Dante had a cosy bifurcated wife in his bed, and a family of lusty little Dantinos? Petrarch, with his Laura in the distance, had *twelve* little legitimate Petrarchs of his own, between his knees. Yet all we hear is *Laura! Laura! Beatrice! Beatrice! Distance! Distance!*

What bunk! Why didn't Dante and Petrarch chant in chorus:

Oh be my spiritual concubine Beatrice!

Laura!

My old girl's got several babies that are mine, But *thou* be my spiritual concubine, Beatrice!

Laura!

Then there would have been an honest relation between all the bunch. Nobody grudges the gents their spiritual concubines. But keeping a wife and family — twelve children — up one's sleeve, has always been recognised as a dirty trick.

Which reveals how *immoral* the absolute is! Invariably keeping some vital fact dark! Dishonorable!

Here we come upon the third essential quality of the novel. Unlike the essay, the poem, the drama, the book of philosophy, or the scientific treatise: all of which may beg the question, when they don't downright filch it; the novel inherently is and must be:

1. Quick.
2. Interrelated in all its parts, vitally, organically.
3. Honorable.

I call Dante's *Commedia* slightly dishonorable, with never a mention of the cosy bifurcated wife, and the kids. And *War and Peace* I call downright dishonorable, with that fat, diluted Pierre for a hero, stuck up as preferable and desirable, when everybody knows that he *wasn't* attractive, even to Tolstoi.

Of course Tolstoi, being a great creative artist, was true to his characters. But being a man with a philosophy, he wasn't true to his *own character*.

Character is a curious thing. It is the flame of a man, which burns brighter or dimmer, bluer or yellower or redder, rising or sinking or flaring according to the draughts of circumstance and the changing air of life, changing itself continually, yet remaining one single, separate flame, flickering in a strange world: unless it be blown out at last by too much adversity.

If Tolstoi had looked into the flame of his own belly, he would have seen that he didn't really like the fat, fuzzy Pierre, who was a poor tool, after all. But Tolstoi was a personality even more than a character. And a personality is a self-

conscious *I am*: being all that is left in us of a once-almighty Personal God. So being a personality and an almighty *I am*, Leo proceeded deliberately to lionise that Pierre, who was a domestic sort of house-dog.

Doesn't anybody call that dishonorable on Leo's part? He might just as well have been true to *himself*! But no! His self-conscious personality was superior to his own belly and knees, so he thought he'd improve on himself, by creeping inside the skin of a lamb; the doddering old lion that he was! Leo! Leon!

Secretly, Leo worshipped the human male, man as a column of rapacious and living blood. He could hardly meet three lusty, roisterous young guardsmen in the street, without crying with envy: and ten minutes later, fulminating on them black oblivion and annihilation, utmost moral thunder-bolts.

How boring, in a great man! And how boring, in a great nation like Russia, to let its old-Adam manhood be so improved upon by these reformers, who all feel themselves short of something, and therefore live by spite, that at last there's nothing left but a lot of shells of men, improving themselves steadily emptier and emptier, till they rattle with words and formulae, as if they'd swallowed the whole encyclopaedia of socialism.

But wait! There is life in the Russians. Something new and strange will emerge out of their weird transmogrification into Bolsheviks.

When the lion swallows the lamb, fluff and all, he usually gets a pain, and there's a rumpus. But when the lion tries to force himself down the throat of the huge and popular lamb — a nasty old sheep, really — then it's a phenomenon. Old Leo did it: wedged himself bit by bit down the throat of wooly Russia. And now out of the mouth of the bolshevist lambkin still waves an angry, mistaken, tufted leonine tail, like an agitated exclamation mark.

Meanwhile it's a deadlock.

But what a dishonorable thing for that claw-biting little Leo to do! And in his novels you see him at it. So that the papery lips of *Resurrection* whisper: "*Alas! I would have been a novel. But Leo spoiled me.*"

Count Tolstoi had that last weakness of a great man: he wanted the absolute: the absolute of love, if you like to call it that. Talk about the "last infirmity of noble minds"! It's a perfect epidemic of senility. He wanted to *be* absolute: a universal brother. Leo was too tight for Tolstoi. He wanted to puff, and puff, and puff, till he became Universal Brotherhood itself, the great gooseberry of our globe.

Then pop went Leo! And from the bits sprang up bolshevists.

It's all bunk. No man can be absolute. No man can be absolutely good or absolutely right, nor absolutely lovable, nor absolutely beloved, nor absolutely loving. Even Jesus, the paragon, was only relatively good and relatively right.

Judas could take him by the nose.

No god, that men can conceive of, could possibly be absolute or absolutely right. All the gods that men ever discovered are still God: and they contradict one another and fly down one another's throats, marvellously. Yet they are *all* God: the incalculable Pan.

It is rather nice, to know what a lot of gods there are, and have been, and will be, and that they are all of them God all the while. Each of them utters an absolute: which, in the ears of all the rest of them, falls flat. This makes even eternity lively.

But man, poor man, bobbing like a cork in the stream of time, must hitch himself to some absolute star of righteousness overhead. So he throws out his line, and hooks on. Only to find, after a while, that his star is slowly falling: till it drops into the stream of time with a fizzle, and there's *another* absolute star gone out.

Then we scan the heavens afresh.

As for the babe of love, we're simply tired of changing its napkins. Put the brat down, and let it learn to run about, and manage its own little breeches.

But it's nice to think that all the gods are God all the while. And if a god only genuinely feels to you like God, then it *is* God. But if it doesn't feel quite, quite altogether like God to you, then wait awhile, and you'll hear him fizzle.

The novel knows all this, irrevocably. 'My dear,' it kindly says, "one God is relative to another god, until he gets into a machine; and then it's a case for the traffic cop!"

"But what am I to do!" cries the despairing novelist. "From Amon and Ra to Mrs. Eddy, from Ashtaroth and Jupiter to Annie Besant, I don't know where I am."

"Oh yes you do, my dear!" replies the novel. "You are where you are, so you needn't hitch yourself on to the skirts either of Ashtaroth or Eddy. If you meet them, say *how-do-you-do!* to them quite courteously. But don't hook on, or I shall turn you down.

"Refrain from hooking on!" says the novel.

"But be honorable among the host!" he adds.

Honour! Why, the gods are like the rainbow, all colours and shades. Since light itself is invisible, a manifestation has got to be pink or black or blue or white or yellow or vermilion, or "tinted".

You may be a theosophist, and then you will cry: *Avaunt! Thou dark-red aura! Away!!! — Oh come! Thou pale-blue or thou primrose aura, come!*

This you may cry if you are a theosophist. And if you put a theosophist in a novel, he or she may cry *avaunt!* to the heart's content.

But a theosophist cannot be a novelist, as a trumpet cannot be a regimental band. A theosophist, or a Christian, or a Holy Roller, may be *contained* in a novelist. But a novelist may not put up a fence. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and auras will be red when they want to.

As a matter of fact, only the Holy Ghost knows truly what righteousness is. And heaven only knows what the Holy Ghost is! But it sounds all right. So the Holy Ghost hovers among the flames, from the red to the blue and the black to the yellow, putting brand to brand and flame to flame, as the wind changes, and life travels in flame from the unseen to the unseen, men will never know how or why. Only travel it must, and not die down in nasty fumes.

And the honour, which the novel demands of you, is only that you shall be true to the flame that leaps in you. When that Prince in *Resurrection* so cruelly betrayed and abandoned the girl, at the beginning of her life, he betrayed and wetted on the flame of his own manhood. When, later, he bullied her with his repentant benevolence, he again betrayed and slobbered upon the flame of his waning manhood, till in the end his manhood is extinct, and he's just a lump of half-alive elderly meat.

It's the oldest Pan-mystery. God is the flame-life in all the universe; multifarious, multifarious flames, all colours and beauties and pains and sombrenesses. Whichever flame flames in your manhood, that is you, for the time being. It is your manhood, don't make water on it, says the novel. A man's manhood is to honour the flames in him, and to know that none of them is absolute: even a flame is only relative.

But see old Leo Tolstoi wetting on the flame. As if even his wet were absolute!

Sex is flame, too, the novel announces. Flame burning against every absolute, even against the phallic. For sex is so much more than phallic, and so much deeper than functional desire. The flame of sex singses your absolute, and cruelly scorches your ego. What, will you assert your ego in the universe? Wait till the flames of sex leap at you like striped tigers.

“They returned from the ride
With the lady inside,
And a smile on the face of
the tiger.”

You will play with sex, will you! You will tickle yourself with sex as with an ice-cold drink from a soda-fountain! You will pet your best girl, will you, and spoon with her, and titillate yourself and her, and do as you like with your sex?

Wait! Only wait till the flame you have dribbled on flies back at you, later!
Only wait!

Sex is a life-flame, a dark one, reserved and mostly invisible. It is a deep reserve in a man, one of the core-flames of his manhood.

What, would you play with it? Would you make it cheap and nasty!

Buy a king-cobra, and try playing with that. Sex is even a majestic reserve in the sun. Oh, give me the novel! Let me hear what the novel says.

As for the novelist, he is usually a dribbling liar.

HIM WITH HIS TAIL IN HIS MOUTH

ANSWER a fool according to his folly, philosophy ditto. Solemnity is a sign of fraud. Religion and philosophy both; have the same dual purpose: to get at the beginning of things, and at the goal of things. They have both decided that the serpent has got his tail in his mouth, and that the end is one with the beginning.

It seems to me time someone gave that serpent of eternity another dummy to suck.

They' ve all decided that the beginning of all things is the life-stream itself, energy, ether, libido, not to mention the Sanskrit joys of Purusha, Pradhana, Kala.

Having postulated the serpent of the beginning, now see all the heroes from Moses and Plato to Bergson, wrestling with him might and main, to push his tail into his mouth.

Jehovah creates man in his Own Image, according to His Own Will. If man behaves according to the ready-made Will of God, formulated in a bunch of somewhat unsavoury commandments, then lucky man will be received into the bosom of Jehovah.

Man isn't very keen. And that is Sin, original and perpetual.

Then Plato discovers how lovely the intellectual idea is: in fact, the only perfection is ideal.

But the old dragon of creation, who fathered us all, didn't have an idea in his head.

Plato was prepared. He popped the Logos into the mouth of the dragon, and the serpent of eternity was rounded off. The old dragon, ugly and venomous, wore yet the precious jewel of the Platonic idea in his head. Unable to find the dragon wholesale, modern philosophy sets up a retail shop. You can't lay salt on the old scoundrel's tail, because, of course, he's got it in his mouth, according to postulate. He doesn't seem to be sprawling in his old lair, across the heavens. In fact, he appears to have vamoosed. Perhaps, instead of being one big old boy, he is really an infinite number of little tiny boys: atoms, electrons, units of force or energy, tiny little birds all spinning with their tails in their beaks. Just the same in detail as in the gross. Nothing will come out of the egg that isn't in it. Evolution sings away at the same old song. Out of the amoeba, or some such old-fashioned entity, the dragon of evolved life stretches himself enormous and

more enormous, only, at last, to return each time, and put his tail into his own mouth, and be an amoeba once more. The amoeba, or the electron, or whatever it may lately be — the rose would be just as scentless — is the constant, from which all manifest living creation starts out, and to which it all returns.

There was a time when man was not, nor monkey, nor cow, not catfish. But the amoeba (or the electron, or the atom, or whatever it is) always was and always will be.

Boom! tiddy-ra-ta! Boom!
Boom! tiddy-ra-ta! Boom!

How do you know? How does anyone know, what always was or wasn't? Bunk of geology, and strata, and all that, biology or evolution.

“One, two, three four five, Catch a little fish alive.
Six, seven, eight nine ten, I have let him go again.

Bunk of beginnings and of ends, and heads and tails. Why does man always want to know so damned much? Or rather, so damned little? If he can't draw a ring round creation, and fasten the serpent's tail into its mouth with the padlock of one final clinching idea, then creation can go to hell, as far as man is concerned.

There is such a thing as life, or life energy. We know, because we've got it, or had it. It isn't a constant. It comes and it goes. But we *want* it.

This I think is incontestable.

More than anything else in the world, we want to have life, and life-energy abundant in us. We think if we eat yeast, vitamins and proteins, we're sure of it. We're had. We diddle ourselves for the million millionth time.

What we want is life, and life-energy inside us. Where it comes from, or what it is, we don't know, and never shall. It is the capital X of all our knowledge.

But we want it, we must have it. It is the all in all.

This we know, now, for good and all: that which is good, and moral, is that which brings into us a stronger, deeper flow of life and life-energy: evil is that which impairs the life-flow.

But man's difficulty is, that he can't have life for the asking. “He asked life of Thee, and Thou gavest it him: even length of days for ever and ever.” There's a pretty motto for the tomb!

It isn't length of days for ever and ever that a man wants. It is strong life within himself, while he lives.

But how to get it? You may be as healthy as a cow, and yet have fear inside you, because your life is not enough.

We know, really, that we can't have life for the asking, nor find it by seeking, nor get it by striving. The river flows into us from behind and below. We must turn our backs to it, and go ahead. The faster we go ahead, the stronger the river rushes into us. The moment we turn round to embrace the river of life, it ebbs away, and we see nothing but a stony fiumara.

We must go ahead.

But which way is ahead?

We don't know.

We only know that, continuing in the way we are going, the river of life flows feebler and feebler in us, and we lose all sense of vital direction. We begin to talk about vitamins. We become idiotic. We cunningly prepare our own suicide.

This is the philosophic problem: to find the way ahead.

Allons! — there is no road before us.

Plato said that ahead, ahead was the perfect Idea, gleaming in the brow of the dragon.

We have pretty well caught up with the perfect Idea, and we find it a sort of vast, white, polished tomb-stone.

If the mouth of the serpent is the open grave, into which the tail disappears, then three cheers for the Logos, and down she goes.

We children of a later Pa, know that Life is real, Life is earnest, and the Grave is not its Goal.

Let us side-step.

All goals become graves.

Every goal is a grave, when you get there.

Well, I came out of an egg-cell, like an amoeba, and I go into the grave. I can't help it. It's not my fault, and it's not my business.

I don't want eternal life, nor length of days for ever and ever. Nothing so long drawn out.

I give up all that sort of stuff.

Yet while I live, I want to live. Death, no doubt, solves its own problems. Let Life solve the problem of living.

“Teach me to live that so I may Rise glorious at the Judgment Day.”

I have no desire to rise glorious at any Judgment Day, when the serpent finally chokes himself with his own tail.

“Teach me to live that I may Go gaily on from day to day.”

Nay, in all the world, I feel the life-urge weakening. It may be, there are too many people alive. I feel it is, because there is too much automatic

consciousness and self-consciousness in the world.

We can't live by loving life, alone. Life is like a capricious mistress: the more you woo her the more she despises you. You have to get up and go to something more interesting. Then she'll pelt after you.

Life is the river, darkly sparkling, that enters into us from behind, when we set our faces towards the unknown. Towards some goal!!!

But there is no eternal goal. Every attempt to find an eternal goal puts the tail of the serpent into his mouth again, whereby he chokes himself in one more last gasp.

What is there then, if there is no eternal goal?

By itself, the river of life just gets nowhere. It sinks into the sand.

The river of life follows the living. If the living don't get anywhere, the river of life doesn't. The old serpent lays him down and goes into a torpor, instead of dancing at our heels and sending the life-sparks up our legs and spine, as we travel.

So we've got to get somewhere.

Is there no goal?

"Oh man! on your four legs, your two, and your three, where are you going?" — says the Sphinx.

"I'm just going to say *How-do-you-do?* to Susan," replies the man. And he passes without a scratch.

When the cock crows, he says "*How-do-you-do?*"

"*How-do-you-do Peter! How-do-you-do? old liar!*"

"*How-do-you-do, Oh Sun!*"

A challenge and a greeting.

We live in a multiple universe. I am a chick that absolutely refuses to chirp inside the monistic egg. See me walk forth, with a bit of egg-shell sticking to my tail!

When the cuckoo, the cow, and the coffee-plant chipped the Mundane Egg, at various points, they stepped out, and immediately set off in different directions. Not different directions of space and time, but different directions in creation: within the fourth dimension. The cuckoo went cuckoo-wards, the cow went cow-wise, and the coffee-plant started coffing. Three very distinct roads across the fourth dimension.

The cow was dumb, and the cuckoo too.

They went their ways, as creatures do, Till they chanced to meet, in the Lord's green Zoo.

The bird gave a cluck, the cow gave a coo, At the sight of each other the pair of them flew Into tantrums, and started their hullabaloo.

They startled creation; and when they were through Each said to the other: till I came across you I wasn't aware of the things I could do!

Cuckoo! Moo! Cuckoo!

And this, I hold, is the true history of evolution. The Greeks made equilibrium their goal. Equilibrium is hardly a goal to travel towards. Yet it's something to attain. You travel in the fourth dimension, not in yards and miles, like the eternal serpent.

Equilibrium argues either a dualistic or a pluralistic universe. The Greeks, being sane, were pantheists and pluralists, and so am I.

Creation is a fourth dimension, and in it there are all sorts of things, gods and what-not. That brown hen, scratching with her hind leg in such common fashion, is a sort of goddess in the creative dimension. Of course, if you stay outside the fourth dimension, and try to measure creation in length, breadth and height, you've set yourself the difficult task of measuring up the Monad, the Mundane Egg. Which is a game, like any other. The solution is, of course (let me whisper): *put his tail in his mouth!*

Once you realise that, willy nilly, you're *inside* the Monad, you give it up. You're inside it and you always will be. Therefore, Jonah, sit still in the whale's belly, and have a look round. For you'll *never* measure the whale, since you're inside him.

And then you see it's a fourth dimension, with all sorts of gods and goddesses in it. That brown hen, who, being a Rhode Island Red, is big and stuffy like plush-upholstery, is of course, a goddess in her own rights. If I myself had to make a poem to her, I should begin:

Oh my flatfooted plush armchair So commonly scratching in the yard — !

But this poem would only reveal my own limitations.

Because Flatfoot is the favourite of the white leghorn cock, and he shakes the tid-bit for her with a most wooing noise, and when she lays an egg, he bristles like a double white poppy, and rushes to meet her, as she flounders down from the chicken-house, and his echo of her *I've-laid-an-egg* cackle is rich and resonant. Every pine-tree on the mountains hears him:

And his poem would be:

“Oh you who make me feel so good, when you sit next me on the perch At night! (temporarily, of course!) Oh you who make my feathers bristle with the vanity of life! Oh you whose cackle makes my throat go off like a rocket! Oh you who walk so slowly, and make me feel swifter Than my boss!

Oh you who bend your head down, and move in the under Circle, while I prance in the upper! Oh you, come! come! come! for here is a bit of fat from The roast veal; I am shaking it for you.”

In the fourth dimension, in the creative world, we live in a pluralistic universe, full of gods and strange gods and unknown gods; a universe where that Rhode Island Red hen is a goddess in her own right and the white cock is a god indisputable, with a little red ring on his leg: which the boss put there.

Why? Why, I mean, is he a god?

Because he is something that nothing else is. Certainly he is something that I am not.

And she is something that neither he is nor I am.

When she scratches and finds a bug in the earth, she seems fairly to gobble down the monad of all monads; and when she lays, she certainly thinks she's put the Mundane Egg in the nest.

Just part of her naive nature!

As for the goal, which doesn't exist, but which we are always coming back to: well, it doesn't spatially, or temporally, or eternally exist: but in the fourth dimension, it does.

What the Greeks called equilibrium: what I call relationship. Equilibrium is just a bit mechanical. It became very mechanical with the Greeks: an intellectual nail put through it.

I don't *want* to be "good" or "righteous" — and I won't even be "virtuous", unless "vir" means a man, and "vis" means the life-river.

But I *do* want to be alive. And to be alive, I must have a goal in the *creative*, not the *spatial* universe.

I want, in the Greek sense, an equilibrium between me and the rest of the universe. That is, I want a relationship between me and the brown hen.

The Greek equilibrium took too much for granted. The Greek never asked the brown hen, nor the horse, nor the swan, if it would kindly be equilibrated with him. He took it for granted that hen and horse would be only too delighted.

You can't take it for granted. That brown hen is extraordinarily callous to my god-like presence. She doesn't even choose to know me to nod to. If I've got to strike a balance between us, I've got to work at it.

But that is what I want: that she shall nod to me, with a "*Howdy!*" — and I shall nod to her, more politely: "*How-do-you-do, Flatfoot?*" And between us there shall exist the third thing, the *connaissance*. That is the goal.

I shall not betray myself nor my own life-passion for her. When she walks into my bedroom and makes droppings in my shoes, I shall chase her with disgust, and she will flutter and squawk. And I shall not ask her to be human for my sake.

That is the mistake the Greeks made. They talked about equilibrium, and then, when they wanted to equilibrate themselves with a horse, or an ox, or an

acanthus, then horse, ox, and acanthus had to become nine-tenths human, to accommodate them. Call that equilibrium?

As a matter of fact, we don't call it equilibrium, we call it anthropomorphism. And anthropomorphism is a bore. Too much anthropos makes the world a dull hole.

So Greek sculpture tends to become a bore. If it's a horse, it's an anthropomorphised horse. If it's a Praxiteles *Hermes*, it's a Hermes so Praxitelised, that it begins sugarily to bore us.

Equilibrium, in its very best sense — in the sense the Greeks *originally* meant it — stands for the strange spark that flies between two creatures, two things that are equilibrated, or in living relationship. It is a goal: to come to that state when the spark will fly from me to Flatfoot, the brown hen, and from her to me.

I shall leave off addressing her: "*Oh my flatfooted plush armchair!*" I realise that is only impertinent anthropomorphism on my part. She might as well address *me*:" *Oh my skin-flappy split pole!*" Which would be like her impudence. Skin-flappy, of course, would refer to my blue shirt and baggy cord trousers. How would *she* know I don't grow them like a loose skin!

In the early Greeks, the spark between man and man, stranger and stranger, man and woman, stranger and strangeress, was alive and vivid. Even those Doric Apollos.

In the Egyptians, the spark between man and the living universe remains alight for ever in those early, silent, motionless statues of Pharaohs. They say, it is the statue of the soul of the man. But what is the soul of a man, except *that* in him which is himself alone, suspended in immediate relationship to the sum of things? Not isolated or cut off. The Greeks began the cutting apart business. And Rodin's re-merging was only an intellectual tacking on again.

The serpent hasn't got his tail in his mouth. He is on the alert, with lifted head like a listening, sparky flower. The Egyptians knew.

But when the oldest Egyptians carve a hawk or a Sekhet-cat, or paint birds or oxen or people: and when the Assyrians carve a shelion: and when the cavemen drew the charging bison, or the reindeer, in the caves of Altamira: or when the Hindoo paints geese or elephants or lotus in the great caves of India whose name I forget — Ajanta! — then how marvellous it is! How marvellous is the living relationship between man and his object! be it man or woman, bird, beast, flower or rock or rain: the exquisite frail moment of pure conjunction, which, in the fourth dimension, is timeless. An Egyptian hawk, a Chinese painting of a camel, an Assyrian sculpture of a lion, an African fetish idol of a woman pregnant, an Aztec rattlesnake, an early Greek Apollo, a cave-man's paintings of a Pre-historic mammoth, on and on, how perfect the timeless moments between man

and the other Pan-creatures of this earth of ours!

And by the way, speaking of cavemen, how did those prognathous semi-apes of Altamira come to depict so delicately, so beautifully, a female bison charging, with swinging udder, or deer stooping feeding, or an antediluvian mammoth deep in contemplation. It is art on a pure, high level, beautiful as Plato, far, far more “civilized” than Burne Jones. Hadn’t somebody better write Mr. Wells’ History backwards, to prove how we’ve degenerated, in our stupid visionlessness, since the cavemen?

The pictures in the cave represent moments of purity which are the quick of civilization. The pure relation between the cave-man and the deer: fifty percent. man, and fifty percent. bison, or mammoth, or deer. It is not ninety-nine percent. man, and one percent, horse: as in a Raphael horse. Or hundred percent. fool, as when F. G. Watts sculpts a bronze horse and calls it Physical Energy.

If it is to be life, then it is fifty percent. me, fifty percent. thee: and the third thing, the spark, which springs from out of the balance, is timeless. Jesus, who saw it a bit vaguely, called it the Holy Ghost.

Between man and woman, fifty percent. man and fifty percent. woman: then the pure spark. Either this, or less than nothing.

As for ideal relationships, and pure love, you might as well start to water tin pansies with carbolic acid (which is pure enough, in the antiseptic sense) in order to get the Garden of Paradise.

BLESSED ARE THE POWERFUL

THE reign of love is passing, and the reign of power is coming again.

The day of popular democracy is nearly done. Already we are entering the twilight, towards the night that is at hand. Before the darkness comes, it is as well to take our directions.

It is time to enquire into the nature of power, so that we do not crassly blunder into a new era: or fall down the gulf of anarchy, in the dark, as we cross the borders.

We have a confused idea, that *will* and power are somehow identical. We think we can have a will-to- power.

A will-to-power seems to work out as bullying. And bullying is something despicable and detestable.

Tyranny, too, which seems to us the apotheosis of power, is detestable.

It comes from our mistaken idea of power. It comes from the ancient mistake, old as Moses, of confusing power with *will*. The *power* of God, and the *will* of God, we have imagined identical. We need only think for a moment, and we can see the vastness of difference between the two.

The Jews, in Moses' time, and again particularly in the time of the Kings, came to look upon Jehovah as the apotheosis of arbitrary *will*. This is the root of a very great deal of evil; an old, old root.

Will is no more than an attribute of the ego. It is, as it were, the accelerator of the engine: or the instrument which increases the pressure. A man may have a strong will, an iron will, as we say, and yet be a stupid mechanical instrument, useful simply as an instrument, without any *power* at all.

An instrument, even an iron one, has no power. The power has to be put into it. This is true of men with iron wills, just the same.

The Jews made the mistake of deifying Will, the ethical Will of God. The Germans again made the mistake of deifying the egoistic Will of Man: the will-to-power.

There is a certain inherent stupidity in apotheosised Will, and a consequent inevitable inferiority in the devotees thereof. They all have an inferiority complex.

Because power is not in the least like Will. Power comes to us, we know not how, from beyond. Whereas our will is our own.

When a man prides himself on something that is just in himself, part of his

own ego, he falls into conceit, and conceit carries an inferiority complex as its shadow.

If a man, or a race, or a nation is to be anything at all, he must have the generosity to admit that his strength comes to him from beyond. It is not his own, self-generated. It comes as electricity comes, out of nowhere into somewhere.

It is no good trying to intellectualise about it. All attempts to argue and intellectualise merely strangle the passages of the heart. We wish to keep our hearts open. Therefore we brush aside argument and intellectual haggling.

The intellect is one of the most curious instruments of the psyche. But, like the will, it is only an instrument. And it works only under pressure of the will.

By willing and by intellectualising we have done all we can, for the time being. We only exhaust ourselves, and lose our lives — that is, our livingness, our power to live — by any further straining of the will and the intellect. It is time to take our hands off the throttle: knowing well enough what we are about, and choosing our course of action with a steady heart.

To take one's hand off the throttle is not the same as to let go the reins.

Man lives to live, and for no other reason. And life is not mere length of days. Many people hang on, and hang on, into a corrupt old age, just because they have *not* lived, and therefore cannot let go.

We must live. And to live, life must be in us. It must come to us, the power of life, and we must not try to get a strangle-hold upon it. From beyond comes to us the life, the power to live, and we must wisely keep our hearts open.

But the life will not come *unless* we live. That is the whole point. "To him that hath shall be given." To him that hath life shall be given life: on condition, of course, that he lives.

And again, life does not mean length of days. Poor old Queen Victoria had length of days. But Emily Bronte had life. She died of it.

And again "living" doesn't mean just doing certain things: running after women, or digging a garden, or working an engine, or becoming a member of Parliament. Just because, for Lord Byron, to sleep with a "crowned head" was life itself, it doesn't follow that it will be life for *me* to sleep with a crowned head, or even a head uncrowned. Sleeping with heads is no joke, anyhow. And living won't even consist in jazzing or motoring or going to Wembley, just because most folks do it. Living consists in doing what you really, vitally want to do: what the *life* in you wants to do, not what your ego imagines you want to do. And to find out *how* the life in you wants to be lived, and to live it, is terribly difficult. Somebody has to give us a clue.

And this is the real *exercise* of power.

That settles two points. First, power is life rushing in to us. Second, the exercise of power is the setting of life in motion.

And this is very far from *Will*.

If you want a dictator, whether it is Lenin, or Mussolini, or Primo de Rivera, ask, not whether he can set money in circulation, but if he can set life in motion, by dictating to his people.

Now, although we hate to admit it, Lenin did set life a good deal in motion, for the Russian proletariat. The Russian proletariat was like a child that had been kept under too much. So it was dying to be free. It was crazy to keep house for itself.

Now, like a child, it is keeping house for itself, without Papa or Mama to interfere. And naturally it enjoys it. For the time it's a game.

But for us, English or American or French or German people, it would not be a game. We have more or less kept house for ourselves for a long time, and it's not very thrilling after years of it.

So a Lenin wouldn't do us any good. He wouldn't set any life going in us at all.

The Gallic and Latin blood isn't thrilled about keeping house, anyhow. It wants Glory, or else Glory on horse-back, or Glory upset. If there was any Glory to upset, either in France or Italy or Spain, then communism might flourish. But since there isn't even a spark of Glory to blow out — Alfonso! Victor Emmanuel! Poincare! — what's the good of blowing?

So they set up a little harmless Glory in baggy trousers — Papa Mussolini — or a bit of fat, self-loving but amiable elder-brother Glory in General de Rivera: and they call it power. And the democratic world holds up its hands, and moans: “*Dictators! Tyranny!*” While the conservative world cheers loudly, and cries: “*The Man! The Man! El hombre! L' uomo! L homme! Hooray!!!*”

Bunk!

We want life. And we want the power of life. We want to feel the power of life in ourselves.

We're sick of being soft, and amiable, and harmless. We're sick to death of even enjoying ourselves. We're a bit ashamed of our own existence. Or if we aren't we ought to be.

But what then? Shall we exclaim, in a fat voice: “*Aha! Power! Glory! Force! The Man!*” — and proceed to set up a harmless Mussolini, or a fat Rivera? Well, let us, if we want to. Only it won't make the slightest difference to our real living. Except it's probably a good thing to have the press — the newspaper press — crushed under the up-to-date rubber heel of a tyrannous but harmless dictator.

We won't speak of poor old Hindenburg. Except, why didn't they set up his wooden statue with all the nails knocked into it, for a President? For surely they drove *something* in, with those nails!

We had a harmless dictator, in Mr. Lloyd George. Better go ahead with the Houses of Representatives, than have another shot in that direction.

Power! How can there be power in politics, when politics is money?

Money is power, they say. Is it? Money is to power what margarine is to butter: a nasty substitute.

No, power is something you've got to respect, even revere, before you can have it. It isn't bossing, or bullying, hiring a manservant or Salvationising your social inferior, issuing loud orders and getting your own way, doing your opponent down. That isn't power.

Power is *pouvoir*: to be able to.

Might: the ability to make: to bring about that which may-be.

And where are we to get Power, or Might, or Glory, or Honour, or Wisdom?

Out of Lloyd George, or Lenin, or Mussolini, or Rivera, or anything else political?

Bah! It has to be in the people, before it can come out in politics.

Do we *want* Power, Might, Glory, Honour, and Wisdom?

If we do, we'd better start to get them, each man for himself.

But if we don't, we'd better continue our lick-spittling course of being as happy, as happy as Kings.

"The world is so full of a number of things We ought all to be happy, as happy as Kings."

Which Kings, might we ask? Better be careful!

Myself I want Power. But I don't want to boss anybody.

I want Honour. But I don't see any existing nation or government that could give it me.

I want Glory. But heaven save me from mankind.

I want Might. But perhaps I've got it.

The first thing, of course, is to open one's heart to the source of Power, and Might, and Glory, and Honour. It just depends, which gates of one's heart one opens. You can open the humble gate, or the proud gate. Or you can open both, and see what comes.

Best open both, and take the responsibility. But set a guard at each gate, to keep out the liars, the snivellers, the mongrel and the greedy.

However smart we be, however rich and clever or loving or charitable or spiritual or impeccable, it doesn't help us at all. The real power comes in to us from beyond. Life enters us from behind, where we are sightless, and from

below, where we do not understand.

And unless we yield to the beyond, and take our power and might and honour and glory from the unseen, from the unknown, we shall continue empty. We may have length of days. But an empty tin can lasts longer than Alexander lived.

So, anomalous as it may sound, if we want power, we must put aside our own will, and our own conceit, and *accept* power, from the beyond.

And having admitted the power from the beyond into us, we must abide by it, and not traduce it. Courage, discipline, inward isolation, these are the conditions upon which power will abide in us.

And between brave people there will be the communion of power, prior to the communion of love. The communion of power does not exclude the communion of love. It includes it. The communion of love is only a part of the greater communion of power.

Power is the supreme quality of God and man: the power to cause, the power to create, the power to make, the power to do, the power to destroy. And then, between those things which are created or made, love is the supreme binding relationship. And between those who, with a single impulse, set out passionately to destroy what must be destroyed, joy flies like electric sparks, within the communion of power.

Love is simply and purely a relationship, and in a pure relationship there can be nothing but equality; or at least equipoise.

But Power is more than a relationship. It is like electricity, it has different degrees. Men are powerful or powerless, more or less: we know not how or why. But it is so. And the communion of power will always be a communion in inequality.

In the end, as in the beginning, it is always Power that rules the world! There *must be* rule. And only Power can rule. Love cannot, should not, does not seek to. The statement that love rules the camp, the court, the grove, is a lie; and the fact that such love has to rhyme with “grove”, proves it. Power rules and will always rule. Because it was Power that created us all. The act of love itself is an act of power, original as original sin. The power is given us.

As soon as there is an *act*, even in love, it is power. Love itself is purely a relationship.

But in an age that, like ours, has lost the mystery of power, and the reverence for power, a false power is substituted: the power of money. This is a power based on the force of human envy and greed, nothing more. So nations naturally become more envious and greedy every day. While individuals ooze away in a cowardice that they call love. They call it love, and peace, and charity, and benevolence, when it is mere cowardice. Collectively they are hideously greedy

and envious.

True power, as distinct from the spurious power, which is merely the force of certain human vices directed and intensified by the human will: true power never belongs to us. It is given us, from the beyond.

Even the simplest form of power, physical strength, is not our own, to do as we like with. As Samson found.

But power is given differently, in varying degrees and varying kind to different people. It always was so, it always will be so. There will never be equality in power. There will always be unending inequality.

Nowadays, when the only power is the power of human greed and envy, the greatest men in the world are men like Mr. Ford, who can satisfy the modern lust, we can call it nothing else, for owning a motorcar: or men like the great financiers, who can soar on wings of greed to uncanny heights, and even can spiritualise greed.

They talk about “equal opportunity”: but it is bunk, ridiculous bunk. It is the old fable of the fox asking the stork to dinner. All the food is to be served in a shallow dish, levelled to perfect equality, and you get what you can.

If you’re a fox, like the born financier, you get a bellyful and more. If you’re a stork, or a flamingo, or even a *man*, you have the food gobbled from under your nose, and you go comparatively empty.

Is the fox, then, or the financier, the highest animal in creation? Bah!

Humanity never bunked itself so thoroughly as with the bunk of equality, even qualified down to “equal opportunity”.

In living life, we are all born with different powers, and different degrees of power: some higher, some lower. The only thing to do is honorably to accept it, and to live in the communion of power. Is it not better to serve a man in whom power lives, than to clamour for equality with Mr. Motorcar Ford, or Mr. Shady Stinnes? Pfui! to your equality with such men! It gives me gooseflesh.

How much better it must have been, to be a colonel under Napoleon, than to be a Marshal Foch! Oh! how much better it must have been, to live in terror of Peter the Great — who was great — than to be a member of the proletariat under Comrade Lenin: or even to *be* Comrade Lenin: though even he was great-ish, far greater than any extant millionaire.

Power is beyond us. Either it is given us from the unknown, or we have not got it. And better to touch it in another, than never to know it. Better be a Russian and shoot oneself out of sheer terror of Peter the Great’s displeasure, than to live like a well-to-do American, and never know the mystery of Power at all. Live in blank sterility.

For Power is the first and greatest of all mysteries. It is the mystery that is

behind all our being, even behind all our existence. Even the Phallic erection is a first blind movement of power. Love is said to call the power into motion: but it is probably the reverse: that the slumbering *power* calls love into being.

Power is manifold. There is physical strength, like Samson's. There is racial power, like David's or Mahomet's. There is mental power, like that of Socrates, and ethical power, like that of Moses, and spiritual power, like Jesus' or like Buddha's, and mechanical power, like that of Stephenson, or military power, like Napoleon's, or political power, like Pitt's. These are all true manifestations of power, coming out of the unknown.

Unlike the millionaire power, which comes out of the known forces of human greed and envy.

Power puts something new into the world. It may be Edison's gramophone, or Newton's Law or Cas-sar's Rome or Jesus' Christianity, or even Attila's charred ruins and emptied spaces. Something new displaces something old, and sometimes room has to be cleared beforehand.

Then power is obvious. Power is much more obvious in its destructive than in its constructive activity. A tree falls with a crash. It grew without a sound.

Yet true destructive power is power just the same as constructive. Even Attila, the Scourge of God, who helped to scourge the Roman world out of existence, was great with power. He was the scourge of *God*: not the scourge of the League of Nations, hired and paid in cash.

If it must be a scourge, let it be a scourge of God. But let it be power, the old divine power. The moment the divine power manifests itself, it is right: whether it be Attila or Napoleon or George Washington. But Lloyd George, and Woodrow Wilson, and Lenin, they never had the right smell. They never even roused real fear: no real passion. Whereas a manifestation of real power arouses passion, and always will.

Time it should again.

Blessed are the powerful, for theirs is the kingdom of earth.

...LOVE WAS ONCE A LITTLE BOY

COLLAPSE, as often as not, is the result of persisting in an old attitude towards some important relationship, which, in the course of time, has changed its nature.

Love itself is a relationship, which changes as all things change, save abstractions. If you want something really more durable than diamonds you must

be content with eternal truths like “twice two are four”.

Love is a relationship between things that live, holding them together in a sort of unison. There are other vital relationships. But love is this special one.

In every living thing there is the desire, for love, or for the relationship of unison with the rest of things. That a tree should desire to develop itself between the power of the sun, and the opposite pull of the earth’s centre, and to balance itself between the four winds of heaven, and to unfold itself between the rain and the shine, to have roots and feelers in blue heaven and innermost earth, both, this is a manifestation of love: a knitting together of the diverse cosmos into a oneness, a tree.

At the same time, the tree must most powerfully exert itself and defend itself, to maintain its own integrity against the rest of things.

So that love, as a desire, is balanced against the opposite desire, to maintain the integrity of the individual self.

Hate is not the opposite of love. The real opposite of love is individuality.

We live in the age of individuality, we call ourselves the servants of love. That is to say, we enact a perpetual paradox.

Take the love of a man and a woman, today. As sure as you start with a case of “true love” between them, you end with a terrific struggle and conflict of the two opposing egos or individualities. It is nobody’s fault: it is the inevitable result of trying to snatch an intensified individuality out of the mutual flame.

Love, as a relationship of unison, means and must mean, *to some extent*, the sinking of the individuality. Woman for centuries was expected to sink her individuality into that of her husband and family. Nowadays the tendency is to insist that a man shall sink his individuality into his job, or his business, primarily, and secondarily into his wife and family.

At the same time, education and the public voice urges man and woman into intenser individualism. The sacrifice takes the old symbolic form of throwing a few grains of incense on the altar. A certain amount of time, labor, money, emotion are sacrificed on the altar of love, by man and woman: especially emotion. But each calculates the sacrifice. And man and woman alike, each saves his individual ego, her individual ego, intact, as far as possible, in the scrimmage of love. Most of our talk about love is cant, and bunk. The treasure of treasures to man and woman today is his own, or her own ego. And this ego, each hopes it will flourish like a salamander in the flame of love and passion. Which it well may: but for the fact that there are two salamanders in the same flame, and they fight till the flame goes out. Then they become grey cold lizards of the vulgar ego.

It is much easier, of course, when there *is* no flame. Then there is no serious

fight.

You can't worship love and individuality in the same breath. Love is a mutual relationship, like a flame between wax and air. If either wax or air insists on getting its own way, or getting its own back too much, the flame goes out and the unison disappears. At the same time, if one yields itself up to the other entirely, there is a guttering mess. You have to balance love and individuality, and actually sacrifice a portion of each.

You have to have some sort of balance.

The Greeks said equilibrium. But whereas you can quite nicely balance a pound of butter against a pound of cheese, it is quite another matter to balance a rose and a ruby. Still more difficult is it to put male man in one scale and female woman in the other, and equilibrate that little pair of opposites.

Unless, of course, you abstract them. It's easy enough to balance a citizen against a citizeness, a Christian against a Christian, a spirit against a spirit, or a soul against a soul. There's a formula for each case. Liberty, Equality, Fraternity, etc., etc.

But the moment you put young Tom in one scale, and young Kate in the other: why, not God Himself has succeeded as yet in striking a nice level balance. Probably doesn't intend to, ever.

Probably it's one of the things that are most fascinating because they are *nearly* possible, yet absolutely impossible. Still, a miss is better than a mile. You can at least draw blood.

How can I equilibrate myself with my black cow Susan? I call her daily at six o'clock. And sometimes she comes. But sometimes, again, she doesn't, and I have to hunt her away among the timber. Possibly she is lying peacefully in cowy inertia, like a black Hindu statue, among the oak-scrub. Then she rises with a sighing heave. My calling was a mere nothing against the black stillness of her cowy passivity.

Or possibly she is away down in the bottom corner, lowing *sotto voce* and blindly to some far-off, inaccessible bull. Then when I call at her, and approach, she screws round her tail and flings her sharp, elastic haunch in the air with a kick and a flick, and plunges off like a buck rabbit, or like a black demon among the pine trees, her udder swinging like a chime of bells. Or possibly the coyotes have been howling in the night along the top fence. And then I call in vain. It's a question of saddling a horse and sifting the bottom timber. And there at last the horse suddenly winces, starts: and with a certain pang of fear I too catch sight of something black and motionless and alive, and terribly silent, among the tree-trunks. It is Susan, her ears apart, standing like some spider suspended motionless by a thread, from the web of the eternal silence. The strange faculty she has,

cow-given, of becoming a suspended ghost, hidden in the very crevices of the atmosphere! It is something in her *will*. It is her *tarnhelm*. And then, she doesn't know me. If I am afoot, she knows my voice, but not the advancing me, in a blue shirt and cord trousers. She waits, suspended by the thread, till I come close. Then she reaches forward her nose, to smell. She smells my hand: gives a little snort, exhaling her breath, with a kind of contempt, turns, and ambles up towards the homestead, perfectly assured. If I am horse-back, although she knows the grey horse perfectly well, at the same time she *doesn't* know what it is. She waits till the wicked Azul, who is a born cow-punching pony, advances mischievously at her. Then round she swings, as if on the blast of some sudden wind, and with her ears back, her head rather down, her black back curved, up she goes, through the timber, with surprising, swimming swiftness. And the Azul, snorting with jolly mischief, dashes after her. And when she is safely in her milking place, still she watches with her great black eyes as I dismount. And she has to smell my hand before the cowy peace of being milked enters her blood. Till then, there is something *roaring* in the chaos of her universe. When her cowy peace comes, then her universe is silent, and like the sea with an even tide, without sail or smoke: nothing.

That is Susan, my black cow.

And how am I going to equilibrate myself with her? Or even, if you prefer the word, to get in harmony with her?

Equilibrium? Harmony? with that black blossom! Try it!

She doesn't even know me. If I put on a pair of white trousers, she wheels away as if the devil was on her back. I have to go behind her, talk to her, stroke her, and let her smell my hand; and smell the white trousers. She doesn't know they are trousers. She doesn't know that I am a gentleman on two feet. Not she. Something mysterious happens in her blood and her being, when she smells me and my nice white trousers.

Yet she knows me, too. She likes to linger, while one talks to her. She knows quite well she makes me mad when she swings her tail in my face. So sometimes she swings it, just on purpose: and looks at me out of the black corner of her great, pure-black eye, when I yell at her. And when I find her, away down the timber, when she is a ghost, and lost to the world, like a spider dangling in the void of chaos, then she is relieved. She comes to, out of a sort of trance, and is relieved, trotting up home with a queer, jerky cowy gladness. But she is never *really* glad, as the horses are. There is always a certain untouched chaos in her.

Where she is when she's *in* the trance, heaven only knows.

That's Susan! I have a certain relation to her. But that she and I are in equilibrium, or in harmony, I would never guarantee while the world stands. As

for her individuality being in balance with mine, one can only feel the great blank of the gulf.

Yet a relationship there is. She knows my touch and she goes very still and peaceful, being milked. I, too, I know her smell and her warmth and her feel. And I share some of her cowy silence, when I milk her. There is a sort of relation between us. And this relation is part of the mystery of love: the individuality on each side, mine and Susan's, suspended in the relationship.

Cow Susan by the forest's rim A black-eyed Susan was to him And nothing more — One understands Wordsworth and the primrose and the yokel. The yokel had no relation at all — or next to none — with the primrose. Wordsworth gathered it into his own bosom and made it part of his own nature. "I, William, am also a yellow primrose blossoming on a bank." This, we must assert, is an impertinence on William's part. He ousts the primrose from its own individuality. He doesn't allow it to call its soul its own. It must be identical with *his* soul. Because, of course, by begging the question, there is but One Soul in the universe.

This is bunk. A primrose has its own peculiar prim-rosy identity, and all the oversouling in the world won't melt it into a Williamish oneness. Neither will the yokel's remarking: "Nay, boy, that's nothing. It's only a primrose!" — turn the primrose into nothing. The primrose will neither be assimilated nor annihilated, and Boundless Love breaks on the rock of one more flower. It has its own individuality, which it opens with lovely naivete to sky and wind and William and yokel, bee and beetle alike. It *is* itself. But its very floweriness is a kind of communion with all things: the love unison.

In this lies the eternal absurdity of Wordsworth's lines. His own behaviour, primrosely, was as foolish as the yokel's.

"A primrose by the river's brim A yellow primrose was to him And nothing more —"

A primrose by the river's brim A yellow primrose was to him And a great deal more —

A primrose by the river's brim Lit up its pallid yellow glim Upon the floor —

And watched old Father William trim His course beside the river's brim And trembled sore —

The yokel, going for a swim Had very nearly trod on him An hour before.

And now the poet's fingers slim
Were reaching out to pluck at him
And hurt him more.

Oh gentlemen, hark to my hymn!
To be a primrose is my whim
Upon the floor, And nothing more.

The sky is with me, and the dim Earth clasps my roots.
Your shadows skim My face once more
Leave me therefore Upon the floor; Say *au revoir*

Ah William! The "something more" that the primrose was to you, was yourself in the mirror. And if the yokel actually got as far as beholding a "yellow primrose", he got far enough.

You see it is not so easy even for a poet to equilibrate himself even with a mere primrose. He didn't leave it with a soul of its own. It had to have his soul. And nature had to be sweet and pure, Williamish. Sweet-Williamish at that! Anthropomorphised! Anthropomorphism, that allows nothing to call its soul its own, save anthropos: and only a special brand, even of him!

Poetry can tell alluring lies, when we let our feelings, or our ego, run away with us.

And we must always beware of romance: of people who love nature, or flowers, or dogs, or babies, or pure adventure. It means they are getting into a love-swing where everything is easy and nothing opposes their own egoism. Nature, babies, dogs are so lovable, because they can't answer back. The primrose, alas! couldn't pipe up and say: "Hey! Bill! get off the barrow!"

That's the best of men and women. There's bound to be a lot of back chat. You can *Lucy Gray* your woman as hard as you like, one day she's bound to come back at you: "Who are *you* when you're at home?"

A man isn't going to spread his own ego over a woman, as he has done over nature and primroses, and dogs, or horses, or babies, or "the people", or the proletariat or the poor-and-needy. The old hen takes the cock by the beard, and says: "*That's me, mind you!*"

Man is an individual, and woman is an individual. Which sounds easy.

But it's not as easy as it seems. These two individuals are as different as chalk and cheese. True, a pound of chalk weighs as much as a pound of cheese. But the proof of the pudding is in the eating, not the scales.

That is to say, you can announce that men and women should be equal and *are* equal. All right. Put them in the scales.

Alas! my wife is about twenty pounds heavier than I am.

Nothing to do but to abstract. *L'homme est nelibre*: with a napkin round his little tail.

Nevertheless, I am a citizen, my wife is a citizeness: I can vote, she can vote, I can be sent to prison, she can be sent to prison, I can have a passport, she can have a passport, I can be an author, she can be an authoress. Ooray! OO-bloomin- ray!

You see, we are both British subjects. Everybody bow!

Subjects! Subjects! Subjects!

Madame is already shaking herself like a wet hen.

But yes, my dear! we are both subjects. And as subjects, we enjoy a lovely equality, liberty, my dear! Equality! Fraternity or Sorority! my dear!

Aren't you pleased?

But it's no use talking to a wet hen. That "subject" was a cold douche.

As subjects, men and women may be equal.

But as objects, it's another pair of shoes. Where, I ask you, is the equality between an arrow and a horseshoe? or a serpent and a squash-blossom? Find me the equation that equates the cock and the hen.

You can't.

As inhabitants of my backyard, as loyal subjects of my *rancho*, they, the cock and the hen, are equal. When he gets wheat, she gets wheat. When sour milk is put out, it is as much for him as for her. She is just as free to go where she likes, as he is. And if she likes to crow at sunrise, she may. There is no law against it. And he can lay an egg, if the fit takes him. Absolutely nothing forbids.

Isn't that equality? If it isn't, what is?

Even then, they're two very different objects.

As equals, they are just a couple of barnyard fowls, clucking! generalised!

But dear me, when he comes prancing up with his red beard shaking, and his eye gleaming, and she comes slowly pottering after, with her nose to the ground, they're two very different objects. You never think of equality: or of inequality, for that matter. They're a cock and a hen, and you accept them as such.

You don't think of them as equals, or as unequals. But you think of them *together*.

Wherein, then, lies the togetherness?

Would you call it love?

I wouldn't.

Their two egos are absolutely separate. He's a cock, she's a hen. He never thinks of her for a moment, as if she were a cock like himself; and she never thinks for a moment that he is a hen like herself. I never hear anything in her

squawk which would seem to say: “ *Areri 11 a fowl as much as you are, you brute!* “ Whereas I always hear women shrieking at their men: “Aren’t I a human being as much as you are?”

It seems beside the point.

I always answer my spouse, with sweet reasonableness: “My dear, we are both British Subjects. What can I say more, on the score of equality? You are a British Subject as much as I am.”

Curiously, she hates to have it put that way. She wants to be a human being as much as I am. But absolutely and honestly, I don’t know what a human-being is. Whereas I do know what a British Subject is. It can be defined.

And I can see how a *Civis Roman urn*, or a British Subject can be free, whether it’s he or she. The he-ness or the she-ness doesn’t matter. But how a *man* can consider himself free, I don’t know. Any more than a cock-robin or a dandelion.

Imagine a dandelion suddenly hissing: “*I am free and I will be free!*” Then wriggling on his root like a snake with his tail pegged down!

What a horrifying sight!

So it is when a man, with two legs and a penis, a belly and a mouth begins to shout about being free. One wants to ask: which bit do you refer to?

There’s a cock and there’s the hen, and their two egos or individualities seem to stay apart without friction. They never coo at one another, nor hold each other’s hand. I never see her sitting on his lap and being petted. True, sometimes he calls for her to come and eat a titbit. And sometimes he dashes at her and walks over her for a moment. She doesn’t seem to mind. I never hear her squawking: “*Don’t you think you can walk over me!*”

Yet she’s by no means downtrodden. She’s just herself, and seems to have a good time: and she doesn’t like it if he is missing.

So there is this peculiar togetherness about them. You can’t call it love. It would be too ridiculous.

What then?

As far as I can see, it is desire. And the desire has a fluctuating intensity, but it is always there. His desire is always towards her, even when he has absolutely forgotten her. And by the way she puts her feet down, I can see she always walks in her plumes of desirableness, even when she’s going broody.

The mystery about her, is her strange undying desirableness. You can see it in every step she takes. She is desirable. And this is the breath of her life.

It is the same with Susan. The queer cowy mystery of her is her changeless cowy desirableness. She is far, alas, from any bull. She never even remotely dreams of a bull, save at rare and brief periods. Yet her whole being and motion

is that of being desirable: or else fractious. It seems to unite her with the very air, and the plants and trees. Even to the sky and the trees and the grass and the running stream, she is subtly, delicately and *purely* desirable, in cowy desirability. It is her cowy mystery. Then her fractiousness is the fireworks of her desirableness.

To me she is fractious, tiresome, and a faggot. Yet the subtle desirableness is in her, for me. As it is in a brown hen, or even a sow. It is like a peculiar charm: the creature's femaleness, her desirableness. It is her sex, no doubt: but so subtle as to have nothing to do with function. It is a mystery, like a delicate flame. It would be false to call it love, because love complicates the ego. The ego is always concerned in love. But in the frail, subtle desirousness of the true male, towards everything female, and the equally frail, indescribable desirability of every female for every male, lies the real clue to the equating, or the *relating*, of things which otherwise are incommensurable.

And this, this desire, is the reality which is inside love. The ego itself plays a false part in it. The individual is like a deep pool, or tarn, in the mountains, fed from beneath by unseen springs, and having no obvious inlet or outlet. The springs which feed the individual at the depths are sources of power, power from the unknown. But it is not until the stream of desire overflows and goes running downhill into the open world, that the individual has his further, secondary existence.

Now we have imagined love to be something absolute and personal. It is neither. In its essence, love is no more than the stream of clear and unclouded, subtle desire which flows from person to person, creature to creature, thing to thing. The moment this stream of delicate but potent desire dries up, the love has dried up, and the joy of life has dried up. It's no good trying to turn on the tap. Desire is either flowing, or gone, and the love with it, and the life too.

This subtle streaming of desire is beyond the control of the ego. The ego says: "This is *my* love, to do as I like with! This is *my* desire, given me for my own pleasure."

But the ego deceives itself. The individual cannot possess the love which he himself feels. Neither should he be entirely possessed by it. Neither man nor woman should sacrifice individuality to love, nor love to individuality.

If we lose desire out of our life, we become empty vessels. But if we break our own integrity, we become a squalid mess, like a jar of honey dropped and smashed.

The individual has nothing, really, to do with love. That is, his individuality hasn't. Out of the deep silence of his individuality runs the stream of desire, into the open squash-blossom of the world. And the stream of desire may meet and

mingle with the stream from a woman. But it is never *himself* that meets and mingles with *herself*: any more than two lakes, whose waters meet to make one river, in the distance, meet in themselves.

The two individuals stay apart, for ever and ever. But the two streams of desire, like the Blue Nile and the White Nile, from the mountains one and from the low hot lake the other, meet and at length mix their strange and alien waters, to make a Nilus Flux.

See then the childish mistake we have made, about love. We have *insisted* that the two individualities should “fit”. We have insisted that the “love” between man and woman must be “perfect”. What on earth that means, is a mystery. What would a perfect Nilus Flux be? — one that never overflowed its banks? or one that always overflowed its banks? or one that had exactly the same overflow every year, to a hair’s-breadth?

My dear, it is absurd. Perfect love is an absurdity. As for casting out fear, you’d better be careful. For fear, like curses and chickens, will also come home to roost.

Perfect love, I suppose, means that a married man and woman never contradict one another, and that they both of them always feel the same thing at the same moment, and kiss one another on the strength of it. What blarney! It means, I suppose, that they are absolutely intimate: this precious intimacy that lovers insist on. They tell each other *everything*: and if she puts on chiffon knickers, he ties the strings for her: and if he blows his nose, she holds the hanky.

Pfui! Is anything so loathsome as intimacy, especially the married sort, or the sort that “lovers” indulge in!

It’s a mistake and ends in disaster. Why? Because the individualities of men and women are incommensurable, and they will no more meet than the mountains of Abyssinia will meet with Lake Victoria Nyanza. It is far more important to keep them distinct, than to join them. If they are to join, they will join in the third land where the two streams of desire meet.

Of course, as citizen and citizeness, as two persons, even as two spirits, man and woman can be equal and intimate. But this is their outer, more general or common selves. The individual man himself, and the individual woman herself, this is another pair of shoes.

It is a pity that we have insisted on putting all our eggs in one basket: calling love the basket, and ourselves the eggs. It is a pity we have insisted on being individuals only in the communistic, semi-abstract or generalised sense: as voters, money-owners, ‘free’ men and women: free in so far as we are all alike, and individuals in so far as we are commensurable integers.

By turning ourselves into integers: every man to himself and every woman to

herself a Number One; an infinite number of Number Ones; we have destroyed ourselves as desirous or desirable individuals, and broken the inward sources of our power, and flooded all mankind into one dreary marsh where the rivers of desire lie dead with everything else, except a stagnant unity.

It is a pity of pities women have learned to think like men. Any husband will say, “*they haven’t.*” But they have: they’ve all learned to think like some other beastly man, who is not their husband. Our education goes on and on, on and on, making the sexes alike, destroying the original individuality of the blood, to substitute for it this dreary individuality of the ego, the Number One. Out of the ego streams neither Blue Nile nor White Nile. The infinite number of little human egos makes a mosquito marsh, where nothing happens except buzzing and biting, ooze and degeneration.

And they call this marsh, with its poisonous will-o-the-wisps, and its clouds of mosquitos, *democracy*, and the reign of love!!

You can have it.

I am a man, and the Mountains of Abyssinia, and my Blue Nile flows towards the desert. There should be a woman somewhere far South, like a great lake, sending forth her White Nile towards the desert, too: and the rivers will meet among the Slopes of the World, somewhere.

But alas, every woman I’ve ever met spends her time saying she’s as good as any man, if not better, and she can beat him at his own game. So Lake Victoria Nyanza gets up on end, and declares it’s the Mountains of Abyssinia, and the Mountains of Abyssinia fall flat and cry: “*You re all that, and more, my dear!*” — and between them, you’re bogged.

I give it up.

But at any rate it’s nice to know *what’s* wrong, since wrong it is.

If we were men, if we were women, our individualities would be lone and a bit mysterious, like tarns, and fed with power, male power, female power, from underneath, invisibly. And from us the streams of desire would flow out in the eternal glimmering adventure, to meet in some unknown desert.

Mais nous avons change tout cela.

I’ll bet the yokel, even then, was more himself, and the stream of his desire was stronger and more gurgling, than William Wordsworth’s. For a long time the yokel retains his own integrity, and his own real stream of desire flows from him. Once you break this, and turn him, who was a yokel, into still another Number One, an assertive newspaper-parcel of an ego, you’ve done it!

But don’t, dear, darling reader, when I say “desire”, immediately conclude that I mean a jungleful of rampaging Don Juans and raping buck niggers. When I say that a woman should be eternally desirable, *don’t* say that I mean every man

should want to sleep with her, the instant he sets eyes on her.

On the contrary. Don Juan was only Don Juan because he *had* no real desire. He had broken his own integrity, and was a mess to start with. No stream of desire, with a course of its own, flowed from him. He was a marsh in himself. He mashed and trampled everything up, and desired no woman, so he ran after every one of them, with an itch instead of a steady flame. And tortured by his own itch, he inflamed his itch more and more. That's Don Juan, the man who *couldn't* desire a woman. He shouldn't have tried. He should have gone into a monastery at fifteen.

As for the yokel, his little stream may have flowed out of commonplace little hills, and been ready to mingle with the streams of any easy, puddly little yokeless. But what docs it matter! And men are far less promiscuous, even then, than we like to pretend. It's Don Juanery, sex-in-the-head, no real desire, which leads to profligacy or squalid promiscuity. The yokel usually met desire with desire: which is all right: and sufficiently rare to ensure the moral balance.

Desire is a living stream. If we gave free rein, or a free course, to our living flow of desire, we shouldn't go far wrong. It's quite different from giving a free rein to an itching, prurient imagination. That is our vileness.

The living stream of sexual desire itself does not often, in any man, find its object, its confluent, the stream of desire in a woman into which it can flow. The two streams flow together, spontaneously, not often, in the life of any man or woman. Mostly, men and women alike rush into a sort of prostitution, because our idiotic civilisation has never learned to hold in reverence the true desire-stream. We force our desire from our ego: and this is deadly.

Desire itself is a pure thing, like sunshine, or fire, or rain. It is desire that makes the whole world living to me, keeps me in the flow connected. It is my flow of desire that makes me move as the birds and animals move through the sunshine and the night, in a kind of accomplished innocence, not shut outside of the natural paradise. For life is a kind of Paradise, even to my horse Azul, though he doesn't get his own way in it, by any means, and is sometimes in a real temper about it. Sometimes he even gets a bellyache, with wet alfalfa. But even the bellyache is part of the natural paradise. Not like human *ennui*.

So a man can go forth in desire, even to the primroses. But let him refrain from falling all over the poor blossom, as William did. Or trying to incorporate it in his own ego, which is a sort of lust. Nasty anthropomorphic lust.

Everything that exists, even a stone, has two sides to its nature. It fiercely maintains its own individuality, its own solidity. And it reaches forth from itself in the subtlest flow of desire.

It fiercely resists all inroads. At the same time it sinks down in the curious

weight, or flow, of that desire which we call gravitation. And imperceptibly, through the course of ages, it flows into delicate combination with the air and sun and rain.

At one time, men worshipped stones: symbolically, no doubt, because of their mysterious durability, their power of hardness, resistance, their strength of remaining unchanged. Yet even then, worshipping man did not rest till he had erected the stone into a pillar, a menhir, symbol of the eternal desire, as the phallus itself is but a symbol.

And we, men and women, are the same as stones: the powerful resistance and cohesiveness of our individuality is countered by the mysterious flow of desire, from us and towards us.

It is the same with the worlds, the stars, the suns. All is alive, in its own degree. And the centripetal force of spinning earth is the force of earth's individuality: and the centrifugal force is the force of desire. Earth's immense centripetal energy, almost passion, balanced against her furious centrifugal force, holds her suspended between her moon and her sun, in a dynamic equilibrium.

So instead of the Greek: *Know thyself*/ we shall have to say to every man: "*Be Thyself Be Desirous!*" — and to every woman: "*Be Thyself! Be Desirable!*"

Be Thyself! does not mean: *Assert thy ego!* It means, be true to your own integrity, as man, as woman: let your heart stay open, to receive the mysterious inflow of power from the unknown: know that the power comes to you from beyond, it is not generated by your own will: therefore all the time, be watchful, and reverential towards the mysterious coming of power into you.

Be Thyself! is the grand cry of individualism. But individualism makes the mistake of considering an individual as a fixed entity: a little windmill that spins without shifting ground or changing its own nature. And this is nonsense. When power enters us, it does not just move us mechanically. It changes us. When the unseen wind blows, it blows upon us, and through us. It carries us like a ship on a sea. And it roars to flame in us, like a draught in a fierce fire. Or like a dandelion in flower.

What is the difference between a dandelion and a windmill?

Heap on more wood!

Even the Nirvanists consider man as a fixed entity, a changeless ego, which is capable of nothing, ultimately, but reemerging into the infinite. A little windmill that can turn faster and faster, till it becomes actually invisible, and nothing remains in nothingness, except a blur and a faint hum.

I am not a windmill. I am not even an ego. I am a man.

I am myself, and I remain myself only by the grave of the powers that enter me, from the unseen, and make me forever newly myself.

And I am myself, also, by the grace of the desire that flows from me and consummates me with the other unknown, the invisible, tangible creation.

The powers that enter me fluctuate and ebb. And the desire that goes forth from me waxes and wanes. Sometimes it is weak, and I am almost isolated. Sometimes it is strong, and I am almost carried away.

But supposing the cult of Individualism, Liberty, Freedom, and so forth, has landed me in the state of egoism, the state so prettily and nauseously described by Henley in his *Invictus*: which, after all, is but the yelp of a house-dog, a domesticated creature with an inferiority complex!

“It matters not how strait the gate, How charged with punishment the scroll:
I am the master of my fate!
I am the captain of my soul!”

Are you, old boy? Then why hippety-hop?
He was a cripple at that!

As a matter of fact, it is the slave’s bravado! The modern slave is he who does not receive his powers from the unseen, and give reverence, but who thinks he is his own little boss. Only a slave would take the trouble to shout: “*I am free!*” That is to say, to shout it in the face of the open heavens. In the face of men, and their institutions and prisons. Yes-yes! But in the face of the open heavens I would be ashamed to talk about freedom. I have no life, no real power, unless it will come to me. And I accomplish nothing, not even my own fulfilled existence, unless I go forth, delicately, desirous, and find the mating of my desire; even if it be only the sky itself, and trees, and the cow Susan, and the inexpressible consolation of a statue of an Egyptian Pharaoh, or the *Old Testament*, or even three rubies. These answer my desire with fulfilment. What bunk then to talk about being master of my fate! when my fate depends upon these things: — not to mention the unseen reality that sends strength, or life into me, without which I am a gourd rattle.

The ego, the little conscious ego that I am, that doll-like entity, that mannikin made in ridiculous likeness of the Adam which I am: am I going to allow that that is *all of me*? And shout about it?

Of course, if I am nothing but an ego, and woman is nothing but another ego, then there is really no vital difference between us. Two little dolls of conscious entities, squeaking when you squeeze them. And with a tiny bit of an extraneous appendage to mark which is which.

“Woman is just the same as man,” loudly said the political speaker, “Save for a very little difference.”

“Three cheers for the very little difference!” says a vulgar voice from the crowd.

But that’s a chestnut.

“Quick! Sharp! On the alert!
Let every gentleman put on his shirt!
And be *quick* if you please!
Let every lady put on her chemise!”

Though nowadays, a lady’s chemise won’t save her face.

In or out her chemise, however, doesn’t make much difference to the modern woman. She’s a finished-off ego, an assertive conscious entity, cut off like a doll from any mystery. And her nudity is about as inter-esting as a doll’s. If you can be interested in the nudity of a doll, then jazz on, jazz on!

The same with the men. No matter how they pull their shirts off they never arrive at their own nakedness. They have none. They can only be undressed. Naked they cannot be. Without their clothes on, they are like a dismantled street-car without its advertisements: sort of public article that doesn’t refer to anything.

The ego! Anthropomorphism! Love! What it works out to in the end is that even anthropos disappears, and leaves a sawdust mannikin wondrously jazzing.

‘ ‘My little sisters, the birds!’’ says Francis of Assisi.

“*Whew!*” goes the blackbird.

“Listen to me, my little sisters, you birds!”

“*Whew!*” goes the blackbird. “I’m a cock, mister!”

Love! What’s the good of woman who isn’t desirable, even though she’s as pretty as paint, and the waves in her hair are as permanent as the pyramids!

He buried his face in her permanent wave, and cried: “Help! Get me out!”

Individualism! Read the advertisements! “Jew-jew’s hats give a man that individual touch he so much desires. No man could lack individuality in Poppem’s pyjamas.” Poor devil! If he was left to his own skin, where would he be!

Pop goes the weasel!

REFLECTIONS ON THE DEATH OF A PORCUPINE

THERE are many bare places on the little pine trees, towards the top, where the porcupines have gnawed the bark away and left the white flesh showing. And some trees are dying from the top.

Everyone says, porcupines should be killed; the Indians, Mexicans, Americans all say the same.

At full moon a month ago, when I went down the long clearing in the brilliant moonlight, through the poor dry herbage a big porcupine began to waddle away from me, towards the trees and the darkness. The animal had raised all its hairs and bristles, so that by the light of the moon it seemed to have a tall, swaying, moonlit aureole arching its back as it went. That seemed curiously fearsome, as if the animal were emitting itself demon-like on the air.

It waddled very slowly, with its white spiky spoon-tail steering flat, behind the round bear-like mound of its back. It had a lumbering, beetle's, squalid motion, unpleasant. I followed it into the darkness of the timber, and there, squat like a great tick, it began scapily to creep up a pine-trunk. It was very like a great aureoled tick, a bug, struggling up.

I stood near and watched, disliking the presence of the creature. It is a duty to kill the things. But the dislike of killing him was greater than the dislike of him. So I watched him climb.

And he watched me. When he had got nearly the height of a man, all his long hairs swaying with a bristling gleam like an aureole, he hesitated, and slithered down. Evidently he had decided, either that I was harmless, or else that it was risky to go up any further, when I could knock him off so easily with a pole. So he slithered podgily down again, and waddled away with the same bestial, stupid motion of that white-spiky repulsive spoon-tail. He was as big as a middle-sized pig: or more like a bear.

I let him go. He was repugnant. He made a certain squalor in the moonlight of the Rocky Mountains. As all savagery has a touch of squalor, that makes one a little sick at the stomach. And anyhow, it seemed almost more squalid to pick up a pine-bough and push him over, hit him and kill him.

A few days later, on a hot, motionless morning when the pine-trees put out their bristles in stealthy, hard assertion; and I was not in a good temper, because

Black-eyed Susan, the cow, had disappeared into the timber, and I had had to ride hunting her, so it was nearly nine o'clock before she was milked: Madame came in suddenly out of the sunlight, saying: "I got such a shock! There are two strange dogs, and one of them has got the most awful beard, all round his nose."

She was frightened, like a child, at something unnatural.

"Beard! Porcupine quills, probably! He's been after a porcupine."

"Ah!" she cried in relief. "Very likely! Very likely!" — then with a change of tone; "Poor thing, will they hurt him?"

"They will. I wonder when he came."

"I heard dogs bark in the night."

"Did you? Why didn't you say so? I should have known Susan was hiding —

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The ranch is lonely, there is no sound in the night, save the innumerable noises of the night, that you can't put your finger on; cosmic noises in the far deeps of the sky, and of the earth.

I went out. And in the full blaze of sunlight in the field, stood two dogs, a black-and-white, and a big, bushy, rather handsome sandy-red dog, of the collie type. And sure enough, this latter did look queer and a bit horrifying, his whole muzzle set round with white spines, like some ghastly growth; like an unnatural beard.

The black-and-white dog made off as I went through the fence. But the red dog whimpered and hesitated, and moved on hot bricks. He was fat and in good condition. I thought he might belong to some shepherds herding sheep in the forest ranges, among the mountains.

He waited while I went up to him, wagging his tail and whimpering, and ducking his head, and dancing. He daren't rub his nose with his paws any more: it hurt too much. I patted his head and looked at his nose, and he whimpered loudly.

He must have had thirty quills, or more, sticking out of his nose, all the way round: the white, ugly ends of the quills protruding an inch, sometimes more, sometimes less, from his already swollen, blood-puffed muzzle.

The porcupines here have quills only two or three inches long. But they are devilish; and a dog will die if he does not get them pulled out. Because they work further and further in, and will sometimes emerge through the skin away in some unexpected place.

Then the fun began. I got him in the yard: and he drank up the whole half-gallon of the chickens' sour milk. Then I started pulling out the quills. He was a big, bushy, handsome dog, but his nerve was gone, and every time I got a quill out, he gave a yelp. Some long quills were fairly easy. But the shorter ones, near

his lips, were deep in, and hard to get hold of, and hard to pull out when you did get hold of them.

And with every one that came out, came a little spurt of blood and another yelp and writhe.

The dog wanted the quills out: but his nerve was gone. Every time he saw my hand coming to his nose, he jerked his head away. I quieted him, and stealthily managed to jerk out another quill, with the blood all over my fingers. But with every one that came out, he grew more tiresome. I tried and tried and tried to get hold of another quill, and he jerked and jerked, and writhed and whimpered, and ran under the porch floor.

It was a curiously unpleasant, nerve-trying job. The day was blazing hot. The dog came out and I struggled with him again for an hour or more. Then we blindfolded him. But either he smelled my hand approaching his nose, or some weird instinct told him. He jerked his head, this way, that way, up, down, sideways, roundwise, as one's fingers came slowly, slowly, to seize a quill.

The quills on his lips and chin were deep in, only about a quarter of an inch of white stub protruding from the swollen, blood-oozed, festering black skin. It was very difficult to jerk them out.

We let him lie for an interval, hidden in the quiet cool place under the porch floor. After half an hour, he crept out again. We got a rope round his nose, behind the bristles, and one held while the other got the stubs with the pliers. But it was too trying. If a quill came out, the dog's yelp startled every nerve. And he was frightened of the pain, it was impossible to hold his head still any longer.

After struggling for two hours, and extracting some twenty quills, I gave up. It was impossible to quiet the creature, and I had had enough. His nose on the top was clear: a punctured, puffy, blood-darkened mess; and his lips were clear. But just on his round little chin, where the few white hairs are, was still a bunch of white quills, eight or nine, deep in.

We let him go, and he dived under the porch, and there he lay invisible: save for the end of his bushy, foxy tail, which moved when we came near. Towards noon he emerged, ate up the chicken-food, and stood with that doggish look of dejection, and fear, and friendliness, and greediness, wagging his tail.

But I had had enough.

"Go home!" I said. "Go home! Go home to your master, and let him finish for you."

He would not go. So I led him across the blazing hot clearing, in the way I thought he should go. He followed a hundred yards, then stood motionless in the blazing sun. He was not going to leave the place.

And I! I simply did not want him.

So I picked up a stone. He dropped his tail, and swerved towards the house. I knew what he was going to do. He was going to dive under the porch, and there stick, haunting the place.

I dropped my stone, and found a good stick under the cedar tree. Already in the heat was that stinglike biting of electricity, the thunder gathering in the sheer sunshine, without a cloud, and making one's whole body feel dislocated.

I could not bear to have that dog around any more. Going quietly to him, I suddenly gave him one hard hit with the stick, crying: "Go home!" He turned quickly, and the end of the stick caught him on his sore nose. With a fierce yelp, he went off like a wolf, downhill, like a flash, gone. And I stood in the field full of pangs of regret, at having hit him, unintentionally, on his sore nose.

But he was gone.

And then the present moon came, and again the night was clear. But in the interval there had been heavy thunder-rains, the ditch was running with bright water across the field, and the night, so fair, had not the terrific, mirror-like brilliancy, touched with terror, so startling bright, of the moon in the last days of June.

We were alone on the ranch. Madame went out into the clear night, just before retiring. The stream ran in a cord of silver across the field, in the straight line where I had taken the irrigation ditch. The pine tree in front of the house threw a black shadow. The mountain slope came down to the fence, wild and alert.

"Come!" said she excitedly. "There is a big porcupine drinking at the ditch. I thought at first it was a bear."

When I got out he had gone. But among the grasses and the coming wild sunflowers, under the moon, I saw his greyish halo, like a pallid living bush, moving over the field, in the distance, in the moonlit *clair-obscur*.

We got through the fence, and following, soon caught him up. There he lumbered, with his white spoon-tail spiked with bristles, steering behind almost as if he were moving backwards, and this was his head. His long, long hairs above the quills quivering with a dim grey gleam, like a bush.

And again I disliked him.

"Should one kill him?"

She hesitated. Then with a sort of disgust:

"Yes!"

I went back to the house, and got the little twenty-two rifle. Now never in my life had I shot at any live thing: I never wanted to. I always felt guns very repugnant: sinister, mean. With difficulty I had fired once or twice at a target: but resented doing even so much. Other people could shoot if they wanted to. Myself, individually, it was repugnant to me even to try.

But something slowly hardens in a man's soul. And I knew now, it had hardened in mine. I found the gun, and with rather trembling hands, got it loaded. Then I pulled back the trigger and followed the porcupine. It was still lumbering through the grass. Coming near, I aimed.

The trigger stuck. I pressed the little catch with a safety-pin I found in my pocket, and released the trigger. Then we followed the porcupine. He was still lumbering towards the trees. I went sideways on, stood quite near to him, and fired, in the clear-dark of the moonlight.

And as usual I aimed too high. He turned, went scuttling back whence he had come.

I got another shell in place, and followed. This time I fired full into the mound of his round back, below the glistening grey halo. He seemed to stumble on to his hidden nose, and struggled a few strides, ducking his head under like a hedgehog.

"He's not dead yet! Oh, fire again." cried Madame.

I fired, but the gun was empty.

So I ran quickly, for a cedar pole. The porcupine was lying still, with subsiding halo. He stirred faintly. So I turned him and hit him hard over the nose; or where, in the dark, his nose should have been. And it was done. He was dead.

And in the moonlight, I looked down on the first creature I had ever shot.

"Does it seem mean?" I asked aloud, doubtful.

Again Madame hesitated. Then: "No!" she said resentfully.

And I felt she was right. Things like the porcupine, one must be able to shoot them, if they get in one's way.

One must be able to shoot. I, myself, must be able to shoot, and to kill.

For me, this is a *voltaface*. I have always preferred to walk round my porcupine, rather than kill it.

Now, I know it's no good walking 'round. One must kill.

I buried him in the adobe hole. But some animal dug down and ate him; for two days later there lay the spines and bones spread out, with the long skeletons of the porcupine-hands.

The only nice thing about him — or her, for I believe it was a female, by the digs on her belly — were the feet. They were like longish, alert black hands, paw-hands. That is why a porcupine's tracks in the snow look almost as if a child had gone by, leaving naked little human foot-prints, like a little boy.

So, he is gone: or she is gone. But there is another one, bigger and blacker-looking, among the west timber. That too is to be shot. It is part of the business of ranching: even when it's only a little half-abandoned ranch like this one.

Wherever man establishes himself, upon the earth, he has to fight for his place, against the lower orders of life. Food, the basis of existence, has to be fought for even by the most idyllic of farmers. You plant, and you protect your growing crop with a gun. Food, food, how strangely it relates man with the animal and vegetable world! How important it is! And how fierce is the fight that goes on around it.

The same when one skins a rabbit, and takes out the inside, one realises what an enormous part of the animal, comparatively, is intestinal, what a big part of him is just for food-apparatus; for *living on* other organisms.

And when one watches the horses in the big field, their noses to the ground, bite-bite-biting at the grass, and stepping absorbedly on, and bite-bite-biting without ever lifting their noses, cropping off the grass, the young shoots of alfalfa, the dandelions, with a blind, relentless, unwearied persistence, one's whole life pauses. One suddenly realises again how all creatures devour, and *must* devour the lower forms of life.

So Susan, swinging across the field, snatches off the tops of the little wild sunflowers as if she were mowing. And down they go, down her black throat. And when she stands in her cowy oblivion chewing her cud, with her lower jaw swinging peacefully, and I am milking her, suddenly the camomiley smell of her breath, as she glances round with glaring, smoke-blue eyes, makes me realise it is the sunflowers that are her ball of cud. Sunflowers! And they will go to making her glistening black hide, and the thick cream on her milk.

And the chickens, when they see a great black beetle, that the Mexicans call a *toro*, floating past, they are after it in a rush. And if it settles, instantly the brown hen stabs it with her beak. It is a great beetle two or three inches long: but in a second it is in the crop of the chicken. Gone!

And Timsy, the cat, as she spies on the chipmunks, crouches in another sort of oblivion, soft, and still. The chipmunks come to drink the milk from the chickens' bowl. Two of them met at the bowl. They were little squirrely things with stripes down their backs. They sat up in front of one another, lifting their inquisitive little noses and humping their backs. Then each put its two little hands on the other's shoulders, they reared up, gazing into each other's faces; and finally they put their two little noses together, in a sort of kiss.

But Miss Timsy can't stand this. In a soft, white-and-yellow leap she is after them. They skip with the darting jerk of chipmunks, to the wood-heap, and with one soft, high-leaping sideways bound Timsy goes through the air. Her snowflake of a paw comes down on one of the chipmunks. She looks at it for a second. It squirms. Swiftly and triumphantly she puts her two flowery little white paws on it, legs straight out in front of her, back arched, gazing con-

centrately yet whimsically. Chipmunk does not stir. She takes it softly in her mouth, where it dangles softly, like a lady's tippet. And with a proud, prancing motion the Timsy sets off towards the house, her white little feet hardly touching the ground.

But she gets shooed away. We refuse to loan her the sitting-room any more, for her gladiatorial displays. If the chippy must be "butchered to make a Timsy holiday", it shall be outside. Disappointed, but still high-stepping, the Timsy sets off towards the clay oven by the shed.

There she lays the chippy gently down, and soft as a little white cloud lays one small paw on its striped back. Chippy does not move. Soft as thistle-down she raises her paw a tiny, tiny bit, to release him.

And all of a sudden, with an elastic jerk, he darts from under the white release of her paw. And instantly, she is up in the air and down she comes on him, with the forward-thrusting bolts of her white paws. Both creatures are motionless.

Then she takes him softly in her mouth again, and looks round, to see if she can slip into the house. She cannot. So she trots towards the wood-pile.

It is a game, and it is pretty. Chippy escapes into the wood-pile, and she softly, softly reconnoitres among the faggots.

Of all the animals, there is no denying it, the Timsy is the most pretty, the most fine. It is not her mere *corpus* that is beautiful; it is her bloom of aliveness. Her "infinite variety"; the soft, snow-flakey lightness of her, and at the same time her lean, heavy ferocity. I had never realised the latter, till I was lying in bed one day moving my toe, unconsciously, under the bedclothes. Suddenly a terrific blow struck my foot. The Timsy had sprung out of nowhere, with a hurling, steely force, thud upon the bedclothes where the toe was moving. It was as if someone had aimed a sudden blow, vindictive and unerring.

"Timsy!"

She looked at me with the vacant, feline glare of her hunting eyes. It is not even ferocity. It is the dilation of the strange, vacant arrogance of power. The power is in her.

And so it is. Life moves in circles of power and of vividness, and each circle of life only maintains its orbit upon the subjection of some lower circle. If the lower cycles of life are not *mastered*, there can be no higher cycle.

In nature, one creature devours another, and this is an essential part of all existence and of all being. It is not something to lament over, nor something to try to reform. The Buddhist who refuses to take life is really ridiculous, since if he eats only two grains of rice per day, it is two grains of life. We did not make creation, we are not the authors of the universe. And if we see that the whole of creation is established upon the fact that one life devours another life, one cycle

of existence can only come into existence through the subjugating of another cycle of existence, then what is the good of trying to pretend that it is not so? The only thing to do is to realise what is higher, and what is lower, in the cycles of existence.

It is nonsense to declare that there *is* no higher and lower. We know full well that the dandelion belongs to a higher cycle of existence than the hartstongue fern, that the ant's is a higher form of existence than the dandelion's, that the thrush is higher than the ant, that Timsy the cat, is higher than the thrush, and that I, a man, am higher than Timsy.

What do we mean by higher? Strictly, we mean more alive. More vividly alive. The ant is more vividly alive than the pine-tree. We know it, there is no trying to refute it. It is all very well saying that they are both alive in two different ways, and therefore they are incomparable, incommensurable. This is also true.

But one truth does not displace another. Even apparently contradictory truths do not displace one another. Logic is far too coarse to make the subtle distinctions life demands.

Truly, it is futile to compare an ant with a great pine-tree, in the absolute. Yet as far as *existence* is concerned, they are not only placed in comparison to one another, they are occasionally pitted against one another. And if it comes to a contest, the little ant will devour the life of the huge tree. If it comes to a contest.

And, in the cycles of *existenc*:, this is the test. From the lowest form of existence, to the highest, the test question is: *Can thy neighbour finally overcome thee?*

If he can, then he belongs to a higher cycle of existence.

This is the truth behind the survival of the fittest. Every cycle of existence is established upon the overcoming of the lower cycles of existence. The real question is, wherein does *fitness* lie? Fitness for what? Fit merely to survive? That which is only fit to survive will survive only to supply food or contribute in some way to the existence of a higher form of life, which is able to do more than survive, which can really *vive*, live.

Life is more vivid in the dandelion than in the green fern, or than in a palm tree.

Life is more vivid in a snake than in a butterfly.

Life is more vivid in a wren than in an alligator.

Life is more vivid in a cat than in an ostrich.

Life is more vivid in the Mexican who drives the wagon, than in the two horses in the wagon.

Life is more vivid in me, than in the Mexican who drives the wagon for me.

We are speaking in terms of *existence*: that is, in terms of species, race, or type.

The dandelion can take hold of the land, the palm tree is driven into a corner, with the fern.

The snake can devour the fiercest insect.

The fierce bird can destroy the greatest reptile.

The great cat can destroy the greatest bird.

The man can destroy the horse, or any animal.

One race of man can subjugate and rule another race.

All this in terms of *existence*. As far as existence goes, that life-species is the highest which can devour, or destroy, or subjugate every other life-species against which it is pitted in contest.

This is a law. There is no escaping this law. Anyone, or any race, trying to escape it, will fall a victim: will fall into subjugation.

But let us insist and insist again, we are talking now of existence, of species, of types, of races, of nations, not of single individuals, nor of *beings*. The dandelion in full flower, a little sun bristling with sun-rays on the green earth, is a nonpareil, a nonsuch. Foolish, foolish, foolish to compare it to anything else on earth. It is itself incomparable and unique.

But that is the fourth dimension, of *being*. It is in the fourth dimension, nowhere else.

Because, in the time-space dimension, any man may tread on the yellow sun-mirror, and it is gone. Any cow may swallow it. Any bunch of ants may annihilate it.

This brings us to the inexorable law of life.

1. Any creature that attains to its own fullness of being, its own *living* self, becomes unique, a nonpareil. It has its place in the fourth dimension, the heaven of existence, and there it is perfect, it is beyond comparison.

2. At the same time, every creature exists in time and space. And in time and space it exists relatively to all other existence, and can never be absolved. Its existence impinges on other existences, and is itself impinged upon. And in the struggle for existence, if an effort on the part of any one type or species or order of life, can finally destroy the other species, then the destroyer is of a more vital cycle of existence than the one destroyed. (When speaking of existence we always speak in types, species, not individuals. Species exist. But even an individual dandelion has *being*.)

3. The force which we call *vitality*, and which is the determining factor in the struggle for existence, is, however, derived also from the fourth dimension. That is to say, the ultimate source of all vitality is in that other dimension, or

region, where the dandelion blooms, and which men have called heaven, and which now they call the fourth dimension: which is only a way of saying that it is not to be reckoned in terms of space and time.

4. The primary way, in our existence, to get vitality, is to absorb it from living creatures lower than ourselves. It is thus transformed into a new and higher creation. (There are many ways of absorbing: devouring food is one way, love is often another. The best way is a pure relationship, which includes the *being* on each side, and which allows the transfer to take place in a living flow, enhancing the life in both beings.)

5. No creature is fully itself till it is, like the dandelion, opened in the bloom of pure relationship to the sun, the entire living cosmos.

So we still find ourselves in the tangle of existence and being, a tangle which man has never been able to get out of, except by sacrificing the one to the other.

Sacrifice is useless.

The clue to all existence is being. But you can't have being without existence, any more than you can have the dandelion flower without the leaves and the long tap root.

Being is *not* ideal, as Plato would have it: nor spiritual. It is a transcendent form of existence, and as much material as existence is. Only the matter suddenly enters the fourth dimension.

All existence is dual, and surging towards a consummation into being. In the seed of the dandelion, as it floats with its little umbrella of hairs, sits the Holy Ghost in tiny compass. The Holy Ghost is that which holds the light and the dark, the day and the night, the wet and the sunny, united in one little clue. There it sits, in the seed of the dandelion.

The seed falls to earth. The Holy Ghost rouses, saying: "*Come!*" And out of the sky come the rays of the sun, and out of earth comes dampness and dark and the death-stuff. They are called in, like those bidden to a feast. The sun sits down at the hearth, inside the seed; and the dark, damp death-returner sits on the opposite side, with the host between. And the host says to them: "*Come! Be merry together!*" So the sun looks with desirous curiosity on the dark face of the earth, and the dark damp one looks with wonder on the bright face of the other, who comes from the sun. And the host says: "*Here you are at home! Lift me up, between you, that I may cease to be a Ghost. For it longs me to look out, it longs me to dance with the dancers.*" So the sun in the seed, and the earthy one in the seed take hands, and laugh, and begin to dance. And their dancing is like a fire kindled, a bonfire with leaping flame. And the treading of their feet is like the running of little streams, down into the earth. So from the dance of the sun-in-theseed with the earthy death-returner, green little flames of leaves shoot up, and

hard little trickles of roots strike down. And the host laughs, and says: *“I am being lifted up! Dance harder! Oh wrestle, you two, like wonderful wrestlers, neither of which can win.”* So sun-in-theseed and the death-returner, who is earthy, dance faster and faster and the leaves rising greener begin to dance in a ring above-ground, fiercely overwhelming any outsider, in a whirl of swords and lions’ teeth. And the earthy one wrestles, wrestles with the sun-in-theseed, so the long roots reach down like arms of a fighter gripping the power of earth, and strangles all intruders, strangling any intruder mercilessly. Till the two fall in one strange embrace, and from the centre the long flower-stem lifts like a phallus, budded with a bud. And out of the bud the voice of the Holy Ghost is heard crying: *“I am lifted up! Lo! I am lifted up! I am here!”* So the bud opens, and there is the flower poised in the very middle of the universe, with a ring of green swords below, to guard it, and the octopus, arms deep in earth, drinking and threatening. So the Holy Ghost, being a dandelion flower, looks round, and says: *“Lo! I am yellow! I believe the sun has lent me his body! Lo! I am sappy with golden, bitter blood! I believe death out of the damp black earth has lent me his blood! I am incarnate! I like my incarnation! But this is not all. I will keep this incarnation. It is good! But oh! if I can win to another incarnation, who knows how wonderful it will be! This one will have to give place. This one can help to create the next.”*

So the Holy Ghost leaves the clue of himself behind, in the seed, and wanders forth in the comparative chaos of our universe, seeking another incarnation.

And this will go on for ever. Man, as yet, is less than half grown. Even his flower-stem has not appeared yet. He is all leaves and roots, without any clue put forth. No sign of bud anywhere.

Either he will have to start budding, or he will be forsaken of the Holy Ghost: abandoned as a failure in creation, as the ichthyosaurus was abandoned. Being abandoned means losing his vitality. The sun and the earth-dark will cease rushing together in him. Already it is ceasing. To men, the sun is becoming stale, and the earth sterile. But the sun itself will never become stale, nor the earth barren. It is only that the *due* is missing inside men. They are like flowerless, seedless fat cabbages, nothing inside.

Vitality depends upon the clue of the Holy Ghost inside a creature, a man, a nation, a race. When the clue goes, the vitality goes. And the Holy Ghost seeks for ever a new incarnation, and subordinates the old to the new. You will know that any creature or race is still alive with the Holy Ghost, when it can subordinate the lower creatures or races, and assimilate them into a new incarnation.

No man, or creature, or race can have vivid vitality unless it be moving

towards a blossoming: and the most powerful is that which moves towards the as-yet-unknown blossom.

Blossoming means the establishing of a pure, *new* relationship with all the cosmos. This is the state of heaven. And it is the state of a flower, a cobra, a jenny-wren in spring, a man when he knows himself royal and crowned with the sun, with his feet gripping the core of the earth.

This too is the fourth dimension: this state, this mysterious other reality of things in a perfected relationship. It is into this perfected relationship that every straight line curves, as if to some core, passing out of the time-space dimension.

But any man, creature, or race moving towards blossoming will have to draw immense supplies of vitality from men, or creatures below, passionate strength. And he will have to accomplish a perfected relation with all things.

There will be conquest, always. But the aim of conquest is a perfect relation of conquerors with conquered, for a new blossoming. Freedom is illusory. Sacrifice is illusory. Almightyness is illusory. Freedom, sacrifice, almighty, these are all human side-tracks, cul-de-sacs, bunk. All that is real is the overwhelmingness of a new inspirational command, a new relationship with all things.

Heaven is always there. No achieved consummation is lost. Procreation goes on for ever, to support the achieved revelation. But the torch of revelation itself is handed on. And this is all important.

Everything living wants to procreate more living things.

But more important than this is the fact that every revelation is a torch held out, to kindle new revelations. As the dandelion holds out the sun to me, saying: "*Can you take it!*"

Every gleam of heaven that is shown — like a dandelion flower, or a green beetle — quivers with strange passion to kindle a new gleam, never yet beheld. This is not self-sacrifice: it is self-contribution: in which the highest happiness lies.

The torch of existence is handed on, in the womb of procreation.

And the torch of revelation is handed on, by every living thing, from the protococcus to a brave man or a beautiful woman, handed to whomsoever can take it. He who can take it, has power beyond all the rest.

The cycle of procreation exists purely for the keeping alight of the torch of perfection, in any species: the torch being the dandelion in blossom, the tree in full leaf, the peacock in all his plumage, the cobra in all his colour, the frog at full leap, woman in all the mystery of her fathomless desirableness, man in the fulness of his power: every creature become its pure self.

One cycle of perfection urges to kindle another cycle, as yet unknown.

And with the kindling from the torch of revelation comes the inrush of vitality,

and the need to consume and *consummate* the lower cycles of existence, into a new thing. This consuming and this consummating means conquest, and fearless mastery. Freedom lies in the honourable yielding towards the new flame, and the honourable mastery of that which shall be new, over that which must yield. As I must master my horses, which are in a lower cycle of existence. And they, they are relieved and *happy* to serve. If I turn them loose into the mountain ranges, to run wild till they die, the thrill of real happiness is gone out of their lives.

Every lower order seeks in some measure to serve a higher order: and rebels against being conquered.

It is always conquest, and it always will be conquest. If the conquered be an old, declining race, they will have handed on their torch to the conqueror: who will burn his fingers badly, if he is too flippant. And if the conquered be a barbaric race, they will consume the fire of the conqueror, and leave him flameless, unless he watch it. But it is always conquest, conquered and conqueror, for ever. The Kingdom of heaven is the Kingdom of conquerors, who can serve the conquest for ever, after their own conquest is made.

In heaven, in the perfected relation, is peace: in the fourth dimension. But there is getting there. And that, for ever, is the process of conquest.

When the rose blossomed, then the great Conquest was made by the Vegetable Kingdom. But even this conqueror of conquerors, the rose, had to lend himself towards the caterpillar and the butterfly of a later conquest. A conqueror, but tributary to the later conquest.

There is no such thing as equality. In the kingdom of heaven, in the fourth dimension, each soul that achieves a perfect relationship with the cosmos, from its own centre, is perfect, and incomparable. It has no superior. It is a conqueror, and incomparable.

But every man, in the struggle of conquest towards his own consummation, must master the inferior cycles of life, and never relinquish his mastery. Also, if there be men beyond him, moving on to a newer consummation than his own, he must yield to their greater demand, and serve their greater mystery, and so be faithful to the kingdom of heaven which is within him, which is gained by conquest and by loyal service.

Any man who achieves his own being will, like the dandelion or the butterfly, pass into that other dimension which we call the fourth, and the old people called heaven. It is the state of perfected relationship. And here a man will have his peace for ever: whether he serve or command, in the process of living.

But even this entails his faithful allegiance to the kingdom of heaven, which must be for ever and for ever extended, as creation conquers chaos. So that my perfection will but serve a perfection which still lies ahead, unrevealed and

unconceived, and beyond my own.

We have tried to build walls round the kingdom of heaven: but it's no good. It's only the cabbage rotting inside.

Our last wall is the golden wall of money. This is a fatal wall. It cuts us off from life, from vitality, from the alive sun and the alive earth, as *nothing* can. Nothing, not even the most fanatical dogmas of an iron-bound religion, can insulate us from the inrush of life and inspiration, as money can.

We are losing vitality: losing it rapidly. Unless we seize the torch of inspiration, and drop our moneybags, the moneyless will be kindled by the flame of flames, and they will consume us like old rags.

We are losing vitality, owing to money and money-standards. The torch in the hands of the moneyless will set our house on fire, and burn us to death, like sheep in a flaming corral.

ARISTOCRACY

EVERYTHING in the world is relative to everything else. And every living thing is related to every other living thing.

But creation moves in cycles, and in degrees. There is higher and lower, in the cycles of creation, and greater and less, in the degree of life.

Each thing that attains to purity in its own cycle of existence, is pure and is itself, and, in its purity, is beyond compare.

But in relation to other things, it is either higher or lower, of greater or less degree.

We have to admit that a daisy is more highly developed than a fern, even if it be a tree-fern. The daisy belongs to a higher order of life. That is, the daisy is more alive. The fern more torpid.

And a bee is more alive than a daisy: of a higher order of life. The daisy, pure as it is in its own being, yet, when compared with the bee, is limited in its being.

And birds are higher than bees: more alive. And mammals are higher than birds. And man is the highest, most developed, most conscious, most *alive* of the mammals: master of them all.

But even within the species, there is a difference. The nightingale is higher, purer, even more alive, more subtly, delicately alive, than the sparrow. And the parrot is more highly developed, or more alive, than the pigeon.

Among men, the difference in *being* is infinite. And it is a difference in degree as well as in kind. One man *is*, in himself, more, more alive, more of a man, than another. One man has greater being than another, a purer manhood, a more vivid livingness. The difference is infinite.

And, seeing that the inferiors are vastly more numerous than the superiors, when Jesus came, the inferiors, who are no means the meek that they *should* be, set out to inherit the earth.

Jesus, in a world of arrogant Pharisees and egoistic Romans, thought that purity and poverty were one. It was a fatal mistake. Purity is often enough poor. But poverty is only too rarely pure. Poverty too often is only the result of *natural* poorness, poorness in courage, poorness in living vitality, poorness in manhood: poor life, poor character. Now the poor in life are the most impure, the most easily degenerate.

But the few men rich in life and pure in heart read purity into poverty, and Christianity started. "Charity suffereth long, and is kind. Charity envieth not.

Charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up.”

They are the words of a noble manhood.

There happened what was bound to happen: the men with pure hearts left the scramble for money and power to the impure.

Still the great appeal: “The Kingdom of Heaven is within you,” acted powerfully on the hearts of the poor, who were still full of life. The rich were more active, but less alive. The poor still wanted, most of all, the Kingdom of Heaven.

Until the pure men began to mistrust the figurative Kingdom of Heaven: “Not much Kingdom of Heaven for a hungry man,” they said.

This was a mistake, and a fall into impurity. For even if I die of hunger, the Kingdom of Heaven is within me, and I am within it, if I truly choose.

But once the pure man said this: “*Not much Kingdom of Heaven for a hungry man,*” the Soul began to die out of men.

By the old creed, every soul was equal in the sight of God. By the new creed, every body should be equal in the sight of men. And being equal meant, having equal possessions. And possessions were reckoned in terms of money.

So that money became the one absolute. And man figures as a money-possessor and a money-getter. The absolute, the God, the Kingdom of Heaven itself, became money; hard, hard cash. “The Kingdom of Heaven is within you” now means “The money is in your pocket.” “Then shall thy peace be as a river” now means “Then shall thy investments bring thee a safe and ample income.”

“*L’homme est ne libre*” means “He is born without a sou.” “*Et on le trouve par tout enchaine*” means “He wears breeches, and must fill his pockets.”

So now there is a new (a new-old) aristocracy, completely unmysterious and scientific: the aristocracy of money. Have you a million *gold*? (for heaven’s sake, the gold standard!) Then you are a *king*. Have you five hundred thousand? Then you are a lord.

“In my country, we’re *all* kings and queens,” as the American lady said, being a bit sick of certain British snobbery. She was quite right: they are all potential kings and queens. But until they come into their kingdom — five hundred thousand dollars minimum — they might just as well be commoners.

Yet even still, there is *natural* aristocracy.

Aristocracy of birth is bunk, when a Kaiser Wil-helm and an Emperor Franz-Josef and a Czar Nicolas is all that noble birth will do for you.

Yet the whole of life is established on a natural aristocracy. And aristocracy of birth is a *little* more natural than aristocracy of money. (Oh, for God’s sake, the gold standard!)

But a millionaire can do without birth, whereas birth cannot do without

dollars. So, by the all-pre- vailing law of pragmatism, the dollar has it.

What then does *natural* aristocracy consist in?

It's not just brains! The mind is an instrument, and the *savant*, the professor, the scientist, has been looked upon since the Ptolemies, as a sort of upper servant. And justly. The millionaire has brains too: so does a modern President or Prime Minister. They all belong to the class of upper servants. They serve, forsooth, the public.

“Ca, Ca, Caliban!

Get a new master, be a new man.”

What does a natural aristocracy consist in? Count Keyserling says: “Not in what a man can *do*, but what he *is*.” Unfortunately what a man *is*, is measured by what he can do, even in nature. A nightingale, being a nightingale, can sing: which a sparrow can't. If you *are* something you'll *do* something, *ipso facto*.

The question is what *kind* of thing can a man do? Can he put more life into us, and release in us the fountains of our vitality? Or can he only help to feed us, and give us money or amusement.

The providing of food, money, and amusement belongs, truly, to the servant class.

The providing of *life* belongs to the aristocrat. If a man, whether by thought or action, makes *life*, he is an aristocrat. So Caesar and Cicero are both strictly aristocrats. Lacking these two, the first century B.C. would have been far less vital, less vividly alive. And Antony, who seemed so much more vital, robust and robustious, was, when we look at it, comparatively unimportant. Cassar and Cicero lit the flame.

How? It is easier asked than answered.

But one thing they did, whatever else: they put men into a new relation with the universe. Cassar opened Gaul, Germany and Britain, and let the gleam of ice and snow, the shagginess of the north, the mystery of the menhir and the mistletoe in upon the rather stuffy soul of Rome, and of the Orient. And Cicero was discovering the moral nature of man, as citizen chiefly, and so putting man in new relation to man.

But Cassar was greater than Cicero. He put man in new relation to ice and sun.

Only Cassar was, perhaps, also too much an egoist; he never knew the mysteries he moved amongst. But Cassar was great *beyond* morality.

Man's life consists in a connection with all things in the universe. Whoever can establish, or initiate a new connection between mankind and the circumambient universe is, in his own degree, a saviour. Because mankind is always exhausting its human possibilities, always degenerating into repetition, torpor, *ennui*, lifelessness. When *ennui* sets in, it is a sign that human vitality is

waning, and the human connection with the universe is gone stale.

Then he who comes to make a new revelation, a new connection, whether he be soldier, statesman, poet, philosopher, artist, he is a saviour.

When George Stephenson invented the locomotive engine, he provided a *means of communication*, but he didn't alter in the slightest man's *vital* relation to the universe. But Galileo and Newton, *discoverers*, not inventors, they made a big difference. And the energy released in mankind because of them was enormous. The same is true of Peter the Great, Frederick the Great, and Napoleon. The same is true of Voltaire, Shelley, Wordsworth, Byron, Rousseau. They established a *new* connection between mankind and the universe, and the result was a vast release of energy. The *sun* was reborn to man, so was the moon.

To man, the very sun goes stale, becomes a habit. Comes a saviour, a seer, and the very sun dances new in heaven.

That is because the *sun* is always *sun beyond sun beyond sun*. The sun is every sun that ever has been, Helios or Mithras, the sun of China or of Brahma, or of Peru or of Mexico: great gorgeous suns, besides which our puny "envelope of incandescent gas" is a smoky candle-wick.

It is our fault. When man becomes stale and paltry, his sun is the mere stuff that our sun is. When man is great and splendid, the sun of China and Mithras blazes over him and gives him, not radiant energy in the form of heat and light, but life, life, life!

The world is to us what we take from it. The sun is to us what we take from it. And if we are puny, it is because we take punily from the superb sun.

Man is great according as his relation to the living universe is vast and vital.

Men are related to men: including women: and this, of course, is very important. But one would think it were everything. One would think, to read modern books, that the life of any tuppenny bank-clerk was more important than sun, moon, and stars; and to read the pert drivel of the critics, one would be led to imagine that every three-farthing whipper-snapper who lifts up his voice in approval or censure were the thrice-greatest Hermes speaking in judgment out of the mysteries.

This is the democratic age of cheap clap-trap, and it sits in jackdaw judgment on all greatness.

And this is the result of making, in our own conceit, man the measure of the universe. Don't you be taken in. The universe, so vast and profound, measures man up very accurately, for the yelping mongrel with his tail between his legs, that he is. And the great sun, and the moon, with a smile will soon start dropping the mongrel down the vast refuse-pit of oblivion. Oh, the universe has a terrible hole in the middle of it, an oubliette for all of you, whipper-snapping

mongrels.

Man, of course, being measure of the universe, is measured only against man. Has, of course, vital relationship only with his own cheap little species. Hence the cheap little twaddler he has become.

In the great ages, man had vital relation with man, with woman: and beyond that, with the cow, the lion, the bull, the cat, the eagle, the beetle, the serpent. And beyond these, with narcissus and anemone, mistletoe and oak-tree, myrtle, olive, and lotus. And beyond these with humus and slanting water, cloud-towers and rainbow and the sweeping sun-limbs. And beyond that, with sun, and moon, the living night and the living day.

Do you imagine the great realities, even the ram of Amon, are only *symbols* of something human? Do you imagine the great symbols, the dragon, the snake, the bull, only refer to bits, qualities or attributes of little man? It is puerile. The puerility, the puppyish conceit of modern white humanity is almost funny.

Amon, the great ram, do you think he doesn't stand alone in the universe, without your permission, oh cheap little man? Because he's there, do you think *you* bred him, out of your own almightiness, you cheap-jack?

Amon, the great ram! Mithras, the great bull! The mistletoe on the tree. Do you think, you stuffy little human fool sitting in a chair and wearing lambs-wool underwear and eating your mutton and beef under the Christmas decoration, do you think then that Amon, Mithras, Mistletoe, and the whole Tree of Life were just invented to contribute to your complacency?

You fool! You dyspeptic fool, with your indigestion tablets! You can eat your mutton and your beef, and by sixpenn'orth of the golden bough, till your belly turns sour, you fool. Do you think, because you keep a fat castrated cat, the moon is upon your knees? Do you think, in your woolen underwear, you are clothed in the might of Amon?

You idiot! You cheap-jack idiot!

Was not the ram created before you were, you twaddler? Did he not come in night out of chaos? And is he not still clothed in might? To you, he is mutton. Your wonderful perspicacity relates you to him just that far. But any farther, he is — well, wool.

Don't you see, idiot and fool, that you have *lost* the ram out of your life entirely, and it is one great connection gone, one great life-flow broken? Don't you see you are so much the emptier, mutton-stuffed and wool-wadded, but lifeless, lifeless.

And the oak-tree, the slow great oak-tree, isn't he alive? Doesn't he live where you don't live, with a vast silence you shall never, never penetrate, though you chop him into kindling shred from shred? He is alive with life such as you have

not got and will never have. And in so far as he is a vast, powerful, silent life, you should worship him.

You should seek a living relation with him. Didn't the old Englishman have a living, vital relation to the oak-tree, a *mystic* relation? Yes, mystic! Didn't the red-faced old Admirals who *made* England, have a living relation in *sacredness*, with the oak-tree which was their ship, their ark? The last living vibration and power in pure connection, between man and tree, coming down from the Druids.

And all you can do now is to twiddle-twaddle about golden boughs, because you are empty, empty, empty, hollow, deficient, and cardboardy.

Do you think the tree is not, now and for ever, sacred and fearsome? The trees have turned against you, fools, and you are running in imbecility to your own destruction.

Do you think the bull is at your disposal, you zenith of creation? Why, I tell you, the blood of the bull is indeed your poison. Your veins are bursting, with beef. You may well turn vegetarian. But even milk is bull's blood: or Hathor's.

My cow Susan is at my disposal indeed. But when I see her suddenly emerging, jet-black, sliding through the gate of her little corral into the open sun, does not my heart stand still, and cry out, in some long-forgotten tongue, salutation to the fearsome one? Is not even now my life widened and deepened in connection with her life, throbbing with the other pulse, of the bull's blood?

Is not this my life, this throbbing of the bull's blood in my blood?

And as the white cock calls in the doorway, who calls? Merely a barnyard rooster, worth a dollar-and-a-half. But listen! Under the old dawns of creation the Holy Ghost, the Mediator, shouts aloud in the twilight. And every time I hear him, a fountain of vitality gushes up in my body. It is life.

So it is! Degree after degree after degree widens out the relation between man and his universe, till it reaches the sun, and the night.

The impulse of existence, of course, is to *devour* all the lower orders of life. So man now looks upon the white cock, the cow, the ram, as good to eat.

But *living* and having *being* means the relatedness between me and all things. In so far as I am I, a being who is proud and in place, I have a connection with my circumambient universe, and I know my place. When the white cock crows, I do not hear myself, or some anthropomorphic conceit, crowing. I hear the not-me, the voice of the Holy Ghost. And when I see the hard, solid, longish green cones thrusting up at blue heaven from the high bluish tips of the balsam pine, I say: "Behold! Look at the strong, fertile silence of the thrusting tree! God is in the bush like a clenched dark fist, or a thrust phallus."

So it is with every natural thing. It has a vital relation with all other natural things. Only the machine is absolved from vital relation. It is based on the

mystery of neuters. The neutralising of one great natural force against another, makes mechanical power. Makes the engine's wheels go round.

Does the earth go round like a wheel, in the same way? No! In the living, balanced, hovering flight of the earth, there is a strange leaning, an unstatic equilibrium, a balance that is non-balance. This is owing to the relativity of earth, moon, and sun, a vital, even sentient relatedness, never perpendicular: nothing neutral or neuter.

Every natural thing has its own living relation to every other natural thing. So the tiger, striped in gold and black, lies and stretches his limbs in perfection between all that the day is, and all that is night. He has a by-the-way relatedness with trees, soil, water, man, cobras, deer, ants, and of course, the she-tiger. Of all these he is reckless as Cassar was. When he stretches himself superbly, he stretches himself between the living day and the living night, the vast inexhaustible duality of creation. And he is the fanged and brindled Holy Ghost, with ice-shining whiskers.

The same with man. His life consists in a relation with all things: stone, earth, trees, flowers, water, insects, fishes, birds, creatures, sun, rainbow, children, women, other men. But his greatest and final relation is with the sun, the sun of suns: and with the night, which is moon and dark and stars. In the last great connections, he lifts his body speechless to the sun, and, the same body, but so different, to the moon and the stars, and the spaces between the stars.

Sun! Yes, the actual sun! That which blazes in the day! Which scientists call a sphere of blazing gas — what a lot of human gas there is, which has never been set ablaze! — and which the Greeks call Helios!

The sun, I tell you, is alive, and more alive than I am, or a tree is. It may have blazing gas, as I have hair, and a tree has leaves. But I tell you, it is the Holy Ghost in full raiment, shaking and walking, and alive as a tiger is, only more so, in the sky.

And when I can turn my body to the sun, and say: "Sun! Sun!" and we meet — then I am come finally into my own. For the universe of day, finally, is the sun. And when the day of the sun is my day too, I am a lord of all the world.

And at night, when the silence of the moon, and the stars, and the spaces between the stars, is the silence of me too, then I am come into my own by night. For night is a vast untellable life, and the Holy Ghost starry, beheld as we only behold night on earth.

In his ultimate and surpassing relation, man is given only to that which he can never describe or account for; the sun, as it is alive, and the living night.

A man's supreme moment of active life is when he looks up and is with the sun, and is with the sun as a woman is with child. The actual yellow sun of

morning.

This makes man a lord, an aristocrat of life.

And the supreme moment of quiescent life is when a man looks up into the night, and is gone into the night, so the night is like a woman with child, bearing him. And this, a man has to himself.

The true aristocrat is the man who has passed all the relationships and has met the sun, and the sun is with him as a diadem.

Cassar was like this. He passed through the great relationships, with ruthlessness, and came to the sun. And he became a sun-man. But he was too unconscious. He was not aware that the sun for ever was beyond him, and that only in his *relation* to the sun was he deified. He wanted to be God.

Alexander was wiser. He placed himself a god among men. But when blood flowed from a wound in him, he said, 'Look! It is the blood of a man like other men.'

The sun makes man a lord: an aristocrat: almost a deity. But in his consummation with night and the moon, man knows for ever his own passing away.

But no man is man in all his splendour till he passes further than every relationship: further than mankind and womankind, in the last leap to the sun, to the night. The man who can touch both sun and night, as the woman touched the garment of Jesus, becomes a lord and a saviour, in his own kind. With the sun he has his final and ultimate relationship, beyond man or woman, or anything human or created. And in this final relation is he most intensely alive, surpassing.

Every creature at its zenith surpasses creation and is alone in the face of the sun, and the night: the sun that lives, and the night that lives and survives. Then we pass beyond every other relationship, and every other relationship, even the intensest passion of love, sinks into subordination and obscurity. Indeed, every relationship, even that of purest love, is only an approach nearer and nearer, to a man's last consummation with the sun, with the moon or night. And in the consummation with the sun, even love is left behind.

He who has the sun in his face, in his body, he is the pure aristocrat. He who has the sun in his breast, and the moon in his belly, he is the first: the aristocrat of aristocrats, supreme in the aristocracy of life.

Because he is *most alive*.

Being alive constitutes an aristocracy which there is no getting beyond. He who is most alive, intrinsically, is King, whether men admit it or not. In the face of the sun.

Life rises in circles, in degrees. The most living is the highest. And the lower

shall serve the higher, if there is to be any life among men.

More life! More *vivid* life! Not more safe cabbages, or meaningless masses of people.

Perhaps Dostoevsky was more vividly alive than Plato: culminating a more vivid life circle, and giving the clue towards a higher circle still. But the clue *hidden*, as it always is hidden, in every revelation, underneath what is stated.

All creation contributes, and must contribute to this: towards the achieving of a vaster, vivid cycle of life. That is the goal of living. He who gets nearer the sun is leader, the aristocrat of aristocrats. Or he who, like Dostoevsky, gets nearest the moon of our not-being.

There is, of course, the power of mere conservatism and inertia. Deserts made the cactus thorny. But the cactus still is a rose of roses.

Whereas a sort of cowardice made the porcupine spiny. There is a difference between the cowardice of inertia, which now governs the democratic masses, particularly the capitalist masses: and the conservative fighting spirit which saved the cactus in the middle of the desert.

The democratic mass, capitalist and proletariat alike, are a vast, sluggish, ghastly greedy porcupine, lumbering with inertia. Even Bolshevism is the same porcupine: nothing but greed and inertia.

The cactus had a rose to fight for But what has democracy to fight for, against the living elements, except money, money, money!

The world is stuck solid inside an achieved form, and bristling with a myriad spines, to protect its hulking body as it feeds: gnawing the bark of the young tree of Life, and killing it from the top downwards. Leaving its spines to fester and fester in the nose of the gay dog.

The actual porcupine, in spite of legend, cannot shoot its quills. But mankind, the porcupine out-pigging the porcupine, can stick quills into the face of the sun.

Bah! Enough of the squalor of democratic humanity. It is time to begin to recognize the aristocracy of the sun. The children of the sun shall be lords of the earth.

There will form a new aristocracy, irrespective of nationality, of men who have reached the sun. Men of the sun, whether Chinese or Hottentot, or Nordic, or Hindu, or Esquimo, if they touch the sun in the heavens, are lords of the earth. And together they will form the aristocracy of the world. And in the coming era they will rule the world; a confraternity of the living sun, making the embers of financial internationalism and industrial internationalism pale upon the hearth of the earth.

A PROPOS OF LADY CHATTERLEY'S LOVER



Lawrence wrote this pamphlet to defend his 'infamous' novel in 1929.

Love is the happiness of the world. But happiness is not the whole of fulfillment. Love is a coming together. But there can be no coming together without an equivalent going asunder. In love, all things unite in a oneness of joy and praise. But they could not unite unless they were previously apart. And, having united in a whole circle of unity, they can go no further in love. The motion of love, like a tide, is fulfilled in this instance; there must be an ebb.

So that the coming together depends on the going apart; they systole depends on the diastole; the flow depends upon the ebb. There can never be love universal and unbroken. The sea can never rise to high tide over all the globe at once. The undisputed reign of love can never be.

Because love is strictly a traveling. 'It is better to travel than to arrive', somebody has said. This is the essence of unbelief. It is a belief in absolute love, when love is by nature relative. It is a belief in the means, but not in the end. It is strictly a belief in force, for love is a unifying force.

How shall we believe in force? Force is instrumental and functional; it is neither a beginning nor an end. We travel in order to arrive; we do not travel in order to travel. At least, such traveling is mere futility. We travel in order to arrive.

And love is a traveling, a motion, a speed of coming together. Love is the force of creation, but all force, spiritual or physical, has its polarity, its positive and its negative. All things that fall, fall by gravitation to the earth. But has not the earth, in the opposite of gravitation, cast off the moon and held her at bay in our heavens during all the aeons of time?

So with love. Love is the hastening gravitation of spirit towards spirit, and body towards body, in the joy creation. But if all be united in one bond of love, then there is no more love. And therefore, for those who are in love with love, to travel is better than to arrive. For in arriving one passes beyond love, or, rather, one encompasses love in a new transcendence. To arrive is the supreme joy after all our traveling.

The bond of love! What worse bondage can we conceive than the bond of love? It is an attempt to wall in the high tide; it is a will to arrest the spring, never to let May dissolve into June, never to let the hawthorn petal fall for the

berrying.

This has been our idea of immortality, this infinite of love, love universal and triumphant. And what is this but a prison and a bondage? What is eternity but the endless passage of time? What is infinity but an endless progressing through space? Eternity, infinity, our great ideas of rest and arrival, what are they but ideas of less traveling through space; no more, however we try to argue it. And immortality, what is it, in our idea, but an endless continuing in the same sort? A continuing, a living for ever, a lasting and enduring for ever-what is this but traveling? An assumption into heaven, a becoming one with God-what is the infinite on arrival? The infinite is no arrival. When we come to find exactly what we mean by God, by the infinite, by our immortality, it is a meaning of endless continuing in the same line and in the same sort, endless traveling in one direction. This is infinity, endless traveling in one direction. And the God of Love is our idea of the progression *ad infinitum* of the force of love. Infinity is no arrival. It is as much a cul-de-sac as is the bottomless pit. And what is the infinity of love but a cul-de-sac or a bottomless pit?

Love is a progression towards the goal. Therefore it is a progression away from the opposite goal. Love travels heavenwards. What then does love depart from? Hellwards, what is there? Love is at last a positive infinite. What then is the negative infinite? Positive and negative infinite are the same, since there is only one infinite. How will it matter if we travel heavenwards, *ad infinitum*, or in the opposite direction, to infinity? Since the infinity abstained is the same in either case, the infinite of pure homogeneity, which is nothingness, or everythingness, it does not matter which.

Infinity, the infinite, is no goal. It is a cul-de-sac, or, in another sense, it is the bottomless pit. To fall down the bottomless pit is to travel for ever. And a pleasant-walled cul-de-sac may be a perfect heaven. But to arrive in a sheltered, paradisiacal cul-de-sac of peace and unblemished happiness, this will not satisfy us. And to fall for ever down the bottomless pit of progression, this will not do either.

Love is not a goal; it is only a traveling. Likewise death is not a goal; it is a traveling asunder into elemental chaos. And from the elemental chaos all is cast forth again into creation. Therefore death also is but a cul-de-sac, a meltingpot.

There is a goal, but the goal is neither love nor death. It is a goal neither infinite nor eternal. It is the realm of calm delight, it is the other-kingdom of bliss. We are like a rose, which is a miracle of pure centrality, pure absolved equilibrium. Balanced in perfection in the midst of time of time and space, the rose is perfect in the realm of perfection, neither temporal, but absolved by the quality of perfection, pure immanence of absolution.

We are creatures of time and space. But we are like a rose; we accomplish perfection, we arrive in the absolute. We are creatures of time and space, perfection in the realm of the absolute, the other-world of bliss.

And love, love is encompassed and surpassed. Love always has been encompassed and surpassed by the fine lovers. We are like a rose, a perfect arrival.

Love is manifold, it is not of one sort only. There is the love between man and woman, sacred and profane. There is Christian love, 'thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.' And there is the love of God. But always love is a joining together.

Only in the conjunction of man and woman has love kept a duality of meaning. Sacred love and profane love, they are opposed, and yet they are both love. The love between man and woman is the greatest and most complete passion the world will ever see, because it is dual, because it is of two opposing kinds. The love between man and woman is the perfect heart-beat of life, systole, diastole.

Sacred love is selfless, seeking not its own. The lover serves his beloved and seeks perfect communion of oneness with her. But whole love between man and woman is sacred and profane together. Profane love seeks its own. I seek my own in the beloved, I wrestle with her to wrest it from her. We are not clear, we are mixed and mingled. I am in the beloved also, and she is in me. Which should not be, for this is confusion and chaos. Therefore I will gather myself complete and free from the beloved, she shall single herself out in utter contradistinction to me. There is twilight in our souls, neither light nor dark. The light must draw itself together in purity, the dark must stand on the other hand; they must be two complete in opposition, neither one partaking of the other, but each single in its own stead.

We are like a rose. In the pure passion for oneness, in the pure passion for distinctness and separateness, a dual passion of unutterable separation and lovely conjunction of the two, the new configuration takes place, the transcendence, the two in their perfect singleness, transported into one surpassing heaven of a rose blossom.

But the love between a man and woman, when it is whole, is dual. It is the melting into pure communion, and it is the friction of sheer sensuality, both. In pure communion I become whole in love. And in pure, fierce passion of sensuality I am burned into essentiality. I am driven from the matrix into sheer separate distinction. I become my single self, inviolable and unique, as the gems were perhaps once driven into themselves out of the confusion of earths. The woman and I, we are the confusion of earths. Then in the fire of their extreme

sensual love, in the friction of intense, destructive flame, I am destroyed and reduced to her essential otherness. It is a destructive fire, the profane love. But it is the only fire that will purify us into singleness, fuse us from the chaos into our won unique gemlike separateness of being.

All whole love between man and woman is thus dual, a love which is the motion of melting, fusing together into oneness, and a love which is the intense, frictional, and sensual gratification of being burnt down, burnt apart into separate clarity of being, unthinkable otherness and separateness. But not all love between man and woman is whole. It may be all gentle, the merging into oneness, like St Francis and St Clare, or Mary of Bethany and Jesus. There may be no separateness discovered, no singleness won, no unique otherness admitted. This is a half love, what is called sacred love. And this is the love which knows the purest happiness. On the other hand, the love may be all a lovely battle of sensual gratification, the beautiful but deadly counterposing of male against female, *as Tristan and Isoled*. These are the lovers that top the sum of pride, they go with the grandest banners they are the gemlike beings, he pure male singled and separated out in superb jewel-like isolation of arrogant manhood, she purely woman, a lily balanced in rocking pride of beauty and perfume of womanhood. This is the profane love, that ends in flamboyant and lacerating tragedy when the two which are so singled out are torn finally apart by death. But if profane love ends in piercing tragedy, none the less the sacred love ends in a poignant yearning and exquisite submissive grief. St Francis dies and leaves St Clare to her pure sorrow.

There must be two in one, always two in one—the sweet love of communion and the fierce, proud love of sensual fulfillment, both together in one love. And then we are like a rose. We surpass even love, love is encompassed and surpassed. We are two who have a pure connexion. We are two, isolated like gems in our unthinkable otherness. But the rose contains and transcends us, we are one rose, beyond.

Now sex and beauty are one thing, like flame and fire. If you hate sex you hate beauty. If you love living beauty, you have a reverence for sex. Of course you can love old, dead beauty and hate sex. But to love living beauty you must have a reverence for sex.

Sex and beauty are inseparable, like life and consciousness. And the intelligence which goes with sex and beauty, and arises out of sex and beauty, is intuition.

Sex is the root of which intuition is the foliage and beauty the flower. Why is a woman lovely, if ever, in her twenties? It is the time when sex rises softly to her face, as a rose to the top of a rose bush.

And the appeal is the appeal of beauty. We deny it wherever we can. We try to make the beauty as shallow and trashy as possible. But, first and foremost, sex appeal is the appeal of beauty.

Beauty is an experience, nothing else. It is not a fixed pattern or an arrangement of features. It is something felt, a glow or a communicated sense of fineness. What ails us is that our sense of beauty is so bruised and blunted, we miss all the best.

What sex is, we don't know, but it must be some sort of fire. For it always communicates a sense of warmth, of glow. And when the glow becomes a pure shine, then we feel the sense of beauty.

But while we are fully alive, the fire of sex smoulders or burns in us. In youth it flickers and shines; in age it glows softer and stiller, but there it is. We have some control over it; but only partial control. That is why society hates it.

Handsome, good-looking, but not lovely, not beautiful. Handsome and good-looking women are the women with good features and the right hairs. But a lovely woman is an experience. It is a question of communicated fire. It is a question of sex appeal in our poor, dilapidated modern phraseology.

One may be at war with society, and with man, and still keep one's deep peace with mankind. It is not pleasant to be at war with society, but sometimes it is the only way of preserving one's peace of soul, which is peace with the living, struggling, real mankind. And this latter one cannot afford to lose.

The result of forcing any feeling is the death of that feeling, and the substitution of some sort of opposite. Whitman insisted on sympathizing with everything and everybody: so much so, that he came to believe in death only, not just his own death, but the death of all people.

As matter of fact, the young are becoming afraid of their own emptiness. It's awful fun throwing things out of window. But when you've thrown everything out, and you've spent two or three days sitting on the bare floor, your bones begin to ache, and you begin to wish for some of the old furniture, even if it was the ugliest Victorian horsehair.

At least, that's how it seems to me the young women begin to feel. They are frightened at the emptiness of their house of life, now they've thrown everything out of the window. Their young Philips and Peters and so on don't seem to make the slightest move to put any new introduce is a cocktail-shaker and perhaps a wireless set. For the rest, it can stay blank.

And the young women begin to feel a little uneasy. Women don't like to feel empty. A woman hates to feel that she believes in nothing and stands for nothing. Let her be the silliest woman on earth, she will take something seriously: her appearance, her clothes, her house, something. And let her be not

so very silly, and she wants more than that. She wants to feel, instinctively, that she amounts to something and that her life stands for something. Women, who so often are angry with men because men cannot 'just live', but must always be wanting some purpose in life. It seems to me that in a woman the need to feel that her life means something, stands for something, and amounts to something is much more imperative than in a man. The woman herself may deny it emphatically; because, of course, it is the man's business to supply her life with this 'purpose'. But a man can be tramp, purposeless, and be happy. Not so a woman. It is a very, very rare woman who can be happy if she feels herself 'outside' the great purpose of life. Whereas, I verily believe, vast numbers of men would gladly drift away as wasters, if there were anywhere to drift to.

A woman cannot bear to feel empty and purposeless. But a man may take a real pleasure in that feeling. A man can take real pride and satisfaction in pure negation: 'I am quite empty of feeling, I don't care the slightest bit in the world for anybody or anything except myself. But I do care for myself, and I'm going to survive in spite of them all, and I'm going to have my own success without caring the least they are, even if I'm weak. I must build myself proper protections, and entrench myself, and then I'm safe. I can sit inside my glass tower and feel nothing and be touched by nothing, and yet exert my power, my will, through the glass walls of my ego.'

That, roughly, is the condition of a man who accepts the condition of true egoism, and emptiness, in himself. He has a certain pride in the condition, since in pure emptiness of real feeling he can still carry out his ambition, his will to egoistic success.

Now I doubt if any woman can feel like this. The most egoistic woman is always in a tangle of hate, if not of love. But the true male egoist neither hates nor loves, he is quite empty, at the middle of him. Only on the surface he has feelings: and these he is always trying to get away from. Inwardly, he feels nothing. And when he feels nothing, he exults in his ego and knows he is safe. Safe, within his fortifications, inside his glass tower.

But I doubt if women can even understand this condition in a man. They mistake the emptiness for depth. They think the false calm of the egoist who really feels nothing, is strength. And they imagine that all the defences which the confirmed egoist throws up, the glass tower of imperviousness, are screens to a real man, a positive being. And they throw themselves madly on the defences, to tear them down and come at the real man, little knowing that there is no real man, the defences are only there to protect a hollow emptiness, an egoism, not a human man.

But the young are beginning to suspect. The young women are beginning to

respect the defences, for they are more afraid of coming upon the ultimate nothingness of the egoist, than of leaving him undiscovered. Hollowness, nothingness-it frightens the woman. They cannot be real nihilists. But men can. Men can have a savage of sheer negative emptiness, when there is nothing left to throw out of the window, and the window is sealed.

Women wanted freedom. The result is a hollowness, an emptiness which frightens the stoutest heart. Women then turn to women for love. But that doesn't last. It can't. whereas the emptiness persists and persists.

The love of humanity is gone, leaving a great gap. The cosmic consciousness has collapsed upon a great void. The egoist sits grinning furtively in the triumph of his own emptiness. And now what is woman going to do? Now that the house of life is empty, now that she's thrown all the emotional furnishing out of the window, and the house of life, which is her eternal home, is empty as a tomb, now what is dear forlorn woman going to do?

"To me, dancing," said Romeo, "is just making love to music."

"That's why you never will dance with me, I suppose," relied Juliet.

"Well, you know, you are a bit too much of an individual."

And really, surely this is all to the good. If the young don't really like copulation, then they are safe. As for marriage, they will marry, according to their grandmothers' dream, for quite other reasons. Our grandfathers, or great-grandmothers, married crudely and unmusically, for copulation. That was the actuality. So the dream was all of music. The dream was the mating of two souls, to the faint chiming of the Seraphim. We, the third and fourth generation, we are the dream made flesh. They dreamed of a marriage with all things gross-meaning especially copulation-left out, and only the pure harmony of equality and intimate companionship remaining. And the young live out the dream. They marry: they copulate in a perfunctory and halfdisgusted fashion, merely to show they can do it. And so they have children. But the marriage is made to music, the gramophone and the wireless orchestrate each small domestic art, and keep up the jazzing jig of connubial felicity, a felicity of companionship, equality, forbearance, and mutual sharing of everything the married couple have in common. Marriage set to music! The worn-out old serpent in this musical Eden of domesticity is the last, feeble instinct for copulation, which drives the married couple to clash upon the boring organic differences in one another, and prevents them from being twin souls in almost identical bodies. But we are wise and soon learn to leave the humiliating act out altogether. It is the only wisdom.

To the music one should dance, and dancing, dance. The Etruscan young woman is going gaily at it, after two thousand five hundred years. She is not making love to music, nor is the dark-limbed youth, her partner. She is just

dancing her very soul into existence, having made an offering on one hand to the lively phallus of man, on the other hand, to the shut womb-symbol of woman, and put herself on real good terms with both of them. So she is quite serene, and dancing herself as a very fountain of motion and of life, young man opposite her dancing himself the same, in contrast and balance, with just the double flute to whistle round their naked heels.

And I believe this is, or will be, the dream of our pathetic, music-stunned young girl of today, and the substance of her children's children, unto the third and fourth generation.

The real trouble about women is that they must always go on trying to adapt themselves to men's theories of women, as they always have done. When a woman is thoroughly herself, she is being what her type of man wants her to be. When a woman is hysterical it's because she doesn't quite know what to be, which pattern to follow, which man's picture of woman to live up to.

For, of course, just as there are many men in the world, there are many masculine theories of what women should be. But men run to type, and it is the type, not the individual, that produces the theory, or 'ideal' of woman. Those very grasping gentry, the Romans, produced a theory or ideal of the matron, which fitted in very nicely with the Roman property lust. 'Caesar's wife should be above suspicion.' – So Caesar's wife kindly proceeded to be above it, no matter how far below it the Caesar fell. Later gentlemen like Nero produced the 'fast theory of woman, and later ladies were fast enough for everybody. Dante arrived with a chaste and untouched Beatrice, and chaste and untouched Beatrices began to march self-importantly through the centuries. The Renaissance discovered the learned woman, and learned women buzzed mildly into verse and prose. Dickens invented the child-wife, so child-wives have swarmed ever since. He also fished out his version of the chaste Beatrice, a chaste but marriageable Agnes. George Eliot imitated this pattern, and it became confirmed. The noble woman, the pure spouse, the devoted mother took the field, and was simply worked to death. Our own poor mothers were this sort. So we younger men, having been a bit frightened of our noble mothers, tended to revert to the child-wife. We weren't very inventive. Only the child-wife must be a boyish little thing-that was the new touch we added. Because young men are definitely frightened of the real female. She's too risky a quantity. She is too untidy, like David's Dora. No, let her be a boyish little thing, it's safer. So a boyish little thing she is.'

There are, of course, other types. Capable men produce the capable woman ideal. Doctors produce the capable nurse. Business the capable secretary. And so

you get all sorts. You can produce the masculine sense of honour in women, if you want to. There is also the eternal secret ideal of men-the prostitute. Lots of women live up to this idea, just because men want them to.

And so, poor woman, destiny makes away with her. It isn't that she hasn't got a mind-she has. She's got everything that man has. The only difference is that she asks for a pattern. Give me a pattern to follow! That will always be woman's cry. Unless of course she has already chosen her pattern quite young, then she will declare she is herself absolute, and no man's idea of women has any influence over her.

Now the real tragedy is not that women ask and must ask for a pattern of womanhood. The tragedy is not, even, that men give them such abominable patterns, child-wives, little-boy- baby= face girls, perfect secretaries, noble spouses, self-sacrificing mothers, pure women who bring forth children in virgin coldness, prostitutes who just make themselves low, to please men; all the atrocious patterns of womanhood that men have supplied to woman; patterns all perverted from any real natural fullness of a human being. Man is willing to accept woman as an equal, as a man in skirts, as an angel, a devil, a baby-face, a machine, an instrument, a bosom, a womb, a pair of legs, a servant, an encyclopedia, an ideal, or an obscenity; the one thing he won't accept her as, is a human being, a real human being of the feminine sex.

And, of course, women love living up to strange pattern, weird patterns-the more uncanny the better. What could be more uncanny than the present pattern of the Eton-boy girl with flower-like artificial complexion? It is just weird. And for its very weirdness women like living up to it. what can be more gruesome than the little-boy- face pattern? Yet the girls take it on the avidity.

What a man has to do to-day is to admit, at last, that all these fixed ideas are no good. As a fixed object, even as an individuality or a personality, no human being, so they may as well leave it alone. As soon as anybody, a man or woman, becomes a great I AM, he becomes nothing. Man or woman, each is a flow, a flowing life. And without one another, we can't flow , just as a river cannot flow without banks. A woman is one bank of the river of my life, and the world is the other. Without the two shores, my life would be a marsh. It is the relationship to woman, and to my fellow men, which makes me myself a river of life. And it is this, even, that gives me my soul. A man who has never had a vital relationship to any other human being doesn't really have a soul. We cannot feel that Immanuel Kant ever had a soul. A soul is something that forms and fulfills itself in my contacts, my living touch with people I have loved or hated or truly know. I am born with the clew to my soul. The wholeness of my soul I must achieve. And by my soul I mean my wholeness. What we suffer from today is the lack of

a sense of our own wholeness, or completeness, which is peace. What we lack, what the young lack, is a sense of being whole in themselves. They feel so scrappy, they have no peace. And by peace I don't mean inertia, but the flowing of life, like a river.

We lack peace because we are not whole. And we are not whole because we have known only a tittle of the vital relationships we might have had, we live in an age which believes in stripping away the relationship. Strip them away, like an onion, till you come to pure, or blank nothingness. Emptiness. That is where most men have come now: to a knowledge of their own complete emptiness. They wanted so badly to be 'themselves' that they became nothing at all: or next to nothing.

It is not much fun, being next to nothing. And life ought to be fun, the greatest fun, not merely 'having a good time,' in order to 'get away from yourself.' But real fun in being yourself. Now there are two great relationships possible to human beings: the relationship of man to woman, and the relationship of man to man. As regards both, we are in a hopeless mess.

And what is sex, after all, but the symbol of the relation of man to woman, woman to man? And the relation of man to woman is wide as all life. It consists in infinite different flows between the two beings, different, even apparently contrary. Chastity is part of the flow between man and woman, as to physical passion. And beyond these, an infinite range of subtle communication which we know nothing about. I should say that the relation between any two decently married people changes profoundly every few years, often without their knowing anything about it; though every change causes pain, even if it brings a certain joy. The long course of marriage is a long event perpetual change, in which a man and a woman mutually build up their souls and make themselves whole. It is like rivers flowing on, though new country, always unknown.

But we are so foolish, and fixed by our limited ideas. A man says: 'I don't love my wife any more, I no longer want to sleep with her.' But why should he always want to sleep with her? How does he know what other subtle and vital interchange is going on between him and her, making them both whole, in this period when he doesn't want to sleep with her? And she, instead of jibbing and saying that all is over and she must find another man and get a divorce-why doesn't she pause, and listen for a new rhythm in her soul, and look for the new movement in the man? with every change, a new being emerges, a new rhythm,

establishes itself; we renew our life as we grow older, and there is real peace. Why oh, why do we want one another to be always the same, fixed, like a menu card that is never changed?

If only we had more sense. But we are held by a few fixed ideas, like sex, money, what a person "ought" to be, and so forth, and we miss the whole of life. Sex is a changing thing, now alive, now quiescent, fiery, now apparently quite gone, quite gone. But the ordinary man and woman haven't the gumption to take it in all its changes. They demand crass, crude sex-desire, they demand it always, and when it isn't forthcoming, then-smash- bash! Smash up the whole show. Divorce! Divorce!

However! We take it, I assume, that pornography is something base, something unpleasant. In short, we don't like it. and why don't we like it? Because it arouses sexual feelings?

I think not. No matter how hard we may pretend otherwise, most of us rather like a moderate rousing of our sex. It warms us, stimulates us like sunshine on a grey day. After a century or two of Puritanism, this is still true of most people. Only the mob-habit of condemning any form of sex is too strong to let us admit it naturally. And there are, of course, many people who are genuinely repelled by the simplest and most natural stirrings of sexual feeling. But these people are perverts who have fallen into hatred of their fellow men: thwarted, disappointed, unfulfilled people, of whom, alas, our civilization contains so many. And they nearly always enjoy some unsimple and unnatural form of sex excitement, secretly.

The whole question of pornography seems to me a question of secrecy. Without secrecy there would be no pornography. But secrecy and modesty are two utterly different things. Secrecy has always an element of fear in it, amounting very often to hate. Modesty is gentle and reserved. Today, modesty is thrown to the wind, even in the presence of the grey guardians. But secrecy is hugged, being a vice in itself. And the attitude of the grey ones is: Dear young ladies, you may abandon all modesty, so long as you hug your dirty little secret.

This 'dirty little secret' has become infinitely precious to the mob of people today. It is a kind of hidden sore or inflammation which, when rubbed or scratched, gives off sharp thrills that seem delicious. So the dirty little secret is rubbed and scratched more and more, till it becomes more and more secretly inflamed, and the nervous and psychic health of the individual is more and more impaired. One might easily say that half the love novels and half the love films today depend entirely for their success on the secret rubbing of the dirty little

secret. You can call this sex excitement if you like, but it is sex excitement of a secretive, furtive sort, quite special. The plain and simple excitement, quite open and wholesome, which you find in some Boccaccio stories is not for a minute to be confused with the furtive excitement aroused by rubbing the dirty little secret in all secrecy in modern best-sellers. This furtive, sneaking, cunning rubbing of an inflamed spot in the imagination is the very quick of modern pornography, and it is a beastly and very dangerous thing. You can't so easily expose it, because of its very furtiveness and its sneaking cunning. So the cheap and popular modern love novel and love film flourishes and is even praised by moral guardians, because you get the snaking thrill fumbling under all the purity of dainty underclothes, without one single gross word to let you know what is happening.

Then secondly, in his adventure of self-consciousness a man must come to the limits of himself and become aware of something beyond him. A man must be self-conscious enough to know his own limits, and to be aware of that which surpasses him. What surpasses me is the very urge of life that is within me, and this life urges me to forge myself and to yield to the stirring half-born impulse to smash up the vast lie of the world, and make a new world. If my life is merely to go on in a vicious circle of self enclosure, masturbation self-consciousness, it is worth nothing to me. If my individual life is to be enclosed within the huge corrupt lie of society today, purity and the dirty little secret, then it is worth not much to me. Freedom is a very great reality. But it means, above all things, freedom from lies. It is first, freedom from lies. It is first, freedom from myself, from the lie of myself, from the lie of my all importance, even to myself; it is freedom from the self-conscious masturbating thing I am, self-enclosed. And second, freedom from the vast lie of the social world, the lie of purity and the dirty little secret. And the other monstrous lies under the cloak of this one primary lie. The monstrous lie of money lurks under the cloak of purity. Kill the purity lie, and the money lie will be defenceless.

And that is the whole point. We are today, as today, as human beings, evolved and cultured for far beyond the taboos which are inherent in our culture. This is a very important fact to realize. Probably, to the Crusaders, mere words were potent and evocative to a degree we can't realize. The evocative power of the so-called obscene words must have been very dangerous to the dim-minded, obscure, violent natures of the Middle Ages, and perhaps is still too strong for slow-minded, half-evoked lower today. But real culture makes us give to a word only those mental and imaginative reactions which belong to the mind, and savers us from violent and indiscriminate physical functions, without getting all messed up with physical reactions that overpowered him. It is no longer so.

Culture and civilization have taught us to separate the reactions. We now know the act does not necessarily follow on the thought. In fact, thought and action, word and deed, are two separate forms of consciousness, two separate lives which we lead. We need, very sincerely, to keep a connection. But while we in thought we cannot really act, and while we are in action we cannot really think. The two conditions, of thought and action, are mutually exclusive. Yet they should be related in harmony.

Life is only bearable when the mind and the body are in harmony, and there is a natural balance between them, and each has a natural respect for the other.

And it is obvious, there is no balance and no harmony now. the body is at the best the tool of the mind, at the worst, the toy. The business man keeps himself 'fit,' that is, keeps his body in good working order, for the sake of his business, and the usual young person who spends much time on keeping fit does so as a rule out of self-conscious self – absorption, narcissism. The mind has a stereotyped set of ideas and 'feelings,' and the body is made to act up, like a trained dog: to beg for sugar, whether it wants sugar or whether it doesn't, to shake hands when it would dearly like to snap the hand it has to shake. The body of men and women today is just a trained dog. And of no one is this more true than of the free and emancipated young. Above all, their bodies are the bodies of trained dogs. And because the dog is trained to do things the old-fashioned dog never did, they call themselves free, full of real life, the real thing.

But they know perfectly well it is false. Just as the business man knows, somewhere, that he's all wrong. Men and women aren't really dogs: they only look like it and behave like it. somewhere inside there is a great chagrin and a gnawing discontent. The body is, in its spontaneous natural self, dead or paralysed. It has only the secondary life of a circus dog, acting up and showing off: and then collapsing.

What life could it have, of itself? the body's life is the life of sensations and emotions. The body feels real hunger, real thirst, real joy in the sun or the snow, real pleasure in the smell of roses or the look of a lilac bush; real anger, real sorrow, real love, real tenderness, real warmth, real passion, real hate, real grief. All the emotions belong to the body, and are only feel a mental excitement. Then, hours after, perhaps in sleep, the awareness may reach the bodily centres, and true grief wrings the heart.

Our education from the start has taught us a certain range of emotions, what to feel and what not to feel, and how to feel the feelings we allow ourselves to feel. All the rest is just non-existent.

But especially in love, only counterfeit, from parents exist nowadays. We have all been taught to mistrust everybody emotionally, from parents downwards, or

upwards. Don't trust anybody with your real emotions: if you've got any: that is the slogan of today. Trust them with your money, even, but never with your feelings. They are bound to trample on them.

I believe there has never been an age of greater mistrust between persons than ours today: under a superficial but quite genuine social trust. Very few of my friends would pick my pocket, or let me sit on a chair where I might hurt myself. But practically all my friends would turn my real emotions to ridicule. They can't each implies a fundamental emotional sympathy. And hence, counterfeit love, which there is no escaping.

And with counterfeit emotions there is no real sex at all. Sex is the one thing you cannot really swindle. Once come down to sex, and the emotional swindle must collapse. But in all the approaches to sex, the emotional swindle intensifies more and more. Till you get there. Then collapse.

Sex lashes out against counterfeit emotion, and is ruthless, devastating against false love. The peculiar hatred of people who have not loved one another, but who have pretended to, even perhaps have imagined they really did love, is one of the phenomena of our time. The phenomenon, of course, belongs to all time. But today it is almost universal. People who thought they loved one another dearly, dearly, and went on for years, ideal: lo! Suddenly the most profound and vivid hatred appears. If it doesn't come out fairly young, it saves itself till the happy couple are nearing fifty, the time of the great sexual change-and then-cataclysm!

Nothing is more startling. Nothing is more staggering, in our age, than the intensity of the hatred people, men and women, feel for one another when they have once 'loved' one another. It breaks out in the most extraordinary ways. And when you know people intimately, it is almost universal. It is the charwoman as much as the mistress, and the duchess as much as the policeman's wife.

Now the real tragedy is here: that we are none of us all of a piece, none of us all counterfeit, or all true love. And in many a marriage, in among the counterfeit there flickers a little flame of the true thing, on both sides. The tragedy is, that in an age peculiarly conscious of counterfeit, peculiarly suspicious of substitute and swindle in emotion, particularly sexual emotion, the rage and mistrust against the counterfeit element is likely to overwhelm and extinguish the small, true flame of real loving communion, which might have made two lives happy. Herein lies the danger of harping only on the counterfeit and the swindle of emotion, as most 'advanced' writers do. Though they do it, of course, to counterbalance the hugely greater swindle of the sentimental 'sweet' writers.

Now when brilliant young people like this talk to me about sex: or scorn to: I say nothing. There is nothing to say. But I feel a terrible weariness. To them sex

means, just plainly and simply, a lady's underclothing, and the fumbling therewith. They have read all the love literature, Anna Karenina, all the rest, and looked at to today, sex means to them meaningless young women and expensive underthings. Whether they are young men from Oxford, or working-men, it is the same.

The woman exposes her flesh more and more, and the more she exposes, the more men are sexually repelled by her. But let us not forget that the men are socially thrilled, while sexually repelled.

But we are very mixed, all of us, and creatures of many diverse and often opposing desires, the very men who encourage women to be most daring and sexless complain most bitterly of the sexlessness of women. The same the women. the women who adore men so tremendously for their social smartness and sexlessness as males, hate them most bitterly for not being 'men.' But at certain hours in their lives, all individuals hate counterfeit sex with deadly and maddened hate, and those who have dealt it out most perhaps have the wildest hate of it, in the other person-or persons.

But when women's flesh arouses no sort of desire, something is specially wrong! Something is sadly wrong. For the naked arms of women today asrouses a feeling of flippancy, cynicism,a dn vulgarity which is indeed the very last feeling to go to church with, if you have any respect for the Church. The bare arms of women in an Italian church are really a mark of disrespect, given the tradition.

Now this question of sex and marriage is of paramount importance. Our social life is established on marriage, and marriage, the sociologists say, is established upon property. Marriage has found the best-method of conserving property and stimulating production. Which is all there is to it.

For my part, I have to say NO! every time. And having said it, we have to come back and consider the famous saying, that perhaps the greatest contribution to the social life of man made by Christianity is-marriage. Christianity brought marriage into the world: marriage as we know it. Christianity established the little autonomy of the family within the greater rule of the State. Christianity made marriage in some respects inviolate, not to be violated by the State. It is marriage, perhaps, which has given man the best of his freedom, given him his little kingdom of his own within the big kingdom of the State, given him his foothold of independence on which to stand and resist an unjust State. Man and wife, a king and queen with one or two subjects, and a few square yards of territory of their own: this, really, is marriage. It is true freedom because it is a true fulfillment, for man, woman, and children.

And the Church created marriage by making it a sacrament, a sacrament of

man and woman united in the sex communion, and never to be separated, except by death. And even when separated by death, still not freedom the marriage. Marriage, as far as the individual went, eternal. Marriage, making one complete body out of two incomplete ones, and providing for the complex development of the man's soul and the woman's soul in unison, throughout a life-time. Marriage sacred and inviolable, the great way of earthly fulfillment for man and woman, in unison, under the spiritual rule of the Church.

This is Christianity's great contribution to the life of man, and it is only too easily overlooked. Is it, or is it not, a great step in the direction of life-fulfillment of man and woman, or is it a frustration? It is a very important question indeed, and every man and woman must answer it.

But supposing I am neither bent on saving my own soul nor other people's souls? Supposing Salvation seems incomprehensible to me, as I confess it does? 'being saved' seems to me just jargon, the jargon of self-conceit. Supposing, then, that I cannot see this Saviour and Salvation stuff, supposing that I see the soul as something which must be developed and fulfilled, to the very end; what then?

The rhythm of life itself was preserved by the Church hour by hour, day by day, season by season, year by year, epoch by epoch, down among the people, and the wild coruscations were accommodated to this permanent rhythm. We feel it, in the south, in the country, when we hear the jangle of the bells at dawn, at noon, at sunset, making the hours with the sound of mass or prayers. It is the rhythm of the daily sun. We feel it in the John's Day, all Saints, all Souls. This is the wheeling of the year, the movement of the sun through solstice and equinox, the coming of the seasons, the sadness of Lent, the delight of Easter, the wonder of Pentecost, the fires of St. John, the candles on the graves of All Souls, the lit-up tree of Christmas, all representing kindled rhythmic emotions in the souls of men and women. And men experience the great rhythm of emotion manwise, women experience it womanwise, and in the unison of men and women it is complete.

Augustine said that God created the universe new every day: and to the living, emotion soul this is true. Every dawn dawns upon an entirely new universe, every Easter light up an entirely new glory of a new world opening in utterly new flower. And the soul of man and the soul of woman is in the same way, with the infinite delight of life and the ever-newness of life. So a man and a woman are new to one another throughout a life-time, in the rhythm of marriage that matches the rhythm of marriage that matches the rhythm of the year.

APOCALYPSE AND THE WRITINGS ON REVELATION



First published in 1931, this is Lawrence's last book, written during the winter of 1929, when he was dying. It is a radical criticism of civilisation and a statement of the author's unwavering belief in man's power to create 'a new heaven and a new earth'. The work poses a system of thought on religion, art, psychology and politics, and has been noted as Lawrence's final attempt to convey his vision of man and the universe.



Vence, France, where Lawrence died, shortly after writing 'Apocalypse and the Writings on Revelation'

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CHAPTER I

Apocalypse means simply Revelation, though there is nothing simple about this one, since men have puzzled their brains for nearly two thousand years to find out what, exactly, is revealed in all its orgy of mystification, and of all the books in the Bible, they find Revelation perhaps the least attractive.

That is my own first feeling about it. From earliest years right into manhood, like any other nonconformist child I had the Bible poured every day into my helpless consciousness, till there came almost a saturation point. Long before one could think or even vaguely understand, this Bible language, these 'portions' of the Bible were doused over the mind and consciousness, till they became soaked in, they became an influence which affected all the processes of emotion and thought. So that today, although I have 'forgotten' my Bible, I need only begin to read a chapter to realise that I 'know' it with an almost nauseating fixity. And I must confess, my first reaction is one of dislike, repulsion, and even resentment. My very instincts resent the Bible.

The reason is now fairly plain to me. Not only was the Bible, in portions, poured into the childish consciousness day in, day out, year in, year out, willy-nilly, whether the consciousness could assimilate it or not, but also it was day in, day out, year in, year out expounded, dogmatically, and always morally expounded, whether it was in day-school or Sunday-school, at home or in Band of Hope or Christian Endeavour. The interpretation was always the same, whether it was a Doctor of Divinity in the pulpit, or the big blacksmith who was my Sunday-school teacher. Not only was the Bible verbally trodden into the consciousness, like innumerable foot-prints treading a surface hard, but the foot-prints were always mechanically alike, the interpretation was fixed, so that all real interest was lost.

The process defeats its own ends. While the Jewish poetry penetrates the emotions and the imagination, and the Jewish morality penetrates the instincts, the mind becomes stubborn, resistant, and at last repudiates the whole Bible authority, and turns with a kind of repugnance away from the Bible altogether. And this is the condition of many men of my generation.

Now a book lives as long as it is unfathomed. Once it is fathomed, it dies at once. It is an amazing thing, how utterly different a book will be, if I read it again after five years. Some books gain immensely, they are a new thing. They are so astonishingly different, they make a man question his own identity. Again,

other books lose immensely. I read War and Peace once more, and was amazed to find how little it moved me, I was almost aghast to think of the raptures I had once felt, and now felt no more.

So it is. Once a book is fathomed, once it is known, and its meaning is fixed or established, it is dead. A book only lives while it has power to move us, and move us differently; so long as we find it different every time we read it. Owing to the flood of shallow books which really are exhausted in one reading, the modern mind tends to think every book is the same, finished in one reading. But it is not so. And gradually the modern mind will realise it again. The real joy of a book lies in reading it over and over again, and always finding it different, coming upon another meaning, another level of meaning. It is, as usual, a question of values: we are so overwhelmed with quantities of books, that we hardly realise any more that a book can be valuable, valuable like a jewel, or a lovely picture, into which you can look deeper and deeper and get a more profound experience every time. It is far, far better to read one book six times, at intervals, than to read six several books. Because if a certain book can call you to read it six times, it will be a deeper and deeper experience each time, and will enrich the whole soul, emotional and mental. Whereas six books read once only are merely an accumulation of superficial interest, the burdensome accumulation of modern days, quantity without real value.

We shall now see the reading public dividing again into two groups: the vast mass, who read for amusement and for momentary interest, and the small minority, who only want the books which have value to themselves, books which yield experience, and still deeper experience.

The Bible is a book that has been temporarily killed for us, or for some of us, by having its meaning arbitrarily fixed. We know it so thoroughly, in its superficial or popular meaning, that it is dead, it gives us nothing any more. Worse still, by old habit amounting almost to instinct, it imposes on us a whole state of feeling which is now repugnant to us. We detest the 'chapel' and the Sunday-school feeling which the Bible must necessarily impose on us. We want to get rid of all that vulgarity — for vulgarity it is.

Perhaps the most detestable of all these books of the Bible, taken superficially, is Revelation. By the time I was ten, I am sure I had heard, and read, that book ten times over, even without knowing or taking real heed. And without ever knowing or thinking about it, I am sure it always roused in me a real dislike. Without realising it, I must, from earliest childhood, have detested the pie-pie mouthing, solemn, portentous, loud way in which everybody read the Bible, whether it was parsons or teachers or ordinary persons. I dislike the 'parson' voice through and through my bones. And this voice, I remember, was always at

its worst when mouthing out some portion of Revelation. Even the phrases that still fascinate me I cannot recall without shuddering, because I can still hear the portentous declamation of a nonconformist clergyman: 'And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called ' there my memory suddenly stops, deliberately blotting out the next words: 'Faithful and True.' I hated, even as a child, allegory: people having the names of mere qualities, like this somebody on a white horse, called 'Faithful and True'. In the same way I could never read Pilgrim's Progress. When as a small boy I learnt from Euclid that: 'The whole is greater than the part,' I immediately knew that that solved the problem of allegory for me. A man is more than mere Faithfulness and Truth, and when people are merely personifications of qualities they cease to be people for me. Though as a young man I almost loved Spenser and his Faerie Queene, I had to gulp at his allegory.

But the Apocalypse is, and always was from earliest childhood, to me antipathetic. In the first place its splendiferous imagery is distasteful because of its complete unnaturalness. 'And before the throne there was a sea of glass like unto crystal: and in the midst of the throne, and round about the throne, were four beasts full of eyes before and behind.

'And the first beast was like a lion, and the second beast like a calf, and the third beast had a face as a man, and the fourth beast was like a flying eagle.

And the four beasts had each of them six wings about him; and they were full of eyes within: and they rest not day and night, saying. Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come.'

A passage like that irritated and annoyed my boyish mind because of its pompous unnaturalness. If it is imagery, it is imagery which cannot be imagined: for how can four beasts be 'full of eyes before and behind', and how can they be 'in the midst of the throne, and round about the throne'? They can't be somewhere and somewhere else at the same time. But that is how the Apocalypse is.

Again, much of the imagery is utterly unpoetic and arbitrary, some of it really ugly, like all the wadings in blood, and the rider's shirt dipped in blood, and people washen in the blood of the Lamb. Also such phrases as 'the wrath of the Lamb' are on the face of them ridiculous. But this is the grand phraseology and imagery of the nonconformist chapels, all the Bethels of England and America, and all the Salvation armies. And vital religion is said to be found, in all ages, down among the uneducated people.

Down among the uneducated people you will still find Revelation rampant. I think it has had, and perhaps still has more influence, actually, than the Gospels or the great Epistles. The huge denunciation of Kings and Rulers, and of the

whore that sitteth upon the waters is entirely sympathetic to a Tuesday evening congregation of colliers and colliers' wives, on a black winter night, in the great barnlike Pentecost Chapel. And the capital letters of the name: mystery, babylon the great, the mother of harlots and abominations of the earth thrill the old colliers today as they thrilled the Scotch Puritan peasants and the more ferocious of the early Christians. To the underground early Christians, Babylon the great meant Rome, the great city and the great empire which persecuted them. And great was the satisfaction of denouncing her and bringing her to utter, utter woe and destruction, with all her kings, her wealth and her lordliness. After the Reformation, Babylon was once more identified with Rome, but this time it meant the Pope, and in Protestant and nonconformist England and Scotland out rolled the denunciations of John the Divine, with the grand cry: 'Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and is become the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird.' Nowadays the words are still mouthed out, and sometimes still they are hurled at the Pope and the Roman Catholics, who seem to be lifting their heads up again. But more often, today, Babylon means the rich and wicked people who live in luxury and harlotry somewhere in the vague distance, London, New York, or Paris worst of all, and who never once set foot in 'chapel', all their lives.

It is very nice, if you are poor and not humble — and the poor may be obsequious, but they are almost never truly humble in the Christian sense — to bring your grand enemies down to utter destruction and discomfiture, while you yourself rise up to grandeur. And nowhere does this happen so splendidly as in Revelation. The great enemy in the eyes of Jesus was the Pharisee, harping on the letter of the law. But the Pharisee is too remote and subtle for the collier and the factory-worker. The Salvation Army at the street corner rarely raves about Pharisees. It raves about the Blood of the Lamb, and Babylon, Sion, and Sinners, the great harlot, and angels that cry Woe, Woe, Woe! and Vials that pour out horrible plagues. And above all, about being Saved, and sitting on the Throne with the Lamb, and reigning in Glory, and having Everlasting Life, and living in a grand city made of jasper, with gates of pearl: a city that 'had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it'. If you listen to the Salvation Army you will hear that they are going to be very grand. Very grand indeed, since they get to heaven. Then they'll show you what's what. Then you'll be put in your place, you superior person, you Babylon: down in hell and in brimstone.

This is entirely the tone of Revelation. What we realise when we have read the precious book a few times is that John the Divine had on the face of it a grandiose scheme for wiping out and annihilating everybody who wasn't of the elect, the chosen people, in short, and of climbing up himself right on to the

throne of God. With nonconformity, the chapel people took over to themselves the Jewish idea of the chosen people. They were 'it', the elect, or the 'saved'. And they took over the Jewish idea of ultimate triumph and reign of the chosen people. From being bottom dogs they were going to be top dogs: in Heaven. If not sitting actually on the throne, they were going to sit in the lap of the enthroned Lamb. It is doctrine you can hear any night from the Salvation Army or in any Bethel or Pentecost Chapel. If it is not Jesus, it is John. If it is not Gospel, it is Revelation. It is popular religion, as distinct from thoughtful religion.

CHAPTER II

Or at least, it was popular religion when i was a boy. And I remember, as a child, I used to wonder over the curious sense of self-glory which one felt in the uneducated leaders, the men especially of the Primitive Methodist Chapels. They were not on the whole pious or mealy-mouthed or objectionable, these colliers who spoke heavy dialect and ran the 'Pentecost'. They certainly were not humble or apologetic. No, they came in from the pit and sat down to their dinners with a bang, and their wives and daughters ran to wait on them quite cheerfully, and their sons obeyed them without overmuch resentment. The home was rough yet not unpleasant, and there was an odd sense of wild mystery or power about, as if the chapel men really had some dispensation of rude power from above. Not love, but a rough and rather wild, somewhat 'special' sense of power. They were so sure, and as a rule their wives were quite humble to them. They ran a chapel, so they could run their household. I used to wonder over it, and rather enjoy it. But even I thought it rather 'common'. My mother, who was Congregationalist, never set foot in a Primitive Methodist Chapel in her life, I suppose. And she was certainly not prepared to be humble to her husband. If he'd been a real cheeky chapel man, she would no doubt have been much meeker with him. Cheek, that was the outstanding quality of chapel men. But a special kind of cheek, authorised from above, as it were. And I know now, a good deal of this special kind of religious cheek was backed up by the Apocalypse.

It was not till many years had gone by, and I had read something of comparative religion and the history of religion, that I realised what a strange book it was that had inspired the colliers on the black Tuesday nights in Pentecost or Beauvale Chapel to such a queer sense of special authority and of religious cheek. Strange marvellous black nights of the north Midlands, with the gas-light hissing in the chapel, and the roaring of the strong-voiced colliers. Popular religion: a religion of self-glorification and power, forever! and of darkness. No wailing 'Lead, kindly Light!' about it.

The longer one lives, the more one realises that there are two kinds of Christianity, the one focussed on Jesus and the Command: Love one another! — and the other focussed, not on Paul or Peter or John the Beloved, but on the Apocalypse. There is the Christianity of tenderness. But as far as I can see, it is utterly pushed aside by the Christianity of self-glorification: the self-glorification

of the humble.

There's no getting away from it, mankind falls forever into the two divisions of aristocrats and democrats. The purest aristocrats during the Christian era have taught democracy. And the purest democrats try to turn themselves into the most absolute aristocracy. Jesus was an aristocrat, so was John the Apostle, and Paul. It takes a great aristocrat to be capable of great tenderness and gentleness and unselfishness: the tenderness and gentleness of strength. From the democrat you may often get the tenderness and gentleness of weakness: that's another thing. But you usually get a sense of toughness.

We are speaking now not of political parties, but of the two sorts of human nature: those that feel themselves strong in their souls, and those that feel themselves weak. Jesus and Paul and the greater John felt themselves strong. John of Patmos felt himself weak, in his very soul.

In Jesus's day, the inwardly strong men everywhere had lost their desire to rule on earth. They wished to withdraw their strength from earthly rule and earthly power, and to apply it to another form of life. Then the weak began to rouse up and to feel inordinately conceited, they began to express their rampant hate of the 'obvious' strong ones, the men in worldly power.

So that religion, the Christian religion especially, became dual. The religion of the strong taught renunciation and love. And the religion of the weak taught Down with the strong and the powerful, and let the poor be glorified. Since there are always more weak people, than strong, in the world, the second sort of Christianity has triumphed and will triumph. If the weak are not ruled, they will rule, and there's the end of it. And the rule of the weak is Down with the strong!

The grand biblical authority for this cry is the Apocalypse. The weak and pseudo-humble are going to wipe all worldly power, glory, and riches off the face of the earth, and then they, the truly weak, are going to reign. It will be a millennium of pseudo-humble saints, and gruesome to contemplate. But it is what religion stands for today: down with all strong, free life, let the weak triumph, let the pseudo-humble reign. The religion of the self-glorification of the weak, the reign of the pseudo-humble. This is the spirit of society today, religious and political.

CHAPTER III

And this was pretty well the religion of John of Patmos. They say he was an old man already when he finished the Apocalypse in the year A.D. 96: which is the date fixed by modern scholars, from 'internal evidence'.

Now there were three Johns in early Christian history: John the Baptist, who baptised Jesus, and who apparently founded a religion, or at least a sect of his own, with strange doctrines that continued for many years after Jesus's death; then there was the Apostle John, who was supposed to have written the Fourth Gospel and some Epistles; then there was this John of Patmos who lived in Ephesus and was sent to prison on Patmos for some religious offence against the Roman State. He was, however, released from his island after a term of years, returned to Ephesus, and lived, according to legend, to a great old age.

For a long time it was thought that the Apostle John, to whom we ascribe the Fourth Gospel, had written the Apocalypse also. But it cannot be that the same man wrote the two works, they are so alien to one another. The author of the Fourth Gospel was surely a cultured 'Greek' Jew, and one of the great inspirers of mystic, 'loving' Christianity. John of Patmos must have had a very different nature. He certainly has inspired very different feelings.

When we come to read it critically and seriously, we realise that the Apocalypse reveals a profoundly important Christian doctrine which has in it none of the real Christ, none of the real Gospel, none of the creative breath of Christianity, and is nevertheless perhaps the most effectual doctrine in the Bible. That is, it has had a greater effect on second-rate people throughout the Christian ages, than any other book in the Bible. The Apocalypse of John is, as it stands, the work of a second-rate mind. It appeals intensely to second-rate minds in every country and every century.

Strangely enough, unintelligible as it is, it has no doubt been the greatest source of inspiration to the vast mass of Christian minds — the vast mass being always second rate — since the first century, and we realise, to our horror, that this is what we are up against today; not Jesus nor Paul, but John of Patmos.

The Christian doctrine of love even at its best was an evasion. Even Jesus was going to reign 'hereafter', when his 'love' would be turned into confirmed power. This business of reigning in glory hereafter went to the root of Christianity, and is, of course, only an expression of frustrated desire to reign here and now. The Jews would not be put off: they were determined to reign on

earth, so after the Temple of Jerusalem was smashed for the second time, about 200 b.c., they started in to imagine the coming of a Messiah militant and triumphant, who would conquer the world. The Christians took this up as the Second Advent of Christ, when Jesus was coming to give the gentile world its final whipping, and establish a rule of saints. John of Patmos extended this previously modest rule of saints (about forty years) to the grand round number of a thousand years, and so the Millennium took hold of the imagination of men.

And so there crept into the New Testament the grand Christian enemy, the power-spirit. At the very last moment, when the devil had been so beautifully shut out, in he slipped, dressed in apocalyptic disguise, and enthroned himself at the end of the book as Revelation.

For Revelation, be it said once and for all, is the revelation of the undying will-to-power in man, and its sanctification, its final triumph. If you have to suffer martyrdom, and if all the universe has to be destroyed in the process, still, still, still, O Christian, you shall reign as a king and set your foot on the necks of the old bosses!

This is the message of Revelation.

And just as inevitably as Jesus had to have a Judas Iscariot among his disciples, so did there have to be a Revelation in the New Testament.

Why? Because the nature of man demands it, and will always demand it.

The Christianity of Jesus applies to a part of our nature only. There is a big part to which it does not apply. And to this part, as the Salvation Army will show you, Revelation does apply.

The religions of renunciation, meditation, and self-knowledge are for individuals alone. But man is individual only in part of his nature. In another great part of him, he is collective.

The religions of renunciation, meditation, self-knowledge, pure morality are for individuals, and even then, not for complete individuals. But they express the individual side of man's nature. They isolate this side of his nature. And they cut off the other side of his nature, the collective side. The lowest stratum of society is always non-individual, so look there for the other manifestation of religion.

The religions of renunciation, like Buddhism or Christianity or Plato's philosophy, are for aristocrats, aristocrats of the spirit. The aristocrats of the spirit are to find their fulfilment in self-realisation and in service. Serve the poor. Well and good. But whom are the poor going to serve? It is a grand question. And John of Patmos answers it. The poor are going to serve themselves, and attend to their own self-glorification. And by the poor we don't mean the indigent merely; we mean the merely collective souls, terribly 'middling', who have no aristocratic singleness and alone-ness.

The vast mass are these middling souls. They have no aristocratic individuality, such as is demanded by Christ or Buddha or Plato. So they skulk in a mass and secretly are bent on their own ultimate self-glorification. The Patmoosers.

Only when he is alone, can man be a Christian, a Buddhist, or a Platonist. The Christ statues and Buddha statues witness to this. When he is with other men, instantly distinction occurs, and levels are formed. As soon as he is with other men, Jesus is an aristocrat, a master. Buddha is always the Lord Buddha. Francis of Assisi, trying to be so humble, as a matter of fact finds a subtle means to absolute power over his followers. Shelley could not bear to be the aristocrat of his company. Lenin was a Tyrannus in shabby clothes.

So it is! Power is there, and always will be. As soon as two or three men come together, especially to do something, then power comes into being, and one man is a leader, a master. It is inevitable.

Accept it, recognise the natural power in the man, as men did in the past, and give it homage, then there is a great joy, an uplifting, and a potency passes from the powerful to the less powerful. There is a stream of power. And in this, men have their best collective being, now and forever, and a corresponding flame springs up in yourself. Give homage and allegiance to a hero, and you become yourself heroic. It is the law of men. Perhaps the law of women is different.

But act on the reverse, and what happens! Deny power, and power wanes. Deny power in a greater man, and you have no power yourself. But society, now and forever, must be ruled and governed. So that the mass must grant authority where they deny power. Authority now takes the place of power, and we have 'ministers' and public officials and policemen. Then comes the grand scramble of ambition, competition, and the mass treading one another in the face, so afraid they are of power.

A man like Lenin is a great evil saint who believes in the utter destruction of power. It leaves men unutterably bare, stripped, mean, miserable, and humiliated. Abraham Lincoln is a half-evil saint who almost believes in the utter destruction of power. President Wilson is a quite evil saint who quite believes in the destruction of power — but who runs himself to megalomania and neurasthenic tyranny. Every saint becomes evil — and Lenin, Lincoln, Wilson are true saints so long as they remain purely individual; — every saint becomes evil the moment he touches the collective self of men. Then he is a perverter: Plato the same. The great saints are for the individual only, and that means, for one side of our nature only, for in the deep layers of ourselves we are collective, we can't help it. And the collective self either lives and moves and has its being in a full relationship of power: or it is reserved, and lives a frictional misery of

trying to destroy power, and destroy itself.

But nowadays, the will to destroy power is paramount. Great kings like the Tzar — we mean great in position—are rendered almost imbecile by the vast anti-will of the masses, the will to negate power. Modern kings are negated till they become almost idiots. And the same of any man in power, unless he be a power-destroyer and a white-feathered evil bird: then the mass will back him up. How can the anti-power masses, above all the great middling masses, ever have a king who is more than a thing of ridicule or pathos?

The Apocalypse has been running for nearly two thousand years: the hidden side of Christianity: and its work is nearly done. For the Apocalypse does not worship power. It wants to murder the powerful, to seize the power itself, the weakling.

Judas had to betray Jesus to the powers that be, because of the denial and subterfuge inherent in Jesus's teaching. Jesus took up the position of the pure individual, even with his disciples. He did not really mix with them, or even really work or act with them. He was alone all the time. He puzzled them utterly, and in some part of them, he let them down. He refused to be their physical power-lord: the power-homage in a man like Judas felt itself betrayed! So it betrayed back again: with a kiss. And in the same way, Revelation had to be included in the New Testament, to give the death kiss to the Gospels.

CHAPTER IV

It is a curious thing, but the collective will of a community really reveals the basis of the individual will. The early Christian Churches, or communities, revealed quite early a strange will to a strange kind of power. They had a will to destroy all power, and so usurp themselves the final, the ultimate power. This was not quite the teaching of Jesus, but it was the inevitable implication of Jesus's teaching, in the minds of the vast mass of the weak, the inferior. Jesus taught the escape and liberation into unselfish, brotherly love: a feeling that only the strong can know. And this, sure enough, at once brought the community of the weak into triumphant being; and the will of the community of Christians was anti-social, almost anti-human, revealing from the start a frenzied desire for the end of the world, the destruction of humanity altogether; and then, when this did not come, a grim determination to destroy all mastery, all lordship, and all human splendour out of the world, leaving only the community of saints as the final negation of power, and the final power.

After the crash of the Dark Ages, the Catholic Church emerged again a human thing, a complete, not a half-thing, adjusted to seed-time and harvest and the solstice of Christmas and of mid-summer, and having a good balance, in early days, between brotherly love and natural lordship and splendour. Every man was given his little kingdom in marriage, and every woman her own little inviolate realm. This Christian marriage guided by the Church was a great institution for true freedom, true possibility of fulfilment. Freedom was no more, and can be no more than the possibility of living fully and satisfactorily. In marriage, in the great natural cycle of church ritual and festival, the early Catholic Church tried to give this to men. But alas, the Church soon fell out of balance, into worldly greed.

Then came the Reformation, and the thing started over again: the old will of the Christian community to destroy human worldly power, and to substitute the negative power of the mass. The battle rages today, in all its horror. In Russia, the triumph over worldly power was accomplished, and the reign of saints set in, with Lenin for the chief saint.

And Lenin was a saint. He had every quality of a saint. He is worshipped today, quite rightly, as a saint. But saints who try to kill all brave power in mankind are fiends, like the Puritans who wanted to pull all the bright feathers out of the chaffinch. Fiends!

Lenin's rule of saints turned out quite horrible. It has more thou-shalt-nots than any rule of 'Beasts', or emperors. \ And this is bound to be so. Any rule of saints must be horrible. Why? Because the nature of man is not saintly. The primal need, the old-Adamic need in a man's soul is to be, in his own sphere and as far as he can attain it, master, lord, and splendid one. Every cock can crow on his own muck-heap, and ruffle gleaming feathers; every peasant could be a glorious little Tzar in his own hut, and when he got a bit drunk. And every peasant was consummated in the old dash and gorgeousness of the nobles, and in the supreme splendour of the Tzar. The supreme master and lord and splendid one: their own, their own splendid one: they might see him with their own eyes, the Tzar! And this fulfilled one of the deepest, greatest, and most powerful needs of the human heart. The human heart needs, needs, needs, splendour, gorgeousness, pride, assumption, glory, and lordship. Perhaps it needs these even more than it needs love: at least, even more than bread. And every great king makes every man a little lord in his own tiny sphere, fills the imagination with lordship and splendour, satisfies the soul. The most dangerous thing in the world is to show man his own paltriness as hedged-in male. It depresses him, and makes him paltry. We become, alas, what we think we are. Men have been depressed now for many years in their male and splendid selves, depressed into dejection and almost into abjection. Is not that evil? Then let men themselves do something about it.

And a great saint like Lenin — or Shelley or St. Francis — can only cry anathema! anathema! to the natural proud self of power, and try deliberately to destroy all might and all lordship, and leave the people poor, oh, so poor! Poor, poor, poor, as the people are in all our modern democracies, though nowhere so absolutely impoverished in life as in the most absolute democracy, no matter how they be in money.

The community is inhuman, and less than human. It becomes at last the most dangerous because bloodless and insentient tyrant. For a long time, even a democracy like the American or the Swiss will answer to the call of a hero, who is somewhat of a true aristocrat: like Lincoln: so strong is the aristocratic instinct in man. But the willingness to give the response to the heroic, the true aristocratic call, gets weaker and weaker in every democracy, as time goes on. All history proves it. Then men turn against the heroic appeal, with a sort of venom. They will only listen to the call of mediocrity wielding the insentient bullying power of mediocrity: which is evil. Hence the success of painfully inferior and even base politicians.

Brave people add up to an aristocracy. The democracy of thou-shalt-not is bound to be a collection of weak men. And then the sacred 'will of the people'

becomes blinder, baser, and more dangerous than the will of any tyrant. When the will of the people becomes the sum of the weakness of a multitude of weak men, it is time to make a break.

So today. Society consists of a mass of weak individuals trying to protect themselves, out of fear, from every possible imaginary evil, and, of course, by their very fear, bringing the evil into being.

This is the Christian community today, in its perpetual mean thou-shalt-not. This is how Christian doctrine has worked out in practice.

CHAPTER V

And Revelation was a foreshadowing of all this. It is above all what some psychologists would call the revelation of a thwarted 'superiority' goal, and a consequent inferiority complex. Of the positive side of Christianity, the peace of meditation and the joy of unselfish service, the rest from ambition and the pleasure of knowledge, we find nothing in the Apocalypse. Because the Apocalypse is for the non-individual side of a man's nature, written from the thwarted collective self, whereas meditation and unselfish service are for pure individuals, isolate. Pure Christianity anyhow cannot fit a nation, or society at large. The great war made it obvious. It can only fit individuals. The collective whole must have some other inspiration.

And the Apocalypse, repellent though its chief spirit be, does also contain another inspiration. It is repellent because it resounds with the dangerous snarl of the frustrated, suppressed collective self, the frustrated power-spirit in man, vengeful. But it contains also some revelation of the true and positive power-spirit. The very beginning surprises us: 'John to the seven churches in Asia: grace be to you and peace from he who is and was and is coming, and from the seven Spirits before his throne, and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the first-born from the dead, and the prince over the kings of the earth; to him who loves us and loosed us from our sins by shedding his blood — he has made us a realm of priests for his God and Father — to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever, Amen. Lo, he is coming on the clouds, to be seen by every eye, even by those who impaled him, and all the tribes of earth will wail because of him: even so, Amen.' — I have used Moffatt's translation, as the meaning is a little more explicit than in the authorised version.

But here we have a curious Jesus, very different from the one in Galilee, wandering by the lake. And the book goes on: 'On the Lord's day I found myself rapt in the Spirit, and I heard a loud voice behind me like a trumpet calling, "Write your vision in a book." — So I turned to see whose voice it was that spoke to me; and on turning round I saw seven golden lampstands and in the middle of the lampstands One who resembled a human being, with a long robe, and a belt of gold round his breast; his head and hair were white as wool, white as snow; his eyes flashed like fire, his feet glowed like burnished bronze, his voice sounded like many waves, in his right hand he held seven stars, a sharp sword with a double edge issued from his mouth, and his face shone like the sun

in full strength. When I saw him, I fell at his feet like a dead man; but he laid his hand on me, saying: 'Do not be afraid; I am the First and Last, I was dead and here I am alive for evermore, holding the keys that unlock death and Hades. Write down your vision of what is and what is to be hereafter. As for the secret symbol of the seven stars which you have seen in my right hand, and of the seven golden lampstands: the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches. To the angel of the church at Ephesus write thus: — 'These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who moves among the seven golden lampstands — " "

Now this being with the sword of the Logos issuing from his mouth and the seven stars in his hand is the Son of God, therefore, the Messiah, therefore Jesus. It is very far from the Jesus who said in Gethsemane: 'My heart is sad, sad even unto death; stay here and watch.' — But it is the Jesus that the early Church, especially in Asia, prominently believed in.

And what is this Jesus? It is the great Splendid One, almost identical with the Almighty in the visions of Ezekiel and Daniel. It is a vast cosmic lord, standing among the seven eternal lamps of the archaic planets, sun and moon and five great stars around his feet. In the sky his gleaming head is in the north, the sacred region of the Pole, and he holds in his right hand the seven stars of the Bear, that we call the Plough, and he wheels them round the Pole star, as even now we see them wheel, causing universal revolution of the heavens, the roundwise moving of the cosmos. This is the lord of all motion, who swings the cosmos into its course. Again, from his mouth issues the two-edged sword of the Word, the mighty weapon of the Logos which will smite the world (and in the end destroy it). This is the sword indeed that Jesus brought among men. And lastly, his face shines like the sun in full strength, the source of life itself, the dazzler, before whom we fall as if dead.

And this is Jesus: not only the Jesus of the early churches, but the Jesus of popular religion today. There is nothing humble nor suffering here. It is our 'superiority goal', indeed. And it is a true account of man's other conception of God; perhaps the greater and more fundamental conception: the magnificent Mover of the Cosmos! To John of Patmos, the Lord is Kosmokrator, and even Kosmodynamos; the great Ruler of the Cosmos, and the Power of the Cosmos. But alas, according to the Apocalypse man has no share in the ruling of the cosmos until after death. When a Christian has been put to death by martyrdom, then he will be resurrected at the Second Advent and become himself a little Kosmokrator, ruling for a thousand years. It is the apotheosis of the weak man.

But the Son of God, the Jesus of John's vision, is more even than this. He holds the keys that unlock death and Hades. He is Lord of the Underworld. He is

Hermes, the guide of souls through the death-world, over the hellish stream. He is master of the mysteries of the dead, he knows the meaning of the holocaust, and has final power over the powers below. The dead and the lords of death, who are always hovering in the background of religion away down among the people, these chthonioi of the primitive Greeks, these too must acknowledge Jesus as a supreme lord.

And the lord of the dead is master of the future, and the god of the present. He gives the vision of what was, and is, and shall be.

Here is a Jesus for you! What is modern Christianity going to make of it? For it is the Jesus of the very first communities, and it is the Jesus of the early Catholic Church, as it emerged from the Dark Ages and adjusted itself once more to life and death and the cosmos, the whole great adventure of the human soul, as contrasted with the little petty personal adventure of modern Protestantism and Catholicism alike, cut off from the cosmos, cut off from Hades, cut off from the magnificence of the Star-mover. Petty little personal salvation, petty morality instead of cosmic splendour, we have lost the sun and the planets, and the Lord with the seven stars of the Bear in his right hand. Poor, paltry, creeping little world we live in, even the keys of death and Hades are lost. How shut in we are! All we can do, with our brotherly love, is to shut one another in. We are so afraid somebody else might be lordly and splendid, when we can't. Petty little bolshevists, every one of us today, we are determined that no man shall shine like the sun in full strength, for he would certainly outshine us.

Now again we realise a dual feeling in ourselves with regard to the Apocalypse. Suddenly we see some of the old pagan splendour, that delighted in the might and the magnificence of the cosmos, and man who was as a star in the cosmos. Suddenly we feel again the nostalgia for the old pagan world, long before John's day, we feel an immense yearning to be freed from this petty personal entanglement of weak life, to be back in the far-off world before men became 'afraid'. We want to be freed from our tight little automatic 'universe', to go back to the great living cosmos of the 'unenlightened' pagans.

Perhaps the greatest difference between us and the pagans lies in our different relation to the cosmos. With us, all is personal. Landscape and the sky, these are to us the delicious background of our personal life, and no more. Even the universe of the scientist is little more than an extension of our personality, to us. To the pagan, landscape and personal background were on the whole indifferent. But the cosmos was a very real thing. A man lived with the cosmos, and knew it greater than himself.

Don't let us imagine we see the sun as the old civilisations saw it. All we see

is a scientific little luminary, dwindled to a ball of blazing gas. In the centuries before Ezekiel and John, the sun was still a magnificent reality, men drew forth from him strength and splendour, and gave him back homage and lustre and thanks. But in us, the connection is broken, the responsive centres are dead. Our sun is a quite different thing from the cosmic sun of the ancients, so much more trivial. We may see what we call the sun, but we have lost Helios forever, and the great orb of the Chaldeans still more. We have lost the cosmos, by coming out of responsive connection with it, and this is our chief tragedy. What is our petty little love of nature — Nature!! — compared to the ancient magnificent living with the cosmos, and being honoured by the cosmos!

And some of the great images of the Apocalypse move us to strange depths, and to a strange wild fluttering of freedom: of true freedom, really, an escape to somewhere, not an escape to nowhere. An escape from the tight little cage of our universe; tight, in spite of all the astronomist's vast and unthinkable stretches of space; tight, because it is only a continuous extension, a dreary on and on, without any meaning: an escape from this into the vital cosmos, to a sun who has a great wild life, and who looks back at us for strength or withering, marvellous, as he goes his way. Who says the sun cannot speak to me! The sun has a great blazing consciousness, and I have a little blazing consciousness. When I can strip myself of the trash of personal feelings and ideas, and get down to my naked sun-self, then the sun and I can commune by the hour\ the blazing interchange, and he gives me life, sun-life, and I send him a little new brightness from the world of the bright blood. The great sun, like an angry dragon, hater of the nervous and personal consciousness in us. As all these modern sunbathers must realise, for they become disintegrated by the very sun that bronzes them. But the sun, like a lion, loves the bright red blood of life, and can give it an infinite enrichment if we know how to receive it. But we don't. We have lost the sun. And he only falls on us and destroys us, decomposing something in us: the dragon of destruction instead of the life-bringer.

And we have lost the moon, the cool, bright, ever-varying moon. It is she who would caress our nerves, smooth them with the silky hand of her glowing, soothe them into serenity again with her cool presence. For the moon is the mistress and mother of our watery bodies, the pale body of our nervous consciousness and our moist flesh. Oh, the moon could soothe us and heal us like a cool great Artemis between her arms. But we have lost her, in our stupidity we ignore her. and angry she stares down on us and whips us with nervous whips. Oh, beware of the angry Artemis of the night heavens, beware of the spite of Cybele, beware of the vindictiveness of horned Astarte.

For the lovers who shoot themselves in the night, in the horrible suicide of

love, they are driven mad by the poisoned arrows of Artemis: the moon is against them: the moon is fiercely against them. And oh, if the moon is against you, oh, beware of the bitter night, especially the night of intoxication.

Now this may sound nonsense, but that is merely because we are fools. There is an eternal vital correspondence between our blood and the sun: there is an eternal vital correspondence between our nerves and the moon. If we get out of contact and harmony with the sun and moon, then both turn into great dragons of destruction against us. The sun is a great source of blood-vitality, it streams strength to us. But once we resist the sun, and say: It is a mere ball of gas! — then the very streaming vitality of sunshine turns into subtle disintegrative force in us, and undoes us. The same with the moon, the planets, the great stars. They are either our makers or our unmakers. There is no escape.

We and the cosmos are one. The cosmos is a vast living body, of which we are still parts. The sun is a great heart whose tremors run through our smallest veins. The moon is a great gleaming nerve-centre from which we quiver forever. Who knows the power that Saturn has over us, or Venus? But it is a vital power, rippling exquisitely through us all the time. And if we deny Aldebaran, Aldebaran will pierce us with infinite dagger-thrusts. He who is not with me is against me! — that is a cosmic law.

Now all this is literally true, as men knew in the great past, and as they will know again.

By the time of John of Patmos, men, especially educated men, had already almost lost the cosmos. The sun, the moon, the planets, instead of being the communers, the comminglers, the life-givers, the splendid ones, the awful ones, had already fallen into a sort of deadness; they were the arbitrary, almost mechanical engineers of fate and destiny. By the time of Jesus, men had turned the heavens into a mechanism of fate and destiny, a prison. The Christians escaped this prison by denying the body altogether. But alas, these little escapes! especially the escapes by denial! — they are the most fatal of evasions. Christianity and our ideal civilisation have been one long evasion. It has caused endless lying and misery, misery such as people know today, not of physical want but of far more deadly vital want. Better lack bread than lack life. The long evasion, whose only fruit is the machine!

We have lost the cosmos. The sun strengthens us no more, neither does the moon. In mystic language, the moon is black to us, and the sun is as sackcloth.

Now we have to get back the cosmos, and it can't be done by a trick. The great range of responses that have fallen dead in us have to come to life again. It has taken two thousand years to kill them. Who knows how long it will take to bring them to life?

When I hear modern people complain of being lonely then I know what has happened. They have lost the cosmos. — It is nothing human and personal that we are short of. What we lack is cosmic life, the sun in us and the moon in us. We can't get the sun in us by lying naked like pigs on a beach. The very sun that is bronzing us is inwardly disintegrating us — as we know later. Process of katabolism. We can only get the sun by a sort of worship: and the same with the moon. By going forth to worship the sun, worship that is felt in the blood. Tricks and postures only make matters worse.

CHAPTER VI

And now we must admit that we are also grateful to St. John's Revelation for giving us hints of the magnificent cosmos and putting us into momentary contact. The contacts, it is true, are only for moments, then they are broken by this other spirit of hope-despair. But even for the moments we are grateful.

There are flashes throughout the first part of the Apocalypse of true cosmic worship. The cosmos became anathema to the Christians, though the early Catholic Church restored it somewhat after the crash of the Dark Ages. Then again the cosmos became anathema to the Protestants after the Reformation. They substituted the non-vital universe of forces and mechanistic order, everything else became abstraction, and the long, slow death of the human being set in. This slow death produced science and machinery, but both are death products.

No doubt the death was necessary. It is the long, slow death of society which parallels the quick death of Jesus and the other dying gods. It is death none the less, and will end in the annihilation of the human race — as John of Patmos so fervently hoped — unless there is a change, a resurrection, and a return to the cosmos.

But these flashes of the cosmos in Revelation can hardly be attributed to John of Patmos. As apocalypticist he uses other people's flashes to light up his way of woe and hope. The grand hope of the Christians is a measure of their utter despair.

It began, however, before the Christians. Apocalypse is a curious form of literature, Jewish and Jewish-Christian. This new form arose somewhere about 200 B.C., when the prophets had finished. An early Apocalypse is the Book of Daniel, the latter part at least: another is the Apocalypse of Enoch, the oldest parts of which are attributed to the second century B.C.

The Jews, the Chosen People, had always had an idea of themselves as a grand imperial people. They had their try, and failed disastrously. Then they gave it up. After the destruction they ceased to imagine a great natural Jewish Empire. The prophets became silent forever. The Jews became a people of postponed destiny. And then the seers began to write Apocalypses.

The seers had to tackle this business of postponed destiny. It was no longer a matter of prophecy: it was a matter of vision. God would no longer tell his servant what would happen, for what would happen was almost untellable. He

would show him a vision.

Every profound new movement makes a great swing also backwards to some older, half-forgotten way of consciousness. So the apocalyptists swung back to the old cosmic vision. After the second destruction of the Temple the Jews despaired, consciously or unconsciously, of the earthly triumph of the Chosen People. Therefore, doggedly, they prepared for an unearthly triumph. That was what the apocalyptists set out to do: to vision forth the unearthly triumph of the Chosen.

To do this, they needed an all-round view: they needed to know the end as well as the beginning. Never before had men wanted to know the end of creation: sufficient that it was created, and would go on for ever and ever. But now, the apocalyptists had to have a vision of the end.

They became then cosmic. Enoch's visions of the cosmos are very interesting, and not very Jewish. But they are curiously geographical.

When we come to John's Apocalypse, and come to know it, several things strike us. First, the obvious scheme, the division of the book into two halves, with two rather discordant intentions. The first half, before the birth of the baby Messiah, seems to have the intention of salvation and renewal, leaving the world to go on renewed. But the second half, when the Beasts rouse up, develops a weird and mystic hate of the world, of worldly power, and of everything and everybody who does not submit to the Messiah out and out. The second half of the Apocalypse is flamboyant hate and simple lust, lust is the only word, for the end of the world. The apocalyptist must see the universe, or the known cosmos, wiped out utterly, and merely a heavenly city and a hellish lake of brimstone left.

The discrepancy of the two intentions is the first thing that strikes us. The first part, briefer, more condensed or abbreviated, is much more difficult and complicated than the second part, and the feeling in it is much more dramatic, yet more universal and significant. We feel in the first part, we know not why, the space and pageantry of the pagan world. In the second part is the individual frenzy of those early Christians, rather like the frenzies of chapel people and revivalists today.

Then again, we feel that in the first part we are in touch with great old symbols, that take us far back into time, into the pagan vistas. In the second part, the imagery is Jewish allegorical, rather modern, and has a fairly easy local and temporal explanation. When there is a touch of true symbolism, it is not of the nature of a ruin or a remains embedded in the present structure, it is rather an archaic reminiscence.

A third thing that strikes us is the persistent use of the great pagan, as well as Jewish power-titles, both for God and for the Son of Man. King of Kings and

Lord of Lords is typical throughout, and Kosmokrator, and Kosmodynamos. Always the titles of power, and never the titles of love. Always Christ the omnipotent conqueror flashing his great sword and destroying, destroying vast masses of men, till blood mounts up to the horses' bridles. Never Christ the Saviour: never. The Son of Man of the Apocalypse comes to bring a new and terrible power on to the earth, greater than that of any Pompey or Alexander or Cyrus. Power, terrific, smiting power. And when praise is uttered, or the hymn to the Son of Man, it is to ascribe to him power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing — all the attributes given to the great kings and Pharaohs of the earth, but hardly suited to a crucified Jesus.

So that we are left puzzled. If John of Patmos finished this Apocalypse in a.d. 96, he knew strangely little of the Jesus legend, and had just none of the spirit of the Gospels, all of which preceded his book. A curious being, this old John of Patmos, whoever he was. But anyhow he focussed the emotions of certain types of men for centuries to come.

What we feel about the Apocalypse is that it is not one book but several, perhaps many. But it is not made up of pieces of several books strung together, like Enoch. It is one book, in several layers: like layers of civilization as you dig deeper and deeper to excavate an old city. Down at the bottom is a pagan substratum, probably one of the ancient books of the Aegean civilisation: some sort of book of a pagan Mystery. This has been written over by Jewish apocalyptists, then extended, and then finally written over by the Jewish-Christian apocalyptist John: and then, after his day, expurgated and corrected and pruned down and added to by Christian editors who wanted to make of it a Christian work.

But John of Patmos must have been a strange Jew: violent, full of the Hebrew books of the Old Testament, but also full of all kinds of pagan knowledge, anything that would contribute to his passion, his unbearable passion, for the Second Advent, the utter smiting of the Romans with the great sword of Christ, the trampling of mankind in the winepress of God's anger till blood mounted to the bridles of the horses, the triumph of the rider on a white horse, greater than any Persian king: then the rule of martyrs for one thousand years: and then, oh then the destruction of the entire universe, and the last Judgment. 'Come, Lord Jesus, Come!'

And John firmly believed he was coming, and coming immediately. Therein lay the trembling of the terrific and terrifying hope of the early Christians: that made them, naturally, in pagan eyes, the enemies of mankind altogether.

But He did not come, so we are not very much interested. What does interest us is the strange-pagan recoil of the book, and the pagan vestiges. And we realise

how the Jew, when he does look into the outside world, has to look with pagan or gentile eyes. The Jews of the post-David period had no eyes of their own to see with. They peered inward at their Jehovah till they were blind: then they looked at the world with the eyes of their neighbours. When the prophets had to see visions, they had to see Assyrian or Chaldean visions. They borrowed other gods to see their own invisible God by.

Ezekiel's great vision, which is so largely repeated in the Apocalypse, what is it but pagan, disfigured probably by jealous Jewish scribes? a great pagan concept of the Time Spirit and the Kosmokrator and the Kosmodynamos! Add to this that the Kosmokrator stands among the wheels of the heavens, known as the wheels of Anaximander, and we see where we are. We are in the great world of the pagan cosmos.

But the text of Ezekiel is hopelessly corrupt — no doubt deliberately corrupted by fanatical scribes who wanted to smear over the pagan vision. It is an old story.

It is none the less amazing to find Anaximander's wheels in Ezekiel. These wheels are an ancient attempt to explain the orderly yet complex movement of the heavens. They are based on the first 'scientific' duality which the pagans found in the universe, namely, the moist and the dry, the cold and the hot, air (or cloud) and fire. Strange and fascinating are the great revolving wheels of the sky, made of dense air or night-cloud and filled with the blazing cosmic fire, which fire peeps through or blazes through at certain holes in the felloes of the wheels, and forms the blazing sun or the pointed stars. All the orbs are little holes in the black wheel which is full of fire: and there is wheel within wheel, revolving differently.

Anaximander, almost the very first of the ancient Greek thinkers, is supposed to have invented this 'wheel' theory of the heavens in Ionia in the sixth century b.c. Anyhow Ezekiel learnt it in Babylonia: and who knows whether the whole idea is not Chaldean. Surely it has behind it centuries of Chaldean sky-knowledge.

It is a great relief to find Anaximander's wheels in Ezekiel. The Bible at once becomes a book of the human race, instead of a corked-up bottle of 'inspiration'. And so it is a relief to find the four Creatures of the four quarters of the heavens, winged and starry. Immediately we are out in the great Chaldean star-spaces, instead of being pinched up in a Jewish tabernacle. That the Jews managed, by pernicious anthropomorphising, to turn the four great Creatures into Archangels, even with names like Michael and Gabriel, only shows the limit of the Jewish imagination, which can know nothing except in terms of the human ego. It is none the less a relief to know that these policemen of God, the great Archangels,

were once the winged and starry creatures of the four quarters of the heavens, quivering their wings across space, in Chaldean lore.

In John of Patmos, the 'wheels' are missing. They had been superseded long ago by the spheres of the heavens. But the Almighty is even more distinctly a cosmic wonder, amber-coloured like sky-fire, the great Maker and the great Ruler of the starry heavens, Demiurge and Kosmokrator, the one who wheels the cosmos. He is a great actual figure, the great dynamic god, neither spiritual nor moral, but cosmic and vital.

Naturally or unnaturally, the orthodox critics deny this. Archdeacon Charles admits that the seven stars in the right hand of the 'Son of Man' are the stars of the Bear, wheeling round the Pole, and that this is Babylonian: then he goes on to say 'but our author can have had nothing of this in mind.'

Of course, excellent clergymen of today know exactly what 'our author' had in mind. John of Patmos is a Christian saint, so he couldn't have had any heathenism in mind. This is what orthodox criticism amounts to. Whereas as a matter of fact we are amazed at the almost brutal paganism of 'our author', John of Patmos. Whatever else he was, he was not afraid of a pagan symbol, nor even, apparently, of a whole pagan cult. The old religions were cults of vitality, potency, and power: we must never forget it. Only the Hebrews were moral: and they only in patches. Among the old pagans, morals were just social manners, decent behaviour. But by the time of Christ all religion and all thought seemed to turn from the old worship and study of vitality, potency, power, to the study of death and death-rewards, death-penalties, and morals. All religion, instead of being religion of life, here and now, became religion of postponed destiny, death, and reward afterwards, 'if you are good'.

John of Patmos accepted the postponement of destiny with a vengeance, but he cared little about 'being good'. What he wanted was the ultimate power. He was a shameless, power-worshipping pagan Jew, gnashing his teeth over the postponement of his grand destiny.

It seems to me he knew a good deal about the pagan value of symbols, as contrasted even with the Jewish or Christian value. And he used the pagan value just when it suited him, for he was no timid soul. To suggest that the figure of the Kosmodynamos wheeling the heavens, the great figure of cosmic Fire with the seven stars of the Bear in his right hand, could be unknown to John of Patmos is beyond even an archdeacon. The world of the first century was full of star-cults, the figure of the Mover of the Heavens must have been familiar to every boy in the east. Orthodox critics in one breath relate that 'our author' had no starry heathenism in mind, and in the next they expatiate on how thankful men must have been to escape, through Christianity, from the senseless and

mechanical domination of the heavens, the changeless rule of the planets, the fixed astronomical and astrological fate. 'Good heavens!' we still exclaim: and if we pause to consider, we shall see how powerful was the idea of moving, fate-fixing heavens, half cosmic, half mechanical, but still not anthropomorphic.

I am sure not only John of Patmos, but St. Paul and St. Peter and St. John the Apostle knew a great deal about the stars, and about the pagan cults. They chose, perhaps wisely, to suppress it all. John of Patmos did not. So his Christian critics and editors, from the second century down to Archdeacon Charles, have tried to suppress it for him. Without success: because the kind of mind that worships the divine power always tends to think in symbols. Direct thinking in symbols, like a game of chess, with its king and queen and pawns, is characteristic of those men who see power as the great desideratum — and they are the majority. The lowest substratum of the people still worships power, still thinks crudely in symbols, still sticks to the Apocalypse and is entirely callous to the Sermon on the Mount. But so, apparently, does the highest superstratum of church and state still worship in terms of power: naturally, really.

But the orthodox critics like Archdeacon Charles want to have their cake and eat it. They want the old pagan power-sense in the Apocalypse, and they spend half their time denying it is there. If they have to admit a pagan element, they gather up the skirts of their clerical gowns and hurry past. And at the same time, the Apocalypse is a veritable heathen feast for them. Only they must swallow it with pious appearances.

Of course the dishonesty, we can call it no less, of the Christian critic is based on fear. Once start admitting that anything in the Bible is pagan, of pagan origin and meaning, and you are lost, you won't know where to stop. God escapes out of the bottle once and for all, to put it irreverently. The Bible is so splendidly full of paganisms and therein lies its greater interest. But once admit it, and Christianity must come out of her shell.

Once more then we look at the Apocalypse, and try to sense its structure vertically, as well as horizontally. For the more we read it, the more we feel that it is a section through time, as well as a Messianic mystery. It is the work of no one man, and even of no one century, of that we feel sure.

The oldest part, surely, was a pagan work, probably the description of the 'secret' ritual of initiation into one of the pagan Mysteries, Artemis, Cybele, even Orphic: but most probably belonging there to the east Mediterranean, probably actually to Ephesus: as would seem natural. If such a book existed, say two or perhaps three centuries before Christ, then it was known to all students of religion: and perhaps it would be safe to say that every intelligent man in that day, especially in the east, was a student of religion. Men were religious-mad:

not religious-sane. The Jews were just the same as the gentiles. The Jews of the dispersion certainly read and discussed everything they could lay their hands on. We must put away forever the Sunday-school idea of a bottled-up Jewry with nothing but its own god to think about. It was very different. The Jews of the last centuries b.c. were as curious, as widely read, and as cosmopolitan as the Jews of today: saving, of course, a few fanatical sets and sects.

So that the old pagan book must quite early have been taken and written over by a Jewish apocalypticist, with a view to substituting the Jewish idea of a Messiah and a Jewish salvation (or destruction) of the whole world, for the purely individual experience of pagan initiation. This Jewish Apocalypse, written over perhaps more than once, was surely known to all religious seekers of Jesus's day, including the writers of the Gospel. And probably, even before John of Patmos tackled it, a Jewish-Christian apocalypticist had rewritten the work once more, probably had already extended it in the prophetic manner of Daniel, to foretell the utter downfall of Rome: for the Jews loved nothing in the world so much as prophesying the utter downfall of the gentile kingdoms. Then John of Patmos occupied his prison-years on the island in writing the whole book over once more, in his own peculiar style. We feel that he invented little, and had few ideas: but that he did indeed have a fierce and burning passion against the Romans who had condemned him. For all that, he shows no hatred of the pagan Greek culture of the east. In fact, he accepts it almost as naturally as his own Hebrew culture, and far more naturally than the new Christian spirit, which is alien to him. He rewrites the older Apocalypse, probably cuts the pagan passages still shorter, simply because they have no Messianic anti-Rome purport, not for any objection to their paganism; and then he lets himself go in the second half of the book, where he can lash the Beast called Rome (or Babylon), the Beast called Nero, or Nero redivivus, and the Beast called Antichrist, or the Roman priesthood of the Imperial cult. How he left the final chapters about the New Jerusalem we don't know, but they are now in a state of confusion.

We feel that John was a violent but not very profound person. If he invented the letters to the seven churches, they are a rather dull and weak contribution. And yet it is his curious fervid intensity which gives to Revelation its lurid power. And we cannot help liking him for leaving the great symbols on the whole intact.

But after John had done with it, the real Christians started in. And that we really resent. The Christian fear of the pagan outlook has damaged the whole consciousness of man. The one fixed attitude of Christianity towards the pagan religious vision has been an attitude of stupid denial, denial that there was anything in the pagans at all, except bestiality. And all pagan evidence in the

books of the Bible had to be expurgated, or twisted into meaninglessness, or smeared over into Christian or Jewish semblances.

This is what happened to the Apocalypse after John left it. How many bits the little Christian scribes have snipped out, how many bits they have stuck in, how many times they have forged 'our author's' style, we shall never know: but there are certainly many evidences of their pettifogging work. And all to cover up the pagan traces, and make this plainly unchristian work passably Christian.

We cannot help hating the Christian fear, whose method, from the very beginning, has been to deny everything that didn't fit: or better still, suppress it. The system of suppression of all pagan evidence has been instinctive, a fear-instinct, and has been thorough, and has been really criminal, in the Christian world, from the first century until today. When a man thinks of the vast stores of priceless pagan documents that the Christians have wilfully destroyed, from the time of Nero to the obscure parish priests of today, who still burn any book found in their parish that is unintelligible, and therefore possibly heretical, the mind stands still! — and we reflect with irony on the hullabaloo over Rheims Cathedral. How many of the books we would give our fingers to possess, and can't, are lost because the Christians burnt them on purpose! They left Plato and Aristotle, feeling these two kin. But the others — !

The instinctive policy of Christianity towards all true pagan evidence has been and is still — suppress it, destroy it, deny it. This dishonesty has vitiated Christian thought from the start. It has, even more curiously, vitiated ethnological scientific thought the same. Curiously enough, we do not look on the Greeks and the Romans, after about 600 b.c., as real pagans: not like Hindus or Persians, Babylonians or Egyptians, or even Cretans, for example. We accept the Greeks and Romans as the initiators of our intellectual and political civilisation, the Jews as the fathers of our moral-religious civilisation. So these are 'our sort'. All the rest are mere nothing, almost idiots. All that can be attributed to the 'barbarian' beyond the Greek pale: that is, to Minoans, Etruscans, Egyptians, Chaldeans, Persians, and Hindus, is, in the famous phrase of a famous German professor: *Urdummheit*. *Urdummheit*, or primal stupidity, is the state of all mankind before precious Homer, and of all races, all, except Greek, Jew, Roman, and — ourselves!

The strange thing is that even true scholars, who write scholarly and impartial books about the early Greeks, as soon as they mention the autochthonous races of the Mediterranean, or the Egyptians, or the Chaldeans, insist on the childishness of these peoples, their perfectly trivial achievement, their necessary *Urdummheit*. These great civilised peoples knew nothing: all true knowledge started with Thales and Anaximander and Pythagoras, with the Greeks. The

Chaldeans knew no true astronomy, the Egyptians knew no mathematics or science, and the poor Hindus, who for centuries were supposed to have invented that highly important reality, the arithmetical zero, or nought, are now not allowed even this merit. The Arabs, who are almost 'us', invented it.

It is most strange. We can understand the Christian fear of the pagan way of knowledge. But why the scientific fear? Why should science betray its fear in a phrase like *Urdummheit*? We look at the wonderful remains of Egypt, Babylon, Assyria, Persia, and old India, and we repeat to ourselves: *Urdummheit!* *Urdummheit!* We look at the Etruscan tombs and ask ourselves again, *Urdummheit!* primal stupidity! Why, in the oldest of peoples, in the Egyptian friezes and the Assyrian, in the Etruscan paintings and the Hindu carvings we see a splendour, a beauty, and very often a joyous, sensitive intelligence which is certainly lost in our world of *Neufrechheit*. If it is a question of primal stupidity or new impudence, then give me primal stupidity.

The Archdeacon Charles is a true scholar and authority in *Apocalypse*, a far-reaching student of his subject. He tries, without success, to be fair in the matter of pagan origins. His predisposition, his terrific prejudice, is too strong for him. And once, he gives himself away, so we understand the whole process. He is writing in time of war — at the end of the late war — so we must allow for the fever. But he makes a bad break, none the less. On page 86 of the second volume of his commentary on *Revelation*, he writes of the Antichrist in the *Apocalypse* that it is 'a marvellous portrait of the great god-opposing power that should hereafter arise, who was to exalt might above right, and attempt, successfully or unsuccessfully for the time, to seize the sovereignty of the world, backed by hosts of intellectual workers, who would uphold all his pretensions, justify all his actions, and enforce his political aims by an economic warfare, which menaced with destruction all that did not bow down to his arrogant and godless claims. And though the justness of this forecast is clear to the student who approaches the subject with some insight, and to all students who approach it with the experience of the present world war, we find that as late as 1908, Bousset in his article on the "Antichrist" in *Hastings's Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, writes as follows: "The interest in the (Antichrist)

legend ... is now to be found only among the lower classes of the Christian community, among sects, eccentric individuals, and fanatics."

'No great prophecy receives its full and final fulfilment in any single event, or single series of events. In fact, it may not be fulfilled at all in regard to the object against which it was primarily delivered by the prophet or seer. But, if it is the expression of a great moral and spiritual truth, it will of a surety be fulfilled at sundry times and in divers manners and in varying degrees of completeness. The

present attitude of the Central Powers of Europe on this question of might against right, of Caesarism against religion, of the state against God, is the greatest fulfilment that the Johan-nine prophecy in XIII has as yet received. Even the very indefiniteness regarding the chief Antichrist in XIII is reproduced in the present upheaval of evil powers. In XIII the Antichrist is conceived as a single individual, i.e., the demonic Nero; but even so, behind him stands the Roman Empire, which is one with him in character and purpose, and in itself the Fourth Kingdom or the Kingdom of the Antichrist — in fact, the Antichrist itself. So in regard to the present war, it is difficult to determine whether the Kaiser or his people can advance the best claims to the title of a modern Antichrist. If he is a present-day representative of the Antichrist, so just as surely is the empire behind him, for it is one in spirit and purpose with its leader — whether regarded from its military side, its intellectual, or its industrial. They are in a degree far transcending that of ancient Rome “those who are destroying the earth”.’

So there we have Antichrist talking German to Arch deacon Charles, who, at the same moment, is using the books of German scholars for his work on the Apocalypse. It is as if Christianity and ethnological science alike could not exist unless they had an opposite, an Antichrist or an Urdummheit, for an offset. The Antichrist and the Urdummheit are just the fellow who is different from me. Today Antichrist speaks Russian, a hundred years ago he spoke French, tomorrow he may speak cockney or the Glasgow brogue. As for Urdummheit, he speaks any language that isn't Oxford or Harvard or an obsequious imitation of one of these.

CHAPTER VII

It is childish. What we have now to admit is that the beginning of the new era (our own) coincided with the dying of the old era of the true pagans or, in the Greek sense, barbarians. As our present civilisation was showing the first sparks of life, say in 1000 B.C., the great and ancient civilisation of the older was waning: the great river civilisations of the Euphrates, the Nile, and the Indus, with the lesser sea-civilisations of the Aegean. It is puerile to deny the age and the greatness of the three river civilisations, with their intermediary cultures in Persia or Iran, and in the Aegean, Crete or Mycenae. That any of these civilisations could do a sum in long division we do not pretend. They may not even have invented the wheel-barrow. A modern child of ten could lick them hollow in arithmetic, geometry, or even, maybe, astronomy. And what of it?

What of it? Because they lacked our modern mental and mechanical attainments, were they any less 'civilised' or 'cultured', the Egyptians and the Chaldeans, the Cretans and the Persians and the Hindus of the Indus, than we are? Let us look at a great seated statue of Rameses, or at Etruscan tombs; let us read of Assiburnipal or Darius, and then say: How do our modern factory-workers show beside the delicate Egyptian friezes of the common people of Egypt? or our khaki soldiers, beside the Assyrian friezes? or our Trafalgar Square lions beside these of Mycenae? Civilisation? it is revealed rather in sensitive life than in inventions: and have we anything as good as the Egyptians of two or three thousand years before Christ as a people? Culture and civilisation are tested by vital consciousness. Are we more vitally conscious than an Egyptian 3000 years b.c. was? Are we? Probably we are less. Our conscious range is wide, but shallow as a sheet of paper. We have no' depth to our consciousness.

A rising thing is a passing thing, says Buddha. A rising civilisation is a passing civilisation. Greece rose upon the passing of the Aegean: and the Aegean was the link between Egypt and Babylon. Greece rose as the passing of the Aegean civilisation, and Rome rose as the same, for the Etruscan civilisation was a last strong wave from the Aegean, and Rome rose, truly, from the Etruscans. Persia arose from between the cultures of the Euphrates and the Indus, and no doubt, in the passing of these.

Perhaps every rising civilisation must fiercely repudiate the passing civilisation. It is a fight within the self. The Greeks fiercely repudiated the

barbarians. But we know now, the barbarians of the east Mediterranean were as much Greeks as most of the Greeks themselves. They were only Greeks, or autochthonous Hellenes who adhered to the old way of culture instead of taking on the new. The Aegean must always have been, in the primitive sense, Hellenic. But the old Aegean culture is different from what we call Greek, especially in its religious basis. Every old civilisation, we may be certain of it, had a definitely religious basis. The nation was, in a very old sense, a church, or a vast cult-unit. From cult to culture is only a step, but it took a lot of making. Cult-lore was the wisdom of the old races. We now have culture.

It is fairly difficult for one culture to understand another. But for culture to understand cult-lore is extremely difficult, and, for rather stupid people, impossible. Because culture is chiefly an activity of the mind, and cult-lore is an activity of the senses. The pre-Greek ancient world had not the faintest inkling of the lengths to which mental activity could be carried. Even Pythagoras, whoever he was, had no inkling: nor Herakleitos nor even Empedokles or Anaxagoras. Socrates and Aristotle were the first to perceive the dawn.

But on the other hand, we have not the faintest conception of the vast range that was covered by the ancient sense-consciousness. We have lost almost entirely the great and intricately developed sensual awareness, or sense-awareness, and sense-knowledge, of the ancients. It was a great depth of knowledge arrived at direct, by instinct and intuition, as we say, not by reason. It was a knowledge based not on words but on images. The abstraction was not into generalisations or into qualities, but into symbols. And the connection was not logical but emotional. The word 'therefore' did not exist. Images or symbols succeeded one another in a procession of instinctive and arbitrary physical connection — some of the Psalms give us examples — and they 'get nowhere' because there was nowhere to get to, the desire was to achieve a consummation of a certain state of consciousness, to fulfil a certain state of feeling-awareness. Perhaps all that remains to us today of the ancient way of 'thought-process' are games like chess and cards. Chess-men and card-figures are symbols: their 'values' are fixed in each case: their 'movements' are non-logical, arbitrary, and based on the power-instinct.

Not until we can grasp a little of the working of the ancient mind can we appreciate the 'magic' of the world they lived in. Take even the sphinx conundrum: What is it that goes first on four legs, then on two, and then on three? — The answer is: Man. — To us it is rather silly, the great question of the sphinx. But in the uncritical ancient who felt his images, there would spring up a great complex of emotions and fears. The thing that goes on four legs is the animal, in all its animal difference and potency, its hinterland consciousness

which circles round the isolated consciousness of man. And when, in the answer, it is shown that the baby goes on four legs, instantly there springs up another emotional complex, half fear, half amusement, as man realises himself as an animal, especially in the infantile state, going on all fours with face to the ground and belly or navel polarised to the earth's centre, like a true animal, instead of navel polarised to the sun, as in the true man, according to primitive conception. The second clause, of the two-legged creature, would bring up complex images of men, monkeys, birds, and frogs, and the weird falling into relationship of these four would be an instant imaginative act, such as is very hard for us to achieve, but which children still make. The last clause, of the three-legged creature, would bring wonder, faint terror, and a searching of the great hinterlands beyond the deserts and the sea for some still-unrevealed beast.

So we see that the emotional reaction to such a conundrum was enormous. And even kings and heroes like Hector or Menelaus would make the same reaction, as a child now does, but a thousandfold stronger and wider. Men were not fools for so doing. Men are far more fools today, for stripping themselves of their emotional and imaginative reactions, and feeling nothing. The price we pay is boredom and deadness. Our bald processes of thought no longer are life to us. For the sphinx-riddle of man is as terrifying today as it was before Oedipus, and more so. For now it is the riddle of the dead-alive man, which it never was before.

CHAPTER VIII

Man thought and still thinks in images. But now our images have hardly any emotional value. We always want a 'conclusion', an end, we always want to come, in our mental processes, to a decision, a finality, a full stop. This gives us a sense of satisfaction. All our mental consciousness is a movement onwards, a movement in stages, like our sentences, and every full-stop is a mile-stone that marks our 'progress' and our arrival somewhere. On and on we go, for the mental consciousness. Whereas of course there is no goal. Consciousness is an end in itself. We torture ourselves getting somewhere, and when we get there it is nowhere, for there is nowhere to get to.

While men still thought of the heart or the liver as the seat of consciousness, they had no idea of this on-and-on process of thought. To them a thought was a completed state of feeling-awareness, a cumulative thing, a deepening thing, in which feeling deepened into feeling in consciousness till there was a sense of fulness. A completed thought was the plumbing of a depth like a whirlpool, of emotional awareness, and at the depth of this whirlpool of emotion the resolve formed. But it was no stage in a journey. There was no logical chain to be dragged further.

This should help us to appreciate that the oracles were not supposed to say something that fitted plainly in the whole chain of circumstance. They were supposed to deliver a set of images or symbols of the real dynamic value, which should set the emotional consciousness of the enquirer, as he pondered them, revolving more and more rapidly, till out of a state of intense emotional absorption the resolve at last formed; or, as we say, the decision was arrived at. As a matter of fact, we do very much the same in a crisis. When anything very important is to be decided we withdraw and ponder and ponder until the deep emotions are set working and revolving together, revolving, revolving, till a centre is formed and we 'know what to do'. And the fact that no politician today has the courage to follow this intensive method of 'thought' is the reason of the absolute paucity of the political mind today.

CHAPTER IX

Well then, let us return to the Apocalypse with this in mind: that the Apocalypse is still, in its movement, one of the works of the old pagan civilisation, and in it we have, not the modern process of progressive thought, but the old pagan process of rotary image-thought. Every image fulfils its own little circle of action and meaning, then is superseded by another image. This is specially so in the first part, before the birth of the Child. Every image is a picturegraph, and the connection between the images will be made more or less differently by every reader. Nay, every image will be understood differently by every reader, according to his emotion-reaction. And yet there is a certain precise plan or scheme.

We must remember that the old human conscious process has to see something happen, every time. Everything is concrete, there are no abstractions. And everything does something.

To the ancient consciousness, Matter, Materia, or Substantial things are God. A pool of water is god. And why not? The longer we live the more we return to the oldest of all visions. A great rock is god. I can touch it. It is undeniable. It is god.

Then those things that move are doubly god. That is, we are doubly aware of their godhead: that which is, and that which moves is twice godly. Everything is a 'thing': and every 'thing' acts and has effect: the universe is a great complex activity of things existing and moving and having effect. And all this is god.

Today, it is almost impossible for us to realise what the old Greeks meant by god, or theos. Everything was theos; but even so, not at the same moment. At the moment, whatever struck you was god. If it was a pool of water, the very watery pool might strike you: then that was god; or a faint vapour at evening rising might catch the imagination: then that was theos; or thirst might overcome you at the sight of the water: then the thirst itself was god; or you drank, and the delicious and indescribable slaking of thirst was the god; or you felt the sudden chill of the water as you touched it: and then another god came into being, 'the cold': and this was not a quality, it was an existing entity, almost a creature, certainly a theos: the cold; or again, on the dry lips something suddenly alighted: it was 'the moist', and again a god. Even to the early scientists or philosophers, 'the cold', 'the moist', 'the hot', 'the dry' were things in themselves, realities, gods, theoi. And they did things.

With the coming of Socrates and 'the spirit', the cosmos died. For two thousand years man has been living in a dead or dying cosmos, hoping for a heaven hereafter. And all the religions have been religions of the dead body and the postponed reward: eschatological, to use a pet word of the philosophers.

It is very difficult for us to understand the pagan mind. When we are given translations of stories from the ancient Egyptian, the stories are almost entirely unintelligible. It may be the translations' fault: who can pretend really to read hieroglyph script! But when we are given translations from Bushman folk-lore, we find ourselves in almost the same puzzled state. The words may be intelligible, but the connection between them is impossible to follow. Even when we read translations of Hesiod, or even of Plato, we feel that a meaning has been arbitrarily given to the movement that is wrong, the inner connection. Flatter ourselves as we may, the gulf between Professor Jowett's mentality and Plato's mentality is almost impassable; and Professor Jowett's Plato is, in the end, just Professor Jowett with hardly a breath of the living Plato. Plato divorced from his great pagan background is really only another Victorian statue in a toga — or a chlamys.

To get at the Apocalypse we have to appreciate the mental working of the pagan thinker or poet — pagan thinkers were necessarily poets — who starts with an image, sets the image in motion, allows it to achieve a certain course or circuit of its own, and then takes up another image. The old Greeks were very fine image-thinkers, as the myths prove. Their \

images were wonderfully natural and harmonious. They followed the logic of action rather than of reason, and they had no moral axe to grind. But still they are nearer to us than the orientals, whose image-thinking often followed no plan whatsoever, not even the sequence of action. We can see it in some of the Psalms, the flitting from image to image with no essential connection at all, but just the curious image-association. The oriental loved that.

To appreciate the pagan manner of thought we have to drop our own manner of on-and-on-and-on, from a start to a finish, and allow the mind to move in cycles, or to flit here and there over a cluster of images. Our idea of time as a continuity in an eternal straight line has crippled our consciousness cruelly. The pagan conception of time as moving in cycles is much freer, it allows movement upwards and downwards, and allows for a complete change of the state of mind, at any moment. One cycle finished, we can drop or rise to another level, and be in a new world at once. But by our time-continuum method, we have to trail wearily on over another ridge.

The old method of the Apocalypse is to set forth the image, make a world, and then suddenly depart from this world in a cycle of time and movement and

event, an epos; and then return again to a world not quite like the original one, but on another level. The 'world' is established on twelve: the number twelve is basic for an established cosmos. And the cycles move in sevens.

This old plan still remains, but very much broken up. The Jews always spoil the beauty of a plan by forcing some ethical or tribal meaning in. The Jews have a moral instinct against design. Design, lovely plan, is pagan and immoral. So that we are not surprised, after the experience of Ezekiel and Daniel, to find the *mise en scene* of the vision muddled up, Jewish temple furniture shoved in, and twenty-four elders or presbyters who no longer quite know what they are, but are trying to be as Jewish as possible, and so on. The sea as of glass has come in from the Babylonian cosmos, the bright waters of heaven, as contrasted with the bitter or dead waters of the earthly sea: but of course it has to be put in a dish, a temple laver. Everything Jewish is interior. Even the stars of heaven and the waters of the fresh firmament have to be put inside the curtains of that stuffy tabernacle or temple.

But whether John of Patmos actually left the opening vision of the throne and the four starry creatures and the twenty-four elders or witnesses in the muddle we find them in, or whether later editors deliberately, in true Christian spirit, broke up the design, we don't know. John of Patmos was a Jew, so he didn't much mind whether his vision was imaginable or not. But even then, we feel the Christian scribes smashed up the pattern, to 'make it safe'. Christians have always been 'making things safe'.

The book had difficulty in getting into the Bible at all: the eastern Fathers objected to it so strongly. So if, in Crom-wellian fashion, the heathen figures had their noses and heads knocked off, to 'make them safe', we can't wonder. All we can do is to remember that there is probably a pagan kernel to the book: that this was written over, perhaps more than once, by Jewish apocalyptists, before the time of Christ: that John of Patmos probably wrote over the whole book once more, to make it Christian: and after that, Christian scribes and editors tinkered with it to make it safe. They could go on tinkering for more than a hundred years.

Once we allow for pagan symbols more or less distorted by the Jewish mind and the Christian iconoclast, and for Jewish temple and ritual symbols arbitrarily introduced to make the heavens fit inside that precious Israelitish tabernacle, we can get a fairly good idea of the *mise en scene*, the vision of the throne with the cosmic beasts giving praise, and the rainbow-shrouded Kosmokrator about whose presence the prismatic glory glows like a rainbow and a cloud: 'Iris too is a cloud'. This Kosmokrator gleams with the colour of jasper and the sardine stone: the commentators say greenish yellow, whereas in Ezekiel it was amber

yellow, as the effulgence of the cosmic fire. Jasper equates with the sign Tisces, which is the astrological sign of our era. Only now are we passing over the border of Pisces, into a new sign and a new era. And Jesus was called The Fish, for the same reason, during the first centuries. Such a powerful hold had stargazing, originally Chaldean, over the mind of man!

From the throne proceed thunders and lightnings and voices. Thunder indeed was the first grand cosmic utterance. It was a being in itself: another aspect of the Almighty or the Demiurge: and its voice was the first great cosmic noise, betokening creation. The grand Logos of the beginning was a thunderclap laughing throughout chaos, and causing the cosmos. But the thunder, which is also the Almighty, and the lightning, which is the Fiery Almighty, putting forth the first jet of life-flame — the fiery Logos — have both also their angry or sundering aspect. Thunder claps creative through space, lightning darts in fecund fire: or the reverse, destructive.

Then before the throne are the seven lamps, which are explained as the seven Spirits of God. Explanations are fishy, in a work like this. But the seven lamps are the seven planets (including sun and moon) who are the seven Rulers from the heavens over the earth and over us. The great sun that makes day and makes all life on earth, the moon that sways the tides and sways our physical being, unknown, sways the menstrual period in women and the sexual rhythm in a man, then the five big wandering stars, Mars, Venus, Saturn, Jupiter, Mercury, these, which are also our days of the week, are as much our Rulers now as ever they were: and as little. We know we live by the sun: how much we live by the others, we don't know. We reduce it all to simple gravitation-pull. Even at that, strange fine threads hold us to the moon and stars. That these threads have a psychic pull on us, we know from the moon. But what of the stars? How can we say? We have lost that sort of awareness.

However, we have the *mise en scene* of the drama of the Apocalypse — call it heaven, if you like. It really means the complete cosmos as we now have it: the 'unregenerate' cosmos.

The Almighty had a book in his hand. The book is no doubt a Jewish symbol. They were a bookish people: and always great keepers of accounts: reckoning up sins throughout the ages. But the Jewish symbol of a book will do fairly well, with its seven seals, to represent a cycle of seven: though how the book is to be opened piece by piece, after the breaking of each seal, I myself cannot see: since the book is a rolled up scroll, and therefore could not actually be opened till all seven seals were broken. However, it is a detail: to the apocalypticist and to me. Perhaps there is no intention of opening it, till the end.

The Lion of Judah is supposed to open the book. But lo! when the kingly beast

comes on to the stage, it turns out to be a Lamb with seven horns (of power, the seven powers or potencies) and seven eyes (the same old planets). We are always hearing a terrific roaring as of lions, and we are always seeing a Lamb exhibiting this wrath. John of Patmos' Lamb is, we suspect, the good old lion in sheep's clothing. It behaves like the most terrific lion. Only John insists that it is a Lamb.

He has to insist on the Lamb, in spite of his predilection for lions, because Leo must now give way to Aries; for, throughout the whole world, the God who, like a lion, was given blood sacrifice must be shoved into the background, and the sacrificed god must occupy the foreground. The pagan mysteries of the sacrifice of the god for the sake of a greater resurrection are older than Christianity, and on one of these mysteries the Apocalypse is based. A Lamb it has to be: or with Mithras, a bull: and the blood drenches over the initiate from the cut throat of the bull (they lifted his head up as they cut his throat) and makes him a new man.

‘Wash me in the blood of the Lamb And I shall be whiter than snow — ’

shrieks the Salvation Army in the market place. How surprised they would be if you told them it might just as well have been a bull. But perhaps they wouldn't. They might twig at once. In the lowest stratum of society religion remains pretty much the same, throughout the ages.

(But when it was for a hecatomb, they held the head of the bull downwards, to earth, and cut his throat over a pit. We feel that John's Lamb was for a hecatomb.)

God became the animal that was slain, instead of the animal that does the slaying. With the Jews, then, it had to be a Lamb, partly because of their ancient paschal sacrifice. The Lion of Judah put on a fleece: but by their bite ye shall know them. John insists on a Lamb ‘as it were slain’: but we never see it slain, we only see it slaying mankind by the million. Even when it comes on in a victorious bloody shirt at the end, the blood is not its own blood: it is the blood of inimical kings.

‘Wash me in the blood of my enemies And I shall be that I am — ’

says John of Patmos in effect.

There follows a paean. What it is, is a real pagan paean of praise to the god who is about to demonstrate — the elders, those twice twelve of the established cosmos, who are really the twelve signs of the zodiac on their ‘seats’, keep getting up and bowing to the throne, like the sheaves to Joseph. Vials of sweet

odour are labelled: Prayers of the saints; probably an aftertouch of some little Christian later on. Flocks of Jewish angels flock in. And then the drama begins.

CHAPTER X

With the famous four horsemen, the real drama begins. These four horsemen are obviously pagan. They are not even Jewish. In they ride, one after the other — though why they should come from the opening of the seals of a book, we don't know. In they ride, short and sharp, and it is over. They have been cut down to a minimum.

But there they are: obviously astrological, zodiacal, prancing in to a purpose. To what purpose? This time, really individual and human, rather than cosmic. The famous book of seven seals in this place is the body of man: of a man: of Adam: of any man: and the seven seals are the seven centres or gates of his dynamic consciousness. We are witnessing the opening and conquest of the great psychic centres of the human body. The old Adam is going to be conquered, die, and be reborn as the new Adam: but in stages: in sevenfold stages: or in six stages, and then a climax, seven. For man has seven levels of awareness, deeper and higher: or seven spheres of consciousness. And one by one these must be conquered, transformed, transfigured.

And what are these seven spheres of consciousness in a man? Answer as you please, any man can give his own answer. But taking common 'popular' view they are, shall we say, the four dynamic natures of man and the three 'higher' natures. Symbols mean something: yet they mean something different to every man. Fix the meaning of a symbol, and you have fallen into the commonplace of allegory.

Horses, always horses! How the horse dominated the mind of the early races, especially of the Mediterranean! You were a lord if you had a horse. Far back, far back in our dark soul the horse prances. He is a dominant symbol: he gives us lordship: he links us, the first palpable and throbbing link with the ruddy-glowing Almighty of potency: he is the beginning even of our godhead in the flesh. And as a symbol he roams the dark underworld meadows of the soul. He stamps and threshes in the dark fields of your soul and of mine. The sons of God who came down and knew the daughters of men and begot the great Titans, they had 'the members of horses', says Enoch.

Within the last fifty years man has lost the horse. Now man is lost. Man is lost to life and power — an underling and a wastrel. While horses thrashed the streets of London, London lived.

The horse, the horse! the symbol of surging potency and power of movement,

of action, in man. The horse, that heroes strode. Even Jesus rode an ass, a mount of humble power. But the horse for true heroes. And different horses for the different powers, for the different heroic flames and impulses.

The rider on the white horse! Who is he then? The man who needs an explanation will never know. Yet explanations are our doom.

Take the old four natures of man: the sanguine, the choleric, the melancholic, the phlegmatic! There you have the four colours of the horses, white, red, black, and pale, or yellowish. But how should sanguine be white? — Ah, because the blood was the life itself, the very life: and the very power of life itself was white, dazzling. In our old days, the blood was the life, and visioned as power it was like white light. The scarlet and the purple were only the clothing of the blood. Ah, the vivid blood clothed in bright red! itself it was like pure light.

The red horse is choleric: not mere anger, but natural fieriness, what we call passion.

The black horse was the black bile, refractory.

And the phlegm, or lymph of the body was the pale horse: in excess it causes death, and is followed by Hades.

Or take the four planetary natures of man: jovial, martial, saturnine, and mercurial. This will do for another correspondence, if we go a little behind the Latin meaning, to the older Greek. Then Great Jove is the sun, and the living blood: the white horse: and angry Mars rides the red horse: Saturn is black, stubborn, refractory and gloomy: and Mercury is really Hermes, Hermes of the Underworld, the guide of souls, the watcher over two ways, the opener of two doors, he who seeks through hell, or Hades.

There are two sets of correspondence, both physical. We leave the cosmic meanings, for the intention here is more physical than cosmic.

You will meet the white horse over and over again, as a symbol. Does not even Napoleon have a white horse? The old meanings control our actions, even when our minds have gone inert.

But the rider on the white horse is crowned. He is the royal me, he is my very self and his horse is the whole mana of a man. He is my very me, my sacred ego, called into a new cycle of action by the Lamb and riding forth to conquest, the conquest of the old self for the birth of a new self. It is he, truly, who shall conquer all the other 'powers' of the self. And he rides forth, like the sun, with arrows, to conquest, but not with the sword, for the sword implies also judgment, and this is my dynamic or potent self. And his bow is the bended bow of the body, like the crescent moon.

The true action of the myth, or ritual-imagery, has been all cut away. The rider on the white horse appears, then vanishes. But we know why he has appeared.

And we know why he is paralleled at the end of the Apocalypse by the last rider on the white horse, who is the heavenly Son of Man riding forth after the last and final conquest over the 'kings'. The son of man, even you or I, rides forth to the small conquest: but the Great Son of Man mounts his white horse after the last universal conquest, and leads on his hosts. His shirt is red with the blood of monarchs, and on his thigh is his title: King of Kings and Lord of Lords. (Why on his thigh? Answer for yourself. Did not Pythagoras show his golden thigh in the temple? Don't you know the old and powerful Mediterranean symbol of the thigh?) But out of the mouth of the final rider on the white horse comes that fatal sword of the logos of judgment. Let us go back to the bow and arrows of him to whom judgment is not given.

The myth has been cut down to the bare symbols. The first rider only rides forth. After the second rider, peace is lost, strife and war enter the world — really the inner world of the self. After the rider on the black horse, who carries the balances of measure, that weigh out the measures or true proportions of the 'elements' in the body, bread becomes scarce, though wine and oil are not hurt. Bread, barley is here the body or flesh which is symbolically sacrificed — as in the barley scattered over the victim in a Greek sacrifice: 'Take this bread of my body with thee.' The body of flesh is now at famine stage, wasted down. Finally, with the rider on the pale horse, the last, the physical or dynamic self is dead in the 'little death' of the initiate, and we enter the Hades or underworld of our being.

We enter the Hades or underworld of our being, for our body is now 'dead'. But the powers or demons of this underworld can only hurt a fourth part of the earth: that is, a fourth part of the body of flesh: which means, the death is only mystical, and that which is hurt is only the body that belongs to already-established creation. Hunger and physical woes befall the physical body in this little death, but there is as yet no greater hurt. There are no plagues: these are divine wrath, and here we have no anger of the Almighty.

There is a crude and superficial explanation of the four horsemen: but probably it hints at the true meaning. The orthodox commentators who talk about famines in the time of Titus or Vespasian may be reading the bit about barley and wheat correctly, according to a late apocalypticist. The original meaning, which was pagan, is smeared over intentionally with a meaning that can fit this 'Church of Christ versus the wicked Gentile Powers' business. But none of that touches the horsemen themselves. And perhaps here better than anywhere else in the book can we see the peculiar way in which the old meaning has been cut away and confused and changed, deliberately, while the bones of the structure have been left.

But there are three more seals. What happens when these are opened?

After the fourth seal and the rider on the pale horse, the initiate, in pagan ritual, is bodily dead. There remains, however, the journey through the underworld, where the living 'I' must divest itself of soul and spirit, before it can at last emerge naked from the far gate of hell into the new day. For the soul, the spirit, and the living T are the three divine natures of man. The four bodily natures are put off on earth. The two divine natures can only be divested in Hades. And the last is a stark flame which, on the new day is clothed anew and successively by the spiritual body, the soul-body, and then the 'garment' of flesh, with its fourfold terrestrial natures.

Now no doubt the pagan script recorded this passage through Hades, this divesting of the soul, then of the spirit, till the mystic death is fulfilled sixfold, and the seventh seal is at once the last thunder of death and the first thunderous paean of new birth and tremendous joy.

But the Jewish mind hates the mortal and terrestrial divinity of man: the Christian mind the same. Man is only postponedly divine: when he is dead and gone to glory. He must not achieve divinity in the flesh. So the Jewish and Christian apocalyptists abolish the mystery of the individual adventure into Hades and substitute a lot of martyred souls crying under the altar for vengeance — vengeance was a sacred duty with the Jews. These souls are told to wait awhile — always the postponed destiny — until more martyrs are killed; and they are given white robes: which is premature, for the white robes are the new resurrected bodies, and how could these crying souls put them on in Hades: in the grave? However — such is the muddle that Jewish and Christian apocalyptists have made of the fifth seal.

The sixth seal, the divesting of the spirit from the last living quick of the 'I', this has been turned by the apocalyptist into a muddled cosmic calamity. The sun goes black as sackcloth of hair: which means that he is a great black orb streaming forth visible darkness; the moon turns to blood, which is one of the horror-reversals of the pagan mind, for the moon is mother of the watery body of men, the blood belongs to the sun, and the moon, like a harlot or demon woman, can only be drunk with red blood in her utterly maleficent aspect of meretrix, blood-drinker, she who should give the cool water of the body's fountain of flesh; the stars fall from the sky, and the heavens depart like a scroll rolled together, and 'every mountain and island were moved out of their places'. It means the return of chaos, and the end of our cosmic order, or creation. Yet it is not annihilation: for the kings of the earth and all the rest of men keep on hiding in the shifted mountains, from the ever-recurrent wrath of the Lamb.

This cosmic calamity no doubt corresponds to the original final death of the

initiate, when his very spirit is stripped off him and he knows death indeed, yet still keeps the final flame-point of life, down in Hades. But it is a pity the apocalyptists were so interfering: the Apocalypse is a string of cosmic calamities, monotonous. We would give the New Jerusalem cheerfully, to have back the pagan record of initiation; and this perpetual 'wrath of the Lamb' business exasperates one like endless threats of toothless old men.

However, the six stages of mystic death are over. The seventh stage is a death and birth at once. Then the final flame-point of the eternal self of a man emerges from hell, and at the very instant of extinction becomes a new whole cloven flame, of a new-bodied man with golden thighs and a face of glory. But first there is a pause: a natural pause. The action is suspended, and transferred to another world, to the outer cosmos. There is a lesser cycle of ritual to fulfil, before the seventh seal, the crash and the glory.

CHAPTER XI

Creation, we know, is four-square, and the number of creation, or of the created universe, is four. From the four corners of the world four winds can blow, three bad winds, one good one. When all the winds are loosed, it means chaos in the air, and destruction on earth.

So the four angels of the winds are told to hold back their winds and hurt neither earth nor sea nor trees: that is, the actual world.

But there is a mystic wind from the east which lifts the sun and the moon like full-sailed ships, and bears them across the sky, like vessels slowly scudding. — This was one of the beliefs, in the second century b.c. — Out of this east rises the angel crying for a pause in the blowing of the winds of destruction, while he shall seal the servants of God in their foreheads. Then the twelve tribes of Jews are tediously enumerated and sealed: a tedious Jewish performance.

The vision changes, and we see a great multitude, clothed in white robes and with palms in their hands, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, and crying with a loud voice: 'Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and to the Lamb.' Thereupon angels and elders and the four winged beasts fall on their faces and worship God saying: 'Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power, and might be unto our God for ever and ever. Amen.'

This suggests that the seventh seal is opened. The angel cries to the four winds to be still, while the blessed, or the new-born appear. And then those who 'went through the great tribulation', or initiation into death and rebirth, appear in glory, clothed in the white dazzling robes of their new bodies, carrying branches of the tree of life in their hands, and appearing in a grand blaze of light before the Almighty.

They hymn their praise, and the angels take it up.

Here we can see, in spite of the apocalyptist, the pagan initiate, perhaps in a temple of Cybele, suddenly brought forth from the underdark of the temple into the grand blaze of light in front of the pillars. Dazzled, reborn, he wears white robes and carries the palm-branch, and the flutes sound out their rapture round him, and dancing women lift their garlands over him. The lights flash, the incense rolls up, the brilliant priests and priestesses throw up their arms and sing the hymn to the new glory of the reborn, as they form around him and exalt him in a kind of ecstasy. The crowd beyond is breathless.

This vivid scene in front of the temple, of the glorification of a new initiate and his identification or assimilation to the god, amid grand brilliance and wonder, and the sound of flutes and the swaying of garlands, in front of the awed crowd of onlookers was, we know, the end of the ritual of the Mysteries of Isis. Such a scene has been turned by the apocalyptists into a Christian vision. But it really takes place after the opening of the seventh seal. The cycle of individual initiation is fulfilled. The great conflict and conquest is over. The initiate is dead, and alive again in a new body. He is sealed in the forehead, like a Hindu monk, as a sign that he has died the death, and that his seventh self is fulfilled, he is twice-born, his mystic eye or 'third eye' is now open. He sees in two worlds. Or, like the Pharaohs with the serpent Uraeus rearing between their brows, he has charge of the last proud power of the sun.

But all this is pagan and impious. No Christian is allowed to rise up new and in a divine body, here on earth and in the midst of life. So we are given a crowd of martyrs in heaven, instead.

The seal in the forehead may be ashes: the seal of the death of the body: or it may be scarlet or glory, the new light or vision. It is, really, in itself the seventh seal.

Now it is finished, and there is silence in heaven for the space of about half an hour.

CHAPTER XII

And here, perhaps, the oldest pagan manuscript ended. At any rate the first cycle of the drama is over. With various hesitations, some old apocalypticist starts the second cycle, this time the cycle of the death and regeneration of earth or world, instead of the individual. And this part, too, we feel is much older than John of Patmos. Nevertheless, it is very Jewish, the curious distortion of paganism through the Jewish moral and cataclysmic vision: the monomaniacal insistence on punishment and woes, which goes right through the Apocalypse. We are now in a real Jewish atmosphere.

But still there are old pagan ideas. Incense rises up to the nostrils of the Almighty in great clouds of smoke. But these clouds of incense-smoke are allegorised, and made to carry up the prayers of the saints. Then the divine fire is cast down to earth, to start the little death and final regeneration of the world, the earth and the multitude. Seven angels, the seven angels of the seven dynamic natures of God, are given seven trumpets to make seven annunciations.

And then the now-Jewish Apocalypse starts to unroll its second cycle of the Seven Trumps.

There is again a division into four and three. We are witnessing the death (the little death) of the cosmos at divine command, and therefore each time there is a trumpet blast, a third part, not a fourth, of the world is destroyed. The divine number is three: the number of the world, foursquare, is four.

At the first Trump, a third part of vegetable life is destroyed.

At the second Trump, a third part of all marine life, even ships.

At the third Trump, a third part of the fresh waters of earth are embittered and become poison.

At the fourth Trump, a third part of the heavens, sun, moon, and stars, are destroyed.

This corresponds to the four horsemen of the first cycle, in a clumsy Jewish-apocalyptic parallel. The material cosmos has now suffered the little death.

What follows are the 'three woes', which affect the spirit and soul of the world (symbolised now as men), instead of the material part. A star falls to earth: Jewish figure for an angel descending. He has the key of the abyss: Jewish counterpart of Hades. And the action now moves to the underworld of the cosmos instead of the underworld of the self, as in the first cycle.

It is now all Jewish and allegorical, not symbolical any more. The sun and the

moon are darkened because we are in the underworld.

The abyss, like the underworld, is full of malefic powers, injurious to man.

For the abyss, like the underworld, represents the superseded powers of creation.

The old nature of man must yield and give way to a new nature. In yielding, it passes away down into Hades, and there lives on, undying and malefic, superseded, yet malevolent-potent in the underworld.

This very profound truth was embodied in all old religions, and lies at the root of the worship of the underworld powers. The worship of the underworld powers, the chthonioi, was perhaps the very basis of the most ancient Greek religion. When man has neither the strength to subdue his underworld powers — which are really the ancient powers of his old, superseded self; nor the wit to placate them with sacrifice and the burnt holocaust; then they come back at him, and destroy him again. Hence every new conquest of life means a ‘harrowing of Hell’.

In the same way, after every great cosmic change, the power of the old cosmos, superseded, becomes demonic and harmful to the new creation. It is a great truth which lies behind the Gea-Ouranos-Kronos-Zeus series of myths.

Therefore the whole cosmos has its malefic aspect. The sun, the great sun, in so far as he is the old sun of a superseded cosmic day, is hateful and malevolent to the new-born, tender thing I am. He does me harm, in my struggling self, for he still has power over my old self and he is hostile.

Likewise the waters of the cosmos, in their oldness and their superseded or abysmal nature, are malevolent to life, especially to the life of man. The great Moon and mother of my inner water-streams, in so far as she is the old, dead moon, is hostile, hurtful, and hateful to my flesh, for she still has a power over my old flesh.

This is the meaning away back of the ‘two woes’: a very deep meaning, too deep for John of Patmos. The famous locusts of the first woe, which emerge from the abyss at the fifth Trump, are complex but not unintelligible symbols. They do not hurt vegetable earth, only the men who have not the new seal on their foreheads. These men they torture, but cannot kill: for it is the little death. And they can torture only for five months, which is a season, the sun’s season, and more or less a third part of the year.

Now these locusts are like horses prepared unto battle, which means, horses, horses, that they are hostile potencies or powers.

They have hair as the hair of women: the streaming crest of the sun-powers, or sun-rays.

They have the teeth of the lion: the red lion of the sun in his malefic aspect.

They have faces like men: since they are directed only against the inward life of men.

They have crowns like gold: they are royal, of the royal orb of the sun.

They have stings in their tails: which means they are in the reversed or hellish aspect, creatures which once were good, but being superseded, of a past order, are now reversed and hellish, stinging, as it were, backwards.

And their king is Apollyon: which is Apollo, great Lord of the (pagan and therefore hellish) sun.

Having made his weird, muddled composite symbol at last intelligible, the Jewish apocalyptist declares the first woe is past, and that there are two more still to come.

CHAPTER XIII

The sixth Trump sounds. The voice from the golden altar says: Loose the four angels which are bound in the great river Euphrates

These are evidently four angels of four corners, like those of the four winds. So Euphrates, the evil river of Babylon, will no doubt stand for the waters under the earth, or the abysmal under-ocean, in its hellish aspect.

And the angels are loosed, whereupon, apparently the great army of demon-horsemen, two hundred million, all told, issue from the abyss.

The horses of the two hundred million horsemen have heads as the heads of lions, and out of their mouths issue fire and brimstone. And these kill a third part of men, by the fire, smoke, and brimstone which come out of their mouths. Then unexpectedly we are told that their power is in their mouths and in their tails; for their tails are like serpents, and have heads, and with them they do hurt.

These weird creatures are apocalyptic images, surely: not symbols but personal images of some old apocalyptist long before John of Patmos. The horses are powers, and divine instruments of woe: for they kill a third part of men, and later we are told they are plagues. Plagues are the whips of God.

Now they ought to be the reversed or malevolent powers of the abysmal or underworld waters. Instead of which they are sulphurous, evidently volcanic beasts of the abysmal or underworld fires, which are the hellish fires of the hellish sun.

Then suddenly they are given serpent tails, and they have evil power in their tails. Here we are back at the right thing — the horse-bodied serpent-monster of the salty deeps of hell: the powers of the underworld waters seen in their reversed aspect, malevolent, striking a third of men, probably with some watery and deadly disease; as the locusts of the fifth Trump smote men with some hot and agonising, yet not deadly disease, which ran for a certain number of months.

So that here probably two apocalyptists have been at work. The later one did not understand the scheme. He put in his brimstone horses with their riders having breastplates of fire and jacinth and brimstone (red, dark blue, and yellow), following his own gay fancy, and perhaps influenced by some volcanic disturbance and some sight of splendid red, blue, and yellow cavalry of the east. That is a true Jewish method.

But then he had to come back to the old manuscript, with serpent-tailed watery monsters. So he tacked on the serpent tails to his own horses, and let them

gallop.

This apocalypticist of the brimstone horses is probably responsible for the 'lake of fire burning with brimstone' into which the souls of fallen angels and wicked men are cast to burn for ever and ever more. This pleasant place is the prototype of the Christian hell, specially invented by the Apocalypse. The old Jewish hells of Sheol and Gehenna were fairly mild, uncomfortable abysmal places like Hades, and when a New Jerusalem was created from heaven, they disappeared. They were part of the old cosmos, and did not outlast the old cosmos. They were not eternal.

This was not good enough for the brimstone apocalypticist and John of Patmos. They must have a marvellous, terrific lake of sulphurous fire that could burn for ever and ever, so that the souls of the enemy could be kept writhing. When, after the last Judgment, earth and sky and all creation were swept away, and only glorious heaven remained, still, away down, there remained this burning lake of fire in which the souls were suffering. Brilliant glorious eternal heaven above: and brilliant sulphurous torture-lake away below. This is the vision of eternity of all Patmossers. They could not be happy in heaven unless they knew their enemies were unhappy in hell.

And this vision was specially brought into the world with the Apocalypse. It did not exist before.

Before, the waters of the hellish underworld were bitter like the sea. They were the evil aspect of the waters under the earth, which were conceived as some wondrous lake of sweet, lovely water, source of all the springs and streams of earth, lying away down below the rocks.

The waters of the abyss were salt like the sea. Salt had a great hold on the old imagination. It was supposed to be the product of 'elemental' injustice. Fire and water, the two great living elements and opposites, gave rise to all substance in their slippery unstable 'marriage'. But when one triumphed over the other, there was 'injustice'. So, when the sun-fire got too strong for the sweet waters, it burnt them, and when water was burnt by fire, it produced salt, child of injustice. This child of injustice corrupted the waters and made them bitter. So the sea came into being. And thence the dragon of the sea, leviathan.

And so the bitter waters of hell were the place where souls were drowned: the bitter anti-life ocean of the end.

There was for ages a resentment against the sea: the bitter, corrupt sea, as Plato calls it. But this seems to have died down in Roman times: so our apocalypticist substitutes a brimstone-burning lake, as being more horrific, and able to make the souls suffer more.

A third of men are killed by these brimstone horsemen. But the remaining

two-thirds do not refrain from worshipping idols which can 'neither see nor hear nor walk'.

That sounds as if the Apocalypse here was still quite Jewish and pre-Christian. There is no Lamb about.

Later, this second woe winds up with the usual earthquakes. But since the shiver of the earth must immediately give rise to a new movement, it is postponed awhile.

CHAPTER XIV

Six Trumps are blown, so now there is a pause: just as there was a pause after the Six Seals were opened, to let the angels of the four winds arrange themselves, and the action transfer itself to heaven.

Now, however, come various interruptions. First there comes down a mighty angel, a cosmic lord, something like the Son of Man in the first vision. But the Son of Man, indeed all Messianic reference, seems missing in this part of the Apocalypse. This mighty angel sets one burning foot upon the sea and one on earth, and roars like a lion throughout space. Whereupon the seven creative thunders roll out their creative utterances. These seven thunders, we know, are the seven tonal natures of the Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth: and now they are giving voice to seven vast new commands, for a new cosmic day, a new phase in creation. The seer is in a hurry to write down these seven new words, but he is commanded not to do so. He is not allowed to divulge the nature of the commands which will bring the new cosmos into being. We must wait for the actuality. Then this great 'angel' or cosmic lord raises his hand and swears, by heaven and earth and water under the earth, which is the great Greek oath of the gods, that the old Time is over, the mystery of God is about to be fulfilled.

Then the seer is given the little book to eat. It is the lesser general or universal message of the destruction of the old world and creation of the new: a lesser message than that of the destruction of the old Adam and the creation of new man, which the seven-sealed book told. And it is sweet in the mouth — as revenge is sweet — but bitter in experience.

Then another interruption: the measuring of the temple, a pure Jewish interruption; the measuring or counting of the 'chosen of God', before the end of the old world; and the exclusion of the unchosen.

Then comes the most curious interruption of the two witnesses. Orthodox commentators identify these two witnesses with Moses and Elijah who were with Jesus in the transfiguration on the mount. They are something much older too. These two witnesses are prophets clothed in sackcloth: that is, they are in their woeful aspect, hostile or reversed. They are the two candlesticks and the two olive trees which stand before 'Adonai', the god of the earth. They have power over the waters of the sky (rain), power to turn water into blood, and to smite the earth with all the plagues. They make their testimony, then the beast out of the Abyss rises and slays them. Their dead bodies lie out in the street of

the great city, and the people of the earth rejoice because these two who tormented them are dead. But after three and a half days, the spirit of life from God enters the dead two, they rise to their feet, and a great voice says from heaven, 'Come up hither'. So they rise to heaven on a cloud, and their enemies in fear behold them.

It looks as if we had here a layer of very old myth referring to the mysterious twins, 'the little ones', who had such power over the nature of men. But both the Jewish and Christian apocalyptists have balked this bit of Revelation: they have not given it any plain meaning of any sort.

The twins belong to a very old cult which apparently was common to all ancient European peoples; but it seems they were heavenly twins, belonging to the sky. Yet when they were identified by the Greeks with the Tyndarids, Kastor and Polydeukes, already in the Odyssey, they lived alternately in Heaven and in Hades, witnessing to both places. And as such, they may be the candlesticks, or stars of heaven, on the one hand, and the olive trees of the underworld, on the other.

But the older a myth, the deeper it goes in the human consciousness, the more varied will be the forms it takes in the upper consciousness. We have to remember that some symbols, and this of the twins is one of them, can carry even our modern consciousness back for a thousand years, for two thousand years, for three thousand years, for four thousand years, and even beyond that. The power of suggestion is most mysterious. It may not work at all: or it may carry the unconscious mind back in great cyclic swoops through eras of time: or it may go only part way.

If we think of the heroic Dioskouroi, the Greek Twins, the Tyndarids, we go back only halfway. The Greek heroic age did a strange thing, it made every cosmic conception anthropomorphic, yet kept a great deal of the cosmic wonder. So that the Dioskouroi are and are not the ancient twins.

But the Greeks themselves were always reverting to the pre-heroic, pre-Olympian gods and potencies. The Olympic-heroic vision was always felt to be too shallow, the old Greek soul would drop continually to deeper, older, darker levels of religious consciousness, all through the centuries. So that the mysterious Tritopatores at Athens, who were also called the Twins, and Dioskouroi, were the lords of the winds, and mysterious watchers at the procreation of children. So here again we are back in the old levels.

When the Samothracian cult spread in Hellas, in the third and second centuries b.c., then the twins became the Kabeiroi, or the Kabiri, and then again they had an enormous suggestive influence over the minds of men. The Kabiri were a swing back to the old idea of the dark or mysterious twins, connected with the

movement of the cloudy skies and the air, and with the movement of fertility, and the perpetual and mysterious balance between these two. The apocalypticist sees them in their woeful aspect, masters of sky-water and the waters of earth, which they can turn into blood, and masters of plagues from Hades: the heavenly and hellish aspect of the twins, malevolent.

But the Kabiri were connected with many things: and it is said their cult is still alive in Mohammedan countries. They were the two secret little ones, the homunculi, and the 'rivals'. They were also connected with thunder, and with two round black thunder-stones. So they were called the 'sons of thunder', and had power over rain: also power to curdle milk, and malefic power to turn water into blood. As thunderers they were Sunderers, Sundering cloud, air, and water. And always they have this aspect of rivals, dividers, separators, for good as well as for ill: balancers.

By another symbolic leap, they were also the ancient gods of gateposts, and then they were the guardians of the gate, and then the twin beasts that guard the altar, or the tree, or the urn, in so many Babylonian, Aegean, and Etruscan paintings and sculpture. They were often panthers, leopards, gryphons, earth and night creatures, jealous ones.

It is they who hold things asunder to make a space, a gateway. In this way, they are rainmakers: they open the gates in the sky: perhaps as thunder-stones. In the same way they are the secret lords of sex, for it was early recognised that sex is a holding of two things asunder, that birth may come through between them. In the sexual sense, they can change water into blood: for the phallos itself was the homunculus, and, in one aspect, it was itself the twins of earth, the small one who made water and the small one who was filled with blood: the rivals within a man's own very nature and earthly self symbolised again in the twin stones of the testes. They are thus the roots of the twin olive trees, producing the olives, and the oil of the procreative sperm. They are also the two candlesticks which stand before the lord of earth, Adonai. For they give the two alternate forms of elemental consciousness, our day-consciousness and our night-consciousness, that which we are in the depths of night, and that other very different being which we are in bright day. A creature of dual and jealous consciousness is man, and the twins witness jealously to the duality. Physiologically, in the same meaning, it is they who hold apart the two streams of the water and of the blood in our bodies. If the water and blood ever mingled in our bodies, we should be dead. The two streams are kept apart by the little ones, the rivals. And on the two streams depends the dual consciousness.

Now these little ones, these rivals, they are 'witnesses' to life, for it is between their opposition that the Tree of Life itself grows, from the earthly root. They

testify before the god of earth or fecundity all the time. And all the time, they put a limit on man. They say to him, in every earthly or physical activity: Thus far and no farther. — They limit every action, every ‘earth’ action, to its own scope, and counterbalance it with an opposite action. They are gods of gates, but they are also gods of limits: each forever jealous of the other, keeping the other in bounds. They make life possible; but they make life limited. As the testes, they hold the phallic balance forever, they are the two phallic witnesses. They are the enemies of intoxication, of ecstasy, and of licence, of licentious freedom. Always they testify to Adonai. Hence the men in the cities of licence rejoice when the beast from the abyss, which is the hellish dragon or demon of the earth’s destruction, or man’s bodily destruction, at last kills these two ‘guardians’, regarded as a sort of policemen in ‘Sodom’ and ‘Egypt’. The bodies of the slain two lie unburied for three and a half days: that is half a week, or half a period of time, when all decency and restraint has departed from among men.

The language of the text, ‘rejoice and make merry and send gifts to one another’ suggests a pagan Saturnalia, like the Hermaia of Crete or the Sakaia at Babylon, the feast of unreason. If this is what the apocalyptist meant, it shows how intimately he follows pagan practice, for the ancient saturnalian feasts all represented the breaking, or at least the interruption of an old order of rule and law: and this time it is the ‘natural rule’ of the two witnesses which is broken. Men escape from the laws even of their own nature for a spell: for three days and a half, which is half the sacred week, be a ‘little’ period of time. Then, as heralding the new earth and the new body of man, the two witnesses stand up again: men are struck with terror: the voice from heaven calls the two witnesses, and they go up in a cloud.

‘Two, two for the lily-white boys, clothed all in green-O! — ’

Thus the earth, and the body, cannot die its death till these two sacred twins, the rivals, have been killed.

An earthquake comes, the seventh angel blows his trumpet and makes the great announcement: The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever. — So there is again worship and thanksgiving in heaven, that God takes the reign again. And the temple of God is opened in heaven, the holy of holies is revealed, and the ark of the testament. Then there are the lightnings, voices, thunderings, earthquakes, and hail which end a period and herald another. The third woe is ended.

And here ends the first part of the Apocalypse: the old half. The little myth that follows stands quite alone in the book, dramatically, and is really out of keeping with the rest. One of the apocalyptists put it in as part of a theoretic scheme: the birth of the Messiah after the little death of earth and man. And the

other apocalyptists left it there.

CHAPTER XV

What follows is the myth of the birth of a new sun-god from a great sun-goddess, and her pursuit by the great red dragon. This myth is left as the centre-piece of the Apocalypse, and figures as the birth of the Messiah. Even orthodox commentators admit that it is entirely unchristian, and almost entirely unjewish. We are down pretty well to a pagan bed-rock, and we can see at once how many Jewish and Jewish-Christian overlays there are in the other parts.

But this pagan birth-myth is very brief — as was the other bit of pure myth, that of the four horsemen.

‘And there appeared a great wonder in heaven; a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars: and she being with child cried, travailing in birth, and pained to be delivered.

‘And there appeared another wonder in heaven; and behold a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and seven crowns upon his heads. And his tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven, and did cast them to the earth: and the dragon stood before the woman which was ready to be delivered, for to devour her child as soon as it was born.

‘And she brought forth a man child, who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron: and her child was caught up unto God, and to his throne. And the woman fled into the wilderness, where she hath a place prepared of God, that they should feed her there a thousand two hundred and threescore days.

‘And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, and prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven. And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.’

This fragment is really the pivot of the Apocalypse. It looks like late pagan myth suggested from various Greek, Egyptian, and Babylonian myths. Probably the first apocalypticist added it to the original pagan manuscript, many years before the birth of Christ, to give his vision of a Messiah’s birth, born of the sun. But connecting with the four horsemen, and with the two witnesses, the goddess clothed in the sun and standing upon the moon’s crescent is difficult to reconcile with a Jewish vision. The Jews hated pagan gods, but they more than hated the great pagan goddesses: they would not even speak of them if possible. And this wonder-woman clothed in the sun and standing upon the crescent of the moon

was too splendidly suggestive of the great goddess of the east, the great mother, the Magna Mater as she became to the Romans. This great woman goddess with a child stands looming far, far back in history in the eastern Mediterranean, in the days when matriarchy was still the natural order of the obscure nations. How then does she come to tower as the central figure in a Jewish Apocalypse? We shall never know: unless we accept the old law that when you drive the devil out of the front door he comes in at the back. This great goddess has suggested many pictures of the Virgin Mary. She has brought into the Bible what it lacked before: the great cosmic Mother robed and splendid, but persecuted. And she is, of course, essential to the scheme of power and splendour, which must have a queen: unlike the religions of renunciation, which are womanless. The religions of power must have a great queen and queen mother. So here she stands in the Apocalypse, the book of thwarted power-worship.

After the flight of the great Mother from the dragon, the whole Apocalypse changes tone. Suddenly Michael the archangel is introduced: which is a great jump from the four starry beasts of the presence, who have been the Cherubim till now. The dragon is identified with Lucifer and Satan, and even then has to give his power to the beast from the sea: alias Nero.

There is a great change. We leave the old cosmic and elemental world, and come to the late Jewish world of angels like policemen and postmen. It is a world essentially uninteresting, save for the great vision of the scarlet woman, which has been borrowed from the pagans, and is, of course, the reversal of the great woman clothed in the sun. The late apocalyptists are much more at their ease cursing her and calling her a harlot and other vile names, than in seeing her clothed in the sun and giving her due reverence.

Altogether the latter half of the Apocalypse is a comedown. We see it in the chapter of the seven vials. The seven vials of the wrath of the Lamb are a clumsy imitation of the seven seals and the seven trumps. The apocalyptist no longer knows what he is about. There is no division into four and three, no rebirth or glory after the seventh vial — just a clumsy succession of plagues. And then the whole thing falls to earth in the prophesying and cursing business which we have met already in the old prophets and in Daniel. The visions are amorphous and have fairly obvious allegorical meanings: treading the winepress of the wrath of the Lord, and so on. It is stolen poetry, stolen from the old prophets. And for the rest, the destruction of Rome is the blatant and rather boring theme. Rome was anyhow more than Jerusalem.

Only the great whore of Babylon rises rather splendid, sitting in her purple and scarlet upon her scarlet beast. She is the Magna Mater in malefic aspect, clothed in the colours of the angry sun, and throned upon the great red dragon of the

angry cosmic power. Splendid she sits, and splendid is her Babylon. How the late apocalyptists love mouthing out all about the gold and silver and cinnamon of evil Babylon! How they want them all! How they envy Babylon her splendour, envy, envy! How they love destroying it all! The harlot sits magnificent with her golden cup of the wine of sensual pleasure in her hand. How the apocalyptists would have loved to drink out of her cup! And since they couldn't: how they loved smashing it!

Gone is the grand pagan calm which can see the woman of the cosmos wrapped in her warm gleam like the sun, and having her feet upon the moon, the moon who gives us our white flesh. Gone is the great Mother of the cosmos, crowned with a diadem of the twelve great stars of the zodiac. She is driven to the desert and the dragon of the watery chaos spues floods upon her. But kind earth swallows the floods, and the great woman, winged for flight like an eagle, must remain lost in the desert for a time, and times, and half a time. Which is like the three and a half days, or years, of other parts of the Apocalypse, and means half of a time-period.

That is the last we have seen of her. She has been in the desert ever since, the great cosmic Mother crowned with all the signs of the zodiac. Since she fled, we have had nothing but virgins and harlots, half-women: the half-women of the Christian era. For the great woman of the pagan cosmos was driven into the wilderness at the end of the old epoch, and she has never been called back. That Diana of Ephesus, John of Patmos's Ephesus, was already a travesty of the great woman crowned with the stars.

Yet perhaps it was a book of her 'mystery' and initiation ritual which gave rise to the existing Apocalypse. But if so, it has been written over and over, till only a last glimpse is left of her: and one other corresponding glimpse, of the great woman of the cosmos 'seen red'. Oh, how weary we get, in the Apocalypse, of all these woes and plagues and deaths! how infinitely weary we are of the mere thought of that jeweller's paradise of a New Jerusalem at the end! All this maniacal anti-life! They can't bear even to let the sun and the moon exist, these horrible Salvationists. But it is envy.

CHAPTER XVI

The woman is one of the 'wonders'. And the other wonder is the Dragon. The dragon is one of the oldest symbols of the human consciousness. The dragon and serpent symbol goes so deep in every human consciousness, that a rustle in the grass can startle the toughest 'modern' to depths he has no control over.

First and foremost, the dragon is the symbol of the fluid, rapid, startling movement of life within us. That startled life which runs through us like a serpent, or coils within us potent and waiting, like a serpent, this is the dragon. And the same with the cosmos.

From earliest times, man has been aware of a 'power' or potency within him — and also outside him — which he has no ultimate control over. It is a fluid, rippling potency which can lie quite dormant, sleeping, and yet be ready to leap out unexpectedly. Such are the sudden angers that spring upon us from within ourselves, passionate and terrible in passionate people: and the sudden accesses of violent desire, wild sexual desire, or violent hunger, or a great desire of any sort, even for sleep. The hunger which made Esau sell his birthright would have been called his dragon: later, the Greeks would even have called it a 'god' in him. It is something beyond him, yet within him. It is swift and surprising as a serpent, and overmastering as a dragon. It leaps up from somewhere inside him, and has the better of him.

Primitive man, or shall we say early man, was in a certain sense afraid of his own nature, it was so violent and unexpected inside him, always 'doing things to him'. He early recognised the half-divine, half-demonish nature of this 'unexpected' potency inside him.

Sometimes it came upon him like a glory, as when Samson slew the lion with his hands, or David slew Goliath with a pebble. The Greeks before Homer would have called both these two acts 'the god', in recognition of the superhuman nature of the deed, and of the doer of the deed who was within the man. This 'doer of the deed', the fluid, rapid, invincible, even clairvoyant potency that can surge through the whole body and spirit of a man, this is the dragon, the grand divine dragon of his superhuman potency, or the great demonish dragon of his inward destruction. It is this which surges in us to make us move, to make us act, to make us bring forth something: to make us spring up and live. Modern philosophers may call it Libido or Elan Vital, but the words are thin, they carry none of the wild suggestion of the dragon.

And man 'worshipped' the dragon. A hero was a hero, in the great past, when he had conquered the hostile dragon, when he had the power of the dragon with him in his limbs and breast. When Moses set up the brazen serpent in the wilderness, an act which dominated the imagination of the Jews for many centuries, he was substituting the potency of the good dragon for the sting of the bad dragon, or serpents. That is, man can have the serpent with him or against him. When his serpent is with him, he is almost divine. When his serpent is against him, he is stung and envenomed and defeated from within. The great problem, in the past, was the conquest of the inimical serpent and the liberation within the self of the gleaming bright serpent of gold, golden fluid life within the body, the rousing of the splendid divine dragon within a man, or within a woman.

What ails men today is that thousands of little serpents sting and envenom them all the time, and the great divine dragon is inert. We cannot wake him to life, in modern days. He wakes on the lower planes of life: for a while in an airman like Lindbergh or in a boxer like Dempsey. It is the little serpent of gold that lifts these two men for a brief time into a certain level of heroism. But on the higher planes, there is no glimpse or gleam of the great dragon.

The usual vision of the dragon is, however, not personal but cosmic. It is in the vast cosmos of the stars that the dragon writhes and lashes. We see him in his maleficent aspect, red. But don't let us forget that when he stirs green and flashing on a pure dark night of stars it is he who makes the wonder of the night, it is the full rich coiling of his folds which makes the heavens sumptuously serene, as he glides around and guards the immunity, the precious strength of the planets, and gives lustre and new strength to the fixed stars, and still more serene beauty to the moon. His coils within the sun make the sun glad, till the sun dances in radiance. For in his good aspect, the dragon is the great vivifier, the great enhancer of the whole universe.

So he persists still to the Chinese. The long green dragon with which we are so familiar on Chinese things is the dragon in his good aspect of life-bringer, life-giver, life-maker, vivifier. There he coils, on the breasts of the mandarins' coats, looking very horrific, coiling round the centre of the breast and lashing behind with his tail. But as a matter of fact, proud and strong and grand is the mandarin who is within the folds of the green dragon, lord of the dragon. — It is the same dragon which, according to the Hindus, coils quiescent at the base of the spine of a man, and unfolds sometimes lashing along the spinal way: and the yogi is only trying to set this dragon in controlled motion. Dragon-cult is still active and still potent all over the world, particularly in the east.

But alas, the great green dragon of the stars at their brightest is coiled up tight

and silent today, in a long winter sleep. Only the red dragon sometimes shows his head, and the millions of little vipers. The millions of little vipers sting us as they stung the murmuring Israelites, and we want some Moses to set the brazen serpent aloft: the serpent which was 'lifted up' even as Jesus later was 'lifted up' for the redemption of men.

The red dragon is the kakodaimon, the dragon in his evil or inimical aspect. In the old lore, red is the colour of man's splendour, but the colour of evil in the cosmic creatures or the gods. The red lion is the sun in his evil or destructive aspect. The red dragon is the great 'potency' of the cosmos in its hostile and destructive activity.

The agathodaimon becomes at last the kakodaimon. The green dragon becomes with time the red dragon. What was our joy and our salvation becomes with time, at the end of the time-era, our bane and our damnation. What was a creative god, Ouranos, Kronos, becomes at the end of the time-period a destroyer and a devourer. The god of the beginning of an era is the evil principle at the end of that era. For time still moves in cycles. What was the green dragon, the good potency, at the beginning of the cycle has by the end gradually changed into the red dragon, the evil potency. The good potency of the beginning of the Christian era is now the evil potency of the end.

This is a piece of very old wisdom, and it will always be true. Time still moves in cycles, not in a straight line. And we are at the end of the Christian cycle. And the Logos, the good dragon of the beginning of the cycle, is now the evil dragon of today. It will give its potency to no new thing, only to old and deadly things. It is the red dragon, and it must once more be slain by the heroes, since we can expect no more from the angels.

And, according to old myth, it is woman who falls most absolutely into the power of the dragon, and has no power to escape till man frees her. The new dragon is green or golden, green with the vivid ancient meaning of green which Mohammed took up again, green with that greenish dawn-light which is the quintessence of all new and life-giving light. The dawn of all creation took place in greenish pellucid gleam that was the shine of the very presence of the Creator. John of Patmos harks back to this when he makes the iris or rainbow which screens the face of the Almighty green like smaragd or emerald. And this lovely jewel-green gleam is the very dragon itself, as it moves out wreathing and writhing into the cosmos. It is the power of the Kosmodynamos coiling throughout space, coiling along the spine of a man, leaning forth between his brows like the Uraeus between the brows of a Pharaoh. It makes a man splendid, a king, a hero, a brave man gleaming with the gleam of the dragon, which is golden when it wreathes round a man.

So the Logos came, at the beginning of our era, to give men another sort of splendour. And that same Logos today is the evil snake of the Laocoon which is the death of all of us. The Logos which was like the great green breath of springtime is now the grey stinging of myriads of deadening little serpents. Now we have to conquer the Logos, that the new dragon gleaming green may lean down from among the stars and vivify us and make us great.

And no one is coiled more bitterly in the folds of the old Logos than woman. It is always so. What was a breath of inspiration becomes in the end a fixed and evil form, which coils in round like mummy clothes. And then woman is more tightly coiled even than man. Today, the best part of womanhood is wrapped tight and tense in the folds of the Logos, she is bodiless, abstract, and driven by a self-determination terrible to behold. A strange 'spiritual' creature is woman today, driven on and on by the evil demon of the old Logos, never for a moment allowed to escape and be herself. The evil Logos says she must be 'significant', she must 'make something worth while' of her life. So on and on she goes, making something worth while, piling up the evil forms of our civilisation higher and higher, and never for a second escaping to be wrapped in the brilliant fluid folds of the new green dragon. All our present life-forms are evil. But with a persistence that would be angelic if it were not devilish woman insists on the best in life, by which she means the best of our evil life-forms, unable to realise that the best of evil life-forms are the most evil.

So, tragic and tortured by all the grey little snakes of modern shame and pain, she struggles on, fighting for 'the best', which is, alas, the evil best. All women today have a large streak of the policewoman in them. Andromeda was chained naked to a rock, and the dragon of the old form fumed at her. But poor modern Andromeda, she is forced to patrol the streets more or less in policewoman's uniform, with some sort of banner and some sort of bludgeon — or is it called a baton! — up her sleeve, and who is going to rescue her from this? Let her dress up fluffy as she likes, or white and virginal, still underneath it all you can see the stiff folds of the modern policewoman, doing her best, her level best.

Ah God, Andromeda at least had her nakedness, and it was beautiful, and Perseus wanted to fight for her. But our modern policewomen have no nakedness, they have their uniforms. And who could want to fight the dragon of the cold form, the poisonous old Logos, for the sake of a policewoman's uniform?

Ah woman, you have known many bitter experiences. But never, never before have you been condemned by the old dragon to be a policewoman.

O lovely green dragon of the new day, the undawned day, come, come in touch, and release us from the horrid grip of the evil-smelling old Logos! Come

in silence, and say nothing. Come in touch, in soft new touch like a springtime, and say nothing. Come in touch, in soft new touch like a springtime breeze, and shed these horrible policewoman sheaths from off our women, let the buds of life come nakedly!

In the days of the Apocalypse the old dragon was red. Today he is grey. He was red, because he represented the old way, the old form of power, kingship, riches, ostentation, and lust. By the days of Nero, this old form of ostentation and sensational lust had truly enough become evil, the foul dragon. And the foul dragon, the red one, had to give way to the white dragon of the Logos — Europe with the glorification of white: the white dragon. It ends with the same sanitary worship of white, but the white dragon is now a great white worm, dirty and greyish. Our colour is dirty-white, or grey.

But just as our Logos colour began dazzling white — John of Patmos insists on it, in the white robes of the saints — and ends in a soiled colourlessness, so the old red dragon started marvellously red, glowing golden and blood-red. He was bright, bright, bright red, like the most dazzling vermilion. This, this vivid gold-red was the first colour of the first dragon, far, far back under the very dawn of history. The farthest off men looked at the sky and saw in terms of gold and red, not in terms of green and dazzling white. In terms of gold and red, and the reflection of the dragon in a man's face, in the far-off, far-off past, showed glowing brilliant vermilion. Ah then the heroes and the hero-kings glowed in the face red as poppies that the sun shines through. It was the colour of glory: it was the colour of the wild bright blood, which was life itself. The red, racing bright blood, that was the supreme mystery: the slow, purplish, oozing dark blood, the royal mystery.

The ancient kings of Rome, of the ancient Rome, which was really a thousand years behind the civilisation of the eastern Mediterranean, they painted their faces vermilion, to be divinely royal. And the Red Indians of North America do the same. They are not red save by virtue of this very vermilion paint, which they call 'medicine'. But the Red Indians belong almost to the Neolithic stage of culture, and of religion. Ah, the dark vistas of time in the pueblos of New Mexico, when the men come out with faces glistening scarlet! Gods! they look like gods! It is the red dragon, the beautiful red dragon.

But he became old, and his life-forms became fixed. Even in the pueblos of New Mexico, where the cold life-forms are the life-forms of the great red dragon, the greatest dragon, even there the life-forms are really evil, and the men have a passion for the colour blue, the blue of the turquoise, to escape the red. Turquoise and Silver, these are the colours they yearn for. For gold is of the red dragon. Far-off down the ages gold was the very stuff of the dragon, its soft,

gleaming body, prized for the glory of the dragon, and men wore soft gold for glory, like the Aegean and Etruscan warriors in their tombs. And it was not till the red dragon became the kakodaimon, and men began to yearn for the green dragon, and the silver arm-bands, that gold fell from glory and became money. What makes gold into money? the Americans ask you. And there you have it. The death of the great gold dragon, the coming of the green and silver dragon — how the Persians and Babylonians loved turquoise blue, the Chaldeans loved lapis lazuli; so far back they had turned from the red dragon! The dragon of Nebuchadnezzar is blue, and is a blue-scaled unicorn stepping proudly. He is very highly developed. The dragon of the Apocalypse is a much more ancient beast: but then, he is kakodaimon.

But the royal colour still was red: the vermilion and the purple, which is not violet but crimson, the true colour of living blood, these were kept for kings and emperors. They became the very colours of the evil dragon. They are the colours in which the apocalypticist clothes the great harlot woman whom he calls Babylon. The colour of life itself becomes the colour of abomination.

And today, in the day of the dirty-white dragon of the Logos and the Steel Age, the socialists have taken up the oldest of life-colours, and the whole world trembles at a suggestion of vermilion. For the majority today, red is the colour of destruction. 'Red for danger', as the children say. So the cycle goes round: the red and gold dragons of the Gold Age and the Silver Age, the green dragon of the Bronze Age, the white dragon of the Iron Age, the dirty-white dragon, or grey dragon of the Steel Age: and then a return once more to the first brilliant red dragon.

But every heroic epoch turns instinctively to the red dragon, or the gold: every non-heroic epoch instinctively turns away. Like the Apocalypse, where the red and the purple are anathema.

The great red dragon of the Apocalypse had seven heads, each of them crowned: which means his power is royal or supreme in its own manifestation. The seven heads mean he has seven lives, as many lives as a man has natures, or as there are 'potencies' to the cosmos. All his seven heads have to be smitten off, that is, man has another great series of seven conquests to make, this time over the dragon. The fight goes on.

The dragon, being cosmic, destroys a third part of the cosmos before he is cast down out of heaven into earth: he draws down a third part of the stars with his tail. Then the woman brings forth the child who is 'to shepherd mankind with an iron flail'. Alas, if that is a prophecy of the reign of the Messiah, or Jesus, how true it is! For all men today are ruled with a flail of iron. This child is caught up to God: we almost wish the dragon had got him. And the woman fled into the

wilderness. That is, the great cosmic mother has no place in the cosmos of men any more. She must hide in the desert since she cannot die. — And there she hides, still during the weary three and a half mystic years which are still going on, apparently.

Now begins the second half of the Apocalypse. We enter the rather boring process of Danielesque prophecy, concerning the Church of Christ and the fall of the various kingdoms of the earth. We cannot be very much interested in the prophesied collapse of Rome and the Roman Empire.

CHAPTER XVII

But before we look at this second half, let us glance at the dominant symbols, especially at the symbols of number. The whole scheme is so entirely based on the numbers of seven, four and three, that we may as well try to find out what these numbers meant to the ancient mind.

Three was the sacred number: it is still, for it is the number of the Trinity: it is the number of the nature of God. It is perhaps from the scientists, or the very early philosophers, that we get the most revealing suggestions of the ancient beliefs. The early scientists took the extant religious symbol-ideas and transmuted them into true 'ideas'. We know that the ancients saw number concrete — in dots or in rows of pebbles. And the number three was held by the Pythagoreans to be the perfect number, in their primitive arithmetic, because you could not divide it and leave a gap in the middle. This is obviously true of three pebbles. You cannot destroy the integrity of the three. If you remove one pebble on each side, it still leaves the central stone poised and in perfect balance between the two, like the body of a bird between the two wings. And even as late as the third century, this was felt as the perfect or divine condition of being.

Again, we know that Anaximander, in the fifth century, conceived of the Boundless, the infinite substance, as having its two 'elements', the hot and the cold, the dry and the moist, or fire and the dark, the great 'pair', on either side of it, in the first primordial creation. These three were the beginning of all things. This idea lies at the back of the very ancient division of the living cosmos into three, before the idea of God was separated out.

In parenthesis let us remark that the very ancient world was entirely religious and godless. While men still lived in close physical unison, like flocks of birds on the wing, in a close physical oneness, an ancient tribal unison in which the individual was hardly separated out, then the tribe lived breast to breast, as it were, with the cosmos, in naked contact with the cosmos, the whole cosmos was alive and in contact with the flesh of man, there was no room for the intrusion of the god idea. It was not till the individual began to feel separated off, not till he fell into awareness of himself, and hence into apartness; not, mythologically, till he ate of the Tree of Knowledge instead of the Tree of Life, and knew himself apart and separate, that the conception of a God arose, to intervene between man and the cosmos. The very oldest ideas of man are purely religious, and there is no notion of any sort of god or gods. God and gods enter when man has 'fallen'

into a sense of separateness and loneliness. The oldest philosophers, Anaximander with his divine Boundless and the divine two elements, and Anaximenes with his divine 'air', are going back to the great conception of the naked cosmos, before there was God. At the same time, they know all about the gods of the sixth century: but they are not strictly interested in them. Even the first Pythagoreans, who were religious in the conventional way, were more profoundly religious in their conceptions of the two primary forms, Fire and the Night, or Fire and Dark, dark being conceived of as a kind of thick air or vapour. These two were the Limit and the Unlimited, Night, the Unlimited, finding its Limit in Fire. These two primary forms, being in a tension of opposition, prove their oneness by their very opposedness. Herakleitos says that all things are an exchange for fire: and that the sun is new every day. The limit of dawn and evening is the Bear: and opposite the Bear is the boundary of bright Zeus.' Bright Zeus is here supposed to be the bright blue sky, so his boundary is the horizon, and Herakleitos means probably that opposite the Bear, that is down, down in the antipodes, it is always night, and Night lives the death of Day, as Day lives the death of Night.

This is the state of mind of great men in the fifth and fourth centuries before Christ, strange and fascinating and a revelation of the old symbolic mind. Religion was already turning moralistic or ecstatic, with the Orphics the tedious idea of 'escaping the wheel of birth' had begun to abstract men from life. But early science is a source of the purest and oldest religion. The mind of man recoiled, there in Ionia, to the oldest religious conception of the cosmos, from which to start thinking out the scientific cosmos. And the thing the oldest philosophers disliked was the new sort of religious conception, with its ecstasies and its escape and its purely personal nature: its loss of the cosmos.

So the first philosophers took up the sacred three-part cosmos of the ancients. It is paralleled in Genesis, where we have a god creation, in the division into heaven, and earth, and water: the first three created elements, presupposing a God who creates. The ancient threefold division of the living heavens, the Chaldean, is made when the heavens themselves are divine, and not merely God-inhabited. Before men felt any need of God or gods, while the vast heavens lived of themselves and lived breast to breast with man, the Chaldeans gazed up in religious rapture. And then by some strange intuition, they divided the heavens into three sections. And then they really knew the stars as the stars have never been known since.

Later, when a God or Maker or Ruler of the skies was invented or discovered, then the heavens were divided into the four quarters, the old four quarters that lasted so long. And then, gradually with the invention of a God or a Demiurge,

the old star-knowledge and true worship declined with the Babylonians into magic and astrology, the whole system was 'worked'. But still the old Chaldean cosmic knowledge persisted, and this the Ionians must have picked up again.

Even during the four-quarter centuries, the heavens still had three primary rulers, sun, moon, and morning-star. But the Bible says, sun, moon, and stars.

The morning-star was always a god, from the time when gods began. But when the cult of dying and reborn gods started all over the old world, about 600 b.c., he became symbolic of the new god, because he rules in the twilight, between day and night, and for the same reason he is supposed to be lord of both, and to stand gleaming with one foot on the flood of night and one foot on the world of day, one foot on sea and one on shore. We know that night was a form of vapour or flood.

CHAPTER XVIII

Three is the number of things divine, and four is the number of creation. The world is four-square, divided into four quarters which are ruled by four great creatures, the four winged creatures that surround the throne of the Almighty. These four great creatures make up the sum of mighty space, both dark and light, and their wings are the quivering of this space, that trembles all the time with thunderous praise of the Creator: for these are Creation praising their Maker, as Creation shall praise its Maker forever. That their wings (strictly) are full of eyes before and behind, only means that they are the stars of the trembling heavens forever changing and travelling and pulsing. In Ezekiel, muddled and mutilated as the text is, we see the four great creatures amid the wheels of the revolving heavens — a conception which belongs to the seventh, sixth, and fifth centuries — and supporting on their wing-tips the crystal vault of the final heaven of the throne.

In their origin, the Creatures are probably older than God himself. They were a very grand conception, and some suggestion of them is at the back of most of the great winged Creatures of the east. They belong to the last age of the living cosmos, the cosmos that was not created, that had yet no god in it because it was in itself utterly divine and primal. Away behind all the creation myths lies the grand idea that the cosmos always was, that it could not have had any beginning, because it always was there and always would be there. It could not have a god to start it, because it was itself all god and all divine, the origin of everything.

This living cosmos man first divided into three parts: and then, at some point of great change, we cannot know when, he divided it instead into four quarters, and the four quarters demanded a whole, a conception of the whole, and then a maker, a Creator. So the four great elemental creatures became subordinate, they surrounded the supreme central unit, and their wings cover all space. Later still, they are turned from vast and living elements into beasts or Creatures or Cherubim — it is a process of degradation — and given the four elemental or cosmic natures of man, lion, bull, and eagle. In Ezekiel, each of the creatures is all four at once, with a different face looking in each direction. But in the Apocalypse each beast has its own face. And as the cosmic idea dwindled, we get the four cosmic natures of the four Creatures applied first to the great Cherubim then to the personified Archangels, Michael, Gabriel, etc., and finally they are applied to the four Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. ‘Four

for the Gospel Natures.’ It is all a process of degradation or personification of a great old concept.

Parallel to the division of the cosmos into four quarters, four parts, and four dynamic ‘natures’ comes the other division, into four elements. At first, it seems as if there had been only three elements: heaven, earth, and sea, or water: heaven being primarily light or fire. The recognition of air came later. But with the elements of fire, earth, and water the cosmos was complete, air being conceived of as a form of vapour, darkness the same.

And the earliest scientists (philosophers) seemed to want to make one element, or at most two, responsible for the cosmos. Anaximenes said all was water. Xenophanes said all was earth and water. Water gave off moist exhalations, and in these moist exhalations were latent sparks; these exhalations blew aloft as clouds, they blew far, aloft, and condensed upon their sparks instead of into water, and thus they produced stars: thus they even produced the sun. The sun was a great ‘cloud’ of assembled sparks from the moist exhalations of the watery earth. This is how science began: far more fantastic than myth, but using processes of reason.

Then came Herakleitos with his: All is Fire, or rather: All is an exchange for Fire, and his insistence on Strife, which holds things asunder and so holds them integral and makes their existence even possible, as the creative principle: Fire being an element.

After which the Four Elements become almost inevitable. With Empedokles in the fifth century the Four Elements of Fire, Earth, Air, and Water established themselves in the imagination of men forever, the four living or cosmic elements, the radical elements: the Four Roots Empedokles called them, the four cosmic roots of all existence. And they were controlled by two principles, Love and Strife. — ‘Fire and Water and Earth and the mighty height of Air; dread Strife, too, apart from these, of equal weight to each, and Love in their midst, equal in length and breadth.’ And again Empedokles calls the Four: ‘shining Zeus, life-bringing Hera, Aidoneus, and Vestis.’ So we see the Four also as gods: the Big Four of the ages. When we consider the four elements, we shall see that they are, now and forever, the four elements of our experience. All that science has taught about fire does not make fire any different. The processes of combustion are not fire, they are thought-forms. H₂O is not water, it is a thought-form derived from experiments with water. Thought-forms are thought-forms, they do not make our life. Our life is made still of elemental fire and water, earth and air: by these we move and live and have our being.

From the four elements we come to the four natures of man himself, based on the conception of blood, bile, lymph, and phlegm, and their properties. Man is

still a creature that thinks with his blood: 'the heart, dwelling in the sea of blood that runs in opposite directions, where chiefly is what men call thought; for the blood round the heart is the thought of men'. — And maybe this is true. Maybe all basic thought takes place in the blood around the heart, and is only transferred to the brain. Then there are the Four Ages, based on the four metals: gold, silver, bronze, and iron. In the sixth century already the Iron Age had set in, and already man laments it. The age before the eating of the Fruit of Knowledge is left far behind.

The first scientists, then, are very near to the old symbolists. And so we see in the Apocalypse, that when St. John is referring to the old primal or divine cosmos, he speaks of a third part of this, that, or another: as when the dragon, who belongs to the old divine cosmos, draws down a third part of the stars with his tail: or where the divine trumps destroy a third part of things: or the horsemen from the abyss, which are divine demons, destroy a third part of man. But when the destruction is by non-divine agency, it is usually a fourth part that is destroyed. — Anyhow there is far too much destroying in the Apocalypse. It ceases to be fun.

CHAPTER XIX

The numbers four and three together make up the sacred number seven: the cosmos with its god. The Pythagoreans called it 'the number of the right time'. Man and the cosmos alike have four created natures, and three divine natures. Man has his four earthly natures, then soul, spirit, and the eternal I. The universe has the four quarters and the four elements, then also the three divine quarters of Heaven, Hades, and the Whole, and the three divine motions of Love, Strife, and Wholeness. — The oldest cosmos had not Heaven nor Hades. But then it is probable that seven is not a sacred number in the oldest consciousness of man.

It is always, from the beginning, however, a semi-sacred number because it is the number of the seven ancient planets, which began with the sun and moon, and included the five great 'wandering' stars, Jupiter, Venus, Mercury, Mars, and Saturn. The wandering planets were always a great mystery to man, especially in the days when he lived breast to breast with the cosmos, and watched the moving heavens with a profundity of passionate attention quite different from any form of attention today.

The Chaldeans always preserved some of the elemental immediacy of the cosmos, even to the end of Babylonian days. They had, later, their whole mythology of Marduk and the rest, and the whole bag of tricks of their astrologers and magi, but it never seems to have ousted, entirely, the direct star-lore, nor to have broken altogether the breast to breast contact of the star-gazer and the skies of night. The magi continued, apparently, through the ages concerned only in the mysteries of the heavens, without any god or gods dragged in. That the heaven-lore degenerated into tedious forms of divination and magic later on is only part of human history: everything human degenerates, from religion downwards, and must be renewed and revived.

It was this preserving of star-lore naked and without gods that prepared the way for astronomy later, just as in the eastern Mediterranean a great deal of old cosmic lore about water and fire must have lingered and prepared the way for the Ionian philosophers and modern science.

The great control of the life of earth from the living and intertwining heavens was an idea which had far greater hold of the minds of men before the Christian era than we realise. In spite of all the gods and goddesses, the Jehovah and the dying and redeeming Saviours of many nations, underneath the old cosmic vision remained, and men believed, perhaps, more radically in the rule of the

stars than in any of the gods. Man's consciousness has many layers, and the lowest layers continue to be crudely active, especially down among the common people, for centuries after the cultured consciousness of the nation has passed to higher planes. And the consciousness of man always tends to revert to the original levels; though there are two modes of reversion: by degeneration and decadence; and by deliberate return in order to get back to the roots again, for a new start.

In Roman times there was a great slipping back of the human consciousness to the oldest levels, though it was a form of decadence and a return to superstition. But in the first two centuries after Christ the rule of the heavens returned on man as never before, with a power of superstition stronger than any religious cult. Horoscopy was the rage. Fate, fortune, destiny, character, everything depended on the stars, which meant, on the seven planets. The seven planets were the seven Rulers of the heavens, and they fixed the fate of man irrevocably, inevitably. Their rule became at last a form of insanity, and both the Christians and the Neo-Platonists set their faces against it.

Now this element of superstition bordering on magic and occultism is very strong in the Apocalypse. The Revelation of John is, we must admit it, a book to conjure with. It is full of suggestions for occult use, and it has been used, throughout the ages, for occult purposes, for the purpose of divination and prophecy especially. It lends itself to this. Nay, the book is written, especially the second half, in a spirit of lurid prophecy very like the magical utterances of the occultists of the time. It reflects the spirit of the time:

as The Golden Ass reflects that of less than a hundred years later, not very different.

So that the number seven ceases almost to be the 'divine' number, and becomes the magical number of the Apocalypse. As the book proceeds, the ancient divine element fades out and the 'modern', first century taint of magic, prognostication, and occult practice takes its place. Seven is the number now of divination and conjuring rather than of real vision.

So the famous 'time, times and a half, which means three and a half years. It comes from Daniel who already starts the semi-occult business of prophesying the fall of empires. It is supposed to represent the half of a sacred week — all that is ever allowed to the princes of evil, who are never given the full run of the sacred week of seven 'days'. But with John of Patmos it is a magic number.

In the old days, when the moon was a great power in heaven, ruling men's bodies and swaying the flux of the flesh, then seven was one of the moon's quarters. The moon still sways the flux of the flesh, and still we have a seven-day week. The Greeks of the sea had a nine-day week. That is gone.

But the number seven is no longer divine. Perhaps it is still to some extent magical.

CHAPTER XX

The number ten is the natural number of a series. 'It is by nature that the Hellenes count up to ten and then start over again.' It is of course the number of the fingers of the two hands. This repetition of five observed throughout nature was one of the things that led the Pythagoreans to assert that 'all things are number'. In the Apocalypse, ten is the 'natural' or complete number of a series. The Pythagoreans, experimenting with pebbles, found that ten pebbles could be laid out in a triangle of $4 + 3 + 2 + 1$: and this sent their minds off in imagination. — But the ten heads or crowned horns of John's two evil beasts probably represent merely a complete series of emperors or kings, horn being a stock symbol for empires or their rulers. The old symbol of horns, of course, is the symbol of power, originally the divine power that came to man from the vivid cosmos, from the starry green dragon of life, but especially from the vivid dragon within the body, that lies coiled at the base of the spine, and flings himself sometimes along the spinal way till he flushes the brow with magnificence, the gold horns of power that bud on Moses' forehead, or the gold serpent, Uraeus, which came down between the brows of the royal Pharaohs of Egypt, and is the dragon of the individual. But for the commonalty, the horn of power was the ithyphallos, the phallos, the cornucopia.

CHAPTER XXI

The final number, twelve, is the number of the established or unchanging cosmos, as contrasted with the seven of the wandering planets, which are the physical (in the old Greek sense) cosmos, always in motion apart from the rest of motion. Twelve is the number of the signs of the zodiac, and of the months of the year. It is three times four, or four times three: the complete correspondence. It is the whole round of the heavens, and the whole round of man. For man had seven natures in the old scheme: that is, $6 + 1$, the last being the nature of his wholeness. But now he has quite another new nature, as well as the old one: for we admit he still is made up of the old Adam plus the new. So now his number is twelve, $6 + 6$ for his natures, and one for his wholeness. But his wholeness is now in Christ: no longer symbolised between his brows. And now that his number is twelve, man is perfectly rounded and established, established and unchanging, for he is now perfect and there is no need for him to change, his wholeness, which is his thirteenth number (unlucky in superstition), being with Christ in heaven. Such was the opinion of the 'saved', concerning themselves. Such is still the orthodox opinion: those that are saved in Christ are perfect and unchanging, no need for them to change. They are perfectly individualised.

CHAPTER XXII

When we come to the second half of Revelation, after the new-born child is snatched to heaven and the woman has fled into the wilderness, there is a sudden change, and we feel we are reading purely Jewish and Jewish-Christian Apocalypse, with none of the old background.

And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon.' They cast down the dragon out of heaven into the earth, and he becomes Satan, and ceases entirely to be interesting. When the great figures of mythology are turned into rationalised or merely moral forces, then they lose interest. We are acutely bored by moral angels and moral devils. We are acutely bored by a 'rationalised' Aphrodite. Soon after 1000 b.c. the world went a little insane about morals and 'sin'. The Jews had always been tainted.

What we have been looking for in the Apocalypse is something older, grander than the ethical business. The old, flaming love of life and the strange shudder of the presence of the invisible dead made the rhythm of really ancient religion. Moral religion is comparatively modern, even with the Jews.

But the second half of the Apocalypse is all moral: that is to say, it is all sin and salvation. For a moment there is a hint of the old cosmic wonder, when the dragon turns again upon the woman and she is given wings of an eagle and flies off into the wilderness: but the dragon pursues her and spues out a flood upon her, to overwhelm her: 'And the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed up the flood And the dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.'

The last words are, of course, the moral ending tacked on by some Jew-Christian scribe to the fragment of myth. The dragon is here the watery dragon, or the dragon of chaos, and in his evil aspect still. He is resisting with all his might the birth of a new thing, or new era. He turns against the Christians, since they are the only 'good' thing left on earth.

The poor dragon henceforth cuts a sorry figure. He gives his power, and his seat, and great authority to the beast that rises out of the sea, the beast with 'seven heads and ten horns, and upon his horns ten crowns and upon his heads the name of blasphemy. And the beast which I saw was like unto a leopard, and his feet were as the feet of a bear, and his mouth as the mouth of a lion.'

We know this beast already: he comes out of Daniel and is explained by

Daniel. The beast is the last grand world-empire, the ten horns are ten kingdoms confederated in the empire — which is of course Rome. As for the leopard, bear, and lion qualities, these are also explained in Daniel as the three empires that preceded Rome, the Macedonian, swift as a leopard, the Persian, stubborn as a bear, the Babylonians, rapacious as the lion.

We are back again at the level of allegory, and for me, the real interest is gone. Allegory can always be explained: and explained away. The true symbol defies all explanation, so does the true myth. You can give meanings to either — you will never explain them away. Because symbol and myth do not affect us only mentally, they move the deep emotional centres every time. The great quality of the mind is finality. The mind ‘understands’, and there’s an end of it.

But the emotional consciousness of man has a life and movement quite different from the mental consciousness. The mind knows in part, in part and parcel, with full stop after every sentence. But the emotional soul knows in full, like a river or a flood. For example, the symbol of the dragon — look at it, on a Chinese tea-cup or in an old wood-cut, read it in a fairy-tale — and what is the result? If you are alive in the old emotional self, the more you look at the dragon, and think of it, the farther and farther flushes out your emotional awareness, on and on into dim regions of the soul aeons and aeons back. But if you are dead in the old feeling-knowing way, as so many moderns are, then the dragon just ‘stands for’ this, that, and the other — all the things it stands for in Frazer’s Golden Bough: it is just a kind of glyph or label, like the gilt pestle and mortar outside a chemist’s shop. Or take better still the Egyptian symbol called the ankh, the symbol of life, etc., which the goddesses hold in their hands. Any child ‘knows what it means’. But a man who is really alive feels his soul begin to throb and expand at the mere sight of the symbol. Modern men, however, are nearly all half dead, modern women too. So they just look at the ankh and know all about it, and that’s that. They are proud of their own emotional impotence.

Naturally, then, the Apocalypse has appealed to men through the ages as an ‘allegorical’ work. Everything just ‘meant something’ and something moral at that. You can put down the meaning flat — plain as two and two make four.

The beast from the sea means Roman Empire — and later Nero, number 666. The beast from the earth means the pagan sacerdotal power, the priestly power which made the emperors divine and made Christians even ‘worship’ them. For the beast from the earth has two horns, like a lamb, a false Lamb indeed, an Antichrist, and it teaches its wicked followers to perform marvels and even miracles — of witchcraft, like Simon Magus and the rest.

So we have the Church of Christ — or of the Messiah — being martyred by the beast, till pretty well all good Christians are martyred. Then at last, after not

so very long a time — say forty years — the Messiah descends from heaven and makes war on the beast, the Roman Empire, and on the kings who are with him. There is a grand fall of Rome, called Babylon, and a grand triumph over her downfall — though the best poetry is all the time lifted from Jeremiah or Ezekiel or Isaiah, it is not original. The sainted Christians gloat over fallen Rome: and then the Victorious Rider appears, his shirt bloody with the blood of dead kings. After this, a New Jerusalem descends to be his Bride, and these precious martyrs all get their thrones, and for a thousand years (John was not going to be put off with Enoch's meagre forty), for a thousand years, the grand Millennium, the Lamb reigns over the earth, assisted by all the risen martyrs. And if the martyrs in the Millennium are going to be as bloodthirsty and ferocious as John the Divine in the Apocalypse — Revenge! Timotheus cries — then somebody's going to get it hot during the thousand years of the rule of Saints.

But this is not enough. After the thousand years the whole universe must be wiped out, earth, sun, moon, stars, and sea. These early Christians fairly lusted after the end of the world. They wanted their own grand turn first — Revenge! Timotheus cries. — But after that, they insisted that the whole universe must be wiped out, sun, stars, and all — and a new New Jerusalem should appear, with the same old saints and martyrs in glory, and everything else should have disappeared except the lake of burning brimstone in which devils, demons, beasts and bad men should frizzle and suffer for ever and ever and ever, Amen!

So ends this glorious work: surely a rather repulsive work. Revenge was indeed a sacred duty to the Jerusalem Jews: and it is not the revenge one minds so much as the perpetual self-glorification of these saints and martyrs, and their profound impudence. How one loathes them, in their 'new white garments'. How disgusting their priggish rule must be! How vile is their spirit, really, insisting, simply insisting on wiping out the whole universe, bird and blossom, star and river, and above all, everybody except themselves and their precious 'saved' brothers. How beastly their New Jerusalem, where the flowers never fade, but stand in everlasting sameness! How terribly bourgeois to have unfading flowers!

No wonder the pagans were horrified at the 'impious' Christian desire to destroy the universe. How horrified even the old Jews of the Old Testament would have been! For even to them, earth and sun and stars were eternal, created in the grand creation by Almighty God. But no, these impudent martyrs must see it all go up in smoke.

Oh, it is the Christianity of the middling masses, this Christianity of the Apocalypse. And we must confess, it is hideous. Self-righteousness, self-conceit, self-importance and secret envy underlie it all.

By the time of Jesus, all the lowest classes and mediocre people had realised that never would they get a chance to be kings, never would they go in chariots, never would they drink wine from gold vessels. Very well then — they would have their revenge by destroying it all. ‘Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and is become the habitation of devils.’ And then all the gold and silver and pearls and precious stones and fine linen and purple, and silk, and scarlet — and cinnamon and frankincense, wheat, beasts, sheep, horses, chariots, slaves, souls of men — all these that are destroyed, destroyed, destroyed in Babylon the great — how one hears the envy, the endless envy screeching through this song of triumph!

No, we can understand that the Fathers of the Church in the east wanted Apocalypse left out of the New Testament. And like Judas among the disciples, it was inevitable that it should be included. The Apocalypse is the feet of clay to the grand Christian image. And down crashes the image, on the weakness of these very feet.

There is Jesus — but there is also John the Divine. There is Christian love — and there is Christian envy. The former would ‘save’ the world — the latter will never be satisfied till it has destroyed the world. They are two sides of the same medal.

CHAPTER XXIII

Because, as a matter of fact, when you start to teach individual self-realisation to the great masses of people, who when all is said and done are only fragmentary beings, incapable of whole individuality, you end by making them all envious, grudging, spiteful creatures. Anyone who is kind to man knows the fragmentariness of most men, and wants to arrange a society of power in which men fall naturally into a collective wholeness, since they cannot have an individual wholeness. In this collective wholeness they will be fulfilled. But if they make efforts at individual fulfilment, they must fail for they are by nature fragmentary. Then, failures, having no wholeness anywhere, they fall into envy and spite. Jesus knew all about it when he said: To them that have shall be given, *etc.* But he had forgotten to reckon with the mass of the mediocre, whose motto is: We have nothing and therefore nobody shall have anything.

But Jesus gave the ideal for the Christian individual, and deliberately avoided giving an ideal for the State or the nation. When he said, 'Render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's', he left to Caesar the rule of men's bodies, willy-nilly: and this threatened terrible danger to a man's mind and soul. Already by the year a.d. 60 the Christians were an accursed sect; and they were compelled, like all men, to sacrifice, that is to give worship to the living Caesar. In giving Caesar the power over men's bodies, Jesus gave him the power to compel men to make the act of worship to Caesar. Now I doubt if Jesus himself could have performed this act of worship, to a Nero or a Domitian. No doubt he would have preferred death. As did so many early Christian martyrs. So there, at the very beginning was a monstrous dilemma. To be a Christian meant death at the hands of the Roman State; for refusal to submit to the cult of the Emperor and worship the divine man, Caesar, was impossible to a Christian. No wonder, then, that John of Patmos saw the day not far off when every Christian would be martyred. The day would have come, if the imperial cult had been absolutely enforced on the people. And then when every Christian was martyred, what could a Christian expect but a Second Advent, resurrection, and an absolute revenge! There was a condition for the Christian community to be in, sixty years after the death of the Saviour.

Jesus made it inevitable, when he said that the money belonged to Caesar. It was a mistake. Money means bread, and the bread of men belongs to no men. Money means also power, and it is monstrous to give power to the virtual

enemy. Caesar was bound, sooner or later, to violate the soul of the Christians. But Jesus saw the individual only, and considered only the individual. He left it to John of Patmos, who was up against the Roman State, to formulate the Christian vision of the Christian State. John did it in the Apocalypse. It entails the destruction of the whole world, and the reign of saints in ultimate bodiless glory. Or it entails the destruction of all earthly power, and the rule of an oligarchy of martyrs (the Millennium).

This destruction of all earthly power we are now moving towards. The oligarchy of martyrs began with Lenin, and apparently others also are martyrs. Strange, strange people they are, the martyrs, with weird, cold morality. When every country has its martyr-ruler, either like Lenin or like those, what a strange, unthinkable world it will be! But it is coming: the Apocalypse is still a book to conjure with.

A few vastly important points have been missed by Christian doctrine and Christian thought. Christian fantasy alone has grasped them.

1. No man is or can be a pure individual. The mass of men have only the tiniest touch of individuality: if any. The mass of men live and move, think and feel collectively, and have practically no individual emotions, feelings or thoughts at all. They are fragments of the collective or social consciousness. It has always been so. And will always be so.

2. The State, or what we call Society as a collective whole cannot have the psychology of an individual. Also it is a mistake to say that the State is made up of individuals.

It is not. It is made up of a collection of fragmentary beings. And no collective act, even so private an act as voting, is made from the individual self. It is made from the collective self, and has another psychological background, non-individual.

3. The State cannot be Christian. Every State is a Power. It cannot be otherwise. Every State must guard its own boundaries and guard its own prosperity. If it fails to do so, it betrays all its individual citizens.

4. Every citizen is a unit of worldly power. A man may wish to be a pure Christian and a pure individual. But since he must be a member of some political State, or nation, he is forced to be a unit of worldly power.

5. As a citizen, as a collective being, man has his fulfilment in the gratification of his power-sense. If he belongs to one of the so-called 'ruling nations', his soul is fulfilled in the sense of his country's power or strength. If his country mounts up aristocratically to a zenith of splendour and power, in a hierarchy, he will be all the more fulfilled, having his place in the hierarchy. But if his country is powerful and democratic, then he will be obsessed with a

perpetual will to assert his power in interfering and preventing other people from doing as they wish, since no man must do more than another man. This is the condition of modern democracies, a condition of perpetual bullying.

In democracy, bullying inevitably takes the place of power. Bullying is the negative form of power. The modern Christian State is a soul-destroying force, for it is made up of fragments which have no organic whole, only a collective whole. In a hierarchy each part is organic and vital, as my finger is an organic and vital part of me. But a democracy is bound in the end to be obscene, for it is composed of myriad disunited fragments, each fragment assuming to itself a false wholeness, a false individuality. Modern democracy is made up of millions of frictional parts all asserting their own wholeness.

6. To have an ideal for the individual which regards only his individual self and ignores his collective self is in the long run fatal. To have a creed of individuality which denies the reality of the hierarchy makes at last for more anarchy. Democratic man lives by cohesion and resistance, the cohesive force of 'love' and the resistant force of the individual 'freedom'. To yield entirely to love would be to be absorbed, which is the death of the individual: for the individual must hold his own, or he ceases to be 'free' and individual. So that we see, what our age has proved to its astonishment and dismay, that the individual cannot love. The individual cannot love: let that be an axiom. And the modern man or woman cannot conceive of himself, herself, save as an individual. And the individual in man or woman is bound to kill, at last, the lover in himself or herself. It is not that each man kills the thing he loves, but that each man, by insisting on his own individuality, kills the lover in himself, as the woman kills the lover in herself. The Christian dare not love: for love kills that which is Christian, democratic, and modern, the individual. The individual cannot love. When the individual loves, he ceases to be purely individual. And so he must recover himself, and cease to love. It is one of the most amazing lessons of our day: that the individual, the Christian, the democrat cannot love. Or, when he loves, when she loves, he must take it back, she must take it back.

So much for private or personal love. Then what about that other love, 'caritas', loving your neighbour as yourself?

It works out the same. You love your neighbour. Immediately you run the risk of being absorbed by him: you must draw back, you must hold your own. The love becomes resistance. In the end, it is all resistance and no love: which is the history of democracy.

If you are taking the path of individual self-realisation, you had better, like Buddha, go off and be by yourself, and give a thought to nobody. Then you may achieve your Nirvana. Christ's way of loving your neighbour leads to the

hideous anomaly of having to live by sheer resistance to your neighbour, in the end.

The Apocalypse, strange book, makes this clear. It shows us the Christian in his relation to the State; which the gospels and epistles avoid doing. It shows us the Christian in relation to the State, to the world, and to the cosmos. It shows him in mad hostility to all of them, having, in the end, to will the destruction of them all.

It is the dark side of Christianity, of individualism, and of democracy, the side the world at large now shows us. And it is, simply, suicide. Suicide individual and *en masse*.

If man could will it, it would be cosmic suicide. But the cosmos is not at man's mercy, and the sun will not perish to please us.

We do not want to perish, either. We have to give up a false position. Let us give up our false position as Christians, as individuals, as democrats. Let us find some conception of ourselves that will allow us to be peaceful and happy, instead of tormented and unhappy.

The Apocalypse shows us what we are resisting, unnaturally. We are unnaturally resisting our connection with the cosmos, with the world, with mankind, with the nation, with the family. All these connections are, in the Apocalypse, anathema, and they are anathema to us. We cannot bear connection. That is our malady. We must break away, and be isolate. We call that being free, being individual. Beyond a certain point, which we have reached, it is suicide. Perhaps we have chosen suicide. Well and good. The Apocalypse too chose suicide, with subsequent self-glorification.

But the Apocalypse shows, by its very resistance, the things that the human heart secretly yearns after. By the very frenzy with which the Apocalypse destroys the sun and the stars, the world, and all kings and all rulers, all scarlet and purple and cinnamon, all harlots, finally all men altogether who are not 'sealed', we can see how deeply the apocalyptists are yearning for the sun and the stars and the earth and the waters of the earth, for nobility and lordship and might, and scarlet and gold splendour, for passionate love, and a proper unison with men, apart from this sealing business. What man most passionately wants is his living wholeness and his living unison, not his own isolate salvation of his 'soul'. Man wants his physical fulfilment first and foremost, since now, once and once only, he is in the flesh and potent. For man, the vast marvel is to be alive. For man, as for flower and beast and bird, the supreme triumph is to be most vividly, most perfectly alive. Whatever the unborn and the dead may know, they cannot know the beauty, the marvel of being alive in the flesh. The dead may look after the afterwards. But the magnificent here and now of life in the flesh is

ours, and ours alone, and ours only for a time. We ought to dance with rapture that we should be alive and in the flesh, and part of the living, incarnate cosmos. I am part of the sun as my eye is part of me. That I am part of the earth my feet know perfectly, and my blood is part of the sea. My soul knows that I am part of the human race, my soul is an organic part of the great human soul, as my spirit is part of my nation. In my own very self, I am part of my family. There is nothing of me that is alone and absolute except my mind, and we shall find that the mind has no existence by itself, it is only the glitter of the sun on the surface of the waters.

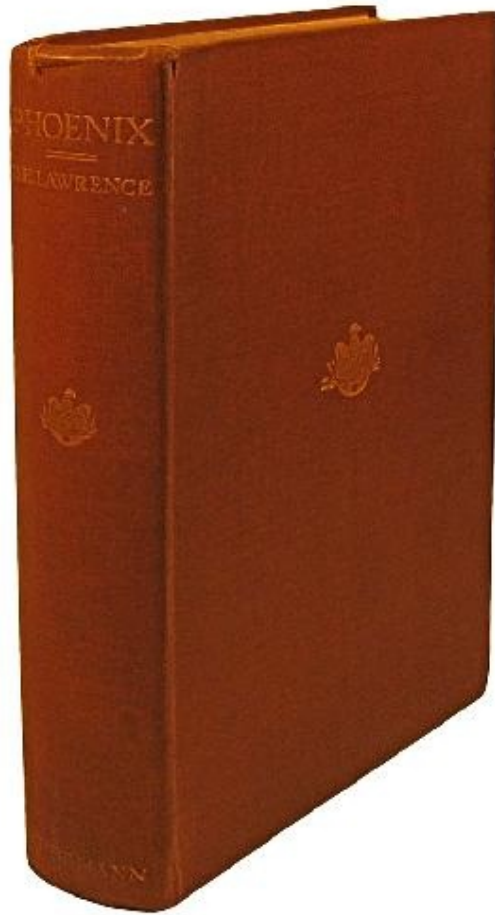
So that my individualism is really an illusion. I am a part of the great whole, and I can never escape. But I can deny my connections, break them, and become a fragment. Then I am wretched.

What we want is to destroy our false, inorganic connections, especially those related to money, and re-establish the living organic connections, with the cosmos, the sun and earth, with mankind and nation and family. Start with the sun, and the rest will slowly, slowly happen.

PHOENIX: THE POSTHUMOUS PAPERS OF D. H. LAWRENCE



This collection of non-fiction works was first published in 1936, six years after Lawrence's death. It contains many articles, reviews and other literary pieces, which were mostly found among the novelist's possessions in manuscript form. Of particular note are Lawrence's critical reviews of other novelists, his treatise on education and an incomplete autobiography, located towards the end of the large collection.



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WHISTLING OF BIRDS

The frost held for many weeks, until the birds were dying rapidly. Everywhere in the fields and under the hedges lay the ragged remains of lapwings, starlings, thrushes, redwings, innumerable ragged bloody cloaks of birds, whence the flesh was eaten by invisible beasts of prey.

Then, quite suddenly, one morning, the change came. The wind went to the south, came off the sea warm and soothing. In the afternoon there were little gleams of sunshine, and the doves began, without interval, slowly and awkwardly to coo. The doves were cooing, though with a laboured sound, as if they were still winter-stunned. Nevertheless, all the afternoon they continued their noise, in the mild air, before the frost had thawed off the road. At evening the wind blew gently, still gathering a bruising quality of frost from the hard earth. Then, in the yellow-gleamy sunset, wild birds began to whistle faintly in the blackthorn thickets of the stream-bottom.

It was startling and almost frightening after the heavy silence of frost. How could they sing at once, when the ground was thickly strewn with the torn carcasses of birds? Yet out of the evening came the uncertain, silvery sounds that made one's soul start alert, almost with fear. How could the little silver bugles sound the rally so swiftly, in the soft air, when the earth was yet bound? Yet the birds continued their whistling, rather dimly and brokenly, but throwing the threads of silver, germinating noise into the air.

It was almost a pain to realize, so swiftly, the new world. *Le monde est mort. Vive le monde!* But the birds omitted even the first part of the announcement, their cry was only a faint, blind, fecund *vive!*

There is another world. The winter is gone. There is a new world of spring. The voice of the turtle is heard in the land. But the flesh shrinks from so sudden a transition. Surely the call is premature while the clods are still frozen, and the ground is littered with the remains of wings! Yet we have no choice. In the bottoms of impenetrable blackthorn, each evening and morning now, out flickers a whistling of birds.

Where does it come from, the song? After so long a cruelty, how can they make it up so quickly? But it bubbles through them, they are like little well-

heads, little fountain-heads whence the spring trickles and bubbles forth. It is not of their own doing. In their throats the new life distils itself into sound. It is the rising of silvery sap of a new summer, gurgling itself forth.

All the time, whilst the earth lay choked and killed and winter-mortified, the deep undersprings were quiet. They only wait for the ponderous encumbrance of the old order to give way, yield in the thaw, and there they are, a silver realm at once. Under the surge of ruin, unmitigated winter, lies the silver potentiality of all blossom. One day the black tide must spend itself and fade back. Then all-suddenly appears the crocus, hovering triumphant in the rear, and we know the order has changed, there is a new regime, sound of a new *vive! vive!*

It is no use any more to look at the torn remnants of birds that lie exposed. It is no longer any use remembering the sullen thunder of frost and the intolerable pressure of cold upon us. For whether we will or not, they are gone. The choice is not ours. We may remain wintry and destructive for a little longer, if we wish it, but the winter is gone out of us, and willy-nilly our hearts sing a little at sunset.

Even whilst we stare at the ragged horror of the birds scattered broadcast, part-eaten, the soft, uneven cooing of the pigeon ripples from the outhouses, and there is a faint silver whistling in the bushes come twilight. No matter, we stand and stare at the torn and unsightly ruins of life, we watch the weary, mutilated columns of winter retreating under our eyes. Yet in our ears are the silver vivid bugles of a new creation advancing on us from behind, we hear the rolling of the soft and happy drums of the doves.

We may not choose the world. We have hardly any choice for ourselves. We follow with our eyes the bloody and horrid line of march of extreme winter, as it passes away. But we cannot hold back the spring. We cannot make the birds silent, prevent the bubbling of the wood-pigeons. We cannot stay the fine world of silver-fecund creation from gathering itself and taking place upon us. Whether we will or no, the daphne tree will soon be giving off perfume, the lambs dancing on two feet, the celandines will twinkle all over the ground, there will be a new heaven and new earth.

For it is in us, as well as without us. Those who can may follow the columns of winter in their retreat from the earth. Some of us, we have no choice, the spring is within us, the silver fountain begins to bubble under our breast, there is gladness in spite of ourselves. And on the instant we accept the gladness! The first day of change, out whistles an unusual, interrupted paean, a fragment that will augment itself imperceptibly. And this in spite of the extreme bitterness of the suffering, in spite of the myriads of torn dead.

Such a long, long winter, and the frost only broke yesterday. Yet it seems,

already, we cannot remember it. It is strangely remote, like a far-off darkness. It is as unreal as a dream in the night. This is the morning of reality, when we are ourselves. This is natural and real, the glimmering of a new creation that stirs in us and about us. We know there was winter, long, fearful. We know the earth was strangled and mortified, we know the body of life was torn and scattered broadcast. But what is this retrospective knowledge? It is something extraneous to us, extraneous to this that we are now. And what we are, and what, it seems, we always have been, is this quickening lovely silver plasm of pure creativity. All the mortification and tearing, ah yes, it was upon us, encompassing us. It was like a storm or a mist or a falling from a height. It was estrangled upon us, like bats in our hair, driving us mad. But it was never really our innermost self. Within, we were always apart, we were this, this limpid fountain of silver, then quiescent, rising and breaking now into the flowering.

It is strange, the utter incompatibility of death with life. Whilst there is death, life is not to be found. It is all death, one overwhelming flood. And then a new tide rises, and it is all life, a fountain of silvery blissfulness. It is one or the other. We are for life, or we are for death, one or the other, but never in our essence both at once.

Death takes us, and all is torn redness, passing into darkness. Life rises, and we are faint fine jets of silver running out to blossom. All is incompatible with all. There is the silver-speckled, incandescent-lovely thrush, whistling pipingly his first song in the blackthorn thicket. How is he to be connected with the bloody, feathered unsightliness of the thrush-remnants just outside the bushes? There is no connexion. They are not to be referred the one to the other. Where one is, the other is not. In the kingdom of death the silvery song is not. But where there is life, there is no death. No death whatever, only silvery gladness, perfect, the other-world.

The blackbird cannot stop his song, neither can the pigeon. It takes place in him, even though all his race was yesterday destroyed.

He cannot mourn, or be silent, or adhere to the dead. Of the dead he is not, since life has kept him. The dead must bury their dead. Life has now taken hold on him and tossed him into the new ether of a new firmament, where he bursts into song as if he were combustible. What is the past, those others, now he is tossed clean into the new, across the untranslatable difference?

In his song is heard the first brokenness and uncertainty of the transition. The transit from the grip of death into new being is a death from death, in its sheer metempsychosis a dizzy agony. But only for a second, the moment of trajectory, the passage from one state to the other, from the grip of death to the liberty of newness. In a moment he is a kingdom of wonder, singing at the centre of a new

creation.

The bird did not hang back. He did not cling to his death and his dead. There is no death, and the dead have buried their dead. Tossed into the chasm between two worlds, he lifted his wings in dread, and found himself carried on the impulse.

We are lifted to be cast away into the new beginning. Under our hearts the fountain surges, to toss us forth. Who can thwart the impulse that comes upon us? It comes from the unknown upon us, and it behoves us to pass delicately and exquisitely upon the subtle new wind from heaven, conveyed like birds in unreasoning migrations from death to life.

ADOLF

When we were children our father often worked on the night-shift. Once it was spring-time, and he used to arrive home, black and tired, just as we were downstairs in our nightdresses. Then night met morning face to face, and the contact was not always happy. Perhaps it was painful to my father to see us gaily entering upon the day into which he dragged himself soiled and weary. He didn't like going to bed in the spring morning sunshine.

But sometimes he was happy, because of his long walk through the dewy fields in the first daybreak. He loved the open morning, the crystal and the space, after a night down pit. He watched every bird, every stir in the trembling grass, answered the whinnying of the pewits and tweeted to the wrens. If he could, he also would have whinnied and tweeted and whistled in a native language that was not human. He liked non-human things best.

One sunny morning we were all sitting at table when we heard his heavy slurring walk up the entry. We became uneasy. His was always a disturbing presence, trammelling. He passed the window darkly, and we heard him go into the scullery and put down his tin bottle. But directly he came into the kitchen. We felt at once that he had something to communicate. No one spoke. We watched his black face for a second.

"Give me a drink," he said.

My mother hastily poured out his tea. He went to pour it out into his saucer. But instead of drinking he suddenly put something on the table among the teacups. A tiny brown rabbit! A small rabbit, a mere morsel, sitting against the bread as still as if it were a made thing.

"A rabbit! A young one! Who gave it you, father?"

But he laughed enigmatically, with a sliding motion of his yellow-grey eyes, and went to take off his coat. We pounced on the rabbit.

"Is it alive? Can you feel its heart beat?"

My father came back and sat down heavily in his armchair. He dragged his saucer to him, and blew his tea, pushing out his red lips under his black moustache.

"Where did you get it, father?"

"I picked it up," he said, wiping his naked forearm over his mouth and beard.

"Where?"

"It is a wild one!" came my mother's quick voice.

“Yes, it is.”

“Then why did you bring it?” cried my mother.

“Oh, we wanted it,” came our cry.

“Yes, I’ve no doubt you did — ” retorted my mother. But she was drowned in our clamour of questions.

On the field path my father had found a dead mother rabbit and three dead little ones — this one alive, but unmoving.

“But what had killed them, daddy?”

“I couldn’t say, my child. I s’d think she’d aten something.”

“Why did you bring it!” again my mother’s voice of condemnation. “You know what it will be.”

My father made no answer, but we were loud in protest.

“He must bring it. It’s not big enough to live by itself. It would die,” we shouted.

“Yes, and it will die now. And then there’ll be *another* outcry.”

My mother set her face against the tragedy of dead pets. Our hearts sank.

“It won’t die, father, will it? Why will it? It won’t.”

“I s’d think not,” said my father.

“You know well enough it will. Haven’t we had it all before!” said my mother.

“They dunna always pine,” replied my father testily.

But my mother reminded him of other little wild animals he had brought, which had sulked and refused to live, and brought storms of tears and trouble in our house of lunatics.

Trouble fell on us. The little rabbit sat on our lap, unmoving, its eye wide and dark. We brought it milk, warm milk, and held it to its nose. It sat as still as if it was far away, retreated down some deep burrow, hidden, oblivious. We wetted its mouth and whiskers with drops of milk. It gave no sign, did not even shake off the wet white drops. Somebody began to shed a few secret tears.

“What did I say?” cried my mother. “Take it and put it down in the field.”

Her command was in vain. We were driven to get dressed for school. There sat the rabbit. It was like a tiny obscure cloud. Watching it, the emotions died out of our breast. Useless to love it, to yearn over it. Its little feelings were all ambushed. They must be circumvented. Love and affection were a trespass upon it. A little wild thing, it became more mute and asphyxiated still in its own arrest, when we approached with love. We must not love it. We must circumvent it, for its own existence.

So I passed the order to my sister and my mother. The rabbit was not to be spoken to, nor even looked at. Wrapping it in a piece of flannel I put it in an

obscure corner of the cold parlour, and put a saucer of milk before its nose. My mother was forbidden to enter the parlour whilst we were at school.

“As if I should take any notice of your nonsense,” she cried affronted. Yet I doubt if she ventured into the parlour.

At midday, after school, creeping into the front room, there we saw the rabbit still and unmoving in the piece of flannel. Strange grey-brown neutralization of life, still living! It was a sore problem to us.

“Why won’t it drink its milk, mother?” we whispered. Our father was asleep.

“It prefers to sulk its life away, silly little thing.” A profound problem. Prefers to sulk its life away! We put young dandelion leaves to its nose. The sphinx was not more oblivious. Yet its eye was bright.

At tea-time, however, it had hopped a few inches, out of its flannel, and there it sat again, uncovered, a little solid cloud of muteness, brown, with unmoving whiskers. Only its side palpitated slightly with life.

Darkness came; my father set off to work. The rabbit was still unmoving. Dumb despair was coming over the sisters, a threat of tears before bedtime. Clouds of my mother’s anger gathered as she muttered against my father’s wantonness.

Once more the rabbit was wrapped in the old pit-singlet. But now it was carried into the scullery and put under the copper fireplace, that it might imagine itself inside a burrow. The saucers were placed about, four or five, here and there on the floor, so that if the little creature *should* chance to hop abroad, it could not fail to come upon some food. After this my mother was allowed to take from the scullery what she wanted and then she was forbidden to open the door.

When morning came and it was light, I went downstairs. Opening the scullery door, I heard a slight scuffle. Then I saw dabbles of milk all over the floor and tiny rabbit-droppings in the saucers. And there the miscreant, the tips of his ears showing behind a pair of boots. I peeped at him. He sat bright-eyed and askance, twitching his nose and looking at me while not looking at me.

He was alive — very much alive. But still we were afraid to trespass much on his confidence.

“Father!” My father was arrested at the door. “Father, the rabbit’s alive.”

“Back your life it is,” said my father.

“Mind how you go in.”

By evening, however, the little creature was tame, quite tame. He was christened Adolf. We were enchanted by him. We couldn’t really love him, because he was wild and loveless to the end. But he was an unmixed delight.

We decided he was too small to live in a hutch — he must live at large in the house. My mother protested, but in vain. He was so tiny. So we had him upstairs,

and he dropped his tiny pills on the bed and we were enchanted.

Adolf made himself instantly at home. He had the run of the house, and was perfectly happy, with his tunnels and his holes behind the furniture.

We loved him to take meals with us. He would sit on the table humping his back, sipping his milk, shaking his whiskers and his tender ears, hopping off and hobbling back to his saucer, with an air of supreme unconcern. Suddenly he was alert. He hobbled a few tiny paces, and reared himself up inquisitively at the sugar basin. He fluttered his tiny fore-paws, and then reached and laid them on the edge of the basin, whilst he craned his thin neck and peeped in. He trembled his whiskers at the sugar, then did his best to lift down a lump.

“Do you think I will have it! Animals in the sugar pot!” cried my mother, with a rap of her hand on the table.

Which so delighted the electric Adolf that he flung his hindquarters and knocked over a cup.

“It’s your own fault, mother. If you left him alone — ”

He continued to take tea with us. He rather liked warm tea. And he loved sugar. Having nibbled a lump, he would turn to the butter. There he was shooed off by our parent. He soon learned to treat her shooing with indifference. Still, she hated him to put his nose in the food. And he loved to do it. And one day between them they overturned the cream-jug. Adolf deluged his little chest, bounced back in terror, was seized by his little ears by my mother and bounced down on the hearthrug. There he shivered in momentary discomfort, and suddenly set off in a wild flight to the parlour.

This last was his happy hunting ground. He had cultivated the bad habit of pensively nibbling certain bits of cloth in the hearthrug. When chased from this pasture he would retreat under the sofa. There he would twinkle in Buddhist meditation until, suddenly, no one knew why, he would go off like an alarm clock. With a sudden bumping scullle he would whirl out of the room, going through the doorway with his little ears flying. Then we would hear his thunderbolt hurtling in the parlour, but before we could follow, the wild streak of Adolf would flash past us, on an electric wind that swept him round the scullery and carried him back, a little mad thing, flying possessed like a ball round the parlour. After which ebullition he would sit in a corner composed and distant, twitching his whiskers in abstract meditation. And it was in vain we questioned him about his outbursts. He just went off like a gun, and was as calm after it as a gun that smokes placidly.

Alas, he grew up rapidly. It was almost impossible to keep him from the outer door.

One day, as we were playing by the stile, I saw his brown shadow loiter across

the road and pass into the field that faced the houses. Instantly a cry of “Adolf!” — a cry he knew full well. And instantly a wind swept him away down the sloping meadow, his tail twinkling and zigzagging through the grass. After him we pelted. It was a strange sight to see him, ears back, his little loins so powerful, flinging the world behind him. We ran ourselves out of breath, but could not catch him. Then somebody headed him off, and he sat with sudden unconcern, twitching his nose under a bunch of nettles.

His wanderings cost him a shock. One Sunday morning my father had just been quarrelling with a pedlar, and we were hearing the aftermath indoors, when there came a sudden unearthly scream from the yard. We flew out. There sat Adolf cowering under a bench, whilst a great black and white cat glowered intently at him, a few yards away. Sight not to be forgotten. Adolf rolling back his eyes and parting his strange muzzle in another scream, the cat stretching forward in a slow elongation.

Ha, how we hated that cat! How we pursued him over the chapel wall and across the neighbours’ gardens.

Adolf was still only half grown.

“Cats!” said my mother. “Hideous detestable animals, why do people harbour them?”

But Adolf was becoming too much for her. He dropped too many pills. And suddenly to hear him clumping downstairs when she was alone in the house was startling. And to keep him from the door was impossible. Cats prowled outside. It was worse than having a child to look after.

Yet we would not have him shut up. He became more lusty, more callous than ever. He was a strong kicker, and many a scratch on face and arms did we owe to him. But he brought his own doom on himself. The lace curtains in the parlour — my mother was rather proud of them — fell on the floor very full. One of Adolf’s joys was to scuffle wildly through them as though through some foamy undergrowth. He had already torn rents in them.

One day he entangled himself altogether. He kicked, he whirled round in a mad nebulous inferno. He screamed — and brought down the curtain-rod with a smash, right on the best beloved pelargonium, just as my mother rushed in. She extricated him, but she never forgave him. And he never forgave either. A heartless wild-ness had come over him.

Even we understood that he must go. It was decided, after a long deliberation, that my father should carry him back to the wild-woods. Once again he was stowed into the great pocket of the pit-jacket.

“Best pop him i’ th’ pot,” said my father, who enjoyed raising the wind of indignation.

And so, next day, our father said that Adolf, set down on the edge of the coppice, had hopped away with utmost indifference, neither elated nor moved. We heard it and believed. But many, many were the heartsearchings. How would the other rabbits receive him? Would they smell his tameness, his humanized degradation, and rend him? My mother pooh-poohed the extravagant idea.

However, he was gone, and we were rather relieved. My father kept an eye open for him. He declared that several times passing the coppice in the early morning, he had seen Adolf peeping through the nettle-stalks. He had called him, in an odd, high-voiced, cajoling fashion. But Adolf had not responded. Wildness gains so soon upon its creatures. And they become so contemptuous then of our tame presence. So it seemed to me. I myself would go to the edge of the coppice, and call softly. I myself would imagine bright eyes between the nettle-stalks, flash of a white, scornful tail past the bracken. That insolent white tail, as Adolf turned his flank on us! It reminded me always of a certain rude gesture, and a certain unprintable phrase, which may not even be suggested.

But when naturalists discuss the meaning of the rabbit's white tail, that rude gesture and still ruder phrase always come to my mind. Naturalists say that the rabbit shows his white tail in order to guide his young safely after him, as a nursemaid's flying strings are the signal to her toddling charges to follow on. How nice and naive! I only know that my Adolf wasn't naive. He used to whisk his flank at me, push his white feather in my eye, and say "*Merde!*" It's a rude word — but one which Adolf was always semaphoring at me, flag-wagging it with all the derision of his narrow haunches.

That's a rabbit all over — insolence, and the white flag of spiteful derision. Yes, and he keeps his flag flying to the bitter end, sporting, insolent little devil that he is. See him running for his life. Oh, how his soul is fanned to an ecstasy of fright, a fugitive whirlwind of panic. Gone mad, he throws the world behind him, with astonishing hind legs. He puts back his head and lays his ears on his sides and rolls the white of his eyes in sheer ecstatic agony of speed. He knows the awful approach behind him; bullet or stoat. He knows! He knows, his eyes are turned back almost into his head. It is agony. But it is also ecstasy. Ecstasy! See the insolent white flag bobbing. He whirls on the magic wind of terror. All his pent-up soul rushes into agonized electric emotion of fear. He flings himself on, like a falling star swooping into extinction. White heat of the agony of fear. And at the same time, bob! bob! bob! goes the white tail, *merde! merde! merde!* it says to the pursuer. The rabbit can't help it. In his utmost extremity he still flings the insult at the pursuer. He is the unconquerable fugitive, the indomitable meek. No wonder the stoat becomes vindictive.

And if he escapes, this precious rabbit! Don't you see him sitting there, in his

earthly nook, a little ball of silence and rabbit triumph? Don't you see the glint on his black eye? Don't you see, in his very immobility, how the whole world is *merde* to him? No conceit like the conceit of the meek. And if the avenging angel in the shape of the ghostly ferret steals down on him, there comes a shriek of terror out of that little hump of self-satisfaction sitting motionless in a corner. Falls the fugitive. But even fallen, his white feather floats. Even in death it seems to say: "I am the meek, I am the righteous, I am the rabbit. All you rest, you are evil doers, and you shall be *bien emmerdes!*"

REX

Since every family has its black sheep, it almost follows that every man must have a sooty uncle. Lucky if he hasn't two. However, it is only with my mother's brother that we are concerned. She had loved him dearly when he was a little blond boy. When he grew up black, she was always vowing she would never speak to him again. Yet when he put in an appearance, after years of absence, she invariably received him in a festive mood, and was even flirty with him.

He rolled up one day in a dog-cart, when I was a small boy. He was large and bullet-headed and blustering, and this time, sporty. Sometimes he was rather literary, sometimes coloured with business. But this time he was in checks, and was sporty. We viewed him from a distance.

The upshot was, would we rear a pup for him. Now my mother detested animals about the house. She could not bear the mix-up of human with animal life. Yet she consented to bring up the pup.

My uncle had taken a large, vulgar public-house in a large and vulgar town. It came to pass that I must fetch the pup. Strange for me, a member of the Band of Hope, to enter the big, noisy, smelly plate-glass and mahogany public-house. It was called The Good Omen. Strange to have my uncle towering over me in the passage, shouting "Hello, Johnny, what d'yer want?" He didn't know me. Strange to think he was my mother's brother, and that he had his bouts when he read Browning aloud with emotion and eclat.

I was given tea in a narrow, uncomfortable sort of living-room, half kitchen. Curious that such a palatial pub should show such miserable private accommodations, but so it was. There was I, unhappy, and glad to escape with the soft fat pup. It was winter-time, and I wore a big-flapped black overcoat, half cloak. Under the cloak-sleeves I hid the puppy, who trembled. It was Saturday, and the train was crowded, and he whimpered under my coat. I sat in mortal fear of being hauled out for travelling without a dog-ticket. However, we arrived, and my torments were for nothing.

The others were wildly excited over the puppy. He was small and fat and white, with a brown-and-black head: a fox terrier. My father said he had a lemon head — some such mysterious technical phraseology. It wasn't lemon at all, but coloured like a field bee. And he had a black spot at the root of his spine.

It was Saturday night — bath-night. He crawled on the hearth-rug like a fat white teacup, and licked the bare toes that had just been bathed.

“He ought to be called Spot,” said one. But that was too ordinary. It was a great question, what to call him.

“Call him Rex — the King,” said my mother, looking down on the fat, animated little teacup, who was chewing my sister’s little toe and making her squeal with joy and tickles. We took the name in all seriousness.

“Rex — the King!” We thought it was just right. Not for years did I realize that it was a sarcasm on my mother’s part. She must have wasted some twenty years or more of irony on our incurable naivete.

It wasn’t a successful name, really. Because my father and all the people in the street failed completely to pronounce the monosyllable Rex. They all said Rax. And it always distressed me. It always suggested to me seaweed, and rack-and-ruin. Poor Rex!

We loved him dearly. The first night we woke to hear him weeping and whinnying in loneliness at the foot of the stairs. When it could be borne no more, I slipped down for him, and he slept under the sheets.

“I won’t have that little beast in the beds. Beds are not for dogs,” declared my mother callously.

“He’s as good as we are!” we cried, injured.

“Whether he is or not, he’s not going in the beds.”

I think now, my mother scorned us for our lack of pride. We were a little *infra dig.*, we children.

The second night, however, Rex wept the same and in the same way was comforted. The third night we heard our father plod downstairs, heard several slaps administered to the yelling, dismayed puppy, and heard the amiable, but to us heartless voice saying “Shut it then! Shut thy noise, ‘st hear? Stop in thy basket, stop there!”

“It’s a shame!” we shouted, in muffled rebellion, from the sheets.

“I’ll give you shame, if you don’t hold your noise and go to sleep,” called our mother from her room. Whereupon we shed angry tears and went to sleep. But there was a tension.

“Such a houseful of idiots would make me detest the little beast, even if he was better than he is,” said my mother.

But as a matter of fact, she did not detest Rexie at all. She only had to pretend to do so, to balance our adoration. And in truth, she did not care for close contact with animals. She was too fastidious. My father, however, would take on a real dog’s voice, talking to the puppy: a funny, high, sing-song falsetto which he seemed to produce at the top of his head. “ ‘S a pretty little dog! ‘s a pretty little doggy! — ay! — yes! — he is, yes! — Wag thy strunt, then! Wag thy strunt, Rexie! — Ha-ha! Nay, tha munna — ” This last as the puppy, wild with

excitement at the strange falsetto voice, licked my father's nostrils and bit my father's nose with his sharp little teeth.

"'E makes blood come," said my father.

"Serves you right for being so silly with him," said my mother. It was odd to see her as she watched the man, my father, crouching and talking to the little dog and laughing strangely when the little creature bit his nose and toused his beard. What does a woman think of her husband at such a moment?

My mother amused herself over the names we called him.

"He's an angel — he's a little butterfly — Rexie, my sweet!"

"Sweet! A dirty little object!" interpolated my mother. She and he had a feud from the first. Of course he chewed boots and worried our stockings and swallowed our garters. The moment we took off our stockings he would dart away with one, we after him. Then as he hung, growling, vociferously, at one end of the stocking, we at the other, we would cry:

"Look at him, mother! He'll make holes in it again." Whereupon my mother darted at him and spanked him sharply.

"Let go, sir, you destructive little fiend."

But he didn't let go. He began to growl with real rage, and hung on viciously. Mite as he was, he defied her with a manly fury. He did not hate her, nor she him. But they had one long battle with one another.

"I'll teach you, my Jockey! Do you think I'm going to spend my life darning after your destructive little teeth! I'll show you if I will!"

But Rexie only growled more viciously. They both became really angry, whilst we children expostulated earnestly with both. He would not let her take the stocking from him.

"You should tell him properly, mother. He won't be driven," we said.

"I'll drive him further than he bargains for. I'll drive him out of my sight for ever, that I will," declared my mother, truly angry.

He would put her into a real temper, with his tiny, growling defiance.

"He's sweet! A Rexie, a little Rexie!"

"A filthy little nuisance! Don't think I'll put up with him."

And to tell the truth, he was dirty at first. How could he be otherwise, so young! But my mother hated him for it. And perhaps this was the real start of their hostility. For he lived in the house with us. He would wrinkle his nose and show his tiny dagger-teeth in fury when he was thwarted, and his growls of real battle-rage against my mother rejoiced us as much as they angered her. But at last she caught him *in flagrante*. She pounced on him, rubbed his nose in the mess, and flung him out into the yard. He yelped with shame and disgust and indignation. I shall never forget the sight of him as he rolled over, then tried to

turn his head away from the disgust of his own muzzle, shaking his little snout with a sort of horror, and trying to sneeze it off. My sister gave a yell of despair, and dashed out with a rag and a pan of water, weeping wildly. She sat in the middle of the yard with the befouled puppy, and shedding bitter tears she wiped him and washed him clean. Loudly she reproached my mother. "Look how much bigger you are than he is. It's a shame, it's a shame!"

"You ridiculous little lunatic, you've undone all the good it would do him, with your soft ways. Why is my life made a curse with animals! Haven't I enough as it is — —"

There was a subdued tension afterwards. Rex was a little white chasm between us and our parent.

He became clean. But then another tragedy loomed. He must be docked. His floating puppy-tail must be docked short. This time my father was the enemy. My mother agreed with us that it was an unnecessary cruelty. But my father was adamant. "The dog'll look a fool all his life, if he's not docked." And there was no getting away from it. To add to the horror, poor Rex's tail must be *bitten* off. Why bitten? we asked aghast. We were assured that biting was the only way. A man would take the little tail and just nip it through with his teeth, at a certain joint. My father lifted his lips and bared his incisors, to suit the description. We shuddered. But we were in the hands of fate.

Rex was carried away, and a man called Rowbotham bit off the superfluity of his tail in the Nag's Head, for a quart of best and bitter. We lamented our poor diminished puppy, but agreed to find him more manly and *comme il faut*. We should always have been ashamed of his little whip of a tail, if it had not been shortened. My father said it had made a man of him.

Perhaps it had. For now his true nature came out. And his true nature, iike so much else, was dual. First he was a fierce, canine little beast, a beast of rapine and blood. He longed to hunt, savagely. He lusted to set his teeth in his prey. It was no joke with him. The old canine Adam stood first in him, the dog with fangs and glaring eyes. He flew at us when we annoyed him. He flew at all intruders, particularly the postman. He was almost a peril to the neighbourhood. But not quite. Because close second in his nature stood that fatal need to love, the *besoin d'aimer* which at last makes an end of liberty. He had a terrible, terrible necessity to love, and this trammelled the native, savage hunting beast which he was. He was torn between two great impulses: the native impulse to hunt and kill, and the strange, secondary, supervening impulse to love and obey. If he had been left to my father and mother, he would have run wild and got himself shot. As it was, he loved us children with a fierce, joyous love. And we loved him.

When we came home from school we would see him standing at the end of the entry, cocking his head wistfully at the open country in front of him, and meditating whether to be off or not: a white, inquiring little figure, with green savage freedom in front of him. A cry from a far distance from one of us, and like a bullet he hurled himself down the road, in a mad game. Seeing him coming, my sister invariably turned and fled, shrieking with delighted terror. And he would leap straight up her back, and bite her and tear her clothes. But it was only an ecstasy of savage love, and she knew it. She didn't care if he tore her pinafores. But my mother did.

My mother was maddened by him. He was a little demon. At the least provocation, he flew. You had only to sweep the floor, and he bristled and sprang at the broom. Nor would he let go. With his scruff erect and his nostrils snorting rage, he would turn up the whites of his eyes at my mother, as she wrestled at the other end of the broom. "Leave go, sir, leave go!" She wrestled and stamped her foot, and he answered with horrid growls. In the end it was she who had to let go. Then she flew at him, and he flew at her. All the time we had him, he was within a hair's-breadth of savagely biting her. And she knew it. Yet he always kept sufficient self-control.

We children loved his temper. We would drag the bones from his mouth, and put him into such paroxysms of rage that he would twist his head right over and lay it on the ground upside-down, because he didn't know what to do with himself, the savage was so strong in him and he must fly at us. "He'll fly at your throat one of these days," said my father. Neither he nor my mother dared have touched Rex's bone. It was enough to see him bristle and roll the whites of his eyes when they came near. How near he must have been to driving his teeth right into us, cannot be told. He was a horrid sight snarling and crouching at us. But we only laughed and rebuked him. And he would whimper in the sheer torment of his need to attack us.

He never did hurt us. He never hurt anybody, though the neighbourhood was terrified of him. But he took to hunting. To my mother's disgust, he would bring large dead bleeding rats and lay them on the hearth-rug, and she had to take them up on a shovel. For he would not remove them. Occasionally he brought a mangled rabbit, and sometimes, alas, fragmentary poultry. We were in terror of prosecution. Once he came home bloody and feathery and rather sheepish-looking. We cleaned him and questioned him and abused him. Next day we heard of six dead ducks. Thank heaven no one had seen him.

But he was disobedient. If he saw a hen he was off, and calling would not bring him back. He was worst of all with my father, who would take him walks on Sunday morning. My mother would not walk a yard with him. Once, walking

with my father, he rushed off at some sheep in a field. My father yelled in vain. The dog was at the sheep, and meant business. My father crawled through the hedge, and was upon him in time. And now the man was in a paroxysm of rage. He dragged the little beast into the road and thrashed him with a walking stick.

“Do you know you’re thrashing that dog unmercifully?” said a passerby.

“Ay, an’ mean to,” shouted my father.

The curious thing was that Rex did not respect my father any the more, for the beatings he had from him. He took much more heed of us children, always.

But he let us down also. One fatal Saturday he disappeared. We hunted and called, but no Rex. We were bathed, and it was bedtime, but we would not go to bed. Instead we sat in a row in our nightdresses on the sofa, and wept without stopping. This drove our mother mad.

“Am I going to put up with it? Am I? And all for that hateful little beast of a dog! He shall go! If he’s not gone now, he shall go.”

Our father came in late, looking rather queer, with his hat over his eye. But in his staccato tipped fashion he tried to be consoling.

“Never mind, my duckie, I s’ll look’ for him in the morning.”

Sunday came — oh, such a Sunday. We cried, and didn’t eat. We scoured the land, and for the first time realized how empty and wide the earth is, when you’re looking for something. My father walked for many miles — all in vain. Sunday dinner, with rhubarb pudding, I remember, and an atmosphere of abject misery that was unbearable.

“Never,” said my mother, “never shall an animal set foot in this house again, while I live. I knew what it would be! I knew.”

The day wore on, and it was the black gloom of bedtime, when we heard a scratch and an impudent little whine at the door. In trotted Rex, mud-black, disreputable, and impudent. His air of offhand “How d’ye do!” was indescribable. He trotted around with *suffisance*, wagging his tail as if to say, “Yes, I’ve come back. But I didn’t need to. I can carry on remarkably well by myself.” Then he walked to his water, and drank noisily and ostentatiously. It was rather a slap in the eye for us.

He disappeared once or twice in this fashion. We never knew where he went. And we began to feel that his heart was not so golden as we had imagined it.

But one fatal day reappeared my uncle and the dog-cart. He whistled to Rex, and Rex trotted up. But when he wanted to examine the lusty, sturdy dog, Rex became suddenly still, then sprang free. Quite jauntily he trotted round — but out of reach of my uncle. He leaped up, licking our faces, and trying to make us play.

“Why, what ha’ you done wi’ the dog — you’ve made a fool of him. He’s

softer than grease. You've ruined him. You've made a damned fool of him," shouted my uncle.

Rex was captured and hauled off to the dog-cart and tied to the seat. He was in a frenzy. He yelped and shrieked and struggled, and was hit on the head, hard, with the butt-end of my uncle's whip, which only made him struggle more frantically. So we saw him driven away, our beloved Rex, frantically, madly fighting to get to us from the high dog-cart, and being knocked down, whilst we stood in the street in mute despair.

After which, black tears, and a little wound which is still alive in our hearts.

I saw Rex only once again, when I had to call just once at The Good Omen. He must have heard my voice, for he was upon me in the passage before I knew where I was. And in the instant I knew how he loved us. He really loved us. And in the same instant there was my uncle with a whip, beating and kicking him back, and Rex cowering, bristling, snarling.

My uncle swore many oaths, how we had ruined the dog for ever, made him vicious, spoiled him for showing purposes, and been altogether a pack of mard-soft fools not fit to be trusted with any dog but a gutter-mongrel.

Poor Rex! We heard his temper was incurably vicious, and he had to be shot.

And it was our fault. We had loved him too much, and he had loved us too much. We never had another pet.

It is a strange thing, love. Nothing but love has made the dog lose his wild freedom, to become the servant of man. And this very servility or completeness of love makes him a term of deepest contempt — "You dog!"

We should not have loved Rex so much, and he should not have loved us. There should have been a measure. We tended, all of us, to overstep the limits of our own natures. He should have stayed outside human limits, we should have stayed outside canine limits. Nothing is more fatal than the disaster of too much love. My uncle was right, we had ruined the dog.

My uncle was a fool, for all that.

PAN IN AMERICA

At the beginning of the Christian era, voices were heard off the coasts of Greece, out to sea, on the Mediterranean, wailing: "Pan is dead! Great Pan is dead!"

The father of fauns and nymphs, satyrs and dryads and naiads was dead, with only the voices in the air to lament him. Humanity hardly noticed.

But who was he, really? Down the long lanes and overgrown ridings of history we catch odd glimpses of a lurking rustic god with a goat's white lightning in his eyes. A sort of fugitive, hidden among leaves, and laughing with the uncanny derision of one who feels himself defeated by something lesser than himself.

An outlaw, even in the early days of the gods. A sort of fshmael among the bushes.

Yet always his lingering title: The Great God Pan. As if he was, or had been, the greatest.

Lurking among the leafy recesses, he was almost more demon than god. To be feared, not loved or approached. A man who should see Pan by daylight fell dead, as if blasted by lightning.

Yet you might dimly see him in the night, a dark body within the darkness. And then, it was a vision filling the limbs and the trunk of a man with power, as with new, strong-mounting sap. The Pan-power! You went on your way in the darkness secretly and subtly elated with blind energy, and you could cast a spell, by your mere presence, on women and on men. But particularly on women.

In the woods and the remote places ran the children of Pan, all the nymphs and fauns of the forest and the spring and the river and the rocks. These, too, it was dangerous to see by day. The man who looked up to see the white arms of a nymph flash as she darted behind the thick wild laurels away from him followed helplessly. He was a nympholept. Fascinated by the swift limbs and the wild, fresh sides of the nymph, he followed for ever, for ever, in the endless monotony of his desire. Unless came some wise being who could absolve him from the spell.

But the nymphs, running among the trees and curling to sleep under the bushes, made the myrtles blossom more gaily, and the spring bubble up with greater urge, and the birds splash with a strength of life. And the lithe flanks of the faun gave life to the oak-groves, the vast trees hummed with energy. And the wheat sprouted like green rain returning out of the ground, in the little fields, and the vine hung its black drops in abundance, urging a secret.

Gradually men moved into cities. And they loved the display of people better than the display of a tree. They liked the glory they got of overpowering one another in war. And, above all, they loved the vainglory of their own words, the pomp of argument and the vanity of ideas.

So Pan became old and grey-bearded and goat-legged, and his passion was degraded with the lust of senility. His power to blast and to brighten dwindled. His nymphs became coarse and vulgar.

Till at last the old Pan died, and was turned into the devil of the Christians. The old god Pan became the Christian devil, with the cloven hoofs and the horns, the tail, and the laugh of derision. Old Nick, the Old Gentleman who is responsible for all our wickednesses, but especially our sensual excesses — this is all that is left of the Great God Pan.

It is strange. It is a most strange ending for a god with such a name. Pan! All! That which is everything has goat's feet and a tail! With a black face!

This really is curious.

Yet this was all that remained of Pan, except that he acquired brimstone and hell-fire, for many, many centuries. The nymphs turned into the nasty-smelling witches of a Walpurgis night, and the fauns that danced became sorcerers riding the air, or fairies no bigger than your thumb.

But Pan keeps on being reborn, in all kinds of strange shapes. There he was, at the Renaissance. And in the eighteenth century he had quite a vogue. He gave rise to an "ism," and there were many pantheists, Wordsworth one of the first. They worshipped Nature in her sweet-and-pure aspect, her Lucy Gray aspect.

"Oft have I heard of Lucy Gray," the school-child began to recite, on examination-day.

"So have I," interrupted the bored inspector.

Lucy Gray, alas, was the form that William Wordsworth thought fit to give to the Great God Pan.

And then he crossed over to the young United States: I mean Pan did. Suddenly he gets a new name. He becomes the Oversoul, the Allness of everything. To this new Lucifer Gray of a Pan Whitman sings the famous *Song of Myself*: "I am All, and All is Me." That is: "I am Pan, and Pan is me."

The old goat-legged gentleman from Greece thoughtfully strokes his beard, and answers: "All A is B, but all B is not A." Aristotle did not live for nothing. All Walt is Pan, but all Pan is not Walt.

This, even to Whitman, is incontrovertible. So the new American pantheism collapses.

Then the poets dress up a few fauns and nymphs, to let them run riskily — oh, would there were any risk! — in their private "grounds." But, alas, these tame

guinea-pigs soon became boring. Change the game.

We still *pretend* to believe that there is One mysterious Something-or-other back of Everything, ordaining all things for the ultimate good of humanity. It wasn't back of the Germans in 1914, of course, and whether it's back of the bolshevist is still a grave question. But still, it's back of *us*, so that's all right.

Alas, poor Pan! Is this what you've come to? Legless, hornless, faceless, even smileless, you are less than everything or anything, except a lie.

And yet here, in America, the oldest of all, old Pan is still alive. When Pan was greatest, he was not even Pan. He was nameless and unconceived, mentally. Just as a small baby new from the womb may say Mama! Dada! whereas in the womb it said nothing; so humanity, in the womb of Pan, said nought. But when humanity was born into a separate idea of itself, it said *Pan*.

In the days before man got too much separated off from the universe, he *was* Pan, along with all the rest.

As a tree still is. A strong-willed, powerful thing-in-itself, reaching up and reaching down. With a powerful will of its own it thrusts green hands and huge limbs at the light above, and sends huge legs and gripping toes down, down between the earth and rocks, to the earth's middle.

Here, on this little ranch under the Rocky Mountains, a big pine tree rises like a guardian spirit in front of the cabin where we live. Long, long ago the Indians blazed it. And the lightning, or the storm, has cut off its crest. Yet its column is always there, alive and changeless, alive and changing. The tree has its own aura of life. And in winter the snow slips off it, and in June it sprinkles down its little catkin-like pollen-tips, and it hisses in the wind, and it makes a silence within a silence. It is a great tree, under which the house is built. And the tree is still within the allness of Pan. At night, when the lamplight shines out of the window, the great trunk dimly shows, in the near darkness, like an Egyptian column, supporting some powerful mystery in the over-branching darkness. By day, it is just a tree.

It is just a tree. The chipmunks skelter a little way up it, the little black-and-white birds, tree-creepers, walk quick as mice on its rough perpendicular, tapping; the bluejays throng on its branches, high up, at dawn, and in the afternoon you hear the faintest rustle of many little wild doves alighting in its upper remoteness. It is a tree, which is still Pan.

And we live beneath it, without noticing. Yet sometimes, when one suddenly looks far up and sees those wild doves there, or when one glances quickly at the inhuman-human hammering of a woodpecker, one realizes that the tree is asserting itself as much as I am. It gives out life, as I give out life. Our two lives meet and cross one another, unknowingly: the tree's life penetrates my life, and

my life the tree's. We cannot live near one another, as we do, without affecting one another.

The tree gathers up earth-power from the dark bowels of the earth, and a roaming sky-glitter from above. And all unto itself, which is a tree, woody, enormous, slow but unyielding with life, bristling with acquisitive energy, obscurely radiating some of its great strength.

It vibrates its presence into my soul, and I am with Pan. I think no man could live near a pine tree and remain quite suave and supple and compliant. Something fierce and bristling is communicated. The piny sweetness is rousing and defiant, like turpentine, the noise of the needles is keen with aeons of sharpness. In the volleys of wind from the western desert, the tree hisses and resists. It does not lean eastward at all. It resists with a vast force of resistance, from within itself, and its column is a ribbed, magnificent assertion.

I have become conscious of the tree, and of its interpenetration into my life. Long ago, the Indians must have been even more acutely conscious of it, when they blazed it to leave their mark on it.

I am conscious that it helps to change me, vitally. I am even conscious that shivers of energy cross my living plasm, from the tree, and I become a degree more like unto the tree, more bristling and turpentiney, in Pan. And the tree gets a certain shade and alertness of my life, within itself.

Of course, if I like to cut myself off, and say it is all bunk, a tree is merely so much lumber not yet sawn, then in a great measure I shall *be* cut off. So much depends on one's attitude. One can shut many, many doors of receptivity in oneself; or one can open many doors that are shut.

I prefer to open my doors to the coming of the tree. Its raw earth-power and its raw sky-power, its resinous erectness and resistance, its sharpness of hissing needles and relentlessness of roots, all that goes to the primitive savageness of a pine tree, goes also to the strength of man.

Give me of your power, then, oh tree! And I will give you of mine.

And this is what men must have said, more naively, less sophistically, in the days when all was Pan. It is what, in a way, the aboriginal Indians still say, and still *mean*, intensely: especially when they dance the sacred dance, with the tree; or with the spruce twigs tied above their elbows.

Give me your power, oh tree, to help me in my life. And I will give you my power: even symbolized in a rag torn from my clothing.

This is the oldest Pan.

Or again, I say: "Oh you, you big tree, standing so strong and swallowing juice from the earth's inner body, warmth from the sky, beware of me. Beware of me, because I am strongest. I am going to cut you down and take your life and

make you into beams for my house, and into a fire. Prepare to deliver up your life to me.”

Is this any less true than when the lumberman glances at a pine tree, sees if it will cut good lumber, dabs a mark or a number upon it, and goes his way absolutely without further thought or feeling? Is he truer to life? Is it truer to life to insulate oneself entirely from the influence of the tree’s life, and to walk about in an inanimate forest of standing lumber, marketable in St. Louis, Mo.? Or is it truer to life to know, with a pantheistic sensuality, that the tree has its own life, its own assertive existence, its own living relatedness to me: that my life is added to, or militated against, by the tree’s life?

Which is really truer?

Which is truer, to live among the living, or to run on wheels?

And who can sit with the Indians around a big camp-fire of logs, in the mountains at night, when a man rises and turns his breast and his curiously-smiling bronze face away from the blaze, and stands voluptuously warming his thighs and buttocks and loins, his back to the fire, faintly smiling the inscrutable Pan-smile into the dark trees surrounding, without hearing him say, in the Pan-voice: “Aha! Tree! Aha! Tree! Who has triumphed now? I drank the heat of your blood into my face and breast, and now I am drinking it into my loins and buttocks and legs, oh tree! I am drinking your heat right through me, oh tree! Fire is life, and I take your life for mine. I am drinking it up, oh tree, even into my buttocks. Aha! Tree! I am warm! I am strong! I am happy, tree, in this cold night in the mountains!”

And the old man, glancing up and seeing the flames flapping in flamy rags at the dark smoke, in the upper fire-hurry towards the stars and the dark spaces between the stars, sits stonily and inscrutably: yet one knows that he is saying: “Go back, oh fire! Go back like honey! Go back, honey of life, to where you came from, before you were hidden in the tree. The trees climb into the sky and steal the honey of the sun, like bears stealing from a hollow tree-trunk. But when the tree falls and is put on to the fire, the honey flames and goes straight back to where it came from. And the smell of burning pine is as the smell of honey.”

So the old man says, with his lightless Indian eyes. But he is careful never to utter one word of the mystery. Speech is the death of Pan, who can but laugh and sound the reed-flute.

Is it better, I ask you, to cross the room and turn on the heat at the radiator, glancing at the thermometer and saying: “We’re just a bit below the level, in here”? Then to go back to the newspaper!

What can a man do with his life but live it? And what docs life consist in, save a vivid relatedness between the man and the living universe that surrounds him?

Yet man insulates himself more and more into mechanism, and repudiates everything but the machine and the contrivance of which he himself is master, god in the machine.

Morning comes, and white ash lies in the fire-hollow, and the old man looks at it broodingly.

“The fire is gone,” he says in the Pan silence, that is so full of unutterable things. “Look! there is no more tree. We drank his warmth, and he is gone. He is way, way off in the sky, his smoke is in the blueness, with the sweet smell of a pine-wood fire, and his yellow flame is in the sun. It is morning, with the ashes of night. There is no more tree. Tree is gone. But perhaps there is fire among the ashes. I shall blow it, and it will be alive. There is always fire, between the tree that goes and the tree that stays. One day I shall go — ”

So they cook their meat, and rise, and go in silence.

There is a big rock towering up above the trees, a cliff. And silently a man glances at it. You hear him say, without speech:

“Oh, you big rock! If a man fall down from you, he dies. Don’t let me fall down from you. Oh, you big pale rock, you are so still, you know lots of things. You know a lot. Help me, then, with your stillness. I go to find deer. Help me find deer.”

And the man slips aside, and secretly lays a twig, or a pebble, some little object in a niche of the rock, as a pact between him and the rock. The rock will give him some of its radiant-cold stillness and enduring presence, and he makes a symbolic return, of gratitude.

Is it foolish? Would it have been better to invent a gun, to shoot his game from a great distance, so that he need not approach it with any of that living stealth and preparedness with which one live thing approaches another? Is it better to have a machine in one’s hands, and so avoid the life-contact: the trouble! the pains! Is it better to see the rock as a mere nothing, not worth noticing because it has no value, and you can’t eat it as you can a deer?

But the old hunter steals on, in the stillness of the eternal Pan, which is so full of soundless sounds. And in his soul he is saying: “Deer! Oh, you thin-legged deer! I am coming! Where are you, with your feet like little stones bounding down a hill? I know you. Yes, I know you. But you don’t know me. You don’t know where I am, and you don’t know me, anyhow. But I know you. I am thinking of you. I shall get you. I’ve got to get you. I got to; so it will be. — I shall get you, and shoot an arrow right in you.”

In this state of abstraction, and subtle, hunter’s communion with the quarry — a weird psychic connexion between hunter and hunted — the man creeps into the mountains.

And even a white man who is a born hunter must fall into this state. Gun or no gun! He projects his deepest, most primitive hunter's consciousness abroad, and finds his game, not by accident, nor even chiefly by looking for signs, but primarily by a psychic attraction, a sort of telepathy: the hunter's telepathy. Then when he finds his quarry, he aims with a pure, spellbound volition. If there is no flaw in his abstracted huntsman's *will*, he cannot miss. Ari'ow or bullet, it flies like a movement of pure will, straight to the spot. And the deer, once she has let her quivering alertness be overmastered or stilled by the hunter's subtle, hypnotic, *following* spell, she cannot escape.

This is Pan, the Pan-mystery, the Pan-power. What can men who sit at home in their studies, and drink hot milk and have lamb's-wool slippers on their feet, and write anthropology, what *can* they possibly know about men, the men of Pan?

Among the creatures of Pan there is an eternal struggle for life, between lives. Man, defenceless, rapacious man, has needed the qualities of every living thing, at one time or other. The hard, silent abidingness of rock, the surging resistance of a tree, the still evasion of a puma, the dogged earth-knowledge of the bear, the light alertness of the deer, the sky-prowling vision of the eagle: turn by turn man has needed the power of every living thing. Tree, stone, or hill, river, or little stream, or waterfall, or salmon in the fall — man can be master and complete in himself, only by assuming the living powers of each of them, as the occasion requires.

He used to make himself master by a great effort of will, and sensitive, intuitive cunning, and immense labour of body.

Then he discovered the "idea." He found that all things were related by certain *laws*. The moment man learned to abstract, he began to make engines that would do the work of his body. So, instead of concentrating upon his quarry, or upon the living things which made his universe, he concentrated upon the engines or instruments which should intervene between him and the living universe, and give him mastery.

This was the death of the great Pan. The idea and the engine came between man and all things, like a death. The old connexion, the old Allness, was severed, and can never be ideally restored. Great Pan is dead.

Yet what do we live for, except to live? Man has lived to conquer the phenomenal universe. To a great extent he has succeeded. With all the mechanism of the human world, man is to a great extent master of all life, and of most phenomena.

And what then? Once you have conquered a thing, you have lost it. Its real relation to you collapses.

A conquered world is no good to man. He sits stupefied with boredom upon his conquest.

We need the universe to live again, so that we can live with it. A conquered universe, a dead Pan, leaves us nothing to live with.

You have to abandon the conquest, before Pan will live again. You have to live to live, not to conquer. What's the good of conquering even the North Pole, if after the conquest you've nothing left but an inert fact? Better leave it a mystery.

It was better to be a hunter in the woods of Pan, than it is to be a clerk in a city store. The hunter hungered, laboured, suffered tortures of fatigue. But at least he lived in a ceaseless living relation to his surrounding universe.

At evening, when the deer was killed, he went home to the tents, and threw down the deer-meat on the swept place before the tent of his women. And the women came out to greet him softly, with a sort of reverence, as he stood before the meat, the life-stuff. He came back spent, yet full of power, bringing the life-stuff. And the children looked with black eyes at the meat, and at that wonder-being, the man, the bringer of meat.

Perhaps the children of the store-clerk look at their father with a *tiny* bit of the same mystery. And perhaps the clerk feels a fragment of the old glorification, when he hands his wife the paper dollars.

But about the tents the women move silently. Then when the cooking-fire dies low, the man crouches in silence and toasts meat on a stick, while the dogs lurk round like shadows and the children watch avidly. The man eats as the sun goes down. And as the glitter departs, he says: "Lo, the sun is going, and I stay. All goes, but still I stay. Power of deer-meat is in my belly, power of sun is in my body. I am tired, but it is with power. There the small moon gives her first sharp sign. So! So! I watch her. I will give her something; she is very sharp and bright, and I do not know her power. Lo! I will give the woman something for this moon, which troubles me above the sunset, and has power. Lo! how very curved and sharp she is! Lo! how she troubles me!"

Thus, always aware, always watchful, subtly poisoning himself in the world of Pan, among the powers of the living universe, he sustains his life and is sustained. There is no boredom, because *everything* is alive and active, and danger is inherent in all movement. The contact between all things is keen and wary: for wariness is also a sort of reverence, or respect. And nothing, in the world of Pan, may be taken for granted.

So when the fire is extinguished, and the moon sinks, the man says to the woman: "Oh, woman, be very soft, be very soft and deep towards me, with the deep silence. Oh, woman, do not speak and stir and wound me with the sharp

horns of yourself. Let me come into the deep, soft places, the dark, soft places deep as between the stars. Oh, let me lose there the weariness of the day: let me come in the power of the night. Oh, do not speak to me, nor break the deep night of my silence and my power. Be softer than dust, and darker than any flower. Oh, woman, wonderful is the craft of your softness, the distance of your dark depths. Oh, open silently the deep that has no end, and do not turn the horns of the moon against me.”

This is the might of Pan, and the power of Pan.

And still, in America, among the Indians, the oldest Pan is alive. But here, also, dying fast.

It is useless to glorify the savage. For he will kill Pan with his own hands, for the sake of a motor-car. And a bored savage, for whom Pan is dead, is the stupefied image of all boredom.

And we cannot return to the primitive life, to live in tepees and hunt with bows and arrows.

Yet live we must. And once life has been conquered, it is pretty difficult to live. What are we going to do, with a conquered universe? The Pan relationship, which the world of man once had with all the world, was better than anything man has now. The savage, today, if you give him the chance, will become more mechanical and unliving than any civilized man. But civilized man, having conquered the universe, may as well leave off bossing it. Because, when all is said and done, life itself consists in a live relatedness between man and his universe: sun, moon, stars, earth, trees, flowers, birds, animals, men, everything — and not in a “conquest” of anything by anything. Even the conquest of the air makes the world smaller, tighter, and more airless.

And whether we are a store-clerk or a bus-conductor, we can still choose between the living universe of Pan, and the mechanical conquered universe of modern humanity. The machine has no windows. But even the most mechanized human being has only got his windows nailed up, or bricked in.

MAN IS A HUNTER

It is a very nice law which forbids shooting in England on Sundays. Here in Italy, on the contrary, you would think there was a law ordering every Italian to let off a gun as often as possible. Before the eyelids of dawn have come apart, long before the bells of the tiny church jangle to announce daybreak, there is a sputter and crackle as of irritating fireworks, scattering from the olive gardens and from the woods. You sigh in your bed. The Holy Day has started: the huntsmen are abroad; they will keep at it till heaven sends the night, and the little birds are no more.

The very word *cacciatore*, which means hunter, stirs one's bile. Oh, Nimrod, oh, Bahram, put by your arrows:

And Bahram, the great hunter: the wild ass Stamps o'er his bed, and cannot wake his sleep.

Here, an infinite number of tame asses shoot over my head, if I happen to walk in the wood to look at the arbutus berries, and they never fail to rouse my ire, no matter how fast asleep it may have been.

Man is a hunter! *L'uomo e cacciatore*: the Italians are rather fond of saying it. It sounds so virile. One sees Nimrod surging through the underbrush, with his spear, in the wake of a bleeding lion. And if it is a question of a man who has got a girl into trouble: "*L'uomo e cacciatore*" — "*man is a hunter*" — what can you expect? It behoves the "game" to look out for itself. Man is a hunter!

There used to be a vulgar song: "If the Missis wants to go for a row, let 'er go." Here it should be: "If the master wants to run, with a gun, let him run." For the pine-wood is full of them, as a dog's back with fleas in summer. They crouch, they lurk, they stand erect, motionless as virile statues, with gun on the alert. Then *bang!* they have shot something, with an astonishing amount of noise. And then they run, with fierce and predatory strides, to the spot.

There is nothing there! Nothing! The game! *La caccia!* — where is it? If they had been shooting at the ghost of Hamlet's father, there could not be a blanker and more spooky emptiness. One expects to see a wounded elephant lying on its side, writhing its trunk; at the very least, a wild boar ploughing the earth in his death-agony. But no! There is nothing, just nothing at all. Man, being a hunter, is, fortunately for the rest of creation, a very bad shot.

Nimrod, in velveteen corduroys, bandolier, cartridges, game-bag over his shoulder and gun in his hand, stands with feet apart *virilis-simo*, on the spot

where the wild boar should be, and gazes downwards at some imaginary point in underworld space. So! Man is a hunter. He casts a furtive glance around, under the arbutus bush, and a tail of his eye in my direction, knowing I am looking on in raillery. Then he hitches his game-bag more determinedly over his shoulder, grips his gun, and strides off uphill, large strides, virile as Hector. Perhaps even he is a Hector, Italianized into Ettore. Anyhow, he's going to be the death of something or somebody, if only he can shoot straight.

A Tuscan pine-wood is by no means a jungle. The trees are umbrella-pines, with the umbrellas open, and bare handles. They are rather parsimoniously scattered. The undergrowth, moreover, is allowed to grow only for a couple of years or so; then it is most assiduously reaped, gleaned, gathered, cleaned up clean as a lawn, for cooking Nimrod's macaroni. So that, in a *pineta*, you have a piny roof over your head, and for the rest a pretty clear run for your money. So where can the game lurk? There is hardly cover for a bumble-bee. Where can the game be that is worth all this powder? The lions and wolves and boars that must prowl perilously round all these Nimrods?

You will never know. Or not until you are going home, between the olive-trees. The hunters have been burning powder in the open, as well as in the wood: a proper fusillade. Then, on the path between the olives, you may pick up a warm, dead bullfinch, with a bit of blood on it. The little grey bird lies on its side, with its frail feet closed, and its red breast ruffled. Nimrod, having hit for once, has failed to find his quarry.

So you will know better when the servant comes excitedly and asks: "Signore, do you want any game?" Game! Splendid idea! A couple of partridges? a hare? even a wild rabbit? Why, of course! So she arrives in triumph with a knotted red handkerchief, and the not very bulky game inside it. Untie the knots! Aha! — Alas! There, in a little heap on the table, three robins, two finches, four hedge-sparrows, and two starlings, in a fluffy, coloured, feathery little heap, all the small heads rolling limp. "Take them away," you say. "We don't eat little birds." "But these," she says, tipping up the starlings roughly, "these are big ones." "Not these, either, do we eat." "No?" she exclaims, in a tone which means: "*More fools you!*" And, digusted, disappointed at not having sold the goods, she departs with the game.

You will know best of all if you go to the market, and see whoie yard-lengths of robins, like coral and onyx necklaces, and strings of bullfinches, goldfinches, larks, sparrows, nightingales, starlings, temptingly offered along with strings of sausages, these last looking like the strings of pearls in the show. If one bought the birds to wear as ornament, barbaric necklaces, it would be more conceivable. You can get quite a string of different-coloured ones for ten-pence. But imagine

the small mouthful of little bones each of these tiny carcasses must make!

But, after all, a partridge and a pheasant are only a bit bigger than a sparrow and a finch. And compared to a flea, a robin is big game. It is all a question of dimensions. Man is a hunter. “If the master wants to hunt, don’t you grunt; let him hunt!”

MERCURY

It was Sunday, and very hot. The holiday-makers flocked to the hill of Mercury, to rise two thousand feet above the steamy haze of the valleys. For the summer had been very wet, and the sudden heat covered the land in hot steam.

Every time it made the ascent, the funicular was crowded. It hauled itself up the steep incline, that towards the top looked almost perpendicular, the steel thread of the rails in the gulf of pine-trees hanging like an iron rope against a wall. The women held their breath, and didn't look. Or they looked back towards the sinking levels of the river, steamed and dim, far-stretching over the frontier.

When you arrived at the top, there was nothing to do. The hill was a pine-covered cone; paths wound between the high tree-trunks, and you could walk round and see the glimpses of the world all round, all round: the dim, far river-plain, with a dull glint of the great stream, to westwards; southwards the black, forest-covered, agile-looking hills, with emerald-green clearings and a white house or two; east, the inner valley, with two villages, factory chimneys, pointed churches, and hills beyond; and north, the steep hills of forest, with reddish crags and reddish castle ruins. The hot sun burned overhead, and all was in steam.

Only on the very summit of the hill there was a tower, an outlook tower; a long restaurant with its beer-garden, all the little yellow tables standing their round disks under the horse-chestnut trees; then a bit of a rock-garden on the slope. But the great trees began again in wilderness a few yards off.

The Sunday crowd came up in waves from the funicular. In waves they ebbed through the beer-garden. But not many sat down to drink. Nobody was spending any money. Some paid to go up the outlook tower, to look down on a world of vapours and black, agile-crouching hills, and half-cooked towns. Then everybody dispersed along the paths, to sit among the trees in the cool air.

There was not a breath of wind. Lying and looking upwards at the shaggy, barbaric middle-world of the pine-trees, it was difficult to decide whether the pure high trunks supported the upper thicket of darkness, or whether they descended from it like great cords stretched downwards. Anyhow, in between the tree-top world and the earth-world went the wonderful clean cords of innumerable proud tree-trunks, clear as rain. And as you watched, you saw that the upper world was faintly moving, faintly, most faintly swaying, with a circular movement, though the lower trunks were utterly motionless and monolithic.

There was nothing to do. In all the world, there was nothing to do, and nothing to be done. Why have we all come to the top of the Merkur? There is nothing for us to do.

What matter? We have come a stride beyond the world. Let it steam and cook its half-baked reality below there. On the hill of Mercury we take no notice. Even we do not trouble to wander and pick the fat, blue, sourish bilberries. Just lie and see the rain-pure tree-trunks like chords of music between two worlds.

The hours pass by: people wander and disappear and reappear. All is hot and quiet. Humanity is rarely boisterous any more. You go for a drink: finches run among the few people at the tables: everybody glances at everybody, but with remoteness.

There is nothing to do but to return and lie down under the pine trees. Nothing to do. But why do anything, anyhow? The desire to do anything has gone. The tree-trunks, living like rain, they are quite active enough.

At the foot of the obsolete tower there is an old tablet-stone with a very much battered Mercury, in relief. There is also an altar, or votive stone, both from the Roman times. The Romans are supposed to have worshipped Mercury on the summit. The battered god, with his round sun-head, looks very hollow-eyed and unimpressive in the purplish-red sandstone of the district. And no one any more will throw grains of offering in the hollow of the votive stone: also common, purplish-red sandstone, very local and un-Roman.

The Sunday people do not even look. Why should they? They keep passing on into the pine-trees. And many sit on the benches: many lie upon the long chairs. It is very hot, in the afternoon, and very still.

Till there seems a faint whistling in the tops of the pine-trees, and out of the universal semi-consciousness of the afternoon arouses a bristling uneasiness. The crowd is astir, looking at the sky. And sure enough, there is a great flat blackness reared up in the western sky, curled with white wisps and loose breast-feathers. It looks very sinister, as only the elements still can look. Under the sudden weird whistling of the upper pine trees, there is a subdued babble and calling of frightened voices.

They want to get down; the crowd want to get down off the hill of Mercury, before the storm comes. At any price to get off the hill! They stream towards the funicular, while the sky blackens with incredible rapidity. And as the crowd presses down towards the little station, the first blaze of lightning opens out, followed immediately by a crash of thunder, and great darkness. In one strange movement, the crowd takes refuge in the deep veranda of the restaurant, pressing among the little tables in silence. There is no rain, and no definite wind, only a sudden coldness which makes the crowd press closer.

They press closer, in the darkness and the suspense. They have become curiously unified, the crowd, as if they had fused into one body. As the air sends a chill waft under the veranda the voices murmur plaintively, like birds under leaves, the bodies press closer together, seeking shelter in contact.

The gloom, dark as night, seems to continue a long time. Then suddenly the lightning dances white on the floor, dances and shakes upon the ground, up and down, and lights up the white striding of a man, lights him up only to the hips, white and naked and striding, with fire on his heels. He seems to be hurrying, this fiery man whose upper half is invisible, and at his naked heels white little flames seem to flutter. His flat, powerful thighs, his legs white as fire stride rapidly across the open, in front of the veranda, dragging little white flames at the ankles, with the movement. He is going somewhere, swiftly.

In the great bang of the thunder the apparition disappears. The earth moves, and the house jumps in complete darkness. A faint whimpering of terror comes from the crowd, as the cold air swirls in. But still, upon the darkness, there is no rain. There is no relief: a long wait.

Brilliant and blinding, the lightning falls again; a strange bruising thud comes from the forest, as all the little tables and the secret tree-trunks stand for one unnatural second exposed. Then the blow of the thunder, under which the house and the crowd reel as under an explosion. The storm is playing directly upon the Merkur. A belated sound of tearing branches comes out of the forest.

And again the white splash of the lightning on the ground: but nothing moves. And again the long, rattling, instantaneous volleying of the thunder, in the darkness. The crowd is panting with fear, as the lightning again strikes white, and something again seems to burst, in the forest, as the thunder crashes.

At last, into the motionlessness of the storm, in rushes the wind, with the fiery flying of bits of ice, and the sudden sea-like roaring of the pine trees. The crowd winces and draws back, as the bits of ice hit in the face like fire. The roar of the trees is so great, it becomes like another silence. And through it is heard the crashing and splintering of timber, as the hurricane concentrates upon the hill.

Down comes the hail, in a roar that covers every other sound, threshing ponderously upon the ground and the roofs and the trees. And as the crowd surges irresistibly into the interior of the building, from the crushing of this ice-fall, still amid the sombre hoarseness sounds the tinkle and crackle of things breaking.

After an eternity of dread, it ends suddenly. Outside is a faint gleam of yellow light, over the snow and the endless debris of twigs and things broken. It is very cold, with the atmosphere of ice and deep winter. The forest looks wan, above the white earth, where the ice-balls lie in their myriads, six inches deep, littered

with all the twigs and things they have broken.

“Yes! Yes!” say the men, taking sudden courage as the yellow light comes into the air. “Now we can go!”

The first brave ones emerge, picking up the big hailstones, pointing to the overthrown tables. Some, however, do not linger. They hurry to the funicular station, to see if the apparatus is still working.

The funicular station is on the north side of the hill. The men come back, saying there is no one there. The crowd begins to emerge upon the wet, crunching whiteness of the hail, spreading around in curiosity, waiting for the men who operate the funicular.

On the south side of the outlook tower two bodies lay in the cold but thawing hail. The dark-blue of the uniforms showed blackish. Both men were dead. But the lightning had completely removed the clothing from the legs of one man, so that he was naked from the hips down. There he lay, his face sideways on the snow, and two drops of blood running from his nose into his big, blond, military moustache. He lay there near the votive stone of the Mercury. His companion, a young man, lay face downwards, a few yards behind him.

The sun began to emerge. The crowd gazed in dread, afraid to touch the bodies of the men. Why had they, the dead funicular men, come round to this side of the hill, anyhow?

The funicular would not work. Something had happened to it in the storm. The crowd began to wind down the bare hill, on the sloppy ice. Everywhere the earth bristled with broken pine boughs and twigs. But the bushes and the leafy trees were stripped absolutely bare, to a miracle. The lower earth was leafless and naked as in winter.

“Absolute winter!” murmured the crowd, as they hurried, frightened, down the steep, winding descent, extricating themselves from the fallen pine-branches.

Meanwhile the sun began to steam in great heat.

THE NIGHTINGALE

Tuscany is full of nightingales, and in spring and summer they sing all the time, save in the middle of the night and the middle of the day. In the little, leafy woods that hang on the steep of the hill towards the streamlet, as maidenhair hangs on a rock, you hear them piping up again in the wanness of dawn, about four o'clock in the morning: "Hello! Hello! Hello!" It is the brightest sound in the world, a nightingale piping up. Every time you hear it, you feel wonder and, it must be said, a thrill, because the sound is so bright, so glittering, it has so much power behind it.

"There goes the nightingale," you say to yourself. It sounds in the half-dawn as if the stars were darting up from the little thicket and leaping away into the vast vagueness of the sky, to be hidden and gone. But the song rings on after sunrise, and each time you listen again, startled, you wonder: "Now *why* do they say he is a sad bird?"

He is the noisiest, most inconsiderate, most obstreperous and jaunty bird in the whole kingdom of birds. How John Keats managed to begin his "Ode to a Nightingale" with: "My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains my senses," is a mystery to anybody acquainted with the actual song. You hear the nightingale silverily shouting: "What? What? What, John? Heart aches and a drowsy numbness pains? Tra-la-la! Tri-li-lilylilylilylily!"

And why the Greeks said he, or she, was sobbing in a bush for a lost lover, again I don't know. "Jug-jug-jug!" say the medieval writers, to represent the rolling of the little balls of lightning in the nightingale's throat. A wild, rich sound, richer than the eyes in a peacock's tail:

And the bright brown nightingale, amorous, Is half assuaged for Itylus.

They say, with that "Jug! jug! jug!," that she is sobbing. How they hear it is a mystery. How anyone who didn't have his ears on upside down ever heard the nightingale "sobbing," I don't know.

Anyhow it's a male sound, a most intensely and undilutedly male sound. A pure assertion. There is not a hint nor a shadow of echo and hollow recall. Nothing at all like a hollow low bell! Nothing in the world so unforlorn.

Perhaps that is what made Keats straightway feel forlorn.

Nightingale, from a 1790 edition of Buffon's Natural History in the British

Museum Forlorn! the very word is like a bell To toll me back from thee to my sole self!

Perhaps that is the reason of it; why they all hear sobs in the bush, when the nightingale sings, while any honest-to-God listening person hears the ringing shouts of small cherubim. Perhaps because of the discrepancy.

Because, in sober fact, the nightingale sings with a ringing, pinching vividness and a pristine assertiveness that makes a mere man stand still. A kind of brilliant calling and interweaving of glittering exclamation such as must have been heard on the first day of creation, when the angels suddenly found themselves created, and shouting aloud before they knew it. Then there must have been a to-do of angels in the thickets of heaven: "Hello! Hello! Behold! Behold! Behold! It is I! It is I! What a mar-mar-marvellous occurrence! What!"

For the pure splendidness of vocal assertion: "Lo! It is I!" you have to listen to the nightingale. Perhaps for the visual perfection of the same assertion, you have a look at a peacock shaking all his eyes. Among all the creatures created in final splendor, these two are perhaps the most finally perfect; the one is invisible, triumphing sound, the other is voiceless visibility. The nightingale is a quite undistinguished grey-brown bird, if you do see him, although he's got that tender, hopping mystery about him, of a thing that is rich alive inside. Just as the peacock, when he does make himself heard, is awful, but still impressive: such a fearful shout from out of the menacing jungle. You can actually see him, in Ceylon, yell from a high bough, then stream away past the monkeys, into the impenetrable jungle that seethes and is dark.

And perhaps for this reason — the reason, that is, of pure, angel-keen or demon-keen assertion of true self — the nightingale makes a man feel sad, and the peacock often makes him angry. It is a sadness that is half envy. The birds are so triumphantly positive in their created selves, eternally new from the hand of the rich, bright God, and perfect. The nightingale ripples with his own perfection. And the peacock arches all his bronze and purple eyes with assuredness.

This — this rippling assertion of a perfect bit of creation — this green shimmer of a perfect beauty in a bird — makes men angry or melancholy, according as it assails the eye or the ear.

The ear is much less cunning than the eye. You can say to somebody: "I like you awfully, you look so beautiful this morning," and she will believe it utterly, though your voice may really be vibrating with mortal hatred. The ear is so stupid, it will accept any amount of false money in words. But let one tiny gleam of the mortal hatred come into your eye, or across your face, and it is detected immediately. The eye is so shrewd and rapid.

For this reason we get the peacock at once, in all his showy, male self-assertion; and we say, rather sneeringly: “Fine feathers make fine birds!” But when we hear the nightingale, we don’t know what we hear, we only know we feel sad, forlorn. And so we say it is the nightingale that is sad.

The nightingale, let us repeat, is the most unsad thing in the world; even more unsad than the peacock full of gleam. He has nothing to be sad about. He feels perfect with life. It isn’t conceit. He just feels life-perfect, and he trills it out — shouts, jugs, gurgles, trills, gives long, mock-plaintiff calls, makes declarations, assertions, and triumphs; but he never reflects. It is pure music, in so far as you could never put words to it. But there are words for the feelings aroused in us by the song. No, even that is not true. There are no words to tell what one really feels, hearing the nightingale. It is something so much purer than words, which are all tainted. Yet we can say, it is some sort of feeling of triumph in one’s own life-perfection.

‘Tis not through envy of thy happy lot,
But being too happy in thine happiness, —
That thou, light-winged Dryad of the trees,
In some melodious plot
Of beechen green, and shadows numberless,
Singing of summer in full-throated ease.

Poor Keats, he has to be “too happy” in the nightingale’s happiness, not being very happy in himself at all. So he wants to drink the blushful Hippocrene, and fade away with the nightingale into the forest dim.

Fade far away, dissolve, and quite forget
What thou among the leaves hast never known,
The weariness, the fever, and the fret. . . .

It is such sad, beautiful poetry of the human male. Yet the next line strikes me as a bit ridiculous.

Here, where men sit and hear each other groan;
Where palsy shakes a few, sad, last gray hairs. . . .

This is Keats, not at all the nightingale. But the sad human male still tries to break away, and get over into the nightingale world. Wine will not take him across. Yet he will go.

Away! away! for I will fly to thee,
Not charioted by Bacchus and his pards,
But on the viewless wings of Poesy. . . .

He doesn't succeed, however. The viewless wings of Poesy carry him only into the bushes, not into the nightingale world. He is still outside.

Darkling I listen: and for many a time
I have been half in love with easeful Death. . . .

The nightingale never made any man in love with easeful death, except by contrast. The contrast between the bright flame of positive pure self-aliveness, in the bird, and the uneasy flickering of yearning selflessness, for ever yearning for something outside himself, which is Keats:

To cease upon the midnight with no pain,
While thou art pouring forth thy soul abroad
In such an ecstasy!
Still wouldst thou sing, and I have ears in vain, —
To thy high requiem become a sod.

How astonished the nightingale would be if he could be made to realize what sort of answer the poet was answering to his song. He would fall off the bough with amazement.

Because a nightingale, when you answer him back, only shouts and sings louder. Suppose a few other nightingales pipe up in neighbouring bushes — as they always do. Then the blue-white sparks of sound go dazzling up to heaven. And suppose you, mere mortal, happen to be sitting on the shady bank having an altercation with the mistress of your heart, hammer and tongs, then the chief nightingale swells and goes at it like Caruso in the Third Act — simply a brilliant, bursting frenzy of music, singing you down, till you simply can't hear yourself speak to quarrel.

There was, in fact, something very like a nightingale in Caruso — that bird-like, bursting, miraculous energy of song, and fullness of himself, and self-luxuriance.

Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird!
No hungry generations tread thee down.

Not yet in Tuscany, anyhow. They are twenty to the dozen. Whereas the cuckoo seems remote and low-voiced, calling his low, half secretive call as he flies past. Perhaps it really is different in England.

The voice I hear this passing night was heard
In ancient days by emperor and clown:

Perhaps the self-same song that found a path
Through the sad heart of Ruth, when, sick for home,
She stood in tears amid the alien corn.

And why in tears? Always tears. Did Diocletian, I wonder, among the emperors, burst into tears when he heard the nightingale, and vF.sop among the clowns? And Ruth, really? Myself, I strongly suspect that young lady of setting the nightingale singing, like the nice damsel in Boccaccio's story, who went to sleep with the lively bird in her hand, “ — *tua figliuola e slata si vaga dell'usignuolo, ch'ella l'ha preso e tienlosi in mano!*”

And what does the hen nightingale think of it all, as she mildly sits upon the eggs and hears milord giving himself forth? Probably she likes it, for she goes on breeding him as jaunty as ever. Probably she prefers his high cockalorum to the poet's humble moan:

Now more than ever seems it rich to die,
To cease upon the midnight with no pain. . . .

That wouldn't be much use to the hen nightingale. And one sympathizes with Keats's Fanny, and understands why she wasn't having any. Much good such a midnight would have been to *her!*

Perhaps, when all's said and done, the female of the species gets more out of life when the male isn't wanting to cease upon the midnight, with or without pain. There are better uses for midnights. And a bird that sings because he's full of his own bright life, and leaves her to keep the eggs cozy, is perhaps preferable to one who moans, even with love of her.

Of course, the nightingale is utterly unconscious of the little dim hen, while he sings. And he never mentions her name. But she knows well enough that the song is half her; just as she knows the eggs are half him. And just as she doesn't want him coming in and putting a heavy foot down on her little bunch of eggs, he doesn't want her poking into his song, and fussing over it, and mussing it up. Every man to his trade, and every woman to hers:

Adieu! adieu! thy plaintive anthem fades. . . .

It never was a plaintive anthem — it was Caruso at his jauntiest. But don't try to argue with a poet.

FLOWERY TUSCANY

I

Each country has its own flowers, that shine out specially there. In England it is daisies and buttercups, hawthorn and cowslips. In America, it is goldenrod, stargrass, June daisies, Mayapple and asters, that we call Michaelmas daisies. In India, hibiscus and datura and champa flowers, and in Australia mimosa, that they call wattle, and sharp-tongued strange heath-flowers. In Mexico it is cactus flowers, that they call roses of the desert, lovely and crystalline among many thorns; and also the dangling yard-long clusters of the cream bells of the yucca, like dropping froth.

But by the Mediterranean, now as in the days of the Argosy, and, we hope, for ever, it is narcissus and anemone, asphodel and myrtle. Narcissus and anemone, asphodel, crocus, myrtle, and parsley, they leave their sheer significance only by the Mediterranean. There are daisies in Italy too: at Paestum there are white little carpets of daisies, in March, and Tuscany is spangled with celandine. But for all that, the daisy and the celandine are English flowers, their best significance is for us and for the North.

The Mediterranean has narcissus and anemone, myrtle and asphodel and grape hyacinth. These are the flowers that speak and are understood in the sun round the Middle Sea.

Tuscany is especially flowery, being wetter than Sicily and more homely than the Roman hills. Tuscany manages to remain so remote, and secretly smiling to itself in its many sleeves. There are so many hills popping up, and they take no notice of one another. There are so many little deep valleys with streams that seem to go their own little way entirely, regardless of river or sea. There are thousands, millions of utterly secluded little nooks, though the land has been under cultivation these thousands of years. But the intensive culture of vine and olive and wheat, by the ceaseless industry of naked human hands and winter-shod feet, and slow-stepping, soft-eyed oxen does not devastate a country, does not denude it, does not lay it bare, does not uncover its nakedness, does not drive away either Pan or his children. The streams run and rattle over wild rocks of secret places, and murmur through blackthorn thickets where the nightingales

sing all together, unruffled and undaunted.

It is queer that a country so perfectly cultivated as Tuscany, where half the produce of five acres of land will have to support ten human mouths, still has so much room for the wild flowers and the nightingale. When little hills heave themselves suddenly up, and shake themselves free of neighbours, man has to build his garden and his vineyard, and sculp his landscape. Talk of hanging gardens of Babylon, all Italy, apart from the plains, is a hanging garden. For centuries upon centuries man has been patiently modelling the surface of the Mediterranean countries, gently rounding the hills, and graduating the big slopes and the little slopes into the almost invisible levels of terraces. Thousands of square miles of Italy have been lifted in human hands, piled and laid back in tiny little flats, held up by the drystone walls, whose stones came from the lifted earth. It is a work of many, many centuries. It is the gentle sensitive sculpture of all the landscape. And it is the achieving of the peculiar Italian beauty which is so exquisitely natural, because man, feeling his way sensitively to the fruitfulness of the earth, has moulded the earth to his necessity without violating it.

Which shows that it *can* be done. Man *can* live on the earth and by the earth without disfiguring the earth. It has been done here, on all these sculptured hills and softly, sensitively terraced slopes.

But, of course, you can't drive a steam plough on terraces four yards wide, terraces that dwindle and broaden and sink and rise a little, all according to the pitch and the breaking outline of the mother hill. Corn has got to grow on these little shelves of earth, where already the grey olive stands semi-invisible, and the grapevine twists upon its own scars. If oxen can step with that lovely pause at every little stride, they can plough the narrow field. But they will have to leave a tiny fringe, a grassy lip over the drystone wall below. And if the terraces are too narrow to plough, the peasant digging them will still leave the grassy lip, because it helps to hold the surface in the rains.

And here the flowers take refuge. Over and over and over and over has this soil been turned, twice a year, sometimes three times a year, for several thousands of years. Yet the flowers have never been driven out. There is a very rigorous digging and sifting, the little bulbs and tubers are flung away into perdition, not a weed shall remain.

Yet spring returns, and on the terrace lips, and in the stony nooks between terraces, up rise the aconites, the crocuses, the narcissus and the asphodel, the inextinguishable wild tulips. There they are, for ever hanging on the precarious brink of an existence, but for ever triumphant, never quite losing their footing. In England, in America, the flowers get rooted out, driven back. They become

fugitive. But in the intensive cultivation of ancient Italian terraces, they dance round and hold their own.

Spring begins with the first narcissus, rather cold and shy and wintry. They are the little bunchy, creamy narcissus with the yellow cup like the yolk of the flower. The natives call these flowers *taizette*, little cups. They grow on the grassy banks rather sparse, or push up among thorns.

To me they are winter flowers, and their scent is winter. Spring starts in February, with the winter aconite. Some icy day, when the wind is down from the snow of the mountains, early in February, you will notice on a bit of fallow land, under the olive trees, tight, pale-gold little balls, clenched tight as nuts, and resting on round ruffs of green near the ground. It is the winter aconite suddenly come.

The winter aconite is one of the most charming flowers. Like all the early blossoms, once her little flower emerges it is quite naked. No shutting a little green sheath over herself, like the daisy or the dandelion. Her bubble of frail, pale, pure gold rests on the round frill of her green collar, with the snowy wind trying to blow it away.

But without success. The *tramontana* ceases, comes a day of wild February sunshine. The clenched little nuggets of the aconite puff out, they become light bubbles, like small balloons, on a green base. The sun blazes on, with February splendour. And by noon, all under the olives are wide-open little suns, the aconites spreading all their rays; and there is an exquisitely sweet scent, honey-sweet, not narcissus-frosty; and there is a February humming of little brown bees.

Till afternoon, when the sun slopes, and the touch of snow comes back into the air.

But at evening, under the lamp on the table, the aconites are wide and excited, and there is a perfume of sweet spring that makes one almost start humming and trying to be a bee.

Aconites don't last very long. But they turn up in all odd places — on clods of dug earth, and in land where the broad-beans are thrusting up, and along the lips of terraces. But they like best land left fallow for one winter. There they throng, showing how quick they are to seize on an opportunity to live and shine forth.

In a fortnight, before February is over, the yellow bubbles of the aconite are crumpling to nothingness. But already in a cosy-nook the violets are dark purple, and there is a new little perfume in the air.

Like the debris of winter stand the hellebores, in all the wild places, and the butcher's broom is flaunting its last bright red berry. Hellebore is Christmas roses, but in Tuscany the flowers never come white. They emerge out of the

grass towards the end of December, flowers wintry of winter, and they are delicately pale green, and of a lovely shape, with yellowish stamens. They have a peculiar wintry quality of invisibility, so lonely rising from the sere grass, and pallid green, held up like a little hand-mirror that reflects nothing. At first they are single upon a stem, short and lovely, and very wintry-beautiful, with a will not to be touched, not to be noticed. One instinctively leaves them alone. But as January draws towards February, these hellebores, these greenish Christmas roses become more assertive. Their pallid water-green becomes yellower, pale sulphur-yellow-green, and they rise up, they are in tufts, in throngs, in veritable bushes of greenish open flowers, assertive, bowing their faces with a hellebore assertiveness. In some places they throng among the bushes and above the water of the stream, giving the peculiar pale glimmer almost of primroses, as you walk among them. Almost of primroses, yet with a coarse hellebore leaf and an up-rearing hellebore assertiveness, like snakes in winter.

And as one walks among them, one brushes the last scarlet off the butcher's broom. This low little shrub is the Christmas holly of Tuscany, only a foot or so high, with a vivid red berry stuck on in the middle of its sharp hard leaf. In February the last red ball rolls off the prickly plume, and winter rolls with it. The violets already are emerging from the moisture.

But before the violets make any show, there are the crocuses. If you walk up through the pine-wood, that lifts its umbrellas of pine so high, up till you come to the brow of the hill at the top, you can look south, due south, and see snow on the Apennines, and on a blue afternoon, seven layers of blue-hilled distance.

Then you sit down on that southern slope, out of the wind, and there it is warm, whether it be January or February, *tramonlana* or not. There the earth has been baked by innumerable suns, baked and baked again; moistened by many rains, but never wetted for long. Because it is rocky, and full to the south, and sheering steep in the slope.

And there, in February, in the sunny baked desert of that crumbly slope, you will find the first crocuses. On the sheer aridity of crumbled stone you see a queer, alert little star, very sharp and quite small. It has opened out rather flat, and looks like a tiny freesia flower, creamy, with a smear of yellow yolk. It has no stem, seems to have been just lightly dropped on the crumbled, baked rock. It is the first hill-crocus.

II

North of the Alps, the everlasting winter is interrupted by summers that struggle and soon yield; south of the Alps, the everlasting summer is interrupted by spasmodic and spiteful winters that never get a real hold, but that are mean and dogged. North of the Alps, you may have a pure winter's day in June. South of the Alps, you may have a midsummer day in December or January or even February. The in-between, in either case, is just as it may be. But the lands of the sun are south of the Alps, for ever.

Yet things, the flowers especially, that belong to both sides of the Alps, are not much earlier south than north of the mountains. Through all the winter there are roses in the garden, lovely creamy roses, more pure and mysterious than those of summer, leaning perfect from the stem. And the narcissus in the garden are out by the end of January, and the little simple hyacinths early in February.

But out in the fields, the flowers are hardly any sooner than English flowers. It is mid-February before the first violets, the first crocus, the first primrose. And in mid-February one may find a violet, a primrose, a crocus in England, in the hedgerows and the garden corner.

And still there is a difference. There are several kinds of wild crocus in this region of Tuscany: being little spiky mauve ones, and spiky little creamy ones, that grow among the pine-trees of the bare slopes. But the beautiful ones are those of a meadow in the corner of the woods, the low hollow meadow below the steep, shadowy pine-slopes, the secretive grassy dip where the water seeps through the turf all winter, where the stream runs between thick bushes, where the nightingale sings his mightiest in May, and where the wild thyme is rosy and full of bees, in summer.

Here the lavender crocuses are most at home — here sticking out of the deep grass, in a hollow like a cup, a bowl of grass, come the lilac-coloured crocuses, like an innumerable encampment. You may see them at twilight, with all the buds shut, in the mysterious stillness of the grassy underworld, palely glimmering like myriad folded tents. So the apaches still camp, and close their tepees, in the hollows of the great hills of the West, at night.

But in the morning it is quite different. Then the sun shines strong on the horizontal green cloud-puffs of the pines, the sky is clear and full of life, the water runs hastily, still browned by the last juice of crushed olives. And there the earth's bowl of crocuses is amazing. You cannot believe that the flowers are really still. They are open with such delight, and their pistil-thrust is so red-orange, and they are so many, all reaching out wide and marvellous, that it suggests a perfect ecstasy of radiant, thronging movement, lit-up violet and orange, and surging in some invisible rhythm of concerted, delightful movement.

You cannot believe they do not move, and make some sort of crystalline sound of delight, if you sit still and watch, you begin to move with them, like moving with the stars, and you feel the sound of their radiance. All the little cells of the flowers must be leaping with flowery life and utterance.

And the small brown honey-bees hop from flower to flower, dive down, try, and off again. The flowers have been already rifled, most of them. Only sometimes a bee stands on his head, kicking slowly inside the flower, for some time. He has found something. And all the bees have little loaves of pollen, bee-bread, in their elbow-joints.

The crocuses last in their beauty for a week or so, and as they begin to lower their tents and abandon camp, the violets begin to thicken. It is already March. The violets have been showing like tiny dark hounds for some weeks. But now the whole pack comes forth, among the grass and the tangle of wild thyme, till the air all sways subtly scented with violets, and the banks above where the crocuses had their tents are now swarming brilliant purple with violets. They are the sweet violets of early spring, but numbers have made them bold, for they flaunt and ruffle till the slopes are a bright blue-purple blaze of them, full in the sun, with an odd late crocus still standing wondering and erect amongst them.

And now that it is March, there is a rush of flowers. Down by the other stream, which turns sideways to the sun, and has tangles of brier and bramble, down where the hellebore has stood so wan and dignified all winter, there are now white tufts of primroses, suddenly come. Among the tangle and near the water-lip, tufts and bunches of primroses, in abundance. Yet they look more wan, more pallid, more flimsy than English primroses. They lack some of the full wonder of the northern flowers. One tends to overlook them, to turn to the great, solemn-faced purple violets that rear up from the bank, and above all, to the wonderful little towers of the grape-hyacinth.

I know no flower that is more fascinating, when it first appears, than the blue grape-hyacinth. And yet, because it lasts so long, and keeps on coming so repeatedly, for at least two months, one tends later on to ignore it, even to despise it a little. Yet that is very unjust.

The first grape-hyacinths are flowers of blue, thick and rich and meaningful, above the unrenewed grass. The upper buds are pure blue, shut tight; round balls of pure, perfect warm blue, blue, blue; while the lower bells are darkish blue-purple, with the spark of white at the mouth. As yet, none of the lower bells has withered, to leave the greenish, separate sparseness of fruiting that spoils the grape-hyacinth later on, and makes it seem naked and functional. All hyacinths are like that in the seeding.

But, at first, you have only a compact tower of night-blue clearing to dawn,

and extremely beautiful. If we were tiny as fairies, and lived only a summer, how lovely these great trees of bells would be to us, towers of night and dawn-blue globes. They would rise above us thick and succulent, and the purple globes would push the blue ones up, with white sparks of ripples, and we should see a god in them.

As a matter of fact, someone once told me they were the flowers of the many-breasted Artemis; and it is true, the Cybele of Ephesus, with her clustered breasts was like a grape-hyacinth at the bosom.

This is the time, in March, when the sloe is white and misty in the hedge-tangle by the stream, and on the slope of land the peach tree stands pink and alone. The almond blossom, silvery pink, is passing, but the peach, deep-toned, bluey, not at all ethereal, this reveals itself like flesh, and the trees are like isolated individuals, the peach and the apricot.

A man said this spring: "Oh, I *don't* care for peach blossom! It is such a vulgar pink!" One wonders what anybody means by a "vulgar" pink. I think pink flannelette is rather vulgar. But probably it's the flannelette's fault, not the pink. And peach blossom has a beautiful sensual pink, far from vulgar, most rare and private. And pink is so beautiful in a landscape, pink houses, pink almond, pink peach and purple apricot, pink asphodels.

It is so conspicuous and so individual, that pink among the coming green of spring, because the first flowers that emerge from winter seem always white-or yellow or purple. Now the celandines are out, and along the edges of the *podere*, the big, sturdy, black-purple anemones, with black hearts.

They are curious, these great, dark-violet anemones. You may pass them on a grey day, or at evening or early morning, and never see them. But as you come along in the full sunshine, they seem to be baying at you with all their throats, baying deep purple into the air. It is because they are hot and wide open now, gulping the sun. Whereas when they are shut, they have a silkiness and a curved head, like the curve of an umbrella handle, and a peculiar outward colourlessness, that makes them quite invisible. They may be under your feet, and you will not see them.

Altogether anemones are odd flowers. On these last hills above the plain, we have only the big black-purple ones, in tufts here and there, not many. But two hills away, the young green corn is blue with the lilac-blue kind, still the broad-petalled sort with the darker heart. But these flowers are smaller than our dark-purple, and frailer, more silky. Ours are substantial, thickly vegetable flowers, and not abundant. The others are lovely and silky-delicate, and the whole corn is blue with them. And they have a sweet, sweet scent, when they are warm.

Then on the priest's *podere* there are the scarlet, Adonis-blood anemones:

only in one place, in one long fringe under a terrace, and there by a path below. These flowers above all you will never find unless you look for them in the sun. Their silver silk outside makes them quite invisible, when they are shut up.

Yet, if you are passing in the sun, a sudden scarlet faces on to the air, one of the loveliest scarlet apparitions in the world. The inner surface of the Adonis-blood anemone is as fine as velvet, and yet there is no suggestion of pile, not as much as on a velvet rose. And from this inner smoothness issues the red colour, perfectly pure and unknown of earth, no earthiness, and yet solid, not transparent. How a colour manages to be perfectly strong and impervious, yet of a purity that suggests condensed light, yet not luminous, at least, not transparent, is a problem. The poppy in her radiance is translucent, and the tulip in her utter redness has a touch of opaque earth. But the Adonis-blood anemone is neither translucent nor opaque. It is just pure condensed red, of a velvetiness without velvet, and a scarlet without glow.

This red seems to me the perfect premonition of summer — like the red on the outside of apple blossom — and later, the red of the apple. It is the premonition in redness of summer and of autumn.

The red flowers are coming now. The wild tulips are in bud, hanging their grey leaves like flags. They come up in myriads, wherever they get a chance. But they are holding back their redness till the last days of March, the early days of April.

Still, the year is warming up. By the high ditch the common magenta anemone is hanging its silky tassels, or opening its great magenta daisy-shape to the hot sun. It is much nearer to red than the big-petalled anemones are; except the Adonis-blood. They say these anemones sprang from the tears of Venus, which fell as she went looking for Adonis. At that rate, how the poor lady must have wept, for the anemones by the Mediterranean are common as daisies in England.

The daisies are out here too, in sheets, and they too are red-mouthed. The first ones are big and handsome. But as March goes on, they dwindle to bright little things, like tiny buttons, clouds of them together. That means summer is nearly here.

The red tulips open in the corn like poppies, only with a heavier red. And they pass quickly, without repeating themselves. There is little lingering in a tulip.

In some places there are odd yellow tulips, slender, spiky, and Chinese-looking. They are very lovely, pricking out their dulled yellow in slim spikes. But they too soon lean, expand beyond themselves, and are gone like an illusion.

And when the tulips are gone, there is a moment's pause, before summer. Summer is the next move.

III

In the pause towards the end of April, when the flowers seem to hesitate, the leaves make up their minds to come out. For some time, at the very ends of the bare boughs of fig trees, spurts of pure green have been burning like little cloven tongues of green fire vivid on the tips of the candelabrum. Now these spurts of green spread out, and begin to take the shape of hands, feeling for the air of summer. And tiny green figs are below them, like glands on the throat of a goat.

For some time, the long stiff whips of the vine have had knobby pink buds, like flower buds. Now these pink buds begin to unfold into greenish, half-shut fans of leaves with red in the veins, and tiny spikes of flower, like seed-pearls. Then, in all its down and pinky dawn, the vine-rosette has a frail, delicious scent of a new year.

Now the aspens on the hill are all remarkable with the translucent membranes of blood-veined leaves. They are gold-brown, but not like autumn, rather like the thin wings of bats when like birds — call them birds — they wheel in clouds against the setting sun, and the sun glows through the stretched membrane of their wings, as through thin, brown-red stained glass. This, is the red sap of summer, not the red dust of autumn. And in the distance the aspens have the tender panting glow of living membrane just come awake. This is the beauty of the frailty of spring.

The cherry tree is something the same, but more sturdy. Now, in the last week of April, the cherry blossom is still white, but waning and passing away: it is late this year; and the leaves are clustering thick and softly copper in their dark, blood-filled glow. It is queer about fruit trees in this district. The pear and the peach were out together. But now the pear tree is a lovely thick softness of new and glossy green, vivid with a tender fullness of apple-green leaves, gleaming among all the other green of the landscape, the half-high wheat, emerald, and the grey olive, half-invisible, the browning green of the dark cypress, the black of the evergreen oak, the rolling, heavy green puffs of the stone-pines, the flimsy green of small peach and almond trees, the sturdy young green of horse-chestnut. So many greens, all in flakes and shelves and tilted tables and round shoulders and plumes and shaggles and uprisen bushes, of greens and greens, sometimes blindingly brilliant at evening, when the landscape looks as if it were on fire from inside, with greenness and with gold.

The pear is perhaps the greenest thing in the landscape. The wheat may shine lit-up yellow, or glow bluish, but the pear tree is green in itself. The cherry has white, half-absorbed flowers, so has the apple. But the plum is rough with her new foliage, and inconspicuous, inconspicuous as the almond, the peach, the apricot, which one can no longer find in the landscape, though twenty days ago they were the distinguished pink individuals of the whole countryside. Now they are gone. It is the time of green, pre-eminent green, in ruffles and flakes and slabs.

In the wood, the scrub-oak is only just coming uncrumpled, and the pines keep their hold on winter. They are wintry things, stone-pines. At Christmas, their heavy green clouds are richly beautiful. When the cypresses raise their tall and naked bodies of dark green, and the osiers are vivid red-orange, on the still blue air, and the land is lavender, then, in mid-winter, the landscape is most beautiful in colour, surging with colour.

But now, when the nightingale is still drawing out his long, wistful, yearning, teasing plaint-note, and following it up with a rich and joyful burble, the pines and the cypresses seem hard and rusty, and the wood has lost its subtlety and its mysteriousness. It still seems wintry in spite of the yellowing young oaks, and the heath in flower. But hard, dull pines above, and hard, dull, tall heath below, all stiff and resistant, this is out of the mood of spring.

In spite of the fact that the stone-white heath is in full flower, and very lovely when you look at it, it does not, casually, give the impression of blossom. More the impression of having its tips and crests all dipped in hoarfrost; or in a whitish dust. It has a peculiar ghostly colourlessness amid the darkish colourlessness of the wood altogether, which completely takes away the sense of spring.

Yet the tall white heath is very lovely, in its invisibility. It grows sometimes as tall as a man, lifting up its spires and its shadowy-white fingers with a ghostly fullness, amid the dark, rusty green of its lower bushiness; and it gives off a sweet honeyed scent in the sun, and a cloud of fine white stone-dust, if you touch it. Looked at closely, its little bells are most beautiful, delicate and white, with the brown-purple inner eye and the dainty pin-head of the pistil. And out in the sun at the edge of the wood, where the heath grows tall and thrusts up its spires of dim white next a brilliant, yellow-flowering vetch-bush, under a blue sky, the effect has a real magic.

And yet, in spite of all, the dim whiteness of all the flowering heath-fingers only adds to the hoariness and out-of-date quality of the pine-woods, now in the pause between spring and summer. It is the ghost of the interval.

Not that this week is flowerless. But the flowers are little lonely things, here and there: the early purple orchid, ruddy and very much alive, you come across

occasionally, then the little groups of bee-orchid, with their ragged concerted indifference to their appearance. Also there are the huge bud-spikes of the stout, thick-flowering pink orchid, huge buds like fat ears of wheat, hard-purple and splendid. But already odd grains of the wheat-ear are open, and out of the purple hangs the delicate pink rag of a floweret. Also there are very lovely and choice cream-coloured orchids with brown spots on the long and delicate lip. These grow in the more moist places, and have exotic tender spikes, very rare-seeming. Another orchid is a little, pretty yellow one.

But orchids, somehow, do not make a summer. They are too aloof and individual. The little slate-blue scabious is out., but not enough to raise an appearance. Later on, under the real hot sun, he will bob into notice. And by the edges of the paths there are odd rosy cushions of wild thyme. Yet these, too, are rather samples than the genuine thing. Wait another month, for wild thyme.

The same with the irises. Here and there, in fringes along the upper edge of terraces, and in odd bunches among the stones, the dark-purple iris sticks up. It is beautiful, but it hardly counts. There is not enough of it, and it is torn and buffeted by too many winds. First the wind blows with all its might from the Mediterranean, not cold, but infinitely wearying, with its rude and insistent pushing. Then, after a moment of calm, back comes a hard wind from the Adriatic, cold and disheartening. Between the two of them, the dark-purple iris flutters and tatters and curls as if it were burnt: while the little yellow rock-rose streams at the end of its thin stalk, and wishes it had not been in such a hurry to come out.

There is really no hurry. By May, the great winds will drop, and the great sun will shake off his harassments. Then the nightingale will sing an unbroken song, and the discreet, barely audible Tuscan cuckoo will be a little more audible. Then the lovely pale-lilac irises will come out in all their showering abundance of tender, proud, spiky bloom, till the air will gleam with mauve, and a new crystalline lightness will be everywhere.

The iris is half-wild, half-cultivated. The peasants sometimes dig up the roots, iris root, orris root (orris powder, the perfume that is still used). So, in May, you will find ledges and terraces, fields just lit up with the mauve light of irises, and so much scent in the air, you do not notice it, you do not even know it. It is all the flowers of iris, before the olive invisibly blooms.

There will be tufts of iris everywhere, rising up proud and tender. When the rose-coloured wild gladiolus is mingled in the corn, and the love-in-the-mist opens blue: in May and June, before the corn is cut.

But as yet it is neither May nor June, but end of April, the pause between spring and summer, the nightingale singing interruptedly, the bean-flowers dying

in the bean-fields, the bean-perfume passing with spring, the little birds hatching in the nests, the olives pruned, and the vines, the last bit of late ploughing finished, and not much work to hand, now, not until the peas are ready to pick, in another two weeks or so. Then all the peasants will be crouching between the pea-rows, endlessly, endlessly gathering peas, in the long pea-harvest which lasts two months.

So the change, the endless and rapid change. In the sunny countries, the change seems more vivid, and more complete than in the grey countries. In the grey countries, there is a grey or dark permanency, over whose surface passes change ephemeral, leaving no real mark. In England, winters and summers shadowily give place to one another. But underneath lies the grey substratum, the permanency of cold, dark reality where bulbs live, and reality is bulbous, a thing of endurance and stored-up, starchy energy.

But in the sunny countries, change is the reality and permanence is artificial and a condition of imprisonment. In the North, man tends instinctively to imagine, to conceive that the sun is lighted like a candle, in an everlasting darkness, and that one day the candle will go out, the sun will be exhausted, and the everlasting dark will resume uninterrupted sway. Hence, to the northerner, the phenomenal world is essentially tragical, because it is temporal and must cease to exist. Its very existence implies ceasing to exist, and this is the root of the feeling of tragedy.

But to the southerner, the sun is so dominant that, if every phenomenal body disappeared out of the universe, nothing would remain but bright luminousness, sunniness. The absolute is sunniness; and shadow, or dark, is only merely relative: merely the result of something getting between one and the sun.

This is the instinctive feeling of the ordinary southerner. Of course, if you start to *reason*, you may argue that the sun is a phenomenal body. Therefore it came into existence, therefore it will pass out of existence, therefore the very sun is tragic in its nature.

But this is just argument. We think, because we have to light a candle in the dark, therefore some First Cause had to kindle the sun in the infinite darkness of the beginning.

The argument is entirely shortsighted and specious. We do not know in the least whether the sun ever came into existence, and we have not the slightest possible ground for conjecturing that the sun will ever pass out of existence. All that we do know, by actual experience, is that shadow comes into being when some material object intervenes between us and the sun, and that shadow ceases to exist when the intervening object is removed. So that, of all temporal or transitory or bound-to-cess things that haunt our existence, shadow or darkness,

is the one which is purely and simply temporal. We can think of death, if we like, as of something permanently intervening between us and the sun: and this is at the root of the southern, underworld idea of death. But this doesn't alter the sun at all. As far as experience goes, in the human race, the one thing that is always there is the shining sun, and dark shadow is an accident of intervention.

Hence, strictly, there is no tragedy. The universe contains no tragedy, and man is only tragical because he is afraid of death. For my part, if the sun always shines, and always will shine, in spite of millions of clouds of words, then death, somehow, does not have many terrors. In the sunshine, even death is sunny. And there is no end to the sunshine.

That is why the rapid change of the Tuscan spring is utterly free, for me, of any sense of tragedy. "Where are the snows of yesteryear?" Why, precisely where they ought to be. Where are the little yellow aconites of eight weeks ago? I neither know nor care. They were sunny and the sun shines, and sunniness means change, and petals passing and coming. The winter aconites sunnily came, and sunnily went. What more? The sun always shines. It is our fault if we don't think so.

THE ELEPHANTS OF DIONYSUS

Dionysus, returning from India a victor with his hosts, met the Amazons once more towards the Ephesian coasts. O small-breasted, brilliant Amazons, will you never leave off attacking the Bull-foot, for whom the Charites weave ivy-garlands? Garlands and flutes. Oh, listen to the flutes! Oh, draw near, there is going to be sacrifice to the god of delight!

But the Amazons swept out of cover with bare limbs flashing and bronze spears lifted. O Dionysus! Iacchus! Iacchus! how fierce they are against you, fiercer than your own panthers. Ah, the shock of the enraged Amazons! Ah, elephants of the East, trumpeting round Dionysus!

They have fled again, lo! the Amazons have fled like a sudden ceasing of a hail-storm. They are gone, they are vanished. Ah no! here are some, suppliant in the temple. Pardon, Lord Dionysus! Oh, pardon!

But inveterate are the Amazons: over the sea, over the sea to Samos. In Samos shall be no cry of Iacchus! None shall cry: Come! Come in the spring-time! For Amazons range along the coast, inveterate; defy thee, Dionysus.

The god takes ship, and his dark-faced following, elephants stand in the boats. And the Amazons wail when they see again the long-nosed beasts bulk up. Ah, how will they devour us! Bitter, bitter the fight! Spare them not this time, Lord Dionysus! Bitter, bitter the fight! And bright-red Amazon blood spreads over the rocks and the earth, yet the last ones pierce the elephants. The rocks are torn with the piercing death-cries of elephants, the great and piercing cry of elephants, dying at the hands of the last of the Amazons, rips the island rocks.

Dionysus has conquered the Amazons. The elephants are dead. And the rocks of Samos, called Phloion, remain torn.

DAVID

Perpetual sound of water. The Arno, having risen with rain, is swirling brown: *cafe-au-lait*. It was a green river, suggesting olive trees and the hills. It is a rushing mass of *cafe-au-lait*, and it has already eaten one great slice from the flight of black steps. *Cafe-au-lait* is not respectful. But a world of women has brought us to it.

Morning in Florence. Dark, grey, and raining, with a perpetual sound of water. Over the bridge, carriages trotting under great ragged umbrellas. Two white bullocks urged from beneath a bright green umbrella, shambling into a trot as the whip-thong flickers between their soft shanks. Two men arm-in-arm under one umbrella, going nimbly. Mid-day from San Ministo — and cannon-shots. Why cannon-shots? Innumerable umbrellas over the bridge, “like flowers of infernal moly.”

David in the Piazza livid with rain. Unforgettable, now I am safe in my upper room again. Livid — unnatural. He is made so natural that he is against nature, there in his corpse-whiteness in the rain. The Florentines say that a hot excitement, an anticipatory orgasm, possesses him at midnight of the New Year. Once told, impossible to forget. A year’s waiting. It will happen to him, this orgasm, this further exposure of his nakedness. Uncomfortable. The Neptune, the Bandinelli statues, great stone creatures, do not matter. Water trickles over their flanks and down between their thighs, without effect. But David — always so sensitive. Corpse-white and sensitive. The water sinks into him, cold, diluting his stagnant springs. And yet he waits with that tense anticipation. As if to clutch the moment. Livid! The Florentine.

Perpetual sound of water. When the sun shines, it shines with grand brilliance, and then the Arno creeps underneath like a cat, like a green-eyed cat in a strange garden. We scarcely observe. We seem to hear the sun clapping in the air, noiseless and brilliant. The aerial and inaudible music of all the sun-shaken ether, inaudible, yet surely like chimes of glass. What is a river, then, but a green thread fluttering? And now! And particularly last night. Last night the river churned and challenged with strange noises. Not a Florentine walked by the parapet. Last night enormous cat-swirls breathed hoarse beyond the bank, the weir was a fighting flurry of waters. Like enormous cats interlocked in fight, uttering strange noises. Weight of dark, recoiling water. How is this Italy?

Florence — she puts up no fight. Who hears the river in Turin? Turin camps

flat in defiance. Great snowy Alps, like inquisitive gods from the North, encircle her. She sticks a brandished statue at the end of the street, full in the vista of glistening, peering snow. She pokes her finger in the eye of the gods. But Florence, the Lily-town among her hills! Her hills, her hovering waters. She can be hot, brilliant, burnt dry. But look at David! What's the matter with him? Not sun but cold rain. Children of the South, exposing themselves to the rain. Savonarola, like a hot coal quenched. The South, the North: the fire, the wet downfall. Once there was a pure equilibrium, and the Lily blossomed. But the Lily now — livid! David, livid, almost quenched, yet still strained and waiting, tense for that orgasm. Crowds will gather at New Year's midnight.

The Lily, the flower of adolescence. Water-born. You cannot dry a lily-bulb. Take away its watery preponderance, surcharge an excess of water, and it is finished. Its flesh is dead. Ask a gardener. A water-blossom dripped from the North. How it blossomed here in the flowery town. Obviously northerners must love Florence. Here is their last point, their most southerly. The extreme south of the Lily's flowering. It is said the fruits are best at their extremity of climate. The southern apple is sweetest at his most northerly limit. The Lily, the Water-born, most dazzling nearest the sun. Florence, the flower-town. David!

Michelangelo's David is the presiding genius of Florence. Not a shadow of a doubt about it. Once and for all, Florence. So young: sixteen, they say. So big: and stark-naked. Revealed. Too big, too naked, too exposed. Livid, under today's sky. The Florentine! The Tuscan pose — half self-conscious all the time. Adolescent. Waiting. The tense look. No escape. The Lily. Lily or iris, what does it matter? Whitman's Calamus, too.

Does he listen? Does he, with his young troubled brow, listen? What does he hear? Weep of waters? Even on bluest, hottest day, the same tension. Listen! The weep of waters. The wintry North. The naked exposure. Stripped so bare, the very kernel of youth. Stripped even to the adolescent orgasm of New Year's night — at midwinter. Unbearable.

Dionysus and Christ of Florence. A clouded Dionysus, a refractory Christ. Dionysus, brightness of sky and moistness of earth: so they tell us is the meaning. Giver of riches. Riches of transport, the vine. Nymphs and Hamadryads, Silenus, Pan and the Fauns and Satyrs: clue to all these, Dionysus, Iacchus, Dithyrambus. David? — Dionysus, source of reed-music, water-born melody. "The Crocus and the Hyacinth in deep grass" — lily-flowers. Then wine. Dew and fire, as Pater says. Eleutherios, the Deliverer. What did he deliver? Michelangelo asked himself that; and left us the answer. Dreams, transports. Dreams, brilliant consciousness, vivid self-revelation. Michelangelo's Dionysus, and Michelangelo's David — what is the difference? The cloud on

David. The four months of winter were sacred to Dionysus: months of wine and dreams and transport of self-realization. Months of the inner fire. The vine. Fire which even now, at New Year's night, comes up in David. To have no issue. A cloud is on him.

Semele, scarred with lightning, gave birth prematurely to her child. The Cinque-Cento. Too fierce a mating, too fiery and potent a sire. The child was sewn again into the thigh of Zeus, re-entered into the loins of the lightning. So the brief fire-brand. It was fire overwhelming, over-weening, briefly married to the dew, that begot this child. The South to the North. Married! The child, the fire-dew, Iacchus, David.

Fire-dew, yet still too fiery. Plunge him further into the dew. Dithyrambus, the twice-born, born first of fire, then of dew. Dionysus leaping into the mists of the North, to escape his foes. David, by the Arno.

So Florence, this Lily. Here David trembled to his first perfection, on the brink of the dews. Here his soul found its perfect embodiment, in the trembling union of southern flame and northern waters. David, Dithyrambus; the adolescent. The shimmer, the instant of unstable combination, the soul for one moment perfectly embodied. Fire and dew, they call it. David, the Lily-flame, the Florentine.

The soul that held the fire and the dew clipped together in one lily-flame, where is it? David. Where is he? Cinque-Cento, a fleeting moment of adolescence. In that one moment the two eternal elements were held in consummation, forming the perfect embodiment of the human soul. And then gone. David, the Lily, the Florentine-Venus of the Scallop-Shell — Leonardo's John the Baptist. The moment of adolescence — gone. The subtle, evanescent lily-soul. They are wistful, all of them: Botticelli's women; Leonardo's, Michelangelo's men: wistful, knowing the loss even in the very moment of perfection. A day-lily, the Florentine. David frowning, Mona Lisa sadly, subtly smiling, beyond bitterness, Botticelli getting rapture out of sadness, his Venus wistfully Victrix. Fire and dew for one moment proportionate, immediately falling into disproportion.

They all knew. They knew the quenching of the flame, the breaking of the lily-balance, the passing of perfection and the pure pride of life, the inestimable loss. It had to be. They knew the mists of the North damping down. Born of the fire, they had still to be born of the mist. Christ, with his submission, universal humility, finding one level, like mist settling, like water. A new flood. Savonarola smokily quenched. The fire put out, or at least overwhelmed. Then Luther and the North.

Michelangelo, Leonardo, Botticelli, how well they knew, artistically, what was coming. The magnificent pride of life and perfection granted only to bud.

The transient lily. Adam, David, Venus on her shell, the Madonna of the Rocks: they listen, all of them. What do they hear? Perpetual sound of waters. The level sweep of waters, waters overwhelming. Morality, chastity — another world drowned: equality, democracy, the masses, like drops of water in one sea, overwhelming all outstanding loveliness of the individual soul. Quenching of all flame in the great watery passivity which bears down at last so ponderous. Christ-like submissiveness which, once it bursts its bounds, floods the face of the earth with such devastation.

Pride of life! The perfect soul erect, holding the eternal elements consummate in itself. Thus for one moment the young lily David. For one moment Dionysus touched the hand of the Crucified: for one moment, and then was dragged down. Meekness flooded the soul of Dithyrambus, mist overwhelmed him. The elements supervene in the human soul, men become nature-worshippers; light, landscape and mists — these take the place of human individuality. Dionysus pale and corpse-like, there in the Piazza della Signoria. David, Venus, Saint John, all overcome with mist and surrender of the soul.

Yet no final surrender. Leonardo laughs last, even at the Crucified. David, with his knitted brow and full limbs, is unvanquished. Livid, maybe, corpse-coloured, quenched with innumerable rains of morality and democracy. Yet deep fountains of fire lurk within him. Must do. Witness the Florentines gathered at New Year's night to watch that fiery fruitless orgasm. They laugh, but it is Leonardo's laugh. The fire is not ridiculous. It surges recurrent. Never to be quenched. Stubborn. The Florentine.

One day David finishes his adolescence. One day he reaps his mates. It is a throbbing through the centuries of unquenchable fire, that will still leap out to consummation. The pride of life. The pride of the fulfilled self. The bud is not nipped; it awaits its maturity. Not the frail lily. Not even the clinging purple vine. But the full tree of life in blossom.

NOTES FOR BIRDS, BEASTS AND FLOWERS

FRUITS

“For fruits are all of them female, in them lies the seed. And so when they break and show the seed, then we look into the womb and see its secrets. So it is that the pomegranate is the apple of love to the Arab, and the fig has been a catchword for the female fissure for ages. I don’t care a fig for it! men say. But why a fig? The apple of Eden, even, was Eve’s fruit. To her it belonged, and she offered it to the man. Even the apples of knowledge are Eve’s fruit, the woman’s. But the apples of life the dragon guards, and no woman gives them. . . .”

“No sin is it to drink as much as a man can take and get home without a servant’s help, so he be not stricken in years.”

TREES

“It is said, a disease has attacked the cypress trees of Italy, and they are all dying. Now even the shadow of the lost secret is vanishing from earth.”

“Empedokles says trees were the first living creatures to grow up out of the earth, before the sun was spread out and before day and night were distinguished; from the symmetry of their mixture of fire and water, they contain the proportion of male and female; they grow, rising up owing to the heat which is in the earth, so that they are parts of the earth just as embryos are parts of the uterus. Fruits are excretions of the water and fire in plants.”

FLOWERS

“And long ago, the almond was the symbol of resurrection. — But tell me, tell me, why should the almond be the symbol of resurrection? —

Have you not seen, in the mild winter sun of the southern Mediterranean, in January and in February, the re-birth of the almond tree, all standing in clouds of glory? —

Ah yes! ah yes! would I might see it again!

Yet even this is not the secret of the secret. Do you know what was called the almond bone, the last bone of the spine? This was the seed of the body, and from the grave it could grow into a new body again, like almond blossom in January. — No, no, I know nothing of that. — ”

“Oh Persephone, Persephone, bring back to me from Hades the life of a dead man. — ”

“Wretches, utter wretches, keep your hands from beans! saith Empedokles. For according to some, the beans were the beans of votes, and votes were politics. But others say it was a food-taboo. Others also say the bean was one of the oldest symbols of the male organ, for the peas-cod is later than the beans-cod.”

“But blood is red, and blood is life. Red was the colour of kings. Kings, far-off kings, painted their faces vermilion, and were almost gods.”

THE EVANGELISTIC BEASTS

“Oh, put them back, put them back in the four corners of the heavens, where they belong, the Apocalyptic beasts. For with their wings full of stars they rule the night, and man that watches through the night lives four lives, and man that sleeps through the night sleeps four sleeps, the sleep of the lion, the sleep of the bull, the sleep of the man, and the eagle’s sleep. After which the lion wakes, and it is day. Then from the four quarters the four winds blow, and life has its changes. But when the heavens are empty, empty of the four great Beasts, the four Natures, the four Winds, the four Quarters, then sleep is empty too, man sleeps no more like the lion and the bull, nor wakes from the light-eyed eagle sleep.”

CREATURES

“But fishes are very fiery, and take to the water to cool themselves.”

“To those things that love darkness, the light of day is cruel and a pain. Yet the light of lamps and candles has no fears for them; rather they draw near to taste it, as if saying: Now what is this?”

So we see that the sun is more than burning, more than the burning of fires or the shining of lamps. Because with his rays he hurts the creatures that live by night, and lamplight and firelight do them no hurt. Therefore the sun lives in his shining, and is not like fires, that die.”

REPTILES

“Homer was wrong in saying, ‘Would that strife might pass away from among gods and men!’ He did not see that he was praying for the destruction of the universe; for, if his prayer were heard, all things would pass away — for in the tension of opposites all things have their being — ”

“For when Fire in its downward path chanced to mingle with the dark breath of the earth, the serpent slid forth, lay revealed. But he was moist and cold, the sun in him darted uneasy, held down by moist earth, never could he rise on his feet. And this is what put poison in his mouth. For the sun in him would fain rise halfway, and move on feet. But moist earth weighs him down, though he dart and twist, still he must go with his belly on the ground. — The wise tortoise laid his earthy part around him, he cast it round him and found his feet. So he is the first of creatures to stand upon his toes, and the dome of his house is his heaven. Therefore it is charted out, and is the foundation of the world.”

BIRDS

“Birds are the life of the skies, and when they fly, they reveal the thoughts of the skies. The eagle flies nearest to the sun, no other bird flies so near.

So he brings down the life of the sun, and the power of the sun. in his wings, and men who see him wheeling are filled with the elation of the sun. But all creatures of the sun must dip their mouths in blood, the sun is for ever thirsty, thirsting for the brightest exhalation of blood.

You shall know a bird by his cry, and great birds cry loud, but sing not. The eagle screams when the sun is high, the peacock screams at the dawn, rooks call at evening, when the nightingale sings. And all birds have their voices, each means a different thing.”

ANIMALS

“Yes, and if oxen or lions had hands, and could paint with their hands, and produce works of art as men do, horses would paint the forms of the gods like horses, and oxen like oxen, and make their bodies in the image of their several kinds.”

“Once, they say, he was passing by when a dog was being beaten, and he spoke this word: ‘Stop! don’t beat it! For it is the soul of a friend I recognized

when I heard its voice.’ “

“Swine wash in mire, and barnyard fowls in dust.”

GHOSTS

“And as the dog with its nostrils tracking out the fragments of the beasts’ limbs, and the breath from their feet that they leave in the soft grass, runs upon a path that is pathless to men, so does the soul follow the trail of the dead, across great spaces. For the journey is a far one, to sleep and a forgetting, and often the dead look back, and linger, for now they realize all that is lost. Then the living soul comes up with them, and great is the pain of greeting, and deadly the parting again. For oh, the dead are disconsolate, since even death can never make up for some mistakes.”

PEOPLES, COUNTRIES, RACES

GERMAN IMPRESSIONS:

I. French Sons of Germany

In Metz I prefer the Frenchmen to the Germans. I am more at my ease with them. It is a question of temperament.

From the Cathedral down to the river is all French. The Cathedral seems very German. It is nothing but nave: a tremendous lofty nave, and nothing else: a great jump at heaven, in the conception; a rather pathetic fall to earth in execution. Still, the splendid conception is there.

So I go down from the Cathedral to the French quarter. It is full of smells, perhaps, but it is purely itself. A Frenchman has the same soul, whether he is eating his dinner or kissing his baby. A German has no soul when he is eating his dinner, and is beautiful when he kisses his baby. So I prefer the Frenchman who hasn't the tiresome split between his animal nature and his spiritual, in whom the two are fused.

The barber drinks. He has wild hair and bloodshot eyes. Still, I dare trust my throat and chin to him. I address him in German. He dances before me, answering in mad French, that he speaks no German. Instantly I love him in spite of all.

"You are a foreigner here?" I remark.

He cannot lather me, he is so wildly excited. "No he was born in Metz, his father was born in Metz, his grandfather was born in Metz. For all he knows, Adam was born in Metz. But no Leroy has ever spoken German; no, not a syllable. It would split his tongue—he could not, you see, Sir, he could not; his construction would not allow of it."

With all of which I agree heartily; whereupon he looks lovingly upon me and continues to lather.

"His wife was a Frenchwoman, born in Paris. I must see his wife." He calls her by some name I do not know, and she appears — fat and tidy.

"You are a subject of France?" my barber demands furiously.

"Certainly," she begins. "I was born in Paris — " As they both talk at once, I can't make out what they say. But they are happy, they continue. At last, with a final flourish of the razor, I am shaved. The barber is very tipsy.

"Monsieur is from Brittany?" he asks me tenderly.

Alas! I am from England.

“But, why?” cries Madame; “you have not an English face; no, never. And a German face — pah! impossible.”

In spite of all I look incurably English. Nevertheless, I start a story about a great-grandfather who was refugee in England after the revolution. They embrace me, they love me. And I love them.

“Sir,” I say, “will you give me a morsel of soap? No, not shaving soap.”

“This is French soap, this is German,” he says. The French is in a beautiful flowery wrapper, alas! much faded.

“And what is the difference?” I ask.

“The French, of course, is *better*. The German is five pfennigs-one sou, Monsieur — the cheaper.”

Of course, I take the French soap. The barber grandly gives my twenty-pfennig tip to the lathering boy, who has just entered, and he bows me to the door. I am in the street, breathless.

A German officer, in a flowing cloak of bluey-grey — like ink and milk — looks at me coldly and inquisitively. I look at him with a “Go to the devil” sort of look, and pass along. I wonder to myself if my dislike of these German officers is racial, or owing to present national feeling, or if it is a temperamental aversion. I decide on the last. A German soldier spills something out of a parcel on to the road and looks round like a frightened boy. I want to shelter him.

I pass along, look at the ridiculous imitation-medieval church that is built on the islet — or peninsula — in the middle of the river, on the spot that has been called for ages “The Place of Love.” I wonder how the Protestant conscience of this ugly church remains easy upon such foundation. I think of the famous “three K’s” that are allotted to German women, “*Kinder, Kuche, Kirche*,” and pity the poor wretches.

Over the river, all is barracks — barracks, and soldiers on foot, and soldiers on horseback. Everywhere these short, baggy German soldiers, with their fair skins and rather stupid blue eyes! I hurry to get away from them. To the right is a steep hill, once, I suppose, the scarp of the river.

At last I found a path, and turned for a little peace to the hillside and the vineyards. The vines are all new young slips, climbing up their sticks. The whole hillside bristles with sticks, like an angry hedgehog. Across lies Montigny; to the right, Metz itself, with its cathedral like a brown rat humped up. I prefer my hillside. In this Mosel valley there is such luxuriance of vegetation. Lilac bushes are only heaps of purple flowers. Some roses are out. Here on the wild hillside there are lively vetches of all sorts, and white poppies and red; and then the vine shoots, with their tips of most living, sensitive pink and red, just like blood under

the skin.

I am happy on the hillside. It is a warm, grey day. The Mosel winds below. The vine sticks bristle against the sky. The little church of the village is in front. I climb the hill, past a Madonna shrine that stands out by the naked path. The faded blue "Lady" is stuck with dying white lilac. She looks rather ugly, but I do not mind. Odd men, and women, are working in the vineyards. They are very swarthy, and they have very small-bladed spades, which glisten in the sun.

At last I come to the cemetery under the church. As I marvel at the bead-work wreaths, with ridiculous little naked china figures of infants floating in the middle, I hear voices, and looking up, see two German soldiers on the natural platform, or terrace, beside the church. Along the vineyard path are squares of yellow and black and white, like notice boards. The two soldiers, in their peculiar caps, almost similar to our round sailors' hats, or blue cooks' caps, are laughing. They watch the squares, then me.

When I go up to the church and round to the terrace, they are gone. The terrace is a natural platform, a fine playground, very dark with great horse-chestnuts in flower, and walled up many feet from the hillside, overlooking the far valley of the Mosel. As I sit on a bench, the hens come pecking round me. It is perfectly still and lovely, the only sound being from the boys' school.

Somewhere towards eleven o'clock two more soldiers came. One led his horse, the other was evidently not mounted. They came to the wall, or parapet, to look down the valley at the fort. Meanwhile, to my great joy, the mare belonging to the mounted soldier cocked up her tail and cantered away under the horse-chestnuts, down the village. Her owner went racing, shouting after her, making the peculiar *hu-hu!* these Germans use to their horses. She would have been lost had not two men rushed out of the houses, and, shouting in French, stopped her. The soldier jerked her head angrily, and led her back. He was a short, bear-like little German, she was a wicked and delicate mare. He kept her bridle as he returned. Meanwhile, his companion, his hands clasped on his knees, shouted with laughter.

Presently, another, rather taller, rather more manly soldier appeared. He had a sprig of lilac between his teeth. The foot-soldier recounted the escapade with the mare, whereupon the newcomer roared with laughter and suddenly knocked the horse under the jaw. She reared in terror. He got hold of her by the bridle, teasing her. At last her owner pacified her. Then the newcomer would insist on sticking a piece of lilac in her harness, against her ear. It frightened her, she reared, and she panted, but he would not desist. He teased her, bullied her, coaxed her, took her unawares; she was in torment as he pawed at her head to stick in the flower, she would not allow him. At last, however, he succeeded.

She, much discomfited, wore lilac against her ear.

Then the children came out of school — boys, in their quaint pinafores. It is strange how pleasant, how quaint, and manly these little children are; the tiny boys of six seemed more really manly than the soldiers of twenty-one, more alert to the real things. They cried to each other in their keen, naive way, discussing the action at the fortress, of which I could make out nothing.

And one of the soldiers asked them, “How old are you, Johnny?” Human nature is very much alike. The boys used French in their play, but they answered the soldiers in German.

As I was going up the hill there came on a heavy shower. I sheltered as much as I could under an apple-tree thick with pink blossom; then I hurried down to the village. “Cafe — Restauration” was written on one house. I wandered into the living-room beyond the courtyard.

“Where does one drink?” I asked the busy, hard-worked-looking woman. She answered me in French, as she took me in. At once, though she was a drudge, her fine spirit of politeness made me comfortable.

“This is not France?” I asked of her.

“Oh, no — but always the people have been French,” and she looked at me quickly from her black eyes. I made my voice tender as I answered her.

Presently I said: “Give me some cigarettes, please.”

“French or German?” she asked.

“What’s the difference?” I inquired.

“The French, of course, are better.” “Then French,” I said, laughing, though I do not really love the black, strong French cigarettes.

“Sit and talk to me a minute,” I said to her. “It is so nice not to speak German.”

“Ah, Monsieur!” she cried, and she loved me. She could not sit, no. She could only stay a minute. Then she sent her man.

I heard her in the other room bid him come. He was shy — he would not. “Ssh!” I heard her go as she pushed him through the door.

He was very swarthy, burned dark with the sun. His eyes were black and very bright. He was a man of about forty-five. I could not persuade him to sit down or to drink with me; he would accept only a cigarette. Then, laughing, he lighted me my cigarette. He was a gentleman, and he had white teeth.

The village, he told me, was Sey: a French name, but a German village.

“And you are a German subject?” I asked.

He bowed to me. He said he had just come in from the vines, and must go back immediately. Last year they had had a bad disease, so that all the plants I had seen were new. I hoped he would get rich with them. He smiled with a

peculiar sad grace.

“Not rich, Monsieur, but not a failure this time.”

He had a daughter, Angele: “In Paris — in *France*.”

He bowed and looked at me meaningly. I said I was glad. I said:

“I do not like Metz: too many soldiers. I do not like German soldiers.”

“They are scarcely polite,” he said quietly.

“You find it?” I asked.

He bowed his acquiescence.

It is a strange thing that these two Frenchmen were the only two men — not acquaintances — whom I felt friendly towards me in the whole of Metz.

II. Hail in the Rhineland

We were determined to take a long walk this afternoon, in spite of the barometer, which persisted in retreating towards “storm.” The morning was warm and mildly sunny. The blossom was still falling from the fruit-trees down the village street, and drifting in pink and white all along the road. The barber was sure it would be fine. But then he’d have sworn to anything I wanted, he liked me so much since I admired, in very bad German, his moustache.

“I may trim your moustache?” he asked.

“You can do what you like with it,” I said.

As he was clipping it quite level with my lip he asked:

“You like a short moustache?”

“Ah,” I answered, “I could never have anything so beautiful and upstanding as yours.”

Whereupon immediately he got excited, and vowed my moustache should stand on end even as Kaiserly as did his own.

“Never,” I vowed.

Then he brought me a bottle of mixture, and a gauze bandage, which I was to bind under my nose, and there I should be, in a few weeks, with an upstanding moustache sufficient as a guarantee for any man. But I was modest; I refused even to try.

“No,” I said, “I will remember yours.” He pitied me, and vowed it would be fine for the afternoon.

I told Johanna so, and she took her parasol. It was really sunny, very hot and pretty, the afternoon. Besides, Johanna’s is the only parasol I have seen in Waldbrol, and I am the only Englishman any woman for miles around could boast. So we set off.

We were walking to Niimbrecht, some five or six miles away. Johanna moved

with great dignity, and I held the parasol. Every man, even the workmen on the fields, bowed low to us, and every woman looked at us yearningly. And to every woman, and to every man, Johanna gave a bright "Good day."

"They like it so much," she said. And I believed her.

There was a scent of apple-blossom quite strong on the air. The cottages, set at random and painted white, with their many numbers painted black, have a make-believe, joyful, childish look.

Everywhere the broom was out, great dishevelled blossoms of ruddy gold sticking over the besom strands. The fields were full of dandelion pappus, floating misty bubbles crowded thick, hiding the green grass with their globes. I showed Johanna how to tell the time. "One!" I puffed; "two-three-four-five-six! Six o'clock, my dear."

"Six o'clock what?" she asked.

"Anything you like," I said.

"At six o'clock there will be a storm. The barometer is never wrong," she persisted.

I was disgusted with her. The beech wood through which we were walking was a vivid flame of green. The sun was warm.

"Johanna," I said. "Seven ladies in England would walk out with me, although they *knew* that at six o'clock a thunder-shower would ruin their blue dresses. Besides, there are two holes in your mittens, and black mittens show so badly."

She quickly hid her arms in the folds of her skirts. "Your English girls have queer taste, to walk out seven at a time with you."

We were arguing the point with some ferocity when, descending a hill in the wood, we came suddenly upon a bullock-wagon. The cows stood like blocks in the harness, though their faces were black with flies. Johanna was very indignant. An old man was on the long, railed wagon, which was piled with last year's brown oak-leaves. A boy was straightening the load, and waiting at the end of the wagon ready to help, a young, strong man, evidently his father, who was struggling uphill with an enormous sack-cloth bundle-enormous, full of dead leaves. The new leaves of the oaks overhead were golden brown, and crinkled with young vigour. The cows stood stolid and patient, shutting their eyes, weary of the plague of flies. Johanna 'flew to their rescue, fanning them with a beech-twigg.

"Ah, poor little ones!" she cried. Then, to the old man, in tones of indignation: "These flies will eat up your oxen."

"Yes — their wicked little mouths," he agreed.

"Cannot you prevent them?" she asked.

"They are everywhere," he answered, and he smacked a fly on his hand.

“But you can do something,” she persisted.

“You could write a card and stick it between their horns, ‘Settling of flies strictly forbidden here,’ “ I said.

“ ‘*Streng verboten,*’ “ he repeated as he laughed.

Johanna looked daggers at me.

“Thank you, young fellow,” she said sarcastically. I stuck leafy branches in the head-harness of the cattle. The old man thanked me with much gratitude.

“It is hot weather!” I remarked.

“It will be a thunderstorm, I believe,” he answered.

“At six o’clock?” cried Johanna.

But I was along the path.

We went gaily through the woods and open places, and had nearly come to Numbrecht, when we met a very old man, coming very slowly up the hill with a splendid young bull, of buff-colour and white, which, in its majestic and leisurely way, was dragging a harrow that rode on sledges.

“Fine weather,” I remarked, forgetting.

“*Jawohl!*” he answered. “But there will be a thunderstorm.”

“And I knew it,” said Johanna.

But we were at Niimbrecht. Johanna drank her mineral water and raspberry juice. It was ten minutes to six.

“It is getting dark,” remarked Johanna.

“There is no railway here?” I asked.

“Not for six miles,” she replied pointedly.

The landlord was a very handsome man.

“It is getting dark,” said Johanna to him.

“There will be a thunderstorm, Madame,” he replied with beautiful grace.

“Madame is walking?”

“From Waldbrol,” she replied. By this time she was statuesque. The landlord went to the door. Girls were leading home the cows.

“It is coming,” he said, and immediately there was a rumbling of thunder.

Johanna went to the door.

“An enormous black cloud. The sky is black,” she announced. I followed to her side. It was so.

“The barber — ” I said.

“Must you live by the word of the barber?” said Johanna.

The landlord retired indoors. He was a very handsome man, all the hair was positively shaved from his head. And I knew Johanna liked the style.

I fled to Stollwerck’s chocolate machine, and spent a few anxious moments extracting burnt almonds. The landlord reappeared.

“There is an omnibus goes to Waldbrol for the station and the east. It passes the door in ten minutes,” he said gracefully. No English landlord could have equalled him. I thanked him with all my heart.

The omnibus was an old brown cab — a growler. Its only occupant was a brown-paper parcel for Frau — .

“You don’t mind riding?” I said tenderly to Johanna.

“I had rather we were at home. I am terribly afraid of thunderstorms,” she answered.

We drove on. A young man in black stopped the omnibus. He bowed to us, then mounted the box with the driver.

“It is Thienes, the Bretzel baker,” she said. *Bretzel* is a very twisty little cake like *Kringel*.

I do not know why, but after this Johanna and I sat side by side in tense silence. I felt very queerly.

“There, the rain!” she suddenly cried.

“Never mind,” I pleaded.

“Oh, I like riding in here,” she said.

My heart beat, and I put my hand over hers. She pretended not to notice, which made my heart beat more. I don’t know how it would have ended. Suddenly there was such a rattle outside, and something pounding on me. Johanna cried out. It was a great hailstorm — the air was a moving white storm — enormous balls of ice, big as marbles, then bigger, like balls of white carbon that housewives use against moths, came striking in. I put up the window. It was immediately cracked, so I put it down again. A hailstone as big as a pigeon-egg struck me on the knee, hurt me, and bounced against Johanna’s arm. She cried out with pain. The horses stood still and would not move. There was a roar of hail. All round, on the road balls of ice were bouncing viciously up again. We could not see six yards out of the carriage.

Suddenly the door opened, and Thienes, excusing himself, appeared. I dragged him in. He was a fresh young man, with naive, wide eyes. And his best suit of lustrous black was shining now with wet.

“Had you no cover?” we said.

He showed his split umbrella, and burst into a torrent of speech. The hail drummed bruisingly outside.

It had come like horse-chestnuts of ice, he said.

The fury of the storm lasted for five minutes, all of which time the horses stood stock still. The hailstones shot like great white bullets into the carriage. Johanna clung to me in fear. There was a solid sheet of falling ice outside.

At last the horses moved on. I sat eating large balls of ice and realizing

myself. When at last the fall ceased Thienes *would* get out on to the box again. I liked him; I wanted him to stay. But he would not.

The country was a sight. All over the road, and fallen thick in the ruts, were balls of ice, pure white, as big as very large marbles, and some as big as bantam-eggs. The ditches looked as if stones and stones weight of loaf sugar had been emptied into them — white balls and cubes of ice everywhere. Then the sun came out, and under the brilliant green birches a thick white mist, only a foot high, sucked at the fall of ice. It was very cold. I shuddered.

“I was only flirting with Johanna,” I said to myself. “But, by Jove, I was nearly dished.”

The carriage crunched over the hail. All the road was thick with twigs, as green as spring. It made me think of the roads strewed for the Entry to Jerusalem. Here it was cherry boughs and twigs and tiny fruits, a thick carpet; next, brilliant green beech; next, pine-brushes, very beautiful, with their creamy pollen cones, making the road into a green bed; then fir twigs, with pretty emerald new shoots like stars, and dark sprigs over the hailstones. Then we passed two small dead birds, fearfully beaten. Johanna began to cry. But we were near a tiny, lonely inn, where the carriage stopped. I said I *must* give Thienes a *Schnapps*, and I jumped out. The old lady was sweeping away a thick fall of ice-stones from the doorway.

When I next got into the carriage, I suppose I smelled of *Schnapps*, and was not lovable. Johanna stared out of the window, away from me. The lovely dandelion bubbles were gone, there was a thicket of stripped stalks, all broken. The corn was broken down, the road was matted with fruit twigs. Over the Rhineland was a grey, desolate mist, very cold.

At the next stopping place, where the driver had to deliver a parcel, a young man passed with a very gaudily apparelled horse, great red trappings. He was a striking young fellow. Johanna watched him. She was not *really* in earnest with me. We might have both made ourselves unhappy for life, but for this storm. A middle-aged man, very brown and sinewy with work, came to the door. He was rugged, and I liked him. He showed me his hand. The back was bruised, and swollen, and already going discoloured. It made me wince. But he laughed rather winsomely, even as if he were glad.

“A hailstone!” he said, proudly.

We watched the acres of ice-balls slowly pass by, in silence. Neither of us spoke. At last we came to the tiny station, at home. There was the station-master, and, of all people, the barber.

“I can remember fifty-five years,” said the station-master, “but nothing like this.”

“Not round, but squares, two inches across, of ice,” added the barber, with gusto.

“At the shop they have sold out of tiles, so many smashed,” said the station-master.

“And in the green-house roofs, at the Asylum, not a shred of glass,” sang the barber.

“The windows at the station smashed — ” “And a man” — I missed the name — ”hurt quite badly by — ” rattled the barber.

“But,” I interrupted, “you said it would be fine.”

“And,” added Johanna, “we went on the strength of it.” It is queer, how sarcastic she can be, without *saying* anything really meaningful.

We were four dumb people. But I had a narrow escape, and Johanna had a narrow escape, and we both know it, and thank the terrific hailstorm, though at present *she* is angry — vanity, I suppose.

CHRISTS IN THE TIROL

The real Tirol does not seem to extend far south of the Brenner, and northward it goes right to the Starnberger See. Even at Sterzing the rather gloomy atmosphere of the Tirolese Alps is being dispersed by the approach of the South. And, strangely enough, the roadside crucifixes become less and less interesting after Sterzing. Walking down from Munich to Italy, I have stood in front of hundreds of *Martertafeln*; and now I miss them; these painted shrines by the Garda See are not the same.

I, who see a tragedy in every cow, began by suffering from the Secession pictures in Munich. All these new paintings seemed so shrill and restless. Those that were meant for joy shrieked and pranced for joy, and sorrow was a sensation to be relished, curiously; as if we were epicures in suffering, keen on a new flavour. I thought with kindness of England, whose artists so often suck their sadness like a lollipop, mournfully, and comfortably.

Then one must walk, as it seems, for miles and endless miles past crucifixes, avenues of them. At first they were mostly factory made, so that I did not notice them, any more than I noticed the boards with warnings, except just to observe they were there. But coming among the Christs carved in wood by the peasant artists, I began to feel them. Now, it seems to me, they create almost an atmosphere over the northern Tirol, an atmosphere of pain.

I was going along a marshy place at the foot of the mountains, at evening, when the sky was a pale, dead colour and the hills were nearly black. At a meeting of the paths was a crucifix, and between the feet of the Christ a little red patch of dead poppies. So I looked at him. It was an old shrine, and the Christus was nearly like a man. He seemed to me to be real. In front of me hung a Bavarian peasant, a Christus, staring across at the evening and the black hills. He had broad cheek-bones and sturdy limbs, and he hung doggedly on the cross, hating it. He reminded me of a peasant farmer, fighting slowly and meanly, but not giving in. His plain, rudimentary face stared stubbornly at the hills, and his neck was stiffened, as if even yet he were struggling away from the cross he resented. He would not yield to it. I stood in front of him, and realized him. He might have said, "Yes, here I am, and it's bad enough, and it's suffering, and it doesn't come to an end. *Perhaps* something will happen, will help. If it doesn't, I s'll have to go on with it." He seemed stubborn and struggling from the root of his soul, his human soul. No God-ship had been thrust upon him. He was human

clay, a peasant Prometheus-Christ, his poor soul bound in him, blind, but struggling stubbornly against the fact of the nails. And I looked across at the tiny square of orange light, the window of a farmhouse on the marsh. And, thinking of the other little farms, of how the man and his wife and his children worked on till dark, intent and silent, carrying the hay in their arms out of the streaming thunder-rain which soaked them through, I understood how the Christus was made.

And after him, when I saw the Christs posing on the Cross, a la Guido Reni, I recognized them as the mere conventional symbol, meaning no more Christ than St. George and the Dragon on a five-shilling-piece means England.

There are so many Christs carved by men who have carved to get at the meaning of their own soul's anguish. Often, I can distinguish one man's work in a district. In the Zemm valley, right in the middle of the Tirol, there are some half-dozen crucifixes by the same worker, who has whittled away in torment to see himself emerge out of the piece of timber, so that he can understand his own suffering, and see it take on itself the distinctness of an eternal thing, so that he can go on further, leaving it. The chief of these crucifixes is a very large one, deep in the Klamm, where it is always gloomy and damp. The river roars below, the rock wall opposite reaches high overhead, pushing back the sky. And by the track where the pack-horses go, in the cold gloom, hangs the large, pale Christ. He has fallen forward, just dead, and the weight of his full-grown, mature body is on the nails of the hands. So he drops, as if his hands would tear away, and he would fall to earth. The face is strangely brutal, and is set with an ache of weariness and pain and bitterness, and his rather ugly, passionate mouth is shut with bitter despair. After all, he had wanted to live and to enjoy his manhood. But fools had ruined his body, and thrown his life away, when he wanted it. No one had helped. His youth and health and vigour, all his life, and himself, were just thrown away as waste. He had died in bitterness. It is sombre and damp, silent save for the roar of water. There hangs the falling body of the man who had died in bitterness of spirit, and the driver of the pack-horses takes off his hat, cringing in his sturdy cheerfulness as he goes beneath.

He is afraid. I think of the carver of the crucifix. He also was more or less afraid. They all, when they carved or erected these crucifixes, had fear at the bottom of their hearts. And so the monuments to physical pain are found everywhere in the mountain gloom. By the same hand that carved the big, pale Christ I found another crucifix, a little one, at the end of a bridge. This Christ had a fair beard instead of a black one, and his body was hanging differently. But there was about him the same bitterness, the same despair, even a touch of cynicism. Evidently the artist could not get beyond the tragedy that tormented

him. No wonder the peasants are afraid, as they take off their hats in passing up the valley.

They are afraid of physical pain. It terrifies them. Then they raise, in their startled helplessness of suffering, these Christs, these human attempts at deciphering the riddle of pain. In the same-way they paint the humorous little pictures of some calamity — a man drowned in a stream or killed by a falling tree — and nail it up near the scene of the accident. “*Memento mori*,” they say everywhere. And so they try to get used to the idea of death and suffering, to rid themselves of some of the fear thereof. And all tragic art is part of the same attempt.

But some of the Christs are quaint. One I know is very elegant, brushed and combed. “I’m glad I am no lady,” I say to him. For he is a pure lady-killer. But he ignores me utterly, the exquisite. The man who made him must have been dying to become a gentleman.

And a fair number are miserable fellows. They put up their eyebrows plaintively, and pull down the corners of their mouths. Sometimes they gaze heavenwards. They are quite sorry for themselves.

“Never mind,” I say to them. ‘ It’ll be worse yet, before you’ve done.’”

Some of them look pale and done-for. They didn’t make much fight; they hadn’t much pluck in them. They make me sorry.

“It’s a pity you hadn’t got a bit more kick in you,” I say to them. And I wonder why in England one sees always this pale, pitiful Christ with no “go” in him. Is it because our national brutality is so strong and deep that we must create for ourselves an anaemic Christus, for ever on the whine; either that, or one of those strange neutrals with long hair, that are supposed to represent to our children the Jesus of the New Testament.

In a tiny glass case beside the high-road where the Isar is a very small stream, sits another Christ that makes me want to laugh, and makes me want to weep also. His little head rests on his hand, his elbow on his knee, and he meditates, half-wearily. I am strongly reminded of Walther von der Vogelweide and the German medieval spirit. Detached, he sits, and dreams, and broods, in his little golden crown of thorns, and his little cloak of red flannel, that some peasant woman has stitched for him.

“*Couvre-toi de gloire, Tartarin-couvre-toi de flanelle*,” I think to myself.

But he sits, a queer little man, fretted, plunged in anxiety of thought, and yet dreaming rather pleasantly at the same time. I think he is the forefather of the warm-hearted German philosopher and professor.

He is the last of the remarkable Christs of the peasants that I have seen. Beyond the Brenner an element of unreality seems to creep in. The Christs are

given great gashes in the breast and knees, and from the brow and breast and hands and knees streams of blood trickle down, so that one sees a weird striped thing in red and white that is not at all a Christus. And the same red that is used for the blood serves also to mark the path, so that one comes to associate the *Martertafeln* and their mess of red stripes with the stones smeared with scarlet paint for guidance. The wayside chapels, going south, become fearfully florid and ornate, though still one finds in them the little wooden limbs, arms and legs and feet, and little wooden cows or horses, hung up by the altar, to signify a cure in these parts. But there is a tendency for the Christs themselves to become either neuter or else sensational. In a chapel near St. Jakob, a long way from the railway, sat the most ghastly Christus I can imagine. He is seated, after the crucifixion. His eyes, which are turned slightly to look at you, are bloodshot till they glisten scarlet, and even the iris seems purpled. And the misery, the almost criminal look of hate and misery on the bloody, disfigured face is shocking. I was amazed at the ghastly thing: moreover, it was fairly new.

South of the Brenner again, in the Austrian Tirol, I have not seen anyone salute the Christus: not even the guides. As one goes higher the crucifixes get smaller and smaller. The wind blows the snow under the tiny shed of a tiny Christ: the guides tramp stolidly by, ignoring the holy thing. That surprised me. But perhaps these were particularly unholy men. One does not expect a great deal of an Austrian, except real pleasantness.

So, in Austria, I have seen a fallen Christus. It was on the Jaufen, not very far from Meran. I was looking at all the snowpeaks all around, and hurrying downhill, trying to get out of a piercing wind, when I almost ran into a very old *Martertafel*. The wooden shed was silver-grey with age, and covered on the top with a thicket of lichen, weird, grey-green, sticking up its tufts. But on the rocks at the foot of the cross was the armless Christ, who had tumbled down and lay on his back in a weird attitude. It was one of the old, peasant Christs, carved out of wood, and having the long, wedge-shaped shins and thin legs that are almost characteristic. Considering the great sturdiness of a mountaineer's calves, these thin, flat legs are interesting. The arms of the fallen Christ had broken off at the shoulders, and they hung on their nails, as *ex voto* limbs hang in the shrines. But these arms dangled from their palms, one at each end of the cross, the muscles, carved in wood, looking startling, upside down. And the icy wind blew them backwards and forwards. There, in that bleak place among the stones, they looked horrible. Yet I dared not touch either them or the fallen image. I wish some priest would go along and take the broken thing away.

So many Christs there seem to be: one in rebellion against his cross, to which he was nailed; one bitter with the agony of knowing he must die, his heart-

beatings all futile; one who felt sentimental; one who gave in to his misery; one who was a sensationalist; one who dreamed and fretted with thought. Perhaps the peasant carvers of crucifixes are right, and all these were found on the same cross. And perhaps there were others too: one who waited for the end, his soul still with a sense of right and hope; one ashamed to see the crowd make beasts of themselves, ashamed that he should provide for their sport; one who looked at them and thought: "And I am of you. I might be among you, yelling at myself in that way. But I am not, I am here. And so —"

All those Christs, like a populace, hang in the mountains under their little sheds. And perhaps they are falling, one by one. And I suppose we have carved no Christs, afraid lest they should be too like men, too like ourselves. What we worship must have exotic form.

AMERICA, LISTEN TO YOUR OWN

“America has no *tradition*. She has no culture-history.”

Therefore, she is damned.

Europe invariably arrives at this self-congratulatory conclusion, usually from the same stock starting-point, the same phrase about tradition and culture. Moreover it usually gets Americans in the eye, for they really haven't anything more venerable than the White House, or more primitive than Whistler. Which they ought to be thankful for, boldly proclaiming this thankfulness.

Americans in Italy, however, are very humble and deprecating. They know their nakedness, and beg to be forgiven. They prostrate themselves with admiration, they knock their foreheads in front of our elegant fetishes. Poor, void America, crude, barbaric America, the Cinquescents knew her not. How thankful she ought to be! She doesn't know when she is well off.

Italy consists of just one big arrangement of things to be admired. Every step you take, you get a church or a coliseum between your eyes, and down you have to go, on your knees in admiration. Down go the Americans, till Italy fairly trembles with the shock of their dropping knees.

It is a pity. It is a pity that Americans are always so wonderstruck by our — note the possessive adjective — cultural monuments. Why they are any more mine than yours, I don't know — except that I have a British passport to validate my existence, and you have an American. However . . .

After all, a heap of stone is only a heap of stone — even if it is Milan Cathedral. And who knows that it isn't a horrid bristly burden on the face of the earth? So why should the *Corriere della Sera* remark with such sniffy amusement: “Of course they were duly impressed, and showed themselves overcome with admiration” — *they* being the Knights of Columbus, *i Cavalieri di Colombo*.

The Knights of Columbus were confessedly funny in Milan. But once more, why not? The dear, delicate-nosed, supercilious Anna Comnena found Bohemund and Tancred and Godfrey of Bouillon funny enough, in Constantinople long ago. And well-nurtured Romans never ceased to be amused by the gaping admiration of Goths and Scythians inside some forum or outside some temple, until the hairy barbarians stopped gaping and started to pull the wonder to pieces.

Of course, Goths and Scythians and Tancred and Bohemund had no tradition

behind them. Luckily for them, for they would never have got so far with such impedimenta. As a matter of fact, once they *had* a tradition they were fairly harnessed. And if Rome could only have harnessed them in time, she might have made them pull her ponderous uncouth Empire across a few more centuries. However, men with such good names as Alaric and Attila were not going to open their mouths so easily to take the bit of Roman tradition.

You might as well sneer at a lad for not having a grey beard as jibe at a young people for not having a tradition. A tradition, like a bald head, comes with years, fast enough. And culture, more often than not, is a weary saddle for a jaded race.

A thing of beauty is a joy for ever. Let us live in hopes. But it isn't the end of all joys. There are as good fish in the sea as ever came out of it: quite as good as that prickly sea-urchin of Milan Cathedral, O Knights of Columbus! As for the sea — *la mer, c'est moi. La mer, c'est aussi votis, o Chevaliers de Colombe*. Which is to say, there are quite as many wonders enfathomed in the human spirit as ever have come out of it: be they Milan Cathedral or the Coliseum or the Bridge of Sighs. And in the strange and undrawn waters of the Knights of Columbus, what wonders of beauty, etc., do not swim unrevealed? A fig for the spiny cathedral of Milan. Whence all this prostration before it?

A thing of beauty is a joy for ever. But there's more than one old joy. It isn't the limit. Do you expect me to gasp in front of Ghirlandajo, that life has reached its limit, and there's no more to be done? You can't fix a high-water mark to human activity: not till you start to die. Here is Europe swimming in the stagnation of the ebb, and congratulating itself on the long line of Cathedrals, Coliseums, Ghirlandajos which mark the horizon of the old high water: people swarming like the little crabs in the lagoons of Venice, in seas gone dead, and scuttling and gaping and pluming themselves conceitedly on the vision of St. Mark's and San Giorgio, looming up magic on the sky-and-water line beyond.

Alas for a people when its tradition is established, and its limit of beauty defined. Alas for a race which has an exhibition of modern paintings such as the one in the Gardens at Venice, in this year of grace 1920. What else is left but to look back to Tintoret? Let it look back then.

Let the beauty of Venice be a sort of zenith to us, beyond which there is no seeing. Let Lincoln Cathedral fan her wings in our highest heaven, like an eagle at our pitch of flight. We can do no more. We have reached our limits of beauty. But these are not the limits of all beauty. They are not the limit of all things: only of *us*.

Therefore St. Mark's need be no reproach to an American. It isn't *his* St. Mark's. It is ours. And we like crabs ramble in the slack waters and gape at the excess of our own glory. Behold our golden Venice, our Lincoln Cathedral like a

dark bird in the sky at twilight. And think of our yesterdays! What would you not give, O America, for our yesterdays? Far more than they are worth, I assure you. What would not I give for your tomorrows!

One begins to understand the barbarian rage against the great monuments of civilization. "Go beyond *that*, if you can." We say to the Americans, pointing to Venice among the waters. And the American humbly admits that it can't be done. Rome said the same thing to Attila, years gone by. "Get beyond Aquileia, get beyond Padua, you barbarian!" Attila promptly kicked Aquileia and Padua to smithereens, and walked past. Hence Venice. If Attila or some other barbaric villain hadn't squashed the cities of the Adriatic head, we should have had no Venice. Shall we bewail Aquileia or praise our Venice? Is Attila a reprehensible savage, or a creator in wrath?

Of course, it is simple for America. Venice isn't really in her way, as Aquileia was in the way of Attila, or Rome in the way of the Goths. Attila and the Goths *had* to do some kicking. The Americans can merely leave us to our monuments.

There are limits. But there are no limits to the human race. The human race has no limits. The Milanese fished that prickly sea-bear of a cathedral out of the deeps of their own soul, and have never been able to get away from it. But the Knights of Columbus depart by the next train.

Happy is the nation which hasn't got a tradition and which lacks cultural monuments. How gay Greece must have been, while Egypt was sneering at her for an uneducated young nobody, and what a good time Rome was having, whilst Hellas was looking down a cultured and supercilious nose at her. There's as fine fish in the sea as ever came out of it.

America, therefore, should leave off being *quite* so prostrate with admiration. Beauty is beauty, and must have its wistful time-hallowed dues. But the human soul is father and mother of all man-created beauty. An old race, like an old parent, sits watching the golden past. But the golden glories of the old are only fallen leaves about the feet of the young. It is an insult to life itself to be *too* abject, too prostrate before Milan Cathedral or a Ghirlandajo. What is Milan Cathedral but a prickly, empty burr dropped off the tree of life! The nut was eaten even in Sforza days.

What a young race wants is not a tradition nor a bunch of culture monuments. It wants an inspiration. And you can't acquire an inspiration as you can a culture or a tradition, by going to school and by growing old.

You must first have faith. Not rowdy and tub-thumping, but steady and deathless, faith in your own unrevealed, unknown destiny. The future is not a finished product, like the past. The future is a strange, urgent, poignant responsibility, something which urges inside a young race like sap, or like

pregnancy, urging towards fulfilment. This urge you must never betray and never deny. It is more than all tradition, more than all law, more than all standards or monuments. Let the old world and the old way have been what they may, this is something other. Abide by that which is coming, not by that which has come.

And turn for the support and the confirmation not to the perfected past, that which is set in perfection as monuments of human passage. But turn to the unresolved, the rejected.

Let Americans turn to America, and to that very America which has been rejected and almost annihilated. Do they want to draw sustenance for the future? They will never draw it from the lovely monuments of our European past. These have an almost fatal narcotic, dream-luxurious effect upon the soul. America must turn again to catch the spirit of her own dark, aboriginal continent.

That which was abhorrent to the Pilgrim Fathers and to the Spaniards, that which was called the Devil, the black Demon of savage America, this great aboriginal spirit the Americans must recognize again, recognize and embrace. The devil and anathema of our forefathers hides the Godhead which we seek.

Americans must take up life where the Red Indian, the Aztec, the Maya, the Incas left it off. They must pick up the life-thread where the mysterious Red race let it fall. They must catch the pulse of the life which Cortes and Columbus murdered. There lies the real continuity: not between Europe and the new States, but between the murdered Red America and the seething White America. The President should not look back towards Gladstone or Cromwell or Hildebrand, but towards Montezuma. A great and lovely life-form, unperfected, fell with Montezuma. The responsibility for the producing and the perfecting of this life-form devolves upon the new American. It is time he accepted the full responsibility. It means a surpassing of the old European life-form. It means a departure from the old European morality, ethic. It means even a departure from the old range of emotions and sensibilities. The old emotions are crystallized for ever among the European monuments of beauty. There we can leave them, along with the old creeds and the old ethical laws outside of life. Montezuma had other emotions, such as we have not known or admitted. We must start from Montezuma, not from St. Francis or St. Bernard.

As Venice wedded the Adriatic, let America embrace the great dusky continent of the Red Man. It is a mysterious, delicate process, no theme for tub-thumping and shouts of Expositions. And yet it is a theme upon which American writers have touched and touched again, uncannily, unconsciously, blindfold as it were. Whitman was almost conscious; only the political democracy issue confused him. Now is the day when Americans must become fully self-reliantly

conscious of their own inner responsibility. They must be ready for a new act, a new extension of life. They must pass the bounds.

To your tents, O America. Listen to your own, don't listen to Europe.

INDIANS AND AN ENGLISHMAN

Supposing one fell onto the moon, and found them talking English, it would be something the same as falling out of the open world plump down here in the middle of America. "Here" means New Mexico, the Southwest, wild and woolly and artistic and sage-brush desert.

It is all rather like comic opera played with solemn intensity. All the wildness and woolliness and westernity and motor-cars and art and sage and savage are so mixed up, so incongruous, that it is a farce, and everybody knows it. But they refuse to play it as farce. The wild and woolly section insists on being heavily dramatic, bold and bad on purpose; the art insists on being real American and artistic; motor-cars insist on being thrilled, moved to the marrow; highbrows insist on being ecstatic; Mexicans insist on being Mexicans, squeezing the last black drop of macabre joy out of life; and Indians wind themselves in white cotton sheets like Hamlet's father's ghost, with a lurking smile.

And here am I, a lone lorn Englishman, tumbled out of the known world of the British Empire onto this stage: for it persists in seeming like a stage to me, and not like the proper world.

Whatever makes a proper world, I don't know. But surely two elements are necessary: a common purpose and a common sympathy. I can't see any common purpose. The Indians and Mexicans don't even seem very keen on dollars. That full moon of a silver dollar doesn't strike me as overwhelmingly hypnotic out here. As for a common sympathy or understanding, that's beyond imagining. West is wild and woolly and bad-on-purpose; commerce is a little self-conscious about its own pioneering importance — Pioneers! O Pioneers! — highbrow is bent on getting to the bottom of everything and saving the lost soul down there in the depths; Mexican is bent on being Mexican and not gringo; and the Indian is all the things that all the others aren't. And so everybody smirks at everybody else, and says tacitly: "Go on; you do your little stunt, and I'll do mine," and they're like the various troupes in a circus, all performing at once, with nobody for Master of Ceremonies.

It seems to me, in this country, everything is taken so damn seriously that nothing remains serious. Nothing is so farcical as insistent drama. Everybody is lurkily conscious of this. Each section or troupe is quite willing to admit that all the other sections are buffoon stunts. But it itself is the real thing, solemnly bad in its badness, good in its goodness, wild in its wildness, woolly in its

woolliness, arty in its artiness, deep in its depths — in a word, earnest.

In such a masquerade of earnestness, a bewildered straggler out of the far-flung British Empire, myself! Don't let me for a moment pretend to *know* anything. I know less than nothing. I simply gasp like a bumpkin in a circus ring, with the horse-lady leaping over my head, the Apache war-whooping in my ear, the Mexican staggering under crosses and bumping me as he goes by, the artist whirling colours across my dazzled vision, the highbrows solemnly declaiming at me from all the cross-roads. If, dear reader, you, being the audience who has paid to come in, feel that you must take up an attitude to me, let it be one of amused pity.

One has to take sides. First, one must be either pro-Mexican or pro-Indian; then, either art or intellect; then, Republican or Democrat; and so on. But as for me, poor lamb, if I bleat at all in the circus ring, it will be my own shorn lonely bleat of a lamb who's lost his mother.

The first Indians I really saw were the Apaches in the Apache Reservation of this state. We drove in a motor-car, across desert and mesa, down canons and up divides and along arroyos and so forth, two days, till at afternoon our two Indian men ran the car aside from the trail and sat under the pine tree to comb their long black hair and roll it into the two roll-plaits that hang in front of their shoulders, and put on all their silver-and-turquoise jewellery and their best blankets: because we were nearly there. On the trail were horsemen passing, and wagons with Ute Indians and Navajos.

"De donde viene Usted?" . . .

We came at dusk from the high shallows and saw on a low crest the points of Indian tents, the tepees, and smoke, and silhouettes of tethered horses and blanketed figures moving. In the shadow a rider was following a flock of white goats that flowed like water. The car ran to the top of the crest, and there was a hollow basin with a lake in the distance, pale in the dying light. And this shallow upland basin, dotted with Indian tents, and the fires flickering in front, and crouching blanketed figures, and horsemen crossing the dusk from tent to tent, horsemen in big steeple hats sitting glued on their ponies, and bells tinkling, and dogs yapping, and tilted wagons trailing in on the trail below, and a smell of wood-smoke and of cooking, and wagons coming in from far off, and tents pricking on the ridge of the round *vallum*, and horsemen dipping down and emerging again, and more red sparks of fires glittering, and crouching bundles of women's figures squatting at a fire before a little tent made of boughs, and little girls in full petticoats hovering, and wild barefoot boys throwing bones at thin-tailed dogs, and tents away in the distance, in the growing dark, on the slopes, and the trail crossing the floor of the hollows in the low dusk.

There you had it all, as in the hollow of your hand. And to my heart, born in England and kindled with Fenimore Cooper, it wasn't the wild and woolly West, it was the nomad nations gathering still in the continent of hemlock trees and prairies. The Apaches came and talked to us, in their steeple black hats and plaits wrapped with beaver fur, and their silver and beads and turquoise. Some talked strong American, and some talked only Spanish. And they had strange lines in their faces.

The two kivas, the rings of cut aspen trees stuck in the ground like the walls of a big hut of living trees, were on the plain, at either end of the race-track. And as the sun went down, the drums began to beat, the drums with their strong-weak, strong-weak pulse that beat on the plasm of one's tissue. The car slid down to the south kiva. Two elderly men held the drum, and danced the pit-pat, pat-pat quick beat on flat feet, like birds that move from the feet only, and sang with wide mouths: Hie! Hie! Hie! Hy-a! Hy-a! Hy-a! Hie! Hie! Hie! Ay-away-away-a! Strange dark faces with wide, shouting mouths and rows of small, close-set teeth, and strange lines on the faces, part ecstasy, part mockery, part humorous, part devilish, and the strange, calling, summoning sound in a wild song-shout, to the thud-thud of the drum. Answer of the same from the other kiva, as of a challenge accepted. And from the gathering darkness around, men drifting slowly in, each carrying an aspen twig, each joining to cluster close in two rows upon the drum, holding each his aspen twig inwards, their faces all together, mouths all open in the song-shout, and all of them all the time going on the two feet, pat-pat, pat-pat, to the thud-thud of the drum and the strange, plangent yell of the chant, edging inch by inch, -pat-pat, pat-pat, pat-pat, sideways in a cluster along the track, towards the distant cluster of the challengers from the other kiva, who were sing-shouting and edging onwards, sideways, in the dusk, their faces all together, their leaves all inwards, towards the drum, and their feet going pat-pat, pat-pat on the dust, with their buttocks stuck out a little, faces all inwards, shouting open-mouthed to the drum, and half laughing, half mocking, half devilment, half fun. *Hie! Hie! Hie! Hie-away-awaya!* The strange yell, song, shout rising so lonely in the dusk, as if pine trees could suddenly, shaggily sing. Almost a pre-animal sound, full of triumph in life, and devilment against other life, and mockery, and humorousness, and the pit-pat, pit-pat of the rhythm. Sometimes more youths coming up, and as they draw near laughing, they give the war-whoop, like a turkey giving a startled shriek and then gobble-gobbling with laughter — Ugh! — the shriek half laughter, then the gobble-gobble-gobble like a great demoniac chuckle. The chuckle in the war-whoop. — They produce the gobble from the deeps of the stomach, and say it makes them feel good.

Listening, an acute sadness, and a nostalgia, unbearably yearning for

something, and a sickness of the soul came over me. The gobble-gobble chuckle in the whoop surprised me in my very tissues. Then I got used to it, and could hear in it the humanness, the playfulness, and then, beyond that, the mockery and the diabolical, pre-human, pine-tree fun of cutting dusky throats and letting the blood spurt out unconfined. Gobble-agobble-agobble, the unconfined loose blood, gobble-agobble, the dead, mutilated lump, gobble-agobble-agobble, the fun, the greatest man-fun. The war-whoop!

So I felt. I may have been all wrong, and other folk may feel much more natural and reasonable things. But so I felt. And the sadness and the nostalgia of the song-calling, and the resinous continent of pine trees and turkeys, the feet of birds treading a dance, far off, when man was dusky and not individualized.

I am no ethnologist. The point is, what is the feeling that passes from an Indian to me, when we meet? We are both men, but how do we feel together? I shall never forget that first evening when I first came into contact with Red Men, away in the Apache country. It was not what I had thought it would be. It was something of a shock. Again something in my soul broke down, letting in a bitterer dark, a pungent awakening to the lost past, old darkness, new terror, new root-griefs, old root-richnesses.

The Apaches have a cult of water-hatred; they never wash flesh or rag. So never in my life have I smelt such an unbearable sulphur-human smell as comes from them when they cluster: a smell that takes the breath from the nostrils.

We drove the car away half a mile or more, back from the Apache hollow, to a lonely ridge, where we pitched camp under pine trees.

Our two Indians made the fire, dragged in wood, then wrapped themselves in their best blankets and went off to the tepees of their friends. The night was cold and starry.

After supper I wrapped myself in a red serape up to the nose, and went down alone to the Apache encampment. It is good, on a chilly night in a strange country, to be wrapped almost to the eyes in a good Navajo blanket. Then you feel warm inside yourself, and as good as invisible, and the dark air thick with enemies. So I stumbled on, startling the hobbled horses that jerked aside from me. Reaching the rim-crest one saw many fires burning in red spots round the slopes of the hollow, and against the fires many crouching figures. Dogs barked, a baby cried from a bough shelter, there was a queer low crackle of voices. So I stumbled alone over the ditches and past the tents, down to the kiva. Just near was a shelter with a big fire in front, and a man, an Indian, selling drinks, no doubt Budweiser beer and grape-juice, non-intoxicants. Cowboys in chaps and big hats were drinking too, and one screechy, ungentle cowgirl in khaki. So I went on in the dark up the opposite slope. The dark Indians passing in the night

peered at me. The air was full of a sort of sportiveness, playfulness, that had a jeering, malevolent vibration in it, to my fancy. As if this play were another kind of harmless-harmful warfare, overbearing. Just the antithesis of what I understand by jolliness: ridicule. Comic sort of bullying. No jolly, free laughter. Yet a great deal of laughter. But with a sort of gibe in it.

This, of course, may just be the limitation of my European fancy. But that was my feeling. One felt a stress of will, of human wills, in the dark air, gibing even in the comic laughter. And a sort of unconscious animosity.

Again a sound of a drum down below, so again I stumbled down to the kiva. A bunch of young men were clustered — seven or eight round a drum, and standing with their faces together, loudly and mockingly singing the song-yells, some of them treading the pat-pat, some not bothering. Just behind was the blazing fire and the open shelter of the drink-tent, with Indians in tall black hats and long plaits in front of their shoulders, and bead-braided waistcoats, and hands in their pockets; some swathed in sheets, some in brilliant blankets, and all grinning, laughing. The cowboys with big spurs still there, horses' bridles trailing, and cowgirl screeching her laugh. One felt an inevitable silent gibing, animosity in each group, one for the other. At the same time, an absolute avoidance of any evidence of this.

The young men round the drum died out and started again. As they died out, the strange uplifted voice in the kiva was heard. It seemed to me the outside drumming and singing served to cover the voice within the kiva.

The kiva of young green trees was just near, two paces only. On the ground outside, boughs and twigs were strewn round to prevent anyone's coming close to the enclosure. Within was the firelight. And one could see through the green of the leaf-screen, men round a fire inside there, and one old man, the same old man always facing the open entrance, the fire between him and it. Other Indians sat in a circle, of which he was the key. The old man had his dark face lifted, his head bare, his two plaits falling on his shoulders. His close-shutting Indian lips were drawn open, his eyes were as if half-veiled, as he went on and on, on and on, in a distinct, plangent, recitative voice, male and yet strangely far-off and plaintive, reciting, reciting, reciting like a somnambulist, telling, no doubt, the history of the tribe interwoven with the gods. Other Apaches sat round the fire. Those nearest the old teller were stationary, though one chewed gum all the time and one ate bread-cake and others lit cigarettes. Those nearer the entrance rose after a time, restless. At first some strolled in, stood a minute, then strolled out, desultory. But as the night went on, the ring round the fire inside the wall of green young trees was complete, all squatting on the ground, the old man with the lifted face and parted lips and half-unseeing eyes going on and on, across the

fire. Some men stood lounging with the half self-conscious ease of the Indian behind the seated men. They lit cigarettes. Some drifted out. Another filtered in. I stood wrapped in my blanket in the cold night, at some little distance from the entrance, looking on.

A big young Indian came and pushed his face under my hat to see who or what I was.

“*Buenos!*”

“*Buenos!*”

“*Que quiere?*”

“*No hablo espahol.*”

“Oh, only English, eh? You can’t come in here.”

“I don’t want to.”

“This Indian church.”

“Is it?”

“I don’t let people come, only Apache, only Indian.”

“You keep watch?”

“I keep watch, yes; Indian church, eh?”

“And the old man preaches?”

“Yes, he preaches.”

After which I stood quite still and uncommunicative. He waited for a further development. There was none. So, after giving me another look, he went to talk to other Indians, *sotto voce*, by the door. The circle was complete; groups stood behind the squatting ring, some men were huddled in blankets, some sitting just in trousers and shirt, in the warmth near the fire, some wrapped close in white cotton sheets. The firelight shone on the dark, unconcerned faces of the listeners, as they chewed gum, or ate bread, or smoked a cigarette. Some had big silver ear-rings swinging, and necklaces of turquoise. Some had waistcoats all bead braids. Some wore store shirts and store trousers, like Americans. From time to time one man pushed another piece of wood on the fire.

They seemed to be paying no attention; it all had a very perfunctory appearance. But they kept silent, and the voice of the old reciter went on blindly, from his lifted, bronze mask of a face with its wide-opened lips. They furl back their teeth as they speak, and they use a sort of resonant tenor voice that has a plangent, half-sad, twanging sound, vibrating deep from the chest. The old man went on and on, for hours, in that urgent, far-off voice. His hair was grey, and parted, and his two round plaits hung in front of his shoulders on his shirt. From his ears dangled pieces of blue turquoise, tied with string. An old green blanket was wrapped round above his waist, and his feet in old moccasins were crossed before the fire. There was a deep pathos, for me, in the old, mask-like, virile

figure, with its metallic courage of persistence, old memory, and its twanging male voice. So far, so great a memory. So dauntless a persistence in the piece of living red earth seated on the naked earth, before the fire; this old, bronze-resonant man with his eyes as if glazed in old memory, and his voice issuing in endless plangent monotony from the wide, unfurled mouth.

And the young men, who chewed chewing-gum and listened without listening. The voice no doubt registered on their under-consciousness, as they looked around, and lit a cigarette, and spat sometimes aside. With their day-consciousness they hardly attended.

As for me, standing outside, beyond the open entrance, I was no enemy of theirs; far from it. The voice out of the far-off time was not for my ears. Its language was unknown to me. And I did not wish to know. It was enough to hear the sound issuing plangent from the bristling darkness of the far past, to see the bronze mask of the face lifted, the white, small, close-packed teeth showing all the time. It was not for me, and I knew it. Nor had I any curiosity to understand. The soul is as old as the oldest day, and has its own hushed echoes, its own far-off tribal understandings sunk and incorporated. We do not need to live the past over again. Our darkest tissues are twisted in this old tribal experience, our warmest blood came out of the old tribal fire. And they vibrate still in answer, our blood, our tissue. But me, the conscious me, I have gone a long road since then. And as I look back, like memory terrible as bloodshed, the dark faces round the fire in the night, and one blood beating in me and them. But I don't want to go back to them, ah, never. I never want to deny them or break with them. But there is no going back. Always onward, still further. The great devious onward-flowing stream of conscious human blood. From them to me, and from me on.

I don't want to live again the tribal mysteries my blood has lived long since. I don't want to know as I have known, in the tribal exclusiveness. But every drop of me trembles still alive to the old sound, every thread in my body quivers to the frenzy of the old mystery. I know my derivation. I was born of no virgin, of no Holy Ghost. Ah, no, these old men telling the tribal tale were my fathers. I have a dark-faced, bronze-voiced father far back in the resinous ages. My mother was no virgin. She lay in her hour with this dusky-lipped tribe-father. And I have not forgotten him. But he, like many an old father with a changeling son, he would like to deny me. But I stand on the far edge of their firelight, and am neither denied nor accepted. My way is my own, old red father; I can't cluster at the drum any more.

TAOS

The Indians say Taos is the heart of the world. Their world, maybe. Some places seem temporary on the face of the earth: San Francisco, for example. Some places seem final. They have a true nodality. I never felt that so powerfully as, years ago, in London. The intense powerful nodality of that great heart of the world. And during the war that heart, for me, broke. So it is. Places can lose their living nodality. Rome, to me, has lost hers. In Venice one feels the magic of the glamorous old node that once united East and West, but it is the beauty of an after-life.

Taos pueblo still retains its old nodality. Not like a great city. But, in its way, like one of the monasteries of Europe. You cannot come upon the ruins of the old great monasteries of England, beside their waters, in some lovely valley, now remote, without feeling that here is one of the choice spots of the earth, where the spirit dwelt. To me it is so important to remember that when Rome collapsed, when the great Roman Empire fell into smoking ruins, and bears roamed in the streets of Lyon and wolves howled in the deserted streets of Rome, and Europe really was a dark ruin, then, it was not in castles or manors or cottages that life remained vivid. Then those whose souls were still alive withdrew together and gradually built monasteries, and these monasteries and convents, little communities of quiet labour and courage, isolated, helpless, and yet never overcome in a world flooded with devastation, these alone kept the human spirit from disintegration, from going quite dark, in the Dark Ages. These men made the Church, which again made Europe, inspiring the martial faith of the Middle Ages.

Taos pueblo affects me rather like one of the old monasteries. When you get there you feel something final. There is an arrival. The nodality still holds good.

But this is the pueblo. And from the north side to the south side, from the south side to the north side, the perpetual silent wandering intentness of a full-skirted, black-shawled, long-fringed woman in her wide white deerskin boots, the running of children, the silent sauntering of dark-faced men, bare-headed, the two plaits in front of their thin shoulders, and a white sheet like a sash swathed round their loins. They must have something to swathe themselves in.

And if it were sunset, the men swathing themselves in their sheets like shrouds, leaving only the black place of the eyes visible. And women, darker than ever, with shawls over their heads, busy at the ovens. And cattle being

driven to sheds. And men and boys trotting in from the fields, on ponies. And as the night is dark, on one of the roofs, or more often on the bridge, the inevitable drum-drum- drum of the tomtom, and young men in the dark lifting their voices to the song, like wolves or coyotes crying in music.

There it is, then, the pueblo, as it has been since heaven knows when. And the slow dark weaving of the Indian life going on still, though perhaps more waveringly. And oneself, sitting there on a pony, a far-off stranger with gulfs of time between me and this. And yet, the old nodality of the pueblo still holding, like a dark ganglion spinning invisible threads of consciousness. A sense of dryness, almost of weariness, about the pueblo. And a sense of the inalterable. It brings a sick sort of feeling over me, always, to get into the Indian vibration. Like breathing chlorine.

The next day, in the morning, we went to help erect the great stripped maypole. It was the straight, smoothed yellow trunk of a big tree. Of course one of the white boys took the bossing of the show. But the Indians were none too ready to obey, and their own fat dark-faced boss gave counter-orders. It was the old, amusing contradiction between the white and the dark races. As for me, I just gave a hand steadying the pole as it went up, outsider at both ends of the game.

An American girl came with a camera, and got a snap of us all struggling in the morning light with the great yellow trunk. One of the Indians went to her abruptly, in his quiet, insidious way.

“You give me that Kodak. You ain’t allowed take no snaps here. You pay fine — one dollar.”

She was frightened, but she clung to her camera.

“You’re not going to take my Kodak from me,” she said.

“I’m going to take that film out. And you pay one dollar fine, see?”

The girl relinquished the camera; the Indian took out the film.

“Now you pay me one dollar, or I don’t give you back the Kodak.”

Rather sullenly, she took out her purse and gave the two silver half-dollars. The Indian returned the camera, pocketed the money, and turned aside with a sort of triumph. Done it over one specimen of the white race.

There were not very many Indians helping to put up the pole.

AU REVOIR, U. S. A.

Say ail revoir But not good-bye This parting brings A bitter sigli. . . .

It really does, when you find yourself in an unkempt Pullman trailing through endless deserts, south of El Paso, fed on doubtful scraps at enormous charge and at the will of a rather shoddy smallpox-marked Mexican Pullman-boy who knows there's been a revolution and that his end is up. Then you remember the neat and nice nigger who looked after you as far as El Paso, before you crossed the Rio Grande into desert and chaos, and you sigh, if you have time before a curse chokes you.

Yet, U. S. A., you do put a strain on the nerves. Mexico puts a strain on the temper. Choose which you prefer. Mine's the latter. I'd rather be in a temper than be pulled taut. Which is what the U. S. A. did to me. Tight as a fiddle string, tense over the bridge of the solar plexus. Anyhow the solar plexus goes a bit loose and has a bit of play down here.

I still don't know why the U. S. A. pulls one so tight and makes one feel like a chicken that is being drawn. The people on the whole are quite as amenable as people anywhere else. They don't pick your pocket, or even your personality. They're not unfriendly. It's not the people. Something in the air tightens one's nerves like fiddle strings, screws them up, squeak-squeak! . . . till one's nerves will give out nothing but a shrill fine shriek of overwroughtness. Why, in the name of heaven? Nobody knows. It's just the spirit of place.

You cross the Rio Grande and change from tension into exasperation. You feel like hitting the impudent Pullman waiter with a beer-bottle. In the U. S. A. you don't even think of such a thing.

Of course, one might get used to a state of tension. And then one would pine for the United States. Meanwhile one merely snarls back at the dragons of San Juan Teotihuacan.

It's a queer continent — as much as I've seen of it. It's a fanged continent. It's got a rattlesnake coiled in its heart, has this democracy of the New World. It's a dangerous animal, once it lifts its head again. Meanwhile, the dove still nests in the coils of the rattlesnake, the stone coiled rattlesnake of Aztec eternity. The dove laves her eggs on his flat head.

The old people had a marvellous feeling for snakes and fangs, down here in Mexico. And after all, Mexico is only the sort of solar plexus of North America.

The great paleface overlay hasn't gone into the soil half an inch. The Spanish churches and palaces stagger, the most rickety things imaginable, always just on the point of falling down. And the peon still grins his Indian grin behind the Cross. And there's quite a lively light in his eyes, much more so than in the eyes of the northern Indian. He knows his gods.

These old civilizations down here, they never got any higher than Quetzalcoatl. And he's just a sort of feathered snake. Who needed the smoke of a little heart's-blood now and then, even he.

"Only the ugly is aesthetic now," said the young Mexican artist. Personally, he seems as gentle and self-effacing as the nicest of lambs. Yet his caricatures are hideous, hideous without mirth or whimsicality. Blood-hideous. Grim, earnest hideousness.

Like the Aztec things, the Aztec carvings. They all twist and bite. That's all they do. Twist and writhe and bite, or crouch in lumps. And coiled rattlesnakes, many, like dark heaps of excrement. And out at San Juan Teotihuacan where are the great pyramids of a vanished, pre-Aztec people, as we are told — and the so-called Temple of Quetzalcoatl — there, behold you, huge gnashing heads jut out jagged from the wall-face of the low pyramid, and a huge snake stretches along the base, and one grasps at a carved fish, that swims in old stone and for once seems harmless. Actually a harmless fish!

But look out! The great stone heads snarl at you from the wall, trying to bite you: and one great dark, green blob of an obsidian eye, you never saw anything so blindly malevolent: and then white fangs. Great white fangs, smooth today, the white fangs, with tiny cracks in them. Enamelled. These bygone pyramid-building Americans, who were a dead-and-gone mystery even to the Aztecs, when the Spaniards arrived, they applied their highest art to the enamelling of the great fangs of these venomous stone heads, and there is the enamel today, white and smooth. You can stroke the great fang with your finger and see. And the blob of an obsidian eye looks down at you.

It's a queer continent. The anthropologists may make what pretti-ness they like out of myths. But come here, and you'll see that the gods bit. There is none of the phallic preoccupation of the old Mediterranean. Here they hadn't got even as far as hot-blooded sex.

Fangs, and cold serpent folds, and bird-snakes with fierce cold blood and claws.

I admit that I feel bewildered. There is always something a bit amiably comic about Chinese dragons and contortions. There's nothing amiably comic in these ancient monsters. They're dead in earnest about biting and writhing, snake-blooded birds.

And the Spanish white superimposition, with rococo church-towers among pepper-trees and column cactuses, seems so rickety and temporary, the pyramids seem so indigenous, rising like hills out of the earth itself. The one goes down with a clatter, the other remains.

And this is what seems to me the difference between Mexico and the United States. And this is why, it seems to me, Mexico exasperates, whereas the U. S. A. puts an unbearable tension on one. Because here in Mexico the fangs are still obvious. Everybody knows the gods are going to bite within the next five minutes. While in the United States, the gods have had their teeth pulled, and their claws cut, and their tails docked, till they seem real mild lambs. Yet all the time, inside, it's the same old dragon's blood. The same old American dragon's blood.

And that discrepancy of course is a strain on the human psyche.

A LETTER FROM GERMANY

We are going back to Paris tomorrow, so this is the last moment to write a letter from Germany. Only from the fringe of Germany, too.

It is a miserable journey from Paris to Nancy, through that Marne country, where the country still seems to have had the soul blasted out of it, though the dreary fields are ploughed and level, and the pale wire trees stand up. But it is all void and null. And in the villages, the smashed houses in the street rows, like rotten teeth between good teeth.

You come to Strasburg, and the people still talk Alsatian German, as ever, in spite of French shop-signs. The place feels dead. And full of cotton goods, white goods, from Miilhausen, from the factories that once were German. Such cheap white cotton goods, in a glut.

The cathedral front rearing up high and flat and fanciful, a sort of darkness in the dark, with round rose windows and long, long prisons of stone. Queer, that men should have ever wanted to put stone upon fanciful stone to such a height, without having it fall down. The Gothic! I was always glad when my card-castle fell. But these Goths and Alemans seemed to have a craze for peaky heights.

The Rhine is still the Rhine, the great divider. You feel it as you cross. The flat, frozen, watery places. Then the cold and curving river. Then the other side, seeming so cold, so empty, so frozen, so forsaken. The train stands and steams fiercely. Then it draws through the flat Rhine plain, past frozen pools of flood-water, and frozen fields, in the emptiness of this bit of occupied territory.

Immediately you are over the Rhine, the spirit of place has changed. There is no more attempt at the bluff of geniality. The marshy places are frozen. The fields are vacant. There seems nobody in the world.

It is as if the life had retreated eastwards. As if the Germanic life were slowly ebbing away from contact with western Europe, ebbing to the deserts of the east. And there stand the heavy, ponderous, round hills of the Black Forest, black with an inky blackness of Germanic trees, and patched with a whiteness of snow. They are like a series of huge, involved black mounds, obstructing the vision eastwards. You look at them from the Rhine plain, and know that you stand on an actual border, up against something.

The moment you are in Germany, you know. It feels empty, and, somehow, menacing. So must the Roman soldiers have watched those black, massive round hills: with a certain fear, and with the knowledge that they were at their own

limit. A fear of the invisible natives. A fear of the invisible life lurking among the woods. A fear of their own opposite.

So it is with the French: this almost mystic fear. But one should not insult even one's fears.

Germany, this bit of Germany, is very different from what it was two-and-a-half years ago, when I was here. Then it was still open to Europe. Then it still looked to western Europe for a reunion, for a sort of reconciliation. Now that is over. The inevitable, mysterious barrier has fallen again, and the great leaning of the Germanic spirit is once more eastwards, towards Russia, towards Tartary. The strange vortex of Tartary has become the positive centre again, the positivity of western Europe is broken. The positivity of our civilization has broken. The influences that come, come invisibly out of Tartary. So that all Germany reads *Beasts, Men and Gods* with a kind of fascination. Returning again to the fascination of the destructive East, that produced Attila.

So it is at night. Baden-Baden is a little quiet place, all its guests gone. No more Turgenievs or Dostoievskys or Grand Dukes or King Edwards coming to drink the waters. All the outward effect of a world-famous watering-place. But empty now, a mere Black Forest village with the wagon-loads of timber going through, to the French.

The Rentenmark, the new gold mark of Germany, is abominably dear. Prices are high in England, but English money buys less in Baden than it buys in London, by a long chalk. And there is no work — consequently no money. Nobody buys anything, except absolute necessities. The shop-keepers are in despair. And there is less and less work.

Everybody gives up the telephone — can't afford it. The tram-cars don't run, except about three times a day to the station. Up to the Annaberg, the suburb, the lines are rusty, no trams ever go. The people can't afford the ten pfennigs for the fare. Ten pfennigs is an important sum now: one penny. It is really a hundred millions of marks.

Money becomes insane, and people with it.

At night the place is almost dark, economizing light. Economy, economy, economy — that too becomes an insanity. Luckily the government keeps bread fairly cheap.

But at night you feel strange things stirring in the darkness, strange feelings stirring out of this still-unconquered Black Forest. You stiffen your backbone and you listen to the night. There is a sense of danger. It is not the people. They don't seem dangerous. Out of the very air comes a sense of danger, a queer, *bristling* feeling of uncanny danger.

Something has happened. Something has happened which has not yet

eventuated. The old spell of the old world has broken, and the old, bristling, savage spirit has set in. The war did not break the old peace-and-production hope of the world, though it gave it a severe wrench. Yet the old peace-and-production hope still governs, at least the consciousness. Even in Germany it has not quite gone.

But it feels as if, virtually, it were gone. The last two years have done it. The hope in peace-and-production is broken. The old flow, the old adherence is ruptured. And a still older flow has set in. Back, back to the savage polarity of Tartary, and away from the polarity of civilized Christian Europe. This, it seems to me, has already happened. And it is a happening of far more profound import than any actual *event*. It is the father of the next phase of events.

And the feeling never relaxes. As you travel up the Rhine valley, still the same latent sense of danger, of silence, of suspension. Not that the people are actually planning or plotting or preparing. I don't believe it for a minute. But something has happened to the human soul, beyond all help. The human soul recoiling now from unison, and making itself strong elsewhere. The ancient spirit of pre-historic Germany coming back, at the end of history.

The same in Heidelberg. Heidelberg full, full, full of people. Students the same, youths with rucksacks the same, boys and maidens in gangs come down from the hills. The same, and not the same. These queer gangs of *Young Socialists*, youths and girls, with their non-materialistic professions, their half-mystic assertions, they strike one as strange. Something primitive, like loose, roving gangs of broken, scattered tribes, so they affect one. And the swarms of people somehow produce an impression of silence, of secrecy, of stealth. It is as if everything and everybody recoiled away from the old unison, as barbarians lurking in a wood recoil out of sight. The old habits remain. But the bulk of the people have no money. And the whole stream of feeling is reversed.

So you stand in the woods above the town and see the Neckar flowing green and swift and slippery out of the gulf of Germany, to the Rhine. And the sun sets slow and scarlet into the haze of the Rhine valley. And the old, pinkish stone of the ruined castle across looks sultry, the marshalry is in shadow below, the peaked roofs of old, tight Heidelberg compressed in its river gateway glimmer and glimmer out. There is a blue haze.

And it all looks as if the years were wheeling swiftly backwards, no more onwards. Like a spring that is broken, and whirls swiftly back, so time seems to be whirling with mysterious swiftness to a sort of death. Whirling to the ghost of the old Middle Ages of Germany, then to the Roman days, then to the days of the silent forest and the dangerous, lurking barbarians.

Something about the Germanic races is unalterable. White-skinned, elemental,

and dangerous. Our civilization has come from the fusion of the dark-eyes with the blue. The meeting and mixing and mingling of the two races has been the joy of our ages. And the Celt has been there, alien, but necessary as some chemical reagent to the fusion. So the civilization of Europe rose up. So these cathedrals and these thoughts.

But now the Celt is the disintegrating agent. And the Latin and southern races are falling out of association with the northern races, the northern Germanic impulse is recoiling towards Tartary, the destructive vortex of Tartary.

It is a fate; nobody now can alter it. It is a fate. The very blood changes. Within the last three years, the very constituency of the blood has changed, in European veins. But particularly in Germanic veins.

At the same time, we have brought it about ourselves — by a Ruhr occupation, by an English nullity, and by a German false will. We have done it ourselves. But apparently it was not to be helped.

Quos vult perdere Deus, dementat prius.

SEE MEXICO AFTER, BY LUIS Q.

My home's in Mexico, That's where you want to go. Life's one long cine show. .

..

As a matter of fact, I am a hard-worked, lean individual poked in the corner of a would-be important building in Mexico D. F.

That's that.

I am — married, so this is not a matrimonial ad. But I am, as I said, lean, pale, hard-worked, with indiscriminate fair hair and, I hope, nice blue eyes. Anyhow they aren't black. And I am young. And I am Mexican: oh, don't doubt it for a second. *Mejicano soy*. La-la-la-la! I'll jabber your head off in Spanish. But where is my gun and red sash?

Ay de mi! That's how one sighs in Spanish. I am sighing because I am Mexican, for who would be a Mexican? Where would he be if he was one? I am an official — without doubt important, since every four-farthing sparrow, *etc.* And being an important official, I am always having to receive people. Receive. Deceive. Believe. Rather, they're not usually people. They're almost always commissions.

"Please to meet you, Mister," they say. "Not American, are you?"

I seize my chin in trepidation. "Good God! Am I?" There is a Monroe doctrine, and there is a continent, or two continents. Am I American? by any chance?

"Pardon me one moment!" I say, with true Mexican courtesy.

And I dash upstairs to the top floor — the fourth — no elevators — to my little corner office that looks out over the flat roofs and bubbly church-domes and streaks of wire of Mexico D. F. I rush to the window, I look out, and ah! — Yes! *Que tal? Amigo!* How lucky you're there! Say, boy, will you tell me whether you're American or not? Because if you are, I am.

This interesting announcement is addressed to my old friend Popo, who is lounging his heavy shoulders under the sky, smoking a cigarette end, *a la Mexicaine*. Further, since I'm paid to give information, Popo is the imperturbable volcano, known at length as Popocatepetl, with the accent on the tay, so I beg you not to put it on the cat, who is usually loitering in the vicinity of Mexico D. F.

No, I shan't tell you what the D. F. is: or *who* it is. Take it for yourself if you like. I never come pulling the tail of your D. C. — Washington.

Popo gives another puff to his eternal cigarette, and replies, as every Mexican should:

“*Quien sabe?*”

“Who knows? — Ask me another, boy!”

Ca!~as a matter of fact, we don’t say *Caramba!* very much. But I’ll say it to please. I say it. I tear my hair. I dash downstairs to the Committee, or rather Commission, which is waiting with bated breath (mint) to know whether I’m American or not. I smile ingratiatingly.

“Do pardon me for the interruption, gentlemen. (One of them is usually a lady, but she’s best interpreted by *gentlemen*.) You ask me, am I American? — *Quien sabe?*”

“Then you’re *not*.”

“Am I not, gentlemen? *Ay de mi!*”

“Ever been in America?”

Good God! Again? Ah, my chin, let me seize thee!

Once more I flee upstairs and poke myself out of that window and say *Oiga! Viejo! Oiga* is a very important word. And I am in the Bureau of Information.

“*Oiga! Viejo!* Are you in America?”

“*Quien sabe?*” He bumps the other white shoulder at me. Snow!

“Oh, gentlemen!” I pant. “*Quien sabe?*”

“Then you haven’t.”

“But I’ve been to New York.”

“Why didn’t you say so?”

“Have I been to America?”

“Hey! Who’s running this Information Bureau?”

“I am. Let me run it.”

So I dart upstairs again, and address myself to Popo.

“Popo! I have been to America, *via* New York, and you haven’t.”

Down I dart, to my Commission. On the way I remember how everything — I mean the loud walls — in New York, said SEE AMERICA FIRST. Thank God! I say to myself, wiping my wet face before entering to the Commission: On American evidence, I’ve seen him, her, or it. But whether *en todo* or *en parte*, *quien sabe?*

I open the door, and I give a supercilious sniff. Such are my American manners.

I am just smelling my Commission. — As usual! I say to myself, snobbishly: *Oil!*

There are all sorts and sizes of commissions, every sort and size and condition of commission. But oil predominates. Usually, I can smell oil down the

telephone.

There are others — Railway Commissions, Mines Commissions, American Women's Christian Missions, American Bankers' Missions, American Bootleggers' Missions, American Episcopalian, Presbyterian, Mormon, and Jewish Missions, American Tramps' Missions . . .

I, however, in my little office, am Mohammed. If you would like to see Mexico summed up into one unique figure, see me, *a la* Mohammed, in my little office, saying: Let these mountains come to *me*.

And they come. They come in whole ranges, in sierras, in cordil-leras. I smell oil, and I see the backbone of America walking up the stair-case (no elevator). I hear the chink of silver, and behold the entire Sierra Madre marching me-wards. Ask me if [sic] leave Mohammed with cold feet! Oh, I am *muy Mejicano*, I am!

I feel I am SEEING AMERICA FIRST, and they are seeing Mexico after. I feel myself getting starrier and stripyer every day, I see such a lot of America first.

But what happens to them, when they see Mexico after?

Quien sabe!

I am always murmuring: You see, Mexico and America are not in the same boat.

I want to add: They're not even floating on the same ocean. I doubt if they're gyrating in the same cosmos.

But superlatives are not well-mannered.

Still, it is hard on a young man like me to be merely Mexican, when my father, merely by moving up the map a little while he was still strong and lusty, might have left me hundred-per-cent American. I'm sure I should have been plus.

It is hard on me, I say. As it is hard on Popo. He might have been Mount Brown or Mount Abraham. How can any mountain, when you come to think of it, be Popocatepetl? — and iay-petl at that!

There, there! let me soothe myself.

In fact, I am always a little sorry for the Americans who come seeing Mexico after. "I am left such a long way behind!" as the burro said when he fell down an abandoned mine.

Still, the commissioners and missioners often stay quite brisk. They really do wonders. They put up chimneys and they make all sorts of wheels go round. The Mexicans are simply enraptured. But after a while, being nothing but naughty boys and greasers, they are pining to put their spokes in those wheels. Mischief, I tell you. *Brummmm!* go the spokes! And the wheels pause to wonder, while the bits fly. That's fun!

Other gentlemen who are very sharp-eyed, seeing Mexico after, are the political see-ers. America is too hot for them, as a rule, so they move into cool, cool Mexico. They are some boys, they are! At least, so they tell me. And they belong to weird things that only exist as initials, such I.W.W.'s and A.F.L.'s and P.J.P.'s. Give me a job, say these gentlemen, and I'll take the rest.

Why certainly, what could be more accommodating! Whereupon instantly, these gentlemen acquire the gift of Spanish, with an almost Pentecostal suddenness; they pat you on the shoulder and tell you sulphureous Mexican stories which certainly you would never have heard but for them. Oh, hot stuff! Hot dog! They even cry aloud *Perro caliente!* — and the walls of the city quake.

Moreover they proceed to organize our labour, after having so firmly insisted that we haven't any. But we produce some, for their sakes. And they proceed to organize it: without music. And in throes of self-esteem they cry: Ah, Mexico's the place. America can't touch it! God bless Mexico!

Whereupon all the Mexicans present burst into tears.

You want no darn gringos and gringo capital down here! they say.

We cross ourselves rapidly! Absit omen.

But alas, these thrilling gentlemen always leave us. They return with luggage, having come without, to AMERICA.

Well, *adios!* eh, boy? Come up there one day. Show you something.

Tears; the train moves out.

No, I am Mexican. I might as well be Jonah in the whale's belly, so perfectly, so mysteriously am I nowhere.

But they come. They come as tourists, for example, looking round the whale's interior.

"My wife's a college graduate," says the he-man.

She looks it. And she may thank her lucky stars — Rudolph Valentino is the first-magnitude — she will go on looking it all her days.

Ah, the first time she felt Rudolph's Italianino-Argentino-swoon-between-o-kisses! On the screen, of course — Ah, that first time!

On the back porch, afterwards: Bill, I'm so tired of clean, hygienic kisses.

Poor Bill spits away his still-good, five-cent, mint-covered Wrigley's chewing-gum gag, and with it, the last straw he had to cling to.

Now, aged thirty-four, and never quite a Valentino, he's brought her to see Mexico after — she'd seen Ramon Novarro's face, with the skin-you-love-to-touch. On the screen, of course.

Bill has brought her south. She has crossed the border with Bill. Ah, her eyes at the Pullman window! Where is the skin I would love to touch? they cry. And a dirty Indian pushes his black face and glaring eyes towards her, offering to sell

her enchiladas.

It is no use *my* being sorry for her. Bill is better-looking than I am. So she re-falls in love with Bill; the dark-eyed flour-faced creatures make such eyes at him, down here. Call them women! Downtrodden things!

The escaped husband is another one. He drinks, swears, looks at all the women meaningly over a red nose, and lives with a prostitute. Hot *dog!*

Then the young lady collecting information! Golly! Quite nice-looking too. And the things she does! One would think the invisible unicorn that protects virgins was ramping round her every moment. But it's not that. Not even the toughest bandit, not even Pancho Villa, could carry off all that information, though she as good as typed out her temptation to him.

Then the home-town aristocrats, of Little Bull, Arizona, or of Old Hat, Illinois. They are just looking round for something: seeing Mexico after: and very rarely finding it. It really is extraordinary the things there are in Little Bull and in Old Hat, that there aren't in Mexico. Cold slaw, for example! Why, in Little Bull — !

San Juan Teotihuacan! Hey, boy, why don't you get the parson to sprinkle him with a new tag? Never stand a name like that for half a day, in Little Bull, Illinois. Or was it Arizona?

Such a pity, to have to see Mexico after you've seen America first: or at least, Little Bull, which is probably more so.

The ends won't meet. America isn't just a civilization, it is civilization. So what is Mexico? Beside Little Bull, what is Mexico?

Of course Mexico went in for civilization long, long, long ago. But it got left. The snake crawled on, leaving the tail behind him.

The snake crawled, lap by lap, all round the globe, till it got back to America. And by that time he was some snake, was civilization. But where was his tail? He'd forgotten it?

Hey, boy! What's that?

Mexico!

Mexico! — *the* snake didn't know his own tail. *Mexico!* Gam!

That's nothing. It's mere nothing, but the darn silly emptiness where I'm not. Not yet.

So he opens his mouth, and Mexico, his old tail, shivers. But before civilization swallows its own tail, that tail will buzz. For civilization's a rattler: anyhow Mexico is.

EUROPE V. AMERICA

A young American said to me: "I am not very keen on Europe, but should like to see it, and have done with it." He is an ass. How can one "see" Europe and have done with it? One might as well say: I want to see the moon next week and have done with it. If one doesn't want to see the moon, he doesn't look. And if he doesn't want to see Europe, he doesn't look either. But neither of 'em will go away because he's not looking.

There's no "having done with it." Europe is here, and will be here, long after he has added a bit of dust to America. To me, I simply don't see the point of that American trick of saying one is "through with a thing," when the thing is a good deal better than oneself.

I can hear that young man saying: "Oh, I'm through with the moon, she's played out. She's a dead old planet anyhow, and was never more than a side issue." So was Eve only a side issue. But when a man is through with her, he's through with most of his life.

It's the same with Europe. One may be sick of certain aspects of European civilization. But they're in ourselves, rather than in Europe. As a matter of fact, coming back to Europe, I realize how much more *tense* the European civilization is, in the Americans, than in the Europeans. The Europeans still have a vague idea that the universe is greater than they are, and isn't going to change very radically, not for all the telling of all men put together. But the Americans are tense, somewhere inside themselves, as if they felt that once they slackened, the world would really collapse. It wouldn't. If the American tension snapped tomorrow, only that bit of the world which is tense and American would come to an end. Nothing more.

How could I say: I am through with America? America is a great continent; it won't suddenly cease to be. Some part of me will always be conscious of America. But probably some part greater still in me will always be conscious of Europe, since I am a European.

As for Europe's being old, I find it much younger than America. Even these countries of the Mediterranean, which have known quite a bit of history, seem to me much, much younger even than Taos, not to mention Long Island, or Coney Island.

In the people here there is still, at the bottom, the old, young insouciance. It isn't that the young *don't care*: it is merely that, at the bottom of them there *isn't*

care. Instead there is a sort of bubbling-in of life. It isn't till we grow old that we grip the very sources of our life with care, and strangle them.

And that seems to me the rough distinction between an American and a European. They are both of the same civilization, and all that. But the American grips himself, at the very sources of his consciousness, in a grip of care: and then, to so much of the rest of life, is indifferent. Whereas, the European hasn't got so much care in him, so he cares much more for life and living.

That phrase again of wanting to see Europe and have done with it shows that strangle hold so many Americans have got on themselves. Why don't they say: I'd like to see Europe, and then, if it means something to me, good! and if it doesn't mean much to me, so much the worse for both of us. *Vogue la galere!*

I've been a fool myself, saying: Europe is finished for me. It wasn't Europe at all, it was myself, keeping a strangle-hold on myself. Anil that strangle-hold I carried over to America; as many a man — and woman, worse still — has done before me.

Now, back in Europe, I feel a real relief. The past is too big, and too intimate, for one generation of men to get a strangle hold on it. Europe is squeezing the life out of herself, with her mental education and fixed ideas. But she hasn't got her hands round her own throat not half so far as America has hers; here the grip is already falling slack; and if the system collapses, it'll only be another system collapsed, of which there have been plenty. But in America, where men grip themselves so much more intensely and suicidally — the women worse — the system has its hold on the very sources of consciousness, so God knows what would happen, if the system broke.

No, it's a relief to be by the Mediterranean, and gradually let the tight coils inside oneself come slack. There is much more life in a deep insouciance, which really is the clue to faith, than in this frenzied, keyed-up care, which is characteristic of our civilization, but which is at its worst, or at least its intensest, in America.

PARIS LETTER

I promised to write a letter to you from Paris. Probably I should have forgotten, but I saw a little picture — or sculpture — in the Tuileries, of Hercules slaying the Centaur, and that reminded me. I had so much rather the Centaur had slain Hercules, and men had never developed souls. Seems to me they're the greatest ailment humanity ever had. However, they've got it.

Paris is still monumental and handsome. Along the river where its splendours are, there's no denying its man-made beauty. The poor, pale little Seine runs rapidly north to the sea, the sky is pale, pale jade overhead, greenish and Parisian, the trees of black wire stand in rows, and flourish their black wire brushes against a low sky of jade-pale cobwebs, and the huge dark-grey palaces rear up their masses of stone and slope off towards the sky still with a massive, satisfying suggestion of pyramids. There is something noble and man-made about it all.

My wife says she wishes that grandeur still squared its shoulders on the earth. She wishes she could sit sumptuously in the river windows of the Tuileries, and see a royal spouse — who wouldn't be me — cross the bridge at the head of a tossing, silk and silver cavalcade. She wishes she had a bevy of ladies-in-waiting around her, as a peacock has its tail, as she crossed the weary expanses of pavement in the Champs Elysees.

Well, she can have it. At least, she can't. The world has lost its faculty for splendour, and Paris is like an old, weary peacock that sports a bunch of dirty twigs at its rump, where it used to have a tail. Democracy has collapsed into more and more democracy, and men, particularly Frenchmen, have collapsed into little, rather insignificant, rather wistful, rather nice and helplessly commonplace little fellows who rouse one's mother-instinct and make one feel they should be tucked away in bed and left to sleep, like Rip Van Winkle, till the rest of the storms rolled by.

It's a queer thing to sit in the Tuileries on a Sunday afternoon and watch the crowd drag through the galleries. Instead of a gay and wicked court, the weary, weary crowd, that looks as if it had nothing at heart to keep it going. As if the human creature had been dwindling and dwindling through the processes of democracy, amid the ponderous ridicule of the aristocratic setting, till soon he will dwindle right away.

Oh, those galleries. Oh, those pictures and those statues of nude, nude women: nude, nude, insistently and hopelessly nude. At last the eyes fall in absolute weariness, the moment they catch sight of a bit of pink-and-white painting, or a pair of white marble *jesses*. It becomes an inquisition; like being forced to go on eating pink marzipan icing. And yet there is a fat and very undistinguished bourgeois with a little beard and a fat and hopelessly petit-bourgeoise wife and awful little girl, standing in front of a huge heap of twisting marble, while he, with a goose-grease unctuous simper, strokes the marble hip of the huge marble female, and points out its niceness *to his wife*. She is not in the least jealous. She knows, no doubt, that her own hip and the marble hip are the only ones he will stroke without paying prices, one of which, and the last he could pay, would be the price of spunk.

It seems to me the French are just worn out. And not nearly so much with the late great war as with the pink nudities of women. The men are just worn out, making offerings on the shrine of Aphrodite in elastic garters. And the women are worn out, keeping the men up to it. The rest is all nervous exasperation.

And the table. One shouldn't forget that other, four-legged mistress of man, more unwitherable than Cleopatra. The table. The good kindly tables of Paris, with Coquilles Saint Martin, and escar-gots and oysters and Chateaubriands and the good red wine. If they can afford it, the men sit and eat themselves pink. And no wonder. But the Aphrodite in a hard black hat opposite, when she has eaten herself also pink, is going to insist on further delights, to which somebody has got to play up. Weariness isn't the word for it.

May the Lord deliver us from our own enjoyments, we gasp at last. And he won't. We actually have to deliver ourselves.

One goes out again from the restaurant comfortably fed and soothed with a food and drink, to find the pale-jade sky of Paris crumbling in a wet dust of rain; motor-cars skidding till they turn clean around, and are facing south when they were going north: a boy on a bicycle coming smack, and picking himself up with his bicycle pump between his legs: and the men still fishing, as if it were a Sisyphus penalty, with long sticks fishing for invisible fishes in the Seine: and the huge buildings of the Louvre and the Tuileries standing ponderously, with their Parisian suggestion of pyramids.

And no, in the old style of grandeur I never want to be grand.

That sort of regality, that builds itself up in piles of stone and masonry, and prides itself on living inside the monstrous heaps, once they're built, is not for me. My wife asks why she can't live in the Petit Palais, while she's in Paris. Well, even if she might, she'd live alone.

I don't believe any more in democracy. But I can't believe in the old sort of

aristocracy, either, nor can I wish it back, splendid as it was. What I believe in is the old Homeric aristocracy, when the grandeur was inside the man, and he lived in a simple wooden house. Then, the men that were grand inside themselves, like Ulysses, were the chieftains and the aristocrats by instinct and by choice. At least we'll hope so. And the Red Indians only knew the aristocrat by instinct. The leader was leader in his own being, not because he was somebody's son or had so much money. It's got to be so again. They say it won't work. I say, why not? If men could once recognize the natural aristocrat when they set eyes on him, they can still. They can still choose him if they would.

But this business of dynasties is weariness. House of Valois, House of Tudor! Who would want to be a House, or a bit of a House! Let a man be a man, and damn the House business. I'm absolutely a democrat as far as that goes.

But that men are all brothers and all equal is a greater lie than the other. Some men are always aristocrats. But it doesn't go by birth. A always contains B, but B is not contained in C.

Democracy, however, says that there is no such thing as an aristocrat. All men have two legs and one nose, ergo, they are all alike. Nosily and leggily, maybe. But otherwise, very different.

Democracy says that B is not contained in C, and neither is it contained in A. B, that is, the aristocrat, does not exist.

Now this is palpably a greater lie than the old dynastic life. Aristocracy truly does not go by birth. But it still goes. And the tradition of aristocracy will help it a lot.

The aristocrats tried to fortify themselves inside these palaces and these splendours. Regal Paris built up the external evidences of her regality. But the two-limbed man inside these vast shells died, poor worm, of over-encumbrance.

The natural aristocrat has got to fortify himself inside his own will, according to his own strength. The moment he builds himself external evidences, like palaces, he builds himself in, and commits his own doom. The moment he depends on his jewels, he has lost his virtue.

It always seems to me that the next civilization won't want to raise these ponderous, massive, deadly buildings that refuse to crumble away with their epoch and weigh men helplessly down. Neither palaces nor cathedrals nor any other hugenesses. Material simplicity is after all the highest sign of civilization. Here in Paris one knows it finally. The ponderous and depressing museum that is regal Paris. And living humanity like poor worms struggling inside the shell of history, all of them inside the museum. The dead life and the living life, all one museum.

Monuments, museums, permanencies, and ponderosities are all anathema. But

brave men are for ever born, and nothing else is worth having.

FIREWORKS IN FLORENCE

Yesterday being St. John's Day, the 24th June, and St. John being the patron saint of Florence, his day being also the day of midsummer festival, when, in the north, you jump through the flames: for all these reasons Florence was lit up, and there was a show of fireworks from the Piazzale. There must be fire of some sort on Midsummer Day: so let it be fireworks.

The illuminations were rather scanty. The Palazzo Vecchio had frames of little electric bulbs round the windows. But above that, all along the battlements of the square roof, and in the arches of the thin-necked tower, and between the battlements at the top of the tower, the flames were orange-ruddy, and they danced about in one midsummer witch-night dance, a hundred or two little ruddy dancements among the black, hard battlements, and round the lofty, unrelenting square crown of the old building. It was at once medieval and fascinating, in the soft, hot, moonlit night. The Palazzo Vecchio has come down to our day, but it hasn't yet quite come down to us. It lifts its long slim neck like a hawk rearing up to look around, and in the darkness its battlements in silhouette look like black feathers. Like an alert fierce bird from the Middle Ages it lifts its head over the level town, eagle with serrated plumes. And one feels it is a wonder that the modern spirit hasn't given it a knock over the head, it is so silently fierce and haughty and severe with splendour.

On Midsummer Night the modern spirit had only fixed itself, like so many obstinate insects, in the squares of paltry electric bulb lights on the hard facade. Stupid, staring, unwinking, unalive, unchanging beads of electric lights! As if there could be anything festive or midsummerish about them, in their idiotic fixity like bright colourless brass nail-heads nailed on the night.

Thus far had the modern spirit nailed itself on the old Palazzo. But above, where the battlements ruffled like pinion-tips upon the blond sky, and the dark-necked tower suddenly shot up, the modern spirit unexplainedly ceased, and the Middle Ages flourished. There the illuminations must have been oil flare-lamps, old oil torch lamps, because the flames were like living bodies, so warm and alive, and they danced about perpetually in the warm bland air of night, like Shiva dancing her myriad-movement dance. And all this alive dancement the severe old building carried calmly, with pride and dignity, its neck in the sky. As for the rows of electric bulbs below, like buttons on the breast of a page-boy, they didn't exist.

If anything is detestable, it is hard, stupid fixity, that doesn't know how to flicker and waver and be alive, but must keep on going on being the same, like the buttons on a coat; the coat wears out, but the idiotic buttons are the same as ever.

The people were streaming out of the piazza, all in one direction, and all quiet, and all seeming small and alive under the tall buildings. Of course the Palazzo Vecchio and the Uffizi aren't really tall: in terms of the Woolworth Tower, that is, or the Flatiron Building. But underneath their walls people move diminished, in small, alert, lively throngs, just as in the street-scenes of the old pictures: throngs and groups of striding and standing and streaming people who are quick and alive, and still have a certain alert human dignity, in spite of their being so diminished. And that again is different from the effect of looking down from the top of the Flatiron Building, let us say. There you see people little and scurrying and insect-like, rather repulsive, like the thick mechanical hurrying of ants.

Out of the Piazza Signoria the people were all flowing in one direction, towards the dark mouth of the Uffizi, towards the river. The fountain was shooting up a long, leaning stem of water, and the rather stupid thick Bandinelli statue below glistened all over, in his thick nakedness, but not unpleasant, really. Michelangelo's *David*, in the dry dimness, continued to smirk and trail his foot self-consciously, the incarnation of the modern self-conscious young man, and very objectionable.

But the crowd streamed on, towards the Lungarno, under the big-headed David, unheeding. It is a curious thing, that in spite of that extremely obtrusive male statue of David which stands and has stood for so long a time there in the Piazza, where every Friday the farmers from the country throng to discuss prices, still the name *David* is practically unknown among the ordinary people. They have never heard it. It is meaningless sound to them. It might as well be Popocatepetl. Tell them your name is David, and they remain utterly impervious and blank. You cannot bring them to utter it.

On the Lungarno the crowd is solid. There is no traffic. The whole length of the riverside has become one long theatre pit, where the whole populace of Florence waits to see the fireworks. In countless numbers they stand and wait, the whole city, yet quiet almost as mice.

The fireworks will go off from the Piazzale Michelangelo, which is like a platform, a little platform away above the left bank of the river. So the crowd solidly lines the right bank, the whole city.

In the sky a little to the south, the fair, warm moon, almost full, lingers in a fleece of iridescent cloud, as if also wanting to look on, but from an immeasurable distance. There is no drawing near, on the moon's part.

The crowd is quiet, and perfectly well-behaved. No excitement, and absolutely no exuberance. In a sense, there is no holiday spirit at all. A man hawks half-a-dozen balloons, but nobody buys them. There is a little flare-lit stall, where they cook those little aniseed waffles. And nobody seems to buy them. Only the men who silently walk through the throng with little tubs of ice-cream do a trade. But almost without a sound.

It seems long to wait. Down on the grass by the still full river, under the embankment, are throngs of people. Even those boats in which during the day one sees men getting gravel are full of spectators. But you wouldn't know, unless you looked over the rampart. They are so still. In the river's underworld.

It is weary to wait. The young men, all wearing no hats, stroll, winding among the throng of immovable citizens and wives. There is nothing to see. Best sit in the motor-car by the kerb.

By the car stand two women with a police-dog on a chain. The dog, alert, nervous, uneasy, crouches and then rises restlessly. *Bang!* Up goes the first rocket, like a golden tadpole wiggling up in the sky, then a burst of red and green sparks. The dog winces, and crouches under the running-board of the car. *Bang! Bang! Crackle!* More rockets, more showers of stars and fizzes of aster-petal light in the sky. The dog whimpers, the mistresses divide their attention between the heavens and him. In the sky, the moon draws further and further off, while still watching palely. At an immense distance, the moon, pallid far. Nearer, in the high sky, a rolling and fuming of smoke, a whistling of rockets, a spangling and splashing of fragments of coloured lights, and, most impressive of all, the continuous explosions, crepitation within the air itself, the high air bursting outwards from within itself, in continual shocks. It is more like an air-raid than anything. And perhaps the deepest impression made on the psyche is that of a raid in the air.

The dog suffers and suffers more. He tries to hide away, not to look at all. But there is an extra bang and a fusillade! He has to look! *bish!* the sky-asters burst one beyond the other! He cannot bear it. He shivers like a glass cup that is going to shatter. His mistresses try to comfort him. They want to look at the fireworks but their interest in the dog is more real. And he, he wants to cover his ears, and bury his head, but at every new bang! he starts afresh and rises, and turns round. Sometimes he sits like a statue of pure distress, still as bronze. Then he curls away upon himself again, curling to get away. While the high sky bursts and reverberates, wiggles with tadpoles of golden fire, and plunges with splashes of light, spangles of colour, as if someone had thrown a stone into the ether from above, and then pelted the ether with stones.

The crowd watches in silence. Young men wander by, and in the subdued tone

of mocking irony common to the Italians, they say *bello! bello! bellezza!* But it is pure irony. As the light goes up, you see the dark trees and cypresses standing tall and black, like Dan-tesque spectators, on the sky-line. And down below, you see the townspeople standing motionless, with uplifted faces. Also, rather frequently, a young man with his arm round his white-dressed sweetheart, caressing her and making public love to her. Love-making, it seems, like everything else, must be public nowadays. The stag goes into the depths of the forest. But the young city buck likes the light to flare up and reveal his arm round the shoulders of his girl, his hand stroking her neck.

Up on the Piazzale, they are letting off the figure-pieces: wheels that turn round showerily in red and green and white fire, fuming dense smoke, that moves in curious slow volumes, all penetrated with colour. Now there is a red piece: and on top of the old water-tower a column of red fire and reddish smoke. It looks as if a city in the distance were being burnt by the enemy. And again the fusillade of a raid, while the smoke rolls ponderously, the colour dies out, only the iridescence of the far, unreachable naked moon tinges the low fume.

In heaven are more rockets. There are lovely ones that lean down in the sky like great spider lilies, with long outcurving petals of soft light, and at the end of each petal, a sudden drop of pure green, ready to fall like dew. But some strange hand of evanescence brushes it away, and it is gone, and the next rocket bursting shows all the smoke-threads still stretching, like the spectre of the great fire lily, up in the sky: like the greyness of wild clematis fronds in autumn, crumbling together, as the succeeding rocket bursts in brilliance.

Meanwhile, in another world, and a world more real, the explosion and percussions and fusillades keep up, and penetrate into the soul with a sense of fear. The dog, reduced and shattered, tries to get used to it, but can't succeed.

There is a great spangling and sparkling and trailing of long lights in the sky and long sprays of whitish, successively-bursting fire-blossoms, and other big many-petalled flowers curving their petals downwards like a grasping hand. Ah, at last, it is all happening at once!

And as the eye is thrilled and dazzled, the ear almost ceases to hear. Yet the moment the sky empties, it is the percussion of explosions on the heart that one feels.

It is quickly all over. The chauffeur is gabbling *sotto voce* that it is shorter than last year. The crowd is dispersing so quickly and silently, as if they were running away. And you feel they are all mocking quietly at the spectacle. *Panem et circenses* is all very well, but when the great crowd quietly jeers at your circus, it leaves you at a loss.

The cathedral dome, the top of Giotto's tower, like a lily-stem, and the straight

lines of the top of the Baptistery are outlined with rather sparse electric bulbs. It looks very unfinished. Yet, with that light above illuminating the pale and coloured marbles ghostly, and the red tiles of the dome in the night-sky, and the abrupt end of the lily-stem without a flower, and the old hard lines of the Baptistery's top, there is a lovely ethereal quality to the great cathedral group; and you think again of the Lily of Florence — "The Lily of Florence shall become the cauliflower of Rovenzano," somebody said.

But not yet, anyhow.

GERMANS AND LATINS

It is already summer in Tuscany, the sun is hot, the earth is baked hard, and the soul has changed her rhythm. The nightingales sing all day and all night — not at all sadly, but brightly, vividly, impudently, with a trilling power of assertion quite disproportionate to the size of the shy bird. Why the Greeks should have heard the nightingale weeping or sobbing is more than I can understand. Anyhow, perhaps the Greeks were looking for the tragic, rather than the rhapsodic consummation to life. They were predisposed.

Tomorrow, however, is the first of May, and already summer is here. Yesterday, in the flood of sunshine on the Arno at evening, I saw two German boys steering out of the Por Santa Maria onto the Ponte Vecchio in Florence. They were dark-haired, not blonds, but otherwise the true *Wandervogel* type, in shirts and short trousers and thick boots, hatless, coat slung in the rucksack, shirtsleeves rolled back above the brown muscular arms, shirt-breast open from the brown, scorched breast, and the face and neck glowing sun-darkened as they strode into the flood of evening sunshine, out of the narrow street. They were talking loudly to one another in German, as if oblivious of their surroundings, in that thronged crossing of the Ponte Vecchio. And they strode with strong strides, heedless, marching past the Italians as if the Italians were but shadows. Strong, heedless, travelling intently, bent a little forward from the rucksacks in the plunge of determination to travel onwards, looking neither to right nor left, conversing in strong voices only with one another, where were they going, in the last golden light of the sun-flooded evening, over the Arno? Were they leaving town, at this hour? Were they pressing on, to get out of the Porta Romana before nightfall, going southwards?

In spite of the fact that one is used to these German youths, in Florence especially, in summer, still the mind calls a halt each time they appear and pass by. If swans or wild geese flew honking, low over the Arno in the evening light, moving with that wedge-shaped, intent, unswerving progress that is so impressive, they would create the same impression on one. They would bring that sense of remote, far-off lands which these Germans bring, and that sense of mysterious, unfathomable purpose.

Now no one knows better than myself that Munich or Frankfort-am-Main are not far-off, remote, lonely lands: on the contrary: and that these boys are not mysteriously migrating from one unknown to another. They are just wandering

for wandering's sake, and moving instinctively, perhaps, towards the sun, and towards Rome, the old centre-point. There is really nothing more remarkable in it than in the English and Americans sauntering diffidently and, as it were, obscurely along the Lungarno. The English in particular seem to move under a sort of Tarnhelm, having a certain power of invisibility. They manage most of the time to efface themselves, deliberately, from the atmosphere. And the Americans, who don't try to efface themselves, give the impression of not being really there. They have left their real selves way off in the United States, in Europe they are like rather void *Doppelgänger*. I am speaking, of course, of the impression of the streets. Inside the hotels, the trains, the tea-rooms and the restaurants, it is another affair. There you may have a little England, very insular, or a little America, very money-rich democratic, or a little Germany, assertive, or a little Scandinavia. domestic. But I am not speaking of indoor impressions. Merely of the streets.

And in the streets of Florence or Rome, the *Wandervogel* make a startling impression, whereas the rest of the foreigners impress one rather negatively. When I am in Germany, then Germany seems to me very much like anywhere else, especially England or America.

And when I see the *Wandervogel* pushing at evening out of the Por Santa Maria, across the blaze of sun and into the Ponte Vecchio, then Germany becomes again to me what it was to the Romans: the mysterious, half-dark land of the north, bristling with gloomy forests, resounding to the cry of wild geese and of swans, the land of the stork and the bear and the *Drachen* and the *Greifen*.

I know it is not so. Yet the impression comes back over me, as I see the youths pressing heedlessly past. And I know it is the same with the Italians. They see, as their ancestors saw in the Goths and the Vandals, *i barbari*, the barbarians. That is what the little policeman with his staff and his peaked cap thinks, as the boys from the north go by: *i barbari!* Not with dislike or contempt: not at all: but with the old, weird wonder. So he might look up at wild swans flying over the Ponte Vecchio: wild strangers from the north.

So strong is the impression the *Wandervogel* make on the imagination! It is not that I am particularly impressionable. I know the Italians feel very much as I do.

And when one sees English people with rucksacks and shirtsleeves rolled back and hob-nailed boots, as one does sometimes, even in Tuscany, one notices them, but they make very little impression. They are rather odd than extraordinary. They are just *gli escursioni-isti*, quite comprehensible: part of the fresh-air movement. The Italians will laugh at them, but they know just what to think about them.

Whereas about the *Wandervogel* they do not quite know what to think, nor even what to feel: since we even only feel the things we know how to feel. And we do not know what to feel about these *Wandervogel* boys. They bring with them such a strong feeling of *somewhere else*, of an unknown country, an unknown race, a powerful, still unknown northland.

How wonderful it must have been, at the end of the old Roman Empire, for the Roman citizens to see the big, bare-limbed Goths, with their insolent-indifferent blue eyes, stand looking on at the market-places! They were there like a vision. *Non angli sed angeli*, as we were told the first great Pope said of the British slaves. Creatures from the beyond, presaging another world of men.

So it was then. So it is, to a certain extent, even now. Strange wanderers towards the sun, forerunners of another world of men. That is how one still feels, as one sees the *Wandervogel* cross the Ponte Vecchio. They carry with them another world, another air, another meaning of life. The meaning is not explicit, not as much as it is even in storks or wild geese. But there it lies, implicit.

Curious how different it is with the well-dressed Germans. They are very often quite domesticated, and in the sense that Ibsen's people are ridiculous, just a little ridiculous. They are so bourgeois, so much more a product of civilization than the producers of civilization. They are so much buttoned up inside their waistcoats, and stuck inside their trousers, and encircled in their starched collars. They are not so grotesquely self-conscious and physically withered or non-existent as the equivalent English bourgeois tourist. And they are never quite so utterly domesticated as the equivalent Scandinavian. But they have so often the unsure look of children who have been turned out in their best clothes by their mama, and told to go and enjoy themselves: Now enjoy yourselves! That is a little absurd.

The Italians, whatever they are, are what they are. So you know them, you feel that they have developed themselves into an expression of themselves, as far as they go. With the English, weird fish as they are very often, you feel the same: whatever they are, they are what they are, they can't be much different, poor dears. But with the Germans abroad, you feel: These people ought really to be something else. They are not themselves, in their Sunday clothes. They are being something they are not.

And one has the feeling even stronger, with many Russians. One feels: These people are not themselves at all. They are the roaring echoes of other people, older races, other languages. Even the things they say aren't really Russian things: they're all sorts of half-translations from Latin or French or English or God-knows-what.

Some of this feeling one has about the Germans one meets abroad: as if they

were talking in translation: as if the ideas, however original, always had a faint sound of translations. As if they were never *quite* themselves.

Then, when one sees the *Wandervogel*, comes the shock of realization, and one thinks: There they go, the real Germans, seeking the sun! They have really nothing to say. They are roving, roving, roving. seeking themselves. That is it, with these “barbarians.” They are still seeking themselves. And they have not yet found themselves. They are turning to the sun again, in the great adventure of seeking themselves.

Man does not start ready-made. He is a weird creature that slowly evolves himself through the ages. He need never stop evolving himself, for a human being who was completely himself has never even been conceived. The great Goethe was half-born, Shakespeare the same, Napoleon only a third-born. And most people are hardly born at all, into individual consciousness.

But with the Italians and the French, the mass-consciousness which governs the individual is really derived from the individual. Whereas with the German and the Russian, it seems to me not so. The mass-consciousness has been *taken over*, by great minds like Goethe or Frederick, from other people, and does not spring inherent from the Teutonic race itself. In short, the Teutonic mind, young, powerful, active, is always thinking in terms of somebody else’s experience, and almost never in terms of its own experience.

Then comes a great unrest. It seems to show so plainly in the *Wandervogel*. Thinking in terms of somebody else’s experience at last becomes utterly unsatisfactory. Then thought altogether falls into chaos — and then into discredit. The young don’t choose to think any more. Blindly, they turn to the sun.

Because the sun is anti-thought. Thought is of the shade. In bright sunshine no man thinks. So the *Wandervogel* turn instinctively to the sun, which melts thoughts away, and sets the blood running with another, non-mental consciousness.

And this is why, at times of great change, the northern nations turn to the sun. And this is why, when revolutions come, they often come in May. It is the sun making the blood revolt against old conceptions. And this is why the nations of the sun do not live the life of thought, therefore they are more “themselves.” In the grey shadow the northern nations mould themselves according to a few ideas, until their whole life is buttoned and choked up. Then comes a revulsion. They cast off the clothes and turn to the sun, as the *Wandervogel* do, strange harbingers.

NOTTINGHAM AND THE MINING COUNTRYSIDE

I was born nearly forty-four years ago, in Eastwood, a mining village of some three thousand souls, about eight miles from Nottingham, and one mile from the small stream, the Erewash, which divides Nottinghamshire from Derbyshire. It is hilly country, looking west to Crich and towards Matlock, sixteen miles away, and east and north-east towards Mansfield and the Sherwood Forest district. To me it seemed, and still seems, an extremely beautiful countryside, just between the red sandstone and the oak-trees of Nottingham, and the cold limestone, the ash-trees, the stone fences of Derbyshire. To me, as a child and a young man, it was still the old England of the forest and agricultural past; there were no motor-cars, the mines were, in a sense, an accident in the landscape, and Robin Hood and his merry men were not very far away.

The string of coal-mines of B.W. 8c Co. had been opened some sixty years before I was born, and Eastwood had come into being as a consequence. It must have been a tiny village at the beginning of the nineteenth century, a small place of cottages and fragmentary rows of little four-roomed miners' dwellings, the homes of the old colliers of the eighteenth century, who worked in the bits of mines, foot-rill mines with an opening in the hillside into which the miners walked, or windlass mines, where the men were wound up one at a time, in a bucket, by a donkey. The windlass mines were still working when my father was a boy — and the shafts of some were still there, when I was a boy.

But somewhere about 1820 the company must have sunk the first big shaft — not very deep — and installed the first machinery of the real industrial colliery. Then came my grandfather, a young man trained to be a tailor, drifting from the south of England, and got the job of company tailor for the Brinsley mine. In those days the company supplied the men with the thick flannel vests, or singlets, and the moleskin trousers lined at the top with flannel, in which the colliers worked. I remember the great rolls of coarse flannel and pit-cloth which stood in the corner of my grandfather's shop when I was a small boy, and the big, strange old sewing-machine, like nothing else on earth, which sewed the massive pit-trousers. But when I was only a child the company discontinued supplying the men with pit-clothes.

My grandfather settled in an old cottage down in a quarry-bed, by the brook at Old Brinsley, near the pit. A mile away, up at Eastwood, the company built the

first miners' dwellings — it must be nearly a hundred years ago. Now Eastwood occupies a lovely position on a hilltop, with the steep slope towards Derbyshire and the long slope towards Nottingham. They put up a new church, which stands fine and commanding, even if it has no real form, looking across the awful Erewash Valley at the church of Heanor, similarly commanding, away on a hill beyond. What opportunities, what opportunities! These mining villages *might* have been like the lovely hill-towns of Italy, shapely and fascinating. And what happened?

Most of the little rows of dwellings of the old-style miners were pulled down, and dull little shops began to rise along the Nottingham Road, while on the down-slope of the north side the company erected what is still known as the New Buildings, or the Square. These New Buildings consist of two great hollow squares of dwellings planked down on the rough slope of the hill, little four-room houses with the “front” looking outward into the grim, blank street, and the “back,” with a tiny square brick yard, a low wall, and a w.c. and ash-pit, looking into the desert of the square, hard, uneven, jolting black earth tilting rather steeply down, with these little back yards all round, and openings at the corners. The squares were quite big, and absolutely desert, save for the posts for clothes lines, and people passing, children playing on the hard earth. And they were shut in like a barracks enclosure, very strange.

Even fifty years ago the squares were unpopular. It was “common” to live in the Square. It was a little less common to live in the Breach, which consisted of six blocks of rather more pretentious dwellings erected by the company in the valley below, two rows of three blocks, with an alley between. And it was most “common,” most degraded of all to live in Dakins Row, two rows of the old dwellings, very old, black, four-roomed little places, that stood on the hill again, not far from the Square.

So the place started. Down the steep street between the squares, Scargill Street, the Wesleyans' chapel was put up, and I was born in the little corner shop just above. Across the other side the Square the miners themselves built the big, barn-like Primitive Methodist chapel. Along the hilltop ran the Nottingham Road, with its scrappy, ugly mid-Victorian shops. The little market-place, with a superb outlook, ended the village on the Derbyshire side, and was just left bare, with the Sun Inn on one side, the chemist across, with the gilt pestle-and-mortar, and a shop at the other corner, the corner of Alferton Road and Nottingham Road.

In this queer jumble of the old England and the new, I came into consciousness. As I remember, little local speculators already began to straggle dwellings in rows, always in rows, across the fields: nasty red-brick, flat-faced

dwellings with dark slate roofs. The bay-window period only began when I was a child. But most of the country was untouched.

There must be three or four hundred company houses in the squares and the streets that surround the squares, like a great barracks wall. There must be sixty or eighty company houses in the Breach. The old Dakins Row will have thirty to forty little holes. Then counting the old cottages and rows left with their old gardens down the lanes and along the twitchells, and even in the midst of Nottingham Road itself, there were houses enough for the population, there was no need for much building. And not much building went on when I was small.

We lived in the Breach, in a corner house. A field-path came down under a great hawthorn hedge. On the other side was the brook, with the old sheep-bridge going over into the meadows. The hawthorn hedge by the brook had grown tall as tall trees, and we used to bathe from there in the dipping-hole, where the sheep were dipped, just near the fall from the old mill-dam, where the water rushed. The mill only ceased grinding the local corn when I was a child. And my father, who always worked in Brinsley pit, and who always got up at five o'clock, if not at four, would set off in the dawn across the fields at Coney Grey, and hunt for mushrooms in the long grass, or perhaps pick up a skulking rabbit, which he would bring home at evening inside the lining of his pit-coat.

So that the life was a curious cross between industrialism and the old agricultural England of Shakespeare and Milton and Fielding and George Eliot. The dialect was broad Derbyshire, and always "thee" and "thou." The people lived almost entirely by instinct, men of my father's age could not really read. And the pit did not mechanize men. On the contrary. Under the butty system, the miners worked underground as a sort of intimate community, they knew each other practically naked, and with curious close intimacy, and the darkness and the underground remoteness of the pit "stall," and the continual presence of danger, made the physical, instinctive, and intuitional contact between men very highly developed, a contact almost as close as touch, very real and very powerful. This physical awareness and intimate *togetherness* was at its strongest down pit. When the men came up into the light, they blinked. They had, in a measure, to change their flow. Nevertheless, they brought with them above ground the curious dark intimacy of the mine, the naked sort of contact, and if I think of my childhood, it is always as if there was a lustrous sort of inner darkness, like the gloss of coal, in which we moved and had our real being. My father loved the pit. He was hurt badly, more than once, but he would never stay away. He loved the contact, the intimacy, as men in the war loved the intense male comradeship of the dark days. They did not know what they had lost till they lost it. And I think it is the same with the young colliers of today.

Now the colliers had also an instinct of beauty. The colliers' wives had not. The colliers were deeply alive, instinctively. But they had no daytime ambition, and no daytime intellect. They avoided, really, the rational aspect of life. They preferred to take life instinctively and intuitively. They didn't even care very profoundly about wages. It was the women, naturally, who nagged on this score. There was a big discrepancy, when I was a boy, between the collier who saw, at the best, only a brief few hours of daylight — often no daylight at all during the winter weeks — and the collier's wife, who had all the day to herself when the man was down pit.

The great fallacy is, to pity the man. He didn't dream of pitying himself, till agitators and sentimentalists taught him to. He was happy: or more than happy, he was fulfilled. Or he was fulfilled on the receptive side, not on the expressive. The collier went to the pub and drank in order to continue his intimacy with his mates. They talked endlessly, but it was rather of wonders and marvels, even in politics, than of facts. It was hard facts, in the shape of wife, money, and nagging home necessities, which they fled away from, out of the house to the pub, and out of the house to the pit.

The collier fled out of the house as soon as he could, away from the nagging materialism of the woman. With the women it was always: This is broken, now you've got to mend it! or else: We want this, that and the other, and where is the money coming from? The collier didn't know and didn't care very deeply — his life was otherwise. So he escaped. He roved the countryside with his dog, prowling for a rabbit, for nests, for mushrooms, anything. He loved the countryside, just the indiscriminating feel of it. Or he loved just to sit on his heels and watch — anything or nothing. He was not intellectually interested. Life for him did not consist in facts, but in a flow. Very often, he loved his garden. And very often he had a genuine love of the beauty of flowers. I have known it often and often, in colliers.

Now the love of flowers is a very misleading thing. Most women love flowers as possessions, and as trimmings. They can't look at a flower, and wonder a moment, and pass on. If they see a flower that arrests their attention, they must at once pick it, pluck it. Possession! A possession! Something added on to *me!* And most of the so-called love of flowers today is merely this reaching out of possession and egoism: something I've *got*: something that embellishes *me*. Yet I've seen many a collier stand in his back garden looking down at a flower with that odd, remote sort of contemplation which shows a *real* awareness of the presence of beauty. It would not even be admiration, or joy, or delight, or any of those things which so often have a root in the possessive instinct. It would be a sort of contemplation: which shows the incipient artist.

The real tragedy of England, as I see it, is the tragedy of ugliness. The country is so lovely: the man-made England is so vile. I know that the ordinary collier, when I was a boy, had a peculiar sense of beauty, coming from his intuitive and instinctive consciousness, which was awakened down pit. And the fact that he met with just cold ugliness and raw materialism when he came up into daylight, and particularly when he came to the Square or the Breach, and to his own table, killed something in him, and in a sense spoiled him as a man. The woman almost invariably nagged about material things. She was taught to do it; she was encouraged to do it. It was a mother's business to see that her sons "got on," and it was the man's business to provide the money. In my father's generation, with the old wild England behind them, and the lack of education, the man was not beaten down. But in my generation, the boys I went to school with, colliers now, have all been beaten down, what with the din-din-dinning of Board Schools, books, cinemas, clergymen, the whole national and human consciousness hammering on the fact of material prosperity above all things.

The men are beaten down, there is prosperity for a time, in their defeat — and then disaster looms ahead. The root of all disaster is disheartenment. And men are disheartened. The men of England, the colliers in particular, are disheartened. They have been betrayed and beaten.

Now though perhaps nobody knew it, it was ugliness which really betrayed the spirit of man, in the nineteenth century. The great crime which the moneyed classes and promoters of industry committed in the palmy Victorian days was the condemning of the workers to ugliness, ugliness, ugliness: meanness and formless and ugly surroundings, ugly ideals, ugly religion, ugly hope, ugly love, ugly clothes, ugly furniture, ugly houses, ugly relationship between workers and employers. The human soul needs actual beauty even more than bread. The middle classes jeer at the colliers for buying pianos — but what is the piano, often as not, but a blind reaching out for beauty. To the woman it is a possession and a piece of furniture and something to feel superior about. But see the elderly colliers trying to learn to play, see them listening with queer alert faces to their daughter's execution of *The Maiden's Prayer*, and you will see a blind, unsatisfied craving for beauty. It is far more deep in the men than the women. The women want show. The men want beauty, and still want it.

If the company, instead of building those sordid and hideous Squares, then, when they had that lovely site to play with, there on the hill top: if they had put a tall column in the middle of the small market-place, and run three parts of a circle of arcade round the pleasant space, where people could stroll or sit, and with handsome houses behind! If they had made big, substantial houses, in apartments of five or six rooms, and with handsome entrances. If above all, they

had encouraged song and dancing — for the miners still sang and danced — and provided handsome space for these. If only they had encouraged some form of beauty in dress, some form of beauty in interior life — furniture, decoration. If they had given prizes for the handsomest chair or table, the loveliest scarf, the most charming room that the men or women could make! If only they had done this, there would never have been an industrial problem. The industrial problem arises from the base forcing of all human energy into a competition of mere acquisition.

You may say the working man would not have accepted such a form of life: the Englishman's home is his castle, etc., etc. — "my own little home." But if you can hear every word the next-door people say, there's not much castle. And if you can see everybody in the square if they go to the w.c.! And if your one desire is to get out of your "castle" and your "own little home"! — well, there's not much to be said for it. Anyhow, it's only the woman who idolizes "her own little home" — and it's always the woman at her worst, her most greedy, most possessive, most mean. There's nothing to be said for the "little home" any more: a great scrabble of ugly pettiness over the face of the land.

As a matter of fact, till 1800 the English people were strictly a rural people — very rural. England has had towns for centuries, but they have never been real towns, only clusters of village streets. Never the real *urbs*. The English character has failed to develop the real *urban* side of a man, the civic side. Siena is a bit of a place, but it is a real city, with citizens intimately connected with the city. Nottingham is a vast place sprawling towards a million, and it is nothing more than an amorphous agglomeration. There is no Nottingham, in the sense that there is Siena. The Englishman is stupidly undeveloped, as a citizen. And it is partly due to his "little home" stunt, and partly to his acceptance of hopeless paltriness in his surrounding. The new cities of America are much more genuine cities, in the Roman sense, than is London or Manchester. Even Edinburgh used to be more of a true city than any town England ever produced.

That silly little individualism of "the Englishman's home is his castle" and "my own little home" is out of date. It would work almost up to 1800, when every Englishman was still a villager, and a cottager. But the industrial system has brought a great change. The Englishman still likes to think of himself as a "cottager" — "my home, my garden." But it is puerile. Even the farm-labourer today is psychologically a town-bird. The English are town-birds through and through, today, as the inevitable result of their complete industrialization. Yet they don't know how to build a city, how to think of one, or how to live in one. They are all suburban, pseudo-cottagy, and not one of them knows how to be truly urban — the citizen as the Romans were citizens — or the Athenians — or

even the Parisians, till the war came.

And this is because we have frustrated that instinct of community which would make us unite in pride and dignity in the bigger gesture of the citizen, not the cottager. The great city means beauty, dignity, and a certain splendour. This is the side of the Englishman that has been thwarted and shockingly betrayed. England is a mean and petty scrabble of paltry dwellings called "homes." I believe in their heart of hearts all Englishmen loathe their little homes — but not the women. What we want is a bigger gesture, a greater scope, a certain splendour, a certain grandeur, and beauty, big beauty. The American does far better than we, in this.

And the promoter of industry, a hundred years ago, dared to perpetrate the ugliness of my native village. And still more monstrous, promoters of industry today are scrabbling over the face of England with miles and square miles of red-brick "homes," like horrible scabs. And the men inside these little red rat-traps get more and more helpless, being more and more humiliated, more and more dissatisfied, liked trapped rats. Only the meaner sort of women go on loving the little home which is no more than a rat-trap to her man.

Do away with it all, then. At no matter what cost, start in to alter it. Never mind about wages and industrial squabbling. Turn the attention elsewhere. Pull down my native village to the last brick. Plan a nucleus. Fix the focus. Make a handsome gesture of radiation from the focus. And then put up big buildings, handsome, that sweep to a civic centre. And furnish them with beauty. And make an absolute clean start. Do it place by place. Make a new England. Away with little homes! Away with scrabbling pettiness and paltriness. Look at the contours of the land, and build up from these, with a sufficient nobility. The English may be mentally or spiritually developed. But as citizens of splendid cities they are more ignominious than rabbits. And they nag, nag, nag all the time about politics and wages and all that, like mean narrow housewives.

NEW MEXICO

Superficially, the world has become small and known. Poor little globe of earth, the tourists trot round you as easily as they trot round the Bois or round Central Park. There is no mystery left, we've been there, we've seen it, we know all about it. We've done the globe, and the globe is done.

This is quite true, superficially. On the superficies, horizontally, we've been everywhere and done everything, we know all about it. Yet the more we know, superficially, the less we penetrate, vertically. It's all very well skimming across the surface of the ocean, and saying you know all about the sea. There still remain the terrifying under-deeps, of which we have utterly no experience.

The same is true of land travel. We skim along, we get there, we see it all, we've done it all. And as a rule, we never once go through the curious film which railroads, ships, motor-cars, and hotels stretch over the surface of the whole earth. Peking is just the same as New York, with a few different things to look at; rather more Chinese about, *etc.* Poor creatures that we are, we crave for experience, yet we are like flies that crawl on the pure and transparent mucous-paper in which the world like a bon-bon is wrapped so carefully that we can never get at it, though we see it there all the time as we move about it, apparently in contact, yet actually as far removed as if it were the moon.

As a matter of fact, our great-grandfathers, who never went anywhere, in actuality had more experience of the world than we have, who have seen everything. When they listened to a lecture with lantern-slides, they really held their breath before the unknown, as they sat in the village school-room. We, bowling along in a rickshaw in Ceylon, say to ourselves: "It's very much what you'd expect." We really know it all.

We are mistaken. The know-it-all state of mind is just the result of being outside the mucous-paper wrapping of civilization. Underneath is everything we don't know and are afraid of knowing.

I realized this with shattering force when I went to New Mexico.

New Mexico, one of the United States, part of the U. S. A. New Mexico, the picturesque reservation and playground of the eastern states, very romantic, old Spanish, Red Indian, desert mesas, pueblos, cowboys, penitentes, all that film-stuff. Very nice, the great South-

West, put on a sombrero and knot a red kerchief round your neck, to go out in the great free spaces!

That is New Mexico wrapped in the absolutely hygienic and shiny mucous-paper of our trite civilization. That is the New Mexico known to most of the Americans who know it at all. But break through the shiny sterilized wrapping, and actually *touch* the country, and you will never be the same again.

I think New Mexico was the greatest experience from the outside world that I have ever had. It certainly changed me for ever. Curious as it may sound, it was New Mexico that liberated me from the present era of civilization, the great era of material and mechanical development. Months spent in holy Kandy, in Ceylon, the holy of holies of southern Buddhism, had not touched the great psyche of materialism and idealism which dominated me. And years, even in the exquisite beauty of Sicily, right among the old Greek paganism that still lives there, had not shattered the essential Christianity on which my character was established. Australia was a sort of dream or trance, like being under a spell, the self remaining unchanged, so long as the trance did not last too long. Tahiti, in a mere glimpse, repelled me: and so did California, after a stay of a few weeks. There seemed a strange brutality in the spirit of the western coast, and I felt: O, let me get away!

But the moment I saw the brilliant, proud morning shine high up over the deserts of Santa Fe, something stood still in my soul, and I started to attend. There was a certain magnificence in the high-up day, a certain eagle-like royalty, so different from the equally pure, equally pristine and lovely morning of Australia, which is so soft, so utterly pure in its softness, and betrayed by green parrot flying. But in the lovely morning of Australia one went into a dream. In the magnificent fierce morning of New Mexico one sprang awake, a new part of the soul woke up suddenly, and the old world gave way to a new.

There are all kinds of beauty in the worldj thank God, though ugliness is homogeneous. How lovely is Sicily, with Calabria across the sea like an opal, and Etna with her snow in a world above and beyond! How lovely is Tuscany, with little red tulips wild among the corn: or bluebells at dusk in England, or mimosa in clouds of pure yellow among the grey-green dun foliage of Australia, under a soft, blue, unbreathed sky! But for a *greatness* of beauty I have never experienced anything like New Mexico. All those mornings when I went with a hoe along the ditch to the Canon, at the ranch, and stood, in the fierce, proud silence of the Rockies, on their foothills, to look far over the desert to the blue mountains away in Arizona, blue as chalcedony, with the sage-brush desert sweeping grey-blue in between, dotted with tiny cube-crystals of houses, the vast amphitheatre of lofty, indomitable desert, sweeping round to the ponderous Sangre de Cristo, mountains on the east, and coming up flush at the pine-dotted foothills of the Rockies! What splendour! Only the tawny eagle could really sail

out into the splendour of it all. Leo Stein once wrote to me: It is the most aesthetically-satisfying landscape I know. To me it was much more than that. It had a splendid silent terror, and a vast far-and-wide magnificence which made it way beyond mere aesthetic appreciation. Never is the light more pure and overweening than there, arching with a royalty almost cruel over the hollow, uptilted world. For it is curious that the land which has produced modern political democracy at its highest pitch should give one the greatest sense of overweening, terrible proudness and mercilessness: but so beautiful, God! so beautiful! Those that have spent morning after morning alone there pitched among the pines above the great proud world of desert will know, almost unbearably how beautiful it is, how clear and unquestioned is the might of the day. Just day itself is tremendous there. It is so easy to understand that the Aztecs gave hearts of men to the sun. For the sun is not merely hot or scorching, not at all. It is of a brilliant and unchallengeable purity and haughty serenity which would make one sacrifice the heart to it. Ah, yes, in New Mexico the heart is sacrificed to the sun and the human being is left stark, heartless, but undauntedly religious.

And that was the second revelation out there. I had looked over all the world for something that would strike *me* as religious. The simple piety of some English people, the semi-pagan mystery of some Catholics in southern Italy, the intensity of some Bavarian peasants, the semi-ecstasy of Buddhists or Brahmins: all this had seemed religious all right, as far as the parties concerned were involved, but it didn't involve me. I looked on at their religiousness from the outside. For it is still harder to feel religion at will than to love at will.

I had seen what I felt was a hint of wild religion in the so-called devil dances of a group of naked villagers from the far-remote jungle in Ceylon, dancing at midnight under the torches, glittering wet with sweat on their dark bodies as if they had been gilded, at the celebration of the Pera-hera, in Kandy, given to the Prince of Wales. And the utter dark absorption of these naked men, as they danced with their knees wide apart, suddenly affected me with a *sense* of religion, I *felt* religion for a moment. For religion is an experience, an uncontrollable sensual experience, even more so than love: I use sensual to mean an experience deep down in the senses, inexplicable and inscrutable.

But this experience was fleeting, gone in the curious turmoil of the Pera-hera, and I had no permanent feeling of religion till I came to New Mexico and penetrated into the old human race-experience there. It is curious that it should be in America, of all places, that a European should really experience religion, after touching the old Mediterranean and the East. It is curious that one should get a sense of living religion from the Red Indians, having failed to get it from

Hindus or Sicilian Catholics or Cingalese.

Let me make a reservation. I don't stand up to praise the Red Indian as he reveals himself in contact with white civilization. From that angle, I am forced to admit he *may* be thoroughly objectionable. Even my small experience knows it. But also I know he *may* be thoroughly nice, even in his dealings with white men. It's a question of individuals, a good deal, on both sides.

But in this article, I don't want to deal with the everyday or superficial aspect of New Mexico, outside the mucous-paper wrapping, I *want* to go beneath the surface. But therefore the American Indian in his behaviour as an American citizen doesn't really concern me. What concerns me is what he is — or what he seems to me to be, in his ancient, ancient race-self and religious-self.

For the Red Indian seems to me much older than Greeks, or Hindus or any Europeans or even Egyptians. The Red Indian, as a civilized and truly religious man, civilized beyond taboo and totem, as he is in the south, is religious in perhaps the oldest sense, and deepest, of the word. That is to say, he is a remnant of the most deeply religious race still living. So it seems to me.

But again let me protect myself. The Indian who sells you baskets on Albuquerque station or who slinks around Taos plaza may be an utter waster and an indescribably low dog. Personally he may be even less religious than a New York sneak-thief. He may have broken with his tribe, or his tribe itself may have collapsed finally from its old religious integrity, and ceased, really to exist. Then he is only fit for rapid absorption into white civilization, which must make the best of him.

But while a tribe retains its religion and keeps up its religious practices, and while any member of the tribe shares in those practices, then there is a tribal integrity and a living tradition going back far beyond the birth of Christ, beyond the pyramids, beyond Moses. A vast old religion which once swayed the earth lingers in unbroken practice there in New Mexico, older, perhaps, than anything in the world save Australian aboriginal taboo and totem, and that is not yet religion.

You can feel it, the atmosphere of it, around the pueblos. Not, of course, when the place is crowded with sight-seers and motor-cars. But go to Taos pueblo on some brilliant snowy morning and see the white figure on the roof: or come riding through at dusk on some windy evening, when the black skirts of the silent women blow around the white wide boots, and you will feel the old, old root of human consciousness still reaching down to depths we know nothing of: and of which, only too often, we are jealous. It seems it will not be long before the pueblos are uprooted.

But never shall I forget watching the dancers, the men with the fox-skin

swaying down from their buttocks, file out at San Geronimo, and the women with seed rattles following. The long, streaming, glistening black hair of the men. Even in ancient Crete long hair was sacred in a man, as it is still in the Indians. Never shall I forget the utter absorption of the dance, so quiet, so steadily, timelessly rhythmic, and silent, with the ceaseless down-tread, always to the earth's centre, the very reverse of the upflow of Dionysiac or Christian ecstasy. Never shall I forget the deep singing of the men at the drum, swelling and sinking, the deepest sound I have heard in all my life, deeper than thunder, deeper than the sound of the Pacific Ocean, deeper than the roar of a deep waterfall: the wonderful deep sound of men calling to the unspeakable depths.

Never shall I forget coming into the little pueblo of San Filipi one sunny morning in spring, unexpectedly, when bloom was on the trees in the perfect little pueblo more old, more utterly peaceful and idyllic than anything in Theocritus, and seeing a little casual dance. Not impressive as a spectacle, only, to me, profoundly moving because of the truly terrifying religious absorption of it.

Never shall I forget the Christmas dances at Taos, twilight, snow, the darkness coming over the great wintry mountains and the lonely pueblo, then suddenly, again, like dark calling to dark, the deep Indian cluster-singing around the drum, wild and awful, suddenly rousing on the last dusk as the procession starts. And then the bonfires leaping suddenly in pure spurts of high flame, columns of sudden flame forming an alley for the procession.

Never shall I forget the khiva of birch-trees, away in the Apache country, in Arizona this time, the tepees and flickering fires, the neighing of horses unseen under the huge dark night, and the Apaches all abroad, in their silent moccasined feet: and in the khiva, beyond a little fire, the old man reciting, reciting in the unknown Apache speech, in the strange wild Indian voice that reechoes away back to before the Flood, reciting apparently the traditions and legends of the tribe, going on and on, while the young men, the *braves* of today, wandered in, listened, and wandered away again, overcome with the power and majesty of that utterly old tribal voice, yet uneasy with their half-adherence to the modern civilization, the two things in contact. And one of these *braves* shoved his face under my hat, in the night, and stared with his glittering eyes close to mine. He'd have killed me then and there, had he dared. He didn't dare: and I knew it: and he knew it.

Never shall I forget the Indian races, when the young men, even the boys, run naked, smeared with white earth and stuck with bits of eagle fluff for the swiftness of the heavens, and the old men brush them with eagle feathers, to give them power. And they run in the strange hurling fashion of the primitive world,

hurled forward, not making speed deliberately. And the race is not for victory. It is not a contest. There is no competition. It is a great cumulative effort. The tribe this day is adding up its male energy and exerting it to the utmost — for what? To get power, to get strength: to come, by sheer cumulative, hurling effort of the bodies of men, into contact with the great cosmic source of vitality which gives strength, power, energy to the men who can grasp it, energy for the zeal of attainment.

It was a vast old religion, greater than anything we know: more starkly and nakedly religious. There is no God, no conception of a god. All is god. But it is not the pantheism we are accustomed to, which expresses itself as “God is everywhere, God is in everything.” In the oldest religion, everything was alive, not supernaturally but naturally alive. There were only deeper and deeper streams of life, vibrations of life more and more vast. So rocks were alive, but a mountain had a deeper, vaster life than a rock, and it was much harder for a man to bring his spirit, or his energy, into contact with the life of the mountain, and so draw strength from the mountain, as from a great standing well of life, than it was to come into contact with the rock. And he had to put forth a great religious effort. For the whole life-effort of man was to get his life into direct contact with the elemental life of the cosmos, mountain-life, cloud-life, thunder-life, air-life, earth-life, sun-life. To come into immediate *felt* contact, and so derive energy, power, and a dark sort of joy. This effort into sheer naked contact, *ivithout an intermediary or mediator*, is the root meaning of religion, and at the sacred races the runners hurled themselves in a terrible cumulative effort, through the air, to come at last into naked contact with the very life of the air, which is the life of the clouds, and so of the rain.

It was a vast and pure religion, without idols or images, even mental ones. It is the oldest religion, a cosmic religion the same for all peoples, not broken up into specific gods or saviours or systems. It is the religion which precedes the god-concept, and is therefore greater and deeper than any god-religion.

And it lingers still, for a little while, in New Mexico: but long enough to have been a revelation to me. And the Indian, however objectionable he may be on occasion, has still some of the strange beauty and pathos of the religion that brought him forth and is now shedding him away into oblivion. When Trinidad, the Indian boy, and I planted corn at the ranch, my soul paused to see his brown hands softly moving the earth over the maize in pure ritual. He was back in his old religious self, and the ages stood still. Ten minutes later he was making a fool of himself with the horses. Horses were never part of the Indian’s religious life, never would be. He hasn’t a tithe of the feeling for them that he has for a bear, for example. So horses don’t like Indians.

But there it is: the newest democracy ousting the oldest religion! And once the oldest religion is ousted, one feels the democracy and all its paraphernalia will collapse, and the oldest religion, which comes down to us from man's pre-war days, will start again. The sky-scraper will scatter on the winds like thistledown, and the genuine America, the America of New Mexico, will start on its course again. This is an interregnum.

LOVE, SEX, MEN, AND WOMEN

LOVE

Love is the happiness of the world. But happiness is not the whole of fulfilment. Love is a coming together. But there can be no coming together without an equivalent going asunder. In love, all things unite in a oneness of joy and praise. But they could not unite unless they were previously apart. And, having united in a whole circle of unity, they can go no further in love. The motion of love, like a tide, is fulfilled in this instance; there must be an ebb.

So that the coming together depends on the going apart; the systole depends on the diastole; the flow depends upon the ebb. These can never be love universal and unbroken. The sea can never rise to high tide over all the globe at once. The undisputed reign of love can never be.

Because love is strictly a travelling. "It is better to travel than to arrive," somebody has said. This is the essence of unbelief. It is a belief in absolute love, when love is by nature relative. It is a belief in the means, but not in the end. It is strictly a belief in force, for love is a unifying force.

How shall we believe in force? Force is instrumental and functional; it is neither a beginning nor an end. We travel in order to arrive; we do not travel in order to travel. At least, such travelling is mere futility. We travel in order to arrive.

And love is a travelling, a motion, a speed of coming together. Love is the force of creation. But all force, spiritual or physical, has its polarity, its positive and its negative. All things that fall, fall by gravitation to the earth. But has not the earth, in the opposite of gravitation, cast off the moon and held her at bay in our heavens during all the aeons of time?

So with love. Love is the hastening gravitation of spirit towards spirit, and body towards body, in the joy of creation. But if all be united in one bond of love, then there is no more love. And therefore, for those who are in love with love, to travel is better than to arrive. For in arriving one passes beyond love, or, rather, one encompasses love in a new transcendence. To arrive is the supreme joy after all our travelling.

The bond of love! What worse bondage can we conceive than the bond of love? It is an attempt to wall in the high tide; it is a will to arrest the spring,

never to let May dissolve into June, never to let the hawthorn petal fall for the berrying.

This has been our idea of immortality, this infinite of love, love universal and triumphant. And what is this but a prison and a bondage? What is eternity but the endless passage of time? What is infinity but an endless progressing through space? Eternity, infinity, our great ideas of rest and arrival, what are they but ideas of endless travelling? Eternity is the endless travelling through time, infinity is the endless travelling through space; no more, however we try to argue it. And immortality, what is it, in our idea, but an endless continuing in the same sort? A continuing, a living for ever, a lasting and enduring for ever — what is this but travelling? An assumption into heaven, a becoming one with God — what is this, likewise, but a projection into the infinite? And how is the infinite an arrival? The infinite is no arrival. When we come to find exactly what we mean by God, by the infinite, by our immortality, it is a meaning of endless continuing in the same line and in the same sort, endless travelling in one direction. This is infinity, endless travelling in one direction. And the God of Love is our idea of the progression *ad infinitum* of the force of love. Infinity is no arrival. It is as much a cul-de-sac as is the bottomless pit. And what is the infinity of love but a cul-de-sac or a bottomless pit?

Love is a progression towards the goal. Therefore it is a progression away from the opposite goal. Love travels heavenwards. What then does love depart from? Hellwards, what is there? Love is at last a positive infinite. What then is the negative infinite? Positive and negative infinite are the same, since there is only one infinite. How then will it matter whether we travel heavenwards, *ad infinitum*, or in the opposite direction, to infinity. Since the infinity obtained is the same in either case, the infinite of pure homogeneity, which is nothingness, or everythingness, it does not matter which.

Infinity, the infinite, is no goal. It is a cul-de-sac, or, in another sense, it is the bottomless pit. To fall down the bottomless pit is to travel for ever. And a pleasant-walled cul-de-sac may be a perfect heaven. But to arrive in a sheltered, paradisiacal cul-de-sac of peace and unblemished happiness, this will not satisfy us. And to fall for ever down the bottomless pit of progression, this will not do either.

Love is not a goal; it is only a travelling. Likewise death is not a goal; it is a travelling asunder into elemental chaos. And from the elemental chaos all is cast forth again into creation. Therefore death also is but a cul-de-sac, a melting-pot.

There is a goal, but the goal is neither love nor death. It is a goal neither infinite nor eternal. It is the realm of calm delight, it is the other-kingdom of bliss. We are like a rose, which is a miracle of pure centrality, pure absolved

equilibrium. Balanced in perfection in the midst of time and space, the rose is perfect in the realm of perfection, neither temporal nor spatial, but absolved by the quality of perfection, pure immanence of absolution.

We are creatures of time and space. But we are like a rose; we accomplish perfection, we arrive in the absolute. We are creatures of time and space. And we are at once creatures of pure transcendence, absolved from time and space, perfected in the realm of the absolute, the other-world of bliss.

And love, love is encompassed and surpassed. Love always has been encompassed and surpassed by the fine lovers. We are like a rose, a perfect arrival.

Love is manifold, it is not of one sort only. There is the love between man and woman, sacred and profane. There is Christian love, "thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." And there is the love of God. But always love is a joining together.

Only in the conjunction of man and woman has love kept a duality of meaning. Sacred love and profane love, they are opposed, and yet they are both love. The love between man and woman is the greatest and most complete passion the world will ever see, because it is dual, because it is of two opposing kinds. The love between man and woman is the perfect heart-beat of life, systole, diastole.

Sacred love is selfless, seeking not its own. The lover serves his beloved and seeks perfect communion of oneness with her. But whole love between man and woman is sacred and profane together. Profane love seeks its own. I seek my own in the beloved, I wrestle with her to wrest it from her. We are not clear, we are mixed and mingled. I am in the beloved also, and she is in me. Which should not be, for this is confusion and chaos. Therefore I will gather myself complete and free from the beloved, she shall single herself out in utter contradistinction to me. There is twilight in our souls, neither light nor dark. The light must draw itself together in purity, the dark must stand on the other hand; they must be two complete in opposition, neither one partaking of the other, but each single in its own stead.

We are like a rose. In the pure passion for oneness, in the pure passion for distinctness and separateness, a dual passion of unutterable separation and lovely conjunction of the two, the new configuration takes place, the transcendence, the two in their perfect singleness, transported into one surpassing heaven of a rose-blossom.

But the love between a man and a woman, when it is whole, is dual. It is the melting into pure communion, and it is the friction of sheer sensuality, both. In pure communion I become whole in love. And in pure, fierce passion of

sensuality I am burned into essentiality. I am driven from the matrix into sheer separate distinction. I become my single self, inviolable and unique, as the gems were perhaps once driven into themselves out of the confusion of earths. The woman and I, we are the confusion of earths. Then in the fire of their extreme sensual love, in the friction of intense, destructive flames, I am destroyed and reduced to her essential otherness. It is a destructive fire, the profane love. But it is the only fire that will purify us into singleness, fuse us from the chaos into our own unique gemlike separateness of being.

All whole love between man and woman is thus dual, a love which is the motion of melting, fusing together into oneness, and a love which is the intense, frictional, and sensual gratification of being burnt down, burnt apart into separate clarity of being, unthinkable otherness and separateness. But not all love between man and woman is whole. It may be all gentle, the merging into oneness, like St. Francis and St. Clare, or Mary of Bethany and Jesus. There may be no separateness discovered, no singleness won, no unique otherness admitted. This is a half love, what is called sacred love. And this is the love which knows the purest happiness. On the other hand, the love may be all a lovely battle of sensual gratification, the beautiful but deadly counterposing of male” against female, as Tristan and Isolde. These are the lovers that top the summit of pride, they go with the grandest banners, they are the gemlike beings, he pure male singled and separated out in superb jewellike isolation of arrogant manhood, she purely woman, a lily balanced in rocking pride of beauty and perfume of womanhood. This is the profane love, that ends in flamboyant and lacerating tragedy when the two which are so singled out are torn finally apart by death. But if profane love ends in piercing tragedy, none the less the sacred love ends in a poignant yearning and exquisite submissive grief. St. Francis dies and leaves St. Clare to her pure sorrow.

There must be two in one, always two in one — the sweet love of communion and the fierce, proud love of sensual fulfilment, both together in one love. And then we are like a rose. We surpass even love, love is encompassed and surpassed. We are two who have a pure connexion. We are two, isolated like gems in our unthinkable otherness. But the rose contains and transcends us, we are one rose, beyond.

The Christian love, the brotherly love, this is always sacred. I love my neighbour as myself. What then? I am enlarged, I surpass myself, I become whole in mankind. In the whole of perfect humanity I am whole. I am the microcosm, the epitome of the great microcosm. I speak of the perfectibility of man. Man can be made perfect in love, he can become a creature of love alone. Then humanity shall be one whole of love. This is the perfect future for those

who love their neighbours as themselves.

But, alas! however much I may be the microcosm, the exemplar of brotherly love, there is in me this necessity to separate and distinguish myself into gemlike singleness, distinct and apart from all the rest, proud as a lion, isolated as a star. This is a necessity within me. And as this necessity is unfulfilled, it becomes stronger and stronger and it becomes dominant.

Then I shall hate the self that I am, powerfully and profoundly shall I hate this microcosm that I have become, this epitome of mankind. I shall hate myself with madness the more I persist in adhering to my achieved self of brotherly love. Still I shall persist in representing a whole loving humanity, until the unfulfilled passion for singleness drives me into action. Then I shall hate my neighbour as I hate myself. And then, woe betide my neighbour and me! Whom the gods wish to destroy they first make mad. And this is how we become mad, by being impelled into activity by the subconscious reaction against the self we maintain, without ever ceasing to maintain this detested self. We are bewildered, dazed. In the name of brotherly love we rush into stupendous blind activities of brotherly hate. We are made mad by the split, the duality in ourselves. The gods wish to destroy us because we serve them too well. Which is the end of brotherly love, *liberte, fraternite, egalite*. How can there be liberty when I am not free to be other than fraternal and equal? I must be free (o be separate and unequal in the finest sense, if I am to be free. *Fraternite* and *egalite*, these are tyranny of tyrannies.

There must be brotherly love, a wholeness of humanity. But there must also be pure, separate individuality, separate and proud as a lion or a hawk. There must be both. In the duality lies fulfilment. Man must act in concert with man, creatively and happily. This is greatest happiness. But man must also act separately and distinctly, apart from every other man, single and self-responsible and proud with unquenchable pride, moving for himself without reference to his neighbour. These two movements are opposite, yet they do not negate each other. We have understanding. And if we understand, then we balance perfectly between the two motions, we are single, isolated individuals, we are a great concordant humanity, both, and then the rose of perfection transcends us, the rose of the world which has never yet blossomed, but which will blossom from us when we begin to understand both sides and to live in both directions, freely and without fear, following the inmost desires of our body and spirit, which arrive to us out of the unknown.

Lastly, there is the love of God; we become whole with God. But God as we know Him is either infinite love or infinite pride and power, always one or the other, Christ or Jehovah, always one half excluding the other. Therefore, God is

for ever jealous. If we love one God, we must hate this one sooner or later, and choose the other. This is the tragedy of religious experience. But the Holy Spirit, the unknowable, is single and perfect for us.

There is that which we cannot love, because it surpasses either love or hate. There is the unknown and the unknowable which propounds all creation. This we cannot love, we can only accept it as a term of our own limitation and ratification. We can only know that from the unknown, profound desires enter in upon us, and that the fulfilling of these desires is the fulfilling of creation. We know that the rose comes to blossom. We know that we are incipient with blossom. It is our business to go as we are impelled, with faith and pure spontaneous morality, knowing that the rose blossoms, and taking that knowledge for sufficient.

ALL THREE

What you want to do, said Jimmy to Ciss, is to forget yourself. — So I can think of you all the time, I suppose, said Cecilia. — Well, not necessarily all the time. Now and then would do. But it'd do you a lot of good to forget yourself, persisted Jim. — I agree, snapped Cecilia. But why don't you make me? Why don't you give a girl a bit of a lift? You don't exactly sweep me off my feet, or lift me clean out of myself, I must say! — Dash it all, a fellow might as well try to sweep the Albert Memorial off its feet. Seems to me you're cemented in! cried the exasperated Jim. — In what? — Eh? — What am I cemented in? demanded Cecilia. — Oh, how should I know? In your own idea of yourself! cried he, desperately.

Silence! One of those fatal and Egyptian silences that can intervene between the fair sex and the unfair.

I should love to forget myself, if I were allowed, resumed Cecelia. — Who prevents you? — You do! — I wish I knew how. — You throw me back on myself every time. — Throw you back on yourself! cried the mortified Jim. Why, I've never seen you come an inch forward, away from yourself, yet. — I'm always coming forward to you, and you throw me back on myself, she declared. — Coming forward to me! he cried, in enraged astonishment. I wish you'd tell me when the move begins. — You wouldn't see it, if I hooted like a bus. — I believe you, he groaned, giving up.

The gulf yawned between them. I, miserable ostrich, hid my head in the sands of the *Times*. The clock had the impertinence to tick extra cheerfully.

Don't you think it's a boy's duty to make a girl forget herself? she asked of me, mercilessly. — If there's a good band, said I. — Precisely! cried Jim. The minute the saxophone lets on, she's as right as rain. — Of course! she said. Because then I don't have to forget myself, I'm all there. — We looked at her in some astonishment, and Jim, being a cub, did the obvious. — Do you mean to say that the rest of the time you're not all there? he asked, with flat-footed humour. — Witty boy! she said witheringly. No, naturally I leave my wits at home, when I go out with you. — Sounds like it! said Jim.

Now look here! said I. Do you mean to say you only feel quite yourself when you're dancing? — Not always then, she retorted. — And never any other time? — Never! The word fell on top of us with a smack, and left us flat. Oh, go on!

cried Jimmy. What about the other day at Cromer? — What about it? said she. — Ah! What were the wild waves saying! cried he knowingly. — You may ask me, she replied. They hummed and hawed, but they never got a word out, as far as I'm concerned. — Do you mean to say you weren't happy! cried he, mortified. — I certainly never forgot myself, not for a moment, she replied. He made a gesture of despair.

But what do you mean? said I. Do you mean you were never all there, or that you were too much there? Which? She became suddenly attentive, and Jimmy looked at her mockingly, with a sort of got-her-on-toast look. — Why? she drawled languidly. I suppose when you can't forget yourself, it's because some of you's left out, and you feel it. — So you are only painfully aware of yourself when you're not altogether yourself — like a one-legged man trying to rub his missing toes, because they ache? said I. She pondered a moment. — I suppose that's about the size of it, she admitted. — And nothing of you is left out in jazz? Jimmy demanded. — Not in good jazz, if the boy can dance, she replied. — Well, I think you'll grant me that, said Jim. To which she did not reply.

So it takes a jazz band to get you all there? I asked. — Apparently, she replied. — Then why aren't you content to be only half there, till the band toots up? — Oh, I am. It's only friend James gets the wind up about the missing sections. — Hang it all! cried James — But I held up my hand like a high-church clergyman, and hushed him off. — Then why don't you marry a boy who will prefer you only half there? I demanded of her. — What! marry one of those coat-hangers? You see me! she said, with cool contempt.

Then the point, said I, is that Jimmy leaves some of you out, and so he never sweeps you off your feet. And so you can't forget yourself, because part of you isn't embraced by Jimmy, and that part stands aside and gibbers. — Gibbers is the right word, like a lucky monkey! said Jim spitefully. — Better a whole monkey than half a man! said she. — So what's to be done about it? said I. Why not think about it? Which bit of the woman does Jimmy leave out of his manly embrace? — Oh, about nine-tenths of her! said she. — Nine-tenths of her being too conceited for nuts! said Jimmy.

Look here! said I. This is vulgar altercation. — What do you expect, with a whipper-snapper like Jimmy? said she. — My stars! if that two-stepping Trissie says another word — ! cried Jim.

Peace! said I. And give the last word to me, for I am the latter-day Aristotle, who has more to say even than a woman. Next time, O James, when you have your arms, both of them, around Cecilia —

Which will be never! said Cecilia- — then, I continued, you must say to yourself, I have here but one-tenth of my dear Ciss, the remaining nine-tenths

being mysteriously elsewhere. Yet this one-tenth is a pretty good armful, not to say handful, and will do me very nicely; so forward the light brigade! And you, Cecilia, under the same circumstance, will say to yourself: Alas so little of me is concerned, that why should I concern myself? Jimmy gets his tenth. Let's see him make the most of it.

MAKING LOVE TO MUSIC

“To me, dancing,” said Romeo, “is just making love to music.”

“That’s why you never will dance with me, I suppose.” replied Juliet.

“Well, you know, you are a bit too much of an individual.”

It is a curious thing, but the ideas of one generation become the instincts of the next. We are all of us, largely, the embodied ideas of our grandmothers, and, without knowing it, we behave as such. It is odd that the grafting works so quickly, but it seems to. Let the ideas change rapidly, and there follows a correspondingly rapid change in humanity. We become what we think. Worse still, we have become what our grandmothers thought. And our children’s children will become the lamentable things that we are thinking. Which is the psychological visiting of the sins of the fathers upon the children. For we do not become just the lofty or beautiful thoughts of our grandmothers. Alas no! We are the embodiment of the most potent ideas of our progenitors, and these ideas are mostly private ones, not to be admitted in public, but to be transmitted as instincts and as the dynamics of behaviour to the third and fourth generation. Alas for the thing that our grandmothers brooded over in secret, and willed in private. That thing are we.

What did they wish and will? One thing is certain: they wished to be made love to, to music. They wished man were not a coarse creature, jumping to his goal, and finished. They wanted heavenly strains to resound, while he held their hand, and a new musical movement to burst forth, as he put his arm round their waist. With infinite variations the music was to soar on, from level to level of love-making, in a delicious dance, the two things inextricable, the two persons likewise.

To end, of course, before the so-called consummation of love-making, which, to our grandmothers in their dream, and therefore to us in actuality, is the grand anti-climax. Not a consummation, but a humiliating anti-climax.

This is the so-called act of love itself, the actual knuckle of the whole bone of contention: a humiliating anti-climax. The bone of contention, of course, is sex. Sex is very charming and very delightful, so long as you make love to music, and you tread the clouds with Shelley, in a two-step. But to come at last to the grotesque bathos of capitulation: no, sir! Nay-nay!

Even a man like Maupassant, an apparent devotee of sex, says the same thing: and Maupassant is grandfather, or great-grandfather, to very many of us. Surely,

he says, the act of copulation is the Creator's cynical joke against us. To have created in us all these beautiful and noble sentiments of love, to set the nightingale and all the heavenly spheres singing, merely to throw us into this grotesque posture, to perform this humiliating act, is a piece of cynicism worthy, not of a benevolent Creator, but of a mocking demon.

Poor Maupassant, there is the clue to his own catastrophe! He wanted to make love to music. And he realized, with rage, that copulate to music you cannot. So he divided himself against himself, and damned his eyes in disgust, then copulated all the more.

We, however, his grandchildren, are shrewder. Man *must* make love to music, and woman *must* be made love to, to a string and saxophone accompaniment. It is our inner necessity. Because our grandfathers, and especially our great-grandfathers, left the music most severely out of their copulations. So now we leave the copulation most severely out of our musical love-making. We *must* make love to music: it is our grandmothers' dream, become an inward necessity in us, an unconscious motive force. Copulate you cannot, to music. So cut out that part, and solve the problem.

The popular modern dances, far from being "sexual," are distinctly anti-sexual. But there, again, we must make a distinction. We should say, the modern jazz and tango and Charleston, far from being an incitement to copulation, are in direct antagonism to copulation. Therefore it is all nonsense for the churches to raise their voice against dancing, against "making love to music." Because the Church, and society at large, has no particular antagonism to sex. It would be ridiculous, for sex is so large and all-embracing that the religious passion itself is largely sexual. But, as they say, "sublimated." This is the great recipe for sex: only sublimate it! Imagine the quicksilver heated and passing off in weird, slightly poisonous vapour, instead of heavily rolling together and fusing: and there you have the process: sublimation: making love to music! Morality has really no quarrel at all with "sublimated" sex. Most "nice" things are, "sublimated sex." What morality hates, what the Church hates, what modern *mankind* hates — for what, after all, is "morality" except the instinctive revulsion of the majority? — is just copulation. The modern youth especially just have an instinctive aversion from copulation. They love sex. But they inwardly loathe copulation, even when they play at it. As for playing at it, what else are they to do, given the toys? But they don't like it. They do it in a sort of self-spite. And they turn away, with disgust and relief, from this bed-ridden act, to make love once more to music.

And really, surely this is all to the good. If the young don't really *like* copulation, then they are safe. As for marriage, they will marry, according to

their grandmothers' dream, for quite other reasons. Our grandfathers, or great-grandfathers, married crudely and unmusically, for copulation. That was the actuality. So the dream was all of music. The dream was the mating of two souls, to the faint chiming of the Seraphim. We, the third and fourth generation, we are the dream made flesh. They dreamed of a marriage with all things gross — meaning especially copulation — left out, and only the pure harmony of equality and intimate companionship remaining. And the young live out the dream. They marry: they copulate in a perfunctory and half-disgusted fashion, merely to show they can do it. And so they have children. But the marriage is made to music, the gramophone and the wireless orchestrate each small domestic act, and keep up the jazzing jig of connubial felicity, a felicity of companionship, equality, forbearance, and mutual sharing of everything the married couple have in common. Marriage set to music! The worn-out old serpent in this musical Eden of domesticity is the last, feeble instinct for copulation, which drives the married couple to clash upon the boring organic differences in one another, and prevents them from being twin souls in almost identical bodies. But we are wise, and soon learn to leave the humiliating act out altogether. It is the only wisdom.

We are such stuff as our grandmothers' dreams were made on, and our little life is rounded by a band.

The thing you wonder, as you watch the modern dancers making love to music, in a dance-hall, is what kind of dances will our children's children dance? Our mothers' mothers danced quadrilles and sets of Lancers, and the waltz was almost an indecent thing to them. Our mothers' mothers' mothers danced minuets and Roger de Coverleys, and smart and bouncing country-dances which worked up the blood and danced a man nearer and nearer to copulation.

But lo! even while she was being whirled round in the dance, our great-grandmother was dreaming of soft and throbbing music, and the arms of "one person," and the throbbing and sliding unison of this one more elevated person, who would never coarsely bounce her towards bed and copulation, but would slide on with her for ever, down the dim and sonorous vistas, making love without end to music without end, and leaving out entirely that disastrous, music-less full-stop of copulation, the end of ends.

So she dreamed, our great-grandmother, as she crossed hands and was flung around, and buffeted and busked towards bed, and the bouncing of the *bete a deux dos*. She dreamed of men that were only embodied souls, not tiresome and gross males, lords and masters. She dreamed of "one person" who was all men in one, universal, and beyond narrow individualism.

So that now, the great-granddaughter is made love to by all men — to music — as if it were one man. To music, all men, as if it were one man, make love to

her, and she sways in the arms, not of an individual, but of the modern species. It is wonderful. And the modern man makes love, to music, to all women, as if she were one woman. All woman, as if she were one woman! It is almost like Baudelaire making love to the vast thighs of Dame Nature herself, except that that dream of our great-grandfather is still too copulative, though all-embracing.

But what is the dream that is simmering at the bottom of the soul of the modern young woman as she slides to music across the floor, in the arms of the species, or as she waggles opposite the species, in the Charleston? If she is content, there is no dream. But woman is never content. If she were content, the Charleston and the Black Bottom would not oust the tango.

She is not content. She is even less content, in the morning after the night before, than was her great-grandmother, who had been bounced by copulatory attentions. She is even less content; therefore her dream, though not risen yet to consciousness, is even more devouring and more rapidly subversive.

What is her dream, this slender, tender lady just out of her teens, who is varying the two-step with the Black Bottom? What can her dream be? Because what her dream is, that her children, and my children, or children's children, will become. It is the very ovum of the future soul, as my dream is the sperm.

There is not much left for her to dream of, because whatever she wants she can have. All men, or no men, this man or that, she has the choice, for she has no lord and master. Sliding down the endless avenues of music, having an endless love endlessly made to her, she has this too. If she wants to be bounced into copulation, at a dead end, she can have that too: just to prove how monkeyish it is, and what a fumbling in the cul-de-sac.

Nothing is denied her, so there is nothing to want. And without desire, even dreams are lame. Lame dreams! Perhaps she has lame dreams, and wishes, last wish of all, she had no dreams at all.

But while life lasts, and is an affair of sleeping and waking, this is the one wish that will never be granted. From dreams no man escapeth, no woman either. Even the little blonde who is preferred by gentlemen has a dream somewhere, if she, and we, and he, did but know it. Even a dream beyond emeralds and dollars.

What is it? What is the lame and smothered dream of the lady? Whatever it is, she will never know: not till somebody has told it her, and then gradually, and after a great deal of spiteful repudiation, she will recognize it, and it will pass into her womb.

Myself, I do not know what the frail lady's dream may be. But depend upon one thing, it will be something very different from the present business. The dream and the business! — an eternal antipathy. So the dream, whatever it may

be, will *not* be “making love to music.” It will be something else.

Perhaps it will be the re-capturing of a dream that started in mankind, and never finished, was never fully unfolded. The thought occurred to me suddenly when I was looking at the remains of paintings on the walls of Etruscan tombs at Tarquinia. There the painted women dance, in their transparent linen with heavier, coloured borders, opposite the naked-limbed men, in a splendour and an abandon which is not at all abandoned. There is a great beauty in them, as of life which has not finished. The dance is Greek, if you like, but not finished off like the Greek dancing. The beauty is not so pure, if you will, as the Greek beauty; but also it is more ample, not so narrowed. And there is not the slight element of abstraction, of inhumanity, which underlies all Greek expression, the tragic will.

The Etruscans, at least before the Romans smashed them, do not seem to have been tangled up with tragedy, as the Greeks were from the first. There seems to have been a peculiar large carelessness about them, very human and non-moral. As far as one can judge, they never said: certain acts are immoral, just because we say so! They seem to have had a strong feeling for taking life sincerely as a pleasant thing. Even death was a gay and lively affair.

Moralists will say: Divine law wiped them out. The answer to that is, divine law wipes everything out in time, even itself. And if the smashing power of the all-trampling Roman is to be identified with divine law, then all I can do is to look up another divinity.

No, I do believe that the unborn dream at the bottom of the soul of the shingled, modern young lady is this Etruscan young woman of mine, dancing with such abandon opposite her naked-limbed, strongly dancing young man, to the sound of the double flute. They are wild with a dance that is heavy and light at the same time, and not a bit anti-copulative, yet not bouncingly copulative either.

That was another nice thing about the Etruscans: there was a phallic symbol everywhere, so everybody was used to it, and they no doubt all offered it small offerings, as the source of inspiration. Being part of the everyday life, there was no need to get it on the brain, as we tend to do.

And apparently the men, the men slaves at least, went gaily and jauntily round with no clothes on at all, and being therefore of a good brown colour, wore their skin for livery. And the Etruscan ladies thought nothing of it. Why should they? We think nothing of a naked cow, and we still refrain from putting our pet-dogs into pants or petticoats: marvellous to relate: but then, our ideal is Liberty, after all! So if the slave was stark-naked, who gaily piped to the lady as she danced, and if her partner was three-parts naked, and herself nothing but a transparency, well, nobody thought anything about it; there was nothing to shy off from, and

all the fun was in the dance.

There it is, the delightful quality of the Etruscan dance. They are neither making love to music, to avoid copulation, nor are they bouncing towards copulation with a brass band accompaniment. They are just dancing a dance with the elixir of life. And if they have made a little offering to the stone phallus at the door, it is because when one is full of life one is full of possibilities, and the phallus gives life. And if they have made an offering also to the queer ark of the female symbol, at the door of a woman's tomb, it is because the womb too is the source of life, and a great fountain of dance-movements.

It is we who have narrowed the dance down to two movements: either bouncing towards copulation, or sliding and shaking and waggling, to elude it. Surely it is ridiculous to make love to music, and to music to be made love to! Surely the music is to dance to! And surely the modern young woman feels this, somewhere deep inside.

To the music one should dance, and dancing, dance. The Etruscan young woman is going gaily at it, after two-thousand-five-hundred years. She is not making love to music, nor is the dark-limbed youth, her partner. She is just dancing her very soul into existence, having made an offering on one hand to the lively phallus of man, on the other hand, to the shut womb-symbol of woman, and put herself on real good terms with both of them. So she is quite serene, and dancing herself as a very fountain of motion and of life, the young man opposite her dancing himself the same, in contrast and balance, with just the double flute to whistle round their naked heels.

And I believe this is, or will be, the dream of our pathetic, music-shunned young girl of today, and the substance of her children's children, unto the third and fourth generation.

WOMEN ARE SO COCKSURE

My destiny has been cast among cocksure women. Perhaps when man begins to doubt himself, woman, who should be nice and peacefully hen-sure, becomes instead insistently cocksure. She develops convictions, or she catches them. And then woe betide everybody.

I began with my mother. She was convinced about some things: one of them being that a man' ought not to drink beer. This conviction developed from the fact, naturally, that my father drank beer. He sometimes drank too much. He sometimes boozed away the money necessary for the young family. Therefore the drinking of beer became to my mother the cardinal sin. No other sin was so red, so red-hot. She was like a bull before this red sin. When my father came in tipsy, she saw scarlet.

We dear children were trained never, *never* to fall into this sin. We were sent to the Band of Hope, and told harrowing stories of drunkenness; we wept bitterly over the heroic youth who had taken the pledge and sworn never never to touch nor to taste, and who clenched his teeth when his cruel comrades tried to force beer down his throat: but alas, he had lost one of his front teeth, and through this narrow gap beer trickled even down his gullet. So he died of a broken heart.

My mother, though a woman with a real sense of humour, kept her face straight and stern while we recounted this fearsome episode. And we were rigidly sent to the Band of Hope.

Years passed. Children became young men. It was evident my mother's sons were not going to hell down the beer-mug: they didn't care enough about it. My mother relaxed. She would even watch with pleasure while I drank a glass of ale, the fearful enemy, at supper. There was no longer a serpent in the glass, dash it down, dash it down.

"But, mother, if you don't mind if I drink a little beer, why did you mind so much about my father?"

"You don't realize what I had to put up with."

"Yes, I do. But you made it seem a sin, a horror. You terrified our lives with the bogy of strong drink. You were absolutely sure it was utter evil. Why isn't it utter evil any more?"

"You're different from your father — "

But she was just a little shame-faced. Life changes our feelings.

We may get mellow, or we may get harder, as time goes on. But we change.

What outrages our feelings in the twenties will probably not outrage them in the fifties, not at all. And the change is much more striking in women than in men. Particularly in those women who are the moral force in the household, as my mother was.

My mother spoilt her life with her moral frenzy against John Barleycorn. To be sure she had occasion to detest the alcoholic stuff. But why the moral frenzy? It made a tragedy out of what was only a nuisance. And at fifty, when the best part of life was gone, she realized it. And then what would she not have given to have her life again, her young children, her tipsy husband, and a proper natural insouciance, to get the best out of it all. When woman tries to be too much mistress of fate, particularly of other people's fates, what a tragedy!

As sure as a woman has the whip-hand over her destiny and the destinies of those near her, so sure will she make a mess of her own destiny, and a muddle of the others'. And just as inevitably as the age of fifty will come upon her, so inevitably will come the realization that she has got herself into a hole. *She ought not to have been so cocksure.*

Beware, oh modern women, the age of fifty. It is then that the play is over, the theatre shuts, and you are turned out into the night. If you have been making a grand show of your life, all off your own bat, and being grand mistress of your destiny, all triumphant, the clock of years tolls fifty, and the play is over. You've had your turn on the stage. Now you must go, out into the common night, where you may or may not have a true place of shelter.

It is dangerous for anybody to be cocksure. But it is peculiarly dangerous for a woman. Being basically a creature of emotion, she will direct all her emotion force full on to what seems to her the grand aim of existence. For twenty, thirty years she may rush ahead to the grand goal of existence. And then the age of fifty approaches — the speed slackens — the driving force begins to fail — the grand goal is not only no nearer, it is all too near. It is all round about. It is a waste of unspeakable dreariness.

There were three sisters. One started out to be learned and to give herself to social reform. She was absolutely cocksure about being able to bring the world nearer salvation. The second obstinately decided to live her own life and to be herself. "The aim of my life is to be myself." She was cocksure about what her self was and how to be it. The aim of the third was to gather roses, whilst she might.

She had real good times with her lovers, with her dress-makers, with her husband and her children. All three had everything life could offer.

The age of fifty draws near. All three are in the state of vital bankruptcy of the modern woman of that age. The one is quite cynical about reform, the other

begins to realize that the “self” she was so cocksure about doesn’t exist, and she wonders what does exist. To the third the world is a dangerous and dirty place, and she doesn’t know where to put herself.

Of all things, the most fatal to a woman is to have an aim, and be cocksure about it.

PORNOGRAPHY AND OBSCENITY

What they are depends, as usual, entirely on the individual. What is pornography to one man is the laughter of genius to another.

The word itself, we are told, means “pertaining to harlots” — the graph of the harlot. But nowadays, what is a harlot? If she was a woman who took money from a man in return for going to bed with him — really, most wives sold themselves, in the past, and plenty of harlots gave themselves, when they felt like it, for nothing. If a woman hasn’t got a tiny streak of a harlot in her, she’s a dry stick as a rule. And probably most harlots had somewhere a streak of womanly generosity. Why be so cut and dried? The law is a dreary thing, and its judgments have nothing to do with life.

The same with the word *obscene*: nobody knows what it means. Suppose it were derived from *obscena*: that which might not be represented on the stage; how much further are you? None! What is obscene to Tom is not obscene to Lucy or Joe, and really, the meaning of a word has to wait for majorities to decide it. If a play shocks ten people in an audience, and doesn’t shock the remaining five hundred, then it is obscene to ten and innocuous to five hundred; hence, the play is not obscene, by majority. But *Hamlet* shocked all the Cromwellian Puritans, and shocks nobody today, and some of Aristophanes shocks everybody today, and didn’t galvanize the later Greeks at all, apparently. Man is a changeable beast, and words change their meanings with him, and things are not what they seemed, and what’s what becomes what isn’t, and if we think we know where we are it’s only because we are so rapidly being translated to somewhere else. We have to leave everything to the majority, everything to the majority, everything to the mob, the mob, the mob. They know what is obscene and what isn’t, they do. If the lower ten million doesn’t know better than the upper ten men, then there’s something wrong with mathematics. Take a vote on it! Show hands, and prove it by count! *Vox populi, vox Dei. Odi profanum vulgum! Profanum vulgum.*

So it comes down to this: if you are talking to the mob, the meaning of your words is the mob-meaning, decided by majority. As somebody wrote to me: the American law on obscenity is very plain, and America is going to enforce the law. Quite, my dear, quite, quite, quite! The mob knows all about obscenity. Mild little words that rhyme with spit or farce are the height of obscenity. Supposing a printer put “h” in the place of “p,” by mistake, in that mere word

spit? Then the great American public knows that this man has committed an obscenity, an indecency, that his act was lewd, .and as a compositor he was pornographical. You can't tamper with the great public, British or American. *Vox populi, vox Dei*, don't you know. If you don't we'll let you know it. At the same time, this *vox Dei* shouts with praise over moving-pictures and books and newspaper accounts that seem, to a sinful nature like mine, completely disgusting and obscene. Like a real prude and Puritan, I have to look the other way. When obscenity becomes mawkish, which is its palatable form for the public, and when the *Vox populi, vox Dei* is hoarse with sentimental indecency, then I have to steer away, like a Pharisee, afraid of being contaminated. There is a certain kind of sticky universal pitch that I refuse to touch.

So again, it comes down to this: you accept the majority, the mob, and its decisions, or you don't. You bow down before the *Vox populi, vox Dei*, or you plug your ears not to hear its obscene howl. You perform your antics to please the vast public, *Deus ex machina*, or you refuse to perform for the public at all, unless now and then to pull its elephantine and ignominious leg.

When it comes to the meaning of anything, even the simplest word, then you must pause. Because there are two great categories of meaning, for ever separate. There is mob-meaning, and there is individual meaning. Take even the word *bread*. The mob-meaning is merely: stuff made with white flour into loaves that you eat. But take the individual meaning of the word bread: the white, the brown, the corn-pone, the home-made, the smell of bread just out of the oven, the crust, the crumb, the unleavened bread, the shew-bread, the staff of life, sour-dough bread, cottage loaves, French bread, Viennese bread, black bread, a yesterday's loaf, rye, graham, barley, rolls, *Bretzeln, Kringeln*, scones, damper, matsen — there is no end to it all, and the word bread will take you to the ends of time and space, and far-off down avenues of memory. But this is individual. The word bread will take the individual off on his own journey, and its meaning will be his own meaning, based on his own genuine imagination reactions. And when a word comes to us in its individual character, and starts in us the individual responses, it is great pleasure to us. The American advertisers have discovered this, and some of the cunningest American literature is to be found in advertisements of soap-suds, for example. These advertisements are *almost* prose-poems. They give the word soap-suds a bubbly, shiny individual meaning, which is very skilfully poetic, would, perhaps, be quite poetic to the mind which could forget that the poetry was bait on a hook.

Business is discovering the individual, dynamic meaning of words, and poetry is losing it. Poetry more and more tends to far-fetch its word-meanings, and this results once again in mob-meanings, which arouse only a mob-reaction in the

individual. For every man has a mob-self and an individual self, in varying proportions. Some men are almost all mob-self, incapable of imaginative individual responses. The worst specimens of mob-self are usually to be found in the professions, lawyers, professors, clergymen and so on. The business man, much maligned, has a tough outside mob-self, and a scared, floundering yet still alive individual self. The public, which is feeble-minded like an idiot, will never be able to preserve its individual reactions from the tricks of the exploiter. The public is always exploited and always will be exploited. The methods of exploitation merely vary. Today the public is tickled into laying the golden egg. With imaginative words and individual meanings it is tricked into giving the great goose-cackle of mob-acquiescence. *Vox populi, vox Dei*. It has always been so, and will always be so. Why? Because the public has not enough wit to distinguish between mob-meanings and individual meanings. The mass is for ever vulgar, because it can't distinguish between its own original feelings and feelings which are diddled into existence by the exploiter. The public is always profane, because it is controlled from the outside, by the trickster, and never from the inside, by its own sincerity. The mob is always obscene, because it is always second-hand.

Which brings us back to our subject of pornography and obscenity. The reaction to any word may be, in any individual, either a mob-reaction or an individual reaction. It is up to the individual to ask himself: Is my reaction individual, or am I merely reacting from my mob-self?

When it comes to the so-called obscene words, I should say that hardly one person in a million escapes mob-reaction. The first reaction is almost sure to be mob-reaction, mob-indignation, mob-condemnation. And the mob gets no further. But the real individual has second thoughts and says: Am I really shocked? Do I *really* feel outraged and indignant? And the answer of any individual is bound to be: No, I am not shocked, not outraged, nor indignant. I know the word, and take it for what it is, and I am not going to be jockeyed into making a mountain out of a mole-hill, not for all the law in the world.

Now if the use of a few so-called obscene words will startle man or woman out of a mob-habit into an individual state, well and good. And word prudery is so universal a mob-habit that it is time we were startled out of it.

But still we have only tackled obscenity, and the problem of pornography goes even deeper. When a man is startled into his individual self, he still may not be able to know, inside himself, whether Rabelais is or is not pornographic: and over Aretino or even Boccaccio he may perhaps puzzle in vain, torn between different emotions.

One essay on pornography, I remember, comes to the conclusion that

pornography in art is that which is calculated to arouse sexual desire, or sexual excitement. And stress is laid on the fact, whether the author or artist *intended* to arouse sexual feelings. It is the old vexed question of intention, become so dull today, when we know how strong and influential our unconscious intentions are. And why a man should be held guilty of his conscious intentions, and innocent of his unconscious intentions, I don't know, since every man is more made up of unconscious intentions than of conscious ones. I am what I am, not merely what I think I am.

However! We take it, I assume, that *pornography* is something base, something unpleasant. In short, we don't like it. And why don't we like it? Because it arouses sexual feelings?

I think not. No matter how hard we may pretend otherwise, most of us rather like a moderate rousing of our sex. It warms us, stimulates us like sunshine on a grey day. After a century or two of Puritanism, this is still true of most people. Only the mob-habit of condemning any form of sex is too strong to let us admit it naturally. And there are, of course, many people who are genuinely repelled by the simplest and most natural stirrings of sexual feeling. But these people are perverts who have fallen into hatred of their fellow men: thwarted, disappointed, unfulfilled people, of whom, alas, our civilization contains so many. And they nearly always enjoy some unsimple and unnatural form of sex excitement, secretly.

Even quite advanced art critics would try to make us believe that any picture or book which had "sex appeal" was *ipso facto* a bad book or picture. This is just canting hypocrisy. Half the great poems, pictures, music, stories of the whole world are great by virtue of the beauty of their sex appeal. Titian or Renoir, the Song of Solomon or *Jane Eyre*, Mozart or "Annie Laurie," the loveliness is all interwoven with sex appeal, sex stimulus, call it what you will. Even Michelangelo, who rather hated sex, can't help filling the Cornucopia with phallic acorns. Sex is a very powerful, beneficial and necessary stimulus in human life, and we are all grateful when we feel its warm, natural flow through us, like a form of sunshine.

So we can dismiss the idea that sex appeal in art is pornography. It may be so to the grey Puritan, but the grey Puritan is a sick man, soul and body sick, so why should we bother about his hallucinations? Sex appeal, of course, varies enormously. There are endless different kinds, and endless degrees of each kind. Perhaps it may be argued that a mild degree of sex appeal is not pornographical, whereas a high degree is. But this is a fallacy. Boccaccio at his hottest seems to me less pornographical than *Pamela* or *Clarissa Harlowe* or even *Jane Eyre*, or a host of modern books or films which pass uncensored. At the same time

Wagner's *Tristan and Isolde* seems to me very near to pornography, and so, even, do some quite popular Christian hymns.

What is it, then? It isn't a question of sex appeal, merely: nor even a question of deliberate intention on the part of the author or artist to arouse sexual excitement. Rabelais sometimes had a deliberate intention, so in a different way, did Boccaccio. And I'm sure poor Charlotte Bronte, or the authoress of *The Sheik*, did not have any deliberate intention to stimulate sex feelings in the reader. Yet I find *Jane Eyre* verging towards pornography and Boccaccio seems to me always fresh and wholesome.

The late British Home Secretary, who prides himself on being a very sincere Puritan, grey, grey in every fibre, said with indignant sorrow in one of his outbursts on improper books: " — and these two young people, who had been perfectly pure up till that time, after reading this book went and had sexual intercourse together!!!" *One up to them!* is all we can answer. But the grey Guardian of British Morals seemed to think that if they had murdered one another, or worn each other to rags of nervous prostration, it would have been much better. The grey disease!

Then what is pornography, after all this? It isn't sex appeal or sex stimulus in art. It isn't even a deliberate intention on the part of the artist to arouse or excite sexual feelings. There's nothing wrong with sexual feelings in themselves, so long as they are straightforward and not sneaking or sly. The right sort of sex stimulus is invaluable to human daily life. Without it the world grows grey.

I would give everybody the gay Renaissance stories to read, they would help to shake off a lot of grey self-importance, which is our modern civilized disease.

But even I would censor genuine pornography, rigorously. It would not be very difficult. In the first place, genuine pornography is almost always underworld, it doesn't come into the open. In the second, you can recognize it by the insult it offers, invariably, to sex, and to the human spirit.

Pornography is the attempt to insult sex, to do dirt on it. This is unpardonable. Take the very lowest instance, the picture post-card sold under hand, by the underworld, in most cities. What I have seen of them have been of an ugliness to make you cry. The insult to the human body, the insult to a vital human relationship! Ugly and cheap they make the human nudity, ugly and degraded they make the sexual act, trivial and cheap and nasty.

It is the same with the books they sell in the underworld. They are either so ugly they make you ill, or so fatuous you can't imagine anybody but a cretin or a moron reading them, or writing them.

It is the same with the dirty limericks that people tell after dinner, or the dirty stories one hears commercial travellers telling each other in a smoke-room.

Occasionally there is a really funny one, that redeems a great deal. But usually they are just ugly and repellent, and the so-called “humour” is just a trick of doing dirt on sex.

Now the human nudity of a great many modern people is just ugly and degraded, and the sexual act between modern people is just the same, merely ugly and degrading. But this is nothing to be proud of. It is the catastrophe of our civilization. I am sure no other civilization, not even the Roman, has showed such a vast proportion of ignominious and degraded nudity, and ugly, squalid dirty sex. Because no other civilization has driven sex into the underworld, and nudity to the w.c.

The intelligent young, thank heaven, seem determined to alter in these two respects. They are rescuing their young nudity from the stuffy, pornographical hole-and-corner underworld of their elders, and they refuse to sneak about the sexual relation. This is a change the elderly grey ones of course deplore, but it is in fact a very great change for the better, and a real revolution.

But it is amazing how strong is the will in ordinary, vulgar people, to do dirt on sex. It was one of my fond illusions, when I was young, that the ordinary healthy-seeming sort of men, in railway carriages, or the smoke-room of an hotel or a pullman, were healthy in their feelings and had a wholesome rough devil-may-care attitude towards sex. All wrong! All wrong! Experience teaches that common individuals of this sort have a disgusting attitude towards sex, a disgusting contempt of it, a disgusting desire to insult it. If such fellows have intercourse with a woman, they triumphantly feel that they have done her dirt, and now she is lower, cheaper, more contemptible than she was before.

It is individuals of this sort that tell dirty stories, carry indecent picture postcards, and know the indecent books. This is the great pornographical class — the really common men-in-the-street and women-in-the-street. They have as great a hate and contempt of sex as the greyest Puritan, and when an appeal is made to them, they are always on the side of the angels. They insist that a film-heroine shall be a neuter, a sexless thing of washed-out purity. They insist that real sex-feeling shall only be shown by the villain or villainess, low lust. They find a Titian or a Renoir really indecent, and they don't want their wives and daughters to see it.

Why? Because they have the grey disease of sex-hatred, coupled with the yellow disease of dirt-lust. The sex functions and the excrementory functions in the human body work so close together, yet they are, so to speak, utterly different in direction. Sex is a creative flow, the excrementory flow is towards dissolution, de-creation, if we may use such a word. In the really healthy human being the distinction between the two is instant, our profoundest instincts are

perhaps our instincts of opposition between the two flows.

But in the degraded human being the deep instincts have gone dead, and then the two flows become identical. *This* is the secret of really vulgar and of pornographical people: the sex flow and the excrement flow is the same to them. It happens when the psyche deteriorates, and the profound controlling instincts collapse. Then sex is dirt and dirt is sex, and sexual excitement becomes a playing with dirt, and any sign of sex in a woman becomes a show of her dirt. This is the condition of the common, vulgar human being whose name is legion, and who lifts his voice and it is the *Vox populi, vox Dei*. And this is the source of all pornography.

And for this reason we must admit that *Jane Eyre* or Wagner's *Tristan* are much nearer to pornography than is Boccaccio. Wagner and Charlotte Bronte were both in the state where the strongest instincts have collapsed, and sex has become something slightly obscene, to be wallowed in, but despised. Mr. Rochester's sex passion is not "respectable" till Mr. Rochester is burned, blinded, disfigured, and reduced to helpless dependence. Then, thoroughly humbled and humiliated, it may be merely admitted. All the previous titillations are slightly indecent, as in *Pamela* or *The Mill on the Floss* or *Anna Karenina*. As soon as there is sex excitement with a desire to spite the sexual feeling, to humiliate it and degrade it, the element of pornography enters.

For this reason, there is an element of pornography in nearly all nineteenth century literature and very many so-called pure people have a nasty pornographical side to them, and never was the pornographical appetite stronger than it is today. It is a sign of a diseased condition of the body politic. But the way to treat the disease is to come out into the open with sex and sex stimulus. The real pornographer truly dislikes Boccaccio, because the fresh healthy naturalness of the Italian story-teller makes the modern pornographical shrimp feel the dirty worm he is. Today Boccaccio should be given to everybody young or old, to read if they like. Only a natural fresh openness about sex will do any good, now we are being swamped by secret or semi-secret pornography. And perhaps the Renaissance story-tellers, Boccaccio, Lasca, and the rest, are the best antidote we can find now, just as more plasters of Puritanism are the most harmful remedy we can resort to.

The whole question of pornography seems to me a question of secrecy. Without secrecy there would be no pornography. But secrecy and modesty are two utterly different things. Secrecy has always an element of fear in it, amounting very often to hate. Modesty is gentle and reserved. Today, modesty is thrown to the winds, even in the presence of the grey guardians. But secrecy is hugged, being a vice in itself. And the attitude of the grey ones is: Dear young

ladies, you may abandon all modesty, so long as you hug your dirty little secret.

This “dirty little secret” has become infinitely precious to the mob of people today. It is a kind of hidden sore or inflammation which, when rubbed or scratched, gives off sharp thrills that seem delicious. So the dirty little secret is rubbed and scratched more and more, till it becomes more and more secretly inflamed, and the nervous and psychic health of the individual is more and more impaired. One might easily say that half the love novels and half the love films today depend entirely for their success on the secret rubbing of the dirty little secret. You can call this sex excitement if you like, but it is sex excitement of a secretive, furtive sort, quite special. The plain and simple excitement, quite open and wholesome, which you find in some Boccaccio stories is not for a minute to be confused with the furtive excitement aroused by rubbing the dirty little secret in all secrecy in modern best-sellers. This furtive, sneaking, cunning rubbing of an inflamed spot in the imagination is the very quick of modern pornography, and it is a beastly and very dangerous thing. You can't so easily expose it, because of its very furtiveness and its sneaking cunning. So the cheap and popular modern love novel and love film flourishes and is even praised by moral guardians, because you get the sneaking thrill fumbling under all the purity of dainty underclothes, without one single gross word to let you know what is happening.

Without secrecy there would be no pornography. But if pornography is the result of sneaking secrecy, what is the result of pornography? What is the effect on the individual?

The effect on the individual is manifold, and always pernicious. But one effect is perhaps inevitable. The pornography of today, whether it be the pornography of the rubber-goods shop or the pornography of the popular novel, film, and play, is an invariable stimulant to the vice of self-abuse, onanism, masturbation, call it what you will. In young or old, man or woman, boy or girl, modern pornography is a direct provocative of masturbation. It cannot be otherwise. When the grey ones wail that the young man and the young woman went and had sexual intercourse, they are bewailing the fact that the young man and the young woman didn't go separately and masturbate. Sex must go somewhere, especially in young people. So, in our glorious civilization, it goes in masturbation. And the mass of our popular literature, the bulk of our popular amusements just exists to provoke masturbation. Masturbation is the one thoroughly secret act of the human being, more secret even than excrementation. It is the one functional result of sex-secrecy, and it is stimulated and provoked by our glorious popular literature of pretty pornography, which rubs on the dirty secret without letting you know what is happening.

Now I have heard men, teachers and clergymen, commend masturbation as the solution of an otherwise insoluble sex problem. This at least is honest. The sex problem is there, and you can't just will it away. There it is, and under the ban of secrecy and taboo in mother and father, teacher, friend, and foe, it has found its own solution, the solution of masturbation.

But what about the solution? Do we accept it? Do all the grey ones of this world accept it? If so, they must now accept it openly.

We can none of us pretend any longer to be blind to the fact of masturbation, in young and old, man and woman. The moral guardians who are prepared to censor all open and plain portrayal of sex must now be made to give their only justification: We prefer that the people shall masturbate. If this preference is open and declared, then the existing forms of censorship are justified. If the moral guardians prefer that the people shall masturbate, then their present behaviour is correct, and popular amusements are as they should be. If sexual intercourse is deadly sin, and masturbation is comparatively pure and harmless, then all is well. Let things continue as they now are.

Is masturbation so harmless, though? Is it even comparatively pure and harmless? Not to my thinking. In the young, a certain amount of masturbation is inevitable, but not therefore natural. I think, there is no boy or girl who masturbates without feeling a sense of shame, anger, and futility. Following the excitement comes the shame, anger, humiliation, and the sense of futility. This sense of futility and humiliation deepens as the years go on, into a suppressed rage, because of the impossibility of escape. The one thing that it seems impossible to escape from, once the habit is formed, is masturbation. It goes on and on, on into old age, in spite of marriage or love affairs or anything else. And it always carries this secret feeling of futility and humiliation, futility and humiliation. And this is, perhaps, the deepest and most dangerous cancer of our civilization. Instead of being a comparatively pure and harmless vice, masturbation is certainly the most dangerous sexual vice that a society can be afflicted with, in the long run. Comparatively pure it may be — purity being what it is. But harmless! ! !

The great danger of masturbation lies in its merely exhaustive nature. In sexual intercourse, there is a give and take. A new stimulus enters as the native stimulus departs. Something quite new is added as the old surcharge is removed. And this is so in all sexual intercourse where two creatures are concerned, even in the homosexual intercourse. But in masturbation there is nothing but loss. There is no reciprocity. There is merely the spending away of a certain force, and no return. The body remains, in a sense, a corpse, after the act of self-abuse. There is no change, only deadening. There is what we call dead loss. And this is

not the case in any act of sexual intercourse between two people. Two people may destroy one another in sex. But they cannot just produce the null effect of masturbation.

The only positive effect of masturbation is that it seems to release a certain mental energy, in some people. But it is mental energy which manifests itself always in the same way, in a vicious circle of analysis and impotent criticism, or else a vicious circle of false and easy sympathy, sentimentalities. The sentimentalism and the niggling analysis, often self-analysis, of most of our modern literature, is a sign of self-abuse. It is the manifestation of masturbation, the sort of conscious activity stimulated by masturbation, whether male or female. The outstanding feature of such consciousness is that there is no real object, there is only subject. This is just the same whether it be a novel or a work of science. The author never escapes from himself, he pads along within the vicious circle of himself. There is hardly a writer living who gets out of the vicious circle of himself — or a painter either. Hence the lack of creation, and the stupendous amount of production. It is a masturbation result, within the vicious circle of the self. It is self-absorption made public.

And of course the process is exhaustive. The real masturbation of Englishmen began only in the nineteenth century. It has continued with an increasing emptying of the real vitality and the real *being* of men, till now people are little more than shells of people. Most of the responses are dead, most of the awareness is dead, nearly all the constructive activity is dead, and all that remains is a sort of shell, a half-empty creature fatally self-preoccupied and incapable of either giving or taking. Incapable either of giving or taking, in the vital self. And this is masturbation result. Enclosed within the vicious circle of the self, with no vital contacts outside, the self becomes emptier and emptier, till it is almost a nullus, a nothingness.

But null or nothing as it may be, it still hangs on to the dirty little secret, which it must still secretly rub and inflame. For ever the vicious circle. And it has a weird, blind will of its own.

One of my most sympathetic critics wrote: "If Mr. Lawrence's attitude to sex were adopted, then two things would disappear, the love lyric and the smoking-room story." And this, I think, is true. But it depends on which love lyric he means. If it is the: *Who is Sylvia, what is she?* — then it may just as well disappear. All that pure and noble and heaven-blessed stuff is only the counterpart to the smoking-room story. *Du bist wie eine Blume!* Jawohl! One can see the elderly gentleman laying his hands on the head of the pure maiden and praying God to keep her for ever so pure, so clean and beautiful. Very nice for him! Just pornography! Tickling the dirty little secret and rolling his eyes to

heaven! He knows perfectly well that if God keeps the maiden so clean and pure and beautiful — in his vulgar sense of clean and pure — for a few more years, then she'll be an unhappy old maid, and not pure nor beautiful at all, only stale and pathetic. Sentimentality is a sure sign of pornography. Why should “sadness strike through the heart” of the old gentleman, because the maid was pure and beautiful? Anybody but a masturbator would have been glad and would have thought: What a lovely bride for some lucky man! — But no, not the self-enclosed, pornographic masturbator. Sadness has to strike into his beastly heart! — Away with such love lyrics, we've had too much of their pornographic poison, tickling the dirty little secret and rolling the eyes to heaven.

But if it is a question of the sound love lyric, *My love is like a red, red rose* — .’ then we are on other ground. My love is like a red, red rose only when she's *not* like a pure, pure lily. And nowadays the pure, pure lilies are mostly festering, anyhow. Away with them and their lyrics. Away with the pure, pure lily lyric, along with the smoking-room story. They are counterparts, and the one is as pornographic as the other. *Du bist wie eine Blume* is really as pornographic as a dirty story: tickling the dirty little secret and rolling the eyes to heaven. But oh, if only Robert Burns had been accepted for what he is, then love might still have been like a red, red rose.

The vicious circle, the vicious circle! The vicious circle of masturbation! The vicious circle of self-consciousness that is never *fully* self-conscious, never fully and openly conscious, but always harping on the dirty little secret. The vicious circle of secrecy, in parents, teachers, friends — everybody. The specially vicious circle of family. The vast conspiracy of secrecy in the press, and at the same time, the endless tickling of the dirty little secret. The needless masturbation! and the endless purity! The vicious circle!

How to get out of it? There is only one way: Away with the secret! No more secrecy! The only way to stop the terrible mental itch about sex is to come out quite simply and naturally into the open with it. It is terribly difficult, for the secret is cunning as a crab. Yet the thing to do is to make a beginning. The man who said to his exasperating daughter: “My child, the only pleasure I ever had out of you was the pleasure I had in begetting you” has already done a great deal to release both himself and her from the dirty little secret.

How to get out of the dirty little secret! It is, as a matter of fact, extremely difficult for us secretive moderns. You can't do it by being wise and scientific about it, like Dr. Marie Stopes: though to be wise and scientific like Dr. Marie Stopes is better than to be utterly hypocritical, like the grey ones. But by being wise and scientific in the serious and earnest manner you only tend to disinfect the dirty little secret, and either kill sex altogether with too much seriousness and

intellect, or else leave it a miserable disinfected secret. The unhappy “free and pure” love of so many people who have taken out the dirty little secret and thoroughly disinfected it with scientific words is apt to be more pathetic even than the common run of dirty-little-secret love. The danger is, that in killing the dirty little secret, you kill dynamic sex altogether, and leave only the scientific and deliberate mechanism.

This is what happens to many of those who become seriously “free” in their sex, free and pure. They have mentalized sex till it is nothing at all, nothing at all but a mental quantity. And the final result is disaster, every time.

The same is true, in an even greater proportion, of the emancipated bohemians: and very many of the young are bohemian today, whether they ever set foot in Bohemia or not. But the bohemian is “sex free.” The dirty little secret is no secret either to him or her. It is, indeed, a most blatantly open question. There is nothing they don’t say: everything that can be revealed is revealed. And they do as they wish.

And then what? They have apparently killed the dirty little secret, but somehow, they have killed everything else too. Some of the dirt still sticks, perhaps; sex remains still dirty. But the thrill of secrecy is gone. Hence the terrible dreariness and depression of modern Bohemia, and the inward dreariness and emptiness of so many young people of today. They have killed, they imagine, the dirty little secret. The thrill of secrecy is gone. Some of the dirt remains. And for the rest, depression, inertia, lack of life. For sex is the fountain-head of our energetic life, and now the fountain ceases to flow.

Why? For two reasons. The idealists along the Marie Stopes line, and the young bohemians of today have killed the dirty little secret as far as their personal self goes. But they are still under its dominion socially. In the social world, in the press, in literature, film, theatre, wireless, everywhere purity and the dirty little secret reign supreme. At home, at the dinner table, it is just the same. It is the same wherever you go. The young girl, and the young woman is by tacit assumption pure, virgin, sexless. *Du bist wie eine Blume*. She, poor thing, knows quite well that flowers, even lilies, have tippling yellow anthers and a sticky stigma, sex, rolling sex. But to the popular mind flowers are sexless things, and when a girl is told she is like a flower, it means she is sexless and ought to be sexless. She herself knows quite well she isn’t sexless and she isn’t merely like a flower. But how bear up against the great social life forced on her? She can’t! She succumbs, and the dirty little secret triumphs. She loses her interest in sex, as far as men are concerned, but the vicious circle of masturbation and self-consciousness encloses her even still faster.

This is one of the disasters of young life today. Personally, and among

themselves, a great many, perhaps a majority of the young people of today have come out into the open with sex and laid salt on the tail of the dirty little secret. And this is a very good thing. But in public, in the social world, the young are still entirely under the shadow of the grey elderly ones. The grey elderly ones belong to the last century, the eunuch century, the century of the mealy-mouthed lie, the century that has tried to destroy humanity, the nineteenth century. All our grey ones are left over from this century. And they rule us. They rule us with the grey, mealy-mouthed, canting lie of that great century of lies which, thank God, we are drifting away from. But they rule us still with the lie, for the lie, in the name of the lie. And they are too heavy and too numerous, the grey ones. It doesn't matter what government it is. They are all grey ones, left over from the last century, the century of mealy-mouthed liars, the century of purity and the dirty little secret.

So there is one cause for the depression of the young: the public reign of the mealy-mouthed lie, purity and the dirty little secret, which they themselves have privately overthrown. Having killed a good deal of the lie in their own private lives, the young are still enclosed and imprisoned within the great public lie of the grey ones. Hence the excess, the extravagance, the hysteria, and then the weakness, the feebleness, the pathetic silliness of the modern youth. They are all in a sort of prison, the prison of a great lie and a society of elderly liars. And this is one of the reasons, perhaps the main reason why the sex-flow is dying out of the young, the real energy is dying away. They are enclosed within a lie, and the sex won't flow. For the length of a complete lie is never more than three generations, and the young are the fourth generation of the nineteenth century lie.

The second reason why the sex-flow is dying is of course, that the young, in spite of their emancipation, are still enclosed within the vicious circle of self-conscious masturbation. They are thrown back into it, when they try to escape, by the enclosure of the vast public lie of purity and the dirty little secret. The most emancipated bohemians, who swank most about sex, are still utterly self-conscious and enclosed within the narcissus-masturbation circle. They have perhaps less sex even than the grey ones. The whole thing has been driven up into their heads. There isn't even the lurking hole of a dirty little secret. Their sex is more mental than their arithmetic; and as vital physical creatures they are more non-existent than ghosts. The modern bohemian is indeed a kind of ghost, not even narcissus, only the image of narcissus reflected on the face of the audience. The dirty little secret is most difficult to kill. You may put it to death publicly a thousand times, and still it reappears, like a crab, stealthily from under the submerged rocks of the personality. The French, who are supposed to be so

open about sex, will perhaps be the last to kill the dirty little secret. Perhaps they don't want to. Anyhow, mere publicity won't do it.

You may parade sex abroad, but you will not kill the dirty little secret. You may read all the novels of Marcel Proust, with everything there in all detail. Yet you will not kill the dirty little secret. You will perhaps only make it more cunning. You may even bring about a state of utter indifference and sex-inertia, still without killing the dirty little secret. Or you may be the most wispy and enamoured little Don Juan of modern days, and still the core of your spirit merely be the dirty little secret. That is to say, you will still be in the narcissus-masturbation circle, the vicious circle of self-enclosure. For whenever the dirty little secret exists, it exists as the centre of the vicious circle of masturbation self-enclosure. And whenever you have the vicious circle of masturbation self-enclosure, you have at the core the dirty little secret. And the most high-flown sex-emancipated young people today are perhaps the most fatally and nervously enclosed within the masturbation self-enclosure. Nor do they want to get out of it, for there would be nothing left to come out.

But some people surely do want to come out of the awful self-enclosure. Today, practically everybody is self-conscious and imprisoned in self-consciousness. It is the joyful result of the dirty little secret. Vast numbers of people don't want to come out of the prison of their self-consciousness: they have so little left to come out with. But some people, surely, want to escape this doom of self-enclosure which is the doom of our civilization. There is surely a proud minority that wants once and for all to be free of the dirty little secret.

And the way to do it is, first, to fight the sentimental lie of purity and the dirty little secret wherever you meet it, inside yourself or in the world outside. Fight the great lie of the nineteenth century, which has soaked through our sex and our bones. It means fighting with almost every breath, for the lie is ubiquitous.

Then secondly, in his adventure of self-consciousness a man must come to the limits of himself and become aware of something beyond him. A man must be self-conscious enough to know his own limits, and to be aware of that which surpasses him. What sur passes me is the very urge of life that is within me, and this life urges me to forget myself and to yield to the stirring half-born impulse to smash up the vast lie of the world, and make a new world. If my life is merely to go on in a vicious circle of self-enclosure, masturbating self-consciousness, it is worth nothing to me. If my individual life is to be enclosed within the huge corrupt lie of society today, purity and the dirty little secret, then it is worth not much to me. Freedom is a very great reality. But it means, above all things, freedom from lies. It is first, freedom from myself, from the lie of myself, from the lie of my all-importance, even to myself; it is freedom from the self-

conscious masturbating thing I am, self-enclosed. And second, freedom from the vast lie of the social world, the lie of purity and the dirty little secret. All the other monstrous lies lurk under the cloak of this one primary lie. The monstrous lie of money lurks under the cloak of purity. Kill the purity-lie, and the money-lie will be defenceless.

We have to be sufficiently conscious, and self-conscious, to know our own limits and to be aware of the greater urge within us and beyond us. Then we cease to be primarily interested in ourselves. Then we learn to leave ourselves alone, in all the affective centres: not to force our feelings in any way, and never to force our sex. Then we make the great onslaught on to the outside lie, the inside lie being settled. And that is freedom and the fight for freedom.

The greatest of all lies in the modern world is the lie of purity and the dirty little secret. The grey ones left over from the nineteenth century are the embodiment of this lie. They dominate in society, in the press, in literature, everywhere. And, naturally, they lead the vast mob of the general public along with them.

Which means, of course, perpetual censorship of anything that would militate against the lie of purity and the dirty little secret, and perpetual encouragement of what may be called permissible pornography, pure, but tickling the dirty little secret under the delicate underclothing. The grey ones will pass and will commend floods of evasive pornography, and will suppress every outspoken word.

The law is a mere figment. In his article on the “Censorship of Books,” in the *Nineteenth Century*, Viscount Brentford, the late Home Secretary, says: “Let it be remembered that the publishing of an obscene book, the issue of an obscene post-card or pornographic photograph — are all offences against the law of the land, and the Secretary of State who is the general authority for the maintenance of law and order most clearly and definitely cannot discriminate between one offence and another in discharge of his duty.”

So he winds up, *ex cathedra* and infallible. But only ten lines above he has written: “I agree, that if the law were pushed to its logical conclusion, the printing and publication of such books as *The Decameron*, Benvenuto Cellini’s *Life*, and Burton’s *Arabian Nights* might form the subject of proceedings. But the ultimate sanction of all law is public opinion, and I do not believe for one moment that prosecution in respect of books that have been in circulation for many centuries would command public support.”

Ooray then for public opinion! It only needs that a few more years shall roll. But now we see that the Secretary of State most clearly and definitely *does* discriminate between one offence and another in discharge of his duty. Simple

and admitted discrimination on his part! Yet what is this public opinion? Just more lies on the part of the grey ones. They would suppress Benvenuto tomorrow, if they dared. But they would make laughing-stocks of themselves, because *tradition* backs up Benvenuto. It isn't public opinion at all. It is the grey ones afraid of making still bigger fools of themselves. But the case is simple. If the grey ones are going to be backed by a general public, then every new book that would smash the mealy-mouthed lie of the nineteenth century will be suppressed as it appears. Yet let the grey ones beware. The general public is nowadays a very unstable affair, and no longer loves its grey ones so dearly, with their old lie. And there is another public, the small public of the minority, which hates the lie and the grey ones that perpetuate the lie, and which has its own dynamic ideas about pornography and obscenity. You can't fool all the people all the time, even with purity and a dirty little secret.

And this minority public knows well that the books of many contemporary writers, both big and lesser fry, are far more pornographical than the liveliest story in *The Decameron*: because they tickle the dirty little secret and excite to private masturbation, which the wholesome Boccaccio never does. And the minority public knows full well that the most obscene painting on a Greek vase — *Thou still unravished bride of quietness* — is not as pornographical as the close-up kisses on the film, which excite men and women to secret and separate masturbation.

And perhaps one day even the general public will desire to look the thing in the face, and see for itself the difference between the sneaking masturbation pornography of the press, the film, and present-day popular literature, and then the creative portrayals of the sexual impulse that we have in Boccaccio or the Greek vase-paintings or some Pompeian art, and which are necessary for the fulfilment of our consciousness.

As it is, the public mind is today bewildered on this point, bewildered almost to idiocy. When the police raided my picture show, they did not in the least know what to take. So they took every picture where the smallest bit of the sex organ of either man or woman showed. Quite regardless of subject or meaning or anything else: they would allow anything, these dainty policemen in a picture show, except the actual sight of a fragment of the human *pudenda*. This was the police test. The dabbing on of a postage stamp—especially a green one that could be called a leaf — would in most cases have been quite sufficient to satisfy this “public opinion.”

It is, we can only repeat, a condition of idiocy. And if the purity-with-a-dirty-little-secret lie is kept up much longer, the mass of society will really be an idiot, and a dangerous idiot at that. For the public is made up of individuals. And each

individual has sex, and is pivoted on sex. And if, with purity and dirty little secrets, you drive every individual into the masturbation self-enclosure, and keep him there, then you will produce a state of general idiocy. For the masturbation self-enclosure produces idiots. Perhaps if we are all idiots, we shan't know it. But God preserve us.

WE NEED ONE ANOTHER

We may as well admit it: men and women need one another. We may as well, after all our kicking against the pricks, our revolting and our sulking, give in and be graceful about it. We are all individualists: we are all egoists: we all believe intensely in freedom, our own at all events. We all want to be absolute, and sufficient unto ourselves. And it is a great blow to our self-esteem that we simply *need* another human being. We don't mind airily picking and choosing among women — or among men, if we are a woman. But to have to come down to the nasty, sharp-pointed brass tacks of admitting: My God, I can't live without that obstreperous woman of mine! — this is terribly humiliating to our isolated conceit.

And when I say: “without that woman of mine” I do not mean a mistress, the sexual relation in the French sense. I mean the woman, my relationship to the woman herself. There is hardly a man living who can exist at all cheerfully without a relationship to some particular woman: unless, of course, he makes another man play the role of woman. And the same of woman. There is hardly a woman on earth who can live cheerfully without some intimate relationship to a man; unless she substitutes some other woman for the man.

So there it is. Now for three thousand years men, and women, have been struggling against this fact. In Buddhism, particularly, a man could never possibly attain the supreme Nirvana if he so much as saw a woman out of the corner of his eye. “Alone I did it!” is the proud assertion of the gentleman who attains Nirvana. And “Alone I did it!” says the Christian whose soul is saved. They are the religions of overweening individualism, resulting, of course, in our disastrous modern egoism of the individual. Marriage, which on earth is a sacrament, is dissolved by the decree absolute of death. In heaven there is no giving and taking in marriage. The soul in heaven is supremely individual, absolved from every relationship except that with the Most High. In heaven there is neither marriage nor love, nor friendship nor fatherhood nor motherhood, nor sister nor brother nor cousin: there is just me, in my perfected isolation, placed in perfect relation to the Supreme, the Most High.

When we talk of heaven we talk, really, of that which we would most like to attain, and most like to be here on earth. The condition of heaven is the condition to be longed for, striven for, now.

Now, if I say to a woman, or to a man: “Would you like to be purely free of all

human relationships, free from father and mother, brother and sister, husband, lover, friend, or child? free from all these human entanglements, and reduced purely to your own pure self, connected only with the Supreme Power, the Most High?" Then what would the answer be? What is the answer, I ask you? What is your own sincere answer?

I expect, in almost all cases, it is an emphatic "yes." In the past, most men would have said "yes," and most women "no." But today, I think, many men might hesitate, and nearly all women would unhesitatingly say "yes."

Modern men, however, have so nearly achieved this Nirvana-like condition of having no real human relationships at all, that they are beginning to wonder what and where they are. What are you, when you've asserted your grand independence, broken all the ties, or "bonds," and reduced yourself to a "pure" individuality? What are you?

You may imagine you are something very grand, since few individuals even approximate to this independence without falling into deadly egoism and conceit: and emptiness. The real danger is, reduced to your own single merits and cut off from the most vital human contacts, the danger is that you are left just simply next to nothing. Reduce any individual, man or woman, to his elements, or her elements, and what is he? what is she? Extremely little! Take Napoleon, and stick him alone on a miserable island, and what is he? — a peevish, puerile little fellow. Put Mary Stuart in a nasty stone castle of a prison, and she becomes merely a catty little person. Now Napoleon was not a peevish, puerile little fellow, even if he became such when isolated on St. Helena. And Mary Queen of Scots was only a catty little person when she was isolated in Fotheringay or some such hole. This grand isolation, this reducing of ourselves to our very elemental selves, is the greatest fraud of all. It is like plucking the peacock naked of all his feathers to try to get at the real bird. When you've plucked the peacock bare, what have you got? Not the peacock, but the naked corpse of a bird.

And so it is with us and our grand individualism. Reduce any of us to the *mere* individual that we are, and what do we become? Napoleon becomes a peevish, puerile little fellow, Mary Queen of Scots becomes a catty little person, St. Simeon Stylites, stuck up on his pillar, becomes a conceited lunatic, and we, wonderful creatures as we are, become trashy, conceited little modern egoists. The world today is full of silly, impertinent egoists who have broken all the finer human ties, and base their claims to superiority on their own emptiness and nullity. But the empty ones are being found out. Emptiness, which makes a fair noise, deceives for a short time only.

The fact remains that when you cut off a man and isolate him in his own pure

and wonderful individuality, you haven't got the man at all, you've only got the dreary fag-end of him. Isolate Napoleon, and he is nothing. Isolate Immanuel Kant, and his grand ideas will still go on tick-tick-ticking inside his head, but unless he could write them down and communicate them, they might as well be the ticking of the death-watch beetle. Take even Buddha himself, if he'd been whisked off to some lonely place and planted cross-legged under a bho-tree and nobody had ever seen him or heard any of his Nirvana talk, then I doubt he would have got much fun out of Nirvana, and he'd have been just a crank. In absolute isolation, I doubt if any individual amounts to much; or if any soul is worth saving, or even having. "And I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me." But if there were no other men to be lifted, the whole show would be a fiasco.

So that everything, even individuality itself, depends on relationship. "God cannot do without me," said an eighteenth-century Frenchman. What he meant was, that if there were no human beings, if Man did not exist, then God, the God of Man, would have no meaning. And it is true. If there were no men and women, Jesus would be meaningless. In the same way, Napoleon on St. Helena became meaningless, and the French nation lost a great part of its meaning without him in connexion with his army and the nation; a great power streamed out of Napoleon, and from the French people there streamed back to him a great responsive power, and therein lay his greatness and theirs. That is, in the relationship. The light shines only when the circuit is completed. The light does not shine with one half of the current. Every light is some sort of completed circuit. And so is every life, if it is going to be a life.

We have our very individuality in relationship. Let us swallow this important and prickly fact. Apart from our connexions with other people, we are barely individuals, we amount, all of us, to next to nothing. It is in the living touch between us and other people, other lives, other phenomena that we move and have our being. Strip us of our human contacts and of our contact with the living earth and the sun, and we are almost bladders of emptiness.

Our individuality means nothing. A skylark that was alone on an island would be songless and meaningless, his individuality gone, running about like a mouse in the grass. But if there were one female with him, it would lift him singing into the air, and restore him his real individuality.

And so with men and women. It is in relationship to one another that they have their true individuality and their distinct being: in contact, not out of contact. This is sex, if you like. But it is no more sex than sunshine on the grass is sex. It is a living contact, give and take: the great and subtle relationship of men and women, man and woman. In this and through this we become real

individuals, without it, without the real contact, we remain more or less nonentities.

But, of course, it is necessary to have the contact alive and unfixed. It is not a question of: Marry the woman and have done with it — that is only one of the stupid recipes for avoiding contact and killing contact. There are many popular dodges for killing every possibility of true contact: like sticking a woman on a pedestal, or the reverse, sticking her beneath notice; or making a “model” housewife of her, or a “model” mother, or a “model” help-meet. All mere devices for avoiding any contact with her. A woman is not a “model” anything. She is not even a distinct and definite personality. It is time we got rid of these fixed notions. A woman is a living fountain whose spray falls delicately around her, on all that come near. A woman is a strange soft vibration on the air, going forth unknown and unconscious, and seeking a vibration of response. Or else she is a discordant, jarring, painful vibration, going forth and hurting everyone within range. And a man the same. A man, as he lives and moves and has being, is a fountain of life-vibration, quivering and flowing towards someone, something that will receive his outflow and send back an inflow, so that a circuit is completed, and there is a sort of peace. Or else he is a source of irritation, discord, and pain, harming everyone near him.

But while we remain healthy and positive, we seek all the time to come into true human relationship with other human beings. Yet it has to happen, the relationship, almost unconsciously. We can't *deliberately* do much with a human connexion, except smash it: and that is usually not difficult. On the positive side we can only, most carefully let it take place, without interfering or forcing.

We are labouring under a false conception of ourselves. For centuries, man has been the conquering hero, and woman has been merely the string to his bow, part of his accoutrement. Then woman was allowed to have a soul of her own, a separate soul. So the separating business started, with all the clamour of freedom and independence. Now the freedom and independence have been rather overdone, they lead to an empty nowhere, the rubbish-heap of all our dead feelings and waste illusions.

The conquering hero business is as obsolete as Marshal Hinden-burg, and about as effective. The world sees attempts at revival of this stunt, but they are usually silly, in the end. Man is no longer a conquering hero. Neither is he a supreme soul isolated and alone in the universe, facing the unknown in the eternity of death. That stunt is also played out, though the pathetic boys of today keep on insisting on it, especially the pathetic boys who wrap themselves in the egoistic pathos of their sufferings during the late war.

But both stunts are played out, both the conquering hero and the pathetic hero

clothed in suffering and facing Eternity in the soul's last isolation. The second stunt is, of course, more popular today, and still dangerous to the self-pitying, played-out specimens of the younger generation. But for all that, it is a dead stunt, finished.

What a man has to do today is to admit, at last, that all these fixed ideas are no good. As a fixed object, even as an individuality or a personality, no human being, man or woman, amounts to much. The great I AM does not apply to human beings, so they may as well leave it alone. As soon as anybody, man or woman, becomes a great I AM, he becomes nothing. Man or woman, each is a flow, a flowing life. And without one another, we can't flow, just as a river cannot flow without banks. A woman is one bank of the river of my life, and the world is the other. Without the two shores, my life would be a marsh. It is the relationship to woman, and to my fellow-men, which makes me myself a river of life.

And it is this, even, that gives me my soul. A man who has never had a vital relationship to any other human being doesn't really have a soul. We cannot feel that Immanuel Kant ever had a soul. A soul is something that forms and fulfils itself in my contacts, my living touch with people I have loved or hated or truly known. I am born with the clue to my soul. The wholeness of my soul I must achieve. And by my soul I mean my wholeness. What we suffer from today is the lack of a sense of our own wholeness, or completeness, which is peace. What we lack, what the young lack, is a sense of being whole in themselves. They feel so scrappy, they have no peace.

And by peace I don't mean inertia, but the full flowing of life, like a river.

We lack peace because we are not whole. And we are not whole because we have known only a tithe of the vital relationships we might have had. We live in an age which believes in stripping away the relationships. Strip them away, like an onion, till you come to pure, or blank nothingness. Emptiness. That is where most men have come now: to a knowledge of their own complete emptiness. They wanted so badly to be "themselves" that they became nothing at all: or next to nothing.

It is not much fun, being next to nothing. And life ought to be fun, the greatest fun. Not merely "having a good time," in order to "get away from yourself." But real fun in being yourself. Now there are two great relationships possible to human beings: the relationship of man to woman, and the relationship of man to man. As regards both, we are in a hopeless mess.

But the relationship of man to woman is the central fact in actual human life. Next comes the relationship of man to man. And, a long way after, all the other relationships, fatherhood, motherhood, sister, brother, friend.

A young man said to me the other day, rather sneeringly, "I'm afraid I can't believe in the regeneration of England by sex." I said to him: "I'm sure you can't." He was trying to inform me that he was above such trash as sex, and such commonplace as women. He was the usual vitally below par, hollow, and egoistic young man, infinitely wrapped up in himself, like a sort of mummy that will crumble if unwrapped.

And what is sex, after all, but the symbol of the relation of man to woman, woman to man? And the relation of man to woman is wide as all life. It consists in infinite different flows between the two beings, different, even apparently contrary. Chastity is part of the flow-between man and woman, as to physical passion. And beyond these, an infinite range of subtle communication which we know nothing about. I should say that the relation between any two decently married people changes profoundly every few years, often without their knowing anything about it; though every change causes pain, even if it brings a certain joy. The long course of marriage is a long event of perpetual change, in which a man and a woman mutually build up their souls and make themselves whole. It is like rivers flowing on. through new country, always unknown.

But we are so foolish, and fixed by our limited ideas. A man says: "I don't love my wife any more, I no longer want to sleep with her." But why should he always want to sleep with her? How does he know what other subtle and vital interchange is going on between him and her, making them both whole, in this period when he doesn't want to sleep with her? And she, instead of jibbing and saying that all is over and she must find another man and get a divorce — why doesn't she pause, and listen for a new rhythm in her soul, and look for the new movement in the man? With every change, a new being emerges, a new rhythm establishes itself; we renew our life as we grow older, and there is real peace. Why, oh, why do we want one another to be always the same, fixed, like a menu-card that is never changed?

If only we had more sense. But we are held by a few fixed ideas, like sex, money, what a person "ought" to be, and so forth, and we miss the whole of life. Sex is a changing thing, now alive, now quiescent, now fiery, now apparently quite gone, quite gone. But the ordinary man and woman haven't the gumption to take it in all its changes. They demand crass, crude sex-desire, they demand it always, and when it isn't forthcoming, then — smash-bash! smash up the whole show. Divorce! Divorce!

I am so tired of being told that I want mankind to go back to the condition of savages. As if modern city people weren't about the crudest, rawest, most crassly savage monkeys that ever existed, when it comes to the relation of man and woman. All I see in our vaunted civilization is men and women smashing

each other emotionally and psychically to bits, and all I ask is that they should pause and consider.

For sex, to me, means the whole of the relationship between man and woman. Now this relationship is far greater than we know. We only know a few crude forms — mistress, wife, mother, sweetheart. The woman is like an idol, or a marionette, always forced to play one role or another: sweetheart, mistress, wife, mother. If only we could break up this fixity, and realize the unseizable quality of real woman: that a woman is a flow, a river of life, quite different from a man's river of life: and that each river must flow in its own way, though without breaking its bounds: and that the relation of man to woman is the flowing of two rivers side by side, sometimes even mingling, then separating again, and travelling on. The relationship is a life-long change and a life-long travelling. And that is sex. At periods, sex-desire itself departs completely. Yet the great flow of the relationship goes on all the same, undying, and this is the flow of living sex, the relation between man and woman, that lasts a lifetime, and of which sex-desire is only one vivid, most vivid, manifestation.

THE REAL THING

Most revolutions are explosions: and most explosions blow up a great deal more than was intended. It is obvious, from later history, that the French didn't really want to blow up the whole monarchic and aristocratic system, in the 1790's. Yet they did it, and try as they might, they could never really put anything together again. The same with the Russians: they want to blow a gateway in a wall, and they blow the whole house down.

All fights for freedom, that succeed, go too far, and become in turn the infliction of a tyranny. Like Napoleon or a soviet. And like the freedom of women. Perhaps the greatest revolution of modern times is the emancipation of women; and perhaps the deepest fight for two thousand years and more has been the fight for woman's independence, or freedom, call it what you will. The fight was deeply bitter, and, it seems to me, it is won. It is even going beyond, and becoming a tyranny of woman, of the individual woman in the house, and of the feminine ideas and ideals in the world. Say what we will, the world is swayed by feminine emotion today, and the triumph of the productive and domestic activities of man over all his previous military or adventurous or flaunting activities is a triumph of the woman in the home.

The male is subservient to the female need, and outwardly, man is submissive to the demands of woman.

But inwardly, what has happened? It cannot be denied that there has been a fight. Woman has not won her freedom without fighting for it; and she still fights, fights hard, even when there is no longer any need. For man has fallen. It would be difficult to point to a man in the world today who is not subservient to the great woman-spirit that sways modern mankind. But still not peacefully. Still the sway of a struggle, the sway of conflict.

Woman in the mass has fought her fight politically. But woman the individual has fought her fight with individual man, with father, brother, and particularly with husband. All through the past, except for brief periods of revolt, woman has played a part of submission to man. Perhaps the inevitable nature of man and woman demands such submission. But it must be an instinctive, unconscious submission, made in unconscious faith. At certain periods this blind faith of woman in man seems to weaken, then break. It always happens at the end of some great phase, before another phase sets in. It always seems to start, in man, an overwhelming worship of woman, and a glorification of queens. It always

seems to bring a brief spell of glory, and a long spell of misery after. Man yields in glorifying the woman, the glory dies, the fight goes on.

It is not necessarily a sex struggle. The sexes are not by nature pitted against one another in hostility. It only happens so, in certain periods: when man loses his unconscious faith in himself, and woman loses her faith in him, unconsciously and then consciously. It is not biological sex struggle. Not at all. Sex is the great uniter, the great unifier. Only in periods of the collapse of instinctive life-assurance in men does sex become a great weapon and divider.

Man loses his faith in himself, and woman begins to fight him. Cleopatra really fought Antony — that's why he killed himself. But he had first lost faith in himself, and leaned on love, which is a sure sign of weakness and failure. And when woman once begins to fight her man, she fights and fights, as if for freedom. But it is not even freedom she wants. Freedom is a man's word: its meaning, to a woman, is really rather trivial. She fights to escape from a man who doesn't really believe in himself; she fights and fights, and there is no freedom from the fight. Woman is truly less free today than ever she has been since time began, in the womanly sense of freedom. Which means, she has less peace, less of that lovely womanly peace that flows like a river, less of the lovely, flower-like repose of a happy woman, less of the nameless joy in life, purely unconscious, which is the very breath of a woman's being, than ever she has had since she and man first set eyes on one another.

Today, woman is always tense and strung-up, alert, and bare-armed, not for love but for battle. In her shred of a dress and her little helmet of a hat, her cropped hair and her stark bearing she is a sort of soldier, and look at her as one may, one can see nothing else. It is not her fault. It is her doom. It happens when man loses his primary faith in himself and in his very life.

Now through the ages thousands of ties have been formed between men and women. In the ages of discredit, these ties are felt as bonds, and must be fought loose. It is a great tearing and snapping of sympathies, and of unconscious sympathetic connexions. It is a great rupture of unconscious tenderness and unconscious flow of strength between man and woman. Man and woman are not two separate and complete entities. In spite of all protestation, we must continue to assert it. Man and woman are not even two separate persons: not even two separate consciousnesses, or minds. In spite of vehement cries to the contrary, it is so. Man is connected with woman for ever, in connexions visible and invisible, in a complicated life-flow that can never be analysed. It is not only man and wife: the woman facing me in the train, the girl I buy cigarettes from, all send forth to me a stream, a spray, a vapour of female life that enters my blood and my soul, and makes me me. And back again, I send the stream of

male life which soothes and satisfies and builds up the woman. So it still is, very often, in public contacts. The more general stream of life-flow between men and women is not so much broken and reversed as the private flow. Hence we all tend more and more to live in public. In public men and women are still kind to another, very often.

But in private, the fight goes on. It had started in our great-grandmothers; it was going strong in our grandmothers; and in our mothers it was the dominant factor in life. The women *thought* it was a fight for righteousness. They *thought* they were fighting the man to make him “better,” and to make life “better” for the children.

We know now this ethical excuse was only an excuse. We know now that our fathers were fought and beaten by our mothers, not because our mothers really knew what was “better,” but because our fathers had lost their instinctive hold on the life-flow and the life-reality, that therefore the female had to fight them at any cost, blind, and doomed. We saw it going on as tiny children, the battle. We believed the moral excuse. But we lived to be men, and to be fought in turn. And now we know there is no excuse, moral or immoral. It is just phenomenal. And our mothers, who asserted such a belief in “goodness,” were tired of that self-same goodness even before their death.

No, the fight was, and is, for itself, and it is pitiless — except in spasms and pauses. A woman does not fight a man for his love-though she may say so a thousand times over. She fights him because she knows, instinctively, he *cannot* love. He has lost his peculiar belief in himself, his instinctive faith in his own life-flow, and so he cannot love. He *cannot*. The more he protests, the more he asserts, the more he kneels, the more he worships, the less he loves. A woman who is worshipped, or even adored, knows perfectly well, in her instinctive depths, that she is not loved, that she is being swindled. She encourages the swindle, oh enormously, it flatters her vanity. But in the end comes Nemesis and the Furies, pursuing the unfortunate pair. Love between man and woman is neither worship nor adoration, but something much deeper, much less showy and gaudy, part of the very breath, and as ordinary, if we may say so, as breathing. Almost as necessary. In fact, love between man and woman is really just a kind of breathing.

No woman ever got a man’s love by fighting for it: at least, by fighting *him*. No man ever loved a woman until she left off fighting him. And when will she leave off fighting him? When he has, apparently, submitted to her (for the submission is always, at least partly, false and a fraud)? No, then least of all. When a man has submitted to a woman, she usually fights him worse than ever, more ruthlessly. Why doesn’t she leave him? Often she does. But what then?

She merely takes up with another man in order to resume the fight. The need to fight with man is upon her, inexorable.

Why can't she live alone? She can't. Sometimes she can join with other women, and keep up the fight in a group. Sometimes she *must* live alone, for no man will come forward to fight with her. Yet, sooner or later, the need for contact with a man comes over a woman again. It is imperative. If she is rich, she hires a dancing partner, a gigolo, and humiliates him to the last dregs. The fight is not ended. When the great Hector is dead, it is not enough. He must be trailed naked and defiled; tied by the heels to the tail of a contemptuous chariot.

When is the fight over? Ah when Modern life seems to give no answer. Perhaps when a man finds his strength and his rooted belief in himself again. Perhaps when the man has died, and been painfully born again with a different breath, a different courage, and a different kind of care, or carelessness. But most men can't and daren't die in their old, fearful selves. They cling to their women in desperation, and come to hate them with cold and merciless hate, the hate of a child that is persistently ill-treated. Then when the hate dies, the man escapes into the final state of egoism, when he has no true feelings any more, and cannot be made to suffer.

That is where the young are now. The fight is more or less fizzling out, because both parties have become hollow. There is a perfect cynicism. The young men know that most of the "benevolence" and "motherly love" of their adoring mothers was simply egoism again, and an extension of self, and a love of having absolute power over another creature. Oh, these women who secretly lust to have absolute power over their own children — for their own good! Do they think the children are deceived? Not for a moment! You can read in the eyes of the small modern child: "My mother is trying to bully me with every breath she draws, but though I am only six, I can really resist her." It is the fight, the fight. It has degenerated into the mere fight to impose the will over some other creature, mostly now, mother over her children. She fails again, abjectly. But she goes on.

For the great fight with the man has come almost to an end. Why? Is it because man has found a new strength, has died the death in his old body and been born with a new strength and a new sureness? Alas, apparently not so at all. Man has dodged, sidetracked. Tortured and cynical and unbelieving, he has let all his feelings go out of him, and remains a shell of a man, very nice, very pleasant, in fact the best of modern men. Because nothing really moves him except one thing, a threat against his own safety. He is terrified of not feeling "safe." So he keeps his woman there between him and the world of dangerous feelings and demands.

But he feels nothing. It is the great *counterfeit* liberation, this counterfeit of Nirvana and the peace that passeth all understanding. It is a sort of Nirvana, and a sort of peace: in sheer nullity. At first, the woman cannot realize it. She rages, she goes mad. Woman after woman you can see smashing herself against the figure of a man who has achieved the state of false peace, false strength, false power: the egoist. The egoist, he who has no more spontaneous feelings, and can be made to suffer humanly no more. He who derives all his life henceforth at second-hand, and is animated by self-will and some sort of secret ambition to *impose* himself, either on the world or another individual. See a man or a woman trying to impose herself, himself, and you have an egoist in natural action. But the true *pose* of the modern egoist is that of perfect suaveness and kindness and humility: oh, always delicately humble!

When a man achieves this triumph of egoism: and many men have achieved it today, practically all the successful ones, certainly all the charming ones, and all the “artistic” ones: then the woman concerned is apt to go really a little mad. She gets no more responses. The fight has suddenly given out. She throws herself against a man, and he is not there, only the sort of glassy image of him receives her shocks and feels nothing. She becomes wild, outrageous. The explanation of the impossible behaviour of some women in their thirties lies here. Suddenly nothing comes back at them in the fight, and they go crazy, demented, as if they were on the brink of a fearful abyss. Which they are.

And then they either go to pieces, or else, with one of those sudden turns typical of women, they suddenly realize. And then, almost instantly, their whole behaviour changes. It is over. The fight is finished. The man has sidetracked. He becomes, in a sense, negligible, though the basic animosity is only rarefied, made more subtle. And so you have the smart young woman in her twenties. She no longer fights her man — or men. She leaves him to his devices, and as far as possible invents her own. She may have a child to bully. But as a rule she pushes the child away as far as she can. No, she is now quite alone. If the man has no real feelings, she has none either. No matter how she feels about her husband, unless she is in a state of nervous rage she calls him angel of light, and winged messenger, and loveliest man, and my beautiful pet boy. She flips it all over him, like eau de cologne. And he takes it quite for granted, and suggests the next amusement. And their life is “one round of pleasure,” to use the old banality: until the nerves collapse. Everything is counterfeit: counterfeit complexion, counterfeit jewels, counterfeit elegance, counterfeit charm, counterfeit endearment, counterfeit passion, counterfeit culture, counterfeit love of Blake, or of *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*, or Picasso, or the latest film-star. Counterfeit sorrows and counterfeit delights, counterfeit woes and moans, counterfeit

ecstasies, and, under all, a hard, hard realization that we live by money, and money alone: and a terrible lurking fear of nervous collapse, collapse.

These are, of course, the extreme cases of the modern young. They are those who have got way beyond tragedy or real seriousness, that old-fashioned stuff. They are — they don't know where they are. And they don't care. But they are at the far end of the great fight between men and women.

Judging them as a result, the fight hardly seems to have been worth it. But we are looking on them still as fighters. Perhaps there is something else, positive, as a result.

In their own way, many of these young ones who have gone through everything and reached a stage of emptiness and disillusion unparalleled since the decadent Romans of Ravenna, in the fifth century, they are now, in very fear and forlornness, beginning to put out feelers towards some other way of trust. They begin to realize that if they are not careful, they will have missed life altogether. Missed the bus! They, the smart young who are so swift at hopping onto a thing, to have missed life itself, not to have hopped onto it! Missed the bus! to use London slang. Let the great chance slip by, while they were fooling round! The young are just beginning uneasily to realize that this may be the case. They are just beginning uneasily to realize that all that "life" which they lead, rushing around and being so smart, perhaps isn't life after all, and they are missing the real thing.

What then? What *is* the real thing? Ah, there's the rub. There are millions of ways of living, and it's all life. But what is the real thing in life? What is it that makes you *feel* right, makes life really feel good?

It is the great question. And the answers are old answers. But every generation must frame the answer in its own way. What makes life good to me is the sense that, even if I am sick and ill, I am alive, alive to the depths of my soul, and in touch somewhere in touch with the vivid life of the cosmos. Somehow my life draws strength from the depths of the universe, from the depths among the stars, from the great "world." Out of the great world comes my strength and my reassurance. One could say "God," but the word "God" is somehow tainted. But there *is* a flame or a Life Everlasting wreathing through the cosmos for ever and giving us our renewal, once we can get in touch with it.

It is when men lose their contact with this eternal life-flame, and become merely personal, things in themselves, instead of things kindled in the flame, that the fight between man and woman begins. It cannot be avoided; any more than nightfall or rain. The more conventional and correct a woman may be, the more outwardly devastating she is. Once she feels the loss of the greater control and the greater sustenance, she becomes emotionally destructive, she can no more

help it than she can help being a woman, when the great connexion is lost.

And then there is nothing for men to do but to turn back to life itself. Turn back to the life that flows invisibly in the cosmos, and will flow for ever, sustaining and renewing all living things. It is not a question of sins or morality, of being good or being bad. It is a question of renewal, of being renewed, vivified, made new and vividly alive and aware, instead of being exhausted and stale, as men are today. How to be renewed, reborn, revived? That is the question men must ask themselves, and women too.

And the answer will be difficult. Some trick with glands or secretions, or raw food, or drugs won't do it. Neither will some wonderful revelation or message. It is not a question of knowing something, but of doing something. It is a question of getting into contact again with the *living* centre of the cosmos. And how are we to do it?

NOBODY LOVES ME

Last year, we had a little house up in the Swiss mountains, for the summer. A friend came to tea: a woman of fifty or so, with her daughter: old friends. “And how are you all?” I asked, as she sat, flushed and rather exasperated after the climb up to the chalet on a hot afternoon, wiping her face with a too-small handkerchief. “Well!” she replied, glancing almost viciously out of the window at the immutable slopes and peaks opposite, “I don’t know how *you* feel about it — but — these mountains! — well! — I’ve lost *all* my *cosmic consciousness*, and *all* my *love for humanity*.”

She is, of course, New England of the old school — and usually transcendentalist calm. So that her exasperated frenzy of the moment — it was really a frenzy — coupled with the New England language and slight accent, seemed to me really funny. I laughed in her face, poor dear, and said: “Never mind! Perhaps you can do with a rest from your cosmic consciousness and your love of humanity.”

I have often thought of it since: of what she really meant. And every time, I have had a little pang, realizing that I was a bit spiteful to her. I admit, her New England transcendental habit of loving the cosmos *en bloc* and humanity *en masse* did rather get on my nerves, always. But then she had been brought up that way. And the fact of loving the cosmos didn’t prevent her from being fond of her own garden — though it did, a bit; and her love of humanity didn’t prevent her from having a real affection for her friends, except that she felt that she *ought* to love them in a selfless and general way, which was rather annoying. Nevertheless, that, to me, rather silly language about cosmic consciousness and love of humanity did stand for something that was not merely cerebral. It stood, and I realized it afterwards, for her peace, her inward peace with the universe and with man. And this she could *not* do without. One may be at war with society, and still keep one’s deep peace with mankind. It is not pleasant to be at war with society, but sometimes it is the only way of preserving one’s peace of soul, which is peace with the living, struggling, *real* mankind. And this latter one cannot afford to lose. So I had no right to tell my friend she could do with a rest from her love of humanity. She couldn’t, and none of us can: if we interpret *love of humanity* as that feeling of being at one with the struggling soul, or spirit, or whatever it is, of our fellow-men.

Now the wonder to me is that the young do seem to manage to get on without

any “cosmic consciousness” or “love of humanity.” They have, on the whole, shed the cerebral husk of generalizations from their emotional state: the cosmic and humanity touch. But it seems to me they have also shed the flower that was inside the husk. Of course, you can hear a girl exclaim: “*Really*, you know, the colliers are darlings, and it’s a shame the way they’re treated.” She will even rush off and register a vote for her darlings. But she doesn’t really care — and one can sympathize with her. This caring about the wrongs of unseen people has been rather overdone. Nevertheless, though the colliers or cotton-workers or whatever they be are a long way off and we can’t do anything about it, still, away in some depth of us, we know that we are connected vitally, if remotely, with these colliers or cotton-workers, we dimly realize that mankind is one, almost one flesh. It is an abstraction, but it is also a physical fact. In some way or other, the cotton-workers of Carolina, or the rice growers of China, are connected with me and, to a faint yet real degree, part of me. The vibration of life which they give off reaches me, touches me, and affects me all unknown to me. For we are more or less connected, all more or less in touch: all humanity. That is, until we have killed the sensitive responses in ourselves, which happens today only too often.

Dimly, this is what my transcendentalist meant by her “love of humanity,” though she tended to kill the real thing by labelling it so philanthropically and bossily. Dimly, she meant her sense of participating in the life of all humanity, which is a sense we all have, delicately and deeply, when we are at peace in ourselves. But let us lose our inward peace, and at once we are likely to substitute for this delicate inward sense of participating in the life of all mankind another thing, a nasty pronounced benevolence, which wants to do good to all mankind, and is only a form of self-assertion and of bullying. From this sort of love of humanity, good Lord deliver us! and deliver poor humanity. My friend was a tiny bit tainted with this form of self-importance, as all transcendentalists were. So if the mountains, in their brutality, took away the tainted love, good for them. But my dear Ruth — I shall call her Ruth — had more than this. She had, woman of fifty as she was, an almost girlish naive sense of living at peace, real peace, with her fellow-men. And this she could not afford to lose. And save for that taint of generalization and *will*, she would never have lost it, even for that half-hour in the Swiss mountains. But she meant the “cosmos” and “humanity” to fit her will and her feelings, and the mountains made her realize that the cosmos *wouldn’t*. When you come up against the cosmos, your consciousness is likely to suffer a jolt. And humanity, when you come down to it, is likely to give your “love” a nasty jar. But there you are.

When we come to the younger generation, however, we realize that “cosmos

consciousness” and “love of humanity” have really been left out of their composition. They are like a lot of brightly coloured bits of glass, and they only feel just what they bump against, when they’re shaken. They make an accidental pattern with other people, and for the rest they know nothing and care nothing.

So that cosmic consciousness and love of humanity, to use the absurd New England terms, are really dead. They were tainted. Both the cosmos and humanity were too much manufactured in New England. They weren’t the real thing. They were, very often, just noble phrases to cover up self-assertion, self-importance, and malevolent bullying. They were just activities of the ugly, self-willed ego, determined that humanity and the cosmos should exist as New England allowed them to exist, or not at all. They were tainted with bullying egoism, and the young, having fine noses for this sort of smell, would have none of them.

The way to kill any feeling is to insist on it, harp on it, exaggerate it. Insist on loving humanity, and sure as fate you’ll come to hate everybody. Because, of course, if you insist on loving humanity, then you insist that it shall be lovable: which half the time it isn’t. In the same way, insist on loving your husband, and you won’t be able to help hating him secretly. Because of course nobody is *always* lovable. If you insist they shall be, this imposes a tyranny over them, and they become less lovable. And if you force yourself to love them — or pretend to — when they are not lovable, you falsify everything, and fall into hate. The result of forcing any feeling is the death of that feeling, and the substitution of some sort of opposite. Whitman insisted on sympathizing with everything and everybody: so much so, that he came to believe in death only, not just his own death, but the death of all people. In the same way the slogan “Keep Smiling!” produces at last a sort of savage rage in the breast of the smilers, and the famous “cheery morning greeting” makes the gall accumulate in all the cheery ones.

It is no good. Every time you force your feelings, you damage yourself and produce the opposite effect to the one you want. Try to force yourself to love somebody, and you are bound to end by detesting that same somebody. The only thing to do is to have the feelings you’ve really got, and not make up any of them. And that is the only way to leave the other person free. If you feel like murdering your husband, then don’t say, “Oh, but I love him dearly. I’m devoted to him.” That is not only bullying yourself, but bullying him. He doesn’t want to be *forced*, even by love. Just say to yourself: “I could murder him, and that’s a fact. But I suppose I’d better not.” And then your feelings will get their own balance.

The same is true of love of humanity. The last generation, and the one before that *insisted* on loving humanity. They cared terribly for the poor suffering Irish

and Armenians and Congo rubber Negroes and all that. And it was a great deal of it fake, self-conceit, self-importance. The bottom of it was the egoistic thought: "I'm so good, I'm so superior, I'm so benevolent, I care intensely about the poor suffering Irish and the martyred Armenians and the oppressed Negroes, and I'm going to save them, even if I have to upset the English and the Turks and the Belgians severely." This love of mankind was half self-importance and half a desire to interfere and put a spoke in other people's wheels. The younger generation, smelling the rat under the lamb's-wool of Christian Charity, said to themselves: No love of humanity for me!

They have, if the truth be told, a secret detestation of all oppressed or unhappy people who need "relief." They rather hate "the poor colliers," "the poor cotton-workers," "the poor starving Russians," and all that. If there came another war, how they would loathe "the stricken Belgians"! And so it is: the father eats the pear, and the son's teeth are set on edge.

Having overdone the sympathy touch, especially the love of humanity, we have now got the recoil away from sympathy. The young don't sympathize, and they don't want to. They are egoists, and frankly so. They say quite honestly: "I don't give a hoot in hell for the poor oppressed this-that-and-the-other." And who can blame them? Their loving forebears brought on the Great War. If love of humanity brought on the Great War, let us see what frank and honest egoism will do. Nothing so horrible, we can bet.

The trouble about frank and accepted egoism is its unpleasant effect on the egoist himself. Honesty is very good, and it is good to cast off all the spurious sympathies and false emotions of the prewar world. But casting off spurious sympathy and false emotion need not entail the death of all sympathy and all deep emotion, as it seems to do in the young. The young quite deliberately *play* at sympathy and emotion. "Darling child, how lovely you look tonight! I *adore* to look at you!" — and in the next breath, a little arrow of spite. Or the young wife to her husband: "My beautiful love, I feel so precious when you hold me like that, my perfect dear! But shake me a cocktail, angel, would you? I need a good kick — you *angel* of light!"

The young, at the moment, have a perfectly good time strumming on the keyboard of emotion and sympathy, tinkling away at all the exaggerated phrases of rapture and tenderness, adoration and delight, while they feel — nothing, except a certain amusement at the childish game. It is so *chic* and charming to use all the most precious phrases of love and endearment amusingly, just amusingly, like the tinkling in a music-box.

And they would be very indignant if told they had no love of humanity. The English ones profess the most amusing and histrionic love of England, for

example. “There is only one thing I care about, except my beloved Philip, and that is England, our precious England. Philip and I are both prepared to die for England, at any moment.” At the moment, England does not seem to be in any danger of asking them, so they are quite safe. And if you gently inquire: “But what, in your imagination, is England?” they reply fervently: “The great tradition of the English, the great idea of England” — which seems comfortably elastic and non-committal.

And they cry: “I would give anything for the cause of freedom. Hope and I have wept tears, and saddened our precious marriage-bed, thinking of the trespass on English liberty. But we are calmer now, and determined to fight calmly to the utmost.” Which calm fight consists in taking another cocktail and sending out a wildly emotional letter to somebody perfectly irresponsible. Then all is over, and freedom is forgotten, and perhaps religion gets a turn, or a wild outburst over some phrase in the burial service.

This is the advanced young of today. I confess it is amusing, while the coruscation lasts. The trying part is when the fireworks have finished — and they don’t last very long, even with cocktails — and the grey stretches intervene. For with the advanced young, there is no warm daytime and silent night. It is all fireworks of excitement and stretches of grey emptiness; then more fireworks. And, let the grisly truth be owned, it is rather exhausting.

Now in the grey intervals in the life of the modern young one fact emerges in all its dreariness, and makes itself plain to the young themselves, as well as the onlooker. The fact that they are empty: that they care about nothing and nobody: not even the Amusement they seek so strenuously. Of course this skeleton is not to be taken out of the cupboard. “Darling angel man, don’t start being a nasty white ant. Play the game, angel-face, play the game; don’t start saying unpleasant things and rattling a lot of dead men’s bones! Tell us something nice, something amusing. Or let’s be *really* serious, you know, and talk about bolshevism or *la haute finance*. Do be an angel of light, and cheer us up, you nicest precious pet!”

As a matter of fact, the young are becoming afraid of their own emptiness. It’s awful fun throwing things out of the window. But when you’ve thrown everything out, and you’ve spent two or three days sitting on the bare floor, your bones begin to ache, and you begin to wish for some of the old furniture, even if it was the ugliest Victorian horsehair.

At least, that’s how it seems to me the young women begin to feel. They are frightened at the emptiness of their house of life, now they’ve thrown everything out of the window. Their young Philips and Peters and so on don’t seem to make the slightest move to put any new furniture in the house of the young generation.

The only new piece they introduce is a cocktail-shaker and perhaps a wireless set. For the rest, it can stay blank.

And the young women begin to feel a little uneasy. Women don't like to feel empty. A woman hates to feel that she believes in nothing and stands for nothing. Let her be the silliest woman on earth, she will take something seriously: her appearance, her clothes, her house, something. And let her be not so very silly, and she wants more than that. She wants to feel, instinctively, that she amounts to something and that her life stands for something. Women, who so often are angry with men because men cannot "just live," but must always be wanting some purpose in life, are themselves, perhaps, the very root of the male necessity for a purpose in life. It seems to me that in a woman the need to feel that her life *means* something, stands for something, and amounts to something is much more imperative than in a man. The woman herself may deny it emphatically; because, of course, it is the man's business to supply her life with this "purpose." But a man can be a tramp, purposeless, and be happy. Not so a woman. It is a very, very rare woman who can be happy if she feels herself "outside" the great purpose of life. Whereas, I verily believe, vast numbers of men would gladly drift away as wasters, if there were anywhere to drift to.

A woman cannot bear to feel empty and purposeless. But a man may take a real pleasure in that feeling. A man can take real pride and satisfaction in pure negation: "I am quite empty of feeling, I don't care the slightest bit in the world for anybody or anything except myself. But I do care for myself, and I'm going to survive in spite of them all, and I'm going to have my own success without caring the least in the world how I get it. Because I'm cleverer than they are, I'm cunninger than they are, even if I'm weak. I must build myself proper protections, and entrench myself, and then I'm safe. I can sit inside my glass tower and feel nothing and be touched by nothing, and yet exert my power, my will, through the glass walls of my ego."

That, roughly, is the condition of a man who accepts the condition of true egoism, and emptiness, in himself. He has a certain pride in the condition, since in pure emptiness of real feeling he can still carry out his ambition, his will to egoistic success.

Now I doubt if any woman can feel like this. The most egoistic woman is always in a tangle of hate, if not of love. But the true male egoist neither hates nor loves. He is quite empty, at the middle of him. Only on the surface he has feelings: and these he is always trying to get away from. Inwardly, he feels nothing. And when he feels nothing, he exults in his ego and knows he is safe. Safe, within his fortifications, inside his glass tower.

But I doubt if women can even understand this condition in a man. They

mistake the emptiness for depth. They think the false calm of the egoist who really feels nothing, is strength. And they imagine that all the defences which the confirmed egoist throws up, the glass tower of imperviousness, are screens to a real man, a positive being. And they throw themselves madly on the defences, to tear them down and come at the real man, little knowing that there *is* no real man, the defences are only there to protect a hollow emptiness, an egoism, not a human man.

But the young are beginning to suspect. The young women are beginning to respect the defences, for they are more afraid of coming upon the ultimate nothingness of the egoist, than of leaving him undiscovered. Hollowness, nothingness — it frightens the woman. They cannot be *real* nihilists. But men can. Men can have a savage satisfaction in the annihilation of all feeling and all connexion, in a resultant state of sheer negative emptiness, when there is nothing left to throw out of the window, and the window is sealed.

Women wanted freedom. The result is a hollowness, an emptiness which frightens the stoutest heart. Women then turn to women for love. But that doesn't last. It can't. Whereas the emptiness persists and persists.

The love of humanity is gone, leaving a great gap. The cosmic consciousness has collapsed upon a great void. The egoist sits grinning furtively in the triumph of his own emptiness. And now what is woman going to do? Now that the house of life is empty, now that she's thrown all the emotional furnishing out of the window, and the house of life, which is her eternal home, is empty as a tomb, now what is dear forlorn woman going to do?

LITERATURE AND ART

PREFACES AND INTRODUCTIONS TO BOOKS

All Things Are Possible, by Leo Shestov

In his paragraph on The Russian Spirit, Shestov gives us the real clue to Russian literature. European culture is a rootless thing in the Russians. With us, it is our very blood and bones, the very nerve and root of our psyche. We think in a certain fashion, we feel in a certain fashion, because our whole substance is of this fashion. Our speech and feeling are organically inevitable to us.

With the Russians it is different. They have only been inoculated with the virus of European culture and ethic. The virus works in them like a disease. And the inflammation and irritation comes forth as literature. The bubbling and fizzing is almost chemical, not organic. It is an organism seething as it accepts and masters the strange virus. What the Russian is struggling with, crying out against, is not life itself: it is only European culture which has been introduced into his psyche, and which hurts him. The tragedy is not so much a real soul tragedy, as a surgical one. Russian art, Russian literature after all does not stand on the same footing as European or Greek or Egyptian art. It is not spontaneous utterance. It is not the flowering of a race. It is a surgical outcry, horrifying, or marvellous, lacerating at first; but when we get used to it, not really so profound, not really ultimate, a little extraneous.

What is valuable is the evidence against European culture, implied in the novelists, here at last expressed. Since Peter the Great Russia has been accepting Europe, and seething Europe down in a curious process of catabolism. Russia has been expressing nothing inherently Russian. Russia's modern Christianity even was not Russian. Her genuine Christianity, Byzantine and Asiatic, is incomprehensible to us. So with her true philosophy. What she has actually uttered is her own unwilling, fantastic reproduction of European truths. What she has really to utter the coming centuries will hear. For Russia will certainly inherit the future. What we already call the greatness of Russia is only her pre-natal struggling.

It seems as if she had at last absorbed and overcome the virus of old Europe. Soon her new, healthy body will begin to act in its own reality, imitative no more, protesting no more, crying no more, but full and sound and lusty in itself. Real Russia is born. She will laugh at us before long. Meanwhile she goes through the last stages of reaction against us, kicking away from the old womb of Europe.

In Shestov one of the last kicks is given. True, he seems to be only reactionary

and destructive. But he can find a little amusement at last in tweaking the European nose, so he is fairly free. European idealism is anathema. But more than this, it is a little comical. We feel the new independence in his new, half-amused indifference.

He is only tweaking the nose of European idealism. He is preaching nothing: so he protests time and again. He absolutely refutes any imputation of a central idea. He is so afraid lest it should turn out to be another hateful hedge-stake of an ideal.

“Everything is possible” — this is his really central cry. It is not nihilism. It is only a shaking free of the human psyche from old bonds. The positive central idea is that the human psyche, or soul, really believes in itself, and in nothing else.

Dress this up in a little comely language, and we have a real ideal, that will last us for a new, long epoch. The human soul itself is the source and well-head of creative activity. In the unconscious human soul the creative prompting issues first into the universe. Open the consciousness to this prompting, away with all your old sluice-gates, locks, dams, channels. No ideal on earth is anything more than an obstruction, in the end, to the creative issue of the spontaneous soul. Away with all ideals. Let each individual act spontaneously from the for ever incalculable prompting of the creative well-head within him. There is no universal law. Each being is, at his purest, a law unto himself, single, unique, a Godhead, a fountain from the unknown.

This is the ideal which Shestov refuses positively to state, because he is afraid it may prove in the end a trap to catch his own spirit. So it may. But it is none the less a real, living ideal for the moment, the very salvation. When it becomes ancient, and like the old lion who lay in his cave and whined, devours all its servants, then it can be dispatched. Meanwhile it is a really liberating word.

Shestov’s style is puzzling at first. Having found the “ands” and “buts” and “because” and “therefores” hampered him, he clips them all off deliberately and even spitefully, so that his thought is like a man with no buttons on his clothes, ludicrously hitching along all undone. One must be amused, not irritated. Where the arm-holes were a bit tight, Shestov cuts a slit. It is baffling, but really rather piquant. The real conjunction, the real unification lies in the reader’s own amusement, not in the author’s unbroken logic.

The American Edition of *New Poems*, by D. H. Lawrence

It seems when we hear a skylark singing as if sound were running into the future, running so fast and utterly without consideration, straight on into futurity. And when we hear a nightingale, we hear the pause and the rich, piercing rhythm of recollection, the perfected past. The lark may sound sad, but with the lovely lapsing sadness that is almost a swoon of hope. The nightingale's triumph is a paean, but a death-paeon.

So it is with poetry. Poetry is, as a rule, either the voice of the far future, exquisite and ethereal, or it is the voice of the past, rich, magnificent. When the Greeks heard the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, they heard their own past calling in their hearts, as men far inland sometimes hear the sea and fall weak with powerful, wonderful regret, nostalgia; or else their own future rippled its time-beats through their blood, as they followed the painful, glamorous progress of the Ithacan. This was Homer to the Greeks: their Past, splendid with battles won and death achieved, and their Future, the magic wandering of Ulysses through the unknown.

With us it is the same. Our birds sing on the horizons. They sing out of the blue, beyond us, or out of the quenched night. They sing at dawn and sunset. Only the poor, shrill, tame canaries whistle while we talk. The wild birds begin before we are awake, or as we drop into dimness, out of waking. Our poets sit by the gateways, some by the east, some by the west. As we arrive and as we go out our hearts surge with response. But whilst we are in the midst of life, we do not hear them.

The poetry of the beginning and the poetry of the end must have that exquisite finality, perfection which belongs to all that is far off. It is in the realm of all that is perfect. It is of the nature of all that is complete and consummate. This completeness, this consummateness, the finality and the perfection are conveyed in exquisite form: the perfect symmetry, the rhythm which returns upon itself like a dance where the hands link and loosen and link for the supreme moment of the end. Perfected bygone moments, perfected moments in the glimmering futurity, these are the treasured gemlike lyrics of Shelley and Keats.

But there is another kind of poetry: the poetry of that which is at hand: the immediate present. In the immediate present there is no perfection, no consummation, nothing finished. The strands are all flying, quivering,

intermingling into the web, the waters are shaking the moon. There is no round, consummate moon on the face of running water, nor on the face of the unfinished tide. There are no gems of the living plasm. The living plasm vibrates unspeakably, it inhales the future, it exhales the past, it is the quick of both, and yet it is neither. There is no plasmic finality, nothing crystal, permanent. If we try to fix the living tissue, as the biologists fix it with formation, we have only a hardened bit of the past, the bygone life under our observation.

Life, the ever-present, knows no finality, no finished crystallization. The perfect rose is only a running flame, emerging and flowing off, and never in any sense at rest, static, finished. Herein lies its transcendent loveliness. The whole tide of all life and all time suddenly heaves, and appears before us as an apparition, a revelation. We look at the very white quick of nascent creation. A water-lily heaves herself from the flood, looks around, gleams, and is gone. We have seen the incarnation, the quick of the ever-swirling flood. We have seen the invisible. We have seen, we have touched, we have partaken of the very substance of creative change, creative mutation. If you tell me about the lotus, tell me of nothing changeless or eternal. Tell me of the mystery of the inexhaustible, forever-unfolding creative spark. Tell me of the incarnate disclosure of the flux, mutation in blossom, laughter and decay perfectly open in their transit, nude in their movement before us.

Let me feel the mud and the heavens in my lotus. Let me feel the heavy, silting, sucking mud, the spinning of sky winds. Let me feel them both in purest contact, the nakedness of sucking weight, nakedly passing radiance. Give me nothing fixed, set, static. Don't give me the infinite or the eternal: nothing of infinity, nothing of eternity. Give me the still, white seething, the incandescence and the coldness of the incarnate moment: the moment, the quick of all change and haste and opposition: the moment, the immediate present, the Now. The immediate moment is not a drop of water running downstream. It is the source and issue, the bubbling up of the stream. Here, in this very instant moment, up bubbles the stream of time, out of the wells of futurity, flowing on to the oceans of the past. The source, the issue, the creative quick.

There is poetry of this immediate present, instant poetry, as well as poetry of the infinite past and the infinite future. The seething poetry of the incarnate Now is supreme, beyond even the everlasting gems of the before and after. In its quivering momentaneity it surpasses the crystalline, pearl-hard jewels, the poems of the eternities. Do not ask for the qualities of the unfading timeless gems. Ask for the whiteness which is the seethe of mud, ask for that incipient putrescence which is the skies falling, ask for the never-pausing, never-ceasing life itself. There must be mutation, swifter than iridescence, haste, not rest,

come-and-go, not fixity, inconclusiveness, immediacy, the quality of life itself, without denouement or close. There must be the rapid momentaneous association of things which meet and pass on the for ever incalculable journey of creation: everything left in its own rapid, fluid relationship with the rest of things.

This is the unrestful, ungraspable poetry of the sheer present, poetry whose very permanency lies in its wind-like transit. Whitman's is the best poetry of this kind. Without beginning and without end, without any base and pediment, it sweeps past for ever, like a wind that is for ever in passage, and unchainable. Whitman truly looked before and after. But he did not sigh for what is not. The clue to all his utterance lies in the sheer appreciation of the instant moment, life surging itself into utterance at its very wellhead. Eternity is only an abstraction from the actual present. Infinity is only a great reservoir of recollection, or a reservoir of aspiration: man-made. The quivering nimble hour of the present, this is the quick of Time. This is the immanence. The quick of the universe is the *pulsating, carnal self*, mysterious and palpable. So it is always.

Because Whitman put this into his poetry, we fear him and respect him so profoundly. We should not fear him if he sang only of the "old unhappy far-off things," or of the "wings of the morning." It is because his heart beats with the urgent, insurgent Now, which is even upon us all, that we dread him. He is so near the quick.

From the foregoing it is obvious that the poetry of the instant present cannot have the same body or the same motion as the poetry of the before and after. It can never submit to the same conditions. It is never finished. There is no rhythm which returns upon itself, no serpent of eternity with its tail in its own mouth. There is no static perfection, none of that finality which we find so satisfying because we are so frightened.

Much has been written about free verse. But all that can be said, first and last, is that free verse is, or should be direct utterance from the instant, whole man. It is the soul and the mind and body surging at once, nothing left out. They speak all together. There is some confusion, some discord. But the confusion and the discord only belong to the reality, as noise belongs to the plunge of water. It is no use inventing fancy laws for free verse, no use drawing a melodic line which all the feet must toe. Free verse toes no melodic line, no matter what drill-sergeant. Whitman pruned away his cliches — perhaps his cliches of rhythm as well as of phrase. And this is about all we can do, deliberately, with free verse. We can get rid of the stereotyped movements and the old hackneyed associations of sound or sense. We can break down those artificial conduits and canals through which we do so love to force our utterance. We can break the stiff neck

of habit. We can be in ourselves spontaneous and flexible as flame, we can see that utterance rushes out without artificial form or artificial smoothness. But we cannot positively prescribe any motion, any rhythm. All the laws we invent or discover — it amounts to pretty much the same — will fail to apply to free verse. They will only apply to some form of restricted, limited un-free verse.

All we can say is that free verse does *not* have the same nature as restricted verse. It is not of the nature of reminiscence. It is not the past which we treasure in its perfection between our hands. Neither is it the crystal of the perfect future, into which we gaze. Its tide is neither the full, yearning flow of aspiration, nor the sweet, poignant ebb of remembrance and regret. The past and the future are the two great bournes of human emotion, the two great homes of the human days, the two eternities. They are both conclusive, final. Their beauty is the beauty of the goal, finished, perfected. Finished beauty and measured symmetry belong to the stable, unchanging eternities.

But in free verse we look for the insurgent naked throb of the instant moment. To break the lovely form of metrical verse, and to dish up the fragments as a new substance, called *vers libre*, this is what most of the free-versifiers accomplish. They do not know that free verse has its own *nature*, that it is neither star nor pearl, but instantaneous like plasm. It has no goal in either eternity. It has no finish. It has no satisfying stability, satisfying to those who like the immutable. None of this. It is the instant; the quick; the very jetting source of all will-be and has-been. The utterance is like a spasm, naked contact with all influences at once. It does not want to get anywhere. It just takes place.

For such utterance any externally applied law would be mere shackles and death. The law must come new each time from within. The bird is on the wing in the winds, flexible to *every* breath, a living spark in the storm, its very flickering depending upon its supreme mutability and power of change. Whence such a bird came: whither it goes: from what solid earth it rose up, and upon what solid earth it will close its wings and settle, this is not the question. This is a question of before and after. Now, *now*, the bird is on the wing in the winds.

Such is the rare new poetry. One realm we have never conquered: the pure present. One great mystery of time is terra incognita to us: the instant. The most superb mystery we have hardly recognized: the immediate, instant self. The quick of all time is the instant. The quick of all the universe, of all creation, is the incarnate, carnal self. Poetry gave us the clue: free verse: Whitman. Now we know.

The ideal — what is the ideal? A figment. An abstraction. A static abstraction, abstracted from life. It is a fragment of the before or the after. It is a crystallized aspiration, or a crystallized remembrance: crystallized, set, finished. It is a thing

set apart, in the great storehouse of eternity, the storehouse of finished things.

We do not speak of things crystallized and set apart. We speak of the instant, the immediate self, the very plasm of the self. We speak also of free verse.

All this should have come as a preface to *Look! We Have Come Through!* But is it not better to publish a preface long after the book it belongs to has appeared? For then the reader will have had his fair chance with the book, alone.

Mastro-don Gesualdo, by Giovanni Verga

It seems curious that modern Italian literature has made so little impression on the European consciousness. A hundred years ago, when Manzoni's *I Promessi Sposi* came out, it met with European applause. Along with Sir Walter Scott and Byron, Manzoni stood for "Romance" to all Europe. Yet where is Manzoni now, even compared to Scott and Byron? Actually, I mean. Nominally, *I Promessi Sposi* is a classic; in fact, it is usually considered *the* classic Italian novel. It is set in all "literature courses." But who reads it? Even in Italy, who reads it? And yet, to my thinking, it is one of the best and most interesting novels ever written: surely a greater book than *Ivanhoe* or *Paul et Virginie* or *Werther*. Why then does nobody read it? Why is it found boring? When I gave a good English translation to the late Katharine Mansfield, she said, to my astonishment: I couldn't read it. Too long and boring.

It is the same with Giovanni Verga. After Manzoni, he is Italy's accepted greatest novelist. Yet nobody takes any notice of him. He is, as far as anybody knows his name, just the man who wrote the libretto to *Cavalleria Rusticana*. Whereas, as a matter of fact, Verga's story *Cavalleria Rusticana* is as much superior to Mascagni's rather cheap music as wine is superior to sugar-water. Verga is one of the greatest masters of the short story. In the volume *Novelle Rusticane* and in the volume entitled *Cavalleria Rusticana* are some of the best short stories ever written. They are sometimes as short and as poignant as Chekhov. I prefer them to Chekhov. Yet nobody reads them. They are "too depressing." They don't depress me half as much as Chekhov does. I don't understand the popular taste.

Verga wrote a number of novels, of different sorts: very different. He was born about 1850, and died, I believe, at the beginning of 1921. So he is a modern. At the same time, he is a classic. And at the same time, again, he is old-fashioned.

The earlier novels are rather of the French type of the seventies — Octave Feuillet, with a touch of Gyp. There is the depressing story of the Sicilian young man who made a Neapolitan marriage, and on the last page gives his wife a much-belated slap across the face. There is the gruesome book, *Tigre Reale*, of the Russian countess — or princess, whatever it is — who comes to Florence and gets fallen in love with by the young Sicilian, with all the subsequent horrid affair: the weird woman dying of consumption, the man weirdly infatuated, in

the suicidal South-Italian fashion. It is a bit in the manner of Matilda Serao. And though unpleasant, it is impressive.

Verga himself was a Sicilian, from one of the lonely agricultural villages in the south of the island. He was a gentleman — but not a rich one, presumably: with some means. As a young man, he went to Naples, then he worked at journalism in Milan and Florence. And finally he retired to Catania, to an exclusive, aristocratic old age. He was a shortish, broad man with a big red moustache. He never married.

His fame rests on his two long Sicilian novels, *I Malavoglia* and *Mastro-don Gesualdo*, also on the books of short pieces, *Cavalleria Rusticana*, *Novelle Rusticane*, and *Vagabondaggio*. These are all placed in Sicily, as is the short novel, *Storia di Una Capinera*. Of this last little book, one of the leading literary young Italians in Rome said to me the other day: Ah, yes, Verga! *Some* of his things! But a thing like *Storia di Una Capinera*, now, is ridiculous.

But why? It is rather sentimental, maybe. But it is no more sentimental than *Tess*. And the sentimentality seems to me to belong to the Sicilian characters in the book, it is true to type, quite as much so as the sentimentality of a book like Dickens's *Christmas Carol*, or George Eliot's *Silas Marner*, both of which works are "ridiculous," if you like, without thereby being wiped out of existence.

The trouble with Verga, as with all Italians, is that he never seems quite to know where he is. When one reads Manzoni, one wonders if he is not more "Gothic" or Germanic, than Italian. And Verga, in the same way, seems to have a borrowed outlook on life: but this time, borrowed from the French. With d'Annunzio the same, it is hard to believe he is really being himself. He gives one the impression of "acting up." Pirandello goes on with the game today. The Italians are always that way: always acting up to somebody else's vision of life. Men like Hardy, Meredith, Dickens, they are just as sentimental and false as the Italians, in their own way. It only happens to be our own brand of falseness and sentimentality.

And yet, perhaps, one can't help feeling that Hardy, Meredith, Dickens, and Maupassant and even people like the Goncourts and Paul Bourget, false in part though they be, are still looking on life with their own eyes. Whereas the Italians give one the impression that they are always borrowing somebody else's eyes to see with, and then letting loose a lot of emotion into a borrowed vision.

This is the trouble with Verga. But on the other hand, everything he does has a weird quality of Verga in it, quite distinct and like nothing else. And yet, perhaps the gross vision of the man is not quite his own. All his movements are his own. But his main motive is borrowed.

This is the unsatisfactory part about all Italian literature, as far as I know it.

The main motive, the gross vision of all the nineteenth-century literature, is what we may call the emotional-democratic vision or motive. It seems to me that since 1860, or even 1830, the Italians have always borrowed their ideals of democracy from the northern nations, and poured great emotion into them, without ever being really grafted by them. Some of the most wonderful martyrs for democracy have been Neapolitan men of birth and breeding. But none the less, it seems a mistake: an attempt to live by somebody else's lights.

Verga's first Sicilian novel, *I Malavoglia*, is of this sort. It was considered his greatest work. It is a great book. But it is *parti pris*. It is one-sided. And therefore it dates. There is too much, too much of the tragic fate of the poor, in it. There is a sort of wallowing in tragedy: the tragedy of the humble. It belongs to a date when the "humble" were almost the most fashionable thing. And the Malavoglia family are most humbly humble. Sicilians of the sea-coast, fishers, small traders — their humble tragedy is so piled on, it becomes almost disastrous. The book was published in America under the title of *The House by the Medlar Tree*, and can still be obtained. It is a great book, a great picture of poor life in Sicily, on the coast just north of Catania. But it is rather overdone on the pitiful side. Like the woebegone pictures by Bastien Lepage. Nevertheless, it is essentially a true picture, and different from anything else in literature. In most books of the period — even in *Madame Bovary*, to say nothing of Balzac's earlier *I,ys dans la Vallee* — one has to take off about twenty per cent of the tragedy. One does it in Dickens, one does it in Hawthorne, one does it all the time, with all the great writers. Then why not with Verga? Just knock off about twenty per cent of the tragedy in *I Malavoglia*, and see what a great book remains. Most books that live, live in spite of the author's laying it on thick. Think of *Wuthering Heights*. It is quite as impossible to an Italian as even *I Malavoglia* is to us. But it is a great book.

The trouble with realism — and Verga was a realist — is that the writer, when he is a truly exceptional man like Flaubert or like Verga, tries to read his own sense of tragedy into people much smaller than himself. I think it is a final criticism against *Madame Bovary* that people such as Emma Bovary and her husband Charles simply are too insignificant to carry the full weight of Gustave Flaubert's sense of tragedy. Emma and Charles Bovary are a couple of little people. Gustave Flaubert is not a little person. But, because he is a realist and does not believe in "heroes," Flaubert insists on pouring his own deep and bitter tragic consciousness into the little skins of the country doctor and his uneasy wife. The result is a discrepancy. *Madame Bovary* is a great book and a very wonderful picture of life. But we cannot help resenting the fact that the great tragic soul of Gustave Flaubert is, so to speak, given only the rather

commonplace bodies of Emma and Charles Bovary. There's a misfit. And to get over the misfit, you have to let in all sorts of seams of pity. Seams of pity, which won't be hidden.

The great tragic soul of Shakespeare borrows the bodies of kings and princes — not out of snobbism, but out of natural affinity. You can't put a great soul into a commonplace person. Commonplace persons have commonplace souls. Not all the noble sympathy of Flaubert or Verga for Bovarys and Malavoglias can prevent the said Bovarys and Malavoglias from being commonplace persons. They were deliberately chosen because they *were* commonplace, and not heroic. The authors insisted on the treasure of the humble. But they had to lend the humble by far the best part of their own treasure, before the said humble could show any treasure at all.

So, if *I Malavoglia* dates, so does *Madame Bovary*. They belong to the emotional-democratic, treasure-of-the-humble period of the nineteenth century. The period is just rather out of fashion. We still feel the impact of the treasure-of-the-humble too much. When the emotion will have quite gone out of us, we can accept *Madame Bovary* and *I Malavoglia* in the same free spirit with the same detachment as that in which we accept Dickens or Richardson.

Mastro-don Gesualdo, however, is not nearly so much treasure-of-the-humble as *I Malavoglia*. Here, Verga is not dealing with the disaster of poverty, and calling it tragedy. On the contrary, he is a little bored by poverty. He must have a hero who wins out, and makes his pile, and then succumbs under the pile.

Portrait of Verga from “Verga “ by Giulio Cattaneo

Mastro-don Gesualdo started life as a barefoot peasant brat, not a don at all. He becomes very rich. But all he gets of it is a great tumour of bitterness inside, which kills him.

Verga must have known, in actual life, the prototype of Gesualdo. We see him in the marvellous realistic story in *Cavalleria Rusticana*, of a fat little peasant who has become enormously rich, grinding his labourers, and now is diseased and must die. This little fellow is quite unheroic. He has the indomitable greedy will, but nothing else of Gesualdo’s rather attractive character.

Gesualdo is attractive, and, in a sense, heroic. But still he is not allowed to emerge in the old heroic sense, with swagger and nobility and head-and-shoulders taller than anything else. He is allowed to have exceptional qualities, and above all, exceptional force. But these things do not make a hero of a man. A hero must be a hero by grace of God, and must have an inkling of the same. Even the old Paladin heroes had a great idea of themselves as exemplars. And Hamlet had the same. “O cursed spite that ever I was born to set it right.” Hamlet didn’t succeed in setting anything right, but he felt that way. And so all heroes must feel.

But Gesualdo, and Jude, and Emma Bovary are not allowed to feel any of these feelings. As far as *destiny* goes, they felt no more than anybody else. And this is because they belong to the realistic world.

Gesualdo is just an ordinary man with extraordinary energy. That, of course, is the intention. But he is a Sicilian. And here lies the difficulty. Because the realistic-democratic age has dodged the dilemma of having no heroes by having every man his own hero. This is reached by what we call subjective intensity, and in this subjectively-intense every-man-his-own-hero business the Russians have carried us to the greatest lengths. The merest scrub of a pickpocket is so phenomenally aware of his own soul, that we are made to bow down before the imaginary coruscations that go on inside him. That is almost the whole of Russian literature: the phenomenal coruscations of the souls of quite commonplace people.

Of course your soul will coruscate, if you think it does. That’s why the Russians are so popular. No matter how much of a shabby animal you may be, you can learn from Dostoievsky and Chekhov, etc., how to have the most tender,, unique, coruscating soul on earth. And so you may be most vastly

important to yourself. Which is the private aim of all men. The hero had it openly. The commonplace person has it inside himself, though outwardly he says: Of course I'm no better than anybody else! His very asserting it shows he doesn't think it for a second. Every character in Dostoevsky or Chekhov thinks himself *inwardly* a nonesuch, absolutely unique.

And here you get the blank opposite, in the Sicilians. The Sicilians simply don't have any subjective idea of themselves, or any souls. Except, of course, that funny little *alter ego* of a soul which can be prayed out of purgatory into paradise, and is just as objective as possible.

The Sicilian, in our sense of the word, doesn't have any soul. He just hasn't got our sort of subjective consciousness, the soulful idea of himself. Souls, to him, are little naked people uncomfortably hopping on hot bricks, and being allowed at last to go up to a garden where there is music and flowers and sanctimonious society, Paradise. Jesus is a man who was crucified by a lot of foreigners and villains, and who can help you against the villainous lot nowadays: as well as against witches and the rest.

The self-tortured Jesus, the self-tortured Hamlet, simply does not exist. Why should a man torture himself? Gesualdo would ask in amazement. Aren't there scoundrels enough in the world to torture him?

Of course, I am speaking of the Sicilians of Verga's day, fifty and sixty years ago, before the great emigration to America, and the great return, with dollars and bits of self-aware souls: at least politically self-aware.

So that in *Mastro-don Gesualdo* you have the very antithesis of what you get in *The Brothers Karamazov*. Anything more un-Russian than Verga it would be hard to imagine: save Homer. Yet Verga has the same sort of pity as the Russians. And, with the Russians, he is a realist. He won't have heroes, nor appeals to gods above nor below.

The Sicilians of today are supposed to be the nearest thing to the classic Greeks that is left to us: that is, they are the nearest descendants on earth. In Greece today there are no Greeks. The nearest thing is the Sicilian, the eastern and south-eastern Sicilian.

And if you come to think of it, Gesualdo Motta might really be a Greek in modern setting, except that he is not intellectual. But this many Greeks were not. And he has the energy, the quickness, the vividness of the Greek, the same vivid passion for wealth, the same ambition, the same lack of scruples, the same queer openness, without ever really openly committing himself. He is not a bit furtive, like an Italian. He is astute instead, far too astute and Greek to let himself be led by the nose. Yet he has a certain frankness, far more than an Italian. And far less fear than an Italian. His boldness and his queer sort of daring are Sicilian rather

than Italian, so is his independent manliness.

He is Greek above all in not having any soul or any lofty ideals. The Greeks were far more bent on making an audacious, splendid impression than on fulfilling some noble purpose. They loved the splendid look of a thing, the splendid ring of words. Even tragedy was to them a grand gesture, rather than something to mope over. Peak and pine they would not, and unless some Fury pursued them to punish them for their sins, they cared not a straw for sins: their own or anyone else's.

As for being burdened with souls, they were not such fools.

But alas, ours is the day of souls, when soul pays, and when having a soul is as important to the young as solitaire to a valetudinarian. If you don't have feelings about your soul, what sort of person can you be?

And Gesualdo didn't have feelings about his soul. He was remorselessly and relentlessly objective, like all people that belong to the sun. In the sun, men are objective, in the mist and snow, subjective. Subjectivity is largely a question of the thickness of your overcoat.

When you get to Ceylon, you realize that, to the swarthy Cingalese, even Buddhism is a purely objective affair. And we have managed to spiritualize it to such a subjective pitch.

Then you have the setting to the hero. The south-Sicilian setting to *Mastro-don Gesualdo* is perhaps nearer to the true medieval than anything else in modern literature, even barring the Sardinian medievalism of Grazia Deledda. You have the Sicily of the Bourbons, the Sicily of the kingdom of Naples. The island is incredibly poor and incredibly backward. There are practically no roads for wheeled vehicles, and consequently no wheeled vehicles, neither carts nor carriages, outside the towns. Everything is packed on asses or mules, man travels on horseback or on foot, or, if sick, in a mule-litter. The land is held by the great landowners, the peasants are almost serfs. It is as wild, as poor, and in the ducal houses of Palermo even as splendid and ostentatious as Russia.

Yet how different from Russia! Instead of the wild openness of the north, you have the shut-in, guarded watchfulness of the old Mediterranean. For centuries, the people of the Mediterranean have lived on their guard, intensely on their guard, on the watch, wary, always wary, and holding aloof. So it is even today, in the villages: aloof, holding aloof, each individual inwardly holding aloof from the others; and this in spite of the returned "Americans."

How utterly different it is from Russia, where the people are always — in the books — expanding to one another, and pouring out tea and their souls to one another all night long. In Sicily, by nightfall, nearly every man is barricaded inside his own house. Save in the hot summer, when the night is more or less

turned into day.

It all seems, to some people, dark and squalid and brutal and boring. There is no soul, no enlightenment at all. There is not one single enlightened person. If there had been, he would have departed long ago. He could not have stayed.

And for people who seek enlightenment, oh, how boring! But if you have any physical feeling for life, apart from nervous feelings such as the Russians have, nerves, nerves — if you have any appreciation for the southern way of life, then what a strange, deep fascination there is in *Mastro-don Gesualdo*! Perhaps the deepest nostalgia I have ever felt has been for Sicily, reading Verga. Not for England or anywhere else — for Sicily, the beautiful, that which goes deepest into the blood. It is so clear, so beautiful, so like the physical beauty of the Greek.

Yet the lives of the people all seem so squalid, so pottering, so despicable: like a crawling of beetles. And then, the moment you get outside the grey and squalid walls of the village, how wonderful in the sun, with the land lying apart. And isolated, the people too have some of the old Greek singleness, carelessness, dauntlessness. It is only when they bunch together as citizens that they are squalid. In the countryside, they are portentous and subtle, like the wanderers in the *Odyssey*. And their relations are all curious and immediate, objective. They are so little aware of themselves, and so much aware of their own effects.

It all depends what you are looking for. Gesualdo's lifelong love-affair with Diodata is, according to our ideas, quite impossible. He puts no value on sentiment at all: or almost none: again a real Greek. Yet there is a strange forlorn beauty in it, impersonal, a bit like Rachel or Rebecca. It is of the old, old world, when man is aware of his own belongings, acutely, but only very dimly aware of his own feelings. And feelings you are not aware of, you don't have.

Gesualdo seems so potent, so full of potency. Yet nothing emerges, and he never says anything. It is the very reverse of the Russian, who talks and talks, out of impotence.

And you have a wretched, realistic kind of tragedy for the end. And you feel, perhaps the book was all about nothing, and Gesualdo wasn't worth the labour of Verga.

But that is because we are spiritual snobs, and think, because a man can fume with "To be or not to be," therefore he is a person to be taken account of. Poor Gesualdo had never heard of: To be or not to be, and he wouldn't have taken any notice if he had. He lived blindly, with the impetuosity of blood and muscles, sagacity and will, and he never woke up to himself. Whether he would have been any the better for waking up to himself, who knows!

A Bibliography of D. H. Lawrence, by Edward D. McDonald

There doesn't seem much excuse for me, sitting under a little cedar tree at the foot of the Rockies, looking at the pale desert disappearing westward, with hummocks of shadow rising in the stillness of incipient autumn, this morning, the near pine trees perfectly still, the sunflowers and the purple Michaelmas daisies moving for the first time, this morning, in an invisible breath of breeze, to be writing an introduction to a bibliography.

Books to me are incorporate things, voices in the air, that do not disturb the haze of autumn, and visions that don't blot the sunflowers. What do I care for first or last editions? I have never read one of my own published works. To me, no book has a date, no book has a binding.

What do I care if "e" is somewhere upside down, or "g" comes from the wrong font? I really don't.

And when I force myself to remember, what pleasure is there in that? The very first copy of *The White Peacock* that was ever sent out, I put into my mother's hands when she was dying. She looked at the outside, and then at the title-page, and then at me, with darkening eyes. And though she loved me so much, I think she doubted whether it could be much of a book, since no one more important than I had written it. Somewhere, in the helpless privacies of her being, she had wistful respect for me. But for me in the face of the world, not much. This David would never get a stone across at Goliath. And why try? Let Goliath alone! Anyway, she was beyond reading my first immortal work. It was put aside, and I never wanted to see it again. She never saw it again.

After the funeral, my father struggled through half a page, and it might as well have been Hottentot.

"And what dun they gi'e thee for that, lad?"

"Fifty pounds, father."

"Fifty pounds!" He was dumbfounded, and looked at me with shrewd eyes, as if I were a swindler. "Fifty pounds! An' tha's niver done a day's hard work in thy life."

I think to this day, he looks upon me as a sort of cleverish swindler, who gets money for nothing: a sort of Ernest Hooley. And my sister says, to my utter amazement: "You always were lucky!"

Somehow, it is the actual corpus and substance, the actual paper and rag

volume of any of my works, that calls up these personal feelings and memories. It is the miserable tome itself which somehow delivers me to the vulgar mercies of the world. The voice inside is mine for ever. But the beastly marketable chunk of published volume is a bone which every dog presumes to pick with me.

William Heinemann published *The White Peacock*. I saw hint once; and then I realized what an immense favour he was doing me. As a matter of fact, he treated me quite well.

I remember at the last minute, when the book was all printed and ready to bind: some even bound: they sent me in great haste a certain page with a marked paragraph. Would I remove this paragraph, as it might be considered "objectionable," and substitute an exactly identical number of obviously harmless words. Hastily I did so. And later, I noticed that the two pages, on one of which was the altered paragraph, were rather loose, not properly bound into the book. Only my mother's copy had the paragraph unchanged.

I have wondered often if Heinemann's just altered the "objectionable" bit in the first little batch of books they sent out, then left the others as first printed. Or whether they changed all but the one copy they sent me ahead.

It was my first experience of the objectionable. Later, William Heinemann said he thought *Sons and Lovers* one of the dirtiest books he had ever read. He refused to publish it. I should not have thought the deceased gentleman's reading had been so circumspectly narrow.

I forget the first appearance of *The Trespasser* and *Sons and Lovers*. I always hide the fact of publication from myself as far as possible. One writes, even at this moment, to some mysterious presence in the air. If that presence were not there, and one thought of even a single solitary actual reader, the paper would remain for ever white.

But I always remember how, in a cottage by the sea, in Italy, I rewrote almost entirely that play, *The Widowing of Mrs. Holroyd*, right on the proofs which Mitchell Kennerley had sent me. And he nobly forbore with me.

But then he gave me a nasty slap. He published *Sons and Lovers* in America, and one day, joyful, arrived a cheque for twenty pounds. Twenty pounds in those days was a little fortune: and as it was a windfall, it was handed over to Madame; the first pin-money she had seen. Alas and alack, there was an alteration in the date of the cheque, and the bank would not cash it. It was returned to Mitchell Kennerley, but that was the end of it. He never made good, and never to this day made any further payment for *Sons and Lovers*. Till this year of grace 1924, America has had that, my most popular book, for nothing — as far as I am concerned.

* In a letter 10 Mr. Edward Garnett, dated April 2s, 1914. Lawrence acknowledges the receipt of £35 from Mr. Mitchell Kennerley. *Letters of D. H. Lawrence* p. 191 (American edition).

Then came the first edition of *The Rainbow*. I'm afraid I set my rainbow in the sky too soon, before, instead of after, the deluge. Methuen published that book, and he almost wept before the magistrate, when he was summoned for bringing out a piece of indecent literature. He said he did not know the dirty thing he had been handling, he had not read the work, his reader had misadvised him-and Peccavi! Peccavi! wept the now be-knighted gentleman. Then around me arose such a fussy sort of interest, as when a really scandalous bit of scandal is being whispered about one. In print my fellow-authors kept scrupulously silent, lest a bit of the tar might stick to them. Later Arnold Bennett and May Sinclair raised a kindly protest. But John Galsworthy told me, very calmly and *ex cathedra*, he thought the book a failure as a work of art. They think as they please. But why not wait till I ask them, before they deliver an opinion to me? Especially as impromptu opinions by elderly authors are apt to damage him who gives as much as him who takes.

There is no more indecency or impropriety in *The Rainbow* than there is in this autumn morning-I, who say so, ought to know. And when I open my mouth, let no dog bark.

So much for the first edition of *The Rainbow*. The only copy of any of my books I ever keep is my copy of Methuen's *Rainbow*. Because the American editions have all been mutilated. And this is almost my favourite among my novels: this, and *Women in Love*. And I should really be best pleased if it were never reprinted at all, and only those blue, condemned volumes remained extant.

Since *The Rainbow*, one submits to the process of publication as to a necessary evil: as souls are said to submit to the necessary evil of being born into the flesh. The wind bloweth where it listeth. And one must submit to the processes of one's day. Personally, I have no belief in the vast public. I believe that only the winnowed few can care. But publishers, like thistle, must set innumerable seeds on the wind, knowing most will miscarry.

To the vast public, the autumn morning is only a sort of stage background against which they can display their own mechanical importance. But to some men still the trees stand up and look around at the daylight, having woven the two ends of darkness together into visible being and presence. And soon, they will let go the two ends of darkness again, and disappear. A flower laughs once, and having had his laugh, chuckles off into seed, and is gone. Whence? Whither? Who knows, who cares? That little laugh of achieved being is all.

So it is with books. To every man who struggles with his own soul in mystery, a book that is a book flowers once, and seeds, and is gone. First editions or forty-first are only the husks of it.

Yet if it amuses a man to save the husks of the flower that opened once for the first time, one can understand that too. It is like the costumes that men and women used to wear, in their youth, years ago, and which now stand up rather faded in museums. With a jolt they reassemble for us the day-to-day actuality of the bygone people, and we see the trophies once more of man's eternal fight with inertia.

***Max Havelaar*, by E. D. Dekker (Multatuli, pseud.)**

Max Havelaar was first published in Holland, nearly seventy years ago, and it created a *furor*. In Germany it was the book of the moment, even in England it had a liberal vogue. And to this day it remains vaguely in the minds of foreigners as the one Dutch classic.

I say vaguely, because many well-read people know nothing about it. Mr. Bernard Shaw, for example, confessed that he had never heard of it. Which is curious, considering the esteem in which it was held by men whom we might call the pre-Fabians, both in England and in America, sixty years ago.

But then *Max Havelaar*, when it appeared, was hailed as a book with a purpose. And the Anglo-Saxon mind loves to hail such books. They are so obviously in the right. The Anglo-Saxon mind also loves to forget completely, in a very short time, any book with a purpose. It is a bore, with its insistency.

So we have forgotten, with our usual completeness, all about *Max Havelaar* and about Multatuli, its author. Even the pseudonym, Multatuli (Latin for: I suffered much, or: I endured much), is to us irritating as it was exciting to our grandfathers. We don't care for poor but noble characters who are aware that they have suffered much. There is too much self-awareness.

On the surface, *Max Havelaar* is a tract or a pamphlet very much in the same line as *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Instead of "pity the poor Negro slave" we have "pity the poor oppressed Javanese"; with the same urgent appeal for legislation, for the government to do something about it. Well, the government did something about Negro slaves, and *Uncle Tom's Cabin* fell out of date. The Netherlands government is also said to have done something in Java for the poor Javanese, on the strength of Multatuli's book. So that *Max Havelaar* became a back number.

So far so good. If by writing tract-novels you can move governments to improve matters, then write tract-novels by all means. If the government, however, plays up, and does its bit, then the tract-novel has served its purpose, and descends from the stage like a political orator who has made his point.

This is all in the course of nature. And because this is the course of nature, many educated Hollanders today become impatient when they hear educated Germans or English or Americans referring to *Max Havelaar* as "the one Dutch classic." So Americans would feel if they heard *Uncle Tom's Cabin* referred to as "the one American classic." *Uncle Tom* is a back number in the English-

speaking world, and *Max Havelaar* is, to the Dutch-speaking world, another.

If you ask a Hollander for a really good Dutch novelist he refers you to the man who wrote: *Old People and the Things that Pass*, (Louis Couperus) — or else to somebody you know nothing about.

As regards the Dutch somebody I know nothing about, I am speechless. But as regards *Old People and the Things that Pass* I still think *Max Havelaar* a far more real book. And since *Old People etc.* is quite a good contemporary novel, one needs to find out why *Max Havelaar* is better.

I have not tried to read *Uncle Tom's Cabin* since I was a boy, and wept. I will try again, when I come across a copy. But I am afraid it will pall. I know I shan't weep.

Then why doesn't *Max Havelaar* pall? Why can one still read every word of it? As far as composition goes, it is the greatest mess possible. How the reviewers of today would tear it across and throw it in the w.p.b! But the reviewers of today, like the clergy, feel that they must justify God to man, and when they find they can't do it, when the book or the Almighty seems really unjustifiable, in the sight of common men, they apply the w.p.b.

It is surely the mistake of modern criticism, to conceive the public, the man-in-the-street, as the real god, who must be served and flattered by every book that appears, even if it were the Bible. To my thinking, the critic, like a good beadle, should rap the public on the knuckles and make it attend during divine service. And any good book is divine service.

The critic, having dated *Max Havelaar* a back number, hits him on the head if he dares look up, and says: Down! Revere the awesome modernity of the holy public!

I say: Not at all! The thing in *Max* that the public once loved, the tract, is really a back number. But there is so very little of the tract, actually, and what there is, the author has retracted so comically, as he went, that the reader can grin as he goes.

It was a stroke of cunning journalism on Multatuli's part (Dostoievsky also made such strokes of cunning journalism) to put his book through on its face value as a tract. What Multatuli really wanted was to get his book over. He wanted to be heard. He wanted to be read. *I want to be heard. I will be heard!* he vociferates on the last pages. He himself must have laughed in his sleeve as he vociferated. But the public gaped and fell for it.

He was the passionate missionary for the poor Javanese! Because he knew missionaries were, and are, listened to! And the Javanese were a good stick with which to beat the dog. The successful public being the dog. Which dog he longed to beat. To give it the trouncing of its life!

He did it, in missionary guise, in *Max Havelaar*. The book isn't really a tract, it is a satire. Multatuli isn't really a preacher, he's a satirical humourist. Straight on in the life of Jean Paul Richter the same bitter, almost mad-dog aversion from humanity that appeared in Jean Paul, appears again in Multatuli, as it appears in the later Mark Twain. Dostoievsky was somewhat the same, but in him the missionary had swallowed the mad dog of revulsion, so that the howls of derision are all ventriloquistic undertone.

Max Havelaar isn't a tract or a pamphlet, it is a satire. The satire on the Dutch bourgeois, in *Drystubble*, is final. The coffee-broker is reduced to his ultimate nothingness, in pure humour. It is the reduction of the prosperous business man in America and England today, just the same, essentially the same: and it is a death-stroke.

Similarly, the Java part of the book is a satire on colonial administration, and on government altogether. It is quite direct and straightforward satire, so it is wholesome. Multatuli never quite falls down the fathomless well of his own revulsion, as Dostoievsky did, to become a lily-mouthed missionary rumbling with ventral howls of derision and dementia. At his worst, Multatuli is irritatingly sentimental, harping on pity when he is inspired by hate. Maybe he deceives himself. But never for long.

His sympathy with the Javanese is also genuine enough; there was a man in him whose bowels of compassion were moved. Whereas a great nervous genius like Dostoievsky never felt a moment of real physical sympathy in his life. But with Multatuli, the sympathy for the Javanese is rather an excuse for hating the Dutch authorities still further. It is the sympathy of a man preoccupied with other feelings.

We see this in the famous idyll of Sai'dyah and Adinda, once the most beloved and most quoted part of the book. We see how it bored the author to write it, after the first few pages. He *tells* us it bored him. It bored him to write sympathetically. He was by nature a satirical humorist, and it was far more exciting for him to be attack-ing the Dutch officials than sympathizing with the Javanese.

This is again obvious in his partiality for the old Native Prince, the Regent. It is obvious that all the *actual* oppression of the poor Javanese came from the Javanese themselves, the native princes. It isn't the Dutch officials who steal Sai'dyah's buffalo: it is the princely Javanese. The oppression has been going on, Havelaar himself says it, *since the beginning of time*. Not since the coming of the Dutch. Indeed, it is the Oriental idea that the prince shall oppress his humble subjects. So why blame the Dutch officials so absolutely? Why not take the old native Regent by the beard?

But no! Multatuli, Max Havelaar, swims with pity for the poor and oppressed, but only because he hates the powers-that-be so intensely. He doesn't hate the powers because he loves the oppressed. The boot is on the other leg. The chick of pity comes out of the egg of hate. It is perhaps always so, with pity. But here we have to distinguish compassion from pity.

Surely, when Sai'dyah sets off into the world, or is defended by the buffalo, it is compassion Multatuli feels for him, not pity. But the end is pity only.

The bird of hate hatches the chick of pity. The great dynamic force in Multatuli is as it was, really, in Jean Paul and in Swift and Gogol and in Mark Twain, hate, a passionate, honourable hate. It is honourable to hate Drystubble, and Multatuli hated him. It is honourable to hate cowardly officialdom, and Multatuli hated that. Sometimes, it is even honourable, and necessary, to hate society, as Swift did, or to hate mankind altogether, as often Voltaire did.

For man tends to deteriorate into that which Drystubble was, and the Governor-General and Slimering, something hateful, which must be destroyed. Then in comes Multatuli, like Jack and the Beanstalk, to fight the giant.

And when Jack fights the giant, he *must* have recourse to a trick. David thought of a sling and stone. Multatuli took a sort of missionary disguise. The gross public accepted the disguise, and David's stone went home. *A la guerre comme a la guerre.*

When there are no more Drystubbles, no more Governor-Generals or Slimerings, then *Max Havelaar* will be out of date. The book is a pill rather than a comfit. The jam of pity was put on to get the pill down. Our fathers and grandfathers licked the jam off. We can still go on taking the pill, for the social constipation is as bad as ever.

Cavalleria Rusticana, by Giovanni Verga

Cavalleria Rusticana is in many ways the most interesting of the Verga books. The volume of short stories under this title appeared in 1880, when the author was forty years old, and when he had just “retired” from the world.

The Verga family owned land around Vizzini, a biggish village in southern Sicily; and here, in and around Vizzini, the tragedies of Turiddu and La Lupa and Jeli take place. But it was only in middle life that the drama of peasant passion really made an impression on Giovanni Verga. His earlier imagination, naturally, went out into the great world.

The family of the future author lived chiefly at Catania, the seaport of east Sicily, under Etna. And Catania was really Verga’s home town, just as Vizzini was his home village.

But as a young man of twenty he already wanted to depart into the bigger world of “the Continent,” as the Sicilians called the mainland of Italy. It was the Italy of 1860, the Italy of Garibaldi, and the new era. Verga seems to have taken little interest in politics. He had no doubt the southern idea of himself as a gentleman and an aristocrat, beyond politics. And he had the ancient southern thirst for show, for lustre, for glory, a desire to figure grandly among the first society of the world. His nature was proud and unmixable. At the same time, he had the southern passionate yearning for tenderness and generosity. And so he ventured into the world, without much money; and, in true southern fashion, he was dazzled. To the end of his days he was dazzled by elegant ladies in elegant equipages: one sees it, amusingly, in all his books.

He was a handsome man, by instinct haughty and reserved: because, partly, he was passionate and emotional, and did not choose to give himself away. A true provincial, he had to try to enter the *beau monde*. He lived by journalism, more or less: certainly the Vizzini lands would not keep him in affluence. But still, in his comparative poverty, he must enter the *beau monde*.

He did so: and apparently with a certain success. And for nearly twenty years he lived in Milan, in Florence, in Naples, writing, and imagining he was fulfilling his thirst for glory by having love-affairs with elegant ladies: most elegant ladies, as he assures us.

To this period belong the curiously unequal novels of the city world: *Eva*, *Tigre Reale*, *Eros*. They are interesting, alive, bitter, somewhat unhealthy, smelling of the seventies and of the Paris of the Goncourts, and, in some curious

way, abortive. The man had not found himself. He was in his wrong element, fooling himself and being fooled by show, in a true Italian fashion.

Then, towards the age of forty, came the recoil, and the *Cavalleria Rusticana* volume is the first book of the recoil. It was a recoil away from the *beau monde* and the “Continent,” back to Sicily, to Catania, to the peasants. Verga never married: but he was deeply attached to his own family. He lived in Catania, with his sister. His brother, or brother-in-law, who had looked after the Vizzini property, was ill. So for the first time in his life Giovanni Verga had to undertake the responsibility for the family estate and fortune. He had to go to Vizzini and more or less manage the farm work — at least keep an eye on it. He said he hated the job, that he had no capacity for business, and so on. But we may be sure he managed very well. And certainly from this experience he gained his real fortune, his genuine sympathy with peasant life, instead of his spurious sympathy with elegant ladies. His great books all followed *Cavalleria Rusticana*: and *Mastro-don Gesualdo* and the *Novelle Rusticane* (“Little Novels of Sicily”) and most of the sketches have their scenes laid in or around Vizzini.

So that *Cavalleria Rusticana* marks a turning-point in the man’s life. Verga still looks back to the city elegance, and makes such a sour face over it, it is really funny. The sketch he calls “Fantas-ticheria” (“Caprice”) and the last story in the book, “II Come, il Quando, et il Perche” (“The How, When, and Wherefore”) both deal with the elegant little lady herself. The sketch “Caprice” we may take as autobiographical — the story not entirely so. But we have enough data to go on.

The elegant little lady is the same, pretty, spoilt, impulsive emotional, but without passion. The lover, Polidori, is only half-sketched. But evidently he is a passionate man who *thinks* he can play at love and then is mortified to his very soul because he finds it is only a game. The tone of mortification is amusingly evident both in the sketch and in the story. Verga is profoundly and everlastingly offended with the little lady, with all little ladies, for not taking him absolutely seriously as an amorous male, when all the time he doesn’t quite take himself seriously, and doesn’t take the little lady seriously at all.

Nevertheless, the moment of sheer roused passion is serious in the man: and apparently not so in the woman. Each time the moment comes, it involves the whole nature of the man and does not involve the whole nature of the woman: she still clings to her social safeguards. It is the difference between a passionate nature and an emotional nature. But then the man goes out deliberately to make love to the emotional elegant woman who is truly social and not passionate. So he has only himself to blame if his passionate nose is out of joint.

It is most obviously out of joint. His little picture of the elegant little lady

jingling her scent-bottle and gazing in nervous anxiety for the train from Catania which will carry her away from Aci-Trezza and her too-intense lover, back to her light, gay, secure world on the mainland is one of the most amusingly biting things in the literature of love. How glad she must have been to get away from him! And how bored she must have been by his preaching the virtues of the humble poor, holding them up before her to make her feel small. We may be sure she doesn't feel small, only nervous and irritable. For apparently she had no deep warmth or generosity of nature.

So Verga recoiled to the humble poor, as we see in his "Caprice" sketch. Like a southerner, what he did he did wholesale. Floods of savage and tragic pity he poured upon the humble fisher-folk of Aci-Trezza, whether they asked for it or not — partly to spite the elegant little lady. And this particular flood spreads over the whole of his long novel concerning the fisher-folk of Aci-Trezza: *I Malavoglia*. It is a great novel, in spite of the pity: but always in spite of it.

In *Cavalleria Rusticana*, however, Verga had not yet come to the point of letting loose his pity. He is still too much and too profoundly offended, as a passionate male. He recoils savagely away from the sophistications of the city life of elegant little ladies, to the peasants in their most crude and simple, almost brute-like aspect.

When one reads, one after the other, the stories of Turiddu, La Lupa, Jeli, Brothpot, Rosso Malpelo, one after the other, stories of crude killing, it seems almost too much, too crude, too violent, too much a question of mere brutes.

As a matter of fact, the judgment is unjust. Turiddu is not a brute: neither is Alfio. Both are men of sensitive and even honourable nature. Turiddu knows he is wrong, and would even let himself be killed, he says, but for the thought of his old mother. The elegant Maria and her Erminia are never so sensitive and direct in expressing themselves; not so frankly warm-hearted.

As for Jeli, who could call him a brute? or Nanni? or Brothpot? They are perhaps not brutal enough. They are too gentle and forbearing, too delicately naive. And so grosser natures trespass on them unpardonably; and the revenge flashes out.

His contemporaries abused Verga for being a realist of the Zola school. The charge is unjust. The base of the charge against Zola is that he made his people too often merely physical-functional arrangements, physically and materially functioning without any "higher" nature. The charge against Zola is often justifiable. It is completely justifiable against the earlier d'Annunzio. In fact, the Italian tends on the one hand to be this creature of physical-functional activity and nothing else, spasmodically sensual and materialist; hence the violent Italian outcry against the portrayal of such creatures, and d'Annunzio's speedy

transition to neurotic Virgins of the Rocks and ultra-refinements.

But Verga's people are always people in the purest sense of the word. They are not intellectual, but then neither was Hector nor Ulysses intellectual. Verga, in his recoil, mistrusted everything that smelled of sophistication. He had a passion for the most naive, the most unsophisticated manifestation of human nature. He was not seeking the brute, the animal man, the so-called cave-man. Far from it. He knew already too well that the brute and the cave-man lie quite near under the skin of the ordinary successful man of the world. There you have the predatory cave-man of vulgar imagination, thinly hidden under expensive cloth.

What Verga's soul yearned for was the purely naive human being, in contrast to the sophisticated. It seems as if Sicily, in some way, under all her amazing forms of sophistication and corruption, still preserves some flower of pure human candour: the same thing that fascinated Theocritus. Theocritus was an Alexandrine courtier, singing from all his "musk and insolence" of the pure idyllic Sicilian shepherds. Verga is the Theocritus of the nineteenth century, born among the Sicilian shepherds, and speaking of them in prose more sadly than Theocritus, yet with some of the same eternal Sicilian dawn-freshness in his vision. It is almost bitter to think that Rosso Malpelo must often have looked along the coast and seen the rocks that the Cyclops flung at Ulysses; and that Jeli must some time or other have looked to the yellow temple-ruins of Girgenti.

Verga was fascinated, after his mortification in the *beau monde*, by pure naivete and by the spontaneous passion of life, that spurts beyond all convention or even law. Yet as we read, one after the other, of these betrayed husbands killing the co-respondents, it seems a little mechanical. Alfio, Jeli, Brothpot, Gramigna ending their life in prison: it seems a bit futile and hopeless, mechanical again.

The fault is partly Verga's own, the fault of his own obsession. He felt himself in some way deeply mortified, insulted in his ultimate sexual or male self, and he enacted over and over again the drama of revenge. We think to ourselves, ah, how stupid of Alfio, of Jeli, of Brothpot, to have to go killing a man and getting themselves shut up in prison for life, merely because the man had committed adultery with their wives. Was it worth it? Was the wife worth one year of prison, to a man, let alone a lifetime?

We ask the question with our reason, and with our reason we answer No! Not for a moment was any of these women worth it. Nowadays we have learnt more sense, and we let her go her way. So the stories are too old-fashioned.

And again, it was not for love of their wives that Jeli and Alfio and Brothpot killed the other man. It was because people talked. It was because of the fiction

of “honour.” We have got beyond all that.

We are so much more reasonable. All our life is so much more reasoned and reasonable. *Nous avons change tout cela.*

And yet, as the years go by, one wonders if mankind is so radically changed. One wonders whether reason, sweet reason, has really changed us, or merely delayed or diverted our reactions. Are Alfio and Jeli and Gramigna utterly out of date, a thing superseded for ever? Or are they eternal?

Is man a sweet and reasonable creature? Or is he, basically, a passional phenomenon? Is man a phenomenon on the face of the earth, or a rational consciousness? Is human behaviour to be reasonable, throughout the future, reasoned and rational? — or will it always display itself in strange and violent phenomena?

Judging from all experience, past and present, one can only decide that human behaviour is ultimately one of the natural phenomena, beyond all reason. Part of the phenomenon, for the time being, is human reason, the control of reason, and the power of the Word. But the Word and the reason are themselves only part of the coruscating phenomenon of human existence; they are, so to speak, one rosy shower from the rocket, which gives way almost instantly to the red shower of ruin or the green shower of despair.

Man is a phenomenon on the face of the earth. But the phenomena have their laws. One of the laws of the phenomenon called a human being is that, hurt this being mortally at its sexual root, and it will recoil ultimately into some form of killing. The recoil may be prompt, or delay by years or even by generations. But it will come. We may take it as a law.

We may take it as another law that the very deepest quick of a man’s nature is his own pride and self-respect. The human being, weird phenomenon, may be patient for years and years under insult, insult to his very quick, his pride in his own natural being. But at last, O phenomenon, killing will come of it. All bloody revolutions are the result of the long, slow, accumulated insult to the quick of pride in the mass of men.

A third law is that the naive or innocent core in a man is always his vital core, and infinitely more important than his intellect or his reason. It is only from his core of unconscious naivete that the human being is ultimately a responsible and dependable being. Break this human core of naivete — and the evil of the world all the time tries to break it, in Jeli, in Rosso Malpelo, in Brothpot, in all these Verga characters — and you get either a violent reaction, or, as is usual nowadays, a merely rational creature whose core of spontaneous life is dead. Now the rational creature, who is merely rational, by some cruel trick of fate remains rational only for one or two generations at best. Then he is quite mad. It

is one of the terrible qualities of the reason that it has no life of its own, and unless continually kept nourished or modified by the naive life in man and woman, it becomes a purely parasitic and destructive thing. Make any human being a really rational being, and you have made him a parasitic and destructive force. Make any people mainly rational in their life, and their inner activity will be the activity of destruction. The more the populations of the world become only rational in their consciousness, the swifter they bring about their destruction pure and simple.

Verga, like every great artist, had sensed this. What he bewails really, as the tragedy of tragedies, in this book, is the ugly trespass of the sophisticated greedy ones upon the naive life of the true human being: the death of the naive, pure being — or his lifelong imprisonment — and the triumph or the killing of the sophisticated greedy ones.

This is the tragedy of tragedies in all time, but particularly in our epoch: the killing off of the naive innocent life in all of us, by which alone we can continue to live, and the ugly triumph of the sophisticated greedy.

It may be urged that Verga commits the Tolstoian fallacy, of repudiating the educated world and exalting the peasant. But this is not the case. Verga is very much the gentleman, exclusively so, to the end of his days. He did not dream of putting on a peasant's smock, or following the plough. What Tolstoi somewhat perversely worshipped in the peasants was poverty itself, and humility, and what Tolstoi perversely hated was instinctive pride or spontaneous passion. Tolstoi has a perverse pleasure in making the later Vronsky abject and pitiable: because Tolstoi so meanly envied the healthy passionate male in the young Vronsky. Tolstoi cut off his own nose to spite his face. He envied the reckless passionate male with a carking envy, because he must have felt himself in some way wanting in comparison. So he exalts the peasant: not because the peasant may be a more natural and spontaneous creature than the city man or the guardsman, but just because the peasant is poverty-stricken and humble. This is malice, the envy of weakness and deformity.

We know now that the peasant is no better than anybody else; no better than a prince or a selfish young army officer or a governor or a merchant. In fact, in the mass, the peasant is worse than any of these. The peasant mass is the ugliest of all human masses, most greedily selfish and brutal of all. Which Tolstoi, leaning down from the gold bar of heaven, will have had opportunity to observe. If we have to trust to a *mass*, then better trust the upper or middle-class mass, all masses being odious.

But Verga by no means exalts the peasants as a class: nor does he believe in their poverty and humility. Verga's peasants are certainly not Christ-like,

whatever else they are. They are most normally ugly and low, the bulk of them. And individuals are sensitive and simple.

Verga turns to the peasants only to seek for a certain something which, as a healthy artist, he worshipped. Even Tolstoi, as a healthy artist, worshipped it the same. It was only as a moralist and a personal being that Tolstoi was perverse. As a true artist, he worshipped, as Verga did, every manifestation of pure, spontaneous, passionate life, life kindled to vividness. As a perverse moralist with a sense of some subtle deficiency in himself, Tolstoi tries to insult and to damp out the vividness of life. Imagine any great artist making the vulgar social condemnation of Anna and Vronsky figure as divine punishment! Where now is the society that turned its back on Vronsky and Anna? Where is it? And what is its condemnation worth, today?

Verga turned to the peasants to find, *in individuals*, the vivid spontaneity of sensitive passionate life, non-moral and non-didactic. He found it always *defeated*. He found the vulgar and the greedy always destroying the sensitive and the passionate. The vulgar and the greedy are themselves usually peasants: Verga was far too sane to put an aureole round the whole class. Still more are the women greedy and egoistic. But even so, Turiddu and Jeli and Rosso Malpelo and Nanni and Gramigna and Brothpot are not humble. They have no saint-like, self-sacrificial qualities. They are only naive, passionate, and natural. They are “defeated” not because there is any glory or sanctification in defeat; there is no martyrdom about it. They are defeated because they are too unsuspecting, not sufficiently armed and ready to do battle with the greedy and the sophisticated. When they do strike, they destroy themselves too. So the real tragedy is that they are not sufficiently conscious and developed to defend their own naive sensitiveness against the inroads of the greedy and the vulgar. The greedy and the vulgar win all the time: which, alas, is only too true, in Sicily as everywhere else. But Giovanni Verga certainly doesn't help them, by preaching humility. He does show them the knife of revenge at their throat.

And these stories, instead of being out of date, just because the manners depicted are more or less obsolete, even in Sicily, which is a good deal Americanized and “cleaned up,” as the reformers would say; instead of being out of date, they are dynamically perhaps the most up to date of stories. The Chekhovian after-influenza effect of inertia and will-lessness is wearing off, all over Europe. We realize we've had about enough of being null. And if Chekhov represents the human being driven into an extremity of self-consciousness and faintly-wriggling inertia, Verga represents him as waking suddenly from inaction into the stroke of revenge. We shall see which of the two visions is more deeply true to life.

“Cavalleria Rusticana” and “La Lupa” have always been hailed as masterpieces of brevity and gems of literary form. Masterpieces they are, but one is now a little sceptical of their form. After the enormous diffusiveness of Victor Hugo, it was perhaps necessary to make the artist more self-critical and self-effacing. But any wholesale creed in art is dangerous. Hugo’s romanticism, which consisted in letting himself go, in an orgy of effusive self-conceit, was not much worse than the next creed the French invented for the artist, of self-effacement. Self-effacement is quite as self-conscious, and perhaps even more conceited than letting oneself go. Maupassant’s self-effacement becomes more blatant than Hugo’s self-effusion. As for the perfection of form achieved — Merimee achieved the highest, in his dull stories like “Mateo Falcone” and “L’Enlèvement de la Redoute.” But they are hopelessly literary, fabricated. So is most of Maupassant. And if *Madame Bovary* has form, it is a pretty flat form.

But Verga was caught up by the grand idea of self-effacement in art. Anything more confused, more silly, really, than the pages prefacing the excellent story “Gramigna’s Lover” would be hard to find, from the pen of a great writer. The moment Verga starts talking theories, our interest wilts immediately. The theories were none of his own: just borrowed from the literary smarties of Paris. And poor Verga looks a sad sight in Paris ready-mades. And when he starts putting his theories into practice, and effacing himself, one is far more aware of his interference than when he just goes ahead. Naturally! Because self-effacement is, of course, self-conscious, and any form of emotional self-consciousness hinders a first-rate artist: though it may help the second-rate.

Therefore in “Cavalleria Rusticana” and in “La Lupa” we are just a bit too much aware of the author and his scissors. He has clipped too many away. The transitions are too abrupt. All is over in a gasp: whereas a story like “La Lupa” coven at least several years of time.

As a matter of fact, we need more looseness. We need an apparent formlessness, definite form is mechanical. We need more easy transition from mood to mood and from deed to deed. A great deal of the meaning of life and of art lies in the apparently dull spaces, the pauses, the unimportant passages. They are truly passages, the places of passing over.

So that Verga’s deliberate missing-out of transition passages is, it seems to me, often a defect. And for this reason a story like “La Lupa” loses a great deal of its life. It may be a masterpiece of concision, but it is hardly a masterpiece of narration. It is so short, our acquaintance with Nanni and Maricchia is so fleeting, we forget them almost at once. “Jeli” makes a far more profound impression, so does “Rosso Malpelo.” These seem to me the finest stories in the book, and among the finest stories ever written. Rosso Malpelo is an extreme of

the human consciousness, subtle and appalling as anything done by the Russians, and at the same time substantial, not introspective vapours. You will never forget him.

And it needed a deeper genius to write “Rosso Malpelo” than to write “Cavalleria Rusticana” or “La Lupa.” But the literary smarties, being so smart, have always praised the latter two above the others.

This business of missing out transition passages is quite deliberate on Verga’s part. It is perhaps most evident in this volume, because it is here that Verga practises it for the first time. It was a new dodge, and he handled it badly. The sliding-over of the change from Jeli’s boyhood to his young manhood is surely too deliberately confusing!

But Verga had a double motive. First was the Frenchy idea of self-effacement, which, however, didn’t go very deep, as Verga was too much of a true southerner to know quite what it meant. But the second motive was more dynamic. It was connected with Verga’s whole recoil from the sophisticated world, and it effected a revolution in his style. Instinctively he had come to hate the tyranny of a persistently logical sequence, or even a persistently chronological sequence. Time and the syllogism both seemed to represent the sophisticated falsehood and a sort of bullying, to him.

He tells us himself how he came across his new style:

“I had published several of my first novels. They went well: I was preparing others. One day, I don’t know how, there came into my hands a sort of broadside, a halfpenny sheet, sufficiently un-grammatical and disconnected, in which a sea-captain succinctly relates all the vicissitudes through which his sailing-ship has passed. Seaman’s language, short, without an unnecessary phrase. It struck me, and I read it again; it was what I was looking for, without definitely knowing it. Sometimes, you know, just a sign, an indication is enough. It is a revelation. . . .”

This passage explains all we need to know about Verga’s style, which is perhaps at its most extreme in this volume. He was trying to follow the workings of the unsophisticated mind, and trying to reproduce the pattern.

Now the emotional mind, if we may be allowed to say so, is not logical. It is a psychological fact, that when we are thinking emotionally or passionately, thinking and feeling at the same time, we do not think rationally: and therefore, and therefore, and therefore. Instead, the mind makes curious swoops and circles. It touches the point of pain or interest, then sweeps away again in a cycle, coils round and approaches again the point of pain or interest. There is a curious spiral rhythm, and the mind approaches again and again the point of concern, repeats itself, goes back, destroys the time-sequence entirely, so that

time ceases to exist, as the mind stoops to the quarry, then leaves it without striking, soars, hovers, turns, swoops, stoops again, still does not strike, yet is nearer, nearer, reels away again, wheels off into the air, even forgets, quite forgets, yet again turns, bends, circles slowly, swoops and stoops again, until at last there is the closing-in, and the clutch of a decision or a resolve.

This activity of the mind is strictly timeless, and illogical. Afterwards you can deduce the logical sequence and the time sequence, as historians do from the past. But in the happening, the logical and the time sequence do not exist.

Verga tried to convey this in his style. It gives at first the sense of jumble and incoherence. The beginning of the story "Brothpot" is a good example of this breathless muddle of the peasant mind. When one is used to it, it is amusing, and a new movement in deliberate consciousness: though the humorists have used the form before. But at first it may be annoying. Once he starts definitely narrating, however, Verga drops the "muddled" method, and seeks only to be concise, often too concise, too abrupt in the transition. And in the matter of punctuation he is, perhaps deliberately, a puzzle, aiming at the same muddled swift effect of the emotional mind in its movements. He is doing, as a great artist, what men like James Joyce do only out of contrariness and desire for a sensation. The emotional mind, however apparently muddled, has its own rhythm, its own commas and colons and full-stops. They are not always as we should expect them, but they are there, indicating that other rhythm.

Everybody knows, of course, that Verga made a dramatized version of "Cavalleria Rusticana," and that this dramatized version is the libretto of the ever-popular little opera of the same name. So that Mascagni's rather feeble music has gone to immortalize a man like Verga, whose only *popular* claim to fame is that he wrote the aforesaid libretto. But that is fame's fault, not Verga's.

The Collected Poems of D. H. Lawrence

Instead of bewailing a lost youth, a man nowadays begins to wonder, when he reaches my ripe age of forty-two, if ever his past will subside and be comfortably bygone. Doing over these poems makes me realize that my teens and my twenties are just as much me, here and now and present, as ever they were, and that pastness is only an abstraction. The actuality, the body of feeling, is essentially alive and here.

And I remember the slightly self-conscious Sunday afternoon, when I was nineteen, and I “composed” my first two “poems.” One was to “Guelder-roses,” and one to “Champions,” and most young ladies would have done better: at least I hope so. But I thought the effusions very nice, and so did Miriam.

Then much more vaguely I remember subsequent half-furtive moments when I would absorbedly scribble at verse for an hour or so, and then run away from the act and the production as if it were secret sin. It seems to me that “knowing oneself” was a sin and a vice for innumerable centuries, before it became a virtue. It seems to me, it is still a sin and vice, when it comes to new knowledge. In those early days — for I was very green and unsophisticated at twenty — I used to feel myself at times haunted by something, and a little guilty about it, as if it were an abnormality. Then the haunting would get the better of me, and the ghost would suddenly appear, in the shape of a usually rather incoherent poem. Nearly always I shunned the apparition once it had appeared. From the first, I was a little afraid of my real poems — not my “compositions,” but the poems that had the ghost in them. They seemed to me to come from somewhere, I didn’t quite know where, out of a me whom I didn’t know and didn’t want to know, and to say things I would much rather not have said: for choice. But there they were. I never read them again. Only I gave them to Miriam, and she loved them, or she seemed to. So when I was twenty-one, and went to Nottingham University as a day-student, I began putting them down in a little college notebook, which was the foundation of the poetic me. *Sapientiae Urbs Conditur*, it said on the cover. Never was anything less true. The city is founded on a passionate unreason.

To this day, I still have the uneasy haunted feeling, and would rather not write most of the things I do write — including this Note.

Only now I know my demon better, and, after bitter years, respect him more than my other, milder and nicer self. Now I no longer like my “compositions.” I

once thought the poem “Flapper” a little masterpiece: when I was twenty: because the demon isn’t in it. And I must have burnt many poems that had the demon fuming in them. The fragment “Discord in Childhood” was a long poem, probably was good, but I destroyed it. Save for Miriam, I perhaps should have destroyed them all. She encouraged my demon. But alas, it was me, not he, whom she loved. So for her too it was a catastrophe. My demon is not easily loved: whereas the ordinary me is. So poor Miriam was let down. Yet in a sense, she let down my demon, till he howled. And there it is. And no more *past* in me than my blood in my toes or my nose.

I have tried to arrange the poems in chronological order: that is, in the order in which they were written. The first are either subjective, or Miriam poems. “The Wild Common” was very early and very confused. I have rewritten some of it, and added some, till it seems complete. It has taken me twenty years to say what I started to say, incoherently, when I was nineteen, in this poem. The same with “Virgin Youth,” and others of the subjective poems with the demon fuming in them smokily. To the demon, the past is not past. The wild common, the gorse, the virgin youth are here and now. The same: the same me, the same one experience. Only now perhaps I can give it more complete expression.

The poems to Miriam, at least the early ones like “Dog-Tired” and “Cherry-Robbers” and “Renascence,” are not much changed. But some of the later ones had to be altered, where sometimes the hand of commonplace youth had been laid on the mouth of the demon. It is not for technique these poems are altered: it is to say the real say.

Other verses, those I call the imaginative, or fictional, like “Love on the Farm” and “Wedding Morn,” I have sometimes changed to get them into better form, and take out the dead bits. It took me many years to learn to play with the form of a poem: even if I can do it now. But it is only in the less immediate, the more fictional poems that the form has to be played with. The demon, when he’s really there, makes his own form willy-nilly, and is unchangeable.

The poems to Miriam run into the first poems to my mother. Then when I was twenty-three, I went away from home for the first time, to the south of London. From the big new red school where I taught, we could look north and see the Crystal Palace: to me, who saw it for the first time, in lovely autumn weather, beautiful and softly blue on its hill to the north. And past the school, on an embankment, the trains rushed south to Brighton or to Kent. And round the school the country was still only just being built over, and the elms of Surrey stood tall and noble. It was different from the Midlands.

Then began the poems to Helen, and all that trouble of “Lilies in the Fire”: and London, and school, a whole new world. Then starts the rupture with home, with

Miriam, away there in Nottinghamshire. And gradually the long illness, and then the death of my mother; and in the sick year after, the collapse of Miriam, of Helen, and of the other woman, the woman of “Kisses in the Train” and “The Hands of the Betrothed.”

Then, in that year, for me everything collapsed, save the mystery of death, and the haunting of death in life. I was twenty-five, and from the death of my mother, the world began to dissolve around me, beautiful, iridescent, but passing away substanceless. Till I almost dissolved away myself, and was very ill: when I was twenty-six.

Then slowly the world came back: or I myself returned: but to another world. And in 1912, when I was still twenty-six, the other phase commenced, the phase of *Look! We Have Come Through*. — when I left teaching, and left England, and left many other things, and the demon had a new run for his money.

But back in England during the war, there are the War poems from the little volume: *Bay*. These, beginning with “Tommyes in the Train,” make up the end of the volume of *Rhyming Poems*. They are the end of the cycle of purely English experience, and death experience.

The first poems I had published were “Dreams Old” and “Dreams Nascent,” which Miriam herself sent to Ford Madox Hueffer, in 1910, I believe, just when the *English Review* had started so brilliantly. Myself, I had offered the little poem “Study” to the Nottingham University *Magazine*, but they returned it. But Hueffer accepted the “Dreams” poems for the *English Review*, and was very kind to me, and was the first man I ever met who had a real and a true feeling for literature. He introduced me to Edward Garnett, who, somehow, introduced me to the world. How well I remember the evenings at Garnett’s house in Kent, by the log fire. And there I wrote the best of the dialect poems. I remember Garnett disliked the old ending to “Whether or Not.” Now I see he was right, it was the voice of the commonplace me, not the demon. So I have altered it. And there again, those days of Hueffer and Garnett are not past at all, once I recall them. They were good to the demon, and the demon is timeless. But the ordinary meal-time me has yesterdays.

And that is why I have altered “Dreams Nascent,” that exceedingly funny and optimistic piece of rhymeless poetry which Ford Hueffer printed in the *English Review*, and which introduced me to the public. The public seemed to like it. The M.P. for schoolteachers said I was an ornament to the educational system, whereupon I knew it must be the ordinary me which had made itself heard, and not the demon. Anyhow, I was always uneasy about it.

There is a poem added to the second volume, which had to be left out of *Look! We Have Come Through!* when that book was first printed, because the

publishers objected to mixing love and religion, so they said, in the lines:

But I hope I shall find eternity
With my face down buried between her breasts.
. . . But surely there are many eternities, and one of them Adam spends with his face buried and at peace between the breasts of Eve: just as Eve spends one of her eternities with her face hidden in the breast of Adam. But the publishers coughed out that gnat, and I was left wondering, as usual.

Some of the poems in *Look!* are rewritten, but not many, not as in the first volume. And *Birds, Beasts and Flowers* are practically untouched. They are what they are. They are the same me as wrote "The Wild Common," or "Renaissance."

Perhaps it may seem bad taste to write this so personal foreword. But since the poems are so often personal themselves, and hang together in a life, it is perhaps only fair to give the demon his body of mere man, as far as possible.

Chariot of the Sun, by Harry Crosby

The text of this preface is taken from Lawrence's typescript, not from *Chariot of the Sun*.

Poetry, they say, is a matter of words. And this is just as much true as that pictures are a matter of paint, and frescoes a matter of water and colour-wash. It is such a long way from being the whole truth that it is slightly silly if uttered sententiously.

Poetry is a matter of words. Poetry is a stringing together of words into a ripple and jingle and a run of colours. Poetry is an interplay of images. Poetry is the iridescent suggestion of an idea. Poetry is all these things, and still it is something else. Given all these ingredients, you have something very like poetry, something for which we might borrow the old romantic name of poesy. And poesy, like bric-a-brac, will for ever be in fashion. But poetry is still another thing.

The essential quality of poetry is that it makes a new effort of attention, and "discovers" a new world within the known world. Man, and the animals, and the flowers, all live within a strange and for ever surging chaos. The chaos which we have got used to we call a cosmos. The unspeakable inner chaos of which we are composed we call consciousness, and mind, and even civilization. But it is, ultimately, chaos, lit up by visions, or not lit up by visions. Just as the rainbow may or may not light up the storm. And, like the rainbow, the vision perisheth.

But man cannot live in chaos. The animals can. To the animal all is chaos, only there are a few recurring motions and aspects within the surge. And the animal is content. But man is not. Man must wrap himself in a vision, make a house of apparent form and stability, fixity. In his terror of chaos he begins by putting up an umbrella between himself and the everlasting whirl. Then he paints the under-side of his umbrella like a firmament. Then he parades around, lives and dies under his umbrella. Bequeathed to his descendants, the umbrella becomes a dome, a vault, and men at last begin to feel that something is wrong.

Man fixes some wonderful erection of his own between himself and the wild chaos, and gradually goes bleached and stifled under his parasol. Then comes a poet, enemy of convention, and makes a slit in the umbrella; and lo! the glimpse of chaos is a vision, a window to the sun. But after a while, getting used to the vision, and not liking the genuine draught from chaos, commonplace man daubs

a simulacrum of the window that opens on to chaos, and patches the umbrella with the painted patch of the simulacrum. That is, he has got used to the vision; it is part of his house-decoration. So that the umbrella at last looks like a glowing open firmament, of many aspects. But alas! it is all simulacrum, in innumerable patches. Homer and Keats, annotated and with glossary.

This is the history of poetry in our era. Someone sees Titans in the wild air of chaos, and the Titan becomes a wall between succeeding generations and the chaos they should have inherited. The wild sky moved and sang. Even that became a great umbrella between mankind and the sky of fresh air; then it became a painted vault, a fresco on a vaulted roof, under which men bleach and go dissatisfied. Till another poet makes a slit on to the open and windy chaos.

But at last our roof deceives us no more. It is painted plaster, and all the skill of all the human ages won't take us in. Dante or Leonardo, Beethoven or Whitman: lo! it is painted on the plaster of our vault. Like St. Francis preaching to the birds in Assisi. Wonderfully like air and birdy space and chaos of many things — partly because the fresco is faded. But even so, we are glad to get out of that church, and into the natural chaos.

This is the momentous crisis for mankind, when we have to get back to chaos. So long as the umbrella serves, and poets make slits in it, and the mass of people can be gradually educated up to the vision in the slit: which means they patch it over with a patch that looks just like the vision in the slit: so long as this process can continue, and mankind can be educated up, and thus built in, so long will a civilization continue more or less happily, completing its own painted prison. It is called completing the consciousness.

The joy men had when Wordsworth, for example, made a slit and saw a primrose! Till then, men had only seen a primrose dimly, in the shadow of the umbrella. They saw it through Wordsworth in the full gleam of chaos. Since then, gradually, we have come to see primavera nothing but primrose. Which means, we have patched over the slit.

And the greater joy when Shakespeare made a big rent and saw emotional, wistful man outside in the chaos, beyond the conventional idea and painted umbrella of moral images and iron-bound paladins, which had been put up in the Middle Ages. But now, alas, the roof of our vault is simply painted dense with Hamlets and Macbeths, the side walls too, and the order is fixed and complete. Man can't be any different from his image. Chaos is all shut out.

The umbrella has got so big, the patches and plaster are so tight and hard, it can be slit no more. If it were slit, the rent would no more be a vision, it would only be an outrage. We should dab it over at once, to match the rest.

So the umbrella is absolute. And so the yearning for chaos becomes a

nostalgia. And this will go on till some terrific wind blows the umbrella to ribbons, and much of mankind to oblivion. The rest will shiver in the midst of chaos. For chaos is always there, and always will be, no matter how we put up umbrellas of visions.

What about the poets, then, at this juncture? They reveal the inward desire of mankind. What do they reveal? They show the desire for chaos, and the fear of chaos. The desire for chaos is the breath of their poetry. The fear of chaos is in their parade of forms and technique. Poetry is made of words, they say. So they blow bubbles of sound and image, which soon burst with the breath of longing for chaos, which fills them. But the poetasters can make pretty shiny bubbles for the Christmas-tree, which never burst, because there is no breath of poetry in them, but they remain till we drop them.

What, then, of *Chariot of the Sun*? It is a warlike and bronzy-title for a sheaf of flimsies, almost too flimsy for real bubbles. But incongruity is man's recognition of chaos.

If one had to judge these little poems for their magic of words, as one judges Paul Valery, for example, they would look shabby. There is no obvious incantation of sweet noise; only too often the music of one line deliberately kills the next, breathlessly staccato. There is no particular jewellery of epithet. And no handsome handling of images. Where deliberate imagery is used, it is perhaps a little clumsy. There is no coloured thread of an idea; and no subtle ebbing of a theme into consciousness, no recognizable vision, new gleam of chaos let in to a world of order. There is only a repetition of sun, sun, sun, not really as a glowing symbol, more as a bewilderment and a narcotic. The images in "Sun Rhapsody" shatter one another, line by line. For the sun,

it is a forest without trees
it is a lion in a cage of breeze
it is the roundness of her knees
great Hercules
and all the seas
and our soliloquies

The rhyme is responsible for a great deal. The lesser symbols are as confusing: sunmaids who are naiads of the water world, hiding in a cave. Only the forest becomes suddenly logical.

I am a tree whose roots are tangled in the sun
All men and women are trees whose roots are tangled in the sun
Therefore humanity is the forest of the sun.

What is there, then, in this poetry, where there seems to be nothing? For if

there is nothing, it is merely nonsense.

And, almost, it is nonsense. Sometimes, as in the “verse” beginning: “sthhe fous on ssu eod,” since I at least can make no head or tail of it, and the mere sound is impossible, and the mere look of it is not inspiring, to me it is just nonsense. But in a world overloaded with shallow “sense,” I can bear a page of nonsense, just for a pause.

For the rest, what is there? Take, at random, the poem called “Neant:”

Red sunbeams from an autumn sun
Shall be the strongest wall
To shield the sunmaids of my soul
From worlds inimical.

Yet sunflakes falling in the sea
Beyond the outer shore
Reduplicate their epitaph
To kill the conqueror.

It is a tissue of incongruity, in sound and sense. It means nothing, and it says nothing. And yet it has something to say. It even carries a dim suggestion of that which refuses to be said.

And therein lies the charm. It is a glimpse of chaos not reduced to order. But the chaos *alive*, not the chaos of matter. A glimpse of the living, untamed chaos. For the grand chaos is all alive, and everlasting. From it we draw our breath of life. If we shut ourselves off from it, we stifle. The animals live with it, as they live in grace. But when man became conscious, and aware of *himself*, his own littleness and puniness in the whirl of the vast chaos of God, he took fright, and began inventing God in his own image.

Now comes the moment when the terrified but inordinately conceited human consciousness must at last submit, and own itself part of the vast and potent living chaos. We must keep true to ourselves. But we must breathe in life from the living and unending chaos. We shall put up more umbrellas. They are a necessity of our consciousness. But never again shall we be able to put up The Absolute Umbrella, either religious or moral or rational or scientific or practical. The vast parasol of our conception of the universe, the cosmos, the firmament of suns and stars and space, this we can roll up like any other green sunshade, and bring it forth again when we want it. But we mustn't imagine it always spread above us. It is no more absolutely there than a green sunshade is absolutely there. It is casually there, only; because it is as much a contrivance and invention of our mind as a green sunshade is. Likewise the grand conception of God: this already shuts up like a Japanese parasol, rather clumsily, and is put by for

Sundays, or bad weather, or a “serious” mood.

Now we see the charm of *Chariot of the Sun*. It shuts up all the little and big umbrellas of poesy and importance, has no outstanding melody or rhythm or image or epithet or even sense. And we feel a certain relief. The sun is very much in evidence, certainly, but it is a bubble reality that always explodes before you can really look at it. And it upsets all the rest of things with its disappearing.

Hence the touch of true poetry in this sun. It bursts all the bubbles and umbrellas of reality, and gives us a breath of the live chaos. We struggle out into the fathomless chaos of things passing and coming, and many suns and different darkneses. There is a bursting of bubbles of reality, and the pang of extinction that is also liberation into the roving, uncaring chaos which is all we shall ever know of God.

To me there is a breath of poetry, like an uneasy waft of fresh air at dawn, before it is light. There is an acceptance of the limitations of consciousness, and a leaning-up against the sun-imbued world of chaos. It is poetry at the moment of inception in the soul, before the germs of the known and the unknown have fused to begin a new body of concepts. And therefore it is useless to quote fragments. They are too nebulous and *not there*. Yet in the whole there is a breath of real poetry, the essential quality of poetry. It makes a new act of attention, and wakes us to a nascent world of inner and outer suns. And it has the poetic faith in the chaotic splendour of suns.

It is poetry of suns which are the core of chaos, suns which are fountains of shadow and pools of light and centres of thought and lions of passion. Since chaos has a core which is itself quintessen-tially chaotic and fierce with incongruities. That such a sun should have a chariot makes it only more chaotic.

And in the chaotic re-echoing of the soul, wisps of sound curl round with curious soothing —

Likewise invisible winds Drink fire, and all my heart is sun-consoled.

And a poem such as “Water-Lilies” has a lovely suffusion in which the visual image passes at once into sense of touch, and back again, so that there is an iridescent confusion of sense-impression, sound and touch and sight all running into one another, blending into a vagueness which is a new world, a vagueness and a suffusion which liberates the soul, and lets a new flame of desire flicker delicately up from the numbed body.

The suffused fragments are the best, those that are only comprehensible with the senses, with visions passing into touch and to sound, then again touch, and the bursting of the bubble of an image. There is always sun, but there is also water, most palpably water. Even some of the suns are wetly so, wet pools that wet us with their touch. Then loose suns like lions, soft gold lions and white

lions half-visible. Then again the elusive gleam of the sun of livingness, soft as gold and strange as the lion's eyes, the livingness that never ceases and never will cease. In this there is faith, soft, intangible, suffused faith that is the breath of all poetry, part of the breathing of the myriad sun in chaos. Such sun breathes its way into words, and the words become poetry, by suffusion. On the part of the poet it is an act of faith, pure attention and purified receptiveness. And without such faith there is no poetry. There is even no life. The poetry of conceit is a dead-sea fruit. The poetry of sunless chaos is already a bore. The poetry of a regulated cosmos is nothing but a wire bird-cage. Because in all living poetry the living chaos stirs, sun-suffused and sun-impulsive, and most subtly chaotic. All true poetry is most subtly and sensitively chaotic, outlawed. But it is the impulse of the sun in chaos, not conceit.

The Sun in unconcealed rage
Glares down across the magic of the world.

The sun within us, that sways us incalculably.

At night
Swift to the Sun
Deep imaged in my soul
But during the long day black lands
To cross

And it is faith in the incalculable sun, inner and outer, which keeps us alive.

Sunmaid
Left by the tide
I bring you a conch-shell
That listening to the Sun you may
Revive

And there is always the battle of the sun, against the corrosive acid vapour of vanity and poisonous conceit, which is the breath of the world.

Dark clouds
Are not so dark
As our embittered thoughts
Which carve strange silences within
The Sun

That the next "cinquain" may not be poetry at all is perhaps just as well, to keep us in mind of the world of conceit outside. It is the expired breath, with its necessary carbonic acid. It is the cold shadow across the sun, and saves us from

the strain of the monos, from homogeneity and exaltation and forcedness and all-of-a-pieceness, which is the curse of the human consciousness. What does it matter if half the time a poet fails in his effort at expression! The failures make it real. The act of attention is not so easy. It is much easier to write poesy. Failure is part of the living chaos. And the groping reveals the act of attention, which suddenly passes into pure expression.

But I shall not be frightened by a sound Of Something moving cautiously around.

Whims, and fumbings, and effort, and nonsense, and echoes from other poets, these all go to make up the living chaos of a little book of real poetry, as well as pure little poems like "Sun-Ghost," "To Those Who Return," "Torse de Jeune Femme au Soleil," "Poem for the Feet of Polia." Through it all runs the intrinsic naivety without which no poetry can exist, not even the most sophisticated. This naivete is the opening of the soul to the sun of chaos, and the soul may open like a lily or a tiger-lily or a dandelion or a deadly nightshade or a rather paltry chickweed flower, and it will be poetry of its own sort. But open it must. This opening, and this alone, is the essential act of attention, the essential poetic and vital act. We may fumble in the act, and a hailstone may hit us. But it is in the course of things. In this act, and this alone, we truly *live*: in that innermost naive opening of the soul, like a flower, like an animal, like a coloured snake, it does not matter, to the sun of chaotic livingness.

Now, after a long bout of conceit and self-assurance and flippancy, the young are waking up to the fact that they are starved of life and of essential sun, and at last they are being driven, out of sheer starvedness, to make the act of submission, the act of attention, to open into inner naivete, deliberately and dauntlessly, admit the chaos and the sun of chaos. This is the new naivete, chosen, recovered, regained. Round it range the white and golden soft lions of courage and the sun of dauntlessness, and the wliorlecl ivory horn of the unicorn is erect and ruthless, as a weapon of defence. The naive, open spirit of man will no longer be a victim, to be put on a cross, nor a beggar, to be scorned and given a pittance. This time it will be erect and a bright lord, with a heart open to the wild sun of chaos, but with the yellow lions of the sun's danger on guard in the eyes.

The new naivete, erect, and ready, sufficiently sophisticated to wring the neck of sophistication, will be the new spirit of poetry and the new spirit of life. Tender, but purring like a leopard that may snarl, it may be clumsy at first, and make gestures of self-conscious crudity. But it is a real thing, the real creature of the inside of the soul. And to the young it is the essential reality, the liberation into the real self. The liberation into the wild air of chaos, the being part of the

sun. A long course of merely negative “freedom” reduces the soul and body both to numbness. They can feel no more and respond no more. Only the mind remains awake, and suffers keenly from the sense of nullity; to be young, and to feel you have every “opportunity,” every “freedom” to live, and yet not to be able to live, because the responses have gone numb in the body and soul, this is the nemesis that is overtaking the young. It drives them silly.

But there is the other way, back to the sun, to faith in the speckled leopard of the mixed self. What is more chaotic than a dappled leopard trotting through dappled shade? And that is our life, really. Why try to whitewash ourselves? — or to camouflage ourselves into an artificially chaotic pattern? All we have to do is to accept the true chaos that we are, like the jaguar dappled with black suns in gold.

The Mother, by Grazia Deledda

Grazia Deledda is already one of the elder living writers of Italy, and though her work does not take on quite so rapidly as the novels of Fogazzaro, or even d'Annunzio, that peculiarly obscuring nebulousness of the past-which-is-only-just-gone-by, still, the dimness has touched it. It is curious that fifteen or twenty years ago should seem so much more remote than fifty or eighty years ago. But perhaps it is organically necessary to us that our feelings should die, temporarily, towards that strange intermediate period which lies between present actuality and the revived past. We can hardly bear to recall the emotions of twenty or fifteen years ago, hardly at all, whereas we respond again quite vividly to the emotions of Jane Austen or Dickens, nearer a hundred years ago. There, the past is safely and finally past. The past of fifteen years ago is still yeastily working in us.

It takes a really good writer to make us overcome our repugnance to the just-gone-by emotions. Even d'Annunzio's novels are hardly readable at present: Matilda Serao's still less so. But we can still read Grazia Deledda with genuine interest.

The reason is that, though she is not a first-class genius, she belongs to more than just her own day. She does more than reproduce the temporary psychological condition of her period. She has a background, and she deals with something more fundamental than sophisticated feeling. She does not penetrate, as a great genius does, the very sources of human passion and motive. She stays far short of that. But what she does do is to create the passionate complex of a primitive populace.

To do this, one must have an isolated populace: just as Thomas Hardy isolates Wessex. Grazia Deledda has an island to herself, her own island of Sardinia, that she loves so deeply: especially the more northerly, mountainous part of Sardinia.

Still Sardinia is one of the wildest, remotest parts of Europe, with a strange people and a mysterious past of its own. There is still an old mystery in the air, over the forest slopes of Mount Gennargentu, as there is over some old Druid places, the mystery of an unevolved people. The war, of course, partly gutted Sardinia, as it gutted everywhere. But the island is still a good deal off the map, on the face of the earth.

An island of rigid conventions, the rigid conventions of barbarism, and at the same time the fierce violence of the instinctive passions. A savage tradition of

chastity, with a savage lust of the flesh. A barbaric overlordship of the gentry, with a fierce indomitableness of the servile classes. A lack of public opinion, a lack of belonging to any other part of the world, a lack of mental awakening, which makes inland Sardinia almost as savage as Benin, and makes Sardinian singing as wonderful and almost as wild as any on earth. It is the human instinct still uncontaminated. The money-sway still did not govern central Sardinia, in the days of Grazia Deledda's books, twenty, a dozen years ago, before the war. Instead, there was a savage kind of aristocracy and feudalism, and a rule of ancient instinct, instinct with the definite but indescribable tang of the aboriginal people of the island, not absorbed into the world: instinct often at war with the Italian government; a determined, savage individualism often breaking with the law, or driven into brigandage: but human, of the great human mystery.

It is this old Sardinia, at last being brought to heel, which is the real theme of Grazia Deledda's books. She is fascinated by her island and its folks, more than by the problems of the human psyche. And therefore this book, *The Mother*, is perhaps one of the least typical of her novels, one of the most "Continental." Because here, she has a definite universal theme: the consecrated priest and the woman. But she keeps on forgetting her theme. She becomes more interested in the death of the old hunter, in the doings of the boy Antiochus, in the exorcising of the spirit from the little girl possessed. She is herself somewhat bored by the priest's hesitations; she shows herself suddenly impatient, a pagan sceptical of the virtues of chastity, even in consecrated priests; she is touched, yet annoyed, by the pathetic, tiresome old mother who made her son a priest out of ambition, and who simply expires in the terror of a public exposure: and, in short, she makes a bit of a mess of the book, because she started a problem she didn't quite dare to solve. She shirks the issue atrociously. But neither will the modern spirit solve the problem by killing off the fierce instincts that made the problem. As for Grazia Deledda, first she started by sympathizing with the mother, and then must sympathize savagely with the young woman, and then can't make up her mind. She kills off the old mother in disgust at the old woman's triumph, so leaving the priest and the young woman hanging in space. As a sort of problem-story, it is disappointing. No doubt, if the priest had gone off with the woman, as he first intended, then all the authoress's sympathy would have fallen to the old abandoned mother. As it is, the sympathy falls between two stools, and the title *La Madre* is not really justified. The mother turns out not to be the heroine.

But the interest of the book lies, not in plot or characterization, but in the presentation of sheer instinctive life. The love of the priest for the woman is sheer instinctive passion, pure and unde-filed by sentiment. As such it is worthy of respect, for in other books on this theme the instinct is swamped and

extinguished in sentiment. Here, however, the instinct of direct sex is so strong and so vivid, that only the other blind instinct of mother-obedience, the child-instinct, can overcome it. All the priest's education and Christianity are really mere snuff of the candle. The old, wild instinct of a mother's ambition for her son defeats the other wild instinct of sexual mating. An old woman who has never had any sex-life — and it is astonishing, in barbaric half-civilization, how many people are denied a sex-life — she succeeds, by her old barbaric maternal power over her son, in finally killing his sex-life too. It is the suicide of semi-barbaric natures under the sway of a dimly comprehended Christianity, and falsely conceived ambition.

The old, blind life of instinct, and chiefly frustrated instinct and the rage thereof, as it is seen in the Sardinian hinterland, this is Grazia Deledda's absorption. The desire of the boy Antiochus to be a priest is an instinct: perhaps an instinctive recoil from his mother's grim priapism. The dying man escapes from the village, back to the rocks, instinctively needing to die in the wilds. The feeling of Agnes, the woman who loves the priest, is sheer female instinctive passion, something as in Emily Bronte. It too has the ferocity of frustrated instinct, and is bare and stark, lacking any of the graces of sentiment. This saves it from "dating" as d'Annunzio's passions date. Sardinia is by no means a land for Romeos and Juliets, nor even Virgins of the Rocks. It is rather the land of *Wuthering Heights*.

The book, of course, loses a good deal in translation, as is inevitable. In the mouths of the simple people, Italian is a purely instinctive language, with the rhythm of instinctive rather than mental processes. There are also many instinct-words with meanings never clearly mentally defined. In fact, nothing is brought to real mental clearness, everything goes by in a stream of more or less vague, more or less realized, feeling, with a natural mist or glow of sensation over everything, that counts more than the actual words said; and which, alas, it is almost impossible to reproduce in the more cut-and-dried northern languages, where every word has its fixed value and meaning, like so much coinage. A language can be killed by over-precision, killed especially as an effective medium for the conveyance of instinctive passion and instinctive emotion. One feels this, reading a translation from the Italian. And though Grazia Deledda is not masterly as Giovanni Verga is, yet, in Italian at least, she can put us into the mood and rhythm of Sardinia, like a true artist, an artist whose work is sound and enduring.

***Bottom Dogs*, by Edward Dahlberg**

When we think of America, and of her huge success, we never realize how many failures have gone, and still go, to build up that success. It is not till you live in America, and go a little under the surface, that you begin to see how terrible and brutal is the mass of failure that nourishes the roots of the gigantic tree of dollars. And this is especially so in the country, and in the newer parts of the land, particularly out west. There you see how many small ranches have gone broke in despair, before the big ranches scoop them up and profit by all the back-breaking, profitless, grim labour of the pioneer, for in the west you can still see the pioneer work of tough, hard first-comers, individuals, and it is astounding to see how often these individuals, pioneer first-comers who fought like devils against their difficulties, have been defeated, broken, their efforts and their amazing hard work lost, as it were, on the face of the wilderness. But it is these hard-necked failures who really broke the resistance of the stubborn, obstinate country, and made it easier for the second wave of exploiters to come in with money and reap the harvest. The real pioneer in America fought like hell and suffered till the soul was ground out of him: and then, nine times out of ten, failed, was beaten. That is why pioneer literature, which, even from the glimpses one has of it, contains the amazing Odyssey of the brute fight with savage conditions of the western continent, hardly exists, and is absolutely unpopular. Americans will not stand for the pioneer stuff, except in small, sentimentalized doses. They know too well the grimness of it, the savage fight and the savage failure which broke the back of the country but also broke something in the human soul. The spirit and the will survived: but something in the soul perished: the softness, the floweriness, the natural tenderness. How could it survive the sheer brutality of the fight with that American wilderness, which is so big, vast, and obdurate!

The savage America was conquered and subdued at the expense of the instinctive and intuitive sympathy of the human soul. The fight was too brutal. It is a great pity some publisher does not undertake a series of pioneer records and novels, the genuine, unsweetened stuff. The books exist. But they are shoved down into oblivion by the common will-to-forget. They show the strange brutality of the struggle, what would have been called in the old language the breaking of the heart. America was not colonized and "civilized" until the heart was broken in the American pioneer. It was a price that was paid. The heart was broken. But the will, the determination to conquer the land and make it submit to

productivity, this was not broken. The will-to-success and the will-to-produce became clean and indomitable once the sympathetic heart was broken.

By the sympathetic heart, we mean that instinctive belief which lies at the core of the human heart, that people and the universe itself are *ultimately* kind. This belief is fundamental and, in the old language, is embodied in the doctrine: God is good. Now given an opposition too ruthless, a fight too brutal, a betrayal too bitter, this belief breaks in the heart, and is no more. Then you have either despair, bitterness, and cynicism, or you have the much braver reaction which says: God is not good, but the human will is indomitable, it cannot be broken, it will succeed against all odds. It is not God's business to be good and kind, that is man's business. God's business is to be indomitable. And man's business is essentially the same.

This is, roughly, the American position today, as it was the position of the Red Indian, when the white man came, and of the Aztec and of the Peruvian. So far as we can make out, neither Redskin nor Aztec nor Inca had any conception of a "good" God. They conceived of implacable, indomitable Powers, which is very different. And that seems to me the essential American position today. Of course the white American believes that man should behave in a kind and benevolent manner. But this is a social belief and a social gesture, rather than an individual flow. The flow from the heart, the warmth of fellow-feeling which has animated Europe and been the best of her humanity, individual, spontaneous, flowing in thousands of little passionate currents often conflicting, this seems unable to persist on the American soil. Instead you get the social creed of benevolence and uniformity, a mass *will*, and an inward individual retraction, an isolation, an amorphous separateness like grains of sand, each grain isolated upon its own will, its own indomitable-ness, its own implacability, its own unyielding, yet heaped together with all the other grains. This makes the American mass the easiest mass in the world to rouse, to move. And probably, under a long stress, it would make it the most difficult mass in the world to hold together.

The deep psychic change which we call the breaking of the heart, the collapse of the flow of spontaneous warmth between a man and his fellows, happens of course now all over the world. It seems to have happened to Russia in one great blow. It brings a people into a much more complete social unison, for good or evil. But it throws them apart in their private, individual emotions. Before, they were like cells in a complex tissue, alive and functioning diversely in a vast organism composed of family, clan, village, nation. Now, they are like grains of sand, friable, heaped together in a vast inorganic democracy.

While the old sympathetic flow continues, there are violent hostilities between people, but they are not secretly repugnant to one another. Once the heart is

broken, people become repulsive to one another, secretly, and they develop social benevolence. They smell in each other's nostrils. It has been said often enough of more primitive or old-world peoples, who live together in a state of blind mistrust but also of close physical connexion with one another, that they have no noses. They are so close, the flow from body to body is so powerful, that they hardly smell one another, and hardly are aware at all of offensive human odours that madden the new civilizations. As it says in this novel: The American senses other people by their sweat and their kitchens. By which he means, their repulsive effluvia. And this is basically true. Once the blood-sympathy breaks, and only the nerve-sympathy is left, human beings become secretly intensely repulsive to one another, physically, and sympathetic only mentally and spiritually. The secret physical repulsion between people is responsible for the perfection of American "plumbing," American sanitation, and American kitchens, utterly white-enamelled and antiseptic. It is revealed in the awful advertisements such as those about "halitosis," or bad breath. It is responsible for the American nausea at coughing, spitting, or any of those things. The American townships don't mind hideous litter of tin cans and paper and broken rubbish. But they go crazy at the sight of human excrement.

And it is this repulsion from the physical neighbour that is now coming up in the consciousness of the great democracies, in England, America, Germany. The old flow broken, men could enlarge themselves for a while in transcendentalism, Whitmanish "adhesiveness" of the social creature, noble supermen, lifted above the baser functions. For the last hundred years man has been elevating himself above his "baser functions" and posing around as a transcendentalism a superman, a perfect social being, a spiritual entity. And now, since the war, the collapse has come.

Man has no ultimate control of his own consciousness. If his nose doesn't notice stinks, it just doesn't, and there's the end of it. If his nose is so sensitive that a stink overpowers him, then again he's helpless. He can't prevent his senses from transmitting and his mind from registering what it does register.

And now, man has begun to be overwhelmingly conscious of the repulsiveness of his neighbour, particularly of the physical repulsiveness. There it is, in James Joyce, in Aldous Huxley, in Andre Gide, in modern Italian novels like *Parigi* — in all the very modern novels, the dominant note is the repulsiveness, intimate physical repulsiveness of human flesh. It is the expression of absolutely genuine experience. What the young feel intensely, and no longer so secretly, is the extreme repulsiveness of other people.

It is, perhaps, the inevitable result of the transcendental bodiless brotherliness and social "adhesiveness" of the last hundred years. People rose superior to their

bodies, and soared along, till they had exhausted their energy in this performance. The energy once exhausted, they fell with a struggling plunge, not down into their bodies again, but into the cesspools of the body.

The modern novel, the very modern novel, has passed quite away from tragedy. An American novel like *Manhattan Transfer* has in it still the last notes of tragedy, the sheer spirit of suicide. An English novel like *Point Counter Point* has gone beyond tragedy into exacerbation, and continuous nervous repulsion. Man is so nervously repulsive to man, so screamingly, nerve-rackingly repulsive! This novel goes one further. Man just *smells*, offensively and unbearably, not to be borne. The human stink!

The inward revulsion of man away from man, which follows on the collapse of the physical sympathetic flow, has a slowly increasing momentum, a wider and wider swing. For a long time, the *social* belief and benevolence of man towards man keeps pace with the secret physical repulsion of man away from man. But ultimately, inevitably, the one outstrips the other. The benevolence exhausts itself, the repulsion only deepens. The benevolence is external and extra-individual. But the revulsion is inward and personal. The one gains over the other. Then you get a gruesome condition, such as is displayed in this book.

The only motive power left is the sense of revulsion away from people, the sense of the repulsiveness of the neighbour. It is a condition we are rapidly coming to — a condition displayed by the intellectuals much more than by the common people. Wyndham Lewis gives a display of the utterly repulsive effect people have on him, but he retreats into the intellect to make his display. It is a question of manner and manners. The effect is the same. It is the same exclamation: They stink! My God, they stink!

And in this process of recoil and revulsion, the affective consciousness withers with amazing rapidity. Nothing I have ever read has astonished me more than the “orphanage” chapters of this book. There I realized with amazement how rapidly the human psyche can strip itself of its awarenesses and its emotional contacts, and reduce itself to a sub-brutal condition of simple gross persistence. It is not animality — far from it. Those boys are much less than animals. They are cold wills functioning with a minimum of consciousness. The amount that they are *not* aware of is perhaps the most amazing aspect of their character. They are brutally and deliberately *unaware*. They have no hopes, no desires even. They have even no will-to-exist, for existence even is too high a term. They have a strange, stony will-to-persist, that is all. And they persist by reaction, because they still feel the repulsiveness of each other, of everything, even of themselves.

Of course the author exaggerates. The boy Lorry “always had his nose in a book’ — and he must have got tilings out of the books. If he had taken the

intellectual line, like Mr. Huxley or Mr. Wyndham Lewis, he would have harped on the intellectual themes, the essential feeling being the same. But he takes the non-intellectual line, is in revulsion against the intellect too, so we have the stark reduction to a persistent minimum of the human consciousness. It is a minimum lower than the savage, lower than the African Bushman. Because it is a *willed* minimum, sustained from inside by resistance, brute resistance against any flow of consciousness except that of the barest, most brutal egoistic self-interest. It is a phenomenon, and pre-eminently an American phenomenon. But the flow of repulsion, inward physical revulsion of man away from man, is passing over all the world. It is only perhaps in America, and in a book such as this, that we see it most starkly revealed.

After the orphanage, the essential theme is repeated over a wider field. The state of revulsion continues. The young Lorry is indomitable. You can't destroy him. And at the same time, you can't catch him. He will recoil from everything, and nothing on earth will make him have a positive feeling, of affection or sympathy or connexion. His mother? — we see her in her decaying repulsiveness. He has a certain loyalty, because she is his sort: it is part of his will-to-persist. But he must turn his back on her with a certain disgust.

The tragedian, like Theodore Dreiser and Sherwood Anderson, still dramatizes his defeat and is in love with himself in his defeated role. But the Lorry Lewis is in too deep a state of revulsion to dramatize himself. He almost deliberately finds himself repulsive too. And he goes on, just to see if he can hit the world without destroying himself. Hit the world not to destroy it, but to experience in himself how repulsive it is.

Kansas City; Beatrice, Nebraska; Omaha; Salt Lake City; Portland, Oregon; Los Angeles, he finds them all alike, nothing if not repulsive. He covers the great tracts of prairie, mountain, forest, coast-range, without seeing anything but a certain desert scaliness. His consciousness is resistant, shuts things out, and reduces itself to a minimum.

In the Y.M.C.A. it is the same. He has his gang. But the last word about them is that they stink, their effluvia is offensive. He goes with women, but the thought of women is inseparable from the thought of sexual disease and infection. He thrills to the repulsiveness of it, in a terrified, perverted way. His associates — which means himself also — read Zarathustra and Spinoza, Darwin and Hegel. But it is with a strange external, superficial mind that has no connexion with the affective and effective self. One last desire he has — to write, to put down his condition in words. His will-to-persist is intellectual also. Beyond this, nothing.

It is a genuine book, as far as it goes, even if it is an objectionable one. It is, in

psychic disintegration, a good many stages ahead of *Point Counter Point*. It reveals a condition that not many of us have reached, but towards which the trend of consciousness is taking us, all of us, especially the young. It is, let us hope, a *ne plus ultra*. The next step is legal insanity, or just crime. The book is perfectly sane: yet two more strides, and it is criminal insanity. The style seems to me excellent, fitting the matter. It is sheer bottom-dog style, the bottom-dog mind expressing itself direct, almost as if it barked. That directness, that unsentimental and non-dramatized thoroughness of setting down the under-dog mind surpasses anything I know. I don't want to read any more books like this. But I am glad to have read this one, just to know what is the last word in repulsive consciousness, consciousness in a state of repulsion. It helps one to understand the world, and saves one the necessity of having to follow out the phenomenon of physical repulsion any further, for the time being.

The Story of Doctor Manente, by A. F. Grazzini

It is rather by accident than design that *The Story of Doctor Manente* should be the first book to appear in this Lungarno Series. Yet the accident is also fortunate, since it would be difficult to find a work more typical of the times. It is true, Lasca was not a sensitive genius like Boccaccio: but then the Renaissance was by no means a sensitive period. Boccaccio was far lovelier than the ordinary, or even than most extraordinary men of his day. Whereas Lasca is of the day and of the city, and as such, as a local and temporal writer, he is a typical Florentine.

Again, this famous story is a magnificent account of what is perhaps the best Florentine *beffa*, or *burla* (practical joke) on record. The work is a *novella*, a short novel, composed of various parts which fit together with the greatest skill. In this respect the story is far superior to most of Boccaccio's long *novelle*, which are full of unnecessary stuff, often tedious. Here we are kept sharp to essentials, and yet we are given a complete and living atmosphere. Anyone who knows Florence today can picture the whole thing perfectly, the big complicated *palazzi* with far-off attics and hidden chambers, the inns of the country where men sit on benches outside, and drink and talk on into the night, the houses with the little courtyards at the back, where everybody looks out of the window and knows all about everybody's affairs. The presentation of the story is masterly, and could hardly be bettered, setting a pattern for later works. In character, each man is himself. One can see the sly, frail Lorenzo playing this rather monstrous joke. One can see Doctor Manente through and through. The Grand Vicar, so authoritative and easily cowed, what a fine picture of an Italian inquisitor, how different from the Spanish type! The people are people, they are Italians and Florentines, absolutely. There they are, in their own ordinary daylight, not lifted into the special gleam of poetry, as Boccaccio's people so often are. And we have to admit, if Boccaccio is more universal, Lasca is more Tuscan. The Italians are, when you come down to it, peculiarly *terre a terre*, right down on the earth. It is part of their wholesome charm. But the rather fantastic side of their nature sometimes makes them want to be angels or winged lions or soaring eagles, and then they are often ridiculous, though occasionally sublime. But the people itself is of the earth, wholesomely and soundly so, and unless perverted, will remain so. The great artists were wild coruscations which shone and expired. The people remains the people, and wine and spaghetti are their forms

of poetry: good forms too. The peasants who bargain every Friday, year in, year out, in the Piazza della Signoria, where the great white statue of Michelangelo's *David* stands livid, have *never even heard* of the name *David*. If you say to them: My name is *David*, they say: What? To them it is no name. Their outward-roaming consciousness has never even roamed so far as to read the name of the statue they almost touch each Friday. Inquiry is not their affair. They are centripetal.

And that is Italian. This soaring people sticks absolutely to the earth, and keeps the strength of the earth. The cities may go mad; they do. But the real Italian people is on the earth, and the cities will never lift them up. The bulk of the Italian people will never be "interested." They are centripetal, and only the little currents near to them matter.

So Doctor Manente! His courage and his force of life under all his trial are wonderful. Think of the howls, laments, prayers, sighs, and recriminations the northerner would have raised, under the circumstances. Not so the Doctor! He refuses to take an objective view of his mishaps, he refuses to *think*, but eats and drinks handsomely, sleeps, builds castles in the air, and sings songs, even improvising. We feel, when he comes back into the world, he is still good and fat. Mental torture has not undermined him. He has refused to *think*, and so saved himself the worst suffering. And how can we fail to admire the superb earthly life-courage which this reveals! It is the strength and courage of trees, deep rooted in substance, in substantial earth, and centripetal. So the Italian is, really, *rooted in substance*, not in dreams, ideas, or ideals, but *physically* self-centred, like a tree.

But the Italian also gets stuck sometimes, in this self-centred physicality of his nature, and occasionally has wild revolts from it. Then you get the sombre curses of Dante, the torments of Michelangelo and Leonardo, the sexless flights of Fra Angelico and Botticelli, the anguish of the idealists. The Italian at his best doesn't quarrel with substance on behalf of his soul or his spirit. When he does, you see strange results.

Among which are the famous *burle*, or *befle* of the Renaissance period: the famous and infamous practical jokes. Apparently the Florentines actually did play these cruel jokes on one another, all the time: it was a common sport. It is so even in Boccaccio, though we feel that he was too true a poet really to appreciate the game. Lasca, who was a real Florentine of the town and taverns, was in heaven when there was a good, cruel joke being perpetrated. Lorenzo de' Medici, who writes so touchingly of the violet, did actually play these pranks on his acquaintances — and if this is not a true story, historically it might just as well be so. The portrait of Lorenzo given here is true to life: that even the most

gentle modern Italian critics admit. But they deny the story any historical truth; on very insufficient grounds, really. The modern mind, however, dislikes the *befja*, and would like to think it never really existed. "Of course Lorenzo never really played this trick." But the chances are that he did. And denying the historical truth of every recorded *beffa* does not wipe the *befja* out of existence. On the contrary, it only leaves us blind to the real Renaissance spirit in Italy.

If every exalted soul who stares at Fra Angelico and Filippo Lippi, Botticelli and Michelangelo and Piero della Francesca, were compelled at the same time to study the practical-joke stories which play around the figures of these men and which fill the background of the great artists, then we should have a considerable change in feeling when we visited the Uffizi Gallery. We might be a little less exalted: we should certainly be more amused and more *on the spot*, instead of floating in the vapour of ecstasized admiration.

The *befja* is real, the *befja* is earnest, and what in heaven was its goal? We can only understand it, I think, if we remember the true substantial, *terre a terre* nature of the Italian. This self-centred physical nature can become crude, gross, even bestial and monstrous. We see it in d'Annunzio's peasant stories. We see it in the act of that Gonzaga of Mantua (if I remember right) who met his only son walking near the palace, and because the child did not salute with sufficient obsequiousness, kicked the boy ferociously in the groin, so that he died. The two centuries preceding the Renaissance had been full of such ferocity, beastliness. The spirit of Tuscany recoiled against it, and used every weapon of wit and intelligence against the egoistic brute of the preceding ages. And Italy is always having these periods of self-shame and recoil, not always into wit and fine intelligence, often into squeamish silliness. Indeed the Renaissance itself fizzled out into silly squeamishness, even in Lasca's day.

There seems to be a cycle: a period of brutishness, a conquering of the brutish energy by intelligence, a flowering of the intelligence, then a fizzling down into nervous fuss. The *befja* belongs to the period when the brute force is conquered by wit and intelligence, but is not extinguished. It is a form of revenge taken by wit on the self-centred physical fellow. The *beffe* are sometimes simply repulsive. But on the whole it is a sport for spurring up the sluggish intelligence, or taming the forward brute. If a man was a bit fat and simple, but especially if he overflowed in physical self-assertion, was importunate, pedantic, hypocritical, ignorant, all infallible signs of self-centred physical egoism, then the wits marked him down as a prey. He was made the victim of some *beffa*. This put the fear of God into him and into his like. He and his lot did not dare to assert themselves, their pedantry or self-importance or ignorance or brutality or hypocrisy, so flagrantly. Chastened, they learned better manners. And so

civilization moves on, wit and intelligence taking their revenge on insolent animal spirits, till the animal spirits are cowed, and wit and intelligence become themselves insolent, then feeble, then silly, then null, as we see during the latter half of the sixteenth century, and the first half of the seventeenth, even in Florence and Rome.

Like all other human corrective measures the *beffa* was often cruelly unjust and degenerated into a mere lust for sporting with a victim. Nimble wits, which had been in suppression during the preceding centuries, now rose up to take a cruel revenge on the somewhat fat and slower-witted citizen.

It is said that the Brunelleschi, who built the Cathedral dome in Florence, played the cruel and unjustified *beffa* on the *Fat Carpenter*, in the well-known story of that name. Here, the Magnificent Lorenzo plays a joke almost as unjustifiable and cruel, on Doctor Manente. All Florence rings with joy over the success of these terrific pieces of horse-play. The gentle Boccaccio tries to record such jokes with gusto. Nobody seems to have pitied the victim. Doctor Manente certainly never pitied himself; there is that to his credit, vastly: when we think how a modern would howl to the world at large. No, they weren't sorry for themselves — they were tough without being hard-boiled. The courage of life is splendid in them. We badly need some of it today, in this self-pitying age when we are so sorry for ourselves that we have to be soothed by art as by candy. Renaissance art has some of its roots in the cruel *beffa* — you can see it even in Botticelli's *Spring*: it is glaring in Michelangelo. Michelangelo struck his languishing Adam high on the Sistine ceiling for safety, for in Florence they'd have played a rare *beffa* on that chap.

So we have the story of Doctor Manente, history alive and kicking, instead of dead and mumified. It should be given to every student of that great period, the Italian Renaissance — and who is *not* a student of the period.

Whether the joke was ever played by the Magnificent, we may ask. Thin-skinned moderns will certainly shudder and say: No! The real historian will say: It is possible, but hardly probable! The artist will say: It sounds so true, it must be true! Meanwhile someone ought to annotate Lasca, and verify his allusions where possible.

Lasca means *Roach*, or some little fish like that. It was the nickname of Anton Francesco Grazzini, who was born in Florence in March 1504, just twelve years after the death of Lorenzo the Magnificent, which took place in 1492. Lasca arranged his stories, after the manner of Boccaccio, in three Suppers, and the *Story of Doctor Manente* is the only one we have complete from the third and Last Supper. The stories of the Second Supper and those of the First Supper, will occupy two volumes following on this one, and in the final volume will be

included a study of Lasca. his life and his work.

The Privately Printed Edition of *Pansies*, by D. H. Lawrence

This little bunch of fragments is offered as a bunch of *pensees*, *anglice* pansies; a handful of thoughts. Or, if you will have the other derivation of pansy, from *panser*, to dress or soothe a wound, these are my tender administrations to the mental and emotional wounds we suffer from. Or you can have heartsease if you like, since the modern heart could certainly do with it.

Each little piece is a thought; not a bare idea or an opinion or a didactic statement, but a true thought, which comes as much from the heart and the genitals as from the head. A thought, with its own blood of emotion and instinct running in it like the fire in a fire-opal, if I may be so bold. Perhaps if you hold up my pansies properly to the light, they may show a running vein of fire. At least, they do not pretend to be half-baked lyrics or melodies in American measure. They are thoughts which run through the modern mind and body, each having its own separate existence, yet each of them combining with all the others to make up a complete state of mind.

It suits the modern temper better to have its state of mind made up of apparently irrelevant thoughts that scurry in different directions, yet belong to the same nest; each thought trotting down the page like an independent creature, each with its own small head and tail, trotting its own little way, then curling up to sleep. We prefer it, at least the young seem to prefer it to those solid blocks of mental pabulum packed like bales in the pages of a proper heavy book. Even we prefer it to those slightly didactic opinions and slices of wisdom which are laid horizontally across the pages of Pascal's *Pensees* or La Bruyere's *Caracteres*, separated only by *pattes de mouches*, like faint sprigs of parsley. Let every *pensee* trot on its own little paws, not be laid like a cutlet trimmed with a *patte de mouches*.

Live and let live, and each pansy will tip you its separate wink. The fairest thing-in nature, a flower, still has its roots in earth and manure; and in the perfume there hovers still the faint strange scent of earth, the under-earth in all its heavy humidity and darkness. Certainly it is so in pansy-scent, and in violet-scent; mingled with the blue of the morning the black of the corrosive humus. Else the scent would be just sickly sweet.

So it is: we all have our roots in earth. And it is our roots that now need a little attention, need the hard soil eased away from them, and softened so that a little

fresh air can come to them, and they can breathe. For by pretending to have no roots, we have trodden the earth so hard over them that they are starving and stifling below the soil. We have roots, and our roots are in the sensual, instinctive and intuitive body, and it is here we need fresh air of open consciousness.

I am abused most of all for using the so-called “obscene” words. Nobody quite knows what the word “obscene” itself means, or what it is intended to mean: but gradually all the *old* words that belong to the body below the navel, have come to be judged obscene. Obscene means today that the policeman thinks he has a right to arrest you, nothing else.

Myself, I am mystified at this horror over a mere word, a plain simple word that stands for a plain simple thing. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was God and the Word was with God.” If that is true, then we are very far from the beginning. When did the Word “fall”? When did the Word become unclean “below the navel”? Because today, if you suggest that the word *arse* was in the beginning and was God and was with God, you will just be put in prison at once. Though a doctor might say the same of the word *ischial tuberosity*, and all the old ladies would piously murmur “Quite!” Now that sort of thing is idiotic and humiliating. Whoever the God was that made us, He made us complete. He didn’t stop at the navel and leave the rest to the devil. It is too childish. And the same with the Word which is God. If the Word is God — which in the sense of the human it is — then you can’t suddenly say that all the words which belong below the navel are obscene. The word *arse* is as much god as the word *face*. It must be so, otherwise you cut off your god at the waist.

What is obvious is that the words in these cases have been dirtied by the mind, by unclean mental associations. The words themselves are clean, so are the things to which they apply. But the mind drags in a filthy association, calls up some repulsive emotion. Well, then, cleanse the mind, that is the real job. It is the mind which is the Augean stables, not language. The word *arse* is clean enough. Even the part of the body it refers to is just as much me as my hand and my brain are me. It is not for *me* to quarrel with my own natural make-up. If I am, I am all that I am. But the impudent and dirty mind won’t have it. It hates certain parts of the body, and makes the words representing these parts scapegoats. It pelts them out of the consciousness with filth, and there they hover, never dying, never dead, slipping into the consciousness again unawares, and pelted out again with filth, haunting the margins of the consciousness like jackals or hyenas. And they refer to parts of our own living bodies, and to our most essential acts. So that man turns himself into a thing of shame and horror. And his consciousness shudders with horrors that he has made for himself.

That sort of thing has got to stop. We can't have the consciousness haunted any longer by repulsive spectres which are no more than poor simple scapegoat words representing parts of man himself; words that the cowardly and unclean mind has driven out into the limbo of the unconscious, whence they return upon us looming and magnified out of all proportion, frightening us beyond all reasons. We must put an end to that. It is the self divided against itself most dangerously. The simple and natural "obscene" words must be cleaned up of all their depraved fear-associations, and readmitted into the consciousness to take their natural place. Now they are magnified out of all proportion, so is the mental fear they represent. We must accept the word arse as we accept the word face, since arsens we have and always shall have. We can't start cutting off the buttocks of unfortunate mankind, like the ladies in the Voltaire story, just to fit the mental expulsion of the word.

This scapegoat business does the mind itself so much damage. There is a poem of Swift's which should make us pause. It is written to Celia, his Celia — and every verse ends with the mad, maddened refrain: "But — Celia, Celia, Celia shits!" Now that, stated baldly, is so ridiculous it is almost funny. But when one remembers the gnashing insanity to which the great mind of Swift was reduced by that and similar thoughts, the joke dies away. Such thoughts poisoned him, like some terrible constipation. They poisoned his mind. And why, in heaven's name? The *fact* cannot have troubled him, since it applied to himself and to all of us. It was not the fact that Celia shits which so deranged him, it was the *thought*. His mind couldn't bear the thought. Great wit as he was, he could not see how ridiculous his revulsions were. His arrogant mind overbore him. He couldn't even see how much worse it would be if Celia didn't shit. His physical sympathies were too weak, his guts were too cold to sympathize with poor Celia in her natural functions. His insolent and sicklily squeamish mind just turned her into a thing of horror, because she was merely natural and went to the w.c. It is monstrous! One feels like going back across all the years to poor Celia, to say to her: It's all right, don't you take any notice of that mental lunatic.

And Swift's form of madness is very common today. Men with cold guts and over-squeamish minds are always thinking those things and squirming. Wretched man is the victim of his own little revulsions, which he magnifies into great horrors and terrifying taboos. We are all savages, we all have taboos. The Australian black may have the kangaroo for his taboo. And then he will probably die of shock and terror if a kangaroo happens to touch him. Which is what I would call a purely unnecessary death. But modern men have even more dangerous taboos. To us, certain words, certain ideas are taboo, and if they come upon us and we can't drive them away, we die or go mad with a degraded sort of

terror. Which is what happened to Swift. He was such a great wit. And the modern mind altogether is falling into this form of degraded taboo-insanity. I call it a waste of sane human consciousness. But it is very dangerous, dangerous to the individual and utterly dangerous to society as a whole. Nothing is so fearful in a mass-civilization like ours as a mass-insanity.

The remedy is, of course, the same in both cases: lift off the taboo. The kangaroo is a harmless animal, the word shit is a harmless word. Make either into a taboo, and it becomes more dangerous. The result of taboo is insanity. And insanity, especially mob-insanity, mass-insanity, is the fearful danger that threatens our civilization. There are certain persons with a sort of rabies, who live only to infect the mass. If the young do not watch out, they will find themselves, before so very many years are past, engulfed in a howling manifestation of mob-insanity, truly terrifying to think of. It will be better to be dead than to live to see it. Sanity, wholeness, is everything. In the name of piety and purity, what a mass of disgusting insanity is spoken and written. We shall have to fight the mob, in order to keep sane, and to keep society sane.

***The Grand Inquisitor*, by F. M. Dostoievsky**

It is a strange experience, to examine one's reaction to a book over a period of years. I remember when I first read *The Brothers Karamazov*, in 1913, how fascinated yet unconvinced it left me. And I remember Middleton Murry saying to me: "Of course the whole clue to Dostoievsky is in that Grand Inquisitor story." And I remember saying: "Why? It seems to me just rubbish."

And it was true. The story seemed to me just a piece of showing off: a display of cynical-satanical pose which was simply irritating. The cynical-satanical pose always irritated me, and I could see nothing else in that black-a-vised Grand Inquisitor talking at Jesus at such length. I just felt it was all pose; he didn't really mean what he said; he was just showing off in blasphemy.

Since then I have read *The Brothers Karamazov* twice, and each time found it more depressing because, alas, more drearily true to life. At first it had been lurid romance. Now I read *The Grand Inquisitor* once more, and my heart sinks right through my shoes. I still see a trifle of cynical-satanical showing-off. But under that I hear the final and unanswerable criticism of Christ. And it is a deadly, devastating summing-up, unanswerable because borne out by the long experience of humanity. It is reality versus illusion, and the illusion was Jesus', while time itself retorts with the reality.

If there is any question: Who is the grand Inquisitor? — then surely we must say it is Ivan himself. And Ivan is the thinking mind of the human being in rebellion, thinking the whole thing out to the bitter end. As such he is, of course, identical with the Russian revolutionary of the thinking type. He is also, of course, Dostoievsky himself, in his thoughtful, as apart from his passional and inspirational self. Dostoievsky half hated Ivan. Yet, after all, Ivan is the greatest of the three brothers, pivotal. The passionate Dmitri and the inspired Alyosha are, at last, only offsets to Ivan.

And we cannot doubt that the Inquisitor speaks Dostoievsky's own final opinion about Jesus. The opinion is, baldly, this: Jesus, you are inadequate. Men must correct you. And Jesus in the end gives the kiss of acquiescence to the Inquisitor, as Alyosha does to Ivan. The two inspired ones recognize the inadequacy of their inspiration: the thoughtful one has to accept the responsibility of a complete adjustment.

We may agree with Dostoievsky or not, but we have to admit that his criticism of Jesus is the final criticism, based on the experience of two thousand years (he

says fifteen hundred) and on a profound insight into the nature of mankind. Man can but be true to his own nature. No inspiration whatsoever will ever get him permanently beyond his limits.

And what are the limits? It is Dostoievsky's first profound question. What are the limits to the nature, not of Man in the abstract, but of men, mere men, everyday men?

The limits are, says the Grand Inquisitor, three. Mankind in the bulk can never be "free," because man on the whole makes three grand demands on life, and cannot endure unless these demands are satisfied.

1. He demands bread, and not merely as foodstuff, but as a miracle, given from the hand of God.
2. He demands mystery, the sense of the miraculous in life.
3. He demands somebody to bow down to, and somebody before whom all men shall bow down.

These three demands, for miracle, mystery and authority, prevent men from being "free." They are man's "weakness." Only a few men, the elect, are capable of abstaining from the absolute demand for bread, for miracle, mystery, and authority. These are the strong, and they must be as gods, to be able to be Christians fulfilling all the Christ-demand. The rest, the millions and millions of men throughout time, they are as babes or children or geese, they are too weak, "impotent, vicious, worthless and rebellious" even to be able to share out the earthly bread, if it is left to them.

This, then, is the Grand Inquisitor's summing-up of the nature of mankind. The inadequacy of Jesus lies in the fact that Christianity is too difficult for men, the vast mass of men. It could only be realized by the few "saints" or heroes. For the rest, man is like a horse harnessed to a load he cannot possibly pull. "Hadst Thou respected him less, Thou wouldst have demanded less of him, and that would be nearer to love, for his burden would be lighter."

Christianity, then, is the ideal, but it is impossible. It is impossible because it makes demands greater than the nature of man can bear. And therefore, to get a livable, working scheme, some of the elect, such as the Grand Inquisitor himself, have turned round to "him," that other great Spirit, Satan, and have established Church and State on "him." For the Grand Inquisitor finds that to be able to live at all, mankind must be loved more tolerantly and more contemptuously than Jesus loved it, loved, for all that, more truly, since it is loved for itself, for what it is, and not for what it ought to be. Jesus loved mankind for what it ought to be, free and limitless. The Grand Inquisitor loves it for what it is, with all its limitations. And he contends his is the kinder love. And yet he says it is Satan. And Satan, he says at the beginning, means annihilation, and not-being.

As always in Dostoievsky, the amazing perspicacity is mixed with ugly perversity. Nothing is pure. His wild love for Jesus is mixed with perverse and poisonous hate of Jesus: his moral hostility to the devil is mixed with secret worship of the devil. Dostoievsky is always perverse, always impure, always an evil thinker and a marvellous seer.

Is it true that mankind demands, and will always demand, miracle, mystery, and authority? Surely it is true. Today, man gets his sense of the miraculous from science and machinery, radio, aeroplane, vast ships, zeppelins, poison gas, artificial silk: these things nourish man's sense of the miraculous as magic did in the past. But now, man is master of the mystery, there are no occult powers. The same with mystery: medicine, biological experiment, strange feats of the psychic people, spiritualists, Christian scientists — it is all mystery. And as for authority, Russia destroyed the Tsar to have Lenin and the present mechanical despotism, Italy has the rationalized despotism of Mussolini, and England is longing for a despot.

Dostoievsky's diagnosis of human nature is simple and unanswerable. We have to submit, and agree that men are like that. Even over the question of sharing the bread, we have to agree that man is too weak, or vicious, or something, to be able to do it. He has to hand the common bread over to some absolute authority, Tsar or Lenin, to be shared out. And yet the mass of men are *incapable* of looking on bread as a mere means of sustenance, by which man sustains himself for the purpose of true living, true life being the "heavenly bread." It seems a strange thing that men, the mass of men, cannot understand that *life* is the great reality, that true living fills us with vivid life, "the heavenly bread," and earthly bread merely supports this. No, men cannot understand, never have understood that simple fact. They cannot see the distinction between bread, or property, money, and vivid life. They think that property and money are the same thing as vivid life. Only the few, the potential heroes or the "elect," can see the simple distinction. The mass *cannot* see it, and will never see it.

Dostoievsky was perhaps the first to realize this devastating truth, which Christ had not seen. A truth it is, none the less, and once recognized it will change the course of history. All that remains is for the elect to take charge of the bread — the property, the money — and then give it back to the masses as if it were really the gift of life. In this way, mankind might live happily, as the Inquisitor suggests. Otherwise, with the masses making the terrible mad mistake that money is life, and that therefore no one shall control the money, men shall be "free" to get what they can, we are brought to a condition of competitive insanity and ultimate suicide.

So far, well and good, Dostoievsky's diagnosis stands. But is it then to betray

Christ and turn over to Satan if the elect should at last realize that instead of refusing Satan's three offers, the heroic Christian must now accept them. Jesus refused the three offers out of pride and fear: he wanted to be greater than these, and "above" them. But we now realize, no man, not even Jesus, is really "above" miracle, mystery, and authority. The one thing that Jesus is truly above, is the confusion between money and life. Money is not life, says Jesus, therefore you can ignore it and leave it to the devil.

Money is not life, it is true. But ignoring money and leaving it to the devil means handing over the great mass of men to the devil, for the mass of men *cannot* distinguish between money and life. It is hard to believe: certainly Jesus didn't believe it: and yet, as Dostoievsky and the Inquisitor point out, it is so.

Well, and what then? Must we therefore go over to the devil? After all, the whole of Christianity is not contained in the rejection of the three temptations. The essence of Christianity is a love of mankind. If a love of mankind entails accepting the bitter limitation of the mass of men, their inability to distinguish between money and life, then accept the limitation, and have done with it. Then take over from the devil the money (or bread), the miracle, and the sword of Caesar, and, for the love of mankind, give back to men the bread, with its wonder, and give them the miracle, the marvellous, and give them, in a hierarchy, someone, some men, in higher and higher degrees, to bow down to. Let them bow down, let them bow down *en masse*, for the mass, who do not understand the difference between money and life, should always bow down to the elect, who do.

And is that serving the devil? It is certainly not serving the spirit of annihilation and not-being. It is serving the great wholeness of mankind, and in that respect, it is Christianity. Anyhow, it is the service of Almighty God, who made men what they are, limited and unlimited.

Where Dostoievsky is perverse is in his making the old, old, wise governor of men a Grand Inquisitor. The recognition of the weakness of man has been a common trait in all great, wise rulers of people, from the Pharaohs and Darius through the great patient Popes of the early Church right down to the present day. They have known the weakness of men, and felt a certain tenderness. This is the spirit of all great government. But it was not the spirit of the Spanish Inquisition. The Spanish Inquisition in 1500 was a newfangled thing, peculiar to Spain, with her curious death-lust and her bullying, and, strictly, a Spanish-political instrument, not Catholic at all, but rabidly national. The Spanish Inquisition actually was diabolic. It could not have produced a Grand Inquisitor who put Dostoievsky's sad questions to Jesus. And the man who put those sad questions to Jesus could not possibly have been a Spanish Inquisitor. He could

not possibly have burnt a hundred people in an *auto-da-fe*. He would have been too wise and far-seeing.

So that, in this respect, Dostoevsky showed his epileptic and slightly criminal perversity. The man who feels a certain tenderness for mankind in its weakness or limitation is not therefore diabolic. The man who realizes that Jesus asked too much of the mass of men, in asking them to choose between earthly and heavenly bread, and to judge between good and evil, is not therefore Satanic. Think how difficult it is to know the difference between good and evil! Why, sometimes it is evil to be good. And how is the ordinary man to understand that? He can't. The extraordinary men have to understand it for him. And is that going over to the devil? Or think of the difficulty in choosing between the earthly and heavenly bread. Lenin, surely a pure soul, rose to great power simply to give men — what? The earthly bread. And what was the result? Not only did they lose the heavenly bread, but even the earthly bread disappeared out of wheat-producing Russia. It is most strange. And all the socialists and the generous thinkers of today, what are they striving for? The same: to share out more evenly the earthly bread. Even *they*, who are practising Christianity *par excellence*, cannot properly choose between the heavenly and earthly bread. For the poor, they choose the earthly bread, and once more the heavenly bread is lost: and once more, as soon as it is really chosen, the earthly bread begins to disappear. It is a great mystery. But today, the most passionate believers in Christ believe that all you have to do is to struggle to give earthly bread (good houses, good sanitation, etc.) to the poor, and that is in itself the heavenly bread. But it isn't. Especially for the poor, it isn't. It is for them the loss of heavenly bread. And the poor are the vast majority. Poor things, how everybody hates them today! For benevolence is a form of hate.

What then is the heavenly bread? Every generation must answer for itself. But the heavenly bread is life, is living. Whatever makes life vivid and delightful is the heavenly bread. And the earthly bread must come as a by-product of the heavenly bread. The vast mass will never understand this. Yet it is the essential truth of Christianity, and of life itself. The few will understand. Let them take the responsibility.

Again, the Inquisitor says that it is a weakness in men, that they must have miracle, mystery and authority. But is it? Are they not bound up in our emotions, always and for ever, these three demands of miracle, mystery, and authority? If Jesus cast aside miracle in the Temptation, still there is miracle again in the Gospels. And if Jesus refused the earthly bread, still he said: "In my Father's house are many mansions." And for authority: "Why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?"

The thing Jesus was trying to do was to supplant physical emotion by moral emotion. So that earthly bread becomes, in a sense, immoral, as it is to many refined people today. The Inquisitor sees that this is the mistake. The earthly bread must in itself be the miracle, and be bound up with the miracle.

And here, surely, he is right. Since man began to think and to feel vividly, seed-time and harvest have been the two great sacred periods of miracle, rebirth, and rejoicing. Easter and harvest-home are festivals of the earthly bread, and they are festivals which go to the roots of the soul. For it is the earthly bread as a miracle, a yearly miracle. All the old religions saw it: the Catholic still sees it, by the Mediterranean. And this is not weakness. This is *truth*. The rapture of the Easter kiss, in old Russia, is intimately bound up with the springing of the seed and the first footstep of the new earthly bread. It is the rapture of the Easter kiss which makes the bread worth eating. It is the absence of the Easter kiss which makes the Bolshevist bread barren, dead. They eat dead bread, now.

The earthly bread is leavened with the heavenly bread. The heavenly bread is life, is contact, and is consciousness. In sowing the seed man has his contact with earth, with sun and rain: and he *must not* break the contact. In the awareness of the springing of the corn he has his ever-renewed consciousness of miracle, wonder, and mystery: the wonder of creation, procreation, and re-creation, following the mystery of death and the cold grave. It is the grief of Holy Week and the delight of Easter Sunday. And man must not, must not lose this supreme state of consciousness out of himself, or he has lost the best part of him. Again, the reaping and the harvest are another contact, with earth and sun, a rich touch of the cosmos, a living stream of activity, and then the contact with harvesters, and the joy of harvest-home. All this is life, life, it is the heavenly bread which we eat in the course of getting the earthly bread. Work is, or should be, our heavenly bread of activity, contact and consciousness. All work that is not this, is anathema. True, the work is hard; there is the sweat of the brow. But what of it? In decent proportion, this is life. The sweat of the brow is the heavenly butter.

I think the older Egyptians understood this, in the course of their long and marvellous history. I think that probably, for thousands of years, the masses of the Egyptians were happy, in the hierarchy of the State.

Miracle and mystery run together, they merge. Then there is the third thing, authority. The word is bad: a policeman has authority, and no one bows down to him. The Inquisitor means: "that which men bow down to." Well, they bowed down to Caesar, and they bowed down to Jesus. They will bow down, first, as the Inquisitor saw, to the one who has the power to control the bread.

The bread, the earthly bread, while it is being reaped and grown, it is life. But

once it is harvested and stored, it becomes a commodity, it becomes riches. And then it becomes a danger. For men think, if they only possessed the hoard, they need not work; which means, really, they need not live. And that is the real blasphemy. For while we live we must live, we must not wither or rot inert.

So that ultimately men bow down to the man, or group of men, who can and dare take over the hoard, the store of bread, the riches, to distribute it among the people again. The lords, the givers of bread. How profound Dostoevsky is when he says that the people will forget that it is their own bread which is being given back to them. While they keep their own bread, it is not much better than stone to them — inert possessions. But given back to them from the great Giver, it is divine once more, it has the quality of miracle to make it taste well in the mouth and in the belly.

Men bow down to the lord of bread, first and foremost. For, by knowing the difference between earthly and heavenly bread, he is able calmly to distribute the earthly bread, and to give it, for the commonalty, the heavenly taste which they can never give it. That is why, in a democracy, the earthly bread loses its taste, the salt loses its savour, and there is no one to bow down to.

It is not man's weakness that he needs someone to bow down to. It is his nature, and his strength, for it puts him into touch with far, far greater life than if he stood alone. All life bows to the sun. But the sun is very far away to the common man. It needs someone to bring it to him. It needs a lord: what the Christians call one of the elect, to bring the sun to the common man, and put the sun in his heart. The sight of a true lord, a noble, a nature-hero puts the sun into the heart of the ordinary man, who is no hero, and therefore cannot know the sun direct.

This is one of the real mysteries. As the Inquisitor says, the mystery of the elect is one of the inexplicable mysteries of Christianity, just as the lord, the natural lord among men, is one of the inexplicable mysteries of humanity throughout time. We must accept the mystery, that's all.

But to do so is not diabolic.

And Ivan need not have been so tragic and satanic. He had made a discovery about men, which was due to be made. It was the rediscovery of a fact which was known universally almost till the end of the eighteenth century, when the illusion of the perfectibility of men, of all men, took hold of the imagination of the civilized nations. It was an illusion. And Ivan has to make a restatement of the old truth, that most men *cannot* choose between good and evil, because it is so extremely difficult to know which is which, especially in crucial cases: and that most men *cannot* see the difference between life-values and money-values: they can only see money-values; even nice simple people who *live* by the life-

values, kind and natural, yet can only estimate value in terms of money. So let the specially gifted few make the decision between good and evil, and establish the life-values against the money-values. And let the many accept the decision, with gratitude, and bow down to the few, in the hierarchy. What is there diabolical or satanic in that? Jesus kisses the Inquisitor: Thank you, you are right, wise old man! Alyosha kisses Ivan: Thank you, brother, you are right, you take a burden off me! So why should Dostoievsky drag in Inquisitors and *autos-da-fe*, and Ivan wind up so morbidly suicidal? Let them be glad they've found the truth again.

The Dragon of the Apocalypse, by Frederick Carter

It is some years now since Frederick Carter first sent me the manuscript of his *Dragon of the Apocalypse*. I remember it arrived when I was staying in Mexico, in Chapala. The village post-master sent for me to the post-office: Will the honourable Senor please come to the post-office. I went, on a blazing April morning, there in the northern tropics. The post-master, a dark, fat Mexican with moustaches, was most polite: but also rather mysterious. There was a packet — did I know there was a packet? No, I didn't. Well, after a great deal of suspicious courtesy, the packet was produced; the rather battered typescript of the *Dragon*, together with some of Carter's line-engravings, mainly astrological, which went with it. The post-master handled them cautiously. What was it? What was it? It was a book, I said, the manuscript of a book, in English. Ah, but what sort of a book? What was the book about? I tried to explain, in my hesitating Spanish, what the *Dragon* was about, with its line-drawings. I didn't get far. The post-master looked darker and darker, more uneasy. At last he suggested, was it *magic*? I held my breath. It seemed like the Inquisition again. Then I tried to accommodate him. No, I said, it was not magic, but the *history* of magic. It was the history of what magicians had thought, in the past, and these were the designs they had used. Ah! The postman was relieved. The history of magic! A scholastic work! And these were the designs they had used! He fingered them gingerly, but fascinated.

And I walked home at last, under the blazing sun, with the bulky package under my arm. And then, in the cool of the patio, I read the beginning of the first *Dragon*.

The book was not then what it is now. Then, it was nearly all astrology, and very little argument. It was confused: it was, in a sense, a chaos. And it hadn't very much to do with St. John's *Revelation*. But that didn't matter to me. I was very often smothered in words. And then would come a page, or a chapter, that would release my imagination and give me a whole great sky to move in. For the first time I strode forth into the grand fields of the sky. And it was a real experience, for which I have been always grateful. And always the sensation comes back to me, of the dark shade on the veranda in Mexico, and the sudden release into the great sky of the old world, the sky of the zodiac.

I have read books of astronomy which made me dizzy with the sense of illimitable space. But the heart melts and dies — it is the disembodied mind

alone which follows on through this horrible hollow void of space, where lonely stars hang in awful isolation. And this is not a release. It is a strange thing, but when science extends space *ad infinitum*, and we get the terrible sense of limitlessness, we have at the same time a secret sense of imprisonment. Three-dimensional space is homogeneous, and no matter *how* big it is, it is a kind of prison. No matter how vast the range of space, there is no release.

Why then, this sense of release, of marvellous release, in reading the *Dragon*? I don't know. But anyhow, the *whole* imagination is released, not a part only. In astronomical space, one can only *move*, one cannot be. In the astrological heavens, that is to say, the ancient zodiacal heavens, the whole man is set free, once the imagination crosses the border. The whole man, bodily and spiritual, walks in the magnificent fields of the stars, and the stars have names, and the feet tread splendidly upon — we know not what, but the heavens, instead of untreadable space.

It is an experience. To enter the astronomical sky of space is a great sensational experience. To enter the astrological sky of the zodiac and the living, roving planets is another experience, another *kind* of experience; it is truly imaginative, and to me, more valuable. It is not a mere extension of what we know: an extension that becomes awful, then appalling. It is the entry into another world, another kind of world, measured by another dimension. And we find some prisoned self in us coming forth to live in this world.

Now it is ridiculous for us to deny any experience. I well remember my first real experience of space, reading a book of modern astronomy. It was rather awful, and since then I rather hate the mere suggestion of illimitable space.

But I also remember very vividly my first experience of the astrological heavens, reading Frederick Carter's *Dragon*: the sense of being the Macrocosm, the great sky with its meaningful stars and its profoundly meaningful motions, its wonderful bodily vastness, not empty, but all alive and doing. And I value this experience more. For the sense of astronomical space merely paralyses me. But the sense of the living astrological heavens gives me an extension of my being, I become big and glittering and vast with a sumptuous vastness. I am the Macrocosm, and it is wonderful. And since I am not afraid to feel my own nothingness in front of the vast void of astronomical space, neither am I afraid to feel my own splendour in the zodiacal heavens.

The *Dragon* as it exists now is no longer the *Dragon* which I read in Mexico. It has been made more — more argumentative, shall we say. Give me the old manuscript and let me write an introduction to that! I urge. But: No, says Carter. It isn't *sound*.

Sound what? He means his old astrological theory of the Apocalypse was not

sound, as it was exposed in the old manuscript. But who cares? We do not care, vitally, about theories of the Apocalypse: what the Apocalypse means. What we care about is the release of the imagination. A real release of the imagination renews our strength and our vitality, makes us feel stronger and happier. Scholastic works don't release the imagination: at the best, they satisfy the intellect, and leave the body an unleavened lump. But when I get the release into the zodiacal cosmos my very feet feel lighter and stronger, my very knees are glad.

What does the Apocalypse matter, unless in so far as it gives us imaginative release into another vital world? After all, what meaning *has* the Apocalypse? For the ordinary reader, not much. For the ordinary student and biblical student, it means a prophetic vision of the martyrdom of the Christian Church, the Second Advent, the destruction of worldly power, particularly the power of the great Roman Empire, and then the institution of the Millennium, the rule of the risen Martyrs of Christendom for the space of one thousand years: after which, the end of everything, the Last Judgment, and souls in heaven; all earth, moon and sun being wiped out, all stars and all space. The New Jerusalem, and Finis!

This is all very fine, but we know it pretty well by now, so it offers no imaginative release to most people. It is the orthodox interpretation of the Apocalypse, and probably it is the true superficial meaning, or the final intentional meaning of the work. But what of it? It is a bore. Of all the stale buns, the New Jerusalem is one of the stalest. At the best, it was only invented for the Aunties of this world.

Yet when we read Revelation, we feel at once there are meanings behind meanings. The visions that we have known since childhood are not so easily exhausted by the orthodox commentators. And the phrases that have haunted us all our life, like: And I saw heaven opened, and behold! A white horse! — these are not explained quite away by orthodox explanations. When all is explained and expounded and commented upon, still there remains a curious fitful, half-spurious and half-splendid wonder in the work. Sometimes the great figures loom up marvellous. Sometimes there is a strange sense of incomprehensible drama. Sometimes the figures have a life of their own, inexplicable, which cannot be explained away or exhausted.

And gradually we realize that we are in the world of symbol as well as of allegory. Gradually we realize the book has no one meaning. It has meanings. Not meaning *within* meaning: but rather, meaning against meaning. No doubt the last writer left the Apocalypse as a sort of complete Christian allegory, a Pilgrim's Progress to the Judgment Day and the New Jerusalem: and the orthodox critics can explain the allegory fairly satisfactorily. But the Apocalypse

is a compound work. It is no doubt the work of different men, of different generations and even different centuries.

So that we don't have to look for a *meaning*, as we can look for a meaning in an allegory like *Pilgrim's Progress*, or even like Dante. John of Patmos didn't *compose* the Apocalypse. The Apocalypse is the work of no one man. The Apocalypse began probably two centuries before Christ, as some small book, perhaps, of Pagan ritual, or some small pagan-Jewish Apocalypse written in symbols. It was written over by other Jewish apocalyptists, and finally came down to John of Patmos. He turned it more or less, rather less than more, into a Christian allegory. And later scribes trimmed up his work.

So the ultimate intentional, Christian meaning of the book is, in a sense, only plastered over. The great images incorporated are like the magnificent Greek pillars plastered into the Christian Church in Sicily: they are not merely allegorical figures: they are symbols, they belong to a bigger age than that of John of Patmos. And as symbols they defy John's superficial allegorical meaning. You can't give a great symbol a "meaning," any more than you can give a cat a "meaning." Symbols are organic units of consciousness with a life of their own, and you can never explain them away, because their value is dynamic, emotional, belonging to the sense — consciousness of the body and soul, and not simply mental. An allegorical image has a *meaning*. Mr. Facing-both-ways has a meaning. But I defy you to lay your finger on the full meaning of Janus, who is a symbol.

It is necessary for us to realize very definitely the difference between allegory and symbol. Allegory is narrative description using, as a rule, images to express certain definite qualities. Each image means something, and is a term in the argument and nearly always for a moral or didactic purpose, for under the narrative of an allegory lies a didactic argument, usually moral. Myth likewise is descriptive narrative using images. But myth is never an argument, it never has a didactic nor a moral purpose, you can draw no conclusion from it. Myth is an attempt to narrate a whole human experience, of which the purpose is too deep, going too deep in the blood and soul, for mental explanation or description. We *can* expound the myth of Chronos very easily. We can explain it, we can even draw the moral conclusion. But we only look a little silly. The myth of Chronos lives on beyond explanation, for it describes a profound experience of the human body and soul, an experience which is never exhausted and never will be exhausted, for it is being felt and suffered now, and it will be felt and suffered while man remains man. You may explain the myths away: but it only means you go on suffering blindly, stupidly, "in the unconscious," instead of healthily and with the imaginative comprehension playing upon the suffering.

And the images of myth are symbols. They don't "mean something." They stand for units of human *feeling*, human experience. A complex of emotional experience is a symbol. And the power of the symbol is to arouse the deep emotional self, and the dynamic self, beyond comprehension. Many ages of accumulated experience still throb within a symbol. And we throb in response. It takes centuries to create a really significant symbol: even the symbol of the Cross, or of the horse-shoe, or the horns. No man can invent symbols. He can invent an emblem, made up of images: or metaphors: or images: but not symbols. Some images, in the course of many generations of men, become symbols, embedded in the soul and ready to start alive when touched, carried on in the human consciousness for centuries. And again, when men become unresponsive and half dead, symbols die.

Now the Apocalypse has many splendid old symbols, to make us throb. And symbols suggest schemes of symbols. So the Apocalypse, with its symbols, suggests schemes of symbols, deep underneath its Christian, allegorical surface meaning of the Church of Christ.

And one of the chief schemes of symbols which the Apocalypse will suggest to any man who has a feeling for symbols, as contrasted with the orthodox feeling for allegory, is the astrological scheme. Again and again the symbols of the Apocalypse are astrological, the movement is star-movement, and these suggest an astrological scheme. Whether it is worth while to work out the astrological scheme from the impure text of the Apocalypse depends on the man who finds it worth while. Whether the scheme *can* be worked out remains for us to judge. In all probability there was once an astrological scheme there.

But what is certain is that the astrological symbols and suggestions are still there, they give us the lead. And the lead leads us sometimes out into a great imaginative world where we feel free and delighted. At least, that is my experience. So what does it matter whether the astrological scheme can be restored intact or not? Who cares about explaining the Apocalypse, either allegorically or astrologically or historically or any other way. All one cares about is the lead, the lead that the symbolic figures give us, and their dramatic movement: the lead, and where it will lead us to. If it leads to a release of the imagination into some new sort of world, then let us be thankful, for that is what we want. It matters so little to us who care more about life than about scholarship, what is correct or what is not correct. What does "correct" mean, anyhow? *Sanahorias* is the Spanish for carrots: I hope I am correct. But what are carrots correct for?

What the ass wants is carrots; not the idea of carrots, nor thought-forms of carrots, but carrots. The Spanish ass doesn't even know that he is eating

sanahorias. He just eats and feels blissfully full of carrot. Now does *he* have more of the carrot, who eats it, or do I, who know that in Spanish it is called a *sanahoria* (I hope I am correct) and in botany it belongs to the *umbelliferce*?

We are full of the wind of thought-forms, and starved for a good carrot. I don't care *what* a man sets out to prove, so long as he will interest me and carry me away. I don't in the least care whether he proves his point or not, so long as he has given me a real imaginative experience by the way, and not another set of bloated thought-forms. We are starved to death, fed on the eternal sodom-apples of thought-forms. What we want is *complete* imaginative experience, which goes through the whole soul and body. Even at the expense of reason we want imaginative experience. For reason is certainly not the final judge of life.

Though, if we pause to think about it, we shall realize that it is not Reason herself whom we have to defy, it is her myrmidons, our accepted ideas and thought-forms. Reason can adjust herself to almost anything, if we will only free her from her crinoline and powdered wig, with which she was invested in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Reason is a supple nymph, and slippery as a fish by nature. She had as leave give her kiss to an absurdity any day, as to syllogistic truth. The absurdity may turn out truer.

So we need not feel ashamed of flirting with the zodiac. The zodiac is well worth flirting with. But not in the rather silly modern way of horoscopy and telling your fortune by the stars. Telling your fortune by the stars, or trying to get a tip from the stables, before a horse-race. You want to know what horse to put your money on. Horoscopy is just the same. They want their "fortune" told, never their misfortune.

Surely one of the greatest imaginative experiences the human race has ever had was the Chaldean experience of the stars, including the sun and moon. Sometimes it seems it must have been greater experience than any God-experience. For God is only a great imaginative experience. And sometimes it seems as if the experience of the living heavens, with a living yet not human sun, and brilliant living stars in *live* space must have been the most magnificent of all experiences, greater than any Jehovah or Baal, Buddha or Jesus. It may seem an absurdity to talk of *live* space. But is it? While we are warm and well and "unconscious" of our bodies, are we not all the time ultimately conscious of our bodies in the same way, as live or living space? And is not this the reason why void space so terrifies us?

I would like to know the stars again as the Chaldeans knew them, two thousand years before Christ. I would like to be able to put my ego into the sun, and my personality into the moon, and my character into the planets, and live the life of the heavens, as the early Chaldeans did. The human consciousness is

really homogeneous. There is no complete forgetting, even in death. So that somewhere within us the old experience of the Euphrates, Mesopotamia between the rivers, lives still. And in my Mesopotamian self I long for the sun again, and the moon and stars, for the Chaldean sun and the Chaldean stars. I long for them terribly. Because *our* sun and *our* moon are only thought-forms to us, balls of gas, dead globes of extinct volcanoes, things we *know* but never feel by experience. By *experience*, we should feel the sun as the savages feel him, we should “know” him as the Chaldeans knew him, in a terrific embrace. But our experience of the sun is dead, we are cut off. All we have now is the thought-form of the sun. He is a blazing ball of gas, he has spots occasionally, from some sort of indigestion, and he makes you brown and healthy if you let him. The first two “facts” we should never have known if men with telescopes, called astronomers, hadn’t told us. It is obvious, they are mere thought-forms. The third “fact,” about being brown and healthy, we believe because the doctors have told us it is so. As a matter of fact, many neurotic people become more and more neurotic, the browner and “healthier” they become by sun-baking. The sun can rot as well as ripen. So the third fact is also a thought-form.

And that is all we have, poor things, of the sun. Two or three cheap and inadequate thought-forms. Where, for us, is the great and royal sun of the Chaldeans? Where even, for us, is the sun of the Old Testament, coming forth like a strong man to run a race? We have lost the sun. We have lost the sun, and we have found a few miserable thought-forms. A ball of blazing gas! With spots! He browns you!

To be sure, we are not the first to lose the sun. The Babylonians themselves began the losing of him. The great and living heavens of the Chaldeans deteriorated already in Belshazzar’s day to the fortune-telling disc of the night skies. But that was man’s fault, not the heavens’. Man always deteriorates. And when he deteriorates he always becomes inordinately concerned about his “fortune” and his fate. While life itself is fascinating, fortune is completely uninteresting, and the idea of fate does not enter. When men become poor in life then they become anxious about their fortune and frightened about their fate. By the time of Jesus, men had become so anxious about their fortunes and so frightened about their fates, that they put up the grand declaration that life was one long misery and you couldn’t expect your fortune till you got to heaven; that is, till after you were dead. This was accepted by all men, and has been the creed till our day, Buddha and Jesus alike. It has provided us with a vast amount of thought-forms, and landed us in a sort of living death.

So now we want the sun again. Not the spotted ball of gas that browns you like a joint of meat, but the living sun, and the living moon of the old Chaldean

days. Think of the moon, think of Artemis and Cybele, think of the white wonder of the skies, so rounded, so velvety, moving so serene; and then think of the pockmarked horror of the scientific photographs of the moon!

But when we have seen the pockmarked face of the moon in scientific photographs, need that be the end of the moon for us? Even rationally? I think not. It is a great blow: but the imagination can recover from it. Even if we have to believe the pockmarked photograph, even if we believe in the cold and snow and utter deadness of the moon — which we *don't* quite believe — the moon is not therefore a dead nothing. The moon is a white strange world, great, white, soft-seeming globe in the night sky, and what she actually communicates to me across space I shall never fully know. But the moon that pulls the tides, and the moon that controls the menstrual periods of women, and the moon that touches the lunatics, she is not the mere dead lump of the astronomer. The moon is the great moon still, she gives forth her soft and feline influences, she sways us still, and asks for sympathy back again. In her so-called deadness there is enormous potency still, and power even over our lives. The Moon! Artemis! the great goddess of the splendid past of men! Are you going to tell me she is a dead lump?

She is not dead. But maybe we are dead, half-dead little modern worms stuffing our damp carcasses with thought-forms that have no sensual reality. When we describe the moon as dead, we are describing the deadness in ourselves. When we find space so hideously void, we are describing our own unbearable emptiness. Do we imagine that we, poor worms with spectacles and telescopes and thought-forms, are really more conscious, more vitally aware of the universe than the men in the past were, who called the moon Artemis, or Cybele, or Astarte? Do we imagine that we really, livingly know the moon better than they knew her? That our knowledge of the moon is more real, more “sound”? Let us disabuse ourselves. We know the moon in terms of our own telescopes and our own deadness. We know everything in terms of our own deadness.

But the moon is Artemis still, and a dangerous goddess she is, as she always was. She throws her cold contempt on you as she passes over the sky, poor, mean little worm of a man who thinks she is nothing but a dead lump. She throws back the cold white vitriol of her angry contempt on to your mean, tense nerves, nervous man, and she is corroding you away. Don't think you can escape the moon, any more than you can escape breathing. She is on the air you breathe. She is active within the atom. Her sting is part of the activity of the electron.

Do you think you can put the universe apart, a dead lump here, a ball of gas there, a bit of fume somewhere else? How puerile it is, as if the universe were

the back yard of some human chemical works! How gibbering man becomes, when he is really clever, and thinks he is giving the ultimate and final description of the universe! Can't he see that he is merely describing himself, and that the self he is describing is merely one of the more dead and dreary states that man can exist in? When man changes his state of being, he needs an entirely different description of the universe, and so the universe changes its nature to him entirely. Just as the nature of our universe is entirely different from the nature of the Chaldean Cosmos. The Chaldeans described the Cosmos as they found it: Magnificent. We describe the universe as we find it: mostly void, littered with a certain number of dead moons and unborn stars, like the back yard of a chemical works.

Is our description true? Not for a single moment, once you change your state of mind: or your state of soul. It is true for our present deadened state of mind. Our state of mind is becoming unbearable. We shall have to change it. And when we have changed it, we shall change our description of the universe entirely. We shall not call the moon Artemis, but the new name will be nearer to Artemis than to a dead lump or an extinct globe. We shall not get back the Chaldean vision of the living heavens. But the heavens will come to life again for us, and the vision will express also the new men that we are.

And so the value of these studies in the Apocalypse. They wake the imagination and give us at moments a new universe to live in. We may think it is the old cosmos of the Babylonians, but it isn't. We can never recover an old vision, once it has been supplanted. But what we can do is to discover a new vision in harmony with the memories of old, far-off, far, far-off experience that lie within us. So long as we are not deadened or drossy, memories of Chaldean experience still live within us, at great depths, and can vivify our impulses in a new direction, once we awaken them.

Therefore we ought to be grateful for a book like this of the *Dragon*. What does it matter if it is confused? What does it matter if it repeats itself? What does it matter if in parts it is not very interesting, when in other parts it is intensely so, when it suddenly opens doors and lets out the spirit into a new world, even if it is a very old world! I admit that I cannot see eye to eye with Mr. Carter about the Apocalypse itself. I cannot, myself, feel that old John of Patmos spent his time on his island lying on his back and gazing at the resplendent heavens; then afterwards writing a book in which all the magnificent cosmic and starry drama is deliberately wrapped up in Jewish-Christian moral threats and vengeance, sometimes rather vulgar.

But that, no doubt, is due to our different approach to the book. I was brought up on the Bible, and seem to have it in my bones.

From early childhood I have been familiar with Apocalyptic language and Apocalyptic image: not because I spent my time reading Revelation, but because I was sent to Sunday School and to Chapel, to Band of Hope and to Christian Endeavour, and was always having the Bible read at me or to me. I did not even listen attentively. But language has a power of echoing and re-echoing in my unconscious mind. I can wake up in the night and “hear” things being said — or hear a piece of music — to which I had paid no attention during the day. The very sound itself registers. And so the sound of Revelation had registered in me very early, and I was as used to: “I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s day, and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet, saying: I am Alpha and the Omega” — as I was to a nursery rhyme like “Little Bo-Peep”! I didn’t know the meaning, but then children so often prefer sound to sense. “Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth.” The Apocalypse is full of sounding phrases, beloved by the uneducated in the chapels for their true liturgical powers. “And he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God.”

No, for me the Apocalypse is altogether too full of fierce feeling, fierce and moral, to be a grand disguised star-myth. And yet it has intimate connexion with star-myths and the movement of the astrological heavens: a sort of submerged star-meaning. And nothing delights me more than to escape from the all-too-moral chapel meaning of the book, to another wider, older, more magnificent meaning. In fact, one of the real joys of middle age is in coming back to the Bible, reading a new translation, such as Moffatt’s, reading the modern research and modern criticism of some Old Testament books, and of the Gospels, and getting a whole new conception of the Scriptures altogether. Modern research has been able to put the Bible back into its living connexions, and it is splendid: no longer the Jewish-moral book and a stick to beat an immoral dog, but a fascinating account of the adventure of the Jewish — or Hebrew or Israelite nation, among the great old civilized nations of the past, Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, and Persia: then on into the Hellenic world, the Seleucids, and the Romans, Pompey and Anthony. Reading the Bible in a new translation, with modern notes and comments, is more fascinating than reading Homer, for the adventure goes even deeper into time and into the soul, and continues through the centuries, and moves from Egypt to Ur and to Nineveh, from Sheba to Tarshish and Athens and Rome. It is the very quick of ancient history.

And the Apocalypse, the last and presumably the latest of the books of the Bible, also comes to life with a great new life, once we look at its symbols and take the lead that they offer us. The text leads most easily into the great chaotic Hellenic world of the first century: Hellenic, not Roman. But the symbols lead much further back.

They lead Frederick Carter back to Chaldea and to Persia, chiefly, for his skies are the late Chaldean, and his mystery is chiefly Mith-raic. Hints, we have only hints from the outside. But the rest is within us, and if we can take a hint, it is extraordinary how far and into what fascinating worlds the hints can lead us. The orthodox critics will say: Fantasy! Nothing but fantasy! But then, thank God for fantasy, if it enhances our life.

And even so, the “reproach” is not quite just. The Apocalypse has an old, submerged astrological meaning, and probably even an old astrological scheme. The hints are too obvious and too splendid: like the ruins of an old temple incorporated in a Christian chapel. Is it any more fantastic to try to reconstruct the embedded temple, than to insist that the embedded images and columns are mere rubble in the Christian building, and have no meaning? It is as fantastic to deny meaning when meaning is there, as it is to invent meaning when there is none. And it is much duller. For the invented meaning may still have a life of its own.

REVIEWS OF BOOKS

Georgian Poetry: 1911-1912

Georgian Poetry is an anthology of verse which has been published during the reign of our present king, George V. It contains one poem of my own, but this fact will not, I hope, preclude my reviewing the book.

This collection is like a big breath taken when we are waking up after a night of oppressive dreams. The nihilists, the intellectual, hopeless people — Ibsen, Flaubert, Thomas Hardy — represent the dream we are waking from, it was a dream of demolition. Nothing was, but was nothing. Everything was taken from us. And now our lungs are full of new air, and our eyes see it is morning, but we have not forgotten the terror of the night. We dreamed we were falling through space into nothingness, and the anguish of it leaves us rather eager.

But we are awake again, our lungs are full of new air, our eyes of morning. The first song is nearly a cry, fear and the pain of remembrance sharpening away the pure music. And that is this book.

The last years have been years of demolition. Because faith and belief were getting pot-bound, and the Temple was made a place to barter sacrifices, therefore faith and belief and the Temple must be broken. This time art fought the battle, rather than science or any new religious faction. And art has been demolishing for us: Nietzsche, the Christian religion as it stood; Hardy, our faith in our own endeavour; Flaubert, our belief in love. Now, for us, it is all smashed, we can see the whole again. We were in prison, peeping at the sky through loop-holes. The great prisoners smashed at the loop-holes, for lying to us. And behold, out of the ruins leaps the whole sky.

It is we who see it and breathe in it for joy. God is there, faith, belief, love, everything. We are drunk with the joy of it, having got away from the fear. In almost every poem in the book comes this note of exultation after fear, the exultation in the vast freedom, the illimitable wealth that we have suddenly got.

But send desire often forth to scan
The immense night that is thy greater soul,

says Mr. Abercrombie. His deadly sin is Prudence, that will not risk to avail

itself of the new freedom. Mr. Bottomley exults to find men for ever building religions which yet can never compass all.

Yet the yielding sky
Invincible vacancy was there discovered.

Mr. Rupert Brooke sees

every glint
Posture and jest and thought and tint
Freed from the mask of transiency
Triumphant in eternity,
Immote, immortal

and this at Afternoon Tea. Mr. John Drinkwater sings:

We cherish every hour that strays
Adown the cataract of days:
We see the clear, untroubled skies,
We see the glory of the rose —

Mr. Wilfrid Wilson Gibson hears the “terror turned to tenderness,” then

I watched the mother sing to rest
The baby snuggling on her breast.

And to Mr. Masefield:

When men count
Those hours of life that were a bursting fount
Sparkling the dusty heart with living springs.
There seems a world, beyond our earthly things,
Gated by golden moments.

It is all the same — hope, and religious joy. Nothing is really wrong. Every new religion is a waste-product from the last, and every religion stands for us for ever. We love Christianity for what it has brought us, now that we are no longer upon the cross.

The great liberation gives us an overwhelming sense of joy, *joie d’etre, joie de vivre*. This sense of exceeding keen relish and appreciation of life makes romance. I think I could say every poem in the book is romantic, tinged with a love of the marvellous, a joy of natural things, as if the poet were a child for the first time on the seashore, finding treasures. “Best trust the happy moments,” says Mr. Masefield, who seems nearest to the black dream behind us. There is Mr. W. H. Davies’s lovely joy, Mr. De La Mare’s perfect appreciation of life at

still moments, Mr. Rupert Brooke's brightness, when he "lived from laugh to laugh," Mr. Edmund Beale Sargant's pure, excited happiness in the woodland — it is all the same, keen zest in life found wonderful. In Mr. Gordon Bottomley it is the zest of activity, of hurrying, labouring men, or the zest of the utter stillness of long snows. It is a bookful of Romance that has not quite got clear of the terror of realism.

There is no *carpe diem* touch. The joy is sure and fast. It is not the falling rose, but the rose for ever rising to bud and falling to fruit that gives us joy. We have faith in the vastness of life's wealth. We are always rich: rich in buds and in shed blossoms. There is no winter that we fear. Life is like an orange tree, always in leaf and bud, in blossom and fruit.

And we ourselves, in each of us, have everything. Somebody said: "The Georgian poets are not love poets. The influence of Swinburne has gone." But I should say the Georgian poets are just ripening to be love poets. Swinburne was no love poet. What are the Georgian poets, nearly all, but just bursting into a thick blaze of being? They are not poets of passion, perhaps, but they are essentially passionate poets. The time to be impersonal has gone. We start from the joy we have in being ourselves, and everything must take colour from that joy. It is the return of the blood, that has been held back, as when the heart's action is arrested by fear. Now the warmth of blood is in everything, quick, healthy, passionate blood. I look at my hands as I write and know they are mine, with red blood running its way, sleuthing out Truth and pursuing it to eternity, and I am full of awe for this flesh and blood that holds this pen. Everything that ever was thought and ever will be thought, lies in this body of mine. This flesh and blood sitting here writing, the great impersonal flesh and blood, greater than me, which I am proud to belong to, contains all the future. What is it but the quick of all growth, the seed of all harvest, this body of mine? And grapes and corn and birds and rocks and visions, all are in my fingers. I am so full of wonder at my own miracle of flesh and blood that I could not contain myself, if I did not remember we are all alive, have all of us living bodies. And that is a joy greater than any dream of immortality in the spirit, to me. It reminds me of Rupert Brooke's moment triumphant in its eternity; and of Michelangelo, who is also the moment triumphant in its eternity; just the opposite from Corot, who is the eternal triumphing over the moment, at the moment, at the very point of sweeping it into the flow.

Of all love poets, we are the love poets. For our religion is loving. To love passionately, but completely, is our one desire.

What is "The Hare" but a complete love poem, with none of the hackneyed "But a bitter blossom was born" about it, nor yet the Yeats, "Never give all the

heart.” Love is the greatest of all things, no “bitter blossom” nor such-like. It is sex-passion, so separated, in which we do not believe. The *Carmen* and *Tosca* sort of passion is not interesting any longer, because it can’t progress. Its goal and aim is possession, whereas possession in love is only a means to love. And because passion cannot go beyond possession, the passionate heroes and heroines — Tristans and what-not — must die. We believe in the love that is happy ever after, progressive as life itself.

I worship Christ, I worship Jehovah, I worship Pan, I worship Aphrodite. But I do not worship hands nailed and running with blood upon a cross, nor licentiousness, nor lust. I want them all, all the gods. They are all God. But I must serve in real love. If I take my whole, passionate, spiritual and physical love to the woman who in return loves me, that is how I serve God. And my hymn and my game of joy is my work. All of which I read in the anthology of *Georgian Poetry*.

German Books: Thomas Mann

Thomas Mann is perhaps the most famous of German novelists now writing. He, and his elder brother, Heinrich Mann, with Jakob Wassermann, are acclaimed the three artists in fiction of present-day Germany.

But Germany is now undergoing that craving for form in fiction, that passionate desire for the mastery of the medium of narrative, that will of the writer to be greater than and undisputed lord over the stuff he writes, which is figured to the world in Gustave Flaubert.

Thomas Mann is over middle age, and has written three or four books: *Buddenbrooks*, a novel of the patrician life of Lubeck; *Tristan*, a collection of six *Novellen*; *Königliche Hoheit*, an unreal Court romance; various stories, and lastly, *Der Tod in Venedig*. The author himself is the son of a Lubeck *Patrizier*.

It is as an artist rather than as a story-teller that Germany worships Thomas Mann. And yet it seems to me, this craving for form is the outcome, not of artistic conscience, but of a certain attitude to life. For form is not a personal thing like style. It is impersonal like logic. And just as the school of Alexander Pope was logical in its expressions, so it seems the school of Flaubert is, as it were, logical in its aesthetic form. "Nothing outside the definite line of the book," is a maxim. But can the human mind fix absolutely the definite line of a book, any more than it can fix absolutely any definite line of action for a living being?

Thomas Mann, however, is personal, almost painfully so, in his subject-matter. In "Tonio Kroger," the long *Novelle* at the end of the *Tristan* volume, he paints a detailed portrait of himself as a youth and younger man, a careful analysis. And he expresses at some length the misery of being an artist. "Literature is not a calling, it is a curse." Then he says to the Russian painter girl: "There is no artist anywhere but longs again, my love, for the common life." But any young artist might say that. It is because the stress of life in a young man, but particularly in an artist, is very strong, and has as yet found no outlet, so that it rages inside him in *Sturm und Drang*. But the condition is the same, only more tragic, in the Thomas Mann of fifty-three. He has never found any outlet for himself, save his art. He has never given himself to anything but his art. This is all well and good, if his art absorbs and satisfies him, as it has done some great men, like Corot. But then there are the other artists, the more human, like Shakespeare and Goethe, who must give themselves to life as well

as to art. And if these were afraid, or despised life, then with their surplus they would ferment and become rotten. Which is what ails Thomas Mann. He is physically ailing, no doubt. But his complaint is deeper: it is of the soul.

And out of this soul-ailment, this unbelief, he makes his particular art, which he describes, in “Tonio Kroger,” as “*Wahlerisch, er-lesen, kostbar, fein, reizbar gegen das Banale, und aufs hochste empfindlich in Fragen des Taktes und Geschmacks.*” He is a disciple, in method, of the Flaubert who wrote: “I worked sixteen hours yesterday, today the whole day, and have at last finished one page.” In writing of the *Leitmotiv* and its influence, he says: “Now this method alone is sufficient to explain my slowness. It is the result neither of anxiety nor indigence, but of an overpowering sense of responsibility for the choice of every word, the coining of every phrase ... a responsibility that longs for perfect freshness, and which, after two hours’ work, prefers not to undertake an important sentence. For which sentence is important, and which not? Can one know before hand whether a sentence, or part of a sentence may not be called upon to appear again as *Motiv*, peg, symbol, citation or connexion? And a sentence which must be heard twice must be fashioned accordingly. It must — I do not speak of beauty — possess a certain high level, and symbolic suggestion, which will make it worthy to sound again in any epic future. So every point becomes a standing ground, every adjective a decision, and it is clear that such work is not to be produced off-hand.”

This, then, is the method. The man himself was always delicate in constitution. “The doctors said he was too weak to go to school, and must work at home.” I quote from Aschenbach, in *Der Tod in Venedig*. “When he fell, at the age of fifty-three, one of his closest observers said of him: ‘Aschenbach has always lived like this’ — and he gripped his fist hard clenched; ‘never like this’ — and he let his open hand lie easily on the arm of the chair.”

He forced himself to write, and kept himself to the work. Speaking of one of his works, he says: “It was pardonable, yea, it showed plainly the victory of his morality, that the uninitiated reader supposed the book to have come of a solid strength and one long breath; whereas it was the result of small daily efforts and hundreds of single inspirations.”

And he gives the sum of his experience in the belief: “*dass beinahe alles Grosse, was dastehe, als ein Trotzdem dastehe, trotz Kummer und Qual, Armut, Verlassenheit, Korperschwache, Luster, Leidenschaft und tausend hemmnischen Zustände gekommen sei.*” And then comes the final revelation, difficult to translate. He is speaking of life as it is written into his books:

“For endurance of one’s fate, grace in suffering, does not only mean passivity, but is an active work, a positive triumph, and the Sebastian figure is the most

beautiful symbol, if not of all art, yet of the art in question. If one looked into this portrayed world and saw the elegant self-control that hides from the eyes of the world to the last moment the inner undermining, the biological decay; saw the yellow ugliness which, sensuously at a disadvantage, could blow its choking heat of desire to a pure flame, and even rise to sovereignty in the kingdom of beauty; saw the pale impotence which draws out of the glowing depths of its intellect sufficient strength to subdue a whole vigorous people, bring them to the foot of the Cross, to the feet of impotence; saw the amiable bearing in the empty and severe service of Form; saw the quickly enervating longing and art of the born swindler: if one saw such a fate as this, and all the rest it implied, then one would be forced to doubt whether there were in reality any other heroism than that of weakness. Which heroism, in any case, is more of our time than this?"

Perhaps it is better to give the story of *Der Tod in Venedig*, from which the above is taken, and to whose hero it applies.

Gustav von Aschenbach, a fine, famous author, over fifty years of age, coming to the end of a long walk one afternoon, sees as he is approaching a burying place, near Munich, a man standing between the chimeric figures of the gateway. This man in the gate of the cemetery is almost the *Motiv* of the story. By him, Aschenbach is infected with a desire to travel. He examines himself minutely, in a way almost painful in its frankness, and one sees the whole soul of this author of fifty-three. And it seems, the artist has absorbed the man, and yet the man is there, like an exhausted organism on which a parasite has fed itself strong. Then begins a kind of Holbein *Totentanz*. The story is quite natural in appearance, and yet there is the gruesome sense of symbolism throughout. The man near the burying ground has suggested travel — but whither? Aschenbach sets off to a watering place on the Austrian coast of the Adriatic, seeking some adventure, some passionate adventure, to which his sick soul and unhealthy body have been kindled. But finding himself on the Adriatic, he knows it is not thither that his desire draws him, and he takes ship for Venice. It is all real, and yet with a curious sinister unreality, like decay, the "biological decay." On board there is a man who reminds one of the man in the gateway, though there is no connexion. And then, among a crowd of young Poles who are crossing, is a ghastly fellow, whom Aschenbach sees is an old man dressed up as young, who capers unsuspected among the youths, drinks hilariously with them, and falls hideously drunk at last on the deck, reaching to the author, and slobbering about "*dern allerliebsten, dem schdnsten Liebchen.*" Suddenly the upper plate of his false teeth falls on his underlip.

Aschenbach takes a gondola to the Lido, and again the gondolier reminds one of the man in the cemetery gateway. He is, moreover, one who will make no

concession, and, in spite of Aschenbach's demand to be taken back to St. Mark's, rows him in his black craft to the Lido, talking to himself softly all the while. Then he goes without payment.

The author stays in a fashionable hotel on the Lido. The adventure is coming, there by the pallid sea. As Aschenbach comes down into the hall of the hotel, he sees a beautiful Polish boy of about fourteen, with honey-coloured curls clustering round his pale face, standing with his sisters and their governess.

Aschenbach loves the boy — but almost as a symbol. In him he loves life and youth and beauty, as Hyacinth in the Greek myth. This, I suppose, is blowing the choking heat to pure flame, and raising it to the kingdom of beauty. He follows the boy, watches him all day long on the beach, fascinated by beauty concrete before him. It is still the *Kiinstler* and his abstraction: but there is also the “yellow ugliness, sensually at a disadvantage,” of the elderly man below it all. But the picture of the writer watching the folk on the beach gleams and lives with a curious, gold-phosphorescent light, touched with the brightness of Greek myth, and yet a modern seashore with folks on the sands, and a half-threatening, diseased sky.

Aschenbach, watching the boy in the hotel lift, finds him delicate, almost ill, and the thought that he may not live long fills the elderly writer with a sense of peace. It eases him to think the boy should die.

Then the writer suffers from the effect of the *sirocco*, and intends to depart immediately from Venice. But at the station he finds with joy that his luggage has gone wrong, and he goes straight back to the hotel. There, when he sees Tadzin again, he knows why he could not leave Venice.

There is a month of hot weather, when Aschenbach follows Tadzin about, and begins to receive a look, loving, from over the lad's shoulder. It is wonderful, the heat, the unwholesomeness, the passion in Venice. One evening comes a street singer, smelling of carbolic acid, and sings beneath the veranda of the hotel. And this time, in gruesome symbolism, it is the man from the burying ground distinctly.

The rumour is, that the black cholera is in Venice. An atmosphere of secret plague hangs over the city of canals and palaces. Aschenbach verifies the report at the English bureau, but cannot bring himself to go away from Tadzin, nor yet to warn the Polish family. The secretly pest-smitten days go by. Aschenbach follows the boy through the stinking streets of the town and loses him. And on the day of the departure of the Polish family, the famous author dies of the plague.

It is absolutely, almost intentionally, unwholesome. The man is sick, body and soul. He portrays himself as he is, with wonderful skill and art, portrays his

sickness. And since any genuine portrait is valuable, this book has its place. It portrays one man, one atmosphere, one sick vision. It claims to do no more. And we have to allow it. But we know it is unwholesome — it does not strike me as being morbid for all that, it is too well done — and we give it its place as such.

Thomas Mann seems to me the last sick sufferer from the complaint of Flaubert. The latter stood away from life as from a leprosy. And Thomas Mann, like Flaubert, feels vaguely that he has in him something finer than ever physical life revealed. Physical life is a disordered corruption, against which he can fight with only one weapon, his fine aesthetic sense, his feeling for beauty, for perfection, for a certain fitness which soothes him, and gives him an inner pleasure, however corrupt the stuff of life may be. There he is, after all these years, full of disgusts and loathing of himself as Flaubert was, and Germany is being voiced, or partly so, by him. And so, with real suicidal intention, like Flaubert's, he sits, a last too-sick disciple, reducing himself grain by grain to the statement of his own disgust, patiently, self-destructively, so that his statement at least may be perfect in a world of corruption. But he is so late.

Already I find Thomas Mann, who, as he says, fights so hard against the banal in his work, somewhat banal. His expression may be very fine. But by now what he expresses is stale. I think we have learned our lesson, to be sufficiently aware of the fulsomeness of life. And even while he has a rhythm in style, yet his work has none of the rhythm of a living thing, the rise of a poppy, then the after uplift of the bud, the shedding of the calyx and the spreading wide of the petals, the falling of the flower and the pride of the seed-head. There is an unexpectedness in this such as does not come from their carefully plotted and arranged developments. Even *Madame Bovary* seems to me dead in respect to the living rhythm of the whole work. While it is there in *Macbeth* like life itself.

But Thomas Mann is old — and we are young. Germany does not feel very young to me.

***Americans*, by Stuart P. Sherman**

Professor Sherman once more coaxing American criticism the way it should go.

Like Benjamin Franklin, one of his heroes, he attempts the invention of a creed that shall “satisfy the professors of all religions, and offend none.”

He smites the marauding Mr. Mencken with a velvet glove, and pierces the obstinate Mr. More with a reproachful look. Both gentlemen, of course, will purr and feel flattered.

That’s how Professor Sherman treats his enemies: buns to his grizzlies.

Well, Professor Sherman, being a professor, has got to be nice to everybody about everybody. What else does a professor sit in a chair of English for, except to dole out sweets?

Awfully nice, rather cloying. But there, men *are* but children of a later growth.

So much for the professor’s attitude. As for his “message.” He steers his little ship of Criticism most obviously between the Scylla of Mr. Mencken and the Charybdis of Mr. P. E. More. I’m sorry I never heard before of either gentleman: except that I dimly remember having read, in the lounge of a Naples hotel, a bit of an article by a Mr. Mencken, in German, in some German periodical: all amounting to nothing.

But Mr. Mencken is the Scylla of American Criticism, and hence, of American democracy. There is a verb “to menckenize,” and a noun “menckenism.” Apparently to *menckenize* is to manufacture jeering little gas-bomb phrases against everything deep and earnest, or high and noble, and to paint the face of corruption with phosphorus, so it shall glow. And a *menckenism* is one of the little stink-gas phrases.

Now the *nouveau riche jeune fille* of the *bourgeoisie*, as Professor Sherman puts it; in other words, the profiteers’ flappers all read Mr. Mencken and swear by him: swear that they don’t give a nickel for any Great Man that ever was or will be. Great Men are all a bombastical swindle. So asserts the *nouveau riche jeune fille*, on whom, apparently, American democracy rests. And Mr. Mencken “learnt it her.” And Mr. Mencken got it in Germany, where all stink-gas comes from, according to Professor Sherman. And Mr.

Mencken does it to poison the noble and great old spirit of American democracy, which is grandly Anglo-Saxon in origin, but absolutely American in fact.

So much for the Scylla of Mr. Mencken. It is the first essay in the book. The Charybdis of Mr. P. E. More is the last essay: to this monster the professor warbles another tune. Mr. More, author of the *Shelburne Essays*, is learned, and steeped in tradition, the very antithesis of the nihilistic stink-gassing Mr. Mencken. But alas, Mr. More is remote: somewhat haughty and supercilious at his study table. And even, alasser! with all his learning and remoteness, he hunts out the risky Restoration wits to hob-nob with on high Parnassus; Wycherley, for example; he likes his wits smutty. He even goes and fetches out Aphra Behn from her disreputable oblivion, to entertain her in public.

And there you have the Charybdis of Mr. More: snobbish, distant, exclusive, disdainful even the hero from the Marne who mends the gas bracket: and at the same time absolutely *preferring* the doubtful odour of Wycherley because it is — well, malodorous, says the professor.

Mr. Mencken: Great Men and the Great Past are an addled egg full of stink-gas.

Mr. P. E. More: Great Men of the Great Past are utterly beyond the *mobile vulgus*. Let the *mobile vulgus* (in other words, the democratic millions of America) be cynically scoffed at by the gentlemen of the Great Past, especially the naughty ones.

To the Menckenites, Professor Sherman says: Jeer not at the Great Past and at the Great Dead. Heroes are heroes still, they do not go addled, as you would try to make out, nor turn into stink-bombs. Tradition is honourable still, and will be honourable for ever, though it may be splashed like a futurist's picture with the rotten eggs of menckenism.

To the smaller and more select company of Moreites: Scorn not the horny hand of noble toil: “ — the average man is, like (Mr. More) himself, at heart a mystic, vaguely hungering for a peace that diplomats cannot give, obscurely seeking the permanent amid the transitory: a poor swimmer struggling for a rock amid the flux of waters, a lonely pilgrim longing for the shadow of a mighty rock in a weary land. And if ‘P. E. M.’ had a bit more of that natural sympathy of which he is so distrustful, he would have perceived that what more than anything else today keeps the average man from lapsing into Yahooism is the religion of democracy, consisting of a little bundle of general principles which make him respect himself and his neighbour; a bundle of principles kindled in crucial times by an intense emotion, in which his self-interest, his petty vices, and his envy are consumed as with fire; and he sees the common weal as the mighty rock in the shadow of which his little life and personality are to be surrendered, if need be, as things negligible and transitory.”

All right, Professor Sherman. All the profiteers, and shovers, and place-

grabbers, and bullies, especially bullies, male and female, all that sort of gentry of the late war were, of course, outside the average. The supermen of the occasion.

The Babbitts, while they were on the make.

And as for the mighty rocks in weary lands, as far as my experience goes, they have served the pilgrims chiefly as sanitary offices and places in whose shadows men shall leave their offal and tin cans.

But there you have a specimen of Professor Sherman's "style." And the thin ends of his parabola.

The great arch is of course the Religion of Democracy, which the professor italicizes. If you want to trace the curve you must follow the course of the essays.

After Mr. Mencken and Tradition comes Franklin. Now Benjamin Franklin is one of the founders of the Religion of Democracy. It was he who invented the creed that should satisfy the professors of all religions, not of universities only, and offend none. With a deity called Providence. Who turns out to be a sort of superlative Mr. Wanamaker, running the globe as a revolving dry-goods store, according to a profit-and-loss system; the profit counted in plump citizens whose every want is satisfied: like chickens in an absolutely coyote-proof chicken-run.

In spite of this new attempt to make us like Dr. Franklin, the flesh wearies on our bones at the thought of him. The professor hints that the good old gentleman on Quaker Oats was really an old sinner. If it had been proved to us, we *might* have liked him. As it is, he just wearies the flesh on our bones. *Religion civile*, indeed.

Emerson. The next essay is called "The Emersonian Liberation." Well, Emerson is a great man still: or a great individual. And heroes are heroes still, though their banners may decay, and stink.

It is true that lilies may fester. And virtues likewise. The great Virtue of one age has a trick of smelling far worse than weeds in the next.

It is a sad but undeniable fact.

Yet why so sad, fond lover, prithee why so sad? Why should Virtue remain incorruptible, any more than anything else? If stars wax and wane, why should Goodness shine for ever unchanged? That too makes one tired. Goodness sweals and gutters, the light of the Good goes out with a stink, and lo, somewhere else a new light, a new Good. Afterwards, it may be shown that it is eternally the same Good. But to us poor mortals at the moment, it emphatically isn't.

And that is the point about Emerson and the Emersonian Liberation — save the word! Heroes are heroes still: safely dead. Heroism is always heroism. But the hero who was heroic one century, uplifting the banner of a creed, is followed

the next century by a hero heroically ripping that banner to rags. *Sic transit Veritas mundi.*

Emerson was an idealist: a believer in “continuous revelation,” continuous inrushes of inspirational energy from the Over-Soul. Professor Sherman says: “His message when he leaves us is not, ‘Henceforth be masterless,’ but, ‘Bear thou henceforth the sceptre of thine own control through life and the passion of life.’ “

When Emerson says: “I am surrounded by messengers of God who send me credentials day by day,” then all right for him. But he cozily forgot that there are many messengers. He knew only a sort of smooth-shaven Gabriel. But as far as we remember, there is Michael too: and a terrible discrepancy between the credentials of the pair of ‘em. Then there are other cherubim with outlandish names, bringing very different messages than those Ralph Waldo got: Israfel, and even Mormon. And a whole bunch of others. But Emerson had a stone-deaf ear for all except a nicely aureoled Gabriel *qui n’avait pas de quoi.*

Emerson listened to one sort of message and only one. To all the rest he was blank. Ashtaroth and Ammon are gods as well, and hand out their own credentials. But Ralph Waldo wasn’t having any. They could never ring *him* up. He was only connected on the Ideal phone. “We are all aiming to be idealists,” says Emerson, “and covet the society of those who make us so, as the sweet singer, the orator, the ideal painter.”

Well, we’re pretty sick of the ideal painters and the uplifting singers. As a matter of fact we have worked the ideal bit of our nature to death, and we shall go crazy if we can’t start working from some other bit. Idealism now is a sick nerve, and the more you rub on it the worse you feel afterwards. Your later reactions aren’t pretty at all. Like Dostoievsky’s Idiot, and President Wilson sometimes.

Emerson believes in having the courage to treat all men as equals. It takes some courage *not* to treat them so now.

“Shall I not treat all men as gods?” he cries.

If you like, Waldo, but we’ve got to pay for it, when you’ve made them *feel* that they’re gods. A hundred million American god-lets is rather much for the world to deal with.

The fact of the matter is, all those gorgeous inrushes of exaltation and spiritual energy which made Emerson a great man, now make us sick. They are with us a drug habit. So when Professor Sherman urges us in Ralph Waldo’s footsteps, he is really driving us nauseously astray. Which perhaps is hard lines on the professor, and us, and Emerson. But it wasn’t I who started the mills of God a-grind- ing.

I like the essay on Emerson. I like Emerson's real courage. I like his wild and genuine belief in the Over-Soul and the inrushes he got from it. But it is a museum-interest. Or else it is a taste of the old drug to the old spiritual drug-fiend in me.

We've got to have a different sort of sardonic courage. And the sort of credentials we are due to receive from the god in the shadow would have been real bones out of hell-broth to Ralph Waldo. *Sic transeunt Dei hominorum*.

So no wonder Professor Sherman sounds a little wistful, and somewhat pathetic, as he begs us to follow Ralph Waldo's trail.

Hawthorne: A Puritan Critic of Puritanism. This essay is concerned chiefly with an analysis and praise of *The Scarlet Letter*. Well, it is a wonderful book. But why does nobody give little Nathaniel a kick for his duplicity? Professor Sherman says there is nothing erotic about *The Scarlet Letter*. Only neurotic. It wasn't the sensual act itself had any meaning for Hawthorne. Only the Sin. He knew there's nothing deadly in the act itself. But if it is Forbidden, immediately it looms lurid with interest. He is not concerned for a moment with what Hester and Dimmesdale really felt. Only with their situations as Sinners. And Sin looms lurid and thrilling, when after all it is only just a normal sexual passion. This luridness about the book makes one feel like spitting. It is somewhat worked up-, invented in the head and grafted on to the lower body, like some serpent of supposition under the fig-leaf. It depends so much on *coverings*. Suppose you took off the fig-leaf, the serpent isn't there. And so the relish is all two-faced and tiresome. *The Scarlet Letter* is a masterpiece, but in duplicity and half-false excitement.

And when one remembers *The Marble Faun*, all the parochial priggishness and poor-bloodedness of Hawthorne in Italy, one of the most bloodless books ever written, one feels like giving Nathaniel a kick in the seat of his poor little pants and landing him back in New England again. For the rolling, many-godded medieval and pagan world was too big a prey for such a ferret.

Walt Whitman. Walt is the high priest of the Religion of Democracy. Yet "at the first bewildering contact one wonders whether his urgent touch is of lewdness or divinity," says Professor Sherman.

"All I have said concerns you." But it doesn't. One ceases to care about so many things. One ceases to respond or to react. And at length other things come up, which Walt and Professor Sherman never knew.

"Whatever else it involves, democracy involves at least one grand salutary elementary admission, namely, that the world exists for the benefit and for the improvement of all the decent individuals in it." O Lord, how long will you submit to this Insurance Policy interpretation of the Universe! How "decent"?

Decent in what way? Benefit! Think of the world's existing for people's "benefit and improvement."

So wonderful says Professor Sherman, the way Whitman identifies himself with everything and everybody: Runaway slaves and all the rest. But we no longer want to take the whole hullabaloo to our bosom. We no longer want to "identify ourselves" with a lot of other things and other people. It is a sort of lewdness. *Noli me tangere*, "you." I don't want "you."

Whitman's "you" doesn't get me.

We don't want to be embracing everything any more. Or to be embraced in one of Waldo's vast promiscuous armfuls. *Merci, monsieur!*

We've had enough democracy.

Professor Sherman says that if Whitman had lived "at the right place in these years of Proletarian Millennium, he would have been hanged as a reactionary member of the *bourgeoise*." ('Tisn't my spelling.)

And he gives Whitman's own words in proof: "The true gravitation hold of liberalism in the United States will be a more universal ownership of property, general homesteads, general comforts — a vast intertwining reticulation of wealth. . . . She (Democracy) asks for men and women with occupations, well-off, owners of houses and acres, and with cash in the bank and with some craving for literature too" — so that they can buy certain books. Oh, Walt!

A lions! The road is before us.

Joaquin Miller: Poetical Conquistador of the West. A long essay with not much spirit in it, showing that Miller was a true son of the Wild and Woolly West, in so far as he was a very good imitation of other people's poetry (note the Swinburnian bit) and a rather poor assumer of other people's played-out poses. A self-conscious little "wild" man, like the rest of the "wild" men. The Wild West is a pose that pays Zane Grey today, as it once paid Miller and Bret Harte and Buffalo Bill.

A note on Carl Sandburg. That Carl is a super-self-conscious literary gent stampeding around with red-ochre blood on his hands and smeared-on soot darkening his craggy would-be-criminal brow: but that his heart is as tender as an old tomato.

Andrew Carnegie. That Andy was the most perfect American citizen Scotland ever produced, and the sweetest example of how beautifully the *Religion Civile* pays, in cold cash.

Roosevelt and the National Psychology. Theodore didn't have a spark of magnanimity in his great personality, says Professor Sherman, what a pity! And you see where it lands you, when you play at being pro-German. You go quite out of fashion.

Evolution of the Adams Family. Perfect Pedigree of the most aristocratic Democratic family. Your aristocracy is played out, my dear fellows, but don't cry about it, you've always got your Democracy to fall back on. If you don't like falling back on it of your own free will, you'll be shoved back on it by the Will of the People.

“Man is the animal that destiny cannot break.”

But the Will of the People can break Man and the animal man, and the destined man, all the lot, and grind 'em to democratic powder, Professor Sherman warns us.

A lions! en-masse is before us.

But when Germany is thoroughly broken, Democracy finally collapses. (My own prophecy.)

An Imaginary Conversation with Mr. P. E. More: You've had the gist of that already.

Well there is Professor Sherman's dish of cookies which he bids you eat and have. An awfully sweet book, all about having your cookies and eating 'em. The cookies are Tradition, and Heroes, and Great Men, and \$350,000,000 in your pocket. And eating 'em is Democracy, Serving Mankind, piously giving most of the \$350,- 000,000 back again. “Oh, nobly and heroically get \$350,000,000 together,” chants Professor Sherman in this litany of having your cookies and eating 'em, “and then piously and munificently give away \$349,000,000 again.”

P.S. You can't get past Arithmetic.

A Second Contemporary Verse Anthology

“It is not merely an assembly of verse, but the spiritual record of an entire people.” — This from the wrapper of *A Second Contemporary Verse Anthology*. The spiritual record of an entire people sounds rather impressive. The book as a matter of fact is a collection of pleasant verse, neat and nice and easy as eating candy.

Naturally, any collection of contemporary verse in any country at any time is bound to be more or less a box of candy. Days of Horace, days of Milton, days of Whitman, it would be pretty much the same, more or less a box of candy. Would it be at the same time the spiritual record of an entire people? Why not? If we had a good representative anthology of the poetry of Whitman’s day, and if it contained two poems by Whitman, then it would be a fairly true spiritual record of the American people of that day. As if the whole nation had whispered or chanted its inner experience into the horn of a gramophone.

And the bulk of the whisperings and murmurings would be candy: sweet nothings, tender trifles, and amusing things. For of such is the bulk of the spiritual experience of any entire people.

The Americans have always been good at “occasional” verse. Sixty years ago they were very good indeed: making their little joke against themselves and their century. Today there are fewer jokes. There are also fewer footprints on the sands of time. Life is still earnest, but a little less real. And the soul has left off asserting that dust it isn’t nor to dust returneth. The spirit of verse prefers now a “composition salad” of fruits of sensation, in a cooked mayonnaise of sympathy. Odds and ends of feelings smoothed into unison by some prevailing sentiment:

My face is wet with the rain
But my heart is warm to the core. . . .

Or you can call it a box of chocolate candies. Let me offer you a sweet!
Candy! Isn’t everything candy?

There be none of beauty’s daughters
With a magic like thee —
And like music on the waters Is thy sweet voice to me.

Is that candy? Then what about this?

But you are a girl and run
Fresh bathed and warm and sweet.
After the flying ball
On little, sandalled feet.

One of those two fragments is a classic. And one is a scrap from the contemporary spiritual record.

The river boat had loitered down its way,
The ropes were coiled, and business for the day
Was done

Now fades the glimmering landscape on the sight,
And all the air a solemn stillness holds;
Save where

Two more bits. Do you see any intrinsic difference between them? After all, the one *means* as much as the other. And what is there in the mere stringing together of words?

For some mysterious reason, there is everything.
When lilacs last in the dooryard bloomed

It is a string of words, but it makes me prick my innermost ear. So do I prick my ear to: “Fly low, vermilion dragon.” But the next line: “With the moon horns,” makes me lower that same inward ear once more, in indifference.

There is an element of danger in all new utterance. We prick our ears like an animal in a wood at a strange sound.

Alas! though there is a modicum of “strange sound” in this contemporary spiritual record, we are not the animal to prick our ears at it. Sounds sweetly familiar, linked in a new crochet pattern. “Christ, what are patterns for?” But why invoke Deity? Ask the *Ladies’ Home Journal*. You may know a new utterance by the element of danger in it. “My heart aches,” says Keats, and you bet it’s no joke.

Why do I think of stairways
With a rush of hurt surprise?

Heaven knows, my dear, unless you once fell down.

The element of danger. Man is always, all the time and for ever on the brink of the unknown. The minute you realize this, you prick your ears in alarm. And the minute any man steps alone, with his whole naked self, emotional and mental, into the everlasting hinterland of consciousness, you hate him and you wonder

over him. Why can't he stay cozily playing word-games around the camp fire?

Now it is time to invoke the Deity, who made man an adventurer into the everlasting unknown of consciousness.

The spiritual record of any people is 99 per cent a record of games around a camp fire: word-games and picture-games. But the one per cent is a step into the grisly dark, which is for ever dangerous and wonderful. Nothing is wonderful unless it is dangerous. Dangerous to the *status quo* of the soul. And therefore to some degree detestable.

When the contemporary spiritual record warbles away about the wonder of the blue sky and the changing seas, etc., etc., etc., it is all candy. The sky is a blue hand-mirror to the modern poet and he goes on smirking before it. The blue sky of our particular heavens is painfully well known to us all. In fact, it is like the glass bowl to the goldfish, a *ne plus ultra* in which he sees himself as he goes round and round.

The actual heavens can suddenly roll up like the heavens of Ezekiel. That's what happened at the Renaissance. The old heavens shrivelled and men found a new empyrean above them. But they didn't get at it by playing word-games around the camp fire. Somebody has to jump like a desperate clown through the vast blue hoop of the upper air. Or hack a slow way through the dome of crystal.

Play! Play! Play! All the little playboys and playgirls of the western world, playing at goodness, playing at badness, playing at sadness, and playing deafeningly at gladness. Playboys and playgirls of the western world, harmlessly fulfilling their higher destinies and registering the spiritual record of an entire people. Even playing at death, and playing with death. Oh, poetry, you child in a bathing-dress, playing at ball!

You say nature is always nature, the sky is always the sky. But sit still and consider for one moment what sort of nature it was the Romans saw on the face of the earth, and what sort of heavens the medievals knew above them, and your sky will begin to crack like glass. The world is what it is, and the chimerical universe of the ancients was always child's play. The camera cannot lie. And the eye of man is nothing but a camera photographing the outer world in colour-process.

This sounds very well. But the eye of man photographs the chimera of nature, as well as the so-called scientific vision. The eye of man photographs gorgons and chimeras, as the eye of the spider photographs images unrecognizable to us and the eye of the horse photographs flat ghosts and looming motions. We are at the phase of scientific vision. This phase will pass and this vision will seem as chimerical to our descendants as the medieval vision seems to us.

The upshot of it all is that we are pot-bound in our consciousness. We are like

a fish in a glass bowl, swimming round and round and gaping at our own image reflected on the walls of the infinite: the infinite being the glass bowl of our conception of life and the universe. We are prisoners inside our own conception of life and being. We have exhausted the possibilities of the universe, as we know it. All that remains is to telephone to Mars for a new word of advice.

Our consciousness is pot-bound. Our ideas, our emotions, our experiences are all pot-bound. For us there is nothing new under the sun. What there is to know, we know it already, and experience adds little. The girl who is going to fall in love knows all about it beforehand from books and the movies. She knows what she wants and she wants what she knows. Like candy. It is still nice to eat candy, though one has eaten it every day for years. It is still nice to eat candy. But the spiritual record of eating candy is a rather thin noise.

There is nothing new under the sun, once the consciousness becomes pot-bound. And this is what ails all art today. But particularly American art. The American consciousness is peculiarly pot-bound. It doesn't even have that little hole in the bottom of the pot through which desperate roots straggle. No, the American consciousness is not only potted in a solid and everlasting pot, it is placed moreover in an immovable ornamental vase. A double hide to bind it and a double bond to hide it.

European consciousness still has cracks in its vessel and a hole in the bottom of its absoluteness. It still has strange roots of memory groping down to the heart of the world.

But American consciousness is absolutely free of such danglers. It is free from all loop-holes and crevices of escape. It is absolutely safe inside a solid and ornamental concept of life. There it is Free! Life is good, and all men are meant to have a good time. Life is good! that is the flower-pot. The ornamental vase is: Having a good time.

So they proceed to have it, even with their woes. The young maiden knows exactly when she falls in love: she knows exactly how she feels when her lover or husband betrays her or when she betrays him: she knows precisely what it is to be a forsaken wife, an adoring mother, an erratic grandmother. All at the age of eighteen.

Vive la vie!

There is nothing new under the sun, but you can have a jolly good old time all the same with the old things. A nut sundae or a new beau, a baby or an automobile, a divorce or a troublesome appendix: my dear, that's Life! You've got to get a good time out of it, anyhow, so here goes!

In which attitude there is a certain piquant stoicism. The stoicism of having a good time. The heroism of enjoying yourself. But, as I say, it makes rather thin

hearing in a spiritual record. *Rechauffes of rechauffes*. Old soup of old bones of life, heated up again for a new consomme. Nearly always called *printaniere*.

I know a forest, stilly-deep . . .

Mark the poetic novelty of stilly-deep, and then say there is nothing new under the sun.

My soul-harp never thrills to peaceful tunes;
I should say so.

For after all, the thing to do
Is just to put your heart in song —

Or in pickle.

I sometimes wish that God were back
In this dark world and wide;
For though some virtues he might lack,
He had his pleasant side.

“Getting on the pleasant side of God, and how to stay there.” — Hints by a Student of Life.

Oh, ho! Now I am. masterful!
Now I am filled with power.
Now I am brutally myself again
And my own man.

For I have been among my hills today,
On the scarred dumb rocks standing;

And it made a man of him . . .
Open confession is good for the soul.
The spiritual record of an entire . . . what?

Hadrian the Seventh, by Baron Corvo

In *Hadrian the Seventh*, Frederick Baron Corvo falls in, head over heels, in deadly earnest. A man must keep his earnestness nimble, to escape ridicule. The so-called Baron Corvo by no means escapes. He reaches heights, or depths, of sublime ridiculousness.

It doesn't kill the book, however. Neither ridicule nor dead earnest kills it. It is extraordinarily alive, even though it has been buried for twenty years. Up it rises to confront us. And, great test, it does not "date" as do Huysmans's books, or Wilde's or the rest of them. Only a first-rate book escapes its date.

Frederick Rolfe was a fantastic figure of the nineties, the nineties of the *Yellow Book*, Oscar Wilde, Aubrey Beardsley, Simeon Solomon, and all the host of the godly. The whole decade is now a little ridiculous, ridiculous decadence as well as ridiculous pietism. They said of Rolfe that he was certainly possessed of a devil. At least his devil is still alive, it hasn't turned into a sort of gollywog, like the bulk of the nineties' devils.

Rolfe was one of the Catholic converts of the period, very intense. But if ever a man was a Protestant in all his being, this one was. The acuteness of his protest drove him, like a crazy serpent, into the bosom of the Roman Catholic Church.

He seems to have been a serpent of serpents in the bosom of all the nineties. That in itself endears him to one. The way everyone dropped him with a shudder is almost fascinating.

He died about 1912, when he was already forgotten: an outcast and in a sense a wastrel.

We can well afford to remember him again: he was not nothing, as so many of the estimables were. He was a gentleman of education and culture, pining, for the show's sake, to be a priest. The Church shook him out of her bosom before he could take orders. So he wrote himself Fr. Rolfe. It would do for Frederick, and if you thought it meant Father Rolfe, good old you!

But then his other passion, for medieval royalism, overcame him, and he was Baron Corvo when he signed his name. Lord Rook, Lord Raven, the bird was the same as Fr. Rolfe.

Hadrian the Seventh is, as far as his connexion with the Church was concerned, largely an autobiography of Frederick Rolfe. It is the story of a young English convert, George Arthur Rose (Rose foi Rolfe), who has had bitter experience with the priests and clergy, and years of frustration and disappointment, till he arrives at about the age of forty, a highly-bred, highly-

sensitive, super-aesthetic man, ascetic out of aestheticism, athletic the same, religious the same. He is to himself beautiful, with a slim, clean-muscled grace, much given to cold baths, white-faced with a healthy pallor, and pure, that is sexually chaste, because of his almost morbid repugnance for women. He had no desires to conquer or to purify. Women were physically repulsive to him, and therefore chastity cost him nothing, the Church would be a kind of asylum.

The priests and clergy, however, turned him down, or dropped him like the proverbial snake in the bosom, and inflamed him against them, so that he was burned through and through with white, ceaseless anger. His anger had become so complete as to be pure: it really was demonish. But it was all nervous and imaginative, an imaginative, sublimated hate, of a creature born crippled in its affective organism.

The first part of the book, describing the lonely man in a London lodging, alone save for his little cat, whose feline qualities of aloofness and self-sufficiency he so much admires, fixes the tone at once. And in the whole of literature I know nothing that resembles those amazing chapters, when the bishop and the archbishop come to him, and when he is ordained and makes his confession. Then the description of the election of the new pope, the cardinals shut up in the Vatican, the failure of the Way of Scrutiny and the Way of Access, the fantastic choice, by the Way of Compromise, of George Arthur Rose, is too extraordinary and daring ever to be forgotten.

From being a rejected aspirant to the priesthood, George Arthur Rose, the man in the London lodging, finds himself suddenly not only consecrated, but elected head of all the Catholic Church. He becomes Pope Hadrian the Seventh.

Then the real fantasy and failure begins. George Arthur Rose, triple-crowned and in the chair of Peter, is still very much Frederick Rolfe, and perfectly consistent. He is the same man, but now he has it all his own way: a White Pope, pure, scrupulous, chaste, living on two dollars a day, an aesthetic idealist, and really, a super-Protestant. He has the British instinct of authority, which is now gloriously gratified. But he has no inward *power*, power to make true change in the world. Once he is on the throne of high power, we realize his futility.

He is, like most modern men, especially reformers and idealists, through and through a Protestant. Which means, his life is a changeless fervour of protest. He can't help it. Everything he comes into contact with he must criticize, with all his nerves, and react from. Fine, subtle, sensitive, and almost egomaniac, he can accept nothing but the momentary thrill of aesthetic appreciation. His life-flow is like a stream washing against a false world, and ebbing itself out in a marsh and a hopeless bog.

So it is with George Arthur Rose, become Pope Hadrian the Seventh, while he

is still in a state of pure protest, he is vivid and extraordinary. But once he is given full opportunity to do as he wishes, and his *raison d'être* as a Protestant is thereby taken away, he becomes futile, and lapses into the ridiculous.

He can criticize men, exceedingly well: hence his knack of authority. But the moment he has to build men into a new form, construct something out of men by making a new unity among them, swarming them upon himself as bees upon a queen, he is ridiculous and powerless, a fraud.

It is extraordinary how *blind* he is, with all his keen insight. He no more “gets” his cardinals than we get the men on Mars. He can criticize them, and analyse them, and reject or condone them. But the real old Adam that is in them, the old male instinct for *power*, this, to him, does not exist.

In actual life, of course, the cardinals would drop a Hadrian down the oubliette, in ten minutes, and without any difficulty at all, once he was inside the Vatican. And Hadrian would be utterly flabbergasted, and call it villainy.

And what's the good of being Pope, if you've nothing but protest and aesthetics up your sleeve? Just like the reformers who are excellent, while fighting authority. But once authority disappears, they fall into nothingness. So with Hadrian the Seventh. As Pope, he is a fraud. His critical insight makes him a politician of the League of Nations sort, on a vast and curious scale. His medievalism makes him a truly comical royalist. But as a *man*, a real power in the world, he does not exist.

Hadrian unwinding the antimacassar is a sentimental farce. Hadrian persecuted to the point of suicide by a blowsy lodging-house keeper is a bathetic farce. Hadrian and the Socialist “with gorgonzola teeth” is puerile beyond words. It is all amazing, that a man with so much insight and fineness, on the one hand, should be so helpless and just purely ridiculous, when it comes to actualities.

He simply has no conception of what it is to be a natural or honestly animal man, with the repose and the power that goes with the honest animal in man. His attempt to appreciate his Cardinal Ragna — probably meant for Rampolla — is funny. It is as funny as would be an attempt on the part of the late President Wilson to appreciate Hernan Cortes, or even Theodore Roosevelt, supposing they were put face to face.

The time has come for stripping: cries Hadrian. Strip then, if there are falsities to throw away. But if you go on and on and on peeling the onion down, you'll be left with blank nothing between your hands, at last. And this is Hadrian's plight. He is assassinated in the streets of Rome by a Socialist, and dies supported by, three Majesties, sublimely absurd. And there is nothing to it. Hadrian has stripped himself and everything else till nothing is left but absurd conceit,

expiring in the arms of the Majesties.

Lord! be to me a Saviour, not a judge! is Hadrian's prayer: when he is not affectedly praying in Greek. But why should such a white streak of blamelessness as Hadrian need saving so badly? Saved from what? If he has done his best, why mind being judged — at least by Jesus, who in this sense is any man's peer?

The brave man asks for justice: the rabble cries for favours! says some old writer. Why does Hadrian, in spite of all his protest, go in with the rabble?

It is a problem. The book remains a clear and definite book of our epoch, not to be swept aside. If it is the book of a demon, as the contemporaries said, it is the book of a man-demon, not of a mere poseur. And if some of it is caviare, at least it came out of the belly of a live fish.

The Origins of Prohibition, by J. A. Krout

This is a book which one may honestly call “an excellent piece of work.” Myself, I feel I have done a more or less excellent piece of work, in having read it. Because it wearied me a little.

But then, I am not an American, and have never, to my knowledge, had a single relative in the United States. And I am a novelist, not a scientific historian. All the American names mean nothing to me, and to this day I don't know where Rhode Island is. So there are limits to my sympathy.

Yet I have read the book, and realize it is a sound piece of work: an attempt to convey, dispassionately, the attitude of the American people to alcoholic drinks, since the early days of the colonies. This is not, strictly, an inquiry into the *origins* of prohibition. For that, one would have to go deeper. It is a record of the development of the prohibitionist feeling: almost, a statistical record. There are copious notes, and an extraordinary bibliography: good scholarship, but, on the whole, flat reading.

One wonders if anything should try to be so angelically dispassionate: anything except an adding-up machine. Reading the chapters about excise laws, and political campaigns, a deep depression comes over one. There are gleams of warmth and vividness elsewhere. The very words malmsey, and sack, and pale sherry, cheer one up a bit. And the famous cycle molasses — rum — slaves — molasses-rum — slaves — makes one pause: as does the glimpse of Washington's army getting its whisky rations. As soon as we catch sight of an actual individual, like Dr. Rush, we prick up our ears — but Dr. Rush turns out rather boring. The Washingtonians, with the Cold Water Army, and Hawkins and Gough, might really have been lively; while to step into the sobbing literature of teetotalism is a relaxation. But the author is inexorable. He won't laugh, and he won't let us laugh. He won't get angry, and he prevents our getting angry. He refuses to take an attitude, except that of impartiality, which is the worst of all attitudes. So he leaves us depressed, not wanting to hear another word about temperance, teetotalism, prohibition. We want to relegate the whole business into the class of “matters indifferent,” where John Knox put it.

We can't, quite, since prohibition has us by the leg. So perhaps it is as well to read the book, which helps us to come to a decision. For myself — dropping all pretence at impartiality — it makes me regret that ardent spirits were ever discovered. Why, oh, why, as soon as the New World waved the sugar-cane, did

it start turning molasses into rum? And as soon as the wheat rose in the colonies, why did it disappear into whisky? Apparently, until the time of the Renaissance and the discovery of America, men actually drank no liquors — or very little. Beer, cider, wine, these had kept the world going, more or less, till the days of Columbus. Why did all Europe and America suddenly, after the Renaissance, demand powerful liquor? get drunk quick? It is a mystery, and a tragedy, and part of our evolution.

That distilled liquor has been more of a curse than a blessing to mankind, few, surely, will deny. It is only the curse of whisky which has driven wine and beer into disrepute. Until a few decades ago, even the temperance societies had nothing to say against beer. But now it is the whole hog.

In the conclusion, which is cautiously called “A Summary View,” the author finds that prohibition in America was inevitable: firstly, because a self-governing people must be self-responsible. “Intemperance might be tolerated in a divine-right monarchy, but in a republic it endangered the very existence of the state. No popular government could long endure, unless the electorate was persuaded or forced to follow the straight and narrow path of sobriety.” — “It was ridiculous to talk of the *will of the sovereign people*, when intoxicated citizens were taken to the polls.”

This is confused thinking. How can the electorate of a popular government be *forced* to follow the straight and narrow path? Persuaded, an electorate may be. But how, and by whom can it be *forced*?

The answer is, by itself: an electorate forcing itself to do a thing it doesn't want to do, and doesn't intend to do, is indeed making a display of the sovereign will of the people.

But this is the anomaly of popular government. Obviously America failed to *persuade* herself, or to be persuaded, into the straight and narrow path of sobriety. So she went one worse, and forced herself.

And this is the dreary, depressing reality. A republic with a “popular government” can only exist honourably when the bulk of the individuals choose, of their own free will, to follow the straight and narrow path necessary to the common good. That is, when every man governs himself, responsibly, from within. Which, say what we may, was the very germ of the “American idea.”

The dreary and depressing fact is that this germ is dying, if not dead. Temperance reformers decided, after long experience, that America was not to be persuaded. Her citizens could not, or would not control themselves, with regard to liquor.

Therefore they must be coerced. By whom? By the electorate itself. Every man voting prohibition for his neighbour voted it for himself, of course. But

somewhere he made a mental reservation. He intended, himself, to have his little drink still, if he wanted it. Since he, good citizen, knew better than to abuse himself.

The cold misery of every man seeking to coerce his neighbour, in the name of righteousness, creeps out of these pages and makes depressing reading.

The second reason why prohibition was inevitable — because it is advantageous to industry — is sound as far as economics go. But how far do national economics go, even in America, in the ordinary individual? And even then, it is temperance, not prohibition, which is truly advantageous to industry.

One is chilled and depressed. The saloon was bad, and is best abolished. Myself, I believe that. But in prohibition one sees an even worse thing: a nation, knowing it cannot control itself from the inside, self-responsibly, each man vindictively votes to coerce his neighbour.

Because surely, seeing the state of things, a great number of the voters voting for prohibition must have reserved for themselves the private right to a drink, all the same.

A man may vote from his honourable national self: or he may vote from his vindictive herd self. Which self voted, you will only know by the smell, afterwards.

***In the American Grain*, by William Carlos Williams**

Mr. Williams quotes Poe's distinction between "nationality in letters" and the *local* in literature. Nationality in letters is deplorable, whereas the *local* is essential. All creative art must rise out of a specific soil and flicker with a spirit of place.

The local, of course, in Mr. Williams's sense, is the very opposite of the parochial, the parish-pump stuff. The local in America is America itself. Not Salem, or Boston, or Philadelphia, or New York, but that of the American subsoil which spouts up in any of those places into the lives of men.

In these studies of "American" heroes, from Red Eric of Greenland, and Columbus and Cortes and Montezuma, on to Abraham Lincoln, Mr. Williams tries to reveal the experience of great men in the Americas since the advent of the whites. History in this book would be a sensuous record of the Americanization of the white men in America, as contrasted with ordinary history, which is a complacent record of the civilization and Europizing (if you can allow the word) of the American continent.

In this record of truly American heroes, then, the author is seeking out not the ideal achievement of great men of the New World but the men themselves, in all the dynamic explosiveness of their energy. This peculiar dynamic energy, this strange yearning and passion and uncanny explosive quality in men derived from Europe, is American, the American element. Seek out *this* American element, O Americans!, is the poet's charge.

All America is now going hundred per cent American. But the only hundred per cent American is the Red Indian, and he can only be canonized when he is finally dead. And not even the most American American can transmogrify into an Indian. Whence, then, the hundred per cent?

It is here that Mr. Williams's — and Poe's — distinction between the *national* and the *local* is useful. Most of the hundred per centism is national, and therefore not American at all. The new one hundred per cent literature is all *about* Americans, in the intensest American vernacular. And yet, in vision, in conception, in the very manner, it still remains ninety-nine per cent European. But for *Ulysses* and Marcel Proust and a few other beetling high-brows, where would the modernist hundred per centers of America have been? Alas, where they are now, save for cutting a few capers.

What then? William Carlos Williams tries to bring into his consciousness

America itself, the still-unravished bride of silences. The great continent, its bitterness, its brackish quality, its vast glamour, its strange cruelty. Find this, Americans, and get it into your bones. The powerful, unyielding breath of the Americas, which Columbus sniffed, even in Europe, and which sent the Conquistadores mad. National America is a gruesome sort of fantasy. But the unravished *local* America still waits vast and virgin as ever, though in process of being murdered.

The author sees the genius of the continent as a woman with exquisite, super-subtle tenderness and recoiling cruelty. It is a myth-woman who will demand of men a sensitive awareness, a supreme sensuous delicacy, and at the same time an infinitely tempered resistance, a power of endurance and of resistance.

To evoke a vision of the essential America is to evoke Americans, bring them into conscious life. To bring a few American citizens into American consciousness — the consciousness at present being all bastardized European — is to form the nucleus of the new race. To have the nucleus of a new race is to have a future: and a true aristocracy. It is to have the germ of an aristocracy in sensitive tenderness and diamond-like resistance.

A man, in America, can only *begin* to be American. After five hundred years there are no *racial* white Americans. They are only national, woebegone, or strident. After five hundred years more there may be the developing nucleus of a true American race. If only men, some few, trust the American passion that is in them, and pledge themselves to it.

But the passion is not national. No man who doesn't feel the last anguish of tragedy — and *beyond, that* — will ever know America, or begin, even at the beginning's beginning, to be American.

There are two ways of being American: and the chief, says Mr. Williams, is by recoiling into individual smallness and insentience, and gutting the great continent in frenzies of mean fear. It is the Puritan way. The other is by *touch*; touch America as she is; dare to touch her! And this is the heroic way.

And this, this sensitive touch upon the unseen America, is to be the really great adventure in the New World. Mr. Williams's book contains his adventure; and, therefore, for me, has a fascination. There are very new and profound glimpses into life: the strength of insulated smallness in the New Englanders, the fascination of "being nothing" in the Negroes, the *spell-bound* quality of men like Columbus, De Soto, Boone. It is a glimpse of what the vast America *wants men to be*, instead of another strident assertion of what men have made, do make, will make, can make, out of the murdered territories of the New World.

It would be easy enough to rise, in critical superiority, as a critic always feels he must, superior to his author, and find fault. The modernist style is sometimes

irritating. Was Tenochtitlan really so wonderful? (See Adolf Bandelier's *The Golden Man*.) Does not Mr. Williams mistake Poe's agony of *destructive penetration*, through all the horrible bastard-Europe alluvium of his 1840 America, for the positive America itself?

But if an author rouses my deeper sympathy he can have as many faults as he likes, I don't care. And if I disagree with him a bit, heaven save me from feeling superior just because I have a chance to snarl. I am only too thankful that Mr. Williams wrote his book.

***Heat*, by Isa Glenn**

Heat is the title of a novel by an American authoress, Isa Glenn, a name quite unfamiliar. The cover-notice says “Miss Glenn,” but the book is, in the life sense, mature, and seems at least like the work of a married woman. I don’t think any married woman would have written *Jane Eyre*, nor either *The Constant Nymph*. In those books there is a certain naive attitude to men which would hardly survive a year of married life. But the authoress of *Heat* is not naive about her men. She is kindly, rather sisterly and motherly, and a trifle contemptuous. Affectionate contempt, coupled with yearning, is the note of the feeling towards the officers in the American army out there in the Philippines, and to the American fortune-hunting business men. The authoress, or rather, let us say the heroine, Charlotte, is evidently quite a good sport, from the man’s point of view. She doesn’t let you down. And so the men are quite good sports to her. They like her; and she likes them. But she feels a little contempt for them, amid her liking; and at the same time a yearning after some man who will call her his own. The men, for their part, feel very honourable and kindly towards Miss Charlotte, but they are a little afraid of her. They have to respect her just a bit too much. No man could feel tenderly possessive towards the Statue of Liberty. And Charlotte is, in the way of independence and honesty and thinking for herself, just a bit of a Statue of Liberty.

She is not so liberal, though, about the women, the wives of the officers out there in Manila. They are to her just repellent, even if not repulsive. She sees them with that utter cold antipathy with which women often regard other women — especially when the other women are elderly, physically unattractive, and full of flirtatious grimaces. To a man, there is something strange and disconcerting in the attitude of a woman like Charlotte towards other women, in particular her married seniors. She seems to be able to eye them with such complete cold understanding, that it takes one into quite another world of life. It is how a slim silvery fish in a great tank may eye the shapeless, greyish, groping-fishes that float heavily past her.

The story is laid in the Philippines, those islands belonging to the United States far away in the steaming hot Pacific, towards China: islands bought from Spain with good American dollars. A forlorn, unholily hot, lost remnant of the world belonging, really, to the age of the ichthyosaurus, not to our day.

To Manila, then, goes Charlotte, to be a schoolteacher to the brown native

children: a schoolteacher, of course, with high missionary fervour. On the same boat, a transport, goes Tom Vernay, young lieutenant in the American army, fresh from the military school of West Point. There is also a big blond heavy American, Saulsbury, out to make a fortune in cement: modern cement buildings for the Philippines.

This is before the war: twenty years ago, or so. The whole of the first half of the book, at least, is written with the pre-war outlook. Maybe it was actually written before the war.

Charlotte, of course, loves Tom Vernay. But “loves” can mean so many things. She is thrilled by a certain purity in him, and by his intense, but vague, romantic yearning. He is an American who is “different”: he has poetry in him. So Charlotte can feel intensely practical and “wise,” hence a little protective and superior. She adores him. But at the same time, she feels a little protectively superior.

And he? At moments he adores her. At moments, he falls within her spell. He always likes her. He always, unconsciously, relies on her in the background. But! There is always a but! She is beautiful, with her fine gold hair and her girl’s boyish figure. But!

But what, then?

Well, she is not exactly romantic. Going out to be a schoolteacher, to “uplift” brown Filipinos! Going out alone, unprotected too, very capable of looking after herself, and looking after him too! Going out with a great idea that natives and niggers are as good as you are, if they are only educated up to your level. We’re all alike under the skin, only our education is unequal. So let’s level up the education. That kind of thing!

Yes! It was generous and democratic, and he approved of it in an admiring sort of way. But!

Another but! What is it this time?

This time, it is that his music simply won’t play. With the key of her fine democratic spirit she only locks up the flow of her passion tighter, locks it up dead. It needs another key altogether to release the music of his desire.

He is romantic. Manila, shut up tight and tortuous, steaming hot and smelly within the ponderous Spanish fortifications, fascinates him with the allure of the haughty and passionate past. Let it steam and smell! so long as the powerfully sweet flower, the *Dama de la Noche*, also perfumes the nights, and guitars tinkle in unseen patios, and the love-song scrapes and yearns and sinks in the Spanish throat. Romance! he wants romance.

And as the months pass by, and the heat soaks into his brain, and the strange reptilian moisture of heat goes through his very bones, he wants romance more

and more.

Charlotte, poor thing, in a cheap, half-breed lodging-house, spending her days trying to teach insolent brown native children whose heads are rancid with coconut oil, and whose nauseating sexual knowingness seems to be born with them, as a substitute for any other kind of knowledge, does not get so much romance out of it. She is kind to her pupils, she goes to the huts of their parents, and is purely charitable. For which reason, the lizard-like natives jeer at her with a subtle but fathomless contempt. She is only the “ticher,” she is, to put it orientally, their servant, their white bondwoman. And as such they treat her, with infinite subtle disrespect, and that indescribable derision of the East.

Poor Charlotte doesn’t like it at all. A well-born, well-educated American girl, she is accustomed to all the respect in the world. It is *she* who feels privileged to hold a little contempt for others, not quite as clear and sure as herself. And now, these dirty little sexual natives give off silent and sometimes audible mockery at her, because she is kind instead of bullying, and clean instead of impure. Her sort of sexual cleanness makes the little brown women scream with derision: to them it is raw, gawky, incredible incompetence, if not a sort of impotence; the ridiculous female eunuch.

And there must be a grain of truth in it: for she cannot keep her Vernay in her spell. He has fallen wildly, romantically in love with a mysterious Spanish beauty. Romance, this time laid on with a trowel. The oldest, haughtiest family on the island, selling out to retire to Spain, from under the authority of these dogs of Americans! — a fat, waddling, insolent, black-moustached Spanish mother, with her rasping Castilian speech! and a daughter, ah! a Dolores! small and dusky and hidden in a mantilla! — about to be carried off to Spain to be married to some elderly Spaniard who will throw his hands in the air when he is excited! — Dolores, who has a fancy for the blue eyes and the white uniform of the American officers!

Tom Vernay has blue eyes and a white uniform, and is tall. One glimpse of the nose-tip of Dolores, from under her mantilla, does what all the intimacy with Charlotte could not do: it starts his music wildly playing. He is enamoured, and enamoured of Dolores. Through a little brother, a meeting is brought about. Then there is the daily clandestine stroll upon the unfrequented wall. In all the heat! Dolores Ayala! Ah, heaven of romance! Ah, Tom! He feels himself a Don at last! Don Tomas!

And Charlotte, very much in the background, losing her good looks and the fine brightness of her hair, going thin and raky and bitter in the heat and insult of the islands where already she has sweated for three years, must even now defend Vernay from the officers’ wives.

The love-affair works up. The Ayalas are about to depart. Tom Vernay must marry Dolores. Against her parents' will, he must marry her clandestinely, in the American church. But he must resign his commission in the army first, for there will be a great scandal, and he must not expose his country to odium.

So, he resigns his commission. The Ayalas are almost ready to sail. A great buzz goes up among the officers' wives, when the news comes out that Tom Vernay has sent in his resignation. The colonel's wife is giving a dinner-party at the Army Club: one of the endless perspiring parties. Charlotte is there, because they want to pump her; otherwise they don't ask her: she is merely the "ticher" of the natives, the schoolteacher, shrivelling in the heat, becoming an old maid. Vernay is not present.

As the party moves from the table to go to dance, Vernay, white and strained, appears and murmurs to Charlotte that she must come to his room for a moment. Resentfully, she goes. To find — ah, to find the mousy, muffled-up Dolores there, all thrilled with herself for having escaped the family vigilance and arranged a rendezvous.

Tom Vernay, the romantic, is absolutely unequal to the occasion. Dolores, laughing, throws herself on Tom's breast, kissing his mouth. Tom, who has honourable intentions, can't stand it, holds her off and turns her to Charlotte — poor Charlotte! "Listen, dear, you must go home tonight with Miss Carson. And tomorrow morning we can get the chaplain to marry us." — "Why?" cries Dolores. "I can never marry you! Didn't you understand?" — "We will talk about that in the morning. Go home now with Miss Carson, like a good girl." Dolores, instead of being the "good girl," looks at poor Charlotte. And Dolores refuses to be taken off. "I got here so easily," she laughed. "I can do this wicked thing often and often, before we sail for Spain. I shall have to crawl on my knees to the Stations in penance. But is it not worth it — your eyes are so blue!"

It isn't what Dolores would say in real Spanish, but the gist is all right. Tom insists that she go home with poor Charlotte, who by no means enjoys this scene in his bedroom at the Club. He gives Dolores to understand that he has resigned his commission in order to marry her: marry her in the morning.

This is too much for Dolores. She loathes being put off. She loathes the other woman, the very schoolteacher, dragged in on her. She never intended to marry him, and have heretic babies, and be carted off to the United States. Not she! But this wicked thing! Ah! But now, without a uniform, she doesn't intend even to love him. Adios!

The faithful Charlotte smuggles her out of the Club, unseen, as she smuggled herself in. Home goes Dolores. The book, the biggest, romantic part, is finished.

The second part opens some years later. Vernay, his commission gone, has

deteriorated rapidly in civilian life, till now he is a mere whisky-lapper, a derelict in smelly clothes, gone native. Charlotte, who has still been teaching school, but far away in a lonely island, returns and determines to find him, to rescue him.

She finds him: but he is beyond rescue. She finds him in a squalid native quarter, down by the ill-smelling river, in a region of broken bottles. He is vague and corrupted, and his reptilian little native wife is big with his second child. It is enough. The book ends.

Poor Charlotte! There is nothing more to be done.

What was there ever to be done? The kind of attraction he wanted in a woman she hadn't got, and would have despised herself for having. She shuddered at the sexual little beasts of native women, working men up with snaky caresses. Ah, yes, she had to admit it, poor thing, that these native women had a power, a strange and hideous power over men. But it was a power she would loathe to possess.

And lacking it, she lost her Vernay, and went on being a faded schoolteacher. We can call it the man's fault: the man's imbecility and perversity. But in the long run, a man will succumb to the touch of the woman who, touching him, will start his music playing. And the woman whom he esteems and even cherishes, but who, touching him, leaves him musicless and passionless, he will ultimately abandon. That is, if he gets the chance.

***Gifts of Fortune*, by H. M. Tomlinson**

Gifts of Fortune is not a travel-book. It is not even, as the jacket describes it, a book of travel memories. Travel in this case is a stream of reflections, where images intertwine with dark thoughts and obscure emotion, and the whole flows on turbulent and deep and transitory. It is reflection, thinking back on travel and on life, and in the mirror sense, throwing back snatches of image.

Mr. Tomlinson's own title: *Gifts of Fortune: With Some Hints to Those About to Travel* is a little grimly misleading. Those about to travel, in the quite commonplace sense of the word, will find very few encouraging hints in the long essay which occupies a third of this book, and is entitled, "Hints to Those About to Travel." The chief hint they would hear would be, perhaps, the sinister suggestion that they had better stay at home.

There are travellers and travellers, as Mr. Tomlinson himself makes plain. There are scientific ones, game-shooting ones, Thomas Cook ones, thrilled ones, and bored ones. And none of these, as such, will find a single "hint" in all the sixty-six hinting pages, which will be of any use to them.

Mr. Tomlinson is travelling in retrospect, in soul rather than in the flesh, and his hints are to other souls. To travelling bodies he says little.

The sea tempts one to travel. But what is the nature of the temptation? To what are we tempted? Mr. Tomlinson gives us the hint, for his own case. "What draws us to the sea is the light over it," *etc.*

There you have the key to this book. Coasts of illusion! "There are other worlds." A man who has travelled this world in the flesh travels again, sails once more wilfully along coasts of illusion, and wilfully steers into other worlds. Take then the illusion, accept the gifts of fortune, "that passes as a shadow on the wall."

"My journeys have all been the fault of books, though Lamb would never have called them that." Mr. Tomlinson is a little weary of books, though he has here written another. A talk with seamen in the fore-castle of a ship has meant more to him than any book. So he says. But that is how a man feels, at times. As a matter of fact, from these essays it is obvious that books like Bates's *Amazon*, Conrad's *Nigger of the Narcisstis*, and Melville's *Moby Dick* have gone deeper into him than any talk with seamen in fore-castles of steamers.

How could it be otherwise? Seamen see few coasts of illusion. They see very little of anything. And what is Mr. Tomlinson after? What are we all after, if it

comes to that? It is our yearning to land on the coasts of illusion, it is our passion for other worlds that carries us on. And with Bates or Conrad or Melville we are already away over the intangible seas. As Mr. Tomlinson makes very plain, a P. & O. liner will only take us from one hotel to another. Which isn't what we set out for, at all. *That* is not crossing seas.

And this is the theme of the Hints to Those. We travel in order to cross seas and land on other coasts. We do not travel in order to go from one hotel to another, and see a few side-shows. We travel, perhaps, with a secret and absurd hope of setting foot on the Hesperides, of running our boat up a little creek and landing in the Garden of Eden.

This hope is always defeated. There is no Garden of Eden, and the Hesperides never were. Yet, in our very search for them, we touch the coasts of illusion, and come into contact with other worlds.

This world remains the same, wherever we go. Every ship is a money-investment, and must be made to pay. The earth exists to be exploited, and is exploited. Malay head-hunters are now playing football instead of hunting heads. The voice of the gramophone is heard in the deepest jungle.

That is the world of disillusion. Travel, and you'll know it. It is just as well to know it. Our world is a world of disillusion, whether it's Siam or Kamchatka or Athabaska: the same exploitation, the same mechanical lifelessness.

But travelling through our world of disillusion until we are finally and bitterly disillusioned, we come home at last, after the long voyage, home to the rain and the dismalness of England. And how marvellously well Mr. Tomlinson gives the feeling of a ship at the end of the voyage, coming in at night, in the rain, the engines slowed down, then stopped: and in the unspeakable emptiness and blankness of silent engines and rain and nothingness, the passengers wait for the tug, staring out upon utter emptiness, from a ship that has gone suddenly quite dead! It is the end of the voyage of disillusion.

But behold, in the morning, England, England, in her own wan sun, her strange, quiet Englishmen, so silent and intent and self-resourceful! It is the coast of illusion, the other world itself.

This is the gist of the Hints to Those About to Travel. You'll never find what you look for. There are no happy lands. But you'll come upon coasts of illusion when you're not expecting them.

Following the Hints come three sketches which are true travel memories, one on the Amazon, one in the Malay States, one in Borneo. They are old memories, and they gleam with illusion, with the iridescence of illusion and disillusion at once. Far off, we are in the midst of exploitation and mechanical civilization, just the same. Far off, in the elysium of a beautiful spot in Borneo, the

missionary's wife sits and weeps for home, when she sees an outgoing ship. Far off, there is the mad Rajah, whom we turned out, with all kinds of medals and number-plates on his breast, thinking himself grander than ever, though he is a beggar.

And all the same, far off, there is that other world, or one of those other worlds, that give the lie to those realities we are supposed to accept.

The rest of the book is all England. There is a sketch: "Conrad Is Dead." And another, an appreciation of *Moby Dick*. But for the rest, it is the cruel disillusion, and then the infinitely soothing illusion of this world of ours.

Mr. Tomlinson has at the back of his mind, for ever, the grisly vision of his war experience. In itself, this is a horror of disillusion in the world of man. We cannot get away from it, and we have no business to. Man has turned the world into a thing of horror. What we have to do is to face the fact.

And facing it, accept other values and make another world. "We now open a new volume on sport," says Mr. Tomlinson, "with an antipathy we never felt for Pawnees, through the reading of a recent narrative by an American who had been collecting in Africa for an American museum. He confessed he would have felt some remorse when he saw the infant still clinging to the breast of its mother, a gorilla, whom he had just murdered; so he shot the infant without remorse, because he was acting scientifically. As a corpse, the child added to the value of its dead mother."

We share Mr. Tomlinson's antipathy to such sportsmen and such scientists absolutely. And it is not mere pity on our part for the gorilla. It is an absolute detestation of the *insentience* of armed, bullying men, in face of living, sentient things. Surely the most beastly offence against life is this degenerate insentience. It is not cruelty, exactly, which makes such a sportsman. It is crass insentience, a crass stupidity and deadness of fibre. Such overweening fellows, called men, are barren of the feeling for life. A gorilla is a live thing, with a strange unknown life of its own. Even to get a glimpse of its weird life, one little gleam of insight, makes our own life so much the wider, more vital. As a dead thing it can only depress us. We *must* have a feeling for life itself.

And this Mr. Tomlinson conveys: the strangeness and the beauty of life. Once be disillusioned with the man-made world, and you still see the magic, the beauty, the delicate realness of all the other life. Mr. Tomlinson sees it in flashes of great beauty. It comes home to him even in the black moth he caught. "It was quiet making a haze," *etc.* He sees the strange terror of the world of insects. "A statue to St. George killing a mosquito instead of a dragon would look ridiculous. But it was lucky for the Saint he had only a dragon to overcome."

Life! Life exists: and perhaps men do not truly exist. "And for a wolf who

runs up and down his cage, sullenly ignoring our overtures, and behaving as though we did not exist, we begin to feel there is something to be said.”

“And consider the fascination of the octopus!”

“I heard a farmer,” *etc.*

“At sunrise today,” *etc.*

“Perhaps the common notion,” *etc.*

One gradually gets a new vision of the world, if one goes through the disillusion absolutely. It is a world where all things are alive, and where the life of strange creatures and beings flickers on us and makes it take strange new developments. “But in this estuary,” *etc.* And it is exactly so The earth is a planet, and we are inhabitants of the planet, along with many other strange creatures. Life is a strange planetary phenomenon, all interwoven.

Mr. Tomlinson gives us glimpses of a new vision, what we might call the planetary instead of the mundane vision. The glimpses are of extreme beauty, so sensitive to the other life in things. And how grateful we ought to be to a man who sets new visions, new feelings sensitively quivering in us.

The World of William Clissold, by H. G. Wells

The World of William Clissold is, we are told, a novel. We are assured it is a novel, and nothing but a novel. We are not allowed to think of it even as a “mental autobiography” of Mr. Wells. It is a novel.

Let us hope so. For, having finished this first volume, nothing but hope of finding something in the two volumes yet to appear will restrain us from asserting, roundly and flatly, that this is simply not good enough to be called a novel. If *Tono-Bungay* is a novel, then this is not one.

We have with us the first volume of *The World of William Clissold*. The second volume will appear on October 1st, the third on November 1st. We may still hope, then, if we wish to.

This first volume consists of “A Note before the Title-Page,” in which we are forbidden to look on this book as anything but a novel, and especially forbidden to look on it as a *roman à clef*: which means we mustn’t identify the characters with any living people such as, for instance, Mr. Winston Churchill or the Countess of Oxford and Asquith; which negative command is very easy to obey, since, in this first volume, at least, there are no created characters at all: it is all words, words, words, about Socialism and Karl Marx, bankers and cave-men, money and the superman. One would welcome any old scarecrow of a character on this dreary, flinty hillside of abstract words.

The next thing is the title-page: “The World of William Clissold: A Novel from a New Angle” — whatever that pseudo-scientific phrase may mean.

Then comes Book I: “The Frame of the Picture.” All right, we think! If we must get the frame first, and the picture later, let’s make the best of the frame.

The frame consists of William Clissold informing us that he is an elderly gentleman of fifty-nine, and that he is going to tell us all about himself. He is quite well off, having made good in business, so that now he has retired and has bought a house near Cannes, and is going to tell us everything, absolutely everything about himself: insisting rather strongly that he is and always has been a somewhat scientific gentleman with an active mind, and that his mental activities have been more important than any other activity in his life. In short, he is not a “mere animal,” he is an animal with a ferocious appetite for “ideas,” and enormous thinking powers.

Again, like a submissive reader, we say: “Very well! Proceed!” and we sit down in front of this mental gentleman. William Clissold immediately begins to

tell us what he believes, what he always has believed, and what he hasn't always believed, and what he won't believe, and we feel how superior he is to other people who believe other mere things. He talks about God, is very uneasy because of Roman Catholics — like an Early Victorian — and is naughtily funny about Mr. G. — which can mean either Mr. Gladstone or Mr. God.

But we bear up. After all, God, or Mr. G., is only the frame for William Clissold. We must put up with a frame of some sort. And God turns out to be Humanity in its nobler or disinterestedly scientific aspect: or the Mind of Men collectively: in short, William Clissold himself, in a home-made halo. Still, after all, it is only a frame. Let us get on to the picture.

Mr. Clissold, being somewhat of an amateur at making a self-portrait and framing it, has got bits of the picture stuck on to the frame, and great angular sections of the frame occupying the space where the picture should be. But patience! It is a sort of futuristic interpenetration, perhaps.

The first bit of the story is a little boy at a country house, sitting in a boat and observing the scientific phenomena of refraction and reflection. He also observes some forget-me-nots on the bank, and rather likes the look of them. So, scrambling carefully down through mud and sedges, he clutches a handful of the blue flowers, only to find his legs scratched and showing blood, from the sedges. “Oh! Oh! I cried in profound dismay. . . . Still do I remember most vividly my astonishment at the treachery of that golden, flushed, and sapphire-eyed day. — That it should turn on me!”

This “section” is called “The Treacherous Forget-me-nots.” But since, after all, the forget-me-nots had never asked the boy to gather them, wherein lay the treachery?

But they represent poetry. And perhaps William Clissold means to convey that, scrambling after poetry, he scratched his legs, and fell to howling, and called the poetry treacherous.

As for a child thinking that the sapphire-eyed day had turned on him — what a dreary old-boy of a child, if he did! But it is elderly-gentleman psychology, not childish.

The story doesn't get on very fast, and is extremely sketchy. The elderly Mr. Clissold is obviously bored by it himself. Two little boys, their mother and father, move from Bexhill to a grand country house called Mowbray. In the preface we are assured that Mowbray does not exist on earth, and we can well believe it. After a few years, the father of the two boys, a mushroom city magnate, fails, is arrested as a swindler, convicted, and swallows potassium cyanide. We have no vital glimpse of him. He never says anything, except “Hello, Sonny!” And he does ask the police to have some *dejeuner* with him,

when he is arrested. The boys are trailed round Belgium by a weeping mother, who also is not created, and with whom they are only-bored. The mother marries again: the boys go to the London University: and the story is lost again in a vast grey drizzle of words.

William Clissold, having in “The Frame” written a feeble resume of Mr. Wells’s *God the Invisible King*, proceeds in *The Story*, Book II, to write a much duller resume of Mr. Wells’s *Outline of History*. Cave-men, nomads, patriarchs, tribal Old Men, out they all come again, in the long march of human progress. Mr. Clissold, who holds forth against “systems,” cannot help systematizing us all into a gradual and systematic uplift from the ape. There is also a complete *expose* of Socialism and Karl Marxism and finance, and a denunciation of Communism. There is a little feeble praise of the pure scientist who does physical research in a laboratory, and a great contempt of professors and dons who lurk in holes and study history. Last, and not least, there is a contemptuous sweeping of the temple, of all financiers, bankers, and money-men: they are all unscientific, untrained semi-idiots monkeying about with things they know nothing of.

And so, rather abruptly, end of Vol. I.

Except, of course, William Clissold has been continually taking a front seat in the picture, aged fifty-nine, in the villa back of Cannes. There is a slim slip of a red-haired Clem, who ruffles the old gentleman’s hair.

“ ‘It’s no good!’ she said. ‘I can’t keep away from you today.’ And she hasn’t! She has ruffled my hair, she has also ruffled my mind” — much more important, of course, to William C.

This is the young Clementina: “She has a mind like one of those water-insects that never get below the surface of anything. . . . She professes an affection for me that is altogether monstrous” — I should say so — ”and she knows no more about my substantial self than the water-insect knows of the deeps of the pond. . . . She knows as little about the world.”

Poor Clementina, that lean, red-haired slip of a young thing. She is no more to him than an adoring sort of mosquito. But oh! wouldn’t we like to hear all she *does* know about him, this sexagenarian bore, who says of her: “the same lean, red-haired Clem, so absurdly insistent that she idolizes me, and will have no other man but me, invading me whenever she dares, and protecting me,” *etc.*

Clementina, really, sounds rather nice. What a pity *she* didn’t herself write *The World of William Clissold*: it would have been a novel, then. But she wouldn’t even look at the framework of that world, says Clissold. And we don’t blame her.

What is the elderly gentleman doing with her at all? Is it his “racial urge,” as

he calls it, still going on, rather late in life? We imagine the dear little bounder saying to her: "You are the mere object of my racial urge." To which, no doubt, she murmurs in the approved Clissold style: "My King!"

But it is altogether a poor book: the effusion of a peeved elderly gentleman who has nothing to grumble at, but who peevies at everything, from Clem to the High Finance, and from God, or Mr. G., to Russian Communism. His effective self is disgruntled, his ailment is a peevish, ashy indifference to *everything*, except himself, himself as centre of the universe. There is not one gleam of sympathy with anything in all the book, and not one breath of passionate rebellion. Mr. Clissold is too successful and wealthy to rebel and too hopelessly peeved to sympathize.

What has got him into such a state of peevishness is a problem: unless it is his insistence on the Universal Mind, which he, of course exemplifies. The emotions are to him irritating aberrations. Yet even he admits that even thought must be preceded by some obscure physical happenings, some kind of confused sensation or emotion which is the necessary coarse body of thought and from which thought, living thought, arises or sublimates.

This being so, we wonder that he so insists on the Universal or racial *mind* of man, as the only hope or salvation. If the mind is fed from the obscure sensations, emotions, physical happenings inside us, if the mind is really no more than an exhalation of these, is it not obvious that without a full and subtle emotional life the mind itself must wither: or that it must turn itself into an automatic sort of grind-mill, grinding upon itself?

And in that case the superficial Clementina no doubt knows far more about the "deeps of the pond" of Mr. Clissold than that tiresome gentleman knows himself. He grinds on and on at the stale bones of sociology, while his actual living goes to pieces, falls into a state of irritable peevishness which makes his "mental autobiography" tiresome. His scale of values is all wrong.

So far, anyhow, this work is not a novel, because it contains none of the passionate and emotional reactions which are at the root of all thought, and which must be conveyed in a novel. This book is all chewed-up newspaper, and chewed-up scientific reports, like a mouse's nest. But perhaps the novel will still come: in Vols. II and III.

For, after all, Mr. Wells is not Mr. Clissold, thank God! And Mr. Wells has given us such brilliant and such very genuine novels that we can only hope the Clissold "angle" will straighten out in Vol. II.

***Said the Fisherman*, by Marmaduke Pickthall**

Since the days of Lady Hester Stanhope and her romantic pranks, down to the exploits of Colonel T. E. Lawrence in the late war, there seems always to have been some more or less fantastic Englishman, or woman, Arabizing among the Arabs. Until we feel we know the desert and the Bedouin better than we know Wales or our next-door neighbour.

Perhaps there is an instinctive sympathy between the Semite Arab and the Anglo-Saxon. If so, it must have its root way down in the religious make-up of both peoples. The Arab is intensely a One-God man, and so is the Briton.

But the Briton is mental and critical in his workings, the Arab uncritical and impulsive. In the Arab, the Englishman sees himself with the lid off.

T. E. Lawrence distinguishes two kinds of Englishmen in the East: the kind that goes native, more or less like Sir Richard Burton, and takes on native dress, speech, manners, morals, and women; then the other kind, that penetrates to the heart of Arabia, like Charles M. Doughty, but remains an Englishman in the fullest sense of the word. Doughty, in his rags and misery, his blond beard, his scrupulous honesty, with his Country for ever behind him, is indeed the very pith of England, dwelling in the houses of hair.

Marmaduke Pickthall, I am almost sure, remained an Englishman and a gentleman in the Near East. Only in imagination he goes native. And that thoroughly.

We are supposed to get inside the skin of Said the Fisherman, to hunger, fear, lust, enjoy, suffer, and dare as Said does, and to see the world through Said's big, dark, shining Arab eyes.

It is not easy. It is not easy for a man of one race entirely to identify himself with a man of another race, of different culture and religion. When the book opens, Said is a fisherman naked on the coast of Syria, living with his wife Hasneh in a hut by the sands. Said is young, strong-bodied, and lusty: Hasneh is beginning to fade.

The first half of the novel is called: *The Book of his Luck*; the second half: *The Book of his Fate*. We are to read into the word Fate the old meaning, of revenge of the gods.

Said's savings are treacherously stolen by his partner. The poor fisherman wails, despairs, rouses up, and taking a hint about evil genii, packs himself and his scraps on an ass, and lets Hasneh run behind, and sets off to Damascus.

The Book of his Luck is a curious mixture of *Arabian Nights* and modern realism. I think, on the whole, Scheherazade's influence is strongest. The poor fisherman suddenly becomes one of the lusty Sinbad sort, and his luck is stupendous. At the same time, he is supposed to remain the simple man Said, with ordinary human responsibilities.

We are prepared to go gaily on with Said, his sudden glory of impudence and luck, when straight away we get a hit below the belt. Said, the mere man, abandons the poor, faithful, devoted Hasneh, his wife, in circumstances of utter meanness. We double up, and for the time being completely lose interest in the lucky and lusty fisherman. It takes an incident as sufficiently realistic and as amusing as that of the missionary's dressing-gown, to get us up again. Even then we have cold feet because of the impudent Said; he looks vulgar, common. And we resent a little the luck and the glamour of him, the fact that we have to follow him as a hero. A picaresque novel is all very well, but the one quality demanded of a picaro, to make him more than a common sneak, is a certain reckless generosity.

Said is reckless enough, but, as shown by Mr. Pickthall, with impudence based on meanness, the sort of selfishness that is mongrel, and a bit sneaking. Yet Mr. Pickthall still continues to infuse a certain glamour into him, and to force our sympathy for him.

It is the thing one most resents in a novel: having one's sympathy *forced* by the novelist, towards some character we should never naturally sympathize with.

Said is a handsome, strong, lusty scoundrel, impudent, with even a certain dauntlessness. We could get on with him very well indeed, if every now and then we didn't get another blow under the belt, by a demonstration of his cold, gutter-snipe callousness.

One almost demands revenge on him. The revenge comes, and again we are angry.

The author hasn't treated us fairly. He has identified himself too closely with his hero: he can't see wood for trees. Because, of course, inside the skin of Said, Mr. Pickthall is intensely a good, moral Englishman, and intensely uneasy.

So with an Englishman's over-scrupulous honesty, he has had to show us his full reactions to Said. Marmaduke Pickthall, Englishman, is fascinated by Said's lustiness, his reckless, impudent beauty, his immoral, or non-moral nature. We hope it is non-moral. We are shown it is immoral. Marmaduke Pickthall loathes the mean immorality of Said, and has to punish him for it, in the Book of his Fate.

All very well, but it's a risky thing to hold the scales for a man whose moral nature is not your own. Mr. Pickthall's moral values are utilitarian and rational:

Said's are emotional and sensual. The fact that Said's moral values are emotional and sensual makes Said so lusty and handsome, gives him such glamour for Mr. Pickthall. Mr. Pickthall resents the spell, and brings a charge of immorality. Then the Fates and the Furies get their turn.

The two charges against Said are his abandonment of the poor Hasneh, and his indifference to his faithful friend Selim.

As to Hasneh, she had been his wife for six years and borne him no children, and during these years he had lived utterly poor and vacant. But he was a man of energy. The moment he leaves the seashore, he becomes another fellow, wakes up.

The poor lout he was when he lived with Hasneh is transformed. Ca-Ca-Caliban. Get a new mistress, be a new man! Said had no tradition of sexual fidelity. His aim in living — or at least a large part of his aim in living — was sensual gratification; and this was not against his religion. His newly released energy, the new man he was, needed a new mistress, many new mistresses. It was part of his whole tradition. Because all Hasneh's service and devotion did not stimulate his energies, rather deadened them. She was a weight round his neck. And her prostrate devotion, while pathetic, was *not* admirable. It was a dead weight. He needed a subtler mistress.

Here the judgment of Marmaduke Pickthall is a white man's judgment on a dark man. The Englishman sympathizes with the poor abandoned woman at the expense of the energetic man. The sympathy is false. If the woman were alert and kept her end up, she would neither be poor nor abandoned. But it was easier for her to fall at Said's feet than to stand on her own.

If you ride a mettlesome horse you mind the bit, or you'll get thrown. It's a law of nature.

Said was mean, in that he did not send some sort of help to Hasneh, when he could. But that is the carelessness of a sensual nature, rather than villainy. Out of sight, out of mind, is true of those who have not much mind: and Said had little.

No, our quarrel with him is for being a fool, for not being on the alert: the same quarrel we had with Hasneh. If he had not been a slack fool his Christian wife would not have ruined him so beautifully. And if he had been even a bit wary and cautious, he would not have let himself in for his last adventure.

It is this adventure which sets us quarrelling with Mr. Pickthall and his manipulation of our sympathy. With real but idiotic courage Said swims out to an English steamer off Beirut. He is taken to London: falls into the nightmare of that city: loses his reason for ever, but, a white-haired handsome imbecile, is restored to his faithful ones in Alexandria.

We would fain think this ghastly vengeance fell on him because of his

immorality. But it didn't. Not at all. It was merely because of his foolish, impudent leaping before he'd looked. He wouldn't realize his own limitations, so he went off the deep end.

It is a summing-up of the Damascus Arab by a sympathetic, yet outraged Englishman. One feels that Mr. Pickthall gave an extra shove to the mills of God. Perfectly gratuitous!

Yet one is appalled, thinking of Said in London. When one does come out of the open sun into the dank dark autumn of London, one almost loses one's reason, as Said does. And then one wonders: can the backward civilizations show us anything half so ghastly and murderous as we show them, and with pride?

***Pedro de Valdivia*, by R. B. Cunninghame Graham**

This book will have to go on the history shelf; it has no chance among the memoirs or the lives. There is precious little about Valdivia himself. There is, however, a rather scrappy chronicle of the early days of Chile, a meagre account of its conquest and settlement under Pedro de Valdivia.

Having read Mr. Graham's preface, we suddenly come upon another title-page, and another title — "'*Pedro de Valdivia, Conqueror of Chile*. Being a Short Account of his Life, Together with his Five Letters to Charles V.'" So? We are to get Valdivia's own letters! Interminable epistles of a Conquistador, we know more or less what to expect. But let us look where they are.

It is a serious-looking book, with 220 large pages, and costing fifteen shillings net. The Short Account we find occupies the first 123 pages, the remaining 94 are occupied by the translation of the five letters. So! Nearly half the book is Valdivia's; Mr. Graham only translates him. And we shall have a lot of Your-Sacred-Majestys to listen to, that we may be sure of.

When we have read both the Short Account and the Letters, we are left in a state of irritation and disgust. Mr. Cunninghame Graham steals all his hero's gunpowder. He deliberately — or else with the absent-mindedness of mere egoism — picks all the plums out of Valdivia's cake, puts them in his own badly-kneaded dough, and then has the face to serve us up Valdivia whole, with the plums which we have already eaten sitting as large as life in their original position. Of course, all Valdivia's good bits in his own letters read like the shamelessest plagiarism. Haven't we just read them in Mr. Graham's Short Account? Why should we have to read them again? Why does that uninspired old Conquistador try to fob them off on us?

Poor Valdivia! That's what it is to be a Conquistador and a hero to Mr. Graham. He puts himself first, and you are so much wadding to fill out the pages.

The Spanish Conquistadores, famous for courage and endurance, are by now notorious for insentience and lack of imagination. Even Bernal Diaz, after a few hundred pages, makes one feel one could yell, he is so doggedly, courageously unimaginative, visionless, really *sightless*: sightless, that is, with the living eye of living discernment. Cortes, strong man as he is, is just as tough and visionless in *his* letters to His-Most-Sacred-Majesty. And Don Cunninghame, alas, struts feebly in the conquistadorial footsteps. Not only does he write without

imagination, without imaginative insight or sympathy, without colour, and without real feeling, but he seems to pride himself on the fact. He is being conquistadorial.

We, however, refuse entirely to play the part of poor Indians. We are not frightened of old Dons in caracoling armchairs. We are not even amused by their pretence of being on horse-back. A horse is a four-legged sensitive animal. What a pity the Indians felt so frightened of it! Anyhow, it is too late now for cavalierly conduct.

Mr. Graham's Preface sets the note in the very first words. It is a note of twaddling impertinence, and it runs through all the work. "Commentators tell us [do they, though?] that most men are savages at heart, and give more admiration to the qualities of courage, patience in hardships, and contempt of death than they accord to the talents of the artist, man of science, or the statesman. [Funny sort of commentators Mr. Graham reads.]

"If this is true of men, they say it is doubly true of women, who would rather be roughly loved by a tall fellow of his hands [hands, forsooth!] even though their physical and moral cuticle [sic] suffer some slight abrasion, than inefficiently wooed by a philanthropist. [Ah, ladies, you who are inefficiently wooed by philanthropists, is there never a tall fellow of his hands about?]

"This may be so [continues Mr. Graham], and, if it is, certainly Pedro de Valdivia was an archetype [! ! —] of all the elemental qualities nature implants in a man. [He usually had some common Spanish wench for his kept woman, though we are not told concerning her cuticle.]

"Brave to a fault [chants Mr. Graham], patient and enduring to an incredible degree, of hardships under which the bravest might have quailed [what's a quail got to do with it?], loyal to king and country [Flemish Charles V] and a stout man-at-arms, he had yet no inconsiderable talents of administration, talents not so conspicuous today among the Latin race. [Dear-dear!]

"Thus — and I take all the above for granted — etc." Mr. Graham has shown us, not Valdivia, but himself. He lifts a swash-buckling fountain pen, and off he goes. The result is a shoddy, scrappy, and not very sincere piece of work. The Conquistadores were damned by their insensitiveness to life, which we call lack of imagination. And they let a new damnation into the America they conquered. But they couldn't help it. It was the educational result of Spanish struggle for existence against the infidel Moors. Tfie Conquistadores were good enough instruments, but they were not good enough men for the miserable and melancholy work of conquering a continent. Yet, at least, they never felt themselves *too good* for their job, as some of the inky conquerors did even then, and do still.

Mr. Graham does not take Valdivia very seriously. He tells us almost nothing about him: save that he was born in Estremadura (who cares!) and had served in the Italian and German wars, had distinguished himself in the conquest of Venezuela, and, in 1532, accompanied Pizarro to Peru. Having thrown these few facts at us, off goes Mr. Graham to the much more alluring, because much better known, story of the Pizarros, and we wonder where Valdivia comes in. We proceed with Pizarro to Peru, and so, apparently, did Valdivia, and we read a little piece of the story even Prescott has already told us. Then we get a glimpse of Almagro crossing the Andes to Chile, and very impressive little quotations from Spanish writers. After which Valdivia begins to figure, in some unsubstantial remote regions with Indian names, as a mere shadow of a colonizer. We never see the country, we never meet the man, we get no feeling of the Indians. There is nothing dramatic, no Incas, no temples and treasures and tortures, only remote colonization going on in a sort of nowhere. Valdivia becomes a trifle more real when he comes again into Peru, to fight on the loyal side against Gonzalo Pizarro and old Carvajal, but this is Peruvian history, with nothing new to it. Valdivia returns to Chile and vague colonizing; there are vague mentions of the Magellan Straits; there is a Biobio River, but to one who has never been to Chile, it might just as well be Labrador. There is a bit of a breath of life in the extracts of Valdivia's own letters. And there are strings of names of men who are nothing but names, and continual mention of Indians who also remain merely nominal. Till the very last pages, when we do find out, after he is killed, that Valdivia was a big man, fat now he is elderly, of a hearty disposition, good-natured as far as he has enough imagination, and rather commonplace save for his energy as a colonizing instrument.

It is all thrown down, in bits and scraps, as Mr. Graham comes across it in Garcilaso's book, or in Gomara. And it is interlarded with Mr. Graham's own comments, of this nature: "Christians seemed to have deserved their name in those days, for faith and faith alone could have enabled them to endure such misery, and yet be always ready at the sentinel's alarm to buckle on their swords." Oh, what cliches! Faith in the proximity of gold, usually. "Cavalry in those days played the part now played by aeroplanes," says Mr. Graham suavely. He himself seems to have got into an aeroplane, by mistake, instead of onto a conquistadorial horse, for his misty bird's-eye views are just such confusion.

The method followed, for the most part, seems to be that of sequence of time. All the events of each year are blown together by Mr. Graham's gustiness, and you can sort them out. At the same time, great patches of Peruvian history suddenly float up out of nowhere, and at the end, when Valdivia is going to get

killed by the Indians, suddenly we are swept away on a biographical carpet, and forced to follow the life of the poet Ercilla, who wrote his Araucana poem about Valdivia's Indians, but who never came to Chile till Valdivia was dead. After which, we are given a feeble account of a very striking incident, the death of Valdivia. And there the Short Account dies also, abruptly, and Chile is left to its fate.

Then follow the five letters. They are moderately interesting, the best, of course, belonging to Peruvian story, when Valdivia helped the mean La Gasca against Gonzalo Pizarro. For the rest, the "loyalty" seems a little overdone, and we are a little tired of the bluff, manly style of soldiers who have not imagination enough to see the things that really matter. Men of action are usually deadly failures in the long run. Their precious energy makes them uproot the tree of life, and leave it to wither, and their stupidity makes them proud of it. Even in Valdivia, and he seems to have been as human as any Conquistador, the stone blindness to any mystery or meaning in the Indians themselves, the utter unawareness of the fact that they might have a point of view, the abject insensitiveness to the strange, eerie atmosphere of that America he was proceeding to exploit and to ruin, puts him at a certain dull level of intelligence which we find rather nauseous. The world has suffered so cruelly from these automatic men of action. Valdivia was not usually cruel, it appears. But he cut off the hands and noses of two hundred "rebels," Indians who were fighting for their own freedom, and he feels very pleased about it. It served to cow the others. But imagine deliberately chopping off one slender brown Indian hand after another! Imagine taking a dark-eyed Indian by the hair, and cutting off his nose! Imagine seeing man after man, in the prime of life, with his mutilated face streaming blood, and his wrist-stump a fountain of blood, and tell me if the men of action don't need absolutely to be held in leash by the intelligent being who *can* see these things as monstrous, root cause of endless monstrosity! We, who suffer from the bright deeds of the men of action of the past, may well keep an eye on the "tall fellows of their hands" of our own day.

Prescott never went to Mexico nor to Peru, otherwise he would have sung a more scared tune. But Mr. Graham is supposed to know his South America. One would never believe it. The one thing he could have done, re-created the landscape of Chile for us, and made us feel those Araucanians as men of flesh and blood, he never does, not for a single second. He might as well never have left Scotland; better, for perhaps he would not have been so glib about unseen lands. All he can say of the Araucanians today is that they are "as hard-featured a race as any upon earth."

Mr. Graham is trivial and complacent. There is, in reality, a peculiar dread

horror about the conquest of America, the story is always dreadful, more or less. Columbus, Pizarro, Cortes, Quesada, De Soto, the Conquistadores seem all like men of doom. Read a man like Adolf Bandelier, who knows the *inside* of his America, read his *Golden Man* — El Dorado — and feel the reverberation within reverberation of horror the Conquistadores left behind them.

Then we have Mr. Graham as a translator. In the innumerable and sometimes quite fatuous and irritating footnotes — they are sometimes interesting — our author often gives the original Spanish for the phrase he has translated. And even here he is peculiarly glib and unsatisfactory; “ ‘God knows the trouble it cost,’ he says pathetically.” Valdivia is supposed to say this “pathetically.” The footnote gives Valdivia’s words: “*Un bergantin y el trabajo que costo, Dios lo sabe.*” — “\ brigantine, and the work it cost, God knows.” Why *trouble* for *trabajo*? And why pathetically? Again, the proverb: “*A Dios rogando, y con la maza dando,*” is translated: “Praying to God, and battering with the mace.” But why *battering* for *dando*, which means merely *donnant*, and might be rendered *smiting*, or *laying on*, but surely not *battering*! Again, Philip II is supposed to say to Ercilla, who stammered so much as to be unintelligible: “*Habladme por escrito, Don Alonso!*” Which is: “Say it to me in writing, Don Alonso!” Mr. Graham, however, translates it: “Write to me, Don Alonso!” . . . These things are trifles, but they show the peculiar laziness or insensitiveness to language which is so great a vice in a translator.

The motto of the book is:

*El mas seguro don de la fortuna
Es no lo haber tenido vez alguna.*

Mr. Graham puts it: “The best of fortune’s gifts is never to have had good luck at all.” Well, Ercilla may have meant this. The literal sense of the Spanish, anybody can make out: “The most sure gift of fortune, is not to have had it not once.” Whether one would be justified in changing the “don de la fortuna” of the first line into “good luck” in the second is a point we must leave to Mr. Graham. Anyhow, he seems to have blest his own book in this equivocal fashion.

***Nigger Heaven*, by Carl Van Vechten; *Flight*, by
Walter White; *Manhattan Transfer*, by John Dos
Passos; *In Our Time*, by Ernest Hemingway**

Nigger Heaven is one of the Negro names for Harlem, that dismal region of hard stone streets way up Seventh Avenue beyond One Hundred and Twenty-Fifth Street, where the population is all coloured, though not much of it is real black. In the daytime, at least, the place aches with dismalness and a loose-end sort of squalor, the stone of the streets seeming particularly dead and stony, obscenely stony.

Mr. Van Vechten's book is a nigger book, and not much of a one. It opens and closes with nigger cabaret scenes in feeble imitation of Cocteau or Morand, second-hand attempts to be wildly lurid, with background effects of black and vermilion velvet. The middle is a lot of stuffing about high-brow niggers, the heroine being one of the old-fashioned school-teacherish sort, this time an assistant in a public library; and she has only one picture in her room, a reproduction of the Mona Lisa, and on her shelves only books by James Branch Cabell, Anatole France, Jean Cocteau, etc.; in short, the literature of disillusion. This is to show how refined she is. She is just as refined as any other "idealistic" young heroine who earns her living, and we have to be reminded continually that she is golden-brown.

Round this heroine goes on a fair amount of "race" talk, nigger self-consciousness which, if it didn't happen to mention it was black, would be taken for merely another sort of self-conscious grouch. There is a love-affair — a rather palish-brown — which might go into any feeble American novel whatsoever. And the whole coloured thing is peculiarly colourless, a second-hand dish barely warmed up.

The author seems to feel this, so he throws in a highly-spiced nigger in a tartan suit, who lives off women — rather in the distance — and two perfect red-peppers of nigger millionairesses who swim in seas of champagne and have lovers and fling them away and sniff drugs; in short, altogether the usual old bones of hot stuff, warmed up with all the fervour the author can command — which isn't much.

It is a false book by an author who lingers in nigger cabarets hoping to heaven to pick up something to write about and make a sensation — and, of course, money.

Flight is another nigger book; much more respectable, but not much more important. The author, we are told, is himself a Negro. If we weren't told, we should never know. But there is rather a call for coloured stuff, hence we had better be informed when we're getting it.

The first part of *Flight* is interesting — the removal of Creoles, just creamy-coloured old French-Negro mixture, from the Creole quarter of New Orleans to the Negro quarter of Atlanta. This is real, as far as life goes, and external reality: except that to me, the Creole quarter of New Orleans is dead and lugubrious as a Jews' burying ground, instead of highly romantic. But the first part of *Flight* is good Negro *data*.

The culture of Mr. White's Creoles is much more acceptable than that of Mr. Van Vechten's Harlem golden-browns. If it is only skin-deep, that is quite enough, since the pigmentation of the skin seems to be the only difference between the Negro and the white man. If there be such a thing as a Negro soul, then that of the Creole is very very French-American, and that of the Harlemite is very very Yankee-American. In fact, there seems no blackness about it at all. Reading Negro books, or books about Negroes written from the Negro standpoint, it is absolutely impossible to discover that the nigger is any blacker inside than we are. He's an absolute white man, save for the colour of his skin: which, in many cases, is also just as white as a Mediterranean white man's.

It is rather disappointing. One likes to cherish illusions about the race soul, the eternal Negroid soul, black and glistening and touched with awfulness and with mystery. One is not allowed. The nigger is a white man through and through. He even sees himself as white men see him, blacker than he ought to be. And his soul is an Edison gramophone on which one puts the current records: which is what the white man's soul is, just the same, a gramophone grinding over the old records.

New York is the melting-pot which melts even the nigger. The future population of this melting-pot will be a pale-greyish-brown in colour, and its psychology will be that of Mr. White or Byron Kas-son, which is the psychology of a shrewd mixture of English, Irish, German, Jewish, and Negro. These are the grand ingredients of the melting-pot, and the amalgam, or alloy, whatever you call it, will be a fine mixture of all of them. Unless the melting-pot gets upset.

Apparently there is only one feeling about the Negro, wherein he differs from the white man, according to Mr. White; and this is the feeling of warmth and humanness. But *we* don't feel even that. More mercurial, but not by any means wanner or more human, the nigger seems to be: even in nigger books. And he sees in himself a talent for life which the white man has lost. But remembering glimpses of Harlem and Louisiana, and the down-at-heel greyness of the

colourless Negro *ambiente*, myself I don't feel even that.

But the one thing the Negro *knows* he can do, is sing and dance. He knows it, because the white man has pointed it out to him so often. There, again, however, disappointment! About one nigger in a thousand amounts to anything in song or dance: the rest are just as songful and limber as the rest of Americans.

Mimi, the pale-biscuit heroine of *Flight*, neither sings nor dances. She is rather cultured and makes smart dresses and passes over as white, then marries a well-to-do white American, but leaves him because he is not "live" enough, and goes back to Harlem. It is just what Nordic wives do, just how they feel about their husbands. And if they don't go to Harlem, they go somewhere else. And then they come back. As Mimi will do. Three months of Nigger Heaven will have her fed up, and back she'll be over the white line, settling again in the Washington Square region, and being "of French extraction." Nothing is more monotonous than these removals.

All these books might as well be called *Flight*. They give one the impression of swarms of grasshoppers hopping big hops, and buzzing occasionally on the wing, all from nowhere to nowhere, all over the place. What's the point of all this flight, when they start from nowhere and alight on nowhere? For the Nigger Heaven is as sure a nowhere as anywhere else.

Manhattan Transfer is still a greater ravel of flights from nowhere to nowhere. But at least the author knows it, and gets a kind of tragic significance into the fact. John Dos Passos is a far better writer than Mr. Van Vechten or Mr. White, and his book is a far more real and serious thing. To me, it is the best modern book about New York that I have read. It is an endless series of glimpses of people in the vast scuffle of Manhattan Island, as they turn up again and again and again, in a confusion that has no obvious rhythm, but wherein at last we recognize the systole-diastole of success and failure, the end being all failure, from the point of view of life; and then another flight towards another nowhere.

If you set a blank record revolving to receive all the sounds, and a film-camera going to photograph all the motions of a scattered group of individuals, at the points where they meet and touch in New York, you would more or less get Mr. Dos Passos's method. It is a rush of disconnected scenes and scraps, a breathless confusion of isolated moments in a group of lives, pouring on through the years, from almost every part of New York. But the order of time is more or less kept. For half a page you are on the Lackawanna ferry-boat — or one of the ferry-boats — in the year 1900 or somewhere there — the next page you are in the Brevoort a year later — two pages ahead it is Central Park, you don't know when — then the wharves-way up Hoboken — down Greenwich Village — the Algonquin Hotel-somebody's apartment. And it seems to be different people, a

different girl every time. The scenes whirl past like snowflakes. Broadway at night — whizz! gone! — a quick-lunch counter! gone! — a house on Riverside Drive, the Palisades, night — gone! But, gradually, you get to know the faces. It is like a movie picture with an intricacy of different stories and no close-ups and no writing in between. Mr. Dos Passos leaves out the writing in between.

But if you are content to be confused, at length you realize that the confusion is genuine, not affected; it is life, not a pose. The book becomes what life is, a stream of different things and different faces rushing along in the consciousness, with no apparent direction save that of time, from past to present, from youth to age, from birth to death, and no apparent goal at all. But what makes the rush so swift, one gradually realizes, is the wild, strange frenzy for success: egoistic, individualistic success.

This very complex film, of course, does not pretend to film *all* New York. Journalists, actors and actresses, dancers, unscrupulous lawyers, prostitutes, Jews, out-of-works, politicians, labour agents — that kind of gang. It is on the whole a gang, though we do touch respectability on Riverside Drive now and then. But it is a gang, the vast loose gang of strivers and winners and losers which seems to be the very pep of New York, the city itself an inordinately vast gang.

At first it seems too warm, too passionate. One thinks: this is much too healthily lusty for the present New York. Then we realize we are away before the war, when the place was steaming and alive. There is sex, fierce, ranting sex, real New York: sex as the prime stimulus to business success. One realizes what a lot of financial success has been due to the reckless speeding-up of the sex dynamo. Get hold of the right woman, get absolutely rushed out of yourself loving her up, and you'll be able to rush a success in the city. Only, both to the man and woman, the sex must be the stimulant to success; otherwise it stimulates towards suicide, as it does with the one character whom the author loves, and who was "truly male."

The war comes, and the whole rhythm collapses. The war ends. There are the same people. Some have got success, some haven't. But success and failure alike are left irritable and inert. True, everybody is older, and the fire is dying down into spasmodic irritability. But in all the city the fire is dying down. The stimulant is played out, and you have the accumulating irritable restlessness of New York of today. The old thrill has gone, out of socialism as out of business, out of art as out of love, and the city rushes on ever faster, with more maddening irritation, knowing the apple is a Dead Sea shiner.

At the end of the book, the man who was a little boy at the beginning of the book, and now is a failure of perhaps something under forty, crosses on the ferry

from Twenty-third Street, and walks away into the gruesome ugliness of the New Jersey side. He is making another flight into nowhere, to land upon nothingness.

“Say, will you give me a lift?” he asks the red-haired man at the wheel (of a furniture-van).

“How fur ye goin’?”

“I dunno . . . Pretty far.”

The End.

He might just as well have said “nowhere!”

In Our Time is the last of the four American books, and Mr. Hemingway has accepted the goal. He keeps on making flights, but he has no illusion about landing anywhere. He knows it will be nowhere every time.

In Our Time calls itself a book of stories, but it isn't that. It is a series of successive sketches from a man's life, and makes a fragmentary novel. The first scenes, by one of the big lakes in America — probably Superior — are the best; when Nick is a boy. Then come fragments of war — on the Italian front. Then a soldier back home, very late, in the little town way west in Oklahoma. Then a young American and wife in post-war Europe; a long sketch about an American jockey in Milan and Paris; then Nick is back again in the Lake Superior region, getting off the train at a burnt-out town, and tramping across the empty country to camp by a trout-stream. Trout is the one passion life has left him — and this won't last long.

It is a short book: and it does not pretend to be about one man. But it is. It is as much as we need know of the man's life. The sketches are short, sharp, vivid, and most of them excellent. (The “mottoes” in front seem a little affected.) And these few sketches are enough to create the man and all his history: we need know no more.

Nick is a type one meets in the more wild and woolly regions of the United States. He is the remains of the lone trapper and cowboy. Nowadays he is educated, and through with everything. It is a state of *conscious*, accepted indifference to everything except freedom from work and the moment's interest. Mr. Hemingway does it extremely well. Nothing matters. Everything happens. One wants to keep oneself loose. Avoid one thing only: getting connected up. Don't get connected up. If you get held by anything, break it. Don't be held. Break it, and get away. Don't get away with the idea of getting somewhere else. Just get away, for the sake of getting away. Beat it! “Well, boy, I guess I'll beat it.” Ah, the pleasure in saying that!

Mr. Hemingway's sketches, for this reason, are excellent: so short, like striking a match, lighting a brief sensational cigarette, and it's over. His young

love-affair ends as one throws a cigarette-end away. “It isn’t fun any more.” —
”Everything’s gone to hell inside me.”

It is really honest. And it explains a great deal of sentimentality. When a thing has gone to hell inside you, your sentimentality tries to pretend it hasn’t. But Mr. Hemingway is through with the sentimentalism. “It isn’t fun any more. I guess I’ll beat it.”

And he beats it, to somewhere else. In the end he’ll be a sort of tramp, endlessly moving on for the sake of moving away from where he is. This is a negative goal, and Mr. Hemingway is really good, because he’s perfectly straight about it. He is like Krebs, in that devastating Oklahoma sketch: he doesn’t love anybody, and it nauseates him to have to pretend he does. He doesn’t even *want* to love anybody; he doesn’t want to go anywhere, he doesn’t want to do anything. He wants just to lounge around and maintain a healthy state of nothingness inside himself, and an attitude of negation to everything outside himself. And why shouldn’t he, since that is exactly and sincerely what he feels? If he really *doesn’t* care, then why should he care? Anyhow, he doesn’t.

***Solitaria*, by V. V. Rozanov**

We are told on the wrapper of this book that Prince Mirsky considered Rozanov “one of the greatest Russians of modern times . . . Rozanov is the greatest revelation of the Russian mind yet to be shown to the West.”

We become diffident, confronted with these superlatives. And when we have read E. Gollerbach’s long “Critico-Biographical Study,” forty-three pages, we are more suspicious still, in spite of the occasionally profound and striking quotations from *Solitaria* and from the same author’s *Fallen Leaves*. But there we are; we’ve got another of these morbidly introspective Russians, morbidly wallowing in adoration of Jesus, then getting up and spitting in His beard, or in His back hair, at least; characters such as Dostoievsky has familiarized us with, and of whom we are tired. Of these self-divided, gamin-religious Russians who are so absorbedly concerned with their own dirty linen and their own piebald souls we have had a little more than enough. The contradictions in them are not so very mysterious, or edifying, after all. They have a spurting, *gamin* hatred of civilization, of Europe, of Christianity, of governments, and of everything else, in their moments of energy; and in their inevitable relapses into weakness, they make the inevitable recantation; they whine, they humiliate themselves, they seek unspeakable humiliation for themselves, and call it Christ-like, and then with the left hand commit some dirty little crime or meanness, and call it the mysterious complexity of the human soul. It’s all masturbation, half-baked, and one gets tired of it. One gets tired of being told that Dostoievsky’s *Legend of the Grand Inquisitor* “is the most profound declaration which ever was made about man and life.” As far as I’m concerned, in proportion as a man gets more profoundly and personally interested in himself, so does my interest in him wane. The more Dostoievsky gets worked up about the tragic nature of the human soul, the more I lose interest. I have read the *Grand Inquisitor* three times, and never can remember what it’s really about. This I make as a confession, not as a vaunt. It always seems to me, as the Germans say, *mehr Schrei wie Wert*.

And in Rozanov one fears one has got a pup out of the Dostoievsky kennel. *Solitaria* is a sort of philosophical work, about a hundred pages, of a kind not uncommon in Russia, consisting in fragmentary jottings of thoughts which occurred to the author, mostly during the years 1910 and 1911, apparently, and scribbled down where they came, in a cab, in the train, in the w.c., on the sole of

a bathing-slipper. But the thought that came in a cab might just as well have come in the w.c. or “examining my coins,” so what’s the odds? If Rozanov wanted to give the physical context to the thought, he’d have to create the scene. “In a cab,” or “examining my coins” means nothing.

Then we get a whole lot of bits, some of them interesting, some not; many of them to be classified under the heading of: To Jesus or not to Jesus! if we may profanely parody Hamlet’s To be or not to be. But it is the Russian’s own parody. Then you get a lot of self-conscious personal bits: “The only *masculine* thing about you — is your trousers”: which was said to Rozanov by a girl; though, as it isn’t particularly true, there was no point in his repeating it. However, he has that “self-probing” nature we have become acquainted with. “Teaching is form, and I am formless. In teaching there must be order and a system, and I am systemless and even disorderly. There is duty — and to me any duty at the bottom of my heart always seemed comical, and on any duty, at the bottom of my heart, I always wanted to play a trick (except tragic duty). . . .”

Here we have the pup of the Dostoievsky kennel, a so-called nihilist: in reality, a Mary-Mary-quite-contrary. It is largely tiresome contrariness, even if it is spontaneous and not self-induced.

And, of course, in Mary-Mary-quite-contrary we have the ever-recurrent whimper: / want to be good! I *am* good: Oh, I am so good, I’m better than anybody! I love Jesus and all the saints, and above all, the blessed Virgin! Oh, how I love purity! — and so forth. Then they give a loud *crepitus ventris* as a punctuation.

Dostoievsky has accustomed us to it, and we are hard-boiled. Poor Voltaire, if he recanted, he only recanted once, when his strength had left him, and he was neither here nor there. But these Russians are for ever on their death-beds, and neither here nor there.

Rozanov’s talk about “lovely faces and dear souls” of children, and “for two years I have been ‘in Easter,’ in the pealing of bells,” truly “arrayed in white raiment,” just makes me feel more hard-boiled than ever. It’s a cold egg.

Yet, in *Solitaria* there are occasional profound things. “I am not such a scoundrel yet as to think about morals” — “Try to crucify the Sun, and you will see which is God” — and many others. But to me, self-conscious personal revelations, touched with the guttersnipe and the actor, are not very interesting. One has lived too long.

So that I come to the end of Gollerbach’s “Critico-Biographical Study” sick of the self-fingering sort of sloppiness, and I have very much the same feeling at the end of *Solitaria*, though occasionally Rozanov hits the nail on the head and makes it jump.

Then come twenty pages extracted from Rozanov's *The Apocalypse of Our Times*, and at once the style changes, at once you have a real thing to deal with. The *Apocalypse* must be a far more important book than *Solitaria*, and we wish to heaven we had been given it instead. Now at last we see Rozanov as a real thinker, and "the greatest revelation of the Russian mind yet to be shown to the West."

Rozanov had a real man in him, and it is true, what he says of himself, that he did not feel in himself that touch of the criminal which Dostoievsky felt in *himself*. Rozanov was not a criminal. Somewhere, he was integral, and grave, and a seer, a true one, not a *gamin*. We see it all in his *Apocalypse*. He is not really a Dostoievskian. That's only his Russianitis.

The book is an attack on Christianity, and as far as we are given to see, there is no canting or recanting in it. It is passionate, and suddenly valid. It is not jibing or criticism or pulling to pieces. It is a real passion. Rozanov has more or less recovered the genuine pagan vision, the phallic vision, and with those eyes he looks, in amazement and consternation, on the mess of Christianity.

For the first time we get what we have got from no Russian, neither Tolstoi nor Dostoievsky nor any of them, a real, positive view on life. It is as if the pagan Russian had wakened up in Rozanov, a kind of Rip van Winkle, and was just staggering at what he saw. His background is the vast old pagan background, the phallic. And in front of this, the tortured complexity of Christian civilization — what else can we call it? — is a kind of phantasmagoria to him.

He is the first Russian, as far as I am concerned, who has ever said anything to me. And his vision is full of passion, vivid, valid. He is the first to see that immortality is in the vividness of life, not in the loss of life. The butterfly becomes a whole revelation to him: and to us.

When Rozanov is wholly awake, and a new man, a risen man, the living and resurrected pagan, then he is a great man and a great seer, and perhaps, as he says himself, the first Russian to emerge. Speaking of Tolstoi and Leontiev and Dostoievsky, Rozanov says: "I speak straight out what they dared not even suspect. I speak because after all I am more of a thinker than they. That is all." . . . "But the problem (in the case of Leontiev and Dostoievsky) is and was about anti-Christianity, about the victory over the very essence of Christianity, over that terrible avitalism. Whereas from him, from the phallus everything flows."

When Rozanov is in this mood, and in this vision, he is not dual, nor divided against himself. He is one complete thing. His vision and his passion are positive, non-tragical.

Then again he starts to Russianize, and he comes in two. When he becomes

aware of himself, and personal, he is often ridiculous, sometimes pathetic, sometimes a bore, and almost always “dual.” Oh, how they love to be dual, and divided against themselves, these Dostoievskian Russians! It is as good as a pose: always a Mary-Mary-quite-contrary business. “The great horror of the human soul consists in this, that while thinking of the Madonna it at the same time does not cease thinking of Sodom and of its sins; and the still greater horror is that even in the very midst of Sodom it does not forget the Madonna, it yearns for Sodom and the Madonna, and this at one and the same time, without any discord.”

The answer to that is, that Sodom and Madonna-ism are two halves of the same movement, the mere tick-tack of lust and asceticism, pietism and pornography. If you're not pious, you won't be pornographical, and *vice versa*. If there are no saints, there'll be no sinners. If there were no ascetics, there'd be no lewd people. If you divide the human psyche into two halves, one half will be white, the other black. It's the division itself which is pernicious. The swing to one extreme causes the swing to the other. The swing towards Immaculate Madonna-ism inevitably causes the swing back to the whore of prostitution, then back again to the Madonna, and so *ad infinitum*. But you can't blame the soul for this. All you have to blame is the craven, cretin human intelligence, which is always seeking to get away from its own centre.

But Rozanov, when he isn't Russianizing, is the first Russian really to see it, and to recover, if unstably, the old human wholeness.

So that this book is extremely interesting, and really important. We get impatient with the Russianizing. And yet, with Gollerbach's Introduction and the letters at the end, we do get to know all we want to know about Rozanov, personally. It is not of vast importance, what he was personally. If he behaved perversely, he was never, like Dostoievsky, inwardly perverse, and when he says he was not “born rightly,” he is only yelping like a Dostoievsky pup.

It is the voice of the new man in him, not the Dostoievsky whelp, that means something. And it means a great deal. We shall wait for a full translation of *The Apocalypse of Our Times*, and of *Oriental Motifs*. Rozanov matters, for the future.

***The Peep Show*, by Walter Wilkinson**

When I was a budding author, just before the war, I used to hear Ford Hueffer asserting that every man could write *one* novel, and hinting that he ought to be encouraged to do it. The novel, of course, would probably be only a human document. Nevertheless, it would be worth while, since every life is a life.

There was a subtle distinction drawn, in those halcyon days of talk “about” things, between literature and the human documents. The latter was the real thing, mind you, but it wasn’t art. The former was art, you must know, but — but — it wasn’t the raw beefsteak of life, it was the dubious steak-and-kidney pie. Now you must choose: the raw beefsteak of life, or the suspicious steak-and-kidney pie of the public restaurant of art.

Perhaps that state of mind and that delicate stomach for art has passed away. To me, literary talk was always like a rattle that literary men spun to draw attention to themselves. But *The Peep Show* reminds me of the old jargon. They would have called it “A charming human document,” and have descanted on the naive niceness of the unsophisticated author. It used to seem so delightful, to the latter-day *litterateur*, to discover a book that was not written by a writer. “Oh, he’s not a writer, you know! That’s what makes it so delightful!”

The Peep Show is a simple and unpretentious account of a young man who made his own puppets and went round for a few weeks in Somerset and Devon, two or three years ago, in the holiday season, giving puppet shows. It wasn’t Punch and Judy, because the showman, though not exactly a high-brow, was neither exactly a low-brow. He believed in the simple life: which means nuts, vegetables, no meat, tents, fresh air, nature, and niceness. Now this puppet showman was *naturally* vegetarian, and *naturally* nice, with the vices *naturally* left out: a nice modern young fellow, who had enjoyed William Morris’s *News from Nowhere* immensely, as a boy. One might say, a grandson of the William Morris stock, but a much plainer, more unpretentious fellow than his cultural forebears. And really “of the people.” And really penniless.

But he is not a high-brow: has hardly heard of Dostoievsky, much less read him: and the “Works of William Shakespeare, in one volume,” which accompanied the pupDet show for the first week, is just a standing joke to the showman. As if anybody ever *did* read Shakespeare, actually! That’s the farce of it. Bill Shakespeare! “Where’s the works of the immortal William? — Say, are you sitting on Big Bill in one vol.?”

The author has very little to do with culture, whether in the big sense or the little! But he is a simple lifer. And as a simple lifer he sets out, with much trepidation, to make his living by showing his “reformed” puppets: not so brutal, beery, and beefy, as Punch; more suitable to the young, in every way. Still, they actually *are* charming puppets.

The book is an absolutely simple and unaffected account of the two months’ or six-weeks’ tour, from the Cotswolds down through Ilfracombe to Bideford, then back inland, by Taunton and Wells. It was mostly a one-man show: the author trundled his “sticks” before him, on a pair of old bath-chair wheels.

And, curiously, the record of those six weeks makes a book. Call it a human document, call it literature, I don’t know the difference. The style is, in a sense, amateur: yet the whole attempt was amateur, that whole Morris aspect of life is amateur. And therefore the style is perfect: even, in the long run, poignant. The very banalities at last have the effect of the *mot juste*. “It is an exquisite pleasure to find oneself so suddenly in the sweet morning air, to tumble out of bed, to clamber over a stone wall and scramble across some rushy dunes down to the untrodden seashore, there to take one’s bath in the lively breakers.”

That is exactly how the cleverest youth writes, in an essay on the seaside, at night school. There is an inevitability about its banality, the “exquisite pleasure,” the “sweet morning air,” to “tumble out of bed” — which in actuality was carefully crawling out of a sleeping sack — ; the “clamber over a stone wall,” the “scramble across some rushy [sic] dunes” to the “untrodden shore,” the “bath” in the “lively breakers”: it is almost a masterpiece of cliches. It is the way thousands and thousands of the cleverest of the “ordinary” young fellows write, who have had just a touch more than our “ordinary” education, and who have a certain limpidity of character, and not much of the old Adam in them. It is what the “ordinary” young man, who is “really nice,” does write. You have to have something vicious in you to be a creative writer. It is the something vicious, old-adamish, incompatible to the “ordinary” world, inside a man, which gives an edge to his awareness, and makes it impossible for him to talk of a “bath” in “lively breakers.”

The puppet showman has not got this something vicious, so his perceptions lack fine edge. He can’t help being “nice.” And niceness is negative only too often. But, still, he is not *too* nice.

So the book is a book. It is not insipid. It is not banal. All takes place in the banal world: nature is banal, all the people are banal, save, perhaps, the very last “nobber”: and all the philosophy is banal. And yet it is all *just*. “If I were a philosopher expounding a new theory of living, inventing a new ‘ism,’ I should call myself a holidayist, for it seems to me that the one thing the world needs to

put it right is a holiday. There is no doubt whatever about the sort of life nice people want to lead. Whenever they get the chance, what do they do but go away to the country or the seaside, take off their collars and ties and have a good time playing at childish games and contriving to eat some simple [sic] food very happily without all the encumbrances of chairs and tables. This world might be quite a nice place if only simple people would be content to be simple and be proud of it; if only they would turn their backs on these pompous politicians and ridiculous Captains of Industry who, when you come to examine them, turn out to be very stupid, ignorant people, who are simply suffering from an unhappy mania of greediness; who are possessed with perverse and horrible devils which make them stick up smoking factories in glorious Alpine valleys, or spoil some simple country by digging up and exploiting its decently buried mineral resources; or whose moral philosophy is so patently upside down when they attempt to persuade us that quarrelling, and fighting, and wars, or that these ridiculous accumulations of wealth are the most important, instead of the most undesirable things in life. If only simple people would ignore them and behave always in the jolly way they do on a seashore what a nice world we might have to live in.

“Luckily Nature has a way with her, and we may rest assured that this wretched machine age will be over in a few years’ time. It has grown up as quickly as a mushroom, and like a mushroom it has no stability. It will die.”

But this is just “philosophy,” and by the way. It is the apotheosis of ordinariness. The narrative part of the book is the succinct revelation of ordinariness, as seen from the puppet showman’s point of view. And, owing to the true limpidity and vicelessness of the author, ordinariness becomes almost vivid. The book is a book. It is not something to laugh at. It is so curiously *true*. And it has therefore its own touch of realization of the tragedy of human futility: the futility even of ordinariness. It contains the ordinary man’s queer little bitter disappointment in life, because life, the life of people, is more ordinary than even he had imagined. The puppet showman is a bit of a pure idealist, in a fairly ordinary sense. He *really* doesn’t want money. He *really* is not greedy. He *really* is shy of trespassing on anybody. He *really* is nice. He starts out by being too nice.

What is his experience? He struggles and labours, and is lucky if he can make five shillings in a day’s work. When it rains, when there’s no crowd, when it’s Sunday, when the police won’t allow you to show, when the local authorities won’t allow you to pitch the sticks — then there is nothing doing. Result — about fifteen shillings a week earnings. That is all the great and noble public will pay for a puppet show. And you can live on it.

It is enough to embitter any man, to see people gape at a show, then melt away when the hat comes around. Not even a penny that they're not *forced* to pay. Even on their holidays. Yet they give shillings to go to the dirty kinema.

The puppet showman, however, refuses to be embittered. He remembers those who do pay, and pay heartily: sixpence the maximum. People are on the whole "nice" to him. Myself, I should want to spit on such niceness. The showman, however, accepts it. He is cheery by determination. When I was a boy among the miners, the question that would have been flung at the puppet showman would have been: "Lad, wheer'st keep thy ba's?" For his unfailing forbearance and meekness! It is admirable, but . . . Anyhow, what's the good of it? They just trod on him, all the same: all those masses of ordinary people more vulgar than he was; because there is a difference between vulgarity and ordinariness. Vulgarity is low and greedy. The puppet showman is never that. He is at least pure, in the ordinary sense of the word: never greedy nor base.

And if he is not embittered, the puppet showman is bitterly disappointed and chagrined. No, he has to decide that the world is not *altogether* a nice place to show puppets in. People are "nice," but by jove, they are tight. They don't want puppets. They don't want anything but chars-a-bancs and kinemas, girlies and curlies and togs and a drink. Callous, vulgar, less than human the ordinary world looks, full of "nice" people, as one reads this book. And that holiday region of Ilfracombe and Bideford, those country lanes of Devonshire reeling with chars-a-bancs and blurting blind dust and motor-horns, or mud and motor-horns, all August: that is hell! England my England! Who would be a holidayist? Oh, people are "nice"! But you've got to be vulgar, as well as ordinary, if you're going to stand them.

To me, a book like *The Peep Show* reveals England better than twenty novels by clever young ladies and gentlemen. Be absolutely decent in the ordinary sense of the word, be a "holidayist" and a firm believer in niceness; and then set out into the world of all those nice people, putting yourself more or less at their mercy. Put yourself at the mercy of the nice holiday-making crowd. Then come home, absolutely refusing to have your tail between your legs, but — "singing songs in praise of camping and tramping and the stirring life we jolly showmen lead." Because absolutely nobody has been *really nasty to you*. They've all been quite nice. Oh, quite! Even though you *are* out of pocket on the trip.

All the reader can say, at the end of this songful, cheerful book is: God save me from the nice, ordinary people, and from ever having to make a living out of them. God save me from being "nice."

The Social Basis of Consciousness, by Trigant Burrow

Dr. Trigant Burrow is well known as an independent psychologist through the essays and addresses he has published in pamphlet form from time to time. These have invariably shown the spark of original thought and discovery. The gist of all these essays now fuses into this important book, the latest addition to the International Library of Psychology, Philosophy and Scientific Method.

Dr. Burrow is that rare thing among psychiatrists, a humanly honest man. Not that practitioners are usually dishonest. They are intellectually honest, professionally honest: all that. But that other simple thing, human honesty, does not enter in, because it is primarily subjective; and subjective honesty, which means that a man is honest about his own inward experiences, is perhaps the rarest thing, especially among professionals. Chiefly, of course, because men, and especially men with a theory, don't know anything about their own inward experiences.

Here Dr. Burrow is a rare and shining example. He set out, years ago, as an enthusiastic psychoanalyst and follower of Freud, working according to the Freudian method, in America. And gradually the sense that something was wrong, vitally wrong, in the theory and in the practice of psychoanalysis both, invaded him. Like any truly honest man, he turned and asked himself what it was that was wrong, with himself, with his methods, and with the theory according to which he was working.

This book is the answer, a book for every man interested in the human consciousness to read carefully. Because Dr. Burrow's conclusions, sincere, almost naive in their startled emotion, are far-reaching, and vital.

First, in the criticism of the Freudian method, Dr. Burrow found, in his clinical experiences, that he was always applying a *theory*. Patients came to be analysed, and the analyst was there to examine with open mind. But the mind could not be open, because the patient's neurosis, all the patient's experience, *had* to be fitted to the Freudian theory of the inevitable incest-motive.

And gradually Dr. Burrow realized that to fit life every time to a theory is in itself a mechanistic process, a process of unconscious repression, a process of image-substitution. All theory that has to be applied to life proves at last just another of these unconscious images which the repressed psyche uses as a substitute for life, and against which the psychoanalyst is fighting. The analyst wants to break all this image business, so that life can flow freely. But it is

useless to try to do so by replacing in the unconscious another image — this time, the image, the fixed motive of the incest-complex.

Theory as theory is all right. But the moment you apply it to *life*, especially to the subjective life, the theory becomes mechanistic, a substitute for life, a factor in the vicious unconscious. So that while the Freudian theory of the unconscious and of the incest-motive is valuable as a *description* of our psychological condition, the moment you begin to *apply* it, and make it master of the living situation, you have begun to substitute one mechanistic or unconscious illusion for another.

In short, the analyst is just as much fixed in his vicious unconscious as is his neurotic patient, and the will to apply a mechanical incest-theory to every neurotic experience is just as sure an evidence of neurosis, in Freud or in the practitioner, as any psychologist could ask.

So much for the criticism of the psychoanalytic method.

If, then, Dr. Burrow asks himself, it is not sex-repression which is at the root of the neurosis of modern life, what is it? For certainly, according to his finding, sex-repression is not the root of the evil.

The question is a big one, and can have no single answer. A single answer would only be another “theory.” But Dr. Burrow has struggled through years of mortified experience to come to some conclusion nearer the mark. And his finding is surely much deeper and more vital, and, also, much less spectacular than Freud’s.

The real trouble lies in the inward sense of “separateness” which dominates every man. At a certain point in his evolution, man became cognitively conscious: he bit the apple: he began to know. Up till that time his consciousness flowed unaware, as in the animals. Suddenly, his consciousness split.

“It would appear that in his separateness man has inadvertently fallen a victim to the developmental exigencies of his own consciousness. Captivated by the phylogenetically new and unwonted spectacle of his own image, it would seem he has been irresistibly arrested before the mirror of his own likeness and that in the present self-conscious phase of his mental evolution he is still standing spellbound before it. That such is the case with man is not remarkable. For the appearance of the phenomenon of consciousness marked a complete severance from all that was his past. Here was broken the chain of evolutionary events whose links extended back through the nebulous aeons of our remotest ancestry, and in the first moment of his consciousness man stood, for the first time, *alone*. It was in this moment that he was ‘created,’ as the legend runs, ‘in the image and likeness of God.’ For, breaking with the teleological traditions of his age-long biology, man now became suddenly *aware*.”

Consciousness is self-consciousness. “That is, consciousness in its inception entails the fallacy of *a self as over against other selves*.”

Suddenly aware of himself, and of other selves over against him, man is a prey to the division inside himself. Helplessly he must strive for more consciousness, which means, also, a more intensified aloneness, or individuality; and at the same time he has a horror of his own aloneness, and a blind, dim yearning for the old togetherness of the far past, what Dr. Burrow calls the preconscious state.

What man really wants, according to Dr. Burrow, is a sense of togetherness with his fellow-men, which shall balance the secret but overmastering sense of separateness and aloneness which now dominates him. And therefore, instead of the Freudian method of personal analysis, in which the personality of the patient is pitted against the personality of the analyst in the old struggle for dominancy, Dr. Burrow would substitute a method of group analysis, wherein the reactions were distributed over a group of people, and the intensely personal element eliminated as far as possible. For it is only in the intangible reaction of several people, or many people together, on one another that you can really get the loosening and breaking of the me-and-you tension and contest, the inevitable contest of two individualities brought into connexion. What must be broken is the egocentric absolute of the individual. We are all such hopeless little absolutes to ourselves. And if we are sensitive, it hurts us, and we complain, we are called neurotic. If we are complacent, we enjoy our own petty absolutism, though we hide it and pretend to be quite meek and humble. But in secret, we are absolute and perfect to ourselves, and nobody could be better than we are. And this is called being normal.

Perhaps the most interesting part of Dr. Burrow’s book is his examination of normality. As soon as man became aware of himself, he made a picture of himself. Then he began to live according to the picture. Mankind at large made a picture of itself, and every man had to conform to the picture: the ideal.

This is the great image or idol which dominates our civilization, and which we worship with mad blindness. The idolatry of self.

Consciousness should be a flow from within outwards. The organic necessity of the human being should flow into spontaneous action and spontaneous awareness, consciousness.

But the moment man became aware of himself he made a picture of himself, and began to live from the picture: that is, from without inwards. This is truly the reversal of life. And this is how we live. We spend all our time over the picture. All our education is but the elaborating of the picture. “A good little girl” — “a brave boy” — “a noble woman” — “a strong man” — “a productive society” — “a progressive humanity” — it is all the picture. It is all living from the outside

to the inside. It is all the death of spontaneity. It is all, strictly, automatic. It is all the vicious unconscious which Freud postulated.

If we could once get into our heads — or if we once dare admit to one another — that we are *not* the picture, and the picture is not what we are, then we might lay a new hold on life. For the picture is really the death, and certainly the neurosis, of us all. We have to live from the outside in, idolatrously. And the picture of ourselves, the picture of humanity which has been elaborated through some thousands of years, and which we are still adding to, is just a huge idol. It is not real. It is a horrible compulsion set over us.

Individuals rebel: and these are the neurotics, who show some sign of health. The mass, the great mass, goes on worshipping the idol, and behaving according to the picture: and this is the normal. Freud tried to force his patients back to the normal, and almost succeeded in shocking them into submission, with the incest-bogy. But the bogy is nothing compared to the actual idol.

As a matter of fact, the mass is more neurotic than the individual patient. This is Dr. Burrow's finding. The mass, the normals, never live a life of their own. They cannot. They live entirely according to the picture. And according to the picture, each one is a little absolute unto himself; there is none better than he. Each lives for his own self-interest. The "normal" activity is to push your own interest with every atom of energy you can command. It is "normal" to get on, to get ahead, at whatever cost. The man who does disinterested work is abnormal. Every Johnny must look out for himself: that is normal. Luckily for the world, there still is a minority of individuals who do disinterested work, and are made use of by the "normals." But the number is rapidly decreasing.

And then the normals betray their utter abnormality in a crisis like the late war. There, there indeed the uneasy individual can look into the abysmal insanity of the normal masses. The same holds good of the Bolshevik hysteria of today: it is hysteria, incipient social insanity. And the last great insanity of all, which is going to tear our civilization to pieces, the insanity of class hatred, is almost entirely a "normal" thing, and a "social" thing. It is a state of fear, of ghastly collective fear. And it is absolutely a mark of the normal. To say that class hatred *need not exist* is to show abnormality. And yet it is true. Between man and man, class hatred hardly exists. It is an insanity of the mass, rather than of the individual.

But it is part of the picture. The picture says it is horrible to be poor, and splendid to be rich, and in spite of all individual experience to the contrary, we accept the terms of the picture, and thereby accept class war as inevitable.

Humanity, society has a picture of itself, and lives accordingly. The individual likewise has a private picture of himself, which fits into the big picture. In this

picture he is a little absolute, and nobody could be better than he is. He must look after his own self-interest. And if he is a man, he must be very male. If she is a woman, she must be very female.

Even sex, today, is only part of the picture. Men and women alike, when they are being sexual, are only acting up. They are living according to the picture. If there is any dynamic, it is that of self-interest. The man “seeketh his own” in sex, and the woman seeketh her own: in the bad, egoistic sense in which St. Paul used the words. That is, the man seeks himself, the woman seeks herself, always, and inevitably. It is inevitable, when you live according to the picture, that you seek only yourself in sex. Because the picture is your own image of yourself: your *idea* of yourself. If you are quite normal, you don't have any true self, which “seeketh not her own, is not puffed up.” The true self, in sex, would seek a *meeting*, would seek to meet the other. This would be the true flow: what Dr. Burrow calls the “societal consciousness,” and what I would call the human consciousness, in contrast to the social, or image consciousness.

But today, all is image consciousness. Sex does not exist; there is only sexuality. And sexuality is merely a greedy, blind self-seeking. Self-seeking is the real motive of sexuality. And therefore, since the thing sought is the same, the self, the mode of seeking is not very important. Heterosexual, homosexual, narcissistic, normal, or incest, it is all the same thing. It is just sexuality, not sex. It is one of the universal forms of self-seeking. Every man, every woman just seeks his own self, her own self, in the sexual experience. It is the picture over again, whether in sexuality or self-sacrifice, greed or charity, the same thing, the self, the image, the idol, the image of me, and norm!

The true self is not aware that it is a self. A bird, as it sings, sings itself. But not according to a picture. It has no idea of itself.

And this is what the analyst must try to do: to liberate his patient from his own image, from his horror of his own isolation and the horror of the “stoppage” of his real vital flow. To do it, it is no use rousing sex bogies. A man is not neurasthenic or neurotic because he loves his mother. If he desires his mother, it is because he is neurotic, and the desire is merely a symptom. The cause of the neurosis is further to seek.

And the cure? For myself, I believe Dr. Burrow is right: the cure would consist in bringing about a state of honesty and a certain trust among a *group* of people, or many people — if possible, all the people in the world. For it is only when we can get a man to fall back into his true relation to other men, and to women, that we can give him an opportunity to be himself. So long as men are inwardly dominated by their own isolation, their own absoluteness, which after all is but a picture or an idea, nothing is possible but insanity more or less

pronounced. Men must get back into *touch*. And to do so they must forfeit the vanity and the *noli me tangere* of their own absoluteness: also they must utterly break the present great picture of a normal humanity: shatter that mirror in which we all live grimacing: and fall again into true relatedness.

I have tried more or less to give a *resume* of Dr. Burrow's book. I feel there is a certain impertinence in giving these *resumes*. But not more than in the affectation of "criticizing" and being superior. And it is a book one should read and assimilate, for it helps a man in his own inward life.

The Station: Athos, Treasures and Men, by Robert Byron; *England and the Octopus*, by Clough Williams-Ellis; *Comfortless Memory*, by Maurice Baring; *Ashenden*, by W. Somerset Maugham

Athos is an old place, and Mr. Byron is a young man. The combination for once is really happy. We can imagine ourselves being very bored by a book on ancient Mount Athos and its ancient monasteries with their ancient rule. Luckily Mr. Byron belongs to the younger generation, even younger than the Sitwells, who have shown him the way to be young. Therefore he is not more than becomingly impressed with ancientness. He never gapes in front of it. He settles on it like a butterfly, tastes it, is perfectly honest about the taste, and flutters on. And it is charming.

We confess that we find this youthful revelation of ancient Athos charming. It is all in the butterfly manner. But the butterfly, airy creature, is by no means a fool. And its interest is wide. It is amusing to watch a spangled beauty settle on the rose, then on a spat-out cherry-stone, then with a quiver of sunny attention, upon a bit of horse-droppings in the road. The butterfly tries them all, with equal concern. It is neither shocked nor surprised, though sometimes, if thwarted, it is a little exasperated. But it is still a butterfly, graceful, charming, and ephemeral. And, of course, the butterfly on its careless, flapping wings is just as immortal as some hooting and utterly learned owl. Which is to say, we are thankful Mr. Byron is no more learned and serious than he is, and his description of Athos is far more vitally convincing than that, for example, of some heavy Gregorovius.

The four young men set out from England with a purpose. The author wants to come into closer contact with the monks and monasteries, which he has already visited; and to write a book about it. He definitely sets out with the intention of writing a book about it. He has no false shame. David, the archaeologist, wants to photograph the Byzantine frescoes in the monastery buildings. Mark chases and catches insects. And Reinecker looks at art and old pots. They are four young gentlemen with the echoes of Oxford still in their ears, light and frivolous as butterflies, but with an underneath tenacity of purpose and almost a grim determination *to do something*.

The butterfly and the Sitwellian manner need not deceive us. These young

gentlemen are not simply gay. They are grimly in earnest to get something done. They are not young sports amusing themselves. They are young earnestists making their mark. They are stoics rather than frivolous, and epicureans truly in the deeper sense, of undergoing suffering in order to achieve a higher pleasure.

For the monasteries of Mount Athos are no Paradise. The food which made the four young men shudder makes us shudder. The vermin in the beds are lurid. The obstinacy and grudging malice of some of the monks, whose one pleasure seems to have been in thwarting and frustrating the innocent desires of the four young men, make our blood boil too. We know exactly what sewage is like, spattering down from above on to leaves and rocks. And the tortures of heat and fatigue are very real indeed.

It is as if the four young men expected to be tormented at every hand's turn. Which is just as well, for tormented they were. Monks apparently have a special gift of tormenting people: though of course some of the monks were charming. But it is chiefly out of the torments of the young butterflies, always humorously and gallantly told, that we get our picture of Athos, its monasteries and its monks. And we are left with no desire at all to visit the holy mountain, unless we could go disembodied, in such state that no flea could bite us, and no stale fish could turn our stomachs.

Then, disembodied, we should like to go and see the unique place, the lovely views, the strange old buildings, the unattractive monks, the paintings, mosaics, frescoes of that isolated little Byzantine world.

For everything artistic is there purely Byzantine. Byzantine is to Mr. Byron what Baroque is to the Sitwells. That is to say, he has a real feeling for it, and finds in it a real kinship with his own war-generation mood. Also, it is his own special elegant stone to sling at the philistine world.

Perhaps, in a long book like this, the unfailing humoresque of the style becomes a little tiring. Perhaps a page or two here and there of honest-to-God simplicity might enhance the high light of the author's facetious impressionism. But then the book might have been undertaken by some honest-to-God professor, and we so infinitely prefer Mr. Byron.

When we leave Mr. Byron we leave the younger generation for the elder; at least as far as style and manner goes. Mr. Williams-Ellis has chosen a thankless subject: *England and the Octopus*: the Octopus being the millions of little streets of mean little houses that are getting England in their grip, and devouring her. It is a depressing theme, and the author rubs it in. We see them all, those millions of beastly little red houses spreading like an eruption over the face of rural England. Look! Look! says Mr. Williams-Ellis, till we want to shout: Oh, shut up! What's the good of our looking! We've looked and got depressed too often.

Now leave us alone.

But Mr. Williams-Ellis is honestly in earnest and has an honest sense of responsibility. This is the difference between the attitude of the younger and the older generations. The younger generation can't take anything very seriously, and refuses to feel responsible for humanity. The younger generation says in effect: I didn't make the world. I'm not responsible. All I can do is to make my own little mark and depart. But the elder generation still feels responsible for all humanity.

And Mr. Williams-Ellis feels splendidly responsible for poor old England: the face of her, at least. As he says: You can be put in prison for uttering a few mere swear-words to a policeman, but you can disfigure the loveliest features of the English countryside, and probably be called a public benefactor. And he wants to alter all that.

And he's quite right. His little book is excellent: sincere, honest, and even passionate, the well-written, humorous book of a man who knows what he's writing about. Everybody ought to read it, whether we know all about it beforehand or not. Because in a question like this, of the utter and hopeless disfigurement of the English countryside by modern industrial encroachment, the point is not whether we can do anything about it or not, all in a hurry. The point is, that we should all become acutely conscious of what is happening, and of what has happened; and as soon as we are really awake to this, we can begin to arrange things differently.

Mr. Williams-Ellis makes us conscious. He wakes up our age to our own immediate surroundings. He makes us able to look intelligently at the place we live in, at our own street, our own post-office or pub or bank or petrol pump-station. And when we begin to look around us critically and intelligently, it is fun. It is great fun. It is like analysing a bad picture and seeing how it could be turned into a good picture.

Mr. Williams-Ellis's six questions which should be asked of every building ought to be printed on a card and distributed to every individual in the nation. Because, as a nation, it is our intuitive faculty for seeing beauty and ugliness which is lying dead in us. As a nation we are dying of ugliness.

Let us open our eyes, or let Mr. Williams-Ellis open them for us, to houses, streets, railways, railings, paint, trees, roofs, petrol-pumps, advertisements, tea-shops, factory-chimneys, let us open our eyes and see them as they are, beautiful or ugly, mean and despicable, or grandiose, or pleasant. People who live in mean, despicable surroundings become mean and despicable. The chief thing is to become properly conscious of our environment.

But if some of the elder generation really take things seriously, some others

only pretend. And this *pretending* to take things seriously is a vice, a real vice, and the young know it.

Mr. Baring's book *Comfortless Memory* is, thank heaven, only a little book, but it is sheer pretence of taking seriously things which its own author can never for a moment consider serious. That is, it is faked seriousness, which is utterly boring. I don't know when Mr. Baring wrote this slight novel. But he ought to have published it at least twenty years ago, when faked seriousness was more in the vogue. Mr. Byron, the young author, says that progress is the appreciation of Reality. Mr. Baring, the elderly author, offers us a piece of portentous unreality larded with Goethe, Dante, Heine, hopelessly out of date, and about as exciting as stale restaurant cake.

A dull, stuffy elderly author makes faked love to a bewitching but slightly damaged lady who has "lived" with a man she wasn't married to. She is an enigmatic lady: very! For she falls in love, violently, virginally, deeply, passionately and exclusively, with the comfortably married stuffy elderly author. The stuffy elderly author himself tells us so, much to his own satisfaction. And the lovely, alluring, enigmatic, experienced lady actually expires, in her riding-habit, out of sheer love for the comfortably married elderly author. The elderly author assures us of it. If it were not quite so stale it would be funny.

Mr. Somerset Maugham is even more depressing. His Mr. Ashenden is also an elderly author, who becomes an agent in the British Secret Service during the War. An agent in the Secret Service is a sort of spy. Spying is a dirty business, and Secret Service altogether is a world of under-dogs, a world in which the meanest passions are given play.

And this is Mr. Maugham's, or at least Mr. Ashenden's world. Mr. Ashenden is an elderly author, so he takes life seriously, and takes his fellow-men seriously, with a seriousness already a little out of date. He has a sense of responsibility towards humanity. It would be much better if he hadn't. For Mr. Ashenden's sense of responsibility oddly enough is inverted. He is almost passionately concerned with proving that all men and all women are either dirty dogs or imbeciles. If they are clever men or women, they are crooks, spies, police-agents, and tricksters "making good," living in the best hotels because they know that in a humble hotel they'll be utterly declassified, and showing off their base cleverness, and being dirty dogs, from Ashenden himself, and his mighty clever colonel, and the distinguished diplomat, down to the mean French porters.

If, on the other hand, you get a decent, straight individual, especially an individual capable of feeling love for another, then you are made to see that such a person is a despicable fool, encompassing his own destruction. So the

American dies for his dirty washing, the Hindu dies for a blowsy woman who wants her wrist-watch back, the Greek merchant is murdered by mistake, and so on. It is better to be a live dirty dog than a dead lion, says Mr. Ashenden. Perhaps it is, to Mr. Ashenden.

But these stories, being “serious,” are faked. Mr. Maugham is a splendid observer. He can bring before us persons and places most excellently. But as soon as the excellently observed characters have to move, it is a fake. Mr. Maugham gives them a humorous shove or two. We find they are nothing but puppets, instruments of the author’s pet prejudice. The author’s pet prejudice being “humour,” it would be hard to find a bunch of more ill-humoured stories, in which the humour has gone more rancid.

***Fallen Leaves*, by V. V. Rozanov**

Rozanov is now acquiring something of a European reputation. There is a translation in French, and one promised in German, and the advanced young writers in Paris and Berlin talk of him as one of the true lights. Perhaps *Solitaria* is more popular than *Fallen Leaves*: but then, perhaps it is a little more sensational: *Fallen Leaves* is not sensational: it is on the whole quiet and sad, and truly Russian.

The book was written, apparently, round about 1912: and the author died a few years later. So that, from the western point of view, Rozanov seems like the last of the Russians. Post-revolution Russians are something different.

Rozanov is the last of the Russians, after Chekhov. It is the true Russian voice, become very plaintive now. Artzybashev, Gorky, Merejkovski are his contemporaries, but they are all three a little bit off the tradition. But Rozanov is right on it. His first wife had been Dostoievsky's mistress: and somehow his literary spirit showed the same kind of connexion: a Dostoievskian flicker that steadied and became a legal and orthodox light; yet always, of course, suspect. For Rozanov had been a real and perverse liar before he reformed and became a pious, yet suspected conservative. Perhaps he was a liar to the end: who knows? Yet *Solitaria* and *Fallen Leaves* are not lies, not so much lies as many more esteemed books.

The *Fallen Leaves* are just fragments of thought jotted down anywhere and anyhow. As to the importance of the where or how, perhaps it is important to keep throwing the reader out into the world, by means of the: At night: At work: In the tram: In the w.c. — which is sometimes printed after the reflections. Perhaps, to avoid any appearance of systematization, or even of philosophic abstraction, these little *addenda* are useful. Anyhow, it is Russian, and deliberate, done with the intention of keeping the reader — or Rozanov himself — in contact with the *moment*, the actual time and place. Rozanov says that with *Solitaria* he introduced a new *tone* into literature, the tone of manuscript, a manuscript being unique and personal, coming from the individual alone direct to the reader. And “the secret (bordering on madness) that I am talking to myself: so constantly and attentively and *passionately*, that apart from this I practically hear nothing” — this is the secret of his newness, and of his book.

The description is just: and fortunately, on the whole, Rozanov talks sincerely to himself; he really does, on the whole, refrain from performing in front of

himself. Of course he is self-conscious: he knows it and accepts it and tries to make it a stark-naked self-consciousness, between himself and himself as between himself and God. "Lord, preserve in me that chastity of the writer: not to look in the glass." From a professional liar it is a true and sincere prayer. "I am coquetting like a girl before the whole world, hence my constant agitation." "A writer must suppress the writer in himself (authorship, literariness)."

He is constantly expressing his hatred of literature, as if it poisoned life for him, as if he felt he did not live, he was only *literary*. "The *most happy* moments of life I remember were those when I saw (heard) people in a state of happiness. Stakha and A.P.P-va, 'My Friend's' story of her first love and marriage (the culminating point of my life). From this I conclude that I was born a contemplator, not an actor. I came into the world in order to *see*, and not to *accomplish*." There is his trouble, that he felt he was always looking on at life, rather than partaking in it. And he felt this as a humiliation: and in his earlier days, it had made him act up, as the Americans say. He had acted up as if he were a real actor on life's stage. But it was too theatrical: his "lying," his "evil" were too much acted up. A liar and an evil bird he no doubt was, because the lies and the acting up to evil, whether they are "pose" or spontaneous, have a vile effect. But he never got any real satisfaction even out of that. He never felt he had really been evil. He had only acted up, like all the Stavrogins, or Ivan Karamazovs of Dostoevsky. Always acting up, trying to *act* feelings because you haven't really got any. That was the condition of the Russians at the end: even Chekhov. Being terribly emotional, terribly full of feeling, terribly good and pathetic or terribly evil and shocking, just to *make* yourself have feelings, when you have none. This was very Russian — and is very modern. A great deal of the world is like it today.

Rozanov left off "acting up" and became quiet and decent, except, perhaps, for little bouts of hysteria, when he would be perfectly vicious towards a friend, or make a small splash of "sin." As far as a man who *has* no real fount of emotion can love he loved his second wife, "My Friend." He tried very, very hard to love her, and no doubt he succeeded. But there was always the taint of pity, and she, poor thing, must have been terribly emotionally overwrought, as a woman is with an emotional husband who has no real virile emotion or compassion, only "pity." "European civilization will perish through compassion," he says: but then goes on to say, profoundly, that it is not compassion but pseudo-compassion, with an element of perversity in it. This is very Dostoevskian: and this pseudo-compassion tainted even Rozanov's love for his wife. There is somewhere an element of mockery. And oh, how Rozanov himself would have liked to escape it, and just to feel simple affection. But he

couldn't. " 'Today' was completely absent in Dostoevsky," he writes. Which is a very succinct way of saying that Dostoevsky never had any immediate feelings, only "projected" ones, which are bound to destroy the immediate object, the actual "today," the very body which is "today." So poor Rozanov saw his wife dying under his eyes with a paralysis due to a disease of the brain. She was his "today," and he could not help, somewhere, jeering at her. But he suffered, and suffered deeply. At the end, one feels his suffering *was* real: his grief over his wife *was* real. So he had gained that much reality: he really grieved for her, and that was love. It was a great achievement, after all, for the most difficult thing in the world is to achieve real feeling, especially real sympathy, when the sympathetic centres seem, from the very start, as in Rozanov, dead. But Rozanov knew his own nullity, and tried very hard to come through to real honest feeling. And in his measure, he succeeded. After all the Dostoevskian hideous "impurity" he did achieve a certain final purity, or genuineness, or true individuality, towards the end. Even at the beginning of *Fallen Leaves* he is often sentimental and false, repulsive.

And one cannot help feeling a compassion for the Russians of the old regime. They were such healthy barbarians in Peter the Great's time. Then the whole accumulation of western ideas, ideals, and inventions was poured in a mass into their hot and undeveloped consciousness, and worked like wild yeast. It produced a century of literature, from Pushkin to Rozanov, and then the wild working of this foreign leaven had ruined, for the time being, the very constitution of the Russian psyche. It was as if they had taken too violent a drug, or been injected with too strong a vaccine. The affective and effective centres collapsed, the control went all wrong, the energy died down in a rush, the nation fell, for the time being completely ruined. Too sudden civilization always kills. It kills the South Sea Islanders: it killed the Russians, more slowly, and perhaps even more effectually. Once the idea and the ideal become too strong for the spontaneous emotion in the individual, the civilizing influence ceases to be civilizing and becomes very harmful, like powerful drugs which ruin the balance and destroy the control of the organism.

Rozanov knew this well. What he says about revolution and democracy leaves nothing to be said. And what he says of "officialdom" is equally final. I believe Tolstoi would be absolutely amazed if he could come back and see the Russia of today. I believe Rozanov would feel no surprise. He knew the inevitability of it. His attitude to the Jews is extraordinary, and shows uncanny penetration. And his sort of "conservatism," which would be Fascism today, was only a hopeless attempt to draw back from the way things were going.

But the disaster was inside himself already; there was no drawing back.

Extraordinary is his note on his “dreaminess.” “At times I am aware of something monstrous in myself. And that monstrous thing is my dreaminess. Then nothing can penetrate the circle traced by it.

“I am all stone.

“And a stone is a monster.

“For one must love and be aflame.

“From that dreaminess have come all my misfortunes in life (my former work in the Civil Service), the mistake of my whole proceedings (only when ‘out of myself was I attentive to My Friend [his wife] — and her pains), and also my sins.

“In my dreaminess I could do nothing.

“And on the other hand I could do anything [‘sin’].

“Afterwards I was sorry: but it was too late. Dreaminess has devoured me, and everything round me.”

There is the clue to the whole man’s life: this “dreaminess” when he is like stone, insentient, and can do nothing, yet can do “anything.” Over this dreaminess he has no control, nor over the stoniness. But what seemed to him dreaminess and stoniness seemed to others, from his actions, vicious malice and depravity. So that’s that. It is one way of being damned.

And there we have the last word of the Russian, before the great *debacle*. Anyone who understands in the least Rozanov’s state of soul, in which, apparently, he was born, born with this awful insentient stoniness somewhere in him, must sympathize deeply with his real suffering and his real struggle to get back a positive self, a feeling self: to overcome the “dreaminess,” to dissolve the stone. How much, and how little, he succeeded we may judge from this book: and from his harping on the beauty of procreation and fecundity: and from his strange and self-revealing statements concerning Weininger. Rozanov is modern, terribly modern. And if he does not put the fear of God into us, he puts a real fear of destiny, or of doom: and of “civilization” which does not come from within, but which is poured over the mind, by “education.”

Art Nonsense and Other Essays, by Eric Gill

First published in the *Book Collector's Quarterly*, this review was accompanied by a note from Mrs. Lawrence to this effect: "Lawrence wrote this unfinished review a few days before he died. The book interested him, and he agreed with much in it. Then he got tired of writing and I persuaded him not to go on. It is the last thing he wrote."

Art Nonsense and Other Essays, reads the title of this expensive, handsomely printed book. Instinctively the eye reads: *Art Nonsense and Other Nonsense*, especially as the letter "O" in Mr. Gill's type rolls so large and important, in comparison with the other vowels.

But it isn't really fair. "Art Nonsense" is the last essay in the book, and not the most interesting. It is the little essays at the beginning that cut most ice. Then in one goes, with a plunge.

Let us say all the bad things first. Mr. Gill is not a born writer: he is a crude and crass amateur. Still less is he a born thinker, in the reasoning and argumentative sense of the word. He is again a crude and crass amateur: crass is the only word: maddening, like a tiresome uneducated workman arguing in a pub — *argefying* would describe it better — and banging his fist. Even, from his argument, one would have to conclude that Mr. Gill is not a born artist. A born craftsman, rather. He deliberately takes up the craftsman's point of view, argues about it like a craftsman, like a man in a pub, and really has a craftsman's dislike of the fine arts. He has, *au fond*, the man-in-a-pub's *moral* mistrust of art, though he tries to get over it.

So that there is not really much about art in this book. There is what Mr. Gill feels and thinks as a craftsman, shall we say as a medieval craftsman? We start off with a two-page "Apology": bad. Then comes an essay on "Slavery and Freedom" (1918), followed by "Essential Perfection" (1918), "A Grammar of Industry" (1919), "Westminster Cathedral" (1920), "Dress" (1920), "Songs without Clothes" (1921), "Of Things Necessary and Unnecessary" (1921), "Quae ex Veritate et Bono" (1921), on to the last essay, the twenty-fourth, on "Art Nonsense," written in 1929. The dates are interesting: the titles are interesting. What is "Essential Perfection"? and what are "Songs without Clothes"? and why these tags of Latin? and what is a "Grammar of Industry," since industry has nothing to do with words? So much of it is jargon, like a

workman in a pub.

So much of it is jargon. Take the blurb on the wrapper, which is extracted from Mr. Gill's "Apology." "Two primary ideas run through all the essays of this book: that 'art is simply the well making of what needs making' and that 'art is collaboration with God in creating.' "

Could anything, I ask you, be worse? "Art is *simply* the well making of what needs making." There's a sentence for you! So simple! Imagine that a song like "Sally in our Alley" — which is art — should be "simply the well making of what needs making." Or that it should be "collaboration with God in creating." What a nasty, conceited, American sort of phrasel And how one dislikes this modern hob-nobbing with God, or giving Him the go-by.

But if one once begins to quarrel with Mr. Gill, one will never leave off. His trick of saying, over and over, "upon the contrary" instead of "on the contrary," his trick of firing off phrases, as in the essay on "Essential Perfection," which opens: "God is Love. That is not to say merely that God is loving or lovable, but that He *is* Love. In this, Love is an absolute, not a relative term. The Love of God is man's Essential Perfection. The Essential Perfection of man is not in his physical functions — the proper material exercise of his organs — but in his worship of God, and the worship of God is perfect in Charity" — all of which means really nothing: even his trick of printing a line under a word, for emphasis, instead of using italics — an untidy proceeding; if he doesn't like italics, why not space wider, in the Continental fashion? — all this is most irritating. Irritating like an uneducated workman in a pub holding forth and showing off, making a great noise with a lot of cliches, and saying nothing at all.

Then we learn that Mr. Gill is a Roman Catholic: surely a convert. And we know these new English Catholics. They are the last words in Protest. They are Protestants protesting against Protestantism, and so becoming Catholics to Protestants, they have protested against every absolute. As Catholics, therefore, they will swallow all the old absolutes whole, swallow the pill without looking at it, and call that Faith. The big pill being God, and little pills being terms like Charity and Chastity and Obedience and Humility. Swallow them whole, and you are a good Catholic; lick at them and see what they taste like, and you are a queasy Protestant. Mr. Gill is a Catholic, so he uses terms like "Holy Church" and "a good R.C." quite easily, at first; but as the years go by, more rarely. The mere function of swallowing things whole becomes tedious.

That is a long preamble, and perhaps an unkind one. But Mr.

Gill is so bad at the mere craft of language, that he sets a real writer's nerves on edge all the time.

Now for the good side of the book. Mr. Gill is primarily a craftsman, a

workman, and he has looked into his own soul deeply to know what he feels about work. And he has seen a truth which, in my opinion, is a great truth, an invaluable truth for humanity, and a truth of which Mr. Gill is almost the discoverer. The gist of it lies in the first two paragraphs of the first essay, "Slavery and Freedom."

"That state is a state of Slavery in which a man does what he likes to do in his spare time and in his working time that which is required of him. This state can only exist when what a man likes to do is to please himself.

"That state is a state of Freedom in which a man does what he likes to do in his working time and in his spare time that which is required of him. This state can only exist when what a man likes to do is to please God."

It seems to me there is more in those two paragraphs than in all Karl Marx or Professor Whitehead or a dozen other philosophers rolled together. True, we have to swallow whole the phrase "to please God," but when we think of a man happily working away in concentration on the job he is doing, if it is only soldering a kettle, then we know what living state it refers to. "To please God" in this sense only means happily doing one's best at the job in hand, and being livingly absorbed in an activity which makes one in touch with — with the heart of all things; call it God. It is a state which any man or woman achieves when busy and concentrated on a job which calls forth real skill and attention, or devotion. It is a state of absorption into the creative spirit, which is God.

Here, then, is a great truth which Mr. Gill has found in his living experience, and which he flings in the teeth of modern industrialism. Under present conditions, it is useless to utter such truth: and that is why none of the clever blighters do utter it. But it is only the truth that is useless which really matters.

"The test of a man's freedom is his responsibility as a workman. Freedom is not incompatible with discipline, it is only incompatible with irresponsibility. He who is free is responsible for his work. He who is not responsible for his work is not free."

"There is nothing to be said for freedom except that it is the will of God.

"The Service of God is perfect freedom."

Here, again, the "service of God" is only that condition in which we feel ourselves most truly alive and vital, and the "will of God" is the inrush of pure life to which we gladly yield ourselves.

It all depends what you make of the word God. To most of us today it is a fetish-word, dead, yet useful for invocation. It is not a question of Jesus. It is a question of God, Almighty God. We have to square ourselves with the very words. And to do so, we must rid them of their maddening moral import, and give them back-Almighty God — the old vital meaning: strength and glory and

honour and might and beauty and wisdom. These are the continual attributes of Almighty God, in the far past. And the same today, the god who enters us and imbues us with his strength and glory and might and honour and beauty and wisdom, this is a god we are eager to worship. And this is the god of the craftsman who makes things well, so that the presence of the god enters into the thing made. The workman making a pair of shoes with happy absorption in skill is imbued with the god of strength and honour and beauty, undeniable. Happy, intense absorption in any work, which is to be brought as near to perfection as possible, this is a state of being with God, and the men who have not known it have missed life itself.

This is what Mr. Gill means, I take it, and it is an enormously important truth. It is a truth on which a true civilization might be established. But first, you must give men back their belief in God, and then their free responsibility in work. For belief, Mr. Gill turns to the Catholic Church. Well, it is a great institution, and we all like to feel romantic about it. But the Catholic Church needs to be born again, quite as badly as the Protestant. I cannot feel there is much more belief in God in Naples or Barcelona, than there is in Liverpool or Leeds. Yet they are truly Catholic cities. No, the Catholic Church has fallen into the same disaster as the Protestant: of preaching a *moral* God, instead of Almighty God, the God of strength and glory and might and wisdom: a “good” God, instead of a vital and magnificent God. And we no longer any of us *really* believe in an exclusively “good” God. The Catholic Church in the cities is as dead as the Protestant Church. Only in the country, among peasants, where the old ritual of the seasons lives on in its beauty, is there still some living, instinctive “faith” in the God of Life.

Mr. Gill has two main themes: “work done well,” and “beauty” -or rather “Beauty.” He is almost always good, simple and profound, truly a prophet, when he is speaking of work done well. And he is nearly always tiresome about Beauty. Why, oh why, will people keep on trying to define words like Art and Beauty and God, words which represent deep emotional states in us, and are therefore incapable of definition? Why bother about it? “Beauty is absolute, loveliness is relative,” says Mr. Gill. Yes, yes, but really, what does it matter? Beauty is beauty, loveliness is loveliness, and if Mr. Gill thinks that Beauty ought really to have a subtly moral character, while loveliness is merely casual, or equivalent for prettiness — well, why not? But other people don’t care.

STUDY OF THOMAS HARDY

This non-fiction book can be found via [this link](#).

SURGERY FOR THE NOVEL-OR A BOMB

You talk about the future of the baby, little cherub, when he's in the cradle cooing; and it's a romantic, glamorous subject. You also talk, with the parson, about the future of the wicked old grandfather who is at last lying on his death-bed. And there again you have a subject for much vague emotion, chiefly of fear this time.

How do we feel about the novel? Do we bounce with joy thinking of the wonderful novelistic days ahead? Or do we grimly shake our heads and hope the wicked creature will be spared a little longer? Is the novel on his death-bed, old sinner? Or is he just toddling round his cradle, sweet little thing? Let us have another look at him before we decide this rather serious case.

There he is, the monster with many faces, many branches to him, like a tree: the modern novel. And he is almost dual, like Siamese twins. On the one hand, the pale-faced, high-browed, earnest novel, which you have to take seriously; on the other, that smirking, rather plausible hussy, the popular novel.

Let us just for the moment feel the pulses of *Ulysses* and of Miss Dorothy Richardson and M. Marcel Proust, on the earnest side of Briareus; on the other, the throb of *The Sheik* and Mr. Zane Grey, and, if you will, Mr. Robert Chambers and the rest. Is *Ulysses* in his cradle? Oh, dear! What a grey face! And *Pointed Roofs*, are they a gay little toy for nice little girls? And M. Proust? Alas! You can hear the death-rattle in their throats. They can hear it themselves. They are listening to it with acute interest, trying to discover whether the intervals are minor thirds or major fourths. Which is rather infantile, really.

So there you have the "serious" novel, dying in a very long-drawn-out fourteen-volume death-agony, and absorbedly, childishly interested in the phenomenon. "Did I feel a twinge in my little toe, or didn't I?" asks every character of Mr. Joyce or of Miss Richardson or M. Proust. Is my aura a blend of frankincense and orange pekoe and boot-blackening, or is it myrrh and bacon-fat and Shetland tweed? The audience round the death-bed gapes for the answer. And when, in a sepulchral tone, the answer comes at length, after hundreds of pages: "It is none of these, it is abysmal chloro-corymbasis," the audience quivers all over, and murmurs: "That's just how I feel myself."

Which is the dismal, long-drawn-out comedy of the death-bed of the serious novel. It is self-consciousness picked into such fine bits that the bits are most of them invisible, and you have to go by smell. Through thousands and thousands

of pages Mr. Joyce and Miss Richardson tear themselves to pieces, strip their smallest emotions to the finest threads, till you feel you are sewed inside a wool mattress that is being slowly shaken up, and you are turning to wool along with the rest of the woolliness.

It's awful. And it's childish. It really is childish, after a certain age, to be absorbedly self-conscious. One has to be self-conscious at seventeen: still a little self-conscious at twenty-seven; but if we are going it strong at thirty-seven, then it is a sign of arrested development, nothing else. And if it is still continuing at forty-seven, it is obvious senile precocity.

And there's the serious novel: senile-precocious. Absorbedly, childishly concerned with *what I am*. "I am this, I am that, I am the other. My reactions are such, and such, and such. And, oh, Lord, if I liked to watch myself closely enough, if I liked to analyse my feelings minutely, as I unbutton my gloves, instead of saying crudely I unbuttoned them, then I could go on to a million pages instead of a thousand. In fact, the more I come to think of it, it is gross, it is uncivilized bluntly to say: I unbuttoned my gloves. After all, the absorbing adventure of it! Which button did I begin with?" *etc.*

The people in the serious novels are so absorbedly concerned with themselves and what they feel and don't feel, and how they react to every mortal button; and their audience as frenziedly absorbed in the application of the author's discoveries to their own reactions: "That's me! That's exactly it! I'm just finding myself in this book!" Why, this is more than death-bed, it is almost post-mortem behaviour.

Some convulsion or cataclysm will have to get this serious novel out of its self-consciousness. The last great war made it worse. What's to be done? Because, poor thing, it's really young yet. The novel has never become fully adult. It has never quite grown to years of discretion. It has always youthfully hoped for the best, and felt rather sorry for itself on the last page. Which is just childish. The childishness has become very long-drawn-out. So very many adolescents who drag their adolescence on into their forties and their fifties and their sixties! There needs some sort of surgical operation, somewhere.

Then the popular novels — the *Sheiks* and *Babbitts* and Zane Grey novels. They are just as self-conscious, only they do have more illusions about themselves. The heroines do think they are lovelier, and more fascinating, and purer. The heroes do see themselves more heroic, braver, more chivalrous, more fetching. The mass of the populace "find themselves" in the popular novels. But nowadays it's a funny sort of self they find. A Sheik with a whip up his sleeve, and a heroine with weals on her back, but adored in the end, adored, the whip out of sight, but the weals still faintly visible.

It's a funny sort of self they discover in the popular novels. And the essential moral of *If Winter Comes*, for example, is so shaky. "The gooder you are, the worse it is for you, poor you, oh, poor you. Don't you be so blimey good, it's not good enough." Or *Babbitt*: "Go on, you make your pile, and then pretend you're too good for it. Put it over the rest of the grabbers that way. They're only pleased with themselves when they've made their pile. You go one better."

Always the same sort of baking-powder gas to make you rise: the soda counteracting the cream of tartar, and the tartar counteracted by the soda. Sheik heroines, duly whipped, wildly adored. Babbitts with solid fortunes, weeping from self-pity. Winter-Comes heroes as good as pie, hauled off to jail. *Moral*: Don't be too good, because you'll go to jail for it. *Moral*: Don't feel sorry for yourself till you've made your pile and don't need to feel sorry for yourself. *Moral*: Don't let him adore you till he's whipped you into it. Then you'll be partners in mild crime as well as in holy matrimony.

Which again is childish. Adolescence which *can't* grow up. Got into the self-conscious rut and going crazy, quite crazy in it. Carrying on their adolescence into middle age and old age, like the looney Cleopatra in *Dombey and Son*, murmuring "Rose-coloured curtains" with her dying breath.

The future of the novel? Poor old novel, it's in a rather dirty, messy tight corner. And it's either got to get over the wall or knock a hole through it. In other words, it's got to grow up. Put away childish things like: "Do I love the girl, or don't I?" — "Am I pure and sweet, or am I not?" — "Do I unbutton my right glove first, or my left?" — "Did my mother ruin my life by refusing to drink the cocoa which my bride had boiled for her?" These questions and their answers don't really interest me any more, though the world still goes sawing them over. I simply don't care for any of these things now, though I used to. The purely emotional and self-analytical stunts are played out in me. I'm finished. I'm deaf to the whole band. But I'm neither *blase* nor cynical, for all that. I'm just interested in something else.

Supposing a bomb were put under the whole scheme of things, what would we be after? What feelings do we want to carry through into the next epoch? What feelings will carry us through? What is the underlying impulse in us that will provide the motive power for a new state of things, when this democratic-industrial-lovey-dovey-darling-take-me-to-mamma state of things is bust?

What next? That's what interests me. "What now?" is no fun any more.

If you wish to look into the past for what-next books, you can go back to the Greek philosophers. Plato's Dialogues are queer little novels. It seems to me it was the greatest pity in the world, when philosophy and fiction got split. They used to be one, right from the days of myth. Then they went and parted, like a

nagging married couple, with Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas and that beastly Kant. So the novel went sloppy, and philosophy went abstract-dry. The two should come together again — in the novel.

You've got to find a new impulse for new things in mankind, and it's really fatal to find it through abstraction. No, no; philosophy and religion, they've both gone too far on the algebraical tack: Let X stand for sheep and Y for goats: then $X - Y$ equals Heaven, and $X + Y$ equals Earth, and $Y - X$ equals Hell. Thank you! But what coloured shirt does X have on?

The novel has a future. It's got to have the courage to tackle new propositions without using abstractions; it's got to present us with new, really new feelings, a whole line of new emotion, which will get us out of the emotional rut. Instead of snivelling about what is and has been, or inventing new sensations in the old line, it's got to break a way through, like a hole in the wall. And the public will scream and say it is sacrilege: because, of course, when you've been jammed for a long time in a tight corner, and you get really used to its stuffiness and its tightness, till you find it suffocatingly cozy; then, of course, you're horrified when you see a new glaring hole in what was your cosy wall. You're horrified. You back away from the cold stream of fresh air as if it were killing you. But gradually, first one and then another of the sheep filters through the gap, and finds a new world outside.

ART AND MORALITY

It is a part of the common claptrap that “art is immoral.” Behold, everywhere, artists running to put on jazz underwear, to demoralize themselves; or, at least, to *debourgeoiser* themselves.

For the bourgeois is supposed to be the fount of morality. Myself, I have found artists far more morally finicky.

Anyhow, what has a water-pitcher and six insecure apples on a crumpled tablecloth got to do with bourgeois morality? Yet I notice that most people, who have not learnt the trick of being arty, feel a real moral repugnance for a Cezanne still-life. They think it is not *right*.

For them, it isn't.

Yet how can they feel, as they do, that it is subtly *immoral*?

The very same design, if it was humanized, and the tablecloth was a draped nude and the water-pitcher a nude semi-draped, weeping over the draped one, would instantly become highly moral. Why?

Perhaps from painting better than from any other art we can realize the subtlety of the distinction between what is dumbly *felt* to be moral, and what is felt to be immoral. The moral instinct in the man in the street.

But instinct is largely habit. The moral instinct of the man in the street is largely an emotional defence of an old habit.

Yet what can there be in a Cezanne still-life to rouse the aggressive moral instinct of the man in the street? What ancient habit in man do these six apples and a water-pitcher succeed in hindering?

A water-pitcher that isn't so very much like a water-pitcher, apples that aren't very appley, and a tablecloth that's not particularly-much of a tablecloth. I could do better myself!

Probably! But then, why not dismiss the picture as a poor attempt? Whence this anger, this hostility? The derisive resentment?

Six apples, a pitcher, and a tablecloth can't suggest improper *behaviour*. They don't — not even to a Freudian. If they did, the man in the street would feel much more at home with them.

Where, then, does the immorality come in? Because come in it does.

Because of a very curious habit that civilized man has been forming down the whole course of civilization, and in which he is now hard-boiled. The slowly

formed habit of seeing just as the photographic camera sees.

You may say, the object reflected on the retina is *always* photographic. It may be. I doubt it. But whatever the image on the retina may be, it is rarely, even now, the photographic image of the object which is actually *taken in* by the man who sees the object. He does not, even now, see for himself. He sees what the Kodak has taught him to see. And man, try as he may, is not a Kodak.

When a child sees a man, what does the child *take in*, as an impression? Two eyes, a nose, a mouth of teeth, two straight legs, two straight arms: a sort of hieroglyph which the human child has used through all the ages to represent man. At least, the old hieroglyph was still in use when I was a child.

Is this what the child actually *sees* If you mean by seeing, consciously registering, then this is what the child actually sees. The photographic image may be there all right, upon the retina. But there the child leaves it: outside the door, as it were.

Through many ages, mankind has been striving to register the image on the retina *as it is*: no more glyphs and hieroglyphs. We'll have the real objective reality.

And we have succeeded. As soon as we succeed, the Kodak is invented, to prove our success. Could lies come out of a black box, into which nothing but light had entered? Impossible! It takes life to tell a lie.

Colour also, which primitive man cannot really *see*, is now seen by us, and fitted to the spectrum.

Eureka! We have seen it, with our own eyes.

When we see a red cow, we see a red cow. We are quite sure of it, because the unimpeachable Kodak sees exactly the same.

But supposing we had all of us been born blind, and had to get our image of a red cow by touching her, and smelling her, hearing her moo, and "feeling" her? Whatever should we think of her? Whatever sort of image should we have of her, in our dark minds? Something very different, surely!

As vision developed towards the Kodak, man's idea of himself developed towards the snapshot. Primitive man simply didn't know *what* he was: he was always half in the dark. But we have learned to see, and each of us has a complete Kodak idea of himself.

You take a snap of your sweetheart, in the field among the buttercups, smiling tenderly at the red cow with a calf, and dauntlessly offering a cabbage-leaf.

Awfully nice, and absolutely "real." There is your sweetheart, complete in herself, enjoying a sort of absolute objective reality: complete, perfect, all her surroundings contributing to her, incontestable. She is really a "picture."

This is the habit we have formed: of visualizing *everything*. Each man to

himself is a picture. That is, he is a complete little objective reality, complete in himself, existing by himself, absolutely, in the middle of the picture. All the rest is just setting, background. To every man, to every woman, the universe is just a setting to the absolute little picture of himself, herself.

This has been the development of the conscious ego in man, through several thousand years: since Greece first broke the spell of “darkness.” Man has learnt to *see* himself. So now, he *is* what he sees. He makes himself in his own image.

Previously, even in Egypt, men had not learnt to *see straight*. They fumbled in the dark, and didn’t quite know where they were, or what they were. Like men in a dark room, they only *felt* their own existence surging in the darkness of other creatures.

We, however, have learned to see ourselves for what we are, as the sun sees us. The Kodak bears witness. We see as the All-Seeing Eye sees, with the universal vision. And we *are* what is seen: each man to himself an identity, an isolated absolute, corresponding with a universe of isolated absolutes. A picture! A Kodak snap, in a universal film of snaps.

We have achieved universal vision. Even god could not see *differently* from what we see: only more extensively, like a telescope, or more intensively, like a microscope. But the same vision. A vision of images which are real, and each one limited to itself.

We behave as if we had got to the bottom of the sack, and seen the Platonic Idea with our own eyes, in all its photographically developed perfection, lying in the bottom of the sack of the universe. Our own ego!

The identifying of ourselves with the visual image of ourselves has become an instinct; the habit is already old. The picture of me, the me that is *seen*, is me.

As soon as we are supremely satisfied about it, somebody starts to upset us. Comes Cezanne with his pitcher and his apples, which not only are not life-like, but are a living lie. The Kodak will prove it.

The Kodak will take all sorts of snaps, misty, atmospheric, sun-dazed, dancing — all quite different. Yet the image is *the* image. There is only more or less sun, more or less vapour, more or less light and shade.

The All-Seeing Eye sees with every degree of intensity and in every possible kind of mood: Giotto, Titian, El Greco, Turner, all so different, yet all the true image in the All-Seeing Eye.

This Cezanne still-life, however, is *contrary* to the All-Seeing Eye. Apples, to the eye of God, could not look like that, nor could a tablecloth, nor could a pitcher. So, it is *wrong*.

Because man, since he grew out of a personal God, has taken over to himself all the attributes of the Personal Godhead. It is the all-seeing human eye which is

now the Eternal Eye.

And if apples don't *look* like that, in any light or circumstance, or under any mood, then they shouldn't be painted like that.

Oh, *la-la-la!* The apples *are* just like that, to me! cries Cezanne. They *are* like that, no matter what they look like.

Apples are always apples! says Vox Populi, Vox Dei.

Sometimes they're a sin, sometimes they're a knock on the head, sometimes they're a bellyache, sometimes they're part of a pie, sometimes they're sauce for the goose.

And you can't see a bellyache, neither can you see a sin, neither can you see a knock on the head. So paint the apple in these aspects, and you get — probably, or approximately — a Cezanne still-life.

What an apple looks like to an urchin, to a thrush, to a browsing cow, to Sir Isaac Newton, to a caterpillar, to a hornet, to a mackerel who finds one bobbing on the sea, I leave you to conjecture. But the All-Seeing must have mackerel's eyes, as well as man's.

And this is the immorality in Cezanne: he begins to see more than the All-Seeing Eye of humanity can possibly see, Kodak-wise. If you can see in the apple a bellyache and a knock on the head, and paint these in the image, among the prettiness, then it is the death of the Kodak and the movies, and must be immoral.

It's all very well talking about decoration and illustration, significant form, or tactile values, or plastique, or movement, or space-composition, or colour-mass relations, afterwards. You might as well force your guest to eat the menu card, at the end of the dinner.

What art has got to do, and will go on doing, is to reveal things in their different relationships. That is to say, you've got to see in the apple the bellyache, Sir Isaac's knock on the cranium, the vast, moist wall through which the insect bores to lay her eggs in the middle, and the untasted, unknown quality which Eve saw hanging on a tree. Add to this the glaucous glimpse that the mackerel gets as he comes to the surface, and Fantin-Latour's apples are no more to you than enamelled rissoles.

The true artist doesn't substitute immorality for morality. On the contrary, he *always* substitutes a finer morality for a grosser. And as soon as you see a finer morality, the grosser becomes relatively immoral.

The universe is like Father Ocean, a stream of all things slowly moving. We move, and the rock of ages moves. And since we move and move for ever, in no discernible direction, there is no centre to the movement, to us. To us, the centre shifts at every moment. Even the pole-star ceases to sit on the pole. *Allons!* there

is no road before us

I

There is nothing to do but to maintain a true relationship to the things we move with and amongst and against. The apple, like the moon, has still an unseen side. The movement of Ocean will turn it round to us, or us to it.

There is nothing man can do but maintain himself in true relationship to his contiguous universe. An ancient Rameses can sit in stone absolute, absolved from visual contact, deep in the silent ocean of sensual contact. Michelangelo's Adam can open his eyes for the first time, and see the old man in the skies, objectively. Turner can tumble into the open mouth of the objective universe of light, till we see nothing but his disappearing heels. As the stream carries him, each in his own relatedness, each one differently, so a man must go through life.

Each thing, living or unliving, streams in its own odd, intertwining flux, and nothing, not even man nor the God of man, nor anything that man has thought or felt or known, is fixed or abiding. All moves. And nothing is true, or good, or right, except in its own living relatedness to its own circumambient universe; to the things that are in the stream with it.

Design, in art, is a recognition of the relation between various things, various elements in the creative flux. You can't *invent* a design. You recognize it, in the fourth dimension. That is, with your blood and your bones, as well as with your eyes.

Egypt had a wonderful relation to a vast living universe, only dimly visual in its reality. The dim eye-vision and the powerful blood-feeling of the Negro African, even today, gives us strange images, which our eyes can hardly see, but which we know are surpassing. The big silent statue of Rameses is like a drop of water, hanging through the centuries in dark suspense, and never static. The African fetish-statues have no movement, visually represented. Yet one little motionless wooden figure stirs more than all the Parthenon frieze. It sits in the place where no Kodak can snap it.

As for us, we have our Kodak-vision, all in bits that group or jig. Like the movies, that jerk but never move. An endless shifting and rattling together of isolated images, "snaps," miles of them, all of them jiggling, but each one utterly incapable of movement or change, in itself. A kaleidoscope of inert images, mechanically shaken.

And this is our vaunted “consciousness,” made up, really, of inert visual images and little else: like the cinematograph.

Let Cezanne’s apples go rolling off the table for ever. They live by their own laws, in their own *ambiente*, and not by the laws of the Kodak — or of man. They are casually related to man. But to those apples, man is by no means the absolute.

A new relationship between ourselves and the universe means a new morality. Taste the unsteady apples of Cezanne, and the nailed-down apples of Fantin-Latour are apples of Sodom. If the *status quo* were paradise, it would indeed be a sin to taste the new apples; but since the *status quo* is much more prison than paradise, we can go ahead.

MORALITY AND THE NOVEL

The business of art is to reveal the relation between man and his circumambient universe, at the living moment. As mankind is always struggling in the toils of old relationships, art is always ahead of the “times,” which themselves are always far in the rear of the living moment.

When van Gogh paints sunflowers, he reveals, or achieves, the vivid relation between himself, as man, and the sunflower, as sunflower, at that quick moment of time. His painting does not represent the sunflower itself. We shall never know what the sunflower itself is. And the camera will *visualize* the sunflower far more perfectly than van Gogh can.

The vision on the canvas is a third thing, utterly intangible and inexplicable, the offspring of the sunflower itself and van Gogh himself. The vision on the canvas is for -ver incommensurable with the canvas, or the paint, or van Gogh as a human organism, or the sunflower as a botanical organism. You cannot weigh nor measure nor even describe the vision on the canvas. It exists, to tell the truth, only in the much-debated fourth dimension. In dimensional space it has no existence.

It is a revelation of the perfected relation, at a certain moment, between a man and a sunflower. It is neither man-in-the-mirror nor flower-in-the-mirror, neither is it above or below or across anything. It is in between everything, in the fourth dimension.

And this perfected relation between man and his circumambient universe is life itself, for mankind. It has the fourth-dimensional quality of eternity and perfection. Yet it is momentaneous.

Man and the sunflower both pass away from the moment, in the process of forming a new relationship. The relation between all things changes from day to day, in a subtle stealth of change. Hence art, which reveals or attains to another perfect relationship, will be for ever new.

At the same time, that which exists in the non-dimensional space of pure relationship is deathless, lifeless, and eternal. That is, it gives us the *feeling* of being beyond life or death. We say an Assyrian lion or an Egyptian hawk’s head “lives.” What we really mean is that it is beyond life, and therefore beyond death. It gives us that feeling. And there is something inside us which must also be beyond life and beyond death, since that “feeling” which we get from an Assyrian lion or an Egyptian hawk’s head is so infinitely precious to us. As the

evening star, that spark of pure relation between night and day, has been precious to man since time began.

If we think about it, we find that our life *consists in* this achieving of a pure relationship between ourselves and the living universe about us. This is how I “save my soul” by accomplishing a pure relationship between me and another person, me and other people, me and a nation, me and a race of men, me and the animals, me and the trees or flowers, me and the earth, me and the skies and sun and stars, me and the moon: an infinity of pure relations, big and little, like the stars of the sky: that makes our eternity, for each one of us, me and the timber I am sawing, the lines of force I follow; me and the dough I knead for bread, me and the very motion with which I write, me and the bit of gold I have got. This, if we knew it, is our life and our eternity: the subtle, perfected relation between me and my whole circumambient universe.

And morality is that delicate, for ever trembling and changing *balance* between me and my circumambient universe, which precedes and accompanies a true relatedness.

Now here we see the beauty and the great value of the novel. Philosophy, religion, science, they are all of them busy nailing things down, to get a stable equilibrium. Religion, with its nailed-down One God, who says *Thou shalt, Thou shan't*, and hammers home every time; philosophy, with its fixed ideas; science with its “laws”: they, all of them, all the time, want to nail us on to some tree or other.

But the novel, no. The novel is the highest example of subtle inter-relatedness that man has discovered. Everything is true in its own time, place, circumstance, and untrue outside of its own place, time, circumstance. If you try to nail anything down, in the novel, either it kills the novel, or the novel gets up and walks away with the nail.

Morality in the novel is the trembling instability of the balance. When the novelist puts his thumb in the scale, to pull down the balance to his own predilection, that is immorality.

The modern novel tends to become more and more immoral, as the novelist tends to press his thumb heavier and heavier in the pan: either on the side of love, pure love: or on the side of licentious “freedom.”

The novel is not, as a rule, immoral because the novelist has any dominant *idea*, or *purpose*. The immorality lies in the novelist’s helpless, unconscious predilection. Love is a great emotion. But if you set out to write a novel, and you yourself are in the throes of the great predilection for love, love as the supreme, the only emotion worth living for, then you will write an immoral novel.

Because no emotion is supreme, or exclusively worth living for. *All* emotions

go to the achieving of a living relationship between a human being and the other human being or creature or thing he becomes purely related to. All emotions, including love and hate, and rage and tenderness, go to the adjusting of the oscillating, un-established balance between two people who amount to anything. If the novelist puts his thumb in the pan, for love, tenderness, sweetness, peace, then he commits an immoral act: he *prevents* the possibility of a pure relationship, a pure relatedness, the only thing that matters: and he makes inevitable the horrible reaction, when he lets his thumb go, towards hate and brutality, cruelty and destruction.

Life is so made that opposites sway about a trembling centre of balance. The sins of the fathers are visited on the children. If the fathers drag down the balance on the side of love, peace, and production, then in the third or fourth generation the balance will swing back violently to hate, rage, and destruction. We must balance as we go.

And of all the art forms, the novel most of all demands the trembling and oscillating of the balance. The “sweet” novel is more falsified, and therefore more immoral, than the blood-and-thunder novel.

The same with the smart and smudgily cynical novel, which says it doesn’t matter what you do, because one thing is as good as another, anyhow, and prostitution is just as much “life” as anything else.

This misses the point entirely. A thing isn’t life just because somebody does it. This the artist ought to know perfectly well. The ordinary bank clerk buying himself a new straw hat isn’t “life” at all: it is just existence, quite all right, like everyday dinners: but not “life.”

By life, we mean something that gleams, that has the fourth-dimensional quality. If the bank clerk feels really piquant about his hat, if he establishes a lively relation with it, and goes out of the shop with the new straw on his head, a changed man, be-aureoled, then that is life.

The same with the prostitute. If a man establishes a living relation to her, if only for one moment, then it is life. But if it *doesn’t*: if it is just money and function, then it is not life, but sordidness, and a betrayal of living.

If a novel reveals true and vivid relationships, it is a moral work, no matter what the relationships may consist in. If the novelist *honours* the relationship in itself, it will be a great novel.

But there are so many relationships which are not real. When the man in *Crime and Punishment* murders the old woman for sixpence, although it is *actual* enough, it is never quite real. The balance between the murderer and the old woman is gone entirely; it is only a mess. It is actuality, but it is not “life,” in the living sense.

The popular novel, on the other hand, dishes up a rechauffe of old relationships: *If Winter Comes*. And old relationships dished up are likewise immoral. Even a magnificent painter like Raphael does nothing more than dress up in gorgeous new dresses relationships which have already been experienced. And this gives a gluttonous kind of pleasure to the mass: a voluptuousness, a wallowing. For centuries, men say of their voluptuously ideal woman: "She is a Raphael Madonna." And women are only just learning to take it as an insult.

A new relation, a new relatedness hurts somewhat in the attaining; and will always hurt. So life will always hurt. Because real voluptuousness lies in reacting old relationships, and at the best, getting an alcoholic sort of pleasure out of it, slightly depraving.

Each time we strive to a new relation, with anyone or anything, it is bound to hurt somewhat. Because it means the struggle with and the displacing of old connexions, and this is never pleasant. And moreover, between living things at least, an adjustment means also a fight, for each party, inevitably, must "seek its own" in the other, and be denied. When, in the two parties, each of them seeks his own, her own, absolutely, then it is a fight to the death. And this is true of the thing called "passion." On the other hand, when, of the two parties, one yields utterly to the other, this is called sacrifice, and it also means death. So the Constant Nymph died of her eighteen months of constancy.

It isn't the nature of nymphs to be constant. She should have been constant in her nymph-hood. And it is unmanly to accept sacrifices. He should have abided by his own manhood.

There is, however, the third thing, which is neither sacrifice nor fight to the death: when each seeks only the true relatedness to the other. Each must be true to himself, herself, his own manhood, her own womanhood, and let the relationship work out of itself. This means courage above all things: and then discipline. Courage to accept the life-thrust from within oneself, and from the other person. Discipline, not to exceed oneself any more than one can help. Courage, when one has exceeded oneself, to accept the fact and not whine about it.

Obviously, to read a really new novel will *always* hurt, to some extent. There will always be resistance. The same with new pictures, new music. You may judge of their reality by the fact that they do arouse a certain resistance, and compel, at length, a certain acquiescence.

The great relationship, for humanity, will always be the relation between man and woman. The relation between man and man, woman and woman, parent and child, will always be subsidiary.

And the relation between man and woman will change for ever, and will for

ever be the new central clue to human life. It is the *relation itself* which is the quick and the central clue to life, not the man, nor the woman, nor the children that result from the relationship, as a contingency.

It is no use thinking you can put a stamp on the relation between man and woman, to keep it in the *status quo*. You can't. You might as well try to put a stamp on the rainbow or the rain.

As for the bond of love, better put it off when it galls. It is an absurdity, to say that men and women *must love*. Men and women will be for ever subtly and changingly related to one another; no need to yoke them with any "bond" at all. The only morality is to have man true to his manhood, woman to her womanhood, and let the relationship form of itself, in all honour. For it is, to each, *life itself*.

If we are going to be moral, let us refrain from driving pegs through anything, either through each other or through the third thing, the relationship, which is for ever the ghost of both of us. Every sacrificial crucifixion needs five pegs, four short ones and a long one, each one an abomination. But when you try to nail down the relationship itself, and write over it *Love* instead of *This is the King of the Jews*, then you can go on putting in nails for ever. Even Jesus called it the Holy Ghost, to show you that you can't lay salt on its tail.

The novel is a perfect medium for revealing to us the changing rainbow of our living relationships. The novel can help us to live, as nothing else can: no didactic Scripture, anyhow. If the novelist keeps his thumb out of the pan.

But when the novelist *has* his thumb in the pan, the novel becomes an unparalleled perverter of men and women. To be compared only, perhaps, to that great mischief of sentimental hymns, like "Lead, Kindly Light," which have helped to rot the marrow in the bones of the present generation.

WHY THE NOVEL MATTERS

We have curious ideas of ourselves. We think of ourselves as a body with a spirit in it, or a body with a soul in it, or a body with a mind in it. *Mens sana in corpore sano*. The years drink up the wine, and at last throw the bottle away, the body, of course, being the bottle.

It is a funny sort of superstition. Why should I look at my hand, as it so cleverly writes these words, and decide that it is a mere nothing compared to the mind that directs it? Is there really any huge difference between my hand and my brain? Or my mind? My hand is alive, it flickers with a life of its own. It meets all the strange universe in touch, and learns a vast number of things, and knows a vast number of things. My hand, as it writes these words, slips gaily along, jumps like a grasshopper to dot an *i*, feels the table rather cold, gets a little bored if I write too long, has its own rudiments of thought, and is just as much *me* as is my brain, my mind, or my soul. Why should I imagine that there is a *me* which is more *me* than my hand is? Since my hand is absolutely alive, *me* alive.

Whereas, of course, as far as I am concerned, my pen isn't alive at all. My pen *isn't me* alive. *Me* alive ends at my finger-tips.

Whatever is *me* alive is *me*. Every tiny bit of my hands is alive, every little freckle and hair and fold of skin. And whatever is *me* alive is *me*. Only my finger-nails, those ten little weapons between *me* and an inanimate universe, they cross the mysterious Rubicon between *me* alive and things like my pen, which are not alive, in my own sense.

So, seeing my hand is all alive, and *me* alive, wherein is it just a bottle, or a jug, or a tin can, or a vessel of clay, or any of the rest of that nonsense? True, if I cut it it will bleed, like a can of cherries. But then the skin that is cut, and the veins that bleed, and the bones that should never be seen, they are all just as alive as the blood that flows. So the tin can business, or vessel of clay, is just bunk.

And that's what you learn, when you're a novelist. And that's what you are very liable *not* to know, if you're a parson, or a philosopher, or a scientist, or a stupid person. If you're a parson, you talk about souls in heaven. If you're a novelist, you know that paradise is in the palm of your hand, and on the end of your nose, because both are alive; and alive, and *man* alive, which is more than you can say, for certain, of paradise. Paradise is after life, and I for one am not keen on anything that is *after* life. If you are a philosopher, you talk about

infinity, and the pure spirit which knows all things. But if you pick up a novel, you realize immediately that infinity is just a handle to this self-same jug of a body of mine; while as for knowing, if I find my finger in the fire, I know that fire burns, with a knowledge so emphatic and vital, it leaves Nirvana merely a conjecture. Oh, yes, my body, me alive, *knows*, and knows intensely. And as for the sum of all knowledge, it can't be anything more than an accumulation of all the things I know in the body, and you, dear reader, know in the body.

These damned philosophers, they talk as if they suddenly went off in steam, and were then much more important than they are when they're in their shirts. It is nonsense. Every man, philosopher included, ends in his own finger-tips. That's the end of his man alive. As for the words and thoughts and sighs and aspirations that fly from him, they are so many tremulations in the ether, and not alive at all. But if the tremulations reach another man alive, he may receive them into his life, and his life may take on a new colour, like a chameleon creeping from a brown rock on to a green leaf. All very well and good. It still doesn't alter the fact that the so-called spirit, the message or teaching of the philosopher or the saint, isn't alive at all, but just a tremulation upon the ether, like a radio message. All this spirit stuff is just tremulations upon the ether. If you, as man alive, quiver from the tremulation of the ether into new life, that is because you are man alive, and you take sustenance and stimulation into your alive man in a myriad ways. But to say that the message, or the spirit which is communicated to you, is more important than your living body, is nonsense. You might as well say that the potato at dinner was more important.

Nothing is important but life. And for myself, I can absolutely see life nowhere but in the living. Life with a capital L is only man alive. Even a cabbage in the rain is cabbage alive. All things that are alive are amazing. And all things that are dead are subsidiary to the living. Better a live dog than a dead lion. But better a live lion than a live dog. *C'est la vie!*

It seems impossible to get a saint, or a philosopher, or a scientist, to stick to this simple truth. They are all, in a sense, renegades. The saint wishes to offer himself up as spiritual food for the multitude. Even Francis of Assisi turns himself into a sort of angel-cake, of which anyone may take a slice. But an angel-cake is rather less than man alive. And poor St. Francis might well apologize to his body, when he is dying: "Oh, pardon me, my body, the wrong I did you through the years!" It was no wafer, for others to eat.

The philosopher, on the other hand, because he can think, decides that nothing but thoughts matter. It is as if a rabbit, because he can make little pills, should decide that nothing but little pills matter. As for the scientist, he has absolutely no use for me so long as I am man alive. To the scientist, I am dead. He puts

under the microscope a bit of dead me, and calls it me. He takes me to pieces, and says first one piece, and then another piece, is me. My heart, my liver, my stomach have all been scientifically me, according to the scientist; and nowadays I am either a brain, or nerves, or glands, or something more up-to-date in the tissue line.

Now I absolutely flatly deny that I am a soul, or a body, or a mind, or an intelligence, or a brain, or a nervous system, or a bunch of glands, or any of the rest of these bits of me. The whole is greater than the part. And therefore, I, who am man alive, am greater than my soul, or spirit, or body, or mind, or consciousness, or anything else that is merely a part of me. I am a man, and alive. I am man alive, and as long as I can, I intend to go on being man alive.

For this reason I am a novelist. And being a novelist, I consider myself superior to the saint, the scientist, the philosopher, and the poet, who are all great masters of different bits of man alive, but never get the whole hog.

The novel is the one bright book of life. Books are not life. They are only tremulations on the ether. But the novel as a tremulation can make the whole man alive tremble. Which is more than poetry, philosophy, science, or any other book-tremulation can do.

The novel is the book of life. In this sense, the Bible is a great confused novel. You may say, it is about God. But it is really about man alive. Adam, Eve, Sarai, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Samuel, David, Bath-Sheba, Ruth, Esther, Solomon, Job, Isaiah, Jesus, Mark, Judas, Paul, Peter: what is it but man alive, from start to finish? Man alive, not mere bits. Even the Lord is another man alive, in a burning bush, throwing the tablets of stone at Moses's head.

I do hope you begin to get my idea, why the novel is supremely important, as a tremulation on the ether. Plato makes the perfect ideal being tremble in me. But that's only a bit of me. Perfection is only a bit, in the strange make-up of man alive. The Sermon on the Mount makes the selfless spirit of me quiver. But that, too, is only a bit of me. The Ten Commandments set the old Adam shivering in me, warning me that I am a thief and a murderer, unless I watch it. But even the old Adam is only a bit of me.

I very much like all these bits of me to be set trembling with life and the wisdom of life. But I do ask that the whole of me shall tremble in its wholeness, some time or other.

And this, of course, must happen in me, living.

But as far as it can happen from a communication, it can only happen when a whole novel communicates itself to me. The Bible — but *all* the Bible — and Homer, and Shakespeare: these are the supreme old novels. These are all things to all men. Which means that in their wholeness they affect the whole man alive,

which is the man himself, beyond any part of him. They set the whole tree trembling with a new access of life, they do not just stimulate growth in one direction.

I don't want to grow in any one direction any more. And, if I can help it, I don't want to stimulate anybody else into some particular direction. A particular direction ends in a *cul-de-sac*. We're in a *cul-de-sac* at present.

I don't believe in any dazzling revelation, or in any supreme Word. "The grass withereth, the flower fadeth, but the Word of the Lord shall stand for ever." That's the kind of stuff we've drugged ourselves with. As a matter of fact, the grass withereth, but comes up all the greener for that reason, after the rains. The flower fadeth, and therefore the bud opens. But the Word of the Lord, being man-uttered and a mere vibration on the ether, becomes staler and staler, more and more boring, till at last we turn a deaf ear and it ceases to exist, far more finally than any withered grass. It is grass that renews its youth like the eagle, not any Word.

We should ask for no absolutes, or absolute. Once and for all and for ever, let us have done with the ugly imperialism of any absolute. There is no absolute good, there is nothing absolutely right. All things flow and change, and even change is not absolute. The whole is a strange assembly of apparently incongruous parts, slipping past one another.

Me, man alive, I am a very curious assembly of incongruous parts. My yeal of today is oddly different from my yea! of yesterday. My tears of tomorrow will have nothing to do with my tears of a year ago. If the one I love remains unchanged and unchanging, I shall cease to love her. It is only because she changes and startles me into change and defies my inertia, and is herself staggered in her inertia by my changing, that I can continue to love her. If she stayed put, I might as well love the pepper-pot.

In all this change, I maintain a certain integrity. But woe betide me if I try to put my finger on it. If I say of myself, I am this, I am that! — then, if I stick to it, I turn into a stupid fixed thing like a lamp-post. I shall never know wherein lies my integrity, my individuality, my me. I *can* never know it. It is useless to talk about my ego. That only means that I have made up an *idea* of myself, and that I am trying to cut myself out to pattern. Which is no good. You can cut your cloth to fit your coat, but you can't clip bits off your living body, to trim it down to your idea. True, you can put yourself into ideal corsets. But even in ideal corsets, fashions change.

Let us learn from the novel. In the novel, the characters can do nothing but *live*. If they keep on being good, according to pattern, or bad, according to pattern, or even volatile, according to pattern, they cease to live, and the novel

falls dead. A character in a novel has got to live, or it is nothing.

We, likewise, in life have got to live, or we are nothing.

What we mean by living is, of course, just as indescribable as what we mean by *being*. Men get ideas into their heads, of what they mean by Life, and they proceed to cut life out to pattern. Sometimes they go into the desert to seek God, sometimes they go into the desert to seek cash, sometimes it is wine, woman, and song, and again it is water, political reform, and votes. You never know what it will be next: from killing your neighbour with hideous bombs and gas that tears the lungs, to supporting a Foundlings Home and preaching infinite Love, and being co-respondent in a divorce.

In all this wild welter, we need some sort of guide. It's no good inventing Thou Shalt Nots!

What then? Turn truly, honourably to the novel, and see wherein you are man alive, and wherein you are dead man in life. You may love a woman as man alive, and you may be making love to a woman as sheer dead man in life. You may eat your dinner as man alive, or as a mere masticating corpse. As man alive you may have a shot at your enemy. But as a ghastly simulacrum of life you may be firing bombs into men who are neither your enemies nor your friends, but just things you are dead to. Which is criminal, when the things happen to be alive.

To be alive, to be man alive, to be whole man alive: that is the point. And at its best, the novel, and the novel supremely, can help you. It can help you not to be dead man in life. So much of a man walks about dead and a carcass in the street and house, today: so much of women is merely dead. Like a pianoforte with half the notes mute.

But in the novel you can see, plainly, when the man goes dead, the woman goes inert. You can develop an instinct for life, if you will, instead of a theory of right and wrong, good and bad.

In life, there is right and wrong, good and bad, all the time. But what is right in one case is wrong in another. And in the novel you see one man becoming a corpse, because of his so-called goodness, another going dead because of his so-called wickedness. Right and wrong is an instinct: but an instinct of the whole consciousness in a man, bodily, mental, spiritual at once. And only in the novel are *all* things given full play, or at least, they may be given full play, when we realize that life itself, and not inert safety, is the reason for living. For out of the full play of all things emerges the only thing that is anything, the wholeness of a man, the wholeness of a woman, man alive, and live woman.

JOHN GALSWORTHY

Literary criticism can be no more than a reasoned account of the feeling produced upon the critic by the book he is criticizing. Criticism can never be a science: it is, in the first place, much too personal, and in the second, it is concerned with values that science ignores. The touchstone is emotion, not reason. We judge a work of art by its effect on our sincere and vital emotion, and nothing else. All the critical twiddle-twaddle about style and form, all this pseudo-scientific classifying and analysing of books in an imitation-botanical fashion, is mere impertinence and mostly dull jargon.

A critic must be able to *feel* the impact of a work of art in all its complexity and its force. To do so, he must be a man of force and complexity himself, which few critics are. A man with a paltry, impudent nature will never write anything but paltry, impudent criticism. And a man who is *emotionally* educated is rare as a phoenix. The more scholastically educated a man is generally, the more he is an emotional boor.

More than this, even an artistically and emotionally educated man must be a man of good faith. He must have the courage to admit what he feels, as well as the flexibility to *know* what he feels. So Sainte-Beuve remains, to me, a great critic. And a man like Macaulay, brilliant as he is, is unsatisfactory, because he is not honest. He is emotionally very alive, but he juggles his feelings. He prefers a fine effect to the sincere statement of the aesthetic and emotional reaction. He is quite intellectually capable of giving us a true account of what he feels. But not morally. A critic must be emotionally alive in every fibre, intellectually capable and skilful in essential logic, and then morally very honest.

Then it seems to me a good critic should give his reader a few standards to go by. He can change the standards for every new critical attempt, so long as he keeps good faith. But it is just as well to say: This and this is the standard we judge by.

Sainte-Beuve, on the whole, set up the standard of the "good man." He sincerely believed that the great man was essentially the good man in the widest range of human sympathy. This remained his universal standard. Pater's standard was the lonely philosopher of pure thought and pure aesthetic truth. Macaulay's standard was tainted by a political or democratic bias, he must be on the side of the weak. Gibbon tried a purely moral standard, individual morality.

Reading Galsworthy again — or most of him, for all is too much — one feels

oneself in need of a standard, some conception of a real man and a real woman, by which to judge all these Forsytes and their contemporaries. One cannot judge them by the standard of the good man, nor of the man of pure thought, nor of the treasured humble nor the moral individual. One would like to judge them by the standard of the human being, but what, after all, is that? This is the trouble with the Forsytes. They are human enough, since anything in humanity is human, just as anything in nature is natural. Yet not one of them seems to be a really vivid human being. They are social beings. And what do we mean by that?

It remains to define, just for the purpose of this criticism, what we mean by a social being as distinct from a human being. The necessity arises from the sense of dissatisfaction which these Forsytes give us. Why can't we admit them as human beings? Why can't we have them in the same category as Sairey Gamp for example, who is satirically conceived, or of Jane Austen's people, who are social enough? We can accept Mrs. Gamp or Jane Austen's characters or even George Meredith's Egoist as human beings in the same category as ourselves. Whence arises this repulsion from the Forsytes, this refusal, this emotional refusal, to have them identified with our common humanity? Why do we feel so instinctively that they are inferiors?

It is because they seem to us to have lost caste as human beings, and to have sunk to the level of the social being, that peculiar creature that takes the place in our civilization of the slave in the old civilizations. The human individual is a queer animal, always changing. But the fatal change today is the collapse from the psychology of the free human individual into the psychology of the social being, just as the fatal change in the past was a collapse from the freeman's psyche to the psyche of the slave. The free moral and the slave moral, the human moral and the social moral: these are the abiding antitheses.

While a man remains a man, a true human individual, there is at the core of him a certain innocence or naivety which defies all analysis, and which you cannot bargain with, you can only deal with it in good faith from your own corresponding innocence or naivete. This does not mean that the human being is nothing but naive or innocent. He is Mr. Worldly Wiseman also to his own degree. But in his essential core he is naive, and money does not touch him. Money, of course, with every man living goes a long way. With the alive human being it may go as far as his penultimate feeling. But in the last naked him it does not enter.

With the social being it goes right through the centre and is the controlling principle no matter how much he may pretend, nor how much bluff he may put up. He may give away all he has to the poor and still reveal himself as a social being swayed finally and helplessly by the money-sway, and by the social moral,

which is inhuman.

It seems to me that when the human being becomes too much divided between his subjective and objective consciousness, at last something splits in him and he becomes a social being. When he becomes too much aware of objective reality, and of his own isolation in the face of a universe of objective reality, the core of his identity splits, his nucleus collapses, his innocence or his naivete perishes, and he becomes only a subjective-objective reality, a divided thing hinged together but not strictly individual.

While a man remains a man, before he falls and becomes a social individual, he innocently feels himself altogether within the great continuum of the universe. He is not divided nor cut off. Men may be against him, the tide of affairs may be rising to sweep him away. But he is one with the living continuum of the universe. From this he cannot be swept away. Hamlet and Lear feel it, as does Oedipus or Phaedra. It is the last and deepest feeling that is in a man while he remains a man. It is there the same in a deist like Voltaire or a scientist like Darwin: it is there, imperishable, in every great man: in Napoleon the same, till material things piled too much on him and he lost it and was doomed. It is the essential innocence and naivete of the human being, the sense of being at one with the great universe-continuum of space-time-life, which is vivid in a great man, and a pure nuclear spark in every man who is still free.

But if man loses his mysterious naive assurance, which is his innocence; if he gives *too* much importance to the external objective reality and so collapses in his natural innocent pride, then he becomes obsessed with the idea of objectives or material assurance; he wants to *insure* himself, and perhaps everybody else: universal insurance. The impulse rests on fear. Once the individual loses his naive at-oneness with the living universe he falls into a state of fear and tries to insure himself with wealth. If he is an altruist he wants to insure everybody, and feels it is the tragedy of tragedies if this can't be done. But the whole necessity for thus materially insuring oneself with wealth, money, arises from the state of fear into which a man falls who has lost his at-oneness with the living universe, lost his peculiar nuclear innocence and fallen into fragmentariness. Money, material salvation is the only salvation. What is salvation is God. Hence money is God. The social being may rebel even against this god, as do many of Galsworthy's characters. But that does not give them back their innocence. They are only anti-materialists instead of positive materialists. And the anti-materialist is a social being just the same as the materialist, neither more nor less. He is castrated just the same, made a neuter by having lost his innocence, the bright little individual spark of his at-oneness.

When one reads Mr. Galsworthy's books it seems as if there were not on earth

one single human individual. They are all these social beings, positive and negative. There is not a free soul among them, not even Pendyce, or June Forsyte. If money does not actively determine their being, it does negatively. Money, or property, which is the same thing. Mrs. Pendyce, lovable as she is, is utterly circumscribed by property. Ultimately, she is not lovable at all, she is part of the fraud, she is prostituted to property. And there is nobody else. Old Jolyon is merely a sentimental materialist. Only for one moment do we see a man, and that is the road-sweeper in *Fraternity* after he comes out of prison and covers his face. But even *his* manhood has to be explained away by a wound in the head: an abnormality.

Now it looks as if Mr. Galsworthy set out to make that very point: to show that the Forsytes were not full human individuals, but social beings fallen to a lower level of life. They have lost that bit of free manhood and free womanhood which makes men and women. *The Man of Property* has the elements of a very great novel, a very great satire. It sets out to reveal the social being in all his strength and inferiority. But the author has not the courage to carry it through. The greatness of the book rests in its new and sincere and amazingly profound satire. It is the ultimate satire on modern humanity, and done from the inside, with really consummate skill and sincere creative passion, something quite new. It seems to be a real effort to show up the social being in all his weirdness. And then it fizzles out.

Then, in the love affair of Irene and Bosinney, and in the sentimentalizing of old Jolyon Forsyte, the thing is fatally blemished. Galsworthy had not quite enough of the superb courage of his satire. He faltered, and gave in to the Forsytes. It is a thousand pities. He might have been the surgeon the modern soul needs so badly, to cut away the proud flesh of our Forsytes from the living body of men who are fully alive. Instead, he put down the knife and laid on a soft, sentimental poultice, and helped to make the corruption worse.

Satire exists for the very purpose of killing the social being, showing him what an inferior he is and, with all his parade of social honesty, how subtly and corruptly debased. Dishonest to life, dishonest to the living universe on which he is parasitic as a louse. By ridiculing the social being, the satirist helps the true individual, the real human being, to rise to his feet again and go on with the battle. For it is always a battle, and always will be.

Not that the majority are necessarily social beings. But the majority is only *conscious* socially: humanly, mankind is helpless and unconscious, unaware even of the thing most precious to any human being, that core of manhood or womanhood, naive, innocent at-oneness with the living universe-continuum, which alone makes a man individual and, as an individual, *essentially* happy,

even if he be driven mad like Lear. Lear was essentially happy, even in his greatest misery. A happiness from which Goneril and Regan were excluded as lice and bugs are excluded from happiness, being social beings, and, as such, parasites, fallen from true freedom and independence.

But the tragedy today is that men are only materially and socially conscious. They are unconscious of their own manhood, and so they let it be destroyed. Out of free men we produce social beings by the thousand every week.

The Forsytes are all parasites, and Mr. Galsworthy set out, in a really magnificent attempt, to let us see it. They are parasites upon the thought, the feelings, the whole body of life of really living individuals who have gone before them and who exist alongside with them. All they can do, having no individual life of their own, is out of fear to rake together property, and to feed upon the life that has been given by living men to mankind. They have no life, and so they live for ever, in perpetual fear of death, accumulating property to ward off death. They can keep up convention, but they cannot carry on a tradition. There is a tremendous difference between the two things. To carry on a tradition you must add something to the tradition. But to keep up a convention needs only the monotonous persistency of a parasite, the endless endurance of the craven, those who fear life because they are not alive, and who cannot die because they cannot live — the social beings.

As far as I can see, there is nothing but Forsyte in Galsworthy's books: Forsyte positive or Forsyte negative, Forsyte successful or Forsyte *manque*. That is, every single character is determined by money: either the getting it, or the having it, or the wanting it, or the utter lacking it. Getting it are the Forsytes as such; having it are the Pendyces and patricians and Hilarys and Biancas and all that lot; wanting it are the Irenes and Bosinneys and young Jolyons; and utterly lacking it are all the charwomen and squalid poor who from the background — the shadows of the "having" ones, as old Mr. Stone says. This is the whole Galsworthy gamut, all absolutely determined by money, and not an individual soul among them. They are all fallen, all social beings, a castrated lot.

Perhaps the overwhelming numerousness of the Forsytes frightened Mr. Galsworthy from utterly damning them. Or perhaps it was something else, something more serious in him. Perhaps it was his utter failure to see what you were when you *weren't* a Forsyte. What was there *besides* Forsytes in all the wide human world? Mr. Galsworthy looked, and found nothing. Strictly and truly, after his frightened search, he had found nothing. But he came back with Irene and Bosinney, and offered us that. Here! he seems to say. Here is the anti-Forsyte! Here! Here you have it! Love! Pa-assion! PASSION.

We look at this love, this PASSION, and we see nothing but a doggish

amorousness and a sort of anti-Forsyitism. They are the *anti* half of the show. Runaway dogs of these Forsytes, running in the back garden and furtively and ignominiously copulating — this is the effect, on me, of Mr. Galsworthy's grand love affairs, Dark Flowers or Bosinneys, or Apple Trees or George Pendyce — whatever they be. About every one of them something ignominious and doggish, like dogs copulating in the street, and looking round to see if the Forsytes are watching.

Alas! this is the Forsyte trying to be freely sensual. He can't do it; he's lost it. He can only be doggishly messy. Bosinney is not only a Forsyte, but an anti-Forsyte, with a vast grudge against property. And the thing a man has a vast grudge against is the man's determinant. Bosinney is a property hound, but he has run away from the kennels, or been born outside the kennels, so he is a rebel. So he goes sniffing round the property bitches, to get even with the successful property hounds that way. One cannot help preferring Soames Forsyte, in a choice of evils.

Just as one prefers June or any of the old aunts to Irene. Irene seems to me a sneaking, creeping, spiteful sort of bitch, an anti-Forsyte, absolutely living off the Forsytes — yes, to the very end; absolutely living off their money and trying to do them dirt. She is like Bosinney, a property mongrel doing dirt in the property kennels. But she is a real property prostitute, like the little model in *Fraternity*. Only she is *anti!* It is a type recurring again and again in Galsworthy: the parasite upon the parasites, "Big fleas have little fleas, etc." And Bosinney and Irene, as well as the vagabond in *The Island Pharisees*, are among the little fleas. And as a tramp loves his own vermin, so the Forsytes and the Hilarys love these, their own particular body parasites, their *antis*.

It is when he comes to sex that Mr. Galsworthy collapses finally. He becomes nastily sentimental. He wants to make sex important, and he only makes it repulsive. Sentimentalism is the working off on yourself of feelings you haven't really got. We all *want* to have certain feelings: feelings of love, of passionate sex, of kindness. and so forth. Very few people really feel love, or sex passion, or kindness, or anything else that goes at all deep. So the mass just fake these feelings inside themselves. Faked feelings! The world is all gummy with them. They are better than real feelings, because you can spit them out when you brush your teeth; and then tomorrow you can fake them afresh.

Shelton, in *The Island Pharisees*, is the first of Mr. Galsworthy's lovers, and he might as well be the last. He is almost comical. All we know of his passion for Antonia is that he feels at the beginning a "hunger" for her, as if she were a beefsteak. And towards the end he once kisses her, and expects her, no doubt, to fall instantly at his feet overwhelmed. He never for a second feels a moment of

gentle sympathy with her. She is class-bound, but she doesn't seem to have been inhuman. The inhuman one was the lover. He can gloat over her in the distance, as if she were a dish of pig's trotters, *pieds truffes*: she can be an angelic *vision* to him a little way off, but when the poor thing has to be just a rather ordinary middle-class girl to him, quite near, he hates her with a comical, rancorous hate. It is most queer. He is helplessly *anti*. He hates her for even existing as a woman of her own class, for even having her own existence. Apparently she should just be a floating female sex-organ, hovering round to satisfy his little "hungers," and then *basta*. Anything of the real meaning of sex, which involves the whole of a human being, never occurs to him. It is a function, and the female is a sort of sexual appliance, no more.

And so we have it again and again, on this low and bastard level, all the human correspondence lacking. The sexual level is extraordinarily low, like dogs. The Galsworthy heroes are all weirdly in love with themselves, when we know them better, afflicted with chronic narcissism. They know just three types of women: the Pendyce mother, prostitute to property; the Irene, the essential *anti* prostitute, the floating, flaunting female organ; and the social woman, the mere lady. All three are loved and hated in turn by the recurrent heroes. But it is all on the debased level of property, positive or *anti*. It is all a doggy form of prostitution. Be quick and have done.

One of the funniest stories is *The Apple Tree*. The young man finds, at a lonely Devon farm, a little Welsh farm-girl who, being a Celt and not a Saxon, at once falls for the Galsworthian hero. This young gentleman, in the throes of narcissistic love for his marvellous self, falls for the maid because she has fallen so utterly and abjectly for him. She doesn't call him "My King," not being Wellsian; she only says: "I can't live away from you. Do what you like with me. Only let me come with you!" The proper prostitutional announcement!

For this, of course, a narcissistic young gentleman just down from Oxford falls at once. Ensues a grand pa-assion. He goes to buy her a proper frock to be carried away in, meets a college friend with a young lady sister, has jam for tea and stays the night, and the grand pa-assion has died a natural death by the time he spreads the marmalade on his bread. He has returned to his own class, and nothing else exists. He marries the young lady, true to his class. But to fill the cup of his vanity, the maid drowns herself. It is funny that maids only seem to do it for these narcissistic young gentlemen who, looking in the pool for their own image, desire the added satisfaction of seeing the face of drowned Ophelia there as well; saving them the necessity of taking the narcissus plunge in person. We have gone one better than the myth. Narcissus, in Mr. Galsworthy, doesn't drown himself. He asks Ophelia, or Megan, kindly to drown herself instead. And

in this fiction she actually does. And he feels so *wonderful* about it!

Mr. Galsworthy's treatment of passion is really rather shameful.

The whole thing is doggy to a degree. The man has a temporary "hunger"; he is "on the heat" as they say of dogs. The heat passes. It's done. Trot away, if you're not tangled. Trot off, looking shamefacedly over your shoulder. People have been watching! Damn them! But never mind, it'll blow over. Thank God, the bitch is trotting in the other direction. She'll soon have another trail of dogs after her. That'll wipe out my traces. Good for that! Next time I'll get properly married and do my doggishness in my own house.

With the fall of the individual, sex falls into a dog's heat. Oh, if only Mr. Galsworthy had had the strength to satirize this too, instead of pouring a sauce of sentimental savouriness over it. Of course, if he had done so he would never have been a popular writer, but he would have been a great one.

However, he chose to sentimentalize and glorify the most doggy sort of sex. Setting out to satirize the Forsytes, he glorifies the *anti*, who is one worse. While the individual remains real and unfallen, sex remains a vital and supremely important thing. But once you have the fall into social beings, sex becomes disgusting, like dogs on the heat. Dogs are social beings, with no true canine individuality. Wolves and foxes don't copulate on the pavement. Their sex is wild and in act utterly private. Howls you may hear, but you will never see anything. But the dog is tame — and he makes excrement and he copulates on the pavement, as if to spite you. He is the Forsyte *anti*.

The same with human beings. Once they become tame they become, in a measure, exhibitionists, as if to spite everything. They have no real feelings of their own. Unless somebody "catches them at it" they don't really feel they've felt anything at all. And this is how the mob is today. It is Forsyte *anti*. It is the social being spiting society.

Oh, if only Mr. Galsworthy had satirized *this* side of Forsytism, the anti-Forsyte posturing of the "rebel," the narcissus and the exhibitionist, the dogs copulating on the pavement! Instead of that, he glorified it, to the eternal shame of English literature.

The satire, which in *The Man of Property* really had a certain noble touch, soon fizzles out, and we get that series of Galsworthian "rebels" who are, like all the rest of the modern middle-class rebels, not in rebellion at all. They are merely social beings behaving in an anti-social manner. They worship their own class, but they pretend to go one better and sneer at it. They are Forsyte *antis*, feeling snobbish about snobbery. Nevertheless, they want to attract attention and make money. That's why they are *anti*. It is the vicious circle of Forsytism. Money means more to them than it does to a Soames Forsyte, so they pretend to

go one better, and despise it, but they will do anything to have it — things which Soames Forsyte would not have done.

If there is one thing more repulsive than the social being positive, it is the social being negative, the mere *anti*. In the great debacle of decency this gentleman is the most indecent. In a subtle way Bosinney and Irene are more dishonest and more indecent than Soames and Winifred, but they are *anti*, so they are glorified. It is pretty sickening.

The introduction to *The Island Pharisees* explains the whole show: “Each man born into the world is born to go a journey, and for the most part he is born on the high road. ... As soon as he can toddle, he moves, by the queer instinct we call the love of life, along this road: ... his fathers went this way before him, they made this road for him to tread, and, when they bred him, passed into his fibre the love of doing things as they themselves had done them. So he walks on and on. . . . Suddenly, one day, without intending to, he notices a path or opening in the hedge, leading to right or left, and he stands looking at the undiscovered. After that he stops at all the openings in the hedge; one day, with a beating heart, he tries one. And this is where the fun begins.” — Nine out of ten get back to the broad road again, and sidetrack no more. They snuggle down comfortably in the next inn, and think where they might have been. “But the poor silly tenth is faring on. Nine times out of ten he goes down in a bog; the undiscovered has engulfed him.” But the tenth time he gets across, and a new road is opened to mankind.

It is a class-bound consciousness, or at least a hopeless social consciousness which sees life as a high road between two hedges. And the only way out is gaps in the hedge and excursions into naughtiness! These little *anti* excursions, from which the wayfarer slinks back to solid comfort nine times out of ten; an odd one goes down in a bog; and a very rare one finds a way across and opens out a new road.

In Mr. Galsworthy’s novels we see the nine, the ninety-nine, the nine hundred and ninety-nine slinking back to solid comfort; we see an odd Bosinney go under a bus, because he hadn’t guts enough to do something else, the poor *anti!* but that rare figure sidetracking into the unknown we do *not* see. Because, as a matter of fact, the whole figure is faulty at that point. If life is a great highway, then it must forge on ahead into the unknown. Sidetracking gets nowhere. That is mere *anti*. The tip of the road is always unfinished, in the wilderness. If it comes to a precipice and a canon — well, then, there is need for some exploring. But we see Mr. Galsworthy, after *The Country House*, very safe on the old highway, very secure in comfort, wealth, and renown. He at least has gone down in no bog, nor lost himself striking new paths. The hedges nowadays are ragged

with gaps, anybody who likes strays out on the little trips of “unconventions.” But the Forsyte road has not moved on at all. It has only become dishevelled and sordid with excursionists doing the *anti* tricks and being “unconventional,” and leaving tin cans behind.

In the three early novels, *The Island Pharisees*, *The Man of Property*, *Fraternity*, it looked as if Mr. Galsworthy might break through the blind end of the highway with the dynamite of satire, and help us out on to a new lap. But the sex ingredient of his dynamite was damp and muzzy, the explosion gradually fizzled off in sentimentality, and we are left in a worse state than before.

The later novels are purely commercial, and, if it had not been for the early novels, of no importance. They are popular, they sell well, and there’s the end of them. They contain the explosive powder of the first books in minute quantities, fizzling as silly squibs. When you arrive at *To Let*, and the end, at least the *promised* end, of the Forsytes, what have you? Just money! Money, money, money and a certain snobbish silliness, and many more *anti* tricks and poses. Nothing else. The story is feeble, the characters have no blood and bones, the emotions are faked, faked, faked. It is one great fake. Not necessarily of Mr. Galsworthy. The characters fake their own emotions. But that doesn’t help us. And if you look closely at the characters, the meanness and low-level vulgarity are very distasteful. You have all the Forsyte meanness, with none of the energy. Jolyon and Irene are meaner and more treacherous to their son than the older Forsytes were to theirs. The young ones are of a limited, mechanical, vulgar egoism far surpassing that of Swithin or James, their ancestors. There is in it all a vulgar sense of being rich, and therefore we do as we like: an utter incapacity for anything like *true* feeling, especially in the women, Fleur, Irene, Annette, June: a glib crassness, a youthful spontaneity which is just impertinence and lack of feeling; and all the time, a creeping, “having” sort of vulgarity of money and self-will, money and self-will, so that we wonder sometimes if Mr. Galsworthy is not treating his public in real bad faith, and being cynical and rancorous under his rainbow sentimentalism.

Fleur he destroys in one word: she is “having.” It is perfectly true. We don’t blame the young Jon for clearing out. Irene he destroys in a phrase out of Fleur’s mouth to June: “Didn’t she spoil your life too?”-and it is precisely what she did. Sneaking and mean, Irene prevented June from getting her lover. Sneaking and mean, she prevents Fleur. She is the bitch in the manger. She is the sneaking *anti*. Irene, the most beautiful woman on earth! And Mr. Galsworthy, with the cynicism of a successful old sentimentalist, turns it off by making June say: “Nobody can spoil a life, my dear. That’s nonsense. Things happen, but we bob up.”

This is the final philosophy of it all. “Things happen, but we bob up.” Very well, then, write the book in that key, the keynote of a frank old cynic. There’s no point in sentimentalizing it and being a sneaking old cynic. Why pour out masses of feelings that pretend to be genuine and then turn it all off with: “Things happen, but we bob up”?

It is quite true, things happen, and we bob up. If we are vulgar sentimentalists, we bob up just the same, so nothing has happened and nothing can happen. All is vulgarity. But it pays. There is money in it.

Vulgarity pays, and cheap cynicism smothered in sentimentalism pays better than anything else. Because nothing *can* happen to the degraded social being. So let’s pretend it does, and then bob up!

It is time somebody began to spit out the jam of sentimentalism, at least, which smothers the “bobbing-up” philosophy. It is time we turned a straight light on this horde of rats, these younger Forsyte sentimentalists whose name is legion. It is sentimentalism which is stifling us. Let the social beings keep on bobbing up while ever they can. But it is time an effort was made to turn a hosepipe on the sentimentalism they ooze over everything. The world is one sticky mess, in which the little Forsytes indeed may keep on bobbing still, but in which an honest feeling can’t breathe.

But if the sticky mess gets much deeper, even the little Forsytes won’t be able to bob up any more. They’ll be smothered in their own slime along with everything else. Which is a comfort.

INTRODUCTION TO THESE PAINTINGS

The reason the English produce so few painters is not that they are, as a nation, devoid of a genuine feeling for visual art: though to look at their productions, and to look at the mess which has been made of actual English landscape, one might really conclude that they were, and leave it at that. But it is not the fault of the God that made them. They are made with aesthetic sensibilities the same as anybody else. The fault lies in the English attitude to life.

The English, and the Americans following them, are paralysed by fear. That is what thwarts and distorts the Anglo-Saxon existence, this paralysis of fear. It thwarts life, it distorts vision, and it strangles impulse: this overmastering fear. And fear of what, in heaven's name? What is the Anglo-Saxon stock today so petrified with fear about? We have to answer that before we can understand the English failure in the visual arts: for, on the whole, it is a failure.

It is an old fear, which seemed to dig in to the English soul at the time of the Renaissance. Nothing could be more lovely and fearless than Chaucer. But already Shakespeare is morbid with fear, fear of consequences. That is the strange phenomenon of the English Renaissance: this mystic terror of the consequences, the consequences of action. Italy, too, had her reaction, at the end of the sixteenth century, and showed a similar fear. But not so profound, so overmastering. Aretino was anything but timorous: he was bold as any Renaissance novelist, and went one better.

What appeared to take full grip on the northern consciousness at the end of the sixteenth century was a terror, almost a horror of sexual life. The Elizabethans, grand as we think them, started it. The real "mortal coil" in Hamlet is all sexual; the young man's horror of his mother's incest, sex carrying with it a wild and nameless terror which, it seems to me, it had never carried before. Oedipus and Hamlet are very different in this respect. In Oedipus there is no recoil in horror from sex itself: Greek drama never shows us that. The horror, when it is present in Greek tragedy, is against *destiny*, man caught in the toils of destiny. But with the Renaissance itself, particularly in England, the horror is sexual. Orestes is dogged by destiny and driven mad by the Eumenides. But Hamlet is overpowered by horrible revulsion from his physical connexion with his mother, which makes him recoil in similar revulsion from Ophelia, and almost from his father, even as a ghost. He is horrified at the merest suggestion of physical connexion, as if it were an unspeakable taint.

This, no doubt, is all in the course of the growth of the “spiritual-mental” consciousness, at the expense of the instinctive-intuitive consciousness. Man came to have his own body in horror, especially in its sexual implications: and so he began to suppress with all his might his instinctive-intuitive consciousness, which is so radical, so physical, so sexual. Cavalier poetry, love poetry, is already devoid of body. Donne, after the exacerbated revulsion-attraction excitement of his earlier poetry, becomes a divine. “Drink to me only with thine eyes,” sings the cavalier: an expression incredible in Chaucer’s poetry. “I could not love thee, dear, so much, loved I not honour more,” sings the Cavalier lover. In Chaucer the “dear” and the “honour” would have been more or less identical.

But with the Elizabethans the grand rupture had started in the human consciousness, the mental consciousness recoiling in violence away from the physical, instinctive-intuitive. To the Restoration dramatist sex is, on the whole, a dirty business, but they more or less glory in the dirt. Fielding tries in vain to defend the Old Adam. Richardson with his calico purity and his underclothing excitements sweeps all before him. Swift goes mad with sex and excrement revulsion. Sterne flings a bit of the same excrement humorously around. And physical consciousness gives a last song in Burns, then is dead. Wordsworth, Keats, Shelley, the Brontes, all are post-mortem poets. The essential instinctive-intuitive body is dead, and worshipped in death — all very unhealthy. Till Swinburne and Oscar Wilde try to start a revival from the mental field. Swinburne’s “white thighs” are purely mental.

Now, in England — and following, in America — the physical self was not just fig-leaved over or suppressed in public, as was the case in Italy and on most of the Continent. In England it excited a strange horror and terror. And this extra morbidity came, I believe, from the great shock of syphilis and the realization of the consequences of the disease. Wherever syphilis, or “pox,” came from, it was fairly new in England at the end of the fifteenth century. But by the end of the sixteenth, its ravages were obvious, and the shock of them had just penetrated the thoughtful and the imaginative consciousness. The royal families of England and Scotland were syphilitic; Edward VI and Elizabeth born with the inherited consequences of the disease. Edward VI died of it, while still a boy. Mary died childless and in utter depression. Elizabeth had no eyebrows, her teeth went rotten; she must have felt herself, somewhere, utterly unfit for marriage, poor thing. That was the grisly horror that lay behind the glory of Queen Bess. And so the Tudors died out: and another syphilitic-born unfortunate came to the throne, in the person of James I. Mary Queen of Scots had no more luck than the Tudors, apparently. Apparently Darnley was reeking with the pox, though probably at first she did not know it. But when the Archbishop of St. Andrews

was christening her baby James, afterwards James I of England, the old clergyman was so dripping with pox that she was terrified lest he should give it to the infant. And she need not have troubled, for the wretched infant had brought it into the world with him, from that fool Darnley. So James I of England slobbered and shambled, and was the wisest fool in Christendom, and the Stuarts likewise died out, the stock enfeebled by the disease.

With the royal families of England and Scotland in this condition, we can judge what the noble houses, the nobility of both nations, given to free living and promiscuous pleasure, must have been like. England traded with the East and with America; England, unknowing, had opened her doors to the disease. The English aristocracy travelled and had curious taste in loves. And pox entered the blood of the nation, particularly of the upper classes, who had more chance of infection. And after it had entered the blood, it entered the consciousness, and hit the vital imagination.

It is possible that the effects of syphilis and the conscious realization of its consequences gave a great blow also to the Spanish psyche, precisely at this period. And it is possible that Italian society, which was on the whole so untravelled, had no connexion with America, and was so privately self-contained, suffered less from the disease. Someone ought to make a thorough study of the effects of "pox" on the minds and the emotions and imaginations of the various nations of Europe, at about the time of our Elizabethans.

The apparent effect on the Elizabethans and the Restoration wits is curious. They appear to take the whole thing as a joke. The common oath, "Pox on you!" was almost funny. But how common the oath was! How the word "pox" was in every mind and in every mouth. It is one of the words that haunt Elizabethan speech. Taken very manly, with a great deal of Falstaffian bluff, treated as a huge joke! Pox! Why, he's got the pox! Ha-ha! What's he been after?

There is just the same attitude among the common run of men today with regard to the minor sexual diseases. Syphilis is no longer regarded as a joke, according to my experience. The very word itself frightens men. You could joke with the word "pox." You can't joke with the word "syphilis." The change of word has killed the joke. But men still joke about *clap!* which is a minor sexual disease. They pretend to think it manly, even, to have the disease, or to have had it. "What! never had a shot of clap!" cries one gentleman to another. "Why, where have you been all your life?" If we change the word and insisted on "gonorrhoea," or whatever it is, in place of "clap," the joke would die. And anyhow I have had young men come to me green and quaking, afraid they've caught a "shot of clap."

Now, in spite of all the Elizabethan jokes about pox, pox was no joke to them.

A joke may be a very brave way of meeting a calamity, or it may be a very cowardly way. Myself, I consider the Elizabethan pox joke a purely cowardly attitude. They didn't think it funny, for by God it *wasn't* funny. Even poor Elizabeth's lack of eyebrows and her rotten teeth were not funny. And they all knew it. They may not have known it was the direct result of pox: though probably they did. This fact remains, that no man can contract syphilis, or any deadly sexual disease, without feeling the most shattering and profound terror go through him, through the very roots of his being. And no man can look without a sort of horror on the effects of a sexual disease in another person. We are so constituted that we are all at once horrified and terrified. The fear and dread has been so great that the pox joke was invented as an evasion, and following that, the great hush! hush! was imposed. Man was *too* frightened: that's the top and bottom of it.

But now, with remedies discovered, we need no longer be *too* frightened. We can begin, after all these years, to face the matter. After the most fearful damage has been done.

For an overmastering fear is poison to the human psyche. And this overmastering fear, like some horrible secret tumour, has been poisoning our consciousness ever since the Elizabethans, who first woke up with dread to the entry of the original syphilitic poison into the blood.

I know nothing about medicine and very little about diseases, and my facts are such as I have picked up in casual reading. Nevertheless I am convinced that the secret awareness of syphilis, and the utter secret terror and horror of it, has had an enormous and incalculable effect on the English consciousness and on the American. Even when the fear has never been formulated, there it has lain, potent and overmastering. I am convinced that *some* of Shakespeare's horror and despair, in his tragedies, arose from the shock of his consciousness of syphilis. I don't suggest for one moment Shakespeare ever contracted syphilis. I have never had syphilis myself. Yet I know and confess how profound is my fear of the disease, and more than fear, my horror. In fact, I don't think I am so very much afraid of it. I am more horrified, inwardly and deeply, at the idea of its existence.

All this sounds very far from the art of painting. But it is not so far as it sounds. The appearance of syphilis in our midst gave a fearful blow to our sexual life. The real natural innocence of Chaucer was impossible after that. The very sexual act of procreation might bring as one of its consequences a foul disease, and the unborn might be tainted from the moment of conception. Fearful thought! It is truly a fearful thought, and all the centuries of getting used to it won't help us. It remains a fearful thought, and to free ourselves from this fearful dread we should use all our wits and all our efforts, not stick our heads in the

sand of some idiotic joke, or still more idiotic don't-mention-it. The fearful thought of the consequences of syphilis, or of any sexual disease, upon the unborn gives a shock to the impetus of fatherhood in any man, even the cleanest. Our consciousness is a strange thing, and the knowledge of a certain fact may wound it mortally, even if the fact does not touch us directly. And so I am certain that *some* of Shakespeare's father-murder complex, *some* of Hamlet's horror of his mother, of his uncle, of all old men came from the feeling that fathers may transmit syphilis, or syphilis-consequences, to children. I don't know even whether Shakespeare was actually aware of the consequences to a child born of a syphilitic father or mother. He may not have been, though most probably he was. But he certainly was aware of the effects of syphilis itself, especially on men. And this awareness struck at his deep sex imagination, at his instinct for fatherhood, and brought in an element of terror and abhorrence there where men should feel anything but terror and abhorrence, into the procreative act.

The terror-horror element which had entered the imagination with regard to the sexual and procreative act was at least partly responsible for the rise of Puritanism, the beheading of the king-father Charles, and the establishment of the New England colonies. If America really sent us syphilis, she got back the full recoil of the horror of it, in her puritanism.

But deeper even than this, the terror-horror element led to the crippling of the consciousness of man. Very elementary in man is his sexual and procreative being, and on his sexual and procreative being depend many of his deepest instincts and the flow of his intuition. A deep instinct of kinship joins men together, and the kinship of flesh-and-blood keeps the warm flow of intuitional awareness streaming between human beings. Our true awareness of one another is intuitional, not mental. Attraction between people is really instinctive and intuitional, not an affair of judgment. And in mutual attraction lies perhaps the deepest pleasure in life, mutual attraction which may make us "like" our travelling companion for the two or three hours we are together, then no more; or mutual attraction that may deepen to powerful love, and last a life-time.

The terror-horror element struck a blow at our feeling of physical communion. In fact, it almost killed it. We have become ideal beings, creatures that exist in idea, to one another, rather than flesh-and-blood kin. And with the collapse of the feeling of physical, flesh-and-blood kinship, and the substitution of our ideal, social or political oneness, came the failing of our intuitive awareness, and the great unease, the *nervousness* of mankind. We are *afraid* of the instincts. We are *afraid* of the intuition within us. We suppress the instincts, and we cut off our intuitional awareness from one another and from the world. The reason being

some great shock to the procreative self. Now we know one another only as ideal or social or political entities, fleshless, bloodless, and cold, like Bernard Shaw's creatures. Intuitively we are dead to one another, we have all gone cold.

But by intuition alone can man *really* be aware of man, or of the living, substantial world. By intuition alone can man live and know either woman or world, and by intuition alone can he bring forth again images of magic awareness which we call art. In the past men brought forth images of magic awareness, and now it is the convention to admire these images. The convention says, for example, we must admire Botticelli or Giorgione, so Baedeker stars the pictures, and we admire them. But it is all a fake. Even those that get a thrill, even when they call it ecstasy, from these old pictures are only undergoing cerebral excitation. Their deeper responses, down in the intuitive and instinctive body, are not touched. They cannot be, because they are dead. A dead intuitive body stands there and gazes at the corpse of beauty: and usually it is completely and honestly bored. Sometimes it feels a mental coruscation which it calls an ecstasy or an aesthetic response.

Modern people, but particularly English and Americans, *cannot* feel anything with the whole imagination. They can see the living body of imagery as little as a blind man can see colour. The imaginative vision, which includes physical, intuitional perception, they *have not got*. Poor things, it is dead in them. And they stand in front of a Botticelli Venus, which they know as conventionally "beautiful," much as a blind man might stand in front of a bunch of roses and pinks and monkey-musk, saying: "Oh, do tell me which is red; let me feel red! Now let me feel white! Oh, let me feel it! What is this I am feeling? Monkey-musk? Is it white? Oh, do you say it is yellow blotched with orange-brown? Oh, but I can't feel it! What *can* it be? Is white velvety, or just silky?"

So the poor blind man! Yet he may have an acute perception of alive beauty. Merely by touch and scent, his intuitions being alive, the blind man may have a genuine and soul-satisfying experience of imagery. But not pictorial images. These are for ever beyond him.

So those poor English and Americans in front of the Botticelli Venus. They stare so hard; they do so *want* to see. And their eyesight is perfect. But all they can see is a sort of nude woman on a sort of shell on a sort of pretty greenish water. As a rule they rather dislike the "unnaturalness" or "affectation" of it. If they are high-brows they may get a little self-conscious thrill of aesthetic excitement. But real imaginative awareness, which is so largely physical, is denied them. *lis n'ont pas de quoi*, as the Frenchman said of the angels, when asked if they made love in heaven.

Ah, the dear high-brows who gaze in a sort of ecstasy and get a correct mental

thrill! Their poor high-brow bodies stand there as dead as dust-bins, and can no more feel the sway of complete imagery upon them than they can feel any other real sway. *lis n'ont pas de quoi*. The instincts and the intuitions are so nearly dead in them, and they fear even the feeble remains. Their fear of the instincts and intuitions is even greater than that of the English Tommy who calls: "Eh, Jack! Come an' look at this girl standin' wi' no clothes on, an' two blokes spittin' at 'er." That is his vision of Botticelli's Venus. It is, for him, complete, for he is void of the image-seeing imagination. But at least he doesn't have to work up a cerebral excitation, as the high-brow does, who is really just as void.

All alike, cultured and uncultured, they are still dominated by that unnamed, yet overmastering dread and hate of the instincts deep in the body, dread of the strange intuitional awareness of the body, dread of anything but ideas, which *can't* contain bacteria. And the dread all works back to a dread of the procreative body, and is partly traceable to the shock of the awareness of syphilis.

The dread of the instincts included the dread of intuitional awareness. "Beauty is a snare" — "Beauty is but skin-deep" — "Handsome is as handsome does" — "Looks don't count" — "Don't judge by appearances" — if we only realized it, there are thousands of these vile proverbs which have been dinned into us for over two hundred years. They are all of them false. Beauty is not a snare, nor is it skin-deep, since it always involves a certain loveliness of modelling, and handsome doers are often ugly and objectionable people, and if you ignore the look of the thing you plaster England with slums and produce at last a state of spiritual depression that is suicidal, and if you don't judge by appearances, that is, if you can't trust the impression which things make on you, you are a fool. But all these base-born proverbs, born in the cash-box, hit direct against the intuitional consciousness. Naturally, man gets a great deal of his life's satisfaction from beauty, from a certain sensuous pleasure in the look of the thing. The old Englishman built his hut or a cottage with a childish joy in its appearance, purely intuitional and direct. The modern Englishman has a few borrowed ideas, simply doesn't know *what* to feel, and makes a silly mess of it: though perhaps he is improving, hopefully, in this field of architecture and housebuilding. The intuitional faculty, which alone relates us in direct awareness to physical things and substantial presences, is atrophied and dead, and we don't know *what* to feel. We know we ought to feel something, but what? — Oh, tell us what! And this is true of all nations, the French and Italians as much as the English. Look at new French suburbs! Go through the crockery and furniture departments in the *Dames de France* or any big shop. The blood in the body stands still, before such *cretin* ugliness. One has to decide that the modern bourgeois is a *cretin*.

This movement against the instincts and the intuition took on a moral tone in all countries. It started in hatred. Let us never forget that modern morality has its roots in hatred, a deep, evil hate of the instinctive, intuitional, procreative body. This hatred is made more virulent by fear, and an extra poison is added to the fear by unconscious horror of syphilis. And so we come to modern bourgeois consciousness, which turns upon the secret poles of fear and hate. That is the real pivot of all bourgeois consciousness in all countries: fear and hate of the instinctive, intuitional, procreative body in man or woman. But of course this fear and hate had to take on a righteous appearance, so it became moral, said that the instincts, intuitions and all the activities of the procreative body were evil, and promised a *reward* for their suppression. That is the great clue to bourgeois psychology: the reward business. It is screamingly obvious in Maria Edgeworth's tales, which must have done unspeakable damage to ordinary people. Be good, and you'll have money. Be wicked, and you'll be utterly penniless at last, and the good ones will have to offer you a little charity. This is sound working morality in the world. And it makes one realize that, even to Milton, the true hero of *Paradise Lost* must be Satan. But by this baited morality the masses were caught and enslaved to industrialism before ever they knew it; the good got hold of the goods, and our modern "civilization" of money, machines, and wage-slaves was inaugurated. The very pivot of it, let us never forget, being fear and hate, the most intimate fear and hate, fear and hate of one's own instinctive, intuitive body, and fear and hate of every other man's and every other woman's warm, procreative body and imagination.

Now it is obvious what result this will have on the plastic arts, which depend entirely on the representation of substantial bodies, and on the intuitional perception of the *reality* of substantial bodies. The reality of substantial bodies can only be perceived by the imagination, and the imagination is a kindled state of consciousness in which intuitive awareness predominates. The plastic arts are all imagery, and imagery is the body of our imaginative life, and our imaginative life is a great joy and fulfilment to us, for the imagination is a more powerful and more comprehensive flow of consciousness than our ordinary flow. In the flow of true imagination we know in full, mentally and physically at once, in a greater, enkindled awareness. At the maximum of our imagination we are religious. And if we deny our imagination, and have no imaginative life, we are poor worms who have never lived.

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries we have the deliberate denial of intuitive awareness, and we see the results on the arts. Vision became more optical, less intuitive and painting began to flourish. But what painting! Watteau, Ingres, Poussin, Chardin have some real imaginative glow still. They are still

somewhat free. The puritan and the intellectual has not yet struck them down with his fear and hate obsession. But look at England! Hogarth, Reynolds, Gainsborough, they all are already bourgeois. The coat is really more important than the man. It is amazing how important clothes suddenly become, how they *cover* the subject. An old Reynolds colonel in a red uniform is much more a uniform than an individual, and as for Gainsborough, all one can say is: What a lovely dress and hat! What really expensive Italian silk! This painting of garments continued in vogue, till pictures like Sargent's seem to be nothing but yards and yards of satin from the most expensive shops, having some pretty head popped on the top. The imagination is quite dead. The optical vision, a sort of flashy coloured photography of the eye, is rampant.

In Titian, in Velasquez, in Rembrandt the people are there inside their clothes all right, and the clothes are imbued with the life of the individual, the gleam of the warm procreative body comes through all the time, even if it be an old, half-blind woman or a weird, ironic little Spanish princess. But modern people are nothing-*ing* inside their garments, and a head sticks out at the top and hands stick out of the sleeves, and it is a bore. Or, as in Lawrence or Raeburn, you have something very pretty but almost a mere cliché, with very little instinctive or intuitional perception to it.

After this, and apart from landscape and water-colour, there is strictly no English painting that exists. As far as I am concerned, the pre-Raphaelites don't exist; Watts doesn't, Sargent doesn't, and none of the moderns.

There is the exception of Blake. Blake is the only painter of imaginative pictures, apart from landscape, that England has produced. And unfortunately there is so little Blake, and even in that little the symbolism is often artificially imposed. Nevertheless, Blake paints with real intuitional awareness and solid instinctive feeling. He dares handle the human body, even if he sometimes makes it a mere ideograph. And no other Englishman has even dared handle it with alive imagination. Painters of composition-pictures in England, of whom perhaps the best is Watts, never quite get beyond the level of cliché, sentimentalism, and *funk*. Even Watts is a failure, though he made some sort of try: even Etty's nudes in York fail imaginatively, though they have some feeling for flesh. And the rest, the Leightons, even the moderns don't really do anything. They never get beyond studio models and clichés of the nude. The image never gets across to us, to seize us intuitively. It remains merely optical.

Landscape, however, is different. Here the English exist and hold their own. But, for me, personally, landscape is always waiting for something to occupy it. Landscape seems to be *meant* as a back-ground to an intenser vision of life, so to my feeling painted landscape is background with the real subject left out.

Nevertheless, it can be very lovely, especially in water-colour, which is a more bodiless medium, and doesn't aspire to very substantial existence, and is so small that it doesn't try to make a very deep seizure on the consciousness. Water-colour will always be more of a statement than an experience.

And landscape, on the whole, is the same. It doesn't call up the more powerful responses of the human imagination, the sensual, passionate responses. Hence it is the favourite modern form of expression in painting. There is no deep conflict. The instinctive and intuitional consciousness is called into play, but lightly, superficially. It is not confronted with any living, procreative body.

Hence the English have delighted in landscape, and have succeeded in it well. It is a form of escape for them, from the actual human body they so hate and fear, and it is an outlet for their perishing aesthetic desires. For more than a century we have produced delicious water-colours, and Wilson, Crome, Constable, Turner are all great landscape-painters. Some of Turner's landscape compositions are, to my feelings, among the finest that exist. They still satisfy me more even than van Gogh's or Cezanne's landscapes, which make a more violent assault on the emotions, and repel a little for that reason. Somehow I don't want landscape to make a violent assault on my feelings. Landscape is background with the figures left out or reduced to minimum, so let it stay back. Van Gogh's surging earth and Cezanne's explosive or rattling planes worry me. Not being profoundly interested in landscape, I prefer it to be rather quiet and unexplosive.

But, of course, the English delight in landscape is a delight in escape. It is always the same. The northern races are so innerly afraid of their own bodily existence, which they believe fantastically to be an evil thing — you could never find them feel anything but uneasy shame, or an equally shameful gloating, over the fact that a man was having intercourse with his wife, in his house next door — that all they cry for is an escape. And, especially, art must provide that escape.

It is easy in literature. Shelley is pure escape: the body is sublimated into sublime gas. Keats is more difficult — the body can still be *felt* dissolving in waves of successive death — but the death-business is very satisfactory. The novelists have even a better time. You can get some of the lasciviousness of Hetty Sorrell's "sin," and you can enjoy condemning her to penal servitude for life. You can thrill to Mr. Rochester's *passion*, and you can enjoy having his eyes burnt out. So it is, all the way: the novel of "passion"!

But in paint it is more difficult. You cannot paint Hetty Sorrell's sin or Mr. Rochester's passion without being really shocking. And you *daren't* be shocking. It was this fact that unsaddled Watts and Millais. Both might have

been painters if they hadn't been Victorians. As it is, each of them is a wash-out.

Which is the poor, feeble history of art in England, since we can lay no claim to the great Holbein. And art on the continent, in the last century? It is more interesting, and has a fuller story. An artist *can* only create what he really religiously *feels* is truth, religious truth really *felt*, in the blood and the bones. The English could never think anything connected with the body *religious* — unless it were the eyes. So they painted the social appearance of human beings, and hoped to give them wonderful eyes. But they *could* think landscape religious, since it had no sensual reality. So they felt religious about it and painted it as well as it could be painted, maybe, from their point of view.

And in France? In France it was more or less the same, but with a difference. The French, being more rational, decided that the body had its place, but that it should be rationalized. The Frenchman of today has the most reasonable and rationalized body possible. His conception of sex is basically hygienic. A certain amount of copulation is good for you. *fa fait du bien au corps!* sums up the physical side of a Frenchman's idea of love, marriage, food, sport, and all the rest. Well, it is more sane, anyhow, than the Anglo-Saxon terrors. The Frenchman is afraid of syphilis and afraid of the procreative body, but not quite so deeply. He has known for a long time that you can take precautions. And he is not profoundly imaginative.

Therefore he has been able to paint. But his tendency, just like that of all the modern world, has been to get away from the body, while still paying attention to its hygiene, and still not violently quarrelling with it. Puvis de Chavannes is really as sloppy as all the other spiritual sentimentalizers. Renoir is jolly: *fa fait du bien au corps!* is his attitude to the flesh. If a woman didn't have buttocks and breasts, she wouldn't be paintable, he said, and he was right, *fa fait du bien au corps!* What do you paint with, Maitre? — With my penis, and be damned! Renoir didn't try to get away from the body. But he had to dodge it in some of its aspects, rob it of its natural terrors, its natural demonishness. He is delightful, but a trifle banal. *Qa fait du bien au corps!* Yet how infinitely much better he is than any English equivalent.

Courbet, Daumier, Degas, they all painted the human body. But Daumier satirized it, Courbet saw it as a toiling thing, Degas saw it as a wonderful instrument. They all of them deny it its finest qualities, its deepest instincts, its purest intuitions. They prefer, as it were, to industrialize it. They deny it the best imaginative existence.

And the real grand glamour of modern French art, the real outburst of delight came when the body was at last dissolved of its substance, and made part and parcel of the sunlight-and-shadow scheme. Let us say what we will, but the real

grand thrill of modern French art was the discovery of light, the discovery of light, and all the subsequent discoveries of the impressionists, and of the post-impressionists, even Cezanne. No matter how Cezanne may have reacted from the impressionists, it was they, with their deliriously joyful discovery of light and “free” colour, who really opened his eyes. Probably the most joyous moment in the whole history of painting was the moment when the incipient impressionists discovered light, and with it, colour. Ah, then they made the grand, grand escape into freedom, into infinity, into light and delight. They escaped from the tyranny of solidity and the menace of mass-form. They escaped, they escaped from the dark procreative body which so haunts a man, they escaped into the open air, *plein air* and *plein soleil*: light and almost ecstasy.

Like every other human escape, it meant being hauled back later with the tail between the legs. Back comes the truant, back to the old doom of matter, of corporate existence, of the body sullen and stubborn and obstinately refusing to be transmuted into pure light, pure colour, or pure anything. It is not concerned with purity. Life isn't. Chemistry and mathematics and ideal religion are, but these are only small bits of life, which is itself bodily, and hence neither pure nor impure.

After the grand escape into impressionism and pure light, pure colour, pure bodilessness — for what is the body but a shimmer of lights and colours! — poor art came home truant and sulky, with its tail between its legs. And it is this return which now interests us. We know the escape was illusion, illusion, illusion. The cat had to come back. So now we despise the “light” blighters too much. We haven't a good word for them. Which is nonsense, for they too are wonderful, even if their escape was into *le grand neant*, the great nowhere.

But the cat came back. And it is the home-coming torn that now has our sympathy: Renoir, to a certain extent, but mostly Cezanne, the sublime little grimalkin, who is followed by Matisse and Gauguin and Derain and Vlaminck and Braque and all the host of other defiant and howling cats that have come back, perforce, to form and substance and *thereness*, instead of delicious nowhere-ness.

Without wishing to labour the point, one cannot help being amused at the dodge by which the impressionists made the grand escape from the body. They metamorphosed it into a pure assembly of shifting lights and shadows, all coloured. A web of woven, luminous colour was a man, or a woman — and so they painted her, or him: a web of woven shadows and gleams. Delicious! and quite true as far as it goes. A purely optical, *visual* truth: which paint is supposed to be. And they painted delicious pictures: a little too delicious. They bore us, at

the moment. They bore people like the very modern critics intensely. But very modern critics need not be so intensely bored. There is something very lovely about the good impressionist pictures. And ten years hence critics will be bored by the present run of post-impressionists, though not so passionately bored, for these post-impressionists don't move us as the impressionists moved our fathers. We have to persuade ourselves, and we have to persuade one another to be impressed by the post-impressionists, on the whole. On the whole, they rather depress us. Which is perhaps good for us.

But modern art criticism is in a curious hole. Art has suddenly gone into rebellion, against all the canons of accepted religion, accepted good form, accepted everything. When the cat came back from the delicious impressionist excursion, it came back rather tattered, but bristling and with its claws out. The glorious escape was all an illusion. There *was* substance still in the world, a thousand times be damned to it! There *was* the body, the great lumpy body. There it was. You had it shoved down your throat. What really existed was lumps, lumps. Then paint 'em. Or else paint the thin "spirit" with gaps in it and looking merely dishevelled and "found out." Paint had found the spirit out.

This is the sulky and rebellious mood of the post-impressionists. They still hate the body — hate it. But, in a rage, they admit its existence, and paint it as huge lumps, tubes, cubes, planes, volumes, spheres, cones, cylinders, all the "pure" or mathematical forms of substance. As for landscape, it comes in for some of the same rage. It has also suddenly gone lumpy. Instead of being nice and ethereal and non-sensual, it was discovered by van Gogh to be heavily, overwhelmingly substantial and sensual. Van Gogh took up landscape in heavy spadefuls. And Cezanne had to admit it. Landscape, too, after being, since Claude Lorraine, a thing of pure luminosity and floating shadow, suddenly exploded, and came tumbling back on to the canvases of artists in lumps. With Cezanne, landscape "crystallized," to use one of the favourite terms of the critics, and it has gone on crystallizing into cubes, cones, pyramids, and so forth ever since.

The impressionists brought the world at length, after centuries of effort, into the delicious oneness of light. At last, at last! Hail, holy Light! the great natural One, the universal, the universalizer! We are not divided, all one body we — one in Light, lovely light! No sooner had this paean gone up than the post-impressionists, like Judas, gave the show away. They exploded the illusion, which fell back to the canvas of art in a chaos of lumps.

This new chaos, of course, needed new apologists, who therefore rose up in hordes to apologize, almost, for the new chaos. They felt a little guilty about it, so they took on new notes of effrontery, defiant as any Primitive Methodists,

which, indeed, they are: the Primitive Methodists of art criticism. These evangelical gentlemen at once ran up their chapels, in a Romanesque or Byzantine shape, as was natural for a primitive and a methodist, and started to cry forth their doctrines in the decadent wilderness. They discovered once more that the aesthetic experience was an ecstasy, an ecstasy granted only to the chosen few, the elect, among whom said critics were, of course, the arch-elect. This was outdoing Ruskin. It was almost Calvin come to art. But let scoffers scoff, the aesthetic ecstasy was vouchsafed only to the few, the elect, and even then only when they had freed their minds of false doctrine. They had renounced the mammon of "subject" in pictures, they went whoring no more after the Babylon of painted "interest," nor did they hanker after the flesh-pots of artistic "representation." Oh, purify yourselves, ye who would know the aesthetic ecstasy, and be lifted up to the "white peaks of artistic inspiration." Purify yourselves of all base hankering for a tale that is told, and of all low lust for likenesses. Purify yourselves, and know the one supreme way, the way of Significant Form. I am the revelation and the way! I am Significant Form, and my unutterable name is Reality. Lo, I am Form and I am Pure, behold, I am Pure Form. I am the revelation of Spiritual Life, moving behind the veil. I come forth and make myself known, and I am Pure Form, behold, I am Significant Form.

So the prophets of the new era in art cry aloud to the multitude, in exactly the jargon of the revivalists, for revivalists they are. They will revive the Primitive Method-brethren, the Byzantines, the Ra-vennese, the early Italian and French primitives (which ones, in particular, we aren't told); these were Right, these were Pure, these were Spiritual, these were Real! And the builders of early Romanesque churches, O my brethren! these were holy men, before the world went a-whoring after Gothic. Oh, return, my brethren, to the Primitive Method. Lift up your eyes to Significant Form, and be saved.

Now myself, brought up a nonconformist as I was, I just was never able to understand the language of salvation. I never knew what they were talking about, when they raved about being saved, and safe in the arms of Jesus, and Abraham's bosom, and seeing the great light, and entering into glory: I just was puzzled, for what did it *mean*? It seemed to work out as a getting rather drunk on your own self-importance, and afterwards coming dismally sober again and being rather unpleasant. That was all I could see in actual experience of the entering-into-glory business. The term itself, like something which ought to mean something but somehow doesn't, stuck on my mind like an irritating bur, till I decided that it was just an artificial stimulant to the individual self-conceit. How could I enter into glory, when glory is just an abstraction of a human state, and not a separate reality at all? If glory means anything at all, it means the thrill

a man gets when a great many people look up to him with mixed awe, reverence, delight. Today, it means Rudolph Valentino. So that the cant about entering into glory is just used fuzzily to enhance the individual sense of self-importance — one of the rather cheap cocaine-phrases.

And I'm afraid "aesthetic ecstasy" sounds to me very much the same, especially when accompanied by exhortations. It so sounds like another great uplift into self-importance, another apotheosis of personal conceit; especially when accompanied by a lot of jargon about the pure world of reality existing behind the veil of this vulgar world of accepted appearances, and of the entry of the elect through the doorway of visual art. Too evangelical altogether, too much chapel and Primitive Methodist, too obvious a trick for advertising one's own self-glorification. The ego, as an American says, shuts itself up and paints the inside of the walls sky-blue, and thinks it is in heaven.

And then the great symbols of this salvation. When the evangelical says: Behold the lamb of God! — what on earth does he want one to behold? Are we invited to look at a lamb, with woolly, muttoney appearance, frisking and making its little pills? Awfully nice, but what *has* it got to do with God or my soul? Or the cross? What *do* they expect us to see in the cross? A sort of gallows? Or the mark we use to cancel a mistake? — cross it out! That the cross by itself was supposed to *mean* something always mystified me. The same with the Blood of the Lamb. — Washed in the Blood of the Lamb! always seemed to me an extremely unpleasant suggestion. And when Jerome says: He who has once washed in the blood of Jesus need never wash again! — I feel like taking a hot bath at once, to wash off even the suggestion.

And I find myself equally mystified by the cant phrases like Significant Form and Pure Form. They are as mysterious to me as the Cross and the Blood of the Lamb. They are just the magic jargon of invocation, nothing else. If you want to invoke an aesthetic ecstasy, stand in front of a Matisse and whisper fervently under your breath: "Significant Form! Significant Form!" — and it will come. It sounds to me like a form of masturbation, an attempt to make the body react to some cerebral formula.

No, I am afraid modern criticism has done altogether too much for modern art. If painting survives this outburst of ecstatic evangelicism, which it will, it is because people do come to their senses, even after the silliest vogue.

And so we can return to modern French painting, without having to quake before the bogy, or the Holy Ghost of Significant Form: a bogy which doesn't exist if we don't mind leaving aside our self-importance when we look at a picture.

The actual fact is that in Cezanne modern French art made its first tiny step

back to real substance, to objective substance, if we may call it so. Van Gogh's earth was still subjective earth, himself projected into the earth. But Cezanne's apples are a real attempt to let the apple exist in its own separate entity, without transfusing it with personal emotion. Cezanne's great effort was, as it were, to shove the apple away from him, and let it live of itself. It seems a small thing to do: yet it is the first real sign that man has made for several thousands of years that he is willing to admit that matter *actually* exists. Strange as it may seem, for thousands of years, in short, ever since the mythological "Fall," man has been preoccupied with the constant preoccupation of the denial of the existence of matter, and the proof that matter is only a form of spirit. And then, the moment it is done, and we realize finally that matter is only a form of energy, whatever that may be, in the same instant matter rises up and hits us over the head and makes us realize that it exists absolutely, since it is compact energy itself.

Cezanne felt it in paint, when he felt for the apple. Suddenly he felt the tyranny of mind, the white, worn-out arrogance of the spirit, the mental consciousness, the enclosed ego in its sky-blue heaven self-painted. He felt the sky-blue prison. And a great conflict started inside him. He was dominated by his old mental consciousness, but he wanted terribly to escape the domination. He wanted to *express* what he suddenly, convulsedly knew! the existence of matter. He terribly wanted to paint the real existence of the body, to make it artistically palpable. But he couldn't. He hadn't got there yet. And it was the torture of his life. He wanted to be himself in his own procreative body — and he couldn't. He was, like all the rest of us, so intensely and exclusively a mental creature, or a spiritual creature, or an egoist, that he could no longer identify himself with his intuitive body. He wanted to, terribly. At first he determined to do it by sheer bravado and braggadocio. But no good; it couldn't be done that way. He had, as one critic says, to become humble. But it wasn't a question of becoming humble. It was a question of abandoning his cerebral conceit and his "willed ambition" and coming down to brass tacks. Poor Cezanne, there he is in his self-portraits, even the early showy ones, peeping out like a mouse and saying: I *am* a man of flesh, am I not? For he was not quite, as none of us are. The man of flesh has been slowly destroyed through centuries, to give place to the man of spirit, the mental man, the ego, the self-conscious I. And in his artistic soul Cezanne knew it, and wanted to rise in the flesh. He cot-'dn't do it, and it embittered him. Yet, with his apple, he did shove the stone from the door of the tomb.

He wanted to be a man of flesh, a real man: to get out of the sky-blue prison into real air. He wanted to live, really live in the body, to know the world through his instincts and his intuitions, and to be himself in his procreative

blood, not in his mere mind and spirit. He wanted it, he wanted it terribly. And whenever he tried, his mental consciousness, like a cheap fiend, interfered. If he wanted to paint a woman, his mental consciousness simply overpowered him and wouldn't let him paint the woman of flesh, the first Eve who lived before any of the fig-leaf nonsense. He couldn't do it. If he wanted to paint people intuitively and instinctively, he couldn't do it. His mental concepts shoved in front, and these he *wouldn't* paint — mere representations of what the *mind* accepts, not what the intuitions gather — and they, his mental concepts, wouldn't let him paint from intuition; they shoved in between all the time, so he painted his conflict and his failure, and the result is almost ridiculous.

Woman he was not allowed to know by intuition; his mental self, his ego, that bloodless fiend, forbade him. Man, other men, he was likewise not allowed to know — except by a few, few touches. The earth likewise he was not allowed to know: his landscapes are mostly acts of rebellion against the mental concept of landscape. After a fight tooth-and-nail for forty years, he did succeed in knowing an apple, fully; and, not quite as fully, a jug or two. That was all he achieved.

It seems little, and he died embittered. But it is the first step that counts, and Cezanne's apple is a great deal, more than Plato's Idea. Cezanne's apple rolled the stone from the mouth of the tomb, and if poor Cezanne couldn't unwind himself from his cerements and mental winding-sheet, but had to lie still in the tomb, till he died, still he gave us a chance.

The history of our era is the nauseating and repulsive history of the crucifixion of the procreative body for the glorification of the spirit, the mental consciousness. Plato was an arch-priest of this crucifixion. Art, that handmaid, humbly and honestly served the vile deed, through three thousand years at least. The Renaissance put the spear through the side of the already crucified body, and syphilis put poison into the wound made by the imaginative spear. It took still three hundred years for the body to finish: but in the eighteenth century it became a corpse, a corpse with an abnormally active mind: and today it stinketh.

We, dear reader, you and I, we were born corpses, and we are corpses. I doubt if there is even one of us who has ever known so much as an apple, a whole apple. All we know is shadows, even of apples. Shadows of everything, of the whole world, shadows even of ourselves. We are inside the tomb, and the tomb is wide and shadowy like hell, even if sky-blue by optimistic paint, so we think it is all the world. But our world is a wide tomb full of ghosts, replicas. We are all spectres, we have not been able to touch even so much as an apple. Spectres we are to one another. Spectre you are to me, spectre I am to you. Shadow you are even to yourself. And by shadow I mean idea, concept, the abstracted reality, the ego. We are not solid. We don't live in the flesh. Our instincts and intuitions are

dead, we live wound round with the winding-sheet of abstraction. And the touch of anything solid hurts us. For our instincts and intuitions, which are our feelers of touch and knowing through touch, die, are dead, amputated. We walk and talk and eat and copulate and laugh and evacuate wrapped in our winding-sheets, all the time wrapped in our winding-sheets.

So that Cezanne's apple hurts. It made people shout with pain. And it was not till his followers had turned him again into an abstraction that he was ever accepted. Then the critics stepped forth and abstracted his good apple into Significant Form, and henceforth Cezanne was saved. Saved for democracy. Put safely in the tomb again, and the stone rolled back. The resurrection was postponed once more.

As the resurrection will be postponed *ad infinitum* by the good bourgeois corpses in their cultured winding-sheets. They will run up a chapel to the risen body, even if it is only an apple, and kill it on the spot. They are wide awake, are the corpses, on the alert. And a poor mouse of a Cezanne is alone in the years. Who else shows a spark of awakening life, in our marvellous civilized cemetery? All is dead, and dead breath preaching with phosphorescent effulgence about aesthetic ecstasy and Significant Form. If only the dead would bury their dead. But the dead are not dead for nothing. Who buries his own sort? The dead are cunning and alert to pounce on any spark of life and bury *it*, even as they have already buried Cezanne's apple and put up to it a white tombstone of Significant Form.

For who of Cezanne's followers does anything but follow at the triumphant funeral of Cezanne's achievement? They follow him in order to bury him, and they succeed. Cezanne is deeply buried under all the Matisse and Vlamincks of his following, while the critics read the funeral homily.

It is quite easy to accept Matisse and Vlaminck and Friesz and all the rest. They are just Cezanne abstracted again. They are all just tricksters, even if clever ones. They are all mental, mental, egoists, egoists, egoists. And therefore they are all acceptable now to the enlightened corpses of connoisseurs. You needn't be afraid of Matisse and Vlaminck and the rest. They will never give your corpse-anatomy a jar. They are just shadows, minds mountebanking and playing charades on canvas. They may be quite amusing charades, and I am all for the mountebank. But of course it is all games inside the cemetery, played by corpses and *hommes d'esprit*, even *femmes d'esprit*, like Mademoiselle Laurencin. As for *I'esprit*, said Cezanne, I don't give a fart for it. Perhaps not! But the connoisseurs will give large sums of money. Trust the dead to pay for their amusement, when the amusement is deadly!

The most interesting figure in modern art, and the only really interesting

figure, is Cezanne: and that, not so much because of his achievement as because of his struggle. Cezanne was born at Aix in Provence in 1839: small, timorous, yet sometimes bantam defiant, sensitive, full of grand ambition, yet ruled still deeper by a naive, Mediterranean sense of truth or reality, imagination, call it what you will. He is not a big figure. Yet his struggle is truly heroic. He was a bourgeois, and one must never forget it. He had a moderate bourgeois income. But a bourgeois in Provence is much more real and human than a bourgeois in Normandy. He is much nearer the actual people, and the actual people are much less subdued by awe of his respectable bourgeois money.

Cezanne was naive to a degree, but not a fool. He was rather insignificant, and grandeur impressed him terribly. Yet still stronger in him was the little flame of life where he *felt* things to be true. He didn't betray himself in order to get success, because he couldn't: to his nature it was impossible: he was too pure to be able to betray his own small real flame for immediate rewards. Perhaps that is the best one can say of a man, and it puts Cezanne, small and insignificant as he is, among the heroes. He would *not* abandon his own vital imagination.

He was terribly impressed by physical splendour and flamboyancy, as people usually are in the lands of the sun. He admired terribly the splendid virtuosity of Paul Veronese and Tintoretto, and even of later and less good baroque painters. He wanted to be like that — terribly he wanted it. And he tried very, very hard, with bitter effort. And he always failed. It is a cant phrase with the critics to say "he couldn't draw." Mr. Fry says: "With all his rare endowments, he happened to lack the comparatively common gift of illustration, the gift that any draughtsman for the illustrated papers learns in a school of commercial art."

Now this sentence gives away at once the hollowness of modern criticism. In the first place, can one learn a "gift" in a school of commercial art, or anywhere else? A gift surely is given, we tacitly assume, by God or Nature or whatever higher power we hold responsible for the things we have no choice in.

Was, then, Cezanne devoid of this gift? Was he simply incapable of drawing a cat so that it would look like a cat? Nonsense! Cezanne's work is full of accurate drawing. His more trivial pictures, suggesting copies from other masters, are perfectly well drawn — that is, conventionally: so are some of the landscapes, so even is that portrait of M. Geffroy and his books, which is, or was, so famous. Why these cant phrases about not being able to draw? Of course Cezanne could draw, as well as anybody else. And he had learned everything that was necessary in the art-schools.

He *could* draw. And yet, in his terrifically earnest compositions in the late Renaissance or baroque manner, he drew so badly. Why? Not because he couldn't. And not because he was sacrificing "significant form" to "insignificant

form,” or mere slick representation, which is apparently what artists themselves mean when they talk about drawing. Cezanne knew all about drawing: and he surely knew as much as his critics do about significant form. Yet he neither succeeded in drawing so that things looked right, nor combining his shapes so that he achieved real form. He just failed.

He failed, where one of his little slick successors would have succeeded with one eye shut. And why? Why did Cezanne fail in his early pictures? Answer that, and you’ll know a little better what art is. He didn’t fail because he understood nothing about drawing or significant form or aesthetic ecstasy. He knew about them all, and didn’t give a spit for them.

Cezanne failed in his earlier pictures because he was trying with his mental consciousness to do something which his living Provencal body didn’t want to do, or couldn’t do. He terribly wanted to do something grand and voluptuous and sensuously satisfying, in the Tintoretto manner. Mr. Fry calls that his “willed ambition,” which is a good phrase, and says he had to learn humility, which is a bad phrase.

The “willed ambition” was more than a mere willed ambition—it was a genuine desire. But it was a desire that thought it would be satisfied by ready-made baroque expressions, whereas it needed to achieve a whole new marriage of mind and matter. If we believed in reincarnation, then we should have to believe that after a certain number of new incarnations into the body of an artist, the soul of Cezanne *would* produce grand and voluptuous and sensually rich pictures — but not at all in the baroque manner. Because the pictures he actually did produce with undeniable success are the first steps in that direction, sensual and rich, with not the slightest hint of baroque, but new, the man’s new grasp of substantial reality.

There was, then, a certain discrepancy between Cezanne’s *notion* of what he wanted to produce, and his other, intuitive knowledge of what he *could* produce. For whereas the mind works in possibilities, the intuitions work in actualities, and what you *intuitively* desire, that is possible to you. Whereas what you mentally or “consciously” desire is nine times out of ten impossible: hitch your wagon to a star, and you’ll just stay where you are.

So the conflict, as usual, was not between the artist and his medium, but between the artist’s *mind* and the artist’s *intuition* and *instinct*. And what Cezanne had to learn was not humility — cant word! — but honesty, honesty with himself. It was not a question of any gift or significant form or aesthetic ecstasy: it was a question of Cezanne being himself, just Cezanne. And when Cezanne is himself he is not Tintoretto, nor Veronese, nor anything baroque at all. Yet he is something *physical*, and even sensual: qualities which he had

identified with the masters of virtuosity.

In passing, if we think of Henri Matisse, a real virtuoso, and imagine him possessed with a “willed ambition” to paint grand and flamboyant baroque pictures, then we know at once that he would not have to “humble” himself at all, but that he would start in and paint with great success grand and flamboyant modern-baroque pictures. He would succeed because he has the gift of virtuosity. And the gift of virtuosity simply means that you don’t have to humble yourself, or even be honest with yourself, because you are a clever mental creature who is capable at will of making the intuitions and instincts subserve some mental concept: in short, you can prostitute your body to your mind, your instincts and intuitions you can prostitute to your “willed ambition,” in a sort of masturbation process, and you can produce the impotent glories of virtuosity. But Veronese and Tintoretto are real painters; they are not mere *virtuosi*, as some of the later men are.

The point is very important. Any creative act occupies the whole consciousness of a man. This is true of the great discoveries of science as well as of art. The truly great discoveries of science and real works of art are made by the whole consciousness of man working together in unison and oneness: instinct, intuition, mind, intellect all fused into one complete consciousness, and grasping what we may call a complete truth, or a complete vision, a complete revelation in sound. A discovery, artistic or otherwise, may be more or less intuitional, more or less mental; but intuition will have entered into it, and mind will have entered too. The whole consciousness is concerned in every case. — And a painting requires the activity of the whole imagination, for it is made of imagery, and the imagination is that form of complete consciousness in which predominates the intuitive awareness of forms, images, the *physical* awareness.

And the same applies to the genuine appreciation of a work of art, or the *grasp* of a scientific law, as to the production of the same. The whole consciousness is occupied, not merely the mind alone, or merely the body. The mind and spirit alone can never really grasp a work of art, though they may, in a masturbating fashion, provoke the body into an ecstasized response. The ecstasy will die out into ash and more ash. And the reason we have so many trivial scientists promulgating fantastic “facts” is that so many modern scientists likewise work with the mind alone, and *force* the intuitions and instincts into a prostituted acquiescence. The very statement that water is H₂O is a mental *tour de force*. With our bodies we know that water is *not* H₂O, our intuitions and instincts both know it is not so. But they are bullied by the impudent mind. Whereas if we said that water, under certain circumstances, produces two volumes of hydrogen and one of oxygen, then the intuitions and instincts would agree entirely. But that

water *is composed* of two volumes of hydrogen t(5 one of oxygen we cannot physically believe. It needs something else. Something is missing. Of course, alert science does not ask us to believe the commonplace assertion of: *water* is H₂O, but school children have to believe it.

A parallel case is all this modern stuff about astronomy, stars, their distances and speeds and so on, talking of billions and trillions of miles and years and so forth: it is just occult. The mind is revelling in words, the intuitions and instincts are just left out, or prostituted into a sort of ecstasy. In fact, the sort of ecstasy that lies in absurd figures such as 2,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000 miles or years or tons, figures which abound in modern *scientific* books on astronomy, is just the sort of aesthetic ecstasy that the over-mental critics of art assert they experience today from Matisse's pictures.

It is all poppycock. The body is either stunned to a corpse, or prostituted to ridiculous thrills, or stands coldly apart.

When I read how far off the suns are, and what they are made of, and so on, and so on, I believe all I am *able* to believe, with the true imagination. But when my intuition and instinct can grasp no more, then I call my mind to a halt. I am not going to accept mere mental asseverations. The mind can assert anything, and pretend it has proved it. My beliefs I test on my body, on my intuitional consciousness, and when I get a response there, then I accept. The same is true of great scientific "laws," like the law of evolution. After years of acceptance of the "laws" of evolution — rather desultory or "humble" acceptance — now I realize that my vital imagination makes great reservations. I find I can't, with the best will in the world, believe that the species have "evolved" from one common life-form. I just can't feel it, I have to violate my intuitive and instinctive awareness of something else, to make myself believe it. But since I know that my intuitions and instincts may still be held back by prejudice, I seek in the world for someone to make me intuitively and instinctively feel the truth of the "law" — and I don't find anybody. I find scientists, just like artists, asserting things they are *mentally* sure of, in fact cocksure, but about which they are much too egoistic and ranting to be *intuitively, instinctively* sure. When I find a man, or a woman, intuitively and instinctively sure of anything, I am all respect. But for scientific or artistic braggarts how can one have respect? The intrusion of the egoistic element is a sure proof of intuitive uncertainty. No man who is sure by instinct and intuition *brags*, though he may fight tooth and nail for his beliefs.

Which brings us back to Cezanne, why he couldn't draw, and why he couldn't paint baroque masterpieces. It is just because he was real, and could only believe in his own expression when it expressed a moment of wholeness or completeness of consciousness in himself. He could not prostitute one part of

himself to the other. He *could* not masturbate, in paint or words. And that is saying a very great deal, today; today, the great day of the masturbating consciousness, when the mind prostitutes the sensitive responsive body, and just forces the reactions. The masturbating consciousness produces all kinds of novelties, which thrill for the moment, then go very dead. It cannot produce a single genuinely new utterance.

What we have to thank Cezanne for is not his humility, but for his proud, high spirit that refused to accept the glib utterances of his facile mental self. He wasn't poor-spirited enough to be facile — nor humble enough to be satisfied with visual and emotional cliches. Thrilling as the baroque masters were to him in themselves, he realized that as soon as he reproduced them he produced nothing but cliché. The mind is full of all sorts of memory, visual, tactile, emotional memory, memories, groups of memories, systems of memories. A cliché is just a worn-out memory that has no more emotional or intuitional root, and has become a habit. Whereas a novelty is just a new grouping of clichés, a new arrangement of accustomed memories. That is why a novelty is so easily accepted: it gives the little shock or thrill of surprise, but it does not *disturb* the emotional and intuitive self. It forces you to see nothing new. It is only a novel compound of clichés. The work of most of Cezanne's successors is just novel, just a new arrangement of clichés, soon growing stale. And the clichés are Cezanne clichés, just as in Cezanne's own earlier pictures the clichés were all, or mostly, baroque clichés.

Cezanne's early history as a painter is a history of his fight with his own cliché. His consciousness wanted a new realization. And his ready-made mind offered him all the time a ready-made expression. And Cezanne, far too inwardly proud and haughty to accept the ready-made clichés that came from his mental consciousness, stocked with memories, and which appeared mocking at him on his canvas, spent most of his time smashing his own forms to bits. To a true artist, and to the living imagination, the cliché is the deadly enemy. Cezanne had a bitter fight with it. He hammered it to pieces a thousand times. And still it reappeared.

Now again we can see why Cezanne's drawing was so bad. It was bad because it represented a smashed, mauled cliché, terribly knocked about. If Cezanne had been willing to accept his own baroque cliché, his drawing would have been perfectly conventionally "all right," and not a critic would have had a word to say about it. But when his drawing was conventionally all right, to Cezanne himself it was mockingly all wrong, it was cliché. So he flew at it and knocked all the shape and stuffing out of it, and when it was so mauled that it was all wrong, and he was exhausted with it, he let it go; bitterly, because it still was not

what he wanted. And here comes in the comic element in Cezanne's pictures. His rage with the cliché made him distort the cliché sometimes into parody, as we see in pictures like *The Pasha* and *La Femme*. "You will be cliché, will you?" he gnashes. "Then *be* it!" And he shoves it in a frenzy of exasperation over into parody. And the sheer exasperation makes the parody still funny; but the laugh is a little on the wrong side of the face.

This smashing of the cliché lasted a long way into Cezanne's life; indeed, it went with him to the end. The way he worked over and over his forms was his nervous manner of laying the ghost of his cliché, burying it. Then when it disappeared perhaps from his forms themselves, it lingered in his composition, and he had to fight with the *edges* of his forms and contours, to bury the ghost there. Only his colour he knew was not cliché. He left it to his disciples to make it so.

In his very best pictures, the best of the still-life compositions, which seem to me Cezanne's greatest achievement, the fight with the cliché is still going on. But it was in the still-life pictures he learned his final method of *avoiding* the cliché: just leaving gaps through which it fell into nothingness. So he makes his landscape succeed.

In his art, all his life long, Cezanne was tangled in a twofold activity. He wanted to express something, and before he could do it he had to fight the hydra-headed cliché, whose last head he could never lop off. The fight with the cliché is the most obvious thing in his pictures. The dust of battle rises thick, and the splinters fly wildly. And it is this dust of battle and flying of splinters which his imitators still so fervently imitate. If you give a Chinese dressmaker a dress to copy, and the dress happens to have a darned rent in it, the dressmaker carefully tears a rent in the new dress, and darns it in exact replica. And this seems to be the chief occupation of Cezanne's disciples, in every land. They absorb themselves reproducing imitation mistakes. He let off various explosions in order to blow up the stronghold of the cliché, and his followers make grand firework imitations of the explosions, without the faintest inkling of the true attack. They do, indeed, make an onslaught on representation, true-to-life representation: because the explosion in Cezanne's pictures blew them up. But I am convinced that what Cezanne himself wanted was representation. He *wanted* true-to-life representation. Only he wanted it *more* true to life. And once you have got photography, it is a very, very difficult thing to get representation *more* true-to-life: which it has to be.

Cezanne was a realist, and he wanted to be true to life. But he would not be content with the optical cliché. With the impressionists, purely optical vision perfected itself and fell *at once* into cliché, with a startling rapidity. Cezanne saw

this. Artists like Courbet and Daumier were not purely optical, but the other element in these two painters, the intellectual element, was cliché. To the optical vision they added the concept of force-pressure, almost like an hydraulic brake, and this force-pressure concept is mechanical, a cliché, though still popular. And Daumier added mental satire, and Courbet added a touch of a sort of socialism: both cliché and unimaginative.

Cezanne wanted something that was neither optical nor mechanical nor intellectual. And to introduce into our world of vision something which is neither optical nor mechanical nor intellectual-psychological requires a real revolution. It was a revolution Cezanne began, but which nobody, apparently, has been able to carry on.

He wanted to touch the world of substance once more with the intuitive touch, to be aware of it with the intuitive awareness, and to express it in intuitive terms. That is, he wished to displace our present mode of mental-visual consciousness, the consciousness of mental concepts, and substitute a mode of consciousness that was predominantly intuitive, the awareness of touch. In the past the primitives painted intuitively, but *in the direction* of our present mental-visual, conceptual form of consciousness. They were working away from their own intuition. Mankind has never been able to trust the intuitive consciousness, and the decision to accept that trust marks a very great revolution in the course of human development.

Without knowing it, Cezanne, the timid little conventional man sheltering behind his wife and sister and the Jesuit father, was a pure revolutionary. When he said to his models: "Be an apple! Be an apple!" he was uttering the foreword to the fall not only of Jesuits and the Christian idealists altogether, but to the collapse of our whole way of consciousness, and the substitution of another way. If the human being is going to be primarily an apple, as for Cezanne it was, then you are going to have a new world of men: a world which has very little to say, men that can sit still and just be physically there, and be truly non-moral. That was what Cezanne meant with his: "Be an apple!" He knew perfectly well that the moment the model began to intrude her personality and her "mind," it would be cliché and moral, and he would have to paint cliché. The only part of her that was not banal, known *ad nauseam*, living cliché, the only part of her that was not living cliché was her appleyness. Her body, even her very sex, was known nauseously: *connu, connu!* the endless chance of known cause-and-effect, the infinite web of the hated cliché which nets us all down in utter boredom. He knew it all, he hated it all, he refused it all, this timid and "humble" little man. He knew, as an artist, that the only bit of a woman which nowadays escapes being ready-made and ready-known cliché is the appley part of her. Oh, be an

apple, and leave out all your thoughts, all your feelings, all your mind and all your personality, which we know all about and find boring beyond endurance. Leave it all out — and be an apple! It is the appleyness of the portrait of Cezanne's wife that makes it so permanently interesting: the appleyness, which carries with it also the feeling of knowing the other side as well, the side you don't see, the hidden side of the moon. For the intuitive apperception of the apple is so *tangibly* aware of the apple that it is aware of it *all round*, not only just of the front. The eye sees only fronts, and the mind, on the whole, is satisfied with fronts. But intuition needs all-aroundness, and instinct needs insideness. The true imagination is for ever curving round to the other side, to the back of presented appearance.

So to my feeling the portraits of Madame Cezanne, particularly the portrait in the red dress, are more interesting than the portrait of M. Geffroy, or the portraits of the housekeeper or the gardener. In the same way the *Card-Players* with two figures please me more than those with four.

But we have to remember, in his figure-paintings, that while he was painting the appleyness he was also deliberately painting *out* the so-called humanness, the personality, the "likeness," the physical cliché. He had deliberately to paint it out, deliberately to make the hands and face rudimentary, and so on, because if he had painted them in fully they would have been cliché. He *never* got over the cliché denominator, the intrusion and interference of the ready-made concept, when it came to people, to men and women. Especially to women he could only give a cliché response — and that maddened him. Try as he might, women remained a known, ready-made cliché object to him, and he *could not* break through the concept obsession to get at the intuitive awareness of her. Except with his wife — and in his wife he did at least know the appleyness. But with his housekeeper he failed somewhat. She was a bit cliché, especially the face. So really is M. Geffroy.

With men Cezanne often dodged it by insisting on the clothes, those stiff cloth jackets bent into thick folds, those hats, those blouses, those curtains. Some of the *Card-Players*, the big ones with four figures, seem just a trifle banal, so much occupied with painted stuff, painted clothing, and the humanness a bit cliché. Nor good colour, nor clever composition, nor "planes" of colour, nor anything else will save an emotional cliché from being an emotional cliché, though they may, of course, garnish it and make it more interesting.

Where Cezanne did sometimes escape the cliché altogether and really give a complete intuitive interpretation of actual objects is in some of the still-life compositions. To me these good still-life scenes are purely representative and quite true to life. Here Cezanne did what he wanted to do: he made the things

quite real, he didn't deliberately leave anything out, and yet he gave us a triumphant and rich intuitive vision of a few apples and kitchen pots. For once his intuitive consciousness triumphed, and broke into utterance. And here he is inimitable. His imitators imitate his accessories of tablecloths folded like tin, *etc.* — the unreal parts of his pictures — but they don't imitate the pots and apples, because they can't. It's the real appleyness, and you can't imitate it. Every man must create it new and different out of himself: new and different. The moment it looks "like" Cezanne, it is nothing.

But at the same time Cezanne was triumphing with the apple and appleyness he was still fighting with the cliché. When he makes Madame Cezanne most *still*, most apple, he starts making the universe slip uneasily about her. It was part of his desire: to make the human form, the *life* form, come to rest. Not static — on the contrary. Mobile but come to rest. And at the same time he set the unmoving material world into motion. Walls twitch and slide, chairs bend or rear up a little, cloths curl like burning paper. Cezanne did this partly to satisfy his intuitive feeling that nothing is really *statically* at rest — a feeling he seems to have had strongly — as when he watched the lemons shrivel or go mildewed, in his still-life group, which he left lying there so long so that he *could* see that gradual flux of change: and partly to fight the cliché, which says that the inanimate world *is* static, and that walls *are* still. In his fight with the cliché he denied that walls are still and chairs are static. In his intuitive self he *felt* for their changes.

And these two activities of his consciousness occupy his later landscapes. In the best landscapes we are fascinated by the mysterious *shiftiness* of the scene under our eyes; it shifts about as we watch it. And we realize, with a sort of transport, how intuitively *true* this is of landscape. It is *not* still. It has its own weird anima, and to our wide-eyed perception it changes like a living animal under our gaze. This is a quality that Cezanne sometimes got marvellously.

Then again, in other pictures he seems to be saying: Landscape is not like this and not like this and not like this and not . . . *etc.* — and every *not* is a little blank space in the canvas, defined by the remains of an assertion. Sometimes Cezanne builds up a landscape essentially out of omissions. He puts fringes on the complicated vacuum of the cliché, so to speak, and offers us that. It is interesting in a *repudiative* fashion, but it is not the new thing. The appleyness, the intuition has gone. We have only a mental repudiation. This occupies many of the later pictures: and ecstasizes the critics.

And Cezanne was bitter. He had never, as far as his *life* went, broken through the horrible glass screen of the mental concepts, to the actual *touch* of life. In his art he had touched the apple, and that was a great deal. He had intuitively known

the apple and intuitively brought it forth on the tree of his life, in paint. But when it came to anything beyond the apple, to landscape, to people, and above all to nude woman, the cliché had triumphed over him. The cliché had triumphed over him, and he was bitter, misanthropic. How not to be misanthropic when men and women are just clichés to you, and you hate the cliché? Most people, of course, love the cliché — because most people *are* the cliché. Still, for all that, there is perhaps more appleyness in man, and even in nude woman, than Cézanne was able to get at. The cliché obtruded, so he just abstracted away from it. Those last water-colour landscapes are just abstractions from the cliché. They are blanks, with a few pearly-coloured sort of edges. The blank is vacuum, which was Cézanne's last word against the cliché. It is a vacuum, and the edges are there to assert the vacuity.

And the very fact that we can reconstruct almost instantly a whole landscape from the few indications Cézanne gives, shows what a cliché the landscape is, how it exists already, ready-made, in our minds, how it exists in a pigeon-hole of the consciousness, so to speak, and you need only be given its number to be able to get it out, complete. Cézanne's last water-colour landscapes, made up of a few touches on blank paper, are a satire on landscape altogether. *They leaxie so much to the imagination!* — that immortal cant phrase, which means they give you the clue to a cliché and the cliché comes. That's what the cliché exists for. And that sort of imagination is just a rag-bag memory stored with thousands and thousands of old and really worthless sketches, images, etc., clichés.

We can see what a fight it means, the escape from the domination of the ready-made mental concept, the mental consciousness stuffed full of clichés that intervene like a complete screen between us and life. It means a long, long fight, that will probably last for ever. But Cézanne did get as far as the apple. I can think of nobody else who has done anything.

When we put it in personal terms, it is a fight in a man between his own ego, which is his ready-made mental self which inhabits either a sky-blue, self-tinted heaven or a black, self-tinted hell, and his other free intuitive self. Cézanne never freed himself from his ego, in his life. He haunted the fringes of experience. "I who am so feeble in life" — but at least he knew it. At least he had the greatness to feel bitter about it. Not like the complacent bourgeois who now "appreciate" him!

So now perhaps it is the English turn. Perhaps this is where the English will come in. They have certainly stayed out very completely. It is as if they had received the death-blow to their instinctive and intuitive bodies in the Elizabethan age, and since then they have steadily died, till now they are complete corpses. As a young English painter, an intelligent and really modest

young man, said to me: “But I do think we ought to begin to paint good pictures, now that we know pretty well all there is to know about how a picture should be made. You do agree, don’t you, that technically we know almost all there is to know about painting?”

I looked at him in amazement. It was obvious that a new-born babe was as fit to paint pictures as he was. He knew technically all there was to know about pictures: all about two-dimensional and three-dimensional composition, also the colour-dimension and the dimension of values in that view of-composition which exists apart from form: all about the value of planes, the value of the angle in planes, the different values of the same colour on different planes: all about edges, visible edges, tangible edges, intangible edges: all about the nodality of form-groups, the constellating of mass-centres: all about the relativity of mass, the gravitation and the centrifugal force of masses, the resultant of the complex impinging of masses, the isolation of a mass in the line of vision: all about pattern, line pattern, edge pattern, tone pattern, colour pattern, and the pattern of moving planes: all about texture, impasto, surface, and what happens at the edge of the canvas: also which is the aesthetic centre of the canvas, the dynamic centre, the effulgent centre, the kinetic centre, the mathematical centre, and the Chinese centre: also the points of departure in the foreground, and the points of disappearance in the background, together with the various routes between these points, namely, as the crow flies, as the cow walks, as the mind intoxicated with knowledge reels and gets there: all about spotting, what you spot, which spot, on the spot, how many spots, balance of spots, recedence of spots, spots on the explosive vision and spots on the co-ordinative vision: all about literary interest and how to hide it successfully from the policeman: all about photographic representation, and which heaven it belongs to, and which hell: all about the sex-appeal of a picture, and when you can be arrested for sollicitation, when for indecency: all about the psychology of a picture, which section of the mind it appeals to, which mental state it is intended to represent, how to exclude the representation of all other states of mind from the one intended, or how, on the contrary, to give a hint of complementary states of mind fringing the state of mind portrayed: all about the chemistry of colours, when to use Winsor 8c Newton and when not, and the relative depth of contempt to display for Lefranc-on the history of colour, past and future, whether cadmium will really stand the march of ages, whether viridian will go black, blue, or merely greasy, and the effect on our great-great-grandsons of the flake white and zinc white and white lead we have so lavishly used: on the merits and demerits of leaving patches of bare, prepared canvas, and which preparation will bleach, which blacken: on the mediums to be used, the vice of linseed oil, the treachery of turps, the meanness

of gums, the innocence or the unspeakable crime of varnish: on allowing your picture to be shiny, on insisting that it should be shiny, on weeping over the merest suspicion of gloss and rubbing it with a raw potato: on brushes, and the conflicting length of the stem, the best of the hog, the length of bristle most to be desired on the many varying occasions, and whether to slash in one direction only: on the atmosphere of London, on the atmosphere of Glasgow, on the atmosphere of Rome, on the atmosphere of Paris, and the peculiar action of them all upon vermilion, cinnabar, pale cadmium yellow, mid-chrome, emerald green, Veronese green, linseed oil, turps, and Lyall's perfect medium: on quality, and its relation to light, and its ability to hold its own in so radical a change of light as that from Rome to London — all these things the young man knew — and out of it, God help him, he was going to make pictures.

Now, such innocence and such naivete, coupled with true modesty, must make us believe that we English have indeed, at least as far as paint goes, become again as little children: very little children: tiny children: babes: nay, babes unborn. And if we have really got back to the state of the unborn babe, we are perhaps almost ready to be born. The English *may* be born again, pictorially. Or, to tell the truth, they may begin for the first time to be born: since as painters of composition pictures they don't really exist. They have reached the stage where their innocent egos are entirely and totally enclosed in pale-blue glass bottles of insulated inexperience. Perhaps now they *must* hatch out!

"Do you think we may be on the brink of a Golden Age again in England?" one of our most promising young writers asked me, with that same half-timorous innocence and naivety of the young painter. I looked at him — he was a sad young man — and my eyes nearly fell out of my head. A golden age! He looked so ungolden, and though he was twenty years my junior, he felt also like my grandfather. A golden age! in England! a golden age! now, when even money is paper! when the enclosure in the ego is final, when they are hermetically sealed and insulated from all experience, from any *touch*, from anything *solid*.

"I suppose it's up to *you*," said I.

And he quietly accepted it.

But such innocence, such naivete must be a prelude to something. It's a *ne plus ultra*. So why shouldn't it be a prelude to a golden age? If the innocence and naivete as regards artistic expression doesn't become merely idiotic, why shouldn't it become golden? The young might, out of a sheer sort of mental blankness, strike the oil of their live intuition, and get a gusher. Why not? A golden gush of artistic expression! "Now we know pretty well everything that can be known about the technical side of pictures." A golden age!

EDUCATION

EDUCATION OF THE PEOPLE

I

What is education all about? What is it doing? Does anybody know? It doesn't matter so much for people with money. For them social intercourse is an end in itself, a sort of charming game for which they need a little polish of manner, a trifle of social grace, and a certain amount of accomplishments, mental and otherwise. Even supposing they look on life as a serious affair, it only means they intend, in some way or other, to devote themselves to the service of the nation. And the service of the nation, though an important matter surely, is by now a somewhat cut-and-dried business.

The point is, the nation which is served. And what is the nation? Without attempting a high-flown definition, it is the people. And who are the people? Why, they are the proletariat. For according to the modern democratic ideal under which we still march, *ideally*, the upper classes exist only for the purpose of devoting themselves to the good of the people. Everything works back to the people, to the proletariat, strictly. If a man justifies his existence nowadays — and what man doesn't? — he proclaims that he is a servant and benefactor of the people, the vast proletariat. From the King downwards, this is so.

And the people, the proletariat. What about them and their education? They are the be-all and the end-all. To them everything is *ideally* devoted (mind, we are only writing now of education as it exists for us as an ideal, or an idea). There is not an idealist, or a man of ideas living who does not ostensibly come forward, like the Pope in Holy Week, with a basin and a towel to bathe the feet of the poor. And the poor sit aloft while their feet are laved. And then what? What *are* the poor, actually?

Because, before you can educate the people, you must know what the people are. We know well enough they are the proletariat, the human implements of industry. But that, we argue, is in their utilitarian aspect only. They have a higher

reality. Their proletarian or laborious nature is their mundane nature. When the Pope washes the feet of the poor men, it is not because the poor men have been shunting trucks on the railway and got their feet hot and dirty.

Not at all. He washes their feet as an act of symbolic recognition of the divine nature which is alive in each of these poor men. In this world, we are content to recognize divinity only in those that serve. The whole world screams *Ich dien*. Heaven knows *what* it serves! And yet, if we go back to the Pope, we shall realize that it is not in the *service*, the *labour* that he recognizes the divinity, but in the actual nature of the *servant*, the labourer, the humble individual. He washes the feet of the humble, not the feet of trades-unionistic, strike-menacing truck-shunters.

The man and his job. You've got to make a distinction between the two. If Louis Quatorze was content to be a State, we can't allow (ideally, at least) our dustman Jim Shepherd to regard himself as the apotheosis of dustbins. When Louis Quatorze said that He was the State, or the State was Him, he belittled himself really. For after all, it is a much rarer and more difficult thing to be oneself than to be either a State or a dustbin. At his best, a man is himself; his job, even if it be State-swaying, comes a long way after. For almost anybody could sway a State or swing a dust tub. But no man can take on another man's self. If you want to be unique, be yourself. And the spark of divinity in each being, however humble, is what the Pope recognizes in Holy Week.

The job is not by any means holy: and the man, in some degree, is. No doubt here we shall raise the wind of opposition from labour units and employer's units. But we don't care. We represent the true idealists who even now sit on the Board of Education and foggily but fervently enact their ideals. The job is not at all divine, the labour in some measure *is*. So let technical education remain apart.

But here comes the first dilemma. Because, however cloistral our elementary schools may be, sheltering the eternal flame of the high ideal of human existence, Jimmy Shepherd, aged twelve, and Nancy Shepherd, aged thirteen, know very well that the eternal flame of the high ideal is all my-eye. It's all toffee, my dear sirs. What you've got to do is to *get a job*, and when you've got your job then you must *make a decent screw*. First and last, this is the state of man. So says little Jimmy Shepherd, and so says his sister Nancy. She's got her thirteen-year-old eye on a laundry, and he's got his twelve-year-old eye on a bottle-factory. Headmaster and headmistress and all the teachers know perfectly well that the high goal of all *their* endeavours is the laundry and the bottle-factory. They try to stunt a bit sometimes about the high ideal of human existence, the dignity of human life or the nobility of labour. But if they *really* want to put the fear of the Lord into Jimmy or Nancy they say: "You'll break

more bottles than you'll make, my young genius," or else "You'll burn more shirt-fronts than you'll brighten, my girl: and *then* you'll know what you're in for, at the week-end." This mystic week-end is not the sacred Sabbath of Holy Communion. It is *payday*, and nothing else.

The high idealists up in Whitehall may preserve some illusion around themselves. But there is absolutely no illusion for the elementary school-teachers. They know what the end will be. And they know that they've got to keep their *own* job, and they've got to struggle for a head-ship. And between the disillusion of their scholars' destiny, on the one hand, and the disillusion of their own mean and humiliating destiny, on the other, they haven't much breath left for the fanning of the high flame of noble human existence.

If ever there is a poor devil on the face of the earth it is the elementary school-teacher. He is invested with a wretched idealist sort of authority over a pack of children, an authority which parents jeer at and despise. For they know the teacher is under *their* thumb. "I pay for you, I'll let you know, out of the rates. I'm your employer. And therefore you'll treat my child properly, or I'm going up to the Town Hall." All of which Jimmy and Nancy exultingly hear, and the teacher, guardian of the high flame of human divinity, quakes because he knows his job is in danger. He is insulted from above and from below. Comes along an inspector of schools, a university man himself, with no respect for the sordid promiscuity of the elementary school. For elementary schools know no remoteness and dignity of the rostrum. The teacher is on a level with the scholars, or inferior to them. And an elementary school knows no code of honour, no *esprit de corps*. There is the profound cynicism of the laundry and the bottle-factory at the bottom of everything. How should a refined soul down from Oxford fail to find it a little sordid and common?

The elementary school-teacher is in a vile and false position. Set up as representative of an ideal which is all toffee, invested in an authority which has absolutely no base except in the teacher's own isolate will, he is sneered at by the idealists above and jeered at by the materialists below, and ends by being a mongrel who is neither a wage-earner nor a professional, neither a head-worker nor a handworker, neither living by his brain nor by his physical toil, but a bit of both, and despised for both. He is caught between the upper and nether millstones of idealism and materialism, and every shred of natural pride is ground out of him, so that he has to die or to cultivate some unpleasant *suffisance* which makes him objectionable for ever.

Yet who dare say that the idealists are wrong? And who dare say the materialists are right? The elementary school is where the two meet, like millstones. And teacher and scholars are ground between the two.

It is absolutely fatal for the manhood of the teacher. And it is bitterly detrimental for the scholars. You can hardly keep a boy for ten years in the elementary schools, “educating him” to be himself, “educating him” up to the high ideal of human existence, with the bottle-factory outside the gate all the time, without producing a state of cynicism in the child’s soul. Children are wonderfully subtle at dodging a hateful conclusion. If they are going to live, they must keep some illusions. But alas, they know the shoddiness of their illusions. What boy of fourteen, in an elementary school, but is a subtle cynic about all ideals?

What is wrong, then? The system. But when you’ve said that you’ve said nothing. The system, after all, is only the outcome of the human psyche, the human desires. We shout and blame the machine. But who on earth makes the machine, if we don’t? And any alterations in the system are only modifications in the machine. The system is *in us*, it is not something external to us. The machine is in us, or it would never come out of us. Well then, there’s nothing to blame but ourselves, and there’s nothing to change except inside ourselves.

For instance, you may exclude technical training from the elementary schools; you may prolong the school years to the age of sixteen — or to the age of twenty, if you like. And what then? At the gate of the school lies the sphinx who puts this question to every emerging scholar, boy or girl: “How are you going to make your living?” And every boy or girl must answer or die: so the poor things believe.

We call this the system. It isn’t, really. The trouble lies in us who are so afraid of this particular sphinx. “My dear sphinx, my wants are very small, my needs still smaller. I wonder you trouble yourself about so trivial a matter. I am going to get a job in a bottle-factory, where I shall have to spend a certain number of hours a day. But that is the least of my concerns. My dear sphinx, you are a kitten at riddles. If you’d asked me, now, what I’m going to do with my life, apart from the bottle-factory, you might have frightened me. As it is, really, every smoky tall chimney is an answer to you.”

Curious that when the toothless old sphinx croaks “How are you going to get your living?” our knees give way beneath us. What has happened to us, that we are so frightened by that toothless old lion of *want*? Do we really think we might not be able to earn our bread and butter? — bread and margarine, at the worst? Why are we so frightened? Out of fifty million people, about ten thousand can’t obtain their bread and butter without the workhouse or some such aid. But what’s the odds? The odds against your earning your living are one in five thousand. There are not so many odds against your dying of typhoid or being killed in a street-accident. Yet you don’t really care a snap about street-accidents

or typhoid. Then why are you so afraid of dying of starvation? You'll never die of starvation, anyhow. So what *are* you afraid of?

The fear of penury is very curious, in our age. In really poor ages, men did not fear penury. They didn't care. But we are abjectly terrified of it. Why? It isn't any such awful thing, if you don't care about keeping up appearances.

There is no cure for this craven terror of poverty save in human courage and insouciance. A sphinx has you by your cravenness. Oedipus and all those before him might just have easily answered the sphinx by saying, "Oh, my dear sphinx, that's quite easy. A Borogove, of course. What, don't you know what a Borogove is? My dear sphinx, go to school, go to school. I knew all about Borogoves before I was out of the cradle, and here you are, heaven knows how old, propounding silly riddles to which Borogove is the answer, and you admit you've never heard of one. I absolutely refuse to concern myself with *your* solution, if you know nothing of mine." Exit the sphinx with its tail between its legs.

And so with the sphinx of our material existence. She'll never go off with her tail between her legs till we simply jeer at her. "Earn my living, you crazy old bitch? Why, I'm going Jimmy-Shepherding. No, not sheep at all. *Jimmishepherding*. You don't understand. Worse luck for you, old bird."

You can set up State Aid and Old Age Pensions and Young Age Pensions till you're black in the face. But if you can't cure people of being frightened for their own existence, you'll educate them in vain. You may as well let a frightened little Jimmy Shepherd go bottle-blowing at the age of four. If he's frightened for his own existence, he'll never do more than keep himself assertively materially alive. And that's the end of it. So he might just as well start young, and avoid those lying years of idealistic education.

So that the first thing to be done, in the education of the people, is to cure them of the fear of not earning their own living. This won't be easy. The fear goes deep, in our nervous age. Men will go through all the agonies of war, and come out more frightened still of not being able to earn their living. It is a mystery. They will face guns and shells and unspeakable horrors, almost with equanimity. After all, that's merely death. It's not life. Life is the thing to be afraid of — and having enough money to live on is the anguished soul-problem. It has become an *idée fixe*, the idea of earning, or not earning, a living. And we are all monomaniacs in it.

And yet, the only way to solve the whole problem is to cure mankind, from the inside, of the fear. And this is the business of our reformed education. At present, we are all in the boat because our idealists are just as terrified of not earning their living as are the materialists. Even more.

That's the point. The idealists are more terrified than the materialists about not being able to earn their living. The materialists are brutal about it. They don't have to excuse themselves. They handle the tools and do the graft. But the idealists, those that sit in the Olympus of Whitehall, for example? It is they who tremble. They are earning their living tooth-and-nail, by promulgating up there in the clouds. But the material world cocks its eye on them. It keeps them as a luxury, as the Greeks kept their Olympic gods. After all, the idealists butter our motives with fair words and their own parsnips. When we have at last decided that our motives are none the better for the fair-word buttering of idealism, then the idealists will have to eat their Olympic parsnips very dry. Which is what they are afraid of. So they churn fair words, up there, and the proletariat churns margarine and a little butter down below, and so far there is an exchange. But as the price of butter rises the price of fair words depreciates, till the idealists are in a fair way of doing no trade at all, up on Olympus. Which is what they are afraid of. So they churn phrases like mad, hoping to bring out something that will catch the market.

And there we are. Between the idealists and the materialists our poor "elementary" children have their education shaken into them. Which is a shame. It is a shame to treat children as we treat them in school, to a lot of highfalutin and lies, and to a lot of fear and humiliation. Instead of putting the fear of the Lord into them we put the fear of the job. After which the job rises up and gives us a nasty knock in the eye; we get strikes and Labour menaces, and idealism is in a fair way of being kicked off Olympus altogether. Materialism threatens to sit aloft. And Olympus fawns and cringes, and is terrified, because it doesn't know how it will earn its living.

Idealism would be all right if it weren't frightened. But it *is* frightened: frightened to death. It is terrified that it won't be able to butter its parsnips. It is terrified that it won't be able to make a living. Curious thing, but rich people are inwardly more terrified of poverty, want, destitution, even than poor people. Even the proletariat is not so agonized with fear of not being able to make a living as are millionaires and dukes. The more the money the more intense the fear.

So there we are, all living in an agony and nightmare of fear of not being able to make a living. But we actually *are* the living. We live, and therefore everything is ours. Whence, then, the fear? Just a sort of irrational mob-panic.

Idealism *must* get over its fright. It is most to blame. There it sits in a fog, promulgating ideas and ideals, and all the time in a mad panic for fear of losing its job. There it sits decreeing that our children shall be educated pure from the taint of materialism and industrialism, and all the time it is fawning and cringing

before industrialism and materialism, and having throes and spasms of agony about its own salary. Certainly even idealists must have a salary. But why are they in such agonies of fear lest it be not forthcoming? After all, if they draw a salary, it is because they are *not* frightened. Their salary is the tithe due to their living fearlessness. And so, cadging their screw in panic, they are a swindle. And they cause our children to be educated to the tune of their swindlery.

And then no wonder that our children, the children of the people, look down their nose at ideals. It is no wonder the young workmen sneer at all idealism, all idealists, and at everything higher than wages and short hours. They are having their own back on the lie, and on the liars, that educated them in school. They've been educated in the lie, and therefore they also can spout idealism at will. But by their deeds ye shall know them: both parties.

Here's the end, then, of the first word on Education. Idealism is no good without fearlessness. To follow a high aim, you must be fearless of the consequences. To promulgate a high aim, and to be fearful of the consequences — as our idealists today — is much worse than leaving high aims alone altogether. Teach the three R's and leave the children to look out for their own aims. That's the very best thing we can do at the moment, since we are all cowards.

But later, when we've plucked a bit of our courage up, we'll embark on a new course of education, and *vogue la galere*. Those of us that are going to starve, why, we'll take our chance. Who has wits, and *guts*, doesn't starve: neither does he care about starving. *Courage, mes amis*.

II

Elementary Education today assumes two responsibilities. It has in its hands the moulding of the nation. And elementary schoolteachers are taught that they are to mould the young nation to two ends. They are to strive to produce in the child under their charge: (1) The perfect citizen; (2) The perfect individual.

Unfortunately the teachers are not enlightened as to what we mean by a perfect citizen and a perfect individual. When they are, during their training, instructed and lectured upon the teaching of history, they are told that the examples of history teach us the virtues of citizenship: and when drawing and painting and literary composition are under discussion, these subjects are supposed to teach the child self-expression.

Citizenship has been an indefinite Fata Morgana to the elementary schoolteacher: but self-expression has been a worse. Before the war we sailed serene under this flag of self-expression. Each child was to *express himself*: why, nobody thought necessary to explain. But infants were to express themselves, and nothing but themselves. Here was a pretty task for a teacher: he was to make his pupil *express himself*. Which *self* was left vague. A child was to be given a lump of soft clay and told to express himself, presumably in the pious hope that he might model a Tanagra figure or a Donatello plaque, all on his little lonely-o.

Now it is obvious that every boy's first act of self-expression would be to throw the lump of soft clay at something: preferably at the teacher. This impulse is to be suppressed. On what grounds, metaphysically? since the soft clay was given for self-expression. To this just question there is no answer. Self-expression in infants means, presumably, incipient Tanagra figurines and Donatello plaques, incipient *Iliads* and *Macbeths* and "Odes to the Nightingale": a world of infant prodigies, in short. And the responsibility for all this foolery was heaped on the shoulders of that public clown, the elementary schoolteacher.

The war, however, brought us to our senses a little, and we ran the flag of citizenship up above the flag of self-expression. This was much easier for the teacher. At least, now, the ideal was *service*, not self-expression. "Work, and learn how to serve your country." Service means authority: while self-expression means pure negation of all authority. So that teaching became a somewhat simpler matter under the ideal of national service.

However, the war is over, and there is a slump in national service. The public isn't inspired by the ideal of serving its country any more: it has had its whack.

And the idealists, who must run to give the public the inspiration it fancies at the moment, are again coming forward with traysful of infant prodigies and “self-expression.”

Now citizenship and self-expression are all right, as ideals for the education of the people, if only we knew what we meant by the two terms. The interpretation we give them is just ludicrous. Self-sacrifice in time of need: disinterested nobility of heart to enable each one to vote properly at a general election: an understanding of what is meant by income-tax and money interest: all vague and fuzzy. Nobody pretends to enlighten the teacher as to the mysteries of citizenship. Nobody attempts to instruct *him* in the relationship of the individual to the community. Nothing at all. There is a little gas about *esprit de corps* and national interest — but it is all gas.

None of which would matter if we would just leave the ideals out of our educational system. If we were content to teach a child to read and write and do his modicum of arithmetic, just as at an earlier stage his mother teaches him to walk and to talk, so that he may toddle his little way upon the face of the earth by himself, it would be all right. It would be a thousand times better, as things stand, to chuck overboard all your drawing and painting and music and modelling and pseudo-science and “graphic” history and “graphic” geography and “self-expression,” all the lot. Pitch them overboard, teach the three R’s, and then proceed with a certain amount of technical instruction, in preparation for the coming job. For all the rest, for all that concerns the child himself, leave him alone. If he likes to learn, the means of learning are in his hands. Brilliant scholars could be drafted into secondary schools. If he doesn’t like to learn, it is his affair. The quality of learning is not strained. Is not radical *unlearnedness* just as true a form of self-expression, and just as desirable a state, for many natures (even the bulk), as learnedness? Here we talk of free self-expression, and we proceed to force all natures into ideal and aesthetic expression. We talk about individuality, and try to drag up every weed into a rosebush. If a nettle likes to be a nettle, if it likes to have no flowers to speak of, why, that’s the nettle’s affair. Why should we force some poor devil of an elementary schoolteacher to sting his fingers to bits trying to graft the obstreperous nettle-stem with rose and vine? We, who sail under the flag of freedom, are bullies such as the world has never known before: idealist bullies: bullying idealism, which will allow nothing except in terms of itself.

Every teacher knows that it is worse than useless trying to educate at least fifty per cent of his scholars. Worse than useless: it is dangerous: perilously dangerous. What is the result of it? Drag a lad who has no capacity for true learning or understanding through the processes of education, and what do you

produce in him, in the end? A profound contempt for education, and for all educated people. It has meant nothing to him but irritation and disgust. And that which a man finds irritating and disgusting he finds odious and contemptible.

And this is the point to which we are bringing the nation, inevitably. Everybody is educated: and what is education? A sort of untnanliness. Go down in the hearts of the masses of the people and this is what you'll find: the cynical conviction that every educated man is unmanly, less manly than an uneducated man. Every little Jimmy Shepherd has dabbled his bit in pseudo-science and in the arts; he has seen a test-tube and he has handled plasticine and a camel's-hair brush; he knows that $a + a + b = .2a + b$. What more is there for him to know? Nothing. Pfui to your learning.

A little learning is a dangerous thing: how dangerous we are likely to be finding out. A man who has not the soul, or the spirit, to learn and to understand, he whose whole petty education consists in the acquiring of a few tricks, will inevitably, in the end, come to regard all educated or understanding people as tricksters. And once that happens, what becomes of your State? It is inevitably at the mercy of your bottle-washing Jimmy Shepherds and his parallel Nancys. For the uninstructible outnumber the instructible by a very large majority. Behold us then in the grimy fist of Jimmy Shepherd, the uninstructible Brobdingnag. Fools we are, we've put ourselves there: so if he pulls all our heads off, serves us right. He is Brobdingnagian because he is legion. Whilst we poor instructible mortals are Lilliputian in comparison. And the one power we had, the power of commanding reverence or respect in the Brobdingnag, a power God-given to us, we ourselves have squandered and degraded. On our own heads be it.

For a sensible system of education, then. Begin at the age of seven — five is too soon — and teach reading, writing, arithmetic as the only necessary mental subjects: reading to include geography, map-practice, history, and so on. Three hours a day is enough for these. Another hour a day might be devoted to physical and domestic training. Leave a child alone for the rest: out of sight and out of mind.

At the age of twelve, make a division. Teachers, schoolmasters, school-inspectors, and parents will carefully decide what children shall be educated further. These shall be drafted to secondary schools, where an extended curriculum includes Latin or French, and some true science. Secondary scholars will remain till the age of sixteen.

The children who will not be drafted to the secondary schools will, at the age of twelve, have their "mental" education reduced to two hours, whilst three hours will be devoted to physical and domestic training: that is, martial exercises and the rudiments of domestic labour, such as boot-mending, plumbing,

soldering, painting and paper-hanging, gardening — all those minor trades on which domestic life depends, and in which every working man should have some proficiency. This is to continue for three years.

Then on the completion of the fourteenth year, these scholars will be apprenticed half-time to some trade to which they are judged fitting, by a consensus of teachers and parents and the scholars themselves. For two years these half-timers shall spend the morning at their own trade, and some two hours in the afternoon at martial exercises and reading and at what we call domestic training, boot-mending, *etc.* At the age of sixteen they enter on their regular labours, as artisans.

The secondary scholars shall for two years, from the age of twelve to the age of fourteen, follow the curriculum of the secondary school for four hours a day, but shall put in one hour a day at the workshops and at physical training. At the completion of the fourteenth year a division shall be made among these secondary scholars. Those who are apparently “complete,” as far as mental education can make them, according to their own nature and capacity, shall be drafted into some apprenticeship for some sort of semi-profession, such as schoolteaching, and all forms of clerking. Like the elementary scholars, however, all secondary scholars put in two hours in the afternoon at reading and in the workshops or at physical training: one hour for the mental education, one hour for the physical. At the age of sixteen, clerks, schoolteachers, *etc.*, shall enter their regular work, or the regular training for their work.

The remaining scholars, of the third or highest class, shall at the age of sixteen be drafted into colleges. Those that have scientific bent shall be trained scientifically, those that incline to the liberal arts shall be educated according to their inclination, and those that have gifts in the pure arts or in the technical arts shall find artistic training. But an hour a day shall be devoted to some craft, and to physical training. Every man shall have a craft at which finally he is expert — or two crafts if he choose — even if he be destined for professional activity as a doctor, a lawyer, a priest, a professor, and so on.

The scholars of the third class shall remain in their colleges till the age of twenty, receiving there a general education as in our colleges today, although emphasis is laid on some particular branch of the education. At the age of twenty these scholars shall be drafted for their years of final training — as doctors, lawyers, priests, artists and so on. At the age of twenty-two they shall enter the world.

All education should be State education. All children should start together in the elementary schools. From the age of seven to the age of twelve boys and girls of every class should be educated together in the elementary schools. This

will give us a common human basis, a common radical understanding. All children, boys and girls, should receive a training in the respective male and female domestic crafts. Every man should finally be expert at some craft, and should be a trained *free* soldier, no matter what his profession. Every woman also should have her chosen, expert craft, so that each individual is master of some kind of work.

Of course a great deal will depend on teachers and headmasters. The elementary teachers will not be so terribly important, but they will be carefully selected for their power to control and instruct children, not for their power to pass examinations. Headmasters will always be men of the highest education, invested with sound authority. A headmaster, once established, will be like a magistrate in a community.

Because one of the most important parts in this system of education will be the judging of the scholars. Teachers, masters, inspectors and parents will all of them unite to decide the next move for the child. The child will be consulted — but the last decision will be left to the headmaster and the inspector — the final word to the inspector.

Again, no decision will be final. If at any time it shall become apparent that a child is unfit for the group he occupies, then, after a proper consultation, he shall be removed to his own natural group. Again, if a child has no capacity for arithmetic, we shall not persist for five years in drilling arithmetic into him. Some form of useful manual work will be substituted for the arithmetic lesson: and so on.

Such is a brief sketch of a sensible system of education for a civilized people. It may be argued that it puts too much power into the hands of schoolmasters and school-inspectors. But better there than in the hands of factory-owners and trades unions. The position of masters and inspectors will be discussed later.

Again, it may be argued that there is too much rule and government here. As a matter of fact, we are all limited to our own natures. And the aim above all others in this system is to recognize the true nature in each child, and to give each its natural chance. If we want to be free, we cannot be free to do otherwise than follow our own soul, our own true nature, to its fulfilment. And for this purpose primarily the suggested scheme would exist. Each individual is to be helped, wisely, reverently, towards his own natural fulfilment. Children can't choose for themselves. They are not sufficiently conscious. A choice is made, even if nobody makes it. The bungle of circumstance decrees the fate of almost every child today. Which is why most men hate their fates, circumstantial and false as they are.

And then, as to cost: which is always important. Our present system of

education is extravagantly expensive, and simply dangerous to our social existence. It turns out a lot of half-informed youth who despise the whole business of understanding and wisdom, and who realize that in a world like ours nothing but money matters. Our system of education tacitly grants that nothing but money matters, but puts up a little parasol of human ideals under which human divinity can foolishly masquerade for a few hours during school life, and on Sundays. Coming from under this parasol, little Jimmy Shepherd knows that he's quite as divine as anybody else. He's quite as much a little god as anybody else, because he's been told so in school from the age of five till the age of fifteen, so he ought to know. Nobody's any better than he is: he's quite as good as anybody else, and, because he's a poor dustman's son, even more acceptable in the eyes of God. And therefore why hasn't he got as much money? since money is all that he can make any use of. His own human divinity is no more use to him than anybody else's human divinity, and once it comes to fighting for shillings he's absolutely not going to be put off by any toffee about ideals. And there we are with little Jimmy Shepherd, aged fifteen. He's a right dangerous little party, all of our own making: and his name is legion.

Our system of education today threatens our whole social existence tomorrow. We should be wise if by decree we shut up all elementary schools at once, and kept them shut. Failing that, we must look round for a better system, one that will work.

But if we try a new system, we must know what we're about. No good floundering into another muddle. While education was strictly a religious process, it had a true goal. While it existed for governing classes, it had a goal. And *universal elementary* education has had a goal. But a fatal one.

We have assumed that we could educate Jimmy Shepherd and make him a Shelley or an Isaac Newton. At the very least we were sure we could make him a highly intelligent being. And we're just beginning to find our mistake. We can't make a highly intelligent being out of Jimmy Shepherd. Why should we, if the Lord created him only moderately intelligent? Why do we want always to go one better than the Creator?

So now, having gone a very long way downhill on a very dangerous road, and having got ourselves thoroughly entangled in a vast mob which may at any moment start to bolt down to the precipice Gadarene-wise, why, the best we can do is to try to steer uphill.

We've got first to find which way *is* uphill. We've got to shape our course by some just idea. We shaped it by a faulty idea of equality and the perfectibility of man. Now for the true idea: either that or the precipice edge.

III

It is obvious that the old ideal of Equality won't do. It is landing us daily deeper in a mess. And yet no idea which has passionately swayed mankind can be altogether wrong: not even the most fallacious-seeming. Therefore, before we can dispose of the equality ideal, the ideal that all men are essentially equal, we have got to find how far it is true.

In no sense whatever are men actually equal. Physically, some are big and some are small, some weak, some strong; mentally, some are intelligent, some are not, and the degrees of difference are infinite: spiritually, some are rare and fine, some are vulgar; morally, some are repulsive and some attractive. True, all men have noses, mouths, stomachs, and so on. But then this is a mere abstraction. Every nose, every stomach is different, actually, from every other nose and stomach. It is all according to the individual. Noses and stomachs are not interchangeable. You might perhaps graft the end of one man's nose on the nose of another man. But the grafted gentleman would not thereby have a dual identity. His essential self would remain the same: a little disfigured, perhaps, but not metamorphosed. Whatever tricks you may perform, of grafting one bit of an individual on another, you don't produce a new individual, a new type. You only produce a disfigured, patched-up old individual. It isn't like grafting roses. You couldn't graft bits of Lord Northcliffe on a thousand journalists and produce a thousand Napoleons of the Press. Every journalist would remain himself: a little disfigured or mutilated, maybe.

It is quite sickening to hear scientists rambling on about the interchange of tissue and members from one individual to another. They have at last reached the old alchemistic fantasy of producing the homunculus. They hope to take the hind leg of a pig and by happy grafting produce a marvellous composite individual, a fused erection of living tissue which will at last prove that man can *make* man, and that therefore he isn't divine at all, he is a purely human marvel, only so extraordinarily clever and marvellous that the sun will stop still to look at him.

When science begins to generalize from its own performances it is puerile as the alchemists were, at last. The truth about man, before he falls into imbecility, is that each one is just himself. That's the first, the middle truth. Every man has his own identity, which he preserves till he falls into imbecility or worse. Upon this clue of his own identity every man is fashioned. And the clue of a man's own identity is a man's own self or soul, that which is incommutable and

incommunicable in him. Every man, while he remains a man and does not lapse into disintegration, becoming a lump of chaos; is truly himself, only himself, no matter how many fantastic attitudes he may assume. True it is that man goes and gets a host of ideas in his head, and proceeds to reconstruct himself according to those ideas. But he never actually succeeds in this business of reconstructing himself out of his own head, until he has gone cracked. And then he may prance on all fours like Nebuchadnezzar, or do as he likes. But whilst he remains sane the buzzing ideas in his head will never allow him to change or metamorphose his own identity: modify, yes; but never change. While a man remains sane he remains himself and nothing but himself, no matter how fantastically he may attitudinize according to some pet idea. For example, this of equality. St. Francis was ready to fall in rapture at the feet of the peasant. But he wasn't ready to take the muck-rake from the peasant's hands and start spreading manure at twopence a day, an insignificant and forgotten nobody, a serf. Not at all. St. Francis kept his disciples and was a leader of men, in spite of all humility, poverty, and equality. Quite right, because St. Francis was by nature a leader of men, and what has any creed or theory of equality to do with it? He was born such: it was his own intrinsic being. In his soul he was a leader. Where does equality come in? Why, by his poverty, St. Francis wished to prove his own intrinsic superiority, not his equality. And if a man is a born leader, what does it matter if he hasn't got twopence, or if he has got two million? His own nature is his destiny, not his purse.

All a man can be, at the very best, is himself. At the very worst he can be something a great deal less than himself, a money-grubber, a millionaire, a State, like Louis Quatorze, a self-conscious ascetic, a spiritual prig, a grass-chewing Nebuchadnezzar.

So where does equality come in? Men are palpably unequal in *every* sense except the mathematical sense. Every man counts one: and this is the root of all equality: here, in a pure intellectual abstraction.

The moment you come to compare them, men are unequal, and their inequalities are infinite. But supposing you *don't* compare them. Supposing, when you meet a man, you have the pure decency not to compare him either with yourself or with anything else. Supposing you can meet a man with this same singleness of heart. What then? Is the man your equal, your inferior, your superior? He can't be, if there is no comparison. If there is no comparison, he is the incomparable. He is the incomparable. He is single. He is himself. When I am single-hearted, I don't compare myself with my neighbour. He is immediate to me, I to him. He is not my *equal*, because this presumes comparison. He is incomparably himself, I am incomparably myself. We behold each other in our

pristine and simple being. And this is the first, the finest, the perfect way of human intercourse.

And on this great first-truth of the pristine incomparable nature of every individual soul is founded, mistakenly, the theory of equality. Every man, when he is incontestably himself, is single, incomparable, beyond compare. But to deduce from this that all men are equal is a sheer false deduction: a simple *non sequitur*. Let every man be himself, purely himself. And then, in the evil hour when you *do* start to compare, you will see the endless inequality between men.

In the perfect human intercourse, a relation establishes itself happily and spontaneously. No two men meet one another direct without a spontaneous equilibrium taking place. Doubtless there is inequality between the two. But there is no *sense* of inequality. The give-and-take is perfect; without knowing, each is adjusted to the other. It is as the stars fall into their place, great and small. The small are as perfect as the great, because each is itself and in its own place. But the great are none the less the great, the small the small. And the joy of each is that it is so.

The moment I begin to pay direct mental attention to my neighbour, however; the moment I begin to scrutinize him and attempt to set myself over against him, the element of comparison enters. Immediately I am aware of the inequalities between us. But even so, it is inequalities and not inequality. There is *never* either any equality or any inequality between me and my neighbour. Each of us is himself, and as such is single, alone in the universe, and not to be compared. Only in our parts are we comparable. And our parts are vastly unequal.

Which finishes equality for ever, as an ideal. Finishes also fraternity. For fraternity implies a consanguinity which is almost the same as equality. Men are not equal, neither are they brothers. They are themselves. Each one is himself, and each one is essentially, starrily responsible for himself. Any assumption by one person of responsibility for another person is an interference, and a destructive tyranny. No person is responsible for the *being* of any other person. Each one is starrily single, starrily self-responsible, not to be blurred or confused.

Here then is the new ideal for society: not that all men are equal, but that each man is himself: "one is one and all alone and ever more shall be so." Particularly this is the ideal for a new system of education. Every man shall be himself, shall have every opportunity to come to his own intrinsic fullness of being. There are unfortunately many individuals to whom these words mean nothing: mere verbiage. We must have a proper contempt and defiance of these individuals, though their name be legion.

How are we to obtain that a man shall come to his own fullness of being; that

a child shall grow up true to his own essential self? It is no use just letting the child do as it likes. Because the human being, more than any other living thing, is susceptible to falsification. We alone have mental consciousness, speech, and thought. And this mental consciousness is our greatest peril.

A child in the bath sees the soap, and wants it, and won't be happy till he gets it. When he gets it he rubs it into his eyes and sucks it, and is in a far more unhappy state. Why? To see the soap and to want it is a natural act on the part of any young animal, a sign of that wonderful naive curiosity which is so beautiful in young life. But the "he won't be happy till he gets it" quality is, alas, purely human. A young animal, if diverted, would forget the piece of soap at once. It is only an accident in his horizon. Or, given the piece of soap, he would sniff it, perhaps turn it over, and then merely abandon it. Beautiful to us is the pure nonchalance of a young animal which *forgets* the piece of soap the moment it has sniffed it and found it no good. Only the intelligent human baby proceeds to fill its mouth, stomach, and eyes with acute pain, on account of the piece of soap. Why? Because the poor little wretch got an idea, an incipient idea into its little head. The rabbit never gets an idea into its head, so it can sniff the soap and turn away. But a human baby, poor, tormented little creature, *can't help* getting an idea into his young head. And then he *can't help* acting on his idea: no matter what the consequences. And this bit of soap shows us what a bitter responsibility our mental consciousness is to us, and how it leads astray even the infant in his bath. Poor innocent: we like to imagine him a spontaneous, unsophisticated little creature. But what do we mean by sophistication? We mean that a being is at the mercy of some idea which it has got into its head, and which has no true relation to its actual desire or need. Witness the piece of soap. The baby saw the piece of soap, and got an idea into its head that the soap was immeasurably desirable. Acting on this simple idea, it nearly killed itself, and filled an hour or so of its young life with horrid misery.

It is only when we grow up that we learn not to be run away with by ideas which we get in our heads and which don't correspond to any true natural desire or need. At least, education and growing-up is supposed to be a process of learning to escape the automatism of ideas, to live direct from the spontaneous, vital centre of oneself.

Anyhow, it is criminal to expect children to "express themselves" and to bring themselves up. They will eat the soap and pour the treacle on their hair and put their fingers in the candle-flame, in the acts of physical self-expression, and in the wildness of spiritual self-expression they will just go to pieces. All because, really, they have enough mental intelligence to obliterate their instinctive intelligence and to send them to destruction. A little animal that can crawl will

manage to live, if abandoned. Abandon a child of five years and it won't merely die, it will almost certainly maim and kill itself. This mental consciousness we are born with is the most double-edged blessing of all, and grown-ups must spend years and years guarding their children from the disastrous effects of this blessing.

Now let us go back to the maxim that every human being must come to the fullness of himself. It is part of our sentimental and trashy creed today that a little child is most purely himself, and that growing up perverts him away from himself. We assume he starts as a spontaneous little soul, limpid, purely self-expressive, and grows up to be a sad, sophisticated machine. Which is all very well, and might easily be so, if the mind of the little innocent didn't start to work so soon, and to interfere with all his little spontaneity. Nothing is so subject to small, but fatal automatization as a child: some little thing it sets its *mind* on, and the game is up. And a child is always setting its little mind on something, usually something which doesn't at all correspond with the true and restless desire of its living soul. And then, which will win, the little mind or the little soul? We all know, to our sorrow. When a child sets its little mind on the soap, its little soul, not to speak of its little eyes and stomach, is thrown to the winds. And yet the desire for the soap is only the misdirection of the eternally yearning, desirous soul of an infant.

Here we are, then. Instead of waiting for the wisdom out of the mouths of babes and sucklings, let us see that we keep the soap-tablet out of the same mouths. We've got to educate our children, and it's no light responsibility. We've got to try to educate them to that point where at last there will be a perfect correspondence between the spontaneous, yearning, impulsive-desirous soul and the automatic *mind* which runs on little wheels of ideas. And this is the hardest job we could possibly set ourselves. For man just doesn't know how to interpret his own soul-promptings, and therefore he sets up a complicated arrangement of ideas and ideals and works himself automatically till he works himself into the grave or the lunatic-asylum.

We've got to educate our children. Which means, we've got to decide for them: day after day, year after year, we've got to go on deciding for our children. It's not the slightest use asking little Jimmy "What would you like, dear?" because little Jimmy doesn't know. And if he *thinks* he knows, it's only because, as a rule, he's got some fatal little idea into his head, like the soap-tablet. Yet listen to the egregious British parent solemnly soliciting his young son: "What would you like to be, dear? A doctor or a clergyman?" — "An engine-driver," replies Jimmy, and the comedy of babes-and- sucklings continues.

We've got to decide for our children: for years and years we have to make

their decisions. And we've got to take the responsibility on to ourselves, as a community. It's no good feeding our young with a sticky ideal education till they are fourteen years old, then pitching them out, pap-fed, into the whirling industrial machine and the warren of back streets. It's no good expecting parents to do anything. Parents don't know how to decide; they go to little Jimmy as if he were the godhead. And even if they did know how to decide, they can do nothing in face of the factory and the trades union and the back streets.

We, the educators, have got to decide for the children: decide the steps of their young fates, seriously and reverently. It is a sacred business, and unless we can act from our deep, believing souls, we'd best not act at all, but leave it to Northcliffe and trades unions.

We must choose, with this end in view. We want quality of life, not quantity. We don't want swarms and swarms of people in back streets. We want distinct individuals, and these are incompatible with swarms and masses. A small, choice population, not a horde of hopeless units.

And every man to be himself, to come to his own fullness of being. Not every man a little wonder of cleverness or high ideals. Every man himself, according to his true nature. And those who are comparatively non-mental can form a vigorous, passionate proletariat of indomitable individuals: and those who will work as clerks to be free and energetic, not humiliated as they are now, but fierce with their own freedom of beings: and the *man* will be always more than his job; the job will be a minor business.

We must have an ideal. So let our ideal be living, spontaneous individuality in every man and woman. Which living, spontaneous individuality, being the hardest thing of all to come at, will need most careful rearing. Educators will take a grave responsibility upon themselves. They will be the priests of life, deep in the wisdom of life. They will be the life-priests of the new era. And the leaders, the inspectors, will be men deeply initiated into the mysteries of life, adepts in the dark mystery of living, fearing nothing but life itself, and subject to nothing but their own reverence for the incalculable life-gesture.

IV

It is obvious that a system of education such as the one we so briefly sketched out in our second chapter will inevitably produce distinct classes of society. The basis is the great class of workers. From this class will rise also the masters of industry, and, probably, the leading soldiers. Second comes the clerkly caste, which will include elementary teachers and minor professionals, and which will produce the local government bodies. Thirdly we have the class of the higher professions, legal, medical, scholastic: and this class will produce the chief legislators. Finally, there is the small class of the supreme judges: not merely legal judges, but judges of the destiny of the nation.

These classes will not arise accidentally, through the accident of money, as today. They will not derive through heredity, as the great oriental castes. There will be no automatism. A man will not be chosen to a class, or a caste, because he is exceptionally fitted for a particular job. If a child shows an astonishing aptitude, let us say, for designing clocks, and at the same time has a profound natural life-understanding, then he will pass on to the caste of professional masters, or even to that of supreme judges, and his skill in clocks will only be one of his accomplishments, his *private* craft. The whole business of educators will be to estimate, not the particular faculty of the child for some particular job: not at all; nor even a specific intellectual capacity; the whole business will be to estimate the profound life-quality, the very nature of the child, that which makes him ultimately what he is, his soul-strength and his soul-wisdom, which cause him to be a natural master of life. Technical capacity is all the time subsidiary. The highest quality is living understand-mg — not intellectual understanding. Intellectual understanding belongs to the technical activities. But vital understanding belongs to the masters of life. And all the professionals in our new world are not mere technical experts: they are life-directors. They combine with their soul-power some great technical skill. But the first quality will be the soul-quality, the quality of being, and the power for the directing of life itself.

Hence we shall see that the system is primarily religious, and only secondarily practical. Our supreme judges and our master professors will be primarily *priests*. Let us not take fright at the word. The true religious faculty is the most powerful and the highest faculty in man, once he exercises it. And by the religious faculty we mean the inward worship of the creative life-mystery: the

implicit knowledge that life is unfathomable and unsearchable in its motives, not to be described, having no ascribable goal save the bringing-forth of an ever-changing, ever-unfolding creation: that new creative being and impulse surges up all the time in the deep fountains of the soul, from some great source which the world has known as God; that the business of man is to become so spontaneous that he shall utter at last direct the act and the *state* which arises in him from his deep being: and finally, that the mind with all its great powers is only the servant of the inscrutable, unfathomable soul. The *idea* or the *ideal* is only instrumental in the unfolding of the soul of man, a tool, not a goal. Always simply a tool.

We should have the courage to refrain from dogma. Dogma is the translation of the religious impulse into an intellectual term. An intellectual term is a finite, fixed, mechanical thing. We must be content for ever to live from the undescribed and indescribable impulse. Our god is the Unnamed, the Veiled, and any attempt to give names, or to remove veils, is just a mental impertinence which ends in nothing but futility and impertinencies.

So, the new system will be established upon the living religious faculty in men. In some men this faculty has a more direct expression in consciousness than in other men. Some men are aware of the deep troublings of the creative sources of their own souls, they are aware, they find speech or utterance in act, they come forth in consciousness. In other men the troublings are dumb, they will never come forth in expression, unless they find a mediator, a minister, an interpreter.

And this is how the great castes naturally arrange themselves. Those whose souls are alive and strong but whose voices are unmodulated, and whose thoughts unformed and slow, these constitute the great base of all peoples at all times: and it will always be so. For the creative soul is for ever charged with the potency of still unborn speech, still unknown thoughts. It is the everlasting source which surges everlastingly with the massive, subterranean fires of creation, new creative being: and whose fires find issue in pure jets and bubblings of unthinkable newness only here and there, in a few, or comparatively few, individuals.

It must always be so. We cannot imagine the deep fires of the earth rushing out everywhere, in a myriad myriad jets. The great volcanoes stand isolate. And at the same time the life-issues concentrate in certain individuals. Why it is so, we don't know. But why should we know? We are, after all, *only* individuals, we are not the eternal life-mystery itself.

And therefore there will always be the vast, living masses of mankind, incoherent and almost expressionless by themselves, carried to perfect

expression in the great individuals of their race and time. As the leaves of a tree accumulate towards blossom, so will the great bulk of mankind at all time accumulate towards its leaders. We don't want to turn every leaf of an apple tree into a flower. And so why should we want to turn every individual human being into a unit of complete expression? Why should it be our goal to turn every coal-miner into a Shelley or a Parnell? We can't do either. Coal-miners are consummated in a Parnell, and Parnells are consummated in a Shelley. That is how life takes its way: rising as a volcano rises to an apex, not in a countless multiplicity of small issues.

Time to recognize again this great truth of human life, and to put it once more into practice. Democracy is gone beyond itself. The true democracy is that in which a people gradually cumulate, from the vast base of the populace upwards through the zones of life and understanding to the summit where the great man, or the most perfect utterer, is alone. The false democracy is that wherein every issue, even the highest, is dragged down to the lowest issue, the myriad-multiple lowest human issue: today, the wage.

Mankind may have a perverse, self-wounding satisfaction in this reversal of the life-course. But it is a poor, spiteful, ignominious satisfaction.

In its living periods mankind accumulates upwards, through the zones of life-expression and passionate consciousness, upwards to the supreme utterer, or utterers. In its disintegrating periods the reverse is the case. Man accumulates downwards, down to the lowest issue. And the great men of the downward development are the men who symbolize the gradually sinking zones of being, till the final symbol, the great man who represents the wage-reality rises up and is hailed as the supreme. No doubt he is the material, mechanical universal of mankind, a unit of automatized existence.

It is a pity that democracy should be identified with this downward tendency. We who believe that every man's soul is single and incomparable, we thought we were democrats. But evidently democracy is a question of the integral wage, not the integral soul. If everything comes down to the wage, then down it comes. When it is a question of the human soul, the direction must be a cumulation upwards: upwards from the very roots, in the vast Demos, up to the very summit of the supreme judge and utterer, the first of men. There is a first of men: and there is the vast, basic Demos: always, at every age in every continent. The people is an organic whole, rising from the roots, through trunk and branch and leaf, to the perfect blossom. This is the tree of human life. The supreme blossom utters the whole tree, supremely. Roots, stem, branch, these have their own being. But their perfect climax is in the blossom which is beyond them, and which yet is organically one with them.

We see mankind through countless ages trying to express this truth. There is the rising up through degrees of aristocracy up to kings or emperors; there is a rising up through degrees of church dignity, to the pope; there is a rising up through zones of priestly and military elevation, to the Egyptian King-God; there is the strange accumulation of caste.

And what is the fault mankind has had to find with all these great systems? The fact that *somewhere*, the individual soul was discounted, abrogated. And when? Usually at the bottom. The slave, the serf, the vast populace, had no soul. It has been left to our era to put the populace in possession of its own soul. But no populace will ever know, by itself, what to do with its own soul. Left to itself, it will never do more than demand a pound a day, and so on. The populace finds its living soul-expression cumulatively through the rising up of the classes above it, towards pure utterance or expression or being. And the populace has its supreme satisfaction in the up-flowing of the sap of life, from its vast roots and trunk, up to the perfect blossom. The populace partakes of the flower of life: but it can never *be* the supreme, lofty flower of life: only leaves of grass. And shall we hew down the Tree of Life for the sake of the leaves of grass?

It is time to start afresh. And we need system. Those who cry out against our present system, blame it for all evils of modern life, call it the Machine which devours us all, and demand the abolition of all systems, these people confuse the issue. They actually desire the disintegration of mankind into amorphousness and oblivion: like the parched dust of Babylon. Well, that is a goal, for those that want it.

As a matter of fact, all life is organic. You can't have the merest speck of rudimentary life, without organic differentiation. And men who are collectively active in organic life-production must be organized. Men who are active purely in material production must be mechanized. There is the duality.

Obviously a system which is established for the purposes of pure material production, as ours today, is in its very nature a mechanism, a social machine. In this system we live and die. But even such a system as the great popes tried to establish was palpably not a machine, but an organization, a social organism. There is nothing at all to be gained from disunion, disintegration, and amorphousness. From mechanical systematization there is vast material productivity to be gained. But from an organic system of human life we shall produce the real blossoms of life and being.

There must be a system; there *must* be classes of men; there *must* be differentiation: either that, or amorphous nothingness. The true choice is not between system and no-system. The choice is between system and system, mechanical or organic.

We have blamed the great aristocratic system of the past, because of the automatic principle of heredity upon which they were established. A great man does not necessarily have a son at all great. We have blamed the great ecclesiastical system of the Church of Rome for the automatic principle of mediation on which it was established; we blame the automatism of caste, and of dogma. And then what? What do we put in place of all these semi-vital principles? The utterly non-vital, completely automatized system of material production. The ghosts of the great dead must turn on us.

What good is our intelligence to us, if we will not use it in the greatest issues? Nothing will excuse us from the responsibility of living: even death is no excuse. We have to live. So we may as well live fully. We are doomed to live. And therefore it is not the smallest use running into *pis alters* and trying to shirk the responsibility of living. We can't get out of it.

And therefore the only thing to do is to undertake the responsibility with good grace. What responsibility? The responsibility of establishing a new system: a new, organic system, free as far as ever 't can be from automatism or mechanism: a system which depends on the profound spontaneous soul of men.

How to begin? Is it any good having revolutions and cataclysms? Who knows? Revolutions and cataclysms may be inevitable. But they are merely hopeless and catastrophic unless there come to life the germ of a new mode. And the new mode must be incipient somewhere. And therefore, let us start with education.

Let us start at once with a new system of education: a system which will cost us no more, nay, less than the dangerous present system. At least we shall produce capable individuals. Let us first of all have compulsory instruction of all teachers in the new idea. Then let us begin with the schools. Life can go on just the same. It is not a cataclysmic revolution. It is a forming of new buds upon the tree, under the harsh old foliage.

What do we want? We want to produce the new society of the future, gradually, livingly. It will be a slow job, but why not? We cut down the curriculum for the elementary school at once. We abolish all the smatterings. The smatterings of science, drawing, painting and music are only the absolute death-blow to real science and song and artistic capacity. Folk-song lives till we have schools; and then it is dead, and the shrill shriek of self-conscious scholars is supposed to take its place.

Away with all smatterings. Away with the imbecile pretence of culture in the elementary schools. Remember the back streets, remember that the souls of the working people are only rendered neurasthenic by your false culture. We want to keep the young populace robust and sufficiently nonchalant. Teach a boy to read,

to write, and to do simple sums, and you have opened the door of all culture to him, if he wants to go through.

Even if we do no more, let us do so much. Away with all smatterings. Three hours a day of reading, writing and arithmetic, and that's the lot of mental education, until the age of twelve. When we say three hours a day, we mean the three hours of the morning. What it will amount to will be two hours of work: two intervals of absolutely free play, twenty minutes each interval: and twenty minutes for assembly and clearing-up and dismissal.

In the afternoon, actual *martial* exercises, swimming, and games, actual gymnasium *games*, but no Swedish drill. None of that physical-exercise business, that meaningless, vicious self-automatization; no athleticism. Never let physical movement be didactic, didactically performed from the mind.

Thus doing, we shall reduce the cost of our schools hugely, and we can hope to get some children, not the smirking, self-conscious, nervous little creatures we do produce. If we dare to have workshops, let us convert some of our schools into genuine work-sheds, where boys learn to mend boots and do joinering and carpentry and plumbing such as they will need in their own homes; other schools into kitchens, sculleries, and sewing-rooms for the girls. But let this be definite technical instruction for practical use, not some nonsense of fancy wood-carving and model churches. And let the craft-instructors be actual craftsmen, not school-teachers. Separate the workshop entirely from the school. Let there be no connexion. Avoid all "correlation," it is most vicious. Craftsmanship is a physical spontaneous intelligence, quite apart from *ideal* intelligence, and ruined by the introduction of the deliberate mental act.

And all the time, watch the *being* in each scholar. Let the schoolmaster and the crafts-master and the games-master all watch the individual lads, to find out the living nature in each child, so that, ultimately, a man's destiny shall be shaped into the natural form of that man's being, not as now, where children are rammed down into ready-made destinies, like so much canned fish.

You can cut down the expenses of the morning school to one-half. Big classes will not matter. The *personal* element, personal supervision is of no moment.

V

State Education has a dual aim: (1) The production of the desirable citizen; (2) The development of the individual.

You can obtain one kind of perfect citizen by suppressing individuality and cultivating the public virtues: which has been the invariable tendency of reform, and of social idealism in modern days. A real individual has a spark of danger in him, a menace to society. Quench this spark and you quench the individuality, you obtain a social unit, not an integral man. All modern progress has tended, and still tends, to the production of quenched social units: danger-less beings, ideal creatures.

On the other hand, by the over-development of the individualistic qualities, you produce a disintegration of all society. This was the Greek danger, as the quenching of the individual in the social unit was the Roman danger.

You must have a harmony and an inter-relation between the two modes. Because, though man is first and foremost an individual being, yet the very accomplishing of his individuality rests upon his Now it is according to this creed that we proceed, at present, to educate our children. Sentimentally, we like to assume that a child is a little pure spirit arrived out of the infinite and clothed in innocent, manna-like flesh. This pure little spirit only needs to be fed on beauty, truth, and light, and it will grow up into a creature so near the angels that we'd best not mention it. Little stories full of love and sacrifice, little acts full of grace, little productions, little models in plasticine more spiritual than Donatello, little silver-point drawings more ethereal than Botticelli, little water-colour blobs that will suggest the world's dawn: all these things we quite seriously expect of small children, and in this expectation Whitehall gravely elaborates the educational system.

Ideal and innocent little beings, their minds only need to be *led* into the Canaan of their promise, and we shall have a world of *blameless* Shelleys and *superior* Botticellis. The degree of blamelessness and ideal superiority we set out to attain, in educating our children, is unimaginable. Pure little spirits, unblemished darlings! So sad that as they grow up some of the grossness of the world creeps in! *How* it creeps in, heaven knows, unless it is through the Irish stew and rice pudding at dinner. Or perhaps *somewhere* there are evil communications to corrupt good manners: time itself seems the great corrupter.

Whatever the end may be — and the end is bathos — our children *must* be regarded as ideal little beings, and their little minds must be *led* into blossom. Of course their little bodies are important: most important. Because, of course, their little bodies are the instruments of their dear little minds. And therefore you can't have a good sweet mind without a sweet healthy body. Give *every* attention to the body, for it is the sacred ark, the holy vessel which contains the holy of holies, the *mind* of the ideal little creature. *Mens sana in corpore sano*.

And therefore the child is taught to cherish its own little body, to do its little exercises and its little drill, so that it can become a fine man, or a fine woman. Let it only turn its *mind* to its own physique, and it will produce a physique that would shame Phidias. Let only the mind take up the body, and it will produce a body as a show gardener produces carrots, something to take your breath away. For the mind, the ideal reality, this is omnipotent and everything. The body is but a lower extension from the mind, diminishing in virtue as it descends. What is noble is near the brain: the ignoble is near the earth. A child is an ideal little creature, a term of ideal consciousness, pure spirit.

Any ideal, once it is really established, becomes ridiculous, so ridiculous that we begin to feel a certain mistrust of mankind's collective sense of humour. A man is never half such a fool as mankind makes of him. Mankind is a sententious imbecile without misgiving. When an individual reaches this stage, we put him away.

Well, our ideal little darlings, our innocents from the infinite, our sweet and unspoiled little natures, our little spirits straight from the hands of the Maker, our idealized little children, what are we making of them, as we lead their pure little minds into the Canaan of promise, as we educate them up to all that is pure and spiritual and ideal? What are we making of them? Fools, bitter fools. Bitter fools. If you want to know, ask them.

What is a child? A breath of the spirit of God? Well then, the breath of the spirit of God is something that still needs defining. It isn't like the waft of a handkerchief perfumed with *Ess-Bouquet*.

But, seriously, before we can dream of pretending to educate a child, we must get a different notion of the nature of children. When we see a seed putting forth its fat cotyledon, do we rhapsodize about the pure beauty of the divine issue? When we see a foal on stinky legs creaking after its mother, are we smitten with dazzled revelation of the hidden God? If we want to be dazzled with revelation, look at a mature tree in full blossom, a mature stallion in the full pride of spring. Look at a man or a woman in the magnificence of their full-grown powers, not at a tubby infant.

What is an infant? What is its holy little mind? An infant is a new clue to an

as-yet-unformed human being, and its little mind is a pulp of undistinguished memory and cognition. A little child has one clue to itself, central within itself. For the rest, it is new pulp, busy with differentiation towards the great goal of fulfilled being. Instead of worshipping the child, and seeing in it a divine emission which time will stale, we ought to realize that here is a new little clue to a human being, laid soft and vulnerable on the face of the earth. Here is our responsibility, to see that this unformed thing shall come to its own final form and fullness, both physical and mental.

Which is a long and difficult business. We have to feed the little creature in more ways than one: not only its little stomach and its little mind, but its little passions and will, its senses. Long experience has taught us that a baby should be fed on milk and pap: though we're not *quite* sure even now whether carrot-water wouldn't be better. Our ancient creed makes us insist on awaking the little "mind." We are all quite agreed that we have serious responsibilities with regard to the infant stomach and the infant mind. But we don't even know, yet, that there is anything else.

We think that all the reaction goes on within the stomach and the little brain. All that is wonderful, under the soft little skull; all that is tiresome, under the tubby wall of the abdomen. A set of organs which *ought* to work beautifully and automatically, considering the care we take: and a marvellous little mind which, we are sure, is full of invisible celestial blossoms of consciousness.

Poor baby: no wonder it is queer. That self-same little stomach isn't half so automatic as we and our precious doctors would like to have it. The "instrument" of the human body isn't half so instrumental as it might be. Imagine a kettle, for instance, suddenly refusing to sit on the fire, and not to be persuaded. Think of a sewing-machine that insisted on sewing cushions, nothing but cushions, and would not be pacified. What a world! And yet we go on expecting the baby's stomach to cook the food and boil the water automatically, as if it were a kettle. And when it refuses, we still talk to it as if it *were* a kettle. Anything rather than depart from our foregone conclusion that the human body is a complicated instrument, a sort of system of retorts and generators which will finally produce the electric messages of ideas.

The body is not an instrument, but a living organism. And the goal of life is not the idea, the mental consciousness is not the sum and essence of a human being. Human consciousness is not only ideal; cognition, or knowing, is not only a mental act. Acts of emotion and volition are acts of primary cognition and may be almost entirely non-mental.

Even apart from this, it is obvious to anyone who handles a baby that the vital activity is neither mental nor stomachic. Wherein lies the mystery of a baby, for

us adults? From what has grown the legend of the adoration of the infant? From the fact that in the infant the great affective centres, volitional and emotional, act direct and spontaneous, without mental cognition or interference. When mental cognition starts, it only puts a spoke in the wheel of the great affective centres. This for ever baffles us. We can see that it is not mental reaction which constitutes the true consciousness of a baby. Neither perception nor apperception, nor conception, nor any form of cognition, such as is recognized by our psychology, is to be ascribed to the infant mind. And yet there is consciousness, and even cognition: here, as in the mindless animals.

What kind of consciousness is it? We must look to the great affective centres, emotional and volitional. And we shall find that in the tiny infant there are two emotional centres primal and intensely active, with two corresponding volitional centres. We need go through no tortures of scientific psychology to get at the truth. We need only take direct heed of the infant.

And then we shall realize that the busy business of consciousness is not taking place beneath the soft little skull, but beneath the little navel, and in the midst of the little breast. Here are the two great affective centres of the so-called emotional consciousness. Which emotional consciousness, according to our idealistic psychology, is only some sort of *force*, like imagination, heat, or electric current. This force which arises and acts from the primal emotional-affective centres is supposed to be impersonal, general, truly a mechanical universal force, like electricity or heat or any kinetic force.

Impersonal, and having nothing to do with the individual. The personal and the individual element does not enter until we reach mental consciousness. Personality, individuality, depends on mentality. So our psychology assumes. In the *mind*, a child is personal and individual, it is itself. Outside the mind, it is an instrument, a dynamo, if you like, a unit of difficult kinetic force betraying a sort of automatic consciousness, the same in every child, undifferentiated. In the same way, according to our psychology, animals have no personality and no individuality, because they have no mental cognition. They have a certain psyche which they hold in common. What is true of one rabbit is true of another. All we can speak of is “the psychology of the rabbit,” one rabbit having just the same psyche as another. Why? Because it has no recognizable cognition: it has only instinct.

We know this is all wrong, because, having met a rabbit or two, we have seen quite clearly that each separate rabbit was a separate, distinct rabbit — individual, with a specific nature of his own. We should be sorry to attribute a *mind* to him. But he has consciousness, and quite an individual consciousness too. It is notorious that human beings see foreigners all alike. To an English

sailor the faces of a crowd of Chinese are all alike. But that is because the English sailor doesn't *see* the difference, not because the difference doesn't exist. Why, each fat domestic sheep, mere clod as it seems, has a distinct individual nature of its own, known to a shepherd after a very brief acquaintance.

So here we are with the great affective centres, volitional and emotional. The two chief emotional centres in the baby are the solar plexus of the abdomen and the cardiac plexus of the breast. The corresponding ganglia of the volitional system are the lumbar ganglion and the thoracic ganglion.

And we may as well leave off at once regarding these great affective centres as merely instrumental, like little dynamos and accumulators and so on. Nonsense. They are primary, integral mind-centres, each of a specific nature. There is a specific form of *knowing* takes place at each of these centres, without any mental reference at all. And the specific form of knowing at each of the great affective centres in the infant is of an individual and personal nature, peculiar to the very soul and being of that infant.

That is, at the great solar plexus an infant *knows*, in primary, mindless knowledge; and from this centre he acts and reacts directly, individually, and self-responsibly. The same from the cardiac plexus, and the two corresponding ganglia, lumbar and thoracic. The brain at first acts only as a switchboard which keeps these great active centres in circuit of communication. The process of idealization, mental consciousness, is a subsidiary process. It is a second form of conscious activity. Mental activity, final cognition, ideation, is only set up secondarily from the perfect interaction and inter-communication of the primary affective centres, which remain all the time our dynamic first-minds.

VI

How to begin to educate a child. First rule, leave him alone. Second rule, leave him alone. Third rule, leave him alone. That is the whole beginning.

Which doesn't mean we are to let him starve, or put his fingers in the fire, or chew broken glass. That is mere neglect. As a little organism, he must have his proper environment. As a little individual he has his place and his limits: we also are individuals, and as such cannot allow him to make an unlimited nuisance of himself. But as a little person and a little mind, if you please, he does not exist. Personality and mind, like moustaches, belong to a certain age. They are a deformity in a child.

It is in this respect that we repeat, *leave him alone*. Leave his sensibilities, his emotions, his spirit, and his mind severely alone. There is the devil in mothers, that they must try to provoke *personal* recognition and *personal* response from their infants. They might as well start rubbing *Tatcho* on the tiny chin, to provoke a beard. Except that the *Tatcho* provocation will have no effect, unless perhaps a blister: whereas the emotional or psychic provocation has, alas, only too much effect.

For this reason babies should invariably be taken away from their modern mothers and given, not to yearning and maternal old maids, but to rather stupid fat women who can't be bothered with them. There should be a league for the prevention of maternal love, as there is a society for the prevention of cruelty to animals. The stupid fat woman may not guard so zealously against germs. But all the germs in the list of bacteriology are not so dangerous for a child as mother-love.

And why? Not for any thrilling Freudian motive, but because our now deadly idealism insists on idealizing every human relationship, but particularly that of mother and child. Heaven, how we all prostrate ourselves before the mother-child relationship, in all the grovelling degeneracy of Mariolatry! Highest, purest, most ideal of relationships, mother and child!

What nasty drivel! The mother-child relationship is certainly deep and important, but to make it high, or pure, or ideal is to make a nauseous perversion of it. A healthy, natural child has no high nature, no purity, and no ideal being. To stimulate these qualities in the infant is to produce psychic deformity, just as ugly as if we stimulated the growth of a beard on the baby face.

As far as all these high and personal matters go, *leave the child alone*. Personality and spiritual being mean with us our *mental consciousness* of our *own self*. A mother is to a high degree, alas, mentally conscious of her own self, her own exaltedness, her own mission, in these miserable days. And she wants her own mental consciousness reciprocated in the child. The child must *recognize* and respond. Alas, that the child cannot give her the greatest smack in the eye, every time she smirks and yearns for recognition and response. If we are to save the ultimate sanity of our children, it is *down with mothers! A has les meres'*.

Down to the right level. Pull them down from their exalted perches. No more of this Madonna smirking and yearning. No more soul. A mother should have ten strokes with the birch every time she “comes over” with soul or yearning love or aching responsibility. Ten hard, keen, stinging strokes on her bare back, each time. Be-or even, as in the legend, in a she-wolf. Suffice it that the two great dynamic centres, the solar plexus in the infant and the solar plexus in some external being, are seized into correspondence, and a vital circuit set up.

The vital circuit, we remark, is set up between two extraneous and individual beings, each separately existing. Yet the circuit embraces the two in a perfectly balanced unison. The mother and child are on the same plane. The mother is one in vital correspondence with the child. That is, in all her direct intercourse with the child she is as rudimentary as the child itself, her dynamic consciousness is as undeveloped and non-mental as the child's.

Herein we have the true mother: she who corresponds with her child on the deep, rudimentary plane of the first dynamic consciousness. This correspondence is a sightless, mindless correspondence of touch and sound. The two dark poles of vital being must be kept constant in mother and infant, so that the flow is uninterrupted. This constancy is preserved by intimacy of contact, physical immediacy. But this physical immediacy does not make the two beings any less distinct and separate. It makes them more so. The child develops its own single, incipient self at its own primary centre; the mother develops her own separate, matured female self. The circuit of dynamic polarity which keeps the two equilibrated also produces each of them, produces the infant's developing body and psyche, produces the perfected womanhood of the mother.

All this, so long as the circuit is not broken, the flow perverted. The circuit, the flow is kept as the child lies against the bosom of its mother, just as the circle of magnetic force is kept constant in a magnet, by the “keeper” which unites the two poles. The child which sleeps in its mother's arms, the child which sucks its mother's breast, the child which screams and kicks on its mother's knee is established in a vital circuit with its parent, out of which circuit its being arises

and develops. From pole to pole, direct, the current flows: from the solar plexus in the abdomen of the child to the solar plexus in the abdomen of the mother, from the cardiac plexus in the breast of the child to the cardiac plexus in the breast of the mother. The mouth which sucks, the little voice which calls and cries, both issue from the deep centres of the breast and bowels, giving expression from these centres, and not from the brain. The baby is not mentally vocal. It utters itself from the great affective centres. And this is why it has such power to charm or to madden us. The mother in her response utters herself from the same affective centres; her coos and callings also are unintelligible. Not the mind speaks, but the deep, happy bowels, the lively breast.

Introduce one grain of self-consciousness into the mother, as she chuckles and coos to her baby, and what then? The good life-flow instantly breaks. The sounds change. She begins to produce them deliberately, -under mental control. And what then? The deep affective centre in the baby is suddenly robbed, as when the mouth still sucking is suddenly snatched from the full breast. The vital flow is suddenly interrupted, and a new stimulus is applied to the child. There is a new provocation, a provocation for mental response from the infantile self-consciousness. And what then? The child either howls, or turns pale and makes this convulsed effort at mental-conscious, or self-conscious response. After which it is probably sick.

The same with the baby's eyes. They do not see, mentally. Mentally, they are sightless and dark. But they have the remote, deep vision of the deep affective centres. And so a mother, laughing and clapping to her baby, has the same half-sightless, glaucous look in her eyes, vision non-mental and non-critical, the primary affective centres corresponding through the eyes, void of idea or mental cognition.

But rouse the devil of a woman's self-conscious will, and she, clapping and cooing and laughing apparently just as before, will try to force a personal, *conscious* recognition into the eyes of the baby. She will try and try and try, fiendishly. And the child will blindly, instinctively resist. But with the cunning of seven legions of devils and the persistency of hell's most hellish fiend, the cooing, clapping, devilish modern mother traduces the child into the personal mode of consciousness. She succeeds, and starts this hateful "personal" love between herself and her excited child, and the unspoken but unfathomable hatred between the violated infant and her own assaulting soul, which together make the bane of human life, and give rise to all the neurosis and neuritis and nervous troubles we are all afflicted with.

With children we must absolutely leave out the self-conscious and personal note. Communication must be remote and impersonal, a correspondence direct

between the deep affective centres. And this is the reason why we must kick out all the personal frotter from the elementary schools. Stories must be *tales*, fables. They may have a flat *moral* if you like. But they must never have a personal, self-conscious note, the little-Mary-who-dies-and-goes-to-heaven touch, or the little-Alice-who-saw-a-fairy. This is the most vicious element in our canting infantile education today. "And you will all see fairies, dears, if you know how to look for them."

It is perversion of the infant mind at the start. This continual introduction of a little child-heroine or -hero, with whom the little girl or the little boy can self-consciously identify herself or himself, stultifies all development at the true centres. Fairies are not a personal, *mental* reality. Alice Jenkinson, who lives in "The Laburnums," Leslie Road, Brixton, knows quite well that fairies are all "my-eye." But she is quite content to smirk self-consciously and say, "Yes, miss," when teacher asks her if she'd like to see a fairy. It's all very well playing games of pretence, so long as you enter right into the game, robustly, and forget your own pretensive self. But when, like the little Alices of today, you keep a constant self-conscious smirk on your nose all the time you're "playing fairies," then to hell with you and your fairies. And ten times to hell with the smirking, self-conscious "teacher" who encourages you. A hateful, self-tickling, self-abusive affair, the whole business.

And this is what is wrong, first and foremost, with our education: this attempt deliberately to provoke reactions in the great affective centres and to dictate these reactions from the mind. Fairies are true embryological realities of the human psyche. They are true and real for the great affective centres, which see as through a glass, darkly, and which have direct correspondence with living and naturalistic influences in the surrounding universe, correspondence which cannot have mental, rational utterance, but must express itself, if it be expressed, in preternatural forms. Thus fairies are true, and Little Red Riding Hood is most true.

But they are not true for Alice Jenkinson, smirking little minx. Because Alice Jenkinson is an incurably self-conscious little piece of goods, and she *cannot* act direct from the great affective centres, she *can* only act perversely, by reflection, from her *personal* consciousness. And therefore, for her, all fairies and princesses and Peters and Wendys should be put on the fire, and she should be spanked and transported to Newcastle, to have some of her self-consciousness taken out of her.

An inspector should be sent round *at once* to burn all pernicious Little Alice and Little Mary literature in the elementary schools, and empowered to cut down to one-half the salary of any teacher found smirking or smuggling or indulging

in any other form of pretty self-consciousness and personal grace. Abolish all the bunkum, go back to the three R's. Don't cultivate any more imagination at all in children: it only means pernicious self-consciousness. Let us, for heaven's sake, have children without imagination and without "nerves," for the two are damnably inseparable.

Down with imagination in school, down with self-expression. Let us have a little severe hard work, good, clean, well-written exercises, well-pronounced words, well-set-down sums: and as far as head-work goes, no more. No more self-conscious dabbings and smirking and lispings of "The silver birch is a dainty lady" (so is little Alice, of course). The silver birch must be finely downcast to see itself transmogrified into a smirky little Alice. The owl and the pussy-cat may have gone to sea in the pea-green boat, and the little girl may well have said: "What long teeth you've got, Grandmother!" This is well within the bounds of natural pristine experience. But that dainty-lady business is only self-conscious smirking.

It will be a long time before we know how to act or speak again from the deep affective centres, without self-conscious perversion. And therefore, in the interim, whilst we learn, let us abolish all pretence at naivete and childish self-expression. Let us have a bit of solid, hard, tidy work. And for the rest, *leave the children alone*. Pitch them out into the street or the playgrounds, and take no notice of them. Drive them savagely away from their posturings.

There must be an end to the self-conscious attitudinizing of our children. The self-consciousness and all the damned high-flownness must be taken out of them, and their little personalities must be nipped in the bud. Children shall be regarded as young *creatures*, not as young affected persons. Creatures, not persons.

VII

As a matter of fact, our private hope is that by a sane system of education we may release the coming generation from our own nasty disease of self-consciousness: a disease quite as rampant among the working-classes as among the well-to-do classes; and perhaps even more malignant there, because, having fewer forms of expression, it tends to pivot in certain ideas, which fix themselves in the psyche and become little less than manias. The wage is the mania of the moment: the working-man consciousness of himself as a working-man, which has now become an *idée fixe*, excluding any possibility of his remaining a lively human being.

What do we mean by self-consciousness? If we will realize that all spontaneous life, desire, impulse, and first-hand individual consciousness arises and is effective at the great nerve-centres of the body, and *not* in the brain, we shall begin to understand. The great nerve-centres are in pairs, sympathetic and volitional. Again, they are polarized in upper and lower duality, above and below the diaphragm. Thus the solar plexus of the abdomen is the first great affective centre, sympathetic, and the lumbar ganglion, volitional, is its partner. At these two great centres arises our first consciousness, our primary impulses, desires, motives. These are our primal minds, here located in the dual great affective centres below the diaphragm. But immediately above the diaphragm we have the cardiac plexus and the thoracic ganglion, another great pair of conjugal affective centres, acting in immediate correspondence with the two lower centres. And these four great nerve-centres establish the first field of our consciousness, the first plane of our vital being. They are the four corner-stones of our psyche, the four powerful vital poles which, flashing darkly in polarized interaction one with another, form the fourfold issue of our individual life. At these great centres, primarily, we live and move and have our being. Thought and idea do not enter in. The motion arises spontaneous, we know not how, and is emitted in dark vibrations. The vibration goes forth, seeks its object, returns, establishing a life-circuit. And this life-circuit, established internally between the four first poles, and established also externally between the primal affective centres in two different beings or creatures, this complex life-circuit or system of circuits constitutes in itself our profound primal consciousness, and contains all our radical knowledge, knowledge non-ideal, non-mental, yet still knowledge, primary cognition, individual and potent.

The mental cognition or consciousness is, as it were, distilled or telegraphed from the primal consciousness into a sort of written, final script, in the brain. If we imagine the infinite currents and meaningful vibrations in the world's atmosphere, and if we realize how some of these, at the great wireless stations, are ticked off and written down in fixed script, we shall form some sort of inkling of how the primary consciousness centralized in the great affective centres, and circulating in vital circuits of primary cognition, is captured by the supremely delicate registering apparatus in the brain and registered there like some strange code, the newly rising mental consciousness. The brain itself, no doubt, is a very tissue of memory, every smallest cell is a vast material memory which only needs to be roused, quickened by the vibration coming from the primary centres, only needs the new fertilization of a new quiver of experience, to blossom out as a mental conception, an idea. This power for the transfer of the pure affective experience, the primary consciousness, into final mental experience, ideal consciousness, varies extremely according to individuals. It would seem as if, in Negroes for example, the primary affective experience, the affective consciousness is profound and intense, but the transfer into mental consciousness is comparatively small. In ourselves, in modern educated Europeans, on the other hand, the primal experience, the vital consciousness grows weaker and weaker, the mind fixes the control and limits the life-activity. For, let us realize once and for all that the whole mental consciousness and the whole sum of the mental content of mankind is never, and can never be more than a mere tithing of all the vast surging primal consciousness, the affective consciousness of mankind.

Yet we presume to limit the potent spontaneous consciousness to the poor limits of the mental consciousness. In us, instead of our life issuing spontaneously at the great affective centres, the mind, the mental consciousness, grown unwieldy, turns round upon the primary affective centres, seizes control, and proceeds to evoke our primal motions and emotions, didactically. The mind subtly, without knowing, provokes and dictates our own feelings and impulses. That is to say, a man helplessly and unconsciously *causes* from his mind every one of his own important reactions at the great affective centres. He can't help himself. It isn't his own fault. The old polarity has broken down. The primal centres have collapsed from their original spontaneity, they have become subordinate, neuter, negative, waiting for the mind's provocation, waiting to be worked according to some secondary idea. Thus arises our pseudo-spontaneous modern living.

We are in the toils of helpless self-consciousness. We can't help ourselves. It is like being in a boat with no oars. What can we do but drift? We know we are

drifting, but we don't know how or where. Because there is no primary *resistance* in us, nothing that resists the helpless but fatal flux of ideas which streams us away. The resistant spontaneous centres have broken down in us.

Why does this happen? Because we have become too conscious? Not at all. Merely because we have become too fixedly conscious. We have limited our consciousness, tethered it to a few great ideas, like a goat to a post. We insist over and over again on what we know from one mere centre of ourselves, the mental centre. We insist that we are essentially spirit, that we are ideal beings, conscious personalities, mental creatures. As far as ever possible we have resisted the independence of the great affective centres. We have struggled for some thousands of years, not only to get our passions under control, but absolutely to eliminate certain passions, and to give all passions an ideal nature.

And so, at last, we succeed. We do actually give all our passions an ideal nature. Our passions at last are nothing more or less than ideas auto-suggested into practice. We try to persuade ourselves that it is all fine and grand and flowing. And for quite a long time we manage to take ourselves in. But we can't continue, *ad infinitum*, this life of self-satisfied auto-suggestion.

Because, if you think of it, everything which is provoked or originated by an *idea* works automatically or mechanically. It works by principle. So that even our wickedness today, being ideal in its origin, a sort of deliberate reaction to the *accepted* ideal, amounts to the same mechanism. It is an ideal working of the affective centres in the *opposite direction* from the accepted direction: opposite and opposite and opposite, till murder itself becomes an ideal at last. But it is all auto-affective. No matter which way you *work* the affective centres, once you work them from the mental consciousness you automatize them. And the human being craves for change in his automatism. Sometimes it seems to him horrible that he must, in a fixed routine, get up in the morning and put his clothes on, day in, day out. He can't bear his automatism. He is beside himself in his self-consciousness. But he is a damned little Oliver Twist: nothing but twist, and always wanting "more." He doesn't want to drop his self-consciousness. He wants more, always more. The damned little ideal being, he wants to work his own little psyche till the end of time, like a clever little god-in-the-machine that he is. And he despises any real spontaneity with all the street-arab insolence of depraved idealism. Man would rather be the ideal god inside his own automaton than anything else on earth. And woman is ten times worse. Woman as the goddess in the machine of the human psyche is a heroine who will drive us, like a female chauffeur, through all the avenues of hell, till she pitches us eventually down the bottomless pit. And even then she'll save herself, she'll kilt her skirts and look round for new passengers. She has a million more dodges for automatic

self-stimulation than man has. When man has finished, woman can still cadge a million more sensational reactions out of herself and her co-respondent.

Man is accursed once he falls into the trick of ideal self-automatism. But he is infinitely conceited about it. He really works his own psyche! He really *is* the god of his own creation! Isn't this enough to puff him out? Here he is, tricky god and creator of himself at last! And he's not going to be ousted from his at-last-acquired godhead. Not he! The triumphant little god sits in the machine of his own psyche and turns on the petrol. It is like a story by H. G. Wells — too true to life, alas. There sits every man ensconced upon the engine of his own psyche, turning on the ideal taps and opening the ideal valves of his own nature, and so proud of himself, it's a wonder he hasn't set off to fly to the sun in one of his aeroplanes, like a new Icarus. But he lacks the fine boldness for such a flight. He wants to sit tight in his little hobby machine, near enough to his little hearth and home, this tubby, domestic little mechanical godhead.

A curse on idealism! A million curses on self-conscious automatic humanity, men and women both. Curses on their auto-suggestive self-reactions, from which they derive such inordinate self-gratification. Most curses of all upon the women, the self-conscious provokers of infinite sensations, of which man is the instrument. Let there be a fierce new Athanasian creed, to damn and blast all idealists. But let spiritual, ideal self-conscious woman be the most damned of all. Men, after all, don't get much more than aeroplane thrills and political thrills out of their god-in-the-machine reactions. But women get soul-thrills and sexual thrills, they float and squirm on clouds of self-glorification, with a lot of knock-kneed would-be saints and apostles of the male sort goggling sanctified eyes upwards at them, as in some sickening Raphael picture.

It is enough to send a sane person mad, to see this goggling, squirming, self-glorifying idealized humanity carrying on its self-conscious little games. And how it loves its little games. Just heaven, how it wallows in them, ideally!

What is to be done? We talk about new systems of education, and here we have a civilized mankind sucking its fingers avidly, as if its own fingers were so many sticks of juicy barley-sugar. It loves itself so much, this ideal self-conscious humanity, that it could verily eat itself-And so it nibbles gluttishly at itself.

Is it the slightest good doing anything but joining in with the sucking and self-nibbling? Probably not. We'll throw stones at them none the less, even if every stone boomerangs back in our own teeth. Perhaps once we shall catch humanity one in the eye.

The question is, don't our children get this self-conscious, self-nibbling habit, in the very womb of their travesty mothers, before they are even born? We are

afraid it is so. Our miserable offspring, churned in the abdomen of insatiable self-conscious woman, woman self-consciously every moment seeking and watching her own reactions, her own pregnancy and her own everything, grinding all her sensations from her head and reflecting them all back into her head, all her physical churnings ground exceeding small in the hateful self-conscious mills of her female mind, ideal and unremitting; do not our miserable offspring issue from the ovens of such a womb writhing and crisping with self-conscious morbid hunger of self? Alas and alack, to all appearance they do. The self-conscious devil is in them, either smirking and smarming, or preening and prancing, or irritably self-nibbling and sentimentalizing, or stolidly *sufficient*, or hostile. But there it is, the hateful devil of self-conscious self-importance born with them, simmered into them in the acid-seething, irritable womb.

What's to be done? Why, of course, keep the game up. Tickle the poor little wretches into ecstasies of self-consciousness. Gather round them and stare at them and mouth over them and sentimentalize and rhapsodize over them. Get the doctor to paw them, the nurse to expose them naked to a horde of ideal prurient females, get the parson to preach over them and roll his eyes to heaven over their sanctity. Then send them to school to "express themselves," in the hopes that they'll turn out infant prodigies. For, oh, dear me! *what* a feather in the cap of a mortal mother is an infant prodigy!

If *one* healthily sensitive mother in these days bore one healthy-souled, simple child she'd pick him up and bolt for her life from the mobs of our ghoulish "charming" women, and the mobs of goggling adoring men. She'd run, poor Hagar, to some desert with her Ishmael. And there she'd give him to a she-wolf, or a she-bear, or a she-lion to suckle. She'd never trust herself. Verily, she'd have more faith in a rattlesnake, as far as motherhood is concerned.

Would God a she-wolf had suckled me, and stood over me with her paps, and kicked me back into a rocky corner when she'd had enough of me. It might have made a man of me.

But it's no use sighing. Romulus and Remus had all the luck. We see now why they bred a great, great race: because they had no mother: a race of men. Christians have no fathers: only these ogling woman-worshipping saints, and the self-conscious friction of exalted mothers.

Let us rail — why shouldn't we? It is subject enough for railing.

But what about these infants? Alas, there isn't a wild she-wolf in the length and breadth of Britain. There isn't a crevice in the British Isles where you could suckle a brat undisturbed by the village constable. And therefore, no hope with us of heroic twins.

What are we going to do? Presumably, nothing: except carry on the pretty

process of smirking and goggling which we call education. The sense of futility overwhelms us. The thought of all the exalted mothers of England, and of all the knock-kneed smug God-besprinkled fathers is too much for us: all the hosts of the sentimental, self-conscious ones, the sensational self-conscious ones, the free-and-easy self-conscious ones, the downright no-nonsense-about-me self-conscious ones, the elegant self-conscious ones, the would-be dissolute self-conscious ones, the very-very-naughty self-conscious ones, the *chic* self-conscious ones, and spiritual self-conscious ones, and the *nuancy* self-conscious ones (those full of *nuances*), and the self-sacrificial self-conscious ones, and the do-all-you-can-for-others self-conscious ones, the do-your-bit self-conscious ones, the yearning, the aspiring, the sighing, the leering, the tip-the-winking self-conscious ones, females and so-called men: all the lot of them: *ad nauseam* and *ad nauseissimam*: they are too much for me. All of them like so many little barrel-organs grinding their own sensations, nay, their own very natures, out of their own little heads: and become so automatic at it they don't even know they're doing it. They think they are fine spontaneous angels, these little automata. And they are automata, self-turning little barrel-organs, all of them, from the millionaire down to the dustmari. The dustman grinds himself off according to his own dustman-ideal prescription.

VIII

We've got to get on to a different tack: snap! off the old tack and veer on to a new one. No more seeing ourselves as others see us. No more seeing ourselves at all. A fig for such sights.

The primary conscious centres, the very first and deepest, are in the lower body. A button for your brain, whoever you are. If you are not darkly potent below the belt, you are nothing.

Let go the upper consciousness. Switch it off for a time. Release the cramped and tortured lower consciousness. Drop this loving and merging business. Fall back into your own isolation and the insuperable pride thereof. Break off the old polarity, the merging into oneness with others, with everything. Snap the old connexions.

Break clean away from the old yearning navel-string of love, which unites us to the body of everything. Break it, and be born. Fall apart into your own isolation; set apart single and potent in-singularity for ever. One is one and all alone and ever more shall be so. Exult in it. Exult in the fact that you are yourself, and alone for ever. Exult in your own dark being. Across the gulf are strangers, myriad-faced dancing strangers like midges and like Pleiades. One draws near; there is a thrill and a fiery contact. But never a merging. A withdrawal, a bond of knowledge, but no identification. Recognition across space: across a dark and bottomless space: two beings who recognize each other across the chasm, who occasionally cross and meet in a fiery contact, but who find themselves invariably withdrawn afterwards, with dark, dusky-glowing faces glancing across the insuperable chasm which intervenes between two beings.

Have done; let go the old connexions. Fall apart, fall asunder, each into his own unfathomable dark bath of isolation. Break up the old incorporation. Finish for ever the old unison with homogeneity. Let every man fall apart into a fathomless, single isolation of being, exultant at his own core, and apart. Then, dancing magnificent in our own space, as the spheres dance in space, we can set up the extra-individual communication. Across the space comes the thrill of communication. There is an approach, a flash and blaze of contact, and then the sheer fiery purity of a purer isolation, a more exultant singleness. Not a mass of homogeneity, like sunlight, but a fathomless multiplicity, like the stars at night, each one isolate in the darkly singing space. This symbol of Light, the

homogeneous and universal Day, the daylight, symbolizes our universal mental consciousness, which we have in common. But our *being* we have in integral separateness, as the stars at night. To think of lumping the stars together into one mass is hideous. Each one separate, each one his own peculiar ray. So the universe is made up.

And the sun only hides all this. Imagine, if the sun shone all the time, we should never know there was anything but ourselves in the universe. Everything would be limited to the plane superficies of ourself and our own mundane nature. Everything would be as we see it and as we think it.

Which is what ails us. Living as we do entirely in the light of the mental consciousness, we think everything is as we see it and as we think it. Which is a vast illusion. Imagine a man who all his life has been shut up in a hermetically dark room, between sundown and sunrise, and let out only when light was full in the heavens.

He would imagine that everything, all the time, was light, that the firmament was a vast blue space screened from us sometimes by our own vapours, but otherwise a blue, unblemished void occupied by ourselves and the sun, one blue unchanging blaze of eternal light, with ourselves for the only inhabitants, under the sun.

Which, in spite of Galileo, that star-master, is what we actually do think. If we proceed to imagine other worlds, we cook up a few distortions of our own world and scatter them into space. A Martian may have long ears and horns on his forehead, but he is only ourselves dressed up, busy making super-zeppelins. We are convinced, as a matter of fact, that the stars and ourselves are all seed of one sort.

And what holds true cosmologically holds much more true psychologically. The man sealed up during twilight and night-time would have a rare shock the first time he was taken out under the stars. To see all the blue heavens crumpled and shrivelled away! To see the pulsation of myriad orbs proudly moving in the endless darkness, insouciant, sunless, taking a stately path we know not whither or how. Ha, the day-time man would feel his heart and brain burst to a thousand shivers, he would feel himself falling like a seed into space. All that he counted *himself* would be suddenly dispelled. All that he counted eternal, infinite, *Everything*, suddenly shrivelled like a vast, burnt roof of paper, or a vast paper lantern: the eternal light gone out: and behold, multiplicity, twinkling, proud multiplicity, utterly indifferent of oneness, proud far-off orbs taking their lonely way beyond the bounds of knowledge, emitting their own unique and untransmutable rays, pulsing with their own isolate pulsation.

This is what must happen to us. We have kept up a false daylight all through

our nights. Our sophistry has intervened like a lamp between us and the slow-stepping stars, we have turned our cheap lanterns on the dark and wizard face of Galileo, till lo and behold, his words are as harmless as butterflies. Of course the orbs are manifold: we admit it easily. But *light* is one and universal and infinite.

Put it in human terms: men are manifold, but Wisdom and Understanding are one and universal. Men are manifold, but the Spirit, the consciousness, is one, as sunlight is one. And therefore, because the consciousness of mankind is really one and universal, mankind is one and universal. Therefore each individual is a term of the Infinite.

A pretty bit of sophistry. Because the sunlight covers all the stars, therefore the stars are one, each is a homogeneous bit of light. Behold, how oneness achieves its ridiculous triumph, by self-deception. It is a famous dodge, this of self-deception. The popes couldn't squash Galileo. But clever mankind has succeeded in smearing out his star-shine, by a trick of the psyche.

Mankind is an ostrich with its head in the bush of the infinite. This doesn't prevent the stars all trooping past with a superb smile at the rump of the bird.

We don't find fault with the mental consciousness, the daylight consciousness of mankind. Not at all. We only find fault with the One-and-Allness which is attributed to it. It isn't One-and-All, any more than the sun is one and all. Has it never occurred to us that the sun serves no more than as a great lantern and bonfire to the ambulating intermediary world? Has it never occurred to us that the sun is not *superior* to our little earth, and to the other little stars, but just instrumental, a bonfire and a lamp and an axle-tree? After all, it is the little spheres which *live*, and the great sun is instrumental to their living, even as the powerful arc-lamps high over Piccadilly only serve to illuminate the little feet of foot-passengers.

So there we are. All our Oneness and our infinite, which does but mount up to the sum-total of human mentality or consciousness, is merely instrumental to the small individual consciousness of individual beings. Bigness as a rule means departure from life. Things which are vividly living are never so very big. Vastness is a term which applies to the non-vital universe. The moment we consider the vital universe, vastness and extensiveness cease to be terms of merit, and become terms of demerit. Whatever is vast and extensive in the *living* world is less quick, less alive than that which creates no impression of superlative size. In the *living* world, appreciation is intensive, not extensive. A small fowl like a lark or a kestrel is more to us than a flock of rooks or an ostrich or a condor. One is one and all alone and ever more shall be so.

Hence the little stellar orbs, living as we feel they must be, are more than the great sun they hover round: just as the shadowy human men are more than the

great fire round which they squat and move in the dark camp. So, the universe is a great living camp squatted round the sun. We warm ourselves and prepare our food at the fire. But, after all, the fire is only the means to our living. So the sun. It is but the means to the living of the little mid-way spheres, the great fire camped in the middle of the sky, at which they warm themselves and prepare their meat.

And so with human beings. One is one, and as such, always more than an aggregation. Vitaly, intensively, one human being is always more than six collective human beings. Because, in the collectivity, what is gained in bulk or number is lost in intrinsic being. The *quick* of any collective group is some consciousness they have in common. But the quick of the individual is the integral soul, for ever indescribable and unstateable. That which is *in common* is never any more than some mere property of the vital, individual soul.

Away then with the old system of valuation, that many is more than one. In the static material world it is so. But in the living world, the opposite is true. One is more than many. The Japanese know that one flower is lovelier than many flowers. Alone, one flower lives and has its own integral wonder. Massed with other flowers, it has a being-in-common, and this being-in-common is always inferior to the single aloneness of one creature. Being-in-common means the summing-up of one element held in common by many individuals. But this one common element, however many times multiplied, is never more than one mere part in any individual, and therefore much *less* than any individual. The more common the element, the smaller is its part in the individual, and hence the greater its vital insignificance. So with humanity, or mankind, or the infinite, as compared with one individual.

All of which is not mere verbal metaphysic, but an attempt to get in human beings a new attitude to life. Instead of finding our highest reality in an ever-extending aggregation with the rest of men, we shall realize at last that the highest reality for every living creature is in its purity of singleness and its perfect solitary integrity, and that everything else should be but a means to this end. All communion, all love, and all communication, which is all consciousness, are but a means to the perfected singleness of the individual being.

Which doesn't mean anarchy and disorder. On the contrary, it means the most delicately and inscrutably established order, delicate, intricate, complicate as the stars in heaven, when seen in their strange groups and goings. Neither does it mean what is nowadays called individualism. The so-called individualism is no more than a cheap egotism, every self-conscious little ego assuming unbounded rights to display his self-consciousness. We mean none of this. We mean, in the

first place, the recognition of the exquisite arresting *tnanifoldness* of being, multiplicity, plurality, as the stars are plural in their starry singularity. Lump the green flashing Sirius with red Mars, and what will you get? A muddy orb. Aggregate them, and what then? A mere smudgy cloudy nebula. One is one and all alone and ever more shall be so. Enveloped each one in its fathomless abyss of isolation. Magically, vitally alone, flashing with singleness.

Towards *this*, then, we are to educate our children and ourselves. Not towards any infinitely extended consciousness. Not towards any vastness or unlimitedness of any sort. Not towards any inordinate range of understanding or consciousness. Not towards any merging in any whole whatsoever. But delicately, through all the processes of communion and communication, love and consciousness, to the perfect singleness of a full and flashing, orb-like maturity.

And if this is the goal of all our striving and effort, then let us take the first stride by *leaving the child alone*, in his own soul. Take all due care of him, materially; give him all love and tenderness and wrath which the spontaneous soul emits: but always, always, at the very quick, leave him alone. Leave him alone. He is not you and you are not he. He is never to be merged into you nor you into him. Though you love him and he love you, this is but a communion in unfathomable difference, not an identification into oneness. There is *no* living oneness for two people: only a deadly oneness, of merged human beings.

Leave the child *alone*. Alone! That is the great word and world. Suppose the moon went through the sky, loving all the stars, hugging them to her breast, and crushing them into one beam with her. O vile thought! Like a swollen leper the dead moon would roll out of a void and corpse-like sky. Supposing she even caught the star Sirius as he passes low, and embraced him into oneness with herself, so that he merged amorphous into her. Immediately Orion would fall to pieces in the ruined heavens, the planets would drop from their orbits, a vast cataclysm and a rain of ruin in the cosmos.

Sirius must move and flash in his own circumambient space, single. Who knows what strange relation and intercommunion he has with Aldebaran, with the Pole Star, even with ourselves? But whatever his intercommunion, he is never raped from his own singleness, he never falls from his own isolate self.

The same for the child. After the navel-string breaks, he is alone in the aura of his own exquisite and mystic solitariness, and there must be no trespass into this solitariness. He is alone. *Leave* him alone. Never forget. Never forget to leave him alone, within his own soul's inviolability.

Do not be afraid, either, to *drive* him into his own soul's inviolable singleness. A child will trespass. It is born nowadays with an irritable craving to trespass into the nature of its mother. Nay, the parent-child relationship in these nervous

days resolves itself into one series of trespasses across the confines of the two natures, till there is some unholy arrest.

Now the *seeking* centres of the human system are the great sympathetic centres. It is from these, and primarily from the solar plexus, that the individual goes forth seeking communion with another being or creature or thing. At the solar plexus the child yearns avidly for the mother, for contact, for unison, for absorption even. A nervous child yearns and frets ceaselessly for complete identification. It wants to merge, to merge back into the mother, with the ceaseless craving of morbid love.

What are we to do when a child a few weeks old is so smitten, nervously craving for the mother and for re-identification with her? What on earth are we to do?

It is quite simple. *Break* the spell. Set up the activity of the volitional centres. For at the volitional centres a creature keeps itself apart, integral, centred in its own isolation. Living as we have done in one mode only, the mode of love, praising as we have done the single mode of unification and identification through love with the beloved, and with all the rest of the universe, we have used all the strength of the upper, mentally directed *will* to break the power of these dark, proud, integral volitional centres of the lower body. And we have almost succeeded. So that human life is born now creeping, parasitic in its tendency. The proud volitional centres of the lower body, those which maintain a human being integral and distinct, these have collapsed, so that the whole individual crawls helplessly and parasitically from the sympathetic centres, to establish himself in a permanent life-oneness with another being, usually the mother. And the mother, too, rejoices in this horrible parasitism of her child, she feels exalted, like God, now she is the host of the parasite.

Break the horrible circle of this lust. Break it. Seize babies away from their mothers, with hard, fierce, terrible hands. Send the volts of fierce anger and severing force violently into the child. Volts of hard, violent anger, that shock the feeble volitional centres into life again. Smack the whimpering child. Smack it sharp and fierce on its small buttocks. With all the ferocity of a living, healthy anger, spank the little tail, till at last the powerful dynamic centres of the spinal system vibrate into life, out of their atrophied torture. It is not too late. Quick, quick, mothers of England, spank your wistful babies. Good God, spank their little bottoms; with sharp, red anger spank them and make men of them. Drive them back. Drive them back from their yearning, loving parasitism; startle them for ever out of their pseudo-angelic wistfulness; cure them with a quick wild yell of all their wonder-child spirituality. Sharp, sharp, before it is too late. Be *fierce* with the little darling, and put hell's temper into its soft little soul. Quick, before

we are lost.

Let us get this wide, wistful look out of our children's eyes — this oh-so-spiritual look, varied by an oh-so-spiteful look. Let us cure them of their inordinate sensitiveness and consciousness. Kick the cat out of the room when the cat is a nuisance, and let the baby see you do it. And if the baby whimpers, kick the baby after the cat. In just mercy, do it. And then maybe you'll have a slim-muscled, independent cat that can walk with a bit of moon-devilish defiance, instead of the ravel of knitting-silk with a full belly and a sordid *meeau* which is "Pussy" of our dear domestic hearth. More important than the cat, you'll get a healthily reacting human infant, animal and fierce and not-to-be-coddled, the first signs of a proud man whose neck won't droop like a weak lily, nor reach forward for ever like a puppy reaching to suck, and whose knees won't be aching all his life with a luscious, loose desire to slip into some woman's lap, dear darling, and feel her caress his brow.

This instant moment we've got to start to put some fire into the backbones of our children. Do you know what the backbone is? It is the long sword of the vivid, proud, *dark* volition of man, something primal and creative. Not that miserable mental obstinacy which goes in the name of *will* nowadays. Not a will-to-power or a will-to-goodness or a will-to-love or a will-fo anything else. All these wills to this, that, and the other are only so many obstinate mechanical directions given to some chosen mental idea. You may choose the idea of power, and fix your mechanical little will on that, as the Germans did; or the idea of love, and fix your equally mechanical and still more obstinate little will on *that*, as we do, privately. And all you'll get is some neurotic automaton or parasite, materialistic as hell. You must be automatic and materialistic once you substitute an ideal pivot for the spontaneous centres.

But at the centres of the primal will, situate in the spinal system, the great volitional centres, here a man arises in his own dark pride and singleness, his own sensual magnificence in single being. Here the flashing indomitable man himself takes rise. It is not any tuppenny mechanical instrumental thing, a will-to-this or a will-to- that.

And these, these great centres of primal proud volition, these, especially in the lower body, are the life-centres that have gone soft and rotten in us. Here we need sharp, fierce reaction: sharp discipline, rigour; fierce, fierce severity. We, who are willing to operate surgically on our physical sick, my God, we must be quick and operate psychically on our psychic sick, or they are done for.

Whipping, beating, yes, these alone will thunder into the moribund centres and bring them to life. Sharp, stinging whipping, keen, fierce smacks, and all the roused fury of reaction in the child, these alone will restore us to psychic health.

Away with all mental punishments and reprobation. You *must* rouse the powerful physical reaction of anger, dark flushing anger in the child. You must. You *must* fight him, tooth and nail, if you're going to keep him healthy and alive. And if you're going to be able to love him with warm, rich bowels of love, my heaven, how you must fight him, how openly and fiercely and with no nonsense about it.

Rouse the powerful volitional centres at the base of the spine, and those between the shoulders. Even with stinging rods, rouse them.

IX

In the early years a child's education should be entirely non-mental. Instead of trying to attract an infant's attention, trying to arouse its *notice*, to make it *perceive*, the mother or nurse should mindlessly put it into contact with the physical universe. What is the first business of the baby? To ascertain the physical reality of its own context, even of its own very self. It has to learn to wave its little hands and feet. To a baby it is for a long time a startling thing, to find its own hand waving. It does not know what is moving, nor how it moves. It is quite unconscious of having inaugurated the motion, as a cat is unconscious of what makes the shadow after which it darts, or in what its own elusive tail-tip consists. So a baby marvels over the transit of this strange *something* which moves again and again across its own little vision. Behold, it is only the small fist. So it watches and watches. What is it doing?

When a baby absorbedly, almost painfully watches its own vagrant and spasmodic fist, is it trying to form a concept of that fist? Is it trying to formulate a little idea? "That is *my* fist: it is *I* who move it-I wave it so, and so!" — Not at all. The concept of *I* is quite late in forming. Some children do not realize that they are themselves until they are four or five years old. They are something objective to themselves: "Jackie wants it" — "Baby wants it" — and not "I want it." In the same way with the hand or the foot. A child for some years has no *conception* of its own foot as part of itself. It is "*the* foot." In most languages it is always "the foot, the hand," and not "my foot, my hand." But in English the ego is very insistent. We put it selfconsciously in possession as soon as possible.

None the less, it is some time before a child is possessed of its own ego. A baby watches its little fist waving through the air, perilously near its nose. What is it doing, thinking about the fist? NO! It is establishing the *rapport* or connexion between the primary affective centres which controls the fist. From the deep sympathetic plexus leaps out an impulse. The fist waves, wildly, to the peril of the little nose. It waves, does it! It leaps, it moves! And from the fountain of impulse deep in the little breast, it moves. But there is also a quiver of fear because of this spasmodic, convulsive motion. Fear! And the first volitional centre of the upper body struggles awake, between the shoulders. It moves, the arm moves, ah, convulsively, wildly, wildly! Ah, look, beyond control it moves, spurting from the wild source of impulse. Fear and ecstasy! Fear and ecstasy! But the other dawning power obtrudes. Shall it move, the

wildly waving little arm? Then look, it shall move smoothly, it shall not flutter abroad. So! And so! Such a swing means such a balance, such an explosion of force means a leap in such and such a direction.

The volitional centre in the shoulders establishes itself bit by bit in relation to the sympathetic plexus in the breast, and forms a circuit of spontaneous-voluntary intelligence. The volitional centres are those which put us primarily into line with the earth's gravity. The wildly waving infant fist does not know how to swing attuned to the earth's gravity, the omnipresent force of gravity. Life flutters broadcast in the baby's arm. But at the thoracic ganglion acts a new vital power, which gradually seizes the motor energy that comes explosive from the sympathetic centre, and ranges it in line with all kinetic force, in line with the mysterious, omnipresent centre-pull of the earth's great gravity. There is a true circuit now between the earth's centre and the centre of ebullient energy in the child. Everything depends on these true, polarized or orbital circuits. There is no disarray, no haphazard.

Once the flux of life from the spontaneous centres is put into its true kinetic relation with the earth's centre, adjusted to the force of gravity; once the gravitation of the baby's hand is spontaneously accepted and realized in the primary affective centres of the baby's psyche, then that little hand can take true and voluntary direction. The volitional centre is the pole that relates us, kinetically, to the earth's centre. The sympathetic plexus is the source whence the movement-impulse leaps out. Connect the two centres into a perfect circuit, and then, the moment the baby's fist leaps out for the tassel on its cradle, the volitional ganglion swings the leaping fist truly to its goal.

But this requires practice, for a baby. And in the course of the practice the infant bangs its own nose and swings its arm too far, so that it hurts, and brings a fair amount of trouble upon itself. But in the end, the fluttering, palpitating movement of the first days becomes a true and perfect flight, a gesture, a motion.

Has the mind got anything to do with all this? Does there enter any *idea* of movement into the baby's head, does the child form any conception of what it is doing? NONE. This whole range of activity and consciousness is non-mental, effective at the primary centres. It is not mere automatism. Far from it. It is *spontaneous consciousness*, effective and perfect in itself.

And it is in this spontaneous consciousness that education arises. One of the reasons why uneducated peasant nurses, are on the whole so much better for infants than over-conscious mothers is that an uneducated nurse does not introduce any *idea* into her attitude towards the child. When she claps her hands before the child, again and again, nods, smiles, coos, and claps again, she is stimulating the infant to motion, pure, mindless motion. She wants the child to

clap too. She wants its one little hand to find the other little hand, she wants to start the quick touch-and-go in the little shoulders. When you see her, time after time, making a fierce, wild gesture with her arm, before the eyes of the baby, and the baby laughing and chuckling, she is rousing the infant to the same fierce, free, reckless *geste*. Fierce, free, wild, reckless *geste!* How it excites the child to a quaint reckless chuckle! How it wakes in him the desire, the impulse for free, sheer motion! It starts the proud *geste* of independence.

This is the clue to early education: movement, physical motion, the attuning of the kinetic energy of the motor centres to the vast sway of the earth's centre. Without this we are nothing: clumsy, mechanical clowns, or pinched little automata.

But if you are going to make use of this form of education you must find teachers full of physical life and zest, of fine, physical, motor intelligence, and mentally rather stupid, or at least quiescent. Above all things, the *idea*, like a strangling worm, must not creep into the motor centres. It must be excluded. If we move, we must move primarily like a bird in the sky, which swings in supreme adjustment to the multiple forces of the winds of heaven and the pull of earth, mindless, idea-less, a speck of perfect physical animation. That is the whole point of real physical life: its joy in spontaneous mindless animation, in motion sheer and superb, like a leaping fish or a hovering hawk or a deer which bounds away, creatures which have never known the pride and the blight of the idea. The idea is a glorious thing in its place. But interposed in all our living, interpolated into our every gesture, it is like some fatal mildew crept in, some vile blight.

Let children be taught the pride of clear, clean movement. If it only be putting a cup on the table, or a book on a shelf, let it be a fine pure motion, not a slovenly shove. Parents and teachers should be keen as hawks, watching their young in motion. Do we imagine that a young hawk learns to fly and stoop, does a young swallow learn to skim, or a hare to dash uphill, or a hound to turn and seize him in full course, without long, keen pain of learning? Where there is no pain of effort there is a wretched, drossy degeneration, like the hateful cluttered sheep of our lush pastures. Look at the lambs, how they explode with new life, and skip up into the air. Already a *little* bit gawky! And then look at their mothers. Whereas a wild sheep is a fleet, fierce thing, leaping and swift like the sun.

So with our children. We, parents and teachers, must prevent their degenerating into physical cloddishness or mechanical affectation or fluttered nervousness. We must be after them, fiercely, sharpen and chasten their movements, their bearing, their walk. If a boy slouches out of a door, throw a

book at him, like lightning. That will make him jump into keen and handsome alertness. And if a girl comes creeping, whining in, seize her by her pigtail and run her out again, full speed. That will bring the fire to her eyes and the poise to her head: if she's got any fire in her: and if she hasn't, why, give her a good knock to see if you can drive some in.

Anything, anything rather than the nervous, twisting, wistful, pathetic, centreless children we are cursed with: or the fat and self-satisfied, sheep-in-the-pasture children who are becoming more common: or the impudent, I'm-as-good-as-anybody smirking children who are far too numerous. But it's all our own fault. We're afraid to *fight* with our children, and so we let them degenerate. Poor loving parents *we* are!

There must be a fight. There must be an element of danger, always. How do the wild animals get their grace, their beauty, their allure? Through being on the *qui vive*, always on the *qui vive*. A lark on a sand-dune springs up to heaven in song. She leaps up in a pure, fine strength. She trills out in triumph, she is beside herself in mid-heaven. But let her mind her p's and q's. In the first place, if she doesn't flick her wings finely and rapidly, with exquisite skilful energy, she'll come a cropper to earth. Let her mind the winds of heaven, in the first place. And in the second, let her mind the shadow of Monsieur the kestrel. And in the third place, let her be wary how she drops. And in the fourth place, let her be wary of who sees her dropping. For, the moment she alights on this bristling earth she's got to dart to cover, and cut some secret track to her nest, or she's likely to be in trouble. It's all very well climbing a ladder of song to heaven. But you've got to have your wits about you all the time, even while you're cock-a-lorying on your ladder: and *inevitably* you've got to climb down. Mind you don't give your enemies too good a chance, that's all. And watch it that you don't indicate where your nest is, or your ladder of song will have been a sore business. On the *qui vive*, bright lark!

So with our children. On the *qui vive*. The old-fashioned parents were right, when they made their children watch what they were about. But old-fashioned parents were a bore, dragging in moral and religious justification. If we are to chase our children, and chasten them too, it must be because they make our blood boil, not because some ethical or religious code sanctifies us.

"Miss, if you eat in that piggish, mincing fashion, you shall go without a meal or two."

"Why?"

"Because you're an objectionable sight/'

"Well, you needn't look at me."

Here Miss should get a box on the ear.

“Take that! And know that I *need* look at you, since I’m responsible for you. And since I’m responsible for you, I’ll watch it you don’t behave like a mincing little pig.”

Observe, no morals, no “What will people think of you?” or “What would your Daddy say?” or “What if Aunt Lucy saw you now!” or “It’s wrong for little girls to be mincing and ugly!” or “You’ll be sorry for it when you grow up!” or “I thought you were a good little girl!” or “Now, what did teacher say to you in Sunday-school?” — None of all these old dodges for shifting responsibility somewhere else. The plain fact is that parents and teachers are responsible for the bearing and developing of their children, so they may as well accept the responsibility flatly, and without dodges.

“I am responsible for the way you grow up, milady, and I’ll fulfil my responsibility. So stop pushing your food about on your plate and looking like a selfconscious cockatoo, or leave the table and walk well out of my sight.”

This is the tone that any honourable parent would take, seeing his little girl mincing and showing off at dinner. Let us keep the bowels of our compassion alive, and also the bowels of our wrath. No priggish brow-beating and mechanical authority, nor any disapproving superiority, but a plain, open anger when anger is aroused, and pleasure when this is waked.

The parent who sits at table in pained but disapproving silence %while the child makes a nuisance of itself, and says: “Dear, I should be so glad if you would try to like your pudding: or if you don’t like it, have a little bread-and-butter,” and who goes on letting the brat be a nuisance, this ideal parent is several times at fault. First she is assuming a pained ideal aloofness which is the worst form of moral bullying, a sort of Of course I won’t interfere, but I am in the right attitude which is insufferable. If a parent is in the right, then she must interfere, otherwise why does she bring up her child at all? If she doesn’t interfere, what right has she to assume any virtue of superiority? Then, when she is angry with the child, what right has she to say “Dear,” which term implies a state of affectionate communion? This prefixing of the ideal rebuke with the term “Dear” or “Darling” is a hateful travesty of all good feeling. It is using love or affection as a bullying weapon: which vile, sordid act the idealist is never afraid to commit. It is assuming authority of love, when love, as an emotional relationship, can have no authority. Authority must rest on responsible wisdom, and love must be a spontaneous thing, or nothing: an emotional rapport. Love and authority have nothing to do with one another. “Whom the Lord loveth, He chasteneth.” True! But the Lord’s love is not supposed to be an emotional business, but a sort of divine responsibility and purpose. And so is parental love, a responsibility and a living purpose, not an emotion. To make the emotion

responsible for the purpose is a fine falsification. One says “Dear” or “Darling” when the heart opens with spontaneous cherishment, not when the brow draws with anger or irritation. But the deep purpose and responsibility of parenthood remains unchanged no matter how the emotions flow. The emotions should flow unfalsified, in the very strength of that purpose.

Therefore parents should never seek justification outside themselves. They should never say, “I do this for your good.” You don’t do it for the child’s good. Parental responsibility is much deeper than an ideal responsibility. It is a vital connexion. Parent and child are polarized together still, somewhat as before birth. When the child in the womb kicks, it may almost hurt the parent. And the reaction is just as direct during all the course of childhood and parenthood. When a child is loose or ugly it is a direct hurt to the parent. The parent reacts and retaliates spontaneously. There is no justification, save the bond of parenthood, and certainly there is no ideal intervention.

We must accept the bond of parenthood primarily as a vital, mindless conjunction, non-ideal, passional. A parent owes the child all the natural passional reactions provoked. If a child provokes anger, then to deny it this anger, the open, passional anger, is as bad as to deny it food or love. It causes an atrophy in the child, at the volitional centres, and a perversion of the true life-flow.

Why are we so afraid of anger, of wrath, and clean, fierce rage? What cowardice possesses us? Why would we reduce a child to a nervous, irritable wreck, rather than spank it wholesomely? Why do we make such a fuss about a row? A row, a fierce storm in a family is a natural and healthy thing, which we ought even to have the courage to enjoy and exult in, as we can enjoy and exult in a storm of the elements. What makes us so namby-pamby? We ought all to fight: husbands and wives, parents and children, sisters and brothers and friends, all ought to fight, fiercely, freely, openly: and they ought to enjoy it. It stiffens the backbone and makes the eyes flash. Love without a fight is nothing but degeneracy. But the fight must be spontaneous and natural, without fixities and perversions.

The same with parenthood: spontaneous and natural, without any ideal taint.

And this is the beginning of true education: first, the stimulus to physical motion, physical trueness and elan, which is given to the infant. And this is continued during the years of early childhood *not by deliberate instruction*, but by the keen, fierce, unremitting swiftness of the parent, whose warm love opens the valves of glad motion in the child, so that the child plays in delicious security and freedom, and whose fierce, vigilant anger sharpens the child to a trueness and boldness of motion and bearing such as are impossible save in children of

strong-hearted parents.

Open the valves of warm love so that your child can play in serene joy by itself, or with others, like young weasels safe in a sunny nook of a wood, or young tiger-cubs whose great parents lie grave and apart, on guard. And open also the sharp valves of wrath, that your child may be alert, keen, proud, and fierce in his turn. Let parenthood and childhood be a spontaneous, animal relationship, non-ideal, swift, a continuous interplay of shadow and light, ever-changing relationship and mood. And, parents, keep in your heart, like tigers, the grave and vivid responsibility of parenthood, remote and natural in you, not fanciful and selfconscious.

X

From earliest childhood, let us have independence, independence, self-dependence. Every child to do all it can for itself, wash and dress itself, clean its own boots, brush and fold its own clothes, fetch and carry for itself, mend its own stockings, boy or girl alike, patch its own garments, and as soon as possible make as well as mend for itself. Man and woman are happy when they are busy, and children the same. But there must be the right motive behind the work. It must not always, for a child, be “Help mother” or “Help father” or “Help somebody.” This altruism becomes tiresome, and causes disagreeable reaction. Neither must the motive be the ideal of work. “Work is service, hence work is noble. *Laborare est orare.*” Never was a more grovelling motto than this, that work is prayer. Work is not prayer at all: not in the same category. Work is a practical business, prayer is the soul’s yearning and desire. Work is not an ideal, save for slaves. But work is quite a pleasant occupation for a human creature, a natural activity.

And the aim of work is neither the emotional helping of mother and father, nor the ethical-religious service of mankind. Nor is it the greedy piling-up of stupid possessions. An individual works for his own pleasure and independence: but chiefly in the happy pride of personal independence, personal liberty. No man is free who depends on servants. Man can never be quite free. Indeed he doesn’t want to be. But in his *personal* immediate life he can be vastly freer than he is.

How? By doing things for himself. Once we wake the quick of personal pride, there is a pleasure in performing our own personal service, every man sweeping his own room, making his own bed, washing his own dishes — or in proportion: just as a soldier does. We have got a mistaken notion of ourselves. We conceive of ourselves as ideal beings, nothing but consciousness, and therefore actual work has become degrading, menial to us. But let us change our notion of ourselves. We are only in part ideal beings. For the rest we are lively physical creatures whose life consists in motion and action. We have two feet which need tending, and which need socks and shoes. This is our own personal affair, and it behoves us to see to it. Let me look after my own socks and shoes, since these are private to me. Let me tend to my own apparel and my own personal service. Every bird builds its own nest and preens its own feathers: save perhaps a cuckoo or a filthy little sparrow which likes to oust a swallow, or a crazy ostrich which squats in the sand. Proud personal privacy, personal liberty, gay

individual self-dependence. Awake in a child the gay, proud sense of its own aloof individuality, and it will busy itself about its own affairs happily. It all depends what centre you try to drive from, what motive is at the back of all your movement. It is just as irksome to *have* a servant as to *be* a servant: particularly a personal servant. A servant moving about me, or even anybody moving about me, doing things for me, is a horrible drag on my freedom. I feel it as a sort of prostitution. *Noli me tangere*. It is our motto as it is the motto of a wild wolf or deer. I want about me a clear, cool space across which nobody trespasses. I want to remain intact within my own natural isolation, save at those moments when I am drawn to a rare and significant intimacy. The horrible personal promiscuity of our life is extremely ugly and distasteful. As far as possible, let *nobody* do anything for me, personally, save those who are near and dear to me: and even then as little as possible. Let me be by myself, and leave me my native distance. *Sono io* — and not a thing of public convenience.

Self-dependence is independence. To be free one must be self-sufficient, particularly in small, material, personal matters. In the great business of love, or friendship, or living human intercourse one meets and communes with another free individual; there is no service. Service is degrading, both to the servant and the one served: a promiscuity, a sort of prostitution. No one should do for me that which I can reasonably do for myself. Two individuals may be intimately interdependent on one another, as man and wife, for example. But even in this relation each should be as self-dependent, as self-supporting as ever possible. We should be each as single in our independence as the wild animals are. That is the only true pride. To have a dozen servants is to be twelve times prostituted in human relationship, sold and bought and automatized, divested of individual singleness and privacy.

The actual doing things is in itself a joy. If I wash the dishes I learn a quick, light touch of china and earthenware, the feel of it. the weight and roll and poise of it, the peculiar hotness, the quickness or slowness of its surface. I am at the middle of an infinite complexity of motions and adjustments and quick, apprehensive contacts. Nimble faculties hover and play along my nerves, the primal consciousness is alert in me. Apart from all the moral or practical satisfaction derived from a thing well done, I have the *mindless* motor activity and reaction in primal consciousness, which is a pure satisfaction. If I am to be well and satisfied, as a human being, a large part of my life must pass in mindless motion, quick, busy activity in which I am neither bought nor sold, but acting alone and free from the centre of my own active isolation. Not self-consciously, however. Not watching my own reactions. If I wash dishes, I wash them to get them clean. Nothing else.

Every man must learn to be proud and single and alone, and after that, he will be worth knowing. Mankind has degenerated into a conglomerate mass, where everybody strives to look and to be as much as possible an impersonal, non-individual, abstracted unit, a standard. A high *standard* of perfection: that's what we talk about. As if there could be any *standard* among living people, all of whom are separate and single, each one natively distinguished from every other one. Yet we all wear boots made for the abstract "perfect" or standard foot, and coats made as near as possible for the abstract shoulders of Mr. Everyman.

I object to the abstract Mr. Everyman being clapped over me like an extinguisher. I object to wearing his coat and his boots and his hat. Me, in a pair of "Lotus" boots, and a "Burberry," and "Oxonian" hat, why, I might just as well be anybody else. And I strenuously object. I am myself, and I don't want to be rigged out as a poor specimen of Mr. Everyman. I don't want to be standardized, or even idealized.

If I could, I would make my own boots and my own trousers and coats. I suppose even now I could if I would. But in Rome one must do as Rome does: the bourgeois is not worth my while, I can't demean myself to *epater* him, and I am much too sensitive to my own isolation to want to draw his attention.

Although in Rome one must do as Rome does; and although all the world is Rome today, yet even Rome falls. Rome fell, and Rome will fall again. That is the point.

And it is to prepare for this fall of Rome that we conjure up a new system of education. When I say that every boy shall be taught cobbling and boot-making, it is in the hopes that before long a man will make his own boots to his own fancy. If he likes to have Maltese sandals, why, he'll have Maltese sandals; and if he likes better high-laced buskins, why, he can stalk like an Athenian tragedian. Anyhow he'll sit happily devising his own covering for his own feet, and machine-made boots be hanged. They even hurt him, and give him callosities. And yet, so far, he thinks their machine-made standardized nullity is perfection. But wait till we have dealt with him. He'll be gay-shod to the happiness and vanity of his own toes and to the satisfaction of his own desire. And the same with his trousers. If he fancies his legs, and likes to flutter on his own elegant stem, like an Elizabethan, here's to him. And if he has a hankering after scarlet trunk-hose, I say hurray. *Chacun a son gout*: or ought to have. Unfortunately nowadays nobody has his own taste; everybody is trying to turn himself into a eunuch Mr. Everyman, standardized to his collar-stud. A woman is a little different. She wants to look ultra-smart and *chic* beyond words. And so she knows that if she can set all women bitterly asking "Isn't her dress Paquin?" or "Surely it's Poiret," or Lucile, or Cheruit, or somebody *very* Parisian, why,

she's done it. She wants to create an *effect*: not the effect of being just *herself*, her one and only self, as a flower in all its spots and frills is its own candid self. Not at all. A modern woman wants to hit you in the eye with her get-up. She wants to be a picture. She wants to derive her own nature from her accoutrements. Put her in a khaki uniform and she's a man shrilly whistling K-K-K-Katie. Let her wear no bodice at all, but just a row of emeralds and an aigrette, and she's a *cocotte* before she's eaten her hors-d'oeuvre, even though she was a Bible worker all her life. She lays it all on from the outside, powders her very soul.

But of course, when the little girls from *our* schools grow up they will really consider the lily, and put forth their flowers from their own roots. See them, the darlings, the women of the future, silent and rapt, spinning their own fabric out of their own instinctive souls — and cotton and linen and silk and wool into the bargain, of course — and delicately unfolding the skirts and bodices, or the loose Turkish trousers and little vests, or whatever else they like to wear, evolving and unfurling them in sensitive form, according to their own instinctive desire. She puts on her clothes as a flower unfolds its petals, as an utterance from her own nature, instinctive and individual.

Oh, if only people can learn to do as they like and to have what they like, instead of madly aspiring to do what everybody likes and to look as everybody would like to look. Fancy everybody looking as everybody else likes, and nobody looking like anybody. It sounds like Alice in Wonderland. A well-dressed woman before her mirror says to herself, if she is satisfied: "Every woman would like to look as I look now. Every woman will envy me."

Which is absurd. Fancy a petunia leaning over to a geranium and saying: "Ah, miss, *wouldn't* you just love to be in mauve and white, like me, instead of that common turkey-red!" To which the geranium: "You! In your cheap material! You don't look more than one-and-a-ha'penny a yard. You'd thank your lucky stars if you had an inch of *chiffon velvet* to your name."

Of course, a petunia is a petunia, and a geranium is a geranium. And I'll bet Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Why? Because he was trying to cut a dash and look like something beyond nature, overloading himself. Without doubt Solomon in all his nakedness was a lovely thing. But one has a terrible misgiving about Solomon in all his glory. David probably unfolded his nakedness into clothes that came naturally from him. But that Jewish glory of Solomon's suggests diamonds in lumps. Though we may be wrong, and Solomon in all his glory may have moved in fabrics that rippled naturally from him as his own hair, and his jewels may have glowed as his soul glowed, intrinsic. Let us hope so, in the name of wisdom.

All of which may seem a long way from the education of the people. But it isn't really. It only means to say, don't set up standards and regulation patterns for people. Don't have criteria. Let every individual be single and self-expressive: not self-expressive in the self-conscious, smirking fashion, but busy making something he *needs* and wants to have just so, according to his own soul's desire. Everyone individually and spontaneously busy, like a bird that builds its own nest and preens its own feathers, busy about its own business, alone and unaware.

The fingers must almost live and think by themselves. It is no good working from the idea, from the fancy: the creation must evolve itself from the vital activity of the fingers. Here's the difference between living evolving work and that ideal mental business we call "handicraft instruction" or "handwork" in school today.

Dozens of high-souled idealists sit today at hand-looms and spiritually weave coarse fabrics. It is a high-brow performance. As a rule it comes to an end. But sometimes it achieves another effect. Sometimes actually the mind is lulled, by the steady repetition of mechanical, productive labour, into a kind of swoon. Gradually the idealism moults away, the high-brow resolves into a busy, unconscious worker, perhaps even a night-and-day slogger, absorbed in the process of work.

One should go to the extremity of any experience. But that one should stay there, and make a habit of the extreme, is another matter. A great part of the life of every human creature should pass in mindless, active occupation. But not all the days. There is a time to work, and a time to be still, a time to think, and a time to forget. And they are all different times.

The point about any handwork is that it should not be mindwork. Supposing we are to learn to solder a kettle. The theory is told in a dozen words. But it is not a question of applying a theory. It is a question of *knowing*, by direct physical contact, your kettle-substance, your kettle-curves, your solder, your soldering-iron, your fire, your resin, and all the fusing, slipping interaction of all these. A question of direct knowing by contact, not a question of understanding. The mental understanding of what is happening is quite unimportant to the job. If you are of an inquiring turn of mind, you can inquire afterwards. But while you are at the job, *know* what you're doing, and don't bother about understanding. Know by immediate sensual contact. Know by the tension and reaction of the muscles, know, know profoundly but for ever untellably, at the spontaneous primary centres. Give yourself in an intense, mindless attention, almost as deep as sleep, but not charged with random dreams, charged with potent effectiveness. Busy, intent, absorbed work, forgetfulness, this is one of

the joys of life. Thoughts may be straying through the mind all the time. But there is no attention to them. They stream on like dreams, irrelevant. The soul is attending with joy and active purpose to the kettle and the soldering-iron; the mindless psyche concentrates intent on the unwilling little rivulet of solder which runs grudgingly under the nose of the hot tool. To be or not to be. Being isn't a conscious effort, anyhow.

So we realize that there must be a deep gulf, an oblivion, between pedagogy and handwork. Don't let a pedagogue come fussing about in a workshop. He will only muddle up the instincts.

Not that a schoolmaster is necessarily a pedagogue. Poor devil, he starts by being a man, and it isn't always easy to turn a man into that thing. And therefore many a schoolmaster is a thousand times happier turning a lathe or soldering a kettle than expounding long division. But the two activities are incompatible. Not incompatible in the same individual, but incompatible with each other. So, separate the two activities. Let the pedagogue of the morning disappear in the afternoon. If he appears in a workshop, let it be before children who have not known him as a school-teacher.

And in the workshop, let real jobs be done. Workshops may be mere tin sheds, or wooden sheds. Let the parents send the household kettles, broken chairs, boots and shoes, simple tailoring and sewing and darning and even cooking, to the workshop. Let the family business of this sort be given to the children, who will set off to the workshed and get the job done, under supervision, in the hours of occupation. A good deal can be done that way, instead of the silly theoretic fussing making fancy knickknacks or specimen parts, such as goes on at present.

What we want is for every child to be *handy*: physically adaptable, and handy. If a boy shows any desire to go forward in any craft, he will have his opportunity. He can go on till he becomes an expert. But he must start by being, like Jack at sea, just a handy man. The same with a girl.

Let the handwork be a part of the family and communal life, an extension of family life. Don't muddle it up with the mindwork. Mindwork at its best is theoretic. Our present attempts to make mindwork "objective" and physical, and to instil theoretic mathematics through carpentry and joinery is silly. If we are teaching arithmetic, let us teach pure arithmetic, without bothering with piles of sham pennies and shillings and pounds of sham sugar. In actual life, when we do our shopping, every one of our calculations is made quickly in abstraction: a pure mental act, everything abstracted. And let our mental acts be pure mental acts, not adulterated with "objects." What ails modern education is that it is trying to cram primal physical experience into mental activity — with the result of mere muddledness. Pure physical experience takes place at the great affective

centres, and is *de facto* pre-mental, non-mental. Mental experience on the other hand is pure and different, a process of abstraction, and therefore *de facto* not physical.

If our consciousness is dual, and active in duality; if our human activity is of two incompatible sorts, why try to make a mushy oneness of it? The *rapport* between the mental consciousness and the affective or physical consciousness is always a polarity of contradistinction. The two are never one save in their incomprehensible duality. Leave the two modes of activity separate. What connexion is necessary will be effected spontaneously.

XI

The essence of most games, let us not forget, lies in the element of *contest*: contest in force, contest in skill, contest in wit. The essence of work, on the other hand, lies in single, absorbed, mindless productivity. Now here again we have done our best to muck up the natural order of things. All along the line we have tried to introduce the mean and impoverishing factor of *emulation* into work-activities, and we have tried to make games as little as possible contests, and as much as possible fanciful self-conscious processes.

Work is an absorbed and absorbing process of productivity. Introduce this mean motive of emulation, and you cause a flaw at once in the absorption. You introduce a worm-like *arriere-pensee*; you corrupt the true state. Pah, it makes us sick to think of the glib spuriousness which is doled out to young school-teachers, purporting to be “theory of education.” The whole system seems to be a conspiracy to falsify and corrupt human nature, introduce an element of meanness, duplicity, and self-consciousness. Emulation is a dirty spirit, introduced into work, a petty, fostered jealousy and affectation. And this is true whether the work be mental or physical.

On the other hand, rivalry is a natural factor in all sport and in practically all games, simple, natural rivalry, the spirit of contest.

Again let us draw attention to a duality in the human psychic activity. There is the original duality between the physical and the mental psyche. And now there is another duality, a duality of mode and direction chiefly: the natural distinction between productive and contestive activities. The state of soul of a man engaged in productive activity is, when pure, quite distinct from that of the same man engaged in some competitive activity.

Let us note here another fatal defect in our modern system. Having attempted, according to ideals, to convert all life and all living into one mode only, the productive mode, we have been forced to introduce into our productive activities the spirit of contest which is original and ineradicable in us. This spirit of contest takes the form of competition: commercial, industrial, spiritual, educational, and even religious competition.

Was ever anything more humiliating than this spectacle of a mankind active in nothing but productive competition, all idea of pure, single-hearted production lost entirely, and all honest fiery contest condemned and tabooed? Here is the clue to the bourgeois. He will have no honest fiery contest. He will have only the

mean, Jewish competition in productivity, in money-making. He won't have any single, absorbed production. All work must be a scramble of contest against some other worker.

Is anything more despicable to be conceived? How make an end of it? By separating the two modes. By realizing that man is in at least one-half of his nature a pure fighter — not a competitor competing for some hideous silver mug, or some pot of money — but a fighter, a contesteer, a warrior.

We must wake again the flashing centres of volition in the fierce, proud backbone, there where we should be superb and indomitable, where we are actually so soft. We can move in herds of self-sacrificing heroism. But laughing defiance has gone out of our shop-keeping world.

And so for the third part of education, games and physical instruction and drill. We are all on the wrong tack again. In the elementary schools physical instruction is a pitiful business, this Swedish drill business. It is a mere pettifogging attempt to turn the body into a mental instrument, and seems warranted to produce nothing but a certain sulky hatred of physical command, and a certain amount of physical self-consciousness.

Physical training and Sandowism altogether is a ridiculous and puerile business. A man sweating and grunting to get his muscles up is one of the maddest and most comical sights. And the modern athlete parading the self-conscious mechanism of his body, reeking with a degraded physical, muscular self-consciousness and nothing but self-consciousness, is one of the most stupid phenomena mankind has ever witnessed. The physique is all right in itself. But to have your physique in your head, like having sex in the head, is unspeakably repulsive. To have your own physique on your mind all the time: why, it is a semi-pathological state, the exact counterpoise to the querulous, peevish invalid.

To have one's mind full of one's own physical self, and to have one's own physical self pranking and bulging under one's own mental direction is a good old perversion. The athlete is perhaps, of all the self-conscious objects of our day, the most self-consciously objectionable.

It is all wrong to mix up the two modes of consciousness. To the physique belongs the mindless, spontaneous consciousness of the great plexuses and ganglia. To the mind belongs pure abstraction, the *idea*. To drag down the idea into a bulging athletic physique; and to drag the body up into the head, till it becomes an obsession: horror.

Let the two modes of consciousness act in their duality, reciprocal, but polarized in difference, not to be muddled and transfused. If you are going to be physically active, physically strenuous and conscious, then *put off your mental attention*, put off all idea, and become a mindless physical spontaneous

Consciousness.

Away with all physical culture. Banish it to the limbo of human prostitutions: self-prostitution as it is: the prostitution of the primary self to the secondary idea.

If you will have the gymnasium: and certainly let us have the gymnasium: let it be to get us ready for the great *contests* and games of skill. Never, never let the motive be self-produced, the act self-induced. It is as bad as masturbation. Let there be the profound motive of *battle*. Battle, battle; let that be the word that rouses us to pure physical efforts.

Not Mons or Ypres, of course. Ah, the horror of machine explosions! But living, naked battle, flesh-to-flesh contest. Fierce, tense struggle of man with man, struggle to the death. That is the spirit of the gymnasium. Fierce, unrelenting, honourable contest.

Let all physical culture be pure *training*: training for the contest, and training for the expressive dance. Let us have a gymnasium as the Greeks had it, and for the same purpose: the purpose of pure, perilous delight in contest, and profound, mystic delight in unified motion. Drop morality. But don't drop morality until you've dropped ideal self-consciousness.

Set the boys one against the other like young bantam cocks. Let them fight. Let them hurt one another. Teach them again to fight with gloves and fists, egg them on, spur them on. Let it be fine balanced contest in skill and fierce pride. Egg them on, and look on the black eye and the bloody nose as insignia of honour, like the Germans of old.

Bring out the foils and teach fencing. Teach fencing, teach wrestling, teach jujitsu, every form of fierce hand-to-hand contest. And praise the wounds. And praise the valour that will be killed rather than yield. Better fierce and unyielding death than our degraded creeping life.

We are all fighters. Let us fight. Has it come down to chasing a poor fox and kicking a leather ball? Heaven, what a spectacle we should be to the Lacedaemonian. Rouse the old male spirit again. The male is always a fighter. The human male is a superb and godlike fighter, unless he is contravened in his own nature. In fighting to the death he has one great crisis of his being.

What, are we going to revoke our own being? Are we going to soften and soften in self-sacrificial ardour till we are white worms? Are we going to get our battle out of some wretched competition in trade or profession?

We will have a new education, where a black eye is a sign of honour, and where men strip stark for the fierce business of the fight.

What is the fight? It is a primary physical thing. It is not a horrible obscene ideal process, like our last war. It is not a ghastly and blasphemous translation of ideas into engines, and men into cannon-fodder. Away with such war. A million

times away with such obscenity. Let the desire of it die out of mankind.

But let us keep the real war, the real fight. And what is the fight? It is a sheer immediate conflict of physical men: that, and that best of all. What does death matter, if a man die in a flame of passionate conflict? He goes to heaven, as the ancients said: somehow, somewhere his soul is at rest, for death is to him a passional consummation.

But to be blown to smithereens while you are eating a sardine: horrible and monstrous abnormality. The soul should leap fiery into death, a consummation. Then nothing is lost. But our horrible cannon-fodder! — let us go the right way about making an end of it.

And the right way, and the only way, is to rouse new, living, passionate desires and activities in the soul of man. Your universal brotherhood, league-of-nations smoshiness and pappiness is no good. It will end in foul hypocrisy, and nothing can ever prevent its so ending.

It is a sort of idiocy to talk about putting an end to all fighting, and turning all energy into some commercial or trades-union competition. What is a fight? It's not an ideal business. It is a physical business. Perhaps up to now, in our ideal world, war was necessarily a terrific conflict of ideas, engines, and explosives derived out of man's cunning ideas. But now we know we are not ideal beings only: now we know that it is hopeless and wretched to confuse, the ideal conscious activity with the primal physical conscious activity: and now we know that true contest belongs to the primal physical self, that ideas, *per se*, are static; why, perhaps we shall have sense enough to fight once more hand-to-hand as fierce, naked men. Perhaps we shall be able to abstain from the unthinkable baseness of pitting one ideal engine against another ideal engine, and supplying human life as the fodder for these ideal machines.

Death is glorious. But to be blown to bits by a machine is mere horror. Death, if it be violent death, should come as a grand passional climax and consummation, and then all is well with the soul of the dead.

The human soul is really capable of honour, once it has a true choice. But when it has a choice only of war with explosive engines and poison-gases, and a universal peace which consists in the most sordid commercial and industrial competition, why, believe me, the human soul will choose war, in the long run, inevitably it will; if only with a remote hope of at last destroying utterly this stinking industrial-competitive humanity.

Man *must* have the choice of war. But, raving, insane idealist as he is, he must no longer have the choice of bombs and poison-gases and Big Berthas. That must not be. Let us beat our soldering-irons into swords, if we will. But let us blow all guns and explosives and poison-gases sky-high. Let us shoot every man

who makes one more grain of gunpowder, with his own powder.

After all, we are masters of our own inventions. Are we really so feeble and inane that we cannot get rid of the monsters we have brought forth? Why not? Because we are afraid of somebody else's preserving them? Believe me, there's nothing which every man-except insane criminals, and these we ought to hang right off — there's nothing which every man would be so glad to think had vanished out of the world as guns, explosives, and poison-gases. I don't care when my share in them goes sky-high. I'll take every risk of the Japanese or the Germans having a secret store.

Pah, men are all human, till you drive them mad. And for centuries we have been driving each other mad with our idealism and universal love. Pretty weapons they have spawned, pretty fruits of our madness. But the British people tomorrow could destroy all guns, all explosives, all poison-gases, and all apparatus for the making of these things. Perhaps you might leave one-barrelled pistols: but not another thing. And the world would get on its sane legs the very next day. And we should run no danger at all: danger, perhaps, of the loss of some small property. But nothing at all compared with the great sigh of relief.

It's the only way to do it. Melt down *all* your guns of all sorts. Destroy all your explosives, save what bit you want for quarries and mines. Keep no explosive weapon in England bigger than a one-barrelled pistol, which may live for one year longer. At the end of one year no explosive weapon shall exist.

The world at once starts afresh. — Well, do it. Your confabs and your meetings, your discussions and your international agreements will serve you nothing. League of Nations is all bilberry jam: bilge: and you know it. Put your guns in the fire and drown your explosives, and you've done your share of the League of Nations.

But don't pretend you've abolished war. Send your soldiers to Ireland, if you must send them, armed with swords and shields, bi't with no *engines* of war. Trust the Irish to come out with swords and shields as well: they'll do it. And then have a rare old lively scrap, such as the heart can rejoice in. But in the name of human sanity, never point another cannon: never. And it lies with Britain to take the lead. Nobody else will.

Then, when all your explosive weapons are destroyed — which may be before Christmas — then introduce a proper system of martial training in the schools. Let every boy and every citizen be a soldier, a fighter. Let him have sword and spear and shield, and know how to use them, Let him be determined to use them, too.

For, what does life consist in? Not in being some ideal little monster, a superman. It consists in remaining inside your own skin, and living inside your

own skin, and not pretending you're any bigger than you are. And so, if you've got to go in for a scrap, go in your own skin. Don't turn into some ideal-obscene monster, and invent explosive engines which will blow up an ideal enemy whom you've never set eyes on and probably never will set eyes on. Loathsome and hateful insanity that.

If you have an enemy, even a national enemy, go for him in your own skin. Meet him, see him, come into contact and fierce struggle with him. What good is an enemy if he's only abstract and invisible? That's merely ideal. If he is an enemy he is a flesh-and-blood fellow whom I meet and fight with, to the death. I don't blow bombs into the vast air, hoping to scatter a million bits of indiscriminate flesh. God save us, no more of that.

Let us get back inside our own skins, sensibly and sanely. Let us fight when our dander is up: but hand-to-hand, hand-to-hand, always hand-to-hand. Let us meet a man like a man, not like some horrific idea-born machine.

Let us melt our guns. Let us just simply do it as an act of reckless, defiant sanity. Why be afraid? It is such fear that has caused all the bother. Spit on such fear. After all, it can't do anything so vile as it has done already. Let us have a national holiday, melting the guns and drowning the powder. Let us make a spree of it. Let's have it on the Fifth of November: bushels of squibs and rockets. If we're quick we can have them ready. And as a squib fizzes away, we say, "There goes the guts out of a half-ton bomb."

And then let us be soldiers, hand-to-hand soldiers. Lord, but it is a bitter thing to be born at the end of a rotten, idealistic machine-civilization. Think what we've missed: the glorious bright passion of anger and pride, recklessness and dauntless cock-a-lory.

XII

Our life today is a sort of sliding-scale of shifted responsibility. The man, who is supposed to be the responsible party, as a matter of fact flings himself either at the feet of a woman, and makes her his conscience-keeper; or at the feet of the public. The woman, burdened with the lofty importance of man's conscience and decision, turns to her infant and says: "It is all for you, my sacred child. For you are the future!" And the precious baby, saddled with the immediate responsibility of all the years, puckers his poor face and howls: as well he may.

Or the public, meaning the ordinary working-man, being told for the fifty-millionth time that everything is for him, every effort and every move is made for his sake, naturally inquires at length: "Then why doesn't everything come my way?" To which, under the circumstances, there is no satisfactory answer.

So here we are, grovelling before two gods, the baby-in-arms and the people. In the sliding-scale of shirked responsibility, man puts the golden crown of present importance on the head of the woman, and the nimbus of sanctity round the head of the infant, and then grovels in an ecstasy of worship and self-exoneration before the double idol. A disgusting and shameful sight. After which he gets up and slinks off to his money-making and his commercial competition, and feels holy-holy-holy about it. "It is all for sacred woman and her divine child." The most disillusioning part about woman is that she sits on the Brummagem throne and laps up this worship. The baby, poor wretch, gets a stomach-ache. The other god, poor Demogorgon, the gorgon of the People, is even in a worse state. He sees the idealist kneeling before him, crying: "You are Demos, you are the People, you are the All in All. You have ten million heads and ten million voices and twenty million hands. Ah, how wonderful you are! Hail to you! Hail to you! Hail to you!"

Poor Demogorgon Briareus scratches his ten million heads with ten million of his hands, and feels a bit bothered-like. Because every one of the ten million heads is slow and flustered.

"Do you mean it, though?" he says.

"Ah!" shrieks the idealist. "Listen to the divine voice. Ten million throats, and one message! Divine, divine!"

Unfortunately, each of the ten million throats is a little hoarse, each voice a little clumsy and mistrustful.

"All right, then," mumbles Demogorgon Briareus; "fob out, then."

“Certainly! Certainly! Ah, the bliss with which we sacrifice our all to thee!” And he flings a million farthings at the feet of the many-headed.

Briareus picks up a farthing with one million out of his twenty million hands, turns over the coin, spits on it for luck, and puts it in his pocket. Feels, however, that this isn't everything.

“Now work a little harder for us, Great One, Supreme One,” cajoles the idealist.

And Demorgorgon, not knowing any better, but with some misgiving rumbling inside him, sets to for a short spell, whilst the idealist shrills out:

“Behold him, the worker, the producer, the provider! Our Providence, our Great One, our God of gods. Demos! Demogorgon!”

All of which flatters Briareus for a long time, till he realizes once more that if he's as divine as all that he ought to see a few more bradburys fluttering his way. So he strikes, and says: “Look here, what do you mean by it?”

“You're quite right, O Great One,” replies the idealist. “You are *always* right, Almighty Demos. Only don't stop working, otherwise the whole universe, which is *yours*, mind you, will stop working too. And *then* where will you be?”

Demos thinks there's something in it, so he slogs at it again. But always with a bee buzzing in his bonnet. Which bee stings him from time to time, and then he jumps, and the world jumps with him.

It's time to get the bee out of the bonnet of Briareus, or he'll be jumping right on top of us, he'll become a real Demogorgon.

“Keep still, Demos, my dear. You've got a nasty wasp in your bowler. Keep still; it's dangerous if it stings you. Let me get it out for you.”

And so we begin to remove the lie which the idealist has slipped us.

“You're big, Briareus, my dear fellow. You've got ten million heads. But every one of your ten million heads works rather slowly, and not one of your twenty million eyes sees much further than the end of your nose: which is only about an inch and a half, and not ten-million times an inch and a half. And your great ten-million-times voice, rather rough and indistinct, though of course *very* loud, doesn't really tell me anything, Briareus, Demos, O Democracy. Your wonderful cross which you make with your ten-million hands when you vote, it's a stupid and meaningless little mark. You don't know what you're doing: and anyhow it's only a choice of evils, on whose side you put your little cross. A thing repeated ten million times isn't any more important for the repetition: it's a weary, stupid little thing. Go now; be still, Briareus, and let a better man than yourself think for you, with his one clear head. For you must admit that ten million muddled heads are not better than one muddled head, and have no more right to authority. So just be quiet, Briareus, and listen with your twenty million

ears to one clear voice, and one bit of sense, and one word of truth. No, don't ramp and gnash your ten million sets of teeth. You won't come it over us with any of your Demogorgon turns. We shan't turn to stone. We shall think what a fool you are."

The same with the infant.

"My poor, helpless child, let's get this nimbus off, so that you can sleep in comfort. There now, play with your toes and digest your pap in peace; the future isn't yours for many a day. We'll look after the present. And that's all *you* will be able to do. Take care of the present, and the past and future can take care of themselves."

After which, to the woman enthroned:

"I'm sorry to trouble you, my dear, but do you mind coming down? We want that throne for a pigeon-place. And do you mind if I put a bottom in your crown? It'll make a good cake-tin. You can bake a nice dethronement-cake in it. You and I, my dear, we've had enough of this worship farce. You're nothing but a woman, a human female creature, and I'm nothing but a man, a human male creature, and there's absolutely no call for worship on either hand. The fact that you're female doesn't mean that I ought to set about worshipping you, and the fact that I'm male doesn't intend to start you worshipping me. It's all bunkum and lies, this worshipping process, anyhow. We're none of us gods: just two-legged human creatures. You're just yourself, and I'm just myself; we're different, and we'll agree to differ. No more of this puffing-up business. It makes us sick.

"You are yourself, a woman, and I'm myself, a man: and that makes a breach between us. So let's leave the breach, and walk across occasionally on some suspension-bridge. But you live on one side, and I live on the other. Don't let us interfere with each other's side. We can meet and have a chat and swing our legs mid-stream on the bridge. But you live on that side and I on this. You're not a man and I'm not a woman. Don't let's pretend we are. Let us stick to our own side, and meet like the magic foreigners we are. There's much more fun in it. Don't bully me, and I won't bully you.

"I've got most of the thinking, abstracting business to do, and most of the mechanical business, so let me do it. I hate to see a woman trying to be abstract, and being abstract, just as I hate and loathe to see a woman doing mechanical work. You hate me when I'm feminine. So I'll let you be womanly; you let me be manly. You look after the immediate personal life, and I'll look after the further, abstracted, and mechanical life. You remain at the centre, I scout ahead. Let us agree to it, without conceit on either side. We're neither better nor worse than each other; we're an equipoise in difference — but in difference, mind, not

in sameness.”

And then, beyond this, let the men scout ahead. Let them go always ahead of their women, in the endless trek across life. Central, with the wagons, travels the woman, with the children and the whole responsibility of immediate, personal living. And on ahead, scouting, fighting, gathering provision, running on the brink of death and at the tip of the life advance, all the time hovering at the tip of life and on the verge of death, the men, the leaders, the outriders.

And between men let there be a new, spontaneous relationship, a new fidelity. Let men realize that their life lies ahead, in the dangerous wilds of advance and increase. Let them realize that they must go beyond their women, projected into a region of greater abstraction, more inhuman activity.

There, in these womanless regions of fight, and pure thought and abstracted instrumentality, let men have a new attitude to one another. Let them have a new reverence for their heroes, a new regard for their comrades: deep, deep as life and death.

Let there be again the old passion of deathless friendship between man and man. Humanity can never advance into the new regions of unexplored futurity otherwise. Men who can only hark back to woman become automatic, static. In the great move ahead, in the wild hope which rides on the brink of death, men go side by side, and faith in each other alone stays them. They go side by side. And the extreme bond of deathless friendship supports them over the edge of the known and into the unknown.

Friendship should be a rare, choice, immortal thing, sacred and inviolable as marriage. Marriage and deathless friendship, both should be inviolable and sacred: two great creative passions, separate, apart, but complementary: the one pivotal, the other adventurous: the one, marriage, the centre of human life; and the other, the leap ahead.

Which is the last word in the education of a people.

ETHICS, PSYCHOLOGY, PHILOSOPHY

THE REALITY OF PEACE

I

THE TRANSFERENCE

Peace is the state of fulfilling the deepest desire of the soul. It is the condition of flying within the greatest impulse that enters us from the unknown. Our life becomes a mechanical round, and it is difficult for us to know or to admit the new creative desires that come upon us. We cling tenaciously to the old states, we resist our own fulfilment with a perseverance that would almost stop the sun in its course. But in the end we are overborne. If we cannot cast off the old habitual life, then we bring it down over our heads in a blind frenzy. Once the temple becomes our prison, we drag at the pillars till the roof falls crashing down on top of us and we are obliterated.

There is a great systole-diastole of the universe. It has no why or wherefore, no aim or purpose. At all times it is, like the beating of the everlasting heart. What it is, is for ever beyond saying. It is unto itself. We only know that the end is the heaven on earth, like the wild rose in blossom.

We are like the blood that travels. We are like the shuttle that flies from never to for ever, from for ever back to never. We are the subject of the eternal systole-diastole. We fly according to the perfect impulse, and we have peace. We resist, and we have the gnawing misery of nullification which we have known previously.

Who can choose beforehand what the world shall be? All law, all knowledge holds good for that which already exists in the created world. But there is no law, no knowledge of the unknown which is to take place. We cannot know, we cannot declare beforehand. We can only come at length to that perfect state of understanding, of acquiescence, when we sleep upon the living drift of the unknown, when we are given to the direction of creation, when we fly like a

shuttle that flies from hand to hand in a line across the loom. The pattern is woven of us without our foreknowing, but not without our perfect unison of acquiescence.

What is will, divorced from the impulse of the unknown? What can we achieve by this insulated self-will? Who can take his way into the unknown by will? We are driven. Subtly and beautifully, we are impelled. It is our peace and bliss to follow the rarest prompting. We sleep upon the impulse; we lapse on the strange incoming tide, which rises now where no tide ever rose; we are conveyed to the new ends. And this is peace when we sleep upon the perfect impulse in the spirit. This is peace even whilst we run the gauntlet of destruction. Still we sleep in peace upon the pure impulse.

When we have become very still, when there is an inner silence as complete as death, then, as in the grave, we hear the rare, superfine whispering of the new direction; the intelligence comes. After the pain of being destroyed in all our old securities that we used to call peace, after the pain and death of our destruction in the old life comes the inward suggestion of fulfilment in the new.

This is peace like a river. This is peace like a river to flow upon the tide of the creative direction, towards an end we know nothing of, but which only fills us with bliss of confidence. Our will is a rudder that steers us and keeps us faithfully adjusted to the current. Our will is the strength that throws itself upon the tiller when we are caught by a wrong current. We steer by the delicacy of adjusted understanding, and our will is the strength that serves us in this. Our will is never tired of adjusting the helm according to our pure understanding. Our will is prompt and ready to shove off from any obstruction, to overcome any impediment. We steer with the subtlety of understanding and the strength of our will sees us through.

But all the while our greatest effort and our supreme aim is to adjust ourselves to the river that carries us, so that we may be carried safely to the end, neither wrecked nor stranded nor clogged in weeds. All the while we are but given to the stream, we are borne upon the surpassing impulse which has our end in view beyond us. None of us knows the way. The way is given on the way.

There is a sacrifice demanded — only one, an old sacrifice that was demanded of the first man, and will be demanded of the last. It is demanded of all created life. I must submit my will and my understanding — all I must submit, not to any other will, not to any other understanding, not to anything that is, but to the exquisitest suggestion from the unknown that comes upon me. This I must attend to and submit to. It is not me, it is upon me.

There is no visible security; pure faith is the only security. There is no given way; there will never be any given way. We have no foreknowledge, no security

of chart and regulation; there is no pole-star save only pure faith.

We must give up our assurance, our conceit of final knowledge, our vanity of charted right and wrong. We must give these up for ever. We cannot map out the way. We shall never be able to map out the way to the new. All our maps, all our charts, all our right and wrong are only record from the past. But for the new there is a new and for ever incalculable element.

We must give ourselves and be given, not to anything that has been, but to the river of peace that bears us. We must abide by the incalculable impulse of creation; we must sleep in faith. It will seem to us we are nowhere. We shall be afraid of anarchy and confusion. But, in fact, there is no anarchy so horrid as the anarchy of fixed law, which is mechanism.

We must be given in faith, like sleep. We must lapse upon a current that carries us like repose, and extinguishes in repose our self-insistence and self-will. It will seem to us we are nothing when we are no longer actuated by the stress of self-will. It will seem we have no progression, nothing progressive happens. Yet if we look, we shall see the banks of the old slipping noiselessly by; we shall see a new world unfolding round us. It is pure adventure, most beautiful.

But first it needs the act of courage: that we yield up our will to the unknown, that we deliver our course to the current of the invisible. With what rigid, cruel insistence we clutch the control of our lives; with what a morbid frenzy we try to force our conclusions; with what madness of ghastly persistence we break ourselves under our own will! We think to work everything out mathematically and mechanically, forgetting that peace far transcends mathematics and mechanics.

There is a far sublimer courage than the courage of the indomitable will. It is not the courage of the man smiling contemptuously in the face of death that will save us all from death. It is the courage which yields itself to the perfectest suggestion from within. When a man yields himself implicitly to the suggestion which transcends him, when he accepts gently and honourably his own creative fate, he is beautiful and beyond aspersion.

In self-assertive courage a man may smile serenely amid the most acute pains of death, like a Red Indian of America. He may perform acts of stupendous heroism. But this is the courage of death. The strength to die bravely is not enough.

Where has there been on earth a finer courage of death and endurance than in the Red Indian of America? And where has there been more complete absence of the courage of life? Has not this super-brave savage maintained himself in the conceit and strength of his own will since time began, as it seems? He has held

himself aloof from all pure change; he has kept his will intact and insulated from life till he is an automaton — mad, living only in the acute inward agony of a negated impulse of creation. His living spirit is crushed down from him, confined within bonds of an unbreakable will, as the feet of a Chinese woman are bound up and clinched in torment. He only knows that he lives by the piercing of anguish and the thrill of peril. He needs the sharp sensation of peril; he needs the progression through danger and the interchange of mortal hate; he needs the outward torture to correspond with the inward torment of the restricted spirit. For that which happens at the quick of a man's life will finally have its full expression in his body. And the Red Indian finds relief in the final tortures of death, for these correspond at last with the inward agony of the cramped spirit; he is released at last to the pure and sacred readjustment of death.

He has all the fearful courage of death. He has all the repulsive dignity of a static, indomitable will. He has all the noble, sensational beauty of arrestedness, the splendour of insulated changeless-ness, the pride of static resistance to every impulse of mobile, delicate life. And what is the end? He is benumbed against all life, therefore he needs torture to penetrate him with vital sensation. He is cut off from growth, therefore he finds his fulfilment in the slow and mortal anguish of destruction. He knows no consummation of peace, but falls at last in the great conclusion of death.

Having all the resultant courage of negation, he has failed in the great crisis of life. He had not the courage to yield himself to the unknown that should make him new and vivid, to yield himself, deliberately, in faith. Does any story of martyrdom affect us like the story of the conversion of Paul? In an age of barrenness, where people glibly talk of epilepsy on the road to Damascus, we shy off from the history, we hold back from realizing what is told. We dare not know. We dare to gloat on the crucifixion, but we dare not face the mortal fact of the conversion from the accepted world, to the new world which was not yet conceived, that took place in the soul of St. Paul on the road to Damascus.

It is a passage through a crisis greater than death or martyrdom. It is the passage from the old way of death to the new way of creation. It is a transition out of assurance into peace. It is a change of state from comprehension to faith. It is a submission and allegiance given to the new which approaches us, in place of defiance and self-insistence, insistence on the known, that which lies static and external.

Sappho leaped off into the sea of death. But this is easy. Who dares leap off from the old world into the inception of the new? Who dares give himself to the tide of living peace? Many have gone in the tide of death. Who dares leap into the tide of new life? Who dares to perish from the old static entity, lend himself

to the unresolved wonder? Who dares have done with his old self? Who dares have done with himself, and with all the rest of the old-established world; who dares have done with his own righteousness; who dares have done with humanity? It is time to have done with all these, and be given to the unknown which will come to pass.

It is the only way. There is this supreme act of courage demanded from every man who would move in a world of life. Empedocles ostentatiously leaps into the crater of the volcano. But a living man must leap away from himself into the much more awful fires of creation. Empedocles knew well enough where he was going when he leaped into Etna. He was only leaping hastily into death, where he would have to go, whether or not. He merely forestalled himself a little. For we must all die. But we need not all live. We have always the door of death in front of us, and, howsoever our track winds and travels, it comes to that door at last. We *must* die within an allotted term; there is not the least atom of choice allowed us in this.

But we are not compelled to live. We are only compelled to die. We may refuse to live; we may refuse to pass into the unknown of life; we may deny ourselves to life altogether. So much choice we have. There is so much free will that we are perfectly free to forestall our date of death, and perfectly free to postpone our date of life, as long as we like.

We must *choose* life, for life will never compel us. Sometimes we have even no choice; we have no alternative to death. Then, again, life is with us; there is the soft impulse of peace. But this we may deny emphatically and to the end, and it is denied to us. We may reject life completely and finally from ourselves. Unless we submit our will to the flooding of life, there is no life in us.

If a man have no alternative but death, death is his honour and his fulfilment. If he is wintry in discontent and resistance, then winter is his portion and his truth. Why should he be cajoled or bullied into a declaration for life? Let him declare for death with a whole heart. Let every man search in his own soul to find there the quick suggestion, whether his soul be quick for life or quick for death. Then let him act as he finds it. For the greatest of all misery is a lie; and if a man belong to the line of obstinate death, he has at least the satisfaction of pursuing this line simply. But we will not call this peace. There is all the world of difference between the sharp, drug-delicious satisfaction or resignation and self-gratifying humility and the true freedom of peace. Peace is when I accept life; when I accept death I have the hopeless equivalent of peace, which is quiescence and resignation.

Life does not break the self-insistent will. But death does. Death compels us and leaves us without choice. And all comparison whatsoever is death, and

nothing but death.

To life we must cede our will, acquiesce and be at one with it, or we stand alone, we are excluded, we are exempt from living. The service of life is voluntary.

This fact of conversion, which has seemed, in its connexion with religion, to smack of unreality, to be, like the miracles, not quite credible, even if demonstrable, is a matter of fact essentially natural and our highest credit. We know what it is to prosecute death with all our strength of soul and body. We know what it is to be fulfilled with the activity of death. We have given ourselves body and soul, altogether, to the making of all the engines and contrivances and inventions of death. We have wanted to compel every man whatsoever to the activity of death. We have wanted to envelop the world in a vast unison of death, to let nothing escape. We have been filled with a frenzy of compulsion; our insistent will has co-ordinated into a monstrous engine of compulsion and death.

So now our fundamental being has come out. True, our banner is ostensible peace. But let us not degrade ourselves with lying. We were filled with the might of death. And this has been gathering in us for a hundred years. Our strength of death-passion has accumulated from our fathers; it has grown stronger and stronger from generation to generation. And in us it is confessed.

Therefore, we are in a position to understand the "phenomenon" of conversion. It is very simple. Let every man look into his own heart and see what is fundamental there. Is there a gnawing and unappeasable discontent? Is there a secret desire that there shall be new strife? Is there a prophecy that the worst is yet to come, is there a subtle thrill in the anticipation of a fearful tearing of the body of life at home, here, between the classes of men in England; a great darkness coming over England; the sound of a great rending of destruction? Is there a desire to partake in this rending, either on one side or the other? Is there a longing to see the masses rise up and make an end of the wrong old order? Is there a will to circumvent these masses and subject them to superior wisdom? Shall we govern them for their own good, strongly?

It does not matter on which side the desire stands, it is the desire of death. If we prophesy a triumph of the people over their degenerate rulers, still we prophesy from the inspiration of death. If we cry out in the name of the subjected herds of mankind against iniquitous tyranny, still we are purely deathly. If we talk of the wise controlling the unwise, this is the same death.

For all strife between things old is pure death. The very division of mankind into two halves, the humble and the proud, is death. Unless we pull off the old badges and become ourselves, single and new, we are divided unto death. It

helps nothing whether we are on the side of the proud or the humble.

But if, in our heart of hearts, we can find one spark of happiness that is absolved from strife, then we are converted to the new life the moment we accept this spark as the treasure of our being. This is conversion. If there is a quick, new desire to have new heaven and earth, and if we are given triumphantly to this desire, if we know that it will be fulfilled of us, finally and without fail, we are converted. If we will have a new creation on earth, if our souls are chafing to make a beginning, if our fingers are itching to start the new work of building up a new world, a whole new world with a new open sky above us, then we are transported across the unthinkable chasm, from the old dead way to the beginning of all that is to be.

II

The beginning of spring lies in the awakening from winter. For us, to understand is to overcome. We have a winter of death, of destruction, vivid sensationalism of going asunder, the wintry glory of tragical experience to surmount and surpass. Thrusting through these things with the understanding, we come forth in first flowers of our spring with pale and icy blossoms, like bulb-flowers, the pure understanding of death. When we know the death is in ourselves, we are emerging into the new epoch. For whilst we are in the full flux of death, we can find no bottom of resistance from which to understand. When at last life stands under us, we can know what the flood is, in which we are immersed.

That which is understood by man is surpassed by man. When we understand our extreme being in death, we have surpassed into a new being. Many bitter and fearsome things there are for us to know, that we may go beyond them; they have no power over us any more.

Understanding, however, does not belong to every man, is not incumbent on every man. But it is vital that some men understand, that some few go through this final pain and relief of knowledge. For the rest, they have only to know peace when it is given them. But for the few there is the bitter necessity to understand the death that has been, so that we may pass quite clear of it.

The anguish of this knowledge, the knowledge of what we ourselves, we righteous ones, have been and are within the flux of death, is a death in itself. It is the death of our established belief in ourselves, it is the end of our current self-

esteem. Those who live in the mind must also perish in the mind. The mindless are spared this.

We are not only creatures of light and virtue. We are also alive in corruption and death. It is necessary to balance the dark against the light if we are ever going to be free. We must know that we, ourselves, are the living stream of seething corruption, this also, all the while, as well as the bright river of life. We must recover our balance to be free. From our bodies comes the issue of corruption as well as the issue of creation. We must have our being in both, our knowledge must consist in both. The veils of the old temple must be rent, for they are but screens to hide from us our own being in corruption.

It is our self-knowledge that must be torn across before we are whole. The man I know myself to be must be destroyed before the true man I am can exist. The old man in me must die and be put away.

Either we can and will understand the other thing that we are, the flux of darkness and lively decomposition, and so become free and whole, or we fight shy of this half of ourselves, as man has always fought shy of it, and gone under the burden of secret shame and self-aborrence. For the tide of our corruption is rising higher, and unless we adjust ourselves, unless we come out of our veiled temples, and see and know, and take the tide as it comes, ride upon it and so escape it, we are lost.

Within our bowels flows the slow stream of corruption, to the issue of corruption. This is one direction. Within our veins flows the stream of life, towards the issue of pure creation. This is the other direction. We are of both. We are the watershed from which flow the dark rivers of hell on the one hand, and the shimmering rivers of heaven on the other.

If we are ashamed, instead of covering the shame with a veil, let us accept that thing which makes us ashamed, understand it and be at one with it. If we shrink from some sickening issue of ourselves, instead of recoiling and rising above ourselves, let us go down into ourselves, enter the hell of corruption and putrescence, and rise again, not fouled, but fulfilled and free. If there is a loathsome thought or suggestion, let us not dispatch it instantly with impertinent righteousness; let us admit it with simplicity, let us accept it, be responsible for it. It is no good casting out devils. They belong to us, we must accept them and be at peace with them. For they are of us. We are angels and we are devils, both, in our own proper person. But we are more even than this. We are whole beings, gifted with understanding. A full, undiminished being is complete beyond the angels and the devils.

This is the condition of freedom: that in the understanding, I fear nothing. In the body I fear pain, in love I fear hate, in death I fear life. But in the

understanding I fear neither love nor hate nor death nor pain nor abhorrence. I am brave even against abhorrence; even the abhorrent I will understand and be at peace with. Not by exclusion, but by incorporation and unison. There is no hope in exclusion. For whatsoever limbo we cast our devils into will receive us ourselves at last. We shall fall into the cesspool of our own abhorrence.

If there is a serpent of secret and shameful desire in my soul, let me not beat it out of my consciousness with sticks. It will lie beyond, in the marsh of the so-called subconsciousness, where I cannot follow it with my sticks. Let me bring it to the fire to see what it is. For a serpent is a thing created. It has its' own *raison d'être*. In its own being it has beauty and reality. Even my horror is a tribute to its reality. And I must admit the genuineness of my horror, accept it, and not exclude it from my understanding.

There is nothing on earth to be ashamed of, nor under the earth, except only the craven veils we hang up to save our appearances. Pull down the veils and understand everything, each man in his own self-responsible soul. Then we are free.

Who made us a judge of the things that be? Who says that the water-lily shall rock on the still pool, but the snake shall not hiss in the festering marshy border? I must humble myself before the abhorred serpent and give him his dues as he lifts his flattened head from the secret grass of my soul. Can I exterminate what is created? Not while the condition of its creation lasts. There is no killing the serpent so long as his principle endures. And his principle moves slowly in my belly; I must disembowel myself to get rid of him. "If thine eye offend thee, pluck it out." But the offence is not in the eye, but in the principle it perceives. And howsoever I may pluck out my eyes, I cannot pluck the principle from the created universe. To this I must submit. And I must adjust myself to that which offends me, I must make my peace with it, and cease, in my delicate understanding, to be offended. Maybe the serpent of my abhorrence nests in my very heart. If so, I can but in honour say-to him, "Serpent, serpent, thou art at home." Then I shall know that my heart is a marsh. But maybe my understanding will drain the swampy place, and the serpent will evaporate as his condition evaporates. That is as it is. While there is a marsh, the serpent has his holy ground.

I must make my peace with the serpent of abhorrence that is within me. I must own my most secret shame and my most secret shameful desire. I must say, "Shame, thou art me, I am thee. Let us understand each other and be at peace." Who am I that I should hold myself above my last or worst desire? My desires are me, they are the beginning of me; my stem and branch and root. To assume a better angel is an impertinence. Did I create myself? According to the maximum

of my desire is my flower and my blossoming. This is beyond my will for ever. I can only learn to acquiesce.

And there is in me the great desire of creation and the great desire of dissolution. Perhaps these two are pure equivalents. Perhaps the decay of autumn purely balances the putting forth of spring. Certainly the two are necessary each to the other; they are the systole-diastole of the physical universe. But the initial force is the force of spring, as is evident. The undoing of autumn can only follow the putting forth of spring. So that creation is primal and original, corruption is only a consequence. Nevertheless, it is the inevitable consequence, as inevitable as that water flows downhill.

There is in me the desire of creation and the desire of dissolution. Shall I deny either? Then neither is fulfilled. If there is no autumn and winter of corruption, there is no spring and summer. All the time I must be dissolved from my old being. The wheat is put together by the pure activity of creation. It is the bread of pure creation I eat in the body. The fire of creation from out of the wheat passes into my blood, and what was put together in the pure grain now comes asunder, the fire mounts up into my blood, the watery mould washes back down my belly to the underearth. These are the two motions wherein we have our life. Is either a shame to me? Is it a pride to me that in my blood the fire flickers out of the wheaten bread I have partaken of, flickers up to further and higher creation? Then how shall it be a shame that from my blood exudes the bitter sweat of corruption on the journey back to dissolution; how shall it be a shame that in my consciousness appear the heavy marsh-flowers of the flux of putrescence, which have their natural roots in the slow stream of decomposition that flows for ever down my bowels?

There is a natural marsh in my belly, and there the snake is naturally at home. Shall he not crawl into my consciousness? Shall I kill him with sticks the moment he lifts his flattened head on my sight? Shall I kill him or pluck out the eye which sees him? None the less, he will swarm within the marsh.

Then let the serpent of living corruption take his place among us honourably. Come then, brindled abhorrent one, you have your own being and your own righteousness, yes, and your own desirable beauty. Come then, lie down delicately in the sun of my mind, sleep on the bosom of my understanding; I shall know your living weight and be gratified.

But keep to your own ways and your own being. Come in just proportion, there in the grass beneath the bushes where the birds are. For the Lord is the lord of all things, not of some only. And everything shall in its proportion drink its own draught of life. But I, who have the gift of understanding, I must keep most delicately and transcendingly the balance of creation within myself, because now

I am taken over into the peace of creation. Most delicately and justly I must bring forth the blossom of my spring and provide for the serpent of my living corruption. But each in its proportion. If I am taken over into the stream of death, I must fling myself into the business of dissolution, and the serpent must writhe at my right hand, my good familiar. But since it is spring with me, the snake must wreathe his way secretly along the paths that belong to him, and when I see him asleep in the sunshine I shall admire him in his place.

I shall accept all my desires and repudiate none. It will be a sign of bliss in me when I am reconciled with the serpent of my own horror, when I am free both from the fascination and the revulsion. For secret fascination is a fearful tyranny. And then my desire of life will encompass my desire of death, and I shall be quite whole, have fulfilment in both. Death will take its place in me, subordinate but not subjected. I shall be fulfilled of corruption within the strength of creation. The serpent will have his own pure place in me and I shall be free.

For there are ultimately only two desires, the desire of life and the desire of death. Beyond these is pure being, where I am absolved from desire and made perfect. This is when I am like a rose, when I balance for a space in pure adjustment and pure understanding. The timeless quality of *being* is understanding; when I understand fully, flesh and blood and bone, and mind and soul and spirit one rose of unison, then I *am*. Then I am unrelated and perfect. In true understanding I am always perfect and timeless. In my utterance of that which I have understood I am timeless as a jewel.

The rose as it bursts into blossom reveals the absolute world before us. The brindled, slim adder, as she lifts her delicate head attentively in the spring sunshine — for they say she is deaf — suddenly throws open the world of unchanging, pure perfection to our startled breast. In our whole understanding, when sense and spirit and mind are consummated into pure unison, then we are free in a world of the absolute. The lark sings in a heaven of pure understanding, she drops back into a world of duality and change.

And it does not matter whether we understand according to death or according to life; the understanding is a consummating of the two in one, and a transcending into absolution. This is true of tragedy and of psalms of praise and of the Sermon on the Mount. It is true of the serpent and of the dove, of the tiger and the fragile, dappled doe. For all things that emerge pure in being from the matrix of chaos are roses of pure understanding; in them death and life are adjusted, darkness is in perfect equilibrium with light. This is the meaning of understanding. This is why the leopard gleams to my eye a blossom of pure significance, whilst a hyena seems only a clod thrown at me in contumely. The leopard is a piece of understanding uttered in terms of fire, the dove is expressed

in gurgling watery sound. But in them both there is that perfect conjunction of sun and dew which makes for absolution and the world beyond worlds. Only the leopard starts from the sun and must for ever quench himself with the living soft fire of the fawn; the dove must fly up to the sun like mist drawn up.

We, we are all desire and understanding, only these two. And desire is twofold, desire of life and desire of death. All the time we are active in these two great powers, which are for ever contrary and complementary. Except in understanding, and there we are immune and perfect, there the two are one. Yet even understanding is twofold in its appearance. It comes forth as understanding of life or as understanding of death, in strong, glad words like Paul and David, or in pain like Shakespeare.

All active life is either desire of life or desire of death, desire of putting together or desire of putting asunder. We come forth uttering ourselves in terms of fire, like the rose, or in terms of water, like the lily. We wish to say that we are single in our desire for life and creation and putting together. But it is a lie, since we must eat life to live. We must, like the leopard, drink up the lesser life to bring forth our greater. We wish to conquer death. But it is absurd, since only by death do we live, like the leopard. We wish not to die; we wish for life everlasting. But this is mistaken interpretation. What we mean by immortality is this fulfilment of death with life and life with death in us where we are consummated and absolved into heaven, the heaven on earth.

We can never conquer death; that is folly. Death and the great dark flux of undoing, this is the inevitable half. Life feeds death, death feeds life. If life is just one point the stronger in the long run, it is only because death is inevitably the stronger in the short run of each separate existence. They are like the hare and the tortoise.

It is only in understanding that we pass beyond the scope of this duality into perfection, in actual living equipoise of blood and bone and spirit. But our understanding must be dual, it must be death understood and life understood.

We understand death, and in this there is no death. Life has put together all that is put together. Death is the consequent putting asunder. We have been torn to shreds in the hands of death, like Osiris in the myth. But still within us life lay intact like seeds in winter.

That is how we know death, having suffered it and lived. It is now no mystery, finally. Death is understood in us, and thus we transcend it. Henceforward actual death is a fulfilling of our own knowledge.

Nevertheless, we only transcend death by understanding down to the last ebb the great process of death in us. We can never destroy death. We can only transcend it in pure understanding. We can envelop it and contain it. And then

we are free.

By standing in the light we see in terms of shadow. We cannot see the light we stand in. So our understanding of death in life is an act of living.

If we live in the mind, we must die in the mind, and in the mind we must understand death. Understanding is not necessarily mental. It is of the senses and the spirit.

But we live also in the mind. And the first great act of living is to encompass death in the understanding. Therefore the first great activity of the living mind is to understand death in the mind. Without this there is no freedom of the mind, there is no life of the mind, since creative life is the attaining a perfect consummation with death. When in my mind there rises the idea of life, then this idea must encompass the idea of death, and this encompassing is the germination of a new epoch of the mind.

III

We long most of all to belong to life. This primal desire, the desire to come into being, the desire to achieve a transcendent state of existence, is all we shall ever know of a *primum mobile*. But it is enough.

And corresponding with this desire for absolute life, immediately consequent is the desire for death. This we will never admit. We cannot admit the desire of death in ourselves even when it is single and dominant. We must still deceive ourselves with the name of life.

This is the root of all confusion, this inability for man to admit, "Now I am single in my desire for destructive death." When it is autumn in the world, the autumn of a human epoch, then the desire for death becomes single and dominant. I want to kill, I want violent sensationalism, I want to break down, I want to put asunder, I want anarchic revolution — it is all the same, the single desire for death.

We long most of all for life and creation. That is the final truth. But not all life belongs to life. Not all life is progressing to a state of transcendent being. For many who are born and live year after year there is no such thing as coming to blossom. Many are saprophyte, living on the dead body of the past. Many are parasite, living on the old and enfeebled body politic; and many, many more are mere impurities. Many, in these days, most human beings, having come into the world on the impulse of death, find that the impulse is not strong enough to carry

them into absoption. They reach a maturity of physical life, and then the advance ends. They have not the strength for the further passage into darkness. They are born short, they wash on a slack tide; they will never be flung into the transcendence of the second death. They are spent before they arrive; their life is a slow lapsing out, a slow inward corruption. Their flood is the flood of decomposition and decay; in this they have their being. They are like the large green cabbages that cannot move on into flower. They attain a fatness and magnificence of leaves, then they rot inside. There is not sufficient creative impulse, they lapse into great corpulence. So with the sheep and the pigs of our domestic life. They frisk into life as if they would pass on to pure being. But the tide fails them. They grow fat; their only *raison d'être* is to provide food for a really living organism. They have only the moment of first youth, then they lapse gradually into nullity. It is given us to devour them.

So with very many human lives, especially in what is called the periods of decadence. They have mouths and stomachs, and an obscene *will* of their own. Yes, they have also prolific procreative wombs whence they bring forth increasing insufficiency. But of the germ of intrinsic creation they have none, neither have they the courage of true death. They never live. They are like the sheep in the fields, that have their noses to the ground, and anticipate only the thrill of increase.

These will never understand, neither life nor death. But they will bleat mechanically about life and righteousness, since this is how they can save their appearances. And in their eyes is the furtive tyranny of nullity. They will understand no word of living death, since death encompasses them. If a man understands the living death, he is a man in the quick of creation.

The quick can encompass death, but the living dead are encompassed. Let the dead bury their dead. Let the living dead attend to the dead dead. What has creation to do with them?

The righteousness of the living dead is an abominable nullity. They, the sheep of the meadow, they eat and eat to swell out their living nullity. They are so many, their power is immense, and the negative power of their nullity bleeds us of life as if they were vampires. Thank God for the tigers and the butchers that will free us from the abominable tyranny of these greedy, negative sheep.

It is very natural that every word about death they will decry as evil. For if death be understood, they are found out. They are multitudes of slow, greedy-mouthed decay.

There are the isolated heroes of passionate and beautiful death: Tristan, Achilles, Napoleon. These are the royal lions and tigers of our life. There are many wonderful initiators into the death for re-birth, like Christ and St. Paul and

St. Francis. But there is a ghastly multitude of obscene nullity, flocks of hideous sheep with blind mouths and still blinder crying, and hideous coward's eye of tyranny for the sake of their own bloated nothingness.

These are the enemy and the abomination. And they are so many we shall with difficulty save ourselves from them. Indeed, the word humanity has come to mean only this obscene flock of blind mouths and blinder bleating and most hideous coward's tyranny of negation. Save us, oh, holy death; carry us beyond them, oh, holy life of creation; for how shall we save ourselves against such ubiquitous multitudes of living dead? It needs a faith in that which has created all citation, and will therefore never fall before the blind mouth of nullity.

The sheep, the hideous myrmidons of sheep, all *will* and belly and prolific womb, they have their own absolution. They have the base absolution of the I. A vile entity detaches itself and shuts itself off immune from the flame of creation and from the stream of death likewise. They assert a free will. And this free will is a horny, glassy, insentient covering into which they creep, like some tough bugs, and therein remain active and secure from life and death. So they swarm in insulated completeness, obscene like bugs.

We are quite insulated from life. And we think ourselves quite immune from death. But death, beautiful death searches us out, even in our armour of insulated will. Death is within us, while we tighten our will to keep him out. Death, beautiful, clean death, washes slowly within us and carries us away. We have never known life, save, perhaps, for a few moments during childhood. Well may heaven lie about us in our infancy, if our maturity is but the buglike security of a vast and impervious envelope of insentience, the insentience of the human mass. Heaven lies about us in our consummation of manhood, if we are men. If we are men, we attain to heaven in .our achieved manhood, our flowering maturity. But if we are like bugs, our first sight of this good earth may well seem heavenly. For we soon learn not to see. A bug, and a sheep, sees only with its fear and its belly. Its eyes look out in a coward's will not to see, a self-righteous vision.

It is not the will of the overweening individual we have to fear today, but the consenting together of a vast host of null ones. It is no Napoleon or Nero, but the innumerable myrmidons of nothingness. It is not the leopard or the hot tiger, but the masses of rank sheep. Shall I be pressed to death, shall I be suffocated under the slow and evil weight of countless long-faced sheep? This is a fate of ignominy indeed. Who compels us today? The malignant null sheep. Who overwhelms us? The persistent, purblind, buglike sheep. It is a horrid death to be suffocated under these fat-smelling ones.

There is an egoism far more ghastly than that of the tyrannous individual. It is the egoism of the flock. What if a tiger pull me down? It is straight death. But

what if the flock which counts me part of itself compress me and squeeze me with slow malice to death? It cannot be, it shall not be. I cry to the spirit of life, I cry to the spirit of death to save me. I *must* be saved from the vast and obscene self-conceit which is the ruling force of the world that envelops me.

The tiger is sufficient unto himself, a law unto himself. Even the grisly condor sits isolated on the peak. It is the will of the flock that is the obscenity of obscenities. Timeless and clinched in stone is the naked head of the vulture. Timeless as rock, the great condor sits inaccessible on the heights. It is the last brink of deathly life, just alive, just dying, not quite static. It has locked its unalterable will for ever against life and death. It persists in the flux of unclean death. It leans for ever motionless on death. The will is fixed; there shall be no yielding to life, no yielding to death. Yet death gradually steals over the huge obscene bird. Gradually the leaves fall from the rotten branch, the feathers leave naked the too-dead neck of the vulture.

But worse than the fixed and obscene will of the isolated individual is the will of the obscene herd. They cringe, the herd; they shrink their buttocks downward like the hyena. They are one flock. They are a nauseous herd together, keeping up a steady heat in the whole. They have one temperature, one aim, one will, enveloping them into an obscene oneness, like a mass of insects or sheep or carrion-eaters. What do they want? They want to maintain themselves insulated from life and death. Their will has asserted its own absolution. They are the arrogant, immitigable beings who have achieved a secure entity. They are *it*. Nothing can be added to them, nor detracted. Enclosed and complete, they have their completion in the whole herd, they have their wholeness in the whole flock, they have their oneness in their multiplicity. Such are the sheep, such is humanity, an obscene whole which is no whole, only a multiplied nullity. But in their multiplicity they are so strong that they can defy both life and death for a time, existing like weak insects, powerful and horrible because of their countless numbers.

It is in vain to appeal to these ghastly myrmidons. They understand neither the language of life nor the language of death. They are fat and prolific and all-powerful, innumerable. They are in truth nauseous slaves of decay. But now, alas! the slaves have got the upper hand. Nevertheless, it only needs that we go forth with whips, like the old chieftain. Swords will not frighten them, they are too many. At all costs the herd of nullity must be subdued. It is the worst coward. It has triumphed, this slave herd, and its tyranny is the tyranny of a pack of jackals. But it can be frightened back to its place. For its cowardice is as great as its arrogance.

Sweet, beautiful death, come to our help. Break in among, the herd, make gaps

in its insulated completion. Give us a chance, sweet death, to escape from the herd and gather together against it a few living beings. Purify us with death, O death, cleanse from us the rank stench, the intolerable oneness with a negative humanity. Break for us this foul prison where we suffocate in the reek of the flock of the living dead. Smash, beautiful destructive death, smash the complete will of the hosts of man, the will of the self-absorbed bug. Smash the great obscene unison. Death, assert your strength now, for it is time. They have defied you so long. They have even, in their mad arrogance, begun to deal in death as if it also were subjugated. They thought to use death as they have used life this long time, for their own base end of nullification. Swift death was to serve their end of enclosed, arrogant self-assertion. Death was to help them maintain themselves *in statu quo*, the benevolent and self-righteous bugs of humanity.

Let there be no humanity; let there be a few men. Sweet death, save us from humanity. Death, noble, unstainable death, smash the glassy rind of humanity, as one would smash the brittle hide of the insulated bug. Smash humanity, and make an end of it. Let there emerge a few pure and single men — men who give themselves to the unknown of life and death and are fulfilled. Make an end of our unholy oneness, O death, give us to our single being. Release me from the debased social body, O death, release me at last; let me be by myself, let me be myself. Let me know other men who are single and not contained by any multiple oneness. Let me find a few men who are distinct and at ease in themselves like stars. Let me derive no more from the body of mankind. Let me derive direct from life or direct from death, according to the impulse that is in me.

IV

THE ORBIT

It is no good thinking of the living dead. The thought of them is almost as hurtful as their presence. One cannot fight against them. One can only know them as the great static evil which stands against life and against death; and then one skirts them round as if they were a great gap in existence. It is most fearful to fall into that gap. But it is necessary to move in strength round about it, on the actual fields of life and death. We must ignore the static nullity of the living dead, and speak of life and speak of death.

There are two ways and two goals, as it has always been. And so it will always be. Some are set upon one road, the road of death and undoing, and some are set upon the other road, the road of creation. And the fulfilment of every man is the following his own separate road to its end. No man can cause another man to have the same goal or the same path as himself. All paths lead either to death or to the heaven on earth, ultimately. But the paths are like the degrees of longitude, the lines of longitude drawn on a geographer's globe — they are all separate.

Every man has his goal, and this there is no altering. Except by asserting the free will. A man may choose nullity. He may choose to absolve himself from his fate either of life or death. He may oppose his self-will, his free will, between life and his own small entity, or between true death and himself. He may insulate and cut himself off from the systole-diastole of life and death, either within his own small horny integument of a will, or within the big horny will of the herd of humanity. Humanity is like a mass of beetles: it is one monstrosity of multiple identical units. It is like the much-vaunted ant-swarms, an insulated oneness made out of myriads of null units, one big, self-absorbed nullity. Such is humanity when it is self-absorbed.

And so much free will have we: if life comes to us like a potentiality of transcendence, we *must* yield our ultimate will to the unknown impulse or remain outside, abide alone, like the corn of wheat, outside the river of life; if death comes to us, the desire to act in strength of death, we *must* have the courage of our desire, and ride deathwards like the knights of the Dark Ages, covered with armour of imperviousness and carrying a spear and a shield by which we are known; we must do this, of our own free will and courage accept the mission of death, or else roll up like a wood-lice enfolded upon our own ego, our own entity, our own self-will, roll up tight on our own free will, and remain outside. So much free will there is. That the free will of humanity can provide a great unified hive of immunity from life, and death does not make us any more intrinsically alone from life and death. That we are many millions cut off from life and death does not make us any less cut off. That we are contained within the vast nullity of humanity does not make us other than null. That we are a vast colony of wood-lice, fabricating elaborate social communities like the bees or the wasps or the ants, does not make us any less wood-lice curled up upon nothingness, immune in a vast and multiple negation. It only shows us that the most perfect social systems are probably the most complete nullities, that all relentless organization is in the end pure negation. Who wants to be like an ant? An ant is a little scavenger; ants, a perfect social system of scavengers.

So much free will there is. There is the free will to choose between submitting

the will, and so becoming a spark in a great tendency, or withholding the will, curling up within the will, and so remaining outside, exempt from life or death. That death triumphs in the end, even then, does not alter the fact that we can live exempt in nullity, exerting our free will to negation.

All we can do is to know in singleness of heart *which* is our road, then take it unflinching to the end, having given ourselves over to the road. For the straight road of death has splendour and brave colour; it is emblazoned with passion and adventure, sparkling with running leopards and steel and wounds, languorous with drenched lilies that glisten cold and narcotic from the corrupt mould of self-sacrifice. And the road of life has the buttercups and wild birds whistling of real spring, magnificent architecture of created dreams. I tread the subtle way of edged hostility, bursting through the glamorous pageant of blood for the undying glory of our gentle Iseult, some delicate dame, some lily unblemished, watered by blood. Or I bring forth an exquisite unknown rose from the tree of my veins, a rose of the living spirit, beyond any woman and beyond any man transcendent. To the null, my rose of glistening transcendence is only a quite small cabbage. When the sheep get into the garden they eat the roses indifferently, but the cabbages with gluttonous absorption. To the null, my pageantry of death is so much mountebank performing; or, if I tilt my spear under the negative nose, it is monstrous, inhuman criminality, to be crushed out and stifled, to be put down with an unanimous hideous bleating of righteousness.

There are two roads and a no-road. We will not concern ourselves with the no-road. Who wants to go down a road which is no road? The proprietor may sit at the end of his no-road, like a cabbage on its blind gut of a stalk.

There are two roads, the no-road forgotten. There are two roads. There is hot sunshine leaping down and interpenetrating the earth to blossom. And there is red fire rushing upward on its path to return, in the coming asunder. Down comes the fire from the sun to the seed, splash into the water of the tiny reservoir of life. Up spurts the foam and stream of greenness, a tree, a fountain of roses, a cloud of steamy pear-blossom. Back again goes the fire, leaves shrivel and roses fall, back goes the fire to the sun, away goes the dim water.

So and such is all life and death — apart from the sluglike sheep. There is swift death, and slow. I set a light to the flowery bush, and the balance overtopples into the road of flame; up rushes the bush on wings of fiery death, away goes the dim water in smoke.

The sheep feed upon the moist, fat grass till they are sodden mounds of scarcely kindled grey mold. Quick, the balance! Quick, the golden lion of wrath, pierce them with flame, drink them up to a superb leonine being. It is the quick way of death. Sheep blaze up in the sun in the golden bonfire of the lion; they

trickle to darkness in spilled dark blood. The deer is a trembling flower full of shadow and quenched light, fostered in the immunity of the herd. The self-preservation of the herd is round about the shy doe; she will multiply so that the earth is alive with her offspring — if it were not for the tiger. The tiger, like a brand of fire, leaps upon her to restore the balance. His too-much heat drinks their coolness; he waters his thirst with the moist fawn. And the flame of him goes up in the sun brindled with tongues of smoke; the deer disappear like dark mists into the air and the earth. He is a crackling bush burning back to the sun, and burning not away. They are the mists of morning stealing forth and distilling themselves over the sweet earth. So the uneasy balance of life adjusts itself here with the aid of violent death.

Shall we be all like lambs, pellucid Bickerings of shadow? Yes, but for the quick mottled leopard and the all-vivid spark of the sharp steel knife. Shall we be all tigers, brands seized in the burning? It is impossible. For even the mother-tiger is quenched with insuperable tenderness when the milk is in her udder; she lies still, and her dreams are frail like fawns. All is somehow adjusted in a strange, unstable equilibrium.

We are tigers, we are lambs. Yet are we also neither tigers nor lambs, nor immune sluggish sheep. We are beyond all this, this relative life of uneasy balancing. We are roses of pure and lovely being. This we are ultimately, beyond all dark and light. Yes, we are tigers, we are lambs, both in our various hour. We are both these, and more. Because we are both these, because we are lambs, frail and exposed, because we are lions furious and devouring, because we are both, and have the courage to be both, in our separate hour, therefore we transcend both, we pass into a beyond, we are roses of perfect consummation.

Immediately we must be both these, both tigers and lambs, according to the hour and the unknown balance; we must be both in the immediate life, that ultimately we are roses of unfailing glad peace.

Nevertheless, this is the greatest truth: we are neither lions of pride and strength, nor lambs of love and submission. We are roses of perfect being.

It is very great to be a lion of glory, like David or Alexander. But these only exist on the lives they consume, as a fire needs fuel. It is very beautiful to be the lamb of innocence and humility, like St. Francis and St. Clare. But these only shine so star-like because of the darkness of the night on which they have risen, as the lily of light balances herself upon a fountain of unutterable shadow.

Where is there peace, if I take my being from the balance of pure opposition? If all men were Alexanders, what then? And even if all men followed St. Francis or St. Bernard, the race of mankind would be extinct in a generation. Think, if there were no night, we could not bear it; we should have to die. For the half of

us is shadow. And if there were no day, we should dissolve in the darkness and be gone, for we are creatures of light.

Therefore, if I assert myself a creature purely of light, it is in opposition to the darkness which is in me. If I vaunt myself a lion of strength, I am merely set over and balanced against the lambs which are gentle and meek. My form and shape in either case depend entirely on the virtue of resistance, my life and my whole being. I am like one of the cells in any organism, the pressure from within and the resistance from without keep me as I am. Either I follow the impulse to power, or I follow the impulse of submission. Whichever it is, I am only half, complemented by my opposite. In a world of petty Alexanders, St. Francis is the star. In a world of sheep the wolf is god. Each, saint or wolf, shines by virtue of opposition.

Where, then, is there peace? If I am a lamb with Christ, I exist in a state of pure tension of opposition to the lion of wrath. Am I the lion of pride? It is my fate for ever to fall upon the lamb of meekness and love. Is this peace, or freedom? Is the lamb devoured more free than the lion devouring, or the lion than the lamb? Where is there freedom?

Shall I expect the lion to lie down with the lamb? Shall I expect such a thing? I might as well hope for the earth to cast no shadow, or for burning fire to give no heat. It is no good; these are mere words. When the lion lies down with the lamb he is no lion, and the lamb, lying down with the lion, is no lamb. They are merely a neutralization, a nothingness. If I mix fire and water, I get quenched ash. And so if I mix the lion and the lamb. They are both quenched into nothingness.

Where, then, is there peace? The lion will never lie down with the lamb; in all reverence let it be spoken. Whilst the lion is lion, he must fall on the lamb, to devour her. This is his lionhood and his peace, in so far as he has any peace. And the peace of the lamb is to be devourable.

Where, then, is there peace? There is no peace of reconciliation. Let that be accepted for ever. Darkness will never be light, neither will the one ever triumph over the other. Whilst there is darkness, there is light; and when there is an end of darkness, there is an end of light. There are lions, and there are lambs; there are lambs, and thus there are lions predicated. If there are no lions feline, we are the devourers, leonine enough. This is our manhood also, that we devour the lambs. Am I in my conceit more than myself? Not more, but less. I lie down with the lamb and eat grass. What, then, I am only the neutralization of a man.

Where, then, is there peace, which we must seek and pursue, since it is the ultimate condition of our nature? It is peace for the lion when he carries the crushed lamb in his jaws. It is peace for the lamb when she quivers light and

irresponsible within the strong, supporting apprehension of the lion. Where is the skipping joyful-ness of the lamb when the magnificent, strong responsibility of the lion is removed? The lamb need take no thought; the lion is responsible for death in her world.

But let there be no lion, and no exquisite apprehension in the lamb, what does she degenerate into? A clod of stupid weight. Look in the eyes of your sheep, and see there the pitch of tension which holds her against the golden lion of pride. See in the eyes of the sheep the soul of the sheep, giving with coward's jeering malice the lie to the great mystic truth of death. Look at the doe of the fallow deer as she turns back her eyes in apprehension. What does she ask for, what is her helpless passion? Some unutterable thrill in her waits with unbearable acuteness for the leap of the mottled leopard. Not of the conjunction with the hart is she consummated, but of the exquisite laceration of fear as the leopard springs upon her loins, and his claws strike in, and he dips his mouth in her. This is the white-hot pitch of her helpless desire. She cannot save herself. Her moment of frenzied fulfilment is the moment when she is torn and scattered beneath the paws of the leopard, like a quenched fire scattered into the darkness. Nothing can alter it. This is the extremity of her desire, this desire for the fearful fury of the brand upon her. She is balanced over at the extreme edge of submission, balanced against the bright beam of the leopard like a shadow against him. The two exist by virtue of juxtaposition in pure polarity. To destroy the one would be to destroy the other; they would vanish together. And to try to reconcile them is only to bring about their nullification.

Where, then, is there peace if the primary law of all the universe is a law of dual attraction and repulsion, a law of polarity? How does the earth pulse round her orbit save in her overwhelming haste towards the sun and her equivalent rejection back from the sun? She swings in these two, the earth of our habitation, making the systole-diastrale of our diurnal, of our yearly life. She pulses in a diurnal leap of attraction and repulsion, she travels in a great rhythm of approach and repulse.

Where, then, is there peace? There is peace in that perfect consummation when duality and polarity is transcended into absorption. In lovely, perfect peace the earth rests on her orbit. She has found the pure resultant of gravitation. She goes on for ever in pure rest, she rests for ever in perfect motion, consummated into absolution from a complete duality. Fulfilled from two, she is transported into the perfection of her orbit.

And this is peace. The lion is but a lion, the lamb is but a lamb, half and half separate. But we are the two halves together. I am a lion of pride and wrath, I am a lamb with Christ in meekness. They live in one landscape of my soul; the

roaring and the tremulous bleating of their different voices sound from the distance like pure music.

It is by the rage and strength of the lion, and the white, joyous freedom from strength of the lamb, by the equipoise of these two in perfect conjunction, that I pass from the limitation of a relative world into the glad absolution of the rose. It is when I am drawn by centripetal force into communion with the whole, and when I flee in equivalent centrifugal force away into the splendour of beaming isolation, when these two balance and match each other in mid-space, that suddenly, like a miracle, I find the peace of my orbit. Then I travel neither back nor forth. I hover in the unending delight of a rapid, resultant orbit.

When the darkness of which I am an involved seed, and the light which is involved in me as in a seed, when these two draw from the infinite sources towards me, when they meet and embrace in a perfect kiss and a perfect contest of me, when they foam and mount on their ever-intensifying communion in me until they achieve a resultant absolution of oneness, a rose of being blossoming upon the bush of my mortality, then I have peace.

It is not of love that we are fulfilled, but of love in such intimate equipoise with hate that the transcendence takes place. It is not in pride that we are free, but in pride, so perfectly matched by meekness that we are liberated as into blossom. There is a transfiguration, a rose with glimmering petals, upon a bush that knew no more than the dusk of green leaves heretofore. There is a new heaven on the earth, there is new heaven and new earth, the heaven and earth of the perfect rose.

I am not born fulfilled. The end is not before the beginning. I am born uncreated. I am a mixed handful of life as I issue from the womb. Thenceforth I extricate myself into singleness, the slow-developed singleness of manhood. And then I set out to meet the other, the unknown of womanhood. I give myself to the love that makes me join and fuse towards a universal oneness; I give myself to the hate that makes me detach myself, extricate myself vividly from the other in sharp passion; I am given up into universality of fellowship and communion, I am distinguished in keen resistance and isolation, both so utterly, so exquisitely, that I am and I am not at once; suddenly I lapse out of the duality into a sheer beauty of fulfilment. I am a rose of lovely peace.

LIFE

Midmost between the beginning and the end is Man. He is neither the created nor the creator. But he is the quick of creation. He has on one hand the primal unknown from which all creation issues; on the other hand, the whole created universe, even the world of finite spirits. But between the two man is distinct and other; he is creation itself, that which is perfect.

Man is born unfulfilled from chaos, uncreated, incomplete, a baby, a child, a thing immature and inconclusive. It is for him to become fulfilled, to enter at last the state of perfection, to achieve pure and immitigable being, like a star between day and night, disclosing the other world which has no beginning nor end, the otherworld of utterly completed creation, perfect beyond the creator, and conclusive beyond the thing created, living beyond life itself and deathly beyond death, partaking of both and transcending both.

When he comes into his own, man has being beyond life and beyond death; he is perfect of both. There he comprehends the singing of birds and the silence of the snake.

Yet man cannot create himself, nor can he achieve the finality of a thing created. All his time he hovers in the no-land, hovering till he can enter the otherworld of perfection; he still does not create himself, nor does he arrive at the static finality of a thing created. Why should he, since he has transcended the state of creativity and the state of being created, both?

Midway between the beginning and the end is man, midway between that which creates and that which is created, midway in an otherworld, partaking of both, yet transcending.

All the while man is referred back. He cannot create himself. At no moment can man create himself. He can but submit to the creator, to the primal unknown out of which issues the all. At every moment we issue like a balanced flame from the primal unknown. We are not self-contained or self-accomplished. At every moment we derive from the unknown.

This is the first and greatest truth of our being. Upon this elemental truth all our knowledge rests. We issue from the primal unknown. Behold my hands and feet, where I end upon the created universe! But who can see the quick, the well-head, where I have egress from the primordial creativity? Yet at every moment, like a flame which burns balanced upon a wick, do I burn in pure and transcendent equilibrium upon the wick of my soul, balanced and clipped like a

flame corporeal between the fecund darkness of the first unknown and the final darkness of the afterlife, wherein is all that is created and finished.

We are balanced like a flame between the two darknesses, the darkness of the beginning and the darkness of the end. We derive from the unknown, and we result into the unknown. But for us the beginning is not the end, for us the two are not one.

It is our business to burn, pure flame, between the two unknowns. We are to be fulfilled in the world of perfection, which is the world of pure creation. We must come into being in the transcendent otherworld of perfection, consummated in life and death both, two in one.

I turn my face, which is blind and yet which knows, like a blind man turning to the sun, I turn my face to the unknown, which is the beginning, and like a blind man who lifts his face to the sun I know the sweetness of the influx from the source of creation into me. Blind, for ever blind, yet knowing, I receive the gift, I know myself the ingress of the creative unknown. Like a seed which unknowing receives the sun and is made whole, I open onto the great invisible warmth of primal creativity and begin to be fulfilled.

This is the law. We shall never know what is the beginning. We shall never know how it comes to pass that we have form and being. But we may always know how through the doorways of the spirit and the body enters the vivid unknown, which is made known in us. Who comes, who is that we hear outside in the night? Who knocks, who knocks again? Who is that that unlatches the painful door?

Then behold, there is something new in our midst. We blink our eyes, we cannot see. We lift the lamp of previous understanding, we illuminate the stranger with the light of our established knowledge. Then at last we accept the newcomer, he is enrolled among us.

So is our life. How do we become new? How is it we change and develop? Whence comes the newness, the further being, into us? What is added unto us, and how does it come to pass?

There is an arrival in us from the unknown, from the primal unknown whence all creation issues. Did we call for this arrival, did we summon the new being, did we command the new creation of ourselves, the new fulfilment? We did not, it is not of us. We are not created of ourselves. But from the unknown, from the great darkness of the outside that which is strange and new arrives on our threshold, enters and takes place in us. Not of ourselves, it is not of ourselves, but of the unknown which is the outside.

This is the first and greatest truth of our being and of our existence. How do we come to pass? We do not come to pass of ourselves. Who can say, Of myself

I will bring forth newness? Not of myself, but of the unknown which has ingress into me.

And how has the unknown ingress into me? The unknown has ingress into me because, whilst I live, I am never sealed and set apart; I am but a flame conducting unknown to unknown, through the bright transition of creation. I do but conduct the unknown of my beginning to the unknown of my end, through the transfiguration of perfect being. What is the unknown of the beginning, and what is the unknown of the end? That I can never answer, save that in my completeness of being the two unknowns are consummated in a oneness, a rose of perfect explanation.

The unknown of my beginning has ingress into me through the spirit. My spirit is troubled, it is uneasy. Far off it hears the approach of footsteps through the night. Who is coming? Ah, let the newcomer arrive, let the newcomer arrive. In my spirit I am lonely and inert. I wait for the newcomer. My spirit aches with misery, dread of the newcomer. But also there is the tension of expectancy. I expect a visit, I expect a newcomer. For oh, I am conceited and unrefreshed, I am alone and barren. Yet still is my spirit alert and chuckling with subtle expectancy, awaiting the visit. It will come to pass. The stranger will come.

I listen, in my spirit I listen and listen. Many sounds there are from the unknown. And surely those are footsteps? In haste I open the door. But, alas! there is no one there. I must wait in patience, wait and always wait up for the stranger. Not of myself, it cannot happen of myself. With this in mind I check my impatience, I learn to wait and to watch.

And at last, out of all my desire and weariness, the door opens and this is the stranger. Ah, now! ah, joy! There is the new creation in me. Ah, beautiful! Ah, delight of delights! I am come to pass from the unknown, the unknown is added on to me. The sources of joy and strength are filled in me. I rise up to a new achievement of being, a new fulfilment in creation, a new rose of roses, new heavens on earth.

This is the story of our coming to pass. There is no other way. I must have patience in my soul, to stand and wait. Above all, it must be said in my soul that I wait for the unknown, for I cannot avail anything of myself. I wait upon the unknown, and from the unknown comes my new beginning. Not of myself, not of myself, but of my insuperable faith, my waiting. I am like a small house on the edge of the forest. Out of the unknown darkness of the forest, in the eternal night of the beginning, comes the spirit of creation towards me. But I must keep the light shining in the window, or how will the spirit see my house? If my house is in darkness of sleep or fear, the angel will pass it by. Above all, I must have no fear. I must watch and wait. Like a blind man looking for the sun, I must lift

my face to the unknown darkness of space and wait until the sun lights on me. It is a question of creative courage. It is no good if I crouch over a coal fire. This will never bring me to pass.

Once the new has entered into my spirit, from the beginning, I am glad. No one and nothing can make me sorry any more. For I am potential with a new fulfilment, I am enriched with a new incipient perfection. Now no longer do I hover in the doorway listlessly, seeking for something to make up my life. The quota is made up in me, I can begin. It is conceived in me, the invisible rose of fulfilment, which in the end will shine out in the skies of absolution. So long as it is conceived in me, all labour of travail is joy. If I am in bud with the unseen rose of creation, what is labour to me, and what is pain, but pang after pang of new, strange joy? My heart is always glad like a star. My heart is a vivid, quivering star which will fan itself slowly out in flakes and gains creation, a rose of roses taking place.

Where do I pay homage, whereunto do I yield myself? To the unknown, only to the unknown, the Holy Ghost. I wait for the beginning, when the great and all creative unknown shall take notice of me, shall turn to me and inform me. This is my joy and my delight. And again, I turn to the unknown of the end, the darkness which is final, which will gather me into finality.

Do I fear the strange approach of the creative unknown to my door? I fear it only with pain and with unspeakable joy. And do I fear the invisible dark hand of death plucking me into the darkness, gathering me blossom by blossom from the stem of my life into the unknown of my afterwards? I fear it only in reverence and with strange satisfaction. For this is my final satisfaction, to be gathered blossom by blossom, all my life long, into the finality of the unknown which is my end.

DEMOCRACY

I

THE AVERAGE

Whitman gives two laws or principles for the establishment of Democracy. We may epitomize them as:

(1) The Law of the Average; (2) The Principle of Individualism, or Personalism, or Identity.

The Law of the Average is well known to us. Upon this law rests all the vague dissertation concerning equality and social perfection. Rights of Man, Equality of Man, Social Perfectibility of Man: all these sweet abstractions, once so inspiring, rest upon the fatal little hypothesis of the Average.

What is the Average? As we are well aware, there is no such animal. It is a pure abstraction. It is the reduction of the human being to a mathematical unit. Every human being numbers one, one single unit. That is the grand proposition of the Average.

Let us further examine this mysterious One, this Unit, this Average; let us examine it corporeally. The average human being: put him on the table, the little monster, and let us see what his works are like. He is just a little monster. He has two legs, two eyes, one nose — all exact. He has a stomach and a penis. He is a little organism. He is one very complicated organ, a unit, an identity.

What is he for? If he's an organ, he must have a purpose. If he's an organism, he must have a purpose. The question is premature, yet it shall be answered. Since he has a mouth, he is made for eating. Since he has feet, he is made for walking. Since he has a penis, he is made for reproducing his species. And so on, and so on.

What a loathsome little beast he is, this Average, this Unit, this Homunculus. Yet he has his purposes. He is useful to measure by. That's the purpose of all averages. An average is not invented to be an Archetype. What a really comical mistake we have made about him. He is invented to serve as a standard in the business of comparison. He is invented to serve as a standard, just like any other standard, like the metre, or the gramme, or the English pound sterling. That's

what he is for — nothing else. He was never intended to be worshipped. What comical, fetish-smitten savages we are.

We use a foot-rule to tell us how big our house is. We don't proceed to say that the foot-rule is the sceptre which sways the earth and all the stars. Yet we have said as much of this little standardized invention of ours, the Average Man, the man-in-the-street. We have made prime fools of ourselves.

Now let us pull the guilt off the image, and see exactly what it is, and what we want it for. It is a mathematical quantity, like the metre or the foot-rule: a purely arbitrary institution of the human mind. Let us be quite clear about that.

But the human mind has invented the institution for its own purposes. Granted. What are the purposes? Merely for the comparing of one *living* man with another *living* man, in case of necessity: just as money is merely a contrivance for comparing a leg of mutton with a volume of Keats's poems. The money in itself is nothing. It is simply the arbitrary static measure for human desires. We mistake the measure for the thing it measures, and proceed to base our desires on money. It is nonsensical materialism.

Now for the Average Man himself. He is five-feet-six-inches high: and therefore you, John, will take an over-size pair of trousers, reach-me-downs; and you, Francois, mon cher, will take an under-size. The Average Man also has a mouth and a stomach, which consume two pounds of bread and six ounces of meat per day: and therefore you, Fritz, exceed the normal consumption of food, while you, dear Emily, consume less than your share. The Average Man has also a penis; and therefore all of you, Francois, Fritz, John, and Giacomo, you may begin begetting children at the average age, let us say, of twenty-five.

The Average Man is somehow very unsatisfactory. He is not sufficiently worked out. It is astonishing that we have not perfected him before. But this is because we have mixed the issues. How could we scientifically establish the Average, whilst he had to stand draped upon a pedestal, as an Ideal? Haul him down at once. He is no Ideal. He is just a Standard, the creature on whom Standard suits and Standard boots are fitted, to whose stomach Standard bread is adjusted, and for whose eyes the Standard Lamps are lighted, the Standard Oil Company is busy refining its gallons. He comes under the Government Weights and Measures Act.

Perfect him quickly: the Average, the Normal, the Man-in-the-street. He is so many inches high, broad, deep; he weighs so many pounds. He must eat so much, and sleep so much, and work so much, and play so much, and love so much, and think so much, and argue so much, and read so many newspapers, and have so many children. Somebody, quick, — some Professor of Social Economy-draw us up a perfect Average, and let us have him before the middle

of next week. He is urgently required at the moment.

This is all your Man-in-the-street amounts to: this tailor's dummy of an average. He is the image and effigy of all your equality. Men are not equal, and never were, and never will be, save by the arbitrary determination of some ridiculous human Ideal. But still, in the normal course of things, all men *do* have two eyes and one nose and a stomach and a penis. In the teeth of all opposition we assert it. In the normal course of things, all men *do* hunger and thirst and sleep and laugh and feel miserable and fall in love and ache for coition and ache to escape from the woman again. And the Average Man just represents what all men need and desire, physically, functionally, materially, and socially. *Materially* need: that's the point. The Average Man is the standard of material need in the human being.

Please keep out all Spiritual and Mystical needs. They have nothing to do with the Average. You cannot Average such things. As far as the stomach goes, it is not really true that one man's meat is another man's poison. No. The law of the Average holds good for the stomach. All young mammals suck milk, without exception. But in the free, spontaneous self, one man's meat is truly another man's poison. And therefore you *can't* draw any average. You can't *have* an average: unless you are going to poison everybody.

Now we will settle for ever the Equality of Man, and the Rights of Man. Society means people living together. People *must* live together. And to live together, they must have some Standard, some *Material* Standard. This is where the Average comes in. And this is where Socialism and Modern Democracy come in. For Democracy and Socialism rest upon the Equality of Man, which is the Average. And this is sound enough, so long as the Average represents the real basic material needs of mankind: basic material needs: we insist and insist again. For Society, or Democracy, or any Political State or Community exists not for the sake of the individual, nor should ever exist for the sake of the individual, but simply to establish the Average, in order to make living together possible: that is, to make proper facilities for every man's clothing, feeding, housing himself, working, sleeping, mating, playing, according to his necessity as a common unit, an average. Everything beyond that common necessity depends on himself alone.

The proper adjustment of material means of existence: for this the State exists, but for nothing further. The State is a dead ideal. *Nation* is a dead ideal. Democracy and Socialism are dead ideals. They are one and all just *contrivances* for the supplying of the lowest material needs of a people. They are just vast hotels, or hostels, where every guest does some scrap of the business of the day's routine — if it's only lounging gracefully to give the appearance of ease — and

for this contribution gets his suitable accommodation. England, France, Germany — these great nations, they have no vital meaning any more, except as great Food Committees and Housing Committees for a throng of people whose material tastes are somewhat in accord. No doubt they *had* other meanings. No doubt the French individuals of the seventeenth century still felt themselves gloriously expressed in stone, in Versailles. But man loses more and more his faculty for collective self-expression. Nay, the great development in collective expression in mankind has been a progress towards the possibility of purely individual expression. The highest Collectivity has for its true goal the purest individualism, pure individual spontaneity. But once more we have mistaken the means for the end: so that Presidents, those representatives of the collected masses, instead of being accounted the chief machine-section of society, which they are, are revered as ideal beings. The thing to do is not to raise the idea of Nation, or even of Internationalism, higher. The need is to take away every scrap of ideal drapery from nationalism and from internationalism, to show it all as a material contrivance for housing and feeding and conveying innumerable people. The housing and feeding, the method of conveyance and the rules of the road may be as different as you please — just as the methods of one great business house, and even of one hotel, are different from those of another. But that is all it is. Man no longer expresses himself in his form of government, and his President is strictly only his superlative butler. This is the true course of evolution: the great collective activities are at last merely auxiliary to the purely individual activities. Business houses may be magnificent, but there is nothing divine in it. This is why the Kaiser sounded so foolish. He was really only the head of a very great business concern. His God was the most intolerable part of his stock-in-trade. Genuine business houses may quarrel and compete, but they don't go to war. Why? Because they are not ideal concerns. They are just practical material concerns. It is only Ideal concerns which go to war, and slaughter indiscriminately with a feeling of exalted righteousness. But when a business concern masquerades as an ideal concern, and behaves in this fashion, it is really unbearable.

There are two things to do. Strip off at once all the ideal drapery from nationality, from nations, peoples, states, empires, and even from Internationalism and Leagues of Nations. Leagues of Nations should be just flatly and simply committees where representatives of the various business houses, so-called Nations, meet and consult. Consultations, board-meetings of the State business men: no more. *Representatives of Peoples* — *-who* can represent me? — I am myself. I don't intend anybody to represent me.

You, you Cabinet Minister — what are you? You are the arch-grocer, the

super-hotel-manager, the foreman over the ships and railways. What else are you? You are the super-tradesman, same paunch, same ingratiating manner, same everything. Governments, what are they? Just board-meetings of big business men. Very useful, too — very thankful we are that somebody *will* look after this business. But Ideal! An Ideal Government? What nonsense. We might as well talk of an Ideal Cook's Tourist Agency, or an Ideal Achille Serre Cleaners and Dyers. Even the ideal Ford of America is only an ideal *average* motor-car. His employees are not spontaneous, nonchalant human beings, a la Whitman. They are just well-tested, well-oiled sections of the Ford automobile.

Politics — what are they? Just another, extra-large, commercial wrangle over buying and selling — nothing else. Very good to have the wrangle. Let us have the buying and selling well done. But *ideal! Politics ideal! Political Idealists!* What rank gewgaw and nonsense! We have just enough sense not to talk about Ideal Selfridges or Ideal Krupps or Ideal Heidsiecks. Then let us have enough sense to drop the ideal of England or Europe or anywhere else. Let us be men and women, and keep our house in order. But let us pose no longer as houses, or as England, or as housemaids, or democrats.

Pull the ideal drapery off Governments, States, Nations, and Internations. Show them for what they are: big business concerns for manufacturing and retailing Standard goods. Put up a statue of the Average Man, something like those abominable statues of men in woollen underwear which surmount a shop at the corner of Oxford Street and Tottenham Court Road. Let your statue be grotesque: in fact, borrow those ignominious statues of men in pants and vests: the fat one for Germany, the thin one for England, the middling one for France, the gaunt one for America. Point to these statues, which guard the entrance to the House of Commons, to the Chamber, to the Senate, to the Reichstag — and let every Prime Minister and President know the quick of his own ignominy. Let every bursting politician see himself in his commercial pants. Let every senatorial idealist and saviour of mankind be reminded that his office depends on the quality of the underwear he supplies to the State. Let every fiery and rhetorical Deputy remember that he is only held together by his patent suspenders.

And then, when the people of the world have finally got over the state of giddy idealizing of governments, nations, internations, politics, democracies, empires, and so forth; when they really understand that their collective activities are only cook-housemaid to their sheer individual activities; when they at last calmly accept a business concern for what it is; then, at last, we may actually see free men in the streets.

II

IDENTITY

Let us repeat that Whitman establishes the true Democracy on two bases:

(1) The Average; (2) Individualism, Personalism, or Identity.

The Average is much easier to settle and define than is Individualism or Identity. The Average is the same as the Man-in-the-street, the unit of Humanity. This unit is in the first place just an abstraction, an invention of the human mind. In the first place, the Man-in-the-street is no more than an abstract idea. But in the second place, by application to Tom, Dick, and Harry, he becomes a substantial, material, functioning unit. This is how the ideal world is created. It is invented exactly as man invents machinery. First there is an idea; then the idea is substantiated, the inventor fabricates his machine; and then he proceeds to worship his fabrication, and himself as mouthpiece of the Logos. This is how the world, the universe, was invented from the Logos: exactly as man has invented machinery and the whole ideal of humanity. The vital universe was never created from any Logos; but the ideal universe of man was certainly so invented. Man's overweening mind uttered the Word, and the Word was God. So that the world exists today as a flesh-and-blood-and-iron substantiation of this uttered world. This is all the trouble: that the invented *ideal* world of man is superimposed upon living men and women, and men and women are thus turned into abstracted, functioning, mechanical units. This is all the great ideal of Humanity amounts to: an aggregation of ideally functioning units; never a man or woman possible.

Ideals, all ideals and every ideal, are a trick of the devil. They are a superimposition of the abstracted, automatic, invented universe of man upon the spontaneous creative universe. So much for the Average, the Man-in-the-street, and the great ideal of Humanity: all a little trick men have played on us. But quite a useful little trick — so long as we merely use it as one uses the trick of making cakes or pies or bread, just for feeding purposes, and suchlike.

Let us leave the Average, and look at the second basis of democracy. With the Average we settle the cooking, eating, sleeping, housing, mating and clothing problem.. But Whitman insisted on exalting his Democracy; he would not quite leave it on the cooking-eating-mating level. We cook to eat, we eat to sleep, we

sleep to build houses, we build houses in order to beget and bear children in safety, we bear children in order to clothe them, we clothe them in order that they may start the old cycle over again, cook and eat and sleep and house and mate and clothe, and so on *ad infinitum*. That is the Average. It is the business of a government to superintend it.

But Whitman insisted on raising Democracy above government, or even above public service or humanity or love of one's neighbour. Heaven knows what his Democracy is — but something as yet unattained. It is something beyond governments and even beyond Ideals. It must be beyond Ideals, because it has never yet been stated. As an idea it doesn't yet exist. Even Whitman, with all his reiteration, got no further than *hinting*: and frightfully bad hints, many of them.

We've heard the Average hint — enough of that. Now for Individualism, Personalism, and Identity. We catch hold of the tail of the hint, and proceed with Identity.

What has Identity got to do with Democracy? It can't have anything to do with politics and governments. It can't much affect one's love for one's neighbour, or for humanity. Yet, stay — it can. Whitman says there is One Identity in all things. It is only the old dogma. All things emanate from the Supreme Being. All things, being all emanations from the Supreme Being, have One Identity.

Very nice. But we don't like the look of this Supreme Being. It is too much like the Man-in-the-street. This Supreme Being, this Anima Mundi, this Logos was surely just invented to suit the human needs. It is surely the magnified Average, abstracted from men, and then clapped on to them again, like identity-medals on wretched khaki soldiers. But instead of a magnified average-function-unit, we have a magnified unit of Consciousness, or Spirit.

Like the Average, this One Identity is useful enough, if we use it aright. It is not a matter of provisioning the body, this time, but of provisioning the spirit, the consciousness. We are all one, and therefore every bit partakes of all the rest. That is, the Whole is inherent in every fragment. That is, every human consciousness has the same intrinsic value as every other human consciousness, because each is an essential part of the Great Consciousness. This is the One Identity which identifies us all.

It is very nice, theoretically. And it is a very great stimulus to universal comprehension; it leads us all to want to know everything; it even tempts us all to imagine we know everything beforehand, and need make no effort. It is the subtlest means of extending the consciousness. But when you have extended your consciousness, even to infinity, what then? Do you really become God? When in your understanding you embrace everything, then surely you are

divine? But no! With a nasty bump you have to come down and realize that, in spite of your infinite comprehension, you are not really any other than you were before: not a bit more divine or superhuman or enlarged. Your *consciousness* is not *you*: that is the sad lesson you learn in your superhuman flight of infinite understanding.

This big bump of falling out of the infinite back into your own old self leads you to suspect that the One Identity is not *the* identity. There is another, little sort of identity, which you can't get away from, except by breaking your neck. The One Identity is very like the Average. It is what you are when you aren't yourself. It is what you are when you imagine you're something hugely big — the Infinite, for example. And the consciousness is really capable of attaining infinity. But there you are! Your consciousness has to fly back to the old tree, to peck the old apples, and sleep under the leaves. It was all only an excursion. It was wearing a magic cap. You yourself invented the cap, and then puffed up your head to fit it. But a swelled head at last begins to ache, and you realize it's only your own old chump after all. All the extended consciousness that ranges the infinite heavens must sleep under the thatch of your hair at night: and you are only you; and your *spirit* is only a bird in your tree, that flies, and then settles, whistles, and then is silent.

Man is a queer beast. He spends dozens of centuries puffing himself up and drawing himself in, and at last he has to be content to be just his own size, neither infinitely big nor infinitely little. Man is tragi-comical. His insatiable desire to be *everything* has made him clean forget that he might be himself. To be everything — to be everything:-the history of mankind is only a history of this insane craving in man. You can magnify yourself into a Jehovah and a huge Egyptian king-god: or you can reverse the spy-glass, and dwindle yourself away into a speck, lost in the Infinite of Love, as the later great races have done. But still you'll only be chasing the one mad reward, the reward of infinity: which, when you've got it, bursts like a bubble in your hand, and leaves you looking at your own fingers. Well, and what's wrong with your own fingers?

It is a bubble, the One Identity. But, chasing it, man gets his education. It is his education process, the chance of the All, the extension of the consciousness. He *learns* everything: except the last lesson of all, which he can't learn till the bubble has burst in his fingers.

The last lesson? — Ah, the lesson of his own fingers: himself: the little identity; little, but real. Better, far better, to be oneself than to be any bursting Infinite, or swollen One Identity.

It is a radical passion in man, however, the passion to include *everything* in himself, grasp it all. There are two ways of gratifying this passion. The first is

Alexander's way, the way of power, power over the material universe. This is what the alchemists and magicians sought. This is what Satan offered Jesus, in the Temptations: power, mystic and actual, over the material world. And power, we know, is a bubble: a platitudinous bubble.

But Jesus chose the other way: not to *have* all, but to *be* all. Not to *grasp* everything into supreme possession: but to *be* everything, through supreme acceptance. It is the same thing, at the very last. The king-god and the crucified-God hold the same bubble in their hands: the bubble of the All, the Infinite. The king-god extends the dominion of his will and consciousness over all things: the crucified identifies his will and consciousness with all things. But the submission of love is at last a process of pure materialism, like the supreme extension of power. Up to a certain point, both in mastering, which is power, and in submitting, which is love, the soul *learns* and fulfils itself. Beyond a certain point, it merely collapses from its centrality, and lapses out into the material chain of cause and effect. The tyranny of Power is no worse than the tyranny of No-power. Government by the highest is no more fatal than government by the lowest. Let the Average govern, let him be called super-butler, let us have a faint but tolerant contempt for him. But let us keep our very self integral, greater than any having or knowing, centrally alive and quick.

The last lesson: the myriad, mysterious identities, no one of which can *comprehend* another. They can only exist side by side, as stars do. The lesson of lessons: not in any oneness with the rest of things do we have our pure being: but in clean, fine singleness. Oneness, and collectiveness, these are our lesser states, inferior: our impurity. They are mere states of consciousness and of having.

It is all very well to talk about a Supreme Being, an Anima Mundi, an Oversoul, an Infinite: but it is all just human invention. Come down to actuality. Where do you see Being? — In individual men and women. Where do you find an Anima? — In living individual creatures. Where would you look for a soul? — In a man, in an animal, in a tree or flower. And all the rest, about Supreme Beings and Anima Mundis and Oversouls, is just abstractions. Show me the very animal! — You can't. It is merely a trick of the human will, trying to get power over everything, and therefore making the wish father of the thought. The cart foals the horse, and there you are: a Logos, a Supreme Being, a What-not.

But there are two sorts of individual identity. Every factory-made pitcher has its own little identity, resulting from a certain mechanical combination of Matter with Forces. These are the material identities. They sum up to the material Infinite.

The true identity, however, is the identity of the living self. If we look for God, let us look in the bush where he sings. That is, in living creatures. Every

living creature is single in itself, a *ne plus ultra* of creative reality, *fons et origo* of creative manifestation. Why go further? Why begin to abstract and generalize and include? There you have it. Every single living creature is a single creative unit, a unique, incommutable self. Primarily, in its own spontaneous reality, it knows no law. It is a law unto itself. Secondly, in its material reality, it submits to all the laws of the material universe. But the primal, spontaneous self in any creature has ascendance, truly, over the material laws of the universe; it uses these laws and converts them in the mystery of creation.

This then is the true identity: the inscrutable, single self, the little unfathomable well-head that bubbles forth into being and doing. We cannot analyse it. We can only know it is there. It is not by any means a Logos. It precedes any knowing. It is the fountain-head of everything: the quick of the self.

Not people melted into a oneness: that is not the new Democracy. But people released into their single, starry identity, each one distinct and incommutable. This will never be an ideal; for of the living self you cannot make an idea, just as you have not been able to turn the individual “soul” into an idea. Both are impossible to idealize. An idea is an abstraction from reality, a generalization. And you can’t generalize the incommutable.

So the Whitman One Identity, the *En-Masse*, is a horrible nullification of true identity and being. At the best, our *en masse* activities can be but servile, serving the free soul. At the worst, they are sheer self-destruction. Let us put them in their place. Let us get over our rage of social activity, public being, universal self-estimation, republicanism, bolshevism, socialism, empire — all these mad manifestations of *En Masse* and One Identity. They are all self-betrayed. Let our Democracy be in the singleness of the clear, clean self, and let our *En Masse* be no more than an arrangement for the liberty of this self. Let us drop looking after our neighbour. It only robs him of his chance of looking after himself. Which is robbing him of his freedom, with a vengeance.

III

PERSONALITY

One's-self I sing, a simple separate person.

Yet utter the word Democratic, the word En-Masse.

Such are the opening words of *Leaves of Grass*. It is Whitman's whole *motif*, the key to all his Democracy. First and last he sings of "the great pride of man in himself." First and last he is Chanter of Personality. If it is not Personality, it is Identity; and if not Identity, it is the Individual: and along with these, Democracy and *En Masse*.

In Whitman, at all times, the true and the false are so near, so interchangeable, that we are almost inevitably left with divided feelings. The Average, one of his greatest idols, we flatly refuse to worship. Again, when we come to do real reverence to identity, we never know whether we shall be taking off our hats to that great mystery, the unique individual self, distinct and primal in every separate man, or whether we shall be saluting that old great idol of the past, the Supreme One which swallows up all true identity.

And now for Personality. What meaning does "person" really carry? A *person* is given in the dictionary as an *individual human being*. But surely the words *person* and *individual* suggest very different things. It is not at all the same to have personality as to have individuality, though you may not be able to define the difference. And the distinction between a person and a human being is perhaps even greater. Some "persons" hardly seem like human beings at all.

The derivation this time helps. *Persona*, in Latin, is a player's mask, or a character in a play: and perhaps the word is cognate with *sonare*, to sound. An *individual* is that which is not divided or not dividable. A *being* we shall not attempt to define, because it is indefinable.

So now, there must be a radical difference between something which was originally a player's mask, or a transmitted sound, and something which means "the undivided." The old meaning lingers in *person*, and is almost obvious in *personality*. A person is a human being *as he appears to others*; and personality is that which is transmitted from the person to his audience: the transmissible effect of a man.

A good actor can assume a personality; he can never assume an individuality. Either he has his own, or none. So that personality is something much more superficial, or at least more volatile than individuality. This volatile quality is the one we must examine.

Let us take a sentence from an American novel: "My *ego* had played a trick on me, and made me think I wanted babies, when I only wanted the man." This is a perfectly straight and lucid statement. But what is the difference between the authoress's *ego* and her *me*? The *ego* is obviously a sort of second self, which she carries about with her. It is her body of accepted consciousness, which she

has inherited more or less ready-made from her father and grandfathers. This secondary self is very pernicious, dictating to her issues which are quite false to her true, deeper, spontaneous self, her creative identity.

Nothing in the world is more pernicious than the *ego* or spurious self, the conscious entity with which every individual is saddled. He receives it almost *en bloc* from the preceding generation, and spends the rest of his life trying to drag his spontaneous self from beneath the horrible incubus. And the most fatal part of the incubus, by far, is the dead, leaden weight of handed-on ideals. So that every individual is born with a mill-stone of ideals round his neck, and, whether he knows it or not, either spends his time trying to get his neck free, like a wild animal wrestling with a collar to which a log is fastened; or else he spends his days decorating his mill-stone, his log, with fantastic colours.

And a finely or fantastically decorated mill-stone is called a personality. Never trust for one moment any individual who has unmistakable *personality*. He is sure to be a life-traitor. His personality is only a sort of actor's mask. It is his self-conscious *ego*, his *ideal* self masquerading and prancing round, showing off. He may not be aware of it. But that makes no matter. He is a painted bug.

The *ideal* self: this is personality. The self that is begotten and born from the *idea*, this is the *ideal* self: a spurious, detestable product. This is man created from his own Logos. This is man born out of his own head. This is the self-conscious *ego*, the entity of fixed ideas and ideals, prancing and displaying itself like an actor. And this is personality. This is what makes the American authoress gush about babies. And this gush is her peculiar form of personality, which renders her attractive to the American men, who prefer so much to deal with personalities and *egos*, rather than with real beings: because personalities and *egos*, after all, are quite *reasonable*, which means, they are subject to the laws of cause-and-effect; they are safe and calculable: materialists, units of the material world of Force and Matter.

Your idealist alone is a perfect materialist. This is no paradox. What is the idea, or the ideal, after all? It is only a fixed, static entity, an abstraction, an extraction from the living body of life. Creative life is characterized by spontaneous mutability: it brings forth unknown issues, impossible to preconceive. But an ideal is just a machine which is in process of being built. A man gets the idea for some engine, and proceeds to work it out in steel and copper. In exactly the same way, man gets some ideal of man, and proceeds to work it out in flesh-and-blood, as a fixed, static entity: just as a machine is a static entity, so is the ideal Humanity.

If we want to find the real enemy today, here it is: idealism. If we want to find this enemy incarnate, here he is: a personality. If we want to know the steam

which drives this mechanical little incarnation, here it is: love of humanity, the public good.

There have been other ideals than ours, other forms of personality, other sorts of steam. We quite fail to see what sort of personality Rameses II had, or what sort of steam built the pyramids: chiefly, I suppose, because they are a very great load on the face of the earth.

Is love of humanity the same as real, warm, individual love? Nonsense. It is the moonshine of our warm day, a hateful reflection. Is personality the same as individual being? We know it is a mere mask. Is idealism the same as creation? Rubbish! Idealism is no more than a plan of a marvellous Human Machine, drawn up by the great Draughtsmen-Minds of the past. Give God a pair of compasses, and let the designs be measured and formed. What insufferable nonsense! As if creation proceeded from a pair of compasses. Better say that man is a forked radish, as Carlyle did: it's nearer the mark than this Pair of Compasses business.

You can have life two ways. Either everything is created from the mind, downwards; or else everything preceeds from the creative quick, outwards into exfoliation and blossom. Either a great Mind floats in space: God, the Anima Mundi, the Oversoul, drawing with a pair of compasses and making everything to scale, even emotions and self-conscious effusions; or else creation proceeds from the for ever inscrutable quicks of living beings, men, women, animals, plants. The actual living quick itself is alone the creative reality. Once you abstract from this, once you generalize and postulate Universals, you have departed from the creative reality, and entered the realm of static fixity, mechanism, materialism.

Now let us put salt on the tail of that sly old bird of "attractive personality." It isn't a bird at all. It is a self-conscious, self-important, befeathered snail: and salt is good for snails. It is the snail which has eaten off our flowers till none are left. Now let us no longer be taken in by the feathers. Anyhow, put salt on his tail.

No personalities in our Democracy. No ideals either. When still more Personalities come round hawking their pretty ideals, we must be ready to upset their apple-cart. I say, a man's self is a law unto itself: not unto *himself*, mind you. Itself. When a man talks about *himself*, he is talking about his idea of himself; his own ideal self, that fancy little homunculus he has fathered in his brain. When a man is conscious of himself he is trading his own personality.

You can't make an *idea* of the living self: hence it can never become an ideal. Thank heaven for that. There it is, an inscrutable, unfindable, vivid quick, giving us off as a life-issue. It is not *spirit*. Spirit is merely our mental consciousness, a finished essence extracted from our life-being, just as alcohol, spirits of wine, is

the material], finished essence extracted from the living grape. The living self is not spirit. You cannot postulate it. How can you postulate that which is *there*? The moon might as well try to hold forth in heaven, postulating the sun. Or a child hanging on to his mother's skirt might as well commence in a long diatribe to postulate his mother's existence, in order to prove his own existence. Which is exactly what man has been busily doing for two thousand years. What amazing nonsense!

The quick of the self is *there*. You needn't try to get behind it. As leave try to get behind the sun. You needn't try to idealize it, for by so doing you will only slime about with feathers in your tail, a gorgeous befeathered snail of an *ego* and a personality. You needn't try to show it off to your neighbour: he'll put salt on your tail if you do. And you needn't go on trying to save the living soul of your neighbour. It's hands off. Do you think you are such a God-Almighty bird of paradise that you can grow your neighbour's goose-quills for him on your own loving house-sparrow wings? Every bird must grow his own feathers; you are not the almighty dodo; you've got nobody's wings to feather but your own.

IV

INDIVIDUALISM

It is obvious that Whitman's Democracy is not merely a political system, or a system of government — or even a social system. It is an attempt to conceive a new way of life, to establish new values. It is a struggle to liberate human beings from the fixed, arbitrary control of ideals, into free spontaneity.

No, the ideal of Oneness, the unification of all mankind into the homogeneous whole, is done away with. The great *desire* is that each single individual shall be incommutably himself, spontaneous and single, that he shall not in any way be reduced to a term, a unit of any Whole.

We must discriminate between an ideal and a desire. A desire proceeds from within, from the unknown, spontaneous soul or self. But an ideal is superimposed from above, from the mind; it is a fixed, arbitrary thing, like a machine control. The great lesson is to learn to break all the fixed ideals, to allow the soul's own deep desires to come direct, spontaneous into consciousness. But it is a lesson which will take many aeons to learn.

Our life, our being depends upon the incalculable issue from the central Mystery into indefinable *presence*. This sounds in itself an abstraction. But not so. It is rather the perfect absence of abstraction. The central Mystery is no generalized abstraction. It is each man's primal original soul or self, within him. And *presence* is nothing mystic or ghostly. On the contrary. It is the actual man present before us. The fact that an actual man present before us is an inscrutable and incarnate Mystery, untranslatable, this is the fact upon which any great scheme of social life must be based. It is the fact of *otherness*.

Each human self is single, incommutable, and unique. This is its *first* reality. Each self is unique, and therefore incomparable. It is a single well-head of creation, unquestionable: it cannot be compared with another self, another well-head, because, in its prime or creative reality, it can never be comprehended by any other self.

The living self has one purpose only: to come into its own fullness of being, as a tree comes into full blossom, or a bird into spring beauty, or a tiger into lustre.

But this coming into full, spontaneous being is the most difficult thing of all. Man's nature is balanced between spontaneous creativity and mechanical-material activity. Spontaneous being is subject to no law. But mechanical-material existence is subject to all the laws of the mechanical-physical world. Man has almost half his nature in the material world. His spontaneous nature *just* takes precedence.

The only thing man has to trust to in coming to himself is his desire and his impulse. But both desire and impulse tend to fall into mechanical automatism: to fall from spontaneous reality into dead or material reality. All our education should be a guarding against this fall.

The fall is possible in a two-fold manner. Desires tend to automatize into functional appetites, and impulses tend to automatize into fixed aspirations or ideals. These are the two great temptations of man. Falling into the first temptation, the whole human will pivots on some function, some material activity, which then works the whole being: like an *idée fixe* in the mental consciousness. This automatized, dominant appetite we call a lust: a lust for power, a lust for consuming, a lust for self-abnegation and merging. The second great temptation is the inclination to set up some fixed centre in the mind, and make the whole soul turn upon this centre. This we call idealism. Instead of the will fixing upon some sensational activity, it fixes upon some aspirational activity, and pivots this activity upon an idea or an ideal. The whole soul streams in the energy of aspiration and turns automatically, like a machine, upon the ideal.

These are the two great temptations of the fall of man, the fall from

spontaneous, single, pure being, into what we call materialism or automatism or mechanism of the self. All education must tend against this fall; and all our efforts in all our life must be to preserve the soul free and spontaneous. The whole soul of man must *never* be subjected to one motion or emotion, the life-activity must never be degraded into a fixed activity, there must be *no fixed, direction*.

There can be no ideal goal for human life. Any ideal goal means mechanization, materialism, and nullity. There is no pulling open the buds to see what the blossom will be. Leaves must unroll, buds swell and open, and *then* the blossom. And even after that, when the flower dies and the leaves fall, *still* we shall not know. There will be more leaves, more buds, more blossoms: and again, a blossom is an unfolding of the creative unknown. Impossible, utterly impossible to preconceive the unrevealed blossom. You cannot forestall it from the last blossom. We know the flower of today, but the flower of tomorrow is all beyond us. Only in the material-mechanical world can man foresee, foreknow, calculate, and establish laws.

So, we more or less grasp the first term of the new Democracy. We see something of what a man will be unto himself.

Next, what will a man be unto his neighbour? — Since every individual is, in his first reality, a single, incommutable soul, not to be calculated or defined in terms of any other soul, there can be no establishing of a mathematical ratio. We cannot say that all men are equal. We cannot say $A = B$. Nor can we say that men are unequal. We may not declare that $A = B + C$.

Where each thing is unique in itself, there can be no comparison made. One man is neither equal nor unequal to another man. When I stand in the presence of another man, and I am my own pure self, am I aware of the presence of an equal, or of an inferior, or of a superior? I am not. When I stand with another man, who is himself, and when I am truly myself, then I am only aware of a Presence, and of the strange reality of Otherness. There is me, and there is *another being*. That is the first part of the reality. There is no comparing or estimating. There is only this strange recognition of *present otherness*. I may be glad, angry, or sad, because of the presence of the other. But still no comparison enters in. Comparison enters only when one of us departs from his own integral being, and enters the material-mechanical world. Then equality and inequality starts at once.

So, we know the first great purpose of Democracy: that each man shall be spontaneously himself — each man himself, each woman herself, without any question of equality or inequality entering in at all; and that no man shall try to determine the being of any other man, or of any other woman.

But, because of the temptation which awaits every individual — the temptation to fall out of being, into automatism and mechanization, every individual must be ready at all times to defend his own being against the mechanization and materialism forced upon him by those people who have fallen or departed from being. It is the long unending fight, the fight for the soul's own freedom of spontaneous being, against the mechanism and materialism of the fallen.

All the foregoing deals really with the integral, whole nature of man. If man would but *keep* whole, integral, everything could be left at that. There would be no need for laws and governments: agreement would be spontaneous. Even the great concerted social activities would be essentially spontaneous.

But in his present state of unspeakable barbarism, man is unable to distinguish his own spontaneous integrity from his mechanical lusts and aspirations. Hence there must still be laws and governments. But laws and governments henceforth, we see it clearly and we must never forget it, relate only to the material world: to property, the possession of property and the means of life, and to the material-mechanical nature of man.

In the past, no doubt, there were great ideals to fulfil: ideals of brotherhood, oneness, and equality. Great sections of humanity tended to cohere into particular brotherhoods, expressing their oneness and their equality and their united purpose in a manner peculiar to themselves. For no matter how single an ideal may be, even such a mathematical ideal as equality and oneness, it will find the most diverse and even opposite expressions. So that brotherhood and oneness in Germany never meant the same as brotherhood and oneness in France. Yet each was brotherhood, and each was oneness. Souls, as they work out the same ideal, work it out differently: always differently, until they reach the point where the spontaneous integrity of being finally breaks. And then, when pure mechanization or materialism sets in, the soul is automatically pivoted, and the most diverse of creatures fall into a common mechanical unison.

This we see in America. It is not a homogeneous, spontaneous coherence so much as a disintegrated amorphousness which lends itself to perfect mechanical unison.

Men have reached the point where, in further fulfilling their ideals, they break down the living integrity of their being and fall into sheer mechanical materialism. They become automatic units, determined entirely by mechanical law.

This is horribly true of modern democracy — socialism, conservatism, bolshevism, liberalism, republicanism, communism: all alike. The one principle that governs all the *isms* is the same: the principle of the idealized unit, the

possessor of property. Man has his highest fulfilment as a possessor of property: so they all say, really. One half says that the uneducated, being the majority, should possess the property; the other half says that the educated, being the enlightened, should possess the property. There is no more to it. No need to write books about it.

This is the last of the ideals. This is the last phase of the ideal of equality, brotherhood, and oneness. All ideals work down to the sheer materialism which is their intrinsic reality, at last.

It doesn't matter, now, who has the property. They have all lost their being over it. Even property, that most substantial of realities, evaporates once man loses his integral nature. It is curious that it is so, but it is undeniable. So that property is now fast evaporating.

Wherein lies the hope? For with it evaporates the last ideal. Sometime, somewhere, man will wake up and realize that property is only there to be used, not to be possessed. He will realize that possession is a kind of illness of the spirit, and a hopeless burden upon the spontaneous self. The little pronouns "my" and "our" will lose all their mystic spell.

The question of property will never be settled till people cease to care for property. Then it will settle itself. A man only needs so much as will help him to his own fulfilment. Surely the individual who wants a motor-car merely for the sake of having it and riding in it is as hopeless an automaton as the motor-car itself.

When men are no longer obsessed with the desire to possess property, or with the parallel desire to prevent another man's possessing it, then, and only then shall we be glad to turn it over to the State. Our way of State-ownership is merely a farcical exchange of words, not of ways. We only intend our States to be Unlimited Liability Companies instead of Limited Liability Companies.

The Prime Minister of the future will be no more than a sort of steward, the Minister for Commerce will be the great housekeeper, the Minister for Transport the head-coachman: all just chief servants, no more: servants.

When men become their own decent selves again, then we can so easily arrange the material world. The arrangement will come, as it must come, spontaneously, not by previous ordering. Until such time, what is the good of talking about it? All discussion and idealizing of the possession of property, whether individual or group or State possession, amounts now to no more than a fatal betrayal of the spontaneous self. All settlement of the property question must arise spontaneously out of the new impulse in man, to free himself from the extraneous load of possession, and walk naked and light. Every attempt at preordaining a new material world only adds another last straw to the load that

already has broken so many backs. If we are to keep our backs unbroken, we must deposit all property on the ground, and learn to walk without it. We must stand aside. And when many men stand aside, they stand in a new world; a new world of man has come to pass. This is the Democracy, the new order.

THE PROPER STUDY

If no man lives for ever, neither does any precept. And if even the weariest river winds somewhere safe to sea, so also does the weariest wisdom. And there it is lost. Also incorporated.

Know then thyself, presume not God to scan;
The proper study of mankind is man.

It was Alexander Pope who absolutely struck the note of our particular epoch: not Shakespeare or Luther or Milton. A man of first magnitude never fits his age perfectly.

Know then thyself, presume not God to scan;
The proper study of mankind is *Man* — with a capital *M*.

This stream of wisdom is very weary now: weary to death. It started such a gay little trickle, and is such a spent muddy ebb by now. It will take a big sea to swallow all its alluvia.

“Know then thyself.” All right! I’ll do my best. Honestly I’ll do my best, sincerely to know myself. Since it is the great commandment to consciousness of our long era, let us be men, and try to obey it. Jesus gave the emotional commandment, “Love thy neighbour.” But the Greeks set the even more absolute motto, in its way, a more deeply religious motto: “Know thyself.”

Very well! Being man, and the son of man, I find it only honourable to obey. To do my best. To do my best to know myself. And particularly that part, or those parts of myself that have not yet been admitted into consciousness. Man is nothing, less than a tick stuck in a sheep’s back, unless he adventures. Either into the unknown of the world, of his environment. Or into the unknown of himself.

Allons! the road is before us. Know thyself! Which means, *really*, know thine own *unknown self*. It’s no good knowing something you know already. The thing is to discover the tracts as yet unknown. And as the only unknown now lies deep in the passional soul, allons! the road is before us. We write a novel or two, we are called erotic or depraved or idiotic or boring. What does it matter, we go the road just the same. If you see the point of the great old commandment, *Know thyself*, then you see the point of all art.

But knowing oneself, like knowing anything else, is not a process that can continue to infinity, in the same direction. The fact that I myself *am* only myself makes me very specifically finite. True, I may argue that my Self is a mystery that impinges on the infinite. Admitted. But the moment my Self impinges on

the infinite, it ceases to be just myself.

The same is true of all knowing. You start to find out the chemical composition of a drop of water, and before you know where you are, your river of knowledge is winding very unsatisfactorily into a very vague sea, called the ether. You start to study electricity, you track the wretch down till you get some mysterious and misbehaving atom of energy or unit of force that goes pop under your nose and leaves you with the dead body of a mere word.

You sail down your stream of knowledge, and you find yourself absolutely at sea. Which may be safety for the weary river, but is a sad look-out for you, who are a land animal.

Now all science starts gaily from the inland source of *I Don't Know*. Gaily it says: "I don't know, but I'm going to know." It's like a little river bubbling up cheerfully in the determination to dissolve the whole world in its waves. And science, like the little river, winds wonderingly out again into the final *I Don't Know* of the ocean.

All this is platitudinous as regards science. Science has learned an uncanny lot, *by the way*.

Apply the same to the Know Thyself motto. We have learned something by the way. But as far as I'm concerned, I see land receding, and the great ocean of the last *I Don't Know* enveloping me.

But the human consciousness is never allowed finally to say: "I Don't Know." It has got to know, even if it must metamorphose to do so.

Know then thyself, presume not God to scan.

Now as soon as you come across a Thou Shalt Not commandment, you may be absolutely sure that sometime or other, you'll have to break this commandment. You needn't make a practice of breaking it. But the day will come when you'll have to break it. When you'll have to take the name of the Lord Your God in vain, and have other gods, and worship idols, and steal, and kill, and commit adultery, and all the rest. A day will come. Because, as Oscar Wilde says, what's a temptation for, except to be succumbed to!

There comes a time to every man when he has to break one or other of the Thou Shalt Not commandments. And then is the time to Know Yourself just a bit different from what you thought you were.

So that in the end, this Know Thyself commandment brings me up against the Presume-Not-God-to-Scan fence. Trespassers will be prosecuted. Know then thyself, presume not God to scan.

It's a dilemma. Because this business of knowing myself has led me slap up against the forbidden enclosure where, presumably, this God mystery is kept in corral. It isn't my fault. I followed the road. And it leads over the edge of a

precipice on which stands up a signboard: Danger! Don't go over the edge!

But I've *got* to go over the edge. The way lies that way.

Flop! Over we go, and into the endless sea. There drown.

No! Out of the drowning something else gurgles awake. And that's the best of the human consciousness. When you fall into the final sea of *I Don't Know*, then, if you can but gasp *Teach Me*, you turn into a fish, and twiddle your fins and twist your tail and grope in amazement, in a new element.

That's why they called Jesus: The Fish. Pisces. Because he fell, like the weariest river, into the great Ocean that is outside the shore, and there took on a new way of knowledge.

The Proper Study is Man, sure enough. But the proper study of man, like the proper study of anything else, will in the end leave you no option. You'll have to presume to study God. Even the most hard-boiled scientist, if he is a brave and honest man, is landed in this unscientific dilemma. Or rather, he is all at sea in it.

The river of human consciousness, like ancient Ocean, goes in a circle. It starts gaily, bubblingly, fiercely from an inland pool, where it surges up in obvious mystery and Godliness, the human consciousness. And here is the God of the Beginning, call him Jehovah or Ra or Ammon or Jupiter or what you like. One bubbles up in Greece, one in India, one in Jerusalem. From their various God-sources the streams of human consciousness rush variously down. Then begin to meander and to doubt. Then fall slow. Then start to silt up. Then pass into the great Ocean, which is the God of the End.

In the great ocean of the End, most men are lost. But Jesus turned into a fish, he had the other consciousness of the Ocean which is the divine End of us all. And then like a salmon he beat his way up stream again, to speak from the source.

And this is the greater history of man, as distinguished from the lesser history, in which figure Mr. Lloyd George and Monsieur Poincare.

We are in the deep, muddy estuary of our era, and terrified of the emptiness of the sea beyond. Or we are at the end of the great road, that Jesus and Francis and Whitman walked. We are on the brink of a precipice, and terrified at the great void below.

No help for it. We are men, and for men there is no retreat. Over we go.

Over we must and shall go, so we may as well do it voluntarily, keeping our soul alive; and as we drown in our terrestrial nature, transmogrify into fishes. Pisces. That which knows the Oceanic Godliness of the End.

The proper study of mankind is man. Agreed entirely! But in the long run, it becomes again as it was before, man in his relation to the deity. The proper study of mankind is man in his relation to the deity.

And yet not as it was before. Not the specific deity of the inland source. The vast deity of the End. Oceanus whom you can only know by becoming a Fish. Let us become Fishes, and try.

They talk about the sixth sense. They talk as if it were an extension of the other senses. A mere *dimensional* sense. It's nothing of the sort. There is a sixth sense right enough. Jesus had it. The sense of the God that is the End and the Beginning. And the proper study of mankind is man in his relation to this Oceanic God.

We have come to the end, for the time being, of the study of man in his relation to man. Or man in his relation to himself. Or man in his relation to woman. There is nothing more of importance to be said, by us or for us, on this subject. Indeed, we have no more to say.

Of course, there is the literature of perversity. And there is the literature of little playboys and playgirls, not only of the western world. But the literature of perversity is a brief weed. And the playboy playgirl stuff, like the movies, though a very monstrous weed, won't live long.

As the weariest river winds by no means safely to sea, all the muddy little individuals begin to chirrup: "Let's play! Let's play at something! We're so god-like when we *play*."

But it won't do, my dears. The sea will swallow you up, and all your play and perversions and personalities.

You can't get any more literature out of man in his relation to man. Which, of course, should be writ large, to mean man in his relation to woman, to other men, and to the whole environment of men: or woman in her relation to man, or other women, or the whole environment of women. You can't get any more literature out of that. Because any new book must needs be a new stride. And the next stride lands you over the sandbar in the open ocean, where the first and greatest relation of every man and woman is to the Ocean itself, the great God of the End, who is the All-Father of all sources, as the sea is father of inland lakes and springs of water.

But get a glimpse of this new relation of men and women to the great God of the End, who is the Father, not the Son, of all our beginnings: and you get a glimpse of the new literature. Think of the true novel of St. Paul, for example. Not the sentimental looking-backward Christian novel, but the novel looking out to sea, to the great Source, and End, of all beginnings. Not the St. Paul with his human feelings repudiated, to give play to the new divine feelings. Not the St. Paul violent in reaction against worldliness and sensuality, and therefore a dogmatist with his sheaf of Shalt-Nots ready. But a St. Paul two thousand years older, having his own epoch behind him, and having again the great knowledge

of the deity, the deity which Jesus knew, the vast Ocean God which is at the end of all our consciousness.

Because, after all, if chemistry winds wearily to sea in the ether, or some such universal, don't we also, not as chemists but as conscious men, also wind wearily to sea in a divine ether, which means nothing to us but space and words and emptiness? We wind wearily to sea in words and emptiness.

But man is a mutable animal. Turn into the Fish, the Pisces of man's final consciousness, and you'll start to swim again in the great life which is so frighteningly godly that you realize your previous presumption.

And then you realize the new relation of man. Men like fishes lifted on a great wave of the God of the End, swimming together, and apart, in a new medium. A new relation, in a new whole.

ON BEING RELIGIOUS

The problem is not, and never was, whether God exists or doesn't exist. Man is so made, that the word God has a special effect on him, even if only to afford a safety-valve for his feelings when he must swear or burst. And there ends the vexation of questioning the existence of God. Whatever the queer little word means, it means something we can none of us ever quite get away from, or at; something connected with our deepest explosions.

It isn't really quite a word. It's an ejaculation and a glyph. It never had a definition. "Give a definition of the word God," says somebody, and everybody smiles, with just a trifle of malice. There's going to be a bit of sport.

Of course, nobody can define it. And a word nobody can define isn't a word at all. It's just a noise and a shape, like pop! or Ra or Om.

When a man says: *There is a God*, or *There is no God*, or *I don't know whether there's a God or not*, he is merely using the little word like a toy pistol, to announce that he has taken an attitude. When he says: *There is no God*, he just means to say: *Nobody knows any better about life than myself, so nobody need try to chirp it over me*. Which is the democratic attitude. When he says: *There is a God*, he is either sentimental or sincere. If he is sincere, it means he refers himself back to some indefinable pulse of life in him, which gives him his direction and his substance. If he is sentimental, it means he is subtly winking to his audience to imply: *Let's make an arrangement favourable to ourselves*. That's the conservative attitude. Thirdly and lastly, when a man says: *I don't know whether there's a God or not*, he is merely making the crafty announcement: *I hold myself free to run with the hare and hunt with the hounds, whichever I feel like at the time* — And that's the so-called artistic or pagan attitude.

In the end, one becomes bored by the man who believes that nobody, ultimately, can tell him anything. One becomes very bored by the men who wink a God into existence for their own convenience. And the man who holds himself free to run with the hare and hunt with the hounds doesn't hold interest any more. All these three classes of men bore us even to the death of boredom.

Remains the man who sincerely says: *I believe in God*. He may still be an interesting fellow.

I: *How do you believe in God?* HE: *I believe in goodness.*

(*Basta!* Turn him down and try again.)

I: *How* do you believe in God? HE: I believe in love.

(Exit. Call another.)

I: *How* do you believe in God? HE: I don't know.

I: What difference does it make to you, whether you believe in God or not?

HE: It makes a difference, but I couldn't quite put it into words. I: Are you sure it makes a difference? Does it make you kinder or fiercer?

HE: Oh! — I think it makes me more tolerant.

(*Retrp* me. — Enter another believer.)

HE: Hullo!

I: Hullo!

HE: What's up?

I: Do you believe in God?

HE: What the hell is that to you?

I: Oh, I'm just asking.

HE: What about yourself?

I: Yes, I believe.

HE: D'you say your prayers at night? I: No.

HE: When d'you say 'em, then? I: I don't.

HE: Then what use is your God to you? I: He merely isn't the sort you pray to.

HE: What do you do with him then? I: It's what he does with me. HE: And what does he do with you?

I: Oh, I don't know. He uses me as the thin end of the wedge.

HE: Thin enough! What about the thick end?

I: That's what we're waiting for.

HE: You're a funny customer.

I: Why not? Do you believe in God?

HE: Oh, I don't know. I might, if it looked like fun.

I: Right you are.

This is what I call a conversation between two true believers. Either believing in a real God looks like fun, or it's no go at all. The Great God has been treated to so many sighs, supplications, prayers, tears and yearnings that, for the time, He's had enough. There is, I believe, a great strike on in heaven. The Almighty has vacated the throne, abdicated, climbed down. It's no good your looking up into the sky. It's empty. Where the Most High used to sit listening to woes, supplications and repentances, there's nothing but a great gap in the empyrean. You can still go on praying to that gap, if you like. The Most High has gone out.

He has climbed down. He has just calmly stepped down the ladder of the angels, and is standing behind you. You can go on gazing and yearning up the shaft of hollow heaven if you like. The Most High just stands behind you,

grinning to Himself.

Now this isn't a deliberate piece of blasphemy. It's just one way of stating an everlasting truth: or pair of truths. First, there is always the Great God. Second, as regards man, He shifts His position in the cosmos. The Great God departs from the heaven where man has located Him, and plumps His throne down somewhere else. Man, being an ass, keeps going to the same door to beg for his carrot, even when the Master has gone away to another house. The ass keeps on going to the same spring to drink, even when the spring has dried up, and there's nothing but clay and hoofmarks. It doesn't occur to him to look round, to see where the water has broken out afresh, somewhere else out of some live rock. Habit! God has become a human habit, and Man expects the Almighty habitually to lend Himself to it. Whereas the Almighty — it's one of His characteristics — won't. He makes a move, and laughs when Man goes on praying to the gap in the Cosmos.

“Oh, little hole in the wall! Oh, little gap, holy little gap!” as the Russian peasants are supposed to have prayed, making a deity of the hole in the wall.

Which makes me laugh. And nobody will persuade me that the Lord Almighty doesn't roar with laughter, seeing all the Christians still rolling their imploring eyes to the skies where the hole is, which the Great God left when He picked up his throne and walked.

I tell you, it isn't blasphemy. Ask any philosopher or theologian, and he'll tell you that the real problem for humanity isn't whether God exists or not. God always is, and we all know it. But the problem is, how to get at Him. That is the greatest problem ever set to our habit-making humanity. The theologians try to find out: How shall Man put himself into relation to God, into a living relation? Which is: How shall Man *find* God? That's the real problem.

Because God doesn't just sit still somewhere in the Cosmos. Why should He? He, too, wanders His own strange way down the avenues of time, across the intricacies of space. Just as the heavens shift. Just as the pole of heaven shifts. We know now that, in the strange widdershins movement of the heavens, called precession, the great stars and constellations and planets are all the time slowly, invisibly, but absolutely shifting their positions; even the pole-star is silently stealing away from the pole. Four thousand years ago, our pole-star wasn't a pole-star. The earth had another one. Even at the present moment, Polaris has side-stepped. He doesn't really stand at the axis of the heavens. Ask any astronomer. We shall soon have to have another pole-star.

So it is with the Great God. He slowly and silently and invisibly shifts His throne, inch by inch, across the Cosmos. Inch by inch, across the blue floor of heaven, till He comes to the stairs of the angels. Then step by step down the

ladder.

Where is He now? Where is the Great God now? Where has He put His throne?

We have lost Him! We have lost the Great God! O God, O God, we have lost our Great God! Jesus, Jesus, Thou art the Way! Jesus, Jesus, Thou art the Way to the Father, to the Lord Everlasting.

But Jesus shakes His head. In the great wandering of the heavens, the foot of the Cross has shifted. The great and majestic movement of the heavens has slowly carried away even the Cross of Jesus from its place on Calvary. And Jesus, who was our Way to God, has stepped aside, over the horizon with the Father.

So it is. Man is only Man. And even the Gods and the Great God go their way; stepping slowly, invisibly, across the heavens of time and space, going somewhere, we know not where. They do not stand still. They go and go, till they pass below the horizon of Man.

Till Man has lost his Great God, and there remains only the gap, and images, and hollow words. The Way, even the Great Way of Salvation, leads only to the pit, the nothingness, the gap.

It is not our fault. It is nobody's fault. It is the mysterious and sublime fashion of the Almighty, who travels too. At least, as far as we are concerned, He travels. Apparently He is the same today, yesterday, and for ever. Like the pole-star. But now we know the pole-star slowly but inevitably side-steps. Polaris is no longer at the pole of the heavens.

Gradually, gradually God travels away from us, on His mysterious journey. And we, being creatures of obstinacy and will, we insist that He cannot move. God gave us a way to Himself. God gave us Jesus, and the way of repentance and love, the way to God. The salvation through Christ Jesus our Lord.

And hence, we assert that the Almighty cannot go back on it. He can never get away from us again. At the end of the way of repentance and love, there God *is*, and *must be*. Must be, because God Himself *said* that He would receive us at the end of the road of repentance and love.

And He *did* receive men at the end of this road. He received our fathers even, into peace and salvation.

Then He must receive us.

And He doesn't. The road no longer leads to the Throne.

We are let down.

Are we? Did Jesus ever say: *I am the way, and there is no other way*? At the moment there was no other way. For many centuries, there was no other way. But all the time, the heavens were mysteriously revolving and God was going

His own unspeakable way. All the time, men had to be making the road afresh. Even the road called Jesus, the Way of the Christian to God, had to be subtly altered, century by century. At the Renaissance, in the eighteenth century, great curves in the Christian road to God, new strange directions.

As a matter of fact, never did God or Jesus say that there was one straight way of salvation, for ever and ever. On the contrary, Jesus plainly indicated the changing of the way. And what is more, He indicated the only means to the finding of the right way.

The Holy Ghost. The Holy Ghost is within you. And it is a Ghost, for ever a Ghost, never a Way or a Word. Jesus is a Way and a Word. God is the Goal. But the Holy Ghost is for ever Ghostly, unrealizable. And against this unsubstantial unreality, you may never sin, or woe betide you.

Only the Holy Ghost within you can scent the new tracks of the Great God across the Cosmos of Creation. The Holy Ghost is the dark hound of heaven whose baying we ought to listen to, as he runs ahead into the unknown, tracking the mysterious everlasting departing of the Lord God, who is for ever departing from us.

And now the Lord God has gone over our horizon. The foot of the Cross is lifted from the Mound, and moved across the heavens. The pole-star no longer stands on guard at the true polaric centre. We are all disorientated, all is gone out of gear.

All right, the Lord God left us neither blind nor comfortless nor helpless. We've got the Holy Ghost. And we hear Him baying down strange darknesses, in other places.

The Almighty has shifted His throne, and we've got to find a new road. Therefore we've got to get off the old road. You can't stay on the old road, and find a new road. We've got to find our way to God. From time to time Man wakes up and realizes that the Lord Almighty has made a great removal, and passed over the known horizon. Then starts the frenzy, the howling, the despair. Much better listen to the dark hound of heaven, and start off into the dark of the unknown, in search.

From time to time, the Great God sends a new saviour. Christians will no longer have the pettiness to assert that Jesus is the only Saviour ever sent by the everlasting God. There have been other saviours, in other lands, at other times, with other messages. And all of them Sons of God. All of them sharing the Godhead with the Father. All of them showing the Way of Salvation and of Right. Different Saviours. Different Ways of Salvation. Different pole-stars, in the great wandering Cosmos of time. And the Infinite God, always changing, and always the same infinite God, at the end of the different Ways.

Now, if I ask you if you believe in God, I do not ask you if you know the Way to God. For the moment, we are lost. Let us admit it. None of us knows the way to God. The Lord of time and space has passed over our horizon, and here we sit in our mundane creation, rather flabbergasted. Let us admit it.

Jesus, the Saviour, is no longer our Way of Salvation. He *was* the Saviour, and is not. Once it was Mithras: and has not been Mithras for these many years. It never *was* Mithras for us. God sends different Saviours to different peoples at different times.

Now, for the moment, there is no Saviour. The Jews have waited for three thousand years. They preferred just to wait. We do not. Jesus taught us what to do, when He, Christ, could no longer save us.

We go in search of God, following the Holy Ghost, and depending on the Holy Ghost. There is no Way. There is no Word. There is no Light. The Holy Ghost is ghostly and invisible. The Holy Ghost is nothing, if you like. Yet we hear His strange calling, the strange calling like a hound on the scent, away in the unmapped wilderness. And it seems great fun to follow. Oh, great fun, God's own good fun.

Myself, I believe in God. But I'm off on a different road. *Adids!* and, if you like, *au revoir!*

BOOKS

Are books just toys? the toys of consciousness?
Then what is man? The everlasting brainy child?
Is man nothing but a brainy child, amusing himself for ever with the printed toys called books?

That also. Even the greatest men spend most of their time making marvellous fine toys. Like *Pickwick* or *Two on a Tower*.

But there is more to it.

Man is a thought-adventurer.

Man is a great venture in consciousness.

Where the venture started, and where it will end, nobody knows. Yet here we are — a long way gone already, and no glimpse of any end in sight. Here we are, miserable Israel of the human consciousness, having lost our way in the wilderness of the world's chaos, giggling and babbling and pitching camp. We needn't go any further.

All right, let us pitch camp, and see what happens. When the worst comes to the worst, there is sure to be a Moses to set up a serpent of brass. And then we can start off again.

Man is a thought-adventurer. He has thought his way down the far ages. He used to think in little images of wood or stone. Then in hieroglyphs on obelisks and clay rolls and papyrus. Now he thinks in books, between two covers.

The worst of a book is the way it shuts up between covers. When men had to write on rocks and obelisks, it was rather difficult to lie. The daylight was too strong. But soon he took his venture into caves and secret holes and temples, where he could create his own environment and tell lies to himself. And a book is an underground hole with two lids to it. A perfect place to tell lies in.

Which brings us to the real dilemma of man in his long adventure with consciousness. He is a liar. Man is a liar unto himself. And once he has told himself a lie, round and round he goes after that lie, as if it was a bit of phosphorus on his nose-end. The pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire wait for him to have done. They stand silently aside, waiting for him to rub the *ignis fatuus* off the end of his nose. But man, the longer he follows a lie, becomes all the surer he sees a light.

The life of man is an endless venture into consciousness. Ahead goes the pillar of cloud by day, the pillar of fire by night, through the wilderness of time. Till

man tells himself a lie, another lie. Then the lie goes ahead of him, like the carrot before the ass.

There are, in the consciousness of man, two bodies of knowledge: the things he tells himself, and the things he finds out. The things he tells himself are nearly always pleasant, and they are lies. The things he finds out are usually rather bitter to begin with.

Man is a thought-adventurer. But by thought we mean, of course, discovery. We don't mean this telling himself stale facts and drawing false deductions, which usually passes as thought. Thought is an adventure, not a trick.

And of course it is an adventure of the whole man, not merely of his wits. That is why one cannot quite believe in Kant, or Spinoza. Kant thought with his head and his spirit, but he never thought with his blood. The blood also thinks, inside a man, darkly and ponderously. It thinks in desires and revulsions, and it makes strange conclusions. The conclusion of my head and my spirit is that it would be perfect, this world of men, if men all loved one another. The conclusion of my blood says nonsense, and finds the stunt a bit disgusting. My blood tells me there is no such thing as perfection. There is the long endless venture into consciousness down an ever-dangerous valley of days.

Man finds that his head and his spirit have led him wrong. We are at present terribly off the track, following our spirit, which says how nice it would be if everything was perfect, and listening to our head, which says we might have everything perfect if we would only eliminate the tiresome reality of our obstinate blood-being.

We are sadly off the track, and we're in a bad temper, like a man who has lost his way. And we say: I'm not going to bother. Fate must work it out.

Fate doesn't work things out. Man is a thought-adventurer, and only his adventuring in thought rediscovers a way.

Take our civilization. We are in a tantrum because we don't really like it now we've got it. There we've been building it for a thousand years, and built so big we can't shift it. And we hate it, after all.

Too bad! What's to be done?

Why, there's nothing to be done! Here we are, like sulky children, sulking because we don't like the game we're playing, feeling that we've been *made* to play it against our will. So play it we do: badly: in the sulks.

We play the game badly, so of course it goes from bad to worse. Things go from bad to worse.

All right, let 'em! Let 'em go from bad to worse. *Après moi le deluge.*

By all means! But a deluge presupposes a Noah and an Ark. The old adventurer on the old adventure.

When you come to think of it, Noah matters more than the deluge, and the ark is more than all the world washed out.

Now we've got the sulks, and are waiting for the flood to come and wash out our world and our civilization. All right, let it come. But somebody's got to be ready with Noah's Ark.

We imagine, for example, that if there came a terrible crash and terrible bloodshed over Europe, then out of the crash and bloodshed a remnant of regenerated souls would inevitably arise.

We are mistaken. If you look at the people who escaped the terrible times of Russia, you don't see many regenerated souls. They are more scared and senseless than ever. Instead of the great catastrophe having restored them to manhood, they are finally unmanned.

What's to be done? If a huge catastrophe is going only to unman us more than we are already unmanned, then there's no good in a huge catastrophe. Then there's no good in anything, for us poor souls who are trapped in the huge trap of our civilization.

Catastrophe alone never helped man. The only thing that ever avails is the living adventurous spark in the souls of men. If there is no living adventurous spark, then death and disaster are as meaningless as tomorrow's newspaper.

Take the fall of Rome. During the Dark Ages of the fifth, sixth, seventh centuries A.D., the catastrophes that befell the Roman Empire didn't alter the Romans a bit. They went on just the same, rather as we go on today, having a good time when they could get it, and not caring. Meanwhile Huns, Goths, Vandals, Visigoths, and all the rest wiped them out.

With what result? The flood of barbarism rose and covered Europe from end to end.

But, bless your life, there was Noah in his Ark with the animals. There was young Christianity. There were the lonely fortified monasteries, like little arks floating and keeping the adventure afloat. There is no break in the great adventure in consciousness. Throughout the howlingest deluge, some few brave souls are steering the ark under the rainbow.

The monks and bishops of the Early Church carried the soul and spirit of man unbroken, unabated, undiminished over the howling flood of the Dark Ages. Then this spirit of undying courage was fused into the barbarians, in Gaul, in Italy, and the new Europe began. But the germ had never been allowed to die.

Once all men in the world lost their courage and their newness, the world would come to an end. The old Jews said the same: unless in the world there was at least one Jew passionately praying, the race was lost.

So we begin to see where we are. It's no good leaving everything to fate. Man

is an adventurer, and he must never give up the adventure. The venture is the venture: fate is the circumstance around the adventurer. The adventurer at the quick of the venture is the living germ inside the chaos of circumstance. But for the living germ of Noah in his Ark, chaos would have redescended on the world in the waters of the flood. But chaos *couldn't* redescend, because Noah was afloat with all the animals.

The same with the Christians when Rome fell. In their little fortified monasteries they defended themselves against howling invasions, being too poor to excite much covetousness. When wolves and bears prowled through the streets of Lyons, and a wild boar was grunting and turning up the pavement of Augustus's temple, the Christian bishops also roved intently and determinedly, like poor forerunners, along the ruined streets, seeking a congregation. It was the great adventure, and they did not give it up.

But Noah, of course, is always in an unpopular minority. So, of course, were the Christians, when Rome began to fall. The Christians now are in a hopelessly popular majority, so it is their turn to fall.

I know the greatness of Christianity: it is a past greatness. I know that, but for those early Christians, we should never have emerged from the chaos and hopeless disaster of the Dark Ages. If I had lived in the year 400, pray God, I should have been a true and passionate Christian. The adventurer.

But now I live in 1984, and the Christian venture is done. The adventure is gone out of Christianity. We must start on a new venture towards God.

THINKING ABOUT ONESELF

After all, we live most of our time alone, and the biggest part of our life is the silent yet busy stream of our private thoughts. We think about ourselves, and about the things that most nearly concern us, during the greater part of the day and night, all our life long. A comparatively small period is really spent in work or actual activity, where we say we “don’t think.” And a certain space is spent in sleep, where we don’t know what we think, but where, in some sense, we keep on thinking. But the bulk of the time we think, or we muse, or we dully brood about ourselves and the things that most nearly concern us.

Perhaps it is a burden, this consciousness. Perhaps we don’t want to think. That is why people devote themselves to hobbies, why men drink and play golf, and women jazz and flirt, and everybody goes to the brainless cinemas: all just to “get away from themselves,” as they say. *Oh, forget it!* is the grand panacea. “You want to forget yourself,” is the cry. The joy of all existence is supposed to be the “forgetting oneself.”

Well, perhaps it is! and perhaps it isn’t. While a boy is getting “gloriously drunk” in the evening, in the process of forgetting himself, he knows perfectly well all the time that he’ll remember himself next morning quite painfully. The same with the girls who jazz through the gay night. The same even with the crowd that comes out of the cinema. They’ve been forgetting themselves. But if you look at them, it doesn’t seem to have been doing them much good. They look rather like the cat that has swallowed the stuffed canary, and feels the cotton wool on its stomach.

You would think, to hear people talk, that the greatest bugbear you can possibly have is yourself. If you can’t get away from yourself, if you can’t forget yourself, you’re doomed. The mill-stone is round your neck, so you might as well jump in and drown yourself.

It seems curious. Why should I myself be the greatest bugbear to myself? Why should I be so terrified of being in my own company only, as if some skeleton clutched me in its horrid arms, the moment I am alone with myself?

It’s all nonsense. It’s perfectly natural for every man and every woman to think about himself or herself most of the time. What is there to be afraid of? And yet people as a mass are afraid. You’d think everybody had a skeleton in the cupboard of their inside.

Which, of course, they have. I’ve got a skeleton, and so have you. But what’s

wrong with him? He's quite a good solid wholesome skeleton. And what should I do without him? No, no, I'm quite at home with my good and bony skeleton. So if he wants to have a chat with me, let him.

We all seem to be haunted by some spectre of ourselves that we daren't face. "By jove, that's me!" And we bolt. "Oh, heaven, there's an escaped tiger in Piccadilly! Let's rush up Bond Street!" — "Look out! There's a tiger! Make for Maddox Street!" — "My God, there's a tiger here too! Let's get in the underground." — And underground we go, forgetting that we have to emerge somewhere, and whether it's Holland Park or the Bank, there'll be a tiger.

The only thing to do is: "All right! If there's a tiger, let's have a look at him." As everybody knows, all you have to do is to look him firmly in the eye. So with this *alter ego*, this spectral me that haunts my thoughts.

"I'm a poor young man and nobody loves me," says the spectre, the tiger. Look him firmly in the eye and reply: "Really! That's curious. In what way are you poor? Are you nothing *but* poor? Do you *want* to be loved? *How* do you want to be loved, and by whom, for example? And why *should* you be loved?" — Answering these questions is really amusing, far greater fun than running away from yourself and listening-in and being inert.

If the tiger is a tigress, she mews woefully. "I'm such a nice person, and nobody appreciates me. I'm so unhappy!" — Then the really sporting girl looks her tigress in the eye and says: "Oh! What makes you so sure you're nice? *Where* are you nice? Are there no other ways of being nice but *your* way? Perhaps people are pining for a different sort of niceness from your sort. Better do something about it."

If it's a young married couple of tigers they wail: "We're so hard up, and there's no prospect." — Then the young he and she, if they've any spunk, fix their two tigers. "Prospect! What do you mean by prospect? Sufficient unto the day is the dinner thereof. What is a prospect? Why should we need one? What sort of a one do we need? What's it all about?"

And answering these questions is fun, fun for a life-time. It's the essential fun of life, answering the tiger back. Thinking, thinking about oneself and the things that really concern one is the greatest fun of all, especially when, now and then, you feel you've really spoken to your skeleton.

RESURRECTION

“Touch me not! I am not yet ascended unto the Father.”

We have all this time been worshipping a dead Christ: or a dying. The Son of Man on the Cross.

Yet we know well enough, the Cross was only the first step into achievement. The second step was into the tomb. And the third step, whither? “I am not yet ascended unto the Father.”

I have just read, for the first time, Tolstoy’s *Resurrection*. Tolstoy writhed very hard, on the Cross. His Resurrection is the step into the tomb. And the stone was rolled upon him.

Now, as Christians, we have died. The War was the Calvary of all real Christian men. Since the War, it has been the tomb, with no rule at all. As the peasants in Italy used to say — after Christ was put in the tomb — on Good Friday eve: Now we can sin. There is no Lord on earth to see us.

Since the War, the world has been without a Lord. What is the Lord within us, has been walled up in the tomb. But three days have fully passed, and it is time to roll away the stone. It is time for the Lord in us to arise.

With the stigmata healed up, and the eyes full open.

Rise as the Lord. No longer the Man of Sorrows. The Crucified uncrucified. The Crown of Thorns removed, and the tongues of fire round the brows. The Risen Lord.

Man has done his worst, and crucified his God. Men will always crucify their god, given the opportunity. Christ proved that, by giving them the opportunity.

But Christ is not put twice on the Cross. Not a second time. And this is the great point that Tolstoy missed. It seemed to him, Christ would go on being crucified, everlastingly.

Bad doctrine. As man puts off his clothes when he dies, so the Cross is put off, like a garment. But the Son of Man will not be twice crucified. That, never again.

He is risen. And now beware! Touch me not.

Put away the Cross; it is obsolete. Stare no more after the stigmata. They are more than healed up. The Lord is risen, and ascended unto the Father. There is a new Body, and a new Law.

Christ and the Father are at one again. There is a new law. The Man has disappeared into the God again. The column of fire shoots up from the nadir to

the zenith, and there is a new fierce light on our faces.

Men who can rise with the Son of Man, and ascend unto the Father, will see the new day. Many men will perish in the tomb, unable to roll the stone away. But the stone that is rolled away will roll on. It too has a course to run.

Christ has re-entered into the Father, and the pillar of flame shoots up, anew, from the nadir to the zenith. The world and the cosmos stagger to the new axis. There is a new light upon the hills, the valleys groan and are wrenched.

The tree shivers, and sheds its leaves. Never was the tree so vast in stature and so full of leaves. But the new fire spurts at its roots, the boughs writhe, the twigs crackle from within, and the old leaves fall thick and red to the ground. That is how a new day enters the Tree of Life.

The Cross has taken root again, and is putting forth buds. Its branches sprout out where the nails went in, there is a tuft of sprouts like tongues of flame at the top, where the inscription was. Even *consummatum est* is dissolved in a rising up.

When Christ rejoins the Father, the Cross is again a Tree, the wheel of fire flares up and spins in the opposite way. And little wheels of fire are seen round the brow of men who have ascended, reascended to the Father. There are kings in the cosmos once more, there are lords among men again.

It is the day of the Risen Lord. Touch me not! I am the Lord Arisen.

Men of the Risen Lord, rise up. The wheel of fire is starting to spin in the opposite way, to throw off the mud of the world. Deep mud is on the staggering wheel, mud of the multitudes. But Christ has rejoined the Father at the axis, the flame of the hub spurts up. The wheel is beginning to turn in the opposite way, and woe to the multitude.

Men of the Risen Lord, the many ways are one. Down the spokes of flame there are many paths which are one way still, to the core of the wheel. Turn round, turn round, away from the mud of the rim to the flame of the core, and walk down the spokes of fire to the Whole, where God is One.

For the multitudes shall be shaken off as a dog shakes off his fleas. And only the risen lords among men shall stand on the wheel and not fall, being fire as the wheel is Fire, facing in to the inordinate Flame.

The Lord is risen. Let us rise as well and be lords. The multitudes rolled the stone upon us. Let us roll it back.

Men in the tomb, rise up, the time is expired. The Lord is risen. Quick! let us follow Him.

The Lord is risen as Lord indeed; let us follow, as lords in deed. The Lord has rejoined the Father, in the flame at the hub of the wheel. Let us look that way, and cry "Behold!" down the spokes of fire. Let us turn our backs on the tomb,

and the stone that is rolling upon the multitude. It is more than finished, it is begun again.

The lords are out of prison, with the Risen Lord. Let the multitudes tremble and fall down, as the black stone rolls towards them, back from the mouth of the tomb. Except you died with the Lord, you shall surely die. Except you rise with the Lord and roll the stone from the mouth of the tomb, the stone shall surely crush you. The greater the stone you rolled upon the mouth of the tomb, the greater the destruction overtakes you.

It is not given to you twice, oh multitudes, to put the Lord on the Cross. It was given you once, and once and for all, and now it is more than finished. If you have not died, you shall die. If you cannot rise, you shall fall. If you cannot note the coming day, if you're blind to the morning star, it is because the shadow of the stone is upon you, rolling down from the mouth of the tomb.

More blessed to give than to receive. So you gave the Judas kiss.

Now it rolls back on you, huge, an increasingly huge black stone, as big as the world, that kiss.

You thought *consummation est* meant *all is over*. You were wrong. It means; *The step is taken*.

Rise, then, men of the Risen Lord, and push back the stone. Who rises with the Risen Lord rises himself as a lord. Come, stand on the spokes of fire, as the wheel begins to revolve. Face inward to the flame of Whole God, that plays upon the zenith. And be lords with the Lord, with bright, and brighter, and brightest, and most-bright faces.

CLIMBING DOWN PISGAH

Sometimes one pulls oneself up short, and asks: “What am I doing this for?” One writes novels, stories, essays: and then suddenly: “What on earth am I doing it for?”

What indeed?

For the sake of humanity?

Pfui! The very words *human*, *humanity*, *humanism* make one sick. For the sake of humanity as such, I wouldn't lift a little finger, much less write a story.

For the sake of the Spirit?

Tampoco! — But what do we mean by the Spirit? Let us be careful. Do we mean that One Universal Intelligence of which every man has his modicum? Or further, that one Cosmic Soul, or Spirit, of which every individual is a broken fragment, and towards which every individual strives back, to escape the raw edges of his own fragmentariness, and to experience once more the sense of wholeness?

The sense of wholeness! Does one write books in order to give one's fellow-men a sense of wholeness: first, a oneness with all men, then a oneness with all things, then a oneness with our cosmos, and finally a oneness with the vast invisible universe? Is that it? Is that our achievement and our peace?

Anyhow, it would be a great achievement. And this has been the aim of the great ones. It was the aim of Whitman, for example.

Now it is the aim of the little ones, since the big ones are all gone. Thomas Hardy, a last big one, rings the knell of our Oneness. Virtually, he says; Once you achieve the great identification with the One, whether it be the One Spirit, or the Oversoul, or God, or whatever name you like to give it, you find that this God, this One, this Cosmic Spirit isn't human at all, hasn't any human feelings, doesn't concern itself for a second with the individual, and is, all told, a gigantic cold monster. It is a machine. The moment you attain that sense of Oneness and Wholeness, you become cold, dehumanized, mechanical, and monstrous. The greatest of all illusions is the Infinite of the Spirit.

Whitman really rang the same knell. (I don't expect anyone to agree with me.)

The sense of wholeness is a most terrible let-down. The big ones have already decided it. But the little ones, sneakily too selfish to care, go on sentimentally tinkling away at it.

This we may be sure of: all talk of brotherhood, universal love, sacrifice, and

so on, is a sentimental pose for us. We reached the top of Pisgah, and looking down, saw the graveyard of humanity. Those meagre spirits who could never get to the top, and are careful never to try, because it costs too much sweat and a bleeding at the nose, they sit below and still snivellingly invent Pisgah-sights. But strictly, it is all over. The game is up.

The little ones, of course, are writing at so many cents a word — or a line — according to their success. They may say I do the same. Yes, I demand my cents, a Shylock. Nevertheless, if I wrote for cents I should write differently, and with far more “success.”

What, then, does one write for? There must be some imperative.

Probably it is the sense of adventure, to start with. Life is no fun for a man, without an adventure.

The Pisgah-top of spiritual oneness looks down upon a hopeless squalor of industrialism, the huge cemetery of human hopes. This is our Promised Land. “There’s a good time coming, boys, a good time coming.” Well, we’ve rung the bell, and here it is.

Shall we climb hurriedly down from Pisgah, and keep the secret? Mum’s the word!

This is what our pioneers are boldly doing. We used, as boys, to sing parodies of most of the Sunday-school hymns.

They climbed the steep ascent of heaven
Through peril, toil, and pain:
O God, to us may grace be given
To scramble down again.

This is the grand hymn of the little ones. But it’s harder getting down a height, very often, than getting up. It’s a predicament. Here we are, cowering on the brinks of precipices half-way up, or down, Pisgah. The Pisgah of Oneness, the Oneness of Mankind, the Oneness of Spirit.

Hie, boys, over we go! Pisgah’s a fraud, and the Promised Land is Pittsburgh, the Chosen Few, there are billions of ‘em, and Canaan smells of kerosene. Let’s break our necks if we must, but let’s get down, and look over the brink of some other horizon. We’re like the girl who took the wrong turning: thought it was the right one.

It’s an adventure. And there’s only one left, the venture of consciousness. Curse these ancients, they have said everything for us. Curse these moderns, they have done everything for us. The aeroplane descends and lays her eggshells of empty tin cans on the top of Everest, in the Ultimate Thule, and all over the North Pole; not to speak of tractors waddling across the inviolate Sahara and

over the jags of Arabia Petraea, laying the same addled eggs of our civilization, tin cans, in every camp-nest.

Well then, they can have the round earth. They've got it anyhow. And they can have the firmament: they've got that too. The moon is a cold egg in the astronomical nest. *Heigho! for the world well lost!*

That's the known World, the world of the One Intelligence. That is the Human World! I'm getting out of it. *Homo sum. Omnis a me humanum alienum puto.*

Of the thing we call human, I've had enough. And enough is as good as a feast.

Inside of me, there's a little demon — maybe he's a big demon — that says *Basta! Basta!* to all my oneness. "Farewell, a long farewell to all my greatness." In short, come off the perch, Polly, and look what a mountain of droppings you've crouched upon.

Are you human, and do you want me to sympathize with you for that? Let me hand you a roll of toilet-paper.

After looking down from the Pisgah-top on to the oneness of all mankind safely settled these several years in Canaan, I admit myself dehumanized.

Fair waved the golden corn
In Canaan's pleasant land.

The factory smoke waves much higher. And in the sweet smoke of industry I don't care a button who loves whom, nor what babies are born. The sight of all of it *en masse* was a little too much for my human spirit, it dehumanized me. Here I am, without a human sympathy left. Looking down on Human Oneness was too much for my human stomach, so I vomited it away.

Remains a demon which says *Ha ha! So you've conquered the earth, have you, oh man? Now swallow the pill.*

For if the proof of the pudding is in the eating, the proof of a conquest is in digesting it. Humanity is an ostrich. But even the ostrich thinks twice before it bolts a rolled hedgehog. The earth is conquered as the hedgehog is conquered when he rolls himself up into a ball, and the dog spins him with his paw.

But that is not the point, at least for anyone except the Great Dog of Humanity. The point for us is, *What then?*

"Whither, oh splendid ship, thy white sails bending?" To have her white sails dismantled and a gasolene engine fitted into her guts. That is whither, oh Poet!

When you've got to the bottom of Pisgah once more, where are you? Sitting on a sore posterior, murmuring: *Oneness is all bunk. There is no Oneness, till you invented it and killed your goose to get it out of her belly. It takes millions of little people to lay the egg of the Universal Spirit, and then it's an addled omelet,*

and stinks in our nostrils. And all the millions of little people have overreached themselves, trying to lay the mundane egg of oneness. They're all damaged inside, and they can't face the addled omelet they've laid. What a mess!

What then?

Heighol Whither, oh patched canoe, your kinked keel thrusting?

We've been over the rapids, and the creature that crawls out of the whirlpool feels that most things human are foreign to him. *Homo sum!* means a vastly different thing to him, from what it meant to his father.

Homo sum! a demon who knows nothing of oneness or of perfection. *Homo sum!* a demon who knows nothing of any First Creator who created the universe from his own perfection. *Homo sum!* a man who knows that all creation lives like some great demon inhabiting space, and pulsing with a dual desire, a desire to give himself forth into creation, and a desire to take himself back, in death.

Child of the great inscrutable demon, *Homo sum!* Adventurer from the first Adventurer, *Homo sum!* Son of the blazing-hearted father who wishes beauty and harmony and perfection, *Homo sum!* Child of the raging-hearted demon-father who fights that nothing shall surpass this crude and demonish rage, *Homo sum!*

Whirling in the midst of Chaos, the demon of the beginning who is for ever willing and unwilling to surpass the *Status Quo*. Like a bird he spreads wings to surpass himself. Then like a serpent he coils to strike at that which would surpass him. And the bird of the first desire must either soar quickly, or strike back with his talons at the snake, if there is to be any surpassing of the thing that was, the *Status Quo*.

It is the joy for ever, the agony for ever, and above all, the fight for ever. For all the universe is alive, and whirling in the same fight, the same joy and anguish. The vast demon of life has made himself habits which, except in the whitest heat of desire and rage, he will never break. And these habits are the laws of our scientific universe. But all the laws of physics, dynamics, kinetics, statics, all are but the settled habits of a vast living incomprehensibility, and they can all be broken, superseded, in a moment of great extremity.

Homo sum! child of the demon. *Homo sum!* willing and unwilling. *Homo sum!* giving and taking. *Homo sum!* hot and cold. *Homo sum!* loving and loveless. *Homo sum!* the Adventurer.

This we see, this we know as we crawl down the dark side of Pisgah, or slip down on a sore posterior. *Homo sum!* has changed its meaning for us.

That is, if we are young men. Old men and elderly will sit tight on heavy posteriors in some crevice upon Pisgah, babbling about "all for love, and the world well saved." Young men with hearts still for the life adventure will rise up

with their trouser-seats scraped away, after the long slither from the heights down the well-nigh bottomless pit, having changed their minds. They will change their minds and change their pants. Wisdom is sometimes in a sore bottom, and the new pants will no longer be neutral.

Young men will change their minds and their pants, having done with Oneness and neutrality. Even the stork meditates on an orange leg, and the bold drake pushes the water behind him with a red foot. Young men are the adventurers.

Let us scramble out of this ash-hole at the foot of Pisgah. The universe isn't a machine after all. It's alive and kicking. And in spite of the fact that man with his cleverness has discovered some of the habits of our old earth, and so lured him into a trap; in spite of the fact that man has trapped the great forces, and they go round and round at his bidding like a donkey in a gin, the old demon isn't quite nabbed. We didn't quite catch him napping. He'll turn round on us with bare fangs, before long. He'll turn into a python, coiling, coiling, coiling till we're nicely mashed. Then he'll bolt us.

Let's get out of the vicious circle. Put on new bright pants to show that we're meditative fowl who have thought the thing out and decided to migrate. To assert that our legs are not grey machine-sections, but live and limber members who know what it is to have their rear well scraped and punished, in the slither down Pisgah, and are not going to be diddled any more into mechanical service of mountain-climbing up to the great summit of Wholeness and Bunk.

THE DUC DE LAUZUN

The Due de Lauzun [Due de Biron] belongs to the fag-end of the French brocade period. He was born in 1747, was a man of twenty-seven when Louis XV died, and Louis XVI came tinkering to the throne.. Belonging to the high nobility, his life was naturally focused on the court, though one feels he was too good merely to follow the fashion.

He wrote his own memoirs, which rather scrappily cover the first thirty-six years of his life. The result on the reader is one of depression and impatience. You feel how idiotic that French court was: how fulsomely insipid. Thankful you feel, that they all had their heads off at last. They deserved it. Not for their sins. Their sins, on the whole, were no worse than anybody else's. I wouldn't grudge them their sins. But their dressed-up idiocy is beyond human endurance.

There is only one sin in life, and that is the sin against life, the sin of causing inner emptiness and boredom of the spirit. Whoever and whatever makes us inwardly bored and empty-feeling, is vile, the anathema.

And one feels that this was almost deliberately done to the Due de Lauzun. When I read him, I feel sincerely that the little baby that came from his mother's womb, and killed her in the coming, was the germ of a real man. And this real man they killed in him, as far as they could, with cold and insect-like persistency, from the moment he was born and his mother, poor young thing of nineteen, died and escaped the scintillating idiocy of her destiny.

No man on earth could have come through such an upbringing as this boy had, without losing the best half of himself on the way, and emerging incalculably impoverished. Abandoned as a baby to the indifference of French servants in a palace, he was, as he says himself, "like all the other children of my age and condition; the finest clothes for going out, at home half naked and dying of hunger." And that this was so, we know from other cases. Even a dauphin was begrudged clean sheets for his bed, and slept in a tattered night-shirt, while he was a boy. It was no joke to be a child, in that smart period.

To educate the little duke — though when he was a child he was only a little count — his father chose one of the dead mother's lackeys. This lackey knew how to read and write, and this amount of knowledge he imparted to the young nobleman, who was extremely proud of himself because he could read aloud "more fluently and pleasantly than is ordinarily the case in France." Another

writer of the period says: “There are, perhaps, not more than fifty persons in Paris capable of reading prose aloud.” So that the boy became “almost necessary” to Madame de Pompadour, because he could read to her. And sometimes he read to the King, Louis XV. “Our journeys to Versailles became more frequent, and my education consequently more neglected. ... At the age of twelve I was entered into the Guards regiment. . . .”

What sort of education it was, which was neglected, would be difficult to say. All one can gather from the Due himself is that, in his bored forlornness, he had read innumerable novels: the false, reekingly sentimental falderal love-novels of his day. And these, alas, did him a fair amount of harm, judging from the amount of unreal sentiment he poured over his later love affairs.

That a self-critical people like the French should ever have wallowed in such a white sauce of sentimentalism as did those wits of the eighteenth century, is incredible. A mid-Victorian English sentimentalist at his worst is sincere and naive, compared to a French romanticist of the mid-eighteenth century. One works one’s way through the sticky-sweet mess with repulsion.

So, the poor little nobleman, they began to initiate him into “love” when he was twelve, though he says he was fourteen. “Madame la Duchesse de Grammont showed a great friendship for me, and had the intention, I believe, of forming, gradually, for herself a little lover whom she would have all to herself, without any inconveniences.” Her chambermaid and confidante, Julie, thought to forestall her mistress. She made advances to the boy. “One day she put my hand in her breast, and all my body was afire several hours afterwards; but I wasn’t any further ahead.” His tutor, however, discovered the affair, nipped it in the bud, and Mademoiselle Julie didn’t have the honour of “putting him into the world,” as he called it. He was keenly distressed.

When he was sixteen, his father began to arrange his marriage with Mademoiselle de Boufflers. The Duchesse de Grammont turned him entirely against the girl, before he set eyes on her. This was another part of his education.

At the age of seventeen, he had a little actress, aged fifteen, for his mistress, “and she was still more innocent than I was.” Another little actress lent them her cupboard of a bedroom, but “an enormous spider came to trouble our rendezvous; we were both mortally afraid of it; neither of us had the courage to kill it. So we chose to separate, promising to meet again in a cleaner place, where there were no such horrid monsters.”

One must say this for the Due de Lauzun: there is nothing particularly displeasing about his love affairs, especially during his younger life. He never seems to have made love to a woman unless he really liked her, and truly wanted to touch her: and unless she really liked him, and wanted him to touch her.

Which is the essence of morality, as far as love goes.

The Comtesse d'Espartes had thoroughly initiated him, or "put him into the world." She had him to read aloud to her as she lay in bed: though even then, he was still so backward that only at the second reading did he really come to the scratch. He was still seventeen. And then the Comtesse threw him over, and put him still more definitely into the world. He says of himself at this point, in a note written, of course, twenty years later: "All my childhood I had read many novels, and this reading had such an influence on my character, I feel it still. It has often been to my disadvantage; but if I have tended to exaggerate my own sentiments and my own sensations, at least I owe this to my romantic character, that I have avoided the treacherous and bad dealings with women from which many honest people are not exempt."

So that his novels did something for him, if they only saved him from the vulgar brutality of the non-romantic.

He was well in love with Madame de Stainville, when his father married him at last, at the age of nineteen, to Mademoiselle de Boufflers. The marriage was almost a worse failure than usual. Mademoiselle de Boufflers, apparently, liked Lauzun no better than he liked her. Madame de Stainville calls her a "disagreeable child." She did not care for men: seems to have been a model of quiet virtue: perhaps she was a sweet, gentle thing: more likely she was inwardly resentful from the day of her birth. One would gather that she showed even some contempt of Lauzun, and physical repugnance to the married state. They never really lived together.

And this is one of the disgusting sides to the France of that day. Under a reeking sentimentalism lay a brutal, worse than bestial callousness and insensitiveness. Brutality is wholesome, compared with refined callousness, that truly has no feelings at all, only refined selfishness.

The Prince de Ligne gives a sketch of the marriage of a young woman of the smart nobility of that day: "They teach a girl not to look a man in the face, not to reply to him, never to ask how she happened to be born. Then they bring along two men in black, accompanying a man in embroidered satin. After which they say to her: 'Go and spend the night with this gentleman.' This gentleman, all a-fire, brutally assumes his rights, asks nothing, but exacts a great deal; she rises in tears, at the very least, and he, at least, wet. If they have said a word, it was to quarrel. Both of them look sulky, and each is disposed to try elsewhere. So marriage begins, under happy auspices. All delicate modesty is gone: and would modesty prevent this pretty woman from yielding, to a man she loves, that which has been forced from her by a man she doesn't love? But behold the most sacred union of hearts, profaned by parents and a lawyer."

Did the Due de Lauzun avoid this sort of beginning? He was really enamoured of Madame de Stainville, her accepted and devoted lover. He was violently disposed against his bride: "this disagreeable child." And perhaps, feeling himself compelled into the marriage-bed with the "disagreeable child," his bowels of compassion dried up. For he was naturally a compassionate man. Anyhow, the marriage was a drastic failure. And his wife managed somehow, in the first weeks, to sting him right on the quick. Perhaps on the quick of his vanity. He never quite got over it.

So he went on, a dandy, a wit in a moderate way, and above all, a "romantic," extravagant, rather absurd lover. Inside himself, he was not extravagant and absurd. But he had a good deal of feeling which he didn't know what on earth to do with, so he turned it into "chivalrous" extravagance.

This is the real pity. Let a man have as fine and kindly a nature as possible, he'll be able to do nothing with it unless it has some scope. What scope was there for a decent, manly man, in that France rotten with sentimentalism and dead with cruel callousness? What could he do? He wasn't great enough to rise clean above his times: no man is. There was nothing wholesome doing, in the whole of France. Sentimental romanticism, fag-end encyclopaedic philosophy, false fiction, and emptiness. It was as if, under the expiring monarchy, the devil had thrown everybody into a conspiracy to make life false and to nip straight, brave feelings in the bud.

Everything then conspired to make a man little. This was the misery of men in those days: they were made to be littler than they really were, by the niggling corrosion of that "wit," that "esprit" which had no spirit in it, except the petty spirit of destruction. Envy, spite, finding their outlet, as they do today, in cheap humour and smart sayings.

The men had nothing to do with their lives. So they laid their lives at the feet of the women. Or pretended to. When it came to the point, they snatched their lives back again hastily enough. But even then they didn't know what to do with them. So they laid them at the feet of some other woman.

The Due de Lauzun was one of the French anglophiles of the day: he really admired England, found something there. And perhaps his most interesting experience was his affair with Lady Sarah Bunbury, that famous beauty of George III's reign. She held him off for a long time: part of the game seemed to be [Unfinished]

THE GOOD MAN

There is something depressing about French eighteenth-century literature, especially that of the latter half of the century. All those sprightly memoirs and risky stories and sentimental effusions constitute, perhaps, the dreariest body of literature we know, once we do know it. The French are essentially critics of life, rather than creators of life. And when the life itself runs rather thin, as it did in the eighteenth century, and the criticism rattles all the faster, it just leaves one feeling wretched.

England during the eighteenth century was far more alive. The sentimentalism of Sterne laughs at itself, is full of teasing self-mockery. But French sentimentalism of the same period is wholesale and like stale fish. It is difficult, even if one rises on one's hind-legs and feels "superior," like a high-brow in an East End music-hall, to be amused by Restif de la Bretonne. One just sits in amazement that these clever French can be such stale fish of sentimentalism and prurience.

The Due de Lauzun belongs to what one might call the fag-end period. He was born in 1747, and was twenty-seven years old when Louis XV died. Belonging to the high nobility, and to a family prominent at court, he escapes the crass sentimentalism of the "humbler" writers, but he also escapes what bit of genuine new feeling they had. He is far more manly than a Jean Jacques, but he is still less of a man in himself.

French eighteenth-century literature is so puzzling to the *emotions*, that one has to try to locate some spot of firm feeling inside oneself, from which one can survey the morass. And since the essential problem of the eighteenth century was the problem of *morality*, since the new homunculus produced in that period was the *homme de bien*, the "good man," who, of course, included the "man of feeling," we have to go inside ourselves and discover what we really feel about the "goodness," or morality, of the eighteenth century.

Because there is no doubt about it, the "good man" of today was produced in the chemical retorts of the brain and emotional centres of people like Rousseau and Diderot. It took him, this "good man," a hundred years to grow to his full stature. Now, after a century and a half, we have him in his dotage, and find he was a robot.

And there is no doubt about it, it was the writhing of this new little "good man," the new *homme de bien*, in the human consciousness, which was the

essential cause of the French revolution. The new little homunculus was soon ready to come out of the womb of consciousness on to the stage of life. Once on the stage, he soon grew up, and soon grew into a kind of Woodrow Wilson dotage. But be that as it may, it was the kicking of this new little monster, to get out of the womb of time, which caused the collapse of the old show.

The new little monster, the new “good man,” was perfectly reasonable and perfectly irreligious. Religion knows the great passions. The *homme de bien*, the good man, performs the robot trick of isolating himself from the great passions. For the passion of life he substitutes the reasonable social virtues. You must be honest in your material dealings, you must be kind to the poor, and you must have “feelings” for your fellow-man and for nature. Nature with a capital. There is nothing to *worship*. Such a thing as worship is nonsense. But you may get a “feeling” out of anything.

In order to get nice “feelings” out of things, you must of course be quite “free,” you mustn’t be interfered with. And to be “free,” you must incur the enmity of no man, you must be “good.” And when everybody is “good” and “free,” then we shall all have nice feelings about everything.

This is the gist of the idea of the “good man,” chemically evolved by emotional alchemists such as Rousseau. Like every other homunculus, this little “good man” soon grows into a slight deformity, then into a monster, then into a grinning vast idiot. This monster produced our great industrial civilization, and the huge thing, gone idiot, is now grinning at us and showing its teeth.

We are all, really, pretty “good.” We are all extraordinarily “free.” What other freedom can we imagine, than what we’ve got? So then, we ought all to have amazingly nice feelings about everything.

The last phase of the bluff is to pretend that we *do* all have nice feelings about everything, if we are nice people. It is the last grin of the huge grinning sentimentalism which the Rousseau-ists invented. But really, it’s getting harder and harder to keep up the grin.

As a matter of fact, far from having nice feelings about everything, we have nice feelings about practically nothing. We get less and less our share of nice feelings. More and more we get horrid feelings, which we have to suppress hard. Or, if we don’t admit it, then we must admit that we get less and less feelings of any sort.

Our capacity for feeling anything is going numb, more and more numb, till we feel we shall soon reach zero, and pure insanity.

This is the horrid end of the “good man” homunculus.

Now the “good man” is all right as far as he goes. One must be honest in one’s dealings, and one does feel kindly towards the poor man — unless he’s one of

the objectionable sort. If I turn myself into a swindler, and am a brute to every beggar, I shall only be a “not good man” instead of a “good man.” It’s just the same species, really. Immorality is no new ground. There’s nothing original in it. Whoever invents morality invents, tacitly, immorality. And the immoral, unconventional people are only the frayed skirt-tails of the conventional people.

The trouble about the “good man” is that he’s only one-hundredth part of a man. The eighteenth century, like a vile Shy-lock, carved a pound of flesh from the human psyche, conjured with it like a cunning alchemist, set it smirking, called it a “good man” — and lo! we all began to reduce ourselves to this little monstrosity. What’s the matter with us, is that we are bound up like a China-girl’s foot, that has got to cease developing and turn into a “lily.” We are absolutely bound up tight in the bandages of a few ideas, and tight shoes are nothing to it.

When Oscar Wilde said that it was nonsense to assert that art imitates nature, because nature always imitates art, this was absolutely true of human nature. The thing called “spontaneous human nature” does not exist, and never did. Human nature is always made to some pattern or other. The wild Australian aborigines are absolutely bound up tight, tighter than a China-girl’s foot, in their few savage conventions. They are bound up tighter than we are. But the length of the ideal bondage doesn’t matter. Once you begin to feel it pressing, it’ll press tighter and tighter, till either you burst it, or collapse inside it, or go deranged. And the conventional and ideal and emotional bandage presses as tight upon the free American girl as the equivalent bandage presses upon the Australian black girl in her tribe. An elephant bandaged up tight, so that he can only move his eyes, is no better off than a bandaged-up mouse. Perhaps worse off. The mouse has more chance to nibble a way out.

And this we must finally recognize. No man has “feelings of his own.” The feelings of all men in the civilized world today are practically all alike. Men *can* only feel the feelings they know how to feel. The feelings they don’t know how to feel, they don’t feel. This is true of all men, and all women, and all children.

It is true, children do have lots of unrecognized feelings. But an unrecognized feeling, if it forces itself into any recognition, is only recognized as “nervousness” or “irritability.” There are certain feelings we recognize, but as we grow up, every single disturbance in the psyche, or in the soul, is transmitted into one of the recognized feeling-patterns, or else left in that margin called “nervousness.”

This is our true bondage. This is the agony of our human existence, that we can only feel things in conventional feeling-patterns. Because when these feeling-patterns become inadequate, when they will no longer body forth the

workings of the yeasty soul, then we are in torture. It is like a deaf-mute trying to speak. Something is inadequate in the expression-apparatus, and we hear strange howl-ings. So are we now howling inarticulate, because what is yeastily working in us has no voice and no language. We are like deaf-mutes, or like the China-girl's foot.

Now the eighteenth century did let out a little extra length of bandage for the bound-up feet. But oh! it was a short length! We soon grew up to its capacity, and the pressure again became intolerable, horrible, unbearable: as it is today.

We compare England today with France of 1780. We sort of half expect revolutions of the same sort. But we have little grounds for the comparison and the expectation. It is true our feelings are going dead, we have to work hard to get any feeling out of ourselves: which is true of the Louis XV and more so of the Louis XVI people like the Due de Lauzun. But at the same time, we know quite well that if all our heads were chopped off, and the working-classes were left to themselves, with a clear field, nothing would have happened, really. Bolshevik Russia, one feels, and feels with bitter regret, is nothing new on the face of the earth. It is only a sort of America. And no matter how many revolutions take place, all we can hope for is different sorts of America. And since America is *chose connue*, since America is known to us, in our imaginative souls, with dreary finality, what's the odds? America has no new feelings: less even than England: only disruption of old feelings. America is bandaged more tightly even than Europe in the bandages of old ideas and ideals. Her feelings are even more fixed to pattern: or merely devolutionary. Her art forms are even more lifeless.

So what's the point in a revolution? Where's the homunculus? Where is the new baby of a new conception of life? Who feels him kicking in the womb of time?

Nobody! Nobody! Not even the Socialists and Bolsheviks themselves. Not the Buddhists, nor the Christian Scientists, nor the scientists, nor the Christians. Nobody! So far, there is no new baby. And therefore, there is no revolution. Because a revolution is really the birth of a new baby, a new idea, a new feeling, a new way of feeling, a new feeling-pattern. It is the birth of a new man. "For I will put a new song into your mouth."

There is no new song. There is no new man. There is no new baby.

And therefore, I repeat, there is no revolution.

You who want a revolution, beget and conceive the new baby in your bodies: and not a homunculus robot like Rousseau's.

But you who are afraid of a revolution, realize that there will be no revolution, just as there will be no pangs of parturition if there is no baby to be born.

Instead, however, you may get that which is not revolution. You may, and you will, get a *debacle*. *Après moi le deluge* was premature. The French revolution was only a bit of a brief inundation. The real deluge lies just ahead of us.

There is no choice about it. You can't keep the *status quo*, because the homunculus robot, the "good man," is dead. We killed him rather hastily and with hideous brutality, in the great war that was to save democracy. He is dead, and you can't keep him from decaying. You can't keep him from decomposition. You cannot.

Neither can you expect a revolution, because there is no new baby in the womb of our society. Russia is a collapse, not a revolution.

All that remains, since it's Louis XV's Deluge which is luring, rather belated: all that remains is to be a Noah, and build an ark. An ark, an ark, my kingdom for an ark! An ark of the covenant, into which also the animals shall go in two by two, for there's one more river to cross!

THE NOVEL AND THE FEELINGS

We think we are so civilized, so highly educated and civilized. It is farcical. Because, of course, all our civilization consists in harping on one string. Or at most on two or three strings. Harp, harp, harp, twingle, twingle-twang! That's our civilization, always on one note.

The note itself is all right. It's the exclusiveness of it that is awful. Always the same note, always the same note! "Ah, how can you run after other women when your wife is so delightful, a lovely plump partridge?" Then the husband laid his hand on his waistcoat, and a frightened look came over his face. "Nothing but partridge?" he exclaimed.

Toujours perdrix! It was up to that wife to be a goose and a cow, an oyster and an inedible vixen, at intervals.

Wherein are we educated? Come now, in what are we educated? In politics, in geography, in history, in machinery, in soft drinks and in hard, in social economy and social extravagance: ugh! a frightful universality of knowings.

But it's all France without Paris, *Hamlet* without the Prince, and bricks without straw. For we know nothing, or next to nothing, about ourselves. After hundreds of thousands of years we have learned how to wash our faces and bob our hair, and that is about all we *have* learned, *individually*. Collectively, of course, as a species, we have combed the round earth with a tooth-comb, and pulled down the stars almost within grasp. And then what? Here sit I, a two-legged individual with a risky temper, knowing all about — take a pinch of salt — Tierra del Fuego and Relativity and the composition of celluloid, the appearance of the anthrax bacillus and solar eclipses, and the latest fashion in shoes; and it don't do me *no* good! as the charlady said of near beer. It doesn't leave me feeling no less lonesome inside! as the old Englishwoman said, long ago, of tea without rum.

Our knowledge, like the prohibition beer, is always near. But it never gets there. It leaves us feeling just as lonesome inside.

We are hopelessly uneducated in ourselves. We pretend that when we know a smattering of the Patagonian idiom we have in so far educated ourselves. What nonsense! The leather of my boots is just as effectual in turning me into a bull, or a young steer. Alas! we wear our education just as externally as we wear our boots, and to far less profit. It is all external education, anyhow.

What am I, when I am at home? I'm supposed to be a sensible human being.

Yet I carry a whole waste-paper basket of ideas at the top of my head, and in some other part of my anatomy, the dark continent of myself. I have a whole stormy chaos of “feelings.” And with these self-same feelings I simply don’t get a chance. Some of them roar like lions, some twist like snakes, some bleat like snow-white lambs, some warble like linnets, some are absolutely dumb, but swift as slippery fishes, some are oysters that open on occasion: and lo! here am I, adding another scrap of paper to the ideal accumulation in the waste-paper basket, hoping to settle the matter that way.

The lion springs on me! I wave an idea at him. The serpent casts a terrifying glance at me, and I hand him a Moody and Sankey hymn-book. Matters go from bad to worse.

The wild creatures are coming forth from the darkest Africa inside us. In the night you can hear them bellowing. If you are a big game-hunter, like Billy Sunday, you may shoulder your elephant gun. But since the forest is inside all of us, and in every forest there’s a whole assortment of big game and dangerous creatures, it’s one against a thousand. We’ve managed to keep clear of the darkest Africa inside us, for a long time. We’ve been so busy finding the North Pole and converting the Patagonians, loving our neighbour and devising new means of exterminating him, listening-in and shutting-out.

But now, my dear, dear reader, Nemesis is blowing his nose. And muffled roarings are heard out of darkest Africa, with stifled shrieks.

I say feelings, not emotions. Emotions are things we more or less recognize. We see love, like a woolly lamb, or like a decorative decadent panther in Paris clothes: according as it is sacred or profane. We see hate, like a dog chained to a kennel. We see fear, like a shivering monkey. We see anger, like a bull with a ring through his nose, and greed, like a pig. Our emotions are our domesticated animals, noble like the horse, timid like the rabbit, but all completely at our service. The rabbit goes into the pot, and the horse into the shafts. For we are creatures of circumstance, and must fill our bellies and our pockets.

Convenience! Convenience! There are convenient emotions and inconvenient ones. The inconvenient ones we chain up, or put a ring through their nose. The convenient ones are our pets. Love is our pet favourite.

And that’s as far as our education goes, in the direction of feelings. We have no language for the feelings, because our feelings do not even exist for us.

Yet what is a man? Is he really just a little engine that you stoke with potatoes and beef-steak? Does all the strange flow of life in him come out of meat and potatoes, and turn into the so-called physical energy?

Educated! We are not even *born*, as far as our feelings are concerned.

You can eat till you’re bloated, and “get ahead” till you’re a byword, and still,

inside you, will be the darkest Africa whence come roars and shrieks.

Man is not a little engine of cause and effect. We must put that out of our minds for ever. The *cause* in man is something we shall never fathom. But there it is, a strange dark continent that we do not explore, because we do not even allow that it exists. Yet all the time, it is within us: the *cause* of us, and of our days.

And our feelings are the first manifestations within the aboriginal jungle of us. Till now, in sheer terror of ourselves, we have turned our backs on the jungle, fenced it in with an enormous entanglement of barbed wire, and declared it did not exist.

But alas! we ourselves only exist because of the life that bounds and leaps into our limbs and our consciousness, from out of the original dark forest within us. We may wish to exclude this in-bounding, inleaping life. We may wish to be as our domesticated animals are, tame. But let us remember that even our cats and dogs have, in each generation, to be tamed. They are not now a tame species. Take away the control, and they will cease to be tame. They will not tame *themselves*.

Man is the only creature who has deliberately tried to tame himself. He has succeeded. But alas! it is a process you cannot set a limit to. Tameness, like alcohol, destroys its own creator. Tameness is an effect of control. But the tamed thing loses the power of control, in itself. It must be controlled from without. Man has pretty well tamed himself, and he calls his tameness civilization. True civilization would be something very different. But man is now tame. Tameness means the loss of the peculiar power of command. The tame are always commanded by the untame. Man has tamed himself, and so has lost his power for command, the power to give himself direction. He has no choice in himself. He is tamed, like a tame horse waiting for the rein.

Supposing all horses were suddenly rendered masterless, what would they do? They would run wild. But supposing they were left still shut up in their fields, paddocks, corrals, stables, what would they do? They would go insane.

And that is precisely man's predicament. He is tamed. There are no untamed to give the commands and the direction. Yet he is shut up within all his barbed wire fences. He can only go insane, degenerate.

What is the alternative? It is nonsense to pretend we can un-tame ourselves in five minutes. That, too, is a slow and strange process, that has to be undertaken seriously. It is nonsense to pretend we can break the fences and dash out into the wilds. There are no wilds left, comparatively, and man is a dog that returns to his vomit.

Yet unless we proceed to connect ourselves up with our own primeval

sources, we shall degenerate. And degenerating, we shall break up into a strange orgy of feelings. They will be decomposition feelings, like the colours of autumn. And they will precede whole storms of death, like leaves in a wind.

There is no help for it. Man cannot tame himself and then stay tame. The moment he tries to stay tame he begins to degenerate, and gets the second sort of wildness, the wildness of destruction, which may be autumnal-beautiful for a while, like yellow leaves. Yet yellow leaves can only fall and rot.

Man tames himself in order to learn to un-tame himself again. To be civilized, we must not deny and blank out our feelings. Tameness is not civilization. It is only burning down the brush and ploughing the land. Our civilization has hardly realized yet the necessity for ploughing the soul. Later, we sow wild seed. But so far, we've only been burning off and rooting out the old wild brush. Our civilization, as far as our own souls go, has been a destructive process, up to now. The landscape of our souls is a charred wilderness of burnt-off stumps, with a green bit of water here, and a tin shanty with a little iron stove.

Now we have to sow wild seed again. We have to cultivate our feelings. It is no good trying to be popular, to let a whole rank tangle of liberated, degenerate feelings spring up. It will give us no satisfaction.

And it is no use doing as the psychoanalysts have done. The psychoanalysts show the greatest fear of all, of the innermost primeval place in man, where God is, if He is anywhere. The old Jewish horror of the true Adam, the mysterious "natural man," rises to a shriek in psychoanalysis. Like the idiot who foams and bites his wrists till they bleed. So great is the Freudian hatred of the oldest, old Adam, from whom God is not yet separated off, that the psychoanalyst sees this Adam as nothing but a monster of perversity, a bunch of engendering adders, horribly clotted.

This vision is the perverted vision of the degenerate tame: tamed through thousands of shameful years. The old Adam is the for ever untamed: he who is of the tame hated, with a horror of fearful hate: but who is held in innermost respect by the fearless.

In the oldest of the old Adam, was God: behind the dark wall of his breast, under the seal of the navel. Then man had a revulsion against himself, and God was separated off, lodged in the outermost space.

Now we have to return. Now again the old Adam must lift up his face and his breast, and un-tame himself. Not in viciousness nor in wantonness, but having God within the walls of himself. In the very darkest continent of the body there is God. And from Him issue the first dark rays of our feeling, wordless, and utterly previous to words: the innermost rays, the first messengers, the primeval, honourable beasts of our being, whose voice echoes wordless and for ever

wordless down the darkest avenues of the soul, but full of potent speech. Our own inner meaning.

Now we have to educate ourselves, not by laying down laws and inscribing tables of stone, but by listening. Not listening-in to noises from Chicago or Timbuktu. But listening-in to the voices of the honourable beasts that call in the dark paths of the veins of our body, from the God in the heart. Listening inwards, inwards, not for words nor for inspiration, but to the howling of the innermost beasts, the feelings, that roam in the forest of the blood, from the feet of God within the red, dark heart.

And how? How? How shall we even begin to educate ourselves in the feelings?

Not by laying down laws, or commandments, or axioms and postulates. Not even by making assertions that such and such is blessed. Not by words at all.

If we can't hear the cries far down in our own forests of dark veins, we can look in the real novels, and there listen. Not listen to the didactic statements of the author, but to the low, calling cries of the characters, as they wander in the dark woods of their destiny.

THE INDIVIDUAL CONSCIOUSNESS V. THE SOCIAL CONSCIOUSNESS

The more one reads of modern novels, the more one realizes that, in this individualistic age, there are no individuals left. People, men, women, and children, are *not* thinking their own thoughts, they are *not* feeling their own feelings, they are *not* living their own lives.

The moment the human being becomes conscious of himself, he ceases to be himself. The reason is obvious. The moment any individual creature becomes aware of its own individual isolation, it becomes instantaneously aware of that which is outside itself, and forms its limitation. That is, the psyche splits in two, into subjective and objective reality. The moment this happens, the primal integral I, which is for the most part a living *continuum* of all the rest of living things, collapses, and we get the I which is staring out of the window at the reality which is not itself. And this is the condition of the modern consciousness, from early childhood.

In the past, children were supposed to be “innocent.” Which means that they were like the animals, not split into subjective and objective consciousness. They were one living *continuum* with all the universe. This is the essential state of innocence, of naivete, and it is the persistence of this state all through life, as the *basic* state of consciousness, which preserves the human being all his life fresh and alive, a true individual. Paradoxical as it may sound, the individual is only truly himself when he is unconscious of his own individuality, when he is unaware of his own isolation, when he is not split into subjective and objective, when there is no *me or you*, no *me or it* in his consciousness, but the *me and you*, the *me and it* is a living *continuum*, as if all were connected by a living membrane.

As soon as the conception *me or you*, *me or it* enters the human consciousness, then the individual consciousness is supplanted by the social consciousness. The social consciousness means the cleaving of the true individual consciousness into two halves, subjective and objective, “me” on the one hand, “you” or “it” on the other. The awareness of “you” or of “it” as something definitely limiting “me,” this is the social consciousness. The awareness of “you” or of “it” is a *continuum* of “me” — different, but not separate: different as the eye is different from the nose — this is the primal or pristine or basic consciousness of the individual, the state of “innocence” or of naivety.”

This consciousness collapses, and the real individual lapses out, leaving only the social individual, a creature of subjective and objective consciousness, but of no innocent or genuinely individual consciousness. The innocent or radical individual consciousness alone is unanalysable and mysterious; it is the queer nuclear spark in the protoplasm, which is life itself, in its individual manifestation. The moment you split into subjective and objective consciousness, then the whole thing becomes analysable, and, in the last issue, dead.

Of course, it takes a long time to destroy the naive individual, the old Adam, entirely, and to produce creatures which are completely social in consciousness, that is, always aware of the “you” set over against the “me,” always conscious of the “it” which the “I” is up against. But it has happened now in even tiny children. A child nowadays can say: *Mummy*. — and his fatal consciousness of the cleft between him and Mummy is already obvious. The cleavage has happened to him. He is no longer one with things: worse, he is no longer *at one* with his mother even. He is a tiny, forlorn little social individual, a subjective-objective little Consciousness.

The subjective-objective consciousness is never truly individual. It is a product. The social individual, the me-or-you, me-or-it individual, is denied all naïve or innocent or really individual feelings. He is capable only of the feelings, which are really sensations, produced by the reaction between the “me” and the “you,” the “I” and the “it.” Innocent or individual feeling is only capable when there is a *continuum*, when the *me* and the *you* and the *it* are a *continuum*.

Man lapses from true innocence, from the at-oneness, in two ways. The first is the old way of greed or selfishness, when the “me” wants to swallow the “you” and put an end to the *continuum* that way. The other is the way of negation, when the “I” wants to lapse out into the “you” or the “it,” and so end all responsibility of keeping up one’s own bright nuclear cell alive in the tissue of the universe. In either way, there is a lapse from innocence and a fall into the state of vanity, ugly vanity. It is a vanity of positive tyranny, or a vanity of negative tyranny. The old villains-in-the-piece fell into the vanity of positive tyranny, the new villains-in-the-piece, who are still called saints and holy persons, or at worst, God’s fools, are squirming in the vanity of negative tyranny. They won’t leave the *continuum* alone. They insist on passing out into it. Which is as bad as if the eye should insist on merging itself into a oneness with the nose. For we are none of us more than a cell in the eye-tissue, or a cell in the nose-tissue or the heart-tissue of the macrocosm, the universe.

And, of course, the moment you cause a break-down in living tissue, you get inert Matter. So the moment you break the *continuum*, the naivete, the

innocence, the at-oneness, you get materialism and nothing but materialism.

Of course, inert Matter exists, as distinct from living tissue: dead protoplasm as distinct from living, nuclear protoplasm. But the living tissue is able to deal with the dead tissue. Whereas the reverse is not true. Dead tissue cannot do anything to living tissue, except try to corrupt it and make it dead too. Which is the main point concerning Materialism, whether it be the spiritual or the carnal Materialism.

The *continuum* which is alive can handle the dead tissue. That is, the individual who still retains his individuality, his basic at-oneness or innocence or naivete, can deal with the material world successfully. He can be analytical and critical upon necessity. But at the core, he is always naive or innocent or at one.

The contrary is not true. The social consciousness can only be analytical, critical, constructive but not creative, sensational but not passionate, emotional but without true feeling. It can know, but it cannot be. It is always made up of a duality, to which there is no clue. And the one half of the duality neutralizes, in the long run, the other half. So that, whether it is Nebuchadnezzar or Francis of Assisi, you arrive at the same thing, nothingness.

You can't make art out of nothingness. *Ex nihilo nihil fit!* But you can make art out of the collapse towards nothingness: the collapse of the true individual into the social individual.

Which brings us to John Galsworthy with a bump. Because, in all his books, I have not been able to discover one real individual — nothing but social individuals. *Ex nihilo nihil fit!* You can't make art, which is the revelation of the *continuum* itself, the very nuclear glimmer of the naive individual, when there is no *continuum* and no naive individual. As far as I have gone, I have found in Galsworthy nothing but social individuals.

Thinking you are naive doesn't make you naive, and thinking you are passionate doesn't make you passionate. Again, being stupid or limited is not a mark of naivety, and being doggedly amorous is not a sign of passion. In each case, the very reverse. Again, a peasant is by no means necessarily more naive, or innocent, or individual than a stockbroker, nor a sailor than an educationalist. The reverse may be the case. Peasants are often as greedy as cancer, and sailors as soft and corrupt as a rotten apple.

INTRODUCTION TO PICTURES

Man is anything from a forked radish to an immortal spirit. He is pretty well everything that ever was or will be, absolutely human and absolutely inhuman. If we did but know it, we have every imaginable and unimaginable feeling streaking somewhere through us. Even the most pot-headed American judge, who feels that his daughter will be lost for ever if she hears the word *cunt*, has all the feelings of a satyr careering somewhere inside him, very much suppressed and distorted. And the reason that Puritans are so frightened of life is that they happen, unfortunately, to be alive in spite of themselves.

The trouble with poor, pig-headed man is that he makes a selection out of the vast welter of his feelings, and says: I *only* feel these excellent selected feelings, and you, moreover, are allowed only to feel these excellent select feelings too. Which is all very well, till the pot boils over, or blows up.

When man fixes on a few select feelings and says that these feelings must be felt exclusively, the said feelings rapidly become repellent. Because we've *got* to love our wives, we make a point of loving somebody else. The moment the mind *fixes* a feeling, that feeling is repulsive. Take a greedy person, who falls right into his food. Why is he so distasteful? Is it because his stomach is asserting itself? Not at all! It is because his *mind*, having decided that food is good, or good for him, drives on his body to eat and eat and eat. The poor stomach is overloaded in spite of itself. The appetites are violated. The natural appetite says: I've had enough! But the fixed mind, fixed on feeding, forces the jaws, the gullet to go on working, the stomach to go on receiving. And this is greed. And no wonder it is repulsive.

The same is precisely true of drinking, smoking, drug-taking, or any of the vices. When did the *body* of a man ever like getting drunk? Never! Think how it reacts, how it vomits, how it tries to repudiate the excess of drink, how utterly wretched it feels when its sane balance is overthrown. But the mind or spirit of a man finds in intoxication some relief, some escape, some sense of licence, so the drunkenness is forced upon the unhappy stomach and bowels, which gradually get used to it. But which are slowly destroyed.

If only we would realize that, until perverted by the mind, the human body preserves itself continually in a delicate balance of sanity! That is what it is always striving to do, and always it is shoved over by the pernicious mental consciousness called the spirit. As soon as even a baby finds something good, it

howls for more, till it is sick. That is the nauseating side of the human consciousness. But it is not the body. It is the mind, the self-aware-of-itself, which says: This is good. I will go on and on and on eating it! The human spirit is the self-aware-of-itself. This self-awareness may make us noble. More often it makes us worse than pigs. We need above all things a curb upon this spirit of ours, this self-aware-of-itself, which is our spirituality and our vice.

As a matter of fact, we need to be a little more *radically* aware of ourselves. When a man starts drinking, and his stomach simply doesn't want any more, it is time he put a check on his impudent spirit and obeyed his stomach. When a man's body has reached one of its periods of loneliness, and with a sure voice cries that it wants to be alone and intact, it is then, inevitably, that the accursed perversity of the spirit, the self-aware-of-itself, is bound to whip the unhappy senses into excitement and to force them into fornication. It is then, when a man's body cries to be left alone and intact, that man forces himself to be a Don Juan. The same with women. It is the price we have to pay for our precious spirit, our self-aware- of-itself, which we don't yet know how to handle.

And when a man has forced himself to be a Don Juan, you may bet his children will force themselves to be Puritans, with a nasty, *greedy* abstinence, as greedy as the previous gluttony. Oh bitter inheritance, the human spirit, the self-aware-of-itself! The self-aware- of-itself, that says: I like it, so I will have it all the time! — and then, in revulsion, says: I don't like it, I will have *none* of it, and no man shall have any of it. Either way, it is sordid, and makes one sick. Oh lofty human spirit, how sordid you have made us! What a viper Plato was, with his distinction between body and spirit, and the exaltation of the spirit, the self-aware-of-itself. The human spirit, the self-aware-of-itself, is only tolerable when controlled by the divine, or demonish sanity which is greater than itself.

It is difficult to know what name to give to that most central and vital clue to the human being, which clinches him into integrity. The best is to call it his vital sanity. We thus escape the rather nauseating emotional suggestions of words like soul and spirit and holy ghost.

We can escape from the trap of the human spirit, the self-aware- of-itself, in which we are entrapped, by going quite, quite still and letting our whole sanity assert itself inside us, and set us into rhythm.

But first of all we must know we are entrapped. We most certainly are. You may call it intellectualism, self-consciousness, the self aware of itself, or what you will: you can even call it just human consciousness, if you like: but there it is. Perhaps it is simpler to stick to a common word like self-consciousness. In modern civilization we are all self-conscious. All our emotions are mental, self-conscious. Our passions are self-conscious. We are an intensely elaborate and

intricate clockwork of nerves and brain. Nerves and brain, but still a clockwork. A mechanism, and hence incapable of experience.

The nerves and brain are the apparatus by which we signal and *register* consciousness. Consciousness, however, does not take rise in the nerves and brain. It takes rise elsewhere: in the blood, in the corpuscles, somewhere very primitive and pre-nerve and pre-brain. Just as energy generates in the electron. Every speck of protoplasm, every living cell is *conscious*. All the cells of our body are conscious. And all the time, they give off a stream of consciousness which flows along the nerves and keeps us spontaneously alive. While the flow streams through us, from the blood to the heart, the bowels, the viscera, then along the sympathetic system of nerves into our spontaneous minds, making us breathe, and see, and move, and be aware, and *do* things spontaneously, while this flow streams as a flame streams ceaselessly, we are lit up, we glow, we live.

But there is another process. There is that strange switchboard of consciousness, the brain, with its power of transferring spontaneous energy into voluntary energy: or consciousness, as you please: the two are very closely connected. The brain can transfer spontaneous consciousness, which we are *unaware* of, into voluntary consciousness, which we *are* aware of, and which we call consciousness exclusively.

Now it is nonsense to say there cannot be a consciousness in us of which we are *always* unaware. We are never aware of sleep except when we awake. If we didn't sleep, we should never know we were awake. But we *are* very much aware of our "consciousness." We are aware that it is a state only. And we are aware that it displaces another state. The other state we may negatively call the unconscious. But it is a poor way of putting it. To say that a skylark sings unconsciously is feeble. The skylark of course sings consciously. But with the other, spontaneous or sympathetic consciousness, which flows up like a flame from the corpuscles of all the body to the gates of the body, through the muscles and nerves of the sympathetic system to the hands and eyes and all the organs of utterance. The skylark does *not* sing like the lady in the concert-hall, consciously, mentally, deliberately, with the voluntary consciousness.

Some very strange process takes place in the brain, the process of cognition. This process of cognition consists in the forming of ideas, which are units of transmuted consciousness. These ideas can then be stored in the memory, or wherever it is that the brain stores its ideas. And these ideas are alive: they are little batteries in which so much energy of consciousness is stored.

It is here that our secondary consciousness comes in, our mind, our mental consciousness, our cerebral consciousness. Our mind is made up of a vast number of live ideas, and a good number of dead ones. Ideas are like the little

electric batteries of a flashlight, in which a certain amount of energy is stored, which expends itself and is not renewed. Then you throw the dead battery away.

But when the mind has a sufficient number of these little batteries of ideas in store, a new process of life starts in. The moment an idea forms in the mind, at that moment does the old integrity of the consciousness break. In the old myths, at that moment we lose our “innocence,” we partake of the tree of knowledge, and we become “aware of our nakedness”: in short, self-conscious. The self becomes aware of itself, and then the fun begins, and then the trouble starts.

The first thing the self-aware-of-itself realizes is that it is a derivative, not a primary entity. The second thing it realizes is that the spontaneous self with its sympathetic consciousness and non-ideal reaction is the original reality, the old Adam, over which the self-aware-of-itself has no origination power. That is, the self-aware-of-itself knows it can frustrate the consciousness of the old Adam, divert it, but it cannot stop it: it knows, moreover, that as the moon is a luminary because the sun shines, so it, the self-aware-of-itself, the mental consciousness, the spirit, is only a sort of reflection of the great primary consciousness of the old Adam.

Now the self-aware-of-itself has *always* the quality of egoism. The spirit is always egoistic. The greatest spiritual commands are *all* forms of egoism, usually inverted egoism, for deliberate humility, we are all well aware, is a rabid form of egoism. The Sermon on the Mount is a long string of utterances from the self-aware-of-itself, the spirit, and all of them are rabid aphorisms of egoism, backhanded egoism.

The moment the self-aware-of-itself comes into being, it begins egoistically to assert itself. It cuts immediately at the wholeness of the pristine consciousness, the old Adam, and wounds it. And it goes on with the battle. The greatest enemy man has or ever can have is his own spirit, his own self-aware-of-itself.

This self-aware ego *knows* it is a derivative, a satellite. So it must assert itself. It knows it has no power over the original body, the old Adam, save the secondary power of the idea. So it begins to store up ideas, those little batteries which *always* have a moral, or good-and-bad implication.

For four thousand years man has been accumulating these little batteries of ideas, and using them on himself against his pristine consciousness, his old Adam. The queen bee of all human ideas since 2000 B.C. has been the idea that the body, the pristine consciousness, the great sympathetic life-flow, the steady flame of the old Adam is bad, and must be conquered. Every religion taught the conquest: science took up the battle, tooth and nail: culture fights in the same cause: and only art sometimes — or always — exhibits an internecine conflict and betrays its own battle-cry.

I believe that there was a great age, a great epoch when man did not make war: previous to 2000 B.C. Then the self had not really become aware of itself, it had not separated itself off, the spirit was not yet born, so there was no internal conflict, and hence no permanent external conflict. The external conflict of war, or of industrial competition, is only a reflection of the war that goes on inside each human being, the war of the self-conscious ego against the spontaneous old Adam.

If the self-conscious ego once wins, you get immediate insanity, because our primary self is the old Adam, in which rests our sanity. And when man starts living from his self-conscious energy, women at once begin to go to pieces, all the “freedom” business sets in. Because women are only kept in equilibrium by the old Adam. Nothing else can avail.

But the means which the spirit, the self-conscious ego, the personality, the self-aware-of-itself takes to conquer the vital self or old Adam are curious. First it has an idea, a semi-truth in which some of the energy of the vital consciousness is transmuted and stored. This idea it projects down again onto the spontaneous affective body. The very first idea is the idea of shame. The spirit, the self-conscious ego looks at the body and says: You are shameful. The body, for some mysterious reason (really, because it is so vulnerable), immediately feels ashamed. A-ha! Now the spirit has got a hold. It discovers a second idea. The second idea is work. The spirit says: Base body! you need all the time to eat food. Who is going to give you food? You must sweat for it, sweat for it, or you will starve.

Now before the spirit emerged white and tyrannous in the human consciousness, man had not concerned himself deeply about starving. Occasionally, no doubt, he starved; but no oftener than the birds do, and they don't often starve. Anyhow, he cared no more about it than the birds do. But now he feared it, and fell to work.

And here we see the mysterious power of ideas, the power of rousing emotion, primitive emotions of shame, fear, anger, and sometimes joy; but usually the specious joy over another defeat of the pristine self.

So the spirit, the self-aware-of-itself organized a grand battery of dynamic ideas, the pivotal idea being almost always the idea of self-sacrifice and the triumph of the self-aware-of-itself, that pale Galilean *simulacrum* of a man.

But wait! Wait! There is a nemesis. It is great fun overcoming the Old Adam while the Old Adam is still lusty and kicking: like breaking in a bronco. But nemesis, strange nemesis. The old Adam isn't an animal that you can *permanently* domesticate. Domesticated, he goes deranged.

We are the sad results of a four-thousand-year effort to break the Old Adam,

to domesticate him utterly. He is to a large extent broken and domesticated.

But then what? Then, as the flow of pristine or spontaneous consciousness gets weaker and weaker, the grand dynamic ideas go dead and deader. We have got a vast magazine of ideas, all of us. But they are practically all dead batteries, played out. They can't provoke any emotion or feeling or reaction in the spontaneous body, the old Adam. Love is a dead shell of an idea — we don't react — for love is only one of the great dynamic ideas, now played out. Self-sacrifice is another dead shell. Conquest is another. Success is another. Making good is another.

In fact, I don't know of one great idea or ideal — they are the same — which is still alive today. They are all dead. You can turn them on, but you get no kick. You turn on love, you fornicate till you are black in the face — you get no real thing out of it. The old Adam plays his last revenge on you, and refuses to respond *at all* to any of your ideal pokings. You have gone dead. You can't feel anything, and you may as well know it.

The mob, of course, will always deceive themselves that they are feeling things, even when they are not. To them, when they say *I love you!* there will be a huge imaginary feeling, and they will act up according to schedule. All the love on the film, the close-up kisses and the rest, and all the responses in buzzing emotion in the audience, is *all* acting up, all according to schedule. It is all just cerebral, and the body is just forced to go through the antics.

And this deranges the natural body-mind harmony on which our sanity rests. Our masses are rapidly going insane.

And in the horror of nullity — for the human being comes to have his own nullity in horror, he is terrified by his own incapacity to feel anything at all, he has a mad fear, at last, of his own self-consciousness — the modern man sets up the reverse process of katabolism, destructive sensation. He can no longer have any living productive feelings. Very well, he will have destructive sensations, produced by katabolism on his most intimate tissues.

Drink, drugs, jazz, speed, “petting,” all modern forms of thrill, are just the production of sensation by the katabolism of the finest conscious cells of our living body. We explode our own cells and release a certain energy and accompanying sensation. It is, naturally, a process of suicide. And it is just the same process as ever: the self-conscious ego, the spirit, attacking the pristine body, the old Adam. But now the attack is direct. All the wildest Bohemians and profligates are only doing directly what their puritanical grandfathers did indirectly: killing the body of the old Adam. But now the lust is direct self-murder. It only needs a few more strides, and it is promiscuous murder, like the war.

But we see this activity rampant today: the process of the sensational katabolism of the conscious body. It is perhaps even more pernicious than the old conservative attack on the old Adam, certainly it is swifter. But it is the same thing. There is no *volte-face*. There is no new spirit. It may be a *Life of Christ* or it may be a book on Relativity or a slim volume of lyrics or a novel like the telephone directory: it is still the same old attack on the living body. The body is still made disgusting. Only the moderns drag in all the excrements and the horrors and put them under your nose and say: Enjoy that horror! Or they write about love as if it were a process of endless pissing — except that they write kissing instead of pissing — and they say: Isn't it lovely!

PERSONALIA AND FRAGMENTS

THE MINER AT HOME

Like most colliers, Bower had his dinner before he washed himself. It did not surprise his wife that he said little. He seemed quite amiable, but evidently did not feel confidential. Gertie was busy with the three children, the youngest of whom lay kicking on the sofa, preparing to squeal; therefore she did not concern herself overmuch with her husband, once having ascertained by a few shrewd glances at his heavy brows and his blue eyes, which moved conspicuously in his black face, that he was only pondering.

He smoked a solemn pipe until six o'clock. Although he was really a good husband, he did not notice that Gertie was tired. She was getting irritable at the end of the long day.

"Don't you want to wash yourself?" she asked, grudgingly, at six o'clock. It was sickening to have a man sitting there in his pit-dirt, never saying a word, smoking like a Red Indian.

"I'm ready, when you are," he replied.

She lay the baby on the sofa, barricaded it with pillows, and brought from the scullery a great panchion, a bowl of heavy earthenware like brick, glazed inside to a dark mahogany color. Tall and thin and very pale, she stood before the fire holding the great bowl, her grey eyes flashing.

"Get up, our Jack, this minute, or I'll squash thee under the blessed panchion."

The fat boy of six, who was rolling on the rug in the firelight, said broadly:

"Squash me, then."

"Get up," she cried, giving him a push with her foot.

"Gi'e ower," he said, rolling jollily.

"I'll smack you," she said grimly, preparing to put down the panchion.

"Get up, theer," shouted the father.

Gertie ladled water from the boiler with a tin ladling can. Drops fell from her ladle hissing into the red fire, splashing on to the white hearth, blazing like drops of flame on the flat-topped fender. The father gazed at it all, unmoved.

"I've told you," he said, "to put cold water in the panchion first. If one o' th' children goes an' falls in . . ."

"You can see as 'e doesn't then," snapped she. She tempered the bowl with

cold water, dropped in a flannel and a lump of soap, and spread the towel over the fender to warm.

Then, and only then, Bower rose. He wore no coat, and his arms were freckled black. He stripped to the waist, hitched his trousers into the strap, and knelt on the rug to wash himself. There was a great splashing and sputtering. The red firelight shone on his cap of white soap, and on the muscles of his back, on the strange working of his red and white muscular arms, that flashed up and down like individual creatures.

Gertie sat with the baby clawing at her ears and hair and nose. Continually she drew back her face and head from the cruel little baby-clasp. Jack was hanging on to the kitchen door.

“Come away from that door,” cried the mother.

Jack did not come away, but neither did he open the door and run the risk of incurring his father’s wrath. The room was very hot, but the thought of a draught is abhorrent to a miner.

With the baby on one arm, Gertie washed her husband’s back. She sponged it carefully with the flannel, and then, still with one hand, began to dry it on the rough towel.

“Canna ter put th’ childt down an’ use both hands?” said her husband.

“Yes; an’ then if th’ Yhildt screets, there’s a bigger to-do than iver. There’s no suitin’ some folk.”

“The childt ‘ud non screet.”

Gertie plumped it down. The baby began to cry. The wife rubbed her husband’s back till it grew pink, whilst Bower quivered with pleasure. As soon as she threw the towel down:

“Shut that childt up,” he said.

He wrestled his way into his shirt. His head emerged, with black hair standing roughly on end. He was rather an ugly man, just above medium height, and stiffly built. He had a thin black moustache over a full mouth, and a very full chin that was marred by a blue seam, where a horse had kicked him when he was a lad in the pit.

With both hands on the mantelpiece above his head, he stood looking in the fire, his whitish shirt hanging like a smock over his pit trousers.

Presently, still? looking absently in the fire, he said: “Bill Andrews was standin’ at th’ pit top, an’ give ivery man as ‘e come up one o’ these.”

He handed to his wife a small whity-blue paper, on which was printed simply:
February 14, 191s.

To the Manager —

I hereby give notice to leave your employment fourteen days from above date.

Signed —

Gertie read the paper, blindly dodging her head from the baby's grasp.

"An' what d'you reckon that's for?" she asked.

"I suppose it means as we come out."

"I'm sure!" she cried in indignation. "Well, *tha'rt* not goin' to sign it."

"It'll ma'e no diff'rence whether I do or dunna — t'others will."

"Then let 'em!" She made a small clicking sound in her mouth. "This 'ill ma'e th' third strike as we've had sin' we've been married; an' a fat lot th' better for it you are, arena you?"

He squirmed uneasily.

"No, but we mean to be," he said.

"I'll tell you what, colliers is a discontented lot, as doesn't know what they *do* want. That's what they are."

"Tha'd better not let some o' th' colliers as there is hear thee say so."

"I don't care who hears me. An' there isn't a man in Eastwood but what'll say as th' last two strikes has ruined the place. There's that much bad blood now atween th' mesters an' th' men as there isn't a thing but what's askew. An' what *will* it be, I should like to know!"

"It's not on'y here; it's all ower th' country alike," he gloated.

"Yes; it's them blessed Yorkshire an' Welsh colliers as does it. They're that bug nowadays, what wi' talkin' an' spoutin', they hardly know which side their back-side hangs. Here, take this childt!"

She thrust the baby into his arms, carried out the heavy bowlful of black suds, mended the fire, cleared round, and returned for the child.

"Ben Haseldine said, an' he's a union man — he told me when he come for th' union money yesterday, as th' men doesn't want to come out — not our men. It's th' union."

"Tha knows nowt about it, woman. It's a' woman's jabber, from beginnin' to end." "You don't intend us to know. Who wants th' Minimum Wage? Butties doesn't. There th' butties'll be, havin' to pay seven shillin' a day to men as 'appen isn't worth a penny more than five."

"But the butties is goin' to have eight shillin' accordin' to scale."

"An' then th' men as can't work tip-top, an' is worth, 'appen, five shillin' a day, they get th' sack: an' th' old men, an' so on."

"Nowt o' th' sort, woman, nowt o' th' sort. Tha's got it off 'am-pat. There's goin' to be inspectors for all that, an' th' men'll get what they're worth, accordin' to age, an' so on."

"An' accordin' to idleness an' — what somebody says about 'em. I'll back! There'll be a lot o' fairness!"

“Tha talks like a woman as knows nowt. What does thee know about it?”

“I know what you did at th’ last strike. And I know this much, when Shipley men had *their* strike tickets, not one in three signed ‘em — so there. An’ *tha’rt* not goin’ to!”

“We want a livin’ wage,” he declared.

“Hanna you got one?” she cried.

“Han we?” he shouted. “Han we? Who does more chaunterin’ than thee when it’s a short wik, an’ tha gets ‘appen a scroddy twenty-two shillin’? Tha goes at me ‘ard enough.”

“Yi; but what better shall you be? What better *are* you for th’ last two strikes — tell me that?”

“I’ll tell thee this much, th’ mesters doesna’ mean us to ha’e owt. They promise, but they dunna keep it, not they. Up comes Friday night, an’ nowt to draw, an’ a woman fit to ha’e yer guts out for it.”

“It’s nowt but th’ day-men as wants the blessed Minimum Wage — it’s not butties.”

“It’s time as th’ butties *did* ha’e ter let their men make a fair day’s wage. Four an’ sixpence a day is about as ‘e’s allowed to addle, whoever he may be.”

“I wonder what you’ll say next. You say owt as is put in your mouth, that’s a fac’. What are thee, dost reckon? — are ter a butty, or day-man, or ostler, or are ter a mester? — for tha might be, ter hear thee talk.”

“I nedna neither. It ought to be fair a’ round.”

“It ought, hang my rags, it ought! Tha’rt very fair to me, for instance.”

“An’ arena I?”

“Tha thinks ‘cause tha gi’es me a lousy thirty shillin’ reg’lar tha’rt th’ best man i’ th’ Almighty world. Tha mun be “waited on han’ an’ foot, an’ sided wi’ whatever tha says. But I’m *not!* No, an’ I’m not, not when it comes to strikes. I’ve seen enough on ‘em.”

“Then niver open thy mouth again if it’s a short wik, an’ we’re pinched.”

“We’re niver pinched that much. An’ a short wik isn’t no shorter than a strike wik; put that i’ thy pipe an’ smoke it. It’s th’ idle men as wants th’ strikes.”

“Shut thy mouth, woman. If every man worked as hard as I do . . .”

“He wouldn’t ha’e as much to do as me; an’ ‘e wouldna. But *I’ve* nowt to do, as tha’rt flig ter tell me. No, it’s th’ idle men as wants th’ strike. It’s a union strike, this is, not a men’s strike. You’re sharp-enin’ th’ knife for your own throats.”

“Am I not sick of a woman as listens to every tale as is poured into her ears? No, I’m not takin’ th’ kid. I’m goin’ out.”

He put on his boots determinedly.

She rocked herself with vexation and weariness.

THE FLYING FISH

I. DEPARTURE FROM MEXICO

“Come home else no Day in Daybrook.” This cablegram was the first thing Gethin Day read of the pile of mail which he found at the hotel in the lost town of South Mexico, when he returned from his trip to the coast. Though the message was not signed, he knew whom it came from and what it meant.

He lay in his bed in the hot October evening, still sick with malaria. In the flush of fever he saw yet the parched, stark mountains of the south, the villages of reed huts lurking among trees, the black-eyed natives with the lethargy, the ennui, the pathos, the beauty of an exhausted race; and above all he saw the weird, uncanny flowers, which he had hunted from the high plateaux, through the valleys, and down to the steaming crocodile heat of the *tierra caliente*, towards the sandy, burning, intolerable shores. For he was fascinated by the mysterious green blood that runs in the veins of plants, and the purple and yellow and red blood that colours the faces of flowers. Especially the unknown flora of South Mexico attracted him, and above all he wanted to trace to the living plant the mysterious essences and toxins known with such strange elaboration to the Mayas, the Zapotecas, and the Aztecs.

His head was humming like a mosquito, his legs were paralysed for the moment by the heavy quinine injection the doctor had injected into them, and his soul was as good as dead with the malaria; so he threw all his letters unopened on the floor, hoping never to see them again. He lay with the pale yellow cablegram in his hand: “Come home else no Day in Daybrook.” Through the open doors from the patio of the hotel came the heavy scent of that invisible green night-flower the natives call *Buena de Noche*. The little Mexican servant-girl strode in barefoot with a cup of tea, her flounced cotton skirt swinging, her long black hair down her back. She asked him in her birdlike Spanish if he wanted nothing more. “*Nada mas*,” he said. “Nothing more; leave me and shut the door.”

He wanted to shut out the scent of that powerful green inconspicuous night-flower he knew so well.

No Day in Daybrook;

For the Vale a bad outlook.

No Day in Daybrook! There had been Days in Daybrook since time began: at least, so he imagined.

Daybrook was a sixteenth-century stone house, among the hills in the middle of England. It stood where Crichdale bends to the south and where Ashleydale joins in. "Daybrook standeth at the junction of the ways and at the centre of the trefoil. Even it rides within the Vale as an ark between three seas; being indeed the ark of these vales, if not of all England." So had written Sir Gilbert Day, he who built the present Daybrook in the sixteenth century. Sir Gilbert's *Book of Days*, so beautifully written out on vellum and illuminated by his own hand, was one of the treasures of the family.

Sir Gilbert had sailed the Spanish seas in his day, and had come home rich enough to rebuild the old house of Daybrook according to his own fancy. He had made it a beautiful pointed house, rather small, standing upon a knoll above the river Ashe, where the valley narrowed and the woods rose steep behind. "Nay," wrote this quaint Elizabethan, "though I say that Daybrook is the ark of the Vale, I mean not the house itself, but He that Day, that lives in the house in his day. While Day there be in Daybrook, the floods shall not cover the Vale nor shall they ride over England completely."

Gethin Day was nearing forty, and he had not spent much of his time in Daybrook. He had been a soldier and had wandered in many countries. At home his sister Lydia, twenty years older than himself, had been the Day in Daybrook. Now from her cablegram he knew she was either ill or already dead.

She had been rather hard and grey like the rock of Crichdale, but faithful and a pillar of strength. She had let him go his own way, but always when he came home, she would look into his blue eyes with her searching uncanny grey look and ask: "Well, have you come, or are you still wandering?" "Still wandering, I think," he said. "Mind you don't wander into a cage one of these days," she replied; "you would find far more room for yourself in Daybrook than in these foreign parts, if you knew how to come into your own."

This had always been the burden of her song to him: *if you knew how to come into your own*. And it had always exasperated him with a sense of futility; though whether his own futility or Lydia's, he had never made out.

Lydia was wrapt up in old Sir Gilbert's *Book of Days*; she had written out for her brother a fair copy, neatly bound in green leather, and had given it him without a word when he came of age, merely looking at him with that uncanny look of her grey eyes, expecting something of him, which always made him start away from her.

The *Book of Days* was a sort of secret family bible at Daybrook. It was never shown to strangers, nor ever mentioned outside the immediate family. Indeed in

the family it was never openly alluded to. Only on solemn occasions, or on rare evenings, at twilight, when the evening star shone, had the father, now dead, occasionally read aloud to the two children from the nameless work.

In the copy she had written out for Gethin, Lydia had used different coloured inks in different places. Gethin imagined that her favourite passages were those in the royal-blue ink, where the page was almost as blue as the cornflowers that grew tall beside the walks in the garden at Daybrook.

“Beauteous is the day of the yellow sun which is the common day of men; but even as the winds roll unceasing above the trees of the world, so doth that Greater Day, which is the Uncommon Day, roll over the unclipt bushes of our little daytime. Even also as the morning sun shakes his yellow wings on the horizon and rises up, so the great bird beyond him spreads out his dark blue feathers, and beats his wings in the tremor of the Greater Day.”

Gethin knew a great deal of his *Book of Days* by heart. In a dilettante fashion, he had always liked rather highflown poetry, but in the last years, something in the hard, fierce, finite sun of Mexico, in the dry terrible land, and in the black staring eyes of the suspicious natives, had made the ordinary day lose its reality to him. It had cracked like some great bubble, and to his uneasiness and terror, he had seemed to see through the fissures the deeper blue of that other Greater Day where moved the other sun shaking its dark blue wings. Perhaps it was the malaria; perhaps it was his own inevitable development; perhaps it was the presence of those handsome, dangerous, wide-eyed men left over from the ages before the flood in Mexico, which caused his old connexions and his accustomed world to break for him. He was ill, and he felt as if at the very middle of him, beneath his navel, some membrane were torn, some membrane which had connected him with the world and its day. The natives who attended him, quiet, soft, heavy, and rather helpless, seemed, he realized, to be gazing from their wide black eyes always into that greater day whence they had come and where they wished to return. Men of a dying race, to whom the busy sphere of the common day is a cracked and leaking shell.

He wanted to go home. He didn't care now whether England was tight and little and over-crowded and far too full of furniture. He no longer minded the curious quiet atmosphere of Daybrook in which he had felt he would stifle as a young man. He no longer resented the weight of family tradition, nor the peculiar sense of authority which the house seemed to have over him. Now he was sick from the soul outwards, and the common day had cracked for him, and the uncommon day was showing him its immensity, he felt that home was the place. It did not matter that England was small and tight and over-furnished, if the Greater Day were round about. He wanted to go home, away from these big

wild countries where men were dying back into the Greater Day, home where he dare face the sun behind the sun, and come into his own in the Greater Day.

But he was as yet too ill to go. He lay in the nausea of the tropics, and let the days pass over him. The door of his room stood open on to the patio where green banana trees and high strange-sapped flowering shrubs rose from the water-sprinkled earth towards that strange rage of blue which was the sky over the shadow-heavy, perfume-soggy air of the closed-in courtyard. Dark-blue shadows moved from the side of the patio, disappeared, then appeared on the other side. Evening had come, and the barefoot natives in white calico flitted with silent rapidity across, and across, for ever going, yet mysteriously going nowhere, threading the timelessness with their transit, like swallows of darkness.

The window of the room, opposite the door, opened on to the tropical parched street. It was a big window, came nearly down to the floor, and was heavily barred with upright and horizontal bars. Past the window went the natives, with the soft, light rustle of their sandals. Big straw hats balanced, dark cheeks, calico shoulders brushed with the silent swiftness of the Indian past the barred window-space. Sometimes children clutched the bars and gazed in, with great shining eyes and straight blue-black hair, to see the Americano lying in the majesty of a white bed. Sometimes a beggar stood there, sticking a skinny hand through the iron grille and whimpering the strange, endless, pullulating whimper of the beggar — "*por amor de Dios!*" — on and on and on, as it seemed for an eternity. But the sick man on the bed endured it with the same endless endurance in resistance, endurance in resistance which he had learned in the Indian countries. Aztec or Mixtec, Zapotec or Maya, always the same power of serpent-like torpor of resistance.

The doctor came — an educated Indian: though he could do nothing but inject quinine and give a dose of calomel. But he was lost between the two days, the fatal greater day of the Indians, the fussy, busy lesser day of the white people.

"How is it going to finish?" he said to the sick man, seeking a word. "How is it going to finish with the Indians, with the Mexicans? Now the soldiers are all taking *marihuana* — hashish!"

"They are all going to die. They are all going to kill themselves — all — all," said the Englishman, in the faint permanent delirium of his malaria. "After all, beautiful it is to be dead, and quite departed."

The doctor looked at him in silence, understanding only too well. "Beautiful it is to be dead!" It is the refrain which hums at the centre of every Indian heart, where the greater day is hemmed in by the lesser. The despair that comes when the lesser day hems in the greater. Yet the doctor looked at the gaunt white man in malice: — "What, would you have us quite gone, you Americans?"

At last, Gethin Day crawled out into the plaza. The square was like a great low fountain of green and of dark shade, now it was autumn and the rains were over. Scarlet craters rose the canna flowers, licking great red tongues, and tropical yellow. Scarlet, yellow, green, blue-green, sunshine intense and invisible, deep indigo shade! and small, white-clad natives pass, passing, across the square, through the green lawns, under the indigo shade, and across the hollow sunshine of the road into the arched arcades of the low Spanish buildings, where the shops were. The low, baroque Spanish buildings stood back with a heavy, sick look, as if they too felt the endless malaria in their bowels, the greater day of the stony Indian crushing the more jaunty, lean European day which they represented. The yellow cathedral leaned its squat, earthquake-shaken towers; the bells sounded hollow. Earth-coloured tiny soldiers lay and stood around the entrance to the municipal palace, which was so baroque and Spanish, but which now belonged to the natives. Heavy as a strange bell of shadow-coloured glass, the shadow of the greater day hung over this coloured plaza which the Europeans had created, like an oasis, in the lost depths of Mexico. Gethin Day sat half lying on one of the broken benches, while tropical birds flew and twittered in the great trees, and natives twittered or flitted in silence, and he knew that here, the European day was annulled again. His body was sick with the poison that lurks in all tropical air, his soul was sick with that other day, that rather awful greater day which permeates the little days of the old races. He wanted to get out, to get out of this ghastly tropical void into which he had fallen.

Yet it was the end of November before he could go. Little revolutions had again broken the thread of railway at the end of which the southern town hung revolving like a spider. It was a narrow-gauge railway, one single narrow little track which ran over the plateau, then slipped down, down the long *barranca*, descending five thousand feet down to the valley which was a cleft in the plateau, then up again seven thousand feet, to the higher plateau to the north. How easy to break the thread! One of the innumerable little wooden bridges destroyed, and it was done. The three hundred miles to the north were impassable wilderness, like the hundred and fifty miles through the low-lying jungle to the south.

At last however he could crawl away. The train came again. He had cabled to England, and had received the answer that his sister was dead. It seemed so natural, there under the powerful November sun of southern Mexico, in the drugging powerful odours of the night-flowers, that Lydia should be dead. She seemed so much more *real*, shall we say actually vital, in death. Dead, he could think of her as quite near and comforting and real, whereas while she was alive, she was so utterly alien, remote and fussy, ghost-like in her petty Derbyshire

day.

“For the little day is like a house with the family round the hearth, and the door shut. Yet outside whispers the Greater Day, wall-less, and hearthless. And the time will come at last when the walls of the little day shall fall, and what is left of the family of men shall find themselves outdoors in the Greater Day, houseless and abroad, even here between the knees of the Vales, even in Crichdale. It is a doom that will come upon tall men. And then they will breathe deep, and be breathless in the great air, and salt sweat will stand on their brow, thick as buds on sloe-bushes when the sun comes back. And little men will shudder and die out, like clouds of grasshoppers falling in the sea. Then tall men will remain alone in the land, moving deeper in the Greater Day, and moving deeper. Even as the flying fish, when he leaves the air and recovereth his element in the depth, plunges and invisibly rejoices. So will tall men rejoice, after their flight of fear, through the thin air, pursued by death. For it is on wings of fear, sped from the mouth of death, that the flying fish riseth twinkling in the air, and rustles in astonishment silvery through the thin small day. But he dives again into the great peace of the deeper day, and under the belly of death, and passes into his own.”

Gethin read again his *Book of Days*, in the twilight of his last evening. Personally, he resented the symbolism and mysticism of his Elizabethan ancestor. But it was in his veins. And he was going home, back, back to the house with the flying fish on the roof. He felt an immense doom over everything, still the same next morning, when, an hour after dawn, the little train ran out from the doomed little town, on to the plateau, where the cactus thrust up its fluted tubes, and where the mountains stood back, blue, cornflower-blue, so dark and pure in form, in the land of the Greater Day, the day of demons. The little train, with two coaches, one full of natives, the other with four or five “white” Mexicans, ran fussily on, in the little day of toys and men’s machines. On the roof sat tiny, earthy-looking soldiers, faces burnt black, with cartridge-belts and rifles. They clung on tight, not to be shaken off. And away went this weird toy, this crazy little caravan, over the great lost land of cacti and mountains standing back, on to the shut-in defile where the long descent began.

At half-past ten, at a station some distance down the *barranca*, a station connected with old silver mines, the train stood, and all descended to eat: the eternal turkey with black sauce, potatoes, salad, and apple pie — the American apple pie, which is a sandwich of cooked apple between two layers of pie-crust. And also beer, from Puebla. Two Chinamen administered the dinner, in all the decency, cleanness and well-cookedness of the little day of the white men, which they reproduce so well. There it was, the little day of our civilization. Outside,

the little train waited. The little black-faced soldiers sharpened their knives. The vast, varying declivity of the *barranca* stood in sun and shadow as on the day of doom, untouched.

On again, winding, descending the huge and savage gully or crack in the plateau-edge, where no men lived. Bushes trailed with elegant pink creeper, such as is seen in hothouses, enormous blue convolvuluses opened out, and in the unseemly tangle of growth, bulbous orchids jutted out from trees, and let hang a trail of white or yellow flower. The strange, entangled squalor of the jungle.

Gethin Day looked down the ravine, where water was running.

He saw four small deer lifting their heads from drinking, to look at the train. “*Los venados! los venados!*” he heard the soldiers softly calling. As if knowing they were safe, the deer stood and wondered, away there in the Greater Day, in the manless space, while the train curled round a sharp jutting rock.

They came at last to the bottom, where it was very hot, and a few wild men hung round with the sword-like knives of the sugarcane. The train seemed to tremble with fear all the time, as if its thread might be cut. So frail, so thin the thread of the lesser day, threading with its business the great reckless heat of the savage land. So frail a thread, so easily snapped!

But the train crept on, northwards, upwards. And as the stupor of heat began to pass, in the later afternoon, the sick man saw among mango trees, beyond the bright green stretches of sugarcane, white clusters of a village, with the coloured dome of a church all yellow and blue with shiny majolica tiles. Spain putting the bubbles of her little day among the blackish trees of the unconquerable.

He came at nightfall to a small square town, more in touch with civilization, where the train ended its frightened run. He slept there. And next day he took another scrap of a train across to the edge of the main plateau. The country was wild, but more populous. An occasional big *hacienda* with sugar-mills stood back among the hills. But it was silent. Spain had spent the energy of her little day here, now the silence, the terror of the Greater Day, mysterious with death, was filling in again.

On the train a native, a big, handsome man, wandered back and forth among the uneasy Mexican travellers with a tray of glasses of ice-cream. He was no doubt of the Tlascala tribe. Gethin Day looked at him and met his glistening dark eyes. “*Qxiere helados, SenorV* said the Indian, reaching a glass with his dark, subtle-skinned, workless hand. And in the soft, secret tones of his voice, Gethin Day heard the sound of the Greater Day. “*Gracias!*”

“*Padrdrn! Padrdrn!*” moaned a woman at the station. “*POT amor de Dios, Padrdrn!*” and she held out her hand for a few centavos. And in the moaning croon of her Indian voice the Englishman heard again the fathomless crooning

appeal of the Indian women, moaning stranger, more terrible than the ring-dove, with a sadness that had no horizon, and a rocking, moaning appeal that drew out the very marrow of the soul of a man. Over the door of her womb was written not only: "*Lasciate ogni speranza, voi ch'entrate,*" but: "*Perdite ogni pianto, voi ch'uscite.*" For the men who had known these women were beyond weeping and beyond even despair, mute in the timeless compulsion of the Greater Day. Big, proud men could sell glasses of ice-cream at twenty-five centavos, and not really know they were doing it. They were elsewhere, beyond despair. Only sometimes the last passion of the death-lust would sweep them, shut up as they were in the white man's lesser day, belonging as they did to the greater day.

The little train ran on to the main plateau, and to the junction with the main-line railway called the Queen's Own, a railway that still belongs to the English, and that joins Mexico City with the Gulf of Mexico. Here, in the big but forlorn railway restaurant the Englishman ordered the regular meal, that came with American mechanical take-it-or-leave-it flatness. He ate what he could, and went out again. There the vast plains were level and bare, under the blue winter sky, so pure, and not too hot, and in the distance the white cone of the volcano of Orizaba stood perfect in the middle air.

"There is no help, O man. Fear gives thee wings like a bird, death comes after thee open-mouthed, and thou soarest on the wind like a fly. But thy flight is not far, and thy flying is not long. Thou art a fish of the timeless Ocean, and must needs fall back. Take heed lest thou break thyself in the fall! For death is not in dying, but in the fear. Cease then the struggle of thy flight, and fall back into the deep element where death is and is not, and life is not a fleeing away. It is a beautiful thing to live and to be alive. Live then in the Greater Day, and let the waters carry thee, and the flood bear thee along, and live, only live, no more of this hurrying away."

"No more of this hurrying away." Even the Elizabethans had known it, the restlessness, the "hurrying away." Gethin Day knew he had been hurrying away. He had hurried perhaps a little too far, just over the edge. Now, try as he might, he was aware of a gap in his time-space *continuum*; he was, in the words of his ancestor, aware of the Greater Day showing through the cracks in the ordinary day. And it was useless trying to fill up the cracks. The little day was destined to crumble away, as far as he was concerned, and he would *have* to inhabit the greater day. The very sight of the volcano cone in mid-air made him know it. His little self was used up, worn out. He felt sick and frail, facing this change of life.

"Be still, then, be still! Wrap thyself in patience, shroud thyself in peace, as the tall volcano clothes himself in snow. Yet he looks down in him, and sees wet sun in him molten and of great force, stirring with the scald sperm of life. Be

still, above the sperm of life, which spills alone in its hour. Be still, as an apple on its core, as a nightingale in winter, as a long-waiting mountain upon its fire. Be still, upon thine own sun.

“For thou hast a sun in thee. Thou hast a sun in thee, and it is not timed. Therefore wait. Wait, and be at peace with thine own sun, which is thy sperm of life. Be at peace with thy sun in thee, as the volcano is, and the dark holly-bush before berry-time, and the long hours of night. Abide by thy sun in thee, even the onion doth so, though you see it not. Yet peel her, and her sun in thine eyes maketh tears. Each thing hath its little sun, even in the wicked house-fly something twinkleth.”

Standing there on the platform of the station open to the great plains of the plateau, Gethin Day said to himself: My old ancestor is more real to me than the restaurant, and the dinner I have eaten, after all. The train still did not come. He turned to another page of cornflower-blue writing, hoping to find something amusing.

“When earth inert lieth too heavy, then Vesuvius spitteth out fire. And if a nightingale would not sing, his song unsung in him would slay him. For to the nightingale his song is Nemesis, and unsung songs are the Erinyes, the impure Furies of vengeance. And thy sun in thee is thy all in all, so be patient, and take no care. Take no care, for what thou knowest is ever less than what thou art. The full fire even of thine own sun in thine own body, thou canst never know. So how shouldst thou load care upon thy sun? Take heed, take thought, take pleasure, take pain, take all things as thy sun stirs. Only fasten not thyself in care about anything, for care is impiety, it spits upon the sun.”

It was the white and still volcano, visionary across the swept plain, that looked back at him as he glanced up from his *Book of Days*. But there the train came, thundering, with all the mock majesty of great equipage, and the Englishman entered the Pullman car, and sat with his book in his pocket.

The train, almost with the splendour of the Greater Day, yet rickety and foolish at last, raced on the level, entered the defile, and crept, cautiously twining round and round, down the cliff-face of the plateau, with the low lands lying thousands of feet below, specked with a village or two like fine specks. Yet the low lands drew up, and the pine trees were gone far above, and at last the thick trees crowded the line, and dark-faced natives ran beside the train selling gardenias, gardenia perfume heavy in all the air. But the train nearly empty.

Veracruz at nightfall was a modern stone port, but disheartened and tropical, mostly shut up, abandoned, as if life had quietly left it. Great customs buildings, unworking, acres of pianofortes in packing-cases, all the endless jetsam of the little day of commerce flung up here and waiting, acres of goods unattended to,

waiting till the labour of Veracruz should cease to be on strike. A town, a port struck numb, the inner sun striking vengefully at the little life of commerce. The day's sun set, there was a heavy orange light over the waters, something sinister, a gloom, a deep resentment in nature, even in the washing of the warm sea. In these salt waters natives were still baptized to Christianity, and the socialists, in mockery perhaps, baptized themselves into the mystery of frustration and revenge. The port was in the hands of strikers and wild out-of-workers, and was blank. Officials had almost disappeared. Even here, a woman, a "lady" examined the passports.

But the ship rode at the end of the jetty: the one lonely passenger ship. There was one other steamer — from Sweden, a cargo boat. For the rest, the port was deserted. It was a point where the wild primeval day of this continent met the busy white man's day, and the two annulled one another. The result was a port of nullity, nihilism concrete and actual, calling itself the city of the True Cross.

2. THE GULF

In the morning they sailed off, away from the hot shores, from the high land hanging up inwards. And world gives place to world. In an hour, it was only ship and ocean, the world of land and affairs was gone.

There were few people on board. In the second-class saloon only seventeen souls. Gethin Day was travelling second. It was a German boat, he knew it would be clean and comfortable. The second-class fare was already forty-five pounds. And a man who is not rich, and who would live his life under as little compulsion as possible, must calculate keenly with money and its power. For the lesser day of money and the mealy-mouthed Mammon is always ready for a victim, and a man who has glimpsed the Greater Day, and the inward sun, will not fall into the clutches of Mammon's mean day, if he can help it. Gethin Day had a moderate income, and he looked on this as his bulwark against Mammon's despicable authority. The thought of earning a living was repulsive and humiliating to him.

In the first-class saloon were only four persons: two Danish merchants, stout and wealthy, who had been part of a bunch of Danish business men invited by the Mexican government to look at the business resources of the land. They had been feted and feasted, and shown what they were meant to see, so now, fuller of

business than ever, they were going back to Copenhagen to hatch the eggs they had conceived. But they had also eaten oysters in Veracruz, and the oysters also were inside them. They fell sick of poison, and lay deathly ill all the voyage, leaving the only other first-class passengers, an English knight and his son, alone in their glory. Gethin Day was sincerely glad he had escaped the first class, for the voyage was twenty days.

The seventeen souls of the second class were four of them English, two Danish, five Spaniards, five Germans, and a Cuban. They all sat at one long table in the dining-saloon, the Cuban at one end of the table, flanked by four English on his left, facing the five Spaniards across the table. Then came the two Danes, facing one another, and being buffer-state between the rest and the five Germans, who occupied the far end of the table. It was a German boat, so the Germans were very noisy, and the stewards served them first. The Spaniards and the Cuban were mum, the English were stiff, the Danes were uneasy, the Germans were boisterous, and so the first luncheon passed. It was the lesser day of the ship, and small enough. The menu being in correct German and doubtful Spanish, the Englishwoman on Gethin Day's right put up a lorgnette and stared at it. She was unable to stare it out of countenance, so she put it down and ate uninformed as to what she was eating. The Spaniard opposite Gethin Day had come to table without collar or tie, doing the bluff, go-to-hell colonial touch, almost in his shirtsleeves. He was a man of about thirty-two. He brayed at the steward in strange, harsh Galician Spanish, the steward grinned somewhat sneeringly and answered in German, having failed to understand, and not prepared to exert himself to try. Down the table a blonde horse of a woman was shouting at the top of her voice, in harsh North-German, to a Herr Doktor with turned-up moustaches who presided at the German head of the table. The Spaniards bent forward in a row to look with a sort of silent horror at the yelling woman, then they looked at one another with a faint grimace of mocking repulsion. The Galician banged the table with the empty wine-decanter: wine was "included." The steward, with a sneering little grin at such table-manners, brought a decanter half full. Wine was not *ad lib.*, but *a discretion*. The Spaniards, having realized this, henceforth snatched it quickly and pretty well emptied the decanter before the English got a shot at it. Which somewhat amused the table-stewards, who wanted to see the two foreign lots fight it out. But Gethin Day solved this problem by holding out his hand to the fat, clean-shaven Basque, as soon as the decanter reached that gentleman, and saying: "May I serve the lady?" Whereupon the Basque handed over the decanter, and Gethin helped the two ladies and himself, before handing back the decanter to the Spaniards. — Man wants but little here below, but he's damn well got to see

he gets it. — All this is part of the little day, which has to be seen to. Whether it is interesting or not depends on one's state of soul.

Bristling with all the bristles of offence and defence which a man has to put up the first days in such a company, Gethin Day would go off down the narrow gangway of the bottom deck, down into the steerage, where the few passengers lay about in shirt and trousers, on to the very front tip of the boat.

She was a long, narrow, old ship, long like a cigar, and not much space in her. Yet she was pleasant, and had a certain grace of her own, was a real ship, not merely a "liner." She seemed to travel swift and clean, piercing away into the Gulf.

Gethin Day would sit for hours at the very tip of the ship, on the bowsprit, looking out into the whitish sunshine of the hot Gulf of Mexico. Here he was alone, and the world was all strange white sunshine, candid, and water, warm, bright water, perfectly pure beneath him, of an exquisite frail green. It lifted vivid wings from the running tip of the ship, and threw white pinion-spray from its green edges. And always, always, always it was in the two-winged fountain, as the ship came like life between, and always the spray fell swishing, pattering from the green arch of the water-wings. And below, as yet untouched, a moment ahead, always a moment ahead, and perfectly untouched, was the lovely green depth of the water, depth, deep, shallow-pale emerald above an under sapphire-green, dark and pale, blue and shimmer-green, two waters, many waters, one water, perfect in unison, one moment ahead of the ship's bows, so serene, fathomless and pure and free of time. It was very lovely, and on the softly-lifting bowsprit of the long, swift ship the body was cradled in the sway of timeless life, the soul lay in the jewel-coloured moment, the jewel-pure eternity of this gulf of nowhere.

And always, always, like a dream, the flocks of flying fish swept into the air, from nowhere, and went brilliantly twinkling in their flight of silvery watery wings rapidly fluttering, away, low as swallows over the smooth curved surface of the sea, then gone again, vanished, without splash or evidence, gone. One alone like a little silver twinkle. Gone! The sea was still and silky-surfaced, blue and softly heaving, empty, purity itself, sea, sea, sea.

Then suddenly the faint whispering crackle, and a cloud of silver on webs of pure, fluttering water was soaring low over the surface of the sea, at an angle from the ship, as if jettied away from the cut-water, soaring in a low arc, fluttering with the wild emphasis of grasshoppers or locusts suddenly burst out of the grass, in a wild rush to make away, make away, and making it, away, away, then suddenly gone, like a lot of lights blown out in one breath. And still the ship did not pause, any more than the moon pauses, neither to look nor catch

breath. But the soul pauses and holds its breath, for wonder, wonder, which is the very breath of the soul.

All the long morning he would be there curled in the wonder of this gulf of creation, where the flying fishes on translucent wings swept in their ecstatic clouds out of the water, in a terror that was brilliant as joy, in a joy brilliant with terror, with wings made of pure water flapping with great speed, and long-shafted bodies of translucent silver like squirts of living water, there in air, brilliant in air, before suddenly they had disappeared, and the blue sea was trembling with a delicate frail surface of green, the still sea lay one moment ahead, untouched, untouched since time began, in its watery loveliness.

Sometimes a ship's officer would come and peer over the edge, and look at him lying there. But nothing was said. People didn't like looking over the edge. It was too beautiful, too pure and lovely, the Greater Day. They shoved their snouts a moment over the rail, then withdrew, faintly abashed, faintly sneering, faintly humiliated. After all, they showed snouts, nothing but snouts, to the unbegotten morning, so they might well be humiliated.

Sometimes an island, two islands, three, would show up, dismal and small, with the peculiar American gloom. No land! The soul wanted to see the land. Only the uninterrupted water was purely lovely, pristine.

And the third morning there was a school of porpoises leading the ship. They stayed below surface all the time, so there was no hullabaloo of human staring. Only Gethin Day saw them. And what joy! what joy of life! what marvellous pure joy of being a porpoise within the great sea, of being many porpoises heading and mocking in translucent onrush the menacing, yet futile onrush of a vast ship!

It was a spectacle of the purest and most perfected joy in life that Gethin Day ever saw. The porpoises were ten or a dozen, round-bodied torpedo fish, and they stayed there as if they were not moving, always there, with no motion apparent,- under the purely pellucid water, yet speeding on at just the speed of the ship, without the faintest show of movement, yet speeding on in the most miraculous precision of speed. It seemed as if the tail-flukes of the last fish exactly touched the ship's bows, under-water, with the frailest, yet precise and permanent touch. It seemed as if nothing moved, yet fish and ship swept on through the tropical ocean. And the fish moved, they changed places all the time. They moved in a little cloud, and with the most wonderful sport they were above, they were below, they were to the fore, yet all the time the same one speed, the same one speed, and the last fish just touching with his tail-flukes the iron cut-water of the ship. Some would be down in the blue, shadowy, but horizontally motionless in the same speed. Then with a strange revolution, these

would be up in pale green water, and others would be down. Even the toucher, who touched the ship, would in a twinkling be changed. And ever, ever the same pure horizontal speed, sometimes a dark back skimming the water's surface light, from beneath, but never the surface broken. And ever the last fish touching the ship, and ever the others speeding in motionless, effortless speed, and intertwining with strange silkiness as they sped, intertwining among one another, fading down to the dark blue shadow, and strangely emerging again among the silent, swift others, in pale green water. All the time, so swift, they seemed to be laughing.

Gethin Day watched spell-bound, minute after minute, an hour, two hours, and still it was the same, the ship speeding, cutting the water, and the strong-bodied fish heading in perfect balance of speed underneath, mingling among themselves in some strange single laughter of multiple consciousness, giving off the joy of life, sheer joy of life, togetherness in pure complete motion, many lusty-bodied fish enjoying one laugh of life, sheer togetherness, perfect as passion. They gave off into the water their marvellous joy of life, such as the man had never met before. And it left him wonderstruck.

“But they know joy, they know pure joy!” he said to himself in amazement. “This is the most laughing joy I have ever seen, pure and unmixed. I always thought flowers had brought themselves to the most beautiful perfection in nature. But these fish, these fleshy, warm-bodied fish achieve more than flowers, heading along. This is the purest achievement of joy I have seen in all life: these strong, careless fish. Men have not got in them that secret to be alive together and make one like a single laugh, yet each fish going his own gait. This is sheer joy — and men have lost it, or never accomplished it. The cleverest sportsmen in the world are owls beside these fish. And the togetherness of love is nothing to the spinning unison of dolphins playing under-sea. It would be wonderful to know joy as these fish know it. The life of the deep waters is ahead of us, it contains sheer togetherness and sheer joy. We have never got there.”

There as he leaned over the bowsprit he was mesmerized by one thing only, by joy, by joy of life, fish speeding in water with playful joy. No wonder Ocean was still mysterious, when such red hearts beat in it! No wonder man, with his tragedy, was a pale and sickly thing in comparison! What civilization will bring us to such a pitch of swift laughing togetherness, as these fish have reached?

3. THE ATLANTIC

The ship came in the night to Cuba, to Havana. When she became still, Gethin Day looked out of his port-hole and saw litde lights on upreared darkness. Havanal They went on shore next morning, through the narrow dock-streets near the wharf, to the great boulevard. It was a lovely warm morning, already early December, and the town was in the streets, going to mass, or coming out of the big, unpleasant old churches. The Englishman wandered with the two Danes for an hour or so, in the not very exciting city. Many Americans were wandering around, and nearly all wore badges of some sort. The city seemed, on the surface at least, very American. And underneath, it did not seem to have any very deep character of its own left.

The three men hired a car to drive out and about. The elder of the Danes, a man of about forty-five, spoke fluent colloquial Spanish, learned on the oil-fields of Tampico. "Tell me," he said to the chauffeur, "why do all these *americanos*, these Yankees, wear badges on themselves?"

He spoke, as foreigners nearly always do speak of the Yankees, in a tone of half-spiteful jeering.

"Ah, Senor," said the driver, with a Cuban grin. "You know they all come here to drink. They drink so much that they all get lost at night, so they all wear a badge: name, name of hotel, place where it is. Then our policemen find them in the night, turn them over as they lie on the pavement, read name, name of hotel, and place, and so they are put on a cart and carted to home. Ah, the season is only just beginning. Wait a week or two, and they will lie in the streets at night like a battle, and the police doing Red Cross work, carting them to their hotels. Ah, *los americanos!* They are so good. You know they own us now. Yes, they own us. They own Havana. We are a Republic owned by the Americans. *Muy bien*, we give them drink, they give us money. Bali!"

And he grinned with a kind of acrid indifference. He sneered at the whole show, but he wasn't going to do anything about it.

The car drove out to the famous beer-gardens, where all drank beer — then to the inevitable cemetery, which almost rivalled that of New Orleans. "Every person buried in this cemetery guarantees to put up a tomb-monument costing not less than fifty-thousand dollars." Then they drove past the new suburb of villas, springing up neat and tidy, spick-and-span, same all the world over. Then the) drove out into the country, past the old sugar *hacicndas* and to the hills.

And to Gethin Day it was all merely depressing and void of real interest. The Yankees owned it all. It had not much character of its own. And what character it had was the peculiar, dreary character of all America wherever it is a little abandoned. The peculiar gloom of Connecticut or New Jersey, Louisiana or

Georgia, a sort of dreariness in the very bones of the land, that shows through immediately the human effort sinks. How quickly the gloom and the inner dreariness of Cuba must have affected the spirit of the Con-quistadores, even Columbus!

They drove back to town and ate a really good meal, and watched a stout American couple, apparently man and wife, lunching with a bottle of champagne, a bottle of hock, and a bottle of Burgundy for the two of them, and apparently drinking them all at once. It made one's head reel.

The bright, sunny afternoon they spent on the esplanade by the sea. There the great hotels were still shut. But they had, so to speak, half an eye open: a tea-room going, for example.

And Day thought again, how tedious the little day can be! How difficult to spend even one Sunday looking at a city like Havana, even if one has spent the morning driving into the country. The infinite tedium of looking at things! the infinite boredom of things anyhow. Only the rippling, bright, pale-blue sea, and the old fort, gave one the feeling of life. The rest, the great esplanade, the great boulevard, the great hotels, all seemed what they were, dead, dried concrete, concrete, dried deadness.

Everybody was thankful to be back on the ship for dinner, in the dark loneliness of the wharves. See Naples and die. Go seeing any place, and you'll be half dead of exhaustion and tedium by dinner time.

So! good-bye, Havana! The engines were going before breakfast time. It was a bright blue morning. Wharves and harbour slid past, the high bows moved backwards. Then the ship deliberately turned her back on Cuba and the sombre shore, and began to move north, through the blue day, which passed like a sleep. They were moving now into wide space.

The next morning they woke to greyness, grey low sky, and hideous low grey water, and a still air. Sandwiched between two greynesses, the long, wicked old ship sped on, as unto death.

"What has happened?" Day asked of one of the officers.

"We have come north, to get into the current running east. We come north about the latitude of New York, then we run due east with the stream."

"What a wicked shame!"

And indeed it was. The sun was gone, the blueness was gone, life was gone. The Atlantic was like a cemetery, an endless, infinite cemetery of greyness, where the bright, lost world of Atlantis is buried. It was December, grey, dark December on a waste of ugly, dead-grey water, under a dead-grey sky.

And so they ran into a swell, a long swell whose oily, sickly waves seemed hundreds of miles long, and travelling in the same direction as the ship's course.

The narrow cigar of a ship heaved up the up-slope with a nauseating heave, up, up, up, till she righted for a second sickeningly on the top, then tilted, and her screw raced like a dentist's burr in a hollow tooth. Then down she slid, down the long, shivering downslope, leaving all her guts behind her, and the guts of all the passengers too. In an hour, everybody was deathly white, and sicklily grinning, thinking it a sort of joke that would soon be over. Then everybody disappeared, and the game went on: up, up, up, heavingly up, till a pause, ahl — then burr-rr-rr! as the screw came out of water and shattered every nerve. Then whoo-oosh! the long and awful downrush, leaving the entrails behind.

She was like a plague-ship, everybody disappeared, stewards and everybody. Gethin Day felt as if he had taken poison: and he slept — slept, slept, slept, and yet was all the time aware of the ghastly motion — up, up, up, heavingly up, then ah! one moment, followed by the shattering burr-rr-rr! and the unspeakable ghaslliness of the downhill slither, where death seemed inside the entrails, and water chattered like the after-death. He was aware of the hour-long moaning, moaning of the Spanish doctor's fat, pale Mexican wife, two cabins away. It went on for ever. Everything went on for ever. Everything was like this for ever, for ever. And he slept, slept, slept, for thirty hours, yet knowing it all, registering just the endless repetition of the motion, the ship's loud squeaking and chirruping, and the ceaseless moaning of the woman.

Suddenly at tea-time the second day he felt better. He got up. The "Ship was empty. A ghastly steward gave him a ghastly cup of tea, then disappeared. He dozed again, but came to dinner.

They were three people at the long table, in the horribly travelling grey silence: himself, a young Dane, and the elderly, dried Englishwoman. She talked, talked. The three looked in terror at *Sauerkraut* and smoked loin of pork. But they ate a little. Then they looked out on the utterly repulsive, grey, oily, windless night. Then they went to bed again.

The third evening it began to rain, and the motion was subsiding. They were running out of the swell. But it was an experience to remember.

ACCUMULATED MAIL

If there is one thing I don't look forward to it's my mail.

*Look out! Look out! Look out!
Look out! The postman comes!
His double knocking makes us start,
It rouses echoes in the heart,
It wakens expectation, and hope and agitation, etc., etc.*

So we used to sing, in school.

Now, the postman is no knocker. He pitches the mail-bag into a box on a tree, and kicks his horse forward.

And when one has been away, and a heap of letters and printed stuff slithers out under one's eyes, there is neither hope nor expectation in the heart, but only repulsion, as if it were something nauseous one had to eat.

Business letters — all rather dreary. Bank letters, with the nasty green used-up checks, and a dwindling small balance. Family letters: *We are so disappointed you are not coming to England. We wanted you to see the baby, he is so bonny: the new house, it is awfully nice: the show of the daffodils and crocuses down the garden.* Friends' letters: *The winter has been very trying.* And then the unknown correspondents. They are the worst. ... *If you saw my little blue-eyed darling, you could not refuse her anything — not even an autograph. . . .* The high-school students somewhere in Massachusetts or in Maryland are in the habit of choosing by name some unknown man, whom they accept as a sort of guide. A group has chosen me — will I send them a letter of encouragement or of help in the battle of life? Well, I would willingly, but what on earth am I to say to them? *My dear young people: I daren't advise you to do as I do, for it's no fun, writing unpopular books. And I won't advise you, for your own sakes, to do as I say. For in details I'm sure I'm wrong. My dear young people, perhaps I need your encouragement more than you need mine. . . .* Well, that's no message!

Then there's the letter signed "A Mother" — from Lenton, Nottingham: telling me she has been reading *Sons~and Lovers*, and is there not misery enough in Nottingham (my home town) without my indicating where vice can be found, and (to cut short) how it can be practised? She saw a young woman reading *Sons and Lovers*, but was successful in preventing her from finishing the book. And the book was so well written, it was a pity the author could not have kept it clean. "As it is, although so interesting, it cannot be mentioned in polite

society.” Signed “A Mother.” (Let us hope the young woman who was saved from finishing *Soils and Lovers* may also be saved from becoming, in her turn, A Mother!)

Then the letter from some gentleman in New York beginning: *I am afraid you may consider this letter an impertinence.* If he was afraid, then what colossal impertinence to carry on to two sheets, and then post his impudence to me. The substance was: *I should like to know, in the controversy between you and Norman Douglas (I didn't know myself that there was a controversy), how it was the Magnus manuscript came into your hands, and you came to publish it, when clearly it was left to Douglas? In this case, why should you be making a lot of money out of another man's work? — Of course, I know it is your Introduction which sells the book. Magnus's manuscript is trash, and not worth reading. Still, for the satisfaction of myself and many of my readers, I wish you could make it clear how you come to be profiting by a work that is not your own.*

Apparently this gentleman's sense of his own impertinence only drove him deeper in. He has obviously read neither Magnus's work nor my *Introduction* — else he would plainly have seen that this MS. was detained by Magnus's creditors, at his death, and handed by them to me, in the poor hope of recovering some of the money lost with that little adventurer. Moreover, if I wrote the only part of the book that is worth reading (/ don't say so) — the only part for which people buy the book (they're not *my* words) — then it is my work they buy! This out of my genteel correspondent's own mouth — because *I do not* consider Magnus's work trash. Finally, if I get half proceeds for a book of which practically half was written by me and the other half sells on my account, who in heaven's name is going to be impertinent to me? Nobody, without a kick in the pants. As for Douglas, if he could have paid the dead man's debts, he might have “executed” the dead man's literary works to his heart's content. Why doesn't he do something with the rest of the remains? Was this poor Foreign Legion MS. the only egg in the nest? Anyhow, let us hope that those particular debts for which this MS. was detained, will now be paid. And R.I.P. Anyhow, I shan't be a rich man on the half profits.

But this is not all my precious mail. . . . From a London editor and a friend (*soi-disant*): *Perhaps you would understand other people better if you did not think that you were always right.* How one learns things about oneself! Or is it really about the other person? I always find that my critics pretending to criticize me, are analysing themselves. My own private opinion is that I have been, as far as people go, almost every time wrong! Anyhow, my desire to “understand other people better” is turning to dread of finding out any more about them. This “friend” goes on to say, will I ask my literary agent to let him have some articles

of mine at a considerably cheaper figure than the agent puts on them?

It is not done yet. There is Mr. Muir's article about me in the *Nation*. Never did I feel so baffled, confronting myself in my worst moments, as I feel when I read this "elucidation" of myself. I hope it isn't my fault that Mr. Muir plays such havoc between two stools. I think I read that he is a young man, and younger critic. It seems a pity he hasn't "A Mother" to take the books from him before he can do himself any more harm. Truly, I don't want him to read them. "There remain his gifts, splendid in their imperfection," — this is Mr. Muir about me — "thrown recklessly into a dozen books, fulfilling themselves in none. His chief title to greatness is that he has brought a new mode of seeing into literature, a new beauty which is also one of the oldest things in the world. It is the beauty of the ancient instinctive life which civilized man has almost forgotten. Mr. Lawrence has picked up a thread of life left behind by mankind; and at some time it will be woven in with the others, making human life more complete, as all art tends to. . . . Life has come to him fresh from the minting at a time when it seemed to everyone soiled and banal. He has many faults, and many of these are wilful. He has not fulfilled the promise shown in *Sons and Lovers* and *The Rainbow*. He has not submitted himself to any discipline. The will (in Mr. Lawrence's characters) is not merely weak and inarticulate, it is in abeyance; it does not come into action. To this tremendous extent the tragedy in Mr. Lawrence's novels fails in significance. We remember the scenes in his novels; we forget the names of his men and women. We should not know any of them if we met them in the street, as we should know Anna Karenina, or Crevel, or Soames Forsyte. . . ." (Who is Crevel?)

Now listen, you, Mr. Muir, and my dear readers. You read me for your own sakes, not for mine. You do me no favour by reading me. I am not indebted to you in the least if you spend two dollars on a book. You do it entirely for your own delectation. Spend the dollars on chewing-gum, it keeps the mouth busy and doesn't fly to the brain. I shall live just as blithly, unbought and unsold. When you buy chewing-gum, do you feel you acquire divine rights over the mind and soul of Mr. Wrigley? If you do, it's like your impudence. Therefore get it out of your heads that you are throned aloft like the gods, called upon to utter divine judgment. Your lofty seats, after all, are more like tall baby-chairs than thrones of the gods of judgment. . . . But here goes, for an answer.

1. I have lunched with Mr. Banality, and I'm sure I should know him if I met him in the street. . . . Is that my fault, or his? — Alas, that I should recognize people in the street, by their noses bonnets, or beauty. I don't care about their noses, bonnets, or beauty. Does nothing exist beyond that which is recognizable in the street? — How does my cat recognize me in the dark? — Ugh, thank God

there are more and other sorts of vision than the kodak sort which Mr. Muir esteems above all others.

2. “The will is not merely weak and inarticulate, it is in abeyance.” — Ah, my dear Mr. Muir, the will of the modern young gentleman may not be in your opinion weak and inarticulate, but certainly it is as mechanical as a Ford car engine. To this extent is the tragedy of modern young men insignificant. Oh, you little gods in the machine, stop the engine for a bit, do!

3. “He has not submitted himself to any discipline.” — Try, Mr. Muir *et al.*, putting your little iron will into abeyance for one hour daily, and see if it doesn’t need a harder discipline than this doing of your “daily dozen” and all your other mechanical repetitions. Believe me, today, the little god in a Ford machine cannot get at the thing worth having, not even with the most praiseworthy little engine of a will.

4. “He has not fulfilled the promise of *Sons and Lovers* and *The Rainbow*.” — Just after *The Rainbow* was published, the most eminent figure in English letters told me to my nose that this work was a failure. Now, after ten years, Mr. Muir finds it “promising.” Go ahead, O Youth. But whatever promise you read into *The Rainbow*, remember it’s like the little boy who “promised” his mother to be good if she’d “promise” to take him to the pantomime. I promise nothing, inside or out of *The Rainbow*.

5. “Life has come to him fresh from the minting at a time when it seemed to everyone stale and banal.” — Come! Come! Mr. Muir! With all that “spirit” of yours, and all that “intellect,” and with all that “will,” and all that “discipline,” do you dare to confess that (I suppose you lump yourself in among everyone) life seemed to you stale and banal? — If so, something must be badly wrong with you and your psychic equipment, and Mr. Lawrence wouldn’t be in your shoes for all the money and the “cleverness” in the world.

6. “Mr. Lawrence has picked up a thread of life left behind by mankind.” — Darn your socks with it, Mr. Muir?

7. “It is the beauty of the ancient instinctive life which civilized man has almost forgotten.” — He may have forgotten it, but he can put a label on it and price it at a figure and let it go cheap, in one and a half minutes. Ah, my dear Mr. Muir, when do you consider ancient life ended, and “civilized” life began? And which is stale and banal? Wherein does staleness lie, Mr. Muir? As for “ancient life,” it may be ancient to you, but it is still alive and kicking in some people. And “ancient life” is far more deeply conscious than you can even imagine. And its discipline goes into regions where you have no existence.

8. “His chief title to greatness is that he has brought a new mode of seeing into literature, a new beauty,” etc., etc. — Easy, of course, as re-trimming an old

hat. Michael Arlen does it better! Looks more modish, the old hat. — But shouldn't it be a new mode of "feeling" or "knowing" rather than of "seeing"? Since none of my characters would be recognizable in the street?

9. "There remain his gifts, splendid in their imperfection." — Ugh, Mr. Muir, think how horrible for us all, if I were perfect! or even if I had "perfect" gifts! — Isn't splendour enough for you, Mr. Muir? Or do you find the peacock more "perfect" when he is moulting and has lost his tail, and therefore isn't so exaggerated, but is more "down to normal"? — For "perfection" is only one of the attributes of "the normal" and "the average" in modern thought.

Well, I don't want to be just or to be kind. There is a further justice and a greater kindness than this niggling tolerance business, and suffering fools gladly. Fools bore me — but I don't mean Mr. Muir. He is a phoenix, compared to most. I wonder what it is that the rainbow — I mean the natural phenomenon — stands for in my own consciousness! I don't know all it means to me. — Is this lack of intellectual capacity on my part? Or is it because the rainbow is somehow not quite "normal," and therefore not quite fit for intellectual appreciation? Of course white light passing through prisms of falling raindrops makes a rainbow. Let us therefore sell it by the yard.

For me, give me a little splendour, and I'll leave perfection to the small fry.

But oh, my other anonymous little critic, what shall I say to thee? *Mr. Lawrence's horses are all mares or stallions.*

Honi soit qui mal y pense, my dear, though I'm sure the critic is a gentleman (I daren't say a *man*) and not a lady.

Little critics' horses (sic) are all geldings.

Another little critic: "Mr. Lawrence's introspective intelligence is too feeble to balance this melodramatic fancy in activities which cater for a free play of mind."

Retort simple: Mr. Lawrence's intelligence would prevent his writing such a sentence down, and sending it to print. — What can those activities be which "cater for a free play of mind" (whatever that may mean) and at the same time have "introspective intelligence" (what quite is this?) balancing "melodramatic fancy" (what is this either?) within them?

Same critic, finishing the same sentence: ". . . and so, since criticism begins at home, his (Mr. Lawrence's) latter-day garment of philosopher and preacher is shot through with the vulgarity of aggressive self-ignorance."

Retort simple: If criticism begins at home, then the professional, and still more so the amateur critic (I suspect this gentleman to be the latter), is never by any chance at home. He is always out sponging on some author. As for a "latter-day garment of philosopher and preacher" (I never before knew a philosopher and a

preacher transmogrified into a garment) being “shot through with the vulgarity of aggressive self-ignorance,” was it grapeshot, or duck-shot, or just shot-silk effect?

Alas, this young critic is “shot through” with ignorance even more extensive than that of self. Or perhaps it is only his garment of critic and smart little fellow which is so shot through, *perce* or *miroite*, according to fancy — “melodramatic fancy” balanced by “introspective intelligence,” “in activities which cater for a free play of mind.”

“We cater to the Radical Trade,” says Jimmie Higgins’s advertisement. Another friend and critic: “Lawrence is an artist, but his intellect is not up to his art.”

You might as well say: Mr. Lawrence rides a horse but he doesn’t wear his stirrups round his neck. And the accusation is just. Because he hopes to heaven he is riding a horse that is alive of itself, not a wooden hobbyhorse suitable for the nursery. — And he does his best to keep his feet in the stirrups, and to leave his intellect under his hat, when he is riding his naughty steed. No, my dears! I guess, as an instrument, my intellect is as good as yours. But instead of sitting in my own wheelbarrow (the intellect is a sort of wheelbarrow about the place) and whipping it ecstatically over the head, I just wheel out what dump I’ve got, and forget the old barrow again, till next time.

And now, thank God, I can throw all my mail, letters, used checks, pamphlets, periodicals, clippings from the “press,” Ave Marias, paternosters, and bunk, into the fire. — When I get a particularly smelly bit of sentiment, I always burn it slowly, invoking the Lord thus: “Lord! *Herrgott! nimm du diesen Opferrauch!* Take Thou this smoke of sacrifice. — The sacrifice of blood is no longer acceptable, for blood has turned to water: all is vapour! Therefore, O Lord, this choice titbit of the spirit, this kidney-fat of sentiment, accept it, O Lord, from Thy servant. . . . This firstling of the sentimental herd, this young ram without spot or blemish, from the aesthetic flock, this adamantine young he-goat, from the troops of human “stunts” — see, Lord, I cut their throats and burn the cardboard fat of them. Lord of the Spirit, Lord of the Universal Mind, Lord of the cosmic will, snuff up the smoke of this burnt-paper offering, for it makes my eyes smart — ”

I wish they’d make His eyes smart as well! this Lord of sentimentalism, aestheticism, and stunts. One day I’ll make a sacrifice of Him too: to my own Lord, who broods at the centre of all the worlds, over His own fathomless Desire.

THE LATE MR. MAURICE MAGNUS: A LETTER

To the Editor of The New Statesman:

Sir, — Referring to the review published in your last issue of Mr. Norman Douglas's *Experiments*, will you give me a little space in which to shake off Mr. Douglas's insinuations — to put it mildly-regarding my introduction to Maurice Magnus's *Memoirs of the Foreign Legion*? When Mr. Douglas's "pamphlet" first appeared I was in New Mexico, and it seemed too far off to trouble. But now that the essay is enshrined in Mr. Douglas's new book, *Experiments*, it is time that I said a word. One becomes weary of being slandered.

The whole circumstances of my acquaintance with Maurice Magnus, and the facts of his death, are told in my introduction as truthfully as a man can tell a thing. After the suicide of Magnus, I had continual letters from the two Maltese, whom I had met through Magnus, asking for redress. I knew them personally — which Douglas did not. Myself, I had not the money to repay Magnus's borrowings. All the literary remains were left to Douglas, in the terms of Magnus's will. But then, after his death, all Magnus's effects were confiscated, owing to his debts. There was really nothing to confiscate, since the very furniture of the house had been lent by the young Maltese, B — . There were the MSS. — the bulk of them worthless. Only those *Memoirs of the Foreign Legion*, which I had gone over previously with Magnus, might be sold.

I wrote to B — that Norman Douglas would no doubt get the *Memoirs* published. The reply came from Malta, B — would never put anything into the hands of Douglas. I then wrote to Douglas — and, remembering the care with which he files all his letters, I kept his reply. Parts of this reply I quote here:

Florence,

26th December, 1921.

Dear Lawrence, So many thanks for yours of the 20th.

Damn the Foreign Legion. ... I have done my best, and if B — had sent it to me the book would be published by this time, and B — £30 or £50 the richer. Some folks are hard to please. By all means do what you like with the MS. As to M. himself, I may do some kind of memoir of him later on — independent of Foreign Legions. Put me into your introduction. if you tike. . . .

Pocket nil the cash yourself. B — seems to be such a fool that he doesn't deserve any.

I'm out of it and, *for once in my life*, with a clean conscience. . . .

Yours always,
NORMAN DOUGLAS.

The italics in this letter are Douglas's own. As for his accusation of my "unkindness" to Magnus, that too is funny. Certainly Magnus was generous with his money when he had any; who knew that better than Douglas? But did I make it appear otherwise? And when Magnus wanted *actual* help — not postmortem sentiment — where did he look for it? To the young Maltese who would have no dealings whatsoever with Norman Douglas, after the suicide.

Then I am accused of making money out of Magnus's effects. I should never have dreamed of writing a word about Magnus, save for the continual painful letters from the Maltese. Then I did it solely and simply to discharge a certain obligation. For curiously enough, both B — and S — seemed to regard me as in some way responsible for their troubles with Magnus. I had been actually there with them and Magnus, and had driven in their motor-car. To discharge an obligation I do not admit, I wrote the Introduction. And when it was written, in the year 1922, it started the round of the publishers, as introducing the *Memoirs of the Foreign Legion*, and everywhere it was refused. More than one publisher said: "We will publish the Introduction alone, without the Magnus Memoirs." To which I said: "That's no good. The Introduction only exists for the Memoirs."

So, for two years, nothing happened. It is probable that I could have sold the Introduction to one of the large popular American magazines, as a "personal" article. And that would have meant at least a thousand dollars for me. Whereas I shall never see a thousand dollars, by a long chalk, from this *Memoirs* book. Nevertheless, by this time B — will have received in full the money he lent to Magnus. I shall have received as much — as much, perhaps, as I would get in America for a popular short story.

As for Mr. Douglas, he must gather himself haloes where he may.

Yours, etc., D. H. LAWRENCE.

THE UNDYING MAN

Long ago in Spain there were two very learned men, so clever and knowing so much that they were famous all over the world. One was called Rabbi Moses Maimonides, a Jew — blessed be his memory! — and the other was called Aristotle, a Christian who belonged to the Greeks.

These two were great friends, because they had always studied together and found out many things together. At last after many years, they found out a thing they had been specially trying for. They discovered that if you took a tiny little vein out of a man's body, and put it in a glass jar with certain leaves and plants, it would gradually begin to grow, and would grow and grow until it became a man. When it had grown as big as a boy, you could take it out of the jar, and then it would live and keep on growing till it became a man, a fine man who would never die. He would be undying. Because he had never been born, he would never die, but live for ever and ever. Because the wisest men on earth had made him, and he didn't have to be born.

When they were quite sure it was so, then the Rabbi Moses Maimonides and the Christian Aristotle decided they would really make a man. Up till then, they had only experimented. But now they would make the real undying man.

The question was, from whom should they take the little vein? Because the man they took it from would die. So at first they decided to take it from a slave. But then they thought, a slave wasn't good enough to make the beginnings of the undying man. So they decided to ask one of their devoted students to sacrifice himself. But that did not seem right either, because they might get a man they didn't really like, and whom they wouldn't want to be the beginning of the man who would never die. So at last, they decided to leave it to fate; they gathered together their best and most learned disciples, and they all agreed to draw lots. The lot fell to Aristotle, to have the little vein cut from his body.

So Aristotle had to agree. But before he would have the little vein cut out of his body, Aristotle asked Maimonides to take him by the hand and swear by their clasped hands that he would never interfere with the growth of the little vein, never at any time or in any way. Maimonides took him by the hand and swore. And then Aristotle had the little vein cut out of his body by Maimonides himself.

So now Maimonides alone took the little vein and placed it among the leaves and herbs, as they had discovered, in the great glass jar, and he sealed the jar.

Then he set the jar on a shelf in his own room where nobody entered but himself, and he waited. The days passed by, and he recited his prayers, pacing back and forth in his room among his books, and praying loudly as he paced, as the Jews do. Then he returned to his books and his chemistry. But every day he looked at the jar, to see if the little vein had changed. For a long time it did not change. So he thought it was in vain.

Then at last it seemed to change, to have grown a little. Rabbi Moses Maimonides gazed at the jar transfixed, and forgot everything else in all the wide world; lost to all and everything, he gazed into the jar. And at last he saw the tiniest, tiniest tremor in the little vein, and he knew it was a tremor of growth. He sank on the floor and lay unconscious, because he had seen the first tremor of growth of the undying man.

When he came to himself, the room was dusk, it was almost night. And Rabbi Moses Maimonides was afraid. He did not know what he was afraid of. He rose to his feet, and glanced towards the jar. And it seemed to him, in the darkness on the shelf there was a tiny red glow, like the smallest ember of fire. But it did not go out, as the last ember of fire goes out while you watch. It stayed on, and glowed a tiny dying glow that did not die. Then he knew he saw the glow of the life of the undying man, and he was afraid.

He locked his room, where no one ever entered but himself, and went out into the town. People greeted him with bows and reverences, for he was the most learned of all rabbis. But tonight they all seemed very far from him. They looked small and they grimaced like monkeys in his eyes. And he thought to himself: They will all die! They grimace in this fashion, like monkeys, because they will all die. Only I shall not die!

But as he thought this, his heart stood still, because he knew that he too would die. He stood still in the street, though rain was falling, and people crept past him humbly, thinking he was praying some great prayer. But he was only locked in this one thought: I shall die and pass away, but that little red spark which came from Aristotle the Christian, it will never die. It will live for ever and ever, like God. God alone lives for ever and ever. But this man in the jar will also live for ever and ever, even that red spark. He will be a man, and live for ever and ever, as good as God. Nay, better than God! For surely, to be as good as God, and to be also a man and alive, that would be better even than being God!

Rabbi Moses Maimonides started at this thought as if he had been stung. And immediately he began to walk down the street towards home, to see if the red glow were really glowing. When he got to his door, he stood still, afraid to open. He could not open.

So suddenly he cried a great fierce cry to God, to help him and His people. A

great fierce cry for help. For they were God's people, God's chosen people. Though they grimaced in the sight of Rabbi Moses Maimonides like monkeys, they were beautiful in the sight of God, and the best Jews among them would sit in high, high places in the eternal glory of God, in the after-life.

This thought so emboldened Maimonides that he opened his door and entered his room. But he stood again as if pierced through the body by that strange red light, like no light of God, which glowed so tiny and yet was so fierce and strong. "Fierce and strong! fierce and strong!" he kept muttering to himself as he paced back and forth in his room. "Fierce and strong!" His servant thought he was praying, and she dared not bring his food to the door. "Fierce and strong!" — he paced back and forth. And he himself thought he was praying. He was so used to praying the ritual prayers as he paced in his room, that now he thought he was praying to the one and only God. But in fact, all he was saying was "Fierce and strong! Fierce and strong!"

At last he sank down in exhaustion, and then his woman tapped at his door and set down the tray. But he told her to take the tray away, he would not eat in his room, but would come downstairs. For he could not eat in the presence of that little red glow.

So he made his ablutions and went downstairs and ate. And he slept in the guest-room, for he could not sleep in the presence of the little red glow. Indeed he could not sleep at all, but lay and groaned in spirit, thinking of that little red light which alone of all light was not the light of God. And he knew it would grow and grow, and be a man, most splendid, a man who would never die. And all the people would think: What is the most wonderful of all things, seen or unseen? — And there would come the [Unfinished]

NOAH S FLOOD

NOAH

SHEM (the Utterer) and KANAH (the Echoer)

I am, it is. — it was, it shall be.

HAM (Heat) and SHELAH (Flux)

JAPHET (encompassing, spreading, Father of All: also Destroyer) and COSBY (female-male. Kulturtrager)

1st Man. What ails the sun, that his mornings are so sickly?

2nd Man. You heard what the Old One said: the sun is dark with the anger of the skies.

1st Man. The Old One is sly. Himself is angry, so he says the anger breathes from the hollows of the sky. We are not fools altogether. What think you? Are the sons of men more stupid than the sons of God?

3rd Man. I don't think! The Old One and his demigod sons, what are they? They are taller than the sons of men, but they are slower. They are stronger, but it seems to me they are duller. Ask women what they think of the sons of Noah, the demigods! Ah, the sons of God! They follow at the heels of the daughters of men, and the daughters of men laugh beneath the black beards, as they laugh when the bull snorts, and they are on the safe side of the wall. Big is the bull by the river, but a boy leads him by the nose. So, if you ask me, do we lead these big ones, these demigods, old Noah and his sons, Shem and Ham and Japhet.

1st Man. If we had the secret of the red flutterer.

3rd Man. Ha! I have the name of that Bird. Ham told a woman that the name is Fire.

1st Man. Fire! It is a poor name. What is its father, and who its mother?

3rd Man. Nay, that Ham did not tell. It is a secret of these demigods. But I tell you. It comes out of an egg. And the Old One knows where the eggs of that bird called Fire are laid. So he gathers them up, for his house.

2nd Man. He shall tell us.

3rd Man. No, he will never tell us. But his sons may. Because if we knew the secret of the red bird they call Fire, and could find the eggs and have the young ones flutter in our houses, then we should be greater than Noah and his sons. The sons of men already are wittier than the sons of God. If we had the scarlet

chicken they call Fire, between our hands, we could do away with the sons of God, and have the world for our own.

1st Man. So it should be. The sons of men are numberless, but these sons of God are few and slow. The sons of men know the secret of all things, save that of the red flutterer. The sons of men are the makers of everything. The sons of God command and chide, but what can they make, with their slow hands? Why are they lords, save that they guard the red bird which should now be ours. What name do they give it, again?

3rd Man. Fire.

1st Man. Fire! Fire! And that is all their secret and their power: merely Fire! Already we know their secret.

3rd Man. Ham told it to a woman, and even as she lay with him she laughed beneath his beard, and mocked him.

1st Man. Yet this red bird hatches the pale dough into bread, into good dark bread. Let us swear to catch the red bird, and take it to our houses. And when it has laid its eggs, we will kill the demigods, and have the earth to ourselves. For the sons of men must be free.

2nd Man. Yes, indeed! Free! Free! Is it not a greater word than Fire? We will kill the demigods and be free. But first we must catch the red bird, take him alive, in a snare.

1st Man. Ah, if we could! For Ham has told us that the feathers shine like feathers of the sun, with warmth, even hotter than the sun at noon.

2nd Man. Then it were very good if we had him, seeing the sun in heaven has lost his best feathers, and limps dustily across the heavens like a moulting hen. Ah men, have you learnt what it is to shiver?

3rd Man. Have we not! Even in the day-time shivers seize us, since the sun has moulted his rays. And shivering in the day-time is like dying before one's hour. The death-shiver is on us. We must capture the red bird, so that he flutters his wings in our houses and brightens our flesh, as the moulting sun used to do, till he fell poor and mean. 2nd Man. You know what Shem says? He says there are three birds: the little red bird in the houses of the demigods —

3rd Man. The one Ham calls Fire. We must lay hold of that one.

2nd Man. Then the bigger bird of the sun, that beats his yellow wings and makes us warm, and makes the ferns unroll, and the fern-seed fall brown, for bread.

3rd Man. Ay, the bird of the sun! But he is moulting, and has lost his ray-feathers and limps through grey dust across the sky. He is not to be depended on. Let us once get hold of the red chick Ham calls Fire, and we will forget the sick sun of heaven. We need our sun in our grasp. A bird in the hand is worth two in

the bush.

2nd Man. Yet you know what Shem says. Far, far away beyond the yellow sun that flies across the sky every day, taking the red berries to his nest, there lives the Great White Bird, that no man has ever seen.

3rd Man. Nor no demigod either.

2nd Man. In the middle of the tree of darkness is a nest, and in the nest sits the Great White Bird. And when he rises on his nest and beats his wings, a glow of strength goes through the world. And the stars are the small white birds that have their nests among the outer leaves. And our yellow sun is a young one that does but fly across from the eastern bough to the western, near us, each day. and in his flight stirs with his feathers the blue dust of space, so we see him in the blue of heaven, flashing his sun-pinions. But beyond the blue fume of the sky, all the time, beyond our seeing, the Great White Bird roosts at the centre of the tree.

3rd Man. Hast thou seen thy Great White Bird, fool?

2nd Man. I? No!

3rd Man. When dost thou expect to see him?

2nd Man. I? Never!

3rd Man. Then why dost thou talk of him?

2nd Man. Because Shem told me.

3rd Man. Shem! He is fooling thee. Did he tell thee the secret of the little red bird?

2nd Man. That, no!

3rd Man. That, no! Rather will he tell thee of a Great White Duck that no man ever did see or ever will see. Art thou not a fool?

2nd Man. Nay, for listen! Shem says that even the yellow sun cannot fly across from the eastern bough to the western, save on the wind of the wings of the Great White Bird. On the dead air he cannot make heading. Likewise, Shem says, the air men breathe is dead air, dead in the breast, save it is stirred fresh from the wings of the Great White Bird.

3rd Man. The air in my breast is not dead.

2nd Man. And so it is, the sun struggles in grey dust across the heavy sky, because the wings of the Great White Bird send us no stir, there is no freshness for us. And so we shiver, and feel our death upon us beforehand, because the Great White Bird has sunk down, and will no more wave his wings gladly towards us.

1st Man. And pray, why should *he* be moping?

2nd Man. Because the sons of men never breathe his name in answer. Even as the ferns breathe fern-seed, which is the fume of their answer to the sun, and the little green flowers that are invisible make a perfume like the sky speaking with

a voice, answering deep into heaven, so the hearts of men beat the warmth and wildness of an answer to the Great White Bird, who sips it in and is rejoiced, lifting his wings. But now the hearts of men are answerless, like slack drums gone toneless. They say: We ourselves are the Great White Birds of the Universe. It is we who keep the wheel going! — So they cry in impertinence, and the Great White Bird lifts his wings no more, to send the wind of newness and morning into us. So we are stale, and inclining towards dead-ness. We capture the yellow metal and the white, and we think we have captured the answerer. For the yellow gold and the white silver are pure voices of answer calling still from under the oldest dawn, to the Great White Bird, as the cock crows at sunrise. So we capture the first bright answerers, and say: Lo! we are lords of the answer. — But the answer is not to us, though we hold the gold in our fist. And the wings of the Bird are slack.

1st Man. What is all this talk? Is the humming-bird less blue, less brilliant?

2nd Man. It is Shem's word, not mine. But he says, the Great White Bird will waft his wings even to the beast, for the beast is an answerer. But he will withhold his draught of freshness from the new beast called man, for man is impertinent and answerless. And the small white birds, the stars, are happy still in the outer boughs, hopping among the furthest leaves of the tree, and twittering their bright answer. But men are answerless, and dust settles on them; they shiver, and are woe begone in spite of their laughter.

1st Man. Nay, thou art a mighty talker! But thy Great White Bird is only a decoy-duck to drag thee into obedience to these demigods, who cannot stoop to sweep the fern-seed for themselves, but must bid the children of men. — And thou art a fool duck decoyed into their net. Did Japhet ever talk of a Great White Bird? And Japhet is shrewd. Japhet says: Ah, you sons of men, your life is a predicament. You live between warm and cold; take care. If you fall into great heat, you are lost, if you slip down the crevices of cold, you are gone for ever. If the waters forsake you, you are vanished, and if the waters come down on you, you are swept away. You cannot ride on the heat nor live beneath the waters. The place you walk on is narrow as a plank across a torrent. You must live on the banks of the stream, for if the stream dries up, you die, but if the stream flows over its banks, likewise you die. Yet of the stream you ask not whence it cometh nor whither it goeth. It travels for ever past you, it is always going, so you say. The stream is there, I tell you, watch lest it be not there. Watch lest the banks be gone beneath the flood. For the waters run past you like wolves which are on the scent. And waters come down on you like flocks of grasshoppers from the sky, alighting from the invisible. But what are the wolves running for, and what hatched the flying waters in mid-heaven? You know not. You ask not. Yet

your life is a travelling thread of water for ever passing. Ask then, and it shall be answered you. Know the whither and the whence, and not a wolf shall slip silently by in the night, without your consent. Ask and it shall be answered unto you. Ask! Ask! and all things shall be answered unto you, as the cock answers the sun. Oh, wonderful race of Askers, there shall be no answer ye shall not wing out of the depths. And who answers, serves. — So says Japhet, and says well. And if we had the red flutterer, it should answer to us, and all things after should answer to us for their existence. And we should be the invincible, the Askers, those that set the questions.

3rd Man. It is so. If we had the red bird in our hand, we could force the sun to give himself up in answer; yea, even the Great White Bird would answer in obedience. So we could unleash the waters from the ice, and shake the drops from the sky, in answer to our demand. The demigods are dumb askers, they get half-answers from us all. What we want is the red bird.

1st Man. It is true. That is all we need.

2nd Man. Then let us take it. Let us steal it from their house, and be free.

3rd Man. It is the great word: let us be free. Let us yield our answer no more, neither to gods nor demigods, sun nor inner sun.

1st Man. Men, masters of fire, and free on the face of the earth. Free from the need to answer, masters of the question. Lo, when we are lords of the question, how humbly the rest shall answer. Even the stars shall bow humbly, and yield us their reply, and the sun shall no more have a will of his own.

2nd Man. Can we do it?

1st Man. Can we not! We are the sons of men, heirs and successors of the sons of God. Japhet said to me: The sons of men cannot capture the gift of fire: for it is a gift. Till it is given to them, by the sons of God, they cannot have it. — I said to him: Give us the gift. — He said: Nay! for ye know not how to ask. When ye know how to ask, it shall be given you.

3rd Man. So! What they will not give, we will take.

2nd Man. Yes, we will take it, in spite of them. We are heirs of the gods and the sons of God. We are heirs of all. Let us take the flutterer and be free. We have the right to everything; so let us take.

1st Man. Japhet said: it is a gift!

(Enter Noah) [Unfinished]

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL FRAGMENT

Nothing depresses me more than to come home to the place where I was born, and where I lived my first twenty years, here, at Newthorpe, this coal-mining village on the Nottingham-Derby border. The place has grown, but not very much, the pits are poor. Only it has changed. There is a tram-line from Nottingham through the one street, and buses to Nottingham and Derby. The shops are bigger, more plate-glassy: there are two picture-palaces, and one Palais de Danse.

But nothing can save the place from the poor, grimy, mean effect of the Midlands, the little grimy brick houses with slate roofs, the general effect of paltriness, smallness, meanness, fathomless ugliness, combined with a sort of chapel-going respectability. It is the same as when I was a boy, only more so.

Now, it is all tame. It was bad enough, thirty years ago, when it was still on the upward grade, economically. But then the old race of miners were not immensely respectable. They filled the pubs with smoke and bad language, and they went with dogs at their heels. There was a sense of latent wildness and unbrokenness, a weird sense of thrill and adventure in the pitch-dark Midland nights, and roaring footballing Saturday afternoons. The country in between the collier)' regions had a lonely sort of fierceness and beauty, half-abandoned, and threaded with poaching colliers and whippet dogs. Only thirty years ago!

Now it seems so different. The colliers of today are the men of my generation, lads I went to school with. I find it hard to believe. They were rough, wild lads. They are not rough, wild men. The board-school, the Sunday-school, the Band of Hope, and, above all, their mothers got them under. Got them under, made them tame. Made them sober, conscientious, and decent. Made them good husbands. When I was a boy, a collier who was a good husband was an exception to the rule, and while the women with bad husbands pointed him out as a shining example, they also despised him a little, as a petticoat man.

But nearly all the men of my generation are good husbands. There they stand, at the street corners, pale, shrunken, well-dressed, decent, and *under*. The drunken colliers of my father's generation were not got under. The decent colliers of my generation are go* under entirely. They are so patient, so forbearing, so willing to listen to reason, so ready to put themselves aside. And there they stand, at the street corners and the entry-ends, the rough lads I went to school with, men now, with smart daughters and bossy wives and cigarette-

smoking lads of their own. There they stand, then, and white as cheap wax candles, spectral, as if they had no selves any more: decent, patient, self-effacing sort of men, who have seen the war and the high-water-mark wages, and now are down again, under, completely under, with not a tuppence to rattle in their pockets. There they are, poor as their fathers before them, but poor with a hopeless outlook and a new and expensive world around them.

When I was a boy, the men still used to sing: "There's a good time coming, boys, there's a good time coming!" Well, it has come, and gone. If anybody sang now, they'd sing: "It's a bad time now, and a worse time coming." But the men of my generation are dumb: they have been got under and made good.

As for the next generation, that is something different. As soon as mothers become self-conscious, sons become what their mothers make them. My mother's generation was the first generation of working-class mothers to become really self-conscious. Our grandmothers were still too much under our grandfathers' thumb, and there was still too much masculine kick against petticoat rule. But with the next generation, the woman freed herself at least mentally and spiritually from the husband's domination, and then she became that great institution, that character-forming power, the mother of my generation. I am sure the character of nine-tenths of the men of my generation was formed by the mother: the character of the daughters too.

And what sort of characters? Well, the woman of my mother's generation was in reaction against the ordinary high-handed, obstinate husband who went off to the pub to enjoy himself and to waste the bit of money that was so precious to the family. The woman felt herself the higher moral being: and justly, as far as economic morality goes. She therefore assumed the major responsibility for the family, and the husband let her. So she proceeded to mould a generation.

Mould it to the shape of her own unfulfilled desire, of course. What had she wanted, all her life? — a "good" husband, gentle and understanding and moral, one who did not go to pubs and drink and waste the bit of wages, but who lived for his wife and his children.

Millions of mothers in Great Britain, in the latter half of Victoria's reign, unconsciously proceeded to produce sons to pattern. And they produced them, by the million: good sons, who would make good, steady husbands who would live for their wives and families. And there they are! we've got 'em now! the men of my generation, men between forty and fifty, men who almost all had Mothers with a big m.

And then the daughters! Because the mothers who produced so many "good sons" and future "good husbands" were at the same time producing daughters, perhaps without taking so much thought or exercising so much will-power over

it, but producing them just as inevitably.

What sort of daughters came from these morally responsible mothers? As we should expect, daughters morally confident. The mothers had known some little hesitancy in their moral supremacy. But the daughters were quite assured. The daughters were always right. They were born with a sense of self-rightness that sometimes was hoity-toity, and sometimes was seemingly wistful: but there it was, the inevitable sense that I-am-right. This the women of my generation drew in with their mothers' milk, this feeling that they were "right" and must be "right" and nobody must gainsay them. It is like being born with one eye; you can't help it.

We are such stuff as our grandmothers' dreams are made on. This terrible truth should never be forgotten. Our grandmothers dreamed of wonderful "free" womanhood in a "pure" world, surrounded by "adoring, humble, high-minded" men. Our mothers started to put the dream into practice. And we are the fulfilment. We are such stuff as our grandmothers' dreams were made on.

For I think it cannot be denied that ours is the generation of "free" womanhood, and a helplessly "pure" world, and of pathetic "adoring, humble, high-minded" men.

We are, more or less, such stuff as our grandmothers' dreams are made on. But the dream changes with every new generation of grandmothers. Already my mother, while having a definite ideal for her sons, of "humble, adoring, high-minded" men, began to have secret dreams of her own: dreams of some Don Juan sort of person whose influence would make the vine of Dionysus grow and coil over the pulpit of our Congregational Chapel. I myself, her son, could see the dream peeping out, thrusting little tendrils through her paved intention of having "good sons." It was my turn to be the "good son." It would be my son's turn to fulfil the other dream, or dreams: the secret ones.

Thank God I have no son to undertake the onerous burden. Oh, if only every father could say to his boy: Look here, my son! These are your grandmother's dreams of a man. Now you look out! — My dear old grandmother, my mother's mother, I'm sure she dreamed in almost to a *t*, except for a few details.

But the daughter starts, husbandly speaking, where the mother leaves off. The daughters of my mother, and of the mothers of my generation, start, as a rule, with "good husbands," husbands who never fundamentally contradict them, whose lifelong attitude is: Ah right, dear! I know I'm wrong, as usual. This is the attitude of the husband of my generation.

It alters the position of the wife entirely. It is a fight for the woman to get the reins into her own hands, but once she's got them, there she is! the reins have got her. She's got to drive somewhere, to steer the matrimonial cart in some

direction. “All right, dear! I’ll let you decide it, since you know better than I do!” says the husband, in every family matter. So she must keep on deciding. Or, if the husband balks her occasionally, she must keep up the pressure till he gives in.

Now driving the matrimonial cart is quite an adventure for a time, while the children are little, and all that. But later, the woman begins to think to herself: “Oh, damn the cart! Where do I come in?” She begins to feel she’s getting nothing out of it. It’s not good enough. Whether you’re the horse or whether you’re the driver doesn’t make any odds. So long as you’re both harnessed to the cart.

Then the woman of my generation begins to have ideas about her sons. They’d better not be so all-forsaken “good” as their father has been. They’d better be more sporting, and give a woman a bit more “life.” After all, what’s a family? It swallows a woman up until she’s fifty, and then puts the remains of her aside. Not good enough! No! My sons must be more manly, make plenty of money for a woman and give her a “life,” and not be such a muff about “goodness” and being “right.” What is being “right,” after all? Better enjoy yourself while you’ve got the chance.

So the sons of the younger generation emerge into the world — my sons, if I’d got any — with the intrinsic maternal charge ringing in their ears: “Make some money and give yourself a good time — and all of us. Enjoy yourself!”

The young men of the younger generation begin to fulfil the hidden dreams of my mother. They are jazzy — but not coarse. They are a bit Don-Juanish, but, let us hope, entirely without brutality or vulgarity. They are more elegant, and not much more moral. But they are still humble before a woman, especially *the* woman!

It is the secret dream of my mother, coming true.

And if you want to know what the next generation will be like, you must fathom the secret dreams of your wife: the woman of forty or so. There you will find the clue. And if you want to be more precise, then find out what is the young woman of twenty’s ideal of a man.

The poor young woman of twenty, she is rather stumped for an ideal of a man. So perhaps the next generation but one won’t be anything at all.

We are such stuff as our grandmothers’ dreams are made on. Even colliers are such stuff as their grandmothers’ dreams are made on. And if Queen Victoria’s dream was King George, then Queen Alexandra’s was the Prince of Wales, and Queen Mary’s will be — what?

But all this doesn’t take away from the fact that my home place is more depressing to me than death, and I wish my grandmother and all her generation

had been better dreamers. “Those maids, thank God, are ‘neath the sod,” but their dreams we still have with us. It is a terrible thing to dream dreams that shall become flesh.

And when I see the young colliers dressed up like the Prince of Wales, dropping in to the Miners’ Welfare for another drink, or into the “Pally” for a dance — in evening suit to beat the band — or scooting down the black roads on a motor-bike, a leggy damsel behind — then I wish the mothers of my own generation, my own mother included, had been a little less *frivolous* as a dreamer. In life, so deadly earnest! And oh, what frivolous dreams our mothers must have had, as they sat in the pews of the Congregational Chapel with faces like saints! They must unconsciously have been dreaming jazz and short skirts, the Palais de Danse, the Film, and the motor-bike. It is enough to embitter one’s most sacred memories. “Lead Kindly Light” — unto the “Pally.” — The eleventh commandment: “Enjoy yourselves!”

Well, well! Even grandmothers’ dreams don’t always come true, that is, they aren’t allowed to. They’d come true right enough otherwise. But sometimes fate, and that long dragon the concatenation of circumstance, intervene. I am sure my mother never dreamed a dream that wasn’t well-off. My poor old grandmother might still dream noble poverty — myself, to wit! But my mother? Impossible! In her secret dreams, the sleeve-links were solid gold, and the socks were silk.

And now fate, the monster, frustrates. The pits don’t work. There’s reduced wages and short pay. The young colliers will have a hard time buying another pair of silk socks for the “Pally” when these are worn out. They’ll have to go in wool. As for the young lady’s fur coat — well, well! let’s hope it is seal, or some other hard-wearing skin, and not that evanescent chinchilla or squirrel that moults in a season.

For the young lady won’t get another fur coat in a hurry, if she has to wait for her collier father to buy it. Not that he would refuse it her. What is a man for, except to provide for his wife and daughters? But you can’t get blood out of a stone, nor cash out of a collier, not any more.

It is a soft, hazy October day, with the dark green Midlands fields looking somewhat sunken, and the oak trees brownish, the mean houses shabby and scaly, and the whole countryside somewhat dead, expunged, faintly blackened under the haze. It is a queer thing that countries die along with their inhabitants. This countryside is dead: or so inert, it is as good as dead. The old sheep-bridge where I used to swing as a boy is now an iron affair. The brook where we caught minnows now runs on a concrete bed. The old sheep-dip, the dipping-hole, as we called it, where we bathed, has somehow disappeared, so has the mill-dam and the little water-fall. It’s all a concrete arrangement now, like a sewer. And the

people's lives are the same, all running in concrete channels like a vast cloaca.

At Engine Lane Crossing, where I used to sit as a tiny child and watch the trucks shunting with a huge grey horse and a man with a pole, there are now no trucks. It is October, and there should be hundreds. But there are no orders. The pits are turning half-time. Today they are not turning at all. The men are all at home: no orders, no work.

And the pit is fuming silently, there is no rattle of screens, and the head-stock wheels are still. That was always an ominous sign, except on Sundays: even when I was a small child. The head-stock wheels twinkling against the sky, that meant work and life, men "earning a living," if living can be earned.

But the pit is foreign to me anyhow, so many new big buildings round it, electric plant and all the rest. It's a wonder even the shafts are the same. But they must be: the shafts where we used to watch the cage-loads of colliers coming up suddenly, with a start: then the men streaming out to turn in their lamps, then trailing off, all grey, along the lane home; while the screens still rattled, and the pony on the sky-line still pulled along the tub of "dirt," to tip over the edge of the pit-bank.

It is different now: all is much more impersonal and mechanical and abstract. I don't suppose the children of today drop "nuts" of coal down the shaft, on Sunday afternoons, to hear them hit, hit with an awful resonance against the sides far down, before there comes the last final plump into the endlessly far-off sump. My father was always so angry if he knew we dropped coals down the shaft: If there was a man at t'bottom, it'd kill 'im straight off. How should you like that? — We didn't quite know how we should have liked it.

But anyhow Moorgreen is no more what it was: or it is too much more. Even the rose-bay willow-herb, which seems to love collieries, no longer showed its hairy autumn thickets and its last few spikes of rose around the pit-pond and on the banks. Only the yellow snapdragon, toad-flax, still was there.

Up from Moorgreen goes a footpath past the quarry and up the fields, out to Renshaw's farm. This was always a favourite walk of mine. Beside the path lies the old quarry, part of it very old and deep and filled in with oak trees and guelder-rose and tangle of briars, the other part open, with square wall neatly built up with dry-stone on the side under the plough-fields, and the bed still fairly level and open. This open part of the quarry was blue with dog-violets in spring, and, on the smallish brambles, the first handsome blackberries came in autumn. Thank heaven, it is late October, and too late for blackberries, or there would still be here some wretched men with baskets, ignominiously combing the brambles for the last berry. When I was a boy, how a man, a full-grown miner, would have been despised for going with a little basket lousing the hedges for a

blackberry or two. But the men of my generation put their pride in their pocket, and now their pockets are empty.

The quarry was a haunt of mine, as a boy. I loved it because, in the open part, it seemed so sunny and dry and warm, the pale stone, the pale, slightly sandy bed, the dog-violets and the early daisies. And then the old part, the deep part, was such a fearsome place. It was always dark — you had to crawl under bushes. And you came upon honeysuckle and nightshade, that no one ever looked upon. And at the dark sides were little, awful rocky caves, in which I imagined the adders lived.

There was a legend that these little caves or niches in the rocks were “everlasting wells,” like the everlasting wells at Matlock. At Matlock the water drips in caves, and if you put an apple in there, or a bunch of grapes, or even if you cut your hand off and put it in, it won’t decay, it will turn everlasting. Even if you put a bunch of violets in, they won’t die they’ll turn everlasting.

Later, when I grew up and went to Matlock-only sixteen miles away — and saw the infamous everlasting wells, that the water only made a hoary nasty crust of stone on everything, and the stone hand was only a glove stuffed with sand, being “petrified,” I was disgusted. But still, when I see the stone fruits that people have in bowls for decoration, purple, semi-translucent stone grapes, and lemons, I think: *these* are the real fruits from the everlasting wells.

In the soft, still afternoon I found the quarry not very much changed. The red berries shone quietly on the briars. And in this still, warm, secret place of the earth I felt my old childish longing to pass through a gate, into a deeper, sunnier, more silent world.

The sun shone in, but the shadows already were deep. Yet I had to creep away into the darkness of bushes, into the lower hollow of the tree-filled quarry I felt, as I had always felt, there was something there. And as I wound my way, stooping, through the unpleasant tangle, I stared, hearing a sudden rush and clatter of falling earth. Some part of the quarry must be giving way.

I found the place, awar at the depth under the trees and bushes, a new place where yellow earth and whitish earth and pale rock had slid down new in a heap. And at the top of the heap was a crack, a little slantingly upright slit or orifice in the rock.

I looked at the new place curiously, the pallid new earth and rock among the jungle of vegetation, the little opening above, into the earth. A touch of sunlight came through the oak-leaves and fell on the new place and the aperture, and the place flashed and twinkled. I had to climb up to look at it.

It was a little crystalline cavity in the rock, all crystal, a little pocket or womb of quartz, among the common stone. It was pale and colourless, the stuff we call

spar, from which they make little bowls and mementoes, in Matlock. But through the flat-edged, colourless crystal of the spar ran a broad vein of purplish crystal, wavering inwards as if it were arterial. And that was a vein of the Blue John spar that is rather precious.

The place fascinated me, especially the vein of purple, and I had to clamber into the tiny cave, which would just hold me. It seemed warm in there, as if the shiny rock were warm and alive, and it seemed to me there was a strange perfume, of rock, of living rock like hard, bright flesh, faintly perfumed with phlox. It was a subtle yet most fascinating secret perfume, an inward perfume. I crept right into the little cavity, into the narrow inner end where the vein of purple ran, and I curled up there, like an animal in its hole. "Now," I thought, "for a little while I am safe and sound, and the vulgar world doesn't exist for me." I curled together with soft, curious voluptuousness. The scent of inwardness and of life, a queer scent like phlox, with a faint narcotic inner quality like opium or like truffles, became very vivid to me, then faded. I suppose I must have gone to sleep.

Later, I don't know how much later, it may have been a minute, or an eternity, I was wakened by feeling something lifting me, lifting me with a queer, half-sickening motion, curiously exciting, in a slow little rhythmic heave that was at once soft and powerful, gentle and violent, grateful and violating. I could do nothing, not even wake up: yet I was not really terrified, only utterly wonderstruck.

Then the lifting and heaving ceased, and I was cold. Something harsh passed over me: I realized it was my face: I realized I had a face. Then immediately a sharpness and bitingness flew into me, flew right into me, through what must have been my nostrils, into my body, what must have been my breast. Roused by a terrific shock of amazement, suddenly a new thing rushed into me, right into me, with a sweep that swept me away, and at the same time I felt that first thing moving somewhere in me, there was a movement that came aloud.

There were some dizzy moments when my I, my consciousness, wheeled and swooped like an eagle that is going to wheel away into the sky and be gone. Yet I felt her, my I, my life, wheeling closer, closer, my consciousness. And suddenly she closed with me, and I knew, I came awake.

I knew. I knew I was alive. I even heard a voice say: "He's alive!" Those were the first words I heard.

And I opened my eyes again and blinked with terror, knowing the light of day. I shut them again, and felt sensations out in space, somewhere, and yet upon *me*. Again my eyes were opened, and I even saw objects, great things that were here and were there and then were not there. And the sensations out in space drew

nearer, as it were, to me, the middle me.

So consciousness swooped and swerved, returning in great swoops. I realized that I was I, and that this I was also a body that ended abruptly in feet and hands. Feet! yes, feet! I remembered even the word. Feet!

I roused a little, and saw a greyish pale nearness that I recognized was my body, and something terrible moving upon it and making sensations in it. Why was it grey, my own nearness? Then I felt that other sensation, that I call aloudness. and I knew it. It was “Dust of ages!” That was the aloudness: “Dust of ages!”

In another instant I knew that violent movingness that was making sensations away out upon me. It was somebody. In terror and wonder the realization came to me: it was somebody, another one, a man. A man, making sensations on me! A man, who made the aloudness: “Dust of ages.” A man! Still I could not grasp it. The conception would not return whole to me.

Yet once it had lodged within me, my consciousness established itself. I moved. I even moved my legs, my far-off feet. Yes! And an aloudness came out of me, even of me. I knew. I even knew now that I had a throat. And in another moment I should know something else.

It came all of a sudden. I saw the man’s face. I saw it, a ruddy sort of face with a nose and a trimmed beard. I even knew more. I said: “Why — ?”

And the face quickly looked at me, with blue eyes into my eyes, and I struggled as if to get up.

“Art awake?” it said.

And somewhere, I knew there was the word Yes! But it had not yet come to me.

But I knew, I knew! Dimly I came to know that I was lying in sun on new earth that was spilled before my little, opened cave. I remembered my cave. But why I should be lying grey and stark-naked on earth in the sun outside I did not know; nor what the face was, nor whose.

Then there was more aloudness, and there was another one. I realized there could be more than one other one. More than one! More than one! I felt a new sudden something that made all of me move at once, in many directions, it seemed, and I became once more aware of the extent of me, and an aloudness came from my throat. And I remembered even that new something that was upon me. Many sensations galloping in all directions! But it was one dominant, drowning. It was water. Water! I even remembered water, or I knew I knew it. They were washing me. I even looked down and saw the whiteness: me, myself, white, a body.

And I remembered, that when all of me had moved to the touch of water, and I

had made an aloudness in my throat, the men had laughed. Laughed! I remembered laughter.

So as they washed me, I came to myself. I even sat up. And I saw earth and rock, and a sky that I knew was afternoon. And I was stark-naked, and there were two men washing me, and they too were stark-naked. But I was white, pure white, and thin, and they were ruddy, and not thin.

They lifted me, and I leaned on one, standing, while the other washed me. The one I leaned on was warm, and his life softly warmed me. The other one rubbed me gently. I was alive. I saw my white feet like two curious flowers, and I lifted them one after another, remembering walking.

The one held me, and the other put a woollen shirt or smock over me. It was pale grey and red. Then they fastened shoes on my feet. Then the free one went to the cave, peering, and he came back with things in his hands: buttons, some discoloured yet unwasted coins, a dull but not rusted pocket-knife, a waistcoat buckle, and a discoloured watch, whose very face was dark. Yet I knew these things were mine.

“Where are my clothes?” I said.

I felt eyes looking at me, two blue eyes, two brown eyes, full of strange life.

“My clothes!” I said.

They looked at one another, and made strange speech. Then the blue-eyed one said to me:

“Gone! Dust of ages!”

They were strange men to me, with their formal, peaceful faces and trimmed beards, like old Egyptians. The one on whom I was unconsciously leaning stood quite still, and he was warmer than the afternoon sunshine. He seemed to give off life to me, I felt a warmth suffusing into me, an inflooding of strength. My heart began to lift with strange, exultant strength. I turned to look at the man I was resting on, and met the blue, quiet shimmer of his eyes. He said something to me, in the quiet, full voice, and I nearly understood, because it was like the dialect. He said it again, softly and calmly, speaking to the inside of me, so that I understood as a dog understands, from the voice, not from the words.

“Can ta goo, o shollt be carried?”

It sounded to me like that, like the dialect.

“I think I can walk,” said I, in a voice that sounded harsh after the soft, deep modulation of the other.

He went slowly down the heap of loose earth and stones, which I remembered had fallen. But it was different. There were no trees in an old quarry hollow. This place was bare, like a new working. And when we came out, it was another place altogether. Below was a hollow of trees, and a bare, grassy hillside swept

away, with clumps of trees, like park-land. There was no colliery, no railway, no hedges, no square, shut-in fields. And yet the land looked tended.

We stood on a little path of paved stone, only about a yard wide. Then the other man came up from the quarry, carrying tools and wearing a grey shirt or smock with a red cord. He spoke with that curious soft inwardness, and we turned down the path, myself still leaning on the shoulder of the first man. I felt myself quivering with a new strength, and yet ghostlike. I had a curious sensation of lightness, not touching the ground as I walked, as if my hand that rested on the man's shoulder buoyed me up. I wanted to know whether I was really buoyant, as in a dream.

I took my hand suddenly from the man's shoulder, and stood still. He turned and looked at me.

"I can walk alone," I said, and as in a dream I took a few paces forward. It was true. I was filled with a curious rushing strength that made me almost buoyant, scarcely needing to touch the ground. I was curiously, quiveringly strong, and at the same time buoyant.

"I can go alone!" I said to the man.

They seemed to understand, and to smile, the blue-eyed one showing his teeth when he smiled. I had a sudden idea: How beautiful they are, like plants in flower! But still, it was something I felt, rather than saw.

The blue-eyed one went in front, and I walked on the narrow path with my rushing buoyancy, terribly elated and proud, forgetting everything, the other man following silently behind. Then I was aware that the path had turned and ran beside a road in a hollow where a stream was, and a cart was clanking slowly ahead, drawn by two oxen and led by a man who was entirely naked.

I stood still, on the raised, paved path, trying to think, trying, as it were, to come awake. I was aware that the sun was sinking behind me, golden in the October afternoon. I was aware that the man in front of me also had no clothes on whatsoever, and he would soon be cold.

Then I made an effort, and looked round. On the slopes to the left were big, rectangular patches of dark plough-land. And men were ploughing still. On the right were hollow meadows, beyond the stream, with tufts of trees and many speckled cattle being slowly driven forwards. And in front the road swerved on, past a mill-pond and a mill, and a few little houses, and then swerved up a rather steep hill. And at the top of the hill was a town, all yellow in the late afternoon light, with yellow, curved walls rising massive from the yellow-leaved orchards, and above, buildings swerving in a long, oval curve, and round, faintly conical towers rearing up. It had something at once soft and majestic about it, with its soft yet powerful curves, and no sharp angles or edges, the whole substance

seeming soft and golden like the golden flesh of a city.

And I knew, even while I looked at it, that it was the place where I was born, the ugly colliery townlet of dirty red brick. Even as a child, coming home from Moorgreen, I had looked up and seen the squares of miners' dwellings, built by the Company, rising from the hill-top in the afternoon light like the walls of Jerusalem, and I had wished it were a golden city, as in the hymns we sang in the Congregational Chapel.

Now it had come true. But the very realization, and the very intensity of my *looking*, had made me lose my strength and my buoyancy. I turned forlorn to the men who were with me. The blue-eyed one came and took my arm, and laid it across his shoulder, laying his left hand round my waist, on my hip.

And almost immediately the soft, warm rhythm of his life pervaded me again, and the memory in me which was my old self went to sleep. I was like a wound, and the touch of these men healed me at once. We went on again, along the raised pavement.

Three horsemen came cantering up, from behind. All the world was turning home towards the town, at sunset. The horsemen slackened pace as they came abreast. They were men in soft, yellow sleeveless tunics, with the same still, formal Egyptian faces and trimmed beards as my companions. Their arms and legs were bare, and they rode without stirrups. But they had curious hats of beech-leaves on their heads. They glanced at us sharply and my companions saluted respectfully. Then the riders cantered ahead again the golden tunics softly fluttering. No one spoke at all. There was a great stillness in all the world, and yet a magic of close-interwoven life.

The road now began to be full of people, slowly passing up the hill towards the town. Most were bare-headed, wearing the sleeveless woollen shirt of grey and red, with a red girdle, but some were clean-shaven, and dressed in grey shirts, and some carried tools, some fodder. There were women too, in blue or lilac smocks, and some men in scarlet smocks. But among the rest, here and there were men like my guide, quite naked, and some young women, laughing together as they went, had their blue smocks folded to a pad on their heads, as they carried their bundles, and their slender, rosy-tanned bodies were quite naked, save for a little girdle of white and green and purple cord fringe that hung round their hips and swung as they walked. Only they had soft shoes on their feet.

They all glanced at me, and some spoke a word of salute to my companions, but no one asked questions. The naked girls went very stately, with bundles on their heads, yet they laughed more than the men. And they were comely as berries on a bush. That was what they reminded me of: rose-berries on a bush.

That was the quality of all the people: an inner stillness and ease, like plants that come to flower and fruit. The individual was like a whole fruit, body and mind and spirit, without split. It made me feel a curious, sad sort of envy, because I was not so whole, and at the same time, I was wildly elated, my rushing sort of energy seemed to come upon me again. I felt as if I were just going to plunge into the deeps of life, for the first time: belated, and yet a pioneer of pioneers.

I saw ahead the great rampart walls of the town — then the road Suddenly curved to gateway, all the people flowing in, in two slow streams, through the narrow side entrances.

It was a big gateway of yellow stone, and inside was a clear space, paved mostly with whitish stones, and around it stood buildings in the yellow stone, golden-looking, with pavement arcades supported on yellow pillars. My guides turned into a chamber where men in green stood on guard, and several peasants were waiting. They made way, and I was taken before a man who reclined on a dark-yellow couch, himself wearing a yellow tunic. He was blond, with the trimmed beard and hair worn long, cut round like the hair of a Florentine page. Though he was not handsome, he had a curious quality of beauty, that came from within. But this time, it was the beauty of a flower rather than of a berry.

My guides saluted him and explained briefly and quietly, in words I could only catch a drift of. Then the man looked at me, quietly, gently, yet I should have been afraid, if I had been his enemy. He spoke to me, and I thought he asked if I wanted to stay in their town.

“Did you ask me if I want to stay here?” I replied. “You see, I don’t even know where I am.”

“You are in this town of Nethrupp,” he said, in slow English, like a foreigner. “Will you stay some time with us?”

“Why, thank you, if I may,” I said, too helplessly bewildered to know what I was saying.

We were dismissed, with one of the guards in green. The people were all streaming down the side street, between the yellow-coloured houses, some going under the pillared porticoes, some in the open road. Somewhere ahead a wild music began to ring out, like three bagpipes squealing and droning. The people pressed forward, and we came to a great oval space on the ramparts, facing due west. The sun, a red ball, was near the horizon.

We turned into a wide entrance and went up a flight of stairs. The man in green opened a door and ushered me in.

“All is thine!” he said.

My naked guide followed me into the room, which opened onto the oval and the west. He took a linen shirt and a woollen tunic from a small cupboard, and

smilingly offered them to me. I realized he wanted his own shirt back, and quickly gave it him, and his shoes. He put my hand quickly between his two hands, then slipped into his shirt and shoes, and was gone.

I dressed myself in the clothes he had laid out, a blue-and-white striped tunic, and white stockings, and blue cloth shoes, and went to the window. The red sun was almost touching the tips of the tree-covered hills away in the west, Sherwood Forest grown dense again. It was the landscape I knew best on earth, and still I knew it, from the shapes.

There was a curious stillness in the square. I stepped out of my window on to the terrace, and looked down. The crowd had gathered in order, a cluster of men on the left, in grey, grey-and-scarlet, and pure scarlet, and a cluster of women on the right, in tunics of all shades of blue and crocus lilac. In the vaulted porticoes were more people. And the red sun shone on all, till the square glowed again.

When the ball of fire touched the tree-tops, there was a queer squeal of bagpipes, and the square suddenly started into life. The men were stamping softly, like bulls, the women were softly swaying, and softly clapping their hands, with a strange noise, like leaves. And from under the vaulted porticoes, at opposite ends of the egg-shaped oval, came the soft booming and trilling of women and men singing against one another in the strangest pattern of sound.

It was all kept very soft, soft-breathing. Yet the dance swept into swifter and swifter rhythm, with the most extraordinary incalculable unison. I do not believe there was any outside control of the dance. The thing happened by instinct, like the wheeling and flashing of a shoal of fish or of a flock of birds dipping and spreading in the sky. Suddenly, in one amazing wing-movement, the arms of all the men would flash up into the air, naked and glowing, and with the soft, rushing sound of pigeons alighting the men ebbed in a spiral, grey and sparkled with scarlet, bright arms slowly leaning, upon the women, who rustled all crocus-blue, rustled like an aspen, then in one movement scattered like sparks, in every direction, from under the enclosing, sinking arms of the men, and suddenly formed slender rays of lilac branching out from red and grey knot of the men.

All the time the sun was slowly sinking, shadow was falling, and the dance was moving slower, the women wheeling blue around the obliterated sun. They were dancing the sun down, and dancing as birds wheel and dance, and fishes in shoals, controlled by some strange unanimous instinct. It was at once terrifying and magnificent, I wanted to die, so as not to see it, and I wanted to rush down, to be one of them. To be a drop in that wave of life.

The sun had gone, the dance unfolded and faced inwards to the town, the men softly stamping, the women rustling and softly clapping, the voices of the singers

drifting on like a twining wind. And slowly, in one slow wing-movement, the arms of the men rose up unanimous, in a sort of salute, and as the arms of the men were sinking, the arms of the women softly rose. It gave the most marvellous impression of soft, slow flight of two many-pinioned wings, lifting and sinking like the slow drift of an owl. Then suddenly everything ceased. The people scattered silently.

And two men came into the oval, the one with glowing lamps hung on a pole he carried across his shoulder, while the other quickly hung up the lamps within the porticoes, to light the town. It was night.

Someone brought us a lighted lamp, and was gone. It was evening, and I was alone in a smallish room with a small bed, a lamp on the floor, and an unlighted fire of wood on the small hearth. It was very simple and natural. There was a small outfit of clothing in the cupboard, with a thick blue cloak. And there were a few plates and dishes. But in the room there were no chairs, but a long, folded piece of dark felt, on which one could recline. The light shone upwards from below, lighting the walls of creamy smoothness, like a chalk enamel. And I was alone, utterly alone, within a couple of hundred yards of the very spot where I was born.

I was afraid: afraid for myself. These people, it seemed to me, were not people, not human beings in my sense of the word. They had the stillness and the completeness of plants. And see how they could melt into one amazing instinctive thing, a human flock of motion.

I sat on the ground on the dark-blue felt, wrapped in the blue mantle, because I was cold and had no means of lighting the fire. Someone tapped at the door, and a man of the green guard entered. He had the same quiet, fruit-like glow of the men who had found me, a quality of beauty that came from inside, in some queer physical way. It was a quality I loved, yet it made me angry. It made me feel like a green apple, as if they had had all the real sun.

He took me out, and showed me lavatories and baths, with two lusty men standing under the douches. Then he took me down to a big circular room with a raised hearth in the centre, and a blazing wood fire whose flame and smoke rose to a beautiful funnel-shaped canopy or chimney of stone. The hearth spread out beyond the canopy, and here some men reclined on the folded felts, with little white cloths before them, eating an evening meal of stiff porridge and milk, with liquid butter, fresh lettuce, and apples. They had taken off their clothes, and lay with the firelight flickering on their healthy, fruit-like bodies, the skin glistening faintly with oil. Around the circular wall ran a broad dais where other men reclined, either eating or resting. And from time to time a man came in with his food, or departed with his dishes.

My guide took me out, to peep in a steaming room where each man washed his plate and spoon and hung them in his own little rack. Then my guide gave me a cloth and tray and dishes, and we went to a simple kitchen, where the porridge stood in great bowls over a slow fire, the melted butter was in a deep silver pan, the milk and the lettuce and fruit stood near the door. Three cooks guarded the kitchen, but the men from outside came quietly and took what they needed or what they wanted, helping themselves, then returning to the great round room, or going away to their own little rooms. There was an instinctive cleanliness and decency everywhere, in every movement, in every act. It was as if the deepest instinct had been cultivated in the people, to be comely. The soft, quiet comeliness was like a dream, a dream of life at last come true.

I took a little porridge, though I had little desire to eat. I felt a curious surge of force in me: yet I was like a ghost, among these people. My guide asked me, would I eat in the round hall, or go up to my room? I understood, and chose the round hall. So I hung my cloak in the curving lobby, and entered the men's hall. There I lay on a felt against the wall, and watched the men, and listened.

They seemed to slip out of their clothing as soon as they were warm, as if clothes were a burden or a slight humiliation. And they lay and talked softly, intermittently, with low laughter, and some played games with draughtsmen and chessmen, but mostly they were still.

The room was lit by hanging lamps, and it had no furniture at all. I was alone, and I was ashamed to take off my white sleeveless shirt. I felt, somehow, these men had no right to be so unashamed and self-possessed.

The green guard came again, and asked me, would I go to see somebody whose name I did not make out. So I took my mantle, and we went into the softly-lighted street, under the porticoes. People were passing, some in cloaks, some only in tunics, and women were tripping along.

We climbed up towards the top of the town, and I felt I must be passing the very place where I was born, near where the Wesleyan Chapel stood. But now it was all softly lighted, golden-coloured porticoes, with people passing in green or blue or grey-and-scarlet cloaks.

We came out on top into a circular space, it must have been where our Congregational Chapel stood, and in the centre of the circle rose a tower shaped tapering rather like a lighthouse, and rosy-coloured in the lamplight. Away in the sky, at the club-shaped tip of the tower, glowed one big ball of light.

We crossed, and mounted the steps of another building, through the great hall where people were passing, on to a door at the end of a corridor, where a green guard was seated. The guard rose and entered to announce us, then I followed through an antechamber to an inner room with a central hearth and a fire of

clear-burning wood.

A man came forward to meet me, wearing a thin, carmine-coloured tunic. He had brown hair and a stiff, reddish-brown beard, and an extraordinary glimmering kind of beauty. Instead of the Egyptian calmness and fruit-like impassivity of the ordinary people, or the steady, flower-like radiance of the chieftain in yellow, at the city gates, this man had a quavering glimmer like light coming through water. He took my cloak from me; and I felt at once he understood.

“It is perhaps cruel to awaken,” he said, in slow, conscious English, “even at a good moment.”

“Tell me where I am!” I said.

“We call it Nethrupp — but was it not Newthorpe? — Tell me, when did you go to sleep?”

“This afternoon, it seems, — in October, 1927.”

“October, nineteen-twenty-seven!” He repeated the words curiously, smiling.

“Did I really sleep? Am I really awake?”

“Are you not awake?” he said smiling. “Will you recline upon the cushions? Or would you rather sit? See!” — He showed me a solid oak armchair, of the modern furniture-revival sort, standing alone in the room. But it was black with age, and shrunken-seeming. I shivered.

“How old is that chair?” I said.

“It is just about a thousand years! a case of special preservation,” he said.

I could not help it. I just sat on the rugs and burst into tears, weeping my soul away.

The man sat perfectly still for a long time. Then he came and put my hand between his two.

“Don’t cry!” he said. “Don’t cry! Man was a perfect child so long. Now we try to be men, not fretful children. Don’t cry! Is not this better?”

“When is it? What year is this?” I asked.

“What year? We call it the year of the acorn. But you mean its arithmetic? You would call it the year two thousand nine hundred and twenty-seven.” “It cannot be,” I said.

“Yet still it is.”

“Then I am a thousand and forty-two years old!”

“And why not?”

“But how can I be?”

“How? You went to sleep, like a chrysalis: in one of the earth’s little chrysalis wombs: and your clothes turned to dust, yet they left the buttons: and you woke up like a butterfly. But why not? Why are you afraid to be a butterfly that wakes

up out of the dark for a little while, beautiful? Be beautiful, then, like a white butterfly. Take off your clothes and let the firelight fall on you. What is given, accept then — ”

“How long shall I live now, do you think?” I asked him.

“Why will you always measure? Life is not a clock.”

It is true. I am like a butterfly, and I shall only live a little while. That is why I don't want to eat.

[Unfinished]

A Translation



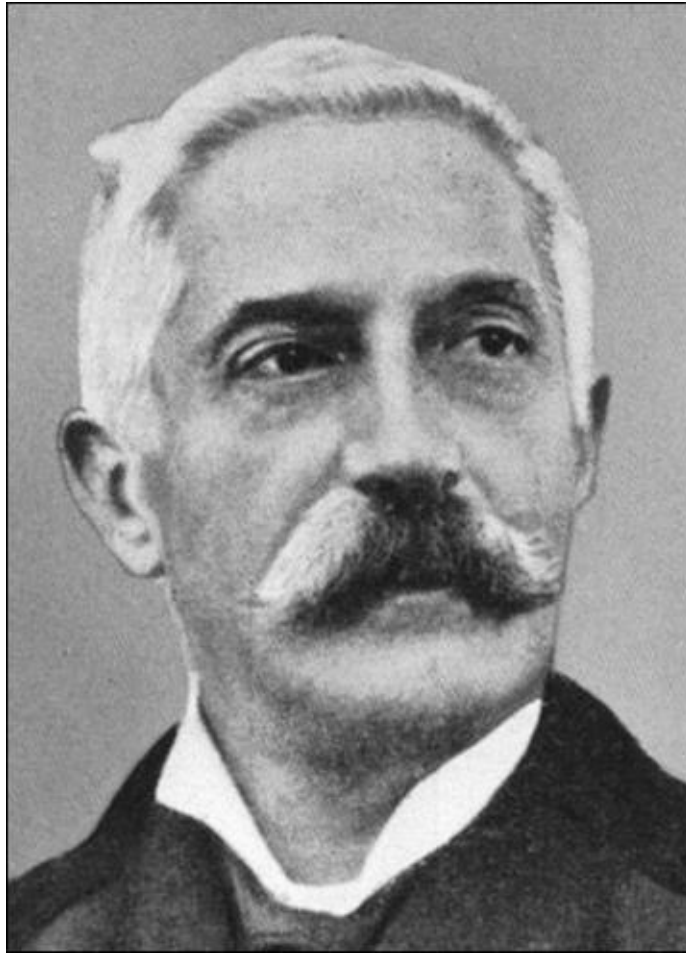
Students of Nottingham University 1906-7 — Lawrence is in the second back row, second from right

LITTLE NOVELS OF SICILY



By Giovanni Verga and translated by D.H. Lawrence

Giovanni Verga (1840–1922) was an Italian realist writer, best known for his faithful depictions of life in Sicily. Lawrence was a great admirer of his work and published this translation of *Novelle rusticane* in 1925 under the title *Little Novels of Sicily*.



Giovanni Verga — the Italian realist author

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NOTE ON GIOVANNI VERGA

Giovanni Verga, the Sicilian novelist and playwright, is surely the greatest writer of Italian fiction, after Manzoni.

Verga was born in Catania, Sicily, in 1840, and died in the same city, at the age of eighty-two, in January, 1922. As a young man he left Sicily to work at literature and mingle with society in Florence and Milan, and these two cities, especially the latter, claim a large share of his mature years. He came back, however, to his beloved Sicily, to Catania, the seaport under Etna, to be once more Sicilian of the Sicilians and spend his long declining years in his own place.

The first period of his literary activity was taken up with "Society" and elegant love. In this phase he wrote the novels *Eros*, *Eva*, *Tigre Reale*, *Il Marito di Elena*, real Italian novels of love, intrigue and "elegance": a little tiresome, but with their own depth. His fame, however, rests on his Sicilian works, the two novels: *I Malavoglia* and *Mastro-Don Gesualdo*, and the various volumes of short sketches, *Vita dei Campi* (*Cavalleria Rusticana*), *Novelle Rusticane*, and *Vagabondaggio*, and then the earlier work *Storia di Una Capinera*, a slight volume of letters between two school-girls, somewhat sentimental and once very popular.

The libretto of *Cavalleria Rusticana*, the well-known opera, was drawn from the first of the sketches in the volume *Vita dei Campi*.

As a man, Verga never courted popularity, any more than his work courts popularity. He kept apart from all publicity, proud in his privacy: so unlike D'Annunzio. Apparently he was never married.

In appearance, he was of medium height, strong and straight, with thick white hair, and proud dark eyes, and a big reddish moustache: a striking man to look at. The story *Across the Sea*, playing as it does between the elegant life of Naples and Messina, and the wild places of southeast Sicily, is no doubt autobiographic. The great misty city would then be Milan.

Most of these sketches are said to be drawn from actual life, from the village where Verga lived and from which his family originally came. The landscape will be more or less familiar to any one who has gone in the train down the east coast of Sicily to Syracuse, past Etna and the Plains of Catania and the Biviere, the Lake of Lentini, on to the hills again. And anyone who has once known this land can never be quite free from the nostalgia for it, nor can he fail to fall under

the spell of Verga's wonderful creation of it, at some point or other.

The stories belong to the period of Verga's youth. The King with the little Queen was King Francis of Naples, son of Bomba. Francis and his little northern Queen fled before Garibaldi in 1860, so the story *So Much For the King* must be dated a few years earlier. And the autobiographical sketch *Across the Sea* must belong to Verga's first manhood, somewhere about 1870. Verga was twenty years old when Garibaldi was in Sicily and the little drama of *Liberty* took place in the Village on Etna.

During the 'fifties and 'sixties, Sicily is said to have been the poorest place in Europe: absolutely penniless. A Sicilian peasant might live through his whole life without ever possessing as much as a dollar, in hard cash. But after 1870 the great drift of Sicilian emigration set in, towards America. Sicilian young men came back from exile rich, according to standards in Sicily. The peasants began to buy their own land, instead of working on the half-profits system. They had a reserve fund for bad years. And the island in the Mediterranean began to prosper as it prospers still, depending on American resources. Only the gentry decline. The peasantry emigrate almost to a man, and come back as gentry themselves, American gentry.

Novelle Rusticane was first published in Turin, in 1883.

D. H. LAWRENCE.

LITTLE NOVELS OF SICILY

HIS REVERENCE

He didn't have his monk's long beard any more, nor his poor friar's hood, now that he got himself shaved every Sunday, and went out walking in his grand cassock of fine cloth, with his silk-lined cloak over his arm. And on those occasions when he was looking at his own fields, and his own vineyards, and his own flocks, and his own laborers, with his hands in his pockets and his little pipe in his mouth, if he ever did chance to recall the days when he washed up dishes for the Capucin monks and they out of charity put him a lay-brother's long frock on, he would make the sign of the cross with his left hand.

Yet if they hadn't taught him to say mass and to read and write, all out of charity, he would never have succeeded in wedging himself in among the first families of the place, nor in nailing down in his account-books the names of all those half-profits peasants who labored and prayed to God and good fortune for him, and then swore like Turks when it came to reckoning day. "Mind what I am, not what I was once," says the proverb. Who he was, everybody knew, for his mother still did his house-cleaning. His Reverence had no family pride, no; and when he went to the baroness' to play at piquet with her, he had his brother to wait in the anteroom for him, holding the lantern.

His charity began at home, as God Himself enjoins; so he'd taken one of his nieces into his house, not bad-looking, but without a rag to her back, so that she'd never have found the ghost of a husband; and he kept her and maintained her, what's more he put her in the fine room with glass in the windows, and the bed with bed-curtains, and he wasn't going to have her work, to ruin her hands with rough jobs. So that everybody thought it a real God's penalty when the poor creature was seized with scruples, such as will happen to women who have nothing else to do and pass their days in church beating their breasts because they're in mortal sin — though not when her uncle was there, for he wasn't one of those priests who like to show themselves on the altar in pomp and splendour before their inamoratas. As for other women, outside their homes it was enough for him to give them a little caress with two fingers on their cheek, paternally, or through the little window of the confession box to give them the benediction after they had rinsed out their consciences and emptied the sack of their own and other people's sins, by which means he always learned something useful, being a man who speculated in country produce.

Blessed Lord, he didn't pretend to be a holy man, not he! Holy men died of hunger, like the Vicar who celebrated mass even when he wasn't paid for it, and went round the beggarly houses in a cassock so tattered that it was a scandal to Religion. His Reverence wanted to get on, and he got on, with the wind full-sail, at first a little bit scuttling, because of that blessed frock which bothered him, so much so that for pitching it into the vegetable garden he had been had up before the Monastic Tribunal, and the confraternity had helped him to get the better of it, so as to be rid of him, because so long as he was in the monastery there were stools and dishes flying at every election of provincials; Father Battistino, a servant of God sturdy as a muleteer, had been half slaughtered, and Father Giammaria, the Superior, had lost all his teeth in the fray. His Reverence, himself, kept mum in his cell, after he'd stirred up the fire, and in that way he'd managed to become a *reverend*, with all his teeth, which were of good use to him; and everybody said to Father Giammaria, who had been the one to take this scorpion into their sleeve, "Good for him!"

But Father Giammaria, good soul, chewing his lips with his bare gums, replied:

"Well, what do you want! He was never cut out for a Capucin friar. He's like Pope Sixtus, who started by being a swineherd and then became what he was. Didn't you see what promise he gave as a boy?"

And so Father Giammaria remained superior of the Capucin friars, without a shirt to his back or a cent in his pocket, hearing confession for the love of God, and cooking vegetable-soup for the poor.

His Reverence, as a boy, when he saw his brother — the one with the lantern — breaking his back hoeing in the fields, and his sisters unable to find a husband even if they'd give themselves away for nothing, and his mother spinning worsted-yarn in the dark so as to save the floating-wick lamp, had said: "I want to be a priest!"

They had sold the mule and the scrap of land in order to send him to school, in the hope that if they got so far as to have a priest in the house, it would be better than the patch of land and the mule. But it took more than that to keep him at the Seminary. And so the boy began to buzz round the monastery for them to take him as a novice; and one day when they were expecting the provincial, and there was a lot to do in the kitchen, they called him in to lend a hand. Father Giammaria, who had a good heart, said to him: "You like it here? Then you stop with us."

And Brother Carmelo, the porter, in the long hours when he had nothing to do, wearying of sitting on the low wall of the cloister knocking his sandals one against the other, put together a bit of a frock for him out of the rags of cassocks

which they'd flung on to the fig-tree to scare away the sparrows. His mother, his brother and his sister protested that if he became a friar it was all over with them, and they gave up the money that had gone for his schooling as lost, for they'd never get another halfpenny out of him. But he, who had it in his blood to be a friar, shrugged his shoulders and answered, "You mean to tell me a fellow can't follow the vocation God has called him to?"

Father Giammaria had taken a fancy to him because he was as light as a cat in the kitchen, and the same at all the menial jobs, even in serving at mass, as if he'd never done anything else all his life long, with his eyes lowered and his lips sewed together like a seraph. Now that he no longer served at mass he still kept his lowered eyes and his sewed-up lips, when it was a question of some shady business with the gentry, or when there was occasion for him to bid in the auction of the communal lands, or to take his oath before the Magistrate.

He had to take a fat oath indeed, in 1854, at the altar, in front of the ark that holds the Sacrament, while he was saying holy mass, and people were accusing him of spreading the cholera, and wanting to make him dance for it.

"By this consecrated host which I have in my hand," said he to the faithful who were kneeling, crouching low on to their heels, "I am innocent, my children! Moreover I promise you the scourge shall cease within a week. Have patience!"

Yes, they had patience; perforce they had patience! Since he was well in with the judge and the force-captain, and King Bomba sent him fat chickens at Easter and at Christmas, because he was so much obliged to him, they said; and Bomba had sent him also the counter-poison, in case there did come a serious accident.

An old aunt of his whom he'd had to take under his roof so as to prevent folks talking, and who was no good for anything any more except to eat the bread of a traitor, had uncorked the bottle for somebody else, and so had caught the cholera out and out; but her own nephew, for fear of raising people's suspicions, hadn't been able to administer the counter-poison to her.

"Give me the counter-poison; give me the counter-poison!" pleaded the old woman, who was already as black as coal, without any regard for the doctor and the lawyer who were both there, looking one another in the face embarrassed. His Reverence, with his brazen face, as if it wasn't his affair, muttered, shrugging his shoulders, "Take no notice of her, she is delirious."

The counter-poison, if he really had got it, had been sent to him by the king under seal of confession, and he couldn't give it to anybody. The judge himself had gone to beg it of him on his knees, for his wife who was dying, and he'd got nothing for answer from his Reverence except this:

"You may command me in life and death, dear friend; but in this business, really, I can do nothing for you."

This was the story as everybody knew it, and since they knew that by dint of intrigues and cleverness he had managed to become the intimate friend of the king, of the judge, and of the force-captain, and had managed to get a handle over the police, like the Intendant himself, so that his reports arrived at Naples without ever passing through the hands of the Lieutenant, nobody dared to fall out with him, and when he cast his eye upon an olive-garden or piece of tilled land that was for sale, or on a lot of the communal lands that was to be leased out by auction, even the big somebodies of the place, if they dared to bid against him, did it with smooth words and smarmy phrases, offering him a pinch of snuff. Once, with the baron himself, they kept on for half a day haffling and chaffling. The baron played the sugary, and his Reverence, seated in front of him with his gown gathered between his legs, at every higher bid offered him his silver snuff-box, sighing:

"Why, whatever are you thinking of, Baron, my dear sir? Now the donkey's fallen down, we've got to get him up again."

And so until the lot was knocked down, and the baron gave in, green with bile.

Which the peasants quite approved of, because big dogs always quarrel among themselves over a good bone, and there's never anything left for poor devils to gnaw. But what made them murmur again was that that servant of God squeezed them worse than the antichrist. Whenever they had to share with him, he had no scruple about laying hold of his neighbour's property, since he had all the implements of confession in his own hands, and if he fell into mortal sin he could give himself absolution by himself.

"Everything depends on having a priest in the house," they sighed. And the most well-to-do among them denied themselves the bread out of their mouths to send their son to the Seminary.

"When a man goes into the field, he's got to go in altogether," said his Reverence as an excuse for himself when he had no regard for anybody. Even mass itself he wouldn't celebrate save on Sunday, when there was nothing else to do, for he wasn't one of your priest-johnnies who'd run round after the quarter-dollar for the mass. He wasn't in want. So that Monsignor the Bishop, in his pastoral visit, arriving in his house and finding his breviary covered with dust, wrote on it with his finger: "*Deo gratias!*" But his Reverence had something else to do but waste his time reading his breviary, and he laughed at Monsignor's reproof. If his breviary was covered with dust, his oxen were glossy, his sheep had deep fleeces, and his wheat stood as high as a man, so that his half-profits laborers enjoyed at least the sight of it, and could build fine castles in the air on

it, before they came to reckon with the master. The poor devils opened their hearts like anything. Wheat standing like magic! The Lord must have passed by it in the night! You can see it belongs to a servant of God; and that it's good to work for him who's got the mass and the benediction in his hands!

In May, in the season when they looked up into the sky to conjure away any cloud that was passing, they knew that their master was saying mass for the harvest, which was worth more than the images of Saints, or the blessed seeds to drive away the evil eye or ill-fortune. So it was, his Reverence didn't want them to sow the blessed small-seed among the wheat, because it does no good except to attract sparrows and other mischievous birds. Of images of the saints however he had pocketfuls, since he took as many as he liked from the sacristy, good ones too, and gave them to his peasants.

But at harvest time he came on horseback, along with his brother, who served him as estate-keeper, with his gun on his shoulder, and then he never stirred, but slept there, in the malaria, to look after his own interests, without bothering even about Christ. Those poor devils, who had forgotten the hard days of winter in that fine weather, stood open-mouthed when they heard the litany of their debts being recited to them. So many measures of beans which your wife came for in the time of the snow — so many bundles of kindling given to your boy — so many measures of corn advanced for seed, with interest at so much a month. — Makes the account!

A swindling account! In the year of scarcity, after Uncle Carmenio had left his sweat and his health in his Reverence's fields, he had to leave his ass as well, come harvest-time, to pay off the debt, and went away himself empty-handed, swearing with awful words that made heaven and earth shudder. His Reverence, who wasn't there to confess him, let him say his say, and led the ass into the stable.

Since he had become rich he had discovered that his family, who had never even had bread to eat, possessed a benefice as fat as a canonry, and at the time of the abolishing of the mortmains, he had applied for the release and had definitely laid hands on the farm. Only he was annoyed at the money he had to pay for the release, and called the Government a thief for not letting the property of the benefices go gratis to those whom it belonged to.

On this score of the Government he had had to swallow a fair amount of bile, until 1860, when they had made the revolution, and he'd had to hide in a hole like a rat, because the peasants, all those who had had trouble with him, wanted to do him in. After that, had come the litany of the taxes, which there was no end to paying, and the very thought of it turned his wine at table into poison. Now they were setting on the Holy Father, and wanting to take away from him the

temporal power. But when the Pope sent out the excommunication against all those who profited by the mortmains, his Reverence felt the fly settle on his own nose, and he grumbled:

"What's the Pope got to do with my property? He's got nothing to do with the temporal power." And he went on saying mass better than ever.

The peasants went to hear his mass, but without wishing it they thought of all the robberies of the celebrant, and were distracted. Their women, while they were confessing their sins to him, couldn't help letting out to his face:

"Father, I accuse myself of having spoken ill of you who are a servant of God, because we've been without beans and without grain this winter, because of you."

"Because of me? Do I make good weather or bad luck? Or am I to own the land so that you lot can sow it and use it to your own advantage? Have you no conscience, and no fear of God? Why have you come here to confess yourself? This is the devil tempting you, to make you lose the sacrament of penitence. When you go and get all those children of yours you never think that they're so many mouths to feed? And what fault is it of mine if then there isn't enough bread for you? Did I make you get all those children? I became a priest so as not to have any."

However, he absolved them, because he was obliged to; but nevertheless in the heads of those rough people there still remained some confusion between the priest who raised his hand to bless in the name of God, and the master who falsified the accounts, and sent them away from the farm with their sack empty and their sickle under their arm.

"We can't do anything, we can't do anything," muttered the poor creatures resignedly. "The pitcher doesn't win against the stone, and we can't go to law with his Reverence, because it's he who knows the law."

He did know it too! When they were before the judge, with a lawyer, he stopped everybody's mouth with his saying: "The law is like this and like that." And it was always as it suited him. In the good days gone by he laughed at his enemies and his enviers. They had raised the deuce, they had gone to the bishop, they had thrown his niece in his face, Farmer Carmenio and ill-gotten gains, they had had mass and confession taken away from him. Very well! What then? He had no need either of bishop or anybody. He had his own possessions, and was respected like those who lead the band in the village; he was at home with the baroness, and the more row they made about him, the worse was the scandal. The big people are never touched, not even by the bishop, and you take your hat off to them, out of prudence and love of peace.

But after heresy had triumphed, with the revolution, what good was all that to

him? The peasants were learning to read and write, and could reckon up accounts better than you could yourself; the political parties were wrangling for the local government, and dividing the spoil without regard to the rest of the world; the first beggar that came along could find a gratuitous counsel, if he had a lawsuit with you, and he made you pay all the costs of the case yourself! A priest didn't count any more, neither with the judge, nor with the force-captain; nowadays he couldn't even get a man put into prison on a mere hint, if they were wanting in respect to him, and he was no good any more except to say mass, and hear confession, like a public servant. The judge feared the newspapers, and public opinion, what Caius and Sempronius might say, and he dispensed justice like Solomon! And then even the property he'd got together with the sweat of his own brow, they envied it him, they'd thrown the evil eye on him and black magic; that bit of nourishment he ate at table gave him a great to-do in the night; while his brother, who led a hard life, and ate bread and onion, digested better than an ostrich, knowing that within a hundred years' time, when he himself was dead, he'd be his heir, and would find himself rich without lifting a finger. The mother, poor thing, was good for nothing any more, and only lived on to suffer and make others suffer, nailed down in bed with paralysis, so that she had to be waited on herself now; and his niece herself, fat, well-clad, provided with everything she could want, with nothing to do but go into church, tormented him when she took it into her head to be in mortal sin, as if he was one of those excommunicated scoundrels who had dispossessed the pope, and she had made the bishop take away mass from him.

"There's neither religion, nor justice, nor anything left!" grumbled his Reverence as he grew to be old. "Now everybody wants to have his say. Those that have got nothing want to take what you've got from you. — 'You get up, so that I can take your place!' Those that have got nothing else to do come looking for fleas in your house! They wanted to make a priest no better than a sexton, say mass and sweep the church. They don't want to do the will of God any more, that's where it is!"

SO MUCH FOR THE KING

Neighbour Cosimo, the litter-driver had dressed down his mules, lengthened the halters a bit for the night, spread a handful of bedding under the feet of the bay mare, who had slipped twice on the wet cobblestones of the narrow street of Grammichele, after the heavy rain there had been, and then he'd gone to stand in the stable doorway with his hands in his pockets, to yawn in the face of all the people who had come to see the King, for there was such a thronging that day in the streets of Caltagirone that you'd have thought it was the festival of San Giacomo; at the same time he kept his ears open and his eye on his cattle, which were steadily munching their barley, so that nobody should come and steal them from him.

A litter was like a large sedan chair carried by two mules, one behind and one in front, and used in all the inland roads of Sicily eighty years ago.

Just at that moment they came to tell him that the King wanted to speak to him. Or rather it wasn't the King who wanted to speak to him, because the King never speaks to anybody, but one of those through whose mouth the King speaks, when he has something to say; and they told him that His Majesty wanted his litter, next day at dawn, to go to Catania, because he didn't want to be obliged neither to the bishop, nor to the lieutenant, but preferred to pay out of his own pocket, like anybody else.

Neighbour Cosimo ought to have been pleased, because it was his business to drive people in his litter, and at that very time he was waiting for somebody to come and hire his conveyance, and the King isn't one to stand and haggle for a dime more or less, like so many folks. But he would rather have gone back to Grammichele with his litter empty, it bothered him so much to have to carry the King in his litter, that the holiday all turned to poison for him at the mere thought of it, and he couldn't enjoy the illuminations any more, nor the band that was playing in the marketplace, nor the triumphal-car that was going round the streets, with the picture of the King and Queen, nor the church of San Giacomo all lit up, so that it was spitting out flames, and the Host was exposed inside, and the bells ringing for the King.

The grander the festival, the more frightened did he become of having to take the actual King in his litter, and all those squibs, that crowd, those illuminations and that clash of bells simply went to his stomach, so that he couldn't close his eyes all night, but he spent it in examining the shoes of the bay mare, curry-

combing his mules, and stuffing them up to their throats with barley, to get their strength up, as if the King weighed twice as much as anybody else. The stables were full of cavalry soldiers, with huge spurs on their heels, which they didn't take off even when they threw themselves down to sleep on the planks, and on all the nails of the stable-posts were hung sabres and pistols so that it seemed to poor Uncle Cosimo that they were there to cut off his head, if by bad luck one of the mules should go and slip on the wet stones of the narrow street while he was carrying the King; and really there had poured such quantities of water out of the sky just on those particular days that the people must have been crazy mad to see the King, to come all the way to Caltagirone in such weather. For himself, sure as God's above, he'd rather have been in his own poor little house, where the mules were pinched for room in the stable, but where you could hear them munching their barley not far from the bed-head, and he'd willingly have paid the five-dollar piece which the King was due to fork out, to find himself in his own bed, with the door shut, and lying with his nose under the blankets, his wife busying herself around with the lamp in her hand, to settle up the house for the night.

At dawn the bugle of the soldiers ringing like a cock that knows the time made him start from his doze, and put the stables into a turmoil. The wagoners raised their heads from the pole they had laid down for a pillow, the dogs barked, and the hostess put in an appearance from the hayloft, heavy with sleep, scratching her head. It was still dark as midnight, but people were going up and down the street as if it was Christmas night, and the hucksters near the fire, with their little paper lanterns in front of them, banged their knives on their benches to sell their almond-rock. Ah, how all the people who were buying toffee must be enjoying themselves at their festival, trailing round the streets tired and sleepy, waiting for the King, and as they saw the litter go by with its collar-bells jingling and its woollen tassels, they opened their eyes and envied Neighbour Cosimo who had seen the King face to face, while nobody else had had so much luck up till then, not in all the forty-eight hours that the crowd had been waiting day and night in the streets, with the rain coming down as God sent it. The church of San Giacomo was still spitting fire and flame, at the top of the steps that there was no end to, waiting for the King to wish him Godspeed, and all its bells were ringing to tell him it was time for him to be going. Were they never going to put out those lights; and had the sexton an arm of iron, to keep on ringing day and night? Meanwhile in the flat-lands of San Giacomo the ashen dawn had hardly come, and the valley was a sea of mist; and yet the crowd was thick as flies, with their noses in their cloaks, and the moment they saw the litter coming they wanted to suffocate Neighbour Cosimo and his mules, thinking the King was inside.

But the King kept them waiting a good bit still; perhaps at that moment he was pulling on his breeches, or drinking his little glass of brandy, to clear his throat, a thing that Neighbour Cosimo hadn't even thought of that morning, for all his throat felt so tight. An hour later arrived the cavalry with unsheathed sabres, and made way. Behind the cavalry rolled another wave of people, and then the band, and then again some gentlemen, and ladies in little hats, their noses red with cold; and even the hucksters came running up, with their little benches on their heads, to set up shop again; to try to sell a bit more almond toffee; so that in the big square you couldn't have got a pin in, and the mules wouldn't even have been able to shake the flies off, if the cavalry hadn't been there to make space; and so if you please the cavalry brought along with them a cloud of horseflies, those flies that send the mules in a litter right off their heads, so that Neighbour Cosimo commended himself to God and to the souls in purgatory every one he caught under the belly of his cattle.

At last the ringing was heard twice as loud, as if the bells had gone mad, and then the loud banging of crackers let off for the King, another flood of people came running up, and the carriage of the King appeared in sight, seeming to swim on the heads of the people in the midst of all that crowd. Then resounded the trumpets and drums, and the crackers began to explode again, till the mules, God save us, threatened to break the harness and everything, lashing out kicks; the soldiers drew their sabres, having sheathed them again, and the crowd shouted: "The Queen, the Queen! That little body there, beside her husband, you'd never believe it!"

But the King was a fine-built man, large and stout, with red trousers and a sabre hanging at his stomach; and he drew behind him the bishop, the mayor, the lieutenant, and another bunch of gentlemen in gloves and white handkerchiefs folded around their necks, and dressed in black so that they must have felt spiders running in their bones, in that bit of a north-wind that was sweeping the mist from the plain of San Giacomo. Now the King, before he mounted his horse, and while his wife was getting into the litter, was talking first to one then to another, as if it was no matter to him, and coming up to Neighbour Cosimo he clapped him on the shoulder, and told him just like this, in his Neapolitan way of talking, "Remember you are carrying your queen!" — so that Neighbour Cosimo felt his legs sinking back into his belly, the more so that at that moment a frenzied cry was heard, the crowd swayed like a sea of ripe corn, and a young girl, still dressed like a nun and very pale, was seen to throw herself at the feet of the King and cry, "Pardon!" She was asking pardon for her father, who had been one of those who had had a hand in trying to pull the King down from the throne, and had been condemned to have his head cut off. The King spoke a

word to one of those near him, and that was enough for them not to cut off the head of the girl's father. And so she rose quite happy, and then they had to carry her away in a faint, she was so glad.

Which was as good as saying that the King with one word could have anybody's head he liked cut off, even Neighbour Cosimo's, if a mule in the litter should chance to stumble and throw out his wife, bit of a thing as she was.

Poor Neighbour Cosimo had all this before his eyes as he walked beside his bay mule with his hand on the shaft, and a bit of Madonna's dress between his lips, recommending himself to God as if he was at death's door, while all the caravan, with King, Queen and soldiers had started off on the journey amid the shouting and bell-ringing, and the banging of the cannon-crackers which you could still hear away down on the plain; and when they had come right down in the valley, on the top of the hill they could still see the black crowd teeming in the sun as if it was the cattle-fair in the plain of San Giacomo.

But what good did Neighbour Cosimo get from the sun and the fine day? If his heart was blacker than a thunder-cloud, and he didn't dare raise his eyes from the cobblestones on which the mules put down their feet as if they were walking on eggs; nor could he look round to see how the corn was coming on, nor enjoy seeing the clusters of olives hanging along the hedges, nor think of what a lot of good all the last week's rain had done, while his heart was beating like a hammer at the mere thought that the torrent might be swollen, and they had got to cross the ford! He didn't dare to seat himself straddle-legs on the shafts, as he always did when he wasn't carrying his queen, and snatch forty winks under that fine sun and on that level road that the mules could have followed with their eyes shut; whilst the mules, who had no understanding, and didn't know what they were carrying, were enjoying the dry level road, the mild sun and the green country, wagging their hind-quarters and shaking the collar-bells cheerfully, and for two pins they would have started trotting, so that Neighbour Cosimo had his heart in his mouth with fright merely seeing his creatures growing lively, without a thought in the world neither for the Queen nor anything.

The Queen, for her part, kept up a chatter with another lady, whom they'd put in the litter to while away the time with her, in a language of which nobody understood a single damn; she looked round at the country with her eyes blue as flax flowers, and she rested a little hand on the window-frame, so little that it seemed made on purpose to have nothing to do; and it certainly wasn't worth while having stuffed the mules with barley to carry that scrap of a thing, Queen though she was! But she could have people's heads cut off with a single word, small though she might be, and the mules, who had no sense in them, what with that light load, and all that barley in their bellies, felt strongly tempted to start

dancing and jumping along the road, and so get Neighbour Cosimo's head taken off for him.

So that the poor devil did nothing all the way but recite paternosters and ave marias between his teeth, and beseech the souls of his own dead, those whom he knew and those whom he didn't know, until they got to Zia Lisa, where a great crowd had gathered to see the King, and in front of every hole of a tavern there was their own side of pork skinned and hung up for the feast. When he got home at last, after having delivered the Queen safe and sound, he couldn't believe it was true, and he kissed the edge of the manger as he tied up his mules, then he went to bed without eating or drinking, and didn't even want to see the queen's money, but would have left it in his jacket pocket for who knows how long, if it hadn't been for his wife who went and put it at the bottom of the stocking under the straw mattress.

His friends and acquaintances, curious to know how the King and Queen were made, came to ask him about the journey, pretending they had come to enquire if he had caught malaria. But he wouldn't tell them anything, feeling himself in a fever again at the very mention of it, and the doctor came morning and evening, and charged him about half of that money from the queen.

Only many years later, when they came to seize his mules in the name of the King, because he couldn't pay his debts, Neighbour Cosimo couldn't rest for thinking that those were the very mules which had brought his wife safe and sound — the King's wife, that is — poor beasts; and in those days there were no carriage-roads, so the Queen would have broken her neck if it hadn't been for his litter, and people said that the King and Queen had come to Sicily on purpose to make the roads, and still there weren't any yet, which was a dirty shame. But in those days litter-drivers could make a living, and Neighbour Cosimo would have been able to pay his debts, and they wouldn't have seized his mules, if the King and Queen hadn't come to make the high-roads.

And later, when they took away his Orazio, whom they called Turk, because he was so swarthy and strong, to make him an artilleryman, and that poor old woman of a wife of his wept like a fountain, there came to his mind again that girl who had come to throw herself at the feet of the King crying, "Pardon!" — and the King had sent her away happy with one word. Nor could you make him understand that there was another king now, and that they'd kicked out the old one. He said that if the King had been there, he'd have sent him away happy, him and his wife, because he had patted him on the shoulder, and he knew him and had seen him face to face, with his red trousers and his sabre hung at his stomach, and with a word he could have people's heads cut off, and send to seize mules into the bargain, if anyone didn't pay his debts, and take the sons for

soldiers, just as he pleased.

DON LICCIU PAPA

The Goodwives were spinning in the sun, and the fowls were scratching among the rubbish in front of the doorsteps, when suddenly there arose a squealing and a scampering all down the little street, as Uncle Maso was seen approaching from the distance, Uncle Maso the pig-snatcher, with his noose in his hand; and all the fowls scuttled away squawking, as if they knew him.

Uncle Maso got a dime from the Town Council for every fowl, and half-a-dollar for every pig which he caught breaking the by-laws. He preferred the pigs. Therefore, seeing Goodwife Santa's little porker stretched out peacefully with its nose in the mire, he threw the running noose round its neck.

"Oh holy, holy Madonna! What are you doing, Uncle Maso?" cried Aunt Santa, pale as death. "For Mercy's sake, Uncle Maso, don't have me fined, it'll be the finish of me!"

Uncle Maso, the traitor, in order to gain time to get the young pig on to his shoulders, began to reel off pretty speeches to her.

"My dear good woman, what am I to do? It's the Town Council's orders. They won't have pigs in the street any more. If I leave you this young sow I lose my own daily bread."

Aunt Santa ran behind him like a madwoman, her hands clutching her hair, screaming all the time:

"Ah, Uncle Maso! don't you know she cost me a dollar at the fair of San Giovanni, and I care for her like the apple of my eye! Leave me my little pig, Uncle Maso, by the soul of those that are dead and gone! Come the New Year, with God's help she'll be worth seven dollars!"

Uncle Maso, with never a word, his head dropped, and his heart as hard as a stone, only minded where he put his feet, so as not to slip in the muck; the young pig over his shoulder twisting up to heaven and grunting. Then Aunt Santa, desperate, in order to save her pig fetched him a solemn kick in the rear, and sent him rolling.

The goodwives no sooner saw the pig-snatcher sprawling in the mud than they were upon him with their distaffs and their wooden-soled slippers, eager to pay him out for all the pigs and fowls he had on his conscience. But at that moment up ran Don Licciu Papa with his sword-belt over his paunch, bawling from the background like one possessed, keeping out of reach of the distaffs.

"Clear the way! Clear the way for the Law!"

The law condemned Goodwife Santa to pay the fine and the costs, and in order to save her from prison they had to turn for protection to the baron, whose kitchen window looked on to the little street, and who rescued her by a miracle, demonstrating to the Court that it was not an instance of rebellion, because that day the pig-snatcher hadn't got his cap on with the Town-Council badge.

"You see now!" exclaimed the women in chorus. "It takes a saint to get into Paradise! Who was to know that about the cap?"

However, the baron wound up with a sermon: Those pigs and fowls had got to be cleared out of the street; the town-council was quite right, the place was a pigsty.

After that, every time the baron's man-servant emptied his dust-pan into the street, on the heads of the neighbours, not a woman murmured. Only they lamented that the hens, shut up in the house to escape the fine, didn't rear good chicks any more; and the pigs, tied by the leg to the bedpost, were like souls tortured in purgatory. Anyhow they used to sweep their streets themselves, before.

"All that muck would be so much gold for the grasshopper closes," sighed Farmer Vito. "If I'd got my bay mule yet, I'd wipe up the street with my own hands."

And this also was a bit of Don Licciu Papa's work. He had come with the bailiff to seize the mule for debt, since Farmer Vito would never have let the bailiff by himself take the mule from the stable, no not if they'd killed him for it, he wouldn't, he'd rather have bitten off the fellow's nose and eaten it like bread. Then before the judge, who sat at the table like Pontius Pilate, when Farmer Venerando prosecuted him to recover the loan advanced on the half-profits, he couldn't find a word to say. The Grasshopper closes were fit for nothing but grasshoppers; the fool was himself, he had himself to blame if he'd come home from harvest empty-handed, and Farmer Venerando was quite right to want to be paid back, without all that talking and spinning things out, though that was what he'd paid a lawyer to talk for him for. But when it was over, and Farmer Venerando was going off gleefully, rocking inside his great boots like a fattened duck, he couldn't help asking the clerk if it was true that they were going to sell his mule.

"Silence!" interrupted the judge, who was blowing his nose before passing on to another case.

Don Licciu Papa woke up with a start on his bench, and cried, "Silence!"

"If you'd brought a lawyer, they'd have let you say something more," Neighbour Orazio told him for his comfort.

In the piazza, in front of the Town Hall steps, the crier sold his mule for him.

"Forty dollars for Neighbour Vito Gnirri's mule! Forty dollars for a fine bay mule! Forty dollars!"

Neighbour Vito, sitting on the steps with his chin between his hands, wasn't going to let out a word about the mule's being old, and it's being over sixteen years that he'd worked her. And she stood there as happy as a bride, in her new halter. But the moment they'd really led her away, he went off his head, thinking of that usurer of a Farmer Venerando who was getting forty dollars out of him just for one year's half-profits on the Grasshopper closes, and the land wasn't worth as much to buy it outright, and without his mule he'd never be able to work it, and next year he'd be in debt again. And he began to shout like a maniac into Farmer Venerando's face:

"What shall you want of me when I've got nothing left? — Antichrist that you are!"

And he'd have liked to knock the baptism off his brow, if it hadn't been for Don Licciu Papa who was there with his sword and his braided hat, and who began to shout as he drew back:

"Halt in the Law's name! Halt in the Law's name!"

"What Law!" squealed Neighbour Vito going home with the halter in his hand. "Law is made for them who've got money to spend."

Which was what the herdsman Arcangelo knew, who, when he'd gone to law with his Reverence because of his bit of a house which his Reverence wanted to force him to sell to him, had everybody saying to him:

"Are you out of your mind going to law with his Reverence? It's the tale of the pitcher fighting with the stones. His Reverence with all his money will hire the best lawyer's tongue among them, and will bring you to poverty and craziness."

His Reverence, since he'd got rich, had enlarged the paternal house, this way and that, like the hedgehog does when he swells himself out to drive his neighbours away from his hole. Now he'd widened the windows looking on to Shepherd Arcangelo's roof, and he said he needed the other man's house so as to build a kitchen above it and turn the window into a doorway.

"You see, my dear Neighbour Arcangelo, I can't manage without a kitchen! You must be reasonable!"

Neighbour Arcangelo didn't see it, and kept on saying he wanted to die in the house where he was born. As a matter of fact, he only came there of a Saturday; but the stones knew him, and if he thought of the Village, when he was away on the wild pastures of Carramone, he never saw it as anything except that patched-up little doorway and that window without any glass.

"All right, all right," said his Reverence to himself. "Pig-headed peasants! We've got to knock the sense in."

And from his Reverence's window rained down broken pots, stones and dirty water on Shepherd Arcangelo's roof, till the corner where the little bed stood was worse than a pigsty. If Shepherd Arcangelo shouted, his Reverence began to shout louder than he, from the roof above: Couldn't one keep a pot of basil on his window-sill nowadays? Wasn't a man free to water his own flowers?

Shepherd Arcangelo had a head stubbornner than his own wethers, and he went to law. There came the judge, the clerk, and Don Licciu Papa, to see whether a man was free to water his own flowers or not, so of course on that day the flowers weren't there on the window-sill, and his Reverence had only to take the trouble to remove them every time the Law was coming, and put them out again as soon as they'd turned their backs. As for the judge he couldn't spend his days playing watchman on Shepherd Arcangelo's roof, or patrolling up and down the narrow street; every visit he made was expensive.

Remained only to decide whether his Reverence's window should or should not have an iron grating, and the judge, the clerk and all the lot looked up with their spectacles on their noses, and took measurements so that you'd have thought it was a baron's roof, that bit of a flat mouldy housetop. And his Reverence brought forth certain ancient rights for a window without a grating, and for a few tiles which projected out over the roof, till you could make nothing of it any more, and poor Shepherd Arcangelo himself stared up in the air as if to find out whatever his roof could be guilty of. He lost his sleep at nights and the smile from his mouth; he bled himself in expenses, and had to leave his flock in charge of the boy while he ran round after the judge and the bailiff. So of course the sheep began to die like flies, with the first cold of winter, which showed that the Lord was punishing him for falling out with the Church, so they said.

"Then you take the house," he said at last to his Reverence, when after so much law-suits and expenses they wouldn't even advance him the money to buy a rope to hang himself from one of the beams. He wanted to sling his saddlebag over his neck and go off with his daughter to live with the sheep, for he didn't want to see that accursed house again, while the world stood.

But then his other neighbour the baron came forward, saying that he too had windows and leanover tiles above the roof of Shepherd Arcangelo, and seeing that his Reverence wanted to build a kitchen, he himself had to enlarge his store-pantry, that the poor goat-herd no longer knew whom his house did belong to. But his Reverence found the means to settle the quarrel with the baron, dividing the house of Shepherd Arcangelo between them like good friends, and seeing that the latter had this other obligation as well, the price of the house was reduced by a good quarter.

Nina, the daughter of Shepherd Arcangelo, when they had to leave the house and depart from the Village, simply never stopped crying, as if her heart was fastened to those four walls and to the nails of the partitions. Her father, poor fellow, tried to console her as best he could, telling her that away up there, in the Caves of Carramone, you lived like a prince, without neighbours and pig-snatchers. But the goodwives who knew the story winked among themselves, murmuring: "Up at Carramone the young Master won't be able to come to her, at evening, when Neighbour Arcangelo is with his sheep. That's why Nina is weeping like a fountain."

When Neighbor Arcangelo got to know this he began to swear and shout:

"Hussy! Now who'll you get to marry you?" But Nina wasn't thinking of getting anybody to marry her. She only wanted to stop where the young Master was, so that she could see him every day at the window, as soon as he got up, and make him a sign to ask him if he was coming to see her that evening. And in this way Nina had fallen, with seeing the young Master at the window every day, who had begun by laughing to her, and sending her kisses and the smoke from his pipe, and the neighbour women were bursting with jealousy. Then bit by bit love had come, so that now the girl had quite lost her senses, and she said straight and flat to her father:

"You go where you like. I shall stop where I am."

And the young Master had promised her he would look after her.

Shepherd Arcangelo wasn't swallowing that, and he wanted to fetch Don Licciu Papa to take away his daughter by force.

"Anyhow when we've gone from here nobody will know our shames," he said. But the judge told him that Nina had already reached years of discretion, and she was her own mistress to do as she pleased and chose.

"Ah! her own mistress?" stammered Shepherd Arcangelo. "And I'm master!" And the first time he met the young Master, who blew smoke into his nose, he cracked his head like a nut with a wooden cudgel.

After they had tied him up fast, Don Licciu Papa came running up shouting: "Make way! Make way for the Law!"

They even gave him a lawyer to defend him before the judge.

"At least the Law will cost me nothing this time," said Neighbour Arcangelo. The lawyer succeeded in proving that four and four make eight, that Shepherd Arcangelo hadn't done it on purpose, wilfully seeking to murder the young Master with a cudgel of wild pear-wood, but that the cudgel belonged to his profession, and was used by him to knock the rams on the head when they wouldn't hear reason.

So he was only condemned to five years, Nina remained with the young

Master, the baron enlarged his store-pantry, and his Reverence built a fine new house above that old place of Shepherd Arcangelo's, with a balcony and two green windows.

THE MYSTERY PLAY

Every time he told this tale again, big tears came to Uncle Giovanni's eyes, which seemed quite incredible in his policeman's face.

They had set up the theatre in the little square in front of the church: myrtle, oak, and entire branches of olive with all the foliage, showing that nobody had refused to let them take what they wanted for the Mystery Play.

Uncle Memmu, seeing the sexton in his orchard hacking and breaking off whole branches, fairly felt the blows of the hatchet in his stomach and called to him from the distance:

"Nay, aren't you a Christian, Neighbour Calogero, or has the priest never marked you with the holy oil, seeing that you lash at that olive tree without mercy?"

But his wife, really with tears in her eyes, kept trying to calm him down: "It's for the Mystery Play; leave him alone. The Lord will send you a good year for it. Don't you see the young corn dying of thirst?"

Quite yellow, green-yellow like children when they're sick, poor corn! and the earth as white and hard as a crust, eating it away, so that it made your throat burn to look at it.

"This is all Don Angelino's doing," grumbled her husband, "to get his supply of kindling, and lay hands on the offerings money."

Don Angelino the curate had worked like a navvy for a week, with the sexton to help him, digging holes, erecting posts, hanging up red-paper lanterns, spreading for a background the new curtains belonging to Farmer Nunzio, who had just got married, which made a fine show among the foliage, with the red lanterns in front.

The play was the Flight into Egypt, and the part of Holy Mary was to be played by Neighbour Nanni, who was a small-made man and had had himself clean shaved for the occasion. The moment he appeared, carrying the Infant Jesus at his breast, the latter being Goodwife Menica's little lad, and said to the robbers: "Behold my blood!" the people in the audience began to beat their breasts with stones, and started crying all in one voice, "Have mercy on us, Holy Virgin!"

But Janu and Master Cola, the robbers, in false beards made of lamb's skin, took no heed, and insisted on seizing the Sacred Child, to carry him off to Herod. The curate had chosen those two well, for robbers. Real stony-hearted villains

they were! — so that Pinto, when he had a lawsuit with Neighbor Janu about the fig-tree in the vegetable garden, threw it up at him all that while after, saying: "You are the robber in the Flight into Egypt, you are."

Don Angelino, with the paper in his hand, kept repeating behind Farmer Nunzio's curtain: "In vain, oh woman, is your prayer; pity does not move me! Pity does not move me! — It's your turn, Neighbor Janu." For those two scoundrels had clean forgotten their part, good-for-nothing lot that they were! The Virgin Mary had to go on begging and beseeching them, while folks were muttering in the crowd: "Neighbour Nanni only plays the softy because he's dressed-up as Holy Mary. But for that he'd stick the pair of them with that sheath-knife he's got in his pocket." But as Saint Joseph came on to the scene, with his white cotton beard, going round seeking for his wife in the forest that came up to his breast, the crowd couldn't keep quiet, because the robbers and the Madonna and Saint Joseph could all have touched one another with their hands, if it hadn't been that the Mystery Play said they'd got to go circling round after one another without meeting. And this was the miracle. If the malefactors managed to lay hold of the Madonna and Saint Joseph, both together they'd make mincemeat of them, and of the Infant Jesus as well, God preserve us!

Goodwife Filippa, whose husband was in the galleys for having slaughtered his neighbour in the vineyard with his hoe, because the fellow was stealing his prickly pears, wept like a fountain seeing Saint Joseph chased by the robbers worse than a rabbit, and thought of her husband, when he had come to the little hut in the vineyard absolutely spent, with the police at his heels, and had said to her:

"Give me a drop of water. I'm done for!"

Then they had handcuffed him like Jesus in the garden, and shut him up in the iron cage, to try him, with his bonnet between his hands and his hair absolutely gone like a grey old wig with so many months of prison — you could see it in his eyes as well — as he listened to the judges and witnesses with his yellow prison-face. And when they had taken him away by sea, on which he had never been before, with his basket over his shoulder, linked up to his galley-companions like a string of onions, he had turned round to look at her for the last time, ah with such a face, for he would never see her again, for from the sea nobody ever comes back, and she had never heard any more of him.

"Ah Mother of Sorrows, you know where he is now!" mumbled the live man's widow as she knelt sitting back on her heels, praying for the poor wretch till she fancied she could see him, there, far off, in the dark. She alone could know what anguish there must be in the heart of the Madonna, at that moment when the robbers were just on the point of seizing Saint Joseph by his cloak.

"Now you see the meeting of the Patriarch Saint Joseph with the malefactors!" said Don Angelino wiping the sweat from his face with his pocket-handkerchief. And Trippa the butcher beat on the big drum — Zum! zum! zum! — to make them understand that the robbers were struggling with Saint Joseph. The goodwives began to scream, and the men picked up stones to flatten the snouts of those two rascals of Janu and Neighbour Cola, shouting, "Leave the patriarch Saint Joseph alone! you pair of villains!" And Farmer Nunzio, for love of his curtain, also started yelling that they were not to burst it. Don Angelino then poked his head out of his den, with his chin unshaved for a week, and worked himself to death trying with hands and voice to calm them:

"Let them be! Let them be! That's how it's written in their part."

A fine part he'd written for them, indeed! and he said moreover it was all his own invention. Really, he would have put Christ on the cross with his own hands, to get the quarter for the mass. Or Neighbour Rocco, a father of five children, hadn't he had him buried without a scrap of a funeral, because he couldn't fleece anything from him — there, under the stone floor of the church, at night, in the dark, so that you couldn't even see to lower him into the vault, for eternity! And hadn't he turned Uncle Menico out of his little house, and taken it from him, because it was built on the rock-slope belonging to the church, and had a tithe-rent of a quarter a year on it, which Uncle Menico had never managed to pay? When he had built the cabin for himself, pleased as could be, carrying the stones with his own hands, it never entered his head that one day the curate would have it sold because of those five nickels tithe-rent. The difficulty was to get them together all at once when the tithes were due, and Don Angelino answered him, shrugging his shoulders:

"What am I to do? You see, brother, it's not my property, it's church property." Just like Master Calogero the Sexton, who repeated: "Serve the altar, and the altar will give you bread." Now he had hitched himself on to the rope in the belfry and was ringing for all he was worth, while Trippa was beating on the big drum, and the women were yelling, "Miracle! Miracle!"

Here Uncle Giovanni felt the hair rise on his head, as he remembered.

Just a year later, day for day, on the eve of Good Friday, Nanni and Master Cola met in the same place, at night, under the Easter moon, so that it was light as day in the small square. Nanni was squatting behind the church-tower, to catch anyone who was going to visit Gossip Venera, whom he had once or twice caught all in a fluster with her dress undone, and had heard someone making off through the garden gate.

"Who was here with you? You'd better tell me. If you like somebody else, I'll leave you to it, and goodnight to the music. But you know, I don't like to have

such a thing on my mind."

She protested it wasn't true, swore by the soul of her husband, and called the Lord and the Madonna hung at the bed-head to witness, and kissed with crossed hands that very same light-blue cotton petticoat that she had lent to Neighbour Nanni to act the Virgin Mary.

"Be careful! Be careful what you say to me!"

He didn't know that Mistress Venera had been smitten by Master Cola when she saw him playing the robber in the Mystery Play, with his lambs-wool beard.

"Oh, all right," he now thought to himself. "If that's the case there's nothing to do but to lie in wait for the rabbit, like a hunter, to make sure with one's own eyes."

The woman had said to the other man: "Look out for Neighbour Nanni. He's got something into his head, by the way he looks at me, and the way he hunts round the house every time he comes."

Cola had his mother depending on him, depending for her life on his earnings, so he didn't risk going to Gossip Venera's again — not for one day, two days, three days, nor till the devil tempted him with that moon which came in right to the bed through the cracks in the window frame, and made him have before his eyes all the time the little deserted street, and the widow's house-door, at the turning of the small square facing the church-tower. Nanni was waiting in the shadow, alone in the square that was all white under the moon, and in a silence such that you could hear the clock of Viagrande chime every quarter of an hour, and the light trotting of the dogs which went sniffing in every corner and rummaging their noses in the street-sweepings. At last a footstep was heard, someone keeping close to the wall, and stopping at the widow's door, to knock softly, once, twice, then more quickly and in a hurry, like someone whose heart beat with desire and fear, and Nanni felt the stranger's knocking strike in his own chest too. Then the door opened gradually, carefully, with a gap darker than the shadow, and a gun went off.

Master Cola fell, crying, "Mother, oh mother! They're killing me!"

Nobody heard or said anything, for fear of the law; even Gossip Venera herself said she was asleep. Only the mother, hearing the gunshot, felt herself struck through the bowels, and ran just as she was to pick up Cola at the widow's door, crying: "My son! My son!" The neighbours appeared with lights, and the only door that remained shut was the one in front of which the desperate mother continued her imprecations: "Vile woman! Vile woman! You've killed my child for me!"

The mother, on her knees beside her wounded son's bed, prayed to God, clasping her hands hard, hard, her eyes quite dry, so that she looked like a

madwoman. "Lord! Lord! My son, Lord!" Ah, what a cruel Easter the Lord had sent her. Exactly on Good Friday, while the procession was passing, with the drum and Don Angelino crowned with thorns! Ah, how black everything was in that house, and through the open door you could see the sun, and the beautiful young cornfields, for that year the folks hadn't had to pray to God for a good season, and so they left Don Angelino to whip himself on the back with the scourge by himself; even when the sexton had gone to get in kindling, pretending it was for the Mystery play, they had threatened to lame him with stones if he didn't clear out quick.

Only in her house there was weeping, now that everybody was content! Only in her house! She was kept down by the side of that poor bed like a bundle of rags, broken, become all at once decrepit, her grey hair hanging about her face. And she heard none of those who filled the room out of curiosity. She saw nothing but the dulled eyes of her child, and his pinched nose. They had fetched the doctor to him; and they had brought Goodwife Barbara, the lucky-woman, and the poor mother had contrived to find the twenty-five cents to have Don Angelino say a mass for him.

The doctor shook his head. "It'll take more than Don Angelino's mass," said the goodwives. "You want the blessed cotton of Fra Sanzio the hermit, or else the candle of the Madonna of Valverde, which performs miracles all over the place."

The wounded man, with the blessed cotton on his abdomen, and the candle before his yellow face, opened wide his dimmed eyes, looking at the neighbours one after the other, and tried to smile at his mother, with his pale lips, to let her know that he was really feeling better, with that miraculous cotton on his stomach. He nodded with his head, with that sad, sad smile of a dying man who says he feels better. The doctor however said no; that he wouldn't live the night through. And Don Angelino, not to have the value of his goods run down, repeated:

"It takes faith to perform miracles. Saints, and relics, and the blessed cotton are all excellent things when you have faith."

The poor mother had plenty of faith, she spoke really heart to heart with the saints and the Madonna, and said to the blessed candle, rapidly, quickly, through her shut teeth: "Lord! Lord! Grant me this mercy! Leave me my child, Lord!" And her son listened, intent, with his eyes fixed on the candle, and he tried to smile, to nod and say yes, he did.

All the village crazy to know the ins and outs of that deed; but the only one who was in the know was Mrs. Venera. As for her she might have been deeper in than ever if she had had to reckon with the blood that was found in the square,

for Master Cola, gasping and staggering, had gone to fall precisely in the place where he'd played the robber in the Mystery Play the year before. However Mrs. Venera had to leave the village, because nobody would buy her bread-cakes any more, and they called her the "excommunicated woman." Neighbour Nanni also lived on for a time, lurking here and there among the rocks and the fields, but at the first cold of winter they caught him one night near the first houses of the village, where he was waiting for the boy who used to bring him bread in secret. They tried him and sent him beyond the sea, to be with the husband of Goodwife Filippa.

Well for him, if he had never thought of putting on the "excommunicated woman's" petticoat to play the Blessed Virgin.

MALARIA

And you feel your could touch it with your hand — as if it smoked up from the fat earth, there, everywhere, round about the mountains that shut it in, from Agnone to Mount Etna capped with snow — stagnating in the plain like the sultry heat of June. There the red-hot sun rises and sets, and the livid moon, and the *Puddara* which seems to float through a sea of exhalations, and the birds and the white marguerites of spring, and the burnt-up summer; and there the wild-duck in long black files fly through the autumn clouds, and the river gleams as if it were of metal, between the wide, lonely banks, that are broken here and there, scattered with pebbles, and in the background the Lake of Lentini, like a mere, with its flat shores, and not a boat, not a tree on its sides, smooth and motionless. By the lake-bed the oxen pasture at will, forlorn, muddied up to the breast, hairy. When the sheep-bell resounds in the great silence, the wag-tails fly away, noiselessly, and the shepherd himself, yellow with fever, and white as well with dust, lifts his swollen lids for a moment, raising his head in the shadow of the dry reeds.

And truly the malaria gets into you with the bread you eat, or if you open your mouth to speak as you walk, suffocating in the dust and sun of the roads, and you feel your knees give way beneath you, or you sink discouraged on the saddle as your mule ambles along, with its head down. In vain the villages of Lentini and Francoforte and Paterno try to clamber up like strayed sheep on to the first hills that rise from the plain, and surround themselves with orange groves, and vineyards, and evergreen gardens and orchards; the malaria seizes the inhabitants in the depopulated streets, and nails them in front of the doors of their houses whose plaster is all falling with the sun, and there they tremble with fever under their brown cloaks, with all the bed-blankets over their shoulders.

Down below, on the plain, the houses are rare and sad-looking, beside the roads wasted by the sun, standing between two heaps of smoking dung, propped up by dilapidated sheds, where the change-horses wait with extinguished eyes, tied to the empty manger. Or by the shore of the lake, with the decrepit bough of the inn sign hung over the doorway, the great bare rooms, and the host dozing squatted on the doorstep, with his head tied up in a kerchief, spying round the deserted country every time he wakes up, to see if a thirsty traveller is coming. Or else what looks like little huts of white wood, plumed with four meagre, grey eucalyptus trees, along the railway that cuts the plain in two like a hatchet cleft,

where the locomotive flies whistling as the autumn wind, and where at night are coruscations of fiery sparks. Or finally here and there, at the boundaries of the farm-lands marked by a little stone pillar very roughly squared, the farm-places with their roofs shoved up from outside, with their door-frames collapsing, in front of the cracked threshing-floors, in the shade of the tall ricks of straw where the hens sleep with their heads under their wing, and the donkey lets his head hang, with his mouth still full of straw, and the dog rises suspiciously, and barks hoarsely at the stone which falls out from the plaster, at the fire-fly which flickers past, at the leaf which stirs in the inert countryside.

At evening, as soon as the sun sinks, sun-burnt men appear in the doorways, wearing big straw hats and wide canvas drawers, yawning and stretching their arms; and half-naked women, with blackened shoulders, suckling babies that are already pale and limp, so that you can't imagine that they'll ever get big and swarthy and romp on the grass when winter comes again, and the yard-floor will be green once more, and the sky blue, and the country all round laughing in the sun. And you can't imagine where all the people live who go to mass on Sundays, or why they live there, all those who come to the little church surrounded by cactus hedges, from ten miles around, from as far as ever the clanging of the little cracked bell can be heard over the endless plain.

However, wherever there is malaria there is earth blessed by God. In June the ears of wheat hang weighted down, and the furrows smoke as if they had blood in their veins the moment the ploughshare enters them in November. And then those who reap and those who sow must fall like ripe ears as well, for the Lord has said, "In the sweat of thy brow shalt thou eat bread." And when the sweats of fever leave some one of them stiff upon the mattress of maize-sheathes, and there's no need any more of sulphate or of decoction of eucalyptus, they put him on the hay-cart, or across an ass' pack-saddle, or on a ladder, or any way they can, with a sack over his face, and they take him to bury him by the lonely little church, under the thorny cactuses whose fruit no one for that reason eats. The women weep in a cluster, and the men stand looking on, smoking.

So they had carried away the estate-keeper of Valsavoia, who was called Farmer Croce, after he'd been swallowing sulphate and eucalyptus decoction for thirty years. In spring he was better, but at autumn, when the wild-ducks passed again, he put his kerchief on his head and showed himself not oftener than every other day in the doorway; till he was reduced to skin and bone, and had a big belly like a drum, so that they called him the Toad, partly because of his rude, savage manner, and partly because his eyes had become livid and stuck out of his head. He kept on saying before he died, "Don't you bother, the master will see after my children!" And with his wondering eyes he looked them one after

another in the face, all those who stood round the bed, the last evening, when they put the candle under his nose. Uncle Menico the goat-herd, who understood those things, said that his liver must be as hard as a stone, and weighed five pounds. But somebody added:

"Well, now he needn't worry about it! He's got fat and rich at his master's expense, and his children don't stand in need of anybody! Do you think he took all that sulphate and put up with all that malaria for thirty years, just to please his master?"

Neighbour Carmine, the host by the lake, had lost all his five children one after the other in the same way, three boys and two girls! Never mind about the girls! But the boys died just when they were getting old enough to earn their bread. So now he was used to it; and as the fever got the last boy under, after having harassed him for two or three years, he didn't spend another farthing, neither for sulphate nor for decoctions, but drew off some good wine and set himself to make all the good fish stews he could think of, to provoke the appetite of the sick youth. He went fishing specially in the mornings, and came back laden with mullet and eels as thick as your arm, and when it was ready he stood before the bed with tears in his eyes and said to his son, "There you are, eat that!" And the rest of the fish Nanni the carter took to town to sell.

"The lake gives, and the lake takes away," said Nanni, seeing Neighbour Carmine weeping in secret. "What's the good, brother?"

The lake had given him good wages. And at Christmas, when eels fetch a good price, they used to have merry suppers before the fire, in the house by the lake, macaroni, sausages, everything you could think of, while the wind howled outside like a wolf that is cold and hungry. And in that way those that were left behind consoled themselves for the ones that were dead. But little by little they were wasting away, so that the mother grew bent like a hook with heart-brokenness, and the father, who was big and fat, was always on the doorstep, so that he needn't see those empty rooms, where his boys used to sing and work. The last one absolutely didn't want to die, and cried and grew desperate when the fever seized him, and even went and threw himself into the lake out of fear of death. But his father could swim, and fished him out again, and shouted at him that that cold bath would bring back the fever worse than ever.

"Ah," sobbed the youth, clutching his hair with his hands, "there's no hope for me, there's no hope for me!" "Just like his sister Agatha, who didn't want to die because she was a bride," observed Neighbour Carmine in private to his wife, sitting on the side of the bed; and she, who for some time now had left off weeping, nodded assent, bent as she was like a hook.

But she, though she was so reduced, and her big fat husband, they both had

tough skins, and lived on alone to mind the house. The malaria doesn't finish everybody. Sometimes there's one who will live to be a hundred, like Cirino the simpleton, who had neither king nor kingdom, nor wit nor wish, nor father nor mother, nor house to sleep in, nor bread to eat, and everybody knew him for forty miles around, since he went from farm to farm, helping to tend the oxen, to carry the manure, to skin the dead cattle, and do all the dirty jobs; and got kicks and a bit of bread; he slept in the ditches, on the edges of the fields, under the hedges, or under the sheds for the standing cattle; and lived by charity, straying round like a dog without a master, with two ends of old drawers held together with bits of string on his thin black legs; and he went singing at the top of his voice under the sun which beat down on his bare head, yellow as saffron. He neither took sulphate any more, nor medicines, nor did he catch the fever. A hundred times they had found him stretched out across the road, as if he was dead, and picked him up; but at last the malaria had left him, because it could do no more with him. After it had eaten up his brain and the calves of his legs, and had got into his belly till it was swollen like a water-bag, it had left him as happy as an Easter Day, singing in the sun better than a cricket. The simpleton liked best to stand in front of the stables at Valsavoia, because people passed by, and he ran after them for miles, crying, "Uuh! uuh!" until they threw him a few cents. The host took the cents from him and kept him to sleep under the shed, on the horses' bedding, and when the horses gave him a kick Cirino ran to wake up the master crying, "Uuh!" and then in the morning he currycombed them and groomed them.

Later he had been attracted by the railway which they were building in the neighbourhood. The coach-drivers and wayfarers had become rarer on the road, and the idiot didn't know what to think, watching the swallows in the air for hours, and blinking his eyelids at the sun to make it out. Then the first time he saw all those people stuffed into the big cars that were leaving the station, he seemed to understand. And after that every day he waited for the train, never a minute wrong in his time, as if he had a clock in his head; and while it fled before him, hurling its noise and smoke in his face, he began to run after it, throwing his arms in the air and howling in a tone of anger and menace, "uuh! uuh!"

The host too, whenever he saw the train passing in the distance puffing through the malaria, said nothing, but spat after it all he felt, shaking his head before the deserted sheds and the empty jugs. Formerly affairs had gone so well with him that he had had four wives, so that they called him "Killwife," and they said he'd got case-hardened to it, and that he was for taking the fifth, if the daughter of Farmer Turi Oricchiazza hadn't given him answer: "God preserve us!

not if he was made of gold, that Christian there! He eats up his fellow-man like a crocodile!"

But it wasn't true that he'd got case-hardened to it, because when Goodwife Santa had died, his third, he had never taken a mouthful of food till midday, nor a drop of water, and he really cried behind the counter of the inn. "This time I want to take one who is used to the malaria," he had said after that event. "I don't want to suffer like this any more."

The malaria killed off his wives, one after the other, but they left him just the same, old and wrinkled, so that it was really hard to imagine that such a man had his own brave homicide on his conscience, intending for all that to take a fourth wife. However, each new time he wanted his wife young and appetizing, for the inn could never prosper without a wife, and for this reason customers had become scarce. Now there was nobody left but Neighbour Mommou, the signalman from the railway just near, a man who never spoke a word, and came to drink his glass between train and train, sitting himself down on the bench by the door with his shoes in his hand, to rest his legs.

"The malaria doesn't get those lot!" thought Killwife, also never opening his mouth, because if the malaria had made them fall like flies there'd have been nobody to keep that railway going. The poor wretch, since the only man who had poisoned his existence had been removed from his sight, had now only two enemies in the world: the railway which took away his customers, and the malaria which carried off his wives. All the other people on the plain, as far as the eye could reach, had their moments of blessedness, even if they had someone in bed sinking bit by bit, or if the fever was beating them down on the doorstep, with their handkerchiefs on their heads and their cloaks over their shoulders. They took pleasure looking round on the young wheat that was rising prosperous and green as velvet, or the wheat-ears waxing like a sea, and they listened to the long singing of the reapers, stretched out in a line like soldiers, and in every little road the bagpipes were heard, behind which swarms of peasants were just arriving from Calabria for the harvest, dusty people bent under their heavy saddle-sacks, the men in front and the women trailing behind, limping and looking with burnt, tired faces at the road which stretched before them. And on the brink of every ditch, behind every clump of aloes, at the hour when evening drops down like a grey veil, the pipes of the watchmen fluted among the ripe ears of grain, which fell silent, motionless, as the wind sank, invaded by the same silence of night.

"There you are!" thought Killwife. "If all that lot of folks can only manage not to leave their bones behind them, and get back home, they'll get back with money in their pockets, they will."

As for him, no! He waited neither for harvest nor anything, and he hadn't the spirit to sing. The evening fell sadly enough, through the empty stables and the dark inn. At that hour the train passed whistling in the distance, and Neighbour Mommu stood beside his signal-box with his flag in his hand; but away up there, when the train had vanished in the shadows, they heard Cirino the simpleton running after it shouting, "Uuh!" And Killwife, in the doorway of the dark, deserted inn, thought to himself that there was no malaria for that lot.

At last, when he could no longer pay the rent for the inn and the stabling, the landlord turned him out after he'd lived there fifty-seven years, and Killwife was reduced to looking for a job on the railway himself, and holding the little flag in his hand when the train passed.

And then, tired with running all day up and down the track, worn out with years and misfortunes, he saw twice a day the long line of carriages crowded with people pass by; the jolly companies of shooters spreading over the plain; sometimes a peasant lad playing the accordion with his head bent, bunched up on the seat of a third-class compartment; the beautiful ladies who looked out of the windows with their heads swathed in a veil; the silver and the tarnished steel of the bags and valises which shone under the polished lamps; the high stuffed seat-backs with their crochet-work covers. Ah, how lovely it must be travelling in there, snatching a wink of sleep! It was as if a piece of a city were sliding past, with the lit-up streets and the glittering shops. Then the train lost itself in the vast mist of the evening, and the poor fellow, taking off his shoes for a moment, and sitting on the bench, muttered, "Ah! for that lot there isn't any malaria."

THE ORPHANS

The little girl appeared in the doorway twisting the corner of her apron between her fingers, and said, "I've come."

Then as nobody took any notice of her, she began to look timidly from one to the other of the village wives who were kneading up the bread, and added: "They told me, 'You go to Neighbour Sidora's'."

"Come on, come on," cried Goodwife Sidora, red as a tomato as she turned from the oven-hole. "Wait and I'll make you a nice bread-cake."

"That means they're bringing the extreme unction to Neighbour Nunzia, if they've sent the child away," observed the Licodia goodwife.

One of the women who was helping to knead the bread turned her head round, keeping on working with her fists in the kneading-trough all the time, her arms bare to the elbows, and asked the child:

"How is your step-mother?"

The child didn't know the woman, so she looked at her with wide eyes, and then lowering her head again, and rapidly, nervously twisting the corner of her apron, she mumbled in a low tone:

"She's in bed."

"Don't you hear there's the Host in the house?" replied the Licodia woman. "Now the neighbours have begun to lament round the door."

"When I've got the bread in the oven," said Neighbour Sidora, "I shall run across for a minute myself to see if they're not wanting anything. Master Meno will lose his right arm if this wife dies as well."

"There's some who have no luck with their wives, like others who are always unlucky with their cattle. As many as they get they are bound to lose. Look at Goodwife Angela!"

"Last night," added the Licodia woman, "I saw Neighbour Meno standing on his doorstep, come home from the vineyard before Ave Maria, and he was wiping his nose with his handkerchief."

"Yet you know," added the gossip who was kneading the bread, "he's a blessed good hand at killing off his wives. In less than three years this makes two daughters of Shepherd Nino that he's finished off, one after the other! Wait a bit, and he'll do for the third one, and then he'll get everything that belongs to Shepherd Nino."

"But is this child here Neighbour Nunzia's daughter, or is she by the first

wife?"

"She's by the first wife. And the second one was as fond of her as if she was her own child, because the little orphan was her niece."

The child, hearing them speaking about her, began to cry quietly in a corner, to ease her aching heart, which she had kept still up till then by fidgeting with her apron.

"Come here then, come here," said Neighbour Sidora again. "The bread-cake is all nice and done. There, don't you cry, your mamma is in Paradise."

Then the child wiped her eyes with her fists, the more readily because Neighbour Sidora was just setting about to open the oven.

"Poor Neighbour Nunzia!" a neighbour woman came saying in the doorway. "The grave-diggers have set off just now. They've just this minute gone past."

"Save us from it! I am a daughter of Holy Mary!" exclaimed the goodwives crossing themselves.

Goodwife Sidora took the bread-cake from the oven, dusted the ashes off it, and gave it fiery hot to the child, who took it in her pinafore and went off with it very quietly, blowing on it.

"Where are you going?" Goodwife Sidora shouted after her. "You stop here. There's a bogey-man at home, with a black face, and he runs off with folks."

The orphan child listened very seriously, opening wide her eyes. Then she answered with the same obstinate little voice:

"I'm going to take it to mamma."

"Your mother's gone away. You stop here," repeated the neighbour. "You stop here and eat your bread-cake."

Then the child squatted on the doorstep, so unhappy, holding her bread-cake in her hands without thinking about it.

All at once, seeing her father approaching she got up quickly and ran to meet him. Neighbour Meno entered without saying anything, and sat in a corner with his hands hanging between his knees, long-faced, his lips white as paper, not having taken a mouthful of food since yesterday, he was so broken-hearted. He looked round at the women as if to say: I'm in a sad way!

The women, seeing him with his black kerchief round his neck, surrounded him in a circle, their hands still white with flour, sympathizing with him in chorus.

"Don't talk to me, Neighbour Sidora," he repeated, shaking his head and heaving his shoulders. "This is a thorn that'll never come out of my heart! A real saint that woman! I didn't deserve her, if I may say so. Even yesterday, bad as she was, she got up to see to the foal that is just weaned. And she wouldn't let me fetch the doctor so as not to spend money nor buy medicine. I shall never find

another wife like her. You mark my word! Leave me alone and let me cry. I've reason to!"

And he kept shaking his head and swelling his shoulders, as if his trouble was heavy on him. "As for finding another wife," added the Licodia woman to cheer him up, "you've only to look round for one."

"No! no!" Neighbour Meno kept repeating, with his head down like a mule. "I shall never find another wife like her. This time I'll stop a widower. I'm telling you."

Goodwife Sidora lifted up her voice: "Don't you talk rash, it doesn't do! You ought to look round for another wife, if for no other reason but out of regard for this poor little orphan, else who's going to look after her, when you're away in the country! You don't want to leave her in the middle of the road?"

"You find me another wife like her if you can! She didn't wash herself so as not to dirty any water, and she waited on me in the house better than a man-servant, loving and so faithful she wouldn't have robbed me of a handful of beans from the shed, and she never as much as opened her mouth to say, 'You give me this!' And then a fine dowry with it all, stuff worth its weight in gold! And now I've got to give it back, because there are no children! The sexton told me just now he was coming with the holy water. And how fond she was of that little thing there, because she reminded her of her poor sister! Any other woman, who wasn't her aunt, would have cast the evil eye on her, poor little orphan."

"If you take the third daughter of Shepherd Nino everything will come all right, for the orphan and the dowry," said the Licodia woman.

"That's what I say myself! But don't talk to me, for my mouth is bitter as gall."

"That's not the way to be talking now," seconded Goodwife Sidora. "Better take a mouthful of something to eat, Neighbour Meno, for you're at your last gasp."

"No! no!" Neighbour Meno kept repeating. "Don't talk to me about eating, I've got a knot in my throat."

Neighbour Sidora put before him on a stool the hot bread with black olives, a piece of sheep's cheese, and the flask of wine. And the poor fellow began to munch slowly, slowly, keeping on mumbling with his long face.

"Such bread," he observed, becoming moved to tenderness. "Such bread as she made, the poor departed soul, there wasn't her like for it. It was as soft as meal, it was! And with a handful of wild fennel she'd make you a soup that would make you lick your fingers after it. Now I shall have to buy my bread at the shop, from that thief of a Master Puddo, and I shall get no more hot soup, every time I come home wet through like a new hatched chicken. And I shall have to go to bed on a cold stomach. Even the other night, while I was sitting up with her, after I'd been

hoeing all day breaking up the lumps on the slope, and I heard myself snoring, sitting beside the bed, I was so tired, the poor soul said to me: 'Go and eat a spoonful. I've left the soup for you warm by the fire.' And she was always thoughtful for me, at home, mindful of whatever there was to be done, this, that and the other, so that she could never have done talking about it, telling me her last advice, like one who is setting off for a long journey, and I hearing her all the time murmuring when I was half asleep and half awake. And she went happy into the other world, with her crucifix on her breast, and her hands folded over it. She's got no need of rosaries and masses, saint that she is! The money for the priest would be money thrown away."

"It's a world of troubles!" exclaimed the neighbour woman. "And now Goodwife Angela's donkey, just close here, is going to die of indigestion."

"My troubles are worse than that!" wounded up Neighbour Meno wiping his mouth with the back of his hand. "No, don't make me eat any more, for every mouthful goes down into my stomach like lead. Better you eat, poor innocent child who don't understand anything. Now you'll have nobody to wash you and comb your hair. Now you'll have no mother to keep you under her wing like a mother-hen, and you are lost as I am. I found you that one, but another step-mother like her you'll never have, my child!"

The little girl, all moved, pushed out her lips again and put her fists in her eyes.

"No, you can't do no less, I say," repeated Gossip Sidora. "You've got to look for another wife, out of regard for this poor little orphan who'd be left on the streets."

"And me, how am I left? And my young foal, and my house, and who's going to see to the fowls? Let me weep, Neighbour Sidora! I'd better have died myself, instead of that poor soul who's gone."

"Be quiet now, you don't know what you're saying, and you don't know what it means, a home without a master!"

"Ay, that's true enough!" agreed Neighbour Meno, somewhat comforted.

"Just think of poor Goodwife Angela, if you like! First she's lost her husband, then her big son, and now her donkey is dying as well!"

"If the donkey's got indigestion, he'd better be bled under the girth," said Neighbour Meno.

"You come and look at it, you understand about it," added the goodwife, "You'll be doing a work of charity for the soul of your wife."

Neighbour Meno got up to go to Goodwife Angela's, and the orphan ran after him like a chicken, now she had no one else in the world. Gossip Sidora, good housewife, reminded him:

"And what about the house? How are you leaving it, now there's nobody in it?"

"I've locked the door; and then Cousin Alfia lives just opposite, to keep an eye on it."

The ass of Neighbour Angela was stretched out in the middle of the courtyard, with his nose cold and his ears drooping, struggling from time to time with his four hoofs in the air, while the pains contracted his sides like a big pair of bellows. The widow, sitting before him on the stones, with her hands clutching her grey hair, and her eyes dry and despairing, watched him, pale as a dead woman.

Neighbour Meno began to walk round the animal, touching its ears, looking into its eyes, and as he saw that the blood was still flowing from the side, black, drop by drop, collecting at the ends of the bristly hairs, he asked:

"Then they have bled him?"

The widow fixed her gloomy eyes on his face without replying, and nodded her head.

"Then there's nothing more to be done," concluded Neighbour Meno, and he stood there watching the ass stretch itself out on the stones, rigid, with its hair all ruffled like a dead cat.

"It's the will of God, sister!" he said to comfort her. "We are both of us ruined, both of us."

He had seated himself on the stones beside the widow, with his little girl between his knees, and they were silent all of them watching the poor creature beating the air with its hoofs, from time to time, just like a dying man.

When Gossip Sidora had finished taking the bread from the oven she too came into the courtyard, along with Cousin Alfia, who had put on her new dress, and her silk kerchief on her head, to come for a minute's chat, and Gossip Sidora said to Neighbour Meno, drawing him aside: "Shepherd Nino won't be willing to give you the other daughter, seeing that they die like flies with you, and he loses the dowry if he does. And then Santa is too young, and there's the danger that she'd fill your house with children."

"If only they were boys, never mind! But what there is to fear is that they'd be girls. I'm a downright unfortunate man."

"There's always Cousin Alfia. She isn't so young as she was, and she's got her own bit, her house and a piece of vineyard."

Neighbour Meno turned his eyes on Cousin Alfia, who was pretending to look at the ass, with her hands on her hips, and he concluded:

"If that's how it is, we can talk about it after. But I'm a downright unlucky man."

Goodwife Sidora up and said:

"Think of those that are worse off than you, think of them."

"There aren't any, I tell you! I shall never find another wife like her! I shall never be able to forget her, not if I marry ten times more! Neither will this poor little orphan forget her."

"Be quiet, you'll forget her. And the child as well will forget her. Hasn't she forgotten her own true mother? You just look at Neighbour Angela, now her donkey is dying! And she's got nothing else! She, yes, she'll always remember it."

Cousin Alfia saw it was time for her to put in too, with a long face, and she began again the praising of the dead woman. She had arranged her in the coffin with her own hands, and put a handkerchief of fine linen on her face. Because she had plenty of linen and white things, though she said it herself. Then Neighbour Meno, touched, turned to Neighbour Angela, who never moved, no more than if she was made of stone, and said:

"Well, now what are you waiting for, why don't you have the ass skinned? At least get the money for the hide."

PROPERTY

The traveller passing along by the Lake of Lentini, stretched out there like a piece of dead sea, and by the burnt-up stubble-fields of the Plain of Catania, and the evergreen orange-trees of Francoforte, and the grey cork-trees of Resecone, and the deserted pasture-lands of Passanetto and of Passinatello, if ever he asked, to while away the tedium of the long dusty road, under the sky heavy with heat in the hour when the litter-bells ring sadly in the immense campagna, and the mules let their heads and tails hang helpless, and the litter-driver sings his melancholy song so as not to be overcome by the malaria-sleep, "Whom does the place belong to?" was bound to get for answer, "To Mazzaro." And passing near to a farmstead as big as a village, with store barns that looked like churches, and crowds of hens crouching in the shade of the big well, and the women putting their hands over their eyes to see who was going by: — "And this place?" — "To Mazzaro." — And you went on and on, with the malaria weighing on your eyes, and you were startled by the unexpected barking of a dog, as you passed an endless, endless vineyard, which stretched over hill and plain, motionless, as if the dust upon it were weighing it down, and the watchman, stretched out face downwards with his gun beneath him, beside the valley, raised his head sleepily to see who it might be. "To Mazzaro." — Then came an olive grove thick as a wood, under which the grass never grew, and the olive-gathering went on until March. They were the olive trees belonging to Mazzaro. And towards evening, as the sun sank red as fire, and the countryside was veiled with sadness, you met the long files of Mazzaro's ploughs coming home softly, wearily from the fallow land, and the oxen slowly crossing the ford, with their muzzles in the dark water; and you saw on the far-off grazing land of Canziria, on the naked slope, the immense whitish blotches of the flocks of Mazzaro; and you heard the shepherd's pipe resounding through the gullies, and the bell of the ram sometimes ringing and sometimes not, and the solitary singing lost in the valley.

All Mazzaro's property. It seemed as if even the setting sun and the whirring cicalas belonged to Mazzaro, and the birds which went on a short, leaping flight to nestle behind the clods, and the crying of the horned-owl in the wood. It was as if Mazzaro had become as big as the world, and you walked upon his belly. Whereas he was an insignificant little fellow, said the litter-driver, and you wouldn't have thought he was worth a farthing, to look at him, with no fat on

him except his paunch, and it was a marvel however he filled that in, for he never ate anything more than a penn'orth of bread, for all that he was rich as a pig, but he had a head on his shoulders that was keen as a diamond, that man had.

In fact, with that head as keen as a diamond he had got together all the property, whereas previously he had to work from morning till night hoeing, pruning, mowing, in the sun and rain and wind, with no shoes to his feet, and not a rag of a cloak to his back; so that everybody remembered the days when they used to give him kicks in the backside, and now they called him *Excellency*, and spoke to him cap in hand. But for all that he hadn't got stuck-up, now that all the Excellencies of the neighbourhood were in debt to him, so that he said *Excellency* meant poor devil and bad payer; he still wore the peasant's stocking-cap, only his was made of black silk, which was his only grandeur, and lately he had started wearing a felt hat, because it cost less than the long silk stocking-cap. He had possessions as far as his eye could reach, and he was a long-sighted man — everywhere, right and left, before and behind, in mountain and plain. More than five thousand mouths, without counting the birds of the air and the beasts of the earth, fed upon his lands, without counting his own mouth, that ate less than any of them, and was satisfied with a penn'orth of bread and a bit of cheese, gulped down as fast as he could, standing in a corner of the store-barn big as a church, or in the midst of the corn-dust, so that you could hardly see him, while his peasants were emptying the sacks, or on top of a straw-stack, when the wind swept the frozen country, in the time of the sowing of the seed, or with his head inside a basket, in the hot days of harvest-time. He didn't drink wine, and he didn't smoke, he didn't take snuff, although indeed he grew plenty of tobacco in his fields beside the river, broad-leaved and tall as a boy, the sort that is sold at ninety shillings. He hadn't the vice of gaming, nor of women. As for women he'd never had to bother with any one of them save his mother, who had cost him actually a dollar when he'd had her carried to the cemetery.

And he had thought about it and thought about it times enough, all that property means, when he went with no shoes to his feet, to work on the land that was now his own, and he had proved to himself what it was to earn his shilling a day in the month of July, to work on with your back bent for fourteen hours, with the foreman on horseback behind you, laying about you with a stick if you stood up to straighten yourself for a minute. Therefore he had not let a minute of his whole life pass by that wasn't devoted to the acquiring of property; and now his ploughs were as many as the long strings of crows that arrive in November; and other strings of mules, endless, carried the seed; the women who were kept squatting in the mire, from October to March, picking up his olives, you couldn't

count them, as you can't count the magpies that come to steal the olives; and in vintage time whole villages came to his vineyards, so that as far as ever you could hear folks singing, in the countryside, it was at Mazzaro's vintage. And then at harvest time Mazzaro's reapers were like an army of soldiers, so that to feed all those folks, with biscuit in the morning and bread and bitter oranges at nine o'clock and at mid-day, and home-made macaroni in the evening, it took shoals of money, and they dished up the ribbon-macaroni in kneading-troughs as big as wash-tubs. For that reason, when nowadays he went on horseback along the long line of his reapers, his cudgel in his hand, he didn't miss a single one of them with his eye, and kept shouting: "Bend over it, boys!" He had to have his hand in his pocket all the year round, spending, and simply for the land-tax the King took so much from him that Mazzaro went into a fever every time.

However, every year all those store-barns as big as churches were filled up with grain so that you had to raise up the roof to get it all in; and every time Mazzaro sold his wine it took over a day to count the money, all good dollar pieces, for he didn't want any of your dirty paper in payment for his goods, and he went to buy dirty paper only when he had to pay the King, or other people; and at the cattle-fairs the herds belonging to Mazzaro covered all the fairground, and choked up the roads, till it took half a day to let them go past, and the saint in procession with the band had at times to turn down another street, to make way for them.

And all that property he had got together himself, with his own hands and his own head, with not sleeping at night, with catching ague and malaria, with slaving from dawn till dark, and going round under sun and rain, and wearing out his boots and his mules — wearing out everything except himself, thinking of his property, which was all he had in the world, for he had neither children nor grandchildren, nor relations of any sort; he'd got nothing but his property. And when a man is made like that, it just means he is made for property.

And property was made for him. It really seemed as if he had a magnet for it, because property likes to stay with those who know how to keep it, and don't squander it like that baron who had previously been Mazzaro's master, and had taken him out of charity, naked and ignorant, to work on his fields; and the baron had been owner of all those meadows, and all those woods, and all those vineyards, and all those herds, so that when he came down to visit his estates on horseback, with his keepers behind him, he seemed like a king, and they got ready his lodging and his dinner for him, the simpleton, so that everybody knew the hour and the minute when he was due to arrive, and naturally they didn't let themselves be caught with their hands in the sack.

"That man absolutely asks to be robbed!" said Mazzaro, and he almost burst

himself laughing when the baron kicked his behind, and he rubbed his rear with his hand, muttering: "Fools should stop at home. Property doesn't belong to those that have got it, but to those that know how to acquire it." He, on the contrary, since he had acquired his property, certainly didn't send to say whether he was coming to superintend the harvest, or the vintage, and when and in what way, but he turned up unexpectedly on foot or on mule-back, without keepers, with a piece of bread in his pocket, and he slept beside his own sheaves, with his eyes open and the gun between his legs.

And in that way Mazzaro little by little became master of all the baron's possessions; and the latter was turned out, first from the olive groves, then from the vineyards, then from the grazing land, and then from the farmsteads and finally from his very mansion, so that not a day passed but he was signing stamped paper, and Mazzaro put his own brave cross underneath. Nothing was left to the baron but the stone shield that used to stand over his entrance-door — which was the only thing he hadn't wanted to sell, saying to, Mazzaro: "There's only this, out of everything I've got, which is no use for you." And that was true; Mazzaro had no use for it, and wouldn't have given two cents for it. The baron still said *thou* to him, but he didn't kick his behind any longer.

"Ah what a fine thing, to have Mazzaro's fortune!" folks said, but they didn't know what it had taken to make that fortune, how much thinking, how much struggling, how many lies, how much danger of being sent to the galleys, and how that head that was sharp as a diamond had worked day and night, better than a mill-wheel, to get all that property together. If the proprietor of a piece of farm-land adjoining his persisted in not giving it up to him, and wanted to take Mazzaro by the throat, he had to find some stratagem to force him to sell, to make him fall, in spite of the peasant's shrewdness. He went to him, for example, boasting about the fertility of a holding which wouldn't even produce lupins, and kept on till he made him believe it was the promised land, till the poor devil let himself be persuaded into leasing it, to speculate with it, and then he lost the lease, his house, and his own bit of land, which Mazzaro got hold of — for a bit of bread. And how many annoyances Mazzaro had to put up with! His half-profits peasants coming to complain of the bad seasons, his debtors, always sending their wives in a procession to tear their hair and beat their breasts trying to persuade him not to turn them out and put them in the street, by seizing their mule or their donkey, so that they'd not have anything to eat.

"You see what I eat," he replied. "Bread and onion! and I've got all those store-barns cram full, and I'm owner of all that stuff." And if they asked him for a handful of beans from all that stuff, he said:

"What, do you think I stole them? Don't you know, what it costs, to sow them,

and hoe them, and harvest them?" And if they asked him for a cent he said he hadn't got one, which was true, he hadn't got one. He never had half-a-dollar in his pocket; it took all his money to make that property yield and increase, and money came and went like a river through the house. Besides money didn't matter to him; he said it wasn't property, and as soon as he'd got together a certain sum he immediately bought a piece of land; because he wanted to get so that he had as much land as the king, and be better than the king, because the king can neither sell his land nor say it is his own.

Only one thing grieved him, and that was that he was beginning to get old, and he had to leave the earth there behind him. This was an injustice on God's part, that after having slaved one's life away getting property together, when you've got it, and you'd like some more, you have to leave it behind you. And he remained for hours sitting on a small basket, with his chin in his hands, looking at his vineyards growing green beneath his eyes, and his fields of ripe wheat waving like a sea, and the olive groves veiling the mountains like a mist, and if a half-naked boy passed in front of him, bent under his load like a tired ass, he threw his stick at his legs, out of envy, and muttered: "Look at him with his length of days in front of him; him who's got nothing to bless himself with!"

So that when they told him it was time for him to be turning away from his property, and thinking of his soul, he rushed out into the courtyard like a madman, staggering, and went round killing his own ducks and turkeys, hitting them with his stick and screaming: "You're my own property, you come along with me!"

STORY OF THE SAINT JOSEPH'S ASS

They had bought him at the fair at Buccheri when he was quite a foal, when as soon as he saw a she-ass he went up to her to find her teats; for which he got a good many bangs on the head and showers of blows upon the buttocks, and caused a great shouting of "Gee back!" Neighbour Neli, seeing him lively and stubborn as he was, a young creature that licked his nose after it had been hit, giving his ears a shake, said, "This is the chap for me!" And he went straight to the owner, holding in his pocket his hand which clasped the eight dollars.

"It's a fine foal," said the owner, "and it's worth more than eight dollars. Never mind if he's got that black and white skin, like a magpie. I'll just show you his mother, whom we keep there in the bough-shelter because the foal has always got his nose at the teats. You'll see a fine black beast there; she works for me better than a mule, and has brought me more young ones than she has hairs on her back. Upon my soul, I don't know where that magpie jacket has come from, on the foal. But he's sound in the bone, I tell you! And you don't value men according to their faces. Look what a chest, and legs like pillars! Look how he holds his ears! An ass that keeps his ears straight up like that, you can put him in a cart or in the plough as you like, and make him carry ten quarters of buckwheat better than a mule, as true as this holy day today! Feel this tail, if you and all your family couldn't hang on to it!"

Neighbour Neli knew it better than he; but he wasn't such a fool as to agree, and stood on his own, with his hand in his pocket, shrugging his shoulders and curling his nose, while the owner led the colt round in front of him.

"Hm!" muttered Neighbour Neli, "with that hide on him, he's like Saint Joseph's ass. Those coloured animals are all Jonahs, and when you ride through the village on their backs everybody laughs at you. What do you want me to make you a present of, for Saint Joseph's ass?"

Then the owner turned his back on him in a rage, shouting that if he didn't know anything about animals, or if he hadn't got the money to pay with, he'd better not come to the fair and make Christians waste their time, on the blessed day that it was.

Neighbour Neli let him swear, and went off with his brother, who was pulling him by his jacket-sleeve, and saying that if he was going to throw away his money on that ugly beast, he deserved to be kicked.

However, on the sly they kept their eye on the Saint Joseph's ass, and on its

owner who was pretending to shell some broad-beans, with the halter-ropes between his legs, while Neighbour Neli went wandering round among the groups of mules and horses, and stopping to look, and bargaining for first one and then the other of the best beasts, without ever opening the fist which he kept in his pocket with the eight dollars, as if he'd got the money to buy half the fair. But his brother said in his ear, motioning towards the ass of Saint Joseph: "That's the chap for us!"

The wife of the owner of the ass from time to time ran to look what had happened, and finding her husband with the halter in his hand, she said to him: "Isn't the Madonna going to send us anybody today to buy the foal?"

And her husband answered every time: "Not so far! There came one man to try for him, and he liked him. But he drew back when he had to pay for him, and has gone off with his money. See him, that one there, in the white stocking-cap, behind the flock of sheep. But he's not bought anything up to now, which means he'll come back."

The woman would have liked to sit down on a couple of stones, just close to her ass, to see if he would be sold. But her husband said to her:

"You clear out! If they see we're waiting, they'll never come to bargain."

Meanwhile the foal kept nuzzling with his nose between the legs of the she-asses that passed by, chiefly because he was hungry, and his master, the moment the young thing opened his mouth to bray, fetched him a bang and made him be quiet, because the buyers wouldn't want him if they heard him.

"It's still there," said Neighbour Neli in his brother's ear, pretending to come past again to look for the man who was selling broiled chickpeas. "If we wait till *ave maria* we can get him for a dollar less than the price we offered."

The sun of May was hot, so that from time to time, in the midst of the shouting and swarming of the fair there fell a great silence over all the fairground, as if there was nobody there, and then the mistress of the ass came back to say to her husband:

"Don't you hold out for a dollar more or less, because there's no money to buy anything in with, this evening; and then you know the foal will eat a dollar's worth in a month, if he's left on our hands."

"If you're not going," replied her husband, "I'll fetch you a kick you won't forget!"

So the hours of the fair rolled by, but none of those who passed before the ass of Saint Joseph stopped to look at him; for sure enough his master had chosen the most humble position, next to the low-price cattle, so as not to make him show up too badly beside the beautiful bay mules and the glossy horses! It took a fellow like Neighbour Neli to go and bargain for Saint Joseph's ass, which set

everybody in the fair laughing the moment they saw it. With having waited so long in the sun the foal let his head and his ears drop, and his owner had seated himself gloomily on the stones, with his hands also dangling between his knees, and the halter in his hands, watching here and there the long shadows, which began to form in the plain as the sun went down, from the legs of all such beast which had not found a buyer. Then Neighbour Neli and his brother, and another friend whom they had picked up for the occasion, came walking that way, looking into the air, so that the owner of the ass also twisted his head away to show he wasn't sitting there waiting for them; and the friend of Neighbour Neli said like this, looking vacant, as if the idea had just come to him:

"Oh, look at the ass of Saint Joseph! Why don't you buy him, Neighbour Neli?"

"I asked the price of him this morning; he's too dear. Then I should have everybody laughing at me with that black-and-white donkey. You can see that nobody would have him, so far."

"That's a fact, but the colour doesn't matter, if a thing is any use to you."

And he asked of the owner:

"How much do you expect us to make you a present of, for that Saint Joseph's donkey?"

The wife of the owner of the ass of Saint Joseph, seeing that the bargaining had started again, came edging softly up to them, with her hands clasped under her short cloak.

"Don't mention such a thing!" Neighbour Neli began to shout, running away across the plain. "Don't mention such a thing to me; I won't hear a word of it."

"If he doesn't want it, let him go without it," answered the owner. "If he doesn't take it, somebody else will. It's a sad man who has nothing left to sell, after the fair!"

"But I mean him to listen to me, by the blessed devil I do!" squealed the friend. "Can't I say my own fool's say like anybody else?"

And he ran to seize Neighbour Neli by the jacket; then he came back to speak a word in the ear of the ass' owner, who now wanted at any cost to go home with his little donkey, so the friend threw his arms round his neck, whispering: "Listen! a dollar more or less; — if you don't sell it today, you wont find another softy like my pal here to buy your beast, which isn't worth a cigar."

And he embraced the ass' mistress also, talking in her ear, to get her on his side. But she shrugged her shoulders and replied with a sullen face:

"It's my man's business. It's nothing to do with me. But if he lets you have it for less than nine dollars he's a simpleton, in all conscience! It cost us more!"

"I was a lunatic to offer eight dollars this morning," put in Neighbour Neli.

"You see now whether you've found anybody else to buy it at that price. There's nothing left in all the fair but three or four scabby sheep and the ass of Saint Joseph. Seven dollars now, if you like."

"Take it," suggested the ass' mistress to her husband, with tears in her eyes. "We haven't a cent to buy anything in tonight, and Turiddu has got the fever on him again; he needs some sulphate."

"All the devils!" bawled her husband. "If you don't get out, I'll give you a taste of the halter!" "Seven and a half, there!" cried the friend at last, shaking him hard by the jacket collar. "Neither you nor me! This time you've got to take my word, by all the saints in paradise! And I don't ask as much as a glass of wine. You can see the sun's gone down. Then what are you waiting for, the pair of you?"

And he snatched the halter from the owner's hand, while Neighbour Neli, swearing, drew out of his pocket the fist with the eight dollars, and gave them him without looking at them, as if he was tearing out his own liver. The friend drew aside with the mistress of the ass, to count the money on a stone, while the owner of the ass rushed through the fair like a young colt, swearing and punching himself on the head.

But then he permitted himself to go back to his wife, who was very slowly and carefully counting over again the money in the handkerchief, and he asked:

"Is it right?"

"Yes, it's quite right; Saint Gaetano be praised! Now I'll go to the druggist."

"I've fooled them! I'd have given it him for five dollars if I'd had to; those coloured donkeys are all Jonahs."

And Neighbour Neli, leading the little donkey behind him down the slope, said:

"As true as God's above I've stolen his foal from him! The colour doesn't matter. Look what legs, like pillars, neighbour. He's worth nine dollars with your eyes shut."

"If it hadn't been for me," replied the friend, "you wouldn't have done a thing. Here, I've still got half a dollar of yours. So if you like, we'll go and drink your donkey's health with it."

And now the colt stood in need of all his health to earn back the seven and a half dollars he had cost, and the straw he ate. Meanwhile he took upon himself to keep gamboling behind Neighbour Neli, trying to bite his jacket in fun, as if he knew it was the jacket of his new master, and he didn't care a rap about leaving for ever the stable where he had lived in the warmth, near his mother, rubbing his muzzle on the edge of the manger, or butting and capering with the ram, or going to rouse up the pig in its corner. And his mistress, who was once more

counting the money in the handkerchief in front of the druggist's counter, she didn't either once think of how she had seen the foal born, all black and white with his skin as glossy as silk, and he couldn't stand on his legs yet, but lay nestling in the sun in the yard, and all the grass which he had eaten to get so big and stout had passed through her hands. The only one who remembered her foal was the she-ass, who stretched out her neck braying towards the stable door; but when she no longer had her teats swollen with milk, she too forgot about the foal.

"Now this creature," said Neighbour Neli, "you'll see he'll carry me ten quarters of buckwheat better than a mule. And at harvest I'll set him threshing."

At the threshing the colt, tied in a string with the other beasts, old mules and broken-down horses, trotted round over the sheaves from morning till night, till he was so tired he didn't even want to open his mouth to bite at the heap of straw when they had put him to rest in the shade, now that a little wind had sprung up, so that the peasants could toss up the grain into the air with broad wooden forks, to winnow it, crying, "*Viva Maria!*"

Then he let his muzzle and his ears hang down, like a grown-up ass, his eye spent, as if he was tired of looking out over the vast white campagna which fumed here and there with the dust from the threshing-floors, and it seemed as if he was made for nothing else but to be let die of thirst and made to trot around on the sheaves. At evening he went back to the village with full saddlebags, and the master's lad went behind him pricking him between the legs, along the hedges of the by-way that seemed alive with the twittering of the tits and the scent of cat-mint and of rosemary, and the donkey would have liked to snatch a mouthful, if they hadn't made him trot all the time, till the blood ran down his legs, and they had to take him to the vet.; but his master didn't care, because the harvest had been a good one, and the colt had earned his seven and a half dollars. His master said: "Now he's done his work, and if I sell him for five dollars, I've still made money by him."

The only one who was fond of the foal was the lad who made him trot along the little road, when they were coming home from the threshing-floor, and he cried while the farrier was burning the creature's legs with a red-hot iron, so that the colt twisted himself up, with his tail in the air and his ears as erect as when he had roved round the fairground, and he tried to get free from the twisted rope which pressed his lips, and he rolled his eyes with pain almost as if he had human understanding, when the farrier's lad came to change the red hot irons, and his skin smoked and frizzled like fish in a frying-pan. But Neighbour Neli shouted at his son: "Silly fool! What are you crying for? He's done his work now, and seeing that the harvest has gone well we'll sell him and buy a mule,

which will be better for us."

Some things children don't understand; and after they had sold the colt to Farmer Cirino from Licodia, Neighbour Neli's son used to go to visit it in the stable, to stroke its nose and its neck, and the ass would turn to snuff at him as if its heart were still bound to him, whereas donkeys are made to be tied up where their master wishes, and they change their fate as they change their stable. Farmer Cirino from Licodia had bought the Saint Joseph's ass cheap, because it still had the wound in the pastern; and the wife of Neighbour Neli, when she saw the ass going by with its new master, said: "There goes our luck; that black and white hide brings a jolly threshing floor; and now times go from bad to worse, so that we've even sold the mule again."

Farmer Cirino had yoked the ass to the plough, with the old horse that went like a jewel, drawing out his own brave furrow all day long, for miles and miles, from the time when the larks began to trill in the dawn-white sky, till when the robins ran to huddle behind the bare twigs that quivered in the cold, with their short flight and their melancholy chirping, in the mist which rose like a sea. Only, seeing that the ass was smaller than the horse, they had put him a pad of straw on the saddle, under the yoke, and he went at it harder than ever, breaking the frozen sod, pulling with all his might from the shoulder. "This creature saves my horse for me, because he's getting old," said Farmer Cirino. "He's got a heart as big as the plain of Catania, has that ass of St. Joseph! And you'd never think it."

And he said to his wife, who was following behind him clutched in her scanty cloak, parsimoniously scattering the seed:

"If anything should happen to him, think what a loss it would be! We should be ruined, with all the season's work in hand."

And the woman looked at the work in hand, at the little stony desolate field, where the earth was white and cracked, because there had been no rain for so long, the water coming all in mist, the mist that rots the seed; so that when the time came to hoe the young corn it was like the devil's beard, so sparse and yellow, as if you'd burnt it with matches. "In spite of the way we worked that land!" whined Farmer Cirino, tearing off his jacket. "That donkey put his guts into it like a mule! He's the ass of misfortune, he is."

His wife had a lump in her throat when she looked at that burnt-up corn-field, and only answered with the big tears that came to her eyes:

"It isn't the donkey's fault. He brought a good year to Neighbour Neli. It's us who are unlucky."

So the ass of Saint Joseph changed masters once more, for Farmer Cirino went back again with his sickle from the corn-field, there was no need to reap it that

year, in spite of the fact that they'd hung images of the saints on to the cane hedge, and had spent twenty cents having it blessed by the priest. "The devil is after us!" Farmer Cirino went swearing through those ears of corn that stood up straight like feathers, which even the ass wouldn't eat; and he spat into the air at the blue sky that had not a drop of water in it. Then Neighbour Luciano the carter, meeting Farmer Cirino leading home the ass with empty saddlebags, asked him: "What do you want me to give you for Saint Joseph's ass?"

"Give me what you like. Curse him and whoever made him," replied Farmer Cirino. "Now we haven't got bread to eat, nor barley to give to the beast."

"I'll give you three dollars because you're ruined; but the ass isn't worth it, he won't last above six months. See what a poor sight he is!"

"You ought to have asked more," Farmer Cirino's wife began to grumble after the bargain was concluded. "Neighbour Luciano's mule has died, and he hasn't the money to buy another. If he hadn't bought the Saint Joseph's ass he wouldn't know what to do with his cart and harness; and you'll see that donkey will bring him riches."

The ass then learnt to pull the cart, which was too high on the shafts for him, and weighed so heavily on his shoulders that he wouldn't have lasted even six months, scrambling his way up the steep rough roads, when it took all Neighbour Luciano's cudgelling to put a bit of breath into his body; and when he went down-hill it was worse, because all the load came down on top of him, and pressed on him so much that he had to hold on with his back curved up in an arch, with those poor legs that had been burnt by fire, so that people seeing him began to laugh, and when he fell down it took all the angels of paradise to get him up again. But Neighbour Luciano knew that he pulled his ton and a half of stuff better than a mule, and he got paid forty cents a half-ton. "Every day the Saint Joseph's ass lives it means a dollar and a dime earned," he said, "and he costs me less to feed than a mule." Sometimes people toiling up on foot at a snail's pace behind the cart, seeing that poor beast digging his hoofs in with no strength left, and arching his spine, breathing quick, his eye hopeless, suggested: "Put a stone under the wheel, and let that poor beast get his wind." But Neighbour Luciano replied: "If I let him go his own pace he'll never earn me my dollar and a dime a day. I've got to mend my own skin with his. When he can't do another stroke I'll sell him to the lime man, for the creature is a good one and will do for him; and it's not true a bit that Saint Joseph's asses are Jonahs. I got him for a crust of bread from Farmer Cirino, now he's come down and is poor."

Then the St. Joseph's ass fell into the hands of the lime man, who had about twenty donkeys, all thin skeletons just ready to drop, but which managed nevertheless to carry him his little sacks of lime, and lived on mouthfuls of

weeds which they could snatch from the roadside as they went. The lime man didn't want him because he was all covered with scars worse than the other beasts, and his legs seared with fire, and his shoulders worn out with the collar, and his withers gnawed by the plough-saddle, and his knees broken by his falls, and then that black and white skin which in his opinion didn't go at all with his other black animals. "That doesn't matter," replied Neighbour Luciano, "it'll help you to know your own asses at a distance." And he took off another fifteen cents from the dollar and a half which he had asked, to close the bargain. But even the mistress, who had seen him born, would no longer have recognized the Saint Joseph's ass, he was so changed, as he went with his nose to the ground and his ears like an umbrella, under the little sacks of lime, twisting his behind at the blows from the boy who was driving the herd. But the mistress herself had also changed by then, with the bad times there had been, and the hunger she had felt, and the fevers that they'd all caught down on the plain, she, her husband and her Turiddu, without any money to buy sulphate, for one hasn't got a Saint Joseph's ass to sell every day, not even for seven dollars.

In winter, when work was scarcer, and the wood for burning the lime was rarer and further to fetch, and the frozen little roads hadn't a leaf on their hedges, or a mouthful of stubble along the frozen ditchside, life was harder for those poor beasts; and the owner knew that the winter would carry off half of them for him; so that he usually had to buy a good stock of them in spring. At night the herd lay in the open, near the kiln, and the beasts did the best for themselves pressing close up to one another. But those stars that shone like swords penetrated them in their vulnerable parts, in spite of their thick hides, and all their sores and galls burned again and trembled in the cold as if they could speak.

However, there are plenty of Christians who are no better off, and even haven't got that rag of a cloak in which the herd-boy curled himself up to sleep in front of the furnace. A poor widow lived close by — in a hovel even more dilapidated than the lime kiln, so that the stars penetrated through the roof like swords, as if you were in the open, and the wind made the few rags of coverlets flutter. She used to do washing, but it was a lean business, because folk washed their own rags, when they were washed at all, and now that her boy was grown she lived by going down to the village to sell wood. But nobody had known her husband, and nobody knew where she got the wood she sold; though her boy knew, because he went to glean it here and there, at the risk of being shot at by the estate-keepers. "If you had a donkey," said the lime-man, who wanted to sell the Saint Joseph's ass because it was no longer any good to him, "you could carry bigger bundles to the village, now that your boy is grown."

The poor woman had a dime or two tied in a corner of a handkerchief, and she let the lime man get them out of her, because it is as they say: "old stuff goes to die in the house of the crazy."

At least the poor Saint Joseph's ass lived his last days a little better, because the widow cherished him like a treasure, thanks to the dimes he had cost her, and she went out at nights to get him straw and hay, and kept him in the hut beside the bed, so that he helped to keep them all warm, like a little fire, he did, in this world where one hand washes the other. The woman, driving before her the ass laden with wood like a mountain, so that you couldn't see his ears, went building castles in the air; and the boy foraged round the hedges and ventured into the margins of the wood to get the load together, till both mother and son imagined themselves growing rich at the trade; till at last the baron's estate-keeper caught the boy in the act of stealing boughs and tanned his hide for him thoroughly with a stick. To cure the boy the doctor swallowed up all the cents in the handkerchief, the stock of wood, and all there was to sell, which wasn't much; so that one night when the boy was raving with fever, his inflamed face turned towards the wall, and there wasn't a mouthful of bread in the house, the mother went out raving and talking to herself as if she had got the fever as well; and she went and broke down an almond tree close by, though it didn't seem possible that she could have managed to do it, and at dawn she loaded it on the ass to go and sell it. But under the weight, as he tried to get up the steep path, the donkey kneeled down really like Saint Joseph's ass before the Infant Jesus, and couldn't get up again.

"Holy Spirits!" murmured the woman. "Oh carry that load of wood for me, you yourselves."

And some passers-by pulled the ass by the rope and hit his ears to make him get up.

"Don't you see he's dying," said a carter at last, and so the others left him in peace, since the ass had eyes like a dead fish, and a cold nose, and shivers running over his skin.

The woman thought of her son in his delirium, with his face red with fever, and she stammered:

"Now what shall we do? Now what shall we do?"

"If you want to sell him with all the wood I'll give you forty cents for him," said the carter, who had his wagon empty. And as the woman looked at him with vacant eyes, he added, "I'm only buying the wood, because *that's* all the ass is worth!" And he gave a kick at the carcass, which sounded like a burst drum.

BLACKBREAD

Neighbour Nanni had hardly taken his last breath, and the priest in his stole was still there, when the quarrel broke out between the children as to who should pay the costs of the burial, and they went at it till the priest with the aspersion under his arm was driven away.

For Neighbour Nanni's illness had been a long one, the sort that eats away the flesh off your bones and the things out of your house. Every time the doctor spread his piece of paper on his knee to write out the prescription, Neighbour Nanni watched his hands with beseeching eyes, and mumbled, "Write it short, your honor; anyhow write it short, for mercy's sake."

The doctor carried out his own job. Everybody in the world carries out his own job. In carrying out his, Farmer Nanni had caught that fever down there at Lamia, land blessed by God, producing corn as high as a man. In vain the neighbours said to him, "Neighbour Nanni, you'll leave your bones on that half-profits farm!"

"As if I was a baron," he replied, "to do what I like and choose!"

The brothers, who were like the fingers on the same hand as long as their father lived, had now each one to think for himself. Santo had a wife and children on his back; Lucia was left without any dowry, as good as turned on the street; and Carmenio, if he wanted to have bread to eat, would have to go away from home and find himself a master. Then the mother, who was old and ailing, didn't know whose business it was to keep her, for none of the three children had anything at all.

The oxen, the sheep, the store in the granary had all gone with their owner. There remained the dark house, with the empty bed, and the equally dark faces of the orphans. Santo carried his things across, with Redhead, his wife, and said he'd take his mamma to live with him. "Then he won't have to pay house-rent," said the others. Carmenio made up his own bundle and went as shepherd to Herdsman Vito, who had a piece of grazing land at Camemi; and Lucia threatened to go into service rather than live with her sister-in-law.

"No!" said Santo. "It shan't be said that my sister had to be servant to other folks."

"He wants me to be servant to Redhead," grumbled Lucia.

The great question was this sister-in-law who had driven herself into the family like a nail. "What is there to be done, now I've got her?" sighed Santo

shrugging his shoulders. "I should have listened in time to that good soul, my father."

That good soul had preached to him: "Leave yon Nena alone, for she's got never a bit of dowry, nor house, nor land."

But Nena was always at his side, at the Castelluccio farm; whether he was hoeing or mowing, she was there gathering the corn into sheaves, or removing the stones from under his feet with her hands; and when they rested, at the door of the great farm-place, they sat together with their backs to the wall, at the hour when the sun was dying over the fields, and everything was going still.

"Neighbour Santo, if God is good you won't have lost your labours this year."

"Neighbour Santo, if the harvest turns out well, you ought to take the big field, down on the plain; because the sheep have been on it, and it's rested for two years."

"Neighbour Santo, this winter, if I've time, I want to make you a pair of thick leggings to keep you warm."

Santo had got to know Nena while he was working at Castelluccio, a girl with red hair, daughter of the keeper, whom nobody wanted. So for that reason, poor thing, she made a fuss of every dog that passed, and she denied herself the bread from her mouth in order to make neighbour Santo a present of a black silk stocking-cap, every year at Saint Agrippina's day, and to have a flask of wine for him, or a piece of cheese, when he arrived at Castelluccio. "Take this, for my sake, Neighbour Santo. It's the same as the master drinks." Or else: "I've been thinking, you never had a bit of something to eat with your bread not all last week."

He didn't say no, but took everything. The most he ever did was to say out of politeness: "This won't do, Neighbour Nena, you deny your own self to give to me."

"I like it better for you to have it."

And then, every Saturday night when Santo went home, that dear departed soul used to tell him again: Leave yon Nena alone, for she hasn't got this; leave yon Nena alone, for she hasn't got the other.

"I know I've got nothing," said Nena as she sat on the low wall facing the setting sun. "I've neither land nor houses; and to get together that bit of linen I've had to go without bread to eat. My father is a poor keeper, who lives at his master's charge, and nobody wants to saddle himself with a wife without a dowry."

Nevertheless the nape of her neck was fair, as it usually is with red-haired people; and as she sat with her head bowed, all those thoughts heavy inside it, the sun glowed among the golden-coloured hairs behind her ears, and lit on her

cheeks that had a fine down like a peach; and Santo looked at her flax-blue eyes, and at her breast which filled her stays and swayed like the corn-field.

"Don't you worry, Neighbour Nena," he said. "You won't go short of husbands."

She shook her head, saying no; and her red earrings that were almost like coral caressed her cheeks. "No, no, Neighbour Santo. I know I'm not beautiful, and nobody wants me."

"Look though!" said he all at once, as the idea came to him. "Look how opinions vary! They say red hair is ugly, and yet on you now it doesn't strike me as bad."

The good departed soul, his father, when he saw that Santo was altogether smitten with Nena and wanted to marry her, had said to him one Sunday: "You want her whether-or-not, that Redhead? Say the truth, you want her whether or not?"

Santo, with his back to the wall and his hands behind him, didn't dare to raise his head; but he nodded yes, yes, that he didn't know what to do with himself without the Redhead, and it was the will of God it should be so.

"And have you given it a thought as to how you're going to keep a wife? You know I can give you nothing. But I've one thing to tell you, and your mother here will say the same: think it over before you go and get married, for bread is scarce, and children come quick."

His mother, crouching on the stool, pulled him by the jacket and said to him *sotto voce*, with a long face: "Try and fall in love with the widow of Farmer Mariano, she's rich, and she won't ask a great deal of you, being part paralysed."

"Oh yes!" grumbled Santo, "You may bet Farmer Mariano's widow would take up with a beggar like me!"

Neighbour Nanni also agreed that Farmer Mariano's widow was looking for a husband as rich as herself, hip-lame though she was. And then there'd have been that other misery to look forward to, seeing your grandchildren born lame as well.

"Well, it's for you to think about it," he repeated to his son. "Remember that bread is scarce, and children come quick."

Then towards evening on St. Bridget's day Santo had met the Redhead by chance, as she was gathering wild asparagus beside the path, and she blushed at seeing him as if she didn't know quite well that he had to pass that way going back to the village, and she dropped down the hem of her skirt that she had turned up round her waist for going on all fours among the cactus plants. The young man looked at her, he also went red in the face, and could say nothing. At last he began to stammer that the week was over and he was going home.

"You've no messages to send to the village, Neighbour Nena? Tell me if I can do anything."

"If I'm going to sell the asparagus, I'll come along with you, and we'll go the same way," said Redhead. And he, as if stupefied, nodded yes, yes; she added, with her chin on her heaving bosom: "But you don't want me, women are a nuisance to you."

"I'd like to carry you in my arms, Neighbour Nena, carry you in my arms."

Then Neighbour Nena began to chew the corner of the red handkerchief she wore round her head. And Neighbour Santo again had nothing to say; but he looked at her, and looked at her, and changed his saddlebag from one shoulder to the other, as if he couldn't find words to begin. The mint and the marjoram were making the air merry, and the side of the mountain, above the cactuses, was all red with sunset. "You go now," Nena said to him. "You go now, it's late." Then she stood listening to the night crickets rattling away. But Santo didn't move. "You go now, somebody might see us here by ourselves."

Neighbour Santo, who was really going at last, came out again with his old assertion, and another shake of the shoulder to settle his double sack, that he'd have carried her in his arms, he would, he'd have carried her if they'd been going the same road. And he looked Neighbour Nena in the eyes, and she avoided his looks and kept on seeking for the wild asparagus among the stones, and he watched her face that was as red as if the sunset were beating upon it.

"No, Neighbour Santo, you go on by yourself, you know I'm a poor girl with no dowry."

"Let us do as Providence wishes, let us — —"

She kept on saying no, that she was not for him, and now her face was dark and frowning. Then neighbour Santo, downcast, settled his bag on his shoulder and moved away, with bent head. But Redhead wanted at least to give him the asparagus that she had gathered for him. They'd make a nice little dish for him, if he would eat them for her sake. And she held out to him the two corners of the full apron. Santo put his arm round her waist and kissed her on the cheek, his heart melting inside him.

At that moment her father appeared, and the girl ran away in a fright. The keeper had his gun on his arm, and didn't see at all what should prevent him from laying neighbour Santo out for practising this treachery on him.

"No! I'm not like that!" replied Santo with his hands crossed on his breast. "I want to marry your daughter, I do. Not for fear of the gun; but I'm the son of a good man, and Providence will help us because we do no wrong."

So the wedding took place on a Sunday, with the bride in her holiday dress, and her father the keeper in new boots in which he waddled like a tame duck.

Wine and baked beans made even Neighbour Nanni merry, though he had the malaria on him bad; and the mother took out of the chest a pound or two of worsted yarn which she had put aside toward a dowry for Lucia, who was already eighteen, and who combed and arranged her hair for half an hour every Sunday morning before going to mass, looking at herself in the water of the wash-bowl, for a mirror.

Santo, with the tips of his ten fingers stuck in the pockets of his coat, exulted as he looked at the red hair of his bride, at the yarn, and at all the celebration which there was for him that Sunday. The keeper, with a red nose, hobbled inside his shoes and wanted to kiss them all around, one after the other.

"Not me!" said Lucia, sulky because of the yarn they were taking from her. "This isn't water for my mouth."

She stayed in a corner pulling a sulky face, as if she already knew what her lot would be the moment her parents were gone.

And now sure enough she had to cook the bread and sweep the house for her sister-in-law, who as soon as God sent daylight set off for the field with her husband, although she was again with child, she being worse than a cat for filling the house with little ones. There was more needed now than presents at Christmas and at St. Agrippina's day, or than the pretty talk she used to have with Neighbour Santo at Casteluccio. That swindler of a keeper had done well for himself marrying off his daughter without a dowry, and now Neighbour Santo had to see about maintaining her. Since he'd got Nena he saw that there wasn't bread enough for the two of them, and that they'd got to wring it out of the earth at Licciardo, in the sweat of their brow.

As they went to Licciardo with the double bag over their shoulder, wiping the sweat from their foreheads on their shirt-sleeves, they had the young corn always in their mind and in front of their eyes, they saw nothing else but that between the stones of the path. It was to them like the thought of one who is sick and whom you have always heavy on your heart, that corn; first yellow, swamped in mud with all the rain; and then, when it did begin to get a bit of hold, came the weeds, so that Nena had made pitiful work of both her hands, pulling them out one by one, bending down over all that load of her belly, drawing her skirt above her knees so as not to hurt the corn. And she didn't feel the weight of her child, nor the pains of her back, as if every green blade which she freed from the weeds was a child she had borne. And when at last she squatted on the little bank, panting, pushing her hair behind her ears with both her hands, she seemed to see before her the tall ears of June, bending over one above the other as the breeze touched them; and they would reckon up, she and her husband, as he was untying his soaking gaiters, and cleaning his hoe on the grass of the bank: So

much seed they had taken, and therefore they'd have so much corn if the ear came to twelfefold or to tenfold or even to sevenfold; the stalk wasn't very stout but the growth was thick. If only March was not too dry, and if only it didn't rain except when rain was needed! Blessed Saint Agrippina must remember them! The sky was clear and the sun lingered in gold on the green meadows, from the fiery west, whence the larks fell singing on to the clods, like black dots. Spring was really beginning everywhere, in the cactus hedges, in the bushes of the little road, between the stones, on the roofs of the hamlets green with hope; and Santo, walking heavily behind his companion, who was bent beneath the sack of straw for the animals, with all that belly on her, felt his heart swell with tenderness for the poor thing, and went along talking to her, his voice broken by the steep climbs, about what he'd do if the Lord blessed the corn up to the last. Now they didn't have to talk any more about red hair, whether it was beautiful or ugly, or any such nonsense. And when treacherous May came with its mists to rob them of all their labours and their hopes of harvest, the husband and wife, seated once more on the bank watching the field going yellow under their eyes, like a sick man departing to the other world, said not a word, their elbows on their knees and their eyes stony in their pale faces.

"This is God's punishment!" muttered Santo. "That sainted soul my father told me how it would be."

And into the hovel of the poor penetrated the ill-humour of the black, muddy little road outside. Husband and wife turned their backs on one another stupefied, and they quarrelled every time Redhead asked for money to buy necessaries, or whenever the husband came home late, or when there wasn't enough wood for the winter, or when the wife became slow and idle with her childbearing; long faces, ugly words, and even blows. Santo seized Nena by her red hair, and she set her nails in his face; the neighbours came running up, and Redhead squealed that that villain wanted to make her have a miscarriage, and that he didn't care if he sent a soul to hell. Then, when Nena had her baby, they made peace again, and Neighbour Santo went carrying the infant girl in his arms, as if he had fathered a princess, and ran to show her to his relations and his friends, he was so pleased. And for his wife, as long as she was in bed he made her broth, he swept the house, he cleaned the rice, he stood there in front of her to see that she wanted for nothing. Then he went to the door with the baby at his shoulder, like a wet-nurse; and to anybody who asked him, as they were passing, he replied: "It's a girl, neighbour! Bad luck follows me even here, and I've got a girl born to me. My wife couldn't do any better than that."

And when Redhead got knocks from her husband, she turned round on her sister-in-law, who never did a hand's turn to help in the house, and Lucia flew

back at her saying that without having any husband of her own she'd got all the burden of other folk's children foisted on her. The mother-in-law, poor thing, tried to make peace in these quarrels, repeating: "It's my fault, I'm no good for anything now. I eat idle bread, I do."

She was no good for anything but to hear all those miseries, and to brood over them inside herself; Santo's difficulties, his wife's crying, the thought of her other son far away, a thought that stuck in her heart like a nail; Lucia's bad temper, because she hadn't got a rag of a Sunday frock and never saw so much as a dog pass under her window. On Sundays, if they called her to join the group of gossips who were chattering in the shadow, she replied with a shrug of the shoulders: "What do you want me to come for? To show you the silk frock I haven't got?"

Sometimes however Pino the Tome, him of the frogs, would join the group of neighbour women, though he never opened his mouth, but stood with his back to the wall and his hands in his pockets, listening, and spitting all over the place. Nobody knew what he came for; but when Neighbour Lucia appeared in the doorway, Pino looked at her from under his eyes, pretending to be turning to spit. And at evening, when all the street-doors were shut, he went so far as to sing her little songs outside the door, making his own bass for himself — huum! huum! huum! Sometimes the young fellows of the village going home late, recognizing his voice would strike up the frog tune, to mock him.

Meanwhile Lucia pretended to be busying herself about the house, as far as possible from the light, her head sunk, so that they shouldn't see her face. But if her sister-in-law grumbled, "There goes the music!" she turned round like a viper to retort: "Even the music is a trouble to you, is it? In this galley-hole there musn't be anything for eyes to see nor ears to hear, my word!"

The mother who noticed everything, and who was also listening, watching her daughter, said that as far as she was concerned that music made her feel happy inside herself. Lucia pretended not to understand anything. Yet every day, at the time when the frog fellow was due to be passing, she did not fail to be standing in the doorway with her distaff in her hand. The Tome, as soon as he got back from the river, went round and round the village, always returning to that particular quarter, with the remains of his frogs in his hand, crying, "Song-fish! song-fish!" As if the poor folks of those mean streets could afford to buy song-fish!

"But they must be good for sick people!" said Lucia, who was dying to get a start bargaining with the Tome. But the mother wouldn't let them spend money on her.

The Tome, seeing Lucia watching him from under her eyes, her chin on her

breast, slackened his pace before the door, and on Sunday he summoned enough courage to draw a little nearer, till he came so far as to sit on the steps of the next terrace, with his hands hanging between his thighs; and he told all the women in the group about how you caught frogs, how it needed the devil's own cunning. He was more cunning than a red-haired ass, was Pino the Tome, and he waited till the goodwives had gone away to say to Neighbour Lucia, "We want rain badly for the corn, don't we!" Or else, "Olives will be scarce this year!"

"What does that matter to you? You live by your frogs," Lucia said to him.

"You hark here, my dear friend; we are all like the fingers on one hand; or like the tiles on the roof of the house, one sending water to the other. If there's no crop of corn or of olives, there'll be no money coming into the village, and nobody will buy my frogs. You follow what I mean?"

That "my dear friend" went sweet as honey to the heart of the girl, and she thought about it all evening long as she was spinning silently beside the lamp; and she turned it round and round in her mind, like her spool that spun from her fingers.

The mother seemed as if she read into the secrets of the distaff, and when for a few weeks no more songs had been heard in the evening, and the frog-seller had not been seen going past, she said to her daughter-in-law: "How miserable the winter is! We don't hear a living soul in the neighbourhood."

Now they had to keep the door shut, for the cold, and through the little opening they never saw a thing except the window of the house across the road, black with rain, or some neighbour going home in his soaking wet cloak. But Pino the Tome never showed his face, so that if a poor sick person wanted a drop of frog broth, said Lucia, there was no telling how you were going to get it to her.

"He'll have gone to earn his bread some other road," said the sister-in-law. "It's a poor trade, that is, and nobody would follow it who could do anything else."

Santo, who had heard the chatter on Saturday evening, made his sister the following speech, out of love for her: "I don't like this talk about the Tome. He'd be a fancy match for my sister! A man who lives on frog-catching, and stands with his legs in the wet all day long! You ought to get a man who works on the land, so that even if he owned nothing, at least he'd be drawn from the same class as yourself."

Lucia was silent, her head lowered and her brows knit, biting her lips from time to time so as not to blurt out: "And where am I going to find a man who works on the land?" How indeed was she to find him, all by herself? The only one she had managed to find now never showed his face any more, probably because Redhead had played her some nasty trick, envious, tattling creature that

she was. There was Santo who never said anything but what his wife said, and she, the Redhead, had gone round repeating that the frog man was a good-for-nought, which bit of news of course had come to the ears of Neighbour Pino.

Therefore squabbles broke out every moment between the two sisters-in-law.

"The mistress here isn't me, that it isn't," grumbled Lucia. "The mistress in this house is the one who was clever enough to wheedle round my brother and snap him up for a husband."

"If I'd only known what was coming I'd never have wheedled round him, I wouldn't, brother or no brother; because if I needed one loaf of bread before, now I need five."

"What does it matter to you whether the frog-catcher has got a proper trade or not? If he was my husband, it would be his business to look after keeping me."

The mother, poor thing, came between them to soothe them down; but she was a woman of few words, and she didn't know what to do but run from one to the other, clutching her hair with her hands, stammering:

"For mercy's sake! for mercy's sake!"

But the women took not the slightest notice of her, setting their nails in each other's faces after Redhead had called Lucia that bad word, "Nasty-cat!"

"Nasty-cat yourself! You stole my brother from me!"

Then arrived Santo, and gave both of them knocks to quiet them, so that Redhead, weeping, grumbled: "I say it for her own good! because if a woman marries a man who's got nothing, troubles come fast enough."

And to his sister, who was screaming and tearing her hair, Santo said, to quiet her: "Well what do you expect, now that she is my wife? But I'm fond of you and I speak for your own sake. You see what a lot of good we've done ourselves by getting married, us two!"

Lucia lamented to her mother: "I want to do as much good for myself as they've done for them selves! I'd rather go out to service! If a mortal man does show his face round here, they drive him away." And she thought about the frog-catcher of whom there was never a sign nowadays.

Afterwards they got to know that he had gone to live with the widow of Farmer Mariano; even that he was thinking of getting married to her; because though it was true he hadn't got a proper trade, he was none the less a fine piece of a young fellow, built without any sparing of material, and as handsome as San Vito in flesh and blood, that he was; and the lame woman had property enough to be able to take what husband she liked and chose.

"Look at this, Neighbour Pino," she said. "This is all white things, linen and everything, these are all gold earrings and necklaces; in this jar there are twelve gallons of oil; and that section is full of beans. If you like you can live with your

hands in your pockets, and you needn't stand up to your knees in the marsh catching frogs."

"I should like it all right," said the Tome. But he thought of Lucia's black eyes looking for him under the cotton panes of the window, and then of the hips of the lame woman, which woggled like a frog's as she went about the house showing him all her stuff. However, one day when he hadn't been able to get a scrap of anything for three days and had had to stay in the widow's house, eating and drinking and watching the rain fall outside the door, he persuaded himself to say yes, out of love for daily bread.

"It was for the sake of my daily bread, I swear to you," he said with his hands crossed on his breast, when he came back to look for Neighbour Lucia outside her door. "If it hadn't been for the hard times, I wouldn't have married the lame woman, I wouldn't, Neighbour Lucia!"

"Go and tell that to the lame woman herself," replied the girl, green with bile. "I've only got this to say to you; you don't set foot here any more."

And the lame woman also told him that he wasn't to set foot there any more, for if he did she'd turn him out of her house, naked and hungry as when she had taken him in. "Don't you know that, even more than to God, you're obliged to me for the bread you eat?"

But as her husband he went short of nothing: well clad, well fed, with shoes on his feet and nothing else to do but lounge in the market-place all day, at the greengrocer's, at the butcher's, at the fishmonger's, with his hands behind his back and his belly full, watching them buy and sell.

"That's his real trade, being a vagabond!" said Redhead. And Lucia gave it her back again, saying that if he did nothing it was because he'd got a rich wife who kept him. "If he'd married *me* he'd have worked to keep his wife." Santo, with his head in his hands, was thinking how his mother had told him to take the lame woman himself, and how it was his own fault if he'd let the bread slip from his mouth.

"When we're young," he preached to his sister, "we have these notions in our heads, like you have now, and we only think of pleasing ourselves, without counting what comes after. Ask Redhead now if she thinks folks ought to do as we have done."

Redhead, squatting on the threshold, shook her head in agreement with him, while her brats squealed round her, pulling her by the dress and the hair.

"At least the Lord God shouldn't send the plague of children," she said fretfully.

As many children as she could she took with her to the field, every morning, like a mare with her foals; the least one inside the bag over her shoulder, and the

one a bit bigger she led by the hand. But she was forced to leave the other three at home, to drive her sister-in-law crazy. The one in the sack and the one that trotted limping behind her screamed in concert the length of the rough road, in the cold of the white dawn, and the mother had to pause from time to time, scratching her head and sighing: "Oh, my Lord!" And she breathed on the tiny blue hands of the little girl, to warm them, or she took the baby out of the sack to put it to her breast as she walked. Her husband went in front, bent under his load, and if he turned half round, waiting to give her time to overtake him, all out of breath as she was, dragging the little girl by the hand, and with her breast bare, it wasn't to look at the hair of Redhead, or at her breast which heaved inside her stays, like at Castelluccio. Now Redhead tipped out her breast in sun and frost, as if it served for nothing more except to give out milk, exactly like a mare. A real beast of burden, though as far as that went her husband could not complain of her: hoeing, mowing, sowing, better than a man, when she pulled up her skirts, and was black half-way up her legs, on the corn-land. She was twenty-seven years old now, with something else to do besides think of thin shoes and blue stockings. "We are old," said her husband, "and we've got the children to think of." But anyhow they helped one another like two oxen yoked to the same plough, which was what their marriage amounted to now.

"I know only too well," grumbled Lucia, "that I've got all the trouble of children, without ever having a husband. When that poor old woman shuts her eyes at last, if they want to give me my bit of bread they'll give it, and if they don't they'll turn me out on to the street."

The mother, poor thing, didn't know what to answer, and sat there listening to her, seated beside the bed with the kerchief round her head and her face yellow with illness. During the day she sat in the doorway, in the sun, keeping still and quiet till the sunset paled upon the blackish roofs opposite, and the goodwives called the fowls to roost.

Only, when the doctor came to see her, and her daughter put the candle near her face, she asked him, with a timid smile:

"For mercy's sake, your honour, is it a long job?"

Santo, who had a heart of gold, replied: "I don't mind spending money on medicine, so long as we can keep the poor old mother here with us, and I can know I shall find her in her corner when I come home. Then she's worked her share, in her own day, and when we are old our children will do as much for us."

And then it happened that Carmenio had caught the fever at Camemi. If the master had been rich he'd have bought him medicine; but Herdsman Vito was a poor devil who lived on that bit of a flock, and he kept the boy really out of charity, for he could have looked after that handful of sheep himself, if it hadn't

been for fear of the malaria. But then he wanted to do the good work of giving bread to Neighbour Nanni's orphan, hoping by that means to win over Providence to his help, as it ought to help him, if there was justice in heaven. How was it his fault if he owned nothing but that bit of grazing land at Camemi, where the malaria curdled like snow, and Carmenio had caught the ague? One day when the boy felt his bones broken by the fever, he let himself sink asleep behind a rock which printed a black shadow on the dusty little road, while heavy flies were buzzing in the sultry air of May, and in a minute the sheep broke into the neighbour's corn, a poor little field as big as a pocket-handkerchief, already half eaten up by the hot drought. Nevertheless Uncle Cheli, who was curled up under a little roof of boughs, cherished it like the apple of his eye, that corn-patch that had cost him so much sweat and was the hope of the year for him. Seeing the sheep devouring him, he cried: "Ah! You Christians don't eat bread, don't you?"

And Carmenio woke up under the blows and kicks of Uncle Cheli, and began to run like a madman after the scattered sheep, weeping and yelling. Carmenio, who had his bones already broken by the ague, stood badly in need of that cudgelling! But he thought, did he, that he could pay in squeals and laments for the damage done to his neighbour?

"A year's work lost, and my children without bread this winter! Look at the damage you've done, you assassin! If I skin you alive it won't be as much as you deserve."

Uncle Cheli went round getting witnesses to go to law with the sheep of Herdsman Vito. The latter, when he was served with the summons, felt as if he was struck with paralysis, and his wife as well. "Ah, that villain of a Carmenio has ruined us all! You do somebody a good turn, and this is how they pay you back! Did he expect me to stop there in all the malaria and watch the sheep? Now Uncle Cheli will finish us off into poverty, making us pay costs." The poor devil ran to Camemi at midday, blinded by despair, because of all the misfortunes which were raining down on him, and with every kick and every punch on the jaw he fetched Carmenio he stammered, panting: "You've brought us down to nothing! You've landed us in ruin, you brigand!"

"Don't you see how sick I am?" Carmenio tried to answer, parrying the blows. "How is it my fault, if I couldn't stand on my feet with fever? It got me unawares, there, under the rock."

None the less he had to make up his bundle there and then, and say good-bye to the five dollar-pieces which were due to him from Herdsman Vito, and leave the flock. And Herdsman Vito was downright glad to catch the fever again, he was so overwhelmed by his troubles.

Carmenio said nothing at home, when he came back empty-handed and empty-bellied, with his bundle on a stick over his shoulder. Only his mother grieved at seeing him so pale and wasted, and didn't know what to think. She learned everything later from Don Venerando, who lived just near and had also land at Camemi, next the field of Uncle Cheli.

"Don't you tell anybody why Uncle Vito sent you away," said the mother to her boy. "If you do, nobody will take you on as a hired lad." And Santo added as well: "Don't say anything about having tertian fever, because if you do nobody will want you, knowing you're ill."

However, Don Venerando took him for his flock at Santa Margherita, where the shepherd was robbing him right and left, and doing him more hurt even than the sheep in the corn. "I'll give you medicine myself, and so you'll have no excuse for going to sleep, and letting the sheen rove where they like."

Don Venerando had developed a kindly feeling towards all the family, out of love for Lucia, whom he used to see from his little terrace when he was taking the air after dinner. "If you like to give the girl as well I'll give her half a dollar a month." And he said moreover that Carmenio could go to Santa Margherita with his mother, because the old woman was losing ground from day to day, and with the flock she would at any rate not lack for eggs, and milk, and a bit of mutton broth, when a sheep died. Redhead stripped herself of the best of anything she had worth taking, to get together a little bundle of white washing for the old woman. It was now sowing time, and they couldn't come and go every day from Licciardo, and winter, the season of scarcity of everything, would be on them again. So now Lucia said she absolutely would go as servant in the house of Don Venerando.

They put the old woman on the ass, Santo on one side and Carmenio on the other, and the bundle behind; and the mother, while she let them have their way with her, said to her daughter, looking at her with heavy eyes from her blanched face: "Who knows if we shall ever see one another again? Who knows if we shall ever see one another again? They say I shall come back in April. You live in the fear of the Lord, in your master's house. Anyhow you'll want for nothing there." Lucia sobbed in her apron, and Redhead did the same, poor thing. At that moment they had made peace, and held their arms round one another, weeping together.

"Redhead has got a good heart," said her husband. "The trouble is we aren't rich enough to be always fond of one another. When hens have got nothing else to peck at in the fowl-house, they peck at one another."

Lucia was now well settled in Don Venerando's house, and she said she never wanted to leave it till she died, as folks always say, to show their gratitude to the

master. She had as much bread and soup as she wanted, a glass of wine every day, and her own plate of meat on Sundays and holidays. So that her month's wages lay in her pocket untouched, and at evening she had also time to spin herself linen for her dowry on her own account. She had already got the man ready to hand, there in the selfsame house: Brasi the kitchen-man who did the cooking and also helped in the fields when necessary. The master had got rich in the same way, in service at the baron's, and now he was a Don, and had farmland and cattle in abundance. Because Lucia came from a respectable family that had fallen on evil days, and they knew she was honest, they had given her the lighter jobs to do, to wash the dishes, and go down into the cellar, and look after the fowls; with a cupboard under the stairs to sleep in, quite like a little bedroom, with a bed and a chest of drawers and everything; so that Lucia never wanted to leave till she died. Meanwhile she turned her eyes on Brasi, and confided to him that in two or three years she'd have a bit of savings of her own and would be able to "go out into the world," if the Lord called her.

Brasi was deaf in that ear. But Lucia pleased him, with her eyes as black as coals, and the good flesh she had on her bones, and for her part she liked Brasi too; a little, curly-headed fellow with the delicate cunning face of a little fox-dog. While they were washing dishes or putting wood under the boiler he invented every kind of roguery to make her laugh, as if he was trying to rouse her up. He squirted water on to the back of her neck, and stuck endive leaves in her hair. Lucia squealed subduedly, so that the masters shouldn't hear; she took refuge in the corner by the oven, her face as red as fire, and she threw dish-rags and twigs in his face, whilst the water trickled down her back like a thrill.

"With meat you make rissoles — I've made mine, you make yours."

"I won't," replied Lucia. "I don't like these jokes."

Brasi pretended to be mortified. He picked up the leaf of endive which she had thrown at him, and stuck it in his bosom, inside his shirt, grumbling: "This belongs to me. I don't touch you. It belongs to me and is going to stop here. Don't you want something from me, to put in the same place, you?" And he pretended to pull out a handful of his hair to offer her, sticking out the length of his tongue as he did so.

She punched him with the solid punches of a peasant woman, which made him hunch up his back, and gave him bad dreams at night, he said. She seized him like a little dog by the hair, and found a certain pleasure in thrusting her fingers in that soft, curly wool.

"Keep it up! Keep it up! I'm not touchy like you, and I'd let myself be pounded to sausage-meat by your hands."

One day Don Venerando caught him at these games, and made the devil of a

row. He wasn't going to have carryings-on in his house; he'd kick them both out if there was any more of it. And yet when he found the girl alone in the kitchen he took her by the chin and wanted to caress her with two fingers.

"No! no!" replied Lucia, "I don't like those sort of carryings-on. If you don't leave me alone I'll get my things and go."

"You like them from him all right, you like them from him. And yet not from me who are your master? What do you mean by it? Don't you know I can give you gold rings and gold earrings with pendants, and make you up your dowry if I like."

Certainly he could, Brasi assured her, for the master had any amount of money, and his wife wore a silk mantle like a lady, now that she was old and thin as a mummy, for which reason her husband came down to the kitchen to have his little joke with the maids. And he came as well to watch his own interests, how much wood they burnt, and how much meat they were putting down to roast. He was rich, yes, but he knew what it cost to get property together, and he quarrelled all day long with his wife, who had no end of vanities in her head, now that she played the lady, and had taken to complaining of the smoke from the faggots and the nasty smell of onions.

"I want to gather my dowry together with my own hands," retorted Lucia. "My mother's daughter wants to remain an honest girl, in case any Christian should ask her to be his wife."

"Remain it then!" replied her master. "You'll see what a grand dowry it will be, and how many men will come after your honesty!"

If the macaroni was a little over-cooked, if Lucia brought to table a couple of fried eggs that smelled a bit singed, Don Venerando abused her thoroughly, quite another man in his wife's presence, with his stomach stuck out and his voice loud. Did they think they were making swill for the pigs? With two servants in the kitchen sending everything to rack and ruin! Another time he'd throw the dish in her face! The mistress, blessed dear, didn't want all that racket, because of the neighbours, and she sent away the servant, squealing in falsetto: "Be off into the kitchen; get out of here, you jackanapes! you wastrel!"

Lucia went to cry her eyes out in the corner by the oven, but Brasi consoled her, with that tricky face of his.

"What does it matter? Let them rattle! If we took any notice of the masters it would be poor us! The eggs smelt burnt? All the worse for them! I can't split the wood in the yard and turn the eggs at the same time. They make me do the cooking and the outside work as well, and then they expect to be waited on like the king. I should think they've forgotten the days when he used to eat bread and onion under an olive tree, and she used to go gleaning corn."

Then servant-maid and cook discussed their "misfortunes," born as they were of "respectable people," and their parents were richer than the master, once upon a time. Brasi's father was a cart-builder, no less, and it was the son's own fault if he hadn't wanted to follow the same trade, but had taken it into his head to go wandering round the fairs, following the cart of the travelling draper, and it was then he had learnt to cook and look after a horse and cattle.

Lucia recommenced the litany of her woes — her father, the cattle, Redhead, the bad harvest — both of them alike, she and Brasi, in that kitchen; they seemed made for one another.

"What, another case of your brother and Redhead?" replied Brasi. "Much obliged!" However he did not want to insult her with it, straight to her face. He didn't care a rap that she was a peasant. He didn't reject her out of pride. But they were both of them poor, and it would have been better to throw themselves down the well with a stone round their necks.

Lucia swallowed that bitter pill without saying a word, and if she wanted to cry she went and hid in the stair-cupboard, or in the oven corner, when Brasi wasn't there. For she was now very fond of that Christian, what with being with him in front of the fire all day long. The reprimands and abuse of the master she took upon herself, and kept the best plate of food for him, and the fullest glass of wine, and went into the yard to chop wood for him, and had learned to turn the eggs and dish up the macaroni to a nicety. Brasi, as he saw her crossing herself, with her bowl on her knees, before she began to eat, said to her: "Have you never seen food in your life before?"

He grumbled at everything all the time; that it was a galley-slave's life, and that he had only three hours an evening to go for a walk or to go to the inn. Lucia sometimes went so far as to ask him, with her head bent and her face growing red: "Why do you go to the inn? Leave the inn alone, it's not the place for you."

"Anybody can see you're a peasant," he replied. "You folks think there's the devil in the public-house. I was born of shop-workers, masters of their trade, my dear. I am not a clod-hopper!"

"I say it for your good. You spend all your money, and besides there's always a chance of you starting a quarrel with somebody."

Brasi felt himself soften at these words, and at those eyes which avoided looking at him. And he allowed himself the gratification of asking:

"Well, does it matter to you, anyhow?"

"No, it doesn't matter to me. I speak for your own sake."

"Well, doesn't it get on *your* nerves, stopping here in the house all day long?"

"No, I thank the Lord I am so well off, and I wish all my own people were like me, and lacked for nothing."

She was just drawing the wine, squatting with the jug between her knees, and Brasi had come down into the cellar with her to show her a light. As the cellar was big and dark as a church, and not even a fly was to be heard in that subterranean place, only they two alone, Brasi and Lucia, he put his arm around her neck and kissed her on her coral-red mouth.

The poor lass remained overcome, as she crouched with her eyes on the jug, and they were both silent, she hearing his heavy breathing, and the gurgling of the wine. But then she gave a stifled cry, drawing back all trembling, so that a little of the red froth was spilled on the floor.

"Why what's amiss?" exclaimed Brasi. "As if I'd given you a slap on the face! It isn't true then that you like me?"

She dared not look him in the face, though she was dying to. She stared at the spilled wine, embarrassed, stammering:

"Oh poor me! Oh poor me! What have I done? The master's wine!"

"Eh! let it go; he's got plenty, the master has! Listen to me rather. Don't you care for me? Say it, yes or no!"

This time she let him take her hand, without replying, and when Brasi asked her to give him the kiss back again, she gave it him, red with something that was not altogether shame.

"Have you never had one before?" asked Brasi laughing. "What a joke! You are all trembling, as if I'd said I was going to kill you."

"Yes, I do like you," she replied, "but I could hardly tell you. Don't take any notice if I'm trembling. It's because I was frightened about the wine."

"There now, think of that! You do, eh? Since when? Why didn't you tell me?"

"Since that saying we were made for one another."

"Ah!" said Brasi, scratching his head. "Let's go up, the master might come."

Lucia was all happiness since that kiss, it seemed to her as if Brasi had sealed on her mouth his promise to marry her. But he never spoke of it, and if the girl tried him on that score, he replied: "What are you bothering about? Besides, what's the good putting our necks in the yoke, when we can be together just as if we were married."

"No, it's not the same. Now you fend for yourself and I fend for myself, but when we are married, we shall be one."

"And a lovely thing that will be, an' all! Besides, we don't belong to the same walk of life. It would be different if you had a bit of dowry."

"Ah! what a black heart you've got! No! You've never cared for me!"

"Yes, I have! And I'm ready for you for whatever you want of me; but without talking about that there — —"

"No! I don't want any of that sort of thing! Leave me alone, and don't look at

me any more!"

Now she knew what men were like. All liars and traitors. She didn't want to hear of it any more. She'd rather throw herself head first down the well; she wanted to become a Daughter of Mary; she wanted to take her good name and throw it out of the window! What good was it to her, without a dowry? She wanted to break her neck with that old creature her master, and get her dowry out of her shame. Now that — ! Now that — ! Don Venerando was always hanging round her, first saying nice things and then nasty, looking after his own interests, seeing if they put too much wood on the fire, how much oil they used for the frying, sending Brasi to buy a ha'porth of snuff, and trying to take Lucia by the chin, running round after her in the kitchen, on tip-toe so his wife shouldn't hear, scolding the girl for her lack of respect for him, making him run in that fashion! "No! No!" She was like a mad cat. She'd rather take her things and go! "And where shall you find anything to eat? And how shall you find a husband, without a dowry? Look at these earrings! Then I'll give you fifty dollars for your dowry. Brasi would have both his eyes pulled out, for fifty dollars."

Ah, that black-hearted Brasi! He left her in the wicked hands of her master, which trembled as they pawed at her. Left her with the thought of her mother, who hadn't long to live; and of the bare house empty of everything except trouble, and of Pino the Tome who had thrown her over to go and eat the bread of the widow! He left her with the temptation of the earrings and the fifty dollars in her head!

And one day she came into the kitchen with her face all dismayed, and the gold pendants dangling against her cheeks. Brasi opened his eyes, and said to her; "How fine you look now, Neighbour Lucia!"

"Ah! You like me in them? All right, all right!"

Brasi, now that he saw the earrings and the rest, strove so hard to show himself helpful and useful to her, that you might have thought she had become another mistress in the house. He left her the fuller plate, and the best seat at the fire. And he opened his heart wide to her, that they were two poor things both of them, and it did your soul good to tell your troubles to somebody you were fond of. And as soon as he could scrape fifty dollars together he'd set up a little public-house and take a wife. He in the kitchen, she behind the bar. And then you weren't at anybody's bidding. If the master liked to do them a good turn, he could do it without hurting himself, because fifty dollars was a pinch of snuff to him. And Brasi wouldn't look down his nose, not he! One hand washes the other in this world. And it wasn't his fault if he tried to earn his living as best he could. Poverty wasn't a sin.

But Lucia went red and white, her eyes swelled with tears, or she hid her face in her apron. After some time she didn't show herself outside the house, neither for mass, nor for confession, nor at Easter, nor at Christmas. In the kitchen she hid herself in the darkest corner, with her face dropped, huddled in the new dress her master had given her, wide around the waist.

Brasi consoled her with kind words. He put his arm round her neck, felt the fine stuff of her frock, and praised it. Those gold earrings were made for her. Anybody who is well dressed and has money in her pocket has no need to feel ashamed and walk with her eyes down; above all when the eyes are as lovely as Neighbour Lucia's. The poor thing took courage by looking into his face with those same eyes, still overcome, and she stammered: "Do you mean it, Master Brasi? Do you still care for me?"

"Yes, yes, I do really!" replied Brasi, with his hand on his conscience. "But is it my fault if I'm not rich enough to marry you? If you'd got ten pounds, I'd marry you with my eyes shut."

Don Venerando had now taken to liking him also, and gave him his left-off clothes and his broken boots. When he went down into the cellar he gave him a good pot of wine, saying to him:

"Here, drink my health!"

And his fat belly shook with laughing, seeing the grimaces which Brasi made, and hearing him stuttering to Lucia, pale as a dead man: "The master is a gentleman, Neighbour Lucia! Let the neighbours cackle, they're all jealous, because they're dying with hunger, and they'd like to be in your shoes."

Santo, the brother, heard the gossip in the square some month or so later. He ran to his wife, staggered. Poor they had always been, but honored. Redhead was also overwhelmed, and she ran in dismay to her sister-in-law, who couldn't utter a word. But when she came back home, she was quite different, serene and with roses in her cheeks.

"If you did but see! A chest as high as this, full of white goods! and rings, and pendant-ear-rings, and necklaces of fine gold. Then there are fifty dollars for the dowry. A real God's provision!"

"And what by that?" the brother kept saying from time to time, unable to take it all in. "At least she might have waited till our mother had closed her eyes!"

All this took place in the year of the snow, when a good many roofs fell in, and there was a great mortality among the cattle of the district, God preserve us!

At Lamia and on the Mount of Santa Margherita, as folks saw that livid evening declining, heavy with ill-omened clouds, so that the oxen looked suspiciously behind them, and moored, all the people stood outside their huts to gaze far off towards the sea, with one hand over their eyes, not speaking. The

bell of the Old Monastery, at the top of the village, was ringing to drive away the bad night, and on the Castle hill-crest there was a great swarming of goodwives, seen black against the pale sky-rim, watching the Dragon's Tail in the sky, a pitch-black stripe that smelled of sulphur, they said, and which meant it was going to be a bad night. The women made signs with their fingers to conjure him away, the dragon, and they showed him the little medal of the Madonna on their bare breasts, and spat in his face, making the sign of the cross upon themselves right down to their navels, and praying God and the souls in purgatory, and Santa Lucia, whose eve it was, to protect their fields, their cattle, and also their men, all live creatures that were outside the village. At the beginning of winter Carmenio had gone with the flock to Santa Margherita. His mother wasn't well that evening, and tossed in her bed, with her dilated eyes, and wouldn't keep quiet like she usually did, but wanted this, and wanted that, and wanted to get up, and wanted them to turn her over on to the other side. Carmenio had run round for a while, attending to her, trying to do something. Then he had posted himself by the bed, stupefied, with his hands clutching his hair.

The hut was across the stream, in the bed of the valley, between two great rocks which leaned over the roof. Opposite, the coast, seeming to stand on end, was beginning to fade in the darkness which was rising from the valley, naked and black with stones, and between the stones the white stripe of the road-track lost itself. When the sun was setting the neighbours had come from the flock in the cactus-grove, to see if the sick woman wanted anything; but she was lying quite still in her bit of a bed, with her face upwards and her nose going black, as if dusted with soot.

"A bad sign!" Herdsman Decu had said. "If I hadn't got the sheep up above, and the bad weather that's coming on, I wouldn't leave you alone tonight. Call me, if there's anything!"

Carmenio said yes, with his head leaning against the door post; but seeing him going away step by step, to be lost in the night, he had a great desire to run after him, to begin to shout, and tear his hair — to do he knew not what.

"If anything happens," shouted Herdsman Decu from the distance, "run up to the flock in the cactus thicket, up there, there's people there."

The flock was still to be seen on the rocky height, skywards, in that dim of twilight which still gathered on the tops of the mountains, and penetrated the thickets of the cactus. Far, far away, towards Lamia and the plain, was heard the howling of dogs — waow! waow! waow! — the sound coming right up to there and making your bones turn cold.

Then the sheep suddenly were possessed and began to rush about in a mass in the enclosure, driven by a mad terror, as if they heard the wolf in the

neighbourhood; and at that frantic clanging of sheep-bells, it seemed as if the shadows had become lit up with so many fiery eyes, all going round. Then the sheep stopped still, huddled close together, with their noses down to the ground, and the dog with one long and lamentable howl, left off barking, seated there on his tail.

"If I'd known," thought Carmenio, "it would have been better to tell Herdsman Decu not to leave me alone."

Outside, in the darkness, the bells of the flock were heard shuddering from time to time. Through the window-hole you could see the square of the black doorway, black as the mouth of an oven; nothing else. And the coast away opposite and the deep valley and the plain of Lamia, all was plunged in that bottomless blackness, so that it seemed as if what you saw was nothing but the noise of the torrent, away below, mounting up towards the hut, swollen and threatening.

If he had known this too he'd have run to the village before it got dark, to fetch his brother; and then of course by this time he'd have been there with him, and Lucia as well, and the sister-in-law.

Then the mother began to speak, but you couldn't make out what she said, and she kept grasping the bedclothes with her wasted hands.

"Mamma! Mamma! What do you want?" asked Carmenio. "Tell me what it is, I'm here with you!"

But the mother did not answer. She shook her head instead, as if to say no! no! she didn't want to. The boy put the candle under her nose and burst out crying with fear.

"Oh, mamma! oh, mamma!" whimpered Carmenio. "Oh, I'm all alone and I can't help you!" He opened the door to call the folks from the flock among the cactus. But nobody heard him. Everywhere there was a dense glimmer; on the coast, in the valley, and down on the plain — like a silence made of cotton wool. All at once came the sound of a muffled bell from far off — 'nton! 'nton! 'nton! — and it seemed to curdle in the snow.

"Oh, holiest Madonna!" sobbed Carmenio. "Whatever bell is that? Oh, you with the cactus sheep, help! Help! Holy Christians!" he began to shout.

At last, above there, at the top of the cactus hill, was heard a far-off voice, like the bell of Francoforte.

"Ooooh!-what's a - m a a a t t e r? what's a-maaatter?"

"Help, good Christians! Help, here at Shepherd Decu-u-u's — "

"Ooooh! — follow the shee-eeep! — fo-o-ollow!"

"No! no! it isn't the sheep — it *isn't!*"

Just then the screech-owl flew past and began to screech over the hut.

"There!" murmured Carmenio, crossing himself. "Now the screech-owl has smelt the smell of dead people. Now my mamma is going to die!"

Having to stay alone in the cabin with his mother, who no longer spoke, made him want to cry. "Mamma, what's a-matter? Mamma, tell me! Mamma, are you cold?" She did not breathe, her face was dark. He lit the fire between the two stones of the hearth, and sat watching how the boughs burned, how they made a flame and then breathed out as if they were saying something about it.

When he had been with the flocks at Resecone, the Francoforte man, as they sat up at night, had told tales of witches who ride on broom-sticks, and do witchcraft over the flames of the hearth. Carmenio remembered even now how the farm-people had gathered to listen, with all their eyes open, in front of the little light hung to the pillar of the great dark mill-stone, and that not one of them had had the courage afterwards to go and sleep in his own corner that evening.

Against these things he had the medal of the Madonna under his shirt, and the ribbon of Santa Agrippina tied round his wrist, till it had become black with wear. And in his pocket he had the reed whistle, which reminded him of summer evenings — *Yoo! Yoo!* — when they let the sheep into the stubble that is yellow as gold, and the grass-hoppers explode in sound at the hour of noon, and the larks fall whistling to nestle behind the sods at sunset, when the scent of wildmint and marjoram wakes up. *Yoo! Yoo! Infant Jesu!* At Christmas, when he had gone to the village, that was how they had played for the novena in front of the little altar that was lit up and adorned with boughs of orange-tree; and in front of the doors of all the houses the children had been playing chuck-stone, the fine December sun shining on their backs. Then they had all set off for the midnight mass, in a crowd with the neighbours, colliding and laughing through the dark streets. Ah, why had he got this thorn in his heart now? And why didn't his mother say anything! It still wanted a long time to midnight. Between the stones of the unplastered walls it seemed as if there were eyes watching from every hole, looking into the hut, at the hearth, eyes black and frozen.

On a straw-stack in a corner a jacket was thrown down, spread out long, and it seemed as if the sleeves were swelling out; and the devil with the Archangel Michael, in the image-card stuck on to the bed-head, gnashed his white teeth, with his hands in his hair, among the red zigzags of hell.

Next day, pale as so many corpses, arrived Santo, and Redhead with the children trailing after her, and Lucia who had no thought for concealing her condition, in that hour of anguish. Around the bed of the dead woman they tore their hair and beat their heads, and thought of nothing else. Then as Santo noticed his sister with so much stomach on her that it was shameful, he began saying in the midst of all the blubbering: "You might at least have let that poor

woman close her eyes first, you might — "

And Lucia on her side:

"If I'd only known, if I'd only known! She shouldn't have gone short of doctor or druggist, now I've got fifty dollars of my own."

"She is in Paradise praying to God for us sinners," concluded Redhead. "She knows you've got your dowry and she's at peace, poor thing. Now Master Brasi will marry you without fail."

THE GENTRY

They know how to read and write — that's the trouble. The white-frost of dark winter dawns and the burning dog-days of harvest time fall upon them as upon every other poor devil, since they're made of flesh and blood like their fellowmen, and since they've got to go out and watch to see that their fellowman doesn't rob them of his time and of his day's pay. But if you have anything to do with them, they hook you by your name and your surname, and the names of those that begot you and bore you, with the beak of that pen of theirs, and then you'll never get yourself out of their ugly books any more, nailed down by debt.

"You still owe two bushels of corn from last year."

"Sir, the harvest was bad."

"Is it my fault if it doesn't rain? Perhaps I ought to have watered your corn with my drinking glass?"

"Oh Sir, I put my very blood into your land."

"That's what I pay you to do, rascal! I pay you blood for blood. I bleed myself in expenses for the agricultural outlay and then if there comes a bad season, you leave me stuck with the land, while you go off with the sickle under your arm."

And then they say, "A beggar is better off than a proprietor," because you can't take the skin off his back to pay his debts with. That's why the man who has got nothing is forced to pay dearer for his land than others — the owner risks more — and if the harvest turns out poor the half-profits peasant naturally gets none of it, and has to go off with his sickle under his arm. But it is a nasty business, for all that, going off like that after a year's hard work, and with the prospect of a long winter in front of you, with no bread to eat.

Bad times will put the devil into any man. One time, at harvest, such a harvest that you'd think it had been excommunicated by God Himself, the friar on his begging-round rode into Don Piddu's field, kicking his fine bay mule in the belly with his wooden-soled sandals and shouting from the distance, "Hail Jesu and Mary!"

Don Piddu was sitting on a caved-in hamper sadly looking at his meagre threshing-floor, in the midst of the burnt-up stubble of the field, under that sky of fire which he didn't even feel upon his bare head, he was in such a state of despair.

"Oh, the fine bay mule you've got, Fra Giuseppe! She's worth more than all those four old nags put together, that have nothing to thresh and nothing to eat!"

"It's the collections mule," replied Fra Giuseppe. "Praise be to charity towards a fellowman. I've come round to make the collection."

"Lucky for you who reap without sowing, and who go down to your refectory when the bell rings, and eat your fellowman's charity! I've got five children, and have to find bread for the lot of them. Look what a grand harvest! Last year you got half a measure of corn out of me because St. Francis had sent me a good crop, and the thanks I get for it is that it hasn't rained anything but fire out of the sky for three months."

Fra Giuseppe wiped the sweat from his own face with his pocket handkerchief.

"Are you hot, Fra Giuseppe? Then I'll see you get something to cool you, I will!"

And he got four other peasants who were as enraged as himself to give the friar a sousing, turning the creature's long gown over his pate and pouring bucketfuls of green water over him out of the water-hole.

"Deuce and damnation!" shouted Don Piddu. "Since it isn't any good giving charity to Christ, I'm going to give it to the devil, next time."

And after that he wouldn't have any more Capucin friars round his threshing floor, and was satisfied if the brother of St. Francis of Paola came to make the collection.

Brother Giuseppe put it away in his memory box: "Ah! you wanted to see my drawers, did you, Don Piddu? I'll see you without either drawers or shirt."

He was a great lump of an ugly friar with a mass of beard, and a great thick neck on him as black as a Modica bull, for which reason he was the oracle of the goodwives and the peasants in all the yards and along all the country roads.

"You musn't have anything to do with Don Piddu. Let me tell you he is excommunicated by God, and his land is accursed!"

When the mission preachers came, in the last day of Carnival, for the spiritual discipline of Lent, if there happened to be any sinner or woman of ill repute in the village, or any other merry person, they went to preach outside his door, in a procession and with the scourge round their necks, for the sins of others. Then Fra Giuseppe pointed out the house of Don Piddu, saying that now nothing went well with him: failure of crops, mortality among his cattle, his wife sick, his daughters all marriageable, handsome and ready. Donna Saridda, the eldest, was almost thirty, and was still called Donna Saridda so that she shouldn't grow up so fast. At the little party at the mayor's on Shrove Tuesday, she had at last laid hold of a swain, because Pietro Macca, peeping out of the servant's hall, had seen her clasping hands with young Don Giovannino, while they were twirling and figuring in the quadrille. Don Piddu had denied himself the bread of his mouth to

take his daughter to the party in a silk dress open in front as low as her heart. Who knows! Straightway came the mission preachers outside the mayor's street door, preaching against temptations, because of all the sin that was going on inside, and the mayor had to have the windows shut to save his glass from being smashed with stones by the people outside.

Donna Saridda went home as pleased as could be, as if she had got the first prize in the lottery safe in her pocket; and she never slept all night, for thinking about Don Giovannino, little suspecting that Fra Giuseppe was saying to him: "Are you mad, your honour, to be entering the family of Don Piddu, when you know he'll be sold up before long!"

Don Giovannino didn't care about the dowry. But the dishonour of the selling up was another pair of shoes. People crowded outside Don Piddu's door to see them carrying out the cupboards and the chests of drawers, which left a white mark upon the wall against which they had stood for so long, and the daughters, pale as wax, had a great job to hide what was happening from their mother, who was ill in bed. She, poor thing, pretended not to know. She had gone beforehand with her husband to beg and beseech first the lawyer, then the magistrate. "We'll pay tomorrow — we'll pay the day after tomorrow." And they had come back home creeping along close to the wall, she with her face hidden in her cloak — for she was of baronial blood! The day of the sale Donna Saridda, with tears in her eyes, had gone to shut all the windows, because even those who are born with Don before their names are subject to shame. Don Piddu, when out of charity they had taken him as overseer of the fields of Fiumegrande, at harvest time, when malaria ate up every Christian that came near, he didn't care about the malaria; he only grieved because now, when the peasants disputed with him, they left out the Don and called him plainly *thou*.

But while he has his arms and his health a poor devil can at least earn his bread. Which is what Don Marcantonio Malerba said when he fell into poverty, burdened with children, and his wife, always with child, was forced to go on making bread and preparing the soup and doing the washing and sweeping the rooms. Gentry need so many more things, and they're used to a different way of life. When the children of Don Marcantonio went empty-bellied all day long they never said a word, and the oldest, when his father sent him to buy bread on credit, or a bundle of lettuce, went with his face lowered, at nightfall, hiding the stuff under his patched cloak.

His father turned his hand to anything he could get, in order to earn something, renting a bit of land, or taking it on the half-profits system. He came home on foot from the fields later than anybody else, wrapped in that rag of a shawl belonging to his wife, which he called a *plaid*, and he did his day's brave

hoeing like any other man, when nobody was passing along the bridle-road.

Then on Sundays he went to be the gentleman along with the others in the club, prattling in a group among the rest of them with his hands in his pockets and his nose inside the collar of his overcoat; or he played at piquet with his stick between his knees and his hat on his head. At the first sound of midday they all bolted as fast as they could, some in one direction and some in another, and he also went home as if he had a dinner ready waiting for him as well. "What am I to do?" he said. "I can't go out day-labouring, with my children." And the children, now when their father sent them to ask for the loan of half a bushel of buckwheat for seed, or a peck of beans for soup, from Uncle Masi or from Farmer Pinu, they blushed and stammered as if they were already grown up.

When the fire came out of Mount Etna, destroying vineyards and olive groves, then whoever had arms to work had at least no need to starve. But for the gentry who had their land in those parts, it would have been better if the lava had buried them along with their acres, them and their children and everything. The folks who had nothing to lose went out of the village to see the fire, with their hands in their pockets. Today it had taken so-and-so's vineyard, tomorrow it would be in the fields of so-and-so; now it was threatening the bridge of the road, later it encircled the house on the right hand. Those who were not standing looking on were busying themselves removing tiles, window-frames, furniture, clearing the bedrooms, saving what they could, losing their head in the rush and the desperation of the hour, like a disturbed ants' nest.

They brought the news to Don Marco while he was at table with his family, eating a plate of macaroni.

"Signor Don Marco, the lava is coming your way, and you'll have it in your vineyards directly." At the sound of this misfortune the fork fell from his hand. The man who looked after the vineyard was carrying away the implements of the wine-press, the staves of casks, everything that could be saved, and the wife had gone to fix canes bearing images of the saints who should protect the place, at the boundaries of the vineyard, mumbling *ave marias*.

Don Marco arrived exhausted, driving the donkey in front of him, through the dark great cloud that rained down ashes. From the little courtyard in front of the press you could see the black mountain looming over the vineyard, smoking, collapsing here and there, with a rattling of stones as if a mountain of broken pots were slipping down, splitting open to reveal the red fire that was boiling inside it. In the distance the tallest trees shook and rustled in the still air even before they were overtaken; then they smoked and crackled; all at once they blazed and went up in a single flame. They seemed like torches lighted one by

one in the dusk of the silent country, along the course of the lava. The wife of the man who looked after the vineyard went round setting a little further back the canes with the sacred images, but one by one they flared up like matches; and she cried, terrified by all that ruin, thinking that the master wouldn't need a caretaker any more, and they would be dismissed. And the watch-dog also howled before that burning vineyard. The press-house, dismantled and thrown open, roofless, with all that stuff thrown out into the courtyard, in the midst of the frightened countryside, seemed as if it trembled with fear as they removed everything from it previous to abandoning it.

"What are you doing?" Don Marco asked his man, as the latter was trying to save the casks and the implements of the wine-press. "Leave it alone. I shall have nothing left now, there'll be nothing to put in the casks."

He kissed the fence of the vineyard for the last time before abandoning it, and he turned back, leading the donkey by the halter.

In God's name! Even gentry have their troubles, and are made of flesh and blood like their neighbours. Poor Donna Maria, the other daughter of Don Piddu, had flung herself into the arms of the stable-boy, having lost all hope of ever getting married, and now they were away in the lonely country, in want and misery. Her parents had kept her without a rag of new clothes to her back, with not so much as a dog to bark after her. In the noon of a hot July day, while the flies were buzzing in the deserted farmyard, and her parents were trying to sleep, with their noses against the wall, she went to look for the lad behind the strawstacks, and he, red and stammering every time she fixed her eyes on him, seized her by the hair to give her a kiss.

Don Piddu almost died of shame. After the sale, after all the misery, he would never have thought he could sink lower. The poor mother came to know of it at the Easter communion. A saint, that woman! Don Piddu was shut up in the Capucin monastery along with all the other gentry of the place, performing the spiritual discipline of the sacred days. The gentry gathered together with their peasants to confess themselves and to hear the evangelical mission; and they paid the expenses of maintenance also, in the hope that the laborers would be converted, and that if they had robbed their masters, they would restore the ill-gotten goods. During those eight days of spiritual discipline, gentry and laborers became brothers again, as in the days of Adam and Eve; and the masters, to show their humility, waited on their farm-men at table with their own hands; so that the food went down all the wrong way, in the throats of the laborers, they were so shy and uncomfortable, and in the refectory it was like a stall of cattle, what with the noise of all those jaws working, while the evangelical preachers preached hell and purgatory. Don Piddu didn't want to go that year, not having

the money to pay his share, and besides, his laborers couldn't rob anything from him. But the magistrate sent for him, and they made him turn saint by force, so that he shouldn't set a bad example. Those eight days were a godsend to anybody who had an affair on hand in the house of some poor devil, with no need to fear that the husband might come home unexpectedly from the country to spoil the fun. The door of the monastery was closed to everybody, but the lads who had something to spend slipped out at evening and did not come back till dawn.

Now Don Piddu, after there had come to his ears certain things which Fra Giuseppe had been letting fall, got out secretly one night, as if he was but twenty years old, or as if his love-lady was waiting for him, and heaven knows what he went and discovered in his own house. Certainly when he came in again just before dawn he was pale as death, and looked a hundred years older. This time the clandestine traffic had been taken by surprise, and as the young womanisers came creeping back into the monastery, they found the mission padre kneeling outside the door, praying for the sins which others had gone out to commit. Don Piddu also threw himself on to his knees, to confess in the ear of the padre, at the same time weeping all the tears he had in his eyes.

Ah! the thing he had found out, there in his own home! in his daughter's little bedroom where not even the sun could enter! The stable-lad escaping through the window; and Maria, pale as death, trying none the less to look him in the face, and clinging with desperate arms to the door-post, to defend her lover. Then there passed before his eyes his other daughter, and his sick wife, the magistrates and the police, in a sea of blood.

"You! You!" he stammered. She trembled all over, this wretched woman, but she did not answer. Then she fell on her knees with her hands clasped, as if she read in his face that she was a parricide. And then he fled with his hands clutching his hair.

But the confessor who counselled him to offer this anguish to God, should really have said to him:

"You see, your honour, when the same trouble falls on other poor folks they keep quiet, because they are poor, and can't read and write, and can't let out what they feel without getting sent to the galleys."

LIBERTY

They unfurled a red-white-and-green handkerchief from the church-tower, they rang the bells in a frenzy, and they began to shout in the village square, "Hurray for liberty!"

Like the sea in storm. The crowd foamed and swayed in front of the club of the gentry, and outside the Town Hall, and on the steps of the church — a sea of white stocking-caps, axes and sickles glittering. Then they burst into the little street.

"Your turn first, baron! You who have had folks cudgelled by your estate-keepers!"

Until recently only the gentle-folks wore hats in Sicily. The men-peasants wore the old Phrygian stocking-caps, the women went bareheaded or, for church, had a scarf or a shawl. The hat was a sign of class distinction.

This story is based on an actual incident in the revolution of 1860, when Garibaldi was in Sicily with the Thousand.

At the head of all the people a witch, with her old hair sticking up, armed with nothing but her nails. "Your turn, priest of the devil! for you've sucked the soul out of us!" "Your turn now, rich glutton, you're not going to escape no matter how fat you are with the blood of the poor!" "Your turn, police-sergeant! you who never took the law on anybody except poor folks who'd got nothing!" "Your turn, estate-keepers, who sold your own flesh and your neighbour's flesh for twenty cents a day!"

And blood smoked and went drunk. Sickles, hands, rags, stones, everything red with blood! *The gentry! The hat-folks!* Kill them all! Kill them all! Down with the *hat-folks!*

Don Antonio was slipping home by the short cuts. The first blow made him fall with his bleeding face against the causeway. "Why? Why are you killing me?" "You as well, the devil can have you!" A lame brat picked up the filthy hat and spat inside it. "Down with the hats! Hurray for Liberty! You, take that!" Then for his Reverence who used to preach hell for anybody who stole a bit of bread. He was just coming back from saying mass, with the consecrated Host inside his fat belly. "Don't kill me, I am in mortal sin!" Neighbour Lucia being the mortal sin; Neighbour Lucia whose father had sold her to the priest when she was fourteen years old, at the time of the famine winter, and she had ever since been filling the streets and the Refuge with hungry brats. If such dog's-

meat had been worth anything that day they'd have been able to stuff themselves with it, as they hacked it to pieces with their hatchets in the doorways of the houses and on the cobble-stones of the street. Like the wolf when he falls famished on a flock of sheep, and never thinks of filling his belly, but just slaughters right and left with rage — Milady's son, who had run to see what was happening — the apothecary, while he was locking up shop as fast as he could — Don Paolo, who was coming home from the vineyard riding on his ass, with his lean saddlebags behind him. And he was wearing into the bargain a little old cap that his daughter had embroidered for him long ago, before the vines had taken the disease. His wife saw him fall in front of the street-door, as she and her five children were waiting for him and for the handful of stuff for the soup which he had got in his saddlebags. "Paolo! Paolo!" The first fellow caught him in the shoulder with a hatchet cut. Another was on him with a sickle, and disembowelled him as he was reaching with his bleeding arm for the knocker.

But the worst was when the lawyer's son, a lad of eleven, blond as gold, fell no one knows how, overthrown in the crowd. His father had raised himself two or three times before he dragged himself aside into the filth, to die, calling to him: "Neddu! Neddu!" Neddu fled in terror, mouth and eyes wide open, unable to make a sound. They knocked him down; he also raised himself on one knee, like his father; the torrent passed over him; somebody put his great boot on the boy's cheek and smashed it in; nevertheless the lad still begged for mercy with his hands. He didn't want to die, no, not in the way he had seen his father killed; it broke his heart! The woodcutter out of pity gave him a great blow with the axe, using both hands, as if he had had to fell a fifty-year-old oak-tree — and he trembled like a leaf. Somebody shouted, "Bah, he'd have been another lawyer!"

No matter! Now they had their hands red with such blood, they'd got to spill the rest of it. All of 'em! All the *hats*! It was no longer hunger, beatings, swindling which made their anger boil up again. It was innocent blood. The women most ferocious of all, waving their fleshless arms, squealing in falsetto, with rage, the tender flesh showing under the rags of their clothing. "You who came praying to the good God in a silk frock!" "You who thought yourself contaminated if you knelt beside poor folks! Take that! Take that!" In the houses, on the stair-cases, inside the alcoves, a tearing of silk and of fine linen. Oh the ear-rings upon bleeding faces, oh the golden rings upon hands that tried to ward off the hatchet-strokes!

The baroness had had the great door barricaded: beams, wagons, full casks piled against it, and the estate-keepers firing from the windows to sell their lives dear. The crowd bowed its head to the gun-fire, because it had no weapons to respond with. Because in those days it was death-penalty for having fire-arms in

your possession. Hurray for Liberty! And they burst in the great doors. Then into the courtyard, up the steps, dislodging the wounded. They left the estate-keepers for the time. They would settle them later. First they wanted the flesh of the baroness, flesh made of partridges and good wine. She ran from room to room with her baby at her breast, all dishevelled — and the rooms were many. The crowd was heard howling along the twistings of the passages, advancing like a river in flood. The oldest son, sixteen years of age, also with fair white flesh still, was pushing the door with his trembling hands, crying: "Mamà! Mamà!" At the first rush they sent the door down on top of him. He clung to the legs which trod him down. He cried no more. His mother had taken refuge on the balcony, clasping her baby close, shutting its mouth with her hand so that it should not cry, mad. The other son wanted to defend her with his body, glaring, as if he had a hundred hands, clutching all those axes by the blades. They separated them in a flash. One man seized her by the hair, another by her hips, another by her dress, lifting her above the balcony rail. The charcoal-man tore the infant baby from her arms. The other brother saw nothing but red and black. They trampled him down, they ground his bones with iron-shod heels; he had set his teeth in a hand which was squeezing his throat, and he never let go. Hatchets couldn't strike in the heap, they hovered flashing in the air.

And in that mad carnival of the month of July, above all the drunken howling of the fasting crowd, the bell of God kept on ringing frantically, until evening, with no mid-day, no ave-maria, like in the land of the Turks. Then they began to disband, tired with the slaughter, quietly, slinkingly, every one fleeing from his companion. Before nightfall all doors were shut, in fear, and in every house the lamp was burning. Along the little streets no sound was heard save that of the dogs, which went prying in the corners, then a dry gnawing of bones, in the bright moonlight which washed over everything, and showed the wide-open big doors and the open windows of the deserted houses.

Day broke: a Sunday with nobody in the square, and no mass ringing. The sexton had burrowed into his hiding hole; there were no more priests. The first-comers that began to gather on the sacred threshold looked one another in the face suspiciously; each one thinking of what his neighbour must have on his conscience. Then, when they were a fair number, they began to murmur: "We can't be without mass, and on a Sunday, like dogs!" The club of the *Gentry* was barricaded up, and they didn't know where to go to get their masters' orders for the week. From the church tower still dangled the red-white-and-green handkerchief, flaccid, in the yellow heat of July. And as the shade diminished slowly outside the church-front, the crowd clustered all in one corner. Between two miserable houses of the square, at the bottom of a narrow street that sloped

steeply downwards, you could see the fields yellowish on the plain, and the dark woods on the slopes of Etna. Now they were going to share up those fields and woods among themselves. Each one was calculating to himself, on his fingers, how much he should get for his share, and was looking askance at his neighbours. Liberty meant that everybody should have his share — yon Nino Bestia and yon Ramurazzo would have liked to make out that they must carry on the bossy tricks of the *hats!* If there was no surveyor to measure the land, and no lawyer to put it on to paper, everybody would be going at it tooth and nail! And if you booze your share at the public-house, then afterwards we've got to start sharing all over again — thief here and thief there. Now that there was Liberty, anybody who wanted to eat enough for two ran the risk of being done in like those there *gentry!* The woodcutter brandished his fist in the air as if he still grasped the axe.

The next day they heard that the General was coming to deal out justice; which news made folks tremble. They saw the red shirts of their own soldiers climbing slowly up the ravine towards the village; if you had rolled down rocks you could have squashed them all. But nobody stirred. The women screamed and tore their hair. And the dark-faced men with long beards only sat on the top of the hill with their hands between their thighs watching those tired boys come up, bent beneath their rusty rifles, and that little General on his great black horse, in front of them all, alone.

The General made them carry straw into the church, and put his boys to sleep like a father. In the morning, before dawn, if they weren't up at the sound of the bugle, he rode into the church on his horse, swearing like a Turk. That was a man! And on the spot he ordered five or six of them to be shot. Pippo, the dwarf, Pizzannello, the first ones they laid hold of. The woodcutter, while they were making him kneel against the cemetery wall, wept like a child because of certain words his mother had said to him, and because of the cry she had uttered when they tore him from her arms. From afar off, in the remotest alleys of the village as you sat behind your closed door, you could hear those gun-shots firing one after the other, like cannon-crackers at holiday time.

And then came the real judges, gentlemen in spectacles perched upon mules, done up with the journey, complaining still of their fatigue, while they were examining the accused in the refectory of the monastery, sitting on one hip on their seats, and saying *aha!* every time they changed the side. A trial that would never come to an end. They took the guilty over away to the city, on foot, chained two by two, between two files of soldiers with cocked muskets. Their women followed them running down the long country roads, across the fallow land, through the cactus thickets and the vineyards and the golden-coloured

wheat, tired out, limping, calling out their names every time the road made a bend and they could see the faces of the prisoners. At the city they shut them up in the great prison that was high and vast as a monastery, all pierced with iron-barred windows; and if the women wished to see their men, it was only on Mondays in presence of the warders, behind the iron grating. And the poor fellows got yellower and yellower in that everlasting shadow, never seeing the sun. Every Monday they were more taciturn, and they hardly answered, they complained even less. Other days if the women roved in the square round the prison, the sentinels threatened them with their guns. And then never knowing what to do, where to find work in the town, nor how to earn bread. The bed in the stables cost two cents; the white bread they swallowed in a gulp did not fill their stomachs; and if they crouched down in the doorway of a church, to pass the night there, the police arrested them. One by one they went back home, first the wives, then the mothers. One good-looking lass lost herself in the town and was never heard of again. All the others belonging to the village had come back to do the same as they had done before. The gentry couldn't work their lands with their own hands, and the poor folks couldn't live without the gentry. So they made peace. The apothecary's orphan son stole Neli Pirru's wife, and it seemed to him a proper thing to do, to revenge himself on the one who had killed his father. And when the woman had qualms now and then, and was afraid that her husband when he came out of prison would cut her face, the apothecary's son replied, "Don't be afraid, he won't come out." Nowadays nobody thought of them; unless it was some mother, some old father, when their eyes wandered towards the plain where the city lay, or on Sundays when they saw the others talking over their affairs quietly with the gentry, in front of the club, with their caps in their hands; and they convinced themselves that rags must suffer in a wind.

The case lasted three years, no less; three years of prison without ever seeing the sun. So that the accused seemed like so many dead men out of the tomb, every time they were conducted fettered to the court. Whoever could manage it had come down from the village, witnesses, relatives, people full of curiosity, like a holiday, to see their fellow villagers, after such a long time, crowded together in the chicken-coop of the prisoner's dock — and real chickens you became, inside there! and Neli Pirru had to see the apothecary's lad face to face, the fellow who had become his relation underhand! They made them stand up one by one. "What is your name?" And each one answered for himself, name and surname and what he had done. The lawyers fenced away with their speeches, in wide, loose sleeves, getting besides themselves, foaming at the mouth, suddenly wiping themselves calm with a white pocket-handkerchief, and

snuffing up a pinch of snuff. The judges dozed behind the lenses of their spectacles, which froze your heart. Facing were seated twelve *gentry* in a row, tired, bored, yawning, scratching their beards or gabbling among themselves. For sure they were telling one another what a marvellous escape it had been for them that they weren't gentry of that village up there, when the folks had been making liberty. And those poor wretches opposite tried to read their faces. Then they went away to confabulate together, and the accused men waited white-faced, with their eyes fixed on the closed door. As they came in again, their foreman, the one who spoke with his hand on his stomach, was almost as pale as the prisoners, and he said, "On my honour and on my conscience — !"

The charcoal man, while they were putting the handcuffs on him again, stammered: "Where are you taking me to? To the galleys? Oh, why? I never got so much as half a yard of land! If they'd told me what liberty was like — !"

ACROSS THE SEA

She listened, wrapped up in her furs and leaning back against the outside of the cabin, her large pensive eyes staring into the vague shadows of the sea. The stars glittered above their heads, and no sound was heard around them save the heavy throb of the engines, and the moan of the waves which lost themselves upon the boundless horizon. In the bows, behind them, somebody was softly humming a popular song, to the accompaniment of the accordion.

Perhaps she was thinking of the hot emotions she had felt the previous evening at the theatre of San Carlo in Naples, or of the Chiaia foreshore blazing with light, which they had left behind them. She had loosely taken his arm, with the abandon of that isolation in which they found themselves, and had gone to lean on the ship's rail, looking at the phosphorescent stripe which the steamer made, deep under which the screw broke open unexplored abysses, as if she wanted to fathom the mystery of other unknown existences. On the opposite side, towards the land above which Orion sloped over, other unknown, almost mysterious lives quivered and suffered who knows what poor joys, poor sorrows, how like to those he was telling! The woman was thinking of them vaguely, with compressed lips, her eyes fixed on the darkness of the horizon.

Before they separated they remained a while in the cabin doorway in the wavering glimmer of the swinging lamp. The steward, tired out, was squatted asleep on the stairs, dreaming perhaps of his little home in Genoa. In the poop the compass-light faintly lit up the muscular figure of the man at the helm, who was motionless, his eyes fixed on the quadrant and his mind who knows where. From the bows all the while came the sad Sicilian folk-song, telling in its own way of joys and sorrows, or of humble hopes, amid the monotonous moaning of the sea and the regular, impassive beat of the piston-rod.

It was as if the woman could not bring herself to let go his hand. At last she raised her eyes and smiled sadly at him.

"Tomorrow!" she sighed.

He nodded his head without speaking.

"You will never forget this last evening?"

He did not answer.

"I never shall," added the woman.

At dawn they met again on deck. Her delicate small face seemed quenched with insomnia. The breeze lifted her soft black hair. Already Sicily was rising

like a cloud out of the far horizon. Then Etna all at once lit up with gold and ruby, and the paling coast broke here and there into gulfs and obscure promontories. On board the crew began to busy themselves about the first morning work. Passengers came up one by one on deck, pale, dazed, wrapped up in various ways, chewing a cigar and staggering about. The crane began to screech, and the song heard through the night was silent as if dismayed and lost in all that bustle. On the gleaming blue sea great spreading sails passed by the stern, swaying their large hulls that seemed as if they were empty, the few men on board shading their eyes to see the proud steamer go by. In the distance were other still smaller boats, like black dots, and the coast swathed in foam; on the left Calabria, and on the right the sandy Pharos Headland, Charybdis stretching her white arms towards rocky, lofty Sicily.

Unexpectedly, in the long line of the shore that seemed all one, you perceived the Straits like a blue river, and beyond, the sea again widening out once more, boundless. The woman uttered an exclamation of wonder. Then she wanted him to point out to her the mountains of Licodia and the Plain of Catania, or the Lake of Lentini with its flat shores. He showed her far away, beyond the blue mountains, the long, melancholy lines of the whitish plain, the soft slopes grey with olives, the harsh rocks with the cactus thickets, and scented, many-planted little mountain roads. It was as if all those places were peopled with people out of a legend, as he pointed them out to her one by one. Thereabouts the malaria; on that "slope of Etna the village where Liberty burst out like a vendetta; below, beyond, the humble dramas of the Mystery Play, and the ironic justice of Don Licciu Papa. As she listened she even forgot the quivering drama in which they two were acting, whilst Messina was drawing towards them with the vast semi-circle of its palace fronts. All at once she started and murmured, "There he is!"

From the land a row-boat was advancing, and in it a white handkerchief waving salutes like a white gull in a storm.

"Goodbye!" murmured the young man.

The woman did not answer, and bent her head. Then she clasped his hand fast under her furs and took a stride away from him.

"Not goodbye! Au revoir!"

"When?"

"I don't know. But not goodbye."

And he saw her offer her lips to the man who had come to meet her in the boat. Sinister visions passed through his mind, ghosts of the people in his stories, with crooked frown and knife in hand.

Her blue veil disappeared towards the shore, amid the crowd of boats and anchor-chains.

The months passed by. At last she wrote to him that he could come to her. "In a lonely little house among the vines — there will be a cross chalked on the door. I shall come by the path between the fields. Wait for me. Don't let anybody notice you, or I am lost."

It was still autumn, but it rained and blew like winter. Hidden behind the door, with his heart thudding inside him, he eagerly watched for the strokes of rain that struck furrows past the window-hole to thin down. The dry leaves whirled behind the threshold like the rustle of a dress. What was she doing? Would she come? The clock always answered no, no, every quarter of an hour, from the neighbouring village. At last a ray of sun came through a broken tile. All the country shone. The carob trees above the roof rustled loudly, and beyond, behind the dripping avenues, the foot-path opened out blossoming with yellow and white marguerites. It was there her little white umbrella should appear, down there, above the low wall on the right. A wasp buzzed in the golden ray that penetrated through the cracks, and bumped against the window-frame saying: Come! Come! All at once somebody roughly pushed open the garden door on the left. Like a stroke through the blood! It was she! White, all white, from her dress to her pale face. The moment she saw him she fell into his arms, with her mouth against his mouth.

How many hours passed by in that rough, smoky little room! How many things they said to one another! The changeless insentient woodworm continued gnawing the beams of the roof. The clock in the neighbouring village let fall the hours one by one. Through a hole in the wall they could see the reflection of the shaken leaves outside, shadow alternating with green light as at the bottom of a lake.

Such is life. All at once she was as if bewildered, she passed her hand over her lips, then opened the door to see the setting sun. Then resolutely she threw her arms round his neck, saying, "I won't leave you any more."

Arm in arm they walked together to the little station not far off, lost in the deserted plain. Not to part any more! What boundless and trembling joy! To go clasped one against the other, silent, as if dazed, through the still country, in the mingled hour of evening.

Insects were buzzing about the ridge of the foot-path. From the crumbled earth a heavy, confused mist arose. Not a human voice, not a dog that barked. Far away a lonely light twinkled in the shadows. At last the train came, plumed and puffing. They set off together; to go far away, far away, into those mysterious mountains of which he had spoken to her, so that she seemed to know them already.

For ever!

For ever. They rose at daybreak, rambled round the fields, in the first dews, they sat at midday in the thick of the plants, or in the shadow of the poplars whose white leaves trembled without a wind, happy at feeling themselves alone, in the great stillness. They lingered on till late evening, to see the day die on the tips of the mountains, when the window-panes suddenly took fire and revealed the far off cabins. Darkness rose along the little roads of the valley, which now took on a melancholy air; then a gold-coloured beam rested for an instant on a bush that grew on top of the low wall. This bush also had its hour, and its ray of sun. Tiny insects hummed around, in the tepid light. When winter came the bush would disappear, and sun and night would alternate once more upon gloomy bare stones, wet with rain. So had disappeared the hut of the lime-burner, and the inn of "Killwife" on the top of the little deserted hill. Only the crumbling ruins showed themselves black in the crimson of sunset. The lake spread always the same in the background of the plain, like a tarnished mirror. Nearer at hand the vast fields of Mazzaro, the thick grey olive-groves on which the sunset came down more darkly, the endless pasturage which disappeared into the glory of the west, on the crowns of the hills; and other people appeared in the doorways of the farms as big as villages, to see other travellers pass by. Nobody knew anything more about Cirino, or about Neighbour Carmine, or the rest. The phantoms had passed away. Only the solemn and changeless landscape remained, with its large eastward spaces and its hot, robust tones. Mysterious sphinx, representing the passing phantoms with a character of fatal necessity. In the village the children of the victims had made peace with the blind, bloody instruments of Liberty; shepherd Arcangelo dragged out a late old age at the expense of the young master; one of Neighbour Santo's daughters had gone as bride into the home of Master Cola. At the inn by the Lake of Lentini a hairless, half-blind old dog that had been forgotten at the door by the various inn-keepers as they succeeded one another, still barked gloomily at the rare travellers passing by.

Then the bush also went colourless, and the owl began to hoot in the distant wood.

Farewell, sunsets of the distant land. Farewell, solitary poplars, in whose shade she has so often listened to the stories he told, which have seen so many people pass, and the sun rise and set so often away down there. Farewell! She too is far away.

One day ill news came from the city. One word was enough, from a distant man whom she could not hear mentioned without going pale and bending her head. In love, young, rich, the pair of them, both of them having said that they wanted to be together for ever, and yet a word from that man had been enough to

part them. It wasn't need of bread, such as had made Pino the Tome fall, nor was it the sharp knife of a jealous man. It was something subtler and stronger which parted them. It was the life in which they lived and by which they had been formed. The lovers became dumb and bowed their heads to the will of the husband. Now she seemed as if she feared the other one, and wanted to flee away from him. At the moment of parting from him she wept her many tears, which he greedily drank up; but she went all the same. Who knows how often they recall that time, in the midst of their divers excitements, at their feverish balls and parties, in the swirling succession of events, in the harsh necessities of life? How many times has she called to mind that far-off little village, that desert in which they were alone with their love, that old stump in whose shade she had lain with her head on his shoulder, saying to him with a smile, "Shade for the Camelias."

There were plenty of Camelias, and superb ones, in the splendid conservatory where the merry sounds of the feast arrived faintly, long afterwards, when another had plucked her a crimson blossom red as blood, and had put it in her hair. Farewell, far-off sunsets of the far-off countryside! And he too, when he raised his tired head to gaze into the aureole of his lonely lamp, at the phantoms of the past, what numerous images he saw, what memories came back! one place or another in the world, in the solitude of the fields, in the whirlpool of the great cities. How many things had come to pass! and how much they had lived through, those two hearts now separated far apart!

At last they met again in the wild excitement of carnival. He had gone to the festival to see her, with his soul weary and his heart wrung with anguish. She was there, dazzling, surrounded by a thousand flatteries. But she had a tired face too, and a sad, absent smile. Their eyes met and flashed. Nothing more. Late in the evening they found themselves as if by chance near to one another, in the shade of the big, motionless palms. "Tomorrow!" she said to him. "Tomorrow, at such and such a time, in such and such a place. Let happen what may! I want to see you!" Her white delicate bosom was in storm beneath the transparent lace, and her fan trembled in her hands. Then she bent her head, with her eyes fixed and abstracted, while light and fleeting blushes passed over the nape of her neck that was of the colour of a magnolia. How hard his heart was beating! How exquisite and fearful the joy of that moment! But when they saw each other the next day, it wasn't the same any more. Why not, who can tell? They had tasted the poisonous fruit of worldly knowledge; the refined pleasure of the look and the word exchanged in secret in the midst of two hundred people, of a promise which is worth more than the reality, because it is murmured behind a fan and amid the scent of flowers, to the glitter of gems and the excitation of music. So

that when they threw themselves into one another's arms, when they said with their mouths that they loved one another, they were both of them thinking with regretful, keen desire about the rapid moment of the previous evening, when they had said to each other in a low voice, without looking at one another, almost without words, that both their hearts were in a whirl in their breasts at being near to one another again. When they parted once more, and were holding hands on the threshold, they were both gloomy, and not simply because they had to say goodbye — but as if something were missing from them. Still they held each other by the hand, and to each of them came the impulse to ask, "Do you remember?" But they dared not ask it. She had said she was leaving the next day by the first train, and he let her go.

He saw her go away down the deserted avenue, and he stood there, with his forehead against the laths of that venetian blind. Evening fell, a hand-organ played in the distance at the door of a public-house.

She left the next day by the first train. She had said to him, "I must go with *him!*" He too had received a telegram which called him far away. On that leaf she had written: *For ever*, and a date. But life took them both again, one this way and one that, inexorably. The following evening he also was at the station, sad and alone. People were embracing and saying goodbye; husbands and wives were parting smiling; a mother, a poor old woman of the peasantry trailed weeping after her boy, a stout young fellow in bersagliere's uniform, with his sack on his shoulder, who went from door to door looking for the way out.

The train started. First the city passed by, the streets swarming with lights, the suburb lively with merry companions. Then it began to pass like lightning through the lonely country, the open fields, the streams that glittered in the shade. From time to time a hamlet smoking, people gathered in front of a doorway. On the low wall of a little station where the train had stopped for a moment puffing, two lovers had left their obscure names written in big charcoal letters. He was thinking that she too had passed that way in the morning, and had seen those names.

Far, far away, long after, in the immense misty and gloomy city, he still recalled at times those two humble, unknown names, amidst all the crowded, hurrying throng, and the incessant noise, and the fever of immense general activity, exhausting and inexorable; among the luxurious carriages, and men who must walk through the mud bearing two boards covered with advertisements, and in front of the splendid shop-windows glittering with gems, or beside squalid slum-shops which displayed human skulls and old boots spread out in rows. From time to time he heard the whistling of a train passing under earth or through the air overhead, rushing to disappear in the distance, towards the pale

horizon, as if it longed for the country of the sun. Then again came into his mind the names of those two unknown folk who had written the story of their humble joys on the wall of a house in front of which so many people must pass. Two blond, calm young creatures were walking slowly through the wide avenues of the garden, hand in hand; the youth had given the girl a little bunch of crimson roses for which he had bargained anxiously for a quarter of an hour with a ragged, miserable old woman; the girl, with her roses in her bosom like a queen, was disappearing along with him far from the crowd of amazons and superb carriages. When they were alone under the big trees of the water-side, they sat down side by side, talking together in low tones, in the calm expansion of their affection.

The sun sank in the vivid west, and even there, down the deserted avenues, came the sound of the hand-organ with which a beggar from far-away villages was going round begging his bread in an unknown tongue.

Farewell, sweet melancholy of sunset, silent shadows and wide, lonely horizons of our known country. Farewell, scented lanes where it was so lovely to walk together arm in arm. Farewell, poor, ignored people who opened your eyes so wide, seeing the two happy ones pass by.

Sometimes, when the sweet sadness of those memories came over him, he thought again of the humble actors in the humble dramas, with a vague, unconscious inspiration of peace and of forgetting, and of that date and of those two words — *for ever* — which she had left with him in a moment of anguish, a moment that had remained more living in heart and mind than any of the feverish joys. And then he would have liked to set her name on a page or on a stone, like those two unknown lovers who had written the record of their love on the wall of a far-away railway station.

THE END

The Paintings



Self-portrait (June 1929)

THE PAINTINGS OF D. H. LAWRENCE



Lawrence published this collection of his paintings in 1929 through Mandrake Press. His art received immediate censure and notoriety, due to their shocking and, by the standards of the time, explicit nature.

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INTRODUCTION TO THE PAINTINGS

The reason the English produce so few painters is not that they are, as a nation, devoid of a genuine feeling for visual art: though, to look at their productions, and to look at the mess which has been made of actual English landscape, one might really conclude that they were, and leave it at that. But it is not the fault of the God that made them. They are made with aesthetic sensibilities the same as anybody else. The fault lies in the English attitude to life.

The English, and the Americans following them, are paralysed by fear. That is what thwarts and distorts the Anglo-Saxon existence, this paralysis of fear. It thwarts life, it distorts vision, and it strangles impulse: this overmastering fear. And fear what of, in heaven's name? What is the Anglo-Saxon stock to-day so petrified with fear about? We have to answer that before we can understand the English failure in the visual arts; for on the whole, it is a failure. It is an old fear, which seemed to dig into the English soul at the time of the Renaissance. Nothing could be more lovely and fearless than Chaucer. But already Shakespeare is morbid with fear, fear of consequences. That is the strange phenomenon of the English Renaissance: this mystic terror of the consequences, the consequences of action. Italy too had her reaction, at the end of the sixteenth century, and showed a similar fear. But not so profound, so overmastering. Aretino was anything but timorous: he was bold as any Renaissance novelist, and went one better.

What appeared to take full grip on the northern consciousness at the end of the sixteenth century was a terror, almost a horror of sexual life. The Elizabethans, grand as we think them, started it. The real 'mortal coil' in Hamlet is all sexual, the young man's horror of his mother's incest, sex carrying with it a wild and nameless terror which, it seems to me, it had never carried before. Oedipus and Hamlet are very different in this respect. In Oedipus there is no recoil in horror from sex itself. Greek drama never shows us that. The horror, when it is present in Greek tragedy, is against destiny, man caught in the toils of destiny. But with the Renaissance itself, particularly in England, the horror is sexual. Orestes is dogged by destiny and driven mad by the Eumenides. But Hamlet is overpowered by horrible revulsion from his physical connection with his mother, which makes him recoil in similar revulsion from Ophelia, and almost from his father, even as a ghost. He is horrified at the merest suggestion of physical connection, as if it were an unspeakable taint.

This no doubt is all in the course of the growth of the 'spiritual-mental'

consciousness, at the expense of the instinctive-intuitive consciousness. Man came to have his own body in horror, especially in its sexual implications: and so he began to suppress with all his might his instinctive-intuitive consciousness, which is so radical, so physical, so sexual. Cavalier poetry, love poetry, is already devoid of body. Donne, after the exacerbated revulsion-attraction excitement of his earlier poetry, becomes a divine. 'Drink to me only with thine eyes,' sings the cavalier: an expression incredible in Chaucer's poetry. 'I could not love thee, dear, so well loved I not honour more,' sings the cavalier lover. In Chaucer the 'dear' and the 'honour' would have been more or less identical.

But with the Elizabethans the grand rupture of human consciousness, the mental consciousness recoiling in violence away from the physical, instinctive-intuitive. To the Restoration dramatists sex is, on the whole, a dirty business, but they more or less glory in the dirt. Fielding tries in vain to defend the Old Adam. Richardson with his calico purity and his underclothing excitements sweeps all before him. Swift goes mad with sex and excrement revulsion. Sterne flings a bit of the same excrement humorously around. And physical consciousness gives a last song in Burns, then is dead. Wordsworth, Keats, Shelley, the Brontes, all are post-mortem poets. The essential instinctive-intuitive body is dead, and worshipped in death - all very unhealthy. Till Swinburne and Oscar Wilde try to start a revival from the mental field. Swinburne's 'white thighs' are purely mental.

Now in England - and following, in America - the physical self was not just fig-leafed over or suppressed in public, as was the case in Italy and on most of the Continent. In England it excited a strange horror and terror. And this extra morbidity came, I believe, from the great shock of syphilis and the realisation of the consequences of the disease. Wherever syphilis, or 'pox,' came from, it was fairly new in England at the end of the fifteenth century. But by the end of the sixteenth its ravages were obvious, and the shock of them had just penetrated the thoughtful and the imaginative consciousness. The royal families of England and Scotland were syphilitic, Edward VI and Elizabeth born with the inherited consequences of the disease. Edward VI died of it while still a boy. Mary died childless and in utter depression. Elizabeth had no eyebrows, her teeth went rotten, she must have felt herself, somewhere, utterly unfit for marriage, poor thing. That was the grisly horror that lay behind the glory of Queen Bess. And so the Tudors died out: and another syphilitic-born unfortunate came to the throne in the person of James I. Mary Queen of Scots had no more luck than the Tudors, apparently. Apparently Darnley was reeking with the pox, though probably at first she did not know it. But when the Archbishop of St Andrews was christening her baby James, afterwards James I of England, the old

clergyman was so dripping with pox that she was terrified lest he should give it to the infant. And she need not have troubled, for the wretched infant had brought it into the world with him, from that fool Darnley. So James I of England slobbered and shambled, and was the wisest fool in Christendom, and the Stuarts likewise died out, the stock enfeebled by the disease.

With the Royal families of England and Scotland in this condition we can judge what the noble houses, the nobility of both nations, given to free living and promiscuous pleasure, must have been like. England traded with the East and with America; England, unknowing, had opened her doors to the disease. The English aristocracy travelled and had curious taste in loves. And pox entered the blood of the nation, particularly of the upper classes, who had more chance of infection. And after it had entered the blood it entered the consciousness, and it hit the vital imagination.

It is possible that the effects of syphilis and the conscious realisation of its consequences gave a great blow to the Spanish psyche, precisely at this period. And it is possible that Italian society, which was on the whole so untravelled, had no connection with America, and was so privately self-contained, suffered less from the disease. Someone ought to make a thorough study of the effects of 'pox' on the minds and the emotions and imagination of the various nations of Europe at about the time of our Elizabethans.

The apparent effect on the Elizabethans and the Restoration wits is curious. They appear to take the whole thing as a joke. The common oath, 'Pox on you!' was almost funny. But how common the oath was!

How the word 'pox' was in every mind, and in every mouth. It is one of the words that haunt Elizabethan speech. Taken very manly, with a great deal of Falstaffian bluff, treated as a huge joke! Pox! Why, he's got the pox! Ha-ha! What's he been after?

There is just the same attitude among the common run of men to-day with regard to the minor sexual diseases. Syphilis is no longer regarded as a joke, according to my experience. The very word itself frightens men. You could joke with the word 'pox.' You can't joke with the word 'syphilis.' The change of word has killed the joke. But men still joke about clap, which is a minor sexual disease. They pretend to think it manly, even, to have the disease, or to have had it. 'What! never had a shot of clap!' cries one gentleman to another. 'Why, where have you been all your life!' If we changed the word and insisted on 'gonorrhoea,' or whatever it is, in place of 'clap,' the joke would die. And anyhow I have had young men come to me green and quaking, afraid they've caught 'a shot of clap'.

Now, in spite of all the Elizabethan jokes about pox, pox was no joke to them.

A joke may be a very brave way of meeting a calamity, or it may be a very cowardly way. Myself, I consider the Elizabethan pox joke a purely cowardly attitude. They didn't think it funny, for by God it wasn't funny. Even poor Elizabeth's lack of eyebrows and her rotten teeth were not funny. And they all knew it. They may not have known it was the direct result of pox: though probably they did. This fact remains, that no man can contract syphilis, or any deadly sexual disease, without feeling the most shattering and profound terror go through him, through the very roots of his being. And no man can look without a sort of horror on the effects of a sexual disease in another person. We are so constituted that we are all at once horrified and terrified. The fear and dread has been so great that the pox joke was invented as an evasion, and following that, the great hush! hush! was imposed. Man was too frightened, that's the top and bottom of it.

But now, with remedies discovered, we need no longer be too frightened. We can begin, after all these years, to face the matter. After the most fearful damage has been done.

For an overmastering fear is poison to the human psyche. And this overmastering fear, like some horrible secret tumour, has been poisoning our consciousness ever since the Elizabethans, who first woke up with dread to the entry of the original syphilitic poison into the blood.

I know nothing about medicine and very little about diseases, and my facts are such as I have picked up in casual reading. Nevertheless, I am convinced that the secret awareness of syphilis, and the utter secret terror and horror of it, has had an enormous and incalculable effect on the English consciousness, and on the American. Even when the fear has never been formulated there it has lain, potent and overmastering. I am convinced that some of Shakespeare's horror and despair, in his tragedies, arose from the shock of his consciousness of syphilis. I don't suggest for one moment Shakespeare ever contracted syphilis. I have never had syphilis myself. Yet I know and confess how profound is my fear of the disease, and more than fear, my horror. In fact, I don't think I am so very much afraid of it. I am more horrified, inwardly and deeply, at the idea of its existence.

All this sounds very far from the art of painting. But it is not so far as it sounds. The appearance of syphilis in our midst gave a fearful blow to our sexual life. The real natural innocence of Chaucer was impossible after that. The very sexual act of procreation might bring as one of its consequences a foul disease, and the unborn might be tainted from the moment of conception. Fearful thought! It is truly a fearful thought, and all the centuries of getting used to it won't help us. It remains a fearful thought, and to free ourselves from this fearful dread we should use all our wits and all our efforts, not stick our heads in the

sand of some idiotic joke or still more idiotic don't-mention-it. The fearful thought of the consequences of syphilis, or of any sexual disease, upon the unborn gives a shock to the impetus of fatherhood in any man, even the cleanest. Our consciousness is a strange thing, and the knowledge of a certain fact may wound it mortally, even if the fact does not touch us directly. And so I am certain that some of Shakespeare's father-murder complex, some of Hamlet's horror of his mother, of his uncle, of all old men came from the feeling that fathers may transmit syphilis, or syphilis-consequences, to children. I don't know even whether Shakespeare was actually aware of the consequences to a child born of a syphilitic father or mother. He may not have been, though most probably he was. But he certainly was aware of the effects of syphilis itself, especially on men. And this awareness struck at his deep sex imagination, at his instinct for fatherhood, and brought in an element of terror and abhorrence there where man should feel anything but terror and abhorrence, into the procreative act.

The terror-horror element which had entered the imagination with regard to the sexual and procreative act was at least partly responsible for the rise of Puritanism, the beheading of the king-father Charles, and the establishment of the New England colonies. If America really sent us syphilis she got back the full recoil of the horror of it in her puritanism.

But deeper even than this, the terror-horror element led to the crippling of the consciousness of man. Very elementary in man is his sexual and procreative being, and on his sexual and procreative being depend many of his deepest instincts and the flow of his intuition. A deep instinct of kinship joins men together, and the kinship of flesh-and- blood keeps the warm flow of intuitional awareness streaming between human beings. Our true awareness of one another is intuitional, not mental. Attraction between people is really instinctive and intuitional, not an affair of judgment. And in mutual attraction lies perhaps the deepest pleasure in life, mutual attraction which may make us 'like' our travelling companion for the two or three hours we are together, then no more, or mutual attraction that may deepen to powerful love, and last a life-time.

The terror-horror element struck a blow at our feeling of physical communion. In fact it almost killed it. We have become ideal beings, creatures that exist in idea, to one another, rather than flesh-and- blood kin. And with the collapse of the feeling of physical, flesh-and- blood kinship, and the substitution of an ideal, social or political oneness, came the failing of our intuitive awareness, and the great unease, the nervousness of mankind. We are afraid of the instincts. We are afraid of the intuition within us. We suppress the instincts, and we cut off our intuitional awareness from one another and from the world. The reason being

some great shock to the procreative self. Now we know one another only as ideal or social or political entities, fleshless, bloodless, and cold, like Bernard Shaw's creatures. Intuitively we are dead to one another, we have all gone cold.

But by intuition alone can man really be aware of man, or of the living, substantial world. By intuition alone can man love and know either woman or world, and by intuition alone can he bring forth again images of magic awareness which we call art. In the past men brought forth images of magic awareness, and now it is the convention to admire these images. The convention says, for example, we must admire Botticelli or Giorgione, so Baedeker stars the pictures, and we admire them. But it is all a fake. Even those that get a thrill, even when they call it ecstasy, from these old pictures, are only undergoing a cerebral excitation. Their deeper responses, down in the intuitive and instinctive body, are not touched. They cannot be, because they are dead. A dead intuitive body stands there and gazes at the corpse of beauty: and usually it is completely and honestly bored: sometimes it feels a mental coruscation which it calls an ecstasy or an aesthetic response.

Modern people, but particularly English and Americans, cannot feel anything with the whole imagination. They can see the living body of imagery as little as a blind man can see colour. The imaginative vision, which includes physical intuitional perception, they have not got. Poor things, it is dead in them. And they stand in front of a Botticelli Venus, which they know is conventionally 'beautiful,' much as a blind man might stand in front of a bunch of roses and pinks and monkey-musk, saying: 'Oh, do tell me which is red, let me feel red! Now let me feel white! Oh, let me feel it! What is this I am feeling? Monkey-musk? is it white? Oh, do you say it is yellow blotched with orange-brown? Oh, but I can't feel it! What can it be? Is white velvety, or just silky?' —

So the poor blind man! Yet he may have an acute perception of alive beauty. Merely by touch and scent, his intuitions being alive, the blind man may have a genuine and soul-satisfying experience of imagery. But not pictorial images. These are forever beyond him.

So those poor English and Americans in front of the Botticelli Venus. They stare so hard, they do so want to see. And their eyesight is perfect. But all they can see is a sort of nude woman on a sort of shell on a sort of pretty greenish water. As a rule they rather dislike the 'unnaturalness' or 'affectation' of it. If they are high-brows they may get little self-conscious thrills of aesthetic excitement. But real imaginative awareness, which is so largely physical, is denied them. *lis n'ont pas de quoi*, as the Frenchman said of the angels, when asked if they made love in heaven.

All, the dear high-brows who gaze in a sort of ecstasy and get a correct mental

thrill! Their poor high-brow bodies stand there as dead as dust-bins, and can no more feel the sway of complete imagery upon them than they can feel any other real swav. *lis n'ont pas de qnoi*. The instincts and the intuitions are so nearly dead in them, and they fear even the feeble remains. Their fear of the instincts and intuitions is even greater than that of the English Tommy who calls: 'Eh, Jack! come an' look at this girl standin' wi' no clothes on, an' two blokes spittin' at 'er.' - That is his vision of Botticelli's Venus. It is, for him, complete, for he is void of image-seeing imagination. But at least he doesn't have to work up a cerebral excitation, as the high-brow does, who is really just as void.

All alike, cultured and uncultured, they are still dominated by that unnamed, yet overmastering dread and hate of the instincts deep in the body, dread of the strange intuitional awareness of the body, dread of anything but ideas which can't contain bacteria. And the dread all works back to a dread of the procreative body, and is partly traceable to the shock of the awareness of syphilis.

The dread of the instincts included the dread of intuitional awareness. 'Beauty is a snare' - 'Beauty is but skin-deep' - 'Handsome is as handsome does' - 'Looks don't count' - 'Don't judge by appearances' - if we only realised it, there are thousands of these vile proverbs which have been dinned into us for over two hundred years. They are all of them false. Beauty is not a snare, nor is it skin deep, since it always involves a certain loveliness of modelling, and handsome doers are often ugly and objectionable people, and if you ignore the look of the thing you plaster England with slums and produce at last a state of spiritual depression that is suicidal, and if you don't judge by appearances, that is, if you can't trust the impression which things make on you, you are a fool. But all these base-born proverbs, born in the cash-box, hit direct against the intuitional consciousness. Naturally, man gets a great deal of his life's satisfaction from beauty, from a certain sensuous pleasure in the look of the thing. The old Englishman built his hut or a cottage with a childish joy in its appearance, purely intuitional and direct. The modern Englishman has a few borrowed ideas, simply doesn't know what to feel, and makes a silly mess of it: though perhaps he is improving, hopefully, in this field of architecture and housebuilding. The intuitional faculty, which alone relates us in direct awareness to physical things and substantial presences, is atrophied and dead, and we don't know what to feel. We know we ought to feel something, but what? - oh, tell us what! - And this is true of all nations, the French and Italians as much as the English. Look at new French suburbs! Go through the crockery and furniture departments in the Dames de France or any big shop. The blood in the body stands still, before such cretin ugliness. One has to decide that the modern bourgeois is a cretin.

This movement against the instincts and the intuition took on a moral tone in

all countries. It started in hatred. Let us never forget that modern morality has its roots in hatred, a deep, evil hate of the instinctive, intuitional, procreative body. This hatred is made more virulent by fear, and an extra poison is added to the fear by unconscious horror of syphilis. And so we come to modern bourgeois consciousness, which turns upon the secret poles of fear and hate. That is the real pivot of all bourgeois consciousness in all countries: fear and hate of the instinctive, intuitional, procreative body in man or woman. But of course this fear and hate had to take on a righteous appearance, so it became moral, said that the instincts, intuitions and all the activities of the procreative body were evil, and promised a reward for their suppression. That is the great clue to bourgeois psychology: the reward business. It is screamingly obvious in Maria Edgeworth's tales, which must have done unspeakable damage to ordinary people. - Be good, and you'll have money. Be wicked, and you'll be utterly penniless at last, and the good ones will have to offer you a little charity. - This is sound working morality in the world. And it makes one realise that, even to Milton, the true hero of Paradise Lost must be Satan. But by this baited morality the masses were caught and enslaved to industrialism before ever they knew it; the good ones got hold of the goods, and our modern 'civilisation' of money, machines and wage-slaves was inaugurated. The very pivot of it, let us never forget, being fear and hate, the most intimate fear and hate, fear and hate of one's own instinctive, intuitive body, and fear and hate of every other man's and every other woman's warm, procreative body and imagination.

Now it is obvious what result this will have on the plastic arts, which depend entirely on the representation of substantial bodies, and on the intuitional perception of the reality of substantial bodies. The reality of substantial bodies can only be perceived by the imagination, and the imagination is a kindled state of consciousness in which intuitive awareness predominates. The plastic arts are all imagery, and imagery is the body of our imaginative life, and our imaginative life is a great joy and fulfilment to us, for the imagination is a more powerful and more comprehensive flow of consciousness than our ordinary flow. In the flow of true imagination we know in full, mentally and physically, at once, in a greater, enkindled awareness. At the maximum of our imagination we are religious. And if we deny our imagination, and have no imaginative life, we are poor worms who have never lived.

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries we have the deliberate denial of intuitive awareness, and we see the results on the arts. Vision became more optical, less intuitive, and painting began to flourish. But what painting! Watteau, Ingres, Poussin, Chardin have some imaginative glow still. They are still somewhat free. The puritan and the intellectual has not yet struck them

down with his fear and hate obsessions. But look at England! Hogarth, Reynolds, Gainsborough, they all are already bourgeois. The coat is really more important than the man. It is amazing how important clothes suddenly become, how they cover the subject. An old Reynolds colonel in a red uniform is much more a uniform than an individual, and as for Gainsborough, all you can say is: What a lovely dress and hat! What really expensive Italian silk! - This painting of garments continued in vogue, till pictures like Sargent's seem to be nothing but yards and yards of satin from the most expensive shops, having some pretty head popped on at the top. The imagination is quite dead. The optical vision, a sort of flashy coloured photography of the eye, is rampant.

In Titian, in Velasquez, in Rembrandt the people are there inside their clothes all right, and the clothes are imbued with the life of individual, the gleam of the warm procreative body comes through all the time, even if it be an old, half-blind woman or a weird, ironic little Spanish princess. But modern people are nothing inside their garments, and a head sticks out at the top and hands stick out of the sleeves, and it is a bore. Or, as in Lawrence, or Raeburn, you have something very pretty but almost a mere cliché, with very little instinctive or intuitional perception to it.

After this, and apart from landscape and water-colour, there is strictly no English painting that exists. As far as I am concerned, the pre-Raphaelites don't exist, Watts doesn't, Sargent doesn't, and none of the moderns.

There is the exception of Blake. Blake is the only painter of imaginative pictures, apart from landscape, that England has produced. And unfortunately there is so little Blake, and even in that little the symbolism is often artificially imposed. Nevertheless, Blake paints with real intuitional awareness and solid instinctive feeling. He dares handle the human body, even if he sometimes makes it a mere ideograph. And no other Englishman has even dared handle it with alive imagination. Painters of composition pictures in England, of whom perhaps the best is Watts, never quite get beyond the level of cliché, sentimentalism, and funk. Even Watts is a failure, though he made some sort of try: and Etty's nudes in York fail imaginatively, though they have some feeling for flesh. And the rest, the Leightons, even the moderns, don't really do anything. They never get beyond studio models and clichés of the nude. The image never gets across to us, to seize us intuitively. It remains merely optical.

Landscape, however, is different. Here the English exist and hold their own. But, for me, personally, landscape is always waiting for something to occupy it. Landscape seems to be meant as a background to an intenser vision of life, so to my feeling painted landscape is background with the real subject left out.

Nevertheless, it can be very lovely, especially in water-colour, which is a

more bodiless medium, and doesn't aspire to very substantial existence, and is so small that it doesn't try to make a very deep seizure on the consciousness. Water-colour will always be more of a statement than an experience.

And landscape, on the whole, is the same. It doesn't call up the more powerful responses of the human imagination, the sensual, passionate responses. Hence it is the favourite modern form of expression in painting. There is no deep conflict. The instinctive and intuitional consciousness is called into play, but lightly, superficially. It is not confronted with any living, procreated body.

Hence the English have delighted in landscape, and have succeeded in it well. It is a form of escape for them, from the actual human body they so hate and fear, and it is an outlet for their perishing aesthetic desires. For more than a century we have produced delicious water-colours, and Wilson, Crome, Constable, Turner are all great landscape-painters. Some of Turner's landscape compositions are, to my feeling, among the finest that exist. They still satisfy me more even than Van Gogh's or Cezanne's landscapes, which make a more violent assault on the emotions, and repel a little for that reason. Somehow I don't want landscape to make a violent assault on my feelings. Landscape is background with the figures left out or reduced to minimum, so let it stay back. Van Gogh's surging earth and Cezanne's explosive or rattling planes worry me. Not being profoundly interested in landscape, I prefer it to be rather quiet and unexplosive.

But, of course, the English delight in landscape is a delight in escape. It is always the same. The northern races are so innerly afraid of their own bodily existence, which they believe fantastically to be an evil thing - you could never find them feel anything but uneasy shame, or an equally shameful gloating, over the fact that a man was having intercourse with his wife, in his house next door - that all they cry for is an escape. And, especially, art must provide that escape.

It is easy in literature. Shelley is pure escape: the body is sublimated into sublime gas. Keats is more difficult - the body can still be felt dissolving in waves of successive death - but the death-business is very satisfactory. The novelists have even a better time. You can get some of the lasciviousness of Hetty Sorrell's 'sin,' and you can enjoy condemning her to penal servitude for life. You can thrill to Mr Rochester's passion, and you can enjoy having his eyes burnt out. So it is, all the way: the novel of 'passion'!

But in paint it is more difficult. You cannot paint Hetty Sorrell's sin or Mr Rochester's passion without being really shocking. And you daren't be shocking. It was this fact that unsaddled Watts and Millais. Both might have been painters if they hadn't been Victorians. As it is, each of them is a washout.

Which is the poor feeble history of art in England, since we can lay no claim

to the great Holbein. And art on the Continent, in the last century? It is more interesting, and has a fuller story. An artist can only create what he really religiously feels is truth, religious truth really felt, in the blood and the bones. The English could never think anything connected with the body religious - unless it were the eyes. So they painted the social appearance of human beings, and hoped to give them wonderful eyes. - But they could think landscape religious, since it had no sensual reality. So they felt religious about it and painted it as well as it could be painted, maybe, from their point of view.

And in France? In France it was more or less the same, but with a difference. The French, being more rational, decided that the body had its place, but that it should be rationalised. The Frenchman of to-day has the most reasonable and rationalised body possible. His conception of sex is basically hygienic. A certain amount of copulation is good for you. (*^a fait du bien au corps!* sums up the physical side of a Frenchman's idea of love, marriage, food, sport and all the rest. Well, it is more sane, anyhow, than the Anglo-Saxon terrors. The Frenchman is afraid of syphilis and afraid of the procreative body, but not quite so deeply. He has known for a long time that you can take precautions. And he is not profoundly imaginative.

Therefore he has been able to paint. But his tendency, just like that of all the modern world, has been to get away from the body, while still paying attention to its hygiene, and still not violently quarrelling with it. Puvis de Chavannes is really as sloppy as all the other spiritual sentimentalists. Renoir is jolly: *£a fait dri bien au corps!* is his attitude to the flesh. If a woman didn't have buttocks and breasts she wouldn't be paintable, he said, and he was right. *Ca fait du bien au corps!* What do you paint with, Maitre? - With my penis, and be damned! - Renoir didn't try to get away from the body. But he had to dodge it in some of its aspects, rob it of its natural terrors, its natural demonishness. He is delightful, but a trifle banal. *Ca fait du bien au corps!* Yet how infinitely much better he is than any English equivalent.

Courbet, Daumier, Degas, they all painted the human body. But Daumier satirised it, Courbet saw it as a toiling thing, Degas saw it as a wonderful instrument. They all of them deny it its finest qualities, its deepest instincts, its purest intuitions. They prefer, as it were, to industrialise it. They deny it the best imaginative existence.

And the real grand glamour of modern French art, the real outburst of delight came when the body was at last dissolved of its substance, and made part and parcel of the sunlight-and-shadow scheme. Let us say what we will, but the real grand thrill of modern French art was the discovery of light, the discovery of light and all the subsequent discoveries of the impressionists, and of the post-

impressionists, even Cezanne. No matter how Cezanne may have reacted from the impressionists, it was they, with their deliriously joyful discovery of light and 'free' colour, who really opened his eyes. Probably the most joyous moment in the whole history of painting was the moment when the incipient impressionists discovered light, and with it colour. Ah, then they made the grand, grand escape into freedom, into infinity, into light and delight. They escaped from the tyranny of solidity and the menace of mass-form. They escaped, they escaped from the dark procreative body which so haunts a man, they escaped into the open air, plein air and plein soleil: light and almost ecstasy.

Like every other human escape, it meant being hauled back later with the tail between the legs. Back comes the truant, back to the old doom of matter, of corporate existence, of the body sullen and stubborn and obstinately refusing to be transmuted into pure light, pure colour, or pure anything. It is not concerned with purity. Life isn't. Chemistry and mathematics and ideal religion are, but these are only small bits of life, which is itself bodily, and hence neither pure nor impure.

After the grand escape into impressionism and pure light, pure colour, pure bodilessness - for what is the body but a shimmer of lights and colours! - poor art came home truant and sulky, with its tail between its legs. And it is this return which now interests us. We know the escape was illusion, illusion, illusion. The cat had to come back. So now we despise the 'light' blighters too much. We haven't a good word for them. Which is nonsense, for they too are wonderful, even if their escape was into legrand neant, the great nowhere.

But the cat came back. And it is the home-coming torn that now has our sympathy: Renoir, to a certain extent, but mostly Cezanne, the sublime little grimalkin, who is followed by Matisse and Gauguin and Derain and Vlaminck and Braque and all the host of other defiant and howling cats that have come back, perforce, to form and substance and thereeness, instead of delicious nowhere-ness.

Without wishing to labour the point, one cannot help being amused at the dodge by which the Impressionists made the grand escape from the body. They metamorphosed it into a pure assemblage of shifting lights and shadows, all coloured. A web of woven, luminous colour was a man, or a woman - and so they painted her, or him: a web of woven shadows and gleams. Delicious! and quite true as far as it goes. A purely optical, visual truth: which paint is supposed to be. And they painted delicious pictures: a little too delicious. They bore us, at the moment. They bore people like the very modern critics intensely. But very modern critics need not be so intensely bored. There is something very lovely about the good impressionist pictures. And ten years hence critics will be bored

by the present run of post-impressionists, though not so passionately bored, for these post-impressionists don't move us as the impressionists moved our fathers. We have to persuade ourselves, and we have to persuade one another to be impressed by the post-impressionists, on the whole. On the whole they rather depress us. Which is perhaps good for us.

But modern art criticism is in a curious hole. Art has suddenly gone into rebellion, against all the canons of accepted religion, accepted good form, accepted everything. When the cat came back from the delicious impressionist excursion, it came back rather tattered, but bristling and with its claws out. The glorious escape was all an illusion. There was substance still in the world, a thousand times be damned to it! There was the body, the great lumpy body. There it was; you had it shoved down your throat. What really existed was lumps, lumps. Then paint 'em. Or else paint the thin 'spirit' with gaps in it and looking merely dishevelled and 'found out.' Paint had found the spirit out.

This is the sulky and rebellious mood of the post-impressionists. They still hate the body - hate it. But in a rage they admit its existence, and paint it as huge lumps, tubes, cubes, planes, volumes, spheres, cones, cylinders, all the 'pure' or mathematical forms of substance. As for landscape, it comes in for some of the same rage. It has also suddenly gone lumpy. Instead of being nice and ethereal and non-sensual, it was discovered by Van Gogh to be heavily, overwhelmingly substantial and sensual. Van Gogh took up landscape in heavy spadefuls. And Cezanne had to admit it. Landscape, too, after being, since Claude Lorraine, a thing of pure luminosity and floating shadows, suddenly exploded, and came tumbling back on to the canvases of artists in lumps. With Cezanne landscape 'crystallised,' to use one of the favourite terms of the critics, and it has gone on crystallising into crystals, cubes, cones, pyramids and so-forth ever since.

The impressionists brought the world at length, after centuries of effort, into the delicious oneness of light. At last, at last! Hail, Holy Light! the great natural One, the universal, the universaliser! We are not divided, all one body we - one in Light, lovely light! No sooner had this paean gone up than the post-impressionists, like Judas, gave the show away. They exploded the illusion, which fell back to the canvas of art in a chaos of lumps.

This new chaos, of course, needed new apologists, who therefore rose up in hordes to apologise, almost, for the new chaos. They felt a little guilty about it, so they took on new notes of effrontery, defiant as any Primitive Methodists, which indeed they are: the Primitive Methodists of art criticism. These evangelical gentlemen at once ran up their chapels, in a Romanesque or Byzantine shape, as was natural for a primitive and a methodist, and started to cry forth their doctrines in the decadent wilderness. They discovered once more

that the aesthetic experience was an ecstasy, an ecstasy granted only to the chosen few, the elect, among whom said critics were, of course, the archelect. This was out-doing Ruskin. It was almost Calvin come to art. But let scoffers scoff, the aesthetic ecstasy was vouchsafed only to the few, the elect, and even then, only when they had freed their minds of false doctrine. They had renounced the mammon of 'subject' in pictures, they went whoring no more after the Babylon of painted 'interest,' nor did they hanker after the flesh-pots of artistic 'representation.' Oh, purify yourselves, ye who would know the aesthetic ecstasy, and be lifted up to the 'white peaks of artistic inspiration.' Purify yourselves of all base hankering for a tale that is told, and of all low lust for likenesses. Purify yourselves, and know the one supreme way, the way of Significant Form. I am the revelation and the way! I am Significant Form, and my unutterable name is Reality. Lo, I am Form and I am Pure, behold I am Pure Form. I am the revelation of Spiritual Life, moving behind the veil. I come forth and make myself known, and I am Pure Form, behold, I am Significant Form.

So the prophets of the new era in art cry aloud to the multitude, in exactly the jargon of the revivalists, for revivalists they are. They will revive the Primitive Method-brethren, the Byzantines, the Ravennese, the early Italian and French primitives (which ones, in particular, we aren't told): these were Right, these were Pure, these were Spiritual, these were Real! And the builders of early Romanesque churches. Oh, my brethren! these were holy men, before the world went a-whoring after Gothic. Oh, return, my brethren, to the Primitive Method, lift up your eyes to Significant Form and be saved —

Now myself, brought up a nonconformist as I was, I just was never able to understand the language of salvation. I never knew what they were talking about, when they raved about being saved, and safe in the arms of Jesus, and Abraham's bosom, and seeing the great light, and entering into glory: I just was puzzled, for what did it mean? It seemed to work out as a getting rather drunk on your own self-importance, and afterwards coming dismally sober again and being rather unpleasant. That was all I could see in actual experience of the entering-into-glory business. The term itself, like something which ought to mean something but somehow doesn't, stuck on my mind like an irritating burr, till I decided that it was just an artificial stimulant to the individual self-conceit. How could I enter into glory, when glory is just an abstraction of a human state, and not a separate reality at all? If glory means anything at all, it means the thrill a man gets when a great many people look up to him with mixed awe, reverence, delight. To-day, it means Rudolf Valentino. So that the cant about entering into glory is just used fuzzily to enhance the individual sense of self-importance - one of the rather cheap cocaine-phrases.

And I'm afraid 'aesthetic ecstasy' sounds to me very much the same, especially when accompanied by exhortations. It sounds like another great uplift into self-importance, another apotheosis of personal conceit: especially when accompanied by a lot of jargon about the pure world of reality existing behind the veil of this vulgar world of accepted appearances, and of the entry of the elect through the doorway of visual art. Too evangelical altogether, too much chapel and Primitive Methodist, too obvious a trick for advertising one's own self-glorification. The ego, as an American says, shuts itself up and paints the inside of the walls sky blue, and thinks it is in heaven.

And then the great symbols of this salvation. When the evangelical says: Behold the lamb of God! - what on earth does he want one to behold? Are we invited to look at a lamb, with woolly, muttoney appearance, frisking and making its little pills? Awfully nice, but what has it got to do with God or my soul? Or the cross? What do they expect us to see in the cross? A sort of gallows? or the mark we use to cancel a mistake? cross it out! That the cross by itself was supposed to mean something always mystified me. - The same with the Blood of the Lamb. - Washed in the Blood of the Lamb! always seemed to me an extremely unpleasant suggestion. And when Jerome says: He who has once washed in the blood of Jesus need never wash again! - I feel like taking a hot bath at once, to wash off even the suggestion.

And I find myself equally mystified by the cant phrases like Significant Form and Pure Form. They are as mysterious to me as the Cross and the Blood of the Lamb. They are just the magic jargon of invocation, nothing else. If you want to invoke an aesthetic ecstasy, stand in front of a Matisse and whisper fervently under your breath, 'Significant Form! Significant Form!' and it will come. It sounds to me like a form of masturbation, an attempt to make the body react to some cerebral formula.

No, I am afraid modern criticism has done altogether too much for modern art. If painting survives this outburst of ecstatic evangelicism, which it will, it is because people do come to their senses, even after the silliest vogue.

And so we can return to modern French painting, without having to quake before the bogey, or the Holy Ghost of Significant Form: a bogey which doesn't exist if we don't mind leaving aside our self-importance when we look at a picture.

The actual fact is that in Cezanne modern French art made its first tiny step back to real substance, to objective substance, if we may call it so. Van Gogh's earth was still subjective earth, himself projected into the earth. But Cezanne's apples are a real attempt to let the apple exist in its own separate entity, without transfusing it with personal emotion. Cezanne's great effort was, as it were, to

shove the apple away from him, and let it live of itself. It seems a small thing to do: yet it is the first real sign that man has made for several thousands of years that he is willing to admit that matter actually exists. Strange as it may seem, for thousands of years, in short, ever since the mythological 'Fall,' man has been pre-occupied with the constant pre-occupation of the denial of the existence of matter, and the proof that matter is only a form of spirit. - And then, the moment it is done, and we realise finally that matter is only a form of energy, whatever that may be, in the same instant matter rises up and hits us over the head and makes us realise that it exists absolutely, since it is compact energy itself Cezanne felt it in paint, when he felt for the apple. Suddenly he felt the tyranny of mind, the white, worn-out arrogance of the spirit, the mental consciousness, the enclosed ego in its sky-blue heaven self-painted. He felt the sky-blue prison. And a great conflict started inside him. He was dominated by his old mental consciousness, but he wanted terribly to escape the domination. He wanted to express what he suddenly, convulsedly knew: the existence of matter. He terribly wanted to paint the real existence of the body, to make it artistically palpable. But he couldn't. He hadn't got there yet. And it was the torture of his life. He wanted to be himself in his own procreative body - and he couldn't. He was, like all the rest of us, so intensely and exclusively a mental creature, or a spiritual creature, or an egoist, that he could no longer identify himself with his intuitive body. He wanted to, terribly. At first he determined to do it by sheer bravado and braggadocio. But no good; it couldn't be done that way. He had, as one critic says, to become humble. But it wasn't a question of becoming humble. It was a question of abandoning his cerebral conceit and his 'willed ambition,' and coming down to brass tacks. Poor Cezanne, there he is in his self-portraits, even the early showy ones, peeping out like a mouse and saying: I am a man of flesh, am I not? - For he was not quite, as none of us are. The man of flesh has been slowly destroyed through centuries, to give place to the man of spirit, the mental man, the ego, the self-conscious I. And in his artistic soul, Cezanne knew it, and wanted to rise in the flesh. He couldn't do it, and it embittered him. Yet, with his apple, he did shove the stone from the door of the tomb.

He wanted to be a man of flesh, a real man: to get out of the sky-blue prison into real air. He wanted to live, really live in the body, to know the world through his instincts and his intuitions, and to be himself in his procreative blood, not in his mere mind and spirit. He wanted it, he wanted it terribly. And whenever he tried, his mental consciousness, like a cheap fiend, interfered. If he wanted to paint a woman, his mental consciousness simply overpowered him and wouldn't let him paint the woman of flesh, the first Eve who lived before any of the fig-leaf nonsense. He couldn't do it. If he wanted to paint people,

intuitively and instinctively, he couldn't do it. His mental concepts shoved in front, and these he wouldn't paint - mere representations of what the mind accepts, not what the intuitions gather - and they, his mental concepts, wouldn't let him paint from intuition; they shoved in between all the time, so he painted his conflict and his failure, and the result is almost ridiculous.

Woman he was not allowed to know by intuition; his mental self, his ego, that bloodless fiend, forbade him. Man, other men, he was likewise not allowed to know - except by a few, few touches. The earth likewise he was not allowed to know: his landscapes are mostly acts of rebellion against the mental concept of landscape. After a fight tooth-and-nail for forty years, he did succeed in knowing an apple, fully; and, not quite so fully, a jug or two. That was all he achieved.

It seems little, and he died embittered. But it is the first step that counts, and Cezanne's apple is a great deal, more than Plato's Idea. Cezanne's apple rolled the stone from the mouth of the tomb, and if poor Cezanne couldn't unwind himself from his cerements and mental winding-sheet, but had to lie still in the tomb, till he died, still he gave us a chance.

The history of our era is the nauseating and repulsive history of the crucifixion of the procreative body for the glorification of the spirit, the mental consciousness. Plato was an arch-priest of this crucifixion. Art, that handmaid, humbly and honestly served the vile deed, through three thousand years at least. The Renaissance put the spear through the side of the already crucified body, and syphilis put poison into the wound made by the imaginative spear. It took still three hundred years for the body to finish: but in the nineteenth century it became a corpse, a corpse with an abnormally active mind: and to-day it stinketh.

We, dear reader, you and I, we were born corpses, and we are corpses. I doubt if there is even one of us who has even known so much as an apple, a whole apple. All we know is shadows, even of apples. Shadows of everything, of the whole world, shadows even of ourselves. We are inside the tomb, and the tomb is wide and shadowy like hell, even if sky-blue by optimistic paint, so we think it is all the world. But our world is a wide tomb full of ghosts, replicas. We are all spectres, we have not been able to touch even so much as an apple. Spectres we are to one another. Spectre you are to me, spectre I am to you. Shadow you are even to yourself. - And by shadow I mean idea, concept, the abstracted reality, the ego. We are not solid. We don't live in the flesh. Our instincts and intuitions are dead, we live wound round with the winding-sheet of abstraction. And the touch of anything solid hurts us. For our instincts and intuitions, which are our feelers of touch and knowing through touch, they are dead, amputated. We walk and talk and eat and copulate and laugh and evacuate wrapped in our winding-

sheets, all the time wrapped in our winding-sheets.

So that Cezanne's apple hurts. It made people shout with pain. And it was not till his followers had turned him again into an abstraction that he was ever accepted. Then the critics stepped forth and abstracted his good apple into Significant Form, and henceforth Cezanne was saved. Saved for democracy. Put safely in the tomb again, and the stone As the resurrection will be postponed ad infinitum by the good bourgeois corpses in their cultured winding-sheets. They will run up a chapel to the risen body, even if it is only an apple, and kill it on the spot. They are wide awake, are the corpses, on the alert. And a poor mouse of a Cezanne is alone in the years. Who else shows a spark of awakening life, in our marvellously civilised cemetery? All is dead, and dead breath preaching with phosphorescent effulgence about aesthetic ecstasy and Significant Form. If only the dead would bury their dead. But the dead are not dead for nothing. Who buries his own sort? The dead are cunning and alert to pounce on any spark of life and bury it, even as they have already buried Cezanne's apple and put up to it a white tombstone of Significant Form.

For who of Cezanne's followers does anything but follow at the triumphant funeral of Cezanne's achievement? They follow him in order to bury him, and they succeed. Cezanne is deeply buried under all the Matisse and Vlamincks of his following, while the critics read the funeral homily.

It is quite easy to accept Matisse and Vlaminck and Friesz and all the rest. They are just Cezanne abstracted again. They are all just tricksters, even if clever ones. They are all mental, mental, egoists, egoists, egoists. And therefore they are all acceptable now to the enlightened corpses of connoisseurs. You needn't be afraid of Matisse and Vlaminck and the rest. They will never give your corpse-anatomy a jar. They are just shadows, minds, mountebanking and playing charades on canvas. They may be quite amusing charades, and I am all for the mountebank. But of course it is all games inside the cemetery, played by corpses and *hommes d'esprit*, even *femmes d'esprit*, like *Mademoiselle Laurencin*. As for *Fesprit*, said Cezanne, I don't give a f — for it.

Perhaps not! But the connoisseur will give large sums of money. Trust the dead to pay for their amusement, when the amusement is deadly!

The most interesting figure in modern art, and the only really interesting figure, is Cezanne: and that not so much because of his achievement as because of his struggle. Cezanne was born at Aix in Provence in 1839: small, timorous, yet sometimes bantam defiant, sensitive, full of grand ambition, yet ruled still deeper by a naive, Mediterranean sense of truth or reality, imaginative, call it what you will. He is not a big figure. Yet his struggle is truly heroic. He was a bourgeois, and one must never forget it. He had a moderate bourgeois income.

But a bourgeois in Provence is much more real and human than a bourgeois in Normandy. He is much nearer the actual people, and the actual people are much less subdued by awe of his respectable bourgeois money.

Cezanne was naïf to a degree, but not a fool. He was rather insignificant, and grandeur impressed him terribly. Yet still stronger in him was the little flame of life where he felt things to be true. He didn't betray himself in order to get success, because he couldn't: to his nature it was impossible: he was too pure to be able to betray his own small real flame for immediate rewards. Perhaps that is the best one can say of a man, and it puts Cezanne, small and insignificant as he is, among the heroes. He would not abandon his own vital imagination.

He was terribly impressed by physical splendour and flamboyancy, as people usually are in the lands of the sun. He admired terribly the splendid virtuosity of Paul Veronese and Tintoretto, and even of later and less good baroque painters. He wanted to be like that - terribly he wanted it. And he tried very, very hard, with bitter effort. And he always failed. It is a cant phrase with the critics to say 'he couldn't draw.' Mr Fry says: 'With all his rare endowments, he happened to lack the comparatively common gift of illustration, the gift that any draughtsman for the illustrated papers learns in a school of commercial art.'

Now this sentence gives away at once the hollowness of modern criticism. In the first place, can one learn a 'gift' in a school of commercial art, or anywhere else? A gift surely is given, we tacitly assume by God or Nature or whatever higher power we hold responsible for the things we have no choice in.

Was then Cezanne devoid of this gift? Was he simply incapable of drawing a cat so that it would look like a cat? Nonsense! Cezanne's work is full of accurate drawing. His more trivial pictures, suggesting copies from other masters, are perfectly well drawn - that is, conventionally: so are some of the landscapes, so even is that portrait of M. Geffroy and his books, which is, or was so famous. Why these cant phrases about not being able to draw? Of course Cezanne could draw, as well as anybody else. And he had learned everything that was necessary in the art schools.

He could draw. And yet, in his terrifically earnest compositions in the late Renaissance or Baroque manner, he drew so badly. Why? Not because he couldn't. And not because he was sacrificing 'significant form' to 'insignificant form,' or mere slick representation, which is apparently what artists themselves mean when they talk about drawing. Cezanne knew all about drawing: and he surely knew as much as his critics do about significant form. Yet he neither succeeded in drawing so that things looked right, nor combining his shapes so that he achieved real form. He just failed.

He failed, where one of his little slick successors would have succeeded with

one eye shut. And why? Why did Cezanne fail in his early pictures? Answer that, and you'll know a little better what art is. He didn't fail because he understood nothing about drawing or significant form or aesthetic ecstasy. He knew about them all, and didn't give a spit for them.

Cezanne failed in his earlier pictures because he was trying with his mental consciousness to do something which his living proven^{al} body didn't want to do, or couldn't do. He terribly wanted to do something grand and voluptuous and sensuously satisfying, in the Tintoretto manner. Mr Fry calls that his 'willed ambition,' which is a good phrase, and says he had to learn humility, which is a bad phrase.

The 'willed ambition' was more than a mere willed ambition - it was a genuine desire. But it was a desire that thought it could be satisfied by ready-made baroque expressions, whereas it needed to achieve a whole new marriage of mind and matter. If we believed in reincarnation, then we should have to believe that after a certain number of new incarnations into the body of an artist, the soul of Cezanne would produce grand and voluptuous and sensually rich pictures - but not at all in the baroque manner. Because the pictures he actually did produce with undeniable success are the first steps in that direction, sensual and rich, with not the slightest hint of baroque, but new, the man's new grasp of substantial reality.

There was, then, a certain discrepancy between Cezanne's notion of what he wanted to produce, and his other, intuitive knowledge of what he could produce. For whereas the mind works in possibilities, the intuitions work in actualities, and what you intuitively desire, that is possible to you. Whereas what you mentally or 'consciously' desire is nine times out of ten impossible: hitch your wagon to a star, and you'll just stay where you are.

So the conflict, as usual, was not between the artist and his medium, but between the artist's mind and the artist's intuition and instinct. And what Cezanne had to learn was not humility - cant word! - but honesty, honesty with himself. It was not a question of any gift of significant form or aesthetic ecstasy: it was a question of Cezanne being himself, just Cezanne. And when Cezanne is himself he is not Tintoretto, nor Veronese, nor anything baroque at all. Yet he is something physical, and even sensual: qualities which he had identified with the masters of virtuosity.

In passing, if we think of Henri Matisse, a real virtuoso, and imagine him possessed with a 'willed ambition' to paint grand and flamboyant baroque pictures, then we know at once that he would not have to 'humble' himself at all, but that he would start in and paint with great success grand and flamboyant modern-baroque pictures. He would succeed because he has the gift of

virtuosity. And the gift of virtuosity simply means that you don't have to humble yourself, or even be honest with yourself, because you are a clever mental creature who is capable at will of making the intuitions and instincts subserve some mental concept: in short, you can prostitute your body to your mind, your instincts and intuitions you can prostitute to your 'willed ambition,' in a sort of masturbation process, and you can produce the impotent glories of virtuosity. - But Veronese and Tintoretto are real painters, they are not mere virtuosi, as some of the later men are.

The point is very important. Any creative act occupies the whole consciousness of a man. This is true of the great discoveries of science as well as of art. The truly great discoveries of science and real works of art are made by the whole consciousness of man working together in unison and oneness; instinct, intuition, mind, intellect all fused into one complete consciousness, and grasping what we may call a complete truth, or a complete vision, a complete revelation in sound. A discovery, artistic or otherwise, may be more or less intuitional, more or less mental; but intuition will have entered into it, and mind will have entered too. The whole consciousness is concerned in every case. - And a painting requires the activity of the whole imagination, for it is made of imagery, and the imagination is that form of complete consciousness in which predominates the intuitive awareness of forms, images, the physical awareness.

And the same applies to the genuine appreciation of a work of art, or the grasp of a scientific law, as to the production of the same. The whole consciousness is occupied, not merely the mind alone, or merely the body. The mind and spirit alone can never really grasp a work of art, though they may, in a masturbating fashion, provoke the body into an ecstasised response. The ecstasy will die out into ash and more ash. And the reason we have so many trivial scientists promulgating fantastic 'facts' is that so many modern scientists likewise work with the mind alone, and force the intuitions and instincts into a prostituted acquiescence. The very statement that water is H₂O is a mental tour de force. With our bodies we know that water is not H₂O, our intuitions and instincts both know it is not so. But they are bullied by the impudent mind. Whereas if we said that water, under certain circumstances, produces two volumes of hydrogen and one of oxygen, then the intuitions and instincts would agree entirely. But that water is composed of two volumes of hydrogen to one of oxygen we cannot physically believe. It needs something else. Something is missing. - Of course, alert science does not ask us to believe the commonplace assertion of: water is H₂O, but school-children have to believe it.

A parallel case is all this modern stuff about astronomy, stars, their distances and speeds and so on, talking of billions and trillions of miles and years and so

forth: it is just occult. The mind is revelling in words, the intuitions and instincts are just left out, or prostituted into a sort of ecstasy. In fact the sort of ecstasy that lies in absurd figures such as 2,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000 miles or years or tons, figures which abound in modern scientific books on astronomy, is just the sort of aesthetic ecstasy that the over-mental critics of art assert they experience to-day from Matisse's pictures. It is all poppycock. The body is either stunned to a corpse, or prostituted to ridiculous thrills, or stands coldly apart.

When I read how far off the suns are, and what they are made of, and so on, and so on, I believe all I am able to believe, with the true imagination. But when my intuition and instinct can grasp no more, then I call my mind to a halt. I am not going to accept mere mental asseverations. The mind can assert anything, and pretend it has proved it. My beliefs I test on my body, on my intuitional consciousness, and when I get a response there, then I accept. The same is true of great scientific 'laws,' like the law of evolution. After years of acceptance of the 'laws' of evolution - rather desultory or 'humble' acceptance - now I realise that my vital imagination makes great reservations. I find I can't, with the best will in the world, believe that the species have 'evolved' from one common life-form. I just can't feel it, I have to violate my intuitive and instinctive awareness of something else, to make myself believe it. But since I know that my intuitions and instincts may still be held back by prejudice, I seek in the world for someone to make me intuitively and instinctively feel the truth of the 'law' - and I don't find anybody. I find scientists, just like artists, asserting things they are mentally sure of, in fact cocksure, but about which they are much too egoistic and ranting to be intuitively, instinctively sure. When I find a man, or a woman, intuitively and instinctively sure of anything I am all respect. But for scientific or artistic braggarts how can one have respect? The intrusion of the egoistic element is a sure proof of intuitive uncertainty. No man who is sure by instinct and intuition brags, though he may fight tooth-and-nail for his beliefs.

Which brings us back to Cezanne, why he couldn't draw, or why he couldn't paint baroque masterpieces. It is just because he was real, and could only believe in his own expression when it expressed a moment of wholeness or completeness of consciousness in himself. He could not prostitute one part of himself to the other. He could not masturbate, in paint or words. And that is saying a very great deal, to-day; to-day, the great day of the masturbating consciousness, when the mind prostitutes the sensitive, responsive body, and just forces the reactions. The masturbating consciousness produces all kinds of novelties, which thrill for the moment, then go very dead. It cannot produce a single genuinely new utterance.

What we have to thank Cezanne for is not his humility, but for his proud, high

spirit that refused to accept the glib utterances of his facile mental self. He wasn't poor-spirited enough to be facile - nor humble enough to be satisfied with visual and emotional cliches. Thrilling as the baroque masters were to him in themselves, he realised that as soon as he reproduced them he produced nothing but cliche. The mind is full of all sorts of memory, visual, tactile, emotional memory, memories, groups of memories, systems of memories. A cliche is just a worn-out memory that has no more emotional or intuitional root, and has become a habit. Whereas a novelty is just a new grouping of cliches, a new arrangement of accustomed memories. That is why a novelty is so easily accepted: it gives the little shock or thrill of surprise, but it does not disturb the emotional and intuitive self. It forces you to see nothing new. It is only a novel compound of cliches. The work of most of Cezanne's successors is just novel, just a new arrangement of cliches, soon growing stale. And the cliches are Cezanne cliches, just as in Cezanne's own earlier pictures his cliches were all, or mostly, baroque cliches.

Cezanne's early history as a painter is a history of his fight with his own cliche. His consciousness wanted a new realisation. And his ready-made mind offered him all the time a ready-made expression. And Cezanne, far too inwardly proud and haughty to accept the ready-made cliches that came from his mental consciousness, stocked with memories, and which appeared mocking at him on his canvas, spent most of his time smashing his own forms to bits. To a true artist, and to the living imagination, the cliche is the deadly enemy. Cezanne had a bitter fight with it. He hammered it to pieces a thousand times. And still it reappeared.

Now again we can see why Cezanne's drawing was so bad. It was bad because it represented a smashed, mauled cliche, terribly knocked about. If Cezanne had been willing to accept his own baroque cliche his drawing would have been perfectly conventionally 'all right,' and not a critic would have had a word to say about it. But when his drawing was conventionally all right, to Cezanne himself it was mockingly all wrong, it was cliche. So he flew at it and knocked all the shape and stuffing out of it, and when it was so mauled that it was all wrong, and he was exhausted with it, he let it go; bitterly, because it still was not what he wanted. And here comes in the comic element in Cezanne's pictures. His rage with the cliche made him distort the cliche sometimes into parody, as we see in pictures like *The Pasha* and *La Femme*. 'You will be cliche, will you?' he gnashes. 'Then be it!' And he shoves it in a frenzy of exasperation over into parody. And the sheer exasperation makes the parody still funny: but the laugh is a little on the wrong side of the face.

This smashing of the cliche lasted a long way into Cezanne's life; indeed, it

went with him to the end. The way he worked over and over his forms was his nervous manner of laying the ghost of his cliché, burying it. Then, when it disappeared perhaps from his forms themselves, it lingered in his composition, and he had to fight with the edges of his forms and contours, to bury the ghost there. Only his colour he knew was not cliché. He left it to his disciples to make it so.

In his very best pictures, the best of the still-life compositions, which seem to me Cézanne's greatest achievement, the fight with the cliché is still going on. But it was in the still-life pictures he learned his final method of avoiding the cliché: just leaving gaps through which it fell into nothingness. So he makes his landscape succeed.

In his art, all his life long, Cézanne was tangled in a twofold activity. He wanted to express something, and before he could do it he had to fight the hydra-headed cliché, whose last head he could never lop off. The fight with the cliché is the most obvious thing in his pictures. The dust of battle rises thick, and the splinters fly wildly. And it is this dust of battle and flying of splinters which his imitators still so fervently imitate. If you give a Chinese dressmaker a dress to copy, and the dress happens to have a darned rent in it, the dressmaker carefully tears a rent in the new dress, and darns it in exact replica. And this seems to be the chief occupation of Cézanne's disciples, in every land. They absorb themselves reproducing imitation mistakes. He let off various explosions in order to blow up the stronghold of the cliché, and his followers make grand firework imitation of the explosions, without the faintest inkling of the true attack. They do, indeed, make an onslaught on representation, true-to-life representation: because the explosion in Cézanne's pictures blew them up. But I am convinced that what Cézanne himself wanted was representation. He wanted true-to-life representation. Only he wanted it more true to life. And once you have got photography, it is a very, very difficult thing to get representation more true-to-life: which it has to be.

Cézanne was a realist, and he wanted to be true to life. But he would not be content with the optical cliché. With the impressionists, purely optical vision perfected itself and fell at once into cliché, with a startling rapidity. Cézanne saw this. Artists like Courbet and Daumier were not purely optical, but the other element in these two painters, the intellectual element, was cliché. To the optical vision they added the concept of force-pressure, almost like a hydraulic brake, and this force-pressure concept is mechanical, a cliché, though still popular. And Daumier added mental satire, and Courbet added a touch of a sort of socialism, both cliché and unimaginative.

Cézanne wanted something that was neither optical nor mechanical nor

intellectual. And to introduce into our world of vision something which is neither optical nor mechanical nor intellectual-psychological requires a real revolution. It was a revolution Cezanne began, but which nobody, apparently, has been able to carry on.

He wanted to touch the world of substance once more with the intuitive touch, to be aware of it with the intuitive awareness, and to express it in intuitive terms. That is, he wished to displace our present mode of mental visual consciousness, the consciousness of mental concepts, and substitute a mode of consciousness that was predominantly intuitive, the awareness of touch. In the past the primitives painted intuitively, but in the direction of our present mental-visual, conceptual form of consciousness. They were working away from their own intuition. Mankind has never been able to trust the intuitive consciousness, and the decision to accept that trust marks a very great revolution in the course of human development.

Without knowing it, Cezanne, the timid little conventional man sheltering behind his wife and sister and the Jesuit father, was a pure revolutionary. When he said to his models: 'Be an apple! Be an apple!' he was uttering the foreword to the fall not only of Jesuits and the Christian idealists altogether, but to the collapse of our whole way of consciousness, and the substitution of another way. If the human being is going to be primarily an Apple, as for Cezanne it was, then you are going to have a new world of men: a world which has very little to say, men that can sit still and just be physically there and be truly non-moral. That was what Cezanne meant with his: 'Be an apple!' He knew perfectly well that the moment the model began to intrude her personality and her 'mind,' it would be cliché, and moral, and he would have to paint cliché. The only part of her that was not banal, known ad nauseam, living cliché, the only part of her that was not living cliché was her appleyness. Her body, even her very sex was known, nauseously: connu! connul the endless chain of known cause-and-effect, the infinite web of the hated cliché which nets us all down in utter boredom. He knew it all, he hated it all, he refused it all, this timid and 'humble' little man. He knew, as an artist, that the only bit of a woman which nowadays escapes being ready-made and ready-known cliché is the apple part of her. Oh, be an apple, and leave out all your thoughts, all your feelings, all your mind and all your personality, which we know all about and find boring beyond endurance. Leave it all out - and be an apple! It is the appleyness of the portrait of Cezanne's wife that makes it so permanently interesting: the appleyness, which carries with it also the feeling of knowing the other side as well, the side you don't see, the hidden side of the moon. For the intuitive apperception of the apple is so tangibly aware of the apple that it is aware of it all round, not only just of the

front. The eye sees only fronts, and the mind, on the whole, is satisfied with fronts. But intuition needs all-aroundness, and instinct needs insideness. The true imagination is forever curving round to the other side, to the back of presented appearance.

So to my feeling the portraits of Madame Cezanne, particularly the portrait in the red dress, are more interesting than the portrait of M. Geoffroy, or the portraits of the housekeeper or the gardener. In the same way the Card-players with two figures please me more than those with four.

But we have to remember, in his figure-paintings, that while he was painting the appleyness he was also deliberately painting out the so-called humanness, the personality, the 'likeness,' the physical cliché. He had deliberately to paint it out, deliberately to make the hands and face rudimentary, and so on, because if he had painted them in fully they would have been cliché. He never got over the cliché denominator, the intrusion and interference of the ready-made concept, when it came to people, to men and women. Especially to women he could only give a cliché response - and that maddened him. Try as he might, woman remained a known, ready-made cliché object to him, and he could not break through the concept obsession to get at the intuitive awareness of her. Except with his wife - and in his wife he did at least know the appleyness. But with his housekeeper he failed somewhat. She is a bit cliché, especially the face. So really is M. Geoffroy.

With men Cezanne often dodged it by insisting on the clothes, those stiff cloth jackets bent into thick folds, those hats, those blouses, those curtains. Some of the Card-players, the big ones with four figures, seem just a trifle banal, so much occupied with painted stuff, painted clothing, and the humanness a bit cliché. Nor good colour, nor clever composition, nor 'planes' of colour, nor anything else will save an emotional cliché from being an emotional cliché, though they may, of course, garnish it and make it more interesting.

Where Cezanne did sometimes escape the cliché altogether and really give a complete intuitive interpretation of actual objects is in some of the still-life compositions. To me these good still-life scenes are purely representative and quite true-to-life. Here Cezanne did what he wanted to do: he made the things quite real, he didn't deliberately leave anything out, and yet he gave us a triumphant and rich intuitive vision of a few apples and kitchen pots. For once his intuitive consciousness triumphed, and broke into utterance. And here he is inimitable. His imitators imitate his accessories of table-cloths folded like tin, *etc.* - the unreal parts of his pictures - but they don't imitate the pots and apples, because they can't. It's the real appleyness, and you can't imitate it. Every man must create it new and different out of himself: new and different. The moment

it looks 'like' Cezanne it is nothing.

But at the same time that Cezanne was triumphing with the apple and appleyness he was still fighting with the cliché. When he makes Madame Cezanne most still, most appley, he starts making the universe slip uneasily about her. It was part of his desire: to make the human form, the life form, come to rest. Not static - on the contrary. Mobile but come to rest. And at the same time he set the unmoving material world into motion. Walls twitch and slide, chairs bend or rear up a little, cloths curl like burning paper. Cezanne did this partly to satisfy his intuitive feeling that nothing is really statically at rest - a feeling he seems to have had strongly - as when he watched the lemons shrivel or go mildewed, in his still-life group, which he left lying there so long so that he could see that gradual flux of change: and partly to fight the cliché, which says that the inanimate world is static, and that walls are still. In his fight with the cliché he denied that walls are still and chairs are static. In his intuitive self he felt for their changes.

And these two activities of his consciousness occupy his later landscapes. In the best landscapes we are fascinated by the mysterious shiftiness of the scene under our eyes; it shifts about as we watch it. And we realise, with a sort of transport, how intuitively true this is of landscape. It is wo?still. It has its own weird anima, and to our wide-eyed perception it changes like a living animal under our gaze. This is a quality that Cezanne sometimes got marvellously.

Then again, in other pictures he seems to be saying: Landscape is not like this and not like this and not like this and not . . . *etc.* - and every not is a little blank space in the canvas, defined by the remains of an assertion. Sometimes Cezanne builds up a landscape essentially out of omissions. He puts fringes on the complicated vacuum of the cliché, so to speak, and offers us that. It is interesting in a repudiative fashion, but it is not the new thing. The appleyness, the intuition has gone. We have only a mental repudiation. This occupies many of the later pictures: and ecstasises the critics.

And Cezanne was bitter. He had never, as far as his life went, broken through the horrible glass screen of the mental concepts, to the actual touch of life. In his art he had touched the apple, and that was a great deal. He had intuitively known the apple and intuitively brought it forth on the tree of his life, in paint. But when it came to anything beyond the apple, to landscape, to people, and above all to nude woman, the cliché had triumphed over him. The cliché had triumphed over him, and he was bitter, misanthropic. How not be misanthropic, when men and women are just clichés to you, and you hate the cliché? Most people, of course, love the cliché - because most people are the cliché. Still, for all that, there is perhaps more appleyness in man, and even in nude woman, than Cezanne was

able to get at. The cliché obtruded, so he just abstracted away from it. Those last water-colour landscapes are just abstractions from the cliché. They are blanks, with a few pearly-coloured sort of edges. The blank is vacuum, which was Cézanne's last word against the cliché. It is a vacuum. And the edges are there to assert the vacuity.

And the very fact that we can reconstruct almost instantly a whole landscape from the few indications Cézanne gives, shows what a cliché the landscape is, how it exists already, ready-made, in our minds, how it exists in a pigeon-hole of the consciousness, so to speak, and you need only be given its number to be able to get it out, complete. Cézanne's last water-colour landscapes, made up of a few touches on blank paper, are a satire on landscape altogether. They leave so much to the imagination! - that immortal cant phrase, which means they give you the clue to a cliché and the cliché comes. That's what the cliché exists for. And that sort of imagination is just a rag-bag memory stored with thousands and thousands of old and really worthless sketches, images, etc., clichés.

We can see what a fight it means, the escape from the domination of the ready-made mental concept, the mental consciousness stuffed full of clichés that intervene like a complete screen between us and life. It means a long, long fight, that will probably last for ever. But Cézanne did get as far as the apple. I can think of nobody else who has done anything.

When we put it in personal terms it is a fight in a man between his own ego, which is his ready-made mental self which inhabits either a sky-blue self-tinted heaven or a black, self-tinted hell, and his other free intuitive self. Cézanne never freed himself from his ego, in his life. He haunted the fringes of experience. - 'I who am so feeble in life' - but at least he knew it. At least he had the greatness to feel bitter about it. Not like the complacent bourgeois who now 'appreciate' him!

So now perhaps it is the English turn. Perhaps this is where the English will come in. They have certainly stayed out very completely. It is as if they had received the death-blow to their instinctive and intuitive bodies in the Elizabethan age, and since then they have steadily died, till now they are complete corpses. As a young English painter, an intelligent and really modest young man, said to me: 'But I do think we ought to begin to paint good pictures, now that we know pretty well all there is to know about how a picture should be made. You do agree, don't you, that technically we know almost all there is to know about painting?'

I looked at him in amazement. It was obvious that a new-born babe was as fit to paint pictures as he was. He knew technically all there was to know about pictures: all about two-dimensional and three-dimensional composition, also the

colour-dimension and the dimension of values in that view of composition which exists apart from form: all about the value of planes, the value of the angle in planes, the different values of the same colour on different planes: all about edges, visible edges, tangible edges, intangible edges: all about the nodality of form-groups, the constellating of mass-centres: all about the relativity of mass, the gravitation and the centrifugal force of masses, the resultant of the complex impinging of masses, the isolation of a mass in the line of vision: all about pattern, line pattern, edge pattern, tone pattern, colour pattern, and the pattern of moving planes: all about texture, impasto, surface, and what happens at the edge of the canvas: also which is the aesthetic centre of the canvas, the dynamic centre, the effulgent centre, the kinetic centre, the mathematical centre and the Chinese centre: also the points of departure in the foreground, and the points of disappearance in the background, together with the various routes between these points, namely, as the crow flies, as the mind intoxicated with knowledge reels and gets there: all about spotting, what you spot, which spot, on the spot, how many spots, balance of spots, recedence of spots, spots on the explosive vision and spots on the co-ordinative vision: all about literary interest and how to hide it successfully from the policeman: all about photographic representation, and which heaven it belongs to and which hell: all about the sex appeal of a picture, and when you can be arrested for solicitation, when for indecency: all about the psychology of a picture, which section of the mind it appeals to, which mental state it is intended to represent, how to exclude the representation of all other states of mind from the one intended, or how, on the contrary, to give a hint of complementary states of mind fringing the state of mind portrayed: all about the chemistry of colours, when to use Windsor and Newton and when not, and the relative depth of contempt to display for Lefranc: on the history of colour, past and future, whether cadmium will really stand the march of ages, whether viridian will go black, blue, or merely greasy, and the effect on our great-great-grandsons of the flake white and zinc white and white lead we have so lavishly used: on the merits and demerits of leaving patches of bare, prepared canvas, and which preparation will bleach, which blacken: on the mediums to be used, the vice of linseed oil, the treachery of turps, the meanness of gums, the innocence or the unspeakable crime of varnish: on allowing your picture to be shiny, on insisting that it should be shiny, or weeping over the merest suspicion of gloss, and rubbing it with a raw potato: on brushes, and the conflicting length of the stem, the best of the hog, the length of bristle most to be desired on the many varying occasions, and whether to slash in one direction only : on the atmosphere of London, on the atmosphere of Glasgow, on the atmosphere of Rome, on the atmosphere of Paris, and the peculiar action of them all upon

vermilion, cinnabar, pale cadmium yellow, mid-chrome, emerald green, Veronese green, linseed oil, turps, and Lyalls' perfect medium : on quality, and the relation to light, and its ability to hold its own in so radical a change of light as that from Rome to London - all these things the young man knew - and out of it, God help him, he was going to make pictures.

Now, such innocence and such naivete, coupled with true modesty, must make us believe that we English have indeed, at least as far as paint goes, become again as little children : very little children : tiny children : babes : nay, babes unborn. And if we have really got back to the state of the unborn babe, we are perhaps almost ready to be born. The English may be born again, pictorially. Or, to tell the truth, they may begin for the first time to be born: since as painters of composition pictures they don't really exist. They have reached the stage where their innocent egos are entirely and totally enclosed in pale-blue glass bottles of insulated inexperience. Perhaps now they must hatch out!

'Do you think we may be on the brink of a Golden Age again in England?' one of our most promising young writers asked me, with that same half-timorous innocence and naivete of the young painter. I looked at him - he was a sad young man - and my eyes nearly fell out of my head. A golden age! He looked so ungolden, and though he was twenty years my junior, he felt also like my grandfather. A golden age! in England! a golden age! now, when even money is paper! when the enclosure in the ego is final, when they are hermetically sealed and insulated from all experience, from any touch, from anything solid.

'I suppose it's up to row,' said I.

And he quietly accepted it.

But such innocence, such naivete must be a prelude to something. It's a ne plus ultra. So why shouldn't it be a prelude to a golden age? If the innocence and naivete as regards artistic expression doesn't become merely idiotic, why shouldn't it become golden? The young might, out of a sheer sort of mental blankness, strike the oil of their live intuition, and get a gusher. Why not? A golden gush of artistic expression! 'Now we know pretty well everything that can be known about the technical side of pictures.' A golden age!

Baudot, 1929.
D. H. LAWRENCE

THE PLATES



On the road from Gargnano to San Gaudenzio, Lago di Garda. (April 1913)

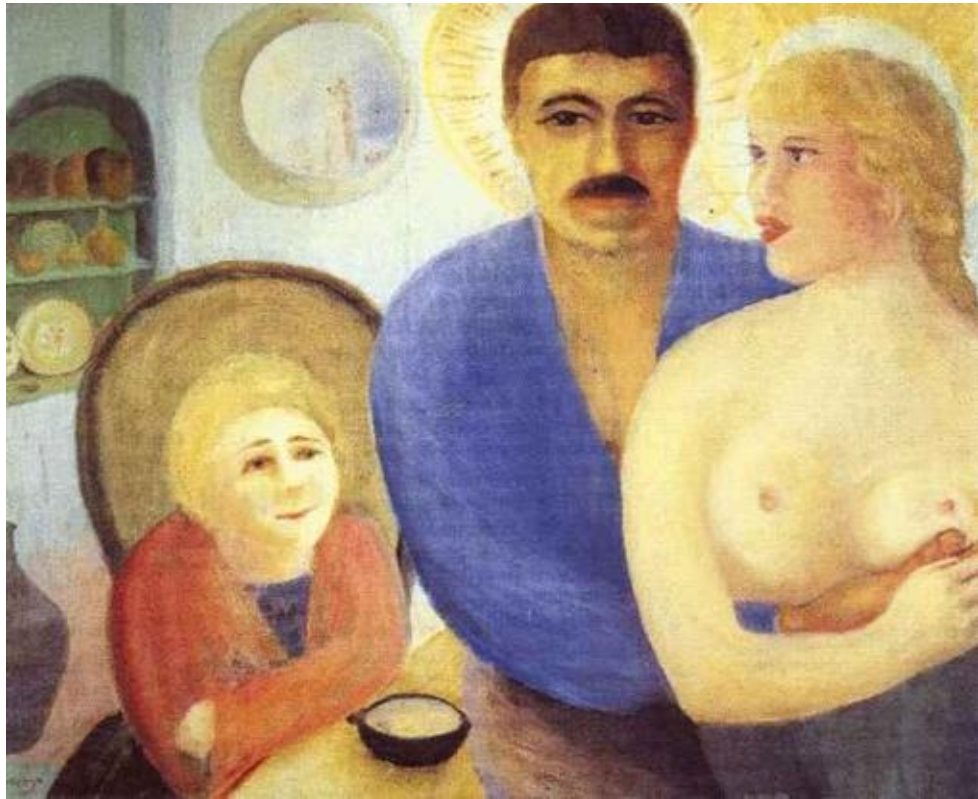


New Mexico Landscape (1924)

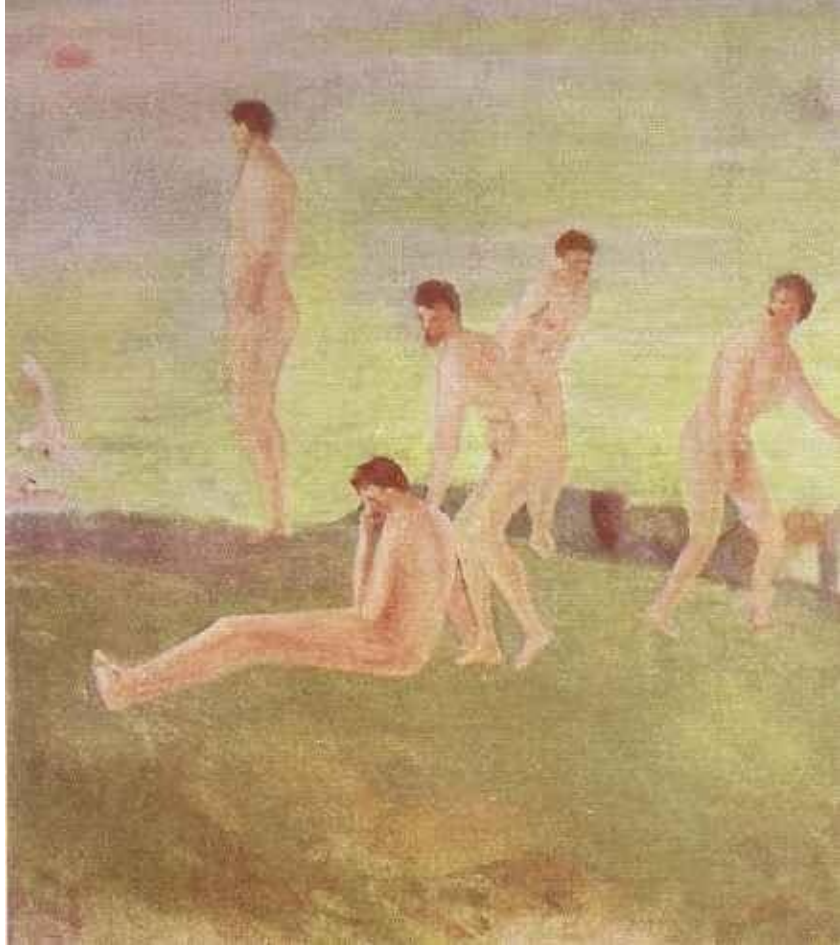


Untitled (1925)





A Holy Family (November 1926)



Men Bathing (inspired by Cezanne)



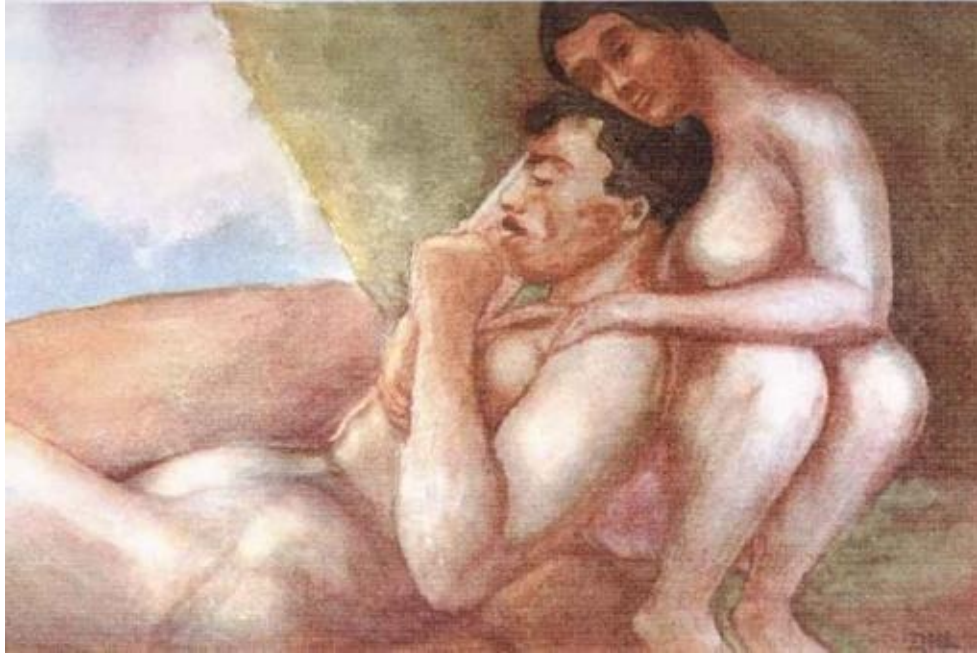
Boccaccio Story (November-December 1926)



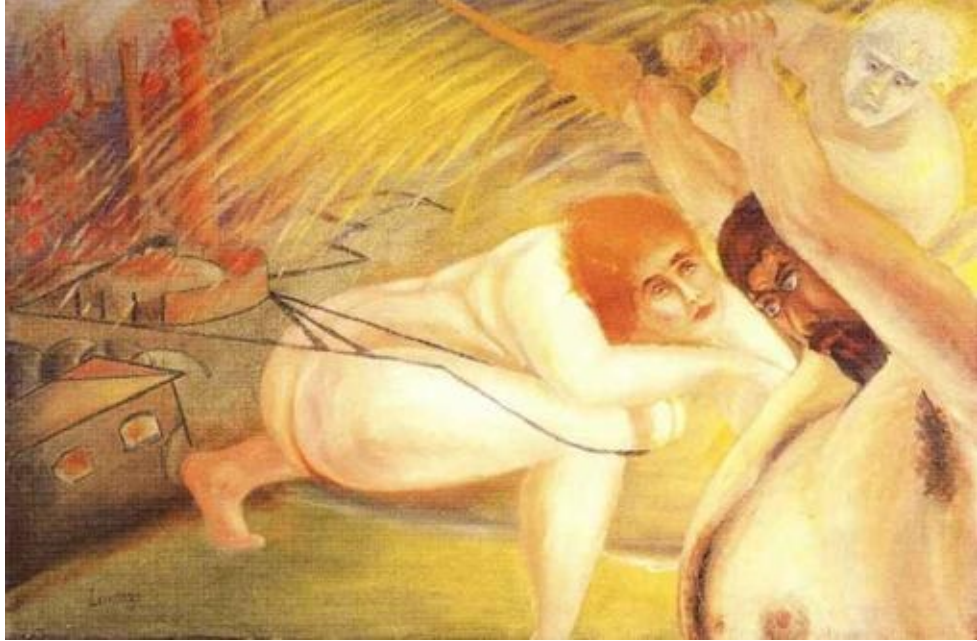
Red Willow Trees (January 1927)



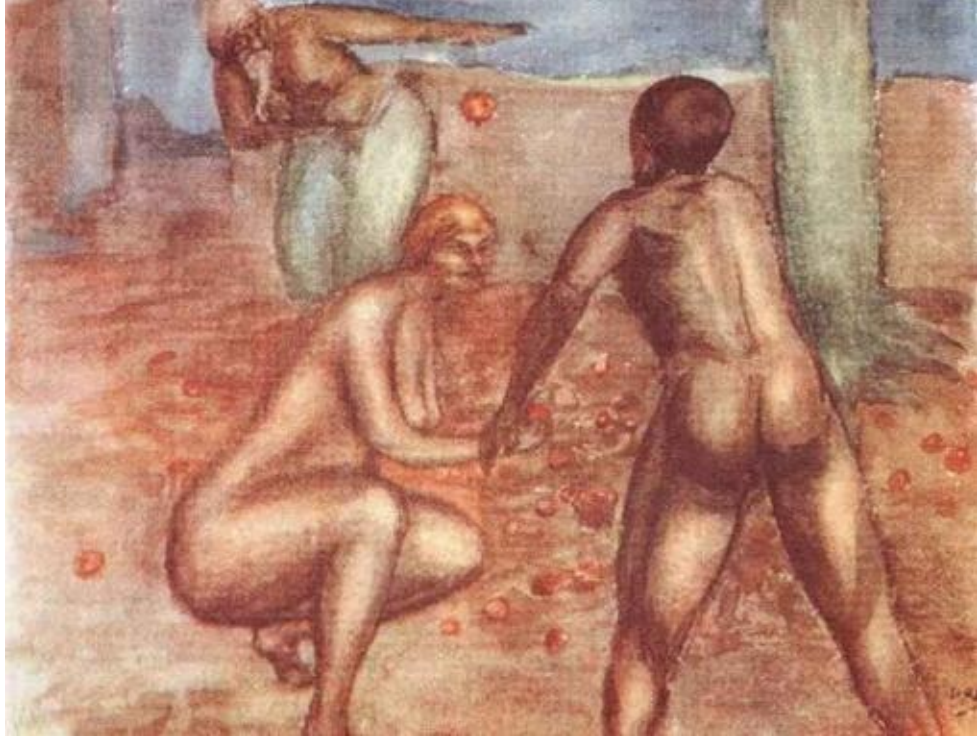
Fight with an Amazon (December 1926)



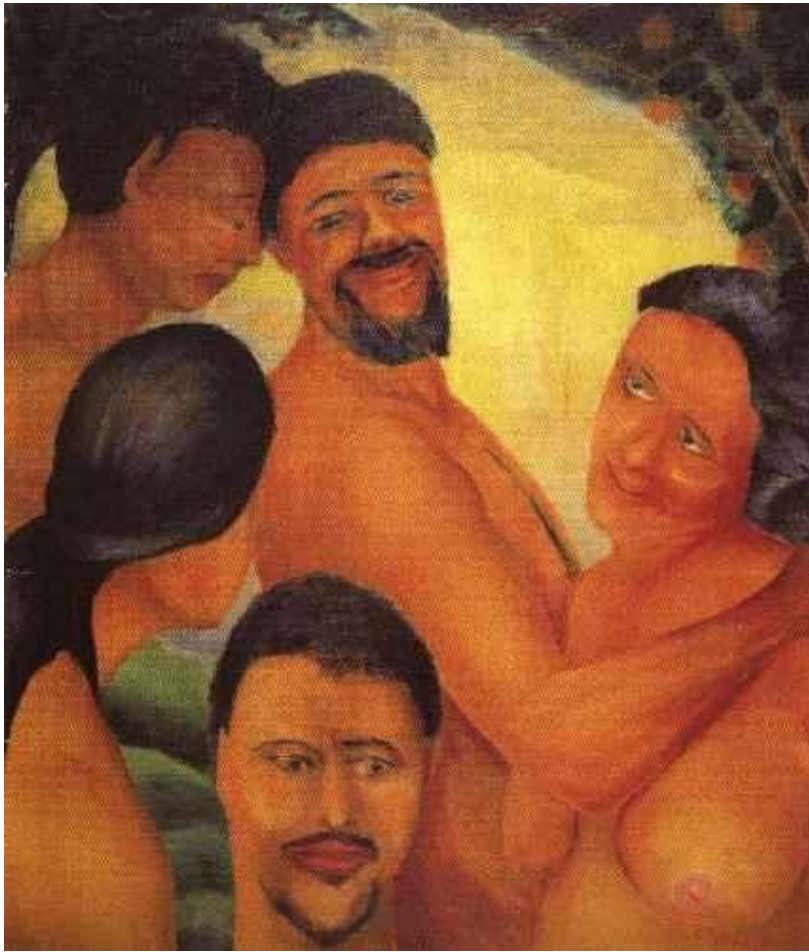
Under The Hay-Stack (March 1928)



Flight Back Into Paradise (January 1927)



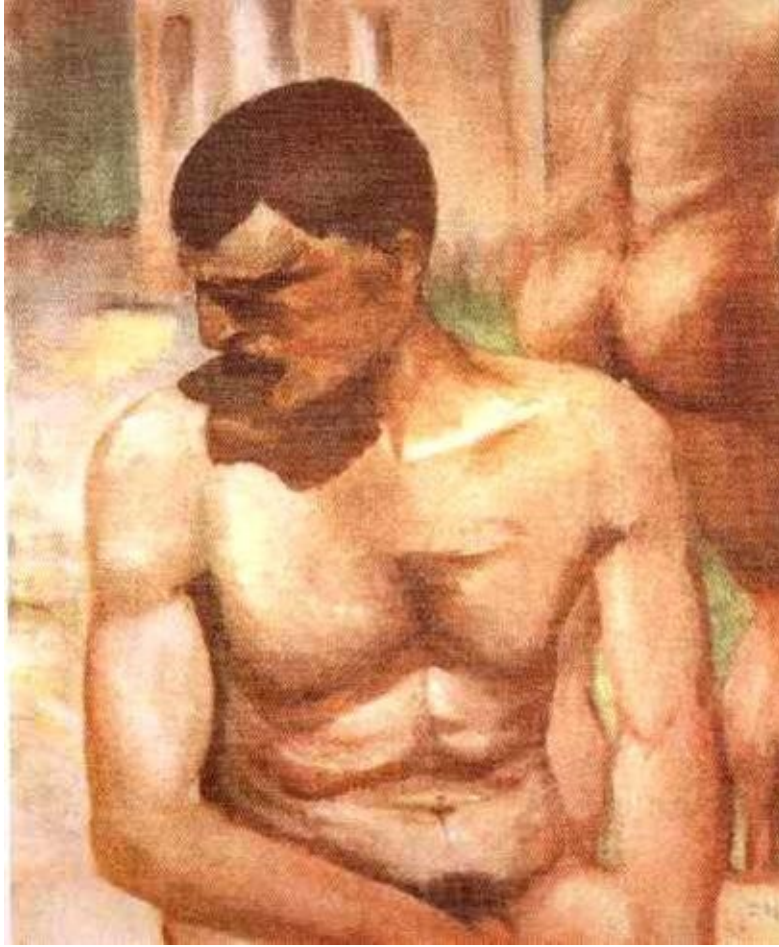
Throwing Back the Apple



Fauns and Nymphs (March 1927)



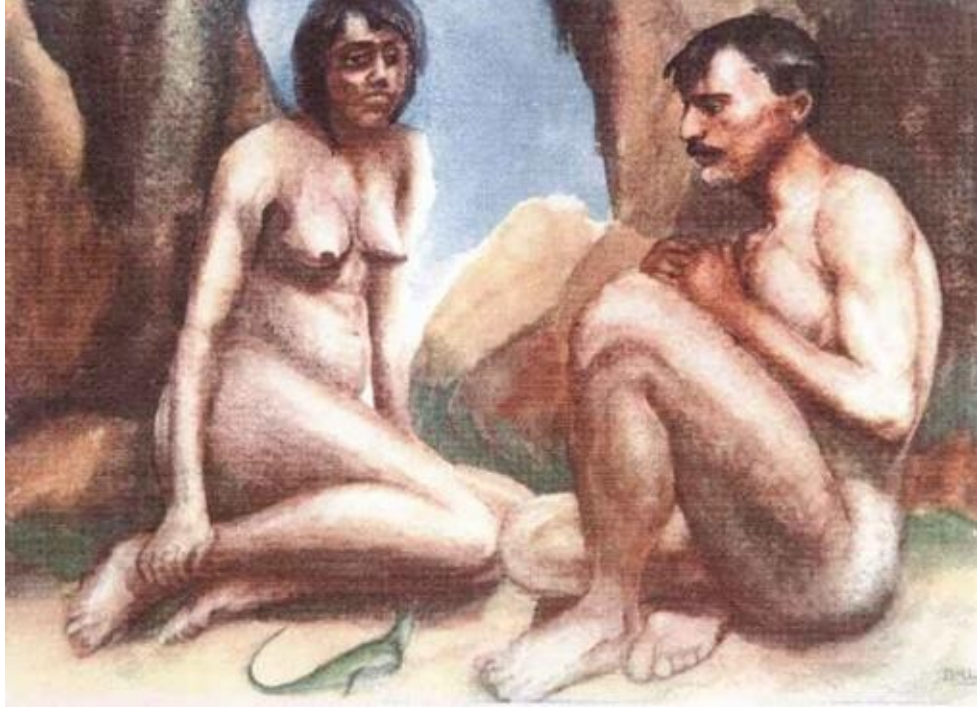
Resurrection (May 1927)



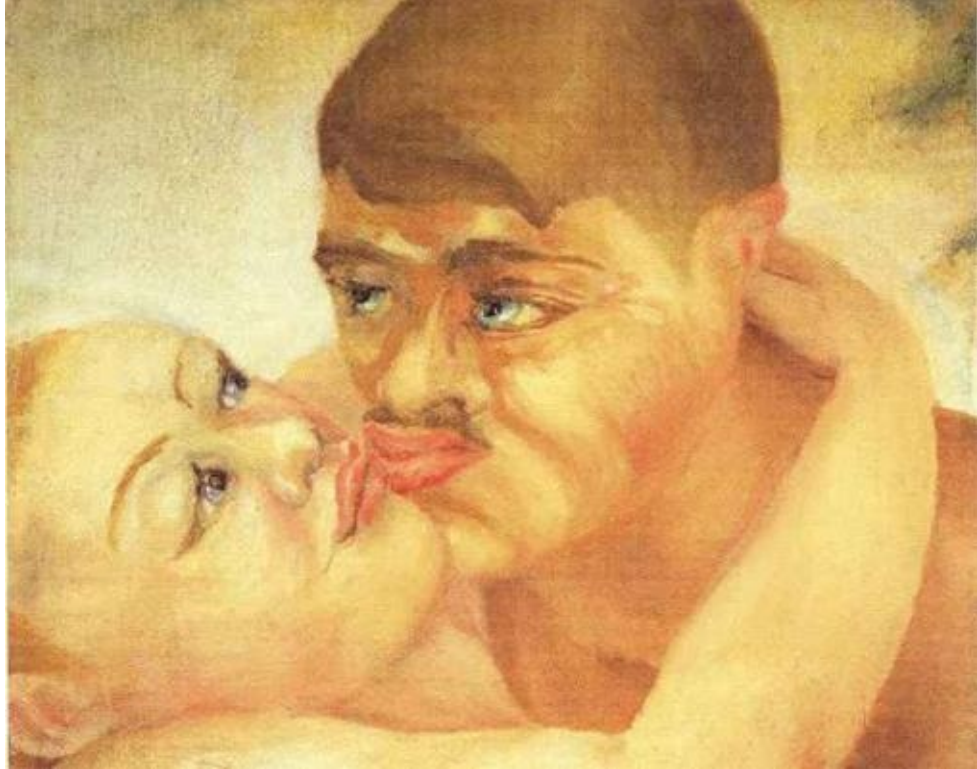
Contadini (August 1928)



Renaissance of Men (March 1928)



The Lizard (March 1928)



Close-Up (Kiss) (September 1928)



Accident in a Mine (September 1928)



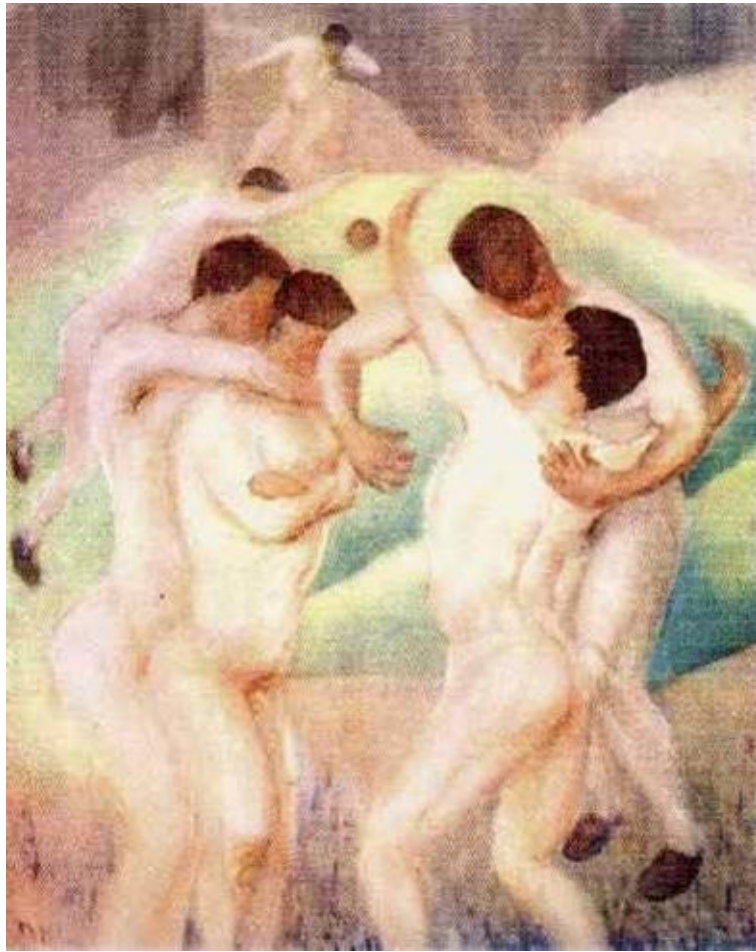
Dance-Sketch (before July 1928)



Leda



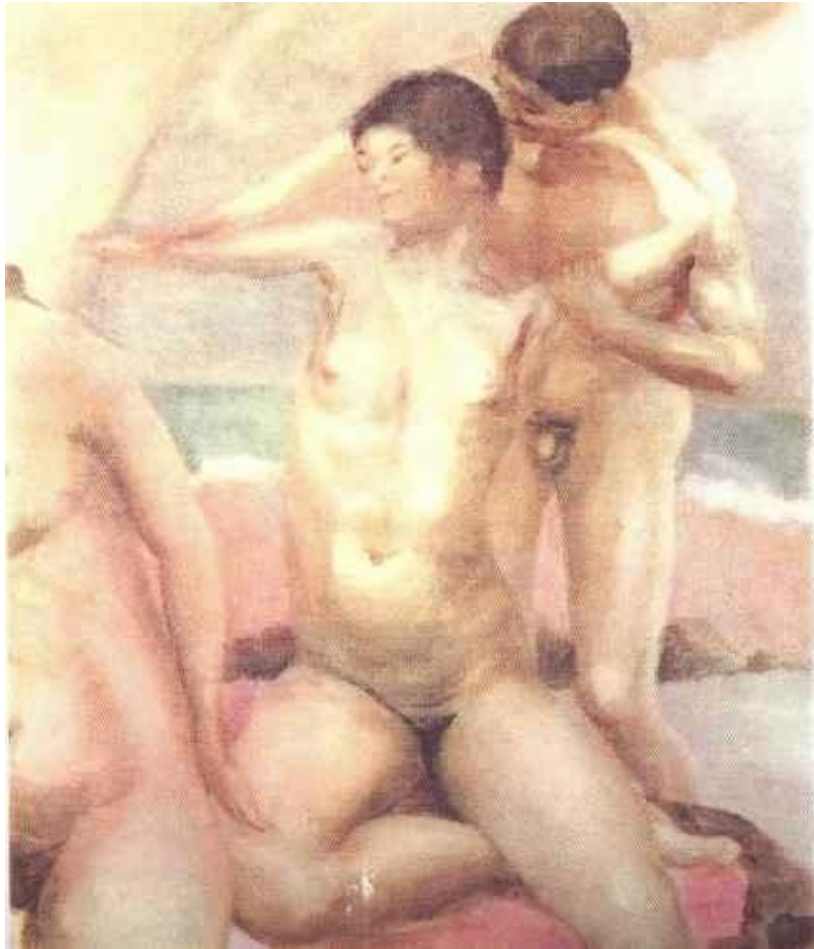
Summer Dawn (January)



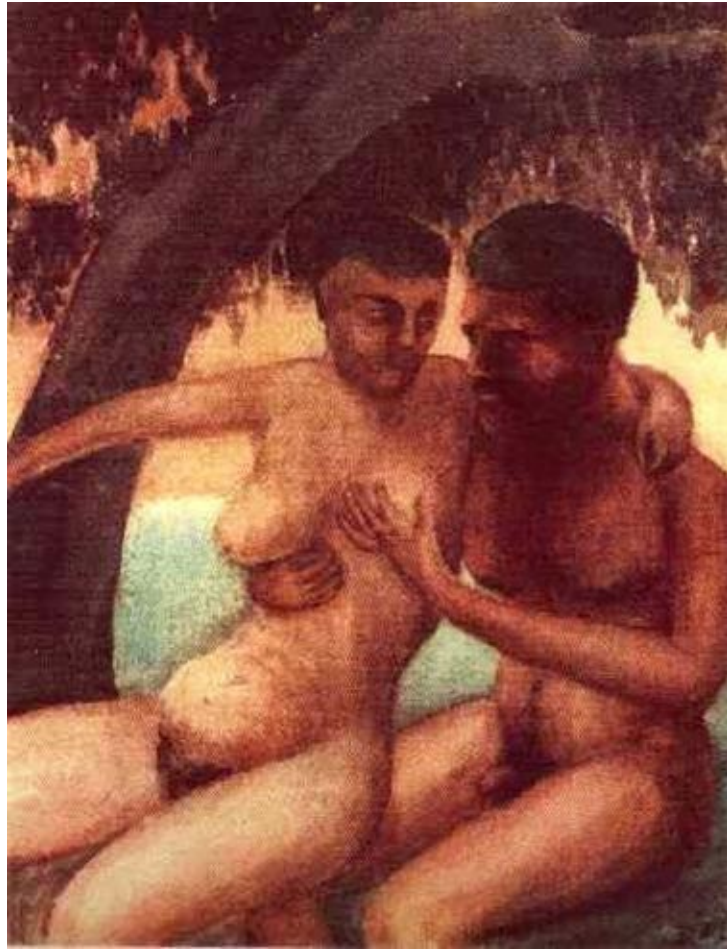
Spring (1929)



Dandelions (March 1928)



North Sea (August 1928)



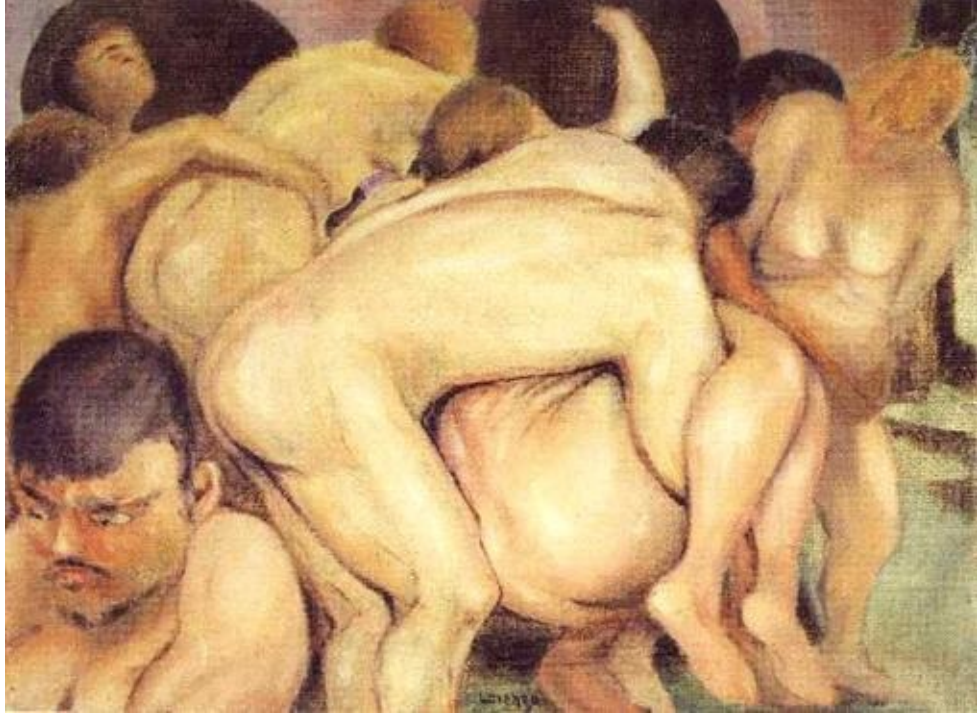
The Mango Tree (March 1928)



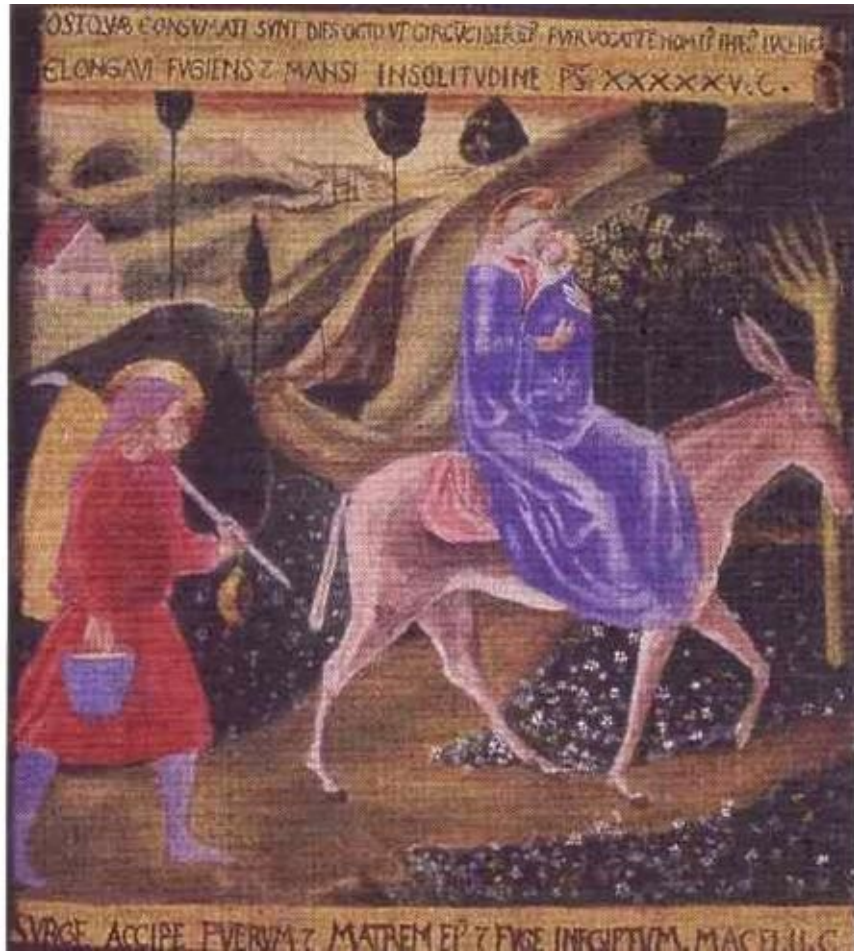
The Coal-black Smith (August 1928)



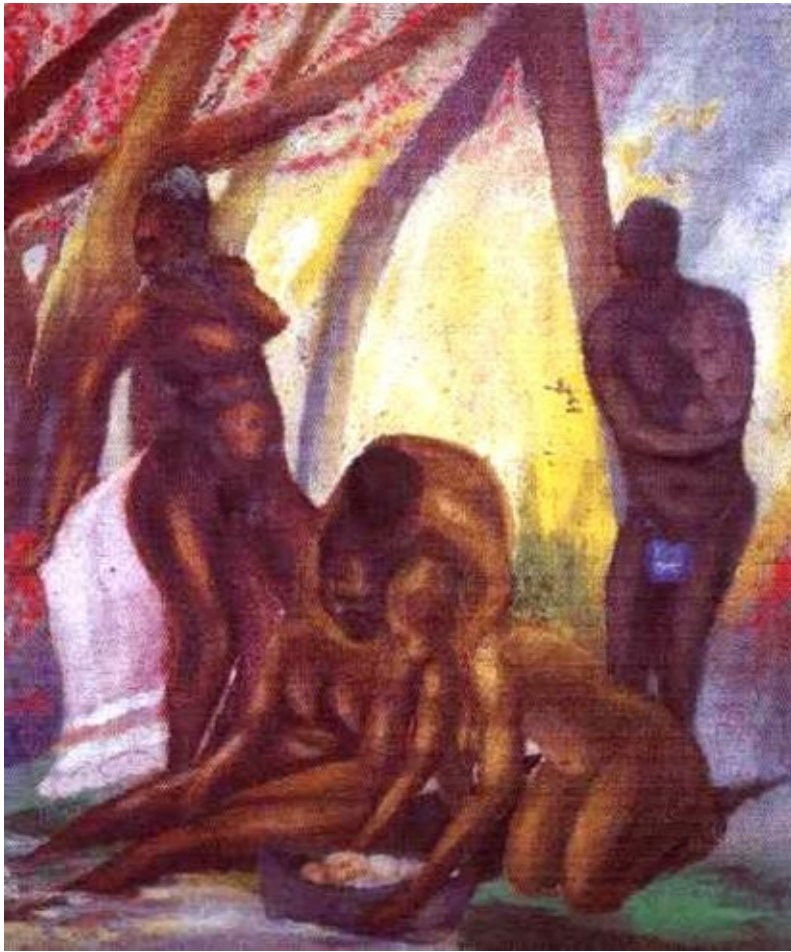
Family on a Verandah (April 1928)



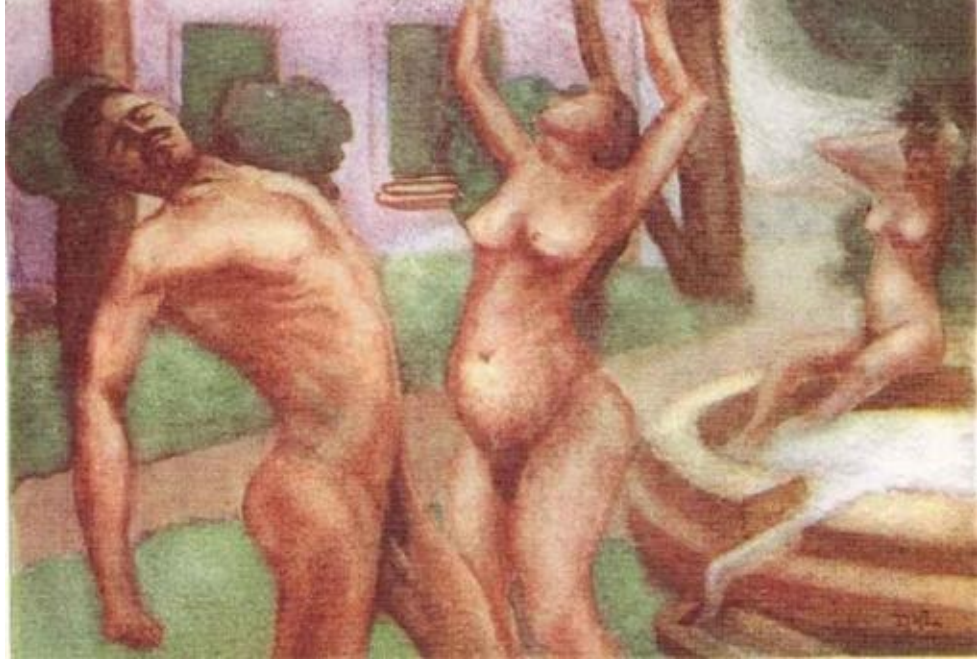
The Rape of the Sabine Women (April 1928)



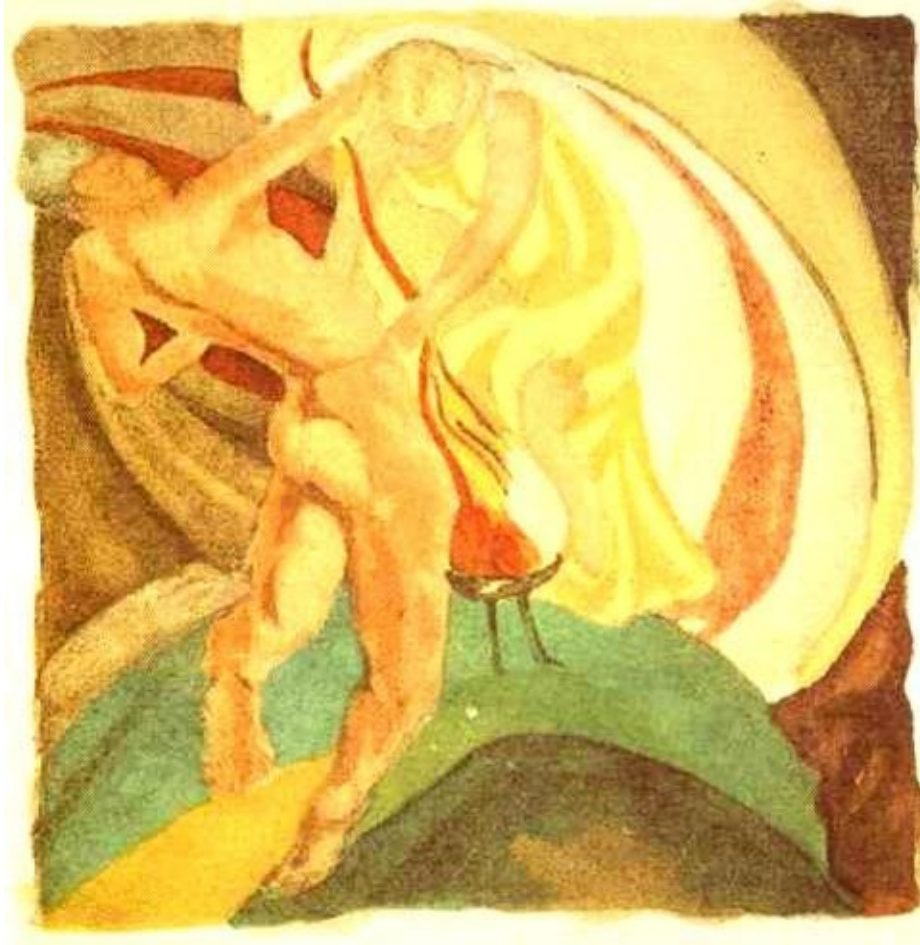
Inspired by Fra Angelico's Flight into Egypt



The Finding Of Moses (1927- 1928)



Yawning (March 1928)



The man who had died and the Priestess of Isis in Search.



Singing of Swans (1929)

THE END

The Biographies



NOT I, BUT THE WIND... by Frieda Lawrence



Frieda Freiin von Richthofen (1879-1956) is best known for her marriage to D. H. Lawrence, although she was a distant relative of the famous Red Baron. In 1899, she married Ernest Weekley, a British philologist and professor of modern languages, with whom she had three children. They settled in Nottingham, where Ernest worked at the university and she worked on translating pieces of German literature into English.

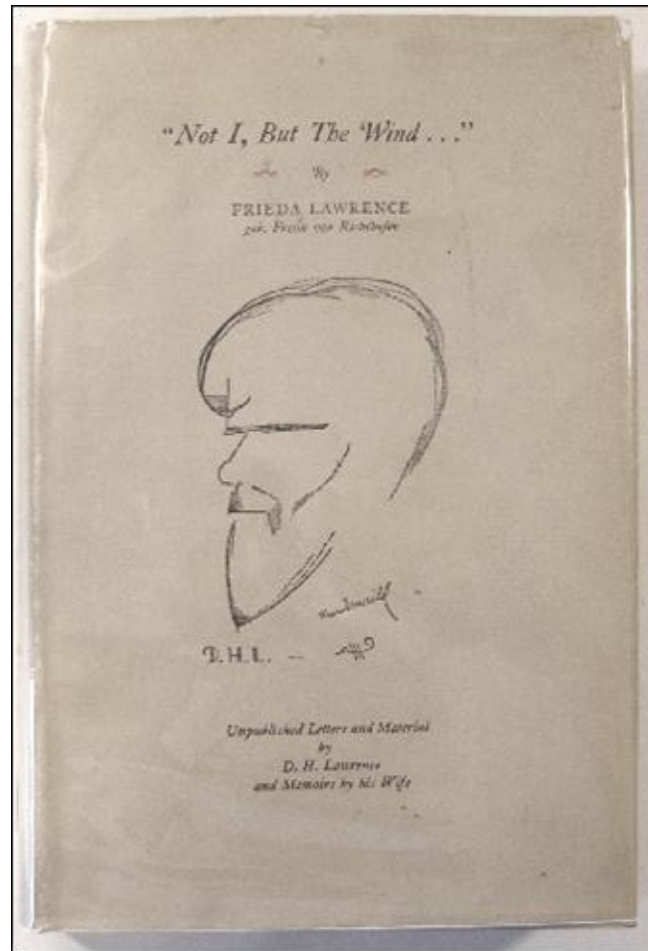
In 1912 Frieda met Lawrence, who had previously been her husband's student. They soon fell in love and eloped to Germany, leaving Frieda's children behind. During their stay, Lawrence was arrested for spying and, after the intervention of Frieda's father, the couple travelled south into Italy. Following her divorce from Weekley, Frieda married Lawrence in 1914. They intended to return to the continent, but the outbreak of war kept them in England, where they endured official harassment and censorship, as well as Lawrence's already frail health.

Leaving post-war England at the earliest opportunity, they travelled widely, eventually settling at the Kiowa Ranch, near Taos, New Mexico and, in Lawrence's last years, at the Villa Mirinda, near Scandicci in Tuscany. After Lawrence's death in Venice in 1930, Frieda returned to Taos to live with her third husband, Angelo Ravagli.

In 1935 Frieda published this biography of her life and travels with the famous author.



Frieda, when Lawrence first met her



The first edition of the biography

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Frieda in later years

Foreword

It was still cold last night, though it is the middle of May.

Here the ranch, with the Sangre de Cristo mountain range behind it to the northeast, slopes to the desert. The big pine trees stand like dark sentinels in the night at the edge of the twenty-acre alfalfa field. Beyond them floats the desert. You can see far. A few lights twinkle at Ranchos de Taos. A shepherd's fire glows. All is covered by an enormous sky full of stars, stars that hang in the pine trees, in Lawrence's big tree with his phoenix on it that the Brett painted, stars that lean on the edge of the mountains, stars twinkling out of the Milky Way. It is so still. Only stars, nothing but stars.

This morning early there was still ice on the edge of the irrigation ditch from the Gallina Canyon. There is such a rush of water. The ice is melting high up in the mountains and the water sings through one's blood.

But now, about midday, it is warm. The desert below circles in rings of shadow and sunshine. The alfalfa field is green, during these last days of sunshine it has turned green.

I am in the little cabin that Lawrence built with the Indians. I sit in the chair that he made with the 'petit point' canvas that we bought in the Rue de la Paix in Paris and that I embroidered. It took me a long time, and when I got bored, he did a bit.

It is a nice chair, although a bit rough, carved as it was with only a penknife.

So I sit and try to write.

I did not want to write this book. I wanted to give Lawrence my silence. Would he have wanted me to write it? Would he have jeered at me as one of those intellectual females whom he disliked so much? Is it any use, my writing?

Do I want to blow my own trumpet? Yes, I do. But will it have a clear rousing sound or will it be a bit wheezy and out of tune? Can I hear the real song of our life, the motifs gay, bold, sad, terrible, or can't I?

After all, this is my book, that I am writing. Do I understand anything at all or am I recording unliving dull facts?

Is it a genuine necessity for me to write or has Lawrence said all a million times better than I could? Will this, that costs me so much, be of any use, any pleasure to anybody else? Will others who come after learn from our life, take from it the good and avoid our mistakes?... I wonder...

Anyhow, I will try to write as honestly as I can. Lies are all very well in their

place but the truth seems to me so much more interesting and proud, but truth is not so easily conquered, there is always more of it, like a bottomless pit is truth. It was a long fight for Lawrence and me to get at some truth between us; it was a hard life with him, but a wonderful one. Stark and bare, without trimmings and frills. But a few realities remained, a lasting truth triumphed.

Whatever happened on the surface of everyday life, there blossomed the certainty of the unalterable bond between us, and of the ever-present wonder of all the world around us.

We had so many battles to fight out, so much to get rid of, so much to surpass. We were both good fighters.

There was the ordinary man-and-woman fight between us, to keep the balance, not to trespass, not to topple over. The balance in a human relationship was one of Lawrence's chief themes. He felt that each should keep intact his own integrity and isolation, yet at the same time preserve a mutual bond like the north and south poles which between them enclose the world.

Then there was the class war. We came from different worlds. We both had to reach beyond our class, to be reborn into the essence of our individual beings, the essence that is so much deeper than any class distinction.

Then beyond class there was the difference in race, to cross over to each other. He, the Englishman, Puritan, stern and uncompromising, so highly conscious and responsible; I, the German, with my vagueness and uncertainty, drifting along.

Only the fierce common desire to create a new kind of life, this was all that could make us truly meet.

As for pretending to understand Lawrence or to explain him, I am neither so impertinent nor such a fool. We are so much more than we understand. Understanding is such a little part of us, there is so much in us of unexplored territory that understanding can never grasp. As Lawrence and I were adventurers by nature, we explored.

I only know that I felt the wonder of him always. Sometimes it overwhelmed me, it knocked out all my consciousness, as if a flame had burnt me up. I remained in awe and wonder.

Sometimes I hated him and held him off as if he were the devil himself. At other times I took him as you take the weather. Here's a spring day, glorious sunshine, what a joy! Then another day - alas! all is changed: it is chilly and it rains and I wish, how I wish, it were sunny again.

I learned that a genius contains the whole gamut of human emotions, from highest to lowest. I learned that a man must be himself, bad or good at any price.

Life and emotions change in us. We are not pictures, 'Patiences on

monuments'; anyhow Lawrence wasn't, nor I either. Ours was not just a love affair, just as his writing was not just writing as a profession.

His love wiped out all my shames and inhibitions, the failure and the miseries of my past. He made me new and fresh, that I might live freely and lightly as a bird. He fought for the liberty of my being, and won. Just as in his writings he tried, with his fierce and responsible love for his fellowmen, to free them of the stale old past, and take the load of all the centuries of dead thought and feeling on himself.

Will the world gain from him as I did? I hope so, in the long run.

We Meet

As I look back now it surprises me that Lawrence could have loved me at first sight as he did. I hardly think I could have been a very lovable woman at the time. I was thirty-one and had three children. My marriage seemed a success. I had all a woman can reasonably ask. Yet there I was, all 'smocktravelled,' to use one of Lawrence's phrases.

I had just met a remarkable disciple of Freud and was full of undigested theories. This friend did a lot for me. I was living like a somnambulist in a conventional set life and he awakened the consciousness of my own proper self.

Being born and reborn is no joke, and being born into your own intrinsic self, that separates and singles you out from all the rest - it's a painful process.

When people talk about sex, I don't know what they mean - as if sex hopped about by itself like a frog, as if it had no relation to the rest of living, one's growth, one's ripening. What people mean by sex will always remain incomprehensible to me, but I am thankful to say sex is a mystery to me.

Theories applied to life aren't any use. Fanatically I believed that if only sex were 'free' the world would straightaway turn into a paradise. I suffered and struggled at outs with society, and felt absolutely isolated. The process left me unbalanced. I felt alone. What could I do, when there were so many millions who thought differently from me? But I couldn't give in, I couldn't submit. It wasn't that I felt hostile, only different. I could not accept society. And then Lawrence came. It was an April day in 1912. He came for lunch, to see my husband about a lectureship at a German University. Lawrence was also at a critical period of his life just then. The death of his mother had shaken the foundations of his health for a second time. He had given up his post as a schoolmaster at Croydon. He had done with his past life.

I see him before me as he entered the house. A long thin figure, quick straight legs, light, sure movements. He seemed so obviously simple. Yet he arrested my attention. There was something more than met the eye. What kind of a bird was this?

The half-hour before lunch the two of us talked in my room, French windows open, curtains fluttering in the spring wind, my children playing on the lawn.

He said he had finished with his attempts at knowing women. I was amazed at

the way he fiercely denounced them. I had never before heard anything like it. I laughed, yet I could tell he had tried very hard, and had cared. We talked about Œdipus and understanding leaped through our words.

After leaving, that night, he walked all the way to his home. It was a walk of at least five hours. Soon afterwards he wrote to me: 'You are the most wonderful woman in all England.'

I wrote back: 'You don't know many women in England, how do you know?' He told me, the second time we met: 'You are quite unaware of your husband, you take no notice of him.' I disliked the directness of this criticism.

He came on Easter Sunday. It was a bright, sunny day. The children were in the garden hunting for Easter eggs.

The maids were out, and I wanted to make some tea. I tried to turn on the gas but I didn't know how. Lawrence became cross at such ignorance. Such a direct critic! It was something my High and Mightiness was very little accustomed to.

Yet Lawrence really understood me. From the first he saw through me like glass, saw how hard I was trying to keep up a cheerful front. I thought it was so despicable and unproud and unclean to be miserable, but he saw through my hard bright shell.

What I cannot understand is how he could have loved me and wanted me at that time. I certainly did have what he called 'sex in the head'; a theory of loving men. My real self was frightened and shrank from contact like a wild thing.

So our relationship developed.

One day we met at a station in Derbyshire. My two small girls were with us. We went for a long walk through the early spring woods and fields. The children were running here and there as young creatures will.

We came to a small brook, a little stone bridge crossed it. Lawrence made the children some paper boats and put matches in them and let them float downstream under the bridge. Then he put daisies in the brook, and they floated down with their upturned faces. Crouched by the brook, playing there with the children, Lawrence forgot about me completely.

Suddenly I knew I loved him. He had touched a new tenderness in me. After that, things happened quickly.

He came to see me one Sunday. My husband was away and I said: 'Stay the night with me.'

'No, I will not stay in your husband's house while he is away, but you must tell him the truth and we will go away together, because I love you.'

I was frightened. I knew how terrible such a thing would be for my husband, he had always trusted me. But a force stronger than myself made me deal him the blow. I left the next day. I left my son with his father, my two little girls I

took to their grandparents in London. I said goodbye to them on Hampstead Heath, blind and blank with pain, dimly feeling I should never again live with them as I had done.

Lawrence met me at Charing. Cross Station, to go away with him, never to leave him again.

He seemed to have lifted me body and soul out of all my past life. This young man of twenty-six had taken all my fate, all my destiny, into his hands. And we had known each other barely for six weeks. There had been nothing else for me to do but submit.

Going Away Together

We met at Charing Cross and crossed the grey Channel sitting on some ropes, full of hope and agony. There was nothing but the grey sea, and the dark sky, and the throbbing of the ship, and ourselves.

We arrived at Metz where my father was having his fifty-years-of-service jubilee. Pre-war Germany: the house was full of grandchildren and relatives, and I stayed in a hotel where Lawrence also stayed. It was a hectic time. Bands were playing in honour of my father, telegrams came flying from England. Lawrence was pulling me on one side, my children on the other. My mother wanted me to stay with her. My father, who loved me, said to me in great distress: 'My child, what are you doing? I always thought you had so much sense. I know the world.' I answered: 'Yes, that may be, but you never knew the best.' I meant to know the best.

There was a fair going on at Metz at the moment. I was walking with my sister Johanna through the booths of Turkish Delight, the serpentmen, the ladies in tights, all the pots and pans.

Johanna, or 'Nusch,' as we called her, was at the height of her beauty and elegance, and was the last word in 'chic.' Suddenly Lawrence appeared round a corner, looking odd, in a cap and raincoat. What will she think of him? I thought.

He spoke just a few words to us and went away. To my surprise, Johanna said: 'You can go with him. You can trust him.'

At first nobody knew of Lawrence's presence except my sisters. One afternoon Lawrence and I were walking in the fortifications of Metz when a sentinel touched Lawrence on the shoulder suspecting him of being an English officer. I had to get my father's help to pull us out of the difficulty. Lo, the cat was out of the bag, and I took Lawrence home to tea.

He met my father only once, at our house. They looked at each other fiercely - my father, the pure aristocrat, Lawrence, the miner's son. My father, hostile, offered a cigarette to Lawrence. That night I dreamt that they had a fight, and that Lawrence defeated my father.

The strain of Metz proved too great for Lawrence and he left for the Rhineland. I stayed behind in Metz.

Here are some of Lawrence's letters, which show his side of our story up to that time.

Eastwood - Tuesday I feel so horrid and helpless. I know it all sickens you, and you are almost at the end of the tether. And what was decent yesterday will perhaps be frightfully indecent today. But it's like being ill: there's nothing to do but shut one's teeth and look at the wall and wait.

You say you're going to G... tomorrow. But even that is uncertain. And I must know about the trains. What time are you going to Germany, what day, what hour, which railway, which class? Do tell me as soon as you can, or else what I can do? I will come any time you tell me - but let me know.

You must be in an insane whirl in your mind. I feel helpless and rudderless, a stupid scattered fool. For goodness' sake tell me something and something definite. I would do anything on earth for you, and I can do nothing. Yesterday I knew would be decent, but I don't like my feeling today - presentiment. I am afraid of something low, like an eel which bites out of the mud, and hangs on with its teeth. I feel as if I can't breathe while we're in England. I wish I could come and see you, or else you me.

D. H. Lawrence

Queens Square, Eastwood, Notts 2 May 1912

I shall get in King's Cross tomorrow at 1.25. Will that do? You see I couldn't come today because I was waiting for the laundry and for some stuff from the tailor's. I had prepared for Friday, but Thursday was impossible. I am sorry if it makes things tiresome.

Will you meet me, or let somebody meet me, at King's Cross? Or else wire me very early, what to do. It is harassing to be as we are.

I have worried endlessly over you. Is that an insult? But I shan't get an easy breath till I see you. This time tomorrow, exactly, I shall be in London.

I hope you've got some money for yourself. I can muster only eleven pounds. A chap owes me twenty-five quid, but is in such a fix himself, I daren't bother him. At any rate, eleven pounds will take us to Metz, then I must rack my poor brains.

Oh Lord, I must say 'making history, ' as Garnett puts it, isn't the most comfortable thing on earth. If I know how things stood with you, I wouldn't care a damn. As it is, I eat my blessed heart out.

Till tomorrow, till tomorrow, till tomorrow (I nearly put à demain).

D. H. Lawrence P.S. *I haven't told anything to anybody. Lord, but I wonder*

how you are.

DHL.

Metz Damn the rain! I suppose you won't go out while it continues heavily. I'll venture forth in a minute - 9.15 already. I don't know where you live exactly -so if I can't find you I shall put this in number 4. That's the nearest I can get; is it right?

If I don't meet you, I suppose I shan't see you today, since this is the festive day. I don't mind. At least, I do, but I understand it can't be helped.

I shall go into the country if it'll keep a bit fine - shall be home here about 2.30, I suppose. I can work as soon as I like.

Let us go away from Metz. Tell Else I'm not cross. How should I be? You are the soul of good intention - how can one be cross with you? But I wish I had the management of our affairs.

Don't love me for things I'm not - but also don't tell me I'm mean. I wondered what had become of you this morning. Were you being wise and good and saving my health? You needn't. I'm not keen on coming to your place to lunch tomorrow - but I am in your hands - 'into thine hand, O Lord, I commend, ' etc. I want you to do as you like, over little things such as my coming to your father's house. In oddments, your will is my will.

I love you - but I always have to bite my tongue before I can say it. It's only my Englishness.

Commend me to your sister. I lodge an appeal with her. I shall say to her - it's no good saying it to you - 'Ayez pitié de moi. '

No, I'm only teasing. It doesn't matter at all what happens - or what doesn't happen, that's more to the point - these few days. But if you put up your fingers, and count your days in Germany, and compare them with the days to follow in Nottingham, then you will see, you - (I don't mean it) - are selling sovereigns at a penny each. No, you are not doing it - but it's being done.

Don't be hurt, or I shall - let me see - go into a monastery - this hotel is precious much like one already.

This is the last day I let you off - so make the most of it and be jolly.

Tuesday -

Now I can't stand it any longer, I can 't. For two hours I haven't moved a muscle -just sat and thought. I have written a letter to E... You needn't, of course, send it. But you must say to him all I have said. No more dishonour, no more lies. Let them do their - silliest - but no more subterfuge, lying, dirt, fear. I feel as if it would strangle me. What is it all but procrastination? No, I can't bear it,

because it's bad. I love you. Let us face anything, do anything, put up with anything. But this crawling under the mud I cannot bear.

I'm afraid I've got a jit of heroics. I've tried so hard to work - but I can't. This situation is round my chest like a cord. It mustn't continue. I will go right away, if you like. I will stop in Metz till you get E... 's answer to the truth. But no, I won't utter or act or willingly let you utter or act, another single lie in the business.

I'm not going to joke, I'm not going to laugh, I'm not going to make light of things for you. The situation tortures me too much. It's the situation, the situation I can't stand - no, and I won't. I love you too much.

Don't show this letter to either of your sisters - no. Let us be good. You are clean, but you dirty your feet. I'll sign myself as you call me - Mr Lawrence.

Don't be miserable - if I didn't love you I wouldn't mind when you lied.

But I love you, and Lord, I pay for it.

Hotel Rheinischer Hof, Trier 8 May 1912

I am here -I have dined - it seems rather nice. The hotel is little - the man is proprietor, waiter, bureau, and everything else, apparently - speaks English and French and German quite sweetly - has evidently been in swell restaurants abroad - has an instinct for doing things decently, with just a touch of swank - is cheap - his wife (they're a youngish couple) draws the beer-it's awfully nice. The bedroom is two marks fifty per day, including breakfast - per person. That's no more than my room at the Deutscher Hof, and this is much nicer. It's on the second floor-two beds - rather decent. Now, you ought to be here, you ought to be here. Remember, you are to be my wife - see that they don't send you any letters, or only tinder cover to me. But you aren't here yet. I shall love Trier - it isn't a ghastly medley like Metz - new town, old town, barracks, barracks, cathedral, Montigny. This is nice, old, with trees down the town. I wish you were here. The valley all along coming is full of apple trees in blossom, pink puffs like the smoke of an explosion, and then bristling vine sticks, so that the hills are angry hedgehogs.

I love you so much. No doubt there'll be another dish of tragedy in the morning, and we've only enough money to run us a fortnight, and we don't know where the next will come from, but still I'm happy, I am happy. But I wish you were here. But you'll come, and it isn't Metz. Curse Metz.

They are all men in this hotel - business men. They are the connoisseurs of comfort and moderate price. Be sure men will get the best for the money. I think it'll be nice for you. You don't mind a masculine atmosphere, I know.

I begin to feel quite a man of the world. I ought, I suppose, with this wickedness of waiting for another man's wife in my heart. Never mind, in heaven there is no marriage nor giving in marriage.

I must hurry to post - it's getting late. Come early on Saturday morning. Ask the Black Hussy at Deutscher Hof if there are any letters for me. I love you - and Else - I do more than thank her. Love.

D. H. Lawrence

Hotel Rheinischer Hof Trier - Thursday Another day nearly gone - it is just sunset. Trier is a nice town. This is a nice hotel. The man is a cocky little fellow, but good. He's lived in every country and swanks about his languages. He really speaks English nicely. He's about thirty-five, I should think. When I came in just now - it is sunset - he said, 'You are a bit tired?' It goes without saying I laughed. 'A little bit, ' he added quite gently. That amuses me. He would do what my men friends always want to do, look after me a bit in the trifling, physical matters.

I have written a newspaper article that nobody on earth will print, because it's too plain and straight. However, I don't care. And I've been a ripping walk -up a great steep hill nearly like a cliff, beyond the river. I will take you on Saturday - so nice: apple blossom everywhere, and the cuckoo, and brilliant beech trees. Beech leaves seem to rush out in spring, with éclat. You can have coffee at a nice place, and look at the town, like a handful of cinders and rubbish thrown beside the river down below. Then there are the birds always. And I went past a Madonna stuck with flowers, beyond the hilltop, among all the folds and jumble of hills: pretty as heaven. And I smoked a pensive cigarette, and philosophized about love and life and battle, and you and me. And I thought of a theme for my next novel. And I forgot the German for matches, so I had to beg a light from a young priest, in French, and he held me the red end of his cigar. There are not so many soldiers here. I should never hate Trier. There are more priests than soldiers. Of the sort I've seen - not a bit Jesuitical - I prefer them. The cathedral is crazy: a grotto, not a cathedral, inside - baroque, baroque. The town is always pleasant, and the people.

One more day, and you'll be here. Suddenly I see your chin. I love your chin. At this moment, I seem to love you, because you've got such a nice chin. Doesn't it seem ridiculous?

I must go down to supper. I am tired. It was a long walk. And then the strain of these days. I dreamed E... was frantically furiously wild with me-I won't tell you the details - and then he calmed down, and I had to comfort him. I am a

devil at dreaming. It's because I get up so late. One always dreams after seven a.m.

The day is gone. I'll talk a bit to my waiter fellow, and post this. You will come on Saturday? By Jove, if you don't! We shall always have to battle with life, so we'll never fight with each other, always help.

Bis Samstag - ich liebe dich schwer.

D. H. Lawrence

Postcard with picture of Trier, Porta Nigra Here is your Porta Nigra, that you have missed three times. I think I am quite clever. It is a weird and circuitous journey to Waldbrol - seven hours. Now I am at Niederlahnstein - Rechtsrheinisch - having just come over from Coblenz! I go on to Troisdorf - ever heard of such places! - then to Hennef - and at last Waldbrol - four changes - umsteigen - seven hours' journey. But isn't the Mosel valley pretty? The Rhein is most awfully German. It makes me laugh. It looks fearfully fit for the theatre. Address me care of Frau Karl Krenkow, Waldbrol Rheinprovinz. Anything new and nasty happened? This is my sentimental journey.

Love D. H. Lawrence

Postcard with picture of Trier, Basilica Now, I am in Hennef - my last changing place. It is 8.30 - and still an hour to wait. So I am sitting like a sad swain beside a nice, twittering little river, waiting for the twilight to drop, and my last train to come. I shan 't get to Waldbrol till after 11.00-nine hours on the way - and that is the quickest it can be done. But it's a nice place, Hennef, nearly like England. It's getting dark. Now for the first time during today, my detachment leaves me, and I know I only love you. The rest is nothing at all. And the promise of life with you is all richness. Now I know.

D. H. Lawrence

Adr. Frau Karl Krenkow Waldbrol - Rheinprovinz It's really very nice here - Hannah is very bright and so decent with me. Her husband is 'a very good man ' - uninteresting. She never loved him - married him because she was thirty and time going by. Already she's quite fond of me - but do not mind, she is perfectly honourable - the last word of respectability. Then there is 'Opar O'pa'- how do you spell it? - Stiilchen. He is seventy-three - a lovely old man - really a sweet disposition, and no fool. Now he is really lovable. It was Kermesse at one of the villages yesterday - Sunday - and we went to look. It was jolly. Onkel Stülchen

bought us a Herz - a great heart of cake, covered with sugar, and sugar grapes, and sugar roses, and a bird, a dove - and three pieces of poetry. It's rather quaint. Strange, how deep symbolism is in your soil. Herr Stulchen brought up Hannah, since she was five years old. Her father was killed - or died a while after the Franco-Prussian War. Now I am fond of him.

Here, I am so respectable, and so good - it is quite a rest. We are not dull. Hannah is really intelligent. We amuse ourselves a good deal with my German. In three months here I should know quite a lot.

It's a quiet, dead little village - miles from everywhere - rather pretty in a tame sort of way - a bit Englishy. Once they let me begin, I shall knock off quite a lot of work. There is that novel on my conscience.

I write in the morning, when one is wonderfully sane. Waldbrol is good for my health - it is cooler, more invigorating. Trier was like a perpetual Turkish bath. I like this air.

If you must go to England - must you? - go before I leave Waldbrol. Don't leave me stranded in some unearthly German town. How are you? I am not going to sound worried over you, because I am so a bit. You might write to me and tell me a few significant details. The tragedy will begin to slacken off from now, I think.

I wrote to you yesterday, but it wasn't a nice letter, so I didn't send it. Things are better, surely, and growing better - oh yes!

Waldbrol - Mittwoch I have had all your three letters quite safely. We are coming on quickly now. Do tell me if you can what is E...'s final decision. He will get the divorce, I think, because of his thinking you ought to marry me. That is the result of my letter to him. I will crow my little crow, in opposition to you. And then after six months, we will be married - will you? Soon we will go to Munich. But give us a little time. Let us get solid before we set up together. Waldbrol restores me to my decent sanity. Is Metz still bad for you - no? It will be better for me to stay here - shall I say till the end of next week? We must decide what we are going to do, very definitely. If I am to come to Munich next week, what are we going to live on? Can we scramble enough together to last us till my payments come in? I am not going to tell my people anything till you have the divorce. If we can go decently over the first three or four months - financially - I think I shall be able to keep us going for the rest. Never mind about the infant. If it should come, we will be glad, and stir ourselves to provide for it - and if it should not come, ever - I shall be sorry. I do not believe, when people love each other, in interfering there. It is wicked, according to my feeling. I want you to

have children come - I don't care how soon. I never thought I should have that definite desire. But you see, we must have a more or less stable foundation if we are going to run the risk of the responsibility of children - not the risk of children, but the risk of the responsibility.

I think after a little while, I shall write to E... again. Perhaps he would correspond better with me.

Can't you feel how certainly I love you and how certainly we shall be married? Only let us wait just a short time, to get strong again. Two shaken, rather sick people together would be a bad start. A little waiting, let us have, because I love you. Or does the waiting make you worse? - no, not when it is only a time of preparation. Do you know, like the old knight, I seem to want a certain time to prepare myself - a sort of vigil with myself. Because it is a great thing for me to marry you, not a quick, passionate coming together. I know in my heart 'here's my marriage.' It feels rather terrible - because it is a great thing in my life - it is my life - I am a bit awe-inspired - I want to get used to it. If you think it is fear and indecision, you wrong me. It is you who would hurry, who are undecided. It's the very strength and inevitability of the oncoming thing that makes me wait, to get in harmony with it. Dear God, I am marrying you, now, don't you see. It's a far greater thing than ever I knew. Give me till next week-end, at least. If you love me, you will understand.

If I seem merely frightened and reluctant to you - you must forgive me.

I try, I always try, when I write to you, to write the truth as near the mark as I can get it. It frets me, for fear you are disappointed in me, and for fear you are too much hurt. But you are strong when necessary.

You have got all myself - I don't even flirt - it would bore me very much - unless I got tipsy. It's a funny thing, to feel one's passion - sex desire - no longer a sort of wandering thing, but steady, and calm. I think, when one loves, one's very sex passion becomes calm, a steady sort of force, instead of a storm. Passion, that nearly drives one mad, is far away from real love. I am realizing things that I never thought to realize. Look at that poem I sent you - I would never write that to you. I shall love you all my life. That also is a new idea to me. But I believe it.

Auf Wiedersehen

D. H. Lawrence

Alr. Herrn Karl Krenkow Waldbröl - Rheinprovinz 14 May 1912

Yes, I got your letter later in the day - and your letter and E... 's and yours to Gamett, this morning. In E... 's, as in mine to E..., see the men combining in their freemasonry against you. It is very strange.

I will send your letter to Garnett. I enclose one of his to me. It will make you laugh.

With correcting proofs, and reading E...,'s letter, I feel rather detached. Things are coming straight. When you got in London, and had to face that judge, it would make you ill. We are not callous enough to stand against the public, the whole mass of the world's disapprobation, in a sort of criminal dock. It destroys us, though we deny it. We are all off the balance. We are like spring scales that have been knocked about. We had better be still awhile, let ourselves come to rest.

Things are working out to their final state now. I did not do wrong in writing to E... Do not write to my sister yet. When all is a fait accompli then we will tell her, because then it will be useless for her to do other than to accept.

I am very well, but, like you, I feel shaky. Shall we not leave our meeting till we are better? Here, in a little while, I shall be solid again. And if you must go to England, will you go to Munich first - so far? No, I don't want to be left alone in Munich. Let us have firm ground where we next go. Quakiness and uncertainty are the death of us. See, tell me exactly what you are going to do. Is the divorce coming off? Are you going to England at all? Are we going finally to pitch our camp in Munich? Are we going to have enough money to get along with? Have you settled anything definite with '...?'- One must be detached, impersonal, cold, and logical, when one is arranging affairs. We do not want another fleet of horrors attacking us when we are on a rather flimsy raft - lodging in a borrowed flat on borrowed money.

Look, my dear, now that the suspense is going over, we can wait even a bit religiously for one another. My next coming to you is solemn, intrinsically - I am solemn over it - not sad, oh no - but it is my marriage, after all, and a great thing - not a thing to be snatched and clumsily handled. I will not come to you unless it is safely, and firmly. When I have come, things shall not put us apart again. So we must wait and watch for the hour. Henceforth, dignity in our movements and our arrangements - no shufflings and underhandedness. And we must settle the money business. I will write to the publishers, if necessary, for a sub. I have got about £30 due in August - £24 due - and £25 more I am owed. Can we wait, or not, for that?

Now I shall do as I like, because you are not certain. Even if I stay in Waldbrol a month, I won't come till our affair is welded firm. I " can wait a month - a year almost - for a sure thing. But an unsure thing is a horror to me.

I love you - and I am in earnest about it - and we are going to make a great - or, at least, a good life together. I'm not going to risk fret and harassment, which would spoil our intimacy, because of hasty forcing of affairs.

Don't think I love you less, in being like this. You will think so, but it isn't true. The best man in me loves you. And I dread anything dragging our love down.

Be definite, my dear, be detailed, be business-like. In our marriage, let us be business-like. The love is there - then let the common-sense match it.

Auf Wiedersehen D. H. Lawrence

This poetry will come in next month's English. I'm afraid you won't like it.

DHL.

And I love you, and I am sorry it is so hard. But it is only a little while - then we will have a dead cert.

Waldbrol - Thursday

I have worked quite hard at my novel today. This morning we went to see the Ascension Day procession, and it rained like hell on the poor devils. Yesterday, when we were driving home, luckily in a closed carriage, the hail came on in immense stones, as big as walnuts, the largest. The place seemed covered with lumps of sugar.

You are far more ill than I am, now. Can 'tyou begin to get well? It makes me miserable to think of you so badly off the hooks. No, I am well here. I am always well. But last week made me feel queer - in my soul mostly - and I want to get that well before I start the new enterprise of living with you. Does it seem strange to you? Give me till tomorrow or Saturday week, will you? I think it is better for us both. Till the twenty-fourth or twenty-fifth, give me. Does it seem unloving and unnatural to you? No? See, when the airman fell, I was only a weak spot in your soul. Round the thought of me-all your fear. Don't let it be so. Believe in me enough.

Perhaps it is a bit of the monk in me. No, it is not. It is simply a desire to start with you, having a strong, healthy soul. The letters seem a long time getting from me to you. Tell me you understand, and you think it is-at least perhaps, best. A good deal depends on the start. You never got over your bad beginning with E...

If you want H..., or anybody, have him. But I don't want anybody, till I see you. But all natures aren't alike. But I don't believe even you are your best, when you are using H... as a dose of morphia - he's not much else to you. But sometimes one needs a dose of morphia, I've had many a one. So you know best. Only, my dear, because I love you, don't be sick, do will to be well and sane.

This is also a long wait. I also am a carcass without you. But having a rather sick soul, I'll let it get up and be stronger before I ask it to run and live with you again.

Because, I'm not coming to you now for rest, but to start living. It's a

marriage, not a meeting. What an inevitable thing it seems.

Only inevitable things - things that feel inevitable - are right. I am still a trifle afraid, but I know we are right. One is afraid to be born, I'm sure.

I have written and written and written. I shall be glad to know you understand. I wonder if you'll be ill. Don't, if you can help it. But if you need me - Frieda!

Vale!

D.H. LAWRENCE

Waldbrol - Friday That was the letter I expected - and I hated it. Never mind. I suppose I deserve it all. I shall register it up, the number of times I leave you in the lurch: that is a historical phrase also. This is the first time. 'Rats' is a bit hard, as a collective name for all your men - and you 're the ship. Poor H..., poor devil! Vous le croquez bien entre les dents. I don't wonder E... hates your letters - they would drive any man on earth mad. I have not the faintest intention of dying: I hope you haven't any longer. I am not a tyrant. If I am, you will always have your own way. So my domain of tyranny isn't wide. - I am trying to think of some other mildly sarcastic things to say. Oh - the voice of Hannah, my dear, is the voice of a woman who laughs at her newly married husband when he's a bit tipsy and a big fool. You fling H... in my teeth. I shall say Hannah is getting fonder andfonder of me. She gives me the best in the house. So there!

I think I've exhausted my shell and shrapnel. You are getting better, thank the Lord. I am quite better. We have both, I think, marvellous recuperative powers.

You really seriously and honestly think I could come to Munich next Saturday, and stay two months, till August? You think we could manage it all right, as far as the business side goes? I begin to feel like rising once more on the wing. Ich komm - je viens - I come - advenio.

We are going to be married, respectable people, later on. If you were my property, I should have to look after you, which God forbid.

I like the way you stick to your guns. It's rather splendid. We won't fight, because you'd win, from sheer lack of sense of danger.

I think you're rather horrid to H... You make him more babified-baby-fied. Or shall you leave him more manly?

You make me think of Maupassant's story. An Italian workman, a young man, was crossing in the train to France, and had no money, and had eaten nothing for a long time. There came a woman with breasts full of milk - she was going into France as a wet nurse. Her breasts full of milk hurt her - the young man was in a bad way with hunger. They relieved each other and went their several ways. Only where is H...to get his next feed? - Am I horrid?

Write to me quick from Munich, and I will tell them here. I can return here in August.

' Be well, and happy, I charge you (tyranny)

I found these letters by accident in my mother's writing desk after Lawrence's death. At the time he wrote them, I was in such a bewildered state of mind, the depth of their feeling did not touch me, all I wanted was to be with him and have peace. I have not found my letters to him.

Isartal

Last night I looked into the flames that leap in the big adobe fireplace that Lawrence built with the Indians, here at the ranch, in my room. He found an iron hoop to make the large curve of the fireplace. I don't know how he did it but the chimney draws well, the big logs burn fast. Those leaping flames seemed he himself flickering in the night. This morning I found the wild red columbines that I had first found with him. There they were at my feet, in the hollow where the workmen have been cutting the logs for the new house. A delicate blaze of startling red and yellow, in front of me, the columbines, like gay small flags.

A rabbit stood still behind an oak shrub and watched me. A humming-bird hummed at me in consternation, as startled at me as I was at him. These things are Lawrence to me.

I shrink from remembering and putting down that almost too great intensity of our life together. I resent committing to paper for others to read what was so magic and new, our first being together. I wanted to keep it secret, all to myself, secretly I wanted to exult in the riches he gave me of himself and me and all the world.

But I owe it to him and myself to write the truth as well as I can. I laugh at the claims of others that he might have loved them and that he didn't care for me at all. He cared only too much. I laugh when they write of him as a lonely genius dying alone. It is all my eye. The absolute, simple truth is so very simple.

I laugh when they want to make him out a brutal, ridiculous figure, he who was so tender and generous and fierce.

What does it amount to that he hit out at me in a rage, when I exasperated him, or mostly when the life around him drove him to the end of his patience? I didn't care very much. I hit back or waited till the storm in him subsided. We fought our battles outright to the bitter end. Then there was peace, such peace.

I preferred it that way. Battles must be. If he had sulked or borne me a grudge, how tedious!

What happened, happened out of the deep necessity of our natures. We were out for more than the obvious or 'a little grey home in the West.' Let them jeer at him, those superior people, it will not take away a scrap of his greatness or his genuineness or his love. To understand what happened between us, one must

have had the experiences we had, thrown away as much as we did and gained as much, and have known this fulfilment of body and soul. It is not likely that many did.

But here I am far from the little top floor in the Bavarian peasant-house in the Isartal.

Lawrence had met me in Munich.

He had given up the idea of a lectureship at a German University and from now on he lived by his writing. A new phase of life was beginning for both of us. But on me lay still heavily the children I had left behind and could not forget. But we were together, Lawrence and I. A friend had lent us the little top flat with its balcony, three rooms and a little kitchen. The Alps floated above us in palest blue in the early morning. The Isar rushed its glacier waters and hurried the rafts along in the valley below. The great beechwoods stretched for hours behind us, to the Tegernsee.

Here we began our life together. And what a life! We had very little money, about fifteen shillings a week. We lived on black bread that Lawrence loved, fresh eggs, and 'ripple'; later we found strawberries, raspberries, and 'Heidelbeeren.'

We had lost all ordinary sense of time and place. Those flowers that came new to Lawrence, the fireflies at night and the glow-worms, the first beech leaves spreading on the trees like a delicate veil overhead, and our feet buried in last year's brown beech leaves, these were our time and our events.

When Lawrence first found a gentian, a big single blue one, I remember feeling as if he had a strange communion with it, as if the gentian yielded up its blueness, its very essence, to him. Everything he met had the newness of a creation just that moment come into being.

I didn't want people, I didn't want anything, I only wanted to revel in this new world Lawrence had given me. I had found what I needed, I could now flourish like a trout in a stream or a daisy in the sun. His generosity in giving himself: 'Take all you want of me, everything, I am yours'; and I took and gave equally, without thought.

When I asked him: 'What do I give you, that you didn't get from others?' he answered: 'You make me sure of myself, whole.'

And he would say: 'You are so young, so young!' When I remonstrated: 'But I am older than you.' - 'Ah, it isn't years, it's something else. You don't understand.'

Anyhow I knew he loved the essence of me as he loved the blueness of the gentians, whatever faults I had. It was life to me.

'You have a genius for living,' he told me.

'Maybe, but you brought it out in me.'

But there were awful nights when he was still ill and feverish and delirious and I was frightened. Death seemed close. But the shadow of sickness soon vanished in the healthy, happy life we lived. He became strong, and full of energy and hope.

He would do nearly all the work of the small flat, bring the breakfast to me with a bunch of flowers that Frau Leitner had left on the milk jug in the early morning.

Frau Leitner had a shop underneath, with shoestrings and sweets, and bacon and brooms and everything under the sun. She gave Lawrence, whom she called 'Herr Doktor,' tastes of her 'Heidelbeerschnapps,' talking to him in her Bavarian dialect, while I, in a dream of wellbeing, would let time slip by. When I spilt coffee on the pillow I would only turn the pillow over. Nothing mattered except feeling myself live, and him. We talked and argued about everything. Vividly he would present to me all the people he had known in his youth, Walker Street with all its inhabitants, the close intimate life of what, for a better word, I called the common people; his mother, such a queen in her little house, and his father, down at the pit, sharing his lunch with the pit-pony. It all seemed romantic to me. And the colliers being drunk on Friday nights and battles going on inevitably, it seemed, every Friday night in nearly all the houses, like a weekly hysteria. I listened enchanted by the hour. But poverty in his home was grievous. Lawrence would never have been so desperately ill if his mother could have given him all the care he needed and the food she could not afford to buy for him with the little money she had.

Bitter it was to him, when a friend at the high school who took him home to tea, refused to continue the friendship as soon as he heard Lawrence was a miner's son. Then I would tell him about my early life in Lorraine. Mine had been a happy childhood. We had a lovely house and gardens outside Metz. I lived through the flowers, as they came: snowdrops, scyllae and crocuses, the enormous oriental poppies in their vivid green leaves so overwhelmingly near one's small face, the delicate male irises. My father would pick the first asparagus and I would trot behind his bent back. Later in the summer I lived on the fruit trees: cherry, pear, apple, plum, peach trees. I would even go to sleep on them and fall off, sometimes, trying to do my lessons up in them. I did not like school.

First I went to a convent, where I did not learn very much. 'Toujours doucement, ma petite Frieda,' they would say to me as I came dashing into class with my Hessian boots. But it was no use; I was a wild child and they could not tame me, those gentle nuns. I was happiest with the soldiers, who had temporary

barracks outside our house for years. They invited my sister Johanna and me to their big Christmas tree hung with sausages, cigars, 'hearts of gingerbread,' packages from home, and little dolls they had carved for us. And they sang for us accompanied by their mournful harmonicas:

'Wenn ich zu meinem Kinde geh.'

Once my father's old regiment acted the occasion on which he had received his iron cross in the Franco-Prussian War. It was on the Kaiser's birthday. After the ceremony the soldiers lifted my father on their shoulders and carried him through the hall. My heart beat to bursting: 'What a hero my father is!'

But a few days after one of my special friends, a corporal, told me how he hated being a soldier, how bullied you were, how unjust and stupid it all was, that military life. He stood there talking to me in the garden path, in his bright blue uniform, while he tied some roses. He had a mark over his bed for each day he had still to serve, he told me. A hundred and nineteen more there were, he said. I looked up at him and understood his suffering. After that the flags of the dragoons and the splendid bands of the regiments had no longer the same glamour as they passed along the end of the garden to the Exerzierplatz. n.i.b.t.y.-c When the regiments were filing past, Johanna and I sat on the garden wall, very grandly. Then we would throw pears and apples into the ranks. Great confusion would arise. An irate major turned toward his men and yelled, we popped quickly out of sight behind the wall, only to reappear and begin anew.

What I loved most of all was playing with my boy friends in the fortifications around Metz, among the huts and trenches the soldiers had built. I always liked being with the boys and men. Only they gave me the kind of interest I wanted. Women and girls frightened me. My adolescence and youth puzzled me. Pleasure and social stuff left me unsatisfied. There was something more I wanted, I wanted so much. Where would I get it, and from whom? With Lawrence I found what I wanted. All the exuberance of my childhood came back to me.

One day I bathed in the Isar and a heel came off one of my shoes on the rough shore; so I took both shoes off and threw them into the Isar. Lawrence looked at me in amazement. 'He's shocked, as I must walk home barefoot, but it's a lonely road, it doesn't matter,' I thought. But it wasn't that; he was shocked at my wastefulness.

He lectured me: 'A pair of shoes takes a long time to make and you should respect the labour somebody's put into those shoes.'

To which I answered: 'Things are there for me and not I for them, so when they are a nuisance I throw them away.'

I was very untidy and careless, so he took great pains to make me more

orderly. 'Look, put your woollen things in this drawer, in this one your silk clothes, and here your cotton ones.'

It sounded amusing, so I did it.

When I said: 'But I like to be like the lilies in the field, who do not spin.'

'What! Don't they just work hard, those lilies,' was his reply. 'They have to bring up their sap, produce their leaves, flowers and seeds!' That was that. Later on he aroused my self-respect. 'You can't even make a decent cup of coffee. Any common woman can do lots of things that you can't do.'

'Oh,' I thought, 'I'll show him if I can't.' But that was later on.

One day, in Munich, seeing all the elegant people in the streets I had an aristocratic fit. I bought some handkerchiefs with an *F* and a little crown on them. When I brought them home he said: 'Now I'll draw *my* coat-of-arms.' He drew a pickaxe, a school-board, a fountain pen with two lions rampant. 'When they make me a Lord, which they never will,' he said. Then, half jokingly, but I took it seriously: 'Would you like me to become King of England?' I was distressed. 'Isn't he satisfied, the whole universe is ours, does he want to be so dull a thing as a king?' But I never doubted that he might have been a king if he wanted to. Then he would write poems for me, poems I took a little anxiously, seeing he knew me so well.

He would go for walks by himself, and his quick, light feet coming home told me in their footfall how he had enjoyed his adventure.

He would have a large, heroic bunch of flowers, or a tight little posy for me or a bright bird's feather.

Then the story of his adventure, a deer peeping at him inquisitively from the underbrush, a handsome Bavarian peasant he had spoken to, how raspberries were just coming out, soldiers marching along the road.

Then again we would be thrown out of our paradisaical state. Letters would come. The harm we had done; my grief for my children would return red hot.

But Lawrence would console me and say: 'Don't be sad, I'll make a new heaven and earth for them, don't cry, you see if I don't.' I would be consoled yet he was furious when I went on. 'You don't care a damn about those brats really, and they don't care about you.' I cried and we quarrelled.

'What kind of an unnatural woman would I be if I could forget my children?' Yet my agony over them was my worst crime in his eyes. He seemed to make that agony more acute in me than it need have been. Perhaps he, who had loved his mother so much, felt, somewhere, it was almost impossible for a mother to leave her children. But I was so sure: 'This bond is for ever, nothing in heaven or earth can break it. I must wait, I must wait!'

My father had written: 'You travel about the world like a barmaid.' It was a

grief to him, who loved me, that I was so poor, and socially impossible.

I only felt wonderfully free, 'vogelfrei' indeed. To Lawrence fell the brunt of the fight, and he protected me. 'You don't know how I stand between you and the world,' he said, later on. If I supported him with all my might, the wings of his sure spirit made a shelter for me always.

Now I lie writing by the stream, where it makes a little pool. The bushes all around form an enclosed shelter for bathing, while in front stretches the alfalfa field, then the trees, then the desert, so vast and changing with sun and shadow. Curtains of rain, floating clouds, grey, delicate, thin but to the west today white, large, round, billowing.

It is the end of June. I wonder if the strawberries are ripe, in the hollow by the aqueduct, or if the wild roses are out, the very pink ones, along the stream by the Gallina. Shall I see a wild turkey, if I walk along the path Lawrence took so often, I running behind, to the mouth of the Gallina?

He and Mr Murry laid the big pipes on pillars of wood to bring the water along. Where tall aspens stand and the Gallina waters come tearing down. Often the pipes had to be fixed, after a cloudburst had broken the whole thing down.

Here at the ranch we are alive and busy, but Lawrence will see it no more.

Last night the coyotes have torn to pieces a young sheep, on the ranch. Poor thing, that looked at me with scared sheep's eyes, when I drew near. How hateful coyotes are. Mr Murry tells me they even play with lambs, whisking their tails among them, to get them away more easily. Nature sweet and pure!

This is one of the perfect moments here. The days are swinging their serene hours across the immense skies, the sun sets splendidly, then a star comes, and the young moon in the old moon's arms. The water sings louder than in the daytime. More and more stars come as the light fades out of the western sky.

But then, in the silence of the beautiful night, the coyotes, a few yards from the house, tore the lamb to pieces. How I wish someone would shoot them all, but they are hard to shoot.

Here I am in the present again, when I want to write of the past. I will go back to Icking, our village in the Isartal, and that young Lawrence who was beginning to spread his wings.

I think of my going into a chapel, in a village near Beuerberg. I looked at the Madonna on the altar; she wasn't a *mater dolorosa*, nor of the spiritual sort, she was of the placid peasant type, and I said to her: 'Yes, you have a halo round your head, but I feel as if I had a halo around the whole of me, that's how *he* makes me feel. You have nothing but a dead son. It doesn't seem good enough

for me. Give me a live man.'

Sitting on a little landing pier, once, by the Kochelsee, dangling our feet in the clear water of the lake, Lawrence was putting the rings of my fingers on my toes to see how they looked in the clear water. Suddenly a shower overtook us. There was a bunch of trees behind, and a road going in both directions. We ran for shelter and must have run in opposite ways. I looked all around but Lawrence was not there. A great fear came over me, I had lost him, perhaps he was drowned, slipped into the lake. I called, I went to look, somehow he had dissolved into the air, I should never see him again. There was always this 'not of the earth' quality about him.

By the time I saw him coming down the road, an hour later, I was almost in hysterics. 'Brother Moonshine' I called him, as in the German fairytale. He didn't like that.

Then he would sit in a corner, so quietly and absorbedly, to write. The words seemed to pour out of his hand onto the paper, unconsciously, naturally and without effort, as flowers bloom and birds fly past.

His was a strange concentration, he seemed transferred into another world, the world of creation.

He'd have quick changes of mood and thought. This puzzled me. 'But Lawrence, last week you said exactly the opposite of what you are saying now.'

'And why shouldn't I? Last week I felt like that, now like this. Why shouldn't I?'

We talked about style in writing, about the new style Americans had evolved - cinematographic, he called it.

All this idea of style and form puzzled Lawrence.

For my part, I felt certain that a genuine creation would take its own form inevitably, the way every living thing does.

All those phrases 'Art for art's sake,' 'Le style c'est l'homme,' are all very well but they aren't creation. But Lawrence had to be quite sure in everything.

On some evenings he would be so gay and act a whole revival meeting for me, as in the chapel of his home town.

There was the revivalist parson. He would work his congregation up to a frenzy; then, licking his finger to turn the imaginary pages of the book of Judgment and suddenly darting a finger at some sinner in the congregation: 'Is *your* name written in the book?' he would shout.

A collier's wife in a little sailor straw hat, in a frenzy of repentance, would clatter down the aisle, throw herself on her knees in front of the altar, and pray: 'Oh Lord, our Henry, he would 'ave come too, only he dursn't, O Lord, so I come as well for him, O Lord!' It was a marvellous scene! First as the parson then as

the collier's wife Lawrence made me shake with laughter. He told me how desperately ill he had been at sixteen, with inflammation of the lungs, how he was almost dead but fought his way back to life with the fierce courage and vitality that was his. It made me long to make him strong and healthy.

Healthy in soul he always was. He may have been cross and irritable sometimes but he was never sorry for himself and all he suffered.

This poem was written in the Isartal:

SONG OF A MAN WHO IS LOVED

Between her breasts is my home, between her breasts.
Three sides set on me space and fear, but the fourth side rests,
Warm in a city of strength, between her breasts.

All day long I am busy and happy at my work
I need not glance over my shoulder in fear of the terrors that lurk
Behind. I am fortified, I am glad at my work.

I need not look after my soul; beguile my fear
With prayer, I need only come home each night to find the dear
Door on the latch, and shut myself in, shut out fear.

I need only come home each night and lay
My face between her breasts;
And what of good I have given the day, my peace attests.

And what I have failed in, what I have wronged
Comes up unnamed from her body and surely
Silent tongued I am ashamed.

And I hope to spend eternity
With my face down-buried between her breasts
And my still heart full of security
And my still hands full of her breasts.

Walking to Italy

It is five o'clock in the morning. The air is fresh after last night's heavy rain. There is a slight mist, but the sun from the desert is driving it away.

Suddenly it comes over me so strongly that Lawrence is dead, really dead. The grief for his loss will be my steady companion for the rest of my life. Sometimes it will be a friend, consoling me, putting everything in proper proportion. And sometimes this grief will follow me, dogging my footsteps like a hyena, not wanting me to live. Never will anything matter so desperately any more.

I remember Lawrence saying to me: 'You always identify yourself with life, why do you?'

I answered: 'Because I feel like it.'

I know now how completely he trusted his life to me, he in whom death was always so near.

I hated that death and I fought against it like a demon, unconsciously on my own. I did not know he was consumptive till years later when the doctor in Mexico told me. All my life with him there was this secret fear that I could not share with him. I had to bear it alone. Then in the end I knew, and it was an awful knowledge, that I could do no more. Death was stronger than I. His life hung by a thread and one day that thread would break. He would die before his time.

This true mountain morning takes me back to our journey across the Alps.

It was in the middle of August that we set out gaily. Neither of us knew Italy at the time, it was a great adventure for both. We packed up our few possessions, three trunks went ahead of us to the Lago di Garda. We set off on foot, with a rucksack each and a Burberry. In the rucksack was a little spirit lamp, we were going to cook our food by the roadside for cheapness.

We started on a misty morning very thrilled. The trees were dripping along the road, but we were happy in our adventure, free, going to unknown parts. We walked along the solid green of the valley of the Isar, we climbed up hills and went down again. One of my desires, to sleep in haylofts, was fulfilled. But sleeping in haylofts is uncomfortable, really. It rained so much and we were soaked. And the wind blows through haylofts and if you cover yourself with a ton of hay you still can't get warm. Lawrence has described the crucifixes we

passed, the lovely chapel he found high up in the mountains. He lit the candles on the altar, for it was evening, read all the ex-votos and forgot how tired and hungry he was.

Here are some poems he wrote about this time:

ALL OF ROSES

I

By the Isar, in the twilight
We were wandering and singing:
By the Isar, in the evening
We climbed the huntsman's ladder and sat swinging
In the fir-tree overlooking the marshes;
While river met river, and the ringing
Of their pale-green glacier-water filled the evening.

By the Isar, in the twilight
We found our warm wild roses
Hanging red at the river; and simmering
Frogs were singing, and over the river closes
Was scent of roses, and glimmering
In the twilight, our kisses across the roses
Met, and her face, and my face, were roses.

II

When she rises in the morning
I linger to watch her.
She stands in silhouette against the window
And the sunbeams catch her
Glistening white on the shoulders:

While down her sides, the mellow
Golden shadow glows, and her breasts
Swing like full-blown yellow
Gloire de Dijon roses.

She drips herself with water
And her shoulders
Glisten as silver, they crumple up
Like wet and shaken roses, and I listen
For the rustling of their white, unfolding petals.
In the window full of sunlight
She stirs her golden shadow
And flashes all herself as sunbright
As if roses fought with roses.

III

Just a few of the roses we gathered from the Isar
Are fallen, and their mauve-red petals on the cloth
Float like boats on a river, waiting
For a fairy-wind to wake them from their sloth.

She laughs at me across the table, saying
She loves me, and I blow a little boat
Rocking down the shoals between the tea-cups
And so kiss-beladen that it scarce can float.

IV

Slow like a rose comes tip-toe out of bud I see the woman's soul steal in her
eyes,
And wide in ecstasy I sit and watch
The unknown flower issued magic-wise.

And day by day out of the envious bud
My treasure softly slips uncurled,
And day by day my happiness vibrates
In wide and wider circles round the world.

Lawrence's birthday came as we were crossing the Alps. I had no present to give him but some edelweiss. That evening we danced and drank beer with the peasants in the Gasthaus of the village we were passing through. His first birthday together. It was all very wonderful. New things happened all the time.

Here is a poem Lawrence wrote:

MEETING AMONG THE MOUNTAINS

The little pansies by the road have turned
Away their purple faces and their gold;
And evening has taken all the bees from the wild thyme
And all the scent is shed away by the cold.

Against the hard pale-blue evening sky
The mountains' new-dropped summer snow is clear
Glistening in steadfast stillness - clear
Like clean pain sending on us a chill down here.

Christ on the cross, his beautiful young man's body
Has fallen forward on the nails, and hangs
White and loose at last, with all his pain
Drawn on his mouth, eyes broken in the final pangs.

And slowly down the mountain road, a belated
Bullock waggon comes: Lo I am ashamed
To gaze any more at the Christ, whom the mountain snows
Whitely confront, my heart shrinks back, inflamed.

The breath of the bullock steams on the hard chill air;
The band across its brow, it scarcely seems
To draw the load, so slow and dull it moves
While the driver sits on the left-hand shaft and dreams.

Surely among your sunbrowned hand, some face, something
That vexes me with memory! He sits so still
Here among all this silence, crouching forward
Dreaming and letting the bullock take its will.

I stand on the grass to let them go,
And, Christ, again have I met his eyes, again
The brown eyes black with misery and hate, that look
Full into mine, and the torment starts again.

One moment the hate leaps at me standing there,
One moment I see the stillness of agony
Something frozen in silence, that dare not be
Loosed; one moment the darkness frightens me.

Then among the averted pansies, below the high
White peaks of snow, at the foot of the sunken Christ,
I stood in a chill of anguish trying to say
The joy I bought was not too highly priced.

But he was gone, motionless, hating me,
Enduring as the mountains do, because they are strong
But a pale dead Christ on the crucifix of his heart
And breathing the frozen memory of his wrong.

Still in his nostrils the frozen breath of despair,
And in his heart the half-numbed agony;
In his clenched fist the shame and in
His belly the smouldering hate of me.

And I, as I stand in the cold averted flowers,
Feel the shame that clenches his fists like nails through my own,
Feel the despair on his brow like a crown of thorns
And his frozen anguish turning my heart to stone.

Tuxtal

How I want to recapture the gaiety of that adventurous walk into Italy, romantic Italy, with all its glamour and sunshine.

We arrived at Trento, but alas for the glamour! We could only afford a very cheap hotel and the marks on the walls, the doubtful sheets, and worst of all the W.C.s were too much for me.

The people were strangers, I could not speak Italian, then.

So, one morning, much to Lawrence's dismay, he found me sitting on a bench under the statue of Dante, weeping bitterly. He had seen me walk barefoot over icy stubble-, laughing at wet and hunger and cold; it had all seemed only fun to me, and here I was crying because of the city-uncleanness and the W.C.s. It had taken us about six weeks to get there.

We took the train to Riva on the Lago di Garda. It was an Austrian garrison town at that time. Elegant officers in biscuit-coloured trousers and pale-blue jackets walked about with equally elegant ladies. For the first time I looked at Lawrence and myself; two tramps with rucksacks! Lawrence's trousers were frayed, Miriam's trousers we called them, for he had bought them with 'Miriam.' I had a reddish cotton crêpe dress all uneven waves at the skirt; the colour of the red velvet ribbon had run into my panama hat. I was grateful to the three ladies who took us into their pensione and, instead of fearing the worst for their silver, sent us yellow and blue figs and grapes to our room, where we cooked our meals on the spirit lamp for economy, in fear and trembling of the housemaid. Then we got our trunks.

My sister Johanna had sent me lovely clothes and hats, some 'Paquins,' much too elegant for our circumstances; but we dressed up proudly and set forth in triumph.

At Gargnano we found Villa Igea to spend the winter.

Lawrence for the first time had a place of his own. The first floor of a large villa, our windows looking over the lake, the road running underneath, opposite us the Monte Baldo in rosy sunsets. 'Green star Sirius dribbling over the lake,' as Lawrence says in one of his poems.

Here began my first attempt at housekeeping. It was uphill work, in that big bare kitchen with the 'fornelli' and the big copper pans. Often the stews and 'fritti' had to be rescued, and he would come nobly from his work, never grumbling, when I called: 'Lorenzo, the pigeons are burning, what shall I do?'

The first time I washed sheets was a disaster. They were so large and wet, their wetness was overwhelming. The kitchen floor was flooded, the table drenched, I dripped from hair to feet.

When Lawrence found me all misery he called: 'The One and Only' (which name stood for the one and only phoenix, when I was uppish) 'is drowning, oh,

dear!' I was rescued and dried, the kitchen wiped and soon the sheets were hanging to dry in the garden where the 'cachi' were hanging red from the trees. One morning he brought me breakfast in bed and in the Italian bedroom there was a spittoon and to my horror a scorpion was on it. To Lawrence's surprise I said, when he killed it: 'Birds of a feather flock together.'

'Ungrateful woman... here I am the faithful knight killing the dragons and that's all I get.'

One of the favourite walks was to Bogliacco, the next village on the Garda, where we drank wine and ate chestnuts with the Bersaglieri who seemed quiet and sad and didn't say much. My window high up over the road was a joy to me. Bersaglieri came past in their running march with a gay spark of a tenente at their head, singing: 'Tripoli sara' Italiana.' Secretly people did their bargaining under my windows, at night the youths played their guitars; when I peeped Lawrence was cross.

He was then rewriting his 'Sons and Lovers,' the first book he wrote with me, and I lived and suffered that book, and wrote bits of it when he would ask me: 'What do you think my mother felt like then?' I had to go deeply into the character of Miriam and all the others; when he wrote his mother's death he was ill and his grief made me ill too, and he said: 'If my mother had lived I could never have loved you, she wouldn't have let me go.' But I think he got over it; only, this fierce and overpowerful love had harmed the boy who was not strong enough to bear it. In after years he said: 'I would write a different "Sons and Lovers" now; my mother was wrong, and I thought she was absolutely right.'

I think a man is born twice; first his mother bears him, then he has to be reborn from the woman he loves. Once, sitting on the little steamer on the lake he said: 'Look, that little woman is like my mother.' His mother, though dead, seemed so alive and *there* still to him.

Towards the end of 'Sons and Lovers' I got fed up and turned against all this 'house of Atreus' feeling, and I wrote a skit called: 'Paul Morel, or His Mother's Darling.' He read it and said, coldly: 'This kind of thing isn't called a skit.'

While we were at Villa Igea Lawrence wrote also 'Twilight in Italy,' and most of the poems from 'Look! We Have Come Through!'

His courage in facing the dark recesses of his own soul impressed me always, scared me sometimes.

In his heart of hearts I think he always dreaded women, felt that they were in the end more powerful than men. Woman is so absolute and undeniable. Man moves, his spirit flies here and there, but you can't go beyond a woman. From her man is born and to her he returns for his ultimate need of body and soul. She is like earth and death to which all return.

Here is a poem:

THE MOTHER OF SONS

This is the last of all, then, this is the last!
I must fold my hands, and turn my face to the fire,
And watch my dead days fusing into dross,
Shape after shape, and scene after scene, from the past
Sinking to one dead mass in the dying fire
Leaving the grey ash cold and heavy with loss.

Strange he is to me, my son, whom I waited like a lover;
Strange as the captive held in a foreign country, haunting
The shore and gazing out on the level sea;
White, and gaunt, with wistful eyes that hover
Always upon the distance, as his soul was chaunting
The dreary weird of departure from me.

Like a young bird blown from out of the frozen seas,
Like a bird from the far north blown with a broken wing
Into our sooty garden, he drags and beats
From place to place perpetually, and seeks release
From me, and the hound of my love that creeps up fawning
For his mastership, while he in displeasure retreats.

I must look away from him, for my fading eyes
Like a cringing dog at his heels offend him now,
Like a toothless hound pursuing him with my eyes,
Till he chafes at my cringing persistence, and a sharp spark flies
Into my soul from the sudden fall of his brow
And he bites his lip in pain as he hears my sighs.

This is the last - it will not be any more -

All my life I have borne the burden of myself,
All the long years of sitting in my husband's house,
And never have I said to myself, as he closed the door:

'Now I am caught. - You are hopelessly lost, O self,

You are frightened with joy, my heart, like a frightened mouse.'

Three times have I offered my soul - three times rejected
It will not be any more - no more, my son, my son!

Never to know the glad freedom of obedience, since long ago
The angel of childhood kissed me and went. - I expected
A man would take me, and now, my son, oh my son
I must sit awhile and wait and never know
A bridegroom, till 'twixt me and the bright sun

Death, in whose service is nothing of gladness, takes me. —

For the lips and the eyes of God are behind a veil,
And the thought of the lipless voice of the Father shakes
With fear and fills my eyes with tears of desire,
But the voice of my life is dumb and of no avail,
And the hands in my lap grow cold as the night draws nigher.

And always again the mail and tragedy. I was so sure I would be able to be with my children but finally my husband wrote: 'If you don't come home the children have no longer any mother, you shall not see them again.' I was almost beside myself with grief. But Lawrence held me, I could not leave him any more, he needed me more than they did.

But I was like a cat without her kittens, and always in my mind was the care, 'Now if they came where would I put them to sleep?' I felt the separation physically as if something tore at my navel-string. And Lawrence could not bear it, it was too much for him. And then again I would turn to him and be healed and forget for a while.

Everybody seemed to condemn us and be against us and I couldn't for the life of me understand how the whole world couldn't see how right and wonderful it was to live as we did; I just couldn't. I said: 'Lorenzo, why can't people live as happily and get as much out of life as we do? Everybody could, with the little money we spend.' And he answered: 'You forget that I'm a genius,' half in fun and half seriously.

I wasn't impressed by the genius at that time, making a long nose at him, taking everything like the wind and the rain, but now I know that the glamour of it all was his genius.

He was always absolutely sure of himself, sure that the Lord was with him.

Once we had a big storm on our way to Australia and I said, afraid: 'Now, if this ship goes down ' He answered: 'The ship that I am on won't go down.'

Here follow some letters he wrote to my sister Else:

Villa Igea Villa di Gargnano Lago di Garda 14 Dec. 1912

Dear Else:

I was not cross with your letter. I think you want to do the best for Frieda. I do also. But I think you ask us to throw away a real apple for a gilt one. Nowadays it costs more courage to assert one's desire and need, than it does to renounce. If Frieda and the children could live happily together, I should say 'Go' because the happiness of two out of three is sufficient. But if she would only be sacrificing her life, I would not let her go if I could keep her. Because if she brings to the children a sacrifice, that is a curse to them. If I had a prayer, I think it would be 'Lord, let no one ever sacrifice living stuff to me - because I am burdened enough. '

Whatever the children may miss now, they will preserve their inner liberty, and their independent pride will be strong when they come of age. But if Frieda gave all up to go and live with them, that would sap their strength because they would have to support her life when they grew up. They would not be free to live of themselves - they would first have to live for her, to pay back. It is like somebody giving a present that was never asked for, and putting the recipient under the obligation of making restitution, often more than he could afford.

So we must go on, and never let go the children, but will, will and will to have them and have what we think good. That's all one can do. You say 'Lawrence kommt mir vor wie ein Held' - I hope he may 'gehen dir aus' similarly. He doesn't feel at all heroic, but only in the devil of a mess.

Don't mind how I write, will you?

Yours sincerely, D. H. Lawrence

Villa Igea Villa di Gargnano Lago di Garda (Brescia) 10 Feb. 1913

Dear Else:

You don't expect me to stay here, gaping like a fish out of water, while Frieda goes careering and carousing off to Miinchen, do you? Je vous en veux.

About the article - Frieda is a nameless duffer at telling anything - the English Review - a shilling monthly, supposed to be advanced and clever - asked me to write an article on modern German poetry - about three thousand words. It is the modem, new stuff they want to hear about - say that which is published in the last ten years-such people as Dehmel, and Liliencron, Stefan George, Ricarda

Huch, Eisa Laska Schule. Haven't you got a strong opinion about modern German poetry - pottery, as father calls it? Well, do write about what you think - say Dehmel is ranty and tawdry, if you like, but don't be too classical. If you like, the English Review will listen with great respect to dithyrambs on beautiful printing and fine form in book issuing.

It will adore tendency, and influences. And for heaven's sake, put in plenty of little poems or verses as examples. - It would be rather a cute idea to write about: 'The Woman-Poets of the Germany of Today' or 'The Woman-Poets of Germany Today.'

It would fetch the English Review readers like pigeons to salt. And surely Die Frau has got articles on the subject. I should love doing it myself if I knew enough about it. (Nicht wahr-I have reviewed, in England, two anthologies of modern German Poetry.)

Do write about the women - their aims and ideals - and a bit about them personally, any you know and how they'd rather paint Pictures than nurse children, because any motherly body can do the fatter, while it needs a fine and wonderful woman to speak a message.

Didn't somebody tell you that? Did she have red hair? Put it all in.

'The Woman-Poets of Germany Today,' it sounds lovely. Do write it in German - I can read your letters quite easily, because you don't write in Gothic hieroglyphs.

It is beautiful weather here. We are finding the first violets. There are bunches of primroses everywhere, and Leber Blumen, lovely little blue things, and lilac-coloured crocuses. You must come, you would love it, and we should feel quite grand having you for a visitor.

Mrs K... has written, forwarding a lawyer's letter which was sent to..., and which says: 'We should advise... to refer... to the Court, pending the divorce proceedings. Any request she had to make concerning the children, should be made to the Court.' That of course necessitates the engaging of a solicitor.

Frieda says, it is too long to let the children wait another six months without seeing her - they would become too much estranged. Perhaps that is true. Heaven knows how we are going to untangle these knots. At any rate, the divorce is going forward; in England, after the first hearing, the judge pronounces a decree nisi - that is, the divorce is granted unless something turns up; then at the end of the six months the divorce is made absolute, if nothing has turned up. Then Frieda is free again. Till the divorce is absolute, E... must have nothing to do with Frieda. So arrangements should be made through lawyers. But the children have holidays only at Easter, and can anything be settled before then? We shall have to see. This is to put you au courant. Send that wonderful

book do. The sixty francs have come.

Frieda is sending a picture that I want to have framed for Prof Weber at Icking, but she says it is for you. And a thousand thanks.

D. H. Lawrence

1913-1914

In the spring I went from the Villa Igea to Baden-Baden and saw my father for the last time; he was ill and broken. 'I don't understand the world any more,' he said.

Lawrence walked over the big St Bernard with a friend. We met in London after a fortnight to see my children and to arrange about the divorce. We stayed with the Garnetts. One morning I met my children on their way to their school. They danced around me in complete delight. 'Mama, you are back, when are you coming home?'

'I can't come back, you must come to me. We shall have to wait.'

How I suffered not to be able to take them with me! So much of my spontaneous living had gone to them and now this was cut off. When I tried to meet them another morning they had evidently been told that they must not speak to me and only little white faces looked at me as if I were an evil ghost. It was hard to bear, and Lawrence, in his helplessness, was in a rage.

We met Katherine Mansfield and Middleton Murry at that time. I think theirs was the only spontaneous and jolly friendship that we had. We had tea with Katherine in her flat in London. If I remember rightly her room had only cushions and pouffes and a large aquarium with goldfish and shells and plants.

I thought her so exquisite and complete, with her fine brown hair, delicate skin, and brown eyes which we later called her 'gu-gu' eyes. She was a perfect friend and tried best to help me with the children. She went to see them, talked to them and took letters from me. I loved her like a younger sister.

I fell for Katherine and Murry when I saw them quite unexpectedly on the top of a bus, making faces at each other and putting their tongues out.

We also met Cynthia and Herbert Asquith, at Margate. Cynthia seemed to me lovely as Botticelli's Venus. We also saw Eddie Marsh and Sir Walter Raleigh and Cynthia's relations at her house, which was an unusual one, made all of ship's timber. Cynthia was always a loyal friend, even through the war, when friends were rare.

But Lawrence wanted to go away from England, also because the divorce was not finished. Later we returned to Bavaria. There Lawrence wrote 'The Prussian Officer.' The strange struggle of those two opposite natures, the officer and his

servant, seems to me particularly significant for Lawrence. He wrote it before the war but as if he had sensed it. The unhappy, conscious man, the superior in authority envying the other man his simple, satisfied nature. I felt as if he himself was both these people.

They seemed to represent the split in his soul, the split between the conscious and the unconscious man.

To grow into a complete whole out of the different elements that we are composed of is one of our most elemental tasks. It is a queer story and it frightened me at the time of the dark corners of Lawrence's soul, the human soul altogether. But his courage in facing the problems and horrors of life always impressed me. Often he was ill when his consciousness tried to penetrate into deeper strata, it was an interplay of body and soul and I in real agony would try to understand what was happening. He demanded so much of me and I *had* to be there for him so completely. Sometimes it was I who forced him to go deeper and roused his inner conflict. When I went away it was always terrible. He hated me for going away. 'You use me as a scientist his 'dissecting rabbit,' I am your "Versuchs Kaninchen," I told him.

We wanted to go to Italy again.

The next winter we found a little cottage, 'Fiascherino,' near Lerici - finding a new more southern Italy and settling down for a while like gypsies in their camp; always more adventure.

' We had a large piece of land with olive trees and vegetables running down to the little bay where we bathed and kept a flat-bottomed boat, on which Lawrence went out to sea through the surf. I was on the shore watching him like a hen who has hatched a duckling and yelled in a rage: 'If you can't be a real poet, you'll drown like one, anyhow.'

Shelley was drowned not so far away. I spent lazy days lying in a hammock watching the fishermen with their beautiful red-sailed boats underneath my high rock. I watched the submarines from Spezia bobbing up and down. We had a maid, Elide, who looked after us and loved us, and her mother Felice was mostly there too. 'Bocca di mosca!' she would shout at her daughter. They loved us quite ferociously; fought to buy things cheaply for us in the market and felt absolutely responsible for us. One of Elide's griefs was that Lawrence would go out in his old clothes; she would rush after him with another coat: 'Signor Lorenzo, Signor Lorenzo,' and force him to put it on, which is more than I could have done... When I took her along to Spezia for Christmas shopping she behaved as if she were attending the Queen of Italy at least, much to my chagrin. Nothing was too good for 'la mia Signora...'

We went once to visit the Waterfields at their lovely old castle, 'Aula,' near

Sarzana. We slept there in such a terrifically large room that it overwhelmed us, the beds looked so tiny in the vast room that we brought them close together, to make a larger spot in the vastness... it was a beautiful place, high up above the Magra, wide river arms underneath... there were flowers growing on the wide fortress walls, a dantesque sunrise; we were impressed.

The cottage at Fiascherino had only three small rooms and a kitchen and I tried to make it look as cheerful as possible; it did not matter what I did with them, for we were out of doors most of the day; had our meals outdoors and took long walks, returning only when it grew dark, and built a fire in the downstairs room. I believe the chief tie between Lawrence and me was always the wonder of living... every little or big thing that happened carried its glamour with it.

But we also had sordid blows. A New York publisher had bought copies of one of Lawrence's books and sent a cheque for £25. As I had no money of my own, Lawrence said: 'You can spend that for yourself.' I took the cheque to the bank at La Spezia where they told me the date was altered, the cheque must go back to New York. It never returned. For that book Lawrence never got any money from America for about twelve years. Meanness made Lawrence always silently angry - it was something not to be thought of, but dismissed, nothing to be done, why waste your energy, then. But I, like a fool, talked furiously when I'd been disappointed. We had many such disappointments later on. With the dangerous quality of his work he accepted his more than doubtful financial position and I think one of my merits in his eyes was my never being eager to be rich or to play a role in the social world. It was hardly merit on my part. I enjoyed being poor and I didn't want to play a role in the world.

We had met many people who had villas round the bay of La Spezia, English and American. They were friendly, but I said to Lawrence: 'I don't want to be a fraud, let's tell them that we aren't married; perhaps they won't like us any more if they know how it is.'

One charming Miss Huntingdon, who had become a Catholic, was much distressed. 'I am fond of you both,' she wrote, 'and far be it from me to judge you, but I must tell you that I believe you are wrong, your life together is a mistake, a sin.' Her deep distress made me feel sorry for her, as if she had had to face the same problem and had chosen otherwise. But I was aware of the joyful acceptance and hope in me, that for my part I had chosen what was right. I don't understand, to this day, what social values really are and what meaning has the whole social game; social standards were never real to me, and the game didn't ever seem worth the candle. That winter in Fiascherino was a very happy one. He wrote 'The Rainbow' there, 'The Sisters' it was called at first. When Edward Garnett read it he didn't like it. This upset Lawrence, that Garnett did not follow

his trend. But I said: 'You are fighting the old standards, and breaking new ground.' They said I ruined Lawrence's genius, but I know it is not so.

Lawrence was always busy, he taught me many songs, we sang by the hour in the evenings; he liked my strong voice. He sang with very little voice but, like a real artist that he was, he conveyed the music and the spirit of the song in a marvellous fashion.

We painted together, too. I can see him so absorbed and intent, licking the brush, putting it down on the paper with quick gestures, giving himself completely to everything he was doing and not understanding that I did it all so carelessly and for fun.

I remember the day the piano arrived from Spezia by sea in a little boat and we watched it bobbing around the corner of the foreland, with three Italians, very frightened, fearing to go to the bottom of the sea with it. We felt for them, for it really looked very dangerous. Then at last they pulled up on the shingly beach and it was brought up to our little cottage with terrific shouts of 'Avanti, Italiani!'

Christmas came and we had Elide's relations, about a dozen peasants, in the evening and they sang to us, very much at home with us. Elide's old mother, Felice sang: 'Da quella parte dove si lev il sol,' and 'Di' a la Marcella che lui so far l'amor,' with old Pasquale, a duet. The beautiful Luigi was there, who looked so handsome picking olives from the trees; also the Maestro from Telaro, who was in love with Luigi; but she was of higher station and he, alas, wasn't in love with her. I don't know if they ever were married or not. But always the tragedy came up... it got me from time to time like an illness. We had trespassed the laws of men, if not of God, and you have to pay. Lawrence and I paid in full, and the others, on the contrary, had to pay for *want* of love and tenderness, and nobody likes to pay. Yet it's an eternal human law: too much happiness isn't allowed us mere mortals. And I and Lawrence seemed at times to surpass the measure of human bliss. He could be so deeply and richly happy, that young Lawrence that I have known, before the war crushed so much of his belief in human civilization... His deep natural love for his fellowmen... The deadness of them, the mechanicalness that triumphed in their souls.

I asked: 'What is civilization? What is it, this man-made world that I don't understand?'

And he said: 'It's like a tree that comes forth out of a race of men, and it grows and flowers, and then it must die.' And sometimes I think that Lawrence was the last green shoot on the tree of English civilization. Anyhow, whether English civilization is dead or not, and I hope it isn't, Lawrence is the last shoot of it that has grown ahead and pierced the air.

He was always so absolutely, undeniably, *something*. 'They can't ignore me in the long run,' he would say, with clenched teeth, 'they can't get past me, much as they'd like to.' And I think they can't.

Life rattles on so mechanically, there is less and less meaning in its motor-hoots and in all the noise, all meaning is drowned. Nobody has delicate courage enough to listen to the things that give us genuine vibrating life. Our feelers for life, just quick life, are atrophied.

When I think that nobody wanted Lawrence's amazing genius, how he was jeered at, suppressed, turned into nothing, patronized at best, the stupidity of our civilization comes home to me. How necessary he was! How badly needed! Now that he is dead and his great love for his fellowmen is no longer there in the flesh, people sentimentalize over him... Critics indeed! Had they been able to *take* instead of criticizing, how much richer their own lives might have been!

Those wonderful mornings in our little podere, getting up joyfully to that Mediterranean sun by the sea! And I'd walk through the olive trees to Telaro, for the post. It took me, the northerner, some time to see the beauty of these olive trees, so different at different times; the wind running up them turns them into quicksilver and sometimes they seem quite tired and still dark. During those early morning walks the sun threw delicate quivering shadows on the stony, mossy path. To my right was the sea. I wouldn't have been surprised meeting Christ and his disciples — it may be just as well that I didn't.

Lawrence could well teach people how to live, how to be grateful simply for life itself. He who was always so frail and so much nearer death at every moment than most people, how religiously he appreciated every good moment! Every big and little thing! I hadn't lived before I lived with Lawrence. It was drudgery, grey tired days with endless efforts, before. With him, being in love and ecstasy was only a small part of the whole, always the whole and we two balanced in it, the universe around us for us to take as much as we could, and we took a lot of it in those eighteen years together.

Of his short life didn't Lawrence make the most! It was his deep sense of the reality of living. He knew what feeds the life-flame in a creature, it isn't Rolls-Royces or first-class hotels and cinemas. He wasn't a high-brow and he wasn't a low-brow, but with a real genius he got out of the quick of living the abiding values and said so in his writing. It is always amazing to me how little people understand him. Misunderstand him, is more like it.

I suppose when you are inside the pale you see only the palings and think they are quite splendid, but once outside, you realize how big the world is and the palings are just palings to you. You look at them in surprise: all these insurmountable obstacles, it was only rather low palings to climb over after all.

But for those who feel safe inside, let them, the palings don't care, neither does the bigger world.

He was quite aware of the hostility to him, but in those days, I don't think we either of us measured the depth of it. Also as he grew more and more, the antagonism grew. We were too busy living to take much notice. Our own world, so small and poor to others on the outside, what a strong unconquerable fortress it really was!

Another thing I understood: there was no 'God-Almightiness' about him, like the universal 'I-am-everlasting' feeling of Goethe, for instance. He knew 'I am D. H. Lawrence from my head to my toes, and there I begin and there I end and my soul lives inside me. All else is not me, but I can have a relationship with all that is not me in the world, and the more I realize the otherness of other things around me the richer I am.'

It makes me laugh when I think of that American doctor who 'looked at literature' who wrote about Lawrence and saw only a diseased prurient mind in him. I think all he wanted to see was disease. Because Ursula, and Birkin, in 'Women in Love,' have a good meal with beetroot and ham and venison pastry, he reads some horror into beetroot and ham and pastry. I think the horror was in the good doctor's mind for what horror is there in beetroot or ham or venison pastry? Good to eat they are, that's all. Lawrence was so direct, such a real puritan! He hated any 'haut-goût' or lewdness. Fine underclothing and all the apparatus of the seducing sort were just stupid to him. All tricks; why tricks? Passionate people don't need tricks.

In the spring of 1914 Lawrence and I went from Fiascherino to London. We stayed with a friend, Gordon Campbell, whose wife was in Ireland. The house was in Kensington. We saw a good deal of the Murrys and there were long discussions between us all. Katherine was young and yet old, like a precocious child. I never suspected so much sadness in her, then; her relation with Murry seemed so fresh and young.

We had a housekeeper, Mrs Conybear, who sang 'Angels ever bright and fair' from the basement.

Campbell was very much in love with Ireland, 'Areland' he called it. At breakfast always sad and cross, about 'Areland.'

I remember a ghastly Sunday afternoon when we wanted to amuse ourselves. We went on one of the Thames boats to Richmond — Campbell, Murry, Katherine, Lawrence and I — there were a few seedy people on the boat - a sad object of a man was playing 'Lead, Kindly Light' on a harmonium - we got more and more silent with the dreariness of that enjoyment. And then, further along, people threw sixpences from the boat into that centuries-old, awful-looking

Thames mud and small boys dived for them - the Thames mud seemed to soak into our very souls and soon we could stand it no more and left the boat and got a bus to go home. Campbell, a dignified person, trod on the conductor's toe going on top and the conductor said: 'Hallo, clumsy,' to Katherine's and my joy.

Finally I and Lawrence got married at a registrar's office in Kensington. Campbell and Murry went with us. On the way there Lawrence dashed out of the cab into a goldsmith's to buy a new wedding ring. I gave my old one to Katherine and with it she now lies buried in Fontainebleau.

It was quite a simple and not undignified ceremony. I didn't care whether I was married or not, it didn't seem to make any difference, but I think Lawrence was glad that we were respectable married people.

On that first visit to London Lawrence's writings were already a little known and I thought: 'What fun it is going to be to know some amusing people.' But then, oh dear, we were asked to lunch by a few lion huntresses and the human being in me felt only insulted. You were fed more or less well, you sat next to somebody whose name had also been printed in the papers, the hostess didn't know who or what you were, thought you were somebody else, and wanted to shoo you away after you were fed like chickens that had become a nuisance, and that was all. So Lawrence and I hardly went anywhere. What fun people might have had with us they never realized; perhaps they had no fun in themselves. So Lawrence and I were mostly alone.

A friend asked me once: 'But wasn't it very difficult, Lawrence and you coming from a different class, wasn't the actual contact very difficult, wasn't your sensitiveness offended?'

I don't know whether it was the genius in Lawrence or the man from the people in him, but I certainly found him more delicately and sensitively aware of me than I ever imagined anybody would be.

Once I bumped my head against a shutter and was a little stunned and Lawrence was in such an agony of sympathy and tenderness over it. It astonished me; when I had bumped my head before or hurt myself nobody seemed to bother and I didn't see why they should have done so. To be so enveloped in tenderness was a miracle in itself to me.

The War

And then the war came, quite out of the blue for us both. Lawrence was on a walking tour in the Lakes with two friends and I was in London. After Lawrence came back, I remember our having lunch with Rupert Brooke and Eddie Marsh. I see Rupert Brooke's strange fair skin, he blushed so easily, the beauty of him was strangely sad. He was coming to stay with us. Even then I thought: 'He has had enough of life, it wearies him.' He wasn't a bit happy or fulfilled. I remember Eddie Marsh saying: 'There will be war, we fear, but it may be that the Foreign Office and Earl Grey have averted it today.'

But we couldn't believe it... War...

But a politician had only said: 'Bloody peace again.'

And then it was declared. At first it seemed only exciting.... Exciting indeed! Nobody realized at first what hell, what lowest demons, had been let loose.

We were at Charing Cross station and saw trains of soldiers depart. Their women were there so pale and strained looking, saying good-bye, trying to be brave and not cry. It made me weep for those unknown women and their sorrow. What did I care whether these boys, boys so many of them, were English or Russian or French. Nationality was just an accident and here was grief. Lawrence was ashamed of my tears.

He himself was bewildered and lost, became abstract and mental, and couldn't feel any more. I, who had been brought up with all the 'big-drumming' of German militarism, I was scared.

Lawrence was not a pacifist, he fought all his life. But that 'World War' he condemned with all his might. The inhuman, mechanical, sheer destruction of it! Destruction for what end!

Then when Lloyd George came to power Lawrence lost all hope in the spirit of his native country. Lloyd George, who was so un-English, to stand for English prestige! It seemed incredible.

War, more war! 'Dies irae, dies ilia,' a monstrous disaster, the collapse of all human decency. Lawrence felt it so. I could feel only fear - all base instincts let loose, all security gone.

We were in a big crowd on Hampstead Heath one evening going home from a friend's house. In the sky, uncertain and terrible amidst the clouds, hung a

Zeppelin. 'In that Zeppelin,' I thought, 'are perhaps men I have danced with when I was a girl, boys I have played with, and here they come to bring destruction and death. And if this dark crowd knew I was a German they would tear me to pieces in their fear.'

Sadly we went home. So helpless we were, at the power of all horrors. We took a small cottage out in Berkshire. Suspicion was ever present. Even when we were gathering blackberries in the nearby hedges a policeman popped up behind a bush and wanted to know who we were. Lawrence, who comes out in the open so courageously in his writings, why, why, do so many people see a sinister figure in him? The darkness wasn't in him but in those others. There is a woman even now who boasts that she turned us out of Cornwall as spies.

Our cottage was near the mill of Gilbert and Mary Cannan. And the Murrys were an hour's walk away in another cottage. We would go over to them in the dark winter nights, through bare woods and fields of dead cabbage stalks, with their smell of rottenness.

Campbell came to spend a week-end with us. He, who in London had been so elegant, with spats and top-hat, now wore an old cap and carried a very heavy stick under his arm. He looked to me like an Irish tramp. He was still weeping over his 'Areland.'

Christmas came. We made the cottage splendid with holly and mistletoe, we cooked and boiled, roasted and baked. Campbell and Koteliansky and the Murrys came, and Gertler and the Cannans. We had a gay feast.

We danced on the shaky floor. Gilbert with uplifted head sang: 'I feel, I feel like an eagle in the sky.' Koteliansky sang soulfully his Hebrew song: 'Ranani Sadekim Badanoi.' Katherine, with a long, ridiculous face, sang this mournful song:

I am an unlucky man,
I fell into a coalhole I broke my leg,
And got three months for stealing coal.
I am an unlucky man,
If it rained soup all day,
I wouldn't have a spoon,
I'd only have a fork.

She also sang:

Ton sirop est doux,
Madeleine,

Ton sirop est doux.
Ne crie pas si fort, Madeleine,
La maison n'est pas à nous.

I liked this tune, but when I sang it Lawrence stopped me; it was too 'fast' for him. This occasion was the last time for years to come that we were really gay.

In the spring we went to stay with the Meynells in Sussex. We were fond of all the sons and daughters. Monica was our neighbour. We lived in the cottage that Violet had lent us. I only remember Alice Meynell as a vision in the distance, being led by Wilfred Meynell across the lawn like Beatrice being led by Dante.

I heard while there of my father's death. I did not tell anybody, I kept it to myself. When I told Lawrence he only said: 'You didn't expect to keep your father all your life?' Bertrand Russell invited Lawrence to Cambridge at that time. Lawrence had expected much of this visit. 'What did you do there? What did they say?' I asked him, when he came back.

He answered: 'Well, in the evening they drank port and they walked up and down the room and talked about the Balkan situation and things like that, and they know nothing about it.'

We had met Lady Ottoline Morrell. She was a great influence in Lawrence's life. Her profound culture, her beautiful home, 'Garsington,' her social power, all meant much to Lawrence.

I felt in those days: 'Perhaps I ought to leave Lawrence to her influence; what might they not do together for England? I am powerless, and a Hun, and a nobody.' Garsington was a refuge during the war for many people and stood as a stronghold for freedom in those unfree days.

Later we took a small flat in the Vale of Heath. 'The Rainbow' appeared and was suppressed. When it happened I felt as though a murder had been done, murder of a new, free utterance on the face of the earth. I thought the book would be hailed as a joyous relief from the ordinary dull stuff, as a way out into new and unknown regions. With his whole struggling soul Lawrence had written it. Then to have it condemned, nobody standing for it — the bitterness of it! He was sex-mad, they said. Little even now do people realize what men like Lawrence do for the body of life, what he did to rescue the fallen angel of sex. Sex had fallen in the gutter, it had to be pulled out. What agony it was to know the flame in him and see it quenched by his fellowmen! 'I'll never write another word I mean,' he said in his bitterness; 'they aren't fit for it,' and for a time the flame in him was quenched.

It could not be for long; I remember with joy Frere's words: 'Lawrence is like

a man so far ahead on the road, that for them he seems small.' When I think of his critics the words of Heraclitus come into my mind:

'The Ephesians would do well to hang themselves, every grown man of them, and leave the city to beardless lads, for they have cast out Hermodorus, the best man among them, saying: "We will have none who is best among us; if there be any such, let him be so elsewhere and among others."'

The best were treated so during the war. And in those dark days I had a bad time. Naturally, I came in for all Lawrence's tortured, irritable moods. His sweetness had disappeared and he turned against me as well as the rest for the time being. It all made him ill. There was not even a little hope or gaiety anywhere. We had a little flat in the Vale of Heath in Hampstead. He didn't like the Vale of Heath and he didn't like the little flat and he didn't like me or anybody else... And the war was everywhere... We were saturated with war.

Cornwall At Cornwall, near Zennor, we found Tregarthen cottage. As usual we made it out of a granite hole into a livable place. It cost five pounds a year rent. We had made it very charming. We washed the walls very pale pink and the cupboards were painted a bright blue. This was the entrance room; all very small but well proportioned.

There was a charming fireplace on which lived two Staffordshire figures riding to market, 'Jasper and Bridget.' On the wall a beautiful embroidery Lady Ottoline Morrell had embroidered after a drawing by Duncan Grant, a tree with big bright flowers and birds and beasts. Behind the sitting room was a darkish rough scullery, and upstairs was one big room overlooking the sea, like the big cabin on the upper deck of a ship. And how the winds from that untamed Cornish sea rocked the solid little cottage, and howled at it, and how the rain slashed it, sometimes forcing the door open and pouring into the room.

I see Katherine Mansfield and Murry arriving sitting on a cart, high up on all the goods and chattels, coming down the lane to Tregarthen. Like an emigrant Katherine looked. I loved her little jackets, chiefly the one that was black and gold like bees.

It was great fun buying very nicely made furniture for a few shillings in St. Ives, with the Murrys. The fishermen were selling their nice old belongings to buy modern stuff. Our purchases would arrive tied on a shaky cart with bits of rope, the cart trundling down the uneven road. I think our best buy was a well-proportioned bedstead we got for a shilling. Then in both the Murrys' neighbouring cottage and our own such a frenzy broke out of painting chairs and polishing brass and mending old clocks, putting plates on the dressers, arranging all the treasures we had bought. After they had settled in their cottage I loved

walking with Katherine to Zennor. A high wind she hated and stamped her foot at it. Later we'd sit in the sun under the foxgloves and talk, like two Indian braves, as she said. We enjoyed doing things together. I can see her round eyes when Murry painted all the chairs black with Ripolin and she said: 'Look at the funeral procession of chairs.' She told me many things from her life, but she told me them in confidence and trust.

Katherine and Lawrence and Murry had invented a place, a wonderful place where we were all going to live in complete bliss; Rananim it was called.

Lawrence thought of the new spirit of the life we would try to live there. Murry thought of the ship, and its equipment, that would take us to our island of Rananim. Katherine saw all the coloured bundles that we would have to take. By the hour we could talk Rananim.

There in Cornwall I can remember days of complete harmony between the Murrays and us, Katherine coming to our cottage so thrilled at my foxgloves, tall in the small window seat. Since then whenever I see foxgloves I must think of Katherine.

One day we went out on the sea in bright sunshine in a boat, and sang the canon:

Row, row, row your boat
Gently down the stream,
Merrily, merrily, merrily, merrily,
Life is but a dream.

I don't know why even then this canon moved me so. They were so strangely significant, those words. And I was so bad at keeping my part of the song going, to Lawrence's rage.

So much, so much was still ahead for us all. And all so wonderful. At that time we were so poor, and such nobodies, and yet so rich in dreams and gaiety! But then Lawrence would have his reactions against all this, feel that his dreams were like petty vapourings, that the only real facts were war, and a war of all the lower elements come uppermost, carrying all before them. Grimly his soul would try to understand, but in the end it could only hang on to its faith, to its own, own, unknown God.

He had to go through with it, that I knew; also I knew — however miserable I was, and he made me so — that there was a man who suffered because of his vision.

He wanted people to be as they came out of the hands of the Lord, not to violate them but gently adjust them to life in their own capacity. He didn't expect

me to type. I hated it. Poor as we were he never expected me to do it. 'People should do what they enjoy, then they'll do it well,' he said.

In the first year of the war Cornwall was still not quite engulfed by it; but slowly, like an octopus, with slow but deadsure tentacles, the war spirit crept up and all around us. Suspicion and fear surrounded us. It was like breathing bad air and walking on a bog.

I remember once sitting on the rocks with Lawrence, by the sea, near our cottage at Tregerthen. I was intoxicated by the air and sun. I had to jump and run, and my white scarf blew in the wind. 'Stop it, stop it, you fool, you fool!' Lawrence cried. 'Can't you see they'll think that you're signalling to the enemy!'

I had forgotten the war for a moment.

There was an unfortunate policeman from St Ives. He had to trot up so many times to our cottage to look over and over again Lawrence's papers, to see if he were really an Englishman and his father without a doubt an Englishman, and if his mother was English. This policeman once said to me: 'Oh, ma'am, if I dare only speak my thoughts, but I mustn't.' But he took the peas and beans I offered him from our field that Lawrence had ploughed with the help of William Henry from the farm, and sown with vegetables. They came up splendidly and lots of people had vegetables from this field during the war.

Our standby and friend was Katie Berryman. Her saffron cake and baked stuffed rabbit were our modest luxuries.

We had so little money, Lawrence not being wanted, nor his work, in those days when profiteers and such men were flourishing and triumphant. I remember his writing to Arnold Bennett and saying: 'I hear you think highly of me and my genius, give me some work.'

Arnold Bennett wrote back: 'Yes, I do think highly of your genius, but that is no reason why I should give you Work.'

The war seemed to drive Lawrence to utter despair. He was called up for inspection and told me about it afterwards. 'You have no idea what a pathetic sight all the men were in nothing but their shirts.' How glad he was to come back to his cottage and me!

Lawrence was fond of the people at Tregerthen Farm nearby. Their Celtic natures fascinated him. He could talk by the hour with William Henry, the farmer's elder son, ruddy and handsome.

In those days Lawrence seemed to turn against me, perhaps on account of the bit of German in me. I felt utterly alone there, on that wild Cornish moor, in the little granite cottage. Often Lawrence would leave me in the evenings, and go over to the farm, where he'd spend his time talking to William Henry and giving French lessons to Stanley, the younger son.

Sometimes at night, in the dark, the door would fly open, and it seemed as if the ancient spirits and ghosts of the place blew into my cottage. In the loneliness I seemed to hear the voices of young men crying out to me from the battlefields: 'Help us, help us, we are dying, we are dying.' Despair had blown in on the night. I thought how in the past women like Catherine of Siena had influenced events. But now what could any woman do to stem or divert this avalanche?

And then Lawrence would come home and want to quarrel with me, as if he were angry with me because I too felt sad and hopeless and helpless.

It was only at the very last, and out of one's final despair, that there arose a hope and a belief. But the outer world was viler every day.

I remember coming home from Zennor with a loaf of Katie Berryman's bread in Lawrence's rucksack. Coastguards suddenly pounced on us from behind a hedge and said: 'Let us look at your rucksack, you have a camera in there.'

I could feel Lawrence swooning with rage. I opened the rucksack and held the loaf of bread under their noses. I had to show my contempt, if they hanged me for it the next moment. I believe they would have liked to.

It was no wonder Lawrence went almost mad at times at the creeping foulness around us; he who came out so completely in the open. And I knew that he felt so helpless, as if all that he believed in was utterly lost, he who by his genius felt responsible for the spirit of his England, he whose destiny it was to give England a new direction.

If only the war could end! But it went on, was present wherever you went, there was no escaping it. One evening at Cecil Grey's place, Bosigran Castle, we were sitting after dinner, when there came a knock at the door and four coast-watchers stood there ominously.

'You are showing a light.'

To Grey's dismay it was true. He had a new housekeeper from London and the light from her bedroom could be seen at sea.

As we stood there I shivered with alarm. I had before this been under suspicion of giving supplies to the German submarine crews. As for the suspicion, we were so poor at the time — a biscuit a day we might have spared for the submarines, but no more.

I took a secret pleasure in the fact that our coast-watchers were all covered with mud. They had fallen into a ditch listening under the windows.

Fortunately Grey had an uncle who was an admiral. That saved him, and us. As for Lawrence, he just looked at those men. What a manly job theirs was, listening under other people's windows!

A few days later I came home from Bosigran Castle to the cottage. Lawrence was away, had driven to Penzance. In the dusk I entered the cottage alone.

Immediately I was inside I knew by instinct something had happened, I felt overwhelming fear. With shaking knees I went to the farm. Yes, I was told, two men had asked for us.

I was full of foreboding, even though Lawrence, coming home later, didn't share my fear.

But then early next morning there appeared a captain two detectives, and my friend the policeman. The captain read us a paper that we must leave the county of Cornwall in three days. Lawrence, who lost his temper so easily, was quite calm.

'And what is the reason?' he asked.

'You know better than I do,' answered the captain.

'I don't know,' said Lawrence.

Then the two awful detectives went through all our cupboards, clothes, beds, etc., while I, like a fool, burst into a rage:

'This is your English liberty, here we live and don't do anybody any harm, and these creatures have the right to come here and touch our private things.'

'Be quiet,' said Lawrence.

He was so terribly quiet, but the iron of his England had stabbed his soul once more, and I knew he suffered more than I.

In the background stood my friend the policeman, full of sympathy. How sad I was, and desperate. But nothing could be done, so we left Cornwall, like two criminals. When we were turned out of Cornwall something changed in Lawrence for ever.

We went to London where H. D. lent us her flat in Mecklenburg Square. It had a very large room. Richard Aldington was home on leave at the time and in the evening we met and were very gay.

Where did we get the courage to be gay? I don't know.

Lawrence invented wonderful charades. Once we played the Garden of Eden. Lawrence was the Lord, H. D. was the tree, Richard Aldington waving a large chrysanthemum was Adam, and I was the serpent, and a little scared at my part.

A few days later Cynthia Asquith invited us to the royal box that Lady Cunard had lent her at Covent Garden.

Lawrence trimmed his beard, we made ourselves very fine, and went to listen to 'Aida.'

Very few people wanted to be friendly to us in those days. I was a Hun and Lawrence not wanted.

That was the time of air raids over London, the time there was such a strain on people's nerves. During the air raids we were supposed to go into the cellar, but Lawrence always refused to go; he stayed in bed. And it was certainly very

depressing being in the cellar with all the other gloomy people. So I spent my time during air raids running up and down stairs imploring Lawrence to come to the cellar. But he'd never do it.

We met Gertler in those days and he used to tell us funny stories about his experiences during air raids, especially one sudden one when he lost his head and kept running up and down the stairs of a strange house. Campbell also told about air-raid experiences, how once in Hampstead Heath he'd found himself buried under a heap of terrified housemaids coming home from a dinner party.

Yet underneath all this gaiety, we were so dulled and bitter. 'Dancing while Rome burns.' But if Nero enjoyed his burning Rome, we did not. And Lawrence's helplessness to stem this lavaflood of death to all that is best in man made him savage underneath and again I had a bad time... It was torture to live, and to live with him.

I felt helpless and an outcast, and only a burden and a difficulty for Lawrence.

I, the Hunwife in a foreign country!

Then we went to Hermitage in Berkshire. The country there is so quiet and English with its woods. Our simple life in the cottage healed him a lot.

I saw my son, who was in the O.T.C., and it seemed terrible that he would have to fight against his own relations, perhaps, and I said: 'Let me hide you somewhere in a cave or in a wood, I don't want you to go and fight, I don't want you to be killed in this stupid war.' But he was shocked.

All this time we were followed by detectives. Detectives had even gone to my first husband and asked him if he knew anything against me.

While we were there in Hermitage the armistice came. I nearly said peace came. But it was not peace, it is not peace yet. The war has bred not peace but awful gargoyle children of hate and resentment, and has only left death as the desirable, clean thing, almost.

Lawrence and My Mother

Lawrence and my mother were fond of one another; she was a wonderful mother to us, her three daughters. We were all three different and yet she helped and understood us, and was there for us in our hours of need — alas, there were plenty of them for the three of us. But she was equal to all the awful situations we found ourselves in. My eldest sister Else wanted to study, when studying for women in Germany was still *infra dig*. I remember walking through the crowds of men students into a lecture hall at Heidelberg with my sister at sixteen and feeling like a real martyr. My sister Johanna had lovely names for my mother, like 'Goldfasanchen,' my little golden pheasant — it was so quaint to hear her, worldly and elegant, being so tender with my mother, and she half loving it and saying: 'What do you want now?' She had taught me the love for poetry from early childhood. Especially after the war she and Lawrence became great friends. She lived in her 'Stift,' at Baden-Baden, a kind of home for women, mostly widows of distinguished men, Excellencies and so on. It was a very dignified life. We three sisters loved to meet there and stay with my mother. We had to be on our best behaviour, except in my mother's beautiful rooms, where all the wildness of our childhood came back, especially for my sister Johanna and me. Lawrence sat on the sofa, happily, while my mother tried to give him all the things for tea that he liked - 'Pumpnickel' and 'Truffelleberwurst' - and we played wild games of bridge.

Sometimes, when Lawrence wanted to complain about me she would say: 'I know her longer than you, I know her.'

He wrote his 'Fantasia of the Unconscious' in the woods behind the Altes Schloss. We stayed in a rough little inn at Ebersteinburg. I remember that we had some friends to dinner and a chicken flew into the soup tureen.

Then Lawrence, in the meagre after-the-war days, would scour the country for some cream for her.

She was very happy in Lawrence's life and mine, it meant so much to her, but she always trembled that the women in the Stift might read his books.

He was so polite to them and they liked him, again he was the Herr Doktor.

At Ebersteinburg he would go out in the morning and take his book and fountain pen. I would find him later on, leaning against a big pine tree; it was as

if the tree itself helped him to write his book, and poured its sap into it.

Then we would go down to Baden to my mother in the afternoon and take her our wildflowers or some honey or fruit or nuts; or we would go for long walks and make the place our own as usual. Looking over the Rheintal or listening to the music in the Kurpark. Baden was no longer the Baden of Turgeniev and archdukes and grand dukes and the Prince of Wales; no, it was after the war, would-be elegant.

Lawrence and my mother in her wisdom and ripeness understood each other so well. She said to me: 'It's strange that an old woman can still be as fond of a man as I am of that Lorenzo.'

Happy was their relationship. Only the last time, when my mother was so frail and old herself, being with Lawrence who was so very ill, they got on each other's nerves, and when she saw him often so irritable with me, she said: 'He isn't grateful to you for all you do for him.' But I did not feel like that myself; I was glad to do everything for him I possibly could. It seemed little enough.

Then when she and I were going to meet for the first time after his death, we were afraid to meet. She knew what his death meant to me and I what it meant to her. So we avoided our common grief; there was no need of words.

I remember after she had been indoors for weeks, coming to Baden and taking her out on one of those first tender spring days we get in the north, just the first whisper of spring. To feel her respond to this coming renewal of the earth in an almost sacred happiness was very moving to me.

I think after Lawrence's death her desire to live left her. Less than a year after he died telling me: 'You have many friends, you have much to live for yet,' I got a telegram: 'Come.'

I went but it was too late. In the train I listened as it were to the sound of the wheels: 'Is she still alive? Is she dead?' At the door of the Stift I was told: 'The Frau Baronin died two hours ago.'

She lay for the last time in her bedroom, the rocks of the Altes Schloss looking in through the window. 'Lawrence is there for me,' she had said. We, her three daughters, stood by her bedside, she for the first time not welcoming me with open arms as always. She lay with her silver hair like thistledown, in gentle and peaceful death.

She who had sustained our lives for half a century with the strength and harmony of her nature.

I remember my mother saying to me once: 'But it's always you in Lorenzo's books, all his women are you.' There was an expression on her face I could not get. Is she pleased at this or is she not? My sister Nusch was the only person that ever could take a liberty with him. She could lightly jump on his knee and say in

her broken English:

'O Lorenzo, you are so nice, I like your red beard.' He felt happy in the atmosphere of my mother and of us three sisters, so free and open and gay. Only when my sister Nusch and I had our long female talks, he did not like it, he had to be in it.

We spent some weeks at Zell-am-See with Nusch, her husband and children at her villa. We bathed and boated and Lawrence wrote his 'Captain's Doll' there.

One day the peasants from my sister's shooting-lodge high up in the mountains brought us some honey and left. The honey was found to be full of worms. 'Hadu,' said Lawrence, full of rage, to my nephew, 'you and I will take this honey back to them.' So up they marched to the lodge, in the heat of the afternoon, Lawrence and Hadu, and arrived at the peasant's hut to find them in the midst of a meal; in the very middle of the table Lawrence planted the jar of honey and left without a word. The peasants remained petrified. 'If honesty, common-and-garden honesty goes,' Lawrence told me once, 'then all is lost, life becomes impossible.'

After the War

The first snow has fallen, it's a still, black and white world. All the gold of the autumn has gone. On the mountains it was green-gold where the aspens turned, and the oakbrush was red-gold and there was yellow-gold in the tall sunflowers all along the road to Taos. The sage brush bloomed pale yellow and the fields and openings of the woods were yellow with small sunflowers. The mountains looked like tigers with their stripes of gold and dark pine trees. And the golden autumn sun lit it all. Now it has gone, this golden world: the frost and the snow have taken it away. I am writing in the sun on the snowy hill behind the cabins, where the Indians had their camp; where Lawrence and I slept in the summer, years ago, and again a grey squirrel scolded me for intruding; I wonder if it is the same grey squirrel. The snow drips from the cedar trees that are alive with birds; it is melting fast; in the desert below it has gone. The pinto ponies look bright like painted wooden toys against the snow. The black and white pigs follow me grunting and the black cats look shiny and black on the whiteness, delicately trotting after me. I have seen tracks of wild turkeys, of deer and bears, in the Gallina. I am now leaving that English autumn there in Berkshire, with its blackberry hedges and mushroom fields and pale sunsets behind a filigree of trees.

I am leaving Lawrence behind, who doesn't want to come to Germany so soon after the war. I go on my journey, a nightmare of muddle, my trunks stolen. I arrive in Baden, so glad to see my sisters and my mother, but, oh, so many, many dead that had been our life and our youth. A sad, different Germany.

We had suffered so much, all of us, lost so much. And money was scarce.

Meanwhile Lawrence had gone to Florence and I went to join him. I arrived at four o'clock in the morning. 'You must come for a drive with me,' he said, 'I must show you this town.' We went in an open carriage, I saw the pale crouching Duomo and in the thick moonmist the Giotto tower disappeared at the top into the sky. The Palazzo Vecchio with Michelangelo's *David* and all the statues of men, we passed. 'This is a men's town,' I said, 'not like Paris, where all statues are women.' We went along the Lungarno, we passed the Ponte Vecchio, in that moonlight night, and ever since Florence is the most beautiful town to me, the lily town, delicate and flowery.

Lawrence was staying at a pensione on the Lungarno with Norman Douglas and Magnus.

The English there in Florence had still a sense of true hospitality, in the grand manner. And yet it struck me all as being like 'Cranford,' only it was a man's 'Cranford.' And the wickedness there seemed like old maids' secret rejoicing in wickedness. Corruption is not interesting to me, nor does it frighten me: I find it dull.

Nobody knows Norman Douglas that doesn't know him in German. When he talks German you know something about him that you don't know if you only know him in English. I was thrilled at the fireworks of wit that went off between Lawrence and Douglas. They never quarrelled. I understood that Douglas had to stand up for his friend Magnus and to Lawrence's logical puritanical mind Magnus presented a problem of human relations. When we had gone to Capri and Magnus was in trouble at Montecassino, Lawrence went there and lent him some money, and yet we had so very little then.

Later Magnus appeared at our Fontana Vecchia at Taormina, having fled from Montecassino. He came almost taking for granted that we would be responsible for him, that it was our duty to keep him. This disturbed Lawrence.

'Is it my duty to look after this man?' he asked me.

To me it was no problem. Had I been fond of Magnus, had he had any meaning, or purpose - but no, he seemed only anti-social, a poor devil without any pride, and he didn't seem to matter anyhow. With the money Lawrence had lent him, he stayed at the best hotel in Taormina, to my great resentment, we who could not afford to stay even in a second-rate hotel. I felt he made a fool of Lawrence, and afterwards, when we went to Malta, crossing second class from Palermo, whom should I discover gaily swanking and talking to an English Navy officer but Magnus on the first-class deck! The cheek of the man! He had written to Lawrence: 'I am sweating blood till I am out of Italy.' I knew his sort, people always sweating blood and always going to shoot themselves. But Magnus, anyhow, did commit suicide at the end. It was a shock, but there was nothing else for him to do. It seemed to me he had put his money on the wrong horse. He thought the splendour of life lay in drinking champagne, having brocade dressing gowns, and that kind of thing. But Lawrence felt deeply disturbed by Magnus and did feel a responsibility for him.

There is a letter from Douglas to Lawrence in which Douglas says: 'Go ahead, my boy, do as you like with Magnus's work.' Lawrence wanted to pay the Maltese young men who had helped Magnus, hence the publication of Magnus's memoirs with Lawrence's introduction.

From Florence we went to Capri. I didn't like Capri; it was so small an island,

it seemed hardly capable to contain all the gossip that flourished there. So Lawrence went to Sicily and took Fontana Vecchia for us, outside Taormina.

Living in Sicily after the war was like coming to life again. Fontana Vecchia was a very simple but big-roomed Here are letters of Lawrence to my mother:

Fontana Vecchia Taormina Sicilia 16 March *Meine liebe Schwiegermutter:*

Your post card came this morning. I do hope you will be feeling better. Frieda is in Rome, doing her passport. I hope by the time you have this card she will be with you. It will make her happy to nurse you and get you better. Soon you must be about walking - and then I will come to Germany and perhaps we can all go away into the Schwarzwald and have a good time. Meanwhile I sit in Fontana Vecchia, and feel the house very empty without F. Don't like it at all: but don't mind so long as you will be better.

I am having my portrait painted: hope that today will be the last sitting, as I am tired. I look quite a sweet young man, so you will feel quite pleasant when I send you a photograph. The weather is once more sunny and beautiful, the sea so blue, and the flowers falling from the creeper.

I have no news as yet from Rome, but hope she is managing everything easily. I am all right in Taormina: people invite me to tea and dinner all the time. But I don't want to go very badly. I am correcting the MS. of my diary of a Trip to Sardinia, which I think will amuse you. Give my love to Else. Tell me if there is anything I can send: and do get better soon.

Fontana Vecchia Taormina, Sicily
Sunday, Dec. 10

Dear Mother-in-Law:

I am glad you got the cheque. But don't trouble about being grateful. The money is there, all right, and enough said.

Frieda does not want any. We had a piece of luck. The professor of English Literature in Edinburgh gave me a prize: a hundred pounds for 'The Lost Girl.' That is a piece of luck. I hope to have the money next week. A hundred pounds is a nice little sum.

Please, mother-in-law, send 500 marks to Hadu and the rest. We don't send any Christmas parcels, the post is so difficult here in Italy. But when the book arrives I will send it to you. I am so glad that you are feeling well. But go carefully before Xmas. Go on still, small feet and don't get overbearing and drunk.

D. H. L.

A thousand white horses on the hard blue sea and the sailing ships run anxiously with half a wing.

Frieda has made a hundred good 'Seckerle, ' very good - made them this morning.

(Translated from the German)

Fontana Vecchia

I am not working at the present time. I wrote three long stories since we are here - that will make quite a nice book. I also collected my short stories ready for a book. So, for the moment I am free, I don't want to begin anything else, only perhaps translate a grey Sicilian novel 'Maestro Don Gesualdo' by Giovanni Verga. It is pure Sicilian and you can see in it how heavy and black and hopeless are these Sicilians inside. Outside so beautiful, inside horror and money. No, mother-in-law, here out of Europe nothing new can come forth. They can only go on chewing the same old strings. The Banca di Sconto, perhaps the biggest bank in Italy, has failed, does not pay and such a black cloud over the people here. Money is the blood of an Italian. He says it himself: 'Vuole il sangue mio - he wants my blood,' if he has to pay. But it is also cruel. Very likely the Government will come and help the people...

(Translated from the German)

Fontana Vecchia Taormina, Sicily

Dear Mother-in-Law:

We must find a good ship. Maybe we'll leave next month, but not for sure. And if we go to America and I can earn some money, we can easily return to Germany and see you. If one only has the dollars, then America is no further from Baden than Taormina, perhaps not as far. You know it well.

I have had a little influenza, it. was very cold, the snow came nearer and nearer down the mountains. Monte Venere was white, also our own Monte Riretto. But right near to us the snow could not reach, the sea said no, and now, thank God, it is warm as summer, the snow has flown away, the sea is blue, and the almonds are busy flowering. Many thousands of birds came down with the cold - goldfinches, blackbirds, redbreasts, redtails, so gay and coloured, and thank goodness, cartridges are so dear that the Italians can't buy them.

Frieda also wants to write a word. We sit in the salotto, warm and still, with the lamp on the table. Outside, through the door, I see like twilight, the moonlit sea; and the moon through the begonia leaves of our terrace; and all is quite still, except from time to time the stove crackles. If I think that we are going away I feel melancholy. But inside I feel sure, that I must go. This is a beautiful

end, but better a difficult beginning than only an end.

Greet all. Tell Else I had all the letters: and Friedel writes English so well. He'll think little of my German. I am so glad you have Annie with you and are not alone these long winter evenings.

Keep well always. I'll write again soon. Make a bow for me to all the ladies of the Stift in my name.

Your son-in-law,

D. H. Lawrence (Translated from the German)

Fontana Vecchia Taormina Sicily Sunday

My dear Mother-in-Law:

We sit waiting to depart - 4 trunks - one household trunk, 1 book trunk, Frieda's and mine, two small valises, a hatbox, and two very small bags: just like Abraham going to a new land. My heart is trembling now, mostly with pain - the going away from home, and the people and Sicily. But I will forget it and only think of palms and elephants and monkeys and peacocks. Tomorrow at 10.34 we leave here: eat at Messina, where we must change, arrive at 8:30 at Palermo, then to the Hotel Panormus where our friend lives. Thursday to Naples by boat, there at the Hotel Santa Lucia. Then on the S.S. 'Osterley,' Orient Line to Ceylon. The ship goes on to Australia. You have the address - Ardnarce, Lake View Estate, Kandy, Ceylon. Think, it is only 14 days from Naples. We can always return quickly when we've had enough. Perhaps Else is right and we shall return to our Fontana. I don't say no: I don't say anything for certain. Today I go, tomorrow I return. So things go. I'll write again from Palermo if there's time. I think of you.

D. H. L.

(Translated from the German)

R.M.S. 'Osterley' Tuesday, 28 February

My dear Mother-in-Law:

We have been gone for two days. We left Naples Sunday evening, 8 o'clock. Monday morning at 8 o'clock we came through the Straits of Messina and then for hours we saw our Etna like a white queen or a white witch there standing in the sky so magic-lovely. She said to me, 'You come back here,' but I only said, 'No,' but I wept inside with grief grief of separation. The weather is wonderful - blue sky, blue sea, still. Today we see no land, only the long thin white clouds where Greece lies. Later on we shall see Crete (Candia). We arrive on Thursday at Port Said. There this letter goes on land. We also for a few hours. Then we go through the Suez Canal and so into the Red Sea. This ship is splendid, so

comfortable, so much room and not many passengers. The berths are not half taken. It is just like a real luxury hotel. In the morning at seven o'clock comes the steward with a cup of tea. - If you want to take a bath and if cold or hot or how. At 8 o'clock the breakfast gong rings and such a menu - cooked pears, porridge, fish, bacon, eggs, fried sausages, beefsteak, kidneys, marmalade, all there. Then afterwards one sits about, flirts or plays croquet. Eleven o'clock comes the steward with a cup of Bovril. One o'clock lunch - soup, fish, chicken or turkey, meat, entrées, always much too much. Four o'clock tea, 7 o'clock dinner. Ah no, one eats all the time. But you also have an appetite at sea, when it is still and so heavenly like now. I find it strange that it is so still, so quiet, so civilized. The people all so still and so easy and such a cleanliness, all so comfortable. Yes, it is better than Italy. The Italians are not good now, everything becomes base. Frieda caught a cold in Naples, and you ought to see how good the steward and stewardess are with her as she lies in bed. They come so quickly with tea or soda water or what she wants and always such gentle manners. After Italy it is extraordinary. Yes, civilization is a beautiful and fine thing if it only remains alive and does not become ennui. I can write to you again from Aden and then not again before Ceylon. Now I must go down and see if Frieda has got up. Her cold is better today.

I am sorry you were not there to see us go on board at Naples, with trunks and bits and pieces - baskets of apples and oranges (gifts) and a long board that is a piece of a Sicilian wagon painted very gaily with two scenes out of the life of Marco Visconte. Else knows how beautiful are these Sicilian carts and the facchini are always crying: 'Ecco la Sicilia - Ecco la Sicilia in viaggio per l'India!' For the moment a rivederci.

Frieda also ought to write a word.

D. H. L.

The whole afternoon we have seen Crete with snow on the mountains-so big the island. Also another little island, all yellow and desert with great ravines. Now the sun is down, the rim of the sky red, the sea inky blue and the littlest, finest, sharpest moon that I ever saw. It is already quite warm.

Wednesday Today only warm and still. Seen no land - seagulls and two ships. Tomorrow morning we arrive at Port Said - letters must be posted tonight before 10 o'clock.

D. H. L.

R.M.S. 'Osterley' Tuesday, 7 March Arabian Sea Dear Mother-in-Law:

Perhaps I can post this letter at Aden this evening, but we do not stop. We have come so far and so lovely. We stopped three hours in Port Said, and it was quite like the Thousand and One Nights. It was 9 o'clock in the morning, and the ladies of Port Said were all abroad shopping. Little black waddling heaps of black crêpe and two houri eyes between veil and mantle. Comic is the little peg that stands above the nose and keeps veil and headcloth together. There came a charabanc with twenty black women parcels. Then one of the women threw back her veil and spat at us because we are ugly Christians. But you still see everything - beggars, water carriers, the scribe who sits with his little table, and writes letters, the old one who reads the Koran, the men who smoke their 'chibouks' in the open café and on the pavement - and what people! Beautiful Turks, Negroes, Greeks, Levantines, Fellaheen, three Bedouins out of the desert like animals, Arabs, wonderful. We have taken coal on board, and then at midday off again into the Suez Canal, and that is very interesting. The Canal is eighty-eight miles long, and you can only travel five miles an hour. There you sit on this great ship and you feel really on land, slowly travelling on a still land ship. The shores are quite near, you can surely throw an orange at the Arabs that work on the shores. Then you see beautifully, wonderfully, the Sahara Wiiste, or desert - which do you say? The waterway goes narrow and alone through red-yellow sands. From time to time Arabs with camels work on the shores and keep on shouting 'Hallo, Hallo' when the big ship passes so slowly, in the distance little sharp sand hills so red and pink-gold and sharp on the horizon sharp like a knife edge so clear. Then a few lonely Palms, lonely and lost in the strong light, small, like people that have not grown very tall.

Then again only sand, gold-pink and sharp little sand hills, so sharp and defined and clear, not like reality but a dream. Solemn evening came, and we so still, one thought we did not seem to move any more. Seagulls flew about like a sandstorm, and a great black bird of prey alone and cruel, so black between thousands of white screaming, quick-flying sea birds. Then we came to the Dead Sea, flat seas that extend very far, and slowly the sun sank behind the desert with marvellous colours, and as the sun had set, then such a sky like a sword burning green and pink. Beautiful it was, I have never seen anything so superhuman. One felt near to the doors of the old Paradise, I do not know how, but something only half human, something of a heaven with grey-browed, overbearing and cruel angels. The palm trees looked so little the angels should be much bigger and every one with a sword. Yes, it is a frontier country.

Next morning we were in the Red Sea. There stands Mount Sinai, red like old dried blood, naked like a knife and so sharp, so unnaturally sharp, like a dagger

that has been dipped in blood and has dried long ago and is a bit rusty and is always there like something dreadful between man and his lost Paradise. All is Semitic and cruel, naked, sharp. No tree, no leaf, no life: the murderous will and the iron of the idea and ideal - iron will and ideal. So they stand, these dreadful shores of this Red Sea that is hot like an oven without air. It is a strange exit through this Red Sea - bitter. Behind lie finally Jerusalem, Greece, Rome, and Europe, fulfilled and past - a great dreadful dream. It began with Jews and with Jews it ends. You should have seen Sinai, then you could know it. The ideal has been wicked against men and Jehovah is father of the ideal and Zeus and Jupiter and Christ are only sons. And God be praised Sinai and the Red Sea are past and consummated.

Yesterday morning we came through the Straits of Bab-el-Mandeb, again into the open. I am so glad that we came this way. Yesterday we always saw land - Arabia naked and desert but not so red and sharp and like dried blood. Today we see no land but later on we shall pass Cape Socotra. This ship has gained fifteen hours. We are fifteen hours before time. Perhaps we arrive in Colombo on Sunday evening instead of Monday. It is very warm, but there is always air. The sea is covered with little white sea-horses, but the ship is still and sure. We have not had one single bad moment. All here on board so friendly and so good and comfortable. I work on the translation of 'Maestro Don Gesualdo' and I let my inkpot fall on the deck. The 'Osterley' shall wear my black sign for ever. At 11 o'clock in the morning we do not get Bovril any more, but ice cream. The women all wear colourful summer frocks. In the evening we dance. We see now the little flying fish. They are all silver and they fly like butterflies, so wee. There are also little black dolphins that run about like little black pigs.

Benediciti, D. H. Lawrence

Fontana Vecchia had a large podere to it. Great 'vasche' were on the rocky slope toward the sea, pools of green water to feed the lemon and orange trees. The early almond blossoms pink and white, the asphodels, the wild narcissi and anemones, all these we found during our walks, nothing new would escape Lawrence and we never got tired finding new treasures.

We went on a jolly expedition to Syracuse with Renée and John Juta and Insole. Trains had their own sweet way in Italy then and arrived when they felt like it. I remember being much impressed by how Renée Hansard, with the experience of a true colonial, was fortified with a hamper of food and a spirit lamp so we could have tea at any time.

She pulled out her embroidery with its wools from a neat little bag. She turned the railway car into a live little temporary home. The quarries of Syracuse impressed me much. Here at Syracuse the flower of the Athenian youth had been

defeated; in these quarries the Greek men had been put to starve while the ladies of Syracuse took their walks along the top of the quarries to see them slowly die. A sinister dread impression it left in me. I doubt whether centuries can clean a place of such inhumanity, the place will retain and remember such horrors. Syracuse and its splendour have gone. Man is more cruel than nature but whenever he has been so he pays for it.

Of our winter excursion to Sardinia Lawrence has described every minute, it seems to me, with extraordinary accuracy.

Garibaldi, the picturesque, had begun his campaign here in Sicily with his thousand, with his Anita and his South American experience.

Along our rocky road the peasants rode past into the hills on their donkeys, singing loudly, the shepherds drove their goats along, playing their reed pipes as in the days of the Greeks. We had an old Greek temple in the garden; there was the beautiful Greek theatre at Taormina, facing the Etna; what a marvellous stage for a play, not a modern play, alas, but how I longed to see one of the old giants like Sophocles there. How I longed for the old splendour of life to come back to us in those shabby after-the-war days.

'Give me a little splendour, O Lord,' would be my prayer.

There in Taormina, in the whole of Sicily, one could feel the touch of the hands of many civilizations: Greek and Moorish and Norman and beyond into the dim past.

Old Grazia did our shopping and I loved watching Lawrence doing the accounts with her, her sly old Sicilian face spying his, how much she could rook him.

'She can rook me a little, but not too much,' he would say, and he kept a firm hand on her.

The sun rose straight on our beds in the morning, we had roses all winter and we lived the rhythm of a simple life, getting up early, he writing or helping in the house or getting the tangerines from the round little trees in the garden or looking at the goat's new kids. Eating, washing up, cleaning the floor and getting water from the trough near the wall, where the large yellow snake came to drink and drew itself into its hole in the wall again.

Wherever Lawrence was, the surroundings came alive so intensely. At the Fontana Vecchia we mostly cooked on charcoal fires, but on Sundays he lit the big kitchen stove for me, and I, who had become quite a good cook by now, made cakes and tarts, big and little, sweet pies and meat pies and put them on the side-board in the dining room and called them Mrs Beeton's show.

Once we had lunch with three friends at their villa. It was a jolly lunch. We had some white wine that seemed innocent, but it was not. When we left, going

home, I felt its effects but soon got over it.

'We must hurry, because those two English ladies are coming to tea.'

So we hurried home and unfortunately the white Sicilian wine affected Lawrence later. The very English ladies came and Lawrence was terribly jovial and friendly with them. I tried to pull his sleeve and whispered: 'Go away,' but it was no use.

'What are you telling me to go away for?' he said.

I could see the two visitors being very uneasy and wanting to leave.

'No, no, you must have some mimosa, I'll get you some,' Lawrence insisted. So he went with them through the garden, tried to climb a small mimosa tree and fell.

The ladies hurried away.

Next day Lawrence was chagrined and he met one of the ladies and tried to apologize to her, but she was very stiff with him, so he said: 'Let her go to blazes.'

I think from this incident arose the story that Lawrence was a drunkard. Poor Lawrence, he who could not afford wine and didn't want it, who was so naturally abstemious. I have seen him drunk only twice in all my life with him.

We stayed at Taormina in the heat and I remember when the mulberries were ripe and delicious and he climbed a big mulberry tree in his bathing suit. The mulberries were so juicy and red and they ran down his body so that he looked like one of those very realistic Christs we had seen on our walk across the Alps years ago.

He wrote 'Birds, Beasts and Flowers' and 'Sea and Sardinia' at Fontana Vecchia, and also 'The Lost Girl.' 'Sea and Sardinia' he wrote straight away when we came back from Sardinia in about six weeks. And I don't think he altered a word of it. His other works, especially the novels, he wrote many times, parts of them anyhow. Sometimes I liked the first draft best, but he had his own idea and knew the form he wanted it to take.

One day I found the manuscript of 'Sea and Sardinia' in the W.C. at Fontana Vecchia. So I told him: 'But why did you put it there, it's such a pity, it's so nicely written and tidy.' I had then no idea it might have any value, only regretted the evenly written pages having this ignominious end. But no, he had a passion for destroying his own writing. He hated the personal touch.

'I would like to burn all my writing. Print is different. They-can have it in print, my stuff.'

Just as he wanted Lawrence, the private person, separate from Lawrence the writer, the public man. He guarded his privacy ferociously. He liked best to meet people who knew nothing about him. He really disliked talking about his

writing. 'They don't like it, anyhow,' he would say. But I read every day what he had written; his writing was the outcome of our daily life.

I had to take in what he had written and had to like it. Then he was satisfied and did not care for the approval of the rest of the world. What he wrote he had lived and was sure of. Travelling with him was living new experiences vividly every minute.

Then from Fontana Vecchia, we were really leaving Europe for the first time.

We did so much with the little money we had, making homes and unmaking them.

We unmade our beloved Fontana Vecchia and went to Palermo where the 'facchini' were so wild and threw themselves on our luggage; I can see Lawrence struggling amongst a great crowd of them, waving his umbrella about, equally wild. It was midnight and I was terrified.

An American friend gave me the side of a Sicilian cart I had always longed for. It had a joust painted on one panel, on the other St Genevieve. It was very gay and hard in colour. I loved it. Lawrence said: 'You don't mean to travel to Ceylon with this object?'

'Let me, let me,' I implored. So he let me. And off we set for Naples. There we were bounced in the harbour into our P. & O. boat. We arrived nearly too late, the gang-plank was pulled up immediately the minute we got on board. How we enjoyed that trip! Everybody feeling so free and detached, no responsibility for the moment, people going to meet husbands or wives, people going to Australia full of the wonders that were coming to them, and Lawrence being so interested and feeling so well. How tenderly one loves people on boats! They seem to become bosom friends for life. And then we went through the Suez Canal into the Red Sea, Arabia Deserta on one side, so very deserta, so terrifying. Then one morning I woke up and I was sure I could smell cinnamon; the ship stopped and we were in Colombo. It struck me: 'I know it all, I know it all.' It was just as I expected it. The tropics, so marvellous these black people, this violent quick growth and yet a little terrifying, a little repulsive, as Lawrence would say. We stayed with the Brewsters in a huge bungalow with all those black servants in the background. In the morning the sun rose and we got up and I always felt terrified at the day and its heat. The sun rose higher and the heat would rise. We went for a walk and I saw a large thing coming towards us, large like a house, an elephant holding a large tree with its trunk! Its guide made him salaam to us, the great animal - young natives would come and pay visits to us and the Brewsters, who were interested in Buddhism. Lawrence became so terribly English and snubbed them mostly. Some young Cingalese said I had the face of a saint! Didn't I make the most of it and didn't Lawrence get this saint rubbed into him! Then we had

the fantastic experience of a Pera-Hera given in honour of the Prince of Wales. Such a contrast was the elegant figure of the Prince sitting on the balcony of the Temple of the Tooth amongst the black seething tropical mass of men. The smell of the torches and the oily scent of dark men. Great elephants at midnight, and the heat in the dark. The noise of the tom-toms that goes right through some dark corner in one's soul. The night falls so quickly and the tom-toms begin and we could see the native fires on the hills all around. Noises from the jungle; those primeval criés and howls and the brainfever bird and the sliding noises on the roof and the jumps in the darkness outside. How could one rest under such a darkness that was so terribly alive!

I The climate didn't suit Lawrence and we had to leave. Lawrence was not well and happy in Ceylon. The tropics didn't suit him.

I was so enthralled with the life around us, it was like living in a fairy-tale. We would go to Casa Lebbes, a little jewelshop at Number 1 Trincomalee Street in Kandy, and look at his jewels. He would pull out a soft leather bundle, undo it, and put before our eyes coloured wonders of sapphires, blue and lovely yellow ones, and rubies and emeralds. Lawrence bought me six blue sapphires and a yellow one: they were round in order to make a brooch in the form of a flower. The yellow one was the centre and the blue petal-shaped ones formed a flower round it. Also he bought me a cinnamon stone and a little box of moonstones. The blue sapphire flower I have lost, as I have lost so many things in my life, and the moonstones have disappeared, only the cinnamon stone remains. I wanted to go to Australia; it attracted me. Off we set again, trunks, Sicilian cart, and all, and went to Perth. Only Englishmen and Australians on the boat and it really felt as if one was going to the end of the earth.

We stayed only a little while near Perth and went a long way into that strange vague bush, everything so vague and dim, as before the days of Creation. It wasn't born yet. Vague, remote, and unborn it made one feel oneself. There we stayed with Miss Skinner, whose manuscript Lawrence was looking over: 'The Boy in the Bush.' Later on, as I look back, it's all vague to me. Then, after a few weeks, we went on to Sydney.

We arrived in Sydney Harbour - nice it was not knowing a soul.

A young officer on the boat had told me: 'The rain on the tin roofs over the trenches always made me think of home.' Sydney.

And there they were, the tin roofs of Sydney and the beautiful harbour and the lovely Pacific Coast, the air so new and clean. We stayed a day or two in Sydney, two lonely birds resting a little. And then we took a train with all our trunks and said: 'We'll look out of the window and where it looks nice we'll get out.' It looked very attractive along the coast but also depressing. We were

passing deserted homesteads: both in America and Australia, these human abandoned efforts make one very sad. Then we came to Thirroul, we got out at four and by six o'clock we were settled in a beautiful bungalow right on the sea. Lined with jarra the rooms were, and there were great tanks for rain water and a stretch of grass going right down to the Pacific, melting away into a pale-blue and lucid, delicately tinted sky.

But what a state the bungalow was in! A family of twelve children had stayed there before us: beds and dusty rugs all over the place, torn sailing canvases on the porches, paper all over the garden, the beautiful jarra floors grey with dust and sand, the carpet with no colour at all, just a mess, a sordid mess the whole thing. So we set to and cleaned, cleaned and cleaned as we had done so many times before in our many temporary homes! Floors polished, the carpet taken in the garden and scrubbed, the torn canvases removed. But the paper in the garden was the worst; for days and days we kept gathering paper.

But I was happy: only Lawrence and I in this world. He always made a great big world for me, he gave it me whenever it was possible; whenever there was wonder left, we took it, and revelled in it.

The mornings, those sunrises over the Pacific had all the wonder of newness, of an uncreated world. Lawrence began to write 'Kangaroo' and the days slipped by like dreams, but real as dreams are when they come true. The everyday life was so easy, the food brought to the house, especially the fish cart was a thrill: it let down a flap at the back and like pearls and jewels inside the cart lay the shiny fishes, all colours, all shapes, and we had to try them all.

We took long walks along the coast, lonely and remote and unborn. The weather was mild and full of life, we never got tired of the shore, finding shells for hours that the Pacific had rolled gently on to the sand. I Lawrence religiously read the 'Sydney Bulletin.' He loved it for all its stories of wild animals and people's living experiences. The only papers Lawrence ever read were the 'Corriere della Sera,' in the past, and the 'Sydney Bulletin.' I wonder whether this latter has retained the same character it had then; I haven't seen it since that time. It was our only mental food during that time.

I remember being amazed at the generosity of the people at the farms where we got butter, milk, and eggs; you asked for a pound of butter and you were given a big chunk that was nearly two pounds; you asked for two pints of milk and they gave you three; everything was lavish, like the sky and the sea and the land. We had no human contacts all these months: a strange experience: nobody bothered about us, I think.

At the library, strangely enough, in that little library of Thirroul we found several editions of Lawrence's condemned 'Rainbow.' We bought a copy - the

librarian never knew that it was Lawrence's own book. Australia is like the 'Hinterland der Seele.'

Like a fantasy seemed the Pacific, pellucid and radiant, melting into the sky, so fresh and new always; then this primal radiance was gone one day and another primeval sea appeared. A storm was throwing the waves high into the air, they rose on the abrupt shore, high as in an enormous window. I could see strange sea-creatures thrown up from the deep: sword-fish and fantastic phenomena of undreamt deep-sea beasts I saw in those waves, frightening and never to be forgotten.

And then driving out of the tidy little town into the bush with the little pony cart. Into golden woods of mimosa we drove, or wattle, as the Australians call it. Mostly red flowers and yellow mimosa, many varieties, red and gold, met the eye, strange fern trees, delicately leaved. We came to a wide river and followed it. It became a wide waterfall and then it disappeared into the earth. Disappeared and left us gaping. Why should it have disappeared, where had it gone?

Lawrence went on with 'Kangaroo' and wove his deep underneath impressions of Australia into this novel. Thirroul itself was a new little bungalow town and the most elegant thing in it was a German gun that glistened steely and out of place there near the Pacific.

I would have liked to stay in Australia and lose myself, as it were, in this unborn country but Lawrence wanted to go to America. Mabel Dodge had written us that Lawrence must come to Taos in New Mexico, that he must know the pueblo Indians, that the Indians say that the heart of the world beats there in New Mexico.

This gave us a definite aim, and we began to get ready for America, in a few weeks.

Darlington West Australia 15 May 1922

My dear Mother-in-Law:

So the new Jews must wander on. Frieda is very disappointed. She had hoped to find a new England or new Germany here, with much space and gayer people.

The land is here, sky high and blue and new as if you 'd never taken a breath out of it: and the air is new, new, strong, fresh as silver. And the country is terribly big and empty, still uninhabited. The bush is grey and without end. No noise - quiet - and the white trunks of the gum trees, all a little burnt: a wood and a prewood, not a jungle: something like a dream, a twilight wood that has not seen the day yet. It needs hundreds of years before it can live. This is the land where the unborn souls, strange and unknown, that will be born in five hundred years, live. A grey, strange, spirit, and the people that are here are not

really here: only like ducks that swim on the surface of a lake. But the country has a fourth dimension and the white people float like shadows on the surface. And they are not new people: very nervous, neurotic, they don't sleep well, as if they always felt a ghost near. I say, a new country is like sharp wine in which floats like a pearl the soul of an incoming people, till this soul is melted or dissolved. But this is stupid.

Thursday we go on by the P & O boat 'Malwa' to Adelaide, Melbourne, and Sydney. We stay at Adelaide a day, sleep a night at Melbourne, and arrive at Sydney on the twenty-seventh: nine days from Fremantle. That will be interesting. We have our tickets from Colombo to Sydney. It does please me to go on further. I think from Sydney we may go on to San Francisco, and stay a few weeks at Tahiti. And so round the world.

Oh, mother-in-law, it must be so! It is my destiny, this wandering. But the world is round and will bring us back to Baden.

Be well.

D. H. L.

(Translated from the German)

'Wyewurk' Thirroul New South Wales Australia 28 May 1922

Meine liebe Schwiegermutter:

Diesmal schreibe dir auf Englisch, ich muss schnell sein. We got to Sydney on Saturday, after a fine journey. I like the P & O boats, with the dark servants. But that was a frightful wreck of the 'Egypt' in the Bay of Biscay. We heard of it in Adelaide. Our captain of the 'Malwa' changed from the 'Egypt' only this very voyage. He was very upset - so was everybody. They say the Lascar servants are so bad in a wreck - rushing for the boats. But I don't believe all of it.

Anyway, here we are safe and sound. Sydney is a great fine town, half like London, half like America. The harbour is wonderful - a narrow gateway between two cliffs - then one sails through and is in another little sea, with many bays and gulfs. The big ferry steamers go all the time threading across the blue water, and hundreds of people always travelling.

But Sydney town costs too much, so we came down into the country - We are about fifty kilometres south of Sydney, on the coast. We have got a lovely little house on the edge of the low cliff just above the Pacific Ocean. - Der grosse oder stille Ozean, says Frieda. But it is by no means still. The heavy waves break with a great roar all the time: and it is so near. We have only our little grassy garden - then the low cliff - and then the great white rollers breaking, and the surf seeming to rush right under our feet as we sit at table. Here it is winter, but not

cold. But today the sky is dark, and it makes me think of Cornwall. We have a coal fire going, and are very comfortable-Things go so quietly in Australia. It will not cost much to live here, food is quite cheap. Good meat is only fivepence or sixpence a pound - 50 Pfg. ein Pfund.

But it is a queer, grey, sad country - empty, and as if it would never be filled. Miles and miles of bush -forlorn and lost. It all feels like that. Yet Sydney is a huge modern city.

I don't really like it, it is so raw - so crude. The people are so crude in their feelings - and they only want to be up-to-date in the 'conveniences' - electric light and tramways and things like that. The aristocrats are the people who own big shops - and there is no respect for anything else. The working people very discontented - always threaten more strikes - always more socialism.

I shall cable to America for money, and sail in July across the Pacific to San Francisco - via Wellington, New Zealand, Raratonga, Tahiti, Honolulu - then to our Taos. And that is the way home - coming back. Next spring we will come to Germany. I've got a Heimweh for Europe: Sicily, England, Germany.

Auf Wiedersehen.

D. H. L.

I must hurry to catch the mail which leaves here tonight - leaves Sydney tomorrow, for Europe. Write to me:

care of Robert Mountsier 417 West 118 Street New York City I shall get your letters in America. Frieda ist so glücklich mit ihrem neuen Hans - macht allés so schon.

Thirroul, N.S.W. Australia 9 June 1922

My dear Mother-in-Law:

We had two letters today - Anita's wedding letter, also the news that Nusch wants to leave Max. Oh, God! Revolution and earthquake. From your letters you seem to be a little angry. Are you angry that we wandered farther away, we wandering Jews? I tell you again, the world is round and brings the rolling stone home again. And I must go on till I find something that gives me peace. Last year I found it at Ebersteinburg. There I finished 'Aaron's Rod' and my 'Fantasia of the Unconscious.' And now 'Aaron' has appeared and this month the 'Fantasia' will appear in New York. And I, I am in Australia, and suddenly I write again, a mad novel of Australia. That's how it goes. I hope I can finish it by August. Then, mother-in-law, again to the sea. We want to take the ship 'Tahiti,' that leaves Sydney on the tenth of August, and arrives on the sixteenth in

Wellington, New Zealand; then to Raratonga and Papeete, capital of Tahiti, in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, and then, September fourth, we arrive at San Francisco, California. From San Francisco to Taos, N'w Mexico. And I believe, in the spring, you will see us again in Baden-Baden. I've only just enough money to take us to Taos. And then nothing. But it always comes.

It is nice here. You'd like this house very much: the large room with open fireplace and beautiful windows with red curtains, and large verandas, and the grass and the sea, always big and noisy at our feet. We bathe at midday when the sun is very hot and the shores quite lonely, quite, quite lonely. Only the waves. The village is new and crude. The streets are not built, it is all sand and loam. It's interesting. The people are all very kind and yet strange to me. Postman and newspaper boy come riding on horses and whistle on a policeman's whistle when they have thrown in the letters or newspaper.

Meat is so cheap. Two good sheep's tongues ten cents, and a huge piece of beef enough for twelve people forty cents. We also have lovely fruit - apples, pears, passion-fruit, persimmons - and marvellous butter and milk.

And heaven and earth so new as if no man had ever breathed in it, no foot ever trodden on it. The great weight of the spirit that lies so heavily on Europe doesn't exist here. You feel a little like a child that has no real cares. It is interesting - a new experience.

It is your birthday in a little while. I send you a few cents, you can still have teas with old women. Greet all. Poor Else! I'm writing to her.

Leb wohl, D. H. L.

(Translated from the German)

'Wyewurk' Thirroul South Coast, N.S.W. Australia 13 June 1922

Dear Else:

I have been wanting to write to you. The Schweigermutter says that Friedel is ill with jaundice. I am so sorry, and do hope it is better by now.

I often think of you here, and wonder what you would think of this. We're in a very nice place: have got a delightful bungalow here about forty miles south of Sydney, right on the shore. We live mostly with the sea - not much with the land - and not at all with the people. I don't present any letters of introduction, we don't know a soul on this side of the continent: which is almost a triumph in itself. For the first time in my life I feel how lovely it is to know nobody in the whole country: and nobody can come to the door, except the tradesmen who bring the bread and meat and so on, and who are very unobtrusive. One nice thing about these countries is that nobody asks questions. I suppose there have been too

many questionable people here in the past. But it's nice not to have to start explaining oneself, as one does in Italy.

The people here are awfully nice, casually: thank heaven I need go no further. The township is just a scatter of bungalows, mostly of wood with corrugated iron roofs, and with some quite good shops: 'stores. ' It lies back from the sea. Nobody wants to be too near the sea here: only we are on the brink. About two miles inland there is a great long hill like a wall, facing the sea and running all down the coast. This is dark greyish with gum-trees, and it has little coal-mines worked into it. The men are mostly coal-miners, so I feel quite at home. The township itself - they never say village here - is all haphazard and new, the streets unpaved, the church built of wood. That part is pleasant - the newness. It feels so free. And though it is midwinter, and the shortest day next week, still every day is as sunny as our own summer, and the sun is almost as hot as our June. But the nights are cold.

Australia is a weird, big country. It feels so empty and untrodden. The minute the night begins to go down, even the towns, even Sydney, which is huge, begins to feel unreal, as if it were only a daytime imagination, and in the night it did not exist. That is a queer sensation: as if life here really had never entered in: as if it were just sprinkled over, and the land lay untouched. They are terribly afraid of the Japanese. Practically all Australians, and especially Sydney, feel that once there was a fall in England, so that the Powers could not interfere, Japan would at once walk in and occupy the place. They seriously believe this: say it is even the most obvious thing for Japan to do, as a business proposition. Of course Australia would never be able to defend herself. It is queer to find these bogies wherever one goes. But I suppose they may materialize. I Labour is very strong and very stupid. Everything except meat is exorbitantly expensive, many things twice as much as in England. And Australian apples are just as cheap in London as in Australia, and sometimes cheaper. It is all very irritating.

This is the most democratic place I have ever been in. And the more I see of democracy the more I dislike it. It just brings everything down to the mere vulgar level of wages and prices, electric light and water closets, and nothing else. You never knew anything so nothing, nichts, nullus, niente, as the life here. They have good wages, they wear smart boots, and the girls all have silk stockings; they fly around on ponies and in buggies - sort of low one-horse traps - and in motor-cars. They are always vaguely and meaninglessly on the go. And it all seems so empty, so nothing, it almost makes you sick. They are healthy, and to my thinking almost imbecile. That's what the life in a new country does to you: it makes you so material, so outward, that your real inner life and your inner self die out, and you clatter round like so many mechanical animals. It is very like

the Wells story - the fantastic stories. I feel if I lived in Australia for ever I should never open my mouth once to say one word that meant anything. Yet they are very trustful and kind and quite competent in their jobs. There's no need to lock your doors, nobody will come and steal. All the outside life is so easy. But there it ends. There's nothing else. The best society in the country are the shopkeepers - nobody is any better than anybody else, and it really is democratic. But it all feels so slovenly, slipshod, rootless, and empty, it is like a kind of dream. Yet the weird, unawakened country is wonderful and if one could have a dozen people, perhaps, and a big piece of land of one's own - But there, one can't.

There is this for it, that here one doesn't feel the depression and the tension of Europe. Everything is happy-go-lucky, and one couldn't fret about anything if one tried. One just doesn't care. And they are all like that. Au fond they don't care a straw about anything: except just their little egos. Nothing really matters. But they let the little things matter sufficiently to keep the whole show going. In a way it's a relief-a relief from the moral and mental and nervous tension of Europe. But to say the least, it's surprising. I never felt such a foreigner to any people in all my life as I do to these. An absolute foreigner, and I haven't one single thing to say to them.

But I am busy doing a novel: with Australia for the setting: a queer show. It goes fairly quickly, so I hope to have it done by August. Then we shall sail via New Zealand and Tahiti for San Francisco, and probably spend the winter in Taos, New Mexico. That is what I think I want to do. Then the next spring come to Europe again. I feel I shall wander for the rest of my days. But I don't care.

I must say this new country has been a surprise to me. Flinders Petrie says new countries are no younger than their parent country. But they are older, more empty, and more devoid of religion or anything that makes for 'quality' in life.

I have got a copy of 'Aaron's Rod' for you, but am not sure whether I may post it from here or not. Trade relations with Germany don't start till August.

Write to me care of Robert Mountsier, 417 West 118th Street, New York. I wish I had good news for you. Frieda sleeps after her bath.

D. H. Lawrence

If a girl called Ruth Wheelock sends you a little note I gave her to introduce her to you, I think you'd like her. American, was in the consulate in Palermo - we knew her there and in Rome - both like her.

D. H. L.

She's not got any money, unless she earns some or her father gives her some.

We sailed from Sydney for San Francisco. It was a smallish boat with a stout jolly captain. We passed Raratonga and went on to Tahiti, always in perfect weather in the Pacific. Nothing but flying fish, porpoises, sky, the great sea, and our boat. Then Tahiti. It must have been so marvellous in the past, those gentle, too gentle handsome natives, with their huts, the perfection of the island in itself. But the joy of it was gone. The charming native women, who offered me old beads and flowers, made me sad in their clumsy Mother Hubbard garments. I know how European diseases were wiping the natives out, the contact with Europe fatal to them. In the evening we saw a cinema in a huge kind of barn; there was a native king, enormous; he was in a box near the stage with several handsome wives. We had travelled with a cinema crowd from Tahiti. Near our cabin two of the young stars had their cabin. They seemed to sleep all day and looked white and tired in the evening. Cases of empty champagne bottles stood outside their cabin in the morning. One of them I had seen flirt quite openly with a passenger but when we arrived in San Francisco I saw her trip so innocently into the arms of a young man who was waiting for her. I remember in San Francisco how the moon at night made such a poor show above all the lights of the town.

We went into a cafeteria and did not know how to behave; how to take our plates and food.

America

We travelled from San Francisco to Taos in great expectation. It was September and the journey through the inner American desert very hot. We got out at Lamy to be met by Mabel Dodge who had brought us here. And as we looked out we saw Mabel standing there in a turquoise blue dress with much of the silver-and-turquoise Indian jewellery and by her side a handsome Indian in a blanket with a large silver belt going across his chest. I looked at Mabel. 'She has eyes one can trust,' I said to myself. And afterwards I always kept to this: people are what they are, whatever they may occasionally do.

When we came to Santa Fe all the hotels were full, so Mabel asked Witter Bynner to take us in. He did: us, the trunks, Sicilian cart and all.

The next morning we drove up through the vast wonderful desert country, with its clear pure air, driving through the Rio Grande canyon deep down by the river and then coming up on to the Taos plateau. Coming out of the canyon to the mesa is an unforgettable experience, with all the deep mountains sitting mysteriously around in a ring, and so much sky.

Mabel had prepared us a house all to ourselves in her 'Mabel-town.' The house stood on Indian land and belonged to Tony. It was a charming adobe house, with Mexican blankets and Indian paintings of Indian dances and animals, clean and full of sun.

A new life for us - and we began it straightaway. Out from the pueblo to the east of us, a few miles away, came the feel of the Indians, so different from anything we had ever known. We neither of us wanted to stunt about it, but we were very happy. Tony went for two days with Lawrence to the Navajo country. I spent the days with Mabel and her friend Alice Corbin.

They asked me many questions, which I answered truthfully, giving the show away completely as usual. Then Mabel, with her great energy, took us all over the country: we saw the pueblo, we bathed in a hot radium spring by the Rio Grande. Mabel and Lawrence wanted to write a book together: about Mabel, it was going to be. I did not want this. I had always regarded Lawrence's genius as given to me. I felt deeply responsible for what he wrote. And there was a fight between us, Mabel and myself: I think it was a fair fight. One day Mabel came over and told me she didn't think I was the right woman for Lawrence and other

things equally upsetting and I was thoroughly roused and said: 'Try it then yourself, living with a genius, see what it is like and how easy it is, take him if you can.'

And I was miserable thinking that Lawrence had given her a right to talk like this to me. When Lawrence came in, he saw that I was unhappy, and somebody had told him that Mabel's son John Evans had said: 'My mother is tired of those Lawrences who sponge on her.' This may have been pure malice, but Lawrence was in a fury too; not for nothing was his beard red, and he said: 'I will pay the rent of the house and I'll leave as soon as I can.'

And then he would draw me in a flood of tenderness and love and we would be washed clean of all our apartness and be together again. And Lawrence would rave against Mabel as only he could rave. When I wanted to stick up for her I would get it: 'All women are alike, bossy, without any decency; it's your business to see that other women don't come too close to me.'

That's what he said. It was all very well, but I didn't know how to do it.

We had learned to ride: a long thin Don Quixote of a Mexican had taught us how in a few rides across the open desert. I was terribly happy, feeling the live horse under me. Later on, Azul, my horse, would go like the wind with me and he seemed always aware of me when I was a bit scared.

So we left Mabel's ambient and went to live at the Del Monte Ranch, under the mountains. We had a log house, and the Hawks lived at the big house and in the lower log cabin lived two Danish painters who had come to stay with us; they had come from New York in the most trying old Lizzie that ever went along the road.

She coughed and trembled at the tiniest hill, she stuck and had to be shoved: she was a trial.

It was a real mountain winter. So sharp, knifey cold at night; snow and ice, and the Danes and Lawrence had to chop lots of wood.

We rode into the Lobo Canyon over the logs under the trees and one had to look out for one's head and knees when the horses tore along under the trees. Lawrence would say later on: 'If you were only as nice with me as you are with Azul.'

The friendship and fight with Mabel went on, off and on. She was so admirable in her terrific energy, in her resources and intelligence, but e couldn't get on, somehow.

I remember riding along in the car, when Lawrence said to her: 'Frieda is the freest human being I know.' And I said to him, afterwards: 'You needn't say nice things about me, just to make other people mad.'

Tony would sing his Indian songs when driving. I had told him: 'In our

country, Tony, one crow means bad luck and two good luck.' So he would watch for crows and say: Two crows, Frieda.'

In the spring we went to Mexico with Witter Bynner and Spud Johnson. After the hard winter, I clamoured for a known. We neither of us wanted to stunt about it, but we were very happy. Tony went for two days with Lawrence to the Navajo country. I spent the days with Mabel and her friend Alice Corbin.

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In the spring we went to Mexico with Witter Bynner and Spud Johnson. After the hard winter, I clamoured for a first-rate hotel in Mexico City. But it wasn't a success, the first-rate hotel, after all, it seemed dull and a bit unclean; the ladies were so very painted and the men not attractive.

The journey across the lonely desert had been strange. The stations were only a few miserable houses and a big water tank and fine dust blew in at the window of the car, filling one's eyes and ears and nose, all one's pores with very fine sand.

Mexico City seemed like a would-be smart and grand lady to me, but she hadn't quite brought it off. The shabby parts were the most interesting. The Volador Market and all the fascinating baskets and ropes and saddles and belts, pots and dishes and leather jackets.

One day we were in the cathedral plaza of Mexico City, Bynner and Spud and I, when on the top of the church we saw a red flag being hoisted. A crowd collected, soldiers appeared. Bynner and Spud had dashed into the dark hole of the door of the church tower. It was crowding with people. I stayed in the plaza, watching the tower on which were Bynner and Spud, fearing for their fate. My relief when they appeared after an hour was great.

In the Museum we saw among the Aztec relics coiled snakes and other terrifying stone carvings, Maximilian's state carriage. That took me back to my childhood. One of the impressive figures of my childhood had been a Graf Geldern, long, lean, sad, and loosely built like a Mexican, in the uniform of a

colonel of the 'Totenkopffhusaren.' He had been to Mexico with Maximilian. How he afterwards took Prussian service I don't know. When they shot Maximilian, they played 'La Paloma.' He had asked for it.

Lawrence went to Guadalajara and found a house with a patio on the Lake of Chapala. There Lawrence began to write his 'Plumed Serpent.' He sat by the lake under a pepper tree writing it. The lake was curious with its white water. My enthusiasm for bathing in it faded considerably when one morning a huge snake rose yards high, it seemed to me, only a few feet away. At the end of the patio we had the family that Lawrence describes in the 'Plumed Serpent,' and all the life of Chapala. I tried my one attempt at civilizing those Mexican children, but when they asked me one day: 'Do you have lice too, Nina,' I had enough and gave up in a rage. At night I was frightened of bandits and we had one of the sons of the cook sleeping outside our bedroom door with a loaded revolver, but he snored so fiercely that I wasn't sure whether the fear of bandits wasn't preferable. We quite sank into the patio life. Bynner and Spud came every afternoon, and I remember Bynner saying to me one day, while he was mixing a cocktail: 'If you and Lawrence quarrel, why don't you hit first?' I took the advice and the next time Lawrence was cross, I rose to the occasion and got out of my Mexican indifference and flew at him.

All that time in Mexico seems to me, now, as if I had dreamt it, dreamt it intensely.

We went across the pale Lake of Chapala to a native village where they made serapes; they dyed the wool and wove them on simple looms. Lawrence made some designs and had them woven, as in the 'Plumed Serpent.'

Lawrence could only write in places where one's imagination could have space and free play, where the door was not closed to the future, where one's vision could people it with new souls to be born, who would live a new life.

I remember the Pyramids at Teotihuacan, that we saw with Spud and Bynner, I hanging around behind. It was getting dusky and suddenly I came on a huge stone snake, coiling green with great turquoise eyes, round the foot of a temple. I ran after the others for all I was worth. I got a glimpse of old Mexico then, the old sacrifices, hearts still quivering held up to the sun, for the sun to drink the blood: there it had all happened, on the pyramid of the Sun.

And that awful goddess, who, instead of a Raphael bambino, brings forth an obsidian knife. Fear of these people who don't mind killing and don't mind dying. And I had seen a huge black Christ, in a church, with a black beard and long woman's hair and he wore little white, frilly knickers. Death and sacrifice and cruel gods seemed to reign in Mexico under its sunshine and splendour of flowers and lots of birds and fruit and white volcano peaks.

We went into a huge old Noah's Ark of a boat, called 'Esmeralda,' on the Lake of Chapala, with two other friends and Spud. Three Mexicans looked after the boat. They had guitars and sang their melancholy or fierce songs at the end of the boat. In the evening we slowly drifted along the large lake, that was more like a white sea, and, one day, we had no more to eat. So we landed on the island of the scorpions, still crowned by a Mexican empty prison, and only fit for scorpions. There Lawrence bought a live goat, but when we had seen our Mexican boatmen practically tearing the poor beast to pieces, our appetites vanished and we did not want to eat any more.

Lawrence's visions which he wrote in the 'Plumed Serpent' seem so interwoven with everyday life. The everyday and the vision running on together day by day. That autumn we returned to America and spent some time in New Jersey. Lawrence remained in America and went again to Mexico. I went to Europe.

So I went to England alone and had a little flat in Hampstead to see something of my children. It was winter and I wasn't a bit happy alone there and Lawrence was always cross when I had this longing for the children upon me; but there it was, though now I know he was right: they didn't want me any more, they were living their own lives. I felt lost without him. Finally he came and wrote this cross and unjust letter to my mother:

Hotel Garcia Guadalajara Jalisco, Mexico 10 November, 1923

My dear Mother-in-Law:

I had the two letters from Frieda at Baden, with the billet-doux from you. Yes, mother-in-law, I believe one has to be seventy before one is full of courage. The young are always half-hearted. Frieda also makes a long, sad nose and says she is writing to the moon - Guadalajara is no moon-town, and I am completely on the earth, with solid feet.

But I am coming back, am only waiting for a ship. I shall be in England in December. And in the spring, when the primroses are out, I shall be in Baden. Time goes by faster and faster. Frieda sent me Hartmann von Richthofen's letter. It was nice. But the women have more courage these days than the men - also a letter from Nusch, a little sad but lively. I hope to see her also in the spring. One must spit on one's hands and take firm hold. Don't you think so?

I was at the Barranca, a big, big ravine, and bathed in the hot springs - came home and found the whole of Germany in my room.

I like it here. I don't know how, but it gives me strength, this black country. It is full of man's strength, perhaps not woman's strength, but it is good, like the old German beer-for-the-heroes, for me. Oh, mother-in-law, you are nice and

old, and understand, as the first maiden understood, that a man must be more than nice and good, and that heroes are worth more than saints. Frieda doesn't understand that a man must be a hero these days and not only a husband: husband also but more. I must go up and down through the world, I must balance Germany against Mexico and Mexico against Germany. I do not come for peace. The devil, the holy devil, has peace round his neck. I know it well, the courageous old one understands me better than the young one, or at least something in me she understands better. Frieda must always think and write and say and ponder how she loves me. It is stupid. I am no Jesus that lies on his mother's lap. I go my way through the world, and if Frieda finds it such hard work to love me, then, dear God, let her love rest, give it holidays. Oh, mother-in-law, you understand, as my mother finally understood, that a man doesn't want, doesn't ask for love from his wife, but for strength, strength, strength. To fight, to fight, to fight, and to fight again. And one needs courage and strength and weapons. And the stupid woman keeps on saying love, love, love, and writes of love. To the devil with love! Give me strength, battle-strength, weapon-strength, fighting-strength, give me this, you woman!

England is so quiet: writes Frieda. Shame on you that you ask for peace today. I don't want peace. I go around the world fighting. Pfui! Pfui! In the grave I find my peace. First let me fight and win through. Yes, yes, mother-in-law, make me an oak-wreath and bring the town music under the window, when the half-hero returns.

D.H.L.

(Translated from the German)

But I think he was right; I should have gone to meet him in Mexico, he should not have come to Europe; these are the mistakes we make, sometimes irreparable.

Finally he came and I was glad. Just before Christmas he came and we had some parties and saw some friends, but we wanted to go back to America in the spring and live at the ranch that Mabel Luhan had given me. She had taken me to the little ranch near Taos and I said: 'This is the loveliest place I have ever seen.' And she told me: 'I give it you.' But Lawrence said: 'We can't accept such a present from anybody.' I had a letter from my sister that very morning telling me she had sent the manuscript of 'Sons and Lovers,' so I told Lawrence: 'I will give Mabel the MS. for the ranch.' So I did.

Murry was coming to America too. First we went to Paris, where we stayed as in our own home at the Hôtel de Versailles.

Lawrence wanted me to have some new clothes. Mabel Harrison, who had a

large studio opposite the hotel, told us of a good tailor nearby. Lawrence went with me. The stout little tailor draped himself with the cape we bought to show me how to wear it. 'Voyez-vous, la ligne, Madame.' He made me some other clothes and Lawrence remarked with wonder: 'How is it possible that a man can throw all his enthusiasm into clothes for women?'

We went to Strassburg and Baden-Baden, a strange journey for me, going through French territory that had been German just a few years ago.

In the spring we went to America again and Dorothy Brett came with us. We only stayed a few days in New York and went on to Taos. We stayed with Mabel Luhan but, somehow, we didn't get on. I was longing to go to the ranch and live there. Lawrence was a bit afraid to tackle the forlorn little ranch. We had some ten or a dozen Indians to build up the tumble-down houses and corrals and everything. Then he loved it. We had to mend the irrigation ditch and we were impressed by the way Mr Murry dragged huge pipes through the woods, just over no road, to the mouth of the Gallina Canyon of which we had the water rights. And I cooked huge meals for everybody. We all worked so hard. Brett, as everybody called her, straight from her studio life, was amazing for the hard work she would do. One day we cleaned our spring and carried huge stones until we nearly dropped. The spring is in a hollow, and I loved watching the horses play when they came to drink there, shoving each other's noses away from the water level and then tearing up the bank. We did it all ourselves for very little money for we didn't have much. We got a cow and had four horses: Azul, Aaron, and two others; and then we got chickens, all white ones, Leghorns. The beautiful cockerel was called Moses and Susan was the cow's name.

Lawrence got up at five o'clock each morning. With the opera glasses my mother had given him, he looked for Susan, who was an independent creature and loved to hide in the woods. There he would stand, when at last he had found her, and shake his forefinger at her - to my delight - and scold her, the black cow.

I made our own butter in a little glass churn and the chickens flourished on the buttermilk, and so did we in this healthy life. We made our own bread in the Indian oven outside, black bread and white and cakes, and Lawrence was terribly fussy about the bread, which had to be perfect. He made cupboards and chairs and painted doors and windows. He wrote and irrigated and it seems amazing that one single man got so much done. We rode and people stayed with us, and he was always there for everybody as if he did nothing at all. He helped Brett with her pictures and me with my poor attempts.

It was a wonderful summer; there were wild strawberries, that year, and back in the canyon raspberries as big as garden ones, but I was afraid to get them

because I had heard that bears love raspberries. Bears won't do you any harm except when they have young. There were bears in the canyon - that seemed indeed the end of the world! The Brett had a tiny shanty in which she lived. She adored Lawrence and slaved for him.

In the autumn we went again to Mexico City. It was fun and we saw several people. In Mexico you could still feel a little lordly and an individual; Mexico has not yet been made 'safe for democracy.'

An amusing thing happened: Lawrence had become a member of the PEN Club and they gave an evening in his honour. It was a men's affair and he put on his black clothes and set off in the evening, and I, knowing how unused he was to public functions and how he really shrank from being a public figure, wondered in the hotel room how the evening would go off. Soon after ten o'clock he appeared.

'How was it?'

'Well, they read to me bits of "The Plumed Serpent" in Spanish and I had to sit and listen and then they made a speech and I had to answer.'

'What did you say?'

'I said: here we are together, some of us English, some Mexicans and Americans, writers and painters and business men and so on, but before all and above all we are *men* together tonight. That was about what I said. But a young Mexican jumped up: "It's all very well for an Englishman to say I am a man first and foremost, but a Mexican cannot say so, he must be a Mexican above everything."'

So we laughed, the only speech that Lawrence ever made falling so completely flat. They had missed the whole point, as so often.

Just as it was said of him that he wasn't patriotic; he who seemed to me England itself, a flower sprung out of its most delicate, courageous tradition, not the little bourgeois England but the old England of Palmerston, whom he admired when men were still men and not mere social beings.

One day William Somerset Maugham was expected in Mexico City; so Lawrence wrote to him if they could meet. But Maugham's secretary answered for him, saying: 'I hear we are going out to a friend's to lunch together who lives rather far out; let's share a taxi.'

Lawrence was angry that Maugham had answered through his secretary and wrote back: 'No, I won't share a car.'

Brett came with us and she had a story from her sister, the Ranee of Sarawak, where Maugham had stayed and he and his secretary had nearly got drowned, shooting some rapids, I think. So there had been feeling there. And our hostess had a grudge against the secretary. Maugham sat next to me and I asked how he

liked it here. He answered crossly: 'Do you want me to admire men in big hats?'

I said: 'I don't care what you admire.' And then the lunch was drowned in acidity all round. But after lunch I felt sorry for Maugham: he seemed to me an unhappy and acid man, who got no fun out of living. He seemed to me to have fallen between two stools as so many writers do. He wanted to have his cake and eat it. He could not accept the narrow social world and yet he didn't believe in a wider human one. Commentators and critics of life and nothing more.

When I met other writers, then I knew without knowing how different altogether Lawrence was. They may have been good writers, but Lawrence was a genius.

The inevitability of what he elementally was and had to say at any price, his knowledge and vision, came to him from deeper secret sources than it is given to others to draw from. When I read Aeschylus and Sophocles, then I know Lawrence is great, he is like these - greatest in his work, where human passions heave and sink and mingle and clash. The background of death is always there and the span of life is felt as fierce action. Life is life only when death is part of it. Not like the Christian conception that shuts death away from life and says death comes after: death is always there. I think the great gain of the war is a new reincorporation of death into our lives.

Then we went down to Oaxaca. We had again a house with a patio. There Lawrence wrote 'Mornings in Mexico,' with the parrots and Corasmin, the white dog, and the mozo. He rewrote and finished the 'Plumed Serpent' there. There was malaria in Oaxaca, it had come with the soldiers, and the climate didn't suit him.

I went to the market with the mozo and one day he showed me in the square, in one of the bookshops, an undeniable caricature of Lawrence, and he watched my face to see how I would take it. I was thrilled! To find in this wild place, with its Zapotec and undiluted Mexican tribes, anything so civilized as a caricature of Lawrence was fun. I loved the market and it was only distressing to see the boy with his basket so utterly miserable at my paying without bargaining: it was real pain to him. But the lovely flowers and everything seemed so cheap.

Meanwhile Lawrence wrote at home and got run down. The Brett came every day and I thought she was becoming too much part of our lives and I resented it. So I told Lawrence: 'I want the Brett to go away,' and he raved at me, said I was a jealous fool. But I insisted and so Brett went up to Mexico City. Then Lawrence finished 'The Plumed Serpent,' already very ill, and later on he told me he wished he had finished it differently. Then he was very ill. I had a local native doctor who was scared at having anything to do with a foreigner and he didn't come. Lawrence was very ill, much more ill than I knew, fortunately. I can never

say enough of the handful of English and Americans there: how good they were to us. Helping in every way. I thought these mine-owners and engineers led plucky and terrible lives. Always fever, typhoid, malaria, danger from bandits, never feeling a bit safe with their lives. And so I was amazed at the 'Selbstverständlichkeit' with which they helped us. It was so much more than Christian, just natural: a fellow-Englishman in distress: let's help him. Lawrence himself thought he would die.

'You'll bury me in this cemetery here,' he would say, grimly.

'No, no,' I laughed, 'it's such an ugly cemetery, don't you think of it.'

And that night he said to me: 'But if I die, nothing has mattered but you, nothing at all.' I was almost scared to hear him say it, that, with all his genius, I should have mattered so much. It seemed incredible.

I got him better by putting hot sandbags on him, that seemed to comfort his tortured inside.

One day we had met a missionary and his wife, who lived right in the hills with the most uncivilized tribe of Indians. He didn't look like a missionary but like a soldier. He told me he had been an airman, and there far away in Oaxaca he told me how he was there when Manfred Richthofen was brought down behind the trenches and in the evening at mess one of the officers rose and said: 'Let's drink to our noble and generous enemy.'

For me to be told of this noble gesture made in that awful war was a great thing.

Then I remember the wife appeared with a very good bowl of soup when Lawrence was at his worst, and then prayed for him by his bedside in that big bare room. I was half afraid and wondered how Lawrence would feel. But he took it gently and I was half laughing, half crying over the soup and the prayer.

While he was so ill an earthquake happened into the bargain, a thunderstorm first, and the air made you gasp. I felt ill and feverish and Lawrence so ill in the next room - dogs howled and asses and horses and cats were scared in the night - and to my horror I saw the beams of my roof move in and out of their sheaves.

'Let's get under the bed if the roof falls!' I cried.

At last, slowly, slowly, he got a little better. I packed up to go to Mexico City. This was a crucifixion of a journey for me. We travelled through the tropics. Lawrence in the heat so weak and ill and then the night we stayed half-way to Mexico City in a hotel. There, after the great strain of his illness, something broke in me. 'He will never be quite well again, he is ill, he is doomed. All my love, all my strength, will never make him whole again.' I cried like a maniac the whole night. And he disliked me for it. But we arrived in Mexico City. I had Dr Uhlfelder come and see him. One morning I had gone out and when I came back

the analyst doctor was there and said, rather brutally, when I came into Lawrence's room: 'Mr Lawrence has tuberculosis.' And Lawrence looked at me with such unforgettable eyes.

'What will she say and feel?' And I said: 'Now we know, we can tackle it. That's nothing. Lots of people have that.' And he got slowly better and could go to lunch with friends. But they, the doctors, told me:

'Take him to the ranch; it's his only chance. He has T.B. in the third degree. A year or two at the most.'

With this bitter knowledge in my heart I had to be cheerful and strong. Then we travelled back to the ranch and were tortured by immigration officials, who made all the difficulties in the ugliest fashion to prevent us from entering the States. If the American Embassy in Mexico hadn't helped we would not have been able to go to the ranch that was going to do Lawrence so much good.

Slowly at the ranch he got better. The high clear air, short sunbaths, our watching and care, and the spring brought life back into him. As he got better he began writing his play 'David,' lying outside his little room on the porch in the sun.

I think in that play he worked out his struggle for life. Old Saul and the young David — old Samuel's prayer is peculiarly moving in its hopeless love for Saul - so many different motifs, giant motifs, in that play.

Mabel took us to a cave along the road near Arroyo Seco and he used it for his story 'The Woman Who Rode Away.'

Brett was always with us. I liked her in many ways; she was so much her own self.

I said to her: 'Brett, I'll give you half a crown if you contradict Lawrence,' but she never did. Her blind adoration for him, her hero-worship for him was touching, but naturally it was balanced by a preconceived critical attitude towards me. He was perfect and I always wrong, in her eyes.

When the Brett came with us Lawrence said to me: 'You know, it will be good for us to have the Brett with us, she will stand between us and people and the world.' I did not really want her with us, and had a suspicion that she might not want to stand between us and the world, but between him and me. But no, I thought, I won't be so narrow-gutted, one of Lawrence's words, I will try.

So I looked after Brett and was grateful for her actual help. She did her share of the work. I yelled down her ear-trumpet, her Toby, when people were there, that she should not feel out of it. But as time went on she seemed always to be there, my privacy that I cherished so much was gone. Like the eye of the Lord, she was; when I washed, when I lay under a bush with a book, her eyes seemed to be there, only I hope the eye of the Lord looks on me more kindly. Then I

detested her, poor Brett, when she seemed deaf and dumb and blind to everything quick and alive. Her adoration for Lawrence seemed a silly old habit. 'Brett,' I said, 'I detest your adoration for Lawrence, only one thing I would detest more, and that is if you adored me.'

When I finally told Lawrence in Oaxaca: 'I don't want Brett such a part of our life, I just don't want her,' he was cross at first, but then greatly relieved.

How thrilling it was to feel the inrush of new vitality in him; it was like a living miracle. A wonder before one's eyes. How grateful he was inside him! 'I can do things again. I can live and do as I like, no longer held down by the devouring illness.' How he loved every minute of life at the ranch. The morning, the squirrels, every flower that came in its turn, the big trees, chopping the wood, the chickens, making bread, all our hard work, and the people and all assumed the radiance of new life.

He worked hard as a relaxation and wrote for hard work.

Palace Hotel San Francisco, U.S.A. 5 September 1922

Dear Mother-in-Law:

We arrived yesterday, the journey good all the way. Now we sit in the Palace Hotel, the first hotel of San Francisco. It was first a hut with a corrugated iron roof, where the ox-wagons unhitched. Now a big building, with post and shops in it, like a small town in itself: is expensive, but for a day or two it doesn't matter. We were twenty-five days at sea and are still landsick - the floor ought to go up and down, the room ought to tremble from the engines, the water ought to swish around but doesn't, so one is landsick. The solid ground almost hurts. We have many ship's friends here, are still a jolly company.

I think we shall go to Taos Tuesday or Friday: two days by train, a thousand miles by car. We have such nice letters and telegrams from Mabel Dodge and Mountsier. Mabel says: 'From San Francisco you are my guests, so I send you the railway tickets' - so American! Everybody is very nice. All is comfortable, comfortable, comfortable - I really hate this mechanical comfort.

I send you thirty dollars - I have no English cheques - till I arrive in Taos. I will send you English money, with the rise of the valuta. Does Else need any money? I don't know how much I've got, but our life in Taos will cost little - rent free and wood free. Keep well, mother-in-law. I wait for news from you.

D. H. L.

(Translated from the German)

Taos New Mexico U.S.A.

27 September 1922

My dear Else:

Well, here we are in the Land of the Free and the Home of the Brave. But both freedom and bravery need defining. The Eros book came, and I shall read it as soon as we get breathing space. Even though we are in the desert, in the sleepy land of the Mexican, we gasp on the breath of hurry.

We have got a very charming adobe house on the edge of the Indian Reservation - very smartly furnished with Indian village-made furniture and Mexican and Navajo rugs, and old European pottery. Behind runs a brook - in front the desert, a level little plain all grey, white-grey sage brush, in yellow flower-and from this plain rise the first Rocky Mountains, heavy and solid. We are seven thousand feet above the sea -in a light, clear air.

The sun by day is hot, night is chilly. At the foot of the sacred Taos Mountain, three miles off, the Indians have their pueblo, like a pile of earth-coloured cube-boxes in a heap; two piles rather, one on one side of the stream, one on the other. The stream waters the little valley, and they grow corn and maize, by irrigation. This pueblo owns four square miles of land. They are nearer the Aztec type of Indian - not like Apaches whom I motored last week to see - far over these high, sage-brush deserts and through canyons.

These Indians are soft-spoken, pleasant enough - the young ones come to dance to the drum - very funny and strange. They are Catholics but still keep the old religion, making the weather and shaping the year: all very secret and important to them. They are Rurally secretive, and have their backs set against our form of civilization. Yet it rises against them. In the pueblo they have mowing machines and threshing machines, and American schools, and the young men no longer care so much for the sacred dances.

And after all, if we have to go ahead, we must ourselves go ahead. We can go back and pick up some threads - but these Indians are up against a dead wall, even more than we are: but a different wall.

Mabel Sterne is very nice to us - though I hate living on somebody else's property and accepting their kindnesses. She very much wants me to write about here. I don't know if I ever shall. Because though it is so open, so big, free, empty, and even aboriginal - still it has a sort of shutting-out quality, obstinate.

Everything in America goes by will. A great negative will seems to be turned against all spontaneous life - there seems to be no feeling at all - no genuine bowels of compassion and sympathy: all this gripped, iron, benevolent will,

which in the end is diabolic. How can one write about it, save analytically?

Frieda, like you, always secretly hankered after America and its freedom: It's very freedom not to feel. But now she is just beginning-to taste the iron ugliness of what it means, to live by will against the spontaneous inner life, superimposing the individual, egoistic will over the real genuine sacred life. Of course I know you will jeer when I say there is any such thing as sacred spontaneous life, with its pride and its sacred power. I know you too believe in the screwed-up human will dominating life. But I don't. And that's why I think America is neither free nor brave, but a land of tight, iron-clanking little wills, everybody trying to put it over everybody else, and a land of men absolutely devoid of the real courage of trust, trust in life's sacred spontaneity. They can't trust life until they can control it. So much for them - cowards! You can have the Land of the Free - as much as I know of it. In the spring I want to come back to Europe.

I send you ten pounds to spend for the children - since you suffer from the exchange. I hope in this little trifle you can profit by it. F-sends her love.

P. S. If you want winter clothing, or underclothing, for the children or yourself or Alfred, write to my sister, Mrs L. A. Clarke, Grosvenor Rd., Ripley near Derby - tell her just what you want, and she will send it. I shall pay her - I have told her you will write - so don't hesitate.

Del Monte Ranch Questa, New Mexico 5 December 1922

My dear Mother-in-Law:

You see, we have flown again, but not far - only twenty-five kilometres, and here we are in an old log-house with five rooms, very primitive, on this big ranch. Behind, the Rocky Mountains, pines and snow-peaks; around us the hills - pine trees, cedars, greasewood, and a small grey bush of the desert. Below, the desert, great and flat like a shadowy lake, very wide. And in the distance more mountains, with small patches of snow - and the sunsets! Now you see the picture.

The Hawk family live five minutes from here, then no houses for four kilometres. Behind, no house for three hundred kilometres or more. Few people, an empty, very beautiful country.

We have hewn down a great balsam pine and cut it to pieces - like a quarry - the gold wood.

We have for companions two young Danes, painters: they will go into a little three-room cabin nearby. Our nearest neighbour, Hawk, is a young man, thirty years old, has a hundred and fifty half-wild animals, a young wife, is nice, not rich.

You have asked about Mabel Dodge: American, rich, only child, from Buffalo on Lake Erie, bankers, forty-two years old, has had three husbands - one Evans (dead), one Dodge (divorced), and one Maurice Sterne (a few, Russian, painter, young, also divorced). Now she has an Indian, Tony, a stout chap. She has lived much in Europe - Paris, Nice, Florence - is a little famous in New York and little loved, very intelligent as a woman, another 'culture-carrier, likes to play the patroness, hates the white world and loves the Indian out of hate, is very 'generous,' wants to be 'good' and is very wicked, has a terrible will-to-power, you know - she wants to be a witch and at the same time a Mary of Bethany at fesus's feet - a big, whit crow, a cooing raven of ill-omen, a little buffalo.

The people in America all want power, but a small, personal base power: bullying. They are all bullies.

Listen, Germany, America is the greatest bully the world has ever seen. Power is proud. But bullying is democratic and base.

Bas ta, we are still 'friends' with Mabel. But do not take this snake to our bosom. You know, these people have only money, nothing else but money, and because all the world wants money, all the money, America has become strong, proud and over-powerful.

If one would only say: America, your money is sh...' go and sh... more'- then America would be a nothing.

(Translated from the German)

Hotel Monte Carlo Uruguay, Mexico 27 April 1923

My dear Mother-in-Law:

We are still here, still making excursions. We can't make up our minds to go away. Tomorrow I go to Guadalajara and the Chapala Lake. There you have the Pacific breeze again, straight from the Pacific. One doesn't want to come back to Europe. All is stupid, evilly stupid and no end to it. You must be terribly tired of this German tragedy - all without meaning, without direction, idea, or spirit. Only money-greed and impudence. One can't do anything, nothing at all, except get bored and wicked. Here in Mexico there's also Bolshevism and Fascism and revolutions and all the rest of it. But I don't care. I don't listen. And the Indians remain outside. Revolutions come and revolutions go but they remain the same. They haven't the machinery of our consciousness, they are like black water, over which go our dirty motorboats, with stink and noise - the water gets a little dirty but does not really change.

I send you ten pounds and five for Else. I hope it arrives soon. A Hamburg-America boat goes every month from Vera Cruz to Hamburg. It must be lovely spring in Germany. If only men were not so stupid and evil, I would so love to be in Ebersteinburg when the chestnuts are in bloom. Have you seen 'The Captain's

Doll'? It ought to amuse you.

A thousand greetings.

D. H. L.

(Translated from the German)

Zaragoza 4 Chapala, Jalisco Mexico 31 May, Corpus Christi Day

My dear Mother-in-Law:

You will think we are never coming back to Europe. But it isn't so.

But I always had the idea of writing a novel here in America. In the US I could do nothing. But I think here it will go well. I have already written ten chapters and if the Lord helps me I shall have finished the first full sketch by the end of June. And then we will come home at once.

I must go by way of New York because of business and because it is shorter and cheaper. But in July New York is very hot and the nastiest heat, they say. Still, we won't stay more than a fortnight, from there to England and from England to Germany - very likely in September: my birthday month that I like so much.

Today is Corpus Christi and they have a procession. But there are no lovely birches as in Ebersteinburg two years ago. They only carry little palms into the churches, and palms aren't beautiful like our trees, and this eternal sun is not as joyous as our sun. It is always shining and is a little mechanical.

But Mexico is very interesting: a foreign people. They are mostly pure Indians, dark like the people in Ceylon but much stronger. The men have the strongest backbones in the world, I believe. They are half civilized, half wild. If they only had a new faith they might be a new, young, beautiful people. But as Christians they don't get any further, are melancholy inside, live without hope, are suddenly wicked, and don't like to work. But they are also good, can be gentle and honest, are very quiet, and are not at all greedy for money, and to me that is marvellous, they care so little for possessions, here in America where the whites care for nothing else. But not the peon. He has not this fever to possess that is a real ' Weltschmerz ' with us.

And now you know where we are and how it is with us. I'll send you a beautiful serape - blanket -for your birthday.

Auf Wiedersehen.

D. H. Lawrence (Translated from the German,

Care of Seltzer 5 West 50th Street New York City 7 August 1923

My dear Mother-in-Law:

We are still here in America - I find my soul doesn't want to come to Europe, it is like Balaam's ass and can't come any further. I am not coming, but Frieda is.

Very likely she will come by the S.S. 'Orbita,' on the eighteenth, from New York, for Southampton, England. She will be in London on the twenty-fifth, stays there a fortnight, then to Baden. I remain on this side: go to California, Los Angeles, where we have friends, and if it is nice there, Frieda can come there in October. I don't know why I can't go to England. Such a deadness comes over me, if I only think of it, that I think it is better if I stay here, till my feeling has changed.

I don't like New York - a big, stupid town, without background, without a voice. But here in the country it is green and still. But I like Mexico better. With my heart I'd like to come - also with my feet and eyes. But my soul can't. Farewell. Later on, the ass will be able to come.

D. H. L.

(Translated from the German)

110 Heath Street Hampstead, London, N.W.3 14 December 1923

My dear Mother-in-Law:

Here I am back again. Frieda is nice but England is ugly. I am like a wild beast in a cage - it is so dark and closed-in here and you can't breathe freely. But the people are friendly. Frieda has a nice apartment but I go about like an imprisoned coyote - can't rest. I think we'll go to Paris at the end of the month and then Baden. Do you hear me howl?

D. H. L. (Translated from the German)

Paris Hôtel de Versailles 60 Boulevard Montparnasse Saturday *Dearest Mutchen:*

We are sitting in bed, have had our coffee, the clock says 8:30, and we see the people and the carriages pass on the boulevard outside in the morning sun. The old men and women shake their carpets on their balconies in the tall house opposite, cleaning hard. Paris is still Paris.

We went to Versailles yesterday. It is stupid, so very big and flat, much too big for the landscape. No, such hugeness is merely blown up frog, that wants to make himself larger than nature and naturally he goes pop! Le Roi Soleil was like that - a very artificial light. Frieda was terribly disappointed in Le Petit Trianon of Marie Antoinette - a doll's palace and a doll's Swiss village from the stage. Poor Marie Antoinette, she wanted to be so simple and become a peasant, with her toy Swiss village and her niece, a little ordinary, Austrian, blond face. Finally she became too simple, without a head.

On the great canal a few people skated, a very few people, little and cold and without fun, between those well-combed trees that stand there like hair with an elegant parting. And these are the great. Man is stupid. Naturally the frog goes

pop!

Frieda has bought two hats and is proud of them.

Tomorrow we go to Chartres to see the cathedral. And that is our last outing. Tuesday we go to London.

Now, mother-in-law, you know all we are doing and can travel along with us. Such is life. We can go together in spite of separation and you can travel, travel in spite of old age.

Salutations, Madame, D. H. L.

(Translated from the German)

Del Monte Ranch Questa, New Mexico 28 June 1924

Dearest Mother-in-Law:

It's so long since I wrote you, but we had much to do here and my desire for writing is weak. I don't know why, but words and speech bore me a little. We know so well without saying anything. I know you, you know me, so I need no longer speak on paper.

You know, Frieda is quite proud of her ranch and her horse Azul, that's the one with two wives-my Poppy, who is very shy but beautiful, sorrel and quick, and then old Bessy, Brett's horse. Bessy is also red, or sorrel.

Every evening we go down to Del Monte, only three and a half kilometres, through woods and over the Lobo brook. You know, this place is called Lobo, which means 'wolf in Spanish.

Frieda is always talking to her Azul. 'Yes, Azul, you 're a good boy! Yes, my Azul, go on, go on, then! Yes! Are you afraid, silly horse! It's only a stone, a great white stone, why are you afraid then?' That's how she is always talking to him, because she is a little afraid herself There is always something to do here. I've written two stories. Right now we're building a roof over the little veranda before the kitchen door, with eight small pillars of pinewood and boards on top-very nice. It's nearly finished. You know, we've also got an Indian oven made of adobe. It stands outside, not far from the kitchen door, built like a beehive.

Last week came Francisco, the Indian servant at Del Monte. We baked bread and roasted chickens in the oven - very good. We can bake twenty loaves of bread in half an hour in it.

Five minutes' walk from here are the tents and beds of the Indians, still standing. Frieda and I slept there once, under the big stars that hang low on the mountains here. Morning comes and a beautiful grey squirrel runs up the balsam pine and scolds us. No one else in the world, only the great desert below, to the west. We don't go much to Taos and Mabel does not come often. We have

our own life. The Brett is a little simple but harmless, and likes to help. Else writes Friedel is coming to America. He will likely come here. I think Else may also come, she has a desire for America. All right, but life in America is empty and stupid, more empty and stupid than with us. I mean the city and village life. But here, where one is alone with trees and mountains and chipmunks and desert, one gets something out of the air, something wild and untamed, cruel and proud, beautiful and sometimes evil - that is really America. But not the America of the whites.

Here comes your birthday again, you old Valkyrie, so you leap on the horse of your spirit from one year's peak to the next, and look always further into the future. I send you a cheque. How gladly would I be with you, to drink your health in good Moselle. Here there is no wine and the 'prosit' cannot sound through the pines. But next year we will drink together to your birthday.

Auf Wiedersehen.

D. H. L.

P.S. I forgot, we have two small Bibble's-sons, two little dogs from our Pips. They are six weeks old, named Roland and Oliver, and are gay, small, and fat, and lift their paws like Chinese lions.

(Translated from the German)

Santa Fe 14 August 1924

[To Else]

We are motoring with Mabel Luhan to the Hopi country - hotter down here.

Curtis Brown wrote they were arranging with you for 'Boy in the Bush'-hope everything is satisfactory, and what a pity Baltimore is so far.

Del Monte Ranch Questa, New Mexico 26 October 1924

Dear Mother-in-Law:

We are home again, thank God. When one has been for three days with people one has had enough, quite enough. But next week we are going away, to stay a few days in Taos, then on to Mexico. Write to me care of British Consulate, 1 Avenida Madero, Mexico, DF, until I give you a new address.

The Brett will go with us: we do not know what else she could do, and she cannot remain here alone.

I am glad to go to Mexico. I don't know why, but I always want to travel south. It is already cold here, especially at night. The sun doesn't come over the hills till seven-thirty, then it turns warm and the horses stand stone-still, numbed by the

cold, in the middle of the alfalfa field soaking themselves in the sun's heat. For the most the sun is hot like July but today there are clouds.

I hope you will get your parcel, with blanket and picture. You will like them, I'm sure. I send you ten pounds for wood, you must keep nice and warm.

Here we shut everything up. The better things - silverware, rugs, beds, pictures, we take down on the wagon to good William and Rachel. Del Monte belongs to Mr Hawk, William's father. The parents have a biggish house but go to California a lot. The young ones, William and Rachel, are in the log-cabin where we stayed two years ago. They make butter there and look after the cows and chickens.

Every evening we ride down to get the milk and the post from William. He always brings the letters up from the post box. Rachel and William will take good care of our things. Monday, Mr Murray, a workman, comes to put up the shutters. We shall leave the horses here till December when the bis snow comes. Then William will take them to Del Monte, only two and a half kilometres away, and feed them every day with alfalfa till spring when we come back again.

I don't know how long we want to stay in Mexico City. I want to go southward to Oaxaca where the Mayas and Zapotec Indians live. It is always warm there, even hot. There I would like to finish my novel, 'The Plumed Serpent. '

Here the hills are golden with aspen and cottonwoods and red with scrub-oak, wonderful. The pines and firs are nearly black. A lovely moment, a beautiful moment, but it will not last.

Auf Wiedersehen, mother-in-law. Winter comes again for old ladies, too bad.

D. H. L.

(Translated from the German)

[A letter to Lawrence from his mother-in-law] BADEN

Sunday 9 November 1924

My dear Fritzl:

Else has vanished in beautiful winter sunshine and I sit alone in my lonely wintry room. So far I got yesterday when the charwoman came and today, 0 jubilee, 0 triumph, came the cheque and the parcel. Like a demon I rushed to the station, number 2 brought the parcel, too heavy for me, and what came forth! Moved, admiring and happy, I sit and look. How you have painted! No, how adorable is the ranch! Here the stones speak! I understand that you love being there. I see it all - 0 dear son-in-law, how happy you have made me! I would like to pack up and come. If I were only younger! No, those horses and the lovely tree! But I think the winter is too cold - and I can smell those flowers, almost, so charming and gay and colourful. I called all the ladies in my tempestuous joy

and all admired with me. What treasures - the blanket is just what I needed. The little original cover I put on my cane chair - My room looks quite Mexican! At once I will have the two pictures framed and hang them where I can see them - Now I know how you live, oh, the wonderful tree!

The tablecloth Else shall have for Christmas; the bag is ideal. All is spread out on the table before me and I do nothing but look and enjoy it all day! So much love in it all! I feel it so deeply and gratefully. May it shine into your own lives your thoughts of the old mother. I am looking forward to Else's coming back - how she will open her eyes.

I hope you are really comfortable somewhere and have good news of the horses and the ranch. The parcel has taken five weeks but all arrived safely. I hope you found my letters in Mexico. I can't thank you enough. I have not enjoyed anything so much for a long time and must always have another look at the cabin.

All luck to you - keep well.

With all my heart, your happy Mother

(Translated from the German)

Pel Monte Ranch Questa, New Mexico 15 April 1925

My dear Mother-in-Law:

Today came your two letters. So you went up the Merkur. Yes, you are younger than I am.

We have been at the ranch a week already. We found all well and safe, nothing broken, nothing destroyed. Only the mice found Mabel's chair and ate the wool.

In the second house we have two young Indians, Trinidad and Rufina, husband and wife. Rufina is short and fat, waddles like a duck in high, white Indian boots - Trinidad is like a girl, with his two plaits. Both are nice, don't sweat over their work, but do what we want. We still have the three horses but they are down with the Hawks, till the alfalfa and the grass have grown a bit.

We had three cold days - the wind can come ice-cold. I had a cold again. But now the weather is mild and warm, very beautiful, and spring in the air. All was washed very clean on the land, coming out of a yard of snow. Now the first anemones have come, built like crocuses but bigger and prouder, hairy on the brown-red earth under the pines. But everything is very dry again, the grass has hardly appeared, and yet it won't grow any higher. We hoped for rain or snow again.

Brett stays down on Del Monte, in a little house by herself, near the old Hawks. She wanted to come up here but Frieda said no. And so we are only two whites and two reds, or rather yellow-browns, on the ranch. Trinidad fetches milk and butter and eggs from Del Monte. I lie in the sun. Frieda is happy to be on her ranch. Friedel comes in May - writes very happily, very likely he will return to the Fatherland at the end of the summer. For September we also think to come to England and Germany. But the Lord's will be done. We bought a buggy and Trinidad will be coachman. I don't work this year, am cross that I was so ill. Mabel is still in New York, but Friday Tony came.

Tomorrow Frieda goes to Taos by car. We are nice and warm here and have all one needs.

Well that you have friends with you. I send you a little pin-money. Auf Wiedersehen.

D. H. L. (Translated from the German)

S.S. 'Resolute' 25 September 1925

Meine liebe Schwiegermutter:

This is the second day at sea - very nice, with blue running water and a fresh wind. I am quite glad to be out of that America for a time: it's so tough and wearing, with the iron springs poking out through the padding.

We shall be in England in five more days - I think we shall take a house by the sea for a while, so Frieda can have her children to stay with her. And I must go to my sisters and see their new house. And then we must hurry off to Baden-Baden, before winter sets in.

I don't feel myself very American: no, I am still European. It seems a long time since we heard from you - I hope it's a nice autumn. In New York it was horrid, hot and sticky.

e Save me a few good Schwarzwald apples, and a bottle of Kirschwasser, and a few leaves on the trees, and a few alten Damen in the Stift to call me Herr Doktor when I'm not one, and a hand at whist with you and my kurzrockige Schwàgerin, and a Jubilaum in the Stiftskôniginkammer. The prodigal children come home, vom Schwein gibt's kein mehr, nur vom Kalb. à bientôt!

auf baldige Wiedersehen! hasta luego! till I see you!

D. H. L.

Going Back to Europe

At the end of the summer he became restless again and wanted to go to Europe. To the Mediterranean he wished to go. So on the coast, not far from Genoa, we found Spotorno, that Martin Seeker had told us was not overrun with foreigners. Under the ruined castle I saw a pink villa that had a friendly look and I wondered if we could have it. We found the peasant Giovanni who looked after it. Yes, he thought we could. It belonged to a Tenente dei Bersaglieri in Savona. We were staying at the little inn by the sea, when the bersaglieri asked for us. Lawrence went and returned. 'You must come and look at him, he is so smart.' So I went and found a figure in uniform with gay plumes and blue sash, as it was the Queen's birthday. We took the Bernarda and the tenente became a friend of ours. Lawrence taught him English on Sundays, but they never got very far.

My daughter Barbara, now grown up, was coming to stay with me. She was coming for the first time. I was beside myself with joy to have her. I had not waited in vain for so many years and longed for these children. But Lawrence did not share my joy. One day at our evening meal came the outburst: 'Don't you imagine your mother loves you,' he said to Barby; 'she doesn't love anybody, look at her false face.' And he flung half a glass of red wine in my face. Barby, who besides my mother and myself was the only one not to be scared of him, sprang up. 'My mother is too good for you,' she blazed at him, 'much too good; it's like pearls thrown to the swine.' Then we both began to cry. I went to my room offended.

'What happened after I went?' I asked Barby later on.

'I said to him: "Do you care for her?"'

"It's indecent to ask," he answered; "haven't I just helped her with her rotten painting?" Which again puzzled me because he would gladly help anybody. It did not seem a sign of love to me. Then my daughter Else came too. But evidently to counterbalance my show Lawrence had asked his sister Ada and a friend to come and stay, so there were hostile camps. Ada arrived and above me, in Lawrence's room with the balcony, I could hear him complaining to her about me. I could not hear the words but by the tone of their voices I knew.

His sister Ada felt he belonged to her and the past, the past with all its sad memories. Of course it had been necessary for him to get out of his past as I had,

of equal necessity, to fight that past, though I liked Ada for herself.

Lawrence was ill with all this hostility. I was grieved for him. So one evening I went up to his room and he was so glad I came. I thought all was well between us. In the morning Ada and I had bitter words. 'I hate you from the bottom of my heart,' she told me. So another night I went up to Lawrence's room and found it locked and Ada had the key. It was the only time he had really hurt me; so I was quite still. 'Now I don't care,' I said to myself.

He went away with Ada and her friend, hoping at the last I would say some kind word, but I could not. Lawrence went to Capri to stay with the Brewsters.

But I was happy with the two children. The spring came with its almond blossoms and sprouting fig-trees. Barby rushed up the hills with her paint box, her long legs carrying her like a deer. We lay in the sun and I rejoiced in her youthful bloom. Then a picture arrived from Lawrence. There was Jonah on it, just going to be swallowed by the whale. Lawrence had written underneath: 'Who is going to swallow whom?'

But I was still angry.

Finally Lawrence came from Capri, wanting to be back. The children tried like wise elders to talk me round. 'Now Mrs L.' (so they called me) 'be reasonable, you have married him, now you must stick to him.'

So Lawrence came back. 'Make yourself look nice to meet him,' the children said. We met him at the station all dressed up. Then we all four had peace. He was charming with Else and Barby, trying to help them live their difficult young lives. 'Else is not one of those to put the bed on fire, because there is a flea in it,' Lawrence said of her.

But for his sister Ada he never felt the same again.

Villa Bernarda Spotorno Prov. di Genova 16 December 1925

My dear Mother-in-Law:

Soon Christmas comes again: here the children have written 'natale' on every door. But it isn't a great fact in Italy. I was in Savona today: but you can't buy much there, not much of interest. I bought figs and dates and raisins, these are good. Tomorrow we will make a parcel for you of such things, I hope you get it in time for Christmas.

We are having lovely weather here again. Yesterday it wanted to snow, but this morning no such thing, only beautiful sunshine. My publisher Martin Seeker is here, went to Savona with me. He is nice but not sparkling.

Now it is evening: we are sitting in the kitchen high under the roof. The evening star is white over the hill opposite, underneath the lights of the village

lie like oranges and tangerines, little and shining. Frieda has devoured her whipped cream from Savona at one gulp, and now she moans that she hasn't kept any to eat with coffee and cake after supper. Now she sits by the stove and reads. The soup is boiling. In a moment we call down into the depth: 'Vieni, Giovanni, épronto il mangiare. ' Then the old man runs up the stairs like an unhappy frog, with his nose in the air, sniffing and smelling. It is nice for him to know that there is always something good for him to eat.

I am sending you a little money, you must always be the Duchess of the Stift. Be jolly.

D. H. L.

(Translated from the German)

Villa Bernarda Spotorno Riviera di Ponente Easter Sunday

My dear Mother-in-Law:

I am back. The three women were down at the station when arrived yesterday all dressed up festively, the women, not I. For the moment I am the Easter-lamb. When I went away, I was very cross, but one must be able to forget a lot and go on.

Frieda has a cold but Else and Barby have grown much stronger and Barby has painted one or two quite good pictures. I also feel much better, almost like in the past, only a little bronchitis. But they say, an Englishman at forty is almost always bronchial.

We don't know yet what we want to do. We leave this house on the twentieth and perhaps we'll go to Perugia between Florence and Rome, for six or eight weeks. I think I would like to write a book about Umbria and the Etruscans, half travel-book, also scientific. Perhaps I'll do this. Then we come to you in June when finally, in God's name, the weather is-fine. Here it's always grey and close, sirocco. I think it is boiling, but slowly comes the spring.

D. H. L.

(Translated from the German)

Villa Bernarda Spotorno Genoa 7 March 1926

Dear Else:

I got back here on Saturday, and found your letter. Frieda has a bad cold, but the two girls are very well. They are nice girls really, it is Frieda, who, in a sense, has made a bad use of them, as far as I am concerned.

Frieda thinks to bring them to Baden-Baden for a day or two, at the beginning of May. I shall stay in Florence presumably: and probably Frieda will come back there. I have an idea I might like to roam round in Umbria for a little

while, and look at the Etruscan things, which interest me.

Thank you very much for offering us Irschenhausen. But I don't think now that I shall come to Germany till about July, so for heaven's sake, don't disappoint the young Ehepaar. I am leaving my plans quite indefinite. I sent you Knopfs Almanac, I thought it would amuse you. He was inspired to it by the Insel Verlag Almanac... These copies must cost him three dollars each - and he just presents one to each of his authors. I also ordered you again 'The Plumed Serpent.'

I am glad you had a good time with Nusch - she is really very nice with me always. I am sorry she couldn't come here.

Will you go to the south of France with Alfred? I was at Monte Carlo and at Nice, but I couldn't stand it. I didn't like it at all. But it isn't expensive - pension at the Beau Séjour at Monaco was fifty francs. They say that Bormes, a little place off the railway, is very nice, with a very good hotel - not far from Toulon.

I shall be glad when this stupid and muddled winter is at last over. The weather is still very heavy and overcast, sirocco, not nice. It feels as if an earthquake were brewing somewhere.

We leave this house on the twentieth, presumably for Florence. I hope you'll have a good holiday. Remember me to Friedel, and 'Marianne. Brett is sailing for America, for the ranch, at the end of the month. Tante cose.

D. H. L.

Lawrence wanted to go further into the heart of Italy. The Etruscan tombs and remains interested him. But the ranch too called him.

However the idea of having to struggle with immigration officials, thinking of his tuberculosis, scared him. So he went to Florence, with Else and Barby. After a short time they went back to England.

Friends told us of a villa to let in the country about Florence. So we took a car and went out by the Porta Federicana through dreary suburban parts till we came to the end of the tramline.

It was April, the young beans were green and the wheat and the peas up, and we drove into the old Tuscan landscape, that perfect harmony of what nature did and man made. It is quite unspoiled there still. Beyond Scandicci we passed two cypresses and went to the left on a small, little used road. On the top of one of those Tuscan little hills stood a villa. My heart went out to it. I wanted that villa. It was rather large, but so perfectly placed, with a panorama of the Valdarno in front, Florence on the left, and the umbrella-pine woods behind.

'I do hope it is this one that's to let,' I said to Lawrence, and my wish was fulfilled; we could have the villa, we could live in the Mirenda. We were thrilled by the peasants who belonged to the podere... the Orsini, Bandelli, and Pini. The

Orsini had a wild feud with the Bandelli. The Bandelli fascinated me; a loosely built, untamed father and easygoing mother, and two beautiful wild girls, Tosca and Lila, and three beautiful boys... My special favourite was Dino, who was so gently grey-eyed and angelic, but you knew perfectly well how he would laugh at you behind your back. So polite he was, carrying parcels for me, such exquisite manners at ten years old! Then I discovered that he looked very pale and ill at times and they told me that he had a rupture, and, with the brutality of boys, he told me the boys at school jeered at him for it. So I went with him to Doctor Giglioli in Florence and poor Dino was to have an operation. His sisters and I took him to the hospital, first decking him out with new shirts and vests. He was miserable, but chiefly miserable because they had put him among the women, him, a maschio. He was put to bed and, when we left him there, he crept under the sheets and shook with misery. Alas, next day, who appeared at home? Dino! He had crept about the place, seen a man under an anaesthetic, and fled. It was like putting a wild creature into a hospital. Then we persuaded him to go back, chiefly by telling him that, once operated, no one could laugh at him any more. So back he went, this time he had made up his mind. He was a plucky boy, and afterwards they told me at the hospital how they had never had a better, braver patient. It was a jolly hospital, this Florence one, so human and friendly, not at all prisonlike or too much white starch of nurses, white tiles, whitewash, white paint about, that one's very blood turns white. No, there your friends came to see you, everybody took a friendly interest in everybody else; well, such is life, here we are ever so ill, one day, then we get ever so well again, and then we die; 'Ah, signora, cost é la vita.' And after the operation Dino was a prouder and more important person than he had ever been in his life, with his chicken-broth and good foods, and his new vests and shirts and socks, and two hankies, and actually some eau de Cologne. And proudly he told his sisters, in superior knowledge, when they asked for the WC: 'There is a thing, and you pull, you must pull, see?' They not having seen such an arrangement before!

Then Dino came home and he brought me flowers and fruit and we were very fond of each other, although he never felt quite at ease with me.

Our servant was Giulia, from the Pini family. There was the Pini father, a zio, and a poor old zia, who had been buried in an earthquake and occasionally had fits, and Pietro who also helped Giulia about the house, arriving each morning to feed the chickens and goats, and Stellina, the horse. Giulia had to cut the grass every day with a sickle to feed all the animals. In the morning she was barefoot and shabby, but in the afternoon, when she heard a motorcar with visitors, she would appear at the Mirinda in high-heeled shoes and a huge bow in her hair. We loved Giulia. never was anything too much for her, gay and amusing and

wise, she was.

For the first time, there near Florence, I got the Italian, especially the Tuscan, feel of things. In Florence, the ancient unbroken flower of a culture made its deep mark on me. The Misericordia, how deep it impressed me, the voluntary, immediate effort to help one's neighbour in distress. And when people pass it the youngest and the oldest take off their hats to it... To me this seems real culture... The Misericordia dates from the twelfth century and was founded by a facchino, an interesting story in itself.

Oh, the strange, almost ferocious intelligence of the Florentines!

What a pleasure it was to walk from the villa Mirenda, and take the tram in Scandicci to Florence! The handsome Tuscan girls with their glossy, neatly done hair in the tram I.. a chicken, sitting, tenderly held by its owner in a red hankie, its destiny either a sick friend or the mercato. Bottles of wine are hidden from the Dazio men, men friends embrace each other, somebody sees a relation and yells something about the 'pasta' for midday, and so on, while we sail gaily on for Florence. There we would rush to Orioli's shop, hear his news and all the news of our friends. We would each dash out and do our exciting shopping. Shopping in Florence was still fun, not the dreary large-store drudgery... There are the paper shops, leather shops, scent shops, stuffs; one glorious shop sells nothing but ribbons, velvet and silk, all colours and sizes, spotted and gold and silver. Another shop, all embroidery silks. Then to have your shoes made is so comfortable... the shoemaker feels your foot more important than the measuring. And then the '48'... what didn't we buy at the '48'!

Marionettes and pots and pans, china and glasses and hammers and paints. We would collect our things at Orioli's and drive home with Pietro and Giulia, furnishing the great kitchen at the Mirenda so conveniently with a few pounds, Lawrence designing a large kitchen table and brackets from which the pots hung. We painted the shutters of the Mirenda, and the chairs, green; we put 'stuoie,' thick pale grass matting, on the red-tiled floor in the big sitting-room. We had a few Vallombrosa chairs, a round table, a piano, hired, a couch and an old seat. The walls were syringed white with the syringe one uses to put verderane on the vines... that was done fast, and the sun poured into the big room so still and hot. The only noises came from the peasants, calling or singing at their work, or the water being drawn at the well. Or best, and almost too fierce, were the nightingales singing away from early dawn, almost the clock round... an hour or two's rest at midday in the heat. The spring that first year was a revelation in flowers, from the first violets in the woods... carpets of them we found, and as usual in our walks we took joyful possession of the unspoiled, almost medieval country around us. By the stream in the valley were tufts of enormous primroses,

where the willow trees had been blood red through the winter. On the edge of the umbrella-pine woods, in the fields, were red and purple big anemones, strange, narrow-pointed, red and yellow wild tulips, bee orchids and purple orchids, tufts of tight-scented lavender... flowers thick like velvety carpets, like the ground in a Fra Angelico picture.

Our carriage and the Stellina were so small, I felt like sitting in a doll's perambulator. One day I went shopping with Pietro in Scandicci, when he had tooth-ache; he wore a red hankie round his poor swollen cheek, and on top on the hankie perched a hat, a bit sideways, with the Italian chic in it. He was very sorry for himself, and so was I, but none of the people we passed seemed to think us a funny sight, and we must have been, in that tiny barrocino, Pietro with his tooth-ache and his hankie by my side. I The Italians are so natural, one has tooth-ache and why hide it? Pietro would tell me: 'Si, signora, questa sera vado a fare al Pamore con la mia fidanzata.' The fidanzata had only one eye, she was pretty, but in a self-conscious way she always kept the side *with* the eye toward one.

Christmas came and I wanted to make a Christmas tree for all the peasants. I told Pietro: 'Buy me a tree in Florence, when you go to market.'

'What,' he said, 'buy a tree, signora? Ah, no, one doesn't buy a tree, I'll get the signora one from the prete's wood.'

On Christmas Day, or rather Christmas Eve, at four in the morning I heard a whisper: 'Signora! Signora!' under my window. I looked out and there was Pietro with a large beautiful tree. He brought it in and how Lawrence and I and Giulia and Pietro enjoyed trimming that tree. There were pine cones on it and we put gold and silver paper around these cones and Pietro would yell: 'Guarda, guarda, signora, che bellezza!' while Lawrence and I went on trimming the tree with a lot of shiny things bought at the '48'; silver threads that we called 'Christ Child hair' when I was small, and also lots and lots of candies. The Christmas tree looked so beautiful in that big white empty room, not a bit Christian, and how the peasant children loved their cheap wooden toys and how carefully they handled them, so precious were they. They had never had toys before. The grown-ups loved it too. We had difficulty in making them all go home again.

| Such a sweetness and perfection of successive flowering Sanity:

Instinct

Intuition

Spirit

The English have never painted from intuition or instinct.

Man has two selves: one unknown, vital, living from roots: the other the known self, like a picture in a mirror or the objects on a tray. People live from

this latter. And this latter can only feel known feelings: and its only experience of liberation or freedom is in the experience of novelty, which is the clash of sensation and a katabolic process.

Florence meant to us. We walked in the afternoons, almost awed through so much unknown, unobtrusive loveliness... the white oxen so carefully ploughing, between the cypresses, and flowers in the wheat, and beans and peas and clover! At twilight we would come home and light our stove in the big sitting-room, the stove that had been there for centuries, used as it had been to keep the silkworms warm in the winter... now it warmed us. We had no pictures on the walls, but Maria Huxley had left some canvases behind and I said: 'Let's have some pictures.'

Then, mixing his paints himself, boldly and joyfully, Lawrence began to paint. I watched him for hours, absorbed, especially when he began a new one, when he would mix his paints on a piece of glass, paint with a rag and his fingers, and his palm and his brushes. 'Try your toes next,' I would say. Occasionally, when I was cooking pigeons that tasted of wine because they had fed on the dregs of grapes from the wine-press, or washing, he would call me, and I would have to hold out an arm or a leg for him to draw, or tell him what I thought of his painting.

He enjoyed his painting... with what intensity he went for it! Then he wrote 'Lady Chatterley.' After breakfast-we had it at seven or so - he would take his book and pen and cushion, followed by John the dog, and go into the woods behind the Mirinda and come back to lunch with what he had written. I read it day by day and wondered how his chapters were built up and how it all came to him. I wondered at his courage and daring to face and write these hidden things that people dare not write or say.

For two years 'Lady Chatterley' lay in an old chest that Lawrence had painted a greeny yellow with roses on it, and often when I passed that chest, I thought: 'Will that book ever come out of there?'

Lawrence asked me: 'Shall I publish it, or will it only bring me abuse and hatred again?' I said: 'You have written it, you believe in it, all right, then publish it.' So one day we talked it all over with Orioli; we went to a little old-fashioned printer, with a little old printing shop where they had only enough type to do half the book - and 'Lady Chatterley' was printed. When it was done, stacks and stacks of 'Lady C...', or Our Lady, as we called it - were sitting on the floor of Orioli's shop. There seemed such a terrific lot of them that I said in terror: 'We shall never sell all these.' A great many were sold before there was a row; first some did not arrive at their destination in America, then there came abuse from England... but it was done... his last great effort.

He had done it... and future generations will benefit, his own race that he loved and his own class, that is less inhibited, for he spoke out of them and for them, there in Tuscany, where the different culture of another race gave the impetus to his work.

One winter we went to Diablerets and stayed in a little chalet. Aldous Huxley and Maria, Julian Huxley and Juliette, and their children shared a big villa nearby. Maria read 'Lady C.' there and Juliette was shocked at first. But then it was meant to be a shock. I can see Aldous and Lawrence talking together by the fire. I remember Aldous patiently trying to teach me to ski, but my legs tied themselves into knots with the skis and I seemed to be most of the time sitting in the snow collecting my legs.

We went for picnics in the snow, the Huxleys ski-ing, Lawrence and I in a sledge. I saw Diablerets again later on in the summer - I didn't recognize it, so completely different it looked in the snow.

I think the greatest pleasure and satisfaction for a woman is to live with a creative man, when he goes ahead and fights - I found it so. Always when he was in the middle of a novel or writing I felt happy as if something were happening, there was a new thing coming into the world. Often before he conceived a new idea he was irritable and disagreeable, but when it had come, the new vision, he could go ahead, and was eager and absorbed.

We had a very hot summer that year and we wanted to go to the mountains. One hot afternoon Lawrence had gathered peaches in the garden and came in with a basket full of wonderful fruit - he showed them to me - a very little while after he called from his room in a strange, gurgling voice; I ran and found him lying on his bed; he looked at me with shocked eyes while a slow stream of blood came from his mouth. 'Be quiet, be still,' I said. I held his head, but slowly and terribly the blood flowed from his mouth. I could do nothing but hold him and try to make him still and calm and send for Doctor Giglioli. He came, and anxious days and nights followed. In this great heat of July nursing was difficult - Giulia, all the peasants - helped in every possible way. The signor was so ill - Giulia got down to Scandicci at four in the morning and brought ice in sawdust in a big handkerchief, and milk, but this, even boiled straightaway, would be sour by midday. The Huxleys came to see him, Maria with a great bunch of fantastically beautiful lotus, and Giglioli every day, and Orioli came and helped. But I nursed him alone night and day for six weeks, till he was strong enough to take the night train to the Tyrol.

This was another inroad his illness made. We both fought hard and won.

People came to see us at the Mirenda. Capitano Ravagli had to come to Florence for a military case - he came to see us and showed Lawrence his

military travel-pass. When Lawrence saw on it: *Capitano Ravagli deve partire* (must leave) *at such and such a time...* he shook his head and said resentfully: 'Why "must"? why "must"? there shouldn't be *any must...*'

One Sunday afternoon Osbert and Edith Sitwell came.

They moved us strangely. They seemed so oversensitive, as if something had hurt them too much, as if they had to keep up a brave front to the world, to pretend they didn't care and yet they only cared much too much. When they left, we went for a long walk, disturbed by them.

That autumn we gave up the Mirenda. Lawrence had been so ill there and wanted the sea. I went to pack up at the Mirenda, it was a grief to me. I had been so very happy there except for Lawrence's illness. How great the strain was at times, always the strain of his health. The last ounce of my strength seemed to be drained at times but I had my reward. He got better and I always knew however tired I might be he felt worse than ever I could. Making another effort my own strength grew. I never had time to think of my own health, so it looked after itself and it never let me down. The peasants at the Mirenda, the very place itself, the woods with their umbrella pines, the group of buildings, seemed sad at being left.

The peasants took all the belongings we had collected and carried them away on their backs, like gnomes they crept under their loads down the path. When I gave a last look from the two cypress trees along the road there stood the Mirenda upon its hill in the evening sun, with its shutters closed, old and solid, it seemed as if its eyes had closed for sleep, to dream of the life that had been and gone.

Lawrence had gone to Port Cros with Richard Aldington, Brigit Patmore, and Dorothy Yorke - Arabella we called her.

I joined them there. Port Cros seemed an island of mushrooms - I had never seen so many as there on the moist warm ground of the undergrowth. We had a donkey and a man who worked for us and brought up the food from the little harbour below. Lawrence was not well and I remember how we all did our best on the top of that island to help him in every way.

We drank coffee in the inner space of the small fortress we lived in. The donkey looked on and Richard jumped up to play the brave toreador, waving his blue scarf at the donkey. Jasper was its name. Jasper fled into the bushes but its long ears stuck out and he had to peep at Richard - he hadn't got the bullfight idea, but was intrigued.

Richard was an education in itself to me: he knew so much about Napoleon, for instance, and made me see Napoleon from a different angle, the emotional power he had over his men. Richard told me of his war experiences, death

experience and beyond death: it seemed to melt one's brain away; Richard began writing his 'Death of a Hero' there in Port Cros. One day we went bathing in the bluest little bay, when an octopus persecuted Brigit and Richard had to beat it away.

We wanted to go to the mainland, not to be so far away with Lawrence so frail. So we left for Toulon, gay Toulon with its ships and sailors and shops, real sailors' shops, with boxes adorned with shells, ships made of shells, long knives from Corsica, on which was written: 'Che la mia ferita sia mortale.'

Near Toulon, at Bandol, in the hotel Beau Rivage we stayed all winter. A sunny hotel by the sea, friendly and easy as only Provence can be. We seemed to live completely the life of a 'petit rentier,' as Rousseau le Douanier has Painted it. Lawrence wrote 'Pansies' in his room in the Horning, then we went to have our apéritif before lunch in a café on the sea-front. There was a small war memorial, a gay young damsel that would please any poilu. We knew all the dogs of the small place, we saw the boats come in, their silvery loads of sardines glittering on the sand of the shores. Lawrence was better that winter in health. He watched the men playing 'boccia' on the shore, after lunch. We seemed to share the life of the little town, running along so easily, e went with the bus to Toulon. We saw the coloured soldiers. We went to a beautiful circus. Yes, easy and sunny was this winter in Bandol.

The Huxleys came and later on they found a house across the bay at Sanary. I see us sitting in the sunny dining-room of the Beau Rivage, and Lawrence saying to Maria: 'No, Maria, you would not be a bit nice if you were really very rich.'

In the spring we went to Spain from Marseilles - to Barcelona, from there to Mallorca. Mallorca still has a depth to it, a slight flavour of Africa, a distance in its horizon over the sea.

Our hotel was by a small bay. Deliciously hot, the days went by. We went all over the island, always wary not to tire Lawrence. I bathed in the heat of midday and climbed the rocks with the little bay entirely to myself. But one day I looked around and saw a Spanish officer on a splendid horse, looking out towards the sea; I was disturbed in my loneliness and wanted to dash to my bathing cloak and go away. I sprang on to a heap of seaweeds that had a hole underneath it and rocks. Like a gunshot my ankle snapped, I collapsed sick with pain. The officer rode up and offered me his horse that danced about. I thought: what a waste of a romantic situation; the ankle hurts so much, I can't get on to a prancing horse - if I could only be alone with this pain.

Lawrence appeared, got two young men to take me to the hotel in their car. The ankle did not hurt any more, but it was broken.

Lawrence wanted me to go to London to be there for the exhibition of his

paintings. A gay flag with his name was flying outside the Warren Gallery when I went there. His pictures looked a little wild and overwhelming in the elegant, delicate rooms of the galleries. But never could I have dreamed that a few pictures could raise such a storm. I had not realized their potency in the big, bare rooms of the Mirenda, where they had been born so naturally, as if Tuscany had given its life to them. I was astonished. Then the Police came and put them in the cellar of Marlborough Street Police Station to be destroyed. I was worried lest the cellar be damp and so destroy them that way. But no, they were saved; it was a fight, though.

Meanwhile Lawrence was ill in Florence. What with the abuse of 'Lady Chatterley' and the disapproval of the pictures, he had become ill. Orioli telegraphed in distress. So off I set on my journey to Florence, my ankle still wobbly and aching and with constant worry in my mind of how I would find Lawrence. Orioli told me that after receiving my telegram saying I was coming, he had said: 'What will Frieda say when she arrives?' And Lawrence had answered: 'Do you see those peaches in the bowl? She will say, "What lovely peaches," and she will devour them.' So it was. After my first look at Lawrence, when his eyes had signalled to me their relief, 'She is here with me,' I felt my thirst from the long journey and ate the peaches.

He always got better when I was there. But Orioli told me how scared he had been when he had seen Lawrence, his head and arms hanging over the side of the bed, like one dead.

We left the heat of Florence for the Tegernsee to be near Max Mohr. We had a rough peasant house, it was autumn. Lawrence rested a great deal. My sister Else came to see him, and Alfred Weber. When he was alone with Alfred Weber, he said to him: 'Do you see those leaves falling from the apple tree? When the leaves want to fall you must let them fall.' Max Mohr had brought some doctors from Munich, but medicine did not help Lawrence. His organism was too frail and sensitive. I remember some autumn nights when the end seemed to have come. I listened for his breath through the open door, all night long, an owl hooting ominously from the walnut tree outside. In the dim dawn an enormous bunch of gentians I had put on the floor by his bed seemed the only living thing in the room. But he recovered and slowly Max Mohr and I travelled with him south again to Bandol.

After the Mirenda we seemed to live chiefly for his health. Switzerland and the sea one after the other seemed to do him most good. He did not want any doctors or cures. 'I know so much better about myself than any doctor,' he would say. His life became a struggle for health. And yet he would rise above it so amazingly and his spirit brought forth immortal flowers right up to the very end.

One of his desires was to write a novel about each continent. Africa and Asia still he wanted to do. It was not given to him to do so. As one of my Indian friends here said: 'Why didn't Mr Lawrence write about the whole world? He knew all about it.' When he had read 'The Lost Girl' he said: 'What happened to those people afterwards? I want to know their story till they die.'

Here these Indians seem to understand him so immediately - better, I believe, than his white fellowmen.

The Nightingale

By D. H. Lawrence

Tuscany is full of nightingales, and in spring and summer they sing all the time, save in the middle of the night and the middle of the day. In the little leafy woods that hang on the steep of the hill toward the streamlet, as maidenhair hangs on a rock, you hear them piping up in the wanness of dawn, about four o'clock in the morning: Hello! Hello! Hello! It is the brightest sound, perhaps, of all sounds in the world: a nightingale piping up. Every time you hear it, you feel a wonder and, it must be confessed, a thrill, because the sound is so bright, so glittering, and it has such power behind it.

'There goes the nightingale!' you say to yourself: and it is as if the stars were darting up from the little thicket and leaping away into the vast vagueness of the sky, to be hidden and gone. And every single time you hear the nightingale afresh, your second thought is: 'Now *why* do they say he is a sad bird?'

He is the noisiest, most inconsiderate, most obstreperous and jaunty bird in the whole kingdom of birds. How John Keats managed to begin his 'Ode to a Nightingale' with 'My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains my senses IL.' — well, I for one don't know. You can hear the nightingale silverily shouting: 'What? What? What, John? Heart aches and a drowsy numbness pains? — tra-la-la!-tri-li-lilly-lilyly!'

And why the Greeks said he - or she — was sobbing in a bush for a lost lover, again I don't know. Jug-jug-jug! say the medieval writers, to represent the rolling of the little balls of lightning in the nightingale's throat. A wild rich sound, richer than the eyes in a peacock's tail. 'And the bright brown nightingale, amorous, Is half assuaged for Itylus - ' They say, with that jug! jug! jug! that she is sobbing. It really is mysterious, what people hear. You'd think they had their ears on upside down. Anyone who ever heard the nightingale 'sobbing' must have quite a different hearing-faculty from the one I've got.

Anyhow, it's a male sound, a most intensely and undilutedly male sound. And pure assertion. There is not a hint nor shadow of echo and hollow recall. Nothing at all like a hollow low bell. Nothing in the world so unforlorn.

Perhaps that is what made Keats straightway feel forlorn.

Forlorn! the very word is like a bell To toll me back from thee to my sole self!

Perhaps that is the reason of it: why they all hear sobs in the bush, where any really normal listening mortal hears the silver ringing shouts of cherubim. Perhaps because of the discrepancy.

Because, as a matter of fact, the nightingale sings with a ringing, punching vividness and a pristine assertiveness that makes a mere man sit down and consider. It is the kind of brilliant calling and interweaving of glittering exclamation which must have been heard on the first day of creation, when the angels suddenly found themselves created in brightness, and found themselves able to shout aloud. Then there must have been a nightingaleish to-do! Hello! Hello! Behold! Behold! Behold! It is I! It is I! What a mar-mar-marvellous occurrence! What?

For the pure splendid splendidness of vocal assertion: *Lo! It is I!* you have to listen to the nightingale. Perhaps for the visual perfection of the same assertion, you have to look at a peacock shaking all his eyes. Among all creatures created in positive splendour, these two are perhaps the most perfect: the one in invisible, triumphing sound, the other in voiceless visibility. The nightingale is a quite undistinguished grey-brown bird, if you do see him: although he's got that tender hopping mystery about him, of a thing that is rich alive inside. Just as the peacock, when he does make himself heard, is awful, but still impressive: such a fearful shout from out of the menacing jungle. You can actually see him, in Ceylon, yell from a high bough, then stream away past the monkeys, into the impenetrable jungle that seethes and is dark.

And, perhaps, for this reason - the reason, that is, of pure angel-keen self-assertion - the nightingale makes a man feel sad, and the peacock so often makes him feel angry. Because they are so triumphantly positive in their created selves, eternally new from the hand of the rich bright God, and perfect. The nightingale simply ripples with his own perfection. And the peacock arches all his bronze and purple eyes with assuredness.

This, this rippling assertion of perfection, this emerald shimmer of a perfect self, makes men angry or melancholy, according as it assails the eye or the ear. The ear is much less cunning than the eye. You can say to somebody: I like you awfully: you look so beautiful this morning! and they'll believe it utterly, though your voice may really be vibrating with mortal hatred. The ear is so stupid, it will accept any amount of false money in words. But let one tiny gleam of the mortal hatred come into your eye, or across your face, and it will be detected instantly. The eye is so shrewd and rapid.

For this reason, we see the peacock at once, in his showy Hale self-assertion: and we say, rather sneeringly: Fine feathers make fine birds! But when we hear

the nightingale, we don't know what we hear, we only know we feel sad-forlorn!
And so we say it is the nightingale that is sad.

The nightingale, let us repeat, is the most unsad thing in the world: even more unsad than the peacock full of gleam. The nightingale has nothing to be sad about. He feels perfect with life. It isn't conceit. He just feels life perfect, and he trills it out, shouts, jugs, gurgles, calls, declares, asserts, and triumphs, but never reflects. It is pure music, in so far as you could never put words to it. But there are words for the feelings aroused in us by the song. No! even that is not true. There are no words to tell what one really feels, hearing the nightingale. It is something so much more pure than words. But it is some sort of feeling of triumph in one's own life perfection. Keats feels this all, through his ode.

'Tis not through envy of thy happy lot, But being too happy in thy happiness, -
That thou, light-wingèd Dryad of the trees, In some melodious plot Of beechen
green, and shadows numberless, Singest of summer in full-throated ease...

It is beautiful poetry, of a truthful poet. And Keats keeps it up, in the next stanza, wanting to drink the blushful Hippocrene and fade away with the nightingale into the forest dim.

Fade far away, dissolve, and quite forget What thou among the leaves hast
never known, The weariness, the fever, and the fret...

It is such lovely poetry! But the next line is a bit ridiculous, so I won't quote it.
Yes, I will:

Here, where men sit and hear each other groan; Where palsy shakes a few,
sad, last grey hairs... *etc.*

This is Keats, not the nightingale. - But Keats still tries to break away, and get
over into the nightingale world.

Away! away! for I will fly to thee,
Not charioted by Bacchus and his pards,
But on the viewless wings of Poesy...

He doesn't succeed, however. The viewless wings of Poesy carry him only
into the bushes, not into the nightingale world. He is still outside.

Darkling I listen; and for many a time
I have been half in love with easeful Death...

I am sure the sound of the nightingale never made any man in love with
easeful death - except by contrast. The contrast between the bright flame of
positive pure self-perfection, in the bird, and the uneasy flame of waning

selflessness, for ever reaching out to be something not himself, in the poet!

To cease upon the midnight with no pain,
While thou art pouring forth thy soul abroad
In such an ecstasy!
Still wouldst thou sing, and I have ears in vain -
To thy high requiem become a sod.

How astonished the nightingale would be if he could be made to realize what sort of answer the poet was answering to his song! He would fall off the bough with amazement.

Because a nightingale, when you answer him back, only shouts and sings louder. Suppose a few other nightingales pipe up in the neighbouring bushes - as they always do - then the blue-white sparks of sound go dazzling up to heaven. And suppose you, mere mortal, happen to be sitting on the shady bank having an altercation with the mistress of your heart, hammer and tongs, then the chief nightingale swells and goes it like Caruso in the third act, simply a brilliant, bursting frenzy of music, singing you down: till you simply can't hear yourself speak to quarrel, and you have to laugh.

There was, in fact, something very like a nightingale in Caruso, that bird-like bursting miraculous energy of song and self-utterance, and self-luxuriance.

Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird!
No hungry generations tread thee down...

Not yet in Tuscany, anyhow. They are twenty to the dozen. And the cuckoo seems remote and low-voiced, calling low, half-secretive, even as he flies past. - Perhaps really it is different in England.

The voice I heard this passing night was heard
In ancient days by emperor and clown:
Perhaps the self-same song that found a path
Through the sad heart of Ruth, when, sick for home,
She stood in tears amid the alien corn.

I wonder what sort of answer they all made! Diocletian, for instance! And Aesop! And Mademoiselle Ruth! I strongly suspect the last young lady of giving the nightingale occasion to sing, like the nice damsel in the Boccaccio story, who went to sleep with the nightingale in her hand: 'tua figliuola é stata si vaga

dell'usignuolo, che ella l'ha preso e tienlosi in mano.'

And I wonder what the hen nightingale thinks of it all, as she mildly sits upon the eggs and hears milord giving himself forth? Probably she likes it, for she goes on breeding him true to type. Probably she likes it better than if, like the poet, he humbly warbled:

Now more than ever seems it rich to die,
To cease upon the midnight with no pain...

One sympathizes with Keats's Fanny, and understands why she wasn't having any. Much *she'd* have got out of such a midnight! Perhaps, when all's said and done, the female of the species prefers it when the male of the species is full of his own bright life, and warbles her into the spell of himself. In the end, she gets more out of it that way.

Because, of course, though the nightingale is utterly unconscious of the little dim hen while he sings, *she* knows well enough that the song is half her; just as the eggs are half his. And just as she doesn't want him coming and putting a heavy foot down on her little bunch of eggs, he doesn't want her to go nestling down on his song and smothering it, or muffling it. Every man to his trade, and every woman to hers.

Adieu! adieu! thy plaintive anthem fades...

It never was a plaintive anthem, it was Caruso at his best. But don't argue with a poet.

Villa Miranda Scandicci Firenze 26 March 1926

My dear Else:

The Schweigermutter wrote from Baden that you aren't well, and had a little operation. That's bad luck! I do hope you're better.

It isn't a good year, anyhow. Here it has rained and rained, till the country is turning yellow with wetness. But these last two days are sunny and warm: but not hot, as it should be.

We took the top half of this old villa, out on one of the little hills of Tuscany, about seven miles from Florence. We are two kilometres from the tram, which takes us in to the Duomo in half an hour. The country around is pretty - all poderi and pinewoods, and no walls at all. I hope in the autumn, really, you'll come and stay a while: unless everything goes muddled again. For myself, I struggle to get back into a good humour, but don't succeed very well. - We've got

the villa for a year, anyhow, so there should be time.

Myself, I am labouring at the moment to type Frieda's MS. of the play 'David.' It's a slow business, I'm no typist. But it is just as well for me to go through the MS. myself and it is good for me to lean some German, I suppose.

Frieda's daughter Else typed the first twenty-six pages and then are a fair number of alterations. But I shall send you the typescript as soon as it is finished: within a month, pray God! - I am interested, really, to see the play go into German, so much simpler and more direct than in English. English is really very complicated in its meanings. Perhaps the simpler a language becomes in its grammar and syntax, the more subtle and complex it becomes in its suggestions. Anyhow, this play seems to me much more direct and dramatic in German, much less poetic and suggestive than in English. I shall be interested to know what you think of it.

I said to myself I would write perhaps a book about the Etruscans: nothing pretentious, but a sort of book for people who will actually be going to Florence and Cortona and Perugia and Volterra and those places, to look at the Etruscan things. They have a great attraction for me: there are lovely things in the Etruscan Museum here, which no doubt you've seen. But I hope you'll come in the autumn and look at them again with me. Mommsen hated everything Etruscan, said the germ of all degeneracy was in the race. But the bronzes and terracottas are fascinating, so live with physical life, with a powerful physicality which surely is as great, or sacred, ultimately, as the ideal of the Greeks and Germans. Anyhow, the real strength of Italy seems to me in this physicality, which is not at all Roman. - I haven't yet seen any of the painted tombs at...!

Grand Hotel Chexbres-sur-Vevey Sunday Morning Had your p.c. this morning - glad you found Nusch there. I guess you 'Il schwätzen schwätzen all the day. Today is better here - am sitting on my little balcony to write this - Achsah has already sent Earl down with a cup of Ovaltine - and it is sunny in snatches. I worked over my Isis story a bit - am going to try it on Earl. Last night we sang songs, Twankydililo, etc., up in Achsah's attic. Everything very quiet and domestic.

Had a few letters forwarded from Florence this morning: enclose the Curtis Brown. Ask Else what she thinks about a complete break in November with Insel Verlag. Of course it is insolence on their part that they won't tell my agents what they are doing with my books. They should of course write Miss Watson about the proposed book of short stories. Ask Else about it - what they are really doing. And ask her if she kept that short biography of me which she did for the 'Frankfurter Zeitung' man. If she did, you might look it over and send it to Miss

Watson, in English, for this Kra man. I simply can't write biographies about myself. Damn them all.

A sort of lamentable letter from Cath Carswell - no money, etc. - and still fussing about what Yvonne Franchetti said about that typing. Then a letter from the irrepressible Durham miner man - wanting 'Lady C. ' very much - nothing else - no word from Orioli though it's his handwriting on the envelopes. Nothing from Huxleys either, save their telegram. Madame will have a double room for them. Wish they'd bring their car, we could look at places a bit higher. I told you they arrive next Tuesday or Wednesday. There is nothing forwarded from that St-Nizier place.

I think of you in the Schwiegermutter's room with Nusch there. Has die Anna got any flowers? Buy her a nice pot from me. And buy something for Nusch for twenty marks. I want her to have something for a quid. Only not Schnecken or foie gras. I now smell Braten of some sort. Perhaps we shall go to Vevey this afternoon. We want to go to Gruyère when you come back - also to Le Pont, which is M. Stucke's other hotel about three thousand feet up, with three little lakes. Might go there. But he leases it in summer to another hotelier. What are Nusch's plans? Love to you all - the goddesses three.

D. H. L.

At Bailathadan Newtonmore Inverness 20 August 1926

Dear Else:

Frieda sent me on your letter from Irschenhausen. I am glad you I like being there, but am surprised it is so cold. Here the weather is j mild, mixed rainy and sunny. The heather is out on the moors: the day lasts till nine o'clock: yet there is that dim, twilight feeling of the North. We made an excursion to the west, to Fort William and Mallaig, and sailed up from Mallaig to the Isle of Skye. I liked it very much. It rains and rains, and the white wet clouds blot over the mountains. But we had one perfect day, blue and iridescent, with the bare northern hills sloping green and sad and velvety to the silky blue sea. There is still something of an Odyssey up there, in among the islands and the silent lochs: like the twilight morning of the world, j the herons fishing undisturbed by the water, and the sea running far in, for miles, between the wet, trickling hills, where the cottages are low and almost invisible, built into the earth. It is still out of the world, and like the very beginning of Europe: though, of course, in August there are many tourists and motorcars. But the country is almost uninhabited.

I am going south tomorrow, to stay with my sisters in Lincolnshire for a little while, by the sea. Then really I should like to come to Bavaria, if only for a

fortnight. I have a feeling that I want to come again to Bavaria. I hope I shan't have to stay in England for that play. I would much rather come to Germany at the end of August. And Frieda, I know, has had enough, more than enough, of London. Perhaps after all we can come to Irschenhausen for the first part of September, and let that inhalation wait a while. - I am much better since I am here in Scotland: it suits me here: and probably the altitude of Irschenhausen would suit me too. Anyhow we could go back to Baden to do a bit of inhaling. There is no hurry to get to Italy. - If only I need not stay in London for that play.

I find it most refreshing to get outside the made world, if only for a day - like to Skye. It restores the old Adam in one. The made world is too deadening - and too dead.

So I am still hoping to see you all - Friedel will be there? - in ___ Bayern, quite soon. Why should one be put off, from what one wants to do.

Auf Wiedersehen.

D. H. L.

Duneville Trusthorpe Rd. Sutton-on-Sea, Lincs. 7 September, 1926

My dear Else:

I had your letter today. I'm very disappointed not to be able to come to Irschenhausen. Those fools are still delaying beginning the play. We go to London on Saturday - I'm not sure of the address - and I shall see what I can do. But I am annoyed and bored beforehand.

But I doubt if we could get to Bavaria before the end of the month. Too late! I shall have to wait till spring, and go straight to Irschenhausen from Italy, if I may.

I expect we shall be in Baden, at least a day or two - travel over Paris. So we shall see you. I do hope you are feeling better. What makes you so knocked up?

It's dull weather here - a grey sky, a grey sea. My thoughts are turning south. The swifts are already going, and the swallows are gathering to go. Nothing to stay for.

Auf Wiedersehen.

VILLA Mirinda Scandicci Florence 12 October, 1926

Dear Else:

I have just had the enclosed letter from my agent. My agreement with him is such, that the contracts for all the things I publish must be made through him, and all payments must be made to him. He deducts ten per cent for himself, and deposits the rest to my account.

Will you please tell me what contract you made with the Insel Verlag for 'Der

Fuchs': and what were the payments, apart from the translator's fee? I know it was not much. But of course I owe Curtis Brown ten per cent on it.

And in future will you see that everything goes through the agent's hands, or I shall be in trouble, as I am legally bound to him: he is quite good to me. It's my fault, I know, for not remembering sooner.

We have been back here just a week, and I am very glad to sit still in the peace of these quiet rooms. I am getting really tired of moving about, and cast round in my mind for a place which I shall keep as a permanency. Perhaps it will be in England.

It is warm here, almost hot still. The vendemmia finished last week, and we are all festooned with grapes. But the Schwiegermutter toys that you too were in Venice. Venice is lovely in autumn, if it's not too crowded. Do you feel content now, for the winter?

They are producing the 'David' play in December. I saw the producer and the people concerned, and I promised to go to England to hip them at the end of November. I am not very sure if I shall do so, though. But if we do, we must come through Baden. I daren't say anything, because I know the Schwiegermutter was cross with us for Putting off again this time. But we had moved so much, we were both feeling stupefied.

I wonder how the translation of the 'Serpent' is going. You will find it a long job: I hope not too tedious. Myself, I am not working anything particular; don't feel inclined.

I hope you are feeling well. Are the children all busy again, Friedel in Berlin? Here it seems so sleepy - the world is all vague.

Love,

Villa Mirinda Scandicci Firenze 18 October, 1926 Dear Else:

Kippenberg behaves as if he were the great Chan of Tartary: whereas he's only a tiresome old buffer. I have told him that once personally, I don't care for Franzius's pompous and heavy translation: I'll tell him again, and to hell with him. Pity we can't change over to the people who did 'Jack in Bushland. ' They are more up to date and go-ahead.

But anyhow Kip has no right over magazine productions: so if you could get 'The Woman Who Rode Away' into a Monatsheft, you couldn't be interfered with, by him at least. I get awfully bored, between publishers and agents, and one state and another.

So now you'll be off to Vienna! Everybody seems to have been to Vienna, or to be going. Glad I needn't go, anyhow just now.

I'll tell Curtis Brown what you say about 'Fox. '

Sunny autumn here, still and nice: but an epidemic of typhoid in the

neighbourhood: must look out.

I feel I'll never write another novel: that damned old Franzius turning 'The Plumed Serpent' into a ponderous boa constrictor! O Germania! It really is time you bobbed your philosophic hair!

Wiedersehen, D. H. L.

Villa Mirinda Scandicci Florence 10 January, 1927

Dear Else:

That was a nice letter you wrote - and a very nice little purse you sent me for Christmas. I ought to have thanked you before - but something has happened to me about letters - in fact all writing. I seem to be losing my will-to-write altogether: in spite of the fact that I am working at an English novel - but so differently from the way I have written before!

I spend much more time painting - have already done three, nearly four, fairly large pictures. I wonder what you 'll say to them when you'll see them. Painting is more fun than writing, much more of a game, and costs the soul far, far less.

I enclose a cross letter from Curtis Brown's foreign clerk. I have answered that I don't believe you have made any legal agreement whatsoever with Insel Verlag. Have you? Do let me know. It is rather a bore, the high-handed way old Kippenberg behaves, as if he were the great Chan of publishers. I should like to get a bit of a slap at him.

It's very nice that Alfred is being feasted and rejoiced over. Congratulate him for me. It is nice to have a bit of grateful recognition, whatever one may say.

I am going to make another effort to get the two downstairs rooms with the big terrace, so you could have them as a little apartment when you come. They would be so nice.

They keep deferring the production of 'David' - no doubt they are frightened of it. I believe they hated "The Widowing of Mrs Holroyd." Now they say 'David' will probably be April, but I don't mind, because I'd much rather stay here till the sun warms up a bit in the north... One gets sick of winter... though it is a lovely day today.

Auf Wiedersehen then,

VILLA MIRENDA FLORENCE

WEDNESDAY EVENING

Dear Mother-in-Law:

Frieda and I arrived at the same moment at the station in Milan, the two trains at the same time, and the two porters brought us together in two minutes. Wasn't that clever?

We have just entered the Villa Mirenda, all good and lovely here! friends with flowers, and the peasants all there to welcome us, very nice and friendly. Now we have eaten and sit by the fire for an hour, then to bed.

Frieda is happy to be back, goes about and looks at everything. Nice is the tie. I must look at the colour in the daytime. I'm so glad you're well. I'm coming in the spring and we'll eat strawberries and cream, shan't we?

*Such lovely primulas and violets on the table under the lamp. Good night then.
D. H. L.*

Friends are going to Florence tomorrow and will put this letter in the post. I want you to know that we arrived safely.

(Translated from the German)

Villa Mirenda Scandicci Florence 14 April, 1927

My dear Mother-in-Law:

I am home again - I returned Monday evening from Volterra. I had a very beautiful week with Brewster. We went to Cerveteri, Tarquinia, and Vulci, Grosseto and Volterra, not far from the sea, north of Rome. The Etruscan tombs are very interesting and so nice; and lovable. They were a living, fresh, jolly people, lived their own lives without wanting to dominate the lives of others. I am fond of my Etruscans - they had life in themselves, so they had no need to govern others. I want to write some sketches of these Etruscan places, not scientifically, but only as they are now and the impression they make.

I found Frieda with a cold and a little depressed, but she is well again and herself once more. Barby came Tuesday with Mrs Seaman - she is nice, older than last year, not so beautiful, tall as a telegraph pole, quieter, not much life in her. That is London over one. She will stay here three weeks. She works well in her school and really i wants to be free, but it will take another year and a half at least. But it is better that she works. If she had much money and were quite free, (it would be worse. Oh, liberty, liberty, what have you done for poor woman! But they must go on to spread their bread of life with that poison, poison of liberty.

The weather, thank God, is always lovely. There are still tulips in the corn and apple and peach blossoms. The peasants are faithful and nice. The house is still. It is good to be here. Frieda has gone to ndicci - Barby and Mrs Seaman to Florence - so I am alone. I am wearing the socks you knitted me, they are beautiful and exactly the colour of my trousers, very elegant. And the ties are beautiful - I tried the speckled one at once. I am glad you are so well and your

Stift is always made more beautiful. The world goes forward, surely.

Later on, we will make plans for the summer, when and how to come. I don't want to think of travel, it is enough. Greet Else when you see her. Frieda has come home from Alassio with the love for her sister all new and shiny again. Good! Greet the ladies, my friends. When I come, we will eat Blaufelchen. There is no fish as good in Italy.

Then farewell, D. H. L.

(Translated from the German)

Villa Miranda Scandicci Florence 1 June, 1927

My dear Else:

Could you get me a copy of F. Weege's 'Etruskische Malerei'- costs about twenty marks - at least, in England twenty. If the book-seller can get me a copy, and send it me here by registered post - else they'll steal it - Drucksache, I shall be very glad, and will send you the money at once, when you let me know how much it was. It is a nice book - very - I saw it at a friend's house - and should like to have it. I heard when I was in Tarquinia that Weege was in Florence - but not doing any more Etruscan books. F It is very hot here, too hot - to sit in the sun for breakfast, even before seven in the morning. One gets up early, then has a siesta in the afternoon. Frieda is still peacefully slumbering - I have wakened up early from mine - and not a soul is alive on all the poderi - peasants sleeping too. The Arno valley lies hot and still, in the sun, but there is a little breeze, so I shall go down and sit on the grass in a deck chair under the nespole tree. The nespole are just ripe - I shall climb up and get the first today - warm - they are good like that. The big cherries also are ripe - Giulia brings them in - very good. It seems to me always very pleasant when it is full of summer and one ceases to bother about anything, goes drowsy, like an insect.

We heard from friends that the performance of 'David' went off very well, and the play was well received. But the notices in the newspapers are very contrary. They say the play was very dull, that it was like a cinema with too much talking, that it was boring and no drama in it, and that it was a very great mistake for a clever man like me to offer such a thing for the actual stage. A clever man like me doesn't fret over what they say. If the producers made a bad film of it, that's the producers' fault. And if the dramatic critics can only listen to snappy talk about divorces and money, that's their fault too. They should pray to the Lord - 'Lend thou the listening ear' and not blame me. Anyhow, io ne mifrego! Frieda, however, was very disappointed and downcast about it and almost refused to be comforted. We shall hear more later.

Unless it gets sizzling hot, I suppose we shall stay here till towards the end of

July. We may do a little giro to Cortona and Arezzo and Chiusi and Orvieto, coming back by Assisi and Perugia: if it's not too hot. Then for August we can go to Baden to the Schwiegermutter - that hot and tiresome month, when everybody in the whole world is somewhere where they shouldn't be. Did you say you were going to the Haute Savoie? That'll be very nice - I have got some friends gone there just now. If it weren't the wrong time of year, a bit too warm for you - I should suggest you bring the children here and make use of this flat while we are away, and the young ones could explore Florence and all this countryside, which is very nice. They'd like it - but you would probably rather be cooler and quite free from housekeeping.

The Brett has gone back to the ranch, and is frantic because we don't go too. Mabel also writes urgingly. She has built two or three more houses and keeps one for us. But this summer anyhow we shan't go. I should like to see Bavaria again: and September should be lovely. If we went there any earlier, we would stay at that inn in Beurberg, where we began our career, at the end of May, fifteen years ago. I liked Beurberg so much. But now in summer I suppose the inn is crammed full.

I had notice from Curtis Brown today they had received ten pounds for 'The Woman Who Rode Away.' As soon as it appears, in the 'Dial' or the 'London Mercury,' either in the June number or the July, I forget - I'll send you 'The Man Who Loved Islands.' I believe you'd like that, and it might amuse you to translate.

Well, it's not often I write such a long letter, nowadays. The days go by, and we hardly see anybody - which is what I prefer. Frieda grumbles sometimes, but when people come she doesn't want them. She has an idea she is a social soul who loves her fellowmen to distraction I don't see it quite. But I suppose one idea of one's self is as good as another.

I Remember me to the children, and to Alfred-and tante belle cose.

D. H. L.

Villa Mirinda Scandicci Florence 11 July, 1927

My dear Mother-in-Law:

Your son-in-law is a poor wretch and is in bed again with bronchitis and hemorrhage. We have the best doctor in Florence, Giglioli - he gives me coagulin but I am still in the corner. It is not dangerous, but...

And you, how are you? You are not taking any sea-baths? The doctor says my hemorrhage comes from sea-bathing that I took in Forte.

And does it amuse you, your Konstanz? We were there at the Walthaus Jakob for supper, the time Mountsier was with us, do you remember? It was lovely. But

aren't you a little lost and homeless there? Or are you always getting younger and are you shingling your hair and cutting your skirt short? You can never know what a woman will do in her green seventy-sixth year.

Friends are very good. Every day somebody comes from Florence. I've been only five days in bed and in a fortnight I can go away to that Wortersee, but we don't know where it is yet - Emil should write. The doctor says I ought to go into the pines - eight hundred metres, no higher.

If only once I were well again!

I send you only two pounds for your birthday, since I am to bring the rest myself when we come for the feast. Else must write to us. Many thanks to her for her letters. I borrowed the book in London. But the Etruscan and all work can sleep with the devil, if only I get well again. I will enjoy myself and forget everything. You, be content, and take the joys of this earth peacefully.

We are coming soon and will eat the Baden sausages together.

(Translated from the German)

IRSCHENHAUSEN POST EBENHAUSEN MUNICH

12 SEPTEMBER, 1927

My dear Mother-in-Law:

We had the little parcel today. But why did you spend so much money? You ought not to do it. The handkerchiefs are really charming. I like them very much, and the pralines are for princes, we've only eaten two rows. Good there was also a little sausage - bread is the staff of life but with a little sausage it also becomes an umbrella.

You are lonely, I know it, quite forlorn, with three daughters running all over the world. But now you'll be content again, Nusch is with you.

Else went this morning to sleep in Augsburg - God knows why-but we were very happy together, what with 'patience' and embroidery and walks -what a pity she is gone!

The weather is cold and it rains - Nusch's barometer still makes a bad, grinning foreboding face in the room. But in the Isartal still hangs a gay-coloured rag of rainbow, the Lord still keeps his promise.

We haven't heard from Barby - I think she will come here direct, perhaps Saturday. Emil writes so nicely and sends me thirty bottles of malt-beer. Think what drunkards we shall become, arriving in Baden with red noses and watery

eyes.

It is really a pity we can't stay together longer, with Nusch and Else and you. Always this stupid going away. But soon we shall see you, so farewell.

D. H. L.

It is evening, the clouds are gold, the mountains stand there with slow white pillows of steam.

(Translated from the German)

Saturday MORNING Dear Else:

So nice of you to send all those toilet things, and the money - but why didn't you keep the money to pay for them? Let me know how much they cost.

The 'Jugend' man came - a nice little soul after all - but they'll do him in - he'll never stand the modern mill. And the Kahlers came - both very nice - but like all people of that class nowadays, they have lost their raison d'etre, and there seems no reason whatever why they should exist-they haven't even, like the Nachbarin, the spoignancy of woes.) A rainy morning and a cold wind.

f Barby arrives in Munchen at 10:40 tonight - so Frieda will go in by a late train, and they'll come out tomorrow morning. We've omised to go to the Kahlers' tomorrow to tea. Did you get the book I sent? - The 'Jugend' man wants only a hort-short story-four Schreibmaschineseiten: that's about two usand words. No stories are as short as that - usually jive usand. I must try and hunt something up. Hope all is well in Heidelberg. Greet everybody.

D. H. L.

This swanky paper comes from Fr Häuselmaier - or however she is lied.

Irschenhausen Isartal Wednesday 29 September, 1927

My dear Motherin-Law:

Else writes Nusch is still there. Na, Johanna, you Easter-lamb, don't you sacrifice yourself yet on the altar of marriage. Wait then till Tuesday, when we are coming. We take the twelve o'clock train and arrive at seven in Baden, is that right, motherin-law? And we go to the Augustabad, where the Blaufelchen is so good. It has turned much colder tonight - we've both had colds. Sunday was a horror of darkness and rain but we went out and got wet. But we are better. Anna is here and looks after us well. Barby is already in London. I can hardly believe she has been here. I've nearly drunk all the beer Emil sent, a record for Munich, no? Yesterday we went to see Frau Leitner, so nice and small, but what chatter. She sends you all her greetings.

The beeches begin to turn yellow and today we gathered some violets under the balcony - they smell sweet like spring and the flowers are still wonderful.

Kahlers come tomorrow and Max Mohr, the dramatist, is to come from Tegernsee. Then, you, mother-in-law, and I hope you too, Nusch - will meet us on Tuesday and everything can be told then.

D. H. L.

(Translated from the German)

Irschenhausen Sunday

My dear Else:

Many thanks for the pen, which I am so glad to have in my fingers again - it's an old friend: it wrote 'Boy in the Bush' and 'St Mawr' and 'Princess' and 'Woman Who Rode Away' and 'Plumed Serpent' and all the stories in between: not bad, even if it is a nasty orangy brown colour. But I've got even to like this colour. They seem to have mended it all right, it goes well.

This is the horriddest day of all, after tea and still pouring with rain: and I would like to go out! If only I had strong boots and a rain-proof. I would of course if we were staying. - Yesterday was lovely and sunny till teatime.

I This weekend we are alone - Anna is coming tomorrow. Then I suppose the Meyers will come and the Kahlers - and I've promised to go to Schoenberner's, and to meet Hans Carossa there. I heard from England that a man who writes plays and thinks I am the greatest living novelist (quote) and who lives in Tegernsee, may come and see me: Max Mohr: do you know anything about him? I don't.

I began the little bag - with green grass waves and dandelion seed-stones -you know, the fluffy balls - and it's going to have bees. But today is so dark and the stuff is so black! But it will be rather a small bag.

I suppose we shall stay here till Monday week - is that December 2nd? I don't feel a bit anxious to return to Italy - but I think Frieda does. I don't mind, for the time being, if it rains and is dark. - By the way, you should see how pretty your garden looks, with the gold, and the mauve of the Michaelmas daisies, and the big autumn daisy, and the pink phlox: it looks really gay, on a sunny day - We have gathered the apples - so bright and red - and the last two hazel-nuts, I'm afraid either squirrels or children had fetched the others. The foods are simply populated with mushrooms, all sorts, in weird camps everywhere - really like strange inhabitants come in. We eat the little yellow ones, and keep picking Steinpilze and throwing them away again. The cows come every afternoon on to our grass, with a terrific tintinnabulation, like a host of tinkling Sundays. There is a Jersey who is pining to come to tea in the porch - and a white calf that suddenly goes round the moon. Frieda reads Goethe, and I play patience - today I have finished my 'Cavalleria Rusticana' translation: now I've only to do the introduction: if that fool of a young postman hasn't lost my bookful of MS. that I

sent to England. Frieda told him loudly registered: he says he sent it unregistered - and Drucksache. I shall curse him if I have to do it all over again.

It's nightfall - I think I shall go out, spite of rain, for a few minutes.

Wiedersehen!

D. H. L.

HOTEL EDEN

BADEN-BADEN

FRIDAY

My dear Else:

You also have a birthday, but it seems to me one must be four or eighty to have important birthdays. Of the number we won't speak.

I had your letter. Yes, we saw Hans Carossa, a nice man, mild like mashed potatoes. He listened to my lung passages, he could not hear my lungs, thinks they must be healed, only the bronchi, and doctors are not interested in bronchi. But he says not to take more inhalations with hot air: it might bring the hemorrhage back. The journey was vile, many people, much dust, and I had a cold. But it is better. We are very grand here, two rooms, a bath, and the food very good.

Yesterday it was goose, Michaelmas goose; I can eat better but they bring so much, wagonloads of potatoes, and cutlets big as carpets, and how the people feed! It takes my shy appetite away a bit.

The mother-in-law grows younger and younger. We must go back like this on her next birthday: 66 next time, then 55 years. It is thus with old age, the only real youth without trouble, after seventy.

Max Mohr came in a car from Tegemsee, where he has a pleasant house - with wife and child - a man thirty-six years old or so.

He wants to be a child of nature but we were disappointed in the nature. But he is good and interesting, but a last man who has arrived at the last end of the road, who can no longer go ahead in the wilderness nor take a step into the unknown. So he is very unhappy, is a doctor, prisoner of war in England, and his

psychology a little like Hadu's. We have his plays, we send them to you.

When are you coming? Come this weekend. We stay till the seventeenth. We are very fortunate here, but the world seems dark to me again. That scares me and I want to go south.

I send you the story - too long for 'fugend'- but you might sell it somewhere else. Would not 'Tickets Please' and 'England, My England' be just right for 'Jugend'? Have you got them? The piece about the dog I can't find. But come and we can talk it all over Are Friedel and Marianne there? Greet Alfred and them.

D. H. L.

(Translated from the German)

Villa Miranda Scandicci Firenze 14 November, 1927

Dear Else:

Many thanks for the Beethoven letters - arrived today - not a literary man - and always in love with somebody - or thought he was - and in the flesh wasn't. But how German! - I mean the way he really wasn't.

Frau Katherina Kippenberg wrote they want to publish one of my books next year, and asks which I would suggest. I think I shall suggest, 'Woman Who Rode Away,' and 'The Princess' (from the English 'St Mawr') and a third story you haven't yet seen, 'None of That.' They'd make a smallish volume. Or would you suggest one of the novels? 'The Last Girl' or 'Aaron's Rod.' I don't care. Only we'll keep back 'The Plumed Serpent,' and offer it ready translated to another firm, for 1929. Do you think that's wise?

It has rained a bit here, but is sunny again - we're just going out for a walk - the country is full of colour, vines yellow, olives blue, pines very green. It is Monday, so the fusillade of cacciatori shooting little birds is quieter - it makes me so mad - I am really quite a lot better - cough much less, especially in the morning - but haven't yet been to Firenze - think we'll go Thursday. There's a queer sort of unease in the air - as if the wrong sort of spirits were flying abroad in the unseen ether - but it may be my imagination. Frieda strums away on her piano, and I have to listen for when she hits a wrong note. - I am dabbling at poems, getting them ready for the 'Collected Poems.'

Alfred wrote very nicely from Ascona. I hope we'll see you here in the early spring: if we are here: I feel sort of uncertain and unstuck. I hope you're having more conferences and so on, if they amuse you. As for nie, I play 'patience' - and it hardly ever comes out. Love!

D. H. L.

VILLA MIRENDA SCANDICCI FLORENCE 16 NOVEMBER, 1927

My dear Motherin-Law:

This time I want you to do something for me: our neighbour at the ranch, Rachel Hawk, wants toys for the children. She wants two boxes - a farmyard and a village, not too small, to cost five marks. The people in the shop can send it direct: Mrs Rachel Hawk, Del Monte Ranch, Questa, New Mexico. And in the shop buy also animals and trees and men, as small as possible, also chickens, and little houses and carts and so forth for my niece Joan and my nephew Bertie, for about ten marks. They can be sent straight from the shop to my sister Emily.

I send you two pounds, that will be enough. You like doing it, yes? In the shop on the Augustplatz, where the large autos stand.

How are you? We are well. It has turned cold, but sun all day today. I was on the top of the hill, I saw Florence, lying there in the sunshine, so light and clear, the lilytown.

Tomorrow we are going for lunch with Reggie; the first time I shall go to town since we came back. If it is fine like today I'll go with pleasure.

We are both busy - I am writing stories and am typing all my poems, they are to be collected in one volume. Frieda has finished her jacket, very pretty, from the violet velvet Nusch gave her. It is really pretty, a short jacket with silver buttons, quite Florentine Renaissance.

In the evening we have a fire in the stove. The day is warm, the sun streams into the room. But the evenings are cold.

Max Mohr writes always very nicely and will come to see us in January. Perhaps we shall go to Cortina, we are not going to Egypt-But if we both keep well, we shall stay in our own house.

I always have a 'patience' in the evening and I think the motherin-law has a game at this same hour. Yours comes better than Else's. If your little one is called the demon, then Else's ought to be called 'devil.'

Else sent me Beethoven's letters. But what a cut-off man! He could not come near to anybody: and his house, what untidyness, what a mad show! The poor, great man! Thank the Lord, I am still small enough to mend my socks and wash my cup.

Frieda has written to you: the letter lies about these last two days, half finished. You will get it finally, when it arrives.

I greet you, mère éternelle! A pity we can't send you our roses, they are so lovely.

D. H. L. (Translated from the German)

Villa Mirinda Scandicci Firenze 12 December, 1927 *Dear Else:*

I can't help laughing at the end of Frau Katherina's letter - gets quite snappy. However, that's that. I suppose by 'Holy Ghosts' (imagine daring to pluralize it!) she means 'Glad Ghosts. ' I sent you a copy last year - didn't I? - little yellow book. I don't mind what they put in a volume. - I suggested 'Woman Who Rode Away' and 'Princess' and 'None of That' - all more or less Mexican. But let her put in 'Glad Ghosts' if she likes. Anyhow we have got her hipped. Don't suddenly go and say you don't want to translate the things - or haven't time, or something - just when I've got it into order. It would be just like you.

Very grey and misty and unsatisfactory here. I am in bed, as the best place out of it all. But I'm all right - cough a nuisance still, but nothing extra. I'd get up if the sun would shine. Anyhow I'll get up this afternoon.

I'm writing my 'Lady Chatterley' novel over again. It's very 'shocking' - the Schwiegermutter must never see it. - I think I shall publish it privately here in Florence.

We are staying here for Christmas and making a tree for the peasants. This year there'll be at least thirty of them. Dreadful thought. But Frieda wants it.

And we aren't sending out any Christmas presents - so please, Else, don't send us anything. The post is so tiresome here, and altogether one feels so unchristmassy. I'm sick of Jesus, and don't see at all why he should go on being born every year. We might have somebody else born, for a change. Toujours perdrix!

The Huxleys will be in Florence for Christmas, then going to Diablerets. I don't want to go there, another San Moritz, where Michael Arlen has gone. I'd have liked to go to Egypt, but the fates seem to say no. So it's just San Polo!

The Schwiegermutter says you are having festas in Heidelberg, so I suppose you are wearing your best clothes and going it. Nothing like learning, for setting people on the hop. Anyhow I hope you're having a good time, and the children too. Love from both.

Villa Mirinda Scandicci Florence Sunday

My dear Mother-in-Law:

Christmas is here again. I say, the poor chap has been bom nearly two thousand times, it is enough. He might really have peace now, and leave us in peace, without Christmas and stomach-aches. But we sit still and only make the tree for the peasant children and they think it is a miracle, that it really grows here in the salon, and has silver apples and golden birds: for them it is only a fairytale, nothing Christian. You've heard how Frieda wanted to act Sancta Sanctissima, she's really St Frieda, butter doesn't melt in her mouth: because, of course, she has taken a Bandelli child to the hospital. But, thank the Lord, the

child makes trouble and Saint Frieda begins to be bored and is becoming all-too-human again.

The Wilkinsons, our neighbours, have just been here, he with a flute and an overcoat. Tomorrow they go to Rome for a fortnight-Thank goodness I'm not going: there is an ice-cold wind these last two days and Rome is an ice-cold town.

I sit here in the corner by the stove that sings quite amiably and the world can go to blazes as far as I am concerned.

Else wrote that she will take you to Heidelberg over the holidays. But don't you go, remain safely there, and let the mistletoe berries fall on those that want them.

The Wilkinsons have brought me a Christmas pudding: it smells good; I'll enjoy it. I send you a pound, you can buy such a one -yes, o. real English pudding. (Don't!)

Then farewell. Don't drink too much and dance too much and flirt too much, or you'll have a real moral 'morning-after,' and I shan't weep with you. Farewell, O Germania under the tree.

D. H. L.

(Translated from the German)

Villa Mirinda Scandicci Wednesday

My dear Motherin-Law:

Lo, everything is nearly normal again. The tree is still standing - we want to relight it when the Wilkes return from Rome, perhaps Monday. And we have the remains of the plum pudding from yesterday. Otherwise, as I say, we are nearly normal. Frieda has forgotten her holiness for the moment. The boy flew away from the hospital, his padrone took him back again and promised him a bicycle. So, the operation is done, Frieda is going to visit him tomorrow. But now she is no longer the one and only saint. The padrone promised Dino a bicycle and Dante, the elder brother, says: 'If somebody promises me a bicycle I'll also go and be operated on.' But, poor boy, he has no rupture.

The weather is abominable - rain and little sun - evening is the best time, with fire and lamp and peace. Frieda is making herself an apron all covered with roses and birds.

The tie is a great success. I wore it on Christmas day in Florence - very nice, it's much nicer on than off. The Baden calendar ties faithfully here, ready to carry us through another year, with all the pictures. The last sheet of the old one hangs over the piano, a black and white scene in the Black Forest.

*Oh, dear motherin-law, live well for another year and have a jolly, happy
1928. Greet Else, I am writing to her.*

Your, D. H. L.

The book from Friedel is pretty, really pretty.

(Translated from the German)

Villa MIRENDA scandicci Florence Wednesday

My dear Motherin-Law:

*I haven't said 'thank you' yet for the beautiful tie that I like so much. I'm a
brute. But now the pen has become a difficulty to me. I have written so much in
my life, I would like to be silent. But you understand.*

*We are well on in January and I haven't had a cold yet this winter. I thank the
Lord and pray it may go on so with me. You are also well, aren't you?*

*We are sitting still and work much, and that's healthy. People make you tired
and bring sickness. Frieda is sewing much, makes herself some dresses and
jackets and a coat, and says she is better than Paquin. All right! Her hats grow
higher and higher, like the tower of Babel, which was so high. In the spring
you'll see a daughter such as you've never seen before in all your life.*

*Now they write to me from London that 'David' won't be produced until April.
I prefer it, I would rather go to England or Germany when the winter is past and
the flowers greet you. Wait a little, motherin-law, have a little patience, summer
is the best time. We are having bad weather, not rain but cold fog that is quite
unnatural in this country. But beautiful days in between: like Monday, when I
went to the Villa Curonia, Mabel's villa on the Poggio Imperiale for the first
time. Oh dear, a big, beautiful villa, somewhat noble, but sad, sad as death. She
wants to pull out some books and send them to Taos. Farewell, motherin-law, till
we meet.*

D. H. L. (Translated from the German)

Villa Mirenda Scandicci Florence Sunday

My dear Motherin-Law:

*I have the ties, they are beautiful as Rhinegold, but why for rainy days'?
Today I am wearing the blue and red, do you remember? I believe it is only
cotton, but you ought to see how gay and manly it looks. We are still waiting for
my novel, 'Lady Chatterley's Lover.' Only half has been printed - all goes slowly.
But I hope in a fortnight it will be ready - at least printed.*

*It's just as well we aren't in Switzerland yet, the wind comes cold and the snow
lies deep on the hills opposite. Today was a wonderful day but no warmer than a
sunny winter's day. I don't want to be in the snow again, as at Diablerets. We are*

looking for an inn in Switzerland. In the hotels sit thousands of English spinsters and they bore me. In an inn, life is more natural. Barby writes there is a good inn at Talloire, near Annecy where Nusch was, but it is in Switzerland. Ask Nusch about it. Frieda can go to Baden when she likes, but I think it would be stupid for only five or six days and then off again. What a pity we can't both come while Nusch is there! But for me everybody says: 'Switzerland! Switzerland!' - so I, poor beast, have to go. But later in the summer I'm coming to Baden.

Frieda is still sewing clothes. The two girls, Giulia and Teresina, come in the evenings and the three sew and talk together in the diningroom, but I sit alone here in the salotto, too many females for me.

The spring vegetables are here already - asparagus, sweet young peas, broad beans, and during the last three weeks new potatoes and many artichokes. It is always a good moment in Italy when the vegetables come. For fruit we have nespole, the yellow Japanese misplein, and the first cherries, which are not really sweet. Everything If late this year and many, many roses but not happy ones. They fall off in a day because the undersoil is still too dry, the rain has not yet gone deep down.

You remember Zaira, the mistress of the major here, and the big white dog Titi? Well, Titi has bitten Zaira's arm badly and has had to be shot, and poor Zaira must stay at home, there in Florence, till the doctor is sure that it isn't hydrophobia. Frieda says: another of my enemies has fallen - she means Titi.

Poor A... H... - she was so nice but seemed so small and lost here in Italy. And poor Frau... really ill. I hope they are all right again in Baden. Don't you go travelling to Spain or Sweden, motherin-law - old ladies should stay in their own home-town. Then farewell to you two - we'll meet again before long.

D. H. L.

(Translated from the German)

Villa Mirenda Scandicci Florence Thursday

My dear Motherin-Law:

We had a good journey, few people, no difficulties, and I was not very tired. I never saw Switzerland so lovely: a still grey autumn day, grass so strangely green, nearly like fire: and then the fruit trees, all delicate flames, the cherry trees absolutely red like cherries, apple trees and pear trees yellow red scarlet and still as flowers: really like a fairyland. It has rained in Italy. But today there is gentle sun and clouds, warm air and a great stillness. The neighbours were at the station with the car, all so friendly. And here the peasants all ranged on the 'aia'- Giulia radiant, she is getting quite pretty; she had the fires ready and the

hot water and we are here. But the house seemed foreign to me, naked and empty, and a bit uncanny, as if I had never known it, but Frieda is happy.

I don't know what it is with me, I don't feel at home in Italy, this time. In your little vase are roses and jasmine. My pictures please me - and I listen, listen to the stillness. But now we go to the neighbours. Take our small presents. Already your letter was here this morning. What a pity that distance remains distance, so absolutely. If we could come for tea to you, we would all three be happy. But we will come nearer to live, near you.

Auf Wiedersehen, be happy.

D. H. L.

(Translated from the German)

Villa Mirenda Scandicci Florence Monday

My dear Motherin-Law:

I am glad you had such a beautiful trip to Herrenalp. Are you glad to come home or would you have liked to stay longer?

We arrive about the thirteenth. We leave next Monday the twelfth for Milan, and on Tuesday the thirteenth from Milan to Baden-Baden. We arrive at 6:45 in the evening. Can you find us one or two rooms in a villa or a hotel, that we can eat where we want to? And then, after a few days, we can go again to Herrenalp with you, or stay in Baden or somewhere in the neighbourhood. We promised to be in England all the month of August. But that leaves us about twenty days in Germany. It will be lovely.

I am always fond of Baden and the Black Forest, and always feel well there. It will be splendid summer, and the strawberries and cherries won't be over yet.

We can eat at the Wald Kaffee, drink tea there, and visit Excellenz Stotzer in her wooden house and make excursions. Yes, it will be lovely. Frieda also is happy to come, really. Don't be sad.

It is wonderful here, so warm and still. The fruit is already ripe: figs, peaches, apricots, plums, all big and fine, because it rained so much - the apricots are marvellous, really as big as peaches, and the first little pears are so sweet and pale yellow. Yes, it is full summer.

My sisters write sadly because of the strike: there is no end to it and both are losing much money. One must not make one's life out of money, if money disappears the life is broken. With or without money I have had my life for myself and am not swindled.

Friedel wrote nicely from Berlin but I think he has had enough of a big town and wants to go home.

Else tells me how she likes the play.

They are already translating 'The Plumed Serpent' into Swedish but I only get six hundred marks.

I send you a little money for your birthday, that you may buy what you like.

We won't bring you any presents, they are such a nuisance. Then, mother-in-law, soon we'll meet.

D. H. L. (Translated from the German)

Villa Mirinda Scandicci Florence Sunday

My dear Mother-in-Law:

This is already another Sunday, and the third that we are here. The weather is always like summer, so warm and clear, the windows are open all day and we don't dream of having a fire: the evenings also are quite warm. The roses are in bloom, but there are few flowers, all is still too dry, little water even in the wells. Also Baden will be lovely just now. On Sundays I must always think of the music in the 'Kurpark' and of the 'Malzbier' in your room. Here there is no music, the stupid hunters shoot the sparrows and nightingales in the woods behind, you always hear it go 'pop' - Malzbier there isn't either, and your room is not just five minutes from here. But you will be going for a walk at this moment and you will be meeting all the ladies from the Stift in their Sunday clothes returning from Mass.! Nusch has written - says she sees many people, and goes out a lot. She wants to come here in March. Alfred also has written from Ascona - quite charmed by the paradisaical days there: a charming letter. Frieda has a piano again, now she wants to play Handel, the 'Messiah', but she hasn't arrived at the Alleluia! I am painting a picture, not very big, of a tiger who springs on a man: such a grinning tiger. Tomorrow we are going to Florence with friends. I haven't been to town yet. We play cards with the neighbours, solo-whist and Pope John and also 'patience.' You know, your little 'patience'- the one-two-three - the one that is called the demon, may well be called so, with me it never comes right.

Greet Frau Kugler, also the Halms. I hope that Frau Oberin is better. You keep jolly; you must ask the cards if in January we are going to Cortina. 'O dear cards, tell me truly...'

Les Diablerets Thursday morning [To Frieda]

No letter from you this morning - only one letter from Curtis Brown, asking for the 'Lady C.' MS. - But I am still waiting for the final two chapters from that woman.

A warm morning, with warm dimmish sun. Our maid got the grippe, so her sister is here.

I'm just going down to the station with Aldous. Diablerets coming to an end for us. I do hope we shan't get gripped going down to the valley. - How do you feel it?

Love to die Alte.

D. H. L.

Chalet Beau Site Les Diablerets Vaud Tuesday Dear Else:

We'll just go ahead with 'Rex' without bothering about Curtis Brown. I'll just mention it to him when I write, and tell him I fixed things up myself. I think M. 180 is quite a good price for 'Jugend' to pay: and the usual arrangement is one third to the translator, two thirds to the author - so you get M. 60. Business, caramia, business!

I wrote Seeker direct and asked him to send you and to Frau Katherina both, copies of the 'Princess' (in 'St Mawr') and proofs of the volume of short stories 'The Woman Who Rode Away.' I hope you will get these directly. In the stories, the end of 'The Border Line' is missing -printer lost two or three pages: so I'm having to write it in. But you'll understand the story is unfinished. It's 'None of That' I want you to consider.

i; We had hot sunshine, and the snow was melting: but now today it is snowing again, a fine and crumbling snow. I must say, I don't like it. I am no snow-bird, I hate the stark and shroudy whiteness, white and black. It offends the painter in one - it is so uniform - only sometimes lovely contours, and pale blue gleams. But against life.

I've been busy doing my poems - have at last got all the early ! poems together and complete. What a sweat! But I shall publish the others, 'Look!' and 'Birds and Beasts' as they stand. Then I'll have to go through the novel, which I'm having typed in London. How glad I'll be when all this work is behind me, and I needn't give a damn any more. I'm sick to death of literature.

I think this place is a good tonic, but snow isn't good for bronchials: it just isn't: it scrapes inside.

I dreamt of Frau v. Kahler last night. Are they all right? That was such a good p.c. of Irschenhausen. F. waiting to take the letter - so Wiedersehen!

D. H. L.

Firenze 16 April 28 Saturday [To Else]

Had your note from Alassio - glad you like it there. I wonder if you are setting

off today for Germany. I stayed the night in Florence at Orioli's, but came back to Mirenda this afternoon. There is an atmosphere of departure and departure, which is a bit éccœurant. I wish we were safely away, with no good-byes to say. - We shall meet some time during the summer somewhere nice and free and forgetful. Italy has too many memories, not enough spunk.

I shall send your Fullfeder, which I just discovered.

D. H. L.

Villa Mirenda Scandicci Florence 4 May 1928

Dear Else:

I simply can't write biographical facts about myself Will you answer this Bulow man, if you feel like it: and if you think it is worth while. I have never heard of him. I must ask Curtis Brown if they have arranged with him about 'Islands. '

You have heard by now that we are keeping on the Mirenda. I took down the pictures and we began to pack: but Frieda became so gloomy that I hung the pictures up again and paid six months' rent. Not worth while getting into a state about. So here we are, just the same. And probably we shall stay till the end of the month, as the proofs of the novel are still only half done. I wish the printer would hurry up.

I am asking people if they know of a nice Gasthaus in Switzerland, for me. I hate hotel-pensions, after a few days. I always want to kill the old women - usually English - that come into meals like cats. We just had a very handsome Louis XV sort of a one to tea - but American this time - and of course I'm bristling in every hair.

It's more or less summer too - the Kastanien in full flower - is yours too? The Bandelli peasants just brought us the first baccelli - Saubohnen - which are tiny, and they eat them raw, and think them wonderful. I like them because il baccello is one of the improper words. We also eat green almonds boiled in sugar and water, like plums - and they taste like gooseberries. We went to see an old Englishwoman - not so very old - who has a very elegant flat on the Lungarno and was a cocotte - the expensive sort - but a real one. I must say, I find her very restful and smooth, after some of the others.

Au revoir - tante cosa!

Villa Mirenda Scandicci Firenze Friday *Dear Else:*

I will send this to Baden - perhaps you will still be there. You will have had a lovely sunny week: here the sun is too hot, makes one tired, and feels like earthquakes. Still, it is beautiful.

We got home safely with all the spoil - there are roses in the Wolfratshausener glass you gave me, here on the table - and we drank the Kirsch from the little yellow glasses when the Wilkinsons were here yesterday. I am much better, I eat more joyfully, and take the Brustthee. Imagine, one must let it boil slowly for hours. I do believe it is good, better than all the medicines. I am already doing a story, and dabbling at my picture of five Negresses - called 'The Finding of Moses, ' or, if the Schwiegermutter had to name it, 'ein fürchterliches Schauerstück. ' A la bonne heure.

I had a letter from Curtis Brown, saying that next year, in November, our contract with Kippenberg comes to an end, and then we can leave him and go to a different publisher. Also that he, Kip, said in a letter of 1923 that he would gladly agree that you should do the translations. Curtis Brown's have the letter. Now I have written Kippenberg to ask him what exactly he intends to do next year, with regard to my work. We'll see if we can't have our own way in this matter, and you shall translate 'The Plumed Serpent, ' if you wish, trotz Anton, trotz Katherina. Vogue la galère!

Dark falling. We haven't made any fire in the stove yet - it is so warm. Hope you are feeling well and easy. Love to the Schwiegermutter - the Schlips came today - but I shan't wear it yet. Say thanks for me.

Love, Villa Mirinda Scandicci Firenze Montag Liebe Else:

You wrote me so nicely from Constance. - I'm glad you had a good time with the Schwiegermutter. I can so well understand she didn't want to see her old home. It's too upsetting: the past is so far off I am better - getting up again, and going about the house - but feeling feeble. I went downstairs and out of doors a few yards yesterday - but it's too hot to go out till sundown. However, this day week - or tomorrow week - I hope we can leave for Villach. I shall feel better a little higher. It's lovely weather here, sunny, and not too hot at all if one keeps quiet. But it's much too hot to walk in the sun. If I was well, I should enjoy it. Frieda for the first time really likes the heat. But now I feel I should like to see the world green, and hear the waters running: and to taste good northern food.

I almost wish we'd arranged to rent Irschenhausen for August too, and gone straight there. But it will be nice to see Nusch too - and as you say, if one can really be amused, that is the chief thing. My illnesses I know come from chagrin - chagrin that goes deep in and comes afterwards in haemorrhage or what not. When one learns, also, not to be chagrined, then one can become like your Burger-meister? -fat and lustig, to the age of eighty. Anyhow I'd be glad to be fat and lustig once before I die: even a bit versoffen, if that's a way of not having a sore chest.

I wonder if the 'revolution' in Vienna, which the papers report, amounts to

anything? Probably not. I think if we didn't go to Austria we'd go to Bavaria, or somewhere high in Baden.

We shall see you then in September. It is good of you to let us have the Irschenhausen house - but I must pay you a rent.

Wiedersehen!

D. H. L.

I sent you a 'Dial' with a story in it - don't know if you'll like it.

Kesselmatte Gsteig b Gstaad Schweiz 11 September 1928

My dear Motherin-Law:

I have your letter and the tie, a nice one. Yes, we're coming soon. Else comes here Saturday the fifteenth and stays till Sunday.

It's wonderfully still here since my sister and niece went. They left Friday. They were jolly here but my sister is a little sad - the husband is nothing.

We have had summer days but today is autumn. The clouds turn round and round the tops of the mountains, still and grey and low, so still it is frightening. In these mountains one needs the sun. It will be nice in Baden, when the Brewsters are also there and we can go to concerts and theatres together.

We eat pounds of grapes. Frieda makes a diet of grapes, juniper berries, and God knows what. Do you hear nothing from Nusch? Farewell and soon, Auf Wiedersehen, D. H. L. (Translated from the German)

La Vigie Ile de Port-Cros Var Saturday Dear Else:

Your letter today, saying the Schwiegermutter is in bed. I'm awfully sorry and do hope it's not much. I thought in Lichtental she wasn't well. Of course, she is a heavy woman, and her legs are sure to suffer. Let us know how she goes on - and I hope she'll soon be up and about.

We are here settled in. But Frieda arrived in Lavandou with that fatal Italian grippe, and of course I took it. I felt ill all last week, and have been in bed all this, with a very raked chest. Sickening! - The others are very nice and very kind. The Vigie isn't a castle at all - just a low thick defence-wall with loop-holes, enclosing the top of the hill - about as big as the Leopoldplatz - and the inside all I wild, grown with lavender and arbutus and little pine trees, and with a few rooms built against the inside of the wall. It's quite pleasant, and comfortable, and we have big fires of pine logs in the open fires. Giuseppe is a strong fellow of twenty-eight, Sicilian. He fetches and carries and washes all dishes and makes fires. The women only cook, and they do it in turns. Joseph brings the food from

the boat on a small donkey, Jasper - and we get abundance. The ship comes nearly every day - but the post only three times a week. The climate is very warm - warm and moist. I am afraid that doesn 't suit me very well. I don't know how long we shall stay. I have promised, till December 15 or 20. But if the warm-moist is bad for my cough, we shall leave soon. The others are really very nice and kind, it will be a pity if we have to leave them. And where shall we go?

The Brewsters are back in Capri. Inevitable.

I ordered the poems to Heidelberg. They look very nice.

We are on top of the island, and look down on green pine-tops, down to the blue sea, and the other islands and the mainland. Since I came I have not been down to the sea again - and Frieda has bathed only once. But it is very pretty. And at night the lights flash at Toulon and Hyeres and Lavandou. - But I really don't like islands, I would never stay long on one. Frieda wants to go back to Lago di Garda. Vediamo! I am in abeyance.

Write and tell us how the Schwiegermutter is. Frieda says she feels worried - but it seems to me there is no danger, only it is painful and depressing. No peace on this earth.

Love from both.

D. H. L.

I hope this letter will leave the island before next Tuesday - the next mail.

Port-Cros Friday Such storms, such winds, such torrents of rain! And the Vigie, although quite hygienic, is not very comfortable. So we are all leaving next week - Tuesday or Thursday, as the sea permits. I think Frieda and I will stay in Bandol, on the big railway.

Am so glad the Schwiegermutter is better.

Will write next week.

D. H. L.

Ile de Port-Cros Var Wednesday

My dear Mother-in-Law:

I am glad you are better. You have been too brave. You know, you are heavy on your feet now, you are no longer a young, light thing. You must not walk so far. I remember with grief the 'Fisch Kultur, ' a mad excursion and you insisted doing it. No, no, you must go gently and wisely. To force things is not for you.

Tomorrow we leave here. Thank the Lord, the weather is good, blue sky, blue quiet sea, and so warm. But I have enough. I would never like to stay more than

a month on a little island. But as an experience it was nice. I think we will only go as far as Bandol, a little place on the coast, half an hour from Toulon. But there we are on the main line, and only an hour from Marseille. And we can think where we really want a house - neither of us knows what we want.

They write from Florence it rains and rains; awful. Thank God, we aren't there. My book of stories came with the Inselalmanach and Moricke. You know I have not broken with Insel? They pay me fifty pounds instead of thirty-five and Else can translate when she wants to. That's good.

I send you five pounds, if you want more tell me. It is my money and I give it with pleasure, but please pay the ten marks for Frieda's dress.

The Brewsters are in Capri again. They say it is the best place in the world. Good, when you know it!

Keep still and quiet inside yourself, then your legs will go without pain.

D. H. L.

(Translated from the German)

Hôtel Beau Rivage Bandol, Var 19 December, 1928

My dear Mother-in-Law:

This evening the ties and the calendar came. The friendly calendar, we know it so well, it makes me homesick. We must really find a house, if it is only to hang it on the wall. But we still don't know where we want to live. It is very nice here, so sunny and friendly. Now we wait till Xmas is past.

Perhaps Else and Barby are coming. Tomorrow we shall know. But Else is working till the end of February, so she can only stay a week. She says she wants to come before she gets married; because really she wants to get married at last. Barby is not very well. Perhaps she will stay some weeks with us.

! We have a friend here, a young writer, quite nice and faithful. First Frieda did not like him because he's not beautiful - but now she inks him quite good-looking and she likes him. We also had a young Australian here for two days, this afternoon he left for Nice. He makes those expensive books that people collect nowadays - he says he will make a book next year of my paintings - of all my paintings, with a foreword by me, to be sold at ten guineas each. It seems madness to me, but it's his money and he will pay me well if he does it. But how mad people are - there is quite a large vogue in éditions de luxe that cost two or five or even twenty-five pounds. I hate it. Rhys Davies, the friend who is here, is Welsh and his grandfather was also a miner.

Max Mohr writes a little sadly from his 'Wolfgrube, ' he says he must always fight with his editors and has little money. There in Bavaria the snow is deep.

I am glad that you are better. I also feel better, but hot sun and cold wind find my bronchi, that feel a bit raw. It is always so in weather like this.

Else will be there, with you - she will give you five pounds from me, from 'Jugend,' and keeps the rest. You will have a quiet, good, happy Xmas, only keep still inside yourself.

Greet them all from me. And Nusch? She won't be there any more. I will write her and Emil. I hope we shall see them this spring, here on the Mediterranean, where the sun is so bright, and the sea so blue, and the small boats so white and dancing. Very friendly I find also the Frenchmen, they leave you alone and don't hang on so heavily. But Frieda is always longing for Italy, I think.

So farewell, mother-in-law, Merry Xmas. What flowers have you? Here are many narcissi in the fields. Merry Xmas! Merry Xmas!

D. H. L.

(Translated from the German)

Hôtel Principe Alfonso Palma de Mallorca Spain 12 June 1929 Dear Else:

We want to leave here next Tuesday - eighteenth - by the boat to Marseille. Frieda sprained her ankle, bathing, but I think it will be better by then - it's not bad. I want her to go and see after my pictures, as the show is supposed to open this week. And the book is ready today - I have a set of the coloured plates - twenty-six - rather good, although only done in three-colour process. I hear they have already orders for about three hundred copies at ten guineas, and ten vellum copies at fifty guineas are all ordered. World of crazes! But I ought to make about five hundred pounds out of the book - not bad. I shan't send you a copy - I know you don't care especially about it - and in these things you belong to the opposite direction, so of course you don't see much value in work of this sort. You say satanisch. Perhaps you are right; Lucifer is brighter now than tarnished Michael or shabby Gabriel. All things fall in their turn, now Michael goes down, and whispering Gabriel, and the Son of the Morning will laugh at them all. Yes, I am all for Lucifer, who is really the Morning Star. The real principle of Evil is not anti-Christ or anti-Jehovah, but anti-life. I agree with you in a sense, that I am with the anti-Christ. Only I am not anti-life.

If Frieda comes to England from Marseille, I shall probably go to North Italy, the Garda, where it won't be too hot. This year I don't want to come very far north; I feel I am better south of the Alps - really. Probably, Frieda will come to Baden on her way back from England.

This island is a queer place - so dry - but at last it has rained. We "light possibly come back next winter.

I expect the Schwiegermutter will have gone back to the Stift. I was glad she was well enough to come to Heidelberg. It must be summer with you, leafy and lovely. Here it is all dried up, only the bushes of wild thyme in flower on the waste places, and the bougainvilleas in the gardens.

I wonder where you will go for the summer holiday? Anyhow we will meet somewhere, if not in Baden.

Greet everybody from me.

D. H. L.

6 Lungarno Corsini Florence Sunday 7 July [To Frieda]

Maria drove me to Pisa yesterday afternoon - very sirocco and overcast, but not hot, not at all uncomfortable. Unfortunately my inside is upset - either I must have eaten something or it came from drinking ice-water very cold on Thursday when it was very hot. Anyhow my lower man hurts and it makes my chest sore - which is a pity, because I was so well. Now I'm rather limp. But I've kept still all day in Pino's flat, and he looks after me well-so I hope by tomorrow or Tuesday it will be all right. Luigino Franchetti said he'd got ptomaine poisoning, on Friday at Forte - but I think it was an upset too, nothing serious. I think mine is going off. Pino's flat gets a bit hot just at evening, but in the night and the most part of the day it is pleasant and cool - it's not really a hot year. Carletto has gone off for a day's tramp in the hills beyond Fiesole. Pino and I will have a cup of tea now, then perhaps take a carriage-drive for an hour.

I had your mother's letter this morning - she says you are all going up to Plàssig or somewhere on the thirteenth - which is next; Saturday. What is it like there? Probably I shall arrive in Baden by then - it depends a bit on the innards. I wanted to look at the Lake of; Como to see if we'd like a house there - but I am not sure if I shall want to make the effort. And I was so well before.

X... Y... is staying on in Forte, thank God - till about fifteenth. She must be in Paris by twenty-third - sails on twenty-seventh - thank heaven. She is a mixture of the worst side of A...- turns up her eyes in that awful indecent fashion - and of L... M... - humble, cringing, yet impudent, with an eternal and ceaseless self-preoccupation, tangled up in her own ego till it's shameful - thinking all and only of herself. Ugh, she's awful. At the same time, she's a poor pathetic thing. She has sent you a feather thing that she says is for a little cape - pretty - but I shall leave it behind in the trunk. I am leaving this trunk here also - the money they cost in transport and facchinaggio is awful, pure waste - and the bother.

Well, I've not had a coherent or sensible letter from you since you left Paris - so I suppose you were gone overhead - and then it's no use saying anything. However, emerge quickly - and we'll see if we can settle the problem of a house.

Had a letter from Barby - but it wasn't somehow very nice - same cattiveria as M..., underneath - or so it seemed. I suppose you didn't go and see my sisters. Hope Else is better. Aldous was very well, I've never seen him so well. Am seeing nobody here. No sound from Brett about MSS. or ranch. Think I shall come by night to Milano - but hate sharing a berth with some stranger. Hope you are nice and peaceful in Baden.

L.

I really think Italy is not good for my health - the country is much slacker, all going deflated - and lots of poverty again, so they say. But everybody is very nice, much softer once more, and sort of subdued.

FLORENCE MONDAY NIGHT

[TO Frieda]

The pains were a chill - have been in bed all day today - damn! Pino very nice, but oh the noise of traffic. I'm a lot better. I want to get up tomorrow, and leave if possible on Wednesday night for Milan. I might arrive Baden on Thursday night - otherwise Friday - all being well. Hot internal cold I've got, real Italian. I hate this country like poison, sure it would kill me.

I should rather like an apartment for six weeks or so - Ebersteinburg, Baden - anywhere - where I can lie in bed all day if I want to - and where I needn't see people. But don't at all know what you feel like, since you have not written lately.

Rained a bit today - quite cool. Pino and Carletto gone out into town.

D.H.L.

Shall wire - suppose you had all my letters addressed to the Kingsley.

Hotel Lôwen Lichtental 13 August 1929

Dear Else:

Hans says it rains in Bavaria, and Max Mohr says it rains in Bavaria, so I suppose it does. Only now I hope it has left off. Here it is quite decent, sunny mornings, cloudy afternoons, and quite pleasant. The Schwiegermutter is here, but says she will go back to the Stift on Thursday. On Friday her 'heissgeliebte Anita' is due to arrive with the not so heissgeliebter-aber dochgeliebter Hinke: they will stay a while here in the Lôwen. I have never met the Hinke, so I have a joy in store.

We had the 50n Geburtstagsfeier on Sunday evening, very noble, Bowie, trout, ducks, and nine people - three Halms, two Schweikhardts, one Kugler - and they all seemed very happy and we all kept it up very bravely. But alas, next day Frieda was in one of the worst moods I have ever seen her in! - a Seelenkater, or however you spell it.

You hear the pictures are to be returned to me on condition that they are never shown again in England, but sent away to me on the Continent, that they may never pollute that island of lily-livered angels again. What hypocrisy and poltroonery, and how I detest and despise my England. I had rather be a German or anything than belong to such a nation of craven, cowardly hypocrites. My curse on them! They will burn my four picture books, will they? So it is decreed. But they shall burn through the thread of their own existence as a nation, at the same time. Delenda est Cartago! - but she will destroy herself, amply. Che nuoia!

Your mother says we are to stay here till the middle of September. I hope not. We have been here a month on Thursday, and when the heissgeliebte Annie is here we shall surely be a superfluity. I should like to move in another week or ten days. Shall we come to Bavaria, to Rottach, do you think? or best go south to Lugano?

I wonder if Hans is setting off across the mountains?

We are going to tea with some Taormina friends, Americans, who are staying in the Stephanie. Your mother says: Du wirst was Schones sehen, das Stephanie! - It is all I can do not to make a really rude remark. I am so sick of all those old lies. It is terrible to be old, one becomes a bottle of old, but never mellow lies - lies, lies, lies! everything. Weisheit der Alten! - nineteenth century lies.

Well, I hope it's pleasant in Irschenhausen. Only today I threw away the flowers I gathered when you were here - and the toadflax (wilde Lowenmàule) were still fresh.

D. H. L.

Remember me to Alfred, and Hans - and is Marianne better?

Lôwen Lichtental Baden-Baden 21 August 1929

Dear Else:

Frieda says she wants to stay till Sunday, to have her bath and her masseuse once more. She is still troubled about the foot, though it is much better. - So I suppose we shall arrive in Munchen on Sunday evening. - Max Mohr says he will meet us at Rottach station with a Wagen - and he knows of a nice little

house for us. So it sounds quite good, if only it will not rain.

Your mother is going back into the Stift today - very sad - and Annie is going to her tomorrow. I am very fed up with here, and shall be glad to be gone too.

So - we shall see you one of these days in Bavaria!

D. H. L.

Hotel Lôwen Monday *Dear Else:*

Just a line to say we expect to leave here for Munchen next Saturday. - I have written to Max Mohr to say we shall arrive in Rottach either on Sunday or Monday. I suppose we shall stay one night in Munchen. What is the name of the hotel where we stayed last time? at the station?

Marianne sounded quite sad in her letter to Frieda. I'm so sorry, and do hope she's feeling better.

The Hinkes arrived on Saturday, both very nice. They are staying in the Lôwen here - your mother too - she would not go back to the Stift. But Hinke returns to Volklingen today, and Annie and your mother return to the Stift on Thursday - so we want to depart on Saturday. I want to go - I get really depressed here - and you know it isn't usual for me to get depressed. But here I get spells of hopeless feeling, heavy, and I hate it. What is it? I never have them in other countries. Is it Germany? or your mother, who is now so afraid of death? Anyhow I hate it, and want to go away. So I expect we shall see you in Bavaria - perhaps even in: Munchen. I'm so glad you are having a good time. - I can just see the „ yellow Pfifferlinge in the woods.

Regards to Alfred and to Marianne. - It has begun to rain again I here!

Villa Beau Soleil Bandol, Var France 4 October 1929

Dear Else:

Here we are already in a house of our own, a nice little bungalow villa right on the sea - and with bathroom and all conveniences - and a nice woman to cook and clean. It is very easy and I like it. I still love the Mediterranean, it still seems young as Odysseus, in the morning. And Frieda is happy. The only trouble is my health, which is not very good. For some reason, which I don't understand, I lost a lot of strength in Germany. I believe Germany would kill me, if I had to stay long in it. Now it has killed Stresemann - whom will it not kill? - everybody except the Hindenburgs and the old women in the Stifts. Those ancient ones are

the terrible fungi, parasites of the younger life.

It is very lovely, the wind, the clouds, the running sea that bursts up like blossom on the island opposite. If only I was well, and had my strength back!

But I am so weak. And something inside me weeps black tears. I wish it would go away.

Max Mohr is quite near in the Goélands Hotel - always very nice and willing to do everything he can to help. But also his voice says the same thing over and over again: Ailes ist nichts? Why must everybody say it? - when it is only they who are nothing, and perhaps not even they. When the morning comes, and the sea runs silvery and the distant islands are delicate and clear, then I feel again, only man is vile. But man, at the moment, is very vile.

Perhaps a woman, Francesca Ewald, whose husband is brother of the Salem Ewald woman, will write to you about translating some short story of mine. Do advise her all you can.

The Huxleys say they want to come, and take a house here. I rather hope they won't. The Brews ters also may come for the winter - their girl is in school in England.

I do hope Marianne is well from her Ischias, and that everything goes pleasantly. Frieda's foot is nearly better - still a little stiffness.

Ever D. H. L.

Beau Soleil Bandol, Var France 14 December 1929

Dear Else:

I got a copy of 'Plumed Serpent' and tried to translate a hymn - but you might as well ask me to translate into Hottentot - I can't even begin. So that's that. I think Tal of Vienna is going to do 'Lady C. ' - and the translator Herbert E. Herlitschka, Wiedner Gurtel 6, Wien IV, has written me several times. He seems a competent and experienced translator - and his criticism of the translation of 'Women in Love' made my blood feel chill. He says he would be glad to help you with 'Plumed Serpent, ' if there is any difficulty, or to go over the manuscript if you could send him a carbon copy. You must please yourself about it.

You are coming to see us in the New Year. I wish you would send an approximate date, as my sister Ada also wants to come, and Barby. There's only one little extra bedroom.

We've had lovely sunny weather all week-today is a most beautiful day, still and sunny. The narcissus are in full flower in the tiny field next to us. So yellow.

My health has been a great nuisance - not so good as last winter - and it

wearies me. Then I don't want to do anything.

The Brewsters are still in the hotel - and Mr and Mrs Di Chiara from Capri (she is American) and Ida Rauh (Mrs Max Eastman - the socialist's wife) from Santa Fe-and they all come trooping along, so we are by no means alone. Frieda loves her little house - though it's very commonplace - but it is sunny and warm and easy, so one doesn't grumble. Her foot still troubles her a bit.

Have you seen Dr Osborne's translation of 'Fantasia'? - quite good, in my opinion.

D. H. L.

I shall write again directly.

Love.

Beau Soleil Bandol, Var 30 January 1930

Dear Else:

So you got back safely - at least as far as Strassburg. Here all is the same - I lay out today in the mouth of the garage, because the mistral is blowing - a sunny, brilliant day with blue sea and sharp white foam.

Barby helps Frieda to look after me, and all goes very well. Yesterday the bronchitis was much better, but today it is tiresome again - probably the wind.

The doctor sent word about the nursing home at Vence - it is not much of a place - like a little hotel or convalescent home. If I make good progress here, I shall not go to Vence - but if I don't get better, I will. But truly, I am already much stronger for this rest.

It was very kind of you to come all that long way to give us a helping hand - it did Frieda a lot of good, to share the responsibility with you, and I was glad to see you.

I have asked for a copy of 'The Escaped Cock' for you. Barby is still in an unhappy state, inside herself. Oh dear!

Remember me to Friedel.

D. H. L.

Nearing the End

Now I am nearing the end... I think of Bandol and our little villa 'Beau Soleil' on the sea, the big balcony windows looking toward the sea, another window at the side overlooking a field of yellow narcissus called 'soleil' and pine-trees beyond and again the sea. I remember sunny days when the waves came flying along with white manes, they looked as if they might come flying right up the terrace into his room. There were plants in his room and they flowered so well and I said to him: 'Why, oh why, can't you flourish like those?' I remember what a beautiful and strange time it was. One day a cat, a big handsome yellow-and-white cat came in; Lawrence chased it away. 'We don't want it. If we go away it'll be miserable. We don't want to take the responsibility for it'; but the cat stayed, it insisted on it. Its name was 'Micky' and it grew more and more beautiful and never a cat played more intelligently than Micky... he played hide-and-go-seek with me, and Lawrence played mouse with him... Lawrence was such a convincing mouse... and then he insisted: 'You must put this cat out at night or it will become a bourgeois, unbeautiful cat.' So very sadly, at nightfall, in spite of Micky's remonstrances I put him out into the garden. To Mme Martens, the cook, Lawrence said: 'Vous lui donnez à manger, il dort avec moi, et Madame l'amuse.'

But in the morning at dawn Micky and I appeared in Lawrence's room... Micky took a flying leap on to Lawrence's bed and began playing with his toes, and I looked at Lawrence to see how he was... his worst time was before dawn when he coughed so much, and I knew what he had been through... But then at dawn I believe he felt grateful that another day had been given him. 'Come when the sun rises,' he said, and when I came he was glad, so very glad, as if he would say: 'See, another day is given me.'

The sun rose magnificently opposite his bed in red and gold across the bay and the fishermen standing up in their boats looked like eternal mythological figures dark and alive against the lit-up splendour of the sea and sky, and when I asked him: 'What kind of a night did you have?' to comfort me, he would answer: 'Not so bad...' but it was bad enough to break one's heart... And his courage and unflinching spirit, doing their level best to live as long as he possibly could in this world he loved so much, gave me courage too. Never, in all illness and

suffering, did he let the days sink to a dreary or dull or sordid level... those last months had the glamour of a rosy sunset... I can only think with awe of those last days of his, as of the rays of the setting sun... and the setting sun obliterates all the sordid details of a landscape. So the dreary passages in our lives were wiped out and he said to me: 'Why, oh why did we quarrel so much?' and I could see how it grieved him... our terrible quarrels... but I answered: 'Such as we were, violent creatures, how could we help it?'

One day the charming old mother of Mme Douillet who was at the Hôtel Beau Rivage brought us two gold-fish in a bowl; 'Pour amuser Monsieur,' but, alas, Micky thought it was 'pour amuser Monsieur le chat.' With that fixed, incomprehensible cat-stare he watched those red lines moving in the bowl... then my life became an anxious one... the gold-fish had to go in the bathroom on a little table in the sun. Every morning their water was renewed and I had to let it run for half an hour into the bowl. That was all they got, the gold-fish, no food. And they flourished... 'Everything flourishes,' I said to Lawrence imploringly, 'plants and cats and gold-fish, why can't you?' And he said: 'I want to, I want to, I wish I could.'

His friend Earl Brewster came and massaged him every day with coconut oil... and it grieved me to see Lawrence's strong, straight, quick legs gone so thin, so thin... and one day he said to me: 'I could always trust your instinct to know the right thing for me, but now you don't seem to know any more...' I didn't... I didn't know any more...

And one night he asked me: 'Sleep with me,' and I did |.. all night I was aware of his aching inflexible chest, and all night he must have been so sadly aware of my healthy body beside him... always before, when I slept by the side of him, I could comfort and ease him... now no more... He was falling away from life and me, and with all my strength I was helpless...

Micky had his eye on the gold-fish. One sad evening at tea-time the bathroom door was left open... I came and found both gold-fish on the floor, Micky had fished them out of the bowl. I put them in quickly, one revived, a little sadder and less golden for his experience, but the other was dead. Lawrence was furious with Micky. 'He knew we wanted him to leave those gold-fish alone, he knew it. We feed him, we take care of him, he had no right to do it.'

When I argued that it was the nature of cats and they must follow their instincts he turned on me and said: 'It's your fault, you spoil him, if he wanted to eat *me* you would let him.' And he wouldn't let Micky come near him for several days.

I felt: 'Now I can do no more for Lawrence, only the sun and the sea and the stars and the moon at night, that's his portion now...' He never would have the

shutters shut or the curtains drawn, so that at night he could see the sky. In those days he wrote his 'Apocalypse'; he read it to me, and how strong his voice still was, and I said: 'But this is splendid.'

I was reading the New Testament and told Lawrence: 'I get such a kick out of it, just the same as when Azul gallops like the wind across the desert with me.'

As he read it to me he got angry with all those mixed-up symbols and impossible pictures.

He said: 'In this book I want to go back to old days, pre-Bible days, and pick up for us there what men felt like and lived by then.'

The pure artist in him revolted! His sense of the fitness of things never left him in the lurch! He stuck to his sense of measure and I am often amused at the criticism people bring against him... criticisms only reveal the criticizers and their limitations... If the criticizer is an interesting person his criticism will be interesting, if he isn't then it's a waste of time to listen to him. If he voices a general opinion he is uninteresting too, because we all know the general opinion *ad nauseum*. 'My flesh grows weary on my bones' was one of Lawrence's expressions when somebody held forth to him, as if one didn't know beforehand what most people will say!

One day Lawrence said to himself: 'I shan't die... a rich man now... perhaps it's just as well, it might have done something to me.' But I doubt whether even a million or two would have changed him!

One day he said: 'I can't die, I can't die, I hate them too much! I have given too much and what did I get in return?'

It sounded so comical the way he said it, and I ignored the depth of sadness and bitterness of the words and said: 'No, Lawrence, you don't hate them as much as all that.' It seemed to comfort him.

And now I wonder and am grateful for the superhuman strength that was given us both in those days. Deep down I knew 'something is going to happen, we are steering towards some end,' but every nerve was strained and every thought and every feeling... Life had to be kept going gaily at any price.

Since Doctor Max Mohr had gone, we had no doctor, only Mme Martens, the cook. She was very good at all kinds of tisanes and inhalations and mustard plasters, and she was a very good cook.

My only grief was that we had no open fireplaces, only central heating and, thank goodness, the sun all day. Lawrence made such wonderful efforts of will to go for walks and the strain of it made him irritable. If I went with him it was pure agony walking to the corner of the little road by the sea, only a few yards! How gallantly he tried to get better and live! He was so very clever with his frail failing body. Again one could learn from him how to handle this complicated

body of ours, he knew so well what was good for him, what he needed, by an unflinching instinct, or he would have died many years ago... and I wanted to keep him alive at any cost. I had to see him day by day getting nearer to the end, his spirit so alive and powerful that the end and death seemed unthinkable and always will be, for me.

And then Gertler sent a doctor friend to us, and when he saw Lawrence he said the only salvation was a sanatorium higher up...

For the last years I had found that for a time mountain air, and then a change by the sea, seemed to suit Lawrence best. Lawrence had always thought with horror of a sanatorium, we both thought with loathing of it. Freedom that he cherished so much! He never felt like an invalid, I saw to that! Never should he feel a poor sick thing as long as I was there and his spirit! Now we had to give in... we were beaten. With a set face Lawrence made me bring all his papers on to his bed and he tore most of them up and made everything tidy and neat and helped to pack his own trunks, and I never cried... His self-discipline kept me up, and my admiration for his unflinching courage. And the day came that the motor stood at the door of our little house, Beau Soleil... Micky the cat had been taken by Achsah Brewster. She came before we started with armfuls of almond blossoms, and Earl Brewster travelled with us... And patiently, with a desperate silence, Lawrence set out on his last journey. At Toulon station he had to walk down and up stairs, wasting strength he could ill afford to waste, and the shaking train and then the long drive from Antibes to the 'Ad Astra' at Vence... And again he had to climb stairs. There he lay in a blue room with yellow curtains and great open windows and a balcony looking over the sea. When the doctors examined him and asked him questions about himself he told them: 'I have had bronchitis since I was a fortnight old.'

In spite of his thinness and his illness he never lost his dignity, he fought on and he never lost hope. Friends brought flowers, pink and red cyclamen and hyacinths and fruit... but he suffered much and when I bade him 'good night' he said: 'Now I shall have to fight several battles of Waterloo before morning.' I dared not understand to the full the meaning of his words. One day he said to my daughter:

'Your mother does not care for me any more, the death in me is repellent to her.'

But it was the sadness of his suffering... and he would not eat and he had much pain... and we tried so hard to think of different foods for him. His friends tried to help him, the Di Chiaras and the Brewsters and Aldous and Maria Huxley and Ida Rauh.

Wells came to see him, and the Aga Khan with his charming wife. Jo

Davidson did a bust of him.

One night I saw how he did not want me to go away, so I came again after dinner and I said: 'I'll sleep in your room tonight.' His eyes were so grateful and bright, but he turned to my daughter and said: 'It isn't often I want your mother, but I do want her tonight to stay.' I slept on the long chair in his room, and I looked out at the dark night and I wanted one single star to shine and comfort me, but there wasn't one; it was a dark big sky, and no moon and no stars. I knew how Lawrence suffered and yet I could not help him. So the days went by in agony and the nights too; my legs would hardly carry me, I could not stay away from him, and always the dread, 'How shall I find him?' One night I thought of the occasion long ago when I knew I loved him, when a tenderness for him rose in me that I had not known before. He had taken my two little girls and me for a walk in Sherwood Forest, through some fields we walked, and the children ran all over the place, and we came to a brook... it ran rather fast under a small stone bridge. The children were thrilled, the brook ran so fast. Lawrence quite forgot me but picked daisies and put them face upwards on one side of the bridge in the water and then said: 'Now look, look if they come out on the other side.'

He also made them paper boats and put burning matches into them; 'this is the Spanish Armada, and you don't know what that was.' 'Yes, we do,' the older girl said promptly. I can see him now, crouching down, so intent on the game, so young and quick, and the small girls in their pink and white striped Viyella frocks, long-legged like colts, in wild excitement over such a play-fellow. But that was long ago... and I thought: 'This is the man whom they call sex-obsessed.'

I slept on his cane chair several nights. I heard coughing from many rooms, old coughing and young coughing. Next to his room was a young girl with her mother, and I heard her call out: 'Mama, Mama, je souffre tant!' I was glad Lawrence was a little deaf and could not hear it all. One day he tried to console me and said: 'You must not feel so sympathetic for people. When people are ill or have lost their eyesight there is always a compensation. The state they are in is different. You needn't think it's the same as when you are well.'

After one night when he had suffered so much, I told myself: 'It is enough, it is enough; nobody should have to stand this.'

He was very irritable and said: 'Your sleeping here does me no good.' I ran away and wept. When I came back he said so tenderly: 'Don't mind, you know I want nothing but you, but sometimes something is stronger in me.'

We prepared to take him out of the nursing home and rented a villa where we took him... It was the only time he allowed me to put on his shoes, everything else he always did for himself. He went in the shaking taxi and he was taken into

the house and lay down on the bed on which he was to die, exhausted. I slept on the couch where he could see me. He still ate. The next day was a Sunday. 'Don't leave me,' he said, 'don't go away.' So I sat by his bed and read. He was reading the life of Columbus. After lunch he began to suffer very much and about tea-time he said: 'I must have a temperature, I am delirious. Give me the thermometer.' This is the only time, seeing his tortured face, that I cried, and he said: 'Don't cry,' in a quick, compelling voice. So I ceased to cry any more. He called Aldous and Maria Huxley who were there, and for the first time he cried out to them in his agony. 'I ought to have some morphine now,' he told me and my daughter, so Aldous went off to find a doctor to give him some... Then he said: 'Hold me, hold me, I don't know where I am, I don't know where my hands are... where am I?'

Then the doctor came and gave him a morphine injection. After a while he said: 'I am better now, if I could only sweat I would be better...' and then again: 'I am better now.' The minutes went by, Maria Huxley was in the room with me. I held his left ankle from time to time, it felt so full of life, all my days I shall hold his ankle in my hand.

He was breathing more peacefully, and then suddenly there were gaps in the breathing. The moment came when the thread of life tore in his heaving chest, his face changed, his cheeks and jaw sank, and death had taken hold of him of... Death was there, Lawrence was dead. So simple, so small a change, yet so final, so staggering. Death!

I walked up and down beside his room, by the balcony, and everything looked different, there was a new thing, death, where there had been life, such intense life. The olive trees outside looked so black and close, and the sky so near: I looked into the room, there were his slippers with the shape of his feet standing neatly under the bed, and under the sheet he lay, cold and remote, he whose ankle I had held alive only an hour or so ago... I looked at his face. So proud, manly and splendid he looked, a new face there was. All suffering had been wiped from it, it was as if I had never seen him or known him in all the completeness of his being. I wanted to touch him but dared not, he was no longer in life with me. There had been the change, he belonged somewhere else now, to all the elements; he was the earth and sky, but no longer a living man. Lawrence, my Lorenzo who had loved me and I him... he was dead...

Then we buried him, very simply, like a bird we put him away, a few of us who loved him. We put flowers into his grave and all I said was: 'Good-bye, Lorenzo,' as his friends and I put lots and lots of mimosa on his coffin. Then he was covered over with earth while the sun came out on to his small grave in the little cemetery of Vence which looks over the Mediterranean that he cared for so

much.

Conclusion

Now that I have told my story in such a condensed way, letting blow through my mind anything that wanted to blow, I know how little I have said - how much I could say that perhaps would be more interesting. But I wrote what rose up, and here it is.

Frieda Lawrence Kiowa Ranch San Cristobal New Mexico

THE SAVAGE PILGRIMAGE by Catherine Carswell



One of Lawrence's most loyal friends, Catherine Carswell wrote this intimate biography of the author's life shortly after his death, at a time when his reputation was still suffering due to the controversy of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. The biography features faithful accounts of Lawrence's humble working class background, descriptions of his life during the Great War and the agonies he underwent when *The Rainbow* was banned and he struggled to have any of his work printed. Carswell's close friendship with Lawrence allowed her to illustrate such a detailed and vivid account of the author, which has enabled scholars to develop a much richer understanding of his work and genius.



Catherine Carswell

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*The
Savage
Pilgrimage*

A NARRATIVE OF
D. H. LAWRENCE

by

Catherine Carswell

The first edition of the biography, published in 1932

Author's Introductory Note

Barring some youthful poems, D. H. Lawrence had just twenty years of writing life. Throughout these years - which included and were in a special way harried by the incidence of the War - he was severely encumbered by circumstances. He had to reckon with poverty, with illness, with the misapprehension of friends, and the malice of strangers. None the less we find that, besides wresting from the most unpromising elements a life that was rich and adventurous, he was a prolific writer. Indeed, if we allow for the various nature of his output and take for comparison the twenty most productive years of any other accepted author, he would appear to have been the most prolific writer our country has had since Sir Walter Scott. In addition to a dozen full-length novels he wrote short stories, essays, translations, pamphlets, books of travel and of philosophy, plays and many poems. Over the same period his correspondence, whether measured by interest or by bulk, bids fair to rival the correspondences of our most communicative English men of letters. It is worth noting that from the very beginning most of Lawrence's correspondents have had the instinct to preserve what he wrote to them, and it may be safely predicted that his letters will be included with his more formal works in a particular sense that is faintly paralleled only in the case of Keats. They contain a free expression of his findings about life in the very accents he was accustomed to use in speech - accents that are fresh and inimitable. With their richness of human admission they do away with the charges of morbidity and impotence as with the contention that there was a sad or bad discrepancy between the man and the writer. Further works - letters and other things - still await print. For Lawrence as a writer it will be seen that all things have worked in the end together for good. The very difficulties of publication during his lifetime will justify, now that he is dead, his early and confident adoption of the phoenix as his emblem. Meanwhile, he is like Joey in the Punch and Judy show. He will not 'stay put', but bobs up serenely and repeatedly from the grave to mock those who would reduce him to a formula. His unholy ghost will not be pigeon-holed.

It is one of the marks of those who dislike him that they evince a lust for simple and final pronouncements - a lust as notable as their disparagement of anything in the nature of hearty praise.

For final pronouncements the critics must abide the verdict of the future reader. Lawrence as a whole remains to be read and to be reread. He has to

create the taste for his work, and this takes time. But it is a taste that grows. Not only so: it is a taste that delicately transforms the palate and renews it for the retrieval of other tastes, ancient and modern. His books are easy to read but hard to understand. Therein lies part of their potency. 'A book,' said Lawrence, who had pondered deeply upon such matters, 'lives as long as it is unfathomed.' Or again, 'The mind understands; and there's an end of it.' Therein also lies their vital difference from the books of such writers as Joyce or Proust, which are hard at first to read, but comparatively easy to understand once the initial difficulty is overcome. These have evolved a new technique, but they belong themselves to an outworn way of life. What they do - and it is much - is to interpret and express the old in a fresh language. Lawrence, on the contrary, except that the drum-tap and emphasis of his style are as original to himself as they are at first irritating to many readers, has elected to speak in a familiar language. But his story-shapes, his incidents, his objects and his characters are chosen primarily as symbols in his endeavour to proffer a new way of life. That there can indeed be a new way of life - though possibly only by a recovery of values so remote in our past that they are fecund from long forgetting, and as far out of mind as they are near to our blind fingers - is the single admission he seeks from his readers, as it was the belief that governed his actions. Most, however, even of those who have vocally admired him, will make any admission except just this. It includes, they know, the admission that his prescience was unique in his generation. Here is much for one man to ask of his fellows. So they prefer to continue with simplifications that are away from the point, with 'patterns' and with set phrases, which serve at the best to show how evocative Lawrence is - as a mere name more evocative than Lenin or than Freud. If Lawrence invariably committed himself, his critics infallibly give themselves away. Of all moralists he is the most demoralising.

I believe that there not only may, but must be, a new way of life, and that Lawrence was on the track of it. In his own words, he wanted 'to put something through' by means of 'a long, slow, dark, almost invisible fight', with a victory that would come 'little by little' and that could be interrupted only by death. It was so interrupted sadly, but not as will appear, fatally. Because of its undertaking, readers who find in themselves some answering spark and are content to wait without prejudice for fuller comprehension, will find nothing concerning Lawrence to be irrelevant. His immediate appeal is that of potent innocence which has met with a grave miscarriage of judgement. Here is a man who lived from a pure source and steadfastly refused to break faith with that source. And so we have another fountain for the heart, another proof that pure and living sources still exist and always will exist. Upon Byron's death Scott said

it was as if the sun had gone out. With Lawrence it is the other way. With his going he has given to the sun, as to the water, an added splendour. Readers who never saw him will see sky and earth, bird, beast and flower differently because of him, and he will find a place like a friend's place in the lives of men who knew nothing of him until after his death.

While my own memories are fresh, I have set myself to put down all I can recall about Lawrence. Without attempting to write anything like a biography I have tried to give a narrative - in his own words when possible - of this non-Christian saint, this hero who repudiated heroism, this Innocent the First of our modern world. I shall show him as I see him - a man upon a dangerous but fascinating pilgrimage, who set forth from his City of Destruction in the English industrial Midlands, passed through the London and cosmopolitan Vanity Fair and traversed the physical and intellectual world, carrying a load of bitterness in his bowels and a talisman of purity in his hand, until such time as he died quietly and bravely with his work unfinished but with victory nearly enough in sight to place him as far beyond failure as he was beyond his fellows, because of the greater risks he ran. If I have not been as adequate as I should wish, at least I have tried to refrain from approaching the least solemn of men with graveyard graces.

For my first assembling of material I must renew my acknowledgements to several friends of Lawrence whose names appear in the text. During the original writing I had not access to the now published *Letters*. But with some two hundred of my own, and a good number which have been shown to me by their possessors or have come upon the market, together with those already published by Mr Murry, Mrs Clarke (Ada Lawrence) and Mrs Luhan, I was able to give a fairly detailed account of Lawrence's movements. This was aided by a scheme of dates and addresses kindly provided by Mr and Mrs Laurence Hilton from the collection of the letters with which they were entrusted for the formidable task of transcription. From Messrs Pinker I had the substantial benefit of reading the letters from Lawrence to their father, the late J. B. Pinker. By the courtesy of Messrs Heinemann and with the approval of Mrs Lawrence, I was able to quote freely from Lawrence's letters to me.

C. C.

Hampstead, November 1932

Part One

AET. 2I-29

PROSE

The White Peacock

The Trespasser

Sons and Lovers

The Lost Girl (early parts)

The Prussian Officer, etc. (short stories)

The Widowing of Mrs Holroyd (play in 3 acts)

Love among the Haystacks

The Rainbow VERSE

Love Poems and Others

Amores

Look! We Have Come Through! (in part)

'There is nothing to do -with life but to let it run, and it's a very bitter thing, but it's also wonderful, for -we never know what'll happen next.'

1

In the spring of 1914 Henry James contributed to *The Times Literary Supplement* two long and characteristically sibylline articles on 'The Younger Generation'. At that date it was still possible to include in the category of 'younger' Mr Joseph Conrad, Mr Maurice Hewlett, Mr Galsworthy, Mr H. G. Wells, and Mr Arnold Bennett, though, as the veteran admitted, these had 'not quite, perhaps, the early bloom of Mr Hugh Walpole, Mr Gilbert Cannan and Mr D. H. Lawrence'.

Proceeding, by way of mixed metaphor, we learn that Mr Wells and Mr Bennett have 'practically launched the boat in which we admire the fresh play of oar of the author of *The Duchess of Wrexe* and the documented aspect exhibited successively by *Carnival* and *Sinister Street* and even by *Sons and Lovers*, however much we may find Mr Lawrence, we confess, hang in the dusty rear'.

That last phrase sounds ungracious, but was perhaps not so ungraciously meant. It was hardly in character for Henry James to back anybody as a winner, even while he might set himself to describe the field in its order as viewed through the prism of his Jamesian binoculars. Still less was it in character for him to back the dark horse of the field. But we may give him this credit at least. He perceived that there was a dark horse. The figure he employs would further lead us to conclude that by his admission he found it difficult to report on the contours of that entrant.

There were, however, some onlookers, younger, less cautious and not at all burdened with responsibility, who felt that in this case there was a duty of more definite prophecy upon anyone professing to be a judge of form. In 1911 these had read *The White Peacock*, in 1912 *The Trespasser*, and in 1913 *Love Poems and Others* and *Sons and Lovers* - especially *Sons and Lovers*. They had also read 'Goose Fair' and 'Odour of Chrysanthemums' in *The English Review*, and the poems under the same signature appearing from time to time there and in the *Saturday Westminster Gazette*. After *Sons and Lovers* it appeared to them - as indeed it had already appeared to several persons more powerfully placed - that no other writer was producing work of a like importance. Of a small group of these I was a comparatively passive member. One who was more impetuous, however - Ivy Low (now the wife of Commissar Litvinoff) - was moved to repudiate the Jamesian pronouncement in the person of 'The Younger

Generation'. She wrote to Lawrence through his publisher, and Lawrence answered. Lawrence always answered. His first letter, short but friendly, was triumphantly read aloud to me. I remember nothing about it now except that it was written from Fiascherino, near Lerici, upon coroneted notepaper; that the coronet had been crossed through with a pen stroke; and that beside it Lawrence had written the words, 'My wife's father was a baron.' Even this I might not now remember were it not that precisely the same thing was repeated on the second letter - which made us smile. We wondered how large the store of notepaper might be, and if Lawrence felt bound to repeat the formula every time he wrote a letter. This we were unable to test, however, as I don't think there was any third letter, but merely postcards, which confirmed the invitation extended to our representative in the second letter and gave travelling directions. Ivy Low accepted the invitation at once. Ivy always accepted invitations. She spent what money remained from her own initial literary efforts (this being all she had) on a return ticket to Fiascherino, was rigged out for the journey in my only tailor-made ('so as to make a neat impression if possible') and seen off by me with best wishes. She returned after about a month, very full of her visit, which we gathered had been of memorable but mixed quality. Not long afterwards Latence and Frieda arrived in London and almost at once called on me in Hampstead. Ivy was there, and Viola Meynell, who was a friend of Ivy's and a warm admirer of *Sons and Lovers*, came to meet him.

By then I knew in outline what Lawrence's history had been. A miner's son, born on September 11th, 1885, in the village of Eastwood in Nottinghamshire, he had described his early life clearly enough in his three novels. And in the poems there had been the deeper, briefer expression of his youthful experience. More precisely, I knew that he had won a scholarship at Nottingham High School at twelve, at sixteen had worked for a short time as a clerk in a manufacturer's office at thirteen shillings a week, and after being seriously ill with pneumonia had become a pupil teacher at Eastwood. I did not know till recently that, when he left the Eastwood school a year later and went to Nottingham University College, he had passed first in all England and Wales in the Uncertificated Teachers' Examination. He remained for two years at college, after which he went as a certificated master to the Davidson Road Elementary School at Croydon.

He was still at Croydon when his mother died. That was at the end of 1910. *The White Peacock* appeared immediately after, in January, 1911. He had been able to place an advance copy in her hand, but she was too ill to read it. Off and on he had been engaged on it for over four years.

It was not Lawrence's mother, but the girl he was in love with - the Miriam of

Sons and Lovers - that had encouraged his writing. Over a year before, in the autumn of 1909, she had sent on her own initiative the poems 'A Still Afternoon', 'Dreams Old and Nascent', 'Discipline', and the two 'Baby Movements' to the *English Review*. All Lawrence's future is contained in these five poems. Ford Madox Hueffer, who was then editor, accepted them and got into correspondence with Lawrence. It was to Hueffer that Lawrence sent the manuscript of *The White Peacock*, and Hueffer got it accepted by Heinemann. When the book appeared Violet Hunt wrote a glowing review in the *Chronicle* and invited the author to her literary club. It was a *succès d'estime*. To Lawrence's amusement his work was taken for a woman's in several quarters.

This interest, and the appearance at intervals of poems in periodicals, had brought him the acquaintance of Edward Garnett. Garnett's well-meaning hand was stretched out with those of the Hueffers, and Lawrence grasped it gladly. Here, without his seeking, was an opening from an existence which had grown ever less tolerable. But he had none of the conventional notions of a literary career. It signified much to him that his dying mother had been unable to read his book. Books to him would never mean what they do to most writers. They would mean both much more and much less. He never read one of his own published works. 'Books to me,' he wrote much later, 'are incorporate things, voices in the air, that do not disturb the haze of autumn, and visions that don't blot out the sunflowers.'

After his mother's death he continued for another year at Croydon, but after a second attack of pneumonia he decided to leave school-mastering for good. He had been at the Davidson Road School for five years, and his work was highly spoken of. After a visit to Garnett he spent three months at home.

2

Eight years earlier, while at college in Nottingham, he had become acquainted with Professor Ernest Weekley. The Professor had helped him with the French necessary for his certificate, and had noted his intelligence, but had not then asked him to his house. Now, however, that he was spoken of as a poet, Lawrence was bidden there. Upon his very first meeting with the Professor's wife his course was determined. During the last year there had been a love affair with a married woman older than himself in his home district. But it was an affair in which the woman had set the course and marked the end. When Lawrence met Frieda Weekley he was free, and this time he would lead. Never again would he be mothered by any woman. He would even put behind him that first mothering that had meant more than anything else to his youth.

After the provincial women he had known, this daughter of a Continental aristocracy was a revelation to him. He lost no time in committing himself. Early in May he and Frieda Weekley were both in Germany, though not together. She was with her people, he wandering and waiting about with the unfinished manuscript of *Sons and Lovers*.

It was over a year since he had written *The Trespasser*, and there had been a long-drawn debate about it between him and his publisher, Heinemann. For the first and last time in his career Lawrence was definitely unwilling and a publisher eager to print. The book recorded an incident of which he was ashamed. But suddenly in the spring of 1912 all this was in the past and did not matter - not at least to Lawrence. Though he disliked the incident and did not much like the book, the first was true and the second was his honest account at the time. *Vogue la galère!* The wide and terrifying prospect which he now faced was everything. Courage to proceed entailed the courage that lets the dead past bury its dead. Some money too was absolutely necessary. At the end of twelve months there was nothing left of the fifty pounds from *The White Peacock*, and he had no savings, for at Croydon he had earned but a bare living. This new book would not bring much, but it was honestly earned. Weighing the old importance against the new, Lawrence made his choice. He paid his fare to Germany in May, 1912, with money from *The Trespasser*.

Lawrence was sure of himself but not yet sure of Frieda. As for Frieda, she

was sure neither of herself nor of Lawrence. How should she be? She was several years older than he, and vastly more 'experienced' in every worldly sense of the term. A daughter of Baron von Richthofen, who had been Governor of Alsace-Lorraine after the Franco-Prussian war, she was socially confident. In the midst of a gay and eventful girlhood she had married before she was twenty, and when Lawrence met her she had three children, a boy and two girls, the younger girl being only three years old. She was not unhappy, had never known unhappiness. Merely she lived in a placid dream, which was variegated at times by love affairs that were almost equally unreal. This made a rich tapestried background that satisfied her well enough so long as nobody woke her up and made her aware that it was no more. And until Lawrence came nobody had. Lawrence, incredibly raw and really innocent, felt the glamour deeply. But he refused to be intimidated. He held by his own experience, that was limited but intense. With Frieda added to him and dominated by him he could start in and live.

Frieda did not see it so. There were other things besides pure life for her to consider. And there were her children, who were certainly a large part of life to her. She was carelessly generous of herself, as no provincial woman could have been generous. There was nothing of bargaining here, nor of coquetry. This in itself was dazzlingly attractive to the many times wounded Lawrence. But all the more, and in its accompanying contempt for 'faithfulness', it made him suffer. From first to last Lawrence was for fidelity in marriage. While he admired this woman's 'freedom' it was torture to him. At the same time he would hold his own and not be at her mercy. I have been allowed to see some of these early letters written by him from different parts of Germany. They are unlike any others I know in the range of poets' love-letters. They rarely mention love, yet love-letters they are, and they are exquisite as they are extraordinary.

He spent the early summer going from place to place alone, suffering intensely, seeing the Rhine, and little German places like Trier and Mayrhofen, with the clarity of suffering; getting on immediate human terms with the humble hosts and hostesses at his various lodgings; working on *Sons and Lovers* (which already belonged wholly to the past); and every day sending off letters of an explosive quality, that was contained in quietness, to a wayward and uncertain and beautiful woman with features like those of a handsome creature of the wilds. It was as when a friend once introduced Lawrence to a tame fox that was his pet. Lawrence would not rest till he had found some touch that made the pet forget its tameness. Frieda has a nose like a puss fox, so fine and tremulous about the nostrils, and her eyes might be the eyes of a lioness into lady. It was not for nothing that Lawrence's mind often ran upon poachers - and

gamekeepers.

By midsummer Frieda had thrown in her lot with his. It would not be true to say that she had found her master. Rather she expected to rule but could not resist this man who had discovered the secret of her wildness and was so insistent on his own power. Or perhaps it was the challenge more than the man that she found irresistible. Anyhow it was no conclusion, but only a beginning, when she and Lawrence set out one day in August on foot together to cross Tirol into Italy. They had almost no money. Frieda was entirely courageous.

That autumn and winter and the following early spring they stayed at Lake Garda, moving only once from one place to another. In February *Love Poems and Others* came out with Duckworth in London. In the same year that publisher issued *Sons and Lovers*, which Heinemann had refused, giving as his verdict - or endorsing the verdict of his reader - that it was 'one of the dirtiest books he had ever read'. The reviews were mostly favourable. Some were enthusiastic.

In April, 1913, Lawrence and Frieda went to the Isarthal in Bavaria and stayed in a pleasant corner at Irschenhausen. The little wooden house with the fir and beech forest behind, the 'big open country' in front, and the mountains beyond, had been the scene of their setting forth together the summer before. Here Lawrence wrote the first part of *The Lost Girl (The Insurrection of Miss Houghton)*. In June they came home, visited the Garnetts in Kent and went on to London.

It was in July that Lawrence and Frieda first met Middleton Murry and Katherine Mansfield in the flat above the office of *Rhythm* in Chancery Lane. Murry, as the editor of *Rhythm*, had been offered a story by Lawrence, from which the meeting naturally arose.

Lawrence once described to me his first sight of Katherine Mansfield. She was sitting on the floor of a bare room, he said, beside a bowl of goldfish. When I asked him to describe her, Frieda, who was with us, took the words out of his mouth. 'So pretty she is, such *lovely legs!*' she shouted. But Lawrence broke in violently, if not so loudly with, 'If you *like* the legs of the principal boy in the pantomime!' Here was a flick of a spinsterish tartness that he always had, but there was something more - an expression of his distaste for certain of the accepted forms of beauty, a distaste that later could alienate and puzzle a critic like Mr Gerhardi.

But it had nothing to do with Katherine Mansfield, to whose great charm Lawrence made response as eagerly as to the emotional readiness of Middleton Murry. To them he had come from the circle of the Garnetts where, in spite of much kindness and appreciation, he had felt himself regarded as essentially 'a sort of queer fish that can write'. He foresaw too that neither the Garnetts nor the

Hueffers would like his next novel. But with Murry and Katherine all was young, hopeful and untried. When Mr 'Eddie' Marsh, always on the spot when fresh genius was about, introduced Lawrence and Frieda to Herbert and Cynthia Asquith, and the Asquiths invited the Lawrences to Broadstairs, where Mr Marsh also was, Lawrence would have it that Murry and Katherine must come too. Murry has told how, as they could not afford the journey, Lawrence insisted on paying for it, with solemn injunctions on the obtuseness of not letting others pay in such case. They went and they bathed.

By Murry's later account it was a happy time, a holiday with nowhere a strain.

When, after another weekend with the Garnetts, they went back to the Isarthal at the beginning of August, they had Murry's light promise to join them in Italy with Katherine Mansfield - a promise that was not fulfilled. Lawrence, who would go anywhere if he wanted to go and felt it mattered, was disappointed. Had he made too sudden and sweeping a demand on this other man so that he was obliged in self-defence to withhold himself? Lawrence often blamed himself thus, and quickly knew the point of strain in any relation. But he built upon seeing much of them on his return to England the following summer. By the middle of September he and Frieda were at Lerici near Spezia, and, after a fortnight, at Fiascherino, where they stayed till June, 1914.

After seven beginnings and many burnings the manuscript of *The Rainbow* was complete before the middle of May. Lawrence sent it to J. B. Pinker, who was now to act as his literary agent. At Fiascherino too he wrote - or more probably rewrote - *The Widowing of Mrs Holroyd*, for a New York publisher. He has recorded in print how he rewrote the play yet again almost completely over the proof, and how the enterprising publisher bore with him, but - can it have been out of revenge? - how the same publisher also persuaded him to part with the American copyright of *Sons and Lovers*. Early in June Lawrence and Frieda were once more in England. By this time there was no barrier to their marriage. It was Lawrence, though he was far more terrified of the married state than was Frieda, who insisted upon regularising their union.

Part Two

AET. 29-34

PROSE

Twilight in Italy (essays)

Reflections on the Death of a Porcupine, etc. (in part)

Women in Love

England, My England, etc. (short stories)

Studies in Classic American Literature

Movements in European History

Touch and Go (play in 3 acts)

Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious

VERSE

Look! We Have Come Through! (completed)

New Poems Bay

*

I am tired of life being so ugly and cruel. How I long for it to be pleasant. It makes my soul heave to see it so harsh and brutal. '

1

All this is to say that when I came to meet him Lawrence was at the end of that adventure which three years later he was to confide with some reluctance to the world in the cycle of poems called *Look! We Have Come Through!* Besides *The Rainbow*, most of these astonishing, perfectly original poems were already in existence. Of course I did not know this. With Lawrence one was usually in the dusty rear in literary as well as other matters. His sister has told how in their youthful expeditions he always ranged ahead. He continued all his life to do so.

I have read that to Richard Aldington in those days Lawrence looked like a soldier, and that to David Garnett he suggested a plumber's mate or the kind of workman that makes trouble with the boss. But to me, on that day in June, 1914, when I first set eyes on him, the immediately distinguishing thing was his swift and flamelike quality, which was quite unlike anything suggested by even the most fascinating type of British soldier or workman. I was sensible of a fine, rare beauty in Lawrence, with his deep-set jewel-like eyes, thick dust-coloured hair, pointed underlip of notable sweetness, fine hands, and rapid but never restless movements. The stiff, the slow or the unreal had as little part in that frame as had any mechanically imposed control, but he was beautifully disciplined. In any kind of paid manual or even mechanical labour, if he had undertaken it, I should have said that Lawrence would have risen quickly to a position of authority and would have been in favour because of his good workmanship. This is not the kind that 'makes trouble' in the accepted sense of the phrase, anyhow not so long as he is employed on a definite understanding. I have seen Lawrence under many circumstances but I never once saw him heavy or lounging, and he was never idle, just as a bird is never idle. At the same time I never saw a trace of strain or resentment in him when engaged in any of his manifold activities. In these two ways - never being idle, yet never seeming to labour - he was unlike anybody else I ever met. He was without human dreariness.

On this first meeting I was disappointed in Frieda, whose beauty I had heard impressively described. I had lived in Germany, and she struck me as being a typical German *Frau* of the blonde, gushing type. She wore a tight coat and skirt of horse-cloth check that positively obscured her finely-cut, rather angry Prussian features. To discover how magnificent she could look, I had to see her

marching about a cottage hatless and in an overall or, still better, in peasant costume. After that her handsomeness never escaped me, and I admired her greatly.

Nothing memorable was said over tea. But afterwards, when we all walked down to the Finchley Road together to see the Lawrences into their bus, he and I walked in front; and as we passed the churchyard where my child was buried and I had paid for a grave for myself, I found that I was talking to him as if I had known him all my life. It was not that Lawrence encouraged confidences. He had none of the traits, still less the tricks of what is usually understood to be the 'sympathetic' man. There were no 'intimacies', either physical or mental. But he gave an immediate sense of freedom, and his responses were so perfectly fresh, while they were puzzling, that it seemed a waste of time to talk about anything with him except one's real concerns.

I forget now how many times we had met before Lawrence undertook to read the manuscript of my first attempt at a novel, but it was still June when I received his first letter, which was all about it.

And for a postscript, 'You must be willing to put much real work, hard work into this, and you'll have a genuine creative piece of work. It's like Jane Austen at a deeper level.'

Lawrence would always read anything that anybody tried to write; but, though he was a valuable and astute literary critic, his critical point of view was not 'literary', as the word is usually understood. He read that he might find out what the writer would be at, and, having found out, that he might expound it to the writer who, as often as not, is only half conscious of the character of the impulses underlying all literary effort.

It was this, with his astonishing patience, his delighted recognition of any sign of vitality and his infectious insistence upon the hardest work, that made him unique among critics. Even if you were incapable of carrying out in the work itself what you learned from his comments upon it, you could hardly refrain from coming, in some degree at least, to distinguish in yourself between what was native and impulsive and what was affected or imposed and in consequence confused. If the writing under consideration was by an acknowledged master it was just the same. Himself an accomplished artist, Lawrence never underrated accomplishment. But he was no more deterred by skilled than by unskilled expression from divining and revealing the underlying stream of life. He could neither be put off nor carried away by talent, a quality which, among others, makes his *Studies in Classic American Literature* a book of rare critical value. His second letter followed next day - it seem natural that the author of any serious effort should be on his own footing, and soon one accepted it almost too

easily. To encourage me he told me how many years and how despairingly he had worked over *The White Peacock* and how often rewritten *Sons and Lovers*.

At that moment he was very busy trying to get his own affairs into working order, and though I was not aware of it he had acute anxieties. Murry has said that Lawrence's agent had obtained an advance of three hundred pounds for the new novel on the strength of the notable reception of *Sons and Lovers*. It is true that such was the agreement. But Murry's assumption that in the summer of 1914 there was 'three hundred pounds, solid, all in the bank, and a brand-new banking account' is unhappily not in accordance with the facts. The sum mentioned was to be paid on publication. What with discussions and drastic revisions the manuscript was not ready for the printer until over a year later. Actually by October, 1915, when the book was out, Methuen was still owing fifty pounds, of which seventeen pounds would be retained for proof correction and five pounds by the agent for his fee. In all, Lawrence could not count on receiving more than two hundred and fifty-three pounds over a period of nearly eighteen months after his first submission of the novel. And by July he was at the end of all other resources. He had not till then realised the discrepancy between a contract for 'three hundred pounds in advance' and the slow, abbreviated payments of actuality. Pinker came to the rescue by advancing forty-five pounds out of his own pocket (*i.e.*, fifty pounds on the strength of the contract for *The Rainbow* less five pounds commission) and a little later the Royal Literary Fund made a grant of fifty pounds. Otherwise Lawrence could hardly have carried on.

He never worried unduly, however, and prospects were not bad. He was seeing Lena Ashwell, who was hopeful of producing *Mrs Holroyd*. A book of short stories was almost ready, and he had been personally approached by another publisher, who wanted from him 'an interpretative essay on Hardy'. It was to run to fifteen thousand words, and Lawrence would receive fifteen pounds in advance on delivery, with royalties afterwards at 1s 'Ad. a copy in England and 'Ad. in America. He thought he might throw this off without difficulty.

But Frieda and he got married without any of this new money, and when Pinker's forty-five pounds arrived a fortnight later, small accumulated debts asked to be settled and were settled. Lawrence never left loose ends.

His third letter to me, dated July 13th, told of the marriage.

I am awfully sorry we couldn't come tonight. I, poor devil am seedy with neuralgia in my left eye and my heart is in my boots.

Domani sono i nostri matrimoni - allé

Povero me, mi sento poco bene.

And I was to see them within a day or two. That morning I left a bunch of anemones at Selwood Terrace, where they were staying with Gordon and Beatrice Campbell. Long afterwards Frieda, laughing, told me how that day Lawrence's infectious insistence on the importance of fidelity, and so of marriage, had given Katherine Mansfield the desire to wear a wedding-ring herself. But such trifles cost something, and money with the Murrys, too, was scarce. So Frieda lent Katherine her discarded ring to wear till Murry could give her one of her own. Frieda had looked to have it back. But Katherine misunderstood and nothing more was ever said. On the 30th July, leaving Frieda in the South, Lawrence went for the weekend to his sisters in the Midlands. He then set off on a short walking tour in the Westmorland hills with three other men. Two of these were acquaintances to whom he had felt casually drawn. They were neither intimate nor literary friends. The fourth, who joined the party at the last moment, was S. S. Koteliansky. He knew nothing of Lawrence save what he had heard from one of the other two who had described him as a 'writer chap with ideas about love', with the usual implication that Lawrence was an apostle of 'free love'. And though not particularly attracted by the description, Koteliansky agreed to make a fourth for the few days' tour.

Lawrence, slender, vivacious and friendly, in his corduroy jacket, was entirely different from the companion he had pictured. The second night of the walk they had to put up in a cottage where there was only one bed, so that two of the quartette had to lie on the floor. Lawrence, as the delicate one, was made to sleep in the bed, and Koteliansky as the visitor was urged to share it. He was very unwilling. Never in his life had such a thing befallen him. But Lawrence was so gay and easy that all shyness vanished. Above all, this foreign stranger was captivated by a kind of sensitive innocence in Lawrence which he had never before seen in an Englishman. It roused a jealously protective tenderness. Lawrence spoke lightly, as was his way, and without being in any degree confidential, of his recent marriage. He had a wife, he said, who was a German lady of high degree. His lack of sophistication made the boast somehow delightful. Kot must visit them in the English countryside when they had found a home there. Lawrence would have liked to return immediately to Italy, but he did not see how he could afford to do so.

Lawrence was still in Westmorland when war was declared. So far as I can discover, his first feeling about it, which lasted for nearly six months, was not unmixed with sober hopefulness. He did not think it would last long, and it might 'shake people into a live seriousness' and 'set a slump on trifling'.

After a few days back in London at the Campbells' flat, he and Frieda went to a cottage near Chesham in Bucks. Gilbert and Mary Cannan inhabited a windmill not far off, full of the most wonderful nicknacks, and the Murrys took a cottage two miles across the fields. There were ten days or so of picnicking together and the work of settling in, of which Lawrence always took both the direction and the lion's share. When they were settled, Koteliansky came down, met Frieda for the first time and became acquainted with the Murrys. On one of his weekend visits he rebuked Frieda for what he considered her too great self-importance by the side of her husband, with such effect that Katherine had to act as mediator.

It fell also, I believe, to Katherine to put a laughing extinguisher on the great *Rananim* idea when that had run its course as a pleasant dream but was still harped upon by Lawrence as something he wished to realise.

Ranani zadikim I'Adonoi. Koteliansky had sung the Hebrew chant to them in Bucks as the war horror arose and increased, and it intensified the longing Lawrence had always felt to live remote with a group of kindred spirits. He and Frieda, Koteliansky and Katherine and Murry must get away to an island and be happy and busy. Others would follow. The Murrys took it up at first like a lovely game; but it was no game to Lawrence, and when Katherine, not without realistic mischief, went and obtained a mass of detailed, difficult information about suitable islands, Lawrence, says Koteliansky, fell sadly silent. He really cared. Though from that day *Rananim* was off, he still went on caring and hoping and planning.

The events of 1914-1919 all went to strengthen his strong and simple belief that the only thing to be done was for a few people to go together of their own desire to some distant refuge and breeding place of newness. Lawrence was not a 'conscientious objector'. He was not in principle opposed to war - far from it. But he quickly divined the dire significance of this war, which we now appreciate after the event. He could see no true way of ameliorating the horror. He believed that attempts at amelioration (such as war-work), like attempts at defiance (such as conscientious objection), equally involved identification with the horror. Springing from 'the nervous fire of opposition', these were secretly part of the evil and by opposing fomented it. He could but say that he would have no part in it, not even a protesting part. Nothing could have been harder for him than the inaction thus imposed. While he accorded a qualified sympathy to the conscientious objector, his real sympathy was for the soldier. But the latter he could not and the former, in the Quakerish sense, he would not be. We must, he said, 'be done with half-truths'. We must not 'adapt ourselves', but rather go apart.

There are sane minds today inclined to the belief that only by some such proceeding as Lawrence urged, mystical in its import but active in its immediate bearing, can we save ourselves and the world. It is a proceeding as old as sin and as simple as goodness. There was Noah and there was Lot. Civilisation itself was saved by the monastic retreat provided by the Christian genius. Lawrence felt the old need of severance and departure, but he felt it in a new way, and he would have nothing to do with catchwords or with the tricks that accompany earthly leadership. He had the genius of direction enough to have exploited his 'personality' and founded an order or an institution. He knew, however, that 'personality', orders and institutions could no longer be employed without the creeping in of bogus principles. The time had passed for any such attempt. But the time could never pass for obedience to a profound and simple impulse. If several men and women felt the same impulse, even in differing degrees, surely they should make the movement of severance and departure in company?

In the War he came to believe fully in the putrescence - worse because it was denied - of the Christian era. The only thing to do was to get out and away, if possible to some place where a newer growth or an older decay would save us from using up our energies in protestation, reaction or mere self-preservation.

In October I wrote telling Lawrence that I was going to be married. He was surprised. He wrote from Bucks:

How exciting your letter is! We are glad to hear you are going to marry Donald Carswell. Your life will run on a staple pivot then, and you will be much happier. After all, one has a complete right to be happy. I only want to know people who have the courage to live. The dying resigned sort only bore me now. We are glad to have your news - soon we'll come and see you.

They were to come one day in the following week and put up for the night at my house. Lawrence was in straits for money, having nothing but the grant from the Royal Literary Fund. (He and Frieda were actually trying to find a market for their painted boxes and embroideries, and we got as far as nervously taking some of these to a Hampstead shop, that was dubiously interested.) I have another letter of the same October in which he writes:

I have got about seventy pounds in the world now. Of this I owe a hundred and forty-five pounds to the divorce lawyers, for costs claimed against me. This I am never going to pay. I also owe about twenty pounds otherwise. So I have got some fifty pounds. If you think the other fund would give me any more - benissimo, I'll take it like a shot.

Oh, by the way [he adds in a postscript], I was seedy and have grown a beard.

I think I look hideous, but it is so warm and complete, and such a clothing to one's nakedness, that I like it and shall keep it. So when you see me don't laugh.

I never quite believed and do not now, that Lawrence found his beard hideous. His saying so was one of the small and transparent affectations which - in the absence of all profounder deceits - made him so easy to approach and so impossible not to love. At the same time his warning was necessary, as it was something of a shock to see this new Lawrence with a beard quite different from the hair of his head, of a deep glowing red in the sun, and in the shade the colour of strong tea. And it marked a stage. The Lawrence with the moustache, the Lawrence of *Sons and Lovers* and tramps from Germany to Italy, had given place to the bearded, married Lawrence, the Lawrence of *The Rainbow*, and the War, and the long struggle with the woman and with the world that was begun and ended in solitude.

Donald was at this time on the staff of *The Times*, working in the same department with Mr F. S. Lowndes, husband of Mrs Belloc-Lowndes. Finding that Donald was acquainted with Lawrence, Mr Lowndes, a kindly man, expressed great interest and, on learning also that Lawrence was very hard up, great sympathy. He hinted that something further might be done out of a fund in which his wife had some say, and added that Mrs Belloc-Lowndes would be very glad to have an opportunity of meeting this remarkable young man. On hearing all this from Donald I at once invited Mrs Belloc-Lowndes to come to my house and meet Mr and Mrs D. H. Lawrence.

Mrs Belloc-Lowndes, whom none of us had ever set eyes on before, duly turned up. I remember how silent Lawrence sat as she told us (a) that she didn't know how on earth she was going to afford a necessary operation for one of her children, and (b) what splendid large sums she always got on account for her books, naming the amounts. Also, just as we were showing her out, we managed to disabuse her of her firm impression that Lawrence had eloped with the wife of the local butcher of his village, *i.e.*, Frieda *geb.* von Richthofen, whom we had just left upstairs! But the literary fund which she was supposed to represent had melted in an explanatory haze. When we were left alone Lawrence indulged in some pithead language.

That night we talked - especially Lawrence. I was only beginning to know him. Often I disagreed with what he said or declared it to be exaggerated. But from the first I was sure that he was worth more than the lot of us. Also with Lawrence there was something that begot in the listener a kind of inward ear.

'Thank you so much for having us down. I like to stay with you - you are a perfect hostess. Please don't think me a fool or conceited for my tirade,' he

wrote, enclosing a cheque for one pound which I must have lent him, with two shillings extra 'for the maid'. I was to go down soon to see them. He had pleased me very much by saying that mine was the only town-house in which he had ever felt it might be possible for him to live. I think, however, that this was chiefly because, though it was old, there was an unpretentious air of impermanency about it, so that we always expected it to fall down when the anti-aircraft gun went off. Lawrence disliked an air of everlastingness about a home. For him it must have something of the tent about it, though he liked everything to be seemly and clean, and he approved of a few household gods.

2

I went once to Bucks, but only, I think, for the day. There I met the Cannans, was taken over their windmill, and went a hilly walk. For some reason it was also a gloomy walk. The grass of the hills looked black and I wished I were at home. I felt a great unhappiness in Gilbert Cannan which Mary's chirpiness did not dispel. And Lawrence seemed to be holding on to himself against depression. On the return to England the links between Frieda and her children had reasserted themselves, and he found the complication hard to endure.

Donald and I were married early in January, and Lawrence sent me a little blue plate 'as a love token from us. That it is a dragon is a fitting symbol, but I shall paint you a phoenix on a box.' The phoenix, as I knew, was his most fitting 'badge and sign'. Being married, I had now one of the chief qualifications for inclusion in the Lawrence exodus. There were to be, if possible, no single males or females in the party - as with the denizens of the Ark - and Lawrence caused much amusement by his suggestions for the mating of those among the probable starters who were still unattached. He thought, for instance, that Dorothy Warren might marry the writer who is now known as Michael Arlen.

Lawrence was not happy in Bucks, and I never heard him speak of his stay there with any pleasure. To him that countryside was dreary. Literary prospects too, instead of improving, looked blacker. The Hardy book was turning out as 'rum' unsaleable stuff that would not fetch even the promised fifteen pounds. That good friend, Amy Lowell, who had met Lawrence in England and was now in New York, had not so far succeeded in eliciting the money owed by the New York publisher of *Mrs Holroyd* and *Sons and Lovers*. The new novel, of which a contemplated title was then *The Wedding-Ring*, was still undergoing final revision and wearisome typing by the author, with many of its pages queried by the publishers. *The Prussian Officer* came out, but Lawrence disliked the title, which had been chosen against his wish. 'What Prussian officer?' he asked. When the money from the Royal Literary Fund came to an end, what next?

After a 'long, slow, pernicious cold' in January he accepted an invitation from the Meynells at Greatham in Sussex to occupy the barn which had been newly-converted for Viola into a very attractive cottage. There were still finishing touches to be put to it - linoleums to be laid and so forth. Lawrence would

undertake these and would give daily coaching to one of the Meynell grandchildren, who was kept from school owing to a serious accident. Viola, nobly if often disapprovingly, undertook to type the remainder of the novel.

Again I cannot recall any reference by Lawrence to his six months at Greatham which suggests enjoyment, as, for example, his references to Cornwall suggest enjoyment. But socially it was an eventful period - vide *Women in Love*. He met here for the first time people like Lady Ottoline Morrell and the Hon. Bertrand Russell (now Earl Russell), and he was at first deeply impressed by them besides being himself in his special way impressive.

The innocence of Lawrence has always to be kept in mind. It is this quality, with the force of his beliefs and the strength of his imaginative vision, that puts him humanly with Blake and with Shelley among the English poets. But because Lawrence was practical, with the realism of the English working man, his innocence is easily ignored. He had none of the charming foolishness in worldly affairs that distinguishes most of the poetic innocents. On the other hand circumstances had rendered him far less sophisticated in social matters. One result of this was that, upon finding himself mistaken about people, he would strike out with all his force.

Given any expression of natural sympathy Lawrence went forth at a first meeting blind to all discrepancies. It was only in the face of hostile assertiveness that he became either arrogant or reserved. He provided in general, as has been said, an immediate air of liberty, equality and fraternity such as I never breathed with any man of like gifts.

But though Lawrence practised the charity of culture and of his own nature - the charity that hopes all things, he definitely rejected the Christian petrification and prolongation of this - the charity that endureth all things. For here he saw a breeding-place of tyrants and of victims. He could hope a long time. But when he judged that the time for hope was past he no longer endured.

In this, as in so much else, his moderation was marked. He was always ready to revise a judgement and to start afresh without rancour or a backward glance. But he affirmed the right to judge, as he admitted the right of others to judge him. 'Judge not that ye be not judged!' I once heard him in conversation echo that sententiously uttered statement.

'But don't you see that if we live we *must* judge, for to live is to judge - and to be judged too at every turn, even as you are now judging me by bidding me not to judge!'

What Lawrence refused to do was to judge by any set principle. He began by taking the life attainment of others eagerly on trust. But he had no doubt as to the nature and extent of his own. And when discrepancies appeared, he measured the

one against the other and lost no time in announcing the results. In the case of highly placed and highly gifted persons, being more astonished by the discrepancy, he was the more emphatic in underlining it.

Frieda apart, it was first and foremost on Murry that Lawrence relied - Murry, young, gifted and sympathetic. Before they had been three weeks at Greatham Murry had come to stay with them. He was lonely (Katherine had gone to Paris) and not well (after an attack of influenza) and just nearing the end of his first novel. So he went to Lawrence, and Lawrence nursed him beautifully. An intimacy sprang up, and Lawrence could not think or speak too highly of this friend. The more that Frieda was increasingly fretting about her children and fighting against Lawrence in the matter, Murry seemed a man sent from God. Lawrence included him in every plan, praised the manuscript of his first novel and expounded to him *The Rainbow*, which he counted upon Murry to review when it should appear in the face of a hostile, misunderstanding world. He even saw in Murry a colleague and successor who would build up the temple when he, Lawrence, had cut out the ground.

To Murry also he poured forth the philosophy which he was then beginning to write down. This had become all-important to him, so that he saw himself as putting forth one novel after *The Rainbow* and no more. After that his 'approach to the revolution of the conditions of life' - a revolution profoundly opposed to socialism, with which he had merely a shallow intellectual and emotional sympathy - was to take some more direct, active and human form. What form precisely he did not specify even to himself. But it involved a 'withdrawal from the world' and it called for support from at least a few people. From poor Murry among them!

There was some talk of the Lawrences occupying a cottage at Garsington Manor, the Oxfordshire home of the Morrells. At the mere thought of this Lawrence saw himself building a new Jerusalem within convenient distance of Oxford and Cambridge. But owing to practical difficulties nothing came of it.

Lawrence was sharply ill at Greatham and very weak afterwards. But besides much philosophy he wrote some short stories and the sketches for *Twilight in Italy*. He wrestled hard, too, with his publisher for the totality of *The Rainbow* and, though he yielded in the matter of some words and phrases, he refused to alter or omit any passage or paragraph. As well, he said, cut off your nose to make your face pleasant to people who say it is spoiled by that feature. He conjured his publisher, as he conjured Murry, to fight for the book, because it would both need and deserve fighting support. He knew it could not be popular, but he encouraged his publisher by the assurance that in years to come it would prove a sound financial speculation.

He also conjured for a further advance in money, his fear being that this, if delayed till the appearance of the book, would be claimed by the divorce lawyers before it reached him. Again J. B. Pinker rose to the occasion. Lawrence received ninety pounds. After this there would be only thirty-three pounds to come.

The question was urgent - what was to be their next home? The way to the Continent was barred by the War - though Lawrence thought the War would be over by the autumn and that the appearance of his *Rainbow* would coincide with peace and new beginnings. In the interim it did not much matter where he lived so long as he and Frieda were independent. She wished to be near her children, who were now in London. So, suddenly in July, they took the lower half of 2 Byron Villas in the Vale of Health at Hampstead. Having done this, he was for a time in a gay and careless mood. He asked us all for contributions - as small and cheap as possible - for the new home. I gave them an old-fashioned gilt mirror.

Lawrence loved making a home in a simple, transitory way; and, though he looked upon this one as more than usually transitory, he threw himself into the setting of it up with ardour. Proudly he showed me the new pots and pans which were to be kept clean, not merely on the inside, as the Christians use, but on the outside, as the Pharisees use. In the process he sang all day long - as often as not the evangelical hymns of his youth. His next-door neighbours wondered at the sound. Of all the stories told of Lawrence's boyhood by his sister Ada (in her book *The Early Life of D. H. Lawrence*) none is more characteristic than that of the youthful company who, under the threat of Lawrence's violence, stood up and sang in the empty Easter-gay church at Alfreton, and this though by then Lawrence had 'criticised and got over the Christian dogma'. When I heard him lift up his voice in 'Sun of my soul, Thou Saviour dear', I thought he would not be content to die without having written hymns of his own. We have his hymns in *The Plumed Serpent*.

One day I went with him and Frieda to hunt for secondhand furniture in Praed Street. None of it was cheap enough, and we trudged homeward through disagreeable weather late in the afternoon. Frieda begged that we might stop somewhere for a cup of tea, and I was all agreement. But Lawrence turned on us with fury. We should *not* have any tea! Were we not on the way home to our evening meal? Money and time and stomachs might not be so wasted. I was struck by Frieda's ungrumbling acceptance of this ruling as we pushed wearily on. It now seems to me that we walked home all the way from Camden Town. Even so, or rather *just* so, life in Lawrence's company was so great an adventure that the utmost weariness or disappointment was without boredom. He was *the* man in whose company to miss a last train; and this not primarily because he

was sweet-tempered and entertaining. Frieda, though a rebellious creature, submitted from the first to Lawrence's practical direction, as she did at the last (after a long fight) to his profounder guidance. For one thing she had what, to me at least, is one of the most lovable qualities in a human being, a simple animal stoicism in the face of pain or discomfort. For another she recognised instinctively that in practical matters Lawrence was well-nigh infallible. Besides, in return for obedience of this kind, one got from Lawrence a lovely assurance. I have a letter, written by Frieda nearly a year after his death, in which she refers to 'the glamour he gave to everything', and says, 'with Lawrence it was always worth while even at the worst.' There has not been a truer word spoken of him. Of how many can it be said?

3

They stayed at Byron Villas till Christmas (1915) - five important months to Lawrence as a writer. *The Rainbow* appeared on September 30th, and on November 13th was condemned at Bow Street as 'obscene' within the meaning of the statute of 1857 therein made and provided.

Work was being steadily turned out. Early in October the Italian sketches were complete, and the book was accepted by Duckworth. Soon afterwards the collection of poems to be called *Amores* was ready. All the while, short stories were written in rapid succession, and some of the philosophy saw print in the *Signature*.

Though I was asked both to go to the premises of the *Signature* (to which I contributed a rug for the floor), and to write for it, I did neither. I never believed in it, and Lawrence's own feelings, as conveyed to me at the time, tallied perfectly with his later account given in the preface to *Death of a Porcupine*. In that account no doubt, as Murry says, 'the details of fact are inaccurate, but not, I think, the content of feeling. To me Lawrence appeared deprecating, almost apologetic at the outset, and he was clearly disappointed in the performance. That it contained nothing of importance except his own contribution anybody may see who cares to look up the three issues. Lawrence said as much to me when he asked me, as a subscriber, if his essay on 'The Crown' conveyed anything to me. I had to admit, to his disappointment, that it didn't. One lives and learns. Today 'The Crown' is the only thing in the *Signature* that has meaning for me; and it has so much meaning that I well understand how Lawrence was bound to take any chance to see it in print.

From all this, however, there came scarcely any money. Lawrence was constrained to accept thirty pounds from the Morrells. He had not been well, and, dreading November in London, was still hoping to escape it by sailing away. He applied for passports to Spain. Then he had the offer of a cottage in Florida. Dr Eder, who examined him, warned him against New York in the winter. But he would rush through New York to warmer climes beyond. Certainly he felt that London was dangerous to him. Those appalling 'colds' that laid him low! That he might be in readiness to go, the noble Pinker brought the Morrells' thirty pounds up to a hundred pounds. Immediately Lawrence

delivered work to many times that value, though not immediately saleable. Bernard Shaw, too, being appealed to by the Morrells, sent five pounds for Lawrence.

This was in October and November. Early in October I reviewed *The Rainbow* for the *Glasgow Herald*. I lacked Murry's advantages in that Lawrence had given me no exposition of the book beforehand. After *Sons and Lovers* it puzzled and disappointed me. I had been expecting a masterpiece of fiction, and this did not correspond to my notions of such a thing. Neither did I understand the book. But the processional beauty, the strangeness, the magnificence of the descriptive passages, which passed far beyond anything in the earlier novels, gave me enough to admire and praise whole-heartedly. No other writer could have risen to such heights or plumbed such depths, and I said so as well as I could at considerable length. But I had no grasp, and I found it a hard review to write.

Other critics praised in varying degrees; but many were offended, notably Mr James Douglas, whose coarse and copious abuse was the efficient cause of the police proceedings. The review by Mr de la Mare written for *The Times Literary Supplement* was, I believe, both long and largely favourable; but it was still in proof when the prosecution took place, and so was never published. Murry, when it came to the bit, did not review the book. This omission was natural, perhaps even friendly. He 'simply', as he would say - which seems to mean 'complicatedly' - disliked *The Rainbow*. But he ought not to give us to understand that the prosecution precluded a review.

Lawrence was given no official notice of the prosecution, but he heard of it as early as November 5th through the late W. L. George. Noticing that the book was suddenly omitted from the publishers' advertisements, Mr George had rung up Methuens, learned that legal action was being taken, and immediately informed Lawrence.

The affair kept Lawrence in London, hanging on to see if any remedy was to be found, till he was caught by December and really frightened by the severity of his colds. For his health he knew he ought to have gone earlier. Now he was divided in mind whether to face it out in the hope of some concerted action in his favour, or to let the whole thing drop, and fly. Believing that ultimately his books must fight for themselves, he greatly preferred the latter course. The English did not like him. Why not stop writing for England and change his public? But from many quarters he was urged and encouraged to stay. He felt his publisher had behaved badly ('What a snake in his boiled shirt bosom!' exclaimed Lawrence), but the Society of Authors might help. Murry has said accusingly that no established writer came forward in the matter. Lawrence himself, however, has given some credit to Arnold Bennett, May Sinclair and

others. And he received many encouraging letters and calls. Sir Oliver Lodge came, and Mr Drinkwater. The failure was in the matter of an organised protest. And this, no doubt, was because, like Murry, men such as Mr Galsworthy and Mr Wells *did not like 'The Rainbow'*. They were shocked by some of its details and, perhaps unconsciously, they felt its essential repudiation of all they stood for.

Lawrence, through Pinker, tried to sound his confrères - what did Henry James think of it, what Bennett, what E. M. Forster? - and the cautious or candid replies he received alike convinced him of the deep contention between him and all the rest. They would allow that he had 'genius', but how they hated the manifestations of that genius! This was really what he had to accept. And he knew it. No protest would alter it. Besides he was incensed by literary strictures. 'When they have as good a work to show, they may make their pronouncements ... till then let them learn decent respect.' So he wrote when he heard that a brother novelist had criticised his 'construction'.

At the same time Philip Morrell asked questions in Parliament; the favourable reviews (mine among them) were collected as evidence; and several schemes - one of them by Prince Antoine Bibesco - were set afoot for producing the book by private subscription. As Lawrence truly said, an energetic man could have done this and made it pay. But more than mere energy was needed. Even in those who would promote the scheme there was scarcely any real enthusiasm for the book. Most people, like Murry, were paralysed by distaste. The mere justice of a cause is seldom enough to carry it through. So it dragged. And Lawrence saw behind it well enough. He had to content himself with glowing praise in an American magazine (the *Metropolitan*) and with the prospect of the novel appearing shortly in the United States.

One way and another I saw a good deal of Lawrence when he was in Hampstead; but there was a thin veil between us and this, I think, he resented, though he was also grateful for it. It was of my making. Lawrence did not draw veils. He scoffed a little, though in the most friendly way, when he said that I made him think of that title of an old novel, *The Guarded Flame*, or reminded him of the bunched up, bell-clustered flower of the wild nettle. Himself he was a blown and dancing flame, and his flower emblem was the open-faced wild rose or the luminous outspread blossom of the campion, which he loved one of the best of wild flowers.

From beginning to end I had for Lawrence, as he well knew, a special kind of love and admiration which I never had for any other human being. It was impossible not to pay him the profoundest tributes and at the same time to rejoice in his companionship in ordinary ways. But I felt also the need to save

myself, even to save myself up - for what I knew not, but for something that would come. For my age and experience I was still very immature. But there are wounds in life to which one does not twice expose oneself, and I had known such wounds. Yet again, where giving is demanded there must be the ability to take. Lawrence had the capacities of giving, taking and demanding in a marvellous if terrifying degree. But he was past the time of spending and being spent, and he had married a woman who would see to it that he did not return in his tracks. Lawrence was one thing, the combination of Lawrence and Frieda quite another. I have a cowardly dread of a mess. It was necessary, I believe, for Lawrence to create a great deal of mess in his human contacts - necessary to his work. His marriage with Frieda was a step which inevitably created a morass about the paths of friendship. I saw one person after another flounder in that morass. For me, I preferred to signal across it. My recent marriage was another barrier. Lawrence knew perfectly what marriage meant to me. And though there was an enduring respect between him and the man I had married there was no particular gush of sympathy.

I had not only a wholesome fear of Lawrence. I was shy, and even suspicious of most of the friends by whom he was now surrounded. I did not fit well with them, and there was something in their relation with him that saddened me. If he needed them, then he did, and it was his affair. But I got the feeling that he did not think much of them, and was using them for what he needed, not so much willingly as *malgré lui*.

It was from his experience with these friends, and their interrelations through Frieda, that he wrote *Women in have*. Later, when he gave me the manuscript of that novel to read, I asked him why must he write of people who were so far removed from the general run, people so sophisticated and 'artistic' and spoiled, that it could hardly matter what they did or said? To which he replied that it was only through such people that one could discover whither the general run of mankind, the great unconscious mass, was tending. There, at the uttermost tips of the flower of an epoch's achievement, one could already see the beginning of the flower of putrefaction which must take place before the seed of the new was ready to fall clear. I gathered too that in the nature of the putrefaction the peculiar nature of an epoch was revealed. And the more quickly we recognised and accepted the nature of the failure, the more speedily would the new unknown seed find a condition for its germination. Achievement carried to its furthest limits coincided with putrefaction. Those who sought the new must take their stand right in the flux.

I am not now reporting Lawrence's actual words, which I cannot remember, but I use remembered phrases to give the impression he conveyed - an

impression familiar to all his readers. I found his answer as I have described it, satisfactory from his point of view and illuminating to mine. But it left my practical position unchanged. I gave it as my opinion that, whatever the value of the putrefying petals to him as a writer, he would not find the human beings representing them much use either as friends or in the formation of a group for the furthering of new life.

Even as I spoke, I felt that my obvious little truth did not matter nearly so much as his difficult big one. Yet beneath what I said there was lurking a deeper truth - my still unformulated belief that Lawrence was meant to be understood of the common people and that they would eventually be the ones to profit by what he would bring forth. I had always noticed that he took for granted the common virtues, and even many of what we call the Christian virtues. He built on a solid foundation. So I persisted.

He was a little offended at my disparagement of his friends. 'Whom then would you suggest? What kind of people?' At his look sadness overcame me. It was something like having to break the secret of suffering to a child, and in my own helplessness in the face of this man's clear destiny I would have been glad to eat my words. But now it was started I had to go on. How stupid it was of me not to have seen from the first that Lawrence must work for those who could not understand him till long afterwards, and that those who could give - or seem to give - immediate understanding, were absolutely needful to him, though they must soon prove to be humanly detestable. Failing to see this clearly at the time, I could only blunder on with the thought that came nearest. 'You will have to be alone, I am afraid,' I said, 'all through and in the end, alone.' It was dragged out of me unwillingly, while I hoped with all my heart that I was talking bosh. Who was I that I should condemn a man like Lawrence to loneliness? But it sounded horribly like the truth.

Lawrence dropped his head. He admitted that it might perhaps be so. But I saw he could not quite accept it. Not yet. One thing was clear to me. The only way for me to help Lawrence in the slightest degree, or for Lawrence to help me, was for me to keep my hands off him. He knew this, with so much more besides. It couldn't be helped. The surprising thing was how much it meant just to have met and to know him.

He brought his sister Ada to see me one day. I had been baking oatcakes. We sat chatting and nibbling happily at the crisp warm oatmeal. He loved Ada. He told me afterwards that he and she had felt constrained together in all other London company except mine.

In small ways Lawrence could often be, as he has confessed in one of his *Assorted Articles*, 'a bit false'. He could not bear being unpleasant to anybody's

face. Once when I was at Byron Villas and he was in bed with a cold, a woman called. He heard her voice in the hall, grimaced viciously and in a whispered yell to Frieda said, 'Don't let that woman come into my room!' But Frieda, not hearing or not caring or not contriving, ushered the visitor in. And Lawrence welcomed her quite charmingly. She could not possibly have guessed how he had looked and spoken a moment before.

4

Till well on in December we were looking out ships for Lawrence to sail to Florida. But he was too ill, and the War made it all too difficult. So he gave it up. He spent Christmas week with his sisters at Ripley.

We got here with a struggle. How terrible it is to return into the past like this - with the future quivering far off forsaken - to turn back to the past.

No wonder Lawrence hated Proust! For a poet born in the mining Midlands there can be no *récherche du temps perdu* behind soundproof walls while the present goes by to muffled drums outside. The mining Midlands see to that. And I, from Glasgow, understood it, just as Katherine Mansfield from the sweeter home in New Zealand, could not. Being herself able to be playful, affectionate, whimsical about 'home', she felt a shade reproachful and superior towards those who could not. For Lawrence, the more deeply touched he had been, the more he had suffered and been outraged. The past had been no 'very perfect nest' for him. But the scenes of childhood and youth, of course, have a clutching hold on the heart, and on Lawrence's more than on most.

Christmas over, he accepted most gratefully an invitation from the J. D. Beresfords to use their house at Padstow in Cornwall. Never would he forget this kindness. He began there by being two weeks in bed, but did not cease working. In February *Amores* was returned by a publisher, together with 'instructions as to how to write poetry'. Which elicited from Lawrence a letter calling his critic 'impertinent and foolish and presumptuous'.

My review of *The Rainbow* (to which the angry attention of my editor was drawn only after the prosecution) had lost me my reviewing of ten years' standing on the *Glasgow Herald*. Lawrence did not hear of this till he was in Cornwall. He wrote to me 'I am sorry about your reviewing because I believe you enjoyed the bit you had. And one *does not* want to be martyred.' Somehow from this I understood that he thought it a good thing for me, if I could take it so, that I was cut off from that sort of newspaper work. I now think he was right in this.

Chiefly to keep in touch with him, and because I knew he liked it, I kept sending him poems of mine. There was only one - a Hardy-esque poem about a graveyard - that he thought good. But he found fault with it for being 'verse

which in spirit bursts all the old world, and yet goes corseted in rhymed scansion', though immediately afterwards he apologised for his 'scribblings on it' as 'only impertinent suggestions'. He need not have apologised. It was not a very good poem, though it had merit. The chief thing for me was that he recognised in it that bit of merit. Of another he wrote:

There is a really good conception of a poem: but you have not given yourself with sufficient passion to the creating, to bring it forth. I'm not sure that I want you to - there is something tragic and displeasing about a woman who writes - but I suppose Sapho [sic] is as inevitable and as right as Shelley - but you must burn, to be a Sapho - burn at the stake. And Sapho is the only woman poet.

Or:

The essence of poetry with us in this age of stark and unlovely actualities is a stark directness, without a shadow of a lie, or a shadow of deflection anywhere. Everything can go, but this stark, bare, rocky directness of statement, this alone makes poetry, today.

Or he told how he liked Cornwall, which for him was a true land's end.

... It is not England. It is bare and dark and elemental, Tristan's land. I lie looking down at a cove where the waves come white under a low, black headland, which slopes up in bare green-brown, bare and sad under a level sky. It is old, Celtic, pre-Christian. Tristan and his boat, and his horn.

Again:

I love being here: such a calm, old, slightly deserted house - a farmhouse; and the country remote and desolate and unconnected; it belongs to the days before Christianity, the days of the Druids, or of desolate Celtic magic and conjuring and the sea is so grey and shaggy, and the wind so restless, as if it had never found a home since the days of Iseult. Here I think my life begins again - one is free. Here the autumn is gone by, it is pure winter of forgetfulness. I love it. Soon I shall begin to write a story - a midwinter story of oblivion.

He was writing 'erratically', being several times down with his 'wintry inflammation' and 'so seedy he thought he was dead' - 'so ill that nearly everything has gone out of me but a sort of abstract strength.' But he was hopeful - 'this is the last turn - I shall be solid again in a week.'

Philip Heseltine (the late 'Peter Warlock') had stayed with them for eight weeks and - other plans for it having fallen through - he and Heseltine had a

scheme by which *The Rainbow* would be published for subscribers at 7s. 6d.

I possess what may well be the only surviving copy of the prospectus, a printed slip with a subscription form attached. I reproduce the text here.

The Rainbow Books and Music Either there exists a sufficient number of people to buy books because of their reverence for truth, or else books must die. In its books lie a nation's vision; and where there is no vision the people perish.

The present system of production depends entirely upon the popular esteem: and this means gradual degradation. Inevitably, more and more, the published books are dragged down to the level of the lowest reader.

It is monstrous that the herd should lord it over the uttered word. The swine has only to grunt disapprobation, and the very angels of heaven will be compelled to silence.

It is time that enough people of courage and passionate soul should rise up to form a nucleus of the living truth; since there must be those among us who care more for the truth than for any advantage.

For this purpose it is proposed to attempt to issue privately such books and musical works as are found living and clear in truth; such books as would either be rejected by the publisher, or else overlooked when flung into the trough before the public.

This method of private printing and circulation would also unseal those sources of truth and beauty which are now sterile in the heart, and real works would again be produced.

It is proposed to print first *The Rainbow*, the novel by Mr D. H. Lawrence, which has been so unjustly suppressed. If sufficient money is forthcoming, a second book will be announced; either Mr Lawrence's philosophical work, *Goats and Compasses*, or a new book by some other writer.

All who wish to support the scheme should sign the accompanying form and send it at once to the Secretary, PHILIP HESELTINE, Cefn Bryntalch, Abermule, Montgomeryshire.

Murry has attributed the *Signature* and this second scheme to a single motive. Did they not follow upon each other with an interval of only a few months? This is plausible at first sight. But it omits a major circumstance - namely, that it was just within this interval that *The Rainbow* was prosecuted. At the date of the *Signature* such an event was not to be foreseen, and it made all the difference to Lawrence as a writer. It was one thing to know that editors could not be expected to accept difficult contributions like 'The Crown'; quite another thing to realise that publishers, hitherto amenable, would fight shy of future novels by the author of *The Rainbow*. One must recall that the now familiar private presses did not then exist, anyhow, not so far as Lawrence's need was concerned. It was out of

this particular need that the second project arose. Though I could not believe that it would come to anything more than a possible reissue of *The Rainbow*, this was enough to make me a hopeful subscriber. Support, however, was lacking. The project fell through. That summer *Twilight in Italy* and *Amores* would be 'flung into the trough' in the ordinary way.

At the beginning of March Lawrence and Frieda, finding Cornwall congenial, went to Zennor thinking to look for a furnished house - 'lovely pale hills, all gorse and heather, and an immense peacock sea spreading all below.'

They stayed at the inn, the Tinnars' Arms, for a fortnight, then moved amid snow blizzards to an unfurnished cottage not far off - at Higher Tregerthen on the St Ives road. Here 'under the moor and above the sea' they would 'live in poverty and quiet'. They started collecting their scattered bits of things from London. On leaving Byron Villas they had distributed for storage, among their friends, anything they wished to keep. One of these things was my mirror.

But the great attraction of the place to Lawrence was that there were really two cottages, the one behind on the seaward side being an annexe to the one fronting the road. Both were the same size - 'two *good* rooms and a scullery' - and cost the same, five pounds a year. Might not this be the nucleus of that which had been Lawrence's dream? The thought filled him with new health. And of course it was spring. 'I am beginning to feel strong again,' he wrote, 'life coming in at the unseen sources,' though he was also 'so tired, so tired, so tired of the world' that he could have died there and then were it not that 'one must not die without having known a real good life, and a fulfilment, a happiness that is born of a new world from a new centre.'

I believe, if we cannot discover a terrestrial America there are new continents of the soul for us to land upon. Virgin soil. Only one must get away from this foul old world, one must have the strength to depart...

In the same letter he speaks of the Murrays coming to live at Tregerthen. 'It is always my idea, that a few people by being together should bring to pass a new earth and a new heaven.' Poor Murray! But in the next letter, though still cheerfully engaged in furnishing -

I have made a dresser, which is painted royal blue, and the walls are pale pink! Also a biggish cupboard for the food, which looks like a rabbit hutch in the back place. Here, doing one's own things in this queer outlandish *Celtic* country I feel fundamentally happy and free, beyond.

- he already knows that there can be no abiding place for him in Cornwall:

It is queer, how almost everything has gone out of me, all the world I have known, and the people, gone out like candles. When I think of —, or —, even perhaps the —s who are here, it is with a kind of weariness, as of trying to remember a light which is blown out. Somehow it is all gone, both I and my friends have ceased to be, and there is another country, where there are no people, and even I myself am unknown, to myself as well.

He continued to take an interest in us, sending kindly messages to Donald, asking for our news and encouraging me to write. He thought me culpably lazy about writing and too strenuous in other ways. That spring he wrote:

I am very glad to hear of the novel. I firmly believe in it. I think you are the only woman I have met, who is so intrinsically unattached, so essentially separate and isolated, as to be a real writer or artist or recorder. Your relations with other people are only excursions from yourself. And to want children, and common human fulfilments, is rather a falsity for you, I think. You were never made to 'meet and mingle', but to remain intact, *essentially*, whatever your experiences may be. Therefore I believe your book will be a real book, and a woman's book: one of the very few.

He himself was busy helping to settle the Murrys in the annexe. Murry has told' how, in response to Lawrence's urgent invitation, he and Katherine had left the French Riviera, where they were snatching a brief happiness under the nose of the War, and what a failure the Cornish experiment was 'right from the beginning'. His account shows how they each suffered in their different ways. Lawrence, in his account to me, was brief and to the point as usual.

The Murrys have gone over to the South side, about thirty miles away. The North side was too rugged for them and Murry and I are not really associates. How I deceive myself. I am a liar to myself about people. I was angry when you ran over a list of my 'friends' - whom you did *not* think much of. But it is true, they are not much, any of them. I give up having intimate friends at all. It is a self-deception. But I do wish somebody produced some real work I am very anxious to see your book.

If I am not conscripted, and Carswell isn't, I think we shall furnish a *nice* room in the Murrys' house, and if you would like to come and stay in it, we should be glad. Barbara Low has an old invitation for part of her summer holiday - she is our only prospect in the visitor way. I like her enough.

It is very fine here, foxgloves now everywhere between the rocks and ferns. There is some magic in the country. It gives me a strange satisfaction.

Many greetings from us both to you and Carswell.

After a visit from Murry Lawrence was always well disposed toward Donald. He felt relief in thinking of someone who was unable to beat up emotions. 'I must say I quite frequently sympathise with his point of view,' he wrote to me much later. It was the same with the few men friends whom he met through us from time to time. These did not greatly interest him, and to some he was definitely hostile. But 'at least from Donald's friends one gets a *real* reaction, a true, human response,' he once said grimly. It is significant that although Murry lived for weeks in the same house, he neither saw nor heard anything of the novel upon which Lawrence was working at the time.

In the same letter he was anxious about my health. I had been overtired. Earlier he had written:

I think you have been exhausting yourself. . . One has to withdraw into a very real solitude, and he there, hidden, to recover. Then the world gradually ceases to exist, and a new world is discovered, where there are as yet no people ... I hope you will be better. Don't talk about me with those others.

Now in the later letter he went on:

. . . also you said how you alternate between a feeling of strength and productiveness, and a feeling of utter hopelessness and ash. I think that is fairly well bound to be, because I think your process of life is chiefly exhaustive, not accumulative at all. It is like a tree which, feeling the ivy tightening upon it, forces itself into bursts of utterance, bursts of flower and fruition, using up itself, not taking in any stores at all, till at last it is spent. I have seen elm trees do this - covered, covered with thick flowering, making scarcely any leaves, taking any food.

But one has to live according to one's own being, and if your method is productive and exhaustive, then it is so. Better that than mere mechanical activity, housework, *etc.* Tell me how the novel has got on. I think that is very important.

5

This was in June, 1916. Though disappointed at his failure to form a 'group' of the kind he desired - a kind different in certain essentials from any of the groups imagined before by men of prophetic genius - Lawrence did not strike me as being unhappy. Rather he was angry, without depression. He was annoyed by 'the idiotic and *false* review' of *Twilight in Italy*, which appeared in *The Times Literary Supplement* for 19th June, and told its readers that Lawrence 'might have written a good book about Italy if he had been content to take things simply, and to see no more than he really saw' - which I take to mean no more than the reviewer thought he would have seen himself! But he was nearing the end of his novel, which he then thought to call *The Sisters*. 'It has come rushing out, and I feel very triumphant in it,' he wrote to me. And to Pinker in May he spoke of 'something quite new on the face of the earth', 'a terrible and horrible and wonderful novel. You will hate it and nobody will publish it. But there, these things are beyond us.' Again one is struck by the strangeness that Murry should have known nothing of this 'terrible and horrible and wonderful novel' until its English (and second) publication five years later. Until he wrote *The Plumed Serpent* Lawrence considered *Women in Love* his most important novel.

Ten days after his invitation to us he was going to Penzance to be examined for military service. 'If I must be a soldier, then I must - ta-rattatata! It's no use trying to dodge one's fate. It doesn't trouble me any more. I'd rather be a soldier than a schoolteacher, anyhow.'

His next letter, which he wrote to me some days after he had been examined and given exemption, is a useful commentary on the 'nightmare' passage in *Kangaroo*. It helps to distinguish the 'voice' in Lawrence from the individual man with his immediate reactions, both of which he fought to maintain in their differing integrities. 'Something makes me state my position when I write to you,' he says. '... It was experience enough for me, of soldiering. I am sure I should die in a week if they kept me. It is the annulling of all one stands for, this militarism, the nipping of the very germ of one's being.' He proceeds:

Yet I liked the men. They all seemed so *decent*. And yet they all seemed as if they had *chosen wrong*. It was the underlying sense of disaster that overwhelmed me. They are all so brave, to suffer, but none of them brave enough, to reject

suffering. They are all so noble, to accept sorrow and hurt, but they can none of them demand happiness. Their manliness all lies in accepting calmly this death, this loss of their integrity. They must stand by their fellow-man: that is the motto.

This is what Christ's weeping over Jerusalem has brought us to, a whole Jerusalem offering itself to the Cross. To me, this is infinitely more terrifying than Pharisees and Publicans and Sinners, taking *their* way to death. This is what the love of our neighbour has brought us to, that, because one man dies, we all die.

This is the most terrible madness. And the worst of it all is that it is a madness of righteousness. These Cornish are most, most unwarlike, soft, peaceable, ancient. No men could suffer more than they at being conscripted - at any rate, those that were with me. Yet they accepted it all: they accepted it, as one of them said to me, with wonderful purity of spirit - I could howl my eyes up over him - because 'they believed first of all in their duty to their fellow-man'. There is no falsity about it; they believe in their duty to their fellow-man. And what duty is this, which makes us forfeit everything, because Germany invaded Belgium? Is there nothing beyond my fellow-man? If not, then there is nothing beyond myself, beyond my own throat, which may be cut, and my own purse, which may be slit: because *I* am the fellow-man of all the world, my neighbour is but myself in a mirror. So we toil in a circle of pure egoism.

This is what 'love thy neighbour as thyself' comes to. It needs only a little convulsion, to break the mirror, to turn over the coin, and there I have myself, my own purse, I, I, I, we, we, we - like the newspapers today: 'Capture the trade - unite the Empire - *à bas les autres.*'

There needs something else besides the love of the neighbour. If all my neighbours chose to go down the slope to Hell, that is no reason why I should go with them. I know in my own soul a truth, a right, and no amount of neighbours can weight it out of the balance. I know that for me the war is wrong. I know that if the Germans wanted my little house, I would rather give it them than fight for it: because my little house is not important enough to me. If another man must fight for his house, the more's the pity. But it is his affair. To fight for possessions, goods, is what my soul *will not* do. Therefore it will not fight for the neighbour who fights for his own goods.

All this war, this talk of nationality, to me is false. *I feel no* nationality, not fundamentally. I feel no passion for my own land, nor my own house, nor my own furniture, nor my own money. Therefore I won't pretend any. Neither will I take part in the scrimmage, to help my neighbour. It is his affair to go in or to stay out, as he wishes.

If they had compelled me to go in, I should have died, I am sure.

One is too raw, one fights too hard already, for the real integrity of one's being. That last straw of compulsion would have been too much, I think.

Christianity is based on the love of self, the love of property one degree removed. Why should I care for my neighbour's property, or my neighbour's life, if I do not care for my own? If the truth of my spirit is all that matters to me, in the last issue, then on behalf of my neighbour, all I care for is the truth of *his* spirit. And if his truth is his love of property, I refuse to stand by him, whether he be a poor man robbed of his cottage, his wife and children, or a rich man robbed of his merchandise. I have nothing to do with him, in that wise, and I don't care whether he keep or lose his throat, on behalf of his property. Property, and power - which is the same - is *not* the criterion. The criterion is the truth of my own intrinsic desire, clear of ulterior contamination.

Lawrence had now finished *Women in Love* all but the tide and epilogue chapter, and was starting to type it himself. 'It will be a labour - but we have no money. But I am asking Pinker for some.' And he had bought about a pound's worth of furniture (described in detail with prices) for the two rooms of the annexe.

It is such a pleasure, buying this furniture -I remember my sermon. But one doesn't really care. This cottage, that I like so much - and the new table, and the chairs - I could leave them all tomorrow, blithely. Meanwhile they are very nice.

What I wrote in answer to this, the longest letter I had yet had from Lawrence, I cannot wholly remember; but I certainly told him that he seemed in his attitude to property to admit something of the Christian spirit. This brought from him a letter twice as long as the last, and to me even more interesting. He began by saying I was right on 'nearly all' my points and that he wanted people 'to be more Christian rather than less: only for different reasons.'

Christianity is based on reaction, on negation really. It says 'renounce all worldly desires, and live for heaven'. Whereas I think people ought to fulfil sacredly their desires. And this means fulfilling the deepest desire, which is a desire to live unhampered by things which are extraneous, a desire for pure relationships and living truth. The Christian was hampered by property, because he must renounce it.

And to renounce a thing is to be subject to it. Reaction against any force is the complement of that force. So Christianity is based too much on reaction.

But Christianity is infinitely higher than the war, higher than nationalism or even than family love. I have been reading S. Bernard's Letters, and I realise that the greatest thing the world has seen is Christianity, and one must be endlessly thankful for it, and weep that the world has learned the lesson so badly.

But I count Christianity as one of the great historical factors, the has-been. That is why I am not a conscientious objector: I am not a Christian. Christianity is insufficient in me. I too believe man must fight.

But because a thing *has been*, therefore I will not fight for it. Because, in the cruder stage, a man's property is symbol for his manhood, I will not fight for the symbol. Because this is *a falling back*. Don't you see, all your appeal is to the testimony of *the past*. And we must break through the film which encloses us one with the past, and come out into the new. All those who stand one with the past, with our past, as a nation and a Christian people even (though Christian appeal *in the war* is based on property recognition - which was really the point of my last letter) must go to the war: but those who believe in a life better than *what has been*, they can view the war only with grief, as a great falling back.

I would say to my Cornishmen, 'Don't let your house and home be a symbol of your manhood.' Because it has been the symbol for so long, it has exhausted us, become a prison. So we fight, desperate and hopeless. 'Don't let your nation be a symbol of your manhood' - because a symbol is something static, petrified, turning towards what has been, and crystallised against that which shall be. Don't look to the past for justification. The Peloponnesian war was the death agony of Greece, really, not her life struggle. I am just reading Thucydides - when I can bear to - it is too horrible to see a people, adhering to traditions, fling itself down the abyss of the past, and disappear.

We must have the courage to cast off the old symbols, the old traditions: at least, put them aside, like a plant in growing surpasses its crowning leaves with higher leaves and buds. There is something beyond the past. The past is no justification. Unless from us the future takes place, we are death only. That is why I am not a conscientious objector. The great Christian tenet must be surpassed, there must be something new: neither the war, nor the turning the other cheek.

What we want is the fulfilment of our desires, down to the deepest and most spiritual desire. The body is immediate, the spirit is beyond: first the leaves and then the flower: but the plant is an integral whole: therefore *every* desire, to the very deepest. And I shall find my deepest desire to be a wish for pure, unadulterated relationship with the universe, for truth in being. My pure relationship with one woman is marriage, physical and spiritual: with another, is another form of happiness, according to our nature. And so on for ever.

It is this establishing of pure relationships which makes heaven, wherein we are immortal, like the angels, and mortal, like men, both. And the way to immortality is in the fulfilment of desire. I would never *forbid* any man to make war, or to go to war. Only I would say, 'Oh, if you don't spontaneously and

perfectly *want* to go to war, then it is wrong to go - don't let *any* extraneous consideration influence you, nor any old tradition mechanically compel you. If you *want* to go to war, go, it is your righteousness.'

Because, you see, what intimation of immortality have we, save our spontaneous wishes? God works in me (if I use the term God) as my desire. He gives me the understanding to discriminate between my desires, to discern between greater and lesser desire: I can also frustrate or deny any desire: so much for me, I have a 'free will', in so far as I am an entity. But God in me is my desire. Suddenly, God moves afresh in me, a new motion. It is a new desire. So a plant unfolds leaf after leaf, and then buds, till it blossoms. So do we, under the unknown impulse of desires, which arrive in us from the unknown.

But I have the power to choose between my desires. A man comes to me and says, 'Give me your house.' I ask myself, 'Which do I want more, my house, or to fight?' So I choose.

In nearly all men, now, the greater desire is *not* to fight for house and home. They will prove to themselves, by fighting, that their greater desire, on the whole, was *not* to fight for their nation, or sea-power, but to know a new value, to recognise a new, stronger desire in themselves, more spiritual and gladdening. Or else they will die. But many will die falsely. *All Greece died*. It must not be so again, we must have more sense. It is cruelly sad to see men caught in the clutches of the past, working automatically in the spell of an authorised desire that is a desire no longer. That *should not be*.

In the same letter he refers to his story *England, My England!* which he had written about a year before (though it had only recently appeared in the *English Review*) and had based on fact so clearly as to give pain to kind friends. He had made the man in the story die in the War. Now, after his story was public property, he learned that the real man had since been killed in France.

It upsets me very much to hear of P— L—. I did not know he was dead. I wish that story at the bottom of the sea, before ever it had been printed. Yet, it seems to me, man must find a new expression, give a new value to life, or his women will reject him, and he must die. I liked M— L—, the best of the M—s really. She was the one who was capable of honest love: she and M—. L— was, somehow, a spiritual coward. But who isn't? I ought never, never to have gone to live at —. Perhaps M— L— won't be hurt by that wretched story - that is all that matters. If it was a true story, it shouldn't really damage.

But in a postscript he adds, 'No, I *don't* wish I had never written that story. It should do good, at the long run.'

Such quotations contain useful examples of the bewildering thoroughness with which Lawrence preferred life before logic. It must be faced that he was

consistent only in the faithfulness of his aim and the unconstraint of his expression. He can rejoice in his possessions yet part with them tomorrow, exalt Christianity yet forsake it, regret his pain-giving story yet abide by it.

In another passage from the same letter he treats of the deception - as he considered it - which lay in the procreation of children by those who have in themselves no other hope than this, to bring forth.

There are plenty of children, and no hope. If women can bring forth hope, they are mothers indeed. Meanwhile even the mice increase - they cannot help it. What is this highest, this procreation? It is a lapsing back to the primal origins, the brink of oblivion. It is a tracing back, when there is no going forward, a throwing life on to the bonfire of death and oblivion, an autumnal act, a consuming down. This is a winter. Children and child-bearing do not make spring. It is not in children the future lies. The Red Indian mothers bore many children, and yet there *are* no Red Indians. It is the truth, the new perceived hope, that makes spring. And let them bring forth that, who can: they are the creators of life. There are many enceinte widows, with a new crop of death in their wombs. What did the mothers of the dead soldiers bring forth, in childbed? - death or life? And of death you gather death: when you sow death, in this act of love which is pure reduction, you reap death, in a child born with an impulse towards the darkness, the origins, the oblivion of all.

Yet another passage speaks of that kind of 'disastrous act of love'

which is a pure thrill, is a kind of friction between opposites, interdestructive, an act of death. There is an extreme *self-realisation*, *self-sensation*, in this friction against the really hostile, opposite. But there must be an act of love which is a passing of the self into a pure relationship with the other, something new and creative in the coming together of the lovers, in their creative spirit, before a new child can be born: a *new flower* in us before there can be a new seed of a child.

Soon afterwards I was to have an argument with Lawrence about what then seemed to me his arbitrariness. He had said, I think, that he could foretell with absolute certainty from any given couple whether a child born of that couple would be in his sense of the word a 'living and lifegiving child or a deathly and retrogressive one'. But I pleaded that there was always an unknown element, and that this element had a way of upsetting the wisest calculations. 'The wind bloweth where it listeth' was my way of putting it, and I held that God or Nature had always an odd trick up the sleeve. Lawrence, however, would have none of this; anyhow, not then. Neither would he in such a case admit of chance.

6

Lack of money was again the difficulty: lack of money and Frieda's insistence that she must see her children in London when their autumn term began - for which again money was needed. Her only way of seeing them was to wait outside of their schools as they came out, so to walk along, have a word with them, give them some small gift, and keep herself fresh in their memories. Lawrence hated and disapproved of this. But Frieda stayed firm.

By the middle of July they had exactly six pounds left in the world, and Lawrence had not been well. The *Smart Set*, from which he had been able at times to get ten pounds for a poem, had changed hands and did not want his work. There was only a tentative offer from an American magazine, *The Seven Arts*, for stories at a cent a word. He had poems for sale, and stories, and four-fifths of *Women in Love* (which had now acquired this tide) in a pencil draft, which he jibbed at typing himself and could not afford to send out. As soon as it was finished, he would try to write *only* 'family' stories that would be immediately saleable in some such magazine as the *Strand*. He loathed alike debts and obligations. But meanwhile what? Nothing for it but to apply once more to Pinker.

Pinker, still hopeful of the financial future and always kindly, sent along fifty pounds on the strength of the unseen manuscript. Then - lovely and unexpected - came a letter from Amy Lowell in America, enclosing a present of sixty pounds. Being herself a poet, she knew how to give in such a way that acceptance by another poet was as little painful as possible. So Lawrence thanked her warmly. Prophets still are fed!

He foresaw, however, that *Women in Love* would be a difficult piece of goods to sell. And though he never once failed to deliver solid commodities for every advance by his agent, he chafed against this 'imminent dependence' on 'a sort of charity'. If only some publisher might see his way to subsidise him. Could not Pinker bring this about? In Cornwall he could live, he said, on one hundred and fifty pounds a year. With two hundred pounds a year he 'could send everybody to the devil'. Pinker said he would try. No doubt he did try. But nothing came of it.

At this juncture a young and admiring American journalist, Robert Mountsier,

had come to England largely that he might make Lawrence's acquaintance. With him came a girl friend, Esther Andrews, who lived by drawings of a frankly journalistic sort for the magazines. These two went down to stay for a time in the annexe in Cornwall. Both were immediately and violently attracted by Lawrence, and Mountsier undertook to act, with Pinker's cognisance, as Lawrence's short-story agent in America.

Though living with the Murrays had been a failure, and they were away at Mylor near Falmouth, Lawrence kept in communication with them and even visited them twice. He did not easily give people up. Perhaps, he thought, it had been a mistake living quite so close together. People must have room to be themselves without knocking against each other at every turn.

In July he sent me *Amoves*, which had found a home with Duckworth and appeared that month with a dedication to Ottoline Morrell. Here were the last poems gathered from his youth. In August there was talk of his coming with Frieda to London and using our house in September, but he changed his mind and decided to let Frieda go by herself. 'I can't come to London - spiritually *I cannot*... I am *much* too terrified and horrified by people - the world - nowadays ... I had much rather be Daniel in the lion's den, than myself in London. I am really terrified.' He was even terrified by the idea of 'getting into a big train'. It was decided in the same letter that I should pay my long-promised visit to them in Cornwall, arriving on September 3rd. Donald was asked too, but he could not get away. Other visitors by the middle of August had come and gone - 'They make me feel how far off the world is - such stray, blown, sooty birds they seem. It is lovely to bathe and be alive now, in the strong, remote days.'

In the same letter he consults me about the title *Women in Love*. He does not feel at all sure of it. Lawrence often said he was 'no good at titles'. This did not prevent him from pouring forth suggestions for other people's books. Mine was to be *The Wild Goose Chase*. It is so nice and gay.'

Or *The Rare Bird*, or *The Love Bird* (very nice that), or just *Cuckoo!* (splendid). Do call it *Cuckoo*, or even the double *Cuckoo! Cuckoo!* I'm sure something bird-like is right. *Cuckoo!* is so nice, that if you don't like it, I think I must have it instead of *Women in Love*. Then *Loosestrife* is a nice name. Then *Had* is a good one. *The Pelican in the Wilderness* is lovely, but perhaps inappropriate: I don't know. *The Lame Duck* - I'm sure there is a suggestion in the bird kingdom - *The Kingfisher*, which I am *sure* is appropriate, or *Ducks and Drakes*. Write me a postcard which one you choose: only *don't* be too seriously tided.

We shall be very glad to see you and the Hon. Bird on the 3rd September (historic day): The Hon. Bird is the book, which must be a bird: it isn't Carswell.

I wish he were coming too.

In the letter of four days earlier:

I feel really eager about your novel. I feel it is coming under the same banner with mine. The 'us' will be books. There will be a fine wild little squadron soon, faring over the world. Nothing shall I welcome so much as books to ride with mine. Oh, to see them go, a gallant little company, like ships over an unknown sea, and Pizarro and his people breaking upon a new world, the books, now.

This, after a letter in between, replying to my own suggestion of a tide, *Bird of Paradise*, which referred to the legend that, being bereft of its feet, that bird can never alight.

We love the *Bird of Paradise* that is most beautiful and perfect a tide - do not budge a hair's breadth further - the Hon. Bird is christened; we all dance his name-feast. Do, somewhere in the book, put the story of the Bird of Paradise - quite tiny.

I have thought that the plight of the heavenly but footless bird must have struck Lawrence as having a similarity with his own.

My visit to Cornwall was all happiness - of the quietest kind. It was my first stay with the Lawrences. I was their only visitor, sleeping in the other cottage, which I 'made' myself each day. Nothing particular happened. Chiefly we talked - though even that not so very much. We also walked, but not so very much either, as the weather was not of the best. One of the reasons I got on with Lawrence was that I enjoyed 'doing' ordinary things.

I seem to recall that Lawrence spoke a good deal of Dostoevsky. Murry had written a book about him and had sent a copy to Lawrence. Lawrence perfectly disagreed with Murry's findings, and was incisive as well as eloquent on the subject. It would appear that Murry stands by that book today, although he finds it 'extravagant' as well as 'excessively intellectual' - two qualities that one might think hard to reconcile.

Lawrence's own view of Dostoevsky (by whom so many of us at the time were carried away) struck me then as difficult to follow. It now appears as remarkably level-headed, abounding in insight, and therefore surely, in the truest sense of the word, intellectual. It is, indeed, very much the view of the more advanced thinkers of today, with whom Dostoevsky *as a thinker* has somewhat lost his place. According to Murry, Lawrence was willing to admit in theory only 'that the "being" of man included his spiritual impulses also, and that these were just as profound and deep-rooted as his sensual impulses'; but that when it came to practice with Lawrence 'the spiritual and the sensual man were implacably opposed. In practice, therefore, he could only admit the one by

denying the other. And it was the spiritual man who had to be denied, and if possible annihilated.'

Now, as Murry writes this passage with reference to *Women in Love*, I do not see how anything except theory - *i.e.*, thought - comes into question. In any case one thing was clear to me even then, when I understood so little what Lawrence said or stood for, that alike in practice and in theory Lawrence wanted nothing more than *equal power* for the spiritual and the sensual. Were these implacably opposed in life? Perhaps. But so were the two bloodstreams within the human body - the pure one coming from the heart implacably opposed to the charged one returning to the heart. What Lawrence maintained was that now for too long the spiritual had been given a spurious, an *ideal* lordship over the sensual, as if the one bloodstream should be praised at the expense of the other. He saw in himself, as in all his generation, the disaster of a spiritual supremacy, which in the end makes men first sensually and then spiritually impotent. For spiritual supremacy at the cost of sensual abnegation was in his eyes inevitably followed by spiritual impotence. In restoring the just place and power of the sensual, the restorer must first *appear* to exalt it above the spiritual. But this is only in appearance and because the balance has been already destroyed. The theme of *Women in Love* is sensual impotence (not identical with sexual impotence) caused by the overweening lordly vanity of too long a reign of spiritual ideals. Hence it is intended to be what Murry was later to blame it for being, a 'deathly book' - deathly, but clearly displaying, for those who would see it, the hopeful seed of new human values. It was because Lawrence saw the restoration, the new adjustment, as so well worth fighting for, that he could neither enter into nor admire the point of view of Murry's soldier friend - that it was something fine 'to face death for a trick not worth an egg'. The trick for which Lawrence continually faced death and ultimately died was worth precisely an egg - the fertile egg of the future. And certainly the risking of death for anything worth less seemed to him either pose or folly. Still, Lawrence thought that Murry would perhaps come round. He was prepared to wait and to be friendly.

We carried on the daily work of the cottages without help from outside. With Lawrence one seemed, in such a case, to have enough time over for anything else one wanted. But the necessary daily jobs seemed so much a part of life that one did not fret to be done with them. Certain literary critics have found that in estimating Lawrence as a writer it is beside the point to note that even while washing up dishes he radiated life. But those who washed dishes with Lawrence know that it is not beside the point.

More than by his unceasing interest in my novel, which he had made me bring with me, I was pleased when he said that I 'fitted in' with their cottage life better

than the Londoners did. Perhaps from his North Midland upbringing and origin, Lawrence had a warm feeling for Scottish people. 'I don't care if every English person is my enemy,' he wrote to me once later; 'if they wish it, so be it. I keep a reserve for the Scotch.' He had not a good word to say for the Irish character. He detested anything like professional 'charm'. There was prejudice here, of course, but it could be tracked down to a radical feeling. The inexpressiveness of the Northern temper, implying, as it does, a distrust of easy verbal expression, was congenial to him just as the so different Latin mentality with its subtle realism was congenial. In the facile intellectualising of emotion he found evidence of a certain poverty of nature. He saw this at its worst in the Irish and the Americans. Here, however, he was perhaps not more characteristic of the North than of the English working-class generally, whose experience it is to associate true warmth with verbal inexpressiveness. 'I think one understands best without explanations,' he said often. Or of those who talked and talked - 'they don't *Want* to understand.'

Another strongly 'working-class' trait in Lawrence was his extreme distaste of anything that could be regarded as indecent. It would indeed be easy to call him prudish. One night in Cornwall, after having just begun to undress for bed, I found I had left my book in the sitting-room, where Lawrence and Frieda still were, and I returned to fetch it. I had brought no dressing-gown with me, but there seemed to me no impropriety in my costume - an ankle-length petticoat topped by a long-sleeved woollen vest! Lawrence, however, rebuked me. He disapproved, he said, of people appearing in their underclothes. No doubt, if I had not privately believed my *négligé* to be attractive as well as decent, I might neither have ventured to appear in it nor have felt so much abashed as I did by Lawrence's remark. So, essentially, Lawrence was right after all! How more than horrified he was - furious - when from his flat in Florence, looking across the Arno, he was compelled to overlook also a stretch of mud and shingle which the Florentine *gamins* found a convenient spot for the relief of nature. He hated the domestic dog on account of its too public habits. In such respects Lawrence was no advocate of what is often, but wrongly, called 'the natural'. Still less was he an apostle of the nude. I am sure that he put down all our civilised indecencies - our coquetries as well as our callousnesses, our sophisticated desire to shock as well as our prurience - to a departure from natural reticence. On first thoughts this may seem strange to those who have not considered the matter closely. On second thoughts it will be seen that such a man, and only such, could have become the author of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*.

Lawrence's critics and friends at this time wanted another *Sons and Lovers*. But with *The Rainbow* he had turned definitely away from any such easy end.

Nobody who ever heard him describe the scenes and persons of his boyhood, or watched him re-create with uncanny mimicry the talk, the movements and the eccentricities of the men and women among whom he grew up, can doubt but that Lawrence, if he had liked, might have been a new kind of Dickens of the Midlands. Critics who contend that he was unable to create character or invent situations are confuted by the earlier scenes in *The Lost Girl* and by passage after passage from the short stories. We might have had from him a gallery of characters such as the housekeeper in *Lady Chatterley*, with all kinds of people - comic, touching or strange in their ordinary ways - if he had cared to try. Those who say, 'What a pity he did not care!' have a point of view with which it is difficult not to sympathise at times. With Lawrence, and perhaps with Lawrence alone, the dumb cottagers and inexpressive 'workers' of industrial England might for the first time have found a voice. Even as it is, we now see them *because* of Lawrence, as they have not been seen before. We are pierced with a passional knowledge of them never even suggested by any other writer. But he has given us, practically speaking, no characters.

'Character' for Lawrence belonged to the dead past - to a way of life that he strove to transcend. Character, of course, was amusing and interesting, and would, of course, persist. But the interest in it was a literary interest and, so far as life goes, was static. Character - which Lawrence savoured as well as anybody - had been *used* as a demonstration of life until it had become stereotyped - a *made*, instead of a spontaneous thing. At the best it had now come to provide the merely sensational or merely intellectual excitement (and Lawrence found the modern division into sensationalism and intellectualism a division into two equal stalenesses) of working out a psychological problem. Given *a*, *b* and *c* acting upon each other and being acted upon by circumstances, what will be the result? All of which *seems* to have a lot to do with life, all of which is, indeed, so much the appearance of life that it is easy to mistake it for life itself. But it is not life.

The best writers have known by instinct that it is not. A writer like Hardy, as Lawrence well reveals in his exposition (everywhere rejected at the time and only recently published in part), passes through the surface of human character to the deeper interest of life with its crisscross currents beneath. He shows his people in their relation to the moor and the sky. In our memory of their almost accidental conflicts with each other, we see rocks and trees and storms as equally, if not more truly, as the protagonists.

One might continue showing at what points many of the most objective of our major novelists, including Dickens, make the necessary diving escape from character into the life flow. Lawrence went a stride further in consciousness and in practice than any before him. He repudiated 'character' entirely, and retained

only the merest crust of outward form sufficient for the telling of a story. He knew so well how to tell a story, and his feeling for physical and outward appearances was so delicate and intense, that at first the repudiation is not noticed as such. It gives, however, the peculiar flavour to his books, which at first makes them so distasteful and so puzzling to many readers.

What is even more baffling than his repudiation of the old-fashioned, classic 'character', is his refusal of the whole modern machinery of psychology. This, indeed, has been a greater stumbling-block than the other.

After *Sons and Lovers* he had been, naturally, pounced upon by the psychoanalysts; and for a short time he looked with interest, even fascination, into this new realm. But it was for a short time only. Quickly he saw in it merely another attempt at mechanisation which, by the time it was finished with us would have finished us as living beings. 'They can only help you more competently *to make your own feelings*. They can never let you *have* any real feelings,' as he said of one famous psychologist. And real feelings - a real self without any self-importance - was one of the things Lawrence thought worth fighting for.

So he turned not only from the old, but from the modern, the contemporaneous, the 'latest'. And he was lonely, which he found hard to bear.

Murry has made the frank confession that, much as he and Katherine Mansfield delighted in Lawrence as a man and a talent, they were 'against him' in his aims from as early as 1915. But Murry goes on to say that all Lawrence's friends were against him. This is overstating the case. There was always a minority that believed enough in Lawrence throughout to believe also that his aim must be right.

I, for one, admitted that I did not comprehend his philosophy or see what he was driving at. But I knew that Lawrence was no madman, and I was convinced that his combination of qualities was not to be found in association with a mistaken man. Besides this, though each new book, *as a book*, came to me as a disappointment, there was not only a curious cumulative effect, but there was in each book that which had the power to enter into the texture of one's life and to work there like a leaven. Who else was writing books which even partially possessed this power? So far as I could see, nobody. I was therefore prepared to take Lawrence on trust as somebody who must be essentially right or he would not possess either this power or this persistence. I began to understand how far from his aims was the production of 'masterpieces'.

Knowing this of me, Lawrence forgave my intellectual shortcomings. I would grow up, he said, and he was ready to love anybody who would grow up. 'But the hideous wasters who will only rot in the bud, how I hate them!' And again -

'They don't *want* to understand, that's what is wrong.' So our friendship remained. But I was a very small drop of sweet water in his bucket. At times even Frieda feared that he was mad, declared that she would have to leave him, and shouted at him that she 'hated' all his writings now.

This, of course, was said in anger, but it had enough in it to present itself as a ready weapon when there came the desire to wound. Lawrence knew how to take it. He was sure, as he had a right to be, of Frieda's fundamental sympathy, cooperation and courage. But he knew also, that being a woman and in untried circumstances, Frieda might at any time go back upon him momentarily. I, being a woman, should no doubt have done the same in her place, if in my different way. But I was not in her place, and faith was easy for me. In Frieda Lawrence reckoned on such brief defections and, at the expense of a bit of rage, discounted them. They were not of the same order as the intellectual defections of those cleverer friends who were guilty of emotional stupidity.

I was present at many 'rows' between Lawrence and Frieda, some of them violent and exhausting enough. But I never felt any one of them to be of that deadly 'painful' nature which is of frequent occurrence between many couples who all the while protest their love with endearments and never get within arm's length of violence. It was indeed the thing about Lawrence which I understood best at this time, and it made me see in him a courage that I never saw in any other man in the same degree. Nor had I read of it, for it was something utterly remote from what is usually understood as the subjection of a woman by a man, in that it was free from egoism on the man's part, free too from bullying or any reliance on tradition. Lawrence asserted himself on the strength of his power. And he asserted the male principle, which he believed was destined to lead. But there was no egoism in it, and it left Frieda the utmost liberty of her female assertion, so long as she did not try to 'put across' mere female egoism. On his male egoism, should it appear, she was welcome to jump with all her weight. She did. Since then I have come across a similar spirit in some of Gaudier-Brzeska's letters. Most other men - a notable instance occurs to me in Robert Louis Stevenson - seem always to have shirked the true marriage issue, and so played false with disastrous effect both to their women and to their own manhood. But Lawrence was no shirker, just as he was no seeker of conquest over another human being for the sake of conquest. '. . . if we break, or conquer anyone . . . it's like breaking the floor joists, you're sure to go through into the cellar, and cripple yourself.' He succeeded in making Frieda pay the required tribute and become, in doing so, the most triumphant woman in the world.

He had chosen (after shattering misadventures for which he largely laid the blame upon himself) a woman from whom he felt he could win the special submission he demanded without thereby defeating her in her womanhood. Sometimes it seemed to us that he had chosen rather a force of nature - a female force - than an individual woman. Frieda was to Lawrence by turns a buffeting and a laughing breeze, a healing rain or a maddening tempest of stupidity, a cheering sun or a stroke of indiscriminate lightning. She was mindless Womanhood, wilful, defiant, disrespectful, argumentative, assertive, vengeful, sly, illogical, treacherous, unscrupulous and self-seeking. At times she hated

Lawrence and he her. There were things she jeered at in him and things in her that maddened him - things that neither would consent to subdue. But partly for that very reason - how he *admired* her! And to be ardently admired by Lawrence was something of a rarity, and it meant that the admired one was somebody rare. In Frieda Lawrence found a magnificent female probity of being, as well as of physical well-being. She could bear the pressure of his male probity - his 'demon' - as no other woman could have borne it. Sure in herself, she could accept anything and recover from anything. She was the 'freest' woman he had ever met, and if not mild she was by Lawrence teachable. She had this rare virtue - teachableness without mildness. Much will be written - something has already been written - about Frieda! For myself, I find that in her own very different way Frieda is a person as remarkable as Lawrence, and that Lawrence knew it. Two things are certain: that in all his journeyings he never saw another woman whom he would or could have put in her place: also, that Lawrence cannot be accepted without acceptance of his wife. Recently, in a popular daily newspaper as a result of an English home-to-home domestic enquiry, I saw some such heading as this: 'The Old Loyalties Gone, Husband and Wife now Simply Good Pals.' Lawrence and Frieda had dispensed with most of the 'old loyalties'. Each was capable of bitter complaints against the other uttered behind the other's back to a third party. But they kept the most ancient loyalty of all, and they never descended into being 'good pals'. Lawrence with Frieda was the man who does not shirk woman in any of her aspects. In return for her profound submission as wife to husband, he offered her fidelity and richness of life. She was a long time in coming to it. But the exchange, as I believe, was made. In passing it may be said - or rather circumstances compel that it should be said - that if Lawrence had not been potent in body as well as in spirit he would never have had Frieda to wife, or having her he would not have kept her. The suggestion has been made, though vaguely, that because the marriage was without issue Lawrence was impotent. To accept that would be to make both Lawrence and Frieda and all the circumstances of their life together a lie. But the untruth lies elsewhere. This is not the place in which to discuss or expose it. It must, however, be mentioned and denied.

I have said I was present at many rows between these two extraordinary people, the one so richly endowed with physical life, the other subtly and magnificently endowed with mind, responding with natural delight to the minds of others, yet bending all the force of his own to break the dominance of mind in our modern ways, and to destroy 'ideal' reactions in favour of true reactions out of which life would come trembling and renewed.

When I first arrived in Cornwall they told me in concert of a quarrel that had

taken place shortly before. I don't remember what it was about - probably Frieda's children - but it had been fought out to what Lawrence took to be a finish, and he had gone into the scullery at the back to wash up. While he was thus engaged, with his back to the living-room door, singing quietly to himself (Lawrence was slightly deaf) and working with a bit of a clatter at the enamel wash bowl, Frieda came in from the living-room carrying one of the stone dinner plates. His unconcerned roundelay after what had just passed (I only wish I knew which song, sacred or profane, Lawrence chose on this occasion) so wrought upon her that her wrath boiled up afresh. Down on the singer's head she brought the dinner plate.

It hurt him very much and might, of course, have injured him seriously. But he was as far from bearing Frieda a grudge as from turning the other cheek. 'That was like a woman!' said he, turning on her viciously, but on this occasion too much astonished to strike back. 'No man could have done such a thing when the quarrel was over, and from behind too! But as you *are* a woman,' he added ruefully, 'you were right to do as you felt. It was only lucky you didn't kill me. You might have. These plates are hard and heavy.'

No, Lawrence was no pacifist, though he could make peace; and he was far from believing that emotional differences could be settled by arbitration. Rather, he would say, the more we recognise essential differences the nearer we are to true peace. Also, the more we deny or elude that physical violence which is inherent in life, the more we deny to one another and ourselves those precious renewals of the vital flow which are to be had in no other way. By our denial of them we are driven to indulge in the perverse or apologetic violence of sensationalism in its many forms. Weekdays and Sundays we cannot have too many murders to read about, and the slow ideal deaths we undergo are in the end worse than those of either the real murderer or his victim. Being ourselves poverty-stricken in fear, in rage, in magic, in physical response, we crave for these things more than for bread. Go into the first cinema theatre and see how we devour the husks that swine would refuse. We do not even know in what our need consists. It is our illusion, the great illusion of civilisation, that we have outgrown the simple magic of touch, and of wonder, which is a kind of touch. Just as we have put the moon into our pocket encyclopaedias, and when we weep with boredom do not realise that we are crying for the moon in our blood, so, poor in the magic of naturally enlivening reactions of the blood from which fresh life can issue constantly, we are driven to that false, mechanical, organised reaction which is modern warfare. The Great War came, Lawrence would have it, when we were individually too frightened to fight, too Christian to smite, too meek or indifferent to respond to insult with swift violence.

Danger apart, there was nothing terrible about Frieda's rages, though Lawrence's did make you sit up and look out. Even so, I never felt that sense of shame or of lasting misery so many human rages inspire. True, Lawrence never really raged at me. Frieda, baffled and afraid of his intensity, felt more than once that he was mad and that she would have to leave him. But the feeling soon passed. She knew well enough that even beyond his own conscious knowledge he was fighting her for something worth while in which she could share.

That I, too, knew it was one of the reasons Lawrence put up with me. On this same visit Frieda appealed to me - not so much asking counsel as relieving herself by declamation to another woman in Lawrence's presence - 'What would you do, Catherine, if you had a man like that to deal with?' And I recall how deeply pleased they both seemed when I said I would thank my stars that a man like Lawrence should think it worth while to fight things out with me and bear no grudge that I fought with him.

This may not be missed in speaking of Lawrence. What here and there a pure artist like Gaudier will half-practise for a time by instinct, and perhaps before long throw up in despair, Lawrence felt it his business to maintain as the first urgent condition for everybody's health and happiness. A revised relation between the man and the woman was needed, and that not chiefly for the artist's sake, as in Gaudier's case, but for the sake of any man and woman who would be really alive.

'It needs a man and a woman to create anything,' he wrote to me that autumn, '... there is nothing can be created save of two, a two-fold spirit.' He put from him as a devilish temptation the idea that in singleness there was strength. In singleness of aim, certainly; in severance from the world of conformity; even in renunciation of adherents - alas! this also, as it must be! But never in the sexual pride of singleness which he took to be a denial of life at its source.

It is those who are married who should live the life of contemplation together. In the world, there is the long day of destruction to go by. But let those who are single, man torn from woman, woman from man, men all together, women all together, separate violent and deathly fragments, each returning and adhering to its own kind, the body of life torn in two, let these finish the day of destruction, and those who have united go into the wilderness to know a new heaven and a new earth.

I hope I have made it clear that a miserable account of Lawrence at this time, or any other, would be a false and misleading account. He had far too magnificent a talent for enjoyment, far too fine a capacity for work, to be miserable in the true sense of misery, which is dreariness, regret, sterility and doubt. He had an aim worth struggling for to the utmost, and he felt himself

growing strong in and for the struggle. One day you might hear him say he felt like never writing another line. And this he said, not so much in despair, as in the furious determination that life held better things than books. But within a week or so he would be sending you a volume of new poems in manuscript, or one of a series of essays that nobody would publish, or telling you that he was triumphantly typing the last chapter of a novel. At intervals he burned piles of manuscripts. Once he almost set the chimney on fire and revelled in its roaring. He enjoyed warming his hands at such fires of outgrown life. All along, when no entirely new thing was clamouring to be written, there would be something lying by, which waited upon his mood for its last revision. I came to take it as a sign, when Lawrence wrote to say he was writing nothing, that even as I read his letter he would be deep in some new undertaking.

When not engaged on a book or a story, Lawrence would be working at something else with precisely the same ardour and economy and dislike of outgrown accumulations. Once he bought a gauze shawl of Paisley pattern for Frieda - cheaply, because it had the moth in it - and set himself to make it whole without delay by mending it himself. It took him two entire days, working well into the night, and allowing only the shortest intervals for his meals. When I say I never saw Lawrence idle, I do not mean that he was that wretched thing, a time-haunted man. He was that as little as he was the Shavian 'writing machine'. He did not seem to be 'driven', either by clocks or by conscience. He worked more as a bird works, eagerly and unceasingly till the job on hand was finished. But he certainly valued time as any good worker must, and he was shocked in a light passing way when he noticed other people dillydallying or spending their hours on trivialities or lying unduly long in bed of a morning. I have heard him say that he needed nine hours' sleep out of the twenty-four, and he observed this as a rule, being neither a late sitter-up nor an unduly early riser. But throughout his fifteen-hour day he was 'doing things' all the time.

Besides, Lawrence was happy in that he had no struggle to create. The 'frail, precious buds of the unknown life', which for him were the only possessions worth fighting for came into being without his groaning or travailing. He had to struggle only for the condition - the 'small, subtle air of life' - in which alone these 'unborn children of one's hope and living happiness' could appear, and he had to shelter them in their growth from meddling or destructive hands. The happy demon of creation was his. All that was demanded of him was the courage to see that the demon's mouth was stopped neither by the world's disapproval nor by his personal fears.

So there was always happiness for Lawrence. He was always engaged upon something supremely worth while, with no less in constant view than a new

heaven and a new earth.

'I feel pretty happy inside too,' he wrote during that same 'bitter winter', when telling me he had finished *Women in Love*. ' . . . I have knocked the first loophole in the prison where we are all shut up ... I feel a bubbling of gladness inside. Frieda and I are in accord.' The same letter ends with a fancy of characteristic humour. 'It is wildly blowy here lately. I always expect to read in the papers in the morning that all England is blown clean and bare, and only a few people are hovering winged in the air.'

I have always greatly liked that picture of Lawrence reading a morning newspaper damp from the press which informs him that morning newspapers are a thing of the past! A man like this will, indeed must, suffer. But he is not subject to any pitiable misery.

The suffering was there all right. Not only in writing but in living, Lawrence had now discarded all the accepted 'ideal reactions' of his age in favour of those pristine, lost reactions from which, as we recovered them, he believed that life would come to us refreshed. And that he might the better do this he had made in sheer faith and hope the 'bitter act of rejection' - repudiation of his 'oneness' with the human world in which he found himself, and he had entered into a special kind of 'singleness' of which he was the initiator. With Christian idealism he repudiated also the ascetic ideal. While he accepted Milton's dictum - 'he for God only', he conceived that no man could be truly 'for God' who did not provide his woman with the full satisfaction of being the 'she for God in him'. For Milton it worked only in one direction; for Lawrence in two. And where for a Milton it was easy, because backed by the conventions, for a Lawrence it entailed misunderstanding, strife, and what appeared like a grave discrepancy in his being. But he saw this kind of singleness with its dual duty as the crucial need of humanity today. If it entailed initial discrepancies, largely because it must dislocate long habit, that must be faced and borne, with the blame for it.

Murry, perceiving the discrepancy, has based upon it his theory of Lawrence's failure. Till we understand Lawrence's active recognition of this duality with all that it involves, we shall fail to understand the peculiar heroism of his achievement. This was further bound up with his recognition that his life would not be a long one. He had that hard 'something to say' which it takes a man twenty years to enunciate, if only because before enunciation is possible he must have stripped himself of fear, while retaining the most sensitive and scrupulous responses to life at every point. One day I bewailed to Lawrence how unproductive my life appeared by the side of his. 'Ah, but you will have so much longer than I to do things in!' he answered quickly and lightly. Though we saw he was delicate, this certainty of his was so shocking that we did our best, with

remarkable success, to believe him wrong. There was no mistaking his own certainty that time for him might not be lost.

In the preface to *Collected Poems* (the publication of which was first suggested by Seeker that summer of 1916, though it did not in fact take place till the spring of 1928, when also the preface was written) Lawrence speaks of the bitter winter of 1916-17' and 'the cruel spring of 1917'. He speaks, too, of the young man who 'is afraid of his demon', and remarks upon having struggled 'to say something which it takes a man twenty years to be able to say' In 1916 Lawrence knew that about his undertaking which we others are only now beginning to see clearly. There is illumination in one of his poems which in 1916 must, I think, have already existed.

Something in me remembers
And will not forget,
The stream of my life in the darkness
Deathward set!

And something in me has forgotten,
Has ceased to care.

Desire comes up, and contentment
Is debonair.

I, who am worn and careful,
How much do I care?

How is it I grin then, and chuckle
Over despair?

Grief, grief, I suppose and sufficient
Grief makes us free
To be faithless and faithful together
As we have to be.

What Murry is too logical and too custom-bound to guess, is that Lawrence's paramount value lies precisely in the discrepancy he bewails.

8

My stay at Tregerthen was short - inside of a week - shorter than I had intended or than Lawrence wished. Donald, lonely at home, sent a telegram that fetched me back. Lawrence mocked at it all a little, but he had a way, not hurtful at all, of mocking gently at one. I remember our driving to the station at St Ives and saying goodbye with the sense that my visit had been broken in half. Better that, anyhow, than to have overstayed my welcome.

Lawrence, though his eyes were troubling him and he wanted to see an oculist, shook his head over any suggestion that he might run up to London. He remained, in fact, at Tregerthen till the following April; and then again, after a short break, till October, 1917.

It was to be a harsh fourteen months for him and Frieda. *Women in Love* was not to see print until November, 1920 and then only by private subscription in New York. It really looked as if no further book of his would ever see the light, with the possible exception of books of poems.

Lawrence, however, went on producing with unshaken faith. He was angry but dauntless. He was practical also, setting himself to get his poems, at least, printed in book form, and writing essays and stories for the few magazines (none of them able to pay well) which were interested. He kept his name before the public. Single correspondents were easily led to believe that he had ceased producing. In fact, however, a couple of weeks was a long enough cessation to make him declare that he was doing nothing. He would tell this when he would not tell that he was at work. As a rule his first mention of a book was when he had written a substantial part or was revising the whole.

At the same time there the War was. And so long as it was, Lawrence might as well stop writing novels. The novel needs for its creation an atmosphere, and for its reception a public. So Thomas Hardy found even in peace time and ceased to write novels after *Jude the Obscure*. But poems and essays are made of sterner stuff; and short stories can slip by. Lawrence fell back upon these. Novels could wait. He must not.

But the existence of *Women in Love*, even in unpublished manuscript, was a fermenting element in the life of those remaining months at Cornwall. It went the round and evoked the most violent feelings. If Lawrence was the Eager Heart

of our day he was also the *enfant terrible*. His innocence was not less disturbing than his insight. And he was far too completely dedicated to have much compunction in the matter of material for the expression of his vision.

In November he sent me a copy of the typescript to read - complete but for the epilogue. It made a painful but powerful impression on me. I did not know what to think of it, and, in fact, said little. Except for the interest which is maintained throughout, the great descriptive passages, and the queer sense of Lawrence's voice talking all the time; except, too, for a few details, chiefly in the matter of women's wear, which struck me as unnecessary and a little ridiculous, I found mainly suffering in the perusal. And I resented the infliction of an almost physical suffering and malaise by what purported to be a novel. All the same here was something. It made one pause. The usual critical outfit had to be discarded. Wait a bit! I must think about this! Anyhow, what a strange, new daring kind of richness of apprehension! "*Touché!*" cries the heart of the reader at every turn.

It was first rejected by Duckworth. I think it must have lain on the table at one time or another of every leading publisher in London. As Lawrence touchingly remarked to his agent, 'I *do* admire it, but I am not everybody.'

In December there was some word of Koteliansky placing the book in Russia (translated, of course). But private as well as public readers in England were mostly united in hatred.

An exception among the public readers was Mr Cecil Palmer, who, though he returned the novel, expressed a wish that he were rich enough to issue it privately at his own expense for his own pleasure.

The notable exception among the private readers was Mr George Moore. He was to 'praise it highly'. But this was not yet, and anyhow it was praise of a nature only too strictly private. Lawrence's fellow-writers, even when they admired him, fought very shy of saying so except in the most general terms. It became the fashion to remark of him, 'Of course he has genius, but . . .' Among those who saw the manuscript was Mr Galsworthy, and Lawrence wrote to Pinker asking to be told 'what dear old out-of-date Galsworthy had said'. One imagines Lawrence's face if he ever read the reply. But it would appear that Pinker had the discretion to draw a veil.

Lawrence sat perfectly tight. This, he declared, was a book 'that would laugh last'. It was 'true and unlying and will last out all the other stuff'. Again he inveighed against the world. It 'has got such a violent rabies that that makes it turn on anything true with frenzy'. But he remained entirely confident, and not at all repentant.

Though he continued to produce, however (his *Studies in Classic American*

Literature had their beginnings early in 1917) he felt more and more hopeless of selling any kind of work in England to the extent of making a living. Could he even go on much longer producing in England? No, he would suffocate if he had to stay.

I wanted him to write to Thomas Hardy. And it seemed that the idea had also occurred to him. Hardy, especially in *Jude the Obscure*, had meant much to Lawrence. And it was to be thought that the reception accorded to *Jude the Obscure* would ensure sympathy for the author of *The Rainbow*. But after a moment's thought he shook his head. 'No,' he said, 'old age is a queer thing. It would be no use. There's something gone dead, I feel, in Hardy these days. He's given way somewhere - gone. Nothing there you can appeal to any more.'

As things were, it could not be denied that the only active encouragement to Lawrence as a writer came from America. In that direction was the only chance of escape. He felt himself awfully like a fox that is cornered by a pack of hounds and boors who don't perhaps know he's there, but are closing in unconsciously'. Increasingly he believed that his country was 'capable of not seeing anything but badness in him for ever and ever' and that its 'vital atmosphere was poisonous to him to an incredible degree'. Even in Cornwall he had begun to feel 'smothered and weary' and 'buried alive'. Early in the year he applied for passports to America. He must transfer both himself and his public. If England would not have him, he would seek his 'virgin soil' elsewhere. And where else was there but America?

Not that Lawrence had any pleasant, puerile illusions about America. 'The people and the life are monstrous.' He felt sure of this beforehand. But he felt that America 'being so much worse, *falsier*, further gone than England', was 'nearer to freedom'. England in his view had 'a long and awful process of corruption and death to go through', whereas America had 'dry-rotted to a point where the final seed of the new' was 'almost left ready to sprout'.

The Americans are *not* younger than we, but older; a second childhood. But being so old in senile decay and second childishness, perhaps they are nearer to the end, and the new beginning.

At the same time, in America 'the skies are not so old, the air is newer, the earth is not so tired'. And, of course, to see how life was in other countries was necessary to Lawrence - part of his destiny, as he later recognised. As he lost hope after hope of making a real life for himself in England, he became ever surer that his early Florida idea had been right in its essence - right, he admitted, 'all save the people. It is wrong to seek adherents. One must be single.'

But Lawrence had grown up in a tough school, and was a sage believer in 'waiting for circumstance'. 'There is a difference,' he warned me once, 'between

"you never can tell what will happen", and "you never can tell *how* it will happen". One can tell what will happen more or less. Some things one knows inwardly and infallibly. But the how and the why are left to the conjunction of circumstances.'

So he went on working, and all the while was 'hammering out' his philosophy. During January he had recomposed the first part of *Women in Love*. At the same time he was rewriting and putting into order the cycle of poems at first called *Man and Woman*, which 'might as well', he said, 'have been called *And Now Farewell*', as it marked 'a sort of conclusion of the old life' in him.

Just because of this, the severance with his old life being still fresh, he felt 'most passionately and bitterly tender' about these poems - so much so that he could not bear either to keep them longer in the house or to send them to Pinker. 'It has meant a great deal to me, and I feel more inclined to burst into tears than anything.' On February 18th, the day he completed them, he posted them to me to read and hand on to Hilda Aldington. He would see what she and I felt. '*Essentially*,' he had said in an earlier letter, 'I don't want to see a soul in London except you two, and perhaps Hilda Aldington and Robert Mountsier, who has gone back.' Thus Lawrence kept handing his past to us. And even as one sat trying to catch up with his past, one had the certainty, not without a kind of sadness, that already he was making a new flight into the unknown.

Over every one of his books and every period of his life Lawrence would thus read the funeral service. He was a great discarder of the burden of living death which most of us drag about with us to the impediment of each new vital effort, even while we label them stepping-stones of our dead selves. But he never omitted from his funeral oration the passage about a glorious resurrection. In all Lawrence's graves - and he had many - there was a phoenix.

I shall never forget reading those poems in the author's neat handwriting in the tiny room over a garage to which we had moved upon Donald's being called up. We had let our house, had found these two rooms farther up the Grove at six shillings a week, and ourselves carried along enough of our furniture after nightfall to make them habitable. We should at least have this for a *pied à terre* so long as we could use it.

By the light of a candle I read the poems through. I confess that no other poet except Hardy (and Shakespeare in his sonnets) has so deeply conveyed to me the wistfulness of humanity as distilled in a noble heart - a heart the nobler for its perfect admission of imperfections. It is as if the lost and naked but indomitable human heart has come to murmur its adventures in your ear. And what rare, what original adventures! With Lawrence, as with Hardy, the very imperfections in the telling are to me a beauty. They are of a piece with the nature of the

adventure, giving a live pang of delight or sorrow, where 'the perfect poem', because of its very crystalline perfection, will often divert the pang of feeling into one of sheer admiration of a miracle. Not but what this kind of imperfection may be a special, most difficult and conscious art. I believe that it may, and that Lawrence's peculiar imperfections will prove to be preservatives of his thought. He will remain, as he meant to do, a man, as well as a voice speaking. In the case of *Man and Woman* I advised him to expunge a love-letter - beautiful and interesting, but a real, sent letter, in prose, which he had included with the poems. He did not at first agree about this, but came round later.

The title of *Man and Woman* was changed to *Poems of a Married Man*, and then again to *Look! We Have Come Through!* But as usual, and in this case more than usually Lawrence shrank from the idea of public print.

Already there was a small book of poems travelling round and meeting with rebuffs. The more important book could wait. It was April before he could bring himself to release this dove out of his ark to a world that 'was not ready'. After some rejections the book was accepted in August, with a brace of reservations, by Messrs Chatto and Windus. Lawrence was puzzled by the reservations. They included the omission of a poem which had already appeared in an anthology. But he submitted with a curse. No use in making a fuss! And he found in this publishing firm such 'nice old-flavoured people'. He was pleased with the format of the book when it appeared. He asked for twelve instead of six author's copies, and got them.

He had been busy throughout the spring with essays begun some time earlier on 'The Reality of Peace'. These he hoped to publish quickly - as applicable to the moment - in the magazines, and without too much delay in a little book to be called *At the Gates*. Some at least of the essays appeared in the *English Review* throughout the summer of 1917. But neither in that form, nor rewritten into something more metaphysical, did they find a publisher for their more permanent collection during his lifetime.

9

That April, on his return from a visit to the Midlands (his first excursion from Cornwall) he was seized with illness while in London. I had only a single glimpse of him, and did not know till after two weeks that he had been taken ill later that same day, had been nursed by Koteliansky at Acacia Road for five days, had then 'scrambled out to Hermitage' in Berkshire to the Radfords' cottage, and after a short time there, returned to Cornwall. He wrote to me from Treggerthen on April 28th, explaining why he had not seen me again, and adding:

You were very sad when I saw you: and there seemed nothing that could be said. Things must work themselves out. It is a great weariness. I felt, that as far as peace work, or *any* work for betterment goes, it is useless. One can only gather the single flower of one's own intrinsic happiness, apart and separate. It is the only faithful fulfilment. I feel that people *choose* the war, somehow, even those who hate it, *choose* it, choose the state of war and in their souls provoke more war, even in hating war. So the only thing that can be done is to leave them to it, and to bring forth the flower of one's own happiness, single and apart.

It is so lovely here, now, my seeds have come up, there is a strange joyfulness in the air. For those of us who can become single and alone, all will become perfectly right.

You were queer and sad as the train went off at Leicester Square Station. But don't be sad. In the innermost soul there is happiness, apart from everything.

Come and stay here if ever you can, and if you feel like it.

The Lawrences had already a guest - a woman. She was unhappy, and in the strength of her unhappiness could not resist attaching herself to Lawrence and trying to match her strength against Frieda's - disastrously to herself. Yet she took away with her, when she left later that summer, an enduring admiration. And I dare say she would now assert that her visit to Cornwall was the least disastrous episode in her life. Where Lawrence and Frieda were, mishaps would occur. But Lawrence had a way of communicating something that flourished in separation, and so was lastingly precious.

That spring Frieda was ill. She had a week or two of internal trouble that made Lawrence anxious. And again at the beginning of August she was crippled with neuritis in the leg, which gave great pain and kept her in and out of bed for

almost a month. Lawrence nursed her with devoted skill.

Not that either Lawrence or Frieda made much of illness. Lawrence, if one may so apply the expression, had a talent of his own for it. If others were ill he was a marvellous nurse. For himself, while hating to be treated in any professional way as an invalid, he was patient and skilful with a kind of innate philosophy that worked remarkably well. It was the only matter in which he was 'adaptable'.

Though the enemy seizes my body for a time, I shall subtly adjust myself so that he pinches me nowhere vitally, and when he is forced to release me again I am the stronger.

In one of my letters I had mentioned a neuralgia which had cursed me for some time, and he replied:

I have a great horror of pain, acute pain, where one keeps one's consciousness. I always thank my stars that I don't have those pains that scintillate in full consciousness. I am only half there when I am ill, and so there is only half a man to suffer. To suffer in one's whole self is so great a violation, that it is not to be endured.

At the same time that Frieda was ill I was laid up at Bournemouth, where Donald and I had now gone while he was at a cadet school. On the top of that I met with a slight motoring accident which kept me a fortnight in bed, and Lawrence wrote scolding and giving me good advice. Again he was full of suggestions for titles for my novel, which was only now nearing an end of its rewriting.

But his real news was that he had been refused a passport for America 'in the interests of national service'. It was a blow, and he felt that he would die with this the one loophole closed. He saw himself as one condemned to 'die of foul inward poison', and England as emitting a stench that was fatal to him. England was his 'City of Destruction'. At all costs he must get out.

Again, though he was full of heartfelt curses for the country that could neither use him nor let him go, curses the more heartfelt in that he so loved his country, Lawrence behaved with remarkable common sense. That late summer, as he has recounted in the 'Nightmare' chapter of *Kangaroo*, he occupied himself as a farm-labourer, working as constantly and hard as any of the country labourers at harvesting. At the same time he made his own three gardens bloom. In addition to the tiny walled one which he had rented at a shilling a year with the cottage, he had acquired two more from the Hockings of Lower Treggerthen, the neighbouring farm, where the Higher Treggerthen folk bought their milk and sometimes got their pies and puddings baked. And he combined the successful production of flowers and vegetables with the writing of 'philosophy'.

The two combined well, and this was by no means a time without happiness for Lawrence, though for Frieda it was probably the most trying period of their life together. Lawrence was a fine and rejoicing gardener. Wherever he went he planted, and his plants came up. To work peacefully with the earth was the best antidote to the War and the next best thing to migration. 'I sit,' he wrote to me that summer, 'a very tender nursling on the knees of the gods.' Till he could leave England, Cornwall was the best place to be in. He loved it. It had a drugging effect on the hard mentality that he felt was a modern evil. Also working in the fields day after day with the dark-eyed young people of Lower Treggerthen, he believed for a time that he had found in one of the young men the 'blood brotherhood' which was as needful as a refreshed relationship between man and woman for the rich and complete life he sought. Murry had rejected the idea - so ancient that it shocked his modern mind - of a sacrament between men who would commit themselves in friendship. Any formal 'laying on of hands', outside of the Church, had seemed to him puerile and even revolting in its primitiveness. But a working man and a Celt, a man with a subtly pagan face, born in the shadow of these Druidical stones, yet English too, might, surely must, have some wordless understanding of one of the oldest of all human rites. I have heard Lawrence say that sexual perversion was for him 'the sin against the Holy Ghost', the hopeless sin. But he cherished the deep longing to see revived a communion between man and man which should not lack its physical symbols. He even held that our modern denial of this communion in all but idea was largely the cause of our modern perversions. To recover true potency, and before there could be health and happiness between man and woman, he believed that there must be a renewal of the sacredness between man and man.

But what he was to find later, to his deep delight, existing among the Mexican Indians - the occasional religious segregation of the male for the communal worship of something greater than himself, and so for the increase of his male power - he was excluded from by the barrier of race. Race was a barrier, he admitted. And among his own, he was to seek in vain for what he wanted and believed to be of fundamental importance. It is doubtful if the subtle, uncultured Cornishman understood much better than the subtle, cultured Londoner, or indeed than the simple German wife, who regarded any relegation of her man's emotions as a species of 'unfaithfulness'. It is even fairly certain that the Cornishman's mystification - as he was also given to talking - added to the cloud of suspicion that was now gathering over the cottage at Higher Treggerthen. It surely added greatly to the loneliness of Lawrence. Here was one of the closed doors of the hated modern system, which he must hereafter refrain from trying to shatter except with words. If he hurled at it his heart, that heart would be not

merely bruised but branded. Lawrence, for all his innocence, was no fool. Loneliness was preferable to certain kinds of misunderstanding.

The cloud of war suspicion, which had begun to gather even before Christmas, was pretty thoroughly formed by August. Frieda was not only German but loudly provocative and indiscreet. In the spring Lawrence had committed the extravagance of buying for five guineas a worn cottage piano 'with an old red silk front and a nice old musty twang': and with its help he had set himself to increase his already considerable repertoire of songs. Some of these - especially as rendered in Frieda's loud, fresh voice - could not have been mistaken for anything but German. Others must have sounded equally bloodcurdling to the curious or the hostile, who took to lying beneath the garden wall to listen. Through Cecil Gray, Lawrence had recently become acquainted with the researches of Mrs Kennedy Fraser. And he had some Hebridean numbers which he howled in what he ingenuously supposed to be the Gaelic, at the same time endeavouring to imitate the noise made by a seal!

It was unfortunate that there was a flat-roofed turret to the annexe commanding a seaward view, that submarines were busy in the Channel, and that a foreign coal-boat chose to be wrecked on the rocks below Tregerthen. We, who lived through the War, know how favourable such a combination could be for the development of war-spite against any individual who not only was not doing what the crowd was doing, but openly condemned such doings. In Lawrence's case, though he himself was never to discover it, I am credibly informed that a half-demented woman, not belonging to the neighbourhood, had set herself deliberately to spy within the cottage on the pretext of doing an occasional day's charring there. It was a time at which such a being could win a hearing of those who lacked her excuse for such behaviour. By August Lawrence letters were being held back and examined. I posted him one from Bournemouth on the 9th which did not reach him till the 13th. Nor was this a single occurrence.

It has been suggested that the Lawrences could have moved inland. In practice such a move was not so easy as it may now sound. The annexe was furnished and painted, the year's rent had been paid in advance, and Lawrence's gardens substantially helped their living. They rarely possessed so much money as would pay for a move. Besides, they loved their cottage. It suited them, and Lawrence, true born Englishman that he was, would never consent to being shifted from his home by mere bullying. As for ceasing to sing what songs he pleased and when he pleased, by his own fireside, that would have been an unthinkable submission.

One day when he was with the Hockings at market in Penzance, and Frieda

was across the fields calling upon Cecil Gray (who was now their nearest cultured neighbour and almost equally under suspicion with themselves), their cottage was searched by the military. Frieda, returning alone, was frightened; Lawrence, arriving later, was shocked and furious. Henceforward he would be on his guard, trust nobody, be intimate with nobody. Though there had been nothing to betray, somebody had undoubtedly acted as an informer. Any specified suspicions he may have had were groundless, though natural and indeed inevitable. Other facts besides the searching of the cottage had made him aware that there was considerable and disseminated spite against him, largely on Frieda's account. But now some individual had taken the definite step of going to the authorities. He was not to know who had done this. He knew, however, that for him and Frieda it was a matter of waiting for further developments. On Friday morning, October 12th, a young officer with a search-warrant arrived with two plain-clothes detectives and a local police sergeant. The Lawrences were ordered to clear out of Cornwall within three days. No charges were made or explanations given. None, of course, were needed. Simply the Lawrences were undesirables. Lawrence was horror-stricken, but composed. Frieda was voluble, argumentative and defiant to rudeness. In being her champion Lawrence had to undertake the championship of her nation. This, without doubt, was unfortunate for Lawrence. It was also, without doubt, necessary. Frieda's insistence, combined with the ineptitude of the authorities, made it so.

They were at 'the fag end of poverty'. Thirteen pounds and ten shillings for several contributions in the *English Review* had come in belatedly in September. I doubt if Lawrence possessed five pounds in the world when he reached London the following Monday and took a taxi with his luggage to Hampstead to find refuge with his staunch little friend, Mrs Ernest Radford, at Well Walk. That day or the next he called round, hoping to find me. But I had gone to Edinburgh where Donald was ill in a military hospital. It was some days later before I heard from him what had happened.

When they had been a week at Well Walk, Hilda Aldington insisted upon their using her rooms in Mecklenburgh Square, or rather her one huge room, that had some kind of appendix by way of scullery. They accepted with gratitude, remained there about a month - of necessity and her kindness largely as her guests - and then went to a flat in Earl's Court Square offered by Cecil Gray's Scottish mother, whom I had seen on Lawrence's account when in Edinburgh.

Mrs Luhan is very far out when she asserts, on the alleged authority of Frieda, that Lawrence's English friends deserted him at this or any juncture. They were as shocked as Lawrence himself over the eviction, and as helpless. But, with a few notable exceptions, they quietly did what they could, distressed that it was

so little, and the Lawrences were enabled to live without running into debt. Lawrence himself was the last man to forget any kindness. Frieda, no doubt unwittingly, gave Mrs Luhan an impression that laid itself open to jealous misconstruction, causing the kind of mistake that made Lawrence rage. Among his friends at this time were Dr and Mrs Eder, and with them Lawrence evolved a plan for migrating in spring to 'the eastern slopes of the Andes'. The Eders actually seem to have produced somebody who was going to produce a thousand pounds for the expedition.

10

While the Lawrences were still at Mecklenburgh Square we returned from Edinburgh and took two furnished rooms in Hampstead. Our own house was let until Easter, as also now the tiny rooms over the garage. (So we eked out our living.) Upon being discharged from hospital Donald was also discharged from the army. I was expecting a baby in the spring. Lawrence came by himself to see us. That same afternoon it happened we had another visitor, a young man who was anxious to meet Lawrence, but still more anxious to convince us that he had produced a literary masterpiece. Lawrence, therefore, sat silent, leaning his head on his hand and looking as if affected with sea-sickness. The last thing he was interested in was literary masterpieces as such, and anyhow he did not believe that this was one. When the young man had left, he uttered some expletives and became apparently cheerful. True, he hardly knew which way to turn next, or how to get the money to turn at all. But as usual he was full of plans, and did not give the effect of being distressed. Would we join the party in the spring and go to the eastern slopes of the Andes? He liked the idea of a baby in the party, but as this baby was not to arrive till the end of May, we did not see ourselves as possible starters. It was decided that he would let us know what the eastern slopes were like, and that we should follow if we could. Meanwhile he rather surprised us by wanting to return to the Cornish cottage for Christmas. His idea was apparently to face the thing out, and he was trying to get the Asquiths to help him with the authorities. But sympathetic as the Asquiths were, they were powerless in this and told him so. Were they not themselves the object of active popular suspicion? One just had to grin and bear it. Everybody declared that the War would end that winter.

It was about this time that George Moore read the manuscript of *Women in Love*, and 'says it is a great book and that I am a better writer than himself, as Lawrence wrote to me later, admitting that this was 'really astounding'. Who sent George Moore the manuscript I do not know. I am sure it was not Lawrence, though it was possibly Pinker at Lawrence's instigation. Nor do I know how the pleasing verdict was conveyed. It was certainly received and must, one thinks, have been given. But that it came direct from Ebury Street seems unlikely. Almost at the same time there was a suggestion that Bertrand Russell, 'who used

to be a fairly intimate friend of mine, but whom I don't agree with', might be asked to write a letter recommending the novel to an Irish publisher.

Nothing came of either of these things, and the immediate situation remained very difficult. How was Lawrence to be helped? The only way we could think of was that he might write for *The Times Educational Supplement*. Donald knew the editor, Mr G. S. Freeman, to whom he made the most urgent representations, with the result that an interview took place, and Lawrence promised that he would do his best to turn out articles such as were wanted. Having heard his account of what was wanted, I had my doubts, but held my peace. He set to work, however, willingly and without delay.

Of one thing Lawrence was sure, he could not remain longer in London. Shortly before Christmas he arranged to pay Dolly Radford a small rent for her cottage at Hermitage in Berkshire. It was bitterly cold with a half-thaw. 'God knows,' he wrote, 'I am not in a good mood in any way whatsoever.' From there he went for New Year to the Midlands. To his sisters, at least, the War had brought added material prosperity.

It was not Lawrence's private friends, nearly all of them poor people, and like himself harried by the War, who failed him in practical matters. (That they failed in understanding was not to be wondered at.) Today, however, when one can view the question dispassionately, it is hard to forgive the literary leaders for their determined aloofness. Admitted that he was a difficult man to help, he was eminently eligible, and one thinks that with goodwill some way might have been found to odo over a rough passage that was largely due to the exigencies of the War. One is forced to the conclusion that the goodwill was lacking. He himself felt that he was deserving of the temporary financial support he so greatly needed. Though Murry has declared that the demand was merely for intellectual support by way of 'recognition', Lawrence's own letters show that he made a frank appeal for funds. He understood perfectly the futility of requiring understanding. But he felt justified, on the strength of his known achievement, in asking his fellow-writers to take his honesty and potency as an artist on trust. Early that February (1918), when he was ill with a severe sore throat which knocked him out for three weeks, he urged Pinker to tempt some money for him out of 'some rich good-natured author'. And he suggested that Arnold Bennett might give him some 'to get along with' till his day came, as he was certain it would.

Could anything be simpler or more direct? Lawrence drew the line only at going himself hat in hand. He would make the demand through his agent as his due. There was no use, he pointed out, in deluding himself that he could make a living under present conditions in England. But engaged as he was at that very

moment on the final revision of his *Studies in Classic American Literature*, he was confident both in his future and in his immediate worth as a *financial investment*.

In an article written shortly after Lawrence's death Arnold Bennett has given his own account of this appeal. As Bennett was a very exact man there is no reason to doubt that his account, in its reserved way, is substantially correct. He saw the sense of the appeal. He was ready to contribute if others would join. But all the others refused. They asked themselves and each other why they need give a hand to Lawrence and they found no answer; which most certainly was what Lawrence expected and even, I surmise, desired to elicit. Exceptions there were. I know of two. Mr Alfred Sutro, hearing that the author of *Sans and Lovers* was in need, sent ten pounds, which later Lawrence repaid. Mr Montagu Shearman also sent ten pounds.

Bennett, I have no doubt, saw through the whole thing more clearly than would appear on the surface, and made a like surmise. Of all the outstanding writers of the time, he, one fancies, had the most lively appreciation of Lawrence both as man and as writer. Lawrence himself, never mistaken in such things, had an inkling of it, and more than once through Pinker he suggested that a personal meeting might be brought about. Yet Bennett, for some deeply felt reason, shrank from this. Evidently he could not believe that good would come of it. What he does not tell in his brief narrative is that he himself sent twenty-five pounds to Pinker for Lawrence. It would seem that he sent it in such a way as to have it conveyed merely as a business advance by Pinker for work in hand. We must give Bennett the credit for perceiving that, in sharp contrast to the typical beggar or borrower, the author of *The Rainbow* would find it far harder to accept than to demand money; that indeed the demand was for Lawrence a proud and permissible gesture, but the acceptance, should occasion arise, very difficult.

Though Lawrence remained in ignorance of this twenty-five pounds, he seems throughout the summer of 1918 to have felt friendly towards Bennett, while he was frankly scornful of the other literary leaders. Something truly human, as well as sweetly reasonable, emanated from Bennett. And to this, Lawrence responded. But he would push the affair to the utmost. Bennett should not so easily escape. That autumn, in yet more desperate need, he asked Bennett to find him a suitable London job. 'Bennett has publicly said that I have genius,' was the substance of his message. 'Then let me tell him that though men of talent are flourishing, this particular possessor of genius is forced to contemplate the fact that in a fortnight's time he will not have enough money to buy "bread and marge" - and this in spite of a pile of manuscript that will certainly be saleable at a day not far distant. Till that day comes, will Bennett use his influence to supply

the said man of genius with a suitable means of livelihood other than the risky one of literature?'

Bennett, as is well known, was at the time in control of an important department created by the War. But he refused point-blank to find Lawrence a place in it. The fact that Lawrence had genius, he replied only too truly, was no recommendation that he would be useful in any job he might have at his disposal. Rather the reverse!

Though it is easy to guess the anger with which Lawrence, and more especially Lawrence's wife, would receive such a message, Lawrence must have realised its truth. It is even presumable that in it he had obtained the answer he sought, and that Bennett understood this quite as clearly as he did. Because, though Lawrence might ask for, and might even see himself in some imaginary job, what discoverable job in England at this time would he have taken, or having taken would he have kept? The most suitable post for him, as being unconnected with War propaganda yet having the benefit of his experience, was indubitably schoolmastering. And what school would open its doors to a man whose book had suffered public prosecution for obscenity? Not Bennett himself could have got Lawrence installed as a teacher, nor do I see Lawrence returning to the dominie's desk. Lawrence has illumined for me many dark Biblical sayings and incidents. This was a case of 'it must needs be that offences come'. But, now as always, there is 'woe to him by whom the offence cometh'. Little more need be said. Lawrence, in asking for money or for work, fulfilled his destiny by acting as a touchstone. The condemnation for his failure falls on the world he was there to indict. Also, I think, in the painful necessary task of cutting himself loose from that world, he needed all the outside drive he could come by. The utmost he was to get from *official* England was a second grant from the Royal Literary Fund. This was applied for and granted during that summer.

The months between February and the Armistice in November were spent by the Lawrences chiefly between the cottage in Berkshire and Mountain Cottage at Middleton-by-Wirksworth in Derbyshire, which his sisters, in great anxiety, took for him at Easter. The Radfords needed their own small retreat for the Easter and summer holidays.

In Derbyshire he much enjoyed a longish visit from his sisters' children - a nephew aged three and a niece aged seven - and he enjoyed the flowers which were unusually rich that spring. But he was 'sick and surfeited', he suffered from the recurrent horror of the Midlands, and laboured under 'poverty and incertitude'.

'I know exactly how it feels,' he wrote to me, sympathising with my different

state of waiting.

I feel as if I had a child of black fury curled up inside my bowels. I am sure I can feel exactly what it is to be pregnant, because of the weary burden of a kind of contained murder which I can't bring forth. We will both pray to be safely delivered.

When, so far as I was concerned, his prayer was answered - in London just a week after the last of the air raids - he sent me the very exquisite present of a shoe-box containing perhaps twenty different kinds of wild flowers, carefully packed in damp moss, many of them having their roots attached. Here were yellow rock-roses - 'pure flowers of light', milkworts, wood-avens, mountain violets, aconites, woodruff and forget-me-nots. Lawrence knew all about wild flowers and could name most of them. His friend Millicent Beveridge, whom he met later in Sicily, has told me how she went walking with him once in the hills near Florence at the height of the Tuscan spring, and how as they went he named and discoursed upon at least thirty varieties. It was out of that walk that he wrote the three fragrant, categorical and joyous essays on 'Flowers in Tuscany' which appeared in the *Criterion*.

With my box of Derbyshire flowers there was a small floral guide, tinely written by Lawrence, describing each plant and making me see how they had been before he picked them for me, in what sorts of places and manner and profusion they had grown, and even how they varied in the different countrysides.

We were all three invited to come immediately to Mountain Cottage, but instead we asked them to visit us later in the summer when we were to have, of all unlikely things, a whole vicarage to ourselves in the Forest of Dean. My monthly nurse, a splendid woman of the old English type, was sister to the vicar who wanted to have his house inhabited for a nominal rent during the latter part of August. So it was arranged. By August Lawrence would have his grant from the Royal Literary Fund. At the moment he was counting chiefly on fifty pounds from the Oxford University Press so soon as his *Movements in European History* should be finished. He was also getting ten pounds from a small publisher for the little book of poems called *Bay* (selling it outright for this amount) and there was hope of placing *Look! We Have Come Through!* in America. Things were hard, and money continually threatened to 'come to a dead end', but Lawrence would never let himself run absolutely dry. His might be a bourgeois boast (as Norman Douglas has said) when he announced his determination always to keep a few pounds between himself and the world. It was at least never an idle boast. It was one of Lawrence's austerities that luck, and therefore anything founded on luck, was a vulgarity. Spiritually he would take all risks adventuring into the

unknown. But to leave material things to chance was culpable folly. In all practical matters he looked and planned ahead. And he never became either penniless or gravely in debt.

To celebrate the birth of our boy, he not only wrote 'War Baby', but embroidered a little cotton frock in red and black cross-stitch, while Frieda crocheted a cot cover of the gayest rainbow-coloured stripes in wool. It became known as 'Frieda's Rainbow', and went everywhere with us, until with rough outdoor usage it fell to pieces.

Shortly before they came to us Lawrence was re-examined for the second time that year on account of the new Military Service Act. He was then definitely put in 'Grade 3'. There can be no doubt that his horror at the mere possibility of being called up for some kind of distasteful work under military orders was the chief cause of his last appeal to Arnold Bennett. Yet I do not believe he seriously thought he would be called up. It was rather that he would take no more chances than he could possibly help. Immediately after the examination he wrote me the following letter. Though it is easily subject to misconstruction, it voices something which needs to be understood in Lawrence, something upon which Murry's misunderstanding in *Son of Woman* is largely based. I therefore quote the relevant passages here:

MY DEAR CATHERINE, I have been examined - am put in Grade 3 - and from this day I take a new line. I've done with society and humanity - Labour and Military can alike go to hell. Henceforth it is for myself, my own life, I live: a good jolly personal life, with a few people who are friends, and the rest can do what they like. I am going to try to get a job: quick, before the military attempt to paw me again - for they shall *never* touch me again. I shall go to London next week. We shall meet again soon. Then we can talk.

About the essays, I crossed out the 'Children' passages. Who am I to dictate when hope lies or doesn't lie? Let it lie when it likes.

Tell Don I shall see him again soon. No more of the social passion and social insistence from me. I can understand I've been a nuisance and a fool.

Love from both to you all.

He was coming to London alone, he said, with Frieda following in a week or so.

11

We were happy in the Forest of Dean, though it was a strange, frightening place. Lawrence told me afterwards that it scared him so that at first he felt like running away. The dark and ancient steepness of those woods, with the mines inconspicuously burrowing everywhere, is unlike anything else in England. But we had fine weather, and peaches were ripening on the walls of the old south-sloping garden, and we had the roomy stone house to ourselves.

Lawrence had looked forward to the visit with 'peculiar anticipation', and when we met him on the platform of Upper Lydbrook station we were struck by his high spirits. Frieda was beaming and ejaculatory as usual - perhaps even more than usual - but Lawrence was like a schoolboy home for the holidays. His festive array - a green-and-red striped blazer and grey flannel trousers - and the fact that both garments were so shrunken as to show stretches of wrist and ankle, added to this impression. One felt the boy had grown since we last saw him. In a gay aside he informed me that these were now his *only* trousers - and that he had to wash them himself of a night-time after undressing so that they might be ready for wear again by the morning. Owing to the fact that he wore *espadrilles* and no socks, his thin ankles were especially in evidence. I rather think his toilet was completed by an old panama hat. With this strange attire and his beard he attracted some local notice.

The holiday dwells in my memory, for, although he had his variations, his prevailing mood was of extraordinary gaiety, serenity and youthfulness, such as we never saw again in him.

Having heard beforehand of the impossible forest roads, we had brought no sort of baby carriage, and, as I was nursing the child, we had to carry him about with us, which meant taking turn and turn about. Frieda that summer vied with her husband in the inexpensive gaiety of her dress. She wore the largest and brightest of cotton checks, and when out together we attracted, to Lawrence's displeased surprise, something of the attention that might have been accorded to a travelling circus. Sometimes we took with us a home-made carrier for the baby, consisting of string bags strung upon two broomsticks to form a sort of hammock, which was decked with Frieda's rainbow. But though this was a real convenience Lawrence preferred to travel without it.

When Lawrence said he found the place 'scaring', this must be understood, like so much else, according to his own idiom. In the ordinary way of speaking he certainly found it interesting, even fascinating. It was a coal-mining district - the oldest in these islands - and therefore he felt at home in it. But it was different from any mining district he had known, and therefore it engaged his attention. Although he avoided contact with the natives he cast a professional eye over them and their place, and commented with brisk amusement on the tininess of the workings - *e.g.*, the cages so small that only two or three men could be wound down at a time. Once in a walk through the forest he stopped suddenly to examine a half-derelict working that was not a perpendicular shaft but a low tunnel driven into a hillside, from which the coal was drawn up on a trolley worked by a hand-winch and cable. That was a 'gin-pit', he said - an old sort of thing that was becoming a rarity.

Lydbrook lies in a pleasant fold in the hills, but it is a grey, squalid village - just one long shabby street of a mile or more. Lawrence expressed himself as puzzled why mining villages should be so *needlessly* ugly. He suggested the reason might be that miners through having to work underground had become blind to form values. They craved for 'a bit of colour', and so loved and cultivated flowers with passion. But, though sensitive to natural beauty, they had a merely utilitarian regard for man-made surroundings.

Often we went far afield. One day we went by train to Monmouth and bought lard cakes there and picnicked by the river. Lawrence wrote of this to Donald when he had gone back to Mountain Cottage, saying how he had enjoyed it:

... the bright sunny town, and the tears in one's inside because there isn't *real* peace; and - *very nice*, the meal in the green riding: also our evenings. They are good memories - worth a lot really. And it pleases me that we carried the child about. One has the future in one's arms so to speak: and one *is* the present... I imagine you in that vicarage room this evening - no more 'What are the Wild Waves Saying?' for a bit.

Not liking the vicarage drawing-room with its china cabinets, we always sat in the pleasant kitchen, which had an outlook on the walled fruit garden; and of a night we used to sing. Hence the reference to 'What are the Wild Waves Saying?' which was a great success given as a duet by Lawrence and Donald, with Lawrence in the male part.

Lawrence had brought with him a little manual of French songs which he carried about everywhere like a Bible, and even the hated china cabinets did not keep him away from the drawing-room piano at which he was often to be found seated, picking out melodies from his manual with one finger. His expression at such times was one of intense and concentrated earnestness, as he hummed the

tune over and over and learned every verse of the longest ballad by heart. Though he had an odd sort of singing voice he knew supremely well how to sing any kind of folksong. But I liked best of all to hear him in English ones, like 'A Cottage Well Thatched with Straw' or 'Twanky-dillo', which he wrote out for me, music and all, and he rendered deliriously the prim, absurd charm of Offenbach in English:

Evoë! Wonderful ways
Have the goddesses now and then
For beguiling the hearts of men!

One evening we tried charades, in which Lawrence excelled, having invented a special kind of his own. But I am the worst of performers, and Donald is not much better, so that we failed in playing up, while we could not be spared to act as audience.

It was here that Lawrence first thought of his story called *The Blind Man*. We had an old and lovable, but almost half-witted servant, a woman like a squirrel, with squirrel-coloured hair piled high over a pad on top of her head in a fashion so elaborate that she used to rise at five in the morning to complete her toilet by seven. I can still see her face of bewilderment as Lawrence, seated one day at the kitchen table, tried to include her with me in his outline of the story. Stupid as Letty was, and far as this was from any tale she was accustomed to, she seemed, as well as myself, to breathe the dark air of the stable, to see the blind man delicately groping about it, and to feel the sad, enclosed, yet natural atmosphere in which these people moved.

That September we were to have gone to Mountain Cottage, but could not. Lawrence wrote on his thirty-third birthday to say that he had received papers calling him up for medical re-examination, but that he was determined not to go. I never heard what happened. Possibly the authorities accepted a doctor's certificate.

That autumn and winter - the winter of the Armistice - things were as hard as ever for Lawrence, and more upsetting as he had no place of his own. The money situation would have been desperate but for hopeful news from America, where there seemed to be a growing market for his stories and Huebsch was negotiating for *Look! We Have Come Through!* Still almost nothing was coming in, and in England he could not command more than five pounds for one of his *Studies in Classic American Literature*, while the indigent *English Review* seemed the only magazine that would print his short stories. The four little

essays on 'The Education of the People' ('Good,' wrote Lawrence, 'but most revolutionary') did not meet with the approval of *The Times Educational Supplement*, and were returned with the request for something 'more suitable'.

We had been obliged to go to Scotland. It was the winter of the great influenza epidemic, and Donald went down with it badly in Edinburgh. The next we heard - at the turn of the year - was that Lawrence, in the Midlands for the holiday, had been at death's door with the same epidemic, 'with complications'.

During an alarmingly slow recovery he went on as well as he could with his plans for leaving England at the first opportunity, which would not be, he was told, till peace was ratified. The idea of going with the Eders to the eastern slopes of the Andes had since been modified into a visit to Palestine. But both had fallen through. Lawrence had a great longing at this time for the sea. This too turned out to be impracticable, and there was nothing for it but to reoccupy the cottage at Hermitage so long as the Radfords were not there. It was less cold and bleak than Derbyshire, and further from the deathly reminders of home. Also it was nearer to London. On the revival of the *Athenaeum* under the editorship of Middleton Murry, the suggestion had been made that Lawrence should become a regular contributor. 'I am to contribute,' he wrote me of this piece of news - 'good thing if I could earn a little weekly money. But,' he added, 'I don't trust Murry.'

In spite of this addition he was very anxious to try what could be done. He was longing to 'meet and have a little happy time together'. So he came south in March.

Murry has given us his own story. He has told us that he welcomed, though with some natural trepidation, the idea of contributions from Lawrence. He became editor in January, 1919. On April 11th, under the pseudonym of 'Grantorto', Lawrence's beautiful and suitable essay, 'The Whistling of Birds' appeared. But the next essay, says Murry, was unsuitable and was returned as such, whereupon 'Lawrence was annoyed, and sent us nothing more.'

From this one would naturally infer that these two efforts covered the extent of contributions tendered by Lawrence. But such is not the case. Other articles were submitted, some at least of which must have been suitable enough. To my own knowledge there were then in existence some of the essays which later appeared in the collection, *Assorted Articles*, none of which could have given serious offence to readers of the *Athenaeum* even in 1919. After telling us that Lawrence sent nothing more, but without connecting the two events, Murry admits that he went himself in May, by Lawrence's request, to stay a few days at Hermitage and 'talk things over'. He admits too that he then found Lawrence 'ill and weary', as well as poor and depressed, and despairing of his life in England. It was the period of Lawrence's greatest need of English literary support. Murry

has denounced with eloquence the English literary men who earlier withheld this. We have already seen that as a comparatively unimportant reviewer he avoided doing what he might for *The Rainbow*. Now that he had some standing, we find not only that he could risk nothing to give Lawrence a hand, but that as time went on he lost few opportunities of disparaging Lawrence in public. Perhaps he thought Lawrence was finished, and he had his own growing reputation as a critic to safeguard. The next two novels by Lawrence that appeared were murderously handled in the *Athenaeum*. It was not until 1922, when Lawrence was well enough established neither to need a hand nor to involve any risk for those who gave it, that Murry discovered a masterpiece in a book of far less significance than either *The Rainbow* or *Women in Love*, a book that is certainly not superior as a novel to *The Lost Girl* - namely, *Aaron's Rod*. With that and the *Fantasia of the Unconscious*, he declares, Lawrence reached the 'pinnacle of his achievement', before wallowing once more in the disintegration - this time a final one - of his later work.

12

It was at Whitsun, falling in the latter part of May, that we three went down to Hermitage for a few days to stay at the local midwife's cottage, which was quite close to Chapel Farm Cottage where the Lawrences were. Lawrence had taken the rooms for us there, and we had goat's milk for the child, who was now weaned, from a white nanny that was tethered in the back garden.

Again it seems to have been mostly good weather that summer, though I remember some slashing showers one day when Lawrence and Donald and I went to Silchester in fond hopes of seeing something spectacular by way of Roman remains. We missed the last train back, and had to walk a long way home, without having set eyes on anything more exciting than some grass-covered mounds.

Usually Lawrence was to be found sitting on a kitchen chair, under the apple tree, in the garden that was open to the road, writing steadily and rapidly on his knee. (He had asked us to sell his typewriter for him, and my brother bought it for four pounds, which seemed a lot to all of us.) He was putting the finishing touches to the history book and writing short stories. That spring, too, after 'gnashing his teeth in vain' over something more acceptable upon the controversial subject of education for *The Times Educational Supplement* ('I couldn't write the educational stuff,' he said in a letter to me, 'I tried so hard - it wouldn't work in me - no go') he wrote the play *Touch and Go*.

Between-whiles at Hermitage we went wooding with a rickety pushchair among the sheets of bluebells, which were just past their best, and so were outshone by the suits of bright blue coarse linen worn by the Lawrences. Frieda and Lawrence were justly proud of these suits, which they had themselves cut out and made. As a woodman Lawrence excelled, collecting twice as much as anybody else and constantly rejecting our faggots as worthless. With all he had to do, in and out of the house, he found time to help the midwife's little daughter every day with her lessons, and he was ready at any time to take a turn in minding John Patrick, our boy, who was now of an age to walk round the kitchen table by clutching its edge. For the first time I had the chance to see how good Lawrence was with children. He made no special business of them, but knew how to include them warmly and naturally in his life. He was devoid of

tricks with them, either old-fashioned or modern, and I was struck by the children's response to a certain light astringency in his treatment of them. It was either here or at the Forest of Dean that seeing me bathe John Patrick, he remarked with a sigh, '*He* won't be having any chest trouble!' And again, with a little grin, 'I suppose he'll grow up into what they call a virile man!'

Lawrence himself was looking delicate, and as if still waiting to be delivered of that 'contained fury' of his. His chief hope now lay in the expected visit of Huebsch, his American publisher, who would, he said, make arrangements for an early visit to America. His failure with the *Athenaeum* had given him an additional shove towards the wilderness. England was become more than ever distasteful. As late as the July of that year, Lawrence's letters to Pinker and others showed signs of having been tampered with. Frieda was 'in accord' with him that go they must. Of their plans he wrote to me, 'Don't tell *anybody* what I say here. I don't tell anybody but you.' And his parting advice to me was, 'Don't be cast down, don't get used up. Above all, conserve yourself, and live only in marriage, not elsewhere.'

There had been talk of them coming to us in August - this time to the New Forest, where we were friendly with one of the agisters, lived in a rough farm, and got any amount of riding on the forest ponies.

But we had no more than a glimpse of them in town in the early summer, when they were on their way to the Midlands. After that, being offered a cottage at Pangbourne by Rosalind Baynes, they went there, and Lawrence's sisters came to stay alternately till the middle of September. We then saw them again in London, when they stayed with Koteliansky. As Ada, since getting home, had been very ill, Lawrence made yet another trip to the Midlands. But it was his farewell. Now he was really on the wing. Somebody had told him of a farm at Caserta, near Naples, and this made a good enough objective. The passports were ready at last. Lawrence has somewhere described vividly how he saw Frieda off, with a malicious grin on her face, to see her mother in Germany. Attached as he was to the old Baroness, he shrank just then from visiting Germany. He would go later. For the present he asked us to find through friends in Rome a 'very simple room' there. He would wait for Frieda in Florence, and they would go south together to prospect, staying in Rome on their way. Except by introduction he knew nobody in Italy.

Now he ran down alone to Berkshire to sell at Reading what books he had in the cottage. Lawrence never collected much of a library, as he was obliged so often to disperse his belongings. And, anyhow, he never wanted a library. On this occasion he gave us his tattered but complete set of De Quincey's works, with the hope that someday we might be rich enough to have them rebound. He

wrote: 'He is a very nice man. I can go on reading and reading him. I laughed over "Goethe" yesterday. I like him, De Quincey, because he also dislikes such people as Plato and Goethe, whom I dislike.' Lawrence's De Quincey still remains in his original state on our shelves.

For the understanding of Lawrence it is needful to remember how completely he disliked and wished to transcend that classic ideal of human balance which was initiated by Plato, and of which Goethe was the great modern embodiment. The whole current of Lawrence's life and work represents a movement towards a new and different kind of balance that would be consistent with all human imperfections.

We, on our side, gave as a parting present a somewhat worn coat-lining of natural camel's hair, which we afterwards learned was 'a godsend' in Sicily in winter. And he accepted with protest, but obvious pleasure, a voluminous black and white shepherd's plaid which had been my mother's and grandmother's! This was destined to figure in *Sea and Sardinia*, but ultimately to fall into the hands of an Italian robber.

We both went to see the solitary pilgrim off. So far as I remember, nobody else was at the station except Koteliansky. Lawrence felt the wrench of the departure, but he was glad, very glad, to be going. He was helped on his way by a small legacy, left to him by Rupert Brooke, that came to him that summer.

Part Three

AET.34-36

PROSE

Aaron's Rod The Lost Girl (completed)
Introduction to Memoirs of the Foreign Legion
Sea and Sardinia (travel essays)
The Ladybird, etc. (3 novelettes)
Fantasia of the Unconscious

VERSE

Birds, Beasts and Flowers (in part)
Tortoises

TRANSLATIONS

Mastro Don Gesualdo (Verga)
Little Novels of Sicily (Verga)

*

'It is hard to hear a new voice.'

1

Some friend had beforehand made known the date of his coming to Norman Douglas, who had taken a room for him at ten lire a day at the Pensione Balestri (called the 'Cavalotti' in the introduction to Magnus's *Memoirs of the Foreign Legion*). Douglas and Magnus were themselves living at the Balestri. In that same introduction we read how on the dark, wet, wintry evening, after his through journey from London, Lawrence found the kindly and practical note of directions waiting for him at Cook's, and how on his way to the Piazza Mentana he was overtaken at the Ponte Vecchio by Douglas with Magnus in tow. No account of the days that followed could hope to rival that given by Lawrence in the Magnus introduction. He said to me once that he considered this the best single piece of writing, *as writing*, that he had ever done.

On the evidence contained therein, it seems to me that Lawrence's activity with the typewriter, which, on a third visit eighteen months later, was to cause so much amusement - of the friendliest sort - in both Douglas and Rebecca West when they welcomed him again to Florence, was not of the precipitate order they fancied. It was more probably an endeavour, with Magnus's *Memoirs* in mind, to provide his 1919 impressions with the refreshed significance furnished by his 1921 arrival. The sordid tragedy of poor Magnus had been played to a finish during the period between the two visits.

I had two postcards from the Balestri, the first beginning: 'Am here in the rain, waiting for Frieda, of whom I hear nothing yet. Italy is rather spoiled by the War - a different *temper* - not so nice a humour by far.' In the second he said he had a really sunny room over the Arno, with good wine, an easy-going *padrone* and altogether such 'a nice carelessness' that he felt he would 'loaf away all his substance'.

When Frieda joined him, he waited on there with her yet a while before they went on together to Rome, where my friend had found what she thought was a suitable pension. In Rome during a short stay they met with two calamities. They were turned out of the first pension (whether English or Italian I am not sure, though I think it was Italian) on the discovery that Frieda was German. Given eager hospitality then by my friend, who, as it happened, was the heroic support of a strangely mingled household, they were robbed of the greater part of their

ready money. The position was painful in more ways than one. Lawrence had at once conceived a real liking for his hostess, who, moreover, though by no means wealthy, had refused to consider payment from him. He knew not only that she was herself above suspicion, but that, whether the thief were discovered or not, she would insist upon refunding the lost money (something like ten pounds, which had just been changed into Italian notes). He decided accordingly to say nothing about it. As the household is now broken up by death and other causes, I feel at liberty to narrate the incident, which the Lawrences told me in confidence years after it happened.

In Florence, too, either on this or some later visit, Lawrence was robbed of his much-needed cash. He was getting on to the crowded train at Fiesole when his wallet was taken from his pocket. He described to me his feelings when he made the discovery - first the sensation as if his heart had dropped from his breast through the soles of his feet, then the mounting fury that flushed him to the roots of his hair. But yet more characteristic of him was his philosophical summing up of the mishap. 'It is a good lesson,' he announced with crisp emphasis. 'One gets into a silly soft way of trusting one's fellows. One *must not* trust them, for they are not trustworthy. One must live as the wild animals live, always wary, always on one's guard against enemies. It makes one more alive, anyway, and not really more suspicious. It is best to recognise the truth that most people will do you if they can.'

Such a determination in Lawrence was compatible with an enviable lightness over losses. He never made moan and never wasted time over them, blaming his own softness as much or more than the cupidity or dishonesty of the other fellow. The trouble, already referred to, over the American rights of *Sons and Lowers* was another case in point.

When asked why he did not make such a matter public and fight for his legal rights, Lawrence only shrugged his shoulders. It was not that he claimed or possessed the orthodox Christian emotion or that he was non-resistant on principle. He resented such injuries, and made no pretence of forgetting or forgiving them. But neither would he let them prey upon him. In this, as in so much else, he evinced a sense of life which might be called transcendently practical. He never forgot the limits of a man's time and strength, especially when that man is handicapped by poverty and 'unhappy bronchials'. To the loss of money - always partly due to one's own fault - he would not add the expenditure of more precious forms of energy. He was profoundly philosophic, and, had he been both stronger and richer, I am sure his view would have remained unchanged. For him the law, though admittedly necessary, was always 'an ass'. He would not even allow, what I was at times inclined to urge, that one

must on occasion fight for one's clear rights, if only to discourage villains and encourage the other victims of villainy. He admitted the need of courts of justice; but, 'No,' he would say, 'let others do as they like or as they must. For me it is nothing but waste to invoke justice or to inflict punishment.' After all, such an episode as that concerning *Sons and Lovers* could be 'counted off', said he, with a light arrogance, as 'the price of fame'. So, perhaps, could the later striking depletion of his profits by the folly and failure of an American publisher, who meant no ill, but reckoned on a better turn of fortune for himself and a longer life for Lawrence than was decreed.

Lawrence's point of view was vitally aristocratic. That is to say, it was the point of view of the man so assured of his rights that he feels no obligation to fight for them. He allowed himself immediate fury in plenty and a warning memory of the chicaneries, slights and breaches of faith which it was his lot to suffer. But they were permitted no abiding place in his life save by that heightened awareness which he took to be an element in vital being. This, I take it, though he framed it courteously, was what he meant when, long after the event, he told Murry that he bore no grudge for the review of *Women in Love*. To bear a grudge was a sin against life. But he felt no call to 'forgive' Murry's sin against the heart. Once more, as it seems to me, Lawrence, by repudiating the Christian doctrine, discovered its soul afresh, and that in a way which would have been impossible without initial repudiation. For him the emotional tenet of Christian forgiveness was closely connected with that organised revenge from which came the Great War.

Almost certainly the theme of *Aaron's Rod*, as well as its charming and unusual opening, belonged to the period before Lawrence left England. Both theme and opening must have suggested themselves during his visit to the Midlands for the Christmas of 1918. In a letter written in February, 1920, he speaks of a half-finished novel in manuscript being held up with Frieda's luggage in Germany owing to a railway strike, and a fortnight later tells of having just 'started a novel'.

The second mentioned, I take it, was *Aaron's Rod*, the first *The Lost Girl* of seven years earlier.

The failure to find a resting-place in the neighbourhood of Caserta was certainly productive of the memorable Italian section of *The Lost Girl*, which Lawrence completed in May, 1920. Such a dovetailing of literary circumstance works havoc with the psychic pattern, or clinical picture designed for us by Murry in *Son of Woman*. The hard light of chronology is equally unkind to his attempt to explain his *Athenaeum* review (*Reminiscences. Adelphi Jan. 1931, pp. 327, 329*).

After some wandering from place to place during the early part of December 'in a state of restlessness', the Lawrences were at Picinisco. But they found that it was impossible. 'Beautiful beyond words but so primitive, and so cold.' Almost they thought they would have died. 'Mountains stood round in a ring, glittering like devils,' and on the Saturday before Christmas it snowed all day long. So, as he wrote me early in January from Capri, they extricated themselves on the Monday by getting up at 5.30, walking five miles to Atina, catching the post-omnibus there which carried them ten miles to Cassino, which was the only station, and reaching Naples by train in time to catch the 3 p.m. boat to Capri. As they left the bay the sea rose, and by 7.30, when they came into the shallow port of Capri, it ran so high that the boats could not put out to land them. There was nothing for it but to go back and seek the semi-shelter of Sorrento, there to roll horribly all night with a shipload of moaning Italians. Luckily neither Frieda nor Lawrence was sick.

At Capri for 160 francs a month they took the top floor of the old and 'extremely beautiful' Palazzo Ferraro which had 'a staircase like a prison, not a palace', and was 'on the very neck of the little town, on the very neck of the island', so that they felt they could almost touch 'the queer bubbling Duomo' from their balcony, and they overlooked all the island life as well as the bay of Naples and Ischia on their right, and on their left 'the wide open Mediterranean'. They had two large rooms to themselves and shared a kitchen with a young Roumanian Socialist, who lost no opportunity of pouring his Socialism into Lawrence's ear. Down to the sea was only a short, steep mile, and though they sometimes felt the need of a fire in the evenings, the days were warm and stormy. 'The narcissus flowers still are many in the rocks, but passing: sweet they are, Greece. A few pink cactus flowers, too.'

It was now that Lawrence severed his connection with the firm of J. B. Pinker. As early as November, 1918, there had been a threatened break. At that date, it will be recalled, Lawrence, hard-driven, had appealed through Pinker to Arnold Bennett for a job - unsuccessfully. He had suffered from a resultant nausea, which was not helped by the persistently miserable sums offered for his work in England, nor by his constant need to approach his agent for advances. It had even been a nice question as to whether it was worth while having a story like 'The Fox' typed, acceptance being so unlikely. But the situation had been tided over, partly perhaps by the client's inability to meet a settlement of the account. It had not grown more tolerable, however. Increasingly Lawrence had felt unhappy in the connection, conscious that he was a 'bother' and an 'unsatisfactory person' from Pinker's point of view, and that Pinker's faith in him as a business proposition had been over-tried. The strain had become so great

that Lawrence dreaded either the writing or the receipt of a letter bearing the Arundel Street address. So in 1920, being at last enabled to square up by the receipt of Huebsch's cheque for the American *Look! We Have Come Through!* he seized the chance and made an end. By March everything was settled, even to the repayment of Bennett's twenty-five pounds ('Who is E. A. Bennett?' enquired Lawrence in some irritation!); and with full acknowledgements of all that Pinker had done for him throughout the past five years, this 'unpleasant handful' received his small parcel of agreements and his large parcel of unpublished manuscript into his own keeping. After all, he hoped soon to go to America where Pinker had not then, as he has now, an extensive connection, and Mountsier was already selling short stories by Lawrence at two hundred and fifty dollars apiece. Today one wonders if Lawrence's business affairs might not have prospered better had he been able to round his Cape Horn without a change of ships. Humanly speaking, too, when Pinker had done so much and had faced so many unprecedented difficulties, it was hard that his firm should not have reaped the benefit. Frieda especially regretted the termination. But it could not be helped, and no blame attached to either party, whereas the credit of the one and the honesty of the other stand high in any perusal of the correspondence. The determining factor was that, with all his kindness and generosity, Pinker had not much hope of Lawrence left. So Lawrence had to cut loose.

2

The cosmopolitan island life was amusing for a time - 'pleasant and bohemian. I wish you were both here' - and before he tired of its scandalous unreality he wrote home about it entertainingly, and not without malice. Of this order was his account of a New Year's Eve celebration in Morgano's Café. Primarily an Italian affair - given over to the barbaric performances in song, dance and recitation, of bands of young men - it became towards midnight, according to Lawrence, a mere background for the decorative figure of Mr Compton Mackenzie flanked by rich Americans and issuing commands for champagne. ' "Head of the realistic school of England, isn't he?" ' asks the Roumanian, with whom, in company with an aged Dutchman, Lawrence and Frieda were sipping a humble punch. Later, Lawrence was to become friendly with Mackenzie. For the present, though he has already lunched and dined sometimes with his confrère, he watches the rich English-American party with those shrewish, almost old-maidenly eyes of his. 'He is nice,' he records. 'But one feels the generations of actors behind him, and can't be quite serious. What a queer thing the theatre is, in its influence. He seems quite rich and does himself well and walks a sort of aesthetic figure ... walking in a pale blue suit to match his eyes, and a large woman's brown velour hat to match his hair.' Of the Americans, who with 'an excruciating self-conscious effort', were trying 'to look wine and womanish', he says, 'Oh, God, the wild rakishness of these young heroes! How conscious they are of the Italian crowd in the background. They never see the faint smile of the same crowd - such a smile. A glass of champagne is sent out to the old road-sweeper from the bounteous English Signore. It is the right thing to do. Meanwhile we sip our last drop of punch, and are the Poor Relations at the other end of the table - ignored - to our amusement.'

But in the same breath Lawrence finds that he is 'nearly as spiteful as the rest of Capri', and 'the English-speaking crowd are the uttermost uttermost limit for spiteful scandal. My dear Catherine, London is a prayer-meeting in comparison . . . We've got a long way to go, such mere people as us. It would be an interesting document, to set down this scandal verbatim. Suetonius would blush to his heels, and Tiberius would feel he'd been a flea-bite.'

He finds, too, that commodities are beyond his purse - 'butter twenty francs,

wine three francs a litre the cheapest - sugar 8 francs a kilo, oil seven or eight francs a litre, carbone a franc for two kilos - a porter expects ten francs for bringing one's luggage from the sea - and so on. With the exchange at fifty, it is just possible, and only just.'

There came, however, an unexpected present of twenty pounds from America. I do not know who sent this, but it must have been one who could afford it, or Lawrence would not have taken it. As it was, he at once sent five pounds of it unasked to Magnus, guessing that he was hard pressed, and he was enabled toward the end of that January to make the strange, much-desired trip alone to the monastery of Monte Cassino. This meant an exhausting day's journey each way for a visit of only three nights. It was like Lawrence that he took with him only the smallest surplus of money over and above what was required for his bare necessities. The present had been for Frieda as much as for him, and he foresaw that Magnus would victimise him for all there might be of loose cash.

Again a peerless record is to be found in the Introduction. In it he combines the fullest admissions of a limited humanity with the limitless desire to remain faithful to that which is beyond humanity. It rises to its height in that part where Lawrence, looking down from the mountain top where St Thomas Aquinas was educated, as if from 'the last foothold of the old world', finds himself racked, as no other man of our time has been racked, between the 'bitter and barren' present in the plain below, and 'the poignancy of the not-quite-dead past' which lingered above in these old walls. To those who would comprehend Lawrence here is a passage of the utmost significance. On Monte Cassino, as on no other single occasion, he saw his temptation and his destiny, and he put the first from him and accepted the second open-eyed. To the lovely past, as worshipped by the monks behind him, he would not bow down, though it might bring peace. He must live in the hard and often loathsome present, an individual man's life, with all its needs, contradictions and errors proclaimed as it went along: and at the same time he must be an unswerving conduit from the very origins of life - so far back that they were lost - to the undiscovered future, in some way that transcended, while it never eliminated or absolved the individual. The conception, I believe, is new and it is potent. But a kind of sensitiveness akin to the sensitiveness of Lawrence, which is a thing far removed from emotionalism, has to be acquired before either the novelty or the potency becomes apparent. In Lawrence's own perception of it he felt that his heart was 'once more broken'. But it is characteristic that, when questioned by Magnus, he merely put it that he was 'too worldly' to think of becoming a monk. In conversation, at any rate, Lawrence habitually refrained from casting his pearls before swine. Neither did he ever wear his heart on his sleeve.

At the moment literary affairs were by no means satisfactory. The appearance of his *History* was still deferred, and he still awaited revised proofs for indexing. He had refused a first offer to publish *The Rainbow* with certain omissions and alterations on condition of the selling of all rights for two hundred pounds, and he was negotiating with another publisher for simple publication on the basis of 'a first royalty, which is all I want'. He hoped, this once settled, that the English publication of *Women in Love* might follow with the same publisher.

Again, the tiny hand-printed and illustrated book of poems called *Bay* had taken seventeen months in production, and except for the beautiful paper and print it was all that Lawrence wished it not to be. Poems and inscriptions which he had intended for inclusion were left out. He was confident that some, at least, of the poems were 'really beautiful and rare'. Otherwise, in his judgement, this was 'a silly-looking little book...' with 'silly little woodcuts, so out of keeping with the poems'.

At about the same time there was printed the play *Touch and Go*, which Katherine Mansfield had not liked - that I well understood - but which she described as being 'black with miners', which I find hardly enlightening as a criticism of a play that concerns itself with miners. Lawrence had written the jarring but interesting seven page preface to this paper-covered book (issued by Daniel, Ltd, in 1920) while at Hermitage in June, 1919. The preface was intended by Lawrence as an announcement of and a plea for a 'People's Theatre'. This was a scheme originated by Mr Douglas Goldring, who was an enthusiast for Lawrence's work and had not long before written an appreciative essay which brought him into Lawrence's acquaintance. Mr Goldring's idea was twofold. There was first to be a 'People's Theatre Society' which would exist for the purpose of presenting plays of a kind suitable to come under that heading. Those who were interested enough to become members on payment of a guinea subscription - or it may have been two - would have the chance of submitting plays of their own, and it was held out as an inducement that one of the earliest productions would be a play by D. H. Lawrence. Lawrence was pleased by the whole idea and looked forward greatly to the possibility of having *Touch and Go* put on - perhaps at the Court Theatre with the interest and assistance of Mr J. B. Fagan. Secondly, there was to be a series of *Plays for a People's Theatre* published by C. W. Daniel, Ltd, under the general editorship of Mr Goldring.

Like many attractive and well-intentioned schemes of the sort 'The People's Theatre Society' came to little. Only one play - *The Liberators* by the Serbian dramatist Tucic - was ever performed, and its performance would seem to have exhausted the resources of the Society and ended its activities. Mr Goldring was still, however, general editor of *Plays for a People's Theatre*, which Lawrence in

1919 understood that he was to inaugurate, out of simple interest in the idea, with *Touch and Go* and its preface. Lawrence was accordingly angered when, in Italy in 1920, he learned that the first play to appear in the series was not his, but a play by the general editor entitled *The Fight for Freedom* with an inaugural preface attached, and his anger was not lessened by his finding himself in violent dissent from all that was expressed in both. Here was 'another fiasco', he wrote to me that February, and once more he found cause to 'curse the sly mongrel world'. After an interchange of letters Mr Goldring made an explanation which Lawrence accepted, and as usual he put the matter behind him. 'I know you don't like the play,' he wrote to me of *Touch and Go* in the same letter, 'but anyhow it's not base.'

It was indeed far from base, this dramatic effort, which escaped publicity so completely that to this day few readers of Lawrence seem to know of its existence. The scenes between the lovers, Gerald and Anabel, give one an odd foretaste of Noel Coward at his best, while the speechifying of the miners is both vivid and true to life. It was written while the successful 'theatre' of Galsworthy's *Strife* was fresh in mind ('Mr Galsworthy had a peep at the Strike situation,' says the preface, 'and sank down towards bathos') and in it Lawrence draws firmly the distinction between non-tragic disaster and that fate, agonising but veritably tragic and therefore fruitful, which follows the working out of some immediate passional problems within the soul of a man. In the true tragedy of 'creative crisis', Lawrence would say, the many 'still know some happiness, the very happiness of creative suffering'. And we have, he would urge, at least 'the moment of pure choice', in which each may decide whether he will 'go through with his fate, and not dodge it'; or by piling accident on accident 'tear the fabric of our existence fibre by fibre'. By the second - which is the method of 'a mechanico-material struggle', even if it brings disaster and death to millions - we get no more than an accidental 'crawl from under one cart wheel straight under another'. By the first, though the fighters themselves may die, death becomes only 'a climax in the progression towards new being'. For 'the whole business of life, at the great critical periods of mankind, is that men should accept and be one with their tragedy'. From this alone new life can come. And here, if nowhere else, we exercise free will in choosing or refusing.

Its intrinsic interest apart, *Touch and Go* is of use to readers of Lawrence in the elucidation of both *Women in Love* and *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. In the character of Gerald, which is common to the first-named novel and the play, Lawrence records his sympathy with the gifted employer - the powerful and proud young man of aristocratic temper and keen intelligence, who has given of his disinterested best to an industry, and refuses to be bullied by hands who are

no more than hands, however great may be their show of numbers. Gerald is essentially the man of organised achievement, to whom, as such, Lawrence pays hearty tribute. When, on reading the manuscript of *Women in Love*, I criticised his deferring of the disclosure of Gerald, he replied:

You meet a man. You get an impression of him. You find out *afterwards* what he has done. If 'you' have, in your arrogance, writ him down a nobody then there is a slap in the eye for you when you find he has done more than you have done. Voilà!

We get, too, in the play, the scales held evenly between the genuine Christian sweetness (so unavailing) of Gerald's father, and the honesty and pride (made crazy and of no avail by our modern life) of Gerald's mother. These two horribly cancel each other out. And we get the voice of a miner who is a genuine man, as well as the voices of miners who beat an unmanly retreat behind the fiction of a merely economic struggle.

Later in the same month - February, 1920 - I received from Lawrence the announcement of a forthcoming production at Altrincham near Manchester of his first play, *The Widowing of Mrs Holroyd*. The performance was to be by a company of experienced amateurs, and Lawrence was anxious to know how it went. He wished me, if possible, to see it and to write a notice which would get into print. To this end he insisted upon sending me five pounds for my journey to Cheshire and back. But this, happily, I did not need, as I managed to obtain a commission from *The Times*.

He was now sick of 'this cat Cranford of Capri', this 'stew-pot of semi-literary cats'. It was too much for his nerves, he said. He had come to like Compton Mackenzie, but 'not his island nor his influence'. When I asked why he did not write a satire on the Capri society, he said no, satire 'just dries up one's bowels - and that I don't like'.

The manuscript of the half-written novel was stuck with the heavy luggage somewhere between Turin and Naples owing to a three weeks' railway strike. But with or without his possessions, Lawrence was determined to move to Sicily. To Sicily we too must come, travelling by sea and bringing John Patrick (now aged twenty months) for whom a Sicilian nurse would be found. This, before they were themselves assured of a foothold! But in the first week of March the invitation was renewed from Fontana Vecchia, Taormina. 'One should not take the world too seriously. I wish you could both come out here to Italy and vegetate - why should one always strive and struggle?' And then - 'such a lovely house and garden here'.

3

Lawrence had taken the house at Taormina for a year, at the rent of twenty-five pounds, or two thousand lire (the exchange being then at eighty). 'Heaven knows which way we shall be moving next,' he wrote in May. 'Depends which way the wind blows us. But one's instinct is to go south, south - and away, away from Europe. Here we are almost on the last tip - and my face still looks south, as if one must step off into space somewhere.'

In April he had visited Syracuse with new friends he had made in Sicily (probably Mr and Mrs Brewster) and it was soon after his return that the fugitive and penniless Magnus descended upon him.

The pamphlet written by Norman Douglas as a counterblast to Lawrence's narrative of Magnus is well known and will always hold its place in the archives of literary dispute. It is brilliant and creditable -I mean that it does credit to the writer's heart and head. Some of Lawrence's best friends have agreed with its finding that a poor wretch who had been driven to take his own life should not have been subjected, anyhow within the covers of his own book, to so searching an examination. While I respect and understand, I do not share this view. Having lately reread both productions, it seems to me that Lawrence, who, after all, was far less the friend than the victim of Magnus, has given his subject full human dues while nailing for good to the barn-door a particular kind of predatory fowl, which to have done is to have rendered a service to honest men in this naughty world. The man whom Douglas defends - naturally and properly as they were on a footing of tolerant affection - does not command the outside reader's sympathy in anything like the same degree as does the man whom Lawrence condemns. In the first case our tribute goes to Douglas; in the second it is compelled for Magnus. At the same time, the sentimentality of this age having run somewhat to the excusing of charming bullies and semi-artistic good-for-nothings, it is a relief to find the inherent nastiness of dishonesty made plain. This, quite apart from other values to be found in the Lawrence narrative. It is true, as Douglas says, that Lawrence gives himself away as much as he gives away Magnus. And that also is good. It contains one of the most vivid of his self-portraits and was never seriously regretted by him. The Lawrence production will stand as a creative, and the Douglas one as a pious effort.

That May, when Lawrence was bailing Magnus out, his own funds were low enough, and I wanted very much to give him fifty pounds. After long and vain travelling from one publisher to another (one firm would have accepted it if I would have cut it down by two-thirds) my novel had won a 'First Novel' prize of two hundred and fifty pounds. So I had this, and I thought it only fair that Lawrence should have a slice. From the first, however, he would consent only to 'hold it' for me in case I could come out there that summer. He had at last signed an agreement for *Women in Love* and *The Rainbow* (one hundred pounds to be received on publication on account of royalties for the first, and later the same sum for *The Rainbow* with the cautious proviso that this should not be paid until three months after publication, and even so, that it should be subject to deduction by any charges of legal proceedings that might arise). He expected 'pretty soon' to have the money for *Women in Love*. But the typing of *The Lost Girl* in Rome cost a thousand lire, and immediate supplies were short.

Unlike the *Athenaeum* Lawrence found *The Lost Girl* 'quite amusing: and quite moral'. 'She's not morally lost, poor darling,' he added, ' . . . marries an Italian.' He wished to serialise this book, but did not succeed in doing so. It brought him a good new friend, however, and a Scottish one - the painter, Miss Millicent Beveridge. She had greatly admired this, the first of his books she had read, and soon afterwards was interested to meet the author. She has told me how that meeting took place at a party in Sicily where she found Lawrence in a rage because, not made aware beforehand that it was a party and that he was to be lionised, he had turned up barefoot with sandals and in his 'pottering about' clothes. In this respect Lawrence was no bohemian. He believed in suiting the occasion. Miss Beveridge, amused and astonished as much as she was charmed, became sincerely attached to him, and the friendship remained firm till his death. May was very hot in Sicily.

Do you know what it is to be in a *dry* southern country - dry, like Africa? I never knew before. But I like it. The sun is a bit overwhelming. Nearly all foreigners have left here already. Today we are going down to the sea to bathe. But it is a good half-hour down, and one hour up. Mary Cannan has a studio here - nice - for three more months. She is dying to go to Malta - the boat runs from Syracuse. But she can't go alone. So she wants us to go if she pays our ship fare - it's only an eight-hour crossing. It might be amusing, for four or five days. But Malta isn't wildly attractive, and I am doubtful if I want to spend the money.

But Mary Cannan had set her mind on it, and the Lawrences went with her. Norman Douglas has quoted an extract from a letter in which Magnus describes with malicious veracity the boredom of Lawrence in Malta. Back in Taormina on May 28th, he wrote to me:

... we were to stay only two days - then a steam boat strike, and we only got back tonight, after some eleven days. Oh, and it was so expensive, and I feel so displeased. Malta is a strange place - a dry bath brick island that glares and sets your teeth on edge and is so dry that one expects oneself to begin to crackle. Valetta Harbour is wonderful: beautiful. But I get set on edge by the British regime. It is very decent, I believe, but it sort of stops life, it prevents the human reactions from taking full swing, there is always a kind of half-measure, half-length, 'not quite' feeling about, which simply arrests my digestion.

Upon his return he had found my cheque waiting for him, and again he gave me to understand that he would not use it but would keep it for me in his bank. A day or so later, however, he suddenly decided otherwise. From America had come two thousand lire for stories. 'I have enough money. And why should I hold any of yours in fee. So I accept the gift all the same: and have burned your cheque.' Again, 'what you do want is money, so you must get it.' Once he started, he felt confident that *he* could make money. 'Then we'll share mine. It won't be long. You see if it is.'

I had by then been to Altrincham to see *Mrs Holroyd*, and I confess that on my way there the undertaking began to assume the nature of a penance. Lawrence had betrayed that he was eager, even nervous, as to the results. 'I have a dreadful feeling that it may be a fiasco,' he had written. So too had I.

The presentation, however, was creditable, if no more. It compared favourably with the performance given in London by the '300 Club' in December, 1926, which also I saw. To do justice to the Altrincham players and the Altrincham audience, no sniggering was elicited by the scene where the dead miner's body is washed by his women. All the same I felt that in a play so realistically written and produced a body-washing scene was theatrically unacceptable. Either it must be done 'off' with only the voices and the footsteps of the women to give it reality, or the stage must be darkened to a firelight glow and the whole production lifted into a plane beyond realism with movements that are classically simplified. To read the scene is simple and tragic. Outside the Irish People's Plays I reckon we can hardly match it in English with any other scene of dramatic dialogue having working folk as the protagonists. And the play holds its own against the Irish plays. Yet, as things are, it does not quite 'do', and I believe the reason lies in the fact that the theatre itself was antipathetic to Lawrence, so much so that even when writing for it he maintained his antipathy. 'Here is drama,' one imagines him to say - 'here is prose drama as authentic as any the English theatre can show. It is not "good theatre!" Then the English theatre must change itself to accommodate a living contemporary English play.' The first scenes of *Mrs Holroyd*, like the first scenes in *Touch and Go*, prove

that Lawrence had the art of crisp and pregnant stage dialogue. The action, besides, the exits and the entrances, are finely devised, and the conflict is real. It is not surprising to find that in his youth Lawrence contemplated the production of a volume of plays, nor that he could not resist occasional returns to the dramatic form. But the theatre is a task-mistress who demands not only obedience but enslavement. And Lawrence would not bow the head to such a muse. We find, accordingly, that though his plays are far from being mere literary dramatisations, and are most genuinely plays, they are not truly adapted to the mechanics of our stage.

Of contemporary productions, opera, with its light-hearted formality and transparent artifice, was probably most to his taste. He was not interested in 'problems', effective situations, or any of the sophisticated trickery of the modern theatre. I question indeed if he ever found enjoyment in witnessing a play, unless it might be one of the older classics. Once, and only once, I was so ill advised as to book seats for him and myself to see - what he thought might be interesting - the translation of Tolstoy's *Living Corpse* at the St James's Theatre, with Henry Ainley and my friend Athene Seyler in the leading parts. And *how* he hated it and everything about it, so far as the theatre was concerned! The more the germ of the thing appealed to him, the more he was appalled by what he considered to be the falsity and ineptitude of its stage appeal. It made him so unhappy, that before the performance was half through he found himself unable to endure it longer, even with his face buried in his hands. 'Do you mind, Catherine? I just can't bear it any longer!' he whispered. There was nothing for it but to squeeze our way out from our upper circle seats (particularly narrow in that theatre) earning, as we did so, black looks from a long row of earnest Russophile playgoers. Immediately afterwards he was apologetic and charming. 'All that good money of yours!' he mourned. 'But no, it was *too* much to expect us to see it through!'

My only other theatrical experience in the Lawrence connection was when, on the day the War began, I took Frieda to hear Marie Lloyd. It was, I think, Frieda's first chance of listening to one of England's idols of the comic sort. From her childish wonderment, not unmixed with a delight that was a trifle timid of itself (as though Lawrence might suddenly appear and wag his head reprovingly) I suspect that this was her first visit to a London music-hall. Frieda would not have been Frieda had she been able to resist Marie Lloyd. But when we got home and recounted our enjoyment to Lawrence (who had been otherwise engaged) she was cautious and - in her half-defensive, half-belligerent way - noncommittal. 'Yes, yes. I *do* think she is a great artist! I *did* enjoy her, and I believe, *Lorenzo*, that you would have liked her real vulgarity.' But though

Lawrence was glad we had enjoyed ourselves, he shook his head a little over Frieda, as some fond but austere Victorian parent might shake his head upon catching his child poring over the pages of *Ally Sloper* — without, however, reproving the child or removing the periodical. Though he loved abandon, and could be the gayest of the gay or the funniest of the funny, it was not in Lawrence either to be frivolous or to contemplate frivolity with pleasure. One felt that while he would make the fullest admission of Marie Lloyd's artistry, he would still feel that this was rather a silly way of spending the evening.

Lawrence was disappointed by the general indifference to *Mrs Holroyd*, and I doubt not, though he never mentioned it, disappointed in particular by *The Times* notice.

In my anxiety I had made a bad mistake. Instead of keeping myself within five hundred words, in which the praise would not have been amenable to scissors, I had run to nearly a thousand words. I was accordingly disgusted to find that in the printed version all my warmest commendations were omitted. What remained was not even good criticism. am afraid *Mrs Holroyd* was altogether a bit of a bore and that you were miserable. Am sorry,' Lawrence wrote. Today it is interesting to learn that after receiving accounts of the 1926 production, Lawrence said, 'I think, if it were being done again, I should alter the end, and make it more cheerful. Myself, I hate miserable endings now.'

4

That summer it was difficult, and therefore easily appeared impossible, for me to get to Italy either with my family or alone. Lawrence, finding Sicily too hot, went for a time with Frieda to Baden-Baden, to return alone to Florence. It was during his solitude of a fortnight there that he wrote *Tortoises*. He then went on to friends in Venice, where he was joined by Frieda, and together they went back in October to Taormina.

Till the end of the year he was writing hard - the introduction to Magnus's Memoirs, most of the poems for *Birds, Beasts and Flowers* and the second half of *Aaron's Rod*. I had very few letters from him, only an occasional greeting, or a book, or the announcement that he was 'unbearably tired of Europe'.

America seems to you looney? Well, I don't care, perhaps there's more sense in lunacy than in our national mechanism. God knows what one will do. I am thinking of next spring. I shan't stay in Taormina, I think - perhaps go to Germany for the summer, perhaps to Sardinia, he had written from Venice in October. And round about Christmas - when he was ill in bed with a cold - 'We really want to sail away to New Mexico in January or February.'

But in January, instead of going farther, he and Frieda made the trip to Sardinia, which he has described in *Sea and Sardinia*. He wrote that book rapidly in the early spring, when he worked further upon *Birds, Beasts and Flowers*, as well as upon a 'first vol. of a funny novel: but a *tiny* first vol. Quite a lot. Yet not much.' This refers to a light novel or novelette, that was never completed. It was about the Midlands, and was to be called *Mr Noon*.

At last that March the *History* had come out, and he sent me a copy - 'Some of the chapters I think are good: first worst. Don't read it if it bores you.' After a year of managing his own affairs, Lawrence had now taken Curtis Brown as his agent. But as usual, after a hard working spell, books had become comparatively unimportant to him, and the need to live was everything. 'If only I had money I should buy a Mediterranean sailing ship that was offered me: so beautiful. Then you'd cruise with me.'

In the gloomy and tearful picture of Lawrence given us in *Son of Woman* there is a singular omission. It is forgotten that after all Lawrence was an artist, and that he stood in need of the delight and the fresh interest, which, for his greater

productiveness, it is the artist's nature to seek. Fury, as we know, was Lawrence's in plenty - that dark, coiled-up child in his 'bowels', begotten of the Midlands, to which he must give birth. But he needed also a careless joie *de vivre*, which was as native to him as his anger, and of which he was starved in England, though England found the means to feed his anger in abundance. The stimulus of anger, as Lawrence knew, can easily be overdone. It heads a man toward bitterness, and what is worse, solemnity. 'A man must keep his earnestness nimble to escape ridicule,' as he said of Baron Corvo. England had seemed to him 'worn on the nerves'. And though 'Sicily indeed is cross and swindles one . . . somehow it doesn't affect one: annoys and amuses one: which is different.' Besides there was the loveliness - 'the orange blossom is passing, northern trees, apple and pear and May blossom are out: the wood is tall and green, the mornings are fine. I feel I do not care a bit about the trials and troubles of the world. Suppose they'll be coming down on my head just now to make me care: but even so I cannot trouble beforehand.' This too was needed. And where another would have been held in one place by habit or fear or sloth, Lawrence followed his desire. In *Touch and Go* he makes the sculptress Anabel incapable of modelling more birds and animals, though she possesses genius, simply because she has lost that joy of life which had once enabled her to render in stone the thistledown lightness of a kitten. Until her joy returns, she will produce nothing lively. Lawrence knew so well what it was to feel inspired that he could not fail to recognise the lack of inspiration in himself or in others. England had inspired him, but England refused recognition of the fruits of her own inspiration; and though he had continued to produce under the hard pressure of poverty, neglect and obloquy, he was aware that pressure can be borne too long and all in vain. For the artist escape may become necessary for survival. Imperatively he must seek both fresh inspiration and the support given by recognition in the most natural way open to him - by moving away from places where these things have failed him. It is easy to call this a morbid restlessness, or to describe it as a symptom of illness. But may it not with quite as much justice be called sanity and courage? Both are certainly needed for it, and no artist ever needed or evinced more of these virtues than Lawrence. If the stages of his pilgrimage may be put down to the restlessness of failure, we must bear in mind that the pilgrimage itself was undertaken by deliberate and difficult choice. Ultimately it must be judged by results. Belonging to this period in Italy - a period of little more than two years - we find *The Lost Girl*, *Aaron's Rod*, the introduction to Magnus's *Memoirs*, *Sea and Sardinia*, *Birds, Beasts and Flowers*, *Tortoises*, and 'Evangelistic Beasts' - besides which the new novel already mentioned began its existence, and several long short stories or novelettes were given their final form

for publication in America. Accompanying all this was continual letter-writing, always by hand, and travelling of the most economical kind, which was exhausting when not actually adventurous. It is not a bad record for an admittedly delicate man, of whom at home it was busily alleged that he suffered from 'decaying' gifts, disintegrating spirit, and general decline in creative power.

These expressions are taken from Murry's long review of *Women in Love* printed three months after the book's appearance in the *Nation* that August - 'The Nostalgia of Mr D. H. Lawrence' - 'nostalgia', be it understood, 'for the slime'. After its five-year wait the novel had appeared, not, as Murry says, a year, but only six months after *The Lost Girl*. This, if he had looked into the matter, might have thrown fight on the chronological order of the two books upon which he partly based his attack. As things are, he stretches in reminiscence the six months to a vague twelve; and, while refusing to regret the nature of the attack, offers the partial excuse that it was 'by the irony of fate' that he announced the end of Lawrence, just as Lawrence was engaged upon the books which Murry was later to announce as his finest. We all make mistakes, especially where Lawrence is concerned; and this review - with that other, 'The Decay of Mr D. H. Lawrence' - might be allowed to blush unseen, were it not that Murry has himself dragged it out to say that 'strangely enough' there is little in it he would withdraw today. It is, therefore, necessary to repeat his verdict therein, which is that Lawrence is no longer an artist, that he has sacrificed his art to a vain philosophy (*i.e.*, not Murry's philosophy) and that he is a 'writhing' and 'obscene' and ridiculous failure, with no command over himself or his characters. Murry ignores the wonderful, the touching, the interesting and the new things in the book, which one thinks that a friend might wish to bring into prominence even while failing to understand or agree with the book's intention; and he displays unconvincing hilarity over passages that are most easily liable to misunderstanding by the vulgar. Certainly Murry allows that Lawrence believes in his own vision. But even Lockhart did not accuse Keats of dishonesty, merely of ineptitude. Nor had Lockhart ever been Keats's friend.

It would more truly seem to be 'by the irony of fate', that Keats himself once had a friend named George Felton Mathew, and that it has been left to Murry to tell us of this friendship, which in certain vital respects is the parallel to his own friendship with Lawrence. Mathew had been one of the very first to praise the immature Keats. But Mathew disliked and misprized the mature Keats, finding him 'in danger of becoming "a proud egotist of diseased feelings and perverted principles"'; and after thirty years he still tried to justify a review in which he feared that the poet might contaminate purity and inoculate degeneracy and corruption - a review which Murry recognises to have been actuated by 'ill-

concealed antagonism'. It is difficult not to fancy that some Murry of the future - a critic of emotional gifts who can be trusted only in his dealings with writers who have been dead for fifty years or more - will discover and elucidate for us the Murry-Lawrence affair in a similar manner. Even today it is impossible to turn over the phrases of Murry's *Lost Girl* review - 'sub human', 'esoteric language', 'quack terminology', 'mysteriously degraded', 'corrupt mysticism', 'slime', 'loss of creative vigour', 'paralysis', and 'decline', without at least the suspicion (shared by him in the similar case of Mathew) that the writer of these 'simply insufferable terms' is 'resentful about something', and that here is 'ill-concealed antagonism'. As for the 'this hurts me more than it hurts you' assurance, which is provided as a sort of ground bass in Murry's reviews, every schoolboy knows the significance of that. How much more truly 'simple' had Murry summed up his 'great man' in the classic manner - 'I hate him, he's a liar, he can't dance, his feet stink, and he doesn't love Jesus.'

To return to *Women in Love*, what foundation Murry has for his up-to-date defence that Lawrence had 'abandoned the ground he had taken up' in this novel, 'even before the book was published', he does not tell us and it is hard to guess. Because quite certainly the novel remains a vital expression of much that its author held to the end of his life, even while it is not the novel he would have written at the end of his life. But nothing of this really matters. Poor criticism is merely poor criticism. What does matter about Murry's review is its demonstration of the horror that Lawrence believed to be inveterate in 'Christian love'. It was an effort to annihilate a man who, not yet being dead, dared to defy critical reduction to a formula. No different derivation can explain its particular flavour.

That October of 1921 Murry further used his position on the *Nation* to join the name of Lawrence with others of whom nothing might now be expected. In a long and favourable review of a novel by Mr Swinnerton, called *Coquette*, he seized the slender, gratuitous chance to praise at Lawrence's expense. And in passing his verdict upon a string of contemporaries, he refused to the author of *The Rainbow* a place anywhere on the same plane as the authors of *Kipps*, *The Old Wives' Tale*, and *Lord Jim*. In his judgement Lawrence was no longer even 'in the dusty rear'. He had fallen out of the race.

5

In March Frieda had been summoned to Baden-Baden by the serious illness of her mother. Lawrence, left alone, went to Rome and Florence (this being the occasion described by Rebecca West) and in June he joined Frieda in Germany. The old Baroness was better, though still weak, he wrote, when sending us a box of the tiny Black Forest toys 'for the boy'. They stayed for two months, living mostly at a place three miles from Baden, near the end of the Forest 'with the Rhine Valley and the Vosges beyond', where they were 'very well done' for three shillings a day. But though there was plenty of food and friendliness, and 'a great sense of magnificent, spacious country', there was also a sense of depression - 'sort of stupefied or numbed rather than anything else', and Lawrence felt a stranger. As he put it, 'I feel a stranger everywhere and nowhere.'

That summer we had arranged to leave the boy at home, and to meet the Lawrences either in Tirol or in Italy. At first it was to be the former. By the middle of July they were at Constance on their way to Lake Zell, near Salzburg. Frieda's younger sister Johanna (it was the older sister Else to whom Lawrence had dedicated *The Rainbow*) had taken a house at Tumersbach and was there with her husband and children. But lovely as this was, Lawrence soon wearied to be gone. 'I have been waiting,' he wrote on August 3rd, 'to see whether I could really stay on here ... the villa is on the edge of the lake, we bathe and boat and go on excursions into the mountains. The snow isn't far. And the Schreibershofens are really *very* nice with us. And yet, I feel I can't breathe. Everything is free and perfectly easy. And still I feel I can't breathe. Perhaps it is one can't live with people any more - *en menage*. Anyhow there it is. Frieda loves it and is quite bitter that I say I want to go away. But there it is - I do.' He did not want to live again at Taormina, but Germany made him homesick for Italy. We were bringing him various things, including signed passport forms, as their passports were almost expired and they did not know how to have them renewed in either Germany or Italy. Though he sent us all the needful information and was ready to engage a room in the neighbouring peasant hotel, we could feel that he was restless. Also the weather broke at Tumersbach. We therefore made our own plans to walk from Innsbruck independently, and to reach Florence when he should be there in September.

After crossing, mainly on foot, in hot but stormy weather from Innsbruck to Meran we turned up the Brenner again and wandered through the battle-area to Cortina d'Ampezzo, where we got on the train for Venice. We did not stay there long. What with bad weather and bugs - 1921 was a great bug year in Italy and Austria - after a day or two we were glad to leave for Florence.

The Lawrences, whom we had advised of our train, were to meet us. But something not anybody's fault went wrong, and Lawrence spent a large part of the morning meeting trains in which we were not. When we did arrive there was nobody about for us, but just as we left the station we caught sight of Frieda hastening away. She had seen the train come in, but somehow had missed us. Such missings are a fatality in my family. Our joyful greeting on the road outside has quite obliterated what followed immediately upon it. I know we appointed to meet later for lunch all four together.

Lawrence and Frieda were in a furnished upper flat on the other side of the Arno, 32, Via dei Bardi, the house that is traditionally pointed out as Romola's. Lawrence had recommended a pension on the other side of the river where he had lived himself; but we found it too grand for us, and going farther on took a room in the Rigatti, a pleasant bell-haunted remnant of the Palazzo Alberti, at which Donald had stayed on a former visit.

Of our daily meetings for the week we were there, our meals together, our walks and our talks, Lawrence wrote to me soon afterwards - 'it seems only a moment we saw you - but the sympathy is there'. Both these remarks ring true to me today. Looking back now the week presents itself as rather less than a moment - a hazy moment at that, and we seem to have said and done nothing in particular, nor to have been particularly happy. Though I never felt more drawn to Lawrence, there was about him something restless, remote and even impatient, which blurred the approach and made me doubt sadly once or twice if my own sympathy found any response. I therefore did my best to conceal it. Sometimes I was relieved to get out of his presence.

To use his own phrase, he was now 'done with Italy', and with Europe. It might turn out to be only for the time - it did in fact so turn out - but that made it none the less urgent. Even Sicily, which he had so loved, had ceased to hold him, and he was willing to return to it only that he might pack up and be off. He knew that we could not or would not go with him and he was bound to identify us in some degree with what he longed to leave. As companion adventurers we had failed him. But we were still acknowledged friends, more deeply acknowledged perhaps than ever before, as he needed friends, if only to leave behind. Even if we were only pillars of salt we stood for something. Lawrence was like the young son in the fairy tale who would one day come and touch his

stony brethren with the far-fetched herb, and turn them once more into brethren of flesh. Meanwhile we were safe in our surroundings, and he was of that threatened frailty of flesh that needs all its wits about it.

Lawrence had loved Italy as much as any English poet ever did, and he got from it more than most. He was grateful till the end of his life for that carelessness of the South which dispelled like an unconscious benison the harsh and petty carefulness of his Northern upbringing. Travelling north would always make him feel ill and resentful. Turning south would always offer ease and healing. 'It cures one of caring, and a good thing too!' He felt this at the beginning and returned to it at the end, but, bask as he might now for a time in the essential tolerance of southern Italy, with its classical mentality and its good-humoured physicalness, it could not assuage for ever his northern thirst for 'something beyond'. He must seek further for that *other* world that is within and behind the real world. The easy and eminently workable Latin compromise with life had gone a little stale, a little rancid in his mouth. It, or something like it, might yet prove to be a practical solution. But there was much to be looked into before this could be accepted.

Lawrence's friends, the Brewsters, who were Buddhists and were shortly leaving Sicily for the East, were urging him to follow them to Ceylon where he could see the working out of Buddhism. At the end of the week he was going to see them off. He was in a restless state of waiting. He knew that he must move soon himself, but was still undecided as to whether the move should be East or West.

As always, there were several stray people who whirled for the time in Lawrence's orbit. I vaguely remember a large American woman who was studying singing, and who had brought with her a stout son of fourteen who carried a cudgel in Fascist fashion, and Lawrence introduced us to at least one of the well-known residents among his acquaintance in Florence. I seem to remember a smallish clean-shaven face that managed to be at once red and dried up. Even this picture, as of something both parched and glowing, may be mistaken. A casual introduction will often thus afflict me with blindness and deafness as well as aphasia.

Again I remember a young woman whom I cannot place, and of whom I have only a single recollection. We were all on the roof of the Lawrences' house. A camera is a thing I scarcely ever use, but I had brought a Brownie with me for our walk across the Dolomites, and when I saw Lawrence standing laughing near the parapet I had the sudden desire to take a snapshot of him. I don't think he was more than faintly irritated. Anyhow he went on laughing and did not say anything to stop me. But the young woman thought she divined in Lawrence

some serious distaste and tried to prevent the photograph from being taken. At any other time I believe I might have submitted. But feeling certain that Lawrence did not really mind, and longing to have a picture of him in his present light and gay mood, I persisted. I am very glad to have the picture now. It is, I think, a misfortune that by far the most of the photographs and portraits of Lawrence show him as thoughtful - either fiercely or sufferingly so. His usual expression was a kind of sparkling awareness, almost an 'I am ready for anything' look which was invigorating to behold.

The Lawrences' flat was second from the top. In the small top floor was Mary Cannan. Once at least we all went to her room for a meal, which was more sumptuous and varied than the meals we shared with the Lawrences. White-haired and with exquisitely pretty features, Mary was always the elegant one of the company. One day when Mary was out, Frieda displayed to me a cupboard full of her enviable clothes. While the rest of us were still content with knitted wool or silk of the common kind, Mary had several hand-knitted dresses of silk *bouclé* - then the very latest thing from Paris. Passing it appreciatively through her hands, Frieda, who prided herself on a 'feeling for textures', assured me with solemn emphasis that it was 'enormously expensive'. It was perhaps a certain lack of response in me on this occasion that led Frieda to the conclusion that 'Catherine had taste but no *feeling* for textures'. I admired the *bouclé* frigidly and without desiring to handle it.

I was jealous of Mary. That summer Donald and I had been roughing it - drenched by storms, devoured by bugs, several nights bedless in the mountains - which was all very well *in* the mountains, but now in civilised surroundings, tired out from over-walking, I was obliged to appear on every occasion in a faded garment of flowered cotton which had originally been intended as a garden overall. When it fell to me, as it often seemed to do, to walk behind Lawrence and Mary, Lawrence attired with impressive suitability in natural coloured silk (a sort of Palm Beach suit) and Mary all that was urbane and charming, I almost hated Mary. Frieda had advised me to apply to her for the secret of a particular face-bleaching lotion which she used and, I understood, had received directly from Sarah Bernhardt. This I never did, but I have often wondered about it since. I saw that Lawrence liked to walk with a fashionably dressed woman, and though he could and did make fun of Mary behind her back (as indeed he could and did of any of us) and was sometimes clearly bored before her face, he was fond of her and took a lot of trouble over her, largely because she looked always so nice. She had written a book, still in manuscript, about all the dogs she had ever had as pets. Lawrence, at her request, went over it most carefully, suggesting alterations and improvements. Remembering my experience with my

own novel, I found this distressing.

Though not in the least rich, Lawrence just then, owing to the placing of short stories in the United States through Mountsier, had become distinctly more prosperous than he had been when I last saw him. This was reflected in his and Frieda's clothes. He would never be a dandy, but he liked to appear in the unmistakable role of *ill signore*. I felt we Carswells were foiling to keep pace. It was unfortunate, too, for me that I had Anglo-Italian cousins in Florence to whom I introduced Lawrence without good effect. My cousins had the right to consider themselves of the Italian aristocracy. But they showed themselves blind alike to Lawrence's genius and his charm, and he disliked what he saw of them. Like so many well-bred Italians they knew nothing of English Literature later than Oscar Wilde, except for modern rumours of Hall Caine, Marie Corelli, and possibly Mr Galsworthy. As they had been associated with some of the romantic passages of my childhood, this state of matters made me feel absurdly jangled, especially in view of several unlucky contacts which I brought about. I suppose most lives contain similar 'pockets', in which a fetish of youth has remained so long undisturbed that the turning out demands a certain resolution.

One specially unlucky incident distressed me out of measure. One of my cousins lived in an old villa, really a little castle, some way out of Florence. This existed in its own world, with some hundreds of peasants living on the estate under the *mezzadria* system. Everything, from the wine and the bread to the restored panelling of the rooms, was home-grown and home-made. Having boasted to Lawrence and Frieda of the beauties of this place, at which Donald and I were going to spend a weekend, I arranged that an invitation should be given. The Lawrences - and, I think, Mary Cannan - were to take the tram from Florence to the nearest hamlet that was some two or three miles from the villa, and a carriage ordered by my cousins was to bring them out to spend the Sunday and meet Professor Guglielmo Ferrero.

Sunday came, but no Lawrence party arrived, and only at the hour they were expected did I learn that my cousin had forgotten, or had anyhow omitted, to order the carriage which should have been done beforehand in the hamlet as she had not one of her own. In desperation I set out to meet them on foot; but when, after traversing about a mile, I saw no signs of them, I knew it was useless to go on. By the time I reached the village, if as it appeared - they had failed to find a carriage for themselves, they would have gone home. It was a frightfully hot day.

On the Monday in Florence we found, as I had feared, that they had come as far as the hamlet by a wearisome tram, had found no further means of transport, and had gone back. Lawrence treated the matter lightly and said it was of no

consequence. The worst thing was that my cousin didn't think it of any consequence either. She regarded Lawrence as nothing more than an obscure English bohemian friend of ours. The lapse was a nightmare of abasement to me, all the more that so little was said on either side. So I could not help rejoicing in my cousin's humiliation when, to his undisguised and very vocal rage, she inadvertently introduced the great Ferrero under the name of his father-in-law, Lombroso.

On Lawrence's thirty-seventh birthday, which fell during our week, we supped alone with Frieda and him at his flat and were gay in a quiet sort of way. I cannot remember much that was said, except that we discussed the break with Pinker, and I recall much praise of the Italian newspapers at the expense of the English ones. How much better than *The Times* was the *Corriere della Sera*! How much less 'base'! When reading the English newspapers in Italy he felt ashamed to be an Englishman, and that was a thing he hated. His John Bullishness was able to raise its head again, however, and its voice, in acute disgust of the use to which the shingle on the other side of the Arno was put by the Florentine *giovinezza*. If anybody should find an inconsistency or a discrepancy between this disgusted Lawrence and the Lawrence who painted certain of his pictures, that person must think again, and think hard.

Another day the Lawrences ate with us at a little downstairs restaurant off the Via dei Calzaioli. I remember only one thing vividly. Shortly before we met for our meal I had been nagging at Donald for what I took to be some small breach of manners on his part with regard to the same cousin who failed to send the carriage for Lawrence. In certain ways, I had argued, the Italians are formal, and in not observing their formalities we give them the opening to despise us and our friends. Smarting under her lack of courtesy to Lawrence, I was annoyed by any possible lapse on our part. So I had been scolding, and Donald at dinner had complained of this, good-naturedly, to Lawrence. 'You ought to hit her!' said Lawrence fiercely - 'Hit her hard. Don't let her scold and nag. You mustn't allow it, *whatever* it is you have done!' We all laughed and felt refreshed. When, the other day, I recalled this to Donald he had no recollection of it. But I have never forgotten.

I have said that the stout son of the American lady singer carried a cudgel in the Fascist fashion. During that summer of 1921, the Fascist order had not yet been established in Italy, but it was coming on fast and there were constant street fights in Florence. Though I witnessed several rushes of a street crowd, I never saw any actual shooting. Lawrence, however, had, and his descriptions were so lively that I had to think twice before saying just now that I was not present myself. He told us how, on the sound of a shot, the crowded street was an empty

one before you could wink. The people, he declared, ran up the fronts of the houses like flies and down into the earth like mice. One moment they were there, strolling slowly and thickly after the manner of a Florentine crowd. The next moment not a soul in sight. When Lawrence had seen anything like this that excited him, he was able by word and voice and gesture to make you share perfectly in his bygone excitement. As in his description of the bullfight at the opening of *The Plumed Serpent*, he made a point of avoiding all the more familiar forms of exaggeration. But when, especially in talking, a single, carefully selected enlargement was necessary to convey the force of his own emotion to the listener, he chose his point infallibly. I never once heard him exaggerate the wrong point or fail to convey the strict emotional truth by means of the exaggeration he had chosen. He would have made a great descriptive reporter.

Our time of holiday was nearly done, and we wished to go on to Rome before returning to London. Lawrence had seen neither Perugia nor Siena. I had associations with both places, and liked Perugia in particular. Lawrence specially wished to see Siena. So it was arranged that, if possible, we should meet him there on our way back. We talked about how much we should all enjoy ourselves. There would just be Frieda and Lawrence and Donald and I.

But somehow I did not believe it would happen, and it did not. We went by ourselves to Perugia, and we heard from Lawrence that on arriving in Siena he had hated it so much that he could not bear to stay on another day. What happened to make Siena so hateful to him I never learned. I agreed, however, with his finding that travelling was 'peculiarly disheartening' that year, when the débris of the War was still everywhere, and one was depressed 'not so much with inconveniences as by the kind of slow poison one breathes in every new atmosphere'. His restlessness, too, I guessed was at a height. He had felt that he must rush away to Capri to see the Brewsters off to Ceylon. This he wrote to us from Siena the day he was to leave, saying he was sorry to miss us but felt sure we should soon be coming to Italy to live. In case that note should not get us, he left another at the Bank in Florence, with a parcel of six stone plates which he begged us to take to England for Ada. My heart felt a bit like this parcel, but we got it triumphantly home and eventually to the Midlands without one of the plates being cracked, which was something. In this puzzling world it is always a comfort to be of some small practical service to those whom one honours most.

It was nearly a week later, on the last day of September, that we, still in Florence, heard again - this time from Sicily. The Brewsters had been seen off, and the Lawrences had reached Taormina on the night of the 29th in a whirlpool of rain -

.. . but so glad to come to rest, I can't tell you - still like this place best - the sea open to the east, to the heart of the east, away from Europe. I had your letter - it seemed only a moment we saw you - but the sympathy is there. You must come here ... Love.

From then till after the middle of February 1922, Lawrence stayed on at Taormina. He was still resolved to go to America, but shrank from the directly westward journey. Neither did he see his way financially clear enough to warrant it.

6

Meanwhile several disagreeable things had happened in England. The *John Bull* attack upon *Women in Love*, headed 'A Book the Police Should Ban', and with the subtitle, 'Loathsome Study of Sex Depravity - Misleading Youth to Unspeakable Disaster', had appeared on September 17th. The calm and cultured easily make light of *John Bull* attacks; yet we can understand - especially as in this case most of the aforesaid elected to side with *John Bull* - that Lawrence's publisher felt 'alarmed and upset', and wrote to say so. The assistant editor of *John Bull*, who in manly fashion signed his article, did 'not claim to be a literary critic', but he 'knew dirt when he smelt it', and here was dirt 'in heaps - festering, putrid heaps which smelt to high Heaven'. And, in phrases not in substance very different from those used a month earlier in the *Nation* by one who *did* claim to be a literary critic, he had gone on to protect the 'unsuspecting public' by calling the book an 'obscene study', a 'neurotic production', and a 'shameless study of sex depravity which in direct proportion to the skill of its literary execution becomes unmentionably vile'. He might almost have read Murry's article! He shares, it will be seen, with Murry, the virtue (for which Murry lays some claim to a monopoly of credit) of taking Lawrence seriously; but he differs from Murry in that he grants art and power to the book, and he refrains from the facetiousness which Murry was to permit himself in the process of relegating Mr Lawrence to the slime. It was left to a foreign critic ten years later - Professor Paul de Reul of Brussels University - to say of one such passage as Murry holds up to ridicule, 'Ne sourions pas de ce geste qui est pur et grave.'

At almost the same time Seeker had to inform Lawrence that Philip Heseltine, who was no longer friendly towards him, was threatening a libel action, alleging that the Halliday of the novel was a portrait of himself, which in fact it was, though Lawrence modified the character and altered the complexion for the English edition. In law, I believe, Heseltine's case was very dubious; but there was already trouble enough about the book, and for peace sake Seeker paid him fifty pounds as solatium for injury to feelings and reputation.

Towards the end of October Lawrence wrote from Taormina one of his long, characteristic letters in reply to one of mine in which I had said that my second novel had failed to please the publisher. He wrote affectionately, maliciously,

lightly, damning his enemies - 'snotty little lot of people' - heartening up his friends, and describing his mood of the moment as one of not really giving 'a damn for any blooming thing' - usually a preliminary mood with him to caring ardently for some one thing in particular. He still thought that Sicily was 'probably better than any other place', and, though he could not get a 'little taste of canker out of his mouth', he admitted that perhaps it was his mouth that was to blame. As usual it was only man that was vile, or rather, at the moment, ludicrous.

Here, of course, it is like a continental Mad Hatter's teaparty. If you'll let it be, it is all teaparty - and you wonder who on earth is going head over heels into the teapot next. On Saturday we were summoned to a gathering of Britons to discuss the erection of an English church here, at the estimated cost of twenty-five thousand pounds sterling - signed Bronte: which means of course Alec Nelson-Hood, Duca di Bronte. I didn't go, fearing they might ask me for the twenty-five thousand pounds.

But he was not idle. In spite of the severe sirocco in November - 'hot billows of wet and clinging mist - and rain. Damn sirocco' - he was 'pottering with short stories' for a volume. One of these, which he had finished by November 15th, was 'The Captain's Doll'. Earlier, he had written to Donald to ask 'which regiment of Scots wears the tight tartan trews: the quite tight ones' and all about them. He was also pondering, with some kind of a book in view, over the fascinating lost Etruscans, and he was preparing to translate Giovanni Verga's *Mastro Don Gesualdo* and some of his shorter stories. This last, he thought, would be 'fun', as Verga's peculiar language was so fascinating. 'He exercises quite a fascination on me, and makes me feel quite sick at the end, but perhaps that is only if one knows Sicily.'

Lawrence has never had full credit as a translator. He had a similar gift to that of the late C. K. Scott Moncrieff. He could enter into the meaning of a highly individual outlook on life that was other than his own and expressed in a difficult idiom. Had he not been novelist and poet in his own right, he might have earned good money, an easy fame and high ungrudging acknowledgement as a translator. He is of the first rank.

That month of November Seltzer was bringing out *Sea and Sardinia* and the illustrated chap-book of *Tortoises*. And there was word of Seltzer doing in chap-book form the poems 'Evangelistic Beasts', for which we were asked to look for a medieval cover design among the British Museum missals. Lawrence had received, as yet, no good word of the *Aaron's Rod* manuscript except from Seltzer, and though he took this as probably no more than 'a publisher's pat', it was anyhow 'better than a smack in the eye, such as one gets from England for

anything'. Some of the worst smacks in the eye had come from the *Athenaeum*, where Murry in the previous December, with Katherine Mansfield behind him, had attacked *The Lost Girl* at length under what he has himself designated the 'characteristic' heading of 'The Decay of Mr D. H. Lawrence' (December 17th, 1920), an attack by which he still stands, though he is obliged to admit that his conclusions were based on a chronological error - an error greater by several years than he knew even when he made the admission. In the same letter Lawrence makes his forecast of Italian affairs -

I shouldn't wonder if before very long they effected a mild sort of revolution here, and turned out the king. It would be a clergy - industrial - socialist move - industrialists and clergy to rule in name of the people. Smart dodge, I think. If the exchange falls again they will effect it. Then they'll ally with Germany, Austria, and probably France and make a European ring excluding England. That seems to be the idea.

He believed, however, that this would come from a victory for the Communists.

All the while he was watching the birds and longing to know when he could set off on his journey.

There are crowds of all sorts of new birds in the garden, suddenly come south. And the storks are passing in the night, whewwing softly and murmuring as they go overhead.

He was scraping up hard for his fares to sail farther away. Not only the full-blown hostility in England, but the growing sympathy in America, strengthened his conviction that there was his virgin soil. Already, as we have seen, Amy Lowell had stretched out a hand of practical helpfulness of a kind that could be taken without humiliation. Now came a letter from another rich and strange American - 'a woman called Mabel Dodge Sterne', offering them the loan of a furnished adobe house for themselves at Taos, New Mexico, and all they could want in addition if only they would go there.

She had told them, wrote Lawrence to me, that 'Taos is on a mountain - 7,000 feet up and 23 miles from a railway - and has a tribe of six hundred free Indians who she says are interesting, sun-worshippers, rain-makers, and unspoiled. It sounds rather fun.' He wanted to know if we knew 'anything about such a place as Taos?' And he made enquiries about tramp vessels to New Orleans or Galveston so that he might go direct, missing out 'that awful New York altogether'.

Till at least the end of December he was thinking of going off in this way. At Christmas, when he sent me an American novel, he said that he was 'unbearably tired of Europe'. For New Year he sent me a copy of *Tortoises* and the further

assurance that he was 'seriously thinking of sailing to New Orleans and going to Taos in New Mexico, to try that' in January or February. But he had spent Christmas in bed with what he called an influenza, which was hardly shaken off by January 24th, and I could feel that he was most reasonably afraid of disobeying doctor's orders by going to America in midwinter. In Sicily, as it was, they were having 'vile ... really wicked ... weather' and he was trying to 'possess his soul in patience'. Of the influenza which had been epidemic in England again (I had just been down with it) he wrote me 'I believe it is partly an organic change in one's whole constitution - through the blood and psyche. We are at the end of our particular tether, and the breaking loose is an uncomfortable process.'

It was indeed uncomfortable for Lawrence. He had just heard that his sisters 'loftily disapproved' of *Tortoises* and that his English publisher did not care for *Aaron's Rod*.

That Rod I'm afraid it is gentian root or wormwood stem. But they've got to swallow it sooner or later: miserable tonic-less lot He hoped that my novel, then in proof, having found a new publisher, was bitter too, though he suggested that *Gingerbread* or *Rose Hearted Camellia* would have been titles more pleasing to publishers than *The Camomile*.

But the chief piece of news in this letter, written on January 24th, was that the Lawrences were leaving Europe. Having almost booked their passages to America however, it had suddenly 'come over' Lawrence that he must first go to Ceylon. His friend Brewster who was studying Pali and Buddhism at the Buddhist Monastery in Kandy, had written asking him to come and had offered hospitality. The Lawrences were to have to themselves a 'big old ramshackle bungalow there'. So they were going.

I have once more gone back on my plan. I shrink as yet from the States. Ultimately I shall go there, no doubt. But I want to go east before I go west: go west *via* the east... I think one must for the moment withdraw from the world, away towards the inner realities that *are* real: and return, maybe, to the world later, when one is quiet and sure. I am tired of the world, and want the peace like a river: not this whisky and soda, bad whisky too, of life so-called. I don't believe in Buddhistic inaction and meditation. But I believe the Buddhistic peace is the point to start from - not our strident fretting and squabbling.

Mabel Sterne (as she has told us) was projecting her strong American self-will - her will to *use* Lawrence for ends of her own - across the Atlantic to draw Lawrence to Taos, but her will was as nothing to what Lawrence called the 'Balaam's ass in his belly'. What he had always felt concerning the 'overriding of life' in America had taken concrete form in Mrs Sterne's letters. Americans would be better 'when the hand had fallen on them a bit heavier'. He would go

there, but not until he had been 'fortified by a country with religion for one that had none'. To face America one must be strong. To be strong one must be 'cured' of sick Europe. So he would withdraw for a breathing-space, would try if 'the old, old East' would 'sweeten the gall in his blood'. He thought he might stay in the East for a year. Anyhow, he would go and see.

In the midst of his preparations for departure he found time to write at length to me about (and no doubt to give other help to) a middle-aged and very poor Finnish writer, once the captain of a tramp steamer, who was struggling to support his wife and child on a small and severely depreciated pension. This man had written short stories of seafaring life, which had already been translated into German, and Lawrence wanted me to read them with a view to making English translations and placing these in the English magazines. Unfortunately the stories, which I read as carefully as my inadequate German permitted, did not interest me; and in any case I knew I could not place them as I had no influence where any magazine was concerned. Lawrence had further admitted that they needed putting 'into proper literary shape'. This was no task for me. So I sent them back to the author with my regrets, hoping that the Englishwoman in Finland to whom he had also applied would be able to do better than I could. T. W. Nylander was the author's name. I never heard how he fared.

On February 18th came a postcard from Taormina to say that they were leaving 'on Monday for Palermo, *en route* for Naples', and that they would sail for Colombo from Naples on the 26th by SS *Osterley*, of the Orient line, the passage taking about fourteen days. Lawrence, in 'throes of packing', was feeling thrilled and glad. 'I want to go. One day you and Don will come. I dream'd of elephants.' A further postcard, dated the 25th, from Naples, told us that they were off next day, and begged us to write to Ceylon. No Columbus ever stood more in need of valour or was less informed as to what awaited him overseas. This may sound silly or exaggerated. It is strictly true.

Part Four

AET. 36-40

PROSE

Kangaroo

The Boy in the Bush (with M. L. Skinner)

The Plumed Serpent

Mornings in Mexico

The Woman who Rode Away, etc.

St Mawr, etc.

David (play)

* * *

'Rip the veil of the old vision across, and walk through the rent'

1

We are here and settling down - very hot at first - but one soon takes naturally to it - soon feels in a way at home - sort of root race home. We're in a nice spacious bungalow on the hill above Kandy in a sort of half jungle of a coconut palm estate - and cocoa - beautiful, and such sweet scents. The Prince of Wales was here on Thursday - looks worn out and nervy, poor thing. The Perahera in the evening with a hundred elephants was lovely. But I don't believe I shall ever work here.

This was Lawrence's first letter from Ceylon, written on March 25th, 1922. Already he was beginning to realise that the tropics, in spite of their interest and loveliness, were 'not really his line' - 'not active enough', a realisation that was sharpened by an attack of malaria - his first. The carelessness of Italy was one thing, but the immense not caring of the Orient was another. Though beautiful to look at, the East was 'queer - how it seems to bleed one's courage and make one indifferent to everything'. This was an indifference which the Englishman in Lawrence rejected. It belonged to an order with which he had neither blood contact nor other affinity, so he must get away from it. It was not what he sought - though he had to see it. Nauseous to him were the tropical scents and sounds, and the 'boneless suavity of the East' did not offer that 'last dark strand from the previous pre-white era' which by joining with 'our own thin end' would, Lawrence believed, establish a new flow of life. He found that the dark Oriental was 'built round a gap - a hollow pit. In the middle of their eyes, instead of a man, a sort of bottomless pit.' As for the Buddhist monks, with their 'nasty faces' and 'little vulgar dens of temples', theirs was 'a very conceited, selfish show, a vulgar temple of serenity built over an empty hole in space'. Within a month of his arrival he had planned to go on to Australia. 'If I don't like Australia I shall go on to San Francisco. Now one is started, nothing like keeping going.'

In the course of that month he saw a good deal, including the celebrations for the Prince of Wales, who was just then on the tour during which he made his celebrated gesture towards the 'Untouchables'. Though I never heard Lawrence comment on this gesture, I can guess that it fitted well with his high notions of princeliness. But I did hear his critical comments on the Prince's visit, and I think they merit record. He would have had the King of England's son splendidly

apparelled and dazzlingly escorted in such a way as to strike both worship and terror into his Indian subjects. The frail, sensitive, simple-mannered, well-meaning, but too often weary-looking boy would have gained a thousand-fold, thought Lawrence, by the very frailty and simplicity of his bearing, if he had been framed in a magnificence symbolic of England and England's throne. Here were millions of men and women who could understand glory and submit to it joyfully, but only if the glory was conveyed to them by the eye and ear, by the richness of material stuffs and sounds and odours. It is a sophisticated, moreover a Western imagination that can be moved to the perception of the greatest earthly glory by the figure of a slender, clean-shaven youth with a pale, gentle face, who wears the tailored jacket and creased trousers of Savile Row. The Prince's outfit for the hottest day in Canada ought, in Lawrence's opinion, to be fundamentally different from his outfit for a public appearance in Kandy. I would have backed Lawrence to stage-manage the public appearance of his own Prince to the best advantage for any given populace.

The Lawrences sailed for Australia at the end of April. In Australia - to be exact, at Thirroul, South Coast, New South Wales - Lawrence found a different kind of indifference from any he had met with before. It was neither Oriental nor Mediterranean, but of the whitest kind, all English in its origins. This fascinated, even while it repelled him. 'A raw hole', but wonderful for its freshness, its rough carelessness and its unfamiliar skies. It held him for three months, fruitful months too, that saw the inception and the writing of *Kangaroo* and the rewriting (planned at least) of *The Boy in the Bush* from the unlikely manuscript brought forth for his inspection by his hostess, Miss M. L. Skinner, when he went upon an expedition inland.

If you want to know what it is to feel the 'correct' social world fizzle to nothing, you should go to Australia... In the established sense it is socially nil. Happy-go-lucky, don't-you-bother we're-in-Austraylia. But also there seems to be no inside life of any sort: just a long lapse and drift. A rather fascinating indifference, a *physical* indifference to what we call soul or spirit. It's really a weird show. The country has an extraordinary hoary, weird attraction. As you get used to it, it seems so *old*, as if it had missed all this Semite-Egyptian-Indo-European vast era of history, and was coal age, the age of great ferns and mosses. It hasn't got a consciousness - just none - too far back. A strange effect it has on one. Often I hate it like poison, then again it fascinates me, and the spell of its indifference gets me. I can't quite explain it: as if one resolved back almost to the plant kingdom, before souls, spirits and minds were grown at all: only quite a live, energetic body with a weird face.

They were very happy, Frieda especially so, in the 'awfully nice' bungalow,

forty miles south of Sydney, they had hired at the rent of thirty shillings a week, with living 'about as much as England'. It was a typical Australian bungalow, I imagine, with 'one *big* room and three small bedrooms, then kitchen and washhouse - and a plot of grass'; but the sovereign attraction was what lay directly beyond the plot of grass, 'a low bushy cliff, hardly more than a bank - and the sand and the sea'. It was the Pacific that Lawrence found lovely and stimulating -

A lovely ocean, but my, how booming crashingly noisy as a rule. Today for the first time it only splashes and rushes, instead of exploding and roaring. We bathe by ourselves - and run in and stand under the shower-bath to wash the *very* seaey water off.

It must have seemed as if the constant roar and wash of that sea could empty a man of his consciousness as it emptied the shells that tumbled about its beaches.

His novel half done by June 22nd ('funny sort of novel where nothing happens and such a lot of things *should* happen: scene Australia'), Lawrence was already planning to sail upon August 10th to San Francisco, *via* Wellington and Tahiti, *en route* for Taos. All he waited for now was money for their fares, which he hoped to have from Mountsier. But he would be looking back at Australia over his shoulder as he did not look back on the East - 'Australia would be a lovely country to lose the world in altogether. I'll go round it once more - the world - and if ever I get back here I will stay.'

On the same day that Lawrence posted me a copy of *Aaron's Rod* in the American edition he received a copy of my second novel, *The Camomile*. He thought it 'amusing, well-written and better made' than my first novel, and approved of its 'drift' as well as liking the letter diary form.

One simply must stand out against the social world, even if one misses life. Much life they have to offer! Those Indian civil servants are the limit: you should have seen them even in Ceylon: conceit and imbecility. No, she [the chief character of my story] was well rid of her empty hero and all he stands for: tin cans.

He hoped it would 'flourish without being trodden on'.

When they came to sail from Australia (Frieda told me this long afterwards), though enough had come for the fares, there was so little money over that it became a nice question whether they might economise by laying in half a dozen pairs of socks for Lawrence. Socks would be far dearer in America - meat and wool were the only cheap Australian commodities - and Lawrence already stood in fair need of socks, and would soon stand in urgent need. But having considered carefully, he decided that socks must take their chance. The economy was not worth the risk of running out of cash before they reached America. He

was right. For a dollar in hand was worth much, and in America, though unknown to him, the sales of *Women in Love* were even then running into 15,000 copies.

August 15th saw them in New Zealand for the day and going on to Raratonga and Tahiti. Tahiti he found beautiful, but Papeete 'a poor, dull, modernish place'. In any case, there was little time for looking round. On September 4th, with exactly 20 dollars in their pockets, and not very much more in the bank, they reached San Francisco - 'quite pleasant but very noisy and iron clanking and expensive'. And after four days there they went on to Santa Fé. He would write to us from Taos, where he was to find his mail.

2

That summer of 1922 we stayed at the 'Tinnors' Arms at Zennor - the same inn at which Lawrence and Frieda had stayed in 1916 when they were getting their cottage in order. I had written to Lawrence from there, addressing him at Taos. He replied the day after my letter reached him: 'I always think Cornwall has a lot to give one. But Zennor sounds too much changed.'

Nevertheless: 'In the spring I think I want to come to England. But I feel England has insulted me, and I stomach that feeling badly. *Pero, son sempre inglese.*'

So much for Cornwall and England. What of Taos and America?

Taos, in its way, *is* rather thrilling. We have got a *very* pretty adobe house, with furniture made in the village, and Mexican and Navajo rugs, and some lovely pots. It stands just on the edge of the Indian reservation: a brook behind, with trees: in front, the so-called desert, rather like a moor but covered with whitish-grey sage brush, flowering yellow now: some 5 miles away the mountains rise. On the North - we face East - Taos mountain, the sacred Mt of the Indians, sits massive on the plain - some 8 miles away. The pueblo is towards the foot of the Mt, 3 miles off: a big, adobe pueblo on each side the brook, like two great heaps of earthen boxes, cubes. There the Indians all live together. They are pueblos - these houses were here before the conquest - very old: and they grow grain and have cattle, on the lands bordering the brook, which they can irrigate . . . We drive across these 'deserts' - white sage scrub and dark green pinon scrub on the slopes. On Monday we went up a canon into the Rockies to a deserted gold mine. The aspens are yellow and lovely. We have a pretty busy time, too. I have already learnt to ride one of these Indian ponies, with a Mexican saddle. Like it so much. We gallop off to the pueblo or up to one of the canons. Frieda is learning too. Last night the young Indians came down to dance in the studio, with two drums: and we all joined in. It is fun: and queer. The Indians are much more remote than negroes. This weekend is the great dance at the pueblo, and the Apaches and Navajos come in wagons and on horseback, and the Mexicans troop to Taos village. Taos village is a Mexican sort of plaza - piazza - with trees and shops and horses tied up. It lies one mile to the south of us: so four miles from the pueblo. We see little of Taos itself. . . The

days are hot sunshine: noon very hot, especially riding home across the open. Night is cold. In winter it snows, because we are 7,000 feet above sea-level. But as yet one thinks of midsummer. We are about 30 miles from the tiny railway station: but we motored 100 miles from the main line.

Interspersed with this was a brief description of the people to gratify my curiosity, and the letter ended:

Well, I am afraid it will all sound very fascinating if you are just feeling cooped up in London. I don't want you to feel envious. Perhaps it is necessary for me to try these places, perhaps it is my destiny to know the world. It only excites the outside of me. The inside it leaves more isolated and stoic than ever. That's how it is. It is all a form of running away from oneself and the great problems: all this wild west and the strange Australia. But I try to keep quite clear. One forms not the faintest inward attachment, especially here in America. America lives by a sort of egoistic *will*, shove and be shoved. Well, one can stand up to that too: but one is quite, quite cold inside. No illusion. I will not shove, and I will *not* be shoved. *Sono io!* . . . Remember if you were here you'd only be hardening your heart and stiffening your neck - it is either that or be walked over, in America.

With this for the postscript:

In my opinion a 'gentle' life with John Patrick and Don, and a gentle faith in life itself, is far better than these women in breeches and riding-boots and sombreros, and money and motor cars and wild west. It is all inwardly a hard stone and nothingness. Only the desert has a fascination - to ride alone - in the sun in the for ever unpossessed country - away from man. That is a great temptation, because one rather hates mankind nowadays. But *pazienza, sempre pazienza!* This was the only letter I had till one that came too late for December 25th following a Christmas present of *England, My England* and it was not from Taos, but from the Del Monte ranch, '17 miles away' and '1,600 feet higher up' the Rockies. In September Frieda and he, busying themselves with the homely task of making wild plum jam, had in some measure settled down in the house hospitably put ready for them. It was near enough to Mrs Luhan's own carefully artistic dwelling (upon first seeing the interior Lawrence had been rude enough to find it 'like those nasty little temples' in Ceylon!) for the Lawrences to be expected every night for supper. But this could not last long. Lawrence had quickly recognised what perhaps did not surprise him, that Mrs Luhan wanted of him what he had made Gudrun want of Gerald in *Women in Love* - to use him as an instrument for the furthering of her own ideas and purposes - spiritual, political, artistic. One of the things she had set herself to do was salvage work for the Indians. This was not for Lawrence and he knew it. Her endeavour to

make it so signified to him a kind of outrage. The man that yielded to such usage must die. Gerald had been made to die as surely by Gudrun's doing as if she had stuffed his mouth with snow to choke him. Lawrence would far sooner the woman died! Again, from its highly artistic-social nature, the existence was conducive neither to work nor enjoyment. So, by the middle of December, finding Taos 'too much' for them socially - 'Mabel Luhan and suppers and motor drives and people dropping in' - they had gone to the Del Monte ranch.

It extended 'over 1,500 acres', 'mostly wild', and held 'about 125 head of cattle'. The farming work was managed by a couple, with whom lived the man's sister. They were more or less responsible for the place - educated, young, hard-working people called Hawk, to whom Lawrence took at once. Three minutes from the Hawks' house, all near together, were several log cabins. Of these one was sufficiently roomy, and this - again by the kindness of Mrs Luhan - the Lawrences occupied. Another, smaller and more ancient, was inhabited by two young Danish artists who - need it be said? - had left Taos in the Lawrences' company. It was 'materially very fine'. Even it was 'very beautiful' - 'the snow mountains behind - a vast landscape below, vast, desert, and then more mountains west, far off in Arizona, a skyline ... trees all behind - and snow'. In the daytime Lawrence and the young Danish artists went chopping down trees for their own burning, or 'riding off together'. So that it was 'altogether . . . ideal, according to one's ideas', although to be sure in December the altitude (8,600 feet) took 'a bit of getting used to'.

But Lawrence was sober enough about it, and recorded even thus early that *linnerlich*, there is nothing'.

It seems to me, in America, for the inside life, there is just blank nothing. All this outside life - and marvellous country - and it all means so little to one. I don't quite know what it is one wants because the ordinary society and 'talk' in Europe are weary enough. But there is no inside life throb here - none - all empty - people inside dead, outside bustling (sometimes). Anyhow dead and always on the move. Truly I prefer Europe. Liberty - space - deadness.

At the same time there *was* liberty and space, and there lacked at least the same kind of deadness that Lawrence had suffered from in Europe - the slow putrescence that vaunted itself as life. It was what, if we look back, he had expected, though realisation has always its difference. At least he got out of it the conviction that he himself belonged to Europe - 'though not to England' - and that to Europe he must return sooner or later whether he wished it or not. The upshot was that he didn't want to 'live anywhere very long'. He would stay for perhaps another three months where he was, 'then come east - come to Europe - perhaps *via* Greenland'. He might even like to go to Russia in the summer. After

America it made an appeal. But there was the difficulty of a moneyless Russia. He asked me to write to Ivy Litvinoff asking her how it would be for Frieda and him to spend a few months, even a year, there. At the moment, he said, he was not writing. But *Kangaroo* was due for February, and *Women in Love* had now sold 15,000 copies - there was even talk of it being filmed! 'Why do they read me?' he asks. 'But anyhow, they *do* read me - which is more than England does.'

The Del Monte was too severe for the earliest months of the year, so the Lawrences did some wandering in Mexico proper. After the forgetful, physical life of the ranch, combined with the searching clashes of temperament and wills (English *versus* American) at Taos, of which there had been repercussions at the ranch, Lawrence was in the state to begin another book.

On April 11th he sent me a postcard photograph of himself with Frieda and an American poet, Witter Bynner, taken on the top of the old Pyramid of the Sun at Teotihuacan. The picture shows him bareheaded, looking alert and well. On the written side, under an address of Mexico City, he acknowledged a letter of mine (by return) and told me that they had been in Mexico for nearly three weeks and liked it. The next day they were going to Puebla and Tehuacan, and Orizaba, to see if they felt like staying the summer. Two things only were immediately clear. He was glad to escape the human complications at Taos, and he was fascinated by Mexico. The rest was uncertain. 'Every time I am near to coming to England, I find I don't want to come - just yet. But I am never sure what I shall do in a month's time.'

Russia, for the moment, seemed 'very far away and not very desirable'. The money question could not yet be taken for granted. As he put it himself - 'my prosperity is only relative - especially with so many relatives in Germany'. He knew he must go on writing, and where he was he felt the vivid interest that was the prelude to writing. This Pyramid of the Sun, for example, he found 'very impressive ... far more than Pompeii or the Forum', and the Indians there were attractive to him. Though Mexico City was 'rather ramshackle and Americanised', there was 'a good *natural* feeling - a great carelessness'. To me this meant that Lawrence was either writing a book or about to do so.

Possibly the ramshackle and Americanised Mexico City, made suddenly more hideous by the spectacle of the bullfight which Lawrence has described in the opening pages of *The Plumed Serpent*, was responsible for the extreme but temporary disgust which led him a fortnight later to feel he had had 'enough of the New World'. Another and much shorter postcard made this announcement, and said that he expected to sail for New York from Vera Cruz the following week, arriving in England about June. He 'felt like coming back now'. At once I wrote suggesting that he might like to take a floor of the old Hampstead house in

which we now had rooms.

But meanwhile, in part perhaps out of that very disgust and that horrid bullfight, the theme of *The Plumed Serpent* had announced itself. It was by far the most ambitious theme that had as yet called for treatment - the theme of men in a modern world who become gods while yet remaining men. A difficult undertaking, as Lawrence well understood. But he accepted it with his usual obedience to what chimed with his deepest desire. His next letter, dated June 7th, was from Lake Chapala, the scene of the novel. He had just heard from me, and liked the idea of the rooms above ours.

But see, we are still here. I felt I had a novel simmering in me, so came here, to this big Lake, to see if I could write it. It goes fairly well. I shall be glad if I can finish the first draft by the end of this month. Then we shall pack up at once, go to Mexico City and sail from Vera Cruz for New York. Hope to be in England by early August. Where will you be then? I shall be glad to be back. But wanted to get this novel off my chest.

Auf Wiedersehen.

The novel, of course, took longer than Lawrence had calculated and, what was more important, the charm of Mexico grew upon him. He wanted to stay longer, to try it to the full. And though he accompanied Frieda - who was longing for Europe - to New York by boat from New Orleans (the latter 'a dead, steaming sort of place, a bit like Martin Chuzzlewit', and the Mississippi 'a vast and weary river that looks as if it had never wanted to start flowing') with the idea that he might accompany her, he felt such a longing to be back in Mexico that he saw her off by the *Orbita* and returned alone. He would follow her - perhaps. He asked me to 'look after Frieda a bit' during the 'month or so' she was to be in London - probably in Mary Cannan's flat in Queen's Gardens, Hyde Park - from August 26th, after which she would go to Germany, after which she would rejoin Lawrence wherever he might be - perhaps in Mexico, perhaps in England by the autumn. This, as it should happen. But, 'at present' he could not come to England.

To avoid confusion, it must be remembered that Lawrence felt very differently about Mexico and the United States. Murry has lumped them both together as America, and has conveniently said that Lawrence hated it. This is misleading. Mexico - horror and all - held something for Lawrence as a man and a writer that he needed. This he never disavowed. The United States, on the other hand, provided merely for his unhampered existence as a writer in the impersonal sense, and had to be visited on that account, much as he shrank from it. Even Mexico could never usurp Europe in the heart of the European Lawrence. But America was the medicine for England and there was no wantonness in his

going. In Mexico he found something more than medicine - a sprig of the magic mountain herb for which he had gone on pilgrimage, a vestige of 'the last dark strand' from the pre-white, pre-Christian era.

But in the midst of these tastings and adventures there arrives by post for Lawrence a bottle of the latest London specific for souls. It is labelled *Adelphi*. Shake well. Contents to be swallowed monthly.

3

The story of the *Adelphi* and its connection with Lawrence has been told in the pages of that periodical by Murry himself with a running commentary. As he was the only begetter and the editor of the periodical we must accept his narrative, but we shall find that, extracted from his commentary, it appears in a different light.

Time and again he is obliged to accuse his 'great' man of self-deception - self-deception alike in small matters and in great. So much so, indeed, that, unless we take his bare word for it, we fail to see any greatness in the Lawrence of his narrative, just as we fail to see on Murry's part any true response to greatness. For one thing self-deception is surely not an attribute of true greatness. What does appear in the very turn of Murry's phrases is something for which self-deception is the most charitable word.

To go back a little. In spite of his ecstasy over *Aaron's Rod* as a 'fountain of life', Murry does not seem to have written to Lawrence to tell him how much he and Katherine thought of the book. He left his review - his single favourable review, of a Lawrence novel, with the exception of a few lines commending *St Mawr* - to speak for itself. The first friendly gesture came, he tells us, from Lawrence. He found the card from New Zealand 'unexpected' - as well as 'sudden'. It was none the less the kind of thing one might expect from Lawrence. His affection for Katherine, whom he now knew to be very ill, had always been great, and seeing her homeland, he could not help remembering with tenderness his early hopeful association with Murry in her company.

There was nothing 'sudden', however, about Murry's response. Not till the end of the year did he write suggesting, 'he supposes', that 'relations should be renewed'. One may infer an appeal from which hysteria was not absent. Lawrence replied that it would be as well to wait and see. 'Heaven knows what we all are, and how we should feel if we met, now that we are changed: we will have to meet and see.' A kindly wave of the hand from New Zealand had come naturally, but there was something which made Lawrence wary in this plea for a clasping of hands across the ocean.

When Katherine Mansfield died in December, 1922, Lawrence sent a message that was kind, eloquent and wise and, as was usual with his messages, free from

any trace of emotional collapse.

'I wish it needn't all have been as it has been. I do wish it.' This, which was strictly true, was as far as he could go for the past. 'We will unite up again when I come to England.' This for a future hope. Lawrence was always willing to welcome a change for the better. As for Murry's present and his own, there was a frank warning but a steady affirmation of faith. 'We keep faith. I always feel death only strengthens that - the faith between those who have it.' Soon after this letter came a present of the *Fantasia*, published in America.

One spring night in a lovely part of the country, solitary and wrought-up by that sort of 'half convalescent' emotion which, in the case of some natures, so easily takes the form of spiritual self-abuse, Murry read the *Fantasia*. One may be pardoned for thinking that in this mood, and following the receipt of so moving a letter from Lawrence, Murry would have been in ecstasies almost equally over any new Lawrence book. A man of moods, this. Still, the *Fantasia* it was, and he has the benefit of the doubt. Its effect on him was twofold. It made him fall grovelling on his face before Lawrence, and it clinched his already 'half-formed' determination - a determination which in the first place had nothing to do with Lawrence - to found the *Adelphi*. So he has told us. Why not launch the new venture with sorrowing praise of Katherine Mansfield and some essential chapters of the *Fantasia*, which was still unknown in England?

We can believe that he 'neither desired nor intended to remain editor' of the magazine, and that he was in his own eyes 'simply *locum tenens*, literally lieutenant, for Lawrence', only by guessing how far he was swept away by his own wrought-up condition. Except for a line of kindly encouragement from Lawrence (which could hardly have been refused, elicited as it was by prepaid cable) the whole thing existed merely 'in his own eyes'. In no real sense was Lawrence consulted. Distance and time made that impossible, for the first copy of the *Adelphi* appeared in June, 1923. Yet because he could infer from some remarks in Lawrence's letters that Lawrence 'was in the throes of a revulsion from America', he concluded that the revulsion from England had spent itself, and that he, Murry, had only to say the magic word '*Adelphi*' for Lawrence to rush back and wait upon the doorstep till such time as the founder and editor should vacate his place at the office table.

To anyone with any knowledge of Lawrence it seems fantastic indeed to imagine him as the editor of a monthly magazine in England: still more fantastic, had he founded a magazine, that it should have resembled the *Adelphi*. No doubt he was willing, even pleased, to encourage Murry and to let him use the *Fantasia*. But in his very first letters after the cable he made it clear that he had no intention of hurrying to England. There were things, more urgent than any

Adelphi, that would keep him in America yet awhile. Besides, 'ghastly' and 'empty' as was America, it was preferable to plausible and stuffy England that made him feel as if he had 'swallowed a lump of lead'. He would come - that very summer, if he could: Murry might be looking out for a quiet cottage for him. Meanwhile there was room for improvement in the *Adelphi*. He did not like the first numbers. They were too accommodating by half, and apart from the *Fantasia*, not to his taste. Murry must have patience and show his mettle. Lawrence, in spite of his American revulsion, 'mistrusted his country too much to identify himself with it any more'. He even felt 'a certain disgust'. 'Something must *happen*' before he could return or regain his confidence. The editor of the *Athenaeum* might, 'in his own eyes' be 'radically changed' by a spiritual experience in which the *Fantasia* had played a part. But how was Lawrence to be sure that such a radical change was necessarily for the better in *his* eyes (however convenient from a literary point of view) or even that it was not a case of 'plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose'? There was nothing in the *Adelphi* as yet to make him sure. While he praised what he could (for Lawrence in such things was both kind and courteous) and hoped hard for its future, and while he would give Murry of his best without expecting more than the minimum of pay, it was not to be thought that he would risk everything on Murry's intimation of a new partisanship and a new integrity.

If any reader has the patience today to read through those early numbers of the *Adelphi* he will see clearly what Lawrence must have thought of them - Lawrence who was without a touch of hysteria; Lawrence who was against precisely the kind of humble and emotional yet rationalised Christianity of which Murry now became the spokesman; Lawrence who, while recognising Katherine Mansfield's charming gifts, would never admit that she had genius or even that her work was important; Lawrence who disliked anything in the nature of exploitation; Lawrence who was finding amid the horrors of Mexico the relief afforded by a 'good natural feeling', and was ready to begin writing *The Plumed Serpent*.

The reader, this is to say, will see what Lawrence must have felt about the *Adelphi* as a possible mouthpiece for his own thought, except in so far as he might be an outside contributor. Which is not, however, to say either (a), that he did not wish Murry well in any venture that would help him to think things out in his own way, or (b), that he did not hope Murry's thinking might bring him and his magazine round in time to something sufficiently harmonious with Lawrence's own to allow of true collaboration.

Yet Murry was so 'perplexed' and 'bewildered' by Lawrence's letters, because they were doubtful and critical as well as encouraging, that he wrote to ask if

Lawrence had really *meant* what he had said in *Aaron's Rod* and *Fantasia*, about wishing for another man's help in the attempt to create a new world! And when Lawrence decided that he must stay a while longer in America - this time in Old Mexico - Murry concluded either that he had misunderstood the *Fantasia* or that Lawrence had *not* meant what he said, or more probably both.

What Murry could not comprehend - or, what comprehending, drove him mad - was that Lawrence, with his passion and his perceptiveness, stood between two worlds, and not between economic worlds like those of capitalism and communism, but between worlds of the human spirit - the old world, rich and beloved but almost dead, which demanded that he be 'faithful and faithless together', and the new world which meant nothing to his aching heart yet claimed all his loyalty. But he would have no trumped-up newness, no rehash of the old, no fobbing off with economic makeshifts of the moment. The new had to be most delicately sought and perilously fought for. If England could hold out the veritable olive branch of Spring he would take it. Somehow the *Adelphi* olive branch did not meet his need. By the side of the bare but quivering twig of the diviner that he carried in his own hand it was suspect.

That his own twig had not lied in leading him to Mexico was already proved. As he had written to me just then, in the letter quoted earlier, there was 'a novel simmering in him' - a novel of well over a hundred thousand words - which had taken him to Lake Chapala, first to see if he could write it, and then to hold him there till he should finish.

This, then, and nothing more sinister is the explanation of Lawrence's 'strange instability'. That and the rest of the fatal sounding phrases mean no more than that an imaginative writer preferred the peaceful production of a new novel in fostering circumstances to throwing in his lot with a new magazine, of which he was doubtful, along with a man in whom he had no cause to believe.

Murry will have it that *Aaron's Rod* was the peak of Lawrence's achievement in fiction. I am against peaks - as of an invalid chart - where Lawrence is concerned. I see him not as a waxing and waning but as a pulsing light, and his life rather as a pilgrimage than as a pattern. But, if there must be a pinnacle, surely, so far anyhow as fiction is concerned, it is reached in *The Plumed Serpent*. And surely here is the most ambitious and the most impressive novel of our generation. If any has been more faultless, which has possessed in the same degree the blazing virtue of potency? Only the pinions of faith could have carried home such a theme. And more than faith. For this tale Lawrence needed not only all his genius, but all his long discipline and all his savage pilgrimage. So far from showing 'disintegration' it creates. In it Lawrence's powers as a novelist are established and his thoughts as a man embodied to that extent that it

would have assured him his place without further production. Indeed it may be said that all later works, such as *Lady Chatterley* and the latter part of *The Man Who Died*, are embroideries on themes contained in the Mexican novel.

In relating how Lawrence delayed his coming Murry makes no mention of *The Plumed Serpent*. When, three years later, it was reviewed in the *Adelphi*, it was dismissed with facetious disparagement in a few lines as a 'disappointing' book that 'lets us down', so much so that 'we cannot help suspecting that Lawrence has lost faith in his own imagination . . . Alas! now that the miracle is here, we cannot grasp it either with our minds, our solar plexuses, or our tails.' Though, of course, there follows, 'need we say that the book contains lovely and memorable things'?

While Lawrence was engaged in writing *The Plumed Serpent* Murry was 'giving himself away' in the magazine (which had been meant for Lawrence) to an extent that in his own words was 'past change, beyond all remedy'. In the editorial to his second number he quoted passages from two private 'letters to the editor'. One was from a woman who, all alone in Plymouth, 'in the throes of a great bereavement, having come straight from the deathbed in the accident ward of a public hospital of a greatly loved friend smitten down under tragic circumstances in the prime of life', had 'wandered into a public library where in an advertisement the arresting headline' of Murry's article in the *Adelphi* had caught her eye, and thrilled her so much that she spent a shilling and discovered 'that ideals and aspirations are indeed spiritual potencies that here and hereafter demand our loyalties'.

As well as this Plymouth Sister, Murry produced a male testifier. The two would seem to be closely related, like sufferers from kidney trouble, whose epistolary style in describing the benefits of a curative pill they exactly reproduce.

Somehow your advertisement had caught my soul - I was and am still, troubled by this terrible enigma - life. I had tried in my way to satisfy my soul; but alas! what is my way? It had made me more miserable and unhappy. On the 28th I wandered the whole afternoon from newsagent to newsagent to get a copy of the *Adelphi* - [he failed owing to some fault in distribution] . . . and with heavy heart wandered - wandered aimlessly.

Though he knows not why, somehow or other the ideal of the *Adelphi* had got hold of him, and he 'was like a moth, determined to whirl round and round the candle till he had either burnt his wings or understood the nature of light'. Advertisers, reading this breathless narrative, must have been relieved to learn that the very next afternoon this most metaphysical moth procured a copy of the *Adelphi* and 'read it through from cover to cover including the advertisements',

with effects that are expressed in phrases of a like vague ecstasy.

It was not, naturally, to Lawrence's *Fantasia* that these testimonials applied, but to Murry's first editorial, 'The Cause of It All', in which Lawrence had no part, either alleged or conceivable. It was a very catchy piece of work, before which, I am ashamed to say, I momentarily went down myself, though Donald condemned it at once and out of hand; and Lawrence, when I first met him afterwards, had no printable words in which to describe it. It was in the emotional-facetious vein - essentially the same vein as we find in 'There was a little Man', Murry's contribution to the *Signature* in 1915, which showed us Murry, aged thirty-four, sitting on the top of a Camden Town bus and describing himself with overflowing sympathy for our benefit. He mentions his 'demon'. But it is not what Lawrence means by a demon. It is merely the common little devil of doubt that, when Murry comes to earth after a heavenward caper of special emotional attainment, whispers in his ear that he may not be able to 'justify the *Adelphi*, with the result that he feels impelled 'to write boldly, to unfurl and wave a flag'.

'What flag?' I can hear Lawrence put this question, with dancing eyes.

Murry unfurls his banner. It bears this device, 'The *Adelphi* is run for and by a belief in Life.'

'So,' replies Lawrence, 'might the editor of *John Bull* truthfully declare. However, get on with it and good luck to you. I too believe in life. But it does not follow that our beliefs are not diametrically opposed, as indeed they have proved to be in the past. However, you *may* be getting by your own way to some plane where we can meet in agreement. You tell me that recent events have radically changed your outlook so that you enter into my position in *Fantasia* (notwithstanding that this book is a logical development from *Women in Love* and in perfect accord with *The Lost Girl* which you still hate). By all means get on with it. Possibly the nasty taste is only in my supersensitive mouth. Again, possibly not.'

For the rest, in his opening number of the *Adelphi* Murry announced some taking features, named a small team of good men who were going to work for next to nothing for him under the banner of the idea, disclaimed the editorial chair for himself, and gave the usual journalistic 'send-off' by the good old stage-army band - Arnold Bennett, H. G. Wells, *etc.* In Murry's own words it was all 'the most frightful giveaway'.

And it 'went with a bang'. So we learn in the second issue. But is Murry elated? Ah, no, my friends. He is humble. He fears only that he may not live up to his first number, or that he may 'fail' such people as his Plymouth Sister and the male moth in their all too human appeal. He disclaims all notion of financial

success, only initiating a scheme by which every three readers (already four times in excess of the number he had modestly counted on) shall bring him one new reader between them.

In this, his second number, he says nothing about vacating the editorial chair. He is indeed very much the editor, speaking in the first person, referring to his colleagues, his policy and his intended procedure, the two last named of which were as un-Lawrentian as can be. As between D. H. Lawrence and Mr Horatio Bottomley they tended perceptibly, in regard to editorial flavour, towards the latter sage - wherein, no doubt, lay their appeal. Editorial matter apart, there was another long extract from the *Fantasia*-, there were extracts from Katherine Mansfield's journal of a personal nature, which exhibited her mourning over her dead brother in language a thought too childlike; there was a poem by her to her dead brother, which, on the other hand, did not seem intended for the public eye; and there was the reproduction of a drawing by her, meant for her brother's pleasure when he was alive. Into these intimacies *Fantasia* seemed to have strayed unawares.

So thought the *Adelphi* readers, anyhow those of the type which Murry most feared to 'let down'. With Lawrence as even a single ingredient of this publication which was to have been all for him, there was going to be trouble. About the first extract nobody had felt impelled to write - not even the man who had read all the advertisements. But in the second Lawrence had stated - what Mr Bernard Shaw had already stated quite a long time before - that Jesus was a failure.

It was now put beyond doubt for what section of the public Murry's magazine had made its bid. It 'passed the comprehension' of the Westminster Catholic Association how the editor of 'a responsible review' could have allowed the Lawrence matter with its 'studied insult to the Christian religion' to appear. Mr Ellis Roberts in a letter took the same view. This was bad enough. But what really touched Murry to the quick was a protest from a private individual who, at the risk of being 'very old-fashioned and narrow', bewailed the admission into this 'most delightful magazine' of 'sneers at the Founder of the Christian religion'. The inclusion of one who thus 'spat in the face of Christ' would 'drive out from the circle' of *Adelphi* readers 'the thousands of people who are alienated by this sort of thing'.

One might have thought that such a letter was predictable. But to Murry it was 'a shock', and 'a bolt from the blue'. Recollect that the *Adelphi* now looked like being, all unexpectedly, a financial success.

Certainly here was a nice question, even a test one, though there were, in fact, as there generally are, more than two ways of meeting it - *i.e.*, three. Murry

might have referred his critics to Lawrence - in which case the *Adelphi* would most likely have gone out on its third issue in a blaze of significant defiance, but would possibly have reissued from its ashes at some later time. He might have referred them to the devil or - almost the same thing - ignored them, in which case he could never hope to recover the readers Lawrence had lost him. Or he might manage in such a way as to placate the 'circle' to which it was clear that his *Adelphi* personality appealed. While doing this he could stand on his dignity as an editor by *appearing* to stand by Lawrence, in which case, though readers might be temporarily lost they could later be rounded up again.

He chose the third course. In the third issue of the *Adelphi* (to which I was one of the smaller contributors) he told how the private letter from which I have quoted had 'deeply moved' him (as well as coming like a bolt from the blue) by its 'simple and exquisite sincerity'. At the same time (with Koteliensky sternly by his elbow) he made the utmost stand for Lawrence of which he was capable. He announced that in his opinion "*since Katherine Mansfield's death*" (the italics are mine) D. H. Lawrence had '*become* incomparably the most important English writer of his generation'.

If it had not been for that odd qualification '*since Katherine Mansfield's death*' it was really not so ill-done. It saved Murry's dignity and it preserved the *Adelphi* to achieve good work of its kind and to publish, for a time at least, work by Lawrence. It is even doubtful if these ends could have been achieved by any other means.

But the inwardness of the matter lay in the fact that Murry was facing both ways and that Lawrence, perceiving this, lost most of the hope he had of identifying himself more closely with the *Adelphi*. The hands were the hands of Esau, but the voice was the voice of Jacob. If Murry could find a 'deeply moving' and 'simple and exquisite sincerity' in the sort of private letters from which he had quoted, and if he thought that only by reason of Katherine Mansfield's death Lawrence was become the most important English writer of his generation, he was far, very far, from possessing the capacity to act as 'lieutenant' to a man whose essential creed was contained in the words 'never adapt yourself'. To put it more mildly, the *Adelphi* was not a thing to rush home for. It could wait. As usual Murry had underrated both Lawrence's subtlety and his clear-sighted arrogance.

4

By August, as we have seen, Frieda was tired of being in Mexico and longed to be in England. For one thing she now had better prospects than ever before of seeing her children. She urged Lawrence to return, telling him among other ready half-truths that 'England was his place'. Like me she did not think so poorly of the *Adelphi* as Lawrence did. Like me she was even carried away by it, and what was more she could almost fancy a future in it for Lawrence. And almost he wanted to be persuaded. In August she got him as far as the quay at New York. But at that point the 'Balaam's ass in his belly' rebelled. He would not go. 'Find I just don't want to - not yet. Later.' So he wrote to me from New York after seeing Frieda off without him, and this though he had no definite plans otherwise.

I think I shall go to California, and either pack with a donkey in the mountains, or get some sailing ship to the islands - if the last is possible. Perhaps by the autumn I'll decide to come to England - who knows! At present I can't come.

On the quay Frieda and Lawrence had been through one of the worst quarrels - perhaps the very worst - of their life together. And when they parted it was in such anger that both of them felt it might be for always. Because, of course, if Lawrence felt that he must stay longer he wanted Frieda to stay with him. It was against his desire that she had persuaded him this far.

Frieda, however, presently calmed and cheered by the voyage, felt quite sure that the parting was not for always, and immediately upon her arrival in England she sent Lawrence a wifely cable. He must come to her because she needed him.

Lawrence did not come at once, though no doubt he was glad of the cable. He went to Buffalo, to Tepic, to Jalisco (which last he greatly liked), making a tour of some two months, which must have had a strong effect upon *The Plumed Serpent* when he came to rewrite the manuscript. In some at least of these places he had acquaintances, at others introductions.

Meanwhile, Frieda having paid her visit to her mother in Germany, was in London; and, thinking that she was preparing the way for Lawrence, was seeing much of Murry. She kept writing enthusiastic letters to Lawrence about him and the *Adelphi*. Yet Lawrence held back.

'Frieda says she likes England now, and it is my place, and I must come back. I wonder.' So he wrote to me from Guadalajara on October 17th, having heard that I had just read *Kangaroo*. The letter continues:

We rode two days down the mountains, and got to Eztadan. Mexico has a certain mystery of beauty for me, as if the gods were here. Now, in this October, the days are so pure and lovely, like an enchantment, as if some dark-faced gods were still young. I wish it could be that I *could* start a little centre - a ranch - where we could have our Little adobe houses and make a life, and you could come with Don and John Patrick. It is always what I work for. But it must come from the inside, not from the will. And when it will be it will be, I suppose. It is queer, all the way down the Pacific Coast, I kept thinking: Best go back to England. And then, once across the Barranca from Ixdan, it was here again, where the gods may sometimes be awful, but they are young, here in Mexico, in Jalisco, that I wanted to be. And there is room - room for all of us if it could but be. But let us watch: things, when they come, come suddenly. It may be my destiny is in Europe. *Quien sabe?* If it is, I'll come back *Hasta el dial* But by the middle of November Lawrence felt that he could, even that he must, come to England. He need not stay, but he must look after Frieda. And he could see for himself if there was anything in the *Adelphi*, as Frieda, unlike himself, was so sure that there was. For the moment there was nothing keeping him in America as there had been three months earlier. He had got what he then wanted. As Frieda insisted, now that Murry was a free man, and was of a mind to accept Lawrence's leading as soon as Lawrence should come upon the scene, they might carry out the old scheme of going forth together.

Eight days after writing to me he wrote to Murry:

Yes, I think I shall come back now. I think I shall be back by the beginning of December. Work awhile with you on the *Adelphi*. Then perhaps we'll set off to India. *Quien sabe?*

The promise went no further than this. Yet Murry would have us believe that in the matter of the *Adelphi* Lawrence had let him down. Anyhow his 'nascent confidence' in Lawrence as his leader 'had already begun to wither'. He is at pains to attribute Lawrence's return simply to his wish to rejoin Frieda.

Lawrence arrived in London at the beginning of December, and Murry went with Kot to the station to meet him. Murry has described the meeting - how ill Lawrence looked, with a face of 'greenish pallor', and how almost his first words were 'I can't bear it,' so that Murry 'supposes' he felt 'as though the nightmare were upon him again'.

Murry's supposition is correct. But this time it was a different nightmare. It arose from a conviction which had begun to form in Lawrence upon his arrival at

Southampton, had hardened during the journey through the Southern Counties, and had been clinched as by a hammer-stroke when he was greeted by Frieda and the others on the London platform. This conviction was that he had made a mistake in coming - that he ought to have waited for Frieda to come to him. If he could have been back in America at that moment, there would have been nothing but a fierce little greenish tongue of flame for Frieda and Murry to fetch from Waterloo to Hampstead. Now that he had come, however, he must see it through. From all this the reader is requested to make no obvious deductions. Lawrence had an uncanny and instantaneous way that was entirely his own, of 'sizing up' any situation. For him to see, for example, Murry and Frieda waiting for him so chummily together was enough to turn him greenish pale all over. 'Chumminess'... 'palliness' between people was anyhow detestable to him. Again, though Murry might be Lawrence's self-appointed lieutenant on a self-constituted *Adelphi*, Frieda was another matter. Here Murry would find himself up against the 'Unknown God' with a vengeance. In Lawrence's marriage there was no place for any lieutenancy, however platonic.

For some little time before Lawrence's arrival Frieda had already been living in the same house as ourselves - not our own house, but a large old one belonging to my brother who lived on the top floor. We had a lower part, and the Lawrences the flat above us. Murry had been Frieda's constant visitor and she was clearly prepared to back him up with all her strength (though why he should need her backing I could never understand) to Lawrence upon his arrival. 'After all,' she said to me one day, 'Murry is Somebody! And *the Adelphi* is Something!!' Her enthusiasm was childlike and infectious - at least it was childlike, and I should have found it infectious if I could have brought myself to believe in Murry. I respected his talent, and admired his capacity for eliciting emotion in others, but that was as far as I could get. Yet I could see, and can now, why it was that for so long he made a special appeal to Lawrence. He seemed made to subserve another's compelling genius.

Lawrence's immediate suggestion, says Murry - made perhaps on the way to Hampstead - was that the *Adelphi* 'should attack everything, everything; and explode in one blaze of denunciation'. Murry could see nothing for it but to treat this as a joke, whereupon Lawrence could see no alternative but for Murry to give the *Adelphi* up and go back to Mexico with him to 'begin the nucleus of a new society'. Lawrence's lingering belief that his own scale of values might have some practical bearing on Murry's should, one thinks, have been the real joke of the occasion for Murry, had Murry been able to regard the situation with detachment. But of course he could not, and we hardly blame him. Strange as it may seem, Lawrence was the only one detached enough to see the true irony of

events.

That afternoon I was asked upstairs while Lawrence bustled about unpacking. I cannot understand Mabel Dodge Luhan's description of him at such times, or when travelling, as fussy or inefficient. He always appeared to me as a model of neatness and precision, neither wasting a movement nor permitting even a temporary disorder. Perhaps as an onlooker Mrs Luhan was upsetting. Some people are. And I have noticed that it is often the inefficient onlooker that most upsets the efficient worker.

On this occasion, while settling in, he talked with the greatest animation. And, although he was thin, I saw none of the 'greenish pallor' which struck Murry. Never had I seen him more energetic. So much so that Frieda asked him didn't he think after the journey he ought to 'rest for a bit'?

But he turned on her. 'Rest!' he snapped. 'When Frieda says England is "so restful!" it gives me the cold shudders. I don't *want* to rest nowadays. I feel *full* of energy!' And he went on producing things for me to see - his Indian belt of plaited horsehair, Frieda's snow-leopard skin, or a painted Mexican vase - fawn and pink and grey, with here and there a dab of light red or pale blue - all earth colours from a place where sun and earth were in close communion. He gave me one of these, after warning me that I must never put flowers in it, as even the eggshell glaze was porous to water. But first he drew from it his sewing and first-aid kit, and unscrewing a pot of boracic he produced from the lid an engraved disk of metal - bigger than an English half-crown, and heavy and shining - a coin of Mexican gold! Somehow, as he gave it to me to handle, it was as if he passed on to me the pristine magnificence of Mexico that had meant so much to him. By this he was to measure us in England and to find us wanting.

Already Frieda, who was great on making a place 'homelike', had hung pictures about the walls, which Mark Gertler or Dorothy Brett, or both, had lent or given for this purpose. Enthusiastically she drew his attention to them. Lawrence inspected them coolly. 'They want thinking about, I guess!' was his comment, uttered in that precise Nottingham speech of his that somehow agreed so well with his emphatic phrases; and Frieda subsided.

At the time I did what I wish I had done oftener. I noted down immediately what I could remember of Lawrence's conversation that first afternoon during his 'getting straight', as it ran on largely in the form of a monologue. I put it down now as it stands in my note.

'The spirits of everybody on board the boat just went right down into their boots when we first sighted the coast of Europe, at Corunna . . . The English are no longer flowering... we are the seed ... we should be scattered. We are the best-bred people on earth. But now we are caged and fearful.'

I asked him if he would rather have New York or London? 'New York,' he replied, without hesitating. 'London as a city - yes, I like it better, love it more. But it is locked away, out of touch. With New York one is in touch with the free outer world, and with the world of Mexico.' Of Mexico he spoke much, with loathing of many things about it, but saying that it had spoiled him, he feared, for Europe. 'Sicily?' he said. 'Never again!'

While he talked, he left all the letters that had collected for him in London unopened - did not even glance at them. He had liked it in Mexico, he said, that there had been no mail for him and no English newspapers. He described with delight how on the voyage home he had hung over the bows, watching a school of porpoises playing about the steamer in the translucent water. Then later the rain on the surface of black water . . . and the beauty of the flying fish. Then the shaking of the little English train - 'so light, so light, as if it would fall to pieces long before we reached London'.

Between Southampton and London he had been oppressed by the hedged fields - 'I feel I am a mouse - a net put over me - the network of the English hedged fields.'

Then suddenly, 'What do you think of the world these days?' he asked me.

I told him, what indeed I have always felt, that the world never seemed to come within my orbit. And that I was kept so busy endeavouring to keep a roof over our heads and food on our table that I never had much time to think about the world.

At this he laughed with a kind of mingled pleasure and disgust that it was so with me. It became a convention between us that I was attached to a little ship, which for me to leave would be infidelity. 'And how is the ship sailing?' he would ask, with a touch of mockery that I liked while I felt it was justified. Or again 'More bric-à-brac!' he would exclaim reproachfully, when I showed him some odd object newly-acquired for the house. I pointed out that he himself found it hard to resist bric-à-brac, though he might not call it so. What about the snow-leopard skin, and the Navajo rings he had been describing to me? And he shook his head laughing. All the same, he was in the right and I knew it, and he knew that I knew, though I fear he thought me incorrigible. He had ceased to collect things, and I had not.

It may have been Dorothy Brett - who now became as constant a visitor as Murry to the Lawrences' rooms - who introduced the craze for modelling small figures and beasts and flowers, which seized upon us that Christmas, and upon Lawrence in particular. He and Dorothy Brett were by far the best at it. Murry worked hard, but without conspicuous success, making all the while little jokes at his own expense. Frieda and Donald and Koteliansky stood resolutely aside as

spectators, when they troubled to look at us at all. To a richly herbaceous garden of Eden, which owed its very red Adam to Lawrence and its paler Eve to Dorothy Brett, I remember I contributed several species of wildfowl, including a kiwi.

Again I recollect seeing Lawrence sitting by the table, his head on his hand, reading with astonishing intentness (which made the activity seem so much more than mere reading) Conrad's then latest novel, *The Rover*. Without once relaxing his concentrated attention he read it all through, then closed it and pushed it from him with the ejaculation that it was 'poor and sad stuff'. Conrad at his best in a sea-story, I gathered, he had never regarded as the equal of Herman Melville. As compared with the true sea literature of *Moby Dick*, Lawrence dismissed the storm in *Typhoon* as descriptive journalism. Still, *Almayer's Folly* was a fine book, and it was depressing to find the author of that declining into the author of *The Rover*.

It was at this time that I heard Lawrence take Murry to task in his role of propagandist of Katherine Mansfield. As I came in only for the end of the conversation I cannot tell what went before. The guess might be hazarded that Lawrence had not shrunk from denouncing the whole policy and atmosphere of the *Adelphi* in this particular matter, which I know he had found repugnant. On the other hand, it would be more characteristic if he let that be, and plunged straight to the quick of the subject. This was what he was doing when I entered. 'You are wrong about Katherine,' he was saying to Murry. 'She was *not* a great genius. She had a charming gift, and a finely cultivated one. But *not more*. And to try, as you do, to make it more is to do her no true service.' To this Murry made no reply, but turned away in a kind of obstinate mortification. Long before this, when I read her *Prelude* and praised it to Lawrence, he had said, 'Yes, yes, but prelude to what?' It was his opinion that the author of *Prelude* would come in time to find a certain essential falseness so closely entwined with the charm in her literary fabric that she would herself condemn even the charm and would write nothing further until she had disentangled herself from the falseness.

Looking back now I find it extraordinary that I could live for so many weeks in the same house and realise so little what a struggle was going on, chiefly between Lawrence and Murry, but also between Lawrence and all of us. In spite of what critics - usually hostile ones - have said about his morbid sensitiveness, Lawrence was not the man to wear his heart on his sleeve. And when he forced an issue he did so with a kind of delicacy that easily concealed the crisis from those concerned. It was the issue, never the person, that he forced.

Murry, not long after Lawrence's arrival, had considered giving up the *Adelphi* and going back to New Mexico with him. But he appears to have been

undecided.

It had come to this, that Lawrence's only purpose for staying a day longer in England was to discover if all of us, or some of us, or even one of us, would feel the compulsion to go with him and Frieda to a freer and richer air, where things 'could happen' as they could not happen in England. The *Adelphi* was a proof to Lawrence of just *how* things happened in England. But with Murry in a new atmosphere and away from the cloying influences of his past, Lawrence still felt that something might be done. As for the rest of us, we were his friends of whose support he would be glad in a less crucial way. It would neither be out of personal affection, nor to 'live to ourselves' in a pleasant spot, as Murry has suggested, 'rejecting the world, washing our hands of it altogether', though something of both these things would naturally be included. It would be to leave the associations of the old ideals that we might live and work freshly in the belief that of such a departure something good was sure to come. Katherine could not come now, hiding her fun behind a solemn face, to prove by timetables and guidebooks that *Rananim* was impossible. Lawrence had gone on and had found the very place for us.

There was nothing wrong with Taos except the Americans. The Indian mode had sunk so far into forgetfulness, so far beyond the confident prying of the intellect, that it was almost one with nature and therefore ready to renourish human life. We must get away from the white benevolence that spouted of 'life' and resulted in *Adelphis*, and learn instead something of the dark malignity that revealed the realm of death. Our mode had come to an end. The new mode must be from a different source.

Who shall say that Lawrence was wrong? To him it was as clear as in old time it was to Noah or to Lot. It may yet be found that before a new spirit can grow up in the world some men and women will have to get together and leave their homes in a special kind of faith. However this may be, only one person in London went with the Lawrences back to New Mexico, and of all Lawrence's friends today she is perhaps the happiest.

For a day or two Lawrence had to stay in bed with cold and a mild attack of malaria. He sent a message by Frieda that he wanted to speak to me. 'I assure you that it is a great Kompliment!' she said, opening her smiling eyes at me.

What she said was true, and I was flattered. I went upstairs at once. Still I did not really want to talk alone with Lawrence just then, a disinclination I tried to attribute to the fact that Frieda had come in upon me at a busy moment of some domestic sort.

A single bed had been moved into the living-room, and there was Lawrence sitting up all neat and trim and looking every bit as alert as if he were well. I sat

down, feeling distraught and uttering platitudes.

He asked me about things. Without, so far as I can remember, putting the question directly, he asked if there was any chance of my coming then or later to New Mexico. I said I was afraid it must be later. 'You see, Lawrence, unless a woman is going to leave her husband and child, she can't go off without them, and I don't think Donald feels like going, anyhow not just now. I'd come, but I can't go without them. It would be no good.' A terrible sadness descended on me and I should like to have left the room. Lawrence quietly admitted the difficulty. 'No, a woman can't choose if she's really married,' he said. And although he had told me more than once that Donald was only a lover, not a husband, he let this pass today. And I knew he was only sounding me. He spoke of how free Dorothy Brett was - 'a real odd man out', he called her with approval. Then he asked if I was writing anything special. 'I could beat you that you don't write,' he said. And why was I pottering about with rubbishy articles for women's papers when I ought to be doing a book either of notes like my Duse note in the *Adelphi* - a book to be called *A Woman Looks at the World* - or stories and sketches about the queer lot of people who were sheltering under the roof that covered us? There were at that moment five separate lots of us living in the old rambling house, and to amuse him I had sometimes retailed the gossip concerning them. I could see that he was casting about for the best way to help me, feeling somehow that I needed help.

Partly to fend off anything like a silence, which I could not have borne, I told him of a novel I had in mind to write. The theme had been suggested to me by reading of some savages who took a baby girl, and that they might rear her into a goddess for themselves, brought her up on a covered river boat, tending her in all respects, but never letting her mix with her kind, and leading her to believe that she was herself no mortal, but a goddess.

I was almost taken aback by Lawrence's interest. He was never effusive, and seldom enough really engaged by what one said, but when he was engaged one knew it. I was not to guess, of course, at that time anything about the contents of *The Plumed Serpent*, or I should have understood his special interest in an allied theme. He would have gone on talking now, but I excused myself and went back to my paltry duty below stairs. As I went, I know that in some essential I had turned away from what I most wanted in life.

It seemed quite a short time after my return downstairs that Lawrence sent Frieda again to fetch me. 'I like that story of yours so much, Catherine,' he said, 'that I've written out a little sketch of how I think it might go. Then, if you like the idea, we might collaborate in the novel. You do the beginning and get the woman character going, and let me have it, and I'll go on and fill in the man. Of

course,' he added, 'you may not see it the same way, but I think this would be the *easiest* way to do it, easier than the way you thought of. Our only trouble will be the end. I'm afraid it can't be a happy ending. But have a look and we'll see.'

Here is what he had written out for me in these few minutes. I began to work upon the beginning in quite the wrong way. Then I saw I was not up to it and lost heart. So it remains as it was:

A woman of about thirty-five, beautiful, a little overwrought, goes into a shipping office in Glasgow to ask about a ship to Canada. She gives her name Olivia Maclure. The clerk asks her if she is not going to accept the Maclure invitation to the feast in the ancestral castle. She laughs - but the days of loneliness in the Glasgow hotel before the ship can sail are too much for her, and she sets off for the Maclure island.

The Maclure, who claims to be chief of the clan and has bought the ancestral castle on his native isle, is a man about forty-five, rather small, dark-eyed, full of energy, but has been a good deal knocked about. He has spent ten years in the USA and twenty years in the silver mines of Mexico, is somewhat grizzled, has a scar on the right temple which tilts up his right eye a little. Chief characteristic his quick, alert brown eyes which seem to sense danger, and the tense energy in his slightly work-twisted body. He has lived entirely apart from civilised women, merely frequented an occasional Indian woman in the hills. Is a bit cranky about his chieftainship.

Olivia arrives a day too soon for the festival, at the patched-up castle. Maclure, in a shapeless worksuit, is running round attending to his house and preparations. He looks like a Cornish miner, always goes at a run, sees everything, has a certain almost womanly quickness of perception, and frequently takes a whisky. He eyes Olivia with the quick Mexican suspicion. She, so distraught, is hardly embarrassed at all. Something weighs on her so much, she doesn't realise she is a day too soon, and when she realises, she doesn't care.

As soon as he has sensed her, he is cordial, generous, but watchful: always on the watch for danger. Soon he is fascinated by her. She, made indifferent to everything by an inward distress, talks to him charmingly, but vaguely: doesn't realise him. He, a man of forty-five, falls for the first time insanely in love. But she is always only half conscious of him.

She spends the night in the mended castle - he most scrupulously sleeps in the cottage below. The next day, she is mistress of the absurd feast. And at evening he begs her not to go away. His frantic, slightly absurd passion penetrates her consciousness. She consents to stay.

After two days of anguished fear lest she should go away, he proposes to her.

She looks at him very strangely - he is just strange to her. But she consents. Something in her is always remote, far off-the weight of some previous distress. He feels the distance, but cannot understand. After being in an agony of love with her for six months, he comes home to find her dead, leaving a little baby girl.

Then it seems to him the mother was not mortal. She was a mysterious woman from the faery, and the child, he secretly believes, is one of the Tuatha De Danaan. This idea he gradually inculcates into the people round him, and into the child herself. It steals over them all gradually, almost unawares.

The girl accepts from the start a difference between herself and the rest of people. She does not feel quite mortal. Men are only men to her: she is of another race, the Tuatha De Danaan. She doesn't talk about it: nobody talks about it. But there it is, tacit, accepted.

Her father hires a poor scholar to be her tutor, and she has an ordinary education. But she has no real friends. There is no one of her race. Sometimes she goes to Glasgow, to Edinburgh, to London with her father. The world interests her, but she doesn't belong to it. She is a little afraid of it. It is not of her race.

When she is seventeen her father is suddenly killed, and she is alone, save for her tutor. She has an income of about three hundred a year. She decides to go to London. The war has broken out - she becomes a nurse. She nurses men, and knows their wounds and their necessities. But she tends them as if they were lambs or other delicate and lovable animals. Their blood is not her blood, their needs are not the needs of her race.

Men fall in love with her, and that is terrible to her. She is waiting for one of her own race. Her tutor supports her in the myth. Wait, he says, wait for the Tuatha De Danaan to send you your mate. You can't mate with a man. Wait till you see a demon between his brows.

At last she saw him in the street. She knew him at once, knew the demon between his brows. And she was afraid. For the first time in her life, she was afraid of her own nature, the mystery of herself. Because it seemed to her that her race, the Tuatha, had come back to destroy the race of men. She had come back to destroy the race of men. She was terrified of her own destiny. She wanted never again to see the man with the demon between his brows.

So for a long time she did not see him again. And then her fear that she would never see him any more was deeper than anything else. Whatever she wanted, she wanted her own destiny with him, let happen what might.

5

If I could help it, I would never intrude upon Lawrence when Murry was there - and Murry frequently was there - because I could not bear the underlying sense of strain and dissatisfaction. Frieda was torn between her recent friendliness with Murry and Lawrence's belief that England held nothing for him any more in spite of all the *Adelphis* that were or ever could be. Lawrence, waiting in vain week after week for some reply to the letters and cables which he was sending to his New York publisher, had begun to be anxious about money. Where was the use of his books going well in the States if he received nothing for them? 'It was a painful time,' says Murry. So it was.

Of the 'painftil things that happened in it' I was certainly witness to one. But on that occasion the special painfulness was created by Murry. Possibly from a conscious desire that Lawrence should be spared, he has not told the story in his *Reminiscences*. It has since been given, however, from hearsay and with the most circumstantial inaccuracy by Mrs Luhan. As the incident concerned neither Lawrence nor Murry alone, but inclusively nine of us, it seems imperative that it should be given here correctly to the best of my remembrance.

During this visit of Lawrence to London he was determined to make at least one attempt at friendly gaiety - a sort of 'Well, well, now that we are here don't let's be too gloomy even if we have made a mistake' gesture on his part. He went with Koteliansky to the Café Royal, engaged a private room there and ordered a supper. (For which, to Lawrence's annoyance, the manager insisted upon having a deposit, and refused to take a cheque.) When Frieda first told me that they were giving a party in a restaurant, I took it merely as an announcement, not as an invitation. I knew that Lawrence had a considerable acquaintance in London, and it struck me as natural that we, living in the same house and seeing each other constantly, were not to be among the guests. But when I said I hoped they would have a good evening, Frieda shouted in amazement: 'But you and Don are coming! You are *invited*! It is a dinner for Lawrence's friends!'

Only then did I recognise my half-unconscious withdrawal on the first reception of the news, as a too willing abnegation. From the first I had felt a slight sinking of the heart at the notion of this supper, so far as I might have any part in it. And it was this that made me utter a feeble and ill-mannered protest

even thus late. 'Are you quite sure that you want us?' I asked. 'There are so many people you must want to see and we can eat together any night.' 'No, no,' sang Frieda, quite shocked and hurt, I could see. This is for Lawrence's real friends. Are you not his real friends?' So it was settled. It was just the presence of some of those other 'real friends' that was saddening to me in the prospect. But we had to enter into the spirit of the thing, and attend with goodwill this, the one and only formal gathering I have ever known Lawrence to initiate.

Soon enough we knew who the others were to be - Koteliansky, Murry and Mark Gerder for the men; Mary Cannan and Dorothy Brett for the women. The round table was attractively laid and the room intimate. Lawrence made a charming host - easy, simple and warm. There was something at once piquant and touching in seeing him receiving us, his friends, thus in surroundings so unlike those in which we had been accustomed to forgather with him these ten years past. It emphasised the lack of sophistication in him which, combined with his subtlety, was so moving a charm. 'Schoolboyish' is perhaps the last adjective that could justly be applied to this mature and refined, this disciplined and impassioned artist, that was D. H. Lawrence at the age of thirty-nine. But at any moment, surroundings like the Café Royal, or the rooms of some fine old house not in the cottage style, would bring out in Lawrence a boyishness that was as comic as it was lovable. 'You'll see I'm quite up to this,' he seemed to be saying. 'Mind you play up to me, so that nobody will have the slightest idea that we don't dine in marble halls all the year round.' It is never a thing to underline, but it is a thing to be remembered, that Lawrence was the son of a miner and spent his youth in a miners' row - no matter with how superior a mother or how sensitive a group of brothers and sisters. For him, for instance, to visit at a house like Garsington Manor, was a genuine experience. He coped with it admirably and he knew just what estimation to put upon it, both as an experience and as a phenomenon. He could add up the life behind it and 'see through' the persons belonging to it, without being in any way dazzled or shaken. Even the utmost of kindly patronage could not keep him from the eventual expression of his summing up. More even than Robert Burns in his adventures with the rich and the famous, Lawrence was the 'chiel amang them takin' notes'. Yet he never became sophisticated enough not to be superficially over-impressed at the first impact with personages like the Meynell family or Bertrand Russell or Lady Ottoline Morrell. With them this most un-schoolboyish man betrayed a kind of quiet schoolboy knowingness that is not unrelated to nervousness. And the reaction from his impressibility (as in the case of Robert Burns) was apt to be violent. People gave themselves away to Lawrence in an extraordinary degree. And as often as not, their 'giving away' was a subtle form of patronage, a fact

that was by no means lost on the observer and writer of fiction who lurked with cool eyes behind the poet in Lawrence. It was naturally a shock when, out of what had seemed a pleasant friendship, there should spring such prodigies, at once fantastic and recognisable, as figure in certain of his novels and tales. True, he did this with any or all of us. But one cannot escape from the touch of malice in certain instances, nor from the belief that it is there as a make-weight for the special sensibility of a man whose genius has lifted him out of his class.

To return to the Café Royal. Frieda, as our hostess, purred loudly and pleasantly. Cafés Royal or Tudor houses were not even child's play to her! She wore, greatly to Lawrence's approval, something that was both gleaming and flower-like - anyhow petal-like, as she delightedly pointed out. I forget how Dorothy Brett was dressed, except that what she wore seemed tame beside Frieda's gaiety. Mary in *décolletée* black, with a large picture hat, à la Mrs Siddons, looked like the heroine from a forgotten novel by John Oliver Hobbes. I, too, was in black - velvet to Mary's silk. The men wore their everyday clothes. Kot, in his dark clothes as ever, looked both the most conventional and the strangest.

The food was excellent, but somehow the feast did not go well. Gerder was silent and looked watchful, even contemptuous. Kot conceived a murderous dislike for Donald, next to whom he was placed.

Mary had nothing to say. I too was stricken with dumbness. Lawrence did his best to enliven us all with wine, bidding us to drink our fill and rejoice in a festive occasion. He set us a good example and drank level. There was *no* champagne. We drank claret. And never before, nor since, have I swallowed so many glasses and remained so heavily sober. With the coming of the dessert a mistake was made. What was the wine to be? asked Lawrence. Murry and Donald both said port. They had forgotten, or had not known, that port was a drink Lawrence could not well tolerate. He immediately hinted very gently that port was not his drink, but his remark was either missed or good-naturedly overruled. 'Port is a man's drink,' I remember either Murry or Donald announcing in solemn tones. So port it was. And Lawrence drank it with the rest of us.

It had the effect of loosening at least some of the mute tongues about the table, though none of us women was perceptibly elevated. Lawrence began to talk in Spanish (which he had learned in Mexico). Donald, who prided himself on knowing a bit of Spanish (enough to read *Don Quixote* and to reply to simple questions), endeavoured to engage in Spanish conversation with Lawrence. This, for some reason, infuriated Kot to such a degree that he looked like taking the unwary Donald's life had not Murry tactfully placed somebody between them.

Kot's idea seemed to be that the Spanish language was Lawrence's special perquisite. Gertler drank, or refrained from drinking, in silence, looking on, always looking on from a cold afar. Both he and Mary Cannan left early.

But not before this strange incident. It began with a speech by Kot in praise and love of Lawrence, the speech being punctuated by his deliberate smashing of a wineglass at the close of each period. As - 'Lawrence is a great man.' (Bang! down came Kot's strong fist enclosing the stem of a glass, so that its bottom came in shivering contact with the table.) 'Nobody here realises how great he is.' (Crash! another good wineglass gone.) 'Especially no woman here or anywhere can possibly realise the greatness of Lawrence.' (Smash and tinkle!) 'Frieda does not count. Frieda is different. I understand and don't include her. But no other woman here or anywhere can understand anything about Lawrence or what kind of being he is.'

We women were silent. We felt, I think, very sympathetic to Kot. Anyhow I did. Sympathetic to his jealous, dark and overpowering affection - even inclined to agree with what he said.

Lawrence looked pale and frightfully ill, but his eyes were starry to an extraordinary degree. It occurred to me then - and I have since had no reason to change my reading, which was revealed as by the appearance of clear writing on the wall - that the deep hold of the Last Supper on the imagination of the world is not unconnected with the mystery of Bacchus. Given a man of genius; more especially given a man whose genius runs to expression by means of symbol, his essential utterance may well be achieved only when his genius is acted upon at a crisis by the magic of the fermented grape.

Anyhow, Lawrence who, like the others present, was habitually temperate, revealed that night at the Café Royal his deepest desire to all of us simply and unforgettably. And in doing so he brought about some other revelations, as will be seen.

Without making anything approaching a speech, he caught our attention by the quiet urgency of his request. What he said, in effect, was that we were his friends here, each and all of us people he had been very fond of. He could not stay in England. He must go back to New Mexico. Would we, would any of us, go with him? He asked each of us in turn. Would we go with him? Implicit in this question was the other. Did the search, the adventure, the pilgrimage for which he stood, mean enough to us for us to give up our own way of life and our own separate struggle with the world? Though his way of life must involve also a struggle with the world, this was not - as we well knew - its main objective. Rather was it a withdrawal of one's essential being from that struggle, and a turning of what strength one had into a new channel.

Essentially the appeal was not a personal one. Though it was to his friends, it was not for his sake or the sake of friendship that he made it. It was because of something in himself which we all acknowledged. But it had never before become so near being a personal appeal. It certainly had a personal element that told of his overwhelming loneliness. It was far less 'follow me' than 'come with me'. It was even - to my thinking at least - 'come for a time, and support me by your presence, as the undertaking is too much for me alone, yet I must not stay here with you'. I give my own reading, but I think something very like it was in the minds of all the others.

Remember we had just supped, and our glasses had been replenished with port, and, as I have said, we were all normally very abstemious people.

Mary Carman was the only one to return a flat negative to Lawrence's question. It was as plump and plain as she herself was slender and pretty. 'No,' said she hardily. 'I like you, Lawrence, but not so much as all that, and I think you are asking what no human being has a right to ask of another.'

Lawrence accepted this without cavil or offence. It was a clear, hard, honest answer.

What Gerder said, I can't remember. I rather think it was a humouring but dry affirmative, which we all understood to mean nothing. Kot and Donald both said they would go, less drily, but so that any listener guessed they were speaking from goodwill rather than from deep intention. Dorothy Brett said quickly that she would go, and I, knowing that she would, envied her. Murry promised emotionally that he would, and one felt that he wouldn't. I said yes, I would go. And I meant it, though I didn't see how on earth it could be, anyhow for a long time. Unlike Mary and Dorothy Brett I had neither money of my own nor freedom from responsibility. Dorothy Brett, who loved to serve, was always coming to a loose end. I, who did not particularly like serving, was always having fresh responsibilities put upon me by life. Mary, disappointed with her 'freedom', had yet got used to its little self-indulgences and could not give them up. All the same I felt that Lawrence had somehow the right to ask me to go. And I feel today equally the impossibility of my going and the wish that I had gone.

As for the supper, what I next remember is Murry going up to Lawrence and kissing him with a kind of effusiveness which afflicted me. He must have been sensible to my feeling, because he turned to me.

'Women can't understand this,' he said. 'This is an affair between men. Women can have no part or place in it.'

'Maybe,' said I. 'But anyhow it wasn't a woman who betrayed Jesus with a kiss.'

At this Murry again embraced Lawrence, who sat perfectly still and unresponsive, with a dead-white face in which the eyes alone were alive.

'I *have* betrayed you, old chap, I confess it,' continued Murry. 'In the past I *have* betrayed you. But never again. I call you all to witness, never again.'

Throughout all this Frieda remained aloof and scornful - excluded. Her innings would be later. She reminded me of King David's wife looking down in derision from an upper window. One could not but admire her.

It must have been almost immediately after the strange episode with Murry, that Lawrence, without uttering a sound, fell forward with his head on the table, was deadly sick, and became at once unconscious. The combination of the port (which, when he had said he could not abide, he said truly) and the cruel loneliness which was brought home to him by the responses he had elicited from us, his friends, was too much for him.

In his sickness Lawrence was more like a child than a man. There was nothing disgusting about him. Frieda, however, remained stonily detached, while Dorothy Brett and I ministered to him as best we could - she especially, who did not want me to help.

It must have been now that Mary and Gerder left us. What with the glasses broken by Kot, and Lawrence's sickness, I was sorry for the waiters who would have to clear up. But they behaved as if they had noticed nothing out of the way. Donald, as the soberest man, was handed money to pay for the wine and the damage. The bill, he tells me, struck him as wonderfully moderate.

We left in two taxi-cabs, Lawrence being still unconscious so that it was difficult getting him down in the lift. But Kot, even in liquor, was powerful. I recall that his legs seemed to fill the cab in which I was. I had been given all the hats of the party to hold, and I lost my own - a little real Russian cap of black astrakhan, which I liked better than any head covering I ever had, though I gave only three shillings for it in an antique shop, and it had a bullet-hole through it.

Arrived at Hampstead the problem was how to get Lawrence up to the first floor. Kot and Murry had to carry him. But in their enthusiasm they went on with their burden, up and up, till my brother, asleep on the top storey, was awakened by the trampling, stumbling sound, and ran out in alarm to the little landing. He told me afterwards that when he saw clearly before him St John and St Peter (or maybe St Thomas) bearing between them the limp figure of their Master, he could hardly believe he was not dreaming. However, he conducted the party downstairs again.

Next morning soon after breakfast - certainly not later than 9.30 a.m. - I was passing the open door of the Lawrences' sitting-room, when Lawrence hailed me and bade me enter. He was fresh and serene. 'Well, Catherine,' he said, 'I made a

fool of myself last night. We must all of us fall at times. It does no harm so long as we first admit and then forget it.'

At such times he was an overwhelmingly attractive human being. That firm and easy, yet not flippant manner of his for dealing with such an incident, bespoke an underlying steadiness that begot trust in the onlooker and was - it seems to me - incompatible with any neurotic condition. Although the fullness of his admissions, and the sensitiveness of his abandon to the impulses of life might give to the superficial observer the impression that he was a sufferer from a neurosis, Lawrence was emphatically no neurotic. Of this I am convinced. If I add that he hated neurotics, even while he had the misfortune to find in them more immediately than in others a kind of response which sprang from superficial understanding, I suppose I shall call forth the gibe of the analyst - 'Thou sayest it!' 'The real neurotic is half a devil,' said Lawrence, 'the cured one' with his 'perfect automatic control', is 'a perfect devil'. And again, 'Spit on every neurotic and wipe your feet on his face if he tries to drag you down.' Yet I know that what I say is true. Lawrence hated, he feared, he fought and he was obliged to consort with neurotics. But he was himself untainted.

When I told him that I had lost my astrakhan cap he insisted on giving me two pounds to buy myself a hat. Unfortunately he did not like the one I bought, though he was too kind to say so. He liked a hat to be a hat, and to have a proper brim. This small black felt was brimless. He gave it a single glance and looked away. 'Quite saucy!' he said. I felt crushed.

6

Before returning to New Mexico the Lawrences were going to Baden-Baden, and there was some talk of my meeting them in Paris. But from Paris he wrote to say he did not think it would be worth the effort and the money I should have to expend to get there. One of these days he would give me, he said 'a *real* holiday in place of this'. He advised me to do as he was doing - to 'lie low' and to 'save oneself up for something better, something real later on'.

I understood that he did not really wish me to come - bringing with me the reminders of his unsatisfactory visit to London. Besides, as things were, he was right: it was hardly worth while. In less than a week he was going on to Baden-Baden, and was in the mood of wanting to get it all over so that he could get back to New Mexico. In London he had felt more ill than he said to any of us.

It was, I realised, his first visit to Paris, and he had arrived 'almost stupefied from London' to find - after one rather lovely day of sunshine and frost - something of the unreality of a museum; a museum, moreover, under rain and dark skies. He admitted the beauty, but found less life than in London (not that he liked the life there was in London), and when in the Louvre he kept wondering whether the museum was more inside than outside. Somewhere he has written an amusing and characteristic essay on either the Louvre or the Tuileries, in which Frieda saw herself living in peacock state, a desire from which he dissociated himself with the utmost violence. His own notion was for a life of rough and austere and simple beauty.

Meanwhile, said he, he wanted only 'to sleep a good bit, and let the days go by'. In fact, however, refreshed immensely by two days' rest alone with Frieda, he was 'trying to amuse himself by writing stories'. It was like him that on a first short visit to the famous capital he should feel compelled to fall back upon short-story writing from sheer lack of amusement. I imagine that the story in question must have been 'Jimmy and the Desperate Woman', which certainly gives us Lawrence at his most amusing, though the *Adelphi* selected it later in a review as a demonstration of Lawrence at his worst.

From among the letters and packages which I had to forward, Lawrence told me to keep back and read the manuscript of his introduction to Magnus's *Memoirs*, after which I was to hand it to Koteliansky. I have said already what I

thought of this. Koteliansky, however, disapproved of it, and bluntly told Lawrence so. Lawrence was angry and hurt, the more so because, during his stay in London, both Dorothy Brett and Murry had made the situation between him and Koteliansky a difficult one, and Koteliansky had felt obliged to withdraw essentially from them both, while he remained devoted to Lawrence. He withdrew himself also from *the Adelphi* into a special and respectable kind of solitude. As an honest man he could see no other way open to him. He was definitely unable to accept or approve of Frieda, and so it was useless for him to think of going to New Mexico, as Lawrence well knew. His great love for Lawrence, however, remained always. He was a critical unbeliever in Lawrence as a 'philosopher' but a profound believer in Lawrence as a man and an artist.

Among those who were drawn to Lawrence he was the doubting Thomas. I question if any suffered more from being Lawrence's friend.

After a day at Strasburg, and less than a fortnight at Baden-Baden, Lawrence wrote asking me to find him a quiet hotel in London, as he was coming on February 26th to stay for one week before sailing for New York. There was still no word from his New York publisher, and no money, so that the sooner he saw to his affairs out there in person the better. I was to tell nobody that he was coming, as he didn't want 'to see people'. On the way back he wasted five days in Paris hoping to get a reply to his cables from New York. None came.

For six days he stayed at Garland's Hotel, Pall Mall. He liked this place because of its quiet, old-fashioned, very English ways. Then, with Dorothy Brett to make a third, he and Frieda sailed. After a good journey (which, however, he hated) they reached New York on March 11th in 'a sort of blizzard' that presently gave way to 'strong American sunshine'. In New York they found that, owing to heavy losses, his publisher there could only with difficulty scrape together the few hundred dollars needed to take them west at the end of a week. In spite of the large sales of *Women in Love* and the respectable sales of other books, there was now no money at all in the bank. Lawrence had spent - for him - a large sum in London and on the Continent. So here he was, actually poorer than on his arrival from Australia. England did not read his books, and the United States did not pay for them. Friendly relations, however, had been preserved: and Lawrence's agent would collect the money that was due 'bit by bit'. All this in his letter to me from New York, where he was doing his best to avoid 'people'. As a place it was 'of course no better than London', but the climate suited him better - 'even the cold wind gives one one's energy back again. It's just that.'

Travelling down through Kent to Southampton on what happened to be a lovely spring day, he had deeply felt the beauty of England, and he was anxious to hear all about our venture in the country. He knew we had thoughts of a small

farm. He would let us know what it was like in Taos when he got there again. It seemed anyhow that there were 'plenty of houses going begging there'.

Our farm idea dissolved into a very small cottage in Bucks where we reckoned we could live better than in town. When I next heard from Lawrence - towards the end of April - we were shortly going there. He wrote from Santé Fé, to which place he had come down for a day or two to see the Indian dances. This must have been when he saw the 'Dance of the Sprouting Corn', of which he wrote for the *Adelphi*, although the article did not appear there until August, and was, in fact, the first Lawrence contribution, except for two translations of Verga, since the excerpts from the *Fantasia*.

During the first weeks of May he was very happy. To begin with, he was deeply affected and cheered by the sight of the Indian dances; also by himself joining in at times (not in one of the great ritual dances, of course, but in the casual smaller affairs) with some two dozen Indians. It was the first dancing he had ever in his life enjoyed, for he hated ballroom efforts. It was further the first time he had ever felt in physical touch with men who had a traditional religion that still meant something to them. There can be no doubt of this. Though 'superficially' he admitted that he did not like the Indians; though he knew that there was no breaking down the barrier of alien blood; though here was only the faintest shadow of what he might have felt had he been able to dance with men of his own blood under an English moon (remote consummation of life for Lawrence!) - yet here was the nearest he was ever to get to 'the dragon's den of the cosmos', and the farthest (save in spirit and in solitude) from the outworn and now accursed ideal of a primal, perfect godhead and a lost perfect paradise. In New Mexico, and for the first time, he found physical relief from the 'cheerful, triumphant success' which was killing the white races with *ennui*. He became a partaker as well as a spectator. Not by the abnegation of the Christian saint or the Oriental fakir, not by the psychic powers of the yogi, not by the short cut by which a modern world contemplate? the conquest of the cosmos by science, not by any victory over matter by either the spirit or the intellect did Lawrence see the possibility of our salvation from boredom and sterility. We were all starving in the midst of plenty. Nothing was needed but for us to perceive religiously that the cosmos itself was alive, and to enter into the richness of that perception. In wrestling with a live cosmos men would immediately become themselves gods of a kind - fallible still, but potent with cosmic energy. Then, and only then, could man properly solve his great problems. But to do so we had to 'destroy our own conception', our accustomed consciousness. Because 'a man can belong to one great way of consciousness only'

It was when Lawrence was thus soothed and restored, that Mabel Luhan gave

him a small ranch for himself - the Kiowa. Strictly speaking, it was to Frieda she gave it; but that was because she thought it the best, perhaps the only way of conveying it to Lawrence. Lawrence joyfully accepted it, and at once set about paying for it - with the manuscript of *Sons and Lovers*. Even at that time this was said to have a high market value, and Mabel could afford, as Lawrence knew, to hold on to it. She was in no need of ready cash. He gave her many other presents and did her substantial services. As usual, Lawrence insisted upon paying his way.

Few things could have delighted him more than to feel that the ranch was his - a hundred and sixty acres high in the skirts of the mountains and with the long summer before them. If his friends would not come, at least he had prepared a place for them, and paid for it! Here he could work off the benumbing and degrading influences of London. And work he did - 'like the devil'.

To help restore the log cabins, which were falling down, they got three Indians and a Mexican carpenter. But, as always, Lawrence did the work of two, inside and out, at the same time undertaking the direction of everything and everybody. In three weeks he and Frieda and Dorothy Brett had rebuilt the whole of the three-roomed house, except the chimney, making all the adobe bricks themselves. Then the roofs of all the cabins had to be re-shingled. The three-roomer was for Lawrence and Frieda, the two-roomer for Mabel when she cared to come, and the little one-roomer for Dorothy Brett. Besides these, there was a nice log hay-house and corral, and there were four horses. It was some three miles from the Del Monte ranch.

Now it is our own [he wrote in May], so we can invite you to come. I hope you'll scrape the money together and come for a whole summer, perhaps next year, and try it. Anyway, it would make a break, and there is something in looking out on to a new landscape altogether. I think we shall stay till October, then go down to Mexico, where I must work at my novel. At present I don't write - don't want to - don't care. Things are all far away. I haven't seen a newspaper for two months, and can't bear to think of one. The world is as it is. I am as I am. We don't fit very well. I never forget that fatal evening at the Café Royal. That is what coming home means to me. Never again, pray the Lord.

Down in the valley, where they often had to ride for necessaries, the spring was - ... so lovely, the wild plum everywhere white like snow, the cotton-wood trees all tender plummy green, like happy ghosts, and the alfalfa fields a heavy dense green. Such a change, in two weeks. The apple orchards suddenly in bloom. Only the grey desert the same. - One doesn't talk any more about being happy - that is child's talk. But I do like having the big unbroken spaces round me. There is something savage unbreakable in the spirit of place out here. The

Indians drumming and yelling at our campfire at evening. But they'll be wiped out too, I expect - schools and education will finish them. But not before the world falls.

Remember me to Don. Save up - and enjoy your cottage meanwhile.

Lawrence, of course, did not stop writing for so long as he thought he would. In August he went down to the Hopi land in Arizona and wrote his marvellous account of the Snake Dances which appeared four months later in the *Adelphi*. He wrote also the short novel, *St Mawr*, and the two novelettes, *The Woman Who Rode Away* and *The Princess* - 'all sad', as he told me, but 'after all, they're true to what is'.

In October, with the coming of the first snows, he was ready to go down to Mexico and revise *The Plumed Serpent*. Brett would go with them, but not to share the same house if they took one. 'Not be too close ... It's so much easier that way.'

He now knew the worst as well as the best of life at the ranch. Probably he had never felt so well anywhere, but the altitude made the place intolerable to his lungs for longer than five, or at the utmost six months of the year. Already by October his bronchials felt 'raw'. Also it was 'very *hard* living up against these savage Rockies. The savage things are a bit gruesome, and they try to down one.' These things he recognised. At the same time, 'better, far better they than the white disintegration'. In April he hoped to be back, and he wondered if I would be able to get over.

For anybody who wishes to know about Lawrence's life it will be necessary to compare his own letters and actions at this, as at other times, with the account given in Murry's *Reminiscences*. And it is to be remembered that it was impossible for Lawrence to remain at 8,600 feet once the snows came. But he fully intended to return in April after that fruitful and economical summer, and he adhered to his plan. In his October letter he hoped I might be able to get over by the following spring.

For the winter in Mexico he had saved 2,000 dollars. *The Boy in the Bush* and the introduction to Magnus's *Memoirs* had just appeared in England. But of his American publisher he wrote, 'He still hovers on the brink of bankruptcy and keeps me on the edge of the same.'

His bronchials felt better at Oaxaca at a height of 5,000 feet, but 'he took it out of himself' over the final revision of *The Plumed Serpent*, so that Frieda was afraid for him, and when the book was finished he fell dangerously ill. He was very near death, and himself believed for a time that he must die. But Frieda kept her head, and he came round - very slowly. The doctor poured quinine down his throat, but his own treatment - which Frieda carried out - was to surround

himself with bags of hot sand. Once, at a critical moment, he told her that she must have him buried in the little local cemetery. He would have her make things as easy for herself as possible. But, stifling her fear, she rallied him by refusing. It was much too ugly a place to be buried in, she protested, and he really must not put that upon her! Frieda was brave, and she had a marvellous power of putting strength into Lawrence when he was ill - this, though in the ordinary sense she was a bad nurse, as both she and Lawrence freely admitted.

In describing his malady to me he called it 'malaria, 'flu and tropical fever'. But though any or all of these may have set the thing going (as it would seem from the huge doses of quinine which permanently increased his deafness) the true danger lay in the active presence of tubercle. The doctor told Frieda so, privately but plainly; and she knew from what he said that Lawrence would never be the same man again.

The letter of 'pure denunciation' which Murry received from Lawrence must have been written during the short interim between the completion of *The Plumed Serpent* and this illness. At a loose end for the moment, he had become acquainted with a group of people - tired Europeans and sophisticated Americans - of whom he was soon weary. He then saw Mexico at its worst - the town and tourist and political sides, the horrors of which engendered homesickness. Because he admitted this, Murry concluded that he was 'done with America', Mexico, New Mexico and all.

But this was not the case. Hateful as the modern aspect of Mexico appeared, so that by the side of it the virtues of Europe shone out like the lights of home, the trend of thought exemplified by the *Adelphi* was yet more hateful. Lawrence could just tolerate Murry on Keats. Murry on God or Jesus or Humanity or Katherine Mansfield he could not stomach. At the same time he had still some hope that Murry might be brought to understand. Was not the drift of his Indian Dances clear enough to one who was so intelligent, given a good will? And about himself, as usual, he was perfectly open. His problem was still how to live. He would return to the ranch for the summer. But what when October came again? Perhaps he ought always to cross the Atlantic for the winter. His illness had shaken him. He must keep in touch with any at home who called themselves friends. Lawrence needed to go to America, and in America he met with much friendliness, which he returned; but I doubt if he ever made a friend there. For a friend he needed one of his own blood.

That April, still weak, staying at Orizaba, he certainly was tempted to come home. But he thought better of it, carried out his original plan and struggled up to the ranch. After ten weeks there he was 'beginning to be himself again'. That was to say he was milking his black cow night and morning, riding his black

horse Aaron on the more tiresome errands in the valley, sowing pansy seeds, and irrigating without help a twenty-acre field to which the water had to be brought from two miles off. Frieda's nephew, a boy still in his teens, had arrived from Germany to be with them. For other help they now had only a Mexican boy, who came up occasionally for two dollars a day.

My description of our Bucks cherry trees in bloom made him a little homesick. They were 'lovely to think of, he said. 'Here the country is too savage, somehow, for such softness.' But he would come to Europe in the autumn, he wrote. He hoped to find 'a warm place for the winter'.

In August he wrote to say he would be seeing us 'in one place or another in early October'. There was no hint in this of anything melodramatic such as a 'final farewell to America'. The melodrama is of Murry's imparting. Lawrence was never dramatic, much less melodramatic, though he was usually emphatic. 'We are running to the end of our stay here,' he put it to me:

. . . leave about September 10th. I suppose we shall be in England in early October... Frieda talks of staying some time in England, seeing her children. But I dread the tightness and stuffiness of England - feel I shan't be able to breathe. But I may like it better this time. I expect I shall suffer a bit anyhow, being shut up in houses and towns, after being so free here. I am as well as ever I was - but malaria comes back in very hot sun or any malaria conditions.

Part Five

AET. 40-41

PROSE

The Virgin and the Gypsy

Etruscan Places (in part)

The Man Who Died (first part)

* * *

'For now I am fully a man, and free above all from my own self-importance.'

1

The Lawrences arrived as planned, and went first to Garland's Hotel for a couple of days. Coming up for a half-day from the country, I saw them there, and arranged that they should have the loan of my younger brother's flat - then unoccupied - in Gower Street. Leaving their luggage at the flat, they would pay a visit to the Midlands, and would return to see a few friends before going to Italy by November. Lawrence did not speak of his health, and, as usual, there was nothing of the invalid about him; but under his big-brimmed Mexican hat his face looked pinched and small, and one easily guessed that he could not face a London winter. Neither could he yet afford the sort of comfortable house somewhere on the South Coast where he might have stayed safely if there had been enough interest or friendship to make England attractive to him. On this occasion he seemed very solitary in London.

This particular solitude was of his own making, as he had told only a few people of his arrival. He came alone, however, to spend the first weekend with us in the country. He said he would spend a day and night with us.

We both met him at High Wycombe station and travelled uphill in the country bus. Why he was by himself I don't remember. Either Frieda had gone before him to the Midlands or - more likely - she was visiting alone elsewhere. But here he was, and not in a cheerful mood, though as always well-disposed towards me. I was not, just then, very cheerful myself. Things had not gone as well as we could wish, and we were poor and anxious.

He was disappointed with the look of the immediate country, which is not particularly attractive, and on Sunday we all four walked under grey skies in the beech woods, while I thought how poor and tame it must seem to him after the pine slopes at Taos. Then, as we sat over a log fire and were near getting to some real talk, unexpected visitors came from London and robbed the occasion of its intimacy.

What with these visitors, my own domestic cares (which just then were pressing), and the sadness I divined in Lawrence, I was in a distracted state, and only two incidents of the visit stand out clearly now in memory. One was pleasant, the other the reverse. While we stood by the garden gate to see the London people off, John Patrick, then aged seven, made some sudden and

unsolicited gesture of love towards me, and as quickly broke away again to his play. We continued with our adieux, paying no attention to the child, but I noticed Lawrence looking keenly at him, and later he referred to the boy in a letter in a special way, which I took to be connected with that remembered glance. 'Wait and see,' he wrote, 'this will be *ein seltsamer Mensch*.'

By the other incident I felt wounded and taken aback. But, as it shows once more how scrupulously Lawrence insisted on paying his way through life, I give it also. As we sat round the tea-table he produced a five-pound note, and in a manner half shy, half careless, threw it across to John Patrick. The child had never seen such a thing before, and did not know what to make of it. Neither did I. I remembered unhappily that it was precisely the sum I had given to Frieda for a travelling coat once when they were leaving England and she badly needed such a thing. Possibly I was wrong, but I don't think so, when, with a pang, I felt that this symbolised the sort of squaring up of accounts that goes with a long farewell. True, we were now rather poorer than Lawrence and with less prospect of growing richer, which he knew. But equally well I knew that he had not any spare five-pound notes to throw across tea-tables. Though he was now fixed up with a new American publisher he was still mainly dependent upon what could be 'squeezed out of the first unlucky one. However, there was nothing for it but to take it, as he would have it so.

From Derbyshire he sent us one of the famous Midland pork pies, with apologies for its not being so big as Midland pies - according to him - ought to be.

2

He had intended to stay a week at home and then to go with his sisters to the Lincolnshire coast for a few weeks. But instead he remained ten days at home and fled again south. He would always be fond of Ada, and would feel kindly towards his 'own people'. He was pleased, he wrote me, to find them in 'comparative opulence - *comparative*, of course - judging by old home standards'. But he hated more than ever 'past things like one's home regions', and when I saw him soon after his arrival in London he told me how, especially on that visit, the horrors of his childhood had come up over him like a smothering flood. Glad he would have been if the place thereof 'were puffed off the face of the earth'. The weather too had been atrocious and continued so. He must get away or a 'cold' would lay him low.

On the eve of his departure to the Midlands - he went on the Wednesday following his visit to us - he had told Murry that he hoped to see him when he came south again. By the 17th or 18th he was back in London and installed with Frieda in Gower Street. But not until the 26th - when Frieda had left for Baden-Baden, whither he was to follow her on the 29th - did he write again to Murry suggesting he might come up from the country and spend the night of the 28th at the flat.

Murry has told how he went and how, after a dispute about his book on Jesus, which Lawrence disliked and condemned, he and Lawrence parted the next day. Murry congratulates himself on not having accompanied Lawrence to New Mexico. He 'could not help thinking in what a hopeless position he should have been at this moment if he had really gone'. This reflection made him feel that now at last, with regard to Lawrence, he had 'burned his boats'. Not that there was any actual quarrel. Lawrence asked if Murry and his wife would visit them in Italy. Murry said they would.

In the November number of the *Adelphi* appeared the article by Murry called 'A Simple Creed', by which he stands today, even as he stands by his review of *Women in Love*. Lawrence hated the article and wrote in vehement protest. Murry, on the other hand, held that Lawrence had missed the point of it. Those who are sufficiently interested can place Lawrence's commentary by the side of Murry's 'Simple Creed' and judge of the matter for themselves.

Having left what must have seemed to him like the ghosts of his old friends in London - and not glad ghosts at that - Lawrence reached Baden-Baden in the first days of November to find it almost as ghostly: '. . . unbelievably quiet and deserted - really deserted. Nobody comes any more: it's nothing but ghosts from the Turgenev period.' This is not an exaggerated description of the Baden-Baden I was to visit two summers later. A happy exception, however, was provided for Lawrence by his mother-in-law, who, though she belonged to the past, remained always fresh and alive for him, with a genuine sturdiness as well as a sensitive vitality - real, bright and alive to the last. In all his returns to this, his other home, Lawrence was more soothed and happy than in his dutiful visits to the Midlands - so long as Frieda's mother was alive. This time he wrote to tell me that she was 'looking older, slower, but still very lively, walks uphill to us in our hotel. She asks for news of you.'

After a fortnight there he and Frieda went on to Spotorno, where they hired a four-storeyed villa. It was not much to their liking, but would serve, especially as they hoped for visitors, beginning with Frieda's two daughters.

Frieda's long insistence had been rewarded. Already in Hampstead, two winters before, she had managed to break down in a great degree the reserve between Lawrence and her children. Her son still remained aloof and refused to see the man who had taken his mother away, but the two girls had often called and, having made his acquaintance, had found themselves vanquished. Now, as young women, they came to Spotorno of their own wish and for the first time lived under the same roof with their mother and Lawrence. The younger of the two, who was then seventeen or eighteen, became particularly attached to Lawrence, and he to her. Here at last was a new and pleasant relationship. These young people were not ghosts, and they felt the greatest admiration, liking and respect for Lawrence, both as man and as writer. *The Virgin and the Gypsy* belongs to this time at Spotorno in the four-decker villa.

It is nevertheless the case that Lawrence, in this houseful of women that yet was not his own, grew restive. Possibly too, while he had to accept it, he was irritated by the flaunting of Frieda in her role of *mater triumphans*. She had squared her circle, and was now having her cake and eating it with a relish that must have been overwhelming to witness. While allowing her achievement with a wry male smile, and even while taking her daughters to his heart, it may be that he felt the need of male support. According to the *Reminiscences* he wrote to Murry reminding him of his promised visit. Two might perhaps play at resuscitating ghosts from the dead past and finding them transformed into healthy flesh and blood. To a woman her children: to a man his comrade. Hope was slow of dying in the heart of Lawrence. In a moment he could brush aside

all intellectual differences, all past lapses and disappointments, and look to the miraculous renewals of life. Murry claimed that in the past he had undergone profound spiritual changes. There was anyhow something mobile in him, and he might yet be moulded by experience to something nearer to Lawrence's heart's desire. Belief in impulsive life tends to weaken belief in the more static aspect of character.

In regard to Murry's proposed visit nothing is clear except that it never took place, that letters passed between the two men and that Lawrence was very angry. As usual, his anger passed, but the crisis that had been reached in their friendship remained, and Lawrence faced it. Early in the year he wrote repudiating the *Adelphi* once and for all. In view of its recent editorials it had become for him 'a sort of self-betrayal' to appear in its pages, and not again would he do so willingly. He gave Murry a final choice. Let him stand by the *Adelphi* or by Lawrence. It could not be both.

Had it been truly the case, as Murry has told us, that the *Adelphi* was started on Lawrence's behalf, and that he acted therein 'simply' as Lawrence's lieutenant and *locum tenens*, there would seem to be nothing unwarrantable in such a request. It was, indeed, the same request that Lawrence had made on his arrival in London a year before, when Murry had acceded to it, without, however, acting upon it. But Murry now failed to see that he had any choice in the matter of the *Adelphi*. In his own phrase he 'accepted the inevitable'. (It is notable how many vague banalities occur when Murry writes of Lawrence - 'simply', 'curiously easy', 'strangely enough', 'irony of fate', 'bolt from the blue', 'out of his ken', 'accepting the inevitable', and the rest.) That is to say, he admitted no responsibility towards Lawrence. The *Adelphi*, as we have seen, had been designed - unconsciously perhaps at first - as the mouthpiece of his own egotism, and in a state of egotistic emotion he had found himself provided with an opening fanfare to the public by Lawrence's *Fantasia*. Even at the beginning Lawrence's strictures upon the tone of the paper had not been allowed to count; and as it took on ever more clearly the imprint of Murry it had become increasingly the enemy of Lawrence. Now, in the January issue, there had appeared an exposition of the aims of the paper, running to eleven pages, of a kind which was unthinkable for any publication sanctioned by Lawrence. In the February issue Murry undertook to discuss the outlooks of living novelists and poets, yet he made no reference to that 'most significant' one of heretofore. In the March issue Lawrence was found to be at his worst in his contribution to 'The Best Short Stories of 1925'; and not long afterwards *The Plumed Serpent* was dismissed in a few lines of facetious contempt. To round things off the July issue announced the Prologue to the *Life of Jems*.

So Murry 'accepted the inevitable', and, with an 'acquiescence' that was 'curiously easy', told Lawrence that if private feelings were to be dragged in, future co-operation was certainly impossible. Lawrence too had now to accept the inevitable, although it was of a different order from Murry's and had about it no 'curious ease'. From that day until, when he was safely dead, the *Adelphi* rushed for the time into a new existence on his name, he ceased to contribute. Only a belated and brilliant review by him of *Said the Fisherman* (which must have been a hold-over) was printed in the January issue of 1927.

Illness and a visit from Ada to Spotorno - Ada and Frieda having different, and to Lawrence equally obnoxious theories on the subject of sick-nursing, together with bedside technique - brought this unhappy winter to an end. After a short visit with Ada to Monte Carlo, which he hated very much, he fled south again to Capri. Here Dorothy Brett was. Also Millicent Beveridge and Mabel Harrison - another painter who was her friend - and with these two, whom he found pleasant travelling companions, he made the long-ago planned Etruscan tour. The trip lasted from March 22nd till April 2nd. They visited Ravello, Rome, Perugia and Assisi: then went by way of Pisa to Florence, where Lawrence chanced to hear of a country villa. On then to Ravenna, at which town he took ill, so that they had to wait a day or two in a place none of them liked. From there, on to Milan.

3

Now Lawrence was joined in Florence by Frieda and her daughters. Through his friend, Pino Orioli, he had found a house - the Villa Mirenda - at the familiar rent of ninety-five pounds a year. Frieda saw it and heartily approved. For a time the four stayed at the Lucchesi pension. Then the girls returned to England and the Lawrences moved in. By the middle of May - a May long remembered in France and Italy for the cold ferocity of its rains - they were established in the new house.

At first the idea of the Mirenda, as described by Lawrence in his letters, was that it should serve as a *pied à terre*, so that they might come and go, and lend it (to us and others) when they were away. But in fact it became their much loved home till the summer of 1928, and they were there for a time as late as April, 1929. That it could not be the permanent, nor the all-the-year-round home for which Lawrence was then beginning to long, he knew fairly soon. The rooms which formed the upper part of an attractive old farm villa were fine and large in good weather but bare and cold and comfortless in bad. It stood in good country, lovely country in the spring, but it was a mile and a half from the tram terminus at Scandicci and then half an hour's journey by tram from the Duomo. It was a good place in which to write and paint - especially paint - but a bad place in which to be ill.

And unhappily from this point onwards Lawrence's plans and movements were to be dictated more and more arbitrarily by illness. That he might bring to fruition the findings of his pilgrimage, he must bend himself to seize and seek every chance of health. He had the strongest hopes that he would be restored; but he had to admit that he was a fugitive, and he never ceased to face the fact that death might overtake him. When Murry identifies him with his own reading of Herman Melville - as a man with 'a long thin chain round his ankle' while he tries frantically to run away, he appropriates a tempting simile and conveys an easy half-truth. But he has omitted two essential elements in Lawrence's life, the elements of art and of illness. And surely he is confusing the needful pilgrimage across the world of a young and delicate, but comparatively sound man, to whose art and aims pilgrimage was a first necessity, with the later and different restlessness imposed upon an experienced man by the struggle for physical

existence.

Lawrence was the first to confess that his trip round the world and his visits to Mexico, New and Old, were 'a kind of running away'. But he needed absolutely to run from the world he knew and to see the world he did not know. It was his initial quest to see if the two ends of humanity might not be brought together - 'our own thin end, and the last dark strand from the previous, pre-white era' - for the beginning of a new life-mode. And to do this he had to see with his own eyes the Buddhist priest in his temple and to hear with his own ears the Indian drum-tap on the *mesa*. He must subject his own body to the 'boneless suavity' of the East, to the rawness of Australia, to the 'overriding of life' of America. If it was only that in his own person he was the representative of Europe in thus subjecting himself, he had to do it, discovering and condemning himself in the process.

I've been a fool myself, saying Europe is finished for me. It wasn't Europe at all, it was myself, keeping a stranglehold on myself. And that stranglehold I carried over to America; as many a man, and woman worse still, has done before me.

So he wrote in an article for America called 'Europe versus America', in April, 1926. It goes on:

Now, back in Europe, I feel a real relief. The past is too big, and too intimate, for one generation of men to get a stranglehold on it. Europe is squeezing the life out of herself, with her mental education and her fixed ideas. But she hasn't got her hands round her own throat not half so far as America has hers; here the grip is already falling slack; and if the system collapses, it'll only be another system collapsed, of which there have been plenty. But in America, where men grip themselves so much more intensely and suicidally - the women worse - the system has its hold on the very sources of consciousness, so God knows what would happen if the system broke.

This is confession, but it is also discovery, and it is the kind of discovery that comes only by pilgrimage, and by pilgrimage of the savage kind. It is far removed from the musings that emanate from editorial armchairs. It is indeed removed from any mere musings. In the making of such confessions and discoveries Lawrence fulfilled his paramount duty and his essential destiny.

But there might, and there should have been more, had he lived. There is every indication that, his pilgrimage fulfilled, Lawrence was not the man to live unsettled and rootless. He knew that every sane creature, man as well as bird or beast, is tied in the long run to a place or compelled to a rhythm by an invisible chain, be it long or short. He believed in natural phases, in the changing needs of age, and in vital progressions and recessions, as strongly as he disbelieved in

evolution, as commonly understood. He was quick to know when youth was over, and to make ready for the different richness of age, which to youth can seem so poor and maimed a thing. Even as a boy it was the faded quietness of the married woman that moved him, and September was his favourite month.

As surely as he had genius Lawrence had the capacity for serene and fruitful old age. In the best sense of two hackneyed but correct expressions, he was already mellowing into a true pontiff of life and letters, who could not have failed of widespread acknowledgement. This is not to say that he failed to do his work. Neither is it to suggest that his ultimate influence would have been increased by established acceptance. I do not think it would. The pontifical voice echoes less hauntingly and long than the voice of one crying in the wilderness. This is merely to say that the potentialities were there - the wisdom, the sanity, the fine incalculableness, the incorruptibility and the passion that is never all spent - in short the capacity to accept responsibility and to blossom afresh in bearing it. Like Mr George Moore, Lawrence would always have remained an artist, yet like Mr H. G. Wells he would always have realised that our age needs most of all a certain life activity in the artist which forbids his preoccupation with artistic perfection. Abundant evidence for these conclusions will be found in his latest works - in *Assorted Articles*, *Etruscan Places*, and the magnificently measured *Apocalypse*, with its profound understanding of Christianity, such an understanding as true repudiation requires. Also in his *Last Poems*. Not one of these works is marred by a trace of shrillness, decay or impatience. Thanks to his own valiant diligence he had won the recognition and the moderate financial prosperity that were needed for him to set and spread his roots. And he knew it. By 1927 at latest - more probably by 1926 - he was ready to stay quietly productive in some chosen home, or anyhow, as the swallows do, to obey some steady rhythm between two homes.

By now he had seen what he wanted to see in the world, and he was home-loving by nature. Lawrence was far from being of that omnivorous tribe that must ever be fed with new travel by way of excitement. It might even be said of him that he was the most incurious of men. In the summer of 1926 he said to me - and I knew he spoke truly - that except for the inconvenience of being blind, he would not care now if he were to lose his sight. He had looked his fill, and now there was something other than looking to be done. Certainly he cared not a straw about his greatly increased deafness, which was doubtless the reason why one never thought of noticing it as an affliction. As often as not, one felt that with his outward ears he was hearing rather more than he wanted, and that some degree of deafness was to be desired as a protection against the wearisome chatter of the world. When Dorothy Brett would recharge her listening-machine,

I have heard him laugh and ask if *any* human conversation was worth the three shillings needed for a fresh battery. He was, of course, nothing like so deaf as she, but, had he been past the aid of acousticons, it would not have mattered beyond the practical inconvenience. This will sound exaggerated only to those who did not know him. To those who did he conveyed - quite unconsciously - the strange conviction that if all five senses were to desert him (or anyhow all but the sense of touch) he would still be able both to apprehend and to express the life about him by some direct magic of the blood. The trouble was that in his very blood he now had to grapple with the enemy illness.

4

At the Mirenda in May, 1926, he was at first undecided and unwell, though not actually ill. Pressing invitations from Taos inclined, but did not persuade him to go there again for the summer. The effort was too great. It was too far. He could not forget how the altitude in October had torn at his bronchials. Also he was tired of 'straining with the world' - the United States world. He would come to England before the summer was out. For the first time he was chary of inviting me. 'If only the weather cleared up,' he wrote, 'you might come and see us: and if Frieda feels like having a visitor. We'll see later.'

I thought I understood well enough. In any case I could not have come, as we were making a difficult experiment of our own. I was living in a French village on half a crown a day, with John Patrick at school there and Donald with friends in London. Lawrence, who approved of the move, wrote me encouraging and sympathetic letters, offered to do anything to help, and sent me an introduction I was glad of to Mabel Harrison in Paris. At Jouy-en-Josas (our village) I was for days on end without a soul to speak to.

Although the years 1926 and 1927 were 'bad' and 'muddled' and 'unsatisfactory', largely because of illness, he went to the Villa Mirenda. He painted happily there, and in so doing developed the passion of his teens. The severe, but sensual and non-intellectual discipline of colour and canvas opened up a new field of activity and a different mode of expression. Not that he stopped writing. But he took writing more easily and watched the Tuscan seasons pass.

At the Mirenda, however, he had bronchial haemorrhages; and, though he made light of them, the symptom was alarming. When we saw him in London that autumn, he said that the year had been spoiled for him by 'bad colds'. As usual he did not dwell on the subject of his health, but his thinness was distressing.

This time we saw him only twice. When he and Frieda arrived at the end of July, after a fortnight at Baden-Baden, we were still in France, and we could not return until within a few days of their leaving. They had hired Millicent Beveridge's flat in Chelsea, and here they renewed an old acquaintance with Aldous Huxley. They had first met him as early as 1915, when Lawrence had wanted him to join the Florida group; and his wife Maria they had known before

her marriage, when she lived at Garsington Manor with the Morrells. It was now, too, that Lawrence at last met and became on good terms with Frieda's son.

But the Chelsea flat was chiefly for Frieda, as Lawrence himself wished to be in London as little as possible. So, leaving her there, he had gone first to Inverness-shire for some twelve days to visit the Beveridges, who were at Newtonmore for the summer; and then for over a fortnight to his sisters at Sutton-on-Sea and Mablethorpe, places where he had been on holiday four years before the death of his mother, when he was a youth of nineteen. Scotland, as he saw it at Newtonmore, made no appeal to him. He found in the typical North Highland scenery none of that touching or moving beauty which I believe he would have found either in the Hebrides or in Galloway. Perhaps, too, the weather was bad, though for this I cannot say. Again, though he was glad to see his family, with the children lively and growing, the Lincolnshire coast was too full of sad ghosts for careless enjoyment. When he came back to London in the middle of September the old weariness was upon him, and he was longing for the rich and glowing autumn of the Miranda vineyards.

This time they were in rooms in Hampstead, whither even then, we were returning, having taken a studio there. He came with Frieda to lunch, and I was so horrified by his delicate looks that I could think of little else. Our talk, however, so far as I can recall, was chiefly of money - the difficulty of making a living. He had always declared that Donald would never make any money, as money did not enter really into his scheme of things, and that therefore I must. 'You should go on a lecture tour in America,' he now said, scolding a little. 'Now, don't say you can't. That helpless air of yours would just be the very thing. You'd have all the Yanks scrambling about to do things for you.' I laughed, partly at this fancy picture and partly relishing his malice. But he insisted, and we argued. 'Well,' said I after a while, 'shall I go on tour and expound D. H. Lawrence and his works?'

He thought this a good plan. Yes, this was what I must do. And immediately he mapped out my tour and gave me all sorts of practical hints about the Americans and how to treat them. Then I would come home with bulging purse and we should all three be able to go and live near the Miranda or at the ranch, or both. 'Have you never thought of lecturing yourself?' I asked. But this he seemed to regard as an unnecessary question. Excellent as Lawrence could be as a fireside or roadside expositor, it was certainly difficult to imagine him as a platform lecturer.

He had brought me a typescript to read, saying that he much wanted to know how it struck me. This was a section of Mabel Dodge Luhan's autobiography, beginning with her earliest memories and carrying her well into adult life, which

she had sent to Italy for Lawrence's advice about possibilities of publication. His own opinion, as I remember, seemed to be that publication would have to be deferred until after the deaths of all the people who appeared in the narrative.

All autobiographies are interesting, and I found this one especially so. But it was so full of personalities and so unreserved that it struck me as unfit for publication for many years to come. When I told this to Lawrence he agreed. 'But I don't care,' he added with a grin, 'so long as she dies before she gets to Frieda and me!' When he had said a thing like this Lawrence would set his teeth in his lower lip, drop his head and look up at you sideways, his eyes dancing with a special kind of malice. Perhaps he was never more himself than just then, and if you did not like him thus you did not like him at all.

That day, having some other engagement, they had to leave early. I went out to the street to say goodbye, and though I saw that Lawrence sped along as swiftly as ever - not like any town walker - with Frieda careering in full sail beside him, I looked after him with a sinking heart. It was a shivery afternoon. He had told me how depressing and void he found the faded eighteenth-century charm of Hampstead, even at its best. How long ago it seemed since in the summer of 1914 we had all gone for a picnic on the Heath! How far, far beyond our reckoning Lawrence had shot in experience and achievement! Now, by being still in NW3, I felt that somehow I had failed myself and him; that all the while he had sat talking so gently and stimulatingly by the studio fire, he had done so merely out of the kindness that was in him; that really he hated being there. And yet, when I had boasted that John Patrick was 'a good traveller', he had shaken his head and said, 'Nay, Catherine, but I want to hear of good stayers at home!' All of which contradictory things came with a truth of their own out of Lawrence's richness of spirit, and none of which things would have made my heart sink so badly but for Lawrence's dreadful thinness of body. He had alarmed me by mentioning for the first time that he had had a 'bronchial' haemorrhage. But immediately he had brushed my alarm aside. 'It's nothing serious,' he had assured me, 'not lungs, you know, only bronchials - tiresome enough, but nothing to worry about, except that I *must* try not to catch colds.'

I next saw him a day or two later, on what I think was the night before he left for Italy. He had invited us and a few others to his lodgings. Koteliansky was there, and my brother from Gower Street, whose war-novel, *The Natural Man*, had greatly interested Lawrence. It was, for some reason, a harmonious evening with nothing much else to remember it by. Once more we talked of money. Koteliansky maintained that *any* unearned income must alienate the possessor hopelessly from the large portion of mankind who had to earn its bread. I still had fifty pounds a year, and it was discussed whether I was therefore alienated.

Kot insisted that I was. Then my brother held forth on the advantages of great wealth, telling us what he would do if only he were 'really rich'. 'Will neither of you people *ever* face reality?' asked Lawrence, shaking his head over my brother and Koteliansky alike. 'Of *course* Catherine ought to have her fifty pounds, only it ought to be three hundred pounds instead. And *of course* Catherine's brother would do none of the things he thinks he would do if he were really rich. Because the moment he was really rich he would be a different person. A lot of money has an influence on the nature of a man that is not to be resisted. I *feel* myself that I, at least, should be able to resist it. But that's just how everybody feels, and I suppose I'd be not so different from the rest of mankind. Money, much money, has a really magical touch to make a man insensitive and so to make him wicked.'

I am glad we were all gay and friendly that night. Because I never saw Lawrence again.

Part Six

AET.41-44

PROSE

Etruscan Places

The Man Who Died (second part)

Lady Chatterley's Lover

Apocalypse

VERSE

Pansies Nettles

Last Poems

*

'But never mind, the tragic is the most holding, the most vital thing in life and as I say, the lesson is to learn to live alone. '

1

In Tuscany they had a quiet and splendid autumn. The vintage, though not abundant, was unusually fine in quality. The white oxen plodded at their leisure with wagon-loads to fill the Mirenda cellars. After misty mornings the sun came hot, and throughout the cool nights the thick stone walls of the villa held the daytime warmth. The woods were dotted with the small wild cyclamen - the hovering yet downward-looking flowers that perhaps Lawrence loved best next to the open-faced rock-rose and the luminous white campion. Lawrence, who never minded not working for a time, took things easy, went for walks alone among the hills and pondered on the lost Etruscans. He seems even to have gone on another gentle little Etruscan tour, this time with Mr Brewster. For neighbours he had the Gair Wilkinsons - Mr Wilkinson of the puppet-show and the red beard, 'king of all the beavers', as Lawrence wrote to me - gentle and pleasant folk to drop in upon. It was his usual state before the inception of a new undertaking.

And of course the Lawrences had visitors. When did the Lawrences not have visitors? - except in Australia, and there only because they did not stay long enough. The Aldingtons came to stay. And towards the end of October, 'Aldous Huxley, a writer, and his wife came for the day, in their fine new car,' as he put it in a letter to Ada.

It was the beginning of an important friendship - emotionally important for Huxley, practically important for Lawrence. And it began with Huxley's offer of a car - the kind of car that is a friend's bargain, being both sound and cheap. Here was Lawrence in the very situation where to Huxley the owning of a car would seem to be a necessity. And he could just afford it. But Lawrence refused. 'I won't bother myself learning to drive, and struggling with a machine,' he wrote to Ada. 'I've no desire to scud about the face of the country myself. It is much pleasanter to go quietly into the pine woods and sit and do there what bit of work I do. Why rush from place to place?'

But in November, coming up the long road from Scandicci on foot and laden with provisions, Lawrence got wet through and had to take to his bed in consequence. There followed the kind of weather he most dreaded - everything 'steamy, soggy wet' with 'great pale brown floods out in the Arno valley' and

nothing to do but to 'grin and abide'.

He would have liked well enough to have seen the '300 Club' production of *Mrs Holroyd* in December but did not feel equal to the journey - perhaps shrank, too, from the double trial of the theatre and the 'miserable ending' which belonged so much to his past.

For Christmas the Mirinda had rare celebrations which included the peasants of the *podere* and their families - twenty-seven souls. These all came in to see their first Christmas tree, decked by Lawrence and Frieda in best German style with candles and shining trinkets from Florence. And there were little toys and sweets and dates for the children, and wine and Tuscan cigars for the grown-ups.

Thus Lawrence all his life grasped every natural chance that offered for cheerfulness and peaceful gaiety. And he did so without a trace of fuss or spouting, sweet posing or exaggeration. His Christmas tree was without the too common adjuncts of vanity and frivolity, and so was a truly sacred symbol, a tiny fountain of life for all who could feel it. There was absolutely no nonsense, emotional or aesthetic, about him. He liked and respected the peasants, for example, and he envied them their physical strength; but he broke into no rhapsody of preference which would put their life above his. As he wrote to Ada:

Sometimes I think it would be good to be healthy and limited like the peasants. But then it seems to me they have so little in their lives, one had better just put up with one's own bad health and have one's own experiences. At least they are more vivid than anything these peasants know.

I have said that Lawrence that autumn was in the condition common with him as precedent to a new undertaking. After Christmas he wrote the first draft of the novel that was later to be known as *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. As usual, therefore, he was less idle than one would have guessed from his letters of the period. His constant productiveness, like his constant courage, fits badly with Murry's picture of dislocation and degeneration. From England during the early months of 1927 came nothing but news of strikes and troubles and illness, which he felt badly, yet he worked firmly on.

'Eh, one wishes things were different,' he wrote to an old friend in the Midlands, a woman who was faced with a serious operation. 'But there's no help for it. One can only do one's best, and then stay brave. Don't weaken or fret - while we live, we must be game. And when we come to die, we'll die game too.' In essentials Lawrence never weakened and never fretted, and though no man ever felt the trials of life more keenly than he, both for himself and others, he never either plumed himself upon his sensitiveness nor wasted his strength in a leaking 'sympathy'. For that he was too much alive and too shrewd a fighter for his own life. His sympathy was like a signal from the very heart of his own

courage.

He needed it all too, if only for the repudiation of that sweet and suffering ideal of courage that has become associated with Christianity - the courage that is playful about symptoms of illness, or that vaunts itself as ready to die 'for a trick not worth an egg', the courage that is not simple, the courage of the victim that is so easily reversed into what it demands for its existence, namely, the bullying of the persecutor. Because, what Murry finds to be Lawrence's failure, is precisely what emerges as his most victorious endeavour.

In practice [writes Murry] Lawrence's belief seemed to mean pretending a harmony between impulses which were verily contradictory; to mean denying the spiritual consciousness and asserting it, to mean loving the world and hating it at the same moment, to mean nailing the flag of the civilised consciousness to the mast and hauling it down in a single operation.

Precisely. But it should not be set down as a gibe or a regret. If for 'seemed to mean pretending' we substitute 'established', and for 'were' put 'hitherto have seemed', and if we continue, 'he has enabled us to deny the spiritual consciousness and to assert it in the same breath, to love the world and hate it at the same moment, to nail the flag of the civilised consciousness to the mast and to haul it down in a single operation', we have said one of the most important things about Lawrence that can be said. And if we can apprehend it, even a bit, we understand a lot about Lawrence. It is not, strictly speaking, an intellectual apprehension as yet, though it will become so in time. Then we can go on to something else.

As we have said, Lawrence needed all his courage. The spring came beautifully at the Mirenda, with sky-staring daisies and earth-gazing violets, with blonde narcissi and dark anemones, both air-trembling, and 'under the olives all the pale-gold bubbles of winter aconites'. But it brought also the *tramontana*. Colds went about, and Lawrence caught one by infection, which first drove him to bed, and then - with a change in the weather to damp heat - turned into an attack of malaria. This, by his own account. Whatever the cause, the effect was no doubt an active tubercular attack, and it was accompanied by bronchial haemorrhage. It seems not to have been so very bad, however, and upon becoming convalescent he might have gone in May to London to help with the Stage Society production of his play *David* - that is, if he had much wished to go. The first performance was to be given towards the end of May. But he was both doubtful of his strength and reluctant about the undertaking. His refusal caused, I understand, some natural resentment in London, where much hard voluntary work and a considerable sum of money was being expended on the production, and it was felt that Lawrence ought to make every effort to

encourage and direct the enterprise. But Lawrence would not risk the strain and disappointment. Though he always had a half hope that one of his plays would succeed on the stage, I doubt if he had much belief in them as stage plays, or if he felt their failure acutely. So he held to the 'take-it-or-leave-it attitude'. Actually *David* - in theme and scope a far more ambitious play than either of the others published, and containing magnificent passages - was less successful as staged in 1927 than was *Mrs Holroyd*. The critics were not kind to either, and Lawrence was obliged to make the best, or the worst, of kindly reports from friends. He could only hope that it was 'really quite a success', knowing well enough what this meant. As I write now I hear that there may shortly be another production of *David*. Personally, had I the choice, I would rather see an experimental performance of *Touch and Go* than a repetition of the Biblical play, unless the production was transformed from that accorded to it in 1927.

In April, though summoned by letter and even cable, not to mention the invisible transatlantic summons of Mabel Dodge Luhan's 'will', Lawrence had refused to go to Taos for the summer. Taos was vastly more attractive than *David*. But Lawrence measured the effort and decided against it - as he had done also the previous spring. One day he would like to go again. For the present, the demands of life there were not equal to what he could get from it. *The Plumed Serpent* was written. He hoped one day to revisit the ranch. Never would he forget the beauty of his daily life. But I think he knew that now there could be no second blooming for him except in old Europe, in his real home, to which he had come back wise and enriched - assuaged.

Besides, he could not afford it. There was no new full-size book newly out or coming - nothing but the little *Mornings in Mexico*, which would not bring much money. Thus he was rather short for the moment. He could just hope to keep going with the help of the improved exchange in Italy. He therefore went quietly on with the Mirinda life, painting the 'Finding of Moses' and writing at intervals about the Etruscans. He was forty-two now - 'getting on', as he recognised. It was time to settle, if only he could get more 'solid' in health. 'Why can't one make oneself *tough!*' he sighed.

In vain. That same spring, as Millicent Beveridge has told me, although he did not consider himself as ill, he had to pause for breath every fifty yards or so when they walked out together. And in June, when the heat on those slopes became too fierce, he allowed Maria Huxley in the kindness of her heart to drive him down the hundred miles to Forte dei Marmi, bathed once in the sea, and came back to the Huxleys' house with severe congestion. In any case he was oppressed and enervated by the dead flat sea at Forte. So back to Florence again till he was able to travel to Austria, there to take an inhalation cure.

Lawrence resembled the Christian Scientists in one respect alone. He preferred not to name an illness precisely, disliking the jargon and finding it unhelpful in the fight for health. But he never denied the existence of the illness, nor ignored the nature of the fight. And though he fought and hoped to the last, he always admitted that he might be beaten.

'I'd rather be penniless and struggle, than *not quite* penniless and sick. *Sporca miseria!*' he wrote to me that autumn. And again, early in 1927, 'If only I could be really well. What a mercy! It's my one refrain.'

His one refrain it certainly was not. One is struck in his letters, even from now on, by the rarity of its occurrence. But it must have become the undertone, the tolling ground-bass of existence for him. And one of its effects was an unwillingness in him to return to any place where he had suffered from a severe attack. All he could do to live he must do. The scene of a defeat would only weaken his resistance. Accordingly, as time went on, the distant ranch grew more and more attractive. There he had never been really downed by illness, and he had felt full of lightness and energy.

But till he could grow stronger, the journey, the altitude, and the strictly seasonal nature of the spot, forbade it as Eden was forbidden to Adam by the flaming sword. Lawrence distrusted the verdicts of doctors as much as the scientific descriptions of illness. He was not rabid on the subject, but rather sceptical. Upon the very few regular practitioners whom he consulted from time to time he must have spent little of his hard-earned money. As to quacks and the great army of specialists, he was immune from their wiles. He could listen to good advice and put it patiently into practice, but this only when the doctor showed signs that he could collaborate with the undoubted, almost uncanny knowledge that Lawrence had of his own body. Such a doctor he found in Dr Giglioli at Florence, who, though he recognised the gravity of Lawrence's symptoms, was equally impressed by his patient's 'splendid healing power'. I believe the strictly medical verdict of those who had occasion to make a thorough examination at any time since 1914 is that by his own vitality and skilful courage Lawrence prolonged his life - a working, vivid life - by a good five years.

As Lawrence's less comprehending critics have been disposed to connect what they take to be his 'pathological' or 'morbid' or 'diseased' state of mind with the tuberculosis that was unhappily lodged in his flesh, it is necessary to dwell upon his illness with an emphasis that would otherwise be superfluous. Before long it will be realised, I believe, that as the mind of Lawrence was not morbid, not pathological and not diseased, but rather full of new health, nothing that is unpopular about him can be explained away by saying that he was ill. This will

come about of itself. Meanwhile a clear distinction may and must be drawn. Lawrence is not explained by his illness. Yet in any examination of his life his illness is important because it *was* important. Though it did not cause his pilgrimage, it helped to make it savage.

In one truly helpful and illuminating statement Murry has disposed of the contamination-by-disease criticism. Here he speaks of what he knows. He says:

Tubercle does have strange effects. Chief among them is its tendency to make infinitely more intense the spiritual character of the person who suffers from it. Whatever he intimately is, he becomes to the nth degree.

Experience goes to prove that the victims of tuberculosis, so far from being temperamentally changed or intellectually undermined by the disease, are rendered the more intensely themselves. Keats was never more himself than when he wrote 'my heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains my sense': Chekhov was never more himself than when he noted down his symptoms in medical detail: Katherine Mansfield was never more herself than when she dared to break her lovely and long-drawn fantasy and to seek her woman's honesty through submission to a male dominance external to her fantasy: Lawrence was never more himself than when he wrote *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, refused to seek the diagnosis of specialists and went on calling his attacks by the name of 'colds', and 'scratchy' or 'unhappy bronchials'. At the same time, to put Lawrence's illness out of the reckoning seems to me as grave an error as to account for the obnoxious in him by it. It was a force that he fought against in a special way as well as a force that made him the more himself. He differed from almost all the other famous consumptives in refusing to make any sort of 'copy' out of his illness. He proved his strength by never becoming an invalid. And - most valuable of all - the inherent consistency of his life was vindicated by his manner of dying. He wanted to live longer, but not to change his life beyond the changes imposed by age. Disease is not merely the revealer of a man: it may also be subdued by a man to his own likeness, and this in the moment of his defeat.

2

At Villach, Karnten, in Austria, he was at first hardly able to walk. But though the weather was variable, he rejoiced in the coolness after the gruelling heat of that July in Florence, and he grew quickly stronger. In September he went with Frieda to Germany, returning to the place from which he and she had started on their perilous mating more than fifteen years earlier - Irschenhausen in the Isarthal, near Munich. Here, in the very same little wooden house at the corner of the forest, and even attended by the very same servant as before, they stayed the month out quietly. Frieda's sister Else (of *The Rainbow*) visited them. The forest was behind, the open country in front, with the mountains beyond, all still unspoiled. Lawrence drank goat's milk and rested. They were both happy, but I think it was Frieda's hour.

Sadly for me I missed seeing them at Baden-Baden, where I was able to call one day that September. In circumstances wholly unforeseen I had been dispatched by my brother-in-law by aeroplane to be with my sister who was having heart treatment at Nauheim. I did not know of the Lawrences' whereabouts, and - taking my chance - missed seeing even Frieda's mother. In October I should have caught all three, but by then I was back at home. A letter from Frieda at Baden told me that Lawrence was doing some more inhaling there, and that he was very 'mild and tame', the utmost of excitement being a game of whist in the evenings with the 'old excellencies' at the *Stift*, whose darling he was.

When Lawrence wrote soon after, it was to assure us that it was only 'a question now of putting on weight and getting the general condition up again'. He had been badly shaken by this last bout, and even while he felt better he could not eat. Still he believed that all would yet come right. 'We really must all chirp up, and have one of the jolly old times,' he wrote. 'We *must* chirp up, all of us. *Sempre!* D. H. L.' Incredible as it now seems I was not seriously anxious about Lawrence at this time. I had always known that he was 'delicate'. Equally I knew that he recovered from every upset and was never very long knocked out. I am sure that most of us felt the same - more anxious to hear of his expected restoration to his normal state than we were afraid of not hearing of it.

He enclosed a number of photographs, taken at the Mirenda, of the pictures he

had been painting during the past two years. In the back of each was a pencil note of the dimensions and colours. One of these days, he said, he might think of exhibiting them.

There was a shy but eager note in every mention by Lawrence of his pictures which I never found in any reference to his novels, though there was something like it in the case of certain poems. In painting he was at once more playful and more exposed than in the writing of prose. He had tremendously *enjoyed* the making of his pictures, and at the same time he felt that he was expressing by means of them something both personal and fundamental to himself. But he had kept very quiet about it, regarding it for long as little more than an amusement. He had, in fact, begun through having by chance at the same time both a number of canvases left by somebody at the villa and a collection of oddments of ordinary house-paints left over from redecorations.

By then the larger and more memorable of his pictures - the 'Holy Family', the 'Expulsion from Eden', the Boccaccio illustration and the men bathing by the willows - were all in existence, besides most of the smaller ones.

I am no judge of paintings, especially not of paintings by Lawrence. Some who are said to be good judges have told me they are worthless. Others again, whose judgement is equally estimable, have contradicted this verdict. I certainly liked the look of those in the photographs, as I did when I later saw them at the Warren Gallery. They seemed to me work that could have been done by nobody but Lawrence, and, like everything by Lawrence, they opened windows and let in fresh air. Simply as compositions I found the Boccaccio piece and the willows landscape lovely. And I was delighted by the true believer's touch of mockery in the rendering of the Eternal Triangle of Father, Mother and Child posed in front of their cottage crocks - that cheeky, clever little Jesus who was going to upset everybody's apple-cart, that mindless, smiling, big-breasted mother Eve, and that moustachioed Father and Husband who was so clearly the master in his own house! Who but Lawrence would have seen them just so?

3

November saw them back at the Mirenda and Lawrence writing his third draft of *Lady Chatterley*.

Just then, after having spent some time on getting up the subject, I was starting to write a life of Robert Burns. Lawrence applauded the project. He wrote to Donald (whose book *Brother Scots* he had just read, enjoyed and helpfully criticised):

Cath's idea of a Burns book I like very much: I always wanted to do one myself, but am not Scotchy enough. I read just now Lockhart's bit of a life of Burns. Made me spit! ... If Cath is condescending to Burns, I disown her. He was quite right, a man's a man for a' that, and it's *not* a bad poem. He means what he says. My word, you can't know Burns unless you can hate the Lockharts and all the estimable bourgeois and upper classes as he really did - the narrow-gutted pigeons. Don't, for God's sake, be mealy mouthed like them. *I'd* like to write a Burns life. Oh, why doesn't Burns come to life again, and really salt them! . . . don't be on the side of the angels, it's too lowering.

Not long afterwards, liking very much Burns's letter to Ainslie, which I had sent to him, he suggested that somebody might like to reissue *The Merry Muses* (of which I had told him but which he had never seen) with an introduction - 'a little essay on being bawdy' - by himself.

For that Christmas a German friend had offered us her little house in the Harz Mountains, and we managed to get together our fares and go there. My friend was a Doctor of Philosophy, and her husband a medical doctor, the head of a *Klinik* at Frankfurt-on-Oder which specialised in lung cases.

Like so many other cultured Germans, our friends were keenly interested in Lawrence and his work, and they questioned us eagerly about him. Hearing of his delicacy, they assured me of what I could well believe, that the air of the Harz possessed in their experience a quality which often rendered it more healing than the air of Switzerland to troubled lungs and bronchials. Very gladly, they said, they would treat Lawrence for nothing, or for what he could afford without a strain. I felt that this doctor, a man who had come through the horrors of the Russo-German front and was quiet and sensitive and gentle, would have known better than most how to deal with a patient to whom the word sanatorium

was almost synonymous with suicide. I even elicited from him his opinion that, in a case such as Lawrence's, the prescription of sanatorium treatment *in* a sanatorium was usually a mistake.

But it came at the wrong moment. Lawrence, though greatly attracted by our descriptions of the place and of the doctor, wrote that it was 'too far, too far'. He was supposed, he said, to be going 'up to the snow in January' but was 'shirking it' and would see when January came. He hated the chopping and changing about. He would prefer to wait where he was, if that were possible, till the spring, and then perhaps, having saved his energy, try another summer season at the ranch before deciding to sell it. The doctor who had examined his lungs at Baden had not been against altitudes. There was a chance that the high dry American mountain air might set him up again. Anyhow he was tired to death of crawling about and being driven to consult new doctors whose prescriptions varied strangely. Money was not exactly pouring in. On what he did earn there was his agent's tax of ten per cent besides the new foreign commission on visitors of twenty per cent.

I still have the unhappy feeling that with more pressure on my part or with very slightly altered circumstances on his, and if we could have outstayed the holiday period there, Lawrence might have joined us; and Dr Dege and the dry, not too high air of the Harz might have helped toward healing him. But such are vain imaginings. As it was, Lawrence stayed at the Mirenda, provided a second jollification for the peasants, in which he joined on Christmas Eve, and for Christmas Day he allowed the Huxleys to motor him to friends of theirs in Florence.

It has been said that since their meeting in the summer of 1926 a dependable and fruitful friendship had sprung up between Lawrence and Huxley. One day this friendship will no doubt be enlarged upon as one of the most remarkable of our time. I can give no more here than my own reading of it, as formed from my very limited knowledge and observation.

As early as 1916, when he was in Cornwall, Lawrence said to me, 'Young men ought to wish to come to me of themselves, I ought not to need to ask them to come.' Already he was sure of himself, and sure that he could make young men surer of themselves by what he could tell them. And even then young men were drawn to Lawrence after a fashion. They were attracted, and some of them came. But they came timidly, half unwillingly, and most of them withdrew in a strange fear - a strange but quite comprehensible fear - and a grave misunderstanding. At the same time these young men - Koteliansky, Murry, Gerder, Cannan, Heseltine, Gray, Aldington, and others - were without exception sensitive and gifted persons, unusual men who were potentially or actually capable of

contributing a creative share to their epoch. While they were still as yet untried and unknown, Lawrence divined this of them. It was also this in them that made them find in their first contacts with Lawrence a stimulant as well as an irresistible charm. And although in turn they were repelled by his entire refusal to adapt himself, and discovered in his intention something at once uncompromising and hard to understand, each one went his way marked for life. Their conversation with Lawrence might result in nothing better than a lasting dissatisfaction, a feeling of guilt or a frantic spite. It never lacked results.

Lawrence on his side remained wholly untouched in the sense of being influenced. If he was incomparably more innocent than any of them, he was also of incomparably superior attainments as an artist and as a man of vital experience in life. Already 'never to adapt himself to humanity was a first requirement and proved his certainty. But he loved these friends as long as he might, bore with them, debated with them patiently and passionately, went to endless trouble over them, and gave them handsomely of his best. It must be borne in mind that of the established men of the day, even those who had stated early admiration or accorded practical help, held themselves at a cautious distance from the author of *The Rainbow*. Either they did not care, or did not know how to approach him, and in the peculiar circumstances the approach would have to come from them. Patronage, frigid, monitory or uncomprehending, of the kind that urged him to write another *Sons and Lovers*, was useless. He needed a grown man's hand stretched out in warm equality and comradeship. There was no such hand.

Not until Aldous Huxley arrived at the Mirenda with his sensitive goodwill and his second-hand car to sell. But then it came - better late than never!

In Huxley, taking first the externals, Lawrence was offered a man still young, who was yet of established reputation, with nothing in the worldly sense to gain or lose by seeking a friendship. As regarded the practical aspects of life, which must always count, Lawrence and he met on an equality.

Less externally, Huxley came before Lawrence as a writer of exquisite perceptiveness who was both perfectly honest and perfectly sceptical. He was indeed so sceptical as to be almost without opinions, certainly without what can be called religious opinions. If Lawrence was our Eager Heart, Huxley was our Scandalised Spectator. He was so perfectly open-minded that intellectually he stood for nothing. But he had looked at life and his heart was appalled. For he had a heart to be appalled.

This is the inmost point. Huxley could suffer cleanly and warmly, without self-seeking or shrieking, but none the less acutely. Unlike Murry, he could feel simply and with the heart. And what he had not been able to get over was that

suffering was one of the major facts of life. 'Be brave!', 'bear it!', 'endure!', 'swallow it!' - so we are obliged to address the baby boy from birth as the terrible equivalent of 'be a man!' Why?

The Japanese, the Chinese, the Red Indians and other peoples take full cognisance of this fact in their education. The boy must learn to bear pain without flinching, perhaps in the process to come by a species of useful self-hypnosis. If less pain falls to him than he may expect, this will be a bonus to his life. If it falls in its plenitude he will deal with it unsurprised. There is much to be said in practice for some such imposition of ardours and endurances. But the true inwardness of the imposition is that it is religious in its origin. The initiation ceremonies enacted by the savage on the threshold of virility are not mere cruelties; they are inspired by the sacredness of manhood and by the recognition in the soul that suffering is something irremediable which must be met without repining.

That is to say, at a certain stage in life they are conventionally inflicted, first in recognition of what man may expect from a live, unknowable, partly malicious cosmos, and second, to endow each individual with the power to defy the cosmos, when need be, in his own sacred person. The conception is profoundly religious and it meets one of the deepest of human needs.

The modern European, however, has no such vitalising way out. He combats pain with science, denies it with Christian Science, bears it with intellectual stoicism, or accepts with regard to it the Christian ideal.

Concerning the first, non-religious ways - stoicism and modern science go badly together, and in spite of our many pain-destroying inventions it is, I suppose, a debatable question as to whether suffering - taking things all round and including mental suffering - has not rather increased than decreased in a nerve-ridden modern world.

By the Jewish-Christian ideal, again, we suffer either as a punishment for sin or in furtherance of our spiritual purification, this being undertaken by a loving God for his own inscrutable ends. In either case we are victims. As it works out in practice, we can become godlike only by welcoming suffering, not by resisting it. The more a victim, the nearer to the divine. When pushed to this extremity the flesh will get some of its own back by such means as flagellation. But the whole of the ascetic practice is an exact antithesis to the hardships undergone in the non-Christian initiation to adult life. The first seeks to weaken the flesh which already it has ideally degraded: the second seeks to strengthen an ideally potent flesh in the conflict between man and the unseen. Both would have man partake of the divine, but submission is the secret communion of the one, while the other communicates by way of a challenge which is none the less

worship.

Once I told Lawrence a story I had thought of writing. A bishop, as I fancied, was obliged to preach in a district that had been ravaged by some awful plague. As he sat in his chair preparing a sermon full of adjurations to the faithful, bidding them endure gladly that their souls might be refined in the fires of suffering and so be fitted to glorify their Maker, he dropped asleep. And in his sleep he dreamed that the Lord, clad in a mantle of pure and sumptuous fur, came and asked him to have a walk through the universe. The bishop went, and he found that the universe was a vast stockyard for fine-skinned animals, such as foxes, hares, ermines, and the rest. In each section the beasts - which were the souls of men - were progressively tortured, plagued and beaten, in such a manner as to refine to the utmost the gloss and quality of their pelts. Only the finest, which incidentally suffered more excruciatingly than the rest, were fitted to adorn at last this God who rubbed His hands over the crucifixion.

Lawrence shuddered over this tale. 'You can't write that,' he said. 'It's too horrible. Yet, oh, yes; it is what thousands of us were brought up to believe. The flagellation of the Christian saint. Yes, you'd better write it, if you can bear to.'

On the other hand, when I was shocked by the old Japanese play *Bushido*, in which the adoring parents of a talented and beautiful only boy, tell him that they must cut off his head to save that of his Emperor, and the boy, like his parents, purifies himself and is willing for the sacrifice, Lawrence told me I was wrong to be offended. 'It is the only way to happiness,' he said, 'the only way for life to be rich, for people to have something apart from their own little individual souls that is worth the sacrifice of life itself.'

Again, though in Lawrence's phrase we were 'between the hammer and the anvil' and life was 'full of wonder and surprise and mostly pain', pain with him was always magnificently balanced by wonder and surprise. In spite of accounts to the contrary, accounts marred by the hidden hysteria of their writers, he was the least hysterical of men. He was sensitive less in an extreme than in a special degree, maintaining his responses to life at every point, yet accepting his own share of suffering in a manner that in practice had almost the appearance of stoicism. This was because his sensitiveness was so far removed from self-importance. During the War it was not primarily the physical or mental agony, or even the wastage of humanity, that engaged his passion. It was the initial outrage on manhood inflicted by a mechanised conflict for something deeply felt to be not worth fighting for. What he entered into, as perhaps did no other man at the time, was the smothered horror of soldiers who feared neither death nor wounds. Thus he never fell into that self-persecuting and impotent 'suffering-with' which only too often begins as a form of masochism and ends as an excuse

for lack of life in ourselves. No one I ever met responded more spontaneously or acted more gently in case of illness or pain. But he never worked himself up by *imagining* the sufferings of another, nor of the world as a whole. Once when we heard of an acquaintance who had lain exposed and wounded for three days in a shell-hole in Flanders, Lawrence checked my horrified fancy.

'He didn't suffer as, sitting here, we think,' he said. 'He wasn't there as you and I are here. In an experience like that, the being, the *man*, is almost gone, is at one remove. Bad enough, of course, but not the kind of sharpness you are imagining.' That this was true was proved when the same man, in hospital later, was cheerfully vague in recounting his sensations. Lawrence indeed exposed for me the wastefulness and the spiritual conceit that for so long have racked the nerves of our northern world in the guise of 'Christian sympathy'.

To return. In Huxley we get a man whose awareness of suffering had led him to pillory in his books each form of cruelty in turn. But this awareness was no neurosis with him - as with so many writers of today, who wallow in horrors - but a real heart wound that made him aloof and gentle. He was therefore immediately attracted to Lawrence, both because Lawrence admitted suffering and because Lawrence in some way had freed himself from its trammels. The effect is apparent in everything written by the younger man since the two became acquainted. It has been so deep that, at this date and in his last book, Huxley finds that a painless life might well be intolerable.

As for Lawrence, he was in certain respects past the stage when he could give himself in friendship. But he was glad and grateful to find an Englishman to whom he could talk and a heart on which he could rely. For the time that remained Huxley was simply and charmingly devoted to him, and proved dependable to the last.

4

After Christmas Lawrence was perplexed as to how best to scheme for health throughout the difficult coming months. The Huxleys, marking the seriousness of his condition, pressed the wisdom of an escape from the uncertainties of a Florentine midwinter. They were themselves going in January to Les Diablerets. A separate little flat could be found in the snow there for Lawrence and Frieda. Lawrence hated the snow. He was now told, however, after a re-examination by his doctor, that the altitude of Les Diablerets (4,000 feet) was just right for his healing. At the same time, in the doctor's opinion, the altitude of the ranch, even in summer, had become dangerous, and must be put out of all question. Upon this Lawrence reserved his own judgement, but he would follow the immediate counsels of doctor and friends. He promised to go to Switzerland shortly after the middle of January.

'I want really to try and get myself better,' he wrote to me on the 10th. 'Cough still troublesome - and I want to lay hold of life again properly. Have been down and out this last six months.' It was the second time he had used this phrase 'down and out', and it came now at the end of the longest passage concerning his health that had ever occurred in a letter to me. We knew he must be ill then, though still we did not take it as really serious.

But he had finished *Lady Chatterley*, keeping quiet about it as usual till it was finished. This was the first I heard of it.

I wrote a novel last winter and rewrote it for the 3rd time this - and it's very *verbally* improper - the last word in all its meanings! - but very truly moral. A woman in Florence said she'd type it - she's done 5 chapters - now turned me down. Says she can't go any further, too indecent!... But will you find me some decent person who'll type it for me at the usual rates? You'd do it, I know, if you were a person of leisure. But you're *not*. So turn over in your mind some decent being, male or female, who I could trust not to let me down in any way and who'd do the thing for the proper pay, and write me soon.

Then I think I shall publish my novel privately here in Florence, in March-April - a thousand copies, two gns each; and so, D.V. earn myself a thousand pounds, which I can do very well with - rather low water. I'll call it *Tenderness* - the novel.

But please don't talk about to anybody - I don't want a scandal advertisement.

I do hope I'm not bothering you. But I feel I must get another blow in at the lily-livered host. One's got to fight.

To someone else he wrote of this book: 'It'll infuriate mean people: but it will surely soothe decent ones.'

When Lawrence said this of *Lady Chatterley* he meant, as I understand it, that the book was a manifesto to a modern world which doubts the sufficiency of bodily love even at its best. It is not, Lawrence would say, the body that fails - it is the modern man and woman, who despise or fear or exploit for sensational ends the subtle simplicities of nature. The intellect and spirit have tried by turns to deny the flesh, and degrade it, and the flesh has had its revenge by turning physical love into mere frictional excitation, of which the fruit is apples of Sodom.

Four days later he sent a postcard to say that an attack of influenza had driven him to bed and postponed his journey to Les Diablerets. It was 'misery' but 'not bad', he insisted. 'Seems to me I always decide to go away a bit too late - or the 'flu gets me a bit too soon. It's my unhappy bronchials that lacerate so easily.'

The delay, so that he was caught again by the dampness of Florence, was probably due to a variety of causes - to his shrinking from the snow, to his arrangements for the Florentine production of *Lady Chatterley*, which had to be made at once, and to his growing dislike of moving. 'One gets older,' he had written to Ada a week earlier, telling how he longed to find a place in which he could really settle. He even thought of trying 'Devonshire or somewhere there for a time, and if it suits me, really make a home there'. The Mirinda, though he loved it, provided a home neither for midsummer nor for midwinter. Nor was it a place in which to take to one's bed, even for a short spell.

By the end of January he was able to 'creep up' to Les Diablerets with Frieda. He did not like it, finding himself unable to walk the slopes, still more debarred from the mildest of winter sports. But in a very few weeks he felt greatly the better for being there.

Though much wishing to do it, I had been unable to undertake the typing of *Lady Chatterley* myself for Lawrence. But I had arranged to have it done for him, and he had sent the first half of the manuscript to me, retaining the last chapters to be typed by Maria Huxley. He wanted to know which tide I preferred. *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, *My Lady's Keeper* or *Tenderness*. I did not care much for any of them, but have forgotten my own alternatives. Actually, owing to an unforeseen delay, I was obliged to sit up two nights typing the last few thousand words myself. Lawrence was in more of a hurry than I had realised. The typescript was in his hands, however, by the 1st of March.

At Les Diablerets, with the breaking of the snow in March, the atmosphere had gone 'warmish and cloudy'. Lawrence dreaded the descent 'to the levels and the germs', but it was time to go. Everybody up there was starting a cold.

He went down alone to Florence on the 6th; and though it was to find the Mirenda veiled in sleet after a frost that had killed outright the first crop of peas and beans, he felt so much better that five days later we find him writing home to say he was thinking of the ranch for the summer. Up at Les Diablerets he had spoken much of it to the Huxleys, and he believed that they would go with him, and Brewster as well. The doctor was not necessarily right on the subject of altitudes. What could an Italian doctor know about the air of the Rockies in summer?

Meanwhile the weather in Florence convinced him that he must give up the Mirenda. Throughout the latter part of the month it poured cold rain upon him; and if it had not been for *Lady Chatterley*, he would have given his landlord notice there and then and fled the place. His term was due to expire at the end of April. He must see the book through, however, and of course there were delays. The little Florentine printer knew no English: he was short of type: he ran out of the special paper, which had to be handmade. But, except for the difficult question of copyright, prospects were encouraging. Order forms had been sent out earlier: now they came back filled in with cheques attached. For the first time one of his books was going to bring a solid sum safe to his pocket.

During the difficult printing he fell ill. Frieda, who had gone from Les Diablerets to see her mother, was not yet back from Germany. But Pino Orioli, who was acting as publisher and distributor of the book, came out every night all the way from Florence at great inconvenience (though with his accustomed cheerfulness, which nothing ruffles) to sleep at the Mirenda, bringing with him a load of comforts, material and otherwise. On the news Frieda returned. Lawrence was soon up and about again. But it meant the end of the Mirenda for them. He could never live there now. At the same time he must have seen that the ranch would be impossible, for that summer at least.

It is not too much to say that he had sacrificed it to his book. Because, upon first leaving Les Diablerets, he had felt quite strong enough for the journey to New Mexico, where he believed he would re-establish his health. But the task of production was not completed till the middle of June. This obliged him to take on the Mirenda, though he would not stay there himself once *Lady Chatterley* was launched. Friends could have the house if they cared to come for the holidays. I do not think that it was occupied that summer after the Lawrences left; but during May, while they were still there, they had a fortnight's visit from Enid and Laurence Hilton, who came out from London. Enid Hilton's mother

had been Lawrence's mother's dearest friend long before at Eastwood, and her father a staunch friend since Lawrence's boyhood. Later she and her husband were to be of great service to Lawrence in London over the *Lady Chatterley* troubles.

A second small trip with Millicent Beveridge, for which he had hoped, had to fall through because he was not strong enough for it. Better obey the doctor and go to Switzerland again. After a couple of months there to 'fix up his chest', he would go to England in August. The question of exhibiting his pictures that autumn was under discussion.

' . . . make a few more enemies', as he wrote to me. 'But you'd like some of them. I'll tell you.' Dorothy Warren thought highly of those he had sent for her to see and she was willing to undertake a one-man show for him at the Warren Gallery. She was a good friend whom he had known since the Garsington Manor days.

5

Soon after the middle of June Lawrence and Frieda were at Chexbres-sur-Vevey. I had a postcard to say that he did not like it much but found it 'good for his bronchials', so they would stay awhile.

They stayed about a month, after which they went for two months to a peasant chalet up on the mountain-side at Kesselmatte. It was like a little, double-decked wooden ship that sailed high above the valley, and they had it entirely to themselves. Lawrence was unable to walk the mountains, but he began to paint again, and the intelligent young Swiss postman came and stared at his pictures, wondering at them, sometimes liking them very much, never at all shocked. The peasant proprietors of the chalet, who lived during the summer in their hay-hut across the valley, brought over baskets of bilberries and cranberries. Sometimes Lawrence and Frieda drove across the pass to revisit Les Diablerets, which in summer was quite a different place.

August came and went. England would have to be postponed, as Lawrence did not feel up to it.

For the first time he was frankly despondent about his health as surveyed over 'this last year', and found that it was 'useless thinking of going anywhere till his cough went'.

But in September they must move on. The signal came with the cowbells as the beasts moved down from the high Alps. Summer was over. Where next? There was some talk of trying the French Alps near Grenoble, this time with Brewster. But, as so often before when no definite step presented itself, they went to Baden-Baden. From there Frieda could visit England by herself, see the picture-show, now fixed for October, and bring back the reports. She was to have our studio.

Lawrence wrote to Ada advising her in good time not to visit the Warren Gallery. 'You won't like the things. Best leave 'em alone.'

The show, however, was put off, and Frieda did not come to England. After little more than a week at Baden Lawrence left her there, and with her elder daughter Eisa he went to where the Huxleys were at Le Lavandou, near Toulon. When Frieda had seen to things at the Mirenda she would follow them there.

The place and the sea agreed with Lawrence; and when Eisa and the Huxleys

left, and Frieda arrived bringing old friends with her - Richard Aldington and others - they made a good company. Together they crossed the ten miles of sea to the Island of Port Cros, there to picnic in the little rooms of La Vigie, fortified and moated on the top of the highest hill. The only trouble was that Lawrence 'with his cold' could never make one of the daily bathing expeditions. La Vigie was an hour's climb from the sea - the wonder was that he had got there at all - and even had he been able to accompany the others he could not have bathed. The experience at Forte dei Marmi had been enough of a warning for that.

If I know anything of Lawrence, his disabilities in such a party must have been hard to bear, for he hated to be a mere onlooker, and alone with Frieda he was always very much the leader. Possibly this had something to do with the fact that the beauty of the green island, with its umbrella pines and 'the blue sea and the other isles', while he admitted it, did not much move him, and as the others disported themselves he kept thinking of the strikes that were forward in the Midlands. At the same time the notorious *John Bull* article on *Lady Chatterley* - 'Famous Novelist's Shameful Book' - 'A Landmark in Evil' (this time unsigned) appeared in London, together with a picture (unrecognisable) of the 'bearded satyr' and 'world-famous novelist, who has prostituted art to pornography'.

Still he would not let such a thing affect him deeply. The neighbourhood of Le Lavandou had seemed to suit his health. And when the weather broke, with such gales that no boat could bring bread, and the fortified walls proved no defence against the wet, and the holiday party had to pack up and at the first opportunity make for the mainland, the Lawrences thought they could not do better than try that coast for the winter. On November 14th they went to the Hotel Beau Rivage, Bandol, where, as it chanced, Katherine Mansfield had stayed during an early stage in her illness.

In noticing this coincidence Murry appears to have made yet another mistake in his dates. According to his *Reminiscences* he had written through Curtis Brown in March after a silence of two years, to ask a trivial favour of Lawrence; and he gives us to understand that without undue delay Lawrence replied from the Beau Rivage. But as Lawrence in March was first in Switzerland and then in Florence, and did not reach Bandol till mid-November, Murry, if correct, must have waited eight months for any response, by which time the response would not be of the practical use he sought. Neither was it like Lawrence that if he were going to answer at all, he should have waited so long. What seems most likely is that Murry did not write until the following March (1929), which would make the silence between him and Lawrence longer by a year. It would also fit with the fact noted by Murry (as if in support of his 'pattern' of Lawrence's restlessness, though actually it deranges that pattern) that the Mirenda had

already been given up. However these things may be, Lawrence remained at the Beau Rivage from November 28th till the first days of March, 1929. The poems in *Pansies*, which he designated as his 'rag-poems', were all written before Christmas.

At Christmas he had a visit from Ada. On the whole this brought sadness. As always, Lawrence was glad to see her; but he knew that now, save in his affections, he was out of touch with this dearest member of his family who was also the sole remaining link with his youth. Such a situation is always most sharply realised upon a face-to-face meeting.

And in this case it was no doubt aggravated by Ada's restrained sadness at the sight of her brother's increased fragility. Lawrence hated restrained sadness, and he disliked any sisterly attempts at treating him as an invalid. That winter he did not spend a single day in bed, and on Christmas Day he spoke hopefully of starting for the ranch in spring, if only for six months there. The hope persisted throughout January and February, until on March 2nd he confessed that it was 'no good', that though he *was* better and never needed to lie in bed, he was 'not well enough', and that it would be best to sell the ranch. It was then that he uttered one of his rare complaints before quoted: 'O why can't one make oneself *tough*'

With Ada, as with most others who loved him, Lawrence had to stand up against the knowledge that, while she delighted in his gifts and himself, she wanted him to be the sort of 'great man' that she and the world were accustomed to. She wanted for him the acceptance and honour which she felt were his due. Again, she could not help resenting the awful discomfort of Lawrence's genius, which was brought about by just that 'demon' of his, to which obedience meant everything to him - that 'Balaam's ass in his belly', that would not let him move along the path of accredited success and loving ease. So he was obliged to break deep down with Ada, or rather to withdraw from her in essentials for the time being, causing a suspension of vital contact. At the same time the bond of affection would always hold between them. On her side there was the goodwill that can exist without understanding, eternally if need be, and on his a tenderness that could forgo understanding while it went on hoping. In human relations it was only where there was neither understanding *nor* natural warmth, but merely the jargon of love, that Lawrence could make an absolute break, as we shall see. Indeed what Murry called 'love' was that very thing that stank in Lawrence's nostrils as the festering of lilies - the emotional collapse due to the Christian ideals, which bore a noble name, but was false and death-dealing and the cause of the War. Because of it, said Lawrence, we must give up using the word. *Tenderness* would do for a change. In *tenderness* there was still a living test of a

man's fidelity, while *love* was heavy with generations of betrayal.

As ever, with Ada as with myself, he was patient, hopeful, wise and extremely gentle. Almost immediately after she had left to go home, he wrote a letter as unconquerably kind as it was free from egotism. He faced the situation squarely and intimately, making none of the familiar excuses of self-pity decked in playful or touching phrases which are so often the last vanity and refuge of the consumptive. Neither by his illness nor by his gifts did he put her at a disadvantage. The phrases are light and quivering with real sweetness. It is among other things a final refutation of Murry's picture of Lawrence in his last phase. And as such, though it appears also in Ada's book, it may be reproduced at least in part here:

... But don't be miserable - or if you must be, at least realise that it's because of a change that is happening inside us, a change in feeling, a whole change in what we find worth while and not worth while. The things that seem to make up one's life die into insignificance, and the whole state is wretched. I've been through it these last three years - and suffered, I tell you. But now I feel I'm coming through, to some other kind of happiness. It's a different kind of happiness we've got to come through to - but while the old sort is dying, and nothing new has appeared, it's really torture. But be patient, and realise it's a process that has to be gone through - and it's taken me three years to get even so far. But we shall come through, and be really happy and in touch. You will see, the future will bring great changes - and I hope one day we may all live in touch with one another, away from business and all that sort of world, and really have a *new* sort of happiness together. You'll see - it will come - gradually - and before not so very many years. This is the slow winding up of an old way of life. Patience - and we'll begin another, somewhere in the sun.

Ada wrote to say that she was hurt because she felt that Lawrence was 'hiding some part of himself' from her. He replied frankly and firmly:

You say you think I've hidden some part of myself from you. Not at all. I am always the same. But there is something you just refuse to see and refuse to accept in me. You insisted on a certain idealisation and there it was ...

Incidentally it was Frieda's supreme virtue that she did not refuse to see or accept, even if her acceptance was by way of open combat. Neither did she insist on 'a certain idealisation', so from her Lawrence never needed to withdraw himself, except in those moments of ultimate loneliness which are for every man and were for him in particular.

In March, though all thoughts of summering at the ranch had to be put aside, he felt well enough to think of prospecting for a real home.

He had not liked the French Riviera enough to wish to make his home there:

Somehow here there isn't enough to it to make one want to live - the country is a bit no-how, and the French mess up their seaside coast worse than anybody - fearful hotch-potch of villas almost as bad as a slum.

But he agreed he might have to do so, as it was 'good for him', which Italy was 'not just now'. There was much to be said for Bandol. Before committing himself to a villa there, however, he might have a look at Spain. He had wanted to make 'a little tour in Spain' as early as December, but had deferred it.

6

What was immediately urgent was that he should use his strength to go to Paris and make arrangements there in person for the private issue of *The Escaped Cock*, which he had completed that winter after eighteen months' interval, besides painting four more pictures for the postponed exhibition in London. So from early March - accompanied on the journey by Rhys Davies - Lawrence was in Paris on business for about a month. He stayed with the Huxleys, who were then living at Suresnes, and Maria Huxley, distracted by his looks, arranged for his examination by a specialist. Frieda tells me that Lawrence did not go to be examined. Whatever happened, or did not happen, a rumour reached England that he had only a few days, possibly only a few hours, to live. Several of his friends, including ourselves, were called up on the telephone by unknown editors - one could almost hear the rejoicing obituarist sharpening his quill. We could only hope that it was a scare and say so. I wrote at once to Frieda asking how Lawrence was.

Murry, too, had heard the rumour and had written, not to Frieda, but to Lawrence. It was his third letter since the estrangement. A second had followed Lawrence's 'sad and tired' response to the request about *The Rainbow*. Because, in that response, Lawrence had said that he might write again later but had not done so; and 'after a month or two' Murry had written making overtures of friendship and enclosing photographs of his children. But to this Lawrence had not replied. It was an omission so unusual as to be significant to any who knew him as well as Murry did.

The rumour that Lawrence was dying, however, gave Murry another chance, and he wrote his third unsolicited letter, which amounted to an appeal for a deathbed reconciliation. He offered to go out for this pious purpose.

This time Lawrence replied. His business being finished in Paris, he had gladly fled, and since the middle of April he and Frieda had been staying at the Hotel Royal, Palma de Mallorca.

I have often fancied that rage, coupled with a sort of bitter amusement, may have acted upon Lawrence like a strong tonic when he read Murry's missive. Deathbed reconciliations were not his line. He had 'no idea of passing out' just yet, but if he had, it would not willingly be with Murry's hand in his. Once and

for all he wished never to see Murry again, in this world or the next. 'Even when we are immortal spirits' - he wrote - 'we shall dwell in different Hades.'

One might have thought that upon a heart capable of loving, no heavier sentence was ever passed by one who was once regarded as a dear friend. Not so Murry, however. He finds it 'not so poor an end to a friendship as it may appear to be'

My letter to Frieda brought an immediate reply from the Hotel Principe Alfonso, Palma de Mallorca, where they now were. 'No,' she wrote, 'I am thankful to say Lorenzo is better; in Paris he got worse again after a good winter on the Riviera. No, we are really enjoying this . . . This is just a line to let you know that we aren't on the downward slope!'

She begged me to go and see the picture-show when it should open, told me of the Mandrake Press book of the pictures which might be expected shortly, and said that before long she and Lawrence were going to find a house for themselves in one place or another. Ten days or so later Lawrence was writing to Ada in the same tone, dispelling the 'silly rumour that he was ill' and giving her his news. *Pansies* was about to appear, minus about a dozen censored items, but he hoped to issue a small unexpurgated edition as well. And the Mandrake people were expending two thousand pounds in the production of the picture book, including ten copies in vellum at fifty guineas, which last had already been ordered six times over. 'Seems to me a bit absurd, but there's this collecting craze nowadays,' was Lawrence's comment. When the proofs arrived he was not greatly pleased with them, finding them 'very dim, vague and disappointing', but, as he philosophically put it to Ada, 'Of course other people don't know them as I do.' As usual he had begun to set aside copies for his family, and for friends who might like to have them but could not afford to buy. The original pictures he was not anxious to sell. He therefore put high prices upon them, and most of them are still Frieda's property.

At midsummer the show opened. It had a mixed reception from the critics and from the public who flocked to see it. Towards the end of the run Frieda came to London, and we went to the party given for her at the Gallery. She wore a gay shawl, red shoes and a sheaf of lilies - the last to symbolise Lawrence's purity! Ada came from the Midlands, and other old friends of the Lawrence family travelled up to see 'Bert's pictures'. These were no more shocked than had been the peasants at the Mirenda, the postman at Kesselmatte or the proprietress of the hotel at Bandol. Ada, who *had* been shocked by *Lady Chatterley*, genuinely liked them. I too liked them. But undoubtedly, as Lawrence knew, 'people who called themselves his dear friends were not only shocked but *mortally offended* by them'. Millicent Beveridge was one friend who was shocked, though I think

not mortally offended.

Unhappily for Frieda, there was something much worse than hostile critics or offended friends to be withstood.

Lawrence, who had returned to Italy, and had been in June at Forte again with the Huxleys, had gone on to Florence in July. There, staying with Orioli, he had fallen so alarmingly ill that Frieda was sent for by telegram.

When Frieda arrived, Lawrence, thanks to Orioli's devoted nursing and his own recuperative power, had pulled through the attack. To the astonishment of those who were with him he managed to greet her as if he had scarcely been ill. Huxley has told me how, at a later period, if Frieda was away, the mere expectation of her return would enable Lawrence to get up and dress himself, though before he knew she was coming he could not so much as lift his head. On this occasion he was joking and easy and interested in her eager news, and then he sent her off to an hotel, as there was not room for her in Orioli's flat. Probably she concluded (as he intended she should) that the telegram had been a matter of mere precaution or expediency. Really he was extremely feeble, and Orioli had feared the worst.

The police raid on the Warren Gallery, with the confiscation of all the pictures and the books of reproductions, came very soon after Frieda's return. It was a blow - especially a blow to a man in great physical weakness. But Lawrence did not noticeably blench. What he felt was chiefly disgust. Perhaps it had also a tonic effect. Anyhow, he wrote *Nettles*, and as soon as he could travel - early in August - got away from the intense heat of Italy to Baden-Baden.

'Yes,' he wrote to Ada, 'one feels very sick about the pictures. I suppose they won't let them burn them. Well, it's an unpleasant world - but I shan't let it worry me more than it need - and don't you either. The dirty swine would like to think they made you weep.'

After a few days at Baden itself, where it was still too hot for them, they moved with Frieda's mother to an hotel in the hills some 2,000 to 3,000 feet up. Here it first thundered and then rained so hard that they were obliged to hug themselves inside their greatcoats for warmth. After little over a week of this they fled back to Baden. Re-examined by the same German doctor who had seen him two years before, Lawrence was told that he was 'in several ways better', and that his lung was 'much healed up'.

But his condition was admittedly 'still bad', and he was plagued with asthma. Accordingly, even the altitude of 3,000 feet, prescribed earlier, was now said to be bad for him. He must go to the sea. Once more the Mediterranean was indicated. For the winter they must choose between the sea-coasts of Italy, Spain and the French Riviera.

In spite of his determination not to let the affair of the pictures disturb him unduly, the constant receipt of letters and telegrams and newspaper extracts with reference to the 'trial' at Marlborough Street Police Court, which was then proceeding, was undoubtedly prejudicial to health. He was bound to feel it and he did.

Disgusting how one is insulted! [he wrote to Ada], I shall not forgive it easily, to my white-livered lot! Thank God I needn't live among them, even to hear their beastly mingy British voices . . . However, the best will be to forget it as soon as possible.

And to me from Baden on August 12th:

- The police case business bores and disgusts me, and makes me feel I never want to send another inch of work to England, either paint or pen. Why are those morons and *canaille* allowed to insult one *ad lib.*, while one is defenceless? England is a lily-livered country when it comes to purity.

And in the same letter:

These people are nastier than you imagine, and it only needs a little more to start them putting pressure on the French or Italian Govts to prosecute me for producing and issuing obscenity. I do not want to find myself in gaol, as a final insult - with a little vague sympathy in the far distance.

His post was again being tampered with, and I had suggested that it might be good if the police were tempted to seize as obscene some extracts from Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* in his handwriting, just as they had at first seized some of Blake's drawings at the Warren Gallery. But he would have none of it.

No, for God's sake leave my unfortunate name alone just now . . . No, the trouble is, once the police attack you, you are entirely at their mercy - so there it is.

Still - and though he was longing to be south again and to be in 'some sort of a place of our own' - it was 'really very nice here - an old inn with garden quiet and shady, where one can sit all day if one likes'.

7

Till nearly the end of September the Lawrences stayed in Germany - or rather moved in a quiet way between Bavaria and Austria. Rottach with its lake - 'so sunny and still' - where they had friends: Villach yet once more, with its full, swift river by which one could sit and watch the people and the swallows and feel like an old veteran - and from which now and again one could visit Munich if one felt like it. Till with October in sight it seemed the easiest and wisest thing to slip back to Bandol.

After collecting themselves at the Hotel Beau Rivage, they found a little villa right on the sea, with a balcony looking seaward for Lawrence. Just at first he was in bed there, then up again, and always up and down.

As usual in his letters home, each period in bed was no more than 'a little bout', only to be expected in the process of getting straight again. He insisted on having the bedroom to himself, and strictly forbade Frieda to come in until after five o'clock each morning, when he should have got over his first and worst fit of coughing. She might come in then, with the big yellow cat pushing through the door before her to jump on to Lawrence's bed.

He passed day after day of a serene autumn on the balcony watching the sea and the dreamlike islands and the Mediterranean fishing boats going about their ages-old business. And in that sight his heart was at home - at home as it had never been in New Mexico. Men out there of his own order of consciousness were in touch with the unknown life of the cosmos, and they partook of that life the more profoundly because they measured themselves as men in conflict against it, therein becoming something more than men. Hope could not die out of the world so long as there was this. The wasted end of our epoch, even if it were faint as a filament wavering in air, would endure and would be joined to the beginning of a new epoch - when the time was ripe. When that time arrives Lawrence will come into his own, but much death and destruction may lie between. For the present, if even half the eyes that feast daily on the sight of the Mediterranean could look at the fishing fleet with the eyes of Lawrence, the new era might begin at once. Yet, to find it as Lawrence found it, all his savage pilgrimage was necessary, and was not too much. For days at a stretch he was sunk far into himself in a state of passivity such as he had never known before,

not writing even letters, not reading nor even painting. For the first time I ceased to hear from him.

But out of this state of passivity came poems which may well prove to be his finest. And he cannot have been passive for so very long on end, as *Apocalypse* belongs to that winter, and he turned out also various articles of a popular nature, such as 'The Risen Lord', which to his surprise was published in *Everyman* without cuts. He was glad to hear in December that the *Obscenity* pamphlet had sold over 6,000. It was almost as if the tide was turning in his favour. As he had always believed it would turn. Though he was not pleased with his health he still did not think he was worse. It was chiefly that he could not walk. First Paris and then Germany had been bad for him. He must be patient and his strength would come back. He grew to like the place so much that it was often discussed whether they should take on the Beau Soleil as a permanency or find another villa in the neighbourhood. They had a good cook, and Lawrence had great belief in the virtue of lying low. In the middle of January he felt so much better that once more he could see himself and Frieda going for summer to New Mexico and making their home at Bandol each winter. Frieda's younger daughter came out to stay and acted as a sort of secretary to Lawrence. Though he would not be treated as an invalid he could do with a little practical help along lines which were not Frieda's. Or perhaps it was chiefly that the girl might feel happier if she felt useful, to which end he insisted on giving her a small salary.

His friends were far more anxious than he, and before the end of January he was persuaded to see a doctor from England in whom both Koteliansky and Gerder had great confidence - Gerder with good reason, as he had himself suffered from pulmonary trouble, had been attended by this doctor and was now in good health. Lawrence therefore had himself examined.

The diagnosis was acute bronchitis aggravated by the condition of the lungs; the treatment recommended was two months of sanatorium treatment. Lawrence submitted.

Writing to tell Ada about it, he was as simple and as reticent as a schoolboy, and as hopefully comforting. She had wanted to come out again to see him, but he said she was not to come till he was better and walking about, as he would be soon. It would be too annoying to have to cope with sanatorium rules about visitors twice weekly, and the rest of it. He did not truly want to see Ada just then.

On February 3rd he went into the Sanatorium Ad Astra at Vence, and Frieda to the Villa Robermond a little higher up the hill. Then of course Lawrence had visitors. Mr H. G. Wells calling from his villa not far away, was among them. Also the Aga Khan with his bride. His Highness had been so charmed with

Lawrence's pictures when he saw them in London that he had the idea of showing them in a private gallery in Paris. As a result of his call at Vence, which was found very enjoyable, Lawrence telegraphed to the Warren Gallery to hold the pictures (now restored by the police) instead of sending them to him at Vence as had been arranged.

On the day after his arrival he wrote to assure Ada that it was 'quite nice and not alarming', that he thought he would 'be all right', and that he had a balcony from which he could see the coast line and Cannes five miles off. Next week, 'all being well', he would be going down to lunch.

He endured the sanatorium life for three weeks. Then he decided that he would endure it no longer. It was not the regimen that was too much for him. Of that he could be entirely patient. But the necessarily mechanical ordering of an institution was what his spirit could not bear and retain its courage. He had become definitely worse. If he was to live he might not stay longer, equally if he was to die it must not be there.

Unaided, to the surprise of those who were with him, he packed his things and without help walked up the rough and stony hill path to the Robermond villa. And that night, as every night at the sanatorium, he refused to let anybody help him with his toilet.

What remains is not for me to tell. I know only that Lawrence - physically the ghost of what he had been, a mere handful of a man - fought death to the last, and at the last accepted what had to be with the simplicity of the brave. He gave orders that his funeral, if he died, was to be of the cheapest description. Yet he went on hoping that he would not die. At home we did not, could not, believe that he would. He bore with fortitude the severe pain - for now it seems that his malady was developing into tubercular meningitis. His mind stayed clear and composed. He would not permit injections for deadening the pain, though he would swallow an opiate.

For the onlookers, particularly for Huxley who was there, it was merely terrible to see the light withdrawn from those bright and daring eyes by the nature of the struggle. But to Frieda, Lawrence's courage was more vivid even than his suffering. 'Had you seen his splendid fight to the last,' she wrote to me soon after, 'and his courageous dying it would have given you courage, it was inspiring.'

It ended within two days of his move to the Villa Robermond. On the 2nd of March, 1930, in his forty-fifth year, died this great English writer and Englishman of destiny. He did more than make his mark on his generation; he marked a way out. For the honour and material success which would have come, and which he would have enjoyed and handled well, he lived not long enough.

But all the more he was victorious. Against terrific odds he did his work, held to his belief and lived his life richly. When we in London heard of his death, it was the sense of our own failure that came home to us - that and the sense of Lawrence's potency in death as in life. He needed, and needs now, no funeral oration. His emblem, the phoenix, has not played him false. If it be true of any man it is true of him, what he said himself - 'the dead don't die. They look on and help.'



A chapel east of Taos, New Mexico, where Lawrence's ashes are interred



D.H.Lawrence's grave — Taos, New Mexico, USA